CHAPTER IV

ASSAMESE POETRY: ITS FORM AND CONTENT.
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Form and content of ancient poetry according to Indian Poetics are word, its meaning and sentiment (rasa), style or suggestion or propriety respectively as Ihamah said 'sabar-thau sahitau kavyam'. The form and content of modern Assamese poetry or literature owes its origin in European thought. All our trend of thought and expression of idea and life had been revived with the spread of the western education. Though we have no direct contact with the European Renaissance and Romanticism in literature we had to borrow all our techniques in literature from the western literature after a century or so. Vaisnavite literature waned with the demise of Sankardev and Madhavdev and the influence on the next generation of poets including Ramakanta Choudhuri, Holanath Das, Kamalakanta Bhattacharya, and Hemchandra Barua, Gunabhiram Barua in other branches of literature, was not in the spirit and fervour or philosophy of life we had in the Vaisnavite cult. However, some had not left the old course and the triplet, couplet along with metrical sequences, were in practice, though the contents had been changed. It was also for the influence of the missionaries, the blessings in disguise the Baptist missions had in them. Transition was there. We had new ideas and forms in our literature. And the old form and contents changed totally in some new hands. But we cannot say that form and content are two separate entities not at all connected
with. We can hardly differentiate them as some call content the internal fact or expression and form the marble, the colours, the rhythm, the sounds but others think the content as form and vice-versa. Only the significant form is the pure formalist school. And we are to purify for the supreme way, the way of significant form. And that could not be evolved by the new generation of poets. And to-day we have so many forms in our poetry—some completely copied from the western literatures. The XXth century poetry has its history in evolving out a change in form and content, structure and attitude, life and expression. The mainstream, tradition and such other thing had been no more attractive as the source for poets. The new trend is free from old customs and costumes. Events of sense alter old dunes of minds, release new channels of flow, free materials to new forms. Here we have a language that is new, the new form of life and the art of dissidence. We had a language that was created by Sankardev for his works in Vrajabali and in them we imagine a new form of life through that language.

The New Form:

During the XIXth century we see another language and form. And poem's ultimate meaning is its actual form. The thematic insistence is not margins but centres, not edges but spaces, not contiguities but distances. We cannot observe the creative phenomenon independently of the form in which it is made manifest. So the theme of poetry during the period of
Assamese literature under consideration is symmetrical, geometrical, fixed, mechanical, the very soul of a poet which has no beginning and no ending. The very style of a poet which has no beginning and no ending. Fixed measures of thought other than its own is the condition the ecstasy affords the occasion and expiation, the form. According to Paul Vier, the element of form is the literal metempsychosis. Today, we have a metamorphosis in our poetry, but after the long century of period under review the Vaishnavite influence of the medieval trilingual scriptures in 1932, medieval trend turned towards the beginning of the 16th century, our poets the Metamorphosis into images now, most probably the poets have to modify in the ideals of the medieval period and in form no longer be motivated by the ideals of the medieval poets have some ideals in their poetry but the present life, our new poets could not follow only for the rhyme, metre in new form so suitable for our times. The rhyme-sceme, the related tone to a line and all. And the concept of poetry is that in which...
The very significant form in his poems is also discernible. We have Agarwala, Bezbarua, Goswami to be followed by the younger group and then the other one like those Lake poets in England and their groups in their Romantic literature i.e., Wordsworth group, Scott group and Shelley group. And metre they practised were natravritta (moric verse), yaugik (composite) and Swaravritta (syllabic verse). Agarwala had no new form though he was the influential ideal to many of the age for his ideology, philosophy or aesthetic beauty. With the only aptitude to worship beauty (sundarar aradhana jivanar khel), he began to write but his Pratima the first poem in that title reveals the very beauty (pratima) installed in the altar of his heart's temple. It is a message in need of an answer. The cry of the human no doubt. We remember David Ignatow's fine expression 'to be alone, to eat alone and sleep alone, to adventure alone; cry of the human,' and our Agarwala cried in utter distress to find no suitable word for the true expression of his inner self or Pratima inherent in his heart of hearts. It is the cry of the very personal, the intimate experiences of its creator—their true poetic self no doubt. When the poet has few words to speak out his mind what can we expect from the audience quite untouched, inexperienced to such exquisite beauty? We fail therefore, to attribute the best words to the best forms and contents.
Agarwala's content is so well epitomised in the most suitable word 'Pratima', the meaning bears a significant form, the Absolute? Certainly not. It is the variegated colour of the very creative mind of Agarwala. He was blind for the riot of colours. And he was crying at the most opportune moment—the creative moment.

The Sonnet:

The most characteristic influence of western literary form is the sonnet. Some of our poets—V.C. Goswami, Hiteswar Agarwala, P.N. Gohainbarua have sonnets. Whether English or Italian, the sonnet is not the real forte of our poets in our own language, as Shakespeare or Milton had their words divided into syllables and then into metres usually an iambic pentameter, of 14 lines for a sonnet. And there are two major divisions of octave and sestet. We have our poets writing a sonnet of 14 lines with 14 words in each line. It was really the influence of M.M. Dutta in Bengali literature, as some of our poets followed him. V.C. Goswami is the forerunner in this new field. His 'Priyamatar Chithi' (Letter from the beloved) is first of its kind in our literature. That is the best contribution of the best mind. It has all the beauty and qualities of a sonnet. And the very subject-matter is a single sentiment of love perfected within it. We have divisions there if we can make out the beauty and song embodied in the letter surpassing all poems of love and
beauty dealt with in the octave and the eternal, everlasting sense of it expressed by the seastet. So it is complete in itself, to say all about love as if the very letter from the beloved is an apostrophe. Bezbarua has his poem 'Prem' (love) and some others in such form of sonnet. R.N. Gohainbarua wrote 'Hemchandra Goswami, Kavita (poem). Hiteswar Jernaerua's Kavi (poet), Agarwala's 'Sandhiya' (dusk), 'Akalsariya (alone) and 'Sundar' (The beautiful) are also to be mentioned. R.C. Goswami is the true follower of western poets in a sonnet. Sonnet sequences are there in the latter group of poets but the ancient verse forms are well practised by J.N. Duara, R.N. Choudhari. Gohainbarua wrote in blankverse like K.N. Dutta. His 'Leela' (wife's name) and many other short poems are in that form. The 'Leela' is an autobiographical episode for its contents have the fine description of his married life, the journey to the place of work at Kohima passing through the deep forest Nambar, a part of Kaziranga. That 'Leela' is spirit and impulse for his poetry 'Leela mor apuni kavita' (My Leela herself is a poem) says that. This is in epic form divided into 25 cantos. The structure of some of the poems by Agarwala is complex but most of the poems composed by Bezbarua are stereotyped for his less efforts in this very field of literature. He wrote poems whether it could be a poem of not as his words in the 'Kadamkali say. So we cannot expect the best from his pen. Very few contributed to the pure verse form and we have the rhymed and unrhymed forms of verse practised by
some of the modern hands.

**Couplets, Triplets:**

Couplets has the fine example in the hands of O.K. Agawala, H. Barbaruwa, and many others. Triplet was practised by R.N. Choudhari in his poems. Different types of the Dulari, Chhavi, Lechhari, mixed forms of Chhavi and Dulari are also explicit in the hands of many. And all these verse-forms are traditional. But this traditional forms were not the helpful thing for many and they practised or evolved out some new and very convenient forms. And such conventional forms can be seen in the latter group of poets. R.K. Sarkakati has invented such verse form. So form becomes style and meaning becomes ideology.

In art as in the dance, the body is the soul. Mere structure of an idol can't attract others. It must be painted with all the modern artistic way of life. The costume and the cosmetics too should be vivid in an idol we worship. The structure, on the other hand, cannot be made with rotten straw or bamboo-sticks nor can the worst cup of colour can dazzle the face. So C.D. Lewis was right to say why we choose fresh epithets and fresh metaphors not so much because they are new but because the old cease to convey a physical thing, become abstract counters. We know that pure soul is embodied in a beautiful figure. Influenced by the romantic literature, the poetry of the period under review, is wide one for lyrical poetry. Most of the poems by young group of poets could be so for the new
trend to depict the renaissance of wonder, strangeness to beauty applied, liberalism in literature, adoration of the past, sense of mystery, intellectual curiosity, and above and above the extra-ordinary development of the imaginative faculty and sensibility in those creative minds. Some of them pined for what was not to them as the sole criterion of romanticism. Bulk of the writers do that. But C.A. Agarwala and L.N. Bezbarua were not true followers of that very path. Though they constituted the very triumvir of the Jonaki, we have the least sensuous poems from those two hands. We can classify the contents of the poems as : Lyrics, elegy, narrative, ballad. Those poets wrote for their own literature and so they had in their poems own angle of vision, experience and expression. Hardly they followed all English or neighbouring Bengalee poets so well in contact either through texts or personal relationships. Bezbarua was intimately connected with Tagore family and his contribution to poetry and other branches of literature can easily prove the wide range of thought and also of people he could meet and know. Yet we have no such striking theme, content or a bright character borrowed from outside the society of Assam. He was purely concerned with the social norm of our society with a view to reform and regenerate vitality in them. It was an urge of the renaissance.
Literary Ballad:

Ballads and aphorisms are handled by him. Contents of ballads by Bezbaruah and Agarwala are best of their kind in our literature, though the theme of Tejimala is traditional love in origin. But Bezbaruah has his originality in Pahanbaru Ratani. It is of pastoral character. Simple and pure folks expressed through the vivid, strong pen-picture by Bezbaruah, simple imagery indeed of the love-episode pagan people can have and express their minds in so simple a way, are there. In both the ballads by C.K. Agarwala and Bezbaruah there is the supernatural element another characteristic of the romantic poetry like 'The Rime of the ancient mariner' of Coleridge.

Bezbaruah was highly educated and contrary to the elite society to which he was a genuine member (we again think of the Tagores and their western and Indian culture) the theme and idea reached to the core of those living in the far distant corner of the country. Bezbaruah was kith and kin to some such people (we may remember his days at Sambalpur) and could read well the minds and feelings of those simple people and their lives. Folk-tales are not only elements of primitive life but of eternal mind in many respects. We have the same propensities, attitudes, motives, wills and desires save our ambitions and thinking for higher realities of life even in this world of sputniks. So the subject-matter of poetry, its theme and content cannot change to be pure literary work of art. It may be art for art's sake. Humanity and all its live problems—
distress, love, aspirations, beauty, philosophy, mysticism, spirituality, supreme reality etc. duly depicted in all the sentiments are embodied in their poems. Yet it is feared that there were limitations of the sphere to see all success and that was due to the craftsmanship so new an adventure in the hands of the originators of the transition from religion to romanticism.

Mainly their contents in poetry were nature, beauty, love, practical life and the wonders of the world and human life with all its attitudes. And the sources of the same for their poetry were innumerable. We have in them fine ideas with full glory, simplicity of emotions and passion, live imaginations, musical fervour, suggestiveness in language though in many of them we hear the cry of despair and deep sentimentality.

Nature:

It will be better to classify poems of different poets for their content in the following heads: nature, beauty, love, life, philosophy, myth, time-spirit, spirituality, God or mysticism. On the nature and its variegated beauty Choudhari wrote most of his poems in Jadari, Ketek, and Dahikatara, the three titles to his poems. Most mentionable poems are Bohagir biya (marriage of Bohagi), Girimallika (a
flower in that name), Golap (rose), Gowahi ebar mor priya
bihangini (sing, O' my loving bird) etc. C.K. Agarwala has
his Phula sarjadara (the blooming mustard-flowers), Shankun-
wari (princess of the forest). Bezbarua has shram (mistake),
Sakhirprati (to the friend), Tara (star), Vasanta (spring).
H.C. Goswami wrote Prakriti (nature) and Puwa (morning). P.J.
Gohainbarua has his Leela, Prakriti, Brahmaputra, Chandangiri,
Guha (cave), Sadiya, Padum aru golap (lotus and the rose).
Anandachandra Agarwala has Phulkonwar (prince of flower), and
Pahesai. Others in this field are not so important.

Beauty:

In the praise of beauty either of nature or of human
being we have C.K. Agarwala's Kishori (young girl), Bedhuri
(beauty), Sundar (the beautiful). Bezbarua has Prem and Priya-
tama. H.C. Goswami wrote his fine sonnet Thi kataksha (askance),
Priyatamar shakti (strength of the sweet-heart). Gohainbarua
has Usha (morning), Phular chaki (cycle of flower). Anand
Agarwala wrote Pranayar parinam (effect of love). M. Kanabarua
has Kanar thuriya (ear-ring), Hiyate thapana pati (installing
at the heart), Asanta (not calm, unpacified). C. Sarma wrote
Rangili, Kiba yen nai (something lost). P.M. Choudhari has his
Sirahir ukati (words of love-smitten), Abhisar (love), Saudarya
sadhak (the worshipper of beauty), Kavipriya (beloved to the
poet), Anahuta (uninvited). N. Phukan wrote Smriti (memory).
Jatin Duara's most of the poems are on love and beauty. A.G.
Raichoudhuri wrote his Tumi (you) and Beena (lyre). P. Devi has her Janambhumi (motherland). Most of the poems by P. N. Barkakati, G. Gogoi and D.K. Barua depict love and beauty as the poets of love. On life and philosophy C.K. Agarwala wrote Prakriti (nature), Maya (illusion), Tejimala, Mabaragi (lyrist), Jiwanar dali (throw of life), Ajeya (unconquerable), Viswabhaoriya (actor of the universe), Ichha (will), Atuparit (discontent), Prapacha (illusion) etc.

Life, Philosophy:

Bezbarua wrote Iswar aru bhakat (God and devotee), Awashesh (last remains), Mahaprayanar yatri (the voyager to death). P.N. Gohainbarua has the Milanmahattwa (the glory of union), Viswaveen (lyre of the universe) etc. Ananda Agarwala wrote Jukh (happiness), H. Barbarua has Chakulo (tears), Chandradhar Barua has Dhulikana mai (I'm the dust-particle), R.N. Choudhari wrote Gachharpat (leaf of tree), Phulsayya (bed of flowers), Viswarup (glimpse of the universe), Chhayachitra (bioscope) etc. D. Sarma has Anta (the end), Parakal (the next life), N. Phukan wrote Sundar tumi kat (where are you, Beautiful). Most of the lines in the Tumi and Beena of A.C. Raichoudhuri have philosophical touch. J. Duara has his own philosophy of life sung through his poems. S.K. Bhuyan wrote his Aponsur (own tune), Kavipran (life of a poet). While P. Devi has her Sandhiyar sur (tone of dusk) imbied with life and the philosophy to some extent especially in Sesh arghya (last rite).
and Param trishna (great thirst).

Myth, History:

Myths have been handled by P.N. Gohainbarua in Urmila; Phalgu, Karbala; R.K. Jarkakati wrote his Urmila, Sakuntala vidai (send-off to Sakuntala) and Tajmahal. History and myth in Sankardev by P.N. Choudhri can be seen. Time-spirit is shown in Bnbaragi (lyrist) by C.K. Agarwala and ezbarua. Bezbarua has another poem Amar Janmahbumi (our motherland) while P.N. Gohainbarua wrote Sainiksangit (Soldier's song), German maharan (war of Germany), Anhi, Bijuli, Usha, Kanti (the periodicals of the age) and Swargatodhik janani (motherland is above the heaven). H. Arbarua wrote his Kamatapur dhamsa (fall of Kamatapur) and Yuddhaksetrat Ahommanani (the Ahom woman in the battlefield) and A.G. Raichoudhuri has his Mai achh* mai achho (I am here, I am), Garha kari mok jharidar (create me as the sweeper), and Mai viplavi mai tandavi (I am the rebel, the great dancer).

Mysticism:

The last group of poems which are most important for their contents, is infused with mysticism spiritualism or God. We have such poems by R.N. Choudhari, A.G. Raichoudhuri, N. Devi. Choudhari has his Phulasay (bed of flowers), Pustati tara (morning star), Bibhuti (wealth), Anjali (offering), Bhiksha (alms), Viswarupa (glimpse of the world) to mention
a few about the spiritual atmosphere. And R.K. Barkakati, Jivan Jeoti (Light of life), Viswabaran (elephant of vanity), Butimamah (two men), Ekatighar (one hut). It will be needless to say that others had no such contributions as most of the creations by poets are mainly inner vision and vision beautifully embodied and they are creations very self.

And there is a question of sentiment or Rasa. Rasa or aesthetic delight is the response of the "whole man", a composite character of thoughts, feelings, ideas and ideals formed from different fields of experience. They cannot acquire moral element in art. They lay stress on the aesthetic excellence alone, or in aesthetic aspects only. And in a work of art worth the name, the aesthetic excellence should be the permanent consideration of the artist. The form and content blend into one and the whole matter i.e. content, though morally elevating and uplifting, is subdued by the form.

Love:

Here in most of our poems of the period we see the sentiment of love so well depicted by most of the poets of love. In this field except a few like G.K. Agarwala, L.N. Barbara, all others have their poems infused with that sentiment of love. And there can be found other sentiments like pathetic and heroic in some. N.N. Chandhari, J.N. Darsahare poems on the pathetic sentiment while H. Barbara could handle heroic sentiment. But in R.K. Barkakati, F.N. ...
and D.K. Barua we have the same aspect of love-sentiment as
G. Gogoi has expressed. Yet Gogoi has in his poems of love
something novelty in the thought of love. In his poems we
see no quest as Barkakati has asked through most of his poems
about life and its eternal problems, and there is no pessimism
in Gogoi like Durga nor is there the shallow, fickle mind of
D.K. Barua as a poet of love, in his poems. In him we see the
brighter rays of love radiated from the very core of the heart
of a true lover. He taught the love poems in our literature
a new tone and spirit. His Papari is the epic of his life and
the Gównatpha is the epitaph as we may say so.

Masterpieces:

We are to consider the masterpieces by poets for any
subject under review as the work is a vast one to deal with
all the pieces and all the creations by a poet cannot be
eternal in value. But there is the historical value of some
of the works though the absolute value cannot be found in
all of them. C.K. Agarwala has a very small treasure for our
literature but according to L.N. Bezbaruah one of his contemporaries we have the opinion about his Pratima, the first
collection of poems, that it is small but is of pure gold
and that is appropriate and true in terms of every word.

Agarwala C.K.:

We have the beauty of woman in medieval poets like
Sankardev and Ananta Kandali. But Agarwala has his Madhuri (sweet heart) in its own glory though it is not so elaborate like those poems by Vaisnavite poets. Here we see the influence of Kalidasa's Kumar Sambhava e.g. "na yayau na tasthau aga picha bhariti (the leg not going or proceeding nor staying) that pose of a maiden in a fix, is as beautiful as the opening lines of that poem "phuto ne nuphuto kai kusaliya kaliti (the soft bud in its half-bloomed stage) which may be compared with Keats lines" "Heard melodies are sweet but those unheard are sweeter". The beauty is everlasting as the poet expresses. His Bankunwari (princess of forest), Jalkunjwari (mermaid or water-nymph), Tejimala have the supernatural touch like Coleridge's Christabel or The Rime of the ancient Mariner. These poems are valuable treasures for that very characteristic in our literature. He has an earnest attempt to show the noumenal and phenomenal worlds in their most minute colour transforming the sensuous into unsensuous. His other poem of importance are Jiwanar dali (throw of life), Viswabhaoriya (actor in the world), Mai(I), Atriiti (discontent), Akalsariya (alone). In the Manavbandana (hymn to man) we have the idea that man is the roof and crown of all things. His Binaaragi, the second collection of poems, has the influence of Shelley's "West Wind", 'Alastor or Prometheus Unbound and Tennyson's Ulysses. A rebel like Shelley Agarwala wants all the evils of the human society removed. There should be no high and low and he says "Himalaya chuda buraloheten."
uchal kaliya pani (I could have seen the peak of the
Himalayas with black water i.e. ocean) in part II of that
poem. Thus making all of the same program as in the modern
socialism. He wants every sin submerged under the ocean.
Then we see the same spirit of Shelley's "When winter
comes, can spring be far behind?" in this last portion of
that part and at the beginning of part III of that poem. In
other words it is really a dream of the poet for an Elysian.
To him man is above all the living beings of the world or
Chandidasa thought, as if humanity is God and to serve
humanity is the religion. And this earth on which we live
is more than the heaven. To him happiness or misery is a
mere state of mind. Agarwala insists on Divya-saathi (divine
sight) or wider view of life to understand the glory of the
creator, and like Browning he is a poet philosopher and at
the most a philanthropist. Though a poet of the romantic
period Barua could show in his Parvat-Kali, only a few
successful poems on romantic ideology e.g. Priyasen getting
Saundarya, Manabar Ratani, Manbaragi as all others differ
from the spirit of that trend while H.C. Goswami wrote
attitude of me the utmost as his Priyatera Chitrei said that
Gohain Barua has no poem purely on romantic faith as he
wanted to say in his Laga, an auto-biographical episode of
his married life, where the sentiment of love is not like
that of Goswami or Barua. The sensuous images in Barua,
and Goswami are not in Gohain Barua's poems for the reason

he could show like the classical literature of the previous age or of deep faith in social and religious conventions.

The most mentionable thing is the blank verse in his long poem Leela as he followed M.M. Dutta of Bengali literature.

R.N. Choudhuri has his nature work Bihagki or poet of birds and flowers. He is called Bihagki Kari or poet of birds and like Wordsworth his poems are woven of the very sympathy and kindness to the natural world. Actually the flowers and fauna of the land is live again in his hands and in a matchless way gives us the bright picture of the beautiful nature and the nature. For the contents of striking feature his Bihagki has been translated into English by Dr. P. Biswas. Bihagki received the Academy prize for his title Bihagki is one of the best creations of the year 1952, but his Afran Sur is the auto-biographical lyric. In tone it is the song of his life all alone in the land of no man only to please a sophisticated soul. It speaks of the innerself of the poet of love as he dreams of love and writes of love. To pine for she who is not to him like Shelley, most of his poems are impregnated with the range of separation and the tragic flow. In these poems we sense and hear the eternal agonies for the lost beauty.
but Raichoudhuri raised his theme of love as the theme of a young lover, free and frank in his work about that sentiment of love and the mystic in him reached its goal as we can see in the lines: another mystic poetess, the only woman poet in that field N. Devi is successful to give the true picture of her broken heart for the love to her near and dear ones, husband and a son lost in their prime of life. To Raichoudhuri, it is the loss of the beloved that made him seek the creative path of mysticism. On the other hand, some of the poets of love like Barkakati, Gogoi and B.K. Barua led no journey of a mystic though equally frustrated in the love's life. In N. Devi we see her love for the traditional myths, history and the problems of life while Barkakati and Barua drew only some myths in their poems. Gogoi did nothing for his mysticism and passions were so strong in order to paint the anguish and heart-wringing pains first.

Thus we see the form and contents of the poems of the period fully free from the previous tone and spirit of the Vaishnavite literature to give the real picture of the new trend of the romanticism proper. So they have all the characteristics of romanticism in all the finest poems in both the form and content as the period wanted from their expert hands to pave the new path.