CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The influence of western thought inspired the Assamese men of letters during the last phase of the nineteenth century to try their hands in the composition of short stories. This was the time to look at the old world with a new vision. Spread of scientific ideas and newer scientific inventions and discoveries brought in a total change in the outlook of men, while at the same time, there was the romantic dream about the liberation of the human spirit. The writers of the period aimed at devoting themselves to the task of bringing about all-round progress of mankind in the new way, instead of following the old track. Consequently, the literature of this period was freed from the convention of the earlier Vaishnavite era and the writers were eager to look at life and the world in the light of the new western thoughts and ideas.

In the midst of this new environment of the Assamese literature, the short story had its inception. Meanwhile, the short story had succeeded in owning a distinctive place by reflecting through it the diverse complex problems and situations of life. The contemporary world and life found their projection through the short story all over the world. In such cross-currents, the short story in Assamese literature had its real birth in the hands of Lakshminath Bezbaruah.
During this period, the current of romantic movement began to sweep the literary field of Assam. The writers of that age were absorbed in the ideas of the western romantic poets, particularly, their love for the beauty of nature, human love, platonic conception of human relations and such other aspects. At the same time, the powerful current of the National Movement aimed at freeing man from colonial oppression began to sweep all over the country and fill the Indian mind with a strong national feeling. To free the human spirit from the gondage of political slavery and also to do away with all kinds of human oppressions, were their avowed ambition. Under the impact of these two forces, a new inspiration swept the Assamese literature. This spirit of freedom found its reflection clearly and distinctly in the short stories of the period.

The short stories of that period succeeded remarkably in infusing a political sentiment in the minds of the readers along with social consciousness. Although the writers could not yet muster enough courage to speak out boldly against the British rule, yet there were attempts at inspiring the nation with the strength and enthusiasm to stand against the Imperialistic regime of England.

Besides arousing social consciousness, the short stories of the period made a free delination of love episodes and other romantic sentiments. In the literature of the pre-
Jonāki era, there was the marked influence of the Vaishnavite thoughts and ideas. Human love in that period was not expressed through human actions and reactions, but it was symbolised through those of gods and goddesses. Although in the Sanskrit literature of the classical age, the love episodes of kings and emperors were given shape to, yet there was hardly any exposition of such things in the regional literatures of the country. The Assamese Vaishnavite literateurs generally did not depict the love-episodes of kings and emperors, and whatever little depiction of the love-sentiment we find in them, is also nothing but the so-called 'Leela' of the Supreme Being of some divine incarnation of Him. Those who composed 'pāñchalis' in Assamese were, however, exceptions in this field, but even their writings were criticised by such a metaphysical poet as Sankardeva, owing to their drifting away from the established norms.

With the advent of the Romantic movement of the 19th century, there came a total change in human outlook. Respectful glance was cast on common people and attempts were made to exhibit their simple ways of life lived amidst love and affection. The short story born in the 19th century began with the depiction of the simple domestic life of a common couple, its joys and sorrows. The first short story written by Lakshminath Bezbaroa, 'Bhadari', presents the simple domestic life of Bhadari and Sishuram and how love plays a glorious role in
ensuring the bliss and happiness of their conjugal existence.

No metaphysical colour has been imposed on the element of love. Nor has there been any imposition of divinity in it. The writer has endeavoured to present how love glorifies the simple life of the unsophisticated rustics, living amidst simple and unadorned surroundings. Sishuram, the chief male character of the story, comes home exhausted after a whole day’s labour. His wife uses harsh words, at which Sishuram suddenly loses his temper and hits her. But a moment later he realises his folly and suffers from repentance and despair. His wife Bhadari a symbol of tolerance and typical Indian womanhood, however, takes the incident in an easy manner. She is rather concerned about the well-being of her husband, forgetting her own pain and suffering. In the meantime, Sishupal gets ready to face punishment for his sin willingly. In this way, two ordinary, unsophisticated people are presented as getting familiar with the ennobling power of love in this story. The story presents in a new way and under a novel setting, the age-old Indian ideals and conventions.

'Bhadari' is not the beginning of Assamese short-story literature, it is the first example of the evaluation of the conception of love in the literary sphere of Assam. While presenting life in its real shape and colour, the writer takes pains to delineate the real appearance of love as well. The story stands as a glowing instance of love
filling the lives of two people with joy, beauty and nobility.

This aspect of love can be discerned in almost all the stories written by the story-writers of the Jonaki Age. In a tale of Sarat Goswami we find how a poor and starving man offering his own meagre share of food to his dying wife and how the wife does a happy and peaceful death with the pleasing realisation of the glorious aspect of love. She dies with her heart filled with great joy, for she has found out love's redeeming feature. The writers of the Jonaki Age painted in their stories the age-old varied aspects of love and their impact on the lives of human beings. This is the novelty of the literary outlook of the Jonaki Age writers.

Physical love during all these days was kept veiled under a religious or spiritual garb. But the writers of this age tried to present the physical aspect of love in their compositions.

It was Lakshminath Bezbaroa who first depicted the sensations of physical love in his story 'Patmugi'. That a man becomes totally forgetful of his age and surroundings in the face of woman's bodily appeal and beauty has been presented in the story. Patmugi finds out the reality of life in the passionate intensity of the man's love and so she desists from complaining against him in the last moment despite her earlier inclination to do so.
It is true that these writers showed great courage on delineating human follies, passions and emotions but yet they could not shake off the bondage of old conventions. These deep-seated conventions often prompted them to present human love under the veil of idealism. Just as on the one hand we find the existence of physical love, on the other, we do not fail to notice the presentation of extra-marital love and love for others spouses. However, in most of the cases we find that the heroes and the heroines have tried to find a way out their sense of guilt through repentance or self destruction.

That one can not totally deny the urge of bodily desire in love, even when leading a life of religious restrictions, has been realistically presented by Mitradev Mahanta in his stories. Is a devotee of God, but yet he fails to get rid of his physical desire and this leads him into great trouble. Mahanta has beautifully and realistically analysed the predicament of this man in one of his stories.

The complex psychology of love and man-woman relationship takes on a new shape during this age. The incidence of love at first sight which forms the core of western love-episodes is rarely to be found in Indian classical literature. In the stories of the Jonaki Age we not only find this phenomenon, but also how this love suffers alteration in the absence of the objects of love. There were however a few
writers of this Age who found it difficult to accept this free exposition of love. Thus in the writings of this Age we notice a conflict between modernism and the tendency to idealise physical love. On the one hand, there is the urge to analyse the element of love through modern outlook while, on the other, there is the tendency to stick to traditional outlook. This clash between traditionalism and modernism has been beautifully exhibited in many stories of this Age. It is only Lakshminath Bezbaroa who seems to be free from this conflict.

It was in the Awahon Age which succeeded the Jonaki Age that we find Assamese short story flowering most extensively. Spread of education and the influence of scientific discoveries added some amount of complexity to literature, it is true, but they led to the expansion of subject matters in literature also. After the first world war, Marxian and Freudian philosophy brought about a revolutionary change in the mental outlook of people all over the world. This totally changed the attitude to love as well. Whatever hesitation there was to present physical love in all its bare forms gradually disappeared. There was clear attempt at explaining the emotion of love from purely sexual point of view. Breaking the barrier of traditional orthodoxy, the writers followed a new path where love was presented as what it really is—a camouflaged expression of one's bodily hunger.
The writer who exposed this sexual aspect in love during this period in a beautiful manner was Haliram Deka. The varied aspects of sexual love have been depicted in a number of his short stories, but nowhere he seems to have been fully able to free himself from conventions. It was Lakshmidhar Sharma, who really succeeded in presenting this sexual love in all its realistic form, by totally subordinating all conventions. Lakshmidhar Sharma was not only a powerful and successful writer of this age, he ranks among the greatest Assamese writers of romantic period. The Freudian philosophy which was only marginally present in the stories of Haliram Deka was minutely analysed by Lakshmidhar Sharma in his writings. Sharma never hesitated to exhibit the glory of physical love. In his story Vidrohini (The Rebel Woman), the widowed Lalita shows great courage in offering her body to Hem at embracing illegal motherhood. She even moves about courageously with the illegitimate son without caring for the consequences of her action. When society sits in trial over her action, it is she who assumes the role of the judge and tries to analyse the injustice and illegal aspects of the society itself. It is her courage and determination that ultimately emboldens Hem at to get rid of all his weaknesses and drawbacks. Sharma's aim was to shatter the hypocrisy and falsehood inherent in our social and moral judgement of events. Unlike many other writers, Sharma never tried to take sexual love by force towards the path of idealism. He tried to show
the importance and value of individualism over idealism. Another writer of this period Roma Das also followed the same tradition but in his stories we find the exposition of sexual love in a more open way. The characters of his stories are always busy in satisfying their carnal desire by all possible means. His stories provide good food for college boys and girls. But it is interesting to note that many writers succeeding him have also been greatly influenced by his ways of thinking.

In the stories of the Awahon Age, another significant aspect is noticeable and it is a revolt against the hypocrisy of in matters of sexual exploitation resorted to by the aristocratic class in society. In this respect, Troilokyanath Goswami is a name to reckon with. He set his eyes on the prostitutes and widows and their problems and revolted against the customs of society which have kept these classes of people in object misery and deprivation. In his story "Jāraj" (The Bastard) the hero lifts his hammer against his father as if to symbolise that revolt.

Another aspect of Goswami's stories is his attempt to bring down the romantic dream into the level of reality. In the story "Sipinī" (The weaving woman) the heroine has learnt to understand the real meaning of love and she is therefore in search of such a lover who can keep her art of weaving alive. This is undoubtedly a novel contribution in
the context of the purely romantic and dreamy conception of the preceding age.

It is however noteworthy that no woman writer of repute emerged in the field of Assamese literature to focus the attention of people on the problems of modern educated women. Birinchi Kumar Barua, under the pen-name of Bina Barua, exposed the problems of educated women in his stories, in a brilliant way. The problems of love and marriage faced by Assamese girls on their going to Calcutta to prosecute higher studies there have been revealed in many of his stories. He has also exhibited remarkable skill in presenting the problems of rural Assamese women in his stories.

Dinanath Sharma, another powerful writer of that age, showed his skill in another manner in his stories. He set his love stories against the background of life's varied aspects. Many of his stories have attained popular recognition because of an admixture of death, murder, suspense, conspiracy, villiany and such other phenomena in them, but we donot find in them characters that can touch the emotional cord of the readers. In Uma Sharma's stories, we find a philosophical interpretation of love while in those of Krishna Bhuyan, varied aspects of physical love found their expression.

A bold approach to the element of love characterised the stories of a few writers of the later Awahon Age. They were Nalini Kumar Barua, Sadananda Das, Chitrabhanu Choudhury
and others. But they gave up story writing after composing a few stories. Two other writers who likewise desisted from story-writing after contribution a couple or two of good stories to the pages of 'Awahon' were Munin Barkatakay and Probodh Gosuami.

The post-war period saw the most remarkable change in the field of literature and the Assamese short story also could not escape radical change. The destruction caused by the war and the partition of the country leading to communal conflicts brought about a change in man’s outlook on love and other finer human feelings. The glory of love lost its glamour under the terrible impact of the horrors of war and the atomic weapons of destructions. Deteriorating sense of values rendered love and the institution of marriage purely commercial in character. Love and chastity lost their greatness and sanctity under the glare of money and wealth. Countless mothers and daughters fell a prey to the communal riots that made them lose their honour and chastity, ultimately forcing them to take refuge in Assam’s shelter homes or land in brothels. Besides, the effect of modernism gave rise to all kinds of perverted forms in matters of sex. Influence of western psychology and literature added to increased sex-perversion resulting out of sex-suppression in our societies. The powerful Assamese writers also could not but be affected by the prevailing tendencies and consequently love lost its spiri-
tual and idealistic flavour. Writers like Syed Abdul Malik and Homen Bargohain presented in their stories this total destruction of the feelings of love and emotion, brought about by communal clashes and the accompanying social and moral degradation. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharjee, among the writers of this period stands singularly apart by restoring the traditional value to love although he also wrote many of his stories in the background of the communal holocaust.

The influence of Freudian psychoanalysis, and the scientific interpretation of sex and sexual behaviour made by Havelock Ellis, Jung etc. further contributed to the changed outlook on love. Alongside, there were created certain complex characters in the stories of the period. In Abdul Malik's story 'Bibhatsa Bedona' (The Horrible Agony) the hero Dipak's character assumes a kind of psychological complexity leading to mental unbalance. This kind of characters are to be found also in Homen Borgohain; often shrinks from freely and openly exposing the suppressed sexual hunger of his characters, but yet he succeeds in becoming realistic in his analysis of love and sex in his stories. Abdul Malik in his story Gohbar (The cave) has gone to the extent of presenting the ugly sexual relation between a father and daughter. This kind of mentality reveals a diseased attitude to love and sex and clearly reflects the unhealthy influence of western decadent life. This damaging trend surely cuts at the very
root of the noble sentiment called love and urgently calls for immediate condemnation from all right and healthy thinking people.

Another aspect of the post-war period was to present the aesthetic side of love through scientific analysis. In this respect Sourav Kumar Chaliha occupies a noteworthy position. Yet another special feature of the stories of this age was to look into the problems of prostitutes from economic standpoint instead of looking into their physical appeal and their lurid sex-life. Not only that there was an attempt to show how financial stringency has driven them to the life of shame, but also there was a strong protest against the exploitation of these helpless women. Padma Barkataky in his story *Aslil* (The obscene) has shown the prostitutes coming out in a procession to voice their grievance against the society. In order to show how financial need prompts the women to take up the oldest profession of the world, the writer has totally ignored the sex-factor from the story. Likewise in the story *Nilai* (The shameless woman) he has presented the pathetic picture of a young woman failing to cover up her body in the absence of a piece of cloth. The same kind of picture we find in Arun Goswami’s story, *Mashmariadhālīr Lāaj* (The shame of a fisher-girl) where the girl cannot afford to put on a pantie beneath her frock because of object poverty. These pictures are realistic perhaps, but
they have totally destroyed the romantic element from the sentiment of love, that have stirred the imagination of writers from times immemorial.

Modern love-stories are fast losing the very sentiment of love which has always been their driving force. Hard realities of life have driven away all that was sustaining and enduring in the bygone days. Inequitable distribution of money, class-difference and class consciousness and such other factors have made men indifferent to the questions of love and marriage. The characters created by the contemporary writers seem to be unfamiliar with the traditional feelings of love and the sentiments associated with it. Like the heroes of Camus' novels they react to the feeling of love. They get attracted to women but fail to understand whether it is love or some other sentiment. Abani, the hero of Apurba Sharma's 'Andhakarar Alaap' (The conversation of darkness) gets infatuated by Suprava, the heroine, but yet fails to understand the nature of his attraction. The same tone is to be noticed in the love-stories of Debabrata Das as well. However, he has tried to show how love can have its fulfilment through physical satisfaction and bodily attachment, instead of remaining just a romantic feeling. Another aspect that finds expression in the love-stories of this period is to look at man woman relationship from financial standpoint and point out the decadence of the traditional value of love. In
this respect Pranabjyoti Deka stands as a class by himself. His 'Bewarish Laash' (The unclaimed corpse) is a very important work. Have a woman gets absorbed by the thought of the amount of money she might get by selling the deadbody of her former husband instead of performing the necessary funeral rites. Being herself a Muslim lady, she goes out to perform the last rites of a Hindu man according to Hindu religious custom. She thereby rises above traditional barrier, but the moment she learns that she can get money in lieu of the corpse, she sells it to the Hospital. Thus ultimately the grim truth comes out that money is more important than any other thing to a destitute woman.

In this way, in the contemporary period, love in all its varied aspects has made its appearance in the Assamese short stories. We can notice a gradual evolution from the purely romantic attitude to a realistic assessment of love. All kinds of traditional beliefs and ideals have often been ruthlessly trampled down. Yet, hopefully, we do not also fail to notice how those beliefs and ideals have not totally lost their significance and importance. In the short stories of the Awahon Age as well as the Ramdhenu Age and even in the present age, those ideals and beliefs often find their expression.

However, modern we become in our outlook and way of thinking, we cannot but recognise the ennobling influence
of love in our life. We cannot overlook the fact that the noble sentiment called love is intimately related to the existence and well-being of humanity and it is through the delineation of that sentiment through literature that we can serve a useful purpose in the society. However scientifically and rationally we try to analyse the feeling of love, its intrinsic value and quality can never be lost sight of. It is this hope which will always continue to sustain the human world even in the face of all attempts to denounce the real worth and glory of love.