CHAPTER VII

HITESWAR BOR BORUAH'S PROSE-WRITINGS:

(1) A Historical Novel
(11) OTHER PROSE-WRITINGS.

CONCLUDING REMARKS
Hiteswar Bor Boruah's solitary contribution to the domain of the Assamese novel is his Mālita, which is ascribed in the title page by the writer himself as "a tragedy of the Ahom-Kacharee War." Though the novel passed through press in 1914, it was the product of Bor Boruah's early endeavours in literature, probably of his teens or sometime after. Bor Boruah, in the chronological chart of his literary works as prepared by him, puts the date-seal of composition against this novel as 1903, the date in which the poet's Kamatāpur Dhyanā Kāvyā is also said to have been composed. Again, in the autobiographical note - Tifook Prabās as appended to Dhubā-Kali, which was published in 1902, there is the mention of this novel, and it proves beyond doubt that the Mālita is a much earlier work of the poet. From the style of the prose-composition and the treatment of the romantic theme of the novel, we can be sure of our contention. An intimate reading of the novel reveals the juvenile promise of Bor Boruah, whose literary talent had its ultimate flowering and fruition in the domains of Assamese sonnets and literary epics.

Our purpose of study is not to see Hiteswar Bor Boruah as a novelist, which he is not, but to see the poet and his purpose even through his novel in our sequential study. In our reading
of the novel as in our reading of the kāvyas come to the focus the same dominating features of Bor Boruah's literary genius: his interest in national history, his deep appreciation of the heroic virtues of woman and his tragic vision of life. Moreover, every page of the novel bears the stamp of Bor Boruah's wide and wise reading of foreign literatures, particularly English as well as of the literary profit he has made out of it. Our approach to Malita will, therefore, be according to these angles of vision.

Bor Boruah had the deep conviction that the bases of the national life and literature should be the national history. And with this conviction he took his poetic pen that produced his famous historical kāvyas as well as his historical novel Malita. The very first lines of the Preface to the novel testify to this conviction of the poet and contain a note of apology for the defects that might be inherent in the novel. Bor Boruah writes: "Our Motherland Assam, which is a play-ground of Nature, is full of many historical events. In the light of one such small event this small novel has been composed. Though this is not the first novel in the modern Assamese literature, it may be called the first endeavour of the writer in novel-writing. When something is going to be done, many troubles appear at the beginning. That in this first novel of ours there are many drawbacks, the readers should not be particularly told."

The defects that may be there in the novel are not to be magnified as the poet himself admits. But the historical perspective of the writer will get due place in our discussion.

1. Hiteswar Bor Boruah: Malita: The first paragraph of the Preface: (Translated into English from the original in Assamese)
Mālita, that has been dedicated to the poet's elder brother Dharmeswar Bor Boruah, contains eleven Chapters in all. Of these the Second, the Third, the Fifth, the Seventh and the Eighth are more devoted to history than to the romantic tale of the novel. The Chapter V, which is said to have contained 'purani kathā' (Old events), may be called a page of the Assam history. The old historical events that are narrated in this Chapter are as follows:

At the beginning of the seventeenth century when Susengphā or Buddhī Svaraga Nārayan was on the throne of the Ahom Kingdom, Dhan Mānik, King of Jaintiā, took Prabhākar, the ruler of Dimaruvā as a prisoner. Prabhākar was the nephew of the Kachāri Rāja Satrudaman and his younger brother - Prince Bhīmbal. Satrudaman asked Dhan Mānik to release his nephew, but the latter paid no heed to it. Being enraged Satrudaman invaded the Jaintia Kingdom in 1533/1534 Saka, and a fierce battle ensued between the two. Being defeated in the battle the Jaintiā Rāja sought the help of the Ahom Rāja Buddhī Svaraga Nārayan and agreed to offer his only daughter Padmāvatī to the Ahom Rāja. In accordance with the agreement the Ahom Rāja assisted the Jaintiā Rāja with many soldiers. The Jaintiā Rāja had another battle with the Kachāri Rāja, in which the former carried the day. The Kachāri Rāja along with his soldiers fled away from the Jaintiā Kingdom.

Hearing the achievement of success in the battle Buddhī Svaraga Nārayan sent his men to bring the promised offer of the daughter of the Jaintiā Rāja. But instead of sending his daughter the Jaintiā Rāja wrote to the Ahom Rāja that the princess
would be sent only when she would be carried on a palanquin through the capital city of the Kachāri Rājā. At this the Āhom Rājā sent two messengers to the Kachāri Rājā, seeking permission for the purpose. But, because of the continued enmity, the Kachari Rājā refused the permission, and at this the Āhom Rājā became furious. The Āhom force under the management of Chopret Burda Gohain, Cāring Rājā, Tipām Rājā, Marangikhovā Bar Chetia and Sādari Gohain had its camp at Singhduvar. By the river-route of Kapilī Khām Cing Bor Gohain, Sondar Gohain and Abhoirām Salāl Gohain took many soldiers with them. At last both the parties had their combined attacks on the Kachāri camps at Dharmapur Lānor and Sāt Gāhani. A few days after, Abhoirām Salāl Gohain with a party of men went to a neighbouring forest on hunting.

There is more of history connected with Abhoirām Salāl Gohain. Abhoirām's father - Lecāidāng Salāl Gohain was endowed with special virtues of intelligence and heroism. The Āhom King Sukhampha offered him the post of Salāl Gohain in recognition of his talents. But Lecāidāng Salāl Gohain was treacherously slain by the Kachāri Prince Bhīmbal in the war between the Āhoms and the Kochs. The death of Lecāidāng was an irreparable loss to the Āhom Kingdom.

At the time of the unfortunate death of his father Abhoirām was only 15 or 16 years old. He had a severe shock at the treacherous killing of his father. His mother at the time of her death asked Abhoirām to feed fat the grudge against Bhīmbal. And at the last wish of his mother Abhoirām promised not to marry
till he succeeded in taking the revenge.

This historical event of the Assam history is clearly described by Edward Gait.  

Bor Boruah takes up this historical character - Abhoiräm Salāl Gohain as the hero of Ṁālītā. He presents in the Chapter I of the novel Abhoiräm on hunting in the manner of a romance. Abhoiräm loses his way in the forest, and following a fire comes near a few huts in it. In the light of a big fire Abhoiräm sees a beautiful girl of sixteen to seventeen years of age - tied hands and feet in chains. From the girl Abhoiräm comes to know that it is a den of dacoits and the girl has been kidnapped by them. A love at the first sight occurs between Abhoiräm and the girl, and Abhoiräm promises to rescue the girl from the clutches of the dacoits.

In the Chapter II the event takes a sudden turn for the better. Abhoiräm becomes pleased to see Rūp Handique, the intimate friend of his father as the Chief of the dacoits. Rūp Handique narrates the story how he has turned himself a dacoit and how he has kidnapped the girl from a garden of flowers of the Kachāri Rājā. But Rūp Handique has failed to give the whereabouts of the girl. He has a mind to offer the girl in marriage to a promising young man with his treasured wealth as dowry. But he has failed to fulfil his desire. Rūp Handique also informs Abhoiräm that he will not survive as he has been mortally wounded with a poisoned sword when he has been engaged in dacoity in the house of a rich man in the Kachāri Kingdom. Just before

death Rup Handique has offered all his men and money along with the kidnapped girl to Abhoiram. He also advises Abhoiram to take revenge upon the enemy of his father. When Rup Handique dies, Abhoiram sets the girl free.

In the Chapter III there has been an intimate understanding between Abhoiram and the beautiful girl. The girl identifies herself as the younger sister of the Kashari Raja - Satrudaman and her name is Malita. She narrates to Abhoiram how she has been kidnapped from the King's flower garden by the gang of dacoits. On further enquiry Abhoiram comes to know that Malita's other elder brother is Princ Bhimal who is the Commander-in-Chief of the Kashari army. Then Abhoiram explains to Malita how her brother Bhimal is his arch enemy as he slew his father treacherously during the Ahom-Koch war. He also gives a detailed account of the old enmity between the Ahoms and the Kasharis with a special reference to the Ahom-Kachari War. Then Abhoiram gives his identity as a general of the Ahom army and tells Malita how he has encamped at Sat Gaon to feed fat the ancient grudge against her brother Bhimal. Abhoiram promises to return Malita safely to her house.

The young pair, then, exchange their words of appreciation to each other. Malita wants Abhoiram to have a compromise with her brothers, but Abhoiram demonstrates his strongest determination and promise not to undergo any compromise with his enemies. But Malita, expressing her innocent love for Abhoiram, submits herself to him as his wife. Abhoiram, while expressing his willingness to accept the proposal, reminds her of his
promise which stands on the way to their union. Thus, a compli-
cacy arises in the love-affair as the hero and the heroine
belong to two opposing enemy-camps.

In the Chapter IV a romantic ride of the hero and the
heroine on the same horse throughout the night is pleasantly
pictured. They at last come to a flower-garden of the Kachāri
King and have their farewell meeting. They renew their love to
each other without resolving the compliacy. Abhoirām has the
premonition that he will be killed by mighty Bhiṁbal, and he
hopes to have a meeting with Mālitā in the night of Sri Panchami
day in which the battle will take place.

In the Chapter VI the Ahom-Kachāri War is described. In
the War Abhoirām and his army have defeated the Kachāri army
under Bhiṁbal. For not having the news of the battle Mālitā
becomes extremely worried. She comes to the temple of Goddess
Mahāmāyā and prepares to commit suicide by cutting her throat
with a knife as she has failed to persuade her brothers to a
compromise with Abhoirām. She cannot dare to see either the
death of Abhoirām who is her betrothed or the deaths of her
own brothers in the War and she is, therefore, caught in the
tangle. But her life has been miraculously saved by Abhoirām,
who, after the initial success in the battle, happens to meet
Mālitā in the temple. Mālitā prays to Abhoirām to have a compro-
mise with her brothers first and then to accept her as his wife.
At this prayer the heart of Abhoirām is softened and his will-
ingness to have a compromise with Prince Bhiṁbal is expressed.
Mālitā assures Abhoirām that she will try her utmost to send her
brother Bhīmbal to him. At this arrangement the tangle seems to be partially over. Abhoirām offers a ring to Mālītā as a token of his promise to accept her as his wife.

In the Chapter VII Prince Bhīmbal appears before Abhoirām and expresses his pleasure to have come to terms with the latter. He also expresses his satisfaction at the proposed union between Mālītā and Abhoirām. Abhoirām, while praising the approach of Bhīmbal, asks him to offer their famous elephant named Pamanā. Bhīmbal tells Abhoirām that Pamanā is very dear to the Kachāri Rājā. However, he will persuade his brother and bring the elephant to Abhoirām after fifteen days, in the night of Sri Pancamī. At the time of departure Bhīmbal observes the camp of the Ahoms carefully.

In the Chapter VIII it is described how Abhoirām is waiting for the arrival of Bhīmbal with the elephant Pamanā on the Sri Pancamī day. But betraying the trust Bhīmbal has come to attack the camp of the Ahoms at the dead of night. Abhoirām and the Ahom soldiers have failed to defend themselves as all their weapons of war are either stolen or made useless by Bhīmbal secretly before the attack. The unarmed Ahom soldiers are mercilessly killed and Abhoirām also falls a prey.

In the Chapter IX Mālītā's condition is heroically described. Mālītā apprehends the death of her beloved Abhoirām and writes a letter to her mother, stating her lot. She tells her mother, that Abhoirām is her husband and he has been killed by her brother. Moreover, her brother is going to offer her in marriage to some other person, and that is not possible for a
chaste woman like her. After writing the letter Malita leaves their house for ever and goes to the battle-field to find out the corpse of her husband.

In the Chapter X Malita discovers her Abhoiram who is lying dead in the battle-field. She tells her dead husband that though they are not united on earth, they will be united in heaven. Cherishing that romantic desire for union in heaven Malita commits suicide and falls down dead upon the lifeless body of Abhoiram.

In the Chapter XI Bhibimal and others come to know of the unfortunate death of Malita. The dead bodies of Abhoiram and Malita are cremated together according to the customs of the land. Bhibimal becomes repentant for what he has done. And calling himself a great sinner the seeks Malita's forgiveness. He declares that Malita has set an example of chastity and he will be eternally united with her husband and she will be really happy there.

As in his kavya - *Kamatimur Dhyana*, so also in his novel *Malita* Bor Boruah seems to have been under the profound impact of Shakespeare's tragic vision and art. In *Malita* several scenes have been designed after those of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. At the head of the Chapter III Bor Boruah quotes the line - "Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo? Deny thy father and refuse thy name; Or if you will not, be but sworn my love and I will no longer be a Capulet" (from Act II, Sc. II of *Romeo and Juliet*). Again, he quotes: "Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near a day" (from Act III, Sc. V. of *Romeo and Juliet*) at the head of
the Chapter IV. In these two Chapters the theme of love between Abhiroirām and Mālitā has been presented. Like Romeo and Juliet, Abhiroirām and Mālitā belong to opposing enemy-camps and their love, like that of Romeo and Juliet, grows at the first sight. As the enmity between the two houses of Montague and Capulet has stood on the union of Romeo and Juliet, so also the enmity between the Āhoms and the Kachāris has dug the grave of Abhiroirām and Mālitā. As Juliet's marriage has been arranged with another young man named Paris, so also Mālitā's marriage has been arranged by her brother Bhīmbal with some other young man. Romeo has nocturnal appointments with Juliet in the orchard of Capulet, so also Abhiroirām meets Mālitā in the flower garden of the Kachāri Rājā. As Juliet stabs herself and falls dead upon dead Romeo, so also Mālitā cuts her throat and lies down dead upon the lifeless Abhiroirām. It is, therefore, seen that though the two episodes are different in context, they are more or less similar in the origin of the love-affair, in the creation of the love-tangle and in the ultimate tragic catastrophe.

In spite of the Shakespearean impact, Bor Boruah tries to maintain his originality by elevating the character of Mālitā with heroic virtues. In his characteristic way Bor Boruah draws the picture of Mālitā as an ideal Hindu woman who is not only chaste but also heroic. While narrating the heroic determination and sacrifice of Mālitā Bor Boruah says: "To speak the truth, women are more courageous and spirited than men. Even without going to very ancient tales, we can remember Joan of Ark at the invasion of Orleans, Jhānsi Rānī Lakṣmībāi and Bor Gohāin
Dāngarīa's widow who fought against her husband's enemy-Turbak during the sixth Muslim invasion of Assam in order to prove how women are endowed with heroic virtues.¹ So, in this light, Mālītā is a heroine who can sacrifice herself heroically for the sake of her husband, and who cannot hope to live on earth without her husband. Bor Boruah's Mālītā, therefore, belongs to the same rank of this other heroines i.e. Jaymatī, Sādarī and Mulā Gābbharu.

Besides presenting woman's heroism Bor Boruah portrays his tragic vision through the dying words of Mālītā: "My dear Husband, I have not gained you in this earth. I am not sorry for it as the earthly life is transient. My Lord, we have not united physically in the world, and I am not weeping in sorrow for that. But we have been united mentally. Where is the pain then? Is this perishable body everlasting? The sinful body is left on earth. Though we are not united on earth, we will be united in heaven. The shadow of dejected love of the poisonous earth cannot touch our union in heaven. The fire of separation in love and other sins will be left on earth."⁴ With these words Bor Boruah wants to present Mālītā as a more matured character than Juliet. What is more interesting is that Bor Boruah succeeds in maintaining his tragic vision unabated all throughout his creations: his kāvyas, his sonnets and his novel. When we have been profited from this understanding, we have all excuses for any lack of characteristics that generally mark a good novel. Yet we shall casually mention how there were sufficient scopes for

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3. Hiteswar Bor Boruah: Mālītā: P 76. (Translated into English from the original in Assamese)
characterisation and plot construction in the novel. A novelist, by virtue of his realistic imagination, must be able to present the society in which his men and women live, move and have their beings. Social systems, manners and customs, passions and prejudices, aims and aspirations to which the men and women of a novel are wedded must form an essential background of a good novel. In other words, the novel as a piece of literature, must be an interpretation of life, and "a novel is really great only when it lays its foundations broad and deep in the things which most constantly and seriously appeal to us in the struggle and fortunes of our common humanity."\(^5\)

And this observation is true in the case of a historical novel also. Here, as in other social novels, the novelist's prime concern is to present his men and women in the context of the society, not to present merely some historical events in isolation. In Mali'ta the novelist has failed to picture the social and family lives as the nucleus of the historical events. We do not have the picture of the society in which Mali'ta, Abheiram and Bhambal used to live. The past age of history should have been present before our eyes through the ways and actions of Mali'ta and Abheiram. In short, the success of Ber Beruah as historical novelist would have mainly depended upon his adequate handling of historical events through the intercourse of "the struggle and fortunes of our common humanity."

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5. William Henry Hudson; An Introduction to the Study of Literature, p. 132.
There were sufficient scopes for characterisation also. The characters of श्रीराम, अभीराम and भीमबाल could have been drawn with more complexities and deeper human touches. In a matured hand the character of भीमबाल would have appeared as a first-rate villain. And the novelist could have successfully shown how love, chastity and innocence of human life perish in the grip of villainy or, in other words, how tragedy is a part of human life. That this was the apparent purpose of the novelist can be known from his use of the term 'tragedy' in the title page of the novel.

We have already made it clear that our purpose is not to magnify the inadequacies of the novel. But we have succeeded in understanding the vision of Ber Beruah, the poet.

(ii) OTHER PROSE-WRITINGS:

(a) The अग्निराम दिन (A Voluminous History of Assam); and
(b) the Presidential Address delivered in the First Historical Conference of the Assam Sāhitya Sabha held at Nongpoh in 1926.

The title of our study does not include Hiteswar Ber Beruah as a prose-writer. Yet his prose-writings that have been embedded in (a) his voluminous history of Assam - the अग्निराम दिन as well as in (b) the Presidential address delivered by him in the First Historical Conference held at Nongpoh in 1926 present before us Ber Beruah's historical personality, which, being wedded to his poetic personality, has established him as a prominent poet of historical epics in Assamese. It is something rare
that a poet of prominence should also become a first-rate writer of national history. It is interesting to note that the top-most epic-writer and Sonneteer in Assamese presided over the first historical conference of the Assam Sāhitya Sābhā. And it proves that in his lifetime Ber Beruah was honoured more as a historian than as a poet. It has, therefore, become crystal clear that Ber Beruah's historical personality forms the basis of his poetic personality and he is popularly known as 'Poet-Historian Hiteswar Ber Beruah.'

The _Āhemar Din _or the History of Assam under the Ahoms may be called a life-long mission of Hiteswar Ber Beruah. The book that contains nearly 8000 (two thousand) pages in manuscript is of four volumes. The continuous efforts of the writer in compiling an authentic history of Assam under the Ahoms that ruled in Assam for six hundred years and his 'chief object' behind the compilation-work can be known well from the words of the writer himself. Regarding his persevering pursuit in the compilation work Ber Beruah says: "After a continuous and strenuous effort of a considerably long period, extending over ten years or more, I have been able to complete this _Āhemar Din _or the History of Assam under the Ahoms, and in handing the same to my countrymen, the generous public of Assam, I must take this opportunity to mention here that this Book hardly claims to be a complete Record of the Province, although no pains and troubles were spared to make it so as far as practicable. After all, it is but a skeleton, made of the braided wisp of straws, but I sincerely hope, that some abler hands in
near future, (even after my death, if not before) will put the
necessary clay and colour to make it a nice and beautiful idol."

The date of writing these words is March, 1924, while the
work of compilation started from 1913 according to the chronol-
egical chart of the literary works as given by Ber Beruah. And
the poet passed away in 1939. But, not to speak of putting "the
necessary clay and colour to make it a nice and beautiful idol,"
the Ahamar Din has remained so long in manuscript for ever half
a century.

If the Ahamar Din comes to light after the solitude of
half a century, it will open up the eyes of historians to many
an authentic information hitherto distorted or concealed. The
'chief object' of Ber Beruah behind the compilation of the
voluminous history is clearly stated in his words: "The chief
object of this book is to acquaint our young men, the future
hope of our mother country, with the past history of their Land
of Birth, mainly in the following heads:

(a) The History of Assam under the Ahoms, including British
period up-to-date;

(b) The Bisayas or Officials under the Ahom Kings; their re-
spective duties, rank and honour;

(c) Khels or Guilds or Clans, - their origins (where possible),
respective duties, social position etc.

(d) Important Four Satras, or the Four Great Religious Institu-
tions of Assam, including Parbatti Gosains, Nea Gosains
and Mukalmeeria Bhattacherjiyas (commonly known as Mukali-
meeria Gosains); their rank and honour;

6. Hiteswar Ber Beruah: The Ahamar Din, The extract is taken
from the Preface written in English, while the History is
written in Assamese.
(e) The Origin of Āhoms: their religion, manners and customs; their social rites and functions, various industries during their reign, such as geld-making etc., their system of Govt. etc.

(f) Some families of High Class Brahmans and Kayasthas, their migration into Assam; their origin (where possible);

(g) Genealogical Tables of the Āhom Kings, three Great Gehains, and Sāt-Gerelia Āhoms (Ber Beresahs and Ber Pheekans, Chera Pheekans etc.) together with some selected families of the Province, Old and New. 7

The authenticity of the information included in the work is proved by the following confession of the chronicle: "I beg to add here that in compiling this Book, for it is more a compilation than an original work, I have consulted (here and there copied also) the writings of various famous writers and authors of books, and also several articles in various journals and magazines." 8

Ber Borah's sincerity of purpose and heartfelt devotion in compiling his Āh Omar Din is also known from the following words of his letter written to the people of Assam through the Letter-to-the-Editorial column of a newspaper of his time: Some ten years ago, I informed the Assamese public of my attempt to compile a voluminous History of Assam under the Āhom rule. I now beg to inform them that labouring under various difficulties and heavy pressure of multifarious works I have been able to complete by this time almost all the volumes of my Āhmar Din or the History of Assam. Three volumes of this History have been fully prepared and, to these three, I wish to add one

7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
volume more, which will solely deal with the origin and genealogy of some families of importance, old and new. In this connection, I had to write to many worthy scions of important lineage asking them for their genealogies, and almost all of them have made favourable response to my appeal."

Thus the poet who is also a historian cannot but be a writer of historical epics and novel.

Ber Beruah's presidential address delivered the First Historical Conference of the Assam Sahitya Sabha held on 29th December, 1926 at Newgong also presents before us his historical personality. He starts his discussion showing the differences in meaning of the terms, 'Buranj', 'History' and 'Itihas'. Then he comes to the pre-historic and pre-Ahem days of Assam. He refers to the information available in the Kālikā Purāṇ and Jezini-Tantra. He then discusses how the Ahoms came and established kingdom in Soomār (Old Assam). He also refers to the original tribes such as Barāhī, Marān, Kachari, Chutiya and Bāra-Bhuyan who dwelt in Soomār. Ber Beruah also discusses the original nationality, language and religion of the Ahoms. How the Ahoms proved their superiority in prowess and the art of war is authentically narrated. The system of the Ahom administration, the condition of the country under the Ahoms, their trade-relations with the neighbouring countries, the acceptance of Hinduism by the Ahoms and their endeavours for its development, and the culture of history under the Ahoms are systematically dealt with in the presidential address. Ber Beruah then

shows the necessity of a detailed history of Assam in three divisions (a) the Pre-Ahem Age, (b) the Ahem Age, and (c) the British Age. He also shows the details to be included in the history of Assam.

Bar Baruah's presidential address appears to be the guideline of his own work - अहेम दिन. He leaves only one topic out of discussion i.e. the indebtedness of the Assamese language and literature to the patronage of the Ahem Kings. In that connection Bar Beruah says: "The Ahem Kings tried their utmost for the development of the Assamese language and literature. The modern Assamese language and literature are very much indebted to the Ahem Kings. If the Assamese language and literature had not had unexpected development under the patronage of the Ahem Kings, we would not have received our language and literature in the present condition. On this topic we have many things to discuss. It will be a matter of great pleasure if some subsequent president of the Sāhitya Sabhā takes up this topic for a detailed discussion."

It has, therefore, become quite clear that Bar Beruah's urge for patriotism, his broad humanism and his excellence in poetic art have their roots in his study of the national history. And by virtue of his historical approach to literature, he has been able to win the patriotic hearts of the people.