CHAPTER - III

BORDOLOI'S LIFE AND SOCIO-CULTURAL AND LITERARY BACK-GROUND OF HIS TIME.

I

Bordoloi's ancestors:

Rajanikanta Bordoloi's ancestors were residents of Dihing area in Upper Assam. During the days of Burmese invasions the grand father of Rajanikanta Bordoloi fled to Nadiya-Santipur. His name was Tuwaroia Bordoloi. Tuwaram Bordoloi later became a great Sanskrit scholar. After the turmoil of the Burmese invasion was over, he again returned to Bajali in erstwhile Kamrup district of Assam and settled there permanently after getting married. There a son was born to him. His name was Narakanta Sarma. This Narakanta Sarma was the father of Rajanikanta Bordoloi.¹

---

¹ There is a difference in respect of the surname of Rajanikanta Bordoloi's father. D. Sarma has mentioned 'Bordoloi' as the surname of Narakanta (Aupanyasik Rajanikanta Bordoloi : p. 163), but the novelist has himself mentioned the surname 'sarma' in his father's name (Rajani Bordoloi Racanamala : p. 107).
Rajanikanta Bordoloi was born in 24th November, 1967 at an adjacent village of Guwahati named Kukurmuta. He was the eldest of Narakanta Sarma's children. Narakanta Sarma married four wives and Rajanikanta was the son of his fourth wife. His mother was the daughter of Dubadatta Changukakati, a great personality of music and culture. Narakanta Sarma's all three earlier wives were issueless. Therefore he had to marry again. This time, with the bliss of the satradhikar of Dakshin Pat satra, Narakanta became father of five sons. Among them Rajanikanta was the eldest.

Narakanta Sarma's mother's name was Tipiri Devi. She was the niece of one Rudraram Ujir, who was a lawyer by profession. He was also a man of rare and dignified personality. Due to his close association with the family of Rudram Ujir's status, Narakanta got the advantage to elevate his position in the then British regime. At first


From the description of the birth place given by the author in his autobiographical article atmajiban carit, the location of the village Kukurmuta can be spotted within the vicinity of present Guwahati's Hedayetpur and Gandhibasti area. A large part of present revenue area of Hedayetpur and the Western part of Gandhibasti area were under the jurisdiction of village Kukurmuta (Rajani Bordoloi Rakanamala; p. 106-107).

he learnt the survey work of land under the supervision of Jenkins. Later he was given the assignment of Muhur-rer in a census office at Guwahati. Thus working in the first ever settlement assignment he was promoted to one more responsible post in Shillong on a monthly salary of Rs. 60/-. He served in the said job till to his retirement. After enjoying three years’ pension Narakanta died of Cholera.

Rajanikanta Bordoloi’s early childhood was not at all struggle-free. At the time of his father’s death Rajanikanta was scarcely nine years of age. At the death of his father Rajanikanta Bordoloi became almost guardian-less and he had to struggle for his survival. His uncle Durlav Chandra became his mentor. Under the guardianship of this uncle and his mother, Bordoloi accepted the life as a challenge. In stead of failing in his life-struggle, he prosecuted on his early education and later on went to Calcutta for higher study. Narakanta died — but he left financial resources to his family to pull on after his death. He procured an estate in Bausi Village near Kulhati in Kamrup District. Another estate also was owned by him at Beltola-Noonmati.
His village life at Bausi:

Rajanikanta's grand-father used to settle in Bausi village permanently. But Narakanta had to move to Kukurmuta village for his service-life. But the estate remained there at Bausi village and the family used to go there occasionally to perform certain rites and rituals. Rajanikanta had been to this village on several occasions and his autobiographical note on childhood was a reminiscent of Bausi's memory. In fact, his Curakaran was performed in Bausi village itself. The reference of this observance was a long-cherished memory of Rajanikanta in the said autobiographical note. It has been mentioned that on the night of the observance dhuliya performance was held. Such memory of early childhood acted as a treasure-house in the mind of this novelist.

His early education and student life:

After the return from Bausi Rajanikanta's formal schooling took place. His bidyarambha (beginning of education) ceremony was performed by Sasadhar Jarna, an orthodox priest.

In his early childhood the village of Kukurmata and was his only place of playfulness and merrymaking. According to his own recollection from memory, at that time there was a P.W.D. road in the Northern side of the village. This was the government road to Nagaon. There was also a lake near it. There was a grazing field in the south. After that there was a hill. To the west of the village there was the township of Guwahati. The Nabagraha hill was situated to its north. In the east there was a pond near the Nabagraha Temple. The pond referred to here is the present Silpukhuri pond of Guwahati. In this vast area of openness and freeness Rajanikanta passed his childhood with gaiety and cheerfulness.

Rajanikanta passed the Entrance examination in 1885 A.D. Then he was seventeen years of age. He was qualified from the Guwahati Seminary. At present this institution is known as Cotton Collegiate Higher Secondary School. At that time there were no colleges in Assam and Rajanikanta had to go to Calcutta for prosecuting higher education. He got himself admitted in the Metropolitan College in Calcutta. For this Rajanikanta got a scholarship of Rs. 20/- instituted by Mr. Eliot, the then Chief Commissioner of Assam. The Scholarship was instituted in 1881

itself, and Rajanikanta's name was selected in 1885 for his performance in the school leaving examination in that year. He passed the F.A. examination with first division in 1887. He then joined the famous City College for his B.A. Course study. Simultaneously he joined in the Calcutta Medical College also but later on he discontinued it. Then he devoted to his B.A. Course and graduated from Calcutta University in 1889. After his graduation, Rajanikanta joined a Law College in the city, but he had to discontinue his study for some personal inconveniences of his own. And literally that was the end of his student life.

Bordoloi left Calcutta in the month of March, 1890 and started for Guwahati. He first joined the Government service on 8th April of the year as a sub-ordinate clerk in the office of the District Commissioner on a salary of Rs. 40/- per month. That was the beginning of his service life. At the time of Bordoloi's joining the government duty, the national census work was started. Bordoloi had to work for the census duty in the capacity of a census clerk. Bordoloi himself had admitted that the experiences he gathered about the history and originality of all the people of the state during this work laid tremendous

influence on his literary career. After this he became the Superintendent in Rani mouza and then joined as a branch assistant in the census office of Sir E. Gait. During this tenure, Bordoloi came into close contact of Gait who asked him some queries about Assam history. Rajanikanta could not satisfy him with answers and he had to endure adverse remarks from Gait for the poor knowledge of his mother land. Nevertheless, Gait was pleased with positive qualities of Bordoloi. He promoted him to the post of Sub-deputy Collector in 1892 at North Lakhimpur. He served in Barpeta also in the same post.

Rajanikanta was an able administrator. For his administrative ability he was elevated to the post of Extra-Assistant Commissioner in 1901. He also served as the Deputy Commissioner of Nagaon; but it was for a brief period. It was in 1909. He then retired from government job in 1918.

After his retirement, Bordoloi involved himself in literary activities. He was a very pious man and like all retired people he gave his life the religious inclination. He even published a socio-religious magazine at his old age. The magazine was *Asom Pradipika*.

---

At his dottage Bordoloi suffered from Paralysis and he was bed-ridden for many days. He breathed his last on 25th March, 1940. At his demise Assam has lost not only a great litterateur but a noble statesman.

Bordoloi's life is experienced with eventful episodes. From his childhood to death, Bordoloi had to travel lots of places for various reasons viz. shifting of residences and governmental occupations. While doing so he gathered useful experiences which provided immense inspiration in his creative works. On the whole his parentage, his early childhood, his association with different people from different walks of life, his government duty and several other factors contributed immensely in moulding his personality and literary career. In fact many sources of his novels and other literary works were originated in such places. Besides, a vast range of people, clustering from high social position to lowermost stratum with whom Bordoloi came into direct association and contact helped him in gaining inspiration by someway or other. Mentionable here is Sir Edward Gait, the most honoured historian, the members of the Jonaki circle and other fellow calcuttans. It was for Sir Gait that Bordoloi felt a deep
fascination for the history of his own motherland. With the members of the Jonaki circle he worked for the uplift of his own language and literature. While he wrote something, he wrote for the people of his own motherland. Due recognition was given to this great son of Assam — particularly for his contribution to the literary field of the state when he was honoured with the presidency of Assam Sahitya Sabha for its Open Session held in Nagaon in 1925.

Rajanikanta had his inspiration to work for his motherland and its literature from many sources. Another factor that helped him in this objective was the closeness of his forefathers with the Ahom rulers. His forefathers were originated from Samudrakhari Daibagya of Vijaykhari clan. The forefathers of Rajanikanta resided permanently in Dihing area, as such they were known as the people of Dihingiakhari family. A genealogical table of Rajanikanta's forefathers is furnished below:

Genealogical table

Kalia Sagar Khari or Samudra Khari
Joynath Babu, place—Gauhati

Forefathers

Sathibar Kalia Bordoloi (1538 Saka era)

Narnath

Achuyatananda Samudra Khari (1592 Saka)

Balram Kavi Sekhar

Bishnanda Sagar Khari

Manpur

Srinath Siromani

Prananath

Prithubhar

Adhyapak Kripanath

Dharnath Siromani

Sarbeswar Dehiram Patgiri

Jaganath Babu

Keshabnath Swarnamoyee Debi

Bijaykhari's Rajanikanta

His family life:

It has been said earlier that Bordoloi lost his father in his very childhood and as such he was brought up under the care of his uncle and his mother. He was very obedient to his superiors. As wished by his guardians he had to marry very early. He married Swarnamoyi Debi, daughter of Joynath Bordoloi, an ancestry of the most virtuous families of Guwahati. Their marriage took place after Rajanikanta passed the F.A. Examination. Bordoloi's father-in-law, Joynath Bordoloi was a man of rich financial position and he served in the Guwahati's D.C. Court. At first his family was a denizen of Uzanbazar locality, later he moved to Catrakar and permanently settled there.

Bordoloi's wife Swarnamoyi Debi was a very pious and honest lady. For her rare qualities of womanhood, the domestic life of Rajanikanta and Swarnamoyi Debi was ideal and sweet. Swarnamoyi Debi was always dependent on her husband and Rajanikanta also had all sorts of affection and care for his wife. He always took his wife with him to all the places like Silchar, Dhuburi, and Nagaon during his tenure as a government officer.
He had to do it for other reasons also.

Towards the later part of his life Bordoloi became almost a lone man in his family. His brothers and sisters died prematurely and as such Bordoloi could not keep the members of his family in a particular place even for a few weeks. 11

**His personality:**

Rajanikanta was a man of rare personality. Physically he was a sturdily built man and like his bodily composition he was strong and sound in mental set-up also. He was high spirited, magnanimous and noble. While talking to others he was always wise, steady, grave, cool and collected. He was always a cheerful person and befriendingly to others. He could impress upon other at the instance of a moment's conversion and each and every one who came into touch of this gentleman could not evade the memory of his contact in future.

It was noticed in his very childhood that Bordoloi would one day become the man of ideal personality and rare human excellence. The natural sign

which he exhibited in course of his playfulness with his early childhood mates spoke volume of it. He was a steward of his mates in their playful activities - he was their mentor and adviser of deeds and misdeeds. But while mixing with friends and team-mates he never did anything which could hurt his superiors and amidst all the activities of childhood also he exhibited the rare spirit of mannerism and well behaviour of his elders. For this quality of his own, Rajanikanta earned blessing and well-wish from others. Bordoloi himself had mentioned about this\textsuperscript{12}

>'The two things - the high esteem that the village folk reposed on me and the fear to my uncle Durlav - kept my child life pure'.
Truely it was the benediction that never became false.

Bordoloi was an ideal student. The blessing which Sasadhar Sarma bestowed upon Rajanikanta at the beginning of his schooling by saying that Rajanikanta one day would become a very learned man\textsuperscript{13} proved true. As student he was very keen, pungent and sharp.


In his literary life also he exhibited idealism and deep sense of personality. He maintained good and cordial relationship with his contemporaries and worked for his motherland with the sense of patriotism and nationalism. He was always keen for his awareness to the uplift of his country and her literature. Once he came into some differences of opinions with Lakshminath Bezbaroa as to the concept of Vaishnavism in Assam and some of its preachers. Even their differences were published in writings in Bahi and pradipika. But these expressions were limited to the extent of literary differences only. There were not any sense of bad feeling between them and unlike some other fellow contemporaries they never indulged in blunt habit of character assassination. Bordoloi himself has confessed -

'Once I resorted to argumentation with him on the pages of pradipika. Many people thought that it was our enmity. But instead, the sense of friendship, grew more in between us. We had good relationship. But I stopped publishing pradipika when the controversy tended to be more. I was benefited by the argumentation and also became pleased with it. But personal correspondence with letters etc. was always on between us'.

In fact, Bordoloi always nurtured a revered sense of adoration for this great son of Assam.

Bordoloi was a religious and pious man. He had a spiritual mind too. His spiritual and metaphysical gaining helped to grow his mental uplift in his old age to attain the spirit of religion. Therefore, perhaps an ideal reflection of religion is always current in his novels. Rajanikanta had great respect for the Vaishnavism, propagated by Sankardeva in Assam. His sincere inclination to the preachings of this great saint added extra qualities to his personality which taught him the excellence of true humanism. He was devoid of any quality which could had hurt any body. He was never angry with anybody even in his service life as a busy government officer. He came into direct contact with different cross-sections of people in his various stages of life -- but he never displeased any body. That was the semblance of personality of this great literary figure of Assam.
The concept of Assamese culture and society does not remain confined to a particular group of people and age only. In fact, the foundation of Assamese social life which is loosely called Assamese culture, was laid during the first millennium A.D. by successive ruling families and gradually developed and expanded in course of different changes and continuities. Assamese society and its culture of is a fine example/syncretism of different heterogeneous groups that reside in Assam. There are multifarious elements which composed the basic concept of Assamese society and culture. The word 'culture' has its manifold meanings. There are diversified opinions as to the real concept of the word culture but above and all these the famous definition set forth by E.B. Tylor is still relevant. According to the definition culture is "...... that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society".15

Therefore it is obvious that culture reflects all the elements of society. Society means the people and culture reflects the behaviour of the people remaining within the society. Therefore it can be said that culture is that process which makes the society constructive and progressive. As such society and culture is complementary to each other. One can not be thought to exist without the help of the other.

Assamese society and culture is very much rich. It has been mentioned earlier that Assamese cultural-set up is multidimensional. With multiplicity of ethnical groups and their own cultural pattern-ranges, Assamese society has grown up in a unique way. Assamese culture is rich from its days of distant past. References to Assamese society and culture have been made in the two great epics of India — the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Observes K.L. Barua — "The country known as Pragjyotisha, in the most ancient times and as Kamarupa in medieval times, has been mentioned both in the Ramayana and Mahabharata. There is no doubt the same country was called pragjyotisha in earlier times and Kamarupa in later times. The references in the Ramayana, as well as the Mahabharata, indicate that the country stretched as far as the sea and that it was also, at least a hilly country."
In the Ramayana it is stated that the city of Pragjyotisha was built on a gold-crested mountain called Varaha, which was 64 yojanas in extent and which stood or abutted on the fathomless Varunalaya (sea). In the Mahabharata, Bhagadatta, the King of Pragjyotisha is called Sailalaya (dwelling among the mountains) and it is also stated that his troops consisted of Kiratas, Chinas and dwellers of the sea-coast. Even the puranic stories are embedded with the elements of Assamese culture. The famous story of Harihara’s encounter, depicted in the Visnupurana is the example of Assam’s traditional history. The story which revolves round the love affair of Usha, daughter of Dana and Aniruddha, grand son of Lord Krishna and their subsequent secret marriage resulted in the war between Hari and Hara. This famous episode is regarded as a religious myth. There are such other myths and legends which correspond to the stories of national level. One of such myth, current in our country relates to the temple of Kamakhya — a holy shrine of the Hindus.

There are myths and legends about Narakasura, the King of Kamarupa. According to one story Narakasur was the adopted son of Saint-king Janaka. Janaka found

him while he was ploughing in the field. In reality he was the son of Varaha Visnu. There are historical legends also which associates Narakasura in the traditional history of Assam. Even there are many a legend about the mighty river Brahmaputra, which is the life and soul of Assamese society and culture. There are place legends which are current in Assam. A few of them corresponds to the etymological reference of two famous names of the country known as pragjyotishpur in most ancient times and as Kamarupa in medieval times.

Assam is the gift of nature. The elements of natural beauty are the main resource of Assamese culture. Its rivers, its hills and mountains, its birds and animals etc. are all sources of her tradition upon which numerous legends, tales, ballads, and narratives are still current among the people.

So it is seen that Assam has been a nation of tradition. Tradition and culture are closely related. If culture is the body of a nation then tradition is the soul of it. Tradition is static, but culture is always dynamic. The culture of Assam developed from the traditional set-up, which thus originated in primitive days, to the present day stage with rigorous changes.
The emergence of Sankardeva the great Vaishnava saint in the social-cultural scenario of Assam is a significant event of the state. With the advent of Vaishnavism into Assam, Assamese society underwent tremendous change. Observes S.N. Sarma — "... the most important contributory factor for streamlining Assamese society was the expansion of the neo-Vaishnavite movement and the impact of the institution on the masses in regulating their religious and social life. The movement initiated by Sankardeva in the early part of the sixteenth century was carried on by his followers to almost all parts of Assam during the next two centuries through the process of proselytisation, religious propaganda and artistic and cultural rejuvenation". Satras and Namghars were established all over the Brahmaputra Valley and in these institutions people congregated to offer prayer with the sense of brotherhood, fraternity and universality and these two served as radiating centres of socio ethical needs of the people. The religion propagated by Sankardeva engulfed people from all walks of life regardless of their tribe, caste and community. This is a remarkable phenomenon of Assam's social history which heralded in a period of cultural renaissance.

The advent of the Ahoms to Assam and their six hundred years of reign is an episode of more significance in the political history of Assam. The Ahoms adopted the language, culture and literature of this land and during their regime the Assamese culture took a more composite shape with more syncretism and more admixture. But towards the end, the machinery of Ahom rule began to decline due to the autocratic mis-rule of some kings and the haughty behaviour of some ministers and as a result chaos and anarchy began to occur which is perhaps the most disgraceful chapter of the history of Assam.

The remaining period of the Ahom rule up to 1826 were nothing but last and final extinction of Ahom dominion. Repeated Burmese invasions took place in between 1816 to 1820. Their virtual occupation of the land and imposing of untold miseries upon the people brought in the collapse of social life. Earlier the Mayamariya revolt which started in 1770 during the reign of Lakshmi Singha and continued for more than a quarter of century with varied intensity stirred the very foundation of socio-cultural and religious life of Assam.
It is relevant to mention here that these two incidents of Assam's socio-political life cast tremendous influence on the literary career of Bordoloi. He could realise the inhuman cruelties that the people of his land had to endure in the Burmese invasions and sufferings for the Mayamariya revolt. Almost all his novels are based on these contaminated periods of Assam's history.

The invasions of the Burmese to Assam opened the avenue to the British resulting in their rule in this part of the country in 1826 A.D. In that year the famous Yandaboo Treaty was signed between the British and the Burmese and accordingly the administration of Assam went into the hands of the company. Political instability was hanging on then - general people were simply frustrated by the misrule of the Ahom-king and the nightmare of Mayamariya revolt was not yet wiped off — at such a juncture people had no other alternative but to welcome the British. The people at least could heaved a heavy sigh at the removal of political restlessness.

But the Ahom rule had its own merit also. The Ahoms had their own language and culture and even they brought their religious deities and scriptures. But as
they were generous in outlook and receptive in manner, the Ahoms adopted the prevalent Hindu customs and manners. Even they gave up their own language and adopted Assamese as the medium of social discourse. As regards culture, assimilation took place in immense stages and one can notice fusion of manifold elements of culture in this period.

The decline of the Ahom rule established the British regime and at the same time made ways for the advent of the Missionaries to this part of the country. But before that one major incident took place — the banishment of Assamese language. The rule of the Britishers came. But the anticipated peace and prosperity did not come for those who surrendered to British regime. The schools were established, courts were instituted; but their dear language Assamese suddenly disappeared in 1836.¹⁸

Why did it happen? There were obvious reasons. Writes B.K. Tarua — "The British were strangers to the land and had no knowledge of the local tongue. So people from other provinces of India began to pour into Assam and settle down as interpreters and clerks of the British

to enable them to carry on the newly established administration. Under the influence of these men, recruited mostly from Bengal, the British administrators made Bengali the language of the court and the medium of instruction in the schools of Assam. It was in 1836 that Assamese was thrown out of the law-courts and schools and Bengali was installed in its place.\(^{19}\)

In 1833, the advent of the Missionaries materialised in formal ways. Major Jenkins, the third commissioner of Assam realised that by teaching of the gospels, the rebellion which occurred amongst the hilly tribes of north-east could be pacified. Therefore he sent invitation to Christian Missionaries to visit Assam. The Missionaries took it in the right earnest and sent Rev. Nathan Brown and Oliver T. Cutter. They came with philanthropic mission. They realised that to instil the love of Jesus Christ in the mind of the Assamese people they should approach them with the language of their own tongue. Therefore they learnt the language established educational institutions, hospitals and orphanages. They composed books on Assamese language and in 1840, a year of landmark, they published \textit{Orunod} the first newspaper journal in Assamese. The publication of \textit{Orunod} ushered

\(^{19}\) Barua, B.K.: \textit{History of Assamese Literature}, p. 103-104.
in a new era of journalism and marked the revival of the Assamese language and culture. Meanwhile some Assamese patriots, headed by Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan worked for the reinstatement of the Assamese language. Due to their strenuous efforts the declaration of reinstatement was made in 1871 which later materialised in 1873.

This span of time was a juncture when the past tended to decline with the advent of modernity and westernized life-style. Bordoloi was born in such a time and as such his life and works were influenced by it. By the time he went to Calcutta for higher education, Assamiya Bhasar Unnati Sadhini Sabha was formed by the Assamese students there at Calcutta in 1888. It is a truism to assert that the sabha was an outcome of the Renaissance movement of Bengal which had its repercussions in Assam just at the end of the first half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the second half. Observes L.K. Barua — "The situation in Assam in the later half of the 19th century was certainly not as full of possibilities as in a place like Calcutta, but it is not realised on how many points of significance, the developments in Assamese society repeated similar developments elsewhere in India, especially in Bengal. The influence of the 19th century
Renaissance in Bengal had been so pervasive that it would be absurd to think that Assam could escape it, more so when we find that many of the operative factors were identical. The impact of British rule had different consequences for the life and culture of the Assamese people. The people became imbued with the trend of westernization and modernisation and as a result Assamese culture became hybridised. But in the opposite pole, there remained the remnants of conservative stocks, who cursed the repercussions. In this juncture, the society was sandwiched between new ideas of new generation and old habits of older generation.

The Sabha was a socio-literary organisation and it pledged to supplement the work for the uplift of Assamese language and literature which faced heavy odds. Bordoloi became an active member of that Sabha and acted and wrote with true spirit and enthusiasm; Bordoloi had a national outlook and a deep inclination for the western type of social set-up. He pledged so that he could instil the sense of patriotism and love for the land in the mind of the coming generation. Therefore he composed a series of novels analysing the idealism

on which a nation like Assam can thrive on — Assam’s Vaishnavism, its national pattern, natural elegance and beauty and historical events. He maintained the idealism in all stages of life and it was for that reason he could write a novel of front-line ranking on the perspective of a local Mishing tribe. Besides he composed novel on the plot of Manipuri tale Khamba-Thai. He composed novels with his idea on Scott and Bankimchandra, but yet he incorporated Assamese language, its folklife, religion and festivities and social-system out his novels. Being inspired by the manifold activities of the contemporary Assamese society he wrote novels, but besides these, the same spirit was the outcome of his other literary activities also.  

The publication of the Jonaki in the year 1889 from Calcutta by Chandra Kumar Agarwall is an event of remarkable and crucial significance for the literature and culture of Assam. It was the mouthpiece of Assam Dhasar Unnati Sadhini Sabha, which associated itself in reasserting the claims of the Assamese society by objective validation of its age-old heritage and

reconstruction of cultural identity. Bordoloi shaped his literary career in the current of the time and participated in the massive creative effort to rebuild the Assamese nation and literature. That is why Rajnikanta is still the most felicitous of our litterateurs.