CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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1.1 SUBJECT MATTER OF THE THESIS

The Ramayana is not only regarded as one of the holiest scriptures in India but also as the source of inspiration for many scholars, sages and poets. As a result, the Ramayana literature began to grow throughout India. It has been translated into almost all the regional languages of India. Even it has been found in some tribal literatures like the Karbi in which it is known as the "Chhābin Aalun". Although for all these Ramayana literatures, the basis is the Ramayana of the great sage Valmiki yet the poets in the regional languages add much of their local colour and their own personal traits in them for which all these appear to be original work rather than mere translations.

The Ramayana was translated into Assamese (old Assamese) by the poet Madhab Kandali in the fourteenth century. But out of seven cantos he did only five while other two were later added by Shri Shankardeva and Shri Madhabdeva. In Hindi the

1. Chhābin Aalun - ed. by Diphu Sāhitya Sabhā, 1976. The story of Ramayana is very popular among the Karbis and the whole story got local colour and is narrated through folksongs.

2. The "Adi Kanda" (i.e. the first canto) is by Shri Madhabdeva and the Uttarā Kanda (the last canto) is by Shri Shankardeva.
Ramayana was translated by Goswami Tulsidas (1532 - 1623 A.D) and named it as the Ramcharit Manas. In the case of the Assamese version i.e. "Asamiya Sapt Kanda Ramayana", Madhab Kandali is a co-author; but considering the work of Kandali which constitutes the major portion (i.e. five cantos out of seven) generally Assamese people call it Madhab Kandali's Ramayana.

The 'Sapt Kanda Ramayana' of Madhab Kandali and the 'Ram Charit Manas' of Tulsidas represent the Ramayana literature in the Eastern and the Northern India respectively. Both of them have tremendous impact on the hearts of common masses of both the regions. Both the poets successfully reflected the great ideals of Indian culture and civilization along with the devotion to the 'Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram' in their writings.

The subject matter of the present research monograph is the comparative study of the woman characters of these two great books - 'Asamiya Sapt Kanda Ramayana' and 'Ram Charit Manas'. Going through these two books one can not only get an idea of the literatures of these two regions i.e. the Eastern India and the Northern India but also of the traditions, customs and convention and the cultural life of the people as
well. Again in our tradition, customs, culture etc. the role of a woman is quite dominating. The very basis of our social and cultural life is the woman. Right from the individual life to the national one, the gift of womanhood is a unique one. Today the woman achieved a newer and nobler status. She has revolted against the established values of the Mediaval ages and has been progressing in the establishment of her own identity. It is, therefore, necessary to study the books which illustrate the instincts and emotions of women, their values and customs and tradition related to them during the Mediaval ages to understand the recent developments and their justification in the face of modern trends. Under these circumstances, the comparative study of the woman characters as depicted in the Asamiya Saptaka Kanda Rāmāyana and the Rāmcharit Mānas has been selected for the subject matter of this thesis. It is expected that such a study would not only bring forth some woman characters of the two regions viz. the Eastern and the Northern India to our view but also it would help us to understand the values and cultural atmosphere that grew centring around the woman world. Further it is also expected that such a study would create a new value for both the languages - Assamese as well as Hindi.
1.2 SCOPE OF THE THESIS

Indian literature began during the ancient times in Sanskrit. Almost all the sages and scholars expressed themselves and had the intercourse among them through this language i.e. Sanskrit only. As a result Sanskrit became the medium of cultural unity among the Indians. Now although Hindi has been accepted as the state language of India yet other regional languages also flourish side by side; and become the expression of culture and tradition. A considerable number of high class books have already been published in these languages. Now for the greater interest and cultural unity of India, it is felt that the following steps are to be taken:

a) To translate the high class and important books of the regional languages into Hindi; and,

b) To have comparative study of these books with those of Hindi.

Considering such an idea, we have undertaken the comparative study of the 'Asamiyā Sapta Kānd Ramāyana' and the Rāmcharit Mānas. Since such a comparative study from different points of view has a very wide scope and even the
study from one point of view may constitute the subject matter of a thesis, we have selected only one aspect of the study i.e. the woman characters and their relevance in the writings of both the great saintly writers Madhab Kandali and Tulsidas; and that too, in their Ramayana Literature.

Different scholars and critics are found discussing the works of Madhab Kandali and Tulsidas from different viewpoints; but none of them are found discussing the woman characters in them. According to Dr. Rajpati Dixit:

- "Tulsidas Ki Naari Kalpana Anusandhan Ka Swatantra Bishay Honeki Xamata Rakhti Hai". ³

The same remark can be easily made on the woman characters of Madhab Kandali. The woman has a very important and dominant role to play as regards to society, religion and culture. Dr. Sudharani Shukla remarked:

- "Bharatiya Naari Sadaiv Apne Jiwan Ke Vahya Tatha Abhyantar Xetra Mein Vyapt Rahi Hai. Naari Ki Samast

³Dr. R.P. Dixit - 'Tulsidas Aur Unka Yug, pp. 76.
She further remarked that the poets regard the woman as the primordial energy:

"Kavi Sadaiv Srāsta Ke Rup Main Naari Ki Shaktiyor Kā Samayojan Karke Samāj Ke Nirmān Mein Agrasar Hotā Rahā Hai."\(^4\)

She means to say that the poets through their eyes of knowledge discern the qualities in a woman and how she uses them that is they know that a woman is. So it is expected that the present study has a social and cultural importance.

The problem of women is one of the major problems that the twentieth century faces. Right from the beginning of civilisation, women began to struggle for their rights and proved their efficiency by taking parts equally with men. So, the outlook of the poets also changed. The evolution of the nature of women is not without its historical background. The

\(^4\) Dr. S.R. Shukla - Goswāmi Tulsiās Kā Sāmājik Ādārsh, pp. 27.

\(^5\) Ibid., pp. 40.
change in the nature and status of women in the society are evident in different ages. It is, therefore, necessary that a study should be made on their problems and their social and cultural nature for the complete understanding of woman life. From this point of view, the study of classical literature may be regarded as the most essential. Adding to that a comparative study also makes the things more clear. So, it is expected that the woman characters of the poets under consideration may give sufficient clues to understand the thoughts and ideas about woman during those days.

It is rather very much encouraging that the importance of comparative studies now-a-days are growing day by day. With such a study, it is found that there had been the beginning of a new era. As a result in spite of all differences in forms of alphabet, in languages and in geographical locations a new type of emotional integration began to grow.

The Rāmcharit Mānas receives the same esteem and status in the Northern India which the Asāmiyā Saptā Kānda Rāmayana receives in the Eastern India, particularly in Assam. One of the major reasons of their popularity is that both of them added many local colour to the original work of the sage Vālmiki which made their works more enjoyable by the local people. As
such their works have permanent value in their respective languages. It is, therefore, expected that the comparative study of the works of these two poets of the Medieval age would definitely make the bridge between Hindi and Assamese languages a bit firm. Specially the study on the woman characters of these two poets would open up new vistas in the understanding of Assamese as well as Hindi literature and culture.

1.3 RESEARCH MATERIALS:

In this comparative study of the Asamiyā Sapta Kānd Rāmāyana and the Rāmcharit Mānas we have collected research materials from two sources:

a) Primary Sources and
b) Secondary Sources.

PRIMARY SOURCES:

The original works of Mādhav Kandali and Tulsidas were the primary sources of the thesis. In case of the work of Mādhav Kandali, we have taken the Asamiyā Saptakanda Rāmāyan, which is known as the Mādhav Kandali's Rāmāyan with addition
of two 'Kāndas' (Cantos) by Shri Shankardeva and Shri Madhabdeva. Similarly we have taken the Rāmcharit Mānas of Gosswāmi Tulsidās as another primary source.

SECONDARY SOURCES:

There are several books on the critical analysis of these two books — Asamiyā Sapta Kānda Rāmāyana and Rāmcharit Mānas in different languages. The available books on the critical analysis of the Rāmāyana are taken as the secondary sources. Adding to them we have consulted several papers and magazines and the opinions and the advice of several scholars including our guide for the research. Most of the research materials were collected from different libraries like the Krishnakānta Handiqui Library of the G.U., the Departmental Library of the Hindi Deptt., G.U., the Library of North Guwahati Hindi Teachers' Training College, Māligaon Railway Hindi Library, the Library of Delhi University etc.

1.4 ARRANGEMENT OF THE THESIS:

For the sake of convenience of study the whole thesis has been divided into eight Chapters.

The first Chapter includes the introduction to the subject-matter, scope of the thesis and research materials
etc. It is an introductory Chapter.

The second Chapter deals with the biography of the poets. As stated, there are two additions in the Asamiyā Sapta Kānda Rāmāyana of Shri Kandali - one canto by Shri Mādhabdeva i.e. the 'Ādi Kānda' and another by Shri Shankardeva i.e. the 'Uttara Kānda'. As such we have added briefly the life and works of these three poets - Shri Shankardeva, Shri Mādhabdeva and Shri Mādhab Kandali in connection with the Asamiyā Sapta Kānda Rāmāyana. In the like manner we have added the life and works of Goswāmi Tulsidās in connection with the Rāmcharit Mānas in this Chapter.

The subjects of discussion in the third Chapter are the contemporary political, religious, social, cultural and literary impacts on the two poets. A poet is not an exception to the principle that a man is a social animal. Therefore, it is natural that contemporary environment would have some impacts on these poets. These two 'Rāmāyanas' represent the literature and cultures of two different ages. As such endeavour has been made here to study the contemporary environments of them. Besides these, necessary materials relating to women are collected so that they may be helpful in the study of the viewpoints of the poets in consideration.
The fourth Chapter deals with the characteristic analysis of the woman characters in the works of the two poets. Here the main features of the woman characters of both the poets are analysed and discussed.

In the fifth Chapter a comparative analysis of the woman characters of the poets has been made. Here we try to show the similarities and dissimilarities of these characters as revealed in the works of Mādhab Kandali and Goswāmi Tulsidās.

The sixth Chapter deals with the views of the two poets on women. We also try here to ascertain the social status of women of the then society as revealed in their poetry.

The seventh Chapter deals with the psychology of women depicted in their poetry. It is expected that the study of psychology of these characters would throw a new light in the analysis of the characters and would help in the understanding of them.

The last Chapter i.e. Chapter VIII is the conclusion. We tried our best to draw certain impartial and appropriate conclusion of the whole study.

We have endeavoured to make the analysis of the woman characters as depicted in their literature of Mādhab Kandali
and Goswami Tulsidas to the best of our ability and if any omissions and commissions take place in the analysis of faults, the fault is mine; and mine alone.