CHAPTER –III

Impact of Tradition on the Writings of Phakirmohana and Lakshminath
TRADITION IN
PHAKIRMOHANA AND LAKSHMINATH

Tradition, like everything else, is subject to the evolutionary principle. "Tradition, in the Indian context, is not unresponsive to changes in the environment. While demonstrating its capacity to survive, it has also offered evidence of its remarkable adaptability and innovativeness.\(^1\) Sanctification of a tradition or way of life lends them a stagnating quality which is not conducive to progress. Instead of behaving like a running stream it turns into a standing pond with all its associative evils. The progress of a people depends to a large measure upon the pace they keep with change. There are values which remain constant even as life styles change. These values prove to be those that bridge the gap between the past and the present.

Phakirmohana Senāpati and Lakshmināth Bezbarōā were two of the enlightened souls who helped their respective provinces in the transition to modern times. They were born at a time when their respective cultures, traditions and languages were in deep peril. They were quick to realise their calling—the elevation of their peoples in more respects than one. They were also quick to realise that antiquity in itself can not lend sanctity to anything. Contact of the Indian intelligentsia with British and European ideas made them to question some of their own social an religious practices.\(^2\) Therefore change in certain respects became a positive value in itself. This applies only to the negativity of some existing patterns. A judicious mix of old and new is important for life to continue on an even keel.

Tradition is largely the conserving aspects of a culture. By its very nature it resists change. Tradition includes the value system, the social structure and the structure of personality. It permeates through all levels of social organisation. The times of Senāpati and Bezbarōā were times of ferment.

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\(^1\) Indranath Choudhary, op. Cit., P-57
\(^2\) B. G. vol. I, P-29
On the one hand we have a stagnating traditional culture and society at a very low ebb, in fact in a state of decadence not witnessed before, a decadence condemned by most modern Indians from Rammohan Roy onwards. On the other hand we have a still traditional society in the throes and the creative excitement of modernizing itself, of emerging as a new nation, remaining thoroughly its own and rooted in its culture, yet taking its place in the contemporary world.  

Indian writers of the period like Senapati and Bezbaroa manifested this tendency and successfully came to terms with their times marked by cross purposes. They knew their respective culture to its marrowbones. The way they tried and largely succeeded in harmonising the traditional with the modern stand testimony to their innate ability and vision. V. K. Gokak has rightly said that “Culture implies an integrated personality and neither time nor eternity can be left out.” Here ‘time’ implies the temporal and ‘eternity’ the everlasting traits of a given culture. Much before T. S. Eliot extolled the virtues of tradition in his epoch making essay “Tradition and Individual Talent,” which became the touchstone of all great art. Senapati and Bezbaroa emphasised this aspect. Phakirmohana had only a couple of years of formal education quite unlike Bezbaroa who did his higher studies at Calcutta. Yet he understood the dynamics of the perspective to understand the nuances of progress. What Abid Hussain says about Indian writers in English can be equally applicable to Senapati and Bezbaroa. “The only writing of any value in English was done by those Indians whose mind had originally been trained by the traditional Oriental education and who had subsequently learnt English.” More than anything else it is Hussain’s emphasis on native learning, which includes its value system, that seems to play a crucial role. Being well grounded in their own cultural traditions Senapati and Bezbaroa were immensely qualified to highlight those aspects that stood stubbornly in the way and resisted the onward march of their people.  

Vaiṣṇavism permeates every aspect of life in Orissa and Assam. The coming of Śankarāchārya, Caitanya, Śankardeva and Nānak to Orissa entrenched Vaiṣṇava

2. V. K. Gokak, op. cit., P-5
3. S. Abid Husain, op. Cit., P-115
faith in Orissa. Of course it is by no means a mono-culture but a composite one in every sense of the word. It is true that some religious sects received royal patronage and become more influential that the others in Orissa, but other religious streams were not constrained from propagation. It is a beautiful synthesis of the Aryan and the non-Aryan elements. Jainism and indigenous tribal culture too have left their indelible mark on the way of life of Orissa. Jagannātha, the reigning deity of Orissa, "harmoniously blends almost all the religions of Orissa- tribal, Buddhist, Sākta, Saivite, Vaiṣṇavite and so forth, and whose presence negates all caste distinctions." In a way it is a small replica of India. The remarkable amity with which all these divergent strands of religious faiths have been assimilated into the main stream of life speaks of the catholicity of the Orissan ethos. Communal disharmony was a thing unheard in Orissa. In the words of J. V. Boulton, "in Orissa something was aplenty which was conspicuous by its absence in Bengal- that is tolerance." As a true representative of Orissa's synthetic vision Phakirmohana abhorred all narrowness concerning religion. Like Vivekānanda he believed all religious paths to be inherently capable of spiritual realisation. All faiths are comparable to streams marching towards the great ocean. Their paths may differ but not their aim. Some believe that Senāpati's conversion to Brāhmaism was at the root of his synthetic idea of religion. But he never really converted to Brāhma faith, just he as never converted to Christianity earlier. His conviction in the principle 'Sabda dharma sambhavīḥ' led him to say that "if you worship with piety all religions are good and all names (of Gods) redemptive." In the preface to Bandhavatār Kāvya too he speaks of the inherent strength of every religion to lead the faithful on the path of spiritual realisation.

Phakiramohana assimilated in to his own positive aspects from various religious strands. From the Gitā he acquired faith in God, from Brāhmaism he acquired knowledge of the scriptures, from Rāmakrishna Paramhamsa came his idea of bhakti, from Vivekānanda he imbibed the idea of Kārma yoga and so on. His idea

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6 Orissa Cultural Forumcd. : 1982 : 'Oḍiṣṭa Sanskrit Itihāsa', PP.74-75
7 'Phakirmohana Senapati and His times' P.7
8 Ibid., P.5
9 Ārāma Jihana Carita, PP. 52-53
10 Mamu, ch. 25
of religion therefore transcended national and geographic boundaries. For Phakirmohana religion was never an end in itself but a via media towards an end. During the Great Famine of 1866 thousands of starving Hindus were made to take food at relief camps. Hindu society rejected these people for the sacrilege of saving their lives. Christian missionaries accepted these people with care and sympathy. Phakiramohana was an eyewitness to this untold suffering and he severely indicts this soulless orthodoxy of Hindu religion.12

Phakiramohana hated atheists. Atheists are most likely to be devoid of human values and hence unfit to be categorised as humans at all. Even the cruelest of characters in his novels like Mangaraj of Chhamika Athaguntha and Natabara Dasa of Manno had to accept the spiritual aspects of life, albeit at the end. In fact he believed that the faith born out of a skeptical outlook tend to be even stronger “The faith born out of vascillation and doubt is the true faith.”13 Phakirmohan’s earlier disillusionment with Hinduism due to the distortions built in to it by its keepers turns into deep faith in his mature years.

Bezbaroa’s love for Srikrishna, Sankardeva, Madhavdeva and other Vaishnava gurus of Assam was as deep as it was profound. This veneration can be gauged even from the nomenclature of some of his writings. Bezbaroa titled his only poetry collection Kadamba, while the name of the literary magazine he edited was Bauli. Both these titles have typical association with Krshna.14 The first reminds one of Krshna frolicking with the gopins under the Kadamba tress (Nauclea Cadamba) on the banks of Jamuna river, the latter reminds one of the flute-yielding Krshna.15 Bezbaroa’s description of the traditional festivities like the nitis of Vaishnavite gurus, Ras-mahotsav(Dol), Holy etc. is charged up and full of participatory enthusiasm.16 Very often Bezbaroa takes recourse to pauranic metaphors to drive his point home. While on a marriage party their carriage got stuck in knee deep slush. To Bezbaroa it

12 Atma Jihana Carita, P-36
13 Mama, ch. - 25
14 B. G. Vol., I, Introduction, Ja’ (H)
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid. PP-34-35s
seems similar to what happens to Karna’s chariot in the Mahābhārat battle. Innumerable instances of such metaphors are strewn across his writings. “In chapter ten of the novel (Padum Kūwari) the writer alluded to the sorrowful plight of some traditional Indian women like Sītā, Sābitri and Damayanti and compared the tragic life of Padum Kūwari with theirs.” Besides the pangs of separation which the heroine undergoes it reminds one of the hiraha tradition of medieval times.” Unfulfilled love as a higher value than fulfilled love can be seen as part of mythic motifs in India-Rādhā’s separation from Kṛiṣṇa being the archetype.

It is interesting to note that Lakshminath refers to his father as pitridev instead of the commonly used pita or devo. In a traditional Hindu household the prominence of the patriarchal figure is indisputable. He is the nucleus around which the whole family moves. Contact with Western education with its emphasis on individualism to some extent diluted the patriarch’s prominence. ‘As a result of the introduction of Western education there arose a difference between the old and the young in the privileged strata of the 19th century society and this naturally created a conflict between the two generations.” It is only natural that this revolt was directed against the father since he was the repository of traditional values and who, on occasion, became authoritarian and oppressive. Bezbaroa belonged to the neo-elite and in certain respects he showed the tendency of the neo-elite. He did things which his father opposed like his going to Calcutta for higher studies, his marriage into a Bengali family and his wielding a gum for shooting games. Inspite of this seeming intransigence Bezbaroa remained an inveterate admirer of his father. This does not mean that Bezbaroa was at war with himself. It was rather an attempt at harmonising traditional Indian-ness with functional modernity. Here one can fruitfully be reminded of his sartorial taste and manner which was European and morals and values which were Assam (and Indian for that matter) to the core. Bezbaroa was not naïve enough to equate modernity with Westernisation, which of necessity, presupposes the

17 Ibid., P-31
18 P. C. Bhuyan, op. Cit., P-193
21 Ibid., P-37
rejection of the native value system and acceptance of the alien one. Modernisation, on the other hand, does not warrant such a drastic measure. Bezbaroa, like his romantic counterparts, was no different than the Vaishnavite poets of yore in their belief in tradition and values. Entrenched firmly within the folds of tradition they endeavoured to express humanistic values. Echoing the same sentiments Hem Barua pays tribute to the synthetic vision of Bezbaroa: "True it is that Bezbaroa was brought up in a socially orthodox climate but when the bonds were loosened in the alien but liberal atmosphere of Calcutta during Bezbaroa's stay there, this loosening of the bonds did not end up in reaction of an extreme type." A man of lesser genius and vision would have drifted with the current. Bezbaroa mastered the art of swimming as young boy. Metaphorically he swam against the current of alien influences in manhood- be it against the Western or of Bengali influence. He refused to be transformed into a Bengali just as he refused to become English in manners and morals. He also resisted the unreasonable demands of his father when it was occasioned. To construe it as revolt may be true to some extent but inadequate to explain this phenomenon. This was defiance of tradition but a putting aside of things that resists progress.

It was true that Dinanath Bezbaroa was an extremely devout man. He was a gentleman of the old school who submitted to many age-old prejudices like casteism. Lakshminath's attitude was one of catholicity in keeping with the true spiritual tradition of India. He did not exalt Hinduism at the expense of other religions. Like Phakirmohana he too believed in the truth of every religion. His exhortation to the faithful of all shades was this: "Ye citizens of the world, Ye Assamese, utter the names of Rama, Krishna and Hari. Surrendering yourself to one God as taught by Sankaradeva, Ye Christians, utter the name of God, the Father, following the teachings of Christ; Ye Mussalmans, shout Alichun Akbar, as preached by Mohammed, you are sure to attain mukta, bhakti and peace." Even while entrenched strongly in his own faith he was a liberated, universal spirit. In a few of his sort stories

23 Hem Barua, op. Cit, P-17
24 Maheshwar Neog (ed.): 1972: 'Lakshminath Bezborua The Satyarta rathi of Assam', the article "Bezbaroh as an Exponent of Religion and Philosophy" by Rajanikanta Devasarma, p. 19.
he was quite open in his praise of other religions and condemnatory of Hinduism. In *Phātemā Biwi* the so-called Hindus are taken to task while the basic humanity of Islam is reinforced in the act of giving refuge to a helpless woman. Lakshmināth lambasts casteism in stories like *Jātirāmar Jāt, Lambodar Dekā*, etc. The view that piety is the cornerstone of religion runs through these stories.

Born in an extremely orthodox period of national history Phakirmohana developed a surprisingly liberal outlook of religion. His eclecticism was remarkable though he considered himself a Hindu. The temple he built in his garden called *Shanti-Kanana* proclaimed the fundamental unity of all major religions of the world. He cited the basic teachings of the Buddha, Caitanya, Kabir, Nānak, Christ and Mohammed. He calls Krishna and Christ two flowers on the same stem. Senāpati’s Catholicism of spirit is nowhere more conspicuous than in his preface to *Baudhavatāra Kāya*. He asserts that race, caste and religious distinctions to be artificial and man-made. He elaborates this view in the following manner:

“All men are equal by virtue of their brotherhood as the sons of the Almighty. All distinctions such as Aryan and non-Aryan, Hindu and Mlechha, Greek and Barbarian, Muslim and infidel are man-made and observed by the uneducated and unintelligent alone.”

Both Senāpati and Bezbaroa accepted the primacy of the spirit. Yet they did not reject the materialistic manifestation of their cultural traditions. To quote V K Gokak from another context “They accepted life in its totality, the temporal and the eternal, the physical and the metaphysical, and sought to include them in a luminous and harmonious synthesis.” And their lives stand testimony to the reconciliation of matter and spirit. Senapati translated the whole of Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyana to console his bereaved wife after the death of their son. He also rendered parts of *Upanishads* and *Gilā* into Oriya. His translation of scriptures is monumental by any standards and he was rightly conferred the title *Jyāsakavi*, an epithet still used by some but largely ignored after Phakirmohana’s primacy as a fiction writer gained
ascendancy. One of the salient features of his translation in simple intelligible Oriya was his effort to imbibe the value system of the holy books among the common people.

While Phakirmohana imbibed the catholicity of the cult of Jagannāth Bezbaroa put new life in to the Vaishnavite preaching of Sankardeva and Madhavdeva, the saints who homogenised Assamese culture to a great extent by bringing the divergent strands in to the fold of Vaishnavism. Therefore these saints were potent symbols of national resurgence just as Jagannāth was in Orissa. Senāpati and Bezbaroa’s ethico-religious writings have distinct nationalistic leanings. Lakshminātha’s Sri Kṛṣṇa Kathā and Tatwa kathā alongside with his famous Baroda lectures stand tribute to his deep understanding of religion and philosophy. It surprises one no end that the creator of Kripābar Barbaruā of the Belles lettres fame could move one with lucidly profound exposition of religion and philosophy. The edifice of Saint Sankardeva’s ideals rested on “the Eksarana Dharma i.e. the religion of love with its undeviating devotion to one God”. This is where Phakirmohana and Lakshminātha look strikingly similar.

In spite of their professed religiosity neither of them was a systematic exponent of philosophy. They belonged very much to this world. They hugged their religious traditions even while lambasting orthodox and obscurantist tendencies in them. Through his Baroda lectures Lakshminātha’s express purpose was to bring the Vaishnavite tradition of Assam into wider currency outside Assam. Nowhere does he emphasise otherworldliness. He was a practical man who sought to find fulfillment in work. The untiring work that went in to reviving all aspects of national life, while still working in the jungles of Orissa to eke out a living, brings to mind the epithet Karma-Yogin, one for whom work is worship. This epithet used for Gaurīsankar in Orissa, can justly be applied to Phakirmohana. He too kept up his tryst with destiny as a writer even as he manufactured windows and doors to earn his bread.
In many of his poems Phakirmohana propounded a philosophy that was ahead of his times. Like Vivekananda he believed that those who claim only their religious path is capable of leading up to God and salvation are frauds. His idea of spirituality was comprehensive enough to include all the positive values of the major religions of the world. Every religion in its essence, he believed, is capable of leading the faithful, unto God. The pleiads called Saptarishi Mundala caught the imagination of the Indian poets since time immemorial. Phakirmohana makes use of this image to club together spiritual leaders like The Buddha, Mohommed, Nānak, Śankarācārya, Caitanya and Rammohan. The inclusion of Rammohan is significant. He combined spiritual regeneration with social reform. Senapati too combined these aspects to revive Orissan life. Besides it also highlights Phakirmohana’s utilitarian concept of religion.  

Senapati had unwavering faith in ancient scriptures. He believed that these holy books are a perennial source of all the life sustaining values. Their communal reading, he believed, can ensure dharmā or righteous living. The Bhāgabata Gītās of Orissa, the equivalent of Sutras and Nāṅgaharas of Assam, diffused righteous living through communal reading of the sastras. In contrast to this sense of community Western education encouraged materialism and selfish tendencies. A major portion of Senapati’s prose fiction is devoted to exposing unhealthy tendencies inherent in Western materialistic philosophy. It encouraged atheistic tendencies, which freed man from fear of God leading him to commit crimes with impunity. The protagonist of his novel Māmu from fear of God leading him to commit crimes with impurity. The protagonist of his novel Māmu – Natabara Dāsa is a bright example. He though money earning and money saving to be the principal aim of life and for that matter he went to the extent of swindling his own kith and kin. Since on proof of crime the law punishes, it is not unnatural that the cunning should commit their crime with secrecy and precaution. Destruction of evidence too can save the criminal from punishment. Mangaraj of ‘Āṭhagūṇṭha’ should have been punished for homicide.

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10 In his short story śāstra Kathā Phakirmohana comments “The purpose of Puranas, novels and stories is the same, i.e. to instruct people”. Galpa-Swalpa Part-II, P-4
11 Temples in Orissa combined the functions of a church (prayer Hall), public library, hotel (any visitor can have a meal there for a nominal fee) and town hall. "Chhamāna Āṭhagūṇṭha, P. 19" Māmu P-34
since his heinous plot led to death by starvation of Saria. But the law finds proof of a lesser crime against Mangaraj - the crime of snatching the cow Neta from Bhagia. Had he believed that an all-seeing God was watching his every action he would not have committed any crime in the first place. But Phakirmohana is a staunch believer in divine justice and Mangaraj could not escape this though he could tamper with temporal justice with the help of lawyer Ram Ram Lala. In Prayaschitta Najar, Natabara Dasa suffers the pricks of conscience. When the Magistrate questioned I said I am innocent. Am I innocent? A greater retribution is due to me. etc. This highlights Phakirmohana’s faith in Gods’ dispensation as opposed to the British justice. Natabara could commit one crime after another with impunity because for him dharma or scrupulousness is the refuge of the idle and stupid.

In the traditional Indian way of life religion and justice went hand in hand. The coming of the British led to the divorce of the two. The Western legal system put too much emphasis on proof. Which could be tampered with or purchased as Mangaraja does. Phakirmohana’s three novels Athaymilha, Māmu, and Prayaschitta could be read as trilogy on this particular theme.

Both the novels Athaymilha and Prayaschitta show the travesty of British justice in India. Mangaraj and Natabara, whose rapacity led innocents to suffer and die, are tried only for minor crimes and not for their more serious ones like manslaughter.

In Prayaschitta Phakirmohana shifts to trial by conscience. Here all the wrongdoers, except Sadananda, feel penitent and try to undo their misdeeds through dedication to righteousness. Senapati employs all his power of irony and understatement to drive home the inadequacy of British legal justice in India. The judge was convinced about the circumstances leading to Bhagia’s insanity and Saria’s going on fast leading to her death. But he could not accept this causality as direct

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33 Chhmannaya. Athaymilha. P. 119
34 Chhmannaya. Athaymilha. P-119
35 Māmu. P-34
36 Boulton, op cit P-381
complicity in manslaughter. The judge’s opinion is an ideal example of how the so-called ‘proof’ or ‘evidence’ can go against natural justice—

“We are convinced that Mangarāja’s act of taking possession of their land and other belongings led to Bhagiā’s insanity and Sāriā’s death from starvation. But this does not make the accused (Mangarāj) guilty of murder”\(^{37}\)

In the organic rural community of yore the criminal would have been promptly punished. What Phakirmohana implies is that implanting an alien system of justice at the cost of the indigenous one, is harmful and detrimental to native way of life.

Bezbaroā, too hints at the stigma attached to the legal profession in his autography. His father Dinanāth Bezbaroā disliked any one of his sons wearing the lawyer’s mantle.\(^{38}\) The elder Bezbaroā was perhaps aware of the unethical practices built in to the legal profession. Bezbaroā himself was not averse to this profession.\(^{39}\) In one of his short stories called \textit{Pānmugi} the rapacity of the people concerned with the profession is highlighted.

Bezbaroā, like his Oriya counterpart Phakirmohana, deals with the unwholesome impact of Western education in a few of his short stories \textit{Malak Gium Gium} is one of them. It is a veritable metaphor, though obviously and exaggerated one, for the rupture that developed between the values of the East and the West in the minds of the people grounded in half-baked does of Western education. For people like Malak the very knowledge of English carried the value of modernity. Since his father Sajtola knew no English, Malak disowns him as an ignoramus. The soul-sapping vanity this education brought turned Malak and his ilk in to ungrateful demons. The human spiritual values which traditional agrarian community fostered stands in stark contrast to the individualistic and utilitarian values showed by the new elite. In ‘\textit{Račhit}’ too one comes across the dehumanising tendency of Western impact.

\(^{37}\) \textit{Chhamānā, ṭhūngūtha}, P-118  
\(^{38}\) \textit{B. G. vol-I}, P-29  
\(^{39}\) \textit{Ibid.}, P- 58
When J. R. Barua, the F. A. C, tortures his virtuous wife, her cultivator father accepts his daughter with open arms.

Senāpati’s ‘Dāka Munshi’ too deals with the havoc created by Western education on the native value system. The ironic treatment of the story highlights the writer’s attitude towards the Anglicised Indian. Gopāla, the protagonist, drives his old and retired father out of his house since the latter did not conform to the external manifestation of English way of life. In a lesser degree Phakirmohana’s novel Prāyaschitta too dwells upon the pitfalls awaiting blind adherence to Western mores.

The anglicised individuals we come across in Senāpati and Bezbaroa have little in common with the anglicised Young Bengal crusaders under the leadership of Derozio. The Derozians were highly educated who imbibed rationalistic thinking. They fought against all in-built orthodoxy and superstition of Indian society. Their acceptance of Western approach is not to be likened to the slavish imitation of people like Malak and Gopāla. These servile anglophiles had abdicated their kinship responsibilities for the sake of hollow vanity.

Senāpati and Bezbaroa seem to support parental authority. On the part of the newly educated colonised individuals parental authority resembled authoritarianism. The values of community and collectivity portrayed by Senāpati and Bezbaroa in their writings stood in stark contrast with the predatory individualism of the newly educated. Devoid of the spiritual moorings of traditional community these people got alienated from native life.

Senapati and Bezbaroa have devoted considerable attention to the subject of woman, particularly the latter. Nineteenth century had been a time of new awareness when thinkers, social reformers and writers tried to look at problems besetting society from a new angle. "The problem of women in society seems to have been a subject of considerable concern to the 19th century novelist ( and writers in general ) in India, as also to social reformers and pamphleteers. This was a part of the new awareness of
human rights and of the concept of individuals as autonomous units.\(^{10}\) Senāpatīnā's
Lachhamā, the heroine of his historical novel of the same name, is a traditional Indian
woman. Removed by circumstance from the security of a husband and society's
protection she is able to fend for herself. She moves among alien men, albeit in the
guise of a man, which was a taboo in the 19th century. She also takes unto herself and
eexecutes the task of revenge. Many of Bezbaroa's heroines too understand their self
worth and assert themselves in the face of insurmountable opposition. In Rachit\(^{11}\) the
educated Brindā has the courage to reject her wayward, callous and womaniser of a
husband to chart her own course of life. It may society where marriages are assigned a
sacred place, Brindā's action is no mean achievement. The tragic consequence of
sticking to a predatory husband is found in the short story Semt.\(^{12}\) Laliti of Laliti
Kākati questions the foundation of marriage when commitment is absent. The idea
that women should be married off without which she stands the risk of losing her
caste comes for attack in the story. Laliti heralds her rebellion against male
chauvenism. But instead of finding another male who could respect her sentiments
she devotes her life to social service. For her husband is not on abstract idea. She
wants to see a good human being worthy of respect in a husband.

In spite of these instances Bezbaroa's approach towards women is not as
radical as they seem. He wrote at a time when orthodoxy was still the order of the
day. Some of his woman characters do achieve self-hood. But by and large the
woman's life lacks the autonomy that one finds in man. Bezbaroa reconciles the
rebellious attitude of some of his heroines with a conclusion that was socially
acceptable. The protagonist of Bhudari\(^{13}\) takes unto herself the blame for the fatal
injury her husband inflicts on her. Pātmugi \(^{44}\) loses faith in men and marriage but
conforms to social norm by leading a pious life devoted to social service.

Senāpati's female characters too follow more or less the same pattern as that
of Bezbaroa. Nimā of 'Snu Bohni' had a smattering of education but no knowledge of

\(^{10}\) Meenakshi Mukherjee, op. Cit., P-81
\(^{11}\) B. G. Vol. I, PP-752-753
\(^{12}\) Ibid, P-666
\(^{13}\) Ibid, P-756
\(^{14}\) Ibid, P-644
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House-wifery. This proves quite troublesome and a trick had to be played upon her to make her realise her wifely responsibilities. In a strictly role-oriented community the performance of the assigned duty ensures survival and continuation of the community. Senāpati’s ideal women are those who look after home and hearth. In Mādha Mahāntinka Kanyā Suta Mālati is a gem of a girl because she is conversant with all the household chores. Even the educated ones are not spared from this responsibility. Rebati is allowed to attend school so that it will facilitate the reading of the puranas and traditional literature. Senāpati had the highest respect for the values of Hindu scriptures and they were supposed to infuse a sense of righteous living. Communal reading of the scriptures, according to Phakirmohana, was an antidote against the pernicious impact of the West. An apparently comic incident in Sabhya Jamidār exemplifies ‘Senāpati’s attitude towards tradition and modernity. Mrs Mahapatra, the Westernised wife of Rajiblochana (the sabhya Jamidār of the title) casually strolls in to the kitchen with her slippers and sleeping gown. The cook is horrified for it is sacrilege to take shoes in to the kitchen. Mrs Mahapatra is horrified because cowdung is being brought to the kitchen to sanctify it as in Orissa cowdung is traditionally consider sacred. If it is unhygienic to carry cowdung into the kitchen, it is not entirely scientific either to carry shoes into it.

Phakirmohana was a votary of native way of life. And progress should be in keeping with this and not at its expense. “Sabhya Jamidār” is also significant for it shows how an anglicized way of life plays havoc with the indigenous rhythm of life. Rajiblochana is imparted English education for specific utilitarian purpose i.e. to further the interest of the landed estate and that of the tenants. Instead he wastes his time and energy on external paraphernalias like giving lectures and organising meetings. In the process he neglects his primary obligation to the land and the tenants. No wonder he proves a wastrel and the property his father built up over years of hard work, diligence and wisdom comes to naught. The underlying moral is that ones education and activities must be in keeping with the native tradition and way of life.

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35 Gajpa Satjra, I, P-118
36 Ibid, P-35
37 Ibid, P-78
The same conviction in the soundness of indigenous tradition led Bezbaroa to criticize all that tried to undo the native way of life. In essays like *Stree-Swañdhænat*\textsuperscript{18} *Rush Deshat Tinmækt*\textsuperscript{19} etc. Bezbaroa makes clear his concept of women’s emancipation. He risks being branded as a conservative while advising Assamese women folk to stick to traditional delicacies while entertaining their guests. The same exhortation is reserved for the sartorial taste of Assamese women. Interestingly, Phakirmohana lashes out at the use of Manchester made clothe at the cost of hand woven local clothe in a poem titled *Utkałja Bhuñmi*\textsuperscript{50} Both Assam and Orissa have a glorious tradition of weaving and the writers were aware of this. Labelling Bezbaroa a traditionalist for his seemingly conservative views would be too simplistic a reading. His support for home made clothe makes sound economic sense, for, buying from outside what can be made at home—be it home-made cakes or clothes—will only drain the coffers of the household and consequently of the indigenous industry. Besides consumerism has the power to destroy rural economy. P. C. Bhuyan’s comment on the basically ascientific attitude of Bezbaroa needs to be put in proper perspective. He comments—

"As a traditionalist he was not in favour of scientific process of thinking and so in all his literary contributions he did no advise the use of modern scientific theories and methods to develop ourselves."\textsuperscript{51}

This assertion is not justified. Bezbaroa’s priorities were different. His primary concern was the preservation of the organic, self-sufficient and cooperative rural community. He addressed an audience which was semi-literate and for whom advanced scientific attitude would have been an anathema. Besides he understood that progress means the integration of the past with the present. He wanted progress come from within in an organic way and not imposed from outside. If this is not kept in mind we stand the risk of being a little unkind to Bezbaroa. Of course Bezbaroa may have propounded some feudalistic traits built in to the indigenous traditions as Hiren

\textsuperscript{18} B. G. Vol. II. PP-1462-1468
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid. P-1549
\textsuperscript{50} P. M. G. Vol. I P-368
\textsuperscript{51} P. C. Bhuyan, op. Cit., P-170
Gohain points out in stories like *Bhomkerolā, Maidām, Mālati* and so on. Gohain also regrets Bezbarā's discounting of the undeniable impact of Bengal on Assamese society and culture. This was because Assam's search for self-identity necessitated that Bengal should be looked at from oppositional terms. Phakirmohana did the same in spite of his awareness of Bengali impact on Orissa. What looks to be narrow parochialism was actually an act of self-preservation given the historical circumstances available at that time in Orissa and Assam. But whatever the material conditions that impelled them to writing, the basic core of values of their respective cultural traditions like desire for love, truth, justice and fraternity can be hardly missed.

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52 *Sāhitya Āru Cetanā*: 1991: PP-90-91
53 Ibid, P-90