CHAPTER – VIII

Conclusion
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In his *Jīwan Sōwaran* Bezbaroa recalls the famous statement of Sir Āshutosh Choudhury that 'A subject nation has no politics. This remark created a furore in the Congress circles. Yet this assertion was not without its basis. Sir Āshutosh was talking about the need to free the people from social, economic and intellectual slavery before seeking political freedom. Bezbaroa and his compatriots understood this cardinal point. In fact Chandrakumār Agarwālā said much the same thing before Sir Āshutosh, which comes for much praise in Bezbaroa’s autobiography. This explains why Bezbaroa devoted almost all his energy to free his people from the various ills afflicting them. He never spoke directly about political freedom. There is more praise than condemnation of the British in his writings. One can discern the same pattern in Senāpati. He attended the Indian National Congress session held at Madras being selected to represent the National Society of Balasore. The purely political nature of the discussions were not to his liking. And that was the last time he associated with the Congress.

This does not mean that they were votaries of British rule. Far from this. They fought foreign rule at a different plane. They spoke and wrote against unwholesome alien values invading their respective societies. They exhorted their own peoples to find their selves which would lay the groundwork for political freedom. Phakirmohana befriended some highly-placed English men to get his work done. Lakshmināth, though twice spurned a lucrative job under the British, cultivated them assiduously once he launched into business with Bholānāth Baruā.

The language dispute with Bengal proved to be the turning points in their lives. The task before them was two-fold. They had to prove the antiquity of their mother tongues to establish their inviolable antecedents. And they needed to create a body of modern literature to sustain the language through a wide reading public. On both the fronts they were eminently successful.

The language controversy occupied a considerable amount of their time and energy. It affected not only their style and subject matter but turned the nascent nationalism in the provinces of Orissa and Assam into linguistic and culture oriented affair. Lakshmināth appeared on the literary scene long after Assamese language was
reinstated officially (1873). But the slur on Assamese continued up to the early part of
the 20th century. Bezbaroā took up the gauntlet on behalf of his language with a
passion that almost bordered on the offensive. This may have had an impact on his
attempts at exploring the innate resources of his language. Phakimohana was directly
involved in the language dispute. His innocuous looking comment that there was little
difference between Oriya and Bengali was made use of by Kāntichandra to prove
Oriya to be a pātois of Bengali. Phakimohana’s language before Chhamānā
Āṭhaguntha also came under severe criticism for doing more harm to Oriya than good.
The burden of harming his own language was too much a burden on his conscience to
bear. He made conscious attempts to write an Oriya as distinctly different from
Bengali as possible. His association with European scholars also taught him the fact
that the language of the street is the lifeblood of a language. The combined impact of
all these was a changed perception about the language of literary prose. Out of this
was born the Phakirmohanesque style. Its bearing on the subsequent literary output
was immense. If language of the common man can be elevated to be a fit medium of
prose fiction, the trials and tribulation of the common man can never be separated
from it. It is all too evident in the writings of Phakirmohana and Bezbaroa. This is
one of the happy fallouts of the language dispute with Bengal.

Language survives in the spoken form, true; but to assure a place among
advanced societies, the literature in the language has to be rich and varied. The
realisation of this truth led Phakirmohana and Bezbaroā to attempt various literary
genres. While Bezbaroā wrote historical and farcical plays, Senāpati never attempted
writing a drama. Senāpati, because of his lack of formal training, was diffident about
the literary merit of his writings. Yet he tried simply to add to Oriya literature and
advised others to do so. He believed that anyone could become an author if
persevered. Publishing books at that time was a costly affair. If an author spent
money, as Phakirmohana did, in publishing the works, the books were never sold. It
defeated the very idea of writing. Phakirmohana exhorted his countrymen to make
small monetary sacrifices by buying Oriya books. Bezbaroā too gave the clarion call
to his countrymen to raise their language and literature. In his address to Asom Sāhitya
Sabha in 1924 he said that the development of the Assamese language was the first
step towards the development of Assam. While other provinces of India are surging
ahead, how can the Assamese keep away from the tide of the new awakening? He asked rhetorically. To enrich his language and literature he wrote much and wrote even when he could afford hardly any time in his busy life. Almost the whole of his creative life was spent outside of his home state. Yet his writings show him as if he was never separated from it. The only genre in which he produced only a solitary work is the novel.

Bezbaroa’s only novel was a historical one. Phakirmohan too wrote a historical novel. Apart from their literary and historical importance, these works are significant for creating a historical consciousness, a prerequisite of any renascent people. Bezbaroa’s Padum Kūwari is the first historical novel in the language which attained glorious heights in the hands of Rajanikānt Bordoloi. They tried to glorify their past to bring into sharp relief the present servitude of the people. Glorification of the past was a Phenomenon that cut across all linguistic formations of India in the later half of the 19th century.

The national question in Orissa had an added dimension. Its territorial boundary had greatly sunk during Phakirmohana’s time. In the name of administrative convenience Orissa was divided and distributed over various Presidencies. The identity of those Oriya-speaking tracts was in danger. Phakirmohana was actively engaged in uniting the Oriya-speaking tracts to safeguard its territorial integrity. Bezbaroa, on the other hand, fought against the attempts to include Gauripur with Bengal. Both Phakirmohana and Lakshmināth took the love for and service of the country to the spiritual plane like Bankimchandra.

Both Phakirmohana and Bezbaroa are called traditionalists in certain respects. But this was not in anyway backward looking. They wrote with a sense of purpose. They wanted to improve the moral climate of their time. Particularly they were agitated by the erosion of native values system of India against the pernicious values of the West. It is not only evident in their religious and philosophic writings but in their fictional works as well. In Phakirmohana’s fiction real justice is meted out not by the British legal institutions, which prove grossly inadequate, but by providence. Their spiritualism too was imbued with a certain amount of Catholicism. They were both associated with the Brāhma Samaj movement though they were never converted to Brāhmosim. Its monotheistic principle attracted them both. For Lakshmināth
Brāhmaism presented a lot in common with Sankarite Vaiṣṇavism. Both the writers remained loyal to the Vaiṣṇavite tradition of their native cultures even while asserting that all religious paths to be essentially true and capable of spiritual realisation. They hated atheists and atheistic philosophy for it foisted materialist tendencies. Malak of Malak Guin Guin, Bhūdhar of Bāpirām, J. R. Baruā of Rachit commit crimes with impunity just like Mangarāj of Chhamāya Āthagunṭha and Natabara of Mānu because they were impelled by materialistic philosophy of the West and its predatory individualism.

Their fictional works and the belles lettres of Bezbarā are inspired by a social consciousness. The reformistic zeal is all too evident. The technique of Phakirmoahana’s fiction is undoubtedly realistic, but the final effect is almost always moral. Lakshmināth too employs realism as a mode of presentation but he is also a romantic and in stories like Rakm MunJa, Jalkuwari and others he highlights truth of another kind - the eternal verities of life. They turned prose into a powerful medium. Their geniuses were typically moulded to the use of satire, sarcasm, humour and understatement. With these modern weapons they attacked vices like hypocrisy, obscurantism, superstition, ignorance, casteism and so on. Their moral indignation was tempered by their basic humanity.

The question which form of self expression was their forte and favourite is perhaps easy to answer. It was the fictional mode. As a simple statement of the obvious it may be true because their chiefs literary fame rests on their fictional works. But they were much more than mere literary artists. Their energies were diffused over a wide range of activities - literary artist, publisher, printer, editor, vanguard of linguistic and cultural independence, interpreter of Indian spiritualism and activist of the territorial integrity of their respective provinces. All these are centrally related to their patriotic fervour. Their fame would have spread to other modes of self-expression had they confined themselves to purely literary endeavour.

Extra-literary considerations went into their choosing the fictional mode. Both of them thought it to be the best mode to popularise language and enrich their literature. Their short stories were conditioned by their conviction that it was a direct descendant of the indigenous tale. As a result they did not fully realise the rigour of the modern short story. It also led to the moral element in their stories. For example in
Bezbaroa’s stories like *Sent/, Dhowā Khowā, Bhempuriā Manjādār* the moral element becomes dominant at the cost of artistic effect. In Phakirmohana too one comes across the same tendency. Many of his stories show the possibility of growing into a novel. He wrote with a bare outline of the plot and then added character and situation to it. Sometimes his short stories grew into novels. *Lachamā* is a pointer in this regard.

Both Phakirmohana and Lakshmināth used the fictional form to assert the native value system. For example Bezbaroa’s women protagonists almost always conform to the prevailing social norm. Their revolts, like in *Radii* and *Pāmmugi*, are mellowed down by their acceptance of a socially meaningful role.

Besides these there were other constraints on their literary productions, particularly fiction. They addressed a readership that was not completely literate. Even this constituted only a small minority. The taste of this reading public was still in tune with the *Kārya* literature (long narrative poem) and folk-tales. Phakirmohana and Lakshmināth had to bridge the gap between traditional literary taste and modernity. It must be said to their credit that they succeed eminently in this regard.

Bezbaroa became the chief arbiter of literary taste of his literature from 1898 till his death in 1938. With Chandrakumār Agarwālā and others he was instrumental in ushering the romantic movement in Assamese literature. In Oriya literature Phakimohana is credited with setting the modern age in motion with his revolutionary prose-style and subject matter. Their preeminence in their respective literatures can be gauged from the fact that the modern age in both Assamese and Oriya literatures are named after them.