PREFACE

When I came to Assam the likeness between Assamese and my mother tongue Oriya fascinated me. Gradually it dawned upon me the cultural affinity between Assam and Orissa. I have had the good fortune of coming in touch with Trailokyanath Goswami, an eminent literary personality of Assam, who inspired me to do a project in Oriya and Assamese literatures. I was interested in Indian literature since my college days. Staying away from home gave me the ingredients to take up a project in comparative literature. Since I was familiar with Phakirmohana’s fictional works I thought of Lakshminath Bezbaroa, who, like his Oriya counterpart, was in the forefront of the reawakening in his province.

The variables available in Assam and Orissa in the 19th century seemed uncannily similar. Both provinces had passed through a turbulent phase of social and political unrest in the first half of the last century. Both had faced the trauma of their mother tongues being relegated to the status of patois. In both the literary renaissance was late in coming.

The language dispute with Bengal catapulted linguistic-cultural questions to the fore in Assam and Orissa in the later half of the 19th century. It gave rise to a love-hate relationship with Bengal. Phakirmohana and Lakshminath were passionately involved with these issues. They fought against Bengali dominance even as they were inspired by Bengali literature and the phenomenal intellectual progress made by Bengal.
The fictional works of Phakirmohana and Lakshminath constitute important landmarks in their respective literatures. Lakshminath wrote one novel in the historical mode and seventy short stories. Phakirmohana, on the other hand, has about twenty short stories and four novels, out of which one is historical in nature. For convenience, the historical fiction are discussed to highlight their importance in rousing historical consciousness. The rest of their fictional works are discussed thematically to point out their similarities. They were pioneers and one comes across some weakness that such pioneers show. At the same time they were also masters in certain respects—particularly in their prose-styles.

The present study ‘Sahityarathi Lakshminath Bezbaroa and Sahityarathi Phakirmohana Senapati: A Comparative Study with Special Reference to their Fiction’ tries to put in perspective the fictional works of the writers in relation to their concerns and in relation to their larger social milieu.