CHAPTER XVI

ASSAMESE CHRONICLE PLAYS

In Assamese literature Padmanath Cohnin Sarma was a pioneer, as far as chronicle plays are concerned. Mr. Cohnin Sarma's contribution to literature was, however, not restricted to writing of plays only. He was at the same time a poet, dramatist, novelist, biographer, essayist, humourist and a journalist too. He contributed to Assamese literature in many ways.

But the brilliance of Cohnin Sarma's literary genius, was, to a large extent, overshadowed by the towering personality of Laxminath Bezbaruah — a contemporary literary genius of great repute. There was another factor for which proper assessment of Padmanath was not possible. This man was a staunch supporter of the British Raj and he did not support the Freedom Movement of India. This personal inclination considerably narrowed the scope for the flourishing of his genius.

Anyway, in spite of his inclination towards the British Raj, Padmanath was so to speak the first conscious dramatist to review the glorious past of his motherland, in his chronicle plays and these plays, though their influence can no longer be felt, are of great literary value. During the Freedom Movement, contd.......
the historical dramas of Padmanath went a long way to awaken the subservient common people to the value of freedom. We are not aware of the existence of any such drama of earlier period. Mr. Satyendra Nath Sharma, the writer of "Assamese Natya Sahitya" once observed:

"Asamiya eitihasik mata jama hay bima satapdir pratham dasakat. unabimna satapdir ei samir nat yadi be rasit heichil tur horo praman be nidarsan amar hatat mai. samkhabata Padmanath Gohain Barua 'Jaymati' mato pratham prakasit baranjimalak nat. 1822 sakat (1900 AD) ei nat prakasit hay." (tritiya adhyay, eitihasik nat, pristha 185). (First chronicle play in Assamese was written in the first decade of the twentieth century. Nineteenth century is supposed to have produced a number of play of this genre but no proof or trace of them is there for us. Padmanath Gohain Barua's 'Jaymati' is in all probability, the first published Assamese Chronicle play. It was published in the year of 1900). (Eitihasik Nat, Chapter-III, Page-185).

Padmanath was allured by the historical anecdotes of his land which were full of patriotic spirit and based his historical dramas on such important characters of the Assam history as Sati Jaimati, Godadhar, Lachit Barphukan etc. These contd......
plays mirrored the most glorious chapter of the Ahom history and the new trend, introduced by Padmanath in Assamese literature was carried on quite satisfactorily in later periods. Padmanath was also greatly influenced by

"Padmanath Cobiain Harma (1871-1946)"

Padmanath was born in a village named Nakari under Nakari Mousa of North Lakhimpur. He moved to Sibsagar having passed the student-scholarship examination and completed his secondary education there. He got through his Entrance Examination in 1890 and thereafter went to Calcutta to pursue higher education. During the student-scholarship examination he started his activities centering literature. On coming to Calcutta he came in contact with the Sabha (At: Bha: Us: Sa: ) (Asamiya Bhasar Ummati Sadhan) connected for the development of Assamese language which led him to develop fully his literary interests. On completion of his college education he came back home and engaged himself for the development of the mother language. In 1893 under his leadership Ahom Sabha was founded and he was elected as the first Chief Secretary of the Sabha. His career was very broad-based. In his official service he served as Headmaster in the Government High School at Kohima and the Normal School at Tempur. In the area of politics he was a suppressive supporter of the Britishers.

contd......
by the English dramatist Shakespeare. His successors wholly depended on the new image of the mediaval age of the Ahom history reflected in his plays. Though such a memorable personality in Assamese literature, in selection of subject matters, however, he was restrictive. His chronicle plays never dealt with any narrative outside the Ahom history. Moreover, though his plays abound in dialogues, emotionally charged with patriotic spirit, they did not succeed in maintaining the solemn mood of history as the dialogues were written in verse-form. Here is bird’s eye view of the chronicle plays written by Gohain Barua -

**JAIMATI (1900):**

Gohain Barua wrote the play 'Jaimati' on the basis of the famous character of Jaimati of Ahom history. This character, unparalleled for her devotion to husband, love for the motherland and sacrifice, ultimately met with a terribly sorrowful end. In portrayal of this character the dramatist needed no help of imagination.

From 1673 to 1681 was a dark era of the Ahom dynasty. During this period quite a number of kings ascended the throne and were dethroned in turn. At 

contd.....
that time, according to the custom of Abom dynasty, no man with any mark of injury on his body could claim the throne of the king. During the reign of Chulikopha or Boy-King, the most powerful man in the Kingdom was Laluksona or Budaphukan. Boy-King or Chulikupa, to get rid of any second claimant of the throne, indulged in physical mutilation of the all the princes of the 2nd Abom dynasty, with the help of Budaphukan.

Now, Jainati, the wife of an Abom Prince named Gadapani, shifted her husband to a secret place for the sake of his security. During that time the Abom Kingdom was in a most chaotic condition. Gadapani thinking of the plight of his men, suffered from worry and anxiety. But, his worthy consort, apprehending his physical risk and appreciating that Gadapani was indispensable to tide over the calamity of the Kingdom, asked him still to live incognito. At first Gadapani did not agree to her proposal but later he changed his mind and took shelter in the Naga Hills concealing his identity. Chulikopha at the news of this concealment, caught hold of Jainati and persecuted her to collect information about Gadapani's whereabouts. But in spite of untold tortures Jainati never gave any information about her husband.

Jainati is the prima donna of this drama. She contd.....
was a woman of unparalleled courage. Neither was there any match for her so far as sacrifice and devotion to husband were concerned. The dramatist has shown great skill in the portrayal of this character. Resolution was the main characteristic of Jaimati and it has become explicit in the following statement of her:

"nidio sandhān mor pati debatāri;
mālare bāsan, lare jadi Himāchal"
(Jaimati, ditiya anka, septam drisya).

(Never will I give any information about my husband; and even if the Himalayas should change its position, my decision shall not change). (Jaimati, 2nd Act, Scene-VII).

Jaimati's self-sacrifice was for the welfare of her motherland. She could appreciate that the weather the storm of the Ahom Kingdom they needed a competent man and that is why she advised her husband to live incognito. Mr. Saraghain commented on Jaimati's patriotism and glorious self-sacrifice:

"despren tomasār
salagā bistar, milo yadi sahayog
sahāro samāne; patita Asam pana
uthaī timriti; anāti palam āru
udiba adanya teje nari jagaran
eotāma suroti; jaimati miryātan
sānjibān bani baha rāidi "udpapi"

(If you all be united, fallen Assam will rise again; women will rise along with to respond contd....
to the harmonious song of the national conscience. Torture on Jaimati will lend the main inspiration) (Act.V, Scene-II).

This drama abounds in occasional outbursts charged with patriotic spirit. Mr. Margoha observed time and again that nothing was dearer than motherland and all should come forward to uphold her honour -

"swajāti samāj āra smār-bhākam samastake pīchā kari svadēs uddhar brata ag kari āni āguāha lāge svadēsar hitiinā svadēsār ummati"

(Interest of one's own race, society and family is secondary to the liberation of motherland. We should march forward with an avowed promise. Think for the welfare and advancement of the motherland) (Act.V, Scene-II).

Unwavering devotion to duty was a most significant aspect of the character of Jaimati. When Gadapani, being excited at the news of tortures on Jaimati, had put in an appearance before her in disguise and advised her to give out his whereabouts, she gestured him to back - the moment she should recognise him. In Jaimati's character, we can see an ideal Indian woman.

Next to Jaimati, second most important character was Gadapani. But Gadapani's character was not very successfully portrayed in this play. Jaimati simply overshadowed him. He had deep sympathy and

contd....
love for her but those feelings did not get properly expressed. Besides, he lacked in due consciousness of duty. His activities often seemed to be controlled by other characters. The playwright had also forgotten to focus on Gadapani's emotional reaction to the Naga lady whose soothing supervision lessened the sorrows of his exiled life to a bearable limit.

The character of the Boy-King was portrayed as an incarnate villain. He was jealous of Gadapani and Jaimati mainly for two reasons. The first cause had a historical base but the second one was a figment of the writer's fancy. Once the boy-king had a mind to marry Jaimati but she refused him and instead accepted Gadapani as her husband. So, it was not only for the consideration of the security of the throne but also to pay off old scores the king tortured Jaimati so much.

The character of Jaimu, the Naga lady, has been very beautifully portrayed by the dramatist. She rescued Gadapani from the danger and in the process fell in love with him. The girl appeared extremely charming in her innocence and modesty. Against the natural backdrop of the hilly surroundings she put in an appearance like the daughter of Mother Nature herself.

contd......
There are two more female characters in this drama worth-mentioning - one is Padmabati, (a maid of Jaimati) and the other is Ani Kabaria (mother of the Boy-King). Padmabati, took charge of the two children of Jaimati and Gadapani in their absence and kept Jaimati ever informed of the well-being of the boys and tried her best to redress her sorrows by soothing consolation. Padmabati proved herself a worthy friend. Ani-Kabaria tried time and again to dissuade the Boy-King from his evil endeavours. Both the characters, in their tenderness of feeling, were incarnation of perfect womanhood.

The fundamental sentiment of the drama is pathos but the tender note had not been uniformly maintained. The ridiculous behaviour of the attendants of the boy-king in the pathetic scene of Jaimati's punishment had marred the solemnity of the drama. Again, though the play is named after Jaimati, it does not end with her death. The scenes after Jaimati's death seem quite irrelevant indeed and hamper dramatic integrity. But in spite of such defects in the scene-sequence, "Jaimati" is quite successful as a historical play.

CADAFAAR - (1907):

Padmanath Mangshain wrote "Cadafaar" in the contd.....
year of 1907. "Jaimati" and "Gadadhar" - these two plays are co-related. The plot of "Jaimati" reaches its conclusion in "Gadadhar". The later play depicts how, after the death of Jaimati, Gadadhar ascended to the throne of the Ahom Kingdom. The story of the drama is purely historical and in five acts it gives an elaborate account of Gadadhar's taking possession of the throne. But in this play the dramatist fails to give any proof of his originality and creativity. In the very first act Gadadhar gives vent to his determination to win the Kingdom in a lengthy soliloquy:

"nāi mor seevyabal judwar samal
nāi kono bandhujan upades hota
subujno prajār mani na jāne yatek
nitra rajya sampradāy - kār kibon māti
tathāpi pratijā mor, janjan akale
akale udbhāti jata apāy bighini,
bāyubeghe prabesim āpon nāgar,
akrani bikrame mor lan simhasan"

(Neither have I the required army strength nor friend-counsellors. I do not know how to read the mind of my subject, and do not know who among the neighbouring Kingdoms are my well wishers - who wants what - still, it is my avowed promise - I will fight to the last, jumping over all the hurdles I will enter my own land and ascend to the throne to prove my mettle) (1st act, 2nd scene).

Though the resolute tone of the soliloquy was not always correspondingly maintained in practice, Gadadhar's hardship and determination inspired his countrymen to a great extent.

contd....
For the restoration of the Kingdom Gadadhar realised more on diplomatic strategies than on muscle power, and if placed side by side with Jaimati's sufferings Gadadhar's outbursts seem to be some wailing slogans only.

There is a lot of resemblance between 'Jaimati' and 'Gadadhar'. Gadadhar, in the second act of the drama, arrived at the house of Salal Gohain, the royal representative of Darang Harliab, in the disguise of a mendicant and Rambha, the daughter of the Gohain got emotionally attached to him. The incident reminds us of the affair between Gadapani and Naga girl Jina. Like Jina, Rambha also had a very short appearance in the play.

Again, Gadadhar conquered the Kingdom with the help of his brother-in-law Harphukan, while the fall of Roy-King was precipitated by the boiling dissatisfaction of the common people at the limitless torture of the King. Gadadhar's victory was celebrated in the Fourth Act and in the Fifth Act the play ends with an account of the coronation ceremony. Gadadhar's patriotic utterances bear ample proof of the dramatist's patriotism:

"bhābichālla yechamāt pūrna haba kam, -
labhim ranat jay senapati hai;"
antarat ucca asa palichime aru, barhe yon bhuratat Assam goorab - bairhi dina pithi rajya.- dur duramit bahubhile mor 

(In young days I hoped that my desire would surely be fulfilled. I would attain victory in the war in the role of a General - I cherished this ambition in the core of my heart - I would expand the kingdom far and wide with my own might and enhance the glory of Assam in India)

(2nd Act, 11nd Scene).

SADHANI - (1910):

"Sadhani" was the third chronicle play by Padmanath Gobain Harah. As in "Jaimati" and "Gadadhari" the dialogue of this play too is written in verse form and like 'Jaimati' this play also has a tragic end. In 'Jaimati', Jaimati did not give out any information about her husband in spite of endless tortures on her and ultimately succumbed to the persecution. In 'Sadhani' too, Sadhani, in the same manner laid down her life to save her honour.

Gobain Harah had collected the materials of this drama from Deedhai Ahom History. There is an account of the conflict between the Cutia and the Ahom dynasty in this play. The dramatist had shown how the cause of the fall of Nitipal, the last King of
the Cutia dynasty was there in his own arbitrary wantonness. The character of Sadhani, the Queen consort of Nitipal, is a combination of different qualities. Devotion to husband and a deep sense of self-respect are main among them. The play opens with the Swayambar Ceremony of Sadhani and ends with her death.

Apart from few dramatic persons like Nitipal, Sadhani, Dharmadhaja, Kamseng, Chahungmung etc., all the remaining characters of the play are the dramatist's own creations. There are many irrelevant scenes and narratives in this tragedy. The character of Sadhani shows individuality but no outstanding characteristics of a heroine and if compared with Jaimati, Sadhani seems rather ordinary. Again, the all pervading patriotic spirit of the other three chronicle plays of Gohain Barua is absent in 'Sadhani'.

LACHIT MAWPHUKANI

'Lachit Barphukan' was published in 1915. This is the last chronicle play of Gohain Barua and is very significant so far as Gohain Barua's chronicle plays are concerned. Here, for the first time, the writer has used prose medium on experimental basis.

Gohain Barua himself acknowledged that he had contd...
acquired the materials for this drama 'Lachit Barphukan' from two essays of Hem Chandra Goswami, viz. 'Bharaighater Juddha' and 'Lachit Barphukan'. Save one or two rather unimportant events, the plot of this drama, is true to history throughout. It depicts the battle between the Ahom and the Mughal during the reign of Swargadev Chakradhwaj Singh and Udayaditya. The dramatist’s main focus is on the extraordinary valour and military skill displayed by Lachit Barphukan and he has narrated the heroic deeds of the brave general with great devotion and reverence.

Between 1767 and 1771 a series of battles took place between the Mughal and the Ahom. The Ahom army under the leadership of Lachit fought with the army of Saied Firoze and Saied Sama at Bansbari and Kajalimukh and defeating them arrested the two generals. The second battle was fought under the leadership of ManSingha, a Mughal general of great repute and this time too the Mughals gave way to the war strategy and valour of Lachit. During the preparation of this battle Lachit asked his men to build up a fort and that too, within one night, under the supervision of his maternal uncle. But when, at dead of night, the general came to check out the progress of the work he found that nothing had been done. Lachit being enraged at this, then and now contd......
there cut off his maternal uncle into two pieces as a punishment for his neglect of duty. The soldiers got terribly afraid at this incident and immediately started their work and before the day-break they also completed the building of the fort. Lachit's observation at the peak of his excitement -

"desathoe amar memai damgar mahay"
(my maternal uncle is not dearer than my motherland)
has passed current as a famous utterance in history.

The dramatist has been very faithful to the run of the historical events in "Lachit Barphukan". He has not indulged in weaving of fancy at all. Two sub-plots of erotic themes have been added, of course. But they do not gain much importance. The dramatist is not very successful, however, in the description of the love-affaire of Lachit Barphukan and Ramani Gavaroo. In the portrayal of the character of Gavaroo there are a few unrealistic touches. For example the account of Gavaroo's hokumobbing in disguise with the Mughal Soldier and her rescue of Lachit lacks in probability. But Ramani very beautifully displays the patriotic sentiment. Her heart-felt concern for her motherland during her stay in the Mughal Marem in Delhi is very appealing -

contd.....
"kār dē? kār ghar? kāt mai? - yē desāt mor jāma, sei desā i nahay; yē gharat mai palita, sei ghar i nahay, yāt jagatar seendarya eke thāite dekhone, sei ānh i nahay, ā bukhā swades nahay, nilagar pardes. eikhan sei mor āpeon ghar mahay, lekar par gharāt Assam atulan sēbha mai, supāse sakut āmanī laga drisya he".

(Whose land? Whose home? Where am I? This is not my motherland...............The beauty of Assam is not to be found here...
.........................(Lachit Harphukan, 1st Act, 2nd scene).

Inspite of so many irrelevancies, the character of Kamani Gavaroṛe attracts our attention by the display of exemplary love, courage and patriotic sentiment.

The two sub-plots mostly serve the purpose of dramatic relief and bear testimony to the fact that no calamity can finally crush the subtle essence of human feeling like love and sympathy.

Lachit, the main character of the play is courageous, dutiful and duly loyal to his motherland. In the drama he is more a political personality than a social being. Of course the dramatist has given us hints of the affairs of Lachit and Kamani Gavaroṛe, but Lachit is never found reminiscing over the ladyvlove nor does he ever express his soft corner for her in...contd....
any of his utterances. His love is reflected only in the sympathetic observations he made after the death of the poor girl. Thus Lachit the lover is, far and away, out done by Lachit the general.

Gohain Barua has displayed his skills more in the portrayal of village people than in the portrayal of the aristocratic historical characters. It implies that the dramatist had not the essential outlook of an historian. In the present drama, Lachit’s patriotism and devotion to duty have got properly expressed. To elaborate his observation after receiving the order from Swargadev may be quoted here:


I will rise to the occasion and carry, the responsibility on my shoulder. I will remove the Mughals from here root and branch. .................The name of this

conto......
land is Assam - (i.e. without parallel)........... No other land can be compared with it........... 'Do or die' is my war cry). (1st Act, 3rd Scene).

This lengthy statement reflects the resoluteness and bellicose character of Lachit and at the same time focuses on his humility and spirit.

In this historical play the dramatist has harped on the string of patriotic sentiment again and again and even the chorus of the soldiers is marked by a pervading spirit of nationalism:

"Lakshya rana jay, lakshya desodwar
Assam amar janambhumi;
i tini dhyana, sei anyakan
jain mohal miscay ami".

(Aim is victory in the war - liberty of Motherland
Assam is our motherland
Do not want any thing else than the defeat of the Mughals). (2nd Act, IVth scene).

There is a vivid picture of the political and social life of the day in this drama side by side with the description of Delhi, - the Mughal Harum and the customs and manners of the Mughals.

LAXMINATH BESARURU I

Laxminath Besbarua was a mention worthy and memorably personality in Assamese literature. His easy efficiency in different literary genre viz. story, drama, could.....
poetry, is surprising. He started his literary career at an early age and within a short period made considerable contribution to Assamese literature by his literary products. He spent most of his life-time in Bengal - Calcutta, to be specific. So as a matter of course he was greatly influenced by Bengali literature. From his memoirs, it can be known that he actually started his literary life with poems written in Bengali but at last he switched over to the mother tongue to contribute to the enrichment of Assamese literature. From this point of view, Laxminath Senbarua could be easily compared with the famous poet and dramatist of Bengal, Michel Madhusudan Datta who also first started his literary life by writing in an alien language viz. English but later accepted his mother tongue as his medium and enriched Bengali literature by his contributions.

Laxminath Senbarua was responsible for all-rounded progress of Assamese literature, particularly for the flourishment and enrichment of Assamese literature during the first half of the twentieth century. That is why this period is named after him and called "Senbarua Jug". Assamese literature, during this period made a great deal of progress being simultaneously contd.......
nourished by Bengali literature, and Western literature, the works of Shakespeare in particular.

Benbarua took to play-writing at a mature age. Bengali dramas influenced his plays to a large extent. Himself being inspired by the spirit of the Freedom Movement, Benbarua wished to infuse that spirit into his brethren and for that purpose, in his dramas he focused on the most glorious chapter of Assam history bringing most heroic characters of history in the limelight. In his chronicle plays, Benbarua presented an undistorted version of history. He composed all his three famous plays viz. 'Selimar', 'Jaimati' and 'Chakradwaja Singha' over the single year of 1915. Though propaganda of patriotism was the main object of these dramas, they do not abound only in slogans of nationalism and patriotic utterances. On the other hand remarkable harmony between the theme and the language has made these dramas artistic whole. Again, Assamese dramatic literature, gaining from the simple and powerful prose of Benbarua explored so many new avenue of expression. Here is a brief account of Benbarua's chronicle plays:

**Selimar**

Laxmanath collected material for 'Selimar'

*contd....*
from 'Assam Baranjee' of Hari Mahadur Cumarthiram Barua and the history book of Mr. Gaite. In this drama he has described quite elaborately how the freedom of Assam had been endangered by the successive three attacks of the King of Maan and has given us an idea about how the wide-spread reputation of valour and heroism of the Assamese that gained currency during the reign of three famous Kings viz. Bhaskar Barma, Chakradhaja Singha and Rudra Singha was subsequently damaged. The dramatist has portrayed the famous characters in his play in conformity with history as far as possible. When the chief personages of the Kingdom were at daggers drawn the enemy came to fish in the troubled water and shattered the solidarity of

*FaN 10* Laxminath Beahara (1868-1938) was born in 1868 in a respectable Vaishnava family at Bibesagar. He, completed his school-education at Bibesagar and went to Calcutta to receive college-education. It was during his stay in Calcutta that the magazine of 'Jonaki' was first published in 1889. He started his literary career through 'Jonaki'. He married Pragna Sundari Devi of famous Tagore family during his days at Calcutta. He spent most of his time outside Assam. He stayed at Sambalpur in Orissa for a long period in connection with his business of wood. Though, he was most of the time outside Assam, his attachment to the motherland was very earnest and this attachment was reflected in his literature also. His achievement in satirical and humorous composition was remarkable.

contd...
Assam. The Mawsa soldiers attacked Assam and to tame them came the British army and the play ended with the defeat of the Mawsa.

The action of the main dramatic personages viz. Chandrakanta, Purmananda, Sadan Chandra and Chatram has been very beautifully depicted. The dramatist is faithful to Assam history all through out. All the characters have been portrayed in accordance with the account of history. Some of them presented even brighter. The character of Chatram is a case in point.

An uncommon character of the play is that it has no hero. The plot of the drama is woven out of the interaction of so many characters. No single character is attached with utmost importance. The play narrated how the fall of a nation was brought about by a handful of self-centred power-crazy persons in key position. The dramatist has presented to us a few most impressive pictures to show how a rich nation met with destruction because of internal factionalism and the tragedy consisted in the chaotic condition of the land.

The story of the play ran thus - Chandramanta Singha, the King of Assam and his counsellor Purmananda were brought up together under the supervision of the contd...
King's mother. Purmananda was power hungry but well
wisher of the Kingdom. Chandra Kanta, at the instance
of his friend Satram (Charingia Phukan), lost his
confidence in Purmananda and went against him. The
King's mother tried her best to correct his mistake
but in vain. Satram himselffalse started inciting
people against Purmananda and that brought in an all
round chaos in the nation. Purmananda requested Chandra
Kanta to bring Satram to book but the latter did not
comply with his request at first, though he gave in at
last under pressure. On the other hand Sadan Chandra,
a royal representative from Gauhati joined his hands
with Satram and went against Purmananda. Sadan's two
sons also made things too hot for the people of Gauhati.
Purmananda sent his man to arrest Sadan, but the latter,
being warned beforehand by a letter from his daughter
Pijey Aideo, absconded and at last took shelter in
Gauhati. There he first sought help from the British
to subdue Purmananda but his mission failing, he went
to Burma and received the help of the Maan army. The
Maan army invaded Assam and plundered Assam. Purmananda,
committed suicide to safeguard his honour. The King's
mother, with the help of a loyal follower, put traitor
Sadan to death. When the nation was passing through
such a tumultuous condition, the Maan army again
contd......
appeared on the scene and let loose a reign of terror. The common people made an united effort to subdue them but failed. Being frustrated and desperate they then sought British assistance which they immediately received. The British army beat the Maam army and started interposing in the administration of Assam.

Among the male characters of the drama most important is Chandrakanta Sinha. Chandrakanta was the King, in name only. He acted as a puppet at the hands of others. There was not a single incident in which he could give any proof of his self-reliance. He was guided by his mother, counsellors and Sadan Chandra. His Chief Counsellor Parnananda Margobain is a remarkable character of this drama. He was power-hungry but at the same time a patriot. Even the thought of a subservient condition of his motherland was unbearable for him. When the King’s mother, considering the future of Assam, asked him to make an offer of the motherland to the British he retorted:

"mai kame imrajkar parakram ye srestha aru sahayo ye bhumuliya, seite anie mambia bidrohar samayate thalko dekhalo, kintu sei buli amar deshka imrajak lalbandhi kari dibaloe gale deshka bandhi kari diyar apabade mok pana."

(I admit that the English is a power nation. We contd....)
have witnessed their prowess during the Moamria Mutiny. But if we hand over our motherland to them just for that I shall be personally slandered). (Salimyar, Act-I, Scene-I).

In the drama there is ample evidence of his concern for freedom of Assam and his sense of self respect. When Sadan Chandra, with the backing of the Maan army, marched forward against him and defeat seemed inevitable, Purnananda shuddered at the thought of the imminent disgrace and committed suicide. Next to Purnananda, Sadan Chandra stands in prominence. Sadan Chandra was a despot and to attain his objective he even did not hesitate at calling in a foreign army to invade his motherland. It was to feed his interest that the Maan army plundered Assam without check. Even when his two sons viz. Joli and Pyali let loose a reign of terror among people - Sadan Chandra paid no heed to any complaint against them. Now coming to Satram, within his limited sphere, he has proved himself to be a man to reckon with. Though Satram was not very mature - age-wise, he had been successful in inciting Chandra Kanta against Purnananda - a middle-aged man. It was at his instance that Chandra Kanta turned antagonistic to his counsellor.

Other mention-worthy characters of the drama are Purandar Singh, Kusminath Bara Gohain, Greshanath, Ghanashyan etc., Greshanath was Purnananda's son and contd.........
Badan Chandra's son-in-law. This character is a very good study of split personality. For him, on one hand there was the order from father Purnananda, on the other hand acted his sentiment for his wife. That is why before coming upon his father-in-law, he could not but alert his wife about the future plan in time. Contradictory concerns always oscillated his mind.

Among the female characters, the King's mother, Pijou Anideo, Sacheshiri and Dhansheri are important. The King's mother, though she was mostly guided by Purnananda, gave proof of her individuality. She, with an eye to the welfare of the Kingdom, even gave indulgence to Purnananda's greed for power and told her son Chandra Kanta time and again not to go against Purnananda. The plan of the murder of Badan Chandra gave evidence of her resolute personality. Pijou Anideo was daughter-in-law of Purnananda and daughter of Badan Chandra. In spite of all her sentiment for her father and brother she did never support the unjust actions of them. In a warning letter to her father she mentioned that he had not been following the path of justice. However, though she was mentally prepared that her father might be assassinated any moment she could not retain her composure when she heard the news of the murder of her father. She suffered mental aberration and ultimately succumbed to her agony. contd.....
The dramatist, in this play has focused on the fact that fall is the inevitable result of factionalism. A song of Namasak Sahauna contains the hint of this moral:

"beekmanthag bisea ara boolasar si
laka laka deshhaso manga oosa thya.
naJaa shataraat bima hisi anak atyasee.
raije rajaay kasles ahi na pay subinah
dukhiaah dukh di ras pay, prajak kare shin.
sei ghar raja, seikhaam desar amsat heinim"

(Oh Lord Visnu of Vaikuntha and Lord Shiva of Kailashal Look now the Kingdom is going to pieces. Internal factionalism and indiscriminate torture have become rampant here. The King does not do justice to the people. He humiliates the poor and neglects all the subjects. How long can such a King - such a Kingdom last? (1st Act, 7th Scene).

A number of major incidents of the drama has been narrated through letters. But congregation of too many incidents there has hampered the healthy balance of the play. Moreover, the lengthy, narrative dialogue lacking in dramatic charm undermines the integrity of the drama.

**CHAKRADHWAJA SINGHA**

Dehshatru compositions 'Chakradhwaaja Singha' with materials from an article by Pandit Hemchandra Goswami, named "Saraighater Juddha". This play is an account of the battle fought between the Muslims and the contd.....
reign of Chakradhwaja Singha. In this fierce battle, Lachit Harphukan led the Assamese army against Sayed Chana, Sayed Ferose and Mughal general Nan Singh and victory went to Chakradhwaja Singha. Lachit could easily win over Sayed Chana and Sayed Ferose at Banshari and Kajalimukh. Lachit's son Priyaran also proved his mettle in this battle. Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, to take revenge of this ignominious defeat of the Mughal army at Banshari and Kajalimukh sent a huge army under the leadership of Nan Singh but Nan Singh also had to submit to the valour, strategy and diplomacy of Lachit Harphukan. In the famous battle of Saraghat the Ahom army defeated the Mughal army out and out. Though the drama named after Chakradhwaja Singha, it is, in fact, an account of Lachit's valour. Chakradhwaja Singha was the King of Assam and freedom of Assam was a matter of great concern for him as can be easily ascertained from his dealings with the Mughal messenger. Though at that time the Ahom treasury was in doldrums and his army strength not very satisfactory he did not bear with the insulting message of the Mughal Emperor; but got ready for the war. He knew how to honour a hero and when he had heard of Lachit's valour, he gave him immediate recognition.

Next worth-mentioning character is Lachit

contd.....
Harphukan. He shouldered the responsibility that was thrust on him with constancy and patience. His valour could be appreciated from the account of his victory. In this drama there is no detail description of the war field. Only from a message to the king we can have an idea of how the battle was won. Lachit's heroism was evident when he visited his army camp even in an indisposed physical condition to encourage his men to get ready for naval warfare. He was only too aware of his own duty, and did not hesitate at putting to death his own maternal uncle for neglect of duty. The dramatist has shown Lachit's son, Priyaram, in an easy-going mood. But traces of his heroism are not altogether missing. Under the leadership of his own father he proved his mettle in the warfare against the Mughals and proved himself, the chip of the old block.

Among the female characters, mention must be made of Gajapuriani i.e. the wife of Lachit Harphukan and Lachit's two daughters viz. Chenchi and Aynahi. Gajapuriani has been presented as a quarrelsome rustic woman. This drama resembles Shakespeare's Henry IV to a large extent. The dramatist himself acknowledged his debt in the prologue. The actions of Priyaram and Gajapuria were very much like the actions of Prince Hall and Falstaff of Henry IV, bk I.

contd.....
The love affairs of Sadia-Khan Gohain and Lachit Barphukan's daughter Chunshi is a sub-plot of the drama. The jokes of Bapaki (Lachit's another daughter) about the pair are very entertaining. But the humour about Gajapuriani and others bordered on vulgarity in many instances.

The earnest endeavour of the Ahom army to safeguard national freedom spoke volumes for their patriotic feelings, and dutifulness. The two songs in the second scene of the drama reverberate with patriotic sentiments quite overtly:

(1) "uthna Assamya uthna kashi pari
rajā-prajā uthna buku datā karī.
Assam matri kake karo pan
des rakshā karmo karī prāpana."
(Act.II, Scene-I)

(2) "Assamyo yuddhāsah suuu nor bāni,
svadēs svadharmac rakshā kariye eosāni...
ako ako bir tora parbat parāy.
ashok yaban dekkhi sāmmo darāy."
(Act.II, Scene-II)

1) (Rise Assamese people -
The King and the subjects simultaneously-
Take avowed promise to protect the Freedom of motherland Assam)
(Act.II, Scene-I).

2) (Hark, the warriors of Assam !
Protect the motherland and your religion
contd....
Each of you is as strong as a mountain
The infidels will get scared of you.

(Act. II, Scene-II).

As there is no detailed description of the war scenes, an idea of the valourous activities of the Ahom army can be formed from the report of the messenger alone. Lachit's letter to his wife contained the account of his son's heroism.

JAIMATI KHAMKI

It is Laxminath Benharua's first chronicle play and based on the character of the famous historical heroine - who is one of the most familiar characters of Ahom history. Before Laxminath, Padmanath Gohain Harua had already written a chronicle play on Jaimati and that was also the first chronicle play of the preceding writer. Like Padmanath, Laxminath too in his drama, did not indulge any distortions of history and save one or two minor factual mistakes here or there, was faithful to history all throughout.

The main character of the play is Jaimati. She was a heroine woman and very much devoted to her husband. In her character the influence of the character of Piyara of the play "Shajahan" can be easily traced. As Piyara, putting a good face to innumerable dangers contd.....
tried her best to comfort her husband with her songs and dances, Jainati too, amidst misfortunes, tried her best to keep up her complacency, gaining solace from songs and thereby to give comfort to others too. When Gadapani ran away and she was caught by the followers of the King, she did not play the coward, but patiently endured all the tortures lying down. Request or reproach—nothing could move her from her resolve. She did not give out any information about her husband in spite of all abuse and harassment. For this she even had to spend her days in prison-cell and bear with the separation from her two male children. Jainati, indeed is portrayed all bright with her firmness, dignity and devotion to husband.

Gadapani, in comparison to Jainati, seems rather lack-lustre. As in Gohain Barua's play, here also Gadapani, apart from giving vent to his affliction in a number of soliloquies did practically nothing, and there is no evidence of his political pragmatism.

In 'Jainati' of Gohain Barua the main accomplice of the Boy-King was Laluk Barphyakan. But there is no mention of Laluk Barphyakan in Buburana's play. On the contrary, here, counsellor Suragohain is found to be the main wirepuller in punishing Jainati.

contd......
As in Gohain Sarus's play all advice of the King's mother and the counsellor fell flat upon the Boy-King and failed to dissuade him from persecution of woman, in "Jaimati Namari" also the Boy-King turned a deaf ear to all beseechings of his mother and had indulged in limitless tortures on Jaimati, taking Sara Gohain as his accomplice. In this play, Jaimati's friend Padmabati has been renamed as Scuti but in her activities this Scuti is very akin to Padmabati. In the earlier play, Padmabati, in the absence of Jaimati took full responsibility of her children, in this play Scuti also does the same job.

Jina, the damsel hailing from the hilly country in Gohain Sarus's play has reappeared as 'Dalimi' in Bosbarus's play, and has left a permanent impression of her simplicity and tenderness on our mind. But, on the whole, Bosbarus's creation 'Dalimi' seems to be more vivacious that of Gohain Sarus's Jina. Dalimi boros close resemblance to Laci, a daughter of Mother Nature in Wordsworth's poems. Dalimi's feelings for Gadapani is tinged with the glow of platonic love as defined by Chandidas:

"rajakini prem aikaṣita hem
rama-gandha nahi tāy."

contd....
(Love of the washer woman was like polished
gold tested by a touch-stone
It was devoid of any carnal desire)

The advent of the supernatural in the last
scene of "Jaimati Kamari" has been detrimental to the
historical value of the play. Immediately after the
death of Jaimati, Gadapani went to the spot and was
overwhelmed by grief. He started crying, cursing shame
on him. At that time a luminous image of Jaimati
appeared on the scene only to disappear in the twinkling
of an eye and voice a message for her husband from behind
the screen assuring him that peace in Ahom Kingdom was
destined to be restored by him. This scene sequence has
indeed undermined the sense of reality of this historical
drama. Gadapani also depended on destiny too much to be
convincing.

ATUL CHANDRA HAZARKA

Atul Chandra Hazarika is an important name in
Assamese literature. His literary genius luxuriated in
all important fields of literature like drama, poetry,
ovel etc. so efficiently that his name is uttered along
with the names of such famous celebrities of Assamese
literature as Lakshinath Boshurua and Padmanath Bargehan.
Though he experimented on different literary genre, for
Atul Chandra Hazarika, drama was the most congenial
contd....
medium and he started his literary life too through it. His Mythological, Social and Historical dramas near the hallmark of his expertise. He took the pen to write these dramas with an eye to let Assamese drama free from the influence of Bengali drama and contribute to the nourishment of the former. His chronicle plays

* FaN 1*  Atul Chandra Narzima - (1901 - ?)

Atul Chandra was born in 1903 at Gaubati, Unamman. He studied in Patashil High School, Manik Chandra Middle English School and appeared at Matriculation examination from Collegiate High School. In 1925 he passed B.Sc., examination from Cotton College and took his B.A. degree in 1929. After a few year, he also took L.L.B. degree. Though he spent a major part of his service life in Cotton College as a Lecturer, he, after taking his B.A. degree initially had joined Sonaran High School. He served as temporary teacher in many institutions vis: Mangaldeep High School, Newgang High School, Collegiate High School and Dibrugah High School. Major part of his life as a teacher was spent in Hargota High School. During this period he had had his B.T. degree from St. Edmunds College, Shillong and he passed M.A.in Assamese from Calcutta University as a private candidate. He retired in 1960 from the post of the Head of the Department of Assamese, Cotton College.

contd...
include "Kanauj Kunaari", "Chatrapati Shivaji" "Mala Gavhar" and "Tikendrajit". Atul Chandra
Hasarika was, however, not always successful to
escape the spell of the Bengali dramatists. For
example in "Chatrapati Shivaji" he rather closely
followed "Maharashtra Jeevan Prabhat" of Kamal
Chandra Dutta and "Gairik Pataka" of Sachindra Nath
Sengupta. Here is a brief discussion of two chronicle
plays of the author:

'KANAUJ KUNARI' (Composition 1928;
Publication 1933).

The drama of Kanauj Kunaari was based on the
rivalry between Prithviraj, the ruler of Delhi and
Ajmer and Jaichand. Here the dramatist has shown how
this personal conflict between the two led to the fall
of the Hindu Kingdom and establishment of Muslim empire
in India. Jaichand, out of envy, grudge and personal
enmity handed over the motherland to the foreigners.
On the contrary, Prithviraj, a broad-hearted, courageous
patriot sacrificed his own life to safeguard the honour
of the motherland. Jaichand took revenge on Prithviraj
but ironically, his only son Ajey Singh fought with the
foreigner in defence of Prithviraj. On the other hand
Jaichand's daughter Sangjukta also choose Prithviraj
as her husband only to add insult to the affliction of
contd. . . . . .
her father. Thus, while vanquishing his enemy Jaiehaad lost the main supports of his life forever and his victory was pervaded by a sense of loss and despair which immediately touches the heart of the spectators.

Among the main dramatic personages of this play Jaiehaad is to be mentioned first. In portraying this character the dramatist has made a synthesis of jealousy, determination and firmness. Though his son and daughter had left him, Jaiehaad did not forsake his own resolution. Prithviraj was characterised by chivalry, sacrifice and patriotism. In the character of Sangjukta we come across a typical Rajput woman - a courageous, spirited and patriotic lady. Her humble supplication to Devi Singha in the battle-field to join the battle is indeed somewhat incongruent with the on-the-whole impression of this great lady. The character of Muhammad Chori has been nicely drawn. But no notice on Diljan’s determination of revenge can be discovered. Patriotic emotion is instilled in abundance in the character of Prithviraj, Sangjukta and Ajey Singha. The same sentiment pervades the songs of the Charana also as few lines from a song sung in the court of Delhi will convey:

"uthak nimādē satakanthā bhodī
bande mārām gān
jatiya nīcān hak jentisām
hadapi mahākā mān."

contd......
(Let hundred voice sing out in chorus -
'Rande Mataram',
Let the national banner flutter ever bright
and never become dull in colour)

**CHATHAPATI SHIBAJI - (1947)**

Long before the publication of Atul Chandra Hasarika's "Chatrapati Shibaji" two dramas viz. 'Gairik Pataka' by Sachindra Nath Sengupta and "Maharashtra Jeevan Prabhat" by Nameek Chandra Dutta based on the character of Shivaji had already been published and staged too in Bengal. Atul Chandra Hasarika's play was influenced by them to a large extent. It contains the story of the rise of the Marathas under the leadership of their widely acclaimed leader Shivaji.

The dramatist has very skilfully unfolded the different noble aspects like charity, idealism, chivalry etc. of the character of Shivaji and described how this man, starting from an insignificant humble position in life scaled a whole way to establish the sovereign kingdom of Maratha by dint of his heroism and skill. It has been shown in the play that Shivaji's character was moulded under the influence of his spiritual guide Ramdas Swami and his mother Jijabai and on this point, the dramatist was in perfect accordance with history.

The dramatist has been quite skillful in
contd.....
portraying the characters of the play. Both the Maganl and the Rajput characters are quite convincing. The main purpose of this drama of course was to propagate the spirit of nationalism. Two sub-plots - one based on the romantic relationship between Aruna and Gopal Singh and the other about Amiya and Dilip Rao - have been added to the main plot and that too in conformity with history.

In the play Shivaji has been presented unparallel in heroism and charity. But side by side with his patriotism, valour and hardy nature, Shivaji's occasional boastful rantings undermines the greatness of this noble leader. Minirabi has been imagined to be the lady-love of Shivaji. This lady belonged to a different caste category and as for that reason Shivaji's mother did not acquiesce of his union with her, their marriage could never be solemnised. Being frustrated in love she dedicated herself to the services of the motherland and sacrificed her own life to save Shivaji. There is some incongruity in the portraiture of this character. In Shivaji's dealing with Minirabi there is no trace of his former feeling towards her. Neither her presence in the jail at Delhi in which Shivaji also was kept prisoner seems to be convincing.

contd......
Shivaji's preceptor Ramaas Swami is portrayed as a genuine devotee and self-denying patriot. Jijabai was Shivaji's mother and she proved a worthy mother of her worthy son. This spirited, patriotic and duty-conscious lady has been painted very brightly by Atul Chandra. Yashobanta Singh and Jaisingha bear the imprint of Rajput valour and Rajput chivalry of mind. Aurangzeb is an incarnation of hypocrisy, keen intelligence and vanity combined together. The dialogue of this play all throughout, is pervaded by a patriotic spirit and though it is mostly in prose, the playwright has had recourse to the medium of poetry in the third scene of the first act. Here are a few excerpts from the dialogue and the musical part of the drama:

"jamanī! parādhima bandhini
gourabmandita biswa binindita
dharitri mandi.
ratna garbhā tumī bīr prasinī -
gagane-pabano karun krāndane bāñiche ragini".

(My dear Motherland, thy have turned you into a subservient captive!

Noble child of the Mother Earth, acclaimed by the whole world!

Mother of distinguished children and brilliant sons,

Still an unlucky woman for whom

The whole atmosphere is wailing in sad music).

(1st Act, Scene-1)

contd........
"Golā - eśār golāpiśhar brata svadesar, swajātir muktimaṅgal, sibājir swaṣṇai aji pratijān bharat santānar swaṣṇa, prayojan hale dibā lāṅgha maṭtir pujābedīt raktar āhuti. janaśī jannabhūmikāche swargadapi gariyasi."

(Gola - This time Gopal Singha's aim is to liberate the motherland, to free the nation. Today, every child of India dreams the dream of Shivaji and is ready to sacrifice his blood at the altar of the Motherland for Mother and Motherland are superior to heaven even.)

(Ist Act, 2nd Scene).

"Sibājī - eśār mahādes euraṇjībar mahay, sibājīre mahay, ei dēsr adhiṅkāri kouti kouti bharatīya janaśī. ei janaśī adhiṅkārī deśī matri bhabānī- tebeni adyāsakti, tebeni swargadapi gariyasi bharatbāra."

(Shivaji - This continent does not belong to Aurangzeb, neither to Shivaji. The owner of this country is millions of crores of common people of India. Their presiding deity is Mother Bhabānī. She is the primordial energy. She is Mother India who is superior to God even.)

(IIIrd Act, 2nd Scene)

"Gesāt - Jayatū janāśī, jayatū bhabānī, bhabāmohinī bharatbāra! eṣṭi - pataṃte dehatār gitāi gagana-pahana bharāle harsa."

contd......
Assamese dramatist Fajiruddin composed his chronicle plays on Mughal history and showed little interest in Ahom history. His "Gulmar" (1924) and "Sindhu-Vijay" (1928) once earned much fame. Particularly, when these two plays were staged they received great applause from the audience. At that time, when Fajiruddin took to writing chronicle plays, the aim of most of the

* FaN: The exact date of Fajiruddin's birth has not yet been confirmed. The dramatist did not have any university education. His service life was of varied nature. He was an active participant in the first non-co-operation movement of India and was once arrested for picketing in front of an opium shop. Fajiruddin spent the major part of his life at Jorhat, though, after the demise of his wife, he permanently settled at Jaipur, Assam. Once as his pecuniary condition ran into utter doldrums, he started the business of opium and amassed a good fortune. He was, at the same time, a musician, a singer and an actor. Fajiruddin died approximately in 1945/50.

contd........
chronicle play writer was to make a propaganda of patriotism. But in "Golemar" and "Sindhu-Vojoy" there is no trace of any such sentiment. In these two plays there is more of fanciful romanticism than history.

'GOLEMAR I (1924)'

The subject of this drama is the love affairs of Prince Selim with Golemar the Iranian beauty-queen. On the eve of Mohar invasion Selim brought this helpless Iranian damsel to the Mughal Harem and in course of time got emotionally involved with her. But Selim's personal rivalry with Mughal general Mangesingha, stood in the way of materialisation of this relationship and in a secret plot Mangesingha in the name of shifting the girl to an unknown but safe place, murdered her surreptitiously.

This drama has a tragic end. The dramatist controls the development of the plot quite tactfully. He shows great skill in characterisation too, and exposes the intermingling rivalry between Selim and Mangesingha with artistry. Selim, on the one hand was a large-hearted prince, on the other he was incarnation of haughty arrogance. Mangesingha possessed all the qualities of a general. He was ingenious, dexterous

contd......
and taciturn. He quite tastefully avenged his malice against the prince. In the portrayal of the character of Akbar, however, the dramatist is not very much successful and the majestic personality of the Mughal emperor is only partially revealed. Among the female characters Jedhbai is specially mention worthy because of her spirited self, a typical characteristic of Rajput women, and her devotion to her husband. The pathetic helplessness of Gulmar has been presented with art and skill.

'SINDHU-VIJAY' (1928):

The plot of this drama is based on the Sind invasion of the Muslims under the Sinn Bibi leadership of Muhammad-Bin-Kashim. Though the materials are mostly historical the dramatist, unfortunately, is not always faithful to history in their use. His imagination played to a large extent, on the already ghastly facts of the past and turned the drama into a romance rather. The play reflects the romantic flavour of the chronicle plays of Khshirod Prasad, the famous Bengali dramatist. Over load of songs is another defect of this drama.

'CHANAKYA':

Janardan Thakur, the noted dramatist of Jorhat contd...
based his play "Chanakya" on the life story of Chandragupta. The impact of Dwijendralal's 'Chandragupta' on it is obvious. In the composition of 'Chandragupta' Dwijendralal failed to accumulate the required historical data and hence he had to rely on his imagination to a large extent. Janardan Thakur, in composing 'Chanakya' followed the same procedure. So, as in Dwijendralal's play, in his play too Chanakya appears more as a vindictive diplomat than a politician. Besides, the casteism as presented in 'Chandragupta', the mirrage of Chandragupta and Helen, Greek general Antigonus's soft corner for Helen - all these figments of imagination in Dwijendralal's play have found a place in 'Chanakya' too.

Chanakya borders on melodrama. The dramatist is not very successful in characterisation either. None of the main two dramatists personae vis. Chanakya and Chandragupta is exposed to the full length. The dramatist occasionally commits some factual blunders too. He is, however, quite successful in sustaining dramatic suspenses here and there in the play.

In characterisation the playwright has shown his originality. He has eliminated many of the non-

contd.......

essential events found in Dwajendralal's Chandragupta.
The character, Arvindhari, is purely a creation of the dramatist's imagination. This brief chronicle play is divided into four acts. In disregard for historical data is a main defect of this drama.

Though 'Chanaaya' was written long after the independence, it lavishly catered to patriotic sentiments, as the chronicle plays, written in the first half of the twentieth century did. Chandragupta's utterings are pervaded with spirit of nationalism e.g.

"GREEK ADHIKRITA RAJYA PUNAR ADHIKR
kARI, AARYABARTA SHREEKHALAMUKTA KARI
MOR CIRA KANYA SWADHYATA RAKSHA KARIM".

(I will restore the Greek occupied land, must free Aryabarta and protect all coveted freedom).

(Act.I, Scene-II).

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