

Jatindra Nath Dowara: A Romantic Legacy In Assamese Poetry.

Dr. Tarun Chandra Roy
Assistant Professor
Department of Assamese
Swami Yagananda Giri College
Saktiashram (Assam)

Introduction:

The Jonaki Era in Assamese literature marked the advent of Romanticism, introducing a shift from traditional divine themes to those centered around human experiences, with an emphasis on the relationship between nature, beauty, and the arts. Although the English Romantic movement had faded by 1889, its influence remained strong in Assamese literature. The writers of this period, inspired by Romantic ideals, adopted these concepts to articulate their own thoughts and emotions.

A pivotal moment in this literary shift was the formation of the "Asamiya Bhasar Unnati Sadhini Sabha" (Society for the Development of the Assamese Language) on August 25, 1888, in Calcutta by a group of Assamese students. This group later launched the literary magazine Jonaki, which became a crucial platform for expressing Romantic ideals and significantly shaped the development of modern Assamese literature.

Leading figures like Lakshminath Bezbarua, Chandrakumar Agarwala, and Hemchandra Goswami were profoundly influenced by Western literary movements, particularly English Romanticism, as well as the contemporary literary resurgence in Bengal. Driven by a renewed sense of patriotism, these writers took it upon themselves to elevate the Assamese language to the level of other developed world languages. Their work also included the restoration and editing of old Assamese manuscripts, contributing to the cultural revival of the language and literature.

This era, often referred to as the Jonaki Era, named after the magazine Jonaki, is regarded as the second golden age of Assamese literature and is synonymous with the rise of Romanticism in Assamese literary history. The term 'Romantic' was readily embraced by Assamese writers and critics, who drew parallels with the English Romantics in their approach to literature. The influence of Romanticism in both Eastern and Western contexts is clearly evident in this transformative period of Assamese literary development.

The great English Romantics—Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats—were not directly imitated by the Assamese writers of the Jonaki era. Instead, these writers were influenced by the Romantic sensibilities of these poets. Assamese writers preferred Romanticism over Victorian ideals, as the region's resources remained largely untapped by industrialization, and urbanization was still a distant concept. The picturesque landscape of Assam provided fertile ground for literary exploration, allowing Assamese writers to delve into new ideas and themes, opening up a world of possibilities.

During this literary period, Assamese writers enriched their works with lyrics and ballads, focusing on the relationship between humans, nature, beauty, and the arts. Nilomani Phookan, a prominent Assamese poet, explained in his introduction to *Kuri Satikar Asomiya Kabita* (20th Century Assamese Poetry) that Romantic poetry represented a shift from theo-centrism to anthro-po-centrism. The focus moved away from devotion to God toward an appreciation of the world, its beauty, and human experiences, portraying man as a reflection of the supernatural and celebrating his pursuit of joy and beauty.

However, the Jonaki era also left its mark on early 20th-century literature, integrating elements of modernity. Influenced by India's independence and reform movements, Assamese literature began addressing social and national issues. The establishment of the Asom Sahitya Sabha in 1917 further facilitated the exchange of ideas and popularized Assamese literature, art, and culture. The Sabha, which continues to be a major literary institution in Assam, provided a platform for literary discussions, conventions, and publications.

Romanticism remained a dominant theme in Assamese poetry during the Jonaki era, despite the growing awareness of modern realities. Chandrakumar Agarwala is a key figure in this movement. His poems, first published in Jonaki and later collected in *Protima* (1913) and *Bin Boragi* (The Wandering Bird, 1923), exemplify the Romantic ideals of the era. In his poem *Niyar* (The Dewdrop), he contemplates a single drop of dew, expressing an intense longing to understand its origin and beauty. Similarly, Hemchandra Goswami's sonnet *Priyatamar Sithi* (My Beloved's Letter), the first Assamese sonnet, weaves an exploration of nature and poetry into the description of a letter.

Lakshminath Bezbarua contributed to the Romantic tradition with his poems *Basanta* (Spring) and *Bin Boragi*. Other poets, such as Raghunath Choudhari, known as Bihogi-Kobi or the bird poet, and Bholanath Das, whose contributions predated Jonaki, also enriched Assamese Romantic poetry. Anandachandra Agarwala, another major figure, translated numerous English and American poems, and his original poetry collection *Jilikoni* (Glittering) was published in 1920.

Though Romantic poetry flourished during the 1950s and 1960s, it remained relevant to the concerns of newly independent India. Poets like Ambikagiri Raichoudhury, Parvati Prasad Barua, and Jyoti Prasad Agarwala continued to enrich Assamese literature through their Romantic themes. The influence of Jonaki-era Romanticism is still evident today.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To analyze the influence of Romanticism on Jatindra Nath Duara's poetry.
2. To explore the thematic and stylistic elements in Duara's poetry.
3. To assess Jatindra Nath Duara's contribution to Assamese Romanticism.

Methodology of the study:

The research will engage in a close textual analysis of Jatindra Nath Duara's poetry, particularly his collections *Apon Sur* and *Banaphul*, *Sesh* etc. to identify and examine Romantic elements. The analysis will focus on key themes such as nature, love, melancholy, and imagination. Data are collected from both primary and secondary sources.

Discussion:

Jatindra Nath Dowara was a prominent poet of the Jonaki era in Assamese literature, fondly known as *Bonphulor Kobi* (The Poet of Wildflowers) in the Assamese literary landscape. Born in 1892 in Sivasagar, Assam, he began writing during his student days and soon gained recognition as a significant voice in Assamese poetry. Dowara is best remembered for his lyrical poetry, with celebrated works such as *Omar Tirtha*, *Apon Sur*, *Banaphul*, *Milana Sur*, and *Maramar Sur*. Dowara made significant contributions to Assamese literature by introducing innovative forms, such as *Katha Kavita*, the first collection of prose poems in the Assamese language. In 1955, Dowara became the first Assamese poet to receive the prestigious *Sahitya Akademi Award* for his collection *Banaphul*. The same year, he was elected to preside over the 24th session of the *Asam Sahitya Sabha* in Guwahati, cementing his influence in Assamese literary culture. He passed away in Sivasagar in 1964, leaving behind a rich legacy that continues to inspire Assamese literature.

Dowara's poetry is known for the emotional depth and lyricism and profound connection to nature. He stands out as one of the finest lyricists in Assamese literature. A subjective poet, Dowara expressed his inner feelings and sorrows throughout his long poetic career, giving a melancholic tone to his work. Noted scholar Dr. Banikanta Kakati praised him as one of the greatest Assamese poets, dealing effectively with the complex ideas

of the 20th century. Dowara's poetry reflects his deep engagement with the themes of love and beauty, often intertwined with personal sorrow and disappointment. He equated love and beauty, as seen in his lines:

"Anedore soponor madhu milanat
Thakotei aapon pahori
Sar pai uthi dekho, hothate heral
Kenibadi kabita kuwari"
(Herowa Sapon)

Although Dowara was not triumphant in love, he succeeded in capturing the emotional depths of disappointment and compassion that arise from it. His poem Sukhor Supon (Happy Dreams) reflects this sentiment:

"Jano Tumi Beya Powa Bishad Ragini
Tumiyei Disahi Jogan
Nohole Kiyono mor jiban binat
Baje matho bishador gaan."

Dowara's attachment to this world remained strong, as he focused on the emotions and experiences of earthly existence. His poetry, rooted in emotion, reflects his response to the world's complexities, often imbued with sadness. His collection Apon Sur demonstrates his finest poetic achievements, addressing profound truths about life. In Atitak Jowahe Pahori (Forget the Past) and Sunyo Parichay (Blank Identity), he expresses a sense of disillusionment with life's fleeting nature:

"Aru dekha nidiya dunai
Din aahe raati jai"
(Aji Mok Jowahe Pahori)

Though Dowara belonged to the second generation of Assamese Romantic poets, his work was deeply influenced by the modern world. His exploration of love often encountered themes of pain, suffering, and separation, creating a metaphorical rainbow in his poetry. In Silgutir Supon Bahgil, he reflects on life's conflicts:

"Dithakar Danobar Nikarun Parashat
Nebhagayiba kori surmor
Saponar sarag amar."

Imagination plays a central role in Dowara's poetry, yet his imagination is grounded in realism. He views the world through his own lens, creating a personal interpretation of what he sees. His engagement with nature is particularly strong, as he draws inspiration from the beauty of the natural world. Like Wordsworth, Dowara celebrates the songs of birds, the murmurs of brooks, and the grandeur of the clouds. This appreciation for nature is evident in his lines:

"Bhal pao barishar Meghar gajoni

Dharasare borosun pora."

and

"Sorote gotai aane sukula dawar

Bosontoi kuhi phool paat."

(Apon Sur)

Dowara's deep knowledge of English Romanticism is clear in his poetry, as he draws from the musicality, smoothness, and fluency of poets like Wordsworth, Shelley, and Tennyson. While influenced by these English Romantics, Dowara's work remains original, particularly in his collections Apon Sur and Banaphul (Wild Flowers). His translation of Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat into Assamese as Omartirtha (1926) added a significant contribution to Assamese literature.

Conclusion:

Jatindra Nath Dowara's poetry plays a key role in Assamese Romanticism by blending deep personal feelings with the ideals of the Romantic movement. His focus on love, beauty, and nature, combined with a sense of melancholy, makes him one of the major lyric poets of his era. While he was influenced by English Romantics like Wordsworth and Shelley, Dowara developed a unique poetic style that reflects the Assamese landscape and culture.

His works, including Apon Sur and Banaphul, explore personal sorrow and human experiences set against the backdrop of nature. Although his poetry echoes the themes of English Romanticism, it remains distinctly Assamese. Today, Dowara is remembered for two contrasting lyrics: Atitak Jowahe Pahori (Forget the Past) and Atitak Najaba Pahori (Don't Forget the Past).

References:

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