

THOMAS HARDY AND ASSAMESE REGIONAL NOVEL

– A CONTEXTUAL COMPARISON

A thesis submitted to Gauhati University
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Faculty of Arts



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This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**Thomas Hardy and Assamese Regional Novel - A Contextual Comparison**” submitted by **Mr. Chittaranjan Nath** for the award of Ph.D. Degree in the faculty of Arts of Gauhati University embodies the result of his original work and personal investigation under my supervision and guidance. He has fulfilled all the requirements laid down by the Ph.D. regulation of the university.

The thesis as a whole or any part of it has not been submitted to any other institution for any research degree.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Umesh Deka'.
(**UMESH DEKA**)
22/01/13

DECLARATION

I, Mr. Chittaranjan Nath, hereby declare that the thesis entitled **“Thomas Hardy and Assamese Regional Novel - A Contextual Comparison”** submitted for the Ph.D. degree is my original work and the same has not been submitted by me for any research degree in this or any other University or institution.

Date: 22/01/2013.


(CHITTARANJAN NATH)

PREFACE

Association of a location as a background in a novel is very obvious. It is the place or the location that helps the novelist to create an appropriate setting for his novel. Sometimes, the location remains a mere background that does not assist much in the progress of the course of action as the novelist concentrates on certain other aspects. However, there are many occasions in which the novel chiefly aims to concentrate on the location of its setting and explore it from physical, environmental and social point of view. The place and its people become the matter of concern in the novel. These are the regional novels. These novels explore minute details of their location or the region. They depict the geography and topography of the region highlighting the customs, traditions and life style of the inhabitant living therein. The location no more remains a mere background; rather it becomes an integral part of the novel- an inseparable component which can not be removed or altered without much damage to the novel. Being closely associated with the real people and places, the regional novels have always been the source of attraction as well as the interest of discussion.

Both English and Assamese literatures have a rich trend of Regional novel. The genre of English Regional novel was started by Maria Edgeworth with her *Castle Rackrent* in 1800 and followed by many like Walter Scott, Susan Ferrier, Bronte sisters, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Arnold Bennett, E.C. Booth, Mary Webbe, Thomas Moulton, Sheila Kaye Smith, Constance Holme, Frances Brett Young etc. On the other hand, the trend of Assamese Regional novel was developed in the hands of Rajanikanta Bordoloi with *Miri Jiori* (1894) and contributed by Birinchi Kumar Baruah, Abdul Malik, Birendra Kumar Bhattacharjya, Nabakanta Baruah, Amulya Baruah, Hitesh Deka, Nirupama Borgohain, Rang Bang Terang, Silabhadra, Mamoni

Raisom Goswami, Swarna Bora, Lumber Dei, Jatin Mipun, Yese Dorse Thongsi and many more.

A comparative study of both English and Assamese regional novels has been considered as a subject of interest; and hence this research work is undertaken aiming at finding out the similarities and differences between the Regional novels of both the trend. The research work has been carried out in a form of contextual comparison, for which major Wessex novels of Thomas Hardy and a few trend-setter Assamese Regional Novels have been brought to discussion.

Thomas Hardy has been the most important of the regional novelists of England. He gave a new depth and gravity to the English Novel reintroducing the concept of regional novel with his settings of "Wessex". His Wessex stretches from the English Channel in South, to Cornwall in the West, and as far as Oxford to the North. It is the limited region which forms the scenic background to each of his Wessex Novels. Hardy's major Wessex novels include *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *The Return of the Native*, *The Woodlanders*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Tess of D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. All these novels display Hardy's thorough knowledge of the Wessex region. Hardy described the physical features of his Wessex with great accuracy and realism. He has expressed the very spirit of this locality in his work. He has immortalized the land of Wessex which is a living, breathing reality in his novels. That is what made Hardy one of the greatest regional novelist. The regional concept of Thomas Hardy and other characteristic features are so universal that those Hardian elements can be traced in most other regional novels.

The Assamese literature also has a rich history of novel that includes a number of novels with regional aspects. Starting with Rajanikanta Bordoloi's *Miri Jiori*, these novels emphasize the setting, social customs of

various regions from different parts of Assam and its surrounding areas. These novels beautifully depict the scenic beauty of those regions where they are set in along with the customs and rituals practised by the local inhabitants therein. Among these novels, the trendsetters which are undertaken for this study are Rajanikanta Bordoloi's *Miri Jiori* that highlights the region by the bank of Subansiri river in the district of Lakhimpur, Nabakanta Baruah's *Kapiliparia Sadhu* highlighting the region of Nagaon by Kapili River, Nirupama Borgohain's *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* and *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* describing the region by Pagaladiya river in Nalbari, Silabhadra's *Madhupur*, *Ahatguri* and *Agamanir Ghat* depicting the Gauripur region of West Goalpara and Mamoni Raisom Goswami's *Dantal Hatir Uniye Khowa Howda* upholding the Jagalia region of South Kamrup and *Nilakanthi Braza* demonstrating the environment in the Brazadham in Brindaban. Similar to that in the novels of Thomas Hardy the physical features of rivers, pastures, meadows, cultivating lands etc. appear and reappear in those Assamese regional novels too.

It is obvious that similarities can be noticed between Assamese regional novels and Thomas Hardy's Wessex novels in regard to their settings, regional background, universally present nature and its domination on the character and environment, man's helplessness in front of mighty nature and circumstances, vision of life, pessimism, belief in destiny, the folk tradition and characterisation etc. This research work has attempted to explore those similarities, and the differences, if any, that prevail in the discussed novels in particular and for all regional novels in general.

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A deep sense of gratitude also goes to all the teaching and non-teaching faculty members of the Department of Modern Indian Languages, Gauhati University for their constant support.

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Chapter – I

THOMAS HARDY AND REGIONAL NOVEL

Chapter - I

THOMAS HARDY AND REGIONAL NOVEL

1.1: THE REGIONAL NOVEL

The regional novel is a derivative of the social novel that focuses on specific features- including characters, dialects, customs, history and topography- of a particular region. Literally, the term region means 'a fairly large area of a country, usually without exact limit, a part of a country that is away from the capital city', and regional refers to 'that which is connected to a particular region'.¹ Oxford English dictionary defines region as 'a large area of land, usually without exact limits or borders' or 'One of the area that a country is divided into, that has its own customs and/or its own government', and regional as 'relating to or characteristic of a region'.² Hence regional novel delineates the life of people in a particular place- focusing on customs and speech- to demonstrate how environment influences its inhabitants.

Several attempts have been made to define regional novel by various scholars. M. Drabble refers it as novels set in a real and well-defined locality, which is in some degree strange to the reader. She added that from about 1839, the localities described in regional novels were often smaller and more exact. Later novelists became ever more interested in precise regional attachment and description.³ F.W.Morgan stressed the novel's absorption, and not merely interest, in a particular locality. Arguing that the area of a regional novel must not be too small he continues 'The true regional novel has people at work as an essential

1. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, p.1190

2. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (Sixth Edition), p.1069

3. Drabble, M. (ed): The Oxford Companion to English Literature p.816

material: it has become almost the epic of the labour.'⁴ Thus the regional novel produces a synthesis, a living picture of the unity of place and people, through work and with regard to landscape it provides an atmosphere which is not transferable. K.D.M. Snell provides a more composite view on regional novels. By regional novel, Snell means fiction that is 'set in a recognizable region, and which describes features distinguishing the life, social relations, customs, language, dialect, or other aspects of the culture, of that area and its people. Fiction with a strong sense of local geography, topography or landscape is also covered by this definition.'⁵

A Regional Novel is the product of its fidelity to a particular geographical section, accurately representing its habits, speech, manners, history, folklore or beliefs. According to M.H. Abrams a regional novel emphasizes the setting, speech and social structure and customs of a particular locality, not merely as local colour, but as important conditions affecting the temperament of the characters and their ways of thinking, feeling, and interacting.⁶ Famous literary critic and regional novelist Phyllis Bentley highlights that the regional novel concentrates on a particular part, a particular region of a nation, depicts the life of that region in such a way that the reader is conscious of its characteristics which are unique to that region and differentiate it from other common motherland.⁷ In one sense, the test of regionalism is that the action and the personages cannot be moved, without major loss or distorting, to any other geographical setting.

In such writing a particular place or regional culture may perhaps be used to illustrate an aspect of life in general, or the effects of a particular environment

4. Margun, F.W.: *Three Aspects of Regional Consciousness*, *Sociological Review*, 31, no.1 (1939), p.84

5. Snell, K. D. M. (Edited): *The Regional Novel in Britain and Ireland*, p.1

6. Abrams, M.H.: *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, p.202

7. Bentley, P.: *English Regional Novel*, p.1

upon the people living in it. And one usually expects to find out certain characteristics in a regional novel: description of a place, setting or region, whether rural or urban, which bears approximation to a real place; characters usually drawn from working or middle class origin; dialogue representation with some striving realism; and attempted verisimilitude.⁸

Although regional novel is the novel which depicts the physical feature, life, customs, manners, history etc. of some particular region or locality, this does not mean that regionalism is mere factual reporting and photographic reproduction. The regional artist emphasises the unique features of a particular locality, its uniqueness, the various ways in which it differs from other localities. But as in all other arts, so also in regional art, there is a constant selection and ordering of material. In other words, regional art is also creative. Through proper selection and ordering of his material the novelist stresses the distinctive spirit of his chosen region and shows, further, that life in its essentials is the same everywhere. The differences are used as means of revealing similarities; from the particular and the local, the artist rises to the general and the universal. The selected region becomes a symbol of the world at large, a microcosm which reflects the great world beyond. The greatness of a general novelist lies in the facts that he surmounts the bounds of his chosen region, and makes it universal in its appeal. That explains the continuing and world-wide popularity of regional novels, say those of the Brontes and Thomas Hardy.

The regional novel concentrates on some particular region, and it is remarkable for its vivid and illuminating presentation of its scenes and sights, of its landscape and geographical features. These geographical features form the background or setting to the human drama that is enacted in the novel. As the same scenes and sights, the same geographical features - rivers, hills, dales etc.

8. Snell, K. D. M. (Edited): *The Regional Novel in Britain and Ireland*, p.1

appear and reappear in successive novels, the separate works of the novelist are welded into a single whole. His separate novels acquire in this way a continuity and a wholeness which is not possible for other kinds of novels. Sometimes, presentation of the scenic background, of the local details, is so vivid, realistic and life-like that the fictitious seems to be real and actual. Thus many Hardy enthusiasts have visited his 'Wessex' and tried to locate the various landmarks which appear in his novels like *Tess* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

Further, the regional novel is essentially democratic. It expresses a belief that the ordinary man and the ordinary woman are interesting and worth depicting.⁹ It details with the ordinary men and women living in a particular locality, and shows them going about the business of living very much like average humanity. They are shown carrying on the professions and occupations, as well as following the customs and traditions, that are peculiar to that region. In this way, the particular region is immortalised in the regional novel. Moreover, concentration within a limited region results in intensity of emotion and passion. The novelist shows that drama of Sophoclean grandeur may be enacted within the confinement of a small village, and in a humble cottage. It is so in the novels of *The Bronte sisters* and the 'Wessex Novels' of *Thomas Hardy*.

1.2: GROWTH OF ENGLISH REGIONAL NOVEL

The year 1800 is a landmark in the history of the English novel, for in that year Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849) published her *Castle Rackrent*, which is often regarded as the first regional novel in English. The region she discovered was Ireland, and, with Ireland, the Irish peasant. Edgeworth was an Anglo-Irish novelist who exploited the humours of the Irish peasantry and its relation to the

9. Bentley, P: *English Regional Novel*, p.45

big houses. She is the founder of the regional novel, and all later regional novelists are indebted to her.

Before Maria Edgeworth, the locale of the English fiction was generalised and conventionalised. The novelists, by and large, confined themselves to London and Bath as their setting. The eighteenth-century novelists rarely had a sense of place; the background of his fiction is as bare of scenery, almost, as in an Elizabethan play. It was there not because it was a specific landscape but because it was a romantic one.

Maria Edgeworth gave fiction a local habitation and a name. And she did more than this: she perceived the relation between the local habitation and the people who dwell in it. She invented, in other words, the regional novel, in which the very nature of the novelist's characters is conditioned, receives its bias and expression, from the fact that they live in a countryside differentiated by a traditional way of life from other countrysides.¹⁰

In *Castle Rackrent* Edgeworth has narrated the history of the Rackrent family, who are Irish landowners. The language she has employed is close enough to Irish peasant speech, which provides the illusion of authenticity. *Castle Rackrent* was followed by *The Absentee*, another great work of fiction. In this novel, Edgeworth has seized upon the essential situation of her country at the time of writing- the absence of its landowners in England and the stranglehold their agents had on helpless peasantry. Thus the novel has a theme that was of the highest importance in its day, and it is embodied forth in a set of admirable characters. Maria Edgeworth had a most enviable gift of creating characters in the round, characters that seem, for much of the time at least, to exist independently of their author. Her *Belinda*, *Ormond*, *Patronage*, and *Harrington* are excellent regional novels with the Irish setting.

10. Allen, Walter: *The English Novel- A Short Critical History*, p.103.

P.H. Newby compares Edgeworth with Jane Austen and writes, "whereas Jane Austen was so much the better novelist, Maria Edgeworth may be the more important. For whereas Jane Austen surveyed with the eye of a realist ground that had already been tilled, and brought it into perfection, Maria struck out and subdued stretches of new territory, the psychology of children, the dignified and humorous mind of the peasant, the resolute mind of a woman of affairs, and she supplied an impetus for the writing of all regional fiction".¹¹

Inspired by Maria Edgeworth, many others took to the regional novel. Susan Ferrier (1782-1854) is another great novelist of the age. Her three famous novels are *Marriage* (1812), *The Inheritance* (1824), and *Destiny* (1831). "What Miss Edgeworth did for Irish life, Miss Ferrier did for the Scottish. The two writers had much in common: humour, observation, and a vein of earnest didacticism; but Miss Ferrier's work shows greater variety".¹²

Walter Scott (1771-1832), who was famous for his historical novels also attempted to popularise the English land through his *Waverley Novels*. In "Postscript" he placed on record his gratitude to Edgeworth and said that his aim was 'in some distant degree to emulate the admirable Irish portraits drawn by Miss Edgeworth.'¹³

Next come the three *Bronte Sisters*- Charlotte (1816 - 1855), Emily (1818 -1848), and Anne (1820-1849) - who may rightly be called regional novelists. The Yorkshire Moorlands which they knew most intimately, as they had been born and brought up in the seclusion of the Moors, is the region which forms the background to their novels. "The most obvious contribution of the Bronte sisters is the presentation of the life of Yorkshire and its rich and beautiful nature-

11. Newby, P.H.: *The Novel 1945-1950*, p.93-94

12. Compton-Rickett: *A History of English Literature*, p.261

13. Lockhart, John G.: *Life of Sir Walter Scott, Volume 2*, p.212

background."¹⁴ They presented its landscape- Charlotte realistically, Anne nostalgically, Emily fully, poetically, superbly.¹⁵ They used its rich rough dialect, and they presented its people realistically. In *Wuthering Heights* the Yorkshire character is presented in its quintessence, as though all wilfulness of Cathy. In *Shirely* the Yorkshire character is shown to us realistically and consciously.

Charlotte and Emily were the rage of the day. They had a fervid imagination and a vast capacity for wrath, which are writ large in their works. Though not of Yorkshire blood, they revealed in their novels the essential character of Northern England. They lived in Haworth, and the scenery of the place, its not very congenial atmosphere, the character of its inhabitants, their traditions have all gone to the making of the novels of the Bronte sisters. Emily paid effusive tributes to Haworth in one of her poems:

"What have those lonely mountains worth revealing?
More glory and more grief than I can tell.
The earth that wakes one human heart to feeling.
Can centre both the worlds of Heaven and Hell."¹⁶

In all her novels Charlotte drew too much upon her own experience, and some of her portraits are mere photographs. She had the light of a vivid imagination, but the light played only upon what she had personally seen, heard, and known in the bleak moors, the turbulent streams, the valleys of the West Riding. All her novels are full of local colour. The dialogues are intensely regional.

The Bronte sisters experienced life within a narrow conflict, but their narrow and limited experience did not stand in the way of their achieving excellence in

14. Jayapalan, N: *History Of English Literature*, p.283

15. Bentley, Phyllis Eleanor : *The Brontes*, p.113

16. The poem was first published by Charlotte Bronte in 1850 as one of the eighteen poems

excellence in their work. Rather, it imparted intensity to it. Of course, the repetition of same themes made their novels somewhat stale, but this lack of freshness was compensated for by the presentation of passion and emotion in an intensified form. Charlotte Brontë and Anne Brontë had experience of life as governesses, school teachers and pupils, and they repeated the same scenes and experiences again and again in their novels. *The Professor* is enjoyable but the repetition of the same theme in *Villette* makes the book uninteresting. But the emotional fervour and exuberance of the novelist carries the readers through. A highly charged emotional atmosphere is the most remarkable feature of their novels. Love in their novels is highly passionate and intimate.

The Brontë sisters' love for the moors in the *West Riding of Yorkshire* is evident in all their creations. We have it on the testimony of Mrs. Gaskell, the author of *the Life of Charlotte Brontë* that Emily was never so happy as when she was roaming the moorland with her dog, like her own Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*, who wished that she were a girl again, "half savage and hardy and free."¹⁷ She felt a spirit on the moors, which provided her with the suitable background of her great novel. What Catherine said is actually her own feelings: "Do let me feel it- it comes straight down the moor—do let me have one breath. I'm sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills."¹⁸

No work of art is a photograph. It is only an idealised portrait. So is *Wuthering Heights*. The scene of the drama has been identified with a farm three miles from Haworth, near the village of Stanbury. The term 'wuthering' itself is the local dialect for 'weathering', which means blustering and tottering. The word 'Wuthering' is, as Mr. Lockwood tells us, "a significant provincial adjective descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy

17. Brontë, Emily: *Weathering Heights*, p.163

18. Allott, Miriam Farris: *Emily Brontë: Wuthering Heights : A Casebook*, p.172

weather".¹⁹ In Haworth, as in the *Wuthering Heights* the common fuel was peat and larger houses had a peat room. The glass chandeliers with tapes instead of candles were in use. The moorland folk were suspicious of strangers. The society was pronouncedly class-conscious. Servants usually spent their whole lives, sometimes through two or three generations in the service of a 'house'. Consumption used to take a heavy toll. Education worth the name was conspicuous by its absence. Prosperous persons engaged private tutors for their wards. The uplands and lowlands of the moors are always present in Emily's imaginative vision. The gaunt and stunted trees, lashed by the fury of the north wind always sprawl before us.

George Eliot (1819 – 1880), whose *nom de plume* is Mary Ann Evans, contributed substantially to regional novels. Her early novels *Adam Bede*, *Mill on the Floss*, and *Silas Marner* are realistic and concrete in the presentation of the life of the Midland Counties of Warwickshire and Derbyshire, which she had intimately known. This particular region with its life and characters, comes to life in these novels. In these early novels, George Eliot freely took her material from her own experience of life, from her personal memories and from the life and activities of her relatives and friends. In this way she showed that personal experience and memories could supply all the matter that a novelist needed. Therefore, realism and faithful portraiture of life and characters known to her are the hallmarks of these novels.

Eliot's *Adam Bede* is a picture of English village life in Staffordshire, and brings into the canvas life-like portraits of artisan, village worthy, tenant farmer, West-eyan preacher, rector, and squire. The scene of *Felix Holt, Radical* is laid in north Loamshire, which is veiled Staffordshire. *Mill on the Floss* is an autobiographical novel, recording much of the author's recollection of her own

19. Bhattacharyya, Jibesh : *Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights*, p.64

childhood and of the people and senses of her Warwickshire days. According to George Eliot's husband Walter Cross. 'The early part of Maggie's portraiture is the best representation we can have of George Eliot's own feelings in her childhood, and many of the incidents in the book are based on real experiments of family life, but so mixed with fictitious elements and situation that it would be absolutely misleading to trust to it as history.' The scene of *Silas Marner* is laid in Raveloe, a village in a Midland county of Warwickshire. It owes much to the influences of the author's childhood and girlhood in Warwickshire. The element of concrete experience is the principal ingredient of most of her novels, particularly the earlier ones, in which she has freely drawn on the stores of her memory. "Scene after scene, character after character in these novels have been identified with some place or person within the range of her early experience. Her mansions and cottages, her lanes and meadows are those to which she had been accustomed to drive in childhood with her father, or over which she had rambled with her brother. Still more are the characters of her novels, the figures with whom she had been familiar ; and almost in proportion to the familiarity is the frequency of their appearance."

Thomas Hardy (1840–1928) is the most important of the regional novelists of England, and deserves more space and attentions. His Wessex stretches from the English channel in the south, to Cornwall in the West, and as far as Oxford to the North. It is this limited region which forms the scenic background to each of his "*Wessex Novels*." The same physical features—hills and dales, rivers, pastures, meadows, woodland and heaths—appear and reappear in all his works. This imparts to his works a kind of scenic continuity and a touch of realism difficult to match in any fiction. Every event takes place within this locality. It is seldom that he strays out of it. It is for this reason that he is a regional novelist.

He had acquired a thorough knowledge of this region. He was permeated with its scents and sounds, with its scenes and sights. He described the physical features of his Wessex with great accuracy and realism. He expressed the very spirit of this locality in his works. He immortalized the land of Wessex which is a living, breathing reality in his novels. That is why many a Hardy enthusiast and topographer has taken the imaginary for the real and has gone in search of various landmarks described in the Wessex novels. For example, the description of Casterbridge in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is so realistic that many have taken it to be an exact reproduction of the town of Dorset. Similarly, all visitors to the Hardy country have testified that the dreary and desolate atmosphere of Flint-Comb-Ash farm in *Tess of the D'urbervilles* is exactly the same as that of the real place.

Another great novelist, Arnold Bennett (1867-1931) has often been described as the most remarkable regional novelist. He was essentially a realist and a regionalist and his realism is well brought out in the vivid and real pictures of the pottery districts of England. His reputation rests on *Anne of the five Towns*, *The Old Wives' Tale*, *Clayhanger*, *Hilda Lessways*, and *These Twain*, for in them Bennett is essentially and unmistakably a regional novelist. The life of materialism is well-portrayed in his novels. "The internal economy of houses and hotels down to their plumbing, to food, bought, prepared and eaten, to clothes and their fashions, to means of transport, indeed, to all the machinery, equipment and paraphernalia of living, claimed Bennett's absorbed interest".²⁰ Bennett became an interpreter of the life and society of a particular region, the Five Towns, which he knew well. But it is to his credit that like a true artist he maintained an air of impartiality and detachment in the presentation of the life of this region. He did not aim at any propaganda or moral preaching through the medium of his art. A charming

20. Collins, Arthur Simons : *The English Literature of Twentieth Century*, p. 157

Dickens like humour plays over all, and makes the reading enjoyable. The impression of drabness, dullness and sordidness, that might be created by a study of his realistic pictures of the life of Five Towns, is further removed by his addition of romance, specially the romance of love. Besides finding romance in love, Bennet, like Kipling, finds romance in the ordinary things of life. He refused to identify romance, 'with the merely picturesque or the merely extraordinary.' God had endowed him with the ability of, 'evoking the beauty and romance of the ordinary lives of ordinary folk which is one of the most attractive features of his best novels.'²¹

A distinction may, however, be drawn between Hardy and Bennett as regional novelists. Hardy belonged to Wessex, and breathed in that atmosphere. Bennett was never of the 'five towns.' For Hardy, Wessex was a microcosm of the universe and we accept it as such. But for Bennett the Five Towns were provincial; he left them where he was twenty-one and never returned to them for longer than a few days at a time. Steeped as he was in them, in their atmosphere, history and traditions as a writer he was completely outside them. His attitude towards them is always expository; he is explaining them, exhibiting them to an outside world that is not provincial. They exist in relation to a longer world than Bennett accepts as the norms.

Hardy's Wessex was a revival of the past and his characters were rooted to that past. This past of Hardy stood contentment, if not happiness; but Bennett's Potteries resisting changes produced only squalor, ugliness and tragedy. The harmony between the people and their environment so prominent in Hardy is absent in Bennett's. Walter Allen underlined the feature of Bennett's novels: "At his best Bennett does achieve a universality of a kind, but it is not Hardy's kind. It is, if such a thing is possible, a limited universality; true for a certain kind of a

21. *Albert, Edward : History of English Literature, p.454*

community at a certain point in time, a picture of life not only in the Five Towns but in any industrial provincial community during the last three decades of the nineteenth century."²² It is a very considerable achievement, but not in the class of the greatest. It is only in a few passages in *The Old Wives' Tale* and *Clayhanger Family* that brought the reader face to face not merely with the human situation at a given date and place in North Staffordshire but with the eternal human situation.

Into *The Old Wives' Tale* and *Clayhanger* Bennett has put without stint his humour, his scrupulousness, and his old knowledge of Midland life. They are full of character and truth to character; the scene is clearly set; one reads with the sense of being taken not only into a tale of individual human beings but into the homes and shops and hearts of the Midlands and the Midland people; above all, the books and the people in them grow not arbitrarily, but organically. If it is true that they remain small, as small as human beings are in real life, that must be set down as a deficiency in the realistic novel itself, for in that genre only Balzac's and Dostoevsky's people are larger than life, and Balzac's live in a world altogether fabulous, while Dostoevsky's are so large as to be fantastic. In Bennett's books one is still among the normal. It was his objective to deal with the normal. That was what absorbed him.

The Five Towns of Bennett's works are the pottery towns of Staffordshire, which form the federated borough of Stoke-on-Trent. They are Tunstall, Burslem, Hanley, Stoke-upon-Trent, and Longton, appearing in Bennett's novels as Turnhill, Bursley, Hanbridge, Knype, and Longshaw; while Oldcastle is the town of Newcastle-under-Lyne. As one reads these regional novels of Bennett, one becomes familiar not only with the main streets and buildings and landmarks, but also with the inmates, who are part and parcel of that area. Bennett saw

22. Allen, *Walter Ernest: Arnold Bennett*, p.43

ugliness as a pattern of life and, therefore, his pictures have become naturalistic. Next to Hardy's Wessex, Bennett's Five Towns was the most remarkable addition to the map of topographical fiction ever since Trollope and the Bronte sisters.

Hardy and Bennett were the creators and populariser of a new type of regional novel. Quite a few of the English writers, therefore, followed their footsteps, although most of them could not reach the heights of their masters. Constance Holme in her *Crump Folk Going Home*, *The Lonely Plough*, *The Splendid Fairing*, and *The Trumpet in the Dust* wrote against the background of Westmoreland and achieved a measure of success. Eden Phillpots in his *Children of the Mist*, *The Human Boy*, and *The Secret Woman* had Devonshire for his canvas. The mantle of Scott fell upon the Kailyard School of novelists in Scotland. These novelists invested their novels with romance and sentiment, and often sacrificed accuracy of description in their bid for popularity. John Watson, who had assumed the pen name of Ian Maclaren, wrote *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush*, *A Doctor of the Old School*, and *Kate Carnegie*. S.R. Crockett wrote *Mad Sir Uchtred of the Hills*, *The black Douglas*, *The Strickit Minister and Some Common Men*, and *The Lilac Sunbonnet*. Thomas Nicoll Heburn with his pen-name Gabriel Setoun, is the author of *Robert Unquhart* and *The Skipper of Barneraig*. All these novelists romanticised and sentimentalized life and landscape. Naturally there was a reaction against the maudlin representation of life and landscape. G.D. Brown in his *House with the Green Shutters* presented a realistic picture of the region. What was done by W.B. Yeats and J.M. Synge in drama was done by Standish O'Grady, Emily Lawless, Martin Ross, and James Joyce. Dublin is the background of Joyce's novels, namely *Ulysses* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

William Faulkner, the Nobel Prize winner, was the only American regional novelist worth mentioning. Born at New Albany, Mississippi, which served as

the principal model for the fictitious town of Jefferson in Yoknapatawpha County, he wrote quite a few novels, e.g. *As I Lay Dying*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *Light and August*, and *Sanctuary*: His characters and more particularly the families of which they are members recur in his novels.

Nevertheless, the regional novel to-day is a well established art-form with some of the greatest novelists of England as its devoted votaries. It could have been rightly expected that with the obliteration of regional and local differences following the mass use of swift means of communications- the car, the railways, the aeroplane, the radio and the television- the regional novel would lose its value and significance but regional novels of great worth and significance continue to be written. *E.C. Booth*, *Mary Webbe*, *Thomas Moulton*, *Sheila Kaye Smith*, *Constance Holme*, *Frances Brett Young*, are a few of the more prominent practitioners of this form in the modern age.

1.3: THOMAS HARDY : LIFE AND CAREER

Born on June 2, 1840, in Upper Backhampton, near Stinsford in Dorset, Thomas Hardy was the eldest son of a master mason or building contractor. His mother came from a family long established in Dorset. At the time of his birth, the old family of le Hardy, as it was once called, was poor and barely above the status of the labouring class. Hardy owed much to his parents and their rural background, inheriting from his father a love of music, from his mother a love of reading, and from both, strength of personality as well as the stability which connected him in an age of change with a world already vanishing.

When Hardy was born he was thought to be dead, and was rescued only by the keen perception of a nurse. His parents did not expect him to live until he was eight. Too frail for school attendance, he was taught first by his mother, then

in the private school of the lady of manor. Only at eight, he was strong enough to enter the village school. In all he attended four schools from 1848 to 1856, the last the Dorchester Grammar School, founded by one of his own ancestors, and of which he himself was the governor from 1909 to 1926. Hardy's formal education consisted only of some eight years in local schools, but by the end of this period he had on his own read a good deal in English, French and Latin. He was interested in music too, and learned to play violin.

At the age of sixteen Hardy was apprenticed to John Hicks, an ecclesiastical architect in Dorchester, with whom his father has long business done. This man was something of a classical scholar, easy-going and lenient, and allowed his young apprentice to spend more time in studying Greek than in studying architecture. Hardy continued his reading, also encouraged by William Barner, the Dorset poet, who kept a school next door to Hicks' office; and by Horace Moule, the brilliant son of a vicar, to whose friendship he owed much intellectual stimulus.

Hardy began to write poetry during this time, but none of it was published. In 1862 he went to London to work for Sir Arthur Bloomfield. In March 1865, his first prose work, a humorous sketch, was published in a journal, but he was more interested in poetry. Feeling often lonely and depressed, he became ill, and in 1867 he returned to Dorset. During 1867 and 1868 he wrote a 'purpose' story *The Poor Man and the Lady*. It was read by George Meredith who asked Hardy to call on him, and advised him not to publish it but to write another story with more plot. Hardy too, having an absurdly critical opinion of his own novel destroyed the manuscript.

His first published novel was *Desperate Remedies* (1871), which was a great financial loss to Hardy. This novel first came out in serial form before publication as a book, an arrangement Hardy was to follow for the rest of his novels. However Hardy continued writing and in the very next year *Under the*

Greenwood Tree appeared followed by *A Pair of Blue Eyes* in 1873. These novels brought him real fame as a novelist, along with some income and enable him to marry Fina Lavinia Gifford on Sep 17, 1874.

Hardy's first popular novel that made him an ever established novelist was *Far From the Madding Crowd*, commissioned first as a serial by Cornhill's magazine. Published in 1874, this novel was his great financial and literary success. Much to Hardy's annoyance, some critic guessed the book to be by George Eliot under a new pseudonym.

From this time Hardy devoted his full time to writing, continuing to publish novels regularly until his last *Jude the Obscure* in 1895. Among these are some of the best of his so-called Wessex novels: *The Return of The Native* (1878), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *The Woodlanders* (1887), *Tess of D'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude The Obscure*. To this list of the best should be added the earlier *Far From the Madding Crowd*.

In writing most of the novels, Hardy meticulously worked out the details of time and geography he wanted to use. Almost every novel is, therefore located in a carefully mapped out area of Wessex and covers a specified period of time. *The Return of the Native*, for example, covers the period of 1842-43 in its first five books and set on Puddretown Heath, called Edgon Heath in the novel, on which Upper Bockhampton is situated.

Between 1878 and 1912, Hardy wrote nine novels, *three volumes of short stories*, published *three collection of poems* and completed the most massive, unique and characteristic achievement of his life, the five hundred and twenty pages of mingled prose, dramatic lyric and philosophical verse which is called *The Dynasts*. Hardy gradually came to be acknowledged, not without dispute, as the greatest English writer of his time. The Order of Merit was conferred upon

him in 1910 by King Edward VII and honorary doctorates were awarded by the universities. He was showered with the honorary degrees from Oxford and Cambridge, from Aberdeen, Bristol and St. Andrew's. He received the gold medal of the Royal Society of Literature. He became an honorary fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects. He was the third President of the Incorporated Society of Authors, the first two being Tennyson and Meredith.

Before this on November 27, 1912, Mrs. Hardy died, a woman who suffered from virtual insanity in her last years and with whom Hardy had become increasingly incompatible. Their married life had been childless, but had been a close and devoted union and enjoyed much memorable moments in early conjugal life. In 1914, at 74, Hardy married again. His second wife was his longtime secretary Florence Emily Dugdale, who later became his chief biographer. She was, of course, very much his junior, but she devoted herself to him acting as companion, nurse and secretary. There is no doubt that Hardy was extremely fond of her and happy in the fourteen years of his second marriage. On January 11, 1928, Hardy breathed his last. His heart was buried in his first wife's grave near Dorchester, the remainder of his body was cremated and buried in the Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey.

"Thomas Hardy's career divides itself into three periods. The first of these contains his work as novelist, and ends with *Jude the Obscure*."²³ Throughout the series of the novels there gradually became more and more insistent a characteristic metaphysic, in which the striving and passions of individuals are in futile conflict with the relentless process of the world.

The second period consists of the *Dynasts*, the greatest single achievement of his career. This great poem was written to give full utterances, in artistic form, to his peculiar metaphysic. That, however, was not its originating intention, which

23. *Yust, Walter (ed.): Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 11, p. 193*

was simply to celebrate in a chronicle play England's part in the Napoleonic war. But as the conception grew and deepened, and as to the human action added the superhuman comment of "Phantom Intelligences", the poem became the summation of Hardy's vision of life. In its fundamental splendor and its perfect command of Hardy's immense wealth of matter, though not in its diction, this work can only be compared with great monuments of man's destiny like Goethe's *Faust* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

The third period may be said to begin with *Time's Laughing Stock* (1909), and is devoted to lyric poetry. Poetry was Hardy's first literary love and his last. No one would have his poems and not one of them was published until 1898, when his career as a novelist was over. Hardy always wished to be remembered as a poet, and it is possible that in the end, his poetry will be felt to outweigh his prose. It is intellectual poetry, cryptic, sometimes difficult and gnomic, full of distinction and personal idiom, yet often beautifully lyric. He made no mistake in knowing himself for a poet. However, this third lyrical period is not entirely a new development of Hardy's genius. While he was writing novels, he had occasionally experimented with poetry. But after 1909, Hardy wrote little besides poetry, and this may therefore truly be called his lyrical period. It represents a new concentration of his power, but certainly no decline in it. It is in fact the same Hardy in the lyrics as in the novels and *The Dynasts*, by virtue of which he holds a secure, indeed a unique position in modern English literature.

1.4: THOMAS HARDY AS REGIONAL NOVELIST

Thomas Hardy is head and shoulders above most of the regional novelists. Wessex is the background of all his novels. Wessex, its atmosphere, its pattern of

life and thought touched him keenly. As mentioned earlier, Hardy's Wessex, the six odd counties in the South-West part of England, appear and reappear in all of his novels. No aspect of Wessex life escaped Hardy's eye.

When Hardy grew old, he shifted from Wimborne Minster to Dorchester, and he a sort of nostalgia for the places, he knew when he was a small observant boy. His interest in Wessex people and their dialect never waned. He recalled the inn known as 'The Three Mariners'. "A long, narrow dimly-lit passage gave access to the inn, within which passage the horses going to the stalls at the back, and the coming and departing human guests, rubbed shoulders indiscriminately, the latter running no slight risk of having their toes trodden upon by the animals. The good stabling and the good ale of the Mariners, though somewhat difficult to reach on account of their being but this narrow way to both, were nevertheless perseveringly sought out by the sagacious old heads who knew what was what in Casterbridge."²⁴

The reverie continues: "The yeomen, farmers, dairymen, and townsfolk, who came to transact business in these ancient streets, spoke in other ways than by articulation.....Here the face, the arms, the hat, the stick, the body throughout spoke equally with the tongue. To express satisfaction, the Casterbridge market-man added to his utterance a broadening of the cheeks, a crevicing of the eyes, a throwing back of the shoulders, which was intelligible from the other end of the street....."²⁵

But this does not mean that Hardy's works have the literal fidelity of a guidebook. One should not expect scientific accuracy from a writer of fiction. As Hardy himself pointed out, his Wessex is "partly a real and partly a dream

24. Hardy, Thomas: *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p.63

25. *Ibid*, p.95

26. Hardy, Thomas: *Far from the Madding Crowd*, preface, p.viii

country".²⁶ It is a clever blending of fact and fiction. The general features and broad outlines remain the same as of the real objects. The spirit-of the place also remains the same. Thus much is realism. But the details are shifted, modified or enlarged to suit the purpose of the novelist. For example, the powerfulness of his imagination enabled the writer to magnify a small heath to epic proportions and immortalise it in *the Return of the Native*. Similarly, he magnified the small wood near his native place, and in *the Woodlanders*, imparted to it a vastness and grandeur which is utterly lacking in the original.

Hardy drew upon his wide and varied experience to create his Wessex works. He was, as had been aptly pointed out by John Butler, "in his real identity: both the educated observer and the passionate participant"²⁷ of Wessex life.

Hardy chose Wessex as the setting of his novels with no regret. In the preface to his novels and poems he wrote: "But I would state that the geographical limits of the stage here trodden were not absolutely forced upon the writer by circumstances; he forced them upon himself from judgment. I considered that our magnificent heritage from the Greek in dramatic literature found sufficient room for a large proportion of its action in an extent of their country not much larger than the half-dozen counties here reunited under the old name of Wessex, that the domestic emotions have throbbed in Wessex nooks with as much intensity as in the palaces of Europe, and that, anyhow, there was quite enough human nature in Wessex for one man's literary purpose. So far was I possessed by this idea that I kept within frontiers when it would have been easier to overleap them and give more cosmopolitan features to the narrative."²⁸

27. Butler, *Lance St. John: Thomas Hardy*, p.6

28. Hardy, *Thomas: Tess of D'Urbervilles, Preface*, p.viii

But in spite of his strong declaration that he is 'cosmopolitan, he tends to be regional.' "Thus, though the people in most of the novels (and in much of the shorter poems) are dwellers in a province bounded on the north by the Thames, on the south by the English channel, on the east by a line running from Hayling Island to Windsor Forest, and on the west by the Cornish Coast, they were meant to be typically and essentially those of any and every place where "Thoughts the slave of life, and life time's fool, begins in whose hearts and minds that which is apparently local should be really universal."²⁹

Hardy chose to present the drama of life, both tragic and comic, in the England province, known as Wessex, which is relatively impervious to new ideas. "He takes for his chief characters," says Lionel Johnson, "men of powerful natures, men of the country, men of little acquired virtue in mind and soul but men disciplined by the facts and by the necessities of life, as a primitive experience manifests them. He surrounds them with men of the same origin and class but men of less strongly marked a power, of less finely touched a spirit ; the rank and file of country labour.....He brings his few men of that stronger and finer nature, his rustic heroes, into contact and into contrast with a few men, commonly their superiors in education, and sometimes in position, but their inferiors in strength and fineness of nature : men, whom more modern experiences have redeemed from being clowns, at the risk of becoming curse."³⁰

The Egdon Heath is the hard core of Wessex. The Heath is the protagonist of the action. It is the symbol of something indescribably sinister. 'The black, lean land of featureless contour' plays a dominant role, and the characters are subordinated to the moods of the Heath. The Heath, says D.H. Lawrence, "is the primitive, primal earth, where the instinctive life heaves up. There, in the deep,

29. Maier, Sarah E. (ed): *Thomas Hardy's Tess of D'Urbervilles, Appendix: General Preface to Wessex Edition*, p.398

30. Johnson, Lionel Pigot : *The Art of Thomas Hardy*, p.174

rude stirring of the instincts, there was the reality that worked the tragedy. Close to the body of things, there can be heard the stir that makes us and destroy us. The [earth] heaved with raw instinct, Egdon whose dark soil was strong and crude and organic as the body of a beast. Out of the body of this crude earth are born Eustacia, Wildeve, Mistress Yeobright, Clym, and all the others. They are one year's accidental crop. What matters if some are drowned or dead, and other preaching or married; what matter, any more than the withering heath, the reddening berries, the seedy furze, and the dead fern of one autumn of Egdon. The Heath persists."³¹

There is no denying the fact that Hardy recreated Wessex, and the outcome is the synthesis of the new Victorian science and hoary tradition and superstition. Wessex was enough for Hardy, for it provided the variety of social levels that he had been in quest in other milieus. He had his training as an architect, but he chose to remain a provincial, a countryman. He revived the word 'Wessex' and added new dimensions. "Peasants for the most part", says Walter Allen. "they are closed to an earth that has changed little over centuries."³²

Hardy belong to Dorchester, the south-western part of England, which he renamed Wessex, and immortalised that region. Never a region has been so comprisingly celebrated as in these books. And within the world, out of which Hardy stepped timidly and with awkward results, he has created hundreds of characters, many of them mere choral voices in an alehouse and aristrophe in the classic Greek drama, who live with a close and intimate endearment for generation after generation of readers. Their cloths and manners are becoming somewhat period-dated now, but the people themselves are still warm-blooded; still capable of infinite suffering and gusty happiness. They dance and sing, eat and drink, work and make love; and on some occasions they do more desperate things,

31. Lawrence, D.H.: *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*, p.25

32. Allen, Walter: *The English Novel: A Short Critical History*, p.287

such as ever taking place in a countryside of downlaid, sea-border, plashy meadows, and creamy farms, where milk and cider flow and the breath of cows is sweet, and lavender is laid in the drawers of old furniture in rooms where man and wife sleep, in beds that their forbears were born and died in.

Hardy, it has been said, is the successor of King Alfred the Great, for both of them were the kings of Wessex, one literally, and the other figuratively. Wessex, the counties of Berkshire, Wiltshire, Hampshire, Somerset, Dorset and Devon owed to Hardy the revelation of their ineffable beauty and charm. Hardy did not describe merely the geographical contours of the Wessex region. With his metaphysical vision he brought Wessex to supreme height. But even then the sight, the smell, and hearing of that region are never lost sight of. It is the panorama of those gross-grown, leafy pasture lands. It is the scent of the orchard in October, the creamy odour around the apple trees hard by the dairies, the fragrance of cut hay on the banks of the river in June. It carries to us the chants of all trees, the hermits of the heath and chorus of the forest. With a record of sensory observations of astonishing scope, it interprets the whispering of the wind upon every species of leaf. What treasures ignored by our eyes and lost to our ears, to our sense of smell and even to our touch have thus been preserved from oblivion!

Beautiful as the Wessex landscape is, it certainly needed a chronicler. And Hardy chronicled it with loving care. With wonderful observation he discovered in Wessex what escaped the notice of our ordinary eye. The rocks and woods, the rivers and lush vegetation of the region were charged with poetry and loveliness. His conclaves of peasants offer a humours assemblage of types curious and even droll, at the same time exhibiting their strewdness; a whole social fauna of a past age. "One recalls the inimitable rustics of Shakespeare's theatre in the

33. *Pierre d'Exideuil (Georges Lasselin): The Human Pair in the Work of Thomas Hardy*, p.186

Shakespeare's theatre in the presence of these simple beings with their dialect talk, creatures of a humanity, fashioned according to the rhythm of the seasons".³³

Hardy's regional novels evince a tendency to retreat into the rural landscape of Wessex to project an idealistic picture of rural England. In its setting, Hardy's novels were as far away as they could be from the rest of the Victorian novelists. His subject matter was the countryside and its people, but their life provided him with no less a powerful metaphor for the condition of England than did urban life for Dickens. In relating into the rural landscape, Hardy was being an essentialist in his approach to the subject matter. But Hardy's concern in relating into rural landscape must be viewed in terms of his association with his Dorsetshire. His portrayal of Wessex was imbued with a strong sense of his personal life. Hardy could not adjust himself to the ways of London and after his unsuccessful attempts at architecture, he turned to creative writing. He therefore endowed this alternative imaginary space with features of Dorset. What is of paramount significance in this context is Hardy's assertion and idealization of the regional identity. In his writings there was an attempt to present what was declining in a world presently characterized by conflicting interests. The tension between the old rural life and new urban life was clearly shown. Hardy expressed his resentment of London while preserving the superiority of Wessex life. The urban and rural spaces were created as contesting each other. One is superior to the other.

1.5: THOMAS HARDY : LITERATURE REVIEW

In accordance with the public appreciation of Hardy's novels, critics started to attend seriously to his novels when his career as a novelist was still in progress. In 1894, Lionel Johnson, in *The Art of Thomas Hardy*, attempted to sum up the impression of Hardy's novels published by then. He suggested a common pattern

common pattern in the *plots* and characters of Hardy's major novels. He pointed out the element of a *heroic* hope in Hardy's works: 'He [Hardy] sends out his characters to that *forlorn* hope, life: forlorn, but not lost, and promising at least the noblest of *defeat*'.³⁴ Although he has focused on Hardy's primarily as an artist, giving equal *coverage* to his plot and narrative, he has derived from his works certain important *themes* like the urban invasion and the validity of the established patterns of *human* relationship.

An American *critic*, W.L. Phelps in *Essays on Modern Novelists* (1910) discussed in detail the *much*-trumpeted pessimism in Hardy's novels. While trying to trace the roots of *Hardy's* depiction of the dark and the terrible side of life in an interesting way, he *claimed* that Hardy was indebted to Schopenhauer, an assertion which didn't *flourish* later as, according to Timothy Hands, it 'drew Hardy's displeasure' (157)

Lascelles Abercrombie (1912) developed a more comprehensive approach, affording due and almost *balanced* coverage to Hardy's subject and style, though slightly overemphasizing the philosophical connotations of his art at the cost of the aesthetic ones. In *Thomas Hardy: A Critical Study*, he analyzed the speech of characters as *representative* of their minds. He applied to Hardy's fiction the classical Greek notions *of* tragedy, and tried to prove him to have been enormously influenced by Sophocles.

D.H. Lawrence concentrated on Hardy's characters as individuals struggling against the *established* conventions of the community. His 'Study of Thomas Hardy' (1914), appearing posthumously in *Phoenix*, was a great tribute by a contemporary *admirer*- who himself was a great creative artist. He appreciated Hardy's protagonists' *outburst* of the instinctive self as the source of all sublimity

34. Johnson, Lionel: *The Art of Thomas Hardy*, p.410

as well as all tragedy and, as such, has evaluated Jude more favourably than the rest.

H.C. Duffin (1916) was the first to discuss Hardy's novels systematically, analyzing in detail his themes, plot and characters. Duffin's work, *Thomas Hardy: The Wessex Novels*, was probably the first classified analysis of Hardy's art. Four of its chapters, in particular, entitled 'The Irony of Fate: Hardy's View of God', 'Human Nature : Hardy's View of Man', 'Convention : Hardy's View of Society', and 'Pessimism : Hardy's View of Life' directly tackle some of the major issues undertaken by this research.

Virginia Woolf (1928) admires Hardy's characters for their ability to compel the readers to remember them. 'We recall their passions. We remember how deeply they have loved each other and often with what tragic results.'³⁵ She is of the opinion that Hardy gives impressions when he is at his greatest, and arguments when he is at his weakest.

In *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, Hardy's estimation of himself and his works is found. Although its authorship is nominally attributed to Florence Emily Hardy, Hardy's second wife, it is widely, rather unanimously, believed to be a disguised autobiography written in third person. Initially, it appears in two parts: *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy* (1840-91) appearing in November, 1928; and *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy* (1892-1928) in April, 1930. The single-volume edition appeared in 1962. *The Life of Thomas Hardy* is not just an autobiography in the traditional sense; it provides a valid self-estimation of Hardy's literary and aesthetic concerns, ideals and inclinations, including many dimensions of his personality.

Arthur McDowell (1931) attempts a comparative evaluation of Hardy's tragic novels, focusing on their individual features of distinction in addition to

35. *Virginia Woolf: Collected Essay, Vol.1, p.261*

of purpose, insight into social problems, extraordinary psychological understanding, perfection of style and plot, as his real greatness rests on his flight of imagination, his talent of story-telling, his ability to relate atmosphere to character and his all-embracing human sympathy, particularly for those that are sensitive and miserable.

John Hollaway (1953) upholds character and environment as the spirit of Hardy's novels, incidents and events being just subservient tools. In this way, he attempted to justify improbabilities in Hardy's fiction. He also pointed out symbolism in Hardy's characters, incidents and happenings, suggesting that a true understanding of Hardy's works can be developed only when his view of life as a whole is taken into consideration, rather than segregated fragments of his thought.

Douglas Brown (1954) discussed the strong simplicity and integrity of Hardy's feeling, taking his novels as a record of a tragic view of life. Two chapters in his *Thomas Hardy* entitled 'Novels of Character and Environment' and 'The Uniqueness of His Art' are masterpieces of in-depth criticism. While questioning the validity of Hardy's novels as criticism of life, he highlighted Hardy's stern insight, honesty of purpose, the power to chasten and subdue, a profounder perturbation of the spirit and the marvelous depiction of the life and ways of the agricultural community as the glories of his art. He pays very high tributes to Hardy as a thrilling narrator: 'In the extreme force and the guileless fascination of his narrative, Hardy yields to no master of our language.'³⁹

George Wing in *Hardy (1963)* questioned the validity of the concept of Hardy's evolutionary meliorism, calling it a distant dream, not very different in terms of prospects of fulfillment from the unappealing orthodox doctrines of consolation offered by the church. His *Hardy* is an impressive critical evaluation

39. Brown, Douglas: *Thomas Hardy*, p.43

of other Hardy critics, particularly those that have discussed the issue of pessimism versus meliorism.

Roy Morrell in *Thomas Hardy: The Way and the Will* (1965) adopted an interestingly original approach to Hardy's art, particularly with reference to the individual capacity of his characters. He stressed the importance of the extent of free will and choice afforded to Hardy's protagonists- Tess in particular- and concluded that their role as individuals is mostly determined by their for-granted role as characters, a blunder through which, according to Morrell, 'Hardy's reputation has suffered out of all proportion to its seriousness.' Morrell also pointed out certain elements of irony, like in the concluding paragraph of *Tess*, also contending that 'the irony is aimed, at least partially, against the reader.'⁴⁰

David Lodge (1966) described the causes of Hardy's being termed a great novelist 'in spite of great defects, the most commonly alleged of which are his manipulation of events in defiance of probability to produce a tragic-ironic pattern, his intrusiveness as authorial commentator, his reliance on stock characters, and his capacity for writing badly'.⁴¹ Concentrating on *Tess* in order to analyze such objections, he has pointed out many uncompromising contradictions in Hardy's art, particularly in his relating his characters to their environment.

Raymond Chapman is one of the most outstanding Hardy critics. In *The Victorian Debate* (1968), he criticized Hardy in the light of his position in reference to the Victorian society - its culture, traditions and artistic inclinations. In the article entitled 'Meredith and Hardy' in the said volume, he appreciated Hardy's art of characterization. According to him, there may be imbalances in individuals- 'Eustacia may be too much a romantic conception and Clym may be too weak in

40. Morrell, Roy; *Thomas Hardy: The Way and the Will*, p.39

41. Lodge, David: *Language of Fiction*, p.165

42. Chapman, Raymond: *The Victorian Debate*, p.327-328

human terms, but there is a grandeur in their portrayal which makes them bear existence beyond the simple plot'.⁴² He also discussed Hardy being affected by Darwinism, and his coverage of the theme of 'the survival of the fittest', comparing the helpless humans to the weak in animals. In *The Language of Thomas Hardy* (1990), Chapman has presented an unparalleled appreciation of Hardy's use of language as reflective of the nature and moods of characters as well as of the collective pattern of life. In *Forms of Speech in Victorian Fiction* (1994), he discussed the speech of many of Hardy's characters- particularly Sue and Jude- as brilliant instances of demonstrating complexes and sensibilities of individuals.

Trevor Johnson (1968) has focused primarily on Hardy's art of characterisation, calling Tess 'Hardy's most masterly portrait of a woman'⁴³, thoroughly tackled and shown while facing multiple problems and persons in different situations. While tracing causes of her tragedy, he has termed her ego, her natural freedom and her delicacy of feeling responsible for her disaster.

Michael Millgate is generally believed to be Hardy's most authoritative biographer. His *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist* (1971) and *Thomas Hardy: A Biography* (1982) are masterpieces of critical biography. He traced the presence of autobiography or depiction of self in all of his successful fiction. According to him, Hardy's best work was produced only when it had strong root in his own background- at least in terms of characterization. The presence of autobiography is very vital as its absence is generally a cause of failure.

Ian Gregor's famous book *The Great Web- The Form of Hardy's Major Fiction* (1974) discusses Hardy's six great novels most comprehensively, claiming that there were two blended levels of his depiction of a character: as a total human being, and as a tool in the drama concerned. The alternative titles that the

43. Johnson, Trevor: *Thomas Hardy*: p.151

author suggested for the novels under discussion were very significant : 'The Creation of Wessex'; *Far from the Madding Crowd*; 'Landscape with Figures': *The Return of the Native*; 'A Man and his History': *The Mayor of Casterbridge*; 'The Great Web'; *The Woodlanders*; 'Poor Wounded Name': *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*; 'An End and a Beginning': *Jude the Obscure*.⁴⁴

Merryn Williams in *A Preface to Hardy* (1976) offered a critical survey of Hardy's life and works. J.R. Ebbatson evaluated Hardy as a trend setter in fiction, followed by great creative artists like D.H. Lawrence. In '*Thomas Hardy and Lady Chatterley*' (1977), he traced Lawrence's appreciation of Hardy's novels, particularly *Two on a Tower*; to the latter's keen insight of female psychology, wherefrom Lawrence derived many elements in his *Lady Chatterley's Lover*; a novel that demonstrates the late Victorian intellectual scientific pessimism.

John Bayley in *An Essay on Hardy* (1978) has called Hardy 'the most aesthetic of all English novelists'. He asked Hardy's readers not to look at disappointments offered by Hardy's novels as a proof of his failure to do otherwise. He has discovered Hardy's fictionalized presence in his novels and his being on very familiar terms with all his characters. Highlighting the foundation status of Hardy's characters in relation to plot and narrative, he stated: 'When his characters bumble, his text bumbles too'.⁴⁵

Lance St. John Butler's *Thomas Hardy* (1978) provided a substantial introduction to his six major novels and his poems. It deals more briefly with the minor fiction. John Butler discussed Hardy as an important novelist and poet due to his capabilities as a social historian or provincial chronicler. Again Hardy's ability to universalise his tragic material, in which he was akin to Shakespeare,

44. Gregor, Ian : *The Great Web- The Form of Hardy's Major Fiction*

45. Bayley, John: *An Essay on Hardy*, p.10

was seen as his abiding achievement. While referring to Hardy's repudiating 'pessimism' and admitting 'evolutionary meliorism', he contends, 'Although Hardy did not claim to have produced a system, he presents a remarkably consistent picture of the universe.'⁴⁶ Detailed analyses were made of some crucial passages in the major novels and a serious attempt was made to counter the proposition that Hardy 'wrote badly'.

Alan Hurst's *Hardy : An Illustrated Dictionary* (1980) is not just a dictionary in the traditional or typical sense: it provides some very intelligent critical comments on Hardy's novels, poems and characters, along with objective evaluation of his major themes and concerns. It has catalytically facilitated academic research on Hardy.

Norman Page (1980) evaluated Hardy's diction and grammar, claiming his being enormously influence by Horace Moule and William Barnes. He proved with the help of epistolary evidences that, in the beginning of his career as a novelist, Hardy did have problems with style, and was anxiously searching for a model to follow, requesting Moule to guide him therein. Moule, however, advised him not to follow any one and to be subjective and creative in style.

Roger Robinson (1980) examined Darwin's influence on Hardy's fiction and poetry, attaching symbolic significance to many of Hardy's characters, settings and authorial comments in the light of Darwin's scientific theories. Calling Hardy 'the most honest and sensitive recorder of the shockwave from the evolutionary discoveries'⁴⁷, he commented on Hardy's tragic novels as 'trying to dramatize the disease of feeling for the popular market'.

46. Butler, *Lance St. John: Thomas Hardy*, p.11

47. Robinson, Roger : "Hardy and Darwin"; Norman Page(ed) : *Thomas Hardy: The Writer and His Background*, p.129-30

David Ball (1987) in his article 'Tragic Contradiction in Hardy's *The Woodlanders*' has contrasted *The Woodlanders* and *Far from the Maddening Crowd*, particularly the characters of Giles Winterborne and Gabriel Oak, suggesting that Giles has a certain edge over Gabriel for his selfless sacrifice without any hope of reward.

F.B. Pinion's *A Thomas Hardy Companion* (1968) is a fine review of Hardy's life and work. Pinion pointed out many elements of affinity between Hardy and Wordsworth, particularly their choice of "low and rustic life" because here "the essential passions of the heart find a better soil". Utilising the findings in his two earlier works, *A Guide to the Works of Thomas Hardy and their Background* (1968) and *Thomas Hardy: Art and Thought* (1977), he has identified some dimensions of the external aspects of romanticism in Hardy's art, dispelling the impression that Hardy, the pessimist, can never be compared to Wordsworth, the optimist. He has proved with strong arguments that, in spite of Hardy's refusal to accept Wordsworth's platonic theory of pre-existence, the points of affinity between the two are stronger than those of adversity.

Phillip Mallett in *The Achievement of Thomas Hardy* (1995), examined in detail Hardy's Wessex as a product of exceptionally strong imagination combined with his talent as a regional writer, depicting the community to which he belonged. The inherent association of Wessex setting, however, fettered his characters within certain compulsions. The protagonists of *Jude the Obscure* are free from such limitations because that novel is Hardy's farewell to Wessex.

Gillian Bear (1996) has discussed the theme of decay and decline in Hardy's works in the light of scientific theories like that of evolution, and certain philosophical assertions of the age. In his article 'Hardy and Decadence,' he has

pointed out Hardy's dislike for systemization of his art, his tendency 'to resist settlement and hold to seemings,' and his 'claim for a new kind of actuality not bound to longer-known laws'.⁴⁸

H.M. Deliski in *Thomas Hardy and Paradoxes of Love* (1997) has tried to exonerate Hardy from the charge of sexism as asserted by the feminist critics. Highlighting Hardy's originality and profundity in tackling his female characters, he rejects the view that Hardy has shown misogynist inclinations in his depiction of characters. He has also pointed out the basic difference between Hardy and sexist novelists like Lawrence and Joyce in tackling sexual relations and the involvement of females therein.

Angelique Richardson projected the theme of 'biologization of romance' in Hardy's novels and short stories, stressing the importance of 'the role that biology played in broadening the franchise of fictional possibilities not simply in terms of a more open treatment of sex, and sexual relations, but in broader portrayals of life, love and heredity'.⁴⁹

Judith Stinton (2001) has scrutinized Hardy's manuscripts, letters and other documents, attempting to discover certain dimensions of Hardy's personality, his friends, heroes and admirers. She tells of Hardy's expectation from his researchers and biographers of 'endorsing his own official version of his life', and of his 'attempting to control how posterity saw him',⁵⁰ resulting in his writing his autobiography, and his strong reaction to hostile biographies and comments by others.

49. Richardson, Angelique: "Hardy and Biology": Mallett, Phillip(ed): *Thomas Hardy: Texts and Contexts*, p.61

50. *Thomas Hardy Journal*, vol.17, issue.1, p.63

Mentioned above are some of the critics that have evaluated Hardy's genius. There are many more, but the quoted ones represent almost all the major critical looks about Hardy's art in general and his novels in particular. This Literature Review along with its preceding discussion makes it clear that most of the critics obviously discussed Hardy's regionalism; his Wessex environment, its people, and his immortal characters.



Chapter – II

BACKGROUND OF THOMAS HARDY'S NOVEL

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2.1: HARDY'S BACKGROUND

Man is mostly a product of his environment and so is a writer. A writer can not be wholly free from the influence of his age or from his environment. The impact of his age and environment must be upon him in varying degrees. Although Hardy was for the most part aloof from the main current of Victorian thought and outlook, nevertheless the prevailing tendencies of his age had their impact upon him.

Indeed, Hardy's age had a great bearing upon him, upon his conception, particularly upon his predilection to pessimism. The prevailing conditions of the nineteenth century have been correctly summed up by G.A. Sambrook. In the first of the century the English Nation adapted itself to revolutionary changes which gave great wealth and power to one section of the community, while the labouring classes were near starvation. The state of unemployment, misery and want which resulted from the Napoleonic Wars was aggravated due to changes in agricultural methods, and large scale enclosure. Fluctuating prices and serious unemployment followed. The hardships and sufferings of the working class encouraged suspicion and distrust, which were fomented into despair and resentment. Violence and crime were everywhere. They reached climax in the "Hungry Forties". "In one parish and Dorchester thirty-six persons dwelt, on an average, in each house."¹ It was no wonder that people living in such conditions were ignorant and vicious.

1. Sambrook, G.A.: *Introduction to English Life in the Nineteenth Century*, p.viii.

These conditions were really disturbing for the sensitive minds. "The industrial revolution was in the process of destroying the old agricultural England; the population was shifting; the old ties which had united the small communities of the past were breaking bit by bit."² Before the industrial revolution, most of the people lived in villages, and the most thickly populated parts of England were in the countries of the South and the East. The North of England was thickly populated. The growth of industries in the Coal and Iron Regions of the North resulted in migrations of populations towards the North. Increasing proportion of population started moving towards the cities. The increasing urbanisation followed, and it brought about the ruin of the old rural institutions and the rural society itself. Under these changed conditions a new social relationship and a new psychology developed. "In England, in the early nineteenth century, Cobbett and others looked on the Industrial Revolution as 'a fall from grace', and wished to restore the rural conditions of pre-1760"³ In fact the contrast between dire poverty and vast wealth became more marked in the nineteenth century in any period of history since the decay of Roman Empire. Naturally the public conscience woke up to the fact that there was social problem within the limits of which the individual was helpless against the forces of modern industrialism.

As a matter of fact, industrial revolution caused serious economic repercussions of the village community because of the concentration of factories in urban areas and the destruction of the two kinds of village industries, mentioned by G.M. Trevelyan. "It destroyed first the spinning and other by-employments of the wives and children of agricultural families ; and secondly the full time employment of villagers in such various trades as clock-making, basket weaving, carriage and wagon building, tanning, milling and brewing, saddlery, cobbling,

2. Cecil, Devid : *Hardy- The Novelist*, pp.20-21

3. Briggs and Jordan : *Economic History of England*, p.708

tailoring and the great national industry of cloth weaving.”⁴ Thus the two industries, which the Industrial Revolution gradually made an end of the village sector, were the spinning industry and a set of cottage and small scale industries of handicrafts type including the weaving industry.

According to Sir Llewellyn Woodward, the creative exuberance of the industrial age had passed out of times by the middle of nineteenth century. There were no doubt certain improvements in material conditions; but they simply left the thoughtful minds more free to consider problems of conduct and belief which went beyond organisation of social life. The thoughtful people began to attack the vast and obvious social abuses. At the same time, the Biblical criticism as well as the materialistic thoughts of Spencer and Buckle started shaking the middle class mind seriously. In other words, the disintegration of ideas went side by side with the old social and economic structure.

"Eighteenth century rationalism had united with the new romantic spirit of rebellion against convention, to shake the fundamental basis of belief- religious, social, political- which the people of the old England had unquestionably accepted. Since the beginning of the century, leaders of thought were, more often than not, unorthodox. The mental atmosphere of the reflective minds tended to be overcast by clouds of doubts.”⁵ Besides the highest criticism of the Bible towards the middle of the century, the Darwinian theory of evolution also contributed much to precipitate the disintegration of ideas and to throw the reflective minds into doubts. The Darwinian theory may be summed up in Herbert Spencer’s phrase as ‘the survival of the fittest’. "The Darwinian theory abolished the dividing line between men and animals, denied any sudden creation of man, and therefore any

4. Trevelyan, G.M. : *History of England* , p. 608

5. Cecil, David : *Hardy- The Novelist* , p.21

literal interpretation of the fall of man, with its theological consequences.”⁶ It was indeed a great shock to the orthodox interpretation of Christian belief, and it was not at all surprising that the first attitude of the Church Leaders was entirely hostile to it. In 1859 the *Origin of Species* by means of Natural Selection was published. Its publication coincided with another attack upon orthodox opinion, starting from a different angle, and based upon different types of evidence. The seven writers, including Temple, Jowett, Mark Pattison, Baden-Powell, C.W. Godwin and others contributed to *Essays and Reviews* and their conclusion was almost the same as Darwin's. These writers insisted upon a less rigid interpretation of the Bible, and a revision of the Historical Doctrines based upon the literal meaning of biblical and patristic texts.

Thus the philosophic basis of Christianity became a subject of controversy. So was the case with the historical facts on which Christianity rested. Such disintegration of ideas not only struck a blow at Christianity but also at all religious and ideal interpretation of the Universe. When Christianity and the conception of Divine Justice were proved to be untrue, the age old moral and spiritual values which men in the past had come to regard as the most precious things in life were reduced into insignificance. Among the new thinkers, some rationalists, some romantics, there was no unanimity. They were uncertain as to what creed should take the place of the old faith. The thoughtful persons were swept by the crisis of faith. In this atmosphere of doubt and disintegration, particularly the sensitive artists were affected to a very great extent. Guided by personal religious experience some discovered strength in old faith. By dint of sheer imagination some also took refuge in the world of beauty. But there was also the third group who had no consolation for themselves. And for the first time there was the expression of conscious and well reasoned pessimism. Arnold, Fitz Gerald, Thompson and

6. Woodward, *Sir Liewellyn : The Age of Reform (1815-1870)* , p. 575

Thomas Hardy belonged to this group. "Hardy was especially open to the melancholy implications of the new outlook"⁷ As a product of rural England Hardy belonged to the world that was passing. It was hallowed for him by every childish sentiment; but unfortunately it was beginning to crumble before his eyes. To his utter regret Hardy noticed that old habits were being discontinued every year. The old stories and songs were being forgotten every moment. The families settled up in certain places for generation were being uprooted every year. In such a state life seemed unbearable; it seemed precarious too.

The disintegration of the old ideas seemed to have affected Thomas Hardy all the more. He was rooted in the old Christian tradition, for he was brought up in a society in which the tradition of mediaeval Christianity had lingered long. Instinctively he respected the Christian ideal of virtue. But he was not however a mystic; he had also no personal sense of spiritual world that would prompt him to support Christianity against any attack. According to him, mere material improvement would never satisfy the demand of man's soul. Christianity could have once satisfied the heart; but now that Christianity was lost. There was very little hope for man in this world. Naturally his philosophy began to appear confirmedly gloomy. "The universe was huge impersonal mechanism, directed by some automatic principle of life unknown, pursuing its mysterious end, utterly indifferent to the feelings of mortals."⁸ Thus Hardy's pessimistic attitude is not at all difficult to understand, if we remember that he was living in an age of sudden scientific development and rapid change in the old, accepted values. By the age of twenty seven Hardy had already lost the religious faith of his youth, and he came more and more to believe in the doctrine of impersonal fate or law of life, an attitude he maintained until the day of his death.

7. *Cecil, David : Hardy- The Novelist* , p. 22

8. *Ibid* , p. 24

While age and environment contribute to the development of one's imaginative sensibility, origin and upbringing contribute to the growths of one's instinctive and emotional faculties. Therefore, to understand Thomas Hardy, apart from his age and environment, one must also understand his origin, his upbringing and the circumstances in which he was born and brought up. David Cecil rightly observed in his evaluation of Thomas Hardy: "First of all, we must acquaint ourselves with his creative range. We have to do this before making a judgement on any novelist."⁹

This prolific writer of human dramas was born on June 2, 1840, in a lonely and silent spot between Woodland and Heathland, his birth place being the seven-roomed house that stood easternmost of the few scattered dwellings called Higher Bockhampton, in the Parish of Stinsford, Dorset. "The domiciles were quaint, brass-knocked, and green shuttered then, some with green garden doors and white balls on the posts, and mainly occupied by life holders of substantial footing like the Hardy's themselves."¹⁰ During the days of Hardy's birth most of the inhabitants of the place were elderly people, and as such the place was also nicknamed "veterans' valley". At the same time, it was also locally called "Cherry Alley", for the lane leading through it was planted with an avenue with cherry trees. In those days the railway communication was yet not available to these country places. These places were linked up with railway only when Hardy was six or seven years old.

Dorchester, "the capital of Dorset, a town of great antiquity on the Frome", was widely known for its excellent ale and was proud of possessing "the most perfect Roman amphitheatre in the Kingdom". The capital town had paved streets and its houses were usually built of stone. Upon the wide meadows and downlands of Dorchester, vast flocks of sheep used to graze. Among country seats, as

9. *Ibid* : p. 13

10. Hardy, F.E. : *The Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1928* , p. 3

mentioned in the road book for London- Bridport road, the most important one was "Stinsford House, Lady Susan O'Brien". Hardy's father was reported to have practised violin at that very house. The Pitts were the most famous public spirited family of Dorchester.

Nevertheless rural Dorset was a remote place, far remoter in the early years of Thomas Hardy than it is at present. "Feudal and sequestered, centring round church and village inn and squire's manor house, its life - little touched by the changes of the great world - revolved in the same slow rhythm as for hundreds of years past"¹¹ It was predominantly an agricultural life in which almost all, except the clergy and the schoolmaster, lived by land. The cottage were clay-built and cramped, in which people struggled for existence year after year against the uncharitable wind, the sun and the rain to support a wife and family with a very meagre income of 7 \$ a week. It was thus a hard life; yet such a life had its dignity and stability. In the grey old churches people used to meet, as their ancestors had done for generations. Along with the sublime meditations of Prayer Book and authorised versions, the community also talked on the joys and sorrows in their lives. In that bucolic atmosphere and environment life also provided ample scope for light relief in the form of home-made traditional pleasures, such as, harvest celebrations, Christmas gaities, birth and marriage celebrations etc. In those celebration people used to dance to their hearts' content, drink ale and tell many tales. Hardy, who as a second fiddle to his father, (who was a famous musician in the neighbourhood) went off to fiddle in those celebrations, and must have heard those tales and verily impressed.

The year of his birth had an accidental coincidence with certain events which, whether pleasing or displeasing, might have indirectly affected Thomas Hardy. There was the marriage of Queen Victoria with Prince Albert in February.

11. *Cecil, David : Hardy- The Novelist* , p. 14

A pot-boy named Edward Oxford made an attempt to shoot the couple as their carriage was climbing up the Constitution Hill in June. It was indeed a new era in postal business in as much as there was circulation of a Penny Postage Stamp designed by Mulready. War broke out against China. Prince Louis Napoleon was sentenced to perpetual imprisonment for his failure to invade Boulogne. The foundation stone of Nelson Monument was laid at Trafalgar Square. There was the second funeral of Emperor Napoleon at the Invalids, Paris. Fanny Burney who was then eighty-eight died. Browning's *Sordello* and Dicken's *Master Humphrey's Clock* were published. There were many other events that might be mentioned. Nevertheless life at Bockhampton went on much as usual.

If not affected by the outside events, the rural Bockhampton had however its own drama. It was the strange simple drama arising out of the narrow poverty stricken circumstances in which its inhabitants carried their miserable existence. Love was often lost, and lovers were often parted. A lover having left the village in search of a livelihood, would return only to find his betrothed wedded to another. Indeed, in such a confined and elemental world, passions would often grow to obsessions. Men were often wronged in the form of injustice and exploitation. They brooded and brooded on their wrongs until these seemed intolerable and ultimately they gave vent to their emotions in crime. In those days the laws were very stern, and the offenders were even awarded capital punishment.

David Cecil rightly observes that Hardy was "fascinated by the idea of heredity."¹² There was in him a reticent pride that he was one with a lineage. Indeed the Hardys of Dorset were a quite ancient and interesting race, "formerly of influence". According to the available evidences, all the Hardys of the South-West were of the origin of the Jersey Le Hardys who had migrated to Dorset

12. Cecil, David : Hardy- The Novelist , p. 14

some centuries ago. Hardy even intended to add the "Le" to his name and be called "Thomas Le Hardy", but that did not ultimately materialise. The Dorset Hardys were in fact the descendants of one Clement Le Hardy who was Lieutenant Governor of the Island of Jersey in 1488. Thomas Hardy was aware that his more recent ancestors had played their parts well and truly in the life of that honourable country world, Wessex.

Indeed, the Hardys had the characteristics of an old family of spent social energies, which for generations dwelt in or near the valley of the river Frome or From. Its diverse Dorset section included many memorable figures like Elizabethan Thomas Hardy, the founder of Dorchester Grammar School; the Thomas Hardy, Captain of the "Victory at Trafalgar"; Thomas Hardy of Warcham, an influential burgess; Thomas Hardy of Chaldon; and others of local note. But the family had considerably declined by the time the Hardy of our discussion was born; and literally he hailed from a poor family, his parents being just above the status of labouring class. Theirs was a thatched house, and in Bockhampton hamlet Hardy's father had only a field and some sand-pits useful for his business.

Hardy's father, the elder Hardy, was a stone mason by profession, who in his world 'spoke with authority'. Though he was successful in his own trade, he had not the soul or the ambition of a tradesman. He was tolerant, humorous, probably an indolent man of integrity and general friendliness. The mother of Thomas Hardy was more determined, critical and farseeing; she was also capable of sharp comments, and her sense of realities was essentially human. Had the elder Hardy been more worldly and materialistic, he would have obeyed his wife's judgement and transferred his business and builder's yards and four children into some more conspicuous and profitable place than Stinsford. But he never did so, and Mrs. Hardy could understand it. One thing the elder Hardy often did was going up on the heath on a hot weather, and then "lying on a bank of thyme

or camomile with the grasshoppers leaping over him".¹³ His other main interest was violin-playing, while his wife's was reading. Thomas Hardy inherited his love of music and the country side from his father, while the love of reading from his mother.

Nothing much is known about the infancy of Thomas Hardy. The only authentic version in this regard is perhaps *"The Life of Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)"* by his second wife Florence Emily Hardy. It shows that Hardy had not the physique of his father, and was very weak in constitution. Perhaps he would have never seen this world, but for the commonsense of the experienced woman who attended his mother as a monthly nurse, while she was in the family way. He was declared to be still-born by the attending surgeon and was thrown aside as dead until rescued by the attending nurse who exclaimed to the surgeon, "Dead! Stop a minute: he is alive enough sure!"¹⁴

Another most interesting of his infancy was the curious fact that while Thomas Hardy as an infant was asleep in his cradle, his mother returning from out of the doors one hot afternoon found a large snake curled up upon his breast, comfortably asleep like himself. Perhaps the snake had crept into the house from the nearby heath which was the abode of many such reptiles.

Although he was generally healthy, yet he was fragile and precocious in the sense that he was able to read even before he could walk and to tune a violin even in his early childhood. His father was reported to have given him a toy-accordion and taught him to fiddle. Being extraordinarily sensitive to music, the child was of ecstatic temperament. Among the endless jigs, hornpipes, reels, waltzes and country dances which his father often played in his early married

13. Grigson : *A Choice of Thomas Hardy's Poems* , p. 11

14. Hardy, Florence Emily : *The Life of Thomas Hardy* , p. 14

years and to which the child often danced, there were at least three or four that invariably moved him to tears, though he tried to hide them with efforts. "This peculiarity in himself troubled the mind of 'Tommy' as he was called, and set him wondering at a phenomenon to which he ventured not to confess. He used to say in later life that, like Calantha in Ford's *Broken Heart*, he danced on at these time to conceal his weeping. He was not over four years of age at this date."¹⁵

In those days the staircase at Bockhampton was coloured venetian red and was so situated that the rays of the setting sun added to its colour a great intensity for about fifteen minutes or so. Tommy watching this chromatic effect of which he was very much fond, used to utter to himself with great fervency from Dr. Watt's Hymns that another day was now gone. It was perhaps not due to any religious sense but from a sense that the scene itself was most suitable to such a recital. Another note-worthy feature of his character during this time or thereabout was his lack of social ambition which followed him all through his life even when he was in health and happiness. Giving his back to the sun and covering his face with his straw hat, he often began to think how useless he was. Upon the reflection of his experiences of the world he had gathered so far, he had not the desire to grow up at all. While other boys talked of becoming men, Hardy for one did not want to be man at all. Nor did he desire to possess anything at all. On the contrary he wanted to remain as he was, in the same spot, and to know no more men than about half a dozen he already knew. This lack of social ambition was perhaps the characteristics of the Bockhampton Hardys.

It was no wonder that the boy of such a temperament should have a genuine interest in the Church services. Even on wet Sunday mornings he wrapped himself in a table cloth, stood on a chair and used to read the morning prayer. Everybody

15. *Ibid*, p. 15

opined that Tommy would be a person, being good for no other practical pursuits. Such an opinion caused his mother many a misgiving.

Since his very birth Hardy was so frail and delicate in health that upto his fifth or sixth year, his parents were sceptical about his survival. Nobody could even imagine that he would survive to be the immortal author of the immortal dramas of country life and passions. But to their great amazement he survived, and gradually when the need arose for the education of the boy Tom, it was his mother who dealt with it. At his eight year he was sent to the village school to learn the rudiments before being sent further afield. Here, in his Bockhampton School, he was set to work at Walkingame's Arithmetic and at Geography, in both of which he excelled. But his chief ability led towards classical reading. For, his mother gave him Dryden's Virgil, Johnson's Rasselas and Paul and Virginia. Hardy also discovered a periodical - A History of the Wars - dealing with the wars with Napoleon. Its contributor was his own grandfather, who also volunteered himself to the Napoleonic Wars. "The torn pages of these contemporary numbers with their melodramatic prints of serried ranks, crossed bayonets huge knapsacks, and dead bodies, were the first to set him on the train of ideas that led to *The Trumpet Major* and *The Dynasts*".¹⁶

At his eighth or ninth year, Hardy had his first experience of travel when he accompanied his mother on a visit to her sister at Hertfordshire. Because their stay prolonged for three to four weeks, Tommy was sent to a private school in which he was mercilessly tyrannised by the bigger boys whom he could beat in Arithmetic and Geography. During their return journey the mother and the son had to put up for the night in the Cross keys, St. John Street, Clerkenwell. It was the famous inn at which Shelley and Mary Godwin had been accustomed to meet

16. *Ibid* , p. 17

at weekends. The mother and the son were perhaps sheltered in the same room as had, perhaps, sheltered the most marvellous lyrical of English Literature.

After the lapse of a year or so when Thomas Hardy was found to be strong enough to walk further than the village school, he was admitted into Dorchester Day School whose Headmaster, as viewed by his mother, was an exceptionally able man and a good teacher of Latin. The Lady of the manor who erected the Bockampton School was very much shocked at the removal of Tommy to the Dorchester Day School. He was then only nine or ten, while she was then about forty. Nevertheless, his feeling for her was almost that of a lover. Naturally, the boy must have secretly mourned his separation from the lady of his childhood passion, to whom he had been very much attached. So, one day, on the prospect of a meeting with her, Tom attended a harvest supper in the company of a young woman, a small farmer's daughter. After the supper, there was singing and dancing. Some non-commissioned officers were also invited to the dancing as partners for the country dancing girls. This event, perhaps, got him extensively acquainted with soldiers of the old uniforms and long service. It must have helped him much when he came to write *The Trumpet Major* and *The Dynasts*. Herein Hardy not only met his intimate old friend, but also danced to his heart's content. Only at three in the next morning he returned home just to be reprimanded by his parents. "It may be worthy of note that this harvest home was among the last at which old traditional ballads were sung, the railway having been extended to Dorchester just then, and the orally transmitted ditties of centuries being slain at a stroke by the London comic songs that were introduced".¹⁷

The other childhood memories of Thomas Hardy were those of seeing men in stocks, corn-law agitations, mail-coaches, road wagons, tinder boxes, candle snuffing etc. He was, as a small boy, taken by his father to witness the

17. *Ibid* . p. 20

burning of the effigy of the Pope and the Cardinal Wiseman in the old Roman Amphitheatre at Dorchester. The sight was quite lurid to young Hardy, and he never forgot it. Two or three years later, his another memory was connected with the Corn-Law Agitation. His father made for him a small wooden sword; he often dipped it into the blood of a pig just killed and walked about the garden with a slogan "Free trade or blood".

At the age of twelve Thomas Hardy was put through the "venerable Etonian Introduction to the Latin Tongue".¹⁸ This laid the foundation of such grammatical mastery of Hardy as even the brilliant classical men could not always display. But despite his love of classics and his general bookishness, Hardy at least during his young manhood, was very much fond of adventures with his fiddles. It was however strange that his mother although a "progressive" woman was ambitious on his account, did not object to these musical performances. It was perhaps from a feeling that they would help to teach him what life meant. So little Thomas played sometimes at village weddings.

Among his school fellows young Hardy was quite popular. At times his too much popularity even proved burdensome to him. Hardy loved being alone; he was by nature so inclined; but to his utter discomfort some of the school fellow often volunteered to accompany him on his way home to Bockhampton. This was really irksome to him. Another of his peculiarities was that, he always avoided being touched by his playmates. This peculiarity remained with him even in his old age.

When Hardy was a boy of fourteen he fell in love with a pretty girl near the South Walk, Dorchester. It was a sort of green sickness. She was riding, while Hardy was coming home from his school. For some unaccountable reasons she smiled at him. Next day Hardy saw her in the company of an old gentleman,

18. *Blunden, Edmund: Thomas Hardy, p. 9*

perhaps her father. Then for several days she was not found, though the boy wandered about miserably for her. After some days she was found once again. This time she was riding with a youngman. Since then she was not to be found any more. Hardy's attachment was too strong to be easily shaken off.

About this time Hardy formed a trio to teach in the Sunday School of the Parish, the other two being the Vicar's sons. Hardy had a dairy maid as his pupil. She was four years older than him. She appeared in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* as Marian, a direct portrait drawn from real life.

Again young Hardy lost his heart for a few days to a young girl. She came from Windsor, just after he had finished his reading Ainsworth's "*Windsor Classic*". But Hardy was disappointed to find that she had no interest either in Herne the Hunter or Anne Bolyen. Another young girl, a gamekeeper's daughter with beautiful bay-red hairs became an object of his boyish admiration. But she despised him, for she was senior to him by two to three years and married early.

Another deep attachment of his was for Lousia, a farmer's daughter. Hardy felt that his attachment to her was being reciprocated. So one evening on his way back home from Dorchester, when he met her, he longed to speak. But bashfulness overcame him. He could only utter "Good Evening", while poor Lousia uttered nothing. Thereafter Hardy even went to Weymouth Boarding School in search of Lousia. But all his efforts resulted in no more than a shy smile from her. That "Good Evening" was the only word passed between the two. The young and sensitive Tom must have been deeply touched by these failures in his childhood attachments; and this is perhaps one of the clues to his predisposition to tragic themes.

At the age of sixteen Hardy had just begun to be immensely interested in French and Latin Classics. Then arose the question of Tom's getting into the

world. His father negotiated with Mr. John Hicks. He was an architect and Church restorer originally in practice in Bristol, and now in Dorchester. Young Hardy became Hicks's pupil, leaving the old British School at Dorchester and the strict discipline of Isaac Last. The professional task in Hicks's office did not prevent other studies. Hicks was an educated, jovial and kindly-natured man, who allowed his boys some leisure for other than architectural studies. Soon Hardy got through several books of the Iliad, the Aeneid, some Horace and Ovid; and in this way he had the chance of getting into the Greek as well as Latin Classics. In those days and in that particular office a notion of theology was also inevitably involved with the rest. At that time Mr. Barnes, the Dorset poet and philologist kept his school next door. Hardy often used to run to him for his decision on some knotty points of dispute between him and his fellow pupil. Hardy said of Mr. Barnes : "A more notable instance of self-help has seldom been recorded".¹⁹

Bastow, the other fellow in Hicks's office, also impressed young Hardy so much that his baptism made young Hardy feel the need of baptism again as an adult. The two were the companions not only in architectural but also in literary and theological studies. During his pupilage at Hicks's, the young Hardy also came in touch with the Baptist Minister Perkins and his argumentative family, including his two sons, friends of Bastow. They often debated on highly controversial matters of Classics and theology; and often Hardy had to fight alone against three. He was undoubtedly junior to his companions; yet he seemed to possess a breadth of mind which they had not. "It was through these Scotch people that Thomas Hardy first became impressed with the necessity for 'Plain living and high thinking', which stood him in such a good stead in later years. Among the few portraits of actual persons in Hardy's novels, that of the Baptist

19. *Ibid*, p. 10

Minister in *A Laodicean* is one-being a recognizable drawing of Perkins the father as he appeared to Hardy at this time, though the incidents are invented".²⁰

During this time young Hardy had two more literary friends in Dorchester, Hooper Talbot and Horace Moule of Queen's College, Cambridge. Hardy often walked in the fields with these youngmen and was biased still further in the direction of the Classics. From them Hardy also learnt much about contemporary problems and thoughts. It was Horace Moule who advised Hardy to devote more time to architecture than to Classics, though he secretly wished that he should have been advised otherwise.

Later on when Hardy entered on a literary career, his architectural training was certainly of great help to him. It supplied him with the architectonic quality of the plots of his novels - the symmetry and the pattern. What he learnt as an architect was later on applied to his literary creations.

These two young people with whom Hardy mixed, such as, Hooper Talbot and Horace Moule and over and above Mr. Hicks himself, were all contributors to Hardy's education. Although unusual for a youngman, yet in Hicks's office his twenty four hours of a day marked off a triple existence - the professional life, the scholar's life and the rustic life. It was due to this accident that he worked in a country town already advanced by Railways, Telegraphs and Daily London Papers but stayed in a World of Shepherds and Ploughmen in a hamlet three miles off, where modern improvements were looked upon as wonders, Hardy could see the doings in of the rural and the urban areas and of the ancient and the modern simultaneously.

Having completed the apprenticeship under Hicks, Hardy left alone for London at the age of twenty two to pursue the art and science of architecture on

20. Hardy, *Florence Emily : The Life of Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)*, p. 30

more advanced lines. On the afternoon of his arrival in London, he was on the look out for lodgings. He got in touch with a fellow, some ten years older than himself, whose cousin was known to him. This acquaintance was sceptical about Hardy and advised him to be more practical. Hardy was disheartened and wished he should have thought less of the classics and more of iron girders. Now perhaps he could realise, at least to some extent, the wisdom behind Moule's suggestion to him. However, through the patronage of one Mr. Norton, a friend of Hicks, Hardy got an anchorage, which he never forgot. Mr. Norton strongly recommended Hardy to Arthur Blomfield who accepted the recommendations. Accordingly, Hardy got employed under Mr. Blomfield at St. Martin's Place. Within a couple of months the drawing office was shifted to 8, Adelphi Terrace. Its ground floor was then under the occupation of the Reform League, while Hardy had his office overhead. The Reform League, as Hardy said, was a body of extreme reformers who even solicited him to sit in Parliament as the representative of more advanced democratic or republican opinions.

In course of his stay in London Hardy became familiar with certain foreign singers like Mario, Tietjens, Nilsson, Patti, Giuglini, Parepa and others of the time. At that time an English Opera Company was also in existence. Hardy patronised it by often visiting operas produced by Balfe, Wallace and others. He was also very much shocked to hear the gradual decadence of the once fine voice of William Harrison. It was in defiance of fate that Harrison used to sing night after night his favourite songs which ultimately moved the sensitive listeners to tears. Harrison struggled on, hoping against hope, and it caused him to be remembered longer than his greatest success.

At Blomfield's Hardy again revived his literary pursuits which he was forced to abandon in 1861. He however, developed a growing tendency towards poetry. It was suggested to him that he might combine literature with architecture

by becoming an art critic. But he abandoned the idea and began to write verses for the magazines. His verses were however rejected by the editors. At that time he delivered short lectures on poets and poetry to his fellow pupils at Blomfield's. The only thing he was able to get published at that time was: *How I built myself a house*. It was primarily written to amuse the pupils of Blomfield. This little success perhaps had turned his mind in the direction of prose. He was supposed to be happy at Blomfield's: but in reality he was not. For, his self-confession in his diary at his twenty fifth birthday bears testimony to it: "June 2. My 25th birthday not very cheerful. Feel as if I have lived a long time and done very little".²¹ Hardy's mental remorse was perhaps more due to his incompatibility with his architectural occupation. Further, in that alien atmosphere of the city of London, Hardy must have felt like a fish out of water.

By the summer of 1867 Hardy's health began to breakdown. He thought in terms of returning back to his native soil, by shrinking himself from the business of social advancement in London. To him, life was after all an emotion rather than a science of climbing. Hardy returned to his native soil in July 1867 and again got employed as an assistant to his former employer, Mr. Hicks. Within a few weeks of his return and with the resumption of his old habit of walking from Bockhampton to Dorchester and vice-versa, Hardy regained his former health and vigour.

Thus, Hardy had the experience of the rural and the urban, of the country and the city, and of the primitive and the modern. But it was indeed his country world that imparted him his greatest education. "There stayed his canon of life, of beauty, of merit; thence without effort he drew from fountains that had run clear for his forefathers, and still flowed in sun and shade with eternal attraction,

21. *Ibid*, p. 50

variousness and blessings."²² It was a rural life, sad, cruel and callous particularly for land labourers. It is a life in the raw, dependent and ignorant, exposed to the oppressions of the unjust social system and the caprice of the weather. Wages were then only a few shillings a week. The poor were made to feel ashamed at being poor, and were treated with condescension or pity, which was hard to put up with. Poverty led to crime; people were still hanged and hanged in public. When Thomas Hardy was in his teens he saw a woman hanged in Dorchester. After some two years or so another man was hanged in Dorchester prison. Hardy claimed on to the heath at the back of the house and focused his father's telescope on the prison and the gallows. When he had just placed the telescope to his eyes, the white figured victim dropped downwards, and the town clock struck eight. "The whole thing had been so sudden that the glass nearly fell from Hardy's hands. He seemed alone on the heath with hanged man, and crept homeward wishing he had not been so curious".²³ Hardy as a sensitive boy, responded precociously to his experiences. The rural life in which he was born and bred deeply stamped his imagination with its moving spirit. When he reached the creative stage of development he conceived his picture of life in these terms. In short, Hardy's interest was always rural England. Timothy O'Sullivan observes that every feature of his rural surroundings spoke to Hardy throughout his life. He was reported to have told Clive Holland in his seventies that "ideas frequently presented themselves in his mind in the first instance more as mental pictures than as subjects for writing down".²⁴ In visual terms Hardy's surroundings were hardly richer or more varied. To Hardy, his surroundings consisting of downland, forest, meadowland, and heath ornamented by earthworks, churches and manor-

22. *Blunden, Edmund : Thomas Hardy, p. 11*

23. *Hardy, Florence Emily : The Life of Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), pp.28-29*

24. *O'Sullivan, Timothy : Thomas Hardy : An Illustrated Biography . p.14*

houses, were but the marks of man's slow progress against nature. "Hardy believed in the oneness in essence of nature and man".²⁵

Wessex is the commonly accepted Hardy world, but it seems that the real Hardy world lies elsewhere. It is the border line between custom and education, between primitive living and modern living and between rural simplicity and urban sophistication. Raymond Williams rightly puts it: "The Hardy country is of course Wessex: that is to say mainly Dorset and its neighbouring countries. But the real Hardy country, I feel more and more, is that border country so many of us have been living in : between custom and education, between work and ideas, between love of place and experience of change".²⁶ In such a characteristics world, mobile and changing, the figures of Hardy stand out quite prominently like a landmark. It is not really from an old rural world or from a remote region that Hardy speaks to us. Nor does he speak anything we know not. He speaks from the heart of an active experience, and what he speaks we always know, understand and feel. Any change of the old ways and customs is a painful experience which every sensitive human soul of all times may be subjected to in varying degrees. This seems to be one of the aspects of Hardian universalism.

2.2: SETTING AND EVOLUTION OF HARDY'S WESSEX

Thomas Hardy set all of his major novels in the south and southwest of England. He named the area "Wessex" after the medieval Anglo-Saxon kingdom that existed in this part of that country prior to the Norman Conquest. Although the places that appear in his novels actually exist, in many cases he gave the place a fictional name. For example, Hardy's hometown of Dorchester is called

25. *Ibid* : p.14

26. *Williams, Raymond : The English Novel : From Dickens to Lawrence* , p.98

Casterbridge in his books, most famously in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. In an 1895 preface to the novel *Far From the Madding Crowd* he described Wessex as “a merely realistic dream country”.²⁷

When Hardy started writing he had not decided whether to pursue his career as an architect or whether to become a professional novelist. It was not until *Far from the Madding Crowd* - his fourth published novel — that he gave up architecture in favour of writing. This step meant for him that he had to earn a sufficient income that enabled him to make ends meet. To be able to fulfill this condition he had to write to the taste of his nineteenth-century readers. This has not always been easy for Hardy, and his communication with publishers (e.g. Alexander Macmillan and Kegan Paul) and editors (e.g. Leslie Stephen) reveal some of the advice Hardy received during this time. It was not only advice that was privately given to Hardy that influenced his writing; perhaps more importantly it were literary reviews his works received that had an influence on their form and content.

It would be oversimplifying matters to suggest that the only demand from the public on Hardy was to create a regional framework for his plots. There were other issues that influenced Hardy during the process of his writing, most importantly the demand of the circulating libraries to write 3-volume fiction that suited the needs of household reading. In addition to complying with these restraints Hardy had to create a kind of trade mark for his fiction that made his works distinguishable from the writings of other professional novelists. This trade mark came to be Wessex.

When *Desperate Remedies* Hardy’s first published novel appeared in 1869 Hardy had not yet created Wessex as the fictional region for his works. Wessex

27. Hardy, Thomas: *Far From the Madding Crowd*. preface.

as it is known to us today was the outcome of a long process of evolution that took several decades. Hardy first used "Wessex" in *Far from the Madding Crowd* writing that Greenhill fair is "the Nijnii Novgorod of Wessex."²⁸ It is doubtful whether at this stage Hardy had Wessex as a fictional region for his works in mind. It seems more likely that his continuing to use Wessex to describe the region in which his fiction is set was the outcome of responses from the public which he received. In favour of this suggestion is that it was not until he wrote *Two on a Tower* - his eighth published novel - that he began to use a uniform system of naming places which he retrospectively introduced in subsequent editions of novels that have previously appeared.

Hardy soon began to divide Wessex into different regions. In *The Return of the Native* (1878) he introduced South Wessex. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) Upper- and Mid-Wessex are mentioned for the first time. In *Jude the Obscure* (1895), the reader learns of the existence of North-, Nether- and Outer Wessex. Finally in 1914, Off Wessex appears for the first time on any of Hardy's maps.

Hardy undertook two extensive textual revisions - the first for the Wessex Novels Edition (London: Osgood, McIlvaine, 1895/96) and the second for the Wessex Edition (London: Macmillan, 1912). The main purpose of these revisions was to turn Wessex into the largely consistent region as which it is known to us today. The outcome was that from then on Wessex came to be perceived as an existing region (mainly Dorset) into which people can travel.

The actual definition of "Hardy's Wessex" varied widely throughout Hardy's career, and was not definitively settled until after he had retired from

28. *Ibid*, p.294

writing novels. When he first created the concept of a fictional Wessex, it consisted merely of the small area of Dorset in which Hardy grew up; by the time he wrote his last novel *Jude the Obscure*, the boundaries had extended to include all of Dorset, Wiltshire, Somerset, Devon, Hampshire, much of Berkshire, and some of Oxfordshire, with its most north-easterly point being Oxford (renamed “Christminster” in the novel). Similarly, the actual nature and significance of ideas of “Wessex” were developed over a long series of novels through a lengthy period of time. The idea of Wessex plays an important artistic role in Hardy’s works, particularly his later novels, assisting the presentation of themes of progress, primitivism, sexuality, religion, nature, and naturalism; however, this is complicated by the economic role Wessex played in Hardy’s career. Considering himself primarily to be a poet, Hardy wrote novels mostly to earn money: books that could be marketed under the Hardy brand of “Wessex novels” were particularly lucrative, which gave rise to a tendency to sentimentalised, picturesque, populist descriptions of Wessex - which, as a glance through most tourist gift shops in the south-west will reveal, remain popular with consumers today.

Hardy’s resurrection of the name “Wessex” is largely responsible for the popular modern use of the term to describe the south-west region of England (with the exception of Cornwall); today, a panoply of organizations take their name from Hardy to describe their relationship to this area. Hardy’s conception of Wessex as a separate, cohesive geographical and political identity has proved powerful, despite the fact it was originally created purely as an artistic conceit, and has spawned a lucrative tourist trade, and even a secessionist Wessex Regionalist Party.

2.3: INTRODUCTION TO MAJOR WESSEX NOVELS

i) *Far from the Madding Crowd*

It was not until the publication of *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), Hardy's fourth novel that Hardy won widespread popularity as a writer, and he was able to give up architecture. The book was published serially in 1874, in *Corn Hill Magazine*, a journal edited by Leslie Stephens, the father of Virginia Woolf. The novel was published in short sections, and as one read it, one can see that they intentionally leave the reader in suspense; this was a device to motivate readers to buy the next issue of the magazine. Early reviewers compared Hardy's writing to that of George Eliot and recognized him as an important new voice in English fiction. The novel gained a wide readership. Critical notices were plentiful and mostly positive. 'Hardy revised the text extensively for the 1895 edition, and made further changes for the 1901 edition'.²⁹

One of Hardy's central concerns in all of his writing was the problem of modernity in a society that was rapidly becoming more and more industrial. One of his projects as a writer was to create an account of life in the swiftly changing Dorsetshire as it had once been. He was particularly interested in the rituals and histories of that part of England, as well as the dialect of its locals. The title *Far From the Madding Crowd* suggests avoidance of the life of a city, modernized government, crowds and industry; in it, Hardy tries to fashion a portrait of what he saw as an endangered way of life and to create a snapshot for future generations.

Bathsheba Everdene has the enviable problem of coping with three suitors simultaneously. The first to appear is Gabriel Oak, a farmer as ordinary, stable,

29. Norman Page (ed): *Oxford Reader's Companion to Hardy*, pp. 130-132.

and sturdy as his name suggests. Perceiving her beauty, he proposes to her and is promptly rejected. He vows not to ask again.

Oak's flock of sheep is tragically destroyed, and he is obliged to seek employment. Chance has it that in the search he spies a serious fire, hastens to aid in extinguishing it, and manages to obtain employment on the estate. Bathsheba inherits her uncle's farm, and it is she who employs Gabriel as a shepherd. She intends to manage the farm by herself. Her farmhands have reservations about the abilities of this woman, whom they think is a bit vain and capricious.

Indeed, it is caprice that prompts her to send an anonymous valentine to a neighboring landowner, Mr. Boldwood, a middle-aged bachelor. His curiosity and, subsequently, his emotions are seriously aroused, and he becomes Bathsheba's second suitor. She rejects him, too, but he vows to pursue her until she consents to marry him.

The vicissitudes of country life and the emergencies of farming, coupled with Bathsheba's temperament, cause Gabriel to be alternately fired and rehired. He has made himself indispensable. He does his work, gives advice when asked, and usually withholds it when not consulted.

But it is her third suitor, Sergeant Francis Troy, who, with his flattery, insouciance, and scarlet uniform, finally captures the interest of Bathsheba. Troy, who does not believe in promises, and laments with some truth that "women will be the death of me," has wronged a young serving maid. After a misunderstanding about the time and place where they were to be married, he left her. This fickle soldier marries Bathsheba and becomes an arrogant landlord. Months later, Fanny, his abandoned victim, dies in childbirth. Troy is stunned — and so is Bathsheba, when she learns the truth. She feels indirectly responsible for the tragedy and knows that her marriage is over.

Bathsheba is remorseful but somewhat relieved when Troy disappears. His clothes are found on the shore of a bay where there is a strong current. People accept the circumstantial evidence of his death, but Bathsheba knows intuitively that he is alive. Troy does return, over a year later, just as Boldwood, almost mad, is trying to exact Bathsheba's promise that she will marry him six years hence, when the law can declare her legally widowed. Troy interrupts the Christmas party that Boldwood is giving. The infuriated Boldwood shoots him. Troy is buried beside Fanny, his wronged love. Because of his insanity, Boldwood's sentence is eventually commuted to internment at Her Majesty's pleasure.

Gabriel, who has served Bathsheba patiently and loyally all this time, marries her at the story's conclusion.

The title *Far From the Madding Crowd* comes from Thomas Gray's famous 18th-century poem "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard (1751)":

*"Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learned to stray;
Along the cool sequestered vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way."*³⁰

By alluding to Gray's poem, Hardy evokes the rural culture that, by Hardy's lifetime, had become threatened with extinction at the hands of ruthless industrialization. His novel thematizes the importance of man's connection to, and understanding of, the natural world. Gabriel Oak embodies Hardy's ideal of a life in harmony with the forces of the natural world.

The novel also contemplates the relationship between luck, or chance, and moral responsibility. Why should we live a morally upright life if tragedy

30. Gray, Thomas: *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, lines 73-76

strikes us all equally anyway? While some characters, like Gabriel, are always responsible and cautious, others, like Sergeant Troy, are careless and destructive. Hardy was very much influenced by the ideas of Charles Darwin, who maintained that the development of a biological species- and, by extension, of human society and history- is shaped by chance and not by the design of a god.

Another theme is the danger and destruction inherent in romantic love and marriage. Hardy exposes the inconsistencies, irrationalities, and betrayals that often plague romantic relationships. Bathsheba begins the novel an independent woman, but by falling in love with Troy, she nearly destroys her life. Similarly, Hardy presents us with many couples in which one partner is more in love than the other, and he shows what disastrous events result from this inequality.

Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd* was a great success. In this novel of 'character and environment' as Hardy called it, the contrasted characters of the three chief men of story have been worked out well: the man of single eye, who waits and works patiently, scarcely hoping for any reward or recognition, but ready to help the woman he loved, literary through fire and water; the profligate soldier, who comes, sees and for a time conquers; and the reserved middle aged farmer falling in love for the first time in life at the age of forty, and driven almost to insanity by disappointment. Each of them plays his part well and takes his due share in the development of the story. H.C.Duffin is quite vocal in his praise of the novel and observes, "Far from the Madding Crowd is Hardy's first masterpiece; and it went near to being his greatest. Only *Tess* surpasses it, and for sheer Hardian quality I doubt whether even the Mayor, even Jude, quite reaches the wonderful heights of this first wonder of all."³¹

31. Duffin, H.C.: *Thomas Hardy*, p.9

ii) The Return of the Native

Hardy's second major novel *The Return of the Native* was almost a breakaway from Victorian convention. This human drama of pain and pathos begins with a description of Egdon Heath. The very description of Egdon Heath in its minute details indicates Hardy's mastery in descriptive art, and in power of description he excels many of his Victorian contemporaries. But it is worth noting that Hardy suggests much more than what he describes. As a descriptive writer Hardy belonged to his own age: but he chose to describe one might easily take him for one belonging to the modern times. "The new Vale of Tempe may be a great waste in Thule: human souls may find themselves in closer and closer harmony with external things wearing a somberness distasteful to our race when it was young. The time seems near, if it has not actually arrived, when the chastened sublimity of a moor, a sea, or a mountain will be all of nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind."³²

The Return of the Native takes as one of its central themes- and, arguably, as its central character- the tract of windswept upland in Hardy's Wessex known as Egdon Heath. The novel is deeply rooted in the folk customs of the residents of the Heath, and attempts to imitate their attitudes and even their patterns of speech. It is the return to the heath of the educated Clym Yeobright that supplies the novel's title and catalyzing crisis. This surely derives from the experience of Thomas Hardy himself, who only a few years before the publication of the novel made his own return to his native country.

The novel opens with the action of the plot already underway. The reddleman Diggory Venn rides onto the heath with Thomasin Yeobright in the back of his wagon: her marriage to Damon Wildeve was delayed by an error in

32. Hardy, Thomas: *The Return of the Native*, p.5

the marriage certificate, and Thomasin collapsed. It is soon learnt that Wildeve orchestrated the error himself. He is infatuated with Eustacia Vye, and is, at least to some extent, using Thomasin as a device to make Eustacia jealous. When Venn learns of the romance between Eustacia and Wildeve, his own love for Thomasin induces him to intervene on her behalf, which he will continue to do throughout the novel. But Venn's attempts to persuade Eustacia to allow Wildeve to marry Thomasin, like his own marriage proposal to Thomasin, are unsuccessful.

Into this confused tangle of lovers comes Clym Yeobright, Thomasin's cousin and the son of the strong-willed widow Mrs. Yeobright, who also serves as a guardian to Thomasin. Eustacia sees in the urbane Clym an escape from the hated heath. Even before she meets him, Eustacia convinces herself to fall in love with Clym, breaking off her romance with Wildeve, who then marries Thomasin. Chance and Eustacia's machinations bring Clym and her together, and they begin a courtship that will eventually end in their marriage, despite the strong objections of Mrs. Yeobright. Once Wildeve hears of Eustacia's marriage, he again begins to desire her, although he is already married to Thomasin.

In marrying Eustacia, Clym distances himself from his mother. Yet distance soon begins to grow between the newlyweds as well. Eustacia's dreams of moving to Paris are rejected by Clym, who wants to start a school in his native country. Wildeve inherits a substantial fortune, and he and the unhappy Eustacia once again begin to spend time together: first at a country dance, where they are seen by the omnipresent observer Diggory Venn, and then later when Wildeve visits Eustacia at home while Clym is asleep. During this visit, Mrs. Yeobright knocks at the door; she has come hoping for a reconciliation with the couple. Eustacia, however, in her confusion and fear at being discovered with Wildeve, does not allow Mrs. Yeobright to enter the house: heart-broken and feeling rejected by her son, she succumbs to heat and snakebite on the walk home, and dies.

Clym blames himself for the death of his mother; he and Eustacia separate when he learns of the role that Eustacia played in Mrs. Yeobright's death, and of her continued relations with Wildeve. Eustacia plans an escape from the heath, and Wildeve agrees to help her. On a stormy night, the action comes to a climax: on her way to meet Wildeve, Eustacia drowns. Trying to save her, Wildeve drowns as well. Only through heroic efforts does Diggory Venn save Clym from the same fate. The last part of the novel sees the growth of an affectionate relationship, and an eventual marriage, between Thomasin and Diggory. Clym, much reduced by his travails and by weak eyesight brought on by overly arduous studies, becomes a wandering preacher, taken only half-seriously by the locals.

The Return of the Native looks at first like a typical nineteenth-century novel: long, with several plots, and set in a wide landscape. But this tale is really very compact. The major action takes place in a year's time. All of the characters live in the Egdon area, and the outside world does not intrude.

All of the major characters are bound together in a dense knot of relationships. The structure of this book is concentrated, to reflect the tight organization of the action. Book First, the longest book, sets the stage and introduces the characters. Book Second brings Clym and Eustacia together and sees the marriage of Thomasin and Wildeve. Book t Third shows the split between Clym and his mother and his marriage to Eustacia. Book Fourth tells of the terrible accidents that lead to Mrs. Yeobright's death. Book Fifth sees Clym and Eustacia separate, bringing about the tragic deaths that end the main action. Book Sixth, a kind of epilogue, shows the marriage of Thomasin and Diggory.

The action is organized around seasonal celebrations, beginning and ending with the autumn bonfires, as if to emphasize the dramatic changes that can take place in such short periods of time. The story is told in straight chronological order, without the use of flashbacks or other devices. (This may underscore the

story's sense of the straightforward, irresistible movement of time itself.) Regularly, our concentration upon the major characters is broken by the appearance of the country folk, as if for comic relief, to stress the need for the reader to step back and consider the meaning of the tale.

Take for instance, the example of Egdon Heath, the first "character" introduced into the book. The heath proves physically and psychologically important throughout the novel: characters are defined by their relation to the heath, and the weather patterns of the heath even reflect the inner dramas of the characters. "Egdon is not only the scene of the tale; it dominates the plot and determines the characters. It is silent; it feels, it speak, it slays".³³ Indeed, it almost seems as if the characters are formed by the heath itself: Diggory Venn, red from head to toe, is an actual embodiment of the muddy earth; Eustacia Vye seems to spring directly from the heath, a part of Rainbarrow itself, when she is first introduced; Wildeve's name might just as well refer to the wind-whipped heath itself. But, importantly, the heath manages to defy definition. It is, in chapter one, "a place perfectly accordant with man's nature".³⁴ The narrator's descriptions of the heath vary widely throughout the novel, ranging from the sublime to the gothic. There is no possible objectivity about the heath. No reliable statement can be made about it.

For Clym, the heath is beautiful; for Eustacia, it is hateful. The plot of the novel hinges around just this kind of difference in perception. Most of the key plot elements in the novel depend upon misconceptions- most notably, Eustacia's failure to open the door to Mrs. Yeobright, a mistake that leads to the older woman's death—and mistaken perceptions. Clym's eventual near- blindness reflects a kind of deeper internal blindness that afflicts all the main characters in the novel: they do not recognize the truth about each other. Eustacia and Clym

33. Duffin, H.C.: *Thomas Hardy*, p. 128

34. Hardy, Thomas: *The Return of the Native*, p. 4

misunderstand each other's motives and true ambitions: Venn remains a mystery; Wildeve deceives Thomasin, Eustacia and Clym. The characters remain obscure for the reader, too. When *The Return of the Native* was first published, contemporary critics criticized the novel for its lack of sympathetic characters. All of the novel's characters prove themselves deeply flawed, or- at the very least- of ambiguous motivation. Clym Yeobright, the novel's intelligent, urbane, generous protagonist, is also, through his impatience and single-minded jealousy, the cause of the novel's great tragedy. Diggory Venn can either be seen as a helpful, kind- hearted guardian or as an underhanded schemer. Similarly, even the antagonistic characters in the novel are not without their redeeming qualities.

Perhaps the most ambiguous aspect of the novel is its ending. The novel seems to privilege a bleak understanding of human nature. Given the tragedy of the double drowning, it seems impossible that the novel could end happily. And yet, Diggory Venn and Thomasin are contentedly married. This is not, however, the way the novel was first conceived: Hardy was forced to give the novel a happy ending in order to please the Victorian public. In an uncharacteristic footnote, Hardy remarks, "The writer may state here that the original conception of the story did not design a marriage between Thomasin and Venn... But certain circumstances of serial publication led to a change of intent. Readers can therefore choose between the endings."³⁵ Thus, even the true conclusion of the novel is left in doubt, a fitting end for a novel that thrives on uncertainty and ambiguity. Nevertheless, the grim sense of tragedy and frustration of the story is to some relieved at the end by this union.

iii) The Mayor of Casterbridge

The Mayor of Casterbridge reveals Hardy's peculiar location in this shifting world, possessing elements of both the Victorian and modernist forms. It charts

35. Hardy, Thomas: *The Return of the Native*, p.470

the course of one man's character, but it also chronicles the dramatic change of an isolated, rural agricultural community into a modern city. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, as well as in his most popular fictions, such as *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy explores the effects of cultural and economic development: the decline of Christianity as well as folk traditions, the rise of industrialization and urbanization, and the unraveling of universally held moral codes.

Michael Henchard is traveling with his wife, Susan, looking for employment as a hay-trusser. When they stop to eat, Henchard gets drunk, and in an auction that begins as a joke but turns serious, he sells his wife and their baby daughter, -Elizabeth-Jane, to Newson, a sailor, for five guineas. In the morning, Henchard regrets what he has done and searches the town for his wife and daughter. Unable to find them, he goes into a church and swears an oath that he will not drink alcohol for twenty-one years, the same number of years he has been alive.

After the sailor's death, eighteen years later, Susan and Elizabeth-Jane seek Henchard; Elizabeth-Jane believes he is merely a long-lost relative. They arrive in Casterbridge and learn that Henchard is the mayor. The parents meet and decide that in order to prevent -Elizabeth-Jane from learning of their disgrace, Henchard will court and remarry Susan as though they had met only recently.

Meanwhile, Henchard has hired Donald Farfrae, a young Scotchman, as the new manager of his corn business. Elizabeth-Jane is intrigued by Farfrae, and the two begin to spend time together. Henchard becomes alienated from Farfrae, however, as the younger man consistently outdoes Henchard in every respect. He asks Farfrae to leave his business and to stop courting Elizabeth-Jane.

Susan falls ill and dies soon after her remarriage to Henchard. After discovering that Elizabeth-Jane is not his own daughter, but Newson's, Henchard

becomes increasingly cold toward her. -Elizabeth-Jane then decides to leave Henchard's house and live with a lady who has just arrived in town. This lady turns out to be Lucetta Templeman, a woman with whom Henchard was involved during Susan's absence; having learned of Susan's death, Lucetta has come to Casterbridge to marry Henchard.

While Lucetta is waiting for Henchard to call on her, she meets Farfrae, who has come to call on Elizabeth-Jane. The two hit it off and are eventually married. Lucetta asks Henchard to return to her all the letters she has sent him. On his way to deliver the letters, the messenger, Jopp, stops at an inn. The peasants there convince him to open and read the letters aloud. Discovering that Lucetta and Henchard have been romantically involved, the peasants decide to hold a "skimmity-ride," a humiliating parade portraying Lucetta and Henchard together. The event takes place one afternoon when Farfrae is away. Lucetta faints upon seeing the spectacle and becomes very ill. Shortly afterward, she dies.

While Henchard has grown to hate Farfrae, he has grown closer to Elizabeth-Jane. The morning after Lucetta's death, Newson, who is actually still alive, arrives at Henchard's door and asks for -Elizabeth-Jane. Henchard tells him that she is dead, and Newson leaves in sorrow. Elizabeth-Jane stays with Henchard and also begins to spend more time with Farfrae. One day, Henchard learns that Newson has returned to town, and he decides to leave rather than risk another confrontation. Elizabeth-Jane is reunited with Newson and learns of Henchard's deceit; Newson and Farfrae start planning the wedding between Elizabeth-Jane and the Scotchman.

Henchard comes back to Casterbridge on the night of the wedding to see Elizabeth-Jane, but she snubs him. He leaves again, telling her that he will not return. She soon regrets her coldness, and she and Farfrae, her new husband, go looking for Henchard so that she can make her peace. Unfortunately, they find

him too late, discovering that he has died alone in the countryside. He has left a will: his dying wish is to be forgotten. He died and left a will requesting no funeral or fanfare:

"That Elizabeth-Jane Farfrae be not told of my death, or made to grieve on account of me. "& that I be not bury'd in consecrated ground. "& that no sexton be asked to toll the bell. "& that nobody is wished to see my dead body. "& that no mourners walk behind me at my funeral. "& that no flowers be planted on my grave, "& that no man remember me. "To this I put my name".³⁶

As a "Story of a Man of Character," *The Mayor of Casterbridge* focuses on how its protagonist's qualities enable him to endure. One tends to think of character, especially in terms of a "Man of Character," as the product of such values as honor and moral righteousness. Certainly Michael Henchard does not fit neatly into such categories. Throughout the novel, his volatile temper forces him into ruthless competition with Farfrae that strips him of his pride and property, while his insecurities lead him to deceive the one person he learns to truly care about, Elizabeth-Jane. Henchard dies an unremarkable death, slinking off to a humble cottage in the woods, and he stipulates in his will that no one mourn or remember him. There will be no statues in the Casterbridge square, as one might imagine, to mark his life and work. Yet Hardy insists that his hero is a worthy man. Henchard's worth, then—that which makes him a "Man of Character"—lies in his determination to suffer and in his ability to endure great pain. He shoulders the burden of his own mistakes as he sells his family, mismanages his business, and bears the storm of an unlucky fate, especially when the firmity-woman confesses and Newson reappears. In a world that seems guided by the "scheme[s] of some sinister intelligence bent on punishing"³⁷ human beings,

36. Hardy, Thomas: *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p.338.

37. *Ibid*, p.126.

there can be no more honorable and more righteous characteristic than Henchard's brand of "defiant endurance."

The value of a good name is abundantly clear within the first few chapters of the novel: as Henchard wakes to find that the sale of his wife was not a dream or a drunken hallucination, his first concern is to remember whether he divulged his name to anyone during the course of the previous evening. All the while, Susan warns -Elizabeth-Jane of the need for discretion at the Three Mariners Inn—their respectability (and, more important, that of the mayor) could be jeopardized if anyone discovered that Henchard's family performed chores as payment for lodging.

The importance of a solid reputation and character is rather obvious given Henchard's situation, for Henchard has little else besides his name. He arrives in Casterbridge with nothing more than the implements of the hay-trusser's trade, and though we never learn the circumstances of his ascent to civic leader, such a climb presumably depends upon the worth of one's name. Throughout the course of the novel, Henchard attempts to earn, or to believe that he has earned, his position. He is, however, plagued by a conviction of his own worthlessness, and he places himself in situations that can only result in failure. For instance, he indulges in petty jealousy of Farfrae, which leads to a drawn-out competition in which Henchard loses his position as mayor, his business, and the women he loves. More crucial, Henchard's actions result in the loss of his name and his reputation as a worthy and honorable citizen. Once he has lost these essentials, he follows the same course toward death as Lucetta, whose demise is seemingly precipitated by the irretrievable loss of respectability brought about by the "skimmity-ride."

The Mayor of Casterbridge is a novel haunted by the past. Henchard's fateful decision to sell his wife and child at Weydon-Priors continues to shape his

life eighteen years later, while the town itself rests upon its former incarnation: every farmer who tills a field turns up the remains of long-dead Roman soldiers. The Ring, the ancient Roman amphitheater that dominates Casterbridge and provides a forum for the secret meetings of its citizens, stands as a potent symbol of the indelibility of a past that cannot be escaped. The terrible events that once occurred here as entertainment for the citizens of Casterbridge have, in a certain sense, determined the town's present state. The brutality of public executions has given way to the miseries of thwarted lovers.

Henchard's past proves no less indomitable. Indeed, he spends the entirety of the novel attempting to right the wrongs of long ago. He succeeds only in making more grievous mistakes, but he never fails to acknowledge that the past cannot be buried or denied. Only Lucetta is guilty of such folly. She dismisses her history with Henchard and the promises that she made to him in order to pursue Farfrae, a decision for which she pays with her reputation and, eventually, her life.

iv) The Woodlanders

The Woodlanders was published in 1887. Thomas Hardy mentioned in the biography that he thought of writing about the woodlanders more than ten years ago. In fact it was after ten years when he could realize his idea. He himself estimated *The Woodlanders* as his best novel. Desmond Hawkins praised it "as the most professional example of the characteristic Hardy novel."³⁸

The Woodlanders is one of the six masterpieces of Thomas Hardy's Wessex novels. However, it is not so popular or attractive as the other novels. One of the reasons may be that *The Woodlanders* was written after *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. In *the Mayor* there is one dominant character whose life and death

38. Hawkins, Desmond: Hardy- Novelist and Poet, p.104

is tragic. Hardy would like to change a style of the novel. As a result, there are five main characters instead of one hero or heroine in the next novel. Although Grace Melbury is a center among five main characters, she is not a dominant character in the novel. Grace is not so strong or impressive as the other heroines.

Grace cannot find her place in her hometown and leaves with her unfaithful husband in the end. She is doomed to live an unhappy life. However, her story is not a tragedy like Henchard's and Tess's, because of her weak character.

Grace belongs to both woodlanders and outsiders. She is suffering from the conflict of the two worlds. Her father, a rich timber merchant, gives her a higher education and tries to raise her social rank. Her marriage is completely controlled by her ambitious father. Grace sometimes shows her hope to marry Giles Winterborne, a rustic man who has lost his cottages under the life-hold system.

She is after all persuaded by her father to marry Edred Fitzpiers, an intellectual dilettante and philanderer. Fitzpiers despises the villagers of Little Hintock and runs away to the continent with Mrs. Charmond, a rich landlady of the woodland. Grace's position as a deserted wife is not secure in the village. Through suffering, Grace comes to know Giles' true love for her, and hopes to remarry him. After Giles dies of the disease, Grace returns to her husband. Thus Grace is torn between Winterborne and Fitzpiers, but she finally chooses to live with Fitzpiers. Her future life might be unhappy, but she chooses not to die but to live a life.

Giles Winterborne and Marty South are woodlanders, while Fitzpiers and Mrs. Charmond are outsiders. As the title shows, Giles and Marty plant trees and know the woods very well. They are the spirits of the trees. The trees in the woods as well as the villagers mourn for the death of Giles, which is just like a

pastoral elegy. Marty's love for Giles is related like a poem in front of his grave, but Giles has never known her love. Giles and Marty are not rewarded at all. Their virtues are useless, while Oak and Venn are strong enough to regain their loves. When there is no possibility to marry Grace, Giles loses his will to live and gives up the battle for the survival. In this sense, his death is not a tragic one.

In *The Woodlanders* the background of the novel is not so hostile as Egdon Heath. The villagers do not play a role of Greek chorus for the first time in Hardy's main works. From the viewpoint of the death of Giles, this novel may be called a pastoral elegy, which is only in the latter part of the novel. Five main characters are not so distinctive. Above all, Grace Melbury is not so attractive. This is because the writer himself is lack of emotional involvement and sympathy with Grace, unlike Tess and Eustacia.

v) Tess of the d'Urbervilles

Soon after *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) was published, its sales assured Hardy's financial future. But the novel also aroused a substantial amount of controversy.

The poor peddler John Durbeyfield is stunned to learn that he is the descendent of an ancient noble family, the d'Urbervilles. Meanwhile, Tess, his eldest daughter, joins the other village girls in the May Day dance, where Tess briefly exchanges glances with a young man. Mr. Durbeyfield and his wife decide to send Tess to the d'Urberville mansion, where they hope Mrs. d'Urberville will make Tess's fortune. In reality, Mrs. d'Urberville is no relation to Tess at all: her husband, the merchant Simon Stokes, simply changed his name to d'Urberville after he retired. But Tess does not know this fact, and when the lascivious Alec d'Urberville, Mrs. d'Urberville's son, procures Tess a job tending fowls on the

d'Urberville estate. Tess has no choice but to accept, since she blames herself for an accident involving the family's horse, its only means of income.

Tess spends several months at this job, resisting Alec's attempts to seduce her. Finally, Alec takes advantage of her in the woods one night after a fair. Tess knows she does not love Alec. She returns home to her family to give birth to Alec's child, whom she christens Sorrow. Sorrow dies soon after he is born, and Tess spends a miserable year at home before deciding to seek work elsewhere. She finally accepts a job as a milkmaid at the Talbothays Dairy.

At Talbothays, Tess enjoys a period of contentment and happiness. She befriends three of her fellow milkmaids—Izz, Retty, and Marian—and meets a man named Angel Clare, who turns out to be the man from the May Day dance at the beginning of the novel. Tess and Angel slowly fall in love. They grow closer throughout Tess's time at Talbothays, and she eventually accepts his proposal of marriage. Still, she is troubled by pangs of conscience and feels she should tell Angel about her past. She writes him a confessional note and slips it under his door, but it slides under the carpet and Angel never sees it.

After their wedding, Angel and Tess both confess indiscretions: Angel tells Tess about an affair he had with an older woman in London, and Tess tells Angel about her history with Alec. Tess forgives Angel, but Angel cannot forgive Tess. He gives her some money and boards a ship bound for Brazil, where he thinks he might establish a farm. He tells Tess he will try to accept her past but warns her not to try to join him until he comes for her.

Tess struggles. She has a difficult time finding work and is forced to take a job at an unpleasant and unprosperous farm. She tries to visit Angel's family but overhears his brothers discussing Angel's poor marriage, so she leaves. She hears a wandering preacher speak and is stunned to discover that he is Alec

d'Urberville, who has been converted to Christianity by Angel's father, the Reverend Clare. Alec and Tess are each shaken by their encounter, and Alec appallingly begs Tess never to tempt him again. Soon after, however, he again begs Tess to marry him, having turned his back on his -religious ways.

Tess learns from her sister Liza-Lu that her mother is near death, and Tess is forced to return home to take care of her. Her mother recovers, but her father unexpectedly dies soon after. When the family is evicted from their home, Alec offers help. But Tess refuses to accept, knowing he only wants to obligate her to him again.

At last, Angel decides to forgive his wife. He leaves Brazil, desperate to find her. Instead, he finds her mother, who tells him Tess has gone to a village called Sandbourne. There, he finds Tess in an expensive boardinghouse called The Herons, where he tells her he has forgiven her and begs her to take him back. Tess tells him he has come too late. She was unable to resist and went back to Alec d'Urberville. Angel leaves in a daze, and, heartbroken to the point of madness, Tess goes upstairs and stabs her lover to death. When the landlady finds Alec's body, she raises an alarm, but Tess has already fled to find Angel.

Angel agrees to help Tess, though he cannot quite believe that she has actually murdered Alec. They hide out in an empty mansion for a few days, then travel farther. When they come to Stonehenge, Tess goes to sleep, but when morning breaks shortly thereafter, a search party discovers them. Tess is arrested and sent to jail. Angel and Liza-Lu watch as a black flag is raised over the prison, signaling Tess's execution.

A close review of the novel reveals that Unfairness dominates the lives of Tess and her family to such an extent that it begins to seem like a general aspect of human existence in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Tess does not mean to kill Prince,

but she is punished anyway, just as she is unfairly punished for her own rape by Alec. Nor is there justice waiting in heaven. Christianity teaches that there is compensation in the afterlife for unhappiness suffered in this life, but the only devout Christian encountered in the novel may be the reverend, Mr. Clare, who seems more or less content in his life anyway. For others in their misery, Christianity offers little solace of heavenly justice. Mrs. Durbeyfield never mentions otherworldly rewards. The converted Alec preaches heavenly justice for earthly sinners, but his faith seems shallow and insincere. Generally, the moral atmosphere of the novel is not Christian justice at all, but pagan injustice. The forces that rule human life are absolutely unpredictable and not necessarily well-disposed to us. The pre-Christian rituals practiced by the farm workers at the opening of the novel, and Tess's final rest at Stonehenge at the end, remind us of a world where the gods are not just and fair, but whimsical and uncaring. When the narrator concludes the novel with the statement that "'Justice' was done, and the President of the Immortals (in the Aeschylean phrase) had ended his sport with Tess,"³⁹ we are reminded that justice must be put in ironic quotation marks, since it is not really just at all. What passes for "Justice" is in fact one of the pagan gods enjoying a bit of "sport," or a frivolous game.

Tess of the d'Urbervilles presents complex pictures of both the importance of social class in nineteenth-century England and the difficulty of defining class in any simple way. Certainly the Durbeyfields are a powerful emblem of the way in which class is no longer evaluated in Victorian times as it would have been in the Middle Ages—that is, by blood alone, with no attention paid to fortune or worldly success. Indubitably the Durbeyfields have purity of blood, yet for the

39. Hardy, Thomas: *Tess of D'Urbervilles*, p.444

parson and nearly everyone else in the novel, this fact amounts to nothing more than a piece of genealogical trivia. In the Victorian context, cash matters more than lineage, which explains how Simon Stokes, Alec's father, was smoothly able to use his large fortune to purchase a lustrous family name and transform his clan into the Stoke-d'Urbervilles. The d'Urbervilles pass for what the Durbeyfields truly are—authentic nobility—simply because definitions of class have changed. The issue of class confusion even affects the Clare clan, whose most promising son, Angel, is intent on becoming a farmer and marrying a milkmaid, thus bypassing the traditional privileges of a Cambridge education and a parsonage. His willingness to work side by side with the farm laborers helps endear him to Tess, and their acquaintance would not have been possible if he were a more traditional and elitist aristocrat. Thus, the three main characters in the Angel-Tess-Alec triangle are all strongly marked by confusion regarding their respective social classes, an issue that is one of the main concerns of the novel.

One of the recurrent themes of the novel is the way in which men can dominate women, exerting a power over them linked primarily to their maleness. Sometimes this command is purposeful, in the man's full knowledge of his exploitation, as when Alec acknowledges how bad he is for seducing Tess for his own momentary pleasure. Alec's act of abuse, the most life-altering event that Tess experiences in the novel, is clearly the most serious instance of male domination over a female. But there are other, less blatant examples of women's passivity toward dominant men. When, after Angel reveals that he prefers Tess, Tess's friend Retty attempts suicide and her friend Marian becomes an alcoholic, which makes their earlier schoolgirl-type crushes on Angel seem disturbing. This

devotion is not merely fanciful love, but unhealthy obsession. These girls appear utterly dominated by a desire for a man who, we are told explicitly, does not even realize that they are interested in him. This sort of unconscious male domination of women is perhaps even more unsettling than Alec's outward and self-conscious cruelty.

Even Angel's love for Tess, as pure and gentle as it seems, dominates her in an unhealthy way. Angel substitutes an idealized picture of Tess's country purity for the real-life woman that he continually refuses to get to know. When Angel calls Tess names like "Daughter of Nature" and "Artemis," we feel that he may be denying her true self in favor of a mental image that he prefers. Thus, her identity and experiences are suppressed, albeit unknowingly. This pattern of male domination is finally reversed with Tess's murder of Alec, in which, for the first time in the novel, a woman takes active steps against a man. Of course, this act only leads to even greater suppression of a woman by men, when the crowd of male police officers arrest Tess at Stonehenge. Nevertheless, for just a moment, the accepted pattern of submissive women bowing to dominant men is interrupted, and Tess's act seems heroic.

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and other novels, Hardy demonstrates his deep sense of moral sympathy for England's lower classes, particularly for rural women. He became famous for his compassionate, often controversial portrayal of young women victimized by the self-righteous rigidity of English social morality. Perhaps his most famous depiction of such a young woman is in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. This novel and the one that followed it, *Jude the Obscure* (1895), engendered widespread public scandal with their comparatively frank look at the sexual hypocrisy of English society.

vi) **Jude the Obscure :**

When Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* was first published in 1895, its critical reception was so negative that Hardy resolved never to write another novel. *Jude the Obscure* attacked the institutions Britain held the most dear: higher education, social class, and marriage. It called, through its narrative, for a new openness in marriage laws and commonly held beliefs about marriage and divorce. It introduced one of the first feminist characters in English fiction: the intellectual, free-spirited Sue Bridehead.

Jude Fawley dreams of studying at the university in Christminster, but his background as an orphan raised by his working-class aunt leads him instead into a career as a stonemason. He is inspired by the ambitions of the town schoolmaster, Richard Phillotson, who left for Christminster when Jude was a child. However, Jude falls in love with a young woman named Arabella, is tricked into marrying her, and cannot leave his home village. When their marriage goes sour and Arabella moves to Australia, Jude resolves to go to Christminster at last. However, he finds that his attempts to enroll at the university are met with little enthusiasm.

Jude meets his cousin Sue Bridehead and tries not to fall in love with her. He arranges for her to work with Phillotson in order to keep her in Christminster, but is disappointed when he discovers that the two are engaged to be married. Once they marry, Jude is not surprised to find that Sue is not happy with her situation. She can no longer tolerate the relationship and leaves her husband to live with Jude.

Both Jude and Sue get divorced, but Sue does not want to remarry. Arabella reveals to Jude that they have a son in Australia, and Jude asks to take him in.

Sue and Jude serve as parents to the little boy and have two children of their own. Jude falls ill, and when he recovers, he decides to return to Christminster with his family. They have trouble finding lodging because they are not married, and Jude stays in an inn separate from Sue and the children. At night Sue takes Jude's son out to look for a room, and the little boy decides that they would be better off without so many children. In the morning, Sue goes to Jude's room and eats breakfast with him. They return to the lodging house to find that Jude's son has hanged the other two children and himself. Feeling she has been punished by God for her relationship with Jude, Sue goes back to live with Phillotson, and Jude is tricked into living with Arabella again. Jude dies soon after.

Jude the Obscure focuses on the life of a country stonemason, Jude, and his love for his cousin Sue, a schoolteacher. From the beginning Jude knows that marriage is an ill-fated venture in his family, and he believes that his love for Sue curses him doubly, because they are both members of a cursed clan. While love could be identified as a central theme in the novel, it is the institution of marriage that is the work's central focus. Jude and Sue are unhappily married to other people, and then drawn by an inevitable bond that pulls them together. Their relationship is beset by tragedy, not only because of the family curse but also by society's reluctance to accept their marriage as legitimate.

The horrifying murder-suicide of Jude's children is no doubt the climax of the book's action, and the other events of the novel rise in a crescendo to meet that one act. From there, Jude and Sue feel they have no recourse but to return to their previous, unhappy marriages and die within the confinement created by their youthful errors. They are drawn into an endless cycle of self-erected oppression and cannot break free. In a society unwilling to accept their rejection

of convention, they are ostracized. Jude's son senses wrongdoing in his own conception and acts in a way that he thinks will help his parents and his siblings. The children are the victims of society's unwillingness to accept Jude and Sue as man and wife, and Sue's own feelings of shame from her divorce.

Jude's initial failure to attend the university becomes less important as the novel progresses, but his obsession with Christminster remains. Christminster is the site of Jude's first encounters with Sue, the tragedy that dominates the book, and Jude's final moments and death. It acts upon Jude, Sue, and their family as a representation of the unattainable and dangerous things to which Jude aspires.



Chapter – III

**THE ASSAMESE REGIONAL
NOVEL**

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THE ASSAMESE REGIONAL NOVEL

3.1: GROWTH

The novel in Assamese grew and took shape in the second half of the 19th century drawing its inspiration from the literature of the west during the reign of British rule. The British imposed Bengali in 1836 in Assam after the state was occupied in 1826. Assamese was banished from its own land. During this dark period of Assamese language, the history of Assamese literature began under the auspices of American Baptist Missionaries. Though the Missionaries came to this land to preach Christianity, they well-understood the importance of the local language. Due to a sustained campaign by the Assamese locals in association with the constant assistance of the Christian Missionaries, Assamese was reinstated in 1873 as the state language.

The American Baptist Missionaries had their greatest contribution in the reintroduction of the Assamese language as the official language in Assam. They established the first printing press in Sibsagar in 1836 and started using the local Asamiya dialect for writing purposes. Assisted by some local talents the Missionaries acquired the knowledge of the Assamese language and wrote textbooks for school children and produced other literary works in Assamese. In 1846 they started a monthly periodical called *Arunodoi* which was the first ever Assamese journal.

In the process of restoring the Assamese language, a few books were written and published to re-establish Assamese as an independent language. In 1848, Nathan Brown published the first book on Assamese grammar- *The Grammatical Notes of the Assamese Language*. The Missionaries published

the first Assamese-English Dictionary compiled by M. Bronson in 1867. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan contributed with his *A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language* and *On Vernacular Education in Assam* in 1855, and so on. As a result of perseverance of these great personalities, the Assamese language was restored in the law court as well as in schools in 1873. However by this time the contemporary Bengali language and literature had advanced to a great extent. Truly said by Satyendranath Sharma, Assamese lagged behind for 50 years for the banishment of its language. However the contemporary educated Assamese people came to the close contact of English and Bengali literature and drawing their inspiration from these two fields, they developed the field of the Assamese literature. Undoubtedly they owe a lot to the Christian Missionaries. The writers like Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Nidhiram Farwel, Jaduram Dekabaruah, Purnananda Baruah, Gunabharam Baruah, Baham Phulan, Kinaram Satriya etc. who wrote in the *Arunodoi* (1846), published by the missionaries were the pioneer to the modern Assamese literature.¹

The British missionaries utilized Assamese language and literature as a tool for their religious propagation. With the purpose of disseminating the idea of Christian piety Rev. Brown undertook the translation of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* under the title of *Jatrikar Jatra* (1851), which paved the way for Assamese novels. In the words of S.N. Sharma "by translating their allegorical story the missionaries have provided the key to the way the full length story as novel"²

Jatrikar Jatra was followed by a number of publications like- *Alokeshi Beshyar Bisay* (1877), *Phulmani Aru Karuna* (1877), and *Kaminikantar Charitra* (1877) etc. Though published in the ground of Christian propagation, *Kaminikantar Charitra* had a well developed theme and better characterization.

1. Bharali, Sailen: *Adhunik Asamiya Sahitya: Duti Taranga*, p. 1

2. Sharma, S.N.: *Asamiya Upanyashar Bhumika*, p. 35

Hence, prominent Assamese scholar Hem Baruah considered it the first Assamese novel.³ According to Hemanta Kumar Sharma “In spite of having some shortcomings, this novel, by the virtue of its style and expression, can be called the first independent novel in Assamese”.⁴ On the other hand, some other critics like Dr. Satyendranath Sharma criticized it and refused to give it the honour of being a novel. According to him, its ultimate aim of reaching various ends hindered in producing a well-knit development of plot and proper analysis of characters.⁵ In 1876, contemporary to the missionaries’ publication, Hemchandra Baruah’s *Bahire-Rang-Chang Bhitare-Kowa-Bhaturi* appeared. It was an excellent piece of satiric story. But due to the lack of well-developed theme and characterization the book was not regarded as a novel. Padmawati Devi Phukanani’s *Sudharmar Upakhyan*, published in 1884, aimed at preaching the effect of virtuous and non-virtuous deeds, depriving its claim as a novel proper. All the publications right from *Jatrikar Jatra* to *Sudharmar Upakhyan* aimed at religious reformations. The basic purpose was to preach Christianity. Hence they lacked the essential characteristics of a novel- a well-knit story, free analysis of characters and situation, and sequence of events etc. But the contributions of the missionaries to the growth of novel as a branch of literature in Assamese can not be ignored.⁶ In real sense the British missionaries had given Assamese language a new tune that the Assamese had never known before.⁷ According to Dr. Maheswar Neog it was only the missionaries who established the Assamese language in a new form in the law courts and the educational field, and thereby created the gateway to form creative literature in Assamese language.⁸

3. Baruah, Hem: *Asomiya Sahitya*, p.261

4. Sharma, Hemanta Kumar: *Asomiya Sahityat Dristipat*, p.269

5. Sharma, Satyendranath: *Asamiya Upanyashar Bhumika*, p.49

6. Deka, Umesh: *Post-war Assamese Novel*, p.5

7. Goswami, Hemchandra: *Asomiya Sahityar Chinaki*, p.134

8. Neog, Maheswar: *Asomiya Sahityar Ruprekha*, p.291

The real growth of Assamese novel took place in the late 19th century. In 1886, the Assamese students studying in Calcutta (now, Kolkata) established *Asomiya Bhasha Ummati Sadhini Sabha* (Association for the development of the Assamese language) and published the Assamese journal “*Jonaki*” in the following year. In the very next year, another newspaper “*Bijuli*” was published. These two journals gave birth to the modern Assamese novels in true sense. Lakshminath Bezbaruah’s *Padum Konwari* and Padmanath Gohain Baruah’s *Bhanumati* were published in these two journals respectively. These two novels were followed by Gohain Baruah’s *Lahari* and Rajanikanta Bordoloi’s *Miri Jiori* (1890). Critics, in modern time, unanimously gave *Bhanumati* the honour of being the first Assamese novel which was developed on a historical plot. Hence the last part of the nineteenth century was the important period for the Assamese literature. In the words of S.N. Sharma ‘The last decade of the nineteenth century was the real birth time of Assamese novel. In this decade four important novels were published. These novels- *Bhanumati* (1891), *Padumkonwari* (1891), *Lahori* (1892) and *Miri Jiori* (1894) were the initial effort of the un-matured writers and hence not completely flawless. However, the *Miri Jiori* was the best amongst them’.⁹

Rajanikanta Bordoloi’s *Miri Jiori* was the first novel in Assamese literature which was regional in tone and nature. It was his maiden and only attempt to deal with social theme. Fulfilling all the requirements of a regional novel, *Mirijiori* deals with the realistic picture of tribal life. On the backdrop of Subansiri River, the author depicted the Miries, their marriage rituals, Cheng puja, Naracinga Bihu, Deudhai’s predictions and the Subansiri river in their lives. All these aspects make a fine regional novel. However, the writer, after writing this novel, diverted his interest to historical themes and there was a big leisure in the field of regional

9. Sharma, S.N.: *Asamiya Upanyashar Bhumika*, p.55

novel. S.N. Sharma's observation in this regard is worth quoting "One can not notice any attempt of writing regional novel except Rajanikanta Bordoloi's *Miri Jiori* till independence".¹⁰ However, the fact is that the general growth of Assamese novel was not satisfactory during this period. As Dr. Sharma observed, the influence of western language and literature should have enhanced and expanded the growth of Assamese novel; instead it was quite slow. It was only after the Second World War that the Assamese novels have overcome the rigidity and took a new turn.¹¹ In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Dr. Birinchi Kumar Baruah emerged to be a successful novelist. He was a master painter of Assamese social novel. He authored *Jivanar Batat* (In the Highway of Life) and *Seuji Patar Kahini* (Story of the Green Leaf) under the pen name of Bina Baruah. Though social in nature, these novels bore many characteristics of regional novel. Especially *Jivanar Batat* highlights the Assamese village life with its pains and sufferings. Saiyad Abdul Malik's *Surujmukhi Swapna* (The Dream of Sunshine) reveals the customs and emotions of a muslim village living on cultivation. The same author's *Jetuka Patar Dare* and *Pahumara Habir Baat* are also apt example of the novels of this type. Homen Borgohain's *Matsyagandha* can not be ignored, which depicts a koibarta village with untouchability practices in it. Renowned poet and storyteller Nabakanta Baruah's *Kapiliparia Sadhu* is a landmark of regional novel. Hitesh Deka's novels also have regional touches. His novels basically deal with realistic analysis of the village life and the problems of the peasants living in it.¹² His novel *Eiyetu Jivan* gives a pictorial description of a village in lower Assam. Nirupama Borgohain was a successful regional novelist. Her *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* and *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* deal the pathetic plight of the people living in riverside. *Rangmilir Hahin* by Rong Bong Terong represents the detail customary practices of the

10. Sharma, S.N.: *Asamiya Upanyasahar Gatidhara*, p.221

11. Sharma, S.N.: *Asamiya Sahityar Itibriti*, p.192

12. Baruah, Hem: *Asamiya Sahitya*, p.273

Karbi tribe. Written on the backdrop of Karbi hills, this novel is considered another great achievement in the field of Assamese regional novel. In the same connection the name of Silabhadra is mention-worthy whose novels like *Madhupur*, *Ahatguri* and *Agamanir Ghat* etc. center round the Madhupur region highlighting the pain, suffering, corruption and oppression of the locality. The name of Mamoni Raisom Goswami can not be ignored. Her *Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda* and *Nilakanthi Braza* are important addition to the genre of regional novel.

There are a countable number of regional novels; at least a reasonable number of novels with major regional aspects in Assamese literature. Some of the mention-worthy novels in this category are Amulya Baruah's *Ei Padumani*, Jatin Mupun's *Miksijili*, Kailash Sharma's *Anami Nagini*, Shiba Sharma's *Maniki Gaonr Kahini*, Pranita Devi's *Dhansirir Usupani*, Lumber Dai's *Prithibir Hahin*, Yese Dorse Thongsi's *Saba Kota Manuh* etc. And this number is gaining addition day by day. However, only a few trendsetter novels in particular have been taken into account for this study, though some general aspects will be drawn as a whole when necessary. The selected novels for this study are: *Miri Jiori* (1894), *Kapiliparia Sadhu* (1953), *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* (1963), *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* (1979), *Madhupur* (1971), *Ahatguri* (1973), *Agamanir Ghat* (1973), *Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda* (1988) and *Nilakanthi Braza* (1989).

3.2: BACKGROUND

Background and setting becomes an integral part of a novel. Especially in case of a regional novel, this aspect becomes very vital. Talking about setting refers to the background in terms of time and place of the course of action of

the novel. It further refers to the life and living, the prevailed social norms and the natural environment of the area where the characters perform their actions. In the view of a prominent critic, in fiction, setting includes the time, location, and everything in which a story takes place, and initiates the main backdrop and mood for a story. Setting has been referred to as story world or milieu to include a context (especially society) beyond the immediate surroundings of the story. Elements of setting may include culture, historical period, geography, and hour.¹³ A complete and perfect background of a novel may include all the components of general living. However, the modern novels are restricted in revealing or highlighting only a few aspects. The setting and background of a novel is utilized for achieving mainly two purposes. Firstly to restrict the course of activities of the characters by the prevailing environment, and secondly to portray the characters as a rebel against the existing norms. The desired purpose is achieved by presenting social background, natural background or the both.

The setting and background become one of the most important components of a regional novel. They control most of the courses of action in a regional novel. In some stories the setting becomes the character itself.¹⁴ Selection of a good setting and background may give a new dimension to a novel. According to Umesh Deka the faithfulness of the subject matter of a novel mainly depends on the selection of its setting and background where the story will progress. A successful writer always wants his art of creation to flourish on the backdrop of perfect setting.

*“Prakrita arthat upanyasar bisaybastur pratyasil rup nirman
hai patbhumi nirbachanar kshamatar uparatei. Sarthak silpiye*

13. Truby, John: *Anatomy of a Story: 22 Steps to Becoming a Master Storyteller*, p. 145

14. Rozelle, Ron : *Write Great Fiction: Description & Setting*. p.2

sacharachar nijar silpakarmar abhigyatapurna prakash bichare patabhumit abestanithe."¹⁵

In Assamese literature, regional novels are written by centering round peculiar background. The number of the novels are more whose backgrounds are based on riverside areas, hilly areas and rural areas touched by the influence of urbanizations.

In Assamese literature, Rajanikanta Bardoloi introduced regional novel in the last decade of nineteenth century. His *Miri-Jiori* (1890) is the first Assamese regional novel. A clear and coherent picture of the Miri people living by the bank of the river Sibonsiri in the district of Lakhimpur is presented in this novel. The story of the novel is enriched by the love affair of Janki and Panei of a Miri village of that area. Both the protagonists Janki and Panei had to embrace tragic death because of the true love they possessed for each other, and which was not accepted by the traditional differences. The novelist has incorporated the life style, traditions, customs, religion of the Miri and the tragic love story in parallel. He also has beautifully sketched the natural environment of the region nearby Subonsiri. To sum up in one sentence, *Mirijiori* is a fine blending of social and natural background.

In the novel, the characteristics of Miri social life are expressed through the description of Miri festivals like Nora Siga Bihu, Sarag puja, Ratisewa etc. with religious beliefs, traditional beliefs etc. In reference to the religious life of the Miri, the novelist has mentioned the names of the gods like Mugling Mirema, Kasing-Kartan, Mattable, Chinek, Dohmukh, Dong-kong, Louji-Leitang etc. and has described the worships which are done to satisfy these gods. The influence of various personal and religious beliefs are immense in the lives of the Miris.

15. Chakrawarty, Mukul (Ed): *Bhasa Sahitya Sanskritir Jilikon*, 2003, p.9; from the article 'Chahbagichr Jivan aru Asamiya Upanyas' by Umesh Deka

Listing to prophecy from the mouth of 'Deodhai', who is possessed by some evil spirit, considering dream as the forecast of future, rectifying future by sacrificing a cock etc. are some of the traditional beliefs of the Miris mentioned in the novel. Moreover, adding various songs sung in various occasions- at the time of boating, cultivating, harvesting, festivals etc. gave the novel a sweet melodious outlook. In a realistic and reliable social background, the love story of Janki and Panei has glittered. That is the reason possibly that the novel has been described as the cultural history of the Miri tribe of people.¹⁶

The geographical background of Mirijiori is a village situated on the bank of Subonsiri river of Lakhimpur district of Assam. The name of the village, which is the epicenter of the novel, is not mentioned by the novelist, whereas the names of two other villages are mentioned as per the demand of the story. The surrounding area of the Subonsiri forms the background of the novel, although the river itself plays the most vital role in the novel. In the words of Satyendranath Sarma the novelist has given utmost emphasis on the Subonsiri River. The river is not just the mere background of the novel; rather it is elevated to the level of goddess of the Miri people.¹⁷

Even the first, fifth and the last section of the novel have been named after the river Subonsiri, respectively as '*Nair Parat*', '*Subonsiri Nair Bukut*' and '*Akou Subonsiri Nair Bukut*'. In the very first section, the novelist gives an apt description of the river, cultivating the seeds of the story. Young Janki and Panei meet each other regularly in their corn field by the bank of Subansiri amidst the wild nature developing a kind of keen affinity from their childhood.

*"Subansiri Noikhan bahale Brahmaputrar pach jukhar ajukhman
hoba. Brahmaputrar panitkoi iar pani nirmal puwa jai... .."*

16. Saikia, Chandraprasad (ed): *Gariyasi*, December issue, 1998, pp.11-12 (Article - '*Rajanikanta Bardalair Mirijiori*' by Parikshit Hazarika.)

17. Sarma, Satyendranath: *Asomiya Upanyasar Bhumika*, p.65

enekua ekhan miri gaonr pachimphale dukhan aahu dhanar bhui asil. Sei dukhan subansiri noir parate. Muthate garar para dah bar anal dur. Bhui dukhanar majat dukhan chang. Muthate panch-chai nalar atara-atari. Ei chang dukhanar ekhanat ejani anth-na bachar bayasiya suali. Ankhanat eta tera-choidha bachar bayasia lara”¹⁸

The love story of Janki and Panei blossomed right from the beginning of the novel on the Subonsiri river and met its destiny there itself. The dead-bodies of the two lovers floated on Subonsiri who were condemned in the judgment of the Baregam. The whole episode is associated and witnessed by Subonsiri for which Satyendra Nath Sarma called the river a ‘muted character’ of the novel.¹⁹

In this way, the novelist was successful in selecting a perfect background for his novel and was faithful in upholding a true presentation of the area and the people living therein. His presentation of the Miri society and its custom and culture is so vivid that it has compensated, as observed by some prominent critic, the immediate need of a socio-cultural history of the Mising society.²⁰

Nabakanta Baruah’s *Kapiliparia Sadhu* is written on the setting of the Kapili river and its surrounding areas in the district of Nagaon. Taking the people and environment of this locality as the background, this novel highlights the relation between human life and nature. This novel is written on the basis of a biographical novel. The novelist, in a little sphere, tries to discover the adapted areas of Nagaon district in a newer light. Nabakanta Barua has described the deep and profound relationship between the people of Nagaon and the Kapili River in those heart-touching poetic language.

18. Bardalai, Rajanikanta: *Mirijiori*, p.3

19. Sarma, S N: *Asamiya Upanyasar Bhumika*, p.66

20. Borkotoki, Biren(ed): *Oupanyasik Rajanikanta Bardalai*, Atul baruah’s article ‘Bardalair Samajik Upanyas’

*"Eikhanei kapili. Nagaonr chakulu. Batari kagaje likhe. Kintu kapiliparia manuhe jane- Kapili dukharu chakulu- anandaru chakulu. Kapilie sihatak banpanire mare, Kapilir paniyei sihatar patharar jip diye; kapilir nirmal paniyei sihatar piah gusaii. Kapiliedi sihatar beha-bepar chale. Ajir nahai; raja dinare para. Guva. Neli, Dimaruwa rajapualiburur rajyabur Kapili parare."*²¹

Various aspects are inserted into the background of *Kapiliparia Sadhu*. In a short sphere, the novelist has added many important aspects and matters. That may be reason that all the matters have been discussed in surface level only, no matters have possessed the required depth. For example, one can point out the aspects of history, legend etc. which are related to the background.

The novelist has mentioned the names of the states like Guva, Neli, Dimoruwa which were situated by the bank of Kapili; and these names have established the history related to the Kapili River. The matters like the battle between Ahom and Jayantia, the rebellion of the kings of Guva, Neli and Dimoruwa, the closed market of Phulaguri area, the help of the kings to Pani Phukan with guns and food etc. have expressed the history hidden in those places by the bank of Kapili.

Historical consciousness is one of the main characteristics of the poet-writer Nabakanta Baruah. Highlighting this historical consciousness of the poet, famous critic Hirendranath Dutta observed that one can notice a special aspect about the writings of Nabakanta Baruah when compared to his predecessor. This is his sense of incorporating the history of humankind. This reveals the modern mind of the author. Dutta calls it historical consciousness.

"Purbasuri sakalar kabya-kritir saite tulana korile Nabakanta Baruah eta bises gun pratijan sangbedansil pathakare chakut

21. Baruah, Nabakanta: *Kapiliparia Sadhu*, p.8

*pare. Saitu hoise kabiye anubhab kara bhab anubhutibur biswa manabar itihasar eta bristitya patabhumi nirksan karar eta swabhabik udyam. Ei adhunik manubhangitu Nabakanta Baruah eta anyatam akarsaniya gun aru iyake kabir itihasa chetana buli kaba khujju.*²²

This historical consciousness is also available in the novels of Nabakanta Baruah. His greatest historical novel 'Kakadeutar Har' proves the fact. The discussed novel *Kapiliparia Sadhu* also could not ignore his historically conscience mind. His mild historical description and the inclusion of the legends and folk believe of the region and the Kapili river upholds the novel as a true and successful regional novel. Baruah's description of *Gayan-Bayan ghuli* that swallows two boats every year, the Gosai pond and the legend of its creation etc. give the vivid details of the environment of the area.

However, it is to be mentioned that, though the novel mostly include the marvelous phenomenon, folk tale, folk lore, customs and traditions of the of the people living by the bank of Kapili river, it has never ignored the practical utility of life. Upendranath Sharma observed that *Kapiliparia Sadhu* aptly projects the true reflection of contemporary social life along with its traditional values. 'The presentation of wrecked social life and vanishing social values as well as historical background is interesting as well.'²³

Moreover, the novel depicts realistic pictures of India's freedom movement, contemporary pathos of educational environment, economic devastation of flood affected people etc. upholding a realistic background of the contemporary period.

22. Bora, Hem & Bora, Purna (ed): *Nabakanta Baruah Jivan aru Karma*, pp.8-9, Harindranah Dutta's article 'Nabakanta Baruah Kabita.

23. *Ibid*, p.47, Upendranath Sharma's article 'Nabakanta Baruah Dukhan Upnyash'

Nirupama Borgohain's famous novels *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* and *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* were authored on the backdrop of two unknown villages by the bank of Pagladia River in the district of Nalbari. Borgohain herself mentioned it in her autobiography *Biswas aru Sangsayar Majedi*, "Taking Pagladia River as background, I wrote two novels. One is *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* and the other *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar*".²⁴

The novel *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* centers round the love story between the village girl Lakshmi and the Dipu who came to village from town due to the cruelty of World War. Parallel to this love story, the novelist presents the minute details of the poor agriculture based people living in a small interior region. The first half of the novel basically deals with the detailed description of this matter. The novelist herself experienced the brutality of the World War-II. During this time, she was in her father's home at Simlia which was around six miles away from the district headquarter of Nalbari. The novelist revealed the fact that her experience and memories of those days- the incidents she witnessed by the bank of Pagladia, the people she was acquainted with and their happiness and sorrows etc. have found a creative form in the said novel.²⁵

Similar to the Kapili river in the *Kapiliparia Sadhu*, the Pgaladiya river is the life source and life force to the people of Nalbari. The river controls the life and living of the region. The people believed that the Pagladia had an unstoppable madness in its force, and none could challenge its will. They believed that the river had changed its course in its own will, which remained a source of discussion for the local people. Lakshmi explained to Dipu that her mother witnessed the flow of the Pagladia river in the back side of their house; but it, then, stopped and changed its direction, and now it is flowing through the front side of the village.

24. Borgohain, Nirupama: *Biswas aru Sangsayar Majedi*, p.64

25. Borgohain, Nirupama: *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi*, Jyoti Prakash edition, 1999, Preface.

*"Biswas kariba Dipu, maye muk nijmukhe koise, kenekoi je ki hol, noikhan kaloi gol kuneu kaba nuware. Tar pachat edin sakaluwe dekhile etiyar ei thait pagala debatai mahafurtit kol kol sabda kari boi goi ase. Tar mane age noikhan asil gaonkhanar pisphale, etia ahil sanmukhaloi. Eneunu aru Pagaladia nam paisene? Eu nij khusit boi goi thakibo, jote man jai yhai salabo, gaon-bhuin khanda, gharbari bhanga, ji ichha koriba, kar sadhya badha diye."*²⁶

The Pagladia has emerged as one of the forceful character in the novel. It is considered as the river of will and woe. It controls the happiness and the miseries of the area. People find a kind of intimacy with this mad river though most of their life is wracked by it. They drink the water from the river, swim and play in its water, use it as a means of their conveyance. On the other hand, they face immense hardship when Pagladia comes up with its destructive flood.

The description of the erosion of the river, small huts of the poor people, barren cultivating land, taboos of caste system, untouchability, educational backwardness, famine, unhygienic lifestyle, people's intimacy with the natural surroundings, use of colloquial language and dialects etc. have made a strong foundation for the background of this regional novel. The novelist herself felt a strong sense of bondage with the river. Recollecting her old childhood memories in her autobiography, Borgohain mentioned that she sometimes felt more intimate with the river compared to other people and any other relations in her life.²⁷

There are many things still found in the region which were described in the novel, bringing the evidence of realistic portrayal of the masterpiece. Among them are the monastery of Bhagibaba, the Arjun and the Bokul trees mentioned

26. Borgohain, *Nirupama: Sei Nadi Nirabadhi*, p.3

27. Borgohain, *Nirupama: Biswas aru Sangsayar Majedi*, p.163

therein, the high school by the pond of Gangapukhuri etc. However these things are to be seen in the Sunkeria village, next to Simalia village. The novelist had also included the legend that was in the belief of the people about the digging of the pond. It is said that the water of the Gangapukhuri had been restored by putting in the water from holy river of Ganga; and hence many wise people had seen there the golden boats of gods.²⁸

Nirupama Borgohain's *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* is another beautiful specimen of region novel in Assamese literature. The novelist developed her storyline in the setting of Dhalkuchi village by the bank of river Pagladia. The novel produces two parallel story of two girls- poor Pateswari, who is the inhabitant of Dhalkuchi village and Anjali, who has been brought up in the big town and well educated as well. Beautiful Pateswari was just like the pearl in the shell; like the lotus grown out of the mud. But her poverty always hindered her from what she actually deserved. Rather, she became the victim of the evildoers only because of her poor background. Pateswari was compelled to lead a life of utter poverty who received no aid and attention from her society. In fact, the novelist intended to depict the fact that most of the people in the Dhalkuchi village had to live an unnoticed life due to poverty. They were mostly ill-fed and ill-treated. Along with misery, they were always grabbed by social evils. Poor Pateswari got her small daughter employed at other's house and even did not hesitate to provoke her to steal to meet their needs. Another character Pramila was shown to repent after marrying an idle poor man and eloped with the rich *mahajan* (landlord) leaving her three year old daughter behind.

The post independence economic changes and its adverse effects on the poor people, especially the village people of Assam, has been presented in an authentic way in this novel. It is shown that the poor residents of the region,

28. Bargohain, Nirupama: *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi*, p.43

who were already troubled by the natural calamities like flood, famine, drought etc. are now in great disaster and hardship with the economic turmoil after independence. It became difficult for them to manage two square meals for a livelihood. Many went to town in search of livelihood. The induction of machines and industry threatened the age old cottage industry. Pateswari was compelled to sell her *Eri-chadar* (a kind of handwoven warm cloths) in low rate because the machine made cloths were of better quality and low price. Pateswari was pained to think that she might have to give up weaving.

*“Pater mukhar nirbikar bhab antarhit hal. Tai asahai mukhabhangi kari kale- Baideu ami buwa-kata eribai lagbu. Sehate seisupa mechinat buwe ba ekelage eksupa buwe, seikarane sastat diba pare. Ami ekhan buw- tenekoi sastat diba naru nahai. Bhagabane amar dare daridrar sakalu pinei maran milechi.”*²⁹

Many of the characters in the novel like Hareswar, Dharma etc. have taken refuge in Guwahati to earn their livelihood. Some small shop owners like Bakul, who has been happy living in his own village, are finding it difficult to keep his pace with big businessman. At last unable to compete with the Ramesh Sraugi, Bakul closed his shop and proceed to the city with the hope that he would find employment in some industry.

Thus the novelist tries to discuss the issue of migration from the rural to the town area in her novel. At the same time, she also has discussed in minute details about the loss of real values of the village life- its simplicity, integrity, virtues etc. This subtle reality of modern life has been depicted with a few examples in the novel. The old retired police officer Paresh Kalita dropped the idea of returning to village after he has been deceived by his own brother and friend.

29. Borgohain, *Nirupama: Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar*. p.58

The notable aspect of both the novels by Nirupama Borgohain is that they are river-centered and they highlight the degradation of the village life of Assam in the fourth decades of twentieth century at the time of Second World War. There came mainly in economic degradation; but it equally affects the moral, social and ethical sides of human. The traditional customs, rituals, feasts and festivals etc. along with the history and legends of the area provide a foundation for the success of these regional novels.

Silabhadra authored all his novels taking the Gauripur region of the Goalpara district as his background. We may discuss his *Madhupur*, *Ahatguri* and *Agamanir Ghat* under this category. The novel *Madhupur* does not have a well organized plot or storyline. It comprises some scattered scenes, incidents, characters etc. that the author produces from his memory to advocate the true nature of the region. Till the time of independence, the social, political, economic, and cultural setting of the Gauripur region have created two distinguished generations. The first generation includes the landlords and their followers who were capable of exercising their power bestowed upon to them by the feudal system. This aristocratic group of people is represented by landlord Dhirendr Narayan Choudhury, proud and boastful singer Narayan Bardeuta, rich businessman Narendra Narayan Choudhury who was the first to pass entrance exam in the area, and mentally disordered Ruhini Borah who spend most of his life after wine and women and lost his mental balance at the suicide of his wife etc. These people are the representative of so called elites of the society sitting at the ruins of their aristocracy, dejected and disapproved by the new generation. The second generation is represented by Kandura Gulam's grandson Prabin, Parashar Mandal's grandson Shami, the contractor Madhusudhan etc. The second generation is the representative of new generation- progressive, courageous and more active. This generation has discarded the age old practices of the so called ruined aristocracy and tried to set a new beginning of equality.

The old elite class felt dejected, who could neither maintain their own pride nor could keep pace with the progressive mind of the new generation. This social background is the key concept of the novel. The novelist successfully presents the social changes and its changing values with the help of historic evolution of the Gauripur region. The powerful landlords and the wealthy people exploited the poor peasants through the ages. They controlled the law and order, gave innumerable pain and suffering to the poor. The poor peasants, on the other hand were helpless. They have to accept the corruption of those unruly lords as the will of gods. But now the values of life have changed. Those people are no more wealthy and powerful as before. With the expansion of knowledge and education, with the changes of economic status, the new generation is no more tolerant to those so called people in power. They ignited a kind of revolution in the social system. The novelist beautifully upholds this idea in the following words:

*"We heard stories of how powerful the landlords were! They controlled the law and order..... the peasants obeyed 'you are our parents...'. But now the thinking has changed.... 'you have become rich by exploiting us...' that is what I am going to say. One episode ended and the other began. Corruption has not been over, but system has changed. The oppressed class is not ready to accept the exploitation as the will of gods. Hence the conflict aroused."*³⁰

With the changing social values, there came changes in socio-cultural and economic aspects of the society. The native of the Gauripur area felt oppressed, previously by the wealthy landlords, and now by the government. One of the characters Gajen felt every moment that the Goalpara region and its people are always ignored by the state government. They are always deprived from their due. Gajen expressed his concern in this regard.

30. Silabhadra: Madhupur, p.18-19

*"Isn't Goalpara a part of Assam. If so, we must get equal facilities and rights, or else...."*³¹

The novelist has also given a fine socio-cultural description of the region. Gajen's sincerity in editing magazines in Goalpara dialect, the landlord's sons going for cinema, the *jatra party* bringing from Calcutta, the singing council at the house of Narayan etc. explain the fine test of cultural life of the region. Moreover, the description of various festivals and the rituals also help in understanding the socio-cultural aspects of the region. The rituals in the Mahamaya temple, the sacrifice of a thousand animals and the distribution of those in every household etc. are some fine example in this regard.

*"The Mahamaya temple used to be packed with people during those days of puja. Though organized by the landlords this puja was open by all. There used to be one thousand sacrifice in that puja. Those were distributed among the people of Madhupur."*³²

The novelist has not shown any direct contribution of the Madhupur in his novel. However, it could hardly escape the atrocious influences of the Second World War. The surroundings of the Mahamaya temple witnessed plenty of temporary huts made of bamboo and thatch. There set an airport at four mile distance of the temple, the MESO office, central PWD office by the bank of the river etc. All these new inductions rapidly changed the outlook of Madhupur. These changes also have affected the inner mind of the people of the region. They become more busy now; more self concern and more materialistic. A sense of greed and lust for wealth grabbed there everyone.

Thus the novelist presented Madhupur on a changing social, political and economic background. The novelist sincerely presented the actions and reactions

31. *Silabhadra: Madhupur*, p. 4

32. *Ibid*, p. 29

of various characters, changing values, and tried to discover the various evolutions that took place in the small area in shorter period. Satyendranath Sarma rightly observed that the novel is a true representation of the contemporary period. It depicts the historic rise and fall, and the influence of changing time. It also highlighted the arrogance of the so-called aristocratic landlords, their humiliation towards the poor peasants, their fall thereafter with the rise of the new and progressive generation who aim to build a society with economic security:

“Madhupurar samajik utthan-patanar itihās, jugakrantir amugh prabhab, jamidarar swajati sakalar abhijatyar garba sadharan srenir prajar prati thaka abagyar bhab, jamidarar bilas aru badanya, phupula bhemake akuwali loi kalar ahban upeksha kari abakshayar mukhat para karmabimukh prachin sambhranta srenir arthik anishyatar sundar chitra upanyas khanat ase.”³³

In his another novel called *Ahatguri*, Silabhadra illustrates how a small unknown village named Perperia had transformed to the Ahatguri town. The novelist explored how the process of urbanization had brought changes in all aspects of the society, be it be social, cultural, ethical, economical and industrial. With the portrayal of all these changes, the novelist beautifully upholds the true nature of the region.

Nilambar is the protagonist of the novel, through whom the novelist has witnessed the old Perperia village and its transformation to a big town. At the time of the birth of Ahatguri town, Nilambar initiated himself as a tea-seller and emerged successful with his establishment. His success as a small businessman owe to his simplicity and sincerity. He saw with his bare eyes the small region growing to a big town. It became the centre of trade and commerce. The local

33. Sarma, S.N.: *Asamiya Upanyasar Gatidhara*, p.152

market opened twice a week, on Sundays and Wednesdays, where people came from far and wide. They came with their goods by means of bullock-carts and boats etc. Some obviously came on foot. People brought various items like rice, mustard seed, jute, vegetables etc. to the market. Many traders came from other big towns to buy those items. Rattan Saha constructed a godown to store these things. Khelia babu also made his own establishment. It became a great rush at the tea-stall of Nilambar on those days.

Apart from Nilambar, there are other characters produced by the novelist who helped in discovering various aspects of the Ahatguri region. It is rather those varied characters through which the novelist tried to showcase the good and adverse effects of urbanization. Some of the characters are Bin Boragi Natbar, the carpenter Lalmohan who devoted himself to build the Dhelkhowa Thakur temple, drunken Sitanath who sold rice-beer, Jadu babu who died a premature death due to his loose character, the truthful, sincere teacher Biren-master, the corrupt headmaster Robin Roy, the driver Bholababu who could not run his family and committed suicide, the poor Ramratiya who was compelled to become a prostitute after eloping to the town with a servant. All these characters from diverse sections of the urban society uphold the true brutal pictures of the impact of urbanization.

The urbanization and modernization have given a lot to the society, but it equally has taken away many goodies from human life. Urbanization has made a class richer but the other the poorer. The novelist showed his concern on the fact that urbanization may mean gain for some; it also brings nothing but pain and misery to many others. In the process of urbanization, the original local people of Ahatguri had to migrate from that place. Many of the residents were compelled to give up their land for the construction of roads etc. Many sold them for better price and left the place. Ahatguri is the dwelling of various

outsiders now. The original Perperia residents were hardly found there. The few there in its periphery were also in pathetic condition. Without having land for cultivation, these people have engaged themselves in unsocial activities. They became the stigma of Ahatguri.

During the early fifties, Ahatguri was compact with PWD workers who came to work on the construction of National Highway-32. Most of them were not native. They came from various places from far and wide. To supply them with tea Nilambar opened his establishment of tea-stall by the roadside. Gradually he saw plenty of varied shops and stores coming up in that area. The place was packed with government offices, hospital and many outsiders coming there for various purposes. The characteristic behavior of these diverse people gave a new identity to the place. Commercialization and urbanization brought artificiality. Various people like poor and rich, workers and employers live in the same place; they greet each other sometimes but hardly know each other. The race to success made everyone self-centered. The novelist provides beautiful description of this fact.

“Everything that should be there in a town is available in Ahatguri. There are plenty of beggars. They shout at the door before people get up from their bed. Rickshaw-puller, washer-man, barber, cobbler all live here. There are gentleman as well as pick-pocketers. Ahatguri is one of those many towns in Assam. More the number of people increase in the town, more they isolate themselves. They talk and greet without knowing each other. Each person is detained in his own cell. None bothers unless it is related to them. Each person is , as if, intertwined in a circle. They are busy in their own business.”³⁴

34. *Silabhadra: Madhupur, p.68*

The novelist beautifully describes the follies that comes along with the benefits of urbanization. His observation of gambling and wine selling in the open market highlights this fact. While discussing the historical evolution of Ahatguri region, the novelist showed his concern for the poor, grass-root people who are simple in nature and true to their minds. Treasury, mockery, corruption etc. are not to be found with them. That was the reason why these simple people had to quit from the place when it undergone urbanization.

Another novel by Silabhadra was '*Agamanir Ghat*'. The theme and background of this novel was similar to that of Ahatguri. This novel also does not have a well-knit plot as a whole. Here again is described the writer's personal experience of some incidents and occurrences. Agamanir Ghat is a ghat of the Gangadhar River. Once quiet and unnoticed, this area suddenly became a busy and famous centre of business. The newly constructed roads and other official constructions in the post independence period helped the Agamanir Ghat to turn into a lively place. The once silent place has now become noisy with the yell and cry of the contractors, truck drivers, boatmen, workers etc. The novelist himself worked as a contractor of supplying stone from the Gangadhar River. Hence, naturally he incorporated most of his first hand experiences in this novel. In his autobiographical writing *Madhupurar Smriti*, Silabhadra mentions that he has presented many characters and incidents from his real life experience. For example, Kandou's death caused by the zamindar's elephant in Agamanir Ghat was a true experience.³⁵

Thus, the reproduction of the true stories has helped the author to produce a true background for a successful piece of novel. Once again the novelist has tried to explore the region by presenting a handful of characters and their activities. Satyendranath Sarma observed that the novelist with utmost compassion has

35. *Silabhadra: Madhupur*, p.89

portrayed his characters with all their good and bad habits. Along with the portrayal of these characters, the novelist successfully upholds the regional characteristics of the novel.³⁶

Mamoni Raisom Goswami in her *Dantal Hatir Uniye Khowa Hawda* has taken the Amranga Satra of Jagalia as the setting and background of the novel. She has also included the area of Barihat, Sikarhati, Pat-haladhia, Heramad and Buatijan along with Jagali as it is the demand of the novel. In the preface of the novel Goswami clearly mentioned that she had her vivid childhood memories of being in the Amranga Satra of Jagalia in South Kamrup which motivated her to author this novel. She has presented some of her personal favourite characters in the story. In her own words:

*This novel is inspired by the Amranga Satra in South Kamrup. I spent quite a number of days in this Satra. Those days were the most memorable days of my life. Hence, though away for long from this Satra, the memories are still lively. The characters of the novel have been drawn from some of my favourite real character.*³⁷

The novel highlights the life and living of the Jagaldia region which is under the worn out practice of vaishnavite cult. It deals with the religious gurus of the satra and their disciples, the influence of the contemporary socio-political scenarios on the satra life as well as the region, and the rigid customary laws of the high class Brahmin people that basically made the woman suffer with agony etc. The chiefs of those Satras enjoyed all sorts of privileges. They were the most powerful people of the region, both in religious and economic aspects. They were the landlords who own most of the land in the region; their disciples were their peasants. They were considered the gods by their followers. But, the

36. Sarma, S.N.: *Asamiya Upanyasar Gatidhara*, p.153

37. Goswami, Mamoni Raisom: *Dantal Hati Unye Khowa Howda*, preface

influence of the independence movement, the rise of communist movement and the Ceiling Law produced by the government reduced the power of these people. They were panic that the ceiling law may confiscate their land property. At the same time the communist movement advocated for the ownership of land by the peasant who cultivated there. Such a social scenario and the collapsing social values of Amranga satra region was taken as the background of this novel by Mamoni Raisom Goswami.

The novelist also highlights the then social evil - the use of *kaani*, a king of intoxication that grabbed most of the people of the region. Most of the people became prey to kaani to such an extent that they were ready to do anything for this intoxication. Obviously some businessman and kaani suppliers took undue advantage to make money and tried to promote the circulation of kaani everywhere. The use of kaani made the people lazy and idle. The whole surrounding of Amranga Satra, Borihat, Sikarhati, Heramad etc. smelled with the preparation of kaani instead of full-grown rice. The fields became almost barren and the pathetic plight of the people knew no bounds. The novelist also describes various incidents like establishment of the hospitals in Heramad for the kaani affected people, arrest of Jukram Bhagabati for smuggling kaani, and the pitiable condition of his daughter thereafter etc. in a very sadistic note.

The plight of the women, who were bound by the orthodox and rigid traditional practices were also depicted pitiable. Mainly the widows like Durga, Saru Gusani, Giribala etc. who had to lead the most miserable life under the traditional customs. They had to live hard widowhood with the restriction of eating, talking and moving. The unmarried girls of the Gosai family were considered not only a family burden, but a social burden as well. Movements of the woman were restricted within the backyard of the household. They were not allowed to go outside or talk to outsiders. However, with the passing of time,

the youngsters like Indranath etc. came out of these superstitious beliefs though they couldn't change the minds of the predecessors. Thus the presentation of local rights and rituals, its dialects, use of legends etc. helped the novelist to produce a lifelike setting in the novel.

The setting and background of the novel Nilakanthi Braza is yet another successful edition in the fields of Assamese regional novel. The holy and pious Brindaban has been taken as the background of this novel. The novelist with her subtle observation noticed both the aspects of Brindaban- its holiness and its viciousness as well. None in the history of Assamese literature tried their hand in such a topic before Goswami. Observing the setting of this novel, Chandraprasad Saikia remarked that the novelist has crossed the geographical bar and installed an all India background. This reflects her broad and bold mentality. This novel reflects that there were no differences in the socio-economic aspects between Assam and that of the other places in India. Nilakanthi Braza is the bare presentation of the Brazadham Brindaban.³⁸ The true nature of Brindaban, its associated legends, historical monuments and religious environment along with its bitter reality makes a fine background of the novel. The musical and poetic language of the novelist helped creating a beautiful environment.

The exceptional theme and subject-matter of the novel gave it a new direction. The pious religious environment in one hand and the cruel reality on the other- these two diverse scenarios of Brindaban created the point of attraction of the novel. The novelist exposed the bare truth of the Brazadham with the help of the widow character called Soudamini, who went to take shelter there to find mental peace.

Thus a thorough discussion of the Assamese regional novels disclose the fact that river plays a vital role in forming the background of the novel. Rajanikanta

38. Saikia, Chandraprasad (edited): *Prakash, January, 1983, p.101-102*

Bordoloi's *Mirijiori*, Nabakanta Baruah's *Kapiliparia Sadhu*, Nirupama Borgohain's *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi*, *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* etc. were authored on the backdrop of Subansiri, Kapili and Pagladia river respectively. Moreover the influence of industrialization or urbanization and changing values of rural life found place as their background. The characters are simple minded poor people, mostly peasants. Most interestingly, almost all the regional novels were created on the backdrop of rural setting; man's intimacy with nature, their changing lifestyle under the gradual influence of urbanization, and corruption and treachery installed in their simple living as its result are upheld in these regional novels. The beautiful description of social customs and traditional rituals including feast and festivals added charm to the background of Assamese regional novels.

3.3: THEMES

A novel's theme is the main idea that the writer expresses. Theme can also be defined as the underlying meaning of the story. The theme of a novel is more than its subject matter, because an author's technique can play as strong a role in developing a theme as the actions of the characters do. A theme is a broad idea, message, or moral of a story. The message may be about life, society, or human nature. Themes often explore timeless and universal ideas and are almost always implied rather than stated explicitly. Along with plot, character, setting, and style, theme is considered one of the fundamental components of fiction.³⁹

Rajanikanta Bordoloi's *Miri Jiori* was a successful regional novel written on contemporary social-religious theme. Bordoloi, as a government employee, had to write articles for then commissioner Edward Gait on socio-religious

39. *Obstfeld, Raymond (2002). Fiction First Aid: Instant Remedies for Novels, Stories and Scripts*, p.1

aspects of the Miri or Mising tribes.⁴⁰ While doing so, he collected his own material for writing his first novel. As a result, he gifted his best novel written on the background of Subansiri River and its surrounding, inhabited by the simple living Miri people.

The novel deals with a beautiful love story of a couple of Miri boy and girl. The childhood friendship of Janki and Panei turned to love in their young age which was not approved by their families. Both of them eloped and wandered various places facing many hardship. Finally they were caught by another tribe of Miri people who after trial killed them and threw them into the Subansiri River. With this love story, Rajanikanta Bordoloi explored the social customs, right-rituals and life style of the Miri tribe who resided in hills. He also aimed to present a harmonious relation that prevailed among the hill and plain dwellers; at the same time the similarities and contrast among them could be noticed. This is the sole social novel of Bordoloi, rest being historical ones, which beautifully highlighted the Ghunakhuti village and the surrounding areas of Subansiri River claiming to be the first regional novel in Assamese literature.

Kapiliparia Sadhu was Nabakanta Baruah's first novel. Taking the setting of the Kapili river in the Nagaon district of Assam, this novel centers around the life and living of the people in the surrounding area, highlighting their hopes and aspirations, efforts and struggles, and consequence of life. The novel is enriched by the real life characters that the author experienced in his lifetime and presented them with the flavour of his creative imagination. In the foreword of this biographical novel the author himself acknowledged that the story on the novel is imaginary one, but the hero and his fellow characters are as humane as the author witnessed them every day. He further said that his imagination has not crossed the limit of writing a biography :

40. Thakur, Nagen(ed): *Exa Bacharar Asamiya Upnyas*, Dr. Mandira Goswami's article '*Rajanikanta Bardalair Upnyas*', p.332

*"Sadhutu mane garha. Kunubai iyat chinaki-achinaki karubak lag pale sambhab tar dukhe muk nuchuwe; karan Kapiliparia Sadhu eta galpatkoi bechi sachha nahai. Anhate moi atmaprasadu labh karim prachur; kionu sadhatur Rupai aru tar sangsparasat aha aan aan manuhbur mur manar chakut tej-mangahar manuhe. Ekhan jibanit jimansini prayujan tatko. besi kalpanar rahun, mur biswas moi charuwa nai."*⁴¹

The story of *Kapiliparia Sadhu* centers round its protagonist Rupai, the son of Dhir Sing. Dhir Sing did not have a son for long. He was very upset for the reason. He tried many doctors and wise persons, but in vain. Once, he found a small baby drifting on the flood of the Kapili river. Dhir Sing took the baby home and brought him up as his own son. This was Rupai. As Rupai grew up, he went to the local school of Master Betharam. But the Kapili river, which flows by the school, drew more of his attention. He liked the river, sometimes even bunked his class to sit by the bank of the river. After passing out from his school, his father sent him to the town to stay with lawyer Dinabandhu and study there. But poverty deprived him from gaining further education. Poor Rupai couldn't continue his study there. However, staying in Nagaon town got him acquainted with the freedom movement. Highly influenced by the slogans of 'Vande Mataram', 'Mahatma Gandhi ki jai' (long live Gandhi) etc., he too joined the procession of the movement and had to go to jail. In the jail he met many freedom fighters including Tilak Gosai. He was highly impressed by the ideologies of the freedom fighter who followed the non-violence ethics of Gandhiji. He considered himself fortunate to have gone to the jail for a noble cause.⁴²

41. Baruah, *Nabakanta: Kapiliparia Sadhu*, foreword

42. *Ibid*, p.35

But the beautiful memories of the Kapili River haunted him in the jail too. He could not forget his dear Kapili. After the release from the jail he returned to his dear village with a photograph of Mahatma Gandhi. Then he worked on reopening the village school which had been closed. In the meantime, he went to Tilak Gosai to get proselytize himself and initiate into the vaishnava religion. There he discovered a new human in the Gosai. Tilak Gosai refused to do the same. *He explains Rupai that both of them are the disciple of Mahatma Gandhi now; they are comrade now. Hence they should look forward for accomplishing their own tasks and responsibilities.*⁴³

Rupai learned the lesson of life from Tilak Gosai. He decided to discharge his duties and responsibilities. His concentrated on various works. With the help of Tilak Gosai and other villagers, Rupai reopened the school and engaged Basu Gosai the teacher of the school.

There came a great flood on the Kapili. Most of the villages were drowned. The people of Rupai's villages suffered a lot. Rupai flung into the action of rescuing the sufferers. He joined with the government servants who came for help and assistance. There in the flood, most dramatically, he found a girl, Sunpahi, swept away by the flow of the flood. This girl later changed the course of his life.

But the major incident that changed Rupai's life was the death of his father Dhir Singh. After the great flood, Dhir Singh died of diarrhoea. Rupai discovered the truth that he was not the actual son of Dhir Singh, as he was not allowed to perform the rituals of a son. This discovery shattered his life. So far, he considered Dhir Singh as his father; now he realized that he had none except the Kapili river in this world. He was disheartened. Depressed of his life, Rupai jumped into the Kapili to surrender his life. But destiny did not agree to it. He

43. Baruah, Nabakanta: *Kapiliparia Sadhu*, p.47

was rescued by the family members of Sunpahi. With the nursing of Sunpahi, Rupai regained his conscience and returned home. He stayed with his mother Rongili, Dhir Singh's wife, and engaged with his routine work.

At the same time, there developed a new relationship between Rupai and Sunpahi. They fell in love and started their secret meeting at night near the Gosai pukhuri. In the mean time, his family members wanted to get him married. Basu Gosai also insisted on the same. But Rupai was not ready to marry. He even could not imagine of marrying Sunpahi. For him Sunpahi was his goddess of love and passion. He just couldn't prison her at his own home. He couldn't deny his deep love for Sunpahi; neither could he accept her as his wife.

At this juncture, he realized that Sunpahi was pregnant. She was stunned at the indifference of Rupai. She could not tolerate Rupai's strange behavior. Finally she ended off her life. She was lost in the Kapili. Sunpahi's death could not affect Rupai at all. Very calmly he accepted it as the will of the Kapili, his mother.

Rupai was a changed man now. Sunpahi's death taught him a new lesson of life. Now he was ready to face the real life. Quite surprisingly, to Basu Gosai and even for the readers, he was now ready to get married. Basu Gosai felt as if Rupai was a stranger.

This story of *Kapiliparia Sadhu* highlights that life is not just a congregation of some realistic incidents; it is rather an assemblage of mysterious feelings and happenings. These feelings become the epicenter of great experience of love, hatred, struggles, gains and dejections. In the discussed novel, the story progresses discussing all the above mentioned themes centering round the protagonist Rupai. Inspired by the ideologies of truth and non-violence of Mahatma Gandhi, Rupai could not maintain the preaching of truthfulness. He

was involved in an illicit love affair with Sunpahi, but couldn't mentally prepare himself to marry her. Rupai emerged to be a mystery like the Kapili itself whom others could never understand. The Kapili river which becomes the source of all misery to the people also gives them the path of living. The great flood caused by Kapili ruins the morals of the natives, but it also paves the way of a new beginning. The action of the river seems to be mysterious. So does the nature of human. Rupai himself saved Sunpahi's life discarding the dangerous flood, but again he compelled her to embrace death by not accepting to marry her. Thus the mysterious nature of human and its association with mysterious Kapili River becomes the main theme of *Kapiliparia Sadhu*.

Similar to *Kapiliparia Sadhu*, Nirupama Borgohain's *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* is again a novel with Pagaladia River in its centre. This novel is themed on the love story of Dipu and Laxmi at the time of Second World War. Dipu was a ten year old young boy when he was brought from town to village by his father to get rid of hazards of warfare in the town. Being in the village, by the bank of Pagaladia River, Dipu met a village girl called Lakshmi and develop friendship with her. With Lakshmi he explored the geography of the region around the river. Pagaladia created some kind of mysterious inclination in the mind of Dipu. The legends related to Pagaladia, its un-resistible force, its madness, disparaging nature etc. were told to Dipu by Lakshmi. Dipu felt some sort of oneness with carefree wild natured Lakshmi. In the first half of the novel, the character of Lakshmi and the river Pagaladia were depicted more prominently.

The first half of the novel depicted the childhood of Dipu, the ten year old son of Promod Deka who took shelter in the village due to the fear of war and Lakshmi, the wild natured girl in the bank of Pagladia. Lakshmi played the active part here. Her character is marked by the wildness of her forefather Birendra Choudhury

*and the unpredictable nature of Pagladia river. Dipu is just like a puppet following her footfall. Lakshmi is his friend, philosopher and guide.*⁴⁴

After staying a few days at the village, Dipu returned to the city. The second half of the novel resumed after a long gap. Dipu is now an engineer, and Lakshmi a widow with a son. With his new job assignment, Dipu stayed in Nalbari. Unexpectedly he met Lakshmi one day, when he went to supervise the work on Pagaladia. Once again they became intimate, but the cheerful and carefree Lakshmi was no more. Now she was more matured, more responsible. Her behavior towards Dipu became more like that of a mother. The intimacy with Lakshmi made Dipu feel a new kind of emotion. He became nostalgic and old memories seized him gradually. He even withdrew his interest from Doli, whom his father arranged for marriage. He gradually showed his disinterest to go to the city and became indifferent with his office work. Dipu was assigned with a big task of supervising the work of embankment of the Pagladia River to control flood in the area. But due to his indifferent attitude, he could not concentrate in his work. As a result, the contractors made a weak embankment that was swept away by the flood of Pagladia leaving the villagers in a chaos. The flood also swept away the small son of Lakshmi. Dipu could not come to console her due to the force in the river. Thus once again their relation was shattered.

The first half of the novel disclosed the un-resistible force of the Pagladia and the people living thereby, with convincing portrayal of Lakshmi-Dipu relationship. The importance of the river was immense here. However, the second half lost that importance and attraction of Pagladia. The river at the end performed the role of the fate in separating Lakshmi and Dipu. The novelist in its middle part mainly concentrated on disclosing the mental state of the protagonists.

44. Sarma, Satyendranath: *Asamiya Upanyasar Gatidhara*, p.247

Thus losing its regional values, the novel elevate itself to a psychological level in the second half. The Pagladiya also lost its connectivity in the main course of the novel while the novelist depicted the mental struggle of Lakshmi and Dipu. However, the novelist tried to re-establish this link through the death of Lakshmi's son. The cordial relationship developed between Lakshmi and Dipu by the bank of Pagladia was swept away at the end by the flood of the river. The river was throughout present in the novel controlling the course of action, except in some part where the author concentrated more in the psychological aspects. The first half of the novel was more regional in nature with the description of all people and their living around Pagladia. Many of the minor characters like Mahidada, his mother, Bengani, Layantara etc., found in the first half, had not been developed inspite of the availability of enough scope of doing so. According to some critics the limited range of characters and the well-knit plot construction denotes much of the characteristics of a short story beyond its length :

“Upanuas khanat lekhikai ghatanawali su-sangbaddhabhabe binyas kara babe aru parswa charitra aru ghatanawalir bikas naghatuwa babe eta chute galpat koi bahu bechi dighal huwa swattweu chitigalpar paramparagata gathanik boisistyau upanyas khanat aase buli kaba pari.”⁴⁵

However the themes of the novel carry great importance as they reveal the rural social values of the discussed region. The concept of womanhood in a rural society is particularly upheld in the novel through the contrasting character of Lakshmi. Lakshmi at her younger age was totally opposite by nature what the society expected from a humble and submissive woman. But the cruel reality and traditional social values did not allow her to be so throughout her life. The character of Lakshmi reveals the fact that the bold-natured characters like Lakshmi

45. Thakur, Nagen (edited): *Exo Basarar Asamiya Upanyas*, p.638, Rajen Kalita's article

are always the victim of social norms which compel them to accept the tradition of society and surroundings sacrificing their own wills and aspirations. On the other hand, the character of Dipu reveals a typical man under the social boundaries, though sensitive and sensible in nature. Thus through these two characters, the novelist beautifully draws the unfulfilled desires of human life. The sense of loss in human life has been intensified by the devastating move of the Pagladia River. With this, the heartbroken pictures of poverty, the activities of the corrupt officials and the remorse of the others etc. are highlighted as the themes of the novel.

Nirupama Borgohain's another novel *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* also centers round the life and living of the people by the bank of Pagaladia River. The miserable life story of a beautiful girl called Pateswari in the Dhalkichi village by the bank of Pagladia has become the central theme of the novel. At the same time the novel parallelly deals with Anjali's hope about the village that has been shattered. Anjali was the daughter of Paresh Kalita who was brought up and being educated in the city. She had a lot of hope and optimistic views about village where she always aspired to live in but the true picture of the village- its suffering, misery, poverty, moral degradation etc. shattered her dreams. The struggle of Pateswari in the village for her survival on one hand and the viewpoint and analysis of Anjali- these two aspects denote the main theme of the novel.

The easy-going simple minded beautiful Pateswari fell in love with Pujan and eloped with him to the city. After staying a few days together at a hotel, Pujan left her and ran away. The hotel boy Sabin helped her in her bad days. He arranged to keep her in a woman heritage home in Jalukbari, where she gathered worldly experience. After some days Sabin married her. Now Pateswari became the victim of the hotel owner. The crude owner proposed Sabin to offer his beautiful wife. Poor Sabin had no choice. His poverty and helplessness could

not but accept the offer. Pateswari was compelled to become a victim once again.

Pateswari became the mother of three children. Just before the birth of the fourth one, Sabin expired. Thereafter Pateswari returned to village, but she got no peace of mind. Here again a man called Lalit started disturbing her. But Pateswari saved herself this time. Her continuous struggle against poverty taught her to be bold enough to face life. However, the same struggle and its miseries ruined her splendor look. Her beauty decayed. Now she even sometimes get shocked to see she own image in the mirror. The bitterness of woman life is aptly highlighted in the novel. The second-rate treatment to the women by the prevailing patriarchal society is criticized by the woman character in the novel. Pateswari found it difficult to accept that the women are the victims all the while. They always tried to find a history in the character of a women, but men are always beyond any judgment. What a man did in the previous days was always ignored, but a woman had to suffer for her whole life due to the mistakes she committed. With reference to the character of Rekhadi, the novelist raised this serious issue through the mouth of Anjali.

*History? History? But only women have history, men don't! Similar to Pateswari, Rekhadi also has history, but the man who ruined her life did not have any history. Unlike Rekhadi, his family life was not shattered by the history!*⁴⁶

Thus the uneducated village girl Pateswari and the educated city girl Rekhadi faced the same plight in this man dominated society. But they were helpless. Moreover Pateswari was compelled to send her daughter Sabitri to work in a household in city to meet financial needs. She was paid only ten rupees per month, whereas a boy servant was paid twenty or more. This unequal

46. Bargohain, Nirupama: *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar*, p.23

status of woman compared to that of man in society was themed in the novel. The theme of social disparity brought a kind of social realism to the novel. The characters like Anjali, Rekhadi etc and their observation of life upheld the concept of feminist ideologies. The beautiful regional aspects of the novel, the description of life and living of poor people in rural and urban areas etc. are hindered from the introduction of social consciousness. The novel also has some loose addition of characters and incidents; the novelist increased the volume of the novel by giving a detailed description of all these characters only to uphold the idea of social injustice towards women.

As a whole the novels deals with the themes of exploring the regional nature of a small village, the adverse effect of modernization and urbanization on the village life and its moral values, the social inequality between man and woman, the deprived status of woman in society etc. Unlike Borgohain's previous novel, this novel is not a novel of the river Pagladia; rather it is a novel of the people around it. On this context it is a beautiful regional novel. The regional tone of the novel is further confirmed by the geographical description of ashrama of Bhagibaba, Gangapukhuri etc. along with the portrayal of the characters soiled to its native.

The industrial and urbanization has of course brought commercial prospect. But it also brought the end of the valued lifestyle not only in the urban areas, but the rural areas as well. The adverse effect of commercialization has axed the moral values of the rural living. The simplicity and virtues of the easy-going village people were buried; and treachery, mockery and corruption took birth in its place. The shattered human relationship and disloyalty grabbed the village people. Lives became harder in the village. Acquiring a square meal became difficult for the villagers. The economic condition of the villages in the post-independent period was depicted in the novel. For survival, the poor people

moved to the cities. Gobinda Prasad Sarma observed that 'the novel was depiction of the economically backward village people migrating to the cities for livelihood and facing there cruel realities of life'.⁴⁷

Moreover the novel aims at analyzing and experimenting various socio-economic obstacles faced by the women in a society. This issue was exposed through the chief female character Pateswari. But no attempt was made to correct any of the social follies. The novelist remained quiet only in exploring those issues and left it for the awareness of the readers.

Silabhadra's novel *Madhupur* which was written on the backdrop of the semi-urban area of Gauripur, in the district of Goalpara does not carry a well maintained plot. The novel reflected various episodes of developing Madhupur area in the early fifties immediately after independence. The diverse incidents and episodes were self sufficient, yet they were connected intently by the regional nature of the place. The main themes of this novel are social realism and changing values of time.

The influence of Indian independence movement and the downfall of the feudal system brought a typical change in Madhupur region. The common poor people turned up with new hopes and aspirations who so far were dominated by the aristocratic power of the landlords. They were motivated by the progressive thinking of the new generation. They were no more ready to accept the tyranny of their lords as the will of God. Education spread all over, many engaged themselves with trade and commerce with the changing scenario of the place. Many grabbed the opportunity of getting government jobs. The old wealthy generation with all their aristocracy and idleness was unable to compete the new progressive minds. With their fixed income from the tax-revenue, the landlords

47. Bargohain, *Homen (Edited): Asamita Sahityar Buranji, Part-VI, p.146, Goninda Prasad Sarma's article Asamiya Upanyasar Dhara.*

could not maintain their lifestyle. Their life became stagnant and they were left behind in the race of life. However, these landlords did never accept the same. Neither could they gain the benefits of the education and industrialization; nor were they able to maintain their aristocracy. Their vanity and pride turned to depression. Satyendranath Sarma rightly observed that the main theme of the novel is to disclose the decay of the feudal society and the emerging of the new progressive class.⁴⁸ There were two distinctive classes of people- one powerful earlier but at the edge of ruin now; and the other which was oppressed before but now shaped their own fate with the help of their intellect and progressive minds. Sarma with beautiful words discusses the downfall of the so called aristocracy.

The novel also discussed the influence of changing time. Nothing is permanent in this world, neither power nor position; but one who is ready to accept the changes in due course of time and proceed ahead with it can progress in life. The novelist produced the changing scenario of the Gauripur area in the late 1940's.

Madhupur is not a historical novel of the Gauripur region, neither the author attempted to do so. Nor it was a place of historical importance. Yet, the novel bore a beautiful impression of time on the place and the changes it brought along with. The novel is indeed a type of historical occurrences in small episodes. It deals with the decaying history of a once powerful generation and the rise of the common people with new insight and outlook. How the impact of the Second World War ruined the existing feudal system ending the miseries of the poor is wonderfully presented in this novel.

Another novel *Ahatguri* is a close and minute observation about a small village called Perperia turned to a town called Ahatguri. This happened under

48. Sarma, Satyendranath: *Asamiya Upanyasar Gatidhara*, p.263

the influence of urbanization when the National Highway-32 was being constructed through that village. The social and economic evolution of this newly developed place, its social life and living, installation of urbanization and modernization, the undignified social and ethical values as its result etc. are the themes of this novel.

During the time of construction of the National Highway-32, the calm and quiet Perperia suddenly became boisterous and lively. The highway passed through this small village. The crowd of workers, the noise of vehicles etc. broke the silence of the place. The big banyan tree by the bank of Gadadhar River became the convenient place for the workers and the travellers to rest. Many small business establishments emerged nearby the tree that spread rapidly and tuned to a big market area. The banyan tree was the centre place of development for which it was labeled as Ahatguri (the spot of banyan).

Between 1948 and 1955 the new town emerged out of a small village. Under the influence of urbanization, Ahatguri became the centre not only of trade and commerce but also of education and culture. Many rich people from outside the town came for business and became resident of the place. On the other hand, the old native dwellers almost vacate the town selling their land and moving to other places. Those who are still there were in pathetic condition, as if they were unable to keep the fast pace of changing time. The issue of migration towards the urban area and the old traditions giving away to the modernism is yet another theme of the novel.

The original inhabitants of Peperiya had vanished. None know where they have gone. None can say whose fault it was- their inability or their lack of foresightedness. However, the truth is that they have accepted their defeat in front of those outsiders

*who are more capable and more intelligent. They have retreated. This is nothing new. This is the trend of history.*⁴⁹

Along with modernization and urbanization came its virtues and vices. Ahatguri became a big town. Social, economic, cultural and educational advancement took place there. School, office, buildings etc. were established as a mark of progress. However, the general human values like simplicity, generosity, loyalty etc were gradually vanishing from the society. These values were replaced by vanity, corruption, treachery, hypocrisy etc. Human selfishness and self-centeredness affect the lives of the wise people. As a whole, human became more mechanical in the new world. All these changes are due to the impact of urbanization, according to the author.

However, the novelist was successful in presenting the incidents and characters under observation, though all came from his own personal experience. His microscopic observation and description of the native of Perperia and their miseries were not sympathized at all; nor did he blame the adverse influence of urbanization. With an unbiased observation the novelist upheld his theme in the novel. There lies the success of Silabhadra as a novelist. The novelist beautifully presented the impact of time and influence of urbanization in Ahatguri.

Like *Madhupur* and *Ahatguri*, the other novel *Agamanir Ghat* also failed to deal with a well-knit plot structure. However, the novelist, once again, successfully presented his theme of changing values of human society along with the influence of urbanization and changing time. *Agamanir Ghat* was a quiet spot on the bank of Gangadhar River. Suddenly the place became a busy one under the influence of industrialization, as the workers gathered there to collect stones from the depth of the river. The crowd of contractors, workers, boatmen, drivers and the noise of trucks and other vehicles made it a centre of business

49. *Silabhadra: Ahatguri, p.51*

place. The new look of the place, the difficulty and complexity faced by the natives of that area, the congregation of various people coming from all around and their mixed ideology etc. were disclosed in the novel. With these were presented the socio-cultural, economic and political aspect of the Gauripur region. The novelist successfully highlighted all these aspects by presenting a series of episodes and various characters installed therein. All these characters and the incidents helped the novelist to explore the true nature of the region. Like Wessex in Thomas Hardy's novel, Silabhadra concentrated his focus in the Gauripur region, as if discovering each part of the region and exploring its man and manner is the chief aim of the novelist.

Manoni Raisom Goswami's *Dantal Hatir Uniye Howa Hawda* is another noteworthy regional novel in the history of Assamese literature. This novel is themed on the decaying tyranny of the orthodoxy in the Brahmin families of the Amranga Satra in Jagaldia at South Kamrup. Those religious heads and their families gained social, political and economic power and position in the contemporary society. But due to their rigidity and unprogressive nature, those wealthy classes met their doom. The main theme of the novel is beautifully symbolized in the title of the novel. Dr Gobindra Prasad Sarma analyzed that an elephant with tusk suggests strength while the howda on its back hints at the richness of its owner. But that howda is now worm eaten which speaks of the waning glory of the wealthy owner. The theme of the novel is thus suggested by this title.⁵⁰

The social inequality and social injustice towards women also stood as another theme of the novel. Women became the victim of social conventions. Giribala, Durga, Saru Gosani, Iliman are examples of oppressed woman characters. The unmarried old girls were considered as burden and shame for

50. Sarma, Gobinda Prasad: *The worm eaten howda of a Tusker. Indira Goswami (Manoni Royson): A critical study of her writings (ed), Malaya Khound, p.59*

the family. Even the women of those wealthy families were not allowed to go outside the household boundaries and met outsiders. Durga was made responsible for the premature death of her husband. The widow in that period had to live a life of hell. They were deprived of hygienic living, healthy eating and the minimum luxuries in their life. Girls were even deprived of basic education in the schools as the customs did not allow that. The pathetic conditions of those unfortunate women were vividly portrayed in the novel. However the novelist did not try to make a revolution against this issue. The male dominated social customs were simply accepted by the unfortunate women. Male keeping more than one wife hurt them, but they never opposed. They were sad, but not vindictive. Women were portrayed graceful with all feminine tolerance. Bound by orthodox customs, characters like Guimenni etc. accepted all injustice bestowed on them by the male.

The influence of freedom struggle, the use of intoxicating *kaani* by the Assamese society and its adverse affects, government's aids to remove this social evil etc. also appeared as the sub-themes of this novel.

Another strong and unconventional novel by Goswami is Nilakanthi Braza, which depicts the unexplainable pain and suffering, and the malicious reality of the so called holy places like Brindaban etc. that was experienced by a widow called Saudamini. The novel exposes the other side of the hindu religious places which are generally considered as pious. The novelist highlights the oppression and domination on the widows who stayed in Brazadham as Radheshyami. The poor widows, ignored by their social tradition, came to the holy place to lead a peaceful leaving in the rest of their life. But the cruel social system did not let them do so. They became the victims in every step of their life, even in this so called holy place.

This beautiful novel of Mamoni Raisom Goswami aims at revealing the bitter truth of the dogmatism of Hindu tradition and the inhuman customs

bestowed on the poor and helpless people in the name of religion. Corruption, treachery, dishonesty at each level of the society and the lack of security for woman, basically the widows, in such a society form the chief theme of the novel. The novelist mercilessly presented her observation of sorrows and sufferings of the Radheshyamis in creative genre that she had experienced in the Brazadham. Translating Kamala Ratnam's comment on the theme of the novel, Dr. Namita Deka said that Nilakanthi Braza was an artistic outcome of the novelist's gathering of experience from Brindaban and other religious places. The novel was a subtle portrayal of the untold story of the young widows who were living an unfortunately deprived and unnoticed life, only busy in accumulating a few rupees for their own funeral after death. This is an unbelievable story, but true. The novelist's attempt to write on this theme was no less than announcing a crusade against the women's agony.⁵¹ The novelist launched this crusade through the rebel of Saudamini, a high caste hindu widow who fell in love with a Christian man but could not dare to marry him. The work of nun could not bring peace to her mind. She came to Brazadham looking for a little peace of mind; but got shock to witness the dirty picture of physical abuse done to the young widows taking shelter in the Ashrama. Saudamini was not ready to accept this life. She accused Raichoudhury and others for such injustice and stood boldly against it. However, she embraced her death to establish her protest.

Thus a close discussion of the regional novels in Assamese literature reveals that they are rich with varied themes, though the basic idea is to highlight human relationship with the nature and their life and living amidst it. Truly speaking, the village life or the rural life became the chief matter of presentation in the regional novel. However, they also insisted on the impacts of changes that the rural areas experienced due to industrialization, urbanization and modernization.

51. Thakur, Nagen (edited): *Exo Bachcrar Asamiya Upanyas*, Namita Deka's article "Manoni Raisom Goswami Upanyas", p.662

The contemporary socio-economic and political scenario like war, freedom movement, class division, corruption etc. have also found place as themes in the regional novels.

3.4: TECHNIQUE

The Assamese literature, basically the novel, is the outcome of the influence of western literature. Eventually it also draws its inspiration from Bengali literature which was “the first Indian literature to be influenced by the western development.”⁵² With the development and growth of Assamese novel, it also experienced a kind of variation in regard to its technique along with its themes. The experiments with themes and technique are seen more in the post-war period compared to that of its prior age. Discussing the technique of Assamese novel, Dr. Krishna Kumar Mishra wrote:

“The history of the development of Assamese novel is similar to that of the growth of western novel. Starting from Gohain Baruah and Bezbaruah to the days of Birinchi Kumar Baruah, the novel followed a typical set pattern. A well-set story, a suitable background, and a few characters were the asset of the novel in these days.”⁵³

However the post-war turmoil in the socio-economic and political sphere also brought noticeable changes to the field of Assamese novel. The novelist, being the part of the prevailing society, witnessed the social changes and adopted them to incorporate into their writing, for which they introduced and experimented with new themes and techniques. ‘Along with the introduction of new themes

52. Kabir, *Humayun: The Bengali Novel*, p.3

53. Mishra, Krishna Kumar : *Birinchi Kumar Baruah and Prafulla Dutta Goswami Upanayas*, p.23

into their novels the post-war novelists also brought about significant changes in the art and technique of the novel."⁵⁴

Rajanikanta Bordoloi's *Miri Jiori* was written in the early age of the growth of Assamese novel. As a matter of fact, it is much conventional in regard to its themes and techniques. As it is being observed that the initial stage of the modern Assamese novel, however, was mediocre so far as technique was concerned. The novelist concentrates in a conventional love story of Janki and Panei that undergoes a lot of challenges and finally meets their doom. However, while doing so, the novelist's pictorial details of the tribal customs of the Miris and their relations with the plain Assamese is commendable. Written in a simple narrative, this novel is not technically perfect; but one should judge it only from the view point that it has given a perfect start to the field of Assamese regional novel.

Nabakanta Baruah's *Kapiliparia Sadhu* is a perfect embodiment of theme and technique for the genre of regional novel. The novelist employed his poetic genius to write out this biographical novel. In his precise novel, the novelist establishes that environment and setting always serves a great purpose in the development of events and characters of the novel. Bordoloi has, in true sense, created a regional novel. The novel basically tries to explore the mystery in nature and its mysterious relationship with human world. Hence a lot of unnatural and unreal events and circumstances have been introduced here. The novelist makes excessive use of marvellous for which he is often criticized. The novelist did not concentrate much in the development of character. In the attempt to establish the nature-human relationship, Baruah's protagonist remains mysterious and ambiguous.

54. Deka, Umesh : *postwar Assamese Novel*, p.79

Nirupama Borgohain's *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* and *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* are written in conventional narrative form, with simple poetic language, the novelist brings home the lives of a handful of characters living and being controlled by nature. The novelist has drawn the mysterious nature of Pagladia and with it the character of Lakshmi. The novel is well planned and well executed with limited number of characters and incidents for which it contains certain characteristics of a long narrative story. The second half of *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* is essentially psychological, showing a little influence of stream of consciousness technique, while disclosing the mind of Dipu. The novelist has put special attention in the development of characters. Her Lakshmi, Dipu and Pateswari are finely grown up characters that establish the novelist's excellence in art of characterization. Most importantly the novelist uses the river Pagladiya as the leading character of the novels. Apart from it the use of symbols, marvelous, allusions etc. and the use of poetic language make both the novels beautiful addition in the field of Assamese literature.

Silabhadra's novels, though traditional in nature, have employed modern techniques. *Madhupur* and *Agamanir Ghat* are written in autobiographical method in a first person narrative, whereas *Ahatguri* is written in third person narrative. Silabhadra did not develop a well-knit plot or storyline in any of his novels. Rather they project some episodes of his experience in bits and pieces. The novelist used flashback technique by recollecting the past events. So far as the art of characterization is concerned, there are hardly any well developed characters in his novel. All of his characters are profile characters- half drawn and incomplete. His characters are led by the circumstances, not that the characters lead the circumstances.

Mamoni Raisom Goswami is probably the most successful and most celebrated novelist in terms of using techniques among the discussed regional

novelists. She is excellent in her portrayal of characters, use of symbols and marvelous. Her novel *Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda* and *Nilakanthi Braza* are the masterpieces of in the list of Assamese novels. The title *Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda* itself is symbolic that reflects the ruin and decay of the ancient institution of Satras and its power. The novelist uses other numerous symbols along with the characters like Giribala, Jagannath the elephant, Indranath etc. with symbolical significance. Goswami's novels are essentially poetic, though she never wrote poetry. Her *Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda* is like a long poem packed with beauty.⁵⁵ Use of similes, imageries, allusions and symbol etc. made her novels packed with beauty. Goswami is an excellent character portrayer. She created memorable characters like Saudamini, Giribala, Durga, Indranath and many more. Most of her strong characters are modern in their outlook and a rebel to the orthodox dogmatism. She brings or tries to bring a social revolution through her rebellious characters. Goswami also executed the stream of consciousness technique to disclose the inner self of her character. All of her novels are based on social realism.

The Assamese regional novels have essentially developed various conventional as well as experimental techniques. The use of technique, which adds to the enrichment of these novels, has a great scope of illustration. Hence, this brief introduction needs elaborate discussion, which is done in the fifth chapter in a comparative form with that of Thomas Hardy.



55. Kakoti, Saroj : *Asamiya Sahityar Anchalik Upanyas*, p.327 (Unpublished)

Chapter – IV

**THOMAS HARDY AND ASSAMESE
REGIONAL NOVEL - A
CONTEXTUAL COMPARISON**

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THOMAS HARDY AND ASSAMESE REGIONAL NOVEL - A CONTEXTUAL COMPARISON

4.1: REGIONALISM

In literature, regionalism refers to fiction or poetry that focuses on specific features- including characters, dialects, customs, history and topography- of a particular region. Since the region may be a reaction or reflection of the author's own, there is often nostalgia and sentimentality in the writing. The regional novel, thus, is the novel depicting physical feature, life, customs, manners, history etc. of some particular region or locality; not necessarily a factual reporting or photographic reproduction, but a highly creative work of art. 'The regional novel concentrates on a particular region of a nation being conscious of its characteristics which are unique to that region and differentiate it from other common motherland'.¹ However, the selected region becomes a symbol of the world at large, a microcosm which reflects the great world beyond. The greatness of the regional novelist lies in the fact that he surmounts the bounds of his chosen region, and makes it universal in its appeal. That explains the continuing and world-wide popularity of regional novels.

Thomas Hardy being the most important of the regional novelists of England deserves more space and attention. His greatness as a regional novelist lies in his depiction of Wessex, the most elaborate study of landscape in the English literature. He has stressed in highlighting the conflict between man and nature, reconstructing the aspects of regionalism in English novel, depicting the nature and environment of the particular region, Wessex, and the people therein. His Wessex stretches

1. Bently, *Phyllis: The English Regional Novel*, p.1

His Wessex stretches from the English Channel in the South, to Cornwall in the West, and Oxford to the North. It is this limited region which forms the scenic background to each of his Wessex Novels. The same physical features- hills and dales, rivers, pastures, meadows, woodlands, and heaths- appear and reappear in all his works. There is hardly a corner of the region that is left unexplored by Hardy in his novels. "*Wessex, one part of a small island, is his ground; and of Wessex, he takes one part in especial, the country of Dorset: he has rarely left it throughout fifteen books*"².

The major undertaking of Hardy was the firm establishment of his imaginative world of Wessex- geography, landscape, folk ways, agricultural pursuits, quaint peasantry- as a background of the drama of his main characters. Beginning with the slender idyll of *Under the Greenwood Tree*, he proceeded to the full-length pastoral of the sheep-country, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, and reached the height of his power in *The Return of the Native* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. And his remarkable achievement had been in the settings and ways of life that had impressed his childish imagination, at his father's cottage in a picturesque hamlet in Dorset. The somber beauty of the country and the quaintness of peasant ways and thought penetrated his spirit and become the very ground and substance of his imagination.

As a novelist, Hardy confines himself to one district of England, which he calls Wessex (the land of West Saxons). In fact, he gave this name to the district in which he was born and with which he was most intimately associated. He resurrected the old name of the locality, Wessex, which comprises Dorset, Wiltshire, Hampshire, parts of Berkshire and Somerset. There are certain natural and other features of the country within this boundary, which distinguish it from the northern and eastern district. The land abounds, with relics from the past- the

2. Johnson, *Lionel: The Art of Thomas Hardy*, p. 86

ancient Roman roads, walls, ruined amphitheatres, fortifications, burial vaults, mounds, the Stonehenge and altars of the ancient Britons. The surface of the earth is varied and undulating, valleys alternating with uplands, heath with deep woods, barns with luxuriant vegetation. The soil is chalky and white, and the principal occupation is agriculture.

It is rarely seen that a man of genius ties himself to his native place as closely as Hardy has done. What he has lost in variety of scenery, he has gained in accuracy of observation and sureness of touch. He was extremely successful in his observation of surrounding and reproducing it with his absolute imagination. *“Hardy’s power not only absorbs minute details and changes in the world around him, but links them up with human personality with consummate skill. His ears are open to every slight sound, he sees (and makes us see) every delicate shade of colour, and he constantly creates the illusion in the reader’s mind that he is in the actual spot described.”*³

Hardy has the power of presenting beneath the familiar surface, and shows that in spite of his restricted field of observation human nature is not wanting in richness and variety. He presented the towns, villages, rivers, hills and valleys of his chosen region in a thinly veiled nomenclature, which any native of the place can identify with exactness. Thus, his Casterbridge is Dorchester, his Budmouth is Weymouth, his King’s Bere is Regis, his Wintoncester is Winchester, and so forth. Within this area every road is known to Hardy, every legend, every relic of antiquity, together with hosts of family histories and traditions. This is why Hardy’s novels are also known as Wessex novels. His range is limited within the four walls of his region, Wessex. In all his novels, the scenes and characters are taken from this region. Brought up in a peasant community, Hardy is superbly successful in drawing the portraits of the natives of Wessex with all their tests, habits, likes

3. *Grimsditch, Herbert B: Character and Environment in the Novels of Thomas Hardy, p.41*

and dislikes, joys and miseries. Every event of his novel, therefore, takes place in this region. In fact Hardy's soul and spirit got mingled with the soul and spirit of Wessex people. It is noted that Hardy's art is mainly built as a result of his deep and sympathetic understanding of the short and simple annals of the poor Wessex people- farmer-labourers, hay-troussers, dairy-maids and shepherds and shepherdesses.

As a regional novelist, the greatest strength of Hardy is his presentation of people and their customs dwelling in the region he selected. These people living in Wessex are soaked in tradition, the tradition of a primitive class rooted in the soil, which is their function to typify. One may in them find the spiritual history of countryside: Feudalism, Catholicism and Protestantism, law and education and tradition, changes in agriculture and commerce and tenure, in traffic and society and living, all these have worked a wrought upon these people. They are as eternal as the wood and field and heaths.

It is observed that these folk display their thoughts and humours most racially and richly, when their talk turns more upon the common emotions, birth and death, and two or three intermediate affairs of the moment. Their talk is shrewd, rude of an earthly and material savour. Hardy makes them talk in such a language as with a smatting of Wessex dialect. He makes his rustics speak in Wessex dialect because he thinks Wessex dialect is the passport to our intimacy with the Wessex folk. However, he makes but a spring use of the local words of Wessex dialect because he properly understands that too much of these words or an exact phonograph of Wessex dialect will spoil his works. So he contrives to reconcile the demands of truth with those of art in a way which brings Wessex before our eyes and the echo of its speech resounds in our ears.

The Wessex folk are far from the madding crowd; away from the confused commerce of towns, and tumult and turmoil of modernization, in which nature

plays a direct part with what influence upon soul and body. For crowds and multitudinous traffic, these men have innumerable society of natural things, trees and winds and waters; they find companionship in creatures of woodland and the fields; their hopes, fears, experiences, sciences, their faith and love, sorrow and hate, are nourished by the Mighty Mother Earth.

These Wessex folk, fast rooted in the soil, have mental immobility i.e., orthodoxy. Their religion is represented as 'fetishistic': a primitive superstition about places and things, persons and practices, of a pagan original, and only disguised under a Christian nomenclature. They entertain many superstitions. They are impregnated with legendary lore. They lead a calm and quiet life, in the lap of nature and are deeply affected by it.

Hardy has a great love to depict men and women of strength and stability of character, of somewhat pagan severity, grand in suffering, simple and resolute. His mastery in the art of characterization is seldom questioned. He is most successful and obviously writes with most enjoyment when deals with the characters and the place with which he is most familiar and which he studied most accurately. But his success as one of the greatest regional novelists lies on his portrayal of immortal characters drawn from the common and lower class men and women who are deeply rooted and affected by the locality they live in. In this regard Goodman rightly remarked – "He is not much interested in middle-class respectability, and not at ease with aristocracy. But his peasants are integral parts of the landscape in which they live and move: the characters and the scenery form one organic whole, and they are inseparable without infinite damage to both."⁴ The portrayal of the rustic characters, which forms one of the basic requirements of regional novel, with due importance to draw the conflict and the desired tragedy into the story is a great strength of Hardy.

4. Goodman, W. R.: *A History of English Literature*, Vol.-2, p. 427

The peasants of Thomas Hardy do not form a class apart from the characters in the Wessex novels, for almost by imperceptible gradation, the background or chorus of yokels is connected with the principal characters who are higher in social scale. Hardy has protested more than once against the cityman's view of undifferentiated 'Hodge'. In *Tess of D'Urbervilles* he remarks that 'these rustic are beings of many minds, being infinite in difference; some happy, many serene, a few depressed, one here or there bright even to genius, some stupid, others wanton, others austere.' "The importance of these people varies with the social strata in which the several stories are set. In *Under the Greenwood Tree* we are in the midst of them; in *The Woodlanders*, they play a great part; in *Far From the Madding Crowd* and still more in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* they serve rather as part of the background and as a sort of chorus that observes and comments upon events."⁵

The peasants and rustics are part of the landscape. They are thoroughly at ease in their world. They lead unspeculative lives close to nature, never rebelling against circumstances. If they complain at all – and it is only the feeble among them that do so – it is usually of small physical ills of little moment. Hardy shows no concern for their 'social condition'. Often he seems to be out of sympathy with the advance of so-called education, believing that National Schools obliterate more of value than they give. He lays no stress on their poverty; in fact he declares that their misery has been much over-estimated. It is the rustic in the Wessex Novels who are happy, for the secret of happiness as is said in the *Woodlanders* lies in limiting the aspirations. They are quietists without being aware of the fact. Importantly they are necessarily unintelligent. Many are shrewd, some witty, nearly all unconsciously humorous.

5. Chew, Samuel C.: *Thomas Hardy: Poet and Novelist*, 1921

It is very obvious that it has been the nature; the immortal Wessex, its environment and the characters therein that has formed the background of Thomas Hardy's novel giving it the Regional note. His love for nature and its relation or rather domination upon helpless human is the chief subject matter of his novels. Here to draw conclusion the lines of David Daiches can be repeated-

“Setting his character in that southern corner of England he named Wessex, a large agricultural region steeped in History and slow to emerge from the older rhythm of rural life and labor into the modern industrial world, he saw them as elemental figures whose passions were doomed to run the course that the human condition set for them, figures who, contemplated against a background of immemorial and indifferent nature, of the recurring procession of the seasons, and suggestive and mysterious relics of the human past-Roman remains, Stonehenge or less tangible relics such as lingering folks customs and superstitions- acted out their general tragic dramas with a dignity imposed on them by the simple fact of their having to endure the human lot.”⁶

Hardy's greatness as a regional novelist is beyond any question or doubt. He has acquired a thorough knowledge of his region. He has described the features of his Wessex, its man and manners, nature and topographic scenery with great accuracy and realism. Hardy has revealed the beauty and charm of Wessex to the reader's eye and immortalized it. It must not be supposed that he inhabited a region with which none could compare in beauty, or that such spots exist nowhere else. What is true is that all these landscapes of meadow and wood, all these pictures of villages and rustic scenes are indebted for their existence and immortalization to Hardy. This wonderful observer discovered things which did

6. *Daiches, David: A Critical History of English Literature, Vol. 4, p.1073*

not exist for the ordinary eye. It is enough to travel in Wessex to be convinced that many a land become a realm changed with poetry and beauty, if only it finds the hand which will illuminate. Hardy is great in virtue of his penetrating and flexible interpretation of his native earth.

Similar to those in Thomas Hardy, the Assamese regional novelists also very successfully presented their regions with its entire local colour. Nabakanta Baruah in his *Kapiliparia Sadhu* depicted his native land in the district of Nagaon by the bank of the famous Kapili river. Baruah tried his best to explore each and every corner of the small village through the childish adventure of the main character Rupai. However the novelist equally emphasised in depicting the city where Rupai stayed for his study at the lawyer's house. Thereafter the novel illustrated the freedom struggle, Rupai's joining into it, going to jail and thereafter returning to his own village inspired by Gandhian ideology. Once again the setting of the course of action for the rest of the novel was the small village by the bank of Kapili River. Nabakanta Baruah beautifully depicted the relation between man and nature in general and the mysterious relation between Kapili and its people in particular. The novelist described '*Kapili is the life-force of the people living by the bank of Kapili. Kapili is a living river and it is associated with their life and death.*'⁷ The Kapili River played the same role that the Egdon Heath played in *The Return of the Native*. The people living by the Kapili River were just like her sons and daughters. The novel beautifully presented the mysterious relationship of mother and son between Kapili and Rupai.

Nirupama Borgohain's *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* explores the small village, called Simalia, by the bank of Pagladia in the district of Nalbari. This is not imaginary region. Rather, like Hardy's Wessex, this is also a real place touched by the author's creative imagination. The novelist herself revealed the fact that

7. Baruah, Nabakanta: *Kapiliparia Sadhu*, p. 3

she took shelter in Simalia in her childhood and these memories of her old days found a creative form in the novel.⁸ This novel highlighted the life of the people living by the bank of Pagladia river. She is the cause of 'will and woe' for the people. She provides them with their livelihood and also ruined them by her devastating flood. Pagladia, becoming the life-force of that region, controlled her surrounding. The central figure Lakshmi was entirely ruled by the mighty force of Pagladia. Like Kapili in *Kapiliparia Sadhu* and Egdon Heath *The Return of the Native*, Pagladia too was the central figure of that novel; and all the characters and incidents move round it. The novel also provided apt description of those things which are still available on the scene. A brief visit to the location would encounter one with the Bhogibaba's monastery, the arjun tree and the bakul tree therein, the Gangapukhuri and the high school near it. These real things still exist and can be witnessed in Sunseria village, next to Simalia village in the district of Nalbari.

Borgohain's another novel *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* presented the degradation of rural life under the impact of socio-economic changes after independence of India. The novelist took a small unknown village of Nalbari district as her setting and beautifully presented the pathos of the people living there in, giving a vivid detail of the area. He also brought the picture of the city to illustrate the difference between the city life and village life. Here again the Pagladia river played a very important role in the novel. The river, this time, did not dominate the scene like the previous novel; but it did serve as a link in the storyline, uniting all the incidents and happenings into an organic whole.

Silabhadra's novels explore the details of the Gauripur region in the district of undivided Goalpara. Madhupur gave a detailed picture of the socio-economic and political scenario of Gauripur along with the difference between the wealthy

8. Borgohain, *Nirupama: Sei Nadi Nirabadhi*, Preface.

the wealthy landlords and the poor peasants; and the conflict aroused between them. *Ahatguri* is another fine depiction of the changing situation in the region; the influence of industrialization, the influence of urbanization is beautifully handled in the novel. This novel explained the unavoidable and quick transformation of a small village into a big town. In doing so, the novelist with his own experience, provided with the details of once existing Perperia village and the newly set up Ahatguri town. *Agamanir Ghat* also is a successful reflection of the social, political, economic and cultural aspects of the west Goalpara region. It was, as if the second episode of the author's previous novel *Madhupur*. Written in an autobiographical style, this novel explored the physical locations of that region along with its inhabitants as well as the migrants who came there for work. 'Silabhadra's novels, as observed by Basanta Bhattacharjee, could make a kind of universal appeal, and this was done due to the author's sensitive inspection of his region Madhupur.'⁹

In all his novels, Silabhadra concentrated on analysing the true nature of the Gauripur region through the help of introducing various characters and installing various incidents. All this, being from his own experience, had been presented more realistically. He left no stone unturned to bring forth a true picture of the west part of the Goalpara district and present it in front of the world. In his own word:

"Our region in the west part of Assam is not seen anywhere in Assamese literature.....my Madhupur, Agamani Ghat,...etc. are written on the backdrop of my own region..... Today some of the people from other parts of Assam have come to know about Dhuburi. They have known about Madhupur i.e. Gauripur. They have heard

9. Thakur, Nogen : *Exo Basaror Asamiya Upanyas*, P. 590, Basanta Bhattacharjee's article : *Silabhadrar Upanyas*.

of Agamani, Gangadhar, Gadadhar etc. I shall proudly say that I have had my contribution in this regard.¹⁰

Truly speaking Gauripur has been the Wessex for Silabhadra. Silabhadra has done the same with Gauripur region what Hardy had done to popularise Wessex.

Mamoni Raisom Goswami's '*Dantal Hatir Uniye Khowa Howda*' is another beautiful specimen of Assamese Regional novel. This novel depicted the limitation of woman's life and their untold miseries bestowed by the traditional dogmatism; the devastated social system and its wasted human lives due to adverse affect of intoxicating *Kaani*; and the decaying social values and the vanity of the wealthy-powerful-royal Brahmins of the Amranga Satra. Goswami selected the Amranga Satra of South Kamrup for her region. The geographical location that the novelist explored was a specific region that included, apart from Amranga Satra, Borihat, Sikarhat, Pat Haladhiya, Heradom, and the surrounding area of Jagalia. With a scenic description of this region, the novelist reflected in her novel the hopes and aspirations of the people living thereby. The novelist's love for her region could be vividly experienced with the beautiful projection of the same. That might be the reason why Dr. Gyanendra Sarma Pathak compared Mamoni Raisom Goswami's intimacy and affinity towards her region with that of Scott's love towards Twida river and Morisus' love towards Thames.¹¹ It may be mentioned, without hesitation, that her love towards Jagalia region can be no less than Hardy's love towards Wessex.

Similar to Thomas Hardy, the Assamese regional novelists had also shown their great strength in preserving the people and their customs dwelling in the regions they selected. The people presented in the Assamese regional novels

10. Borgohain, *Homen (Edited)* : Satsari, 2nd Year, Vol. III (1-15 Sept. 2005) p.6 ; Bhabani Prasad Adhikari's article : *Katha Madhukar Silabhadrar Jiwan aru Sahitya Sadhana*.

11. Sarma Pathak, *Gyanendra: Sahitya Bithika*, p.115

were simple, orthodox and deeply rooted to their soil. They were intertwined with their folk tradition and folk customs. Nabakanta Baruah's *Kapiliparia Sadhu* is a fine example in this regard. Through this novel the novelist beautifully highlighted the way of preaching Vaishnavite cult among common people in Hinduism particularly in Nagaon region. The customary practices of Hindu disciple, obeying a religious Guru, the religious institutions like Satras and their systems etc. were discussed in the novel. The death rituals and the customary laws of death ceremony etc. were also find fine expression in the novel. Being a short and precise novel, all these customs and traditions were not discussed in an elaborate manner. Nevertheless, the novelist provided all necessary rituals of a hindu society, that prevailed in that region, with his poetic genius.

Nirupama Borgohain's both the novels *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* and *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* provide a fine display of social customs practised by the people living by the bank of Pagladia in Nalbari district. The people living in this region were agriculture based; and hence most of them were not financially sound. But they were generous enough to carry gifts according to their might, whenever they visited their relatives and others. Carrying a gift became one of their social customs. The woman in that region did not go without ornaments. Even the poorest of the poor wore something even though it was a duplicate one. "*Having no ornaments in their neck and wrist was against their custom. Only widow don't wear anything*".¹² Apart from these, practice of untouchability, considering widow marriage a social evil, domination on women by men in the name of tradition and custom etc. were shown very beautifully and elaborately in Borgohain's novels. The novelists concentrated and tried to expose those social customs which exploited women in a male dominated society and deprived them from their due. On the whole all the novels were successful in presenting an

12. Borgohain, Nirupama : *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* , p. 29

an unveiled reality of the socio-economic environment and the life and living of the village people.

Regionalism in terms of social customs and systems were very much obvious in the novels of Silabhadra. The author in his novels presented a convincing realistic picture of the Gauripur region. His *Ahatguri* is a descriptive novel whereas *Madhupur* and *Agamani Ghat* were written in autobiographical style. The novelist's real life experience had peeped through his writings, as Silabhadra himself mentioned that he had been a product of the geographical environment and socio-economic situation of Gauripur region.¹³ That was the reason that the local customs and rituals, practice and believes, festivals and celebration etc. found beautiful expression in the novels. The power and tyranny of the landlords, the pride and vanity of the wealthy aristocrats, and the weakness of the poor peasants determined the social customs in the contemporary society. Silabhadra discussed the virtue and vice of the feudal system that became the custom of the age. The new progressive generations advanced into new light discarding the old system that the old generation could not take for granted and there arose the conflict which made the central theme of the novel. The poor and low class people accepted all injustice meted to them by the landlords as if it was considered the tradition. However, things changed with time. Silabhadra beautifully highlighted that the age old customs and traditions which were orthodox and based on injustice were bound to change in the force of changing time.

Mamoni Raisom Goswami's 'Dantal Hatir Uniye Khowa Howda' is another beautiful specimen of regional novel that may claim sublimity in upholding the traditions and customs of the South Kamrup region in its contemporary period. The novel highlighted the customary practices that prevailed in the Amranga Satra and its nearby areas. The high class Brahmins that ran the Satra exercised

13. Silabhadra : *Madhupurar Smriti, Preface.*

exercised great power and enjoyed higher position in those days; and the poor and low caste peasants obeyed them and considered them their Gods. However the same customs and orthodox traditions suppressed the life of woman, basically the widows, too.

The rigidity of the customary practices and the sufferings of the common people due to them were beautifully depicted in the novel. The young girls kept at home without marriage is considered a sin, the widows could do nothing according to their will; they were devoid of all material pleasures. Ladies were not allowed to go out of boundaries etc. were the adverse affect of those contours, that robbed the woman out of their due. On the other hands the same tradition gave ample power and facilities to the man-folk, mainly the high class brahmin men. The greatest example is that the Satradhikar (the master of the Satra) was worshipped as a God, the cloths he stepped on was preserved as a pious cloth that was even used for curing disease. However, here again the novelist uphold her objection against those dogmatism and attempted to change them through the protest of the character like Giribala etc.

Festivals and rituals carry a very important significance to the folk life. Each region has their own customary believes with which are associated quite a many festivals and rituals. Presenting them became one of the main objectives of the regional novels. As it is available in Hardy's Wessex novels, one can observe Assamese regional novels containing a rich description of festivals of the concerned regions.

Rajanikanta Bordoloi's *Miri Jiori* is very rich with the depictions of rituals and festivals of Miri tribe. Along with the traditional customs and rituals of the Miri tribe, the novel also upholds the description of festivals as well. Charag Puja, Narachiga Bihu, Aoi-nitam etc. were beautifully and elaborately discussed

with beautiful bihu songs, and the young miris celebrating it door to door in the village.

*“Miri samajar deka-gabharue dhul-dagar pepa, gagana, taka, tal loi ghare ghare bihu mari takatu ba adhalitu gutaisil.”*¹⁴

Kapiliparia Sadhu also mentioned many rights-rituals and festivals of its society. Among them were Lalung Bihu (the bihu of the Tiwas), Mahjuj (bull fighting), Bhaona (Assames National Theatre) etc.

*“Bohagar pratham dina lalung manuhar bihu arambha hai – gabharu hate nache . siparar dekahate jukai – gabharuhateu chinare”*¹⁵

However, a detailed description of these festivals were not to be found in the novel due to its preciseness. Nevertheless, the novelist, with limited words and space, succeeded in bringing forth a rich cultural heritage of the region.

Sei Nadi Nirabadhi provided a beautiful description of Astami Mela on the bank of Gangapukhuri and the sacrificial rights at the monastery of Kali Gusani (the Goddess of Kali). The novel also highlighted the rights and rituals related to the marriage institution. *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* included a few folk songs of various activities confirming the regional nature of the novel.

Silabhadra’s *Madhupur*, *Ahatguri*, and *Agamanir Ghat* were not less than socio-economic documents of the Gauripur region. While giving an illustration of the social customs, the novelist also provided with vivid details of the major festivals and rituals of the region. *Madhupur* provided the detail of the Durga Puja which was conducted by the landlords. Naturally it was celebrated in a grand fashion to display the power and position of the wealthy class. *Agamanir Ghat* depicted Satya Thakur Puja, Charak Puja etc. Giving a pen picture of Charak

14. Bordoloi, Rajanikanta: *Miri Jiori*, p.10

15. Baruah, Nabakanta: *Kapiliparia Sadhu*, p.17

Puja, Silabhadra mentioned that it was observed to worship Shiva, the hindu deity. However this puja was restricted among low class Hindus who danced with madness and performed dangerous acts like walking on fire or thorns as a ritual of the puja.¹⁶

Taking a rural background as the setting, the regional novels normally displays the life style of agriculture based people. They are poor, but happy enough to lead a harmonious life with the nature. Rajanikanta Bordoloi's *Miri Jiori* depicted the beautiful cultivating land on the bank of Subansiri river, which provided the platform to Janki and Panei to fall in love which coin the cultural theme of the novel. Nabakanta Baruah's *Kapiliparia Sadhu* too discussed the work culture of the poor cultivators who accepted the devastating flood of Kapili as a boon, as they were helpless in front of it. Nirupama Borgohain's *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* depicted the contrasting nature of Pagladia- one calm and quiet, the blessing to the peasants whereas the other wild and destructive, the curse for them. Nevertheless, the regional novels also highlighted the changes in agriculture pattern that occurred in those days. The influence of trade and commerce affected the simple life style of these poor peasants. The world war, industrial revolution, freedom struggle, India's independence etc. brought noticeable changes in the life of the peasants. The materialistic approach of man motivated them to move to cities for better livelihood. Nirupama Borgohain's *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* very boldly projected these issues. Tired of Pagladia's destructions most of the people moved to cities for their livelihood. One who stayed back had been affected by the influence of urbanization. Silabhadra's *Madhupur* beautifully depicted the influence of education, trade and commerce which helped the new generation to get rid of all the atrocities of the landlords and wealthy class of the society. *Ahatguri* displayed the changing scenario of a place from cultivation to commerce whereas *Agamanir Ghat* was the tale of the poor daily workers. Just like Hardy,

16. Silabhadra: *Agamanir Ghat*, pp. 18-19

the Assamese regional novels are also set in quiet landscape away from turmoil of the cities; but at the same time the novelists like Silabhadra, Nirupama Borgohain etc. tried to display the gradual influence of modernity and urbanization and spoiling the quietness of rural life.

As it is seen in the case of Hardy's novel, the Assamese regional novels also presented man and woman of strength. They are too grand in suffering, resolute and simple. The folk presented in Assamese novels are far from the madding crowd, away from breezy commerce of city and deeply rooted in their traditional beliefs. These people entertained superstitions and legendary love. These orthodox beliefs and practices reveal the true nature of the folk psychology.¹⁷ Their presence in a novel may truly reflect the life style and social system of the region. In this sense the regional novels become the mirror of folk life.¹⁸ The folk life of Assam is packed with folk beliefs like—traditional customary practices, superstitions, belief in ghosts and spirits, dogmatism etc. Exploring these beliefs and incorporating them into their novels helped the novelists in presenting a true regional picture. Nabakanta Baruah's *Kapiliparia Sadhu* exposed a life of folk beliefs and practices. The novel dealt with the folk belief that ghosts and spirits did not have shadow, they are afraid of metal like iron etc. The practicing of worship to trees and plants, to river and water etc. found place in *Kapiliparia Sadhu*. The belief that disease could be cured by the miracle of some religious Gurus etc. were nothing but a kind of superstition that grabbed the society.

Nirupama Borgohain's novels also displayed and discussed the traditional beliefs that were associated with Pagladia river and its people. The people living by the bank of Pagladia pray and worship it like a living entity. The villagers did

17. "Loka sahitya aru loka biswasar majatei jatir manujagat aru jivanjapan adarshar parichay ulai." - Baruah, Birinchi Kumar : *Asomor Loka-Sanskriti*, p.1

18. Talukdar, *Lipika* : *Asamiya aru Bangla Anchalik Upanyas*, p.190

not take anything from the white soldiers thinking that the white disease would transmit to them.

Silabhadra also disclosed the traditional and superstitions folk beliefs that prevailed in this region at his period.

His novel depicted the social situation where women were deprived of education as it was considered fruitless. It was also believed that woman education may bring misfortune to the concerned woman or the family. On the death of a girl who was taught how to read, some local women commented

*“Why won't she die? You have got her taught like a boy, that is also English. So tough education, how could a girl bear it!”*¹⁹

The superstitious villagers believed that the girl died due to her education. The novelist also disclosed the superstitious beliefs related to feast and festivals, rights and rituals. People throwing stones in a particular temple to get their wish fulfilled is one of such example.

These orthodox customs and superstitious believes revealed the true nature of the region and its people. Thus, discovering the respective region, exploring its geography, investigating the people and their customs etc. the Assamese regional novelists, in true sense, generate an atmosphere of regionalism.

4.2: NATURE PORTRAYAL

Nature has always exercised a fascinating influence on minds of regional novelist. It is the nature of the particular region that dominates the theme and scenes of a regional novel. And it is undoubtedly agreed that Hardy was very successful in his portrayal of nature. If word picture could be hung on a wall, a

19. Silabhadra : *Madhupur*, p. 46

great gallery could be filled with Hardy's nature picture. He has a great liking for nature. He is in fact a worshipper of nature. Nature enters at his novels much more than it does in the works of other English novelist.

Hardy's novels are rich in description and scene-painting from nature. In his portrayal of nature, Hardy combines the method of Wordsworth, Clare and Cowper. Following the former Hardy too is fond of presenting a broad sketch of mountain, lake and sunset sky etc. whereas he also concentrates on the details of his sketches, like the later, with loving patient accuracy.

Nature is ever present in his story. With an acute discriminating sense of an observer, Hardy records every impression of nature with attention and at the same time analytical zest. His ear for the sound of nature is both sensitive and highly trained. He has broad and comprehensive outlook that takes in the smaller creatures as well as the greater. His sympathy to the little creature, the way he tells as the frost came on "many a small birds went to bed supperless that night among the bare boughs" or with the advent of spring "birds began not to mind getting wet". Though it appears to be playful and humourous but it often became charged with deep pathos, when the sorrows of animal world are shown to be not less than human one.

Hardy's picture of Wessex is the most elaborate study of landscape in English literature. For one thing, it combines, as no other does, breadth and intimacy. We find an example of this combination in the passage which describes Eustacia's lonely vigil on the night of the fifth of November:

"A tract of country unaltered from that sinister condition which made Caesar anxious every year to get clear of its glooms before the autumnal equinox, a kind of landscape and weather which leads travellers from the south to describe our island as Homer's Cimmerian land, was not, on the face of it, friendly to women.

It might reasonably have been supposed that she was listening to the wind, which rose somewhat as the night advanced, and laid hold of the attention. The wind - - - - - which continued as unbroken ever."²⁰

This passage shows an eye for the detail of the country-scene only possible to a man who had lived in it from earliest youth. Who else would realise that the wind made a different noise when it was blowing through hollow or heather or over bare stones, let alone be able to distinguish them? And his other senses were as informed as his ear. A page or two later, Hardy discriminates equally precisely the feel to the foot of path, of fern, and of heather. "To a walker", he says, "practised in such places, the difference between impact on maiden herbage and on the crippled stalks of a slight footway perceptible through the thickest boot." Yet this detail is made subordinate to a general picture. We are not shown the heath through a microscope. An eye for small facts is combined with an eye for the general scene. Indeed, some of his most memorable descriptions (like that of Norcombe Hill) embrace a still greater scope, and reveal their subject in relation to cosmic system. This scope is unique, and it gives Hardy's vision of the natural world a unique force.

Hardy's vision of nature dominates his scene. Nature was to him a symbol of those impersonal forces of fate with whom he shows mankind as being in conflict. In two of his novels, *The Woodlanders* and *The Return of the Native*, the setting is made to stand for the universe; and in all his successful works it has a symbolic value. Not a background, but an actor in the play, Nature is always present, the incarnation of a living force with a will and a purpose of its own, now and again taking an actual hand in the story (running Henchard's crops, killing Giles), but more often standing aloof, the silent and ironic spectator of the

20. Hardy, Thomas: *The Return of the Native*, pp. 60-61

human creatures who struggle on its surface. Nature always moves on its appointed course- waning to spring, yellowing to autumn, with recurrent punctuality, careless whether Tess dies or Anne finds her true love. Now and again the personality of Nature seems to step forward and with one tremendous gesture reduce the human beings in the story to insignificance:

With these words Yeobright went forth from the little dwelling. The pupils of his eyes, fixed steadfastly on blankness, were vaguely lit with an icy shine; his mouth had passed into the phase more or less imaginatively rendered in studies of Oedipus. The strange deeds were possible to his mood. But they were not possible to his situation. Instead of their being before him the pale face of Eustacia, and a masculine shape unknown, there is only the imperturbable countenance of the heath, which having defied the cataclysmic onsets of centuries, reduced to insignificance by its seamed and antique features the wildest turmoil of a single man.²¹

Nature plays a large part in Hardy's novels than in those of any other English novelists. It is not just the background in his drama, but a leading character in it. Sometimes it exercises an active influence on the course of the event, more often it is a spiritual agent, colouring the mood and shaping the disposition of human beings. The huge bleak darkness of Egdon Heath dominates the lives of the characters in *The Return of the Native*, infusing into them its grandeur and its melancholy; the solitary wistfulness of the wood is the keynote of sentiment of *the Woodlanders* who lives among them. As its title suggests, the distinctive mark of the characters in Hardy's second novel comes from the fact that they dwell under *the greenwood tree*. His most living characters are always natives of the countryside. Farmers and shepherds, thatchers and hedgers, they, most of

21. *Ibid*, p. 329

them, never stay beyond its borders. A few, indeed, go off for the fulfillment of their aspiration, like Clym or Jude departed to seek fulfillment in higher sphere, but they remain countrymen. However much they travel or educate themselves, they bear the stamp of field and village on every facet of their personality. Out of their original environment they are aliens. Indeed, so far as the motives actuating Hardy's stories are not motives of rural life, they turn on the conflict between rural circumstances and the aspirations of the rural individuals towards a more refined existence. Jude longs to satisfy his desire for learning; Eustacia yearns for the colour and luxury of life in Paris; Grace and Fancy hesitate to marry their rustic sweethearts because a glimpse of the great world has their taste fastidious.

Nature has been used in several capacities by Thomas Hardy in his novels. The influence of nature on humanity has been presented in different ways in his novels. Nature influences the moods and actions of Hardy's human characters. To understand the self-sacrificing love of Mary South, one must realize the spell of the brooding woods, the magic of the quiet, enduring tress whose life she knew so well. The strange, unearthly feeling of early morning to Clara in proximity to Tess; the tense, boring atmosphere while Gebrial Oak works to save Bathsheba's risks from burning- these and many other scenes show natural aspects working on the mood of the persons and through them on the mood of the readers. The influence of nature on human beings is best illustrated in *The Woodlanders*, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *The Return of the Native*.

Hardy's love for nature and the earth is an intensely personal and local one. He shows a profound feeling for the heaths and the pastures of Wessex. This feeling has little common with the transcendental love of nature felt by Wordsworth though it is reverse of Wordsworthian in its note of sadness and fatality. Unlike Wordsworth Hardy found much in nature that was cruel and

antagonistic to man instead of any holy plan or healing power. As in Wordsworth there is certain pantheism to be declared in Hardy's thought, a feeling that all things are children of Earth and bound up with her life; but with the novelist this does not lead to optimism or belief in the beneficence of nature. There is no Wordsworthian mysticism in Hardy's portrayal of nature. He does not represent it as the incarnation of a spirit 'that lives and moves through all things'. Mr. H. C. Duffin deals with the difference between these two great ones in nature lore by saying- "Hardy nowhere express the extreme inference 'that every flower enjoys the air it breaths'. For the definite formulation and acceptance of that faith perhaps the more transcendent vision of the poet is required."²²

Hardy has more realistic observation of nature and emphasizes on the gloomy part of it which Wordsworth ignored. Like most of the nature lover, Hardy too loves the open life among the country solitudes, feels and conveys the beauty of nature's external aspects. He admires the simple, rustic people who dwell far from towns. He too links up all life in one great family proceeding from the Mother Earth. But Hardy, at the same time, observes in nature other aspects too: cruelty, indifference and caprice. "On 'nature's holy plan' and on 'trailing cloud of glory' Hardy pours out his scorn. Nature is beautiful, yes, but she is the hapless instrument of blind law, and, as such, he is much convinced of her non-morality as Huxley was."²³ For Hardy, Nature is the agent of cruelty and destruction. She has no sympathy for human beings. For him all the resourcefulness, beauty, charm, bewitching power of nature are for the destruction of man. Hardy thinks that nature is insensible to the feelings of man, and finds a sort of fiendish delight in slaying simple human beings. Edgong Heath is the terrible spot where many lives are crushed. The virginity of Tess is ravished by Alec in

22. Duffin, H.C.: *Thomas Hardy: A Study of the Wessex Novels*, p.56

23. *Grimsditch*, Herbert B: *Character and Environment in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*,

the very lap of nature and not a word of protest is heard against the act by nature. Hardy asks- "Darkness and silence ruled everywhere around. Above them rose the primeval yews and oaks of chase. About them stole the hopping rabbits and hares. But, might some say, where was Tess' guardian angel? Where was the providence of her simple faith?"²⁴

To Hardy, man was simply a part of nature who was indifferent to his aspirations and went his way without caring much for it. Nature plays a great role in his novels. It is always present, the incarnation of a living force with a will and purpose of its own, now and again taking an actual hand in the story and sometimes standing aloof, the silent and ironic spectator of the human creatures who struggle on its surface. In two of his novels, *The Woodlander* and *The Return of the Native*, the setting is made to stand for the universe, and in all his novels it has a symbolic value. Such novels as *Under the Greenwood Tree*, *The Woodlander* and *Far From the Madding Crowd* etc. bear the sign manual of nature loving Hardy in their titles and the generous manner in which these novels fulfill the promise thus held needs no demonstrations. Hardy's nature scenery shown to us at any point in a story will be found to have an emotional connection with the events happening at that moment. Hardy has reproduced atmospheric effect, and it is done quite successfully.

No other novelist can render the sights and smells of the countryside with such evocative sensuousness, or surround daily tasks with such intimate tenderness. No one before Hardy had made the landscape part of the story.²⁵ His Dorsetshire, for which he retained the old name of Wessex, is a land of memories, where the hills are crowned with Roman camps, and where barrows hide even more ancient remains. It is a very old pagan part of England:

24. McEathron, Scott (edited): *Thomas Hardy's Tess of Dervilles: A Source Book*, p.115

25. Neill, S. Diana : *A Short History of the English Novel*, p.119

"Civilisation was its enemy; and ever since the beginning of vegetarian its soil had worn the same antique brown dress, the natural and invariable garment of the particular formation. In its venerable one coat lay a certain vein of satire on human vanity in cloths."²⁶

The landscape is always there in the novels, sometimes grimly smiling, sometimes frankly menacing, outstretching the little span of human life by immemorial aeons and dwarfing into pathetic insignificance the human tragedies played out before it as on a stage.

With his intimate knowledge of natural phenomena, Hardy makes his readers feel, by his delicate and multifold allusiveness, the significance of the life of the countryside. The individuality of the damp and fragrant woods; the meaning of the wind's voice, whether for storm or tranquility; the pre monitor of the tempest; the spirit of the heath at every hour of the day and night; above all, the mystic relation between the toiling peasants and the hills and valleys where they live and move and have their being.

Nature has always been a source of aspiration for the regional novelists. It plays a vital role in the Assamese regional novels too, as it is already seen in case of Wessex novel. As is the novels of Thomas Hardy, the Assamese regional novels also concentrate in a rich description of nature of the concerned regions highlighting its relation and influence on human beings.

Rajanikanta Bordoloi's *Miri Jiori* upholds beautiful nature portrayal. The villages by the bank of Subansiri River, their beautiful and scenic natural beauty inspire the life of the Miri people. They consider the Subansiri river as their mother. The flow of this river through the hills and jungles of the region was beautifully portrayed by the novelist.

26. Hardy, Thomas: *The Return of the Native*, p. 14

*‘‘Aair rupare sima nai, kataba bitupan habir majedi bagarise.
Miri hat aair kasat nathakilei nahai - - - - - aair sital batah
napale jiva nathake’’²⁷*

This extract is enough to exemplify Bordoloi’s art of nature portrayal. The novelist gave simple but attractive portrayal of the hills, dales, rivers and forest in the novel. The nature portrayal has nowhere been exaggerated in *Miri Jiori*. The novel beautifully shows how nature influence the life of people; mainly the Miri people in hills and valley by the bank of Subansiri. Living amidst nature, in the hills and jungles, the Miri tribe becomes fierce. They naturally developed the skills to face the natural calamities. The impact of nature makes them open minded. The nature girl Panei even didn’t hesitate to express her heartfelt love towards Janki.

*‘‘Janki tok moi bhal pao, tuk moi maram karu, saday tuk chakur
agat dekhi thaku; moi tuloihe jam’’²⁸*

While portraying nature in *Miri Jiori*, the author gave top priority in portraying the Subansiri river, which is shown as the life force of the novel. Subansiri is the Goddess for the Miri people. It has served the same purpose in the novel that the Edgon Heath did in the *Return of the Native*.²⁹ The river is the witness of the will and woe of the Miris. It is a character in the story of the novel. The Miris feel intimate with the river. They develop their villages by its bank; and live with her. The novel also depicts beautiful paddy fields of the Mising villages. The main love story of Janki and Panei also began in the beautiful green fields by the bank of Subansiri. The river and its beautiful nature helped blooming the love between these lovers and at the end home them after their death.

27. Bordoloi, *Rajanikanta* : *Miri Jiori*, p. 2

28. *Ibid*, p.27

29. Sarma, *Satyendranath* : *Asamiya Upanyasar Bhumika*, p.77

The human-nature relationship is beautifully portrayed in this novel. The tribal people living amidst nature give more value to its existence. They adore nature more; and the nature in return bestowed its blessings on them. The novelist made the human nature relationship more beautiful with gracious impact of the Subansiri river and its intimacy with simple Miri people.

*“Aai Subansirir Asamiya manuhatkoi paharar para aha saral bhabar Miri manuh bilakar uparat cheneh bechi....Subansiri aair sital pani nakhale sihatar piyah napalai. Aai Subansirir kulat saru saru nawat uti umaliba napale Mirihatar manat rang nalage”*³⁰

Nabakanta Baruah’s portrayal of nature is poetic and romantic as well. The beautiful and graceful river Kapili, its impact on the people living nearby, the green cultivating fields and surroundings etc. are beautifully depicted in his Kapiliparia Sadhu. The novel itself begins with a beautiful natural description of the Kapili river flowing down the valley from the Jayantia hills.

*“Khasia paharat barasun hai, barpani upachi pare. Jayantia paharat manchun name. Umiyam juri dhaur sapar negur chiga beg. Pahar dhuwa pani, jhum kheti saruwa kara pani pani, kilingar bukuwedi ring mari nami ahe gaon bhui mahatiyai.”*³¹

Being a poet novelist by nature, Nabakanta Baruah’s narration was very much musical, especially when it takes to the portrayal of nature. The novelist tries to provide a mysterious portrayal of nature, confirming the idea that nature is elegant, gracious and delightful; yet at the same time unpredictable, uncontrollable and beyond human understanding. It has a mysterious relationship and untold domination over human. Confirming nature-human relationship in the novel; famous critic Sisir Kumar Das writes, ‘This novel is a fine and sensitive

30. Bordoloi, Rajanikanta : *Miri Jiori*, p.3

31. Baruah, Nabakanta : *Kapiliparia Sadhu*, p.1

study of relation between man and nature in general and mysterious relationship of man and nature, symbolised by the river Kapili flowing through the Nagaon district in particular. ”³²

Nature has been portrayed as an agent with motherliness that home the people living amidst it. The villagers enjoy the natural beauty by the bank of Kapili. The river waters their green fields to grow paddy for their livelihood. Many a people go on fishing to lead their lives. Kapili is the source of attraction for everybody in the village. The beauty of Kapili even at night thrills everyone.

“*Taktak kare ranga juntu Kapilir bukut sumai goise.*”³³

Kapili is second mother to the hero of the novel. Rupai was found in Kapili; and though he was brought up by Dhir Singh, he always felt a kind of attraction towards Kapili. The river consoles him and solaces him. Even after knowing the truth that he was not the actual son of Dhir Singh, he jumped into Kapili trying to end up his life at the lap of his nature mother. Rupai fell in love with Sunpahi in the lap of nature, sustained it amidst nature and also calmly accepted the death of his Sunpahi at the end, considering that it was the will of his nature mother Kapili. Thus the character of Rupai becomes a mysterious one only because of his mysterious association with nature.

However, Nabakanta Baruah has not confined himself in portraying the beautiful and agile side of the nature. The mystery of nature also lies in its dark side. Kapili is fragile, pleasant, stunning and gorgeous in one hand while tough, deceitful, destructive, furious on the other hand. The rage of Kapili destroys the peaceful life of its people creating human tragedy. The flooded Kapili brings misfortune and unfinished tragedy to the poor peasants living thereby.

32. Das, Sisir Kumar : *History of Indian Literature, 1911-1956*, p. 843

33. Baruah, Nabakanta : *Kapiliparia Sadhu*, p. 76

The river Kapili controls the course of action in the novel. It controls the life of the people. It takes away life and property by overflowing during the flood. It destroys green fields, ruins the fruit of hard toil by the poor peasants and leads them to misfortune and misery. The novelist, here, is of the view point that nature does not always respond to human need. It quite sometimes rebel as if it takes a kind of pleasure at the suffering of the human world. The holy plant of nature sometimes turn so cruel that the human world shatters with pain and agony; and the nature takes delight in it.

Nature plays a vital role in the novels of Nirupama Borgohain too. Her *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* and *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* are set in the beautiful natural backdrop of the region by the bank of Pagladia river. Her first novel *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* begins with a beautiful description of the river Pagladia in the following words:

*“Pagladia noir panit ratipuwar rod pari, dhau bur jilmilaise. Naikhanar thik sumajate ubhali pari thaka banh-jupat panir sute badha puwat kal kal sabda eta uthise”*³⁴

However, the romantic description of nature doesn't sustain for long in the novel. Soon nature shows its other side- rude, destructive and non-responsive to human world. The novel begins with the beauty of nature; but ends with the depiction of nature as a vital force of demolition.

*“Tar pachat sunya dristire samukhar bhayankar noi khonoloi chai murar chulibur ajuri tani si abyakta artanadat gumari uthil”*³⁵

Nature, in the novel as it is shown, is the source of joy and peace. It is seen as a mysterious agent. The heroine of the novel, Lakshmi, is the product of

34. Borgohain, Nirupama : *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi*, p. 1

35. *Ibid*, p. 302

nature- simple and wild, easy going but mysterious like the Pagladia itself. It is calm and quiet at a time, but unpredictable. Dipu enjoys the natural beauty of Pagladia and its surroundings. The beauty of nature takes a romantic description in this novel. The beauty of Pagladia river at the time of evening, under a moonlit sky gives an elegant nature portrayal in the novel.

*"Akasat junak uthil. Panit junakar tirbirani chariophale khula pathar; junakat ujwal akash patharar sipare digantat milise; gaonlia ratir atut stabdhata aru junak pari jiliki thaka Pagladia noikhanar ei sokalubure tar manat ek adbhut ek aparthiv soundarjyatar anubhutit dubi jai."*³⁶

But it is not always so. Nature has a contrasting aspect. It is destructive, an agent of annihilation. Like Thomas Hardy, Nirupama Borgohain also didn't consider nature only as a romantic agent. There is also a gloomy part of the nature. Highlighting the Pagladia river as the agent of nature, the author described how it became the cause of sorrow and misfortune. The nature that had provided space for happy play way for the villagers, but it again destroyed everything. The author depicted the mysterious and aggressive nature of Pagladia.

*"Itimadhye Pagladiai rup salaise. Khoj kahi par haba para noi khonor nishakatia chehera aru nai. Pagla devata etia rudramurti dhari jagi uthise. Siparar bali tal gol. Iparar ukha garatur kan samanaloj pani. Sahasra pakaniare noir sphit buku bhari goise. Sei bah jupa, sei ubhali bagari para muhurtat uthi paniloj japiai Lakshmi hate dhemali kara bahjupaoo bur gol."*³⁷

The beautiful nature has ceased to be so any more. It has stopped showing sympathy to mankind. The Pagladia foamed with flood. The elegant and delightful

36. Borgohain, Nirupama : *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi*, p. 27

37. *Ibid*, p. 65

river suddenly turns to be the terminator of human happiness. It destroys the beautiful paddy field, kills lives robbing a poor woman of her motherhood. This dark aspect of nature was never seen by Wordsworth. But Hardy saw it; so was Nirupama Borgohain :

*‘Bijuli chamaki uthil, aru tar puharat, Dipue dekhile, tar samukhat ekhan bishal samudra, era samudra, eikhon ketiau tar parichita Pagladia noi haba nuware, ketiau nuware..... pagla noi khanar garjanat kan jen tal mari jaba khuje. Tathapi sei unmatta garjanar sabda neochi Dipu jen khub manujugare aan eta sabda sunar chesta kariba dharile. Ekmatra putrahara ejani bidhaba jananir hiya bhaga artanadar dhvani. ’*³⁸

Thus showing the devastating power of nature, the novelist established once again, like Hardy, that nature controls the future of human race. It is destiny in many occasions. Humans are just mere puppets in the hands of mighty nature.

Borgohain's other novel *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* too portrays both the aspects of nature in a complete realistic manner. The novel in one hand gives a striking and graceful nature portrayal of green fields, forest, birds, clean sky and the elegant river Pagladia flowing thereby:

*‘Diganta bistrita hoi thaka gaonr seujia dhanar pathar, uparar antaheen akasar byapti, bananir shyamaliya, saru saru noir aru tar parar nirjanata gabhirtam kari tula daukar karun mat, bah-tamul-narikalar ghan seujia samaruh, charair madhur kal kakali.... ’*³⁹

38. Borgohain, Nirupama : *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi*, p.300

39. Borgohain, Nirupama : *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar*: p.5

With this beautiful nature, the novelist associate the village life, the peaceful and quiet life in such a beautiful natural scene is adorable to the villagers. They enjoy each moment of the day amidst nature.

*‘Dukmukalir nijan noir ghat, tupani bhagi utha kal-kakalir bahire kunu bhanga nakara stabdha samayar hriday khan mathit kari tuliba para dhyan gambhirata Anjalir adbhit bhal laga.’*⁴⁰

However this scenic natural beauty is not enjoyable all the time. The same nature brings misfortune for those happy people in the form of flood, drought and famine. The nature didn't support the poor inhabitants of the region who were mainly agriculture based. As a result, the poor village dwellers had to move to the city for their livelihood.

Silabhadra's novels *Madhupur*, *Ahatguri* and *Agamanir Ghat* deal with the contemporary social changes, under the influence of urbanisation and modernisation. This might be the reason a kind of graceful nature portrayal is difficult to find here. The novel describes the decay and demolition of natural beauty with the advancement of machine age, under the influence of urbanization and commercialisation.

Silbhadra's novel *Madhupur* is set on the titled location in Gauripur. Putting up the theme of conflict between the landlords and the peasants, the novel brings home the portrayal of the wide paddy lands, green fields, and the peasants working there. '*Madhupur*' is a novel that concentrates more on the socio-economic changes of the Perperia village into *Madhupur* town. As a matter of fact, in this novel, picture of road construction along with the development of the trade and commerce is found instead of beautiful nature. In fact, an artificial natural beauty-man made it is, is attempted to portray in this novel. A scene, instead of trees,

40. Borgohain, Nirupama : *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar*: p. 92

novel. A scene, instead of trees, fields, birds, sky etc. is created out of houses, buildings, business establishment, industries etc. However, the novelist didn't forget to bring forth a beautiful portrayal of Gangadhar river along with its gravel road by its bank, which very soon became replaced by the national highway:

"Gangadhar nadir pare pare perperia gaonor majedi paj eta mari udai goise. Agateu alibat eta asil, lucal boardor bat. Namathe bat. Barisa ekathu buka, kharali ekathu dhuli...." ⁴¹

Agamanir Ghat is another beautiful novel by Silabhadra set on the backdrop of 'Agamani Ghat' by the bank of Gadhadhar river in west Goalpara. Once again one can't see a pure description of nature in this novel as it deals with the environment of urbanization. However the novelist draws a beautiful picture of Agamani Ghat at night, as if it is a place of some other magic imaginative world.

"Agamanir Ghattut rati ain eta grahar eta angsha jen lage. Sakalu Sapun, sakalu asthayee. Ain eta grahalai jetia amar pratyahik anubhuti bur jen prithivite korobat eri thai goisu. Sakalu sapun, asariri. Majrati Agamanir Ghatat bichanat pari thaki sunyat upangi thaka jen lage. Boi juwa noir panir niravichinna sabbatuye manak achanna kari pelai. Mantu muhgrasta hoi ahe. Sakalu sapun, sakalu asthayee." ⁴²

Mamoni Raisam Goswami's *Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda* is another masterpiece with excellent nature portrayal. Goswami's language and style was poetic; and hence her portrayal of nature seems to be essential romantic. *Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda* is set on the beautiful natural

41. Silabhadra : *Ahatguri*, p. 1

42. Silabhadra : *Agamanir Ghat*, p. 13

location of Amranga Satra and its surroundings. The huge landscape of green field amplify its beauty in presence of Jagalia river. This was the place of peace and happiness: of enjoyment for the novelist in her childhood days. She left no stone unturned to draw an amplified nature portrayal of the landscape of Jagalia. The beauty of Jagalia amidst the greenery is worth witnessing and experiencing through the pen of Goswami :

‘Souwa Jagalia. Seujia reshamar kapurar majat jen kuchi-muchi sumai ase edal nila sap’ ⁴³

This one line description of Jagalia establishes Mamoni Raisam Goswami's excellences in nature portrayal. Her economic language with all passion and sensuous vigor makes her nature portrayal more beautiful. Goswami never gives a straight forward description in her novel. Her illusionary details and poetic description denotes a kind of esthetic beauty in her nature portrayal. Her depiction of beautiful Jagalia, as if, turns to be a poem:

‘Souwa Jagaliar sonali panir rekha dekha gol. Surujar bukur para bagari aha chapara-chapari tejar chekurabure jen Jagaliar pani rangoli hoi parise. Kuwali aru dhuwai pratyekjupa gachak ek rahasyamay reshmi kapurere he jen meruwai thaise....Sowa belituwe jen ei muhurtat ekhan gadhar chalhe pindhi loise. Kisu samayar pichat muga baraniya puhare gach aru jupuhar bukure uri phura rechmi kapurak phali chiri jen chira-chir kari pelale.’ ⁴⁴

Again the description of rain coming down to the landscape of Jagalia is worth mentioning in this context:

43. Goswami, Mamoni Raisam : *Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda*, p.305

44 Ibid, p.21

45. Ibid, p.263

''Dhap dhap sabda kari Jagaliar balit barasunar dangar tupal paribbaloi dharile. Jen kumu marubhumir bukure edal tejaswi sena aguwai goise. ''⁴⁵

The falling of raindrop on the landscape of Jagalia brings another natural illusion of a scenic desert. The novelist also provides a beautiful portrayal of the moon, the sky, the landscape, the birds-trees etc. :

''Junakar puhare ei petromaxor puharaku mlan karise....Balur barir pach phale korobat budhhai kaji nemu phulise. Ei phular ek atyanta manuram gundha soudishe subashit kari tulise. ''⁴⁶

Mamoni Raisom Goswami was so fascinated by the nature and its beauty of Jagalia that she brings it again and again in her description. She even draws quite many similes, comparing the beauty of Jagalia with other situations. For example:

''Jen Jagaliar muga barania ghula panit duti bhagaruwa surya dub goise. ''⁴⁷

''Jagaliar dhaur bukut khanda-bikhanda hoi para chandramar tukurar dare tair dehar nirdista angga samuh spasta hoi uthil. ''⁴⁸

Here, two different natural scenery of Jagalia are drawn to illustrate Iliman's pain due to failure in her love and Giribala's physical charm respectively. Similarly other objects of nature are also brought very frequently in form of simile, metaphor, symbols etc.:

46. Goswami, Mamoni Raisom : *Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda*, p.176

47. *Ibid*, p.27

48. *Ibid*, p.272

49. *Ibid*, p. 55

“*Jen phuli thaka sewali phul ejupa kunubai jukari dile.*”⁴⁹

Goswami's portrayal of nature is elegant, unconventional and very much poetic. She is, to much extent, similar to Hardy in her description of the landscape of Jagalia.

It is noticed that nature is equally fascinated and important to the regional novelist- whether it is Thomas Hardy or the discussed Assamese novelist. The novelist draws great nature pictures to explore the scenic beauty of the regions of their interest and to establish its relation with human world. Hardy and the Assamese novelist projected nature as the most integral and unseparable component in human life; who live amidst it. The pictorial depiction of natural elements like the hills, rivers, landscape form the real setting which helps the novels to add in its regional aspect.

A common observation among all regional novelists is that, though they are fascinated and keenly inspired in the nature portrayal in their novel, they are not entirely romantic in its presentation. It is already mentioned that Hardy didn't always believe in Nature's 'holy plan'. In spite of observing the beauty of nature, Hardy always explored its gloomy and dark side. The same attitude to nature can be seen in the novels of Assamese novelist. *Kapiliparia Sadhu*, *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi*, *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar*, *Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda* show clearly that nature doesn't always console human world, it instead becomes the cause of misfortune as well.

Nature and the natural elements become the inseparable part in the cause of regional novel. Without its presence, the novel can't progress with its happenings, as the nature turns to a character in it controlling the rest. For example, as Egdon Heath is to the *Return of the Native*, so is Kapili to *Kapiliparia Sadhu*,

Pagladia to *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi*, Jagalia to *Dantal Hatir Uniye Khowa Howda*, Gangadhar to *Agamanir Ghat* and Subansiri to *Miri Jiori*.

Hardy's concept of 'man' being simply a part of nature is again justified by the Assamese regional novels. The nature marks as the destiny of human life. Hardy's Wessex controlled the life of its inhabitants. They can't get away of it when they live in it. Even the Assamese novels too prove the same point that man is just a puppet in the hands of destiny, which is the nature itself in regional novel. However a distinction can be made in terms that Hardy's nature responded the mood of man. It influences the moods and action of Hardy's human character; and then becomes a mere witness to their actions. The influence of nature can best be seen in Hardy's Wessex novel. But nowhere in Hardy's novel, nature is depicted as the cause of utter suffering as it is seen in case of Assamese novel. The Assamese regional novels depicted the devastated village life under the influence of natural disaster like flood, droughts and famine. It is, as if, nature very pleasingly harass human world. It shows no sympathy towards life. The fury of nature can be obviously seen in the novels like *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* etc. In Hardy's novel, nature is indifferent to human aspiration; whereas in Assamese novel, nature crush down human desire and ambitions. Nature responds to the mood of man in Hardy's novels. On the other hand, nature is seen rejoicing at the cost of human suffering in Assamese regional novels.

Above all, the regional novel establishes a kind of mysterious relationship between man and nature. It is seen in case of Clym and Egdon; Rupai and Kapili, Lakshmi and Pagladia, and so on.

4.3: VISION OF LIFE

Hardy was primarily an artist, and as an artist it was his ambition to present his impression of life in a detached and objective manner. He never favoured the idea of being called a philosopher though philosophic ideas are found scattered in all his novels. He did not follow any preconceived pattern of philosophy that could be related to any particular school of thought. He was happy if he was called an artist and impressionist, recording his impressions of life in his novels. Hardy, in fact, considered a novel as a work of impression rather than philosophy. In the preface to *Tess of D'Urbervilles* he says, "A novel is an impression, not an argument. A tale-teller writes down how the things of the world strike him without any intentions whatever".⁵⁰ Hardy's novels are impressions that the novelist gathered from life.

Hardy was profoundly influenced by his age and his environment. The saying 'a man is what he is made' is very much true of Hardy. His was the age when science and Industrial Revolution were making their influence felt. During the time of Hardy, revolutionary changes took place in England. Some of these changes have been summed up by G.A. Sambrook in his book 'Introduction to the English life' in the Nineteenth Century. In the first half of nineteenth century, according to G. A. Sambrook, the English nation adapted itself to revolutionary changes which gave great wealth and power to one section of the community, while labouring class were near starvation. The state of unemployment, misery and want which resulted from the Napoleonic Wars was aggravated due to changes in agricultural methods, and large scale enclosure. Price fluctuation and serious unemployment followed. The hardship and the sufferings of the working class encouraged suspicion and distrust, which were formatted into despair and resentment. Violence and crime were rampant. They reached a climax in the 'Hungry Forties'. It was no wonder that people living in such condition were

50. Hardy, Thomas: *Tess of D'Urbervilles*, preface

51. Hardy, F. E.: *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, p.321

ignorant and vicious. Hardy's own native district Dorset was also greatly affected. In his letter to Sir Rider Haggard, Hardy gave an account of the condition in about 1850 or 1855.⁵¹ As a child, he knew a sheep-keeping boy who, to his great horror, died of want, and the contents of his stomach at the autopsy were nothing but raw turnip. The agricultural labourers of the southern district including Dorset seldom saw meat; and bread and cheese became their staple food. As a result of Napoleonic war the factory wages went high, but the farm wages went down, while the prices of bread became exorbitant. And there was thus the danger of sheer starvation among the agricultural labourers.

These conditions were really disturbing for a sensitive soul. "The Industrial Revolution was in the process of destroying old agricultural England; the population was shifting; the old ties which had united the small communities of the past were breaking bit by bit."⁵² Along with the disintegration of the old social and economic structure went the disintegration of ideas. The thoughtful people began to attack the vast and obvious social abuses. The Biblical criticism as well as the materialistic thought of Spencer and Buckle started shaking. "Eighteenth century rationalism has united with the new romantic spirit of rebellion against convention, to shake the fundamental basis of belief- religious, social, political- which the people of old England had unquestionably accepted. Since the beginning of the century, leaders of thought were more often than not, unorthodox. The mental atmosphere of the reflective minds tends to be overcast by clouds of doubts."⁵³ On the other hand science was becoming prominent. Darwinian Theory of Evolution through the book *The Origin of Species* came and it struck a smashing blow at all religious and ideal interpretation of the universe, which coloured Hardy's thoughts and considerably modified his way of looking at life and its problems.

52. Cecil, *David: Hardy – the Novelist*, p.2

53. *Ibid*, p.21

As a product of rural England Hardy belong to the world that was passing. It was hallowed for him by every childish sentiment; but unfortunately it was beginning to crumble before his eyes. To his great regret Hardy noticed that old habits were being discontinued day by day. The old stories and songs were being forgotten every moment, the families settled up in certain places for generations were being uprooted every year. In such a state life seemed burdened with unbearable possibilities. The disintegration seemed to have affected Hardy all the more. Instinctively Hardy had a reverence for Christianity. But he was not a mystic. Influenced of Darwin, Mill and Huxley, in the passing of time, has helped Hardy in shaping his fatalistic notion or his tragic view of life. Hardy finds very little hope for man in the world. Naturally his philosophy began to appear profoundly gloomy. "The universe was a huge impersonal mechanism, directed by some automatic principle of life unknown, pursuing its mysterious end, and utterly indifferently to the feelings of mortals."⁵⁴ Thus Hardy's pessimistic attitude is not at all difficult to understand, if we remember that he was living in an age of sudden scientific development and a rapid change in the old accepted values. "Hardy's pessimism arose from the contemporary scientific outlook, which left no place for Providence for Christian ideas of a God of Love. The universe spelt indifference to man, and reduced him to a level of significance little higher than that of other species. Cruelty, disease, and suffering were the consequence of the general struggle for survival."⁵⁵

His pessimism, for which he is too often blamed, is indeed an outcome of the impression that he received of village's life, in his early life. There was plenty of tragedy in the life of the poverty-stricken Wessex folk. Dependent and ignorant, exposed alike to the oppressions of the social system and the caprice of weather and 'The President of Immortals', at every moment of their life the

54. Cecil, David: *Hardy – the Novelist*, p.24

55. Pinion, F. B.: *A Hardy Companion*, p.179

people among whom Hardy lived and was brought up, were made conscious of man's helplessness in the face of circumstances. So he happened to entertain a perverse view of God and His way. For him chance in its purely malevolent aspect enters human life and spoils it, brings trials and tribulations, sorrows and sufferings, pain and agony in its train. Hardy projects man's helplessness in the face of circumstances. He believes that circumstances are more powerful than human beings. He was born pessimist as he always said 'tragedy always underlies comedy'.

Several other influences, apart from this, worked effectively in the formation of Hardy's impression about life. His physical ill-health, the morbidity of his temper and his general inclination towards the funeral side of things determined his melancholy and pessimistic outlook and impression about life. To quote Baker, "All his life he had a weakness for gruesome incidents, grim legends, creepy stories, accounts of spells, omens, ghost, murders, suicides and the like. He was always jotting down such things in his diary, and would visit the scene to find out all he could about some sinister event and enjoy its full flavour. He never seems to have missed a funeral, at least of anyone distinguished or of his own kin, and is full of reminiscences of those melancholy festivals."⁵⁶

Hardy approaches life and its varied vision, casting aside the romantic and the roseate views. He views life in a realistic manner. He does not look at life through the many coloured glass of romance or of fancy, but in the spirit of a detached observer accepting without any dismay what life really unfold to him. Hence Hardy's philosophy of life is essentially tragic. His vision of life is neither attractive nor glamorous. He thinks life by no means a boon. For him "happiness is but an occasional episode in the general drama of pain". He hates life immensely. His attitude to life is melancholic and depressive. In the words of Goodman- "He

56. Quoted in *A History of English Literature: Goodman, W. R.*; p.424

does indeed see and present the humourous and attractive sides of his country people, but his prevailing mood is one of melancholy, inspired by the uselessness of their efforts to steer their lives against current of circumstances which they do not understand and which are far stronger than they.”⁵⁷

The movement of Hardy's plots is often compared to that of the Greek tragedies. He has been considered the British Homer of pessimism. He is quite aware of the ills of life. He presumes that “tragedy always underlies comedy”. “Laughter”, he says again, “can only come through forgetfulness”. In the last sentence of *Tess of D'Urbervilles*, Hardy observes: “Justice was done, and the President of Immortals had ended his sport with Tess.” The fact is that Hardy has seen this world full of struggle, writhing in pain and agony. He does not find success, happiness, hopefulness and ruddy optimism among the people he witnessed. He came across despire, dejection, failure, frustration in human life. He notices plenty of tragedy. Whatever he actually saw and noticed, he presented in his novels.

Hardy's attitudes towards life is pessimistic and gloomy in the sense that almost in all his tragic novels like *Tess of D'Urbervilles*, *the Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Jude the Obscure* and *The Return of the Native* we find pictures full of despair and dejection, of hopes unfulfilled, and plans uncarried out. Man proves feeble before chance, fate or destiny. Man is a helpless creature, a mere puppet in the hands of destiny or fate. Man in Hardy's world does not enjoy Free Will. The keen eyes of fate are always looking intently on his activities with a view to intervening as and when it so likes. Man is not free to choose the type of life he wants to live. Obstacles and hindrance swarm on his path of life, and they thwart all his hopes and aspirations, though man wages a futile battle against the odds so created. It appears that man in his world has no individual life of their

57. Goodman, W R: *A History of English Literature*, p.424

own and they are controlled by fate. Fate controls them both from outside and from within. In the other words it means that fate interferes in the lives of men through some external happening. For example, Newson in *The Mayor of Chasterbridge* appears just at the time when Henchard most needed the help of his step-daughter Elizabeth Jane. Newson claims back Elizabeth and Henchard feels greater loneliness, which led him to desperate within the character as well. It is just a matter of fate that Jude with his intellectual aspirations also had a high degree of sensuousness, which led to his misfortune. The noted Hardy critic David Cecil says, "A struggle between the men on the one hand, on the other, an omnipotent and indifferent Fate- that is Hardy's interpretation of the human situation."⁵⁸

Hardy's world was a glorious one, no doubt. Hardy loved his people. But he hated life intensely. He never thinks it worth living. He perceives it in the grip of cruel blind and oppressive Unknown Will. Everywhere in his novels human beings appear to be crushed by this power which is indifferent, callous and hostile to man. He considers that gods are opposed to human beings and it is their pleasure that men and women should suffer, and meet with hard knocks and blows in life. He upholds the Greek view of life according to which the gods are cruel and heartless and kill men for their sport. Hardy presents with firm conviction the working of a sinister intelligence on the affairs of human beings, and reiterates with a firm force what Shakespeare had stated- 'like flies to the wanton boys, are we to the gods; they kill us for their sport'. Hardy even fails to uphold and justify Browning's observation 'God's in his heaven, All's right with the world'; rather, in *Tess of D'Urbervilles*, he controvert the former to criticize God and his wise dispensation of the Universe, and makes on of his characters to remark- God's not in the Heaven / All's wrong with the world.

58. Cecil, David: *Hardy the Novelist*, p. 26

The picture of life in Hardy's novels is thus gloomy and pessimistic. The gloomy view of world is most strikingly expressed in his novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Referring to the numerous children of the poor and feckless Durbeyfields, Hardy complains that children are born where they are not wanted. On the other hand children are forced into the world without their having been asked "if they wished for life on any terms, much less if they wished for it on any such hard conditions as were involved in being of the shiftless house of Durbeyfield." They are described as "passengers in Durbeyfield ship", as "little captive under hatches compelled to sail wherever the Durbeyfield household chose to sail; into difficulty, disaster, starvation, disease, degradation or death." Hardy does not find happiness in human life. He winds up the story of Tess with the remark that life is a sport of gods with mortals. In his *The Mayor of Chasterbridge*, he makes the pregnant observation through the mouth of Elizabeth Jane, "Life is a brief transit through a sorry world and hardly calls for effusiveness. Happiness is but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain. Life and its surroundings are tragical rather than comical and though one could be gay on occasion, moments of gaiety are interludes and no part of the actual drama." Striking the keynote of Hardy's general impression and attitude towards life, Duffin remarks- "Take it as you will, accept or reject, like or dislike his opinion, a hundred times expressed and everywhere implied is, that life is a lost, inglorious and bloody battle, a wide deep sea of mystery with but a very few flowering island, a gift so powerful that it were almost a wise man's part to refuse it altogether."⁵⁹

Hardy can be truly called a pessimistic because his outlook is gloomy and depressing through and through. His attitude towards life is undoubtedly pessimistic and gloomy that holds no hope for human beings. But his pessimism is not depressing for he exhorts us to struggle and fight against the decrees of fate

59. Duffin, H.C.: *Thomas Hardy: A Study of the Wessex Novels*

and cruel destiny, rather than make a weak surrender to the majesty of sinister and malignant power governing the universe. Hardy is of the view that it is man's lot to suffer and meet with defeat and dejection in his life, but in spite of this inevitable fate, man should strive and struggle and fight against untoward circumstances that may come in his life. He should go down fighting in a brave and heroic spirit. This attitude towards life is presented in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, where the Mayor fights against the decrees of fate throughout his life though he ultimately meets his tragic end.

Hardy should be called an artist with different philosophy of life. His vision of life is essentially tragic though he was not, in fact, an unmitigated pessimist. If we note certain elements of pessimism in Hardy's novels, it is pessimism of a very different kind. Along with the dark side there is a bright and sunny side as well in his philosophy. He is certainly not a pessimist - misanthrope like Hobbes who thinks man essentially a beast, mean, abject, detestable and an odious creature. He is a pessimist like a classical writer who considers man merely a puppet in the hands of Mighty Fate. His attitude to life is tragic rather than pessimist. Simply Hardy is more gloomy than they are. He always sees and finds Fate unjust, cruel, blind and jealous of happiness of mankind. He considers the ways of that Unknown Will immoral, unjust and condemnable.

Hardy, himself, did not like to be dubbed as pessimist. He himself advocates, a meliorist rather than a pessimist.. Hardy seems to have winced at the suggestion of pessimism in his thought. He has answered the charge to pessimism in the following words- "People call me a pessimist, and if pessimism to think, with Sophocles, that not to have been born is best, then I do not reject the designation." He made his view very clear in a conversation he held with William Archer in 1904, ".... I believe, indeed, that a good deal of robusting, swaggering optimism of recent literature is at bottom cowardly and insincere ...

my pessimism. If pessimism it be, does not involve the assumption that the world is going to the dogs On the contrary, my practical philosophy is distinctly meliorist."⁶⁰ Here equally significant is the quotation from Galsworthy which Hardy kept on the framed photograph of its author: "the Optimist appears to be one who cannot bear the world as it is, and is forced by his nature to picture it as it ought to be; and the pessimist one who can not only bear the world as it is, but loves it well enough to draw it faithfully."⁶¹

Hardy's philosophy of life is not for intellectual cowards and invalids. His pessimism will be depressing to those who are morally and intellectually incapable of standing shocks in life. Hardy is not complacent in his attitude. He does not supinely give way to cheap optimistic feelings that 'somehow good will be at final goal of ill'. He is a sturdy realist who takes life at its face value, and what actually is the state of affairs in the world. He considers it simply wish-fulfillment to indulge in cheap optimism, when the force of evil, sadness and despair overpower us on all sides. It is foolish and unwise for anyone to be an optimist when he sees the conditions of life in a realistic and faithful light. Such is the realistic vision unfolded by Hardy's novels. He is pessimist, but his pessimism is more satisfying than optimism. Hardy's philosophy and sturdy realism will enable human being to drive away day-dreaming and come to the realities of a hard and stern world. He brings us home to view life realistically as it is without expecting too much from the world.

The vision of life of the Assamese regional novelists too gets reflected beautifully and vividly in their respective novels. Their vision of life gets determined by their attitudes towards life which was influenced equally by the contemporary socio-political events, social systems and their own outlook towards

61. *Pinion, F. B.: A Hardy Companion, p.179*

it. However, a common touch of pessimism always prevails in all Assamese regional novels which is almost similar to that of Hardy's.

Rajanikanta Bordoloi's *Miri Jiori* was written in 1894, prior to the world wars or Indian independence. This might be the reason that his novel didn't deal with the socio-economic concern of the author. On the other hand, Bordoloi being a true worshiper of mankind, concentrated on the feelings of nationalism and brotherhood. Depicting the human nature relationship in general and the Miri people and Subansiri in particular, the author also presented the sense of assimilation of tribal and non-tribal, of hills and plains in forming the general Assamese race. The author's philosophy of equality, posterity and brotherhood is projected through the unity among the people. Bordoloi also made a noble attempt of providing the women equal right and high esteem, which was not a normal practice of those days.

Bordoloi's vision of life is, that like Thomas Hardy, essentially tragic. He, through his novel, argues that life is a boon, but not always devoid of hardship. His protagonist Janki and Panei enjoys the beauty of their love amidst nature. But life brings them tremendous obstacles and they met a kind of tragic death at the end. The couple fought all hardship bravely, but at last had to surrender to their destiny, confirming Hardian idea that "Life is not at all beautiful."

Nabakanta Baruah's *Kapiliparia Sadhu* is written on the backdrop of a small hindu Assamese village in the middle Assam. Being a poet by nature, Baruah depicted the simple living human crowd without any ambiguity of life. The author's love for simplicity and unity in mankind is obvious in his novel. Baruah loves human, he loves the world and considers it a place worth living. This simple vision of life of the author is illustrated by famous critic Dr. Sailen Bharali in the following words:

“Baruah’s philosophy of life which he expresses through his poetry can also be seen in his novels. It is the philosophy of humanity, of mankind, of love. He loves the world, he respects human. His vision of life is to accept the same in a simplified manner without much ambiguity. For him, hope of humanity lies with those who lead a simple, peaceful and natural life.”⁶²

As a writer of contemporary period, Nabakanta Baruah was influenced by the freedom struggle of India, which united all Indians and gave them the guts to fight for one cause. This very fact is beautifully incorporated in the novel by Rupai’s joining the movement, going to jail, meeting Tilak Gosai and inspired by Gandhian thoughts.

Nabakanta Baruah was a great preacher of humanity and brotherhood. He propagates his vision of life through the Gandhian philosophy. Through the action of Tilak Gosai’s refusal of preaching Rupai and advising him to carry on with his own work,⁶³ the author expresses his own philosophy of equality and brotherhood. Tilak Gosai’s taking to physical labour against his Brahmin tradition is Baruah’s own concept of ‘dignity of labour’.

Kapiliparia Sadhu also reveals the mystery of human life. Life is never simple, though expected so. It is full of mystery that is controlled by fate and destiny. Coincidence and Chances, similar to that in Hardy’s, have the power to determine the fate of an individual in this novel. Rupai being found in Kapili by Sunpahi in flood, discovering the truth of his identity are the matter of chances that changed the course of his life. This shows that man is a mere puppet of his fate. He has no power to shape his own life. One rather submits to the willfulness

62. Bharali, Sailen : *Madhab Kandalir Para Mamoni Goswamiloi. (Article : Nabakanta Baruah Upanyasat Itihas Chetana), p.128*

63. Baruah Nabakanta : *Kapiliparia Sadhu, p.47*

of destiny. This ultimate truth revealed in the novel makes the author's vision of life essentially tragic. The Kapiliparia Sadhu very beautifully portray the pain and suffering of the poor village dwellers. Kapili's flood destroys their life and property. But these people accept it quietly as they do understand that they have no power to resist or change their destiny:

*“Kapilir par bagare. Pathar bur jai. Ekathu ekakaloloike tamul, tengar barit ebukuiwa pani hai. Majiat ujai aha kawoi machar lani. Rati puwar chutalat ekathu-abeli loike ebaku-berar mati panit chapara-chapare khahe. Gadhuliloi ruwa maralir betar gathi pani pai mukali hai. Barpani. Pachim Nagaon ekhan athai samudra hai, maje maje ulai thake keikhanman gaon. Garu-gai uti jai. Manuhe goi ashray lai sei dweep burat. Manuh more. Panit-matit-bemarat-anaharat.”*⁶⁴

Nabakanta Baruah draws the pathetic plight of the people of Nagaon. People die in land and water; due to disease and starvation. But they are just helpless in front of the mighty force of nature.

Nirupama Borgohain's *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* and *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* have presented a gloomy picture of life. As a writer of post-independent era, Nirupama Borgohain had undergone the socio-economic crisis of the independent India. The world war had influenced the mind of the tiny author that she herself mentioned in her autobiography *Biswas and Sangsayar Majedi*. Borgohain, when a child, went to her ancestral village to get rid of the adverse affect of Second World War. There she saw the pathetic condition of the people living by the bank of Pagladia,⁶⁵ which was reflected in her novels. It is obvious that her own impression of life has been well exposed in her novels. She has seen

simplicity in the village life. But the changing scenario of modernity and

64. Baruah, Nabakanta : *Kapiliparia Sadhu*, p.1

65. Borgohain, Nirupama : *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi*, preface

urbanization has installed perfidy in it. Commercialization has brought curse to the sustaining virtues in rural life.

Nirupama Borgohain's approach to life is very much realistic. Casting aside the romantic views, she depicts life as it is in real sense- impulsive, full of annoyance and obstacles. Borgohain has not seen the life through the glass of romance. Like a detached observer, the writer unfolds what life preserve for everyone. Her Lakshmi was a carefree girl - wild, fanciful, happy in association with nature. But this happiness did not prevail longer. Soon in the second half of the *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi*, the same Lakshmi is shown in a complete different mood. She is now a widow, mother of a child, grim, pale, unhappy. Circumstances compel her to become so. Her carefree life is gone. Now she is bound by social customs that has been determined to her by her fate. Her tragedy reached its pinnacle when she lost her child in the wild flood of Pagladia.

Nirupama Borgohain's gloomy vision of life is firmly established in her second novel *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar*. This novel is believed to be elevated to the level of a classical tragedy, due to the profound grief experienced by its protagonist Pateswari in particular, and thereby of humankind in general. This 'general drama of pain' affirms Borgohain's vision of life that is essentially Hardian. 'Tragedy always underlies comedy' is persuaded by the novelist in her novel.

Borgohain's picture of life is gloomy and pessimistic. She has seen no hope for her people. Her depiction of poor villagers- poverty stricken and starving prove this point. People in *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* fail to sustain an honest and healthy living in the region depicted. Flood, famine shattered their life and the rapidly changing economic strategy didn't help them live in peace. They become strangers in their own land. People migrate to the city in search of two square meals. The influence of industrialization and commercialization shattered rural

economy. The rural life faced an adverse condition. This socio-economic tragic situation is beautifully portrayed in Nirupama Borgohain's novels.

Borgohain's Pateswari is often compared with Hardy's Tess who for no fault of her own suffers her whole life, becoming the victim of hostile circumstances which is not under her control. Through this character, the novelist projects her own vision of life which is essentially tragic and pessimistic. Pateswari elopes with her lover only to be rejected and deserted by him. She took shelter in a woman hostel just to gather the worst experience of her life. She marries Chajun as if to have offered herself to other men. Her return to village after her husband's death is also not happy at all. The real struggle for survival begins here. But she has been bold and courageous enough to guard herself now. This pathetic life of Pateswari by no means illustrates that life is a boon and worth living. There could be no more misfortune for an Indian woman to have been compelled by her own husband to share her chastity with other men. But this is life. It compels human to accept whatever comes their way. They have no choice. They are helpless in front of situation, in the hands of destiny.

Borgohain has presented her concept of loneliness and isolated life in her novels. Her own personal life being such, Nirupama Borgohain upholds the idea of solitary of human life. It is essentially a philosophic attitude to life that one has to face life all alone in true sense. Lakshmi in Sei Nadi Nirabadhi gains the company of Dipu only for a few moments. Thereafter she leads a lonely life of widowhood. Pateswari has none whom she could call her near and dear. The one who loved her betrayed her. Everybody wants her beautiful body; once the beauty is gone, no one bothered about her. Thus alienation and loneliness has become a central matter in the author's vision of life, which in turn makes it really pessimistic and hopeless.

Silabhadra in his novels projected a world he was passing by. He was the product of a twentieth century world which was tremendously influenced by industrialization and commercialization. On the other hand the World War, Indian Independence, rise of modernism etc. also influenced his creative soul. He witnessed the economic progress in society on one hand while on the other he observed the demolition of age old customs, rituals, virtues and beliefs. All these incidents and components shaped his philosophy of life which is revealed in his novels *Madhupur*, *Ahatguri* and *Agamanir Ghat*.

In *Madhupur*, Silabhadra exposed the hypocrisy of the wealthy class as well as the misery of the poor peasants. Silabhadra cries for the workers and lower class of people and advocates their rise with the advancement of new economic progress. The novelist unfolds the tragedy of the upper class, who are no more capable of maintaining the pace of social changes. Life is not all the same for all throughout. Time changes for all; and the one who keeps pace with it only may succeed in life.

Ahatguri shows the impact of commercialization on the virtues of rural life. With the advancement of trade and commerce, *Ahatguri* witnesses only material prospects. Roads constructed, new buildings, establishment, shops, offices were set up. But there were no spiritual gain. People lost their happiness and charm of life. The society gets divided into two distinguished section- the rich and the poor. And the life of the poor, who live on begging, is the source of tragedy in the novel. Nilambar, the protagonist, remain lonely as his all known faces disappears from his old Perperia village:

"The local people immediately sold their land. Some were confiscated by the Government. Other bought by various people.

The native dwellers migrated to somewhere else, selling their own

land here. Some went to interior villages. After all there was not a single family in the Mandal Chuburi."⁶⁶

The new Madhupur is full of strangers. Nobody knows the other one. People live an alienated life in an urban city. Though Nilambar's hard work and honesty helped him to confirm his existence in Ahatguri, the fact is that no one bothers his honesty now. Being busy with a mechanical life of keeping up pace, he lost his familiar life. Thus Silabhadra shows that industrialization and urbanization is in the process of destroying the beauty and charm of rural life.

Agamanir Ghat presents the same attitude of life. Here the novelist depicts the picture of poor workers and their miserable life. Silabhadra whole heartedly supported the progressive living style of people in the modern era, but at the same time he laments on the destroyed humanity which occurred due to the rise of material prospect.

Mamoni Raisom Goswami is one of the most comprehensive writers of modern Assamese literature. She has explored social injustice in all her writings, especially when it comes to the injustice done to women; Goswami is excellent in her creation. Her novels establish that life is full of injustice, oppression and obstructions; and these become the main themes of her writings. Hence wherever she has seen injustice and inequality she has raised her voice against it. The novelist sympathies those oppressed ones and this sympathy denotes a profound sense of tragedy to her novels:

*"Naribadi lekhika Dr. Mamoni Raisom Goswamiye upanyas rachanar jariate shramik, nari aru artajanar prati teur hridayar aseem sahanubhuti pradarshan kari uchit bicharar babe kalam astrare pratibad janaise. Phalat teur man sukabhibhut hoi parise."*⁶⁷

67. Saikia, Nagen : *Exa Bacharar Asamiya Upanyas*, p.670 ; Namita Deka's article "Mamoni Raisom Goswami Upanyas."

Goswami's *Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda* and *Nilakanthi Braza* reveal her vision of life clearly, which is tragic, pessimistic but full of humanitarian. In both the novels, Goswami portrays the tragic life of women, especially that of Hindu widows. The age old customs and unreasonable traditional values don't allow a young widow to live the share of her life. They are deprived of all facilities and enjoyment. Happiness seems to be a strange feeling in their lives. In a male dominated social tradition, the women are helpless. But the novelist couldn't appreciate their traditional values and hence, made a rebel through the characters of Giribala and Saudamini.

Both Giribala and Saudamini seem to be the novelist's mouthpiece in revealing her own philosophy of life. She is not ready to accept and follow the wane out practices. Discarding all social orthodox custom, Giribala mixes with Mark Chahab, goes with him to the villages to find manuscripts. She even dares to spend a night with Mark Chahab, whom she loved dearly. However, Giribala ended up her life at the end submitting herself to the fate. This rebellious character has turned out to be a mere puppet at the hands of destiny.

Saudamini, in *Nilakanthi Braza* too makes a rebel by not following the rules for the Radheswamies, as she has seen their wretched life. She protested in front of her mother saying that she is an independent soul. She couldn't sacrifice her life like a prophet for the benefits of others :

"Moi mahioshi nahau je tumalukar dare janakalyanmulak kam kari moi mur gutei jivan atibahit kariba parim. Moi swadhin, moi kaku bhoi nakaru.....!" ⁶⁸

Again the same Saudamini, in spite of availing the chance of being united with her Christian beloved, commits suicide. The novelist herself revealed that a tendency to suicide operate many a times in her own life. This might be the

68. Goswami, *Mamoni Raisom : Nilakantha Braza*, p.54

reason why her rebellious characters took to suicide. Whatsoever, with this the author undoubtedly disclose her pessimistic view of life.

Goswami's tragic vision of life prevails throughout her novels. The suffering of the peasants, their falling to the intoxication of kaani that brings their destruction etc. are essentially tragic description. In *Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda*, we see tragedy of many other characters; Durga, Ilimani, Indranath—all these characters live life with untold tragedies in their life. The pathetic plight of the Radheswamies in *Nilakanthi Braza* is unexplainable. Goswami's novels reveal the fact that human is mere slave to circumstances. None can defy it. The novelist, no doubt created some strong characters who challenged their fate and tried to make their own destiny. However at the end all of them surrendered in the 'general drama of pain'.

A close discussion of the Wessex novels and the Assamese regional novels reveals that the discussed novelists were profoundly influenced by their contemporary socio-economic and political environment. They all practised social realism in their creations. Their novels were the impression of their own life; and all of them have seen life closely, from a realistic viewpoint. Hardy as well as the Assamese regional novelists don't have a romantic fascination towards life. For them, life is not a bed of roses; rather it is full of will and woes. The regional novelists attempt to depict life with all its simplicity in a rural background amidst the mighty power of nature. But at the same time, the adverse influence of industrialisation, urbanization and commercialisation shattering the simplicity of rural life is portrayed very realistically.

Hardy and the Assamese novelists have seen life as it is. Obviously, that tragedy always underlies comedy is well understood and well established in their novels. The most common vision of life that can be seen in all regional novels is

essentially tragic. Hardy and the discussed Assamese novelists examine the untold sufferings of human life.

Hardy discussed his characters as helpless creatures. Life is powerless in front of its destiny. The same vision of life can also be seen in the Assamese regional novels. Nabakanta Baruah and Nirupama Borgohain's novels project human helplessness in the hands of mighty nature. Mamoni Raisom Goswami and Silabhadra's novels discuss human vulnerability amidst man made customs and circumstances. Due to this portrayal of human despair and disaster, most of Hardy's Wessex novels and the discussed novels of Nabakanta Baruah, Nirupama Borgohain, Mamoni Raisom Goswami's novels attain the level of classical tragedies.

This gloomy and tragic vision of life made Hardy a pessimist, which he is always alleged of. It is because Hardy discussed the dark side of life, and he has done it without showing sympathy to life. The Assamese novelists have done the same. Lakshmi and Pateswari's whole life suffering and getting no reward till the end, Saudamini and Giribala's suicide to assert their rebel against social dogmatism expose those writers pessimism.

It is seen that the discussed novelists try to provide their impression that it is mere folly to seek happiness at the hands of destiny or providence. Man can only learn to face adversity in a heroic manner. Abandoned by God, treated with scorn by nature, man lies helpless at the mercy of those unkind doomsters-accident, chance and fate. The novelists, through their novels, urge humans to face their destiny bravely.



Chapter – V

**TECHNIQUE AND
CHARACTERISATION OF
THOMAS HARDY AND ASSAMESE
REGIONAL NOVEL**

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A literary technique is any element or the entirety of elements a writer intentionally uses in the structure of their work.¹ The Formalists, and particularly the so-called Russian formalists, focused on literary technique or devices. In particular, Viktor Shklovsky, in 1917, wrote the essay *Art as a Technique*, which marks a significant shift towards this perspective. Literary techniques are tools, methods and a part of author's style to express and give more meaning to their writing. Just like character, plot, setting and theme are critical aspects of story telling or novel writing, literary techniques are methods used by writers to give depth, subtlety and express ideas by fabricating them in bunch of words that can convey many things in just few lines.

Various scholars have advocated various views about the technique of a novel. Nevertheless scholars like Mark Sconer, Jeremy Hawthorn, Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren etc. have considered "Technique" as one of the most important aspects in the creation of novel. Mark Sconer in his book *Technique as Discovery* opines that discovering the technique means discovering the novel as a whole. In his words "when we speak of technique, then, we speak of nearly everything for technique is the means by which the writers experience, which is the subject matter, compels him to attend to it; technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning and finally evaluating it".²

1. Benedetti, Carla (1999): *The Empty Cage: Inquiry into The Mysterious Disappearance of The Author*, pp.117-8

2. Westbrook & Handy (Edited): *Twentieth Century Criticism*, p.71

There are no hard and fast rules of using technique in a novel. Instead, the techniques are used in accordance to the subject matter of the novel and as the novelist wants to expose them. Hence technique may differ according to themes and subject matter of the novel. However, the use of technique, whatsoever it is, means a lot for the real success of the novel. A novelist may attain the level of genius by employing his technique. "It is just true that good writing cannot exist without some degree of technical skill and it is also true that technique, like understanding, exist on many levels. It is the combination of the highest level of both that might be called genius."³

Hardy as a novelist was great for his supreme mastery in plot construction. The history of English novel itself has a very strong tradition of a plot construction. The idea is that a novel must have a moral idea running throughout the story. Even characterization becomes secondary, "a novel must have a plot. There must be certain unity and purpose in the action. It must be possible to discern a line or lines, of progress towards consummation of some sort. In all great dramas, and in most great novels, the action is the logical outcome of the central characters. But even when character is most tyrannical in its control, the plot is also an expression of idea."⁴ No doubt in Hardy we find the domination of character. His characters are more impressive than his stories. It seems that his heart lies in the creation of fully developed characters. Even then we find that there is no plotlessness in his novels. He is the follower of the old traditions. There is the superb blending of the idea with the character in Hardy's novels.

As Legouis and Cazamian put it, Hardy's plots, "grow out of elementary passions, ambition, greed, love, jealousy, the thirst for knowledge, and springs which move them are psychological."⁵ As Hardy's art matures, the plot of his

3. *Fast, Howard: Literature and Reality, p.48*

4. *Duffin, H.C.: Thomas Hardy- A Study of the Wessex Novels, p.26*

5. *Legouis, Émile & Cazamian, L F. : A History of English Literature, p.421*

novels increasingly grow out of inner conflicts. In the construction of his plots, Hardy was a follower of Fielding. Hardy's novels have a structure, a design, a plan, a framework which is definite, not loose. These plots are dramatic in quality, nothing superfluous and unrequired for is inserted in them. There is much in them that is sensational, melodramatic, and unreal, however, as per the demand of his plot.

An architect by his early training, Hardy gives to his novels a design that is architectural. He is a superb master on the constructive side of his plots. He builds it as a mason or an architect builds a house. As a monument rises brick by brick, so Hardy's plot rises scene by scene. They are constructed in scenes which are the bricks of his plots of which his philosophy is the cement. His plots are massively and solidly built, like a building of brick and stone. Of all great writers of the English novel, Hardy alone has, in equal proportion, great gifts of imagination and extraordinary powers of invention. Compton Rickett remarks in this connection, "as a story teller he [Hardy] allied rich inventive power with a sense of symmetrical development which, as a rule, characterises our lesser, not our greater men. Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, so productively fertile in invention, show often little perspective on the constructive side. For all his minuteness of method, Hardy never loses sight of the harmonious whole, his detail touches have their own special significance in unfolding the burden of the story, here he shows the economy of the greatest artist."⁶

The architectonics of Hardy have been universally praised. Architectonics is a word taken from architecture. It means, 'those structural qualities of proportion, unity, emphasis and scale which make a piece of writing proceed logically and smoothly from a beginning to an end with no wasted effort, no

6. Compton Rickett: *A History of English Literature*, p.545

faulty omission.”⁷ Hardy’s plots have all these qualities; they are models of symmetry and proportion.

His plots have a beginning, middle, and an end. Often he opens a story with a man going along a road. His narratives are conducted slowly at first, and great pains are taken to make clear the spirit to the country, with its works and ways, when that has been made clear, the plot begins to move with an increasing momentum to an incalculable goal, the characters come into conflict there is strong attraction and repulsion, ‘spirits are finally touched,’ then, there is a period of waiting, a breathing space, an ominous stillness and a pause, till at last, with increased force and motion, it goes forward to the ‘fine issues,’ all the inherent necessities of things cause their effects, tragic or comic, triumphs of the right or of the wrong, and the end of all is told with soft solemnity, a sense of petty striving against a sense of fate. The final grandeur is the total outcome of converging trivialities. In each separate incident there is an element which proves necessary to the completion of the whole. When we close one of Hardy’s greatest books, the deepest impression is always of something fated and inevitable in the sequence of events and this impression rest equally upon his skill in episode invention and his power of climax, his genius for imagination, his logic and his powers of penetrating vision. He is, in fact, a man of science turned novelist, a mathematician dealing with dramatic and poetic material. We find no digression, no superfluities, no redundancies. His novels always have unity of impression. His plots are simple, organic and symmetrical, they move in direct lines. ‘And however great the play of an external fate, the life or motive, which is the centre of each plot, is essentially psychological. Every novel is an answer to the question: Given certain characters, in certain circumstances, what will become of them.’⁸

7. Harmon, Hugh & Halman, William: *A Handbook To Literature*, p.41

8. Duffin, H.C.: *Thomas Hardy- A Study of the Wessex Novels* p.30

Hardy has the incomparable gift of a story-teller, that of making his stories interesting. The interest of his stories is remarkably maintained from the beginning to the end. Whenever the interest flags, something turns up to enliven the proceedings. Effective use is made of suspense and surprise, of hope and hopelessness of chance and incident. The 'rustic chorus' forms a kind of under plot and serves to dispel the tragic gloom when it begins to grow too painful, or to relieve tension by contrast. However, this comic under-current does not mar the tragic impression. It is skillfully blended with the main tragic story.

Most of Hardy's plots have love stories. This has been all along the English tradition. There are, however, exceptions to the rule. Stevenson Conrad, Bennett and H.G. Wells do not always give us love stories. But "the Wessex novels are almost without exception built solidly round the erotic situation generally of a highly complicated nature".⁹ The only exception in Hardy to the above statement seems to be *Mayor of Casterbridge*; although it has one or two love stories. In almost all his novels the plot is based on the fact "of two or more men loving one woman, or two or more women loving one man or the combination of the two varieties of complication."¹⁰

Tess of D'Urbervilles is a story of simple triangular love. Here Tess is loved by two rivals Engel Clare and Alec. In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Oak and Boldwood love Bathsheba. Bathsheba loves Troy, but Troy loves Fanny. In *The Trumpet Major* Anne loves Job, Bob Festus and Bob Loves Mablda.

Thus almost all the novels of Hardy have love stories. They can be represented through Rhombus. Throughout these novels the same pattern of love has been followed. This is the simple law of Hardy's plots. The action proceeds

9. Duffin, H.C.: *Thomas Hardy- A Study of the Wessex Novels, the Poems and the Dynasts*, p.99

10. *Ibid*, p.99

in direct lines. There are no digressions or sub plots or excess of characters. "In adopting this method of the broad simple outline Hardy departed from the practice of his immediate predecessors."¹¹ He is not like Dickens or Thackeray whose novels have a big population. He established the tradition of simplicity of plot, and fewer characters. One can observe this simplicity in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. There are few characters who are all prime characters. 'Clare is the hero and of great interest, but he is rather portrayed definitely than studied and allowed to destroy his presence. He is chiefly necessary as part of Tess's environment. Now is there any complexity in the action? Tess meets Alec and is seduced. She meets Clare and is wooed and won, the two facts clash with infinite ruin. This is a very simple plot. Similarly in *The Return of the Native* the simplicity is characteristic of the plot where Eustacia is shown torn between two lovers. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is again quite simple. It is one figure story. The novelist is chiefly concerned with the conflict in the mind of Henchard.

The plots are realistic. They represent life as it is. There is no exaggeration there. They observe the principle "willing suspension of disbelief." In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, the novelist has very cleverly divided the novel into seven phases, each one describing different stage and gradual development of Tess. Thus Hardy's plots are simple. A single idea governs them throughout.

Use of symbols is one of the most prominent techniques adopted by Hardy in his novels. Hardy was a great symbolist. He made extensive use of the same in his poems and novels as well, and the themes of his major novels always have a great symbolical significance. The opening scene of *Far From the Madding Crowd* or any of the major Wessex novels will show how adept Hardy has been in the employment of symbolism. The scene opens with Gabriel Oak who always carries in his coat-pocket a silver watch looking like a clock. Its peculiarity is

11. *Ibid*, p.101

that either it moves too fast or does not move at all. Like this watch, its owner too shall have an irregular life to live. That is, Oak will never have a smooth sailing in his life. Further, Oak often remedies the stopping peculiarity of his watch by "thumps and shakes". It implies that, like his watch, Oak will also get several "thumps and shakes" in the hands of his destiny.

An ornamental spring wagon, laden with household goods and window plants, comes down the slope and Bathsheba is found sitting on the summit of the load. She sits motionless surrounded by tables and chairs with their legs upwards, some pots of flower plants, a caged canary, and a cat in a partly opened willow basket. With half-closed eyes, the cat affectionately surveys the small bird around. This is a scene that symbolises what is in store for Bathsheba in future.

Moving from the opening to any other scenes, the symbolic significance does not appear less striking. The scene where Gabriel being saved by Bathsheba when he is about to die of suffocation, suggests that although she may have distaste in accepting him either as a lover or as a husband, he will be provided with all his primary needs by her. After his financial ruin in consequence of fire in his own establishment, Gabriel gets employment in Bathsheba's manor farm and can thus maintain himself somehow.

The fire, which is about to destroy Bathsheba's rickyard, is brought under control by Gabriel. It is symbolic of the part which Gabriel is destined to play in Bathsheba's life. At every crucial moment of her life he will appear as a friend, a helper, a saviour. It also symbolises that the fire of love and passion, tormenting her feminine heart, will be finally extinguished only after her union with Gabriel.

In *The Return of the Native*, Hardy's symbolism can be traced even in its setting. Egdon Heath is the setting: it is the vast tract of unenclosed wild which

embrowns itself moment by moment. The face of the heath by its mere complexion can add half an hour to evening. It can in the like manner retard the dawn, sadden moon, anticipate the frowning of storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of a moonless midnight to cause of shaking and dread. It is neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly; it is neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame. But like a time, it is slighted and enduring, and withal singularity colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony. Distilled by the sun, kneaded by the moon, it is renewed in a year, in a day, or in an hour. The sea changes, the field changes, the river changes, and even man changes; but Egdon remains unchanging and eternal. It has a lonely face, suggesting tragical possibilities. Egdon Heath, like the fungoid forest of The Woodlanders is essentially a symbol as it ambivalently presents nature in both her aspects: vestigial, Wordsworthian, benign on the one hand, casual, Darwinian, and frightening on the other.

The symbolical significance of Egdon Heath and Hintock Woods may also be interpreted in the way that nature, far from being a passive background of human joys and sorrows, is an active agent of Destiny to crush its victims at its own whim. Egdon slays Eustacia who is unable to stand its sombre sylvan spirit. Again, the Hintock Woods thrusts a rival in love upon Winterborne and works out his tragic doom. Thus, Egdon Heath and the Hintock Woods are not mere landscapes but are the effective agents of Destiny to catch its victims under its unfailling meshes.

Of all the scenes of *The Return of the Native*, perhaps the gambling scene is the most symbolic. Mrs. Yeobright has sent Christian to distribute hundred family guineas to be distributed between Thomasin and Clym in equal proportion. Christian meets his fellow rustics and accompanies them to the Quiet Woman Inn to enjoy the game of raffle. His companions place their shillings on the table. Christian also yields to the temptation, and he too lays down his shilling. The

raffle begins and the dice goes round. To the surprise of all, and to his own surprise too, Christian finds that he has won. This victory brings to his poor wits the thought of being a lucky person. From his remarks it does not become difficult for Wildeve, who is standing near him, to understand what he is carrying to Thomasin. Both of them leave the inn to start for mistover. On the way Wildeve induces him to try his luck again on the dark lonely heath, placing the guineas at stake. It is now more than ten o'clock at night. This time Christian loses all the guineas to Wildeve and he goes away in a miserable plight. Now Diggory comes to the scene. He sits down at Christian's place and lays down a sovereign at the stone. So completely is Wildeve carried away by the excitement of recent success that he at once places a guinea at stake, and the game of dice commences. Both the gamblers are so engrossed in the game that they have now no sense of time, place or situation. When their light goes off, Wildeve catches glow-worms to continue the game. Their night long performance draws as many as fifty heath-croppers around them to enjoy their gambling silently. But fortune favours the reddleman who wins all the hundred guineas from Wildeve.

The gambling scene suggests more than what it says, and its suggestion are various. It suggests, for example, that gambling is an exciting game that can automatically attract a large crowd. About fifty heath-croppers have come to enjoy its excitement even in midnight. It is too forbidden a game to be held in public or in broad daylight. A scheduled spot, away from human haunts, and preferably the darkness of the night are usually suitable for such a game. It is also a temptation; it begins to tempt men by initial success to gamble more and more, no matter how he may lose in the end. It is also most uncertain in its results; and who will win or who will lose ultimately cannot be predicted beforehand. Under the influence of such a reckless game, a gambler becomes unconscious of time, place or situation. Both Wildeve and Diggory are notable examples.

The opening scene of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* essentially symbolises the wane out relationship between husband and wife. Poverty stricken Henchard has become the symbol of the victim of Industrial Revolution; he is thrown out of employment and reduced to poverty. The industrial revolution has unsettled and uprooted the English peasantry so long sustained and secured by the agrarian economy.

Another most symbolically significant scene of the novel is perhaps, the one in which Henchard sells his wife and child on auction. He enters the furnity shop at Susan's request, but soon understands its real business and begins to drink. When he is fully drunk, the auctioneer is engaged in selling the old, worn out and useless horses on auction outside. The very idea of disposing of his wife and child through auction at once strikes him. Accordingly, they are put on auction and sold to the highest bidder, Richard Mewson, a sailor.

The symbolic significance of the auction scene is that financial hardships enfeeble marriage bond so much so that the victim of poverty and unemployment may not hesitate to break it off completely. Though Henchard apparently sells his wife and child under the influence of liquor, the real cause behind is his acute poverty resulting from his early marriage. This is what he always feels but never speaks in his sober moments. He speaks of his feeling when he is drunk, and so he sells his wife and child to the highest bidder.

Another interpretation may be that liquor takes away all the good qualities of man and makes so much of a useless animal of him that he may consider even his own wife and child in terms of useless animals fit to be sold on auction like those of the old, worn out and useless horses. A third but the more significant interpretation may be that, like the present auction, Henchard's own life is also going to be auctioned in near future by his cruel destiny. As he throws away Susan and Elizabeth Jane as useless articles to the sailor, the highest bidder,

Henchard's fate will also throw him away as a useless article to his more worthy and more capable rival Farfrae who will displace him in business, in love, and in mayoralty.

As it is in *The Return of the Native*, nature has a symbolic meaning in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* too. There is a deep symbolic sense in which the eternal forms and manifestations of nature have been woven into the thematic scheme. Nature is seen as a part and expression of elemental forces that seem to obey the mighty dictates of a blind Immanent Will. With an autonomous existence, nature stands as a living force, as a living character, for human undoing. The Chase, the oldest wood in England, in which Tess is seduced by Alec in the darkness of the cold night, illustrates it. The whole natural atmosphere seems to have concurred with and connived at the villain's villainy only to bring about Tess's ruination.

The baptism scene in which Tess herself baptises her illegitimate child Sorrow, followed by the burial scene, is symbolically most meaningful. Her child is on the verge of death, and Tess knows it only too well. Yet she baptises him, and after his death, just after baptism, gives him a Christian burial by herself. In both the baptism and burial scenes Tess herself has to act as priest as no priest is available for services to an illegitimate child. Both the scenes may be interpreted in several ways. Mother's distress at the misery of her child may make her so daring that she does not hesitate to transgress any law whether moral, social or religious. Another interpretation may be that mother's heart always craves for the welfare of her child not merely in this world but even the world beyond. There is yet a third interpretation which is that Christianity in its too much of orthodoxy breaks its own gospel- to hate sin, not the sinner. This is what is suggested by the non-appearance of a regular priest for rendering baptism and burial services to Tess's illegitimate child.

Further, this novel as a whole gives rise to several ideas. First, like *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, this novel presents a symbolic tale of gradual extinction of the age old Wessex peasantry by the emergence of the modern capitalistic economy. As Arnold Kettle puts it, Tess herself is the story as well as the symbol of destruction.¹² Second, it is the symbolic tale of the suffering of a pure woman whose purity lies in her heart, not in her body. Tess suffers because she is impure in her body but pure in her heart. Third, it is the symbolic tale of an innocent young woman suffering on account of a double standard in man made moral laws in respect of purity and chastity for men and women. Unchastity for women is a transgression and punishment. For the same offence, if it is at all an offence for Tess, because she is forced to be involved against her will, there is no punishment for Alec, but Tess is severely punished and she suffers immeasurably.

Similarly, the theme of *Jude the Obscure* stands as a symbol of several ideas. The first is the academic frustration of many young people of modern times caused by the lack of academic opportunities. Jude himself is its living symbol. The second is a pathetic human plight resulting from an individuality which is too strong to be fitted into the common scheme, but which is too weak to keep out of conflict with it. Jude and Sue are strong enough to violate the sanctity of the age old social institution of marriage. But they are too weak to stand its consequences and are completely crushed in course of time. The third is Hardy's own statement—happiness is but an occasional episode in the general drama of pain. This idea is not however peculiar to this novel only. It has been translated through all other tragic novels of Hardy. In the lives of all his heroes and heroines—Oak and Bathsheba, Clym and Eustacia, Henchard, Giles, and Grace, Tess, and Jude and Sue—joy is casual, while pain is usual.

12. Kettle, Arnold: *An Introduction to the English Novel*, p.227

“As in his other novels, Hardy employs symbolism frequently and effortlessly in *Jude the Obscure*.¹³ For we have in this novel three types of novel in particular—natural, cultural and Christian or religious. The slaughtering of the pig by Arabella with Jude’s help is the most outstanding example of natural symbolism. The pig stands as the representative of all victims and scapegoats and sacrifices. Although Jude helps Arabella in slaughtering the pig, he feels for the animal. His pity for the animal and his bewilderment about the morality of its fate symbolise man’s reaction to the casual indifference of nature. The blood that stains the snow when the pig is killed symbolises all the suffering generated by existence. It is hideous and meaningless, but it is necessary; the very miserable existence makes it necessary.

The intense physicality of the pig killing scene also makes it a symbol of Jude’s degradation with Arabella. Jude has responded to the call of his flesh and pulse of his blood and it has brought him to this grotesque wallowing in gore. It implies that Arabella, with Jude’s own existence, is slaughtering his hopes and aspirations, leaving only a limited physical satisfaction.

The rabbit caught in the gin seems to be symbolic of the plight of both Jude and Sue. Jude is caught up in the powerful machinery of his own obscure fate, while Sue is caught in the psychological and social trap of her marriage with Phillotson. Jude puts the rabbit out of its agony just as Father Time puts Sue’s younger children out of the world.

Hardy links up Arabella with the pig, while Sue with birds; and this linking certainly gives rise to a powerful symbolic suggestion. In her association with the pig Arabella symbolises the physical and the gross in her very being. But Sue, on the other hand symbolises the spiritual and the delicate in her association with birds. Jude is kind to birds from the very beginning of his life. We have seen

13. *Buttler, Lance St. John : Thomas Hardy, p.136*

his kindness to them when he allowed the rooks to eat oats in Troutham's field when he was a mere child. It suggests that he will be kind to Sue when he will meet her subsequently. He offers her not the trap of marriage she is much afraid of, but the 'nest'.

Passing from the natural to the cultural level, we have the symbol of Christminster. The Christminster symbol alternates with Jude's inspiration and frustration. When he sees this city for the first as a glow on the horizon, it symbolises Jude's aspiration for an academic life. But subsequently when he finds that an academic life is beyond his reach, Christminster symbolises to him mist, illusion and frustration.

Christian and religious symbols are however no less interesting than either the natural or cultural symbol. When man loses his religious faith, he begins to take upon him some of the characteristics of God and Christ. Henchard did it; Tess did it; and Jude and Sue are of no exception. Christminster is associated with Jerusalem. Like Christ abandoned by Jerusalem, Jude also abandoned by Christminster. Jude frequently quotes scripture, and his death-bed oration is an extensive quotation from the book of Job. His name is that of an apostle at least.

Sue, too, has biblical and Christian associations. She is "The Ishmaelite"; she first appears in an aura of high-church ritual; and after the death of her children, her cup of misery is full and she returns to her husband and is remarried to him. Like Christ in the garden, she herself chooses to drink the cup of her suffering, and in both the cases the motivation is the same- the fulfillment of God's will. So Sue, like Jude, Tess and Henchard, is a suffering Christ figure, Christ suffered for humanity. Hardy applies it to suggest that any suffering humanity is Christ.

Hardy is not only symbolic in the presentation of his themes but also fantastic and marvellous in the conception of his character and plot. In spite of a

logical sequence of cause and effect applied in the broad outlines of his characters and plots, Hardy's fondness for the marvellous, for the grotesque, for the tragedy that always underlies comedy makes him appear quite fantastic. The word 'fantastic' literally means a state of extravagant fancy, and he who is extravagantly fanciful may be called fantastic.

During the childhood Hardy had witnessed many memorable events, sad, ironic, sordid and criminal in his native place, rural Dorset. The images of these events, which he directly perceived from his senses, remained almost fixed in Hardy's fancy. But when his faculties had reached the creative stage of development, Hardy's imagination helped him almost to make new construction out of those fixed images of childhood, It is thus partly from fancy and partly from imagination, drawing his imagination from both of them, something using his fixed images and sometimes altering them that Hardy has become fantastic and marvellous. That Hardy is more interested in the unique and aberrant individual than the common relation type is an instance of his being fantastic.

Hardy wrote in his note book of April 1887: "In a work of art it is the accident which charms, not the intention; that only like and admire. Instance the amber tones that pervade the folds of drapery in ancient marbles, the deadened polish of the surfaces, and the cracks and the scratches".¹⁴ In another note of March 1880, Hardy recorded: "Art consists in so depicting the common events of life as to bring out the features which illustrate the author's idiosyncratic mode of regard; making old incidents and things seem as new".¹⁵ Hardy in his letter of May 1901, wrote : "My own interest lies largely in non-rationalistic subjects, since non-rationality seems, so far as one can perceive, to be the principle of Universe. By which I do not mean foolishness, but rather a principle for which

14. Hardy, E.F.: *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, p.191

15. *Ibid*, p.225

there is exact name, lying at the indifference point between rationality and irrationality".¹⁶ Mrs. Hardy's letter of Feb 18, 1920, shows that Hardy was rather an irrationalist than a rationalist. "He could show that no man is a rationalist, and that human's actions are not ruled by reason at all the last report."¹⁷

Fond as he was of irrationalism, accident, idiosyncrasy, grotesqueness and strangeness, most of the Hardy's prominent men and women are not of the common type. Clym, for example, quits his flourishing diamond trade in Paris with an avowed purpose of educating the heath people, despite his mother's timely and most reasonable warning to the contrary. Something that strikes him once, he must pursue up to the last. He is not aware of his own limitation in materialising the scheme in his head. When he is seized with near blindness, he become an ordinary furze-cutter, being totally oblivious of his education, his former occupation in Paris, his social position and the sentiment of his town born wife. This is Clym's irrationalism, rather his abnormalism. His wife, Eustacia, is freakish and shifty; she at first falls in love with Wildeve because there is no one else better in the lonely Egdon. But Clym being a better object to be loved, she falls in love with him and marries him. But the way she goes to meet Clym for the first time is worthy of note. She conceals her female identity and goes to Clym's house as one of the mummers to play the part of The Turkish Knight in place of Charley. It may speak of her novelty, but also of her abnormality.

In the group of aberrant individuals, Henchard is perhaps the gem. In a drunken state his sub-conscious begins to work, when unwanted animals are sold on auction. He smarts under a sense of deprivation that the opportunities of his life have been thwarted by an early marriage. In such an abnormal state of mind Henchard disposes of his unwanted wife, Susan, on auction. Then he takes a vow not to touch wine and does not touch it for the next twenty years of his life.

16. Hardy, E.F.: *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, p.303

17. *Ibid*, p.403

This is also not normal on the part of one who was once a first rate drunkard. It proves that Henchard is always extreme. If he loves any one, he loves him too much; if he hates someone he also hates him too much. Henchard's fluctuating behaviour with Farfrae and Elizabeth are the case in point. The manner of his death and framing of his last testament, expressive of his bitter hatred towards all that he valued so much in life, also points to his abnormal temperament.

Tess is also uncommon and abnormal. Unlike any normal Victorian girl, she, a girl of thirteen only, undertakes a journey at night, herself driving the cart. Her only companion was her nine year old brother, Abraham. So happens the inevitable, the accident and the death of Prince, the only bread earner of the family. This does not seem to be normal on the part of a girl of thirteen years only. She also brings in illegitimate child in public and even allows her baby to suck her in public, completely disregarding all public titterings. She also baptizes her baby and gives it a Christian burial when it dies. She discloses her past to her husband, Angel Clare, despite her mother's advice to the contrary. It may be moral, but not rational, on her part to have done so. Again, to kill Alec, her seducer, and that too, with a bread-knife, is also not expected of a normal Victorian girl.

Jude stands between rationality and irrationality, while she stands for abnormality. Jude is rational in that he is aware of his own limitation and he learns free-stone masonry so that he can learn and earn at the same time at Christminster. He seems to be however irrational in his violent passion for women, first for Arabella, next for Sue. Sue is intellectual, but she is pathetically abnormal. She is reported to have undergone a marriage rehearsal with a devoted young man, with whom she lived as wife but without any physical relation. On a sudden spur of the moment she is engaged to and marries Phillotson, who befits her more as a father than a husband. But she detastes her married life and runs to her

cousin. What is peculiar in her, she is desirous of her infusion with male spirit through marriage, but averse to any physical contact. She lives with Jude as his mistress, yet there is no physical contact for a considerable period of time. This kind of sexlessness is certainly an abnormal trait in her. The reappearance of Arabella however makes her nervous and she surrenders herself to Jude's lust. She becomes the mother of Jude's children without being married to him. Such an aversion to marriage is uncommon among the common Victorian girls. When her children are killed, she can not bear the shock. She deserts Jude and returns to Phillotson to be remarried to him. But it seems to be her funeral rather than her wedding. Sue is abnormal in her complexity and nervousness, abnormal in her strength as well as in her weakness.

Hardy shows his fascination for fantasy, mystery, magic and the marvellous not merely in the idiosyncratic behaviour of his prominent men and women but also in his method of using natural objects and occurrences in a perfectly natural way.

The Reddeman of *The Return of the Native*, who is tall, silent, solitary, in close-fitting raiment, who is lurid red from crown to heel, and who is easily and always at one with the cryptic shades of Edgong, may be cited as an example. Mysteriously does he move across the vast Edgong abode of gloom. Omnipresent and all watchful over the destinies of other persons of the novel, he is ever ready with new moves, and interferes at all crises like the finger of a deity. He moves underground; and how does it come and go nobody knows. He is a ghost, and he should have disappeared like a ghost; but it is startling, somewhat fantastic to find him married quietly at the end of the story. "His (Hardy's) practice in this respect amounts to a denial of the Aristotelian doctrine that probable impossibilities are to be preferred to improbable possibilities"¹⁸

18. Duffin, H.C.: *Thomas Hardy*, p.114

Hardy also builds up the atmosphere of fantasy and marvelousness through chance, accident or coincidence. It is a ubiquitous, yet lawless and unacknowledged phenomenon in Hardy's novels; and it is as important a feature in the lives of Hardy's people as it is in real life. It crops up everywhere, in crises in passing events. When Bathsheba is almost mentally prepared to fall in love and to come to tears with Boldwood, she has a chance meeting with Sergeant Troy in course of her inspecting the fir plantation at night. Her flowing skirt is caught in the spur of this young handsome soldier. Hardy's brilliant description of the event, even more than the conversation more than the two, can transport his readers into land of magic and marvel.

"The man to whom she was hooked was brilliant in brass and scarlet. He was a soldier. His sudden appearance was to darkness what the sound of a trumpet is to silence. Gloom, the genius loci at all times hitherto, was now totally overthrown, less by the lantern light than by what the lantern lighted. The contrast of this revelation with her anticipations of some sinister figure in sombre garb was so great that it had upon her the effect of a fairy transformation."¹⁹

This strange coincidence does shift Bathsheba's affection from Boldwood to Troy and brings her painful suffering in turn.

In *The Return of the Native*, chance almost assumes the form of an inexorable fate to turn human lives into a drama of pain and pathos. Almost at every step chance is at work to give a cruel turn to things unwillingly. Charley kindles a bonfire on the fifth of November to please his mistress Eustacia, but without ever knowing that Wildeve takes it as a signal from her; it is a cruel joke perpetrated on Eustacia by a cruel chance. It has a far reaching consequence in so far as it draws Wildeve to Eustacia again and places her in position to plan her

19. Hardy, Thomas: *Far From the Madding Crowd*, p. 182

flight from Egdon. But it ultimately ends her exit from life. It is another cruel chance that instead of starting at the midnight hour Wildeve is kept waiting, lost in his own thoughts, and starts fifteen minutes late. Had he started in time, one is left conjecturing, Eustacia might not have met her tragic end in the Weir.

After Susan's death, lonely Henchard leans to Elizabeth Jane for solace and comfort. Just then he has the fatal discovery that she is not his daughter, but the sailor's. At the very idea of being deceived so long by a falsehood, Henchard is too infuriated to control himself. The girl is so ill-treated that she is forced to run away from shelter of her step father. Further, when Lucetta is eagerly waiting for Henchard, the caller is not Henchard, but Farfrae who has come to meet Elizabeth Jane who is also not at home. This coincidence paves the ground for mutual affection, love and ultimate union between Farfrae and Lucetta.

In course of returning from Chase-borough weekly market on a Saturday night, Tess is physically assaulted by a dark virago, Car Darch, dubbed as the Queen of Spades, her sister Nancy, nicknamed the Queen of Diamonds, and by some more working women. For, they are all inflamed to madness by a long smouldering sense of rivalry against Tess. Just then Alec comes to her rescue. At almost any other moment of her life Tess would have refused such preferred aid and company; but now in her helpless state, she is forced to accept his help. This strange behaviour and acceptance however lets her fall from frying-pan into the fire. He takes her into the chase, and she becomes a victim of his physical lust. The maiden becomes a mother in due course. Thus, chances and co-incidences have a free play in Hardy, but they are unforced and always explicable; and sometimes they are sufficiently explained.

Hardy can create his fantastic and marvellous world even through the agency of events quite natural, yet strange and uncommon. The scene in the hollow amid the ferns in which Troy displays his sword fighting and wins the

heart of Bathsheba is an example. Troy stands waiting for Bathsheba at the bottom of a pit where the performance is to take place. He helps her down the slope. The pit is a saucer-shaped concave, naturally formed, with a top diameter of about thirty feet, and shallow enough to allow the sunshine reach their heads. Bathsheba is asked to stay a few yards off as if she were the enemy to be attacked by Troy. He misses her every time by a hair's breadth. She is dazzled by a glitter of sword gleaming and flashing into her right, to her left, in her front, seeming to pierce through her, yet leaving her untouched. Then second performance is even more surprising. She scarcely sees the sword before it is a sky full of meteors before her eyes, close at hand. Finally she astonishes by cutting off a lock of her hair, and then a caterpillar sitting on her bodice, without touching her even. Bathsheba fears Troy, she sinks down overcome by a hundred tumultuous emotions, and the spell breaks in a stream of tears as he kisses her unawares and disappears. Bathsheba is now completely hypnotised by his marvellous skill. To her, it was a magic, but to him it was only his skill.

The intensity of fear also helps Hardy to create his wonder and fantasy. The precipice - adventure for the firing of love between Knight and Elfride is a case in point. Having gone to a precipice, Knight cannot keep his balance, and he slips. But somehow he is able to lay his hand on the rock and he keeps himself hanging. He is literally on the veritable verge of death. The situation is most fearful, and quite in an exciting manner. Elfride, by making a rope after tearing off her undergarment, is able to save the life of the dying man. It is by this incident that the two lovers are charged to the sparkling point.

Hardy's fondness for things strange and uncommon also makes him fantastic and wonderful. Its best illustration is perhaps Tess's baptism of her illegitimate child and Christian burial given to it after its death. Her child being illegitimate, no person comes to baptise it. But child is almost coming to its last

breath. Tess then stands erect with the infant on her arm beside the basin, the next sister holds the Prayer Book open before her, as the clerk at church holds it before the person; and thus Tess goes about baptising her child. The whole process is so uncommon and strange that it has become fantastic.

Tess baptises her baby at midnight, but it dies next morning. The Vicar refuses to give it a Christian burial. But Tess gives it a Christian burial by carrying the baby to the churchyard at night in small deal box, under an ancient woman's shawl. The burial is made with a "lantern-light, at the cost of a shilling and a pint of beer to the sexton, in that shabby corner of God's allotment where he lets the nettles grow, and where all unbaptised infants, notorious drunkards, suicides, and others of the conjecturally damned are laid".²⁰ The surroundings are untoward, but Tess bravely makes a little cross of two sticks and a piece of string, and having bound it with flowers, she sticks it up at the head of the grave. At the foot of the grave, she also puts a bunch of the same flowers in a little jar of water to keep them alive.

Jude's first vision of Christminster, as a boy of eleven, is perhaps the most touching and beautiful of all Hardy's suggestion of the natural - supernatural. It also goes to account for Hardy's fantastic elements. Having climbed a ladder that he has been told may give him a view of what he thinks of as 'the heavenly Jerusalem', he finds the distance shrouded in a mist. From the ladder he looks in the direction of his city of dream and romance, but nothing is visible to him on account of mist. He kneels on the third rung of the ladder and prays for the removal of the mist. Jude sits and waits. Within ten or fifteen minutes the thinning mist begins to dissolve in the northern horizon. Within about fifteen minutes the cloud part away completely, and Jude looks back in old direction. Some way within the limits of the stretch of landscape, points of light like the topaz gleam.

20. Hardy, Thomas: *Tess of D'Urbervilles*, p.124

The topaz points show themselves to be the vanes, windows, wet roof slates, and other shining spots upon the spires, domes, freestone-work, and varied outlines that are faintly revealed. It is unquestionably Christminster, either directly seen, or miraged in the peculiar atmosphere. Jude gazes and gazes till the windows and vanes lose their shine, going out almost suddenly like extinguished candles. The vague city becomes veiled in mist.

These instances are enough to show that Hardy is a master of mystery in a distinctly new and fascinating way. Hardy is not however a romancer, nor a mystic; and it is eminently satisfying to find in him, especially in such an acknowledged master of the realities of life of as Hardy is, a clear and practical conviction in the immanence of the supernatural. None can perhaps deny that the world is a queer place, and even queerer than we shall ever know. Hardy appears fantastic in his attempt to bring out the queerness of the world, the hidden truth that underlies human situation and the unusual truth that has seldom been revealed. This is a distinctively modern tendency in Hardy.

Hardy's creative power is best exhibited in the **portrayal of characters**. The first and the best quality of Hardy as a novelist is his wonderful gift of developing characters in his novels. No critic has doubted the greatness of Hardy in this respect. His mastery in the art of characterization is seldom questioned. The reader of Hardy can never forget the long list of great characters which ever remain fresh in his memory. We have Jude Fawley, Gabriel Oak, Angel Clare, Michael Henchard, Clym Yezobright, and Giles Winterbore who are some of the male characters. They make deep impression on the minds of the readers. They have their own whims, impulses and philosophies. Among the male characters, we have unforgettable secondary characters such as, Boldwood, Farfrae, Phillston, Troy, Alec d'Urberville and Jocelyn Pustin. They are the finest examples of human weaknesses and virtues. Then we have female characters-

Tess, Sue, Bathsheba, Elizabeth-Jane, Grace and Marty. Hardy has shown wonderful grasp of womanly 'nature'. The above names are really 'a symphony'.

In the presentation of these characters Hardy delves deep into human nature. "He places the crystals of human souls in his crucibles and subjects them to the awful test of a white enduring heat".²¹ We can pick up Tess, for example, and analyse the method of Hardy in the creation of characters. He has seen agony and innocence in the heart of Tess. From beginning to the end, Hardy has wonderfully entered into the hidden parts of Tess's heart.

A kind of Shakespearean tragic treatment is found in Tess. Tess not only dies but her soul is clearly ruined. This stark tragedy is similar to some of the great tragedies of Shakespeare like Lear, Macbeth and Hamlet "now not in the rest of Elizabethan drama, not in the rest of English literature till you find another soul's tragedy until you reach Hardy and this supreme feature of Shakespeare's tragedy is born again in the novels of pure modern."

One important aspect of Hardy's mastery of character-presentation is that he gives us what may be called the soul's tragedy which is also a feature of Shakespeare's genius as a playwright. The tragedy of Tess lies not in her desertion, her struggle for bread, her frightful death; but it lies in her sin, her bewilderment of soul at Clare's behaviour, the intense agony of her despair, culminating in the awful wrecking of her nature in the foul embrace of Alec's renewed love making. To be crushed to death by grief is nothing; but for a pure woman to be crushed into impurity- there is a soul's tragedy that has no equal in horror. Again, the pure, strong, and beautiful soul of Sue Bridehead is wasted away by the bitter processes of sorrow, fear, error until it becomes a shrunken, maniac thing, too pitiful to be thought upon. Only in these two greatest of the novels is the soul's tragedy to be found, but in these two it is undoubtedly present and the fact is

21. Duffin, H.C.: *Thomas Hardy- A study of the Wessex Novels*, p.9

sufficient to set Hardy, so far as tragedy is concerned, above all other novelists. It is to be noted too that in each case the subject of this special catastrophe is a woman). In some of the other novels too we have the soul's tragedy, though in a much less concentrated and intense form: we have it in the grim struggles and vicissitudes of the Mayor of Casterbridge; in the splendors and disappointments of the love of Eustacia Vye; in the lightning-riven glooms of Farmer Boldwood etc.

The contemporary critics pointed out that all characters of Hardy are common people, villagers, rustics, peasants and labourers. Before Hardy, the practice of almost all character-creators, whether in novel or drama, had been in accordance with Aristotle's theory, following in some modified form the precept that the tragic hero must be a man of high rank. However, Hardy draws his tragic hero or heroines from amongst the common people. They are Tess, a milk maid and hard-driven general farm-hand, daughter of a haggler and his vulgar wife; Jude Fawley, stonemason, sometime baker's assistant; Gabriel Oak, shepherd; Sue Bridehead, elementary school teacher; Michael Henchard, itinerant hay-trusser. These five, the very greatest of the heroes and heroines, are all drawn from the most commonplace walks of life and from occupations which for other writers are completely devoid of romance. Few novelists had, before Hardy, dared to believe that a school teacher or a hay-trusser possessed not only a soul, but also characterised by beauty and grandeur. This in Hardy is the peculiar grace. This is perhaps his supreme achievement- to have found among the unnoticed and forgotten crowds of average humanity, persons as mysteriously interesting and as spiritually adventurous as were ever those of queens and emperors. In a sense this is Hardy's special contribution to the Spirit of the Age-democracy. He first declared the common man to be individually a person of

great subtlety and of Olympian grandeur. This gives to Hardy an extraordinary position among the great creators of character.

The real greatness of Hardy is that he selects characters from ordinary walks of life and makes them so impressive. They become more universal. Out of prosaic incidents of life, he is able to weave a poetic pattern of life which is so appealing to the readers. Life is as interesting among ordinary people as it is in palaces and luxurious drawing rooms. Hardy has disproved that Hamlet's feelings are not present in among common people. By presenting common people, Hardy has really responded to the spirit of Democracy. "It is this type of dim unapprehended personality that Hardy, for the first time in the literature has definitely taken up and made his own. In a sense it is Hardy's special contribution to the spirit of the age— Democracy."²²

Many critics and writers including R.L Stevenson were of the opinion that characters must come from ordinary life. In all the characters of Hardy, we have some special aspects which attract our notice by its simple beauty. "One can point to Tess, with her natural refinement, Oak with his natural dignity, Henchard with his natural grandeur."²³ These characters spring from the very soil of Wessex. Hardy develops new presentation of man where nature forms the background.

The method of character-drawing followed by Hardy is set and his own. This is exemplified by— Henchard and Tess. In the creation of characters his eyes are always on the formation of human personality. For example in Henchard he studies the growth of his mind and heart. The essential substance of a man is manifested to the main currents of his career. But in addition to there are a host of incidental touches of portraiture —vivid descriptive phrases, metaphor illuminations and revealing comparisons, chance utterances of man himself that

22. Duffin, H.C.: *Thomas Hardy- A study of the Wessex Novels*, p. 13

23. *Ibid*, p. 13

are Hardy's means of building up a personality of extraordinary consistency, probability, warmth and reality.

The characters of Hardy are true to life. He has not painted the idealistic aspects of life through his characters. One may find both virtues and vices, weaving the pattern of life. The members of Hardy's world, in short, present such a compound of evil with good as their prototype on the wider stage of earth. There is however even a broader ground of judgment. It is not sufficient that his characters should be human; they must also be what is called universal. All characters that are not unreal, impossible, are either realist, typical or universal. The designers of realistic figures work from keen but superficial observation of men. He has an eye like a camera, and produces vivid photographs; he presented only an outside view of his creations, and his art needs no plumbing of human nature.

In the rustics drawn by Hardy although realistically drawn, there is imaginative or romantic colouring. They have been idealized by the novelist. Hardy becomes poetic when he describes labourers, plebeians, or villagers. Hardy shows marvelous power in describing the typical. The type are multiple, distinct and exclusive. Typical characters cannot show us the depth of human nature. Hardy's characters are not types. "But most of the characters of Hardy's novels are neither types nor mere individuals but universals. Each comprehend within himself the whole of human nature which is one and indivisible. They have their varied casting of the coloured glass of individuality, but the light at the centre is white. To call Hardy a 'fearless realist', is to neither romanticist nor prude: but in the character his eye and hand are those of the idealist – the idealist who rises above the accidents and distinctions of external show, and looks deep down into human nature itself."

The key to Hardy's attitude as a writer is to be found in one of his essays where he writes:

"The conduct of the upper classes is screened by conventions, and thus the real character is not easily seen; if it is seen, it must be portrayed subjectively; whereas in the lower walks, conduct is a direct expression of the inner life; and thus character can be directly portrayed through the act. In one case the author's word has to be taken as to the nerves and muscles of his figures; in the other they can be seen".²⁴

In the light of this, one can understand the ease and sureness with which he deals with simple, primal natures; and the awkwardness and theatricality which appear whenever he has to deal with the more complex character of the highly civilized man or woman. Hardy's strength, as well as his inclination, lay in tracing the elemental things of life, and this is why he took Wessex as his province and did not, for the most part, deal with London and town society.

The Assamese regional novelists also employed various techniques in their novels. Mostly they were traditional in nature; nevertheless, certain experimentation can be found under the influence of western as well as Bengali literature. Nabakanta Baruah's *Kapiliparia Sadhu* is a fine regional novel. It is a fine embodiment of use of the author's own technique. It depicts mysterious kinds of intimacy of its hero with the Kapili River, as we can see in the case of Clym to Egdon Heath. Like Hardy, Nabakanta Baruah also has successfully presented creation in a poetic description. About his own creation, the novelist says that he was unable to write novel in a traditional style. He was not a novelist, rather a speaker only.

24. Quoted in John Boynton Priestley's *The English novel*, p.107

*"Prachalita urthat mai upanyas rachana kariba ketiau para nai. Mai haitu upanyasik nahau- kathamatra"*²⁵

Baruah has been a soft speaker, with intense thinking but less expression. His control of using words has reduced the volume of his novel. However, Baruah's presentation technique is very intense and melodious. The influence of the poet Nabakanta Baruah can be seen in his novel too.

The novelist used the technique of symbolism in the very beginning of the novel. In the very first chapter, there has been a description of a Gorua fish, that was caught by the fisherman in Kapili. The very description of the fish symbolically depicts the next course of the novel, highlighting the mental set-up of the hero of the novel. The description of the fish is given as below:

*"Garuwa machue barkoi chatphataisil. Jaluwa dutai dhari machtur phul khanar bhitareedi hat khan bharai dingitu chepi dharile. Machtue mamah dutak karkaphal khowai upharai pathaba khuje. Sihatar hata tuj lage. Machtur mukhedhi tej ulai gutei murtu ranga hoi jai.....Kapilir panit kiman tej mihali hoi ase?"*²⁶

Apparently it is a simple description, but it intensely highlights the sure and certain death of the fish. The act of washing the blood red hands by the fisherman symbolically depicts the fact that the Kapili River is certainly the silent spectator of pain and suffering of its neighbouring people. The suffering of the dying fish has also left deep impact on Rupai's mind, for a moment he thought if his uncle also died like the fish. However, this feeling was not intense in his mind and he forgets it very soon. This was the technique used by the author to explain the perplexities of the mind of the hero in the novel. He immediately withdraws

25. Dutta, Utpal (ed): Nabakanta Baruar Upanyas Samagra, preface, p.1

26. Baruah, Nabakanta: Kapiliparia Sadhu, p.18

himself from the sadness and concentrates on some practical activity of shooting birds. Rupai was not mesmerized by the paths of life. This gives the indication of Rupai's mental state.

The novelist has used the technique of mysticism and marvellous through the character of Rupai. Rupai is really a mysterious character. After the death of his beloved Sunpahi, Rupai's abrupt decision of getting married shocked everyone. His way of acceptance that the death of Sunpahi was the will of mother Kapili, couldn't be easily acceptable to the readers. Rupai never took life seriously. That is the reason neither the suffering of the Garua fish nor the death of Sunpahi could affect him for longer period. Again, that the course of action of the novel is bound by many deaths is denoted in the very beginning of the novel. The novel describes the deaths of Rupai's uncle, his father Dhir Singh and his beloved Sunpahi. Rupai himself considered responsible for the death of his uncle, as the uncle died in Kapili River while searching for him. The death of his father disclosed the ugly truth of his life that he was an orphan. With discovery of this truth, Rupai lost his interest of living. He jumped into the Kapili to sacrifice his life. However he was rescued by Sunpahi. This incident changed the course of his life. He fell in love with Sunpahi, but couldn't prepare himself to marry her. Pregnant Sunpahi had no choice but to commit suicide in Kapili. Thus one death provoke the other death in the novel; and all these were indicated in the very beginning with a symbolic presentation of the suffering and death of the Garua fish.

Nabakanta Baruah was a genius poet as well as a novelist. Influenced by the western and Bengali literature, he, like the other Assamese writers, tried new techniques to employ in his novels. His *Kapiliparia Sadhu* is a brief and short novel, but essentially with poetic qualities. In this regard Baruah's technique is much similar to the technique of Hardy. The poet Baruah could be seen more often along with the novelist. Famous critic Prahlad Kumar Baruah observed

that beautiful imaginary presentation of the subject matter, lucid character and a well-knit plot may elevate a novel into a poetic novel.²⁷

In this regard Nabakaran Baruah's *Kapiliparia Sadhu*, Nirupama Borgohain's *Sei Nadi Nirabat*, M. M. Mamonji Raison Goswami's *Dantal Hatir*, Unye Khowa Howda, Nilakanthi Braza etc. can be regarded as poetic novels.

Kapiliparia Sadhu carries a small story with simple description. But the theme and the subject matter emphasize much more depth. The novel discusses the mysterious relation between man and nature; man and river.

"Akareu saru haleu, udir lagat rahasyamoy sambandha pradarsan karat upanyas khane saphalya labh kara buli kaleu atyukti kara nahaba."²⁸

To discuss the mysterious relation between man and nature, the novelist used certain techniques to present the Kapili and the character of Rupai in a mysterious way. The novelist here used the technique of marvellous. He associated some ballads and other legends with the Kapili River. These include the legend of the Kamala Kunwari, the Gayan-Bayan Ghuli, the water-gods taking human to their world etc. The dream dreamt by Bairagi Bhakat relating to Mansingh's leaving of Kapili etc. are the mysterious elements introduced in the novel. The main character Rupai and his psychology also added to the marvellous of the novel. Rupai's unexplainable inclination to the Kapili river, his love towards Sunpahi which he never wanted to restrict by the bond of marriage etc. made him truly a mysterious character. His philosophy of upholding his love-affair beyond marital and family bondage gave a new direction to the novel.

"Upanyas khanar sesar angsa kabya sulabh hoi parise. Rupai Sunpahir samparka sadharan premar urdhat sangsthapita kari ek

27. Baruah, Prahlad Kumar: *Upanyas*, p.76

28. Sarman, Satyendranath: *Asamiya Upanyasar Gatidhara*, p.247

*rumantik paribes sristi karise. Rupai Sunpahir samparka, sihatar
Milan huwar paribes aru paristhitiye ek idyllic soundarjya sristi
karise. Ei bisesatwai upanyas khanak ek bises marjyada dank
arise.*²⁹

With the main theme of human nature relationship, the novel also included the various sub-theme of Indian freedom struggle, the life and living of the people by the bank of Kapili river etc. which gave it a basis of a epic novel. However, the novelist denied the scope and confined the novel into a small volume, concentrating only on the main theme. Many situations in the novel became dull due to lack of proper expansion. With his poetic genius and in a smaller space, the poet-novelist expressed his ideas in symbols and elevated the novel into the level of a masterpiece. Upendranath Sarma rightly observed that the book (*Kapiliparia Sadhu*) is a fine draft of a novel. The extreme use of techniques and compact ideas need expansion to develop it into a complete novel. In his words:

*“Muthate grantha khanak bhal upanyasar khachara buliba pari.
Angikar adhikar ghann sannadhata aru paristhiti adir adhikar
bristiti banchanija.”*³⁰

Rupai is the main character of Nabakanta Baruah's *Kapiliparia Sadhu*, which is presented with a flavour of mystery. The novelist tried to identify this character with the mystery of the Kapili River. Rupai always felt a kind of oneness with the Kapili- as his mother. A gradual developing of this character had been drawn by the novelist from his young age to manhood. Deprived and dejected in his true love for Khuki, Rupai joined the freedom movement and suddenly discovered the real meaning of life. Inspired by the Gandhiji's ideology of truths

29. Sarma, Satyendranath: *Asamiya Upanyasar Gatidhara*, p.247

30. Bora, Hem & Bora, Purna: *Nabakanta Baruah- Jiban aru karma; Upendranath Sarma's article 'Nabakanta Baruahar dukhan upanyas'*, p.47

and non-violence. Rupai dedicated his life for the well being of his place, his people.

'He (Rupai) will work for his village, for his country. Nothing can be done in a day- nothing can be gained, if one does nothing and wait for a day to happen everything. ''³¹

During the rescue of flood victims, he met Sunpahi and fell in love with her. Gradually he slipped away from his resolution for work and service to humanity. He became indifferent to his duties. However after losing Sunpahi, Rupai once again returned to his normal life. In the course of the novel, the character of Rupai is portrayed as mysterious and unrealistic. In a couple of occasions, Rupai lost his zeal of living and tried to commit suicide, but being saved everytime. Thereafter he was bold enough to face life- first for his love of Gandhian philosophy and then for his love and longing towards Sunpahi. But his philosophy of love, that he couldn't accept Sunpahi as his wife was truly unconvincing. Some of the critics remarked that a mysterious character such as Rupai is rare in Assamese literature.³² As observed by Dr. Umesh Deka the character of the hero, on many occasions, has been shown in an uncertain and weak light. For instance, Rupai by refusing to accept Sunpahi, who had conceived on account of their frequent intimate meetings at Gosai Pukhuri, that resulted in her ultimate suicide, has overstepped the boundaries of reality. As the hero of the novel Rupai has thus given an evidence of his weakness and cowardice.³³

Through the character of Sunpahi, the novelist revealed the core of woman heart. Love means everything for Sunpahi. She did not believe in platonic love. By giving her everything to Rupai, Sunpahi established herself as a simple and

31. Baruah, Nabakanta: *Kapiliparia Sadhu*, p.43

32. Bora, Hem & Bora. Purna: *Nabakanta Baruah: Jivan aru karma*, p.46; Upendranath Sarma's article '*Nabakanta baruahr Dukhan Upanyas*'

33. Deka, Umesh: *Post War Assamese Novel*, p.94

common woman who aspired to be his wife, wanted to carry his baby. But Rupai's unconvincing philosophy of love and her excessive emotion compelled her to commit suicide and end up her life.

With all characteristics of a regional novel, *Kapiliparia Sadhu* presented the Kapili river as one of the most important character of the novel. In a personal interview with Saroj Kakati, the novelist himself revealed that in the novel, the Kapili turned into a character which is identical with Wessex region in the novels of Thomas Hardy.³⁴ The river has directly controlled the life of the hero. Further it also indirectly controlled the life and living of the people around it. Rewriting the comment of H.C. Duffin, we may say that "Kapili is not only the scene of the tale, it dominates the characters, it is sentiments, it feels, it speaks, it slays."

Another important character of the novel is Tilak Gosain. With the help of this character, the novelist put forward a strong criticism of religious doctrines. Discarding the forefather practice of religious preaching, Tilak Gohain turned to humanity and brotherhood. Inspired by Gandhian ideology, this character left a deep impression on the mind of the hero and the readers as well. Apart from these, the novelist introduced minor characters like Dhirsing, Bhangua Bhakat, etc. who were the representative of the region. Again by introducing the lawyer and his daughter Khuki etc., the novelist successfully draw the differences between rural and urban mentality. Most of minor characters, which are similar to Hardy's rustic characters, did not gain much attention or proper expression. But their presence helped in creating a true regional environment in the novel.

Nirupama Borgohain's *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* and *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* are written in conversational method. The *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* was written in two episodes, with very realistic descriptions. The realistic description of the first half of the novel has turned into a psychological analysis in the second half

34. Kakati, Saroj: *Asamiya Sahityar Anchalik Upanyas*, p.228 (Unpublished)

of the novel. Simple description and lucid language gave those novels poetic attainments. The beautiful description of river, landscape, sky, twilight etc. essentially made the novel poetic and romantic in nature.

Sei Nadi Nirabadhi reflects the life of a handful of people living by the bank of Pagladia. As Egdon Heath is in Thomas Hardy's novels, so is Pagladia in Borgohain's novel. All characters and incidents move round the force of the river, which is the source of happiness and sorrow. It is the inspiration of life in one hand and the cause of destruction on the other. For the novelist, Pagaladiya is a mysterious character- strange and unpredictable.

*"Sei Nadi Nirabadhi Pagladia jibanar utsa, akau bidhangsi ek saktiu. Lekhikar dicitit pagaladiya ek bichitra charitra, abudh aru seyali."*³⁵

The central character Lakshmi can be identified as similar to the nature of Pagaladiya- wild, lively, and irresistible. However the influence has not been sustained for long; as Lakshmi after marriage has changed to a typical village woman- calm, quite and obedient. However the Pagladia still controlled the life of Lakshmi and the others as well. The river acted as the agent of destiny of the people living nearby. It also stood as the obstacle in the union of Dipu and Lakshmi. The refrain 'Lakshmi, I could not bring you this way across Pagaladiya' "Tumak, mai jibanat aru sachikoie Pagladia par kari aniba nuwarilu, Lakshmi"³⁶ has been uttered thrice by Dipu. Thus the novelist has used a fine technique of presenting the river as the fate of the characters in the novel. This refrain ended up the novel, once again indicating the fact that the river is akin with the life and living of the people, and most of the time controlled the fate of the people.

35. Thakur, Nagen (edited): *Exa Bacharar Asamiya Upanyas*, p.637 (Rajen kakati's article 'Nirupama Borgohainr Upanyas')

36. Borgohain, Nirupama: *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi*, p.168

Microscopic observation and detailed description is another strong technique employed by Nirupama Borgohain in her novel. The details in the first half of the novel include the intimacy of Lakshmi and Dipu, the life style of the village people, influence of Pagaladiya on village life, and various aspects of the river etc. The detailed description of the flood for example, the villagers mental and physical preparation for this known phenomenon etc. are so lively that the audience can experience them through the words. All these detailed and vivid descriptions and the huge range of characters and incidents elevate this novel to the level of epic novel.

However, the novelist failed to maintain these details in the second half of the novel, which concentrated more in the psychological revelation of the main characters. It is only because of its details in the first half that novel is able to uphold its regional nature. Moreover, the novelist has successfully retained regionalism through the use of folk tale, folk lore, local dialect and local convention. The language use by Borgohain is not poetic like that of Nabakanta Baruah, but it is essentially simple and lucid.

So far as art of characterization is concern, Borgohain attain great success in her maiden attempt. The main characters in the novel Lakshmi and Dipu. In the first half of the novel, the character of Lakshmi has been discussed much elaborately. The minute detail of this character got so much attention from the novelist that the character of Dipu was ignored to some extent. On the other hand, the second half of the novel had concentrated in depicting the mental conflict of Dipu, which dimmed the character of Lakshmi compared to that in the first half.

The character of Lakshmi was very dynamic. She was an amalgamation of courage, wilderness, sensitive and childish nature. Her nature is similar to that of the wild Pagladia River. This seemed to be a projection of the novelist's

ownself. Borgohain mentioned in her autobiography that she wrote this novel with the help of her own experience of staying in that region in her childhood days. Further she mentioned in her autobiography that her own image among people was like that of a nature-girl- irresistible and unpredictable. Some of her friend told her that the wildness of Pagladia blow through her vein.³⁷ Thus Lakshmi was the reflection of the author's own childhood. Pagladia as well as Lakshmi became the life force of the novel; especially in the first half. However, in the second half of the novel, widowed Lakshmi was no more as lively as before. Instead, she was calm, cool and composed now. Dipu noticed the change in Lakshmi.

"The young Lakshmi laughed and smiled in all talks, now she cried in all occasions".³⁸

The changed Lakshmi is the product of orthodox social tradition that subordinates women in all means; especially when it comes to the case of a widow. She was bound by social norms so rigidly that she even considered her contact with Dipu may bring misfortune to him. She asked Dipu to keep away from her in spite of her deep love for him. Through this character the novelist tried to establish the fact that customary practices may simply drain out all the promises of a child.

Dipu is the protagonist of the novel with a sensitive mind. This character has got enough scope for development in the second half of the novel. The pain and misery of his first love Lakshmi annoyed him. He faced many obstacles in his work station. His personal problems claimed so much priority that Dipu neglected his office duties and responsibilities. As its result, due to his ignorance, the river embankment was weak enough to bring the catastrophe of the novel by

37. Borgohain, Nirupama : Biswas Aru Sansayar Majedi, p.160

38. Borgohain, Nirupama : Sei Nadi Nirabadhi, p.148

flooding away Lakshmi's small child. Thus the character of Dipu fell prey to his own mental conflict. Neither he could perform his responsibility towards Laxmi, nor could he do justice with his profession. This character emerged to be a very weak one in the long run. The character of Laxmi is much stronger and attractive compared to Dipu, though the novelist couldn't utilize optimum opportunity to develop it.

The other characters like Doli, Mamoni, Doli's mother, Dipu's mother etc. revealed various aspects of family life, whereas Jayram Chaudhury, Manmohon Kakati etc. disclosed the ways of human living. However, these characters did not get enough scope for development.

Borgohain's '*Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar*' is also themed on the background of a small village. Its story is written on the same background as *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi*. However the subject matter of this is more illustrated and expanded. Here the novelist draws the picture of post independence period. Various incidents that took place after independence, like economic changes, migrations to the cities for employment, decay of cultivating trend, human struggle in both rural and urban areas etc. were highlighted in the novel. Along with these were the discussions of moral degradation of human values. Hiren Gohain's comment in this regard is noteworthy:

"Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar upanyas swadhinatar pichar jugar kahini. Apata dristit ei batabaranat bikas aru unayanar udar sparsa lagise. Chakari-bakarir jugedi krisijibi jivanar daridra aru abhabar ghanir para echm manuhe mukti puwar katha bhabiba para hoise. Nirbachita sarkar etai rajjak sakah diyar bharasa dise. Kintu sesat goi sakalu nidarun birambanat parinata hoise. Natun koi jikhini sujug ulaise tak dasal karise gaonr dhanik sreniye. Paribartanar

*natun sakti bure kebal je'ni swarthaparata aru subidhabadar prakup
bridhi karise.* ...³⁹

Highlighting various aspects of the rural as well as the urban society in a realistic manner, the novel displays many characteristic features of an epic novel. Analysing the themes and the subject matter of the novel, one can witness various problems endowed in the region. But the fact is that these problems and issues are not entirely regional or bound to that particular region only. Rather they have taken the universal shape-becoming the problems of humanity. Hence the novelist crossed the boundary of regionalism to step into universalism by using various techniques.

Another important technique employed in the novel is the use of the Pagladia river as central link of the story. Unlike *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi*, the Pagaladiya didn't control all the happenings and the characters of the novel. But it established the link among all the episodes of the novel. The domination of the river can be seen on the life of main characters. At the same time it also had its influence, directly or indirectly, on the other characters. For example, Anjali, though lived a city life was influenced by the beauty of the river and hoped to live therein. By the bank of this river, Balin wrote his love letter to Anjali. Anjali's father thought of settling down by the bank of Pagladia after his retirement. However he changed his mind at the end after being deceived by his own brother and friend. The people living in by the bank of Pagladia have developed a strong kind of intimacy with it. In all their day to day activities, the reference of river came spontaneously. For example, Nilakantha didn't allow Bimala to study and expressed his unwillingness by saying that he rather would throw her into the Pagladia.

39. Gohain, Rani (edited): *Aragamini*, p.5 (Hiren Gohain's article 'Nirupama Borgohainr Upanyas')

"Kalejat parhba di'at'koi barang mai eik tukur-tukur kari
Pagaladiyat bhahe di'at'koi."⁴⁰

In the novel the Pagladia river also stood as a symbol of separation- between rural and urban, poor and rich, tradition and modernity. The wild Pagladia also stood as the symbol of destruction of human hopes and aspirations. The further use of local dialect and other linguistic expression made the novel a beautiful one.

Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar centered on its main female character Pateswari. The other characters brought into the development of the story were Pujan, Sabin, Anjali, Parash Kalita, Nilakantha, Baneswar, Bimala, Upen, Balin etc.

Pateswari was born in a poor family in Dhalkuch village. Her utter poverty and extreme beauty became the cause of her tragedy. Many licentious male had their eyes on beautiful Pateswari. Young and innocent Pateswari ran away with Pujan who promised her to marry. But after fulfilling his desire, he deserted her and left her in a hotel in Guwahati. Poor Pateswari was supported at that point of time by Sabin. They got married; but poverty haunted them. Again she became the victim of lustful desire of the hotel owner. Pateswari couldn't protest. Sabin revealed his cowardice nature by not protecting his wife and offering her in other's hand. The tragic tale of Pateswari and her astrayed life remind us of Tess in Thomas Hardy. With no fault of her own Pateswari, like Tess, became the victim of circumstances. Repeating Satya Gopal Acharjee's observation, we may say that Pateswari (Tess) has really broken no moral law; but in the eye of the society, she is a fallen woman.⁴¹

40. Borgohain, *Nirupama: Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar*, p.18

41. Acharjee, Satya Gopal : *Modern Elements in Thomas Hardy* ; p. 273

After Sabin's death, Pateswari returned to the village, but misfortune did not leave her. Utter poverty compelled her to keep her daughter at other's place as servant. The son stayed with his uncle at Tezpur. Pateswari was always scared of the lustful desire of the so-called reputed people in the village. But, now she is strong enough to protect herself. However, utter poverty ruined her health and mind as well. She became the symbol of the oppression.

In the course of the novel, Pateswari stood strong as a character. She did not accept defeat in the adverse circumstances. She boldly faced all the obstacles of life. Hiren Gohain rightly gave a tribute to this character by saying that 'Pateswari was not a conscious woman; but her miserable life was full of some kind of untold bravery. The obstacle of life could not destroy her. She stood erect like a wounded snake'.⁴²

Another important character in the novel was Anjali, through which the novelist revealed her reformist mind. The sensitive Anjali, who serves as a foil to Pateswari, was brought up in city, but had a keen affinity towards village life. Through this character the novelist put forward an analytical approach to evaluate human values. She was pained to see the oppression done by the wealthy class on that of the poor. Anjali understood the treachery and corruption prevailing in the society. She did not blame any individual for being dishonest. She believed that it was the social system and circumstances that is responsible for a person's destiny. However this character undertook no action to protest the social evils, though she had been a good critic.

The novelist made a congregation of various characters including Pateswari, Anjali, Nilakanta, Upin, Nripen, Balin, Bom Mara Banu, Bakul, Sabin, Sabitri

42. Gohain, Rani (Edited) : *Aragamini*, p.9; Hiren Gohain's article "Nirupama Borgohainr Upanyas."

etc. Among them are Bakul, Banu, Pateswari etc. who are the representatives of the region, who are poor, helpless and are oppressed by the rich and wealthy character. Pateswari and Bakul were cheated by Pujanlal and Ramesh. Banu had to leave for the city to get rid of poverty. Nilakantha and Upin were the representatives of cruelty and treachery amidst rural simplicity. With the help of those representative characters, and through the incidents of their life, the novelist presented the regional issues in a universal light.

Silabhadra's *Madhupur*, *Ahatguri* and *Agamanir Ghat* were written in a conventional manner but with modern techniques. *Madhupur* revealed the story of the decaying feudal system and the power of the landlords with the rise of the new progressive and educated generation. The novel presented the story of two generation diverse in their thinking, ideology and work ethics. Silabhadra had employed autobiographical style in this novel. The complete novel is narrated in first person. The novel didn't have a well maintained plot-construction. Unlike conventional novels, this novel didn't have a complete story with a beginning, middle and end. Instead the story of the novel *Madhupur* is a harmonious blend of some small incidents that came across in the mind of the author. This is essentially a new technique employed by the novelist. As observed by a prominent critic.

*"Madhupur is the reflection of the memories of an elderly person about his birthplace during his childhood days, where various aspects of the place came very naturally, of course, without proper planning. The novel is nothing but the small incidents reproduced in bits and pieces."*⁴³

43. Sarma, Gobinda Prasad: *Upanyas aru Asamiya Upanyas*, p.226

However, there was nothing new about the themes and the subject matters, although the techniques were essentially modern.

Silabhadra's *Ahatguri* is another novel that depicts the history of a small village Perperia turning to a busy town Ahatguri. The novelist tried to identify the social, economic- industrial and mental changes which are influenced in the process of urbanization in a place. Once again, one can't find any traditional story-line in this novel. Instead of it, the novelist tried to develop the situations to create and highlight an environment. According to Satyendranath Sarma, introducing some profile characters and by highlighting some small varied incidents, the novelist tried to present the scenario of a particular place in a particular period. Developing a story was not his intention at all.⁴⁴

While writing this novel, the novelist performed the part of a detached observer. Like a true audience, Silabhadra observed each detail incident and produced those actions and reactions in a very objective manner. His vivid details and descriptions were just like the sequence snapshot of some beautiful realistic photographs. The novelist gives beautiful third person description in the novel.

Agamanir Ghat is another successful regional novel of Silabhadra. The novelist presented his first hand experience of working as a contractor in Agamani by the bank of Gangadhar river. In his autobiography '*Madhupurar Smriti*', Silabhadra wrote about this fact. 'I was then camping on the bank of Gangadhar river for my work.'⁴⁵

Agamanir Ghat is just like a document about various characters and incidents that the novelist had acquainted with during his stay in that place. To reproduce the character and the incidents of the novel, Silabhadra used the same

44. Sarma, Satyendranath: *Asamiya Upanyasar Gatidhara*, p.151

45. Silabhadra: *Madhupurar Smriti*, p.79

technique of flashback that he used in his previous novels. In the beginning of the novel *Agamani Ghat*, he wrote:

"To solve my problem, I must go back to that age. It is fruitless to dip in vain thinking. 'I shall not be there at home for few days', I told my wife.

'Where will you go?'

'Twenty years backward.'

'Time-Machine.'

'Yes'.⁴⁶

This is how the novelist uses the method of flashback to bring back the memories of the older time to incorporate in his novels. The first person description in the novel has given an autobiographical touch. The novelist has introduced all his characters and happenings centering round the character of the educated-contractor to present various ways of life and living of that place. Silabhadra's *Agamanir Ghat* is a persistent effort to capture life with the help of small episodes. That is the reason why Satyanath Sarma called this novel a harmonious potter of mosaic weaving of little incidents and circumstances.⁴⁷ The novel upholds the hopes and aspirations of the common people and his experience of customs and rituals prevailed among them. However, he always emphasised more on revealing the true nature of his character rather than their saga.

Silabhadra was a great artist of character portrayal. He made typical experiments in the art of characterization leaving a huge range of characters behind. Silabhadra's '*Madhupur*' successfully presents various characters from

46. Siladhadra: *Agamanir Ghat*, p.6

47. Sarma, Satyendranath: *Asamiya Upanyasar Gatidhara*, p.152

all sections of the society, right from the wealthy landlord to the poor daily workers. Instead of resending a complete picture of life through a well developed story, Silabhadra insisted on presenting small episodes of human life and thereby revealing the true nature of his characters. Written in the style of an autobiography, Madhupur was the novelist's recollection of various characters and their activities in an unsynchronized manner. Though there are a wide range of characters in the novel, none of them were developed into full-grown characters. The novel was themed on the socio-economic changes that took place in the Madhupur region; and the characters were made to witness and cause those changes. The influence of the Second World War dimmed the power and position of the rich landlords. The feudal system was on the verge of ruin. With it decayed the power of wealthy people and their so-called vain aristocracy. Gradually there came the raise of the poor people who were so far oppressed and exploited. As a result the old aristocracy suffered great depression. These changes of time - decay of old and rise of new generation were shown with the help of some truthful characters. Narayan Bardeuta, Narendra Narayan Chaudhury, Ruhini Baruah, Kamakhya Baruah, Dharendra Narayan, his youngest son, Binod, the grandmother of the narrator etc. were the representative of wealthy and powerful class of the society. Those people couldnot pace with the changing time and ended up with their vain hypocrisy. On the other hand Kandura, Bhagirath Das, Mahendra Roy, Surabala, Maneswar, Madhusudan Roy, Mahesh, Aruna, Bimola, Hiramon, Hanyutmal, Prabin, Arati, Bijoy, etc. were the representative of once oppressed generation, who with their own wisdom and skill had brought new light to themselves. All these characters were drawn from the novelist's own experience. Each of them explored various aspects of the Madhupur region.

Narayan Bardeuta, Narendra Narayan Chaudhury and landlord Dharendra Narayan Chaudhury were the then wealthy and royal character of Madhupur.

They exercised their extreme power and rest of the common people had to check their words and movement in front of them. These proud wealthy people ignored and tortured the poor. Once Narayan Bardeuta severely punished Hanyutmal for not getting down from horse back in front of him. But time changed everything. The same Narayan Bardeuta, towards the end, had to buy goods on credit from Manilal, the son of Hanyutmal. Narayan Bardeuta couldn't accept the truth that his servant's son became equally rich like him; his worker's son refused to sell him goods on credit. This vanity and hypocrisy made him suffer more. Likewise Ruhini Baruah etc. were the example of product of decayed and ruined feudal system. However, among those products of feudal system were some exceptional characters like Narendra Narayan, who were generous enough to help others, to feel for the poor.

The oppressed class of Madhupur was represented by Surbala, Maneswar etc. who became the victim of the wealthy and powerful landlords. With the changing of time, many oppressed young staff took the opportunity to climb the ladder to rise high. This new and progressive generation was represented by the grandson of Kandura Gulam, Prabin; his sister Arati who was studying MSc; the grandson of Parasar Mandal, Sani who was a first class Physics graduate; Assistant Professor of Watson University Mr. Bijay and well established contractor Madhusudhan etc. The new ideas and ideologies brought by these new people were not acceptable to Narayan Bardeuta and others like him. The vain aristocracy and idleness gradually form the basis of decay of the old wealthy class. Not being able to accept and keep pace with the changes and still boasting off with their fake pride, these people gradually proceed to the edge of ruin. Thus, Silabhadra through his characters vividly presented the conflict between two generations in Madhupur. The changing scenario of the society and upholding various social issues seemed to be the main objective of the novelist rather than

creating strong characters. In this regard Satyendranath Sarma commented that 'through first person description. The novelist highlights the influence of changing scenario in a small region. Character portrayal was not his chief goal; his aim was to reflect the difference between two ages'.⁴⁸

Silabhadra's *Ahatguri* projects the transformation of a small village into a big town, and entire process is witnessed by the main character Nilambar. This central figure of the novel is the manifesto of simplicity and virtue. During the construction of National Highway-32, Nilambar set up his small establishment. With his hard work and sincerity, he expanded his business and turned it to a Tea Stall. His business ran very well in the beginning. Gradually, there came various people from far and wide and the small peaceful village turned into a big noisy busy town. Nilambar's tea stall seemed smaller day by day compared to other grown up establishment. Gradually virtuous Nilambar lost his status and peace of mind. The busy Ahatguri turned into a place of treachery, discarding all goodness of the people like Nilambar. The urban Ahatguri took away everything from the life of Nilambar. His sister eloped with a Bihari boy, the business and turmoil of urbanization compelled his wife to commit suicide. The newly established block office, hospital, mills, industries and other big stalls dimmed the glory of Nilamba's tea stall. He lost his social status that he enjoyed once due to his honesty.

*The people who came before had seen his virtues. He had helped everyone with his might. But the generation ignored him. For them he was just a third category tea-seller.*⁴⁹

The rapid developments in socio-economic scenario had standstill the life of Nilambar. He failed to cope with the fast pace of changes that took place in

48. Sarma, Satyendra Nath : *Asamiya Upanyasar Gatidhara*, p. 264

49. Silabhadra: *Ahatguri*, p. 10

Ahatguri. He lost his charm of life. In the face of growing Ahatguri, Nilambar became a stagnant character - without any development. "He was, as if, the symbol of the Assamese people thrown out of track by others in the competition of economic growth".⁵⁰

Nilambar is also the symbol of alienation and loneliness in the modern world, mainly in the urban life. The influence of urbanization and its cruelty led Nilambar to alienation, making him a tragic hero. However, his honesty had been duly rewarded as he could spend the latter half of his life with his loving sister.

Apart from Nilambar, the novel Ahatguri was packed with various characters like Bholu Babu, Benga Das, Kalidas, Biren Mastor, Jagannath Doctor, Hariram, Chenimai, Tara, Soneswari, Sankar, Ramratiya, Sitanath, Mahendra, Hachan Miyan, Jadu Babu, Gajen Mandal, Kasi Babu, Motia, Sadananda Hazarika, Robin Roy, Gobinda Das, his wife, Nabakumar, Natbar, Dhruba Chaudhury, Haripad Dutta etc. All of them were profile characters, These characters were not complete in themselves, instead they explored only certain aspects of life to reveal the true picture of the society. They discovered various sides of the society- good and bad, pleasing and cruel.

The characters in Ahatguri have been divided into three categories by Saroj Kakati.⁵¹ In the first category fall those characters who are honest by nature and managed to retain their virtues, Nilambar etc. are of this type. The second are those characters who involved themselves in corruption and enjoyment, and could do anything for their self-gratification. This category includes Sadananda Mahajan, Robin Roy, contractor Panchanan, Jadubabu etc. In the last category

50. Kakati, Prafulla : *Swarajuttar Asamiya Upanyas Samiksha*, p.107

51. Kakati, Saroj: *Asamiya Sahityar Anchalik Upanyas*, p.263 (Unpublished)

are Bholababu, Benga Das, Sankar, Ramratiya, Suneswari etc. who were honest; but couldn't pace into the changing trend and suffered their doom under the burden of modernization. Thus, all these characters collectively reflected a true picture of Ahatguri—what it was and what it has become now. Drawn from his real life experience, all characters became lifelike and convincing. About his characters, Silabhadra mentioned in a personal meeting that he always emphasized more is character portrayal. All his characters are real with a little creative touch. The characters exist in real world and sometimes he amalgamates two characters into one.⁵²

Agamanir Ghat is once again a picture gallery of a huge range of characters. This novel seemed to be a part of 'Madhupur' where the life story of the common ordinary man and daily workers is reflected. The profile picture of the various characters, whom the central character encountered in various occasions in relation to his work were vividly portrayed by the novelist. The narrator introduced the poor workers like Ketu, Ramchela, Katak etc. whose life is full of misery and misfortune. Their living and life style depend on their physical strength. Towards the end of life, whom they have no more strength to daily work, these people suffered from utter poverty. These low class people of society had no security of life. The utter poverty sometime drive them to be heartless and feelingless. They even accept the death of their innocent and young child as very natural as they were helpless. With no physical strength to work, they were compelled to adopt begging for their livelihood.⁵³ Silabhadra didn't intend to portray a fully developed character, rather he wanted highlight socio-economic scenario of the region through his character. Hence most of his characters have become typed character. His huge gallery of character in the novel includes Nita, Manjula, Pramila Bau,

52. *Ibid.*, p. 262

53. Silabhadra, *Agamanir Ghat*, p. 28

Pratul, Hridaynath Sarma, Mr. Brown, Sale Tax Officer Mr. Bhattacharya, ASO Mr. Sarma, Surjya Babu, Mahesh, Keramat myan, Ganesh, Sridam Mandal, Hema, Sital Babu, Rajani Das, Loknath Thakur, Gopinath Babu, Bijay, Gul Mahammad, Raghunandan, Praneswar, Rahman Miyan, Executive Engineer Mr. Das, Haren, Kadeb, Paban, Manik, Mohan, Fayaz, Manchur, Dhanbar, Gedu, Raghunath, Bipin Saha, etc. The activities and action and reaction of these various characters shaped the novel.

Through his characters, Silabhadra tried to highlight the contemporary society and social system. On one hand, the novelist portrayed the simplicity of poor working class with the help of Haren, Kadeb, Surjya Babu, Keramat Miyan etc. whereas on the other hand, he also exposed the treachery and deceitfulness through the selfish characters like S.D.O. Sarma, Bipin Saha etc. The process of urbanization and industrial revolution have not however, erase out the human qualities completely. Rajani's act of marrying Pramila after knowing every truth of her life, Executive Engineer Mr. Das's love and passion for Sanskrit poem; the simple living and high thinking Gul Mahammad etc. still provided the truth that humanity prevailed somewhere in the world. The novelist successfully depicted every aspect of human life- be it be treachery or honesty. And he did it through the sketch of his characters.

Mamoni Raisom Goswami is one of the foremost successful novelists in Assamese literature, whose novel '*Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda*' is packed with all the beauty of that of a long poem.⁵⁴ The novel is highly symbolic in its nature. The title of the novel itself symbolically refers to the power and position of the *Satras* in those days and their gradual decay. Most of its characters like Jagannath, Saru Gosani, Giribala, Indranath etc. are very much symbolic.

54. Kakati, Saroj : *Asamiya Sahityar Anchalik Upanyas*, p.327 (Unpublished)

Discussing the style and technique of Mamoni Raisom Goswami, famous critic Gyananda Sarma Pathak compared her with Dorothy Richardson, Silabhadra, Padma Borkotoky and Phanindra Kumar Debchaudhury etc. calling that she is successful in portraying characters and exploring the environment with the stream of consciousness technique.⁵⁵ And she has done it in a very realistic manner.

The novelist very technically, tried to analyze love in its platonic nature. The love affairs of Giribala, Indranath, Saru Gosani etc. are big failures from practical point of view. But at the same time, the novelist successfully upholds love in true platonic nature through the sense of separation and its agony. The real love can be felt only by those hearts who bore the pain of losses.

Thus the novelist upholds the love of Giribala, Indranath, Saru Gosani etc. that had no physical demands. The beauty of love is beyond physical in nature for them. The novelist tries to express her view that marriage is the means of glorifying love. However, it is a means to channelizing love into social acceptance. A man can secure his love only by offering the woman her due respect. Marriage is just but the symbol of social reorganization.

The novelist also took help of dream and other symbols to reveal the inner-psychology of the characters. The characters like Giribala, Indranath, Saru Gosani etc. were so much mentally tortured that their agony haunted them into their sleep. The deep love of Saru Gosani towards Muhidhar was reflected in one of her dream. In her dream, Muhidhar invited Saru Gosani to visit Nile-Madhav in Nilgiri and took her by hand through a road bloomed with yellow mustard flower. At the end of the dream, Saru Gosani woke up with fear when wild fire touched her. This fire of the forest is the symbolic presentation of Gosani's

55. Pathak, *Gyanendra Sarma: Sahitya Bithika*, p.120

indomitable love towards Muhidhar, and his treachery is exposed through his invitation through an unknown path. Thus the love of Gosani and the deceitfulness of Muhidhar was turned into a symbol in which Muhidhar was the 'black Mathun' and love 'the snake in cage'. Thus the novelist successfully introduced Freud's theory of human psychology. The novelist further adopted such dream-symbols to explore the mental state of Giribala and Indranath's failure to gain Iliman due to orthodox social customs was described by the novelist in the following words:

*"That very night Indranath saw a dream. He stepped into a dry forest full of thorny bushes. He saw Ili standing amidst them. Her body turned to a red flower. The flower turned to blood, and the blood began to fall on those thrones drop by drop."*⁵⁶

By using these symbols, the novelist very successfully revealed the inner psychology of her character that helped her to present her view point very boldly.

Mamani Raisam Goswami was yet another great character portrayal. About her art of characterization Gyanendra Sharma Pathak's comment is noteworthy "Mamoni Raisom Goswami is another woman Voltaire. Like that of Charles Dickens, D.H. Lawrence, and Homen Borgohain, she picked up her characters from the deprived and disgraced class of the society."⁵⁷ In the *Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda* the character of Indranath and Giribala are mostly enlightened among man and woman respectively. In portraying vivid rural characters the novelist was as successful as that of Premchand, Tarasankar and Sibasankar Pillai.⁵⁸

Both the character Giribala and Indranath were sketched with a kind of progressive mind. They were the worshiper of new ideas, looking forward to

56. Goswami, Mamoni Raisom: *Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda*, p.302.

57. Pathak, Gyanendra Sharma: *Sahitya Bithika*, p.115.

58. Kakati, Saroj: *Asamiya Sahityar Anchalik Upanyas*, p.228

bring reformation and freedom breaking away the traditional dogmatism. However they couldn't fight the tradition, and surrendered at the end to its rigidity.

Giribala was the victim of vain social customs. She was married to a characterless man in her childhood, and after her husband's death she had to live a pathetic life of a young widow. The torture at her husband's house compelled her to come to her own home. But she couldn't get rid of the social criticism. Her character was projected as an exception to the narrow minded village women who knew nothing but to criticize the fellow women and derive pleasure by doing so. She was not ready to accept and follow the tradition and custom that were preserved only for woman in male dominated society.

The novelist projected Giribala as a rebellion character. She was not ready to follow those social norms which were meant only for women. The cruelty of her husband and other men always haunted her. She was not ready to follow the traditional practices of a widow; that too for that husband who never loved her. Breaking away all social convention, Giribala came out of her restrictions and went with Mark Sahib in search of old manuscripts in the villages.

The character of Giribala in true sense was a product of Goswami's feminist approach. Unlike the common concept of man, Giribala couldn't accept her husband due to his loose character; and even hated him after his death. This hatred helped her to establish her rebel against the prevailing social customs. Her womanhood was attracted by the good natured Mark Sahib. She wanted solace in his words, in his arms. She didn't hesitate to express her love towards Mark Sahib, though it was very unconventional for an Indian brahmin widow. The novelist's creating such a character in Assamese literature is truly commendable. That is why some critic said that Mamoni Raisom Goswami was the first Assamese woman writer to expose the want of physical desire so explicitly

through literature. So for these natural instincts were almost banned in literature considering that they were shameful and unrepresentable.⁵⁹

The next important female character of the novel is Durga, who had been projected as the foil to Giribala. Durga was also a widow, living at her parents' house. She had accepted her misfortune as her fate. She was ready to ruin herself- ruin her hopes and aspirations by following the customary laws for a widow, imposed by the society. She was a simple lady; didn't understand the complexity of life. She had no will to come out of the rigid bondage of the tradition. Instead she acted as the preserver of those tradition and rituals. She was such a strict follower of her customs that she ran to take bath after she had touched the shadow of the Christian Mark Sahib.⁶⁰

Durga wanted to live with the memory of her dead husband. She followed all rituals of a widow for the salvation of his soul. She wanted to sell her jewellery so that she could go on a pilgrimage for her late husband's ultimate peace. But the theft at Saru Gosani's house spoilt her desire, and so she cursed those who stole her jewellery. Durga wanted to live on with the inspiration of the loving memory of her husband which was totally contrasting with Giribala. However, the opposite nature of these two characters was rightly justified for the love and ignorance they received from their husband. Durga had enjoyed long sixteen years with her loving husband; whereas Giribala always gained hatred and ignorance in contrast. Saratchandra Chatyopadhaya rightly said that "the value of a woman depends on the love, compassion and justice that they received from her husband."⁶¹ Giribala turned rebellion for the tyranny of her husband whereas Durga worshipped her husband for the love she received from him.

59. Pathak, Sarma Gyanendra: *Sahitya Bitika*, p.119

60. Goswami, Mamoni Raisom: *Dantal Hajir Uniye Khowa Howda*, p.68

61. Chatyopadhaya, Saratchandra: *Narir Mulya, Sarat Sahitya Sangrah, vol.-IX, p.365*

Saru Gosani is another strong female character in the novel. The novelist presented her as the follower and preserver of old custom. Inspired by her husband, Saru Gosani preached her pupils after his death. She was extremely courageous and somehow different from the other characters. This character was driven by head, not by heart. Saru Gosani didn't swept away by her physical desire, though she felt a strong inclination towards young Muhidhar. She felt a kind of conflict within her. But she controlled her desire and still loved the man, as she was the devoted follower of tradition and custom. However, Muhidhar took advantage of her love and trust; and cheated out of her properties by forgery. Saru Gosani couldn't bear this unexpected betrayal of trust and fainted in utter guilt, thus submitting to the novelist's viewpoint that all human strong or weak, are subjected to the hands of unknown fate.

Among the male characters, Indranath was portrayed with a progressive mind. He didn't wish to follow the dogmatic practices of society that carried no value. This character, who was strong both mentally and physically, compassionate, reformative seemed to be carrying the ideology of the novelist herself.

Indranath was portrayed as a true human. He was compassionate enough to bring home his aunt Durga. He allowed his sister Giribala to mix with the Christian Mark Sahib in search of old manuscript. He encouraged his widowed sister for further education which was against traditional practices. He even thought of getting his sister married to Mark Sahib breaking away all prevailing social custom. However, his wish remained unfulfilled as Giribala suddenly embraced death stunning everybody around. Indranath had a mind with progressive outlook. Instead of advocating traditional rigidity, he whole heartedly wanted freedom for all, irrespective of men and women of that time society.

Indranath noticed social vices. He wanted all social abuses to be removed. But he could never be a rebel to do anything against them. Due to his vain hypocritical aristocracy, Indranath couldn't think of marrying poor Iliman whom he dearly loved. He couldn't express his love towards her as he was the would-be *Satradhikar* and Iliman didn't belong to his clan. He was bold enough to think of getting married off his widowed sister, but couldn't turn it to reality. On one hand he proved his generosity by saving the life of a low class child, but then he took bath on the other hand as the child was untouchable for him. Thus the character of Indranath emerged to be a blend of tradition and modernity. He certainly had dreams, but was not bold enough to turn them into reality. Renowned critic Dr. Hiren Gohain's review of this character is mentionable "Though Indranath is a sturdy and spirited young man, even he hesitates before such entrenched and formidable force."⁶²

The character of Indranath suffered further shortcomings, for which he couldn't convince his peasants and got killed in their hands. He was misunderstood for his vain feudal behavioural practices though he actually wanted to help his peasants. In a personal meeting Mamoni Raisom Goswami revealed the fact that the real character of Indranath was not killed. The novelist did it in her masterpiece to bring dramatic effect to the scene.⁶³ This revealed the fact that the novelist intended to create a desired situation than to emphasise her character sketches.

The novel is full of characters with unfulfilled desires. The love of Giribala and Iliman didn't succeed. Indranath couldn't express his love. The wishes of the peasants were not fulfilled due to the cruelty of the landlords. Saru Gosani's love and trust was shattered by the treachery of Muhidhar. Thus the whole novel

62. Gohain, Hiren: *Ineffable Mystery – Indira Goswami- A Critical Study of the Writings*,

63. Kakati, Saroj: *Asamiya Sahityar Anchalik Upanyas*, p.310 (Unpublished)

was full of situations and characters that suffered from depression of unfulfillment. Observing this, Ashok Bhagawati remarked "On the whole this is a gloomy novel of despair and death of love rather than of fulfillment. This is what makes the novel really significant for modern reader. Though yearning for romantic love, such love is almost unattainable."⁶⁴

Nilakanthi Braza is another successful novel that presents a very much unconventional storyline of a widow who want to spend her life as a Radheswami in Brazadham. The unexplainable sorrow and worry of the widows, the corrupt Raichaudhury and the literally inhuman living environment is sharply utilized by the novelist through the character of Saudamini. The feminist writer tried to put on a rebel with the help of her protagonist. However, she failed to establish it at the end as Saudamini embrace death protesting against social dogmatism.

Saudamini rebelled against the prevailing corruption and injustice in the religious organizations and exposed the treachery and challenged the corrupt system. Through this character the novelist established a kind of protest against social injustice. Saudamini was not ready to accept and follow the prevailing norms. She tried with her might to defy them and at last established her protest by committing suicide. This revolutionary character represents a product of women's freedom.

The Radheshyanis are the symbol of women bondage in the male dominated society, whereas Raichoudhury and others are the representative of boastful men who never gave women their due. The protest of Saudamini and her death at the end reveal that the traditional practices are too strong to be broken by the efforts of one odd character.

64. Bhagawati, Ashok: *Indira Goswami: A Critical Study of Her Writings*, p.57

Discussing the art of characterization in general, one can see that Assamese Regional novels draw their character from the common people. They are the embodiment of vice and virtue. Like those in Thomas Hardy, most of the characters in Assamese novels are poor or middle class people influenced by modernization and new values. Similar to that in Thomas Hardy, most of the characters are life like, mostly drawn from the experience of the novelists.

The characters truly reflect the will and owe of the real life, revealing the fact that each human came to this world with their own expectations and desires, but many of them couldn't fulfill their expectations as there are situations and circumstances beyond their control; which is called destiny.



Chapter – VI

**STYLE AND EXPRESSION OF
THOMAS HARDY AND ASSAMESE
REGIONAL NOVEL**

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Style is as essential to a prose writer as passion is for a poet. Style in prose not only depends upon matter, it is a form of matter - the most ethereal imponderable form. It is one of the most important and integral component of a novel like plot, character, their technique etc.

In simple words, style is the way the novelist expresses his feelings and ideas through the use of language. Hence, it is most pleasant. The most important thing that the writer has to say, the part of his meaning which is inexpressible in words, he expresses in his style. The writer exposes his own personality through his style, as F.C. Lucas observed that "Style is personality clothed in words"¹ The style is a wonderful manifestation of the writers mind.²

Style is nothing but the use of language by a writer in a particular and peculiar way. It is naturally connected with the novelist's philosophy and vision of life. 'The writers attitude towards life is noticeable even in his sentence- constructions, choice of words and narration of the story.'³ The writer's use of words, sentences and his particular use of idiom is generally known as style. Hence, style varies in case of different writers, as the language undergoes a change with changing thoughts and ideas of the respective writer. It is obvious that the language of a writer determined his style. As per the observation of Prof. Umesh Deka "The language, in fact, is not different from the style; they are

1. Lucas, F.C.: *Style*, p. 49

2. Warren, Robert Penn: *Fundamentals of Good Writing*, p. 438

3. Deka, Umesh : *Post War Assamese Novel*, p. 100

reciprocal and inseparable from each other. The language decides the style. The style is a special method used by the writer for the expression of his thoughts.⁴ Marry Middleton also had confirmed, "Style is the technique of expression."⁵ In other words the regulated use of language is style. It is one such factor by which the greatness of a writer can be evaluated. It is style which brings out the true splendour of any literary composition.

Hardy's strange individuality does contrive to imprint itself on his actual use of language. Even though he uses clichés, the final effect of his writing is never commonplace. His very clumsiness and roughness differentiate it from the leading article, and reveal a characteristic idiosyncrasy in the use of language. One could never mistake a paragraph by Hardy for a paragraph by anybody else.⁶

Hardy's style is essentially of the philosophic type, an emanation of his mind. Hardy may or may not be a pessimist but it is undeniable that his outlook on the visible world is gray. And his style is gray, gray as November skies.⁷ His style is not conspicuously beautiful; it is not luxuriant or alluringly harmonious. There is simplicity in style. It is in the main, a bare, significant narrative style, of easy but not obstructive balance. His thought falls into phrases and paragraphs of massiveness. 'Rarely can it be called supple, agile, brilliant: the sentences do not flash out with a bright play of wit and fancy, in the manner of some delightful modern writers. Rather, Mr. Hardy cultivates a sustained equability'.⁸ The keen epigrams, the swift brilliant saying, are rare. He prefers to build up his speech upon a staidier plan, and cultivate a sustained equality. He gives comfortable

4. Deka, Umesha : *Post War Assamese Novel*, p. 100

5. Murry, Middleton J. : *The Problem of Style*, p. 5

6. Cecil, David : *Hardy the Novelist*, p.138

7. Duffin, H.C. : *Thomas Hardy- A Study of the Wessex Novels*, p.79

8. Johnson, Lionel Pigot : *The Art of Thomas Hardy*, p.72

sense of dealing with realities. His economy in the use of words helps towards a general effect of gravity and deliberation. Of each page, and paragraph, and sentence, we can say, that we know the reason of its existence: the measured expressions, one with another, each contributing its just service, compose an organic whole. There is integrity and balanced progress in his prose. It is a deliberate and grave style and the accent of stateliness and of solemnity is maintained throughout, unsoftened by and unrelieved by the gentler spirit of sympathy.

Moreover, it is a leisurely style, so to say. There is no hurry none of that haste to be concise and terse, which makes a cluster of excited epigrams do the work of many rich and thoughtful pages. The readers, therefore, accepts everything without any immediate sensation of wonder or surprise. The sensation is felt when the story is over; then comes the flush of emotion, as the accumulated truth and beauty last come home to the reader in their unity and entirety. In his own style Hardy expresses his thoughts clearly and effectively. 'Thus it satisfies the first demand that all styles are called upon to fill – it perfectly corresponds with and expresses the profoundest intention of the writer'.⁹ One thing should be noted particularly that the grave atmosphere in Hardy's novels is chiefly due to his style, it breathes in every paragraph, and is as recognizable and characteristics as the scent of the salt ocean. It carries with it an impression of stern and sad eyes, gazing steadily and unflinchingly over the world's wrong. Whatever there may be in it of bitterness is generally suppressed. His great masculine strength appears not least in his style. It is iron-cold with the stillness of dead passion. What opportunities for raving, shrieking, meaning are offered by such scenes as Yoebright's accusation of Eustacia, the Christening of Sorrow, the undesired, the finale of the Woodlanders, the death of the children of Jude, the Sue, and dozen

9. Duffin, *Henry Charles : Thomas Hardy- A Study of the Wessex Novels*, p.80

others. Yet nowhere is there a suspicion of rent, of sensationalism, of noise of any sort. Jude the most agonizingly, desperately, tragic of all the novels is the coldest of all in narration.

Duffin noticed three characteristics of Hardy's style, first being the tragic one. Tragic style predominates in his *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Jude the Obscure*. There it is in *Tess* as well. Purple patches written in his tragic style, however, are legitimate objects of admiration, provided they are the outcome of spontaneous rise in feeling. Many passages of a somber beauty are written in this style. In this, he maintains the accent of stateliness and of solemnity, unsoftened by and unrelieved by the gentler spirit of sympathy.

For the general progress of narration Hardy employs a style that is undistinguished almost to baldness; the statement about the revealing quality of short extracts must not be taken to cover this quite considerable portion of his writing. It is capable of taking on an almost shocking degree of triteness, banality at times.¹⁰ Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* goes in a very plain narrative manner, however, ultimately rises to the greatest heights of the tragic style.

His third variety is on a scarcely lower level than the first tragic kind, it is used when Hardy gets thoroughly absorbed in the details of Wessex life.¹¹ Mostly humour in Hardy's novel arises from his rustic characters. It is created out of ignorance. It is racy of the soil, humorous, perfect without self-consciousness, and dialect flows into and out of it without disturbance.

"We ought to put her in a wagon; we'll get a hearse."

"There will hardly be time, ma'am, well there?"

10. Duffin, H.C.: *Thomas Hardy- A Study of the Wessex Novels, the Poems and the Dynasts*, p.160

11. *Ibid*, p.160

"Perhaps not". She said, *musically*. "When did you say we must be at the door- three o'clock?"

"Three o'clock this afternoon, ma'am, so to speak it. A pretty wagon is better than an ugly hearse, after all. Joseph, have the new spring wagon with the blue body and the red wheels, and wash it very clean. And, Joseph —"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Carry with you some evergreens and flowers to put upon her coffin- indeed, gather a great many, and completely bury her in them. Get some bouquets of laurustinus, and variegated box, and yew, and boy's-love; and some bunches of chrysanthemum. And let old Pleasant draw her, because she knew him so well."¹²

Another domain of his style may be named safely and correctly as "the pastoral style". In this style, Hardy the poet is reflected. This type of style predominates in his *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *The Woodlanders*, *Tess of D'Urbervilles* and *The Return of the Native*. A single specimen of pastoral style is enough to justify Hardy's mastery in his art.

"You know, mistress, that I love you, and shall love you always. I only mention this to bring your mind that at any rate I would wish to do you no harm; beyond that I put it aside. I have lost in the race for money and good things, and I am not such a fool as to pretend to 'ee now I am poor, and you have got altogether above me. But Bathshba, dear mistress- this I beg you to consider, that, both to keep yourself well honoured among the workfolk, and

12. Hardy, Thomas: *Far From the Madding Crowd*, p.326

in common generosity to an honourable man who loves you as well as I, you should be more discreet in your bearing towards this soldier".¹³

The poetic style of Hardy is beautifully observed and discussed by Trevor Johnson. He commented, "Many novelists begin as poets, but Hardy never ceased to be one".¹⁴ He brought into discussion Hardy's concluding lines of chapter "Fury" in *Far From the Madding Crowd* analyzing that Hardy wrote as prose without line division which could actually compose a blank verse. Hardy is so involved in creating the scene here that he broke into verse without realizing it.

*"Above the dark margin of the earth appeared
Foreshores and promontories of coppery cloud,
Bounding a green and pellucid expanses
In the western sky.
Amaranthine glasses came over them then,
And the unresting world wheeled her round to
A contrasting prospect eastward, in the shape
Of indecisive and palpitating stars.
She gazed upon their silent throes amid
The shades of space, but realized none at all.
Her troubled spirit was far away with Troy."*¹⁵

The pastoral style helps Hardy's writing "remain the prose of a poet in close contact with the objects of nature, a creature of tangibility, even in the imaginative handling of abstract ideas. There is indeed a Keats like quality in Hardy".¹⁶ One can think of Keats' description of Madeline unclasping her warmed

13. Hardy, Thomas: *Far From The Madding Crowd*, p.219

14. Johnson, Trevor : *Thomas Hardy*, p.93

15. Hardy, Thomas: *Far From the Madding Crowd*, p.237

16. Church, Richard: *The Growth of English Novel*, p.155

jewels one by one, when one reads Hardy's picture of Tess coming down, on a hot summer afternoon, from her nap, to the silent kitchen, and yawning "like a sunned cat". Hardy's power of visualization can be felt. His creative power shows itself most continuously and most characteristically in its capacity to embody its inspiration in visible form.

This power he achieves first by his sheer ability to picture his scene completely and secondly by his extensive use of arresting similes. Hardy works predominantly with similes, which he clusters around moments of fantasizing or intense emotion. 'Hardy's Gothic fancy does always run to strangeness, and it is the strangeness that makes it so vivid'.¹⁷ A few examples from Tess of D'Urbervilles will justify this point:

'The evening sun was now ugly to her, like a great inflamed wound in the sky' (chapter 1, p. 173)

'Who had been caught during her days of immaturity like a bird in a spring' (chapter 31, p. 251)

'A dawn that was ashy and furtive, as though associated with crime' (chapter 36, p. 302)

'An immense rope of hair like a ship's cable' (chapter 39, p. 335)

'Two girls crawling over the surface of the former like flies' (chapter 43, p. 364)¹⁸

The startling similes of Hardy can also be regarded a conceit, which he learnt from metaphysical school, which is a significant poetic tool in modern age.

17. Cecil, David: Hardy the Novelist, p. 59

18. Hardy, Thomas: Tess of D'Urbervilles, p. aa

Hardy knows how much strength and beauty springs from the simplest words, well-chosen and well-arranged by a scholarly taste. Hence his words are the simplest, appropriate well-chosen and well consorted by the scholar's discrimination. They are expressive and effective in producing a sense of strangeness and wonder. It is also true that at times Hardy writes swiftly, even dully, and little pompously. But a wider view shows him declining to owe to beauty of language any effect which is not inherent in the story. Harold Child says, "His object is to say what exactly he means to say. If the subject is in itself great, or moving, or beautiful, then his prose will convey to you the impression of greatness, or will touch you to tears or uplift you with beauty. But he will never rely upon ornament, nor even upon subtlety of sound or cadence, for an affect which the situation cannot produce of itself."¹⁹

Hardy is fond of using a cluster of words. He repeats a word- noun, adjective or verb- several times and employs a pair of synonymous words to convey the impression. "He has learnt it from Shakespeare who also gives us a pair of two synonymous words- one of Anglo-Saxon root and another of Latin/Greek root. The pair of three has been a favourite structural device in prose; in antithetical sentences as in Bacon's famous 'Some books are to be tasted.....'."²⁰ Hardy usually uses the pair of three, but sometimes he exceeds the number. A few examples from the Tess of D'Urbervilles below here:

"...Who are true, and honest, and just, and pure, and lovely"
(chapter 31, p.250)

"doubt, fear, moodiness, care, shame" (chapter 31, p.249)

"I have been hoping, longing, praying" (chapter 35, p.293)

19. Child, Harold Hannington : Thomas Hardy, p.26

20. Saxena, Alka & Dixit, Sudhir: Hardy's Tess of Durbervilles, p.196

"O Tess- you are too - too - childish- unformed- crude." (chapter 37, p.305)

"It would anger him . grieve him, stultify him" (chapter 37, p.320)

Examples of Hardy's repetition of words and phrase are:

"No, no, no!"

"Dead, dead, dead!"

"too late too late",

"Yes- O, yes, yes!"

"Why didn't you stay and love me....why didn't you, why didn't you?" (chapter 31, p.250)

"He was becoming ill with thinking, eaten out with thinking, withered by thinking" (chapter 36, p.310)²¹

His terms and phrases may not startle us disproportionately to their importance, but they fill us with a continual pleasure. He has not the delicate and discriminating ear of the supreme artist. He has natural eloquence of language. Against his vocabulary, here and there, has been brought a charge of undue parade and being pedantic. This is true; especially in his constant reference to art. Many of his illusions would be unintelligible to his readers without a competent knowledge of Dutch and Italian picture. The same criticism applies to his introduction of scientific terms from architecture, geology, astronomy, botany, optics, etc. He uses expressions like 'monochromatic', 'photosphere', 'redemptive theolatriy', 'isometric', 'pink nebulosity', 'cimarecta', 'diaphragms'; some of

21. Hardy, Thomas: *Tess of D'Urbervilles*, p.aa

these words have been lately absorbed in literature while some are yet not accepted.

When Hardy uses dialect, however he uses it with the touch of a master hand. He makes but a sparing use of the local words of Wessex dialect because he rightly understands that a phonograph of Wessex dialect will spoil the dialogues. He successfully contrives to reconcile the demands of truth with those of art in a way which brings Wessex before our eyes and the echo of its speech into our ears.

Mrs. Durbeyfield habitually spoke the dialect; her daughter, who had passed the Sixth Standard in the National School under a London-trained mistress, spoke two languages; the dialect at home, more or less; ordinary English abroad and to persons of quality.²²

'Hardy did not consider the dialect of his native Wessex to be inferior to Standard English and he did not consider that representing the speech of his characters in dialect form was simply an entertaining embellishment for his readers.²³ Unlike several nineteenth-century writers, he did not employ dialect-speaking characters who were idiosyncratic, lacked education, or who were exaggeratedly 'low' in society; Hardy took local dialects seriously. Hardy took a positive attitude towards the dialect of his native country. For him it was neither a debased form of standard English nor an embellishment to give 'local colour' to his writing, but an ancient tongue with characteristics which existed in their own right and as deviations. In his obituary for the poet William Barnes he wrote:

"In the systematic study of his native dialect....he has shown the world that far from being....a corruption of correct English, it is a

22. Hardy, Thomas: *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, p.17

23. Carter, Roland & McRae, John: *The Routledge history of literature in English: Britain and Ireland*, p.289

distinct branch of Teutonic speech, regular in declension and conjugation, and richer in many classes of words than any other tongue known to him".²⁴

Of course, Hardy knew that to transcribe local speech too accurately would cause problems for his readers, but he believed it was important to retain the spirit of the talk of certain of his characters. He was, however, primarily interested in using speech differences to distinguish between his characters, particularly with references to their social position and to the social and psychological contexts in which they find themselves. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* Tess's ability to move between different speech forms—for example, the dialect of her home and the more standard dialect of Alec D'Urberville—illustrates the linguistic and social dualities and clashes in values produced by new culture processes. Hardy was also aware that speaking the dialect of the speech community of which you are a part is a natural act embodying who you really are.

For example, Henchard in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* moves towards more standard speech when he belongs to achieve material success and a successful position within the community, but when his status changes he begins increasingly to use dialect forms. Here he comments on a man who aspires to his former position as mayor:

“A fellow of his age going to be Mayor, indeed!....But 'tis her money that floats en upward. Ha-ha-how cust odd it is. Here be I, his former master, working for him as man. and he the man standing as master, with my house and my furniture and my what-you-may-call wife all his own.”²⁵

24. Chapman, Raymond: *The Language of Thomas Hardy*, p.112

25. Hardy, Thomas: *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p.223

More commonly, however, characters speak in the local Wessex dialect when under the pressure of emotion. For example, Gabriel Oak in *Far From the Madding Crowd* is moved to speak to Bathsheba:

“If wild heat had to do wi’ it, making ye long to overcome the awkwardness about your husband’s vanishing, it mid be wrong. The real sin, ma’am, in my mind, lies in thinking of ever wedding wi’ a man you don’t love honest and true.”²⁶

Although Hardy was among the first English novelists who understood the social and personal significance of dialects in relation to Standard English, he remained for the most part constrained by the Victorian convention that main characters in a novel, especially those characters who are meant to engage the sympathy of the reader, should consistently speak Standard English. Paradoxically, therefore, major characters such as Tess and Jude (the Obscure) only rarely speak in local dialects, in spite of their social positions. What is important, however, is that Hardy represents his characters as speaking in a way which would be normal both for other characters and readers. He wanted to capture the spirit of independence in his characters but could not risk underlining this by an over-reliance on dialect speech.

A minor matter is the question of the names of Hardy’s characters. Few novelists like him have cared to label their characters with names distinctive of the qualities the reader is to find in them. For example Jude and Tess travel freely under designations that carry no element of descriptive meaning. Angle Clare and Sue Bridehead are marvelously and subtly symbolized by their names. Fawley is geographical, being the real name of Jude’s native village of Marygreen, and

26. Hardy, Thomas : *Far From the Madding Crowd*, p.409

Wessex is full of Winter-bones, though the name with its suggestion of bright stainlessness, is an exquisite choice for Giles.²⁷

Hardy sometimes makes use of quotations as well and an apt and unforced quotation gives great pleasure, partly intellectual and largely emotional. "Occasionally we are presented with a complete and most thankworthy poem, like the altogether admirable 'ancient and time-worn hymn' sung by the Mellstock choir – Remember Adam's fall./ O thou Man – or the very charming 'Point du jour' that Clym Yeobright sings, so much to the distress of the rebellious Eustacia."²⁸

Hardy has also made use of the epistolary form. His letters are much less ambitious; perfectly appropriate and varied and much detached pleasure can be derived from them. Some of his letters are profoundly revealing. And a letter ought to be revealing. After all epistolary form is only a special kind of dramatic expression or projection that is required in a novel. Some of the best specimens of his letters are in the novel *Tess*.

Hardy does not make much use of 'satire'. But whatever use he makes of it, it seems wasted on an impersonal Cause of Things i.e. fate. Furthermore although the whole Hardy world is founded on irony, irony as a figure is rare in his style.

He seems to be incompetent in the ordinary mechanics of his trade. He often cannot manage the ordinary syntax and grammar of the English language. He finds it hard to make a plain statement plainly.

27. Duffin, H.C.: *Thomas Hardy- A Study of Wessex Novels, the Poems and the Dynasts*, p.180

28. Duffin, H.C.: *Thomas Hardy- A Study of Wessex Novels*, p.88

The truth is, two elements go to make a good style. First, which Hardy is noticeably lacking, is the grasp of the nature of the English language which enables a writer to write it clearly, accurately and economically; second, which Hardy has in the highest degree, is the feeling for a flavour of a word and the flow of a rhythm which enables him to write it eloquently and expressively. In fact, "Hardy was not a born master of style like Thackeray, nor a made one like Stevenson. But when his theme makes demands, as it does more than half the time he is writing, he is inspired by it to heights and splendours not easily excelled."²⁹

Considering Assamese Regional novels from this viewpoint, certain special characteristics can be noticed in its style. However, the discussed Assamese Novels are taken from different writers; from various period of time. Hence, a kind of variegated style and expression can be found in this study.

Rajanikanta Bordoloi's Mirijiori was the first Assamese Regional novel, written in the dawn in the history of Assamese literature. Hence, naturally the style and expression used by the novelist was very simple and traditional, without any newness. Bordoloi used the most simple words and plain language. His sentences were short and lucid. For example, we can examine the words of Janki, when both Janki and Panei were tied up by Gachi-Miri:

"Baregam! Tai mur tiruta. Baregam! Taik nameribi. Baregam! Tai Mak-bapeka, eri muloike buli polaisil. Baregam! Subansiri parat thio hoi duyus Kasang Kantangk saksi kari bia korisu. Baregam! Tair petar laratur badhar bhagi nahabi. Baregam! Amak mari Tahatar labh nahabi. Baregam! Mur kanengak badha pape tahatak paba. Baregam! Taik eri de."³⁰

29. Duffin, H.C.: *Thomas Hardy study of the Wessex Novels, the Poems, and The Dynasts*, p.182

30. Bordoloi, Rajanikanta : *Miri Jiori*, p. 78

The main reason of Rajanikanta Bordoloi's success and popularity was his lucid and life-like expressions. There was no unrealistic presentation in his narrative style. "There was no exaggeration in his use of language. Precise and meticulous expressions made his style simple."³¹

Bordoloi's style was very much realistic. Use of Assamese idioms, phrases, proverbs and the daily used language brought the realistic expression. He also used the Assamese as it was spoken by the Miri People. Example :

*'Etia nika tayata' gar chapilu kijani ei dukar angyartu moi epera
nika chaidar jira boloi pau, yen jani bage kauk, baluke kauk moi
jaugoi'*³²

Nabakanta Baruah has essentially employed the pastoral style in his Kapiliparia Sadhu which Hardy was the master of. The poet Nabakanta Baruah can be seen in almost all the pages of the novel. His sentences are small and brief. Simplicity and preciseness became a mention-worthy trait of this novel, which reduced and restricted it into a small volume. The use of symbols, metaphors and other devices made this short novel essentially poetic. The opening line of the novel may be reproduced here as an example :

*'Krandasi, Akasaru nam. Akase kande. Khasia paharat barasun
hoi. Barpani upachi pare. Jayantia paharat mousun name. Umiam
juri dhour sapar negurchiga beg. Paharar dhuwa pani, jhum kheti
sarua kara pan i, Kilingar bukuwedi ring mari nami ahe gaon bhuin
mahatiyai.'*³³

31. Sarma, Satyendranath : Asamiya Upanyasar Bhumika, p. 111.

32. Bordoloi, Rajanikanta : Miri Jiori, p. 79.

33. Baruah, Nabakanta : Kapiliparia Sadhu, p. 1.

The novelist used accurate style and expression for each of the characters. Sometimes his language is very plain and simple while at some other point it is extremely rhythmic and beautiful. The variety of the language and the dialogue served aptly for their specific character. The dialogue of Bhangura Bhakat was an beautiful example of this point.

*"Bhakat e sar pai uti bahe. Madhav- Madhav! Piche ki hol nu? lei-chem, lanthan-chanthan, ariya-chariya loi korpara ulalahi."*³⁴

"Nabakanta Baruah was very subtle in using local language along with the standard Assamese. To maintain the authenticity of the Assamese conversation, feeling and thinking of uneducated lower class people who do not know standard Assamese (exact words), he sometimes uses mispronounced form of Assamese words."³⁵ One may see many rural words in Baruah's novel because of his intimate familiarity with rural life, its manners and conversations. The use of local dialect, which draws our attention can be illustrated with the following example:

*"Tok biri anbahe kaichlu, Hicapat likhba kuni kaichil? Machar damto badi diba narlli."*³⁶

Baruah also used the colloquial language of the non-Assamese speakers. The language of Assamese at the mouth of Hindi and Bengali speaking people was beautifully incorporated in the novel. As these people were a part of the region, as they became characters of his novel, the novelist justified their conversational skills to bring the successful portrayal of the region. Example:

34. Baruah, *Nabakanta* : Kapiliparia Sadhu, p. 25

35. Deka, *Umesh* : Post War Assamese Novel, p. 111

36. Baruah, *Nabakanta* : Kapiliparia Sadhu, p. 36

"Abhi kun pakaega, rat ~~ne~~ kam tab pakake khayega."

"O, tumaluk mach bech dega- hamlog mach nai bechega. Pathar me mach marta aru patte ~~ni~~ bhat ka lagat purpur ke khata hai. Kacha pane se bhuj dega"³⁷

Nabakanta Baruah uses ample phrase and idioms, proverbs etc. which are the integral part of rural speaking. Examples:

'Sapar negur chiga be~~g~~' (p.1), 'chedeli-bhedeli' (p.2), 'bheti uchan hal' (p.4), 'hat-bat ka ~~ra~~' (p.6), 'ethengiya bagali' (p.6), 'Asoi mata' (p.7), 'kalapani hun~~a~~' (p.33), 'bidhi-pathali diya' (p.54), 'guri-gach' (p.79) etc.

The Novelist has presented beautifully the mispronounced English and other words in the mouth of the simple village people. For example—

eschol (school), ~~contector~~ (contractor), farak (frock), karchin (kerosene), kongi~~ej~~ (congress), istation (station), high cut (high court) etc.

Kapiliparia Sadhu basically revealed the mysterious relation between human and nature; between Rupai and Kapili. This mysticism and the mysterious atmosphere are created by the novelist's language and its expression. The poetic expression of Nabakanta Baruah helped in achieving its mysterious aim. He used a number of symbols, metaphors, imageries, marvelous expressions etc. that made it essentially a stylish novel. Observing this stylish nature of the novel, Hem Baruah commented Kapiliparia Sadhu as a "poetry based on extremely assimilation of reality"³⁸.

37. Baruah, Nabakanta: Kapiliparia Sadhu, p.19

38. Baruah, Hem: Assamese Literature (Quoted in Esa Bacharar Asamiya Upanyas, p.462)

Nirupama Borgohain's novels *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* and *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* employ expressive and lucid language. The novelist used simple style, devoid of any complexity in its expressions.

Sei Nadi Nirabadhi was the first novel by Borgohain. She used simple, short and informative sentences in the novel. The expressions were very realistic and lifelike in this novel. The beautiful lucid language gave a clear and accurate picture of the scene and the activities.

"Soob kam bahal noi khan. Sipare kichu bali, ipare thio gara. Siparar batj ahi ketiaba panit milisehi....

..... iparar ukha gara. Tar pach phale bahar jarani. Tar maje maje kaitiyel gach bur. Gaonar lara-chuwali bure kaitar achur khaiu betguti chimgiboloi sumai.....

*.....ukha gaxate hetaniakoi pani juwaliloi nami juwa battu, gaonor adhibasi sekale aha-juwa kara bat. Tatei ghattu."*³⁹

The above description is very simple, but informative. Apart from giving a brief idea of the river, it also gives a beautiful picture of the life and living of the people and their relation with the river. The novelist succeeded in giving a microscopic detail of the region and all the incidents that took place in it.

Being realistic in nature, the language of the novel does not carry music in it. Usage of symbol, image or metaphors are very rare. The novelist did not use any dialect in the novel. Instead, it was mostly written in standard Assamese. However, Borgohain used many rural and colloquial words that are used in the region of Nalbari district where the novel was set. Example of such words are-

39. Borgohain, Nirupama : *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi*, p. 1

chungeli, kur, ural, kankulla, nichala, roina, dhemni, gulti, chupa, goira, bagla thenga, uren jahaj, kurma etc.

The novelist also used some local sentence pattern and some mispronounced words like *miliktery (military), kulendar (calendar) etc.*

Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar has installed the dialect of Nalbari region. Using this dialect form for all dialogues and conversation in the novel, the novelist successfully created a masterpiece in regional novel. A small example would justify the observation:

*"Dibatu parluehoi, kintu Pagladia par hoi ghatut Chayar makak palu. Makmaka kal kita dekhi tairu lubh lagil, muk khujalakei. Mainu nedi kenaike paru?....."*⁴⁰

The novelist made sufficient use of local words, proverbs, idioms etc. to incorporate with her dialect. For example

'boinere', 'khok', 'dadi', 'akla', 'chadi', 'sidha', 'dima', 'sakmaka', 'dhemni', 'chali', 'jakhe', 'dhahi-muhi', 'jamur gharur para ghure ana' etc.

Borgohain used simple language for her Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar. However she had shifted the intensity of it in accordance to the nature of character or situation, she had used for. The language has become very soft sometimes whereas at other time it is quite tough. For example :

"Diganta bistrita hoi thaka gaonr seujia dharani pathar, uparar antahin akasar byapti, Bananir shyamalina, saru saru noi aru tar parar nirjanata, sei nirjanata gabhitar kari tula daukar karun mat,

40. Borgohain, Nirupama : Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar, p. 11

banh-tumul narikalar ghan s eujiya samaruh, charair madhur lal-
kakali....." ⁴¹

This beautiful lucid language is used to describe the romantic feeling of Anjali who has not seen the hardship of real life. But the one who faced it must have understood that life is not a bed of roses. For Pateswari, Surviving in this world is a struggle. Naturally she lost all her romanticism. Hence the novelist used rough language in her description:

"Aji abashesat sei sake ulure mul tair aparup soundarjya sachakoie
mrityu ghatil. Etia aru ei Pateswarir rupak loi kunu durbhabana
nai, etia tai nichita manere purusar rajyat chala-phura kariba
pariba....o' eitawe te nte karan, ei karanei tente haspatalar dacktor
jane taik agar dare hahin mukhe mat katha nidia hal, agardare
pet tipibalo i goi oir thait nitipa hol....o' challa shagun hot, tahate
mara xa khuti khui khabak lagi aru mangkha napawa hali nahay-
challa tirir manghare luibha khagun hat." ⁴²

The style and expression of Silabhadra is very unique. He is said to be the discoverer of a new prose style in Assamese literature. Silabhadra was not fond of the standard Assamese language. Neither he was absorbed in totally in the dialect of his region. He used the local language, the language of daily use, modified it and given it a standard acceptable form.

Hence his language was very simple- the language of the common man. In this regard his style is similar to that of Hardy.

Silabhadra's style was simple. His language was precise, without unnecessary expressions. He was the master of expressing a great idea with a

41. Borgohain, *Nirupama: Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar*, p. 5

42. *Ibid*, pp. 81-82

few words. All of his novels 'Madhupur', 'Ahatguri' and 'Agamanir Ghat' justify Silabhadra's style of writing.

Madhupur was the writer's reaction to vain convention and acceptance of modern and progressive ideology. Silabhadra himself witnessed the changes that took place in front of his eyes. His own vision of life and ideology was reflected through his style of writing:

*"Galpa sunisili! Jamindarar ki duranta pratap! Ain, adalat, bichar-byabastha same! sta asil jamindarar hatat....."*⁴³.

*"Madhupurat jamindarar swajati manuh hale sat sun maph. kunu prakare madhupur goi palei hal. Bach! khuwa luwar chinta guchil. Akal nijare nahai- gutei parialore. Jamidare mati diba, thakiba karane lagile ghar diba. Amiei kaba paru...."*⁴⁴

These expressions clearly expose the writers own ideology. That the landlords were very powerful; and that their injustice was not welcome by the author was obvious in his writing. With his beautifully informative language, Silabhadra projected the situations and the characters therein of his region.

Silabhadra followed preciseness not only in his ideas, but also in his language. He used small sentences in all of his novels. Using simple and short sentences, he wanted to bring realism into his expression. His description of Ahatguri upholds this view:

"Ahatguri krame dangar hoi ahise. Ali paduli hoise. Abasik anchalu bahi ahise. Natun natun manuh ahiyei ase. Pakigharu hol keibatau.

43. Silabhadra: Madhupur, p.18

44. Silabhadra : Madhupur, pp. 12-13

Dhankalar kasate Surajmalar birat dalam. Bजारत Ratan Sahai jupuri ghar bhangi pakighar tulile.....”⁴⁵

Silabhadra sometimes repeated his words or phrase or sometimes a sentence again and again to intensify a certain concept or idea. In *Ahatguri*, many a times he had repeated that ‘the National Highway-32 moved through Perperia village’. This is done to emphasise that a change has taken place in Perperia which has affected and shattered the region. Similarly in *Agamanir Ghat* he had repeated the idea “*Sakalu Sapun, Sakalu asthaye*” (All dream, all momentary).

Nevertheless, like most other regional novelist Silabhadra also made use of Goalparia dialect- the language of his region. For example:

‘*Na jaim, mui mari geliu najaim. Ati geile mui dam phali mari jaim.*’⁴⁶

‘*Ure bapre, marlure bapre marlu*’⁴⁷

Moreover the novelist used some local words and which were resulted from the mixture of more than a language. *Ichara, khali jami utha, jamjamati* etc. are the examples of these type of expression that made Silabhadra’s style more expressive, stronger and unique.

Mentioning about the style of Silabhadra, Homen Borgohain once said that he had never found another writer who could present a character (and a situation) hardly in a few words with intellectually matured language.⁴⁸

45. Silabhadra : *Ahatguri* , p. 46

46. *Ibid* , p. 23

47. *Ibid* , p. 23

48. Borgohain, Homen : *Asom Bani*, 1996, p. 98

Mamoni Raisom Goswami is one of the greatest modern Assamese novelists. Preciseness of language and selection of typical words helped her develop her own unique style. Her description was not objective; rather it was subjective and poetic. Dr. Hiren Gohain observed that "Her language combines remarkable economy with passion and sensuous vigor, realised with telling details. There can't be any doubt that she is a major author from whom great things can be expected."⁴⁹

Like Thomas Hardy and Nabakanta Baruah, Mamoni Raisom Goswami's writings were essentially pastoral. Her selection of words, use of devices and lucidity of thoughts made her style a pastoral one. Goswami did not write poetry. She was not a poet. But her poetry could be seen in her prose itself. Dr. Gobinda Prasad Sarma, in this matter, wrote the following words :

*"Mamoni Raisom Goswami never writes poetry. Nevertheless, just as Anita Desai's novels are always poetic especially because of their language though she never write poetry. So also Mamoni Raisom Goswami's novels always appeal like poetry especially because of their language."*⁵⁰

The novelist, unlike Nirupama Borgohain, instead of giving a physical description of Jagalia, provided a beautiful poetic description.

"Souwa Jagaliar sonali panir rekha dekha gol. Surujar bukur para bagari aha chapara-chapari tejar chekurabure jen Jagaliar pani rangoli hoi parise..... Sowa belituwe jen ei muhurtat ekhan gadhar chalhe pinchi loise. Kisu samayar pichat muga baraniya puhare

49. Gohain, Hiren : *Inffiable Mystery, (Indira Goswami- A Critical Study of Her Writings)*, p. 26

50. Sarma, Govinda Prasad : *The Worm Eaten Howdah of a Tusker (Indira Goswami- A Critical Study of Her Writings)*, p. 66

*gach aru jupuhar bukure uri phura rechmi kapurak phali chiri
jen chira-chir kari pelale.*⁵¹

Goswami employed her style and expression in accordance to the situation and character. Sometimes she used very simple language while in some other occasion her language is complex, illusionary and mysterious. For example:

*"Eiya Agust mahar brindabara, etiya iat jhulan, radha astami ityadi
anek utsavar bhiri. Alibatat sanyasi sakalar ekuta bichitra jak dekha
gol.....eibar nadir duyapine kichuman bhagnaprasadar
smritichihma dekha gol. Ka buli ramanar sakha-prasakhai seiburak
makara jalar dare sabati dharise."*⁵²

*"Chih chih! Damudaria Gosani! Kajinemur gundha nuhuwa hol.
Patar kapurat mukh luhuwai thaka juntu jen bhanghi thanban hoi
ainar tukura hoi paril."*⁵³

Apart from this, the novelist employed dramatic expressions in the novels. She used the local language of South Kamrup region. Befitting dialogues were used for each character according to their nature, status and position. This use of dialect and expressions helped the novelist to reveal the psycho-analysis of her character. Moreover the language used for the labourers in Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda, like 'atah', 'pag', 'maichana', 'gatala kathi' etc. provided a more realistic approach to the theme and background of the novel. A specimen of such use of language will reveal this truth:

*Pala pala, bhat hi khuli pagala howa hathiye chatki bundayar kari
diba. pala, pala.*

51. Goswami, Mamoni Raisom : Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda, p. 21

52. Goswami, Mamoni Raisom : Nilakanthi Braza, p.82

53. Goswami, Mamoni Raisom : Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda, p. 245

Hari Hari, ranir forester offichat khabur nedili maratmak katha
 haba. *Bhatri* khula hathi pagla hoi gaont sumaba lagili sarbanas
 haba. ⁵⁴

Goswami was expert in using figure of speech and other devices in her style. She used various imagery like 'pretatma' (ghost or spirits), 'kukurnechiya' (wolf), 'chameli phul' (the flower Chameli) etc. Various symbols were incorporated in form of human skin, tiger skin, snake, crocodile etc.

Mamoni Raisom Goswami always stood against injustice; especially that was done towards women. This feminist writer beautifully portrayed the tragedy of womanhood in a male dominated society. While portraying these tragic characters, her writings naturally took to a tragic style. She even tried to rebel against this tragedy through her character like Giribala, Saudamini etc. but at last submitted to a tragic end of committing suicide. This tragic style of Mamoni Raisom Goswami elevated her writings to the level of that of Hardy.

The above discussion discloses the fact that though style is private to a writer, there are some common factors that can be noticed in case of all regional novelist - be it be English or Assamese.

The language of Thomas Hardy and Assamese regional novelists is simple and lucid. Simple word and short construction marked almost all the novels.

The most important aspect of all regional novels is the use of local language and dialect of the region that has been picked up for the background of the novels.

Apart from use of the local dialect the novelists has also used mixed words and mispronounced words used by the folk. These words are not a form of the dialect neither they are the standard form. For example, Hardy used some mispronounced English words spoken by the Wessex rustics. In Assamese novels, they occur due to the mixture of Assamese with Hindi or Assamese with English etc.

Nevertheless, the beauty of the language is maintained by each of the novelist in terms of the use of various literary devices. Poetic expressions are very obvious in the novels of Hardy as well as Assamese novelists. In other words the pastoral style predominates all the discussed regional novels.

Whatsoever is the style of the novelists, it is evident that they had employed those style only to intensify the regional nature of their novels. These style used by the respective novelists denote their familiarity with the region-its geography, topography, people and their ways of life; and this necessarily reveal the writers love for the region and the people therein.



Chapter – VII

CONCLUSION

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It is obvious that a novelist draws his inspiration from the life itself. The knowledge he gathers and the experience he accumulates provide him his writing materials; and with his imaginary genius the novelist produce a great piece of art. A novel is 'a personal, a direct impression of life'¹ as observed by Henry James. Ifor Evans defines it as 'a narrative in prose, based on a story, in which the author may portray character, and life of the age, and analyze sentiment and passions, and relations of men and women to the environment, with a setting of writer's own times, or the past'². It is palpably clear that novelist always aim to draw life and reveal human nature. This interest of an author's depicting life resulted in the development of regional novel, which chiefly endeavor to establish physical existence of man in its social as well as natural environment of a particular place or location that is, in most cases, a rural background, away from the commotion of modern mechanical life.

The growth of regional novel can be traced everywhere in world literatures. The English and the Assamese literature, without exception, have their own trend of regional novel. These two trends have been discussed here in the form of contextual comparison, taking a few selected novelists and their novels, only to find out much similarities between them. The study has been framed in seven chapter divisions. A brief summing up of each chapter has been given here.

The *first chapter* attempts a general discussion on the nature of regional novel. It gives a brief idea of the growth of English regional novel asserting

1. James, Henry: *The House of Fiction*, p.29

2. Evans, Ifor: *A Short History of English Literature*, p.149

Thomas Hardy as one of the most prominent regional novelists of English literature. It is seen that the trend of regional novel started quite late by Maria Edgeworth with her *Castle Rackrent* (1800). Nevertheless, the same has been practiced and popularized by many novelists including Walter Scott, Bronte sisters, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Arnold Bennett and many more. It can also be observed that relatively few regional novels were published in the first half of the 19th century, but they grew in popularity during the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. Again during the 20th century such writing declined during both world wars, but gained new impetus from the 1950s onwards.

Among the regional novelists of English literature, Hardy gained utmost attention with his unique contribution to the genre. The genre achieved maturity in his works, set in a fictive Wessex, where an appreciation of both aesthetic and geological aspects of landscape complements a concern with agricultural and economic issues. The physical features of Wessex; its hills and dales, rivers, pastures, meadows, woodland and heaths appear and reappear in all his works. Hardy hardly left any part of the region unexplored. With the geography of Wessex Hardy explored its man and manners. This imparts his work a kind of scenic continuity and a touch of realism difficult to match in any fiction. This is the reason why Hardy is assessed as the master of the masters in the field of regional novel. Hardy's greatness and popularity as a novelist has been discussed and criticized by many critics since his lifetime. Among them were Lionel Johnson, W. L. Phelps, D. H. Lawrence, H.C Duffin, David Cecil, Douglas Brown, Ian George, F. B. Pinion etc., who unanimously agreed Hardy's greatness as a regional novelist affirming his claim as a novelist of 'character of environment'.

The *second chapter* deals with Hardy's background - the socio-economic and political situation of Hardy's age; and their impacts on his novels. The saying 'a man is what he is made' is very much true of Hardy. His was the age when

science and Industrial Revolution were making their influence felt. During the time of Hardy, revolutionary changes took place in England. As a sensitive man, Hardy observed these changes and unveiled his impressions of life through his creative art.

Hardy opted to choose his own district of England as the physical background of his novel, which he called Wessex (the land of West Saxons). He resurrected the old name of the locality, Wessex, which comprises Dorset, Wiltshire, Hampshire, parts of Berkshire and Somerset. Hardy first used the term 'Wessex' in his *Far from the Madding Crowd* and gradually developed it into different regions as South-, Mid-, Upper-, North-, Lower- and Outer Wessex. The setting of Wessex along with its people and their customs and traditions provided a solid background to Hardy's Wessex novels. It is rarely seen that a man of genius ties himself to his native place as closely as Hardy has done.

Discussing the major Wessex novels in brief, it is seen that Hardy basically portrays life in rural background amidst the nature and being dominated by it. Human life being reduced to a mere puppet in the hands of wild nature and destiny is the chief theme of Hardy's novel. He also explores the adverse effect of industrialization and economic development : decline of religious ethics and folk tradition, emotionless urbanization and the unraveling of universally held moral codes. Hardy also discloses and criticizes the aristocratic hypocrisy of social class, higher education and marriage institution.

The *third chapter* attempts to discuss Assamese Regional Novels highlighting its background, themes and technique. Assamese regional novel took birth in the hands of Rajanikanta Bordoloi. His *Miri Jiori* (1894) began the genre, which was followed by many; out of which the regional novels of Rajanikanta Bordoloi, Nabakanta Baruah, Nirupama Bragohain, Silabhadra and Mamoni Raison Goswami were taken for discussion. A detail study on the

background of their novels reveals the fact that most of the Assamese regional novels centres round the setting of river. Subansiri in *Miri Jiori*, Kapili in *Kapiliparia Sadhu*, Pagaladiya in *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* and *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar*, Gadadhar in *Agamanir Ghat*, Jagalia in *Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda* prove this point. They all appeared as the life force of the respective novels as Wessex appeared in Hardy's. Again, all the novels take rural setting as their background. The village areas, its simple peasants and their traditions, customs and lifestyle add to the background of these novels.

Assamese regional novels deal with a number of themes with the priority being given to human-nature relationship. The impact of modernization and influence of urbanization and their affects on rural life is beautifully displayed in these novels. The contemporary socio-economic and political scenarios like freedom struggle, Indian independence, impact of Second World War, industrial revolution etc. and their effects are also obvious. Human intimacy with nature, then-prevailing social dogmas', common people's psychology of facing life in all favourable and adverse situation, struggle for livelihood, social injustice, exploitation by the wealthy class, suppression of woman etc. are some of the themes seen in these novels.

A brief introduction of the technique of the Assamese regional novel is given in this chapter as the same has been elaborately discussed in the sixth chapter again in a comparative form with that of Thomas Hardy.

An integrated study of the second and the third chapter reveals the fact there are much common in English and Assamese regional novels in terms of their background and theme. Both Hardy and Assamese regional novelists have banked on rural background where nature plays a vital role in dominating the life of the characters. Nature-human harmony and struggle, disclosing the pathos of

the rustic, adverse effect of industrialization and urbanization, decay of folk tradition etc. are the common themes practiced by all the regional novelist.

The fourth chapter draws the similarities and differences between Hardy's Wessex novels and Assamese regional novels. The chapter has been discussed in three sub-headings, namely (i) Regionalism, (ii) Nature portrayal and (iii) Vision of Life. The basic concept of regionalism can be noticed in all selected regional novels in their very selection of a particular region as the setting and background of their respective novels. Hardy's range was strictly limited within the four walls of his region, Wessex. In all his novels, the scenes and characters were taken from this region. Similarly Rajanikanta Bordoloi's *Miri Jiori* was set on a Mising village on the banks of Subonsiri in Lakshimpur, Nabakanta Baruah explored the west part of the Nagaon district, Nirupama Borgohain depicted the backward villages in Nalbari district, Silabhadra rediscovered Gauripur region of West Goalpara and Manjoni Raisom Goswami provided beautiful pen picture of Jagalia in South Kamrup. All these novelists are equally successful in upholding the concerned regions with their scenic beauty.

The regional novels are aided by their characters; native to the soil, rooted to the traditions. Brought up in a peasant community, Hardy was superbly successful in drawing the portraits of the natives of Wessex with all their tastes, habits, likes and dislikes, joys and miseries. Every event of his novel, therefore, took place in this region. In fact Hardy's soul and spirit got mingled with the soul and spirit of Wessex people. It is noted that Hardy's art is mainly built as a result of his deep and sympathetic understanding of the short and simple annals of the poor Wessex people- farmer-labourers, hay-thresher, dairy-maids and shepherds and shepherdesses. The Assamese regional novelist were equally successful in portraying their characters with their man and manners. The customs, traditions, dogmatism, rights, rituals, festivals and believes etc. are beautifully projected in

their novels. The novelists admired the simplicity and virtues of the regional folk that include the peasants, workers, daily labourers, shopkeepers etc. and sympathized with their sufferings and pain as well.

However, Wessex and its folk were more focused and more elaborately discussed in Hardy's novels compared to that of the regions in Assamese literature; as Hardy explored the same land again and again rarely leaving a small part undetected throughout his fifteen books.

It is undoubtedly agreed that Hardy was very successful in his portrayal of nature. His picture of Wessex is the most elaborate study of landscape in English literature. Hardy's love for nature and the earth was an intensely personal and local one. He showed a profound feeling for the heaths and pastures of Wessex. Nature is ever present in his story. Nature equally plays a vital role in the Assamese regional novel too. The beautiful scenery of Subansiri, the surroundings of Kapili, landscape of Pagladia and the countryside of Jagalia were made immortal in the respective novels.

Nature is just not the background of the discussed novels; it becomes a leading character in it. It exercises an active influence on the course of the event dominating the lives of the characters. It becomes an inseparable entity of the story, a life force of the novel. Egdon Heath in *The Return of the Native*, the Hintock wood in *The Woodlanders*, Kapili river in *Kapiliparia Sadhu*, Pagladia river in *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* etc. are the best examples of this fact.

The most striking feature is that all the regional novelists have equally emphasized the gloomy part of nature. Apart from being beautiful and pleasant nature is an agent of cruelty and destruction. Egdon Heath is the very spot where many lives are crushed. Pagladia is the root cause of all suffering of Lakshmi and the other villagers, and so on.

In both Wessex and Assamese novels nature is eminently portrayed as a force that controls the fate of people accustomed to it. However, nature in Assamese novels plays a more vicious and treacherous part playing with human life, often taking it away. Nature inspires human in Hardy's novel whereas it discourages humanity in Assamese regional novel; it is depicted nonresponsive to human existence in Assamese regional novel. In other words, Hardy describes Nature responding to the mood of man, whereas nature exalts at the cost of man according to Assamese novelists.

The vision of life for the regional novelist is essentially tragic. As a product of contemporary age Hardy and the Assamese novelists faced tremendous socio-economic and political turmoil. Hardy was influenced by scientific progress and Industrial Revolution whereas the Assamese novelists were influenced by the World War, freedom struggle, and adverse economy of Independent India. Hence the presentation of chaotic contemporary scenarios and their adverse effect on rural life made the novels tragic, gloomy and full of pessimism.

Hardy viewed life in a realistic manner. He did not look at life through the many coloured glass of romance or of fancy, but in the spirit of a detached observer accepting without any dismay what life really unfold to him. Hence Hardy's philosophy of life is essentially tragic. His vision of life is neither attractive nor glamorous. He thinks life by no means is a boon. For him "happiness is but an occasional episode in the general drama of pain". Hardy happened to entertain a perverse view of God and His way. For him chance in its purely malevolent aspect enters human life and spoils it, brings trials and tribulations, sorrows and sufferings, pain and agony in its train. Hardy projected man's helplessness in the face of circumstances. The Assamese regional novels are equally pessimistic in nature. Each novel shows that humans are the victim of chance or fate. The dogmatism and orthodoxy of contemporary social system added to the suffering

of individuals. Life is not beautiful. *Iparrar Ghar Siparar Ghar, Madhupur, Agamanir Ghat, Nilakanthi Braza* etc. depicted the struggle for living in a hostile world. The Assamese regional novels proved that circumstances are more powerful than human beings. The discussed regional novels asserted that 'tragedy always underlies comedy'.

The fifth chapter highlights the literary technique and art of characterisation of Thomas Hardy and Assamese regional novels. Naturally, use of technique varies for different writers. Being a product of late Victorian era, Thomas Hardy wrote in a conventional method, but with a modern outlook. His use of point of view was conventional for his time in literary history, which could also be described as a third person or omniscient point of view. Hardy used a third person narrative in almost all his Wessex novels. In spite of domination of characters, Hardy's novels were not plotless. He was the follower of the old traditions. There was the superb blending of the idea with the character in Hardy's novels. An architect by his early training, Hardy gave to his novels a design that is architectural. His deliberate use of symbols, metaphors etc. had helped him achieve his goal. Being a regional novelist, Hardy incorporated with the use of marvelous to highlight the orthodoxy and dogmatism of his Wessex. Hardy established the supremacy of nature and man's yielding to it in his novels.

The Assamese novelists too successfully incorporated a variety of techniques in Assamese regional novels. Nabakanta Baruah's *Kapiliparia Sadhu* was written in biographical style. Written in the traditional method, the novelist made ample use of symbols and imagery. In poetic language the novelist tried to disclose the mysteries of life. Nipupama Borgohain's both the novels were written in a descriptive method. The novelist's projecting Pagladia River as a character of the novel that controlled the fate of the region is a fine technique that resembles Thomas Hardy all the way. Silabhadra's novels were more or less experimental.

His *Madhupur* and *Agarbanir Ghat* were written in autobiographical method whereas *Ahatguri* had a third person narration. Silabhadra's novels did not develop a well-knit plot. Instead he used a new technique of threading various episodes to build-up his storyline. Mamoni Raisom Goswami's novels revealed human psychology, especially that of women. While doing so, the novelist employed Freud's psychological theories by using dreams and other symbols.

Hardy's creative power is best exhibited in the portrayal of characters. We have Jude Fawley, Gabriel Oak, Angel Clare, Michael Henchard, Clym Yeobright, and Giles Winterbore who are some of the male characters. They make deep impression on the minds of the readers. Among the male characters, there are unforgettable secondary characters such as, Boldwood, Farfrae, Philloston, Troy, Alec Urberville and Jocelyn Pustin. They are the finest examples of human weaknesses and virtues. Forgoing all male, one may still have a gallery of everlasting delight in Hardy's females- Tess, Sue, Bathsheba, Elizabeth Jane, Grace and Marty. Hardy showed wonderful grasp of womanly 'nature' in them. Each character of Hardy belonged to earth. They are lifelike, packed with all human emotions- good, bad, virtuous and with selfish desires and motives. The Assamese regional novels too introduced some of the great characters drawn from the soil. Rupai, Sunpahi, Tilak Gosai, Dipu, Laxmi, Pateswari, Indranath, Giribala, Durga, Saru Gosani, Saoudamini etc. Like that in Hardy, these characters are drawn from the respective regions confirming to their native colour. Nabakanta Baruah's Rupai reminds Hardy's Clym whereas Nirupama Borgohain's Pateswari resembles Tess. The rebel seen in Giribala or Saudamini can also be found in the characters of Hardy. The Assamese regional novels seemed to give more emphasis on developing women characters as it is seen in case of Hardy. With the exception of Silabhadra who concentrated on profile characters, both English and Assamese regional novels successfully developed their characters.

The *sixth chapter* attempts to discuss the style and expression of the novels. Style is as essential for a prose writer as passion for a poet. Hardy's style is essentially of the philosophic type. There is simplicity in his style. His words are the simplest, appropriate, well-chosen and well consorted by the scholar's discrimination. It might not be called brilliant or agile, but it gives a comfortable sense of dealing with reality. Similar type of simple but significant style can be seen in all the discussed Assamese regional novels. The simple style and expression of Assamese novels creates a general effect of gravity and deliberation too. A tragic style also predominates the Wessex and Assamese regional novels. *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Jude the Obscure*, *Tess of D'Urbervilles*, *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi*, *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar*, *Nilakanthi Braza* etc. are good examples of this.

Another dominant style that can be seen in most of the novels of Hardy and some of the Assamese novels is the 'the pastoral style' that reflect the prose of a poet. This type of style predominates in Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *The Woodlanders*, *Tess of D'Urbervilles* and *The Return of the Native*. Nabakanta Baruah's *Kapiliparia Sadhu* is purely a pastoral Assamese novel while *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi*, *Dantal Hatri Uniye Khowa Howda* etc. do carry a pastoral touch.

The use of Wessex dialect made Hardy's novel unique. Hardy did not consider the dialect of his native Wessex to be inferior to Standard English. However, he uses it with the touch of a master hand. He makes but a sparing use of the local words of Wessex dialect because he rightly understands that a phonograph of Wessex dialect will spoil the dialogues. He successfully contrives to reconcile the demands of truth with those of art in a way which brings Wessex before our eyes and the echo of its speech into our ears. He also made use of local proverbs, idioms, folksongs etc. to bring out the true picture of the Wessex

region. The discussed Assamese novels also made ample use of local dialects of their concerned regions. Borgohain used Nalbaria dialect, Silabhadra the Goalparia whereas Goswami incorporated Kamrupia variety. Use of local language and expression along with standard Assamese helped the novels to attain the status of typical regional novels.

The above study reveals that the Wessex novels and Assamese regional novels share much in common. It is seen, as a whole, that inspite of geographical, social, economic and cultural differences the regional novels, be it be English or Assamese, make a kind of universal appeal as it chiefly deals with humanity. And the human emotions, feelings, pain and pleasure are universal devoid of national or geographical boundaries.

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APPENDIX

Appendix - I

CHRONOLOGY OF HARDY'S LIFE AND CAREER

- 1840:** Thomas Hardy born on June 2nd, in Higher Bockhampton.
- 1848:** Hardy begins attending Julia Martin's school in Bockhampton.
- 1849:** Begins playing violin locally.
- 1853:** Hardy's education becomes intensive -- he studies Latin, French and begins reading widely.
- 1856:** Hardy is articled to the local architect John Hicks. The office is next to Barnes' school. Around this time Hardy meets and studies with Horace Moule, going through the Greek dramatists under his tutelage. Hardy witnesses the execution of Martha Browne in August.
- 1862:** Hardy travels to London to work under Arthur Blomfield. While finding his way in London he attends the Exhibition. He explores the cultural life of London, visiting museums, attending plays and operas, and begins writing poetry in earnest.
- 1865:** Hardy publishes his first article, "How I Built Myself a House."
- 1867:** Hardy returns to Dorset and works for Hicks. Hardy begins considering writing as a profession and writes the unpublished novel: *The Poor Man and the Lady*.
- 1869:** Hardy works for Crickmay.
- 1870:** Hardy travels to St. Juliot to work on the restoration of the church. Here he meets Emma Lavinia Gifford.
- 1871:** *Desperate Remedies* published.
- 1872:** *Under the Greenwood Tree* published.
- 1873:** *A Pair of Blue Eyes* published. Hardy now relinquishes architecture as a career to write full-time. Horace Moule commits suicide in Cambridge.
- 1874:** *Far From the Madding Crowd* appears serially. In September Hardy marries Emma, travels to Paris, and sets up house in London. He moves around a bit and eventually settles in Sturminster Newton.

- 1876: *The Hand of Ethelberta* published.
- 1878: *The Return of the Native* published. With it Hardy publishes a map. Hardy moves again and with the success of this novel, begins to experience life as a celebrity. He joins the Saville Club.
- 1880: *The Trumpet-Major* is published — it is one of Hardy's earliest treatments of the Napoleonic war.
- 1881: *A Laodicean* is published. It was written while Hardy was bed-ridden. Hardy moves back to Dorset.
- 1882: *Two on a Tower* published.
- 1883: Hardy designs and supervises construction of his Dorchester home, Max Gate.
- 1886: *The Mayor of Casterbridge* published soon after Hardy moves into Max Gate.
- 1887: *The Woodlanders* published. Hardy tours the continent. When they return, he begins habit of visiting London for "the season."
- 1888: *Wessex Tales*, Hardy's first collection of short stories, is published.
- 1891: *A Group of Noble Dames* published. There is a small uproar after the publication of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.
- 1892: Hardy's father dies. He begins serialization of *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved*.
- 1893: Meets Florence Henniker.
- 1894: *Life's Little Ironies*, Hardy's third collection of short stories, is published.
- 1895: Osgood-McIlvaine begins bringing out the first collected edition of Hardy's works. The set includes the first edition of *Jude the Obscure*.
- 1897: *The Well-Beloved* appears in volume form after extensive revisions.
- 1898: Hardy's first volume of poems, *Wessex Poems*, appears in an edition of only 500 copies. He is now, officially, an ex-novelist.
- 1902: *Poems of the Past and Present*, Hardy's second volume as a poet, is published.

- 1903:** *Part One of the Dynasts*, Hardy extended verse-play about Napoleon and the clash of powers he brought about, appears. Hardy intends it as his masterpiece.
- 1906:** *The Dynasts: Part Two* appears.
- 1908:** *The Dynasts: Part Three* is published, thus concluding Hardy's epic trilogy.
- 1909:** *Time's Laughingstocks*.
- 1910:** Hardy receives the Order of Merit and the Freedom of Dorchester.
- 1912:** A "definitive" edition of Hardy's works, the Wessex Edition, is published. It is a chance for Hardy to thoroughly revise his body of work. The year ends on a low note, though, as Emma suddenly dies on November 27.
- 1913:** Hardy's final book of short stories, *A Changed Man*, is published. Hardy makes a pilgrimage to the sites of his and Emma's early love.
- 1914:** *Satires of Circumstance* is published. It contains the "Poems of 1912-13," written in memory of Emma.
- 1914:** Hardy marries Florence Dugdale. World War I breaks out, contributing to Hardy's pessimism.
- 1917:** *Moments of Vision*.
- 1922:** *Late Lyrics and Earlier*.
- 1923:** *The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall*.
- 1925:** *Human Shows*. These late years see Hardy working on his autobiography, published posthumously under Florence's name.
- 1928:** *Winter Words* is published posthumously: Hardy died on January 11. His ashes are buried in Poet's Corner, Westminster Abbey, and his heart is buried in Emma's grave. *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy* is published under Florence's name.
- 1930:** *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy* published under Florence's name.

Appendix - II

WESSEX REGIONS AND ACTUAL ENGLISH COUNTIES



Outline Map of the England (1851) on which the regions of Wessex can be found.

Region of Wessex	Actual English County	Position on Map
Lower Wessex	Devon	9
Mid Wessex	Wiltshire	37
North Wessex	Berkshire	2
Outer Wessex	Somerset	30
South Wessex	Dorset	10
Upper Wessex	Hampshire	14

Appendix - III

TABLE OF WESSEX PLACE-NAMES, THEIR ACTUAL PLACES, AND THEIR APPEARANCE IN HARDY'S NOVELS

<i>Wessex Name</i>	<i>Region of Wessex</i>	<i>Actual Name</i>	<i>Appearance in Hardy's Novels</i>
Sandbourne	Upper Wessex	Bournemouth	This is the place where Tess Durbeyfield lives with Alec D'Urberville as his mistress, and where she murders him upon the return of her husband, Angel Clare. (TotD). It is also the place where Sue Bridehead's freethinking friend was buried, and where she was the only mourner at his funeral. (JtO)
Weydon-Priors	Upper Wessex	Weyhill	It is there that Michael Henchard sells his wife while he is drunk. (MoC)
Trantridge	South Wessex	Pentridge	Site of the D'Urberville estate.
Shaston	South Wessex	Shaftesbury	Jack Durbeyfield visits the doctor in Shaston and learns that he has a bad heart. (TotD). Mr. Phillotson moves there in order to run a school. Jude Fawley travels there to see Sue Bridehead, who, married to Mr. Phillotson, is working in the town, and they flee the place together. (JtO)
Po'sham	South Wessex	Portesham	The home of Captain Thomas Hardy, one of Lord Nelson's commanders at the Battle of Trafalgar, who lived at Portesham House. (TM)

<i>Wessex Name</i>	<i>Region of Wessex</i>	<i>Actual Name</i>	<i>Appearance in Hardy's Novels</i>
Overcombe	South Wessex	Sutton Poyntz	The Trumpet-Major
Mellstock	South Wessex	Stinsford and Higher & Lower Bockhampton	Thomas Hardy's birthplace. Hardy's heart is also buried here, next to his first wife, Emma. Jude Fawley's father died there. (JtO) Nearly all of Under the Greenwood Tree is set in Mellstock.
Marlott	South Wessex	Marnhull	Tess Durbeyfield is born and brought up there. After becoming pregnant by Alec d'Urberville she returns to the village and gives birth to a baby boy, who dies in his infancy. (TotD)
Kingsbere	South Wessex	Bere Regis	Here is situated the Church of the d'Urbervilles. After Tess' Father's death, the Durbeyfield family take refuge outside the chapel.
Wintoncester	South Wessex	Winchester	Tess Durbeyfield is imprisoned and executed in this former capital of Wessex. (TotD)
Havenpool	South Wessex	Poole	Newson landed here on his return from Newfoundland. (MoC)
Emminster	South Wessex	Beaminster	The home of Angel Clare, and the site of Clare's father's vicarage. (TotD)
Casterbridge	South Wessex	Dorchester	Where Rhoda and Farmer Lodge's son is hanged. The Withered Arm. Also the principal location of the Mayor Casterbridge(WT)
Budmouth	South Wessex	Weymouth	Where Frank Troy goes to gamble on horse races. (FftMC); Eustacia Vye's hometown (RotN)

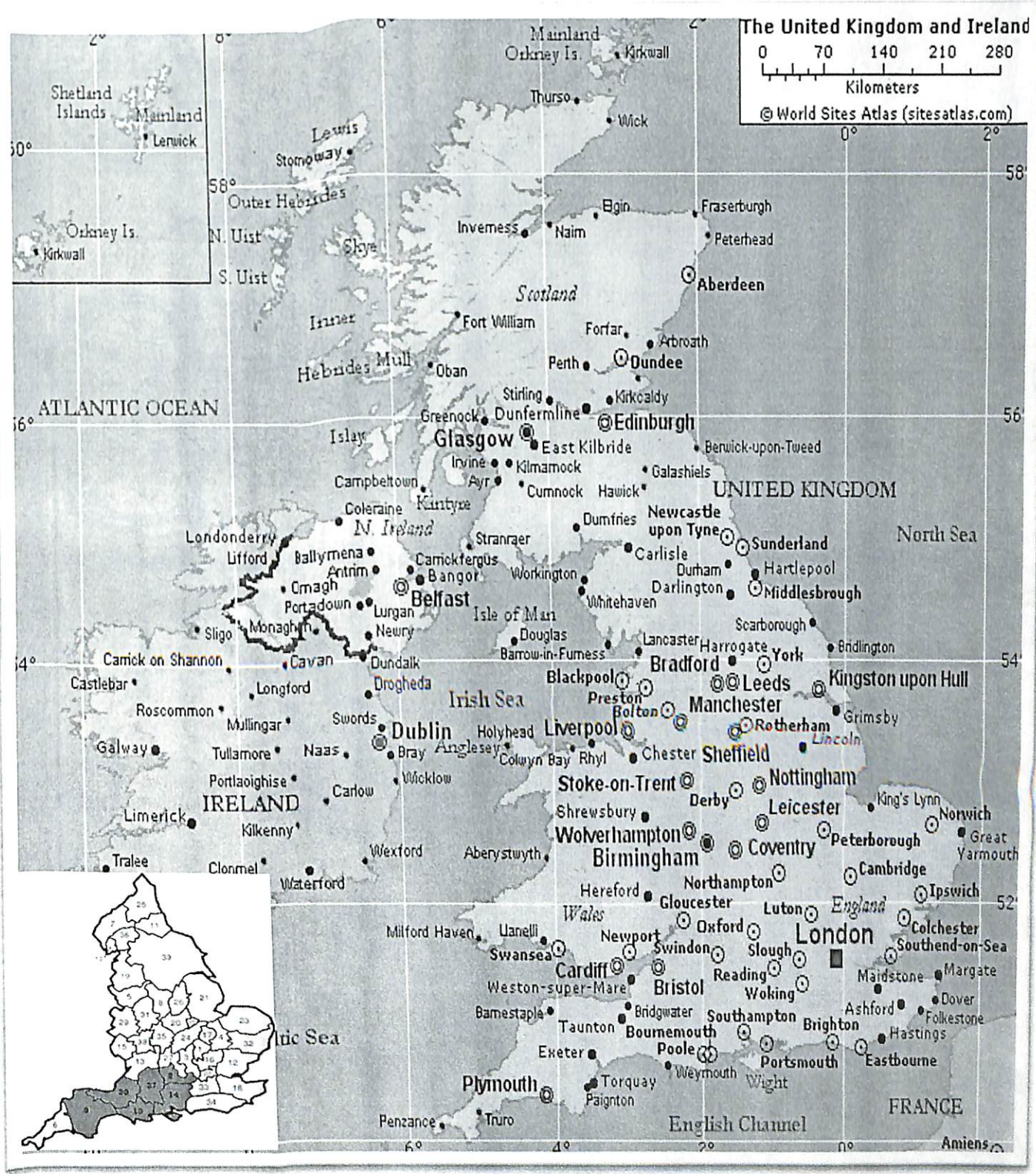
Wessex Name	Region of Wessex	Actual Name	Appearance in Hardy's Novels
Christminster	North Wessex - although Christminster is technically not within the borders of Hardy's Wessex, as it is located to the north of the River Thames, he describes it in <i>Jude the Obscure</i> as being "within hail of the Wessex border, and almost with the tip of one small toe within it"	Oxford	This is where Jude Fawley goes to become a scholar, and is advised to give up his career choice. Sue Bridehead works in a shop which produces religious artifacts there, meets her cousin, and is thrown from her lodgings. (JtO)
Marygreen	North Wessex	Fawley	Drusilla Fawley runs a bakery there. It is the place where Sue Bridehead spent her childhood. Jude Fawley is brought there following the death of his father, and it is where he matures into a man. (JtO)
Lumsdon	North Wessex	Cumnor	It is there that Jude Fawley meets up with his old teacher Mr. Phillotson again. It is where Sue Bridehead starts to work as a teacher and promises herself in marriage to Mr. Phillotson. (JtO)
Kennetbridge	North Wessex	Newbury	"A thriving town not more than a dozen miles south of Marygreen" (JtO) between Melchester and Christminster. The main road (A338) from Oxford to Salisbury runs past Fawley and through Hungerford, which may be

<i>Wessex Name</i>	<i>Region of Wessex</i>	<i>Actual Name</i>	<i>Appearance in Hardy's Novels</i>
			Kennetbridge instead of Newbury, which is to the south-east of Fawley.
Alfredston	North Wessex	Wantage	Jude Fawley becomes a mason's apprentice there. It is also where he works following his marriage to Arabella Donn. (JtO)
Melchester	Mid Wessex	Salisbury	This is the place where Jude goes to prepare himself for the ministry, and where Sue Bridehead is studying to become a teacher. The latter runs away from her school there, and later marries Mr. Phillotson in the town. (JtO)

Note: The abbreviations for Thomas Hardy's novels that are used in the table above are as follows:

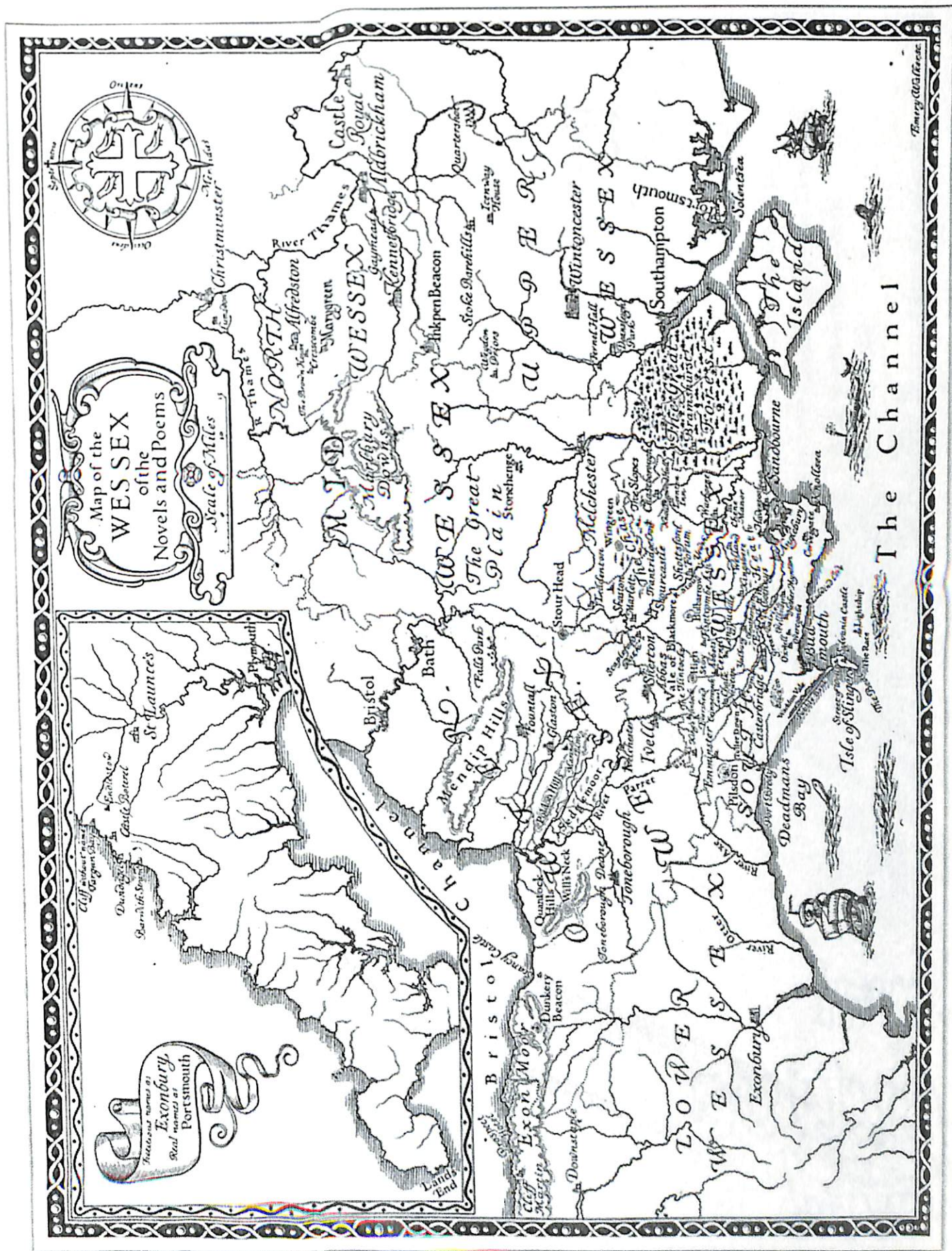
- UtGT - *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872)
- PoBE - *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873)
- FftMC - *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874)
- RotN - *The Return of the Native* (1878)
- MoC - *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886)
- TM - *The Trumpet-Major* (1880)
- W - *The Woodlanders* (1887)
- WT - *Wessex Tales* (1888)
- TotD - *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891)
- JtO - *Jude the Obscure* (1895)

Map - 2



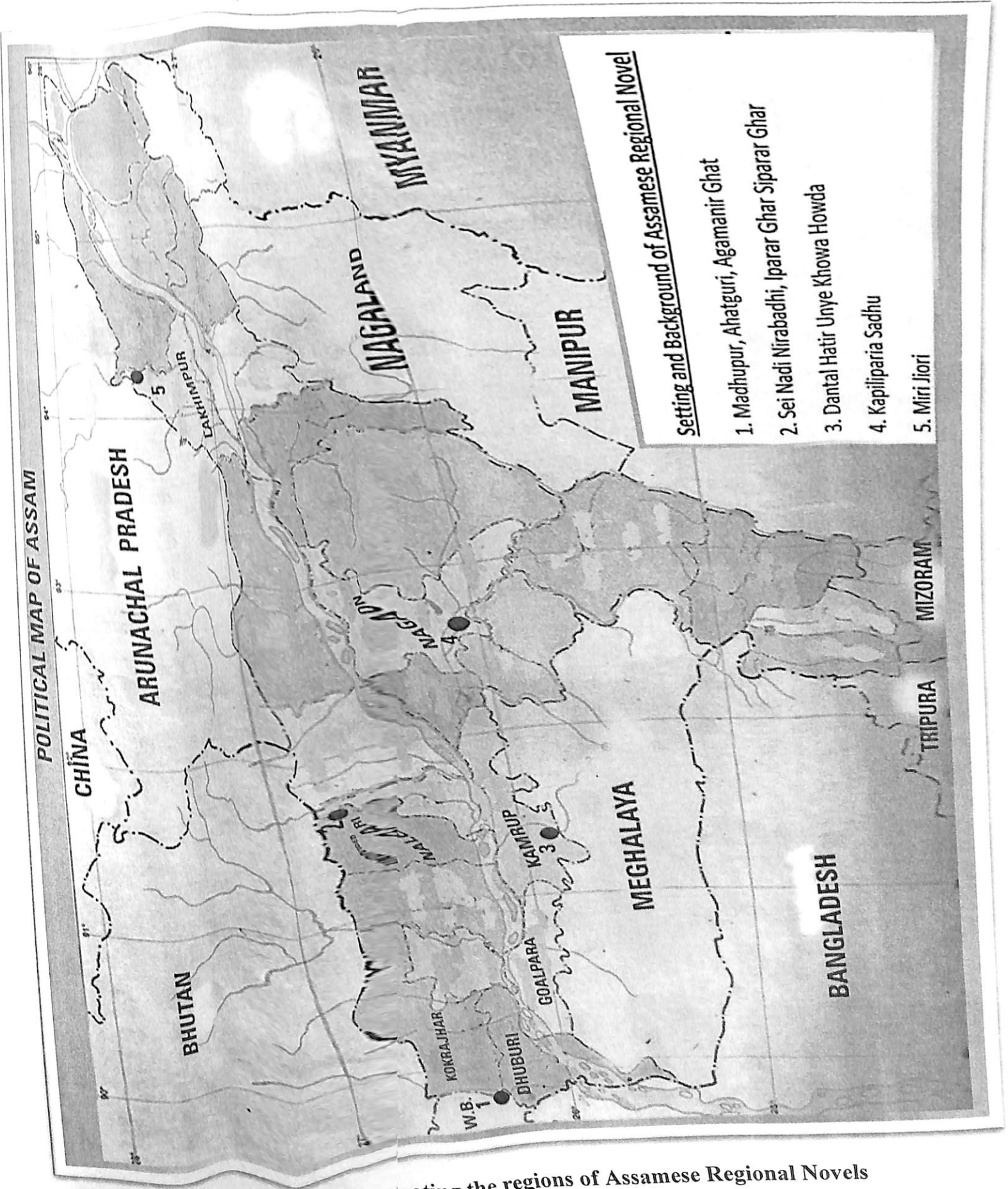
Current Map of the United Kingdom and Ireland
[Inset] Hardy's location of Wessex, marked in outline map of England

Map - 3



The map of the Wessex of the Novels and Poems
Published in most of Hardy's writings

Map - 4



The map of Assam locating the regions of Assamese Regional Novels

PHOTO GALLERY

PHOTO GALLERY

1. Woodbury Hill Fair:
the Greenhill Fair in Far
from the Madding Crowd
near Bere Regis
(September 1909)



2. Bere Regis from
Woodbury Hill: a recent
view



3. Little Hintock—the
setting of "The
Woodlanders"



PHOTO GALLERY

4. "Port Bredy"
(Bridport) — the town
where Donald Farfrae
and Lucetta Templeman
are married (*The Mayor
of Casterbridge*)



5. The King's Arms,
Dorchester (*Hardy's
King's Arms,
Casterbridge*)



6. The Chalk Walk,
Dorchester — *Hardy's
Casterbridge in The
Mayor of Casterbridge*

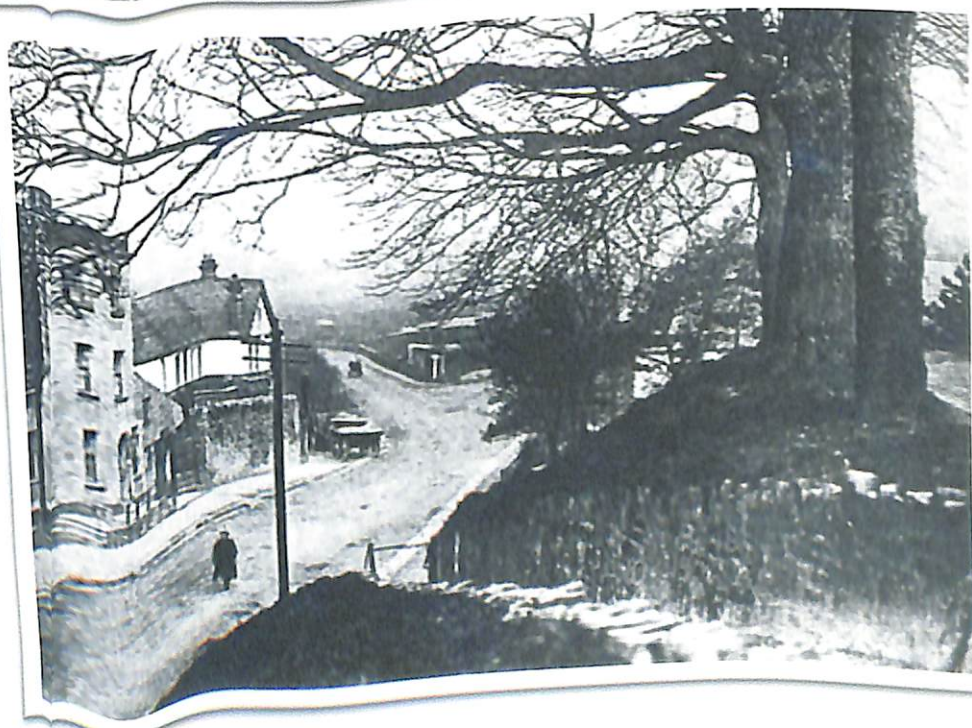
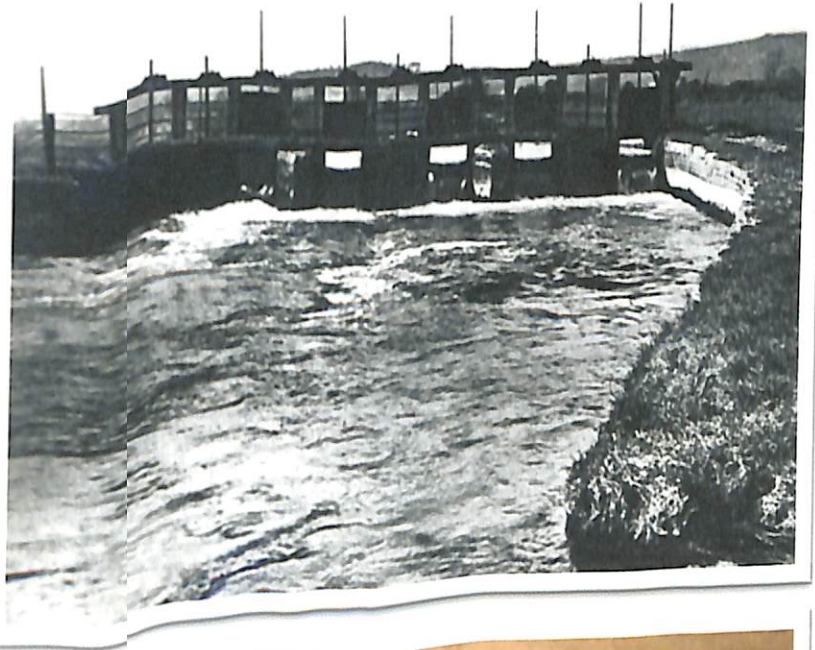


PHOTO GALLERY

7. Shadwater Weir
(The Return of the Native)



8. Egdon Heath in The
Return of the Native



9. The Blackmoor
Vale (Tess of the
D'Urbervilles)



PHOTO GALLERY

10. The River From
(Tess of the
D'Urbervilles)



11. The Red House
supposedly the original
of Hardy's Brown
House Barn in Jude
The Obscure.



12.
"Mellstock" (Stinsford)
: "Jude the Obscure"
... Jude Fawcett's
father died here



PHOTO GALLERY

13. Elegant look of
'Sabarsiri' (Mirijori)



14. The 'Gayan-Bayan
Ghuli' at Kapili River
(Kapiliparia Sadhu)



15. The practice of
fishing in Kapili river is
still going on



PHOTO GALLERY

16. Elegant look of
'Pagladiya' at sunset



17. The 'Ganga-pukhuri'
mentioned in Sei Nadi
Norabadhi



18. Ancient sculpture
found at the bank of
Ganga-pukhuri



PHOTO GALLERY

19. Ancient Balilecha temple



20. Rajbari: the specimen of power and pride of the landlords (Madhupur)



21. Many people at Gauripur region are not financially sound even today



PHOTO GALLERY

22. The Namghar
(monastery) of Amranga
Satra (Dantal Hatir
Uniye Khowa Howda)



23. Scenic beauty of
Jagaliya flowing down the
green fields



24. The monastery of
Sikar-Hati (Dantal Hatir
Uniye Khowa Howda)

