

Chapter-VI

JYOTIPRASAD AGARWALA AND MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci viewed that “the majority of people accept the values and political sayings which shows their subordination to the ruling elite. According to him, capitalism maintains control not always just through violence and political and economic compulsion, but also ideologically, through a hegemonic culture in which the values of the bourgeoisie became ultimately the ‘common sense’ values of all in the society. Thus a compromising culture developed in which even the working class people identify their own good with the good of the bourgeoisie, and help to maintain the statuesque rather than revolting.”¹

However, Jyotiprasad Agarwala seeks assistance of the common people, whom he called as artists to create a new world.² He set an example to the intellectual middle class people for change in hegemony from the bourgeoisie to the working class. Jyotiprasad was never hesitant about his commitment for the oppressed masses and was always an unswerving artist. He believed in antipathy against the evils and sincerely felt and fought for the finer elements of the society are the responsibility of each artist. According to Hemanga Biswas Jyotiprasad was a revolutionary artist who devoted his life to harmonize life and culture. He never saw life as something divided in different closed rooms. He had a simple and natural thinking process. Jyotiprasad who was attracted to communist ideology as peoples’ artist, very easily had shown his faith on people’s revolutionary leadership. When there is a congregation between the old and the new, there is always a conflict to welcome the new. Jyotiprasad was the symbol of this welcome step.³

After the annexation of Assam, with the administrative measures the British also spread the English education and language which ultimately led to the growth of a

¹ Chakravarti, Mahadev., *Social change in Northeast India and the impact of Partition, Ethnicity, revivalism, Globalization*, NEIHA, 2008, Offset, Shillong, p.84

² Dutta, Akhil Ranjan(ed)., 2012, *Culture Ideology Politics Jyotiprasad Agarwala and his Vision for Social Transformation*, DVS Publishers, Guwahati, p.11

³ Ibid. p.157

³ Dutta, A.R., op. cit., P.168

social gap between the educated Assamese and the masses. The colonial government had almost neglected mass education. But it is the commitment of Jyotiprasad Agarwala for the people which took his thoughts and concerns beyond the socio- cultural tendencies of the contemporary Assamese middle class. As against the dominant and indifferent affectation of the marginalized communities of Assam, Jyotiprasad Agarwala's approach showed deep understanding of the plight of these communities.⁴ From the very beginning of his early age Jyotiprasad had a strong sense for social reformation. Having been swayed by this stream of consciousness he enabled himself to march along the path of progress by cutting across the barriers of progress. Jyotiprasad is basically a humanist artist. Instead of being a masculinity or feminist he has openly come forward for the liberation of humanity at large.

Independence for him meant not only a change of the political power from one set of people to the other set of people. Such a situation did not bring in any happiness, peace or welfare to the common people whose expectations from independence were very high. In such situations, the rich went on getting richer, while the poor had no escape route for real emancipation from economic and social exploitations. He was aware of the fact that political freedom will not change the lot of the common people. Every country of the world had its underdogs. The rich-poor division is a common social phenomenon. Like P. B. Shelley, the great English poet, Jyotiprasad also wanted to change the destiny of the common people cutting across all political, geographical and national frontiers. He was essentially a lover of man. A great number of his writings and poems are written for the emancipation of man in general and his country in particular. His noteworthy poems are *Naba Biplabi*, *Kavi Jage*, *Mahamanab*, *Mukti*, *Kanchan janghar Buranji*. Unlike many of the romantics Jyotiprasad wanted to identify himself with common men instead of lying in an imaginary world with an elitist way of looking at things. He used his writings as a weapon for the emancipation of the exploited section of the society.⁵

Jyotiprasad was a revolutionary. He was a creative revolutionary. He promised to take his people to a world where there will be no darkness, pain, hatred and violence. In a poem named *Sirabidrohi* he says:

“Rupantarar moi

⁵ Goswami, Pranati Sarma, *op. cit.*, P.67

Jugantarar moi

Bharatar

Jogatar...” (I speak for change. I speak for new age. This new change is soon taking place in India and also in the world.)

He felt that to liberate the society from the spell it needs the bones of rishi Dadhisi, the great sage who willed death allowing the angels to use his bones for making a special kind of weapon to be used against the demons for their destruction.⁶ He wrote in his poem *Naba Biplabi Kavi Jage-*

“Aaji Jona Dodhisir ashthi bastra loi

Jili Joi mohattar

Asurak karak nipat

Danaviya adhikar kori utkhat...”(Let us take the bones and clothes of rishi Dadhisi and be inspired to finish the demons and put an end to the demoniac rights.)

Banua:

He spent far more than he should have for the welfare, and his love for the workers and knowledge. Their culture is reflected in many of his lyrics. Jyotiprasad became a revolutionary in another sense of the term, fighting not to liberate the motherland but the minds of the people. It was by action rather than words that Jyotiprasad had displayed his revolutionary nature and his identification with the oppressed section of society. When Jyotiprasad able to knew that the new political forces after independence were less interested in working for the poor and downtrodden and more for the benefit of the traditional oppressing class Jyotiprasad raised his weak arm but strong voice against these forces.

He wrote about the new clothes and contents of modern poetry. According to him poetry must change with time. But in spirit they should remained unchanged. It must speak for the people, beset with new issues of modern industrial and commercial life-

⁶ Gohain(ed)., *op. cit.*, P.345

“Factory, minat

Chepa khai jol howa

Manuhar

Hahakar suni tai

Solokai thale son- kharu...(People are now crushed by the factories and mines. New poetry takes off its gold bracelet on hearing the agonies of humanity.) *Janatar Abahan-* the call of the people. *Xabodhan, xabodhan-* careful! Careful. *Khajna xodhat eta Dafalar Khong* (A Dafala’s Anger when asked to pay his Rent), *Eta Matawal Banua* (A Drunk (Tea) Labourer).

Jyotiprasad instead of flying in imaginary world he wants to keep himself occupied with people’s down-to earth problems centring round food, clothes, shelter and human dignity. In *Mor Kavita* he wrote:

“Paharibo khoja nai

Bastab khoja na

Jivanar kartabya kathor

Prithibir mati pani...” (I am not interested in forgetting the down-to-earth problems that beset our life, nor am I interested in evading my duty and responsibility...).

Another important part of the vision of India’s freedom struggle was the question of social change and social justice. His commitment to democracy was rooted in his deep faith in and respect for the common man. He was also fully aware that a diverse country like India could be held together only by a democratic structure of society where democracy also becomes an instrument for the achievement of social and gender equality and the drastic reduction of economic inequalities. His *janata* (common people) were two types. In pre- independence period his *janata* were all people of the country, but after independence his *janata* were the people who stand against the exploiters.⁷

⁷ Hazarika., op. cit., P. 77

He also tried to impart the humanist vision to the entire national movement. After independence too, he kept up the campaign for the spread of socialist ideas and popularized the aim of the fundamental transformation of Indian society in a humanist direction.

Jyotiprasad Agarwala, coming from aristocrat family became the leader of deprived class. It is viewed that people who were not belonged to the deprived class, do not have the courage to fight for the deprived people. But Jyotiprasad was different, In spite of coming from the rich family, he always fought for the deprived poor people of Assam. His words were:

“Janata tor pranoro pranot

Monaro manat

xilpi je moi

lukai lukai aso (O’ my people, me the artist is hidden in the deepest layers of your soul and mind) ⁸

Aji Janatar alok bijoyi

apurba abhijan

aji prithivir akase akase

janatar abhan

naba jibanor maha samghate kopai bortoman” (today (see) the great light capturing march of the people/ (listen to) their clarion call/that reverberates all across the sky/ (see how) the great conflict signaling the new life shaking the present).

Toi jana nai

toi jak bhabo murxa janata

murho janata

murho janata buli

⁸Gohain(ed.), op.cit. p.88

jar habo khujo swayansiddha neta

sei janata aji prabuddha hol (you know not/ whom you deem idiot/ dumb and rustic/ and fancy to became their self- styled leader/ those people are today an inspired lot).

The reactionary forces understood the power of Jyotiprasad's involvement in popularizing the people's movement. Jyotiprasad's socialistic leanings, love for the common man and hatred of the exploiting class had always been reflected in his poems and lyrics-

“Who are you that anatch a bowl of rice

To eat on your gilded platter?

Who are you that thread a pearl- necklace

From the beads of tears shed by the oppressed?”

A childhood incident illustrates the innate humanism that lay at the core of Jyotiprasad. One afternoon at Tezpur he saw a beggar squatting by side of a road. Striking up a conversation, he learnt that the man was a tea worker who had lost his job. It deeply affected his mind and creates a poem titled *Bonuar Mrityu* (A Worker's Death).

In the tragic incident of Naliapul at Dibrugarh Jyotiprasad also wrote a fiery letter of protest against the police firing at Naliapul and also accused the Government of using the law enforcing force as a political instrument. In 15-17 July, 1949A.D. at Naliapul railway colony there was the State Convention of the Indian People's Theatre Association being held with the presidentship of Jyotiprasad. Some anti- social elements, in order to disrupt the Convention, had infiltrated amongst the delegates. The police resorted to a *Lathi- charge* and unfortunately, a policeman was discovered dead. Therefore, the police went wild. Without any provocation, they entered the Convention venue and opened fire on the peaceful gathering. Two women were killed and many delegates were injured in the firing. At that moment Jyotiprasad was in his Tamolbari house and before he could come to the Convention venue, a police force put him under house arrest. His residence was thoroughly searched but nothing incriminating was found. Sadly none of the newspapers, not even his family paper *Dainik Asamiya*, dared

to his fiery letter against the act of the Government in the tragic incident. Suddenly, a life-long fighter for India's freedom became an enemy of the nation in the eyes of the Government.⁹

When Jyotiprasad was in Tamolbari Tea Estate for managing the garden and recover his ill health, he carried on the good example set by his uncle Chandrakumar. He himself was an owner of tea garden but still he wrote about the labourers and told about 'class conscious' in his poems, songs and proses. He took particular care to the school started by his uncle and opened a night section for those children who did not have the opportunity and also for the adults who had to work in the daytime. He also sent his own children to study in the garden school. He also set up a workers' club, equipped it with sports equipment and encouraged them to participate in cultural activities.¹⁰ He, inspite of being a proprietor and manager of the garden, helped the workers to organise themselves into a trade- union, was a feature unprecedented in the annals of tea- garden management.¹¹

The Board of Directors of the Tamolbari Tea Company had accused against him saying that he had misutilised the Company's money in the name of bringing about improvement in the quality of life of the tea- workers. It also resulted in the indiscipline amongst the workers. But the truth was that Jyotiprasad had alienated the entire tea-garden owning section through his attempt to give the workers, the soul of the industry, their fair dues. Capitalists to the core, the tea- owning class had banded together to drive the socialist Jyotiprasad out of the industry. At the same time some of his family member as well as the tea- growing group pressurized him to serve all links with what they considered to be a communist movement.¹²

⁹ Interview with Minaksh Agarwala, nephew of Jyotiprasad Agarwala on 21/02/ 2012 by the author in their residence at Paruwa.

¹⁰ Interview with Mina Agarwala, wife of Kamalaprasad Agarwala on 21/02/012 by the author in their residence at Paruwa

¹¹ Gohain(ed), *op. cit.* p.345

¹² Interview with Mina Agarwalawife of Kamalaprasad Agarwala on 21/02/012 by the author in their residence at Paruwa

Women:

“India in every generation has produced millions of women who never found fame, but whose daily existence has helped to civilize the race and whose warmth of heart, self-sacrificing zeal, unassuming loyalty and strength in suffering when subjected to trials of extreme severity, are among the glories of this ancient race.” -S. Radhakrishnan.¹³

The rise and fall in the standard of a society is, therefore, according to him directly related with the rise and fall of the status of women. Since the Hindu society has always remained dynamic, the status of women in it consequently has undergone changes.

Again, during the early part of the 20th century, when ‘oppressed with growing fears generated by women’s demand for equal socio-political rights and men’s aggressive nature,’ it was quite difficult to rise above the gender consciousness. In every phase of history, women are always the worst affected. However, the Assamese society was free from many of the social evils practiced in Bengal like the Kulinism, the self-immolation of the widows and infanticides were almost unknown in the Assamese society.¹⁴ Assamese women were held in the highest esteem in society, yet the education of women was sadly neglected. Though Assamese girls inherited from their mothers’ skill in spinning, weaving and domestic works, no provision was made, public or private for their formal education. The daughters and wives of some enlightened and wealthy families received lessons at home the basics of reading and writing, but the education of women was considered by the masses as dangerous and no one would marry a girl if she could read and write.¹⁵ Female education therefore naturally received attention of the English educated youths. To create public opinion Haliram Dhekial Phukan wrote a number of anonymous letters in the Bengali newspapers.¹⁶ Anandaram not only advocated but took the lead in the education of the female members of his

¹³ Radhakrishnan, Sarvapalli., 1968, *Religion and Culture*, Orient Paperbacks, Pp-197-98

¹⁴ Cosh, M., *Topography of Assam*, p.26

¹⁵ Robinson, W., *Descriptive account of Assam*, p.277

¹⁶ Cosh, *op. cit.* p.26

family.¹⁷ Concrete steps were however taken by the Christian missionaries who not only carried on propaganda through the *Orunodoi* but also set up few schools for girls.¹⁸

As in the cases of human beings in a society, the work of literature is to establish the communication between man and society. Literature is also a social achievement. It becomes successful when it is able to attain the level of universality. A literature that fails to do so cannot be treated as a superior one. Through literature, man tries to express his own feelings, thoughts and emotions in a universal way that makes it possible for others to share those feelings, thoughts and emotions. Literature being the vehicle of human feelings and ideas necessarily reflects these social changes- changes in attitudes and values.

However, it is interesting to note that, whether it is in a male- dominated patriarchal society or a female dominated matriarchal society, women have always occupied a unique position and this has been amply reflected in the literature and other forms of arts created in a society.¹⁹ Without taking into consideration the status and contributions of women in different spheres of life, we cannot have a total picture of any civilized country. Our country is predominantly a patriarchal one. That is why men are always receiving more importance everywhere and in every respect than women.²⁰

Society changes with the passage of time, and with continuous changes in the society, the position of man and woman also undergoes certain changes. In the male dominated society on the one hand women had been idealized and looked upon with reverence and respect. On the other hand they had been subjected to exploitation and ignominy. They were very much dependent upon men for their security and life. But still, in the midst of such an unfavorable condition, some of the women could achieve exceptional recognition only because of their creative faculty and sacrifices.

The Assamese women were also guided by the same Indian beliefs and customs prevalent in other parts of that country, and that is why they had to accept everything like other Indian women treating their lot as divinely sanctioned. But, in certain respects, the Assamese women were better placed than their counterpart elsewhere in the country.²¹ The Assamese women were free from the system of child

¹⁷ Bhuyan(ed.), *op. cit.* p.129

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Goswami, Pranati sharma., *op. cit.*, P.5

²⁰ *Ibid*

²¹ Goswami, P., *op. cit.*, P.8

marriage and Sati Dah. None of these strict social customs affected the Assamese women like the other Indian women. Though they were not subjected to these social customs, they too, suffered from the crippling effects of lack of educational facilities, economic dependence and want of personal freedom.

The Assamese culture is basically Indian. Therefore, women in Assam enjoyed the same social status as the other Indian women, except that the rigidities of certain social taboos to which women in other parts of the country had been subjected during the medieval period had less impact on the Assamese women. This was because of the influence of Mongoloid culture on the Assamese society. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee has commented that “The Tantric form of later Hinduism, which, however, is not divorced from its bases in Yoga and Pauranic faith and ritual, seems to have taken its final colouring from the character of the Mongoloid cults, which it replaced. Among the Mongoloid tribes, women had far greater freedom in marriage, divorce, and other matters than we find in orthodox Hindu society. Infact, the worship of the great mother in some of her various shrines of Assam and East Bengal particularly in Kamakhya near Guwahati is looked upon as being originally Kirata or Tebeto- Burman.”²² Women belonging to the interior places are much more conservative because of their being less exposed to manners and customs and beliefs of other societies. The village women in Assam, for instances used to helped their families both at home and in the field.

During this period Jyotiprasad Agarwala championed the cause of women in the patriarchal society. This is evident in his five plays. The hopes and aspirations of the Assamese women perhaps for the first time have found their reflections in the plays of Jyotiprasad Agarwala. In his dramas the significant role were played by the women characters and in this connection his attempt was to create an ideal female character representing the Assamese women. But while championing the cause of women Jyotiprasad activities was to rise above the male- female divide. This is implicated in his dramatic personages, the major female characters of his plays Usha and Chitrlekha in *Sonit Konwari*, Lobhita in *Libhita*, Sewali and Kanchanmati in *Karengar Ligiri* and Rupalim and Itiven in *Rupalim*. Uttam Baruah regards Jyotiprasad Agarwala’s drama *Karengar Ligiri* as the undisputed drama of Assamese literature. It is the light of

²² Chatterji, Suniti Kumar(ed)., 1970, The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol-II, Institute of Culture, Calcutta, P.90

divinity and unique beauty of noiselessness of the characters like Usha, Sewali, Rupalim, Nimati Kaina etc. which played attractive role in his plays.²³

With the progress of female education women began to play significant role in the society. Women have occupied a distinguished position in the Assamese society since the Vedic age.²⁴ In the context of changing social and political atmosphere and the increasing role of women in the society Jyotiprasad's portrayal women as leading character has much significance. The most essential part of literature is to represent life in a realistic perspective. Life as a social concept is much influence by women. Jyotiprasad Agarwala understands and realizes the Assamese womanhood and depicted it through the representative characters of his dramas. His new concept of drama and his attempt to create an ideal woman character is notice in his plays.

Drama is an important form of literature. It is the only form of literature which is able to gather the realities of every segment of society of every country in its different stages of evolution. That is why drama is regarded as the mirror of the society. What is essential is the author's view of life that finds expression through it. For the purpose it is necessary for a dramatist to have clear and plain experience of social life. He must gather experiences from different aspects of the society, and express them in a way which can create an impression in the mind of the people. Writers and artists have an inseparable relation with the society. A writer cannot be separated from the society where he is born and brought up. He gets inspiration to write from the people of that society where he uses to move. Drama is regarded as an impersonal representation of life. The dramatic art is indeed a complete literary form, where the socio- cultural life of an individual or people is depicted through various imageries and *dramatis personae*.

Twentieth century proved to be exceptionally fertile for the luxuriant growth of drama of all types. Many new dramatic traditions took shape in the century, more especially in the backdrop of the world wars. The wars brought about revolutionary changes at all levels of people's lives worldwide. New experiments were worked out in drama and stagecraft. On the one hand the dramatists wanted to uproot themselves from the traditional formats of drama, while the other group wanted to revive some of the old traditions in a novel format.

²³ Barua, Uttam.,1985, *Rupkonwarar Jivan Jigyasa*, Jab Printers, Guwahati, p.48

²⁴ Bhuyan(ed), op. cit., P.26

Jyotiprasad Agarwala was fortunate enough to have a rich dramatic background. But he made a distinct departure from what he received. The dramatic background of Assamese drama was relatively richer. It was built up by Sankardeva in the 15th 16th century A.D. History of Assamese drama began with the *Ankianats* composed by the saint and his followers for the propagation of the neo- Vaishnavite faith in this land. To deal with the delicate situation and also to popularize the newfound Vaishnavite order Sankardeva wrote his plays, popularly described as *Ankianats* by his followers. These plays projected the character of Lord Krishna as being the saviour of the honest and truthful. Devotion was the focal point of neo-Vaishnavite order as popularized by the saint. *Ankianats* were short musical presentations wherein both the performing part and the musical parts are specially contrived. Plots of the plays were drawn from the Bhagawatpurana.

The full –fledged Assamese drama emerged with the growth of Ankiya nat written by Sankardeva in the early part of the sixteenth century. The ancient Assamese dramas like their counterparts in the literature are mainly religious. The characters are stereotype they behave more or less in the same manner but in the present age, with the development of realistic outlook things have greatly changed.

For Sankardeva drama was an instrument of social change. It paved the road towards moral salvation of the individual. *Ankianats* were played within the *Satra* premises (house for religious-socio-cultural activities and congregational prayers as founded by the saint) *Patni Prasad*, *Rukmini Haran*, *Kaliya Daman*, *Parijat Haran*, *Keli Gopal* and *Ram Bijay* are his noteworthy plays.

Although the modern Assamese drama began as early as 1857, the real developments of Assamese drama however have taken place only after the Second World War and more particularly after the attainment of independence. The characters depicted are no longer simple and straight but complicated. The inspiration for the growth and development of modern Assamese drama was drawn from the west.

In 1857A.D. an important change came to be notice in Assamese drama. Playwrights like Gunabhiram Barua published his play *Ram-Nabami* in that year. It is a play with a different in content, structure and stagecraft. Gunabhiram Barua's urge was to object the deep-seated taboos on widow marriage. *Ram-Nabami* is a protest against those social discriminations against the womenfolk, especially the widows.

Gunabhiram Barua was followed by playwrights like Lakshminath Bezbarua, Padmanath Gohain Barua, Benudhar Rajkhowa, Durga Prasad Mazindar Barua, Chandradhar Barua, Durgeswar Sarma, Padmadhar Chaliha, Mitradeb Mahanta, Sailadhar Rajkhowa and many others. These playwrights enriched Assamese drama substantially. Despite their sincere efforts to modernize Assamese drama they failed to achieve the desired goal. It was only a beginning of a new- world drama. However, the historical dramas authored by Lakshminath Bezbarua and Padmanath Gohain Barua proved to be a class by itself, often unsurpassed by the subsequent playwrights. There was an impact of Shakespeare's writing in Assamese drama.

Thus by all accounts there was a rich harvest of drama before Jyotiprasad came to the limelight. He found a rich legacy of dramatic literature in Assamese. But he added a new dimension to the available tradition. Assamese drama moved in a new direction due to his vision. He not only added some distinct gloss over what he received, but enriched and modernized it to a considerable extent. Jyotiprasad sought to move some steps ahead with a distinct vision of his own. He started drawing on Henrik Ibsen, G.B. Shaw and Galsworthy. Both ideologically and technically he belonged to the category of Ibsen-shaw Galsworthy trio rather than to Shakespeare. Jyotiprasad believed that it was time to come out of the cocoon of Shakespearean circle. According to him Shakespeare stirs our heart, but authors like Ibsen, Shaw and Galsworthy appeal to head. Jyotiprasad takes to the intellectual heritage of the trio. Perhaps, therefore, Jyotiprasad is different from his contemporaries. He brought in a new sense of modernity through his plays.

With the change of time in the nineteenth century, the Assamese social life began to acquire new values and with the further more change in the middle of the twentieth century society, the role of female character had also undergone changes. As a result of expansion of education, the womenfolk started playing a distinguished role in the society. Guided by the traditional concepts of proper feminine behavior and being aware of the fact that their actions are inextricably linked to family honour, prestige and ultimately material rewards, these characters seemed to have carried out their roles as chaste ladies and dutiful wives and remained the same sentimental, feeble minded women of the old *Kavyas*. Therefore some women characters were there which had reviewed the contemporary society. Naturally, the women characters became glorious by their physical beauty, attractiveness and the pleasing sweetness in the hands of men.

The characters portrayed as the messengers of the society too could not establish themselves by going beyond the firm wall of society.²⁵

But from the middle of the twentieth century the position of women began to attract the board minded and more sensible thinkers. These changes, however, took place after the Second World War and more particularly after the attainment of independence. They by their own efforts and with the help of those having liberal outlook began to come forward in the social and political fields. Of the many changes in the educational facilities and domestic, social, political, legal and economic rights, the women characters remain fundamentally unchanged. As housewives, as ascetics and as both combined, they have always kept burning the torch of their inner inherent sweetness, softness and the spirit of service.²⁶

An important characteristic seen in the women characters of Sankardeva's drama is the intensity of love. There is no trace of selfishness in this kind of love. Moreover, it cannot be regarded as the emotions of blind love too. In the words of Dr. Harishchandra Bhattacharya, 'they are the maidens with superb qualities in the beginning of the play, struck with pangs of love on the hero's qualities and passes sometimes in anxiety and even despair for the attainment of their purpose. They are developed with natural succession of beauty and merit but no desire for amorous feelings depicted therein.'²⁷

In depicting the women characters the playwright did not draw them as simple, uneducated and illiterate village women. It appears that women have occupied a very important place in Sankardeva's dramas. The position of women as we have already discussed gradually degraded after the Vedic age. Sankardeva tried to awaken them and wanted to show the common people that the females are not inferior to men in any respect.

But none of the writers could exhibit their mastery in creating characters and naturally women characters drawn by them do not have that strength and vitality which Sankardeva's women characters possess.²⁸

²⁵ Chatterji, op.cit., P.609

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Goswami, P., op. cit., P.9

²⁸ Ibid

With the growth of social consciousness the playwrights now took a reformative zeal and realism occupied their mind. The inspiration for the new drama was drawn mainly from Shakespeare and the mixture of tragic and comic, use of soliloquies and asides were followed almost mechanically by all the playwrights. It is universally admitted that the early dramas whether eastern or western are religious. They are propaganda plays. The main interest of the playwrights of those dramas being to express the greatness of God and His deeds. The characters depicted in them are not as living human beings. Moreover, the playwrights did not pay attention to the creation of characters. The society was simple and there were no complexities of life. But the modern world is different and the society has witnessed growing complexities. The new playwrights seem to be aware of it. They want the dramatic characters to convey the message of the society.²⁹ The dramatists recollected their glorious past and depicted the merits of rich and fertile ancient tradition.

So far as the question of characters portrayed is concerned Shakespeare left an indelible mark on the modern Assamese playwrights. Effort was made by the Assamese dramatists of this period to create such characters like Shakespeare's revealed in the dramas. But this influence was not so profound in the early part of this stage, but gradually entered very deeply to the Assamese dramatic world. The history of modern Assamese drama started with social drama, but social drama depicting socio- economic problems developed only recently and particularly after the attainment of independence.³⁰

The two chief sources from which the dramatists drew their materials before Independence were mythology and history. Mention has made of the difficulties in writing social plays, the staging of which did not receive adequate response from the audience. The two sources, mythology and history were able to supply readymade materials with all the requisites to satisfy the taste of the people.

Moreover, most of the writers came under the influence of romanticism, the romantic attitude of looking back to the heritage and past glory. But the most important factor was the growth of national consciousness as the idea of liberating the nation from a foreign power spread and the patriotic sentiment of the writers worked fully. They felt

²⁹ Bhuyan, A., op. cit., P.27

³⁰ Goswami, P., op. cit., P. 5

it necessary to remained the common people of their glorious past which could inspire them to unite. The rousing of such sentiment was very much essential for the success of the national movement. Mainly, because of these reasons mythology and history became the principal sources of attraction for the playwrights.

But modern mythical dramas are different from the medieval ones not only in style and technique, but also in the very atmosphere pervading them. In the earlier dramas emphasis was given on the cause of faith where human elements were automatically reduced. They were a kind of dance dramas with more songs and dances than dialogue and action. Except the subject matter, the modern mythical drama has no similarity with the *Ankiyanata*.

Among all the mythological plays of the period the most important one is Jyotiprasad Agarwala's *Sonit- Kunwari* (princess of Sonitpur, 1925). Although the story is taken from mythology, the focus of the play is on romantic episode. The hero and the heroine, Aniruddha and Usha are the legendary lovers but the playwright has succeeded in depicting them as young lovers of all ages. Moreover, it is in *Sonit Kunwari* alone, that indigenous Assamese songs were used for the first time as a dramatic device. The detailed stage- directions and the lyrical quality are two more attractions of the play.³¹

The success of the playwright lies in representing the characters in a new way without deviating from the original story. He also has the liberty to introduce some subsidiary characters. The characters which have only a casual mention in the mythologies, they can be depicted brighter than what they appear in the original ones. Since the importance was given on the heroism and greatness of the characters, they seem to be somewhat unnatural. Even the common people also cannot establish any relation with them.

Moreover, the people could not also ignore the contemporary society and therefore in order to please the masses, the playwrights paid attention to create only a few minor characters.

Although the modern Assamese drama had its beginning with the social drama *Ram- Navami*, this class of dramas did not sustain. On the contrary, satirical writings centered round the corruption and hypocrisy of the society made their appearance. The

³¹ Tamuli, Geetashree., *Jyotiprasad Agarwalar Natar Nareebishwa*, Gariyashi, January, 2011., P33

hypocrisy of the outwardly sagely, the pride of the foolish and the sagacious, the humiliation by the drunkard, the lewdness of the rich, the deplorable condition of the unchaste and the sad plight of the chaste women, all these were depicted in the satirical dramas in order to preach the moral values to the common man. In the nineteenth century, the moral degradation of the Assamese society prompted the creation of satires and light dramas. Since the only aim of these writings was social reform, no male or female character has been clearly drawn in them. The female characters drawn in the satirical dramas are generally devoted to their husbands and sincere to their children. Since they are bound by the situations, they do not have anything to do on their own. That is why, the female characters in most of the satirical dramas lack specialty³².

Although the western influence had already made its impact on the society, the dramatists kept these characters free from such influences in order to retain the idealism of the Indian woman unhurt. This idealism is the Indianness in the Indian woman. But the dramatists of the earlier period had a narrow angle in their outlook. Overwhelmed with the responsibility of depicting the idealism in the male characters they very often ignored the female characters. Patriotism played the prominent role in these dramas against the religious sentiment of the mythological dramas. Female characters did not come to prominence even in this class of dramas. Although many great incidents and their outcome in the world history centred round women, Assam history does not have any women who played a pivotal role in them. The characters depicted in the dramas are seen deviating from the traditional norms with regard to choosing the partners by themselves as well as in some other activities in their way of life. This is because of the change of outlook due to spread of modern education among the womenfolk. In some of the dramas some ideal modern educated women characters are depicted, who are capable of taking a balance view to life and facing life and its problems with courage. There are some ideal modern educated women with good synthesis of traditional as well as modern qualities of womanhood in them. Although these characters are said to belong to the traditional type, they have deviated to a great extent from the traditional norm with regard to choosing of partners by themselves as well as in some other activities in their way of life. This is perhaps because of the influence of the changing trend of the society, including spread of modern education among the womenfolk. But since Assamese society is tradition- bound society, therefore, the traditional attitude

³² Goswami, P., op. cit., P. 11

towards love has not changed much in our society and the characters depicted in this background mostly remain conventional. Thus the western impact over the Assamese society must be said to have opened up new vistas leading to a new worldview and value system and the women characters painted during the time are imbued with a new and liberated attitude of life.

However, it must be noted that the first Assamese historical drama '*Jaymati*' by Padmanath Gohain Baruah was named after a women. Like Gohain Baruah Lakshminath Bezbaruah also wrote a number of historical plays besides '*Jaymati Kunwari*'. It is Lakshminath Bezbaruah who placed the Assamese historical play on a firm footing.

Modern education has also brought the women in touch with ideas like liberty, freedom and equality of status. As a result, portrayal of simple and home keeping women characters gave way to relatively complex characters in the post war times. The playwrights even dared to cut short conservative medieval ideas and depicted love relations among men and women from an entirely new perspective. Their interpretations however, are more western than conventional.³³

The traditional male attitude towards women has been depicted in some dramas. The attitude of controlling the women folk according to the will of menfolk has obstructed the development of individuality and personality in women. In a male dominated society where women's desires and feelings are not recognised, they feel neglected and sometimes out of frustration take the path of self -destruction.

Assamese social plays are as old as modern Assamese drama. But the female characters even though portrayed with sympathy and generosity were largely drab and lifeless till the advent of Jyotiprasad Agarwala who modernized the Assamese drama not only by introducing new form and content but also by developing a new outlook towards women characters. A gradual development of women characters is seen in his plays and they are depicted as the representatives of the progressive society. His Kanchanmati in *Karengar Ligiri*, Itibhen in *Rupalim* and Labhita in *Labhita* are the best examples of them. Nowhere has his distinctive mind been better represented than in the character of Kanchanmati of his famous play *Karengar Ligiri* and in no other Assamese

³³ Tamuli, op. cit., P31

drama such a controversial character as Itibhen of his play *Rupalim* has been represented. His Kanchanmati is a very distinctive mind of women character and Itibhen has been depicted as the most courageous one. He has drawn the character of Labhita as a true female rebel who sacrificed her all to see India free. She is a type of those who can rise to the occasion whenever the situation demands. Jyotiprasad Agarwala moulded superbly his women characters with their strength and weakness and thus made them unique. The unification of modesty, simplicity, humility and also of self- confidence, courage and firmness are seen in his women characters.

Among the changes that have taken place in the life of the people in this period the most important one is the awakening among the women. In this period women once again is coming up to her own, not by oppressive or aggressive means but through soft, sure and noble ways of love and sacrifice. The potentialities of woman as the nation builder came to be more and more emphasised in the Assamese plays whereas the earlier writers had depicted her as the supplement and complement of man. The growing spirit of patriotism and nationalism was at the root of the growth of these historical plays. It should be admitted that the women characters are there. The women characters in Bezbaruah's plays are more attractive than the male ones. The most fascinating among them is Dalimi, a Naga girl who has stirred the imagination of readers and critics of Bezbaruah. Before him, Padmanath Gohain Baruah made an attempt at such a creation, but his Jinu in *Jaymati* faded before she bloomed. Although Bezbaruah's Dalimi has also been drawn on the same model, she has really been a unique character. It is Dalimi that has given Bezbaruah's dramatic talent a good scope to bloom to its full. She is the creation of a poet- dramatist writing under full impact of Romanticism and is clearly reminiscent of Shakespeare's Miranda and Wordsworth's Lucy- pur, simple and quite ignorant of the cruelties of human society.³⁴ But it appears probably that in the matter of delineating the women characters Jyotiprasad was rather more influenced by the variegated characters of the Victorian dramatists.³⁵

Though the modern Assamese drama started with a social theme, the social drama remained in its cradle for a long time without being developed. The women also did not come forward to establish their individuality. Owing to their economic dependence and lack of consciousness they had to be mere puppets in the hands of the

³⁴ Goswami, P., op. cit., P.76

³⁵ Goswami, op. cit. p.94

writers. Lack of education and evil social customs were also responsible for not allowing them to rise above their puny stature.

With the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi on the political scene of India the condition of the downtrodden womenfolk started improving. The most remarkable event of the twentieth century is that the womenfolk themselves come out marching forward with enthusiasm to uplift them. This renaissance amongst the women has also drawn the attention of the writers. But, though different aspects of female characters have been drawn in the dramas of modern period, one can hardly see a single female character amongst all the characters either with a distinctive personality or with some remarkable potentiality.³⁶

On the otherhand, all the plays of Jyotiprasad Agarwala draw the ideas that his main role has been assigned to the heroine in all his plays. In other words the chain of events centers round the heroine and she is the main driving force in his plays. And the characters enriched with divine light that has continued to illuminate the world of his dream and conception with regard to women. His articles like *Aideur Jonaki Bat* and *Silpir Prithivi* also testified the same opinion regarding to women and female education.³⁷

Indeed Jyotiprasad Agarwala was a literary rebel of the first order but for whose literary and artistic creations Assam would have remained poorer. His emergence in the field of modern Assamese drama has given Assam something unique to be proud of for all time.

Organization of scene and acts follows modern lines and in every scene the dramatist has given elaborate stage directions. Dramatic necessity and economy have been maintained in his dramas. It was Jyotiprasad Agarwala who for the first time made dialogue artfully articulate, gave it variety and understanding flash, depth of idea and feeling.

Jyotiprasad Agarwala tried to march along the path of progress by making the Assamese society and culture the central sphere of his activities. As a writer he was

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Ibid, P94

conscious of the true functions of an artist. He did not take the word 'art' in a narrow sense. His definition of art included all kinds of creative activities.

He himself was the true illustrator of this definition. He was a democratic artist-one of the movements launched to guide and conduct along the true path of culture is the real revolution. Keeping the real meaning of the word 'revolution' in mind it should be quite in the fitness of things that a man having the right type of enlightenment and conscience cannot but be a revolutionary. It is through the character of Labhita, Jyotiprasad Agarwala having deep faith in the social and cultural revolution, appeals to the people in general to resist oppression tooth and nail, to dedicate themselves to the removal of the oppressed class and to eschew the path of conservativeness and narrowness. Labhita is the true representative of the Assamese young men and women in the matter of self- confidence, social consciousness and liberal thoughts.³⁸

The character Labhita has the potentialities to inspire and encourage the people to stand face to face with the grim reality of life and to choose the path of struggle. If it is not possible to conquer violence through non- violence, it is then unavoidable to defeat violence through violence. It is for this sense of realism that Labhita refuses to follow the ideal dictum of non- violence propounded by Gandhi at the hour of need- "Thou should know very well that I have not enlisted myself in the Gandhiji's Register book of volunteers." Labhita has introduced Jyotiprasad not only as a playwright of repute, but also as an artist capable of presenting the social reality and of directing new path.

Jyotiprasad Agarwala believed that the world would be able to enjoy real peace only on the day when the rein of administration would fall on Rupkonwar's hand and not before that day. Jyotiprasad wanted to communicate this message through his play *NimatiKaina*. It is through his play *NimatiKaina* that he has revealed his philosophy as an artist. According to Nimati, the Rupkowar is none but the most dedicated worshipper of truth and beauty. The goddess of art comes only at his invitation and smiles at his clarion- call. Her smiles bring in pure joy and her songs bring about world peace, which can be effected only by the poets and philosophers.³⁹

³⁸ Gohain(ed)., op. cit., P. 7

³⁹ Tamuli., op. cit., 32

Jyotiprasad Agarwala has created number of female characters. But unlike Ibsen's his characters are neither active nor are very much eager to bring the adverse situations under control. While Ibsen's women characters protest against the injustices with all their force and vehemence, Jyotiprasad's characters are afraid of the men of authority in the society.⁴⁰

There is also enough scope for thinking that the playwright was very much influenced by the western thoughts for having drawn an extra ordinary female character of Kanchanmati in his drama *Karengar Ligiri* in the midst of a completely feudal milieu. If Sundar is supposed to be the representation of the Romantic Revolution, Kanchanmati can very well be supposed to be the representative of Rationalism. The firm rational mind of Kanchanmati has been able to analyses complicated problems of society and thereby she has rocked the very foundation of the feudal society. Kanchanmati, the newly married woman, in his drama *Karengar Ligiri* had implicit faith in the social authority, is not found to suffer from any sort of social disturbance in accepting her husband. Though she is not found to be ready to openly take her stand as a social rebel, yet we see her use strong words when her ethics is stabbed.⁴¹

Kanchanmati argued in one scene that in the existing social system a girl can love anybody, but cannot marry anybody at her sweet will. At this Anangaram says, it is really difficult to get to the bottom of a woman's heart. At this she replied that most of the menfolk are seen to swim only over the surface of a woman's heart. Only a handful few can touch the bottom. Such arguments and counter-arguments establish Kanchanmati as a new woman. Although she has been painted in a traditional canvas but Kanchanmati represents a new image of a liberated woman.

The character of Sundar is full of contradictions. On one hand, he wants to get rid of the established social customs; while on the other hand, he is timid and orthodox. He also utters bitterly against womanhood, but also records his protests against all rules that tend to subjugate women.

Jyotiprasad through his character Kanchanmati tried to replace the domineering society by a new one based on the individual freedom of man. Because he knows that the hopes and aspirations of the men and women in the society can never find their

⁴⁰ Goswami, P., op. cit., P99

⁴¹ Tamuli, op. cit., P32

fulfilment without a radical change in the society. He thought that the right step towards the social revolution will be to become conscious of one's social status after having determined the real relationship between the individual and the society from the realistic points of view which shows his realistic view. In the matter of outlining a woman character Jyotiprasad was capable of ragged analysis.

On the other hand in the same play he drew another main character named Sewali. Sewali controls spontaneous urges of heart for fear of the society. Although he drew Sewali in a way which is difficult to justify after the Women Liberation Movement, yet it must be admitted that human nature does not change so easily. Viewed from that standpoint the character of Sewali is nothing but natural expression of womanhood. Through the play he displayed the feeling of the spiritual quest for love that flows through the heart of Sundar Konwar.⁴²

Similarly, the character of Rupalim is another dramatic attempt at displaying the same eternal spiritual urge for love. He showed the intensity of the sense of love, beauty, culture and self- esteem in the personalities of all the main characters of Rupalim. Rupalim is a romantic play wherein the playwright declares the victory of love between two individuals, kneckdeep impure passion, in the spectrum of a sense of patriotism. It is also a declaration of superior womanpower.

On the other hand his character Labhita is a supreme example of courage, tolerance, strength of character and self- dedication. The play depicts the moral and missionary superiority of a committed girl, fighting for the liberation of her own land from the British colonial rulers. Labhita has introduced Jyotiprasad not only as a playwright of repute, but also as an artist capable of presenting the social reality and of directing new path.

If one analyses the women characters of his first three plays one can see two categories of women. While Usha, Sewali and Rupalim who are good, beautiful and essentially women like come under the first category; Chitrlekha, Kanchanmati and Itibhen are intelligent, reward- loving and strong protagonist of women liberation belong to the second category. In Labhita the playwright has carefully left out the type of the character of the first category and Labhita has been created out of all the choicest

⁴² Tamuli, *op. cit.*, P34

materials of the characters of the second category and in going to do so Labhita has been promoted to the status of an ideal character.⁴³

In his play *Labhita* he drew a heroic story of the Assamese people- men and women who fought against the British imperialism in 1942A.D. When he was at Dhekiyajuli that scene brought a radical change in the mind of Jyotiprasad Agarwala and his own experience about the grim reality of life's struggle for human liberation had also opened up new vistas to life and his poor idea about the potential capacity of the womenfolk had also undergone a complete change. That is why he has been able to metamorphose an ordinary village girl in Labhita into an extraordinary powerful central force capable of fighting against the forces of evil.

Golap, who wanted to marry Labhita, expresses his reluctance to take her to his own house for fear of his own family members. The reason is Labhita has taken shelter in the house of a Muslim villager, and his own people, steeped in superstitions, may feel embarrassed by her presence. Elahibox, the Muslim villager, request Golap to take Labhita to the latter's house. But Golap appears to be indecisive.

Jyotiprasad declared in the voice of Labhita that to be a modern man one will have modern values both in letter and spirit. A young man lacking the spirit of protest against social injustice and religious obscurantism cannot claim himself to be a man of the present generation. Labhita refuses to accompany Golap and decides to take her own course of life, regardless of her relationship with him, without depending on anyone.

Thus Jyotiprasad presented Labhita as a new woman without much of a traditional mooring. She is committed to her cause, not to be given in to any weak sentiments. She loved Golap, but finally rejected him considering him to be a hangover of the worse side of our traditional beliefs and lifestyles.

The noble ideal of Labhita is not to sacrifice her life for a feeble- hearted lover but to dedicate it for the sake of her country. She is a strong character and therefore she dismisses Golap by advising him to live his individual life with all his ill- conceived notions like his caste consciousness and evils of his narrow society. When he hesitated to give her shelter for fear of the society, she condemns his timidity in clear terms in the

⁴³ Goswami, op. cit., P112

following lines: “a man born today cannot become a modern man by virtue of his birth. Even today your mind is something like that of a young man born some four decades ago. You have neither moral courage to call the spade a spade nor have you the courage to do the thing what you yourself deem to be right.” There is a universal truth in the above quoted words of Labhita. What has been said by her thereafter is also very meaningful. These words are equally applicable to each and every social system.⁴⁴

In Karengar Ligiri, Kanchanmati had bowed down before the injunctions of the society even if she knows it to be harmful to the society at large.

Jyotiprasad Agarwala felt the necessity of a strong character like Labhita in order to drive away the wrong notions in the public mind of the Assamese society. He always tried to move ahead of time and with that end in view he kept himself always busy to create progressive women characters capable of supporting themselves at the time of crisis in place of the timid and submissive ones. Labhita is, therefore, depicted as conscious sentinel of the Assamese society.

In his play *Nimati Kaina* he told in the lips of Nimati that the said Rupkonwar is none but the most dedicated worshipper of truth and beauty. The goddess of art comes only at his invitation and smiles at his clarion-call. Her smiles bring in pure joy and her songs bring about world peace, which can be effected only by the poets and philosophers. Each and every character of the play is a symbol.

In Jyotiprasad’s *Khanikar* there is no woman character playing the main role. Nabanalini appears only in one scene. She is the representative of the modern women longing for women liberation. She has been shown as one of the protagonists of the feminist ideal she has no other special role to play than delivering some long, excited lectures only in one scene on the social progress of women. But Jyotiprasad Agarwala has undoubtedly depicted Nabanalini as one of the carriers of some specific notions. She had a feminist language such as- “My dear poet, you have understood nothing about the progressive march of women. You- the malefolk will enjoy all the choicest things, all the beauty, the smiles and the frolic of life and you want to imprison the womenfolk within the four walls of the house. You malefolk think that the duty of the womenfolk is over only when they satisfy the bestial hunger of the malefolk at night

⁴⁴ Gohain(ed), op. cit., P.345

after being fully exhausted by doing all sorts of household odd jobs all throughout the day.”⁴⁵

But it seems that to some extent Jyotiprasad was conservative regarding womenfolk. As in one dialogue of Kalpana Barua he said: “The womenfolk of our village are free- they are the queens of their households- you, a handful of girls learned in English education, are setting some bad examples before our womenfolk; you need motorcars to drive as you need such male folk to make them run at your errands... On the whole, you are against purpose of the creation of God.” He again said through Kalpana Barua like this- “The purdah system was perhaps introduced as if not to allow the beauty of the creamy bodies of women to be destroyed by the forces of nature.” Through all these sentences Jyotiprasad appeared to have expressed his own thoughts and ideas. From the expression it can be deduced that Jyotiprasad Agarwala was conservative in so far as womenfolk were concerned. However, individual excellence cannot take far an individual from his traditional limitations. The great writer ennobles his tradition and fertilizes the land he is rooted to which is true regarding Jyotiprasad Agarwala.

So, though, there is the predominance of the female characters in all his plays except *Khanikar*, after thereby analysis we can see that in spite of such predominance of female character exception of *Labhita*, the rests of the female characters are not at all active- rather they are passive. Deeply absorbed in their individual inner selves, these women characters live in a fortified world of their own. Most of the heroines do not have the capacity to bring the stream of events under their control. At the crisis hours these heroines become something like helpless beautiful dumb goddesses inspiring others to good works and thus they keep the human mind away from the evil and inauspicious doings.⁴⁶

It appears that Jyotiprasad Agarwala’s main purpose was to establish the human values and he wanted to do it by rousing the dormant capable of overcoming the obstacles like superstitions, oppressions, injustice, exploitations etc. to the realm of spiritual uplift. In order to get his purpose fulfilled he had chosen the womenfolk amongst whom the culture remains pure and simple. Therefore, the women characters

⁴⁵ Baruah, U., op. cit., P50

⁴⁶ Dutta, A.R., op. cit., P11

played better role in the plays. They virtually constitute a new species of rising women determined to work out their own salvation. Again, he showed the power of non-violent means through the characters. They protested what happened to their surroundings but it was a Non- Cooperation but Non -Violent act which can ultimately able to win the *duskriti* (evil). On the otherhand, Jyotiprasad had also revealed more clearly through his plays his implicit faith in and deep regards for the power inherent in women.

These characters empowered in themselves, evolve and strive to achieve ‘the third state of being’ (as Virginia Woolt calls it in her ‘A Room of One’s Own) where the male –female identity constructs do not have any major relevance at all. It is this third space beyond the private- public divide that allows the women in Jyotiprasad’s plays to get themselves spiritedly engaged in the grand venture of constructing the cultural order by defeating all the forces of anti-culture or *Duskriti*.⁴⁷ Geetashri Tamuli in her article *Jyotiprasad Agarwalar Natarakar Naribiswa* deals with the role played by women presented in Jyotiprasad Agarwala’s drama and according to the writer Jyotiprasad Agarwala was a visionary and therefore he could recognize the power of women in nationalist activities. He, therefore in his writings claimed the women to play the leading role in building the new Assamese society. Except the play *Khanikar* each one of his plays has been named after a female character.⁴⁸

Though the women characters have dominated the plays of Jyotiprasad like in the manner of the western dramatist like Ibsen these characters have not been the be-all and end-all of his thoughts, ideas and idealisms. The same criterion is applicable in the case of Jyotiprasad Agarwala also with some exceptions. The drama composed after independence developed some distinct characteristics. The marked tendency was towards realism and economy. The convention of Shakespearean drama which occupied the mind of the dramatists so long was ignored. They were now influenced by Ibsen, Shaw, Galsworthy and other dramatists of the realistic school.

The central character, *Sundar Konwar*, embodied the individualism which seeks to act outside the social framework. The Rajmao or the queen mother is the embodiment of an inert, tradition bound society. This complex play attempts to explore

⁴⁷ Dutta, A.R., op. cit., P12

⁴⁸ Tamuli., op. cit., P33

the relationship between man and woman while advocating liberation from social constraints for the latter.

His play *Labhita* marks a major departure in being realistic and contemporary in theme as well as style.

After the Second World War and more particularly after the attainment of independence, Assamese drama has entered a new era of creativity and the writers are exploiting new themes. There were changes both in the form and contents of the drama.

The trend was initiated by Jyotiprasad Agarwala even before the independence. He introduced the social problems in his drama *Karengar Ligiri* for the first time which was written on the conflicts between the old and the new. Undoubtedly *Karengar Ligiri* is an innovation in the field of modern Assamese drama and here he really succeeds as a true socio- literary rebel having swept away all age old stereo- types from so called modern Assamese drama. The plays referred to above are enough to indicate the social consciousness that occupied the mind of the dramatists. In all these plays social problems have been reflected in a very serious and realistic manner. But mere representation of the problems as such is not enough. Another limitation is that these plays merely depict the material reality; no attempt has been made in them to go deep into problems and strike at their very roots. The post war period has been many changes in the life of the people. The writers seem to have changed their outlook towards life and started feeling that men and women though not identical are but of equal status in the society.

Since independence, there has been a marked development regarding the position, status and values of women. This century has experienced a spectacle of the emancipation of women all over the world. A woman no longer is to be considered as a breeding machine nor a chattel and plaything to be exploited for man's advantage and amusement. Women have now come to realize that they are in no way inferior to men and are capable in contributing to the development of the nation.

After independence a good number of Assamese dramas have appeared and the women characters depicted in them are the reflection of real human beings of the twentieth century. The complex mental attitude, increasing political awareness and the influence of the European literature were the main reason behind this change.

Jyotiprasad's attitude towards women as has been expressed through his plays appears to be a Gandhian one. It is also quite natural on the part of a staunch follower of Gandhi who has looked upon these pure women as the paragon of womenfolk as is generally done in the Hindu society. These ideal women showed their strength of character in two spheres activity- one is the begetting of children and the other is safeguarding of chastity. Great personalities like Mahatma Gandhi, Aurobinda have shown a system of peace protest against injustice without any hostility or bad blood. Aurobinda talks of philosophical revolution, while Mahatma Gandhi resorts to *sattyagraha*. If this modus- operandi is resorted to by people, as they are being practiced in India, a higher civilization will certainly become a reality and this thought was applied by Jyotiprasad in the characters of his plays.

Making of *Jaymati*:

Cinema was merely another medium through which his imagination could work to create something of abiding value. During the time there were very few women who would dare to pose before the camera. Social taboos frowned upon women taking up acting. Therefore, Jyotiprasad visited numerous villages searching for a suitable actress for the leading role of *Jaymati*, the first Assamese film.

Jyotiprasad Agarwala has to face the unwilling and hostile parents when he went to search around for actors and actresses all over the state for his first film *Jaymati*. He has to face angry, indecent rejections from unwilling and hostile parents as acting by girls was still a taboo in Assam at that time.⁴⁹

The Passion of Joan of Arc' by Karl Dreyer and despite its totally different treatment was inspired by the theme of a woman's protest against the powerful royalty for the good of the people. But he had the artistic insight to visualize the difference in the two stories and effected the change by using a different characterization and thematic treatment in his content. The realistic treatment and the subtle suggestion of a message of protest and ultimate sacrifice consciously but unobtrusively and conspicuously absent in the contemporary Indian cinema. The story of a brave princess meeting her death at the hands of a tyrannical king, though smacks of a dynastic feud

⁴⁹ Sarma, Arup., op. cit., P11

centering the throne, yet symbolizes a silent protest and ultimate sacrifice for the deliverance of her kingdom and the people.⁵⁰

It might be possible that Jyotiprasad's film *jaymati*'s story reinvented and retold in a poignant visual narrative was in some way instrumental in working up Assamese women's subconscious to make them join and bravely face the British guns in much greater numbers compared to any other part in India. It is this depth of creative imagination that set him apart from his contemporaries.⁵¹

Thus, Jyotiprasad Agarwala's cultural engagements have significantly inspired almost all sections of the Assamese society. Even today like any other personality, the popularity of Jyotiprasad Agarwala's works was not confined only to a particular era but has transcended the limits of time.

⁵⁰ Ibid., P20

⁵¹ Ibid., P50