

# Chapter-I

## INTRODUCTION

*“Sundarei je phular mantra*

*Ahoratri mate,*

*Seyehe aaji iman phul*

*Prabhate Prabhate.”*

Jyotiprasad Agarwala has been widely known for his literary, cultural and nationalist activities which have been the marker of his social thinking. His association with the cultural and nationalist domain reflects his contributions to the Assamese society. Being an artist, Jyotiprasad’s writings on Assamese society have poetic flavour as well as the hand facets of colonial exploitation and social evils. Jyotiprasad Agarwala was born in 1903 A.D., a period of transition which showed a new era in every aspect of Assam. The 19<sup>th</sup> century Assamese renaissance had its rays in Jyotiprasad Agarwala’s life and being a product of early 20<sup>th</sup> century, his social ideas were remolded with the changing needs of the Assamese society. The study traces to understand the socio-political transformation that took place in the Assamese society during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and relate the shaping up of cultural nationalism in modern Assamese society. The social and ideological transformation of Jyotiprasad Agarwala from his predecessor is the first distinct feature of the present work.

Jyotiprasad Agarwala was a humanist. Man was the center of his moral world. He was a Marxist with his own terms of reference. He created a world of his own with his own values. He wanted people’s total uplift, full enrichment, and total empowerment. He made a distinct departure from what he received with a distinct vision of his own. He brought in a new sense of modernity through his plays, songs which rooted in Assamese cultural traditions. As Hutchinson saw cultural nationalists

“as moral innovators who seek by ‘reviving’ an ethnic historicist vision of the nation to redirect traditionalists and modernists away from conflict and unite them in

the task of constructing an integrated distinctive and autonomous community, capable of competing in the modern world.”- Hutchinson.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, some of the most acute and eminent thinkers of the world have made nationalism a special subject of study and investigation due to its decisive significance role in the life of humanity. The study of Indian nationalism is of great significance from the standpoint of a general study of nationalism. India’s peculiar social, economic and political structure and religious history, together with its territorial vastness etc. make the study of the rise and growth of Indian nationalism more difficult, but also more interesting and useful. The study intends to give a historical, synthetic and systematic account of the genesis of Indian nationalism in general and Assamese nationalism in particular. Attempt has been made to correlate the distinctiveness of Jyotiprasad nationalism with his cultural nationalism.

### **1.1 Review of Literature:**

Nationalism has generated much curiosity among the scholars of History. As a result numerous researches have been undertaken to study this topic. However, in recent years the notion has been become an interesting topic among the Social Science scholars. Again, numerous works also have been undertaken to study the giant personality of Jyotiprasad Agarwala. One has to write volumes to assess him properly.

Usually, Jyotiprasad Agarwala is remarked as a lover of beauty and a man of art and culture. Therefore, the research works mainly covered his literature and regard him as a literate person. However, with the new edition of Jyotiprasad Agarwala’s works edited by Hiren Gohain, new vision of Jyotiprasad Agarwala regarding his vision on nation and the common people has come out in light. The earlier notion has been challenged by present intellectuals like Hiren Gohain, Prasenjit Choudhury, Devabrata Sarma etc. who rather viewed his literature and works in a nationalistic way<sup>2</sup> and thus have they opened up the field for research on the subject. The aim of historical research is not merely narrate the phases of development of a society, but establish a proper analysis and comprehension of those phases. Therefore, the importance of Jyotiprasad Agarwala in shaping of the socio- cultural life of Assamese people has to be examined from the right perspective.

---

<sup>1</sup> Smith, Anthony D and Hutchinson, John., 1994, *Nationalism*, Oxford University Press, London, P.34

<sup>2</sup> Gohain, Hiren(ed)., 2007, *Jyotiprasad Rachanawali*, publication Board Assam, Guwahati.p.i

Again, Eighteenth Century transition has generated new ideas and changes among the Assamese people which had great impact on Jyotiprasad Agarwala. English East India Company was essentially a mercantilist enterprise so when it acquired power after annexation, it focus only on those matter that were economically beneficial for the Company. Spread of Western education was another measures of the colonial rule to benefit the Company's purpose. Jyotiprasad Agarwala was the product of this age and its influence was visible in his life.

Nationalism is also an area of which scholar gave great attention in recent period. Assamese nationalism has important features and distinctiveness which also has been studied by scholars.

The first significant attempt in this direction was undertaken by Hiren Gohain who edited the *Jyotiprasad Rachanawali* for the second time which is a critical response to the pioneering work edited by Satyendra Nath Sarmah. In the edited volume some letters of fiery language of Jyotiprasad Agarwala against the ruling party after independence such as Naliapul Incident were published which were omitted in earlier volume.

In his article in *Natun Prithi*, Nasruddin Hazarika<sup>3</sup> argued that Jyotiprasad Agarwala was a progressive nationalist. He was different from his contemporary nationalist like Ambikagiri Raychoudhury in the point that he can remove the Middle Class Hegemony and took the new ideas in a progressive direction.

Similar line of reasoning was reflected in the work of Devabrata Sarma<sup>4</sup> which mainly revolved around the role of the Political Organizations evolved during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries. He also has discussed about the formation of Assamese middle class and their role in the emergence of Assamese nationalism. It has also the discussion of the role of press, *Asom Sahitya Sabha* and the *Chatra* institutions in forming Assamese nationality.

In the work critical analysis has been made on how the Assamese intellectuals like Lakshminath Bezbaruah, Padmanath Gohain Baruah, Rajanikanta Bardaloi,

---

<sup>3</sup> Hazarika, Nasruddin., *Jyotiprasad Aru Asomar Jatisamasya*, Mukut Bhattacharjee(ed)., Natun Prithivi, Natun Sahitya Parishad, 2016

<sup>4</sup> Sarma, Devabrata, 2006, *Asomiya Jatigathan Prakriya aru Jatiya Janagosthigata Anusthansamuh*, Eklavya Publication, Jorhat.

Nilmoni Phukan and others though were nationalist yet they were very reluctant to refuse the British rule publicly. They took language as a tool for their nationalistic propagations but they did not dare to write against the British Government.

The author also pointed out that freedom fighters like Tarun Ram Phukan, Ambikagiri Raychoudhury were sometimes got confused regarding their nationalist activities. Sarma has argued Ambikagiri as almost unstable in his whole nationalistic activities.

Again the narrative has brought to light a very significant debate initiated by Birendra kumar Bhattacharjee regarding the distinctiveness of Jyotiprasad Agarwala's concept of Assamese nationalism. Bhattacharjee also questioned the portrayal of Jyotiprasad Agarwala by the modern writers by placing him on a pedestal on the basis of his ideas about nationalism.

One of the important study in this direction was undertaken by Chandana Goswami<sup>5</sup> whose work is a simple discussion regarding the growth of modern education and the development of Assamese Renaissance, role of the American Missionaries in development of Assamese literature. She also has a brief discussion about the Middle class of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Impact of Bengal Renaissance is also briefly discussed in the book. The role of press and journals and the impact of Indian National movement in Assam also have been discussed in the book. But no critical discussion has been made in the work regarding the Assamese Middle Class.

Undoubtedly there are many works regarding his songs, literature and contribution to Assamese society. But there was lack of in-depth analysis regarding his nationalistic ideas and the distinctiveness of his nationalism in a historical prospective.

The work to shed light on this area of study is Akhil Ranjan Dutta(ed), "*Culture Ideology Politics Jyotiprasad Agarwala and his Vision for Social Transformation*". The book presented a very significant picture of the study. In his article The Enduring Legacy of Jyotiprasad Chandan Kr, Sharma argues that 'although Jyotiprasad Agarwala has been project as a cultural giant and it obviously enough to immortalize his contributions to the Assamese society and culture, but it will not be a correct evaluation of his personality if he is separated from his social- political philosophy and its praxis.'

---

<sup>5</sup> Goswami, Chandana, 2008, *Nationalism in Assam*, New Delhi.

But since the book is based on social ideas, therefore somehow the real ideas of Jyotiprasad have not been discussed. Besides, the work was confined to his social vision and his ideas of later life alone so the historical background of Jyotiprasad Agarwala and his link with the Assamese Middle Class during the period has missed.

Contrary to the works of A.R.Dutta(ed), Sailen Barkatoki and Uttam Barua, Akhil Gogoi and Geetashree Tamuli's work *Uribo Pora Hole Aakau Jujiloheten* deals specially with the early history of Jyotiprasad Agarwala with special focus on his family backdrop. The author argued that due to their acceptance of Vaishnavite faith it became easier to the family of Jyotiprasad to assimilate with the Assamese society wholeheartedly. The work drew a direct correlation between their religion and their assimilation and further remarked that it was the influence of his family which helped in molding his thought.

Although the above studies discussed in a detailed regarding his social vision and contribution and thus provide a structural frame work to the study, but understanding to his distinctiveness is rather limited.

Attempt has therefore been made in this thesis to 'create a missing history' by analyzing the family archival evidence, his works, letters, personal diary, manuscript of his family members and with the other relating sources. The source materials used are the written evidence available either primary or secondary. But I have also made use of some oral information which gathered from interviewing his family members.

Apurba Baruah in his article<sup>6</sup> has touched upon another important aspect of Jyotiprasad's nationalism. According to the author Jyotiprasad Agarwala seems to accept the third definition of Raymond Williams regarding culture, because it is the most crucial aspect of any social reality. Jyotiprasad opined that culture remains an integral part of all aspects of the social life of all civilizations. Jyotiprasad regarded the national liberation struggle, society, revolution, literature, music all as the different expressions of the same life experience. In his article the author undertook detailed discussion and observed that Jyotiprasad Agarwala's Concept of Culture which can also be linked with the views of Partha Chatterjee and Bipan Chandra's nationalism.

---

<sup>6</sup> Baruah, Apurba Kumar., *Jyotiprasad Agarwala and the Concept of Assamese culture*, NEIHA

Therefore attempt has been made in this work to study Jyotiprasad's cultural nationalism and linked it with his nationalism.

Pranati Sharma Goswami in her book *Female characters in Modern Assamese Drama* undertook a detailed study on the Assamese social life of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries and the reflection of social life of a nation through drama. While studying the nature and types of women characters in modern Assamese dramas, the author gives emphasis to find out women's position and status in different stages of the modern period of Assamese society, their behaviour and interest, their special aspirations, morale idealism, human weakness and their misery and failure through the dramas. According to the author different ethnic origins having different cultures have contributed largely to the development of the Assamese culture. Pranati Sharma Goswami has discussed the significant role played by women characters in Jyotiprasad Agarwala's Dramas and his attempt to create an ideal female character in his dramas. The Assamese playwrights have depicted this type of characters in their plays and among them one was Jyotiprasad Agarwala.

Similarly, Geetashri Tamuli in her article *Jyotiprasad Agarwalas Natar Nabiswa* 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.

Apart from that another side that determines Jyotiprasad's creative genius has been focused by Arup Kumar Dutta,<sup>7</sup> Apurba Sarma<sup>8</sup> and Dipankar Banerjee.<sup>9</sup> Apurba Sarma's study is important from the point of Cinematic history of Assam as well as India. He has undertaken a detailed study of this category and has highlighted the film history of Assam. Dipankar Banerjee and Arup Kumar Dutta discussed in the same line.

Although research and numerous works have been undertaken to study the multifaceted genius of Jyotiprasad Agarwala, our knowledge about his nationalism is rather limited. With the help of available family archival information, archival records attempt has been made in this study to identify the elements of nationalistic ideas and his ideology. During the period of transition how his views had remolded. However, in

---

<sup>7</sup> Dutta, Arup Kumar., 2003, *Jyotiprasad- Prince of Beauty*, Anwasha, Guwahati.

<sup>8</sup> Sarma, Apurba., 1991, *Jyotiprasad as a Film maker and the Forsaken frontier*, Gauhati Cine Club, Guwahati.

<sup>9</sup> Banerjee, Dipankar., 2008, *Jyotiprasad Agarwala*, Guwahati.

order to examine his nationalistic fervor, it is also necessary to study his family backdrop and the development of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century's Assamese society. Therefore understanding of 18<sup>th</sup> Century transition is also important.

The purpose of literary criticism is not to analysis a work in great detail and lay bare its features. Criticism must aid us in our efforts to see the work in a historical perspective and discover its place in it.<sup>10</sup> All good writers are nationalists. A good writer is one who understands his milieu and uses it in an artistic form with his creative genius. In so far as it reflects the culture, environments, future hopes and aspirations any Indian writers work is nationalist writing. There is no separate entity called Nationalist literature. In response to certain emergent needs, nationalism takes on some strange forms.<sup>11</sup> As a literate person, artist, Jyotiprasad's contribution is immense. But at the meantime his contribution in nation building is unforgettable.

## **1.2. Statement of the problem:**

Though a considerable discussion on the various aspects of Jyotiprasad Agarwala has been made, but there has been a lack of in-depth analysis and historical perspective on his nationalist ideology and his association with cultural domain. In the present study attempt has been made to focus on this unexplored aspect of this remarkable personality. The study is to explore the co- relation between literature and nationalist thinking in Jyotiprasad Agarwala's writing. It also intends to show the distinctiveness of Jyotiprasad Agarwala's nationalist ideology with other nationalists. It is an attempt to assert his political and ideological vision with his lifelong concern for culture which he defined as beauty and humanism. Again, the work is also an attempt to assess and evaluate the role of various elements in the growth and rise of nationalism in Assam and aims to locate the linkages of Jyotiprasad Agarwala's perceptions of nationalism which centers round the cultural aspect. The study attempts to show how the family came to Assam and got assimilated to Assamese socio- cultural life. It intends to give information about an important family to which is not an easy access for

---

<sup>10</sup> Subramaniam, Ka, Naa., 1998, *A Movement for literature*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, P.80

<sup>11</sup> Subramaniam, op. cit., Pp. 97,122

the scholars. Jyotiprasad Agarwala and his family was a part of the formation process of Assamese identity. The distinction between him and his predecessors' lay in this point. He was from a different linguistic family and become a part of the Assamese culture or society.

One major source of the study is the autobiography of Haribilash Agarwala and the manuscripts of his family members Bibekananda Agarwala and Kamalaprasad Agarwala. For the family history except the biographical notes of Haribilash Agarwala and the biography of Chandra Kumar Agarwala written by Jyotiprasad Agarwala, no full length account of the family was prepared. Sometimes in the history some events co-incident and become responsible for some new happenings. To have better knowledge on Jyotiprasad's achievements one should have to know the co-incident and background behind all his generosity.

The study tried to discuss the family tree from beginning with Ghasiram. The autobiography, called *Haribilash Agarwala Dangariar Atmajeevani* was written by Haribilash Agarwala, the grandfather of Jyotiprasad Agarwala. The text has focused on the origin and settlement of the Marwari community in Assam and the opening up of Assamese economy and society on the other hand, and reshaping of a particular Marwari family (Agarwalas) and their culture who had settled in Assam.

The text '*Haribilash Agarwala Dangariar Atmajeevani*' has opened up a new dimension of Jyotiprasad's concept of Assamese nationalism. Remarkably, Haribilash was one of the early Marwari entrepreneurs who invested capital in indigenous industrial sectors like saw mills and rice mills. The present study has tried to link up the multidimensional context of this narrative with Assamese nationalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in general, and with Jyotiprasad Agarwala's nationalist thought in particular. The family tree will help to know the influence and environment that Jyotiprasad Agarwala got for his further activities.

### **1.3. Methodology:**

Scientific research methodology mainly the theoretical, empirical and analytical methods is being employed for collecting data and for a proper analysis of them. Both informative and analytical method had been applied in the study. Another angle of approach of the study is to know the historical background.



#### **1.4. Objectives:**

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To focus on the social backdrop of Jyotiprasad Agarwala and to explore his relation with the Assamese elites.
2. To explore the features of nationalism in Assam and nationalism of Jyotiprasad Agarwala.
3. To analyze his role in the National movement and link it with the Assamese culture.
4. To explore his contributions to the Assamese socio-cultural life.
5. To explore the location of social margins in Jyotiprasad Agarwala's writings.

#### **1.5. Chapterization:**

This is an introduction chapter. This chapter will give a glimpse of all the six chapters.

In the second chapter of this work that is 'Jyotiprasad Agarwala: his social backdrop' discussion has been made on the origin of Jyotiprasad Agarwala and the social assimilation of his family to the Assamese society. The difference between their social backdrops with the indigenous literary gentry of the time is also being discussed in this chapter. Discussion has been made on how Jyotiprasad Agarwala's social origin enabled him and his family to become a part of Assamese culture and Assamese elites. To know his engagement with culture one has to know his philosophical and historical background which determined his vision, therefore in this chapter his social root is trying to be explore. His works would revile how he was rooted in culture while advocating a revolution for a humane culture. Though Jyotiprasad Agarwala was a Marwari by birth, but was pure Assamese in mind having strong feelings for the Assamese society.

The third chapter is 'Jyotiprasad Agarwala and Assamese society in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries'. It deals with the transformation of Assamese society during the colonial period. Jyotiprasad Agarwala was born in 1903 A.D. a period of transition since western education, western culture, rationalism and capitalist economy had impact on the Assamese society and culture. The chapter also deals with the process of formation of the Assamese elites and Jyotiprasad Agarwala's observation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century's Assamese elites and his social interaction with his contemporary Assamese intellectuals.

Since the annexation of Assam to the British Indian Empire, the Assamese society underwent different changes and the transformation continued till the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Company introduced new administrative measures and they patronized the spread of western education and culture in the province. They had a notion that once the people were converted to a western mode of life, they would prove to be their most dependable and trusted subjects. It is known that British policy of modern education in India was to create a class who would be Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, opinion, morals and intellect. It led to the formation of a new liberal Assamese middle class with a strong faith in western education and rationalist thinking and their efforts led to the growth of modern ideas like rationalism, social reforms, national consciousness which was unidentified before. Thus, there was a rich harvest of rationalistic ideas, nationalistic ideas and nationalistic feelings before Jyotiprasad Agarwala came to the limelight and he departed his ideas from his predecessors with his vision of a humane culture.

Fourth chapter looks in to different phases of political movements in Assam under the banner of nationalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and trying to focus on the role played by Jyotiprasad Agarwala in inspiring people with national spirit and motivate the people to do everything for the motherland. The nationalist movement spread like a wild fire and consumed every other thought except the thought of national freedom and within the stir of the times, Assam's role was significant. Such a situation was enough to stimulating the heart of young Jyotiprasad Agarwala. The young boy started holding public meetings and tried his best to mobilize support from the people. Before he was at the age of twenty, he was drawn to the cause of the nationalist movement.

The fifth chapter concerns itself with the basic traits of nationalism in Assam that emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The chapter deal with conceptualization of nationalism in broader context and examine the process of the rise of cultural nationalism in Assam from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The chapter also tries to co-relate Jyotiprasad Agarwala's intellectual activities with the cultural nationalism in Assam. Nationalism in general means the unity of diverse societies into one nation. It is a particular sentiment that binds together all the people, brings them under one common umbrella, no matter what their religion, caste, language or history is. Several other factors besides those in common with the other parts of India, contributed to the development of a strong current of regional nationalism amongst the Assamese intelligentsia in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> Jyotiprasad Agarwala, the leading personality in the nationalist movement of Assam had stepped forward from his predecessors who adopted Assamese culture as a tool for propagating and mobilization of the masses.

Sixth chapter locates the place of marginalized communities in Jyotiprasad Agarwala's works. The chapter examines the way that the downtrodden of Assamese society found their places in Jyotiprasad Agarwala's works like his plays, poems, prose narrative and his films. Jyotiprasad Agarwala set an example to the intellectual middle class people for change in hegemony from the bourgeoisie to the working class. His words were: "*Janata tor pranor 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).<sup>13</sup> His cultural engagements have significantly inspired almost all sections of the Assamese society.

Seventh or the last chapter is the concluding chapter. The chapter will critically deal all the findings of the study and will be interpreted and summary.

---

<sup>12</sup> Misra, Tilottoma, 1987, *Literature and Society in Assam*, Omsons Publication, New Delhi, P.148

<sup>13</sup> Gohain(ed), op. cit., P88