

WESTERN INFLUENCE ON MODERN ASSAMESE DRAMA

PONA MAHANTA



The present work is primarily an investigation into the question of the Western influence on modern Assamese drama and aims at showing how the new drama in Assamese, in spite of the Western influence and like any other drama in modern India, has evolved as a distinct literary genre. With this subject as the focal point, it attempts to study the entire question of the Western impact on Assam's life and letters. It is a fact that the influence of the West on the development of modern Indian thought has been very great and that the vernacular literatures of modern India owe much to such influence. This influence has permeated all the branches of modern Assamese literature and on drama the influence has been so profound that the new drama, which came into being in 1857 with a social play has hardly any link with pre-British Assamese drama having a four-century old history. This work attempts to show how the new ideas coming from the west in the wake of English education not only changed the subject-matter of drama but also gave a new mould to dramatic style, technique and stage-craft.

The work consists of eleven chapters of the first is an introductory one while the other try to examine different aspects of the subject. One chapter deals entirely with old Assamese drama prior to the advent of the British, the 'aṅkiya nāt', in an attempt to show the new drama has evolved. Another chapter is devoted wholly to a discussion of the different channels and media through which the new influence percolated into Assam. One of the chapters, dealing in detail with the Shakespearean influence, attempts to show how the study and preformance of Shakespeare's plays in original and in translation has helped the pre-Independence playwrights develop a kind of style and technique suitable for mythological, historical and romantic plays. Three other Chapters trace the growth and development of modern mythological, historical and social drama in Assamese in the wake of the spread of English education and study of Western literature and thought. The remaining chapters examine such questions as the influence of Ibsen, Shaw, Maeterlinck, the Theatre of the Absurd, the growth of the one-act play and so on. The concluding Chapter gives a summing up of the work.

The Author

Dr. Pona Mahanta (born 1-10-43) is at present Reader in English in the Dibrugarh University. He did his B.A. in English at St. Edmund's College, Shillong (1965) and M.A. in English Literature at Gauhati University (1967). After working for some time as Lecturer in English at Sibsagar College, Assam, he did a Post-Graduate Diploma course in the Teaching of English at the Central Institute of English (CIE, now CIEFL), Hyderabad.

As a student and teacher of English literature, he developed interest in comparative studies and in the study of the Western impact on Indian life and letters. So he undertook formal research in this field and wrote his doctoral thesis on the subject, *Western Influence on Modern Assamese Drama from 1857 to the Present Time*. He has written articles on literature and culture which have been published in various journals. At present his interest is mainly concentrated in modern and comparative drama, and has contributed articles and papers mostly on subjects relating to this field.

He is co-author of a book entitled AN APPROACH TO ENGLISH GRAMMAR, which is now a prescribed text-book for classes IX and X in the secondary schools of Assam. He has also edited two annual numbers of the research journal, *The Dibrugarh University Journal of English Studies*. His book in Assamese entitled *Natakaru Natyakar* (Drama and Dramatists) is coming out shortly.

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(*From 1857 to the Present Time*)



Pona Mahanta



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PONA MAHANTA

Dibrugarh University,
DIBRUGARH

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ABBREVIATIONS

- A.S.R.** Maheswar Neog, *Asamiyā Sāhityar Ruparekhā*
- A.N.S.** Satyendranath Sarma, *Asamiyā Nātya Sāhitya*
- Granthāvalī** Lakshminath Bezbaroa, *Bezbaruwā-granthāvalī*,
Vol. I and II
- H.A.L.** Birinchikumar Barua, *History of Assamese Literature*
- H.B.L.** Sukumar Sen, *History of Bengali Literature*
- Jubilee** *Golden Jubilee Volume*, Cotton College, Gauhati,
1952
- Racanāvalī** Padmanath Gohain Barua, *Gohain Baruwā-racanāvalī*
- S.D.** A. Berriendale Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama*

TRANSLITERATION

अ	अ	a	ट	ट	ṭh
आ	आ	ā	ण	ण	ṇ
इ	इ	i	त	त	t
ई	ई	ī	थ	थ	th
उ	उ	u	द	द	d
ऊ	ऊ	ū	ध	ध	dh
ऋ	ऋ	rī	न	न	n
ए	ए	e	प	प	p
ऐ	ऐ	ai	फ	फ	ph
ओ	ओ	o	ब	ब	b
औ	औ	au	भ	भ	bh
क	क	k	म	म	m
ख	ख	kh	य	य	y
ग	ग	g	र	र	r
घ	घ	gh	ल	ल	l
ङ	ङ	ṅ	व	व	v
च	च	c	श	श	sh
छ	छ	ch	ष	ष	ṣ
ज	ज	j	स	स	s
ट	ट	ṭ	ह	ह	h
ठ	ठ	ṭh	•	•	m̄
ड	ड	d	क्ष	क्ष	ksh

INTRODUCTION

THE INFLUENCE of the West on the development of modern Indian thought has been great indeed. It has affected almost all aspects of Indian life—education, art and literature, religion and moral sense, economic conditions and political aspirations. In fact, this influence has been so profound that it “may be said without much exaggeration that during the period of less than a century, India passed from the medieval to modern age”.

This transformation of India from medieval to modern is perhaps the greatest phenomenon in her history, and any student interested in the growth and development of the Indian mind cannot fail to be struck by it. The feelings and emotions, thoughts and aspirations of a people are nowhere better embodied than in literature, and it is an admitted fact that the influence of the west on the vernacular literatures of India has been all-pervading. This influence, which started working from the beginning of the last century, especially in Bengal, gradually attracted thinkers to look at it critically. It was Barada Charan Mitra, who, as early as 1885, published a paper in the *Calcutta Review* on the influence of English literature on Bengali. In 1896, P. N. Bose dwelt on the intellectual condition of the Hindus under British rule in his book, *Hindu Civilization Under British Rule*. In 1932, a systematic and critical study of the subject appeared when Priyaranjan

