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## **Second World War as a Backdrop of the Modern Assamese Poetry and Amulya Baruah's 'Aandharor Hahakar'**

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### **Abstract**

*One of the most rapidly used words witnessed while around the debates and discussion on the trend and nature of literature and art- 'Modernity'. Amongst the backdrop events based on which the concept of modernity was developed, the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War holds a very crucial place. The extent in which it affected the basis of human ideology led to the change in the ideological shift in literature & art. In other words, the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war can relate to the picture of the most crucial background related to the development of Modernity as an idea. Amulya Baruah was the most eminent of all who had brought in modernity to the Assamese literature. The poetry of Amulya Baruah also could not escape the influence of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. Many of his works of poetry reflected the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war and the social structure created by it in a very crucial and philosophical manner. The most cherished work of his life amongst many was the poem "Aandharor Hahakar". In this proposed paper the influence of 2<sup>nd</sup> World War on modern Assamese poetry will be discussed with special reference to the poem 'Aandharor Hahakar' by Amulya Baruah.*

***Key Words: Second World War, Modern, Modernity, Poetry, Influence***

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**1.1 Introduction:** One of the most rapidly used words witnessed while around the debates and discussion on the trend and nature of literature and art- 'Modernity'. Though literature in Europe witnessed a revolution based on the culture of modernism between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but the seeds of modernism were sown several decades prior to that. By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the arguments between the *Prachin Panthi* and the *Aadhunik Panthi* gave rise to the term 'Modernism'.<sup>1</sup> It is observed that the difference in opinions rising in the sphere of literature and art has some underlying relations with certain perspective related to the sphere of life. In support to this we can bring into light the classical literature and romantic literature. In one word, the classical literature established the diverse feelings and emotions of life and on the other hand romantic literature tried to bring in the emotions, experiences and imagination and give it a shape or form through literature. But modern literature on the contrary to classical or romantic literature reflected negative.

The concept of trust and betrayal, life and death, uncertainty, sorrow etc. were the primary characteristics of modern literature. The act of divergence from the virtues of romanticism towards a completely opposite domain of modernization enclosed within itself the background to the concept of 'Modernization'.

### **1.2 Meaning of the word 'Modern'**

The use of the word 'Modern' in literature as well as in the social context encloses in itself a deep meaning. It has acquired different meanings in different contexts and different items. In the field of literature also, especially in the context of poetry the use of this word can be observed quite frequently and extensively. Though the use of the word can be marked in the last decade of the seventeenth century, the people from the ancient school of classical literature recognized those as belonging to the modern school who opposed their school of thought. *"Every modern writer considers modernity as a definition and recognizes its cultural significance. Samuel Johnson in the 'Dictionary of the English Language' has introduced this word as a newly formed one".*<sup>2</sup>

In other words, the act or capability to look in to the society, life and individual through the lens of the new perspectives in the knowledge domain, in itself enclosed the true meaning of *Modernization*.<sup>3</sup> Thus the perspective that holds the capacity of acceptability of the new views of life and society is modernity. The very reputed Oxford Dictionary again defies Modernism- *'A style and movement in art, architecture and literature popular in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in which modern ideas, methods and materials were used rather than traditional ones'*.<sup>4</sup> In reference to that we can say 'Modernity' is used as a synonym of 'Modernism'. 'The Chamber's Dictionary' has introduced the meaning of 'Modernism' as- *'The use of unconventional subject matter, experimental technique'*.<sup>5</sup>

Whatsoever, the definitions and meanings of the word 'Modernity' mentioned above reflect that modernity always relates to something innovative. Even though it's often said that in one's own time every period or phase is innovative in itself but from the context of literature it can be said that literature shaped by declining the ingenious thoughts of romanticism and by adopting and completing unimaginative thought of reality is Modernity.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the events like development of science, the diversification of human mind, the establishment of the idea of evolution of life against the idea of life being created by God, the establishment of the mechanical way, created the feelings of disbelief, uncertainty, despair etc. which induced change in the concept of life.

Modernity is a product of such a change. In other words, in contrary to the reflection of predefined thoughts, emotions, ideologies, appreciation of beauty etc. of the classical and romantic age, the realities, disparities, distress and other such emotions of human life found their place in Modern literature. As a result, a wave of change was induced in the thought, area of discussion and functionalities of literature.

**1.3 Background of Modernity:** The birth of a new school of thought in literature or art requires a very particular and concrete background. Background refers to that platform

based on which a revolution, indifference or literature is born. Modernity also relates to its own background. The continuous existence and activity of this background led to the decline of romanticism and gave rise the thought of Modernity. ‘The reaction of the two world wars, the clashes of the Marxian ideology and the democratic socialist ideology, the economic dilemma caused in the international economic state, the problems raised by the development of technology, the scenario of the gradual movement of the people away from nature has created a complication in the human society’<sup>6</sup>. This has resulted in the writers of the modern state to experience a dilemma of trust and have made them bound to develop a complicated school of thought. The effect of the urban society of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be seen in the development of this school of thought. The drastic development of science and technology has shaped up the mechanical urban society. Amidst the provision of endless facilities, the individual in the urban lifestyle has become isolated. There has been a dynamic change in the inter-personal relation between the people and has gradually grown into a more mechanical and unromantic one. Thus, life has become confined.

The revolution in the field of art as well as development in science and technology in the west has contributed immensely in the development of the Background of Modernity. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the capital cities of Europe namely London, Paris and Berlin developed as the technical-business-economic hubs under the influence of Bourgeois culture. This affected the life of the European and American masses of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Subsequently the progress in the field of science and technology also affected the lives of the people. This has in turn led the masses to shift from the thought of imagination and natural ideology of romanticism towards the acceptance of the crucial reality. Amongst the backdrop events based on which the concept of modernity was developed, the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War holds a very crucial place. The extent in which it affected the basis of human ideology led to the change in the ideological shift in literature & art. In other words, the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war can relate to the picture of the most crucial background related to the development of Modernity as an idea.

**1.4 Second World War & Modernity:** Amongst the factors that extensively affected the shifts in the trend of political, economic and social changes, the World Wars were the most crucial ones. Even though the after effects of the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war was more extensive than the 1<sup>st</sup> one, both the wars affected the masses across the globe drastically. The center of the 1<sup>st</sup> World War was Europe. Taking place between the 1914 and 1918, it was mostly confined to Europe but its consequences were extensive and deadly. It drastically affected the art and literature of Europe but the effect of the same on the literature of other places across the globe was observed to be considerably less. But the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War starting from 1938 drastically affected the masses across the globe. With the alliance of the United States of America, Soviet Union and Great Britain on one side and the alliance of Germany, Italy and Japan on the other, this war lasted for a period of 6 consecutive years and finally ended in the year 1945 when the United States of America dropped two atomic bombs namely “little boy” and Fat man” on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan, the after effects of which can be observed until the present day. It’s worth mentioning that these explosions affected the

political state of that time. This act of the United States of America was extensively criticized by many which also included the partners in their alliance namely the Soviet Union. But the United Nations justified its actions by saying that it was a step taken to end the war and save the property and lives of the partners in their alliance. But USA justifying its actions as a step towards the well-being of its alliance had an underlying motive of establishing its stature as a Superpower of the globe by outdoing its Soviet counterparts. This act of USA continued the global political unrest and gave birth to the Cold War between them and Soviet Russia. The Cold War was not a real war but rather a competition amongst the states to prove oneself as the Ultimate Power. This competition pushed the rest of the world to a state of concern and fear estimating the possibilities of a 3<sup>rd</sup> World War. Whatsoever may be the scenario the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War witnessed the participation of almost all the states of the World. Apart from the European countries, the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War spread across South Asia, China, Burma (Presently Myanmar) as well as the North Eastern Part of India. Even Assam could not escape the clutches of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. One of the editions in “*Bahi*” in 1942 has the description of the World War as follows –

*“With the passage of time, it is seen ultimately that Japan has dropped Bombs in the Eastern part of Assam. The number of casualties and deceased is still not known but according to a published article, 95 enemy aircrafts had attacked which clearly reflects the facts that the damage has been extensive. No matter the protest, it is well understandable to the Assamese population that since the friendly alliance wants to invade the enemy infiltrated parts of Burma from Assam, a reaction on the part of the enemy is imminent. Assam, maintaining a state of patience and peace and keeping itself busy in its own issues since ages, had to satisfy the dreadful scenario as its fate.”<sup>7</sup>*

The war witnessed the destruction of lakhs of lives and property. It saw the breakdown of the economic backbone of several states. It hurt the humane thought and approach of the masses as well as their imaginative minds. People adapted the practical realities moving away from the imaginative fantasies. The sense of attraction towards *Sanatan Dharma*, love, admiration of beauty diminished. The mass destruction caused by the development of science in the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War changed the age-old ancestral ideological views of the people. Subsequently with the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War people had to face several challenges and mishaps as post war consequences. Innumerable incidences and innumerable problems of the society all around were a matter of concern to the masses. A state of uncertainty dawned the social and economic sphere. The emotional attachment amongst the people were replaced by feelings of hatred and uncertainty. The sympathetic feelings replaced by the feelings of uncertainty created a state of unrest in the lives of the people. This negativity deeply affected the poets and writers and this in turn was reflected in their works. The 2<sup>nd</sup> World War also raised questions in regards to the eternal power of God in the minds of the masses. The atrocities and destruction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War disturbed the age old peaceful and creative legacy of God in the minds of the people so much that even philosophers marked it the scenario as the death of the eternal power.

Whatever the effect of the World War that influenced Assam along with the rest of the world was enough to bring in a drastic change in the social scenario as well as the scenario of literature in the state. The atrocities of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War disturbed the world in a such a drastic manner that the poet and writers began to adopt a new point of view towards the society and started to discuss and promote literature with a new set of opinions and perspective. In place of the imaginative fantasies of the romantic age, the modern age literature reflected crude reality and negativity. They tried to reflect the helpless picture of the modern man in their poetry. This led to the birth of a new school of thought in the field of literature known as the modern literature or modernity. The Assamese literature was also no less effected by modernity and the age of modern literature also marked its beginning in Assamese literature. Story, poetry, novel, etc. all reflected the touch of modernity and especially poetry clearly picturized the effect of the devastations of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War.

### **1.5 Amulya Baruah's "Aandharor Hahakar"**

The devastations of the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war and the school of thought generated as a consequence deeply affected the works of the poets and the poetry of the assamese literature of the 40s. *Bhabananda Dutta, Chakreswar Bhattacharya, Hem Baruah, Amulya Baruah, Ajit Baruah, Narakanta Baruah, etc.* were some of the eminent personalities of the world of literature if this age whose works clearly reflected the devastations of the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war as well as the school of thought that was developed as its consequence. Speaking otherwise the devastating picture of the post-war period was one of the crucial characteristics of this age. *Chakreswar Bhattacharya's "Mathu ekhon note", Hem Baruah's "Guwahati", "Prithivi", Ajit Baruah's "Morujatri", Amulya Baruah's "Aandharor Hahakar"* etc. reflected the devastating environment created as a result of the post-war.

The works of one of the eminent personalities of the 40s, Amulya Baruah, reflected the progressive thinking of those times. Amulya Baruah was the most eminent of all who had brought in modernity to the Assamese literature. The poetry of Amulya Baruah also could not escape the influence of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. Many of his works of poetry reflected the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war and the social structure created by it in a very crucial and philosophical manner. The most cherished work of his life amongst many was the poem "Aandharor Hahakar" was recognized by critic Purna Bhattacharya. Published in the 6<sup>th</sup> years 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of "*Jayanti*" s", the poem's backdrop being the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, was known from the words of Amulya Baruah's friend Rajendra Nath Hazarika. Rajendra Nath Hazarika spoke in the context of the poem as –

*"During the times of war we had to lose our college bhawan (JB College, Jorhat), the professors built thatched huts to teach the students. With every nightfall the town drowned in a pool of darkness. But still Amulya and me and some of our friends together roamed the town. In such a situation of Darkness struck by the dilemma of the reality, I remember "Aandharor Hahakar" was created and he also read it out to me."*<sup>8</sup>

Speaking otherwise Amulya Baruah was stunned by the destructive nature of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War and the hardships and changes ignited in the people's lives by it. He was a believer of Marxian ideology and so he was driven by the determination to wipe out the consequences of the evil effects of the arms and ammunitions destructing the world to bring in a change towards peaceful creation the reflection of which could be seen in the poem "*Aandharor Hahakar*". The poet begins with the picture of Autumn purring forward a *Dry Image* to the audience. The use of Dry Image was a crucial characteristic of the Modern Literature. A Dry Image drawn with the in-depth philosophical language and Autumn season opens the doors to a devastating and void picture for the Audience. The first part of the work picturizes the earth as a pool of darkness –

*"Hemantar xemeka xandhia  
Pascimor aakashot ek prantorot  
Xehor pohore chume  
Kolahal dharaneer mouno andhokaar  
Sheetol parash pao pao  
Paat xara gasbor  
Prithivir oprot thio hoi  
Ha-hotosmir xure aartonaad kori  
Prakashise ontorot gabheer hotasha."*

Amidst the opposite environments of light and shadow, amidst the despairs and beauty, the darkness of the man on earth is being clearly picturized in the work.<sup>9</sup> At the sight of the devastations brought in by the war the poet is not at all hesitant to signifies the earth as "an isolated land of a deceased devil". The poet brings out a sorrowful picture of a world devastated by the war as –

*"Moi jao prithivir maartir maanuh  
Maatiyedi khoj karhi karhi  
Bastovotaar bikrito bipode dhoka mor protikriti  
Xei aandhar baat tut  
Okole okole shantiheen, shranriheen  
Mohasamarar dabanole pura  
Prithivir shmoshanot  
Bhoiloga spiritot dore."*

The more the poet makes effort to make the world a better place, he is confronted by more and more barriers.

*"Prithivir bubhukhito hotobhoga dole  
Sepi rokha hai-urumir  
Naakot laagehi mor topot nishwas"*

The poet still stands optimistic. Though the poet is heartbroken at the sight of the devastation of the war still he is very much hopeful for a constructive and bright future breaking down all the walls of mishaps and barriers.

**1.6 Conclusion:** “Background” refers to that platform in the Backdrop based on which Literature, Art or Indifference is shaped up. Amongst the events referred to by the “Background of Modernity”, the effects of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War proves to be very important. The devastations of the War and the diminishing situations in its aftereffects sowed the seeds of Modernity. Assamese poets also diverged from the romantic thought and adopted the thought of Modernity in their works. The works of poets from the 40s clearly reflect this fact. It would not be very wrong to state that the works of the progressive writers of this era encompassing around the topic of World War marked the history of the Modern Assamese Poetry.

**Foot Note:**

1. Ahmed, M. Kamaluddin: *Adhunik Asomiya Kabita*, Page No.- 09
2. Ibid.
3. Bhattacharjya, Purna: *Adhunik Asomiya Kabita*, Page No.- 01
4. Oxford Advance Learner’s Dictionary (7<sup>th</sup> edition), Page No.-984
5. The Chambers Dictionary (10<sup>th</sup> edition): Page No.-964
6. Bhattacharjya, Purna: *Adhunik Asomiya Kabita*, Page No.- 03
7. Kalita, Maheswar: *Challisor Doxokor Asomiya Kabita: Eti Samikhya*, Page No.- 06
8. Amulya, Baruah: *Jibon aru Kabita*, Page No.- 29
9. Deka, Biplob: *Asomiya Kabyo-Kabitar Bichar*, Page No.- 04

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