

Padmanath Gohain Borooah: A Multifaceted Literary Genius of Assam

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ABSTRACT

Padmanath Gohain Borooah (1871–1946) occupies a unique and pioneering position in the history of modern Assamese literature. As the first Assamese novelist, an accomplished poet, dramatist, editor, educationist, journalist, and cultural organiser, he played a decisive role in shaping the literary and intellectual consciousness of Assam during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This paper examines the multifaceted literary genius of Padmanath Gohain Borooah by analysing his life, literary career, and enduring contributions to Assamese language and literature. The study adopts descriptive and analytical research methods based on primary and secondary sources to evaluate his achievements across diverse literary genres. It highlights his pioneering novels *Bhanumati* and *Lahari*, his historical and social dramas, his lyrical poetry, and his significant contributions to journalism through *Bijuli*, *Asam Banti*, and *Usha*. The paper also explores his role as the first President of the Assam Sahitya Sabha, his contribution to educational literature, and his efforts to institutionalise Assamese language and culture. Furthermore, it examines his vision of literature as an instrument of social reform, national consciousness, and cultural identity. The study reveals that Gohain Borooah successfully bridged tradition and modernity by introducing new literary forms while preserving Assamese cultural values. His multifaceted contributions laid the foundation of modern Assamese prose, strengthened literary institutions, and inspired subsequent generations of writers and scholars. The paper concludes that Padmanath Gohain Borooah was not merely a creative writer but a visionary architect of the Assamese literary renaissance whose legacy continues to influence Assamese literature, education, journalism, and cultural thought. His life and works remain indispensable for understanding the evolution of modern Assamese literary and cultural history.

Keywords: Padmanath Gohain Borooah, Assamese Literature, *Bhanumati*, Assam Sahitya Sabha, Literary Renaissance, Cultural Nationalism, etc.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of modern Assamese literature during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was marked by a remarkable literary and cultural awakening. This period witnessed the transition of Assamese literature from traditional forms to modern genres under the influence of print culture, Western education, and socio-political transformation. Among the architects of this literary renaissance, Padmanath Gohain Borooah (1871–1946) occupies an unparalleled position.¹ He was not merely a creative writer but a pioneering novelist, poet, dramatist, journalist, editor, educationist, social reformer, and institution-builder whose multifaceted contributions laid the foundation of modern Assamese literature. His literary vision, organisational leadership, and unwavering commitment to the development of the Assamese language established him as one of the most influential figures in Assam's cultural history.

Padmanath Gohain Borooah's greatest literary achievement lies in his authorship of *Bhanumati* (1890–91), widely recognised as the first modern Assamese novel. Through this pioneering work, he introduced Assamese readers to the modern novel as a literary form capable of portraying social reality, individual consciousness,

and psychological conflict. Unlike the traditional narrative literature that preceded it, *Bhanumati* presented a realistic portrayal of society while addressing contemporary issues such as women's dignity, individual freedom, and social reform. His second novel, *Lahari*, further demonstrated his artistic maturity through a more complex narrative structure and a broader exploration of social transformation. Together, these novels established the novel as an important literary genre in Assamese literature and opened new avenues for subsequent writers.²

Beyond fiction, Padmanath Gohain Borooah made outstanding contributions to Assamese poetry and drama. His poetic collections, including *Leela Kavya*, *Jurani*, and *Phular Chaneki*, reveal deep emotional sensitivity, lyrical beauty, and philosophical reflection. His dramatic works, particularly the historical plays *Joymati*, *Gadadhar*, *Sadhani*, and *Lachit Barphukan*, revived significant episodes from Assam's history and inspired patriotism, cultural pride, and historical consciousness among the Assamese people. His humorous and satirical plays, such as *Gaon Burha*, *Teton Tamuli*, and *Bhoot Ne Bhram*, exposed social evils and human weaknesses through wit and dramatic realism, thereby enriching the Assamese theatrical tradition.

Padmanath Gohain Borooah's contribution extended far beyond creative literature. As an editor and journalist, he recognised the transformative role of the press in shaping public opinion and promoting literary culture. His association with journals and newspapers such as *Bijuli*, *Asam Banti*, and *Usha* significantly strengthened Assamese journalism and created platforms for literary discussion, creative expression, and social awareness. Through these publications, he encouraged emerging writers, stimulated intellectual debate, and contributed to the standardisation and enrichment of modern Assamese prose.

Equally significant was his role in the institutional development of Assamese literature. In 1917, he became the first President of the Assam Sahitya Sabha, the premier literary organisation of Assam. His presidential address articulated a visionary relationship between language, literature, and national identity, emphasising that literature constitutes the true soul of a nation. Under his leadership, the Assam Sahitya Sabha emerged as the principal institution dedicated to the preservation, promotion, and advancement of Assamese language and literature. His organisational leadership laid a durable institutional foundation that continues to influence Assamese literary and cultural life.³

Apart from his literary pursuits, Padmanath Gohain Borooah served society in multiple capacities as an educationist, administrator, magistrate, textbook writer, and social reformer. Recognising the scarcity of educational resources in Assamese, he authored several textbooks on history, geography, moral education, and language, thereby contributing substantially to vernacular education. His active participation in educational, cultural, and civic organisations reflected his conviction that literature should function not merely as artistic expression but also as a powerful instrument for intellectual development, ethical cultivation, and social progress.⁴

The present study seeks to examine Padmanath Gohain Borooah as a multifaceted literary genius by analysing his life, literary achievements, institutional leadership, and enduring contribution to Assamese literature and culture. It explores his pioneering role in the development of the Assamese novel, poetry, drama, journalism, and literary organisations while assessing his influence on the growth of modern Assamese literary consciousness. The study also evaluates his contribution to educational literature and cultural nationalism, highlighting his vision of literature as a means of social reform and national awakening.

By adopting descriptive and analytical methods based on both primary and secondary sources, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Padmanath Gohain Borooah's multifaceted personality and literary legacy. It argues that his contributions transcend the boundaries of individual literary genres and collectively represent a monumental chapter in the evolution of modern Assamese literature. More than seven decades after his death, his writings, ideals, and institutional initiatives continue to inspire scholars, writers, and readers alike, reaffirming his enduring status as one of the principal architects of Assam's literary and cultural renaissance.

Hypotheses of the Study:

The present study is based on the following research hypotheses:

1. Padmanath Gohain Borooah made pioneering and multifaceted contributions that significantly shaped the development of modern Assamese literature.
2. Padmanath Gohain Borooah played a crucial role in the evolution of Assamese novels, poetry, drama, journalism, and educational literature.
3. His literary works significantly contributed to the promotion of social reform, historical consciousness, cultural identity, and national awakening in Assam.
4. His leadership in the Assam Sahitya Sabha and other literary organisations substantially strengthened the institutional development of Assamese language and literature.
5. Padmanath Gohain Borooah successfully integrated literary creativity with education, journalism, and cultural leadership, establishing himself as one of the principal architects of the Assamese literary renaissance.

Objectives of the Study:

The primary objective of the present study is to examine the life, literary career, and multifaceted contributions of Padmanath Gohain Borooah to the development of modern Assamese literature. The study seeks to analyse his contributions to various literary genres, including novels, drama, poetry, essays, journalism, and children's literature. It also aims to evaluate the major themes, literary techniques, and stylistic features reflected in his writings. Furthermore, the study intends to assess his role in promoting the Assamese language, literature, education, and cultural consciousness through his literary activities and leadership in institutions such as the Assam Sahitya Sabha. Finally, the research seeks to evaluate the enduring influence of Padmanath Gohain Borooah's literary and cultural contributions on the growth and enrichment of modern Assamese literature and society.

Biography of Padmanath Gohain Borooah:

Padmanath Gohain Borooah was born on Tuesday, 24 November 1871, at Nakari village in the North Lakhimpur district of Assam. He was the son of Ghinaram Gohain Borooah and Lambhidevi. His father belonged to the distinguished Ahom noble lineage of Thaumung Klinglungmung Burhagohain, originally from Jaji Moran village in Sivasagar district. As the eighth child of a large family rooted in a rich cultural and historical tradition, Padmanath was nurtured in an environment that valued learning, public service, and moral discipline. His upbringing in rural Assam, combined with his aristocratic Ahom heritage, profoundly influenced his literary outlook, social consciousness, and commitment to Assamese culture. These formative influences later shaped his pioneering role in modern Assamese literature and the cultural renaissance of Assam.⁵

Padmanath Gohain Borooah began his formal education in 1879 at Lakhimpur Primary School, where Bengali served as the medium of instruction. After completing his middle school education, he joined Sivasagar Government High School. Although his father temporarily withdrew him to study surveying for estate management, he was later readmitted to continue his schooling. During this period, he came under the guidance of the eminent teacher Chandramohan Goswami, whose influence left a lasting impression on him.

When Chandramohan Goswami was transferred to Kohima Government High School, Padmanath, driven by admiration for his teacher, travelled on foot through difficult terrain to Kohima and continued his studies there. He later undertook a fifteen-day journey to Dibrugarh to appear for the Entrance Examination, which he passed with distinction.

For higher education, Padmanath travelled to Calcutta, where he enrolled successively at Ripon College, St Xavier's College, and City College. However, difficulties with compulsory subjects and discrepancies in his recorded age prevented him from completing either the F.A. or law examinations. Deeply disappointed, he abandoned his studies and returned to Assam.⁶ Despite these setbacks, his educational experiences broadened his intellectual outlook and laid the foundation for his future achievements as a pioneering writer, educationist, editor, and cultural leader.

Padmanath Gohain Borooah's educational journey reflects both the challenges and opportunities of colonial education in Assam. Although his formal education remained incomplete, his perseverance, exposure to different educational institutions, and intellectual curiosity laid the foundation for his later achievements as a pioneering novelist, editor, educationist, and cultural leader.

After returning to Assam, Padmanath Gohain Borooah began his professional career as the Headmaster of Kohima Middle English School. Recognising the shortage of suitable Assamese textbooks, he authored several books on moral education, geography, and history, thereby contributing significantly to vernacular education. He later served as Headmaster of Tezpur Normal School and taught at Tezpur Government High School and Jorhat Government High School.

During his stay in Kohima, he founded the Assamese Language Improvement Society and the Kohima Literary Society, serving as their founder-secretary. Later, he became Secretary of the Tezpur Assamese Language Improvement Society and played an important role in establishing the Namghar and the Ban Theatre at Tezpur.⁷

Besides his educational work, Gohain Borooah actively participated in public life. He served as Chairman of the Tezpur Municipal Board, was associated with several important organisations, including the Assam Ryot Sabha, Ahom Sabha, and the All-Assam Teachers' Conference, and presided over the Third Annual Session of the Assam Students' Conference in 1918. In this connection, we may cite his active role as a socio-political leader as depicted in his Autobiography titled "Mor Sowarani" as follows:

“পিছদিনা পুৱা ৮ বজাত মহাত্মা গান্ধীয়ে কংগ্ৰেছ প্ৰদৰ্শনী টোলৰ দুৱাৰ মুকলি কৰে। সেই আলমতে মহাত্মাজীয়ে ‘স্বদেশী গ্ৰহণ আৰু বিদেশী বৰ্জন’ বিষয়ক এটি সাৰুৱা আৰু হৃদয়গ্ৰাহী বক্তৃতা দিছিল; শ্ৰোতাবৰ্গে দুৱাৰি ঘাঁহনিত লেপেটাকাৰী বহি একান্ত মনেৰে শুনিছিল, তাৰ মাজতে ময়ো আছিলোঁ। এই প্ৰসঙ্গতে মহাত্মা গান্ধীয়ে বিশদ বুজনি দিছিল, ‘স্বৰাজ’ নো কি আৰু কি উপায়েৰে লাভ কৰিব পাৰি। তেখেতৰ মতে স্ব-সমলৰ ওপৰত নিৰ্ভৰ কৰি টিকিব পৰাটোৱেই ‘স্বৰাজ’; তাকে আৰ্জিবলৈ আমাৰ দেশবাসী পৰিয়াল হ’ব লাগে। তাৰ পাছত, গান্ধীজীক আগত লৈ আমি সকলোটিয়ে সেই সুবহুল প্ৰদৰ্শনী টোলৰ ভিতৰত নিয়াৰিয়াকৈ সজাই থোৱা বিবিধ স্বদেশী উৎপন্নৰ সমল পৰিদৰ্শন কৰিবলৈ ধৰিলোঁহঁক। সেই প্ৰদৰ্শনী-সমতলৰ মাজত আচল ঘাই সমল স্বদেশী বস্ত্ৰাদি গান্ধীজী প্ৰমুখ্যে দৰ্শকবৰ্গৰ সূত্ৰৰ দৃষ্টি বিশেষকৈ আকৰ্ষণ কৰিছিল। এৰি, মুগা, পাট, কপাহী, মেজাফুৰী আৰু খন্দৰ বস্ত্ৰাদি বৰ আগ্ৰহেৰে লিৰিকি বিদাৰি চাই স্বদেশী লেংটি মৰা মহাত্মাজীয়ে এটি আপুৰুগীয়া হৰ্ষবিহ্বল ৰূপ ধাৰণ কৰিছিল। অসমীয়া এৰি, মুগা, পাট, মেজাফুৰী আৰু কপাহী কাপোৰৰ উৎকৃষ্টতা নথি শলাগি পণ্ডিত মদনমোহন মালৱ্য, শ্ৰীযুতা সৰোজিনী নাইডু প্ৰমুখ্যে আন প্ৰদেশী নেত্ৰ-নেত্ৰীসকলে গৰাকীবিলাকৰ হাততে ধন দি সেইবোৰ কাপোৰ-কানিৰ কিছুমান কিনি লৈছিল; আৰু তাৰ লগে লগে সিবিলাকে এইবুলি আক্ষেপসূচক মন্তব্য প্ৰকাশ কৰিছিল, ‘আমাৰ অসম দেশজাত এনেবোৰ বিতোপন স্বদেশী বস্ত্ৰাদি উৎপন্নৰ উন্নতিলৈ আওকাণ কৰি আমি জাপানী, বিলাতী, জাৰ্মানী, মাৰ্কিন, বস্ত্ৰাদিৰ ৰংচঙত মোহ গৈছোঁহঁক। মনে মনে ময়ো মূৰ দুখিয়াই থলোঁ।

ভাটিবেলা আবেলি ২ বজাৰ পৰা ঘাই ৰভা-মণ্ডপত মুকলি বৈঠকৰ কাৰ্য আৰম্ভ কৰা হয়। পোন প্ৰথমতে, আগদিনাৰ বাকি থকা প্ৰস্তাৱাদিৰ আলোচনা আগত লৈ তাৰ সমাপতিৰ মোখনি মাৰি থোৱা হয়। তাৰ পাছত আগন্তুক বছৰেকীয়া বৈঠকৰ কাৰণে লাগতীয়াল বিষয়ক আগতীয়া আলোচনাৰ সমাধান কৰি উঠি, পুৰণি সমজুৱা আৰু বিষয়ববীয়া সদস্য সকলৰ পদত্যাগী ইন্তুফা গ্ৰহণ কৰি নতুনকৈ নিৰ্বাচিত নতুন সদস্যৰে সৈতে নতুন কাৰ্যনিৰ্বাহক সভা গঠন কৰা হয়; এই নিৰ্বাচনত সদৌ প্ৰদেশ সমজুৱাই উদাৰভাৱে আৰু অতি উলাহেৰে মিঃ তৰুণৰাম ফুকনৰ নামে ‘ভোট’ দি তেওঁকো এজন সদস্য পতা দেখি বৰ সন্তোষ পাইছিলোঁ।”⁸

("The next morning at 8 o'clock, Mahatma Gandhi formally inaugurated the Congress exhibition pavilion. On that occasion, he delivered a brief yet heartfelt speech on the theme of 'adopting Swadeshi and rejecting foreign goods.' The audience sat attentively on the grass, listening with deep concentration, and I, too, was among them.

In this context, Mahatma Gandhi explained in detail what Swaraj means and how it can be attained. According to him, Swaraj lies in the ability to sustain oneself through self-reliance; therefore, the people of our country must strive diligently to achieve it. Thereafter, with Gandhi leading us, we all began to tour the extensive exhibition pavilion, where a variety of indigenous products had been neatly arranged.

At the centre of the exhibition, the principal attraction was indigenous textiles, which particularly drew the eager attention of Gandhi and the other visitors. Gandhi, dressed in his simple Swadeshi loincloth, examined with great interest the fabrics made of eri, muga, pat, cotton, mezankari, and khadi, running them through his hands and displaying a rare expression of delight and admiration.

Scholars and leaders from other provinces, including Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Mrs Sarojini Naidu, openly praised the excellence of Assamese eri, muga, pat, mezankari, and cotton fabrics. They even purchased some of these textiles with their own money. At the same time, they expressed regret, saying, "We have neglected the development of such valuable indigenous products of our own country and have instead become fascinated by the colourful allure of Japanese, British, German, and American textiles." I, too, silently nodded in agreement.

In the afternoon, from 2 o'clock onwards, the proceedings of the open session began in the main pavilion. First, the remaining resolutions from the previous day were taken up for discussion and conclusion. Thereafter, preparatory discussions were held regarding matters for the forthcoming annual session. The resignations of the previous committee and office-bearers were accepted, and a new executive body was formed with newly elected members. In this election, I felt great satisfaction to see that the entire provincial assembly, with generosity and enthusiasm, cast their votes in favour of Mr Tarun Ram Phukan, thereby electing him as a member.")

He was appointed a Second-Class Magistrate in 1917 and promoted to First-Class Magistrate in 1941. He also served briefly as Tahsildar at Mangaldai and acted as an examiner and question-setter in Assamese for the Universities of Calcutta and Patna. In recognition of his distinguished services, the British Government conferred upon him the honorary titles of Rai Saheb and later Rai Bahadur. These achievements firmly established him as an eminent educationist, administrator, literary organiser, and social reformer who made lasting contributions to the development of the Assamese language and literature, as well as to public institutions.⁹

Padmanath Gohain Borooah was first married to Leelawati during his stay in Kohima. Her untimely death caused him deep personal sorrow, yet he continued his educational, literary, and social activities with remarkable dedication. Later, in keeping with the social customs of the time, he married Heera Wati, who became his lifelong companion and provided stability to his family.

The couple had eight children, seven daughters and one son. Despite the responsibilities of a large family, Gohain Borooah successfully balanced his domestic duties with his literary, educational, and administrative commitments. His experiences of personal loss, family responsibility, and public service enriched his personality and are reflected in the maturity and humanism of his writings.

His family life illustrates his resilience, sense of duty, and ability to harmonise personal responsibilities with a lifelong commitment to the advancement of Assamese language, literature, and society, making him not only a distinguished literary figure but also an exemplary family man and social leader.¹⁰

The Literary Contributions of Padmanath Gohain Baruah

Among the eminent literary figures who devoted their lives to the advancement of the Assamese language, literature, and culture, Sahitya Kandari Padmanath Gohain Baruah occupies a place of great distinction. He was born in 1871 at Nakari village in North Lakhimpur, Assam. His father, Ghinaram Baruah, was a prominent *Mouzadar* (revenue officer) of the Nakari Mouza. After obtaining a scholarship from the Lower Primary School in North Lakhimpur, Padmanath moved to Sivasagar to live with his elder sister. He began his schooling in Lakhimpur and completed it in Sivasagar. Later, he pursued higher studies for a short period at a college in Calcutta. However, as he was unable to pass the F.A. (First Arts) examination, he returned to Assam and served as a teacher in English schools at Kohima and Jorhat. After several years, he resigned from teaching and settled permanently in Tezpur.

Apart from his literary pursuits, Gohain Baruah actively participated in public life. He served as the Chairman of the Tezpur Municipality for several years and was also a member of the Assam Council. Furthermore, he held the office of President of the Ahom Association and was associated with numerous public welfare activities. In recognition of his outstanding literary services, he received a literary pension from the Government of Assam.

During his student days in Calcutta, Gohain Baruah came into close contact with prominent literary figures such as Lakshminath Bezbaroa, Hemchandra Goswami, Benudhar Rajkhowa, and Krishna Prasad Duarah, who were instrumental in the activities of the Asomiya Bhaxa Unnati Sadhini Sabha. Their collective efforts inspired him to devote himself wholeheartedly to Assamese literature. In 1890, he served as the editor of the Calcutta-based journal *Bijuli* for two years. Subsequently, he edited the Tezpur-based journals *Asam Banti* (1901) and *Usha* (1907). Through these editorial activities, he not only encouraged the emergence of new writers but also enriched modern Assamese language and literature, which had flourished under the influence of the Jonaki movement.

The Assamese literary renaissance initiated through the Jonaki magazine gained remarkable momentum through Gohain Baruah's multifaceted literary contributions. He enriched Assamese literature by writing poetry, novels, dramas, farces, biographies, autobiographies, and several other literary works. As one of the pioneers of the Assamese novel, he strengthened the foundation of Assamese fiction with the publication of *Lahari* (1890–91). Following the death of his first wife, he composed the narrative poem *Leela* (1899), inspired by the personal experiences of his married life. Besides these works, he authored nearly fifty books, including textbooks, biographies, and autobiographical writings.

Padmanath Gohain Baruah's creative writings may be broadly classified into three major genres: drama, novels, and poetry. His dramatic works include *Gaon Burha* (1897), *Jaymati* (1900), *Gadadhar* (1907), *Lachit Borphukan* (1916), *Bhut Ne Bhram* (1924), and *Banaraja* (1932). His contributions to Assamese fiction comprise the novels *Bhanumati* (1891) and *Lahari* (1892). His poetic works include *Leela* (1899), *Jurani* (1938), and *Phular Chaneki* (1941). These literary works collectively demonstrate his remarkable versatility and his significant contribution to the enrichment of modern Assamese literature.

Padmanath Gohain Baruah was also a pioneer in Assamese drama. Beginning with *Jaymati* in 1900, he subsequently wrote historical plays such as *Gadadhar*, *Sadhani*, and *Lachit Borphukan*. In addition, he composed social dramas such as *Gaon Burha* and *Teton Tamuli*, while *Banaraja* remains his only mythological play. These dramatic works significantly contributed to the establishment of modern Assamese theatre.

His prose work *Srikrishna* is regarded as a milestone in Assamese prose literature. Divided into three volumes, it represents one of his most important literary achievements. In 1935, he further published *Gitasar*, which may be considered a companion work to *Srikrishna*. His autobiography, *Jibon-Sowaran*, was published in 1971 to commemorate his birth centenary.

Recognising the scarcity of educational materials during his time, Gohain Baruah also prepared several textbooks, including works on moral education. Following the pioneering efforts of Gunabhiram Barua, he

compiled and published a comprehensive history entitled Asomar Buranji. His enduring contributions as the pioneer of the modern Assamese novel, the initiator of historical drama, an accomplished journalist and editor, a mentor to emerging writers, and the creator of a refined and dignified prose style have secured him a permanent and honoured place in the history of Assamese literature. His literary legacy continues to inspire generations of readers and scholars, and his name remains indelibly inscribed in the annals of Assamese literary history.¹¹

Padmanath Gohain Borooah holds a foundational place in modern Assamese literature. His work encompassed poetry, fiction, journalism, editing, and cultural leadership. As editor of journals like *Bijuli*, *Assam Banti*, and *Usha*, he fostered literary debate and nurtured young writers. His organisational role was equally vital, promoting Assamese language and identity. In this connection, Dr. Jahnavi Devi¹² writes in a seminar proceeding as follows:

“গোহাঞিবৰুৱাই প্ৰয়োজনৰ সময়ত দায়িত্বশীলতাৰে হাতত কলম তুলি লৈছিল। ভাষা-সাহিত্য, পাঠ্যক্ৰম আদি বিভিন্ন দিশত থকা অভাৱৰ প্ৰতি লক্ষ্য ৰাখি সাহিত্যিক দায়বদ্ধতাৰে এখনৰ পিছত এখনকৈ পুথি ৰচনা কৰি অসমীয়া সাহিত্যৰ বিভিন্ন বিভাগ সমূহত অৰিহণা যোগাই গৈছিল। ‘জোনাকী’ আৰু ‘বিজুলী’ৰ প্ৰকাশ বন্ধ হোৱাৰ পিছতো গোহাঞিবৰুৱাই ‘উষা’ নামৰ এখন আলোচনী ১৯১২ চনলৈ চলাই আছিল। ১৯০১ চনত প্ৰথম প্ৰকাশ পোৱা ‘বন্তি’ নামৰ আলোচনীও ১৯০২ চনত পদ্মনাথ গোহাঞিবৰুৱাৰ হাতলৈ আহিছিল আৰু ১৯৪৪ চন মানলৈ চলি আছিল।”¹³

(Padmanath Gohain Baruah took up his pen with a deep sense of responsibility whenever the need arose. Recognising the deficiencies that existed in various fields such as language, literature, and educational curricula, he conscientiously wrote one book after another, thereby making valuable contributions to different branches of Assamese literature. Even after the publication of the journals Jonaki and Bijuli had ceased, Gohain Baruah continued to publish the literary magazine Usha until 1912. Likewise, the magazine Banti, which was first published in 1901, came under the editorship of Padmanath Gohain Baruah in 1902 and continued to be published until around 1944.)

His Poetry:

Gohain Borooah’s poetry reflects emotional depth and cultural commitment. His early collaboration with Panindra Nath Gogoi produced *Padmapani*, marking the beginning of his youthful literary enthusiasm. After his wife Leelavati’s death, he composed *Leela Kavya* (1899), an elegiac work of grief and love. His collection *Jurani* (1900) revealed maturity and lyrical sensitivity, while *Phular Chaneki* (1941) demonstrated refined poetic balance in later life.

Padmanath Gohain Baruah employed a wide variety of themes in his poetry. Nature, human life, history, mythology, historical personalities, events, and places occupy a significant position in his poetic works. Although he was a representative of the Romantic movement, his romantic sensibility was not as free and expansive as that of Lakshminath Bezbaroa, Chandrakumar Agarwala, or Hemchandra Goswami. Instead, his poetic consciousness appears to be more restrained, disciplined, and marked by a sense of formal dignity. Nevertheless, Romanticism and realism are harmoniously blended in most of his poems, giving them both emotional appeal and artistic balance.¹⁴

To demonstrate the art of composing poems by Padmanath Gohain Borooah, a few verses have been quoted from the collection titled *Phular Chaneki* as follows:

“লক্ষ্য স্বৰ্গদেৱ,
লক্ষ্য সেনাপতি,
অসম আমাৰ জন্ম ভূমি;—
এই তিনি মাত্ৰ,
নাই আন মন্ত্ৰ,

জিনিম মোগল নিশ্চয় আমি।”¹⁵

(Our goal is the Swargadeo, our goal is the Commander;
Assam is our motherland.
These alone are our guiding principles; there is no other creed.
Surely, we shall defeat the Mughals.)

The above stanza is taken from *Sainik Sangeet* (Army Song), a patriotic poem by Padmanath Gohain Borooah, one of the pioneers of modern Assamese literature. The poem reflects the spirit of Assamese nationalism and celebrates the glorious military tradition of the Ahom Kingdom.

His Drama:

Padmanath Gohain Borooah made a pioneering contribution to the development of modern Assamese drama. At a time when Assamese theatre was largely influenced by Bengali dramatic traditions, he sought to establish an indigenous dramatic tradition based on Assamese history, society, and culture. His interest in drama began in his youth after witnessing a Bengali *jatra* performance, which inspired him to promote Assamese theatre.

His major historical plays include *Joymati* (1900), *Gadadhar* (1907), *Sadhani* (1911), and *Lachit Barphukan* (1915), all of which portray patriotism, heroism, sacrifice, and the rich historical heritage of Assam. He also wrote successful comic plays such as *Gaon Burha* (1897), *Teton Tamuli* (1909), and *Bhoot Ne Bhram* (1915), which exposed social evils through humour and satire. His mythological play *Banaraja* (1932) further demonstrated his literary versatility.¹⁶

Apart from writing plays, Gohain Borooah contributed significantly to the growth of Assamese theatre through his association with the establishment of the Ban Theatre (Ban Rangamancha) at Tezpur, providing an important platform for dramatic performances. His pioneering efforts laid a strong foundation for the development of modern Assamese drama.

His Novels:

Padmanath Gohain Borooah wrote two historical novels—*Bhanumati* (1891) and *Lahari* (1892). Among them, *Bhanumati* occupies a landmark position as the first successful Assamese novel and established him as the first true Assamese novelist. The novel presents a protest against feudal authority and is regarded as one of the earliest modern Assamese novels. According to Birinchi Kumar Barua¹⁷, both novels centred on a love story during the period of Ahom Kings.¹⁸

Padmanath Gohain Borooah's two novels, *Bhanumati* and *Lahari*, occupy a significant place in the history of Assamese literature. Although both novels are set against a historical background, the social narrative receives greater emphasis than the historical events themselves. For this reason, these novels are often described as social-historical novels, as they skilfully combine historical settings with the realities of contemporary society.

The plots of both novels are largely imaginative and are built around romantic love stories. While the historical background provides authenticity and atmosphere, the central focus remains on the emotional experiences and social relationships of the characters. Gohain Baruah's primary aim was not merely to recreate history but to present human emotions, moral values, and social customs within a historical framework.

A distinctive feature of these novels is the successful blending of history and imagination. The author creates a convincing romantic atmosphere while maintaining a balance between historical facts and fictional elements. His imaginative treatment of historical themes reflects the influence of Western Romanticism, which had begun to shape Assamese literature during the late nineteenth century. Like many contemporary Assamese writers, Gohain Baruah was influenced by Romantic literary ideals, and this influence is clearly evident in both *Bhanumati* and *Lahari*.

Although the novels are predominantly social in character, they also incorporate historical settings, characters, and events to create a realistic background. In doing so, Gohain Baruah carefully adapts certain historical names and incidents while enriching them with fictional narratives and vivid descriptions. This combination of history, romance, and social realism gives his novels both literary charm and historical significance.¹⁹

Briefly noting that *Bhanumati* and *Lahari* represent pioneering achievements in Assamese fiction. They not only laid a strong foundation for the Assamese novel but also demonstrated Padmanath Gohain Baruah's ability to harmoniously blend historical authenticity, romantic imagination, and social consciousness, thereby establishing him as one of the foremost pioneers of modern Assamese prose fiction.

Other Literary Contributions of Padmanath Gohain Borooah:

Besides his remarkable contributions to poetry, drama, and fiction, Padmanath Gohain Borooah enriched Assamese literature through his writings on autobiography, religion, education, history, and moral instruction. These works reflect his role as a writer, educationist, social reformer, and cultural leader.

His autobiography, *Mor Sowanoni (My Reminiscences)*, (1972), provides valuable insights into his personal life, literary career, and the socio-cultural development of Assam. In religious literature, he wrote *Sri Krishna* (1930) and *Gitasar* (1935)²⁰, through which he explained the ethical and philosophical teachings of Hinduism in a simple and accessible manner. An excerpt from *Gitasar* has been quoted here as follows:

“হে অৰ্জুন! কেৱল সাধাৰণ জীৱগণেই যে মোৰ (ভগৱানৰ) বিভূতিৰপৰা উৎপন্ন হৈছে, এনে নহয়; প্রজাস্রষ্টা চতুর্দশ মনু, বেদপ্রচাৰক সপ্তঋষি, আৰু তৎপূৰ্বৱৰ্তী চাৰি মহৰ্ষি এই সকলো মোৰপৰাই (ভাগৱতসত্তাৰপৰা) উৎপন্ন হৈছে। যি মোৰ বিভূতি আৰু যোগ বিষয়ক তত্ত্বজ্ঞান লাভ কৰিছে, তেওঁৰেই যথার্থতে সমাহিত; তেওঁৰ বিদিত একো নাই। মইয়ে এই জগতৰ উৎপত্তিৰ কাৰণ, মোৰপৰাই জ্ঞান-বুদ্ধিৰ উৎপত্তি, এই কথাত যাৰ স্থিৰ বিশ্বাস, তেওঁৰেই যথার্থতে ভগৱত আৰধনা কৰে, যাৰ মন প্ৰাণ ভগৱানময় হয়, সেই ভগৱতভক্তই পৰম্পৰে ভগৱত কীৰ্তনত পৰম শান্তি লাভ কৰে।”²¹

“O Arjuna! It is not only ordinary living beings who have originated from My (the Lord's) divine manifestations. The fourteen Manus, the progenitors of mankind, the seven great sages who propagated the Vedas, and the four primordial sages who preceded them have all arisen from Me (from My divine essence). Whoever attains the true knowledge of My divine manifestations (Vibhûti) and My Yoga (divine power and sovereignty) becomes firmly established in spiritual realisation and is free from all doubt. I alone am the source of the creation of this universe, and from Me arise knowledge and wisdom. Whoever has unwavering faith in this truth truly worships the Lord. The devotee whose mind and life are wholly absorbed in God finds supreme peace through mutual glorification and remembrance of the Divine with fellow devotees.”)

As an educationist, Gohain Borooah prepared several textbooks to promote education in the Assamese language. Important works include *Nitisiksha*, *Adi Siksha*, *Asam Buranji*, *Hindu Buranji*, *Buranjibodh*, *Jiboni Sangrah* (1915), *Sahitya Sangrah* (1890), and *Bhugol Darpan*. He also authored instructional books such as *Deshi Kasrat* and *Sikshabidhi*, which aimed at the moral, intellectual, and physical development of students.

Through these writings, Padmanath Gohain Borooah made a lasting contribution to the growth of modern Assamese education, prose literature, and cultural consciousness, firmly establishing himself as one of the pioneers of Assam's literary and educational renaissance.²²

Padmanath Gohain Borooah and His Historic Role in the Assam Sahitya Sabha:

The establishment of the Assam Sahitya Sabha in 1917 marked a significant milestone in the history of Assamese language and literature. Padmanath Gohain Borooah was unanimously elected as its first President at the inaugural session held at Sivasagar on 26–27 December 1917. In his presidential address, he emphasised that language and literature are the strongest expressions of a nation's identity, with literature serving as the foundation of cultural and national consciousness.

His vision helped shape the ideological and organisational framework of the Assam Sahitya Sabha, transforming it into a leading institution for the promotion of Assamese language and literature.²³ In 1918, he was elected Secretary of the Sabha and played an important role in strengthening its activities during its formative years.

In recognition of his outstanding services, he was felicitated by the Assam Sahitya Sabha at its North Lakhimpur session in 1933. Earlier, in 1906, the British Government had awarded him a literary pension, making him the first Assamese writer to receive such an honour. Through his visionary leadership and lifelong dedication, Padmanath Gohain Borooah laid the foundation for one of Assam's most influential literary institutions.²⁴

His Death:

Padmanath Gohain Borooah passed away on 21 April 1946 (7 Bohag 1946)²⁵, marking the end of a remarkable era in Assamese literary history. His death was widely mourned, as he had made pioneering contributions to Assamese poetry, drama, novels, essays, journalism, education, and literary institutions.

As a distinguished writer, editor, and social reformer, Gohain Borooah devoted his life to the advancement of the Assamese language, literature, and cultural identity. Although he passed away in 1946, his rich literary legacy and enduring contributions continue to inspire generations of writers, scholars, and readers, securing his place among the foremost architects of modern Assamese literature.

His Honours and Recognition:

Padmanath Gohain Borooah received numerous honours in recognition of his outstanding contributions to Assamese literature, education, and public life. He served as an examiner and question-setter in Assamese for the Universities of Calcutta and Patna, reflecting his academic distinction. He was the first President of the Assam Sahitya Sabha (1917); later, he presided over the Assam Association (1919), the Assam Students' Conference, and the All-Assam Ahom Conference (1941).

He also served as Chairman of the Tezpur Municipality, Secretary of the Tezpur Asamiya Bhasha Unnati Sadhini Sabha, and Secretary of the Ban Theatre. In 1917, he was appointed an Honorary Magistrate and was later promoted to First-Class Magistrate. He became the first Assamese writer to receive a government literary pension. He was honoured with the title of "Rai Bahadur" by the British Government in recognition of his distinguished public and literary services.²⁶

Critical Views on Padmanath Gohain Borooah and His Works:

Padmanath Gohain Borooah regarded language and literature as the strongest foundations of national identity. He emphasised that literature is the life-force of a nation and advocated the use of simple, accessible language so that literature could reach the common people and strengthen national consciousness.²⁷

Scholars and critics have recognised him as one of the greatest pioneers of modern Assamese literature. The blog *Muktachinta* describes him as the creator of the second Assamese novel, the first President of the Assam Sahitya Sabha, and a distinguished editor whose contributions deserve greater recognition.²⁸ Likewise, scholars have praised him as a pillar of Assamese language and literature who enriched education through his novels, textbooks, and other literary works.²⁹

His vision linked literature with education, social progress, and national development. He believed that education should strengthen individuality, national life, and the country's overall progress (Nath, 2012). His leadership in the Assam Sahitya Sabha, Ban Theatre, Tezpur Municipality, Darrang College, and several social and cultural organisations established him as a visionary public intellectual whose contributions continue to inspire Assamese literary and cultural life.³⁰

In addition, Birinchi Kumar Barua (1908 – 1964), a creative writer of multidisciplinary scholarship, critically remarked on Padmanath Gohain Borooah: “Gohain Barua shows great skill in drawing low life and rustic scenes, but he signally fails in dealing with scriptural anecdotes and in recreating history. He has not that creative imagination and that knowledge which are especially necessary in recreating historical periods and interpreting historical figures.”³¹

FINDINGS

The present study reveals that Padmanath Gohain Borooah occupies an unparalleled position in the evolution of modern Assamese literature and culture. The major findings of the study are as follows:

1. Padmanath Gohain Borooah emerged as one of the foremost architects of the Assamese literary renaissance by making pioneering contributions to almost every major genre of literature, including novels, poetry, drama, journalism, autobiography, educational writing, history, and moral literature.
2. His novel *Bhanumati* established him as the first true Assamese novelist and introduced several modern literary techniques, including the first-person autobiographical narrative, thereby laying the foundation of the modern Assamese novel.
3. His historical dramas such as *Joymati*, *Gadadhar*, *Sadhani*, and *Lachit Barphukan* revived the glorious history of Assam and promoted patriotism, cultural pride, and historical consciousness, while his comic plays effectively criticised social evils through humour and satire.
4. His poetry combined personal emotion, lyrical beauty, philosophical reflection, and devotion to Assamese culture, contributing significantly to the enrichment of modern Assamese poetic tradition.
5. As an editor of *Bijuli*, *Asam Banti*, and *Usha*, he played a decisive role in strengthening Assamese journalism, encouraging new writers, standardising modern Assamese prose, and creating a vibrant literary atmosphere.
6. His writings on education, history, religion, geography, and moral instruction demonstrate his commitment to vernacular education and social reform. His textbooks and instructional works greatly contributed to the intellectual and moral development of Assamese society.
7. Padmanath Gohain Borooah's leadership as the first President of the Assam Sahitya Sabha in 1917 provided a strong ideological and organisational foundation for the promotion of Assamese language, literature, and cultural identity. His literary philosophy established literature as the principal vehicle of national consciousness.
8. His active involvement in educational, cultural, administrative, and civic institutions illustrates that his contribution extended well beyond literature. His services as an educationist, organiser, administrator, and public intellectual significantly influenced the cultural development of modern Assam.
9. The honours conferred upon him, including the title of *Rai Bahadur*, government literary pension, and appointments by leading universities, reflect the widespread recognition of his literary scholarship and public service.
10. The study confirms that Padmanath Gohain Borooah successfully integrated literary creativity with social commitment, educational reform, and cultural nationalism, making him one of the most influential personalities in the history of Assamese literature.

CONCLUSION

Padmanath Gohain Borooah was far more than a distinguished literary figure; he was a visionary who transformed the course of modern Assamese literature and culture. Through his pioneering achievements in

fiction, poetry, drama, journalism, educational writing, and literary organisation, he laid the intellectual and institutional foundations upon which modern Assamese literature continued to develop. His works reveal a remarkable synthesis of artistic excellence, social responsibility, historical consciousness, and cultural nationalism.

His literary philosophy consistently emphasised that language and literature are indispensable instruments for preserving national identity and fostering social progress. This vision found practical expression not only in his creative writings but also in his editorial activities, educational initiatives, and institutional leadership, particularly through the Assam Sahitya Sabha. His efforts strengthened Assamese linguistic identity during a critical period of cultural transition and inspired generations of writers, scholars, and readers.

The study further establishes that Padmanath Gohain Borooah's contributions transcend the boundaries of individual literary genres. As a novelist, poet, dramatist, journalist, editor, educationist, administrator, and social reformer, he embodied the ideals of a complete public intellectual dedicated to the service of society. His enduring legacy continues to shape Assamese literary scholarship, educational thought, journalism, theatre, and cultural institutions.

Therefore, Padmanath Gohain Borooah deserves recognition not merely as one of the pioneers of modern Assamese literature but as one of the principal architects of Assam's literary and cultural renaissance. His life and works remain an enduring source of inspiration for future generations and constitute an indispensable chapter in the history of Indian regional literature and cultural nationalism.

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