

# Assamese SF Short Stories & Contribution of Dinesh Chandra Goswami : An Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

*Hariprasad Baruah penned 'Birasatiyar Desh' (The land of Birasatiya), a story in the 7<sup>th</sup> issue of 8<sup>th</sup> volume of 'Awahan', an Assamese monthly in 1937. The smell of science fiction was somehow prevailed in the story. Again, in 1938, in 'Awahan', Nagendra Narayan Choudhury, patron of the Assamese monthly, published his story 'Rasayan', which is termed by many a critic as the first Assamese SF(or, we can say SF story). Dinesh Chandra Goswami, Santanoo Tamuly, A. K. Ziyauddin Ahmed, Kshiradhar Baruah, Bandita Phukon, Abhijit Sarma Baruah, Rathindra Nath Goswami, Bhaskar Thakuria, Jayanta Kumar Goswami, Manabendra Kumar Baruah, Amulya Kumar Hazarika etc. are some others who have been enriching the genre of SF stories in Assamese with their contribution.*

*Dinesh Chandra Goswami has penned about a hundred of SF stories in Assamese so far being the writer of the maximum no. of SF stories in the language, those are included in his seven story collections excluding the translated one. Not only regarding no. of stories he has written in this genre, but also in terms of vividness of the subjects, contents as well as forms of the stories concerned; without him, the world of Assamese SF stories(or for the sense, total Assamese SF literature) even can't be imagined. By penning these stories, Goswami has been able to enrich the modern Assamese SF world and to give the Assamese literature a dignified place in the arena of national literature.*

## Introduction

Like other regional literature in India like Tamil, Hindi, Bengali etc., the Science fiction (SF) stories(or for that matter many of the SF novels, novellas etc.) in Assamese too, at the initial stage, were surely not to the standards of the famed authors like Arthur C. Clarke. But, finally the stories of this genre have brought the Assamese literature to a new height. At the same time, some of these stories (along with the novels, novellas etc. of this genre) have given the concerned story-writers of the Assamese literary arena have given respectable position in the national level.

To begin with the initial stage of the SF genre in Assamese literature, we have to point out towards publication of a science based story 'Microscope aru Ek Nisthur Lo'rar Kotha'('A Tale of a Microscope and A Cruel Boy') in the monthly 'Orunodoi'(first Assamese journal, published by Baptist Missionaries) in 1853. Prior to that, a story entitled 'Chandralokoloi Gaman' ('A Journey to the Moon'), translated by Ambikagiri Borah was published in the 'Chatoroloi'('To the students') page in 'Bahi', an Assamese monthly, during its first decade of publication. A pamphlet entitled 'Jagatar Sesh Adarsha aru Biswa Shanti Sthapanor Path'('The last ideology of the world and the way to establish world-peace') by Ambikagiri Raychoudhury was published in 1914 which expressed the imagination of living of human beings in another planet besides the Earth. Hariprasad Baruah penned 'Birasatiyar Desh'('The land of Birasatiya'), a story in the 7<sup>th</sup> issue of 8<sup>th</sup> volume of 'Awahan', another Assamese monthly in 1937. The smell of science fiction was somehow prevailed in the story. Though the story subject tallies more with fantasy

than that of a SF story; yet in a broad coverage of Sci-fi arena, it could be dragged. In this story, an opium addicted person is shown 'visiting the space in his imagination owing to his opium consumption'. Again, in 1938, in 'Awahan', Nagendra Narayan Choudhury, patron of the Assamese monthly, published his story 'Rasayan', which is termed by many a critic as the first Assamese SF(or, we can say SF story). In this story, due to use of extra dose of a medicine meant for bringing youthfulness, a man became a child one and again, he was transformed to an old man, owing to mental stress used on him for bringing him back to his earlier stage. Finally, in the story, the man, on whom, experiment was performed, started behaving like a monkey and jumped to a tree of the nearby forest. Thus, the era of Assamese SF stories was started about eight decades ago from today.

## Objectives

The objectives of this paper are :

1. To portray the history as well as the progress of the short stories of the SF genre in Assamese literature.
2. To discuss and highlight, particularly the contribution of Dinesh Chandra Goswami, contributor of maximum number of writings to the SF arena of the literary field in the Assamese language.
3. To focus the importance and development of the Assamese literature in general.

## Methodology

Both, descriptive as well as analytical methods have been adopted.

## Data Source

Primary data : SF story books and other write-ups of the concerned story-writers.

Secondary data : Other relevant books/magazines/write-ups/websites etc.

## Assamese SF Stories : The Modern Era

The Assamese literature its first modern SF story only in the first decade of post-independence. If the period of penning the story, as mentioned by the writer Saurabh Kumar Chaliha, the story was originally written in 1950 under the title 'Mini Noise', though the same was published for the first time only in 1966 in the special issue of 'Asom Batori', an weekly .Later, the title of the story was changed into 'Awaz' and was included in Chaliha's story collection 'Golam'. In this story of Chaliha, the all time giant of Assamese literature, the problem of 'noise pollution' is the theme, about which problem the Assamese people got to know only a few decades ago. Later, Chaliha also wrote a few other SF stories like 'Oparat'('Above'), 'Sesh Anurodh'('The last Request') and 'Marudyan'('Oasis') which dealt with the subjects like 'transfer of an unconscious patient to a Venus-bound ambulance from a satellite moving around the Earth for his higher treatment in the space itself, 'humane behavior of a domestic robot -Karel' as well as 'The close relation between the Earth and the human beings'. It would be pertinent to note that Bhabendra Nath Saikia, another renowned literature in Assamese too could follow the SF trend as set up by Chaliha with his penning the story 'Gahbar'. In this story, Saikia has stated the still prevailing hatred feelings of racism in so-called 'high' society in the aftermath of a transplantation of a dying black man Mr. Smith's heart in one British Mr. Piyenaar's body. 'In 1967, a human heart from one person was transplanted into the body of another by a South African surgeon named Dr. Christian Barnard in Cap Town. Dr. Barnard's surgical team removed the heart of a 25-year-old woman who had died following an auto accident and placed it in the chest of Louis Washkansky, a 55-year-old man dying of heart damage. The patient survived for 18 days." (Source -A brief history of heart transplantation': <https://columbiasurgery.org/heart-transplant/brief-history-heart-transplantation>). It would be noteworthy that, in the story the transplanted patient got out of the operating hospital after 118 days of transplantation and lived for months till his assassination. The story depicts still existing thoughts of 'inequality' even among the 'highly educated people' and sends a message of humanity to its readers. On the other hand, the story has been a successful one depicting the present day success of medical sciences regarding heart transplantation about five decades ago. On the other hand, 'Worldwide, more than 100 transplants were performed by various doctors during 1968. Only a third of these patients lived longer than three months." ([https://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heart\\_transplantation](https://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heart_transplantation)) Thus, these stories prove the credibility of the modern Assamese SF stories, though of first stage, exhibiting the futuristic science, which have been seen 'possible' later on. Bijoy Krishna Dev Sarma, another famed name in the field of Assamese SF stories too compiled his two collections of SF stories entitled 'Suryar Sonalee Apel'('Golden Apple of the Sun' and 'Bijnyanbhittik Galpaguccha'('Science based Stories') respectively. In his story, 'Suryar Sonalee Apel', Dev Sarma

has wonderfully, with magnificent style has tried to depict the importance of energy as well as the history of human civilization based on discovery of fire as well as the progress of wisdom indicating the ultimate source as the Sun. In the story, astronauts from the earth visits the Sun and collects a handful of fire from it which can be seen as the apple of 'wisdom' as was in the story of 'Adam-Eve' in the 'Bible' and the 'Koran' and finally returns to our own lovely planet hoping for a bright future full of wisdom for all of us here in the planet. Santanoo Tamuly, A. K. Ziyauddin Ahmed, Kshiradhar Baruah, Bandita Phukon, Abhijit Sarma Baruah, Rathindra Nath Goswami, Bhaskar Thakuria, Jayanta Kumar Goswami, Manabendra Kumar Baruah, Amulya Kumar Hazarika etc. are some others who have been enriching the genre of SF stories in Assamese with their contribution. Nonetheless to say that most of the SF writers in Assamese are from the background of formal study of Science branch of higher education. Some of them were engaged with the profession of academics, while some others were seen in the professions of Engineer/Physician/Scientist etc.

'Bismo', a popular Assamese monthly has been publishing science fiction stories(along with novel, novella etc. of this genre) since its inception in 1968 .In fact, the magazine can be boasted of popularizing the genre of science fiction among Assamese readers. The magazine along with science fiction written originally in Assamese, also published Assamese translated version of science fictions of high profile SF writers like Arthur C. Clarke, Issac Asimov, Jule Verne etc.

## Dinesh Chandra Goswami : An Identity

Dinesh Chandra Goswami has penned about a hundred of SF stories in Assamese so far being the writer of the maximum no. of SF stories in the language, those are included in his seven story collections excluding the translated one. The collections are : 'Bhadramapok Jantra'(1985), 'Portable Small Absorber'(1986), 'Ek Tarangar Dore'(1995), 'Abhinna Hriday'(2004), 'Kalpa Jagat'(2004), 'Dinesh Chandra Goswami Swa-nirbachito Galpa'-2005 (English version : 'The Hair Timer', 2010, translated by Amritjyoti Mahanta) and 'Antarbahee'(2011). Not only regarding no. of stories he has written in this genre, but also in terms of vividness of the subjects, contents as well as forms of the stories concerned; without him, the world of Assamese SF stories(or for the sense, total Assamese SF literature) even can't be imagined. A translation version of his twenty selected SF stories under the title 'The Hair Timer'(translated version of Goswami's Assamese anthology of self-selected SF stories entitled 'Dinesh Chandra Goswami Swa-nirbachito Galpa') was also published by the National Book Trust, India in 2014 giving an opportunity to the worldwide readers to taste the Assamese SF stories which were translated by Amrit Jyoti Mahanta. . Saurabh Kumar Chaliha, the first modern SF writer in Assamese wrote the foreword to this book.

## Dinesh Chandra Goswami's SF Stories

Dinesh Chandra Goswami, by profession, a scientist penned his first SF story 'Kokaal'(Waistline) in the Assamese daily 'Dainik Asom' in 1970. The SF stories penned by Goswami, highlight the relationship saga among fellow human beings expressed as characters for the sake of the contents as

well as plots therein. According to Goswami, his SF stories are, "Tales first and science later." This attraction has eluded the readers towards his stories and also not made 'so tough' his 'expressions' for the readers concerned.

Saurabh Kumar Chaliha has talked about five characteristics of Goswami's SF stories. Accordingly, the 1<sup>st</sup> characteristic is nothing, but 'sex'. In most of the Goswami's SF stories sex has played the vital role of an active reagent in progress of the story or as the theme of the story concerned itself. Chaliha felt, "Perhaps the writer i.e Goswami himself feels that sex is a strong magnet." The 2<sup>nd</sup> characteristic found in his stories is the swift flow of humour. 'Bedroom Energy' etc. some stories are notable example of such humorous SF stories. The 3<sup>rd</sup> characteristic, Chaliha said, as found in Goswami's SF stories is microscopic psychological analysis of different characters. 'Ek Tarangar Dore' (Like a Wave) etc. stories are best example for this characteristic. The 4<sup>th</sup> characteristic of Goswami's SF stories is frequent use of scientific terms in the stories. Some readers might not be able to understand these terms, yet they would too be able to taste the flavour of the real science world in spite of not understanding those scientific jargons. 'Frequency response', 'Circuit' etc. are some such scientific terms used in his stories. The 5<sup>th</sup> and last, but not the least characteristic in his stories is diversity of subjects in the stories i.e. from biological subjects to space journeys etc. Use of satire, importance of female characters equally to their male counterparts in playing active roles, expression of so-called unsocial but scientific progressive relation between man and women, setting of a dream world in the eyes of problem-thronged lower/middle class readers by painting beautiful roads—parks—interruption free supply of electricity—regular, hassle free payment of salary/pension—personalized newspaper etc. can also be considered as some other characteristics of Goswami's SF stories. No doubt, the story writer has been able to attract his readers through all these characters and thus, proved himself as the most active SF writer in Assamese literature so far.

Further, along with other renowned SF writers' opinions on characteristics of SF stories, particularly Robert Heinlein's theories can be summed up as true in case of Goswami's SF stories. Heinlein stated a total of five characteristics regarding SF stories : " 1.The conditions must be, in some respect, different from here-and-now, although the difference may lie only in an invention made in the course of the story. 2.The new conditions must be an essential part of the story. 3.The problem itself –the 'plot'—must be a human problem. 4.The human problem must be one which is created by, or indispensably affected by, the new conditions. 5. And lastly, no established fact shall be violated, and, furthermore, when the story requires that a theory contrary to present accepted theory be used, the new theory should be rendered reasonably plausible and it must include and explain established facts as satisfactorily as the one the author show fit to junk. It may be far-fetched, it may seem fantastic, but it must not be at variance with observed facts." ([https://www.wikipedoia.org/wiki/Definitions\\_of\\_science\\_fiction](https://www.wikipedoia.org/wiki/Definitions_of_science_fiction)) Again, John Campbell(Junior)'s definition on SF can also be rightly applied to Dinesh Chandra Goswami's stories. John Campbell(Junior), the great SF writer opined, "Scientific

methodology involves the proposition that a well-constructed theory will not only explain every known phenomenon, but will also predict new and still undiscovered phenomena. Science-fiction tries to do much the same—and write-up, in story form, what the results look like when applied not only to machines, but to human society as well." He also said, "To be science fiction, not fantasy, an honest effort at prophetic extrapolation from the known must be made."(Ibid) Based on these observations too, Dinesh Chandra Goswami's stories can be termed as successful SF stories based on these characteristics.

Lessons on life can also be dragged from the SF stories penned by Dinesh Chandra Goswami. Though the base of the SF stories is 'science', yet sorrows and happiness as well as conflicts and expectations etc. natural feelings/happenings belonging to human beings of flesh and bloods are also not ignored in the stories concerned. Though the stories are concentrated on any 'established' or 'futuristic' theory of science, still the stories say about the basics of human life as well as society. As the 'base' is science, no doubt, along with displaying of different social phenomenon, different scientific angles can also be learned by the readers of these stories concerned. In Goswami's SF stories too, readers can find lesions on different social issues as well as science related issues like town-planning, healthy life tips, environmental awareness, protesting social evils by the characters concerned etc. Such lessons from Goswami's stories have also established him as a socially responsible and committed writer too.

#### **Futuristic Science & Other lessons in the Stories Concerned**

Dinesh Chandra Goswami, in his SF stories, have presented many a scientific facts attractively, with reading of which one can, no doubt, develop his mindset towards a logical as well as beautiful, balanced human society. For example, in his stories 'Bedroom Energy', 'Bhadratamapok Jantra', 'The Hair Timer', 'Portable Smell Absorber' etc., Goswami has rightly been able to show the readers the path of logical and justified 'goodness' to be done towards society, humanity as well as one's own life regarding concerned biological as well as other related topics.. About his story, 'Gobeshna'(Translated version-'Research'), Siddhartha Chakraborti opines, "What is clear from the story is that both the male and the female are being contained in certain modes of patriarchy that exist in our society and are finding voice in the SF as well. Sex is seen as a commodity for appeasement of the male. The female seduces and pleasures the male and gets him to sponsor her research. The male is perpetually in need of sexual gratification and falls for the obvious and direct seduction, agreeing to liberally fund the woman as long as he is sexually satisfied. Moreover, science and rationality are used to further allow and encourage this sexual interaction". Though, not easy for common readers to understand the scientific message here, still, stories like this penned by Goswami has touched almost all the points of life in connection with the motto of science for a better future. Again, in his story 'Kothashilpi', Goswami has been able to depict a typewriter used by a typist to type the words promptly as being said by the person nearby it. The story was published in a magazine entitled 'Manoranjan'

in its September-October/1975 issue. Later in Japan, 'In 1990, Dragon released the first consumer speech recognition product, Dragon Dictate, for a whopping \$9,000. Then in 1997 Dragon NaturallySpeaking appeared – the first continuous speech recognition product.' In 1992, a new typewriter recognizing voice command in Japan was invented which resembles the futuristic idea of Goswami depicted in his story 'Kothashilpi'. 'Computer World', a magazine in its August 23, 1993 issue in page no. 28 in a brief write-up entitled as 'Dictating to your computer' mentions, "Dragon Systems, Inc InNewton, Mnss..., last month shipped the second release of the first commercially available speech recognition system, DragonDictate-30K Version 3.0. The software allows users to dictate text into their computers without using a keyboard." The information, proves that perhaps in the previous year the first release of the commercially available automatic voice command computer typewriter was invented in Japan and was opened for public, proving the aforesaid information true, though the concerned newspaper about which was told is not known. Now-a-days, Google-doc service etc. too provide us the voice command typing facility on mobile phone or computer, laptops proving correctness of the imagination depicted in the story. We can also point towards some other selected SF stories of Goswami like 'Portable Smell Absorber'(a story in which imagination of erasing undesired smells as well as idea of accepting only desired smell exists), 'Animal Thought Recorder'(Capability of any trained person to take the 'thought' of any animal by just going through the wave pattern of the scanning report of mind is the theme here.),

'Yugasandhi'(Story in which imagination of binding death in a range of a fortnight is displayed), 'Traveller' (Where the speed of the traveler is shown as that of light with comparison of the speed of mind is a subject), 'Bedroom Energy'(Where the use of sexual energy of young boys and girls is imagined for lighting the electric bulbs!) and 'Sub-project Jorakalpa'(Where protection of Assam's one horned rhinos is planned by creating some bio-robot bio-rhinos) regarding use of proper scientific ideas in his SF stories.

### Conclusion

In total, Dinesh Chandra Goswami by creating realistic as well as relevant structures based on 'futuristic science', has penned his SF stories (along with other SF novels, drama and other translated SFs) very consciously and cautiously in the greater interest of serving the flavour for science among the readers. Though, as aforesaid, he stated himself that these stories were 'Tales first, science later', yet without ignoring the basic taste like other social-fabric stories too, he has been able to attract and enthrall the readers, basically the young ones towards the realm of science. Establishing a strong identity for himself as a storywriter of future years, Goswami has also been able, by penning these stories, to enrich the modern Assamese SF world giving a dignified place in the national literature and also to bring a change towards life and learning of Assamese people, if not for all, at least for a portion, by dragging them to the scientific way of thinking. What can be more success for a SF writer!

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