

Confessions

(Translator's Note)

Munin Barketoki's 'Confessions' (*Āwāhan*, Vol VII, No 12) is, to the best of our knowledge, the first attempt in Assamese at the form of literary exercise called *belles-lettres*, and it remains till date perhaps the most admirable piece of its kind. A fine mixture of wit and humour and light-hearted banter, and a profusion of literary allusions, the piece is marked, above all, by its readability. It also presents the writer's views on several aspects of modern literature, and on the health of Assamese literature of his day. It bears ample evidence of the author's wide reading in the literatures of the East and the West, and shows him as a sober connoisseur of letters.

The present version is mostly a literal translation. In order to convey to the reader the feel and the flavour of the original, as far as possible, the turns of expressions as used by the writer in Assamese have been retained, subject, however, to the syntactical compulsions of the alien language. We have also retained the occasional English phrase or word used by the writer himself.

The form of the 'Confessions', as implied, is a monologue, with the editor whom the writer is addressing, acting as the interlocutor. The poem at the end perhaps has an autobiographical content which, more than anything else, seems to justify the title of the piece.

P. Kotoky

Confessions

Dear Editor,

The very address, 'Dear Editor', must have led you to instantly conclude that this is nothing but a brief from the writer to the editor for favour of accepting his article, has it not? I shall not outcaste the piece by telling you what it is straightaway. If you are willing to be patient, I shall acquaint you, by and by, with the characteristics of this object. Even though your position is not yet like that of Churchilllean England — terrified of the German bomb — still to enter into something so totally unknown and unheard of before is a risk of sorts, you must concede. That is why my first request to you is to be patient, for it is only patience that pays, in a critical situation. A request only, and not a command. For, if I call it a command, there is no knowing that you'll not present these few lines as evidence, insufficient though may be, and thereby straightaway expel me — a fool-hardy Rāvaṇa of a writer — from your Panchavati of the *Āwāhan*. But before I advance even a step further, let me tell you that even though this is a sort of correspondence, it is of a different kind, meaning, it is public correspondence, an open letter. More precisely, although it touches you and me in particular, it is open to all the readers of the *Āwāhan*. Here there is nothing to hide. Frankly, this is neither a letter nor a brief, nor an article. On the whole, this is something strange and peculiar. It is your privilege to decide whether to publish it or not. If you publish it, I shall be happy; if not, I shall feel hurt. But I beg of you, dear editor, please do not consign it to that all-consuming wastepaper basket of yours before looking over it from beginning to end.

The very word 'confessions' has perhaps reminded you of

Tolstoy, Rousseau, De Quincey, the opium addict, and Cassanova. I get the chill down my spine to think of them. Yet I, of all people, have dared to write a confession! What would you call it but dare-devilry? It was a serious lapse. I should have called it an apologia, not a confession. A confession is not for us, that is only for the big shots, for those 'giants', 'biggs' and 'lions' only. For those who have been called 'stud bulls' by our viceroy, Lord Lintithgow. Small fries like us have little right to confessions, we are entitled to apologies only. We are mortals of little consequence. Who bothers about us? Small creatures like us are born, and then they die...

Be it as it may from my side, from yours (I mean the editor's) the first problem is to examine and determine the category of the thing. In the language of economics, your problem *per se* is the problem of standardisation. Your business being the mass production of articles, whatever would pass for that recognition must be a standardised product, an article, or a poem, or a discourse, or a travelogue, or a story, or a play. You have a variety of such classes, numerous divisions. Whatever is despatched to you must fall into one or the other of these classes, and fit in with the rest. Otherwise you are not obliged to accept it. It has no right to enter into the selection grade of your paper's service. Under such a dispensation, you cannot but outright reject my piece. And then I have no other alternative but to accept your verdict meekly. I know very well that try however much you like you simply cannot accommodate my object in any of the current sections of your journal. As they would put it in English, it refuses to be classed in any class, for my article is altogether a new one, it is a class by itself, it is *sui generis*.

Frankly I am getting nervous about the classification of this thing. I have no doubt that you, too, have become unnerved about the classification of this strange object — something beginning with a 'Dear Editor' and ending with a not-very-long poem. But what can I say to dispel your misgiving? Still, let me first attempt an analysis of its classification. There is an English word with which it is easy to denote the class of my piece, but its Assamese equivalent is taboo in

decent society. 'Hybrid' is the word in question. It is neither a poem, nor an article, nor a short-story. Yet, in a sense, it is a mixture of several kinds. You cannot imagine what an embarrassment it has been to me to present to you this linguistic cross-breed of an issue. Maybe, you will accord it a place in your paper out of sheer pity! It also deserves acceptance as something else — as Nonsense. But do not take 'nonsense' as absolute nonsense. Dr. Johnson has recognised one variety of nonsense as 'Grand Nonsense'! How can I say that this exercise of mine will not get the same distinction?

But these are only the conclusions. The premises are yet to be given to you. You must be amused at my illogical proficiency in logic. Others put the premises first, followed by the conclusion. I have given the conclusions first, and will now give you the premises. Say Deduction and Induction. Now let's see if this rare object of mine qualifies for inclusion into any of the categories of poetry, article, prose-poem, prose-cum-poem.

I first thought it would be a poem, on the basis of the poem at the end. But what should I call this babble preceding the poem? I am indeed in a fix. Suppose I had put the poem first and added all this as an appendix — that would have been a way out. But I cannot do that, either, for three reasons. First, I have not so far seen a poem with an appendix published in the *Awāñhan*. What is the guarantee then that mine will be published? All that might happen is that this supplement might go by the board; second, suppose the very sight of an appendix-appendaged-poem makes you suspect that my mind is off the track. That would indeed be a pity! Third, to call a significant piece like this an appendix is to corrupt the word itself! So, all things considered, I abandoned the idea of christening it a poem.

Then I thought, if not a poem, let it be called an essay. The very idea elated me beyond measure. There you are! I remembered Dr. Johnson's definition of an essay — 'a loose sally of the mind', that is to say, an incoherent enthusiastic outburst. Yes, Johnson is right. Maybe he did not have the scholarly wit about when he defined

in such ordinary terms the extra-ordinary thing called an essay. Maybe at that very moment, Dr. Johnson's poetic mind, being assailed by scholarly strings, sallied forth helter-skelter, from the kingdom of intellectualism, like the people of a besieged city. That's why he degraded the essay to a sort of fugitive. But who are we to find fault with that? It is from Dr. Johnson, and therefore for us the Gospel truth. Ours not to reason why he called it such. At the end of a lot of debate within myself, I voted for Dr. Johnson. This is not a poem but an essay, an essay as Dr. Johnson defines it. That's right. For what is this but a sort of incoherent raving? But there's a snag here. 'A loose sally of the mind' — I would call it a characteristic eighteenth century euphemism of Dr. Johnson. That suits Dr. Johnson but why must I, a twentieth-century man, indulge in euphemism? I shall declare openly that it was the result of a disorder of the brain on some particular day. Well, that settles it. It is established as an essay, and madness, too, retains its grace.

Yet I did not feel at ease. Is it in the convention of an essay to incorporate a budding poem? No. I have doubts. I became suspicious about the 'essayness' of this essay. Not a poem, not an essay either — what, then, is it? Suddenly I remembered the Yankee poet, Whitman, and his *Leaves of Grass*. It is he who made a mess of prose and verse. Where is my fault if I, too, do likewise? He put prose into the cast of a poem, and made it look exactly like one. But still, no one has refused to call it a poem? And why Whitman alone? Our reverend old Sire, Rabindranath, just before his death, was also singing the praises of God in the form of Whitmanesque verse. Let the inconsiderate young declare this Whitmanesque phase of Rabindranath to be an index of his imbecility — who cares? The dog barks but the caravan passes on. Suppose I went a step further, and to outshine the shining one, created another vehicle of expression of which one part is in rhyme, and the other is in blank-verse! What's the harm? Suppose I command you, as Whitman did, to call it a poem, could you say no? But don't worry I am not issuing such a command. Let me tell you why. Let the world cry as hoarsely as it would, that Whitman's poetry

is poetry after all. Let his apologists beat their drums as loudly as they can to declare that Whitman freed sweet Dame Poetry from the unfair bondage of the ruffian, metre. But I, for one, would not call his poems poetry. Failing to effect a rhyme you raise a hue and cry that metre throttles poetry — that is just like a bad workman quarrelling with his tools! I am afraid of saying as much for fear of you calling me fool-hardy, but I believe that at the root of such strange definitions of poetry, there is the poet's hysteria or his lack of poetic power. The poet that would preach freedom can do so even in rhymed verse. Why should we believe that mere agreement between lines causes poetic independence to degenerate into servitude?

Would you, then, prefer to call this article of mine a prose poem? This you may, but not in the accepted sense of the term. Do not forget that this is an entirely new creation. You may consider it to be a 'junction', i.e. a confluence, of prose and verse. A 'junction' all right, but not a railway junction; confluence rather, but not the Triveni confluence of Allahabad. What is it then? It is what in English is called, an illicit connection. But how? Let me explain. Since time immemorial, prose has been madly wandering about, yearning for poetry. The body, emaciated and reduced to a mere bag of skin and bundle of bones, longing to be rejuvenated by the soft touch of the beloved — poetry, looking restlessly for the day when it could again live its days as man and wife with poetry. Prose is the exiled Yaksha, poetry is the Yaksha's beloved. For ages, prose, in its present form, is living in exile. This is the eternal *Meghdūta* of prose and poetry. The tragedy of long estrangement made Whitman weep. The poet's heart in him softened in great sympathy for the Yaksha in the guise of prose. Kaldasa's Yaksha invited the cloud to be the messenger. The job of emissary was not for the cloud the labour of love; the Yaksha imposed it upon him by force. The cloud did not volunteer to carry the heavy load of the Yaksha's grief arising from his banishment, to Alka. This can be seen as the characteristic patience of Kaldasa's age. But in the nineteenth century, lost in the post-revolutionary *egalite, liberte, fraternite* — equality, freedom and fraternity — how could

one expect the high priest of freedom, the individualist Whitman, to show such patience? He distanced himself from prose deficient in poetry. But he could not await an invitation, he himself volunteered to act as the emissary to end this tragedy of long separation. Whitman descended on the stage as what should be called in genteel parlance a 'go-between' (what the Bengalis call a match-maker) whose function is to cause 'illicit amour'. Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is a wedlock of prose and verse — it fixed two hinges each to prose and poetry, and locked them together. However, this wed-lock still remains illicit, for it has not been legalised yet. Therefore, I am determined today to try and formalise this illicit amour, and turn this illegal relationship into auspicious union.

I have examined all the claims of my article for entry into the quarters of poem, prose-poem and prose-cum-poem. But the doubts in my mind are still not cleared. I can see now that you will not accept a single one of these claims. But wait a while, do not think I have given up already. I have more to say. In a sense, you can call this queer object of mine a continuation or a revival of what appeared in the *Āwāhan*, in days gone by, in the form of self-narration by Mr. Chitrasen Jakharia. How exactly, let me now discuss.

There are, of course, quite a few objections against Jakharia-ism. They were there then, they are there now as well, for prejudices die hard. It is alleged that Jakharia dragged some bedroom secrets and kitchen-talk of some people into the drawing-room, and made table-talk out of them; that he ridiculed quite a few of the cherished sanctities of our society, and poured upon the unsullied Bhāgrathi of the Assamese language the dirt and filth of outlandish languages like English, and so on and so forth. Some of the charges are perhaps right but, be that as it may, we cannot but aver that the *Āwāhan* has not been able to offer to us such refined humour as Jakharia's, after him. Innuendoes naturally pinch those who are guilty, that is not surprising. But we want a reading public good-humoured enough to stand up to them with grace and dignity. I maintain that at the root of this want of appreciation of Jakharia is our deficiency of a sense of humour. But

there's one thing to consider. Suppose we admit that the majority of our Assamese readership is guilty of this: but why have you surrendered like this? You, at least, should not have shirked your responsibility thus. Of course, I do not know whether you muzzled Jakharia yourself or whether he quit the stage on his own accord. That, however, does not absolve you of your responsibility. If you don't mind, I will say that here you committed a Himalayan blunder. If I maintain that the *Āwāhan* has declined much in popularity after you stopped publishing Jakharia's self-narration, the majority, if not all, will vote for me. It is hard to refrain from telling the truth that at one time Jakharia's self-narration was *Āwāhan's* capital bait. You may not admit it, and those who share the 'wounded pride', too, will not do so. They say that many had clapped their hands in jubilation at the demise of the self-narration, and they snapped their fingers at it. But we were greatly pained at this tragic turn of events. Who knows, were I a poet like Gray, I would have perhaps written an elegy on it.

In the context of Jakharia's case, I cannot resist the temptation of mentioning another such tragedy of the *Āwāhan*, though rather irrelevant here. It certainly has no connection with this confession of mine. This tragedy is related to the disappearance of Mr. Bina Barua. Mr., not Mrs. You are perhaps shocked at this tampering of mine with the gender of people. But my conscience is quite clear about it. You may not admit it, but I can affirm with all the courage at my command that there is hardly a household in Assam where there may be even an iota of doubt about Bina Barua's gender. Moreover, I am sure Mr. Bina Barua will not be hurt at the discovery of his genuine self, that is, his *bonafide*, by the readership of *Āwāhan* even though he had tried to camouflage it with the Assamese ladies' outfit of '*rihā'* and '*mekhelei*'. You may, if you wish, directly confront him. As a matter of fact, be it a *non-de-plume* or pen-name, its mystery wears out as it becomes dated. That is its character. Actually, in the revelation of the identity lies its acclaim. So there's no need to be furious at the fact that the cat is out of the bag. And no cause for embarrassment either, for all artists yearn for fame. The real names of George Eliot,

Mark Twain, Maxim Gorky and Anatole France are known to almost all today, but surely none of them is sore on that score. The exit of Mr. Bina Barua is indeed a stark tragedy for the youth of Assam. The novel inspiration with which he wrote his stories made us all greedy in our expectations from him in the future. We know that many had breathed a sigh of relief at the untimely death of the new realism which he introduced, which side-tracked the stereotyped and based itself on the truth; yet it is an irreparable loss to us. We have heard the allegation that his write-up featuring 'Jaharmal' the old chowkidar of Keteng College had wounded the '*amour propre*' of Cotton College. Otherwise, he would not have stirred this hornet's nest. But we do not know for certain the cause of his exit. It is possible that you yourself gagged him. We can reasonably make another guess as well. Who knows if it was not the criticism all around that killed him. It is said that the death of Keats or some other English poet was also hastened by criticism. There is nothing to be surprised at if the same happened to Bina Barua.

Set aside this irrelevant episode of Bina Barua, and let's revert back to Jakharia. You might be breaking into a cold sweat at the very mention of the revival of Jakharia-ism, aren't you? You may say that the revival of Jakharia-ism is the flogging of a dead horse. Yes, it is true that to flog a dead horse is indeed wasting one's energy for nothing. But unless you waste it, there is no guarantee that this heap of energy will not collapse like an avalanche upon our own heads. If it is a fact that you muzzled Jakharia, then there is no room for doubt that an attempt to revive Jakharia-ism will lead us to the same fate too. But there is a slight difference in my case vis-à-vis Jakharia. Linguistic similarity apart, you can't press the analogy too far. Well, whether you think it a ploy to escape your Leonine clutches or to court your favour, I have a case to make out on my own behalf. Although I have tried to bring in a revival of Jakharia-ism, in a sense, yet my situation should not turn out to be as precarious as his. I am immune to many of the limitations of Jakharia-ism and, on the strength of them, I claim preference over him. Let me explain how.

First, Jakharia had a big allegation against him that although he had overtly put on the mask of a neutral connoisseur of letters, yet he covertly tried most vehemently to grind the axe of his own personal interest. His piece of the self-narration is said to be only a literary Sikhandi (ploy) to attack those with whom he could not see eye to eye in his personal life, and whom he could not stand in a straight fight. A sort of what, in English, is called stabbing in the back. I am not going to verify the truth or otherwise of these allegations. I only want to make it plain to you that this exercise of mine has the least resemblance with that. It is free from all sins, spotless, and what they call in English, pure and immaculate. That which in Jakharia the critics have alleged to be a 'personal axe' I have elevated by calling it a 'personal touch'. Then all its faults are excused. Take any issue of *The Statesman*, and you will come across this: 'Personal touch is the keystone to sound business'. I have no 'personal axe'; if at all I've only this 'personal touch' which is even beyond the reach of the angels. There ends my first preference. Second, I have scored a point over Jakharia in another matter. His self-narration in the pages of the *Awāthan* irked everybody for over a year. My confessions will not appear repeatedly to force everyone to plug his ear-drums with cotton-wool, or get on anybody's nerves. Like all good people, it will appear on the stage only once, and then give the farewell salute for good.

I have given a new interpretation of Jakharia's 'personal'. In his case, it was a personal attack upon others; in my case, it's just the opposite. In other words, it is such that it rebounds upon my head even when directed against others. Plainly put, there is neither altruism nor slandering of others in this article of mine. There is only an incredible projection of the first person singular, that is to say, an unimaginable praise of the self, a climax of egoism, an exaltation of the ego *ad nauseum*, as they say in English.

Just a moment. The very thought of self-advertisement has reminded me of Bernard Shaw, the world's most skilful advertiser. Thank God, he has come to my rescue. May he live for eternity. And

you, Sir? You too, should now get ready to hear a long dissertation on Shaw. For, I have an almighty of things to deliver on this subject. You must hear it. You do not know perhaps that in this presentation of mine, Shaw has appeared in the role of a Sikhāṇḍī (a ploy). If you agree not to charge me as shameless, let me elaborate on it a bit further. I am proceeding against you by holding on to the apron strings of Shaw, that is, hiding my face behind Shaw's skirt. But it is necessary to sound a note of warning at this point — just because I have referred to Shaw's skirt, do not presume that I am going to advance some startling theory about Shaw's gender. Nothing of the kind. Shaw put on no skirt. But you should keep in mind from now on that saying something to me means saying something to my master. And that would mean provoking the world's number one dramatist, George Bernard Shaw.

Call it an illusion or a hallucination, I have an infectious mania. I am always inclined to believe that God has sent me to become Assam's Shaw. To that I am predestined. Shaw I must be, there is no getting out of it. There is no other way. Sometimes when I gaze fixedly at a picture of Shaw for about ten minutes, I get hypnotised. I forget our separate identities — I get merged in him, and he in me. Like a devotee merging with the Lord in his meditations, and assuming a new form, I put on a new slough. In this strangely inspired moment, you, too, go on getting magnified. Your *Āwān* enlarges itself to become the world press, and I become the universal Shaw. I think that you must print whatever I ask you to, for I am the Assamese Shaw. Suppose I say that the belief that a cow has four legs is a mere matter of convention, that it is, after all, a lie, that it is a stranglehold of the dead past, and assert that a cow has five and a half legs — even then you cannot contradict me, for I speak with the authority of my personality. You give poetic licence to a poet. I am Shaw, I demand Shavian licence. I shall preach to you whatever I like, you are bound to listen, whether you like it or not.

You must be rendered speechless by this extraordinary flight of

my fancy, aren't you? Perhaps you suspect that it is the stimulation of some stimulant. But what stimulant? — Wine, nectar, country liquor or foreign-made champagne — what? You have perhaps concluded that for me to match Shaw is like trying to catch the moon, a situation that is altogether pathetically quixotic, isn't that right? You will say that to call this absurd imagination mere illusion is to understate it — it is a story comparable to those of the *Arabian Nights*, or those of the 'open sesame' variety. If you have a Freudian in your camp, he will invariably declare me a neurotic, or even include me in one of those all-consuming complexes of Freud. But my proposition is not as trivial as you consider it to be; I can produce facts and figures that will speak for themselves. I can assert with all conviction that you will discover all the typically Shavian traits in me, barring only one — and that is his long beard, which has done utmost injustice to the word 'Shavian'. I am really not unshaved as the Shavian Shaw. I am a distinguished consumer of Panama blades. I believe that if Shaw, too, had gone for that, the word Shavian would not have been thus made an outcaste.

Let me present clearly the parallelism between Shaw and me. You are perhaps unaware that for me, this is my only trump card, the only weapon to clinch the issue. So long I had hidden it up my sleeve, as they say in English. Consider this to be my 'Sudarsan Cakra'. Look, here I let it go.

There is a serious imputation against Shaw — that is about the endlessly long prefaces to his plays. There is no end to the variety of adjectives with which his critics have qualified them. Some have called them long-winded, some confused, while some others have said that to read them causes nausea, some develop ophthalmia, some feel like tasting quinine, some feel as if the pulses has stopped. Many a man, many a mind. Of course, these are not at all unlikely reactions, for to have a preface longer than the text leaves us full scope to lose our patience. Yet, to say that to read his prefaces makes one inclined to throw up is an exaggeration, a hyperbole. I do not care what others feel about it, but for my present state, this thing of Shaw has presented itself as quite resuscitating; for me every bit of it is an elixir of

life. So long I was looking for a category in which to include my 'thing'. Now, at long last, I have got it. This is it. If others do not call it so let them not. Consider this to be my Shavian preface; that will save my guru's face as well as give this bundle of nonsense of mine, a name. What do you say to that?

Not in form alone, in matter as well there is a fine analogy between Shaw and me. Shaw's words are universally referred to as Shavian outburst, allegedly without coherence, disjointed, meaningless, effervescent like bubbles, like crackers that you burst in your festival of light. They seem proper when emanating from His Lordship's mouth alone; anyone else trying to imitate him will invariably find his name in the register of the mentally imbalanced. 'Absurdities of the Shavian brand', 'Shavian paradox' — these are new additions to the property of the twentieth century vocabulary. If you do not want to call these mutterings of mine by any other name, take them at least as some such outburst, some paradox. You do not have any objection to that, I suppose. Frankly, these utterances of mine compare only with Shaw's outbursts. Never bring my name to your lips ever again, curse me always, if you will, but please, dear editor, fervently do I pray you — for once, and once only, consider me to be a second edition of Shaw, consider me as a young Shaw, take my not-very-long speech to be a Shavian preface, and deem these ravings to be a madman's outburst. This conceded, I seek nothing more, I shall remain your bonded slave all my life.

The problem of determining the caste is over here. Shaw has brought me nearer the main point. Now I shall take up the main business.

You must be surprised to see me misuse my brain in this way. But you do not know that all the while I am championing a cause, and a cause that is, by all means, righteous. There is saying in English 'Righteousness exalteth a nation'. And it is this that I use as a launching pad. Like all big causes, mine too has two aspects — one personal, the other popular, i.e. public. From the trend of my talk you will perhaps say that the popular one is false, just a façade. The per-

sonal is the real thing; only to make it eye-catching have I tried to veneer it with a film of popular varnish. In a sense, this too, is correct to a large extent, for it hardly needs my explaining to anybody that self-interest is greater than philanthropy. It is more or less a truism. Frankly, my aim is to kill two birds with one stone.

First comes self-interest. Mr. Ratnakanta Barkakati, the celebrated poet of *Sewali* who needs no other introduction, is said to have had, since childhood, an ambition to flood, like the Brahmaputra, the whole of Assam, with the roaring waves of poetry. I am no scientist. I do not know well how environs affect a person. Yet this desire of Mr. Barkakati made me a little scientific. I undertook to analyse the fact. And can you guess what I got out of the analysis? I discovered that at the root of this strong desire to overflow Assam is the reaction of what the scientists call a 'locale'. Had Mr. Barkakati been a resident of either Jorhat or Golaghat, and not of Nagaon, he would never have used such a simile. For, a man of Jorhat does not have as much familiarity with the Brahmaputra and floods as has a man from Nagaon. We can say that he was born with a sixth sense, which is the flood-sense. I have no doubt that when God ordered him to be born at Nagaon, a place nearly submerged by floods every year, he was gifted an additional sense over and above the five usual ones with which to sense a flood. If you assume this sixth sense, then we can easily guess the likely attitude of Barkakati, a man from Nagaon, to the rest of Assam. His trying to take revenge for God's injustice towards Nagaon on the other places of the state might seem to some to be 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth' attitude, but I can appreciate his feelings very well. How could his generous poetic heart, saturated with patriotic fervour, tolerate this bias against Nagaon vis-a-vis the rest of Assam in the matter of being able to remain unaffected by floods? He saw that the floods of Nagaon tarnished God's greatest virtues of neutrality and fairness and upset the balance of God's even-handed justice. So, he came forward to correct this balance, inspired by the feeling of God and my country! That is why he decided that he would wash Nagaon with the flood-waters, and the rest

of the state he would flood with his poetry. For Nagraon, there is God's flood; for the rest there is Barkakati's flood of poetry. But we who belong to Jorhat cannot dare to use this simile, for in floods we see its fatality and gruesome toll of death more than its poetry.

While it is not my intention to overflow, like Barkakati, I too nourished from childhood a desire to monopolise the market of poetry by dumping matter of the Freudian brand. You know very well yourself how long I have been sending your monopoly *Āwāhan* market, bags of Freudian poems, and poems bearing the stamp of D.H. Lawrence. Japan is smuggling through Nepal; but I haven't, even for a day till today, adopted such unfair means. Yet you did not relax your 'No Admission' attitude. You are studiously keeping me out of the market for fear of my Freudian stuff overflowing it. You are filling my days with despair and pessimism. Perhaps I shall have no luck in this life. I know very well that my Freudian poems will never be able to pierce through your Chinese wall. Yet it has not ceased knocking at it, nor will it cease either. As long as you will be and your wall of rejection will stand, so long shall I be, and my poetry will be. Know for sure that I shall not cease knocking, not until my horns are blunted. In this I am my master's true disciple. Bernard Shaw is said to have had the routine experience of getting back a rejected manuscript each week. Yet he did not give up and stuck to it with bull-dog tenacity. Today's G.B.S. of world-wide renown and this Bernard Shaw are one and the same person.

For you it is an open secret that till now you have consigned a minimum of about ten of my poems to your all-devouring waste-paper basket. After some days, they will pile up, if not to the Himalayas then at least to a small hillock of Guwahati. I know that notwithstanding a thousand entreaties, you're not going to accommodate these fleshly propaganda without a tinge of poetry in them, in your paper. You may think that I have a very high opinion of them. That, however, is a wrong impression. I know very well that they may be anything but poetry, because with sensuality it might be possible to

write something else but not poetry. I shall be embarrassed if my poems get published along with those of Mr. Devakanta Baruah, the best poet (of course, in my perception) of your journal. I do not have the 'brains' to write poetry; I do not remember even a single instance when a whole stanza has straight struck my mind. In the case of the great poets, someone observed: 'He was hisping in numbers and the numbers came'. In the case of my poems they could say, 'He was sweating for numbers and the numbers came'. Only the Unseen One has seen how much of sweat I have shed in my futile attempts at writing poetry. There is difference of opinion as to the percentage of perspiration and inspiration that combine to create a genius. I do not know what others think, but I, for one, will vote more for perspiration. I perspire no end, yet my thoughts do not get transformed into poetry. Only Bismillah or Allah or Khoda knows why. The perspiration itself is wastage. I leave it to you to work out for yourself the degree of my anger against you, — and how natural that is too — if even after so much wastage of sweat my poems are found unworthy of publication in the *Āwāhan*.

I know it is beyond me to write a poem. You will probably ask me why I still continue to struggle to do so. It is not that there is no cause. It is true that a poem of the kind that many write will not emerge from the nib of my pen. But you will accept that poems can be of different types. I want to introduce a new trend in poetry. Its motto will be the exaltation of the body. Freud has called sensualism the preface to psychology. D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce and others have rescued sensualism from the gutter of obscenity and placed it on the table of literature. Europe, fed up with feeling and lyricism, has sought such poetry which, discarding all its conventionalities and hypocrisies, will admit and uphold only the bare, irrefutable truths; such poetry that will abandon the futile attempt to spiritualise passion, and instead, materialise it as much as possible, and will no longer consider sensuality a sin or a crime, but give it the highest place as the natural religion of man above all his conventional religions. We have meditated a great deal over Miranda for too long. Some of us made

her an angel, some a human being, while some others saw her, like Wordsworth, as

*A creature not too bright or good
For human nature's daily food*

and left her at that. We displayed a lot of subtle intellectuality and elevated thinking with regard to Shakuntala. Now we want to view Miranda and Shakuntala, not through the conventional eye, but through the passion of humanity, laying aside all hypocrisy of sentiment. We want to consider them as human beings, subject to all the passions, desires and weaknesses of the flesh. That is the mission of sensualist poetry. You have conceded a place to sensualism in prose literature but you refuse to do so in poetry. What does this mean? Do you mean to say that poetry is not the right medium for sensuality?

I can give you, if you so desire, another sackful of arguments in favour of writing poetry of this kind. I have told you already that it is beyond me to write poetry of any other variety. Yet, the desire to proclaim oneself a poet is overpowering — an overmastering passion. What is more, this is not my idiosyncrasy alone, it is the habit of many. And habit is the second nature. You may also find such aspirants to poetry who will compose verses like:

What are you doing? / We are peeping;
You took your meal / We were grinning.

and yet would like to register their names as poets. This, however is a sort of an extreme stance. At the other extreme are the followers of Whitman (as already mentioned), the stalwarts of blank verse and the canvassers of prose-poems. Failing to tame the shrew called metre, they have, as if by shifting their rage from the broomstick to the maid, tried to denounce the entire *Poetics* of Aristotle as a legacy of a barbarous, undemocratic age. They are up in arms. They scoff at the ethics which they have smelt in poetry. According to them, poetry must follow the principle of might being the right, it must establish itself by sheer right of force. Almost every one of them is a Hitler,

Mussolini, Pilsudski, Stalin or Kamal Pasha of sorts. They want that once they can make their dictatorial regime prevail, they will deliver a decree — metre is an obstacle to the expression of man's inner feelings, so down with metre-ism. This is the big originality of their argument. They do not argue about their principle — they argue by persons and precedents. Any opposition they will counter by waxing eloquent about Whitman, or forgetting themselves in explaining 'Neo-Rabindranathism'.

Take these two as the North Pole and the South Pole. There is another group besides these two of which I am a champion. The members of this group know very well that in their make-up there is not a trace of what may be called poetic ingredients or constituents. Still they think that their writing poetry is as per God's ordinance, to be a poet is to them a divine mission. Exactly in the manner in which before the World War, it was the German mission to spread world-wide the younglings of 'Kultur'. They know that if this divine mission of theirs does not somehow agree with the prevailing situation or the *status quo*, and some disorder takes place; then they will have to follow Karl Marx — 'First change and then interpret'. If the Assamese readership is not prepared to take this new patent medicine, then they will, even by force, make them swallow it, for they are doctors, and it is an elementary principle of medical ethics to enforce acceptance of a prescription if there is any opposition to it. They will have no regrets if in pouring such new wine, the old bottle cracks; for, after all, wine is wine and a bottle is a bottle.

You can see that I am one of this fraternity. Herein lies the popular aspect of my cause. I stand, not simply for myself, but for many. I am one of those who, though not poets, want to cause a depression in the market of poetry, by creating the problem of over-production, and causing a slump. I have taken up the cudgels to fight for those poets who are persecuted and tormented, and have been driven out from the market of Assamese literature. I throw down the gauntlet and it is up to you to take it up. How long will you be

harassing us like this? We are out to call into being a new order.

I have prattled a lot about whatever came to my mind. Who knows upon how many parts of it you will apply your razor with a sharp glittering edge? I will not say much more. I have only one more thing to add. The matter is irrelevant, but I have discovered much relevance in it.

You must be aware of the commotion that is being caused in the literary market of our neighbourhood. Bengal. Having fed themselves to the full with Continental dishes, the Bengali civilians are now throwing up ultra-modern literature. The master of this group, Mr. Annada Shankar Roy, has openly started playing with fire and has, by beating the drum of youth, nearly forced the Bengalis to plug their ears. One of this group, a master of poetry, called Buddhadev Bose, has written to declare: 'Nothing is like love'. You may react and say, 'Let the Bengalis do whatever they like. It is none of our business'. Yes, you have a point here. In these days of Assam for the Assamese, I fully realise the risk involved in mentioning the Bengalis. But perhaps you do not know the inside story. The Bengalis, having stolen their ultra-modernism from the Continent, would like to declare to India that they hold the monopoly right to the 'new thing'. That is why I have pointed it out here. It is, of course, true beyond all doubt, that in aping the West, none in India can beat the Bengalis — they are the masters here.

But wait a moment. I have something more to say. I have been deeply distressed by a few things in this connection. Brand it as my dogmatism if you will, but it is my firm conviction that for intellectual recreation today, Western modernism, be it take or anything else, is absolutely indispensable. In every step of our day-to-day life in the twentieth century, the West is our regulator. One's nationalistic pride may be hurt in admitting it, but it is simply an acknowledgement of the truth — calling a spade a spade. Considering that, the Bengalis deserve our thanks for the way in which in many Indian matters they are welcoming Occidentalism. My point is: Why should

we always allow Bengalis to be the fore-runners in this matter? Why is it always the Bengalis and not us, who take the lead in interpreting the West? In just the same way as the Bengalis, Annada Shankar Roy and Gurusaday Dutta, went abroad, one or the other Gohain of ours also goes abroad. But after returning home, why do the Bengalis and the Assamese behave so differently? Annada Shankar, after returning from Europe, introduces ultra-modernism in imitation of James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence and Freud. Bengali artists teach Bengalis to appreciate the art of Picasso and Paul Nash. But the Assamese returning from Europe — excepting, of course, a few like Agarwalla — do not give us even a bit of the mind of Europe; they give us only a catalogue of the number of times they threw up on the ship during their journey, and the number of cups of coffee they drank at the Paris cafés. We know that anyone visiting Agra will be able to tell us about the Taj even before he gives us his account. We want to know what else, worth imparting, he discovered there. The tedious account of a journey does not make a travelogue. In a travelogue, we expect, apart from an account of cities, an account of the people there, and of the world of the mind of those people. Our expectation is that, during their sojourn in Europe, they will feel the pulse of the Europeans, and will acquaint us with the currents and the cross-currents of European life. Therein lies the success of a travelogue and the usefulness of travel. If they cannot give us even that, then let them engross themselves in gossip about Europe in their drawing-rooms, of what use to us are the numbers and names of the cities of Europe, the height of the houses there and the number of frames they charge for a cup of coffee in their cafés? Anyone going abroad will find out about such things there. Surely no one goes abroad on the strength of the knowledge acquired from a travelogue in the *Āwāhani*!

In the context of literature, there is another aspect to this thing. After tasting in Europe or America, the novels of writers like Dos Passos, Aldous Huxley and Ethel Mannin, the poetry of Stefan Georg, D'Annunzio and Ezra Pound, and the writings of intellectuals like Andre Maurois, Emil Ludwig and Beverly Nicholas, if, even our

foreign returned Assamese gentlemen, do not feel unhappy to declare *Minomai* as our best novel and *Jñānālini* as our best specimen of poetry, then who is to blame if, in such a situation, our tastes get perverted? Despairing of such people, perhaps, a few, although never having stepped out of their native soil, have been seen attempting to convey through literature, whatever second-hand impression they have of Europe. My aim, too, is similar. If there is any defence of my Freudian poetry, it lies there.

Such a Freudian poem I am now going to present to you.

The Ganga of the Body

You alone ;
I forget the world when I get you,
I touch the heavens when I get you,
I kiss your warm lips and sing

The triumphal song of deathless life.

Friend of my flesh, thou art the essence of my life.

Friend of my flesh, queen of my life-country;

The stream of sweetness of your breasts

Washes away all restraints of shame.

In the surge of your body's flood

Float my body and soul and sense,

And forgets itself in the body.

Stay by me —

My beloved, stay by me, for eternity.

Draw upon my lips a kiss of your red lips,

Pour your nectar-lip in the crimson-cup of life,

Be by me, beloved, hide in my heart, till time eternal

Are you by me? So you are by me?

Nothing more do I crave.
Let the world dissolve—

You alone !

We shall always remain immersed in the Ganga of our bodies.

Let death, too, dissolve,

What death? What earth?

With the elixir of the body-river

We shall conquer all.

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