



# Dinanath Sarmah's "Usha": A realistic portrayal of Contemporary Society

**Dr. Neeva Rani Phukan**

Associate Professor, Discipline of Assamese

Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, Resham Nagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-781022, Assam, India.

## Abstract:

The upliftment of society is based upon an individual's coping with the norms of society. Virtually, the notion of society irradiates the juxtaposition of the rich and the poor and above all, the unbroken unity between them. One of the doyens of Assamese Literature, Dinanath Sarmah, in his novel "Usha", draws a simple and serene picture of Assamese society wherein the main protagonist, Bipin reveals the celestial beauty of village life and how he faces a lot of predicaments when he moves towards the city. At first, he was unable to deal with city life because of its dryness. But he starts liking the city with the passage of time and is cemented with the city's rules and regulations. Dinanath Sarmah also depicts the conflict between city life and village life. He showcases village life as imperturbable and tranquil. On the other hand, city life is portrayed as chaotic and confusing. Bipin, the simple boy feels alone after moving towards the city and he faces a lot of obstacles. Somehow, he manages and starts liking city life gradually. Sarmah, being one among the prominent litterateurs of the Awahan Era in Assamese literature, made significant contribution in the literary journal "Awahan" edited by Dr. Dinanath Sharma and published by Nagendra Narayan Choudhury. "Usha" was his first published novel. It was published in the year 1934. The backdrop of this novel is the Assamese society of his contemporary times.

This research paper aims to describe the struggle of villagers in coping with the city people and the deep bonding between the city people and villagers.

**Keywords:** Society, people, village, city, obstacles, rich, poor, conflict, tranquil.

## Introduction:

Dinanath Sarmah is one of the renowned novelists of Assam of the Awahan Era, who has given a new dimension to Assamese literature. His works are based upon the conflicts of people living in a society. The conflict may be both external and internal. Basically, his novels are realistic and superpose the profound relationship between the city and the village. His acclaimed novel 'Usha' reflects the socio-economic condition of Assam during Pre-Independence period wherein all the characters inherently imitate Gandhi's maxim i.e. truth and non-violence. "Usha" manifests the power of working in which the male protagonist Bipin tries to reform the society by following the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi. Bipin faces a lot of hurdles in merging with the city people. Finally, he overcomes his hesitance and starts coping with the city people and endeavours to merge into city life. This scenario reveals the integration of Indian people with each other. Above all, Dinanath Sarmah's novels light the squabbling situation of today's society and how Indian culture is getting rich day by day which is exhibited in his novels.

As the notable social critic Emily Durkheim already asserts that "Man is only a moral being because he lives in society, since morality consists in solidarity with the group, and varies according to that solidarity. Cause all social life to vanish and moral life would vanish at the same time, having no object to cling to." Bipin, the peace-loving person faces a lot of predicaments when he arrives in the city. He is not able to mingle with the city people and he becomes lonely. It was only after his acquaintance with friends like Usha, Hamid and Binu that he starts to understand city life anew. Bipin is a cultured man who always tries to rectify the society. In the seventh chapter of the novel, he expresses that a cultured one is who has no pride of being rich and only follow the ethics of society. Here we need to mention another critic of society-Saurav Kumar Chaliha. As like in "Usha", the same changing scenario of society can be observed in the works of Saurabh Kumar Chaliha. In his most recognized short story entitled Bina Kutir, he reveals the dynamic changes in society and showcase how people change their attitude with the passage of time. Bipin also changes a lot when he arrives in the city. He becomes less emotional with the passage of time. He searches for the essence of the village in the city and tries to attain contentment. At the beginning, he seeks to abscond from city life and focuses on poetry writing to forget the nostalgia of village life.

The protagonist Bipin was a young man with good academic score. His poverty ridden life came in the way of his aspirations as a young man. His benefactor Surya Baruah is a man of the world who facilitates Bipin to stay in his house and study in college. Due to his hard work and perseverance Bipin comes out with flying colours. He becomes a lawyer and Surya Baruah's son-in-law as well. He married Baruah's daughter Binu. But it was Baruah's adopted niece Usha who stole his heart. Time and situation prevented both Usha and Bipin from acknowledging their love for each other. Usha never married and Bipin remained mentally incomplete in spite of having a successful career as a lawyer. The other characters too, are incomplete and disturbed. Financial aspect was one factor which affected the lives of characters like Bipin, Hamid, etc. It is worthwhile to note that "Usha" got published in the year 1934. India was still under British colonial rule then. As a colony of the British, India too, felt the brunt of the first World War. Assam too, felt its indirect impact. Furthermore, the struggle for independence was gradually gaining momentum. Bipin's friend Hamid's decision to do farming on his own directs our attention to the immergence of entrepreneurial exercises among the youth.

### **Importance:**

Close look and analysis on the different problems of society could be found in the novels of Dinanath Sarmah. His novel 'Usha' is no exception to this. The problem of village people coming to city and adapting the city life is addressed in the novel 'Usha' which is relevant till date. More over numerous socio-economic conditions depicting the specific period interview gets reflected in the novel. So, this research paper has quite relevance as far as the study of the backdrop of the novel "Usha" is concerned.

### **Objectives:**

This Research Paper aims at the portrayal of the social setup depicted in the novel "Usha." Depiction of relationship between individual and the society is another aspect of the Paper. Complex human relationship and its portrayal is another aspect of the novel.

### **Methodology:**

To carry forward the research entitled "Dinanath Sarmah's 'Usha': A realistic portrayal of Contemporary Society", the methodology of close textual analysis is adopted primarily and on the basis of necessity descriptive method has been also applied.

### **Results and Main discussion:**

As the great Irish-born poet, dramatist and politician W. B. Yeats critiques that "In the great cities we see so little of the world, we drift into our minority. In the little towns and villages, there are no minorities; people are not numerous enough. You must see the world there, perforce. Every man is himself a class; every hour carries its new challenge. When you pass the inn at the end of the village you leave your favourite whimsy behind you; for you will meet no one who can share it. We listen to eloquent speaking, read books and write them, and settle all the affairs of the universe.

Dumb village multitudes pass on unchanging; the feel of the spade in the hand is no different for all our talk: good seasons and bad follow each other as of old. The dumb multitudes are no more concerned with us than is the old horse peering through the rusty gate of the village pound. The ancient map-makers wrote across unexplored regions, 'Here are lions.' Across the villages of fishermen and turners of the earth, so different are these from us, we can write but one line that is certain, 'Here are ghosts.' ("Village Ghosts").

When Bipin arrives in the city, he is unable to cope up with the society there. He is lonely and tries to keep himself occupied with some work or the other. He overcomes his loneliness by writing poems and distances himself from socializing with other people around him. His personal burden prevents him from becoming an outgoing person. This Bipin is in stark contrast from the Bipin of his teenager days who was always full of zeal and jest- "Everyone in the village said that there was none other as zealous and industrious as i. At the school too, i was known for my zeal and activeness. But today I have become unenthusiastic and indifferent. I am the same Bipin, who, once upon a time, forgot hunger due to his active involvement at the meetings- that same Bipin, as of now, harbors a deep contempt towards meetings! If by chance I have but to attend any meeting, I would sit uncomfortably with eyes shut."

(Dinanath Sarmar Upanyas Samagra, pp.4)

An air of melancholy surrounded the protagonist Bipin all throughout the story of the novel. The novelist has not hinted at the root cause of such a state of Bipin's mind. This, directly affected his relationship with his well-wishers and dear ones. A times people misunderstood him. He made no explanation either. An unseen gap was always there between him and the others in society. But he did not bother. His silent attraction towards Usha was never expressed before her. He had to pay a heavy price for his silence for Usha's uncle and his benefactor Surya Baruah have had other practical plans in mind. He was confident of Bipin becoming a lawyer in the long run. He sent a formal proposal of marriage alliance of his daughter Binu with Bipin to Bipin's mother in the village. Bipin's mother knew how the Baruah's have been helping her son in his studies. She had high regard for Mr. Baruah. So, she accepted the marriage proposal of Binu with Bipin. Bipin was in the dark regarding the matter. When he came to know about it he felt aggrieved and helpless. Still he could do nothing. He accepted it as a part of his destiny. Like any other normal girl of her age Binu rejoiced at her good fortune. Usha was a silent spectator to everything. She kept her sadness and frustration to herself. She maintained her stand and even rejected the marriage proposal sent for her from Gajen Phukan. She decided to stay unmarried all her life. Bipin couldn't go against the conventional society. He married Binu and tried to be an ideal husband. But his emotional world was shattered when he came to know of Usha's decision of remaining a spinster all her life. Here we see the traits of a weak individual in Bipin. Compared to him Usha's stand was much bold in a conventional society where a woman's choice was never accepted.

The female protagonist, Usha is a metaphor for village life. She represents the serenity and calmness of village life. Usha is not a real daughter of Baruah. But, Baruah bestows upon her everything whatever he gives Binu, his own daughter. It was Usha who looked to the needs of Bipin which shows the attachment of villagers towards their fellowmen. Her attitude was mild, calm and serene which attracted Bipin towards her naturally. Usha, as a young woman, deciphered Bipin's feelings towards her. She didn't lose her composure though. Similar to Bipin she was indebted to her maternal uncle Surya Baruah. She loved her cousin Binu and wanted to see her happy. So, when the marriage alliance between Binu and Bipin was underway, she resolved to remain silent. In other words, she sacrificed her love to keep Binu happy and contented.

Changing socio-political situation of the country is another aspect of this novel. It is worthwhile to note that this novel was written during the third decade of the twentieth century and published later. The non-cooperation movement started by Mahatma Gandhi gets portrayed in the novel. The character Hamid gets involved in the various protest activities against the British administration. With the changing current of time the masses' attitude towards the non-cooperation movement changed

And people looked upon individuals like Hamid with mistrust. Bipin supported Hamid's actions initially and gave him moral encouragement. With the changing situation destructive activities marred the spirit of the movement. This has been critically observed by the protagonist Bipin. His association with the character Arun Chaliha makes him to view the movement from a different viewpoint. Arun Chaliha joined the non-cooperation movement and was imprisoned. When he was freed from prison he went through a drastic mental change. He realized that if the villages

are not reorganized in a constructive way, then Swaraj will be futile. Attaining independence will be a far cry. In order to fulfill the objectives of Swaraj the villages

Need to be made aware of their economic wellbeing and the virtues of being educated. If these objectives are fulfilled then only one can go for the political movement. Arun Chaliha devoted in opening night schools to educate the adult population and those who are eager to learn. They were taught to be self-sufficient by weaving yarn and made to be socially aware through reading newspapers as mass media was the most powerful medium to educate the masses. Opening Co-operative societies and do farming activities on mass scale was another innovation applied by Chaliha. This is a new message given by the novelist in the novel “Usha”.

### Conclusion:

Portrayal of a society in transition is no easy task. The novelist Dinanath Sarmah has made this formidable task a reality. The social backdrop of the novel “Usha” is the pre independent era and diverse mindset of the people there. Both the good and bad reside in society. It is also necessary that we know about the bad or negative elements in society for it is possible to determine the good when the bad or negative is present in society. The various characters sketched out by the novelist have both these elements. The male protagonist Bipin shuttles between country life and city life. His experiences and realizations are diverse. Country life has taught him human as well as moral values. Whereas city life has taught him the critical part of life where the individual has to fend for himself, he has to fight his own way towards success in life.

Man needs to be practical in the ever-changing dynamics of social life. The protagonist Bipin learnt it the hard way round. In the initial part of the novel, we see him as a romantic idealist to some extent. Gradually with the turn of events and his experience at the external conflict zone of life, he became a changed man and wiser too. Here, we may bring into consideration the title of the novel i.e. “Usha” which literal meaning is the dawn in Assamese. Dawn suggests the notions of illumination and hope, the beginning of a new day and thus a chance for happiness and improvement. In the novel too, this thought echoes at the end of the storyline.

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