

# Exploring Assamese Culture and Identity in Bhabendra Nath Saikia's *The Hour Before Dawn* and S.K Bhuyan's *Studies in the History of Assam*

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## Abstract

This paper aims to explore the identity and culture of Assam through the lens of two of the most phenomenal works of Assam born writers. *The Hour Before Dawn* by Bhabendra Nath Saikia set in rural contemporary Assam alongside S.K Bhuyan's "*Studies in the History of Assam.*" Both these works are by two of the most prolific writers Assam has witnessed. This paper delves into the intricacies of the depiction of Assam in both these texts and brings forth a detailed analysis about culture and identity.

## Introduction

The rich complexion of Assamese literature unfolds the unique cultural and linguistic diversity of the people of Assam. Starting from the impeccably talented Mahapurush Srimanta SankarDev from whom the phenomenal Satriya dance was born to being the house of the one horned rhino, the beauty of Assam welcomes and mesmerizes all that approaches it. This research paper embarks on the journey of exploring the rich cultural, socio-economic as well as the traditional complexities of Assam with reference to the novel "*The Hour before Dawn*" by Bhabendra Nath Saikia and "*Studies in the history of Assam*" by S.K Bhuyan. Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia hailing from Nagaon, Assam is a phenomenal writer and an excellent film maker. Born on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1932, Dr. Saikia completed his PhD in physics in the university of London and further honorary PhD in literature from the university of Dibrugarh Assam. Dr Bhabendra Nath Saikia received many awards throughout his life. He was awarded with the Sahitya Academy Award in 1976, he was also awarded with the prestigious Padma Shri in 2001. He was awarded the *Assam Valley Award* in 1990. Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia's films we loved and acknowledged by viewers. Seven of his films were nominated to the internal film festival in Indian Panorama section. He is popularly known for his works in *Angisnaan*, *Sarothi* and *Abhartan*. Dr Bhabendra Nath Saikia left for his heavenly abode on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2003 Guwahati, Assam. He is continues to live on in the hearts of all Assamese scholars and people of Assam.

Dr. Surya Kumar Bhuyan is a very eminent personality in the field of Assam history. He was a prominent figure in Indian history and his name lives on with us with many valuable works in historical Studies. Dr. Bhuyan being born in a small town in Nagaon, completed his early education in government Institution from his native place as well as "Shillong", the heart of Meghalaya and Cotton college, Guwahati. He further completed his BA Honours and Masters in English literature from presidency college Kolkata. He

later completed his Bachelor of law from Law college, Calcutta University. Later in his life, he was assigned as the professor of English at Cotton university in 1918. As a literature lover, his field gravitate from biographical to historical Studies. He researched and published a significant work on the Ahoms namely, *Ahomar Din*, which described the administrative system of the Ahoms in Assam. Further in 1936, Dr Bhuyan moved to the United Kingdom wherein he joined the “School of Oriental Studies” as well as African Studies. There he worked under the guidance of Professor “H.H. Dowell”. His relatively short stay in UK was impactful to say the least. He worked as Additional Lecturer in Assamese which also gave him the opportunity to work on “old Assam records”. Professor Bhuyan breathed his last on 5th of July 1964 in Guwahati, Assam. Dr. Bhuyan’s departure was a heartfelt loss to the Assamese literature.

### Introduction to the Novels

The Hour Before dawn is a novel set in rural contemporary Assam which gives the essence of everyday life of an Assamese family whereas “Studies in the History of Assam” is a compilation of “historical” essays written by S.K Bhuyan. Now one might question about the choice of the texts, where one being fact another being fiction. William J. Long in his work “*English literature: It’s History and its Significance for the Life of the English-Speaking World*” observes,

“To understand them we must read not simply their history, which records their deeds, but their literature, which records the dreams that made their deeds possible.” (Long, 1909)

In the book “Studies in the history of Assam”, SK Bhuyan explores Assam and its cultural nuances as well as the unspoken history of Assam. He expresses his disappointment in the constant ignorance of Assam. Though things started changing after the European merchants discovered Assam. While things are lot different at today’s times, people from all parts of India come and visit Assam every year. The government with the help of press and publications have significantly given publicity to Assam and its rich culture. Assam was the military base for World War II which resulted in receiving a significant amount of attention through the course of events. People who have visited Assam have been mesmerised by its natural beauty, it’s rich heritage and the simplicity of the inhabitants.

Bhuyan says that people who come to Assam from different parts of India find it very hard to move back to their native places and often choose to settle in Assam permanently such is the beauty of Assam. Throughout the ages, there have been many myths related to Assam, it was believed that Assam houses witchcraft and black magic; Raja Ram Singha of Amber invaded Assam in 1669-71, he brought many Muslim saints to clear Assam of its black magic. Assam was believed to be a place of disease and death; malaria was often associated with Assam. It was believed that Mughal emperors who wanted to get rid of generals or any other man were sent to Assam to die. While there is little to negligible evidence about rumours related to black magic, this stereotype continues to live on. Like Said in his book “Orientalism” talks about the othering process, where the dominant groups construct ideas and notions where the “orient” is mysterious, beastly and abnormal. Such misconceptions often lead to the process of “othering” where the dominant group considers themselves as superior.

Said says,

“The Orient is always seen as the ‘other’, never as an equal.” (Said,1978)

The historical and cultural aspects of Assam have been greatly influenced by its geography. During the British raaj, a British officer suggested that the luscious plains the mighty Brahmaputra and the mountains are what makes Assam a place of importance. The mighty Brahmaputra or Luit flows from one extreme end to another extreme end of Assam. The soil near Luit is Rich in minerals and has been the home of

many inhabitants. These conditions of the river have caused to flourish art and culture. The Brahmaputra is also the hub for commercial exchange.

Bhuyan says,

“Assam is a land of great warriors and kings; like Athenians, Assam is lover of beauty without extravagance. Men who love simplicity over extravagance cannot be citizens of a mean city. Throughout the ages, like Assam has acted; in ideals, branches of mankind and its activities, spiritual and intellectual aspects tell us the highest objective of the inhabitants of Assam”. (Bhuyan, 1965)

*The Hour before dawn* was developed after meticulous research work and lot of observation. Bhabendra Nath Saikia drew inspiration from his homeland Assam and its cultural as well as social aspects to reflect in the novel. The novel explores various complicated themes like themes of betrayal, themes of identity social change etc. The novel skilfully delves into the complex ideas of relationships, conflicts between traditional values and modernity, struggle for identity with a changing environment. The novel explores the cultural nuances of Assam, it addresses issues of gender, caste and class. Being a native to Assam, Saikia drew a of inspirations from various native folklore, myths, tales and historical affairs to create the characters and the story lime of the novel. The novel also depicts the authors understanding of the period in which the novel is based. It reflects the perspective of the author about the social and Cultural dynamics around Assam.

### **About Assam**

Assam is one of the seven sister states in the northeastern regions of India. The seven sisters are known for their diverse culture and ethnicity. The calculate which has moulded the history and culture of Assam is its topographical circumstance. Assam is surrounded by fertile plains, hills and thick forests. The Brahmaputra among the largest rivers of the world flows through the heart of Assam which has shaped the landscape of the state. The troopers who travel in and out of Assam, have used the the Brahmaputra for transport. It has been a sacrosanct outlet for travellers going to the heavenly hallowed places of India. It has served as the lifeline of Assam and has contributed to the ripeness and verdure of its soil. The tributaries have served as riparian supply routes of the fundamental channel. The tribes chose to settle in the hilly areas near the Brahmaputra to suit their lifestyle. While the tribals live in the hills, their bonds with the people of the plains have been strong since time immemorial. This bond is discovered from tribal man who address the hilly inhabitants by the word “Mita” which means a companion, being inferred from the Sanskrit word Mitra, This Mita-hood has served as the image of unflinching understanding between individuals living in the plains and their brothers and sisters living in the hills. It must not be assumed that the tribals only live in the hilly regions. They inhabit the plains too where they follow their customs and traditions of the hills.

Assam houses many ethnic groups such as the *Bodo*, *Rabha*, *Miri*, *Karbi*, *Kachari* and majorly the Assamese. Festivals like Bihu, Baisagu, Baikhu reflects the cultural heritage of Assam. The unique cuisine, handicraft and the Assam silk is famous all over India. The ‘Assam Lemon’ or the *Kaji Nemu* in native language has been recognised throughout the world and has been named as the state fruit of Assam. Agriculture is the backbone of Assam. Assam houses the largest tea plantation in Asia called the Monabarie Tea Estate. Assam tea is loved globally and among the largest premium tea manufacturers. Assam is also among the largest producers of rice in India. Assam also houses many oil and gas industries. The Digboi Refinery established in 1901 is the first refinery and the oldest existing in India.

Assam is highly acclaimed for its tourism too. The beauty and the wildlife of Assam attracts numerous tourists across the globe. Many national parks such as the Kaziranga national park, Manas national park, Raimoma national park, Dihing Patkau national parks are among the top national parks of India wherein Kaziranga national park houses the famous one horned rhino. Majuli is the largest river island in the world. Historical sites such as Rong Ghor, Kareng Ghor, Talatal Ghor and Kamkhya temple are globally recognised sites attracting millions of tourists every year.

### Literature Review

“Studies in the history of Assam” is the combination of a weekly articles published by Dr SK Bhuyan. While there aren’t many works published on Assamese literature, the few we find are worth appreciating. *Ahomor Din* by Dr SK Bhuyan which describes the *Ahom* dynasty was Published in 1918. It is a small work but of great significance. Another historical account by Dr Bhuyan the *Jaymati Upākhyān*, has been written in traditional language, metre and style. Another text which paved the way for Dr Bhuyan to be a great historian was *Early British Relations with Assam* Published n 1927. His thesis *Anglo-Assamese Relations* which Dr Bhuyan wrote for his PhD degree was approved in 1938.

Another notable work on Assam namely *History of Assam* by Edward Gait 1906 talks about Assam and it’s immigration. Assam witnessed immigrations of Aryans, Mongolian, Dravidians, Bengali etc. Most of the invasion of Pathans, Mughal, Greeks entered India Through Assam. The work *Transitional Aspects of indigenous people Northeast India* discusses the importance of the originality of the indigenous people and their culture in the north-eastern parts of India. The book is by Dipannita Chakraborty and Rita Das Nayak published in 2022. Dr Dipannita Chakraborty is a reputed educator with more than 34 years of teaching experience. Her interests broadly covers the history and Research of north east India. She has written many books and Co-authored in many more. She is currently the principal of Government degree college situated in tripura. She is also the the member of Education council as well as Vice president of tripura board of secondary education. Dr Rita Das Nayak is presently the principal of Netaji Subhash Mahavidyalaya in Tripura. She previously used to be an Associate professor in the same. She has teaching experience of over 3 decades. She joined various colleges as guest Faculty. She was the hod of the department of geography in Agartala Women’s college. She was head of the department of another college which is MBB college in Agartala. She taught in both graduation and post graduation level in Tripura University. She has been a brilliant student in her early life. She completed her M.Phil with first class from Delhi School of Economics. She completed her PhD from Calcutta University. She as had specialization ion the subjects Geology and Environment geography. She has written the *Bhugol Parichay* under the board of Secondary education.

Another notable work on “Assamese literature”, the “*History of Assamese Literature*”, by Birinchi Kumar Barua explores the deeper roots of Assamese literature. The text was was originally published in the year 1964 and later Published by Sahitya Akademi in 2003. The text delves deep into the origin of Assamese poetry, drama and prose. The text also explores the growth of Assamese literature under the Ahom rule and the influence of Ahoms in contemporary Assamese literature. Birinchi Kumar Barua was born in 16 October, 1908 in Parigudam, Assam. He is a notable folklorist, playwright, novelist, historian, linguist as well as an educationist in Assam. He has given many significant works such as *Studies in Early Assamese Literature* (1952), *A Cultural History of Assam* (1951), *Modern Assamese Literature* (1957)

*Sankaradeva, Vaishnava Saint of Assam* (1960), *Early Geography of Assam* (1952) *Temples and Legends of Assam*, *History of Assamese Literature* (1964). Birinchi Kumar Barua is one of the many founders of Guwahati University. He received the prestigious *Sakitya Akademi Award* in 1964.

### **Social Change and Representation**

*The Hour Before Dawn* by Bhabendra Nath Saikia investigates social changes and representations in the setting of Assam. The novel digs into the complex socio-cultural texture of Assam, delineating the affect of verifiable occasions on the lives of the characters and the community. Saikia depicts the wealthy social differences of Assam, outlining how different communities coexist and associated. The novel emphasises the concordance that can exist in the midst of assorted social foundations. The story weaves through critical authentic occasions, such as the Assam Disturbance, giving experiences into how these occasions shape the social character and values of the characters. The novel investigates the pressure between conventional values and the powers of advancement. Characters hook with changing standards, reflecting the broader social shifts happening in Assam. Saikia dives into the complicated connections inside communities, exhibiting how shared histories, conventions, and social ties impact interpersonal dynamics. The novel distinctively speaks to Assamese celebrations and ceremonies, giving a see into the social hones that contribute to the personality of the community. Migration is a subject in the novel, and it reflects the social alterations and changes experienced by people and communities as they move between locales. The utilize of dialect and communication in the novel reflects the etymological differences of Assam. It investigates how dialect is a vital angle of social identity. The novel addresses intimate desires in contrast with societal norms, shedding light on how social standards impact the lives of ladies and men in Assam. In substance, *The Hour Before Dawn* gives a nuanced depiction of social change by interlacing individual stories with broader verifiable and social settings, contributing to a multifaceted understanding of Assam's social evolution.

"*Studies in the History of Assam*" by Surya Kumar Bhuyan centres on authentic examination or maybe than anecdotal representation, but it does give bits of knowledge into the social changes and representations in Assam over time. Here are a few angles related to social change and representation found in Bhuyan's work:

Bhuyan's chronicled investigation reflects the differing social impacts that molded Assam, counting commitments from different ethnic bunches, religions, and conventions. The work investigates how social amalgamation happened over diverse verifiable periods.

The book examines the advancement of religions in Assam, such as the impact of Hinduism, Buddhism, and other innate conviction frameworks. It investigates how devout hones and convictions changed over time.

Bhuyan's verifiable considers many dives into the social affect of diverse traditions and rulers on Assam, analyzing how political changes affected social hones, craftsmanship, and societal standards. The book may touch upon the phonetic differing qualities of Assam and the part of dialect in forming social personality. It examine the improvement of Assamese writing and its importance in protecting social heritage.

Bhuyan's work highlight occasions of social versatility amid challenging periods, such as intrusions, wars, or colonial run the show. This flexibility may be reflected in social hones, conventions, and social structures.



The authentic examination investigates how exchange courses and social trades with neighboring locales affected Assam's social scene, cultivating a mix of conventions and ideas.

The book addresses the advancement of social structures and chains of command in Assam, shedding light on caste frameworks, course divisions, and their affect on social representation. Bhuyan examines the aesthetic and engineering legacy of Assam, analyzing how social values are communicated through craftsmanship shapes, landmarks, and structures. The book covers the social affect of British colonial run the show on Assam, investigating how colonial arrangements and intelligent affected nearby traditions, conventions, and social practices.

While "*Studies in the History of Assam*" fundamentally centres on verifiable angles, the social changes and representations can be gathered from the relevant data given by Bhuyan in his examinations of diverse chronicled periods in Assam.

### Exploring Migration and its challenges

Migration has been an issue in Assam since time immemorial. The issues relating to migration has been intricately described in the novel "The hour before Dawn" by Bhabendra Nath Saikia. While we delve into the lives of the family of the protagonist Menoka, Saikia takes a creative approach to highlight the issues of migration. There are many reasons to migration, some being political changes, family dispute, in a search of better opportunity and livelihood as well as displacement.

Saikia depicts the lives of people and families who are displaced out of their homes for superficial reasons and political unrest. The novel depicts the emotional turmoil people go through because of displacement. The novel also explores characters who migrate for economic hardships. Characters are uprooted out of their homes for better opportunities and livelihood. Characters lose their roots in the process, and this further causes emotional challenges.

To Freud,

"Displacement is the principle means used in the dream-distortion to which the dream-thoughts must submit under the influence of the censorship" ("New Introductory Lectures" 22.21)

While many do find a better place and opportunities through migration, many don't. This leads to different emotional outbursts.

Saikia's work also depicts how family disputes lead to displacement and migration. The protagonist Menoka even though close with her brother in law's wife had to bid them goodbye because of family dispute. Menoka's husband and her brother in law failed to get into a mutual agreement and understanding which let Rotnokanto and his wife leave to a different place.

A line from the novel depicting this issue-

"Rotnokanto, however, refused to live in the house in constant fear of his younger brother Mohikanto. He bought a bigha of land in the bamboo grove beyond the station and constructed a bamboo-and-thatch house on it. About two years after Mohikanto's wedding, he moved there with his wife and children. The day they were leaving, Menoka took her sister-in-law aside and said to her, 'Please don't hold this against me.' Rotnokanto's wife wiped tears with one hand as the other held Menoka's." (Bhuyan, 1965)

As Bhuyan's works are mostly historical than fictional, the text "*Studies in the history of Assam*" delves deeply into the nuances of the issues of migration throughout, from contemporary times to the ancient Assam. Bhuyan discusses the consequences, causes as well as the patterns of migration. Bhuyan describes how the rulers from the mainstream india sent the generals who they wanted to get rid of to Assam. Assam

was known as the place of death because of its humid and moist weather. Many people die while their visit to Assam because of the weak immunity towards Assam's weather.

Bhuyan describes the migrants of ancient Assam. He gives an in-depth description of the Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Burman group, Dravidian tribes as well as the Austro-Asiatic people. Bhuyan also discusses the medieval migration and the dynastic shifts. Bhuyan discusses the movement of rulers, conquerors as well as traders. The mighty Ahom dynasty was formed by the migration of present-day Myanmar settlers.

Bhuyan further discusses the migration of colonial era. Bhuyan elaborates on the migration which caused by colonial rule for cultivation. The text explores the indentured labourers transported to Assam for agriculture and tea cultivation. Bhuyans work further explores the post independence migration as well as refugee placement. Many migrations occurred after the Partition which resulted of people to migrate from the East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh) to Assam. This caused immense political and social unrest among the communities of Assam.

### **Unveiling Female Representation**

Bhabendra Nath Saikia's *The hour before dawn* circulates around a female protagonist Menoka. Saikia does an excellent job in exposing the patriarchal world through his works. He intricately carves Menoka's character in such a way that it voices the women feministic views of Assam. Menoka is an absolute family-oriented women and religiously does every work she is expected to do. While Menoka obeys her husband and the elders in the house, Mohikanto decision to remarry shatters her to the core and shakes her entirely. Menoka is at the loss of understanding. She finds herself question. She questions her role in the household. Even though Menoka belongs to a very orthodox family her opinions are bold and she stands by it. Menoka refrained herself from conversing with Mohikanto. She shows Empowerment and agency in her actions. Menoka strongly opined on Mohikanto's decision.

Menoka says "She had given Mohikanto four children; had bared her body and soul to this man; yet—yet why did he want to remarry?" (Saikia, 2009)

Menoka shows resilience throughout the novel. Even though deeply heartbroken by the Mohikanto's actions, she refuses to give into Mohikanto's advances. Mohikanto a man who treats women fairly as object fails to see Menoka's worth. He justifies his actions to Menoka.

Mohikanto says "What's so great about this? Hm? What's so great? What did King Dasharath do? Did anybody utter a word? What did Manmohan Sirostadar do? He took the elder one's jewellery, got it remade and used it to marry the younger one. And if the younger one had allowed him to remake her jewellery, he would have married another—of course he would. Good! If you have enough to feed and clothe yourself with, the household should be teeming with people" (Saikia, 2009)

He further continues to pass misogynistic comments. He justifies his actions by commenting on Menoka's body.

He further says, "Why is your flesh withering? At this rate, who will look at you after a while?.....At worst, what could happen? There will be one extra woman in the house. So what? Last month I bought the new cow, right? So—what happened? Did the cowshed sink to hell" (Saikia, 2009)

Mohikanto believes women to be a mere object in the house. He believes women, the more the better in the house. He treats women has inferior to him as a man.

Simone de beauvoir opines –

“Woman is shut up in a kitchen or in a boudoir, and astonishment is expressed that her horizon is limited. Her wings are clipped, and it is found deplorable that she cannot fly. Let but the future be opened to her, and she will no longer be compelled to linger in the present.” (The Second Sex, 1949)

Therefore, we can say that Saikia was a feminist himself, through his depiction of Menoka we come to the conclusion that he was against the patriarchal framework of the society. He strongly opposed the suppression of women and prioritising man in the society.

As we delve into the works of S.K Bhuyan, we discover that Bhuyan does a great job in highlighting women of History. He mentions the great women and their deeds in his work “*Studies in the history of Assam*”.

Bhuyan opines-

“The history of Assam abounds in examples of womanly courage and determination.....Mula Gabharu, who rushed to the thick of the contest, sword in hand, to avenge the death of her husband in the war with the Padshah of Gaur, and died, like Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, fighting in the battlefield.” (Bhuyan, 1965)

Bhuyan does a commendable job in depicting the the courage and resilience of women I’m the history of Assam. He talks about *Nangbakla Gabharu* who snatched her son from the grips of Koch general who aimed to send him as hostage to “Cooch behar”. She says-

“Give me your battle-dress, and I shall fight. You will then know whether I am a man or a woman. You can send my son only if you can make the Dikhow river flow up the current.” (Bhuyan, 1965)

Bhuyan further mentions the courageous Joymoti , an Ahom princess and the wife of Gadapani Konwar. Joymoti refused to give up the location of her fugitive husband and also for the establishment of a peaceful Nation. Joymoti was tortured for 14 days after which she succumbed to the harrowing torture. She was the mother of two and was pregnant when she was tortured. Joymoti till date remains the epitome of courage and sacrifice. She is popularly known as “Soti-Joymoti”.

Another mention of women’s bravery and patriotism in Bhuyan’s work is about Ramani Gabharu. Ramani Gabharu was the wife Muhammad Azam Shah and tbe daughter in law If Aurangzeb. She was the daughter of king Jayadhvaj Singhs. Though a mughal daughter in law, Ramani was true to her Nation and a trye patriot. When her uncle Laluk Barphuksn compared to surrender Guwahati to Mughals treacherous, Ramani Gabharu wrote a letter to her uncle while living in the Mughal Palace. She warmed her uncle to refrain from this treacherous act and be a tractor to his motherland.

### **Cultural mosaic of Assam as depicted in the novels**

The novel “The Hour Before dawn” by Bhabendra Nath Saikia is set in a rural setting of Assamese village. The novel explores a multitude of Assamese Culture. Saikia does an excellent job in portrayal of the minute and intricate details of Assam. The protagonist *Menoka* comes from an Assamese family and is married to an Assamese family. Menoka through displays the nuances of Assamese Culture. Saikia with his brilliance has formed all the characters in such a way that the readers get an in-depth understanding of Assamese Culture and people.

The novel mentions a lot of cultures and festivals that are native to Assam. The novel starts with the description of the nature and the subtle swaying of areca leaf fans. Areca leaf fans are an integral part of Assamese household, it’s a must in every Assamese household. Before the arrival of fans to houses, areca leaf fans were the only relief from the scorching heat of summer. The novel further describes the preparation of festivals by chopping woods and making saucers out of banana stems which are called



*dona*. *Dona* is used in every ritual and worship ceremonies. Betel leaf and nut are an integral part of Assamese Culture. This culture is also honoured in Saikia's novel. Commonly known as *tamulpaan* is eaten after meal or is offered during the invitation of marriages. The kids being fed beaten rice and curd by Menoka, also known as *Doi Seera* in Assamese is a favourite to every Assamese.

Further, the novel portrays the consumption of *Khisri* in banana leaves. Banana leaves in Assam have been used as plates for consuming meals way longer before sustainability and boycotting plastic was in trend. Saikia also uses many terminologies that are only found in Assam. For example the term *nahar*, *kadamba*, *mekhela sador*. The names of the character represent Assamese names and culture eg Menoka, Mohikanto, Jogeswari, Rotnokanto, Ghanakanta, Lokkhi and Bipin etc.

This can be related to the theory of language and identity popularized by Josbua Fishman and William Labov. The theory of language loyalty can be seen in the novel applied by Saikia,

*"Language loyalty is the commitment to speaking and writing in a language that is native or inherited by a person. It is a way of maintaining cultural heritage and is often seen as a sign of respect for the language and its culture."* (Encyclopaedia of Psychology, 2023)

The novel also describes the innocence of rural Assam. Below is a sentence that describes the innocence of the Assamese kids,

*"An earthy, unpaved street. In winter, it gets coated with an ankle-deep layer of dust. Every time a bullock cart passes by, the houses across the street become invisible for a very long time. Bare-bodied young boys, among them Podmo, Gojen and Nitai's sons, dressed in torn button-less half-pants tucked on to their waists, sometimes line up and kick the dust in sport"* (Saikia, 2009)

Saikia gives the readers depiction of Assamese marriage and rituals. Assamese marriages are simple and elegant. The novel describes the turmeric preparation for the ritual bath of the groom. Grooms and brides dress in elegant silk kurtas and *mekhela sador* which is native to Assam. Furthermore, the local bands which play the music. Catering services were not a thing in rural Assam. When there is any ritual or ceremony in someone's house, the entire village gathers up to help in the preparation. Dowry in Assam is not a ritual, but brides come to their new homes with a load of goods sent by her parents. All sorts of goods arrive from the bride's house like furniture, gold, silver, silk clothes, food, vehicle for the groom etc. The couple after marriage have to greet and welcome their relatives to seek blessings by offering them silk and areca.

Women in Assam are especially known for long and lustrous hair. Menoka for example the protagonist of the novel has waist length hair. Women had a lot of restrictions and limitations. Menstrual cycle for example is in itself a task for women in Assam. The rules are extremely difficult and restrict women for almost all actions during the course of 3 days. Women are to not touch and use any material in the house. This can be figured out from the line below-

*"Their mothers use the straw to scour vessels. In a couple of homes, once a considerable amount is gathered, the women use it to make their 'monthly' beds, burning it in the morning to warm themselves up."* (Saikia, 2009)

Dr S.k Bhuyan has given many notable works to Assam. His works on Assam's history and culture are important and scholars refer him till date. In his work the *Studies in the history of Assam*, Bhuyan has accurately described Assam and its culture starting from Assamese music, to its tribes, to the royals or be it the geographical aspects.

Bhuyan talks about the variety and the uniqueness of the Assamese music. The Assamese music wonderfully describes the tapestry of Assamese Culture. Men, women and children all participate in music

and create their own hymns which describe the emotions of the people. Bhuyan describes the variety of music such as “*Bihu gits, Ai Nams, Bia Nams, Huchari Kirtans, Bahua Kirtan, Baramati git*” etc. *Bihu git* and *Huchari* are celebratory songs which people from Assam sing and dance to during bihu, whereas *Nams* are very occasion specific. For example, *Bia Nam* are sang by women during marriages. Some other songs that convey religious beliefs are *Jikris* and *Deha-Bicharar Git*.

Bhuyan says-

“The Vaisnava reformers of Assam adopted songs as one of the mediums for the transmission of their message.....The Adhikar of a Vaisnava Satra in Assam has to give proof of his poetical and musical talents by composing a drama”. (Bhuyan, 1965)

Bhuyans says that every piece of ancient poetry that has been composed where written in “*Pad, Dulari, Chai, Lehari or Totaya*” can be made into music.

Assam also witnessed the birth of legendary Srimanta SankarDev, son to Kusumbar Bhuyan and Satyasandgya Devi. SankarDev started writing poems as young as the age of 12. His first poem *Karatala Kamala* was written when he learned the alphabet. He advocated for the *Ekasana* faith. He gave the music form *Borgeet* and the recognised classical dance of Assam *Satriya*.

Further Bhuyan says that Assam doesn't have any specific class for weaving. Every family has a weaver.

Bhuyan says,

“A unique feature of Assamese society is the absence of any specific class reserved only for weaving. Every Assamese woman, be she the daughter of a Brahman or a Sudra, a Buddhist or an animist, a Muhammadan or a Christian, a prince or a beggar, is a weaver by birth. A knowledge of weaving is an essential qualification for her, while proficiency in the art ensures for her a ready disposal in the matrimonial market. An Assamese maiden of the marriageable age, tarrying long in her mother's roof, is not a financial burden to her parents.” (Bhuyan, 1965)

## Conclusion

*The Hour Before Dawn* initially titled “Antoreep” in Assamese, is a piercing and thought-provoking novel by Bhabendra Nath Saikia, unbelievably deciphered into English by Maitreyee S.C. At its center, the novel dives into the complexities of familial connections, the versatility of the human soul, and the societal standards that shape individuals' lives.

The protagonist, Menoka, finds herself at the centre of a violent storm when her spouse remarries, modifying the direction of her life significantly. As the mother of four children, Menoka is abruptly gone up against with the cruel substances of deserting and disloyalty. Saikia skillfully depicts Menoka's travel as she navigates through the enthusiastic change caused by her husband's decision. One of the novel's central topics is the versatility and quality of ladies in the confront of misfortune. In spite of the challenges tossed her way, Menoka illustrates momentous backbone as she endeavours to revamp her life and give for her children. Through Menoka's character, Saikia highlights the unstoppable soul of ladies who deny being characterised by their circumstances.

Furthermore, *The Hour Before Dawn* offers a significant commentary on the societal desires and sexual standards predominant in Indian society. Menoka's battles serve as a reflection of the systemic treacheries confronted by endless ladies, especially those from marginalised communities. Saikia deftly investigates the complexities of patriarchy and its affect on women's lives, encouraging perusers to address and challenge winning social constructs. Additionally, the novel gives bits of knowledge into the complexities of familial bonds and the persevering control of cherish. In spite of the breaks inside her family, Menoka's

unflinching dedication to her children remains unflinching, serving as a source of quality and comfort in the midst of the chaos. Saikia's nuanced depiction of familial elements includes profundity to the account, emphasizing the noteworthiness of human association in times of crisis.

In conclusion *The Hour Before Dawn* is a compelling investigation of cherish, misfortune, and flexibility in the confront of misfortune. Through the character of Menoka, Bhabendra Nath Saikia offers perusers a strong depiction of the human involvement, reminding us of the transformative control of trust and diligence. Maitreyee's interpretation guarantees that the novel's wealthy account and significant topics reverberate with perusers past phonetic and social boundaries.

SK Bhuyan's "*Studies in the History of Assam*" is a seminal work that digs into the social and authentic setting of Assam, advertising important bits of knowledge into the region's past. To get it Bhuyan's work, it's basic to investigate the social and chronicled scenery against which it was written. Assam, found in the northeastern portion of India, gloats a wealthy and different social legacy molded by centuries of interaction with different ethnic bunches, kingdoms, and realms. The history of Assam can be followed back to old times when it was occupied by different innate tribes and ethnic communities. Over the centuries, Assam seen the rise and drop of a few capable lines, counting the Ahoms, the Kochs, and the Kamata kingdom, each taking off a significant affect on the region's culture, society, and politics. Bhuyan's work is established in this authentic setting, as he fastidiously analyzes the different angles of Assam's history, extending from its early beginnings to the colonial period and past. His investigation is educated by a profound understanding of the socio-cultural flow that formed Assamese society over the centuries. One of the key topics investigated by Bhuyan is the impact of Buddhism and Hinduism on the social scene of Assam. He follows the spread of these religions in the locale and their affect on craftsmanship, engineering, writing, and social traditions. Bhuyan ponders highlights the syncretic nature of Assamese culture, which reflects a mix of innate conventions with outside influences.

Moreover, Bhuyan sheds light on the political history of Assam, especially the rise of the Ahom line, which played a significant part in forming the region's fate for about six centuries. He analyses the regulatory structure of the Ahom kingdom, its military ability, and its relations with neighbouring states. Bhuyan's investigation offers important bits of knowledge into the variables that contributed to the Ahom's rise to control and their possible decay in the confront of outside threats.

Furthermore, Bhuyan's work examines the affect of colonialism on Assam and its individuals. He fundamentally analyses the arrangements of British colonial rulers and their results for Assamese society, economy, and culture. Bhuyan moreover highlights the part of innate resistance developments against colonial misuse, such as the Revolt of 1857 and the Assam Tea Tribes' Work Union.

In expansion to political and devout viewpoints, Bhuyan's work investigates the scholarly and imaginative conventions of Assam. He analyzes the commitments of Assamese writers, journalists, and researchers to the improvement of territorial writing and the conservation of innate social legacy. Bhuyan's work underscores the significance of writing and craftsmanship as vehicles for communicating personality, values, and aspirations.

Overall, SK Bhuyan's "*Studies in the History of Assam*" gives a comprehensive diagram of Assam's social and verifiable advancement, advertising profitable experiences into the region's past. His fastidious inquire about, combined with a nuanced understanding of socio-cultural elements, makes this work a seminal commitment to the think about of Assamese history and culture.

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