
Assamese Science Fiction literature as a New Literary Consciousness

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Abstract

The tradition of science fiction in Assamese literature can be traced back to 1937, when it first appeared in the literary magazine Abahan. Hariprasad Barua's Birchatiar Desh is regarded as one of the pioneering works that initiated the tradition of science fiction writing in Assamese. Subsequently, science fiction expanded into other literary forms, including drama and novels etc. Several prominent writers such as Dinesh Chandra Goswami, Bandita Phukan, Abhijit Sharma Baruah and Ranju Hazarika, have contributed significantly to this genre by producing stories and novels that explore diverse aspects of science, technology and human life. Through their creative contributions, they have enriched and broadened the scope of Assamese literature. In the contemporary Assamese literary landscape, science fiction has emerged as an important and established literary genre, reflecting the evolving relationship between scientific thought, technological advancement, and literary imagination.

Keywords: Assamese, Science Fiction, SF, Literary

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Robert A. Heinlein, Science fiction is “realistic speculation about possible future events, based solidly on adequate knowledge of the real world, past and present, and on a thorough understanding of the nature and significance of the scientific method. To make this definition cover all science fiction (instead of ‘almost all’) it is necessary only to strike out the word “future” (Knight 9). Science fiction (SF) literature is primarily concerned with storytelling, with science serving as its foundation. These stories may be set in the past, present, or future and are often based on scientific theories, discoveries, or possibilities. Science fiction is therefore a distinct genre of fiction grounded in scientific concepts and intended to present possibilities that appear plausible to its readers.

Some scholars trace the origins of science fiction to ancient works such as the Babylonian epic *Gilgamesh*. Similarly, many people in India regard the Vedas as precursors to modern science and technology because they contain ideas that may resemble concepts found in science fiction. However, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, written in 1816 and published in 1818, is widely regarded as a foundational work of modern science fiction. *Frankenstein* exemplifies many of the essential characteristics of the genre. Other works, such as Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Voltaire’s *Micromegas* (1752), and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), may also be considered early examples of science fiction. However, contemporary readers and critics did not necessarily classify these works as science fiction, partly because the genre had not yet acquired literary recognition or prestige.

It was until the late nineteenth century that authors such as Jules Verne and H. G. Wells began producing works that were more distinctly associated with science fiction. The first dedicated science fiction magazine, *Stella*, was launched in Sweden in April 1886. However, science fiction did not become widely recognized as a distinct literary category until 1926, when Hugo Gernsback published *Amazing Stories* in the United States. The magazine, launched in April 1926, was devoted exclusively to science fiction stories and novels. Despite Gernsback’s efforts to promote the genre, some literary critics initially dismissed the quality of the magazine’s content, considering its stories, illustrations, and cover art to be of low literary quality. Nevertheless, Gernsback played a crucial role in popularizing the term “science fiction” and establishing the genre as a recognizable literary category. This development continued with the establishment of *Astounding Science Fiction*, which published works by prominent authors such as John W. Campbell, Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, L. Ron Hubbard, and Robert A. Heinlein. The skilful storytelling of writers such as Robert A. Heinlein contributed significantly to establishing science fiction as an important literary genre.

Jagadish Chandra Bose is widely regarded as one of the earliest Indian science fiction writers. His Bengali story ‘Niruddeshar Kahini’ (1896), translated as ‘The Story of the Missing One’, is considered an early example of Indian science fiction. He later revised the story and included it in his collection *Abyakta* (1921) under the alternative title ‘Palatak Toofan’ (‘Runaway Cyclone’). The story incorporates several characteristics of science fiction and reflects the early development of the genre in India. During the same period, other notable works appeared in Indian languages. These included Nath Madhav’s Marathi novel *Srinivasa Rao* (1908) and Shridhar Balkrishna Renade’s *Tereche Hasya* (*Laughter of a Star*, 1911). In Kerala, the magazine *Kerala Kokil* also contributed to the development of science-fiction literature by publishing translations of Jules Verne’s *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. Later, in 1963, Akash Sen, the pen name of Adrish Bardhan, launched *Ashchorjo*, which became the first Bengali science fiction magazine in India.

1.1 Methodology

The methodology adopted for the study, titled “Assamese Science Fiction literature as a New Literary

Consciousness” is primarily analytical. The study examines the historical development and contemporary scenario of Assamese science fiction by analyzing relevant literary texts, scholarly works, and other related sources. The discussion seeks to present the original content of the selected works through an analytical approach and to interpret their significance on the basis of knowledge gained from relevant books and other available sources. This methodology helps to identify the major characteristics, themes, developments, and contributions of Assamese science fiction literature within the broader context of Indian science fiction.

1.2 Objectives:

- A. To trace the origin and development of Assamese science fiction and examine its emergence as a distinct literary form.
- B. To analyze the relationship between science, technology and literary imagination in Assamese science-fiction literature.
- C. To study the contribution of major Assamese science-fiction writers towards the development of this literary genre.

2. ANALYSIS ABOUT THE TREND AND TENDENCY OF ASSAMESE SF LITERATURE

Although Assamese science fiction (SF) has its roots in traditional folk narratives, its formal literary history is relatively recent. The first recognized SF story in Assamese literature is Saurav Kumar Chaliha's 'Awaaz' ('Voice'), although it was not initially identified as science fiction. Earlier, in 1946, Kumudeshwar Barthakur published a short book titled *Atom Boma (Atomic Bomb)*. However, its narrative elements are considered closer to fantasy than to science fiction. Nevertheless, the book is regarded as one of the earliest attempts at SF in Assamese literature (Goswami 22).

2.1 Origin and Development of Assamese SF Literature

The emergence of science fiction as a distinct genre in Assamese literature can be traced to the fourth decade of the twentieth century. Over time, Assamese SF developed into various literary forms, including novels, short stories, and plays etc. The history of Assamese science fiction can broadly be divided into two major periods:

- A. The pre-independence period and
- B. The post-independence period.

Although very few works of Assamese SF were produced before independence, the works that did emerge during this period were of considerable literary merit. The first Assamese science-fiction (SF) story, titled 'Microscope Aru Eta Nisthur Lorar Kotha' ('The Microscope and the Cruel Boy'), was published in *Orunodoi* in September 1853. Another early science-fiction story appeared in *Usha*, edited by Padmanath Gohain Barua. Ambikanath Bora's 'Chandralukoloi Gomon' ('Going to the Moon') was serialized from the third to the seventh issue of the first part of the journal. The story describes the journey of a man who reaches the Moon by being fired from a cannon inside a bullet, reflecting the emerging theme of space exploration in early Assamese literature. In 1914, Ambikagiri Raichoudhury suggested that human beings should colonize other planets in his essay 'Jagatar Ses Adarsha Aru Biswasanti Sthapanor Pathot' ('On the Way to Establishing the World's Ultimate Ideals and World Peace'). Thus, it is evident that elements of science fiction were already present in Raichoudhury's work, at a time when space exploration itself was still in its infancy.

2.1.1 Assamese Science Fiction-Based Stories

During the pre-independence period, *Abahan* played a significant role in the development and

publication of Assamese science fiction (SF) literature. Notably, the seventh issue of the magazine's eighth year featured Hariprasad Barua's story 'Birchatiar Desh' (1937, 'Birchatiar's country'/'The Country of Birchatia'), which is often regarded as the first Assamese SF story. The narrative centres on Faguna, the protagonist, who experiences a dream in which he has a telephone conversation with an inhabitant of Jupiter after consuming cannabis obtained from a Shiva temple priest in Dergaon.

In 1938, Nagendra Narayan Choudhury's 'Rasayan' ('Chemistry') was also published in *Abahan*. Some critics argue that Birchatiar Desh does not fully satisfy the defining characteristics of science fiction. Consequently, Rasayan is often considered the first genuine SF story in Assamese literature. The story features Dr. Phukan, who, after conducting extensive chemical research, attempts to reverse the ageing process in an elderly man by administering a rejuvenating substance prepared from monkey-gland extract. Instead of simply restoring the man's youth, however, the substance causes his body and behavior to regress to those of a child. Despite attempts to reverse the transformation, the man eventually returns to an elderly state and ultimately transforms into a monkey, climbing onto a tree. Through this unusual narrative, Rasayan explores the possibilities of modern medical science while also drawing attention to the achievements of ancient medical knowledge. The story is therefore regarded as a significant example of genuine Assamese science fiction.

Other notable pre-independence Assamese SF works include Kumudeshwar Barthakur's 'Atom Boma' ('Atom Bomb'), which was influenced by Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories. The story revolves around a plot to construct and detonate an atomic bomb in Guwahati. Included in the *Gulai Series*, Atom Boma portrays the creation of an atomic bomb in Guwahati and its subsequent detonation in the highlands of Meghalaya. The story reflects the widespread global awareness of nuclear warfare during the Second World War. The use of atomic bombs against Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan brought the devastating consequences of nuclear weapons to international attention, resulting in the deaths of numerous people and leaving a lasting impact on societies around the world.

In the post-independence period, Assamese science fiction (SF) literature witnessed considerable diversity and innovation. Sourav Kumar Chaliha, whose real name was Surendra Nath Medhi, emerged as one of the most prominent figures in the genre. His story 'Awaaz' ('Voice'), published in 1950, is regarded as a landmark in the development of modern Assamese SF. The story was later published under the title 'Mininoise' in the Sharadiya issue of *Assam Batari* on October 16, 1966. According to Dinesh Chandra Goswami, Awaaz marked the beginning of genuine modern SF story in Assamese literature. The first part of the story presents a grim depiction of noise pollution, while the second part focuses on the invention of a device called "Shabdalin" or "Mininoise" designed to control noise pollution in the near future. Chaliha made significant contributions to Assamese SF through several other stories, including 'Uparot' ('Above', 1963), 'Ses Anurodh' ('Last Request', 1993), 'Marudyan' ('Oasis', 2008), 'Chintar Beg Kiman' ('How Much Is the Speed of Thought?'), and 'Mahakashat Pranar Sandhan' ('The Search for Life in Space'). His innovative approach and contemporary style brought a new dimension to the Assamese literary scene. This transformation was particularly evident in his story 'Ashanta Electron', published in *Ramdheni*.

Chaliha's works explore a wide range of scientific, philosophical, and human concerns. Uparot, for instance, examines medical treatment in artificial-gravity chambers and explores the possibilities of future medical advancements. Ses Anurodh focuses on the relationship between humans and artificial intelligence, particularly through the protagonist's interaction with a personal assistant robot named Karel. The story explores themes of human-robot relationships, loneliness, human emotions,

and the contrast between mechanical existence and human sensibility. The narrator, disillusioned with life, is assisted by Karel in bringing the processes that sustain his life to an end. In Marudyan, Chaliha combines science fiction with philosophical reflections on life, the universe, and existence. As the protagonist travels through space, he contemplates the creation of Earth and other celestial bodies. Eventually, he discovers a peaceful green landscape beyond the boundaries of the known world. Despite experiencing profound suffering, however, the narrator ultimately wishes to return to his own world. Through such works, Chaliha demonstrated the potential of Assamese SF to engage not only with scientific and technological developments but also with deeper philosophical questions concerning human existence, consciousness, and the future.

A substantial number of Assamese science fiction (SF) books were published during the 1970s and 1980s. One of the early contributions to Assamese SF was Vijayakrishna Dev Sharma's *Tulsir Tole Mrigapahu Chare* (*Deers graze under Black Basil*, 1944), which portrays the extraordinary journey to the Moon. His collection *Surjyar Sonali Apel* (*The Golden Apple of the Sun*, 1976) contains several science fiction stories, including 'Space Station', 'Novar Deshot Manoj Kumar' ('Manoj Kumar in the Land of Nova'), 'Awat', 'Nabagata Nakshatra' ('Newcomer Star'), 'Mayabi Dokan' ('The Elusive Shop'), 'Spaceship—Model 3000', 'Picnic', 'Madhuchandrika' ('Honeymoon'), 'Son 2466, Ek April' ('Year 2466, 1 April'), 'Ajan Bhibhisika' ('Unknown Horror'), 'Anya Taranga' ('Another Wave'), 'Brahmastra', 'Sonor Shila Rupor Batah' ('Gold's Kite, Silver's Wind'), 'Anya Ek Prithivir Para' ('From Another World'), and 'Surjyar Sonali Apel'. In *Space Station*, the narrative centres on an attempt to remove a satellite from space that had been launched by the US Air Force in the 1960s. The story highlights the potential dangers posed by such satellites to space travel and explores the hazards of outer space, including the use of spacesuits and the threats posed by solar radiation and extreme temperatures. *Surjyar Sonali Apel*, on the other hand, follows a team of scientists who undertake an expedition into space to obtain fire from the Sun. Their mission exposes them to extreme temperatures ranging from 4,000 to 7,000 degrees Celsius and other life-threatening conditions. Despite the tragic death of one of their colleagues, the team succeeds in collecting the fire and returning safely to Earth. Another notable contribution to Assamese science fiction in the latter part of the twentieth century was Vijayakrishna Sarma's collection of stories, including 'Basana-Bileen' ('Dissolution of Desire'), which presents compelling narratives involving alien encounters and technological advancements.

In 1969, the versatile Assamese artist and writer Bhabendra Nath Saikia published 'Gahbar' ('Den'/'Cave'), his only science-fiction story. The story is significant for its distinctive narrative style. Although its structure is intricate, it is easy for readers to follow, and its language remains simple and straightforward. *Gahbar* is primarily a psychological story that poignantly explores human conflict and emotional turmoil through the theme of heart transplantation, set against the backdrop of racial discrimination abroad. One of the central characters is Mr. Pienaar, a patient suffering from severe heart disease. When his condition becomes critical, Dr. Campbell performs a pioneering heart transplant, replacing Pienaar's diseased heart with the heart of Smith, a Black man who has died in a car accident. Following the operation, Pienaar's health improved remarkably. However, the situation takes a tragic turn when Smith's wife, Mary, discovers that Pienaar has received her late husband's heart. Grief-stricken and lonely, Mary seeks comfort in Pienaar's presence, believing that although Smith is physically gone, a part of him continues to live through Pienaar's beating heart. Pienaar is deeply disturbed by Mary's revelation and later tells his wife about the encounter, which creates tension in their relationship. As the conflict intensifies, Pienaar becomes increasingly isolated from his family and drawn into further emotional

turmoil involving Mary. Ultimately, he is unable to withstand the psychological and emotional strain, and his life ends tragically. Through this compelling narrative, Saikia examines the complex relationship between science, human emotions, racial prejudice, grief, and identity.

The story not only highlights the remarkable progress and achievements of medical science but also explores the complexities of human emotions and relationships. Through Pienaar's rejuvenation and the challenges he subsequently faces, the narrator effectively examines themes of conflict, uncertainty, and social alienation. Although the story is set against the backdrop of medical advancements, particularly heart transplantation, its central focus is on the human psyche and the diverse emotions that influence human interactions and perceptions.

In 1964, Shantanu Tamuli wrote a science-fiction story titled 'He Chandra Biday' ('O' Moon, Goodbye/ Farewell the Moon'), which describes a journey to the moon and the accident that occurs during his return. Tamuli's collection *Mayamriga* (1998) contains eight science-fiction stories. Among them, 'Barna-Bibartan' ('Color-Evolution') presents the imaginative idea of a microbe capable of producing ink that affects objects such as newspapers, examination papers, bank cheques, and lottery tickets. Another important story, 'Mayamriga', explores space missions, machinery, technology, scientific reasoning, and the practical application of scientific knowledge. Tamuli skillfully combines literary appeal with scientific ideas, while the title *Mayamriga* symbolizes humanity's pursuit of a mythical planet.

The story 'Ulka' ('Meteorite') arouses curiosity through its depiction of astronomer Abadhut Burman's meteor laboratory. Similarly, 'Amritor Sandhanat Internet' ('Internet in Search of Nectar') presents an intriguing exploration of the possibility of extending human life through the consumption of nectar. In contrast, 'Barosun' ('Rain') is a poignant and thought-provoking narrative. The collection concludes with 'Prachir' ('Wall'), a quintessential science-fiction story that symbolizes humanity's continuous pursuit of technological advancement and its desire to achieve mastery over life and outer space. Tamuli's story 'Pani' ('Water') presents a conversation between Mr. Dihingia and Mr. Tamuli about a plan to erode the Himalayas and divert the Brahmaputra River through the Gobi Desert in the interests of national development. This futuristic idea is further developed when Mr. Dihingia, who comes from the future, provides Tamuli with a device intended to carry out the proposed plan. Through such imaginative narratives, Tamuli successfully combines scientific ideas, technological possibilities, and human concerns with literary creativity.

Dinesh Chandra Goswami established his position in Assamese literature with his satirical story 'Kakal' ('Waist'), published in *Dainik Asom* in 1970. His story 'Jugasandhi' ('Conjunction of the Era', 1972) explores the lives of a scientifically minded husband and wife and examines the impact of medical and technological advancements, including test-tube babies, treatments for autism, artificial eyes, and organ and tissue transplantation. The story illustrates the ways in which scientific progress can transform everyday life. In 'Paribrajak' ('Traveller', 1974), Goswami explores the concept of time travel. The protagonist, scientist Ranjan Chowdhury, accidentally travels into the past following a failed experiment, where he encounters his relatives and becomes involved in a series of exciting and dangerous events. In 'Nispriha' ('Insensible', 1974), Goswami examines the possibility of brain regeneration, while 'Bhadratamapak Jantra' ('Politeness-Measuring Machine', 1977) tells the story of three science students who attempt to develop a device capable of identifying and penalizing rude people. Their experiment, however, produces unexpected consequences. 'Ek Tarangar Dare' ('Like a Wave', 1979) presents imaginative descriptions of technologically advanced products while drawing attention to both the possibilities and the risks associated with scientific development.

Goswami's collections, including *Bhadratamapak Jantra* (1985) and *Portable Smell Absorber* (1986), contain a wide range of stories that demonstrate his imagination, scientific curiosity, and foresight. Stories such as 'Alpha Spondon' (1987) and 'Alasya' ('Laziness', 1990) imagine futuristic solutions to ordinary problems. His later collections, including *Ek Tarangar Dare (Like a Wave)*, 1993), *Antarbahi (Coronary/Inter-conductive)*, 2001), *Abhinna Hriday (The Integral Heart/Similar Heart)*, 2004), *Dinesh Chandra Goswami Swa-nirbachita Galpa (Dinesh Chandra Goswami's Self-Selected Stories)*, 2005), and *Natun Satikaar Kalpabastav (New Century Fantasy/ Fictitious Reality of the new Century)*, 2016), further develop themes of science fiction and speculative fiction. His collection *Dinesh Chandra Goswami Swa-nirbachita Galpa* was translated into English as *The Hair Timer* and published by the National Book Trust in 2011. Goswami's contribution to Assamese science fiction helped encourage other writers to explore the genre.

Writers such as Khiradhar Barua and Abhijit Sarma Barua subsequently contributed to Assamese science fiction Literature. Khiradhar Barua wrote 'Computer Shilpi' ('Computer-Artist', 1974), published in the November–December issue of *Ananda-Sangbad* and 'Programme Chitralkha', while Abhijit Sarma Barua's early science-fiction story 'Otho Madhyakarshan Sangbad' ('Gravity News') appeared in *Dainik Janambhumi* in 1982. Sarma Barua has written more than fifty science-fiction stories, including 'Bad De Bujiso' (2005), 'Manuhor Mon' ('The Human Mind', 2005), 'Lubish Ghar Alahi' ('Guest from the Planet Lubish', 2016), *Download* (2009), 'Bipra Damudar' (2008), 'Bibartanot Prem' ('Love in Evolution', 2008), '22.2.2022' (2009), 'Drugs Seito Ki Basto', 'Damini Kandar Jawanika', 'Iyate Marilu Tipa', 'Electronic Prem' ('Electronic Love'), 'Aawarjana' ('Garbage'), 'Aakash Gari' ('The Sky Car'), 'Antim Manav' ('The Last Human') and 'Simar Bahirot' ('Out of Bounds'). His works, ranging from *Bad de Bujiso* to 'Tekhetor Ki Je Apod!' (2011), explore a wide range of themes, including environmental concerns, technological innovations, and ethical dilemmas. In 2015, he also published *Natun Prithibi (New World)*, a collection of children's science-fiction stories, demonstrating his continued interest in imaginative and scientific themes and his commitment to inspiring younger readers. The book reflects his continued interest in imaginative worlds and his commitment to inspiring young readers.

'Priyatama' ('Beloved'), written by Bandita Phukan, is regarded as the first Assamese science-fiction story by a woman. It was published in 1987 in *Bismaya*. Phukan was a pioneer in Assam, having become the first female engineering graduate of Assam Engineering College in 1971. She also made significant contributions to science-fiction literature through her translations. Her Assamese translations of works by the American physician and novelist Robin Cook, including *Coma* (1977), *Brain* (1980), and *Fever* (1982), were published in *Bismaya*. Phukan's contribution to science communication extended beyond fiction and translation. In 1994, she published an article titled *Manuhar Jantra-Pati (Human Machinery)* in the Assamese science magazine *Drishti* (8th year, 6th edition). The article was enriched with additional facts and illustrations by Editor Dinesh Chandra Goswami and was later expanded and published as a complete book under the same title. Among her notable collections of science-fiction stories are *Dritiya Byakti (The Second Person)*, 1991), *Teo Kene Ase (How Is He?)*, 1996), *Apekshikatabad Teor Babe (Relativity Is Because of Him/Theory of Relativity for Him)*, 1998), *Maramor Monikaloi (To Dear Monika)*, *Samay Hoisane (Is It Time?)*, 2016), and *Ek Rahashyar Sandhanot (In Search of a Mystery)*, 2016). *Dritiya Byakti*, her debut collection of short stories, explores the experiences and inner world of a married woman.

A.K. Ziauddin Ahmed's 'Anughatak' ('Catalyst') critically examines the consequences of scientific

research and modern civilization. Rathindranath Goswami's 'Anupam, Diplina and Bhagya Devata' ('Anupam, Diplina and the God of Fortune', 1994) explores genetic experimentation and its possible implications for the future of humanity. In his story 'Nayanmoni' ('Apple of the Eye', 1996), he addresses the threat posed by computer viruses. Monoranjan Hazarika's 'Mrityu' ('Death', 1998), 'Asha' ('Hope', 2000), 'Amaratva' ('Immortality', 2001), and 'Golam' ('Slave', 2002), published in *Prantik*, deal with various themes of space, science, and the future of humanity. Mrityu is set in outer space, while Asha presents a plan for future human beings to inhabit Titan, one of Saturn's moons. Amaratva depicts the development of human civilization after 2122, whereas Golam portrays the colonization of Mars by the people of Earth.

The landscape of Assamese science fiction is further enriched by works such as Phanindra Kumar Dev Choudhury's 'Swapna Nagarit Kalpanik Bhraman' ('Imaginary Travel in the Dream City', 1999), which vividly portrays the scientific and technological development of the oil city of Duliajan. Another science-fiction story by him is Patyawartan ('Comeback', 1999). Manabendra Kumar Boruah's 'Nihota Atit Nirav Nahoi' ('The Dead Past Is Not Silent', 2000) depicts a future in which humans are forced to live in space stations because of devastating wars, disasters, and other crises on Earth. In 'Jantra Manabor Diary' ('Machine Human Diary'), he explores the reproductive system and living conditions of people in future societies in the years 3011 and 2971. Additionally, Rajib Prasad Saikia's 'Pali Charai' ('Pali Bird') offer distinctive perspectives on the adaptation of nature and the ways in which scientific advancements may be utilized.

Other noteworthy contributions to Assamese science fiction include Harekrishna Deka's 'Basopayogita' ('Livability'), Mihir Kumar Goswami's stories 'Seujiya Maramar Nirav Usupani' ('The Silent Sob of Green Love', 2015), 'Kidney', 'Bornali' ('Spectrum'), and 'Himalayar Phul' ('Flowers of the Himalayas'); Ajanta Das's 'Boomerang'; Dipak Kumar Sarma's 'Shidhanta' ('Decision', 2013); Divyajyoti Bora's 'Antim Ghatak' ('The Last Matchmaker', 2014) and 'Nilav Aranya' ('The Bluish Forest'); Devicharan Thakur's 'Abhisar', 'Natun Prahar'; and Amulya Hazarika's 'Homo Minusculus'. These works explore a wide range of themes within the science fiction genre. Jayanta Kumar Goswami's narratives deal with subjects such as genetics and space exploration. His *Aanubanshik (Genetic)* is one of the notable collections of Assamese science fiction stories, while 'Pratyagat' ('Rejected') is regarded as a significant work in Assamese science fiction. Nurul Islam's 'Gela Chocho', meanwhile, explores the consequences of gassing. Although the number of science fiction stories in Assamese literature remains relatively small compared with works in other genres, it is hoped that future generations of writers will continue to enrich the field through their creativity and imagination, thereby expanding the horizons of Assamese science fiction.

2.1.2 Science Fiction Play

Arun Sarma wrote *Sthavar (Immovable)* in 1956, which is considered the first science fiction play in Assamese literature. The play was broadcast in 1959 by the Guwahati Radio Station. Although it was not initially published in print, it was later included in *Arun Sarma Nirbachita Natak (Arun Sarma's Selected Plays)*. Critic Jogen Chetia stated that *Sthavar* can be regarded as the first science fiction play in Assamese literature. The story of *Sthavar* is set between 3000 AD and 3026 AD. It explores the rapid development of science and technology, mechanical changes in the solar system, successful communication between planets, and the scientific invention of a special sound tablet. The play also highlights the destructive consequences of the misuse of atomic energy and the dangers associated with the irresponsible use of scientific discoveries.

Another important writer of Assamese science fiction plays is Shyama Prasad Sharma. His science fiction plays include *Devatar Anya Rup* (*Another Form of the Deity*, 1967), *Biswas* (*Faith*, 1992), *Mathauri* (*Levee/Embankment*, 1992), *Mamatar Mahakavya* (*The Epic of Mamata*, 1993), *Milijuli-Mitirali* (*Together in Friendship*, 1997), *Shubha Sutrapat* (*Auspicious Beginning*, 1999), *Domoja* (*Indecision/Confusion*, 1999), and *Ses Aay* (*The Last Income*, 1999), among others. *Devatar Anya Rup*, published in *Bijnayan Jeuti*, presents a future world shaped by science and technology and explores the idea of the deity in a different form. *Ses Aay* deals with human responsibility and morality towards the environment, while *Mamatar Mahakavya* portrays natural disasters and destruction. *Milijuli-Mitirali*, a children's play, depicts two uneducated boys who kill endangered birds and sell them in the market. The play conveys the importance of environmental awareness, love for nature, and moral education among children. Prabhat Goswami's *Jantramanav* (*Machine Man*, 1987) is regarded as the first Assamese science-fiction stage play. The play tells the story of a group of scientists who create humanoid robots that possess neither humanity nor conscience. The scientists eventually hand over these machines to selfish and power-hungry individuals, who use them to win elections and seize control of the country. Under the rule of these unconscionable machine leaders, the nation descends into chaos and anarchy. In the end, the scientists and their colleagues are destroyed by the very machines they created.

Dinesh Chandra Goswami has also made a significant contribution to Assamese science-fiction drama. His science-fiction plays include *Animal Third Recorder* (1974), *Paribrajak* (*Traveller*, 1975), *Nispriha* (*Indifference*, 1976), *Alasya* (1983), *Bijyapan-Bijyapan* (*Advertisement-Advertisement*, 1984), *Ek Tarangar Dare* (*Like a Wave*), *Alpha Spandan*, *Robot Vijay* (*Robot Victory*, 1986), *Ashrya* (*Surprise/Astonishment*), *Uttaran* (*Promotion*), *Sanghat* (*Conflict*), *Sanyog* (*Connection*), *Ses Prastuti* (*Final Preparation*), *Natun Satikar Sapon* (*Dream of a New Century*), *Sristir Subas* (*The Fragrance of Creation*), *Jugsandhi*, and the children's play *Titanar Abhiyan* (*The Mission of Titan*), among others. Twenty of his science-fiction plays have been broadcast on radio, and he has also written several plays based on his short stories. Among these works, *Bijyapan-Bijyapan* presents an imaginative story about an advertising company that creates problems in cities by covering them with advertisements and three-dimensional images. To address this problem, scientists discover a species of microorganism capable of consuming and destroying advertisements. However, the microorganisms eventually develop an appetite for human beauty, fame, and wealth as well, consuming these qualities in their attempt to satisfy their hunger. The play thus combines science fiction with social satire and explores the unintended consequences of scientific discoveries and technological development.

Again, the theme of robots contributing to human life is explored in *Robot Vijay*. In the play, intelligent and technologically advanced robots initially assist humans in various aspects of life but eventually conspire against them in an attempt to take control. However, the robots ultimately surrender to human authority and become subordinate to them. The play *Nispriha* also presents the idea that pain can be eliminated by using external resonance frequencies to break down newly formed neural connections associated with pain in the brain. It is noteworthy that the play has also been successfully performed on stage.

Himendra Barthakur's *Bindu* (*Point*, 1993) depicts people travelling through time with the help of a special device. The play combines elements of science and fantasy. Sushil Goswami's *Man Guhar Andharat* (*In the Darkness of the Heart's Cave*) explores the enduring instincts of human beings within the metaphorical darkness of a cave. The play attempts to understand the violent tendencies of human beings and reveals certain truths about human nature. Amarjyoti

Choudhury's *Sanketik (Symbolic)* portrays a conflict between a father and his son, which ultimately leads the son to launch a computer attack using a computer virus.

2.1.3 Science Fiction Novel

Science fiction novels have made a significant contribution to Assamese literature by presenting imaginative narratives based on scientific ideas, technological developments, and futuristic possibilities. The genre gained prominence with the publication of Vijayakrishna Dev Sharma's *Son 2446, Ek April (Year 2446, 1st April)* in *Amar Pratinidhi* in 1963. The novel depicts humanity's first encounter with the lunar world in the year 2446. Later, Sharma published *Chandralukot Pratham Manuh (The First Man on the Moon)* in 1969. These pioneering works encouraged other Assamese writers to explore the possibilities of science fiction. The development of the Assamese science-fiction novel continued with the publication of Narendranath Choudhury's *Anya Grahar Khobor (News of another Planet)* in 1967. This work is regarded as an important contribution to the development of the science-fiction novel in Assamese literature.

Among the prominent contributors to Assamese science-fiction novels are Nabakanta Barua, Dinesh Chandra Goswami, Amulya Hazarika, Shantanu Tamuli, Rathindranath Goswami, Bandita Phukan, Shakil Zaman, Abhijit Sarma Barua, Lakshminandan Bora, Ranju Hazarika, and Devicharan Thakur, among others. Dinesh Chandra Goswami's works, including *Shabda, Nirantar Shabda (Sound, Constant Sound, 1992)*, *Ejak Jonakir Jilikani (The Glittering of a Multitude of Fireflies, 1992)*, *Ushma Prabah (Warm Flow, 1993)*, *Ati-Bishista Samaj (A Very Prominent Society, 1999)*, *Mananiya Sampraday (Honorable Community, 2000)*, *Atmajibanir Prayas (An Attempt at Autobiography, 2007)*, *Dibya Upaban (Divine Orchard, 2009)*, and *Atmajibanir Dritiya Prayas (A Second Endeavour of Autobiography, 2015)*, explore themes such as genetic engineering and warfare. These works also offer thought-provoking reflections on humanity's relationship with other planets and forms of life in the universe.

Dr. Padmapani's teenage science-fiction novel *Hartik* (1992) narrates the story of a secret world accessed through a cave near Kaziranga. The novel depicts a civilization whose scientific and technological advancement is far greater than that of the human world. Nabakanta Barua, one of the notable poet-novelists of Assamese literature, explores the theme of destructive power in *A-Padartha (Good for Nothing, 1982)*. The novel presents the invention of "antimatter" through advanced research in surgery and biomaterials. A doctor who develops a bloodless surgical technique using non-material substances ultimately falls victim to the destructive power he has helped create.

Amulya Hazarika's *Akraman (Attack, 1983)* explores the potential use of genetic engineering in warfare. His *Sandhan (Quest/Investigation, 1992)* describes how superhuman beings from the planet Mangalika attempt to destroy humanity by creating chaos on Earth. The novel thus emphasizes the possible relationship between human beings and extraterrestrial civilizations. Ranju Hazarika made his debut as a science-fiction novelist in Assamese with *Bahnibalay (Fire Circle, 1985)*. His other works in this genre include *Jibanta Mritak (Living Corpse, 1985)*, *Ananta Kalar Prahelika (The Riddle of Eternity, 1989)*, *Bahnisikha (Flame, 1990)*, *Prithibir Satru (The Enemy of Earth, 1990)*, *Akasar Ohankar (The Arrogance of the Sky, 1996)*, *Surjya Sandhan (The Search for the Sun, 1997)*, *Nakshatra Joyar Gaan (The Song of Star Victory, 1999)*, *Dhusar Krondoshi (Grey Sky, 2003)*, *Nispanda Grahar Aatatayi (The Attacker of the Silent Planet, 2003)*, *Kuberor Lalosha (Kuber's Covetousness, 2004)*, *Anya Ek Dharitri (Another Earth, 2006)*, *Swarnamrigor Sandhan (The Search for the Golden Deer, 2009)*, *Prahekar Andhakar (The Darkness of the Riddle, 2009)*, and *Odom Kitar Dansan (The Bite of the Ignoble Insect, 2013)*, among others.

These novels address a wide range of scientific and speculative themes. *Jibanta Mritak* tells the story of a scientist who revives a dead body in the form of a robot. *Ananta Kalar Prahelika* depicts jelly-like extraterrestrial creatures that attempt to attack Earth. In *Bahnisikha*, a group of scientists works to save the Earth from destruction. *Kuberor Lalosha* focuses on a scientist who succeeds in artificially creating gold. *Odom Kitar Dansan* portrays the terrifying consequences of an outbreak of beetles and the dangerous environment that emerges as a result. Collectively, these works demonstrate the diversity of Assamese science fiction and its engagement with scientific advancement, extraterrestrial life, technological experimentation, warfare, and the possible consequences of scientific discoveries.

Rathindranath Goswami's *Kingkinir Bidroh* (*The Insurgency of Kingkini*, 2002) explores the conflict between humans and robots. Shakil Zaman's *Nila Nila Bedana* (*Blue Blue Torment*, 1996) and *Siliconor Buddha* (*The Buddha of Silicon*, 2003) are also notable works in this genre.

Lakshminandan Bora's *Kayakalpa* incorporates concepts from modern science, technology, medical science, biotechnology, molecular biology, and related fields. The novel explores biotechnology and several scientific inventions and provides an engaging discussion of tissue culture, greenhouse technology, human cloning, and other applications. The novelist also presents physical therapy in a new form by combining ideas from ancient Indian medicine with remarkable discoveries in modern Gerontology. *Kayakalpa* therapy is associated with the Ayurvedic medical tradition of ancient India. At the same time, the novel portrays various human emotions and tendencies found in modern affluent society, including love, sexual desire, betrayal, and revenge.

Bandita Phukan has made significant contributions to Assamese science fiction novel. Her SF novels include *Natun Prithivi* (*New World*, published in *Basanta Sambhar, Sadin*, 2005), *Jadi* (*If*, 2011), *Sandhan* (*Search/investigation*, 2011), *Chaturmatrik* (*Four-Dimensional*, 2012), and *Aabeg Aru Juktire* (*With Emotion and Reason*, 2012). She has also written several science fiction works for children, including *Sontihotor Bipod* (*The Dangers of Sonti and Others*, 2012), *Minur Robot Sakhi* (*Minu's Robot Friend*, 2012), *Sontir Robot Kukur* (*Sonti's Robot Dog*, 2015), *Sahay* (*Assistance*), *Pen Pen Ahisil* (*Pen Pen Came*), and *Teur Kiyo Ene Hoise?* (*Why Is This Happening to Him?*, 2012), the latter being particularly suitable for adolescents. *Chaturmatrik* deals with the concept of the fourth dimension and the scientific investigation of the forces associated with it. The novel examines human thoughts and instincts from a scientific perspective and also explores the possibility of a fourth force operating in other animals.

Harekrishna Deka's *Agantuk* (*The Visitor*, 2008) explores the concept of the extraterrestrial world. The novelist describes the work as a form of conceptual fiction. Devi Charan Thakur's *Mahaprasthanar Pathot* (*On the Way to the Demise*, 2010) is rooted in social reality. From a scientific perspective, the novel examines the factors underlying human violence and criminal behavior, including the 2004 Dhemaji bombing, the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, and other criminal acts. It raises questions about whether genes contribute to such behavior and how destructive and criminal tendencies develop in human beings.

Abhijit Sarma Barua's notable novels include *Pratyabartan*, *Ipar Sipar* (*Both Banks of the River*), *Andharat Jonak* (*Moonlight in the Darkness*), *Mayabandhan* (*Bonding of Affinity*), *Nano Abhinav Jagat* (*The Innovative Nano World*), and others. Santanu Tamuli's *Prasir* (*Wall*, *Basanta Sambhar, Sadin*, 1994) employs computer-generated imagery, simulation, and computer-assisted writing. His other notable works of science fiction include *Mayajal* (*Enchantment/Worldly Illusion*), *Mani Bani Aru Ekhon Phulani* (*Mani, Bani and a Garden*), *Grahajuddha* (*Planetary*

Warfare), and *Electronic Namor Loratu (The Boy Named Electronic)*. Manbendra Kumar Barua's *Buddhibhrasta Prani-Manuhor* (2001) presents Earth and its inhabitants from the perspective of intelligent creatures living on various planets and satellites in the galaxy.

2.1.4 Translated Science Fiction Literature

Translated science fiction constitutes another important area of Assamese science fiction literature. Among translated works, both short stories and novels occupy a significant position. Several collections of translated science fiction stories have been published in Assamese, including Dinesh Chandra Goswami's *Mahakashchhari (Astronaut)* and *Kailoi Ene Ghatasil (It Happened Tomorrow)*; Meera Goswami's *Lusunor Golpo (The Story of Lusun, Parts I and II)*; Binoy Mohan Saikia's *Jeromor Manoram Golpo*; and Ranju Hazarika's *Biswar Srestha Kalpabigyan Kahini (The Best Science-Fiction Stories of the World)*. Abhijit Sarma Barua has translated numerous science fiction stories from English into Assamese. Among them are *Ati Gopan Kathato* (originally by George H. Smith), *Amar Kabyakarjan* (originally by Isaac Asimov), *Alokiya Drishtibhram* (originally by Mack Reynolds), *Koni, Koni Keval Koni* (originally by Chris Neville), *Cinderella and Company* (originally by Christopher Anvil), *Paharanir Praashad* (originally by Donne Mark Lemon), and *Mrityu Darshan* (originally by Norman Spinrad).

Among Assamese translations of science fiction novels, H. G. Wells's *The Invisible Man*, translated by Hembala Das as *Adrisya Manav*, is regarded as one of the earliest. M. A. Mazid Khan also produced an abridged translation of the same work in 1956. Later, Syed Ajijul Hussain and Abhijit Sarma Barua translated the novel as well. Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* was translated by Bijay Krishna Devsarma and Kulendu Pathak, while Dinesh Chandra Goswami translated it as *Sagarar Taliyedi Kuri Hazar League* (1988). Anil Kumar Sarma translated Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon*. M. Abdul Mazid Khan and Dinesh Chandra Goswami translated *A Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, published as *Prithibir Kendraloi Abhiyan* and *Bhugarbhat Abhiyan* (1982), respectively. *Around the World in Eighty Days* was translated by Mahendra Bora.

Raihan Shah translated Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* (1912) as *Bilupta Jagat* (1990). Sada Saikia translated Alexei Tolstoy's *Aelita* (1957), while Dinesh Baishya and Abhijit Sarma Barua translated Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* was translated by Abhijit Sarma Barua as *Dui Jagatar Juddha*, while Ajijul Hussain translated it as *Mahajagatik Juddha*. Saurabh Kumar Chaliha translated Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Dinesh Chandra Goswami's *2001-Ekhan Mahakash Odyssey* (1996) and *Captain Grandar Santan* are also notable examples of science fiction works in Assamese.

A number of science fiction works intended for children have also been translated into Assamese. Among these, Anatoly Mityayev's *Grishka and the Astronaut* (1984), translated by Hem Sarma, and Russian author Yevgeny Veltistov's children's book *The Adventures of Elektronik (Priklyucheniya Elektronika)*, translated into Assamese by Santanu Tamuli as *Electronic—The Boy from the Suitcase*, are particularly noteworthy. Other examples of translated science fiction include *Mahakashar Taraka*, *Grahajuddha*, *Haiti Taiti*, *Mor Robot Rabbi*, *www.Janghal.com*, *Dhumketut Uthi*, and *Master of the World*. These translations have contributed significantly to the development and expansion of science fiction literature in Assamese.

3. CONCLUSION

Science fiction (SF) has emerged as a significant literary genre in the contemporary Assamese literary

landscape. Although the development of Assamese science fiction began during the pre-independence period, the genre flourished particularly in the post-independence era. Assamese SF encompasses a diverse range of narratives that explore the discoveries, challenges, possibilities, and implications of science and technology. As scientific and technological advancements continue to progress rapidly, Assamese SF writers have an important role in imagining and portraying the potential social and cultural changes that these developments may bring about in the future.

Since the emergence of science fiction as a literary genre, it has contributed to the development of scientific ideas, discoveries, and a scientific outlook among Assamese readers. Consequently, Assamese SF has gradually emerged as a distinct area of academic research. Several researchers have examined Assamese science fiction and produced theoretical, critical, and analytical studies on the subject. Despite the continued contributions of numerous writers, however, science fiction remains less prominent in Assamese literature than several other established literary genres. As a result, it continues to appeal primarily to a relatively specific group of readers and writers. Moreover, Assamese literature has not yet witnessed the sustained publication of a dedicated science fiction magazine. In this context, it is essential to understand the significance of science fiction within Assamese literature, and has played a distinctive and notable role in future in this regard. In recent years, a considerable number of Assamese SF works have been produced, many of which have been influenced by or adapted from ideas and traditions associated with Western science fiction. Although the genre may have a comparatively limited readership, continued efforts in original writing, translation, publication, and scholarly research can contribute to creating a stronger and more sustainable environment for the development of Assamese SF.

This research paper has examined the historical development and contemporary landscape of Assamese science fiction literature, with particular attention to the ways in which science and technology are represented through literary narratives that envision possible future worlds. The continued growth of the genre can therefore contribute not only to the enrichment of Assamese literature but also to the development of scientific awareness, imagination, and critical thinking among its readers. Assamese Science Fiction Literature as a New Literary Consciousness has significant future possibilities. It can become not merely a genre of imaginative scientific storytelling, but also an important literary space for understanding technology, society, environment, culture, identity, and the future of humanity from an Assamese perspective.

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