

An interview with Dr. Dinesh Chandra Goswami

by Manoshi Goswami - Wednesday, June 17, 2015

<http://gonitsora.com/an-interview-with-dr-dinesh-chandra-goswami/>

Dr. Dinesh Chandra Goswami, with his enormous narrative skill and creative imaginations reflected in his vernacular science fiction stories and novels has mesmerized Assamese readers since long. A pioneer in science fiction radio dramas, Dr. Goswami has seven science fictional novels and more than eighty stories to his credit. Notable among the very few contemporary Assamese creative science fiction writers, Dr. Goswami is also working on translation of world's best sci-fi classics.

The interview, taken by **Abu Md. Pharhad Hussain** with the assistance of **Abhijit Barthakur** was [published in February 2014 issue](#) of www.xahitya.org. *Gonit Sora* offers sincere thanks to Abu Md. Pharhad Hussain and **Mr. Pankaj Borah**, permanent member of editorial board, xahitya.org for their kind consent to publish the translated version of the interview.

Translation: Manoshi Goswami

Namaskar! Sir, have you ever heard about xahitya.org?

? Yes, I have come across in Newspapers and also heard people discussing about it. The good thing about it is that it's available throughout the world and Assamese readers are getting opportunities for reading.

This issue of the e-magazine deals with "Science fiction and God". What is your opinion on how to relate these two things together?

? Actually, one cannot directly relate god to anything in science. Because, the concept of God is a completely different one and it was conceived by human race because of their own needs. It is thought that, human being learnt to think 80,000 years ago. Then, there was development of brain and intelligence. Further, around 20,000 years ago, people learnt to imagine about the future like what will happen in future and so on. Gradually, human being started thinking on numerous issues. However, they were unable to find answers for how a village is completely destroyed in a single epidemic or how a respectable person of supreme importance died suddenly due to accident or illness or was attacked by a tiger. But, since from experiences, they knew that they can perform some tasks like throwing a stone, blocking a stream or even sailing a boat; they imagined that there must be some person, who controls all such things like epidemic, disaster or disease or accident. During those days, they only knew to look in to the sky lying overhead as various mysterious events occur in it. So, they have started believing that, since so many wonderful things occur in the sky, the person with enormous power to control everything must reside there. He does one thing, when he is angry and does another, when he is happy or wants us to gift something. Thus, they have created the anthropomorphic concept of God and it has no relationship with science. And since, science fiction is straightway related to science, it has no relationship with God. But, still I must say one thing, even Arthur C. Clarke has written a story titled "Nine Billion Names of God",

but it's a completely different story and the author never tried to establish the concept of God in this story.

Sir, we would like to know about your academic and professional life.

? Since, my father had a transferable job; I had to complete my primary schooling in different places. I had started my school in Dahudi Primary School of my own village Ulubari Satra, located in a very remote place of Nalbari district (between Sarthebari and Saamota). But after some days, my father had to shift to South Salmora and then to Mangaldoi. So, I have also studied there and primary school was completed in Mangaldoi. Similarly, I took my secondary education in Mangaldoi High school and Rangiya High School. After that, I have studied pre-university courses and graduation in Cotton College. I have completed my post-graduation from Gauhati University and then went for a one year diploma course in the Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics, Kolkata. Then, after joining my job, two things that I completed were - my research on cosmic radiation, leading to PhD. under the guidance of Dr. Kishori Mohan Pathak in 1976 and one certificate course of Proficiency in French language from Gauhati University in 1972. My professional life started in B. Barooah College and after two years of working there, I continued working in Cotton College for four years. Then I went to Delhi and finally joined in the North East Institute of Science & technology, Jorhat; formerly known as Regional Research Laboratory.

If compared with World literature, it appears that there is lack of appreciation for science fiction in Assamese Literature. According to you, why is it so? Is it because of Assamese reader's reluctance for scientific writings or any other reason?

? There are two aspects of scientific writing in Assam. First one is that, if someone writes about sun-moon, stars-planets, wild animals or about hills-mountain ranges, rivers like that of Geography or anything related to sky or the universe, then, those write-ups are well accepted. Specially, students love them. Moreover, teachers as well as parents also think that the students should read them. So, we have to say that these types of things have wide acceptability. But, the second aspect is that, science fiction is a completely different genre and our writers and critics don't value them as a part of literature. This holds good for many other places in the world. That's why, sci-fi stories were published as general stories without giving any specific name. The interest in science fictions is generally lesser. So, from that angle, appreciation and acceptance level is still very low in Assam. However, there is a group of readers, who have developed avid interest in science fiction and that's why editors have started asking for science fiction stories and novels in special issues of newspapers and magazines.

Sir, I have read in one of your articles that yearly 50 or so numbers of science-fiction stories or novels are published in Marathi Language, in contrast to the fact that only approx. 10 such stories are published in Assamese. What is your opinion on the current status of Sci-fi writings in Assamese?

? The condition has not changed still. There was a time, when number of science fictions were higher and that was probably due to my own interest. There was a magazine called "Abikol", which published one story every month. Thus, it went up to a total of 20-25 numbers of sci-fi stories per year, if another 9-10 stories published in other magazines. That continued for a few years. After that, that stopped; but at least 40-50 stories were there in Abikol at that time. Presently, due to the effort of other writers and myself, a few numbers of science fictions are being published every year; but still that is quite below the number of

science fictions in Marathi language.

What should be done to lead Assamese science fiction in an appropriate direction? What do you expect in future?

? The writers should be very serious and conscious in this case and they have to strengthen their scientific understanding. What happens in sci-fi is that, first it starts on the basis of science and then it transforms in to a story or a novel. And that's why, as a piece of a story or a novel, it captures the very essence of a human being, including all humanistic feelings, behaviors, humanly characters, struggles and conflicts and thus develops the fictional characters. So, to do all these through science fiction, a person must be a good story teller or writer. The flow of a novel, dramatic character of developing the story must be there in his words. But, most of all, the scientific concept must be very strong. Because, if that is not there, if there is no futuristic vision of science, if an imaginary world is not created on the basis of science; then it will remain unscientific, not a science fiction. So, the writers must concentrate on this aspect.

It is seen that sometimes, an item imagined in a science fiction of earlier times, has turned in to a reality in future. We can take the example of some fictions of Jules Verne. So, for a successful science fiction writer, deep understanding of science and scientific knowledge is very essential. Do you think the limited scope of exercising science and scientific research in Assam has also some impact on this?

? Yes, it may have some definite impact; because, development of science is very poor in Assam. Moreover, we don't have much improved laboratories too. There are a few good laboratories, but the environment is not such that there is scientific discussion and common people are well versed with scientific techniques and developments. Students are also not exposed to better facilities; many of them have not even seen a quality laboratory. So, under such circumstances, development of science fiction is a little tough. But, those who have such exposure and limited experiences at least; if they study the subject thoroughly and plan to work on science fiction and if the editors and critics support and inspire them, then I believe Assamese science fiction can go at least a little ahead.

Is there any specific reason for your interest in this genre of literature?

? I have read very few science fictions, not much. They attracted me a lot. But, when I studied science in college and university level, then I felt that I should tell all these scientific things to the masses. There was an inner desire; a desire to narrate a story, not exactly a desire for science fiction. But, somehow, one day, at some moment, I felt that I may tell these scientific things through a science fiction, through the stories of a probable, imaginary world. And, then it started like this.

In your opinion, which are the best science fictions in the world?

? At first, I must take the names of the 2001 series of Arthur C. Clarke. In this series, we have 2001: A Space Odyssey, followed by 2010, 2061 and 3001: the Last Odyssey. The first one of the series was named as "a space odyssey" and the 3001 was told as the "last odyssey" by the author. I consider it of very high quality because apart from fictional science, this series has the entire human philosophy in it. When you enter once in the series, it looks like you will be embedded by the series forever. Apart from that, Asimov too has written some classics like "The fantastic Voyage" and "The Naked Sun". They are

also very good. Then, we have books by Jules Verne and H.G. Wells; all of their fictions are of high quality. So, you can't finish the list and can't even tell that one is better than the other. However, since I was more closely associated with the 2001 series by Clarke, it always fascinates me.

Can our Assamese science fiction literature be enriched with translations of classics from other language? If so, which are the books, which must be translated?

? Yes, I too have realized this. So, as a very preliminary effort, to form the base, I thought of translating "The Time Machine" by H.G. Wells and entire books by Jules Verne and accordingly, from Saraighat Publishers, started a series of hundred books under the name of "Ageless Classics". This series of hundred books have several science fictions; four or five of Verne and a few from H.G. Wells. These were done by other writers as well as me. But, apart from these books, many of Jules Verne's books are yet to be translated. Then, it's hard to get the copyright of the books of Arthur C. Clarke, Carl Sagan and Isaac Asimov. But, if you give some effort, especially if you can make them understand that not many copies are published in Assamese and not much profit can be made; then you can get the free copyright, like I have got it in 2001. And then, all the books I have mentioned here by Arthur C. Clarke, Sagan, Asimov and Handlin should be translated to Assamese. If possible, all of their creations should be available in Assamese.

Do you think science fictions can attract children towards science?

? Yes, they can. Because, I have read in at least in two of the three autobiographies written by Issac Asimov that only because of science fiction, Asimov entered in to the world of science and science fiction writing. If, during his childhood, he hadn't read the fictions in magazines kept in his father's book stall, then probably he would have not turned in this direction. There were, and are many such scientists who have developed an interest in the world of science only because of science fictions and also gradually entered the world of science fictions too.

If we analyze the science fiction writings, we see that the earlier writings (like that of Arthur C. Clarke, H. G. Wells, Jules Verne, Asimov), most of the time while depicting the science of future, the positivity of science was shown. In contrast, present day science fictions (like in movies of Hollywood) reflect a dystopian image of future world. Can it be termed as a "fad" of the story? Or, it actually reflects the constantly growing doubts of human being on the positive and rewarding side of the science as a whole?

? Both of these options may be true. If we consider from commercial side, an extremely positive story with a happy going image or a story lacking anything dramatic or thrilling will not do good business. That may a reason for the people, who are engaged in the business of fictional stories. But, from another angle, people also like to speak about a negative aspect of science. In most of the public meetings, we always encounter question on if science is always negative or wouldn't it have been great to first make arrangements for supply of safe drinking water instead of sending a spacecraft to space or to Mars. That indicates that people have a tendency of speaking about negativities of science. So, that attitude is uplifted to an enormous scale by the persons in the business for their business success.

Do you find any political or cultural reason behind the same?

? Yes, there was always a political angle with this. This is because, at one point in time, science was used as a weapon of destruction with political motives. Now also, in wars or in case of terrorist issues, although the political facts are not exposed, science and politics are being intermingled. So, there is always some such angles. But, when a negative image of science is reflected in a book or in a Hollywood movie, commercial target becomes more important than the social or political issue.

We don't see a culture of Science literature at present. What may be reason for this?

? Actually, the interest in science literature or science has not declined. I have seen it in Assam like in other places. When a magazine is there, number of readers increases. That is also there in Assam. But, here we need to keep in mind about the acceptance of science. Whatever is delivered to them must be tailored in to an acceptable form by the society or the readers. Then only it will be accepted by a larger section. I believe there are people who accept or are interested to accept. I have seen in case of some of my collections, editions are finished after a period repeatedly. So, you can't tell that there is lack of interest. But, what we need is awareness and popularization. Now, only students are being targeted; till date, no plan is there to disseminate science to other groups of people. So, it needs more effort.

What is your perception about Science fiction? Is it mocked by science or it opens a new horizon for science?

? Actually, the later one is true. Science fiction opens up a new horizon for the scientists because they need to imagine. Many times, it shows a new pathway for the scientists. Science fictions remember the science of the present and on that basis, create an imaginary probable world. In that world, one such invention happens, which is not available at present labs and thus that invention controls some lives. It may influence the life of the scientist or the lives of the people in that world. There may be conflicts, there may be happiness-sorrows-smiles and tears and the fiction capture all of these things and events. But, the most astonishing thing is that invention. For example, some decades ago, a scientist thought that whether the dinosaurs can be recreated or not? Then he arrived at the conclusion that, it may be possible if he gets some dinosaur DNA. But, the complete DNA structure of dinosaurs can't be obtained from fossilized bones. So, one fiction writer came out with an imaginary idea that any insect that fed on the blood of dinosaur have died immediately after having their last food and turned into fossils. So, from one such insect or many such insect's blood, DNA of dinosaurs was extracted and thus a dinosaur was created again. So, on the basis of such an idea, Michael Crichton wrote the book "Jurassic Park", which was later, adapted to a movie by Spielberg. Because of the extreme dramatization and thrilling sequences, the movie became very popular and successful. Then the scientists started talking that such things are impossible because nothing like that has happened yet. But, on the other hand, although dinosaurs are not tried, animals like dodo or some other close ones are being tried to regenerate in laboratories, from the skins, bones or blood samples preserved in museums. That means, instead of utilizing the DNA directly, attempts are being made to regenerate them or their cells from the nearest or close relatives. You may find many such examples and success stories of science fiction mediated research.

Do you think science fiction literature in Assamese is lagging behind in comparison to other language?

? I don't think it to be so. That is because, even if are falling behind quantitatively, qualitatively (though I must say some are not up to the mark. When you have more in number, then if you take samples, some

samples will be average in quality, some will be inferior and some will be of very high quality and this applies for everything), we have some such stories that they make the entire Assamese literature enriched and proud, not only as science fiction but as a literature in true sense.

What do you want to say to the science fiction writers?

? Those who aspire to be science fiction writers, they must keep in their mind the fact that science fiction is a very important and serious thing and it needs enormous concentration and sincerity. It is not possible to go ahead with science fictions, if it is thought that science is a superficial subject. The writers must have the knowledge of science; whatever is depicted in these fictions, be it a future scientific achievement or a new aspect of a machine, they must not be based on any impossible principle or concept. For example, in science, no one can change the basic principles of physics, botany or biology. So, the base should be adhered to these principles and then (as I have mentioned about the blood of dinosaur), science must be uplifted through imaginations and creativity not possible at present without ignoring the rules of science. It is fine if you have not got the blood of the dinosaur, but you have got the fossilized insects that fed on dinosaurs and those insects have dinosaur's blood in them; such type of imaginary concepts can always be given by science fictions. And for such type of concepts, it's not mandatory that the writer must be a scientist. In Assam, we have examples. The book titled "Apadartha" by Nabakanta Baruah is a science fiction. He was not person of science directly, but he had a scientific outlook which made it possible. So, a person will be able to write, if he concentrates on the correctness of the theoretical concepts. These are the things that a science fiction writer must remember always.

Would you please tell us about your own contributions towards science fiction? We would also like to know about your future planning.

? In 1970, when I have just joined in B. Barooah College, Phoni Talukdar, then assistant editor of Dainik Asom requested me to write a story for the Puja special issue. At that time, probably Kirtinath Hazarika was the editor of the paper. Then I thought about writing a science fiction, as it was brooding in my mind. I am not sure about its quality, but it followed every principle of a science fiction. So, after this start, I continued writing and was always inspired by Phoni Talukdar and the readers. Till that, I have seven story collections and 7 novels along with some other unpublished stories. Apart from that, All India Radio supported me a lot. Initially, it was my desire to submit a science fiction drama in All India Radio, Guwahati. But after that, a large number of dramas were aired, may be more than 40. Again, I had to write one 13 episode drama and another 13 episode science fiction for AIR, Dibrugarh due to the constant pressure of Munin Bhuyan, then director of the Dibrugarh radio centre. So, this is all about my works. And yes, about future, I always have that urge of writing better than what I have written already. Still I believe that I have not written any good stories yet and I must improve, must go further.

Would you like to give some of your books to xahitya.org for Unicode transformation? (No doubt, there is the matter of copyright.)

? Copyright is not a problem, as it belongs to me. But, the publisher has to be informed and then one or two books can definitely be given. I don't have any personal reservation in this regard and we can discuss about the same. And, yes, one publisher is working on a collection of all these 15 books compiling all stories, novels and children drama together. DTP has already been done and if directly that can be converted to Unicode, then it will be very good. Otherwise, if we have to type it again in Unicode, that

will be tedious work.

What do you think about the provisions that must be available in Assam to start researches of Nobel Prize standards within 2050?

? We will definitely need quality laboratories. Now, no one can work on science from home. Those days have gone. And what we have seen is that although only one or two gets the prize, actually there are a lot of people in their group. And sometimes, a concept is generated across the world simultaneously, not only by a single person. But, sometimes, due to various reasons, the prize is given to only two or three; like that of Higg's Boson last time. Among the three awardees, one died and hence the other two got the Prize. But, all total 6 persons were involved in the research, but they could not be given because of slightest time factor and especially because not so many persons can be awarded. So, thus, the team may be from the entire world in our cases too. To achieve this from here, a person must be a part of an international team and to make that happen, scientific and research facilities and incentives must be increased. It is not very difficult to get government support or central government's support. But the incentives or inspirations should come from the senior scientists. But, there are some obstacles in this aspect. Certain things or obstacles are created sometimes, if some talents are found to be rising up. We must forget such type of mentality, completely and should work together to develop a best scientist or a team of scientists.

Do you have anything to say on alleged “witch-hunting” in Assam, which have increased in last few years? Is it possible to do something with science fictions?

? In this case, we haven't used fictional science directly, but used puppetry as medium of creating awareness. It was shown in societies having prevalence of such beliefs. And at that time, we were quite assured that from their responses, at least the younger generation will be influenced; will be aware of these issues. So, such things are also possible with science fictions. With a little thinking and planning, we may be able to sensitize them against witch hunting via quality science fictions. They can be made aware of the fact that this is very unscientific and unnecessary traditional belief using such fictions. So, we must try to use science fictions in this case and that can be done by a good writer with good fictions.

PDF generated from <http://gonitsora.com/an-interview-with-dr-dinesh-chandra-goswami/>.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.