

## **Gogoponti Lakratua**

*Tapan Das*

That the sun's slowly rising this dawn, the river that's flowing, the boat that's moving forward, and the breathing of the people – do you know what it is called? – saying so, Nilotpal once again glanced towards the Saraighat Bridge. I looked at him – the scruffy stubbled face, now aglow with the golden rays of the sun – reminded me of a self-portrait of Van Gogh. Gulping the last drops in the bottle, he kept it on the boat itself. The odour of country liquor wafted and hit my nostrils. Surprising, now that I think about it – this decrepit state, with his sullen body language and dirtily-clad attire, this intoxicated Nilotpal, this man, is he the same Nilotpal that I had come across a couple of years ago?

Our boat's mid-river in the Brahmaputra. As the oar-strokes of the youthful boatman propels the boat towards Sukreswar, it carries just the two of us as passengers. This light, fragile boat.

I had come to visit a friend of mine in North Guwahati. As my car broke down, I kept it in his house, and hence my return this early morning by boat. And here, in Rajaduar Ghat, whom do I meet – Nilotpal! Nilotpal Dutta. My college mate. Actually, he was better known amongst us as the 'poet.' He surprised me, and not without reason. For one, he is not supposed to be here in Guwahati's river-ghat so early in the morning. So far as I know, he's still teaching in a school near Nagaon.

I had met him last year at his home where his fiancée was also present. The second reason why he surprised me was this: the broken state of his health and the ragged clothes that he had on. When I addressed him he looked at me, expressionless, and placed his hand on my shoulder. We kept on looking at each other's faces.

The first ferry of the morning had left in the meantime. Without a word, I made him take his seat on a boat. From then on, this quiet journey till mid-river – and I kept on observing him all this while.

The sun's rising up from the east, the river's flowing on, the boat's moving forward, the people are breathing – do you know what all of this tells us? – he queried once more. His eyes fixated on the bridge this time.

– No, I answered. Then, after a few moments' silence, I asked: 'Why are you here in North Guwahati?'

– In anticipation.

– For whom?

– Gogoponti Lakratua.

– I don't get it.

– Gogoponti Lakratua, aren't you aware? – he queried in response. I could not recall coming across the term earlier. I shook my head indicating 'no.' He redirected his gaze in the same manner back onto the bridge. Either from his words or in his gestures, I could not conclusively determine the mental state he was in. Everything appeared normal even though the difference between the earlier Nilotpal and the present one was similar to that between heaven and earth. During his

college days, he was the evergreen one, full of enthusiasm, the tender-hearted flower. 'Auspicious, righteous and pure,' that's how we lovingly addressed him. Like a stationary boat enlivened by a drifting crimson sail, his presence transformed a static moment into one of lively poeticism. The complex arguments about literature, politics and religious philosophy were all readily explicable to him, unambiguously. Logically sound and easily accessible arguments as well as soft verses were at the tip of his tongue. That same Nilotpal is seated in front of me as a piece of dry wood, strange, such is the enchantment of time.

– When did you come from Nagaon? – I asked. He didn't say anything in response. Was it some family crisis that overwhelmed him? And Panna? What about marriage, I wondered.

– How are things at home? – I asked once more.

– Gogoponti Lakratua. You know, necessity is the mother of strange bedfellows. It is lack that brings strangers together.

– Meaning?

– Gogo, Pontilakra, Tuatuatua – he said so by disfiguring his face so much, I began to be concerned about his state.

– I am in a state of flux right now – he said.

– Can you share it? – I asked.

– Inauspicious, confidential and fraught with danger, *for you* – he whispered in a muted voice getting close to me. The boat rocked a little. He sought a *bidi*

from the boatman. The boatman drew a *bidi* and a matchbox from the folds of his *gamosa* and lent it to him. Lighting the *bidi*, Nilotpal drew in a couple of puffs, and continued –

– A woman's always a woman. But a *bidi* isn't just a *bidi*, it is also a bit of smoke.

– I looked at him, trying to make sense of the mystery he configured.

– You don't indulge in these, do you? – he asked. I nodded, indicating that I didn't.

– Can you name some of the world's most renowned addicts? – queried Nilotpal.

I laughed.

– Hermann Göring, German head of the Nazi Airforce, took morphine. Winston Churchill used laughing gas to induce laughter. Charles Dickens, the novelist, was an opium addict. The English actor Cary Grant took LSD. Do you know why they sought refuge in these intoxicants? – he looked at me and sought my view.

– Why? – I asked.

– Because they believed that exactly this was Gogoponti Lakratua.

– What's that?

– *Accha*, what are you occupied with at present? You must have given up drawing – Nilotpal placed it naturally.

– Nothing much. I have two trucks and one mini-bus, a beer bar, and I supply to different

departments, and if I can manage time I invest in movie productions and dabble in acting as well – I elaborated jestfully. Nilotpal became a little glum, looked up at the sky, and as if talking to himself, said – and still you are not familiar with Gogoponti Lakratua?

A few moments went by in silence. I didn't say anything in response, just kept observing him. He started looking at the Saraighat Bridge, mournfully. The morning ferry sped past us towards Rajaduar. A brisk glance towards it, and suddenly Nilotpal covered his hands with his palms. After two-three minutes he took them away. And then, looking at the moving waves, he pointed at them and said – look, just like Gogoponti Lakratua.'

I glanced at him quietly, realising that communication with my one-time friend wasn't taking place as such.

Our boat arrived at Sukreswar Ghat. Offering the fare to the boatman, I disembarked. Nilotpal, however, stayed on.

- Come to my place – I said.
- I'll have to leave again – he replied.
- Where to?
- To the other side.
- Why?
- I have to meet him, he has gone close to the Bridge.
- Who?

– Gogoponti Lakratua. Listen – saying so, he beckoned me closer. When I got close to him, in a hushed voice he whispered in my ear – Our transaction will take place just under the Bridge. Ganja, eighty maunds. He's waiting there.' – I looked at him, astonished. To the boatman – 'come.' And he took twenty rupees from me.

– Visit me. Just adjacent to the Indranagar High School. Just ask anyone, you'll find it. The boatman oared out, and as the boat got a little far off, with a shrill voice, he spoke out – that the sun's up from the East, the river that's flowing on, this moving boat, and the people breathing, do you know what all of these are?

– Symphony, symphony without the theatre – I too shouted back.

– No, it is a Gogoponti Lakratua event – he responded.

With the dilemma that Nilotpal had become, I stood for some time at the Ghat, thinking about him. He looked unwaveringly towards the Saraighat Bridge as both he and the boat moved towards it. I took my steps homeward.

This dramatic interaction with Nilotpal ushered in numerous questions, keeping me occupied for a few days. His teaching career; Panna; the peaceful ambience that suffused their happy home; Panna's ambling mind-adventures and his poetry-induced mind – thoughts along such lines. I decided that I'd write a letter to his home address seeking answers to these

questions. Instead of writing it to his mother, I addressed it to Panna as she lived close to Nilotpal's home. Writing the letter did provide me some relief, and it turned out, I came across Nilotpal just two days after, quite dramatically, and in suspicious circumstances.

I was on my way back home in my Fiat car, and as I was crossing the State Bank premises, a man bolted from somewhere and landed in front of the vehicle. I had to brake suddenly and somehow managed to bring the car to a halt. When the man stood up I saw that it was Nilotpal. He too recognised me. Frantically he opened the car door and sat down beside me, and said – 'Don't wait, move.' As I turned my eyes towards the bank, I could hear an armed security man yell – 'Hey, hey.' Without thinking anything else, I accelerated and sped away.

After we moved a little further ahead, he nudged me in my arm and said – 'Stop.' I stopped the car. He got down and stood beside the car window. His face, indifferent yet sullen.

– Lend me twenty rupees – his hand outstretched.

– May I ask something if you don't mind? – I took out my wallet and asked him.

– God, ghosts and love – the existence of these cannot be proven without debate. Let's assume, Panna loves me, and I love her, and assume I love someone called Kanta which Panna cannot tolerate. In effect, Panna is not happy in my joy which disproves the existence of love. It means that the world is crowded

with ill-feelings. Say what you want to, I may not be able to love, but I will surely be capable of hatred.

I did not say anything in response to Nilotpal's analysis, and handed him twenty rupees. He grabbed it immediately and said – 'lend me a cigarette.'

– I don't smoke – I replied.

– Okay then – saying so he stepped away only to come close to me once again.

– Listen – he said. I looked at him. Getting even closer, he whispered in a hushed tone – only you saved me today, the matter was fraught with danger. He is supposed to enter the bank today. He will empty the vault.

– Who? – I asked, shocked. Perhaps my voice trembled. He smiled.

– Gogoponti Lakratua. Don't even utter a word about it for the next twenty-four hours. I'll be off now, saying so, he pointed towards a police patrolling jeep and disappeared in a flash. I was taken aback. Suspicion took hold of me. Was he out of his mind, or had he started indulging in acts that invited danger? That innocent, naïve and quiet Nilotpal of a couple of years ago and the one now – clueless and mysterious – what's the history of the period in between? I began to wonder.

Repeated constant knocks on my door at ten o'clock at night, opening it I saw a drowsy Nilotpal in front of me. His beard and hair unkempt, his kurta-pyajama gave out a foul-stench.

– How did you find my home? – I asked.

– A rickshaw-puller... – he got tongue-tied.

– Come in. I called him inside. He entered the room with uncertain steps and sat down on the carpet. Even as I sought to say something he silenced me with a gesture of his hand. I switched on the ceiling fan at maximum speed.

– He was not successful in the bank heist. He'll observe Dispur for a couple of days. He wants to know about the whereabouts of a file that concerns transactions of a few crores. And yes, he is grateful to you for saving him from danger today. – said Nilotpal.

– What transaction? – I queried unaffectedly.

– Contract. Government contract. If I can get the file by upbraiding a few, the contract will be mine. Bribery may be required, it'll be ensured, he has gone there. – he tried to light a *bidi*. The fan prevented him from lighting it, even after repeated attempts. I helped him out. 'Thanks' – saying so he drew two puffs and continued – 'Do you know what's the golden rule of the arts and the sciences? Whoever has the gold, makes the rules, that's how it is.'

I remained silent. I felt that Nilotpal would unravel a few things himself. Leaning against the wall, he closed his eyes. As if his sweaty face, wrinkled forehead, the pupils of his eyes and flared nostrils communicated – 'Every large problem has behind it a minor one which attempts to emerge on its own.' He moved a little, and sat down. He opened his eyes and broke his silence with

a sentence that I didn't even imagine – 'Panna went away.'

– Panna! You mean? – I sat down beside him. He shook his head, and then, in his almost inebriated state, his eyes reddened, he looked at me, and said – 'with a businessman, money is the matter. Money-property-security. Scarcity. Necessity is the mother of strange bedfellows.'

– When? – I asked.

– A few days ago.

– And you and your poetry? – I gently put in.

– That's Gogoponti Lakratua – I looked at his face.

He closed his eyes.

– Will you tell me about him? – I asked.

– About whom?

– This, Gogoponti –

– Lakratua?

– Right.

– I don't know. Saying so, Nilotpal lay down on the carpet. I didn't intervene. Time's really quite strange. I never imagined Panna would do this. She was Nilotpal's companion from his adolescent days, and then his beloved. She floated in the effervescence of youthfulness, borne by his verses. From what I knew, discussions on their marriage had already taken place between the two families. In such a situation – 'Hic,' Nilotpal hiccuped – I looked at him – 'hic! hic!'

– ‘Water?’ – he said, trying to get up. I brought him a glass of water and held him by the arm and made him sit.

– She left without letting me know. – He thirstily drank the water and continued – ‘this businessman was known to her hardly for a month. Necessity is the mother of – hic.’ Pausing, he lit a bidi.

– What’s the opinion in your home? – I asked

– ‘Poetry cannot eradicate hunger, it was inevitable’ – that’s what mother said. So, no more teaching, I sought out Gogoponti Lakratua. He’s intelligent, cunning and knows how to make the most of time. With him as my companion, I have come to your world. Only one mantra – I will live to feed, not for the heart. What do you think of the principle?

– Where’s he from?

– Who?

– I don’t know.

– Where did you get him?

– It’s not me, actually he sought me out the day I put the poems to the flames. It all happened in such a way that Gogogogo, Pontilakralakra, Tuatuatua, Tuatua, Tuatu– wa.’ – His face distorted, Nilotpal lay down on the carpet once more. I sat beside him for about half an hour. I placed a light *chadar* over him, and after a while I too fell asleep on the sofa.

When I woke up to the chirping of the birds, Nilotpal was gone. The door was ajar. The light of early dawn was streaking in. On the table, with the telephone

pressing in, there was a small letter, where it was written – ‘I located pen and paper. I had to leave suddenly. I will come in the evening and introduce him to you. – Nilotpal.’

Nilotpal came just before dusk, like a storm. A package wrapped by the newspaper in his hand.

– Keep this. And come quickly. – Saying so, he handed the package to me.

– ‘What’s it?’ – I wanted to know.

– Check later. – There was a strange sparkle in his eyes. The sun-soaked quietude of dusk after a terrifying turbulence.

The moment I took the car from the garage and put it out on the road, he said – ‘Saraighat Bridge.’ I looked at him.

– Fast. – he said. I directed the car towards Jalukbari.

When we got closer to the bridge, the crimson sun hung in the Western sky.

– Keep the car here. He’s out there on the bridge. – Nilotpal gestured. Accordingly, I took the car to one side and parked it at a suitable place, and then we started walking by the pedestrian pathway beside the bridge. Three guards at the opposite pathway were bargaining with a fisherman as they inspected his creel. We had only the Western side of the Brahmaputra as we were moving from the left. Most of the fishing boats were on their way back. We reached the middle of the bridge watching the rays of the setting sun spread across the

muddy waters as the disoriented crows cawed about in the sky. Nilotpal stopped. He lit a *bidi*, looked around cautiously and then turned towards me. His natural gentle look, his lips breaking into a thin smile, as if this was the Nilotpal of old – ‘auspicious, righteous and pure.’

– Where? – I asked.

– What? – he queries back as if knew nothing.

– Your friend.

– Friend?

– You were supposed to have introduced him to me.

– I said. Indifferent, he began to gaze at the setting sun. I grew impatient, and I got angry.

– Just see, almost like Gogoponti Lakratua. – He shouted as he pointed up at the empty sky above.

– I am referring to him as well. – I replied a little heatedly.

– About whom? – he asked again.

– Gogogo Lakrafakra or whatever, about him.

– I don't know.

– But you have brought me here to introduce him.

– That's right. But how will I introduce him, you'll have to find out yourself, because he cannot be seen–

– What?

– Indeed, he's Gogoponti Lakratua, a phrase. I don't know what it means. He's my meaningless and non-existent word-companion. I have no idea about his complexion, colour or shape, yet our mental bonding is excellent. He is intelligent, he's cunning, he's good and

he's bad as well. I scheme the looting of banks, of earning lakhs through huge supplies to government departments, I try my hand in illegal ganja transactions, and other remarkable things. – I too know that he has no existence, nor is there any meaning, he's just a word, a nonsensical word. – He stopped speaking and started to rummage his pockets frantically. A folded piece of paper emerged from his kurta pocket. Handing it to me, he said – I'll show you a game now, watch, just like Gogoponti Lakratuatuatententua Tua, this is the ticket for that show, keep it. – Saying so, he began running away from me up ahead. After a point, he stopped. Pressing himself against the railing, he gazed at the waters of the brimming river, and removing his clothes in a flash, stood completely naked. He turned around to look at me, smiled, and like a circus rope-walker, he bent forth a little and gave me a bow. He stood upon the railing and jumped below. A splash was heard. The incident took place even before a third person appeared on the scene. Dumbstruck, I stood there transfixed. When I regained myself, I looked down from beside the railing, no, there was no trace. Nilotpal and his body had been engulfed by the river.

With shaking hands, I unfolded the piece of paper he had given me – 'Let no one be held responsible for my departure. Yours – Nilotpal Dutta.'

I do not remember how I reached home. I unwrapped the newspaper that Nilotpal had left behind, there was a dagger with coagulated blood stains on it.

Lost, even as I wondered what to do with the dagger, an image in the newspaper caught my attention – Panna's photo. A description beneath it – 'Newly married woman murdered by former lover. Eminent businessman Tarun Bora's wife Panna Bora was murdered with a sharp weapon by a young man named Nilotpal Dutta who fled the scene. This was a love-centric murder, two young witnesses privy to it said.'

### ***About the Author***

One of the most engaging voices of contemporary Assamese literature, Tapan Das has been writing stories and fictional sketches for the last several decades. His stories engage with ideas that cut across multi-generic literary and cultural templates, encompassing worldviews that deepen our dialogue with the complexities of the human psyche. Unlike the staple concerns that populate much of the field of modern Assamese short fiction with an overemphasis on socially directed themes, Das locates in the interiors of the mind and its unpredictabilities to engage with the thought and feeling which do not always submit to easy encapsulation. Das's stories have appeared in literary magazines and are also available in individual volumes. Tapan Das is one of the foremost actors of his generation. His work across multiple platforms – stage,

cinema and mobile theatre – embodies an outstanding talent of our times.

### ***Context***

“Gogoponti Lakratua” is now an established classic of contemporary Assamese literature. It looks at many aspects of life and living in the late twentieth century through the lens of the *doppelgänger* which is a vital key in the narrative. In addressing identity and the role of value-laden assessments that affect the placement of priorities in specific social environments, “Gogoponti Lakratua” offers an interesting picture of the socio-cultural dynamics in late twentieth century Assam. The characters in the story occupy a world where campus life and dynamics of transactional worldviews were considerably different from what we have now as we move to the second quarter of the twenty-first century. The setting of the story presents a world where pre-digital communication was the norm. In such a world, the security as well as the insecurities that impacted individual conduct were conditioned by the prevailing social mechanisms of the time. One picture that we have in the story relates to ‘underground’ activities whose operational aspects appear to be distant from what we have today. Yet, the insistent human propensities which transcend their time of occurrence strike us as being extremely relevant for us today. “Gogoponti Lakratua” also looks at the unbridgeable

chasm between language and reality, drawing before us the stark reminder that 'knowledge' is an elusive matrix that we have to keep revising to make sense of the world we live in. It is noteworthy that certain geographical entities have transformed from the time of the story. For instance, the reference to the 'Saraighat Bridge' over the Brahmaputra pre-dates the building of the parallel bridge beside the earlier one. Transportation to North Guwahati today is possible though other routes across the river, including the new roadway, and is not confined to the Saraighat Bridge alone. Again, the car of the narrator is not among those visible in Guwahati roads now. There are several other time-signs in the story that enable us to situate the circumstances within the world of the late twentieth century. These contextual parameters are essential for us as we try to read "Gogoponti Lakratua" in the twenty-first century.

### *Analysis*

"Gogoponti Lakratua" was first anthologized in the collection titled *Dighala Baruar Dalan* in 1994. It had appeared in *Bismoi* previously in the September volume of 1992. Subsequently, the story was included in other anthologies as well. One of the striking features of the story, evident in the opening paragraph itself, is the sense of drama which is both atmospheric and character-driven. The narrator, about whom we do not have much information, comes across his erstwhile

college friend Nilotpal Dutta in unforeseen and dramatic circumstances in North Guwahati, a place where he was not expected to have been. And the time of this encounter as well as the mode of transport that they resort to is quite uncanny: early morning on a hand-oared boat crossing the river Brahmaputra. This is unusual because, as far the narrator knew, Nilotpal was working as a teacher in Nagaon. Quite literally, he was out of place in North Guwahati. His unkempt look, ungainly and dirt-ridden clothes and scruffy beard showed that he had been inattentive to his bearing in recent times. In his conversation with Nilotpal, the narrator tried to gauge the reason behind his appearance in this location, but all he got was a few scraps of unconnected words and phrases that did not seem to make much sense. Nilotpal talked about an entity called 'Gogoponti Lakratua', but he did not explain what it entailed. He suggested that his association with Gogoponti was complex and someday he would introduce the narrator to him. As they crossed the Brahmaputra, Nilotpal's behaviour appeared to be considerably contrary to what he himself used to be, which is why the narrator was perplexed. He invited Nilotpal to his home when they reached the bank, but it was refused. Nilotpal said that he had work to attend to and took the same boat back. The unusual turn of events with regard to Nilotpal kept the narrator occupied as he found it difficult to reconcile the Nilotpal embedded in his memory with the person he had just met. He recalled

the college days when Nilotpal, the suave and adorable composer of romantic verses sang paeans to his beloved Panna. Nilotpal had a charming personality then and he was known for his considerate and affectionate responsiveness. His mates looked up to him and his acceptance as a role model, especially because he fit into the romantic mould with ease. Panna was constantly by his side and it was assumed that they would be with each other for good. These memories came to the narrator as he was trying to make sense of the personality of the Nilotpal that he had met.

The next meeting with Nilotpal was even more dramatic: one day as he was passing by the bank premises, a man suddenly landed in front of the narrator's vehicle. As he stopped the car, he was astounded to find that the man was none other than Nilotpal. He had not expected Nilotpal here, that too in such inexplicable circumstances. Nilotpal got into the car and impelled the narrator to move out of the scene. Nilotpal said that it was all Gogoponti's doing and the heist that was attempted had gone wrong. The narrator could not discern what was being referred to, as it was not easy to understand the goings-on with so many gaps. Nilotpal went on to talk about Gogoponti Lakratua as the driving force behind all the plans that had been made: the looting of banks, the manipulation of the official machinery to achieve out-of-turn goals, and shady deals that placed him under the cloud. Even as he met Nilotpal under these unexpected circumstances, and

with the information about his past, the unfolding developments could not be placed in a plausible rubric by the narrator. The narrator's insistent enquiries about the situation Nilotpal was presently in only met with a standard response: it all amounted to Gogoponti Lakratua. For the narrator, it only led to further befuddlement. His erratic behaviour and his unconventional approach to things astonished the narrator. He was concerned about his college friend but did not know how to address the matter. When Nilotpal was asked about Panna, all he got was obfuscatory responses. The narrator had written to Panna in meanwhile, but no information had been received from that end as yet.

On another occasion, Nilotpal arrived in the narrator's house, quite unexpectedly, and in his state of inebriation, he slowly began to open up about his past. He said that Panna was gone. But he did not reveal much. Spending the night in the narrator's home, Nilotpal left the next morning, quietly. He scribbled a few words on a scrap of paper where he talked about returning in the evening when he would introduce Gogoponti Lakratua. Nilotpal's frantic entry into the narrator's house that afternoon was no less dramatic: he brought a package wrapped in a newspaper and that stated that it was to be seen later. Saying so, he urged the narrator to take him to the Saraighat Bridge where Gogoponti Lakratua was apparently to be found. When they reached the Bridge and began walking, as they

reached mid-point, Nilotpal suddenly dashed forward and stood on the railing. He had shed all his clothes and stood facing the setting sun on the Western horizon. Offering the narrator a final look, he jumped into the river. The narrator, awestruck and taken by absolute surprise, rushed to the spot and although he had heard a splash, there was nothing visible below. On his return, when he opened the package left behind by Nilotpal he saw a dagger with blood stains. The newspaper that was used to wrap it carried a news report about a woman's murder by her former lover. The woman was identified as Panna. The story ends with the news report in front of the narrator but the complicated intricacies about Nilotpal, the configuration of 'Gogoponti Lakratua' as an entity and the shift in his personality invite us to look at the story as much more than a love story with the thriller twist of revenge.

## ***Themes and Issues***

### *The Dopplegänger*

The term *dopplegänger* refers to the concept of the 'double' in literature and culture, of which there exists a rich history in world fiction. In "Gogoponti Lakratua", Nilotpal Dutta takes recourse to the concept of the *dopplegänger* in order to create an alter-ego, an alternate self, whose existence is not demonstrable but is to be assessed only by inference. It appears that Nilotpal

'developed' this alternative self-identity of himself in order to carry out tasks that were contrary to the image and personality he had been known to have previously. There is also a change in location with regard to the aggressive and the gentler selves of Nilotpal: the later guise is met by the narrator in Guwahati while the one who had a quiet, romantic demeanour remains unnamed. The infusion of the *doppelgänger* is crucial to the suspense and the atmospheric effect of the story as the question of 'Gogoponti Lakratua' remains ambiguous till the very end.

### *Love and Revenge*

'Love' and 'revenge' are two of the most insistent of tropes in world literature. It appears in a variety of ways across genres, including poetry, theatre and fiction. In this story, the back-narrative has the love-account of Nilotpal and Panna, whose relationship was expected to culminate in marital union. Nilotpal wrote love poems for Panna during his college days and their bond was well recognised to be a serious one. The image of Nilotpal during this period was one of a gentle, loving individual adored by his peers. We come to know from the newspaper report that Panna was murdered by a sharp weapon by her former lover – this was the version given by eyewitnesses – and given the turn of events, it can be surmised that the person responsible for this deed was none other than Nilotpal. The transformation

of Nilotpai from an adoring lover to someone driven by the desire to eliminate the one he loved changes the course of their lives, resulting in the end of both. The themes of 'love' and 'revenge' figure in this narrative in an unconventional way as the back-story but in conjunction with that of the *doppelgänger* the integration of each of these themes into the fabric of the closely-knit story is very well achieved.

### *The Thriller Tale*

"Gogoponti Lakratua" is filled with high-drama and has a pacy narrative orientation. Information trickles as the narrative progresses and the turn of events keeps the reader on tenterhooks. The suspense is built up by many elements which converge as the story moves forward. The introduction of the phrase "Gogoponti Lakratua", which gradually transforms into an entity, and then a much-anticipated 'individual', is done in phases and the reader is drawn to the intricacies of the plot by the manner in which the 'thrill' element is made to suffuse the story. Although we do not see *action* as such, the references to deeds attempted and envisaged creates the sense of raciness which is built up as the story progresses. We get to know that Nilotpai, in association with Gogoponti, has plans to carry out daredevil tasks which are fraught with considerable risks. The questions that keep the narrator wondering serve to generate the

element of suspense continuously till the dramatic climax of the story.

### *Narrative Inventiveness*

“Gogoponti Lakratua” employs an inventive narrative style which adds to the gripping interest which is consistently present in the story. The narrator serves as a witness to what happens in the present, but he is also the source for the reader as far as the background information is concerned. As a ‘character’, the narrator has a crucial role to play in the story. He also becomes the confidant of the protagonist, Nilotpal, a role of considerable importance in the story. It is only through the narrator that we are able to connect the dots to make sense of the present because he plays the role of the interpreter as well. He is not just the witness of what happens in Guwahati but he is also familiar with the circumstances of Nilotpal’s past. All of these aspects do not emerge in the story in a sequential fashion. They are filtered at different stages through a conflation of memory, interpretation and available evidence. Perhaps the most beguiling of figures in the story is that of Gogoponti Lakratua, whose status from name to entity to persona to non-existent configuration haunts the narrative. The use of mystery and suspense to keep the *truth* of Gogoponti Lakratua out of reach is an exemplary exercise in narrative inventiveness which makes the story an undoubted classic of Assamese short

fiction. The design of the story shows consummate craftsmanship which not only holds the reader's attention but also works upon the elements of the plot to maintain the sense of mystery all throughout the narrative.