

Chapter 3

ASSAMESE NOVEL AND ASSAMESE CULTURE: SOME HISTORICAL ISSUES

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3.1 GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF ASSAMESE NOVEL

The journal *Orunodai*, was published in 1846 from the Mission Press at Sivasagar (then Sivasagar), which was founded by the American Baptist Missionaries in order to preach the message of the Bible in Assam. The journal also came to be the harbinger of modernity in Assamese literature for the first time in many ways. The *Jatrikar Yatra*, an Assamese rendering of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, which was published in serial in the pages of the *Orunodai*, is considered to be the first Assamese writing bearing the characteristics of a novel. According to Satyendranath Sarma- this translation had born the seed of future novel in Assamese, despite its lack of coherence, intact storyline and non-cultured style. (Sarma 2004: 22) Following this showered a cache of rendering several other novels in to Assamese including *Kaminikanta* (1877), *Alokeshi Beishyar Bisoye* (1877), *Koni Behurar Katha* (1878) and *Ruthar Kahini* (1880), most of which were based on material derived from the Old Testament by A.K. Garni and *Fulmoni and Karuna* by Mrs Garni. Chiefly religious in nature and sentiments, these renderings cannot be termed novels in the truest sense. However, they can be said to have paved the way for the forthcoming novels in Assamese later.

Apart from the Missionaries, *Bahire Rong Song Bhitore Kuwa-Bhatari* (1876) written by Hemchandra Baruah, *Sudharmar Upakhyan* (1884) written by Padmawati Devi Phukanani, and *Pramila* written by Karunabhiram Baruah and published (1885) in the *Assam Bandhu* can be considered to be fore runners of novel writing in Assam. In *Pramila*, we find certain features, though not all, of a novel and Karunabhiram Baruah used the word novel very consciously to mean it. *Bahire Rong Song Bhitore Kuwa-Bhatari* was penned by Hemchandra Baruah to bring to light the social corruptions of the Assamese society. "It was very sarcastic in its story line and free from any propaganda. Coherence in plot and concrete characterization being, two organs of a novel, were absent in it." (Sarma 2004: 26). In *Sudharmar Upakhyan*, Devi Phukanani endeavoured to present the results of the good and evil deeds in the imitation of the ancient stories.

The *Jonaki*, an Assamese journal published in 1889 and edited by Chandra Kumar Agarwalla, came in to form as a cumulative effect of Asomiya Sahitya Chara, a literary club founded in 1872 by Assamese students studying in Calcutta and other followers. The flow of Romanticism touched the soil of Assamese literature through the *Jonaki*. The *Bijuli*, edited by Krishna Prasad Duwarah, was published the following year. Both of these journals played a pivotal role in shaping Assamese literature, specifically the Assamese novel as a genre. *Padma Kumari*, a novel written by Lakshminath Bezbaroa, was published in 1891 in the first issue, of the third year edition of the *Bijuli*. *Bhanumati*, another novel written by Padma Nath Gohain Baruah, was published the same year in the pages of *Bijuli*. However, *Padma Kumari* (later renamed as *Padum Konwari*) and *Bhanumati* were printed as book in 1905 and 1908 respectively. *Lahori*, the second novel written by Padmanath Gohain Baruah, was published in 1892. In the preface to the novel he wrote thus: ‘There is no book to be called Assamese novel till this date. *Lahori* was written in order to meet this dearth and reduce the ill-reputation.’ *Mem*, a novel written by Nilakantha Baruah, was published in serial at *Bijuli* in 1892. Written in eight chapters, this novel reflects the reformative mind of the novelist to eradicate ills of the society.

Miri Jiyari, the first novel of Rajanikanta Bordoloi, was published in 1895. He came into contact with the Mising society and its culture as he was appointed by Edward Gait as Sub-Deputy Collector in North Lakhimpur. His *Miri Jiyari* captures his direct experiences with Mising society and it is considered to be a solid social novel in Assamese, dwelling on the theme of a tribe for the first time. Mahiram Das’s (M. R. Das) *Harideu Kaniyar Katha* published in 1898 and Hareswar Sarma Baruah’s *Kusum Kumari* also reflected the same social vein. From the *Jatrikar Yatra*, published in the pages of the *Orunodai* down to *Kusum Kumari*, published in 1898, marked a definite phase in this way, in the history of Assamese novel.

3.1.1 Novel writing in the hands of Padmanath Gohain Baruah and Lakshminath Bezbaroa

As stated, the journey of the Assamese novel was triggered by *Bhanumati* (written by Padmanath Gohain Baruah) and *Padum Kunwari* (written by Lakshminath Bezbaroa), published in *Bijuli* and *Jonaki* respectively in 1891. However, *Lahori*, published in 1892, was the first Assamese novel printed as a book. Assamese literature had its heyday in the writings of these prolific writers. In due course of time, they opted for other genres of

literature; thereby put an end to the writing of novels. It is noteworthy that Gohain Baruah and Bezbaroa heralded a new horizon that inspired many writers to follow their foot-prints to write novels.

Padmanath Gohain Baruah, Lakshminath Bezbaroa and their contemporaries such as Chandra Kumar Agarwalla and Hem Chandra Goswami and several others, helped to trigger the Indian renaissance in Assamese literature through their manifold writings. Nationalistic aspiration in tune with a growing movement for the country's freedom from the British rule came to influence many of the Assamese writers, more in terms of looking back and reading about the cultural heritage of Assam along with the ushering in of new ideas, forms and expressions in Assamese literature. Newer literary forms were experimented with by these writers, resulting in a literary upsurge in Assamese which also included novel writing. The Romantic movement in Assamese literature, like that in the West was also centered around the revelation of the individual mind of the author including personal emotions and finding expression in different ways. Patriotic fervor also formed a part of such expressions in some of the novels. *Bhanumati*, the first novel of Gohain Baruah that dwells on the revolt of the Mowamariyas, as an example, captures this romantic vein to a larger extent. Here, the novelist depicts the ideal of a romantic love culminating in self-destruction, like Juliet in the play of Shakespeare. A look into the novel reveals that it deals with social elements more than historic. The story creates an imaginary line and characters, including a king without identity. Although King Siva Singha and Queen Phuleswari, the two historical figures are the triggers of the revolt, they not seem to feature in the expansion of the story. (Barua 1957: 73) However, material of history and the royal influence over the story line cannot be denied. (Sarma 2004: 33)

Lahori, another novel written by Gohain Baruah, depicts an image of the same romantic love. However, the novelist characterizes it as a family novel. The salient features of these two novels are their use of everyday languages and the delineation of events drawn from social reality. From this perspective, Gohain Baruah can be held as a trail-blazer of modern Assamese novel.

The same vein and ideal of romanticism, as found in Gohain Baruah, was also expressed in *Padum Kunwari*, the only novel written by Lakshminath Bezbaroa. This novel captures the historical background of the strife known as the 'Danduwa Droh', initiated and headed

by Haradutta and Birdutta, during the reign of Ahom King Kandrapesar Singha. However, the central attraction of the story lies in the imaginary love theme between Padum Kunwari, the daughter of Haradutta and his step son Surjyakumar. “The sorrowful events meted out to Padum Kuwari find expressions in the folk songs prevalent in the Kamrupa areas. Perhaps Bezbaroa was inspired by this in creation of this novel.” (Bharali 2012: 31, 32). Bezbaroa blended historical events within a romantic story line.

Padmanath Gohain Baruah was not instantly inspired to write out novels. He undertook the journey in order to mitigate the dearth in this respect. He was hugely inspired by Walter Scott, the popular British novelist, and Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, the Bengali novelist, who followed the footprints of Scott. Scott had the rare capacity to pick up characters from history and his influence affected Gohain Baruah who emulated him and endeavored to write out novels. His attempts had a popular impact. (Bharali 2012: 38) Lakshminath Bezbaroa followed the same style and later on Rajanikanta Bordoloi wrote several novels which captured the historical events.

3.1.2 The trends in the historical novels of Rajanikanta Bordoloi

Rajanikanta Bordoloi is another novelist who followed the path ushered in by Gohain Baruah and Bezbaroa. He wrote nine novels, and thus played pivotal role in putting the Assamese novel on a solid foundation. Apart from *Miri Jiyari*, his remaining novels were based on various episodes drawn from the history of Assam. In fact, Assamese historical novels received a new zeal in the hands of Rajanikanta Bordoloi. Emulating the models of Walter Scot and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Bordoloi yoked together his creative imagination with history and shed light on social and political life in eras of the past. Among his novels, *Manomati* (1900), *Rangili* (1925), *Nirmal Bhakat* (1926), *Tamreswari Mandir* (1926), and *Rahdoi Ligiri* (1930), he captured the background of the attack of the Burmese. His *Danduwa Droh* (1909) depicts the revolt of Haradutta and Birdutta against Badan Chandra Barphukan. The *Radha Rukminir Ron* (1925) depicts the strife of the Mowamariyas against the tyrannical reign of the Ahom Kings. These novels reflect Bordoloi’s awareness of history and studied response towards events of Assam’s political history.

Bordoloi’s writing kept patriotism and welfare of the nation in his view and through this he tried to inspire the society. The state was made restless by the frequent onslaughts of

the Burmese. A social disorder followed, as the moral and spiritual structures of the society were largely devastated. Bordoloi tried to make people aware of the Vaishnavite traditions and recreate this society on the cultural and moral basis set by the ideals of past history. Therefore, most of his novels contain long discussions of religion; especially the Vaishnavite religion and his characters are seen to achieve mental peace in the long run as they shelter in the religious ethos.

Assamese novels initiated by the *Jatrikar Yatra* in the pages of the *Orunodai* were found to be on solid footing in the hands of Padmanath Gohain Baruah, Lakshminath Bezbaroa and Rajanikanta Bordoloi in later years. Gradually, this journey took new avenues and hues as the novelists incorporated diverse social issues, descriptions of the pristine beauty in the rural areas, superstitions, social conflicts, tribal issues and scientific themes as subjects in their novels. In recent years this journey is accelerated with the inclusion of newer forms like Science fiction, Stream of Consciousness, Existentialism, Expressionism, Post-modernism and techniques, themes and approaches emanating from influences of the West and responses by the novelists to a changing social environment.

3.1.3 Assamese novel in 20th century

The *Manomati*, another novel written by Rajanikanta Bordoloi, was published in 1900 marking the beginning of Assamese novel in the 20th century. “Embodying all the features of a novel, this novel marked and founded the central- post of Assamese novel.” (Thakur: 2000: 09) The *Manomati* captures the historic background of Assam during the attack by the Burmese and partly yokes the lores associated with. It was followed by *Dandowadroh* (1909), *Rangili* (1925), *Nirmal Bhakat* (1910), *Tamreswari Mandir* (1926), *Radha Rukminir Ron* (1925), *Rohdoi Ligiri* (1930) and *Thamba Thuirir Sadhu* (1932), all of which were historical in nature. In fact, historical novel as a genre was put on a solid ground by Rajanikanta Bordoloi through this gamut of novels. In an article titled ‘Asamot Upanyasar Sajuli’, Bordoloi divulged that like Scott and Bankimchandra he unearthed the ancient history of Assam to write novels. (*Awahan* 3.10: 1931) So, apart from the *Miri Jiyari*, one can always find certain historical events as plot in the remaining novels written by him, which tried to spread the sentiments of patriotism and divine love among his readers.

Hiteswar Barbaruah, Sarat Chandra Goswami and Hari Narayan Dutta Baruah were the novelists who dwelt on historical events as themes after Rajanikanta Bordoloi. *Malita* (1918), the only novel of Hiteswar Barbaruah, embodied the strife between the Ahoms and the Kacharis during the reign of Pratap Singha in 16th century with a romantic note. Sarat Chandra Goswami's *Panipath* depicted the first war at Panipath between Babar and Ibrahim Lodi and the war between Babar and Rana Sangram Singha at Fatehpur Sikri, in a romantic vein with elements of historicity. Hari Narayan Dutta Baruah's *Citra Darshan* (1931) was purely an imaginary novel that captured the battle at Saraighat and some other battles prior to that time. A romantic vein intersperses this novel also.

Some memorable novels written during those years include Hareswar Sarma's *Kusum Kumari* (1905), Nabinchandra Battacharya's *Chandraprabha* (1908), Chintaharan Patgiri's *Sangsar Citra* (1921), Dandhidhar Sonowal's (Fatowali) *Chapala*, Pandit Bhabadeva Bhagawati's *Leela* (1928), Kamaleswar Chaliha's *Priya*, Snehalata Baruah's *Bina* (1926) and *Bemejali* (1934) and Chandraprabha Saikiani's *Pitrivitha* (1937).

3.2 THE TRENDS IN 20TH CENTURY ASSAMESE NOVELS

The Assamese novel, which as a genre had its debut in the pages of the Orunodai, became a flourishing genre in the 20th century, with vivacity of expression, intense study of the rural and urban societies, experimentation in technique and style, and the impact of science and technology on the family and social life. The Assamese novel during the 20th century has been found to be one of the satisfying genres in the history of Assamese literature. In a broad classification of the novels of the century, we find that the same novel can be read and followed from different perspectives and categories. In this study, it is attempted to shed light on certain trends only with reference to a few novels, leaving out the others on the basis of their distinctiveness in terms of plot, characterization, motif, style and language.

3.2.1. Social novel

The term social novel refers to a novel that portrays a reflection of society, its reality as far as this is possible. Taking a larger perspective, all novels come under this category because all novels as such depict certain aspects of the society as their theme.

From the very birth of the Assamese novel, social reality has been an inseparable part of its journey. Though, not a novel in the truest sense, *Bahire Rong Song Bhitore Ku-Bhaturi* of Hemchandra Baruah captured some of the burning issues of the society of his time. Mainly sarcastic in nature, this book aims at creating social consciousness among the people at large. The social life is candidly reflected in *Bhanumoti* and *Lahori* as well, written by Padmanath Gohain Baruah. However, the *Miri Jiyari* of Rajanikanta Bordoloi can be termed as the first Assamese social novel of a different kind portraying the society and life of a distinct ethnic community i.e. the Missing's as it dwells exclusively on the Mising society as its theme.

Chandraprabha (1908), written by Nabinchandra Sarma, is a social novel in which dowry has been taken as a thematic concern, though it is a recent malaise coming to our society. The practice of dowry which has immerged as one of the worst evils in Indian society, was however never found to be in practice in the traditional Assamese society. On the contrary, there is a practice of 'inverted dowry' among some of the ethnic communities of Assam and North-East, in which the proposed bride groom has to pay a token amount to the parents of the bride (Kainar Mulya) or to work for some days in the bridal house before marriage. Rajanikanta Bordoloi and Lummer Dai in their *Miri-Jiyari* and *Kainar Mulya* respectively referred to prevalence of this practice. In among the non-tribal Hindu society a token amount is respectfully offered from the bride groom family to the bridal house. However in recent years unfortunate happenings related to dowry have started appearing in Assam. In the *Sansar Chitra*, written by Chintaharan Patgiri, there is a picture of family violence with the plot outlining how a married lady perpetrated brutal torture on another married lady in the household of her in-laws. *Sadhana* and *Abiskar*, two novels written by Dandinath Kalita, reflect the social realities of his time very sympathetically. *Jivanar Batot*, a novel written by Bina Barua, just before India got her independence, is one of the finest social novels of the century containing a sensitive portrayal of the realities of Assamese middle class (Baruah 2007: 229). It is set at the crossroads of rural life against a money culture gradually engulfing the urban social set up of the middle class Assamese. There is no other novel worth the name that equals the *Jivanar Batot* in terms of plot, characterization and subtle treatment of the issues raised by the author. (Mishra 1991: 56) The social reality is also included in Radhika Mohan

Goswami's novels. Social treachery and is also included in corruptions have been delineated very faithfully by Goswami. His *Chakonoiya* describes the story of an ideal youth in conflict with society.

As a novelist Hitesh Deka tries to consolidate his vision to create an ideal Assamese society through his gamut of novels. A sense of nationalism frequently intersperses with his fondness for the ideal of socialism. His dream to form an ideal society permeates his novels. Syed Abdul Malik is a master story teller in delineating the rural life of Assam through his novels. His *Surujmukhir Swapna* conveys salient features of the villages, specifically the rural beauty by the river Dhanshiri, along with the simple village folk living there. This novel captures the rural simplicity, beliefs, superstitions, arrogance and the poverty of the people along with their fight against diseases. Jogesh Das's *Dawar Aru Nai* is an Assamese social novel where, where we find a of post war society referring to a tea estate in Upper Assam as the theme of the novel. It draws a pen picture of the conflict between the old and the new society, the ideals of socialism, corruption, materialist view of life, sexual perversions and the traditional view about the women. He has very honestly pointed out the demerits of his contemporary society through his novels, in *Hejar Phool* (1967), *Utkantha Upakantha* (1970) and *Nedekha Juir Dhowa* (1972). Through the family of Hari Das and Lalit, the caste differences and social indifferences prevalent during the sixties and after have been placed under scrutiny in his novel *Hejar Phool*. At the same time, Jogesh Das's novels hurled sarcasm against the artificial ethical moralities of the Sattras in Assam. The river named Sonai and its surrounding natural beauty, along with the social life find expression in *Ganga Chilanir Pakhi*, a social novel written by Laksminandan Borah. The psychological situations of the villagers appear to be honestly depicted in this novel. *Madhupur*, a social novel written by Shilabhandra, captures the deteriorating social life in the villages in the years after independence.

Homen Borgohain, is another author who narrates the social life of Assam. His novels depict the rural environments, its fragmented details with vividness. His *Haladhiya Saraiye Baudhan Khai* (1973) presents the painful life of the farmers in Assam, their poverty, exploitation by the rich and farce in the name of social justice. His *Pita-Putra* (1975) displays the village life in Assam just after the Independence. On the other hand, his *Subala* (1963) is a visualization of his feelings towards those fellows who are deprived and exploited. Through the conflicting life of Subala, the novelist sheds light on the darker

niches of humanity. Through the character named Menaka, the question of lost glory and social status have been poignantly played in his novel entitled *Matsyagandha* (1987). The class differences, the concept of untouchability, and social treacheries have been examined in this novel. Menaka symbolizes the voice of the poor, who are deprived and so angry, and voices her concerns and vents against the so-called upper caste in the society.

Ashirbadar Rong (1996), written by Arun Sharma, is a remarkable social novel that sheds light on superstitions and jealousy prevalent in the villages. *Edhani Mahir Hanhi* (2001), written by Mahim Bora, is another social novel that depicts the life of a lady before and after her marriage ; the thought and perspectives of the lady become a subject of historical and social importance of post-independence Assam. *Kajolir Rog* (2001), written by Umakanta Sharma, documents the life of immigrant Muslims living in Assam for years. It holds the picture of how they try to live in peace with the neighboring Hindu villages. *Chinnamastar Manuhto* (2001), a novel written by Mamoni Raisom Goswami, critiques the tradition of animal sacrifice prevalent in Assam during the regime of the British. The novelist raises her voice against the continuing practice of animal sacrifice in the temples under the cover of religious belief. The readers will discover how various religious worships in the Kamakhya temple have been used with folk-belief and tradition to create a picture of social realism. *Katha Ratnakar* (2007), a novel written by Dhrubajyoti Borah, is another significant work that looks at the life of the Kaivartas, a socially depressed caste in Assam. Some serious questions relating to caste, creed and credo have been raised here. It is a work on a community, although not ethnic or tribal, with all its colours. The above is an overview of the trends of Assamese novel written during the 20th century with social realism in diverse forms and colours as their principal concern.

3.2.2. Political novel

The novels included under this category are basically social novels. However, they are narrated with political overtones as they shed light on the contemporary political conditions of the state. The story or theme of such a novel can be a political event or philosophy, on which the wheel of the novels revolves.

However, we cannot say with certainty that political novels can be brought under a concrete form or category till date. At the outset in the journey of Assamese novels, some

included political scenarios of the state. However, they were not enough to be given a distinct category. *Rathar Sakari Ghure* (1950), a novel written by Sayed Abdul Malik, is a harbinger by bringing in political ideology as a focal refrain in Assamese novels. It is an ideology based on socialism. *La Sa Gu* (1945-46 in *Banhi*), another novel by the same novelist, uses socialism as its focus.

The pictures of the struggle for Independence are vividly reflected in *Ronga Ronga Tej* (1968), written by Pashupati Bharadwaj and *Mritunjoy* (1970), written by Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya. Both these novels narrate how Assam was influenced by the Quit India movement on 1942. A political tone is prevalent in almost all the novels written by Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya. His *Rajpathe Ringiyai* (1955) based on the first day of Independence on August 1, 1947. *Sataghni* (1965) is based on the Indo-Chinese conflict, *Pratipad* (1970) a narrative on the laborer strike in the refinery of Digboi in 1939; *Kabar Aru Phool* (1972) based on the freedom struggle of Bangladesh. *Bharati* and *Eti Nisha* two other novels written by him, are also narratives on the language movement in Assam and various issues that were raised as its aftermaths. Although a socialist by conviction he was not influenced by any particular political party all through his life. His perspectives were that of a humanist through which he looks at various political and social issues concerning the society around him and his deep concerns for the society emerging from his socialist vision find reflection in all his novels with a range of colours and images.

Bipanna Samoy (1996), a novel written by Medini Chaudhury, is a political novel that faithfully documents the reality and imaginations of a particular decade in Assam. *Upatyakar Para Upatyakaloi* (2002) is a novel written by Dipak Kumar Barkakoty, on the theme of bifurcation of the country after Independence. It has a deep political realism. The political impact soon after the division of the country upon the minds of the people is vividly portrayed in this novel. *Artha* (2003), a novel written by Dhrubajyoti Bora, documents horrors meted out in the final decade of the last century, due to political events in Assam and its adjoining areas. In the second episode of the novel the political activities in the foot-hills of Tibet are introduced.

Abirata Yatra (1981) by Rita Chaudhury is a political novel that partially reflects some events of the language movement in 1970. *Ei Samoy Sei Samoy* (2007), another novel by the same writer, documents the time during and after the Assam Movement. The political

scenario of the state is faithfully depicted in this novel. The novelist herself was an activist of the agitation and she has direct experience of the series of events passed through during that time.

3.2.3 Historical novel

A historical novel is one that captures a true event in the past as its theme of writing. However, as a novel, imagination may play significant role where imaginary characters may also get entry without distorting the historicity of events. As discussed earlier, this category was initiated first by Padmanath Gohainbaruah, followed by Lakshminath Bezbaroa and Rajanikanta Bordoloi. Hiteswar Barbaruah, Dandinath Kalita, Navakanta Barua, Devendranath Acharya, Padma Barkatoky, Trailokya Nath Bhattacharya, Biren Barthakur and Rita Chaudhury belong to this category who continued the journey until the present date.

This stream of historical novels was not much in vogue in the post-independence Assam. Only two novels, written after Independence and before the sixties, have incorporated history or historical elements as their themes. They are *Ganabiplab* (1948) by Dandinath Kalita and *Kono Khed Nai* (1963) by Padma Barkatoky. However, the seventies offered us a pretty good number of such novels, highlighting mostly the history of the time. *Sachipator Puthi* (1973) and *Charaideu* (1977) by Trailokyanath Bhattacharya, *Kakadeutar Har* (1973) and *Garama Kunwari* (1980) by Navakanta Barua, *Kalpurush* (1976) and *Jangam* (1982) by Debendranath Acharya and *Baisaheba* (1980) by Biren Barthakur are some among them. *Asimot Jar Heral Sima* by Kanchan Baruah is a work in which imaginary history and magic elements are yoked together.

Through a character named Bina, Arupa Patangiya Kalita depicts her *Ayanatna* (1998) with her feminist zeal. Bina undergoes a remarkable metamorphosis from her childhood to her maturity. While delineating this character, the novelist brings to light the 19th century Assamese society, especially regarding the social status of the womenfolk of that time. Her *Felani* (2003) focuses on the Assam agitation, the agitation for sovereign independence of Assam, the fight of the ULFA and depicts how these events play a role in shaping the life of the lowest strata of people in the society. While describing the life of the destitute, the novelist brings in some of the political events of her time. The opportunist mentality of the youth who came in contact with Minati, a character in the novel, has been presented with vividness and clarity.

The Assamese society of the 19th century has been described with ingenuity in *Ropowali Nadi Sonowali Ghat* (2001), a novel written by Purabi Barmudoi. The novel covers the time-frame between 1818 to 1898 and includes the peasant's revolt against the colonial regime known as Phulguri Dheba in 1861 (in Nagaon district) and the battle at Patharughat in 1898 (in Darrang district). The novelist presents how the Assamese society moved into the 20th century while bearing the loads of the past. Moreover, some historical and well-known Assamese personalities such as Maniram Dewan, Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Anundoram Boroah, Hemchandra Baruah, Gunabhiram Baruah have been portrayed in detail here. The heydays of the British, the gallowing of Maniram Dewan and Piyoli Baruah, the founding of the first girls' high school at Sivasagar, the beginning of the tea plantation, the discovery of coal and petroleum have been duly placed in the novel with reference to the social, economic and political conditions of the time.

Deulangkhui (2005), a novel written by Rita Chaudhury, covers a period of time after the Ahoms set foot in the soil of Assam. It is a faithful presentation of the Middle Age in Assam. Kings like Pratapchandra, Arimatta, Ratna Singha, Jongal Balahu of the Gobha Kingdom have been delineated here. The novelist herself states that while writing this novel, she adopts sources from the legends and oral history, other than the data offered by the historians, and tries to hold a thread to get into the world of those times.

3.2.4. Biographical novel

Since biography is the real documentation of the life of a person, so the biographical novels have their own values as a distinct category. As it is a literary form and not a full scale biography, so there must be some elements from imagination also. However, it is the duty of the novelists to take enough care so that the imagination does not distort the ideals and personality of the subject concerned. The patriotism grown in the country in the wake of the freedom movement provided the prime inspiration behind writing such a novel. Moreover, there is a direct link between men and their history. Like the great men born and brought up in the womb of history, the activities of the great men create new chapters, by their ideologies and methods of workings. Though based on history, the biographical novels are primarily creative writings. So, the creative assimilation of history with art is the main fillip behind writing biographical novels.

As a genre, biographical novels have gained popularity in recent years. It is because of the growing curiosity of people regarding the life and works of the great men. However, as a genre it is not so old in Assam. But, it is a fact that Assam is not lagging behind in the field of writing biography. The biographical narratives of the Vaishnavite saints during 15th-18th centuries were the initial step in writing biographies in Assam. The life and activities of Sankardeva (1449-1568) and Madhavdeva (1489-1596) were handed down orally among the generations. Later on, some biographers collected them and wrote out biographies with various data, colours and hues. Apart from being biographies those narratives documented the socio- economic and political condition of Assam during those days. Therefore, they are considered to be a valuable document of our national life.

As a genre, the biographical novel started its journey in Assam during 1963-1965 by *Ruptirthar Yatri*, a novel written by Syed Abdul Mallik. The life and activities of Rupkonwar Jyotiprasad Agarwalla (1903-1951) are the triggers behind this novel. Written in two volumes, this novel presents an imaginary man of Jyotiprasad. Known as *Yatri* and *Path*, these volumes were to be supplemented by the third volume called *Tirtha*. The novelist made all the preparation for it. However, the dream did not materialize.

There have been a number of such novels written by novelists in recent years portraying a host of personalities who contributed immensely to the enrichment of the cultural life of Assam. The following books listed below are important in the field of biographical novels:

Tore More Alokare Yatra (1992), was written on the life of Jyotiprasad Agarwalla by Chandraprasad Saikia, *Banduka Behar* (1976) is a novel on the life of Madhavdeva by Medini Choudhury; *Sehi Gunanidhi* (1997), written by Lakhinandan Bora, is another novel written on the life of Madhavdeva. *Prem Amritar Nadi* (1999), written by Sayed Abdul Malik, is a remarkable contribution on the life of Madhavdeva. *Ferengadao* (1982) written by Medini Choudhury about the life and activities of Bishnuprasad Rabha; *Dhanya Nara Tanu Bhal* (1987) and *Jakeri Nahike Upam* (1993) are two novels written by Syed Abdul Malik, that capture the life of Srimanta Sankardeva.

Ulkar Pohar (1985) by Kumud Goswami and *Jivan Premar Atandra Anol* (2000) by Shusibrata Roychoudhury are two novels written on the biography of Asom Kesari

Ambikagiri Roychoudhury. *Kholakatir Tal* (1989), by Medini Choudhury, is a notable biographical novel written on the life and contributions of Brajanath Sarma, a renowned dramatist, actor and director of Assam. *Mritu Gasaki Ana Jaya Jini* (1988), written by Biren Barkatoky, is an outstanding biographical novel on the life of Kanaklata, a martyr girl in the freedom struggle of India in 1942. *Swarnalata* (1991), written by Tilottama Mishra, is a biographical novel on the life of Swarnalata, the pious daughter of Gunabhiram Baruah. *Juie Pura Son* (1986), written by Chidananda Saikia, is a biographical novel on the life of Dhiren Dutta, a revolutionary leader and doyen of the communist movement in Assam, who was not very well-known though. *Abhijatri* (1992), written by Nirupam Borgohain, is a biographical novel on the life of Chandraprabha Saikiani, a pious lady and social reformer of Assam. *Aragamini* (2010), written by Nirupama Borgohain and *Mereng* (2010), written by Anuradha Sarma Pujari, are two novels written on the life and contribution of Indira Miri.

3.2.5 Regional novel

A regional novel refers to one that captures a particular locale or region as its background. As such, such a novel can be called a replica of the locality with reference to its culture, folk-beliefs, religions, festivals, education, politics, economy and struggle for livelihood. Moreover, it covers the natural beauty, geographical features and historical facts of the area. Satyendranath Sarma states:

Limiting the scope for a particular region does not make a novel regional. That is a real regional novel that includes the living style of a particular region, the individual diction, the suchness of a region, social lore, superstitions, features of a its language. (Sarma 2007: 244)

Miri Jiyari, written by Rajanikanta Bordoloi during pre-independence time, is the first regional novel that captures the features of the genre. *Jivanar Batot* and *Seuji Pator Kahini*, two novels written by Birinchi Kumar Barua with his pen name Bina Barua and Rasna Barua respectively, are outstanding examples of regional novels. Primarily dwelling on the life of the labour class in the tea estate and the cultivators in villages, *Seuji pator Kahini* is a replica of a sort.

With an abounding number of novels written during the century and with a multicultural matrix in Assam, a host of writers have authored a considerable number of novels which as a form can be brought under the category of Regional novels in the way in which Thomas Hardy's Wessex Novels are categorized. However characters and situations conditioned to a particular region and nourished by the soil speak of larger human dimensions which are universal in nature.

Surujmukhit Swapna, written by Sayed Abdul Malik, presents a picture of the life of people by the side of the river called Dhansiri. This novel captures the pleasure and pain, hopes and despairs, emotions and feelings of the river-side Muslim community in artistic detail. "Written in an emotional vein, the novel makes the hopes and aspirations, pleasure and pain of the people very alive." (Sarma 2015: 125) His *Jetuka Pator Dare* (1973) is another prominent regional novel that captures the life of the Kaibatrya community in Assam. A fishing community, the kaibatryas are presented with reference to their wants and conflicts, flood, famines and countless other problems that they have to encounter. *Aai* (1960), written by Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya, is a popular regional novel that cast the growing poverty of the village called Dhekiakhowa Gaon. The farming villagers have been exploited by the rich Mahajans, their lands have been grabbed, resulting in the turn out of the farmers into thieves and dacoits as well.

Kapilipariya Sadhu (1953), a novel written by renowned Assamese poet Navakanta Baruah, is a regional novel based on the villagers living by the sides of the river called the Kapili. It is basically a love theme between two characters, Rupai and Sonapahi. *Ei Padumoni* (1965), written by Amulya Baruah, is a remarkable regional novel. Padumoni, a village of the Kaibatta community near Nimati Ghat, is the background of the novel.

Sei Nadi Nirabadhi (1963), written by Nirupama Borgohain, depicts the river named Pagladiya and the people living by its side. Mainly a romantic love story between Lakhmi and Dipu, the novel captures the sordid side of the village, its poverty. The restless Pagladiya is symbolic of the restlessness of the human mind here. Her *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* (1979) is another remarkable regional novel that indicates how economic restlessness leads a woman to lose her social status. In the story, a village named Dhalkuchi, situated by the side of the river call the Pagladiya, is presented pictorially with reference to its poverty. The regional feature of the novel is heightened by the local

diction presented in the lips of the characters. *Sonar Nangal*, written by Ghanakanata Gogoi, presents the deteriorating picture of Pan Gaon, a village in Nagaon. There is no story in the truest sense of the term here; the story line develops here with certain events related to the village. Among the regional novels, *Rangmilir Hanhi* (1981), written by Rong Bong Terang, occupies a prime position in the history of the regional novel. The river named the Barapani and the hill called Karbi pahar go into making the story-line in this novel. It faithfully covers the hopes and despairs of the region as a whole.

Silabhadra has played a significant role in shaping the regional novel in a firm footing. His *Madhupur* (1971), *Ahatguri* (1973), and *Agamanir Ghat* (1986) portray life and living of the people at Madhupur. In *Madhupur*, the novelist places some prominent figures of the society as characters and thus presents a replica of the area. In *Ahatguri*, a village named Barperiya turns into Ahatguri during the course of the change in the society. The national highway that passes through the village invites a change to the hustle of life, and puts an end to the veil of the old and welcomes the new. While working as a contractor to pile up stones for the construction of national highway no 32, the novelist had the rare opportunity to look into the painful life of the labour-class. On the basis of those encounters, he wrote out *Agomonir Ghat*. From the depth of the river called Gangadhar, the labourers collected stones and brought them to Agomoni Ghat. From there, they are brought by trucks to the highway site. Along with their pain, the songs and folk-festivals of the labourers have been presented in this novel.

Datal Hatir Uiye Khowa Haoda (1988), written by Mamoni Roysom Goswami, is a novel that presents the dire limitations in the life of the women and the sufferings inflicted upon them by the society. While doing so, the novelist covers a certain geographical region specifically Amranga satra, barihat, Sikarihati, Pat Halodhiya, Heramod and the neighbouring areas of Bowati Jan Jagaliya. In the novels like *Eyeto Jivan*, *Mati Kar*, *Achal Manuh* written by Hitesh Deka we find glimpses of social life of the areas in which the novels are set for which they can be brought under the category of regional novel.

3.2.6 Scientific novel

As a genre science fiction emerging from wonders of science and innovations and discovery had its debut into literature in India during the first part of the 20th century. Generally, the subject matters of such writings are the discoveries of scientific research

that the creative writers mingle with past, present and the future. The science fictions are written with the events that may happen in years to come or had had happened somewhere in the distant past. Though based on scientific research, imagination has a major role to play in these novels. Assamese fiction too, demonstrated a sense of resilience and innovative zeal in venturing to the world of science fiction or novels based on science and scientific matters. Although not as in other categories, Science fiction or novel, made its presence felt in the realm of Assamese novels. Major writers in this category may be referred to emerging from wonders of science and innovations as well as discoveries.

Atom Boma (1946), a part of the *Golai series* written by Kumudeswar Barthakur, is the first science fiction in Assam. Production in this line is very limited in Assamese literature. In recent years, effort has being made to augment its volume. Dinesh Chandra Goswami, Bijoy Krishna Deva Sarma, Amulya Tamuly, Bandita Phukan, Rathindranath Goswami, Mihir Kumar Goswami, Ranju Hazarika are some of the popular writers in this genre, who have tried to strengthen it to an optimum stage. Meanwhile, several science fictions of repute have come into the market.

Bijoy Krishna Deva Sarma is an established writer of this genre in Assam. Since sixties of the last century onwards, he has been writing science-based novels and short stories. *Chandralokat Pratham Manuh* (1969), *Tulasir Tale Mriga Pahu Sare* are some of his popular science fictions. Adventure of men to set foot on the Moon forms the story line of *Chandralokat Pratham Manuh*.

A-Padartha, written by poet Navakanta Barua in 1982, is another scientific novel in Assamese. It is a story about how a physician invented anti-meter in his effort to do a bloodless operation with the help of bio-physics, and his consequent death out of guilt and remorse.

Dinesh Chandra Goswami has been contributing to Assamese literature by his volume of writings. With his pen name Kokal, he made this journey into literature. *Ejak Jonakir Jilmil* (1992), *Sabda Nirantor Sabda* (1992), *Usma Prabah* (1993) , *Ati Biksista Samaj* (Sadin – Bihu issue, 1999), *Manoniya Sampraday* (Asom Bani, Rongali Bihu issue, 2000). are some of his major contributions to science-based literature in Assamese. *Akramon* (1983) and *Sandhan* (1992) are two well-known science-fictions written by

Amulya Hazarika. *Kayakalpa* (2008), written by Lakshminandan Borah, is another science-based piece of fiction in Assamese.

Apart from the novels mentioned above, a good number of translated science-based novels have enriched this genre in Assamese literature. *The Invisible Man* of H. G. Wells is the first science fiction translated to Assamese. Published in 1956 as *Adrishya Manab*, this book was translated into Assamese by Hembala Das. In 1995, this fiction by Wells was again translated in brief by M. A. Majid Khan. *Sagarar Taledi Kuri Hejar Lig* (1988) is the Assamese translation of Jule Verne's classic *Twenty Thousand League under the Sea*, done by Dinesh Chandra Goswami. *Ekhan Mahakash Odishi* (1996) is his Assamese rendering of Arthur C Clarke's science fiction 2001.

Jule Verne's another classic *A Journey to the Center of the Earth* was rendered into Assamese as *Bhugarva Abhijan*. The same book was again rendered in brief as *Prithibir Kendraloi Abhijan* (1988) by M. A. Majid Khan. British writer Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's classic *The Lost World* (1912) was translated into Assamese as *Bilupta Jagat* by Raihan Shah. The background of the fiction is Professor Challenger's adventure on a plateau in South Africa, where he discovered dinosaurs and cave men relating to the pre-historic era. Apart from the above mentioned trends, Assamese novels have been written in imitation of various recent art-forms in the West. Experimentations are going on to incorporate elements from stream of consciousness, symbolism, cinematic pragmatism, montage, flashback and surrealism. *Professor Adhyapak Howar Kathare*, written by Dhrubajyoti Borah in the puja issue of the *Sadin* in 1995, is the first novel that ventures to include all such elements. In this way, the range and corpus of Assamese novel as a genre under various categories has been strengthened, and growing.

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