

Chapter I

Introduction

1.i Background of the Study

Life writing has always been a popular genre being one of the most immediate and accessible modes of writing about public figures and literary giants. In the recent past, this field has received a great deal of critical attention in literary criticism and cultural studies as well. For cultural studies and social history, it is a valuable site of research as a means of self-examination, self-creation and self-regeneration. Life writing, historically speaking, is a dependable source of history and historical interpretation. Autobiography provides a tremendous scope for self-evolution. Man knows himself only in so far as he knows the world. No person is blessed enough to write a complete account of his or her life. Biography generally covers whole life of the subject and, therefore, a biography is as important as autobiography. There are different ways in which an autobiography or biography can be studied:

- as a source of a person's understanding of his/her environment;
- as an account of a particular period and individual endeavours which becomes a source of inspiration for others;
- as a repository of historical information to be used by historians subject to authentication; and
- as an expression of the world-view of a person or a generation.

Life writing, at one level is literature, at another it is also a form of historical representation of individual experience. Life writing can, therefore, arouse historical interest about different aspects of the past, for example, family, gender and power relations, attitude to labour, productivity in technology, emotional and intellectual preferences. Solid information relating to social and environmental consciousness, political ideas, spirit and prejudice of the age lie hidden in this form of literature.

Assamese cultural tradition was conducive to life writing, especially biography, with a religious fervour. Predominantly Vaishnavite, the early Assamese writers, believed that

man's duty was to glorify God and serve Him. Thus early Assamese writings were based on the notion that the primary values of life are theological. The art of autobiography involves a process of reconstruction of the writer's life. The basic necessity of writing about one's life arises from the sense of individuality. Private emotions and individual conscience replaced some of the functions attributed to God in traditional theology. Self-portraiture is considered as a synonym of self-knowledge (Olney,1988,166). Till the nineteenth century, the quality and quantity of Indian poetry surpassed prose literature. Similar observation is applicable to the men compared to the women writers. Secular life writing emerged as a new genre in Assamese literature only in the late nineteenth century. Biographies and autobiographies are not large in number, but they have a very significant role in unfolding the depth of social realities in terms of individual achievements.

1.ii Statement of the Problem

The period from the early nineteenth century till the mid-twentieth century in Assam was unique. People experienced new rulers and regulations of governance. A traditional society came to face with colonial modernity. The term colonial modernity referred to the state of affairs which was different from the western because it was mediated by colonialism. Prevailing social conventions confronted with unfamiliar experiments. Rural and subsistence economy of the land was exposed to newer avenues of colonial economy. It was mostly considered as an age of revivalism, reform, modernisation and identity formation. Foundation of new educational and cultural institutions and growth of the Assamese literature and communicative media were visible through expanding public space. Some prominent Assamese writers recorded in their life writings different aspects of life in the colonial days. Writers with their valuable insights, attempted to depict an image of their land and people. Through their own lives, they produced a complex panorama of Assamese social life which they observed and experienced.

The present study proposes to cover a few memorable lives through the prism of literature, particularly life writing. From a gallery of many personalities who figured during this period, nine 'representative' lives, seven men and two women, have been chosen. They are Harakanta Sarma Majundar Barua (1815-1902), Anandaram Dhekial Phukan (1829-59), Haribilash Agarwala (1842-1916), Anundoram Borooah (1850-89), Lakshminath Bezbaroa (1864-1938), Padmanath Gohain Barooah (1871-1946), Benudhar Rajkhowa (1872-1955), Rajabala Das (1893-1985) and Nalinibala Devi (1898-1977).

Individually and collectively, they were interesting characters found to be actively involved with issues and concerns of this epoch making age. They crossed the common frontiers of life. Harakanta took to writing first in the form of a diary long back in 1834. Nalinibala covered in her autobiography descriptions of her childhood, trajectories of her youth and later years with an account of her public life till her visit to the holy places in 1938. The present study, therefore, covers little more than one hundred years of modern Assamese life writing. During this century starting from the advent of the colonial rule till the growth of the nationalistic aspirations, a new society was gradually emerging. Historically speaking, the period brought intimations of modernity. They are the only extant material in terms of autobiographies and biographies which are directly related to modernity. The names in the list are memorable for anyone familiar with the pulse of the Assamese nationality at its crucial stage of development. The intellectual and literary history of Assam have characterised them with different attributes. Harakanta Sarma Majundar Barua was a scion of old gentry. He entered colonial bureaucracy at an early age. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan was a pioneer of ideas and a lone upholder of community grievances; Haribilash Agarwala was a venture merchant and literary enthusiast; Anundoram Borooah, an erudite Sanskritist and one of the earliest members of the Indian Civil Service; Lakshminath Bezbaroa and Padmanath Gohain Barooah, the foremost literary figures with substantial contribution to Assamese literature and growth of what can be described as cultural nationalism in Assam; Benudhar Rajkhowa, a bureaucrat and author with dilemmatic social positions; Rajabala Das was a freedom fighter and a champion of women education; and Nalinibala Devi was a poet with a deep spiritual orientation and a commitment for nationalism. Their biographies and autobiographies reveal their own life-history as well as the history of their time. Their literary output brings to light the contemporary Assamese society in broad relief.

The need to establish a distinctive identity for the Assamese was strongly felt by elites like the aforementioned names and the likes of them in an unfriendly environment. H. K. Barpujari (1912-2002) observed that the Christian Missionaries along with the Assamese elites not only emphasized on the development of Assamese literature but also modernized it, rediscovered Assamese tradition and inspired the social reformers and the educated class with patriotic feelings (Barpujari,1996,13). The term elite is used here to describe a special group of people in society. Tapan Raychaudhuri writes about the Indian elites,

A segment which included scions of the old landed classes, industrial entrepreneurs, highly successful professionals as well as middle and low level functionaries in the apparatus of colonial government and often very poor school teachers, journalists, briefless lawyers, medical licentiates and preachers propagating the new religious reforms (Raychaudhuri,2005,3).

They upheld the spirit of Assamese life and culture at the threshold of modernisation and in the process became symbols of Assamese modernity. In carrying out this study, the definition of culture is taken to mean ‘the medium and agency by which the chaos of reality is transformed into an ordered and manageable sense of human reality’ (Grossberg,2012,185). A popular term for the changes brought about in a non-Western country like India by contact, direct or indirect, with a Western country is modernization (Srinivas,2005,53). The ‘modern’ is an imaginary construct. Modernity is, therefore, used to mean ‘articulation of some variety of different elements, a multiplicity of institutional structures, cultural logics and social experiences’ (Grossberg,2012,77). The formulation made by Alex Inkeles appears to be more suitable for our purpose. He finds the following features common in all modern men:

1. Disposition to accept new ideas and try new methods;
2. A readiness to express opinion;
3. A time sense that makes men more interested in the present and the future than the past;
4. A better sense of punctuality;
5. A greater concern for planning, organization and efficiency;
6. A tendency to see the world as calculable;
7. A faith in science and technology and
8. A belief in distributive justice.

(Murshid,1983,6)

The transition observed in the Indian society by its emulation of British culture and life-style fits in to modernization according to the definition given by Inkeles. This set of symptoms holds good also in case of Assam.

Till some years after independence, Assam was understood to be constituted of major parts of the north east. But for the purpose of this work, Assam is taken to mean the life and society in the Brahmaputra valley. One important feature of the discourse is its class limitation; it is centred mainly on the educated middle-class. The personalities named above were all concerned about the human (individual and social) problems surrounding them and their solutions. They reacted in their own way to the circumstances that prevailed at that time. Their activities truly reflected their nationalist aspirations. In this sense their autobiographies may be accepted as the condensed versions of their vision of Assam. Owing to differences in the cultural background and philosophical approach,

there was at times divergence of opinions. The present study at times with a comparatist view, is devoted to deriving a composite image of history of the period under question, from their life history.

1.iii Objectives

The present study includes seven autobiographies and two biographies covering little more than a century from the first half of the nineteenth to the first half of the twentieth century. The proposed study has the following objectives --

- To throw light on the social life of Assam under the British rule mirrored in family and gender relations, community life and spiritualism; with the parallel process of social transition.
- To find out the role of the Assamese elites in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as harbingers of change, their efforts to ensure identity crystallisation and their commitment to proto-nationalism and nationalism.
- To highlight the intellectual achievements of the Assamese elites, their concern for their language and community, literary and cultural tradition.
- To find out and evaluate the impact of the 'new awakening' in India in general and the Bengal Renaissance in particular on the Assamese society.

The exploration of the above objectives relating to the study are formulated and proposed to be worked on the basis of the understanding of select life writings.

1.iv Review of Literature

There is no dearth of material on Modern Assam; with books relating to the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. These books are basically concerned with the political history of Assam rather than socio-cultural aspects, the cause and effect of colonial experience in the making of modern Assam. Important titles among these having a relevance to the present study are as follows:

A Descriptive Account of Asam (1841, reprint 1975) by William Robinson, then head of Gowhatti Government Seminary, is a comprehensive account of the author's contemporary Assam. It has given a concise account of the civil and social state, local geography and productive industry in addition to the recent history, manners and customs

of the Assamese people.

Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam (1855, reprint 1978) is a valuable work by Major John Butler. It gives an account of the plains and neighbouring hill tribes of Assam with their customs and ceremonies. There is detailed study on the population, criminal code, war, hunting, religion, occupations, dress of the people inhabiting mainly in the erstwhile Nagaon district.

A Statistical Account of Assam, volumes I and II (1879, reprint 1982) by W.W. Hunter, who was the Director General of Statistics to the Government of India is an important account of the nineteenth century Assam. Hunter was a civilian of extraordinary merit. As the title of the book suggests, these volumes are full of statistical data. The first volume covers the districts of Kamrup, Darrang, Nagaon, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur and the second volume covers the districts of Goalpara including the Eastern Duars, the Garo Hills, the Naga Hills, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Sylhet and Cachar. Details of geography, aspects of administration, social life, economic life, agriculture, commerce, communication were discussed along with the statistics and the explanations.

Jivani aru Asamiya Jivani (1986) by Gobinda Prasad Sarma is a pioneering work on life writing in Assamese. Sarma elucidates the concepts associated with biographical literature. He discusses the nature, art and history of biography vis-a-vis Assamese biography. The western and ancient Indian theories relating to biography and other related writings and traditions are discussed. He is making a survey also, on the modern Assamese life writing in the first hundred years of its growth. This volume looks into both of their strength and limitation. It also makes commentary on three biographies each one representing a different style of presentation.

Guru Carita Katha (1987) edited by Maheswar Neog is a major work on biographical literature of medieval Assam. Professor Neog has set a rare example of meticulous study and analysis of the text. His scholarly editorial is as important as the text itself. He has examined the medieval biographies from a modern perspective.

Literature and Society in Assam: A Study of the Assamese Renaissance 1826-1926(1987) by Tilottoma Misra attempts to look at those trends in the Assamese literature resulting from the social and cultural impact of the phenomenon popularly regarded as Indian Renaissance. She tries to explore the coming of modernity into Assamese literature.

Among the Luminaries in Assam (1990) by Anjali Sarma makes a systematic survey of Assamese biographies for the first time from its beginning in the medieval times till the recent decades. The author comes to the conclusion that western biographical traditions influenced Assamese literature when nationalist political leaders, social reformers, men of letters, scientists and industrialists came to be the subjects of biographies. This work, in spite of being a collection of critical studies on the Assamese life writing, has not covered the autobiographies of two remarkable women, namely Rajabala Das and Nalinibala Devi.

Social and Economic Change in Assam: Middle Class Hegemony (1990) by Manorama Sharma conceptualises the Assamese middle-class, the social situation favouring its emergence and its dominance in the Assamese society. Her analysis is based on study of social and economic changes in Assam during the period 1860-1910. She observes that the *mauzadars* and the *sattras* were the origin of the middle-class in Assam. Social hegemony of the middle-class is examined using the theory of hegemony by the Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937).

Unavimsa Satikar Asam Samvada (1990) by Jogendranarayan Bhuyan gives a pen picture of the socio-political and cultural aspects of the nineteenth century Assam. The author is particularly concerned with the role played by Reverend Miles Bronson (1812-83), Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Gunabhiram Baroah and the newly founded British institutions. This book is a discourse on the Assamese consciousness and is an analysis from a holistic point of view.

The Comprehensive History of Assam (1993) is the five volume project edited by H. K. Barpujari, on the history of Assam. The fourth and fifth volumes cover the period from 1826 to 1919. The fourth volume narrates the extension of British dominion, introduction of English education, development of townships, improvement in transport, communication and emergence of the Middle-Class. The fifth volume deals with political, economic, social and cultural renaissance in the history of Assam.

Socio-Cultural Aspects of Assam in the Nineteenth Century (1994) by Prosenjit Chowdhury makes an analysis on the Assamese elite reaction to the forces of colonialism and rationalism. He touches upon the roots while studying the sociological foundation of Assamese-Bengali relations in nineteenth century Assam.

Assam In the Days of the Company (1826-1858) (1996) by H. K. Barpujari is another monumental work. It is a political history of Assam under the rule of the British East India Company from 1826 to 1858. It makes a rapid survey of the British paramountcy in Assam as well as the period of subsequent reaction leading to the early phase of the Freedom Movement in the North-East Frontier.

The Agarwala Family of Tezpur: A Vignette of the Early Generations (1998) by Bibekananda Agarwala is a brief family history and the process of its assimilation with the larger Assamese society. The role played by Navarangaram Agarwala, Haribilash Agarwala and all other Agarwalas in the fields of trade, commerce, culture, literature and the different components of Assamese nationalism have been discussed by the author.

Social and Economic History of Assam (1853-1921) (2000) is the result of a study undertaken by Rajen Saikia on the detailed aspects of social and economic life of modern Assam taking account of the all-India background. This book analyses the erosion of the old ruling class, decline of the traditional handicrafts and new land relations in the newly found system. This work looks into the origin and growth of the Assamese Middle-Class.

Gunabhiram Baroah (2001) by Jogendranarayan Bhuyan is a biography with detailed analysis of time and milieu in the making of this uncommon personality. Bhuyan is very much meticulous while discussing the course of life and achievements of Gunabhiram Baroah. His arguments regarding the role of Gunabhiram naturally involved the background situation of Assam.

Asamar Carit Puthit Asamiya Samaj Jiwani (2009) by Bipul Malakar highlights the social life and condition of the medieval Assam as reflected in the Assamese *Caritas*. The author tries to picture out the Assamese society on the basis of a select group of biographical narratives based on lives of the Vaishnava saints of Assam.

Assam and the 19th Century: In the context of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan and the early nineteenth-century Renaissance in Assam (2012) is a research work by Nanda Talukdar published posthumously. Nanda Talukdar made extensive research of the nineteenth century Assam. This is a study of the life and work of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, who, according to the author, ushered a new cultural resurgence.

Lakshminath Bezbaroa: The Architect of Modern Assamese Literature, Issues of

Nationalism and Beyond (2014) edited by Madan M. Sarma and Debarshi P. Nath is a volume of fifteen essays encompassing the varied range of Lakshminath Bezbaroa's personality. Suranjana Barua's article on 'Bezbaroa's life writings: Hermeneutics of the Experiencing Self and the Encountered Other', discusses the life writings of Lakshminath Bezbaroa. The author claims that Lakshminath's autobiography is a testimony to his emerging identity as a prolific writer in a given social, historical context in Assam. She explains how the different forms of Bezbaroa's life writings reflect his 'experiencing' self and 'encountered' others.

History At A Cross-Roads: Three Essays on Nineteenth-Century Assam (2015) edited by Jyotirmay Jana is an anthology of three articles on nineteenth-century Assam. This volume has dealt with some aspects of the nineteenth century Assam with objectivity and seriousness. Anuradha Roy's article 'Nineteenth-Century Assam' is particularly important. The author looked at the nineteenth century Assamese society. She examined how a closed society was exposed to a host of external forces and a new age began. She has clearly brought out that the 'Assam Renaissance' has some distinctiveness and not a photocopy of the Bengal Renaissance.

More and more scholars engage themselves in deriving information as well as ideas from the past lives. In the Indian context, there are several works on the theoretical background of the life writing as well as works utilising them as sources of history. *Mountain Echoes: Reminiscences of Kumaoni Women* (1998) by Namita Gokhale is reminiscence, through the eyes of four talented and highly individualistic women. They highlight the transition, change and continuity of life in the Kumaon hills.

Writers, Editors and Reformers: Social and Political Transformations of Maharashtra, 1830-1930 (1999) edited by N.K. Wagle is a compilation of essays. They reveal the intensity of intellectual and social ferment under the shadow of Westernization taking place in Maharashtra from middle of the nineteenth century to the first three decades of the twentieth century.

Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autobiography, and Life History (2004), edited by David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn is a collection of essays on diverse forms of life writing in India. This volume challenges the concept of collective life and demonstrates how individual agency and selfhood are also important. Life histories are considered as a

special kind of narrative because of its trueness and personalised character.

Men, Women, and Domesticity: Articulating Middle-Class Identity in Colonial Bengal (2004) by Swapna M. Banerjee contributes to a comprehensive understanding of domestic politics in the construction of national identity. She demonstrated how caste class formation among the predominantly Hindu Bengali middle-class depended much upon its relationships with the subordinate social groups and the Bengali middle-class self-identity was articulated on the definition of its women in colonial Bengal.

Perceptions, Emotions, Sensibilities: Essays on India's Colonial and Post-colonial Experiences (2005) by Tapan Raychaudhuri looks into the mental world of the colonial middle-class in India. The essay, 'Transformation of Indian Sensibilities: The West as Catalyst' is primarily based on the experience of the Bengali middle-class under the western impact, but it is also helpful in understanding the case in Assam; the way people felt about and reacted to things, developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Biography As History: Indian Perspectives (2009) is an edited work by Vijaya Ramaswamy and Yogesh Sharma. It examines biographies and autobiographies of people from different social strata and seeks to show how personal accounts of individual lives contribute to our understanding of the historical moment. The essays in this volume look at the biographies of marginalised figures and of people 'in the middle'.

Writing Life: Three Gujarati Thinkers (2009) by Tridip Suhrud discusses the lives and thought of three Gujarati intellectuals belonging to the second half of the nineteenth century. They are Narmadashankar Lal Shankar, Manibhai Nabhubhai and Govardhanram Tripathi. They reveal that social and religious reform in the country was a precursor to the idea of being a nation. This book deals with the emergence of two cultural traditions in the history of Gujarat; they were the idea of being 'one people' and the literary form of the autobiography.

Awakening: The Story of the Bengal Renaissance (2010) authored by Subrata Dasgupta records the stunning development in all fields around the story of Bengal Renaissance. It has a vivid description of the intellectual awakening with the achievements of the social reformers, spiritualists, scientists, creative writers and educationists; the spirit of the age and rhythm of the city of Calcutta.

Windows into the Past: Life Histories and the Historian of South Asia (2011) by Judith M. Brown works on the idea how diverse forms of life history like memoirs and family histories can be a highly significant source and genre of history writing. It chronicles late nineteenth and early twentieth century facets of the interlocking histories of Britain and South Asia.

Though life writing has emerged as a popular form among the readers, it has not received adequate critical attention in Assam. Particularly there is not a single work concerning historical analysis of modern Assamese life writing. The explanations available in the books on Assam history, as one feels, are not adequate. Compared to similar kinds of studies in other parts of India, there is a need to take up a systematic research work to examine the process of the Assamese elites getting mobilized for validating a distinct Assamese identity. It is found to be reflected in the extensive literature available on and around this subject that builds an authentic background for this study.

1.v Methodology

The objective of the study has served as the main guideline in conceptualising and conducting the research work. This work is based on critical study of biographies and autobiographies of remarkable Assamese elites spanning over a little more than one hundred years. They were looking back upon a segment of history, in which they were not only witnesses, but also active participants at times. The reading of these works is carried out from two angles namely as works belonging to the genre of life writing and as documents composed in colonial context. The stand of auto/biographers is considered because Walter Jackson Bate said, 'it is through his eyes we see' (Bacscheider,1999,4). So the praxis of the present study is cultural studies and social history.

I have made use of both primary and secondary source material available in the form of books, journals, government reports and unpublished theses in Assamese, Bengali and mostly in English preserved at the Central Library, Tezpur University, the ICHR North East Centre Library, Guwahati, the Assam State Archives, Guwahati, Kaliabor College Library and Lakshminath Bezbaroa Library, Dibrugarh University. The primary sources include personal accounts, memoirs, biographies, archival records, district gazetteers, both published and unpublished. The secondary sources include published books like

biographies, other works related to personalities and events, accounts of the age, published and unpublished research works related to the subject.

1.vi Relevance of the Study

The present study attempts to make use of the life writing as the base to explore life and culture of Assam. The Assamese life writing is particularly selected as its tool for the simple reason of my sense of belonging to the Assamese tradition and culture. Life events are examined in their socio-cultural contexts. The routine of daily life, attitude to work and occupation, tie of kinship, learning, rituals, recreational activities, religion, philosophy of life, everyday world view, including political ideologies and activities - understanding of all lead to social history.

Worth of this undertaking might be justified on the basis of the reputation of the persons and their works. The men and women figuring in this study are decided upon their centrality to history and identity of Assamese culture. Each life has to tell us something more general about the socio-political issues of Assam's past. With all their contributions, they have had some sort of 'after-life'. Each of them, with his/her unique personality, has contemporary significance. Their supportive attitude to Assamese identity urged them to venture the world of writing. There were variations in accordance with their circumstances and commitments. The differences do not end in divergence; the life stories delineate characters and coherently bear out the spirit of the age. For some purpose, they are cited even today and their remarks communicate their stand to the succeeding generations. These lives correspond to a cross-section of the Assamese middle-class and their study is helpful to know the life and culture centred round this particular group of people.

Many of the prominent lives have been taken as reference across India. Thereby scholars draw general conclusion on the spirit of the age. Local issues get an attention depending on issues of importance. So far in Assam, a very limited study has been conducted on autobiographies and biographies, especially from the standpoint of cultural studies and history. Most of the works on social history of colonial Assam have not adequately consulted the existing life writings. Certainly the Assamese life writing has great possibility in documenting social history of Assam in the early modern period. There is a need to study those lives particularly involved in the making of the Assamese nationality.

In this context a few select lives are taken up for study as an exercise to explore their attitude towards tradition and vision to modernity.

Both history and literature represent (human) nature. E. H. Carr observed, 'the predicament of the historian is a reflection of the nature of man' (Carr, 1990, 20). Both the disciplines expand the boundaries of their respective fields. Their horizons appear ever widening with regard to the scope, nature, method and objectives. A research theme like this may be explored from the perspectives of history, literature and culture as literature and culture very often share a common vocabulary, key concepts and points of reference (Blackburn and Dalmia, 2004, Introduction). The central issue in reading history is centered on the question of association/dissociation of history with/from imagination and literature.

1. vii Limitation of the Study

The study however is not without any limitation. Though there are a good number of Assamese life writings, the researcher confines the work to seven autobiographies and two biographies only. These life writings belong to the emerging middle-class of the Assamese society. Not enough records from this select literature are found to present a detailed and coherent picture of the non-elite segments of the population. The thesis focussing more from the praxis of cultural studies and social history, leaves apart an aesthetic appraisal or discussion on the life writings from the standpoint of literary criticism. Another limitation of this work is that contemporary writings in Assamese and other Indian languages have not been taken for discussion.

1.viii Chapterisation

The approach of this study is thematic. For the convenience in addressing the different issues, it has been divided into seven chapters.

Chapter I is introductory in nature. It gives introduction of the topic, objectives, review of literature, methodology, significance of the study, limitation and at the end chapterisation.

Chapter II 'Life Writing: A Historical and Theoretical Approach' presents a conceptual approach to life writing. It traces the history of this particular genre. It looks at the evolution of biographies and autobiographies in the western world, in India and Assam. It also looks at the background for the emergence of the modern Assamese life writing and its relation to history and culture.

Chapter III 'Education as Window to the World' attempts to locate the intellectual requisites of modernity that emerged in Assam during the period of transition. It tries to see the general condition of learning and education, concern for one's own language, the environmental awareness and moral outlook of the time. It also explores the contacts of the Assamese enlightened section with Bengal and beyond and its subsequent influence over the society.

Chapter IV 'Assamese Society under Colonial Dispensation' gives an idea of the social life focussing on some basics of the Assamese society, family, social institutions and religious life. It also discusses the making of womanhood and the women related issues in Assam.

Chapter V 'Life Writing: Universal Engagement' describes the general activities of the Assamese people with focus on some fundamental aspects of cultural history. It is trying to explain the contemporary accounts on everyday life, common customs, occupational patterns, health and hygiene, visible changes and adversity of the environment.

Chapter VI 'Life Writing: Glimmerings of Nationalism' contains an image of the political developments of the time as depicted in the life histories of the contemporary people. It is understood in terms of identity, ideology, commitment and participation. This chapter takes into account the social effects of the growth of nationalism.

Chapter VII, 'Conclusion' summarises the contents of the earlier chapters and makes an assessment of the modern Assamese society emerging during the colonial period as found to be reflected in the life writings of the aforementioned personalities.

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