Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introducing the Study

In contemporary times modernity has become a progressively global phenomenon. Modernity is linked to the wide-ranging societal transformations that began in Europe, particularly in the domains of art and literature, and then spread globally. Change, creativity, and dynamism were all hallmarks of the period. In the words of Anthony Giddens (1996), Modernity is seen as a two-sided phenomenon: on the one hand, it emphasized development in modern traditional institutions and their global spread has had a significant impact on people's lives by providing better opportunities than those available in pre-modern society, and on the other hand, modernity has had negative consequences. Different classical theorists have explained the phenomenon of modernity in their own ways. Karl Marx's (1946) main concern with modernity was in terms of production relations. For theorists like Emile Durkheim (1922), modernity is understood in the context of 'social solidarity, where he has emphasized that, 'more the differentiation, more there is modernity'. In contrast, Max Weber (1947) has described modernity as a period of 'rationality'.

The renaissance, the enlightenment, modernity, and postmodernity were all stages in the progression of modernity's advent in history. However, it was the age of enlightenment that gave it a more concrete and meaningful meaning. "Modernity and the Enlightenment mark a decisive shift in ways of thinking because they enshrined 'Reason' and empiricism over sentiment and faith" (Nayar, 2014, 90). The age of rationality and scientific thinking, it was claimed, would secure human growth and the development of all parts and all kinds of societies. During the nineteenth century, modernity was closely bound up with industrialization and the formation of capitalism as a system of wealth creation and distribution, resulting in radical shifts in society's economy and culture. Thus, modernity came to be associated with concepts such as industry, urbanisation, capitalism, rationality, democracy, and other aspects of

progress. The contemporary concept of modernity was subsequently adopted by non-Western nations, transforming it into a global phenomenon.

Modernity as a theoretical construct, in a broader sense, offers an approach to understanding society through a wide range of perspectives. While trying to develop an understanding of modernity in the west, it is observed how it attempted to reject its historical precedents in favour of individualism and rationality. Modernity thus represents the present, definitively severing ties with the past, where the two domains of society (traditional and contemporary) are mutually exclusive, creating an evident discontinuity. Regardless of whether modernity is linked to progress or deterioration in social-cultural characteristics, it is regarded as a separate experience witnessed in traditional and pre-modern societies.

Unlike in the west, however, India's experience of modernity remains immensely unique in its own right, establishing it as a distinctly Indian version of modernity. Anthony Giddens (1996) has argued that modernity is multidimensional, referring to the possibility of numerous modernities existing simultaneously. It is in this context that Dipankar Gupta (2016) writes: "The other widely expressed way of coming to grips with our lack of modernity is to say that there are 'multiple modernities' and that the Indian variety is just another expression of modernity" (2016, 9). Although a large part of the world was seen shifting from its traditional roots and acquiring modern institutions, the process of modernization and its results were not uniform in all regions. To reach the "pinnacle" of modernity, the Western world went through an internal process of challenging traditionalism and replacing it with reason and freedom, while the non-Western world went through an external process of colonization by European countries which was painful (Mahadevan, 2002) and therefore modernity always aroused suspicion in these societies.

In India, modernity emerged during British rule in a feudal society. As a result of British infiltration into the economy, a new infrastructure was built to support the new capitalist model. India's shift from a feudal to a semi-capitalist economy was one of the most profound effects of the British occupation. However, as the British tightened

their grip on administration, they expanded their power over production, trade, and education, progressively changing the basic structure of Indian society. India's modernity is unique to the Indian social structure, which is shaped by its traditions and cultures; hence, it is impossible to examine Indian modernity without acknowledging the importance of cultural and traditional values that are strongly ingrained in the community. In contrast to their Western counterparts, Indian intellectuals did not fully repudiate the past but instead referred to and used it when deemed appropriate. Pre-modern institutions and structures in the West were, on the other hand, entirely exiled and isolated.

History provides insight into past events and the phases of transformation that define a civilization. Indian society underwent incremental modifications over centuries, but the transformation that occurred during the British reign was significant for its profound impact on the foundational framework of Indian society. The colonial period is significant since unlike any other period in Indian history, saw enormous changes in the field of administration, politics, education, technology, improved transportation (such as railways and waterways), communication, an adaptation of the modern judicial system, trade, and industries, all of which altered the country's socio-economic, cultural and political landscapes. Consequently, emphasis on the European philosophy of progress has further weakened the traditional structures of Indian society.

With the expansion of the industrial revolution, new techniques of production spurred a fresh wave of technological advancement and innovation. As a result, the industrial and technological achievements of the time proved ideal for enticing Europeans to learn more about their colonial counterparts. Besides highlighting their superiority and dominance over their subjects, the Europeans also sought to "enlighten" the traditional Indian civilization through scientific and technological endeavours. The camera, for instance, became an integral part of the colonial system, serving as a necessary and effective tool for documenting and archiving their journey, as well as quickly collecting and classifying the different individuals and cultures they encountered

across the colonial bounds. Gaskell and Gujral (2019) argue that the early use of the camera to document the country's complex political and cultural transitions in the mid-nineteenth century resulted in an especially rich photographic archive. In a sense, this created a significant data source that enhanced the visual "reality" of the past as preserved in photographs, thus providing evidence of the time and place in which they were captured. For instance, in *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes (1987) argues that a distinguishing aspect of a photograph is its "evidential force" and the power of authenticating that it possesses (1987, 89). The photograph was the pinnacle of a social and cultural desire for a more accurate and realistic depiction of reality. Thus, on the one hand, photography played a significant role in the modernist endeavour in India, where it ended up in the hands of colonial authorities as a classifying tool for knowledge generation, while on the other hand, the significance and meaning of photographs, which is inextricably linked to their materiality, remain profoundly affective when attempting to comprehend social relations. The use of photographs in the thesis has added a new dimension to the examination of the evolution of women's dress from a historical and contemporary perspective while analysing the social importance of clothes in everyday life.

The nineteenth century was a watershed moment in Assam's history due to the 1826 Treaty of Yandaboo between the East India Company and the Burmese. "It was after the acquisition of the Diwani of Bengal in 1765 that the East India Company came into direct contact with the medieval kingdoms of Manipur, Jaintia, Cachar, and Assam, as well as the tribal communities of the adjoining hills" (Guha, 2016, 1). Throughout the next decades, the thinly populated provinces that remained abandoned until the Burmese invasion were gradually conquered by the British. Like other parts of India, the introduction of modernity in Assam is widely associated with the British annexation of the province in 1826 and the involvement of missionaries in influencing the region with their "civilizing" hopes. The main purpose of colonization as Guha (2016) claimed was "to turn Assam into an agricultural estate of tea-drinking Britons and to transform local traditional institutions to suit the colonial pattern of

exploitation" (2016, 2). To facilitate their pursuit of economic profits and revenue, they attempted to develop railway and water lines connecting Calcutta and Assam following the establishment of British authority in Assam, primarily to advance their business interests. The development of transportation, infrastructure, and economic activity aided migration by allowing people from other parts of India to be brought in by the British administration to assist them throughout their rule. On the contrary, it also enabled contact with progressive and enlightened western ideas that travelled through Bengal to Assam. After the British took control of the region, a variety of changes were brought about, such as the establishment of a new administration, education, the expansion of transportation and communication, and the shift from a feudal economy to one based on capitalist principles. One of the critical aspects of social transformation that had a significant impact on traditional Indian society was the introduction of modern education, which resulted in a significant reorientation of the populace's thoughts and attitudes.

A civilization's social structure remains greatly influenced by the status of women at various points in time. Since the beginning of civilization, women have played a vital role in society. Throughout history, women's roles have changed as society has evolved. The condition of women in India under British rule also underwent significant changes during the colonial era. Women's status in India has evolved over time and in different sections of the country. Additionally, women of various socioeconomic statuses, religions, and ethnic backgrounds have had distinct experiences. Historian Romila Thapar (1975) also makes a similar observation that "within the Indian sub-continent, there have been infinite variations on the status of women diverging according to cultural milieu, family structure, class, caste, property rights and morals" (1975, 6). Within the constraints of a patriarchal society, however, the prevailing position was one of subjugation and dominance. Jayawardena (2016) stated, "whether the woman in question belonged to a peasant family and was compelled to drudgery in the field and home or a high-caste family and living a life of leisure, she was the victim of a set of values that demanded implicit obedience to male

domination, and of many other social practices that circumscribed her life". However, it is worth noting that women's status in the Vedic period was better in terms of education, religious liberties, freedom of movement and choices, equality among genders, and other factors (Kumbhare, 2009). In the post-Vedic era, however, the position of women rapidly worsened, resulting in a profound reorientation of society. This occurred concurrently with the emergence of the most effective social distinctions, as a result of the expansion of class and caste. Desai (1957) stated, "Manu invests the Brahmins[1] with new privileges. He deprecates the Shudras[2] and women and concedes to them an inferior status. He thus lays down a theoretical basis for the social and legal subordination of women" (1957, 13).

Hence, until the eighteenth century, patriarchal beliefs restricted women's sexuality, mobility, and freedom, while ignoring other areas of their well-being, such as education, causing their status to collapse. "In the nineteenth century, 'the woman' question loomed largely. This was not a question of 'what do women want?' but rather 'how can they be modernized?'" (Forbes, 2008, 12). European administrators and missionaries also criticized the harmful evil social practices and the draconian laws it had for women, which marginalized women's position in society. They claimed that the Indian women's mistreatment exemplifies the country's backwardness. Thus, the early nineteenth century resulted in a period of social reforms, including widow remarriage, the elimination of child marriage, and the discouragement and outlawing of brutal ancient rituals like *Sati[3]*, all of which had a devastating influence on the lives of women for generations, resulting in beneficial societal transformation. Many Indian social reformers, including Raja Rammohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, M.G. Rande, Jyotiba Phule, Mahatma Gandhi, and many others, rightly believed that

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[1] Brahmins are the highest caste within the Indian caste system. Priests and intellectuals are classified as Brahmins, and members of this caste have historically been valued for their role in maintaining sacred knowledge. Kshatriya, Vaisya, and Shudra are the remaining three major castes, arranged hierarchically from highest to lowest in terms of social prestige and position.
[2] According to the Hindu caste system, Shudras are the lowest caste
[3] Sati was a Hindu ritual in which a widow sacrificed herself by sitting atop the funeral pyre of her departed spouse.

emancipating women by giving them access to education and rights would lead to societal transformation. This period also saw a shift in the pattern of women's lives, with women's roles redefined and alterations to their appropriation of activities throughout their lives, their expression of individuality, and their mobility.

However, while analyzing women's situation in Assam throughout the period, it became clear that women of Assam were impacted by the predominantly patriarchal dogmas and practices present in other parts of the country. Thus, we come across similar family structures dominated by men, gender-based division of labour, and the like. Women's marginalization until the nineteenth century remained strictly restricted through social taboos and stereotypes that restricted women's emancipation. However, with individuals exposed to newer experiences throughout colonial times, subsequent changes in the status of women were also observed (initially among a few women of elite families). Modernity is commonly referred to as "colonial modernity" (Dutta, 2012) in Assam, as the core of modern development eroding traditional structure emerged only after the British conquest of the region. These new experiences initially drew a few Assamese elite families, enabling them to view Assam through the prism of the western progressive paradigm, and encouraging them to embrace modern change. As a result of the concept of development and people's desire to create a modern society, many new aspects of modernity were integrated into Assamese culture. Clothing was one of the many aspects of modernity that underwent a gradual change. Unlike any other period in Indian history, the prominence of clothing and the meaning that was intrinsically connected to clothing induced significant reorientation and transformation during the colonial era. The stability of culture is influenced by social, cultural, and political changes in society. When it comes to clothing, the social and historical circumstances in which people live have a significant impact on their choices. As a result, studying clothing transitions can help us better understand the social psychology of clothing and its impact on human behaviour.

Dress is a prominent aspect of our daily lives and it draws our attention and conveys our ideological viewpoints when we choose to dress for a particular event, whether or

not we do it consciously. Roach-Higgins et al. (1995) stated, "Dress is a distinctive characteristic of human existence. Other animal species groom themselves and make a social gesture toward grooming each other; but as human beings, we far outdistance them regarding the amount of time and resources devoted to preparing our bodies for presentation to ourselves and others" (1995, 1). In the thesis, the terms "clothes" and "dress" will be used interchangeably to refer to the significance of "an outfit that individuals choose to wear" in their daily lives, omitting alterations or modifications made to the body (such as hair colour, jewellery, tattoos, and so on). Similar to clothing, the significance of body alteration and ornamentation are distinct research issues that can be investigated to comprehend their cultural relevance. Therefore, to achieve the primary objective of the study, it was omitted from the scope of the investigation.

The clothes of individuals are researched and analysed with regard to their class, status, caste, and religion as well as their marital status, occupation, and gender among other considerations. Apart from that, clothing as a cultural aspect also deals with society's hierarchical structure, which determines the distinction between 'superior' (classy, elegant, progressive) and 'inferior' (old-fashioned, inelegant, traditional). It also functions as an important part of the community's material culture as a utilitarian object, expressing and contributing to the creation of cultural and social identity. Communication is no longer limited to verbal exchanges; the body itself may be used to produce, express, and symbolise ideas and concepts. For ages, people have used clothing as a means of communication to transmit personal, social, and political trends, as well as a physical reflection of culture. As a result, clothing serves as a language and a means of communication, allowing the wearer to express themselves through a variety of symbols and expressions. Interpretations may, however, have competing and contradictory connotations when offered in a different socio-cultural context.

Association with clothes is investigated more closely as a feminine category when it comes to clothing analysis aligning it to the question of modesty, aesthetics, and

beauty. Thus, compared to men's clothes, the relevance of women's clothing concerning cultural conventions remains incredibly critical in a culture wherein in many contexts women's clothing is rigorously regulated and controlled. Consequently, women's clothing choices and the question of what to wear and what not to wear are heavily influenced by societal norms and expectations, despite their apparent mundanity in everyday life. For instance, why is clothing a significant element of a community's material culture? What is the relationship between culture and women's dress? How did the concept of progress (associated with modernity) influence the dress of colonial society? How does a dress establish its meaning? How does this impact people's choices? How does clothing acquire several meanings over time and in response to situational shifts? How does attire relate to concerns of class, gender, and status? In an attempt to answer the question that has fascinated me concerning the hidden messages in clothing and understanding change, research in dress study has excited me to an extent. Similarly, while clothing's primary function is to protect the wearer's body (from extreme weather conditions), it has been utilized to express hierarchical societal connotations over time, to reflect one's identity, status, class, and power. "Clothes do more than simply cover and fit the body. They are an extension of the body, an extension that proclaims personhood, because people choose clothes that represent who they are" (Becker, 1997, 138). The dressed body gives additional significance and life to clothes by connecting them to the outside world. The breadth of the dress-related questions compelled me to choose a topic that had received scant attention, particularly in Assam.

1.2 Significance of the Study

Throughout the years Assam has remained almost isolated from the rest of India and comparatively less developed than the other Indian states. However, there is much to be said about the landscape of Assam which reflects the topographical diversity of mountainous terrain, plateaus, and river-fed plains. The state boasts of an interesting demographic profile comprising heterogeneous ethnic groups, communities, and

individuals that share cultural aspects like food, dress, and traditions to build distinct cultural identities. As one of its most defining characteristics, Assam has a rich weaving culture and rich biodiversity. Additionally, it is fascinating to look at the way that women in Assam, who have traditionally been skilled weavers and have a close affinity with clothing, were forced to negotiate socio-economic changes. The rich legacy of textiles in the region enables one to comprehend the relationship between nature and culture through the motifs and patterns found in traditional apparel. Although studies on distinct textile traditions and weaving cultures have been undertaken in Assam, very few studies have examined the relationship between clothing and social change through the lens of photography.

Thus, the study explores the shift in women's dress in Assam in the twentieth century, associating it with key socio-political events such as the impact of British reforms, the establishment of missionaries, the impact of Mahatma Gandhi during the Independence movement, the Assam Agitation[4] and later, globalization. The colonial period was one such point where the concept of the dress was redefined, so I chose to analyse the above-mentioned events in chronological order. Further, I also interpret the process of change by analysing the events leading to the gradual and continuous transition of women's dress. Each of these events had a profound effect on Assam. Although Assam's socio-cultural and political landscape is widely documented, there are only a few references to the region's dress history. Consequently, there is a lack of in-depth research on the history of clothing (particularly women) in the region. I have used photographs as a valuable source of data that provided a more reliable model for comprehending the socio-cultural changes in women's dress in contemporary society. Throughout my research, I collected photographs of Assamese women from different periods (late nineteenth century onwards) in order to comprehend the nuances of these changes in dress patterns among the Assamese women.

Assamese identity is a highly contested topic. The question "who is an Assamese?" has been a source of dispute for decades. It is difficult to describe what it means to be

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[4] Also known as *Axom Andolon* or Assam Movement (1979-85)

an Assamese because the state's population is so ethnically, linguistically, and religiously diverse. Thus, any definition of Assamese identity is bound to be problematic because it will leave out one or the other ethnic group. On August 15, 1985, the All-Assam Students Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) signed a memorandum with the central government of India to protect Assam from illegal migrants and to promote the overall development of the state to find a satisfactory solution to the foreigner[5] problem in Assam. As per Clause 6 of the Assam Accord, "constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the culture, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people" (Govt. of Assam). The term 'Assamese' has remained unsatisfactory to the majority of the state's indigenous people, who have maintained their traditional cultural attributes as well as their language, distinguishing them from what is commonly understood as an 'Assamese' (one who speaks Assamese), where "Assameseness" has remained a disputed formation. A simple definition of an Assamese would be: A person who lives in Assam. However, when we take into account the various ethnic groups and their distinctive cultural traits, the term "Assamese" remains a divisive and absurd one. In contrast to the diverse ethnic groups and communities in Assam, where each has its own culture, tradition, language, and sartorial style, the researcher intends to use the word "Assamese" to convey a sense of linguistic identity, but also refer, to in this case, to Hindu women. It must be said in this regard that religion is a big influence on dressing patterns and for the present study the researcher has sought to focus only on Assamese-speaking Hindu women. The study of the clothing traditions and features of Assam's varied ethnic and non-ethnic populations will greatly expand the scope of the investigation since each community has its unique clothing tradition and characteristics. The purpose of each text included in the thesis is to help the reader

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[5] "[T]he movement leaders demanded that the central government take steps to identify, disenfranchise, and deport illegal aliens."(Baruah 1986:1184), and supported a campaign to raise awareness of the issue of illegal immigration, primarily from Bangladesh.

obtain a deeper understanding of the history of the Assamese-speaking people and their clothing.

1.3 Literature Review

In this following section, I try to map the literature on dress, identity, modernity and photography. These texts assisted me in formulating the thesis's central argument. In order to organize the research works in a coherent way, this part has been divided into three sub-sections.

1.3.1 Dress and Identity

Humans have long been interested in clothing, which has led them to document it in a variety of ways, such as sculptures, paintings and later, through various means of visual representation, offering a plethora of information for researchers looking to examine the many styles of clothing over time. Western European nations began to industrialize in the first part of the nineteenth century, marking the shift from rural and pre-modern societies to modern capitalist societies. In the nineteenth century, social and intellectual changes spurred some of the initial debates regarding clothing and human behaviour (Roach-Higgens and Eicher, 1973). Academic interest in dress history has grown in the last two decades as social scientists have been able to examine clothing at a much more in-depth level. Works such as Paul L. D. Giafferri's (1927) *The History of Feminine Costume of the World,* G. S. Ghurye's (1966) *Indian Costume,* William Alexander's (1814) *The Costume of China,* Clark Wissler's (1931) *Indian costumes in the United States,* A Biswas's (1985) *Indian Costume,* etc. are few early works on clothing history. These texts provide a foundation for understanding clothing and human behaviour by connecting clothing to other aspects of society. There was an increased focus on critically evaluating clothes from a social, cultural, economic, and political perspective in the later part of the twentieth century due to this growing interest in clothing history.

While some people may consider clothing to be excessively extravagant, clothing serves as an integral part of our daily lives in addition to concealing our bodies. The primary motives of clothing are defined not exclusively even though, it has mainly dealt with "protection, warmth, decoration, modesty and symbolism" (Gilman et al., 2002). However, we agree with William Keenan's (2001) observation that "clothes are society's way of showing where we belong in the order of things, our role and position in the social pageantry" (2001, 4). As a result, the dress is both a means of expressing and defining one's gender identity and gender expression, where "identities are communicated by dress as it announces the social positions of the wearer to both wearer and observers within a particular interaction situation" (Roach-Higgins et al., 1995, 12).

Cloth and Human Experience (1989) edited by Jane Schneider and Annette B. Weiner explore the social and political contributions of clothing, as well as the ceremonial and social contexts in which people embrace and give significance to these qualities. It also examines how these meanings change through time. Further, the authors focused on how clothing might help social groups reproduce and benefit from social contact when it serves as a sign of differences in age, gender, and social status among members of the group. In the book, both the symbolic potentials of cloth and the human acts that give clothes their political and social significance are examined. Similarly, Ryan (1966) in his book *Clothing: A Study of Human Behaviour* points out that the way people dress and the choices they make are heavily influenced by their social and cultural environment. The impact of society can be either explicit, such as rules and regulations or implicit, such as customs and traditions, or simply what the group accepts. She also discusses how culturally specific characteristics of clothes, such as whether it is seen as masculine or feminine, are so deeply ingrained, even though their significance shifts with time. Using Veblen's theory of economic consumption, the author refers to how clothing has become an important means of identifying a "leisure class" based on the assumption that people choose their attire to communicate their social position and economic standing. In general, a person's

socioeconomic status remains extremely significant as a reflection of the value they place on clothing.

In light of the importance of dress in human behaviour, later researchers were eager to examine the relationship between dress and identity, relating it to gender, age, class, status and the like. Individual appearances and their relation to establishing one's status in social interaction came under intense scrutiny in the twentieth century. *Dress and Identity,* by Mary E. Roach-Higgins, J. B. Eicher, and Kim K.P. Johnson (Eds.) (1995) offers compiled readings that highlight fundamental topics in the study of the relationship between dress, an important part of human behaviour, and establishing and maintaining one's own identity. In Chapter 1, titled 'Dress and Identity,' Higgins and Eicher explain why they have grouped bodily modifications and body augmentations under the category of a dress in a more specific way. In this chapter, the authors focus on two fundamental purposes of clothing: as a tool of communication and as a modifier of body processes, whereby individuals establish identities and selves and attribute identities to others. Identifying one's gender through clothing is an essential element of everyday life, with dress serving as a medium of communication. The authors also state how in the post-1960s, social scientists were more inclined toward the theories of symbolic interaction. While analysing dress, the symbolic interaction theory illustrates the rich perspective of how dress as a medium of communication relates to identity. With this, Gregory P. Stone in the chapter, "Appearances and the Self," emphasizes that nonverbal signals, particularly clothing, are just as significant as verbal ones in establishing an individual's identity and its relationship to oneself. Similarly, in *Beauty Secrets*, Chapkis (1988), explores the relationships between physical appearance, gender, and sexual orientation, giving women a platform to open out about the pressures they face to meet socially-imposed standards of beauty. However, Huisman and Sotelo (2005), in "Dress Matters: Change and Continuity in the Dress Practices of Bosnian Muslim Refugee Women" examined women's bodies and the way they dress as a representation of a broader community.

They argues that women are both objectified as the keepers of traditional culture and legacy and celebrated for their role in social reproduction.

Early studies in Indian dress history concentrated primarily on providing chronological data on clothing evolution and recording clothing as a cultural item, with an emphasis on textile tradition, different motifs, fabrics and indigenous methods of manufacturing. A. Biswas (1985) in his book, *Indian Costume,* reveals how people's clothing history can reveal a great deal about their social and economic standing, their temperament and taste, their appreciation of beauty and refinement, their ability to adapt to their physical and geographical surroundings, their ingenuity, their ability to withstand external and internal influences, and in short, their way of life. Dressing up has become an essential aspect of our daily lives. The book provides an overview of the history of Indian sartorial trends over time and region. Although, G. S. Ghurye (1966), A. Biswas (1985) and Charles Fabri (1961), are few who have contributed to this field, books on Indian clothing/costumes have never included Assam and its people's sartorial styles in their studies. A few works on women have been produced in the region, but there is a dearth of writings on the history of dress and its significance in a social and historical context.

In the context of Assam, the dress was looked at through the prism of cultural aspects, where works of B. K. Barua's (1951) *A Cultural History of Assam*, Hariprasad Neog and Lila Gogoi's (1966) *Asamiya Sanskriti*, S. R. Ward's (1884) *A Glimpse of Assam*, Vickland's (1928) *Women of Assam*, *Sahitya Aru Sanskriti* (1969) by R. Pathak, B. Chowdhury and J. Das (Eds.) and a few others give a glimpse of clothing history in Assam (late nineteenth to the twentieth century). Although this literature helps to some extent to trace sartorial patterns, it does not explain the complex social links that clothing has inside a society. Emphasis is placed on the various textile traditions, with notable works including H. F. Samman's (1897) *The Cotton Fabric of Assam* and Labanya Mazumder's (2013) *Textile Tradition of Assam*, which provide an empirical perspective of textile tradition, the significance of motifs, fabrics, and clothing as material culture.

Clothing in the Indian setting was later investigated holistically by anthropologist Emma Tarlo (1996) to better understand how clothing affects people's lives. Although Tarlo's study is important in comprehending the multifaceted meaning of clothes in everyday life, a chronological approach to the evolution of clothing in India is not entirely new. The importance of dress in Indian culture makes her work relevant to date. In her book, *Clothing Matters,* Tarlo (1996) analyses the seemingly basic conundrum of how "clothing matters" and "the problem of what to wear" necessitate thoughtful consideration of the social, political, and cultural implications of sartorial decisions. In the book, diverse sartorial styles in India from the late nineteenth century are examined to show how caste, urbanization, and a larger cultural discussion about Indian identity are all linked to clothing trends. Throughout the book, Tarlo makes the case that a person's dress choices are heavily impacted by a variety of factors, including caste, status, education, locality (urban vs. rural), and religious ideals of modesty and shame. She argues that a person's ability to establish an identity through their clothing is contingent on the social and political context in which they are wearing it.

Initially investigated in relation to human behaviour and the manner in which it was influenced by other social aspects in the formation of meaning, clothing research was then given a new dimension by applying semiotics to comprehend how potent symbolic meanings might be established and reproduced. As clothing becomes a medium of communication in society, the perception of clothing's meaning and its significance within the context of societal standards gained significance. Understanding the role of clothing in society as a medium of communication necessitates a substantial focus on the interpretation of clothing's meaning and its significance in a social context. Roland Barthes's *The Fashion System* (1983) and Alison Lurie's *The Language of Clothes* (1981) consider clothing as coded linguistic systems. Comprehending the symbolic importance of clothing, Roland Barthes' (1983) works remain incredibly important in understanding the structure of clothing as a cultural analyst, structuralist, and semiotician. Barthes explores Saussure's model

of the linguistic sign in terms of a structural analysis of women's clothes. He emphasizes the three orders of signification that play a role in meaning production. Specifically, they are denotation, connotation, and ideology or mythology. Barthes enabled Saussure's semiotics to investigate and unravel significance in all modalities of human communication, including language. Similarly, in his book *Clothing for Liberation: A Communication Analysis of Gandhi's Swadeshi Revolution*, Peter Gonsalves (2010) asserts that Gandhi's use of clothing as a communication style had a subliminal impact on people's daily life throughout the independence movement. In his study, Gonsalves focuses on three major theorists and analyses the significance of three theories that must be linked to comprehend Mahatma Gandhi's Swadeshi Movement, and how this understanding leads to comprehending "Gandhian Symbolisation". Gonsalves principal objective in this work is to highlight how humans construct symbols via their everyday interactions. By examining the role that clothing played in colonial India before and after Gandhi, Gonsalves draws on Barthes semiological fashion study. When it comes to symbols and their relationships, the author drew on Turner's comparative symbolism theory explaining the broad variety of messages that can be conveyed by symbols. Finally, the author examines Gandhi's emergence as a living icon of Indian freedom whereas he uses Goffman's symbolic behaviour theory to explain how one's impression of another is impacted by their looks and other features of their relationships with others. In addition to functioning as a source of physical protection, decoration, and identity, the clothing described in the book also serves as a symbol of emancipation in the narrative.

The Dress of Women: A Critical Introduction to the Symbolism and Sociology of Clothing by Gilman, et al. (2002) explores the sociological critique of clothes in contemporary culture from a feminist perspective. It offers a nonfictional investigation of clothing's symbolism and its social significance. The authors have focused on dress and fashion to critically examine the institutional and ideological underpinning for gendered activities in the modern world. Furthermore, the author contends that our clothing is a vehicle of expression, capable of expressing everything from individual

conceit to social class consciousness. 'Cloth', according to the author, is a social tissue that allows us to freely, effortlessly, and peacefully associate with one another, whereas without it such interaction is impossible. In the book, the concept of modesty as a social construct is seen as a sort of sex consciousness that is particular to women and consists of giving the greatest attention to femininity. The authors express their thought on how serving a practical purpose, clothing may also serve as a form of artistic expression and has a strong connection with our psychological well-being. This book mainly investigates how institutions and ideologies promote gendered norms by dissecting the symbolic importance of clothing in today's modern society.

Karen Tranberg Hansen (2004) in, "The World in Dress: Anthropological Perspectives on Clothing, Fashion, and Culture," uses an anthropological approach to explore clothing and its symbolic and cultural implications across cultures. "Clothing as Communication: An Empirical Investigation" an empirical analysis by Holman (1980) found that the clothes a person wears communicate a lot about their personality. Research on product meaning continues, but it is framed in the context of communication. All these books give an idea of dress, relating it more to symbolic interpretation as well as its use as a medium for communication while establishing identity, the following has been useful to understand modernity and its impact on Indian society.

1.3.2 Modernity

Edward Royce (2015) in his book, *Classical Social Theory and Modern Society: Marx, Durkheim, Weber*, examines how each of these named thinkers reacted to the establishment and development of modern society in their distinctive ways. The author covers the foundations and complex reading where the works of modern theorists provide a valuable resource for critically assessing our political orientations and worldviews. However, in *Social Change and Modernity*, Hans Haferkamp and Neil J. Smelser (1992) examine the notion of modernity from a broader standpoint. The writers emphasise social conflict and social movements, which are crucial parts

of the development of modernity. People have emphasised the impact of modernity on both social movements and development. They are also interested in the linkages between theoretical constructions and historical actuality. Both internal and external factors interact with one another, resulting in a fusion of forces that can either encourage or inhibit the evolution of society. In addition, they examine the evolution of social change theory across time, particularly concerning modernization, and then present a 'civilized viewpoint' on the process of social change.

Modernity as it is experienced in the West, with an altogether new modern setup, destroying old societies while expanding into modern industrial societies, is quite different and has its counterpart in India. In his book *Mistaken Modernity*, Dipankar Gupta (2016) argues that people's association of modernity with technological advancement symbols such as automobiles, electronics, and so on is erroneous. As the author points out, our country's social system needs an upgrade. Our social relationships are characterized by familial ties, privileges of caste and social standing, and a propensity to break every law. It's all about how people treat each other, writes the author, and ethics is all about treating others as equal citizens. This is what true modernity is all about. Despite the massive industrialization and urbanization taking place in India, our deeply traditional attitudes toward social relations persist. Aiming to jolt us out of our comfort, the author explores how non-modern features persist even in places where we thought we had left tradition behind. Even though many major changes have occurred in Indian culture, the past is still very much a part of our present. The author makes the case that if we realise how out of touch with modernity we still are, we have a better chance of moving forward. India's progress can be aided by modernist social reforms that are based on self-awareness. Gupta's concepts of modernity remain crucial while associating clothing with modernity. Similarly, Indian modernity and its inseparable components from tradition have been discussed by sociologists such as Avijit Pathak (2015), Yogendra Singh (2013), and S. L. Doshi (2015). When it comes to oppression, we still live in a pre-modern culture in India, and modernity has yet to reach its full potential. Modernity was seen through the lens

of social transformation in modern India by social anthropologist M. N. Srinivas (2013), who connected the processes of Sanskritization, Westernisation, and secularism with the growing dominance of politicization in Indian social and cultural life.

Arjun Appadurai (1996), *Modernity at Large,* establishes a new paradigm for the cultural study of globalization and explains how cultural imagination as social forces support the current environment by supplying new resources for individual identity. Not only economically, but also culturally and politically, modernity has been connected with globalization. One of the most significant diacritics of modernity is the mass media, which moulds and compels collective imaginations while simultaneously posing a challenge to nation-states by weakening their sense of national identity. Appadurai argues that it is the imagination that connects modernity and globalization, portraying them as one and encouraging modern subjects to embrace the global into their daily lives through the extensive movement and vast consumption of electronic and print media. Appadurai describes the present imagined worlds in which the post-national subject lives as a series of five distinct – but interconnected – landscapes in his view of global culture. Appadurai views imagination as a dynamic social force that may be exploited to generate new identities that are not bound to the nation-state in this setting.

However, with the massive changes in the clothing industry and the constant transformation that has occurred in India (particularly women's dress) in the last century, dress study has been gradually considered by some contemporary writers in order to comprehend its cultural significance and link it to other factors in the Indian context. Such as Vinay Bahl (2005) " Shifting Boundaries of 'Nativity' and 'Modernity' in South Asian Women's Clothes,", L Mount's (2017) "Saris and Contemporary Indian womanhood: How middle-class women navigate the tradition/ modernity split", Banerjee, and Miller (2008), *The Sari,* are few works which have emphasized the significance of various factors in the creation of specific dress standards for women of various social classes in different historical ages. Cultural

issues and how they might be described historically without compromising human agency, the function of structures and institutions, imagination, and cultural forces as well as cultural experiences in everyday life were also a focus of their works. Similarly, these studies have looked into the personal and societal interactions that Indian women have with their clothes throughout their lives, from childhood to adulthood and beyond.

1.3.3 Photography

While considering photographs as an analytical tool in the thesis, Roland Barthes (1987), *Camera Lucida- Reflections on Photography*, Susan Sontag (2005), *On Photography*, John Berger (1972) *Way of Seeing*, Emerling, J (2012) *Photography: History and Theory,* Christopher Pinney (1997) *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs,* Nathaniel Gaskell and Diva Gujral (2019) *Photography in India,* are among the few scholarly publications in the subject of photography that established a justification for employing photographs in the thesis. *The Camera as Witness* by Joy L. K. Pachuau and Willem van Schendel (2016) has, on the contrary, made a significant addition to the field of visual analysis in social science research, particularly in the context of North East India.

Although many books and research works were consulted, only a handful were reviewed. Only a handful of literature about women has been published in the region, including works by Dipti Sharma, S. L. Baruah, Aparna Mahanta, Meeta Deka, Renu Debi, Elizabeth Vickland, Alpana Sarkar Deka, and others who have contributed their research on the plight of women in Assam. While research has been undertaken in Assam on women's status, their role in politics and the economy, women's empowerment, and similar topics, the area of dress studies has received relatively little attention. Given the importance of gender, identity, class, and the politics of clothing representation in a socio-political and cultural context, the study of women's dress in Assam is still in its infancy. Research on modernity, dress, and photography has been substantial, but the position or portrayal of women's dress in Assam (especially

emphasizing its symbolic character and linkage to modernity) has not been extensively discussed. This has shaped the rationale for this thesis, which seeks to emphasise the fundamental social processes that contributed to the evolution of clothing and its perception in contemporary society. In addition to generating new research ideas, this thesis seeks to fill a gap in the literature on women's dress, particularly in Assam, by drawing on historical scholarship on Assam and providing a critical analysis of significant socio-political events and their impact on the evolution of sartorial styles in the state.

Even though a substantial number of books and other research works were evaluated, only a handful was retained for the literature review. Numerous studies have been undertaken on modernity, clothing, and photography; but, the position or representation of women's costumes in Assam (especially emphasizing its symbolic character and connection to modernity) has been rarely studied. In this regard, the purpose of the thesis was to throw light on women's attire in Assam. In order to do this, a critical examination of significant socio-political events and their influence on the evolution of sartorial trends in the state will be provided.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The thesis was an attempt to examine the changes in women's dress in Assamese society during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The objectives of the study are:

    a) To analyze the historical shifts in women's dress in Assam (by relating this to major socio-political events) and examine them through the prism of gender

    b) To critically look at the impact of modernity among the Assamese-speaking people with special reference to changing patterns of dress through photographs

    c) To relate women's dress in the context of Assam to issues of identity, culture, nationalism, and globalization

1.5 Methodologies/approach(es) Applied

The study is guided by modern thinkers and their concepts on the connection between gender, identity, and cultural norms. The researcher relied mostly on the works of Arjun Appadurai, Dipankar Gupta, Geraldine Forbes, Uma Chakravarti, and Kumari Jayawardene for this purpose. This is predominantly a work of qualitative research. In the thesis, a multidisciplinary approach driven by Cultural Studies theoretical perspectives was used to study the specified objective and research questions. Research in cultural studies combines knowledge from various domains to provide the information needed for any given study or project.

The researcher employed a three-tiered methodology and took a multidisciplinary approach. Initially, a historical method of inquiry combined with available documents, official reports, and secondary sources such as books, articles, diaries, and travelogues assisted in comprehending the socio-cultural and economic aspects of Assamese society and in developing a deeper understanding of the role of clothing in people's lives.

Secondly, textual analysis has been used to analyse visual materials (photographs), with photographs being analysed as 'texts'. Textual analysis helps in interpretation and in the quest for meaning of photographs. "Photographic analysis and interpretation, therefore, form a process that unfolds and elevates the photograph from content to meaning and then to mattering" (Langman and Pick, 2018). In a methodical search for meaning, 'semiotic analysis' of the photographs has been used. G. Rose has explored the concept of semiotic analysis in the way how it elicits meanings and signs from photographs by analysing the 'detailed accounts of the exact ways the meanings of an image are produced through that image' (Rose, 2000, cited in Langman and Pick, 2018).

Thirdly, the researcher used the ethnographic method to interact with Assamese men and women from different strata of society to critically interpret their views on women's dress. By using the case study technique, the researcher attempted to analyse

the transition of dress by describing the coexistence of contemporary and tradition apparel at a particular period and place. During the fieldwork, the use of the photo-elicitation research method remained significant in the way it triggered sensory experiences in participants.

The social sciences have made considerable use of the photo-elicitation method. This approach is also referred to as photovoice, photo feedback, and photo interviewing. Photo elicitation is a technique that enables researchers to integrate a photograph into a study interview, regardless of whether they offer the image, or the participant does. In each instance, participants are given "guiding questions" to assist them in debating the photo and/or choosing their image. One of the most essential reasons to employ photo-elicitation is that the manner in which a concept is presented may influence how individuals respond to it. When pictures include affordances other than words or language based on text, different types of things can be discussed in various ways. Images, for instance, can be used to unearth information that individuals are aware of but are unwilling to reveal. Additionally, images facilitate the usage of metaphors when describing events. People who "know it when they see it" may communicate their thoughts, emotions, and experiences via the use of an image. Due to the unconscious nature of experienced experience, it could be difficult to describe. Photos bring these concepts to life, beyond what can be expressed or written.

The photographs of the participants are not necessary to be the focal element of the interview; rather, they serve as a jumping-off point to identify how the participants see things. According to Carlsson (2001), images make it easy to explain the link between a circumstance and a phenomenon. They are not just "of" something, but also "about" something. They have a substantial effect on what a speaker wishes to portray, as well as psychological and emotional nuance and values. When participants are encouraged to submit their images, the power differential between the researcher and study participants is reduced. This is due to the fact that participants are responsible for bringing and, in some cases, taking their own images. In this sense, photos may free individuals' thought processes. The image offers a point of connection between

the participant and the researcher. This facilitates their conversation. When adopting interviews as a method, the participants' reluctance to articulate abstract notions posed the greatest challenge. When participants were provided with photographs, they were able to relax and feel more at ease, which facilitated the disclosure of more private or delicate information. Both the subject and the researcher felt at peace in the presence of the image, as it provided both a point of reference and a jumping-off point for additional thought.

1.5.1 Conceptual Framework

"In the social psychology of clothing, we are not only concerned with what clothes mean but also with a) the *process* by which people come to associate clothing and appearance with certain meanings, and b) the social *consequences* of these meanings" (Kaiser, 1998, 29). However, even if the relevance of clothes in everyday life may not be immediately apparent, some of the more typical day-to-day behaviour through clothing becomes incredibly significant and intriguing when scrutinized in-depth in reaction to the importance of clothing and its effect on individuals. Even though it appears innocuous on the surface, human behaviours have a tremendous impact on how we connect with one another. As mundane as it may seem, clothing and appearance are an important part of human life that is often taken for granted. However, once we acknowledge the significance of clothing in a cultural context, we can better understand how it aids in the study of individual representation and interpersonal relationships in general. Consequently, while evaluating clothing, the 'context' in which culturally embedded meanings are profoundly ingrained remains incredibly relevant.

To begin, different perspectives exist when analysing and comprehending the significance of clothes in terms of social interactions in the context of developing a framework for enduring knowledge and research. In this study, however, I have used the *'contextual perspective'* as described by Susan B. Kaiser (1998) in her book *The Social Psychology of Clothes: Symbolic Appearance in Context*, which provides a

deeper understanding of the significance of clothing in daily life. Kaiser's emphasis on several perspectives enhances particular ideas to describe and comprehend the fundamental structure of human behaviours and traits about clothing and how they are used to portray themselves.

The idea of 'clothing[6]' in relation to human actions and the emphasis on the concept of 'appearance'[7] that enriches our understanding of clothing in daily life remain crucial to Kaiser's analysis of the social psychology of clothing (Kaiser,1998). Understanding that clothing is viewed in connection with bodies, which are themselves altered, is critical to the study of clothing. Due to the significance of appearance in daily life and the emphasis on social connections, two processes have been highlighted as contributing to and emerging from how people appear to themselves and others: Appearance management[8](Considering and engaging in actions that pertain to one's appearance) and Appearance perception (observation and judgment based on the way other people appear). Both of these processes concerning clothing have been crucial in comprehending the different viewpoints provided, with Kaiser firmly emphasizing the abstract insights on clothing that further allow creative thought and interpretation within a framework.

To comprehend Susan B. Kaiser's "*contextual perspective*," it is necessary to comprehend the various disciplinary perspectives that the author has established to better comprehend the psychology of clothing, such as the *cognitive perspective* and the *symbolic interactionist perspective*, which are derived from the disciplines of psychology and sociology, respectively, and the *cultural perspective*, which emerges from a variety of humanities and social sciences disciplines.

a) **Cognitive Perspective:** The cognitive perspective focuses via the lens of appearance perception, where clothes and appearance both generate thoughts and

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[6] Refers to tangible materials that are linked to the human body, including pants, skirts, and tops.
[7] Referring to a composite image that prioritizes not only clothing but also bodily modification such as tattoos, hairstyling, etc.
[8] Any activity or cognitive process aimed at altering one's physical appearance falls under this umbrella notion. For example, Personal and social consequences can be assessed when making decisions about purchasing a certain item of clothing, such as deciding whether or not to wear it.

opinions about a person, allowing individuals to build impressions of one another (Kaiser, 1998). The focus of this approach is on the individual mind. Thus, people use and retrieve knowledge about individuals and groups of persons, especially in terms of their personal features or qualities, from a cognitive standpoint.

b) **Symbolic Interactionist Perspective:** It was Herbert Blumer who developed the term "symbolic interactionism" (Blumer, 1969) however, he based his ideas on that of George Herbert Mead. The symbolic interactionist perspective was developed by sociologists, such as George Mead and Herbert Blumer, who believed that understanding and studying people's interactions and the symbols they use to communicate is crucial to getting a deeper knowledge of human behaviour. In contrast, Blumer (1969) was more concerned with the meaning ascribed to symbols, as this is the basis of interactive content, which cannot be removed from an individual's social activity. Blumer laid out what he called the three premises of symbolic interaction:

> The first premise is that human beings act toward things based on the meanings the things have for them….. The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things that he encounters (Blumer, 1969, 3)

In contrast to the cognitive perspective, which primarily focused on appearance perception in terms of how perception towards appearance provides specific details of information in the way someone is dressed, the symbolic interactionist focuses on both appearance perception and appearance management, thus addressing both the self and social connection while emphasizing symbolism and the search for meanings through clothing (Kaiser, 1998). The concept of 'meaning' remains crucial to the symbolic interactionist approach, where meaning is negotiated through processes of interpretation and reinterpretation between individuals and is socially constructed in contrast to the cognitive

perspective, where 'knowledge' is obtained through perception. Thus, the symbolic perspective enables researchers to examine how clothing and appearance symbols elicit meaningful responses because symbols represent our social reality as part of our everyday lives.

c) **Cultural Perspective:** Kaiser's cultural perspective is employed to investigate the significance of cultural artefacts and their link to ideological systems in order to understand clothing and physical appearance within a broader cultural framework. The cultural perspective is multidisciplinary, drawing on theories and concepts from anthropology, cultural studies, semiotics, and other human sciences, allowing the study of culture without constraining the borders between disciplines. Through this lens, while comprehending the social psychology of clothing, Kaiser focuses on the symbolic system and codes that are used to decipher and interpret clothing, which may vary in different contexts where individual experiences and ways of evaluating lives may differ, thus considering meaning not only within social contexts but also within a broader cultural context (Kaiser, 1998).

With several disciplines interlaced in this perspective, semiotics plays an extremely essential role in comprehending cultural forms like clothes. To comprehend social relations within a broader context of cultural meanings, it was believed that a connection between semiotics and social psychology had been created, based on the semiotic theory of Swiss linguist Saussure. "A fundamental idea behind a cultural perspective, derived from semiotics, is that the perceiver of a cultural message is a vital part of the process of signification" (MacCannell and MacCannell,1982, cited in Kaiser, 1998, 48). Consequently, how a person interprets and connotes an item of clothing remains crucial when analyzing clothing, resulting in the development of a system of shared values within a culture. All of these approaches assume that individuals use cultural items, such as clothing, to make meaning of daily life. Although each of the aforementioned points of view differs, they all contribute to our understanding of the social

psychology of clothing. In contrast to this, Kaiser grouped these perspectives under the umbrella of a contextual perspective and utilized them as applicable.

d) **Contextual Perspective:** The contextual approach enhances the significance of appearance in terms of its social setting, within a broader cultural and historical framework. As Kaiser states- "This framework leads us to study how people manage and perceive appearances in everyday life, *considering the actual social situations, as well as the larger cultural or historical context, in which people find themselves*" (Kaiser, 1998,58). Through contextual perception, Kaiser provided an outlook on the process of change in clothing and people's interpretation of meanings through a dialogue of negotiation across historical contexts. Kaiser states:

> Contexts are also created by people themselves, so there is a dynamic relationship between individuals and the context in which they find themselves. An understanding of these connections and transitions related to contexts leads to a fuller understanding of how clothing has meanings for people, including the conditions under which these meanings are altered, ……where these meanings arise and how are modified by social interactions, and how individuals' manipulations of clothing and appearance contribute in their own right to a larger cultural context   (Kaiser, 1998, 59-60).

Thus, a contextual framework encourages the employment of diverse approaches and techniques, as well as the contextual analysis of clothing and appearances.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

At the very outset, it is extremely important to point out that researching a topic as vast as this was not easy. One of the biggest difficulties that I faced as a researcher was deciding how to initiate the topic with very less study material available on the topic. There was the possibility to carry out the study on different tangents, each equally exciting and provoking for research. However, despite being tempted on many

occasions, I have refrained from stretching my arguments beyond a point in order to maintain the focus of the study. As such, there might be certain important aspects that have not been elaborately tackled in the thesis. The challenge was to contain the work within a specific limit and therefore, the research sticks to the three basic objectives of this thesis. Secondly, due to the huge temporal period covered, there was difficulty in accessing photographs, which were either damaged or not available in the archives I visited. Hence, although most of the phases of transition resulting in women in women's dress have been covered in the study, a few might have escaped analysis. With all these constraints, the study tries its best to maintain objectivity and articulate the arguments through the analysis of the photographs as well as cultural texts.

1.7 Overview of the Chapters

Chapter-1

This chapter introduces the concepts that have been examined in subsequent chapters. In addition, the chapter describes the objective of the study, methodology (approaches) and a brief overview of the core literature consulted.

Chapter-2

This chapter is an attempt to understand the concept of modernity, identity and nationalism in a broader sense. It scrutinizes how modernity in India was viewed and accepted as compared to modernity in the west. Modernity in Assam (as elsewhere in India) came piggybacking on colonialism. This chapter scrutinise how modernity reoriented and fundamentally altered Assamese culture. One of the most important markers of this change was clothing. The chapter also discusses about the significant relation of clothing with identity. Later, the idea of nationalism and sub-nationalism is studied which helps in understanding the politics of clothing during the socio-political movements.

Chapter 3

This chapter starts with a brief introduction to photography and its influence on colonial India and Assam. This chapter examines the function of the camera as a vital tool for documenting Indian culture in the colonial system and how it portrayed women in photographs. It also attempts to trace the history of nineteenth-century Assamese women's clothing through photographs.

Chapter 4

This chapter examines the socio-cultural and political events that have influenced the attire of Assamese women since the beginning of the twentieth century. This chapter traces the shift of Assamese women's dress during the twentieth century and subsequent decades, with photographs serving as a significant tool for analyzing the change.

Chapter 5

This chapter presents the study's significant findings and conclusions. As a culmination of the previous chapters, this section examines the historical development of women's clothing and shows how it is integral to daily life and is intimately tied to social class, age, identity, gender and the like.