CHAPTER-VI
As we have discussed in chapter two that prior to independence Assam was largely marked by a colonial type of economy with the tea industry as the most prominent and important feature of economy. Whatever development work the British authority in Assam did as to the communication system or administration, it was done to serve their interest only. There were a few administrative towns with 20,000 to 30,000 population. No significant development was noticed as to urbanisation except the setting up of few administrative towns in the days of the colonial rule. It was only after independent that money for development and modernisation for the indigenously people became available. The year, 1948 is very important in the history of Assam. In that year alone many modern institutions like university, radio centre, survey school etc. were established by the native Govt. in Assam. From 1952, the five year plans contributed a great deal to both development and urbanisation. According to 1971 census, the population of Guwahati became 2,00,37.7 and towns with more than 50,000 ubhabitants increased to four. In two decades of independence, the process of urbanisation acquired a tempo. The local people also changed their attitude towards economic activities and many people took a lost more interest in business and commerce. In such a situation, both urban consciousness and urban values became more wide spread and powerful coming into conflict with traditional rural values. The birth of the Ranghar and the Ramdhenu, two literary magazines in 1948 and 1951 respectively is very important as the latter offered scope to many authors for writing stories and novels and other forms of literature. Of course, it stood for the middle class ideology more than the socialistic type of ideas in literature. Lateron, the Nabayug
and the Manideep also contributed towards modern type of literature following the Ramdhenu. The Sunday implements of news paper also played a part in it.

'The Ramdhenu', the trend settler magazine in Assamese short stories after the Awahana practically folded up in 1967. Though it continued after that, appearing very irregularly, it had done its best service to Assamese literature during the editorship of Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya. An enthusiastic editor and a true lover of to Assamese literature, Birendra Bhattacharjee was looking for only new stories with new ideas, be it Asanta Electron of Saurabh Chaliha or Edin of Chandra Prasad Saikia, without considering the political affiliation the the writers. But that age was dominated by another kind of romanticism. The political events like mass participation in independence movement by common people or the growing influences of the left ideologies of the previous period offered new ideas to the fiction writers, who began to write in this age only. The popularity of the IPTA in the 1950s and 60s also created some socially-conscious writers. But the ray of hope that was shown to the common people by the freedom struggle leaders turned into a fiasco as they failed in fulfilment hope and aspiration of the people after independence. The sensitive people became frustrated in such a situation. Some turned to left parties. Yet new values continued the enter the Assamese urban society which was growing gradually under the impact of urbanization and modernization of some traditional institutions. Science based essays and the scientific inventions around the world helped the growth of rational thinking. Of course, the world War II's impact was felt more in this period, particularly in negative aspects like rampant corruption and prostitution in commercial form. The expansion of higher and secondary education was an important force, as seen in chapter two, in spreading some urban values among the people. The sensitive and intelligent writers like Saurabh Kr. Chaliha could percieve the impact of complex city life before hand and so he expressed the this grim reality in his stories.
But in case of majority writers barring few, the tension between traditional values and urban values capture their imagination living on the border line. Like Saurabh Chaliha, Padma Borkataki expressed a total urban orientation in a different field following Rama Das. The sexual laxities of the modern urban society was exposed by him. Thus a host of fiction writers attempted to delineate the social and political environment after the independence. Umakanta Sarma, Syed Abdul Malik, Nirupama Borgohain, Radhika Mohan Goswami, Padma Barkotaki, Prafulla Chandra Goswami and Birendra Kr. Bhattacharya in novels and Saurab Kumar Chaliha in stories have explored the new urban values in this period through their novels and short stories. We shall attempt to find some of them in their select fictions in the following pages.

(A) UMAKANTA SARMA'S URANTA MEGHAR SA.

Though Umakanta Sarma started his career as a novelist way back in the late 1940s his popularity as a novelist shot to zenith with the publication of his much acclaimed novel, *Ejak Manuh, Ekhan Aranya* (A group of people, one forest) in 1986. He has written novels like *Bharanda Pakhir Jak* (A flock of Bharanda birds), *Sim Changar Duyo Par* (The two barks of sim cheng) which was based on the life of ethnic groups like the Bodos and the Garos respectively. His *Ranga Ranga Tej* (Red red blood) centres round the activities of an extremist group led by Braja Sarma during the freedom struggle movement in Assam in the 1940s. He writings always deal with common and oppressed people of the society. It is, clearly a different trend in the history of Assamese novels, as it is dominated mostly by the stories of the middle class life. The tea garden labourers, the Bodos, the immigration problem, the Garo community, the extremist activities during the freedom struggle movement and the life and struggle of the urban poor people — all these new themes of ethnic groups and people, which were the head-ache for
the then Assamese middle class, were consciously chosen by him as the themes of his novels. This is clearly a liberal gesture to the above-mentioned communities from a writer belonging to the middle class himself. Dr. Hiren Gohain has rightly remarked that, that kind of themes and people outside the opportunist upper class people brought a threat to the middle class hegemony in Assamese novels. *Urania Meghar Sa* (The shadows of the flying cloud, 1948) tells about the life struggle of a group of people of the small towns, their economic insecurity and social restlessness. They pass days in endless poverty and uncertainty. In the context of the emerging towns of Assam, the novelist has sympathetically delineated a picture of their life and struggle in the novel discussed below.

*Urania Meghar Sa.*

**The story of the urban poor:** The novelist has chosen one youth named Parama, the hero of the novel, his wife Kanta, an orphan and their friends, working in different trades in small towns to tell the story of the urban poor in the novel. Unable to bear the physical torture of his opium-eating father, like many poor rural boys, Parama worked in a tea-shop, situated at the Dharampur station as a boy. The other persons he met there are Holiram, a waiter, Sambu, a sweetmeat maker and Kaliram, a boy. They are all from poor families living below poverty line and have migrated to the town in search of livelihood. Parama was jailed for a few days for one offence. It was Ananta, who introduced to him with the world of delinquency. After marrying Kanta, he wanted to live a peaceful family life working in a sawmill at Bhorabeel. Before that he served in a truck as handiman also. But, in the sawmill, Kanta was disturbed by the nephew of the mill owner. One day he was caught redhanded while attempting to molest her. Being unable to bear such outrage he killed the nephew of the mill owner. In the mill also he met some persons working in the mill and the transport companies. They are Ganesh, Ramu
and the wife of the blacksmith etc. All are immigrants in the small town of Bhorabeel. Moreover, there are some poor people belonging to the backward community who are forced to run petty business and prostitution together. Thus, we see that in the three towns a floating population of rural immigrants, rootless and shiftless, was eking out their livelihood outside all traditions. They work hard at day time and take wine, ganja and others stuff at any time. Their futures is determined by Robi contractor or Paban, the mill owners and the owners of the trucks determined by Robi contractor or Paban, the mill owner and the owners of the truck determine their future. They also dream, but can not hope to fulfill those dreams. They are all alone. Parama before meeting Kanta was a social outcast. He has no kith and kin in this vast world. Yet after meeting Kanta they dream of a settled life. "If they could deposit Rs. 500 working at Bhorabeel they would leave the place. Town life is not liked by Kanta. With their saving they could purchase a plot of land in the village and would live there in a beautiful small house. Cultivation is much better. If they can manage one pair of bullockes and they would work in the field to earn their livlihood." The migrated poor people, who went to city in search of a happy and prosperous life, thus think of coming back to the villages. They cann't live comfortably there. It is true that in the towns they learn a lot of new things, but economic condition remains more or less the same. Parama realises at last that their life is like the light entering through glass in the evening. "The life of the small people is like that. They are born, they grows up, learns to plough land, if possible go to school for one or two years, after that they get married, giving birth to children, some live, some dies". So it is the cycle of or destiny of life for the poor like them. The pathetic condition of a group of deliquants in the novel reveals this fact through a tragic story. They never get rid of exploitation. They remain always an urban poor class. Their happiness in life is like the shade of flying clouds, quite transitory. But they form the main work force of the cities.
Prostitution and alcoholism: Paraina and all others of his group are school drop-outs. They are not coming from slum area, but their life style and professions resemble that of the slum-dwellers. Many of them work in the goods carrying trucks. Parama and Ananta also worked for somedays in a truck at Dharampur. From Dharampur station many trucks loaded with goods began to moving to different places after the main road was improved. To cater to the staff of the trucks, many highway hotels have been set up along the main road which are run and owned by the local people. Bilpar is such a place of hotel, which was earlier a village of the fishing community. One family at Bilpar attracted more customers to their hotel. They had girls. One passer-by commented at the rising business of the hotels there, "Luck smiled on many people for the construction of the road. How many drivers take tea at these shops. The tea-shops are now in the residences. Have not you seen how many trucks stop in front of the Bilparia? The tea-stalls are there, always dens of wine. Do not you see the new clothes put on by their two girls, and new ornaments? within one year they have built their timber houses. This comment proves that they have made easy money. How many fishes they catch in the beel? So prostitution in a different form grew up there. The truck drivers come from distant places, they need both food and sex. The family tea shops by the side of the road provide both. Of course, most of them are poor people living on fishing, but gradually they are turning to this profession. At Sarujhan, about 70 miles off from Dharampur, Ananta, Parama, Sambu etc. meet in one old woman's house, for meals and gambling. The daughter of the woman took away money from Parama's pocket one day and allowed him to touch her body. This is how prostitution develops as a trade in place like Dharampur and Sarujhan along the main road. Other people also visit these places. All the tea-shops sell country liquour.
The wife of the shopkeeper was a beautiful and affectionate woman. Parama had the first experience of warm affection after the death of his mother there. But, she was sexually unsatisfied with her husband, a middle aged shopkeeper. So, whenever she got opportunity, she wanted to satisfied it with someone else. She wanted to utilise Parama that way also. Her conflict with the traditional values, of course, led nowhere. She could not keep Parama with her, the free bird fled with Kanta oneday. The author has exposed through this incident that, in the urban situation also, traditional sexual mores became more relaxed.

The novels also informs us about the growth of small towns like Dharamapur, Sarujhan and Bhorabeel due to development in road communication and subsequent growth of business. Dharamapur was a small railway station, a sleeping station which awakens only at the ring of the bell. But with the improvements of the linking roads turned into very busy commercial town. Bhorabeel was a deep place when it was a fishing centre. The hotel and trucks changed the complexion of the place. With the growth of a heterogeneous population Dharampur became a cosmopolitan town. It became a centres of trade. Offices were established, schools, hospitals etc. all modern institutions filled the place within a short time. Similarly, the activities of Sarujhan also increased. Parama worked in a saw mill at Bhorabeel. There were saw mills, two rice mills, shops and fairs were held there. It became a town with heterogeneous population due to the small industries and commercial activities. These towns attracted the poor people like Parama, Ananta, Kanta, Ganesh or Sambhu. The rich businessmen also migrated and settled there for business. The work force must be there in order to developed the exploiting centres of the modern civilization. This way all of them turned into small towns under the influence of urbanisation.
Thus we see that the novelist has made the novel an interesting piece of work with the urban poor as the hero of the novel. The novelist seems to understand their life and so he has been successful in delineating them convincingly, but sympathetically.

(B) PRAFULLADATTA GOSWAMI:

Prafulladutta Goswami, noted folklorist and writer brought a new trend to the Assamese novels by introducing new themes and techniques. Both his novels, 'Sesh kot ?' (where is the end ?, 1948) and "Kecha patar kapani" (Tender trembling leaves, 1952) are clear examples. Goswami has made a departure from the traditional content and form in his novels. Like Saurabh Kr. Chaliha he could also perceive the complexities of the modern city life. Dr. Krishna Misra, who has written on the novels of Dr. Goswami observes in this respect, 'It is presumed that Dr. Goswami got inspiration for writing his novels from his personal experience in life and his study of modern literature." Assam's socio-economic condition at that time was not so conducive to modern novels of the mid-20th century. Both Naba Kumar in 'Sesh kot' and Utpal in 'Kecha patar kapani' are unhappy and unsettled representing the modern men in an unstable and unfriendly world. Utpal is the expanded version of Naba Kumar. They are heroes of the modern novels without any heroic qualities as commented by the author himself. They represent a peculiar life-style with their unsettled and restless nature, that affected a section of urban youths for the first time in Assamese novel.

The indecisive youths and their values: Utpal is the only son of a landlord in 'Kecha patar kapani', an educated but restless youth. He has no fixed ideology in his life. Nor does he feel any responsibility towards his family. In this respect he resembles some of camu's heroes. He is disorganised in thought right from his childhood days. But he discusses the importance of art with his friend Robin Kumar.
More in trusted in a care-life, he is not interested either in a settled life through marriage or a permanent job. Social values or customs are not taken seriously by him. He has not rebelled against the traditional values outwardly, but he keeps away consciously from the practice of these values. Love is not a solace for him or with many youths. As to the profession also, Utpal never settles, rather he changes his business very frequently and could not continue in his job in the office also. His restless nature stood on his way in choosing a life partner between the two girls, Nilima and Minati he met in his life. So his nature takes him from here to there as he fails miserably in taking a final decision in different situations in his life like Hamlet. The romantic Utpal always stands on the way of a practical Utpal. Perhaps the novelist has created such a self-divided characters out of the perceived complexities of the future city life in Assam or immitaking such type of works in the Western literature. Naba Kumar in 'Sesh kot' is also like that. He has also lost faith in traditional social system, a very sentimental self-centred, unstable, lovely and cynical person, who is badly affected by a sense of romantic escapism. He is alienated from his job as he gets no pleasure in his work. He is gradually frustrated as he fails to move with times. He is undecided as to the goal of his life. From an office job in Shillong he switched over to journalism. At last we see he has decided to start business with his friend Bijoy. The socio-political situation between the Quit India movement and the attainment of independence was so frustrating that it had a bad impact on the sensitive and undecided youths like Naba Kumar. The economic situation was not improved as expected after 1947. The scope for employment did not expand. It partially supplies the reason for his frustration. Naba Kumar himself observes that there is no work opportunity to utilise the energy. He also disregarded everything around him including friendship and married life. Thus we see that Prafulladatta Goswami beings a set of new characters to the Assamese novels who are marked by their unsettled and restless character.
Individualistic feminism in Sesh kot: Naba Kumar's experience of love and married life is not a bed of roses for him. Though his unstable nature stood on his way to a successful love, later on, he married Kamala in Calcutta in order to bring stability to his restless life. But, both of them collided and in this respect Kamala never became a source of love to bring him back to normalcy. She also loved individualism. She comes from a family that became rich in a single generation, which Naba Kumar considers a dangerous example. He did not find a soft heart and generosity in Kamala's character. "Kamala's face always wears a self-conscious look, it has no attraction or curiosity about others" Naba wanted Kamala in the form of an ideal wife. But she lacks it tragically. She is satisfied only with the outer layers of life, feels satisfied in life when she is praised cheaply. She treats the values of patriotism, education etc. as consumerables. She is interested in maintaining her individuality. She is not ready to put off the outward dresses of her individuality. So their married life runs like parallel lines never meeting each other. The institution of marriage is polluted thus both by the vanity of the rich and modern feminist thought. Marriage has become a luxury for her like other cosmetics. The vanity and self-centred thought keep Kamala away from the shadow of a happy married life like that of Kaya and Prabhat, his friends. Mutual understanding and co-operation make them happy, what is totally absent in case of Naba Kumar and Kamala.

Some other traits in Sesh kot: The protagonist of the novel is interested in book-reading right from his childhood. He reads serious books. He has read some books which are unknown to the heroes and heroines of Assamese fiction. His list includes Crime and Punishment, The Moon and the Six pence etc. These books are serious novels. The hut of Dighala Barua is ruined signifying the destruction of the integrated rural life. People of rural areas also behave like strangers, and the cow-herds ask Bidi from the passengerby shwing no respect at all for age.
Political awareness: The rise of communist activities: Though the novelist has expressed serious doubts through Utpal and through the incident of murdering Batahi, a Kachari woman, whom once Utpal loved, as to the success of communist-led movement, the author dares to create a character named Robin Kumar, supposed to be based on the life and works of Bishnu Rabha, the artist turned revolutionary in the novel, when the native govt. was very much against the communist movement in Assam. Phulaguri is a Kachari village near Raha at the foot of Mikir hills. Rabin Kumar has organised the illiterate people, who are mostly raiyats, against the economic exploitation of the absentee landlords. They are politically organised for a movement against the land taxes and 'Adhiari system'. Rabin Kumar led them. The police party was also attacked by them, when they came in research of Rabin Kumar. Lapang Kachari was arrested for that offence. Utpal also came to know about that changed outlook of the people, when he first went to collect taxes as directed by his father. Batahi said to him they would not pay any taxes following a community decision. Utpal visited that place for second time in order to meet Robin Kumar. He was accompanied by Nitai, who also turned a friend of Rabin Kumar and Baghua, a local tribal lad. Doubting that Utpal might come for revenue, Bhaghua said to Utpal that it was unless to go for taxes as the community meeting resolved not to pay taxes. He also told that they did not believe the landowners and moneyed people. Robin Kumar has taught them to handle rifles and many other things. He is a good man. Robin Kumar was working among them. "You cannot stay here for a long time. You are not a party member, rules are very strict in this respect. My main purpose is to refresh the people, to make them spirited so that they can stand for the fulfillment of their demands after realising their wants." Rabin Kumar declares his purpose to Utpal, thereby showing that communist ideologies are fast spreading to the interior villages. He also informs that he has not joined the party for personal gain, but from the inspiration of heart. Moreover,
they are very much liberal on caste and creed. So Robin Kumar decided to work for the expansion of communist ideology among the Kacharis and the Mikirs, both the ethnic groups are very poor and exploited. They need to be developed. This kind of political awareness spread among people from the RCPI in Assam and other Communist parties whose H.Q.s were based in Guwahati. The author makes a little reference to Ambikagiri Roy Choudhury's 'Jatiya Mahasabha', which worked for the welfare of the indigenous people. Utpal's brother-in-law spoke against the Bengali community when he was superseded by a Bengali in his office for the post of superintendent. This is also a political awareness in the novel.

**Materialistic approach to love and marriage:** We have a lot of examples in the stories of Rama Das and novels of Padma Borkataki, where the human relationship is not based on mutual love, but by materialistic concern. The marriage relation in 'Kecha patar kapani' is no exception. In a culture, polluted by commercial thought an educated and sensitive youth like Utpal has no good position in the market of marriage. Pravin's father, Mr. Saikia is very calculative when his own daughter was proposed for marriage to Utpal by Probin himself. Mr. Saikia turns it down. He prefers Kiran Chandra. He is an I.A. failed candidate but son of a rich man. The value of education has been neglected this way by the materialistic attitude of the opportunist middle class people. The second instance is the case of Utpal-Minati's proposed marriage. Minati was trying to woo Utpal for many days despite her knowledge that Utpal loved Nilima of Gauripur. But after coming to Shillong to study B.T. She met Prabin, Utpal's friend and an insurance agent and married him. When Utpal prepared himself to propose her after a lot of persuasion by his elder sister and after going though a series of debacles. Minati turned him down. Her materialistic thought is shamelessly expressed through her words. "Give up hope for me. I am what I am. But have you not been indifferent to me so many days? When I was mad for you, you rejected me then. And are you able to feed
me? I have come to know that your father's landed property has been seized by the Kacharis and Mikirs, nor you have any interest in service. Had you been involved in politics, it would have brought profit to you in time. But you are indifferent towards that also."¹⁰ It is a matter of wonder now that some Assamese women had already gone to that extent in deciding matrimonial relationships. But the newly liberated middle class of towns were really running after materialistic happiness. Ka-drop is a Khasi girl, who likes to stay with different persons not for money only, but for bodily pleasures. Thus we see that the novelist has given us a picture of a changed society, which is neck-deep in materialistic culture.

There are many other new values in the novel that have affected the urban Assamese society. Utpal is like Naba Kumar as to the study-habit. As described in the novel, he has read Dostoyebsky, Tolstoy, Maugham or other serious authors. He liked other books more than his text books. Some urban youths at that time got this opportunity in the town's library. Like Naba Kumar, Utpal also likes music. The reference to the famous "Moonlight Sonata" music in relation to a night spent together by Nilima and Utpal sitting under the open sky bring to us the knowledge of Western music among a section of Assamese middle class. Nilima's 'Rabindra Sangeet' was a melodious song. These are new things P.D. Goswami has admitted in an interview that during the preparation of his thesis in the early fifties, music was his only companion. He read books on music published by Penguin. Mozart and Beethoven were also his favourite musicians and he liked Rabindra Sangeet and Nazrul geet also. The serious people loved both Western and India music.¹¹ So we find references of music in Kacha patar kapani. Among the negative urban values is the sense of alienation in Utpal, brought by a difference between him and the surrounding world around him. So he does many things mechanically. Next in importants is Burgeoning corruption. Pravin’s father has accumulated lot of money by corruption. Giridharilal, utpal's friend comes to Shillong in order to
secure a permit for civil supply. After getting it he will make money hand over first. As to securing a post in Govt. service, it also required money. Nitai, Utpal's friend, who later joined Robin Kumar's party, felt that money was necessary for a job. So he did not try for it. Thus we see that Goswami's 'Kecha patar kapani' presents us a set of new urban ideas that affected the Assamese society in late forties and early fifties of 20th century. He has artistically presented the values through the characters and story of the novel.

(C) RADHIKAMOHAN GOSWAMI'S BA-MAROLI:

Radhikamohan Goswami never opted for a radical change in society as a novelist though he became very popular in Assamese interature by writing two social novels namely Chaknaiya (The whirlpool) (1952) and Ba-maroli (The whirlwind) (1958) dealing particularly with the question of women's right. He raised the issue of conflict between tradition and modernity, but ended with the glorification of the age-old values inveriably and uncritically. As he was a lawyer by profession, some sense of individualistic thought is marked in some of his characters against the general trends of society. The author is always sincere upto this level, but he has rebels as protagonist. His two novels equally share some of the modern trends affecting the Assamese educated society immediately after the independence.

BA-maroli:

His Ba-maroli (The whirlwind) is based on the conflict between a woman called Jayanti and her family members. She is well-educated and cultured. But her father-in-law, Mouzader Gopinath Baruah, his two sons, Upen, husband of Jayanti and Nagen, his married daughter Kiran are all traditional. The family members are traditionally against women earning their own livelihood outside the family. Upen
spends much of his time in the Mouza office situated at a distant place after his father's death. Jayanti was interested in women's right as an individual. She goes to her neighbour, Mr. Chakrabarty's house, who was a Western educated person, without asking anybody. She is not so much interested in the upbringing of her only child, whom, she leaves at the servant's care when she goes out. She became a member of the local women's club. As her husband and other were traditional in outlook, there arose a conflict with her activities. Gradually the Mouza's income also came down and their family experienced herdship. They did not have lots of money. Already Jayanti developed a sense of hypocrisy after meeting the members of the lady's club. She had no good dress, no private car. She could not afford such things. So she received gift and lift from Mr. Chakrabarti and Hemo Saikia. After the drama she could not show it to others that their family had no money. She purchased new dresses. Her husband and sister-in-law Kiran questioned her several times regarding her acting in drama and mixing with different people without her husband's permission. The conflict made her more vocal. One day when Kiran accused her for moving with Hemo Saikia, one of the advocates of the club, she replied with equal vehemence. Earlier she used to tolerate this kind of attack by remaining silent. She is quite alone in the family, yet she is determined to assert her right, which she has learnt from education and her exposure. She is quite aware of her right and she never tolerate anybody encroaching upon it. In the same encounter when Kiran accused her of instigating Upen to drive her away and spoiling their family tradition and prestige, Jayanti lost her temper and questioned Kiran's actual right in her parent's home after marriage. All these days she was protesting silently like a lady. Now she fight openly for her rights. She exclaimed with anger, "Sister-inlaw, it seems as if you have come to drive me away from this family. But mind that you have no right in this family. You are married family and I am the daughter-in-law of this family. I have one male child also. You ought to
be ashamed of giving such harmful advice." Anyway the author creates her as a character of distinct individuality shaped by the modern education and association. It is true, Jayanti is not perfect and is not a rebel woman like Lalita of Lakshidhar Sarma. She did not want to lose herself like many others in domestic services. So she wants a servant. But what makes her a selfish woman is her lukewarm interest in her only child in the first half of the novel. Durgeswar Sarma believes that in *Ba-maroli* the author has shown the conflict between main Indian tradition and the modern culture. This conflict is the guiding force for the assertion of individual rights by Jayanti in the novel. In the early part of the novel she has shown her rebel character. After receiving Rs. 200 as advance for film acting she felt her own worth. She is not begging, nor praying for help, whatever she has got it is the price of her own talent. But what is lacking in Jayanti as a rebel is that she has no motif for changing the society. She does it for herself. So at last when her child was snatched away from her by her husband, she became a solitary as her rebellion was private nor part of an organised movement.

**Women's clubs and woman's right:** There are some urban institutions and values in the novels like the assertion of Jayanti's individual right. But she was fighting all alone in her family. But her small town was not lagging behind in matters of urban clubs. Many ladies felt the idea of a women's club in order to discuss various problems of the women as well as to entertain themselves. All the leading ladies of the town were invited to a meeting organised by the club with Mrs. Alaka Barua as the President and Miss Pranati Phukan as Secretary. Both belong to higher middle class. So, there was no scope at all to discuss the rights of women from poorer families. Nevertheless, it was a free world for the members outside the four walls of their own houses. Some male members like Pranati's father, Hem Saikia, Durgababu and Jaychand babu also contribute to the club. Most of the members are dependent on male heads of their families, so economically they are
not independent. Inspite of that limitation, the club showed courage in staging one drama, where all the female roles are preformed by females. In the discussion about the drama, Alaka Barua asked the members to come out of their home freely for co-acting, Now days are changed. Out tradition prohibits co-acting, but that should be given up. Jayanti also supports the view in the same meeting that some people would criticise them for co-acting and many others would come to enjoy the show purchasing tickets. The population of the town was sharply divided into two groups. Most people went against it. But the lady's club was determined to carry it on. It was an unpreccessedent incident in the samll town that Jayanti and other ladies would perform in a drama against the social current. It was, as the author records, an apoch-making incident that rocked the small town like an earthquake. After that historic drama the lady's club searched actresses for a proposed film to be directed by Hem Saikiya, a young director and to be financed by two Marowari businessmen. Many ladies came forward to break the ice in the society offering themeselves to stand in front of the camera. Thus we see that though the lady's club is not at all concerned about economic and other problems, they have attempted to challenge the traditional values in a male dominated society, at least in the realm of art and culture. These urban and modern values have influenced many and Jayanti had to assert them in the face of her family. Yet most of the participating actresses are torn by internal conflict ,that is between traditional and modern values which continued to affect the new urban society in general till late sixties. The tension is clearly visible in case of Jayanti and other people. Thouregh Mr. Chakrobarti seems to offer a synthesis between two extremes, his influence is not widespread , confined to only his family. Jayanti wanted to bear both the values equally and peacefully, but her family including her husband with traditional values obstructed on her way and thus, prevented her from achieving her goal. However small this defiance of custom was a major step in woman's emancipation.
Radhikamohan’s Chakniya deals with the individuals right of a widow fighting against a male society, a great social problem we have delt in details in Gunabhiram’s Ramnavami and in some stories of Lakshidhar Sarma.

(D) BIRENDRA KUMAR BHATTACHARYA’S RAJPATHE RINGIAI:

Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya is known in Assamese literature for two important things he did that earned praise for him - first, his contribution as editor of the "Ramdhenu" from 1953 promoting one of the best creative age in Assamese literature after the Vaisnavite age and secondly, he brought laurels to Assamese literature by winning the Jnanapeeth award in 1980, the highest national award in literature. He has written a number of novels and short stories and was also the Chairman of Sahitya Academy. Dr. G. P. Sarma, a critic of his works says, "Dr. Bhattacharya may perhaps be one of the best Assamese novelists; but he is undoubtedly the best writer of political novels in Assamese literature." He has written several political novels in Assamese including the Jnanapeeth award winning, "Mrityanjoy". In his early life Dr. Bhattacharya was a follower of socialists ideal of Rammonohor Lohia and Joy Prakash Narain. His first novel 'Rajpathe Ringiyai' (The call of the Highway, 1955) is based on the activities of a radical, who denounces the newly non independence in front of the political leaders including the C.M., thereby showing a different political trend in the province.

Rajpathe Ringiai:

Rajpathe Ringiai is a social novel, which is based on a student and trade union movement leader of late 1940s of Assam. Some say that the hero of the novel is Nibaran Bora in his youth, who was a follower of Marxist ideology at that time. It was popular political ideology of that time. The author himself confesses that, "My first reaction to the newly won independence, my desired
solutions for different problems and the romantic concept of human relationship - all these were attempted to delineate in real in *Rajpathe Ringiai*. I had intended to present the political consciousness of that time."\(^{16}\) Whatever may be the background of the novel, it presents the story of a revolutionary called Mohan, a Cotton College graduate, who organizes students, workers and women for a radical change in the present social set-up. He loves a girl called Aikon, daughter of a very rich man and class enemy of Mohan's party, but is ready to sacrifice her at any time without being infatuated with her. Mohan's radical political thought is expressed through the political leaflet and his public address in the independence day's meeting.

*Marxist socialistic ideas: Increased political awareness:* Mohan was out and out a revolutionary. It is not found in the novel. Mohan continued his fight against the establishment. But, on the eve of the first 'Independence' day, he prepared a leaflet with the pen, which he received as a mark of love from his beloved Aikon. All these days he had been working for the workers and the down-trodden of the society. The leaflet that he prepared for distribution among the people in the meeting expressed serious concern for the so-called independence and for the condition of the workers. It reads, "This independence is not ours, not of the people. it is meant for the rich class, of the capitalist class, of the smugglers, of the industrialists or of the landed gentry;... We donot want bogus independence, we want real independence. Total independence. We want people's 'durbur'. we want people's govt. We want cloth-food-house and freedom of culture. We are the infantry of history. This is our voice for sacrifice, demand for peace and dream for equality."\(^{17}\) This clearly indicates Mohan's concept of a freedom, which seeks to establish a socialist govt. with social equality. It was not so easy at that time, but he fought for it relentlessly. He has also used his pen in the revolutionary activities. On the day of the independence, Mohan first attended the meeting of the writers and
artists. In the Central Cultural Hall meeting he also called upon the writers and artists to fight for a better society. He insisted that the imagination of the artists must be directed towards a better life. Absorbed in a dream colored with new humanism, Mohan's political views were made public in the independence day meeting attended by the then Chief minister of Assam, Mohan's Police inspector father, Nandan Barua, father of Aikon Dr. Hazarika, tea-planters, industrialists and businessmen. The workers of the mill and labourers of the nearby gardens were also present in the meeting. All of a sudden Mohan stood before the microphone and declared very emotionally, "Ye Ajadi Jutha hai!" echoed by the common people. Refuting the claim of success of the govt. regarding liberty he cried that it was not true. They have not yet gained freedom. "Why the four thousands labourers of the Mithiloti garden do not feel the sense of freedom, why four hundred workers of Dibrugarh are on the path of agitation? Why cobler Manu and washerman Lasman have been rendered destitutes? I want to ask the CM, why the industrialists are still exploiting the workers? what steps have been taken by the new govt. to prevent the common masses from exploitation? why people are unemployed and why they do not get employment? Why the police and officers are not running administration properly? Why every family is making hue and cry for economic purpose? ........ so, this is a bogus independence? His lecture echoes why and why. Though Mohan has became emotional he denuded the so called independence in front of the people. He was inspired by a romantic zeal of sacrifice. Therefore, despite heavy police duty, Mohan dared to speak against the govt. in front of the C.M. and other ministers, which from the tactical point of view appears rash. Mohan's struggle, of course, continued after his arrest. Bisnu Rabha also shouted like him that was a bogus liberty. Mohan's political ideologies are based on Marxist socialism indicating an increased political awareness of the 1950s in a section of political workers of Assam.
**Women's right:** The novel offers, through Mohan a very good solution for the preservation of women's rights. Mohan's idea of socialist state guarantees the rights of the fair sex also. In the novel we meet Mrs. Aparjita Hazarika, wife of Mr. Hazarika, a govt. civil surgeon, who was neglected by her husband. When Mrs Hazarika approaches Mohan for the solution of the problem she is facing now, Mohan consoled her by his theory. He replies that, "There is a class-war in every house. The males are like capitalists, women are proletariates. Women's liberty is impossible provided the society is not liberated from male's exploitation. He adds, "Sex means Biology plus culture. But in this society, person like Dr. Hazarika lacks culture. That is, women in this society is like consumerables. His idea of an exploitation free society can assure real women's right. This solutions is very ideal and acceptable against an anti-male feminist concept and it is quite a different suggestion. So Mrs. Hazarika, Aikon and some other ladies have joined his mass movement for a radical change in the society. The females have accepted his assurance as described in the novel. This solution has similarities with those offered by Nirupama Borgohain in her novels like 'Tinikanya' published in the 1970s.

**Demographic change:** This events of the novel, 'Rajpathe Ringiai' occur at Dibrugarh. A particular locality of the town is described in the novel where a heterogenous population with different professions are coming up as result of urbanisation. There is the C.I.D. inspector Ajit Hazarika house, clerk Bholai Saikia's house with a few children, whose economic condition is ruined by war-time economy, Nandan Saikia's double storied house with big campus. Just near his residence there are some cottages of the workers. It is inhabited by a mutia, called Bhudhuwa, a rickshawpuller, Laxman, washerman and some others, all belonging to lower class. The service holders, businessmen and workers from different communities make the place a cosmopolitan one.
Padma Borkataki 'Monor Dapon' (The mirror of the mind) was published in 1958. This novel brought a wind of change to the Assamese novel with its novelty in presentation of the story. It was followed by 'Khabar Bichari' (In search of news) in 1959 and 'Bicharor babe' in 1961. All these three novels make a Trilogy with the presence of some characters including the protagonist Abhoy in all the three novels. It is not like the traditional novel with linear narrative, rather, a combination of some photographic sequences. The author has attempted to expose the moral laxicities of the upcoming urban middle class in the novels. But he seems to insist more on the descriptions of sexual matters, perhaps keeping in view a sex-starved audience. A no of urban values that affected the urban society of Assamese at that time find expression in the novels. He has other novels and stories also. But these three expose the problem and dilemmas of the urban middle class more than the rest.

The different urban societies of Assam: His first two novels 'Monor Darpon' and 'Khabar Bichari' portray a hollow, selfish and rich upper middle class people. The lower middle class which tries to imitate the rich class is depicted in Bicharar babe. The world of 'Monor Dapon' is comprised mainly of high govt. and company officers of Shillong and their family and in 'Khabar Bichari' it is the tea planters of Shillong, whose gardens are situated in the plains. They are all affluent people living comfortably; of course, their happiness is based on money and sex. Though they have built up an urban society comprised of officers, businessmen etc. among themselves, the self-interest of the individuals disturb it off and on. They have are alienated from the society and have turned and hypocrites. They are motivated by only profit and whatever they do it is for their family members only. This society is marked by absence of natural feelings like love, sympathy and compassion. The
urban middle class of Shillong and Guwahati belongs to upper middle class has taken resort to materialism and gross sensuality. Wine, moral laxity and adultery have become part of this ultra modern society. This type of culture is instilled into the minds of their children also since their childhood. Neela in 'Kabar Bichari' or brother Rajib feel no concern for the tea garden labourers or others. They were sent to the Shillong school or colleges to study so that they can not mix with the local poor people. She developed the idea that only the people connected with the tea industry are the real people, others are different. They are involved with club life also. The Shillong-based service class society is described in 'Monor Dapon'. What fate was waiting for Neela, Mrinal, Janu, Salil and their parents, the same was the case with Mrs. Bora and Hemanta Bora, Mr. Hazarika, a businessman and friend of Janu's father, Janu's parents and Haren Choudhury in 'Manor Dapon'. This service class has made money by corruption and by early 1960s they became quite affluent. But they are not as rich as the tea planters and businessmen. But their culture is the same as that of the planters. They join the same club in Shillong. This urban class society is very much different from what Rama Das delineated in his stories. From 1930s to the 60s, they have changed noticeably. This Shillong society is quite different from the other urban society of Assam's towns. Abhoy, the common protagonist of the trilogy says that Shillong is anglicised. They are very much under the influenced Western culture. It is the colony of the British culture even after India was liberated from the British authority. Here Indian culture followed the British model. The Indians, who are physically Indians, seemed to him alien people. So Janu and Mrs. Bora was taught by their surrounding atmosphere that the price of Nylon's saree, motor car or the imitation of Western culture is much more important than the nation or even their own people. Staying under the flood of light of the Shillong urban culture, they forget that outside their den there is absolute darkness. At the glitter of that life Mrs. Bora tried to
satisfy herself by approaching many persons as she was utterly neglected by her indifferent husband, Mr. Hemanta Bora, a supply superintendent. Mr. Choudhury even attempted to molest Janu. Choudhury was a friend of Janu's father and about forty years old. Their own daughter are even not safe in that morally-degraded society.

In 'Bicharar Babes we have the picture of a lower middle class life of Guwahati, which has been termed as the 'Bahire Rang Sang Bhitori Kuwabhaturi of 20th century' by eminent critic Dr. S.N. Sarma.\textsuperscript{21} This class is neither rich nor poor, so they are at cross roads as to their life-style also. Krishna Kakati, his daughter Kakali and their family maintained a life-style with no income at all. Once Kakati made money by corruption. Now he has no money and get it through her daughter as some businessmen visit them for her beauty. Kakati's family is running that way only. He is a hypocritical braggart. Like 'Tess of the 'Tess of the Derburville' Kakali had to pay the price for showmanship of her poor family. Though Dr. Hiren Gohain attacks the theorising tendencies of the authors, he has sympathised with the tragic fate of Kakali in a selfish world. He writes, "Kakali is the symbol of individual's failure entrapped in the net of a capitalistic civilisation"\textsuperscript{22} Her passive nature and poor economic condition of the family helped to complete her ruined in that world. There was nobody to help her in that situation. In cities and towns we have so many such parents belonging to middle class, who try to maintain their status outwardly even sending their beautiful daughters to the astray. Thus we see that the lower middle class society of Guwahati following upper middle class culture remained insecure and mentally hollow.

The hypocrisy of the lower middle class: In 'Bicharar babe' as above, the family of Krishna Kakati has learnt the tricks of high life. As to Kakati's mentality towards hypocrisy the author gives us the impression that Kakali's in no way, less hypocrat
than any other girls class. "One very cruel truth has been discovered by her. A middle class family of low income has to cover many things with Velvet lies, such a family cannot run without the lure of their pretty daughters. But, something is happening in the family of those people, who are blaming me - she knows it for certain." Her father has developed snobbery and hypocrisy right from his service days in Shillong. He avoids his rural relations, Abhoy, who hails from the same village and was known to him when she was in Shillong. Moreover he hails from the same place. But he avoids Abhoy or behaves with him like a stranger. It has become a habit for him Kakati's hypocrisy is like this. "Kakati feels, a person should maintain social status outwardly even though one is starving. Otherwise the society will not give him any importance." Kakati never expressed any weakness about himself and his family. This way he created a world of sandy home with great risk of collapse at any time. Of course, Kakati had to pay a heavy price for this hypocrisy.

**Rape, prostitution and the urban poor:** The sexual offences are considered to be one of most frequent offences occurring in the cities. In these cases the women always fall a victim. One example could be taken from "Bicharar babe" where a Khasi girl was done to death by unidentified miscreants. It exposes the dark side of the city life where women are not safe at all at right. Abhoy, the reporter, got the news from his over telephone that one Khasi girl was lying dead in front of the Great Eastern hotel in the Bara-bazar area. The O.C. of the police station confirmed it. Perhaps the girl was raped first and after that she was killed. The under world is very much active at night in a city. In another incident, Khonsi, the Khasi girl and a tea-vendor, once escaped unhurt from the clutches of such criminals. Rajib in 'Khabar Bichari' called Lakshi, the adopted daughter of Madhu Sardar for waiting upon him at the time of his fever. All other members of family went to Dibrugarh for the preparation of Neela's marriage. Lakshi was raped by him
mercilessly, and she later on committed suicide. Borkakati has included all these crimes in this novels.

The high cost of living in city compels some sections of the urban poor or lower income group people to run the flesh-trade. The migrated people of the slum area turn easily to this profession. Sometimes the deserted women or widows also carry on such profession for earning a living. One such fallen women is Kongshi's mother, who was betrayed by one Govt. officer named Haren Choudhury. She was tempted by him for a married life. She surrendered to him, but he was a married man. Later on after she was betrayed she became a prostitute to manage a living. There is another women called Kanchi who was running this profession with substantial profit. When Padumi took shelter there after fleeing away from the clutches of the mauzadar's son in Shillong, she was also forced by this Kanchi to do the same. Padumi was not a woman loose morals. She was brought to Shillong by the mauzadar's son to help in their household works. But he wanted to exploit her physically, so she fled from there. With Kanchi however she faces the same situation. In 'Bicharar babe' Kakati also acts like a call girl in order to fulfill her father's ambition.

The extramarital relationship and other laxities: In the stories of Rama Das and Munin Borkataki we have seen that the rich urban middle class of shillong and Guwahati is deeply involved in extramarital relationships. In the late 1950s, it was an open secret in this class and it was accepted by them in Shillong. The urban middle class society of the novels of Padma Borkataki is conspicuous by the absence of natural feelings like love, sympathy and compassion, which promotes individualistic thought. Borkataki has expressed the hollow married life of the so-called businessmen and Govt. officials based in Shillong and Guwahati. Sometimes he has given description of sex that is rather licentious. Let us take examples
from 'Monor Dapon'. Here, Mrs. Bora is totally involved in extramarital sex relationship with many people. Her husband, Hemanta Bora, a corrupt superintendent and a known drunkard comes home late. The heartless husband made her feel that she should seek the real affection from others and as a mark of protest she started the dangerous path of a club woman. She finds justification in making love with Abhoy, the young journalist and the central figure of the trilogy, who visited them sometimes. "As the affection is divided equally among the children, she has divided her affection between Abhoy and her husband. She has divided it this way- "Bora is husband and Abhoy is kecha son. (an affectionate calling in Assamese like darling). When Bora seeks her wife will be available, but at other times she will be by the side of Abhoy. She will be sleeping with Mr. Bora keeping her hands on him and at the same time will think of Abhoy. She will be continuing a married life with Mr. Bora. Simultaneously she will imagine of eloping with Abhoy....."25 This is new type of lady in the Shillong society. So in two incidents we see that she is ready to do anything with Abhoy, but Abhoy is playing the opposite role. The head-ache scene and the taxi-journey scene are two clear examples of her moral laxity. Not only that she mixed freely with many people in the club like Mr. Pandit and other outside people. She was spotted in the Grand Eastern hotel with Mr. Pandit late at night. The author, commenting on her immoral activities says that she becomes like a carpet of the club, waiting to welcome everybody. Her husband and other people witnessed all these, but she continued it. Haren choudhury, the Govt. official is the other man in 'Monor dapon' to get involved in extra marital sexual life as described earlier with a tribal women. He exploited physically Kongshi's mother. He satisfied his last with her. The world of the tea planters in 'Khabar Bichari' is known for adultery. The owner of Hirakhoni tea garden and father of Neela and Rajib had an illicit relationship with a lady school teacher near the garden. Lasmi's mother Dugni, who died after giving birth
to Lasmi, was also raped by the same tea-planter. The tea planter of Sanabali tea
garden also led a very sensual life. Mrinal, who married Janu, was a man of loose
character. Mrinal himself was a son of a Calcutta doctor. Neela also surrenders to
Abhoy for her unfulfilled sex life. Her husband is also a man of that character, for
which she had to approach Abhoy. In the hospital scene of the last part of 'Khabor
Bichari' we find her in that condition. Thus, we see that the urban middle class of
Shillong and Guwahati is not happy with their family alone in sexual matters as
they fall victim to hedonistic culture, where women, they consider as a
consumerable thing.

**Political awareness**: As the trilogy is based on the hollowness of the urban middle
class, guided by a gross hedonistic culture, neither the story nor any important
character shows any significant political awareness or taken part in the mass
political movement. There is only a little reference of the tea garden's labourer
strike in 'Khabor Bichari', but the author has described the pathetic living condition
of the labourers when Abhoy visited it with Meghu. Abhoy, the linking protagonist
of the three novels, who as a journalist has expressed some thought on
contemporary politics and development. One clerk Bordoloi also makes a critical
comment on the govt. while Abhoy was visiting his office in 'Khabor Bichari'.
Datta's political criticism of Govt. aims at the functioning of the free Indian Govt.,
which has basically not changed anything from the social and economic point of
view. His comments prove that only the people in the govt. have changed, not the
system at all. On his way from Shillong to Jorhat, the author gives some thought
playing in Abhoy's mind. The author writes about the Assamese middle class's big
brotherly attitude towards the hilly people. People liberated India, but they could
not liberate Shillong. It remained the colony of the Western mentality. The
oppressed Khasi-Jayantia people under the British regime turned their anti-British
rebellion into anti-Assamese hatred. Because, the free govt. of Assam was formed
by Assamese. This hatred could have never grown considerably provided this liberty had changed the mentality of the rulers and bureaucrats and on over the Khasi people. At that time, the Assamese chauvinism or hegemony offended the sentiment of the hilly people. Dr. Hiren Gohain has said that the Assamese people named the places and streets of Shillong as Motinagar, Bishnu nagar etc. showing little interest to the local Khasi people. As to the attitude of the Assamese people, the author is critical. Abhoy has been able to identify the root cause of hatred. The tea-garden labourers' strike has also been supported by Abhoy in 'Khabar Bichari'. Moreover, the same big brotherly attitude was shown to the garden labourers. The role of municipality is also criticised for the shape of the bad roads of Guwahati and its unplanned development. The two overbridges of Guwahati are without lights, moreover, the bridges are developing cracks here and there pointing to the misuse of funds by the Municipality authority. The houses have also been built without any plans. The author mentions many other as subject of criticism. It expresses a different kind of political awareness-the sense of rights for civic facilities. The author has also described the colonial history of the tea garden in order to exhibit the class conflict. It shows that Abhoy, the journalist has gained much political awareness after having made a field visit in the garden.

**Urban institutions:** For secondary association with the neighbours, friends and locality the urban people set up some institutions or modify the existing institutions or celebrate festivals for expressing community solidarity, among them. The trilogy of Borkataki also describes some such institutions. In the stories of Rama Das also we have seen such institutions of Shillong. In addition, to that, we have other institutions like a 'Mau-mel' in "Manar Dapon". It is a literary club of Shillong for the adults only. The members of the club hold one sitting in every month and they read out poems and stories. Perhaps it has been formed in the line of different ASL clubs of Assam. Such a club offered opportunities for the writers and poets
to meet together and exchange their views on their creative work. Only a few members attend such kind of club. There is another club in the town for total entertainment. Wines and different kinds of games are available there. Even men and women members mix freely without any restriction. Non-Assamese ladies like Motilva, Mrs Brabourn, Mrs Sigal etc. along with Janu, her father, mother, Mr. Hazarika, Mr. Bora etc. all visit the club regularly. There are some other clubs also in Shillong which cater the needs of the service-holders at night. In 'Khabar Bichari' there is one 'Assam Club'. The clubs are cosmopolitan in nature and English etiquette and table manners dominate the different activities. There are some traditional festivals also modified by urban people in order to move with times. Some new festivals as shown in chapter 2 like the Barowari Durga Pujah, is celebrated at Guwahati with pomp and gaiety, what we see in Manor Dapon. The life of Cotton College is also mentioned in the novel, like the youthful evening of Panbazar or the celebration of Sarawati pujah etc. all new experiences in any institution of Assam.

**The problem of retired people and old people:** The Shillong-based Govt. officials hanker after money and power like madman during their service life. They make money and show power and vanity to all at that time. But after retirement nobody notices them and they are, rather neglected by one and all except their family members. They become helpless after losing the Govt. bungalow or car. Even they are not invited to the govt's programmes or festivals of the clubs. The walk with the ivory stick or attend the marriages in traditional dresses. The member was increasing making it a great problem.

**Some other new values:** In addition to the above mentioned values. Borkataki has also made several references in the novels in question to other values also. As to the aesthetic values in Manor Dapon Janu has made her room like a beauty
parlour. She has used a lot of cosmetics to make herself beautiful. Her bathroom is attached to her bedroom and has come out with a dressing gown. Then she did her toilette in front of a life-size mirror. She learnt much English and little Assamese like all other girls of her class. Neela calls her elder brother by name against the tradition. In 'Monor Dapon' Prasanta, Kakali and Isha, all are classmates in Cotton College. They mix freely and take tea together in the restaurant 'Sunlight', which shows that free-mixing started in Cotton College in the 1960s. Isha was a modern girl, and even travelled together with her would-be husband Mr. Sukumar Datta. It is a rare sight in those days. So the culture of courtship was also an exclusive behaviour of the rich class. In the 1960s poor people dared not to do so. One important value is noticed in 'Khabor Bichari'. Mrinal Duara has married Janu in the court first going against the wishes of Mrinal's parents. In the mid-fifties court-marriage was an unimaginable event in the society. Mrinal could do it as he belonged to a such class with progressive outlook. That too, his beloved Janu was from a lower caste community. The family disorganisation is also observed in such a society. Neela, Rajib and Mrinal are examples of this social problem.

(F) MAHENDRA BORTHAKUR'S UDASHI SANDHYA

This is a quite different novel as the story is based on the railway colonies life. This type of campus life is hardly mentioned in Assamese novels, except the one fine work by Basanta Das, named 'Jangsan' (The Junction, 1972) based on the platform life of a family. The railways in Assam, though introduced late by the colonial masters, brought significant changes to the urban life linking not only the distant places, but also providing opportunities for interaction with different people of the world. The Assamese people came into contact with many new things from the railways. Though the offices were dominated by Bengalis, some Assamese
people also got employment opportunities in it towards 1960s. In 'Udashi Sandhya', (The gloomy evening, 1962) we have two important episodes, one related with the family of Shyamlal Bhatta, which had been badly hit by in Eastern Bengali communal riots and later migrated to Assam. The other story is about Bikash, a promising artist and his association with an art-loving Bengali family. All these happen in a small railway colony. Anyway, Mahendra Borthakur who is better known in Assamese literature as a famous playwright brings to us a real picture of a railway town and the campus life of the lower-grade employees with sympathy. It is examined in the following pages.

**The railway station life:** A fine picture of the railway men's life of that particular railway station emerges from the novel. It is a different world with employees working in shifts. This type of life style was quite unknown in Assam before the introduction of railway. The steam engines, the shunting machines, the night-running trains with passengers and goods trains, the persons on duty and their duty room, the ques in front of the ticket counters, the waiting room of the station, the bell of the station, the arrival and departure of trains, the coolies, the vendors with different kinds of eatable inside and outside the trains shouting in peculiar voices all these together create a different world. In 'Udashi Sandhya' there is a common house for railway men near the station. They are living together there. The mess members are Shyamal Bhatta, Negen Saikia, Palas Sarma and Mr. Datta, all are clerks and ticket examiners respectively. They have to attend shift duties, so they can not eat together almost all the days of a week except on the rest day. They have formed a family through secondary association. They share each other's sorrows in a world otherwise very harsh. When Shyamal Bhatta's family was hit by communal riots at Noakhali, they all expressed deep concern for it. They even asked him to bring his family to the mess, at least his lame sister Malabika. Before that, when Bhatta did not have money to attend his ailing mother, the mess members showed highest
feelings of community life by giving him one hundred rupees collected among themselves. His elder sister was left at the nearest station after being raped mercilessly. It was the Point man Sankar Das who dared to provide shelter an unknown girl. Her daughter Tagari was also brought up by him. In a selfish world, the members of the mess showed an extraordinary example of mutual help when they gave medicine to Bikash, an artist, as they knew him personally. When Nagen Saikia wanted to marry Maya, a Bengali girl and daughter of Bikash's guru Mrityunjoy Paul, all the members stood behind him. Saikia's family was not in favour of the marriage. Thus we see that all the members live like a community with mutual understanding and they help each other when most of the urban people were running after money, fame and profit.

The platform life: The other name of slum life: The railway station brings to our mind the platform, the waiting room, go downs, locomotives, vendors etc. Many passengers do not like to stay longer in the platform, but it is a sleeping ground for many urban poor people. All there are the gifts of the modern railways. They will beg or do small jobs at day time and sleep on the platform at night with their families like their own homes. Even some people make their temporary residence besides the track. So their place is very much like the slums, filthy and unhygienic. Borthakur, the novelist has given a vivid description of a night's platform. Though he has drawn picture of poverty and business standing together, the author's sympathy is with the poor. "There was not so many passengers in the platform. Who will be there so late at night? At this time, signal man Sankar Das has approached the crossing with a lamp in his hand. The one or two passengers on the platform are loitering here and there. At the corner, a few yards away there are four/five people sleeping, with them are some women. These are refugees. They have no homes, they are distitutes. The platform with shed is like a boon for those who are homeless. One will find this kind of people in all stations........."
The economic condition of the refugees is deplorable. They hardly get one full meal. All the people of the night's platform sleep together like primitive people in a group. The picture of a railway station is not complete without these people. Many of them are immigrant Muslims, or poor Biharis who migrate to Assam in the hope of a better economic life. But they become either porters or rickshawpullers. Their children take births there, grow up there and sleep there like their parents. That life is a part of urban slum life, where the inhabitants just live from hand to mouth. Borthakur has been able to draw a complete picture of a station with his platform life. Some of them run prostitution inside the railway compartment or godown for earning a living.

The corruption of the officer: Mahendra Borthakur has not forgotten to mention about the small corruption done by the officers and subordinates in the railway offices. The T.T.Es. are subordinates of the station master. They must obey him officially or unofficially. Some officers take undue advantage of the subordinates. Some think that it is their family property, so they can do anything there. For example the station master of that particular station once passed an order transferring Mr. Datta, who was a T.T.E. and an important member of the mess. Why was he punished? One gentleman was caught red handed by Mr. Datta as the former was travelling without ticket in a train. The passenger replied that as he was a guest of the station master, he was asked not to purchase a ticket. Mr. Datta was not convinced by his reply and as per rule he handed over the case to the station master with due penalty. The station master was really embarrassed as the offender was his would-be son-in-law. It was like a big slap in front of his son-in-law. After some days Datta got the transfer order. This type of petty corruption and abuse of power are common in a station. Some T.T.Es are also very corrupt, who are busy in collecting money from the passengers. This is also a regular practice of a railway station.
Secular humanism: As the novel is based on railway life and the incidents of Noakhali communal riots, it has examples of secularism also. In the novel, we find, Bhatta's family at Noakhali faced a life and death problem from the communal forces. The Muslim separatists targeted their family. The rioters were involved in murder, rape and destruction of property. In such heinous acts of killings, rapes etc. one act of humanity by an old religious man named Mirza Sahib shine like pearl, an act that glorifies the liberal, tolerant attitudes of a section of people. He tried to save Bhatta's sister, Manika from the clutches of the rioters, who were taking opportunity of the situation. It is always the children and the women, who suffer most in communal riots. His own son was also involved in that inhuman act. Mirza Sahib poured water on Jonaki's injured head. He could do that much only as he himself was under observation at that time. Manika was raped and left at the station. He then accompanied Jonaki and his family in their journey to Silchar. All these activities proved his humanism.

In another chapter of the novel, Bikash, the act-loving boy reveals a humanist outlook by staying with a Bengali family, during language disturbance. The author has expressed his critical outlook about the rituals of Hinduism also through the character, Bikash. The author has attacked both Muslim and Hindu fanaticism in the novel. Bikash has satirised Hindu dogmatism through a piece of art, named, 'Pabitra Hindu Hotel'. A flock of crows is sitting on the roof of the hotel. His painting made a hue and cry in one hostel of Cotton College, where he was a boarder. This painting is really an expression of critical mind of the progressive artist, who himself is a Hindu.

There are many other modern values in 'Udasi Sandya' associated with different characters of the novel in addition to the above mentioned one. In the 60s of the last century love for art developed in the minds of some people. A host
of Assamese artist in the 1960s like Nilpaban Barua, Sobha Brahma began their career as artists. Bikash in the novel, we see, has given up his study in Cotton College in order to pursue a career of an artist in those days, when artist was not yet a safe profession. Not only that, he is very critical of the present system of education. He realised that by opening schools and colleges and offering degrees to hundreds of students the real problem of life could not be solved. It fails to evaluate properly the value of talent also. For constructing a healthy and ideal state, the current educational system should be radically changed. So, expressing his doubt, he left his study half-way and pursued art. This kind of view is a reflection of a political awareness, particularly, the left-minded youths of the 1960s. The art also became popular among a limited section of people. Biren Phukan purchased a painting of Bikash for one hundred rupees. Some people understood the value of art and so they encouraged the artist.

Thus, we see that, as a social novel based on railway men's life 'Udasi Sandhya' opens to the Assamese readers a new world, closely linked with a new communication system, which is a big urbanizing force, hitherto unknown to the people of Assam. Mahendra Borthakur's own experience, as he disclosed to this researcher, of a small railway town has been expressed in an artistic style and graphic language. His portrayal of a railway life, which is out and out an urban life, inspired Basanta Das, a novelist to write a novel called 'Jangsan' later in the early seventies based on the tragic life of a family on railway platform. Borthakur's social interest is expressed through the novel.

(G) SYED ABDUL MALIK'S ADHARSILA, (THE FOUNDATION, 1966):

Adharsila was written in 1966 when Malik was at the peak of his popularity as a novelist. It is one of the best novels on World War II and it's impact on the Assamese society and it's people. It is a very big novel, losing its structural beauty
here and there for its sheer length. But, two important aspects of the novel strike us firstly the impact of war on the minds of the indigenous people and the hero of the novel is a bastard Muslim youth. It is an act of courage to write a novel on the life of a bastard. The journey of that bastard hero, Samir from a life of uncertainty and socially unaccepted position to a member of the wider human society is really a great story, that too, told by a master story teller. Dr. P. Kotoki, critic and translator remarks, "Adharsila remains an immortal work as it is the part of an endevour to establish a healthy life and study of a character in the background of a vast life atmosphere". Samir, who turned overnight into a rich contractor by war contracts and corruption realised the importance of a human society at last. The negative values like war time corruption, prostitution etc. have been highlighted in the novel. Its an extended version of Yogesh Das's 'Dawar aru Nai' of 1955.

**A rural boy turns gradually urban**: Samir was born to Sonpahi, a beautiful village girl before her marriage. So, he was not recognised by the society as a legitimate son of Sonpahi. He went to primary school staying in the house of his grand father. Later on he was admitted in the town's school. He was offered accommodation in a relative's house, who was a very busy contractor. A different world was exposed to him. The Contractor Ahmed's modern house with his wife, the school and its teachers, his class-mates, games and sports facilities in the school had an impact on his growing mind, which had been formed in the village. There are other things in that small town that also attracted him. So he tried to get adjusted to the urban environment, first by changing his dress. Influence of some urban values is marked in his mind and behaviour. "Unlike is counterparts in the town he did not have wardrobe. Yet, whatever, he had, he puts it on carefully and neatly. Before coming to school he takes bath, combs his hair with oil and the collar of the shirt is lifted on the neck. When he puts on a wide paijama and folds his shirt's hand upto the arm's joint he becomes handsome to look at it"." This shows his attempt to adjust
to a changing environment. He makes friendship also with town boys like Bodheswar. He tries to live happily in this new world with Ahmed contractor's wife Zulekha, his affectionate teacher Purnananda and his wife Devi baideu and many others. He never felt in this atmosphere that he was a bastard, where found a very welcome feature of town life.

War and corruption: The Great Second World War was a symbol of terror and destruction to most of the European nations. Some parts of Assam, particularly the upper Assam witnessed the 2nd world war and its impact. It rocked the small town, where Samir was studying in school. It ended his student career and turns him into a war contractor. As described in chapter two, the Second World War sponsored rampant corruption and so it was a boon to the war time contractors. Samir saw that Purnananda master and Bodheswar have joined the army. He also left that town one day in the wee hours of the day in search of fortune. He could not find a military career with his little education, so he worked under a contractor as helper. There he learnt many things and discovered the Aladin's lamp for making money. If one applies little intelligence and toil and mainly if one can adjust to the corrupt rules, a beggar is certain to turn into a millionaire in this profession. One successful contractor Trilok Singh also taught him some tricks. The author describes "After working six months with the contractor's job he started on his own. He takes up the construction and supply contracts, as it brings maximum profit. Where profit is the main thing, there all rules are flouted. After a few days Samir became a rich man with a lot of money. He became a favourite man for bank managers and businessmen." He became a modern midas. What he touched turned into gold. The depot-manager of Trilok Singh with a small salary turned into a big contractor himself. Yogesh Das in 'Dawar aru nai' has also drawn a similar picture, where some Assamese youths became corrupt. Samir is no exception. Before joining in this profession he had only two or three hundred
rupees as capital, now he is the owner of thousands of rupees. Trilok Singh's advice in this respect brought results. He even went on to the extent of supplying local girls to military officers with one or two bottles of wine as bribes for quickening payment of his bids. Running after money, wine and women became a passion for him. The boy, who used to fight with the military for molesting Assamese girls is now doing the same thing himself. The novelist has exposed the liking for easy money of the Assamese of that generation who easily fell victim to the foreign army's conspiracy in order to spoil them morally. "The ugliness and barbarity of the war made Samir devoid of the sense of the right and the wrong path. Working in different war fields and camp sites he earned a lot more than he expected and after spending lavishly, a lot of money still remained with him. Military dress, costly American watch, belt and Woodbine cigarettes and many more modern things and some currency notes....... By the end of the war, Samir became owner of not less than a huge amount of 2.5 lacs".31 His immoral life, high life style etc. made him alienated from his relatives. In his original society perhaps, he is still a bastaral. After winning the world of money, now he goes back to his original position that he is a bastard. "Why would he be looking for close relatives? He, now understands very well that he is a bastard. A bastard has none whom he can call his own".32 His identity and morality all are lost in the smoke of war. So, the war had a bad impact on Samir and many other Samirs, who became rich, but without friends and relatives.

War and prostitution : Like all other literary works on the Second World War, Adharsila also provided the readers with surprising information of the roaring business of the prostitutes during the war. Like corruption, the foreign soldiers made many innocent girls prostitutes tempting them with money and using force. The local agents including some contractors like Samir or Trilok Singh helped them secure girls for bad purposes. He met a girl called Juti, who took the
profession of prostitution to run her family. She confessed it to Samir we have such prostitutes in the new town of Bahadur Singh nagar. In the bye-lanes again, there are prostitutes, who were sponsored by war. At day time they look like more than thirty years old woman, but at night they turn into sixteen year old girls. They remain silent the whole day, but, with the coming of evening the area becomes lively and the trade of flesh also start. The business runs very normally without disturbing the others ...."33 The business of the prostitutes in Bahadur Singh nagar was running openly with the full knowledge of the police and the Municipality. Perhaps they get money from the offenders, who are involved in a chain. There were some good women from good families who were forced to live such a life during war time. In Yogesh Das's 'Dawar aru nai', Gauri had to die at the hands of the military after she was molested inhumanly. So, war and prostitution progressed simultaneously in Assam.

Slum area and delinquents: 'Adarsila' is basically a novel of the small people of the society. The prostitutes, the working class, the peasants etc. are the people of the story. As the bad impact of the World War II is the central theme of the novel, the description of slum or red-light districts is required. Slums are the places, which give birth to anti-socials in city. There is one slum area of the Ahmed's town towards the rear of Raibahadur Mrigen Barua's residence. In a small bye-lane the tiny houses with thatched roof among water and drains shelter the antisocial and the prostitutes. Their living condition is very dirty and pathetic. Rickshawalas, Vendors of glass, paper or plastic products, thieves, pick-pockets and vegetable shopkeepers etc. inhabit these slum area. There is no family distinction. All are free, and at liberty to do whatever they like. This is an ideal place for the birth and development of delinquents. There is no sense of shame or fear or modesty or cleanliness in this world. Madhab, Arjun and Mobarak and many others have become middlemen as they were brought up in an area of
prostitution. Abdul Malik has realistically delineated such characters who snatch sleep from the eyes of the police.

Social reformation: Orphanage: In 'Adarsila' there is one 'Orphanage' in Bahadur Singh nagar established by Dr. Mohsin, who has devoted his entire life to the welfare of humanity. It is an urban institution exclusively meant for the orphaned children. Dr. Mohsin has been helped by Chenehi, a nurse and her daughter Ginia. Interestingly Dr. Mohsin's advices coupled with the caring affection of Chenehi and her daughter, bring back Samir, the lost soul in the smoky world of money and hedonistic culture to his original home. He regained the trust on humanity there. So, in other words, the orphanage of Dr. Mohsin rehabilitate Samir also in his original belief. Later on, Samir decides to bring up the second bastard son of Sonpahi and to complete the construction of the Mosque of their village. Not only that, under the magic influence of Dr. Mohsin, Juti also return home with the promise of reform.

Thus, we see that, the novel has described the negative urban values like corruption, prostitution and its impact on the Assam society. The slum area and the use of village boy to a big contractor also includes the other important urban values described in the novel elaborately.

(H) NIRUPAMA BORGOHAIN:

A major woman writer of Assamese literature, Nirupama Borgohain is very much concerned about the social problems of Assam, more particularly the problem of the rural men and women. She has written several novels on women's problems like Eparar ghar siparar ghar, Anya Jivan, Tinkanya etc. Her Academy award-winning book 'Abhiyatri' is also based on Chandra Prabha Saikiani. Her 'Ejan Burha Manuh' (1966) opens a debate as to the individualistic feminism
along with a discussion on the problem of the old people in a world, which is very hostile to them. The conflict between traditional and modern values comes out from the story, as discussed below. We propose here to deal with *Ejan Burha Manuh*.

**Individualism Vs traditional values**: The author has chosen a lady called Kamala, who is an M.A. and highly conscious of her rights. She has a modern outlook. In her father's family, an urban middle class family, work is worshipped. The family teaching has made her both practical and selfish. She is a sophisticated lady who knows all the manners of polite society. Kamala never wants to sit idle, so she is working in a school as a teacher, which makes her economically independent with individual identity. To her, education is valueless if it is not utilised properly. She had some other values also undeterred by the social criticism or her husband's criticism. Kamala changed the screens of the windows, the furniture of the refinery quarter and she did embroidery work there. She believed that only bookish knowledge is not enough and is meaningless if things are left as her father-in-law Bijoy Bharali with his simple taste wanted. She is a quite new type of woman in Assam with materialistic and individualistic values. She is self-absorbed. What her husband and father-in-law has for meals never bothers her. Once her husband, a refinery engineer could not attend office due to fever. Kamala was not moved at all by it and she went to attend her school duty that day leaving her ailing husband. She never feels any sympathy for his suffering. Kamala lacks a serious human attitude, that is humanity. Insisting on her individual identity she is only egoistically maintaining her vanity. That she is modern or she has some new idea is not to be decried, but, her departure from tradition leads to unpleasant consequences totally. It is seen in the house-taking ceremony. Kamala should be praised for her involvement and knowledge in the construction of the new house on a plot of land owned by her father-in-law. No guests were invited to the ceremony for a
community feast. She argued that it was needless to invite people to increase the total expenditure as she had already spent a huge sum of money. Her words hurt both Sanjay and his father as they are tradition-loving people. Regarding the nature of Kamala it is observed that remarks, in the character of Kamala we find a modern woman who is educated but very self-centred, greedy for money and property and artificial in her relationship with her husband. Kamala is not a follower of tradition, but a follower of the capitalistic form of individualism and Western type of feminism. Another example that she is lacking in human feelings is the case as to the fixing of a light if the varandah of their house. Sanjoy changed the bulb with a high-powered bulb for which Kamala scolded him. She said that his father now would be reading all the time as he read there sitting in the varandah. She is not adulterous, but individualistic and selfish. Kamala’s nature has been compared with her mother-in-law in the novel as a contrast, who was simple and ready to sacrifice everything for her sons and husband. She sacrificed her own happiness for the sake of her husband’s happiness. Sanjoy was looked after by her all alone, as her husband was a busy man. But Kamala has left her son to the servant’s care, showing a different culture. Illa’s heart was a sea of love, open to all. She was not individualistic nor selfish. She was a follower of the traditional Assamese values. The novelist has shown that the two sets of values are in conflict in the novel. There is a constant tension between the two sets of values in our urban society also till 1960s which is depicted in the novel.

**Social reformation: Inter-caste marriage:** Bijoy Bharali was a studious and serious man from his children days. He fell in love with Illa, who was the daughter of his senior officer, Rohini Das. She was not a good-looking girl nor so highly educated, a simple matriculate. But she appealed to the heart of Bijoy Bharali. He was determined to marry her though she belonged to a low-caste community. His family did not cooperate with him. Bijoy Bharali stuck to his principal. The dressing
down of the high caste vanity was completed when Bharali finally wedded her with total boycott by his parents. He never excused them for not accepting his marriage easily and so he spent the rest of his life without any touch with his family. In a society divided into many factions by casteist feelings, the novelist has, at least, given one example in the novel of social non-conformity, which is a product of modern idea.

*Loneliness of an old man*: In the Assamese society after 1980s the old men are really facing a great problem for proper care and support due to the change in social values. Most people are turning individualistic and selfish. It seems to start in the 1960s in small scale as the novel in question is based on the suffering of an old man as a supplementary story to the main story. Bharali is not properly attended by his daughter-in-law or by his busy son after his retirement. When Bijoy Bharali married a low-caste girl against the wishes of his parents he was naturally declared a social outcast. That sense of alienation was compensated largely by his affectionate wife. But after his wife's death the sense of loneliness again haunted him. It was doubled by the indifferent attitude of his daughter-in-law, Kamala. *Ejan barha manuh* depicts the loneliness of an old man in modern materialistic society. As he is an unsocial man, a strong sense of loneliness chased him all the time. After his wife's death he began to feel that he is only a burden to his son and daughter-in-law. To comfort him in such a situation he wishes someone always near him, but he is mercilessly left alone in his room like Nikhil's father in *Asanta Electron*. So the book reading in the varandah becomes a habit for him to pass time. All are busy with their work, his daughter-in-law or his son has no time to give him company for some time. His grand son is also not allowed to mix with him freely. As there is a wall between his room and their part, he cannot go on his own also to him. Naturally books have become a source of solace for Bijoy Bharali, so he has developed the sense of loneliness and alienation more and more. This
urban negative value has been finally exploited in the plot of the novel by Nirupama Borgohain.

Other urban values: Kamala is presented in the novel as a very modern lady though she lacks humanism some precious traditional values (like humanism) Yet, she is, perhaps the first Assamese woman in any novels, who has constructed a house with total involvement right from the planning of the house to the employment of men for construction works. Her plan of the house with a dividing wall between two parts indicate symbolically the break down of the joint family system and the coming up of a nuclear family. A lady with strong belief in individualism can't go beyond that plan. It also offers many modern facilities like bathtub. But, as to the reservation of open space, she is like other commercial men in cities. She wants to use every inch of the plot of land for construction. But Illa was more serious in this respect. Gardening was her hobby. She also planted a no. of trees in the campus. She was modern as to the of question environment. But a materialistic person like Kamala ignores the question of environment what has become a great problem today. Nirupama Borgohain anticipated the question as far back as in the 1960s through a novel. Indirectly the author Nirupama Borgohain presents the dilemmas of modernity-how the struggle for individual rights also tends to tend to the humanise urban people.

(I) SAURABH KUMAR CHALIHA'S SHORT STORIES:

The town life depicted by SKC is not that of a modern industrial city or a centre of business. It still has movement of stillness and repose. But the life here is already divorced from the cycles of seaurban and rural activity there is more movement and complexity, which foster the growth of complex, restless characters. The ancient communal bonds have been loosened by the power of commerce and business relations. Loneliness is a more common phenomenon.
Among the distinguished short story writers of the Ramdhenu age, Saurabh Kr. Chaliha was the only writer, who devoted his creative power to express the urban life exclusively. He was born and brought up in Guwahati and so he could well understand the different aspects of urban life more than others. His observation is also very minute. Moreover, he applied new techniques like stream of consciousness in his stories. His first story "Ashanta Electron" received the first prize in a short story competition organised by the Ramdhenu in 1950. The story collection by him published during this period are *Ashanta Electron* (The unstable electron, 1962), *Duparia* (The noon, 1963), *Ehat Daba*, (one advance in Chess, 1972). National book trust of India has also brought out one book of selected short stories of Saurabh Kumar Chalia. Not only the urban life in stories, Chaliha has expressed his urban outlook as to the themes of one or two rural-life based stories also. Now let us examine how he has expressed the negative and positive aspects of urban life in his stories.

The impact of urbanisation on a post-independence day's middle class family is artistically described in *'Ashanta Electron'*. How the new values born out of urbanisation and modernisation have generated intense tension within traditional family system, that has been described in the story through the activities of some characters and their responses to different situations. The selfishness of the characters have put the head of the family into trouble. The father of the family is a retired old man. He is confined to his bed. He is a serious person. He has two sons namely Nikhil and Ranjan respectively at home. There is one daughter-in-law also. But the old man, who should have enjoyed all sorts of happiness and security, leads a lonely life. All the members of the family are busy with their own work, nobody has time to attend to him. The old man feels, "Nobody feels like talking to him, everybody wants to avoid the old man. He is weak and with his weak eye-sight he feels the touch of the world".34 This type of condition of an old man
of Assam is quite unimaginable, that too in the 1950s. But it was not a general picture. This particular family was beginning to break up family. The old is so neglected that even his blood pressure was not even checked by a doctor. The well-wisher of the family Karuna babu has arranged one doctor for him. The old man is also disturbed at home. He needs a very clam atmosphere at home. But his grand children are busy with noisy music lessons. The indifferent attitude of the family members has become more painful for the old man than his chronic ailments. The author has beautifully expressed it.

The disintegration of community life: The condition of Nikhil's father is a signal of the beginning of the end of a joint family system. He has become like a guest in his own home. Division of labour has reached a point where people have no meeting ground. The family members of a family are forced to live separately depending on the nature of their work. On the other hand, people are affected by some modern problems such as egoism, uncertainty and scepticism etc. in a modern society. The community life of the primitive age disappears gradually due to the impact of the modern industrial life. In the 1960s Assam also, particularly the urban community in the big towns began to face such a problem. As to the cases of Saurabh Kumar Chaliha it was a special case. In "Ashanta Electron" we see that Nikhil's family is no longer a thriving joint family. They have already lost their solidarity as exemplified in the description of his ailing father. All the members are not contributing equally for the family's welfare. Nikhil or Ranjan is frustrated at having no source of income. The eldest son, Dhana is the only earning member, his wife is the house keeper of the family and his father was forced to sell his land in order to support the family. Nikhil or Ranjan, the other two sons have no plans to end this pathetic economic condition of the family. So, the concept of a joint family feeling or community feeling has been confined to sitting together at the dining table with one's income. Some friends of Nikhil formed an intellectual circle when the sense
of love and community feeling held them together. That wall of community feeling is also under threat of collapse. All other except Nikhil have left the circle. The story, "Bina Kutir" (The cottage of Bina) also highlights such a problem of disintegrating family life through dreams and imagination.

The instability, alienation of the middle class: The newly-won independence could not bring a ray of hope for the educated youth groping in the darkness of unemployment. Some people pointed out to the native minister's corruption as the cause for such a problem. As an author with minute observation and wit Saurabh Kumar Chaliha could well imagine the future picture of the state. The uncertainty of their future has made some characters in the stories unstable and victims of alienation. It is not the result of the rapid industrialisation like the Western industrialised nations.

Nikhil in "Ashanta Electron" is unstable like Utpal of 'Kechapatarkapani'. His own circle of intellectuals friends deviated from their earlier commitment and started selecting comfortable life. The magical attraction of corruption, employment and foreign trips have broken the circle, doing serious literary work together earlier. His own beloved has chosen to marry another young man for a comfortable life. Under such situation Nikhil has become frustrated and the long spell of frustration has made him sceptical, idle and cynical. He is like the unstable floating clouds in the sky, naturally he turns unassertive. With the blessing of the modern civilisation, he discovers selfishness in every act of his simple and straightforward sister-in-law, who is occupied all the time with the domestic work and aims. He thinks that his sister-in-law cleans their home in order to flatter his father only. She does the household works in order to win the appreciation from his father. Without any ground he discovers selfishness in her activities. This type of narrow thinking proves Nikhil to be an irresponsible youth,
he has no thought for the society, the family, even for himself. He has became idle, only busy with sleeping and eating. But Saurabh Kumar Chaliha is a different modern writer in the sense that he has not accepted the urban values of the industrial world without any examination. He has critically accepted some of them. Nikhil, at last, has exhibited the characteristic of a changed character. He gives up his negative aproach to life at last, unlike the heroes of Camus or Satre. His last dialogue, 'Give us this day our daily bread' and his help towards his nephew Runu in scaling the steps are indication of the development of Nikhil towards positive approach. The hero of "Suddhi" is also a victim of cynical attitude, devoid of all emotions. At the death of his only child the protagonist father feels no sorrow like the hero of The Stranger by Camus. In the very beginning of the story, the declares the death of his child in an unsentimental language "I never became dejected at the death of my child, I did not cry".36 He is Mausant of The Stranger, who never weeps for his mother's death, rather swum with his beloved. The narrator protagonist of Suddhi also digest all sorrows. The father who can tolerate this way the death of his child is nothing but a victim of "Fashionable cynism."37 Towards the end of the story he has controlled his hunger with equal power. This type of control or capacity for tolerance is not the result of excerise, it is the other name of hard-heartedness in our society. It is not like that of Portia, the Brutus's wife, rather a cynical attitude born out of the complexities of the modern life. People are alienated at this stage from themselves. No relation with the society of any individual means, the germ of alienation has already captured a place. Nikhil or the narrator protagonist of the 'Suddhi' are totally alienated people for which they could do anything they lided. Nikhil's father has also been alienated from the society due to his confinement to bed.

*The noisy atmosphere of city*: The noisy situation is created in the towns by the industries, traffics, people's shoutings etc. The noise pollution may weaken the
nerves of human beings. This is quite an opposite picture to the cool and calm atmosphere of a village. The sound pollution increases with the size of the city. To create an urban atmosphere in his stories Saurabh Kr. Chalia uses this noise of the city life. The different noises and picture of a busy, fast and uncertain city life and the tiredness, unsatiety and unhappiness of the middle class life etc. compose his story, the 'Awaj' (The sound). The hero of the story is so much disgusted with the noises of industries traffic, weldings, the loose body of a bus, scooters etc. so much that he wants to get rid of all these noises with the help of a sound-sucking machine, which he has already invented. But when he came to know that his machine might suck his wife's affectionate voice, he changed his mind. In the story, "Bhraman Birati" (Interval with travel) the author has included a full description of the noises of Calcutta with details. Daily commuters are waiting for buses amidst such noises, which is a part of city life.

The critical outlook and other values: All the above-mentioned values are related with the negative side of urban life. Among the positive aspects there are many other values like belief in science and scientific discoveries, good taste, a critical outlook for life, dynamism etc. The critical outlook is highlighted in the story, "Awaj". The hero loves science and he wants to apply the theories of science for the betterment the life of man. He is also a lover of music, showing another urban values. As said earlier, he has requested one to make one sound-sucking machine. Both husband and wife help each other in the project. In the dream the man sees that the machine has sucked the sweet voice of his wife, then he smashes the machine into bits. At last, he seeks solace in writing scripts. He understands that the sound-sucking machine cannot differentiate between the sounds of music and general noises. It is easily differentiated by a man of fine taste. It shows the basic drawback of the machinery system. At last, he finds that science cannot be applied in all fields of life, that is, he is critical about the universal benefits from science.
He is not anti-science, but through experience he has learnt the limitation of scientific inventions. Towards the end of the story it is quite obvious. Rajan also wanted to apply the principle of electron of an atom in day-today life. His theory is also proved wrong by the story 'Awaj'.

There are some other values related to city life in the stories of Saurab Kumar Chaliha. He has to experiment with a new technique enriched by new images and symbols and above all an urban language of mixed words. His stories are witty and demands concentrated attention from readers in order to understand. Like the workshop of James Joyce, Chaliha's stories prove that the modern short story, often very far from being a story in the normal sense, was not for all, and it appealed naturally rather to the younger readers than to their elders and to the literary rather to the average readers. Chaliha has created a group of serious readers in Assamese short story.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Gohain, Hiren: *Manabar Sandhanat*, P-137m
3. Ibid, P-121.
4. Ibid, P-69.
8. Ibid, P-64.
9. Ibid, P-70
24. Ibid, P-10.
30. Ibid, P-144
32. Ibid, P-161.
33. Ibid, P-151.
35. Ibid, P-8.