PREFACE

Urbanisation is a great social force in the modern civilisation and no nation in the world has been able to escape the all pervading influence of urbanisation. It is more difficult to ignore such influence today in a new world, termed a 'Global village', marked by spectacular print and electronic and entertaining medias. The 'Industrial revolution' changed the complexion of the Western world beyond recognition right from the late 18th century giving birth to some highly urbanised nations like the UK or USA. This is quite opposite in India, more particularly in a remote state like Assam due to slow progress of industrialisation. Assam witnessed no industrial development in different periods of its past regime including the long colonial rule of about one hundred fifty years in the 19th and 20th century. Obviously, the process of urbanisation suffered a lot during that period and it has not improved much even after independence. The rate of urbanisation is still below the all India rate. In spite of low rate of urbanisation before and after the independence, a limited urban consciousness began to grow among the rising urban middle class people in Assam, (which gradually spread to some rural areas also) residing in the different administrative centres of Assam including the city of Guwahati and Shillong. This urban consciousness has also found its expression in Assamese literature in general and fiction in particular right from the 19th century onwards.

This dissertation aims to find out the influences of urbanisation on Assamese fiction from 1910 to 1967. Our hypothesis in this respect is that modern life and civilisation are not only moulded by certain mental characteristics and an industrial mode of production, but also by the domination of urban way of life with advantages and problems. This form of life has been marked by what Sociologist David Reissman has called 'The lonely crowd'. There is an enormous aggregation of human beings linked by such abstract relations as money. On the otherhand, there
is a tremendous growth in individual self-consciousness and an egoistic approach to things. This has created the peculiar pathos and form of modern literature in all its great diversity. We propose to apply this to modern Assamese literature in general and modern Assamese fiction in particular.

While there have been some studies in contemporary Assamese criticism on the influence of socio-economic life on literary form and sensibility, there has been no specialised inquiry into the effect of urbanisation into Assamese literature. Some critics and researchers have responded to this great force of modern civilisation only as a supplement of modernisation. We have little references of urbanisation in the study like 'Realism in Post-war Assamese fiction' or in 'Socio-economic forces in post-war Assamese fiction' etc. done so far. Assamese criticism and research work can claim to have done enough work on the rural traditional literature, but it is not so in the case of the impact of urbanisation on Assamese literature. Therefore, this specialised study on urbansiation and Assamese fiction was proposed from 1910 to 1967. The period begins with the end of the first decade of the 20th century marked by the division of Bengal in 1905 subsequently formation of Assam with Syhlet as a separate province, when the process of urbanisation started in Assam and ends in our study with the virtual demise of the leading organ, the Ramdhenu, the movement for avant-guard literature in Assamese.

These changes have been reflected in the modern Assamese literature in general and fiction in particular. This is understandable when we compare that with the literature dominated by traditional life and values. However, due to limited expansion of urban values in the early years of the study period, we haven't made a sharp distinction between modern and urban values considering all sometimes in a broad context.
The problem, which is both sociological and literary, involves field work and library work for the collection of data. As to the selection of samples, it is scattered throughout Assam. There is an interview schedule for the collection of primary data. A host of eminent social workers, literatureurs and businessmen of the state were interviewed in order to find out some of the changes that affected the life and values of urban society in Assam. For the literary work, that is, for the collection of primary data the study of the select fictions was also undertaken. The critical works on literature in general and on authors and their works in particular were also studied and after applying investigator's own observation, some secondary data were collected.

We have made use of both English and Assamese critical works to gather our critical concepts, for example, realism, stream of consciousness etc. Apart from libraries in Guwahati and GU, I also visited National Library, Calcutta, USIC, Calcutta. Calcutta University Library, NEHU Library, L.U. Library, Dibrugarh University Library etc. to gather my materials. I am thankful to the librarians of those libraries for their generous help.

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