Chapter – III

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3.1: GROWTH

The novel in Assamese grew and took shape in the second half of the 19th century drawing its inspiration from the literature of the west during the reign of British rule. The British imposed Bengali in 1836 in Assam after the state was occupied in 1826. Assamese was banished from its own land. During this dark period of Assamese language, the history of Assamese literature began under the auspices of American Baptist Missionaries. Though the Missionaries came to this land to preach Christianity, they well-understood the importance of the local language. Due to a sustained campaign by the Assamese locals in association with the constant assistance of the Christian Missionaries, Assamese was reinstated in 1873 as the state language.

The American Baptist Missionaries had their greatest contribution in the reintroduction of the Assamese language as the official language in Assam. They established the first printing press in Sibsagar in 1836 and started using the local Asamiya dialect for writing purposes. Assisted by some local talents the Missionaries acquired the knowledge of the Assamese language and wrote textbooks for school children and produced other literary works in Assamese. In 1846 they started a monthly periodical called *Arunodoi* which was the first ever Assamese journal.

In the process of restoring the Assamese language, a few books were written and published to re-establish Assamese as an independent language. In 1848, Nathan Brown published the first book on Assamese grammar- *The Grammatical Notes of the Assamese Language*. The Missionaries published
the first Assamese-English Dictionary compiled by M. Bronson in 1867. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan contributed with his *A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language* and *On Vernacular Education in Assam* in 1855, and so on. As a result of perseverance of these great personalities, the Assamese language was restored in the law court as well as in schools in 1873. However by this time the contemporary Bengali language and literature had advanced to a great extent. Truly said by Satyendranath Sharma, Assamese lagged behind for 50 years for the banishment of its language. However the contemporary educated Assamese people came to the close contact of English and Bengali literature and drawing their inspiration from these two fields, they developed the field of the Assamese literature. Undoubtedly they owe a lot to the Christian Missionaries. The writers like Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Nidhiram Farwel, Jaduram Dekabaruah, Purnananda Baruah, Gunabhiram Baruah, Baham Phulan, Kinaram Satriya etc. who wrote in the *Arunodoi* (1846), published by the missionaries were the pioneer to the modern Assamese literature.¹

The British missionaries utilized Assamese language and literature as a tool for their religious propagation. With the purpose of disseminating the idea of Christian piety Rev. Brown undertook the translation of John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* under the title of *Jatrikar Jatra* (1851), which paved the way for Assamese novels. In the words of S.N. Sharma “by translating their allegorical story the missionaries have provided the key to the way the full length story as novel”²

*Jatrikar Jatra* was followed by a number of publications like- *Alokeshi Beshyar Bisay* (1877), *Phulmani Aru Karuna* (1877), and *Kaminikantar Charitra* (1877) etc. Though published in the ground of Christian propagation, *Kaminikantar Charitra* had a well developed theme and better characterization.

¹ Bharali, Sailen: *Adhunik Asamfya Sahitya: Duti Taranga*, p.1
² Sharma, S.N.: *Asamiya Upanyashar Bhumika*, p.35
Hence, prominent Assamese scholar Hem Baruah considered it the first Assamese novel.3 According to Hemanta Kumar Sharma “Inspite of having some shortcomings, this novel, by the virtue of its style and expression, can be called the first independent novel in Assamese”4 On the other hand, some other critics like Dr. Satyendranath Sharma criticized it and refused to give it the honour of being a novel. According to him, its ultimate aim of reaching various ends hindered in producing a well-knit development of plot and proper analysis of characters.5 In 1876, contemporary to the missionaries’ publication, Hemchandra Baruah’s *Bahire-Rang-Chang Bhitare-Kowa-Bhaturi* appeared. It was an excellent piece of satiric story. But due to the lack of well-developed theme and characterization the book was not regarded as a novel. Padmawati Devi Phukanani’s *Sudharmar Upakhyan*, published in 1884, aimed at preaching the effect of virtuous and non-virtuous deeds, depriving its claim as a novel proper. All the publications right from *Jatrikar Jatra* to *Sudharmar Upakhyan* aimed at religious reformations. The basic purpose was to preach Christianity. Hence they lacked the essential characteristics of a novel- a well-knit story, free analysis of characters and situation, and sequence of events etc. But the contributions of the missionaries to the growth of novel as a branch of literature in Assamese can not be ignored.6 In real sense the British missionaries had given Assamese language a new tune that the Assamese had never known before.7 According to Dr. Maheswar Neog it was only the missionaries who established the Assamese language in a new form in the law courts and the educational field, and thereby created the gateway to form creative literature in Assamese language.8

4. Sharma, Hemanta Kumar: *Asomiya Sahityat Dristipat*, p.269  
5. Sharma, Satyendranath: *Asamiya Upanyashar Bhumika*, p.49  
7. Goswami, Hemchandra: *Asomiya Sahityar Chinaki*, p.134  
The real growth of Assamese novel took place in the late 19th century. In 1886, the Assamese students studying in Calcutta (now, Kolkata) established Asomiya Bhasha Unnati Sadhini Sabha (Association for the development of the Assamese language) and published the Assamese journal “Jonaki” in the following year. In the very next year, another newspaper “Bijuli” was published. These two journals gave birth to the modern Assamese novels in true sense. Lakshminath Bezbaruah’s Padum Konwari and Padmanath Gohain Baruah’s Bhanumati were published in these two journals respectively. These two novels were followed by Gohain Baruah’s Lahari and Rajanikanta Bordoloi’s Miri Jiori(1894). Critics, in modern time, unanimously gave Bhanumati the honour of being the first Assamese novel which was developed on a historical plot. Hence the last part of the nineteenth century was the important period for the Assamese literature. In the words of S.N. Sharma ‘The last decade of the nineteenth century was the real birth time of Assamese novel. In this decade four important novels were published. These novels- Bhanumati (1891), Padumkonwari (1891), Lahori (1892) and Miri Jiori (1894) were the initial effort of the un-matured writers and hence not completely flawless. However, the Miri Jiori was the best amongst them’.  

Rajanikanta Bordoloi’s Miri Jiori was the first novel in Assamese literature which was regional in tone and nature. It was his maiden and only attempt to deal with social theme. Fulfilling all the requirements of a regional novel, Mirijori deals with the realistic picture of tribal life. On the backdrop of Subansiri River, the author depicted the Miries, their marriage rituals, Cheng puja, Naracinga Bihu, Deudhai’s predictions and the Subansiri river in their lives. All these aspects make a fine regional novel. However, the writer, after writing this novel, diverted his interest to historical themes and there was a big leisure in the field of regional

novel. S.N. Sharma’s observation in this regard is worth quoting “One can not notice any attempt of writing regional novel except Rajanikanta Bordoloi’s *Miri Jiori* till independence”.\(^{10}\) However, the fact is that the general growth of Assamese novel was not satisfactory during this period. As Dr. Sharma observed, the influence of western language and literature should have enhanced and expanded the growth of Assamese novel; instead it was quite slow. It was only after the Second World War that the Assamese novels have overcome the rigidity and took a new turn.\(^{11}\) In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Dr. Birinchi Kumar Baruah emerged to be a successful novelist. He was a master painter of Assamese social novel. He authored *Jivanar Batat* (In the Highway of Life) and *Seuji Patar Kahini* (Story of the Green Leaf) under the pen name of Bina Baruah. Though social in nature, these novels bore many characteristics of regional novel. Especially *Jivanar Batat* highlights the Assamese village life with its pains and sufferings. Saiyad Abdul Malik’s *Surujmukhi Swapna* (The Dream of Sunshine) reveals the customs and emotions of a muslim village living on cultivation. The same author’s *Jetuka Patar Dare* and *Pahumara Habir Baat* are also apt example of the novels of this type. Homen Borgohain’s *Matsyagandha* can not be ignored, which depicts a koibarta village with untouchability practices in it. Renowned poet and storyteller Nabakanta Baruah’s *Kapiliparia Sadhu* is a landmark of regional novel. Hitesh Deka’s novels also have regional touches. His novels basically deal with realistic analysis of the village life and the problems of the peasants living in it.\(^{12}\) His novel *Eiyetu Jivan* gives a pictorial description of a village in lower Assam. Nirupama Borgohain was a successful regional novelist. Her *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* and *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* deal the pathetic plight of the people living in riverside. *Rangmilir Hahin* by Rong Bong Terong represents the detail customary practices of the

\(^{10}\) Sharma, S.N.: *Asamiya Upayyasahar Gatidhara*, p.221  
\(^{11}\) Sharma, S.N.: *Asamiya Sahitya Itibriti*, p.192  
\(^{12}\) Baruah, Hem: *Asamiya Sahitya*, p.273
Karbi tribe. Written on the backdrop of Karbi hills, this novel is considered another great achievement in the field of Assamese regional novel. In the same connection the name of Silabhadra is mention-worthy whose novels like Madhupur, Ahatguri and Agamanir Ghat etc. center round the Madhupur region highlighting the pain, suffering, corruption and oppression of the locality. The name of Mamoni Raisom Goswami can not be ignored. Her Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda and Nilakanthi Braza are important addition to the genre of regional novel.

There are a countable number of regional novels; at least a reasonable number of novels with major regional aspects in Assamese literature. Some of the mention-worthy novels in this category are Amulya Baruah’s Ei Padumani, Jatin Mupun’s Miksijili, Kailash Sharma’s Anami Nagini, Shiba Sharma’s Maniki Gaonr Kahini, Pranita Devi’s Dhansirir Usupani, Lumber Dai’s Prithibir Hahin, Yese Dorse Thongsi’s Saba Kota Manuh etc. And this number is gaining addition day by day. However, only a few trendsetter novels in particular have been taken into account for this study, though some general aspects will be drawn as a whole when necessary. The selected novels for this study are: Miri Jiori (1894), Kapiliparia Sadhu (1953), Sei Nadi Nirabadhi (1963), Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar (1979), Madhupur (1971), Ahatguri (1973), Agamanitr Ghat (1973), Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda (1988) and Nilakanthi Braza (1989).

3.2: BACKGROUND

Background and setting becomes an integral part of a novel. Especially in case of a regional novel, this aspect becomes very vital. Talking about setting refers to the background in terms of time and place of the course of action of
the novel. It further refers to the life and living, the prevailed social norms and the natural environment of the area where the characters perform their actions. In the view of a prominent critic, in fiction, setting includes the time, location, and everything in which a story takes place, and initiates the main backdrop and mood for a story. Setting has been referred to as story world or milieu to include a context (especially society) beyond the immediate surroundings of the story. Elements of setting may include culture, historical period, geography, and hour. A complete and perfect background of a novel may include all the components of general living. However, the modern novels are restricted in revealing or highlighting only a few aspects. The setting and background of a novel is utilized for achieving mainly two purposes. Firstly to restrict the course of activities of the characters by the prevailing environment, and secondly to portray the characters as a rebel against the existing norms. The desired purpose is achieved by presenting social background, natural background or the both.

The setting and background become one of the most important components of a regional novel. They control most of the courses of action in a regional novel. In some stories the setting becomes the character itself. Selection of a good setting and background may give a new dimension to a novel. According to Umesh Deka the faithfulness of the subject matter of a novel mainly depends on the selection of its setting and background where the story will progress. A successful writer always wants his art of creation to flourish on the backdrop of perfect setting.

"Prakrita arthat upanyasar bisaybastur pratyasil rup nirman hai patbhumi nirbachanar kshamatar uparatei. Sarthak silpiye"  

14. Rozelle, Ron: Write Great Fiction: Description & Setting. p.2
In Assamese literature, regional novels are written by centering round peculiar background. The number of the novels are more whose backgrounds are based on riverside areas, hilly areas and rural areas touched by the influence of urbanizations.

In Assamese literature, Rajanikanta Bardoloi introduced regional novel in the last decade of nineteenth century. His Miri-Jiori (1894) is the first Assamese regional novel. A clear and coherent picture of the Miri people living by the bank of the river Sibonsiri in the district of Lakhimpur is presented in this novel. The story of the novel is enriched by the love affair of Janki and Panei of a Miri village of that area. Both the protagonists Janki and Panei had to embrace tragic death because of the true love they possessed for each other, and which was not accepted by the traditional differences. The novelist has incorporated the life style, traditions, customs, religion of the Miri and the tragic love story in parallel. He also has beautifully sketched the natural environment of the region nearby Subonsiri. To sum up in one sentence, Mirijiori is a fine blending of social and natural background.

In the novel, the characteristics of Miri social life are expressed through the description of Miri festivals like Nora Siga Bihu, Sarag puja, Ratisewa etc. with religious beliefs, traditional beliefs etc. In reference to the religious life of the Miri, the novelist has mentioned the names of the gods like Mugling Mirema, Kasing-Kartan, Mattable, Chinek, Dohmukh, Dong-kong, Louji-Leitang etc. and has described the worships which are done to satisfy these gods. The influence of various personal and religious beliefs are immense in the lives of the Miris.

15. Chakrawarty, Mukul (Ed): Bhasa Sahitya Sanskritir Jilikoni, 2003, p.9; from the article ‘Chahbagichr Jivan aru Asamiya Upanyas’ by Umesh Deka
Listing to prophecy form the mouth of ‘Deodhai’, who is possessed by some evil spirit, considering dream as the forecast of future, rectifying future by sacrificing a cock etc. are some of the traditional beliefs of the Miris mentioned in the novel. Moreover, adding various songs sung in various occasions- at the time of boating, cultivating, harvesting, festivals etc. gave the novel a sweet melodious outlook. In a realistic and reliable social background, the love story of Janki and Panei has glittered. That is the reason possibly that the novel has been described as the cultural history of the Miri tribe of people.16

The geographical background of Mirijiori is a village situated on the bank of Subonsiri river of Lakhimpur district of Assam. The name of the village, which is the epicenter of the novel, is not mentioned by the novelist, whereas the names of two other villages are mentioned as per the demand of the story. The surrounding area of the Subonsiri forms the background of the novel, although the river itself plays the most vital role in the novel. In the words of Satyendranath Sarma the novelist has given utmost emphasis on the Subonsiri River. The river is not just the mere background of the novel; rather it is elevated to the level of goddess of the Miri people.17

Even the first, fifth and the last section of the novel have been named after the river Subonsiri, respectively as ‘Nair Parat’, ‘Subonsiri Nair Bukut’ and ‘Akou Subonsiri Nair Bukut’. In the very first section, the novelist gives an apt description of the river, cultivating the seeds of the story. Young Janki and Panei meet each other regularly in their corn field by the bank of Subansiri amidst the wild nature developing a kind of keen affinity from their childhood.

“Subansiri Noikhan bahale Brahmaputrar pach jukhar ajukhman
hoba. Brahmaputrar panitkoi iar pani nirmal puwa jai………

17. Sarma, Satyendranath: Asomiya Upayasar Bhumika, p.65

The love story of Janki and Panei blossomed right from the beginning of the novel on the Subonsiri river and met its destiny there itself. The dead-bodies of the two lovers floated on Subonsiri who were condemned in the judgment of the Baregam. The whole episode is associated and witnessed by Subonsiri for which Satyendra Nath Sarma called the river a ‘muted character’ of the novel.19

In this way, the novelist was successful in selecting a perfect background for his novel and was faithful in upholding a true presentation of the area and the people living therein. His presentation of the Miri society and its custom and culture is so vivid that it has compensated, as observed by some prominent critic, the immediate need of a socio-cultural history of the Mising society.20

Nabakanta Barua’s Kapiliparia Sadhu is written on the setting of the Kapili river and its surrounding areas in the district of Nagaon. Taking the people and environment of this locality as the background, this novel highlights the relation between human life and nature. This novel is written on the basis of a biographical novel. The novelist, in a little sphere, tries to discover the adapted areas of Nagaon district in a newer light. Nabakanta Barua has described the deep and profound relationship between the people of Nagaon and the Kapili River in those heart-touching poetic language.

18. Bardalai, Rajanikanta: Mirijiori, p.3

Various aspects are inserted into the background of Kapiliparia Sadhu. In a short sphere, the novelist has added many important aspects and matters. That may be reason that all the matters have been discussed in surface level only, no matters have possessed the required depth. For example, one can point out the aspects of history, legend etc. which are related to the background.

The novelist has mentioned the names of the states like Guva, Neli, Dimoruwa which were situated by the bank of Kapili; and these names have established the history related to the Kapili River. The matters like the battle between Ahom and Jayantia, the rebellion of the kings of Guva, Neli and Dimoruwa, the closed market of Phulaguri area, the help of the kings to Pani Phukan with guns and food etc. have expressed the history hidden in those places by the bank of Kapili.

Historical consciousness is one of the main characteristics of the poet-writer Nabakanta Baruah. Highlighting this historical consciousness of the poet, famous critic Hirendranath Dutta observed that one can notice a special aspect about the writings of Nabakanta Baruah when compared to his predecessor. This is his sense of incorporating the history of humankind. This reveals the modern mind of the author. Dutta calls it historical consciousness.

“Purbasuri sakalar kabya-kritir saite tulana korile Nabakanta Baruahr eta bises gun pratijan sangbedansil pathakare chakut

21. Baruah, Nabakanta: Kapiliparia Sadhu, p.8
This historical consciousness is also available in the novels of Nabakanta Baruah. His greatest historical novel ‘Kakadeutar Har’ proves the fact. The discussed novel Kapiliparia Sadhu also could not ignore his historically conscience mind. His mild historical description and the inclusion of the legends and folk believe of the region and the Kapili river upholds the novel as a true and successful regional novel. Baruah’s description of Gayan-Bayan ghuli that swallows two boats every year, the Gosai pond and the legend of its creation etc. give the vivid details of the environment of the area.

However, it is to be mentioned that, though the novel mostly include the marvelous phenomenon, folk tale, folk lore, customs and traditions of the of the people living by the bank of Kapili river, it has never ignored the practical utility of life. Upendranath Sharma observed that Kapiliparia Sadhu aptly projects the true reflection of contemporary social life along with its traditional values. ‘The presentation of wrecked social life and vanishing social values as well as historical background is interesting as well.’

Moreover, the novel depicts realistic pictures of India’s freedom movement, contemporary pathos of educational environment, economic devastation of flood affected people etc. upholding a realistic background of the contemporary period.

23. Ibid, p.47, Upendranath Sharma’s article ‘Nabakanta Baruahr Dukhan Upnyash’
Nirupama Borgohain’s famous novels Sei Nadi Nirabadhi and Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar were authored on the backdrop of two unknown villages by the bank of Pagladia River in the district of Nalbari. Borgohain herself mentioned it in her autobiography ‘Biswa aru Sangsayar Majedi, “Taking Pagladia River as background, I wrote two novels. One is Sei Nadi Nirabadhi and the other Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar”.24

The novel Sei Nadi Nirabadhi centers around the love story between the village girl Lakshmi and the Dipu who came to the village from town due to the cruelty of World War. Parallel to this love story, the novelist presents the minute details of the poor agriculture-based people living in a small interior region. The first half of the novel basically deals with the detailed description of this matter. The novelist herself experienced the brutality of the World War-II. During this time, she was in her father’s home at Simlia which was around six miles away from the district headquarter of Nalbari. The novelist revealed the fact that her experience and memories of those days- the incidents she witnessed by the bank of Pagladia, the people she was acquainted with and their happiness and sorrows etc. have found a creative form in the said novel.25

Similar to the Kapili river in the Kapiliparia Sadhu, the Pagaladiya river is the life source and life force to the people of Nalbari. The river controls the life and living of the region. The people believed that the Pagladia had an unstoppable madness in its force, and none could challenge its will. They believed that the river had changed its course in its own will, which remained a source of discussion for the local people. Lakshmi explained to Dipu that her mother witnessed the flow of the Pagladia river in the back side of their house; but it, then, stopped and changed its direction, and now it is flowing through the front side of the village.

24. Borgohain, Nirupama: Biswas aru Sangsayar Majedi, p.64
The Pagladia has emerged as one of the forceful character in the novel. It is considered as the river of will and woe. It controls the happiness and the miseries of the area. People find a kind of intimacy with this mad river though most of their life is wracked by it. They drink the water from the river, swim and play in its water, use it as a means of their conveyance. On the other hand, they face immense hardship when Pagladia comes up with its destructive flood.

The description of the erosion of the river, small huts of the poor people, baron cultivating land, taboos of caste system, untouchability, educational backwardness, famine, unhygienic lifestyle, people’s intimacy with the natural surroundings, use of colloquial language and dialects etc. have made a strong foundation for the background of this regional novel. The novelist herself felt a strong sense of bondage with the river. Recollecting her old childhood memories in her autobiography, Borgohain mentioned that she sometimes felt more intimate with the river compared to other people and any other relations in her life.  

There are many things still found in the region which were described in the novel, bringing the evidence of realistic portrayal of the masterpiece. Among them are the monastery of Bhagibaba, the Arjun and the Bokul trees mentioned

26. Borgohain, Nirupama: Sei Nadi Nirabadhi, p.3
27. Borgohain, Nirupama: Biswas aru Sangsayar Majedi, p.163
therein, the high school by the pond of Gangapukhuri etc. However these things are to be seen in the Sunkeria village, next to Simalia village. The novelist had also included the legend that was in the belief of the people about the digging of the pond. It is said that the water of the Gangapukhuri had been restored by putting in the water from holy river of Ganga; and hence many wise people had seen there the golden boats of gods.\(^{28}\)

Nirupama Borgohain’s *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* is another beautiful specimen of region novel in Assamese literature. The novelist developed her storyline in the setting of Dhalkuchi village by the bank of river Pagladia. The novel produces two parallel story of two girls- poor Pateswari, who is the inhabitant of Dhalkuchi village and Anjali, who has been brought up in the big town and well educated as well. Beautiful Pateswari was just like the pearl in the shell; like the lotus grown out of the mud. But her poverty always hindered her from what she actually deserved. Rather, she became the victim of the evildoers only because of her poor background. Pateswari was compelled to lead a life of utter poverty who received no aid and attention from her society. In fact, the novelist intended to depict the fact that most of the people in the Dhalkuchi village had to live an unnoticed life due to poverty. They were mostly ill-fed and ill-treated. Along with misery, they were always grabbed by social evils. Poor Pateswari got her small daughter employed at other’s house and even did not hesitate to provoke her to steal to meet their needs. Another character Pramila was shown to repent after marrying an idle poor man and eloped with the rich *mahajan* (landlord) leaving her three year old daughter behind.

The post independence economic changes and its adverse effects on the poor people, especially the village people of Assam, has been presented in an authentic way in this novel. It is shown that the poor residents of the region,

\[^{28}\text{Bargohain, Nirupama: Sei Nadi Nirabadhi, p.43}\]
who were already troubled by the natural calamities like flood, famine, drought etc. are now in great disaster and hardship with the economic turmoil after independence. It became difficult for them to manage two square meals for a livelihood. Many went to town in search of livelihood. The induction of machines and industry threatened the age old cottage industry. Pateswari was compelled to sell her *Eri-chadar* (a kind of handwoven warm cloths) in low rate because the machine made cloths were of better quality and low price. Pateswari was pained to think that she might have to give up weaving.

"*Pater mukhar nirbikar bhab antarhit hal. Tai asahai mukhabhangi kari kale- Baideu ami buwa-kata eribai lagbu. Sehate seisupa mechinat buwe ba ekelage eksupa buwe, seikarane sastat diba pare. Ami ekhan buw- tenekoi sastat dibat dibat naru nahai. Bhagabane amar dare daridrar sakalu pinei maran milechi.*"\(^{29}\)

Many of the characters in the novel like Hareswar, Dharma etc. have taken refuge in Guwahati to earn their livelihood. Some small shop owners like Bakul, who has been happy living in his own village, are finding it difficult to keep his pace with big businessman. At last unable to compete with the Ramesh Sraugi, Bakul closed his shop and proceed to the city with the hope that he would find employment in some industry.

Thus the novelist tries to discuss the issue of migration from the rural to the town area in her novel. At the same time, she also has discussed in minute details about the loss of real values of the village life- its simplicity, integrity, virtues etc. This subtle reality of modern life has been depicted with a few examples in the novel. The old retired police officer Paresh Kalita dropped the idea of returning to village after he has been deceived by his own brother and friend.

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29. Borgohain, Nirupama: *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar*, p.58
The notable aspect of both the novels by Nirupama Borgohain is that they are river-centered and they highlight the degradation of the village life of Assam in the fourth decades of twentieth century at the time of Second World War. There came mainly in economic degradation; but it equally affects the moral, social and ethical sides of human. The traditional customs, rituals, feasts and festivals etc. along with the history and legends of the area provide a foundation for the success of these regional novels.

Silabhadra authored all his novels taking the Gauripur region of the Goalpara district as his background. We may discuss his Madhupur, Ahatguri and Agamanir Ghat under this category. The novel Madhupur does not have a well organized plot or storyline. It comprises some scattered scenes, incidents, characters etc. that the author produces from his memory to advocate the true nature of the region. Till the time of independence, the social, political, economic, and cultural setting of the Gauripur region have created two distinguished generations. The first generation includes the landlords and their followers who were capable of exercising their power bestowed upon to them by the feudal system. This aristocratic group of people is represented by landlord Dhirendr Narayan Choudhury, proud and boastful singer Narayan Bardeuta, rich businessman Narendra Narayan Choudhury who was the first to pass entrance exam in the area, and mentally disordered Ruhini Borah who spend most of his life after wine and women and lost his mental balance at the suicide of his wife etc. These people are the representative of so called elites of the society sitting at the ruins of their aristocracy, dejected and disapproved by the new generation. The second generation is represented by Kandura Gulam’s grandson Prabin, Parashar Mandal’s grandson Shami, the contractor Madhusudhan etc. The second generation is the representative of new generation- progressive, courageous and more active. This generation has discarded the age old practices of the so called ruined aristocracy and tried to set a new beginning of equality.
The old elite class felt dejected, who could neither maintain their own pride nor could keep pace with the progressive mind of the new generation. This social background is the key concept of the novel. The novelist successfully presents the social changes and its changing values with the help of historic evolution of the Gauripur region. The powerful landlords and the wealthy people exploited the poor peasants through the ages. They controlled the law and order, gave innumerable pain and suffering to the poor. The poor peasants, on the other hand were helpless. They have to accept the corruption of those unruly lords as the will of gods. But now the values of life have changed. Those people are no more wealthy and powerful as before. With the expansion of knowledge and education, with the changes of economic status, the new generation is no more tolerant to those so called people in power. They ignited a kind of revolution in the social system. The novelist beautifully upholds this idea in the following words:

“We heard stories of how powerful the landlords were! They controlled the law and order..... the peasants obeyed ‘you are our parents...’. But now the thinking has changed.... ‘you have become rich by exploiting us... ’that is what I am going to say. One episode ended and the other began. Corruption has not been over, but system has changed. The oppressed class is not ready to accept the exploitation as the will of gods. Hence the conflict aroused.”

With the changing social values, there came changes in socio-cultural and economic aspects of the society. The native of the Gauripur area felt oppressed, previously by the wealthy landlords, and now by the government. One of the characters Gajen felt every moment that the Goalpara region and its people are always ignored by the state government. They are always deprived from their due. Gajen expressed his concern in this regard.

30. Silabhadra: Madhupur, p.18-19
“Isn’t Goalpara a part of Assam. If so, we must get equal facilities and rights, or else....”

The novelist has also given a fine socio-cultural description of the region. Gajen’s sincerity in editing magazines in Goalpara dialect, the landlord’s sons going for cinema, the jatra party bringing from Calcutta, the singing council at the house of Narayan etc. explain the fine test of cultural life of the region. Moreover, the description of various festivals and the rituals also help in understanding the socio-cultural aspects of the region. The rituals in the Mahamaya temple, the sacrifice of a thousand animals and the distribution of those in every household etc. are some fine example in this regard.

“The Mahamaya temple used to be packed with people during those days of puja. Though organized by the landlords this puja was open by all. There used to be one thousand sacrifice in that puja. Those were distributed among the people of Madhupur.”

The novelist has not shown any direct contribution of the Madhupur in his novel. However, it could hardly escape the atrocious influences of the Second World War. The surroundings of the Mahamaya temple witnessed plenty of temporary huts made of bamboo and thatch. There set an airport at four mile distance of the temple, the MESO office, central PWD office by the bank of the river etc. All these new inductions rapidly changed the outlook of Madhupur. These changes also have affected the inner mind of the people of the region. They become more busy now; more self concern and more materialistic. A sense of greed and lust for wealth grabbed there everyone.

Thus the novelist presented Madhupur on a changing social, political and economic background. The novelist sincerely presented the actions and reactions

31. Silabhadra: Madhupur, p.4
32. Ibid, p.29
of various characters, changing values, and tried to discover the various
evolutions that took place in the small area in shorter period. Satyendranath
Sarma rightly observed that the novel is a true representation of the contemporary
period. It depicts the historic rise and fall, and the influence of changing time. It
also highlighted the arrogance of the so-called aristocratic landlords, their
humiliation towards the poor peasants, their fall thereafter with the rise of the
new and progressive generation who aim to build a society with economic
security:

"Madhupurar samajik utthan-patanar itihas, jugakrantir amugh prabhab, jamidarar swajati sakalar abhijatyar garba sadharan srenir prajar prati thaka abagyar bhab, jamidarar bilas aru badanya, phupula bhemake akuwali loi kalar ahban upeksha kari abakshyar mukhat para karmabimukh prachin sambhranta srenir arthik anishyatar sundar chitra upanyas khanat ase."³³

In his another novel called *Ahagturi*, Silabhadra illustrates how a small
unknown village named Perperia had transformed to the Ahatguri town. The
novelist explored how the process of urbanization had brought changes in all
aspects of the society, be it social, cultural, ethical, economical and industrial.
With the portrayal of all these changes, the novelist beautifully upholds the true
nature of the region.

Nilambar is the protagonist of the novel, through whom the novelist has
witnessed the old Perperia village and its transformation to a big town. At the
time of the birth of Ahatguri town, Nilambar initiated himself as a tea-seller and
emerged successful with his establishment. His success as a small businessman
owe to his simplicity and sincerity. He saw with his bare eyes the small region
growing to a big town. It became the centre of trade and commerce. The local

³³. Sarma, S,N,: Asamiya Upanyasar Gatidhara, p.152
market opened twice a week, on Sundays and Wednesdays, where people came from far and wide. They came with their goods by means of bullock-carts and boats etc. Some obviously came on foot. People brought various items like rice, mustard seed, jute, vegetables etc. to the market. Many traders came from other big towns to buy those items. Rattan Saha constructed a godown to store these things. Khelia babu also made his own establishment. It became a great rush at the tea-stall of Nilambar on those days.

Apart from Nilambar, there are other characters produced by the novelist who helped in discovering various aspects of the Ahatguri region. It is rather those varied characters through which the novelist tried to showcase the good and adverse effects of urbanization. Some of the characters are Bin Boragi Natbar, the carpenter Lalmohan who devoted himself to build the Dhelkhowa Thakur temple, drunken Sitanath who sold rice-beer, Jadu babu who died a premature death due to his loose character, the truthful, sincere teacher Biren-master, the corrupt headmaster Robin Roy, the driver Bholababu who could not run his family and committed suicide, the poor Ramratiya who was compelled to become a prostitute after eloping to the town with a servant. All these characters from diverse sections of the urban society uphold the true brutal pictures of the impact of urbanization.

The urbanization and modernization have given a lot to the society, but it equally has taken away many goodies from human life. Urbanization has made a class richer but the other the poorer. The novelist showed his concern on the fact that urbanization may mean gain for some; it also brings nothing but pain and misery to many others. In the process of urbanization, the original local people of Ahatguri had to migrate from that place. Many of the residents were compelled to give up their land for the construction of roads etc. Many sold them for better price and left the place. Ahatguri is the dwelling of various
outsiders now. The original Perperia residents were hardly found there. The few there in its periphery were also in pathetic condition. Without having land for cultivation, these people have engaged themselves in unsocial activities. They became the stigma of Ahatguri.

During the early fifties, Ahatguri was compact with PWD workers who came to work on the construction of National Highway-32. Most of them were not native. They came from various places from far and wide. To supply them with tea Nilambar opened his establishment of tea-stall by the roadside. Gradually he saw plenty of varied shops and stores coming up in that area. The place was packed with government offices, hospital and many outsiders coming there for various purposes. The characteristic behavior of these diverse people gave a new identity to the place. Commercialization and urbanization brought artificiality. Various people like poor and rich, workers and employers live in the same place; they greet each other sometimes but hardly know each other. The race to success made everyone self-centered. The novelist provides beautiful description of this fact.

"Everything that should be there in a town is available in Ahatguri. There are plenty of beggars. They shout at the door before people get up from their bed. Rickshaw-puller, washer-man, barber, cobbler all live here. There are gentleman as well as pick-pocketers. Ahatguri is one of those many towns in Assam. More the number of people increase in the town, more they isolate themselves. They talk and greet without knowing each other. Each person is detained in his own cell. None bothers unless it is related to them. Each person is, as if, interwined in a circle. They are busy in their own business."34

34. Silabhadra: Madhupur, p.68
The novelist beautifully describes the follies that come along with the benefits of urbanization. His observation of gambling and wine selling in the open market highlights this fact. While discussing the historical evolution of Ahatguri region, the novelist showed his concern for the poor, grass-root people who are simple in nature and true to their minds. Treasury, mockery, corruption etc. are not to be found with them. That was the reason why these simple people had to quit from the place when it undergone urbanization.

Another novel by Silabhadra was 'Agamanir Ghat'. The theme and background of this novel was similar to that of Ahatguri. This novel also does not have a well-knit plot as a whole. Here again is described the writer’s personal experience of some incidents and occurrences. Agamanir Ghat is a ghat of the Gangadhar River. Once quiet and unnoticed, this area suddenly became a busy and famous centre of business. The newly constructed roads and other official constructions in the post independence period helped the Agamanir Ghat to turn into a lively place. The once silent place has now become noisy with the yell and cry of the contractors, truck drivers, boatmen, workers etc. The novelist himself worked as a contractor of supplying stone from the Gangadhar River. Hence, naturally he incorporated most of his first hand experiences in this novel. In his autobiographical writing Madhupurar Smriti, Silabhadra mentions that he has presented many characters and incidents from his real life experience. For example, Kandu’s death caused by the jamindar’s elephant in Agamanir Ghat was a true experience.  

Thus, the reproduction of the true stories has helped the author to produce a true background for a successful piece of novel. Once again the novelist has tried to explore the region by presenting a handful of characters and their activities. Satyendranath Sarma observed that the novelist with utmost compassion has

35. Silabhadra: Madhupur, p.89
portrayed his characters with all their good and bad habits. Along with the portrayal of these characters, the novelist successfully upholds the regional characteristics of the novel.36

Mamoni Raisom Goswami in her *Dantal Hatir Uniye Khowa Hayda* has taken the Amranga Satra of Jagalia as the setting and background of the novel. She has also included the area of Barihat, Sikarhati, Pat-haladhia, Heramad and Buatijan along with Jagali as it is the demand of the novel. In the preface of the novel Goswami clearly mentioned that she had her vivid childhood memories of being in the Amranga Satra of Jagalia in South Kamrup which motivated her to author this novel. She has presented some of her personal favourite characters in the story. In her own words:

>This novel is inspired by the Amranga Satra in South Kamrup. I spent quite a number of days in this Satra. Those days were the most memorable days of my life. Hence, though away for long from this Satra, the memories are still lively. The characters of the novel have been drawn from some of my favourite real character.37

The novel highlights the life and living of the Jagaldia region which is under the worn out practice of vaishnavite cult. It deals with the religious gurus of the satra and their disciples, the influence of the contemporary socio-political scenarios on the satra life as well as the region, and the rigid customary laws of the high class Brahmin people that basically made the woman suffer with agony etc. The chiefs of those Satras enjoyed all sorts of privileges. They were the most powerful people of the region, both in religious and economic aspects. They were the landlords who own most of the land in the region; their disciples were their peasants. They were considered the gods by their followers. But, the

37. Goswami, Mamoni Raisom: Dantal Hati Uniye Khowa Howda, preface
influence of the independence movement, the rise of communist movement and the Ceiling Law produced by the government reduced the power of these people. They were panic that the ceiling law may confiscate their land property. At the same time the communist movement advocated for the ownership of land by the peasant who cultivated there. Such a social scenario and the collapsing social values of Amranga satra region was taken as the background of this novel by Mamoni Raisom Goswami.

The novelist also highlights the then social evil - the use of kaani, a king of intoxication that grabbed most of the people of the region. Most of the people became prey to kaani to such an extent that they were ready to do anything for this intoxication. Obviously some businessman and kaani suppliers took undue advantage to make money and tried to promote the circulation of kaani everywhere. The use of kaani made the people lazy and idle. The whole surrounding of Amranga Satra, Borihat, Sikarhati, Heramad etc. smelled with the preparation of kaani instead of full-grown rice. The fields became almost barren and the pathetic plight of the people knew no bounds. The novelist also describes various incidents like establishment of the hospitals in Heramad for the kaani affected people, arrest of Jukram Bhagabati for smuggling kaani, and the pitiable condition of his daughter thereafter etc. in a very sadistic note.

The plight of the women, who were bound by the orthodox and rigid traditional practices were also depicted pitiably. Mainly the widows like Durga, Saru Gusani, Giribala etc. who had to lead the most miserable life under the traditional customs. They had to live hard widowhood with the restriction of eating, talking and moving. The unmarried girls of the Gosai family were considered not only a family burden, but a social burden as well. Movements of the woman were restricted within the backyard of the household. They were not allowed to go outside or talk to outsiders. However, with the passing of time,
the youngsters like Indranath etc. came out of these superstitious beliefs though they couldn’t change the minds of the predecessors. Thus the presentation of local rights and rituals, its dialects, use of legends etc. helped the novelist to produce a lifelike setting in the novel.

The setting and background of the novel Nilakanthi Braza is yet another successful edition in the fields of Assamese regional novel. The holy and pious Brindaban has been taken as the background of this novel. The novelist with her subtle observation noticed both the aspects of Brindaban - its holiness and its viciousness as well. None in the history of Assamese literature tried their hand in such a topic before Goswami. Observing the setting of this novel, Chandraprasad Saikia remarked that the novelist has crossed the geographical bar and installed an all India background. This reflects her broad and bold mentality. This novel reflects that there were no differences in the socio-economic aspects between Assam and that of the other places in India. Nilakanthi Braza is the bare presentation of the Brazadham Brindaban. The true nature of Brindaban, its associated legends, historical monuments and religious environment along with its bitter reality makes a fine background of the novel. The musical and poetic language of the novelist helped creating a beautiful environment.

The exceptional theme and subject-matter of the novel gave it a new direction. The pious religious environment in one hand and the cruel reality on the other - these two diverse scenarios of Brindaban created the point of attraction of the novel. The novelist exposed the bare truth of the Brazadham with the help of the widow character called Soudamini, who went to take shelter there to find mental peace.

Thus a thorough discussion of the Assamese regional novels disclose the fact that river plays a vital role in forming the background of the novel. Rajanikanta

Bordoloi’s *Mirijiori*, Nabakanta Baruah’s *Kapiliparia Sadhu*, Nirupama Borgohain’s *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi, Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* etc. were authored on the backdrop of Subansiri, Kapili and Pagladia river respectively. Moreover the influence of industrialization or urbanization and changing values of rural life found place as their background. The characters are simple minded poor people, mostly peasants. Most interestingly, almost all the regional novels were created on the backdrop of rural setting; man’s intimacy with nature, their changing lifestyle under the gradual influence of urbanization, and corruption and treachery installed in their simple living as its result are upheld in these regional novels. The beautiful description of social customs and traditional rituals including feast and festivals added charm to the background of Assamese regional novels.

### 3.3: Themes

A novel’s theme is the main idea that the writer expresses. Theme can also be defined as the underlying meaning of the story. The theme of a novel is more than its subject matter, because an author’s technique can play as strong a role in developing a theme as the actions of the characters do. A theme is a broad idea, message, or moral of a story. The message may be about life, society, or human nature. Themes often explore timeless and universal ideas and are almost always implied rather than stated explicitly. Along with plot, character, setting, and style, theme is considered one of the fundamental components of fiction.\(^{39}\)

Rajanikanta Bordoloi’s *Miri Jiori* was a successful regional novel written on contemporary social-religious theme. Bordoloi, as a government employee, had to write articles for then commissioner Edward Gait on socio-religious

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aspects of the Miri or Mising tribes. 40 While doing so, he collected his own material for writing his first novel. As a result, he gifted his best novel written on the background of Subonsiri River and its surrounding, inhabited by the simple living Miri people.

The novel deals with a beautiful love story of a couple of Miri boy and girl. The childhood friendship of Janki and Panei turned to love in their young age which was not approved by their families. Both of them eloped and wandered various places facing many hardship. Finally they were caught by another tribe of Miri people who after trial killed them and threw them into the Subansiri River. With this love story, Rajanikanta Bordoloi explored the social customs, right-rituals and life style of the Miri tribe who resided in hills. He also aimed to present a harmonious relation that prevailed among the hill and plain dwellers; at the same time the similarities and contrast among them could be noticed. This is the sole social novel of Bordoloi, rest being historical ones, which beautifully highlighted the Ghunakhuti village and the surrounding areas of Subansiri River claiming to be the first regional novel in Assamese literature.

_Kapiliparia Sadhu_ was Nabakanta Baruah’s first novel. Taking the setting of the Kapili river in the Nagaon district of Assam, this novel centers around the life and living of the people in the surrounding area, highlighting their hopes and aspirations, efforts and struggles, and consequence of life. The novel is enriched by the real life characters that the author experienced in his lifetime and presented them with the flavour of his creative imagination. In the foreword of this biographical novel the author himself acknowledged that the story on the novel is imaginary one, but the hero and his fellow characters are as humane as the author witnessed them every day. He further said that his imagination has not crossed the limit of writing a biography:

40. Thakur, Nagen(ed): _Exa Bacharar Asamiya Upnyas_, Dr. Mandira Goswami’s article ‘Rajanikanta Bardalair Upnyas’, p.332
The story of Kapiliparia Sadhu centers round its protagonist Rupai, the son of Dhir Sing. Dhir Sing did not have a son for long. He was very upset for the reason. He tried many doctors and wise persons, but in vain. Once, he found a small baby drifting on the flood of the Kapili river. Dhir Sing took the baby home and brought him up as his own son. This was Rupai. As Rupai grew up, he went to the local school of Master Betharam. But the Kapili river, which flows by the school, drew more of his attention. He liked the river, sometimes even bunked his class to sit by the bank of the river. After passing out from his school, his father sent him to the town to stay with lawyer Dinabandhu and study there. But poverty deprived him from gaining further education. Poor Rupai couldn’t continue his study there. However, staying in Nagaon town got him acquainted with the freedom movement. Highly influenced by the slogans of ‘Vande Mataram’, ‘Mahatma Gandhi ki jai’ (long live Gandhi) etc., he too joined the procession of the movement and had to go to jail. In the jail he met many freedom fighters including Tilak Gosai. He was highly impressed by the ideologies of the freedom fighter who followed the non-violence ethics of Gandhiji. He considered himself fortunate to have gone to the jail for a noble cause.

41. Baruah, Nabakanta: Kapiliparia Sadhu, foreword
42. Ibid, p.35
But the beautiful memories of the Kapili River haunted him in the jail too. He could not forget his dear Kapili. After the release from the jail he returned to his dear village with a photograph of Mahatma Gandhi. Then he worked on reopening the village school which had been closed. In the meantime, he went to Tilak Gosai to get proselytize himself and initiate into the vaishnava religion. There he discovered a new human in the Gosai. Tilak Gosai refused to do the same. He explains Rupai that both of them are the disciple of Mahatma Gandhi now; they are comrade now. Hence they should look forward for accomplishing their own tasks and responsibilities.\textsuperscript{43}

Rupai learned the lesson of life from Tilak Gosai. He decided to discharge his duties and responsibilities. His concentrated on various works. With the help of Tilak Gosai and other villagers, Rupai reopened the school and engaged Basu Gosai the teacher of the school.

There came a great flood on the Kapili. Most of the villages were drowned. The people of Rupai’s villages suffered a lot. Rupai flung into the action of rescuing the sufferers. He joined with the government servants who came for help and assistance. There in the flood, most dramatically, he found a girl, Sunpahi, swept away by the flow of the flood. This girl later changed the course of his life.

But the major incident that changed Rupai’s life was the death of his father Dhir Singh. After the great flood, Dhir Singh died of diarrhoea. Rupai discovered the truth that he was not the actual son of Dhir Singh, as he was not allowed to perform the rituals of a son. This discovery shattered his life. So far, he considered Dhir Singh as his father; now he realized that he had none except the Kapili river in this world. He was disheartened. Depressed of his life, Rupai jumped into the Kapili to surrender his life. But destiny did not agree to it. He

\textsuperscript{43} Baruah, Nabakanta: Kapiliparia Sadhu, p.47
was rescued by the family members of Sunpahi. With the nursing of Sunpahi, Rupai regained his conscience and returned home. He stayed with his mother Rongili, Dhir Singh’s wife, and engaged with his routine work.

At the same time, there developed a new relationship between Rupai and Sunpahi. They fell in love and started their secret meeting at night near the Gosai pukhuri. In the mean time, his family members wanted to get him married. Basu Gosai also insisted on the same. But Rupai was not ready to marry. He even could not imagine of marrying Sunpahi. For him Sunpahi was his goddess of love and passion. He just couldn’t prison her at his own home. He couldn’t deny his deep love for Sunpahi; neither could he accept her as his wife.

At this juncture, he realized that Sunpahi was pregnant. She was stunned at the indifference of Rupai. She could not tolerate Rupai’s strange behavior. Finally she ended off her life. She was lost in the Kapili. Sunpahi’s death could not affect Rupai at all. Very calmly he accepted it as the will of the Kapili, his mother.

Rupai was a changed man now. Sunpahi’s death taught him a new lesson of life. Now he was ready to face the real life. Quite surprisingly, to Basu Gosai and even for the readers, he was now ready to get married. Basu Gosai felt as if Rupai was a stranger.

This story of Kapiliparia Sadhu highlights that life is not just a congregation of some realistic incidents; it is rather an assemblage of mysterious feelings and happenings. These feelings become the epicenter of great experience of love, hatred, struggles, gains and dejections. In the discussed novel, the story progresses discussing all the above mentioned themes centering round the protagonist Rupai. Inspired by the ideologies of truth and non-violence of Mahatma Gandhi, Rupai could not maintain the preaching of truthfulness. He
was involved in an illicit love affair with Sunpahi, but couldn’t mentally prepare himself to marry her. Rupai emerged to be a mystery like the Kapili itself whom others could never understand. The Kapili river which becomes the source of all misery to the people also gives them the path of living. The great flood caused by Kapili ruins the morals of the natives, but it also paves the way of a new beginning. The action of the river seems to be mysterious. So does the nature of human. Rupai himself saved Sunpahi’s life discarding the dangerous flood, but again he compelled her to embrace death by not accepting to marry her. Thus the mysterious nature of human and its association with mysterious Kapili River becomes the main theme of Kapiliparia Sadhu.

Similar to Kapiliparia Sadhu, Nirupama Borgohain’s Sei Nadi Nirabadhi is again a novel with Pagaladia River in its centre. This novel is themed on the love story of Dipu and Laxmi at the time of Second World War. Dipu was a ten year old young boy when he was brought from town to village by his father to get rid of hazards of warfare in the town. Being in the village, by the bank of Pagaladia River, Dipu met a village girl called Lakshmi and develop friendship with her. With Lakshmi he explored the geography of the region around the river. Pagaladia created some kind of mysterious inclination in the mind of Dipu. The legends related to Pagaladia, its un-resistible force, its madness, disparaging nature etc. were told to Dipu by Lakshmi. Dipu felt some sort of oneness with carefree wild natured Lakshmi. In the first half of the novel, the character of Lakshmi and the river Pagaladia were depicted more prominently.

*The first half of the novel depicted the childhood of Dipu, the ten year old son of Promod Deka who took shelter in the village due to the fear of war and Lakshmi, the wild natured girl in the bank of Pagladia. Lakshmi played the active part here. Her character is marked by the wildness of her forefather Birendra Choudhury*
and the unpredictable nature of Pagladia river. Dipu is just like a puppet following her footfall. Lakshmi is his friend, philosopher and guide.44

After staying a few days at the village, Dipu returned to the city. The second half of the novel resumed after a long gap. Dipu is now an engineer, and Lakshmi a widow with a son. With his new job assignment, Dipu stayed in Nalbari. Unexpectedly he met Lakshmi one day, when he went to supervise the work on Pagaladia. Once again they became intimate, but the cheerful and carefree Lakshmi was no more. Now she was more matured, more responsible. Her behavior towards Dipu became more like that of a mother. The intimacy with Lakshmi made Dipu feel a new kind of emotion. He became nostalgic and old memories seized him gradually. He even withdrew his interest from Doli, whom his father arranged for marriage. He gradually showed his disinterest to go to the city and became indifferent with his office work. Dipu was assigned with a big task of supervising the work of embankment of the Pagladia River to control flood in the area. But due to his indifferent attitude, he could not concentrate in his work. As a result, the contractors made a weak embankment that was swept away by the flood of Pagladia leaving the villagers in a chaos. The flood also swept away the small son of Lakshmi. Dipu could not come to console her due to the force in the river. Thus once again their relation was shattered.

The first half of the novel disclosed the un-resistible force of the Pagladia and the people living thereby, with convincing portrayal of Lakshmi-Dipu relationship. The importance of the river was immense here. However, the second half lost that importance and attraction of Pagladia. The river at the end performed the role of the fate in separating Lakshmi and Dipu. The novelist in its middle part mainly concentrated on disclosing the mental state of the protagonists.

44. Sarma, Satyendranath: Asamiya Upanyasar Gatidhara, p.247
Thus losing its regional values, the novel elevate itself to a psychological level in the second half. The Pagladiya also lost its connectivity in the main course of the novel while the novelist depicted the mental struggle of Lakshmi and Dipu. However, the novelist tried to re-establish this link through the death of Lakshmi’s son. The cordial relationship developed between Lakshmi and Dipu by the bank of Pagladia was swept away at the end by the flood of the river. The river was throughout present in the novel controlling the course of action, except in some part where the author concentrated more in the psychological aspects. The first half of the novel was more regional in nature with the description of all people and their living around Pagladia. Many of the minor characters like Mahidada, his mother, Bengani, Layantara etc., found in the first half, had not been developed inspite of the availability of enough scope of doing so. According to some critics the limited range of characters and the well-knit plot construction denotes much of the characteristics of a short story beyond its length:

"Upanuas khanat lekhikai ghatanawali su-sangbaddhabhabe binyas kara babe aru parswa charitra aru ghatanawalir bikas naghatuwa babe eta chute galpat koi bahu bechi dighal huwa swattweu chitigalpar paramparagata gathanik boisistyau upanyas khanat aase buli kaba pari."  

However the themes of the novel carry great importance as they reveal the rural social values of the discussed region. The concept of womanhood in a rural society is particularly upheld in the novel through the contrasting character of Lakshmi. Lakshmi at her younger age was totally opposite by nature what the society expected from a humble and submissive woman. But the cruel reality and traditional social values did not allow her to be so throughout her life. The character of Lakshmi reveals the fact that the bold-natured characters like Lakshmi

45. Thakur, Nagen (edited): Exo Basarar Asamiya Upavyas, p.638, Rajen Kalita’s article
are always the victim of social norms which compel them to accept the tradition of society and surroundings sacrificing their own wills and aspirations. On the other hand, the character of Dipu reveals a typical man under the social boundaries, though sensitive and sensible in nature. Thus through these two characters, the novelist beautifully draws the unfulfilled desires of human life. The sense of loss in human life has been intensified by the devastating move of the Pagladia River. With this, the heartbroken pictures of poverty, the activities of the corrupt officials and the remorse of the others etc. are highlighted as the themes of the novel.

Nirupama Borgohain’s another novel *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* also centers round the life and living of the people by the bank of Pagaladia River. The miserable life story of a beautiful girl called Pateswari in the Dhalkichi village by the bank of Pagladia has become the central theme of the novel. At the same time the novel parallelly deals with Anjali’s hope about the village that has been shattered. Anjali was the daughter of Paresh Kalita who was brought up and being educated in the city. She had a lot of hope and optimistic views about village where she always aspired to live in but the true picture of the village- its suffering, misery, poverty, moral degradation etc. shattered her dreams. The struggle of Pateswary in the village for her survival on one hand and the viewpoint and analysis of Anjali- these two aspects denote the main theme of the novel.

The easy-going simple minded beautiful Pateswari fell in love with Pujan and eloped with him to the city. After staying a few days together at a hotel, Pujan left her and ran away. The hotel boy Sabin helped her in her bad days. He arranged to keep her in a woman heritage home in Jalukbari, where she gathered worldly experience. After some days Sabin married her. Now Pateswari became the victim of the hotel owner. The crude owner proposed Sabin to offer his beautiful wife. Poor Sabin had no choice. His poverty and helplessness could
not but accept the offer. Pateswari was compelled to become a victim once again.

Pateswari became the mother of three children. Just before the birth of the fourth one, Sabin expired. Thereafter Pateswari returned to village, but she got no peace of mind. Here again a man called Lalit started disturbing her. But Pateswari saved herself this time. Her continuous struggle against poverty taught her to be bold enough to face life. However, the same struggle and its miseries ruined her splendor look. Her beauty decayed. Now she even sometimes get shocked to see she own image in the mirror. The bitterness of woman life is aptly highlighted in the novel. The second-rate treatment to the women by the prevailing patriarchal society is criticized by the woman character in the novel. Pateswari found it difficult to accept that the women are the victims all the while. They always tried to find a history in the character of a women, but men are always beyond any judgment. What a man did in the previous days was always ignored, but a woman had to suffer for her whole life due to the mistakes she committed. With reference to the character of Rekhadi, the novelist raised this serious issue through the mouth of Anjali.

*History? History? But only women have history, men don’t! Similar to Pateswari, Rekhadi also has history, but the man who ruined her life did not have any history. Unlike Rekhadi, his family life was not shattered by the history!*\(^{46}\)

Thus the uneducated village girl Pateswari and the educated city girl Rekhadi faced the same plight in this man dominated society. But they were helpless. Moreover Pateswari was compelled to send her daughter Sabitri to work in a household in city to meet financial needs. She was paid only ten rupees per month, whereas a boy servant was paid twenty or more. This unequal

\(^{46}\) Bargohain, Nirupama: *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar*, p.23
status of woman compared to that of man in society was themed in the novel. The theme of social disparity brought a kind of social realism to the novel. The characters like Anjali, Rekhadi etc and their observation of life upheld the concept of feminist ideologies. The beautiful regional aspects of the novel, the description of life and living of poor people in rural and urban areas etc. are hindered from the introduction of social consciousness. The novel also has some loose addition of characters and incidents; the novelist increased the volume of the novel by giving a detailed description of all these characters only to uphold the idea of social injustice towards women.

As a whole the novels deals with the themes of exploring the regional nature of a small village, the adverse effect of modernization and urbanization on the village life and its moral values, the social inequality between man and woman, the deprived status of woman in society etc. Unlike Borgohain’s previous novel, this novel is not a novel of the river Pagladia; rather it is a novel of the people around it. On this context it is a beautiful regional novel. The regional tone of the novel is further confirmed by the geographical description of ashrama of Bhagibaba, Gangapukhuri etc. along with the portrayal of the characters soiled to its native.

The industrial and urbanization has of course brought commercial prospect. But it also brought the end of the valued lifestyle not only in the urban areas, but the rural areas as well. The adverse effect of commercialization has axed the moral values of the rural living. The simplicity and virtues of the easy-going village people were buried; and treachery, mockery and corruption took birth in its place. The shattered human relationship and disloyalty grabbed the village people. Lives became harder in the village. Acquiring a square meal became difficult for the villagers. The economic condition of the villages in the post-independent period was depicted in the novel. For survival, the poor people
moved to the cities. Gobinda Prasad Sarma observed that ‘the novel was depiction of the economically backward village people migrating to the cities for livelihood and facing there cruel realities of life’.

Moreover the novel aims at analyzing and experimenting various socio-economic obstacles faced by the women in a society. This issue was exposed through the chief female character Pateswari. But no attempt was made to correct any of the social follies. The novelist remained quiet only in exploring those issues and left it for the awareness of the readers.

Silabhadra’s novel *Madhupur* which was written on the backdrop of the semi-urban area of Gauripur, in the district of Goalpara does not carry a well maintained plot. The novel reflected various episodes of developing Madhupur area in the early fifties immediately after independence. The diverse incidents and episodes were self-sufficient, yet they were connected intently by the regional nature of the place. The main themes of this novel are social realism and changing values of time.

The influence of Indian independence movement and the downfall of the feudal system brought a typical change in Madhupur region. The common poor people turned up with new hopes and aspirations who so far were dominated by the aristocratic power of the landlords. They were motivated by the progressive thinking of the new generation. They were no more ready to accept the tyranny of their lords as the will of God. Education spread all over, many engaged themselves with trade and commerce with the changing scenario of the place. Many grabbed the opportunity of getting government jobs. The old wealthy generation with all their aristocracy and idleness was unable to compete the new progressive minds. With their fixed income from the tax-revenue, the landlords

could not maintain their lifestyle. Their life became stagnant and they were left behind in the race of life. However, these landlords did never accept the same. Neither could they gain the benefits of the education and industrialization; nor were they able to maintain their aristocracy. Their vanity and pride turned to depression. Satyendranath Sarma rightly observed that the main theme of the novel is to disclose the decay of the feudal society and the emerging of the new progressive class. There were two distinctive classes of people— one powerful earlier but at the edge of ruin now; and the other which was oppressed before but now shaped their own fate with the help of their intellect and progressive minds. Sarma with beautiful words discusses the downfall of the so called aristocracy.

The novel also discussed the influence of changing time. Nothing is permanent in this world, neither power nor position; but one who is ready to accept the changes in due course of time and proceed ahead with it can progress in life. The novelist produced the changing scenario of the Gauripur area in the late 1940’s.

Madhupur is not a historical novel of the Gauripur region, neither the author attempted to do so. Nor it was a place of historical importance. Yet, the novel bore a beautiful impression of time on the place and the changes it brought along with. The novel is indeed a type of historical occurrences in small episodes. It deals with the decaying history of a once powerful generation and the rise of the common people with new insight and outlook. How the impact of the Second World War ruined the existing feudal system ending the miseries of the poor is wonderfully presented in this novel.

Another novel Ahatguri is a close and minute observation about a small village called Perperia turned to a town called Ahatguri. This happened under

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48. Sarma, Satyendrnath: Asamiya Upanyasar Gatidhara, p.263
the influence of urbanization when the National Highway-32 was being constructed through that village. The social and economic evolution of this newly developed place, its social life and living, installation of urbanization and modernization, the undignified social and ethical values as its result etc. are the themes of this novel.

During the time of construction of the National Highway-32, the calm and quiet Perperia suddenly became boisterous and lively. The highway passed through this small village. The crowd of workers, the noise of vehicles etc. broke the silence of the place. The big banyan tree by the bank of Gadadhar River became the convenient place for the workers and the travellers to rest. Many small business establishments emerged nearby the tree that spread rapidly and tuned to a big market area. The banyan tree was the centre place of development for which it was labeled as Ahatguri (the spot of banyan).

Between 1948 and 1955 the new town emerged out of a small village. Under the influence of urbanization, Ahatguri became the centre not only of trade and commerce but also of education and culture. Many rich people from outside the town came for business and became resident of the place. On the other hand, the old native dwellers almost vacate the town selling their land and moving to other places. Those who are still there were in pathetic condition, as if they were unable to keep the fast pace of changing time. The issue of migration towards the urban area and the old traditions giving away to the modernism is yet another theme of the novel.

The original inhabitants of Peperiya had vanished. None know where they have gone. None can say whose fault it was- their inability or their lack of foresightedness. However, the truth is that they have accepted their defeat in front of those outsiders.
who are more capable and more intelligent. They have retreated.

This is nothing new. This is the trend of history.49

Along with modernization and urbanization came its virtues and vices. Ahatguri became a big town. Social, economic, cultural and educational advancement took place there. School, office, buildings etc. were established as a mark of progress. However, the general human values like simplicity, generosity, loyalty etc were gradually vanishing from the society. These values were replaced by vanity, corruption, treachery, hypocrisy etc. Human selfishness and self-centeredness affect the lives of the wise people. As a whole, human became more mechanical in the new world. All these changes are due to the impact of urbanization, according to the author.

However, the novelist was successful in presenting the incidents and characters under observation, though all came from his own personal experience. His microscopic observation and description of the native of Perperia and their miseries were not sympathized at all; nor did he blame the adverse influence of urbanization. With an unbiased observation the novelist upheld his theme in the novel. There lies the success of Silabhadra as a novelist. The novelist beautifully presented the impact of time and influence of urbanization in Ahatguri.

Like Madhupur and Ahatguri, the other novel Agamanir Ghat also failed to deal with a well-knit plot structure. However, the novelist, once again, successfully presented his theme of changing values of human society along with the influence of urbanization and changing time. Agamanir Ghat was a quiet spot on the bank of Gangadhar River. Suddenly the place became a busy one under the influence of industrialization, as the workers gathered there to collect stones from the depth of the river. The crowd of contractors, workers, boatmen, drivers and the noise of trucks and other vehicles made it a centre of business

49. Silabhadra: Ahatguri, p.51
place. The new look of the place, the difficulty and complexity faced by the natives of that area, the congregation of various people coming from all around and their mixed ideology etc. were disclosed in the novel. With these were presented the socio-cultural, economic and political aspect of the Gauripur region. The novelist successfully highlighted all these aspects by presenting a series of episodes and various characters installed therein. All these characters and the incidents helped the novelist to explore the true nature of the region. Like Wessex in Thomas Hardy’s novel, Silabhadra concentrated his focus in the Gauripur region, as if discovering each part of the region and exploring its man and manner is the chief aim of the novelist.

Mamoni Raisom Goswami’s *Dantal Hatir Uniye Khowa Hawda* is another noteworthy regional novel in the history of Assamese literature. This novel is themed on the decaying tyranny of the orthodoxy in the Brahmin families of the Amranga Satra in Jagaldia at South Kamrup. Those religious heads and their families gained social, political and economic power and position in the contemporary society. But due to their rigidity and unprogressive nature, those wealthy classes met their doom. The main theme of the novel is beautifully symbolized in the title of the novel. Dr Gobindra Prasad Sarma analyzed that an elephant with tusk suggests strength while the howda on its back hints at the richness of its owner. But that howda is now worm eaten which speaks of the waning glory of the wealthy owner. The theme of the novel is thus suggested by this title.  

The social inequality and social injustice towards women also stood as another theme of the novel. Women became the victim of social conventions. Giribala, Durga, Saru Gosani, Iliman are examples of oppressed woman characters. The unmarried old girls were considered as burden and shame for

50. Sarma, Gobinda Prasad: The worm eaten howda of a Tusker. Indira Goswami (Mamoni Roysom): A critical study of her writings (ed), Malaya Khound, p.59
the family. Even the women of those wealthy families were not allowed to go outside the household boundaries and met outsiders. Durga was made responsible for the premature death of her husband. The widow in that period had to live a life of hell. They were deprived of hygienic living, healthy eating and the minimum luxuries in their life. Girls were even deprived of basic education in the schools as the customs did not allow that. The pathetic conditions of those unfortunate women were vividly portrayed in the novel. However the novelist did not try to make a revolution against this issue. The male dominated social customs were simply accepted by the unfortunate women. Male keeping more than one wife hurt them, but they never opposed. They were sad, but not vindictive. Women were portrayed graceful with all feminine tolerance. Bound by orthodox customs, characters like Guimenni etc. accepted all injustice bestowed on them by the male.

The influence of freedom struggle, the use of intoxicating kaani by the Assamese society and its adverse affects, government’s aids to remove this social evil etc. also appeared as the sub-themes of this novel.

Another strong and unconventional novel by Goswami is Nilakanthi Braza, which depicts the unexplainable pain and suffering, and the malicious reality of the so called holly places like Brindaban etc. that was experienced by a widow called Saudamini. The novel exposes the other side of the hindu religious places which are generally considered as pious. The novelist highlights the oppression and domination on the widows who stayed in Brazadham as Radheshyami. The poor widows, ignored by their social tradition, came to the holy place to lead a peaceful leaving in the rest of their life. But the cruel social system did not let them do so. They became the victims in every step of their life, even in this so called holy place.

This beautiful novel of Mamoni Raisom Goswami aims at revealing the bitter truth of the dogmatism of Hindu tradition and the inhuman customs
bestowed on the poor and helpless people in the name of religion. Corruption, treachery, dishonesty at each level of the society and the lack of security for woman, basically the widows, in such a society form the chief theme of the novel. The novelist mercilessly presented her observation of sorrows and sufferings of the Radheshyamis in creative genre that she had experienced in the Brazadham. Translating Kamala Ratnam’s comment on the theme of the novel, Dr. Namita Deka said that Nilakanthi Braza was an artistic outcome of the novelist’s gathering of experience from Brindaban and other religious places. The novel was a subtle portrayal of the untold story of the young widows who were living an unfortunately deprived and unnoticed life, only busy in accumulating a few rupees for their own funeral after death. This is an unbelievable story, but true. The novelist’s attempt to write on this theme was no less than announcing a crusade against the women’s agony.\textsuperscript{51} The novelist launched this crusade through the rebel of Saudamini, a high caste hindu widow who fell in love with a Christian man but could not dare to marry him. The work of nun could not bring peace to her mind. She came to Brazadham looking for a little peace of mind; but got shock to witness the dirty picture of physical abuse done to the young widows taking shelter in the Ashrama. Saudamini was not ready to accept this life. She accused Raichoudhury and others for such injustice and stood boldly against it. However, she embraced her death to establish her protest.

Thus a close discussion of the regional novels in Assamese literature reveals that they are rich with varied themes, though the basic idea is to highlight human relationship with the nature and their life and living amidst it. Truly speaking, the village life or the rural life became the chief matter of presentation in the regional novel. However, they also insisted on the impacts of changes that the rural areas experienced due to industrialization, urbanization and modernization.

\textsuperscript{51} Thakur, Nagen (edited): \textit{Exo Bachcrar Asamiya Upanyas}, Namita Deka’s article “Manoni Raisom Goswamir Upanyas”, p.662
The contemporary socio-economic and political scenario like war, freedom movement, class division, corruption etc. have also found place as themes in the regional novels.

3.4: TECHNIQUE

The Assamese literature, basically the novel, is the outcome of the influence of western literature. Eventually it also draws its inspiration from Bengali literature which was “the first Indian literature to be influenced by the western development.” With the development and growth of Assamese novel, it also experienced a kind of variation in regard to its technique along with its themes. The experiments with themes and technique are seen more in the post-war period compared to that of its prior age. Discussing the technique of Assamese novel, Dr. Krishna Kumar Mishra wrote:

“The history of the development of Assamese novel is similar to that of the growth of western novel. Starting from Gohain Baruah and Bezbaruah to the days of Birinchi Kumar Baruah, the novel followed a typical set pattern. A well-set story, a suitable background, and a few characters were the asset of the novel in these days.”

However the post-war turmoil in the socio-economic and political sphere also brought noticeable changes to the field of Assamese novel. The novelist, being the part of the prevailing society, witnessed the social changes and adopted them to incorporate into their writing, for which they introduced and experimented with new themes and techniques. Along with the introduction of new themes

52. Kabir, Humayun: The Bengali Novel, p.3
53. Mishra, Krishna Kumar : Birinchi Kumar Baruah and Prafulla Dutta Goswami Upanayyas, p.23
into their novels the post-war novelists also brought about significant changes in the art and technique of the novel.\textsuperscript{54}

Rajanikanta Bordoloi’s \textit{Miri Jiori} was written in the early age of the growth of Assamese novel. As a matter of fact, it is much conventional in regard to its themes and techniques. As it is being observed that the initial stage of the modern Assamese novel, however, was mediocre so far as technique was concerned. The novelist concentrates in a conventional love story of Janki and Panei that undergoes a lot of challenges and finally meets their doom. However, while doing so, the novelist’s pictorial details of the tribal customs of the Miris and their relations with the plain Assamese is commendable. Written in a simple narrative, this novel is not technically perfect; but one should judge it only from the view point that it has given a perfect start to the field of Assamese regional novel.

Nabakanta Baruah’s \textit{Kapiliparia Sadhu} is a perfect embodiment of theme and technique for the genre of regional novel. The novelist employed his poetic genius to write out this biographical novel. In his precise novel, the novelist establishes that environment and setting always serves a great purpose in the development of events and characters of the novel. Baruah has, in true sense, created a regional novel. The novel basically tries to explore the mystery in nature and its mysterious relationship with human world. Hence a lot of unnatural and unreal events and circumstances have been introduced here. The novelist makes excessive use of marvellous for which he is often criticized. The novelist did not concentrate much in the development of character. In the attempt to establish the nature-human relationship, Baruah’s protagonist remains mysterious and ambiguous.

\textsuperscript{54} Deka, Umesh : postwar Assamese Novel, p.79
Nirupama Borgohain’s *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* and *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* are written in conventional narrative form, with simple poetic language, the novelist brings home the lives of a handful of characters living and being controlled by nature. The novelist has drawn the mysterious nature of Pagladia and with it the character of Lakshmi. The novel is well planned and well executed with limited number of characters and incidents for which it contains certain characteristics of a long narrative story. The second half of *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* is essentially psychological, showing a little influence of stream of consciousness technique, while disclosing the mind of Dipu. The novelist has put special attention in the development of characters. Her Lakshmi, Dipu and Pateswari are finely grown up characters that establish the novelist’s excellence in art of characterization. Most importantly the novelist uses the river Pagladiya as the leading character of the novels. Apart from it the use of symbols, marvelous, allusions etc. and the use of poetic language make both the novels beautiful addition in the field of Assamese literature.

Silabhadra’s novels, though traditional in nature, have employed modern techniques. *Madhupur* and *Agamanir Ghat* are written in autobiographical method in a first person narrative, whereas *Ahatguri* is written in third person narrative. Silabhadra did not develop a well-knit plot or storyline in any of his novels. Rather they project some episodes of his experience in bits and pieces. The novelist used flashback technique by recollecting the past events. So far as the art of characterization is concerned, there are hardly any well developed characters in his novel. All of his characters are profile characters- half drawn and incomplete. His characters are led by the circumstances, not that the characters lead the circumstances.

Mamoni Raisom Goswami is probably the most successful and most celebrated novelist in terms of using techniques among the discussed regional
novelists. She is excellent in her portrayal of characters, use of symbols and marvelous. Her novel *Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda* and *Nilakanthi Braza* are the masterpieces of in the list of Assamese novels. The title *Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda* itself is symbolic that reflects the ruin and decay of the ancient institution of Satras and its power. The novelist uses other numerous symbols along with the characters like Giribala, Jagannath the elephant, Indranath etc. with symbolical significance. Goswami’s novels are essentially poetic, though she never wrote poetry. Her *Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda* is like a long poem packed with beauty. Use of similes, imageries, allusions and symbol etc. made her novels packed with beauty. Goswami is an excellent character portrayer. She created memorable characters like Saudamini, Giribala, Durga, Indranath and many more. Most of her strong characters are modern in their outlook and a rebel to the orthodox dogmatism. She brings or tries to bring a social revolution through her rebellious characters. Goswami also executed the stream of consciousness technique to disclose the inner self of her character. All of her novels are based on social realism.

The Assamese regional novels have essentially developed various conventional as well as experimental techniques. The use of technique, which adds to the enrichment of these novels, has a great scope of illustration. Hence, this brief introduction needs elaborate discussion, which is done in the fifth chapter in a comparative form with that of Thomas Hardy.

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