Bengal and Assam, the two neighbouring states cover a vast stretch of land in India and these two states share great many similarities in respect of literature, religion, language and culture. Even though significant similarities may be noticed in the lifestyles, rituals, behaviour, yet life may not be viewed always as smooth as well as uniform, for life has to face problems also in its course. This is specially applicable in case of women, whose problems are almost the same, irrespective of all the regional differences.

Our study attempts to find out various problems of women's life both in Bengal and Assam as they have been reflected in the novels of both the literatures till 1950.

Discrete studies of novels of these two areas have been a subject of discourse since 1970. Comparative study of novels of Nirupama Barghohain and Ashapurna Devi's Assam Aspects of Social Novel Aru Nar Charitra: Eti Tulanamulak Adhyayan by Rita Choudhury, Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay Aru Birinchi Kumar Barua's Upanyas: Eti Tulanamulak Adhyayan by Binita Bora etc may be cited as significant studies in this respect. Yet no systematic and objective study, specifically on the problems of women in the novels of these two areas have been attempted so far. Our proposed study might be regarded as a humble attempt to make a comprehensive evaluation of the problems of women in these two areas viz. Bengal and
Assam. The title of the dissertation is given as *Problems of Women as Depicted in Bengali and Assamese Novels (Till 1950): A Comparative Study*.

For the convenience of discussion our study has been divided into six chapters. Chapter-I has been named as *Review of Status and Problems of Women from Vedic Literature up to Modern Age*. In Vedic era, social status of women was in satisfactory level. But when the feudal system took place, the position of women got compressed. After this influences of various *Smriti-Sastras*, male dominated feudal system, attacks of foreigners, Darsana of Sankaracharya etc. created many problems in women's life. The literature of this period is a witness to the women's attempt to free herself from this subjugated position. Of course, it may be seen that many social rules and customs of Hinduism could not influence the social system of Assam as it strongly displayed the influence of the matriarchal tribal social structure over it. With the progress of time, however, in Assam also problems relating to women and her position occurred. In the modern period, social reforms in India encouraged women for their education and liberation, and it resulted in a new women consciousness. The regressive pull of male-chauvinistic society, the inborn simplicity of the female sex, and last but not least the clarion call of newly inspired world where women share the same position with the male — all these now were focused in the novels of this period.

Chapter-II has been captioned as *Bengali and Assamese Novels and Novelists (Till 1950)*. This chapter endeavors to examine the growth
and development of the novels of both the literature under different influences such as the Renaissance, Western Education and Socio-economic Revolution etc. In the light of this discussion, we have tried to examine the women’s question as it has been reflected in the novels since their inception. The novels of Bankimchandra, Rabindranath, Saratchandra etc. in Bengal and Rajanikanta Bardaloi, Dandinath Kalita, Daibachandra Talukdar, Birinchi Kr. Baruah (Bina Baruah) etc. in Assam have been taken up for a focus on women’s problems as they captured these significant novelists of the period.

Chapter-III, entitled as Women’s Problems from the Perspective of Social System and Values, attempts to search the root of the problems faced by women. It has been seen that the problems of women are more in Bengal than in Assam, and it is due to the difference in concerned social systems. Focus has been made in this chapter on the various social problems of women, specially the problems of the widow, child marriage, polygamy, dowry system etc. as they have been dealt with by different novelists of the two literatures.

Chapter-IV has been entitled as Women’s Problems from the Perspectives of Marriage, Love and Friendship. Here problems in the lives of women in these two areas have been examined objectively. In case of relationship, problems created by the presence of the third person, castes, socio-economic condition etc. can be specially mentioned. It has been seen that women’s problems in such fields have been highlighted more extensively in Bengali novels than in Assamese novels.
Chapter-V, *Women's Problems from the Perspectives of Economic Life*, has dealt with the economic condition and economic problems of women in Bengal and Assam. Here we may notice that the economic life of women was in good position in ancient times, but in the subsequent era, many problems arise in the economic life of women especially due to the social structure. In Bengal, novelists did not sufficiently highlight the picture of problems of women in case of economic self-reliance. On the other hand, in Assam, the novelists highlighted how the women move forward by struggling in the midst of many problems along with family responsibilities. Prabhavati of Dandinath Kalita and Tagar of Birinchi Kumar Baruah (Bina Baruah) are the prominent examples in this case. With this, painful picture of women affected by economic crisis can also be mentioned. It has been seen that economic condition of Assamese women as compared to Bengali women has always been in the satisfactory level as described in the novels of two areas.

Chapter-VI, *Review on the Problems of Muslim and Indigenous Women and Prostitutes*, has also highlighted the problems of Muslim and Indigenous women, along with the problems of the prostitutes or sex-workers, as they have been represented in the concerned novels.

In Chapter-VII, *Conclusion*, it has been seen that neither the novelists of Assam nor those of Bengal have offered the right path to get rid of these problems of women in these two areas. The women, as they have been depicted by the novelists, are not free from old perceptions and they are thoroughly dominated by superstitions and that is why they remain ever
subjugated. It is true that the novelists are not pointing out any proper solution to these problems, but their indirect and slender attempts in such regards too should be underlined as something valuable or significant.

It may be mentioned that throughout our study we have chosen problems of women's in terms of novels only. These novels which are not directly associated with problems of women or which have eschewed the question of the women as unnecessary have been carefully kept aside.

We have adopted both the Oriental and Western methods of criticism in our evaluation of works. We have given the chapter wise introduction to the beginning of the chapter in conformity with the matter and at the end of each chapter, the whole discussion in that chapter has been appropriately summed up.

The methodology followed in the investigation in a combination of inductive, deductive, historical and comparative methods. In the back notes, we shall mention the names of authors, the names of the books, and the concerned page numbers only. Details such as year of publication, place of publication etc. would be available in the bibliography. In the back notes, 'Page number' would be abbreviated as 'P.', 'Published by' as 'Pub.', 'Edited by' as 'Ed.', 'Edition' as 'Edn.', 'Compiled by' as 'Cd.', 'Translated by' as 'Tr', 'Bengali Year' as 'B.S.' and 'Ibid' as used to refer to the same work. In that short of a situation, we have just mentioned in the back notes that the article is from the Web.
The extracts from the originated texts and criticism have been presented in Bengali and Assamese so as to retain the original resonance and spirit. Some Sanskrit quotations have also been used in Bengali transliteration. Titles and quotations of Bengali and Assamese works have been retained as they are. But the English quotations are written in English. And we did not use quotation mark. But inspite of much attempt those books which are not included in my works are mentioned in Appendix-I with books and author's name.

In the course of collectively primary and secondary materials, I must cite the genuine help of quite a few Libraries such as the National Library, Little Magazine Centre, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Rammohan Library of Kolkata and K.K Handique Central Library, Library of the Dept. of Bengali of Gauhati University, Guwahati. I also liberally used the Bijni College Library, Bijni, M.C. College Library, Barpeta; B.H. College Library, Howly. I am indebted to all these Librarians and extend my genuine gratitude to them. Without their assistance, my dissertation might not have been as it stands now. I would like to make special mention of Sri Indrajyoti Roy Choudhury, Dr. Pranjit Bora, Assistant Professor, Dept of English, M.C. College, Barpeta, Sri Debabrata Datta, Associate Professor, Dept of Bengali, B.H. College, Howly, Sri Pranab Bhagwati, Assistant Professor, Dept of Assamese, Bijni College, Bijni, Sri Arun Kumar Sutradhar, PGT-English, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, Bihar, for their invaluable help in my work. Mention must be made of my father and mother - whose inspiration and guidance made this study possible. I am also thankful to
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