Chapter I

NATURE OF BIOGRAPHY: ITS ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

Before going to trace the origin of Assamese biography and pass through its development, it will be better to have an idea of what biography is. Biography literally means writing about life, bios in Greek meaning 'life', and graphos meaning 'to write'.

According to John A. Garraty, a theoretician of biography and a biographer as well, biography is 'the record of life.'¹ He, however, notices that life may mean life of anything; and the record of life may include all the events of a life without any plan or artistry. So he defines biography as 'The history of a human life.'² The Oxford English Dictionary defines biography as 'the history of the lives of individual men as a branch of literature', as pointed out by Harold Nicolson, another theoretician of biography and a biographer at the same time. According to Nicolson, this is the most convenient definition as it includes three basic points of biography - history, individual, and literature.

2. ibid., p. 3
According to him, biography must be a truthful record of an individual's life for which it may be called history. It is also composed as a work of art for which it is a part of literature. As a truthful record, it is history; and as an art, it is literature. This is, no doubt, a convenient definition of biography. But even this, in ultimate analysis, shows some drawbacks.

Indeed, another scholar of this form of literature, Paul Murray Kendall finds fault with these definitions of Garraty and Nicolson, on the ground that in both these definitions, biography is looked upon as history. Kendall says, biography is neither 'history' nor 'the record of life'. For mere collection of some information of a man's life does not make a biography, record meaning only a plain collection of documents or factual accounts or events of life. Without a touch of art, a plain collection of documents or factual accounts or events of a life would not be a biography. Nor biography is truly history; because, after all, the records of the events of some individuals' lives alone cannot be history. History means something much broader. Paul Murray Kendall is so fastidious in his attempt to define the nature and art of biography that he points out how biography is also not a story of life, as often stated. For story means fiction; but biography is no fiction. According to him, biography is "the

simulation, in words, of a man's life, from all that is known about that man.\textsuperscript{5} Biography is a skilful imitation of a man's life, but not a story, just as it is not history, though based on reality.

After considering all these definitions, we may form a working definition of biography for our purpose. Biography is an artistic reconstruction of the events of life of a particular person. The events in a biography must be a skilful imitation of the events of a real life, for which we have called it artistic reconstruction. Artistic side apart, a biography is expected to reflect faithfully the personality and character of the subject. But even after these, one major point is left untouched. Man as a social being, has an impact on his society and time; and time and society, too, in their turn, influence him in some way or other. A serious biographer cannot ignore this action and counter-action of time and society on the life of the person. G. P. Sarma noted this aspect when he put forward a more complete definition in Assamese, which on translation would run as follows:

Biography is the artistic reconstruction of the events of life of a particular real person, reflecting the personality and character of the person and showing the impact of his society and age on him; and his impact, in turn, on them.\textsuperscript{6}

\textsuperscript{5} ibid., p. 15

\textsuperscript{6} G.P. Sarma, \textit{Jivani} (Gauhati, Asam Sahitya Sabha, 1974), pp. 4-5
As biography is the reconstruction of the events of life of a particular person of the real world, reflecting his personality and character and showing his impact on society and time or vice versa, it is similar to history. At the same time, because biography is an artistic reconstruction of a life, it has place in it of imagination, too. And here it resembles a novel. A biography, therefore, has a dual identity. In so far as it concerns reality, its identity is akin to history. In so far as it is based on art, and so on imagination, its identity is akin to that of a novel.

We may now come to the difference between history and biography on one hand, and biography and art on the other. History reflects an age or ages, a society or societies through the events of lives of persons. Biography, on the other hand, reflects only one man's life against the age and society. Another difference between them is that a biography that lacks a touch of art in it, is no biography. But art is not necessarily a characteristic of history. A good history shows always a touch of art in it. But even without a touch of art, there may be history. A historian's prime duty, therefore, is to concern himself with facts; if he looks to the artistic side also while assembling the facts, it will be an additional qualification of him as a historian. A biographer, on the other hand, must maintain a balance between art and fact. His work must be satisfactory as an art; and yet it must be authentic in presentation of facts. It is for this that Desmond McCarthy calls a biographer "an artist upon earth." 7

A point may be raised here about the difference between biography and art. In other words, we go here to the distinction between a biographer and an artist. Both the biographer and the artist represent reality or truth, of course. But whereas the main objective of a biographer is to represent reality even while becoming artistic, the main objective of an artist is to make his work a piece of art even while reflecting a truth.

We may bring in the simile of a photographer here. A photograph is an exact representation of an object; but art need not necessarily be an exact representation. The artist must have an eye on making his work appealing and pleasant even while portraying the real object. A biographer, therefore, resembles an artist.

On the other hand, a historian’s main aim is to preserve the facts and the truth behind the facts. In addition to this, if he tries to make his work readable and artistic, it will, of course, be all the better. But if he lays much stress on art ignoring the truth, then it faces the danger of being reduced to fiction. So the historian’s prime concern is the truth or fact - just as a photographer’s main concern is the exact object he wants to take a photograph of. If a photographer can make his object beautiful with certain skill even while keeping his object intact and untwisted, it is all the better for him. A photographer, therefore, is like a historian.

Lastly, we may go to the difference between a novelist and a biographer. A novel may also be the reconstruction of a
man's life, his personality and character. Like a biography, a novel, too, may highlight its central figure's relationship with the age and society. Yet biography and fiction are not one and the same. A novel is concerned generally with imaginary characters; whereas biography is concerned with real persons. All the events and materials of biography are generally real. There is a limitation in the use of imagination in biography. According to Paul Murray Kendall, the fiction writer, by assimilating his experiences and imaginations, creates a world to which he adds illusion of reality. On the other hand, a biographer recreates a world by assimilating the records of extrinsic reality to which he adds reality of illusion. We want a novel to be 'true to life'.\(^8\) We want a biography to be 'true to a life'.\(^9\) There is certainly a difference between the phrases 'true to life' and 'true to a life'. However, 'true' in both the phrases signifies not 'factual',\(^{10}\) but 'authentic'.\(^{11}\)

By now, it has been clear that to be a good biography, a work of biography must also be a work of art. And to be art, there must be imagination. But biography being the reconstruction of the events of a man's life, there seems to be no room for imagination. However, if a biographer places all the events or materials of his subjects' life in his biography

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8. ibid., p. 8
9. ibid., p. 8
10. ibid., p. 8
11. ibid., p. 8
without making any use of his own imagination, he would certainly fail to produce a good biography. That may not even be an assemblage of facts; but a chaos, as pointed out by Paul Murray Kendall. After all, from a ledger book of the events and incidents of a person's life, one cannot conceive the personality and character of him. To reflect the personality and character along with the events of life of the subject, the biographer has to present some strictly selected events in a systematic way. The biographer must have the power of selection; and he must present such selected events in such a way that it recreates the character and personality of the subject without twisting or mutilating it. For this, the biographer must be an intelligent and imaginative person who has not only a selective power but also a literary ability with a sense of technique and style.

Now, even after knowing what is a good biography, it may not be easy to distinguish between pure and impure biography. In a biography in the true sense, in other words, in a pure biography, there must not be any unnecessary encomium of the hero just as there must not be any undue attempt at maligning the subject with a special motive. A true biographer tries to reflect his subject just as he is in reality. The aim of the biographer of a pure biography, is to reflect the true personality and character of the subject. The biographer, of course, has the freedom of expounding his own philosophy of life.

12. Ibid., p. 25
through the biography of his subject; but his subject, nevertheless, must be reflected there in his true shape, without ever being twisted, if the biography has to be a pure biography. Once the subject, his character or personality is twisted, the biography becomes impure. Thus Nicolson has divided biography into two main classes - pure and impure biographies.\(^\text{13}\)

The present form of biography was not attained as an outcome of a single effort within a day or two. The history of biographical literature in its present concept, is four thousand years old. During this long period, the form suffered many changes. But as a branch of literature proper, it was recognised only two hundred years back. In the English literature, the term 'biography' was attributed to this special branch of literature in 1683 A.D. by Dryden in the Preface to his translation of Plutarch's Lives. It was recognised as a branch of literature in the later part of the eighteenth century only in Dr Johnson's writings.

The tradition of recording of events of life, however, is very old. Biography originated in the human instinct of self-preservation. John A. Garraty has traced the origin of biography to the five thousand years old records of ancient Egypt.\(^\text{14}\) Three thousand years back, Asia-Minor and Babylon, too, had such examples of preserving records of events of life


\(14.\) John A. Garraty, op.cit., p. 51
after the death of the kings. But these are not proper biographies. For there is nothing about the personality, and character; nor is there any description of the man. They are not complete records of the subjects' life, too. Rather they bear exaggerated qualifications of the kings concerned. However, the aims of biography, and of these records, are the same - to perpetuate the memory of the subject. That is why, these records may be regarded as the earliest stage of biography.

Gradually these records came to include the deeds and activities of the subject and the important happenings of his time. In Persia, from the time of King Darius, these records included both the good and the bad sides of the hero. In India, good records were maintained since three thousand years back.

The three thousand years old edicts of India contain not only the events of the particular kings' reigns; they also contain short descriptions of their ages, their forefathers and so on. Sometimes these became lengthy. Of course, these too, were mere encomia of the subjects.

This earliest form of biography developed gradually. About five hundred years before Christ, we find scanty narration of the lives of great persons in the writings of Greek poets and dramatists. As these are not full accounts of the subject concerned, these cannot be regarded as biography in the true sense. For that matter, even Xenophon's Memorabilia which was written in the fourth century B.C., cannot be regarded as the first work of biographical literature of the world. It was not
intended also to be a biography. It was written only as a reply to the criticisms of the enemies of Socrates; and its different chapters were written in different times, all in defence of Socrates against the charges of the philosopher's enemies. Later, the scholars combined the different chapters into one book and named them *Memorabilia*. Naturally, it is neither a systematic study of life of Socrates, nor it is written directly to biographical end. Nevertheless, it is fairly informative of the life of Socrates. Regarding the life of this philosopher and his ideas - one has to turn to this. For this only we may regard it as a biography of some sort.

During the later part of the first century A.D., three great biographers appeared in Rome and helped in the development of biographical literature to a great extent. Among them, there is Plutarch, who was a Greek, writing in Greek; but who lived in Rome and produced there his immortal collection of biographies, *Parallel Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*. In this collection of fifty lives of the notable Greeks and Romans, the lives are studied in pairs of one Greek and one Roman, the two being set against each other in comparison. As an ideal biographer of impartial attitude, Plutarch recreates both the Roman and the Greek lives. By using even small details of his subjects' lives, he vivifies the personality of his subjects, which is an important task of a biographer. This is really the first pure biography of the world.

Two other important names in this period of Roman literature, are Tacitus and Suetonius who came to write after
Plutarch. Tacitus in his work, *Agricola* which is a biography of his father-in-law, concentrates only on the good side of the subject. Besides, it brings into light the subject mainly as an administrator, not as much as a man. *Lives of the Twelve Caesars* by Suetonius is the other work worth mentioning. As a biographer, Suetonius was inferior to Plutarch in his power of estimation as well as in literary quality. But through accurate, authentic and detailed events, he could still recreate a person in his true light.

In this way, biography took its shape in the later part of the first century and early part of the second century A.D. However, it did not have any development immediately. From the third century A.D., Christianity flourished in the whole of Europe in such a way that all the branches of literature came to be used then for the spread of this religion. As a result, biography, too, came to be used as a vehicle of spreading religion. Instead of taking the lives of noble men of political and social affairs or of the world of thought, as was done by Xenophon, Plutarch, Suetonius and Tacitus, lives of religious men now came to be taken for biography. And in these works, there is no attempt at putting forth only true, authentic or accurate events of the subject's life. Rather life-events of the religious saints in this period are exaggerated and dotted with supernatural elements with a view to attributing divinity to the human beings for the spread of Christianity. Such lives of the saints that had their hey-day from the third to the fourteenth centuries and that were written generally in
Greek and Latin, were commonly termed hagiography, in contra-
distinction to biography.

To show the inauthenticity and unreliability of
medieval hagiographies against pure biographies, we can do no
better than point to G.G. Coulton's *Medieval Panoroma* (1938).
Coulton mentions in this book how in the ninth century,
Agnellus, the Bishop of Ravenna, while writing a series of
saints' lives, says that whenever he ran short of facts about
a subject's life, he took help of imagination by the grace of
God, and with the blessings of his well-wishers, so that there
might not be any gap in these lives of the saints. It shows
very well, how the author of this type of biography did not care
much for authenticity and accuracy which is a must for a pure
biography.

In this context, we may also come to the Assamese
*garitas* - the lives of the *Vaishnava* saints of Assam, which came
to be written from the seventeenth century onwards. The main
objectives of these *garitas* also were to help in the spread of
*Vaishnavism*, through the stories of the saints. So the *garita*
writers who were devout followers of their *gurus*, whose live-
stories they came to write, took help of unbridled imagination,
exaggerated events as well as supernatural elements so that
they could attract the general reading or listening public
towards the super human qualities of these *Vaishnava* saints or
*gurus*. Such Assamese *garitas* of the *Vaishnava gurus* or saints
may also be called, therefore, hagiographies like their medieval
European counter-parts.

However, let us come again to the European scene. Critics are of the opinion that there are three hagiographies worth mentioning in this period, where we can trace some good qualities of biography. These are Vita Enseleini by Badmer of Canterbury; Vita Caroli Magni by Einhard, and History of St. Louis by Joinville, both of France.

Badmer of Canterbury had written Vita Enseleini in early twelfth century. In this work, Badmer excels in the tradition of hagiographies by using accurate events, presenting the events in an artistic way and using dialogue in proper context. For such marked qualities which are very rare at his time, Nicolson has called it 'the first pure biography', by an English man. Badmer used letters and his own recollections of Enseleini's conversations to highlight the man's personality and character. This work also creates a tradition of using dialogue for later biographers.

The other important biographical work, Einhard's Vita Caroli Magni was written in the ninth century France. Einhard, the monk writes here about the life of the French emperor, Charlemagne. Like Suetonius, Einhard divided the work into - accounts of Charlemagne's "exploits at home and abroad" and his "Private life and character". Here the

15. Harold Nicolson, op.cit., p. 22
16. John A. Garrett, op.cit., p. 60
author shows his talent regarding selection and scrutiny of the events of the subject's life. Besides, Einhard laid stress on accuracy. He wrote:

It would be foolish of me to say anything about his birth and infancy, or even his boyhood. For I can find nothing about these matters in writing, nor does anyone survive who claims to have personal knowledge of them. 17

Though the author could not quite successfully reproduce the career of Charlemagne, yet the portrayal of character and personality of the king has proved the writer's talent. As a result of this, we find here an impartial treatment of Charlemagne, not only as a ruler, but also as an affectionate father.

Coming to the third work worthy of mention, Jean de Joinville's Life of St. Louis, probably written in the early fourteenth century France, we find here that, Joinville also excelled in depicting the personality of the subject. Though he has described King Louis as a holy Christian, and his hospitality, charity and other qualities are also reflected, yet the subject's human foibles, too, are highlighted. Joinville has used anecdotes effectively and has reproduced his conversation with the king in a very satisfactory way.

These then are the few satisfactory works of biography from the third to fourteenth centuries, in the huge mass of

17. ibid., p. 61
hagiographies of generally bad and indifferent qualities. The process of development must be traced in these good works where we see a concern for the authentic, an awareness of the bad side of the life, too, and the human qualities of the emperors and the saints. We also see in the best of them, the art of selection and scrutiny and of presentation.

Coming from the European scene of the ancient and medieval period, to the English literature of the post-medieval period, we come across two good biographies, viz., Sir Thomas More by William Roper, and Cardinal Wolsey by George Cavendish. Roper's Sir Thomas More was written in the middle of the sixteenth century and was circulated in MS. for quite some time, until at last it was published in 1608 A.D. This is a biographical work where the events of life of one single person are dealt with as it should be done in a biography. However, as a biographical work written by a son-in-law, it shows partiality and undue praise for the subject. Many important facts and events of the subject's life are ignored. Presentation of materials is also not satisfactory. But from the point of its use of dialogues, it has a place in the development of biographical literature.

Cardinal Wolsey by George Cavendish, was written in the middle of the sixteenth century. This was also circulated widely in MS. and was later published in 1641 A.D. Like Roper's work, this work also was devoted to the events of life of one particular individual. As a biography, it is purer than Roper's work. For the author maintains here an impartiality
and presents the subject in an artistic way. Like a good biographer, he has been able to express his own point of view which is not motivated, as in hagiographies. From such points of view, this work is regarded as the first pure biography of English literature.

In this way, in the writings of these two sixteenth century English biographers, the difference between history and biography in one hand, and biography and hagiography on the other, was marked. It was a great development in the field of pure biography. However, neither these two writers, nor the scholars of the time, were as yet conscious of the difference between history and biography.

Even Bacon, a great scholar and thinker of England of the seventeenth century, regarded biography as a part of history. He wrote in 1605 A.D. that there were three types of history, dealing with "a time, or a person, or an action." "The first we call chronicles," he said, "the second lives, and third narrations, or relations."18

Not that Bacon alone betrayed in this his lack of knowledge of the difference between history and biography in the beginning of the seventeenth century. Even in the middle of this century, not only in England but also in the whole of Europe, neither biography was regarded as a branch of literature nor this term biography was invented. During this period, the word 'Vita' in

18. Quoted by John A. Garraty, op.cit., p. 70
Latin and its equivalent, 'life' in English, were used for biography. As mentioned earlier, the term 'biography' then came to be used for the first time by Dryden, in the Preface to his translation of Plutarch's Lives. In the same Preface, he defines biography as history of life of a particular person. He further mentions that the education and pleasure given by biography is better than those given by history. According to Dryden, the significance of biography is that it shows a man in proper perspective (both good and bad).

In the mean time, writing about lives of persons became so popular that all sorts of men could now be the subjects of biography. Even a person who was a thief or a bandit, could also be a fit subject for biography in this age. As Stauffer explains it:

Neither the living nor the dead were safe, and now not even the humble. No flowers were allowed to blush unseen ... ... 19

It was, to a great extent, the result of the importance of men as men, gained in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. England. As Pope, the greatest spokesman of the eighteenth century wrote:

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,
The proper study of mankind is man. 20

19. ibid., p. 79
20. ibid., p. 77
The best example of this could be seen in the biography published in 1714 called *The History of the Lives of the Most Noted Highway-men, Foot-pads, House-breakers, Shop-lifters and Cheats*. It was written by Alexander Smith. But the century also saw the two great biographies, *Lives of the Poets* (1777-1780) by Dr. Johnson and *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) by James Boswell.

Besides these, there is also *History of the Life of Marcus Tillius Cicero* by Conyers Middleton. It was published in 1714 A.D.; and it is a very good example of a Scholarly Biography based on fine research. It is a nice, informative and systematic biography of Cicero, the Roman politician, orator and rhetorician of the first century B.C. This biography shows the great tell the biographer took in collecting the huge mass of materials. But there is also the sign of the author's power of selection and scrutiny of the materials. With a discerning mind and scholarly discipline, the author places the materials systematically in order to reconstruct the life of his subject of many hundred years ago, thus giving rise to a new school of biography known as the Scholarly Biography.

Against Middleton's method of Scholarly Biography, Johnson had written his biographies from a broad base of intuitive knowledge and critical acumen in his series of biographies, *Lives of the Poets*. Whereas Middleton initiated intense research in the field of biographical writing, Johnson introduced the method of writing biography from knowledge and critical insight. He does not go to prove the veracity of his
statements about his subjects with the help of documents or evidences, though he takes all care to be truthful. After writing about the life of his subject, he comes to present a criticism of the works of his subject.

The best biography of the eighteenth century is, however, James Boswell's *Life of Dr. Johnson* (1791), which is regarded as the best biography not only in English literature but also in world literature. Biography reaches the highest point of development in this work by Boswell. As John A. Garraty says:

No, James Boswell was not typical. But he was nearly everything that a biographer can be. Since his day biographers have refined and expanded his methods, sharpened and polished his tools. They have not really pushed much beyond him. Biography, after 1791, had reached maturity. 21

Portraying the subject in the most vivid manner with not only the subject's main incidents of life, but also with the minute details of his day to day activities, makes this a unique work. Since in Boswell's work, English biography reached its peak of development, we could well have stopped here in our discussion of the development of biography in the West. But if not a better work of biography appeared after this, there evolved other methods which lent richness to this branch. These new methods, too, influenced Assamese biography

21. ibid., p. 96
directly or indirectly. So we shall have to trace further the
development of Western biography in these various methods.

In the nineteenth century, though most biographies
were either imitations of Boswell, or were mere jumbles of
enormous materials, two biographies stand out among them in the
early part of the century, viz., Life of Sir Walter Scott (1836–
38) by Lockhart and Life of Nelson (1813) by Robert Southey.
Though both these works were written in the method of Boswell,
using as much material as possible, and portraying the subject
as vividly as possible, yet the authors have been able here to
show their own talents. According to Nicolson, Lockhart's
Life of Sir Walter Scott is the second pure biography of English
literature. 22

In the later part of the nineteenth century, Victorian
prudishness stood in the way of production of good biography
which demands a capability to lay bare the weak side of the
great men, too. The atmosphere for the development of good
and pure biography that prevailed in the eighteenth century,
because of the century's special concern for man as man vanished
now. Biographies became too bulky in this age with enormous
mass of materials that were used with little selection and
scrutiny. Very often the subjects of these biographies were
studied against their age, for which, again, lots of materials
had to be used for portraying various aspects of the age. Such
biographies came to be known as Life-and-Time Accounts. In some

22. Harold Nicolson, op.cit., pp. 117, 118
other biographies, most of the letters written by the subjects were also used or appended to, for which these earned the title for them, Life-and-Letters type. Carlyle's *Life of Sterling* (1851) and Mrs Gaskell's *Charlotte Bronte* (1857) were deviations from the rule. Here we see how the biographers wanted to say something through their subjects while portraying the subjects' lives vividly.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, some biographers reacted against the Victorian tendency of using enormous mass of materials without any selection; and against the Victorian tendency to indulge in tireless panegyrics of the subject. The new tendency came in the period following the first World War. The investigation of Sigmund Freud and others in the field of modern psychology throwing light on the subconscious state of mind, opened a large field of inquiry that influenced biography, too. As a result, the new kind of biography that came to be known as New Biography turned out to be the record of inner life of man, and revelation of the aspects of character which were previously not explored or brought to light. The twentieth century author brought all these with brevity and a sense of wit, irony and satire.

The sign of such change was, however, first traced in the later part of the nineteenth century itself in the *Life of Carlyle* (1882-1884) by James Anthony Freuds. With a detached but satiric spirit, Freude brought into light Carlyle's gruff, selfish, domineering personality, even though Carlyle was then the deyen of all Victorian people. His *Life and Letters of*
Brasnoe (19%) also stands out for his vivid and unacademic approach. Edmund Gosse through his autobiography, *Father and Son* (1907) also contributed further to the new critical approach of Freude. This is a devastating criticism of his father in his youthful relations with him. Here Gosse with a detached and satiric attitude and with a sense of wit and irony, brings into light the Victorian prudishness of his father's character.

This development of the last quarter of the nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth century, had its final shape in the hands of Lytton Strachey. Lytton Strachey opened a new era in the field of biographical literature by his work, *Eminent Victorians* in 1918 immediately in the post-war period. In the Preface, Strachey emphasised the two-fold principles of selection and scrutiny which was to mark all his work. In place of the bulky Life-and-Letters and Life-and-Time types of Victorian biographies, 'with their ill-digested masses of material' and their 'lamentable lack of selection', Strachey proposed a 'brevity which excludes everything that is redundant and nothing that is significant'. But this reduction in size does not mean carelessness or random discarding of excess baggage. The biographer must search for the 'characteristic specimen' which will illuminate his subject. The pleasant reading biographies which were written in this spirit in this period came to be known soon as New Biography.

One branch of the New Biography is Intuitive Biography. In this type, personality and character of the subject are kept
intact; but for making the biography readable, the life-incidents or events and the words put in the subject's lips are invented. The events or words are so invented as to suit the character or personality of the subject which is never twisted. And in arranging such intuitive scenes, the author used a language of hypothesis, using terms like, 'possibly he had done this', 'may be he had said like this', and so on.

Actually even before Lytton Strachey's movement of New Biography, there existed such types of biography in Europe and America. The New Biography simply gave an impetus to the development of this trend. In the nineteenth century, the French critic Saint Beuve portrayed some characters of reality, based on his intuitive judgement. In the later part of the nineteenth century, Gamaliel Bradford's Types of American Character (1895), Emil Ludwig's Goethe (1920), Namara (1926), etc. written in the age of New Biography, and Papini's Life of Christ (1921), were all Intuitive Biographies of this type.

New Biography had another off-shoot in the form of Psychological Biography. With the knowledge of modern psychology of Freud and Jung, some biographers with the spirit New Biography took to analysing the lives of the subjects psychologically. The story of the life is built up in the process of psychological interpretation. The first successful work in this trend is Leonardo-de-Vinci (1910) by Freud. Leon Pierce Clark's Lincoln: A Psycho-Biography (1935) is another such biography.
Though New Biography, because of its comparative brevity and extreme readability, became very popular and was regarded by many as the last development of biography, yet soon the satiric and the ironical attitude as well as its use of imagination were found going to an undesirable extent. While for its readability like a novel, it earned the name of Novelised Biography; for its excess of desire for satirising the subject, very often making him pitiable, it earned the term Debunking Biography for it. New Biography in this way lost its very objective of portraying the subject in its true colour - with objectivity, and on the basis of facts. A new kind of biography, therefore, became the obvious need.

This need has been fulfilled in the latest trend which has come to be known as Super Biography. It is a compromise between the two extremes of the New Biography and the Victorian type of Life-and-Time Accounts or Life-and-Letters type. While readability, selection and brevity are maintained in this kind of biography, authentic facts in a systematic manner to portray the personality against his time, are also marshalled here adequately. We may point here, as examples of this type of biography, to John Adams and the American Revolution (1950) by Catherine Drinker Bowen.