

SYMPOSIUM ON “SELF, NATION, AND NARRATION IN COLONIAL LIFE WRITING IN ASSAMESE”

The department of English and Foreign Languages, Tezpur University, in collaboration with Sahitya Akademi, Kolkata, is organizing a one-day symposium on “Self, Nation, and Narration in Colonial Life Writing in Assamese” on 29th November, 2018. Interested students/research scholars/faculty members are welcome to attend. Only the invited speakers will present papers.

Venue:

Room no 11, Block G, Dept of English and Foreign Languages, Tezpur University

Timings

Registration: 9:15 am- 10 am

Inaugural Session: 10 am – 11.15 am

First Session: 11:30 am – 1 pm

Second Session: 2pm – 3.30pm

About the seminar

This seminar proposes to examine the practice of life writing in Assamese during the colonial period. By looking at different forms of life writing like biography, autobiography, diary, letters, memoirs, and journals, the seminar aims to understand the various ways in which individuals reconstruct the meaning and significance of their lives. The intricacies of self-interpretation in colonial life writing is closely tied to memory and the self's relation to the linguistic, regional, religious, national and global locations. There is a need to address issues of the construction of selfhood, the difference between living and telling about it, the role of facts in life writing, memory and personal past, freedom of narrative imagination, and so on.

The seminar also aims to analyse the links between life writing and nation and nationalism in colonial Assam. Colonialism, which brought about a change in the socio-political and cultural sphere of Assam, created a new understanding of social realities and of subjectivity and identity. In the face of events such as the Burmese Invasion, and the capture of Assam by the British forces, the uncertainties surrounding the Assamese language, for example, Assamese life writing emerged both as a vehicle for nation building as well a medium to depict the construction of nationalism and national selves. Colonialism and nationalism further created a new understanding of gender relations and the status of women. As women began to have access, though limited, to education and the public sphere, they developed a sense of agency and autonomy that finds reflection in their writings (for example, the works of Nalinibala Devi and Rajabala Das).

“Narration”, another important component of life writing is entangled with memory, verifiability of facts, and self-fashioning. It is neither simple nor easy to write about the facts of one's life accurately, to recall feelings, the motives of actions and, still more, those actions which one would have liked to accomplish. Life writing tends to be inaccurate or even at times false, as memories are always selective. Nevertheless, life writing offers supplementary and alternative histories of events

that are otherwise narrated through a seemingly objective prism. Life histories open up experiences of the self-in-society unrecorded elsewhere. They enable us to render more intelligible, on the one hand, the complex forces at work in societies and, on the other, to further reflect on major themes that dominate the state/nation at a given point of time: gender, modernity, colonialism, religion, social change, family and kinship, interrelationship between self and society, among others.

The seminar stresses the importance of “little texts” such as *Haribilash Agarwalar Atmajibani*, *Mur Jivani*, *Manik Chandra Barua*, *Ghunaram Barua*, etc., written by individuals who may not have been leading writers but have played a determining role in the creation of a modern consciousness in Assamese. These texts may also include biographies of national and international heroes/heroine written for children. These texts surround the great texts and contribute significantly to the understanding of the social and imaginative history of colonial Assam.

Some of the indicative subthemes are

Self and Life Writing in Assamese

Gender and Life Writing in Assamese

Nation and Nationalism in Life Writing in Assamese

Narrative Imagination and Life Writing in Assamese

Invited Speakers

1. Dr. Pradip Acharya, Retd professor, Dept of English, Cotton College (Keynote)
2. Prof. Bibhash Choudhury, Dept. of English, Gauhati University
3. Dr. Hemjyoti Medhi, Dept. of English and Foreign Languages, Tezpur University
4. Dr. Sanjib Sahoo, Dept. of English and foreign Languages, Tezpur University
5. Lakhipriya Gogoi, Dept. of English, Dibrugarh University
6. Dr. Sanjib Pol Deka, Dept. of Assamese, Dibrugarh University
7. Dr. Arani Saikia, Dept. of History, Dibrugarh University
8. Dr. Juri Dutta, Centre for Assamese Studies, Tezpur University
9. Dr. Jayprakash Ray, SMD College, Sivasagar

Coordinators

Dr. Esther Daimari, EFL, TU

Dr. Sarat Kumar Doley, EFL, TU

(For queries, write to estherdaimari@yahoo.in/dolesar@tezu.ernet.in)