Chapter I

Introduction: Linguistic History and Philology

1.1 Colonialism and language

From eighteenth century onwards, European states made their power visible through the gradual extension of officializing procedures that established and extended their hold in many areas. They took control by differentiating between private and public sphere; by recording transactions like sale of property; by counting and classifying their populations; by replacing religious institutions as the registrar of births, marriages and deaths; and by standardizing language and scripts (Cohn: 1995: 3). This process of state building in Great Britain was closely linked with its emergence as an imperial power. As India was the largest and the most important colony of the empire, some of these projects of modern state building were first worked out in the Indian sub-continent and then applied in England and vice versa. The study of comparative philology originated in India by the study of Indian languages. On the other hand, the model of modern education system in England, where resources for governing classes were produced, was applied...
to India and other colonies. As the British entered India, they tried to decipher and comprehend the colony by their own form of knowledge. They wanted to codify Indian ideas and knowledge that could later be useful for governance of the colony. The first step the colonizers undertook for collecting local knowledge was to learn the local languages. Classical language like Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic as well as vernacular languages were understood to be the perquisite form of knowledge for all others and the first educational institutions that the British established in India were to teach their own officials Indian languages. This knowledge of local languages helped the officials to communicate, control and rule the native speakers. Language was one of the important apparatus that was used by the colonial rulers in India to strengthen their imperialistic and cultural hold. Through the construction of literary history of ancient and medieval India and reconstructing modern Indian Vernaculars on European models, the colonial rulers tried to achieve their goal. Major cultural and political shifts occurred through colonial interventions that recorded linguistic functions, textual hierarchies and the context and distribution of literate skill in the country (Naregal: 2001: 2).
Colonialism accomplished these vast changes through the discipline of philology and the pragmatic agency of education policy. Given that language is foundational to all forms of cultural practices, focusing on language while mapping major shifts seems very important. The diversity of ways through which the liberal imagination underwent vernacularization in the Indian sub-continent as well as other South Asian countries needs to be mapped in order to understand the diverse trajectory of non-western modernity. Colonial rule brought about structures of authority based on cultural premises very different from those that has long prevailed. Establishing a common ideological space between the new rulers and their subjects assumed the utmost significance in colonial policy. And colonial ideology brought language, communication and authority to the forefront in an unprecedented way.

1.2 Colonial discovery of Indian languages
The belated British discovery of Indian languages was an exercise in power. For over a century and a half, British traders and soldiers were content to rely on interpreters and some knowledge of Portuguese. They began systematic study of Persian, Sanskrit and Bengali once they had direct political authority. But starting with
William Jones, the British developed from their study not only a practical advantage but an ideology of language as separate and autonomous objects in the world which could be classified, arranged and deplored as media of exchange. Different language had different histories; the histories of the people who spoke or used them to make sense of the advantage that native speakers had gained over others in the course of history. Just as it was beginning to wane as an exporter of textiles, India became a rich field for philological enterprise.

Persian was the first Indian language to get attention by the British as its knowledge became essential immediately after the battle of Plassey for recruitment and training an Indian army, and to develop a system of alliances and treaties with native princes to protect the company's territory. As the native translators were liable to leak company's secrets, it was considered better to learn the language and then use it. The prestige of the Persian language as the best language for a junior officer continued into the early nineteenth century. The study of Sanskrit which was regarded as the 'mysterious' language by the seventeenth and eighteenth century British, had started much later. The motivation for the British in India to learn Sanskrit in the late eighteenth century had two basis (Cohn: 4
1995: 26). The first basis was the eagerness to decipher the 'mystery' of the secret language. The second, practical and immediate necessity was Warren Hastings' plan to govern India according to Indian principle, particularly in relation to law. In order to establish what the Hindu law was, Hastings persuaded eleven pundits from Bengal to make a compilation of the relevant Sanskrit shastric literature. He also appointed N.B. Halhed to supervise the compilation and then translate the resulting text into English. As Halhed had very little knowledge of Sanskrit, he depended heavily on a Persian translation by a munshi, who relied on the pundits' Bengali or Hindustani explanation of the original text. The authenticity of the text came into question because of the process of the translation. William Jones, who had been appointed judge in the Supreme Court of Judicature in 1783, therefore, himself learnt Sanskrit and was getting ready to translate a law text from Sanskrit (Cohn: 1995: 29). Jones had the larger project of freeing British judges from dependence on the venality and corruption of the Indian interpreters of Hindu and Muslim law.
1.3 Genealogy of Indian languages

From eighteenth century onwards, the question central to the problematic of linguistic study was about the genealogy or the study of the origin and family of language. It was also the foundation of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, where a more scientific alternative to Bryant's speculative etymological method of language study was being formed. Examination of language structure together with external evidences such as archaeological evidence would form the basis of Bryant's historiographical method. His theory intended to place Biblical historical narrative on a pragmatic and sound footing. Later William Jones also tried to establish a relationship between different nations like Arab, Chinese, Indian or European with reference to their common origin with the sons of Noah. Moreover, with the study of similarities between Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit, he paved the way to the birth of the field of historical comparative philology. Meanwhile, apart from this type of historical study of language, contemporary European discussions of linguistic difference were already invested with a sense of national hierarchy.
By the middle of the nineteenth century, colonial authorities had formulated a very different analysis of the Indian languages. H.H. Wilson, the Boden professor of Sanskrit at Oxford and the author of 'A Glossary of the Judicial and Revenue Terms of British India' (1855), classified Indian languages into two classes: Hindustani and all others. He described Hindustani as an admixture of the original languages of Mohammedan conquerors with languages of Hindus. This language was used in government offices and courts and there were excellent grammars, dictionaries and other teaching tools. Hindustani was loosely spread over the surface of the whole country but unknown in rural areas. On the other hand, 'the different dialects of Hindus' belonged to clearly demarcated geographical areas. Given the purpose of the glossary, Wilson was chiefly concerned with languages that had become 'objects of official requisition', i.e., those used by the government and required for employment of civilian officers. He notes that 'the dialects of Assam', along with other languages were now necessary as well. Noting that the previous study of the languages of India was largely voluntary works of individuals, including the missionaries, he argued that these studies ought to be matters of urgent official concern. His approach and agenda was brought to elaborate function at the end
of the nineteenth century when G.A. Grierson, a colonial officer, brought out the Linguistic Survey of India.

The modern study of Indian literary history may also be traced to the same century, when it was researched and reflected upon by the early Orientalists. But it is significant that a modern literary historical sensibility developed only in the nineteenth century as part of a gradual movement from merely recording the past to rewriting it within a wider public debate about national origins, linguistic identities and political entitlements. Blackburn and Dalmia stresses that the growth of Indian literary historiography was simultaneous with similar projects to recover and reconstruct the past - the writing of historical novels and the institutionalization of the fields of archaeology, epigraphy, anthropology and folklore (Blackburn and Dalmia: 2004:2). But along with these projects, the systematic study of linguistics was also used in these nation building projects. Interestingly it was used for two contradictory missions of projecting a separate identity for the language as well as establishing a pan-Indian identity at the same time on the basis of the relationship between the languages.
1.4 Colonial language policy and Indian vernaculars

The appropriation of vernaculars into frameworks of western rationality and the subsequent introduction of English and colonial education were chronologically related within the transformative designs of colonial power. However, these did not follow a uniform pattern through the subcontinent. There were significant differences in the duration and sequence of the phases in different provinces. Whereas in Bengal, the orientalist phase preceded official education initiatives by at least a few decades, the establishment of British power at a relatively later date in western India meant the timings of the orientalist and education projects overlapped to significant extent in that region (Naregal: 2002). Likewise in Assam, the educational initiatives preceded to the process of reconstruction and initiation of Assamese language as a modern vernacular. The administrative and educational policy, especially regarding the decisions about the medium of instruction as well as the administrative language had long term implications as it affected the communicative capabilities and choices before intelligentsia of the region.
A vernacular in the pre-modern area may be defined as a language evolved locally from a classical language and which was used locally unlike the cosmopolitan nature of earlier classical language. According to Pollock, the history of vernacularization in the west and the east took similar dynamics (Pollock: 2007:21). The vernacularization process of pre-modern era may be broken down into three interconnected components: literization, literarization and superposition (Ibid: 23). In its general morphology, the literary culture of the Latin world was conditioned by the history of the language itself. Like the western counterpart Latin, written Sanskrit also starts in one country and then began its cosmopolitan journey. It was a kind of 'prestige language' used by the enterprising kings around South Asia for creating a courtly literature.

Earlier the Sanskrit cultural axiom emphasized that literature could be made only in a restricted set of languages, namely, Sanskrit, Prakrit and Apabhraṃsa (Pollock: 2007: 287). Only these three languages could be used as the medium of the main body of the text, whereas other languages were permitted to be used to produce an imitation of regional speech.
The literary history of South Asia was profoundly shaped by written textuality. However, the history of the written tradition was a socio-cultural phenomenon rather than a purely technological one. The development of written tradition in different vernaculars of the region covers at least three quarters of a millennium from around the late eighth or early ninth century when Kannada, Javanese and Sinhali attained written literarization, to the fourteenth and fifteenth century when written literary tradition had started in Assamese, Bangla, Hindavi, Gwaliyari and Oriya (Pollock: 2007: 304) This development was related to the influence of Sanskrit as well as the process of discontinuity from the language. For example, the importance and prominence of Kavya in Sanskrit influenced most of the vernaculars to begin their literary tradition with a Kavya. Those Kavyas were still performed orally, but it was an oral performance of a written text. Therefore, the written texts took a foremost position in the early literary traditions of the vernaculars.

1.5.1 The starting point
The problem of pinpointing the exact time of beginning of a vernacular is a complicated one. The different stages of
vernacularization like localization, textualization and literarization are not always distinctly visible. Generally, literary history of the vernaculars project a theory which presupposes that a language has to be developed enough before starting a literary tradition. For example, Assamese literary historiography always ascertains that the Assamese language was well developed at the time of Hema Saraswati or Madhava Kandali. (Neog: 1986: 18). Pollock questions that conviction about the ‘developmental cycle’ followed by the literary tradition of a vernacular. According to him, the development model works positive neither historically nor ethno historically for literature (Polock: 2007: 284). Similarly the problem of acceptance of the beginning of a vernacular by the local litterateur and linguists is another intriguing one. How categories of culture were created through the vernacularization process, why the memory of one textual beginning was erased in favour of another, and why a particular text was selected by a tradition to be preserved as primal are some of the very elements of vernacularization at work.

The initial remarks on the roles played by the vernaculars or the languages of the place as they were defined by the critics of the time were found in two medieval Indian texts. In Bhavaprakasana, a text
on literary and cultural theory written by Saradatanaya, a survey of language and region was incorporated at the end. In this list the author acknowledges the existence of six or seven languages spoken in the vast world where Sanskrit literary culture reigned supreme. The second text which deals with the role of South Asian vernaculars in the contemporary literary culture is the *Manasasolla*, a royal encyclopedia written by king Someswara of northern Karnataka in 1131. Since the languages of place were intimately linked to melody and rhythm, the choice of a language of place was similarly connected with genre. For example, a notable feature of the *Manasollasa*’s conception of crystallizing vernaculars is their restriction to particular genre or social contexts. Some kinds of compositions like *Satpadi* were to be sung only in Kannada, others in Gujarati. Some other compositions were to be sung in mixed languages, such as *Hamsapada*. In this composition, the first half should be sung in Sanskrit and the second half in a language of place. The social contexts decided the style, rhythm and the language of the compositions (Pollock: 2007: 302).

The representations of beginning within the literary tradition themselves and what they believed to be language may give an
insight about the vernacular. From this perspective, the counting of Assamese texts like inscriptions as specimens of Assamese literature in local literary historiography cannot be ignored. The reality of classical axiom of literary-language exclusion and its implications for the early history of vernacularity was confirmed by the inscriptive records where the hesitancy regarding the literization of the vernacular can be observed. In South Asia, attempt to affiliate a bhasa with the oldest possible linguistic period is also a hallmark of literary history. Assamese had no presence whatever until the end of fifth century when some deviation from Sanskrit grammar and some non-Sanskrit or local names were found in 'Sanskrit' inscriptions. After being used nominally for documentary purposes in the next five centuries, the first literary use of the vernacular can be observed in the tenth century 'Charyapada', where some elements of Assamese language were present. But at the same time, it must be noted that this particular text has also been claimed as the first literary work of Bengali, Oriya and Maithili language. While nomenclature like Assamese, Bengali, Oriya or Maithili has to be used to refer to the languages; the linguistic, conceptual and cognitive boundaries that underwrite such terminology must have been blurry until vernacularization itself was
underway and the work of sharpening language differences through production of early texts had begun.

1.5.2 Literarization of the vernaculars

When the regional languages first began to attain literary forms, they were used only for documentary idioms, such as the inscriptive records where Sanskrit with a regional tilt was used. But they were not considered to be worthy enough to be the medium of major literary works. They were located outside the mainstream literary sphere to the realm of the oral forms like songs and ballads. Oral literature, in different regional languages broke free from cosmopolitan tradition much before written literary works. Even after one hundred years of existence of literary tradition in the Assamese language, Sankaradeva and his contemporary litterateurs tried to justify their switch over to Assamese as the medium. They claimed to be well versed in Sanskrit. Still they had to write in Assamese for the benefit of women, sudras and chandalas who were ignorant and bereft of understanding Sanskrit. They did not dare to introduce new subject or theme or model even for their vernacular writing. Almost all the repertoire of Vaishnavite literature was based on Indian classical literature. The Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the
*Madbhagavadgeeta* and *Bhagavat Purana* were the major texts that were translated or adapted to Assamese.

According to a seventeenth century historiography, the Brajabhasha poet Nanddas “sang” the tenth book of the *Bhagavata* “in vernacular verse”. When the Brahmin reciters of lore and Bhagavata exegetes of Mathura complained to Vitthalnath, the spiritual preceptor of Nanddas about the possible disappearance of their livelihood because of the vernacular *Bhagavata*, he ordered Nanddas to immerse the entire book except the *rasalila* section to the river Yamuna (Gupta: 1947:146). In this account, the dispute concerns not the authority to speak spirituality in the vernacular. It concerns written vernacular literariness which threatened the literary-cultural power based on Sanskrit and a class of bilingual intermediaries. But in the case of Assamese language, the situation was more complex than *Brajabhasa*. When Sakaradeva started to propagate the neo-Vaishnava religion in Assam, he already contested the spiritual authority of Brahmins. To diminish their control over the spiritual texts, he had started his project of translating major religious tracts to a more common language. He had got the Assamese *Ramayana* as the model for his translation.
project, but he chose a language having more trans-regional appeal. In fact, his choice of the language Brajavali, a mixture of Assamese with some features from other North and East Indian vernaculars served two purposes. Brajavali gave a religious flavour to the texts as well as it became viable for exposure to the entire Vaishnavite community of Northern and Eastern India.

An expansion of the vernaculars in the ‘post-cosmopolitan era’ or post-Sanskrit era occurred but in an altogether different order of magnitude. The vernacular Assamese must developed from a regional dialect into an almost unified medium for literary and political discourse over Assam and its neighbourhood. Most of the intellectuals who cultivated the language clearly understood these spatial limitations and harboured no illusions about its universalization. They defined a literary culture in conscious opposition to some larger world and created a localized literature. Madhava Kandali, the fourteenth century translator of the Ramayana adapted the classic to local environment, language and culture. On the other hand, Sankaradeva, the fifteenth century Vaishnavite saint and litterateur of Assam must have larger aspirations about his
creation and his use of Brajavali had the potentiality of becoming trans-regional.

The objective dimensions of writing in vernacular against writing in Sanskrit were also registered within the subjective universes of the vernacular writers. To participate in the Sanskrit literary culture was to participate in a vast world of cultural communication and self understanding; to produce a vernacular version or alternative was to confine oneself to a smaller space and breaking with the outer world. Some took a middle path. They produced Sanskrit and vernacular texts simultaneously for reaching to the outer and the inner space at the same time.

The transition to the written or manuscript culture changed the mindset of common people about the authenticity and authority of literature. Earlier, vernacular literature was associated with orality and classical literature was associated with written culture. After being written, vernacular literature also entered the mainstream of literature. It had an authoritative and almost magical significance in oral societies. Manuscripts were kept at a sacred place and they were worshiped as deities. For the oral performer too, manuscript
was a means of legitimizing his oral text. Of course, none of the above should suggest a clean and permanent break between the oral and written. To the contrary, the ongoing interaction between the oral and the written constitutes one of the most remarkable and unique features of Assamese literary culture. The interplay between these two traditions was a complex scene where oral compositions could be literized and vice versa. For example the cases of the Ojapali tradition and the Kirtana may be analyzed. The Ojapali, one of the most popular performing genres of Assamese folklore, earlier used oral texts like Padmapuran and then converted it to written manuscripts. On the other hand, Kirtana, one of the most popular texts of the Vaishnavites of Assam, had been transmitted orally to the illiterate population despite having a written text.

In India, despised manuscripts were generally destroyed by immersing to rivers unlike the west where such manuscripts were burnt. But in Assam, we have seen the western as well as the Indian way for destruction of manuscripts. Kirtichandra Barbarua, an Ahom minister burnt a numbers of the manuscripts of Buranjis, the Assamese chronicles as it contained derogatory comments on his
ancestors. On the other hand, a lot of manuscripts were immersed to protect their sanctity during the Burmese invasion.

To employ the vernaculars in producing literary and political texts and to place those alongside classical languages required a new disciplinary focus as well as a new discourse on the local languages. These had to be developed in grammar and lexicography where a newly theorized category about the local language as well as its newly found cultural authority may come into being. But the vernacular philology was not typical to all the vernaculars of the region. In Kannada, Javanese, Sinhali and Tibetan languages the discipline of philology was flourished at the behest of the court elites (Pollock: 2007:396). But the North Indian vernacular intellectuals did not follow their South Indian counterparts’ suite. The history of development of North Indian vernacular philology had quite specific and much narrower routes. One of the most interesting facts about the development in the north is that no grammaticization whatsoever was produced in any of the vernaculars of the region. None of the local North Indian languages had a written grammar until the colonial period. Even in Maharashtra, where a number of Sanskrit grammars were written,
the Marathi language was almost entirely ignored. There is only a short list of Marathi case-endings included in a language manual in the fourteenth century. In Bengal, the Sanskrit tols concentrated around Nabadweep did not pay any attention to discipline the local vernacular as it was considered to be the language of the non-elite class. Except a vocabulary by Ruchinath Kamrupi (1810) in the early nineteenth century, there was not any grammatical or lexicographical work to be found in Assamese in the pre-colonial period. This absence may be the result of the interplay between several linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena. The conceptual haziness of the near Sanskrit languages, reflected in the fact that several languages including Assamese had no stable name. This may be one reason why the vernacular intellectuals in these languages were not interested in producing vernacular grammars and vocabularies. Moreover, most of the pre-colonial vernacular intellectuals were also very well versed in Sanskrit as this was considered to be the only suitable medium of education. The philology of vernacular was not included in the pre-colonial curricula. For example, at the tol of Mahendra Kandali, Sankaradeva studied four Vedas, fourteen shastras, eighteen puranas, the Mahabharata, fourteen Sanskrit grammars, eighteen kavyas and eighteen tantras.
and the medium of education was invariably Sanskrit (Neog: 1999: 24). Hence, the absence of vernacular grammar was not felt at that time. The status of the vernaculars was not very high and vernacular writings were generally meant for the unlettered and the lower casts of the society. Both Sankaradeva and Bhattadeva clarified that their translations and adaptations were mainly targeted at Stree or women, Sudras or lower casts and Chandalas or 'untouchables'. That said, there was no doubt a philological elaboration of these vernaculars which were not codified in written grammars and dictionaries. There were instances of critical assessment about spelling mistakes or grammatical mistakes in the Assamese manuscripts. Once, Madhavadeva, the famous litterateur of the fifteenth- sixteenth century complained about replacement of one consonant with another and vice versa by copyist in one of his manuscripts (Pathak: 1985: 9).

Around the same time, the vernacular writers began to alter the rules of the cultural theory game. The differentiation of the cultures of Place from the culture of placeless Sanskrit was elsewhere being made by means of the practices of the great way and of particular places. It is in the domain of literature and particularly in the literary theory of southern intellectuals that the rationality and regionality
found their clearest expression. The Kannada vernacular intellectuals for the first time redeployed the term *marga* to define the ways of vernacular writing. In Telugu literary culture *marga* and *desi* were used in the tenth and eleventh centuries to refer to Sanskrit and Telugu respectively. Not everywhere, of course, nor consistently were literary phenomena rethought according to the new cosmopolitan-vernacular distinction. The differentiation between the Sanskritized version and localized version of the vernacular literature was not always defined or followed. In Assamese, most of the medieval Vaishnavite litterateurs tried to follow the Sanskritized Ways. On the other hand, the deviations or deficiencies of their work were defended on the ground of the limitations of the writer himself. Madhava Kandali, in his *Ramayana*, defended the differences with the Valmiki *Ramayana* on two grounds. The first one was the incapability on his part to translate exactly – Birds can fly according to the strength of their wings (Sharma: 1998: 245). Secondly, Kandali asserted that the poet had to adapt some elements of his own as well as folk expressions or *loka vyavahara*. Hence the readers should not find fault with it always (ibid: 245).

The historical beginning of vernacular traditions had a strong sense of breaking with the past to produce a new cultural and
linguistic identity. It is almost everywhere promoted and practiced by those who exercised either political or religious power. The medieval religious consciousness and the religious movement widely known as Bhakti or devotional movement was the force behind the vernacular revolution. The Bhakti exponents in different parts of India used their local language as the base for their religious texts. Some scholars hold that the gradual separation of the emerging literatures of the vernacular languages from the high Sanskrit tradition to be traced to religious developments hostile to the Sanskrit based Brahminical tradition, against which the vernacular literatures made an undeclared revolution (Kaviraj: 1992). It is also assumed that the vernacular revolution is anti-Brahminical in nature. On the other hand, there is a second opinion which holds that the first opinion exaggerates the importance of religion in the vernacularization process. More decisive than religious affiliation as a factor in the literary language choice was the literary system as such, especially the requirements of genre and aesthetic register (Pollock: 2007: 424).

The study of early Assamese literary history presents some curious facts about the context of the beginning of vernacular
literature in the language. Here, vernacular literature had started much ahead of the advent of the *Bhakti* movement. The vernacular literarization of thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Assam were free from any preaching of the fifteenth century Vaishnavite literature. For example Madhava Kandali emphasizes that the *story* he describes is *loukika* or human story (Sharma: 1998: 245). Later, at the insistence of his spiritual mentor Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva edited this text by giving it an overall devotional touch as well as by adding two more chapters written by himself and his mentor. Most of the pre-Sankara vernacular writers such as Madhava Kandali and Haribar Bipra were Brahmins who initiated vernacular writings in Assamese. In fact, Kandali was the first person who translated the *Ramayana* into a northern or eastern Indian vernacular. Political patronage, rather than religious zeal prompted the early Assamese writers to use vernacular as their literary medium. *Barahi* king Mahamanikya commissioned Madhava Kanadali to translate The *Ramayana* into Assamese so that it could be understood by everyone – *sarvajana-bodhe*. Haribar Bipra and Hema Saraswati also mentioned their political patron's name in their works.
This argument does not imply that the new religious movements that arose at a later date did not have a substantial impact on literary cultures and their regionalization of cultural life. The point is to try to gauge these consequences with greater historical and theoretical precision. The hypothesis that the new religious consciousness and devotionalism in particular, constituted the very basis of vernacularization in South Asia makes it more difficult to understand the earlier or later religio-cultural transformations. A more detailed account of the literary history of different vernaculars in the second millennium would show that there were several vernacular revolutions. One was the cosmopolitan in its register and without the devotionalism as the *Ramayana* by Madhava Kandali. Another one can be defined by its cosmopolitan register and with the spirit of devotionalism such as the Vaishnavite literature in Assamese. The third may be termed as regional, both for the regional flavour as well as the non-Sanskritic desi idioms such as the *panchali* literature in Assamese. The second revolution is unthinkable and also not possible without the first revolution. The third one was going on simultaneously with the second one and it can be termed as a counter-revolution to the second one. These lyrical works, written for oral performances, neither followed Sanskrit literary dictum nor the
cosmopolitan raga system. They were also free from Vaishnavism which was the prominent trend in mainstream vernacular literature of that period.

It goes without saying that the trend toward vernacular polity was not everywhere uniform or similar. In general, the medieval polity acknowledged the political role of the vernacular languages just like the ancient emperor Asoka, who used different regional varieties of language for communication with different parts of his empire. As a form of political communication, Vijayanagara kingdom, for example, issued inscriptions in the languages of different areas that came under its rule (Pollock: 2007: 420). In Assam, pre-medieval kings used cosmopolitan Sanskrit language as their political language as they have diplomatic relations with other northern and eastern political states. The Hindu kings of Assam, who reigned from fourth to twelfth century, used Sanskrit for documentation. After Ahom and Koch Kings came into power, the choice of political language entered a different league.

A gradual vernacularization of political process can be clearly observed, most distinctly in the documentary text production but also
in the increasingly sharper definitions of geo-cultural landscapes in different forms of literary-cultural discourse. In fact, this dimension of the cosmopolitan vernacular as well as the *laukika* cultural and political values it represented may have been part of what the regional-vernacular revolution was targeting. It may also interesting to note that most of the Indian vernaculars were using poetry as the medium.

As a descriptive term in linguistics, the idea of Sanskritization merely points a set of processes whereby phonology and morphology of a language aspired to the condition of Sanskrit. It does not explain what this aspiration meant for language as a symbolic or social system. We know that northern Buddhists sanskritized their dialects in linguistic terms. In Assamese vernacular this trend is sometimes visible such as the early prose translation of the *Srimadbhagavatageeta* and the *Bhagavata* by Bhattadeva in the sixteenth century. Bhattadeva, a Sanskrit scholar and author, used Sanskritized Assamese language in both of his creations. He did not explain why he had to use such a prose style in his literary work which was not targeted for scholars but for the common illiterate people. But his fascination with Sanskrit may be associated with his training in the language as well as his desire to
protect the sanctity of the original text which might be 'diluted' with the use of pure vernacular linguistic features.

Colonial rule brought about the abrupt end of the previous period of gradual evolution of literary style as well as the language. It is well-known that colonial rule was able to alter textual norms, networks of patronage and dissemination, and the ways in which the natives described and assessed their world. The introduction of English as a part of the colonial language and education policy, and systematic study of the vernaculars were some of the apparatuses used by the colonizers in the sub-continent for the implementation of their larger project.

The social history of the Assamese language can be approached as a study of how the speech-community uses it and how the issues of political and social processes, authority and identity were attached to the status of the language in the nineteenth century. This thesis is concerned with the role of colonial knowledge in the construction of the language as a modern vernacular. It also tries to understand how the language was construed by the power of a foreign regime into the bounded institution.
1.6 Review of literature

The role of language in the making of a national identity has become a source of major discussion for historians, linguists as well as social scientists in the late twentieth century. They have placed language at the centre of the political interplay of administration and intelligentsia. The works of Benedict Anderson (1991) and Edward Said (1978, 1993) are indicative of such new beginning.

Recent research has shown some of the major cultural and political shifts in the nineteenth century India through the colonial philology. As the language is the foundation of most of the forms of cultural practice, the importance of focusing on language while mapping major shifts seems most important. The transformation of traditional societies into modern communities has been accompanied by corresponding linguistic modernization. One important feature of a traditional society is that it shows extremes of internal linguistic diversity. For example, a classical or foreign language may be used for administration and religious practices whereas common people generally use one or two varieties of local dialects. The gap between the literary language and the spoken one
tends to be reduced with the advancement towards modernity. Bernard Cohn (1985) and Stuart Blackburn (2003) have discussed about the nature of the colonial intervention on the languages of India.

Elizabeth Eisentistein (1979), Roger Chartier (1989) and others have taken the lead in interpreting the impact of print in the modernization of Europe. Recent works on Indian vernaculars have also stressed the need for the interdisciplinary study to understand the problem of vernacular better. These works have largely focused in the areas of colonialism, the cultural dynamics of the society and the intellectual milieu. These studies, too, have placed the problem of Indian vernaculars in the context of Indian nationalism. Christopher King(1994), Veena Naregal (2001), Sheldon Pollock (2003), Stuart Blackburn (2003), Anindita Ghosh (2006), Lisa Mitchell (2009), Farina Mir (2010), Gautam Bhadra (2011) and others discussed the transition process of different Indian vernaculars in the backdrop of colonialism and nationalism. They also deliberated on the role played by western education, print and local traditions in the shaping of the vernaculars.
In Assamese context, mainly three distinct trends of studies on the Assamese language could be noticed. Like most of the other Indian vernaculars, the linguistic study of Assamese had started only in the colonial period. In Assam it was coincided with the displacement of the language as an official medium. Simultaneously, missionaries and colonial bureaucrats started to deliberate to accord the status of Assamese - whether it was a dialect of Bengali or an independent language. The American missionaries such as Nathan Brown and Miles Bronson produced several language tools to prove that Assamese was an independent language which was greatly contested by colonial officers like William Robinson. However leading Assamese literati Hemchandra Barua opposed the missionary project of distancing the Assamese grammar and orthography from Sanskrit. In the late nineteenth century, this study was mainly concentrated around its relationship with the Bengali language. Contemporary litterateurs like Gunabhiram Barua, Lakshminath Bezbaroa and Hemchandra Goswami led these discussions and debates. In the early twentieth century G.A. Grierson projected the Assamese language in a pan-Indian context. Later linguists like Kaliram Medhi (1936), Debananda Bharali
(1912), Banikanta Kakati (1941) and others discussed about the origin and the evolution of the Assamese language.

The second category consists of Assamese literary histories where the origin and evolution of the Assamese language have been discussed by literary historians to pinpoint the start of Assamese literary tradition. Dimbeswar Neog (1962), Maheswar Neog (1962), Satyendra Nath Sarma (1981), Tilottama Misra (1987), and Nagen Saikia (1988) have also deliberated about the displacement of the Assamese language in the early colonial Assam.

More recently sociological as well other literary writings are also covering the language question as it has become evident that language had played a major role in colonial as well as independent Assam. For example, Sibanath Barman and Prasenjit Choudhury have tried to highlight the role played by the imperial divide and rule policy as key a reason behind the displacement of Assamese language while others like Jogendra Narayan Bhuyan reemphasized the argument advocated by Bezbaroa and others. Historical writings on the nineteenth century viz., H.K. Borpujari and Amalendu Guha, however are not convinced with the latter argument.
1.7 **Objective of the study**

The primary aim of the proposed work is to understand the complex history of modern Assamese language. This work will examine the problematic of the emergence of a modern form of standard vernacular in the condition of colonially and nationalism and thus it has focused largely in the nineteenth century. It will also examine how the interplay of colonialism, nationalism and existing cultural tradition shaped the modern literary history of Assam. The making of the Assamese, as a modern vernacular was the result of a few interconnected phenomena. The colonial language policy, the history of Assamese grammar and Assamese lexicography, and the history of Assamese newspapers and journals are representatives of these phenomena. Detailed study of these interconnected events will help in throwing some light on the making of the modern Assamese vernacular. The nineteenth century works on Assamese grammar and lexicography had provided a much needed framework for the beginning of the career of the Assamese as a modern vernacular. Many colonial officials, missionaries and local people carried out rigorous works on the linguistic aspects of the Assamese language. These debates surrounding the philological aspects of the
Assamese language has given a firm shape in the formation of the modern Assamese language. This work is going to study the impact created by these debates and other works in shaping an agenda for the emerging Assamese vernacular as a modern and standard language and an identity marker for the Assamese nationalists. On the other hand, the print medium, a by-product of colonialism, too contributed a large corpus of old and new Assamese literature that reinstated Assamese as modern vernacular. The language that was developed through these media contributed to the growth of the language suitable for modern literary tradition. Several oral forms of literature also got printed in these media. This transformation of orality into a printed form also had some endurable impact on the modern Assamese language and literature. A standard reading public was created by the new history of printed book in the nineteenth century Assam. That reading public also immensely contributed and influenced the course of the standardization of the modern Assamese vernacular. This work is going to examine how the emergence of modern Assamese print culture gave shape to the Assamese language which served the causes of nationalism, culture and politics.
1.8 Methodology

This work has been basically an interdisciplinary study focusing on history, linguistics and folkloristics. It has followed the methodology of social science which consists of data collection and their analysis. The data have been collected from various primary and secondary sources and it involved chiefly the library and archival works as the study is historical. Various primary sources including official records, essays, memorandum and other relevant official transactions have been collected from the Assam State Archive, Guwahati. Analyzing the considerable number of journals, text-books, grammars, dictionaries and vocabularies, biographies and autobiographies, fictions and drama in Assamese published in the nineteenth century is essential for understanding the shaping of the Assamese language in that century. These primary sources have been collected from different libraries and digital archives. The first edition of various nineteenth century tracts and also manuscripts has been collected from the Asia and Africa collection of the British Library at London.

This study used a numbers of primary and secondary sources obtained from different archives and libraries. As the study is based
on the social history of the nineteenth century, the primary sources were from that century. Official records of that period have been mostly obtained from the state archive itself. However, most of the books of that century, mainly the first editions are generally not found in Assam. Those materials were obtained from the British library.

Secondary sources for the study included the literary histories of the Assamese language as well as other Indian languages; works on the impact of coloniality and nationality on Indian and other non-indian languages; works on the emergence of print, books and reading public; and general books on this area.

The data thus collected and analyzed using historical and socio-linguistic methodology. Folkloristic methodology has been used to understand the transition of orality to printing of folklore materials and the impact of incorporating these printed texts in literary histories. Lastly, this study uses the qualitative approach to analyze the problematic.
1.9 Scope of the study

This thesis proposes to analyze the complex interplay of colonial language and education policy along with the missionary linguistic strategies with local intelligentsia's linguistic stand and project to realize the aspiration of bringing a national identity on the basis of a vernacular. It also proposes to establish that the standardization of Assamese vernacular in the late nineteenth century was the outcome of these inter-related phenomena.

This thesis has been divided into six chapters. The first chapter attempts to analyze the pre-colonial process of vernacularization as well as literarization process of the Assamese vernacular in a pan-Indian context. The pre-colonial Assamese literary tradition was immensely beneficial in establishing Assamese as an independent language in the nineteenth century Assam.

The second chapter explores three interrelated themes in the linguistic scenario of colonial Assam by examining colonial language policy adopted in the province in nineteenth century. It examines the relationship between language and colonial governance; the tension between colonial administrative power with the missionaries and local intelligentsia; and the limits of colonial power. Exploration of
these interrelated themes elucidates important dimensions of Assam’s nineteenth century social history and the shaping of the Assamese language as a modern vernacular.

The third chapter analyzes the impact of the colonial apparatus print on the nineteenth century Assamese language and literature. Print also helped in making a new reading public who actively participated in the public debates and discussions and also the debates that were taking place in the emerging public spheres.

The fourth chapter analyzes the transition process of Assamese folklore materials from orality to print. This chapter tries to highlight colonial as well as native project of collecting and printing folklore in the nineteenth century Assam and the implication of this project in Assamese language and literature. It also examines the role of folklore in the debate on tradition and modernity in the nineteenth century.

The fifth chapter concentrates on the impact of hybridity that invariably comes with colonialism on the Assamese language and vice versa. It explores how and why institutions of civil society came to champion Assamese culture in the second half of the nineteenth century. It also examines the heated debates about the ways in which intellectuals attempted to define and make known the wider
meaning of national symbols and culture with the help of a ‘modern’ language.

The sixth and last chapter concludes the general arguments spelled out in this work. It highlights on the choice of the language in the early colonial Assam, colonial intervention and subsequent standardization process of the Assamese language and the emergence of the Assamese language as an identity marker.