CHAPTER: 1

THE STATE ASSAM, PERIOD AND BACKGROUND
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1.1 Nineteenth Century’s Assam and its formation under British rule:

On 24 February 1826, the Yandabu accord was signed between the British East India Company and the Burmese King. As a result of this pact, the territory ruled by the Ahoms came under the jurisdiction of the British. It is worth mentioning that from and after this juncture only the East India Company and later on the British government occupied gradually all the comparatively smaller states of the entire region. They did it not only with the purpose of ruling but the actual motive behind was to attain the ownership of the ample natural resources of this region. In this context we can refer to tea and mineral deposits. The discovery of indigenous variety of tea in Assam, Matak and Cachar areas ruled the British East India Company towards this region from the very beginning of the nineteenth century. It is needless to say that a major reason behind the sustaining of administrative occupation was only the exploration of these mineral deposits and tea plantation.¹

One significant phenomenon of the nineteenth century was the establishment of European power in different parts of the world. The British colonial power played a key role in its expansion and development. A reputed historian says:

Of all European powers, Britain took the lead in colonial expansion. Her efforts in this direction were backed by her scientific and industrial power ever since the Industrial Revolution. During the nineteenth century, she had built up an empire that was the largest evolved less than one crown. It comprised one-fourth of the world’s habitable area with one fourth of the human population.²

¹ Priyam Goswami, Assam in the Nineteenth Century, Industrialisation and Colonial Penetration, P. 17.
In this nineteenth century only Assam came under the British rule. At first it was included in the Bengal Province and later in 1874 it was given the status of a separate administrative territory. The greater Assam was outlined comprising the areas of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang and Nagaon of Lower Assam and Upper Assam’s Sibsagar and Lakhimpur, its adjacent areas like Sylhet and Cachar and Garo, Khasi, Jayantia and Naga Hills. This greater Assam was administered by a Chief Commissioner.

This greater Assam was outlined basically through these two processes:

1. Accession and
2. Formation of a separate administrative territory.

During the period of Swargadeo Sukafa, the Ahom rule was well-established in this region. Since 1228 AD the Ahoms ruled this region unimpeded almost over six hundred years. Despite the repeated assaults from the Koch and Mughals the Ahoms could keep hold of its regime founded by Sukafa. And through this empire only little by little the greater Assamese nationality and culture got their formation. But from the last part of the eighteenth century a range of anarchism emerged in Ahom Kingdom. The basic mobilizing force of the Ahom regime began to split up. Professor Bhabananda Datta in his essay ‘Asom Buranjit Abhumuki’ said:

**[History lets us know that after the recognition of the Hinduism by the Ahom kings, the Satriya Mahantas became powerful. The subjects of the country accepted the authority of the king as well as the satras which resulted in a conflict between the king and its subjects. At last as the consequence of the Mowamoria uprising the state organism got wobbly.]**

Internal conflicts gradually weakened the Ahom administration. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Swargadeo Kamalakanta Singha(1795-1810)

3. Bhabananda Datta, Asomar Jatiya Samasyar Bibartan, P.17
expired. After this in 1810 AD teenager prince Sudinfa alias Chandrakanata Singha was crowned. It was seen that during this time the officials like Burhagohain, Barphukan etc. became increasingly powerful. Aiming at acquiring absolute authority, they began to develop enmity against each other. And all these factors paved the way for the advent of foreign power to this region.

Badanchandra was the ‘Barphukan’— administrator of Guwahati. His cruelty was a great cause of trouble for the people. The prime minister of the Ahom administration, Burhagohain took the ultimate decision to eliminate him from the power and sent his personnel also to arrest him. But Badanchandra managed to flee away. Edward Gait described:

He proceeded to Calcutta, and alleging that the Buragohain was subverting the Government and ruining the country, endeavoured to persuade the Governor-General to dispatch an expedition against him.4

But the British government declined the proposal and the request made by Badanchandra. Helpless Badanchandra pleaded for help from the Burmese King Badawpaya (1782-1819). King Badawpaya acknowledged this opportunity and in the beginning of the year 1817, the Burmese army defeated the Ahom king. During this time only the Prime Minister Purnananda Burhagohain also died. The Ahom king made an agreement with the Burmese. Removed Barphukan Badanchandra was awarded with a newly created rank ‘Mantri Phukan’. Meanwhile Badanchandra was assassinated. The Burmese once against attacked Ahom kingdom. Suryakumar Bhuyan described the consequences of this invasion:

As a result of the invasions of 1817 and 1819 the Burmese had established a partial hold on Assam, and the Swargadeo had accepted some degree of subordination to his Burmese allies. After the accession of Bagyidaw the government of Ava became anxious to make its authority in Assam more effectual by annexing it to the Burmese dominions.5

5. Suryakumar Bhuyan, Anglo-Assamese Relations 1771-1826, P.482.
After 1819 AD Assam came under the jurisdiction of the Burmese king. The Burmese occupation extended even to Cachar and Jainita kingdom also. It is worth mentioning that during this time the oppression of the Burmese army reached an extreme point. Maniram Dewan in his book ‘Buranji Vivekratna’ gave ample description of such hateful atrocity. Maniram Dewan who was also an eye-witness of this episode of Assam history describes:

They take away the women from the villages whomever they like. They pass order to look for and fetch the women. Some people used this anarchic situation as an advantage to take revenge upon rivals. After fulfilling their lust they let the Burmese or the middlemen know about the women in that particular family. The Burmese army or the middlemen immediately rush to that place and ask for the women. If the women can not be produced the male members are tortured and looted. If some pretty women found on the street, they instantaneously plunder their sanctity. Even if in presence of husband also one is physically abused. Sometimes they (women) are snatched away also.

Descriptions of this vile atrocity are found in the history books written in verse. Some poet depicted this on the basis of what he heard from Swargadeo Purandar Singha as below:

At the advent of the Burmese army, people flee away with some portable stuff being terrified by the brutal atrocities of the Burmese. The army of Marangikhowa asks these terrified fleeing people about the location of the Burmese. The desperate people answer with disappointment that there is left nothing, the Burmese have ransacked everything and now knowing about their location is of no use. They further say that they have fled keeping the body and soul together and are dubious of a safe refuge. Marangikhowa’s heart pains hearing to all these.

Having been distraught by the invasion and atrocity of the Burmese, the Ahom royal family and many of the noble families fled away and took shelter in the areas like Goalpara, Rangpur etc. and pleaded for help from the British. In 1824 AD the British force occupied Guwahati. This context got a reference on ‘Samāchār Chandrikā’ (1st January 1825/ 19 Poush 1231) under the headline—‘গত বৎসরের মধ্যে আমাদের আততায়ী ব্যাপারে বে কর্ম হইয়াছে...’ (few happenings in our knowledge that occurred in the last year). It was reported: ‘২৮ মার্চ তারিখে ইংল্যাণ্ডীয় সৈন্য কর্তৃক গোয়াহাতী আক্রমণ হয়।’ (On 28 March the British took hold of Guwahati). After this, the British army moved towards the east and the Burmese had to retreat and ultimately accepted the defeat at a place named Yandabu. An agreement was signed between these two forces. The agreement contains the clause that the
Burmese king will no more interfere and claim any right connecting to Assam. The same would be applicable in the case of Cachar and Jayantia kingdom also. In this way it is observed that after 1826 the British colonial power only took all the decisions regarding Assam's political power and its relocation. It is worth mentioning that before this, a major portion of Sylhet and Goalpara came under the British India when in 1765 AD the British possessed the 'Dewani' of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. During that time the 'eastern duar' area especially Bijni Duar or Nij Bijni was under the royal family of Bijni. In the year 1865, after the battle of Bhutan, the British government took over Nij Bijni (1866), the entire area adjoining Bhutan under its control.

David Scott was the first representative of the British Governor General in Assam territory. A faction of the British govt. sought to include Assam directly into the British Empire. But Scott opined differently. He put forward the proposal for indirect rule through the Ahom regime in Upper Assam. At last the Ahom regime was instituted with the condition of the payment of a yearly tax. Professor A.C. Banerjee let us know in this regard:

On 2 March 1833, Robertson concluded a treaty with Purandar Simha at Guwahati. He was recognized as the ruler of the territory lying on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra to the eastward of the Dhansiri River and on the northern bank to the eastward of a nulla immediately east of Biswanath.

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8. 'By Article 2 of the treaty of Yandabo (24 February 1826) the King of Burma, the King of Burma, Ba-gyi-daw, 'renounced all claims' upon, and promised to 'abstain from all future interference with, the principality of Assam and its dependencies'. This provision apply also to the contiguous petty Sates of Cachar and Jayantia'.


9. 'On the 4th July 1866 the Government of India published a notification (No. 696) declaring that the territory ceded to the British Government "is annexed to the territories of Her Majesty the Queen of England". Statement of the case on behalf of Maharaj Kumar Victor N. Narain for succession to the Bijni Estate, P.2.

From Biswanath to Goalpara this entire area was divided into four districts. The four districts formed by the year 1835 were: Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang and Nagaon.

Purandar Singha was bestowed upon the power to rule Upper Assam in the year 1833. But within five years the British government declared him incompetent and ineffective administrator. As a result he was eliminated and was offered a pension of one thousand rupees per month. Professor A.C. Banerjee says:

The helpless Raja submitted a mild protest that no opportunity was given to him to answer the charges leveled against him. He was granted a pension of Rs.1000 per month.11

After this episode, direct British rule was maintained in the Ahom ruled Upper Assam. Two districts Sibsagar and Lakhimpur were formed.

In the year 1832, the state of Cachar came under British rule. In pre-British period the Dimasa Kings ruled in this region. This kingdom was constituted with some parts of the Surma valley and the hilly terrain in between the Brahmaputra and the Surma valleys.

The Dimasas basically belong to the greater Bodo tribe: From the mid fifteenth century an influence of Hinduism could be traced amongst the Dimasas. It is worth mentioning that in the year 1790 the Brahmin pundits gave the recognition as ‘Kshatriyas’ to Dimasa King Krishna Chandra and his brother Gobinda Chandra.12 In the last part of King Gobinda Chandra’s regime (1813-30) there broke out a revolt in Cachar. Besides that during this period Cachar underwent invasions by the Manipuris also. Gobinda Chandra fled to Sylhet and appealed for military aid from the British. With the help of the British, Gobinda Chandra resumed his kingdom. An accord was signed between King Gobinda Chandra and the British on March 6, 1824. In accordance with the conditions of the agreement, the Dimasa kingdom became a subject to the British Company

and agreed to the yearly payment of Ten thousand rupees to the East India Company in the exchange of the British support in defense side.\textsuperscript{13} It is noteworthy that before the Anglo-Burmese battle (1824-26), the British army had to combat the Burmese in Cachar. Though the state of Cachar got rid of external invasions after the Anglo-Burmese battle (1824-26), King Gobinda Chandra failed to handle the internal conflicts. Tularam Senapati rebelled in North Cachar. David Scott played the role of a mediator and the King Gobinda Chandra was not having any choice but to surrender North Cachar to Tularam Senapati. As a result, only the plain areas of Cachar remained under King Gobinda Chandra’s possession. After King Gobinda Chandra’s death in the year 1832 leaving no issue, the state of Cachar or Dimasa Kingdom was brought under direct British control through a proclamation issued by Lord William Bentink. Subsequently in the year 1853 North Cachar hills area, which was ruled by Tularam Senapati was also brought under British jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{14}

Geographically, Sadiya is situated in Upper Assam or East Assam. In this regard a reference was made in the book ‘The Comprehensive History of Assam’:

Sadiya situated on the right bank of the Kundil, a few miles above its junction with the Lohit or the Brahmaputra, enjoyed a commanding position on the frontier.\textsuperscript{15}

In the last part of eighteenth century (1794), the Khamtis declared Sadiya independent from the Ahom rule. They selected their ruler from their own clan only and the position was known as Sadiya Khowa Gohain. Later on Sadiya Khowa Gohain submitted to the British rule. In the year 1835, a dispute arose between the states of Sadiya and Matak relating to a particular area. The British representatives tried to resolve the problem through dialogue and discussion. Afterward Sadiya Khowa Gohain renounced the British dominance and in the year 1839 killed eighty numbers of British army men including Captain White. Consequently, Sadiya came to British jurisdiction.

\textsuperscript{13} Upendrachandra Guha, Kacharer Itibritta, PP.97-98.
\textsuperscript{14} S.K. Barpujari, History of the Dimasas, P.107.
The state of Matak or Mowamoriya lies to the south of Sadiya. This area could escape the Burmese oppression under the leadership of Matibar Bar Senapati.

The land of Matak state was very fertile and the British were attracted towards this region from the very time of Anglo-Burmese battle. The British were in search of an opportunity to take this fertile area under its direct control. This opportunity came with the death of Bar Senapati in the year 1839. At the time of death Bar Senapati chose his second son Maju Gohain as his successor. But the British government eliminated him from the power and took the state of Matak directly under its command. In the year 1842, the British government officially took over the states of Sadiya and Matak under its jurisdiction. Further these two areas were included in the district of Lakhimpur and Dibrugarh town in Matak area was declared the district headquarters for Lakhimpur district.

The Khasis and the Jayantias belong to the Indo-Mongoloid ethnic group. But their languages are of the Austro group. They live in hilly areas. To the north of the habitation of these two tribes live the Lalungs and the Mikirs, to the west there is the Garo hills and to the east and south there are Cachar and Sylhet respectively. This area known as the Khasi and the Jayantia hills is surrounded by the Assam valley, Cachar and Sylhet. The British made a decision to connect these three valleys. After the Yandabu pact, the British took permission from the King of this region and started the work of road construction at Nunklow area in Khasi hills. But soon after some local people protested against this work as they speculated that the road construction would ebb their sovereignty. Any way, in the year 1829 several attacks had been made upon the British in Khasi hills. The consequence was the arrival of British army and military operation in the area. At last, in the year 1833, Tirat Singh surrendered and after this episode the British appointed a political representative in this area.

Contemporary to this, after 1835 the influence of the Jayantias had been gradually declining. In 'The Comprehensive History of Assam' it has been stated like this:
By a resolution adopted on 23 February 1835 the Government of India decided that the Raja's territories in the plains were to be incorporated in the Company's dominions, the hills being left in his possession. The decision was communicated to him in March 1835 and a British officer took formal possession at Jaintipur on March 1835.  

The greater Naga tribe is constituted with different small sub-tribes in hills. The British influence extended to the Naga Hills in the latter part of the nineteenth century. This area was used as important route for the communication between Assam and Manipur. But the Nagas especially the Angami Nagas often used to attack and afflict the British and the people from the plains. The British decided to assault over the Nagas as a counter to their atrocities. During the period 1835 to 1851, the British made operation in the Naga Hills for ten times, yet complete domination over the Nagas was not possible. Finally in the year 1866, the British Government occupied the Angnami Naga inhabited area. And the entire Angnami Naga inhabited area starting from the Daiyang was converted to a district.

Subsequent to the Yandabu pact, step by step the British occupied all the smaller states of greater Assam. At the first stage these areas were incorporated in Bengal Province; but gradually different inconveniences occurred in administering these areas. Simultaneously open discussion went on relating to the inconveniences in running administrative works from Bengal. Already a number of reports and books got published. These reports and books discussed on the diverse geographical location of Assam and the inconveniences in running administrative procedures of this area from Bengal. In the meantime, there occurred a series of incidents like the Sepoy Mutiny and violence in the hilly areas. As a result, the British Government approved of the idea to recognize Assam as a  

17. a. Robinson, A Descriptive Account of Assam, 1841. 
    c. Sir Alexander Mackenzie, Memorandum on the North-East Frontiers, 1869.
separate administrative area. Consequently, on February 6, 1874, through a notification Assam was declared as the Administrative Area (Province of Assam) under a Chief Commissioner. In this way, an outline of a greater Assam was made under the Colonial intervention.

1.2 The environment and character of Bengali writings:

This expansion of British Colonial power in this area established the commercial relationship with Burma, China and Tibet and on the other hand the exploration of tea and the mineral resources intensified their interest towards this region. On this backdrop in nineteenth century the exercise of the Bengali language had been entertaining more and more scope in this area. Basically three factors can be identified responsible for this:

1. Attraction towards the Bengali language amongst educated and middle class Assamese society.

2. Advent of the Bengali bureaucrats as a part of British administration.

3. Introduction of the Bengali language as the medium of government schools and the court.

Before going to discuss on this environment and backdrop of the exercise of the Bengali language in colonial Assam, another issue for survey is the atmosphere and specimens of the use of the language in this region before nineteenth century.

The use of Bengali language in this greater region can be traced out before nineteenth century also. Since the middle age, basically as a result of the keenness and courtesy shown by the royal families, a trend of using the Bengali language developed in this region. Noteworthy reference in this regard is the letter written to the then Ahom King by the King of Coachbehar. This letter was written in the year 1555 AD. It starts with a greeting in Sanskrit. The letter by Maharaj Naranarayan reads like this:

লেখন কার্যঞ্জ। এখা আমার কুক্ষল। তোমার কুক্ষল নির্দৃষ্ট বাঙ্গা করি। অখন তোমার আমার সুতোষ সম্পাদক পত্রাপতি গতায়াত হইলে উভয়ংকুল গ্রীতির বীজ অঙ্কুরিত হইতে হয়ে।
I am well. I wish for your well being all the time. Now our correspondence will blossom love between us. And we are doing so. Etc.]

Following this letter written in the sixteenth century, Bengali became the language communicado amongst the rulers of this region. In this connection, a remark from Sukumar Sen is worth-citing:

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[The inscription contains only a single sentence. But from that very sentence only we can have an introduction with the prose style of that period. It bears the evidence of the structural accuracy and positions of parts of speech or positioning of Subject, Object and Verb or the extension of a Subject (doer) and Object (receiver). The key sentence is—'Megh Narayan singadwar bandhailen'(Megh Narayan founded the gate.) The extended part of the subject (Megh Narayan) is: ‘Shri Srijut Megh Narayandeb Hachengsa banshajata raj hoi’ and the extended part of the object (singhadwar) is—‘Maibang Rajyat Pathare’(In Maibang’s rock.) The verb is also well structured. Its ‘form’ is same with that of today though a slight difference is there in ‘sound’ only. ‘Bandhailen’ now sounds ‘bdhailen’. The use of suffix ‘ra’ is noticeable. From the time of ‘Charyapada’ to the eighteen century ample use of this suffix can be witnessed. The Arabic word ‘Tarikh’ is used precisely. Adding Persian ba>bi before the Arabic word ‘tarikh’ the word ‘bitarikh’ was made that evidences the beginning of the Bengalisation of foreign elements in the Bengali language.]

After the sixteenth century, a developed form of Bengali prose can be witnessed in a handful of epistles by the Ahom kings in the seventeenth century. In this way, in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, though not as a conscious literary effort but in its use as a medium of communication, the Bengali language was experiencing a developed prose in this region. It is said to be the beginning of writing in Bengali in this area.

Under the patronage of the royal families, the use of Bengali gradually achieved a wide extent. Since the time of Swargadeo Gaurinath Singha (1780-1794) to Chandrakanta Singha (1810-1818), the Ahom kings made their communication with the neighboring royal families in Bengali. In the words of Suryakumar Bhuyan:

The business portion of the letters is in Bengali, mutilated to a great extent by the influence of Assamese syntax and vocabulary. Anyhow, they are good specimens of Bengali as it was used for court purposes outside Bengal; and in the absence of any extant Bengali prose writing of that period and even much later, these letters can be regarded as an extremely valuable acquisition to Bengali literature.23

It is worth mentioning that though Assamese was prevalent in that time in the Ahom court, Bengali used to be the language for diplomatic relationship.24

Along with the letters, during this period some compositions were made on law related subject also. Cachari King Tamradhwaj Narayan (1699-1708) compiled ‘Cachārir Āin’ for the people of plains in Cachar. This law was as follows:

| গৃহাঙ্গর নিকট কৃষি করিয়া যদি বোঝা না দেয় এখানে পালকের ইচ্ছা ব্যতীতের দুর্বল কিং নষ্ট করে তবে পালকের দোষ হয় নাহি জানিবা।যদি এতেহ ইচ্ছা করিয়া পালকে নষ্ট করায় তবে তাহার চোরের প্রায় দুর্বল জানিবা।এবং প্রাগাস্বদির দূর বুদ্ধি কুশিতে করিতে যায় যদি গ্রামপন্থুরে পালকেরইচ্ছা ব্যতীতের দুর্বল করে তবে পালকে রাজাকে তাহ নষ্ট করে তবে পালকের দোষ করে। কৃষি হইল যদি শস্য পৰ্য্যালোচনা লঘুতে চয়ন তবে গ্রামপন্থুরে নাশিতে যে শস্য তাকে সর্বত্রই পরিলিখন দিতে হয় জানিবা কিন্তু গোরে নাশিতে। যে শস্য তাকে যদি কৃষি করিতে পালকের পালক ও ক্ষিতী যাবার পরিপালন তবে তাহার অবিশ্বাসের স্বাত্ত্বিক ও পিতৃস্তলের ক্রান্ত করে নাহি জানিবা।। যদি রাজিতে সেই পর্যায়ক্রমে ভক্ষণ করিয়া গ্রামপন্থুর দুর্বল হইতে তাহা ভক্ষণ করে তবে গ্রামপন্থুর যাবার যাবার রাজাতে দুর্বল করে সুখ্য দুর্বল দুর্বল তাদৃশ ভক্ষণ করে যদি দিবাভোগে তাদৃশ ভক্ষণ করে তবে হয় রাজাতে সুখ্য দুর্বল দুর্বল তিতে হয়। যদি দিবাভোগে ভক্ষণ করে তবে

If a farmer don’t use fencing around his farming land near a village, and the bovine animal would destroy the crops without any wrong intention of its herd, then the herd will not found guilty. If the herd intentionally does so, then they will be punished as a thief. If the bovine animal destroys the crops of farm land far from the village then the herd supposed to pay penalty to the king. And if the farmer wants compensation against the crops then the herd should sepay it. If the land owner demands the compensation then the herd should sepay one same. If the farmer enjoys compensation both from the herd and land owner, then his earned bread won’t reach to the Devlok (realm of God) or the Pitrilok (realm of forefathers). If in the night the bovine animal filled itself with the crops, then the herd should repay 10 rati gold to the king. If it is day, then the amount of repay is 6 rati gold.

In the eighteenth century, under the patronage of the Ahom and the Cachari royal families along with the letters and law related compositions we can get the specimens of creative writings also. Maharaj Surdarpa Narayan (1708-1720), the King of Cachar was deeply devoted to music. He himself composed some ‘Shakta’ music. The following is an excerpt from his ‘Shākta Sangit’:

दीनदयामरी नाम तोमार।
गुलिया भरसा हইযाहे आमार।
पुजा जपतर तिनु नाथक आमार।
तबे यदि कृपा कर महिमा तोमार।
अमि तु कৃত্তি অতি গত নাই আর।
ভরসা করিয়াছি কেবল শ্রীচরণ তোমার।
প্রণতি করিয়া বলে সুরদর্প রায়।
আজ্ঞা কর মুহুর দিয়া ভক্তি রাঙা পায়।

You are kind to the poor, I am faithful to you. I don’t know the rituals. Just bestow your mercy on me. I have no other way, I am ill minded. I just keep faith upon your glorious feet. I Suradarpa Ray prostrate before you. Give me permission I will chop off my head as a devotion to your crimson feet.

During the reign of Surdarpa Narayan only ‘Brihanāradīya Purāṇ’ was translated in verse into Bengali in the name ‘ShriNāradi Rasāmrita’. It was translated by Bhubaneswar Basaspati. ‘ShriNāradi Rasāmrita’ was written in 38 chapters in an easily comprehensible style with the noble objective of spreading out some social ethics. In the part ‘Lakshmi Vandanā’ (worshipping the Goddess of Wealth), we can get an idea of the author’s sense of discernment in the context of a unlucky man:

লম্বীরাঢা পুরুষের বৃদ্ধিহত হয়।
তব কৃপা আছে যারে সেই মহাশয়॥।
লম্বীরাঢা পুরুষের ছাড়ে বস্তুজন।
লম্বী ছড়িলে তারে বিপক্ষ ত্রাঙ্গণ॥।
লম্বীরাঢা পুরুষের সব আকিঙ্কামারা।
থাকুক অনেকের দায় ঘৃণা করে দারা॥।
লম্বীরাঢা পুরুষ কুটুষ্প বাড়া যায়।
থাকুক আসন পানি সজ্জায় না পায় ॥

[If a man loses his character, then his mind will not work. Friends will leave him. Brothers will go against him. That man will not go anywhere but darkness.]

In this very time only ‘Brahma Puran’ was translated into Bengali. The translator is still anonymous. It was transcribed by Shri Ananta Ram Barman.

Maharaj Ramchandradhwaj Narayan (1728-1735) was fervent in composing devotional ‘Mātrī Sangit’ and Vaishnav verse depicting different manifestations of Radha-Krishna. Even the King himself composed some verses. One note worthy composition by Maharaj Ramchandradhwaj is as follows:

27. Jayanta Bhushan Bhattacharya, Kāchari Rājya Utthan Āru Patan, P. 123.
Oh! Mother helps me. I am in danger. I don’t know the devotion, don’t have strength. I just came out in this world. Death is near, I lost my strength. Keep remind the crimson feet of Sharkari (Goddess Kali). King Ramachandra prostrate before you. I will go to Kailash with full of joy changing the names of Durga and Shiv.

Krishnamohan Bhattacharya’s two books ‘Kālicharan Upākhyaṇ’ and ‘Gopichandrer Gān’ were also written during this time only. ‘Kālicharan Upākhyaṇ’ was written in the year 1735 AD. Though the story is based on the life of a Brahmin merchant, the focal objective of the verse was to give an account of the glory of ‘Ranachandi’ — the instituted Goddess of Cachar.

‘Gopichandrer Gān’ belonged to the species of ‘Pāṇchālī Sāhitya’ written in the year 1748 AD. Starting with a eulogy for God Shiv, Hidimba and Bhim, the poet gives an account of the socio-economic and political conditions of the state of Hedamba. Along with this was narrated the ancient history of the Dimasa or Cachari dynasty.

Beyond Bengal, in the peripheral areas like Kamrup, Kamta, Cachar, Tripura the acceptability of Bengali entertained the priority as the language for ‘inter-provincial communication, trade and commerce and agreement on war or conflict’. The question arises naturally how the Bengali language emerged to be the language for communication amongst these peripheral states.

We know that the marginal areas like Kamrup, Cachar, Kamta, Tripura are recognized as the Kirata Bhumi or the land of the Mongoloids. The aborigines of these areas belong to the greater tribe 'Trans-Himalayan Mongoloids'. Two major tribes included in this greater tribe are the Bodos and the Ahoms. It is noteworthy that the greater Bodo tribe was formed in the process of assimilation of comparatively smaller tribes Mech, Rabha, Tripuri, Bodo etc. Whatever it might be, little by little these tribes went on undergoing the influence of Hindu-Aryan culture. As a result, a new terminology 'Indo-Mongoloids' came in use to refer to these tribes. Sunitikumar Chatterji stated:

Briefly, it was of a piece with evolution of culture and history in other parts of India: it was largely a case of progressive Indianisation or Hinduisation of these Mongoloid peoples, bringing them with in the fold of what may be called 'Sanskrit culture'. This was a culture which was brought to the Indo-mongoloids in Nepal by both the Brahman and priest and the Buddhist monk, and in Bengal and Assam by the Brahmin priest mainly. 30

The influence of the Bengali pundits on the people of Ahom kingdom, Kamta, Tripura etc. is well known to all. 31 So obviously some instances of the use the Bengali language in these areas since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries can be witnessed. In the language of Sukumar Sen:

সেকালে বাংলায় ছিল আহোম-হেদাব (কাছড়), ত্রিপুরা ও কোচবিহারের রাজকর্ত্রের ভাষা | 32

[During that time Bengali was the language for royal proceedings in the states of Ahom, Hedamba (Cachar), Tripura and Coachbehar. ]

In this way, the Bengali language was in practice in Assam over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and reached the nineteenth century.

32. Sukumar Sen, Bāṅglā Sāhitye Gadya, P.15.
The nineteenth century was the era of formation and development. Our perception started to be nourished and nurtured in an environment oriented to western notion and consciousness. This era catered the relevance of different opinions and perspectives and there emerged a parade of knowledge and reasons. Before the nineteenth century ours was predominantly a feudal society. After the firm institution of the British colonial regime, our old social-system began to collapse. Its impact had a diverse nature and response. Basically in this backdrop only in nineteenth century the stream of multifarious literary creation in Bengali started. 33 This backdrop of the practice of Bengali emerged not only in greater Bengal but also in the marginal state of Assam. We can observe two main trends of the practice of Bengali in the nineteenth century Assam.

1. The use of the Bengali language amongst the Assamese speakers and
2. The use of Bengali in the districts of Cachar and Sylhet.

The nineteenth century Assam witnessed so many changes. The wind of modernity blew in the society which was still engulfed with the medieval temperament and sensibility. Not only had that, during this time only the communication with Bengal got closer. This contact was mainly based on three factors:

1. Kolkata being the destination of the Assamese youths for higher education.
2. Different newspapers-journals and social movements and
3. Emergence of a group of businessman and government servants in Assam.

For a group of erudite Assamese this contact was mainly for cultural and linguistic reciprocity but as the consequence of this gradually the use of Bengali was nurtured amongst these people.

In the second decade of the nineteenth century it was found that in the journal ‘Samāchār Chandrikā’ some news appeared relating to Assam. For example:

1. ‘�ত বৎসরের (১৮২৪) মধ্যে আমাদের জাতিসারে যে ২ কর্ম হইয়াছে’ Under this headline the news went like this: ‘২৮ মার্চ তারিখে ইংরেজীয় সৈন্য কত্তক গোয়াহাটী আয়ত্ত হয়’।

[‘The two happenings occurred in the last year’.

‘On 28th March the British army took over Guwahati’].

2. Another news appeared on the incident of the year 1825 under the headings—‘আসাম অন্ধি মণিপুর পর্বত নূতন পথ করিতে আরম্ভ হয়’ and ‘আসাম দেশের রাজধানী রংপুর রাজ্যদেশীয়দের অধিকার করা হয়’।

[‘Constructions of road start from Assam to Manipur’.

‘Assam capital Rangpur gone under Burmese occupation’]

Through such news items only the region of Assam got introduced with the readers of greater Bengal. On the other hand, these journals produced a class of readers in Assam. Afterwards these readers used to send different news, letters, poetry etc., to the news journals like ‘Samāchār Darpan’, ‘Samāchār Chandrika’, ‘Bangadut’ etc. We have specimens like the news appeared in the ‘Samāchār Darpan’ (July 30, 1831) heading ‘Assam Deshe Gyanbriddhi’:

আসামদেশীয় অভিমান্য লোকেরা বঙ্গদেশের ও বঙ্গদেশ-প্রচলিত তাব্দ্যাপারের সঙ্গে এতদেশীয় স্বাধীনতার ঘাড়া সম্পর্কীয় রাখেন। এই আসামদেশীয়ারা যাদুশি এতদেশীয় স্বাধীনতা প্রাহাক তাদের প্রায় বঙ্গদেশের কোন জিলায় দৃষ্ট হয় না।

অপর বঙ্গদেশের প্রায় অদ্ধেক জিলা হইতে কোন প্রেরিত পত্র সম্পাদকে কখন দৃষ্ট হয় না কিন্তু আমাদের কিশোর অন্য ২ এতদেশীয় স্বাধীনতার সম্পাদকের নিকটে আসামদেশ হইতে যে সম্পাদক প্রেরিত পত্র না আইনে এমন সম্পাদক প্রায় অপসারিত।

[The elite class Assamese people keep a close contact with these journals along with other affairs connected with Bengal. They show such an interest towards these journals that we can hardly find a match to it in any district of Bengal.


35. Ibid.

From so many districts of Bengal no letter is being sent or published in these journals. But there is not a single week wherein any letter from Assam has not been received by the editors of these journals.

It is noteworthy in this context that in the first half of the nineteenth century up to the year 1846, there was no periodical published in Assam. Moreover, printing machine was also not set up here still. In this background the practice of Bengali expanded amongst the educated Assamese.

In the preliminary stage of Bengali prose literature, some erudite Assamese like Haliram Dhekial Phookan (1802-32), Yagnaram Khargharia Phookan ((1805-38), Jaduram Deka Barua (1801-69), Maniram Dewan (1806-58) used to write Bengali prose. They were regular readers as well as contributors of the journals like John Clerk Marshman’s ‘Samāchār Darpan’ (1818), Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyay’s ‘Samāchār Chandrikā’ (1829), Nilratna Halder’s ‘Bangadut’ (1829).

To be mentioned first is the name of Haliram Dhekial Phukan. He compiled the history book ‘Assām Buranji’. This book was printed in the year 1829 by Samachar Chandrika Press at Kolkata. The book was on the history of Assam. It comprised a historical account of Assam since pre-historic age to the time of Swargadeo Chandrakanta Singha and discussed on the aspects of its geographical individuality, administrative system, divisions of tribes and community etc. Besides this book, a good number of letters and reports by Dhekial Phookan got published in different journals of that time. On appropriate occasion we’ll discuss elaborately on this matter.

After Haliram Dhekial Phookan, comes the name of Yagnram Khargharia Phookan. He was the first Assamese to get English education. Unlike Haliram Dhekial Phookan he wrote no significant book though we can get evidence of his writings in Bengali in the Samachar Darpan. One of Khargharia Phookan’s letters appeared in the ‘Samāchār Darpan’ on July 9, 1831. In his writings he even never vacillated to reproach the Brahmins and extol the viewpoint of Raja Rammohan Ray.
In this context the fact may be cited that Yagnaram Khargharia Phookan was one amongst those with whom Raja Rammohan Ray used to do ‘র্বোগোগনা’ (worship of Brahma) in its initial stage.  

Following this, in 30 July 1831 issue of the Samachar Darpan, the Bengali version of the English poem ‘Lucy and Her Bird’ appeared. It was translated by Yajnaram Khargharia Phookan into Bengali. In that issue only we can get a reference on Yagnaram Khargharia Phookan in a note:

[With delight we have published a poem translated from English into Bengali by a Government servant from Assam Shrijut Yagnaram Khargharia Phookan.]

Another letter by Khargharia Phookan was published in the Samachar Darpan on May 19, 1832. In this letter he wrote on the wide promotion of Hindustani language. The news of his death was published in the journal ‘Gyānennashan’, (18 August 1838) like this:

[With regret we express that... and Yagnaram khargharia Phookan... passed away. Both were very learned people.]

The first Assamese lexicographer Jaduram Deka Barua wrote a critique in the ‘Samāchār Darpan’ (15 Oct. 1831). In this article without any punctuation mark, he expressed his response to the text of Haliram Dhekial Phukan’s ‘Āssām Buranji’ and clarified several incongruity of information. Following is an excerpt from his article:

39. Ibid, P.466.
This book is concise and nicely compiled. But the writer will surely admit it that in some places some incongruities are there. For example on page no. 7 of the Third Part of the book the author has spotted Namrup as the eastern boarder of Assam but we know that it is not appropriate…]

This article bears immense significance if it is considered in the context of the time it was written.

Jaduram Deka Barua always used to criticize different evil traditions and customs in the society. We can have an idea of his attitude in the following writing:

[Satidaha is pious and saving their (women’s) lives is a sin. Those who are of this opinion let them set fire on their own body and have the experience what comfort it carries…]

A letter published on 8th August 1829 (sent from Assam) read like this:

‘As Assam has come under the British, Kali is highly displeased’. (As Assam has come under the British, Kali is highly displeased). In support of this view the writer said:

[At Kamakhya debalay 2/3 Brahmin widows got pregnant and some were indicted for it. But the jury members being bribed are now again trying to prove it untrue.]

From this instance we can get a clear picture what was the attitude of a certain class of Assamese people regarding the advent of the British.

‘কামরুপ নিবাসিনি’ (One inhabitant of Kamrup) wrote a report heading ‘Assam Desher Umānanda Parbater Angahin’. The report published on 1 December 1832 read: ‘কখন শুনা যায় নাই যে ঝড়ে পর্বত পড়ে, ঐ ঝড়ে তাহাও পড়িয়াছে।’ [Never heard that hill is deformed by strom, but it happened.] The writer further added: ‘অস্থির হইলেই অমঙ্গল হয়।’ 43 [Deformation of Umananda hill is a bad omen.]

Bengal witnessed various waves of changes in its social backdrop in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. The impact of these changes was felt in Assam also. And as the result of this impact only we could witness the publications of different thought-provoking news and books related to Assam. The reading of these texts makes it clear that the contemporary erudite Assamese people put effort to awake the conscience of the common folk through the publication of rational and informative news. In this way, from the very second decade of the nineteenth century a class of learned Assamese people started writing in Bengali.

Already in the year 1836 Bengali was introduced in the offices in Assam. Bengali continued to be the language in the offices and educational institutes for more than three decades (1873). In the autobiography Hemchandra Barua wrote:

তেতিয়া়া অসমত বাঙালী ভাষা বর আদর আছিল, মাতৃভাষাক সকলেরে ফিনাইছিল—স্কুলত বাঙালী, কাহৈতে বাঙালী, ডেকা বিলাম আলাপত বাঙালী অরু তেতিয়া়া বিলাম চিঠিতে বাঙালী ভাষাহে চলিছিল; সকলেরে বঙ্গীয়—বঙ্গীয় সঙ্গীঙ্গী কথা লেখিছিল। অর্থাৎ মই এই নয় বিশিষ্টক্ষেত্র নাছিল, বঙ্গভাষাহ মোব বুকব কুটুম্ব আলিছি।’ 44

[During that time Bengali entertained a penchant from the educated Assamese and they detested their own mother tongue. In schools, offices, in the talks of the youngsters even in their letters also Bengali was used; everyone made Bengali their bosom friend. I was also not an exception.]

Having been the official language of Assam, the impact of the Bengali language was obviously very wide-ranging. Amongst the extant Bengali books of this period written by some erudite Assamese, Anandaram Dhekial Phookan’s (1829-59) ‘Āin O Byabasthā Sangrah, Part-I’ (1855) is worth-mentioning. Besides this, Maniram Dewan’s ‘Buranji Vivekratna’ (1838) is also significant. The use of a mixed Bengali closer to Assamese and Sanskrit is noticeable in this book.

In the mid nineteenth century those who played a pioneering role for the prevalence of the Assamese language in educational institutes and offices, Anandaram Dhekial Phookan was one prominent amongst them. His dynamic role in this reference is amply marked out in his books ‘Asomiyā Larār Mitra’ (1849) and ‘A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language and Vernacular Education in Assam’ (1855). Basically after the publication of the latter, a support generation for the prevalence of the Assamese language was visible amongst the Assamese people. It is also worth mentioning that already in the year 1846 AD the first Assamese periodical ‘Arunodai’ started appearing as an enterprise of the American Missionaries. For that reason, it is said that the spontaneous flow of the practice of Bengali in Assam, witnessed in the first half of the nineteenth century or pre-‘Arunodai’ age gradually shriveled up. Two main factors responsible for this are:

1. Generation of a keenness and enthusiasm amongst the middle class Assamese people for own language and culture and
2. The impact of the periodical ‘Arunodai’ published by the American Missionaries.

Of course it is not that there was no instance of the practice of Bengali could be found in the latter part of the nineteenth century amongst the learned Assamese. As Bengali used to be the medium of instruction, those who were educated through Bengali naturally developed an inclination towards the practice of this language. Most of them showed a keen interest in creative writing. Assamese literary prodigies like Padmanath Gohainbarua and Laksminath Bezbaroa initially used to write poetry in Bengali regularly. Besides these, we got a good number

45. See, ‘Gohainbarooha Rachanāvali’ and ‘Bezbaroa Granthāvali’. 
of essays and articles. These were written basically with the objective of removing the misconception of the Bengalis regarding the Assamese society and that Assamese is a dialect of the Bengali language. Here we can have a reference of such writings. In the year 1898 Rabindranath Tagore wrote the article ‘Bhasha Bichched’ in the journal ‘Bhārati’. Lakshminath flatly contradicted Rabindranath on latter’s remarks regarding the status of the Assamese language. He could not accept at all Rabindranath’s opinions on the Oriya and Assamese languages. In this article he remarked:

Had the writer been a well-informed one, he would have never said that it was not possible to produce noble literature in the Assamese language. It behaves only the writer of the article ‘Bhasa Bichched’ to say that no great literature can grow in the Assamese language into which, as frankly admitted by eminent linguists like Griersson, epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata were translated at least four to five centuries before such initiatives were taken in Bengali. There is nothing strange that the Bengali language, which has quickly become rich and powerful under the comfortably cool administration of the Britishers and having enjoyed the enormous facilities of Kolkata, the main city of India, would regard Assamese as a mere dialect.

It is to be noted that nowhere in the lengthy eleven-paged article, Lakshminath did not mention the name of ‘Ravikākā’. Yet he established his opinion with the help of strong logic and suitable data and proofs.

In this way a situation for the use of Bengali was created there amongst a class of erudite Assamese people and simultaneously the great tradition of the use of Bengali flourished in the areas of Surma and Barak Valleys (Sylhet and Cachar). We can notice two trends of the use of Bengali in these areas:

1. the poetry in old tradition and
2. Bengali writing published in the wave of modernity.

Some noteworthy writings in old style are ‘Gobinda Kirtan’, ‘Mahārāṣṭrotsab Lilāmrita’ and ‘Hindu Shāstriya Shrādhādir Kirtan Gitika’. All these three books were compiled by the last King of Cachar Gobinda Chandra Narayan (1813-1830).

After the demise of King Gobinda Chandra in the year 1832 Cachar came under the British Empire. Subsequently the impact of modernity influenced the social life of Cachar. Schools, library, town committee, printing machine were set up. Railways and postal service started functioning. It deserves mentioning that in the year 1871 Dinabandhu Mitra came to Cachar area as a Postal department employee. Later on, on the basis of historical elements of this area he wrote his play ‘Kamale Kamini’. After the British accession, modernity went on influencing the social life of this area. In the case of literature also the same thing happened.

Ramkumar Nandi Mazumdar and Pyaricharan Das were foremost amongst the harbingers of modernity to the poetry or creative writings of Assam.

Ramkumar Nandi Mazumdar was a precursor amongst those who were engaging themselves in the practice of Bengali literature in nineteenth century Assam. He left the mark of a multifarious genius. He had his access to all the areas of literature. Poetry, novel, drama everywhere his talent prospered. ‘Virāṅgānā Patrottar Kāvyā’ (1872) and ‘Ushodbaha Kāvyā’ (1885) are two noteworthy collections of his poetry. Besides this, Ramkumar compiled his poetry book ‘Bhāter Kabitā’ in old poetic style. This book keeps a historical significance as it describes some situation in the backdrops of ‘Sepoy Mutiny’ in Cachar or Barak Valley. For instance:
The rebellious army of Chitagaon moved towards Cachar. Failing to manage shelter and food some of them surrendered, some were killed and some of them committed suicide also.

Along with his poetic works he used to write in prose also. His plays written for yatra (popular dramas of Bengal) are worth referring in this regard. He composed altogether eleven such plays for yatra namely: 'Rāslilā', 'Umār Āgaman', 'Kansabadh', 'Jhulan Yātrā', 'Dol Yātrā', 'Bhāgabatir Janma O Vivāh' etc. 'Balad Mahimā' is a farce by Ramkumar.

Ramkumar was a pioneer of novelistic (prose tale) writing in Assam. He wrote the yarn ‘Mālinir Upākhyān’ in the decade of ninety’s in nineteenth century. His biographer referred to this writing:

Through the story the writer has described how a quarrelsome and illiterate wife can be corrected and the importance of education for woman is also established as well. This is the best instance of his prose which possesses a Bankimite style.

Pyaricharan was born in Latugram an outlying area of Karimganj town. His first poetry collection was ‘Mitrabilāp’ published in the year 1870. Other books by Pyaricharan are poetry collection: ‘Padyapustak’ (First part: 1876, Second and Third part: 1877), ‘Bhārateswari Kāvya’ (1877) and ‘Ranarangini’

48. Shrihattabasi Sharman, Rāmkumār Charit, P.117.
(1877); his prose-work: ‘Dwandwayuddha’ and ‘Victoriyar Jibancharit’ still unpublished. It is worth-noting that in the year 1875 in his editorship a weekly newspaper the ‘Srihatta Prakāsh’ was in print.

After Ramkumar and Pyaricharan, some important writers who were engaged in writing Bengli poetry are Rajiblochan Das and Krishnapriya Choudhury. Rajiblochan’s poetry collection ‘Padya Prasun’ was published in the year 1878. He translated the book ‘Drishtanta Shatak’ from Sanskrit into Bengali. This translation was published in the ‘Shrihatta Darpan’ in sequence in the year 1306 (1899AD).

Krishnapriya Chaudhury is the first woman Bengali litterateur in Barak valley. Her first book (‘Nārimangal’) was published in the year 1301 (1894 AD). It is an anthology of total fifteen writings written in both prose and poetry. Two other books by her are ‘Shok-Smriti’ (1315) and ‘Sanhār Parihār’(1337). It is worth mentioning that both the books were published in the first half of the twentieth century. Saratchandra Choudhury’s ‘Debiyuddha’ was published in Bengali year 1307 (1900). Prior to it, some of his other books ‘Ārya Sangit’ (1284), ‘Mahāpuja’(1288), ‘Chitore Birgan’ (1290), ‘Surendra Kārābas’(1290), ‘Barnashikshā Pranāli’ (1302) were published. His first book ‘Bhārater Sukhaswapna Nātak’ got published in 1875 AD. But basically his work plays was outside of Assam. So his works are published from outside of Assam. And also his journal ‘Shikshāstak’ published from Rajshahi.


We have got two textbooks also published in the nineteenth century. One is Ramkumar Nandi Mazumdar’s ‘Ganit Tatwa’ and another is on chemistry:
‘Rasāyaner Upakramanikā’ (1877) had been written by Bipin Bihari Das. He has discussed various topics of chemistry in this book in a lucid manner. The coinage of Bengali words for different terms of chemistry made this book special. Besides this, Manicharan Barman’s ‘Haidimba Bhāshā Prabesh’ was published in the year 1892 which keeps a historical and social significance of the grammatical aspects of the Dimasa language.

In the last part of the nineteenth century, though not as wide as that of Barak-Surma valleys, an environment for the use of Bengali was created centering the places Goalpara-Guwahati-Tura-Shillong. In the year 1874 a press ‘Hitabidhāyini Yantra’ was set up at Goalpara. It deserves mention that during 1876-77 there were only six numbers of printing press in Assam and ‘Hitabidhāyini Yantra’ was one of those. From this press only the journal ‘Goālpārā Hitasādhini Patrikā’ (1876-78) was published. Tariniprasad Sen’s ‘Bijni Rājībansha’ (1876) which is considered as one of the precursory original history books in Bengali also came out from Hitabidhayini Yantra. The Bengali translation of Shridhar Kandali’s ‘Kānkhowā Puthi’ (1283), which is the first book translated from Assamese into Bengali was also published from this press only.

In the last part of the nineteenth century almost in all important places of Assam printing press was set up. Consequence was an increase in the number of newspaper and journals published from this area. During this time, the journals like ‘Āssām Mihir’(1872) and ‘Śāhītya Sebak’(1887) were being published from Guwahati and Shillong respectively. In the year 1887 the ‘Garo-Bangala Abhidhan’ was published which was compiled by Reverend Ramkhe.

In the sixteenth century, a mixed form of Bengali was used in this region as the medium for diplomatic and political communication amongst the royal courts. Since the sixteenth century up to the nineteenth century, during this time the use of Bengali and Bengali literature in this region achieved a distinctive position. Along with the different languages, the Bengali language and

49. ‘Report on the Administration of the Province of Assam’, for the year 1876-77. Shillong, 1878.
literature is also burgeoning here having been nourished with profound passion and love. Alongside the greater Bengal is outlined here another world of Bengali literature yielding a good harvest. The specialty and multiplicity of these literary works is intriguing and this absorption provokes us to dip into its profoundest depth.