CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The social structure of the Assamese society operated at two levels: (a) that of folk or unlettered peasants and (b) that of the elite or "reflective" few. The cultural process in the former comprised the Little Tradition and those in latter constituted the Great Tradition. There was constant interaction between two levels of tradition. The study found out that the little and the Great traditions' approach of Robert Redfield could be employed in the situation of Assam, during the times of Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan. Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan was a conspicuous voice of the Great Tradition in Assam. The views of Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan on tradition and modernity were set in a background in which forces of different traditions came into play. The Bengali tradition, so to say was brought into a confrontation with the tradition of Assamese people with respect to the language issue. There emerged varying perspectives on the uniqueness of the Assamese language. Advocates of the Assamese language deemed it as a language which was not akin to the Bengali language. Advocates of Bengali language proclaimed that it was an offshoot of one and the same language which had become disfigured in due course of time. Till the official proclamation, there was close proximity of the two traditions. People had exchanged different ideas especially religious ones. People of Assam closely identified themselves with the people of Bengal that they went to the extent of proclaiming themselves as one of them and even christened the names of their places in Bengali language. Till 1852, people of both traditions deeply respected and cherished ideals of each other. From 1836 to 1852, people acquiesced in the fact that they had no problem with the government proclamation. They lay inactive and dormant till 1852. It was in 1852, when Anandaram
Dhekiyal Phukan took up the cause of the Assamese language, that the common peasantry or so to say little tradition suddenly woke up from their slumber and followed in the footsteps of their Great tradition, as exemplified by Ananadaram Dhekiyal Phukan. From 1852 onwards, Esteem and appreciation for the Bengali tradition was suddenly transformed into Abhorrence.

Ananadarm Dhekiyal Phukan was for modernization rather than modernity, as modernization is more conspicuous than modernity, which is abstract and therefore subtle. It was a common remark of all European writers that the Assamese were averse to the admission of foreigners into their country. The timing of the rendezvous with the British opened a new vista for the indigenous people because, immediately after the Burmese invasion, people's psyche was totally bruised with the destruction and mayhem that the Burmese had unleashed. They required a much needed respite and healing and they believed that British rule would provide them with that. The Great Tradition of the Assamese society entertained this belief. The Little Tradition followed suit. Thus, the Assamese tradition at the juncture of meeting with a proud and powerful tradition opened their minds to receive, accept and learn with much fanfare anything and everything that this heterogenic encounter yielded. This tradition tried to build in them the notion of their own language which they had cultivated through varying orthogenetic means. The British provided them the much needed identity in the form of language. Hope and aspiration for the western/British tradition turned into utopia. They had great veneration and adoration for this tradition. Thus, we see that there was a great interplay of three traditions- British tradition acting vertically on the Assamese tradition through the workings of its hegemony and the Bengali tradition acting horizontally on
the same through linguistic dominance; and the response elicited by the Assamese
tradition with the forces acting over and on it.

The Study has to offer three findings—

A. The idea of Modernity as exemplified by Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan
was at an embryonic or nascent stage. At numerous instances, he displays the full use of
rationality, especially with his contribution made in the administrative or linguistic and
cultural domain of Assamese society. But, at various instances, he exhibits a show of
implanted rationality so to speak, because he yearned for replication of conditions in
Assam, which were prevailing in England at that time. He could be considered a victim
of the spell of Westernization. Was it because of his close association with his patrons-
Jenkins and Captain Matthie? His Father Haliram Dhekiyal Phukan was the cream of
pre-colonial society. He was the right hand man of David Scott. His Father’s cordial
relationship with the colonial power also perhaps brought in such high expectations in
his mind. Anything British and Western was deemed to be always good. His blind
fascination for the West proved too costly because he had failed to chart out an
indigenous trajectory of modernity. Thus, Assam’s own indigenous trajectory of
acquiring modernity had been hijacked by the so called process of Westernization. Did
the so called modernity in Assam come from conscious and deliberate effort at
technical, organizational and institutional innovations? He had derailed the notion that
Assam could also make tryst with modernity from the scratch. He was busy with
admiration for conspicuous benefits of colonial modernity rather than focussing on the
temperament itself. Modernity is an abstract idea or condition where rationality,
individuality and other ideals gain precedence over everything. We cannot apply
rationality according to our whims and fancies. It should be put to use to the fullest
extent and everything should be weighed in the scale of Reason. We cannot employ it in a rather shallow way. Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan should have weighed in his scale of reason, before he entertained such high hopes of the idea that there should be a replication of material conditions of England in Assam. Rather, it would not be naive on our part to say that he had a myopic view of Modernity.

He had a machine centric notion of civilization and tried to ape the West. He was of the firm conviction that machines are the measuring rod of the degree of a society getting civilized. A society should not entertain the belief of being civilized until it possesses machines. He displayed Imitation and fondness for newness instead of Ingenuity. He began to think that Western Civilization was the only yardstick for measuring non western societies, as if West is synonymous with civilization. It was as if in the scale of civilization, the East is way down and the West is where it ought to be. He had a disfigured notion of culture. According to him, the Nagas and the Abors constituted the lowest rungs of society in the Universal scale of civilization. But, one day they could also be at par with the Europeans through the 2S- Science and Steam. If the Bengalis could have in the future, why the Abors and the Nagas could not? He forgot the notion that every culture is unique. He should have given precedence to indigenousness rather than to universalism.

B. Both Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan and Raja Ram Mohan Roy were great in their respective societies. The study recovered the greatness of Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan, which had been subsumed under that of Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Modernity in India was first introduced in the Presidency towns of India. Later on, slowly but surely, these new abstract ideas trickled down to other areas of India. British Orientalists had handed down to the Bengali Intelligentsia – Rationalism (search for constant and
Universal principles of human Nature), Cosmopolitanism and Dynamic Classicism. The educated classes yearned for Progress and were always anxious to secure for the motherland the conditions that prevailed in other civilized countries. This was a peculiar mindset and the clearest exposition of naivety on the part of the educated classes, which deemed it the duty of the colonial powers to upgrade them to their level. Anandaram died at a very young age. Perhaps, he had not then reached the pinnacle of his achievements. Even then, he had shown signs of great maturity which was rare at that age.

It would be really unfair to subsume the greatness of Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan under that of Raja Ram Mohun Roy. Each was great in his own unique ways. Even if Anandaram is said to be the Raja Ram Mohun Roy of Assam, it should be seen in a much broader sense. Age and context should be the two basic parameters when we try to compare two grand personalities. Context in Assam was glaringly different from that in Bengal. Raja Ram Mohun Roy had many influential peers in Bengal unlike that of Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan. Ram Mohun Roy experienced the direct effects of the liberal atmosphere of a presidency town unlike that of Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan which got only a trickle down effect of same. Both wanted liberal and enlightened system of instruction with preponderance of natural sciences and a parallel development of Sanskrit learning. Raja Ram Mohun Roy especially grappled with issues of religion and social reforms while Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan proved his administrative acumen and delved in matters of language. Anandaram’s three rooms at his ancestral house — which respectively catered to the local people, Europeans and his study, displayed his finest blending of Tradition and Modernity.
C. Had Bengali not been declared the official language of Assam, Assamese language would have receded into oblivion. It was the American Baptists Missionaries, armed with religious fervour, who took up the case of the Assamese language in order to spread Christianity. It was only for them that Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan took up the cudgels on behalf of his mother tongue. The official proclamation was a blessing in disguise. On one hand, it wanted to remove Assamese. But, on the other hand, it generated a lot of publicity and propaganda which itself hurt its own interests. That Assamese was saved due to the making of Bengali as an official language, can be gauged from the following facts-

a. Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan should not be considered as someone who fought for the total abolition of Bengali from Assam. He acted quite rationally and in the most measured way. Even though he was a votary of the Assamese language, he cannot be clubbed as the member of the anti Bengali Front led by the American Baptist Missionaries. Supporters of Assamese like Mills, Danforth and him urged that it being taught in elementary rather than at higher classes where it was unsuited. Anandaram was constrained to admit that education in Assam could not be completed without Bengali. He himself was one of the finest exponents of the Bengali language. Accepting a language for fulfilment of one’s education and accepting a language to be substituted for one’s own mother tongue are different. Assamese was used for 10 years after annexation of the province. He used the word ‘suppression’, for the substitution of the Assamese language by the Bengali language.

b. There were a lot of similarities that stood in the way of grant of a unique status to the Assamese language. Similarities of Assamese language with regard to the
Bengali language were maintained due to the communication between two countries and the large influx of settlers from Bengal and Behar into Assam. There were bonds of a common religion and of a common sacerdotal community which have also been important in preventing any material divergence of language.

c. Prevalence of several dialects of Assamese Language. In Kamrup, Kamroopie or Dhekeri is prevalent which is different from that of Upper Assam. One third population of Assam (excluding natives of Gowelpara, Kamrup, Darrang and non Aryan tribes of Plains and Hills) spoke Upper Assam Dialect, which again was subdivided into Sutia and Sibsagar dialects. The people of Kamrup, Darrang and Gowelpara did not join this movement.

d. For Courts and Schools of a higher grade a technical vocabulary and terminology is required, and there was the weak point in arguments for introduction of Assamese. Every definition in Penal Code was rendered in Bengali and the whole of law terms. With few exception, Bengali Law terms have been borrowed, almost literation, from Persian and Arabic.

e. In 1835, The Officers found that there were no Assamese books fit for introduction in schools and that old Assamese manuscripts which were discovered were found to be written in a language in idioms and Grammar the same with that of Bengal. So, they could not come to a more correct decision.

f. Assam reconciled to Bengali language and many believed themselves to be immigrants from Bengal and went so far as to adopt Bengali titular and family names, such as Datta. Whatever may be the feelings of Assamese then; there was a time when they considered it as an honour to be recognized as Bengali. This spirit of partiality towards Bengali was manifested by all classes of people up to year
1852, when it was suddenly changed by the influence of Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan, who was with a few friends submitted a memorial to Mr. Mills, Judge of late Sadar Court on deputation in Assam.

g. Natives of Lower Assam would never accept it under compulsion. Even if Assamese were to be accepted, 1. They would have to either accept the language of old Assam Manuscripts or 2. Form two languages, one in Upper Assam and one in Lower Assam.

h. Assamese do not appear to have any fixed rules of Orthography. Same word was written in different forms by two persons of the same district or by same person in two different places.

i. Indifference of the hill tribes with respect to the linguistic battles then.

j. Government wanted a gradual approach. As long as Assam was under Government of Bengal, as long as its natives could not finish their education without repairing to Calcutta, as long as they could not remain ignorant of Bengal newspapers, by far the most potent instrument of education then, and as long as decisions of High Court and laws were to be translated in Bengali Gazette, Assamese were to learn Bengali, and were to form a part and parcel of Bengal.

k. Bengali was indispensable for all those who hoped to obtain employment under Government in those times. It was held in official quarters that those who held that Assamese and Bengal were the same had served in Bengal Proper and had known the Bengali language “as spoken” before coming to Assam. While those who held that province have a distinct language of its own were chiefly missionaries (who came from America to Assam directly) and military officials who before entering the Commission had knowledge of Hindustani, but not of Bengali. Even if they did
have any knowledge of Bengali, it was Bengali of books and not language of peasants.

1. Even the Anti-Assamese lobby went to the extent of stating that all respectable persons, especially the gentry's class, of Assam had in fact migrated from Bengal. (as had been cited in Assam Commissioner's Office File No. 471. Pg. 40)

m. If Christian missions first established in Assam, were to have been derived from a parent branch in Calcutta, instead of one in Burma, it would have been doubtful whether we would have ever heard of an Assamese language. The American Baptist missionaries wanted to propagate in Assamese i.e. language of the masses. But, they became alarmed and literally fought with all their might for the reinstatement only when Assamese was officially proscribed by the Govt.

n. Ethnologists explained that in Assam the Bengali had remained as it was when Bengalis brought it with them, while in Bengal itself, it had been a progressive language.

o. How is it that names of oldest places in Assam were not Assamese- Ganhatty, Nowgong, Joshatti, Golaghat, Rungpore, Seebpore, Luckhimpore, Burpeta, Sonareegaon, etc.?

p. American Baptist Missionaries observed that more than forty language and dialects were spoken in Assam then and half of these were languages of the Hill tribes.

There was a strong Identity of the language spoken in Lower Assam with that of Eastern Bengal district (esp. Rangpur). In Upper Assam- Assamese superseded their own language, which was a language belonging to the Tai Family, by Bengali in purest and most cultivated form known at time of their acquiring from Bengal Brahmins, their chief instructors being members of Santipur brotherhood.
Observation- The key argument of the study is that the Great Tradition of the West had a Midas touch on the Assamese society. Our tryst with modernity had been at least been hastened. It was only for the Western influence in general and the American Baptist Missionaries in particular, that our basic sense of identity in the form of Assamese language was kept intact, thereby helping us in the reconstruction of a greater Assamese society. The sheer show of resilience of the Assamese society in the midst of two forces- vertical one in the form of overall British hegemony and horizontal one in the form of Bengali linguistic dominance is indeed remarkable. There was a great adoration for the West in general and American Baptist Missionaries in particular. But, even then Assamese people at large were not swayed by the evangelization processes of the Baptist Missionaries. An alien religion was not able to make a dent on the socio-religious fabric of the greater Assamese society.