CHAPTER: II

ASSAM’S CONTACT WITH THE WEST- MODUS OPERANDI OF THE WEST

II.0. Assam’s contact with the west- modus operandi of the west

Assimilation is the process by which individuals of a foreign or minority culture enter the social positions of the standard or dominant culture in which they reside. Closely related is the process of acculturation, the process by which individuals of foreign or minority cultures learn the language, habits and values of the standard or dominant culture in which they reside. Acculturation is a cultural process, whereas assimilation is a social process. Acculturation is sometimes called “behavioural assimilation” to distinguish it from integration or social assimilation. The standard or dominant culture consists of the languages, values, and meanings that structure a society’s political, economic and educational institutions.25

Resistance is facilitated when minorities are territorially or occupationally concentrated and in case of large native minorities, may take the form of ethno nationalism. Ethno-nationalist movements are antithesis of assimilation, in that they seek independence from the dominant culture and society.26 Although, acculturation is necessary for assimilation, it is not sufficient. A dominant society may erect barriers to integration. An example is the Assamese society which resisted the superimposition of the Bengali language during the initial years of colonial rule. Acculturation and assimilation are processes of homogenization. They produce changes in the direction of the dominant culture rather than creating a “melting pot” culture blended from numerous and different foreign cultures. They thus lead to a reduction of cultural diversity by shaping minority and immigrant cultures in ways that neither challenge nor

26 Ibid, p. 113.
threaten the standard culture. Persons who acculturate generally lose their native cultural abilities and minority or immigrant groups, after one or more generations of acculturation, may come to identify wholly with the dominant culture. Throughout most of the Palaeolithic period culture remained rudimentary. Human groups were grouped into small, simple, nomadic bands, a far cry from the large and complex states of today. The process by which this great transformation took place was cultural evolution. Anthropologists like Herbert Spencer, Edward Burnett and Lewis Henry Morgan- were all deeply concerned with how culture had evolved and dealt extensively with this subject. Opposition to cultural evolution began with the indictment by Franz Boas (1896) and continued through the first half of the twentieth century. He challenged the very validity of the cultural evolution. A. R Radcliffe called evolutionary formulations as “Conjectural History”- or as lacking a factual basis.27

The culmination of White’s efforts to re-establish cultural evolutionism came with the publication of his “Evolution of Culture” in 1959. He was joined by archaeologist V. Gordon Childe in England and ethnologist Julian H Steward in the US. The difficulty with the biological notion of evolution when applied to culture is brought home with the realization that accepting this view implies that not only the emergence and florescence of the Roman Empire but also its decline and fall would be considered evolution. Earlier, evolution and progress were used interchangeably as if synonyms. Spencer however pointed out that calling a given change “progress” implied a favourable moral judgement to it.28

History is the totality of events involving the actions of Human beings. But, Evolution, on the other hand, if we follow Spencerian notion - includes only events that

have resulted in increased cultural complexity. Cultural Evolution is commonly said to manifest two contrasting forms, Unilinear and Multilinear. According to the former, all societies followed the same sequence as they evolved. The classical evolutionists are called Unilinearists, because they believed that all cultures had evolved along the same lines. Morgan, Tylor and Spencer however, all acknowledged that there was considerable variation in the way societies had developed. In certain aspects, however, cultural evolution has indeed been Unilinear. Spencer proposed a scheme of political development consisting of four successive stages: simple (autonomous village), Compound (chiefdom), Doubly compound (state), Trebly compound (Empire). In advancing to a higher level, a society, evolving independently, passed successively through each of the lower stages.29

Steward proposed the term ‘multilinear’ to label the various pathways by which higher cultures had attained their level of development. He also identified a third mode of evolution, universal, which he said typified the evolutionism of Childe and White. As employed by White, Steward held, evolution did not apply to the historical development of any particular society but to the growth of culture as a whole. In the course of Universal evolution such traits as agriculture, taxation, the corvee, markets and coined money had appeared in that order, even though they might not be in that order in any given society.30

While biologists usually speak of organic evolution as irreversible, the same cannot be said of cultural evolution. As noted, societies have at times reversed course and regressed from a more complex to a simpler level. States may break down into chiefdoms, and chiefdoms in turn may fragment into autonomous villages. Spencer took

pains to point out that evolution is not an inherent tendency to advance on the part of societies; rather, it depends on the occurrence of appropriate conditions. Should the conditions upon which a form of society is based no longer obtain, the society may revert to an earlier simpler form.  

Among primitive societies, sibs (clans) frequently arose when villages attained the size requiring additional means of integration if they were not to fission. Clans in turn gave way to territorial forms of organization as societies grew still larger and kinship based units no longer proved adequate to the task of binding together a society. Anthropologists agree that one of the salient features of cultural evolution is that it is cumulative, but, as in the examples just cited, evolution may also be supplantive. In the struggle for existence new elements are not only added to the cultural inventory, they may also displace older ones. Having greater explanatory power than its rival, one set of ideas may replace another.

The reciprocal adjustment of a society's component elements is called integration. Childe distinguished two great revolutions in human history, the Neolithic and the urban, the first stemming from the invention of agriculture and the second from the growth of population and sedentary lifestyle, which agriculture made possible. For White, technology was the mainspring of cultural evolution, particularly those elements that involved harnessing of energy.

If cultural evolution is an objective fact, it should be possible to assess the level of culture attained by any given society and then to compare that society with others. The frequent use of terms like "higher" and "lower" in describing different cultures, even by such dyed in the wool anti evolutionists as Robert Lowie, shows how difficult it

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32 Ibid, p.274.
33 Ibid, p.274.
is to ignore the fact that cultures do vary tremendously in their level of complexity, and thus in their degree of evolution.34

For Spencer, evolution in its fullest sense comprises two distinct processes, development and growth. Development, he claimed, consists in the emergence of new forms, while growth is an increase in the number of these forms.35 Since the time of the eighteenth century philosophers Anne Robert Jacques Turgot and the Marquis de Condorcet, scholars have divided human history, including prehistory, into evolutionary stages. The first and best known of these sequences was that of Savagery, barbarism, and civilization. Savagery was equated with hunting and gathering subsistence, barbarism with early agriculture, and civilization with traits such as urban life and writing.36

It does not require an anthropologist to notice that people are different in their languages, customs, gestures and beliefs but nearly a century of argument has gone into explaining what that means- different in relation to what, different to whom, and at what level, or for that matter, similar in relation to what. Specifically, within what frameworks or frames of reference do such human institutions as roles, myths, rituals, beliefs, roles, pathologies and aesthetic forms make sense. The concept of cultural relativism crystallizes these issues.37

Within the history of anthropology, the doctrine of cultural relativism began as a reaction against and a revulsion toward the cultural evolutionism of August Comte, Edward Burnett Tylor, Herbert Spencer, and Lewis Henry Morgan and the nationalisms of late nineteenth and twentieth century Europe. In the views of early evolutionists

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34 Ibid, p.275.
35 Ibid, p.275
36 Ibid, p.275
37 Ibid, p.281
human kind proceeded and improved from savagery or barbarism to civilization, yet the most ostensibly progressive cultures, the self declared pinnacle of this process, were those that had the most racist and most brutal nationalist doctrines, enacted in two world wars.  

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, during the European age of exploration, the renaissance, and the enlightenment, the first efforts were made to understand non-Europeans on their own terms and in their own living contexts. The emphatic impulse later became part of the core of anthropological relativism. The question became less one of how anthropologist could fit the people they studied into an explanatory frame of reference (an etic or outsider’s frame of reference) and more like how do the people studied see themselves (an emic or insider’s frame of reference).  

If early cultural evolutionists and rabid nationalists arrogantly defined nineteenth and twentieth century Europeans (and only specific groups within Europe) as the summit of biology if not theology, and regarded everyone else as culturally inferior if not as subhuman creatures to be despised, cultural relativists, discontent with western urbanization, secularization, industrialization, and the enlightenment, reversed the ethnocentric invidious comparison. They elevated what was once called the primitive, the preliterate and the small scale, to a condition of life far superior to anything western or modern. Cultural evolution became a kind of devolution. Romanticization, nostalgia, Sentimentalization, and idealization of primitive harmony still prevail among contemporary relativists as well.  

According to this view, the measure and pinnacle of  

38 Ibid, p. 282  
39 Ibid, p. 282  
humankind is no longer 'us' but 'them', which postmodernists sanctify in the clumsy term, 'otherness'.

When each cultural unit (from person to tribe to workplace to nation state) is regarded as a functional, unique, whole, one is permitted to examine and appreciate patterns within a text but not between texts of different cultural units. Although intra cultural variation is widely recognized among anthropologists, that is not all the members of even a small hunter-gatherer band are culturally uniform or the same- and for many contemporary anthropologists the individual is often regarded as the bounded anthropological unit rather than the tribe or ethnic group.41

In the nineteenth century, social evolutionary theorists used the word 'culture' as an equivalent to 'civilization'. People were thought to have more culture or less culture, accordingly as their civilizations were thought to be more or less advanced. Edward B. Tylor (1903) had this view in his much quoted definition of culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society". Like his contemporary theorists, he saw people with more advanced cultures as being free from primitive superstitions and more sophisticated about the real world of nature and about the social and moral principles that had the greatest promise for helping humans realize their potential for more rewarding lives. 42 Principles that had the greatest promise for helping humans realize their potential for more rewarding lives. In this view, differences in societies' knowledge, customs, and beliefs reflected differences in how advanced they were on a

scale of progress measured by relative complexity of technology and social institutions, as enunciated by Lewis Henry Morgan in the late 1800s. Ethnography’s aim was to describe and compare these different bodies of knowledge, customs, and beliefs so as to order them according to their relative degree of advancement. Societies with the simplest technologies and arts and least developed political and legal orders were considered representative of the earliest stage of the evolutionary emergence of culture as something distinctively human. They were in this sense ‘primitive’. As Tylor put it, ‘By simply placing nations at one end of the social series and savage tribes at the other, arranging the rest of mankind between these limits...ethnographers are able to set up a rough scale of civilization- a transition from the savage state to our own.’ This assumption characterized the work of other major evolutionary theorists such as Herbert Spencer (1876) and William G. Sumner and Albert G Keller (1927). The idea of a single lineal development or several independent lineal developments of social and technological complexity continued to dominate the thinking of the Marxists and other evolutionary theorists.43

In the nineteenth century view, all human societies were travelling the same course of cultural evolution but at different speeds. Accounting for the different speeds posed a problem. If different speeds reflected disparities in the evolved mental capacities of people of different races, then it was necessary to postulate an underlying “psychic unity of mankind” to the effect that all races were fundamentally alike in their inbuilt potential for mental capacities.44

By the beginning of the twentieth century Franz Boas was using the term culture to refer to the beliefs, customs, and social institutions that seem to characterize each separate society. Each society was said to have its own distinctive culture, just as it thought to have its own language or dialect. Rather than seeing their differences on the scale of complexity as a reflection of differences in mental development, Boas and his students offered another explanation. Cultural differences, they said, are explained by the environmental conditions in which people live and by the accidents of history. Historical developments such as the domestication of plants and animals took place where these were present in their wild form. Once domesticated, their cultivation or use could spread to other areas of the world. Differences in complexity of technology and social institutions were thus to be understood as a consequence of where people have been situated in relation to the world's natural resources and to the lines of intersocietal communication. People at the crossroads of communication have benefitted from new developments being transmitted from many different places; people at the peripheries have tended to lag behind.\textsuperscript{45}

That the content of culture is learned through social interaction continues to define the cultural domain, clearly distinguishing it from those things that are not learned but only activated by experience, such as the taste of sweet or feeling of fear. That each society has a culture that its members share and that also characterises the society as a distinct entity, however was questioned by Edward Sapir (1924). Although a society may be said to have customary practices, its members do not all have the same knowledge of them or attach the same significance to them. Depending on the subject matter, moreover, there may be considerable variation among families or other

\textsuperscript{45} Goodenough, \textit{op.cit}, p.292
subgroups within a larger society as to how various activities, including rituals, are customarily conducted. 46 This insight required distinguishing between cultures as something learned by individuals as members of a society as such in contrast with other societies. Clearly anthropologists were using the term "culture" to refer to two quite different, though not unrelated, things, one a phenomenal order and the other an ideational one.47

The phenomenal order is what an observer sees as patterns in the ongoing conduct of affairs- the actual enactment of activities- in a society or community. These patterns are manifested in the recurring regularities of modality and discontinuity that give apparent structure to events and human interactions and taken together constitute what is often referred to as a people’s way of life. These patterns differ from one society to the next, and the term culture is often used in reference to them. Culture in this sense is the property of a society or group. A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, taking society rather than individual people as the object of study has treated culture as roughly equivalent to what they refer to as social structure. In order to distinguish culture in this sense from that of social animals, and seeing the customary practices that characterize a given society as learned by its members, Alfred L. Kroeber argued that culture belongs to the domain of what he called the super organic. As such, it has an existence governed by principles that are at a higher order of phenomena than those operating at the level of the individuals.48

Culture, in the ideational sense, by contrast, being a product of learning, consists of what the members of a human group have to know in order to function acceptably as members of that group in the activities in which they engage. In this sense culture is not

46 Goodenough, op.cit, p.293
47 ibid
48 ibid
necessarily shared by all the members of a group; but in the process of learning from one another, people attribute what they learn to one another, and to the extent that these attributions enable them to accomplish their purposes with one another, they create the illusion of shared understandings and a common culture. In this view each person’s personal view of the world, or ‘propriospect’ includes an understanding of the expectations of various sets of others, and for each person a group’s culture consists of the expectations that he or she attributes to it. As no two persons in the group make identical attributions, the group’s culture, objectively speaking, is made up of the aggregation of its members’ attributions. The cultural makeup of the group is analogous to its genetic makeup. Variation in the latter is limited by the ability of its members to reproduce biologically, and variation in the former is limited by their ability to interact meaningfully with one another.  

Because individuals frequently have dealings with people from more than one group, their propriospects include varying degree of knowledge of more than one language and more than one culture. They shift from using one language and culture to another as the one to guide their behaviour and their understanding of the behaviour of others. The culture they employ is their operating culture for the moment. The culture that members of a group expect their fellows to use as their operating culture constitutes the public culture of that group. Knowledge of other cultures in the individual propriospects of a group’s members, though not a part of that group’s public culture, is a resource upon which the group’s members may draw when circumstances militate against the use of use of their public culture. This wider range of knowledge has been referred to as the group’s culture pool. Culture change involves, among other things, the

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49 Ibid, p. 293
50 Ibid, p.294
processes by which knowledge comes into and drops out of a group’s culture pool. It also involves the processes by which knowledge of how to do things is incorporated into the public culture from the culture pool or drops out of the public culture while persisting in the culture pool.\textsuperscript{51} Myths, stories, dramas and proverbs, artefacts of past applications of ideational culture, serve as both positive and negative models and guides for behaviour, feeding back on ideational culture. The artefacts of ideational culture gives structure to the phenomenal world in which people live, a structure that itself keeps changing over time. The circumstances to which ideational culture is applied today result from modifications of circumstances to which it was applied yesterday. The layout of streets in cities, the way in which property in land has been allocated, the social and economic institutions that have been created- banks, universities, clans, - are all part of the material and social landscape, constraining and channelling how people go about their lives.\textsuperscript{52}

Artefacts of culture, whether objects, legends, musical compositions, or imagined beings, are capable of being shared as consciously cognized objects by a society’s members in ways the ideational culture that produced them cannot be so fully shared. These artefacts are experienced by people in diverse ways and by conditioned association, acquire emotional value. As such they become symbols that evoke feelings. They can serve as focal points of similarity of feeling in some cases and differences of feeling in others. Some anthropologists have defined culture as shared public symbols. Thus they call attention to the importance of cultural artefacts as symbols. The meaning

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, p.294

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid, p. 295.
symbols acquire, however, has to be learned by each individual. Symbols thus acquire different personal meanings for different individuals. People also learn that they are expected publicly to profess to certain valuations of symbols. A definition of culture must distinguish between the things people have to know to behave acceptably to their fellows and the things they have learned that they do not exhibit in public.\(^5^3\)

Cultural evolutionism, especially in the works of Edward Burnett Tylor and Lewis Henry Morgan, was concerned with the states through which human societies had passed on the road to civilization and with the processes that inevitably led from one stage to the next. The specific stages recognized by different theorists varied, but within a given stage, technological developments (i.e. basketry, pottery, metallurgy) were linked with intellectual improvements (i.e. animism, polytheism, monotheism) and to growth in the scope of social organization (i.e. tribe, state, empire). Either technology or intellect might be thought to lead the way upward, that is, some theories stressed the impact of improved tools and techniques on social and intellectual life, while others emphasized the role of increasing rationality, as man put aside primitive notions of magic and witchcraft in favour of a logical, scientific understanding of the world.\(^5^4\)

In a significant functional study that attempted to translate the synchronic into diachronic, the Folk Culture of Yucatan (1941), Robert Redfield described four communities lying along the "folk-urban continuum", suggesting the ways in which small, relatively homogeneous, isolated villages are transformed and incorporated into large, relatively diverse and open societies, proposing processes such as individualization and cultural disorganization as necessary correlates. Virtually all materialist approaches in anthropology stem from the theoretical formulations of Karl

\(^{5^4}\) Ibid, p. 299.
Marx and Friedrich Engels, and most of these centre on the notion of the modes of production, whether or not they accept the doctrine of the inevitable progression from one mode to another (e.g., Feudal to Capitalist or Capitalist to socialist) in ethnology and archaeology, materialists look first to changes in the material base of social relationships for the key to all forms of cultural change. 55 Acculturation, another concept of change, was the name given to investigations of the impact of dominant (colonial) societies on native cultures under conditions of sustained, first-hand contact.

Eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophers published rationalized general histories of humanity, postulating three or four stages of political economy from bestial primitives to the polished nations of Western Europe (Meek 1976). Although as early as 1793 the Scot philosopher Dugald Stewart had labelled these exercises “conjectural”, most 19th-century anthropologists accepted the three-stage framework (Savagery- barbarism- Civilization, in Lewis Henry Morgan’s 1877 formula) for cultural evolution, treating it as uncontested culture history. 57

Kulturgeschichte was introduced by the German writer Gustav Klemm in what was meant as an encyclopaedic illustrated compendium, Allgemeine Cultur-Geschichte der Menschheit (1843). Klemm presented the three-stage evolutionary sequence by then standard in European thought: His version titled the stages “Savagery”, “Domestication” (or “tameness”), and “Freedom” (his opinion of life in Christian nations). Travellers’ descriptions were amassed to describe the “active races” (classical

55 ibid, p.299
56 ibid, p.301
34 Ibid, p.303
Mediterranean and Germanic) and “passive races”, the latter said still to exist, retarded, in the first or second of the three stages.  

The circumstances in which the Hindu World encountered the Modern West were in some points remarkably similar to those in which the main body of Orthodox Christendom underwent the same experience. The Hindu World, too, had entered into its universal state by the time when the impact of the Modern Western civilization upon it began to make itself felt there. (If we are right in our view that a universal state was imposed on the Hindu world by alien hands in the form of the Timurid Mughal Empire, and also right in equating the effective establishment of the Mughal Raj with Akbar’s conquest of Gujarat in 1572, this event in Hindu history did not occur till 74 years after the first landfall of Western Ocean faring mariners on the west coast of the subcontinent; but Da Gama’s arrival at Calicut in AD 1498 did not produce sensation in India that it produced in Venice and in Egypt, where it was immediately realized that rounding of the cape of Good Hope by Portuguese ships was a threat to all parties commercially interested in the traditional short route between India and Western Europe via the Indian Ocean and the Levant. The continental minded Central Asian Muslim conquerors of the interior of the Indian Subcontinent were as insensitive to landfalls on the coast as they were sensitive to passages of the Hindukush; and though their latest representative, the Timurid Mughal empire builder Babur, crossed the Hindukush only six years, and descended from Kabul upon the Punjab only 21 years, after Da Gama Arrived in India by sea, there is no mention of the Portuguese explorers feat in the memoirs of the Central Asian soldier. Even in the eyes of Babur’s grandson Akbar, the

founder of the Mughal Raj, the handful of Westerners squatting on sufferance in one or
two ports on the fringes of his enormous realm were still little more than objects of
curiosity as pedlars of ingenious toys and the missionaries of an interesting religion.
Indeed the impact of the West on Mughal India hardly began to make itself felt
seriously before the Mughal power had begun to go into decline after the death of
Aurangzeb in Ad 1707). In India, as in the non Russian part of Orthodox Christendom,
this universal state had been imposed by alien empire builders who were children of the
Iranic Muslim Civilization; and in Mughal India, as in Ottoman Orthodox Christendom,
the subjects of these Muslim rulers were feeling the attraction of their master's alien
culture at the time when the modern west appeared over the horizon, but subsequently
transferred their cultural allegiance to this later risen star as the West manifestly
increased and the Islamic Society manifestly decreased in potency.

The Hindus had no antipathy to the west, in their corresponding cultural
orientation, had no such unhappy memories to live down and the encounter between the
Hindu world and the West began on the day when Vasco Da Gama made his landfall at
Calicut, and it was virtually the first contact that had ever occurred between these two
societies.

The Hindu Universal state lived out its life to the term of its natural expectation
and likewise remained to the end in alien hands; there was in this case a transfer of
control from one pair of alien hands to another. The empire which the Timurid war lords
feeble successors failed to hold together was reconstituted by the British business men
who stepped into Akbar's shoes when they became aware that the framework of Law
and order in India, without which no westerners could carry on their trade there, was

61 Ibid, p. 199
going to be restored by the French if the British did not forestall these rivals by doing
the work themselves. Thus the Westernization of the Hindu world entered on its critical
stage in a period in which India was under western rule, and in consequence the
reception of the Modern West culture was initiated in India, as in Russia, from above
downwards, and not from below upwards, as in an Ottoman orthodox Christendom.  

After the breakdown of the Hindu civilization in the twelfth century of the
Christian era and the subsequent progressive intrusion of Iranic Muslim invaders into a
disintegrating Hindu Society's domain, these alien intruders found it convenient to
follow in this point the practice of the Hindu states which they were supplanting.
Brahman ministers and minor officials in the service of Muslim rulers made this alien
rule less odious than it would otherwise have been to the Hindu majority of these Indian
Muslim Prince's subjects, because these Brahman intermediaries understood how to
handle their fellow Hindus and at the same time enjoyed a prestige in their eyes which
reconciled the rank and file to following the dominant caste's lead in accommodating
themselves to an irksome alien political yoke. In making the use of the Brahmans the
Mughal Raj followed the precedent of the parochial Indian Muslim states whose former
dominions it had united under its own rule, and the British raj in its turn, followed the
precedent of the Mughal Raj, while the British economic enterprise in India, both public
and private, opened up corresponding opportunities for the Banyas. In enlisting the
services of the services of Hindus in the administration of British India, the British
authorities did not deliberately give the Brahmans any special reference, but the

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Brahmans hereditary ascendancy in the Hindu Society enabled them once again to secure the lion's share of the opportunity for themselves.\(^63\)

As a consequence, of the transfer of the government of India to British hands, the policy of the British regime in making English, instead of Persian, the official language of the Imperial administration, and giving Western literature a preference over Persian and Sanskrit literature as a medium of Indian Higher Education, had great an effect on Hindu cultural history as was made upon Russian cultural History by the Westernizing policy of Peter the Great. In the Hindu, as in the Russian, Society, Western letters, and, with them, a veneer of western life, came into vogue among the dominant classes through the fiat of an autocratic oecumenical government and not through the personal initiative of private individuals, which was the agency through which the ra’iyeh of the Ottoman Porte had made themselves acquainted with the Modern Western Culture.\(^64\) In the 19th century, high caste Hindus went in for a western education because a British regime in India had ruled that a familiarity with the English language and literature should be the key to entry into the British Indian public service. The governmental and commercial life of India could not be put upon a western basis without introducing a western leaven into Indian life over a wider range. The westernization of Indian Business and government called into existence in India two Western liberal professions, the University faculty and the bar, and in a westernized Indian business activity based on private enterprise the most profitable openings could not be made a monopoly for European British subjects, as the highest positions in the ICS were reserved for them in effect down to AD 1917.\(^65\)

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\(^{63}\) Ibid, p. 200
\(^{64}\) ibid
\(^{65}\) ibid, p.201
The non territorial division of India between two geographically intermingled communities, the Hindus and the Indian muslims, and the further subdivision of Hindu community likewise on non territorial lines, into a number of castes, ranging from Brahmans to untouchables. The geographical division between provinces and principalities was an accidental legacy of the history of the British conquest of India in the course of a hundred years beginning with the British occupation of Bengal as recent a date as AD 1757-60. The communal division of people of India into a Hindu and Muslim millet was as old as the Iranian Muslim conquest of Hindustan towards the close of the twelfth century of the Christian era, while communal subdivision of the Hindu millet into castes was a legacy from the history of the antecedent Indic civilization.  

In the first place, the Hindu and the western civilization had hardly any common cultural background and were strikingly alien from one another in ethos in this age. In the second place the hindus who had mastered the intellectual content of an exotic modern western culture with a virtuosity that rivalled the performance of the Phanariots were a tiny minority perched on the backs of a vast majority of ignorant and destitute peasants as precariously as, in the constitution of the Human psyche, the consciousness hovers the abyss of the subconscious. By the date of the India's attainment of political Independence as a state member of a comity of western and westernizing nations, the radiation of the western culture into the Hindu World had affected only the top layer of the society. 

The Hindu society was not related either to the western or to the Iranian Muslim society by any degree of kinship; for, though a tincture of both the Hellenic and the

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66 ibid, p.202
Syriac culture could be traced in the veins of the Hindu body social too, the dilution in both cases weak. 68 The western fringe of the domain of the Hindu Civilization’s predecessor the Indic society had been annexed by Cyrus II and Darius I to an Achaemenian Empire which had served as the Syriac society’s universal state 69 and the transmission of some measure of Syriac cultural influence from the Indic society to the Hindu was attested by the Syriac provenance of the Kharoshthi Alphabet. 70 The Hellenic culture had bitten deeper into Indic life: it shared the credit for the genesis of the Mahayana Buddhist art. This Hellenistic art, however, had become an heirloom, not of the Hindu world, but of the far east, for the Indic society had succeeded in expelling this intrusive Hellenic element from its own body social before going into dissolution, and the religion of Hinduism, which had been the symbol and the agent of this anti Hellenic reaction in Indic souls, had also served as the chrysalis for incubating the Indic society’s Hindu successor. 71 Moreover the difference in ethos between the Hindu Westanschauung and the western Weltanschauung in the late Modern Version in which this first began to make an impression on Hindu souls was no mere diversity; it was an outright antithesis; for by the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries of the christian era the Modern west as we have seen, had fabricated a secular version of its cultural heritage from which religion was eliminated in order to give primacy to technology, whereas the Hindu society, like its Indic predecessor, was and remained religious to the core- so much so, indeed, as to be open to the charge of ‘religiosity’ if, as that pejorative word

68 ibid

implies, there can in truth be such a thing as an excessive concentration of psychic energy on a spiritual activity which is man’s most important pursuit.  

Though the religion of the Hindu world was of Indic provenance, while the religions of the Islamic and early Modern Western Christian worlds were derived from Judaism, this diversity of historical origins was of less moment than the consensus of all three societies in taking it for granted that Religion – whatever the orthodox presentation of it might be held to be- was the main spring and meaning of man’s existence. On the strength of this common belief, it had been possible for Hindus to become converts to Islam and to Roman Catholic Christianity without subjecting themselves to an intolerable spiritual tension. The Muslims of eastern Bengal and the Roman Catholics of Goa were living evidence of this: for both these communities were descended from Hindu converts with only a slight admixture of Central Asian Blood in the one case and west European blood on the other.

This proven ability of Hindus to make their way onto alien cultural ground by a religious approach was significant because, if religiosity was the Hindu civilization’s chief distinguishing mark, its next most conspicuous feature was aloofness. This characteristic aloofness was, no doubt, overcome in the intellectual compartment of their spiritual life by those Hindus who, from the latter part of the 18th century of the Christian Era onwards, acquired a secular Modern Western education and thereby qualified for playing a part in the reconstruction of the political and economic sides of Indian life on a modern western basis; but the recruits of this unhappy intelligentsia performed a valuable social service as cultural intermediaries between the Hindu and

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the Modern western world at the cost of a schism in their souls which did not afflict either the Bengali Muslim or the Goanese Roman catholic descendants of apostates from the Hindu, but not from the religious, outlook on life. This Hindu intelligentsia bred by the British raj remained aloof in their hearts from the secular Modern western way of life with which their minds had become familiar; and this discord produced a deep seated spiritual malaise in Hindu souls which could not be cured by the political panacea of obtaining full self government for an Indian national state organized on a contemporary western pattern.\textsuperscript{74}

The year AD 1799 was fateful for the future course of relations between Indians and English, which saw Wellesley, initiate a systematic conquest of India by British arms. While the British occupation of Bengal in AD 1757-60 might perhaps not inaccurately be described as an act of empire building by inadvertence, this description would not apply to the British conquest for the rest of the subcontinent during the fifty years AD 1799-1849. This military programme was deliberately taken in hand in Ad 1799 with an eye to forestalling a re-entry of the French into India, and it was deliberately carried forward after AD 1814 in order to round off a British raj with which the French were thereafter no longer in a position to interfere.\textsuperscript{75}

Indian subjects acquiescence in a British raj was roved by their 20\textsuperscript{th} century reaction against the same British regime to have been no more than a temporary psychological effect of 18\textsuperscript{th} century political and social tribulations. In terms that have become familiar in this study, an encounter between civilizations that are one another’s contemporaries may be described as being one terrestrial manifestation of the cosmic


\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, p.208
action of challenge and response; and the particular response which this particular challenge evokes will bring in to play the "reversal of roles, since the reaction, however feeble it may be, will, as far as it goes, be an endeavour of the victim's part to wrest the initiative out of the assailant's hands.\textsuperscript{76}

The Portuguese achievement of learning how to navigate the Ocean was, of course, not merely a decisive event in an encounter between the west and the Islamic world; it was an epoch making event in human history, because it made man master of a medium of communication that was sufficiently conductive, and near enough to being ubiquitous, to knit the entire habitable surface of the planet together into a home for an ecumenical society embracing the whole of mankind. At the time of writing in the first century of a post modern age of western history, the social unification of the world which had been brought about by the Portuguese invention of an ocean faring sailing ship had found new instruments in the aeroplane and the broadcasting station; but, however high the latter day conquests of the ether and the air might rank in the honours list of scientific inventions, it was manifest that they could not compare with the conquest of the ocean in point of social importance. As means to the social end of knitting the whole of mankind into a single society, aerial navigation and wireless communication merely served to draw closer a world – encompassing net which man's conquest of the ocean had long since flung round the globe. The decisive step in the unification of the world had been the invention of the type of ocean going sailing vessel that came to be known as the ship, par excellence, and Henry the navigator and his companions had not only required no successors; they had also had no predecessors; for the enduring unification of the whole surface of the globe, which was the fruit of their

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid, p.466
work, was a social achievement whose consequences in its own sphere differed in a
degree that virtually amounted to a difference in kind from the effects of the fitful inter
communication between the civilizations of the old world that had resulted in earlier
ages from the achievements of the Minoan pioneers in the navigation of inland seas and
of nomad pioneers in the taming of horses. ¹⁷⁷

There are different explanations why East and west do not meet in friendly
intercourse. The true explanation is that East is down, West is up, and until the East
goes up, the two cannot meet without strain and injury to either or to both. Hence, it has
always been the aim of great minds to level up classes and races to avoid evil
consequences of contact. Until east shows steadiness in its apparent upward tendency,
western facetiousness describes eastern indifference in face of danger and death as a
sign of immobility, while a similar demeanour under similar circumstances of
westerners becomes fortitude and defiance. The Western tradition has mainly key
salient features—

Self assertion is Independence. Objection to tyranny is a rightful struggle of
freedom. Western religiousness is designated humanitarian Christianity. What in
westerns would be patience, it is in Eastern described as timidity. Personal Insults to
individuals for obscurity of birth, have almost disappeared owing to progress and
democratic teaching. Fear of or respect for monarchs, rulers, noble birth or authority in
general has disappeared, and in its place, monarchs, rulers and authority have to mould
their conduct and policy and even their words according to the will of pushful and
organized sections of people. Muscular development and opulence. Every stranger has to
be regarded with suspicion until he proves his trustworthiness. Fear of or respect for

monarchs, rulers, noble birth or authority in general has disappeared, and in its place, 
monarchs, rulers and authority have to mould their conduct and policy and even their 
words according to the will of pushful and organized sections of people. There is the 
principle of Equality. In the place of Individual despotism, tyranny of thousands of 
persons and of whole races, so long as they are of European descent, is being 
couraged. Authority is afraid of demos. The west does not tolerate individual 
despotism either of a monarch or of a minister but it acquiesces in the imposition of 
despotism and tyranny of thousand s of its “kith and kin” over backward fellow creature 
of the East. As a result of revolutions, the west is attempting to shake of idea of personal 
and unquestioned authority and to base it on popular sanction. It has not yet wholly 
shown off the tradition of importance of birth in human affairs. It is an exception to find 
in public life of Europe a generous feeling for races of non European descent. Art of 
organisation and perfection of instruments of slaughter are considered as a means of self 
preservation. West hopes to reduce power of monarchs and rulers and of upper class 
generally, and by infusing into all classes’ spirit of equality. As in Eyes of Aristocrats, 
nobility is a gift of “high” birth alone and patriotism of toiling class consist in devotion 
to them; so in view of west, the east has no right to be patriotic or public spirited, its 
proper role being, not dutifulness to motherland, but devotion to foreigner. Difference 
between East and West in terms of superstition is one in degree and not in kind. 78

In the Eastern tradition, resentment of bad manners or of crude treatment is 
impertinence. Objection to tyranny is disloyalty. Eastern religiousness is called 
superstitious weakness. Great virtue of Eastern resignation is a western ridicule. 
Veneration for authority and seniors is a cardinal principle of life. Thoughtful and 

ADELPHI Terrace, pp. 1-62
cultured classes still think that it is impossible to live in society without dependence on others in one form or another. Independence can be achieved in life only by ascetic or by complete control over the passions and the appetites since so long as man has wants to satisfy, he has to depend upon others, even when wants can be satisfied by coercion or by unfair exchange. Authority deems itself so infallible that even the slightest attempt to criticise it or to question its absolutism is met with stern repression. Women trained to think that it is immodest to associate familiarly or even be stared by men. Eastern life was based on religiousness, fear of a reverence for temporal regulators of society appear to be as necessary for preservation of order and veneration of Godhead is an indispensable condition of religion and humanity. State decayed because despotic authority, being irremovable, ceased to be dutiful. It is only recently that the East commenced to imbibe the spirit of patriotism and is, on account of its humanitarian instincts, bound to develop it to a wider sphere than the west since disposed to do.  

This was the outcome of the encounter between the Japanese offshoot of the far eastern society and the western society in its still would be Christian ‘early modern’ phase. After giving the intrusive culture a trial, the Japanese decided not to allow themselves to be captivated by it, and they gave effect to their decision by expelling the Portuguese traders, suppressing the Japanese converts to a post tridentate catholic western Christianity, and almost completely insulating Japan from further contact with the western world. This is a classic case of the offer and rejection of an alien culture, because the heralds of the early modern western Christian civilization in Japan lacked the power to impose their way of life by force or even to offer any forcible resistance to their forcible repulse by the Japanese authorities. When a medieval western Christian

79 Ibid
civilization was repelled by the Muslims and orthodox Christians, an Islamic
civilization by the orthodox Christians and Hindus, and a Babylonic civilization by the
Syriac peoples, the reagent who was thus reasserting himself on the cultural plane was
retorting to an assault on the original agent's part which had been, not merely violent,
but, on the plane of violence, victorious. The crusaders, Osmanlis, Mughals, Assyrians,
and Babylonians had made their impact as military aggressors, not as merchants or
missionaries.\textsuperscript{80}

An orthodox Christendom and an Islamic society that had rejected the western
civilization in its medieval phase, and a Japanese society that had subsequently rejected
it in its early modern phase, all afterwards fell under its spell when it offered itself for
sale in a deconsecrated form in which a lucrative technology had been substituted for a
redoubtable Christianity as the pearl of great price which a buyer was invited to acquire.
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It was an indisputable fact that in the twentieth century of the Christian era all
surviving non-western civilizations had been deeply penetrated and intimately affected
by the radiation of the Modern western culture was no proof that these civilizations
themselves were merely so many deposits left by some earlier ubiquitous wave of
cultural radiation, and were not original products of so many independent response to so
many separate challenges.\textsuperscript{82}

Those English pioneers of western Christendom's expansion overseas whose
ships carried them to India instead of North America virtually adopted the institution of

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid
\textsuperscript{82} Toynbee, Arnold. (1955). \textit{A Study of History}. vol.8, p.488
caste which a Hindu society had inherited from its Indic predecessor. If they had been asked to justify themselves by showing reason why they should not suffer the same condemnation as the Nazis, the last generation of the English ascendancy in India would perhaps have pleaded that they had not embraced a doctrine of racialism deliberately and self consciously, but had merely succumbed insensibly and involuntarily to the effects of an Indian social atmosphere that had proved too potent for them to resist; and this line of defence might have secured them their acquittal if the Indian descendants of previous Muslim conquerors of the Hindu world had not confuted their English successor’s specious plea by the accomplished fact of their Muslim sires’ intermarriage with their Hindu converts. This Indian Muslim feat of breaking the bonds of caste was a conclusive proof that an endemic Hindu racialism had no power to prevail, even on its own Indian ground, over the humanity of the votaries of a Judaic religion that preached the brotherhood of man as a corollary of its belief in a common fatherhood of god which was all men’s birthright. 83

In India, the civilization discourse was developed by men outside the ranks of professional historians – by nationalist public spokesmen. Emerging from the embryonic form, in the writings of generation of R G Bhandarkar and Bankim chandra Chatterjee in the late nineteenth century, the discourse of civilization appears fully fledged in mahatma Gandhi’s Hind Swaraj (1909) and Rabindranath Tagore’s early essays on the history of India (published from 1902 to 1907) and reaches its climatic form in Jawaharlal Nehru’s the discovery of India (published in 1946). 84

The two broad tendencies in this trend of thinking were, first, to talk back to the colonial masters in refutation of the disparagement of the ancient civilization by colonial historians and, second, to assert India’s civilizational unity in the past. The first of these tendencies sometimes veered towards a vainglorious depiction of a ‘Hindu Civilization’; the second tended to posit a unity in civilizational terms almost as a surrogate for national unity, since nothing corresponding to the current European notion of nationhood could be established very far back in the past. ‘Talking back’ was evidently a reaction to British colonial historians’ adverse evaluation of Indian civilization.\(^8^5\)

James Mill’s history of India and his adverse evaluation of Indian civilization marked a watershed. It was a departure from the early orientalists’ approach. Sir William Jones, one of the early orientalists, was a great admirer of ancient Indian civilisation.\(^8^6\) In an essay, the ‘history of Bharatvarsha’, published in 1902, Tagore argued that India’s aim through the ages has been to establish unity amidst diversity, (syncretic ideology) without eliminating the uniqueness of each element. In 1912, Tagore elaborated this notion further and postulated that while India’s endeavour has been to bring about unity through cultural assimilation, western civilization has been characterized by self-aggrandizement and suppression of diversity by means of state power. He cited the example of imperialist expansion as well as the fate of the aboriginals in North America, Australia, New Zealand, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. He believed that the ‘organized selfishness’ of nationalism was alien to

\(^8^5\) Ibid, p.3

\(^8^6\) Ibid
Indian civilization. There was a fundamental difference between the civilizations of Europe and India, and hence the apperception of India’s history and civilization through European optics. European history is state centred and ‘its basis is aggrandizement; Indian civilization rests on syncretic unification’.

The concept of a syncretic civilization in India became a fundamental element in the nationalist approach. One of the earliest expressions of this idea is to be found in tagore’s essay in 1902 on Indian history. There is a long passage which merits quotation----

‘We can see that the aim of bharatvarsha has always been to establish unity amidst differences, to bring to a convergence different paths, and to internalize within her soul the unity of the severality, that is to say to comprehend the inner union between the externally perceptible differences without eliminating the uniqueness of each element... bharatvarsha has endeavoured to tie up diversities in a relationship. If there be genuine differences, it is possible to accommodate in its appropriate place such differences. You cannot legislate unity into existence. elements which cannot assimilate need to be recognized and put in their appropriate separate places... bharatvarsha knew the secret of this mode of unification .... bharatvarsha limited the conflict between opposing and competing elements in society by keeping them separate and at the same time engaged in a common task that brought diverse elements together...’

Tagore’s critique of European civilization is notable. European civilization, being statist in character, used subordination as a means of protecting state power and thus to establish unity in the polity. “the European way is to expel and demolish all

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87 Ibid, p.4
89 Tagore, Rabindranath . (1935). “Bharatvarsher Itihas” (the history of India), p.10-11
others for self preservation- America, Australia, New Zealand, cope colony provide evidence of that".  

The publication of the book nationalism in 1917 marks a new phase in Tagore’s thoughts on civilization. Since this work was available in English, it received much attention. These essays were written originally in English by Tagore as texts of lectures he delivered during his tour of Japan and USA from May 1916 to March 1917. The historian E.P. Thompson has recently edited these essays. The war, Tagore argues, exposes the nature of European civilization: “a political civilization has sprung up from the soil of Europe and is overrunning the whole world.... it is carnivorous and cannibalistic in its tendencies, it feeds upon the resources of other peoples and tries to swallow their whole future”.  

“this civilization is the civilization of power, therefore it is exclusive, it is naturally unwilling to open its sources of power (science) to those whom it has selected for its purposes of exploitation...the truth is that the spirit of conflict and conquest is at the origin and in the centre of the western nationalism”. 

“of all the things in western civilization, those which this western nation has given us in a most generous measure are law and order. While the small feeding bottle of our education is nearly dry, and sanitation sucks its thumb in despair, military organisation, the magisterial offices, the police, the CID, the secret spy system, attain to an abnormal girth in their waists, occupying every inch of our country and we cannot but acknowledge this paradox that while the spirit of the west marches under its banners of freedom, the nation of this west forges its iron chains”.

Tagore’s basic notion about the Indian civilization was that the ‘organized selfishness of nationalism ‘was alien to Indian civilization. He said that his conviction

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90 Tagore, Rabindranath . (1913). “Bharatvarsher Itihaser Dharar” (The Course of Indian History), English translation by Sir Jadu Nath Sarkar under the title, “A vision of Indian History”, The Modern Review, August – September 1913; itihas, p.13
92 Ibid, p.426
93 Ibid, pp.426-427
was that it was wrong to accept the view that 'a country is greater than the ideal of humanity in India our ideals have been evolved through our own history and India cannot borrow other people’s history, that is the history of the European people who developed a national identity (nationalism').

In contrast to the self aggrandizement of European nationalism, often displayed in the extermination of other races (for eg., in North America and Australia), India has ‘tolerated differences of races from the first, and that spirit of toleration has acted all through her history.

Tagore criticized the Indian nationalists’ adulation of India’s past. He cited examples: the caste system, ‘the blind and the lazy habit of relying upon the authority of traditions that are incongruous anachronisms in the present age’; the boundaries of immovable walls separating communities. These are symptoms of ‘social inadequacy’ in the modern age but ‘we have accepted as the creed of our nationalism that this social system has been perfected for all times to come by our ancestors’ and hence a blind attempt to ‘build a political miracle of freedom upon the quicksand of social slavery’.

In anthropology and sociology G S Ghurye and Nirmal Kumar Bose opened up the study of Indian civilization on synchronic lines, in conjunction with the historian’s diachronic study. In part this was part of the intellectual impact of the work of A.L. Kroeber and Robert Redfield.

Tagore speculated that the path shown by Europe which emerged from medievalism to modernity was through spread of modern knowledge and rationality. He

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94 Ibid, p. 457
95 Ibid, p.459
visualised a new age which will break the bonds of blind religiosity within which Hindus and Muslims were imprisoned.  

Tagore offered atheism as an alternative to perverse religiosity. His answer seems to be that progress towards attaining nationhood in European sense of the term was not necessarily progress in the evolution of civilization. He makes a distinction between civilization as progress from western point of view and civilization conceived as dharma. ‘The word civilization being a European word, we have hardly taken the trouble to find out its real meaning. For over a century we have accepted it, as we, may accept a gift horse...’.

Civilization is defined as the principle which holds us firm together and leads us to our best welfare’ is like dharma and from that principle Europe departed in modern times. In Europe, the ideal of civilization has been pushed aside by the love of power and by the greed of material wealth.

“nationalism in the training of a whole people for a narrow ideal and when it gets hold of their minds it is sure to lead to moral degeneracy and intellectual blindness... it is emphasis laid in Europe upon the idea of nation’s constant increase of power, which is becoming the greatest danger to man, both in its direct activity and its power of infection... (men) are taught by repeated devices the lesson that that the nation is greater than the people, while yet, it scatters to the winds the moral law that the people have held sacred.”

In a long essay in 1933, (the title ‘Kalantar’ can be roughly translated as New Age) he offers a historical survey of that relationship:

98 Tagore, (1931).“Hindu Musalman” (The Hindus and the Muslims), Itihas, p.314
"we saw an endeavour to undo the wrongs human beings had suffered, we heard in political thought the idea of unshackling mankind, we saw efforts to stop commerce in human beings (As slaves). We must acknowledge that there was much that was new in these ideas. Till then, we (in India) were accustomed to accept that some human beings must accept denial of certain rights because of rebirth into a certain caste or the identity of Karma in previous birth... even today in our domestic interior and in our social interactions, values such as respect for the individuality of a person, right to equal treatment of equal members of society, have not been fully internalized in our culture".  

Tagore's contributions were-

1. He was one of the first to develop the concept of syncretism. He put forward in 1902 that in Indian civilization there was a tendency to assimilate diversities to establish unity exceeded boundaries of earlier statements about geographical unity of Indian subcontinent.

2. He perceived that there was a basic difference between state centred civilization of Europe and civilization of India where samaja or society was given centrality, Tagore made a rather new, though perhaps, debatable point. A socio cultural continuity was a surrogate for a political territorial continuity.

3. Tagore perceived the limitations of nationalism, which he identified as a thing European in origin, as an ideology of aggrandizement on a global scale, and as a model unworthy of emulation for Indian.

Assam's contact with the West has to be observed in the light of the above discussion, which highlighted how the West or Western civilization made inroads into the Indian society and its impact thereupon. In order to fully grasp the contact of Assam

with the West, there is a need to observe it through the prism of traditions or culture or through a discourse on civilization. Needless to say that we ought to state the modus operandi of the West in the Assamese society was affected through the various diverse means of modern education, administration, language, and religion.

The British never tried to assimilate themselves in the greater Assamese society. But, to an extent, they tried to acculturate, not because they were any way keen to learn the language, habits and values of the standard or dominant culture but to meet the various exigencies. For this, they thought that language was a good way to make inroad into their hitherto closed social space. Assamese language in the proper sense of the term was non existent at the time british made their entry into india, it had got its due shape later only at the hands of the Christian missionaries. Also, the british thought that by giving shape to the Assamese language and then by learning it, they would be able to vent their evangelical aspirations as well as meet their administrative needs.

Inland spaces of mobility historically important in Assam includes (i)routes of ancient Khasi immigration, which began in the Red River Basin of Vietnam and extended across Yunnan and Burma to the Gangetic basin as far west as Bihar; (ii) Medieval Tai Ahom migrations, which continued over centuries and built the most powerful pre modern states in the Brahmaputra valley; (iii) routes and heartlands of opium cultivation, consumption and trade, with unknown origins, which extended in the 18th and 19th century from Bihar to China and today stop at the borders of India but extend south across the Golden triangle of Southeast Asia; (iv) the imperial expansion of Burma in the 18th and early 19th century; and (v) The military travels of armies of China, Japan, Britain and America along roads from Assam to Burma to Yunnan, during the 1940s- onroads that still exist today, though in a state of dilapidation. Obility along
river routes has long connected Assam to regions in the south and west as well as to the east and north. In the first and second millennium, territorial powers based in the Brahmaputra Valley moved south along the Barak Valley and surrounding mountain forest slopes, across cachar and sylhet, where the oldest inscriptions are of land grants by the Kamrupa rajas. Trade routes along river routes connected Assam and Bengal with the western Gangetic Basin. Detailed documentation of 18th century trade along the barak and Surma-Kushiara River Basins indicate steady mobility up and down the rivers and forest slopes across what are now Sylhet, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Assam and Nagaland.  

The major mobile forces that shaped Assam decisively in early modern times, circa 1660-1830, came from the east, west, north and south: (i) the Mughals and the british moved North east from Bengal;; (ii) the Ahoms moved down the Brahmaputra valley; (iii) Burmese armies moved around the patkai and across the Nagaland ranges; (iv) and trans Himalayan forces came south from Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet and China. In the long view of history, Assam was shaped by human mobility moving in all directions, even though, before 1800, Indian Ocean routes seem to have had less direct impact on the inland Brahmaputra valley than on other South asian regions comparably close to the coast. 

Gupta culture influenced later Kamrupa kings in assam through the intermediary means of fourth century Bangla Varman Rajas. Indeed the Buddhists who dispersed across eastern frontiers, down to the Meghna delta, flourished there for centuries in part

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106 ibid, p.10
because trade rather than imperial power extended across all the water routes of Bengal. A thousand years after the last of the Guptas, the strength of Ahom warriors in the Brahmaputra valley, combined with the impenetrability of the forests and raging river waters, kept Mughal Imperialism at bay, though the Mughals did manage to create the first regional ruling system ever to organize political power in the sylhet basin, where the Barak river spills into Surma and Kushiara on its trajectory south to the Meghna.\footnote{ibid, p.12}

II.1 Old Assamese attitude towards foreigners

It was a common remark of all European writers that the Assamese were averse to the admission of foreigners into their country. This aversion was principally due to two reasons. From the time of Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji’s invasion in 1205 up to the final expulsion of the Moghuls in 1682 Assam was subject to frequent attacks by the Muhammadans from Bengal; and consequently all men from Bengal and other parts of India were considered by the Assamese as a potential source of danger. No outsider was allowed to acquire a footing in Assam lest he should become too influential and disturbed the loyalty of the subjects or bring in other complications. All people living in the countries to the west of Assam were labelled under one name—Bangals, a term applied even to Europeans.\footnote{Bhuyan, S.K. (1974). Anglo Assamese relations (1771–1826), p.56}

The Ahom rulers had originally come from the Shan kingdom of Pong or Nara in upper Burma and they lived upon the inhabitant of Nara as their brothers and kinsmen with whom they maintained throughout regular social and political intercourse. Whereas the early Hindu rulers of Assam had regarded themselves as one with the
princes and peoples of Hindusthan, the Ahom conquerors materially reduced, if they did not totally destroyed, Assam’s communion with India. Nara priest frequented the Ahom Court and the monarchs married princesses of their parent kingdom. Ahom kings were for several centuries guided in their political actions by the advice of their orthodox priests who looked to their Nara compatriots for recognition and reinforcement. It was only after the hinduisation of the Ahoms, that they began to take some interest in the religion and culture of India. Ahom Princes and nobles then began to depute Brahmin priest to the shrines of India for making offerings on their behalf; they sent also commercial and political agents, mostly in disguise to study foreign customs, manners and movements. But the old fear of an attack from the west continued attended by the suspicion of all foreigners. But, there were exceptions to this rigid exclusion of strangers. The Ahom rulers encouraged men from India to come and settle in Assam, provided their introduction was of advantage to the country. Artisans, craftsmen, weavers, clerks, accountants, scholars and saints, both hindu and muslim, were freely admitted, and occasionally brought by special arrangement with the rulers of Hindustan as there was an inadequacy of such men in Assam. But, these licensed foreigners, after having come to Assam, had to cut off all connection with their mother country and to become assimilated with the Assamese in language, manners and racial sympathy. They became subjects of the Assam Government like the older inhabitants. The Assamese objected to the admission of foreigners who owed allegiance to other rulers and proposed to reside in Assam as a temporary measure. The Assamese made a sharp distinction between desirable foreigners who came to stay and become naturalised and undesirable foreigners, upon whom the assam government could not exercise any degree of control. Europeans fell in the second category and hence their entrance was
almost always forbidden and their movements closely watched even when they were permitted to enter the Assam territory.\(^{109}\)

King Rudra Singha, the most cosmopolitan of the Ahom monarchs, created two new orders, the khaunds and the bairagis, whose function was to visit important places of India and note beneficent foreign customs with a view to their introduction in Assam. He invited Bengali priests, scholars, musicians and merchants, to his court and send them back with presents so that his good name might be spread in their country, which he was scheming to invade.\(^{110}\) Even this monarch would not permit outsiders to quit Assam if he suspected that they had deliberately collected information which might one day be used to the prejudice of this country. An up-country architect named Ghanashyam who had erected the masonry building at the new capital Rangpur was put to death by Rudrasingha, as papers containing a full account of Assam and its inhabitants were found in his possession.\(^{111}\)

Assam being thus a forbidden field for the exploration of Europeans the only opportunity for collecting direct information was during their visit of the country when parts of it were under Mughal occupation, or when the accompanied the mughal expedition as sailors, gunners, or camp followers\(^{112}\). There are reasons to suppose that the Venetian traveller Nicolo Conti who visited India in the first half of the 15th century had gone as far as Assam.\(^{113}\)

Leaving conjectures aside, the first Europeans on record to visit Assam were the two Jesuit missionaries, father Stephen Cadella and father John Cabral. Cadella and Cabral were not the first Europeans to enter Cooch Behar for it had been visited in 1536

\(^{109}\) *Ibid,* pp56-57


by the London merchant Ralph Fitch belonging to the party of John Newbery, who had been furnished with a letter of introduction to Emperor Akbar from Queen Elizabeth. The next European was a soldier serving in the Moghul army during its encampment at Hajo sometime in 1635.

II.2 Early European writers on Assam

Assam received wide publicity in Mughal India and among Europeans as a result of its invasion by Nawab Mir Jumla in 1662. European merchants in Bengal had been directly interested in the progress of the expedition led by the governor of Bengal as upon his support, they mainly depended for their success in trade. Mir Jumla was accompanied by a number of Dutch, Portuguese and English sailors and gunners. Glanius, a Dutch sailor of Mir Jumla, has left an account of his experiences in Assam; and as he was among the first batch of Europeans to proceed as far as the capital or its neighbourhood, his account has a significance of its own. Aurangzeb’s object in sending Mir Jumla to Assam has been stated to be an attempt to get rid of the great general, “the soldier’s darling, people’s favourite, a great politician, a wise and valiant captain and the wealthiest in all the empire”. The three travellers, Bernier, Tavernier and Manucci refer in detail to the Assam Expedition of Mir Jumla and to the distress of the Mughal army in that country, “under a less able commander”, wrote Bernier, “the army could not have hoped to reach Bengal. Tavernier points out that Assam was not properly known till its invasion by Mir Jumla. He attributes the invention of Gun and Gunpowder to Assam from where;

117 Glanius. (1682). *A Relation of an unfortunate voyage to the kingdom of Bengal*, pp 158-177.
they possibly went to Pegu and China for which it was ascribed to the Chinese. Tavernier refers to the economic independence of the Assamese "who produce all that is necessary to the life of man without their being need to go for anything to the neighbouring states". He points out the superior quality of the Assam lac which was used for lacquering cabinets and was said to have been exported to China and Japan in large quantities.  

The first official of the company who surveyed the frontier of Assam and collected some information about that country was major James Rennell, "the father of Indian Geography". In 1765 he traced the course of the river Brahmaputra to about 400 miles above the conflux up to the point where the Bengal districts ended and those of Assam began.

The first European to trade with Assam col. James Mill, came to India was a subaltern in the service of the Ostend East India Company. This company was established in 1722 with a charter from the holy Roman Emperor Charles VI. Mill was not permitted to establish himself in Assam. An Assamese chronicle refers to a visit paid by three Europeans to the court of King Siva Singha in 1739. Their names have been given as Gudimbill, Distirbill and Mistirbill.

Jean Baptiste Chevalier was Governor of Chandernagore and was deputed to carry on a trade with Assam for the French East India Company. He penetrated as far as Sylhet from where he proceeded to Goalpara. The next European to establish a

regular trade with Assam was Paul Richard Pearkes. He established a factory at Jugigopha.\textsuperscript{124}

The year 1771 witnessed the foundation of the East India Company's commercial relations with Assam, for in that year the possibilities of trades with that country were first recognized by the court of Directors and measures were adopted to obtain preliminary information on the subject. An earlier attempt to trade with Assam had been made under the Auspices of the Society of Trade established by Lord Clive in 1765, during his second administration of Bengal to compensate the chief officers for the loss sustained by them by strict observance of the covenants that prohibited acceptance of \textit{Nuzzeranas} or presents and participation in England trade consisting mainly of Salt, bettlenut and tobacco.\textsuperscript{125}

The objects which impelled Lord Cornwallis to send a deputation to Assam were stated in his Minutes delivered to the board in their meeting of October 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 1792. The application of the Raja of Assam was considered along with that of the Raja of Nepal who had solicited the company's assistance against the invasion of the emperor of China in revenge for the injuries which the raja had done to the people of Tibet. "After considering the request of the two Rajas (of Nepal and Assam)," said Lord Cornwallis, "and the commercial advantages that Bengal may obtain by a friendly and open intercourse with both countries, it appears to me that it will be no less political than humane in us to interfere our good offices to establish peace and tranquillity in those quarters."\textsuperscript{126}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Ibid}, pp.64-66
\textsuperscript{126} Bhuyan, \textit{op. cit}, p.301}
According to Lord Cornwallis, the disturbances in Assam were “merely of an internal nature and principally occasioned by gangs of Vagabonds belonging to Bengal”. The Governor General thought that his government was “particularly called upon to make some exertions to quell them.” He considered six companies of Sepoys commanded by “an active and prudent officer” would be adequate for the purpose. He pointed out the prevailing ignorance about the interior parts of Nepal and Assam which he ascribed to the reluctance of the Rajas to admit the English into their countries. He directed that “no pains or attention should be spared to avail ourselves of so favourable an opportunity to obtain good surveys, and to acquire every information that may be possible both of the population and of the manners and customs, of trade and manufactures, natural productions of countries with which it must ever be our interests to maintain the most friendly communication”.  

Captain Welsh deputed to Assam and he gave information relating to political and economic condition of Assam of the period preceding the occupation of the country by the british. The information by the Captain Welsh can be grouped under five different heads- the form of Government in Assam, the sources of the prevailing discontent, the results achieved by the company’s interference and the measures proposed, the commerce of Assam, and the probable consequences of the recall of the detachment. Welsh was recalled due to non intervention policy of Sir John Shore. Sir John Shore’s policy of Assam was the offshoot of his cautious, over prudent and pacific temperament which manifested itself in his strict adherence to the principle of neutrality and non-interference.

127 Cornwallis’s minute, Bengal Pol. Consultations., Oct 3, 1792, No.17
In Assam, the effect of the withdrawal of the Company's influence was first perceived in the heavy losses sustained by the English and the Indian merchants of Bengal. They could not obtain payment of their balances from Assamese traders in spite of the repeated demands upon the Swargadeo made by the Bengal Government on their behalf. The Moamarias allied themselves with the Singphos and sent repeated requests to the king of Ava for assistance. In 1817 the Burmese invaded Assam and in 1822, Burmese became masters of Assam\[131\]

Assam became part of imperial India only after the Mughals lost their grip in Bengal, as British imperialists expanded inland from the sea, with a combined force of merchants, armies and Brahmans, who travelled Mughal inland highways, and who depended initially for profits on the submission of peoples living under Mughal authority. North east of Kolkata, Mughal highways pointed the way to Assam, but Assam lay outside Mughal and thus early British India. Cooch Behar and Sylhet were originally the north-eastern frontiers of Mughal as well as early British India.

British imperialism conquered Assam after 1826, and only then did Assam obtain— for the first time in its history— a firm regional identity as a part of Indian Imperial geography. Until 1874, British Assam inhabited a novel imperial territory, called Bengal, which included much of what some analysts now call Eastern south Asia, including West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Jharkhand, North east India and Bangladesh. Since 1826, the territory called Assam has changed shape inside the histories of imperialism and nationalism. British Assam always included the Brahmaputra and Barak river valleys as well as the Surma- Kushiara River basin of Sylhet. All the river valleys of british Assam had in common surrounding mountain forests filled with

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\[131\] Ibid, p 397
disparate, ethnic groups, which W.W. Hunter called non Aryan tribes, who reflect the cultural legacy of centuries of human mobility across south and East Asia.\textsuperscript{132}

The authorities of the east India Company, both in England and India, had already interested themselves in the commercial possibilities of the North east frontier\textsuperscript{133}. From motives of humanity and from a wish to be better informed of the interior state of Assam, its commerce etc, the governor general resolved to despatch a detachment to Assam under captain Welsh. Six company's of Sepoys arrived at Goalpara towards the close of 1792. Soon Kamrup was cleared of the Barkandazes and the resistance of the Moamarias almost collapsed in Upper Assam. Welsh reinstated Gaurinath on the throne and also took the opportunity to wrest from the Raja a commercial treaty.\textsuperscript{134}

The Burmese occupation of the island of Shahpuri in November 1823 followed by their warlike preparations in Assam, Cachar and Arakan made it evident, that they were ‘bent on invading British territory’. At this juncture, David Scott, the joint magistrate of Rangpur, pointed out to the government of Bengal the vulnerability of the whole of the eastern frontier suggesting that the policy of non intervention which had been so long the watchword towards the North east frontier should be definitely discarded, and that it was highly expedient to support and encourage the Assamese and the frontier tribes to resist and shake off the Burmese yoke.\textsuperscript{135} Because, as Scott pointed out, “the Assamese and the Cacharees are unfortunately, so timid and effeminate...that the defence of these countries ...must be provided for in great measure by extraneous


\textsuperscript{133} Bannerji A.C.(1964). The eastern Frontier of British India. pp. 10 -2

\textsuperscript{134} Aitchison in Barpujari, H.K.(1980). Assam in the days of the company, p. 7

\textsuperscript{135} Barpujari, H.K. (1980). Assam in the days of the Company, pp. 9-10
means: the Nagas, the Singphos, the Khamtis and other tribes to the eastward of Assam... are perhaps too little advanced in arts of civilization and of the Government to be able to make any effectual resistance against the numerous armies of the Burmese.... Manipuris on the other hand... are imbued with all Military spirit, that distinguishes the Rajput tribes of Northern Hindusthan.  

"we are not led into your country by the thirst of conquest; but are forced in our defence- to deprive our enemy of the means of annoying us...’ by David Scott on the eve of British troops march into Assam.”

In a despatch on 20th February 1824 to the Agent to the Governor General, North East-frontier, George Swinton, the political secretary to the government of India, reiterated, ‘although by our expulsion of the Burmese from the territory of Assam, the country would of right become ours by conquest, the Governor General in Council does not contemplate the permanent annexation of any part of it to the British dominion.’

The string that followed in the aforesaid proclamation, “we will never depart until we exclude our foe... and re-establish... a Government adapted to your wants and calculated to the happiness of all classes.

Scott was indeed the patriarch of the Assamese. He was the saviour of the Assam from the domination of the Burmese. No Assamese could have more efficiently championed the cause of his country as did Scott.

III.3 Colonialism and Christian Mission

However noble its goal, profound its theoretical material, sincere its deliberation, and poignant its historical documents, the written history of the 19th

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137 BSPC., 1824, 20 Feb, no.15 cited in H.K. Assam in the days of the company, p.13
139 Bhuyan, S.K .(1974). Anglo Assamese Relations, p.574
century colonial Christian Mission has been predicated on various themes of value subordination of ancient cultures, and socio-religious conversion of the colonized people. Subordination provided control over the silenced subjects, while conversion reconstructed values through their subsumption into yet new principles of Unity. The 19th century colonial mission was a cultural, political and missiological fact. The literatures it produced do not exist independent of any external constraints. The Mission Texts, like any other literatures, were influenced by the dominant external political, cultural, and economic factors, which said calls 'the facts of textuality'\textsuperscript{140}

William Campbell points out that the missionaries and directors of the East India Company were convinced of the divine intervention in favour of the company; the conquest of India was a divine sanction, designed and adapted to become an inestimable blessing to the natives, by it becoming the means of the gradual introduction of Christianity.\textsuperscript{141}

Missionary work in India was the intentional product of 18th century evangelicalism and European patriotism. The focus of the 20th century Western mission historians often ignores the mission's political aspect, or the 'power and knowledge' relations between the colonizer's and the missionaries.\textsuperscript{142} Missionary ideology of the last century did not differ from the hegemonic ideology of the 19th century in its dependence upon the production and consumption of signs, or what we might call the evangelistic economy. European culture is advanced, modern and rational\textsuperscript{143}; whereas Indian Culture is backward, archaic and superstitious.\textsuperscript{144}

\textsuperscript{142} Foucault, Michel.(1980). \textit{Power/ Knowledge}, pp.80ff
\textsuperscript{143} Stokes, Eric. (1989). \textit{The English Utilitarians and India}, p.42
\textsuperscript{144} Hay, Denys. (1968) \textit{Europe: The emergence of an idea}
India should be conquered because it belonged outside. Its religion is ‘abominable’, its morality low and its living standard uncultured. Indians were perceived as lazy, ignorant and uncivilized and so they must be converted and civilized. They were considered as human material. They were perceived as tools. They were invisible humans.\textsuperscript{145} Hence the Europeans, during the 19th century had a simple goal: the people in India should be converted, changed and transformed from outside to inside since they are not the self same. They are the other.\textsuperscript{146}

Mission literatures were produced in an intellectual setting of british political and cultural imperialism. For instance, John Stuart Mill, Thomas Macaulay, Charles Trevelyan and karl Marx had set view on race and british administration in india. They made it explicit in their writings that they had to set a different standard for the people of India as they were civilizationally ‘inferior’. Karl Marx, eg. In the The Eighteenth Brummaireof Louis Bonaparte, writing about the incapacitated, vulnerable Asia, encouraged Europe to act as a surrogate self and wrote, ‘The east cannot represent itself, it should be represented’. European’s philosophy of mission history has been constructed on the premise of India’s abasement: the subordination of the nation to the euro-evangelic cultural order, which gives the appearance of being the condition for the machinery’s functioning. The motive of the European mission, if viewed in retrospect, its essence was an aggressive cultural imperialism, propaganda for the spread of European ideas and ideals over the face of the Globe.\textsuperscript{147}

Nineteenth century India Mission history lacks coherence and does not form a coherent whole. The mission work was carried out with the aid of European colonizers with a view to civilizing and Christianizing the people. The relationship between the

\textsuperscript{145}Metcalf, Thomas R. (1964). \textit{The Aftermath of Revolt, India, 1857-70}, p.10
\textsuperscript{147}Knorr, Klaus E. (1944) \textit{British Colonial Theories. 1570-1850}. Toronto University of Toronto, p.381
colonisers and the colonized, between Europe and India, between missionaries and converts, was a relationship of power, of European covetousness, of domination, and of varying degrees of a complex hegemony.\textsuperscript{148}

The intellectuals and the leaders of the country argued that Christian work in India was being carried out to perpetuate the presence of the colonizers. The non-Christian Indian Leaders were sceptical of the Christian message. Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1821 expressed this suspicion when he asked the missionaries to do evangelistic work in non-colonized countries. Evangelization of India was being attempted because India was pagan and also because India was weak and vulnerable, and it could be converted to Christianity. The only way Indian people could ward off this invading power was to safeguard their religious faiths from missionary invasion by withdrawing into their sanctum sanctorum, which eventually resulted in the Hindu religious renaissance, and the founding of the brahmo Samaj and the Arya samaj.\textsuperscript{149}

Colonialism and Christian missions went hand in hand since the arrival of the Portuguese in India. When the popes saw the zeal and interest of the Portuguese kings in evangelizing the newly found lands, they entrusted them with the task of converting the natives to Christian faith. Pope Leo X, by his bull Pro Excellenti of 1514, and king D. Manuel, the eleventh administrator of Asia Portuguesa, with his Vicar Generals, played important roles in sending missionaries to India.\textsuperscript{150} The Kings also took up the


\textsuperscript{150} George M. Moraes, (1964). \textit{A History of Christianity in India(From Early times to St. Francis Xavier: AD 52-1542}. p.229
responsibility of making necessary contributions for the maintenance of the missions and their institutions and for the protection of the neophytes.\textsuperscript{151}

The Jesuits who began their work in 1542, began to grow and by 1584 there were 349 in the Indian Province.\textsuperscript{152} Afonso d' Albuquerque in 1510 was aware of the fact with the meagre power Portuguese were wielding in India it would become impossible to manage the extensive maritime empire which he was planning to establish. He was convinced that if the natives were converted to Christianity they would be loyal to the Portuguese. In some sense the Portuguese set a precedent for the british in India by combining both mission and state.\textsuperscript{153}

After the East India Company's charters were renewed in 1813 and finally in 1833, the board of directors changed the policy of the company and under pressure from the evangelicals in England the missionaries began to arrive freely in India. Ever since, there has existed a renewed cooperation between the missionaries and the colonial power in helping one another in their missions.\textsuperscript{154}

The terms colonization and colonialism are synonymously used by scholars who argue that both terms mean the same\textsuperscript{155}. Colonization takes the form of political expression of one nation dominating a geographically external political unit inhabited by people of another race and culture with all its attendant evils for material benefits.

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\textsuperscript{151} Joseph Thekkadah. (1982). \textit{From the middle of the 16th to the end of the seventeenth century(1542-1700)}, p.5
\textsuperscript{152} George M. Moraes. (1964). \textit{A History of Christianity in India(From Early times to St. Francis Xavier: AD 52-1542)}, p.6
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid, p. 311
\textsuperscript{154} Stokes, Eric. (1959). \textit{The English Utilitarians and India}
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The term Colonialism, on the other hand, represents "an imperialist policy of exploiting colonies to the profit of the mother country alone." 156

No power had effected the Indian people, culture, and nation as a whole as much as the british power did. Greek imperialism, Mogul invasion, Portuguese domination and their effects were not felt equally by all the Indian people living in the subcontinent. But the british conquest deeply altered Indian society and transformed it to the core. After the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, Britain was forced to develop her control of India because of its strategic location for trading activity in Asia and because of the advantages of holding onto the Indian army inorder to safeguard British interests throughout the east. Missionaries were able to carry on their work in india with the help of colonial monetarism (By the usage Colonial monetarism, it refers to the monetary benefits derived out of the imposition of an alien power and the dominance of the political will of a particular group of people over another for personal gain) and European patriotism. One of their main aim in converting the natives was to make them loyal to the british empire. 157

Cultural change comes about not so much from the experience of groups of people in a given society but from culture producing organizations such as colonialism, English Education, Western religion and so on. Talcott parsons describes cultural change as a process of 'value generalization' issued by the growing complexity of social patterns. 'when the network of socially structured situation becomes more complex, the value pattern itself must be couched at a higher level of generality in order to ensure

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social stability'. Parsons cites examples of changes in religious conceptions, legal codes and theoretical knowledge, and concludes that these constitute the critical form of cultural change. "The generalization of value system can effectively regulate social action without relying upon pluralistic prohibitions. This has been a central factor in the modernizing process. The act of imposing a generalization of value patterns was done in stages by the British.

The modernization adopted by the colonizers through the introduction of western jurisprudence, commercial regulations, religious restrictions, taxation, English education, and so on, altered the social life of colonized Indian people. Pseudo modernization introduced in the nineteenth century not only led to an uprooting of rural and urban communities but also to a potential disorientation. As a result, the aliens could rule the natives with simple but strong legal and political ideologies. Colonial culture and its ideologies were imposed upon India by a dominant class of administrators and bureaucrats from England. At the height of power and privilege they were determined to disseminate European political principles and expand British colonial institutions by governing from above. This downward movement of culture from above penetrated into the powerless society, as Mathew Arnold argues, through great men of prevailing culture and state able to contend forcefully with the existing ideologies, philosophies values and beliefs. This penetrative cultural movement assertively instils an identifiable set of beliefs and ideas upon the society.

158 Parsons, Talcott.(1971). Societies: Evolutionary and comparative perspectives, p.27
159 Ibid, p.15
160 "The great men of culture are those who have had a passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of the time; who have labored to divest knowledge of all that was harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive; to humanize it, to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and learned, yet still remaining the best knowledgeable thought of the time and a true source, of sweetness and light" as written by Matthew Arnold in Culture and Anarchy, ed. J Dover Wilson (Cambridge University Press, 1969), p.70
The prevailing culture’s social and economic barometer that determines what is good and appropriate for people and what it is not; what is to be retained in a society and what is to be discarded. How this cultural norm is used as an institutionalized process to consider what is appropriate to be retained, encouraged and used, and what is to be eliminated has been demonstrated by Foucault in Madness and civilization, the Order of things, The History of Sexuality and discipline and punish. It was on this scale that Indian Culture was weighed by the colonizers and missionaries and found wanting. That was why, as a first measure, Thomas Babington Macaulay introduced English education in India, to educate and civilize the Indians and eventually to develop European tastes so they would buy English Manufactured goods.

Macaulay had calculated with confidence that western science would remove all traces of idolatry in India in forty years. Missionaries were afraid that mere introduction of Western education, science and philosophy would make the Indian Atheists or agnostics. Hence they asked for introduction of the bible in the academic curriculum. The Evangelicals and liberals in Europe believed that the introduction of European Knowledge and civilization was the panacea for all social evil in India and this would disrupt Indian Social tradition to make them embrace Christianity. ‘The conversion of India would thus be accomplished without resort to coercive power of the state’.

Macaulay - “I have never found one among the orientalists who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. It is no

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The essence of the missionary movement, argues Moore, was an aggressive cultural

169 Stebbing, H. S. (1742). *A Sermon Preached before the Incorporate Society for the propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts*, p. 18
170 ibid
imperialism, propaganda for the spread of European ideas and ideals over the face of globe.\textsuperscript{171}

The study of European Mission history in India "is a study of encounter of cultures."\textsuperscript{172} The Christian missionaries, seeing the fall of Muslim Hierarchy and the conquest of India by the company, considered the success a victory of Christianity over Indian religions. According to Christian Lessen, the Hindu period of Indian History was the thesis, the muslim period the antithesis and the british Raj the synthesis. This synthesis to lessen, in the form of Christian supremacy was the direct outcome of Indian History. He wrote, "(in) the world of religion and thought, Christianity unites and transmutes all that is of value in Hinduism and Islam."\textsuperscript{173}

The demand in parliament by Edmund Burke and others that british power in India should be exercised in a moral function for the benefit of the native population found their Christian reflection in the plans of Evangelicals such as Charles Grant, David Brown and Claudius Buchanan for missionary work in India.\textsuperscript{174}

When the Company's Charter came for renewal before the parliament in 1813, the evangelicals received the most willing support.\textsuperscript{175} As a result, the charter Act of 1813, besides creating an Indian Episcopal See, facilitated the entry of Missionaries into India and provided that the Government of India would spend upto 10000 pounds Sterling a year on Education from its surplus revenues, if any.\textsuperscript{176}

\textsuperscript{171} Moore, R.C. (1919). \textit{Spread of Christianity}, p.19
\textsuperscript{172} Philip, T.V. (1998). "\textit{Christianity in India During Western Colonialism}", p.4. Published by CSS & ISPCK, India.
\textsuperscript{174} Stanley, Brian. (1990).\textit{The bible and the Flag}. (Leicester LEI 7GB; Appolos,IVF), p.58
\textsuperscript{175} Embree, A T. (1962). \textit{Charles Grant and british rule in india}, pp.274-275
\textsuperscript{176} See Sharp, \textit{Selections from education records, part I}, pp 7-11 and pp.19-20
The evangelicals believed in the visible presence of God in Indian History, particularly in the “miraculous subjugation of India by a handful of English”,¹⁷⁷ and so they took it as their responsibility to civilize and convert the people of India to Christianity and lead them through a religious revolution similar to what the Europeans experienced at the time of the protestant reformation.¹⁷⁸ This kind of Reformation, they were convinced could be achieved only by the introduction of western Culture. As a result they believed, England would enjoy the benefits of commerce. The British manufacturers could not trade in India, at present, “Because of the poverty of the people and unformed taste. Education and christianity would ...remove these obstacles.”¹⁷⁹

William Carey was the first self sponsored Baptist missionary from England, who arrived in Hooghly in November 1793. He learnt local languages and converted the Indian People. He made no effort to preach to the unconverted Europeans on the Indian soil. He was a beneficiary of the colonial structure, in spite of his trouble with the colonizers.¹⁸⁰

Carey's beliefs in the Baptist doctrines apparently contradicted his deeds on the Indian soil. The Baptists believed in the separation of the Church and state. The church in their view, was an association of like minded believers who ruled without any ecclesiastical or secular head. The Church cannot be used as the secular arm of the state. The state has to regulate the moral affairs of the society while the church directs the spiritual aspects of the community. In areas where church and state collide, the church holds firm,. In a real sense for a Baptist missionary who believed in the separation of state and church to take up a job under the state as a professor of Indian languages and

¹⁷⁷ Stokes, Eric. (1959). English Utilitarians and India, pp. 30-31
¹⁷⁸ Thomas Metcalf. (1964) Aftermath of Revolt, pp 8-18
¹⁷⁹ Ibid, p.34
to work as a missionary, was to act contrary to his beliefs and the polity of the Baptist church.¹⁸¹

Two major factors that exerted a decisive influence upon missionary work in India during the second quarter of the 19th century were approval of the permanent presence of missionaries in India through the charter Act of 1833, and the legalization of English education in 1835.¹⁸²

Speaking to the parliament, William Wilberforce argued that the introduction of European enlightenment would prepare the people for conversion to Christianity. “when truth and reason so long excluded from that benighted land shall once more obtain an access to it... the understanding of the natives will begin to exert their powers and their minds once more enlightened, will instinctively reject the profane absurdities of their theological and the depraving vices of their moral system. Thus they will be prepared for the reception of Christianity”.¹⁸³

Both the colonizers and the mission societies felt the need for the permanent presence of the empire. Being a missionary in India, became an acceptable norm of the colonial structure and an accessible means to gain some converts to the crown. In this way Christian missionary work was rendered useful and existential. Since missionaries knew the local languages, culture and character of the people, missionaries had the advantage of being source persons for the british raj.¹⁸⁴

The common denominator between the missionaries and colonials after 1833 became the introduction of learning, the primary agent of civilization¹⁸⁵. The government hoped that education would civilize the natives so as to facilitate better

¹⁸² Ibid, p.58
¹⁸³ Parliamentary debates, VOL. 26(1813), .1076
¹⁸⁴ Dharmaraj, op. cit., p.61
business transactions; missionaries envisioned that it would reduce the pagan religions to nothing and pave the way for the dissemination of Christian faith. Thus began another round of collaboration between mission and colonialism.\textsuperscript{186}

Duff's strong belief in the European superiority and political ideology characterizes what David Lochhead calls the theology of 19\textsuperscript{th} century colonial missionaries, 'the theology of isolation'.\textsuperscript{187} Duff was not alone in isolating the people of non western societies and positioning them at the lowest rung of civilization. His predecessor, Carey wrote in An Enquiry that all non western societies are culturally inferior. The antidote to religious ignorance and cultural lowliness is preaching of the gospel and introduction of the superior Western culture. While defending the necessity of foreign missions, Carey expressed his feelings about the superiority of European culture.\textsuperscript{188}

After 1800 industrialised Britain was considered culturally and civilisationally an advanced nation. India was consigned to the lowest rung of the ladder of civilization because of its "barbarous and superstitious" religious practices. Missionaries and the colonists argued that the country could be saved only through a "complete reformation."\textsuperscript{189}

In Rana Kabbani's \textit{Europe's Myths of Orient}, she argues that 19\textsuperscript{th} century Europeans believed that Western religion and culture had all the ingredients to uplift any lowly, primitive culture. His immense belief in the "transcendent" European civilization made Duff carry out what in Napoleon's "laicized version" is called the

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\textsuperscript{186} Metcalf, Thomas. \textit{Aftermath of Revolt}, pp. 12ff
\textsuperscript{188} Dharmaraj, \textit{op. cit.}, p.64
\textsuperscript{189} Metcalfe, \textit{The Aftermath of Revolt}, pp.7-8.
mission civilisatrice\textsuperscript{190}.

"The new conviction of superiority arose from technologies and techniques of govt, but it took the form of a belief in Christian superiority... Superiority was explained as the result, not of new techniques but of old morality; often as though the Christian morality had been necessary to achieve the techniques. There was revived in the Victorian age, the religious and moral fervour of the middle ages, speaking with the modern accent of material progress."\textsuperscript{191}

Evangelical spirituality and cultural superiority were inculcated by religious authority figures. For instance, Alexander Duff's mentor, dr. John Inglis, encouraged Duff to educate, civilize, and to use commercial connection for the conversion of people in india.\textsuperscript{192} "Blessed with a keener vision than most of his missionary compatriots, Duff fastened his gaze upon the evolving economic life that swirled through... (Calcutta) and saw that the struggle for employment must inevitably force native job hunters a higher type of training than elementary institutions could provide. In designing his institutions he trimmed his sails to fit that demand."\textsuperscript{193}

Alexander Duff, Charles Trevelyan and his brother in law, Thomas Macaulay formed the triumvirs of English Education in India\textsuperscript{194}. Those big three represented India and spoke on its behalf through the voice they adopted, the structure they built, the moral ideas theyt projected and the political ideas they sold. To these triumvirs, civilizing and Christianizing were synonyms; civilizing Indian people would facilitate

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\textsuperscript{190} Kabbani, Rana. Europe's myths of Orient, p.105
\textsuperscript{191} Daniel, Norman. Islam, Europe and Empire, p. 246. Quoted by Rana Kabbani in Europe's Myths of Orient, p.105
\textsuperscript{192} Smith, George. (1899). Alexander Duff, P.37
\textsuperscript{193} McCully, Bruce. (1942). English Education. P.44
\textsuperscript{194} MetCalfe, Thomas. Aftermath of Revolt, pp.11ff
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easy commercial intercourse, Christianizing would make them loyal to the british
crown.195

The end result could be achieved only through the introduction of western
education. The process of civilization was taken as seriously by the colonials as by
missionaries. For eg., casting aside the orientalists' suggestion of teaching science and
humanities, in both English and the vernacular in schools, macaulay expressed his
contempt and ignorance for traditional education in india. He emphasized that the
introduction of western civilization through English Education would enhance trade
with India. He stressed, "To trade with civilized men is infinitely more profitable than to
govern savages".196

Intellectual colonization was a new phenomenon introduced to the colonized
world in the second quarter of the 19th century. The colonizers were able to sell their
ideas successfully to missionaries also. To all of them, it was the exteriority that
mattered most. From exterior to interior, from trade to religion was their agenda. If the
evangelistic goal was to be reached, missionaries argued, a European model of
Reformation should be created and introduced in India. Again not spontaneous efforts
but mobilization of forces for the movement toward reformation was what they
proposed. For instance, Duff reasoned, "What the Christian Reformation did for Europe
through the Greek tongue, the Roman Law and the bible in the vernaculars, it will
similarly do for India and further Asia through the English Language and the British
Administration."197

Duff argued that the new system of education should also incorporate moral
teaching by which he meant Christian instruction. These incorporation of Christian

195 Smith, George. Alexander Duff, p.295
197 George Smith, (1899). Alexander Duff, p.205
Religious instruction would evoke love and respect for the British crown among the converts and ensure the permanence of the govt. Explaining to the colonials the advantages of English education and proposing the benefits of making converts for the longevity of the empire have been to contextual developments which have characterised the second quarter of the 19th century. This carried the colonial missionary enterprise a step further. In addition, by joining the colonials, Duff does not hesitate to hide his conviction that his primary unit of missiological concern was not only Christianizing the natives but also maintaining the external relations with the larger life of the colonials. In this way, Duffs missiology tended to go beyond the formal contours of the early principals of mission and get deeply entrenched in political soil, thus perpetuating a 19th century version of missionary work with an added dimension.

Analizing the importance of the presence of colonial power to accomplish his missionary work, duff said that Calcutta and Bengal, the administrative headquarters of the colonial govt, were like Jerusalem and Syria.

George Smith summarizes that It was the Greek tongue and the Roman Order... to all the race the fullness of the ages. In India, the set time came with the English Language, with the legislation and administration, the commerce and the civilization of the British people. The missionary had, thus far, done his work.

A very significant fact about Assam is the fusion which took place here of Aryan and Mongolian cultures. We find an example of how a dominant culture, although supported numerically by a few, can seep into, and impose itself on, weaker cultures. Thus we find in Assam, a population by and large Mongolian but speaking at present Assamese, which is an Aryan Sanskritic language. This happened not merely because of

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198 Dharmaraj, op.cit., p.71
199 ibid
200 George Smith, Alexander Duff, pp.176-177
the superiority of Aryan languages over rude tribal dialects but also because of the absorbing power and influence of Hinduism. The Brahmans from northern India succeeded in absorbing into Hinduism all the tribal people of the plains including the powerful Ahoms who ruled Assam for over six hundred years and who in course of time not only adopted the Hindu religion, discarding their own, but also forgot their own shan language and adopted Assamese.\(^{201}\)

The tribal peoples accommodated themselves to British rule and began to see it, as well as Christianity, as a defence against the greater threat of dominance by and absorption into the more advanced plains Hindu community\(^{202}\).

The process of modernization involved such things as the introduction of a cash economy and previously unknown commodities, road and rail communications, modern education and medicine, newspaper and books, models of new lifestyles and a new judicial and political system. In the early stages, there was also the threat of the imposition of a new language, Bengali in the courts and schools of the Assam Plains. The traditional inhabitants had several options. They could acquiesce to the dominance of the newcomers; they could accommodate themselves to the new situation; or they could rebel.

By and large the course chosen by the plainsmen was accommodation mixed with some resistance. There were some things they could change and there were others that they had to accept. They could not reverse the legislation enacted by the British stripping the traditional ruling classes of their authority and social status. This brought about important social changes\(^{203}\).

\(^{201}\) Assam (1969), pp. 7-8

\(^{202}\) Downs, Frederick S. (1983). Christianity in North East India. p.16

\(^{203}\) Barpujari, (1980). "Assam in the days of company (1826-1858), 1963, p.266
Commissioner Francis Jenkins, in 1834-“ These few assamese in their present uneducated state do not suffice to carry on duties of our courts... the old families of Assam are still losing influence in their own native province being elbowed out from those situations which lead to power and decent maintenance. This state of things appear to me pregnant with evil consequences and I know no other method by which it would be remedied than by the Government taking some active measure to provide instruction for the Assamese youths.”

In both the provision of the new skills and the resistance to the imposition of Bengali, Christians played an important role in the Assam plains. The Baptist missionaries at Sibasagar, Nowgong and Gauhati led the agitation against the continued use of Bengali in the courts and schools of Assam and they established schools that for many years educated the new Assamese elite. The Christian High Schools at Jorhat and Shillong were particularly important in this respect. Among the plainsmen however, there was no fundamental cultural or social threat in the new situation. The british did not interfere with their religion and most of the Indian Newcomers were like, themselves, Hindus. The nobles were unseated, but the basic social structures were unaffected, or at least not seriously affected. “ It must however, be pointed out that these changes in society were more apparent than real and a drastic social or institutional change at that stage was not possible. In otherwords, Assamese society in no way changed its basic character... (though) the british government introduced many reforms which helped the Assamese in remodelling their social behaviour and changing some of their traditional practices.”

Mr. David Scott was not endowed with the administrative calibre of the highest order, but he evinced a vigour and power of understanding that was unique... he steered Assam through one of the most chaotic periods of her history and earned the gratitude

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204 Bengal Political Consultations, 1834, July 10, No. 211; cited in Barpujari, Company, pp-275-6
of the posterity as her saviour from the domination of the Burmese. He was indeed the patriarch of the Assamese. With an unimpeachable character and unparalled sense of public duty, he devoted all his exertions to their all round development. His persistent representations for the restoration of the Ahom Monarchy, his generosity and conciliatory manners to the distressed nobility, his keen appreciation of the sentiment and requirements of the Assamese and his sincere endeavours to employ none but the children of the soil, for all these, he is held in high esteem and admiration. Major Jenkins was the prime mover of all the measures connected with the material progress of this province, and he is rightly acclaimed by the contemporaries as the greatest benefactor of the people of Assam.\footnote{Barpujari, op.cit., p.259}

David Scott had studied under William Carey, the famous Serampore missionary, at the Fort William College in Calcutta and was deeply influenced by him.\footnote{Nirode K Barooah. (1969). David Scott in North east India: A Study in British Paternalism (1969), New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Oriental publishers, p.176ff} He encouraged the Serampore mission to establish a school at Gauhati.\footnote{Downs, op.cit., p.25}

Francis Jenkins was the son of an English clergyman and had strong Evangelical Convictions. It was in response to a direct invitation from him that the first American Baptist missionaries came to Assam. Not only did he invite them, but a reading of the reports, journals, and letters of the missionaries gives the impression that he functioned like a member of their Board of Directors. He provided them with a press, advised them concerning the location of new stations, found Government funds to support some of their non evangelistic work, contributed generously out of his private funds and maintained very close personal friendships with many of the missionaries. It was also during his time that the second important protestant mission was established in the
region: That of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists (later Presbyterians) in the Khasi Hills, though Jenkins was not directly involved in its decision to work in that area.  

Both Jenkins and Scott devoted much of their attention to economic rehabilitation of Assam. Jenkins in particular made important contributions here. A number of schemes were introduced to encourage the reoccupation of the once cultivated but now abandoned waste lands in the Brahmaputra Valley. Though a primary motive in these efforts was to increase the revenues of the government, Jenkins wished to do it in such a way that the Assamese people would benefit and not simply become the victims of outside exploitation. One of the most important consequences of this economic effort was the successful introduction of commercial tea cultivation in the 1830s. This, in turn influenced the course of Christianity in the Brahmaputra valley.

C.A. Bruce and his wife were evangelicals who had become interested in the Khampti and singpho tribes. Bruce C.A. Bruce was responsible for having brought the largest Protestant mission in to the region. It was Bruce who persuaded Jenkins to invite missionaries to establish School at sadiya for the benefit of the tribals. Accordingly, in 1834 Jenkins approached William Pearce, through Charles Trevelyan, of the English Baptist Missionary Society in Calcutta and he in turn, proposed that the American Baptists in Burma should be asked if they would be interested. Jenkins, who was a great admirer of the pioneer American Baptist missionary in Burma, adoniram Judson, thought this was a good suggestion and so proceeded accordingly.

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209 Ibid, pp 25-26  
210 Barpujari, Assam in the days of company, p.211ff  
211 Downs, op.cit, p.26  
The second way in which the tea industry influenced the Christian movement was the fact that the great majority of the some 3,50,000 Christians now resident in the Brahmaputra valley are either tea garden labourers or the descendants of tea garden labourers who have settled in the areas.213

In theory the tribes in the hills were to be left alone to follow their own ways and to form a buffer between the administered areas and the Chinese and Burmese neighbours. Though these hills areas were not administered, the british claimed jurisdiction up to the international boundaries as determined by the watersheds.214

In the Khasi, Jayantia, garo, Lushai and Manipur Hills, the missionaries entered after the british had established a reasonable degree of control. The first work among the nagas, in the Ao area, began some 18 years before British administration was established there. There was never the close personal relationship between missionaries and british officers in the Naga Hills that one finds elsewhere and, infact, the attitude of the British officers towards the missionaries was some times hostile.215

The general status of Assam, which came to be the name used to describe all territories under the authority of the Chief Commissioner, including the Brahmaputra and Surma valleys, the Hill Districts and Manipur (but not Tripura) can be briefly summarized. Up until 1874, Assam was a non regulated territory within the administrative structure of Bengal. The non regulated is significant. This meant that the

213 Census of India 1931, Vol III, assam, part I, Report, pp.188-200. The Commissioner notes that in all parts of the valley except Goalpara, kamrup, and Darrang, where the Christians are mainly from other tribal groups, the majority of the Christians are either Tea Garden coolies or ex tea Garden coolies.
214 Downs, op.cit p.29
215 Downs, op.cit p.34
regulations in force in Bengal need not necessarily be applied to Assam, at the discretion of the commissioner, in recognition of regional distinctives. The non regulated system, as first introduced by David Scott in relation to the administration of the Garo area before the annexation of Assam proper in 1826, also concentrated authority in the hands of a single officer on the spot who had great discretionary power. Barpujari describes the system as introduced by Scott: “A beginning was thus made of a new form of administration commonly known as the non regulated system. Herein the powers of a collector, Magistrate and Judge were concentrated in the same hands, subject, however to the supervision of Superior authority. With an intensely Centralized and all powerful executive, the system characterised by a simple and direct procedure was well intentioned and had the wholesome effect of bringing the authorities well within the reach of the people. The Success of the scheme, however depended on the extent of personal contacts, continuity of policies and mainly on the character, vision and promptitude of the man at the helm of Affairs.”

Throughout the 19th century, Assam as a whole had what Chaube refers to a “Specialised Government”. Within this general arrangement there were even more specialized arrangements for the administration of the hills Districts. These are of particular interest to the students of history of Christianity in the North East because Christianity is often closely associated with what are frequently described as British efforts to isolate the hillsmen and alienate them from their plains neighbours- a divide and rule policy. This point was made forcefully and somewhat emotionally by S.P. Sinha, then assistant Director of the Bihar Tribal Welfare Research Institute, Ranchi at a seminar held at Simla, 1969: “They (Christian Missionaries in the Hills Areas of the North East) are responsible for fanning the basic

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distrust and fear among the hillsmen for the plainsmen. In fact, Christian Missionaries are there not for advocating a faith but for keeping Imperialism alive." 217

P.C.Kar interprets the decision by the American Baptist Mission to discontinue the use of Bengali script and adopt the roman script for the written form of the Garo language in a similar way. "The british authority always aimed a socio political and geographic isolation of the Garos from the rest of the country.... It was then correctly apprehended by the british authorities that the use of bengali script for the written Garo language would certainly bring the Garos closer to the Bengalees culturally. But, Bengal was at the behest of a nationalistic upsurge due to the first partition of that province during those days and the swaadeshi movement was also spreading itself in the neighbouring areas. The authorities got allergic to the likely inroad of the swadeshi movement into Garo Society through the Bengali language as the co medium of instruction. It was also apprehended that even the continuation of Bengali script for the growing Garo language might sprout ultimately the seeds of communion between the minds of the hills and the surrounding plains using the script. As the educational efforts of the Mission used to be predominantly subsidised by the govt. Grants the Mission had no alternative but to abide by the administrator's policy of excluding the garo from the rest of the British territory".218 The fact is that the decision to adopt the roman script after having used the Bengali script for 45 years was taken in 1893.

The cross not un-often followed the British flag. In the North eastern Frontier the progress of evangelization was rather slow. Krishna Pal, William Carey's first convert, is said to have arrived in the Khasi Hills as early as 1813, though the number of

converts did not exceed until 1830 even a dozen.\textsuperscript{219} On the representation of Scott, a branch of Serampur Missionary was set up at Gauhati in 1829 under James Rae, a native of Dumfrice, and seven years later William Robinson joined Mission\textsuperscript{220}; they also could not make much headway in their activities. Jenkins thought that the task of pacifying the rude tribes of the North East frontier, particularly the Singphos and the Khamtis, could be effectively done by the spread of Gospel, and when an invitation was accordingly sent, in early 1835, the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society took the matter in right earnest.\textsuperscript{221} Soon they sent a mission under reverends Nathan Brown and Oliver cutter with a printing Press which reached Sadiya on 23 march 1836\textsuperscript{222}. The Baptists hoped that not only the frontier tribes would be converted to Christianity but an entrance would also be opened up at no distant future even to the heart of china.\textsuperscript{223} At Sadiya, the missionaries were able to have access to Khamti villages and to print a few books in their language preparatory to the establishment of Schools and spread of the Gospel amongst these tribes.\textsuperscript{224}

Miles Bronson located himself at Jaypur to commence work amongst the Singphos and the Shans that occupied the valley of the Hukwang between Assam and Burma.\textsuperscript{225} Sadiya soon proved to be 'a barred door rather than an open gate to the celestial empire and their hope of redeeming the Khamtis and the Shans too received a rude shock in January 1839 at the unfortunate tragedy of sadiya where the British party was nearly annihilated.

\textsuperscript{219} Sword, V.H., \textit{Baptists in Assam}, p.37
\textsuperscript{220}Calcutta Christian Observer (1835), p.408
\textsuperscript{221}Barpujari, \textit{Assam in the days of Company}, p.301
\textsuperscript{222}Gammell William, \textit{History of the American Baptist Mission}(1850): p212-3
\textsuperscript{223}ibid
\textsuperscript{224}Barpujari, \textit{op. Cit.}, p.301
\textsuperscript{225}The Baptist Missionary Magazine, xxvi, august in Barpujari, \textit{Assam in the Days of company}, p.302
Brown and cutter moved to Jaypur and thence to Sibsagar. Bronson directed his attention to the Nagas at Namsang where he started a school and prepared some elementary books in their language. Miles Broson for some reason or the other left the Nagas on ground of ill health and settled himself at Nowgong; he baptised in May 1841, the first Assamese convert Nidhiram, later known as Nidhi Levi Farwell. At Gauhati, the first Baptist church was established in December, 1845, and branches were organised in the same year at Nowgong and Sibsagar. Backed by the moral and material support of the small European Community of the valley, the Christian fathers carried on their activities ceaselessly amongst the people of the plains, but their spiritual harvest continued to be unsatisfactory. "The Assamese for whom the mission had yielded Sadiya and Jaypur... had failed to accept Christianity".226

Though inspired by their proselytising spirit, the missionaries founded an orphanage at Nowgong, opened hospitals, started schools, literary and vocational, for the boys as well as girls which were uncommon in those days in Assam.227 They openly taught the Bible in their schools, but espoused the cause of the vernacular of the people and made invaluable contributions to the Assamese language and literature. Brown, Bronson and Farwell, the trio, laid the foundation of the Christian-Assamese literature228. Bronson’s monumental work Dictionary in Assamese and English was published from Baptist Mission Press, Sibsagar, in 1867 he earliest of its kind till 1900. Brown translated the New Testament into Assamese, published his Grammatical Notices on the Assamese Language (1848) and collected a good number of Assamese manuscripts. He also wrote for the Assamese pupils a history, an arithmetic and a Geography. Nidhi Levi is credited with a historical work, a number of story books and

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227 Butler, J. (1855). Travels and Adventures in the province of Assam, pp 250-1
the rendering into assamese of the Indian Penal Code. To crown all, the missionaries published in January 1846 the Orunudoi, the first assamese monthly, 'devoted to religion, science and general intelligence'. Disseminating western thought and learning the orunudoi inspired the younger generation and paved the way for an intellectual awakening.  

The impact of the new ideas, during a period of expanding economy, had their repercussions on the social life of the Assamese firstly mollifying the rigidity of the caste system and secondly in removing, though slowly, some of their traditional beliefs and prejudices. The sentiment of the Orthodox region had been echoed by Maniram when he bewailed- 'By the reduction of all castes to the same level, the people are labouring under the deepest grief and mortification'.

The growing urbanization demanded the services of a number of useful communities like those of the washerman, the barbers and cobblers whose contact was once considered highly objectionable by the orthodox Hindus. The learning of a foreign language and of going abroad were formerly social taboos. Assamese students of the orthodox Brahmins were seen in the thirties of the nineteenth century studying English side by side with pupils of other communities; and some of them, though few, proceeded to the presidency for higher courses in English Education.

It must also be remembered that the western influences, including those of the province of Bengal, percolated into the newly developed middle classes of the urban areas, but the masses in the interior remained almost unaffected.

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229 Barpujari, *op.cit.*, p.303
231 Dhekial Phukan, Haliram. (1962)*Assam Buranji*, p.100
232 Barpujari, *Assam in the days of Company*. p. 305
The ingenious means with which the west in general and the british in particular made their contact with Assam has been delved upon. The whole country including Assam came in contact with the so called Modern age with the coming of the british. But, the moot point is that—Can this Modernity or the heralding of the Modern Age be attributed to the british alone. Had any European country made its presence felt in India at the same juncture when the East India Company came to India, the effects would perhaps been not much different. Because modernity at that point of time had already engulfed the west and its repercussions would have been felt in other areas of the globe, no matter which European power came to the shores of India or to any of its region at that popint of time. The same question can be put in another way. Had the british came to India at a much earlier date, then they did in the eighteenth century, then would the so called Modernity or Modern age could have been preponed.

According to Dimbeswar Neog, “Initially the british had used assamese as the medium of education and legal affairs; but in 1836 they threw out the legal mistress Assamese language from the house of education and law, and brought in the concubine Bengali language. According to the law of 1837 and article 337, all states had to use their own language in civil and revenue affairs. But, in the case of Assam those laws were only inconveniences. No Assamese were seen raising any finger in protest against this gross injustice; it was at this time that the Baptist missionaries of America arrived in Assam in the year 1836, just as a spark of lightning amidst dark clouds.”

(Translated from Assamese)

According to Maheswar Neog, “The Baptists gave new life to the Assamese language by preparing and publishing Assamese Grammar, School textbooks, books of

knowledge, by bringing out orunudoi, an excellent example of newspaper and magazine for thirty seven years, by becoming the first and foremost fighter to restore the status of Assamese as court language, by teaching the Assamese writers to use new Assamese language, by infusing English words and styles into Assamese language. They tilled the land of Assamese language for the first time to produce modern literature and the most important thing was that they taught self confidence to the Assamese people".234 (translated from Assamese)

In 1834, Francis Jenkins, the officer-in-charge of the Assam division of the Bengal province, and the man almost universally esteemed for initiating the modern system of education in Assam, expressed his anguish at what he deemed to be the lamentable state of education in the region.235 Jenkins wrote:

'To leave this matter (education) to the people would be to commit a duty incumbent in my opinion upon us to those who are mostly incapable of judging themselves and who from universal poverty caused perhaps greatly by our mismanagement are unable from want of means and intelligence to accomplish any progress that would satisfy us... To leave the natives alone would approach nearly to parental neglect of children'.236

No country could previously boast of more splendid endowments – one quarter nearly of the cultivated land having been bestowed by the Rajahs on Brahmins, Dewalies, Shhusters and other religious sects and foundations. All the officers whose reports are now forwarded have agreed upon the very low state of education in this province and that it is hopeless to expect any present improvement except the

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Government will (be) pleased to allow of the appropriation of lands and money for the maintenance of the school masters. 237

It contained a subtle indication that the Assamese were somehow unable to comprehend matters intellectual – that they were, to be more precise, "incapable of judging themselves". 238

The official disdain for mass education was epitomised by the policy of "downward filtration", whereby the state had undertaken to develop only a few institutions where western education through the medium of the English language would be impaired only to those already possessing a literate tradition. In her work on the growth of education in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries, Aparna Basu (1974) points out that it was only in the early 20th century, when Curzon was the viceroy, these steps were taken to promote education for the masses. 239

Jenkins' proposal was, thus, at odds with the colonial state's overall policy of promoting higher education alone. He suggested that the state should take the initiative to establish schools at each station possessing a European officer, viz, at Goalpara, Gowhattty (Guwahati), Durrung (Darrang), Nowgong and Bishnath. He further recommended that clever lads capable of giving instruction in Bengali and English should be selected as instructors by members of the Committee for Public Instruction. Such efforts, Jenkins felt, would produce the desired results. In his words:

"...such a commencement might be made as would allow us in a short time to fill all vacancies in offices with the natives of the country to

237 Ibid
give such a stimulus to education as to render the interference of
government no longer necessary. 240

Unlike elsewhere in the country, where by the 1830s, the state had begun to show a distinct preference for English education, in Assam vernacular education, albeit through the medium of Bengali, continued to be encouraged. According to a survey, state-funded schools included higher English, middle English and middle vernacular schools.241

The General Report on Public Instruction in Assam for 1880-81, however, belied this premise by stating that the school had scored a “tolerably fair success” in the “three preceding years at both the Entrance and First Arts Examination”. What was more the decision was not revised despite the improvement in the performance of the students in the next few years. The government’s decision to abolish the collegiate section of the Gauhati school compelled students who had passed the matriculation examination to go to colleges in Calcutta for further studies. To appease the sentiments of the people, the government offered to render partial financial assistance to any private initiative undertaken for the promotion of higher education in the province. The General Report on Public Instruction for 1880-81 carried the following resolution: should the people evince the strength of their desire for higher education, by raising a fund towards the support of college classes at Gauhati, he (the Chief Commissioner) would contribute from provincial funds a sum equal to that raised by public subscription.242

