CHAPTER III
CONTRIBUTION OF ANANDARAM DHEKIYAL PHUKAN TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ASSAMESE SOCIETY.

III.0 Anandaram- His birth and initial Life

Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan had made immense contribution to the Assamese Society. In order to get rid of an inflated notion of his contribution, one needs to examine his greatest contribution in the field of Administration and the restoration of the Assamese Language. Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan was the benefactor of the Assamese language. He studied at the Hindu College at Calcutta. He set the fashion for the Assamese built-in turban (bandha paguri) used by the moderns for quite some time till it disappeared on a sudden for all time to come. Whatever his habiliment, a sense of order, dignity and good taste emanated from his whole personality.243

He dressed in the all genuine Assamese style with silk dhoti (bhanga Pat Churiya), coat (anga Chola) and pugree with brim (taukaniya Paguri) or in the fashion that was in vogue in Calcutta like the pajamas, chapkan or mirzai coat and amama pagri. He loved all three languages—Assamese, English and Bengali. He raised the most effective voice with that demand of reinstatement of the Assamese language. He did not live to see its fulfilment in 1873. He published the first primers in the Assamese language for children in 1849 probably as a challenge to those who considered the language inadequate to fulfil the needs of a medium of modern instruction. He wrote in a fine prose style, simple, homespun and effective. For ousting the Bengali language

from the lower vernacular schools of Assam, he mastered the Bengali language and became the first author in it to have prepared the translations of the Decisions of the *Sudder Dewanny* and *Nizamat Adawlut* in monthly instalments from January 1850 onwards and published *Ain o Vyavastha- Samgraha* or Notes on the law of Bengal, 1855, the first of its kind in Bengali. He even bought a printing press in Calcutta. He advocated English education in western literature and science in the local language, Sanskrit learning in schools and colleges, education of women, a general education in medicine, mechanisation of agriculture, widest facilities of modern medical treatment and healthy judicial and police administration for the people. As his biographer, Gunaviram Barua, says the feeling for his people was ever uppermost in his mind as if he would uplift them all bodily by his two hands.244

He had his formal vidyarambha at the age of five. Durgaram, son of Jajnaram Kharghariya Phukan, Jasodhar Adhyapak of Umananda and others taught him Sanskrit. He was given lessons in Karikas, Ratnamala- Vyakarana of Purushottama and there was not a single person among the local person other than Anandaram who would speak or have a discussion or could offer a little bit of advice anywhere for the good of the people. Most of them took a false pride in their avowed migration from Nadiya-Santipur of Bengal or from Kanauj. They cared not the least whether Assamese or Bengali language was there in the schools and courts. Phukan then helped the Padre sahibs, who also came to Phukan’s help in the matter of the local language, and both exerted themselves to taking special care of that language’.245 A mind once extended never contracts. At that hour there was a big agitation over the Assamese language.

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Phukan also joined that agitation. One copy of the publication was sent to the government of Bengal, and other copies were distributed free among leading men of Assam, an abstract of the publication was published in the Indian antiquity.

In consultation with Captain Butler, Phukan began writing his Abhidan. Butler sent out advance advertisements and 93 people indicated their willingness to buy the book. Phukan thought he would begin printing his dictionary when this number came to one hundred and fifty. The Orunudoi (Vol. XI, No. 12, December 1956) says that Phukan was making two dictionaries, 'Ingraji-Acamiya' and 'Acamiya-Ingraji'.

Gunabhiram writes Phukan's education at college was completely short. When he returned home however, he had great industry and took pains in educating himself. He knew English, Bengali and assamese thoroughly and wrote books in this language. He knew urdu and Persian to a standard. He understood well books in simple Sanskrit. He had a great urge for reading. He was busy with his study every day. He however practised speaking and writing English a great deal. He commanded the same mastery of the Bengali language.

Many believed him to be a Bengali from the Calcutta region. He could write Persian a little. He could talk in Urdu. He did not command over Sanskrit enough for writing or speaking. He took special care of his Assamese language, style. When there was a good Assamese word, he did not like to use a Sanskrit or some other equivalent in its place. He thus did great effort to see that Assamese was used among people in general. He became a pathfinder in that.

248 Barua, G. Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukanar Jivan Charitra. pp. 163-64
He was especially enthusiastic about the establishment of schools. As there was no English school in Nagaon those days, he started an English school in his own school where a teacher taught students in the morning and evening every day. Being encouraged by him, Gunabhiram on his return from Calcutta organised a society called Jnanapradayini, where some local gentleman gather each week to discuss various topics. He was a relentless champion of female education. He himself gave his wife an education and gave his daughter, Padmavati formal Vidyarambha at the age of five. Both men and women, he argued are human beings, if therefore women be uneducated the men themselves have to remain paralyzed over half the body. He was an ardent votary of female emancipation. 249

In food, dress and general social conduct, he was for modern ways; on festive occasions in his house, he had special preparations made in the indigenous style and also in Bengali and western style to cater to the needs of the Sahibs and Muslim friends. Truly like Peter the great the young Anandaram was one of those who tried to open for Assam the window on the west. 250

He acquired a large amount of information about the history of civilised nations-Greece and Rome, Britain and India. He was full of plans for the progress of his own homeland; and the young man then eighteen, charged with a passion for seeing the progress of the country in the light of the progress, particularly of Britain, about which he had just read with much zest in history, contributed a rather well written essay Inglandar bibaran (an Account of England) to the Orunudoi of April 1847 (Vol. II, No. III). It is covered 8 columns of the Orunudoi. Phukan avails himself of an account of modern England with all its educational and industrial progress to admonish the

249 Ibid, p. 169
250 Neog, Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan, p. 19
Assamese people, whom he addressed in a straightforward manner, to positive action, to accept western standards of education, literature and science towards a new life of progress and plenty, beauty and love, happiness and righteousness. He loved the people so as to be able to be harsh on them for their foibles, to lash them for their lethargy and wasteful habits. He wished to see Assam prosper on lines of industry but wanted also to have the progress of agriculture with modern manufacture implements. His language and style particularly have fine features. Like the Baptist writers and unlike us today he desists from using loan words for new concepts and utilised old terms, or coins new ones on indigenous base for connoting new objects and ideas.\(^{251}\)

He imagined a condition in Assam when in place of bamboo built houses there would be brick or stone built mansions; when from village to village there would be thousands and thousands of schools, societies of learning, hospitals and destitute homes; when all people would forsake their mutual jealousy and love all people alike as if all were their own brethren; when in place of standing false witness for two tolas of opium they would spurn even a lac of rupees and will do no wrong to anybody even when offered a crore of rupees as bribe; and when people in this country will not know what prostitution, opium or spirituous liquor is.\(^{252}\)

Phukan wrote his *Asomiya Lorar Mitra* when he was the Dewan of the Bijni Raj as he had time enough to spare for the job. The local people could not appreciate the value of the twin books treating of the European literature and science which were very much unfamiliar to them. As Phukan does not hanker after fame among people he has not put his name on the books. The *Orunudoi* started publishing some lessons from the printed *Asamiya lorar Mitra* in its issues. Even though written for school children,

\(^{251}\) Neog. *Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan* p. 20-21

\(^{252}\) Ibid, p. 22
some of these essays have their own literary beauty, nay even a literary flourish. Patriotism was the key with which Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan unlocked his heart. Even though the matter was being taken from well known books in English, the spirit of Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan permeated that matter and came out in the form of admonishments through his countrymen to take to modern English education, to take to all action and to render the country as a whole into something like a second England.

He had the inspiration from his father's Bengali work. The language echoed the old assamese buranji chronicles and it is echoed in turn by Gunabhiram’s fine account of the History of Assam. The language of the book as a whole, again was set into poise for the new content of literature, the matter of western literature and Science. Haliram Dhekiyal Phukan was a great scholar in Sanskrit and Bengali. Gunabhiram Barua informs us that Haliram made two remarkable books in these two languages - Assam Buranji, (1829), a brief compilation from assamese Buranji Chronicles in Bengali and Kamakhya-yatra-paddhati, 1831, a compilation from Sanskrit tantras particularly for pilgrims from Bengal. Haliram acquired some acquaintance with both the written and spoken language of Bengal during a long residence in the country. 253

Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan worked as the Dewan of the Bijni Raja. During his stint there, he set the administration of the state in order, and formulated a whole code for that purpose which went by his name in later times. When he officiated as a sub Assistant for only three months, for the first time in 1850, he surprised everybody connected with that office by dint of his grammatically sound and logically well written decisions for no assistant before him cared for grammar or logic in writing judgements. Thus, language and method seemed to have been in his very blood. The decisions of

253 Ibid, p. 24-26
Sudder Dewanny and Nizamat Adawlut used to be published every month in English with the Government’s assistance. As these were not available in Bengali, it remained well nigh impossible for people in general to know anything about the wise judgements of these high judicial bodies. Phukan found this a sad reality, and came forward to remove it. He translated the decisions of the Adawluts for January and February, 1850, and sent them for printing to Messrs Rosario and Company, Calcutta. This was the first published book of decisions of a court in the Bengali language. Even though there have been subsequently many translators and publishers in the field, it was initiative and thinking of Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan that was at the root of their origin. The decisions of March 1850 in Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan’s Bengali rendering were printed at the Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta. The learned judges of the Sadar Adawlut were a bit diffident at the beginning about the translation of the decision by an Assamese from Assam. But Phukan’s work very ably stood the test of public criticism. He brought out a printing press called Calcutta New Press, specially for the printing of the decisions and had it registered in 1852 with the Calcutta police in the name of Gunabhiram.254

The Orunudoi of December 1856, pointed out that Assamese boys were applying much attention to the learning of the English language then and in Sibsagar and Gauhati Zillas, good English schools had been established, and very good school masters were appointed there. But, as there were no dictionaries of the boys’ own language, it has been somewhat difficult for them to learn English. It is true that there are dictionaries of the Bengali language, but it is difficult to learn English from them. For, if one does not acquire well the Bengali language first, one cannot learn English.

254 Ibid, p. 27-29.
through those dictionaries. And some English people also had written letters who wished to have English and Assamese dictionaries; but such ones had not been printed at all. But, for the benefit of those types of persons ADP had written two (*dui Khanda*) dictionaries – English-Assamese (*Ingraji Acamiya*) and Assamese English (*acamiya Ingraji*). The dictionary was meant for the school going children and English speaking people. The second thing of importance was the fact that Phukan’s spelling system differed to an extent from the simplified orthography of the *Orunudoi*, which was devised by Dr. Nathan Brown on the principle that the writing ought to reflect the spoken word, and was zealously maintained by the missionaries in spite of attacks upon it from local quarters.\(^{255}\)

Col. Henry Hopkinson, Former Commissioner, Agent to the Governor General and Commissioner of Assam remarked that Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan was to Assam what Ram Mohan Roy was to Bengal, and that, considering the comparative conditions of the two provinces of their times, he could be considered even more extraordinary than Rammohun.\(^{256}\)

The ancestry of Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan can be traced to the time of the reign of Gaurinath Singha(1780-95). The latter was described by Mr. Welsh as a ‘poor debilitated man, incapable of transacting business, always either washing or praying and intoxicated with opium’. He had the eyes of a young *Majumdar* (Secretary) extracted for a trivial offence. When subsequently a letter from a foreign Court came and had to be deciphered by that very *Majumdar*, with his fingers made to move over the shape of letters by another person, repentance came to the king, who ordered his *Bejbaruwas* (royal Physicians) to restore the eyesight of the secretary. Too timid to speak out the

\(^{255}\) Ibid, p. 30 -34
\(^{256}\) Cited by Hemchandra Baruwa in his biographical note on Phukan in his *Pathmala*, 1873. P. 88 Guwahati. Publisher- Hemkosh Prakashan.
truth before such an unpredictable master, the Bejbarmvas said that for the grafting of
eyes, specialists from outside the state would had to be brought. Thus, the king was
gracious to order a scouting party to find out such experts. The party came as far as
Murshidabad in Bengal, where the king’s men met Lakshminarayan, a Brahman from
the Dravida Country, who, strangely enough, had left home just because his three elder
brothers had not given his newly wedded wife as much ornaments as were given to
their wives. Amused by the mission, the Lakshmi Narayan set out to please the king. In
the meantime, the blinded Majumdar had died, the Ahom Capital had been sacked by
the Moamariya Vaishnavas in a fresh rising, and Gaurinatha Singha had fled to
Guwahati in search of support from the British. This came in the form of 360 British
soldiers under Captain Welsh with whose help Gaurinath Singha marched back to his
headquarters at Rangpur. Lakshmi Narayan was able to impress the king and his
ministers and became the Duwariya Baruwa or customs officer at Hadira-chowki or
Bangalghat outpost against an annual cash payment of Rs. 10,000 in Narayani Currency
of Koch Behar and Rs. 70,000 worth of goods in kind. He also gathered around him a
strange family of six destitute boys and one homeless girl, adopting them as sons and
daughter of his own. The eldest boy, Parasuram, succeeded to the Lakshmi Narayan
office of Duwariya Baruwa even before the latter’s death.257

When Laksminarayan died, one of his adopted sons, Ranram, carried the news
all the way to the bereaved wife and family still living in the south. On the other hand,
Laksminarayan’s adopted Assamese family thrived being engaged in trade in imports,
under the care of Parasuram, and in royal services. The Ahom State, however, was then
fast decaying mainly due to inner dissensions. The rulers following Gaurinath Singha,

Kameleswar and Chandrakanta- were weaklings; and the political scene was dominated by the Prime Minister, Purnananda Buragohain. His enmity with the Viceroy at Gauhati, Badanchandra Barphukan, eventually led to the Burmese invasion.  

Parasuram Baruwa worked at Guwahati as Superintendent of the Hadira Chowki till his death in 1816. He had two sons, Haliram born in 1801 and Jajnaram born in 1805 A.D. The fourteen year old Haliram became the Duwariya Baruwa on his father’s death, with his uncle Ranram, as his guardian. But scarcely had Haliram become the Baruwa when Badanchandra Barphukan guided the Burmese army from Ava to take the Ahom capital, now at Jorhat. In the turmoil that followed, The Prime Minister died and the Burmese placed Chandrakanta on the throne. Meanwhile, Badanchandra was assassinated, and Purnananda’s son, Ruchinath Buragohain, disposed Chandrakanta off the throne and placed another prince, Purandar on it. The Burmese led a second invasion in 1810 into Assam and succeeded in reinstating Chandrakanta as a nominal ruler. Subsequently, when Burmese troops were sent just to see if this weakling was safe on the throne, he mistook them to be his enemies and had an attack mounted on them. There was heavy fighting. The Assamese were signally defeated; the king fled to Gauhati , and the Burmese occupied the eastern part of the country only to perpetuate all kinds of atrocities on the people by setting up a puppet, Jogeswar Singha, on the throne. This whole series of events made up “Manar Din” , what literally means the Burmese regime in Assam, at the mention of which people shuddered till about a century later.  

At this juncture, Haliram Baruwa, seeing that Burmese depredations extended as far as the western part of the state, left Gauhati with his people and came to Hadira

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258 Ibid, p.5
259 Ibid, p.6
Chowki. The dethroned Prince, Chandrakanta, ever retreating before Burmese onslaughts, put up his last resistance at a place called, Mahgarh in June 1822. He displayed great personal bravery, and for some time his troops held their own, but in the end their ammunition gave out and they were defeated with a loss of fifteen thousand men.260 In his army were Punjabi and Hindustani soldiers, some of them recruits of Haliram Baruwa, who also put up his own display of bravery. But in the hurry to escape at the end, he got pierced in the neck with a bayonet, kept inside his boat. Pushing out the bayonet and bandaging the wound with his own Pagri, he fled in the boat to Jogighopa with kin’s people. Haliram fled to Silmari in the Rangpur District in British territory, where Chandrakanta Singha, PurandarSingha, the Buragohain and others also now stayed as refugees, the two princes making sporadic and abortive attempts to fight the Burmese out of the land with their local levies. Haliram made a pilgrimage to the Ganges and received help from the famous Jagat Seth of Murshidabad in that. In the meantime, the Burmese, ever demanding repatriation of the two fugitive Ahom Princes, who caused them worry, from the british territories, fell foul with the British by wanton aggression along the northern frontier of Bengal, Chittagong and Sylhet. David Scott, Magistrate of Rangpur, and Agent to the Governor General for the Eastern Frontier, then started operations against the Burmese. The British had a number of victories and inflicted a signal defeat on the Burmese at Rangpur, the old capital of Assam, in January 1826 and by the treaty of Yandaboo, concluded on 24 feb, 1826, the king of Ava agreed inter alia to abstain from all interference in the affairs of Assam.261

Haliram had in the meantime come to Goalpara and managed his trade there from Chandariya. He married Prasuti, daughter of Kusadev Adhikar Goswami of

261 Ibid, p.7
Ahatguri (Majuli), a refugee in the place, but could not afford, it was regretted, the pomp of chaudol and Tawfawali Bai songstresses from Bengal. Haliram and his brother Jajnaram, were already known to Scott, who, now as Assam's administrator, derived much useful information about the newly conquered country from them. On his advice the two brothers came back to Gauhati and made their establishment at Bharalumukh. Scott took Haliram with him during his visit to Upper Assam and accepted the latter's advice and assistance in the revenue settlement of the Nowgong and Darrang districts as in many other matters. Chandrakanta Singha, while at Gauhati, appointed Haliram and Jajnaram as Dhekiyal and Kharghariya Phukans respectively; and Scott recognised them in those positions. Dhekiyal was a class of Choomooa during the Ahom rulers. During the rule of the Ahoms, the revenue was realized by a poll or capitation tax and the population were subdivided into gotes, which consisted of three pykes or ryots and then the pykes or ryots were divided into two classes, the first was designated as "Choomoa" and the other "Korree". The former were composed of the more respectable class of the population, who were not subject, like the Korree pykes, to be pressed as soldiers, or required to perform the common duties of coolies. Jajnaram was one among the few who joined the Brahmo prayer services of Raja Ram Mohan Roy at Calcutta. He knew quite a number of language beside his own- Sanskrit, Bengali, English, Persian, Arabic, urdu and Bhutanese. He is also reported to have completed Hindi and Assamese dictionary (Samachar-darpan, Calcutta, 19 May, 1832).

When Lower Assam and Upper Assam were made into Senior Division and Junior Division, Haliram worked in the Senior as Sheristadar of the Collectorate and

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262 Neog, Maheswar (ed.) Chandrakanta Abhidhan. Gauhati University. 2003
263 Assam Secretariat. General Department. File no. 298 Bengal. "Report on the Judicial and Revenue Administration of Assam, 1835." p. 29
264 Ibid, p. 7
was responsible to a degree for the revenue Settlement of the Kamrup district, going to office in Sedans (parhi dola), flanked by huge sunshades (barjapi). He paid long visit to Calcutta and became known in high circles chiefly by virtue of his two publications meant for Bengalis in particular *Kamakhya- yatra- paddhati*, 1829 in Sanskrit and *Asam Buranji*, Chronicle of Assam, 1831, in Bengali, both printed at the Samachar-Chandrika printing press. He became such a popular figure that some Bengali journals made fun by punning on his name. Haliram was appointed Assistant magistrate at Gauhati in 1832 but died the same year. He was a scholar in Sanskrit tantras and in the local lore of the country. He was a pious tantric and had a daily busy ritualistic programme.\(^{265}\)

Unto Haliram Dhekiyal Phukan and his first wife Prasuti, was born on 7 Asvina, 1751 Saka, sept. 1829 AD, Anandaram. Haliram died three years later. When in 1833, Purandar Singha was made a tributary king under the British in charge of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts, he decided to rule the country in the old traditional way and conferred the title of Dhekiyal Phukan on Anandaram as the son of the last incumbent of the Office. Anandaram had his formal *Vidyarambha* at the age of five. Durgaram, son of Janaram Khargariya Phukan, Jasodhar Adyapak of Umananda and others taught him Sanskrit. The young boy was given lesson in *Karikas*, *Ratnamala Vyakarana* of Purushottam and *Mughabodha-vyakarana* of Vopadeva. He had his lessons in Bengali but did not make much progress in it. The first English school was started in Gauhati in 1835 with Mr. Singer as headmaster and Anandaram was admitted in to this school in 1837. When Ranram and Jajnaram both died in 1838, there was practically no guardian in the family. Jajnaram however, tended the children in particular to the care of Captain

\(^{265}\) *Ibid*, p.8
Jenkins, Commissioner and Captain James Matthie, Deputy Commissioner, both of whom had been his personal friend, beside being very kind to the local people and, particularly, the students. Matthie, especially was veritably Anandaram’s guardian angel all through the latter’s life. Anandaram kept very close contact with both these gentlemen and kept himself busy with a lot of activity – the observance of tri-sandhya rituals, different games and sports, the frequenting of the numerous temples of Gauhati, taking part in different religious festivals in the House with fireworks. The ravages of Burmese invasion being still fresh in people’s memory, the young boys replayed mock fights between the Burmese and the British. In 1841, Anandaram accepted his formal religious initiation from Kalidas Bhattacharya of the family of ‘Parvatiya Gosain’ Krishnaram Nyayavagish, brought to Assam by the Ahom king Rudrasingha.266

Jenkins and Matthie, were both happy to note Anandaram’s fine progress at school and advised him to go to Calcutta, for further education. Despite the initial reluctance of the family members, he along with Durgaram, travelled to Calcutta in 1841 on a six-hundred-maund boat belonging to Matthie. Along with them went Brahman cooks and domestic servant and a Bengali moktar. After sacrificing a white buffalo at Kamakhya temple and making offerings to other deities. The two friendly sahibs gave letters of credit to big Calcutta firms for withdrawal of money by the two scholars and letters of introduction to certain important persons including members of the Hindu colleges Management Committee and the Government Council of Education. At Calcutta, they hired a house at Colootola, and got admitted to the third class of the Junior Department of Hindu College under the management of David Hare. There they got the opportunity of interacting with eminent persons like Prince Dwarkanath Tagore,

266 Ibid, p.9
When Durgaram, died of a sudden illness in 1841, Anandaram moved to Pataldanga lane near his college. But, his mother alarmed at Durgaram’s death and worried on account of litigations for property within the family asked Matthie to recall Anandaram from Calcutta. Anandaram, now promoted to the third class of the Senior Department of the College and very popular with his teachers, (Ramchandra Mitra, Iswarchandra Saha, Gopikrishna Mitra, Joygopal Seth, Jones, Capt. Richardson and others), students and others on account of his studious habit, good behaviour and a good command of the Bengali language, came back home in a hired six hundred maund boat, loaded with books, almirahs, modern furniture, carpets, a palanquin and other fashionable purchases in November, 1844. It is a pity that he could not complete his college education even though he had mastered Mathematics, the histories of England, Greece, Rome, and India and English poetry. He had a particular edge on English speech and English manners.267

This young man of sixteen, returned from Calcutta after an incomplete education was viewed with awe and reverence and, with his polished get up and demeanour, was almost an object of curiosity. He spread an atmosphere of love and freedom around him, and himself lived even now in the intellectual world of Calcutta. He furnished three rooms of one of his houses in three different styles- one with big mattresses and big pillows for receiving local people, the second with four almirahs of books, a table, chairs and sofas for receiving European visitors, and the third, his study, equipped likewise. He took great care of his books, classifying and stacking them as in a well kept library. Captain Matthie arranged for Anandaram’s further study under the care of

267 Ibid p.10
an Oxford Graduate, Mr. Bland, a missionary. A keen student, Phukan memorised a few pages of Johnson’s English dictionary each day.268

Anandaram married Mahindri in April 1845. An advocate of women’s education, he began giving his young wife lessons in reading and writing himself. He had now to undertake the worldly responsibilities as the literary vast wealth of Haliram was laid waste during the Burmese occupation of Assam, and thought of ways to do it. He decided to become a Magistrate or Judge and with the advice of the family advisers, Jenkins and Matthie, began to take lessons in law and judicial procedure from the experienced Chief Sadr Amin of Gauhati, Chandrasen Bharali Kakati, while labouring at home with Government of India Acts and regulations, constructions and decisions of Adalats, and the simple Assam Code promulgated in 1840. He observed from day to day the working of the local public Court of Justice, its munsiffs, Surrasurree Munsiffs, vakils, omlas, Sheristadar and peshkars, and saw the defects of the system through- its perfunctoriness and “the law’s delay”. As he later wrote, “from one extremity of the Province to the other, if the opinion of the lowliest clown be taken on the working of our judicial system, he would unhesitatingly declare that “the public Courts of justice are exclusively for the benefit of the rich and powerful, that it is both imprudent and foolish for men in humble life to resort to them for relief, that cunning and deceit, falsehood and perjury beset the courts on all sides and that in the civil and criminal courts, truth is often transformed into falsehood and falsehood into truth”. His sound knowledge of the English language came for good use now as he rendered free help to litigant parties by way of consultation and translation of representations. Persian was very fashionable among the Elite sections of Assamese society, and Phukan began to

268 Ibid, p. 11
learn both Persian and Urdu from a Munshi, reaching as far as Gulistan, Bustan and Pandnamah of Shaikh Saadi in his appreciation of Persian poetry and prose writing. He learnt Sanskrit and read widely in English. In order to acquaint himself with the functions of the Fiscal officers, the land rights, the procedure of survey and settlement, the condition of the ryots etc. Anandaram, on the advice of Jenkins and Matthie, accepted the office of Zamindar of the Khata Pargana in April 1847. With his experience in the pargana, for about two years he came to know of the revenue system in the Kamrup district more thoroughly and later suggested the removal of the lacunae in it towards a more sound Ryotwari system. In November the same year, Phukan officiated as a Munsiff for three months at Nalbari and impressed everybody with his judgements in elegant draft. He was again temporary Munsiff in the same place for six months from September 1848. In July 1849, he almost got the place of a Sub Assistant, being selected for it after an examination conducted by a committee of two members, Matthie and Dalton. But for some reason or the other, Commissioner’s recommendations in this regard was deferred. Towards the close of the year, he joined as Dewan of the Bijni Zamindar, Amrit Narayan Bhup. There was a long standing quarrel between the Zamindar and the ryots of the two parganas, Habraghat and Khuntaghat, acquired by the British in 1765 AD from the Muhammadan Nawab and rendered to the charge of the Zamindar, over matters of settlement and revenue. Phukan tried to organize and streamline the administration of the estate. In that connection, he prepared a whole set of rules in regard to revenue, maintenance of peace and order, Judiciary, functions of Fiscal officers and punitive measures, corresponding to Government Acts and Sherista rules. These rules made by him became known as the “Qaidabandi of Phukan dewan”. The Zamindari officers accepted these rules; but the
issues of dispute between the Zamindar and the ryots could not be settled. Phukan came back to Gauhati and submitted to the Commissioner of Assam and the collector of Goalpara, a well argued suit, with appropriate references to laws. In 1850, Phukan was sub Assistant for three months in Nowgong and for some time in Goalpara. As the orders of the Commissioner and the Collector in the Bijni suit went against the Zamindar, Phukan as dewan appealed to the Sadar Board of Revenue at Calcutta in 1851; but as the case was referred back to the Commissioner, subsequently he returned to Gauhati in March 1852 and took up the task of preparing a *Digest of Laws of Civil cases* in Bengali.269

In October 1852, Phukan became a permanent Sub Assistant Commissioner at Barpeta, and was soon vested with powers of a Deputy Collector. His connection with the Bijni Raj came to an end formally. During the rains of 1853, A. J. Moffat Mills, Judge of the Sudder Dewanny and Nizamat Adawlut, Calcutta, was appointed by the Governor General of India to investigate and report on the administration of the province of Assam. Phukan first thought of submitting a petition to the judge on behalf of the people of Assam. He, however, decided to write an exhaustive paper in the form of a memorandum on his own behalf, where he ventilated the many grievances of the province regarding the fiscal and judicial system, maintenance of law and order, health and education etc. Etc. He met Mills on fourth July 1853 at Gauhati placed before him his memorandum and made some oral submissions as well. Mills appreciated the value of all these, and included the memorandum as one of the Appendices to his *Report on the Province of Assam*, 1854. The judge accepted Phukan's advice very closely to recommend the reintroduction of Assamese in the schools.270

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269 Ibid, p. 13
270 Ibid, p. 14
Phukan then proceeded, as he was under orders of transfer to Nowgong to join as Sub Assistant there, where he was eventually put in charge of the whole district from time to time. In April 1854, he was given the powers of a Junior Assistant under the Assam code and the powers of a Sudder Amin and of Deputy Collector. In Nowgong, Phukan busied himself with various public activities, trying to find ways of stopping the yearly floods that laid the district’s agriculture in waste, visiting vernacular schools and finding out what progress they made, and devising remedies when Nowgong got caught in the throes of a famine. He had his intellectual activities to attend to. He was all the time busy making translations from English statutes and judgements and brought out his Bengali *Ain o Vyavastha Samgrah*, 1855, the first ever publication of its kind in any Indian language. The volume was in great demand. He had close discussions about matters concerning the good of the country with Captain Butler, the Chief Assistant and the Baptist missionary, Dr. Miles Bronson. One of his greatest concern was the replacement of Assamese by Bengali in the schools and courts of Assam.271

Another aspect which drew his attention was the commercialization of agriculture. The traditional self-sufficient no surplus production economy did not bring much profit to the British. The Government of Bengal instructed the authorities in Assam to encourage the production of cash crops and articles of export, particularly opium.272 They argued that Commercialisation was essential to increase the paying as well as the purchasing capacity of the peasants. Jenkins encouraged the increased cultivation of easily marketable crops and also created a class of speculators to exploit the natural resources of Assam.273 The commercialisation of the agrarian sector and the prosperity of the plantation sector aided by a better marketing network uplifted the

271 Ibid, p. 15
273 Barpujari, H. K. *Assam in the days of Company*, p. 215
Assamese economy within a short span of time. The progress of the tea and jute cultivation and ancilliary industries, the development of communication and the growth of administrative and commercial townships contributed to the system in which traders, speculators, merchants, shopkeepers thrived. Significantly, most of those were from outside the province.

Initially the British tried to conciliate the former nobility by absorbing them in the administration. But, 'owing to the indolent and incapable conduct of the nobility' and because of the 'impossibility of extracting money without the use of duress' the raj finally resorted to the employment of 'men of real ability and business' 'in lieu of rank' lest it was to relinquish all hopes of realising government dues. This policy was the last blow to the former nobility. They were reduced "to the most abject and hopeless state of misery from the loss of their fame, honour, caste, employment."  

"The upper middle classes have seen those offices abolished ... their loquas and licksos taken away, male and female slaves set free ... exemption and perspective rights that had lasted for 600 hundred years removed, the fame and honour of respectable people destroyed, and by making them pay revenue like other poor people they have been reduced to the greatest distress".

An acute sense of frustration was felt by the former nobility. The frustration intensified because the impoverishment was not supplemented by any alternative source of sustenance. The colonial economy provided very few opportunities of income to the natives. The only sector open to an average subject was the white collar one. The nobility soon shed their social superiority and value system, education and white collar

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275 Fp 10 June 1931, nos. 50-59, David Scott to Chief Secretary, Government of Bengal, Fort William, NAI cited in Nag, Sajal. *Roots of Ethnic Conflict,* P. 43


277 Ibid
jobs. These jobs were adequately paying and provided them some social status also. The
nobility educated their children and began to rally round the white collar jobs. It was
reported in 1856:

.....a great number of better classes (former nobility) are therefore in very reduced
circumstances and they now place their whole dependence on the chance of getting
government employment. 278 The inflow of Bengalee functionaries into Assam actually
began when the policy of appointing former nobility was given up and educated recruits
were imported from Bengal. Bengalee influence was strengthened by the April 1831
order of the Government of Bengal which replaced Persian with Bengali as the language
of the court. Soon settlers from Bengal made the revenue and judicial departments
their 'sole preserve'. Their services also became equally indispensable to the newly
started government schools on account of the dearth of local teachers who could impart
instruction in Bengali which had since been made the medium of instruction.279 While
the Assamese were inducted on the basis of their family and clan background the
Bengalees were inducted on the basis of their English Education. English educated men
were inducted into the administration but full fledged English education did not begin in
Assam till the end of the nineteenth century. Initially the Assamese were not very
enthusiastic about receiving alien education. Those who acquired education even faced
the threat of social ostracization.280 Hence, to run the colonial machinery the british
imported people from Bengal: The Deputy Commissioner of Darrang observed

278 Ibid
279 Op. Cit. Nag, p.44
280 Sharma, Krishna. Krishna Sharmar Dairy, (Gauhati, 1972). P.72
"It is not at all possible to find in Assam a candidate of sufficient ability and fill some of the 
more important posts. (Therefore) it becomes necessary to import men from Calcutta and other parts of 
Bengal" 281

Another reason for the dependence on Bengalees was the inefficiency of the 
people of Assam according to the colonial authorities was: "The phrase 'very inefficient' in a 
comparative sense is used to express the opinion that the native of Assam as a body is inferior to those in 
other parts of India; their character, their habits and the state of society they lived, did not qualify them 
(for hard work)... The Assamese cannot be expected to go more than a certain level of efficiency which 
their whole race is capable only." 282.

Hopkinson Commented that "It should be noted that the capacity of the Assamese meaning 
by capacity their ability to discharge the various functions assigned, is much below that of the most 
other races in India....due to the sufficient means nature gifted them for material wants and opium eating, 
caused them to be apathetic, enervate and self-indulgent to a degree hardly conceived of or understood by 
those who had not lived with them... there is nothing an Assamese can do or will do that cannot be got 
much better done elsewhere. 283 The whole European community in Assam is entirely dependent upon the 
Bengalee community... they (the Assamese) cannot be trusted with the execution of many duties which 
our servants in other parts of India would discharge satisfactorily" 284.

Assam was within the jurisdiction of Bengal Presidency up to 1874. The 
Constitution of Assam into a separate Chief Commissionerate necessitated the inclusion 
of a few Bengal districts in it. Considering the educational edge that the Bengalees had 
over the Assamese, it was natural that the former would acquire major share of jobs. 
Education alone was not always the criterion for such appointments. Favouritism and

281 Letter issued to the Government, Vol.38, No. 88, Major Campbell, Deputy Commissioner of Darrang 
to the Chief Commissioner, April 1868, Assam Secretariat Records.

282 Op. Cit Nag, p45

283 Letter issued to the Government of India, Vol. 31, no. 7, Henry Hopkinson to the Secretary, Govt. Of 
India, 16 November 1864, Assam Secretariat Records.

284 Letter issued to the Government, volume 31, No.118, Hopkinson to the Government of India, 30 
December 1864, Assam Secretariat Records
nepotism of the appointing authorities and high officials also played a role in government recruitment. Both these factors went against the interest of the Assamese.

The first attempt to formulate and prescribe educational qualifications for government posts was made on 20 Dec, 1882 when rules relating to the recruitment of clerks for all offices excepting that of the Comptrollers and Public Works Departments were published. These rules which came into effect from 1st April 1883, prescribed that a person eligible for appointment or promotion to clerkship on a salary of more than forty rupees per month, must be able to read, write and speak English and Assamese or Bengali unless certified by the approving officers that such knowledge was not necessary for a particular post. The rule was revised by notification No. 82 of March, 1885 effective from 1st April, 1885. It provided that a candidate must have a certificate of proficiency from a government or government aided school. For vernacular and English clerkship, at least a first class of a high school and middle vernacular scholarship pass certificates were essential. The system of examination was, however, amended in 1889. The new rules required the candidate to produce a certificate of proficiency supported by marks obtained in each subject. The Assamese did not make any headway in this new educational system.

The colonial policies affected the local language too. Even before they had formally announced the annexation of the whole province they set out to impose their view about the official language of Assam upon the local people. During the Ahom rule, Persian was used to conduct the foreign affairs while the lingua franca was Assamese. In April 1836, the Government of Bengal declared Bengali as the Court language. Bengali also began to be taught in the schools of Assam. In spite of the clear provisions

285 Assam Gazette, 23 December 1882; General Notification No 319, December 20, 1882; pp 865-867
in the criminal procedure Code that the language of the soil is to be used in the judicial and revenue proceedings. Bengali was used as the official language of Assam in 1838.286

When Jenkins assumed office in Assam he found that almost all amolahs were Bengalees from Sylhet, Dacca and Mymensingh.287 The courts of the then existing districts, Goalpara and Kamrup were also ‘filled with Bengalees’ who had mostly accompanied David Scott from Rangpur.288 The police officers and judges were mostly ‘Mohammedan of Burdwan’ while the revenue officers and treasurers were Bengalees of Rangpur and Mymensingh or Brahmins of Santipur.289 Jenkins found that “the business of the court was almost entirely conducted in Bengali. The exceptions were a few papers in Persian which was the language best known to Mr. Robertson, for his use and that of the Sudder Court”290. As a matter of fact, the functionaries were not given any specific order by the authorities regarding the language to be used in the offices.291 The use of Bengali was essential, according to Jenkins, ‘because the proceedings of the lower courts, written in Assamese could scarcely be read and very imperfectly understood by the Bengalee officers of the Higher Court’292. The problem of language hampered the proper functioning of the government offices. Jenkins saw only one solution to this problem. Jenkins saw only one solution to this problem. He legalised the prevailing practice by formally declaring Bengali the official language in 1838. His

286 Nag, p.50
287 Letter issued to the Government of India, Vol. 7, No. 236, Jenkins to William Grey, Secretary to the Govt. of India, 7 Dec 1854, Assam Secretariat Records.
288 ibid
289 ibid
290 ibid
291 Jenkins to Grey, op. cit.
292 ibid
motive was ensuring the smooth running of the state machinery. The Bengali policy was also, as Jenkins himself wrote, “expedient under every circumstance for the gradual amalgamation of the people with our subjects in Bengal”. The announcement was followed by the declaration that henceforth the medium of instruction would also be Bengali. The British insisted that this would enable the people of Assam to acquaint themselves with government rules, regulations, orders and other documents which were written in Bengali.

The British felt that “to convey instruction through the medium of Assamese dialect would have been most ruinous to the people, if not impossible”. On the other hand, learning of Bengali would enable them to be enlightened by the progress in Science and arts with their brethren in Bengal.

Jenkins also revealed another aspect of British Policy:

“In England, it is now a matter of deep regret that we so long neglected to teach our language to the Irish and thus made them our people without ourselves. It must be equally our policy and the duty of the Government of India, by all means in its power to assimilate the many nations and tribes under our rule into people and if the early introduction of Bengali in this lately conquered province of Assam would be in any degree productive of blending of the people of Assam with the people of our earlier acquired provinces and of civilisation, I think the government will have course to rejoice at the chance of necessity which made Mr. Scott, Mr. Robertson adopt Bengali as the official language of our courts”.

Other than the Assamese, the missionaries working in Assam were in the forefront of those who opposed the language policy of the Raj. They fought for the introduction of the Assamese and also initiated efforts to establish its separate

294 Jenkins to Grey, op. cit
295 Ibid
296 Ibid
297 Ibid
identity.\textsuperscript{298} The missionaries worked in the hills and plains of Assam. The introduction of Bengali as the official language proved to be a stumbling block. Without the use of the local language, the missionaries found it difficult to preach\textsuperscript{299}. Therefore, the missionaries took up the task of establishing a separate identity for the Assamese language. They mobilised public opinion against the British policy and were successful to some extent in Sibsagar and Nowgong.\textsuperscript{300} Their work was facilitated in 1839 when Joduram Borua (1802-1869), working as an officer under the company, presented an Assamese- Bengali dictionary to Jenkins who handed it over to the Baptist Mission. Joduram was regarded as an authority on the system of Assamese orthography which was used by the missionaries in Orunudoi, a journal they brought out in 1846.\textsuperscript{301}

In 1853, A. J. M. Mills, Judge of the Sudder Dewani and Nijamat Adalat on the language question:

"The people complain and in my opinion with much reason, against the use of Bengali for the vernacular Assamese. Bengali is the language of the Courts not of their popular books and shastras; and there is strong prejudice to its general use. It is because instruction is imparted to the youths in a foreign tongue that they look to the government for employ... A number of Bengalees came to Assam when we took the province and due to the uneducated state of the Assamese it was necessary to give them Service: but there are now many who have qualified themselves for employ and it most discouraging to see most of the high and even some inferior offices filled by foreigners.

... Assamese is described by Mr. Brown (Nathan Brown) the best scholar in the province, as a beautiful, simple language differing in many respects than agreeing with Bengali and I think we

\textsuperscript{298} Op. Cit. Nag. P.52
\textsuperscript{299} Bani Kanta Sharma, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{300} Neog, Maheswar, 'Asomiya Bhasar Trata aru Nirmata: Dr. Bronson' in Prakash, Nov-Dec. 1983
\textsuperscript{301} Op. Cit, Nag, p. 52
made a great mistake by directing that all business should be transacted in Bengali and the Assamese must acquire it".302

The missionaries found support amongst the local people also. Letters opposing the British language policy and recommending the re-introduction of Assamese were published in Orunudoi. On 1st August 1853, “An Assamese gentlemen” from Calcutta wrote about the necessity of the Assamese learning their own language. In December 1855, Gunabhiram Barua published an article comparing Assamese and Bengali languages. The articles of Purnananda Sharma, ‘Asomiya Bhasar Kotha’ in March 1856 and Gunabhiram’s “Matri Bhashar Shakti” in March 1857 reflected the sentiments of the local people. On 25th May, 1855 Miles Bronson of the American Baptist Mission in Assam published a letter in favour of the Assamese language. Earlier, on 10 May, the same paper published an article ‘Progress of the Education Scheme in this Presidency’ on the situation in Assam. Ananda Ram Dhekial Phukan, educated in Hindu college, Calcutta and a government servant since 1847, in his memorandum to A.J.M. Mills regretted that education in Assam under the English rule was in a ‘retrograde state’. He recalled the Ahom regime when the government took special interest in education and schooling. Now, since the official language was Bengali, “the few books that are used are in a foreign tongue, which necessarily prevents their being of any popular use...the reason assigned for the substitution of the vernacular is that Bengali is the language adopted in the court as if the object were to make the Assamese a nation of judicial officers”.303

Phukan stated that for more than ten years after the annexation of the Province, Assamese was used as the language of the courts. He wanted to know on what ground it had been suppressed and Bengali imposed instead. In 1854, William Robinson, then the Inspector of Schools discouraged the attempts to revive Assamese language in place of Bengali by submitting a memorandum to Fort William entitled ‘Some Remarks in Defence of the use of Bengali in the Government Schools of Assam’. In this paper, for the first time, Robinson opined that there was no difference between the Assamese and Bengali languages and that Assamese was a dialect of the Bengali language. Hence, Bengali should continue as the official language. Robinson’s theory that Assamese was a mere dialect of the Bengali language was developed further by Henry Hopkinson.

The supporters of the Assamese language now had to establish a separate identity for their language. On the suggestion of Bronson, Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan anonymously wrote A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language. It was published by the Baptist Mission Press, Sibsagar and distributed free to British officials. He controverted the idea that Assamese had no literature of its own and showed that prior to the nineteenth century, Assamese literary tradition was extensive. He provided a list of works in ancient Assamese literature—sixty two religious works and Puranas and over forty dramas based on events from the celebrated epics, Mahabharata and Ramayana.

The Raj did not pay much attention to the protests and appeals of the missionaries and the Assamese. Henry Hopkinson, who took over in 1861 from Jenkins

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304 Ibid
306 Ibid
307 Ibid
supported the continuance of Bengali as the official language. He propagated Robinson’s theory that there was no difference between Assamese and Bengali:

"The so called Assamese has no more right to the name than it has, to be called Arabic. It is really Bengali disguised by the admixture of some obscure provincial words common among the peasants of the East Bengal districts. Some misspellings do convey the idea of certain local or vulgar differences of pronunciation. Ninety percent of the (Assamese) words were absolutely identical with Bengali while four or five of the remaining ten percent have close resemblance to it. The people of Assam do not understand Bengali. Poor people. They would be in a hopeless state if they did not understand it; for there is no other language that they are known to understand."

Hopkinson went on to prove that Assamese was a dialect of Bengali. He claimed that the evidence he had collected in this regard was of ‘most unquestioned and reliable historical authority’ These reliable authorities were none other than some of his Bengali subordinate officials. According to Hopkinson, Assamese was not the language that the Ahom rulers brought with them. It was the local language of Assam which the Assamese had developed through intercourse with Bengal. He stated that by introducing Bengali, the british were providing an identity to the Assamese. He concluded:

"The language now spoken in Assam is as different from Ahom as English from Arabic. Paddy which a Bengalee calls salee is called in Assam halee; and to say that Assami and Bengali are different is like saying salee dhan and halee dhan are different grains because the letter “S” is pronounced in Assam like “H”..., To call Bengali Assamese, is to encourage a jargon to be maintained in a state of fluidity and uncertainty, variable at different times and places, exposed to all sorts of corruption and governed by no fixed law... By calling Bengali Assamese, we

308 Letter issued to the Government, Vol.151, No. 214, Henry Hopkinson to Secretary, Govt. Of India, 2 December 1873, Assam Secretariat Records.
309 Chandra kanta Nandi and Chandra Mohan Goswami, teacher, High School, Gauhati were two functionaries who mostly figured in the correspondence with Hopkinson. Cited in Nag, p. 55
deprive ourselves of any standard whereby to test the proficiency of our civil officers in the vernacular of the country". 310

Meanwhile the American Baptist Mission Press, established in 1837, continued publishing useful books on the Assamese language and its separate identity. Nathan Brown translated the New Testament and works like Pilgrim’s Progress into Assamese. Brown’s Grammatical Notes and a vocabulary and phrase book by Miss Cutter were issued in 1848. The members of the earliest middle class of the modern Assam were a group of progressive intellectuals. They represented the interests of all the people of Assam rather than those of any particular class. They sought to conquer the masses ideologically. The most important of such actions was the campaign to reinstate Assamese as the official language of Assam and establish its separate identity. It was Dhekial Phukan’s memorandum which convinced Mills who was then preparing a report on Assam, of the distinct identity of Assamese. Mills recommended the replacement of Bengali by Assamese.

Anandaram was ably supported by his contemporaries, Hemchandra Barua and Gunabhiram Barua. The three laid the foundations of modern Assamese literature and language: Hemchandra Borua (1835-1896) produced two monumental works The Grammar of Assamese language (1856) and Hem Kosh (1900) the first Anglo Assamese Dictionary. Besides, other literary works in which he attacked Assamese social evils, he wrote Adipath and Pathmala for Assamese pupils at a time when few text books were available in Assamese. Gunabhiram Borua (1835-97) wrote a comprehensive history of Assam, Assam Buranji (1884), the first modern Assamese drama, Ram Navami (1857), and the first Assamese biography, Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukanor Jiban Charitra (1880). He started the first Assamese journal, Assam Bandhu. In Asamiya Lorar Mitra,

310 ibid
1859, Dhekiyal Phukan demolished the British notion that there were no Assamese reading materials for schools. The efforts of these intellectuals were rewarded. Assamese was reinstated as the official language in 1873.  

His two publications included – ‘A Few remarks on the Assamese language and on Vernacular education in Assam’, 1855 and ‘Observations on the Administration of the Province of Assam’ 1853. These two publications formed the finest exposition of the notions of Anandaram Dhekial on tradition and Modernity. 

Anandaram hailed the day when Assam came under the spell of the British rule at a time when the country was groaning under the oppression and lawless tyranny of the Burmese, whose barbarous and inhuman policy depopulated the country and destroyed more than one half of the population. So, had it not been for the atrocious nature of the rule of the Burmese, Anandaram might not have reposed so much hope in an alien British rule. He saw the British as some kind of saviour who would recover their bruised state. This perhaps is the raison d’être of his firm belief in the miracles of an alien British rule. He acknowledged that many of the expectations of the Assamese from their British masters had been fulfilled to a great extent and that they had acquired a degree of confidence, which they had failed to experience for several ages. Was this sense of heightened security over-statement on the part of Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan? He thanked the British government for being able to gauge the uniqueness of this part of their empire and he thought their very act of not extending the principles of the Bengal Code as an exemplification of it. 

At the same time, he gives due credit to the peaceful and simple nature of the people of the Assamese society and the condition of the country, for he states that

dacoity, private wars and club fights, which prevailed amongst the landholders of Bengal is totally unheard of, in Assam. He added that Assam enjoyed a much more enviable position compared to Bengal and other regulation provinces in matters of good government. The whole population derived their livelihood from the soil and there was no inducement for them to form gangs of dacoits to take to robbery. Condition were such that they had to toil hard to eke out a living and had little spare time to think out of their traditional farming mindset, unlike Bengal, where there was opulent and powerful zamindars, which was the sole cause of affrays and private fights. Anandaram thought that it was but natural to have high expectation from a country which possessed a liberal and free constitution.

Anandaram contrasted the picture of lack of material degree in the province with the prevalence of peace in the same. He laid stress in the fact that vast extents of deserted villages met the eye in various parts of the country and said that the general aspect of the province indicated the administration of an Asiatic government rather than that of the enlightened Bengal.\textsuperscript{313} In other words, he was intoxicated with such utopian ideas that he tried to look for English conditions in the traditional set up of the province. He lamented that even after twenty eight years then, little perceptible changes had occurred in the province such as the introduction of arts and sciences of Europe, the improvement of the civil and social state of the people, and the enlightenment of their minds stress that it had not been able to attract the attention the Government. As if, the government of the day had not fulfilled what it was deemed to do. As long as the government did according to the wishes of Anandaram, the government had done what it ought to do best. But, when the government did things which were against the wish

list of Anandaram, he reiterated that it was really unbecoming of a progressive
government like the British.

III.1 Revenue system of Assam and Improvements suggested by Anandaram

The revenue system and the principles on which it is based were severe
impediments for the development of cultivation and the general improvement of the
country. According to the ancient custom of the country, the government having
reserved to itself the proprietary right in the lands, the province had been portioned out
into small divisions or mehals, called pergunnahs and mauzas. The rents are collected
from every individual ryot and the cultivator of the soil, through officers styled
Chowdrees, mauzadars or bisayas, appointed by government, each having charge of the
collections of one of those petty divisions. In general, the lands of the ryots are
measured annually or after every two years or three years; and public assessment being
fixed on the basis of the ryots cultivations for a term extending generally from one to
five years, the chowdrees and the bisayas are entrusted with its collection from the
ryots for the same term, and are allowed a commission of from ten to seventeen rupees
per cent as charges of collection. They are permitted to appropriate any increase in the
assessment arising from extended cultivation during the term, for which the collections
are entrusted to their charge, but are on the other hand, responsible for any decrease in
the revenue which may accrue either from desertions or diminished culture. At the
expiration of the period for which the collections are entrusted to the charge of the fiscal
officers, a fresh survey is made, and revenue is accordingly fixed for a second period,
and so on, at the termination of every term. The period of settlement throughout the
province does not generally extend to more than five years.\textsuperscript{314}

\textsuperscript{314} Ibid, p.95
When the collecting officer was unable to show any increase in Revenue at the expiration of his short lease, or to assign good reasons for the same, he was liable to dismissal from his charge for mismanagement, without any reference as to whether he had, or had not the sufficient means and inducements to incite him to exert himself in the improvement of his charge. It appears that the individuals to whose care the government has entrusted the improvement of the country, have no interest in such a cause. There is no prospect of future benefit as the individuals had no interest whether cultivations advance or diminish, since they are certain that their exertions will in the ensuing year serve only to swell the public treasury without adding to their own gain.\footnote{Mills, A.J. Moffat, \textit{Report on the province of Assam"}. Publication Board.assam. 1984. P 95}

Anandaram suggested that fiscal officers should have a more lasting interest in their charges, subject to the restriction necessary to guard against abuse. But, he was opposed to the implementation of the permanent settlement in the province of Assam. To Grant to the proprietors and cultivators of lands the means of effecting general improvements in agriculture by increasing the number of reservoirs, embankments whereby drought, inundation and other calamities of the season could be provided against appear to have been (as explained in the preamble to regulation II of 1793) "the primary objects" of the british government in fixing the land revenue of Bengal and other provinces in perpetuity, and in declaring the proprietary rights of the landholders. Ever since the introduction of the perpetual settlement the Zamindars have, in the majority of instances, enjoyed as their private and exclusive profit from three to ten times the amount of the public assessment imposed on their estates; and in many instances, much more. But the experience of more than half a century has evinced that the "primary objects" of the government in creating zamindarees have not been attained,
and that they remain yet to be fulfilled. The art of agriculture at the present day stands in their estates nearly in the same rude state as it was several centuries back.\textsuperscript{316}

The criticism of the Zamindaree system of Bengal had rightly been upheld by Anandaram. It had served only the zamindars to administer their individual pleasures and entertain a host of indolent retainers; to vest themselves with awful powers over their helpless ryots, and lastly it had been the sole cause of those sanguinary private wars and club fights which were so often carried on in all Bengal with impunity and in spite of all law. So this criticism is in other words a word of caution to British government. Had the government even one fourth of the present income of the zamindars at its disposal, to be laid out in the improvement of the country, Bengal would certainly have opened a different aspect by this time.\textsuperscript{317}

Anandaram proposed that there should be a long lease to the officers now employed as collectors of the several fiscal divisions. Instead of revising the settlements after every two or three years, and including in the public assessment the increase of revenue accruing during that period, he proposed that the several fiscal divisions of the country be let out in farms or ijarahs for terms extending to 20 or 25 years, on the basis of an assessment to be fixed on an accurate survey, and to continue invariably to the expiration of the lease; that the farmers be permitted to appropriate to their own use any increase in the revenue which they may be able to effect during the period of their lease, holding them at the same time responsible for any deficiency caused by other than natural causes; that at the expiration of the lease, the assessment be fixed on a re-measurement and survey of the farms, and the lease continued to the original farmer;


\textsuperscript{317} ibid
and that the farmers be allowed to let out all the unoccupied and waste lands within their farms on such terms as they deem best conducive to their interests, a measure which alone is likely to reclaim the vast wastes of the country. This arrangement would afford a reasonable and an adequate inducement to the farmers to exert themselves in the improvement of their farms, and in bringing under cultivation the immense tracts of jungle lands in the country. The lease would be continued to them as long as they do not voluntary infringe on the rules laid down for their guidance. The measure will likewise obviate the serious loss which would accrue both to the government and the country from a perpetual assessment; and when the extensive forests of Assam are gradually brought under tillage, the revenue could be devoted by government to the improvement of the country, instead of being allowed to support the ease and grandeur of a few opulent zamindars.\(^{318}\)

Anandaram stressed the zamindaree system of Bengal has in reality enslaved the ryots to the zamindars. Regulations of the government had proved futile. The judicial and the police system of the country could afford the ryot no relief against extortion or injustice. Cesses and *abwabs*, under various denominations were still exacted. While the legal procedure was too lengthy and expensive and the provisions of law which prescribe a penalty for exactions point out the ryot had little choice but to silently accept his fate because taking recourse to legal action meant undue harassment, delay and expenses.\(^{319}\)

In Assam, the ryotwari system prevailed. Every ryot in Assam was the absolute master of his own lands from which he is never liable to be ousted until he relinquishes it out of his own free will. His liabilities too were ascertained under the immediate


\(^{319}\) Ibid
superintendence of the public revenue authorities, and clearly laid down in the Pattahs issued to him under the seal and signature of the collectors, so that any attempt at exaction could be easily detected and restrained, and the native officers of collection could exercise no other control over the ryots than the mere collection of revenue and the disposal of the ryots land were left with the farmers, on the introduction of the system of long leases and they were permitted to settle with the ryots according to their own will. Anandaram assured the government that it would not only place the cultivating class under the mercy of the farmer, but would gradually lead to a total subversion of their rights and privileges which existed then. Even under the system which prevailed then, by which the control of the officers of collection was confined to the simple duty of ascertaining the cultivation of the tenantry and of collecting revenue according to pattahs issued by the Government, instances frequently occurred in which those officers endeavoured to transfer, on sinister motives, the land of one ryot to the possession of another, by laying down in the measurement papers lands occupied by one party in the name of the another, and thereby imperceptibly deprived him of his possessions. Often the fiscal officers caused an overstatement of the ryots lands by false statements in the survey papers and cases were not of infrequent occurrence in which the Mofussil Revenue officers were guilty of levying a general cess or other legal impositions for their private use. The ryots were obliged to submit to loss and privation rather than leave their cultivations and sojourn half a year at the distance of eighty miles to obtain an award for damages and redress.(See Appendix A)

Anandaram was hopeful that the government was for the interests of the Ryots and the preservation of their liberty and rights. He somehow was of the firm belief that it would be unattainable if the farmers or fiscal officers were to be empowered to
dispose of and assess the ryot’s lands without the imposition of any check on the part of public authorities. The extreme ignorance, poverty and weaknesses of the agricultural class would not admit of their seeking redress against injustice or exactions by application to the regular courts. The supervision then exercised by collectors in the assessment of the ryots’ lands were to be continued, and that all pottahs were to be granted to the ryots by the farmers, either under the signature of the collector, or with his approbation. That gave better security to the ryots against dispossession or exaction. The pottahs were to contain a clear statement of the terms mutually agreed upon between the farmer and the ryots and gave a publicity to the transactions which not only would guard against illegal demands but maintain the ryots in the undisturbed possession of their respective holdings. The confirmation of the pottahs by the collectors would be easily effected by the submission of the usual jumma-bundies by the farmers containing a specification of the jumma of each ryot, at every time they concluded settlements with the tenantry: and as a better security against the imposition of unjust assessments on the ryots, he suggested the expediency of requiring the farmers of file or present in the collector’s office the Kubooleuts of the ryots previously to the confirmation of the pottahs by that functionary. But the body of the ryots were unable to sign their names; so on completion of survey and settlement by a farmer, the ryots were to be required to receive pottahs and they were to enter into Kubooleuts in the presence of public authorities in the respective thannahs and that put to rest every dispute that may have arosed between the farmers and the ryots.320

The revenue authorities were to be entrusted with the duty of superintending the receipt of kubooleuts and were to be vested with the power of inquiring into and

320 Ibid., p. 97-100
summarily disposing of all the objections preferred by the ryots to the quantity of land, or the jummah for which they were called upon to engage and that the result of such enquiry were to be allowed to regulate the jummah to be specified in the pottahs and the kubooleuts. The execution of the kubooleuts necessarily precluded the ryots from tendering istafas or resignations of their lands, as long as the terms of their kubooleuts did not expire. But, if the lands were carried off by the rivers, or destroyed by other accidental nature causes, the ryots were to be allowed to give up their lands; as in many parts of the country the lands were often rendered unfit for cultivation by sudden inundations and it would be oppressive in the extreme to subject the ryots to the rent of those lands. He therefore suggested that resignations, tendered at the expiration of the terms of kubooleuts, or after the lands were rendered unfit owing to the causes above adverted to, were to be received by the farmer, the same were to be duly notified to the revenue authorities to prevent farther disputes.321

The institution of a suit in the summary court to contest the justice of distraint, which were entrusted to the landholders of Bengal, under the provisions of Regulation V. of 1812, pointed out to the ryot a course which he can never resort to without serious loss. The idea of being obliged to be absent from his cultivations, and to lay out money to meet the cost of a summary prosecution, and thereby incur the displeasure of his landlord induced him quietly to submit to exactions rather than be harassed by vexatious litigations. He submitted that distraint in all cases be were to be issued by the revenue or judicial officers stationed at each thanah, on the application of the farmers, and that the latter were not to be permitted to exercise that power independently without the cognizance of a public authority. In the regulation provinces, the sale of distraint

property was conducted by commissioners appointed under ACT I of 1839. So, no delay or inconvenience were possibly resulted if the conduct as well of the sale as of the processes of distraint were to be entrusted to a public functionary. On the contrary, he felt convinced that the measure effectually prevented mischief and guarded against abuse or oppression.\textsuperscript{322}

The highest benefit which had resulted to the country at large by the Revenue system of the province, was the rule which subjected every Bisaya, Chowdree, or Mouzahdar, to the penalty of dismissal from his charge on being convicted of the offence of oppression or extortion on the ryots. Therefore, the then existing practice of cancellation of the leases of the Chowdrees and bisayas, when they were found guilty of gross injustice or oppression, were to be continued, and that all farms were granted under that condition. That measure can be productive of no injustice or impropriety, when it was considered that the principle which subjected Zamindars to the forfeiture of their estates for resistance of legal processes or other offences mentioned in law, may with equal propriety were to be extended to cases of exactions or oppression, with reference to the peculiar circumstances of Assam.\textsuperscript{323}

Transfer of pottahs and creation of chamooahs or independent estates- A custom had lately been sanctioned by the Board of revenue of transferring the pottahas of the ryots to some party, whom the latter chose to interpose between themselves and the fiscal officer of govt. This practice was likely to undermine the whole ryotwaree system, owing to the extreme ignorance of the ryots. The least provocation offered to them by the chowdrees and bisayas had often led them to transfer their pottahs to a stranger to ensure as they imagine, protection from future annoyance. Now, Anandaram

\textsuperscript{322} Mills, A.J. Moffat, Report on the province of Assam”. Publication Board.assam. 1984. P 100
\textsuperscript{323} ibid
submitted that instead of providing against annoyance, the ignorant people often absolutely forfeited their right to lands held by themselves and their ancestors from time immemorial, and actually enslaved themselves to the party thus receiving their pottahs. Their ignorance and simplicity often led them to imagine that a transfer of their pottahs is not a transfer of their lands and that the measure was simply in the nature of a better arrangement for the payment of their revenue to the public treasury. The more intelligent among them sometimes contrived to procure a written acknowledgement from the party to whom they transferred their pattahs, admitting the fictitious nature of the transaction or disallowing his power to oust. No specific rules, however, had been laid down for the protection of the ryots in the chamooahs. It seemed therefore expedient that the exchange of pattahs and kubooleuts were to be enforced in the chamooahs, and that all other necessary measures for the protection of the agriculturing class were to be also introduced into them. A large number had been of late been created by the transfer of pattahs under the system above alluded to. Assessment on the several descriptions of lands in Assam did not appear to have been fixed with reference to their actual capabilities. The uniform rate on lands producing the same crops, without any particular distinction being observed as to the quality of the soil, had rendered the pressure of taxation comparatively light upon some but heavy upon others. For instance, the low rupit lands, yielding 50 maunds of corn per poorah, were taxed at the same rate as high lands producing only from 15 to 20 maunds. Justice, therefore seemed to require that the rupit or rice lands be divided into two or three classes, according to the quality and the capabilities of the soil and that they be proportionately taxed; the assessment on the poorest quality of the rupit were to be moderately reduced. 

324 Ibid, 101
325 Ibid 102
Anandaram was of the opinion that an enhancement of the rates under the circumstances of the province prevailing then, without any marked improvement in agriculture and commerce, were to overburden the people with taxes, which they could but ill afforded to bear. The former government never exceeded the standard of assessment laid down by the ancient Hindu legislators, viz., one sixth of the produce of lands. The rate of taxation under the British regime, however, had far exceeded that limit, and the assessment on some of the poorest classes of ripit lands was nearly equal in value to one half of their produce. In illustration of this fact, Anandaram pointed out that a poorah of high ripit land yielding 20 or 15 maunds of rice valued at from 2 to 3 rs was loaded with a tax of one rupee and four annas. Unless the government provided the people with better and improved means of cultivating their lands, an increased amount of assessment inevitably led to an increase of the unhappiness of the people.326

The Government did not make the slightest exertions in the agricultural sector even after their 28 years of rule. The Assamese, one and all were devoted to agricultural pursuits. In ancient times, the sovereigns had their private farms. In Bengal and other parts of India, tillage was exclusively the occupation of the cultivating class. There was however not a single family in Assam that was not engaged in the culture of the lands, and every family provided itself by agriculture with almost all the necessaries of life. The introduction of improvements in the art of agriculture, therefore, was the only means which could increase the general resources of the country, ameliorate the condition of the people, raise them to wealth or affluence, advance manufactures and commerce, and teach the Assamese the arts and luxuries of civilized life. In point of fertility, the province ranked first and foremost among all the countries of the world.

326 Ibid, 102
Bengal herself stands in that respect a step lower. The soil of Assam was adapted to the production, both of the torrid and temperate regions. Silk, tea, cotton and a variety of other valuable products grew luxuriantly in her fields and valleys. It required only the introduction of the improved method of agriculture to render her produce “tenfold more abundant”. A moderate degree of attention by the government would have led to attainment of all that is important and desirable. In the first place, agriculture was in its infant state and the agricultural implements were of simplest and rude type. The animals used were of the feeblest type, manure and other preparations for the soil was ill understood and the husbandman was ignorant of the growth of a variety of the most valuable articles of commerce which would, even without the aid of human labour would have grown spontaneously in the forests of Assam. The means of irrigation and drainage were seldom resorted to and generally no attempts were made to create embankments, or devise means for the protection of lands from the encroachments of floods or other accidents. The consequence was that drought or inundation often destroyed the crops, famine ensued and the population were actually reduced to wretchedness and misery. The rude state of agriculture prevented the farmers from raising more than one crop throughout the year and the land remained useless for one half of the year. The stock of grain in the country became necessarily so scanty that whenever the least inclemency of the weather involved the failure of the crops, the people were visited with famine. There were instances of famines in 1851 in kamrup and durrung. So, an urgent and fervent appeal was made from Anandaram to the government of the day that people well versed in agriculture were to be brought from Europe and Upper India to teach the people the better management of farms, to instruct them in the cultivation of every variety of valuable products, in improved methods of
irrigation, drainage, and embankments and in short in every other necessary means connected with agriculture; so that every village were furnished from Europe with a supply of the most useful and important agricultural implements and machines, ploughs, harrows, hoes, spades, as well as an improved breed of cattle, viz. bullocks, &c., from Bengal and upper India: and that a sufficient stock of seeds, plants and every other species of produce, both Indian and European were distributed to each village. It cannot be denied that the ignorant classes of the Assamese, from their proneness to follow the footsteps of their ancestors and their profound veneration for their customs of their forefathers, were at the outset unable to appreciate the value and importance of the measures being suggested and considered these innovations little likely to terminate in any beneficial results. The experience of a single season, would have at once convinced them of their intrinsic value and would have induced them eagerly and cheerfully to cooperate in the happy fulfilment of these all important objects.

Unlike that of Bengal and other parts of British India, where the Zamindaree system has been introduced, in Assam the government was in the place of the landholders. An improvement in agriculture and resources of the country would have necessarily led to a proportionate improvement of the public assessment. An endeavour on the part of government to advance the agriculture of the province would have conducted to the attainment of a twofold object, viz. The gradual increase of the government revenue and the general Civilization and enlightenment of the country. Whereas on the other hand, the conclusion of a settlement in perpetuity, at a time when the country was in its rudest state of culture, without waiting for a full development of its resources, would be nearly tantamount to the assessment of an estate without an accurate survey. On a rough calculation it was believed that a year's revenue of the
province, or six or seven lakhs of rupees, would have enabled the government to procure the requisite supply of implements and seeds and to secure the services of an establishment of agriculturists from Europe and upper India for a period of two years. Had the government declared it as an object of national importance, even if the government refrained from bearing the entire costs, the people in general would have contributed towards the development. 327

No permanent advancement in agriculture could have been effected until the people were relieved from the necessity of relying on a foreign country for the requisite implements of husbandry. No nation could secure to itself the blessings and comforts of civilized life until it had manufactures of its own. It was urged that the government opened up a number of schools for instructing the people in the most important and useful branches of European manufacture be established by government throughout the province. Youths were to be trained in the manufacture of iron and wood so as to enable them to construct implements and machines of husbandry and other works of utility; of silk and cotton to clothed the people; of utensils for domestic uses and in short for all other articles which were necessary for the comforts of life. 328

Anandaram regretted to acknowledge that education in the country, under the enlightened Government of England was in a retrograde state. 329 It is a kind of an overstatement. During the previous regime the sole attention was received in attainment of knowledge in Sanskrit. Every important village had public schools to train up the youth in the knowledge of Sanskrit literature and science. Some youths even travelled to Nuddea and Benares to receive instruction in the abstruse sciences. Since the annexation of the province to the British Empire, Sanskrit education, owing to the want of

327 Ibid, p.104
328 Ibid, 105
329 Ibid, p 105
encouragement, had gradually been abolished. A certain number of institutions styled vernacular schools had been established in the country. Instructions in these schools were imparted in a foreign language, viz., the Bengali, which was but imperfectly understood by the teachers themselves, not to speak of the pupils. The education which they afforded was of the simplest and most elementary type; the students seldom aspire to a higher knowledge than a mere acquaintance with simple reading and writing. The few books that were used on the different branches of elementary learning were composed in a foreign tongue which necessarily prevented their being of any popular use. The reason assigned for the substitution of Bengali for the vernacular Assamese, was, that Bengali was the language adopted in the Courts, as if the object were to make the Assamese a nation of judicial officers; and strange to say notwithstanding the proposed object of the schools, very few ex-students of the vernacular institutions in the interior had ever qualified themselves to fulfil offices of trust or responsibility in the courts of the province. Those that were so educated seldom rose to a higher position than that of Gaon kakati, or village Accountant. The teachers too, engaged in the government vernacular schools were generally men ill qualified to impart instruction in any of the higher branches of knowledge. Anandaram therefore thought that little argument was necessary to prove that popular education would never advance in the country unless the system pursued in the vernacular schools at that time were remodelled. Anandaram reiterated the necessity of substitution in the schools of the vernacular language in lieu of the bengali, the publication of a series of popular works on the different branches of native and European knowledge in the Assamese language, the establishment of a Normal school for training a body of teachers and the creation of a separate department for the study of Sanskrit in the several vernacular schools. He was
of the opinion that Bengali should be cultivated as a language indispensable to complete the cause of vernacular education, and that the standard Bengali works should have been introduced in the higher classes. He was opposed to its exclusive adoption as the medium of instruction, the people in literature, science, and other useful branches of knowledge and felt certain that the outlay of a few thousand rupees would have enabled the government to supply the schools, with a complete series of elementary educational works in the Assamese language, in every useful department of learning, literature, history, science and art.

The combination of a knowledge of Sanskrit with that which a vernacular education would afford, cannot fail materially to improve the intellectual capacities of the people. Notwithstanding the indifference so displayed by Government, there were still to be seen numerous private schools throughout the country for the study of Sanskrit. In Bengal and upper India, the British government had provided for the means for the preservation of the ancient learning of the country by the establishment of magnificent College at Benares and Calcutta. Why the government was not proactive in the case of Assam?

In 1835, the Government established an English school at Gowhatty, in lower Assam, under the superintendence of a European teacher. The experience of a few years, however, induced the Council of Education to abandon all hope of success from the institution. The European headmaster’s office was abolished and the establishment reduced to a single native teacher on an extremely low salary. The English school in Upper Assam was in no better state. The few that availed themselves of these two government institutions seldom derived any substantial benefit. The slow progress of the school of 1835 disposed the authorities to conclude that the “Assamese would never
improve in European knowledge.” Anandaram disputed the fact. That the people, especially the higher classes, were still anxious to instruct their children in the knowledge of European science and literature, had been amply proved from the circumstance that several native gentlemen sent their youth to the government colleges in the presidency for the express purpose of giving them an English education. The introduction of a taste for foreign language and literature must be, like all other improvements, be allowed to take effect gradually; and it would be both unfair and unjust to judge the capacity of a people to receive improvements from the trial of a period not extending beyond five or six years. The slow progress made by English schools in Assam must have been imputed more to defects in the system of instruction pursued in them, than to the want of zeal and promptitude on the part of the students; since it had never been advanced by anybody that the Assamese were inferior in their intellectual capacities to any other Indian nation. Additions were to be made to the staff of the two English Schools in lower and Upper Assam, and that competent teachers should have been appointed and an improved system of instruction introduced.330

There was a total want of roads and there were no highways which connected all the districts of Assam with each other nor there were roads in all parts of the country by which travellers could journey from one village to another at all seasons of the year. Owing to the want of means of inland communication, the poor classes never stirred out of their homes during the five rainy months of the year and many poor people were prevented from seeking justice for their grievances. There was also serious injury to trade and commerce. Anandaram proposed that there should have been an attempt to connect all divisions of Assam by two or three high roads. There was a magnitude of

330 Ibid, p. 107
public works of the previous rulers. A proposal that a certain remission in the revenue of every village would induce the people to contribute their labours with alacrity, and at a much cheaper rate to the promotion of this project of primary importance to their happiness and comfort. In place where the lands were low, harvest was always uncertain and the least inclemency of the weather led to a total failure of the crops and the consequent misery and ruin of the villagers with serious loss to the public revenue. This situation could have been mitigated by the erection of bunds, embankments and such other means.

The British followed the Principle of non interference. After the British occupation, the care of the endowments and grants for maintenance of various religious and charitable institutions were continued to be exercised in a partial degree. About the year 1842 government declared principle of non interference and strictly prohibited the exercise of any control over the religious endowments in Assam, evidently influenced to adopt this policy by the law whereby all the public connection with the temple of Jagannath was withdrawn. Endowments for purposes deemed pious and beneficial were applied according to their real and original destination. Where the government was perpetual, the duty of protection was a public and perpetual duty of the government. That duty had been not only fully recognized by government, but special provisions were made by the legislature, in regulation XIX of 1810, for its fulfilment. Why that provision of this law was withheld, and the objects of endowments permitted to be defeated. A vast amount of benefit would have accrued to the country, if the government adopted measures to secure the fulfilment of the original object of these dhurmotter, and the right use and application of the proceeds. The endowments had thus
conduced to the promotion of private interests or necessity for preferring complaints for such misappropriations. These endowments were used for the promotion of private interests rather than the fulfilment of the original intentions of the endowers.\textsuperscript{331}

Anandaram fails to understand why the same liberal and lenient policy which induced the govt. to uphold in Bengal all the rent free tenures, held as such before the acquisition of the \textit{diwani} without any reference to their validity, should not have been observed, and why the genuine grants made by the ancient rulers of Assam should have been assessed at half the rates impose on rent paying lands.\textsuperscript{332}

Large quantities of govt opium had been imported. The expediency of abolishing the cultivation of poppy by the people was under consideration whether by interdicting the culture of the drug by the people, the govt. contemplated to expel the general use of opium from the country or whether the government proposed to substitute its own in lieu of the native opium was still a mystery for Anandaram. The extensive introduction of Government led to the conclusion that the measure was productive of consequences other than the extirpation of the drug from the country. If it be advanced that by abolishing the production of opium in the country and rendering it dearer to the people, the use would be rendered less universal, he stressed that the people would never shrink from the use of the drug as long as they continue to obtain supplies of it and that whatever may be the price put upon it they would seldom consider themselves too poor to purchase it. The universal use of opium had converted the Assamese, once a hardy industrious and enterprising race, into an effeminate, weak, indolent and a degraded people. It had been universally the sole cause of undermining the health and physical constitution of the whole population. It was used by the young as well as by the old.

\textsuperscript{331} Ibid 109
\textsuperscript{332} Ibid 109
Women themselves were often not an exception and in many parts of the country, opium was freely administered to infants and children. Opium was not so generally used in Assam in the eighteenth century. Some fixed the year 1792, the year of captain Welsh deputation to Assam to restore the reigning Rajah to his throne, as the time at which opium was introduced into the country. Before the accession of the british power, the use of opium was not half so universal. Anandaram suggested that a sudden and total abolition of the culture of opium, however, would not only entail the loss of numerous lives, but would subject the people to much calamity and unhappiness. In the first place the importation of govt opium should have been discontinued, and that in the second, the poppy cultivations were to be subjected to a heavy taxation. An over assessment would naturally deter those who cultivated it for the sake of realising money by its sale, a practice which was extensively carried on. The cost of labour, together with an excessive taxation would leave little or nothing to the cultivator as an adequate recompense for his trouble, and the culture of opium would have been an object not of luxury or gain, but of absolute necessity. None but those who could not actually subsist without it, would ever think it worth their while to cultivate it. It would thus become gradually less abundant and get scarce. He hoped that Assam would be completely freed from the temptation of so deleterious a drug.333

Anandaram was of the opinion that an improvement in the administration of the province would lead to an improvement in its population. A large portion of the ancient inhabitants of the country took shelter on the frontiers. These people, under proper encouragements, could have been induced to come back and settle in the lands of their forefathers. The numerous independent mountain tribes that surround the valley of

333 Ibid 111
Assam, under proper management, could have been induced to settle in the plains, and the people from some of the badly provided parts of Bengal could have been like wise invited to emigrate. Mortality, however, above all appeared to have materially impeded the progress of population in Assam. An improvement in the condition of the people conduced to an improvement in health and longevity. He entertained sanguine hopes that when the improvements in the general state of the country would have been effected, the rate of mortality in Assam would have proportionately decreased. The Assamese would have then felt the advantage and the necessity of ventilation, cleanliness and other means essential for the promotion of health. There was imperfect knowledge of science of medicine which had augmented the mortality rate. Even the Hindu system of medicine was seldom used by people at large. In most parts of the country, incantations, harms and amulets were substituted in the place of medicines and the number of deaths caused by ignorant and opposite treatment was prodigiously great.  

Anandaram yearned for establishment of medical schools in Assam and wanted the instructions therein to be provided in the vernacular education. He even proposed the idea of establishment of district schools of medicine. He also entertained hopes of native sub assistant surgeons educated in the medical college of Bengal, with the aid of government who would help in the realisation of the dream of medical schools in Assam.  

He was well aware of a notion that were entertained by men of all ranks that the public courts of justice were exclusively for the benefit of the rich and powerful, and that it was imprudent and foolish for men in humble life to resort to them for relief, that

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334 Ibid, p.112.
335 Ibid, 113
cunning and deceit, falsehood and perjury, beset the court on all sides and that in the
civil and criminal courts, truth was often transformed into falsehood, and falsehood into
truth. The consequence of this was that people in the interior of the country entertained
the utmost dread to resort to the public tribunals for redress, and were obliged, in the
majority of instances, passively to submit to injury or oppression. He cited various
causes of the defects in the judicial administration of the country. They were
inefficiency of the police, paucity of the courts and their distance from the interior of a
district and, defective, tedious, dilatory, expensive nature of the law and procedure.
Last but not the least, the universal corruption which prevailed among the ministerial
officers attached to the courts of justice. Sordid corruption which prevailed among
the ministerial officers of the courts prevailed equally among the Darogahs. Their love
of gain often led them actually to sell justice for money, and lent their cooperation in
the perpetration of the injury and oppression on the poor and helpless. Police darogahs
were the only authority to whom the ryots at all times looked for protection. When
murder, homicide or robbery occurred in a village, the villagers purchased their safety by
the levy of a general contribution for the darogah. The mercenary and biased
proceedings in criminal trials held by them served in various instances to convict the
innocent and exculpate the guilty. The Government raised the salaries of the darogahs
to guard against temptations. Little reliance was placed by the magistrates on the
proceedings conducted by the darogahs. Ananadaram conceive that the appointment of a
superior class of functionaries for the performance of the police duties was the only
means by which a reform of the manifold mischief of the present system could have
been affected. The office of Darogah in the prevailing form then should have been

336 Ibid, 113
abolished. A class of *Mofussil* courts should have been established in each thannah jurisdiction, under a judicial officer of rank and respectability, styled either a sudder Ameen or an Assistant: and that such officer were to be charged not only with the general police duties, but also were to be vested with civil, criminal and fiscal jurisdiction in his division. That measure would have served to remove two of the most prominent defects in the administration of the country, viz., the inefficiency of the police, the paucity of the courts and their distance from the interior of a district.\(^{337}\)

The judicial officer in the mofussil courts, stationed at each thanah be entrusted with all the police duties which was then performed by the darogahs i.e. The preservation of peace within the district, the suppression of crimes, apprehension of offenders, the prevention of affrays and the trial, in the first instance, of all crimes; and also were entrusted with original jurisdiction in all criminal cases and was vested with the same powers which were then exercised by the sub assistants, i.e. imprisonment for a period not exceeding six months and a fine below the sum of fifty rupees. These powers would have helped in the speedier justice in one thannah jurisdiction. All cases calling for a severer sentence could have been transmitted to the magistrate for his final judgement. Under section II, clause 1 of the rules for the administration of criminal justice in Assam, officers with the powers above alluded to were empowered to hold the preliminary proceedings in all heinous crimes likely to be committed to the sessions. The trial in the first instance, therefore of all offences of all kinds, would have not only remedied the mischief of entrusting the same to police darogahs, but considerably abridged the proceedings, to the great benefit of the people, and prevented the necessity

\(^{337}\) Ibid, 115
of the same officer, namely the magistrate, holding second trial as a Court of Sessions before a jury, under the provisions of section II., Clause 4, of the Assam rules.  

To give the people the benefit of Mofussil courts, it appeared necessary that their jurisdiction were to be extended to the trial and decision of the cases in question, subject to an appeal to the magistrate. To enable the mofussil judicial officers to discharge the functions of the police, it seemed necessary that they were to be allowed a suitable staff of constables, and a superintending officer, styled either a darogah or a nazir, with purely ministerial duties to perform. The superintendent may, with safety, be deputed to pursue offenders, hold inquests, prevent affrays and such like active duties rendering it incumbent on the judicial authority personally to hold local investigations or proceed to the spot whenever the nature of a case renders such a course indispensable. So it would have been better if the mofussil courts could have been likewise invested with original jurisdiction in all civil cases which arose within their respective limits and that their power was limited to the trial of cases not exceeding in value 1000 rupees. The rule in the Assam code which prescribed the presentation of all petitions of plaint in civil cases in the first instance to the senior Assistant in charge of a district had been productive of much delay and inconvenience. So, Anandaram suggested that the rule in force in the regulation provinces should have been extended to Assam, and that the Mofussil courts were to be empowered to receive and proceed upon original plaints without any reference to the Assistant Commissioner. Judicial officer at each thanah were to be empowered to hold the summary suit court of his division in Revenue matters and were to be allowed to decide actions relating to arrears or exactions of rent, to issue distraint at the instance of persons having charge of the collection of revenue, to try and

338 Ibid, 115
determine summary suits intended for the purpose of contesting distraint, to superintend the distribution and receipt of pottahs and kubooleuts, to dispose of all disputes relating to assessment at the time of such distribution and try all cases relating to revenue department.

The establishment of the mofussil courts was the only way by which life and property could have been properly and effectually protected. The extortion of confessions, the unlawful detention and the restraint of witnesses and parties at the thannahs to extort money, the compulsion and intimidation practised on witnesses to deliver false testimony and frequently the training up of witnesses to pass through cross-examinations without detection before the magistrate, and the extortions of the villagers in the prosecution of local inquiries, were to be thoroughly done away with. A reference to the records of the courts of justice would show that more than one-half of the cases in the revenue and criminal departments were dismissed on default; and that because the poor sufferers could neither support themselves in the town, nor be able to employ vakeels or agents to look after and conduct their cases in their absence. A considerable saving would have been effected by the abolition of the office of darogahs, who were then paid 50 to 100 rupees and it was conceived that a monthly allowance of 150 to 250 rupees would have been sufficient to secure the services of a respectable body of men as assistants or sudder ameens, to be invested with judicial and police authority in every thanna jurisdiction. The functions of mofussil Munsiffs were to be abolished and that the Assistant or the Sudder Ameen in every extensive jurisdiction, where a single officer was unable to perform with efficiency his duties in all the several departments, were to be allowed an inferior judicial officer, as his assistant, whose duty

339 Ibid, p.116
it would be to try cases referred to him by his immediate superior, to assist him in the superintendence and performance of the police duties to hold local inquiries or inquests, and in short, all other miscellaneous duties that may occur within the jurisdiction. The junior functionary was placed in immediate charge of the branch police stations. Also, the establishment of a mofussil court would have decreased the amount of business in the Sadar stations.\textsuperscript{340}

There was not a village in Assam, how large so ever may be its population, that had a single chowkeedar or constable. It was an exception among the provinces of british empire. The absence of police, testified to the fact that there was a spell of relative peace in Assam. So, there was an urgent need of setting up a rural police force for the entire province. Anandaram suggested that it would have been good if there would have been an imposition of a regular chowkeedaree tax on the villagers rather than be wholly deprived of the benefits of a village Police.\textsuperscript{341}

The law of procedure under the former government were such that all complaints were heard and determined viva voce, and the party complaining obtained redress in the course of a fortnight or week, and sometimes sooner. Under the British judicial system of the province, a party, how trivial so ever may be the nature of his complaint, could never obtain relief without submitting to a vexatious and harassing course of procedure, extending from at least six months to an unlimited length of time; and even when he obtained an award in his favour, the execution of the same was attended with so many obstacles that he was in many instances actually compelled to relinquish all hopes of recovering his dues. Justice is there by defeated, and the people preferred giving up their just dues rather than resort to so uncertain a course and throw

\textsuperscript{340} Ibid, p.117
\textsuperscript{341} Ibid, p.118
away money to meet the costs of suit in pursuit of an object which they were never sure of securing.\textsuperscript{342}

The local legislature wisely foresaw the mischief of introducing in full the regulation Law of procedure among a simple and ignorant people, and in some measure remedied the evil. With a view to abridge the proceedings in regular civil suits, it empowered the assistance of the district, in clause 7, Section II. Of the Assam rules to, "insist on the attendance in person, both of the plaintiff and defendant, and to examine them on oath and hear their pleadings \textit{viva voce}". Anandaram pointed out that the law has long since been a dead letter. The principal Assistant, who alone was vested with the power, seldom tried original suits, and in the few that he retained in his file, the course was never adopted. He proposed that whenever a civil action was preferred for the recovery of the debts or damages in which the sum claimed may not have exceeded three hundred rupees, it was rendered imperative on all the Courts instead of trying the action like a regular civil suit, to proceed with it in a summary way. That the plaintiff was also required to be in attendance on the appointed day either in person or by any authorised agent; and that the presiding officer was required to record briefly the statement and pleadings of both parties, and after hearing and noting down the evidence which either party may had to adduce, either on the same or on a subsequent day, proceed to deliver judgement "without further pleading of issue". That in the event of the defendant failing to attend or to show sufficient cause for his absence on the day fixed for his appearance, and the Court being satisfied of the due service of the summons, the case were to be allowed to be tried and determined ex-parte, on the evidence of the plaintiff; but that if the defendant absconded or concealed himself and

\textsuperscript{342} Ibid, p.119
there by prevented the due service on the summons on him, the proclamation prescribed
by Clause I, Section II of the rules, were to be issued before an ex parte trial of the
case. That the ends of Justice seemed to render it necessary that the rule in section
XLIII, Act IX, of 1850, which empowered the Small Cause Courts to grant a new trial
of a case decided ex parte on sufficient cause being shown for the same, should have
also been extended to the Mofussil Courts in the trial and determination of small causes.
The substance of the verbal statements of the parties as well as of the witnesses were to
be recorded in the Assamese or vernacular language of such parties or witnesses, and
being duly attested by their signatures, in proof of their accuracy, were to put up as a
separate record to enable the appellate court to refer to it whenever an appeal was
preferred.343

Respectable persons out of their fear of publicly exposing their dishonesty, often
took the help of agents or Vakeels to present their case. Instances were common in
which a majority of the lower and the middle classes in Assam from their simple and
honest habits, led at once to elicit the facts of a case when they were personally
examined in a public tribunal, and before opportunities were allowed to them to entrust
their cases to the cunning and dishonest attorneys and mukhtars that infested the Courts.
The wise framer of the Assam Code, therefore had empowered the judges or senior
Assistants of Districts, by Clause 6, section II, of the rules, to insist on the Attendance in
person both of the plaintiff and defendant and were to elicit the truth of a complaint by
their personal statements. With reference to the extensive powers given to the courts of
all grades by the provisions of Act XXVI, of 1852, one could perceive no impropriety in
extending the rule in question to the lowest tribunals in Assam. There was no provision

343 Ibid, 121
in the Assam rules for enforcing or compelling the attendance of a defendant who may have refused to attend, or abscond after a requisition for his personal appearance had been issued to him under clause 6, section II of the rules.\textsuperscript{344}

It was therefore suggested by Anandaram that in such cases resource were to be taken to a “writ of attachment to compel the appearance of the defendant”, in the same manner as was provided in Section XLIII of Regulation IX of 1850; and that parties who considered themselves aggrieved by such a requisition should have the option of filing a petition of Appeal against it, which shall bar its enforcement pending the orders of the appellate Court- a course already prescribed in the Clause in question. It was to be submitted that a refusal on the part of the Plaintiff to obey the requisition may have been visited with the penalty of dismissal on default subject to the usual appeal.\textsuperscript{345}

The people in this country entertained the utmost dread against delivering false testimonies on oath, administered according to the forms dictated by their religions. Under the former government when the truth of a case could not be clearly ascertained by the evidence adduced on both sides, the courts called upon the either the plaintiff or the defendant, according to the circumstances of a case to bear out his allegations by oath; and a refusal to comply with this requisition vitiated the fairness of his pleas. The Regulation law, as defined in the section 6. Regulation IV of 1793 prescribed the examination on oath of parties in suits only when both the plaintiff and the defendant agreed to it. Clause 6 Section II of the Assam Code, however empowered the senior Assistant to take the examination of parties on oath. This rule too had long since been a dead letter. It was believed that its general application to all cases would deter many respectable individuals in consequence of the extreme aversion felt by the natives to

\textsuperscript{344} Ibid, 121  
\textsuperscript{345} Ibid, p121
take oath from prosecuting just claims; and consequently were productive of much injury the power of examining parties on oath were to be granted to all the courts, and that it would have rendered imperative on them to exercise it in cases of every description and on all occasions where the ends of justice render such a course indispensable; subject, however, to the usual appeal. Anandaram believed that exercise of this power were found to be in consonance with the principle declared in the published draft of a proposed act for amending the law of evidence.346

Both the Assam and the Bengal codes had prescribed to the courts the adoption of the following measures before entering in to any detailed investigation of a case; namely:-

First- that the Courts were to examine the truth of the complaint by the oaths of the parties if they mutually consented to it- (Section 6. Regulation IV, of 1793)

Second- that they were to induce the parties to refer their disputes to arbitration to obtain a final adjustment of their claims to enable the courts to decide thereon - (Clause 10, Section II. Assam Rules.)

Not one in a hundred cases did the courts ever consult the wishes of the parties to adjust their disputes by any of the above means, far less induced them. To render arbitration practically useful, Anandaram conceived that when both parties could not agree in appointing one set of arbitrators, each were to be allowed to nominate one, and the court were to appoint a third; and that the award of the majority were to be permitted to guide the decision of the courts.347

The system of examining witnesses in the courts of justice was the principal, and only cause of “truth being transformed into falsehood, and falsehood into truth”. It had

facilitated the commission of perjury to an extent scarcely credible and in fact, it had utterly defeated the ends of justice and converted the public tribunals into engines of oppression, rather than of protection. Under the practice of the courts, witnesses were seldom or never examined personally by the judges. The duty of examination was delegated to the head Omla, who again, unless the case were of a most important nature, deputed a subordinate Mohurir to record the evidence and commonly if the case was not very momentous, and particularly in petty criminal cases the duty was entrusted to one of the numerous unpaid omedwars (candidate) that frequented the courts. These mohurirs could be paid by the party at whose instance the witnesses were summoned, not only to set down the depositions correctly, but as it was said, to prevent the same "being spoiled or rendered unfavourable".

In a great majority of instances, complaints were made by the parties or their vakeels of depositions having been erroneously recorded. It is impossible for them to dispute every word the mohurir wrote out. Beside there was the incapacity and ignorance of the pleaders. Often too, the mohurir or omedwar, from his imperfect acquaintance with the art of composition, was led to fall into errors in expressing the real purport of the witnesses' statements, and not infrequently, he confounded or misconstrued the précis meaning and intention of a witness. Fall out of this act had a profound impact on the criminal cases. The evidence for the prosecution was generally taken without the presence of the defendant or before he was summoned, and there being nobody to watch the examination, the mohurir put down whatever he thought best conducive to the interest of the party who bought him over to his side. The vernacular was not the Court language of Assam and it prevented the discovery of any incorrect

348 Ibid, p.123
statement put down by the mohurir. It was customary for the mohurir to read out the
depositions after examination to the witnesses, and to inquire whether it coincided with
his statements. Thus the judges had no opportunities of observing the “quality, age,
education, understanding, behaviour and inclinations of the witnesses upon whose
evidence he was to decide”. 349

Section II, clause 3 of the Assam Rules enjoined the Senior Assistants to
examine the witnesses themselves, or to delegate that duty to the Junior Assistants, and
only in cases of Necessity to the head Omla; and clause 7 of the same section provided,
that the native judges were in all instances expected to cause the depositions of
witnesses to be taken in their own presence and were not empowered to delegate that
duty to any of their ministerial officers. The criminal rules go up a step higher, and
required Judges in all petty criminal cases to record themselves the substance of the
evidence. Anandaram pointed out that, had it been possible for the native judges or the
inferior courts to give full effect to that law, the evils in the examination of witnesses, in
ninety out of hundred cases that occurred in a district, could have been obviated. It was
impossible for the judges to superintend the cases personally due to the large number of
cases in the lower courts. Anandaram suggested in the first place, the plan of
establishing the Mofussil courts be carried out; and in the second that judges of all
grades be positively required personally to conduct the examination of all the witnesses
that were produced before them. According to the existing practice the examination of
witnesses took place in the presence of the judge or in other words in the same room in
which the court was held but the mere presence of the judge without his being
attentively or intelligibly present could not be of any real advantage. It was therefore

349 Ibid, p.124
desirable that the judges were required in all ordinary cases to dictate the depositions to
the mohurir who committed them to writing and in momentous cases to record them
themselves. 350

The abolition of oaths as formerly administered, and the substitution of the
affirmation prescribed by Act V of 1840, had been in many instances, the cause of
extensive perjury in the Courts. According to the general belief, a false oath was visited
with almost instantaneous Divine; and it has often been found, that a party against
whom a witness was produced readily agrees to forego his pretensions if the witness
deposed on oath according to the form prescribed by their religions. It was suggested
that the courts be empowered to administer to witnesses that form of oath which was
enjoined by the religion of the natives, and that they be permitted to exempt at their
discretion only such witnesses whom they may on a due consideration of their rank,
education, and respectability, thought fit to examine only in the form dictated by6 Act V
of 1840. It was a fact of astonishment that though the forms of Hindu and Mahommedan
oath had been abolished from the Mofussil Courts, they were still kept up in the
Highest court of Justice in India; viz., the Supreme Court of Judicature at the
metropolis. 351

With reference to the circumstances of the country, and in due regard to the
condition of the people, it had been customary in cases of assault and other injuries, in
which pecuniary penalties were imposed, to grant to the complainant the benefit of a
portion of fine levied from the defendants, by way of compensation and damage to the
injured party that rule was never acted in the province except in special cases. The
withdrawal of that great boon had been the cause of much dissatisfaction and hardship

350 Ibid, p.125
351 Ibid, p.126
to the poor. So, it was suggested by Anandaram, that the practice of awarding a portion of fine in criminal prosecutions to the injured party were to be revived.\textsuperscript{352}

Whenever questions of Hindu law arose in the courts of the province, they had no proper authority to whom they can apply for expositions. The consequence is that every court was obliged to refer to, and to be guided in their decisions by, the pundits in their immediate vicinity, who often influenced either by improper motive or by ignorance of the law, delivered erroneous and conflicting views. It was pertinent that a body of Hindu law officers, consisting of two or three of the most learned pundits of the country were to be constituted for the whole province and that the courts were required in all cases to refer to them for opinions. Questions of Mahommedan law was of very rare occurrence, and they were to be assisted by two or three Mahomedans acquainted with the local law and usage of Assam, as explained by the district Qazis.\textsuperscript{353}

The appointment of judges without any form of examination had likewise proved discouraging to merit, as well as to the exertions in the acquirement of knowledge or fitness; and it had also served to keep the majority of native judges in deplorable ignorance of the law which they were appointed to administer. The want of a constituted and respectable bar in the courts of the province had been a source of great injury to the administration of justice. There were no regularly appointed vakeels attached to the Courts of Assam. Every person was allowed to plead and conduct a case without any reference to his character and qualifications. The throwing open the bar to all classes had produced no other favourable results than an inducement to a host of illiterate and ignorant men to occupy it. In appointing the judges of the courts, they should have been subjected to at least some trial of their qualifications; and that a

\textsuperscript{352} Ibid, p. 128
\textsuperscript{353} Ibid, p. 129
knowledge of the principles of law, the regulations and the practice of the courts and ability to dispose of litigations with soundness of judgement, as well as rank, respectability and character, were to be considered the essential qualifications of candidates aspiring to the bench in regard to the Europeans designed for the bench. It was necessary that they had a more intimate acquaintance with the vernacular than they generally possessed. There was inefficient control over the native judges and subordinate courts. The unwillingness which the superior functionaries then generally evinced to inquire into complaints that had any tendency to impeach the character of the subordinate officers, had proved highly discouraging to the institution of just and well founded charges. Encouragement should have been held out to the parties to represent any just complaint they may have had to prefer against the conduct or proceedings of judicial officers. The decisions and the proceedings of the subordinate courts were to be inspected closely and frequently by the Assistants in charge of the districts as well as by the Commissioner.

Under the provisions of the Act XXIX of 1837, the vernacular language of a district was directed to be used in the courts. Inspite of the provision of that wholesome law, a foreign language, viz., the Bengali, had been introduced in the Courts of Assam. It was only to the officers and other persons connected with the courts that Bengali was generally intelligible. The mass of the population and even private gentle men possessed no knowledge of the language. The native judges were less familiar with the Bengali than with their own tongue and the European judges had always been found to understand the Assamese language with greater facility than the Bengali; and they often spoke the former with a degree of fluency much to be commended. Even evidence

354 Ibid 129-130
355 Ibid, p. 130-131
which under section VI, Regulation IV. Of 1793, ought to be taken in the language intelligible to the witnesses was recorded in Bengali, and the mischief that arose from that practice have had been already alluded to on the head of evidence. For more than ten years after the annexation of the province, the Assamese was the language of the courts. On what grounds the Bengali had been now allowed to supersede the vernacular, it was difficult to comprehend. The Assamese being the vernacular language as well of the people as of the majority of the judges and ministerial officers of the courts, no inconvenience could have possibly arisen from its use, and if it be advanced that the Bengali bore an affinity with the Assamese, Anandaram pointed out that the Bengali bore no closer resemblance to the Assamese than it did to the Oriya language, and if the courts of Orissa were to be allowed the privilege of using the language of the country, it is difficult to understand why the same benefit should have had been withheld to the Assamese. Greatest encouragement should have been held out to the people to register their deeds by empowering the courts at every thana to register deeds, and by lowering the fees from one rupee to four annas, according to the nature and value of the transaction which the deeds have had represented.\footnote{Ibid, p. 131-132}

In no part of India perhaps were the bonds of matrimony so unscrupulously violated or connubial relation so little regarded by the mass of the population as in Assam. In some districts, more than one fourth of the cases related to questions of marriage, and their number had often been so great that the legislature (Section II. Clause 5, of the Assam Rules) had found it necessary to authorise the Courts to dispose of them generally in a summary way. To encourage the people therefore, to observe the rights essential to the validity of marriage and to prevent the recurrence of the
innumerable disputes that arose for the possession of wives as well as to obviate the occurrence of offence against the conjugal happiness of the people, Anandaram suggested the expediency nay, the necessity of rendering it imperative on the people to get their marriages registered by the opening of a register of marriages at the mofussil courts of each thana jurisdiction, entitling every person to have had their marriages entered in the register at a trifling cost. The measure, while it would be productive of no inconvenience or injury to the people would have served to protect their conjugal rights and domestic happiness.357

III.2 Issue of Assamese language

The measures that have been recently adopted by government for the promotion of education in british india have given rise to various discussions in this country as to what is the most appropriate medium for educating the people of assam,. Some, from their imperfect acquaintance with the Assamese language have contended, that the Bengali, the medium of instruction in Bengal, ought also to be adopted in assam. Others, again better acquainted with the comparative difference between the Bengali and the assamese languages , have been led to take a more correct view of the subject, and have expressed their conviction of the necessity of strictly adhering to the Assamese as the most successful means of education. Unfortunately however, for our country, those in whose hands the management and control of public instruction are entrusted, have been of the former opinion . They have been led to believe that the Assamese and the Bengali are one and the same language and have accordingly during the last ten or

357 Ibid, p. 132
twelve years introduced Bengali in to our schools as the vernacular language of the country.\textsuperscript{358}

During the Ahom rule, Persian was used to conduct foreign affairs while lingua franca was Assamese. In April 1836, the Government of Bengal declared Bengali as the Court language. Bengali began to be taught in schools of Assam. In spite of clear provisions in Code of Criminal procedure that the language of the soil is to be used in judicial and revenue proceedings, Bengali was introduced as the official language of Assam in 1838.\textsuperscript{359} Anandaram pointed out that "while it is deeply lamented, that no difference was perceived between the languages of Bengal and Assam and marked with regret that a mistake could have been committed regarding a fact so obvious, and to his judgement so irrefutable, he may be permitted to express his belief, that the error in question had been and was still likely to be, the principal cause of retarding the intellectual improvement of the people of Assam. The time however, appeared to have then arrived, when it seemed necessary that the government should have been apprised of the injuries that had resulted from the adoption of a foreign language in imparting education and administering justice to the Assamese. He could no longer suffer the existing misconceptions as to the identity of the Assamese and the Bengali languages, to remain unrefuted, but that he should appeal to the judgement of the public and of the government for the maintenance of that right of which the Assamese had been unjustly deprived by errors and misconception. The Assamese alluded to their right to use their native language both in the education of the people and in the dispensation of justice. He proposed to enquire, whether there exists any radical

\textsuperscript{358} A Few remarks on the assamese language, and on vernacular Education in Assam. By A Native. Sibsagor, Assam. Printed at the American Baptist Misssion Press, 1856. P. 1
\textsuperscript{359} Nag, Sajal. (1990). Roots of Ethnic Conflict. Nationality Question in North East India. Manohar. Pg. 49
difference between the Assamese and Bengali languages. After pointing out the results that had attended the introduction of the Bengali language, into our courts and educational institutions, he wanted to proceed to describe the state of the language and show how far it was adapted to be used as a medium for educating and governing the Assamese. Those who maintained that the Assamese and Bengali were one and the same language, and advocated the adoption of the latter, in the schools and courts of Assam, appeared to adduce arguments that the language spoken in Assam was essentially the same as that spoken in Bengal.\textsuperscript{360}

That the written language of Bengal had been refined and polished by the introduction of a large number of Sanskrit words, was not more intelligible to the Bengalis than it was to the Assamese and that the difference between the colloquial language of the two provinces was not greater than what was observable in the dialects of the different districts of Bengal. The distinction consisted only in a diversity of spelling and pronunciation; and that therefore it would have been better instead of regarding slight differences in spelling and creating a separate literature for Assam, to introduce the written language of Bengal, in the same manner as the modern English language was adopted in England without reference to the unimportant variation observed in the different counties. Anandaram stressed that he had acquired some acquaintance with both the written and spoken language during a long residence in that country. While the Assamese was his mother tongue and the more he compared the two languages, the wider appeared the difference to him.\textsuperscript{361}

\textsuperscript{360} \textit{A Few remarks on the assamese language, and on vernacular Education in Assam.} By A Native. Sibsagar, Asam. Printed at the American Baptist Mission Press, 1856. P. 2

\textsuperscript{361} \textit{A Few remarks on the assamese language, and on vernacular Education in Assam.} By A Native. Sibsagar, Asam. Printed at the American Baptist Mission Press, 1856. P. 3
Anandaram went on to compare various passages of the same meaning both in Assamese and Bengali, with their translations in English and after close examination found out the actual differences between the two languages. He even compared different words in the Assamese language, denoting the most common objects in nature and used by all nations in the daily concerns of life. (See Appendix B)

It was being argued by the advocates of Bengali, that the difference between the Assamese and Bengali languages was observable only when a comparison was made with the refined language of Bengali books. Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan had cited that on comparison of the colloquial language of Bengal and Assam, it was found that the difference was wider in the spoken, than in the written language of both countries. The written languages of Bengal and Assam, abounding in words from the Sanskrit, the common parent, necessarily bore a closer resemblance. (See Appendix C)

Almost all the dialects spoken in different parts of India, may be said to have their origin in Sanskrit and they contain a vast proportion of Sanskrit words introduced either in an original, or a modified form and there was not a Sanskrit word which could not be, with propriety, used in any of the various dialects of the Hindus. It necessarily followed, that if the writer or speaker in any of these dialects, chooses to borrow largely from the Sanskrit, he would be nearly understood by all Hindus of education throughout India. If the similarity, which arose from the abundant use of pure Sanskrit words be admitted as a sufficient proof of the identity of the different dialects of India, not only the Bengali and Assamese, but the Hindustani itself, could have been considered as one and the same language; and in that case the Bengali may, with as much propriety, also...

364 Ibid, p. 22-23
be introduced in Upper India, as in Assam. But, it was not through the medium of a language refined and alleviated, in imitation of the Sanskrit, above the comprehension of the mass of the population, that one should seek to educate the people, or strive to give them a popular literature; but it was by means of the language spoken and understood by all classes, that popular education could have been successfully carried on. If that theory be considered correct, it could no longer be denied, that the Assamese ought to have had their own language as the medium of acquiring knowledge.365

The introduction of Bengali books into the Assam Schools had been productive of consequences precisely similar to those that would have followed, had the Latin or French been adopted as the medium of instruction in the elementary schools of Great Britain and had French or Latin grammars been given to the first beginner instead of Grammars of the English language; Latin spelling books in lieu of English Primers; or French juvenile tales in place of English nursery stories. The first book that was placed in the hands of the Assamese youth in the so called Government vernacular schools was the Bengali Primer — the first words which he learnt to spell, were not those that he had been accustomed to hear or speak, since he first learnt to utter. Those were words, which were to him, even like the sound of mantras or charms, which he occasionally heard chanted over him in sickness by his parents or physicians to cast out the devil, or for removal of the effects of a look from some evil spirit in a venerable tree before an adjoining Hamlet. No sooner was he able to read words, than the “Gyanodoi” or “Easy Reading Lessons” in Bengali, was put before him. That was a little book of some thirty pages, which contained a few moral tales. He set to work, and strove to repeat or understood his lessons in the same manner as he would after a year or two spent in

365 Ibid, p.27
committing to memory the meanings of words or terms in the *Gyanodoi*. As soon he understood some passages of it, he was promoted to the senior class, where he studied the History of Joseph, the proverbs of Solomon, the simple rules of arithmetic, and above all, the Bengali Obhidhan or dictionary, of which he committed to memory as many words to enable him to comprehend Bengali books. There his education was complete and, with but rare exceptions, that may be said to be the whole course of education which the public schools in Assam afforded then. With that education, the student goes out of school and enters into life, satisfied that he had got a smattering of Bengali, could read and write, prepare petitions for his friends in half Bengali or at best, could fill the office of a Gaon Kakoti or village Accountant.\(^{366}\)

Students or senior students of Government Schools studied Bengali in the Schools during four or five years; yet they could not succeed in obtaining even a smattering of Bengali. They appeared to have been made to learn Bengali, evidently, to enable them to acquire knowledge by means of books, written in that language. But, a period of three or four years was of itself too long, in a country where knowledge for its own sake was little appreciated to induce the youth to have the patience of continuing in School for a further period, to make use of his knowledge of the Bengali language, in acquiring any important branch of learning; and the consequence was that education in Assam during the last thirty years since the accession of British rule, had been confined to a simple knowledge of reading and writing and an imperfect acquaintance with the Bengali; while the youth in Bengal and other Provinces, had been advanced not only by a superior training in the vernacular, but have had been likewise blessed with an English

\(^{366}\) Ibid, p. 27-28
education and with a knowledge of almost all the branches of the literature and sciences of modern Europe.\textsuperscript{367}

How vastly different would have been the state of education among the Assamese youths had the first beginners, instead of being made to learn the meaning of new terms and to acquire foreign words been at once put forward to study books on different branches of elementary knowledge composed in Assamese every word of which was similar to them and had they been after passing through their course of rudimental studies led to the study of the Bengali language; or rather where the respectable classes were concerned, promoted to an English school for the purpose of receiving the enlightenment of an European education! On the extension of British supremacy to Assam, the government for some years, maintained the ancient schools for the preservation of Sanskrit learning, in the same manner as Lord Hastings encouraged the revival of Oriental Learning in Bengal and Upper India. But, while in those provinces European education had, in a great measure, superseded the general thirst for Sanskrit or Arabic learning, an imperfect and unprofitable smattering of Bengali had, in Assam, supplanted the vernacular, and abolished a very superior Sanskrit education. Even then, the relics of some ancient Sanskrit Pathsala were kept up by some impoverished Pundits, content with what his pupils could procure him by begging in their annual rounds amongst the indigent villagers.\textsuperscript{368}

Anandaram stressed that while people are apprised of the consequences of using the Bengali as the medium of Instruction, one should not have had omitted to allude to the various disadvantages that had resulted from the adoption of the Bengali language in the Courts of Assam. Those ancient notions which promoted the use of Latin in the

\textsuperscript{367} Ibid, p. 29-30
\textsuperscript{368} Ibid, p. 30
English courts in the Dark Age, or the use of Persian in the Bengal Courts during the early Period of British administration in India seemed to have been still retained with reference to the province of Assam in those days of Progress and Enlightenment. Bengali, which was neither the language of the Conqueror nor of the conquered, had been adopted as the language of the courts, and as the medium of communication between the Government and its subjects. The manifold disadvantages of using a foreign language in the dispensation of Justice were well known. That wholesome check which was maintained by exposing everything that transpired in a court of Justice to the criticism of the public eye was lost; for more than one sixth of the people that resorted to the courts were ignorant of the language in which trials were held, and business transacted. While in other provinces, an intimate acquaintance with the colloquial language of the country was exacted from all officers employed in the administration of justice. In Assam, an acquaintance with the written language of Bengal which was used in the court was made an object of primary importance to all the European candidates for the Bench in preference to a knowledge of the spoken language of Assam, which seemed to be looked upon quite as a secondary consideration. The consequence was, that although the simplified procedures observed in the courts of the province enabled the mass of the population to obtain redress in various matters without the intervention or assistance of pleaders and attorneys yet they were too often incapable of making known their grievance or pleading their cases in person, if the European officer on the bench happened to be new in the service or less assiduous in his attempts to pick up the language of the country from his intercourse with the people. Anandaram wondered whether the legislature was to be blamed for depriving the Assamese of the use of their own language. Act XXIX of 1837 gave full authority to the Government to adopt the
vernacular of the country in lieu of any foreign language, and the Government in the
exercise of that authority wisely abolished the Persian from the courts of Bengal and
Hindustan and substituted the Bengali and Hindustani languages respectively in the
provinces. In regard to Assam however, a serious error appeared to have been
committed; and the law of 1837, instead of giving the Assamese their own native
language, had produced a contrary effect, and made the language of Bengal supersede
that of Assam. From the first occupation of the province to the passing of the Act
nearly, or at least, to the year 1835, the Assamese was the language of the courts. It was
used with great facility and convenience, and with universal satisfaction to the people,
for about fifteen years in almost every department of the public offices, as the public
records would still show. Upon what grounds however, the injurious innovation was
subsequently made, there was no means of judging if one relied upon what one heard of
the probable causes of that change. People are led to understand, that it was sanctioned
on an erroneous impression that the Assamese and Bengali language were identically
one and the same. Anandaram expressed his firm belief, that the restoration of the
Assamese tongue would be productive of inestimable benefits to the people and would
no doubt be convenient to all parties connected with the courts. The native ministerial
officers as well as the non covenanted judges who were almost all Assamese, would be
quite at home in the use of their mother tongue and the covenanted officers in Assam
even at that time when Assamese was everywhere proscribed, understood it with far
greater facility from their daily communication with the people than the Bengali, of
which only a very imperfect knowledge was possessed by most of them. 369

369 Ibid p. 32-33
It was argued by those who advocated the use of Bengali in Assam that, unlike the Bengali, the Assamese language had no distinct literature and that it was a "vulgar and an uncouth dialect", not sufficiently copious to express all the sentiments which the then improved state of Science and literature required. But, it appears, that the idea had originated from an insufficient acquaintance with the capabilities of the Assamese language; and Anandaram believed that to refute the statement, one could only refer to plain and tangible facts.\(^{370}\)

The truth was that the Bengali and Assamese were both founded on Sanskrit and any Sanskrit word or phrase that was used in Bengali could with equal propriety be introduced into Assamese compositions. It therefore followed, that the Bengali was not a particle more copious than the Assamese. Of both the languages, when the native stock failed, the Sanskrit (one of the richest languages in the world) could be freely and extensively used and not the slightest inconvenience was felt in the expression of ideas whether they related to religion, law, philosophy or science. The misconceptions which had then led many to consider the Assamese language as a mere Jargon, unfit to be used as a medium for communicating knowledge, were precisely the same that were once entertained with reference to the language of Bengal. To justify, however, that remark and to dissipate those mistaken ideas, one should not think that one could quote the opinion of a higher authority than that of Dr. Carey, whose deep knowledge of the Indian languages was well known. "Till of late", says that profound scholar, in the preface to his Dictionary of the Bengali Language-

> "the Bengali language was wholly neglected by Europeans, under the idea of its being a mere jargon, only used by the lower orders of people. Most of the vernacular languages of India still lie under the same neglect from a supposition that the"

\(^{370}\) Ibid, p. 33
Hindustani is the language universally prevailing and that the language of the body of
the inhabitants is to be considered as a vulgar, corruption thereof, assuming an almost
endless number of local varieties. Most of the languages of India are copious and,
were they duly cultivated would be found capable of being employed in every kind of
composition with advantage: most of the elegancies of style, and delicate shades, of
meaning, may in their present state expressed by them with great facility; and should
literature become an object of more general pursuit in India and the colloquial
languages be more employed in different species of style and composition, the
capacities of these languages would be developed and the languages themselves carried
to a degree of refinement of which we now have but a faint idea.\footnote{Ibid, p. 41-42}

The Bengali could scarcely be said to have existed as a written language until
the beginning of the nineteenth century when the missionaries of Serampore first
moulded it into a form. Raja Ram Mohan Roy wrote his Bengali Grammar, and other
native gentlemen educated and trained up in the Sciences and literature of Europe,
reared up a distinct literature by the publication chiefly of translations from English
works on different branches of learning. The Bengali translation of the Sanskrit
Mahabharat by Kassi Dass, and that of the Ramayana by Kirti Bas, may be said to have
been the only works of any importance in Bengali, that existed before the present
Bengali literature sprung out from the efforts of Missionaries and educated natives.
Anandaram affirmed that the literature of Assam was in the year 1800 AD more
extensive and varied than that of Bengal. The Mahabharata and Ramayana were
translated into the Assamese language by Ram Saraswati and Sri Sankar Dev, nearly
four hundred years ago, long before Kirti Bas or Kassi dass published their Bengali
translations. The Sri Bhagawat and the Bhagawat Gita were translated into Assamese
both in prose and verse by different authors nearly at the same time; and not only were
other principal Sanskrit works relating to Religion, Medicine, History, drama and other
subjects, translated by successive authors, but a considerable collection of Historical
works of considerable authenticity, composed in original Assamese, and styled
Buranjis, had it appeared, existed since the thirteenth century of the Christian era. 372

In spite of the catalogue of the Assamese books, which Anandaram highlighted,
was it fair to consider that the Assamese was merely a provincial speech like the
Yorkshire or Wiltshire patois in England and that it was an unfit medium for
communicating knowledge to the masses. He thought that many of the Assamese works
had been scattered all over the country.373

The number of works, especially those of a historical character, that were lost
during the late Burmese war and the Mutock insurrection, when the whole country was
in a state of revolution with incredible loss of lives and property, must have had been a
deep source of regret. But, the list of books discussed above, however small, wholly
refutes the notion that the Assamese had no distinct literature of their own. That Bengali
Literature had been of late much extended and improved, it is to be admitted, but one
cannot on account of having acceded to the opinion that it was preferable for the
Assamese, instead of creating a separate literature, to adopt that of Bengal. The fact is
the literature of Bengal had received vast improvements or rather had assumed a
systematic form during the last fifty years but the literature of Assam had remained
stationary and if one did not take in to account a few publication that had been issued by
the advocates of vernacular education during the last fifteen or twenty years. It
continues to be in the same state then as it was a hundred years ago. 374

372 Ibid, p. 42-43
373 Ibid, p. 51
374 Ibid, p. 52
Anandaram took the example of the English School, established at Gauhati in 1835, which had miserably failed. But, the failure is not due to any want of Zeal among the Assamese youth, as held by the Government of the Day; but clearly due to a defective system of instruction. He held that education of the Assamese people in literature and sciences of Europe had led to improvement of literature and other branches of knowledge on modern lines. He suggested various ways to improve system of education and at end referred to labours of the American Missionaries in preparation of schoolbooks in Assamese and to his own efforts through the publication of the series, Asamiya Lorar Mitra.375

Dissemination of European knowledge and enlightened ideas of that age among the native population was alone likely to lead any marked improvement on the ancient literature of the country; and the communication of a knowledge of the modern arts and sciences in a native dress was the best and only means of raising a useful and profitable library for the Assamese. It was an admitted fact that a half civilized or a barbarous country placed under the rule of an enlightened nation, should be raised in the scale of civilization not by the unaided efforts of her own children but by the united exertion and support of her more civilized rulers. Though one must acknowledge with gratitude, that the British Government had not been wholly unmindful of its obligation to advance the people of Assam, yet Anandaram could not forbear expressing his regret that the sincerest efforts of Government to enlighten the Assamese had, in a measure proved abortive, in consequence of its labours which had been misdirected owing partly to the

prevailing misconceptions regarding the vernacular language of Assam and partly to various causes which one could notice at that age.376

After thirty years of the annexation of the province to the British empire, not a single Assamese youths appeared to have succeeded in obtaining the blessing of a liberal English education from the public schools of the province; while thousands in the different districts of Bengal were being daily favoured with all the benefits which a liberal education of Europe afforded and Bengal could then count the number of her enlightened children by hundreds, nay by thousands. Anandaram admitted that Bengal was an older province but the policy that looked with extreme jealousy on the advancement or education of the natives of India, continued to reign for more than 50 years after the extension of British Supremacy to Bengal. It was only then, when liberal views and charitable notions gradually supplanted the old narrow policy; and the education of the Bengalis in the sciences and literature of Europe, might have been said to have commenced simultaneously with the annexation of Assam to British India. It was natural to suppose that the liberal views of Government on the subject of education would have been extended likewise to Assam. Indeed, a prospect for the realisation of these expectations was held out, and a flourishing English School under the superintendence of a European teacher was opened at Guwahati in 1835. In the course of six or seven years, however, the prospect vanished; the European and able teachers were abolished and a nominal English school had been since kept up to answer no better purpose than to teach the students simply the art of reading, spelling or writing a few simple English words. 377

376 Ibid, p. 53
377 Ibid, p. 53-54
What circumstances conduced to nip in the bud the germ of future improvement in Assam, was as much a matter of regret as of mystery. The people of Assam were however informed that the want of zeal and promptitude in Assamese youths, led to the abandonment of every idea of giving the Assamese a sound English education. But, Anandaram could not forbear expressing his belief that if no progress was made by all the pupils of an institution, there was defect in the system, and not in the scholars. If the guwahati English institution made no advancement, it was owing to some defect in the system of instruction pursued and not to deficiency of zeal or intellectual capacity in the students. That the Assamese were at least equal, if not superior to the Bengalis, in their mental capabilities, would be conceded; and that a thirst for European knowledge had then become almost universal in the country, and it could be gauged from the deep anxiety which some Assamese parents had then begun to evince by sending their children to the Bengal colleges for education, and from the circumstance of some few youths having been already sent to the presidency to receive a European education. Had not the climate of Bengal been most unfriendly to Assamese constitutions, number of the youths would have had resorted to the Colleges of Bengal.\textsuperscript{378}

But, that, however as it may the Assamese have had only to deplore that the tendencies and opinions of men who had no means of appreciating the benefits held out to them, and they were allowed to operate as a cause for the abandonment of the whole project of English education in Assam. All improvements, especially if they had to be effected by innovations could not be completed in a day. They must be left to be accomplished in the process of time by patience and perseverance. The Hindus in former days had grave objections to the study of the English and considered themselves

\textsuperscript{378} Ibid, p.54
contaminated by learning the language of the impure Mlechas of Britain. Colleges and schools had sprung up in spite of these obstacle and Civilization and enlightenment triumphed over those ancient prejudices. Success would have undoubtedly attended the first efforts of the government for the introduction of European education in Assam, had they been persisted and the people of Assam would have by that time sent out numbers of educated young Assamese, to contribute towards rearing up a popular literature for the education of the people.  

Anandaram suggested that the government gave Assam one good English college for the education of the respectable classes and a sufficient number of village schools and the use of the native language for the education of the mass. The Assamese were then fully prepared to profit by those institutions and to appreciate their merits and arrangements might have at that point of time carried out the immediate introduction of Assamese books into the village Schools. In spite of the discouraging prospects that had attended all attempts hitherto made to give to the people the means of acquiring in their own language some elementary knowledge of the modern arts and sciences, the friends and supporters of vernacular education in Assam had not wholly despaired of success. The American Missionaries of Assam, like their worthy brethrens of Serampore, have had been the only zealous supporters of the Assamese language during the last twenty years. It is to them that the people of Assam owed their first publications in Assamese; and the credit of reviving the native language was due to them alone. Long would the rising generation have had a cause to be thankful to the missionaries for their timely efforts to preserve the language and literature of their country. While the missionaries had for their primary object, the issue of the bible and religious tracts in

379 Ibid,
380 Ibid, p.56
Assamese, they had not forgotten the all important subject of education. They had published several elementary works in Assamese on History, Geography, Arithmetic and other subjects. Also an invaluable monthly magazine in Assamese, written in a popular style, and devoted to religion, science and general intelligence had been started and continued since 1846. Other useful and instructive works were also in course of preparation by them. In the year, 1849, a series, entitled “the Friend of Young Assam”, was intended to form a complete course of elementary education for Assamese youths and was undertaken by Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan. Two numbers were published by subscriptions raised from the European officers, and the native community. The compiler hoped to publish the subsequent volumes by the proceeds arising from the sale of the published numbers; but that expectation had not been realised, partly owing to the inability of the Assamese to appreciate the merits of works relating to European literature and science, and in a great measure owing to the support of Government having been withheld. The series was intended to contain translations from the works of Peter Parley, Chambers’ educational Course and information for the people and other similar works. If there were every means of meeting the expenses of publication, either by the support of Government or otherwise, there would have been every prospect of all the village schools in Assam being supplied with a complete course of educational books within a very short time.  

In 1823, General Committee of Public Instruction was established for the development of the Indian languages. The Calcutta Book Society and the Serampore mission in the early part of the 19th century did a lot in Bengal for the spread of western education. In 1836, the American Baptist Missionaries for the spread of western

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381 Ibid, p. 56-57
education and thoughts. Nathan Brown, Oliver Cutter and Miles Bronson did their work in Sadiya, Joypur and the Naga Hills. Conversion was their main objective. In 1836, classrooms were organised in Sadiya. Gradually, more classrooms were confined to the Assamese society since there were great insecurity at the borders, and the climate of the Hills. Even Nathan Brown considered Assamese as a branch of Bengali at the first stage. The authorities were disheartened at the performance of these government Schools in Gowhati and Sibsagar. The reality was that there was a newness of topic, and Bengali was not their mother tongue (Bengali was the medium of instruction).

The Sadar Diwani Adalat Judge, A.J.M Mills put a historic petition before the Bengal Council of Education urging Assamese to be put in place by substituting Bengali. Mills emphasised that just as an English youth was not given education in Latin before he was well educated, so also Assamese children were not to be given education in a foreign language unlike the Bengali youths who were learning to read and write and basic elementary maths and only with the purpose of gaining employment. Mills accepted that, the opinion that the Assamese people should be able to understand Bengali and that all administrative works were to be done in Bengali, was a gross mistake. It was simply like playing with the cognitive powers of the Assamese people.

Father of Assamese Language, Miles Bronson presented a petition to Lat Bahadur of Bengal trying to rouse public opinion. Assamese was still the mother tongue of people there. It was still taught in the missionary schools and it had published books and dictionary. He wrote to Lt. Governor George Campbell-

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383 Ibid, p.3
384 Ibid, p.4
385 Assam Secretariat, File no. 47; Bernard, C to Chief Commissioner, 17 May, 1872.
"We failed when we tried to substitute the Mother tongue by imposing Bengali language. Even Bengali Teachers failed. Instead, they learn Assamese and apply it. When Bengali Textbooks are distributed in Villages, Village folks refrain from taking it, expressing their sheer inability to study them. It is opposite in the case of Assamese textbooks which they gladly receive."\(^{386}\)

The Foundation of modern education was at an incipient stage in Assam at that point of time. But, medium of instruction was mainly to be blamed for the delayed takeoff of education in Assam. Consolation could be taken in the context of at least those societies especially the Tribal societies of Assam, who were miles away from English education and were thus, at least successful in maintaining their indigenousness. The indigenousness, psyche and cognition were tampered with in the Assamese society.

Had it not been for the efforts of Brown and Bronson that Assamese language would not have achieved its independent status and George Campbell would not have acceded to their request. The Baptists laid stress on the English education even though they were votaries of Assamese language. They exhorted everyone to have English education if they wanted to excel themselves; if they wanted to learn trade, progressive system, politics, and also if they wanted to earn the respect of the people and also after acquiring knowledge, unite in the language of the region.\(^{387}\) Through Western education, thoughts and Christianity, the religious preacher thought that social evils, superstition and wrong beliefs and rites should be attacked and rationality should be given precedence over other things.\(^{388}\) In Orunudoi, Baptists wrote about Western Science and technical education. Baptists laid stress on female education. There were

\(^{386}\) Bengal Educational Proceedings, 1855, March no. 94; Bronson, 13 November 1854
\(^{388}\) Ibid, p.7
innumerable instances where they gave education to outcaste girls and those who wandered about. 389

Missionaries were against child Marriage, boidhbya, polygamy, Alcohol and opium. Baptists tried for the replacement of Bengali from Schools and courts. Sibsagar Baptist Mission published books and articles. Calcutta’s Asamiya Bhasa Unnayan Sadhini Sabha indirectly helped in the ushering of the Jonaki age. They tried for publication of books of Assamese children. From then on, stress was given to secular education and attention given to those textbooks devoid of religious flavour. Emphasis was given on free publication and distribution of child literature and numerous religious books. 390 Nathan Brown translated the new testament in 1847-48 and wrote Grammatical Notices of Assamese Language (1848) and Bronson’s Assamese English Dictionary (1867). These were the base or foundation of the Assamese language. Orunudoi’s regular writer, Nidhilevi translated Indian Penal Code and religious poetry. A.K Gurney completed “old Testament”. He inaugurated Novel literature in Assamese through “Kamini Kanta”. 391

Orunudoi mostly consisted of National and international news and new facts. Western thought aroused the younger generation. Mostly, articles were translations from English. Orunudoi was devoid of medieval outlook and religious discussion. Secularism and rationality took over their writings. According to Hem Chandra Goswami, lyric, sonnet, Biography, Novel, short story etc. of western literature came into vogue in Assamese literature. Assamese language and literature became well established and

389 Assam Mission : Papers and discussion of Jubilee Conference, Nowgong, 1886, p. 187 cited in ibid, p.8
390 Ibid, p. 9
391 Ibid, p. 11
took its turn towards modern direction only for brown and Bronson. Then, the upcoming intellectuals were aroused.\footnote{Ibid, p. 13}

Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan had contributed a lot for the reinstatement of the Assamese language. But, in order to rid ourselves of having an inflated notion of his contribution in the language issue, we need to have a serious look at the following facts. Then only, we would have a measured estimate of his contribution in the language issue.

Henry Hopkinson and Francis Jenkins, who were commissioners of Assam were staunch supporters of Bengali language. But, the Deputy Commissioners of Assam were supportive of the cause of Assamese.

The Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup, Major T. Lamb remarked-

"As Bengali became the language of the Courts, people thought that Bengali would be very important for them as well as their progenies. In market places etc. everyone speaks Assamese, because they do not understand nor speak any other language."\footnote{Assam Commissioner's Office File no. 471: Lamb Major T.}

Similarly, M.C. Boyd that language which is understood by common people should be used in the courts. Assamese should have replaced Bengali.\footnote{Assam Commissioner's Office File no. 471: Boyd, Captain, M.C., 5 June 1872} When there were no books or dictionaries in Assamese, use of Bengali was abolished. But, when both these were fulfilled, there could not be any need of Bengali. Assamese should have been used in schools.\footnote{Assam Commissioner's Office File no. 471: Philips, A.N, 21 May 1872}

William Robinson through a petition to Bengal Government urged it to establish a Provincial College since the exodus of Assamese students to Calcutta for Higher education was a matter of grave concern.\footnote{Assam Secretariat. File No. 507, 1862. Robinson to Commissioner, 4 October}
Henry Cotton was in favour of proper place of residence for the Assamese students in Calcutta. He was of the opinion that it was very important to break their mood of isolation. He thought that when they would be able to live in harmony with fellow students in Bengal, narrow mentality would be changed. He said just as people in Welsh were dependent upon England, likewise Assamese cannot exist without depending upon Bengal.  

The American Missionaries of Assam, like their worthy brethren of Serampore, had been the only jealous supporters of the Assamese language. The Reverend Dr. Nathan Brown and his wife Eliza, the Reverend Oliver T. Cutter and his wife Harriet, and the Reverend Dr. Miles Bronson were the first among the American Missionaries to have arrived and worked in Assam. Eventually, they became the first Christian writers and for that matter, the first modern writers also in Assamese language. They tried to proselytize among the Assamese as they, and not british missionaries were allowed to preach – but in vain.  

Unlike the British administrators, those Americans who came to the people themselves in a direct way, knew that Assamese was "a beautiful simple language differing in more respects from than agreeing with the Bengali " (as Brown told Mills). When the Government accepted Bengali as the official language and medium of instruction in Assam, they established two printing press in Assam in 1836 and also started publishing books in Assamese- a work taken up earlier by the British Baptists of Serampore near Calcutta under the leadership of the Reverend Dr. William Carey. They brought out from Sibsagar, a news journal in assamese in 1846, the Orunudoi, monthly paper, devoted to religion, science and general intelligence.

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397 Assam secretariat. Home - 1899: July Nos. 123-4, see Note by Chief Commissioner, p.3
398 (A Few remarks on the Assamese Language, etc. P. 56).
Ahoms thought that the language they spoke was unfit for spiritual advancement and on embracing tenets of Hinduism, adopted the speech of the conquered. No conquerors usually adopt speech of the conquered.\textsuperscript{399} Thus, the Ahoms set a precedent. The indigenous people of Assam from many centuries onward had been using their own language. So, when the British superimposed the Bengali language, initially it was unlikely that they had an inherent temperament to adopt an alien language. Perhaps the Assamese thought that, just like the Ahoms, their new conquerors also should not impose any new language on them.

There were several reasons that have tended to prevent any material divergence of speech between hindus of Assam and those of Bengal and Behar which may be stated as follows:\textsuperscript{400}

1. Original Language being fixed by written characters was not susceptible of rapid alteration.

2. Communication between two countries had been always maintained.

3. There had always been a large influx of settlers from Bengal and Behar into Assam, and their intercourse had doubtless, tended to preserve language from becoming unintelligible to each other.

4. The bonds of a common religion and of a common sacerdotal community had also been important in preventing any material divergence of language.

Mr. Mills, Mr Danforth and Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan, all agreed that Bengali was essential to Assamese and they recommended that it should only be taught

\textsuperscript{399} Assam Commissioner's Office (file No. 471), p. 2. Assam State Archives.

\textsuperscript{400} Assam Commissioner's Office (file No. 471), p. 3. Assam State Archives.
in Higher classes to complete vernacular education. The Inspector of Schools urged Sir Cecil Beadon that any attempt to improve Assamese must naturally tend to assimilate it still closer to Bengali until all trace of distinction between the two was lost. The Question was of easy of disposal. The supporters of Assamese urged it being taught in elementary rather than at higher classes where it was unsuited. 401

Mr. R Cornish, Assistant Commissioner, had his own experience limited to the three districts of Mymensingh, Goalpara and Kamrup. They formed three consecutive links in the chain connecting Assam, with the fountainhead of pure Bengali generally placed in the Nuddea district. If Bengal and Assam possessed languages really distinct, Mymensingh would certainly have belonged to the former and Kamrup to latter, while Goalpara with respect to its language, as well as its administration and physical aspect, would form a debatable land. There were in these districts many tribes of non Aryan extraction such as Garos, Cossyahs, Rabhas, Cacharees, Mikirs and others, who all possessed or have at one time possessed languages of their own totally distinct from Aryan languages of the Indian peninsula. There was also a considerable number of pure Bengalis and the remainder were so called Assamese, whose ethnological and philological reaction with Bengalis was so warmly disputed. Among these, the Koches largely preponderated. Amongst these races, language or dialect generally called Assamese was used as the Lingua Franca. In Kamrup, Kamroopie or Dhekeri had been prevalent which was different from that of Upper Assam. The language of each Assam District had been more or less affected by hill tribes who lived on its border, or had at some period swept across its surface. 402

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401 Assam Commissioner's Office (file No. 471), p. 4. Assam State Archives
402 Letter of Mr. R Cornish, Assistant Commissioner, dated 16/11/ 1872 . Assam State Archives.
For Courts and Schools of a higher grade a technical vocabulary and terminology was required, and there was the weak point in arguments for introduction of Assamese. Every definition in Penal Code and the whole of law terms were rendered in Bengali. It was a farce to try a man in Assamese and explain the charge recorded against him in Bengali.

Babu Chandra Mohan Goswami, Member of Asiatic Society of Bengal, Teacher, High School, Guwahati observed:

"In 1835, when Persian, which was the medium of correspondence with Provincial Courts and Sadar Court and Board of Revenue, was abolished and vernacular schools at the State cost were established, it became necessary to the Commissioner then in Charge of the province to decide the language in which the business of the court could be carried on and instruction in school given. The Officers found as many dialects prevailing in Assam then, as there were races and districts, and that there were no Assamese books fit for introduction in schools and that old Assamese manuscripts which have been discovered, were found to be written in a language in idioms and Grammar the same with that of Bengal, and they could not come to a more correct decision."

The sheer naivety on the part of officers could have been easily forgiven. Exigency of the situation was more to be blamed for the superimposition of Bengali rather than the British officials themselves.

Assam reconciled to Bengali language and many believed themselves to be immigrants from Bengal and even went so far as to adopt Bengali titular and family names, such as Datta. Whatever may have been the feelings of the Assamese then, there was a time when they considered it as an honour to be recognized as Bengalis. This

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403 Assam Commissioner's Office (file No. 471), p. 5. Assam State Archives
404 Assam Commissioner's Office (file No. 471), p. 7. Assam State Archives
405 Assam Commissioner's Office (file No. 471), p. 7. Assam State Archives
spirit of partiality towards Bengali was manifested by all classes of people up to year 1852, when it was suddenly changed by the influence of Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan, who was with a few friends submitted a memorial to Mr. Mills, Judge of late Sadar Court on deputation to Assam.  

Missionaries were inimical to everything that was brahminical, and had with unabated zeal tried to produce a vernacular literature by Vandalic mutilations and capricious exclusion of sacred Sanskrit words and bold inclusion of local Patois into written language. The other allies of Assamese language were the natives (only young men who have received an English education) of Upper Assam, and such of them who had settled themselves in Lower Assam, the people of Kamrup, Darrang and Gwalpara had not joined that movement. Assamese with a laudable patriotic zeal had joined the American Missionaries for attainment of same object, and had apparently forgotten their mutual differences in a common cause. Missionaries were desirous of having a language degraded to level of comprehension of masses, whereas the Assamese wanted to have the dialect of Upper Assam recognized as language of whole country.

When Hindus were subjected to a foreign rule and Sanskrit language was neglected and influence of Sastras had become lax, different systems of religion sprang into existence. Religious reformers desirous of addressing masses who were more susceptible of conversion to a new faith than the higher class, began to reduce their doctrines to writing in vernacular of country in which their field of action lay. This was

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the origin of vernacular literature on Bengal and the first book written in Bengali must have been on religion. No Book in Bengali on any other subject have had been discovered or have been written from time of Chaitanya, the great Vaishnav Reformer of Bengal and Sankar Dev, founder of Mahapurushiya sect, in Assam as had been stated by Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan. Madhab Deb appeared to have been among the earliest writers in Assamese language. Sankar Dev was a member of Vaishnab fraternity organised by Chaitanya in 15th Century. Missionaries and Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan represented Assamese language as distinct from Bengali and had taken no inconsiderable labour in reducing to writing Sanskrit and Assamese words as had been pronounced by natives.  

The course which Bengalis had adopted was to write ideographically. The difference between a language and a dialect consists in fixity of words in former and variableness of sounds of words in the latter. Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan did not know that no word could be phonetically represented in writing without a sign representing the sound of the word. The word ‘goil’ (to go) as pronounced in Upper Assam could never be represented by any combination of the letter of Sanskrit alphabet, it may have been represented as gol or gail but never in the form in which it was pronounced. Assamese did not appear to have any fixed rules of Orthography. The same word could have been written in different forms by two persons of the same district or by same person in two different places. 

One third population of Assam (excluding natives of Gowalpara, Kamrup, Darrang and non Aryan tribes of Plains and Hills) spoke Upper Assam Dialect, which

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408 Assam Commissioner’s Office (file No. 471), p. 10. Assam State Archives.
409 Assam Commissioner’s Office (file No. 471), p. 10. Assam State Archives.
again was subdivided into Sutia and Sibsagar dialects. Natives of Lower Assam would never accept it under compulsion. Even if Assamese had been accepted: they must have had either accepted the language of old Assam Manuscripts or form two languages, one in Upper Assam and one in Lower Assam. Whoever had observed the growth of the Bengali language have had marked its tendency of excluding local patois and of incorporating Sanskrit vocables which had given it almost an easy Sanskrit form except in Grammar. Same tendency had been perceived in Hindustani and there was no reason to suppose why Assamese would not have it.411

High or low condition of language is often measured by the number of ideas or different shades of same idea which gets clothed by words. In India, Court language could not and never had been language of the school. The former was intended for educated and an uneducated and therefore must partake of characters of dialects of these two classes whereas language of school was for those who were educated and for those who have had to be educated. The latter must have been always be a head of former.412

Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan was an exception, whose work in law was an ornament of Bengali literature and whose knowledge of English had commanded respect of Europeans, there was not a single instance of an Assamese capable of composing a decent letter in any language. Government wanted a much gradual approach. As long as Assam was under Government of Bengal, as long as its natives could not finish their education without repairing to Calcutta, as long as they could not remain ignorant of Bengal newspapers, by far the most potent instrument of education.

411 Assam Commissioner's Office (file No. 471), p. 16. Assam State Archives
412 Assam Commissioner's Office (file No. 471), p. 17. Assam State Archives
then, and as long as decision of High Court and laws must have been translated in Bengali Gazette, for which Government was not ready to make any provision for the Assamese and as long as they could not be blind to the sublimity of Vidyasagar and wit of Dutta, Assamese must have had to learn Bengali, and would have formed a part and parcel of Bengal. Major J. K. Graham, DC, Darrang observed that exclusion of Bengali was a great boon for only those who have had hopes of employment in courts.413

Introduction of Assamese in Courts- The difference between several dialects of Assam though considerable was not so radical that a native of one village would have failed to make himself understood by Assamese speaking races throughout the length and breadth of Valley from West Kamrup to Sadiya. With few exception, Bengali Law terms had been borrowed, almost literalization, from Persian and Arabic and the like process obtained in Assam. The advocates of Bengali presupposed a crystallized Bengali Language in a very remote period when what was Bengali then, had no fixed existence. 414

American Missionaries had reduced the village patois into a sort of separate language and they have had a dictionary and some books which were used in their schools, but the dialect of Somersetshire or Lancashire might be equally well written and called a different language to English.415

Bengali was sine qua non for all those who hoped one day to obtain employment under Government.416 Those who held that Assamese and Bengal were same had served in Bengal Proper and have had known the Bengali language “as spoken” before coming

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414 Assam Commissioner’s Office (file No. 471), p. 19. Assam State Archives
415 Letter no. 255, dtd 11 June 1872. From Major W.S. Clarke, DC, Lakhimpore. Assam State Archives
416 Letter No. 106-J, dtd 10 June 1872, From Capt. A.N. Phillips, Assistant Commissioner. Assam State Archives
to Assam. While those who held that province had a distinct language of its own were chiefly missionaries (America to Assam Directly) and military officials who before entering the Commission had a knowledge of Hindustani, but not of Bengali. If they had any knowledge of Bengali, it was the Bengali of books and not language of peasants.\(^{417}\)

Older books written in Assamese were translations from Sanskrit of the Mahabharata, Ramayana and Bhagabat, but these translations differed in no essential particulars from those in Bengali language. Modern Bengali books were written in a language suited to a class of people far more advanced in education than the people of Assam. For these latter, books written, if they were to be understood, must have been, and were written, if they were to be understood, must have been, and were written as nearly as possible in colloquial language of the country. So, it was not fair to compare modern Assamese writing with modern Bengali.\(^{418}\)

Dhekerie manifested a remarkable and marked superiority over Upper Assam dialect, as large majority of written works and all most approved publications together with sacred and religious writings of people of Assam were found to have been composed in it. The Upper Assam patois is comprehended by uneducated classes of Lower Assam with almost same amount of difficulty as Bengali. Assamese had written characters of their own resembling as Bengali characters do in many respects, Devanagari characters, used in Upper provinces of India.\(^{419}\) Even the Anti-Assamese lobby went to the extent of stating that all respectable persons, especially the gentry’s

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\(^{417}\) Letter No. 1824 dtd Gauhati. 30/01/1873 From-the Offg. Inspector of Schools, Assam Circle to Col. Hopkinson, Gov. General's Agent, North East Frontier and Commissioner of Assam. Assam State Archives.

\(^{418}\) Assam Commissioner’s Office (file No. 471), p.37. Assam State Archives

\(^{419}\) Assam Commissioner’s Office (file No. 471), p.39. Assam State Archives
class, of Assam had in fact migrated from Bengal. Even if we go by this argument that all respectable persons of Assam had migrated from Bengali, there was no rationale for the superimposition of Bengali over Assamese.\textsuperscript{420}

Besides, no reports were submitted from hill districts, as neither Bengali nor Assamese were spoken.\textsuperscript{421} Bengali was not entitled to least favour on ground of its supplying the Assamese with legal and technical equivalents which Assamese could not have supplied, for well nigh all equivalents of that kind which it possessed, had been borrowed (with a good deal more) from Persian and Arabic.\textsuperscript{422} Ideas transcend language. If some Arabic/ Persian terms were used in Bengali, then what was the taboo of using certain Bengali words in Assamese.

A Memorandum by R. C. Dutt, Asst. Magistrate and Collector, (24 Parganas) was submitted for ascertaining the degree of resemblance between Bengali and Assamese language—\textsuperscript{423}

a. Those which were Bengali words

b. Those which had corresponding Bengali words, difference being so slight that it was understood by Bengali.

c. Corresponding Bengali words, though form and spelling resemblance was faint that it was not understood by Bengali.

d. No Corresponding Bengali words, in form or spelling.

\textsuperscript{420} Assam Commissioner’s Office File No. 471. Pg. 40. Assam State Archives.

\textsuperscript{421} Assam Commissioner’s Office (file No. 471), p.44. Assam State Archives

\textsuperscript{422} Assam Commissioner’s Office (file No. 471), p.56. Assam State Archives

\textsuperscript{423} Assam Commissioner’s Office (file No. 471), p.59. Assam State Archives
American Baptist Missionaries stated that there were more than forty language and dialects which were spoken in Assam at that time. Half of these were languages of Hill tribe people.424

Col. Henry Hopkinson observed in 1873:425

“Had Christian mission first established in Assam happened to have been derived from a parent branch in Calcutta, instead of one in Burma, I doubt whether we should have ever heard of an Assamese language. Bengal mission was supposed to be already occupied when the American Baptist Mission Board sent its missionaries to the extreme frontier of Assam, among the Khamtis and the Singphos, to cooperate with their brethren in Burma. But country in that quarter was found too unsettling and missionaries asked and obtained leave from their Board to move a little down the river, and established themselves at Sibsagar, in honest belief that they were still among a race allied to Burmese and speaking a cognate tongue. If indeed this was not so, they had no business in Assam (an Offshoot from the Burmese Mission). If language of Assam could be confounded with that of Bengal, then exclusive control over most powerful of educational instruments was lost to them. Thus, at Sibsagar, they conceived and from Sibsagar, they promulgated the Assamese dogma, which was to extirpate the Bengali heresy and which was part of creed of Christian Churchman in Assam.”

American Baptist Mission wanted to propagate in Assamese i.e. language of the masses. But, they literally fought for the reinstatement only when it was officially proscribed by the Government. Had they decided to preach in any language other than the Assamese, there would not have been any reaction from their side for the reinstatement of the Assamese language.


When ethnologists were allowed to prove that the plains of Assam were settled from Bengal, it was explained that in Assam the Bengali had remained as it was when Bengalis brought it with them, while in Bengal itself it had been a progressive language. How was it that names of oldest places in Assam were not Assamese—Ganhatty, Nowgong, Joshatti, golaghat, Rungpore, Seebpore, Luckhimpore, Burpeta, Sonareegaon, etc. Anandaram was constrained to admit that education in Assam could not be completed without Bengali.426

Missionaries had endeavoured to make Assamese look as different from Bengali as possible by spelling the words as they were pronounced, thus destroying the whole science of language, and making it possible to trace not a word.427

In Assam, it was really Bengali disguised by admixture of some obscure provincial words common among the peasantry of Eastern Bengal Districts. Kamrup, Sylhet, Mymensingh and Rungpur appeared to have been inhabited by variety of mixed races of uncertain origin, which at earliest period, that history knows anything certain about them had to be converted to Hindu tenets and had adapted the language of Bengal, nor is there any tradition that they ever knew any other written language, or that whatever Bengali was introduced, it was superseded by any other. Whatever is the language of Mymensingh, Rungpur and Cooch Behar, is as far as history shows, language of Kamrup. Whatever name the language of Kamrup goes by was equally appropriate to language of Cooch Behar, Rungpur and Mymensingh. Musalmans did not change the language of Rungpur, nor did Kochs, though they got Cooch Behar to be called after them, Ahoms acted like the Koch in giving their name to the conquests, but


427 Assam Commissioner's Office (file No. 471), p.62. Assam State Archives
not their language, for it is certain that Assamese differed as much from the language then spoken in the province as English did Arabic. Probably, Mymensingh and Rungpur and Cooch Behar and Kamrup had always- their special provincialisms, and had them then, as different countries in England had. Kamrup owed much of its literary cultivation to number of "Vaidik Brahmans" brought from Sylhet by King Bissu in the fifteenth century, but department of Public affairs and Education appeared to have been in the hands of Brahmins long before that. In Kamrup, vaidik Brahmans and the five tribes of Bengali Brahmans, 100000 Kaibarths (the cultivating class of Bengal) and Doms and kalitahas and kochs or Rajbanshis made up pretty nearly whole Hindu population of Kamrup district (this trend is same in Mymensingh, Rangpur and Cooch Behar).428

Assamese was apparently a Tai dialect. This Tai dialect appeared to have been the language of the Court up to the time of repulse of Mir Jumlah, when Assamese first began to come under the Brahminical influences to which they soon entirely had succumbed. A large colony from Nuddea headed chiefly by Brahmins settled at Jorhat, and Denonath Sen related that the Santipur Goswamis, who subsequently reclaimed Assam Kings from apostacy came to Upper Assam about latter end of the fifteenth century. Buchanon said that conversion of Royal families seemed to have been accomplished by a Royal intrigue. As Assamese had conquered Mussulman, the woman and the Priest conquered them and soon Bengali Language became more and more common, until in the time of Rudra Singha, it was used on coin and in state affairs. The Date of earliest coin with a Bengali legend which came to Buchanon's possession was of 1721AD, when Rudra Singha accepted the guidance of Brahmin from Burdwan.429

428 Assam Commissioner's Office (file No. 471), p.86. Assam State Archives
429 Assam Commissioner's Office (file No. 471), p.87. Assam State Archives
Conclusions of Assam Commissioner’s Office (file No. 471).  

a. Identity of the language spoken in Lower Assam with that of Eastern Bengal dist (esp. Rangpur)

b. Upper Assam- Assamese superseded their own language, which was a language belonging to the Tai Family) by Bengali in purest and most cultivated form known at time of their acquiring from Bengal Brahmins, their chief instructors being members of Santipur brotherhood.

c. Assamese, which government admit differs as much from language now spoken by people in Assam, as English from Arabic, has become a dead language.

The late officiating Commissioner, Colonel Haughton, formally recommended that Assamese should be made the language of the Courts. Colonel Haughton’s recommendation was not approved by the Government of Bengal. But, all civil officers serving in Assam were compelled to pass in Assamese, just as Bengal officers had to pass in Bengali, or North Western Provinces officers in Hindustani. Memorials from different parts of Assam had been presented to the Lieutenant Governor upon this subject; and he had himself held in other parts of India that the vernacular of a people ought not to be elbowed out of a country in favour of another language, which happened to be the vernacular of a neighbouring, more numerous and more educated people. The tendency of the Government of India and of the legislation of late years had been to permit the vernacular of each province to be used in its courts. The facts and memorials of the bygone years had shown that the Assamese language was still the vernacular of

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430 Assam Commissioner’s Office (file No. 471), p.88. Assam State Archives
the people. Accordingly, Lieutenant Governor, Sir George Campbell, caused a thorough
enquiry about the matter to be made through the Commissioner of Assam. He referred
inter alia particularly and very significantly to the fact of the existence of a dictionary
of the Assamese language—very clearly the Reverend Bronson’s one (1867), with its
two very appealing prefaces in Assamese and English. The Commissioner, who himself
was an advocate of the retention of Bengali in the Assamese schools and courts, sent up
to Calcutta the field reports of all the Deputy Commissioners and some of the
experienced Sub divisional officers of the valley districts of Assam. These papers
showed to the lieutenant Governor that the majority of these officers, with larger
experience in the province than others, were in favour of Assamese. The Lieutenant
Governor came to the inevitable conclusion “that the people of Assam do not
understand Bengali, and that the petitions written in their name and the court
proceedings were unintelligible to them, while the majority of Assamese wished to have
their own language for educational and court purposes. It would have been abundantly
clear from that the Authorities were not moved till there was a popular agitation, and
that this agitation took shape quite some time after Phukan’s efforts and even the
recommendations of Mills in that regard were wasted on the Government. The Baptist
Associates of Phukan now held the line of this agitation in their hands. In fact, the
commissioner, Colonel Henry Hopkinson, makes specific reference in his letter, dated
11 December 1873, written to the Director of Public Instruction, to “the Sibsagar
Missionaries to whom we are chiefly indebted for the agitation in favour of the creation
of the Assamese language.” 431

431 Neog, Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan, p. 49
The Lieutenant Governor considered it imperative that Assamese must then be introduced into all courts and schools of the valley districts of Assam. His orders were applicable to all the primary schools, middle schools and lower middle classes of higher schools but with certain limitations. The Commissioner of Assam was directed on 9 April 1873 to take very early steps to give effect to these orders of the Government in the five valley districts. Thus and thus the order in Assam’s educational and judicial fields, for which Anandaram worked so diligently, came about at long last.  

432 Neog, Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan. P. 51