CHAPTER 2

Negotiating a New Narrative: Moving from tradition to modernity.

In the trajectory of women’s writing, there is a vast difference in content, structure and style between the first generation women writers and the 21st century women writers. This difference is not sudden but gradual. This has culminated into the present form by passing through numerous social, political and literary movements and upheavals. This is the transition from tradition to modernity. The first problem encountered by early women writers must have been the language itself. In using the language created by male experience and perspective, the female writers had to face numerous difficulties. It not only curtails and compromises the genuineness of feminine feeling and experience; but also forces to conform to the have masculine view of the world. Even when women attempt to write about female subjectivity, they unwittingly present it from the male perspective. For example, Kate Millett writes in her book *Sexual Politics* that “before the reader is shunted through the relatively uncharted, often even hypothetical territory which lies before him, it is perhaps only fair he be equipped with some general notion of the terrain” (Millett xi). Millett failed to break the matrix created by the male perspective although she was advocating the female cause and women’s emancipation and sexual politics in epoch making her book. Nizara Hazarika rightly points out: “Women’s position and their cultural contributions may be historically acclaimed as a separate category but such a claim is tenuous as women have internalized patriarchal values over a long period of subjugation” (N. Hazarika 30).
R. A Scott James writing about ‘the first critic’ undoubtedly assumes the critic as a male when he says ‘that the first imaginatively inspired person was not he who thus drew, but he who first detected in the careless drawing a resemblance to life.” (Scott-James 18) The language employed by James is an androcentric language, which he uses to describe the androcentric creative process. As Simone de Beauvoir rightly says, “The world has always belonged to males, and none of the reasons given for this have ever seemed sufficient.” (Beauvoir, The Second Sex 73) Since the knowledge of the world and its stories are constructed mostly by male, it is bound to give a male version of the world. Beauvoir traces the locus of the androcentricism into the physiological superiority of men over women. Citing history, she maintains that the strength and endurance of female courage is no less extraordinary from their male counterpart, however, quite ironically, the reproductive strength has actually rendered them weak and vulnerable:

In any case, as robust as women may have been at that time, the burdens of reproduction represented for them a severe handicap in the fight against a hostile world: Amazons were said to mutilate their breasts, which meant that at least during the period of their warrior lives they rejected maternity. As for ordinary women, pregnancy, giving birth and menstruation diminished their work capacity and condemned them to long periods of impotence; to defend themselves and their children, they needed the protection of warriors and the catch from hunting and fishing provided by the males (Beauvoir, The Second Sex 74).

Verily, literature is the true reflection of our society. Such traditions percolate down through human consciousness and find reflection in the literature. One can see this kind of instances in the North-East India too. Lieno’s mother tells her daughter,
in the novel *A Terrible Matriarchy*, that men has specific works different from women- “In the old days, women were expected to do those works as well...in fact, they pushed their men to go to war.” (E. Iralu, *A Terrible Matriarchy* 274). Thus from the very beginning the role of the woman has remained limited, whereas the man serves the species, and “creates shapes on the face of the earth, creates new instruments, invents and forges the future.” (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 76) Consequently, owing to biological and economic necessities, the male has occupied the supreme position since antiquity. Given this, the man has come to embody everything that the woman is not. Therefore, the man starts conceiving the world in its duality, and the woman as the ‘Other’ who is limited to ‘sedentary existence’ in the words of Beauvoir. Women have been revered for her fertility powers and her capacity to reproduce. Although there is no literature to ascertain the role of women or the power they have occupied once, Beauvoir maintains that:

> Great patriarchal periods conserve in their mythology, monuments and traditions the memory of times when women occupied very high positions.

> From a feminine point of view, the Brahman period is a regression from that of Rig-Veda, and the latter a regression from the primitive stage that preceded it... These facts all lead to the supposition that in primitive times a veritable reign of women existed...But in reality this golden age of Woman is only a myth (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 82).

> Beauvoir further maintains that since woman is the ‘Other’, she has never been the peer to man, and is outside the reciprocity in a society that is predominantly male empowered to hold the political reigns. In matter of no time, myths have been constructed to justify this subordination of woman in the society. One such use of interesting myth can be seen in the novel *A Grain of Wheat* by Ngugi Wa Thiong’o. A
particular tribe in Kenya has the myth that the land of Agikuyu has been ruled by the women for many years. The uncertainty of the time as “many many years ago” like once upon a time gives it a distant mythical touch allowing the listeners to believe in the possibility of the situation. The myth goes thus:

Men had no property, they were only there to serve the whims and needs of the women. Those were hard years. So they waited for women to go to war, they plotted a revolt, taking an oath of secrecy to keep them bound each to each in the common pursuit of freedom. They would sleep with all the women at once, for didn’t they know the heroines would return hungry for love and relaxation? Fate did the rest; women were pregnant; the takeover met with little resistance (Thiong’o 11).

The creation of such myth resists any inquiry that may have been raised in that primitive society and the women has taken their secondary and subjugated roles unquestioningly thereby submitting themselves completely to the male jurisprudence. Beauvoir’s research has led to revelations that the women did not share the same status or fate in different societies. On the contrary, some societies have offered better position to women and others negligible. In some societies women have been treated like cattle where the husband imposes domestic divinities on her solely for the reason that by maintaining her fidelity to him, by being a chaste and virgin, she will preserve the purity of bloodline. Whereas, the Koran claims man to be superior to woman, the Jewish society allows men to be polygamous (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 95). The polygamous society in Persia has granted a better position to the women, and so did the Hammurabi’s code in Babylonia. Beauvoir also states the fact that the Egyptian women have enjoyed a privileged status; whereas, the Greek women have been semi-slaves. Last but not the least, she states, “Roman woman of the decline is typical of
false emancipation, possessing in a world, where men are still the only masters, nothing but empty freedom: she is free “for nothing” (Beauvoir, *Since the French Revolution* 106). This has been the universal condition of women all over the world, and although a momentary or exceptional case of empowerment cannot be ruled out, yet that can neither be the representative case. Under such circumstances, the huge body of knowledge that preserves the legacy of the world history is undoubtedly androcentric. R. A. Scott-James identifies two types of literature from the early times: literature of knowledge and literature of power; one is for didactic purpose and the other one exists solely for aesthetic purpose. Both these types of literatures have been produced by the male.

The literature thus produced has presented the women through the lens of male imagination. A woman in imaginative literature has been constructed as an object, rather a sexual object; and the didactic literature has always been misogynistic in its delineation of the fair sex. For instance, in Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, one finds Pygmalion falling in love with the statue, his own creation. The physical feature of the statue is symbolic of the desire of man who seeks sexual gratification. The objectification of the female is to be seen in many other classical works. Marlow continues the tradition. The moment Faustus says: “Was this the face that launch’d a thousand ships, And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?” (Act V, Scene I, Lines 99-100) (Marlow 146), he invokes the Homeric world in the 16th century, only to reinforce the idea that the beauty of women has been the cause of Trojan War. Such misogynistic idea not only prevails in the imaginative literature, but is also a core to the didactic literature like the *Bible* and the *Quran* and the *Manusmritos*. 
At a time when India has been reeling under the Mughal rule, and the women have been meted out with the worst form of subjugation in Hindu society, the entry of the British has brought a lease of fresh air. As early as 1790, Charles grant has written a treatise called *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic subjects of Great Britain, Particularly in the Respect of Morals and on the Means of Improving it*, where he “charged the Hindus with dishonesty, corruption, fraud, mutual hatred and distrust, and described their customs such as *Sati* as barbarous” (Ghosh 14). His objective has been to promote the western education, the science and religion which has been through periods of purgation and hence better than those of the Hindus, in India.

Soon Macaulay also came with his most acerbic attack on the ‘native literature of India and Arabia’ of which he has but no knowledge, except for sporadic ideas completely ignoring the allegorical perspectives of the symbolisms employed in such literatures. Macaulay observes that the Indian texts are so ridiculous that “medical doctrines … would disgrace and English farrier, astronomy …would move laughter in girls at an English boarding house”, such ridiculous history abounds in kings thirty feet high and reigns thirty thousand years long, and such geography which talks of seas of treacle and seas of butter (Ghosh 32). Further, the existing vices against the women in the Indian society like child marriage, female infanticide, female genital mutilation, dowry etc made the English cause much stronger. Gradually, through education, modernism has started making its way into Indian life, and quite sooner the new spirit of nationalism has completely produced a new discourse, which has given a new imagination to writers like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Sarat Chandra Chattarjee to conceive the women in a new paradigm.
Education since then has become a contagious process where one woman is inspired by the other. Kamala Visweswaran begins her *Small Speeches, Subaltern gender: Nationalist Ideology and its Historiography*, with a quotation of one captain. The lady gets inspired after listening to the captain and expresses her wish to speak like the speaker. A similar situation has prevailed in the cause of women’s education: After all, are not the Indians good imitators? When the woman of one household participates in the education, the women of other households too start taking instances from it. And with the final approval of Mahatma Gandhi, there have been no regression. Women have come out of their homes in hordes. Such stamina and vigor have taken the nation by storm. Nehru writes in *Discovery of India*, that even Motilal Nehru did not have the courage to stop the women from going to the streets after seeing their passion (Nehru 31). Among many things that triggered the cause of women’s emancipation, three things have played pivotal roles: British administration¹, English Education and National Movement. The last being chiefly responsible for many national policy formulations encouraging the emancipation of women, in which the role of Nehru is certainly undeniable. His views and opinions are catalytic in bringing this change as can be evinced from his book *Discovery of India*.

Therefore, English education system coupled with the nationalist movement became catalectic in bringing out the women from the narrow confines of domestic life to the outside world. This facilitated women to have a firsthand experience not only of the freedom struggle but also they started forming a definite identity of their own. Meeta Deka writes in this connection that:

In Post-Independence period, British colonial legacy perpetuated the subordination of women through caste and class hierarchy at several levels.
However, some educated middle-class women of the colonial period may be seen as catalytic agents of change who tried to break free from the shackles of patriarchy, particularly by venting their ideas through literary works, if not entirely through practice (M. Deka xv).

However, this journey has not been easy. Although education facilitated the growth of a liberal outlook, there were raised eyebrows that saw women’s education as profane. This is also the reason why the Assam Primary Education Act of 1926 was not successful despite of being made compulsory. Women’s education did not become a mass movement and only a few privileged had the opportunity to go to school or to learn at home sunder male supervision. One of the reasons for the failure to make education for women compulsory was that western culture and education was seen as evil and also a challenge to the traditional way of life of Assamese people. However, it made its way at a snail pace and it is not surprising that most of the novelists in English from North-east India are female. A bilingual reader will at once discern the difference in content and approach to women question as addressed by novelists writing in English and Assamese. The novelists writing in English are more liberal and modern in outlook from the very start; however, the Assamese writers did not challenge the patriarchal setup during their early ventures. But in the present century even Assamese women writers like Manikantala Bhattacharjee and Anuradha Sharma Pujari have changed their approach and content in addressing the women question. The negotiation between tradition and modernity has not happened in a single day, but over a period of years and the English education system and English literature have played an important role in this.
2.1: Emergence of English language and Literature in India and North-east India.

The inroads mapped by English language and literature had not been a cakewalk for its initiators. The reason for this had been that on one hand the set of cultural standards that were recognized as modern and indispenisible for progress in India were at the same time considered alien and detrimental for the distinctiveness of national identity. To use the words of Partha Chattarjee, “It is both imitative and hostile to the model it imitates… It is imitative in that it accepts the value of standards set by the alien culture. But it also involves a rejection…” (P. Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World 2). Whereas, English education and literature broadened and liberalized the outlook of the Indians, it also fractured the age-old culture and traditions of the Indians. This is why even after Independence there had been attempts to oust English language from its official position and replace it with Hindi. But this had not been possible on several grounds. Due to the diversity of linguistic and racial groups in India, Hindi became unacceptable in many regions in India and the government was forced to reinstate English into associate official language. Therefore, it is an undeniable fact that English language provided leverage to the women’s emancipation by affecting the very structure of the society. The new education system and the new literature not only questioned the atrocities committed against women, but it also helped the Indian women to look forward to the European women as their model. As women started to read and write, it also gave them the courage to think outside the rigid enclosures of patriarchy. Thus, the journey of English education and
its history is crucial in understanding the female voices in North-east writings in English.

Aparna Mahanta in her book *Journey of Assamese Women* mentions that it was considered a taboo for women to read books; whereas, reading and writing was the sole privilege of the men: “This view has become so deeply embedded in the Assamese social psyche that even today women and members of the non-learned castes find it difficult to accept education” (Mahanta 148). Under this circumstance, the acceptance of modern education system and the spread of English in Assamese society in particular have brought tremendous changes in social setup, and public consciousness. It will be very pertinent to consider the role played by English language in India and its subsequent effect in Assamese society. In India, English is more often than not the second language in many states and the honour of first language is occupied by the ‘regional’ languages.

According to the 1971 census nearly two hundred thousand Indians use English as their mother tongue. Besides, quite a few Indian States and Union Territories, viz., Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Sikkim, have adopted English as the official language…… The Sahitya Academy of India recognizes English as one of the Indian languages (T. Baruah 4).

The status of English in India as a second or a foreign language is debatable; nevertheless, it enjoys the privilege of being an associate official language along with Hindi in Devnagari script.

The language has entered India with the advent of British in India. At first it is the language of the Traders, then the language of Ruler and eventually and partially it
has become the preferred language of the ruled. With the effort of the Christian Missionaries, English has been taught in the missionary schools in some parts of India. After the Battle of Plassey, the British traders turned rulers have started two institutions i.e. Aliya (Calcutta) Madrassah in 1781 and Benares Sanskrit College in 1791 with provision of teaching English (Ghosh 11). In 1813 when the charter of the East India Company has been renewed the educational clause is added to it. Eventually the demand for teaching of English has grown which resulted in the establishment of Hindu College in 1817 by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Radhakanta Deb and David Hare, followed by Serampore College in 1818 and the Bishop’s College in 1820 by the missionaries (Ghosh 26). The foothold of English is further strengthened by the famous *Minute* of Thomas Babington Macaulay in 1835 and Charles Wood’s *Despatch* in 1854. Whereas, Macaulay emphasizes the proliferation of western learning through the medium of English language in India; Wood recommends the medium of instruction to be English in Higher Education (Wood). The next hundred years has witnessed the mushrooming of English medium schools meant for the upper class and middle class people, whereas the vernaculars have been relegated to the lower class people.

The strategic introduction of English in Indian Education system has made a very deep impact on the religious, social and political scenario in India. Whereas, there has been debate regarding the introduction of English by replacing the vernaculars; there are other scholars who continue their debate to trace the agenda behind introduction of this language.

The question of introduction of English in India has arisen due to the vagueness of the Clause 43 of The Charter Act of 1813. Whereas the Charter Act of
1813 has emphasized the ‘revival and improvement of Literature’, ‘the encouragement of the learned natives of India’, and ‘the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of sciences among the inhabitants of the British Territories of India’, it did not specify the methods to achieve this end and which has eventually given rise to the Anglicist Occultist Controversy in India as pointed out by Ram Nath Sharma and Rajendra Kumar Sharma (Sharma and Sharma 80). The Anglicists emphasize the use of English Language and the Occultists or Orientalists emphasize the use of Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian. Of this situation leading to a controversy regarding the appropriate medium of disseminating knowledge, Meenakshi Mukherjee cites a satirical piece that has been published in the *Bangadarshan*, a Bangla Periodical, following the Visit of Prince of Wales in 1875:

> From Sir William Jones upto Max Mueller, many Orientalist scholars tell us that there is a language in India called Sanskrit. But after coming here I have not heard a single person speak that language, nor seen anyone write it. Therefore I do not believe in the existence of this language. The whole thing is likely to be a trick played on us by Messers Jones and the rest who have invented this language to acquire respectability for themselves (Mukherjee, *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English* 1).

Whereas the initial discourse generated by the Charter Act 1813 has centered round the use of Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian language; later on this has been sidelined and Sanskrit and other Languages stopped staking claims as other regional/local languages took their position to contest the spreading influence of English. In Bengal and its surrounding areas, it has been Bangla and in Maharashtra and its surrounding areas it is Marathi. Bangla has tried to cast its influence in Assam
and Odisha as well and tried to subterfuge the languages like Assamese and Odiya as dialects. This has met with violent protest. In this connection British Acharya in his paper titled ‘The Linguistic Movement in the 19th Century Orissa’ observes:

In the Orissan division, comprising Cuttack, Puri, Balasore of the Bengal Presidency, Bengali was perceived as a threat to Oriya. The Orissa intelligentsia suspected that their language would be displaced by Bengali as the medium in schools as well as the language in the court and offices. The main basis of their fear was one small book, *Odiya Ekti Bhasa Naye*, written by one school teacher, Kanti Chandra Bhattacharya, in Balasore in 1872. The book argued that, Oriya was not a language, but a variant of Bengali. Adoption of Bengali as the official language was in the interest of Utkal, Rajendralal Mitra, a scholar from Calcutta argued in a lecture in Cuttack in 1865. In all government offices the lower level officials were Bengali speaking, who strongly advocated for replacing Oriya with Bengali. ‘In case of any job vacancy, they would try to bring their own men. There was not a single Oriya person working in the public works and postal department” (Acharya).

The threat posed by Kanti Chandra Bhattacharya by claiming that Odiya is not a language is also similar to the crisis created by some Bengali Clerks who claimed that Assamese is not a language but only a dialect. The American Baptist Missionaries has played a vital role in reinstating Assamese language its actual place (Bharali 55). One can see the internal conflict among Indian languages taking place in India during the 19th century. This language politics played an important role in the transformation of the society and public consciousness in many ways. Firstly, Bengali language and literature and then British literature with its sense of Victorian morality has shaped the
imagination of the educated class of Assamese people. However it is interesting to note that Macaulay in his Minute did not argue against the languages spoken in India at that time, but solely targeted Sanskrit and Arabic to be replaced with English. One may well assume his intention in doing so. There has always been a possibility that if Sanskrit is promoted throughout the country then the religious instructions in that language will also get a proper channel to be circulated among the Indians in each and every corner of the country, the British ambition of “divide and rule policy will fail”. This will also mean that the culture along with the language Sanskrit might work as a unifying force that may in future give the nation and its people a common platform and a unified strength to stand against its oppressors. It is only by unification and by creating a homogenous culture and language, one can counter the opponent; however if the opponent is divided on the basis of language and culture, it is easy to control the fragmented and isolated clusters which becomes more obverse of the British policies in India.

But this has also led to the catch-22 situation for the British because in restricting the promotion of Sanskrit text (which have been deeply steeped into religious teachings) due to its religious contents; the Missionaries have failed to directly promote the Christian theological texts. Gauri Viswanathan in her research article The Beginnings of English Literary Study in British India discusses the problem faced by the British due the contradictory nature of a certain clause in the charter Act of 1813 which has restricted the religious (Bible) and scriptural teaching: “In keeping with the government policy of religious neutrality, the Bible was proscribed and religious teaching forbidden” (Viswanathan 36). Although India has been open to the Missionaries, the restriction imposed by the English Parliament thwarted their
evangelistic purposes. Thus, the British interest in educating the Indians and the entry of the missionaries has become opposing forces which remained reconciled until Macaulay has came to the rescue with his own theory of the inadequate and poor Sanskrit and Persian literature.

As the British has conspired that in educating the Indians in their native tongues involves a risk of promoting the religious texts in those languages because those texts have been intrinsically related to the moral and religious tenets of the Hindus and Muslims; and in educating them in such text will certainly endanger the firm foothold of the British rule in India, they should at best promote only English Literature. Conversely, to undo the effect of the restriction imposed on Missionary work, they have adopted another policy for promoting English Literature which has been impregnated with Christian teaching. Gauri Viswanathan points out that the early British Indian curriculum in English has been devoted to language studies, but with the insistence of the Christian missionaries the secular nature of these literature has come to be opposed by citing the reason that “texts read as a form of secular knowledge were ‘a sea in which the voyager has to expect shipwreck’… and that they could not be relied on to exert a beneficial effect upon the moral condition of society in general” (Viswanathan 47). This gives the ground to the British to argue that just to study English for language skills requires a sense of high moral and mental cultivation and which the Indians lacked. The Indians who, according to the British, has no sense of moral law, the literature will appear indifferent to the virtue. This will lead the Indians to question the moral law and deviate from the dictates of those laws. However, this argument does not validate the induction of Christian moral principals in the form of Bible and religious scriptures to educate the Indians mentally and
morally. They have to devise an alternate means for propagating Christian teachings other than direct religious preaching. This task has been accomplished by Macaulay and his brother-in-law Charles Trevelyan in identifying the literary texts which are thoroughly diffused with Christian teaching. As Gauri Viswanathan observes:

The process of curricular selection was marked by weighty pronouncements of the ‘Sound Protestant Bible principles’ in Shakespeare, the ‘strain of serious piety’ in Addison’s Spectator papers, the ‘scriptural morality’ of Bacon and Locke, the ‘devout sentiment’ of Abercrombie, the noble ‘Christian sentiments’ in Adam Smith’s Moral Sentiments (hailed as the best authority for the true science of morals which English Literature could supply) (Viswanathan 86).

Thus the British, systematically and strategically, replaces the Sanskrit and Persian by English Literature which has helped to create a future generation of people who will be less resistant and aversive to English Culture.

Language and Literature have always influenced the common people at large and one shall also see the emasculating effect of English language in the entire North-east region of India later. Has the case been made for Sanskrit instead of English it shall have played a vital role in the unification of the diverse communities of India. But the policy of the British has fractured the religious or cultural bonding by injecting an alien and foreign language and literature. One becomes more tolerant to a religion and culture when it is promoted through a literature and language; and gradually one becomes accustomed to it often accepting even the contradictions and the opposing forces that challenge the recipients’ culture and religion. Antonio Gramsci rightly points out in his *Prison Notebooks* that a hegemonic apparatus
achieves its rule through the ingenious combination of force and consent. Gauri Viswanathan proves this point by citing Antonio Gramsci:

One of the great lessons taught by Gramsci … is that cultural domination operates by consent, indeed often preceding conquest by force. ‘The supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways’, he writes in the Prison Notebooks, ‘as “domination” and as “intellectual and moral leadership”’. … It seems clear …. That there can, and indeed must be hegemonic activity even before the rise of power, and that one should not count only on the material force which power gives in order to exercise an effective leadership (Viswanathan 1).

The British has used the policy of public consensus to neutralise any attempt to oppose the long term agenda of converting the intellectuals of India to adopt the British policies. Tejaswani Niranjana also holds a similar view while making her assessment of the translation practice adopted by the British in India: “What is at stake here is the representation of the colonized, who need to be produced in such a manner as to justify colonial domination, and to beg for the English book by themselves”. (Niranjana, *Siting Translation* 2) And this is the end which has been desired by the British Administration as evident from one of its publication as cited by Gauri Viswanathan: “If we lay it down as our rule to teach only what the natives are willing to make national, viz., what they will freely learn, we shall be able by degrees to teach them all we know ourselves, without any risk of offending their prejudice” (Viswanathan 41).

Under these circumstances, English has started replacing Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian gradually and the former has become the language of the elite class too. It is
by principle; the human beings thrive to move upward, i.e. to become better and superior to their previous positions in their lives. The lower class or the middle class soon looks forward to educate their children in the language preferred by the elite class for whom knowing or speaking English has become a status symbol. To this day one can experience the hangover. But this is not done straight way, as English did not replace the dominant Indian languages directly. Initially the British have sponsored the local languages because for Macaulay, local languages pose no threat, as instead of unification it will play the role of divisions and differences that will make the Indian nation fragmented. On reading the Minute of Macaulay, one can see the inherent contradictions that betray the feigned purpose of introducing English Language. For the sake of convenience, it will be worthwhile to quote at length some parts of the passage and then make an analysis of the statements that will serve our purpose to deconstruct the real intention behind the introduction of English language:

All parties seem to be agreed on one point, that the dialects commonly spoken among the natives of this part of India contain neither Literary nor scientific information, and are, moreover, so poor and rude that, until they are enriched from some other quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them... We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. (Company).

In the beginning Macaulay starts, as pointed out by Meenakshi Mukherjee, by replacing “logic by an assumption of universal logic”. The identity of ‘all parties’ are clearly shrouded in mystery as much as the actual intention of introducing the language itself. His initial contention has been that the language is sparsely equipped,
rude and poor and hence it cannot be the carrier of Western Knowledge and Scientific Education unless being improved by the aura of English language. Such hilarious observation not only demonstrates his ignorance of the Vedic texts but also exemplifies his prejudice against the culture, language and religion of a Nation. He has claimed in the Minute that not only the language but also the literature is so poor that half a shelf of European Library is much better than the entire gamut of Sanskrit and Persian literature. Macaulay claims that the Orientalists too have agreed to his claim; however who those orientalists are, are never named. Macaulay further considers that the other languages that have existed in India are dialects of Sanskrit and hence from his earlier presumption of Sanskrit being poor, it can be said that the other languages must have been in the worst state. Is it not ironical then that the Missionaries have attempted to revive these languages instead of Sanskrit? Or is it a tactic to replace Sanskrit so that English can take its place and become the common unifying language of India.

If the entire nation speaks English, then the native subjects will first learn English and to learn it one has to read the Literature written in that Language. While learning the literature, not just randomly but as a strategic move, the curriculum that has been designed for educating the Indians at that time is undoubtedly a selection made by the Eurocentric rulers to mould and homogenize the mindset of the educated Indians. In her Essay ‘Fixing English: Nation, Language Subject’ Rajeswari Sunder Rajan has cited that researchers like “Chris Baldick, Gauri Viswanathan and Franklin Court have disclosed the multiple purposes that the study of English Literature was intended to serve, both in England and the colonies, in terms of social reform and social control” (Rajan 8). According to Rajan, the official introduction of English in
India is preceded by another crucial episode in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, i.e. by the consolidation of a vast recognisable body of English literature as a project of Imperialism and impelled by British Nationalism. In this connection, Meenakshi Mukherjee warns the critics of the pitfalls if they are to assume that the English has made a “unilateral cultural conquest”; and she dismisses the category ‘total conquest’ created by D. R. Nagaraj. (Mukherjee, The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English 3). Meenakshi Mukherjee limiting herself to the genre of the Novel maintains that the history of the novel in India shows the complex negotiations between colonial education and its resistant impulses.

The politics of introducing the English Language and literature in Indian soil has not been a reformation policy but a colonial transformation project. However, this has not only affected the politics and education in India, but it has also affected the literatures, particularly the genre ‘novel’.

Continuing with the position of English in India, it is seen that immediately after the Independence, English as the language of the rulers has been dethroned and Devnagari script is offered as the national language and English is declared as an associate language for 15 years, i.e. until 1965. But this change in the language diplomacy has ignited severe oppositions from several quarters especially from the South India. Thereafter the parliament has passed an act in 1963 for making English an associate official language for an indefinite period: “the Indian constitution has declared that English can also be used for official purposes” (Daniel)

The reinstating of the English language is an evidence of the impact of the language which has penetrated the hearts of the Indians. In a nation of regional and linguistic disparity, English has worked as a unifying force. However, quite ironically,
the seed of the language has been firmly planted by Macaulay and its roots are running deep. The 1971 census of India reveals that there are 380 languages or dialects and English is playing the role of a link language in India. To quote K. Satchidanandan:

> English is the state language of some of the Indian states in the North-East; it is our associate official language and the chief link language for not only international but even inter-regional communication… Salman Rushdie’s Aurora Zogoiby (Moor’s Last Sigh) was not far wrong when he said, “Only English brings us together” (Satchidanandan 19).

English has been declared as the official Language in the North Eastern states except Sikkim, Assam, Manipur and Tripura. Nevertheless, its use has not been restricted, and it is freely used for official and educational purposes. Although the early history tells us that importance has been given to Assamese language by the East India Company to educate the inhabitants; it has been done solely for the sake of converting the population. As Umesh Deka points out:

> …the aforesaid British Missionaries took literature to be the best medium for their religious propagation. They were convinced that there was no other alternative beneficiary agent for the propagation of Christianity among the local people than literature and to fulfil their aims they accepted prose as the medium of literature (U. Deka 2).

However, it has helped in the educational and social development. English has been introduced in North-East India after the annexation of Assam in 1826. The first English School has been opened at Guwahati in 1835 (H.K.Barpujari 105). Although there have been schools and colleges, Assam lagged far behind as compared to the
eastern, northern and southern India. Assam has got its first University in 1948. Since then there have been much changes in the education scenario. In this duration there have been tremendous achievements made by the students and scholars. Initially English has been only a subject, but with the mushrooming of Convent/ Missionary Schools and Private schools, English became the medium of instruction.

The prose literature which has crystallized in Assam during the 16th Century needed a little push and effort to adapt the novel as a new genre of representing the social reality. The early trends of fiction writing have been in vernacular languages and mostly consisted of translation from English or Bengali novels for the purpose of spreading Christian propaganda (U. Deka 2). It can be asserted that the British policy has been that- the people in accepting the religion will eventually accept the language one day too and vice versa. The Missionary Journal Orunodai which has been launched in 1846 soon started publishing stories and texts related to Christian themes. In the year 1851 John Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress has been translated to Assamese and published in series as Jatrikar Jatra (U. Deka 2). This has also laid the foundation of a new genre in Assamese literature which we call novel. As Satyendra Nath Sarma points out in this context that “by translating their allegorical story the missionaries have provided the key to the way of the full length story or novel” (S. N. Sarma 35). It will be noteworthy to mention the fact that the genre of novel has developed in India in general and Assam in particular by taking the English canonical texts and Western Classics as a role model.
Rise of the Novel in India and Assam.

The development of Novel as a form of narrative in Europe has been different from that of its development in India. Meenakshi Mukherjee has stated that Kadambari or Panchatantra are pre-novel narratives and all such tales have a ‘once-upon-a time’ ambience; the novel, on the other hand, has employed realism to view concrete human reality which are bounded by historical and geographical co-ordinates (Mukherjee, Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India. 5). However, it has to be noted that realism did not mean looking life from the seamy side but as Ian Watt says “the novel's realism does not reside in the kind of life it presents, but in the way it presents it” (Watt 10). Mukherjee has further stated that the novel has been produced only “in a specific environment in a particular society at a given point of history” (Mukherjee, Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India. 5) There can be no denying of the fact that the Indian novel has been directly influenced by the western novel although C.D Narasimhaiah contests it in The Rise of the Indian Novel. Narasimhaiah has traced the origin of narrative in India to Jataka Tales, Panchatantra, the Epics etc, but as Milan Kundera pointed out in his The Curtain that Fielding has preferred to give a new name to his narrative than to identify it with a novel brings home the fact that a new form had emerged, as distinguished from the old-romance, with a definite structure which is quite different from its predecessors. According to Ian Watt a comparison between the novel and other literary forms that has existed till 18th century will reveal that Defoe and Richardson did not borrow their plots from mythology or history or legend or previous literature. They have invented something new, which is required of a new social structure in an urban industrial environment under the backdrop of the rising middle class and the reading public.
Thus the spread of education among the masses is also one of the influencing factors as acknowledged by Meenakshi Mukherjee as well. In the Indian context too, Meenakshi Mukherjee critically reviews the circumstance:

A whole new world became available to educated Indians in the middle of the nineteenth century through their study of English literature. The society represented in the novels of Scott, Dickens and Thackeray was very different from the society Indians knew and lived in (Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India*. 6).

The novel is rather implanted artificially in the beginning, which Sisir Kumar Das envisages as a social necessity. Sisir Kumar Das locates its inception in India as an instrument of Propaganda of social and religious ideologies by the British (S. K. Das, *A History of Indian Literature 1800-1910* 114) Early works which have been claimed by critics as Novel include *Phulmani O Karunar Bibaran* (1852) written in Bengali by H. Catherine Mullens, *Aitihasik Upanyas* (1857) in Bengali by Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, *Yamuna Paryatan* (1857) in Marathi by Baba Padamanaji, and *Alaler Gharer Dulal* (1858) in Bengali by Pyarichand Mitra. Whereas *Phulmoni* and *Yamuna Paryatan* extol the virtue of Christian religion with a propagandist mission, *Aitihasik Upanyas* has been based on Reverend Hobart Caunter’s work *Romance of History* (1836) which draws heavily on historical events relating to the life of Shivaji and Aurangzeb (only the second episode). *Aitihasik Upanyas* has been considered as the first historical novel penned by an Indian (S. K. Das, *A History of Indian Literature 1800-1910* 116). Among all these four works which have been labeled as novels, only Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay consciously uses the word *upanyas* (novel) for his work although his work is not modeled on European novels as argued by Meenakshi
Notwithstanding this fact, the conscious effort of writing novel has begun with Bankim who not only produced the first Indian novel in English, but also changed the face of Bengali literature by introducing the new genre of fiction. In other languages too, the novel has started almost simultaneously as cited by Meenakshi Mukherjee. The direct impact of English novel in Indian literary scenario can be seen in an introduction to a historical romance in Gujarati language by Nandshankar Tuljashankar Mehta in 1868— “The former education inspector of our state (Surat) Mr. Ruseel has expressed to me his desire to see Gujarati books written along the lines of English novels and romances. I have written this novel according to that plan” (Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India*).”

Whereas in Europe novel has developed out of a circumstantial necessity; in India, it has been transplanted artificially and it its initial development is only in the form of an imitative art. Milan Kundera in his book *The Curtain* discusses the development of novel since the time when the name ‘novel’ has not been in vague. To quote Kundra:

> From the sociological viewpoint, the history of an art has no meaning in itself but is a part of society’s whole history, like the history of its clothing, its funeral, its marriage rituals, its sports or its marriage celebrations. That is roughly how the novel is discussed in the Diderot and d’Alembert encyclopedia (1751-72)... Rabelais and Cervantes. That the encyclopedist did not cite either of them is no shock. Rabelais hardly worried about whether he was a novelist or not, and Cervantes believed he was writing a sarcastic epilogue to the fantastical literature of the previous period; neither saw himself as “a founder”. It was only in retrospect, over time, that the practice of the art of the novel assigned them the role. And it did so not because they
were the first to write novels (there were many other novelists before Cervantes), but because their works made clear-better than the others had-the raison d’être of this new epic art.; because for the successors the works represented the first great novelistic values; and only when people began to see the novel as having a value-a specific value, an aesthetic value-could novels in their successions be seen as history (Kundera 5-6).

Two questions are to be asked now while discussing the novel in the context of North-east India. Where do we place the growth and development of novel in this history of novel as a whole? And secondly, what is the raison d’être of novel in the context of North-east India? Whereas in European context, novel has grown out of natural circumstances as pointed out by Kundera; in the case of North-east India, it has been a given ‘something’. The novel is a form of borrowed European art which the Indians have been trying to emulate. Whether this implanted art form has taken much time to acclimatize into the new environment or rather the Indians have taken time to adjust their writing skills to this new form of art is debatable. Critics in Europe have been busy investigating the root of the novel after Fielding has given it a more composite form6 and located its germination in writers like Cervantes and Rabelais; in the case of Assam, critics are reluctant to consider the prose styles of Hemchandra Baruah and some of his contemporary writers because those did not conform to the more crystallized European aspects of novel.

The initial development of the novel form in Assam and North East India has been only through the translation of texts from English and other Indian languages to Assamese. After Jatrikar-Jatra, novels like Alokeshi-Bessyar Visay (1877) by Miss. M.E Lesley, Phulmani Aru Karuna by Garney and Kaminikantar-Charitra (1877) by
Garney was published (U. Deka 3). Since the purpose of these novels has been to popularize Christianity among the people of Assam, its primary objective is to establish the supremacy of Christianity over other religions. Apart from the missionaries’ effort to propagate Christianity through the artistic genre which has not still crystallized at that time, another prominent author Hemchandra Baruah’s Bahire-Rang-Sang Bhitare Kowabhatura (1876) made its appearance although critics are reluctant to categorize it as a Novel. In 1884 Padmavati Devi Phukanani’s novel Sudharmar Upakhayan has been published which deals with the effects of virtuous and non-virtuous deeds in one’s life. According to Umesh Deka “the growth and development of Assamese novel, in the true sense of the term took place during the romantic period of Assamese literature” (U. Deka 5). Novels like Bhanumati (1890) by Padmanath Gohain Baruah, Padum Kunwari (1981) by Lakshminath Bezbaruah has provided impetus to the future novelists like Rajani Kanta Bardalai to shape the genre. However another influencing factor is also the litterateurs of the Bengal. If Sir Walter Scott has influenced the Assamese youth in the art of novel; the influence of Bankim Chandra Chattarjee is no less significant among the educated youth who have been in Kolkata for higher studies at that time. In this connection Umesh Deka cites Maheswar Neog’s comment on the influence of an Assamese monthly journal named Jonaki (1889) which has been published from Kolkata:

As a direct literary adventure of the educated youths, the Jonaki brought out a strong literary revolution both in form and spirit and bridged over the gulf between the East and the West. It absorbed freely and consciously the form and the spirit of the western, especially the English literature with an eye on the established Bengali authors and assimilated them in a way that is unique
and modern. The Jonaki has been the most synthesizing and modernizing influence in our literature (U. Deka 6).

Although the art of novel writing started in Assam as a part of the effort of the Missionaries to make Christianity familiar to the masses, later on it has started acquiring its own function of representing the social reality but in the form of Historical Novels which can be another area of research and many scholars have done substantial research work in that area. However, briefly citing the inception of the genre in the North East region one can safely conclude that although English Education has been introduced in Assam much early with the establishment of Guwahati Seminary\(^8\) (At present Cotton Collegiate Higher Secondary School) yet the writings in English appears very late. Initially a vast gamut of rich indigenous works including oral literatures in vernaculars have been translated into English and much later, writers have started taking interest in writing in English language. Tilottoma Misra observes in this connection:

After the introduction of print culture into the region during the colonial times, collecting, re-telling, and printing the folklore of the different communities became an important part of the colonial ethnographic agenda of mapping the region for more effective administrative control over the bewildering variety of races that the British encountered here. P.R.T Gordon, J. Shakespeare, T.C. Hodson, Major A. Playfair, J.P. Mill, Sidney Endle, and many other colonial ethnographers had collected, translated, and printed a rich body of folklore material, the latest in line being the valuable additions made by Verrier Elwin in the post-independence period (Aier xvii)

It has to be noted that initially all the novels in Assam have been written in the Assamese language for several decades. The practice of writing in English comes very
late in Assam and in the North-eastern states unlike the rest of India. Whereas in the Indian context as Meenakshi Mukherjee observes:

Within about twenty-five years after the passing of the Educational Minutes of 1835 which made English the official language of higher education in India, the new narrative form called the novel began to emerge, first in Bangla and Marathi (renamed Upanyas and Kadambari, respectively) to be followed soon after in Hindi, Urdu, Tamil and Malayalam (Mukherjee, The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English 8).

But it is not alone in the Indian languages that the novel form flourished in India. There have been efforts simultaneously by the same writers to write it in English. Thus, in 1864 appears the first Indian English novel Rajmohan’s Wife by a twenty-six year old Deputy Magistrate, Bankim Chandra Chattarjee/ Chattopadhaya posted in Khulna District (Bengal Presidency) (Mukherjee, The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English 30). There are other writers like Lal Bihari Day (Govinda Samanta published, 1874), Soshee Chunder Dutta and K.K. Sinha (The Star of Skiri, 1893 and Sanjogita or The Princess of Aryavarta, 1903) who have written in English as well. However, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s Bangla novels overshadows his English novel; and similarly other writers writing in English has also reverted back to their mother tongues gradually. The usual consensus has been that the mother tongue or the first language is the best medium of expression. Meenakshi Mukherjee argues that the popular belief that mother tongue is the natural vehicle of personal self-expression can be repudiated on the ground that eminent Bengali writers like Bankim though discarded English as the medium of creative writing in favour of their mother tongue, yet much of the personal correspondence of these writers have
continued in English. She cites from the letter written by Michael Modhusudhan Dutta to his friend Gourdas Basak:

Can’t you send me a copy of the Bengali translation of the Mahabhrut by Cassidos as well as a ditto of the Ramayana --- Serempore Edition. I am losing my Bengali faster than I can mention. Won’t you oblige me, old friend, eh, Gour Das Bysack? (Mukherjee, *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English* 10).

One may not agree with Meenakshi Mukherjee’s thesis on the use of language because the language of the conversation cited above is not only affected and artificial but also acknowledges the pronunciation of the British who transcribe the Bengali names according to their convenience of pronunciation. This was how the Basak became Bysack in English with expression like ‘eh’. Further this can also be argued that the correspondence of personal letter is one thing and the medium of creative writing is another. The language of both the genres varies in the degree because of its employment of rhetoric and technical aspects of novel writing. Thus the first use of English has been as a language of translation and then as a language of non-fictional prose writing in the Indian context as well as the North-east Indian Context.

In Assam, Anandaram Dhekial Phukan’s *A few remarks on Assamese language*⁹ (1855) and Raja Rammohan Roy’s *A Defense of Hindu Theism*¹⁰ (1817) are two valuable prose documents both exemplifying the skill in handling the English language which also asserted the need of such a discourse at the national level. It is ironical that both these documents have been written in a foreign language but to lay claim of Assamese Language and Hindu religion. These write-ups have been targeted not for the Educated Indians in general but for the British rulers in particular.
The novels written both in English and in vernacular languages in India have been influenced by the European novels; and therefore this form of writing is practiced by writers who have had the knowledge of English or have been educated:

The early novelists in ‘vernacular’ and the novelists in English belonged to roughly the same social segment across the country—upper-caste urban Hindu male (women like Swarnakumari Debi or Krupa Satthianadhan were rare exceptions) and must have read the same English books—both canonical and popular (Mukherjee, *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English* 18).

This is why the novels written both in English and vernacular languages reflect their knowledge of European literature. Whereas Lal Behari Dey refers to Latin text in his English novel mentioned above (Mukherjee, *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English* 5), O. Chandu Menon acknowledges this debt gratefully (Mukherjee, *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English* 11).

Whereas Indian English fiction has appeared as early as the 19th Century, in the North-east India is a very late appearance. In the beginning it has been done only through translation from English to Assamese, as discussed earlier. Various agencies and also individual effort by translators made the translation of Assamese literature into English possible. Renowned works like Homen Borgohai’s *Halodhiya Choriye Bawdhan Khaye*, Sayed Abdul Mallik’s *Aghori Atmar Kahini (Tales of a Nomadic Soul)*, stories and novels by Mamon Raisomi Goswami and Hitesh Deka have either been translated by the authors themselves, or by the effort of Sahitya Akademi or individual effort; however much remains to be translated. Gradually translation has been replaced by original writings. Since the trend of writing in English in North-east
India is not very old, it is yet to mature to experiment with the various techniques of writing.

The first work of fiction in English in North-east India is perhaps Arup Dutta’s short novel *The Kaziranga Trail*. Although the book is meant for children, yet it contains valuable social message for the adult society. As Assam is the house of the one horned rhino, time and again the endangered species has undergone the threats of poaching that resulted in an alarming decrease in population. The book has given a fictional account of three youths who undertake the onus to protect the endangered species by helping the district forest officer in nabbing the poachers. Thus it is a thrilling read for the children. The book also contains a strong message to protect the invaluable national asset.


2.2 The New Genre and portrayal of women in India.

The image of women in Indian English Fiction is a complex one as there have been multiple factors operating behind it. Firstly, the depiction of woman in Indian fiction is to a large extent influenced by the ancient Indian culture; Secondly, the novel in India has been to a large extent influenced by the British literature and society; Thirdly, the changing role of woman in Europe in the wake of modernization and nationalism no more restricts women to the conventional gender role assigned to her; and therefore the influence of such women can also be seen amongst the writers in India; and last but not the least, the Anglo-Indian writers have created an image of Indian women from their limited knowledge of women they have known as Meena Shirwadkar puts it, “The few Indian women they came to know were either the rich, the Westernized and the Christianised women or the servant women, the ayahs and the native women taken up as mistresses” (Shirwadkar 7). Thus all these factors have cast a profound influence among the Indian novelists which shapes the image of women in Indian English fiction as well as fiction in other Indian languages. Shirwadkar rightly remarks that the image of Indian women has been dimly conceived by these authors because the male vision fails to penetrate the secluded world of female sub-culture.

Since literature is the reflection of a society, the portrayal of woman in a particular image is done because of the existent culture of that time in that society. In ancient India, during the Vedic age, the women were held in high esteem and they received proper education as pointed out by eminent historian Kiran Chandra Chaudhury in his book History of Ancient India. He has observed that women rose to
such eminence because of the education system. And some women have been considered as great scholars in *sastras* during that contemporary world- “Women like Visvavara, Gosha and Apala were experts in sastras and composed hymns and verses and belonged to the rank of seers” (Chaudhuri 47). During pre-Vedic times as well, women were known to have taken part in religious activities as cited by Ramachandran and Rajkumar (Ramachandran and Ramkumar 15-18). Whereas, during Vedic times they have been allowed to have primary education in Vedic Studies, most of the training centered round household tasks and seldom are they sent away to *gurukulas* to receive education. Although women were allowed to receive education, that education was limited by many constraints. In case of marriage, Chaudhuri points the fact that women were allowed to choose their husbands through *Swayamvara*\(^2\) and they enjoyed the privilege of widow remarriage. However, paradoxical to such privileges certain restrictions existed at that time and in the due course these inherent drawback into the social system has retrograded the status of women into an inferior position. Chaudhury as well as Reena Patel have observed that people desired larger number of male children than female. Patel points out:

> From ancient times, hindu society has preferred the birth of a son to a daughter. The Gods are invoked through hymns, to grant sons to the bride…During the marriage ceremony, the prayer of the bride groom is to Indra\(^3\), to grant his bride 10 sons. Ceremonies such as Garbhadhana\(^4\) ceremonies reveal the keen desire of ancient Aryans to have a male offspring, and medicinal herbs were given to the pregnant women in order to conceive a male child (Patel 76-77).

Such elaborate arrangements to have a male child expose the limitations of a society and the plight of women. Further, women have not been seen as independent
by the law. They have been considered subservient to man and have to be dependent on their parents before marriage and on their husbands after marriage (Chaudhuri 47). Moreover, what appears to be a Swayamvara is actually a choice given by the father of the bride because he actually invites a circle of candidates and the girl only places a garland on the one she desires to be best among them. Alex Michaels points out that “the episode of ‘Nala and Damayanti’ in the Mahabharata is famous, but even there, the bride is given to the bridegroom by the father, after she has chosen him herself (Michaels 113).” This dependency has made the fact clear that women are not economically independent, because the trade and business are carried out by the men mostly. Since the material world has been controlled by the men, it gives them complete control over the female. The other world too, i.e. the spiritual world has also been controlled by the male members of the Hindu society. The guards of the spiritual world have been the Brahmin priests who conducted the rituals. The Brahmin priests are consecrated by the sacramental rites symbolized by the sacred thread. The sacred threads can only be worn by the male members and that has to be initiated through elaborate rituals by senior priests. Once the material and spiritual worlds come under the sway of the male domination, all kinds of laws and rights are manipulated in favour of the male; thereby denigrating the position of the female. Such male hegemony to control the society along with decision-making rights has made it inevitable for the parents to desire for a male progeny. Moreover, the family line or name is carried forward by the male child as the female has to be wedded away and to be given in marriage. This is also one of the reasons that polygamy has been allowed to the male members of the society, so that they can maintain the purity of bloodline. Suresh Chandra Ghosh observes that “Kulinism, originally, intended to maintain the
purity of blood line of the higher classes, had degenerated into child marriage and polygamy” (Ghosh 13). Further investigations also reveal the fact that women were treated as commodities who were used for male consumption. Critiquing the Hindu marriage, Alex observes that three forms of marriages have been prevalent- the Brahmanic marriage where a dowry is demanded, the Ksatriyas can win a wife, and the common people have to buy a wife\textsuperscript{15} (Michaels 113) . These three different forms has one commonality- that is, the wife is a commodity, which is either a burden so a penalty had to be paid; or a prize to be own; or a useful commodity to be purchased. And as such a man can have more than one prize which makes polygamy legal. The Post-Vedic period sees the decline in the rights and privileges of women further in 250 B.C under the influence of Manu. Early marriage of girls which have existed earlier, have been made mandatory and Brahmin men are prohibited from marrying girls older than 12 years (Ramachandran and Ramkumar 16-17). Such have been the superstitious belief that the marriage of the girls are equaled to the initiation of Vedic studies and their household duties are considered equal to Brahmacharya period and as good as performing religious duties (Ramachandran and Ramkumar 17). Under these circumstances, the women are naturally involved in the household drudgeries and are deprived form formal education or training which makes them completely dependent on their husbands throughout their lives. Thus women have been deprived of education for almost 2000 years in India.

The condition of women further worsened during the Gupta period with increasing severity and restrictions imposed on them by the Smriti\textsuperscript{16} laws. One positive change noticeable during the Gupta period is that women are granted rights of property as prominent historians like K.C Chaudhuri and Sailendra Nath Sen point
out- “… a change was noticeable during this period when Katyayana recognises women’s right to her property” (S. N. Sen 238). But property rights did not ensure equal status to women, because the individuality of women is secondary in a social and familial setup. Chaudhury points out that according to Vatsayana, self-restraint and service to the household are considered as the only qualities of a virtuous woman:

She ministers to the comforts of her husband at table, attends religious festivals, observes fast along with him. She serves her father-in-law and mother-in-law and obeys their commands. All these qualities remain as the hallmark of Hindu wives down to the present day (Chaudhuri 288).

In doing so, she sacrifices her individuality for the honour of the family. The dilution of individual identity has therefore created new conditions wherein the female starts identifying her existence with the existence of a family under patriarchal social setup. In her Ancient Indian Social History, Romila Thapar also observes that “the patriarchal system tended to keep the status of women at a low level, and the emergence of the joint family with special property rights for the male members reinforced male dominance” (Thapar 32)

During the Gupta Age, severe restrictions have been imposed on the females. Not only widow remarriage has been forbidden, sati system 17 is highly praised. On one hand, the caste and pious women are seen as ideal women; on the other hand, the Devdasis or female courtesans also existed to satiate the male hunger. These opposite images of good and bad have existed simultaneously in the society and both these traditions exposed the hypocrisy of a chauvinistic patriarchal society.

However, there have been exceptions as stated by Megasthenes. He has observed that some women have the knowledge of Vedic texts, which otherwise is
denied to women: “Brahmans do not communicate a knowledge of philosophy to their wives” (Chaudhuri 344). Chaudhuri points out that Megasthenes also mentioned the Satavahana Queen Nayanika, Queen Prabhavati Gupta, daughter of Chandragupta II, and Princess Vijayabhhattarika who have been politically powerful enough to hold important positions on the kingdom. But, such women are already in an advantageous position and their condition does not ensure the similar position to the common women at that time. On the contrary, the social set up only proved beneficial to men, and the women existed as subordinates to men because there are no know restrictions on men like Purdha or veil, sati and monogamy as these have been only applicable women. Thus, the condition of women has further worsened by the 19th century than that of Vedic times. In Assam too the scenario has been no better, as Aparna Mahanta points out: “Certainly in pre-modern Assam, women were denied all scope for education or even allowed to touch the hand written manuscripts containing the religions and literary writings called “puthis” (books) which were carefully and reverently stored in “dhowa change” (smoke platforms hanging over fireplaces) (Mahanta 148)”. Centuries of subjugation and domination has taken a toll on the all round aspect of women and all these gets highlighted in the new genre that appeared in the latter half of the 19th Century.

*Rajmohon’s Wife (1864)*, considered to be the first Indian English novel, has been undoubtedly fashioned on the western art of novel writing. The style, subject matter and form are unprecedented in any literatures available in India. It not only renders a realistic representation of the middle class life in East Bengal, but also for the first time deals with domesticity and contemporary society with a female as the protagonist. Choosing a female as the protagonist is a very calculated move at that
point of time because of several reasons. Firstly, the female education has been gaining ground and so it naturally sees the growth of female readers. But it is also true that at point of time there have not been many Indians who could read English, and the targeted audience should have been the British, as suggested by Meenakshi Mukherjee, because at times the writer has attempted to explain some cultural details about which a non-Bengali reader might not be aware of. Secondly, since the novel penetrates the domestic life, it is focused on the role of women in the making of a family. The family is the most important unit in an Indian society and the joint-family system has been still strong until the concept of modern nuclear family has been imported from the west. However, Bankim’s intentions need to be evaluated. Whether he wants to support the changing social scenario of women empowerment through education and freedom from the domesticity, or the reverse of it by sending a warning to the readers about the threats of such life? This should be found out by analyzing his novels.

Makarand Paranjape calls it a national allegory and tries to conflate the character of Matangini (Rajmohon’s wife) with that of the Nation and other characters with the various sections of the society. However Paranjape fails to justify the death of Matangini- “History does not say how her life terminated, but it is known that she died an early death” (B. C. Chatterjee 125)- and the intention of Bankim in doing so. On the other hand, if one takes into account that Bankim has portrayed Matangini as an unconventional woman who is independent in her will and who undermines social taboos and restrictions then we might see the justification in her death brought about by the consequences of her own action. As discussed earlier, the Indian society is patriarchal in nature where male chauvinism proscribes women to be independent and
bold. Under no circumstances she is allowed to cross the threshold and her only identity is to be somebody’s daughter or sister or wife. This perhaps is the reason why Bankim chooses to name the novel as Rajmohon’s Wife instead of Matangini. It recounts a time when India has been changing, modernism is being imported from the west, women are being educated and encouraged to take part in the nationalist movements. Nevertheless the path has been demarcated and the patriarchal society is not yet ready to see a female independent of male signature. As Jasbir Jain says, “The construction of female identity in India was based first on her status- married, unmarried or widow; then on her conduct- virtuous, chaste or loose and flirtatious, and finally on her role- wife, daughter, or mother” (Jain, Feminising political Discourse: Women and the Novel in India 64).

Hence the death of Matangini is required in order to give the message to the readers that she has violated the sanctity of family by daring to venture the forbidden path of loving her brother-in-law and revolting against her cruel husband. It will be worth mentioning here that individualism in case of women has been yet unknown in India and any attempt by the writer to uphold it will be a dent into the social structure and hence be rejected outright by the reading public. Rajmohan’s Wife is the only novel that Bankim has written in English finally turning to Bengali as the viable medium of his creative genius. However, the other novels like Kapala Kundala, Indira, Debi Chaudhurani, Rajni, Durgeshnandini and Mrinalini also deal with the issue of women. In Indian society the women have been seen either as good or bad. The good woman is one who conforms to the social conventions as a dutiful daughter and virtuous wife; and anyone deviant from the social convention has no place in the society. The Hindu structured society had fixed roles assigned to a woman and she is
expected to behave in acceptable manner. There is no place for extra-marital affairs for the female and love and romance have been social taboos. Although the European novels has had plenty of love and romance figured in them, the Indian writers cannot not fit it within the conventional Hindu structured society because child marriages left no scope for love and romance before marriage. Hence, any portrayal of love or extra-marital affair has to be invested outside the scope of Hindu religion. Therefore, Luftun-Nissa who is the first wife of Naba Kumar in the novel Kapal Kundala, can only fall in love with her husband in her disguise and after conversion to Islam. On the other hand, Naba Kumar’s second wife and savior Kapala Kundala marries Naba without knowing what it means. However, she cannot love Naba Kumar and neither can she bear the restraints of the married life. The most convenient end for her is death which will not dislodge the traditional Hindu society. The society is so parochial that it has been conscious of the chastity and fidelity of the women, but rarely applies the same to the men folk. So it is not surprising that Naba Kumar can marry again and yet being loved by the first wife. The novelist at this point seems to advocate the male polygamy in Indian society.

Another fact to be noted in this regard is that the family plays a very important role. It guards the female from outer threats and since the female is not an individual entity but one with the family- the onus of protecting her naturally falls on the family members. Kapala Kundala is an orphan and has no family to protect her, and even after marriage she cannot not belong to the family of Naba Kumar. Bankim’s next novel Indira also deals with the position of women in a contemporary society. Bankim’s heroines are intelligent, brave, and resourceful; however they had to be subservient to the men. They have the qualities of Shakespeare’s heroine like Portia
or Miranda, but they are wives and daughters in a Hindu structured society. In *Indira* it becomes evident when Indira knowingly overlooks the shortcomings of her husband, which otherwise if been found in herself will have resulted in social rejection. While going to her husband’s home, Indira has been robbed by dacoits and she ends up working as a servant at a lawyer’s household in Kolkata. She can neither return to her father’s home nor to her husband’s abode because of social stigma associated with such instances. It has been assumed on prejudice that the highwaymen will not only rob the valuables but will also taint the chastity of the women. Therefore she devises a stratagem to woo her husband back but as a lover. However, after she seduces her husband and succeeds in securing his love, she raises some vital questions on the hypocrisy of the patriarchal Indian society:

I am happy, but I can’t think very highly of him. I know there is nothing wrong in what I am doing because he is my husband, but he does not know that I am his wife. How can I respect a man who agrees so easily to have a secret appointment with another man’s wife?” (Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India*. 73)

Indira, has had no choice but to accept her husband. She cannot be like Nora in *A Doll’s House* to find her own identity in the society; on the contrary a woman’s identity is linked to the family name which she has to take after marriage. She is therefore left with no other choice but to accept her husband the way he is. She accepts the fact – ‘what are we but slaves?’ (Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India*. 74). The orthodoxy of the novelist, conditioned by the traditional Hindu society, has become visible because he is reluctant to break that social matrix. Whatever modernity or individuality has been injected by the British is
treated gingerly because it will otherwise topsy-turvy the social order and upset the entire family setup. Therefore, modernity is allowed in thought but not in action and it did not ensure the freedom of women from patriarchal subjugation. Despite of all the charisma, a woman has to be under the protection of a male be it in India or any other nation in the world. This claim can be substantiated by citing an example from the award winning film Titanic directed and produced by James Cameron. In one of the scenes in the movie, when the female protagonist Rose seems to fall in love with Jack Dawson, a man belonging to a much lower class and position in the society than Rose herself, her mother, Ruth, rebukes her and warns her to be discrete in choosing her husband. She wants her daughter to marry the rich and affluent Cal because they have been going through pernicious financial conditions and debts. The only way to ensure a secured life is by marrying a rich man like Cal. Economic security and social position become more important than love and passion which Rose feels is unfair. But her mother retorts to it by saying, “Of course it’s unfair! We’re women. Our choices are never easy.” (Ruth)

Choices are there, but a woman is expected to choose a financially secured life by being subjugated to a man and by adjusting with someone, whom she cannot love. However, Rose makes her final choice by choosing love over wealth.

In the Indian scenario, the space for pre-nuptial love cannot not be created within the patriarchal social structure. The marriage is not seen as the marriage between two individuals but as the marriage between two families where the female has to live within the identity of the newly acquired family. This new family has no space for individuality. Therefore, the novelist artistically contrives a woman to be only in love with her husband. However erring the husband might be, it did not
matter; his fault will be over looked because he is a male as we see in Indira; on the other hand a women cannot be seen in that light by any stretch of imagination. She has to please her husband by all means. We see Asha taking instructions on life from her aunt- "Everyone doesn’t have the power to please everyone, my child. If a wife serves her husband and performs her household duties with heartfelt devotion, care and respect, then even if the husband spurns her offering, God Himself would stoop to accept it." (Tagore, Chokher Bali 202). The husband is always placed on the pedestal of divinity and is compared to a demi-god, and it is the religion of the wife to follow her husband unquestioningly. The novelist informs the reader by giving example of a society which conforms to the patriarchal rules; a society where a virtuous woman is to be rewarded with a good family and a bad woman is to be punished with death as in the case of Matangini in Rajmohan’s Wife. This is so much so internalized that the female readers too sympathize with that sensibility without question. For Indira to be accepted by the husband, the family and the readers from the Indian society, it has become necessary for the author to introduce a scene which will vouchsafe Indira’s chastity. Jasbir Jain mentions in this context- “There is an analysis of the social situation. Acceptability is rendered more realistic by the fact that the dacoits have been captured and are on record of having stated that Indira’s chastity has not been violated” (Jain, Feminising political Discourse: Women and the Novel in India 76).

However it is ironical that the reader’s moral curiosity needed a satisfaction without questioning or raising doubt on the alibi of a dacoit. It is because the purpose of the novelist is to provide an instance of an honourable and obedient wife who will at all times remain faithful to her husband. The novelist is setting a trend in literature
by conforming to the position of women rendered by a Hindu structured society. The new genre has validated the subjugation of women in Indian society.
2.3 *Refashioning women in the literature of North-east India: The traditional versus modern.*

There has been a great change in the theme and the approach to the representation of women in fiction in the literature from North-East India. Initially novels from this region have been produced in Assamese language by literary stalwarts like Rajani Kanta Bardalai, Lakshminath Bezbaroa, Bina Barua (Birinchi Kumar Barua), Sayed Abdul Malik, and Mamani Raisom Goswami to name a few. Since the arrival of Bina Barua, the trend of the novel in Assam has been social realism, as Umesh Deka points out, “the new trend of novel with social problems was initiated by Bina Barua. Based on the conflict between the highest and the lowest class of society and composed against the background of rural life Bina Barua’s *Jiwanar Batat* is the first and most successful product of the post-war Assamese novel” (U. Deka 28). The stage of social realism has been occupied by the Assamese writers mostly, as the educated and the elite alike, from Assam and Arunachal Pradesh made Assamese language the veritable medium of their creative expression. Although Lakshminath Bezbaroa has also written about social issues and the women’s cause, it has been taken to a new height by Bina Barua and further by Indira Goswami who has addressed the problems faced by widows in India. Whereas Juri Dutta, in her book *Ethnic Worlds in Select Indian Fiction*, has analyzed the representation of the tribal world in the Assamese novels; Nizara Hazarika analyses the change in writing trend and representation of women by the emerging writers against the backdrop of growing nationalism during the struggle for India’s independence from a post-colonial perspective in her book *Colonial Assam and Women’s Writing*. 
However, the challenge has been to represent the social realism and women’s issue by women writers in a language (English language) which is foreign to the soil: A language that lacks in the contours and shades of emotion and expression required for appropriate reproduction in letters. Precisely, the novelists have not appropriated the English language for the use to convey the locale of Assam. The earliest attempt is therefore made in the field of children fiction as already mentioned in the beginning of the chapter.

But presently with the spread of English language, the stage is now shared by many upcoming writers who feel at ease to express themselves in English. In the early Assamese literature one has seen women are being portrayed in a stereotyped image who are always crushed by patriarchal dominance in the context of Assam. In the context of North-east India, one can see the same in the works of Mitra Phukan, Easterine Kire Iralu, Anjum Hasan, Jahnavi Baruah and Uddipana Goswami. The 21st century novel has seen the different shades in the portrayal of female characters both by male and female writers. From a society where the wives are living under the patriarchal banner (in case of The Collector’s wife), to a society where the institution of marriage is questioned (Stupid Cupid), the journey has been long.

Mitra Phukan in The Collector’s Wife raises some pertinent question, in which one finds the voice of the writer questioning the social codes:

Birth belonged to women. But death in Parbatpuri, had been appropriated by men. The dead, if they were female, were consigned to flames amidst a crowd of men. Rukmani sometimes wondered if the souls of the just-dead women missed the company of other women at this juncture. Surely the female soul
would want to be surrounded by the sorority of grieving women friends, at the
critical moment of its entry into another world? (Phukan 50)

The writer desires for a world where women will have rights, but unknowingly
the writer is indoctrinated by the religious principles which talks of soul and the other
world, and the act of consigning the body to flames is indicative of ‘agni devta’, a
male God. Such questions and possibilities are overlooked by Mitra Phukan which is
the weakness in her novel. She tries to break away from the patriarchal domination by
creating characters like Rukmini and Priyam; but the freedom is sought within the
existing conclave. Rukmini sees her present plight, and the plight of other women like
her, reflected in the nature around her: “In the clear, pitiless light of the bright May
day, with their sparse covering of vegetation, every fold, every scar on their barren
rocks stood out with stark clarity (Phukan 85). The barren rocks are her own barren
childless condition, and the scars are the pain inflicted by the society on women like
her. Rukmini never feels guilty for her infidelity; rather she says: “After all, a wife’s
chastity was the foundation stone on which the entire edifice of patriarchal society
rested. What right, then, did she have to judge Siddharth? (Phukan 275)”

To break the chastity is to break away from patriarchal domination; but it
cannot be broken for the sake of breaking it. It must have a more serious reasoning.
Rukmini has started questioning the religious codes which chain only women, and not
men. She is beginning to see her marriage as a part of ritual in which she has no faith;
for her marriage is a part of social contract which she must fulfill. The obligations
imposed by religion that restrict a woman seem to fade away gradually (Phukan 54).
Mamang Dai takes this position a little further when she questions the utility of such
marriages in our society. One of the characters, who is herself tied to the familial
setup, in the novel *Stupid Cupid*, says: “And there is no intensity in monogamy, in marriage, whatever,’ Amine agreed again. ‘Everyone is looking to rediscover something. But …what?’ (Dai 2)” For Mamang Dai’s characters, it is love and lust. The novel echoes Khuswant Singh’s *Company of Women* which almost verges on pornography, but it is a powerful exposition and critique of the masculine phallocentric ego and the novel is a circumlocution of the appeasement of that desire resulting in a catastrophic end for the protagonist: “In the frenzy of orgasm she dug her nails into his scalp, bit his lips before she collapsed with a long gurgle like an animal being slaughtered. Mohan felt triumphant and proud of his manliness (K. Singh 24). The character Mohan conceives his own triumph in appeasing the women; such is the power of the phallus and the ego. If for Mohan, 'lust is the true foundation of love', then Mamang Dai’s *Stupid Cupid* is the Carpe Diem, but that is at the cost of a family. Mamang Dai’s protagonist Adna can finally say: “Yes, love was not everything. The children grew up and the parents smiled when they talked about the time when their children were babies (Dai 137).” This comes from the mouth of someone who doesn’t have a family. It makes the reader think about the impasse of women’s emancipation: She is incomplete without her family, yet the family keeps her in subjugation. The very foundation of the Indian familial system is shaken to the core in these two novels. Sexuality which has been perceived by male authors as a momentary gratification, finds a complete different articulation in women’s fiction. Mamang Dai and Mitra Phukan explore female sexuality in terms of fulfillment for a complete life. Temsula Ao, like Kafka, finds another way to escape this existential problem. Her short story, *Flight*, is indeed an allegory of the women’s desire to escape
the morbid earthly bindings. Ao presents the condition of women symbolically through a worm in the short story:

As I fluttered my wings for the final take-off, a tiny voice within me said, ‘wait, what about Johnny? Are you going to leave him all alone? I hesitated for the briefest while, but I knew I had to leave this dying universe. I looked at his pale, grief stricken face but my resolve was stronger than the appeal in my eyes. As though propelled by an unknown force, I flapped my wings and was soon fleeting away without a backward glance, the worm within me urging, ‘Fly, you are your own universe now, fly to your destiny.’ (Ao, Laburnum for my Head 107)

Each word in this brief passage can be symbolically translated to the world inhabited by the women. ‘Jonny’ stands for male, the ‘dying universe’ implies the patriarchal world, ‘wings’ imply freedom, the ‘own universe’ if the new world, the final destiny for women. The metamorphosis of a worm into a fly, and its eventual flight to freedom from the ‘dragon-box’ is the journey of women from tradition to modernity. After seeing her metamorphic transformation, Johnny is repelled by the new image of the worm (into a fly), but that is invincible, and Temsula Ao has articulated it beautifully with her craftsmanship. Such freedom can only cause disgust to patriarchal imagination as we will see in the fifth chapter.

Endnote

1 Gayatri Spivak argues that British’s ban on Sati system did not change the Indian scenario, because the British also denied the subject position to women.
Katha Gita of Bhattadev, edited by Pandit Hemchandra Goswami in 1918, composed in the 16th century (1597) is acclaimed as one of the greatest prose pieces in Assamese literature by eminent writers like Sir Prafulla Chandra Roy, Sir Asutosh Mookerjee, and Kabiguru Rabindranath Tagore (Bareh 132).

Sisir Kumar Das dates the novel as 1857 (S. K. Das, A History of Indian Literature 1800-1910 114), whereas, Meenakshi Mukherjee dates it to 1862 (Mukherjee, Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India. 12)

Mukherjee makes a list of such works in her book Realism and Reality. For example Ratan Nath Sharshar’s Fasana-i-Azad was published in 1868, in Telugu Narahari Gopala Krishnaiah Setty’s Sri Rangaraja Charitram.

Cited by Meenakshi Mukherjee.

Fielding preferred to call this art ‘Prosai-comi-epic writing’ to differentiate it from ‘novels’ because he felt that this new province is invaded by a swarm of foolish novels and monstrous romances and he did not want his writings to be confused with those. (Kundera 7)


Birendra Deka discusses the impact of Western Education system in Assam in his Ph.D Dissertation (B. Deka)

Sailen Bharali discusses the contribution of A.D. Phukan in the Assamese Section. (Bharali 55-70)

L.S. Seshagiri Rao discusses the contribution of Raja Rammohan Roy in his Article Indian Writing in English. (Rao 107-119)
Binodini in *Choker Bali* is an instance of the new women in Indian Fiction. It was written by Rabindranath Tagore in Bengali language.

The bride chooses her husband from among the many prospective grooms.

Indra is the king of Gods in Hindu pantheon. (Patel 76)

Garbhadhana was a ceremony to mark the conception of a child by a married woman, and to offer prayers for the well-being of both the mother and the child. (Patel 76)

The beginning of the bride-price system.

The Smrti literature, a Vedic literature, is a vast corpus of derivative work including the six Vedangas and Puranas.

Immolation of the wife in husband’s funeral pyre.

Makarand Paranjape sees the novel as a national allegory in his article *The Allegory of Rajmohan’s Wife: National Culture and Colonialism in Asia’s first English Novel*. 
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<<http://adaniel.tripod.com/Languages2.htm>>.


