CHAPTER-I

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1.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS A GENRE

Autobiography is one of the significant branches of biography. However, there is an essential difference between biography and autobiography.

The biographer depends on recorded dates as far as possible, checks on all subjective memories against records. The value of autobiography ultimately depends upon the faithful projection of memory of a writer.

In true sense, autobiography is the reflection of one’s whole life written by himself. It constitutes the thoughts and passions of a man that are individual and rare. There are several definitions of autobiography given by different critics.

Encyclopaedia of literature defines it like this. "Autobiography is the narration of man's life by himself. It should contain a greater guarantee of truth than any other form of biography, since the central figure of the book appears also as a witness of events which he records."¹

The autobiographers must be an honest author to depict his life-story. He should be well-equipped than any body else to give a complete account of his life. Edward Gibbon in his autobiography is in search of this kind of truth. "Truth, naked, unblushing truth, the first virtue of more serious history, must be the sole recommendation of this personal narrative."² But for several reason it has not happened in many cases.

First of all, an individual memory is not always faithful to himself. Naturally autobiographer may forget his

early part of life, he or she may depend upon his or her parents or grandparent's account.

Secondly, in some autobiography the writer consciously censors some of the events of his life which are unpleasant to him. Due to the sense of shame, develops another form of censorship; he sometimes indulges in highlighting the most attractive parts of his career. "The author of an autobiography presents (or tries to present) a continuous narrative of what he considers the major (or most interesting) event of his life"³.

Actually there are very few writers who can bravely tell the truth of his or her inner life. But it is also true that autobiographer must be careful to depict the unnecessary details of day to day ordinary life. He should concentrate to describe the episodes without breaking the inner chain, the action and characteristics must be maintained.

In the autobiography of Isadora Duncan, the writer tries to reveal the purpose of pure autobiography. "Incidents which seemed to me to last a lifetime, have been taken only a few pages; intervals that seemed thousand of years of suffering and pain, and through which in sheer self-defence, in order to go on living, I emerged an entirely different person, do not appear at all long here"⁴.

It is no doubt that autobiography engages itself in searching the truth, but it does not mean that it needs only record of day to day event. But the pure autobiography is not merely a photocopy of life, but something more than that.

Rabindranath Tagore in his autobiographical book 'Jiban Smriti' says "I don't know who goes on drawing the picture of life on the canvas of memory. But who ever may draw

it, he draws picture only. That means he is not sitting there with a painting brush in hand to keep on exact replica of everything that is happening around him. On his own liking, he keeps many elements while leaving out so many others; reduces so many large things, while magnifies very small elements. He hesitates the least in recasting the events by relegating the recent events to the past while bringing forward the past events to the fore. In fact his job is to draw picture not to write history.5


In 'Encyclopaedia of literature' we find, "There are many autobiographies which are as interesting as novels, as true as finest life".6


In Indian literature the best autobiographies are Gandhiji's 'My experiment with truth', Jawaharlal Nehru's Autobiography, specially in Bengali the remarkable autobiographies are Rasosundari Devi's 'Amar Jiban', Devendranath Tagore's Autobiography, Sibnath Sastri's 'Atmacharit', Rajnarayan Basu's 'Atmacharit' Sarada Sundari Devi's 'Atma-Katha', Pramatha Choudhury's 'Atmakatha', Lila Majumdar's 'Pakdandi', Binacin Devi's 'Amar Kalna' and also many recent autobiographies.

5. Tagore, Rabindranath - Jiban Smriti, Rabindra Rachanabali, 9th Volume, 1396, B.S. Calcutta, P-411.
In Assamese there are also many beautiful autobiographies like Lakshminath Bezbarua's 'Mor Jibansuoran', Hemchandra Barua's 'Atmaji', Benudhar Rajkhowa's 'Mor Jiban Depan', Shailadhar Rajkhowa's 'Atitar Snorani', Gunadaviram Barua's 'Mor Katha', Atul Chandra Hazarika's 'Smritir Papari', Nalinibala Devi's 'Eri Aha Dinbor' etc.

There are several allied types of literary forms like autobiography, these are memoirs, reminiscence, diaries, letters, journals etc.

**Memoirs:** Generally memoirs are likely to focus on one phase of a person's life than on the whole of it. In this type of autobiographical writings the contemporary social life takes major portion in writer's memoirs. The author of a volume of memoirs is intent upon telling the history of his or her life. For instance, the memoirs of St. Simon give a picture of reign of Louis-XIV. In Bengali Rajnarayan Basu's 'Atma-chari' and in Assamese Rajabala Das's 'Tini Kuri dah bacharar smriti' are examples of this kind of memoirs.

**Reminiscence:** In reminiscence only personal life of a writer takes an important role. The political and social events in his or her life comes as a secondary source in the light of his or her personal passion and thought and its significance are purely personal and rare. Rabindranath Tagore's 'Jiban smriti' can be mentioned here as example to some extent.

**Diaries:** A diary is a day to day chronicle of events of one's life and in this closely related to a journal. Many diaries are interesting - some because they reveal a character, others because they have preserved the wealth of details, the picture of a section of society or a period. For example, the journal of Amiel, the journal of Haydon, Rabindranath Tagore's 'Jatrir Diary' is a remarkable book of this kind.

**Letters:** Another literary form which has a bearing on biography is the epistolary. Letters being addressed to friends or lovers are often written under the stress of genuine and strong emotion, they bear the mark of a
exceptional frankness and gives them a special literary beauty, for example Byron's letters are model of his prose style. In Bengali literature Tagore's 'Chinna-Patra' is another example of literary savour. Jawaharlal Nehru's 'Letters from a father to his daughter' brought a fresh outlook and aroused a feeling of concern and interest in the world around.

Many essays, poems and short-stories are based on autobiographical materials. Of these allied types, autobiography is the most notable form of literature no doubt.

Autobiography is not only the description of one's outward life, but actually the best autobiographies are those which dwell upon the feelings and movements of a human's inner life. Inspect of so many restrictions autobiography remains one of the most interesting literary forms. However, on the other hand a critic has expressed doubts regarding the faithful depiction of inner life in women autobiographer. 'No woman has ever told the whole truth of her life. The autobiographies of the most famous women are a series of account of the outward existence, of pretty details and anecdotes which gave no realisation of their real life. For great moments of joy or agony they remain strangely silent.'

But this should not be an universal judgement. Because there are so many autobiographies of women which have become landmark and remarkable example of pure autobiography for their faithfulness, sincerity, revelation and finest expression. For example in Bengali literature Rasosundari Devi's 'Amar Jiban' and in Assamese Nalinibala Devi's 'Eri Aha Dinbor' are of this kind. An attempt will be made to highlight their contributions on the next chapters.

1.2 FACTS OF NINETEENTH CENTURY BENGAL AND ASSAM RENAISSANCE:

Before we dive into the details of the autobiographies, it will be pertinent to discuss here the relevant facts of Bengal and Assam Renaissance of the nineteenth century and their social background that are deemed to be responsible for the birth of these autobiographies. For proper deliberations of the topic, it is being discussed in two specific sections.

1.2.1 Facts of Bengal Renaissance in Nineteenth Century Specially the Social Liberation Movement of Bengal Womanhood:

Nineteenth century marked the period of Renaissance in Bengal and in the history of Bengali literature. A change was visible in every sphere of life during this century because of this renaissance. There was development of new ideology in the field of religion, literature, society, education and polity. The history of this renaissance is therefore of special importance. In the British ruled and British influenced nineteenth century, the advent of the revolution in the life, ideology and literature was necessarily influenced to a considerable extent by the British. In the considered discussion of the distinguished historian, we find "The British conquest of Bengal was not merely a political revolution but brought in a greater revolution in thought and ideas, in religion and social progress. The Hindu intellect came in contact with all that is noblest and most healthy in European history and literature and profited by it".

However it was not the influence of individual British character, but the contact with the English education and ideology that first awakened the Bengali to the concept of humanism. In the words of celebrated commentator, "It was not due to any individual British influence but a sincere

8. Dutta R.C., Literature of Bengal-Quoted in Bangia Sahithya Itikatha (Part-II), Bhudeb Choudhury, 3rd Ed. 1964. P-7
persuade of the English education and ideology, that first lighted up the path towards awakening the renaissance in the nineteenth century Bengal,  

(Bharatiya British Byaktityer sahajyenay.-Ingajignan - jagat O bhabjagater ghana nibistha charchar prabhabe adunik Banglar Renesnaser muktipath pratham alakita hayechilo unish shatake).

A discussion on the backward of nineteenth century renaissance in Bengal, essentially calls back the memory of the European renaissance. In the dying stages of medieval age, countries like Italy, Germany, France and England witnessed the emergence of a new curiosity and expectation about life. Rediscovery of classical knowledge and poetry, a new understanding of religion and the world and also development of individual identity. As a result of this, first signs of European renaissance started appearing in Italy. The signs of modernisation in the background of renaissance have been nicely and scientifically explained by the famous psychologist. The renaissance was an affirmation of individuality. It bade the human mind within himself, the creative sources of his own fulfilment. In this respect, the Renaissance was a necessary and salutary revolt against individual authoritarianism  

Another characteristic of the renaissance was its intensely conscious and intellectual revolt against superstition and senseless emotion and social loyalty of the middle age. Of course, renaissance cannot be explained away in only a few definitions. In the language of John Symonds - "We cannot refer the whole phenomena of the Renaissance to any cause or circumstances or limit them within the field of any one department of human knowledge."

Before searching for the beginning of renaissance in Bengali literature, the medieval Bengal's society and lifestyle needs a conscious appraisal.

During the pre-Mughal era of medieval Bengal, this aristocratic elites or land owners were the chief patrons of art and crafts, culture, religion and literature besides having state administrations.

During the first stage of the Pathan era, Bengal became out of the touch with the all India politics and economics. Although during the reign of the Mughal emperor Akbar, the contact with the rest of India was restored, however the Mughal high handedness during the early stages of installation and expansion of the empire generated an environment of fear among this common people. While a limited circle of opportunist people took advantage of the economic prosperity and led a life of pomp and luxury, the vast multitude of common people could not get benefit from this situation. The unlimited greed, profligacy and moral perversion of the Mughal rule corrupted and polluted Bengal.

In that age, Vaishnavite religion and thinking influenced by Chaitanya can be considered as a effort towards an all round development in the history of Bengali culture. This Chaitanya influenced Vaishnavism and its ideology confined itself into a clan partly in order to defend itself against the contemporary environment of degeneration. However, "The purpose of this clan oriented structure of the Gaudiya Vaishnavism too was not successful and rather met its extermination in the second half of the seventeenth century, after degradation into communalism and doctrine of body worshipping".

(Gaudiya Vaishnabadarshe, ei sampraday-nibaddhatat uddeshya o sarthak hayni, baranag saptadash shatapdir dwitiyardya theke sampraadakata o deha-sadhanar madhya ta binosti lavh karechila).

12. Choudhury Bhudeb - Bangla Sahityer Itihas, P-16
An account of the contemporary life style of profligacy and immorality in the Mughal ruled and Persian influenced Bengal is available in Vidya-sundar, poetic accounts written by Bharat Chandra and Ramprasad. One of them describes the profligate look in the urban life while the other goes into the graceless and gloomy face of rural life.

The hymns of Ramprasad reflected the pain of the helpless and suffering people of Bengal who led a life of drudgery and gloom. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century the opposing ideologies—Vaishnavism and Saktism gradually started towards synthesizing. The self oblivious Bengalee therefore took up the tune of Ramprasad.

'Oh, my soul, leave hatred
Whether it is Kali or Krishna Shiba or Ram
All are my Goddess.
(Man karo na dweshadweshi
Ei je Kali Krishna Shiba, Ram
Sakal amar elakeshi)'

So, Bharat Chandra's Irware Patini prayed to her Goddess not for spiritual salvation of the children, but to keep them in worldly well-being.

Deep inside such wishes were lying hidden the seeds of the new age. These underlying longings in the national sub-conscious embraced the extraordinary opportunity of the European arrival and thus set out to create an unheard of history of a new face of Bengali life. Shri Asit Kumar Bondyapadhyay has said while discussing the history of nineteenth century Bengal:

"Through English language, the wonderful treasure of European literature, sociology, philosophy, politics, history, moral science right from the ancient age down to the medieval period, renaissance period, reformation age and so on generated a tremendous enthusiasm force in the Bengalee mind.
which can be described-like the European renaissance-as Bengal Renaissance.¹³

(Ingreji bhashar marphate samagra Europer prachin,madhya ug. renaissance ba nabajug ebang reformation ba samskar jug bāhita sahitva, samaj darshan,sikkha,rajniti,etihas,nitibigyan ityadi adhunik jibaner bichitra alsamy bangalir samagra che:tanay adbhut pranaras o duranta gatibeg sanchar karechilo,jake Europa renaissance er anusarana bala haechey unish shatakaer Bengali - renaissance).

To help administrative process function better, the British rulers felt the necessity of knowledge in local language. In 1800, Fort William College was established in order to impart training to the newly arrival civilians in the local language. Eminent scholars like Mrityunjay Vidyalankar, Ramram Basu, Haraprasad Roy, Chandicharan Munshi and William Carrey, the gracious missionary wrote, a large number of text books in Bengali. The contribution of Christian Missionaries in the foundation of the prose structure in Bengali literature deserves due recognition.¹⁴

With the establishment of the British rule, Christian Missionaries started spreading English and Christianity. A large number of Bengali educationists who were interested about English Education at that age. "Rammohan was very keen about the introduction and spread of English Education. He believed that for the sake of unity and development of the country, this was essential. "Thearakanath Tagore too eagerly joined in this initiative of Rammohan." ¹⁵

(Deshe Engraj i siksar prabartan o prasar bisaye Rammohaner ghatir utsaha chila. Tini mane karten desher ekata o unnati sadane ei padakop ekānta abashyak. Rammohaner joydyage soutsae bhag nyechilen Dwarakanath.)

Therefore in 1817 through combined contribution of the people and sincere efforts of Rammohan and Dwarakanath, 'Hindu College' was established in Calcutta. Regarding the views about 'Hindu College' affairs detailed discussion are there in this book.  

The progressive youth of the Hindu College known as Young Bengal, though young in age and limited in number, generated a new wave in the middle class society of Bengal. "They began to reason, to question, to doubt."  

In words of Shibnath Shastri, "The twenty years period from 1825 to 1845 can be described as the birth period of the renaissance in Bengal. Whether it was polity or sociology or education in all areas was the emergence of new age during this period."  

(1825 haite 1845 khristabdha parjanta bingsati barshake banger nabayuger jannakal balia gojana kara jaite pare. ei kaler madye ki rajniti, ki samajniti, ki sikshabibhag sakal dikei nabajuger prabartan haiachilo) 

In this period "We see the revolutionary spirit of Derojio in the life history of this age under discussion."  

The struggle of Rammohan against injustice, the grand efforts of Bethune and Vidyasagar—all these generated a revolutionary thinking among the Bengalees to fight against the gloom drudgery of the traditional customs and rituals. 

Rabindranath Tagore has identified Raja Rammohan Roy as the Vanguard of the new era. Rammohan is the first person who first became inquisitive about the European society, religion, scientific mind, modern thinking about life and showed light in Bengal and whole of India. "Rammohan Roy is therefore the father of this age of reason in India."  

19. Edwards, Thomas-Henry Derozio, the European poet, the teacher, journalist, 1884, Calcutta, P-68.  
In the first step his spiritual ideology introduced a new spiritual revolution. "The main theme of the age ushered in by Rammohan was rationalism of liberated soul fighting against rule of religious laws". 21

Since he had mastered the main thought of various religion, he could find a new explanation to the Vedanta and Hindu scriptures. "He was not an antagonist of Brahminic religion, but its associate only, that he preferred the Vedas to Christianity". 22

Behind his efforts to eradicate the 'Sati Danda Pratha' (Widow burning) too lay his infinite sympathy towards the Hindu Womanhood. "Outside India, Rammohan's reputation is more that of a social reformer than of a religious teacher. He was deeply concerned at the position and treatment of women in Hindu society". 23

The new resurgence that started in nineteenth century Bengal by rejecting the medieval concepts of those days showed Bengal the light to freedom from the various superstitions.

A discussion of the history of that glorious march forward reveal that along with sociology, polity, spiritualism etc. the path of progress and emancipation of womanhood that took shape in Europe as an influence of the renaissance, also became particularly inspiring and sought after here in Bengal. Since he development and emancipation of womanhood in the nineteenth


22 Dr. Mukherjee, A Reform and Regeneration in Bengal(1774-1823) 1968, Calcutta P-185.

23 Das, Sisir Kumar-Early Bengali Prose, 1966, Calcutta, P-129.
century Bengal is one of the topics of the present research, therefore the elaborate discussion of the other aspects of the nineteenth century renaissance is not being done here.

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, the women of Bengal were in all respects, a deprived, ignored and battered lot. Child marriage, widow marriage, lack of education, early widowhood—all this reduced the women of Bengal into utter misery and they had to accept the brutal treatment from the society helplessly. However, in the wake of rejuvenated spirit of the nineteenth century, a handful of social reformers with deep feelings and sympathy for the women, came forward to reestablish the womanhood in its own glory and right.

"It is note-worthy that side by side with the efforts to eradicate the social evils associated with religious superstition, the social thinkers emphasised on the welfare of one segment of the society, that is for women welfare."

"(Lakkhya karar bishay dharmer kusamskarer sange sampraksh samajbyadhi nibaraner prochestay, pashapashi samajer chinta nayaker samaj sabhyader ekangsha arthat nari kalyaner chintay).

In this context it is worth mentioning this—"One of the most remarkable features of nineteenth century society of Bengal was the interest and sympathy for the welfare of womanhood. Almost all the reformers were full compassion at the misery of the women and almost all the reform movements were spurred by the cherished aim of emancipation of the womenhood from the state of denigration and bondage."

"(Unish shataker Bangalir Samajjibaner anyatama lakkhyatya baishistya narijatir kalyaner prati agraha o mamata. Pray sah samaskar-ke narir bedanay bedanadra ebang pray pratiti samskar andalaner pectane nariitwer abamanana o narir bondhan muktir akanksha).

With the advent of the nineteenth century renaissance in Bengal and whole of India, the injustice towards the women attracted the attention of the contemporary thinkers.

"In the beginning of nineteenth century, unbearable condition of women's subordination caught the sight of modern elites of Bengal in particular and the whole of India as general". 26

(Unish shataker suchanay Bangladesh ebang samagrik bhabe Bharatbarshe i narijatir asahaniya paradhinata nabajuger chintanayakder dristi akarshan kare)

Raja Rammohan Roy was not only one of these reformers, but the honour of being the forerunner among them also goes to him. He unhesitatingly recognised the greatness of the Hindu Society, but even after accepting it respectfully he considered the western science, morality and western philanthropy as worth imitating. During the conversation and introduction with the first lord Bishop of Calcutta when Bishop Middleton was congratulating Rammohan for giving up Hinduism and accepting Christianity, in reply Rammohan politely corrected his mistake and went on to add. "He had not broken up the chain of superstition in order to move from one superstition to another". 27

One of the prime achievements of Rammohan was eradication of the widow burning. If something appeared to him as untrue - whether it conceived religion, society, economy or polity or something in esteem - Rammohan could not subscribe to any such concept just for the sake of holy scriptures or tradition. That is why, he did not hesitate to protest against the conservative Hindu society on the subject of widow.

"He had used a lot of verses and statements extracted from ancient Puranas and scriptures in support of this. A large number of authors of scriptures and puranas had written against widow burning". 28

27. Ahmed, A. F. Salahuddin - Social ideas and social changes in Bengal (1818-50). Leiden, P-37
28. Dr. Altakar, A. S - The position of women in Hindu civilization (1956, Banaras, PP-145)
For a long time Hindu women were deprived of the properties of father and husband. After the independence of India they got the deserved right over this through enactment of law in 1956. Much earlier than this, the foresightful Rammohan had felt for this deprivation of women.

"He thought that like men, women too, ought to have the right of inheritance and that is why in 1822, he published a book titled, "Brief remarks regarding modern encroachment of the ancient rights of females' wherein he called for social justice to women with regard to the inheritance and also went on to add that he was only trying to bring in the logic of the law".  

(Uttaradhikar sutre pureser mata nario je sampatti pradipikadhir thaka uchitel bodh Rammohaner chila bale tini 1822 sale 'Brief remark regarding modern encroachment of the ancient rights of females' japrakashe kare uttaradhikar sutre nari prati samejik subhish prarthana karen ebang balen tini sudhu ainer juktikeler ante chaichen."

Rammohan was a revolutionary personality, one of characteristic of his nature was his unrelenting crusade against injustice, "Rammohan's whole consisted of a series of battles".

Rammohan was the first to take up his pen to write against polygamy amongst the aristocrats or 'Kulins', child marriage, casteism etc. He extended his support to widow marriage and ignoring the country wide superstition, became the first person to set out for England.

That Rammohan was in favour of female education is evident from his work 'Sahamaran Bishayak Prabartak Nibartaker Dwitiya Sambad' where he says - "First the point of intelligence when did you test the intelligence of the women so as to describe them as duffer. Because, if you impart someone education and knowledge and if they can't absorb it and embrace it, then you can consider him as duffer. But you have imparted almost education and knowledge to the women, so how can they..."

30. Das, Sisir Kumar - Early Bengali Prose, 1966, Calcutta, P-127
considered as duffers, clarify?

(Prathamata buddhir bisyey, stri lokor buddhir pariksha kon kale laiyachen, je anayasei tahadigake alpa buddhi kahen? Karan bidya siksha ebang gnanasiksha dite pare byakti jadi anubhavo grahan karite na pare, takhan apla buddhi kaha samdhabe hay. Apnaro bidyasikha gnanapadesh stri lakke pray deni nai, tabe tahare buddhinhin hay kirupe nishchoy karen?)

In this book 'Stri Siksha Vidhayak', we find Gourmohan Vidyalankar as a follower of Rammohan. "It is highly improper to say that the women have little intelligence that is why they cannot become educated and for that reason the parents also donot make any efforts for their education. Because in the moral scriptures, the women have been said to possess four times the intelligence of the men in general and six times in case of business. Also in recent times no one has organised an intelligence test to measure women's ability in the field of education. And after imparting education in scriptures, knowledge and crafts, if they fail in understanding and grasping the same then it will be correct to call them stupid. In this country, hardly any one imparts education and knowledge to the women and if some one starts learning, then everyone dissuades her citing various false sanction calling it as against the tenets of the scriptures".  

(Jadi balo stri loker buddhi alpa ekarane tahader bidya hay na, tabe pitamata o tahader bidyar janya udyag kare na, ekatha ati anupajukta. Jahetu nitisastre purushapoksha stri buddhi chaturgun o bybasae chaygun kahiachen, ebang edesher stri lokdor parashunar bishaye buddhi pariksha sangprati keha karen nai. Ebang sastra bidya gnan o silpa bidya siksha karaile jadi tahara bujhite o grahan karite na paren tabe tahadigake nirbodh kaha uchit hay. Edesher lokera bidyasiksha o gnaner upadesh stri lokkhe pray den nai baram tahader madhye jadi keha bidya sikhite arambha kare tabe tahake mithya janarab matrasiddha nana ahashtriya pratibandhak dekhaiya o byaban dusta baliya mana karen).

32. Vidyalankar, Gourmohan - Stri Siksha Vidhayak, 3rd Ed. 1824, Calcutta-1.
The Christian Missionaries opened schools for women too like the ones for adult education. As for instance the Female Juvenile Society for Bengalee Female School. The Hindu girls were not easily allowed into the school run by Mrs. William Cook. Under the auspices of the Female Juvenile Society, a number of girl schools were established in Calcutta. After Calcutta Book Society was formed, almost fifty girl school run by the Missionaries were set up. Gourmoham Vidyalankar was not only involved in the management of such girl schools but also associated with the Calcutta Book Society in publishing a large number of books. He felt the need for women's education and wrote the book named 'Stri Siksha Bidhayak' in 1822. The objective and efforts of the author in the second part of the book is indeed praiseworthy. The conservative Hindu Society had the idea that in ancient Hindu Society 'Female education' was not customary but Gourmohan in his book with facts and figures tried to establish that in ancient and medieval Hindu Society, women education was encouraged and accepted by all. "Gourmohan advanced five arguments in favour of female education. (1) If the females receive education there will be no problems for the primary education of the children. (2) There will be monetary savings if the women learn the art of sewing and stitching. (3) Study of holy books will lead to mental peace and will not be busy with family quarrel. (4) They will also become experts in family accounting works. (5) If the women get education then both men and the women will be learned and in that case they will be so much happy due to one another, that it is unnecessary to discuss".

(Strisikshar swapakshe Gourmohan panchti juktir abatarana karen (1) Striloke siksha labhkarile balak ballkader prathamik sikshar jana cintita hate have no. (2) Strilok siban karmadi siksha karle paribarik arthik sashrav habe (3) Sadgranthapathe mananibesh karle paribarik kalaha dwande prabritti habe na, gharoa šānti thakbe (4) Paribarik hisab nikesheo daksha haye utbe (5) Strilok bidyarjan karle stripurushe bidyabatta thakile paraspare katha barta dwara ki parjanta sukhaday hay tāha lipi bahulya).

Apart from this, a number of aristocratic British ladies under the leadership of lady Amherst set up Bengal ladies society and through their initiative a number of girl schools were established. However such schools were primarily set up by Christian lady and were part of the process of preaching Christianity. In 1849, Drinkwater Bethune first went beyond the realm of communalism and religion and set up a school for the girls.

But in that age there were hundreds of impediments for women's education. The conservative Hindu society raised a big movement. Madanmohan Tarkalankar, in order to establish the legitimacy of women's education not only authored a number of books but also got his daughter admitted to the newly established school. The more the progressive people interested about women's education, the more hue and cry was raised in the conservative society. People started saying, "Now whatever was left out of 'Kali Yug', has also arrived. Nothing will be left out once the girls take up books". The dramatist Ramnarayan said jokingly in the parties of Babus, "My god, will there be any escape once the girls educated? There has already been much problems in just teaching them 'bring', 'bring rice', 'bring pulse', 'bring clothes'- they exasperate with just this only and if you teach her other things, there will be no escape".34

(Loke balite lagila - 'eibar kalir ja chilo haiya gen. Meyegula ketab dhalire ar baki thakbe na'. Natu ke Ramnarayan rashikita karia babuder majlise balite lagilo - 'Bap re bap meyeshleke lekhapini sekhale ki ar raksha ache. Ek 'ana' sikhaiyai raksha nai, 'anana', 'Dali ana' Kapar ana Karia asthir kare, anya akshar gnan sekhale ki ar raksha ache).

The male dominated society in no way can happily accept the women's liberalisation. In the words of western thinker John Stuart Mill, 'I believe that their disabilities elsewhere are only clung to in order to maintain the

34. Shastri Sibnath - Ramtanu Lahiri o Tatkalin Banga Samaj-1955, Calcutta, p-140
subordination in domestic life, because the generality of males cannot yet tolerate the idea of living with an equal." Some other thinkers also have remarked on the same line.

Dr. Alexander Duff (1506-1578) has assisted in the process of spread of women's education both directly as well as indirectly. Among the contemporary people worth mentioning who had sincerely supported women's education were Debendra Nath Tagore, Ramtanu Lahiri, Akshay Kumar Dutta, Radhakanta Deb, Motilal Seal, Haladhar Mullick and so on. That a difference in 'levels of thinking' with uneducated wife cannot be avoided was particularly felt by the western educated male society of that age. Gorodesh Basak has written about Madhusudan Dutta. "He used always to tell me that he would rather die a Benedict than wed an illiterate, uneducated, unsympathetic girl and in those days an educated female was a rare avis in our Society."#7

Just as David Hare had totally dedicated himself for the education of Bengali boys irrespective of rich or poor another great, bright large hearted figure was Dr. Bethune. As the President of the Education Counsel and member of the Ministry of the Governor General, the Saintly Bethune dedicated himself towards the spread of women education. On May 7th, 1849 Bethune set up a School for the girls and thus paved the way for cultivation of knowledge for girls belonging to the gentry class. It was first established in the portico of Daishina Ranjan Mukhopadhyay and thus offered chance for girls from decent families to receive education. Among the patrons names like Chandra Vidyasagar, Radhakanta Deb, Modan Mohan Tarkalankar, Rani Kali Krishna Deb, Justice Sambhunath Pandit are worth mentioning. In his last letter to the Government before his death in 1851, Bethune wrote - "I give and devise all my interests...

36. (i) Sheela Roblham - Women consciousness (Mensworth Harmondsworth, 1971)
   (ii) Juliet Micheal, A O Kali (ed) - The right and wrongs of Women, Harmondsworth, 1976
the lands, buildings and other property in Calcutta, now intended to be used and occupied as a Female School, to the East India Company and their successors and assigns for ever with my request, they will endow the said institution as a Female School in perpetuity and honourably connect the name of Babu Dakshina Ranjan Mukherjee in honourable testimony of his great exertions in the cause.

Such example of philanthropy despite being foreigner and from a different religion is indeed rare.

During the thirly's of the nineteenth century, the Bengali newspapers like Samachar Darpan, Samachar Chandrika, Bangadoot, Gnunanweshan, Sambad Sudhakar, Sambad Prabhakar, Sambad Soudamini, Sambad Bhaskar, Sarbasubhakari and so on started publishing views regarding women's education. Noticing the involvement of the Bengali Newspapers with women's education, the English language newspapers also got interested. Newspapers like India Gazette, Bengal Harkara, Friends of India, Bengal Herald Reformer, Hindu, Patriot, Morning Chronical etc. started expressing comments in favour of women's education. Bengal Herald wrote "Why only in ancient age - even in this age too, there is no dearth of educated women. That women will deviate from the right path once they get education - is totally baseless; rather the opposite is possible."

In this context, it is worth quoting - "The immense benefits that the country will get through women's education is indescribable. There may be various benefits like development of morality, better way of understanding worldly functions and so on."

38. Ghose, Mamath - Raja Dakhina Ranjan Mukhopadhyay (1917, Calcutta, P-104-105)
39. The Bengal Herald - On Hindu Female Education (Calcutta, 27/6/1829) Quoted in Banglay nabachetanar Itiha - Swapan Bose Ed. 1985, P-310
In the history of nineteenth century Bengal literature and society, the name which first comes to mind is the great humanist and sympathiser of women in Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1890).

Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar was not the first to introduce widow marriage. Through his writings and initiatives, he had tried to establish his greatness:

"He was the first humanist of the age. That is why it is definitely necessary to recognise him as the leader of the modern age. In the whole of the nineteenth century Bengal, he has no equal." 41

(Tini ejuger pratham Huminist. Tai nishchay i adhuri ejuger 'Juga-pradhan' bale takle ganya kara kartabya - Samasta Unabros). Shatabdir Banglay ar eman dwitiya manush na)

In the contemporary age, people like Krishna Mohan Banerjee, Pyari Chand Mitra, Radhanath Sikdar, Devendra Nath Tagore, Akshay Kumar Dutta, Bhudev Mukherjee, Rajnarayan Bose, Michael Madhusudan Dutta and so on tried to reform the Bengali literature and society in various ways. But the only rare example of such selfless efforts in Bengal in the fields of social reforms, language reforms, opening up the doors of women education and liberation was Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar.

"Almost all the torchbearers of nineteenth century Bengal renaissance were students of Presidency College and later its teachers. But the person who tried to usher in modernity in the ancient studies and old thinking of the
Sanskrit College was Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. His contribution in some of the activities of this college will still appear to be as strange. From that point he emerged as a vanguard of a truly liberal education which was followed by modern life and educational methods, although his childhood adolescence and youth were all associated with the conventional and traditional educational system of that age.  

(Unish shatakera Bengalir nabajibanbodher jnara masha bahan kare enchilen, tinader pray sakali Hindu Presidency Colleger chastra pare i adhyapak. Sanskrit Colleger prachin Siksha o puratan manasikata e colleger kono kono kriyakarme tnar dan ekhano amader adbhut bhole mane nobe sedik theke tini jatharthati udar naitik sikhar karnadhar haye abirbhum hayechilen, jnar sange anushyuta hayechila adhunik jiban charha o siksha pranali, jadio sekele panditi sikshya tnar balya, kaishar, yauban atibhish hafachila).

Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar was one of those who ushered a new age in the nineteenth century Bengali literature. However, they did not create literature just for the joy and happiness of creation alone. "Every great writer of this period of transition was of necessity a politician, a social reformer, a religious enthusiast."  

In a letter written to his brother Shapoor Chandra, Vidyasagar wrote that - Introduction of widow marriage is the first every holy work in his life. There was also a possibility that he would be able to do any better holy work on this. Behind this megnimous words of Vidyasagar, lies the unflinching sympathy and deep affection towards the women. A close look at the reformation movement of Bengal during this period from Ram Mohan to Vidyasagar reveals one basic fact - that even prior to the political subjugation, we had been under the spell of mental subjugation that is why the subjugation to a great extent has effected the fate of the women. The attention of the thinkers of the new age in the nineteenth century Bengal, particularly a whole of India in general was first attracted.

43 Dr. De, S.K.-Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century, 2nd Ed. 1962, Calcutta, P-51
the unbearable subjugation of the women.

Even prior to Vidyasagar, the question of emancipation of the womanhood was much discussed and efforts were on to eradicate various superstitions. But -"In this matter, Rammohan Roy on one side and the Young Bengal group on the other, stated a controversy in the society by clinging to their own viewpoints and in the middle and second part of nineteenth century, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar emerged as the first leader and spokesman for the movement of women's liberation. There were specific aims of this movement. These aims were introduction of women's education and widow marriage and eradication of polygamy and 'rule marriage'".

The efforts of Vidyasagar towards spreading women's education is particularly worth remembering. It has already been mentioned that in 1849, Bethune set up a women's school and following earnest requests from Bethune, Vidyasagar joined as honorary Secretary of the Bethune Female school. In 1854 the British authorities extended support to the cause of female education. In 1857 Halliday sought the co-operation of Vidyasagar for spread of female education and utilising this opportunity, Vidyasagar set up 35 female schools during the period of May 1857 to May 1858.

With the advent of nineteenth century alongside the undivided humanism of the renaissance in Bengal and for that matter in the whole of India, the injustice towards the women and the plight of their subjugated state attracted the attention of the contemporary thinkers.

44. Umar, Badaruddin - Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar o Unish Shataker Bangali Samaj, 2nd Ed. 1982, Calcutta, P-52
"In a news published on 29/4/1837 we find that some of respectable gentlemen of Calcutta like Matilal Seal, Haladhar Mullick and so on decided to convene a meeting to express encouragement to popularise women's education and widow marriage".

(29/4/1837, sale prakasita sambadhe pai Matila Seal, Haladhar Mullick pramukh kalkatar koekjan sambranta byakti strisiksha bidhoba bibaha prachalane utsaha debarjanya ek sabha ahabane manastha karechen)

The contribution of Brahma society to the cause of emancipation of the women in the later half of the nineteenth century is undeniable. Keshab Chandra Sen and his other progressive followers were enthusiastic in eradicating various social discriminations. They were firmly committed to improve the lot of deprived women folk and as a follow up of this, set up a female education cell under the Brahma Bandhu Sabha, initiated efforts to spread education to the domestic confines of the women and even published a monthly newspaper meant for women called "Bamabodhini Patrika". In fact among those who took a leading part in the movement for emancipation of women, Keshab Chandra was one of the prominent figure.

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Maichael Madhusudan Dutta, Ramkrishna Paramhansa, Vivekananda, Sister Nivedita, Rabindranath Tagore, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyaya and many other progressive people till now have reviewed this topic of female emancipation and try to reform the process to the best of their capabilities.

The humanism of the new age influenced the mentality of Vivekananda, and this mentality blossomed in a new way following the ideological teaching received from his mentor Sri Ramkrishna. That the status of women in Hindu society is much ignored was emphasised by Swami Vivekananda. Like modern socialists, Vivekananda too dreamt of a society free from exploitation.

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his thinking and path of establishing such a society was totally different. The whole socialistic thinking, views and initiatives of Swami Vivekananda revolved around spiritual socialism. The views of Swamiji towards the Indian women folk is reflected in his speech - "First educate the women and then leave it to themselves. Then they themselves will decide which and what type of reform is necessary for them". That is why he encouraged Sister Nibedita towards female education too along with spiritualism. He could deeply understand that without the simultaneous development of both the male and female, society cannot progress.

The discrimination and difference between male and female which had subjugated the life of the women to insult and exploitation was unhesitatingly sought to be eradicated by the newly awakened Bengal. The progress of the subsequent age was essentially based on this sympathy and fellow feelings and respect towards the women. As a result of this from the rear half of the nineteenth century with the availability of some amount of opportunity for female education and female emancipation, some female poet and literateurs appeared in the field of Bengali literature. Although a complete awareness about their rights had not yet fully developed, however that they possessed and inherent desire for acquiring knowledge was understood by them.

Even without ignoring the social obstructions and stringent sanction of an unsympathetic society, a lady opened up the door of new writing style in Bengali literature. This lady in discussion named Rasosundari Devi, made the first step start of a form of literature - 'Autobiography' in Bengali literature.
Nineteenth century was a glorious period in the history of India. This was the period which marked the awakening from nightmare of superstition in every field—religion, literature, society, education, art, and culture. As that was the time of British rule, it must be admitted that the revolutionary change that took place in the life, ideology, and literature of India, and for that matter, Bengal was influenced by the West to a considerable extent.

Although more than one state of India had the opportunity of coming in contact with the Europeans even before Bengal, but the first inspiration for a awakened, liberal and progressive thinking developed in Bengal. Only after that this new ideology or renaissance spread out to other states. That is why the attraction of the nineteenth century history is irresistible.

"The nineteenth century is unique in this way that here we have what may be called a new type of intellectual awakening in India, a sort of true Renaissance. This was made possible by the contact of the mind of the Indian elite, particularly in Bengal, with the mind of Europe through the medium of the English language and its literature."

It was not by influence of the British individual character, but as a result of the English education and the contact with their ideology, that the Bengalee first come to understand the concepts of self-identity and humanism. The first half of the nineteenth century can be described as a preparatory phase. This phase was marked by the arrival of the vanguards of new horizons who set up the foundation. Apart from a few leading light from Maharashtra and Madras, majority of these people were the thoughtful and wise visionaries of.

46 Chatterjee S.K.-The Nineteenth Century Renaissance in India and Lakshminath Bezbaruah of Assam:(Ed)Maheswar Neog-Lakshminath Bezbaruah the Sahityarathi of Assam,Gauhati University,1972,P-2
Bengal who were liberal, English educated, but respectful to the Indian heritage. The influence of their new thoughts and newly created Renaissance spread out more or less to the whole of India. Nineteenth century was the age of transition and this transition came through a lot of conflicts.

"During this period of preparation up to about 1850, we have in Bengal a number of great thought leaders whose influence was pan-Indian. We have in the first instance a man like Raja Rammohan Roy, aptly described as the 'The Father of Modern India'. Then we have a great Sanskrit Scholar and an orthodox Hindu too, like Raja Radhakanta Deva who was a great educationist and a compiler of that very famous sanskrit lexicon the 'Sabdakalpa-druma'. Then there was Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, who aimed as much as Rammohan Roy to broaden the Indian mind and spirit by grafting on it, English education side by side with traditional Sanskrit Studies".

As for Assam, there exists no record indicating the arrival of new modern age of Renaissance, overcoming the barriers of medieval conservatism in the field of culture, literature or social life until the first half more than that of the nineteenth century. Lots of important geographical and historical factors are responsible for this backwardness of Assam in respect of Renaissance.

First of all, Assam is on the Eastern Frontier of India. Prior to the arrival of the British, contact with the rest of India was slack due to difficult communication and natural inaccessibility. According to a erudite scholar of Assam's social history, "The backward features of Assam's economy-the prevalence of labour rent in lieu of land tax in cash or kind, the combination of agriculture and weaving within the household irrespective of

castes and status, a less rigid and less differentiated caste system, the persistence of tribal ways of life - all these were derived from this isolation".48

Some of the years which preceded British rule were smeared with blood and dreadful acts. At the last part of the Ahom rule, the state was tormented by civil war. Taking this opportunity, the 'Man' or the Burmese invaded upon the state and resulted in immense death and destruction. The population of Assam came down to the lowest point. "Besides the opium addicted population that survived the prolonged civil war and Burmese occupation had dwindled down to less than one million i.e. to about a third of what it presumably was in the mid eighteenth century".49

Because the present topic is mainly centering round the question of development of womanhood in the nineteenth century, Assam, so in this context some discussion about the facts of Assam Renaissance in inevitable.

In 1826, Assam was taken over by the British from the grip of the Burmese. Although for some days the official work was continued in the local language. In 1836 Bengali took the place of Assamese. Bengali was also introduced in the education system of Assam. Though a lot of unpleasant and somewhat mistaken ideas developed over the history of language change, a reliable and factual view has been obtained in an article by Father F. S. Downs, published recently by the Gauhati University.

"In 1836, it was decided that the Bengali should replace it. The main reason seems to have been pragmatic. At that time there were few Assamese with the type of educational qualification and experience necessary to be...

49. Ibid: P-206.
the lower echelons of the new administrative system. For this purpose Bengalees were brought in. Many of the British officers had also previously served in Bengal and would have learned Bengalee. Hence the bureaucrats chose to adopt the language that would make things easier for themselves irrespective of the inconveniences it may have caused to their subjects. The statements of Father Downs provides a satisfactory solution to the confusing language controversy.

In that unstable time of Assam, it is not possible even to think of a renaissance. But slowly the impact of the nascent renaissance of Bengal started influencing the awakening minds of Assam. Side by side with the first Assamese Newspaper 'Arunodoi (1846-1883), the Bengali periodicals like Samachar Darpan (1818), Samachar Chandrika (1822) and Masic patrika also picked up large circulation in Assam.

By far, it was widely accepted that the first Assamese to receive the enlightenment of English education is Anandaram Dhekial Phookan. But according to the present day researchers and historians of literature and culture, the first English educated Assamese was Jajnaram Khargharia Phookan (1805-38). He was the younger brother of Holiram Dhekial Phookan, the father of Anandaram Dhekial Phookan. Jajnaram had proficiency in Sanskrit, English, Bengali, Persian, Arabic, Bhutanese, Urdu and so on. When the first school was established in Gauhati in 1835, "there was none else other than Jajnaram with proficiency in English language".

(Jajnaram bine an kono Asamiya lokar IngraJI bhoom byut-patti nachil).

The name of Holiram Dhekial Phookan is also worth remembering in this connection. Although he did not have any knowledge on English, but he was a Sanskrit scholar.

50 Father, F.S. Downs - Missionary and Language Controversy (Journal of the University of Gauhati Vol: XXVIII-XXIX No. 1 Arts), 1977-78, P-156
51 Barua, Gunabhiram-Anandaram Dhekial Phookan Jeevan Charitra, 1834, Calcutta, P-281
and had proficiency in Bengali too. Inspite of being conservative his support for women's education is undoubtedly astonishing for those days.

"We find him supporting the cause of female education through his letter published anonymously in Samachar Darpan(25, August, 1832)". The greatest contribution of Holiram Dhekial Phookan is 'Asom Buranji', a treatise on the history of Assam in Bengali. He published this book dividing into four volumes, at his own cost in 1829. "Incidentally, it may be added that Assam - Buranji was the first printed history of the region in any language and was also the first original historical work published in Bengali."

Though belonging to the contemporary age, Jajnaram was progressive in many areas. During his short stay in Calcutta he came in contact with Raja Rammohan Roy and was even influenced by the Brahma religion popularised by Rammohan. Much is known about Jajnaram from the book 'Anandaram Dhekial Phookanar Jivancharitra' written by Gunabhiram Baruah. The rationalistic education influenced by Derozio, establishment of Brahmasabha, efforts to eradicate 'Sati', the free thinking of young Bengal - all these ushered in a new era in the educated society of Bengal. That this had its impact on Jajnaram, the first English educated Assamese is beyond any doubt. In the words of Gunabhiram Barua "As he received guidance from Raja Rammohan Roy for some periods, his ethics and social disposition was very developed and refined".

Col. Adom white Historical Miscellany Vol. (29) also provides us with some very reliable glimpses about Jajnaram.

53 Ibid, P=208.
54 Barua, Gunabhiram - Anandaram Dhekial Phookanar Jivan Charitra, 1830. Calcutta, P=29
The present Phookan, young man named Jaggo-Ram is saristadar of the Revenue Court at Gowahatty. He is talented but does not possess, I think, much principle. He has tolerable knowledge of the English language, which he reads and writes, and is, so far as I know, the only Assamese gifted. He makes no objection to dine with European and eats and drinks freely of what is put before him.  

All throughout Jajnaram had an intellectual tie with Calcutta. During his stay in Guwahati he wrote a letter published in the 9th July, 1831 issue of Samachar darpan, congratulating the British Government for abolishing the 'Satee' and also expressed his deep respect for Rammohan. "The first Assamese to bring in the message of the cultural resurgence of the Bengalee middle class in Assam was none but Jajnaram."

The contribution of the Christian Missionaries towards the re-establishment of Assamese language is undeniable. A few years after the advent of the British rule in Assam, two respected Missionaries Rev. N. Burns and Oliver Thomas Catar, belonging to the American Baptist Mission came to Sadiya of Assam with family. The principal purpose of their arrival was to preach Christianity among the local population. For this purpose, they very quickly picked up Assamese and then published 'Varna Parichay' in Assamese. They set up a school in Assamese medium and collecting students from the locality, started teaching them through this language. At that time, Bengali was used as official language in Courts and offices.

55. Guha, A. - Medieval and Early Colonial Assam, P-209.
and also as medium of instruction. Even earlier in 1813 the missionaries from Serampore Carey and Marshman translated the whole of the Bible into Assamese with the help of the Assamese scholar, Atmaram Sharma of Kaliabor in Naogaon district. "It is reported that Atmaram gave working knowledge in Assamese language to the first Christian Missionary James Roy who came to Guwahati."

"Asamiya Bhashar Byakaran" published by Mr. Robinson from Serampore in 1839 was the first Assamese grammar. Here, it is worth mentioning, Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Cottar too, side by side with their husbands dedicated themselves in spreading education to the illiterate masses. These two ladies came from Sibsagar and established 6 schools in Assamese medium. An English-Assamese book 'Vocabulary and phrases' was published by Mrs Cottar from the Mission press in 1840. She also wrote books on geography and arithmetic for the Assamese students. Besides, she translated a lot of descriptive stories from English and Bengali into Assamese. She published these books in 1850 for mental and development of the children and it is assumed that these marked the introduction of children literature in Assamese. In 1848 Rev. Brown published from Sibsagar a book 'grammatical notes of the Assamese language'. A Dictionary named 'Dictionary in Assamese and English' by Miles Bronson was published from Sibsagar Mission Press.

The American Baptist Missionaries published in 1846, the first Assamese newspaper 'Arunadol' from Sibsagar.

"This newspaper (Arunodoi) uplifted the mental horizon of the Assamese reader and it remained as pieces of witness for the social-political life of Assamese people".58

(ei kakatei(Arunodoi)Asomiya pathakar manasik diganta prasarita karidile aru amar samajik rajnaitik jibanar sakshi noral).

The contribution of 'Arunodoi' towards the consolidation of the Assamese language is undeniable.

"Besides, Arunodoi introduced the new civilization of the outside world to the educated Assamese".59

(Iyarepari bahirjagatar natun sabyatar jagat 'Arunodoi' e sikshit ashomiak chinaki karai dichil).

The history of struggle by Bap Missionaries in reestablishing the Assamese language (though not totally selfless, the ultimate motive of the missionaries was to use local language in preaching Christianity) was nevertheless immensely important. Missionary Brown in his report has observed. "We have the heart of every native with us in our efforts to perpetuate their own mother tongue. They have often expressed their thanks for our advocacy of their language. And they will never submit to repression of it in order to have a native influence with us, we must adopt a standard of spelling that they will support".60

The person worth mentioning a name amongst those local people who can forward to help the missionaries was Niddiram Farwell (This person was earlier known as Nidhiram Keot, later embraced Christianity and became Farewell). In this context, it is obligatory to mention the names of those eminent personalities of that age who brought the light of renaissance to Assamese Society and literature. Foremost among them were Anandaram Dhekiyal Phookan (1829-1859) and Maniram Dewan (1806-58).

"The Assamese society was very much dominated during this period by two eminent personalities - Anandaram Dhekiyal Phookan (1829-1859) the son of Haliram, and Maniram Dewan (1806-1858)".

At one stage of his student life, Anandaram Dhekiyal Phookan studied in the Hindu College of Calcutta (1841-44). He was immensely influenced by the newly generated Renaissance of Bengal and by the newly awakened young Bengal. Anandaram once had written to Hemchandra Baruah. "A new breed of people called 'Young Bengal' have come up in Bengal. My mind is full of joy to see the growth of a sprout as a few people of Assam have started emulating the good side of this while rejecting the bad side. I have the hope that this sprout will develop into a nice tree and will enhance the beauty and happiness of Assam with its fragrant flowers and sweet fruits".

(Bangla deshat 'yuba Bangalee' namere ek sreir manuh olaiche, Ashamat (tar) dosh eri gun lowa kishuman loker eti ankur howa dekhi mor man anandare pur haiche; aru ene asha haiche je sei gajaliti sonkale ejupi uttam gach habo, aru sugandhi phul aru madhur phalere ashamar sobha aru sukh barha ba).

61. Guha, Amalendu - Medieval and Early colonial, Assam, P-210
Anandaram Dhekial Phookoon struggled for the cause of Assamese language as school text and acceptable in the Courts. The American Baptist Missionaries and the 'Arunodoi' too, joined him. He fought for his whole life in his struggle for re-introduction of Assamese language.

'A few remarks on the Assamese language and on vernacular education in Assam, is a remarkable book by him in support of Assamese language. In 1849, he authored a book called 'Asomiya Lorar Mitra' as a children's text. Although he struggled for his whole life for the cause of Assamese language, his relationship with the neighbouring state of Bengal was never sour. "He didn't dislike the Bengalees. He never brought up in his mind the thought of Bengalees being aliens and loathsome. He disliked only those Bengalees with evil characters just as those amongst the Assamese".  

(Bangalee sakalaro tneo apriti nakarichit. Bangalee bilake je bijatiya aru bidweshar patra etu tneo ketiyao marat nanichil. Bangalier jene Asomiyaro tene kucharitraban lokakehe beya paichil).

The influence of the nineteenth century Bengal-Renaissance is significantly evident on the contemporary Assamese educated elites. There is hardly any doubt that the vanguard of the modern culture of Assam - Jagnaram Khargharia Phookan, Anandaram Dhekial Phookan, Gunabhiram Barua, Hemchandra Barua, were all more or less influenced by the ideology of Rammohun Roy, Young Bengal, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar and so on. "This new wave of Bengal came to Assam in two ways. The first one which is also the direct one was the carrying home the message of Renaissance to Assam by those who had gone to Calcutta in search of higher education and had received direct experience. The second and the indirect mode - the newspapers and other media through which the new message of renais..."

63. Barua, Gunabhiram - Anandaram Dhekial Phookanar Jiban-Charitra, P-16
to Assam by those who had gone to Calcutta in search of higher education and had received direct experience. The second and the indirect mode the newspapers and other media through which the new message of renaissance spread amongst the educated society of Assam".  


In this context, it may be worth mentioning that, the close contact of the English educated modern minded elites, a progressive newspaper like Arunodoi, the work for the society by the Christian Missionaries, the social and religious resurgence in the neighbouring Bengal - all these combined brought forth a new message to the middle class, city based, educated Assamese society. A feeble but awakening protest against superstitions, conservatism could be heard. Though large scale social reformation as in Bengal did not start in the nineteenth century, Assam, however a few educated youths of that age started opposing injustice and superstition.

Without confining himself to language re-establishment, Anandaram with his progressive mind tried to bring in the wind of renaissance to the Assamese society. The most significant thing is that he was the first man of modern ideology who made efforts in spreading education amongst the women for their all round development. The surge of renaissance that started in Bengal in the nineteenth century, showed the light to the Bengalees in overcoming the barriers of superstitions. A discussion of that glorious history, shows that along with social, political, religious and other ideological contexts.

64. Choudhury, Prasenjit - Unabinsha Shatikar Asomat E Bhumuki. 1-4 Dibrugarh, P-70
the preaching of women development and women liberation movement become particularly desirable to the Bengalees.

It was not possible that the contemporary newly educated young Assamese society could not remain unaffected. And the man who was most moved by the hapless and miserable condition of the neglected, deprived, suppressed, ignored womenfolk of Assam was Ananda Dhekial Phukoon. Since the growth and development of womenhood in the nineteenth century Assam is one of the topics of the present research, hence this discussion is being kept limited to only this topic without going into the details of other effects of the renaissance in the nineteenth century Assam.

First as a student and then in Government service, Anandaram Dhekial Phukoon was in Calcutta for a long time. He was influenced in many ways by the progressive organisations and personalities of Bengal at that time. "He became a member of Bethune Society established in 1851, which was devoted to the cause of female education and got himself acquainted with its Secretary Pearichand Mitra."65

Naturally he had keen desire to introduce women's liberation and female education in Assam. "He is the first modern Assamese person who worked for the spread of women education keeping in mind the aim of women liberation."66

He imparted education to his wife and daughters and believed that women could be liberated only through education.

Although at that time there was no educational institution for ladies in Assam, but the need for women's education was immensely felt by Anandaram in his generous and progressive mind. It is found in the biography of Anandaram written by Gunabhiram. "His view was that since both males and females are human beings, hence if the women remain illiterates then the other half of the remains afflicted with disease. He was also in favour of women's liberation. He believed that it is not a bad idea to accord freedom to the women if they are properly educated. He himself imparted education to his wife and initiated his daughter Padmabati to education in her fifth year."


During his stay at Nagaon, Anandaram, in association with his close associate, Gunabhiram, Baruah established 'Gnanapradaini Sabha'. Every weekend, discussions were held on various social and religious topics.

Gunabhiram Baruah (1837-94) and Hemchandra (1835-96) were particularly remarkable as successors of Anandaram Dhekial Phukoon.

Like Anandaram, Gunabhiram too was educated in Calcutta. Naturally, the Bengali renaissance influenced him without any doubt. He was deeply moved by the introduction of widow-marriage and eradication of child marriage. He wrote with great deal of pain and anguish in the January, 1857 issue of Arunodoi - 'O God! shall we ever get to rejoice at such auspicious event in Assam? O God! Have mercy on us'. Indeed, God become so merciful that such

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an auspicious and epoch-making event took place in his own life itself. In 1869, Gunabhiram adopted Bramho-faith and in December, 1872, legally married a widow named Bishnupriya Devi. This was the first registry marriage in Assam and his first crusade against the conservatism of Assamese Hindu society. Besides, he expresses in his own personal act, the deep respect and sympathy that he had for the women class. Gunabhiram had keen interest towards female education. He got his wife Bishnupriya Devi educated in Bengali and Assamese. Later on, Bishnupriya herself wrote a book called 'Nitikatha'. In an age when there was no convention of female education in Assam and women had to keep themselves in veil and conservative confinement, Gunabhiram sent his wife Bishnupriya Devi and daughter Swarnalata to Calcutta for education. In the backdrop of the contemporary society, it was undoubtedly a very bold act. Amongst the books written by Gunabhiram of worth mention are 'Anandaram Dhekial Phukanar Jiban Chiritra' 'Assam Buranjee' and 'Ramnavami Natak' - a play on social theme based on widow marriage. From Calcutta itself, Gunabhiram edited a monthly paper called 'Asom Bandhu' (1855).

One of the other co-thinkers of renaissance was Hemchandra Baruah. "If somebody was most enormously influenced by the modern thinking and ideology of the nineteenth century, it was Hemchandra Barua".

With a dislike against traditional customs and superstitions, Hemchandra became vocal and active in favour of the female education and widow marriage. Like Anandaram and Gunabhiram he too wrote various articles in the Arunodoi.

In his autobiography, Hemchandra has clearly spelled out why he had not married for the second time.

68. Choudhury, Prasenjit- Unobinsho satikar Asomat Ebhumuki, P-81.
time. If re-marriage is unacceptable in case of women, then why should men get that right? He was perhaps the first among the Assamese society to be such a stern critic of the social injustices.

"Hemchandra's social criticism had a moral core and even his liberalism was a more radical rather than of a conservative kind".

For his iconoclastic ideology, Hemchandra Baruah was almost deserted by the society. One of the greatest contributions of Hemchandra towards Assamese literature is his Hemkosh dictionary. Besides, 'The Grammar of Assamese Language' authored by him was the first scientifically coded grammar in Assamese language. Apart from this, his satirical social novel 'Bahire Rang Bhitar Kowabhaturi' deserves a special mention. Although he himself hailed from a conservative Brahmin family, he expressed through his novel, the evil customs hidden inside religion. In the history of Assamese prose and also in society, the name of Hemchandra Baruah is highly revered one. But his rigid stand against the contemporary social superstitious and conservative almost excommunicated from the Hindu society, so much so that the society even hesitated to come forward in his last rites after his death.

In the later Assamese literature, the man whose writings and way of life reflects the brightest form of humanism of the new age was the renowned Sahityarat Lakshminath Bezbarua (1868-1938). He was immensely influenced by the education, culture, literature and the new wakeful religion of Brahmo in contemporary Bengal. Being related to the Tagore family through marriage, he had deep contacts with the thoughts of the contemporary Bengal educated and respectable elites. Influenced by the ideology...

69. Barua, Lalit Kr. Bezbarua and Indian Renaissance (Lakshminath Bezbarua, the Sahityarathi of Assam-Gauhati University, 1972, P-20.)
of the new age, he, during his stay in Calcutta, published the newspaper 'Jonaki' in association with Chandramohan Agarwalla and Hemchandra Goswami. This influence of the renaissance only motivated him to develop his mother language Assamese. But despite his loyalty towards his mother tongue, he never showed any narrow mindedness in his life.

"It is point of considerable importance that Bezbarua and his associates had indicated a wider and more secular, in short humanistic base for our literature for the first time in our cultural history".

Following the path of humanism, women's liberation became a desirable objective in the nineteenth century Bengal. In the middle and last part of the nineteenth century, just as it had its reflections on the educated society of Assam, like that it also generated an urge amongst the contemporary upper class women to acquire education and create literature. The recognition of the manfolk was not sufficient for keeping the women established on their own rights, their self confidence and personal mental preparation was also an essential necessity.

In that context, the life and writings of Padmabati, the daughter of Anandaram Dhekial Phukon is undoubtedly fascinating and encouraging. The name of another progressive lady deserves special mention in this context. She was the wife of the progressive Gunabhiram Barua, Smt. Bishnupriya Devi (Approx. 1839-1892). Despite being widow, she ignored the rigid customs and resistance of the contemporary society, and in 1872 legally married Gunabhiram Baruah. Such exemplar courage is rare to find. Women is not merely a commodity for consumption, the society has no right to ignore her personal likings and dislikings. Through her:

70. Barua, L.K. - Bezbarua and Indian Renaissance - Lakshminath Bezbaruah. The Sahityarathi of Assam, Gauhati University, 1972, P-23.
own life, she set an example for the future generation. She made a success of the 'widow marriage propounded by Vidyasagar in her own life. Not only that, in order to impart proper education to her daughter Swarnalata, she alone rented a house in Calcutta and looked after her children. Instance of such a lady with such strong mind more than one hundred years from now is rare. She had remarkable knowledge in Bengali and Assamese language. She wrote a book called 'Nitikatha' too. Her daughter Swarnalata and son Gnanadabhiram were glorious personalities in Assamese society and literatures.

'Sudharmar Upakhyan' written by Padmabati Devi and published in 1884 is the first Assamese novel. It is no doubt a matter of pride and creditable thing that the good beginning of writing a novel in Assamese literature stated at the behest of a lady. When women education was treated as a crime also there were no facilities of women education, at such a time Anandaram's daughter made the starting of these revolutionary writing by living in a conservative society. During her life time Padmabati Devi wrote an article 'Place of woman in the society' and sent it for the magazine of Assam Sahitya Sabha. Padmabati in her writings on the rights and duties of women, their behaviour, capability they could occupy at the high place in the society.

"I remember those old days when I used to appreciate the characters of Arya ladies, their high thoughts and ideas. If we could follow those ideas and also could learn sanskrite education, I hope to get again high position in the society".71

The social obstruction, the narrowness of the society, hurdles on women education—Padmabati ignored.

all the hindrances for her literary devotion is no doubt encouraging. She wrote 'Hitā Sadika' besides her book 'Sudharmar Upakhyan' and also published many prose, poetry and articles in the newspaper prevalent at that time.

Another renowned personality of Assamese literature is Swarnalata Barua (1877–1937). Daughter of a well known progressive literateur Gunabhiram Barua, Swarnalata was born in a family nourished with thoughts and feelings of renaissance. The revolutionary movement of Bengal in the field of social and cultural affairs influenced some progressive and social conscious thinkers of Assam. Amongst those are Ananda Ram Dhekia Phukan and Gunabhiram Barua. No doubt this newly acquired progressive outlook influenced their personal as well as family life. So Gunabhiram wrote an article, entitled 'Asom deshar loksakalar prati nibedan patra' in the 'Arunodoi'.

"Father's and Mother's duty is not only to provide food and shelter for their children, but also to provide scope of learning. In that case, they will really perform their duties towards their children....... like a boy, girl child after being educated, should be married with a faultless and learned bride-groom with pomp and wealth".72

(Pitri matri laracholalik kebal khata pindhibalai dolei sihatar dhar sujita pare ene nahay, sihatnak samane parhibalika sikaba lage, tehe sihatar dhar sujai.............. putram nichina kanyaka palan kari sikai bujai, dashhin aru bidwan dekhi darak dhanratna samanwite samarpan kariba).

Swarnalata Devi's foundation of life from her childhood was built in a vigilant and affectionate atmosphere of her well known father and

72. Barua, Gunabhiram - Asom deshar loksakalar pratinibedan patra Arunodoi, July, 1853,
progressive and dauntless mother. At that time school education for women in Assam was a rare dream. In such a situation, she was sent to Calcutta for undergoing studies in Bethune School at the inspiration of her father and mother. Swarnalata's younger brother Gnanadabhiram wrote in his memoir 'Mor Katha'.

"I was really astonished seeing my father and mother's courageous act. How a girl of nine years was sent for studies to a distant place is no doubt an exemplary incident of boldness. But now our friends of Calcutta loves my elder sister. The English Head Mistress and other native teachers also specially loved her. She was the only Assamese girl at that time".73

(Mai ai aru dautar sah de dekhi acharit hmyan, Pray na bachariya chayali etik iman durat thai ahatat kam sahar katha nahay. Bisek etia kintu kalikatar bandhu bandhabe baidauk maram karichil aru Engraj pradhan sikkhatri aru deshi sikkhaitri sakal baidauk bisek maram karichil, tnawai tat pratham Asomiya chowali)

The influence of elite and educated society of Calcutta made Swarnalata sophisticated and refined. She inherited the devotion to literature and art. Inspiration of father and mother in the literary field encouraged her to write a book 'Arhi - Tirota' in Assamese language. Besides, she used to write articles in the magazine 'Asom Bandhu' edited by her father Gunabhiram Barua. Swarnalata was married to Dr. Nanda Kumar Roy on 1887. After being mother of two daughters she became widow in 1890. She then came back to her paternal house and again at the age of 23 she remarried in 1899 with Khirod Chandra Roy Choudhury. It is a remarkable event in the sense that both mother and daughter married twice, no doubt that was big slap for the conservative society.

73. Barua, Gnanadabhiram - Mor Katha (Gnanadabhiram Barua Rachanabali 1981, Jorhat, P-138.)
In the later era the women's role in the Assamese society definitely became wider with respect to personality or self exposition of women. In the field of art and literature, women's contribution to the society was shown side by side with male literatuer. After Swarnalata we get as a writer Nikunjalata Chaliha (1877-1948), Hemaprabha Das (1886-1946), Hirabati Gohain Barua (1890-1969), renowned poetess Dharmeswari Baruani (1892-1960), famous educationist Rajabala Das (1892-1985), first women edited newspapers editor Kamalalaya Kakati (1894-1946) and Hematala Barua (1896-1981). This famous women's contribution towards Assamese society is undeniable.

Next discussable lady is Nalinibala Devi (1898-1977). A remarkable personality in the realm of poetry in Assamese literature. A mystic poet Nalinibala is also wellknown for her autobiographical writing 'Eri Aha Dinbor' (1976).