Chapter I
INTRODUCTION
SURVEY OF BENGALI PROSE WRITINGS FROM SIXTEENTH TO EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

It is common knowledge that the history of Bengali prose literature dates back to the beginning of the nineteenth century. At that time the Fort William College was opened in Calcutta and Srirampur Mission of the Danes in Srirampur, a little away from Calcutta. Under the auspices of these two institutions a large number of Bengali prose books were written or translated and published. All these Bengali books marked the beginning of Bengali prose literature. It is necessary that a brief discussion be made to highlight the contributions made by these two institutions towards the advancement of Bengali prose literature.

1. FORT WILLIAM COLLEGE (1800 A.D.)

Lord Wellesly during his tenure as Governor General of India realised that the East India Company in order to carryout its administration brought the young English civilians who were within the age range of 15 to 18 but had little knowledge of Indian language, culture and customs.
So Wellessly realised that a college should be set up to train and educate the young civilians with the language, literature, history, geography, economics, physics, Botany, chemistry, Astronomy and legal system and other matters so that a better administration could be provided to this country through these trained civilians. With this end in view Lord Wellessly made a declaration that those British civilians and employees who would not be able to acquire a great deal of knowledge within 1st January of 1801 about the language, literature and the legal system of India, his services would be dispensed with. An extract of the declaration of Lord Wellessly in this context is quoted here:

"From and after the 1st January 1801, no servant will be deemed eligible to any of the offices here in after mentioned, unless he shall have passed an Examination (the nature of which will be here after determined) in laws and regulations, and in the languages, a knowledge of which is hereby declared to be an indispensable qualification."

So Fort William College was founded on the 19th August of 1800 A.D. at Lalbazar near the then Calcutta. The

1. Ashit Kumar Banerjee, Unabimshasatabdi Prathamardha O Bangla Sahitya, p. 45
Aim and objective of the college is mentioned here:

"A College is hereby founded at Fort William College in Bengal for the better instruction of the Junior Civil servants of the company."\(^1\)

It reveals that the college was established not to provide instruction to the Indian Civil servants but to those who were brought to India from abroad.

After the establishment of Fort William College and in order to provide instruction to the British civilians and make them conversant with the different Indian languages the departments of Marathi, Farsi, Sanskrit, Bengali, Hindustani, Tamil, Telugu and Kanari etc. were opened and professors were appointed for this purpose. But there cropped up some difficulties as no professors were available for the departments of Bengali, Sanskrit and Marathi. As a result, William Carey, Principal of the Fort William College finding no way out took over the additional charges of these three departments.

After taking over the charge of Bengali Department, Carey faced certain difficulties in teaching language to the young British civilians as there was dearth of books on

1. Sajani Kanta Das, Bangla Gadya Sahityer Itihas, p. 97
Bengali prose. So, in order to solve the problem of books on Bengali prose he himself began to cultivate learning of Bengali and composing books in a simple and lucid way. He tried to compose Bengali books by the Professors, Pandits and Munshi of Bengal and provide them impetus for writing books and in this great venture these Bengali scholars - Golak Nath Sarna, Tarini Charan Mitra, Rajib Lochan Mukherjee, Ram Kishore Tarka Churamani, Mohan Prasad Thakur, Haraprasad Roy and Kashinath Mukherjee, etc. in general and Mritunjoy Vidyalankar and Ramram Bose in particular, rendered yeoman service for composition of Bengali prose literature. As a result, the concerted efforts of Principal Carey and his colleagues it was possible in teaching, writing and reading of Bengali by the young British civilians within two or three years. Hanter, a student of Fort William College read out an article in Bengali of his own composition in an open meeting held on 20th March in 1803. A little part of his article is presented here:

“অনুদেশের পমদ ও অনুদেশের যুবস্থার দর্শন ও অনুদেশের বিদ্যারস্থে লোকের কুঞ্জির বৃদ্ধি হয় এবং হিন্দু লোকেরদের পোষের মতে প্রতিমে আটকনদি ।

1. Sukumar Sen, Bangla Sahitye Gadya, p. 17
A list of Bengali prose books composed by William Carey and his colleagues is submitted here mentioning the books against their names:

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<td>2. <em>Kathopakathan</em> (1801)</td>
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<td>3. <em>Itihasmala</em> (1812)</td>
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<td>4. <em>A Dictionary of the Bengali language</em> (1815-1825)</td>
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<td>2. Ramram Bose</td>
<td>1. <em>Raja Pratapaditya Charitra</em> (1801)</td>
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<td>3. Hitopadesh (1808)</td>
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<td>4. <em>Prabodh Chandrika</em> (1818-33)</td>
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<td>5. <em>Vedanta Chandrika</em> (1817)</td>
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<td>4. Golak Nath Sarma</td>
<td><em>Hitopadesh</em> (1802)</td>
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<td>5. Tarini Charan Mitra</td>
<td><em>Oriental Febolist</em> (1803)</td>
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<td>6. Chandi Charan Munshi</td>
<td><em>Tota Itihas</em> (1805)</td>
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<td>7. Rajib Lochan Mukherjee</td>
<td><em>Maharaj Krishna Chandra Rayashya Charitang</em> (1805)</td>
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<td>8. Ram Kishore Tarka Churamani</td>
<td><em>Hitopadesh</em> (1808)</td>
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<td>9. Mohan Prasad Thakur</td>
<td><em>Vocabulary Bengalee &amp; English</em> (1801)</td>
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<td>10. Haraprasad Roy</td>
<td><em>Purush Parikshya</em> (1815)</td>
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<td>2. <em>Atma tatta Kaumodi</em> (1823)</td>
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The third book composed by William Carey is *Itihis-mala* which is "A collection of stories in the Bengali language collected from various sources" and as a model of his composition a little extract from his book is presented here:
This is a specimen of standard literary Bengali prose.

This is a composition of the earlier part of the nineteenth century; so it is but natural that it is quite normally developed. 2

2. SRIRAMPUR MISSION (1800 A.D.)

Srirampur Mission was established at the Dutch centre, Srirampur near Calcutta on the 10th of January, 1800. This is a Christian institution. During the later part of the eighteenth century William Carey along with John Thomas came to

1. Ashit Kumar Banerjee, Bangla Sahityer Sampurna Itibritte, p. 385
2. Sushil Kumar Dey, Nineteenth Century Bengali Literature, p. 120
Bengal to spread Christianity. In the year 1790 William Ward, J. Marshman, D. Barnsdon and W. Grant etc. came and joined them. At that time East India Company made Calcutta their principal business centre. They thought that if Calcutta be made the centre of Srirampur Mission their business would be hampered.¹

At first the Missionaries selected Calcutta as their publicity centre. But due to severe opposition by the East India Company they made their centre at Srirampur near Calcutta. This is the first Protestant Christian Mission. As the Missionaries were solely propagandist of Christianity and anti-Hindu, they wanted to translate the Bible into Bengali. By this means they thought the Bengalees would embrace Christianity renouncing Hinduism, i.e., they would worship the Lord Jesus. With this objective they learned Bengali and translated the Bible and distributed it among the Bengalees. They even distributed the Bengali Bible among the ascetics at Haridwar. In order to attract the mind of the Bengalee, they even published and distributed Krittibasi Ramayana, Kasidashi Mahabharata, Valmiki Ramayana, various Sastras, Samachar Darpan (Bengali weekly), Digdarshan (Bengali monthly) etc. in Bengali. But the consequence was reverse to their thought. The Bengalees, no doubt found mental food on these translations.

¹ Ashit Kumar Banerjee, Unabimshasatabdir Prathamardha O Bangla Sahitya, p. 36

Here is an extract of the Bible (Genesis Chapter 1) translated into Bengali is quoted here:

“দৃঢ়কণ্ঠ প্রতিবেদন করিলেন তত্ত্ব ও সিদ্ধান্ত। স্বাভাবিক ভূমি ও অয়িনপালন হইল এবং পথঞ্জলিত উন্নয়ন অনুসারে অস্তরমার আজ্ঞা মোক্ষযুদ্ধ হইলেন জনের উন্নযন। দেহ পশ্চাৎ বলিলেন দীৰ্ঘ হৃদয় ভাঙ্গি হইল তখন পশ্চাৎ সে দীৰ্ঘ বিবাহ সৌজন্য প্রদৰ্শন। তর্কে পশ্চাৎ দীৰ্ঘ অধিকার বিপদ করিলেন। পশ্চাৎ ও দীৰ্ঘ নাম রাখিলেন দীৰ্ঘ ও অর্থনীতির নাম বৈজ্ঞানিক। সংবাদ ও আত্মরক্ষার হইলে হয় প্রথম দিনে।”

But before the Srirampur Mission and Fort William College, Bengali prose writings were plentiful. For example, three books written by Portuguese Missionaries were written:
(1) Brahman Roman Catholic Sambad, (2) Crepar Sastrer Arthbhed, (3) Bengali Portuguese vocabulary and Idioms.

Now a short discussion on the Bengali prose writings of the Portuguese Missionaries is given below.

1. BRAHMAN ROMAN CATHALIC SAMBAD:

This book was written by Dom Antonio who was the Prince of Bhusana of Bengal. In 1663 in his childhood the Mug Pirates kidnapped him and took him to Arakan. He was rescued by Father Manoel Do Rojario, a Portuguese Missionary. He was converted to Christianity and was named Dom Antonio Do Rojario. Later on he came to Bhusana to propagate Christianity. First of all he converted his near relatives and neighbours to Roman Catholic Christianity. It is said that nearly thirty thousand people were converted to Christianity in one day in Dacca and Chattagram by his influence and propaganda.¹

This book was composed at the end of the seventeenth century, undoubtedly. The greatness of Lord Jesus has been depicted in this book in the form of question-answer between a Brahmin and a Roman Catholic. An extract from this book is presented here:

Bramane - "Tomi kare bhaja?
Rom - Paramesvarere, Pūrna brahmere.

¹. Sajani Kanta Das, Bangla Gadya Sahityer Itihas, p. 21
B - তোমার বার উত্তম ভজন ভজা; আমার তাহার ভজি।

R - যদি তোমার সুপ্রীম ব্রহ্মার ভজা; তবে কেন এ কুরিতি, কুদ্ধরা নানা অধর্ম ভজন দেখি?

B - তুমি স্বতন্ত্রতা হয় আমার অন্যান্য পরমেশ্বরে নিন্দা কারা? হাতে তোমার সাংস্কৃতিক সাংস্কৃতিক কারণ নাই?

R - আমার সাংস্কৃতিক সাংস্কৃতিক তুমি জ্ঞানান্তরিক, যা জ্ঞান তুমি নিন্দা কারা; এই যে তুমি অধর্ম অধর্ম কারণ, তুমি দুর্লভ নারাকী।

B - তবে তোমার সাংস্কৃতিক সাংস্কৃতিক এই নিন্দা কারা মহান নারাকী হয়, তবে কেন নিন্দা কারা?

R - অমিত ধর্ম নিন্দা কারা না; ধর্মীয় ধর্ম কারা, অধর্মীয় অধর্মীয় কারা, পাপী পাপী, পুণ্যের পুণ্যে পুণ্য কারা, জাননির জাননি কারা, শ্রী শ্রী কারা, ব্রহ্মানারা ব্রহ্মানারা কারা, কাংদালেরা কাংদালেরা কারা, দুঃখের দুঃখ কারা, গোকানারা গোকানা কারা, অমর্নারা অমর্নারা কারা, বিষ বিষ কারা, এমাতা কারা এমাতা কারা পাপ পাপ নাই: ইহাতো প্রত্যাখ্যাত না জানি ধর্ম ধর্ম জানি নাপারে; পরিপালনে মুক্তি না হয়, ইহা না জানি, এ কুরুন হাতে নিন্দা না কারা।”

In this specimen there are some errors in spelling such as - "ঋষি ঋষি, ঋষি ঋষি, ঋষি ঋষি, ঋষি ঋষি, ঋষি ঋষি, "

1. Abdur Rahim Khondkar, The Portuguese Contribution to Bengali Prose, p. 205
2. CREPAR SASTRER ARTHBHED:

This book was composed by Mano el Da Asumpaceum in Dacca in 1735 and was published in Lisbon, the capital of Portugal in 1743. It deals with Roman Catholik Christianity in the form of conversation between the preceptor and the disciple. Mano-el Da has shown Christianity to be the greatest religion where 'kripa' or grace of God is best manifested undermining other religion, Hinduism. He also wrote a grammar and vocabulary of the Bengali language for teaching Bengali correctly to the Portuguese padri. The name of this book is 'Vocabulario em Idio ma Bengalla, E Portuez. This book was also published in Lisbon, the capital of Portugal.

'Crepar Sastrer Arthbhed' was written in the dialect of bhowal of Dacca (East Bengal) and printed in Roman letters. An extract from this book is quoted here:

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G - "Apūrba kathā kahitā, kintu keha kahibe : ami māla japinā, athāca amān dharan bhajāna kari; japi khrīstar kache, arar sidhare bhajana kari, ehi bhajanar karān asā rakhi svarger jaibar, tahān kripay. tomi ki balā?
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The language of this book is chaste Bengali. Here the usual style of Bengali prose has not been followed, rather the punctuation marks have been used in European style.

3. GRAMMAR OF THE BENGALI LANGUAGE:

Another book was written in 1778 by Nathaniel Brassey Halhed. This is a grammar. He was born on the 25th of May, 1751 in Westminster and in 1772 came to Bengal as a civilian. He wrote this book mainly for teaching Bengali to the employees of the East India Company. For whatever purpose he might have written this book it is a remarkable document on early Bengali Grammar.

This grammar was written in English containing 216 pages and eight chapters. He knew it well that the Bengali language originated from Sanskrit. Hence he wrote this book in the style of Sanskrit Grammar. An excerpt from his book,

1. Sajani Kanta Das, Bangla Gadyer Pratham Jug, p. 18
2. Pramatha Nath Bisi, Bangla Gadyer Padanka, p. 16
'A Grammar of the Bengali Language' is given as a specimen of Bengali prose of the eighteenth century:

This letter has been written at the end of the eighteenth century. Here the words 'শরীরে ওয়াজ শেলাত' etc. are Persian. At that time Persian words were customarily used in Bengali letters. There were also numerous errors in spelling such as 'স' in place of 'স', 'চ' in place of 'চ', 'দুই' in place of 'দুই' etc.

The documents and agreements of the eighteenth century bear the testimony of Bengali prose.

There arose a conflict between the Vaisnava of Bengal and the Vaisnava of Brindabana centering whether Radha was the real wife of Lord Krishna or not. The Vaisnava community of Gaur held the view that Radha was not Krishna's own wife. To the contrary, the Vaisnava community of Brindaban opined that Radha was the Krishna's own wife. In order to discard the view of the Vaisnavas of Bengal, a Vaisnava of Brindaban named Krishnadeb Sarma came to Gaur. He in course of his religious discourse with the Vaisnavas of Bengal and followers of Chaitanya Deb had to give his own view and accepted the views of the followers of Chaitanya. Afterwards he wrote a 'Ajoya Patra' to them and in this connection a document was prepared both by the Vaisnavas of Bengal and Sri Krishna Deb Sarma of Brindaban. The document not only occupies an important place in the history of Bengali prose but also speaks of the existence of pre-modern age of Bengali prose.

An extract of the document is quoted here:

1. "আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র আজন বৃদ্ধি এই সঙ্গত করিলে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করিলে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র সঙ্গত করিলে আনি লসে স্বর্ণকেক্ত্র
This 'Ajoya Patra' has been written in 1731. But here no punctuation marks have been used except at the end of the sentence. If the punctuation marks were used properly the sentence would have become improved.

2. "তোমার মন্দ সর্বদা বাসনা করাক অশীল বৃষ্টিপাত
পরর মূর্ত আরিখের পর ২৭ রোজ রাখে পাইয়া সামান্যৱাজার জানিলাম শ্রীমূত ফেরোজ আগুশা এর এখানে আইশনের সমস্ত জে পাইয়াছি এতক্ষণ তোক লিখিতে নাই লিখিতেই জানা একমিক শ্রীমূত জগতচন্দ্র নিম-রোজের পর বাদী হইতে আনিয়াছেন মেমন্দ আজিম মুকত আগমের ধারাতেই বুঝিয়ান পক্ষ হইয়া আপনারি
মন্দ করিতেছেন যে সকল চারে ও অবশ্য বুঝিয়ে।" 2

1. Dinesh Chandra Sen, Banga Sahitya Parichaya (vol. II), p. 1640
2. Sajani Kanta Das, Bangla Sahityer Itihas, pp. 15-16
The letter was written in 1771 relating to Zamindari and litigations. This was written by Maharaja Nanda Kumar to his son Gurudas.

There are numerous spelling mistakes in Bengali such as ঝোলারের, প্যাটোর, প্রোটোফিল, রপ্তানি, র্নাম, র্নামী, র্নন্দী, etc. Here both the old and new styles have been followed in the composition of Bengali prose. No punctuation marks have been used except at the end of the sentence.

3. “সরকার সেনার বাংলা করা করা হবিকের কর্তৃত্ব করা বিষয় অধিদপ্তরের আওরা সংবাদের দুটি পেশার আমূলতার ও রূপু ও আর ক্ষেত্রে আবাদ করণ ও মালিকের সার নিরিখের ও রক্ষা করিবার নিরিখের মান স্বাচ্ছন্দে ও আরো জন মনান্দের বুদ্ধি আরে। করিবেন।”

It is a legal document. The Supreme Court was established in Calcutta in 1777. At that time Lord Cornwallis was the Governor General of India and all the books were written in English. He felt extreme necessity of translating English legal book into Bengali for justice. This was

1. Arun Kumar Mukherjee, Luso Bacharer Pratono Bangla Gadya Puthi, p. 3
translated by Admonstone in 1791 from English legal act into Bengali. Here a great deal of spelling mistakes are found such as প্রতিষ্ঠা > 'নিমিত্তে', মথন > 'জখন', মাহারা > 'জাহারা'; ভাবিজ্ঞের > 'জাহারিজের' etc. The writers were not very conscious of the spelling mistakes in those days. But no difficulty is felt in understanding its meaning clearly.

An agreement paper of the oldest Bengali prose of the last part of the seventeenth century was found. It was in the British Museum along with other Bengali legal papers. Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee got it from the British Museum and it is presented as a model of Bengali prose of the seventeenth century.

“I আকৃষ্ট ।
আই মিত্রি পার সাহেব মিত্রি পার কেল মহাসেব লিখিতো আইকুন্দাস ও নরসিংহ দাস আপন আমরা দুই পুরো করার করিলা এক কিছু বারে সুনার গায় ও পাশ নিকুটি সর্বোত্তম ২ দুই রামানুর্জিতা করিতে আরু দালালে লেজ আর কুন দারা নাই খুরাক সমেত এই নিয়মে করা পর দিল্লী প ২২০৭ ততো ১৪ অগ্রহায়”।

1. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, Bangla Bhasa Prasangik, p. 27
This agreement was made in 1696 swearing by the name of God (Sri Krishna). Here Sanskrit accent has been used in place of Bengali accent such as নরসিংহ নরসিংহ. This sort of use is not found in modern Bengali prose. Here errors in spelling are abundantly found such as লোকে নুকে; দুই নুই; কারিয়া কারিক্ষা; কেন কান; দাবি দাবাজ; খোঁকার খুরাক; নিম্নে নিখাসে' etc.

SUNYAPURAN:

In 1314 B.S. Nagendra Nath Bose edited and published from Bangiya Sahitya Parshad three Bengal books. The authors of these three books are unknown. But the three books are written in poetic form. He combined the three books into one and named it as 'Sunyapurun'. In this book the greatness of 'Suny-devata' has been described in detail. There is controversy about the book as well as about its author. In the bhanita of this book the names of many authors are found such as 'Ramai Pandit', 'Sreejut Ramai', 'Pandit Ram', 'Ramaiyer' etc. As there are many names of the authors in bhanita of the book it can be said without any doubt that it was composed at least by five authors. There is also a controversy about the writings and composition of the ancient

1. Bhaktimadhah Chatterjee, Sunyapurun, p. 9
Vaisnava poets of Bengal such as Chandidas, Bidyapati, Gobindadas and Jnanadas etc. The kavya is very popular and widespread and there is every possibility of inclusion of other writings in it. The volumes of epics have become so big in this way and there is no exception to Sunyapurāṇ also.

Ramai Pandit was the principal priest of the Dom community. He was very popular among the Doms. Most of the people of Dom community were either uneducated or little educated. As a result by interpolation of various hands like priest, devotees etc., diversified words and sentences have made it so difficult and complex that naturally its oldness has become doubtful. Nevertheless the bhānitaś added to it like Sreejut Ramai, Pandit Ram, Ramaiyer and Ramai etc. seem to be later manipulation.

The scholars are of different opinions regarding the time of writings of Sunyapurāṇ. According to Nagendra Nath Bose, it was written in the eleventh century during the reign of Dharmapal. Dinesh Chandra Sen described it as the specimen of the earliest Bengali literature. Jogesh Chandra Roy opined that it might have been written any time from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century. Dr. Sahidulla has specified three

1. Ashit Kumar Banerjee, Banāla Sahityer Itibritta (vol. IV), p. 28f
2. Bhudeb Choudhury, Banāla Sahityer Itikatha, p. 63
distinct phases of this book. Firstly, it was written by Ratrai Pandit, secondly, it was influenced by Nath and Islam literature and finally, some latest writings and Sanskrit words were interpolated to it.¹ According to Nagendra Nath Bose, somewhere its language is of the earliest time whereas in some places its language is of much later time.² Dr. Sukumar Sen is of the view that its time could never be earlier than seventeenth century, probably later part of the eighteenth century or even later than that. Its language is influenced by dialects of various regions and it is of the sixteenth to the eighteenth century.³

Sushil Kumar Dey's remark about the oldness of Sunyapuran is presented here:

"... the so called prose passages, if not the verse, reveal a much earlier and more antique form of a diction. If the language of the recently published Sri Krishna Kirtan belongs to the early part of the 14th century, we can safely assume that the prose of Sunyapuran must have had its origin in a somewhat earlier age ... ... "⁴

1. Bangia Sahitya Patrika, 1304 B.S., p. 68
3. Sukumar Sen, Bengali Sahitya Gadya, p. 9
4. S.K. Dey, Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century, p. 457
If we subscribed on this view then we are to conclude that the broken prose of Sunyapuran is the earliest specimen of Bengali prose. But this view is not tenable. In this regard Dr. Ashit Kumar Banerjee’s view may be quoted:

Sunyapuran has been exhibited by some as the earliest specimen of Bengali prose. But it is to be noted that Sunyapuran is nothing but a composition of disconnected sentences by semi-educated persons under the cover of Ramai Pandit. In it there are defected couplets which appear to some as the earliest Bengali prose. But there is not an iota of prose syntax in it. Any one may be mired by its broken, incomplete and haphazard couplets to see it as prose. On close observation it becomes clear that it is tuned with couplet (payar), no sense pause (vavyati) of prose in there. In quest of origin of Bengali prose Sunyapuran should be abandoned.

Now some excerpts from the Sunyapuran are given below:

1. “পশিচ দুঃখারে পরঃ ধীলা দরসনঃ।
পশিচ দুঃখারে চন্দ্র পঞ্জারিকে পাড়িতে পড়ে ঢেকার।
আঘ বাঁশ চন্দ্রে বাঁধির বাটা স্মৃতি খাব
রাসার রাঙিত যুগে নির্মাণ করি নিঙা ॥”

1. Ashit Kumar Banerjee, Puratan Bangla Gadya Grantha Sankalan (vol. 1), p. Intro. 31
2. Bhakti Madhab Chatterjee, Sunyapurans, p. 122
Here we find broken prose. Here the words 'লুকি' and 'পাটরী' have been used in place of 'আত্ম' and 'অসব্য' respectively. Verb in future tense has been used as 'খাবি' instead of 'খাবি' or 'খাবি' in the sentence.

2. "বেগাপুরি পায়ের ঔপরে সেটা হাড় বৈষ্ণব। সেই হাড়ের ঔপরে চ্যাদার বৈষ্ণব। চ্যাদার ঔপরে অত্যাকরণ বৈষ্ণব। অত্যাকরণ ঔপরে আদরমনি বৈষ্ণব।"

Here in the composition Sanskritized verbs differing in spelling have been used at the end of the sentences namely 'বৈষ্ণব' and 'বৈষ্ণব। Perhaps the Sanskrit verb 'বন্ধন' has been transformed into 'বৈষ্ণব' and an uneducated scribe not knowing the correct spelling used the two forms.

VAISNAVA KORCHA:

From the early seventeenth century there was a trend of writing Vaisnavite diaries or essays in the form of question-answer mixing prose and poetry. Some of them have their writers' names in them and some are without any name of the writers which denotes that those writers were completely indifferent about their names. One such essay of the seventeenth century has been found. The essay is very small. The

1. Bhaktimadhab Chatterjee, Sunyapuran, p. 232
name of the essay is Dehakorcha and the name of writer is
Narottam Das. The first part of the essay is in broken prose
and the last is in 'payal'. Some part of the Dehakorcha is
given below:

1. "তুমি কি। আমি জীবি। তুমি বেগন জীবি।
আমি তোমাকে জীবি। আমি তোমাকে বলে । তাঁ কি
থাকেন বেগন। তাঁ বাড়ি খেলে। তাঁর বাড়ি কে। পশ্চ
আধা একবারে ছন্ন রিপু ইশ্বর এই সকল এক
মোগে ভাব খেলে।"  

This is a combination of small sentences in question-
answer form. Here the question is 'আসা কিছু খেল' and its answer
is 'ছন্ন রিপু ইশ্বর এই সকল একমোগে ভাব খেলে।' These two are
only complete sentences.

2. "ব্যাঘ্রকল্পের উজ্জ্বলে পালিতাজির কুঞ্জ। তার অকারিতে
আসীন বন্ধুকে আছে। মধ্যে এক হারা নারী কর্ম্মকুঞ্জ। তারমধ্যে
চক্ষুর বুদ্ধি আছে নারী রুদ্ধ জড়িত বন্ধ্যে বল্লে করে। নারী
পুস্পগুচ্ছ আহত নমুনে দূষিতে হ। মধ্যে রত্ন পার্শ্ব। নারী পুষ্প
সম্মানে। বিভূট তার চতুর্দিকে নারী পার্শ্ব পরিপূর্ণ। তার
মধ্যে কিসারূ কিসৌরিকে বৈষ্ণবে নারী সেবা নন্দে সম্রপন
করেন।"

1. Sukumar Sen, Bangla Sahitya Gadya, p. 7
2. Ibid., p. 7
3. Pramatha Nath Bisi, Bangla Gadyer Padakha, p. 8
This Vaisnava Korchha was composed in 1768 A.D., having no name of the piece and its writer, only the time of writing is found. Here also broken prose is found in piece-meal. But in some places complete sentences are found, for example,

'নানা রঞ্জে জড়িত বন্ধে রাখিতে করে'; 'নানা পুশ্চ অথচ দুরিন্ধনে'; 'চতুবিং নানা সামগ্রী পরিপূর্ণ'; 'জার মধ্যে কিশোর কিশোরীকে বৈসাইকা নানা সেবা সহি গত করেন'।

These are the sentences of standard literary prose of higher calibre. But there are some spelling mistakes in it such as:

শস্বাতে > 'সম্পাতে'; মানশী > 'সামগ্রী'; কিশোর > 'কিশোর'; নৃস্র > 'নার'; (না = নর), পরিপূর্ণ > 'পরিপূর্ণ'; বৈসাইকা > 'বৈসাইকা' এলার।

This sort of mistakes is not found in modern Bengali prose.

1. Pramatha Nath Bisi, Bangla Gadyar Padankar, p. 8
A book of the name *Seksubhodaya* written in the later part of the sixteenth century has been found. The book is written in chaste Bengali prose. The book was written when Toradmal was the Revenue Collector of Bengal. Its language is peculiar: The Bengali has been quoted with correct and incorrect Sanskrit covering. A bit close observation reveals the Bengali form.¹

The sentences of *Seksubhodaya* are small. One of the notable characteristics of this book is that here in one hand Bengali prose emerging from the verse form, on the other hand the verse form is transforming itself into prose.² Here some specimens are presented below:

The conversation between the ministers and the servant:

The Sek asked the minister: 'হে মাজিন কেন?'

The minister replied: 'অবে যেন.'³

'চৌদীশ মধ্যে জানিবে মাহার নাম।
বারেক রূপ করি মের এন প্রাণ
দেশে পেলে দিব তোমার নামে অর্থক দান।'⁴

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¹ Sukumar Sen, *Benga Sahitye Gadya*, p. 4
² Sukumar Sen, *Seksovdudya*, p. 61
³ Ibid., p. 61
⁴ Ibid., p. 10
Seksubhodaya1 was written in broken verse form. If the verb be placed at the end of the sentence it becomes pure prose which is very easy and simple and not mixed with any other language except Sanskrit. This type of use is not found in modern Bengali.

In the early nineteenth century before the origin of Bengali prose literature by Fort William College and Srirampur Mission, ample specimens of Bengali prose have

1. Sukumar Sen, Seksubhodaya, p. 90/91
been found. But these are mainly of the eighteenth century only a few of the seventeenth century, but not before that. The materials of the seventeenth century are not plentiful and those are haphazard and disconnected. Still the historical value is beyond any doubt. But surprisingly, sufficient materials of old Bengali prose down from the 16th century have been found outside Bengal. Historical and dict'cinal values of this prose which is rather voluminous are immense. Now they are being discussed one by one.

1. SRI SANKARDEV (1449-1569 A.D.).

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries prophet Srimanta Sankardev occupied an eminent place in the society of north eastern India. He was the main propagator to spread the Bhagabut Dharma in Assam. He lived for 116 years spreading religion for about a century. The exponent of Vaisnavite religion Sri Chaitanyadev (1486-1533 A.D.) was his contemporary. Sri Chaitanyadev was only an exponent and ascetic of Vaisnavite religion. But Srimanta Sankardev was not only an exponent and ascetic of Vaisnavite religion but also a great poet and dramatist himself. In fact he was the greatest litterateur of old Assamese literature. Before elaborating his literary writings let us discuss his biography in a nutshell.
Sankardev was born in 1449 in the village of Batadraba in the district of Nowgong, Assam. His father's name was Kusumbar Bhuyan and his mother's name was Satyasundhiya Devi. His forefathers were the Zeminders. His life was miraculous. He lost his parents within a short time of his birth. His grand-mother Kherasuti brought him up. When he was twelve, he was sent to a village Tol of Mahendra Kandi and became an erudite scholar at the age of twenty two. At first he married Suryabati Devi but after giving birth to a daughter, she died. Then at the age of fiftyfive, he married Kalindi Devi.

Sankardev passed his childhood at his native land. At that time he acquired a great deal of knowledge about the Sanskrit language and literature and Vaisnavism. As he lost his parents and wife at an early age, there came a feeling of renunciation in his mind. Then he travelled throughout the length and breadth of the country from Gaya, Puri, Brindaban, Mathura, Dwarka, Kashi, Prayag, Sitakunda, Ayodhya and Badrikashram, etc. and after twelve years he came back to his native land. During his long pilgrimage of twelve years he came into contact with many Vaisnava scholars and acquired much knowledge about Bhagabat Vaisnavism. Then, on the one hand, he began to preach Vaisnavism and set up Vaisnava Satra

1. Lakshminath Bezbarua, Sri Sankardev aru Sri Madhabdev, p. 14
2. Birinchi Kumar Baruah, History of Assamese Literature, p. 19
and, on the other hand, composed various dramas and Kirtan and Baneot sons etc. As a result, he became very popular in the Ahom kingdom. At that time the Brahmin community of the Ahom kingdom was very powerful. They could not tolerate his preaching of Vaisnavism, his popularity and name and fame. They opposed him tooth and nail and hatched a conspiracy to murder him. At this being helpless he went to Barpeta in Kamrup and set up a Vaisnava satra and Namghar at Fatbaushi. He composed many Kavyas and dramas. After staying sometime there he went to the Koch kingdom at the invitation of Naranarayan, the king of the Koch. Naranarayan became much attracted to his Vaisnavism and became his disciple within a very short time. He after being his disciple helped him to spread Vaisnavism in his kingdom. His brother Chilaray also helped him very much and founded a Vaisnava Satra for him at Veladanga adjacent to the capital. He lived up to 110 years and spent about twenty-five years of his life in this kingdom. He at the request of Chilaray, the brother of Naranarayan, composed 'Ramvijoy' drama. He passed away in this kingdom in 1568.

Mahapurush Sankardev was born in Assam and composed many Kavyas and dramas in Assam. But in connection with the discussion of Bengali literature how he (Sankardev) is

1. Birinchi Kumar Barua, History of Assamese Literature, p. 23
2. Sudhanshu S. Tunga, Banglar Baire Bangali Gadya Charcha, p. 10
involved needs a little clarification. Sankardev's literary works dates back to fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and at that time the Bengali, the Assamese and the Oriya language had no separate identity of their own and these three languages belong to one linguistic group and it was easily comprehended by the people of these three language groups. Charyapada was composed in between the tenth and eleventh centuries. But in Charyapada there are certain elements which every Assamese, Bengalee and Oriya can claim as his own language. Sri Krishna Kirtan was composed in between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and on this these three communities also may have their claim as well. At that time, these three languages were blended into one. But at present each of these three languages has her own separate identity and is not dependent on any other languages. At this juncture Sankardev was born. He wrote most of his literary works and dramas during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and it is natural that his writings would have blending of the Assamese, the Bengalee, the Oriya and the Maithili language. In this connection the comment of Gunabhiram Barua deserves mention: He said that Sankardev's literary works belong not only to the Assamese language but also to Bengali, Oriya and those of North West province and Assam. Baru Chandidas, the poet of Sri Krishna Kirtan preceded Sankardev and was born in Bengal and his mother tongue was Bengali whereas Sankardev was born outside Bengal and his mother tongue was Assamese but there is a
surprising similarity between the languages of the two. As the Indo-Aryan languages there is deep relation between Bengali and Assamese. Besides, this Sankardev spent a great part of his life in Cooch Behar and preached Vaisnavism and composed his literary works there where the prevalent language was Bengali. Thus, it may be inferred he was much influenced by the Bengali language. During the early part of the British rule in Assam Bengali was in vogue and the historical letters, documents etc. bear the testimony of it.¹ He was closely connected with Bengali language. As a result, his composition abounds with Bengali words. Bara Chandidas composed Sri Krishna Kirtan in between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in which he used certain words which are incomprehensible. But to the contrary Sankardev’s literature and language is very easy and lucid and can be easily understood. In certain cases use of Bengali words is so much in his works that it will not be an exaggeration to claim it as Bengali and from this point of view he may be regarded as one of the earliest composers in Bengali literature. It may be added here that he neither composed pure Assamese prose nor pure Bengali prose. He composed in a mixed form of speech where one of the elements is Bengali and its value in the field of Bengali prose literature is very remarkable.² Perhaps he used this mixed

¹. Sudhanshu S. Tunga, Banglar Baire Bangla Gadya Charcha, p. 11
². Ibid., p. 14
language, firstly to put an emphasis on his dramas and secondly to make it attractive to the people of the then Bengal and Orissa.¹

Sankardev's dramas bear the testimony of his composition of prose literature and he has not written any other prose except the dramas. He has written a good number of dramas of which six are known to us and very little is known about the other dramas. He composed these dramas during the reign of the Koch kings. The six dramas which are notable are mentioned below:

4. *Kelingopal*, 5. *Parijat Haran* and 6. *Rambijay*. *Rambijay* was the last drama of his life. It was staged in the royal court of Maharaj Naranarayan (1533-1583 A.D.). These dramas were written in the middle of the sixteenth century. From this drama we can know the structure of the early Bengali prose. Here are some extracts from it:

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'আ পুকুর, এ লোক সাধনাশ্রম চানে কথা মানে কাহারে
আলাপ বলী : · · · · · এ' কথা আলাপে :
বিষু দুয়ে উঠার কোলখন বুকিয়ে হাসি
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The language of Rukmini Harin is at places like modern Bengali prose. But certain words used here like 'হামার', 'হাজার', 'আমি', 'আহনি' and 'চারি' are purely Brajabuli and this sort of words abound in the Vaisnava padas (poem) of the middle era. In Brajabuli as a mark of the possessive case the ending 'क' is used. So use of 'क' as a mark of the sixth case is abundantly found as 'সামার', 'কের', and 'হামার' etc. In modern Bengali 'চে' is used accusative case. In the Bengali of the middle age in second case 'ক' had been in used abundantly. But still now in dialects of Bangladesh (East Bengal) and North Bengal 'ক' is used in place of 'চে'. The use of 'হ' in imperative sentence in second person is an important feature of early and middle Bengali literature. The famous poet Chandi Das' composition 'সুধা মানুষ আই' অবাধ উপরে মানুষ অহ তাকে উপরে নাই' manifests the use of such kinds of words. Here the style of expression is simple and lucid and easily comprehensible.

1. Keshabamani Dev Goswami, Ankamala, p. 25
2. MADHABDEV (1480-1596 A.D.):

Madhabdev, the great disciple of Sri Sankardev composed a few dramas like his preceptor Sankardev. He was a contemporary of Sri Chaitanyadev, the preacher of Vaisnavism in Bengal. He was not only a great preacher, poet and a good songster but also a great dramatist who composed a good number of dramas in Brajabuli mixed with Assamese, Bengali and Oriya. Though he followed to a great extent the style and language of his great teacher Sankardev but he has his own characteristic of introducing the homely and congenial elements in his dramas. In view of his great contribution towards Bengali prose literature, a little light needs to be thrown on his life and works.

Madhabdev was born at Narayanpur in 1480 A.D., in the district of Lakshimpur. His father’s name was Gobindagiri Bhuyan and mother’s name was Manorama. His forefathers like Sankardev’s were the Bhuyans or the landlords. Once a great famine broke out at Narayanpur where his father took him to Bandukaya in the district of Rangpur (Bangladesh) which was his father’s native land. Here at the age of teacher Rajendra his education began. After some time his father died and he left Bandukaya and came to his sister’s house.

1. Satyendra Nath Sarma, Asamia Sahityar Itibritta, p. 120
2. Maheswar Neoq, Asamia Sahityar Ruprekha, p. 119
the village of Bharadobi in the district of Jorhat in Assam. At the early part of his life he was Sakta (devoted to Lord Siva). When he was in his sister's house his mother was seriously ill of dysentery and her life was at stake. For her early recovery Madhabdev decided to sacrifice a he-goat at the altar of goddess Durga. He told his brother-in-law Ramdas to purchase a he-goat. As Ramdas was a Vaishnava, he did not buy a he-goat and took Madhabdeva to Sankardev in 1522 A.D. to the utility of sacrificing a he-goat at the altar of the goddess Durga.¹ Madhabdev in course of his religious discourse was greatly charmed at the wisdom and teachings of Sankardev and became his disciple. He was greatly devoted to his master and helped him in every possible way to spread the cult of Lord Krishna. Madhabdev's devotion and deference was so great that Lakshminath Beharua, the great poet of Assam has described it as the concomitant of gold and gems (manikanchan).² After this Madhabdev went to Cooch Behar in the kingdom of the Koches in 1546 and spent 46 years of his life there and passed away at the age of 107 at Bhelamadhupur in Cooch Behar in 1596 A.D.

Madhabdev's father Gobindagiri Bhuyan was born at Bandukaya in Rangpur in Bangladesh (East Bengal) and lived here for a long time. Madhabdev spent early part of his life in the village of Bharadobi in the district of Jorhat in Assam.

¹. Kaliram Medhi, Ankabali, p. Intro. 10
schooling life here also. He went with his teacher Sankardev to Coochbehar, the kingdom of the Kochraj Narayana after embracing Vaishnavism from the great teacher Sankardev. He spent last part of his life here. At his time Bengali was the language of Rampur as also Kochrajya (present Coochbehar). As a result he was deeply connected with the Bengali language and culture and for this his writings abound with the use of Bengali words and ideas.

Madhabdev composed eight dramas named below although it is said that the last three dramas are not his own composition.  


It is implied from the names of his dramas that Madhabdev was greatly influenced in his writings by local dialects, ideas and customs and language. He through his writings won the heart of the people. An extract of his drama 'Arjun Bhanjan' is quoted below:

"ঐচ্ছিক পরকারে আশীর্বাদ গোকুলবাসী রক্ষিয়ে
নামান বিদায় করিয়ে রাখণ রথে
ইহাক আজ কৌতুক করিয়ে রঞ্জন লিখি।"

1. Keshabananda Dev Goswami, Ankamala, p. 36
The language of the above expression conforms to a great extent to modern Bengali prose. The words used here 'হেক', 'গুণ', 'হিণ', 'কার', 'সাহা' and 'স্যাত' etc. are pure Brajābulī. Such kind of words are also abundantly found in mediaeval Bengali Vaisnava poems. Here the infinitive verbs such as 'হিণ', 'হিণ' and 'হিণ' etc. are also the special features of Bengali. The plural suffix 'াঙ্গ' 'সাঙ্গ' 'স্যাঙ্গ' 'স্যাঙ্গ' etc. noted here are also found in pure Bengali. Here the word 'হিণ' has unnecessarily been used. But the language of this expression is very simple and easy and not difficult to understand.

3. GOPAL DEV (1541-1611 A.D.):

Gopal Dev was born in 1541 A.D. in the North east of Assam at Nachanighat near Gongaon. His father's name was Kameswar Bhuyan and mother's name was Brajanqgi Devi. This Gongaon was the capital of the Ahoms. In his boyhood he came

1. Keshabananda Dev Goswami, Ankamala, p. 227
to Bhabanipur in the district of Kamrup. He was known here as Bhabanipuria Ata. He came into contact with the great Sankardev and after his death he embraced Vaisnavism from Madhabdev. By virtue of his devotion and deference at a very short time he became very favourable to Madhabdev and of his master's twelve disciples he became very prominent. After the death of Madhabdev (1596) he became the principal preceptor of the Vaisnavs in Assam. He passed away in 1611. He composed three dramas named below:


The language used in his dramas is mixed like Sankardev's and Madhabdev's. An extract of his drama Jamrajatra is presented here:

"আই বুলি প্রথা সোজাসর আদেশ করেন, তুমি আমাদের আদেশ নিতে মনে ঢোলে চলবে। অসনদ্র মুহূর্তের বাসনা উঠছেন আঘাত এগুলিয়ে ভেঙে, তোমাদের নিধন নিয়ে অনাসার বাংলা বাসনায় বিচিত্র করে ভাবেন, অনন্তর সৃষ্টি বসে নির্মাণ ঘটে এবং সাম্প্রদায়ের নিয়ন্ত্রণ পাই নিশ্চিত হয়। প্রচুর প্রথা বস্তুদেরকে হেমন্ত তা স্মরণ মনে।"

1. Maheswar Neog, Asamia Sahityar Ruprekha, p. 160
2. Satyendra Nath Sarma, Asamia Sahityar Itibritta, p. 146
3. Keshabinanda Dev Goswami, Ankamala, p. 258
Here the words used 'अङ्क', 'संके', 'भुक्त', 'संयुक्त', 'दुबुर', 'गङ्गा', 'शंक' and 'मुदु' etc. are pure Brajabhali. This sort of words are also abundantly found in mediaeval Bengali Vaisnav poems and here also non-finite verb 'रिक्र' has been used which is also a characteristic of modern Bengali. Besides this, plural suffix 'সব' is only found in pure Bengali. In Brajabali the sixth case is marked by the use of 'তু'. This sort of use is abundantly found in his compositions such as 'দেরাজল', 'লক্ষুরল', 'নন্দিনীল', 'কল্যাণ', 'দুঃখ' and 'মূঢেল' etc. In mediaeval Bengali the mark 'শ' was used in second case. But at present in dialects of Bangladesh (East Bengal) and North Bengal 'শ' is used as second case ending in place of 'ঞি'. Here also the use of 'শ' in imperative second person is a great feature of early and mediaeval Bengali. This kind of use is abundantly found in the famous poet Chandidas' composition. Here the above style of expression is easy and simple and not difficult to make out its meaning.

PROSE IN ASSAMESE HISTORY BOOKS:

The composition of Sankardev, Madhabdev and Gopal Dev from the fifteenth to sixteenth century reveals the use of mixed Bengali in their writings. The different history book of North-east India and during the period of Sankardev,
Madhabdev and Gopaldev through light on the use of unmixed (pure) Bengali in the letters found in them. The word 'Buranji' requires a little elucidation.

'Buranji' means the history of the reign of the Ahom kings. The Ahoms ruled over Assam for a long time and there was a system of writing history of their reign. The Ahom kings left behind very important accounts of their rule. The Ahoms composed history first in their mother tongue and after coming to Assam they accepted Assamese as their mother tongue and began to write history in Assamese. The Ahoms were pioneers in introducing the writing of history. They made remarkable contribution towards writing 'Buranji' from seventeenth to nineteenth century.

In those days histories were written in Assamese. The histories contained a large number of royal letters of which are mostly written in Bengali. So far a large number of Buranjis are found notable among whom are: (1) Purani Asom Buranji, (2) Kamrupar Buranji, (3) Jayantia Buranji, (4) Tungakhungia Buranji, (5) Tripura Buranji, (6) Mangaldoi Buranji, (7) Bardwamaner Buranji, etc.

Now a little discussion is made as to the findings of this history.

1. Maheswar Neoq, Asamja Sahityar Ruprekha, p. 203
1. FURANI ASOM BURANJI:

The ancient *Asom Buranji* was written in the seventeenth century. Edward Gait who was the Agriculture and Revenue Commissioner of Assam got a manuscript from the queer Mahindri Devec. He got the book translated into English by Pandit Hema Chandra Goswami. This was the first history written in Assamese. The ancient Assam Buranj contained 23 (twenty three) letters of which about 20 (twenty) are written in Bengali. An extract of one of the letters is quoted here:

The letter was written by the Mugul Fauzdar Ahaldar Khan to the Ahom King Barbaruah.

"...মৌহীল্পির্কক লেখনঃ কর্ম্যংক ইথার কুশন।
গেমার কুশন মমতা রাখে রাজাক। পরি গেমার ফরমণ
জানিবায়। এই ধর্মে গেমার মর্শা প্রতিষ্ঠা রুদ্দিকে; আর দুই দলের গো ক্রমন সুঃ রুহিল। রুহিয়া দুঃখার
আঞ্জাদিত ফৈলে মনুকের খোরমি তৈরি; আবর বনাম
কিছু না রহিবেক।

আর গেমার উজিব সমাধি ও কানু শর্মা ইথার
সঙ্গ ও আমার আপনি চেকমেদা ও অাকাশ সেমার
সেখানে তোষিতেছি।

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1. Sumanasu S. Junja, Banglar Baire Bangla Gadyer Charcha, p.52
Most of the words of this letter were written in Bengali but in certain cases Persian words such as 'হামেশা', 'দুঃখানার', 'অলসের', 'খোরামি' and 'আদমি' were used and Bengali words used here conforms to Bengali of nineteenth century.

2. KAMRUPAR BURANJI:

This book was composed towards the end of the seventeenth century. It contained 27 letters of which 16 are written in Bengali. Of all the letters, the letters of Prananarayana were very lengthy. Such lengthy letters are hardly found in the historical letters from sixteenth to eighteenth century. An extract of one of the letters of Prananarayana, the Koch king is quoted here.

The letter was to Jayadhaj Singha, the Ahom king.

"সুরক্ষার ব্যবহার মতে জুটি মে আমার লিখিতে

1. Pandit Henta Chandra Goswami, Purani Asom Buranji, p. 133
2. S.S. Tung, Banglar Baire, etc., p. 57
ইহাতে তুমি মোক সিনিয়া আগোনার কথ করিবা ... 
তেজার আমরা মদ না করিব। আমরাকে লেখিরা মদ 
না করিব। পরেরা উপকার পরের করিব। 
ইহার মাজালে মে অনেক রোহে সে মোদাদিয়েই যোক 
বা দীর্ঘদীয়েই যোক ... ... ... তাক 
তুমি ও জানি। পূর্ব মাজালে ... ... ... মোঃ।
রাজ্যাপূত হৈল, এলামারা রাজ্যাপূত হৈল। 
আর এলামার মে রাজ্যাপূত হৈল, ইহার 
করে। এলামার বেলান মনে দুঃখ করিবাক উচিত না হৈ।
দেখে, রামচন্দ্র, সুীরহ, যুধিষ্ঠির - এই সকল রো রাজ্যাপূত 
হৈল। ... কিন্তু এলামা সকলে কৌশল করিয়া 
লোক নিমিতে তাহার অবৈচি না হৈল। সঙ্গীত 
এলামার এলামার রাজ্যাপূত হৈল। ... মনি এলামা 
সময়ে কৌশল না করি তবে এলামার অবৈচি হৈবে।

আর শ্রী গোলাপ চরণ ও শ্রী ভক্ত চরণ ও 
শ্রী রামচরণ ইহার মুখে সকল সমাচার জানিবেন। ... 
ইচ্ছা না ১৩৪৪, ৫ আষাঢ় ..। 

This particular letter of Pranaparayan conforms to 
modern Bengali prose. Here these few words such as

1. Surya Kumar Bhuyan, Kamrupi Buranj, p. 75
'মাজীতে'; 'সাগীতে'; 'আগোরার' are Assamese and the year and month etc. are written in Bengali.

3. JAYANTIJA BURANJI:

Jayantija Buranji was written from the last part of the seventeenth century to the 1st part of the eighteenth century. There are 56 letters in this history of which 42 letters are written in Bengali and rest of the letters are written in Assamese.1 No such large number of letters are found in any other history. An extract of one of the letters is presented below:

"গড়ে জয়ঙ্গ দুই নহে একমার আমু সুমুখ প্রীতি চলিয়া গিছে। পূর্ণ ছাড়িয়া সূর্যা পশ্চিমে তোমায় হৈব, কলা ভঙ্গ ভঙ্গ হৈব, তারি পোহিত্য উজান চালিয়া শ্রীজীগাঁই রাস না হৈব।"2

This letter of Jayantija Buranji is written in modern Bengali prose. Except the few words 'নহ', 'হৈব' and 'কলা', almost all other words used in the letter are Bengali words.

1. S.S. Tunga, Banglar Bajre etc., p. 59
2. Surya Kumar Bhuyan, Jayantiya Buranji, p. 62
4. TRIPURA BURANJII:

Tripura Buranji was composed in the eighteenth century. It contained 10 letters of which eight letters are written in Sanskrit and the two in Bengali. An extract of one of the letters is presented here in order to show the pattern of Bengali that was in vogue in the eighteenth century.

The letter was written to Ratna Manikya, the king of Tripura by the Ahom King Rudra Singha.

"परं समाचार एहि जनमास प्रमन प्रकृति हैत्रांभे में मनोलार बैरैव्रज चेदाभ बेदान्त धर्मन रुढान पाइँना। इ बाबल ओद अश्विनाराम यापार कारते যদি...তোমার সহিতে যে ঘুরলাকের হার্দিত আছে, তার সমস্ত সমাপ্তির কারিতা খাযে বাবূ অমার শীর্ষিনি শিক্ষিপায়। সমস্তকাহ স্বপ্ন অধীন, ত্যাপি মেধমে আলোচন দেখতে অন্য পরা-তব ব্যতিরেকে স্থদ্ধে রাজচেষ্টা কারতে পারি অথা ঘেঁষ্ট ব্যবহারতে অন্য সাপক্ষে নয় তাক প্রতি সংবাদ যতা কারতে সমূচিত হয়। বাকী সমাচার নির্দে- কলামী ও অতঃপূর্ব দাস মুখে ভাড়া হৈয়া। ......... শক ১৬৩৩ রাস কর্তিক, তেজিঙ্ক ৫।"

1. Surya Kumar Bhuyan, Tripura Buranji, p. 16
The expression of the sentences are mixed with Assamese and colloquial dialects of Sylhet of Bangladesh (East Bengal). But the language of this letter is like modern Bengali prose.

5. TUNGKHUNGIA BURANJI:

Tungkhunghi Buranji is a history of the royal family of that name. The two letters of this history belong to the eighteenth century but the other letters were written in the beginning of the nineteenth century. An extract of a letter is quoted here.

The letter was written by Krishna Kanta Narayan, the king of Cachar to the Tungkhunghi Minister Bhadra Kanta Barbarua.

"বিশেষ যথনিবার শং মধ্য হইতে সী রুদ্রসিংহ ও রাজা তাম্রজাভ উদ্ধার করিয়া আন্তরিক শিবসিংহ মহারাজাক বৈষ্ণু পিহাঁ সমুদ্র সত্যধর্ম করিয়াছেন, তদবধি উত্তরদেশ শ্রীরামপুরের মত দুর্গের চেষ্টা গোষ্ঠে।
তদুর্গে তবে তাব্যা অক্ষকরনের তাহে কিন্তু দেশকাণ্ড সত্যধর্ম না চলেন। অতএব পুরুষবাহার্দি বিশ্বরূপ কি কী হৈয়া থাকিবে। তখনি মস্তকেরনাথ গণের দান বেদ হৈয়া কাগজকাণ্ড সত্য করিয়া আসাম হৈতে হই। অতএব সম ধারাপুর দেশীয় কিমুংলোক শ্রী
The expression of this letter conforms to modern Bengali prose but a little mixed with Sanskrit and Assamese. Herein the second case ending 'क' has been used in place of 'कै'. This sort of use is abundantly found in the dialects of Bangladesh and in North Bengal.

Furani Asom Buranji, Kamrupar Buranji, Jayantia Buranji, Tripura Buranji and Tungkhungia Buranji - composed from seventeenth to eighteenth centuries and the style of language is similar everywhere. Now in order to trace out the evaluation of early Bengali prose it is necessary to discuss Bengali prose from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Writings of the different buranjis from the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries speak abundantly about the use of Bengali prose. But the history of sixteenth century does not throw so much light on the use of Bengali prose. There are no large number of letters available in this century as in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Of the two letters of sixteenth century, the first letter was written by Muliar.

1. Surya Kumar Bhuyan, Tungkhungia Buranji, P. 10
Naranarayan of Coochbehar to the Ahomraj Sukamfa and the second letter was written by Ahomraj Sukamfa to Maharaj Naranarayan of Coochbehar. The reign of Maharaj Naranarayan covers from 1533-83 and the reign of Ahomraj Sukamfa from 1552-1603. The letter written by Maharaj Naranarayan was dated June and July of 1555 which was first published on the 27th June, 1909 in the Assam Banti but no record of this valuable letter is found in any history or Buranji of Assam.

It is surprising as well as mysterious why the Buranjis failed to give evidence of such an important document. Perhaps in course of time it was either lost or destroyed like many other important documents. Now in the light of the above discussion it may be concluded that the letter must have it record in any of the Buranjis of Assam, otherwise it would not have been possible for the Assam Banti to bring it into light.

The two letters are quoted below to bring to light the pattern of Bengali prose that was in vogue in the sixteenth century.

1. The letter written to the Ahom King Sukamfa by Maharaja Naranarayan of Coochbehar:

"লেখনঃ কার্য্যকালঃ। এখা আমা কাশলাঃ। সেবার
কুরি নিত্যঃ বাণী বাণী। আহন এলাকাল আপনার।"

1. Sudhanshu S. Tunja, Banglar Bajra Bangla Gadya Church, p. 74
The language of the letter written in the sixteenth century is pure Bengali prose which does not differ much from the Bengali language of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries as in certain cases the use of modern Bengali is evident, e.g., 'ইংরেজি'. Here the use of the two words 'অঙ্গন' and 'অপরে' is a colloquial form of East Bengal and North Bengal and the two Assamese words 'অঙ্গন' and 'অপরে' are only found here. The language of the letter on the whole is easy and lucid.

2. The other letter written to the Maharaja Naranarayan of Coochbehar by the Ahom King Sukamfa:

"কিছুটা বলা হও তবে কৃপণ। সোনার সুখার্ণ রাজা মহারাজ আমি প্রাপ্ত মুখি মঞ্চিত। তাহাতে নিকেলায় শিখিয়া অতিরিক্ত অর্থার্থচিত্র ব্যয়ে দোষিত। আমার সাহিত্যের সুরিতের পায়ু মানতে পারি।"

1. Sajani Kanta Das, Banjara Gadya Sahityer Itihis, p. 17
This letter was written in 1556 A.D. is not pure Bengali prose but mixed with Assamese. Here non-finite verbs 'তব' and 'জ্ঞা' have been used such as 'পূর্ণিত', 'অভিআর্জন' etc. This sort of use is found in modern Bengali prose only.

Over and above the Bengali language which was used in the letters of Maharaj Nar-anarayan and the Ahom King Sukamfa in the sixteenth century, another specimen of Bengali prose was found in an edict which was engraved by the Kachari King Meghanarayan Deb in 1576 A.D. The edict was found in the relics at Mybarj which was the capital of the Kachari kings. There are two versions of this edict. In the first edict the two words 'রাজা' and 'রাজাত' are not found as Meghanarayan Deb was the king of Cachar. Perhaps to keep the record of his reign more familiar, the two words রাজা and রাজাত were later added to the original one and word হৃদয় in the first edict because by mistake as কথান in the second. The two edicts are quoted as a pattern of Bengali prose of

1. Sudhanshu S. Tunga, 'Bangla Baire Bangla Gadya Charchi', p. 75
the sixteenth century:

Edict No. 1:

"Subhamastu Sri Sri Meghanarayan Deb Haichoasaha bamsata jata hai Maiabanga pathare singadvar bandhalen sakabda 1498 biterikh Asadha 26."¹

Edict No. 2:

"Subhamastu Sri Sri Meghanarayan Deb Haichoasaha bamsata jata rajah hai Maiabanga rajat pather singadvar bandhalen sakabda 1498 biterikh Asadha 26."²

OTHER SPECIMENS:

Bhubaneswar Bachaspati during the reign of King Suradarpa rendered Sri Naradiya Kithamrita into Bengali in verse form. But in conclusion of Naradiya Puran in the Chapter 'Byas Bandana' he used Bengali prose. An extract of Naradiya Puran is quoted here to show the pattern of Bengali prose:

2. Ibid., p. 224
Bhubaneswar Bachaspāti composed this in 1781. Here the use of the word 'মাসে' (month) is a colloquial use of 'ষ' Bengali in East Bengal and it is still now found. The is used in place of 'ষ'. Some spelling mistakes, however, are found in his Bengali such as বাজ়, বসিয়া, ভাস্তে ভাসাই; 'আই' 'আই' etc. But the language is very simple and lucid.

The use of Bengali prose is also found in Ramchandra Kabichandra’s poem, Sibasangit (Sibayan) written at the end of the seventeenth century. An extract of this Kavya is presented below:

“অতঃপর তারা প্রশ্রীতি দেবতারা সকল শিবের করে প্রহরিকা এবং সোনিকে সরস্য করিয়া কথালোকাল পালন করিয়া হরকে ইষ্টিত করিভেন্তেন, অবধার করহ”

The book named Bangla Prachir Puthir Bibaran edited by Taraprasanna Bhattacharjee in two volumes were published

1. Upendra Chandra Guha, Cacharer Itibritta, p. 87
by Bangia Sahitya Parishad. The use of Bengali prose is found at the concluding chapter in the second part of this book. Two extracts from this book — one dealing with Chaitanya Mangal's Sanyas Khanda and the other dealing with Prabhalla Charitra — are quoted here:

1. The use of Bengali prose at the concluding chapter of Chaitanya Mangal's Sanyas Khanda:

“ইতি শ্রীচৈতন্যমণ্ডলের মধ্যের একের সন্ধায়নিষ্ঠা প্রদূষ সমাধি হইল। হইল। ইতি সন ১৭৮৫ সাল অর্থে তত্ত্ব ৩১ শ্রাবণ বৃহদীর্বচিত্তির । বেলা চয়দ্বিং থাকিতে সমাধি হইল।”

The chapter Sanyas Lila in the Madhya Khanda of Chaitanya Mangal was composed in 1778 and the language used here conforms to modern Bengali prose. Here the use of the word 'সন্ধায়নিষ্ঠা' has been used instead of 'সন্ধায়নিষ্ঠা' But the language is very simple and lucid.

1. Tara Prasanna Bhattacharjee, Barula Prachin Futhir Bibarin (vol. II), p. 134
2. The use of Bengali prose at the concluding chapter of Prahallad Charitra:

"ইতি প্রহ্লাদ চরিত্র পাণ্ডুলিপি। সপ্তম অধ্যায়ঃ লিখিতঃ সপ্তম কৃত্তিকার। প্রহ্লাদ চরিত্রঃ নয়ন পুত্তল সমাধিস্থেদান।"

The concluding chapter of Prahallad Charitra was composed in 1757. Bengali prose towards the end of the eighteenth century reveals a little use of Sanskrit also such as অনাবধিন but it causes no difficulty in understanding the meaning.

Thus, in the light of the detailed discussion it may be opined that the view of the scholars and critics who dealt with the origin of Bengali prose saying that Bengali prose came into being centring round the Fort William College, Srirampur Mission, the employee of East India Company, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar is not correct. Bengali prose has her origin in the sixteenth century. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Sarkardev, the preacher of Vaisnavism in Assam and his great disciple Madhavdev and

his disciple Gopaldev made use of Bengali prose. The different Buranjis of Assam, the two edicts of Cachari King Meghana-ray Deb, Vaisnavay Korcha, Sunyapuran, Duso Bacharer Purana Bangla Gadya Futhi, Atharo Satak Gadya Banjita Gadya, Atharo Satak Banjla Chithi, various letters found in British Museum and different deeds and documents bear the testimony of abundant use of Bengali prose. But the actual literary prose developed towards the end of the eighteenth but not in nineteenth century and in this connection the comment of Sibratan Mitra is important. He says:

"There existed a considerable amount of Bengali prose writing long before the Serampore Missionaries or the Pandits of the Fort William College, or even Raja Ram Mohan Roy, in the early years of the nineteenth century, even dreamt of 'creating' a general prose style."¹

Dr. Surendra Nath Sen in his book Prachin Bangla Patra Sankalan observed that Bengali prose was amply used from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries as the language of the Court in Bengal as well as in Bhutan, Coochbehur, Assam, Manipur and the kings of Cachar used Bengali as the language of communication among them and with the British Government.

¹ Sibratan Mitra, Types of Early Bengali Prose, p. Intro. 8
According to him Bengali was greatly used in the literate section from Burma to Baleswar (Orissa). It will not therefore be a travesty of truth to say that Bengali prose in her fancy left her indeliable influence on the whole of East India.