CHAPTER – I
The Milieu of Phakirmohana Senapati and Lakshminath Bezbaroa

a. Renaissance in India
b. Milieu : Phakirmohana
c. Milieu Lakshminath
THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

The cumulative impact of India's contact with the West was a gradual transformation of a stagnating traditional society into a nation on the throes of modernizing itself. Socially and economically it still remained at low ebb. But the seed of resurgence was sown in the nineteenth century itself. The British Raj influenced Indian life through many channels: administration, legislation, trade, the creation of a network of communication, inchoative industrialization, all had great influence not only on the many Indians who became directly involved in them, but also on society as a whole, because every measure in some way interfered with some traditional pattern of life.1

The cultural field too could never remain untouched. Through various channels the British brought pressure on it through scholars of various hues. It led to a readjustment of life patterns to suit the demands of the changing scenario. This reaction to the new was not always a passive unconscious thing. The social reformers in particular-

"Consciously reacted to the new situation and advocated deliberate changes in social and religious attitudes and customs involving a break with tradition itself." 2

This favourable inclination towards change is significant. The protagonists of change saw it as a positive value in itself, since they were convinced that only change can revive a moribund cultural scenario. But changes if it were to be permanent, cannot be imposed from outside; it must come from within. Possibly no other agency could bring about change as effectively as education. A great debate ensued centering round the introduction of English education. Initially the British had no intention to


2 Ibid.
introduce English education for obvious political reasons. First their policy of non-interference in the native way of life and administrative and then for the apprehension that English education might open up the eyes of the Indians, who would in turn, fight against British subjugation. Fort William College, established in 1800 A.D., was the first institution to impart English education. Before that a Sanskrit College and an Islamic College came up in Calcutta in 1781 at the initiative of Warren Hastings. Jonathan Duncan, the Resident of Benaras, founded a Sanskrit College there in 1792. This encouragement of Sanskrit knowledge, of course, was guided by utilitarian zeal on the part of Hastings.

"He was engaged in drawing up a code of laws for the company’s Hindu subjects, and for this purpose it was necessary to obtain an accurate knowledge of the ancient Sanskrit Law books."^1

Not till 1813, when the British Parliament enacted laws to take the responsibility of educating the natives at Government expense, English education could take roots in India. For Bengal the establishment of Hindu College (1817), Baptist Mission College (1818) and Bishop College (1820) in Calcutta are significant milestones. Raja Rammohan Roy, the father of Bengal Renaissance, put his considerable persuasive skill to plead for the introduction of English as the medium of instruction. In a letter to the Governor General Lord Amherst against the opening of a Sanskrit College in 1823, he argued:

"...The Sanskrit system of education would be the best calculated to keep this country in darkness, if such had been the policy of the British legislature. But as the improvement of the native population is the object of the government, it will consequently promote a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction embracing mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry, anatomy, with other useful sciences."^1

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^2 Selected Works : 1977 : P. 302
Rammohan was no slavish anglophile. His understanding of the West was as great as his scholarship was deep in Sanskrit and Persian. He even studied Islam to understand its basic tenets. He was most well equipped to evaluate the prevalent educational and social climate of the time. Sanskrit and Persian by that time were long past their usefulness and become rather custodians of orthodoxy and past glory. Rammohan knew that the fare churned out in the name of learning in this languages was an exercise in futility. In difference to the enthusiasm for English education the general committee of Public Instruction was constituted.

Language, literature and thought carry the values of their place of origin. English education and thought could not have been different. It brought about profound changes in the value system of the native society whose intellectual life was at a low ebb. In the words of Krishna Kripalani, “Intellectual lethargy and ritualistic bigotry combined with moral chicanery...” was the hallmark of life at that time. Demand for liberal English education was on the rise on Bengal. More and more people showed a preference for English education by sending their words to English School instead of the traditional Schoolmen. This was the result of a conviction that traditional learning had become “an inhibitive and meaningless discipline of scholasticism and ritual...”. Not everyone was enamoured of the West. In the G.C.P.I. itself there was a vertical division between the protagonists of western education and that of the indigenous education. The former came to be branded as Anglicists the latter came to be known as orientalists. Once Macaulay took over the G.C.P.I as its president the issue was clinched in favour of English with his momentous Education Minute of 1835. It was to exert a profound compact on the socio-cultural history of India. The Minute needs to be quoted at some length to understand its basic thrust.

"It is impossible for us with our limited means to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters..."
between us and the million whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in moral and intellect.

The thrust of the recommendation was to create a class of individuals to act as interpreters between the great mass of the ruled and the rulers. This class was also to be entrusted with the responsibility of developing the vernaculars of the various provinces. As he envisioned, "English education ... brought in to being a class of persons in this subcontinent which had transformed the entire social structure in the later half of the 19th century." This neo-elite was a minuscule minority. Yet they proved instrumental in setting the dynamics of modernity in motion. Though they were expected to act as "a buffer zone for absorbing the effect of foreign rule, which, if experienced directly by the masses, might have an entirely disastrous impact." The impact of this educated middle class released forces that were not for seen by the British rulers. But Rammohan had the vision, and therefore, his insistence on English education at the risk of being run down as an unabashed Anglicist. From the British point of view it seemed to be an imperative – the imperativeness of ruling over a vast and diverse humanity who spoke a babble of tongues and made governance an unenviable task. This middle class did become, to an extent, a conduit of Western thought and ideas10 as Macaulay expected of them. Their pro-British tilt was quite conspicuous. Here an opinion of Surendranath Bānerjee may be quoted:

"Our forefathers, the first fruits of English education, were violently pro-British. They saw no flaw in the civilization and the culture of the West. They were charmed by its novelty and its strangeness."11

The novelty that S.N. Bānerjea speaks are the very ones on which Western civilization rested like "The enfranchisement of the individual, the substitution of the right of private judgement in place of traditional authority, the exaltation of duty over

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T. B. Macaulay: 1972: P. 249
8 D.J.P.N. Reddy (ed) : 1994 : In 'Literary Spectrum' the article "Macaulay's Children and Midnight's Children" by A. Ramakrishna Rao. P-18
9 Gauri Viswanathan: 1990: 'Masks of Conquest Literary Study and British Rule in India'. P - 33
10 Ibid. P-34
11 M. K. Naik, 'History of Indian English Literature.' P-32
This was in stark contrast to the Orient's inveterate faith in immemorial usage and venerable tradition. In the course of time, however, the western educated Indian found his own voice.

This pan-Indian middle class had varied background but they had a common foreground of knowledge, ideas and values. Armed with these they forged a unity of purpose and hope, it was in them that emergent India found its voice and its dynamism.

Resurgence would have come anyway in the course of time. But it was hastened by the twoway impact of Western education. One, it brought a consciousness of one India unheard of before. This political awareness was later to emerge as a potent force to realize the goal of one nation. Two, intellectually it roused people from age-old slumber which sapped the nation of its vitality, what even reservations one may have about the English language its role in the creation of a sense of one nation can never be denied.

The spread of education sharpened the awareness about the evils that were eating into the vitals of Indian life. Religious bigotry, obscurantism, superstition were some of the more prominent ones. Enlightened Indians realized the hollowness of progress without first waging war against these ills social reform became one of the agenda of renascent India. Reformers were not something new to India. Hinduism, by its very nature, is evolutionary and adaptive in spirit. But the new reformers were distinguished from their predecessors since their efforts at reformation became closely wedded to a political movement and sought to influence in several areas of administration. Of course, purely religious reformers were not entirely absent during this period. Swami Nārāyana of Gujrat and Mahātma Rāmliṅgam of Tāmilsṉādu confined their activities to religious sphere, to cite only two examples. But the majority of the reformers during this period had a broad spectrum of interests. Rāmmohun belonged to this category of reformers. His studies in Islam and Hinduism

12 Ibid. P-33
13 Ibid.
14 Percival Spear: 1965: The Oxford History of Modern India; P - 291
15 Jordens, op. cit. PP- 365-366
coupled with his deep acquaintance with Western thought equipped him eminently to play the role of social and religious reformer. He carried out a sustained crusade against idolatry and religious bigotry. In his essay "A Defence of Hindu Theism (1817), he vindicates the monotheistic system as expounded in the Vedas. His study of all the major religions of the world - Islam, Christianity, Hinduism besides Buddhism brought to the conviction that there is a common core that unites all the religions. The basic spirit of all the religious strands is their emphasis on human values. This conviction of Rammohan crystallizes in the form of Brāhma Samāj (1828). As a social reformer the plight of women in orthodox Hindu society became his special concern. He fought against the barbaric custom of burning the widow at the funeral pyre of her husband. He also violently criticized polygamy prevalent among the higher echelons of Hindu society and pleaded passionately for women’s emancipation, equality and against child-marriage. He was one of the earliest pioneers of journalism, particularly in the vernacular variety. This many splendoured genius was the first to resort to propaganda leading to agitation. Rabindranāth therefore, aptly calls him “the inaugurator of the modern age in India”.

Despite of the radical transformation that he tried to bring about, Rāmmohun never really broke away from Hinduism. Henry Vivian Derozio (1807-31) the Eurasian teacher of Hindu College, became a force to reckon with in the social arena of the first half of the nineteenth century. For him and the ‘Young Bengal’ crusaders he led rationalism was the only religion. “Not only was their talk revolutionary, their actions often matched their convictions; some threw away their soared thread, ate beef, and openly flaunted their contempt for Hinduism and for ‘half-liberals’ like Rāmmohan. For such radicalism he was expelled from the Hindu College. This fiery young crusader died prematurely and his Young Bengal movement died a premature death too for lack of direction. “Rāmgopāl Ghosh, important member of the young Bengal group held up a motto:” He who will not reason is a bigot, he who can not is a

16 Ibid. P-367
17 M.K. Naik. P-14
18 Anil Home as quoted in Naik. Op Cit. P-14
19 Jordens op cit. P-366
foot, he who does not is slave.\textsuperscript{20} of socio-religious statusquo against both the reformers and radicals.\textsuperscript{21} They formed Dharma Sabha (1830) to this end. Yet this seeming orthodox group had liberal facet. They were favourably disposed towards Western education which they recommended even for girls. Thus they contributed meaningfully to the new resurgence.

Bengal was the torch-bearer of this new consciousness because it had produced intellectuals of eminence and social leaders hardly matched by any other province, with the exception perhaps of Bombay.

Even after Rāmmoḥun death the Brāhma Samāj kept up its good work through people of such intellectual brilliance as Devendranāth Tāgore and Keshub Chandra Sen. While Devendranath closer to mainstream Hinduism, Keshub Chandra, a universalist in his spiritual beliefs led the movement towards universalis ideals.\textsuperscript{22}

The importance of Iswarchandra Vidyāsāgar in the sphere of social reform can hardly be overemphasised. His impassioned plea for widow marriage and against child marriage had a cascading effect on other reform movements. By highlighting the obscurantist and inhuman face of some Hindu practices he became a leading light of India’s resurgence. In a way he presented the humanistic ideals of the new awakening.

The socio-religious movement in Bengal was not an isolated case. Some regions, particularly the ones that came in contact with western light later than Bengal, were slow to react to western impact. But they were not unresponsive to the new thought current. “Infact it was a pan-Indian movement spearheaded in other parts of the country by persons like Lokhitwādi Telāṅg, Rānāde, Gokhale, Vireshgaṃ Pāntulu, Narmadā Šānkar, Gāīkwād of Barodā, Sorābji Sāpurji and others.\textsuperscript{23} Bombay (Maharastra) in particular could rival Bengal in the intellectual brilliance of its leaders and their reformative zeal. Gopāl Hori Deshmukh, popularly referred to as Lokhitwādi waged a relentless battle against the inequities inherent in the caste

\textsuperscript{20} P. Choudhury : 1994: ‘Socio-Cultural Aspects of Jossom’, P-14
\textsuperscript{21} Jordens, Op cit, P-368
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid Pp-368-369
\textsuperscript{23} Indranath Choudhury : 1992 : ‘Comparative Indian Literature’, P-54
system and the condition of women. Jyotibā Phule, a low caste by birth, did much to ameliorate the condition of the underprivileged and the untouchables. His work was instrumental in giving shape to anti-Brāhmin movement in Māhārāstra. But the reform movement in Māhārāstra was not as revolutionary as its Bengāli counterpart. "The Māhārāṣtriāns saw reform movement as a gradual process of transformation of values and institutions. They invoked their own medieval Bhākī tradition as another reform movement that was evolutionary, not revolutionary."²⁴

If Rāmmohan was a happy synthesis of the Orient and the Occident, Swāmī Dayānand Saraswati typified Indian ethos in its pristine form. He stands as tall as Rammohan as a social reformer and visionary. He was a unique figure in renaissance India in the sense that he neither received western education nor came under the influence of its thought currents.

"Dayānanda’s theological vision was one that emerged neither from personal mysticism nor from Western ideas, but from his intimate observation of the corrupt Hinduism of his day."²⁵ profound insight restored the Vedas to their original conception. Besides, more importantly, he traced the concept of Indian nationhood to the Vedas. This is crucial for nationalism is supposed to be a Western import. "The world is fettered," he declared, "by the chain forged by superstition and ignorance. I have come to snap asunder the chain and set slaves at liberty. It is contrary to my mission to have people deprived of their freedom."²⁶ From Tāgore to Sri Aurobindo the colossal nature of his work is handsomely acknowledged. The Ārya Samāj which he founded has been playing a constructive role in India’s national life.

Bengali contribution to the socio-religious reformation continued further with Rāmkrishna Paramhamsa and Vivekānanda. This teacher-disciple duo did commendable work to revitalise Hinduism. Vivekānanda in particular look Hinduism beyond the national boundaries. His Chicago Lectures at the parliament of Religions in 1895 awakened the world to the true spirit of Hindu religion. His profound

²⁵ Ibid.  P-371
exposition of Hindu philosophy matched that of Dayānand. His talks around the world created much public awareness leading to enhancement of national prestige. He also understood the positive aspects of Western civilization which would help revive India's moribund national life. "Jordens has rightly remarked that: "His knowledge of the West was not only theoretical, but he knew the West from personal experience, which allowed him to renounce its evils and yet acknowledge its strength." Later on even the most fervent of nationalists had to tread the path laid down by Vivekānanda. He showed how the East and the West can complement each other.

"In India the quality of the Rajas is almost absent; the same is the case with Sattva in the West. It is certain, therefore, that the real life of the Western World depends upon the influx, from India, of the current of Sattva, or transcendentalism, and it is also certain that unless we overpower our Tama by the opposite tide of Rajas, we shall never gain any worldly good or welfare in this life."

Vivekānanda took up the gauntlet on behalf of Hinduism and single-handedly silenced its detractors in the west. His commendable achievement made his countrymen to put him on a pedestal, and when he spoke against the evils built in to Hinduism over the centuries, he was listened to with conviction. Here Naik's remark may be quoted - Vidyāsāgar's fiery eloquence, having dazzled the west, instilled a new self-confidence in the minds of his compatriots. Like Dayānanda and Rammohun he too founded an institution the Rāmkrishna Mission, which became an important agency of religious and social reformation. Another great son of Bengal and India was Sri Aurobindo. Like Vivekānanda he too emphasised the happy union of the spirit and the matter. No nation can ever ignore this fundamental pre-requisite if it wants regenerate itself. Aurobindo

"was the first to present comprehensively a philosophy which encompasses the

27 Jordens, op.cit., P-376
28 Complete Works of Vivekananda, Vol. Iv.(1963), P-408
29 Naik, op. Cit., P-32
twin poles of spirit and matter and points to the transformation of the individual and collective life of humanity into the life Divine as the supreme goal and not merely the extinction of the self into a blank and featureless nirvāṇā.

To perpetuate "philosophy the Mother (Madame Mira Richard) founded the Sri Aurobindo International Education Centre, an institution which the UNESCO recognises as a meeting point of divergent humanity.

In the Punjab Dayānanda’s Ārya Samāj had the strongest impact before it transformed into a pan-Indian phenomenon. Lālā Lajpat Rāi, a great nationalist and a staunch Ārya Samājist wedded its ideology to the extreme political cause. He had drawn the attention of the “samajists to the plight of the lower castes. He also ‘rescued’ thousands of orphans from Christian Missionaries." During the 1880 social movements assumed national dimension largely because of one man, Behānīji Māhare, "Who launched the issue that set social reform on its way to becoming consciously national." The issue concerned was child marriage. The efforts of Gokhale and Annie Besant as reformers was no less substantial. Besant contributed to India’s resurgence by founding the Central Hindu College (now Benaras Hindu University) and the Home Rule Movement. Tilak was convinced that India’s redemption did not lie in following blindly the footsteps of the West. He and his followers believed that Hindu culture and tradition needed only reinterpretation to the needs of Indian’s resurgence. This lead him to emphasise freedom of India’s political life from western domination. The Theosophical Society under the leadership of Madam H.P. Blavatsky came up in the same year as the Ārya Samāj. It was largely a Western movement which tried to blend Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Pythagoras, Plato and even Egyptian thought. Though Western in orientation it too contributed meaningfully to India’s resurgence.
These reformers and revivalists not only diagnosed the shortcomings in their own culture but also had the vision to recommend antidots to weed out those ills. This laid the groundwork for India's march towards light and progress.

"Earlier under the first impact of Western education, the Indian, swept off his feet by European culture and thought had often been a prey to an inferiority feeling, as he contemplated, in comparison, the state of his own tradition-bound religion and culture."33

This explains the strong bias towards the British in the early period of India's contact with the West. The leading lights of reformation corrected this imbalance in the national psyche and infused a sense of self-belief.

The year 1857 marks an important watershed. The Great Revolt, which is also, referred to as the First War of Independence, brought about a perceptible change in British attitude towards India and vice-versa. The bonhomie that prevailed between the rulers and the ruled prior to this gave way to mutual distrust and suspicion. Earlier cut off their country of origin, the British in India adapted to Indian conditions.

"... Unaffected by colour prejudice and unspoiled by imperialist hauteur (though these attitudes were certainly not totally absent from the scene), some of them saw nothing wrong in taking Indian mistresses – and few even wives."34

In short the Englishmen before 1857, by and large, did not try to impose their own culture on the Indians. Instead they seemed to have been influenced by Indian way of life themselves. The factors that brought in estrangement between these two peoples are varied in nature. The introduction of civil service examinations to select civil servants for India is one such factor. Their sense of superiority and race pride, inspite of their honest attempts at setting things in order, widened the gap between the rulers and the ruled. The Evangelical Movement in England too lend a touch audaciousness to the English in India. "To the Evangelical mind the hand of God was visible in

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11 Naik. op. Cit., P-32
11 Ibid. P-28
history, and nowhere more surely than in the miraculous subjugation of India by a handful of English.\textsuperscript{15} And for them the native religious system is one grand abomination Such attitudes of the English were hardly conducive to amicable interaction with the native populace.

There were other developments. The introduction of steamship around 1840 shortened the travel line between India and England. It was further reduced with the opening of the Suez canal in 1869. Now Englishmen could bring their families to India or visit their families in England if they wanted in a short time. There was no need to acclimatise themselves to Indian way of life.\textsuperscript{16} From now on “India came to be mostly exile and not home.”\textsuperscript{17} Earlier going native was a fashion. Now ‘native’ started acquiring a distinctly negative connotation. It became a word of contempt. This in a proved beneficial since it nagged the educated Indian to find his own soul, who, inspite of his best efforts, could not life of the rulers was a sanctum forbidden to their subjects – not a lighthouse to guide them.\textsuperscript{18} The Indian’s idea of British benignity gradually evaporated. Their mercantile designs in India became overtly manifest in the later half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century.

“The reason why the British, inspite of their traditional love of political liberty, denied it to the Indians was that their economic interests forced them to hold unto power in India as long as it was possible.”\textsuperscript{19}

The economic imperatives behind this was the Industrial revolution in Britain which had vastly increased output necessitating new markets for its products for its produce.

The British plotted the liquidation of the East Indian Company so that the English merchants could exploit the vast economic resources of India and its market. All these factors opened up the eyes of Indians to the plight of their own country. The end result was national awakening, which, it must be remembered, was inherent in the

\begin{itemize}
  \item Eric Stokes : 1959 : ‘English Utilitarians and India’ P-31
  \item Naik, op. Cit., P-30
  \item Ibid.
  \item S. Abid Husain : 1978 : ‘The National Culture of India’, P-109
  \item Ibid.
\end{itemize}
form movements themselves. From the formation of British India society in 1839 through British India Association in 1843, Indian Association of Surendranath Banerjee in 1876 and to the formation of Indian National Congress in 1885 was a long march for India’s political awareness. Surendranath’s Association was a path-breaking one for it was fashioned on “the conception of a united India derived from the inspiration of Mazzini”\(^{10}\) the founding father of Italian nationalism. The National Congress which had been treading a moderate line to fulfill its demands, suddenly changed to a militant one with the partition of Bengal in 1905. The idea of “using Western techniques and ideas to regenerate ancient societies and then to use Western weapons against Western supremacy”\(^{11}\) soon dawned upon the Indians.

The journey of India “from the shock of defeat and frustration and the trauma of inferiority feeling to a new found self awareness and self confidence”\(^{12}\) can be traced to the year 1857. Jordens however marks the year 1880 as a significant milestone for laying the foundation of nationalism and political action. From this point on individuals and groups openly identified themselves with an Indian nation and a new concept of Indian history. “Nationalism itself developed two patterns, a religious and a secular one...”\(^{13}\) Bankim Chandra best illustrates the spiritualised nationalism. In his hands the motherland was exalted to the position of a goddess. His ‘Bondeamataram’, reverberated through the length and breadth of the country. The secular idea of nationalism manifested best in Tilak and Gokhale.

In the realm of letters too the impact of the West was intensely felt. Literature could not remain aloof from the general reawakening in the social, political many writers were openly supportive of the British. There were some who were ambivalent towards colonial rule now extolling their virtues and now criticizing their vices, a little in a mellowed tone. This was due to the mesmerizing impact of the West. Boehmer puts this dilemma in perspective— “… students across the empire were being instructed as to the world excellence of English literature and Western systems of

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\(^{10}\) R.C. Mazumdar et al.: 1967: *An Advanced History of India* P-885
\(^{11}\) Percival Spenc. op. Cit., P-319
\(^{12}\) Naik, op. Cit., P-33
\(^{13}\) Jordens, op. Cit., P-373
rationality, and the deficiencies of their (colonized's) own."\(^1\) while providing the opportunity to the colonial elite for self-advancement and the courage to protest it "acted also to entrap them."\(^2\) This complex emotional response is conspicuous in writers like Bhāratendu in Hindi, Rangalā in Bengāli and Ghlīb in Urdu and so on.\(^3\) But gradually the "native colonials were able to transform the condition of mimicking the colonizer's moves into a strategy of resistance. Adopting and adapting the white man’s tongue they learned to speak for themselves."\(^4\) This the phase of creation which was a natural culmination of the earlier phases of imitation and assimilation. Literature in India, as across colonial societies, became an important front for nationalist mobilization. In fact it was in literature the first rumbling of nationalism was heard.

It may be said in all fairness that the Christian missionaries, almost in every Indian vernacular language, did the early spadework. Their pioneering work in founding these languages on a strong scientific basis helped stabilise these literature based on colloquial languages of the people. The Christian missionaries "not only translated the Bible and wrote Christian Purānas but also rendered considerable service to the languages by compiling the first modern grammars and dictionaries."\(^5\) They laid the groundwork for various literary genres to flourish. But more than anything else the diffusion of modern knowledge through the printed word in the prose medium created a revolution of sorts.

With printing machines journalism made its appearance. While reporting on happenings the emphasis was on the spatio-temporal dimension of things. It is this dimension that the novel and the short story are based. This was a crucial change since in pre-British literature of India the idea of time was cyclic, to a large extent. What it means is that literature from now on oriented towards portraying the here and now. S Abid Husain sums up the impact of missionary role in these words—

\(^{11}\) Bocchner, op. Cit., P-170
\(^{15}\) Ibid.
\(^{16}\) I. N. Choudhury, op. Cit., P-54
\(^1\) Bocchner, 171
\(^{18}\) A. L. Basham (ed.): 1997; \"A Cultural History of India\", the article \"Modern Literature\" by K. Kripalani, P-409
"Under their guidance the vernacular literature were diverted from the field of pure fantasy to the observation and interpretation of actual life. The revival of drama and the beginning of the novel in Indian languages restored to the Indian mind in a wider and richer form what it had possessed in the classical, but lost in the medieval age - the concept of life as a complex of subjective and objective reality and the art of portraying man in the setting of his physical and social environment in realistic proportions and natural colours."

English language, literature and thought were zealously seized upon and devoured because they were refreshingly different from their own. As a means of self-expression the "literary conventions and discourses inherited from the colonizer were appropriated, translated, decentered, and hybridized ..." in many different ways. This can be considered as a stratagem to beat the colonizer in their own game. Slowly but surely the Indian writers came to their own in course of time. It seems paradoxical that Western literature, instead of stunting the growth of literature in the vernaculars, virtually set in motion a revolutionary upsurge. "And this is the ultimate testimony to the creative nature of the impact."

For historical reasons Bengal led the way to modernity in literature as in other fields. The Bengali mind was quite responsive to foreign impact and quite naturally the seeds of literary renaissance too were sown there. The beginning of modern Indian literature can be traced to the founding of the Fort William College and the Serampore Mission Press in 1800. These institutions went beyond the twin objective of training British civil servants to make them effective administrators and to propagate Christianity through works in Indian language. The tireless devotion of John Gilchrist and William Carey in the production of pamphlets and tracts, compilation of dictionaries and writing of grammars etc. contributed to the growth of prose in India. Prose, which led the way to modernity, was not totally unknown to India. But it was to feeble to be of much consequence. "In any case there was hardly any established

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Husain, op. cit., P-115
Bochmer, P-100
Krishna Kripalani, 'Modern Literature', P-408
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Native literary tradition of what we understand by prose today which could be used as an effective medium of mass communication of knowledge or information. Interestingly the great pioneers in socio-cultural field were also the pioneers of prose in India. The necessity to propagate their ideals led them to take hold of this medium. Rājā Rāmmohun Roy laid the foundation of Bengali prose and Iswarachandra and Aksay Kumār Dutta made seminal contribution to it. In the hands of Bankimchandra it became a potent weapon. There was no tentativeness but a sure-handed authority which makes him stand out not only as the father of the Indian novel but also a master of prose literature. His vigorous prose style mixed with patriotic fervour of an infectious kind had many followers across the country. "His novels in particular awoke in the Bengalis, first the middle class, and later the masses, a self-confidence and pride in their language and their religion." There were a host of writers who enriched this aspect by their writings. Mention in this regard may be made of Parchand Mitra, Bhudev Mukherjee, Debendranāth Thākur and many others.

Dramatic literature too started flowering in the second half of the 19th century. One dramatist who created quite a stir was Dinabandhu Mitra. His Nil Darpan is a moving picture of the untold suffering and oppression of the indigo farmers. It was the first literary work highlighting the economic exploitation by the colonizer. Dwijendralāl Roy and Girishchandra Ghosh popularised dramatic literature in Bengal to a great extent. It was in the field of poetry that the best fruits of cross-fertilization is available. Michael Madhusudan introduced blank verse in his writings. He is called the greatest product of Western influence and represents in life and work both its happy and unhappy aspects. With Rabindranāth this synthesis reaches its pinnacle "It was Tāgore who naturalised the Western spirit in to Indian literature and thereby made it truly modern." What he did with poetry he did to every literary genre. The creative confidence he generated in the Indian writers went a long way in fulfilling the

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Kripalani, op. Cit., P-26

Bankimchandra was no only Ānandaṅgh and militant Hinduism. His novel Rajani visualises the happy synthesis between the East and the West. Its protagonist is at ease with both Kalidasa and Shakespeare. He could appreciate philosophers like Mill and Comte, scientists like Darwin and thinkers like Huxley without affecting his allegiance to the Indian tradition.

Jordens, P-373
Kripalani, P-17
Ibid., P-410
dream that Indian literature promised. He is undoubtedly the greatest behind India's cultural resurgence and also the greatest product of Indian Renaissance.  

Bengal, though first, was not alone in its march to new awakening. Various Indian provinces responded creatively to Western thought current depending on the intensity of their contact with the West. Mähārāstrā responded to it move vigorously than most with the exception of Bengal. It could boast of a host of genuinely great minds like H.N.Āpte, Chiplunkār, Keshavṣut, Rājwāde, Āgarkār, Kirloskār, Devāl and others. In Orissa Gauriśāṅkar, Phakīrmohana, Madhusudan and Rādhānāth blazed new trails. Bengal’s eastern neighbour Assam had its great stalwarts in Lakṣmināth Bezbarāā, Padmaṅgh Gohāinbaruā, Hemachandra Goswāmy, Chandra Kumār Agarwalā etc. Earlier Assam was lucky to have a truly renaissance figure in Ānandarāām Dhekiāl Phukan who drew comparison with Rāmmohun with his depth of genius and profundity of vision. To sum up: “The first light was borrowed from the West, but very soon the sun arose on the Eastern horizon.”

The impact of Western liberal education manifested itself in the passionate espousal of human dignity and egalitarianism by the educated Indian. The rationality it emphasized made him to re-evaluate his cultural traditions in terms of national progress. Reason in the place of the place of blind adherence to age old values and dogma. Serious attempts were made at ensuring social progress by combining the dynamism of Western science and practical wisdom with the spiritual sensibility of Indian mind. The educated Indian while warmly responding to outside influence became more and more sure of himself since he could overcome his earlier infatuation with everything West. This is why Kripalani rightly said – “In the best and most original minds, this fervour for new ideas and forms never rested in being merely imitative, but answered to the deeper needs of the mind.” This gave rise to what Kripalani says “the creative fervour of a new born faith in Indian destiny.” This intellectual transformation was the first great step to change the face of India and lead the way to the great upsurge called Indian Renaissance.

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56 Ibid. P-411
57 Kripalani. P-49
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
The following sections will outline the milieu of Orissa and Assam leading to the reawakening in these provinces.
Long before the advent of the English to Orissa in 1803 she had lost her independence with the death of king Mukunda Deva in 1568. His death heralded one of the darkest periods in the life of the Oriya nation. From that year on Orissa was either under the Mughal or the Marathās. It was a period of unmitigated suffering. In the beginning of Mughal suzerainty Orissa’s northern limits included Tāmluk and Medinipur. The reign of Ākbar saw the disintegration of greater Orissa when Hooqgaly and some other regions were annexed to Bengal Subā.⁶⁰ Later Hinjli and Tāmluk too were merged with Bengal. Amuruzzeb presided over the disintegration of the Mughal empire. After his death Alibardhi Khān became the Nāwāb of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Raghujī Bhonslā, the powerful ruler of the Marathās, made frequent forays into Alibardhi’s territory leading often to bloody skirmishes until a treaty was signed between the warring sides in 1751. In 1765 the English bought the dewani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The Marathās dominated regions of Orissa prevented the English from forging a strategic link between Bengal and Madras in the south. This was the main reason behind the invasion and annexation of Orissa by the English. The other imperative behind this may have been the raids of the Marathās in to English territory beyond the Subarnarekā river. The Marathās themselves were weakened by factionalism leading to their downfall.⁶¹ The English occupied Orissa with the signing of Dehāgrām pact, which reminds one of Tānkāhūn Treaty of 1826 paving the way for English rule in Assam. According to the Dehāgrām pact Orissa was divided into Mughal bandi and Gaḍājātas. The former consisted of the districts of coastal Orissa while the latter included interior, undeveloped, small feudatory states. Phakirmohana served in some of these states either as dewan or manager.

When the British occupied Orissa in 1803 the people heaved a sigh of relief. Prior to this Marathās depredations had plunged Orissa into complete anarchy. Death and destruction stalked life at every moment. The only aim of the Marathās was to

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⁶⁰ S. Baliar Sing, 1985: Odhyā Nāhitvare Jātiyataabhādi Četana, intro., P-khar Lbd. P-7
plunder Orissa’s wealth. A band of armed marauders called Bargis looted people and waylaid travellers. For fear of attracting the Bargis people neither ate nor clad well. The general pall of gloom was further intensified by devastating famines which visited Orissa during the reign of Subedar Sambuji Ganesh. No wonder when the British occupied Orissa they were not confronted as conquerors but welcomed as saviours. It did not of course take them long to divine the real intent of the British.

For administrative reason the British kept Orissa under Bengal Presidency. In spite of their best efforts to bring about a semblance of normalcy things did not look up as expected. Orissa virtually became a mere appendage to Bengal.

Shortly after their occupation of Orissa there occurred an uprising against the British at Khurda. Jayakrishna Rajguru, the Dewān of Khurdā, was totally against British occupation. The child king incurred the wrath of the British by defiant collection of taxes and by attacking Pipili. Provoked the British attacked and occupied Khurdā, arrested the king and his Dewān. The king was banished to Medinipur jail. Rajguru was hanged for treason. This rebellion is popularly referred to as Khurdā Bidroh in Orissa history. In spite of this failure the simmering discontent against foreign occupation could not be suppressed.

The British levied tax on the tax-free land gifted to the Pāiks (peasant-fighters) by the kings of Orissa. The Pāiks rose in revolt against the English under the leadership of Baxi Jagabandhu, popularly referred to as the Pāik Bidroha (1817) it spread quickly to both the Mughal bandi and Gaḍajāt regions. This revolt too was mercilessly suppressed. At various points of time such armed revolts were carried out against the occupying powers. Of the various revolts in Pārlakhemāndi, Ghumusar, Anugula and Sambalpur, the last mentioned was an extension of the First War of Independence in 1857. Surendra Sāi, its leader, became the first martyr of this war of

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62 Pyarimohana Acharya : 1925 : P-129

Interesting reference of two Oriya novels may be given here. Ramsankar Ray’s Bibusini gives a graphic account of the pitiable condition of Orissa under Marathā dispensation. There was no agency to dispense justice, nor was there any court or jail. Senāpati Lachhumāi too highlights the horrors of Marathā raids. ‘The scar left by the Marathās in the popular psyche in the form of a saying ‘Marathā sāsan’, which means lawlessness and bad administration.'
independence. The year 1866 saw the most devastating famine in Orissa which wiped out a large portion of its populace. The failure of government machinery to prepare contingency plan was largely responsible for its severity. This calamity awakened the administration to its tragic failure. As a form of atonement it undertook various developmental works in the province.

The Great Orissa Famine (Na' Arika Durbhikhyu) is an important watershed for Orissa. This is the point from which the reawakening of Orissa takes a perceptible shape. The same year (1866) a magazine called Utkala Dîpikā gets published to ventilate the grievance of the people, besides other things. The imposition of Bengali in Orissa too contributes in large measure to the political and cultural awakening in the province. The movement against the inclusion of Sambalpur in the province of Madhya Pradesh and the introduction of Hindi there too is a contributing factor to Oriya resurgence. "Nationalist spirit had crept into Orissa in the second half of the 19th century and this resulted in the rise of the pan-Orissa idea which got a fillip through the press, the activities of various societies and the mushrooming of educational institutions."

The British paid more than its share of interest to the problem of land settlement and fixation of revenue. Understandably this only benefited the British. The then Governor General Lord Cornwallis was himself a big landlord. He wanted to create a landowning class entrusted with the responsibility of collecting revenue. This class of landholders, like the educated elite later, was to act as conduit between the rulers and the great mass of peasants. While the zamindars paid a fixed amount of revenue to the British, they enjoyed the prerogative to collect taxes from the peasants. From 1804 to 1828 there were as many as eleven land settlements affected by the Board of Commissioner. The frequent increase in revenue and the oppressive nature of the zamindars entrusted with collection of taxes sapped the economic life of the peasantry. The introduction of monetised economy too added to the plight of Orissan economy. Used as they were to cowries as currency. The peasantry and the traditional
landed class often failed to pay dues in time leading to loss of livelihood. The mounting revenue arrears made the British to auction the holdings of defaulting zamindars to the highest bidder. This type of auctioning had started in as early as 1806. The ‘Sun-set Law’ deprived the indigenous land owning class of their land which were auctioned at Calcutta. More and more zamindaries went to Bengali bidders who had little interest either in the land itself or the people working on the land except as a source of monetary gain. In fact out of the total of 2340 zamindaries 1011 were transferred to Bengali hands through auction within a span of ten years (1806-1816). The abolition of zamindaries from Orissa was the primary reasons for the downslide in its economic strength. The lackadaisical land settlements and revenue policy carried out by the colonisers pushed the hapless peasantry to the brink.

What happened to the peasantry befell the indigenous industry too. The Oriyas were a great maritime people. Maritime trade was one of its important source of prosperity. It remained so up to the advent of the Portuguese to Orissa. The introduction of steamships gave a telling blow to the local shipping industry shipping industry in Balasore. According to him there were five to six hundred ships at sea of which seventy five percent were engaged in salt trade. The rest were employed in export business to far off destinations like Colombo, Rangoon, Madras and so on. For centuries Balasore was an important port of call. It became an important trading point soon after Europeans established contact with India. The Portuguese, Dutch and the English set up their trading centers here. The goods that were sent from Bengal to Madras used ships made in either Cuttack or Balasore for transportation. “Balasore was also the nerve centers of salt-manufacturing and iron-foundry. These things were organically linked to Orissa’s strength as a seafaring nation. The economic wellbeing of the people directly or indirectly related to the continuance of these trades. The English saw salt, a commodity consumed daily and by everyone, as an import avenue of revenue. The salt Law came into effect in 1814. It levied tax on salt, banned private

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67 Bhal Talor, op. Cit. Intro. P.E.
69 Phakirmohana’s stories like Kannan Pravāda Gorāpa, Kili Pravāda Gorāpa are largely about the maritime trade and commerce of the Oriya people
70 Walter Hamilton quoted from Mansingh’s ‘Sarasmū Prakārama’. P.23
manufacturing of this essential item, making the local salt costlier. The same fate awaited the local weaving industry in which Balasore occupied a pride of place.

The introduction of railways and water routes worked largely to the advantage of the British in spite of their significance as vital arteries of communication and modernity. Now the British could exploit the local resources with greater impunity and effectiveness. The capital intensive, machine-made, free-market economy of the British naturally edged out the ill-equipped indigenous industry into oblivion. In simple the people concerned but in filling their own coffers. The British- "worldwide system of trade, based on the laissez faire, by which each part of the system was compelled, by the pressure of competition from the other parts, to contribute to the system only those things which it could most easily produce." Prior to the arrival of the English the indigenous system of production was based on community needs. It was a self-sustaining system organically linked to the lifestyle of the people least equipped to withstand large scale production.

Added to the economic woes were the various natural disasters that devastated Orissa beyond repair. In the first seven decades of the 19th century there were seven serious famines, six tornadoes, five destructive floods which crippled Orissan economy. Of these the Great Orissa famine of 1866 was the most destructive in terms of high casualty and its after affects. P.C. Mohanty shows with the help of a table the comparative figures of the population of the coastal districts of Cuttack, Puri and Balasore before and after the great calamity. Before the famine the combined strength of the population of these districts was 20,86,329 which was decimated to 10,72,460 after it. The woeful inadequacy of the government machinery to anticipate the seriousness of the situation is brought out in the fact that rice exports from Orissa to Bengal continued as before contributing to the high mortality rate in the famine. In his autobiography Phakirmohana portrays a touchingly graphic account of its

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72 Bâleswâre Olandâj Jâti, Phakîrmôhâna Granthâvali, P-715
73 J. V. Boulton : 1993 : 'Phakîrmôhâna Sesâpâta: His Life and Prose Fiction', P-497
74 P.C. Mohanty, op. Cit., PP-147-149
75 Ibid. PP-151-153
aftermath. The same is corroborated by the official account. Henry Ricketts, the then commissioner of Orissa, writes with a touch of remorse about the abject condition available in the province in 1887, that is 34 years into the British occupation of Orissa. He finds the conditions of Orissa far too pitiable among all the regions under British rule leading to a tacit admission on his part that the colonisers had failed to provide any succour to the native people.

The middle class which was instrumental in bringing about reawakening of Bengal was almost non-existent in Orissa in the first half of the 19th century. This class was still to take to English education in any significant way. Bengal, on the other hand, could boast of a surfeit of manpower trained in the new mode of administration. This paved the way for a large influx of Bengalis into Orissa to assist the British. Every post of consequence was occupied by non-Oriyas. Even traders and merchants were largely from outside. These factors did not help the economic interest of Orissa.

The educational scenario of Orissa was quite in keeping with its dismal socio-political life. For a people politically servile and economically stagnating education could hardly be one of the priorities. Even learning of the traditional variety survived only in small pockets. The tols and chārīṣis were the agencies that carried out the teaching of Sanskrit and the three R’s, reading, writing and arithmetic. The emphasis here was ethics of living and character formation rather than utilitarian. Though it was not conducive to bring about momentum in social progress, it gave birth to a few remarkable personalities who became instruments of social transformation. Phakirmohana Senāpati, and Madhusudana, the pride of Orissa, were just two such personalities. The introduction of the Western system of education heralded a new beginning in Orissa.

76 *Anna Jiban corta* : 1983 : PP-33
79 Ibid., P-329
Ten years into their annexation of Orissa the British took unto themselves the task of imparting education to the natives in 1813, and an amount of rupees one lakh was set aside for this purpose. But this did not change materially the available education scenario. It was the missionaries who introduced the era of modern education in Orissa. They established the first modern school at Cuttack in 1822, the very year of their arrival in Orissa. They also established a charity school in the same town paving the way for modern education. This school later came under the administrative control of the Company government. It gradually grew into a full-fledged institute of higher learning i.e. collegiate education. In 1878 the bachelor degree class in Arts was introduced here. Its success enthused others to follow suit.

Yet by and large the Oriyas did not show much enthusiasm towards Western education. A comment made by Orissa commissioner Goldberg in 1848 stands testimony to this fact. He lamented the widespread state of ignorance among the people and their failure to corner important jobs which invariably went to the Bengalis.

The missionaries were primarily interested in spreading their creed. Their education was programmed to attract the natives towards Christianity. This proselytising endeavour was linked to furthering of British commercial interests in India.

"Hitherto British manufacturers had found only a limited market in India because of poverty of the people and their unformed taste. Education and Christianity would now remove the obstacles."

To the natives this evangelical mission could not remain draped in the form of a civilizing mission. For fear of being turned in to Christians many shunned Christian schools. The spread of vernacular schools too stood in the way of English schools.

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81 East India Company Act, 1813, Sec. 45
83 P.C Mohanty, op. Cit., P-240
84 Eric Stokes : 1982 : 'The English Utilitarians and India', P-34
Cockburn, the inspector of Schools for Orissa, cites the preponderance of village schools of which Cuttack and Balasore alone had 2074 and 839 respectively. The first precondition for the growth of modern education in Orissa, according to Cockburn, was the reformation and innovation of the village schools. Based on his assessment, Dr. E. Rore, the next inspector brought about some important changes by establishing Normal Schools and Modern Schools. There were other factors which contributed to the qualitative and quantitative improvement in the spread of modern education. Of these, the award of scholarships to meritorious students, establishment of teacher training institutes, publication of textbooks, the spread of printing press, better management of schools and availability of qualified teachers helped modern education take roots in Orissa. Increased awareness about the benefits of Western education must have contributed to its increased demand, for, jobs of any import were cornered by educated Bengali gentlemen. Harding's declaration that the English educated would get preference in jobs must have encouraged students towards Western education.

Woods Despatch of 1854 had many positive points. While emphasising moral and material welfare, it also pleaded for preparation of Indians for government jobs. Even while advocating English as the medium of instruction, it spoke in support of developing local languages. It was in a way the most comprehensive document covering education from the primary to University education.

In spite of all these developments, modern education did not progress as much as one would have expected. Four years after Wood's Despatch, there were only four modern English schools compared to 25 vernacular schools. Cockburn, the commissioner of Orissa, recommended the constitution of a separate Inspectorate for Orissa to boost its educational scenario. With E. Rore taking over as inspector for Orissa, the conditions perceptibly looked up. The establishment of Cuttack High School was a milestone. It later transformed into a degree college and re-christened as

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81 P.C. Mohanty, op. Cit., P-177
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid., P-178
86 P.C. Mohanty, op cit., P-178
Ravenshaw College as a token of gratitude towards Orissa’s benefactor. He was to Orissa what Henry John Steadman Cotton was to Assam. The year 1876 also saw the establishment of a medical college at Cuttack.

Given the status of the girl child in the Indian context women’s education was late in coming. The first school for Hindu girls came up in Orissa in 1871 by private enterprise. It reflects sadly on the Orissan mind that by 1881 only four Hindu girls enrolled there. Phakirmohana’s short story Rebati is a severe indictment of this attitude towards women’s education.

However in the second half of the 19th century English education picked up momentum. As a result there was a small minority of educated middle class. It was largely his class that took unto itself the task of rousing Orissa from her age old slumber to new awakening. This reawakening in Orissa, like it was in Assam, was language and literature based. This sprung from the language dispute with Bengal. It was for this reason that the Oriya nationalists in the first stage were literary men like Gauriśankar Ray and Phakirmohana Senāpati.

The Christian missionaries who came to Orissa on a proselytising mission rendered signal service to Oriya language and literature. They brought printing press to Orissa which helped spread the printed word. They brought out the first printed book in Oriya, albeit in the form of Bible translation titled “Oriyā Nutan Niyam” in 1809. It was translated by William Carey with the help of Mrityunjay Vidyālankār, a teacher of Fort William College. William Bampton and James Peggs came to Orissa in 1822 and established a school at Cuttack. Their ceaseless effort saw the establishment of fifteen schools at various places in little over a year. Mr. Lacy and Ams Sutton reached Orissa with their families in 1825. Though their primary motive was conversion of the natives, by 1828 there was only one convert- Gangādhara

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90 P.C Mohanty, op. Cit., P-188
91 Ibid. P-189
92 Boulton, op. Cit., P-12
93 B.C Samal, op. Cit. P-217

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Sadangi. Though they failed in their conversion bid they were hugely successful in establishing a number of schools not only in the coastal districts but in far flung areas like Pārlākhemundi and Karāput.

The missionaries in fact dominated the education scene of Orissa between 1822 to 1847. They were severely critical of the various evils besetting the Oriya society like idolatry, child-marriage, human sacrifice called ‘meriā’, superstition, ignorance and suttee. They established the Cuttack Printing Press which became an inspiration to Phakirmohana’s own press. From here Rev. Lacy edited Gyanārūm in 1849, the first journal in Orissa. Later he followed up with Prabhodhi Chandrika in 1856 and Aruṇoday in 1861 while the same type of paper with the same title was who published in Assam in 1846. These journals were largely devoted to the spread of the gospel though they did devote some space to secular matter. The Bible in Oriya was remarkable in one way in spite of its low literary merit, it was in prose. It is the medium that transformed literature and heralded modernity. The journals in Orissa carried this medium further. Besides, the missionaries wrote textbooks on various subjects. It aided the spread of education in Orissa. The Oriya translation of F'knuva O’ Karuḥ Biharu helped the genre of fiction to take roots and this book was also translated into Assamese.

The multi-pronged activities of the missionaries brought about a new awareness in the minds of the educated Oriyas. This awareness was to prove catalytic in the reawakening of Orissa.

Renaissance in Orissa:

The Great Orissa Famine of 1866, ironically, marks the rumbling of renaissance in Orissa. It took a disaster of such unprecedented magnitude to open up the eyes of the rulers to the plight of the Oriya people. The guilt emanating from the

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95 B. C. Samal. op. Cit., P-256
colossal loss of human life and total disruption of the social fabric materialised in developmental works long overdue.

"Thus following the famine additional canals were cut to improve crop production and additional facilities in education were created for Oriyas. There included an announcement for prizes for new textbooks in Oriya."96

On the other hand Bengal saw the establishment of Fort William College in 1800, Hindu College in 1817 and Calcutta University in 1858, Orissa did not have a full-fledged College as late as 1859. Degree classes in Cuttack College (later rechristened as Ravenshaw college in 1879) Were opened only in February 1876.97 Mayadhar Mansingh rues this fact when he says- "When in 1857 the neighbouring Bengal got her own university, fate ordained only a couple of minor schools for Orissa".98 Orissa therefore felt the impact of western education a full half a century after Bengal. This clash of cultures made Bengal a fertile ground for the appearance of luminaries of the Indian Renaissance like Rammohan Roy, Radhakanta Deb, Keshubchandra Sen, Iswaschandra Vidyāsāgar, Vivien Derozio, Madhusudan Dutta and many others. These great men appeared in the Bengal socio-cultural scene in the first seven decades of the 19th century. About the same time Orissa was still trying to break the shackles of its medieval moorings.

Two important factors essential for national identity determined the course of national resurgence in Orissa. They were the language controversy with Bengal and Orissa’s territorial integrity. The British had kept Orissa truncated into various odd parts for administrative reasons. The present Sambalpur was part of the central Province and Ganjam in the south formed a part of the Madras Presidency. Some parts of it remained with Bihar. The so-called Orissa comprising the cashtal districts known then as Cuttack, virtually was an appendage of Bengal. It remained so for 109 years, from 1803 to 1912.99 the backward Gadaśās or feudatory states in a way

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96 J. V. Boulton: 1976; 'Phakirmohana Senapati And His Times,' P-9
97 B. C. Samal, op. Cit., P-244
98 Otyōhi Sāhitya Itihāsa: 1990, P-201
99 Mayadhara Mansingh, op. Cit., P-201
remained cut off from the light of modernity. In such a dismembered condition national resurgence was too far-fetched before territorial unification. The threat to the cultural identity of the people of the dismembered regions was quite real. Cut off from the mainstream of Orissan life, these people were imperceptibly being assimilated into the culture in touch and the number of Oriya speakers in those regions were also being reduced.\textsuperscript{100} while the Oriyas of Ganjam were compelled by circumstance to read Telugu in Sambalpur it was Hindi. From time to time some British officials were voicing concern at this. Mr. Ricketts for one recommended assimilation of Sambalpur into Orissa. Medinipur, now in Bengal, was once an Oriya majority region having 182 Oriya schools between 1835 to 1838.\textsuperscript{101} Karmaveera Gaurisankar, the firebrand editor of Utkala Dipika, forcefully drove home this point with a metaphor. He likened Oriya language to a three-pronged cucumber suffering at the hands of three provincial governments, which prevented its evenly growth.\textsuperscript{102} Gaurisankar also widened the scope of the language controversy by exhorting his countrymen to go all out for the unification of the scattered Oriya speaking tracts.

Earlier "The announcement of new educational facilities for Oriyas," says Boulton, "Sounded to Bengalis like the first trumpet notes of a challenge to their supremacy in Orissa."\textsuperscript{103} Rajendralal Mitra, the antiquarian scholar, was the first to take up the gauntlet of behalf of his brethren. He gave a speech in December, 1868, at the Cuttack Debating Society which undermined the sovereign quality of the Oriya language.

His comment is quit meaningful-

"Anyone would do who really desired to promote the wellbeing of Orissa would be to abolish the Oriya language and introduce Bengali: for, as long as Oriya remains it will be impossible for Orissa to progress."\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{100} P. C. Mohanty, op. Cit., P-34
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Utkala Dipika, Part iv, No. ii dt. 13/3/1869.
\textsuperscript{103} Phakirmohana Senapati & His Times, P-9
\textsuperscript{104} Boulton, op. Cit., P-71
Rajendralal was no linguistic expert. He came to Orissa to study its ancient heritage. By claiming Oriya to be distorted Bengali he would have perhaps claimed its heritage for Bengalis. Besides the imperative of Bengali print media for a wider subscription extending to Orissa and Assam if Bengali became the language there, may have been behind Rajendralal’s assertion. Thirdly he was in the lucrative business of textbook writing and likely to have benefitted, greatly had Bengali been accepted in Orissa.

However Rajendralal’s suggestions were greeted with the contempt it deserved. Gaûrisâṅkara made spirited refutation of Rajendralal’s arguments. In the pages of Utkâla Dipika. In Balasore Phâkîrmohana took up cudgels against the misinformation campaign carried out by Kântîchandra Bhattachâryya in his book “Oriyâ Swatantra Bhâyâ Naîa.” The rearguard action of Gaûrisaṅkara and Phâkîrmohana reverberated through the length and breadth of Orissa. Gaûjam rose up in arms against the imposition of Telegu in 1869. The government could not remain dumb to these demands. In 1876 the government proposal to include some Oriya-speaking tracts from Madhya-Pradâsh with Orissa was enthusiastically welcomed by Utkâla Dipikâ. Bâleswar Sambadâ Bahîka, a leading journal of the time too took to task the flawed logic of Kântîchandra. Support to the Oriya cause also came from some intellectuals and journals from Bengal. Mention may be made of Bhûdev Mukhopâdhyây. He condemned in unequivocal terms the anti-Oriya stance of Kântîchandra. Calcutta Review, which had substantial influence with government circles, too came out in support of independent identity of the Oriya language. John Beames who was the collector of Balasore and a linguistic scholar opined as follows-

“it is far beyond the power of the handful of English and Bengalis settled in Orissa to stamp out the mother tongue of these millions.”

The concerted efforts put by all these factors bore fruit and by 1872-73 Bengali was replaced by Oriya in educational institutions and courts.

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105 Part V. No. 18. Dt. 30/4/1870
106 P. C. Mohanty, op. Cit., p.35
108 B. C. Samal, op. Cit., p.251
Yet the question of the survival of the Oriya language remained precarious in the Oriya speaking tracts scattered over other provinces. In 1876 Bichitrānanda Pattnāik and Rājā Baikunṭhanāth Dey presented a memorandum to the government to include the dismembered regions in Orissa province. The furore created by a government circular to introduce Hindi in 1895 strengthened the language based nationalist movement in Orissa. It proved inspirational to the people of Ganjam to protest the imposition of Telegu there. With the creation of Utkalā Sammilani in 1903 the movement for a separate province of Orissa transformed into a political movement.

The position of Orissa in this regard has a lot in common with southern province like Andhra and Kārnātākā who had to fight against Tamil and Mārāthi respectively. About Kārnātākā R. S. Mugali writes:

"But the British had dismembered Kārnātākā in to several odd parts... thus wiping out the very identity of the land and its people. Quite apart from its literature and culture the very survival of Kānnādā as a language was itself in jeopardy."

This sort of double slavery- cultural and political, fell to Orissa’s lot too. The fight against this enslavement was carried out, apart from others, through the printed word largely in the last three decades of the 19th century. Journals played a leading role in rousing people to new challenges. Utkalā Dīpakā and Bāleswar Sambāda Bāhikā were the most prominent among a host of journals that dotted the landscape of Orissa. The missionaries were the first to publish journals but their chief motive, as has already been mentioned, the spread of Christianity. Before them of course there was an instance of a journal being published by Sādhusundar Dās of Kujibar Math (monastery) near Chaudwār which was not printed but hand written. It was the first of its kind in Orissa which reminds one of the journal brought out by Āuniāti Satra (monastery) of Assam. However Dīpakā and Sambāda Bāhikā were instrumental in creating an indigenous tradition of journalism addressing themselves to the voicing of grievances of the people and giving fillip to the development and spread of Oriya

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110 B. C. Samal, op. Cit., P-260
literature. The status of Oriya literature was affecting the status of the Oriya people. Hence Literature became the focal point around which the Oriya nationalist movement revolved. Which the Oriya tracts scattered across other territories affected Orissa’s physical health, lack of modern literature affected their cultural identity. Boulton raises the same question in a rhetorical manner- “were they to lose their mother-tongue and with it their culture, their traditions and their very existence and identity as a separate people?”  

Dīpikā and Bāhikā obviously understood this fact quite well. Their vivid portrayal of the tragic plight of Orissa during the Great Famine, their ceaseless fight for the preservation and progress of Oriya language and literature, their efforts at rousing people to political awareness brought about the much needed momentum to the placid social scene of Orissa. In a way these journals controlled the entire public opinion of Orissa of the time. Two of the most prominent personalities of the time- Gauriśāṅkara and Phakirmohana, were the driving force behind these two journals. The Oriya nationalist movement, in fact, can be traced to the activities of these two stalwarts.

There was a flurry of the appearance of journals following the footsteps of Dīpikā and Bāhikā. Utkala Itihasini, an Anglo-Oriya journal came out in 1871. Strident in its opposition to Brāhma faith it apparently stood for orthodoxy. Utkala Putra, the brainchild of Pyārimohan Achārya, came out in the same year. Pyārimohan was ably assisted by Madhusudana Rāo and Gobinda Ratha. Its courageously straightforward way of saying things it incurred the wrath of the British masters. “Regarding the general policy of the paper, it may be added that it advocated women’s education... The paper was critical of the past and the present, though enthusiastic over the national cause.” There was an element of progressiveness since only through self-criticism self-advance is possible.

The appearance of ‘Utkala Durpastra’ is a milestone from the point of view of the growth of modern literature. Published first in 1873 it helped unleash the creative
energy of Madhusudan Rāo and Rādhānāth Ray, who formed a potent literary triumvirate with Phakirmohana. Essays, short stories, novels, poems, translations both from English and Sanskrit flowed from their pens. There was both quantitative and qualitative change in these writings. Darpaṇa ceased to appear from 1884 due to the simple reason that its chief contributors were transferred being government servants and secondly writhe.116 But within that short span it was able to initiate the march of Oriya literature to modernity.117

The progressive nature of the Brāhma faith attracted Phakirmohana and Madhusudana. The latter in fact “Launched and edited two journals, Siksaka and Dharmabodhinii”118 to keep up his passion for Brahmoism and education. Journalism played the most vital role not only creating social and political awareness in the people but also fathered modern literature. No wonder the growth of modern literature coincided with the growth of journalistic activities.

Journalism in Orissa heralded by the publication of Gyānārum in 1849. Consolidated between the years 1866 to 1880. And from 1881 to 1890 it assumed a new maturity. The lifting of lord Lytton's Vernacular Press Act in 1878 restored press freedom. In fact the efforts to gag the freedom of expression actually worked in favour of national resurgence.119 The growth of journalism brought on its wake the growth of prose.120 Prose was the most effective medium to represent the new awareness. All the discourses of modernity like science and technology, politics, literature etc. could be carried out only in prose. It brought about a change in the perception of reality; the here and now became more important than the hereafter.

Increased awareness led more and more people to welcome Western education. With the spread of English education a small influential middle class came in to being it was this middle class who occupied the centre-stage in the socio-cultural life of Orissa and brought about the renaissance like elsewhere in India.

116 J. V. Boulton, op. Cit., P-45
117 Ibid
118 Ibid
119 Sakuntala Bahar Singh, op. Cit., P-40
120 Srinivasa Misra, Ṛṣabha Ṛṣabha Gadya Sahitya, (1978) PP-91-92
The growth of printing press helped diffuse information to all and sundry. At various district headquarters and urban centres printing presses sprang up. Gaurišankar’s Cuttack printing company and Phakirmohana’s Utkala Press, established on joint stock basis for the first time, inspired others to follow suit. Some of the important printing presses that dotted the Orissan social scene in the last three decades of the 19th century were Bāleswara Dey Press (1873), Cuttack Hitaisini Press (1873), Puri Bhakti Pradāyini Press (1874), Ganjām Press (1885) Bāmanṭā Press (1885), Mayurbanja Press (1879), Printing Corporation Press (1890), Arunoday Press (1893), Utkala Sāhitya Press (1897) etc. There presses put out journals and news papers to mould and represent the aspirations of the people. With the establishment of the Indian National congress in 1885, the papers and journals published by these presses took the lead in giving leadership and direction to the people. Provincial nationalism marched hand in hand with pan Indian nationalism.

Before 1903 when Utkala Gaurab Madhusudana Dās established the Utkala Sammiḷani, which brought all of Orissa under one political umbrella. Nationalism in Orissa largely found expression in language and literature. It was nothing typical of Orissa alone but part of the general trend in every Indian province in the 19th century.

The coming of the missionaries and with them the printing press, the appearance of journals leading to the diffusion of knowledge; the greater acceptance of the prose medium and with it the modern literary genres; the post-Famine development and expansion of educational facilities leading more and more people to the acceptance of English education; the momentous language dispute with Bengal leading to the rise of language cum literature based nationalism; the emergence of a western educated middle class and its leadership were the important contributory factors that led to self discovery and self assertion popularly referred to as renaissance.

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121 B.C. Samal. op. Cit., P-260
The heyday of the sixhundred years of Ahom rule was almost over by the beginning of the nineteenth century. They did much to homogenise the various peoples residing in Assam resulting in a sense of nationhood. But Ahom rule surely had served out its usefulness by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Its decadence could be traced to civil wars, fratricidal conflicts, court intrigues and conspiracies which became the order of the day. Religion may also have played a considerable role in the decline of the Ahom power. In the eighteenth century two forms of religious faiths namely Vaiṣṇavism and Saktism were vying for ascendancy. This did not flare into open conflict as long as the crown sided with a particular faith without interfering with that of other faiths. Trouble started brewing during king Siva Simha's reign. His queen Phuleswari, who took the name of Pramatheswari Devi, was fanatically determined to establish Saktism as a state religion and started persecuting the Vaiṣṇavites, the Moamarias in particular. The disecration of their faith is supposed to have caused the Moamaria Revolt half a century later. Laxmi Simha's reign (1769-80) saw further disintegration of Ahom monarchy culminating in the Burmese invasion and the subsequent establishment of East India Company rule. Edward Gait attaches considerable importance to the Moamaria Rebellion for the decline of Ahom monarchy. This revolt reared its head during Gauri Simha's reign with greater force sweeping the whole of upper Assam. Its impact could be felt right up to Nagāon. As a ruler Gauri Simha was not only incompetent and cowardly but blood-thirty hastening the downfall of Assam's longest serving monarchy. The powerful surge of the Moamarias was but feebly resisted by the royalists which made the occupation of the throne that much easier. After occupying the capital they placed Bharat Simha, a relative of the Moamaria Mahanta, on the throne with Pitambar Gosain as his adviser. The time was quite ripe for powerful chieftains to announce

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122 Bbrinch Kumar Barua : 1964 : 'History fo Assamese Literature'. P-103
126 H. K. Barpajari, op. cit., P-293
their suzerainty over small fiefdoms. In Kamrup the revolt of Haradatta and Biradatta against the Āhom viceroy at Gauhati added to the general anarchy prevalent at that time. Krishna Narāyān, the powerful Koch king of Darrang, came out in open defiance of the Ahom monarchy with the help of mercenary soldiers from neighbouring Bengal. In fact Krishna Narāyana colludes with Haradatta and Biradatta to pulldown the last vestiges of Āhom rule. The state of Affairs of Assam during this time reminds one of the anarchy prevalent in Orissa during the Marāthā dominance.

The Burmese occupation of Assam at the behest of Badan Barphukan further sapped the vitality of the country. The groundwork for Burmese invasion was laid by the inept administration and political feuds of Chandra Kānta Simha. The first wave of attacks came in 1817, and by 1820 the Burmese were the virtual masters of Assam. The Burmese plundered the country, butchered thousands to people mercilessly and carried off a large number as slaves. Their ruthlessness almost halved the population of Assam. Their political and military might posed a real threat to the British administration in Bengal. "The Burmese now commanded the river routes in to the eastern districts of Bengal: the whole of Dacca, Mymensingh, Rangpur and Natore (Rājsahi) districts was 'at the mercy of the power in possession of the upper part of the (Bahmaputra) river' ..." The threat perception led the British to wage war against the Burmese and finally evict them from Assamese soil in 1826 with the Treaty of Yandaboo. The British invasion of Assam obviously was an act of self-defence. Which latter turned out to be an annexation. With the annexation of Puranda Simha’s territory and grant of pension to him the symbolical rule of the Ahom monarchy was over. In reality the defeat of Chandra Kānta Simha at the hands of Burmese general Bāndula’s forces in 1822 at Assam Chokey heralded the end of Āhom suzerainty."
“The fall of a monarchy after about six centuries of uninterrupted ascendancy was a cataclysmic political change, but the people reacted by hailing the advent of the foreign rulers.” This enthusiasm is an eloquent testimony to the chaotic condition prevalent in Assam in its declining monarchy and decadent nobility.

The fall of the monarchy was a great blow to the nobility. Loss of power and social position which they enjoyed unhindered for centuries made them a disgruntled lot. This class was immensely capable of creating trouble for the new rulers. The British with their uncanny practical sense could foresee this danger. David Scott, one of the founders of British administration in Assam recorded to this effect as below, "It is futile to suppose", he said, "that members of the ruling classes, whose ancestors had reigned in the valley for more than five hundred years (sic), would at once give up all their hope of future greatness upon the appearance amongst them of a handful of strangers." To keep the nobility in good humour the British offered key positions to them in the administrative setup. Of course, the new rulers kept in mind not to bring about radical changes in the preceding system which the people were familiar with. So when the rulers set shop in Assam, the common people in general saw it in terms of relief from the hopelessly anarchical situation prevalent prior to the British occupation. Apart from the two uprisings by the nobility in 1828 and 1830, the general populace by and large calmly resigned to British suzerainty. It helped the British to gain a strong foothold in Assam.

The policy of appeasement of the nobility by offering sops in the new dispensation did not really pay much dividends. The Assamese nobility proved unequal to the task assigned to them. They indulged in "bribery and corruption", leading to their fall from British grace. It necessitated the rise of a new class to help...
the colonizers in the day to day administration. One of the primary motives of British education policy in India was to rear such a class. The failure of the Assamese nobility in the field of revenue and judicial administrations hastened the demand for modern education.

Before the advent of the British the education system prevalent in Assam was no different from that of many other parts of India. This too was in a state of collapse. The political uncertainty consequent to the Moamaria Rebellion and the Burmese depredations resulted in the complete unsettlement of socio-intellectual life. "By the time British rule was consolidated in Assam, the entire system of education was in a state of near total collapse except for a handful of 'tols' in remote corners which continued to impart education to a small number of scholars."137 This too was largely confined to the higher classes. The common masses could hardly think in terms of imparting formal education to their wards. Therefore, ignorance remained the order of the day rather than an exception.

David Scot was the first English administrator who thought in terms of imparting education to the general public. In the political arena his policy was one of non-interference with local administrative set-up. He followed the same policy of non-interference with the traditional form of education. This education largely consisted of the teaching of Sanskrit and the scriptures with occasional reading sessions of Bhāgavata and Rāmāyana and the study of medicine, astronomy and arithmatic.138 It is not clear whether Scot wanted to keep the Assamese people away from English education to prevent them from asserting themselves or that he wanted to ward off any discontent that may rear its head if the age-old indigenous tradition was done away with. Whatever the considerations may have been, eleven schools sprang up under his initiative mostly in lower Assam.139 Guwāhati (Sic) Seminary, the first English school, came up in 1834. Jenkins, of course, had the old Assamese aristocracy and nobility in mind as the target group, since they were being elbowed

137 Tilottama Misra, op. Cit., P-35
139 Ibid. P-4
out of all important positions in the government and he apprehended trouble for the colonial government. In this regard Tilottama Misra’s observations may be mentioned—

"Jenkins warned the government that such a situation (i.e. the loss of power and position of the nobility) was fraught with dangers, - probably more in relation to the position of the British rulers than that of the Assamese aristocracy."1

The year the first English school came into being in Guwahati i.e. 1835 is also a high water mark in the socio-cultural history of India. It was to have its impact on the future course of India. This year saw the appearance of Macaulay’s famous *Minutes on Education*. The Minutes needs to be quoted at some length to understand its basic thrust.

"It is impossible for us with our limited means to educate the body of the people. We must at present, do our best to form a class (italics mine) who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in moral and intellect. To this class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with forms of science borrowed from Western nomenclature and to render them by degrees fit vehicle for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population,"141 The thrust of this recommendation was to create ‘a class’ of persons to be interpreters between the British rulers and the great mass of ruled. Macaulay could not have been more prophetic. The Western-educated elite, though only a minuscule minority, brought in a dynamism into the entire social structure of India in the later half of the nineteenth century. The power and position it enjoyed gave it the ability to change the destiny of India. The British government too came round to the point Macaulay advocated in his Minutes when it announced plans to make European literature and science the chief objective of British education policy in India.142 The emphasis here was Euro-centric education which tallies well with Macaulay’s

1 Tilottama Misra, op. Cit., P-37
142 M. K. Naik, op. Cit., P-13
manifest intentions, i.e., the creation of a typical class, Indian in blood and colour but English in opinion, morals and taste.

That this is imperialistic design masquerading as ‘benign civilizing mission’ is a moot point. Yet the educational scenario of Assam did not show much enthusiasm towards Western education right up to the middle of the nineteenth century. There was of course a short spell of attraction for the new learning immediately following the establishment of Gowahatty Seminary in 1835. But it could not be sustained for long. Only seven years into the British occupation of Assam it was too early to expect Western education to sway the popular imagination. After the initial upswing in enrollment of students in the English section in Gowahatty Seminary it started declining rapidly. This general apathy becomes clear in the fact that not a single Assamese student could clear the entrance examination till 1861. And till 1864 there was not a single Secondary school to impart English education. The seeds of English education started burgeoning only in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The expulsion of Assamese from educational institutions and courts of Assam in 1836 must have acted as a dampener to the spread of education in the province. The fact that this fateful step did not stir people into protest is a sad reminder of the weak national spirit of the Assamese people at that time. Coupled with this was the fact that the middle ages lingered a little too long in Assam when Bengal, which came in contact with Western light earlier than rest of India, had already witnessed its Renaissance. Besides feudalistic values characteristic of the middle ages resisted any change that would jeopardize it. But about the middle of the nineteenth century Assamese people must have seen the fruits of English education in the form of a large number of Bengali baboos occupying positions of import and power in their midst.

Wood’s Despatch of July 19, 1854 stands out as an important landmark in the history of Indian education. This despatch tried to drive home the point that it was

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141 Aijaz Ahmad: 1994: 'In 'theory- Classes Xations Literatures. 'P-235
144 Tilottam Misra, op. cit. P-38
145 Ibid. P-39
important not only to produce a higher degree of intellectual fitness, but to raise the
cultural character of those who partake of its advantages.\textsuperscript{146} It emphasized moral and
material welfare, preparation of Indians for government jobs, acceptance of English
education with equal emphasis on the vernaculars etc. This despatch imposed on the
government the responsibility of creating a properly articulated system of education
from the primary schools to university.\textsuperscript{147} In spite of the many positive thrust of
Wood's Despatch it failed to exert the desired effect on Assam's educational scenario
A good ten years after this Assam was separated from Bengal Presidency and put
under a separate regulating authority to look after its educational affairs. Of course
there was some attempt at establishing a college for the First Arts class. The idea died
a natural death when continuously poor results led to the closure of the school. The
disadvantage of learning Bengali by the Assamese students besides English must have
compounded the problems for the students resulting in their failure to clear the
Entrance Examination.\textsuperscript{148}

The rehabilitation of Assamese language and the recognition of Assam as a
separate province proved more conducive to the spread of modern education. As a
natural corollary an independent Public Instruction Department for Assam came into
being. The announcement of scholarships to tune of 220/- per month for indigenous
students of F, A and B. A classes by Charles Elliot, the chief commissioner of Assam,
was enthusiastically welcomed. These scholarships were to be awarded to students
from Assam who went for higher education in Bengal since there was no college in
Assam at that time. The demand for a college in Assam was coming from one section
while another section preferred Assamese students going to Calcutta for its
cosmopolitan atmosphere.\textsuperscript{149} But public opinion greatly favoured the first option
leading to the establishment of the Cotton College in 1901. Ironically Sir Henry
Steadman Cotton, the then Chief Commissioner, would have preferred the
establishment of a hostel at Calcutta for Assamese students going in for higher
education rather than open a college at Guwahati. But he readily bowed down to

\textsuperscript{146} D. P. Sinha : 1961 : "The Educational Policy of the East India company in Bengal 1854",
P-299
\textsuperscript{147} P. Hartog : 1939 : "Some Aspects of Indian Education" P-18
\textsuperscript{148} Mill's Report, Appendix Z, P-xi
\textsuperscript{149} Nagen Saikia : 1988 : "Background of Modern Assamese Literature", P-105
public opinion and laid the foundation of the premier institute of higher education on 3rd November 1890. This was to herald a new age of learning in Assam.

Assam waited too long to get a college though it was envisaged much earlier.\(^{150}\) It was to play a leading role in the social and intellectual resurgence of Assam in the years to come.

**Missionary activities:**

Christian missionaries made signal contribution to Assamese life and literature as elsewhere in India. The fact that their principal purpose was the spread of Christianity has been overshadowed by their seminal work in the spread of the printed word and establishing the Assamese Language on a sound scientific footing. It was they who established the first printing press in Assam. They wrote and published works on grammar, lexicon, prosody; they translated stories from the Bible into Assamese; they introduced new literary genres by their translations and writings.

The year 1836 was momentous for two reasons: it saw the elimination of Assamese language from the schools and law courts of Assam; it saw the advent of “two remarkable members of the American Baptist Mission, the Rev. N. Brown and O. T. Cutter...”\(^{151}\) to Assam. This queer coincident later turns out to be quite significant. The missionaries driven by their zeal to reach out to the common masses for the sake of spreading the gospel took to learning the local language and started publishing materials in it. Within three months of their arrival they came out with the first Assamese Primer to be used in the schools they established.\(^{152}\) The very nature of their work brought about fundamental changes in the sphere of education. Previously education, be it in *tols, Mokhôs* or *Môhôisôs*, was limited to the children of the privileged classes alone. The people at the lower rungs of society could hardly

\(^{150}\) Way back in 1835 the British proposed to "establish ... a college for Western learning at the principal town of every commissioner jurisdiction, or circle of two or three districts and ultimately in every district." Report of the General Committee of Public Instruction. 1835, P-4

\(^{151}\) B. K. Barua. op. Cit, P-104

\(^{152}\) Ibid.
afford it. The missionaries democratised learning by imparting English education to all without any bias of class and caste.

The missionaries had already published works based on Christian themes from the Serampore Mission Press before they set up station in Assam. Carey and Marshman, the English missionaries, translated the entire Bible into Assamese with the help of an Assamese scholar Atmaram Sarma. This translation, profuse as it was with words of Sanskrit origin, was beyond the comprehension of the common reader it was meant for. Rev. Brown tried to overcome this difficulty by translating and then publishing parts of the Bible in Assamese in 1847. Besides he published numerous tracts in the local language to instill the love of Christ in the heart of the Assamese. Proselytisation was only one of their goals. The British were in India on a commercial enterprise and they were interested in furthering their interests under the garb of a civilizing mission. They encouraged the spread of Western education and evangelical activities with the objective of strengthening their grip over acquired territories. That missionary activities in Assam came about at the same time as the discovery of tea plants in the province does not seem to be a mere coincidence.

Whatever motive one may assign to the missionary activities they have undoubtedly ushered in a new beginning in Assam as they did in various other regions of India. For historical reasons national reawakening in Assam and Orissa was largely language and literature oriented. Grammars and dictionaries that the missionaries wrote laid a solid foundation for the growth of the Assamese language. Notable among grammatical works and dictionaries are W. Robinsonson's 'A grammar of the Assamese language, Rev. Brown's Grammatical Notice of the Assamese Language, Bronson's Dictionary in Assamese and English etc.

Their multifarious activities can be summed up in the words of David Koff as below:-

153 A. K. Gurney, "The Bible in Assamese", in Assam Mission Golden Jubilee Vol. P-113
154 A. T. Embree, 1962: 'Charles Grant and British Rule in India', P-146
155 B. Sarma, 1981: 'Asamiyd Bhasd Sdhityalai Missionbry Sekalar Abadaru', P-8
"They started schools, systematised language, brought printing and publishing to India and encouraged the proliferation of books, journals, newspapers and other media of communication". 156

These activities fostered liberal ideas and diffused general information leading to the loosening of the stranglehold of hyde-bound tradition. It undoubtedly prepared the groundwork for the resurgence called Assameses Renaissance. A large part of the credit for this beginning goes to the journal “Armodai” published by the American Baptists from Sibsagar in 1846. About Armodai A. J. Moffat Mills has this to say - "A monthly paper called Armoday or Dawn of Light began its career of usefulness in 1846 and for many years was the only paper published in the province. It was carefully edited, profusely illustrated, treating in all subjects, both secular and religious, in a manner calculated to instruct and interest the people." 157

More than the religious and moral instructions the secular information it diffused concerning topics ranging from science and technology to politics and happenings around the world broadened the mental horizon of its reader and made them to look beyond the small confines of their immediate neighbourhood. This new consciousness was later to herald national reawakening in Assam.

Renaissance in Assam

The operative factors that led to the Assamese renaissance in the latter half of the 19th century were more or less similar in nature to that of the rest of India. The problems faced by Assam resemble to a large measure with that of Orissa. There is of course one significant difference. Orissa was dismembered and scattered over various provinces. Oriyas had to agitate long and hard for the unification of Oriya speaking tracts. As a result Orissa became a separate province only in 1936. Assam was for a long period of six hundred years remained an inviolable political unit under Ahom rule. Yet the danger to its sovereign existence was no less serious than that of Orissa. Orissa (the coastal districts) and Assam were clubbed with the Bengal Presidency.

156 "British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance" vide Gauri Viswanathan op. Cit., P-15
157 Report on the province of Assam, Calcutta, Para XV
The concomitant hardships attending an administration from far off Calcutta and the systematic onslaught on the Assamese language as a result of ignorance of people in power and self-interest of a few prove seminal to the rise of Assamese nationalism. There is a socio-political factor as well. There Assamese aristocracy was securely straddled into comfortable lifestyle before the advent at the British. The fall of Ahom monarchy heralded the fall of old aristocracy. They too voiced their resentment against the alien rulers. Manirām Dewān represented this section. The linguistic and cultural aspects of nationalism found its voice in the dominating personality of ĀnandaRam Dhekiyāl Phukan.158

The introduction of monetised capitalist system of economy with an administrative set up already familiar in Bengal put the Assamese aristocracy in great disadvantage.

Besides, the usurpation of positions and power mostly by Bengalis and people from outside Assam, which traditionally were enjoyed by the Assam aristocracy, was strongly resented by the latter. Manirām’s representation in the form of a memorandum to A. J. Mollat Mills159 highlights the same resentment. As a representative of the aristocracy he was responding to the deprivations of his class “It is with little reservation one must concede that,” comments Nagen Saikia, “that Manirām was a nationalist who stood for the liberation of the country and walked to the gallows for the fulfillment of his mission.”160 The Contribution of Manirām Dewān to the nationalist cause in Assam, inspite of the said limitation, is immense. His courage and conviction were of salutary nature and proved inspirational to others.

The Indian sub-continent of the 19th century saw a renewed vigour in exploring the cultural identities of different provinces through the cultivation of the vernacular. The political configuration of the time, besides other factors, led to clash of sub-nationalisms in various provinces. The case of Assam is a pointer in this

158 Maleswar Neog(ed) : 'Lekshminath Bezbaroa the Sahityarathi of Assam', the article “The Road to Laxminath Bezbaroa” by Bhuban Barua, P-27
159 Mill’s Report, Appendix K. B. PP-LXII-LXIV
160 Bhuban Barua, op. Cit., P. 27
regard. It will be clear to any casual listener the affinity between Bengali and Assamese. The reason is their common origin. In spite of this affinity the Maingaloid impact on Assamese gave it a distinct character\(^ {161}\). When Bengal was hoisted upon the Assamese people, it created a strong resentment in the minds of the Assamese people. A considerable amount of the creative endeavour of the Assamese writers, particularly after the restoration of the Assamese language in 1873, was devoted to exposing the distinctness of Assam's culture and way of life. Besides, stressing the distinct character of the Assamese language by exploring its inherent possibilities, was a historical imperative. All these things helped the language to stand on its own. A large part of the credit for this must go the Ānandārām Dhekiyāḷ Phukan, the morning star of Assamese renaissance. His "Few Remarks on the Assamese Language" makes a strong case for the inviolable identity of Assamese language and it forced its way in to Mills' Report by its intellectual brilliance and force of argument.

It sounds ironic that Orissa and Assam, instead of fighting Western impact, had to direct their energies against Bengali domination. It is more so since Assamese and Orissan Renaissances were inspired largely by Bengal and its writers were rolemodels for the two eastern neighbours. One of the reasons behind this antipathy towards Bengal is "the ferment created in the Assamese society by the West was not very strong; in Assam the process of urbanisation did not gather the momentum which was noticeable in Bengal, and many of the problems of assimilation of the West remained mostly on the periphery to the Assamese"\(^ {162}\). What was true of Assam was equally applicable to Orissa. By the time the Assamese intelligentsia came to its own, Bengali intelligentsia had already fought against it and decided which course a nascent people should choose. For the Assamese new elite it must have been a lesson on what to imbibe and what not to. So instead of turning into imitative voice of the colonial masters they devoted themselves to the cause of discovering and strengthening their unique identity. The conviction that 'a nation which speaks a foreign language seems to have surrendered its unique understanding of the world to

\(^{161}\) Ibid.

the attitudes of its cultural conquerors, \(164\) be it English or Bengali, impelled the champions of Assamese language to work for its rehabilitation. In Ānandarām it manifested as early as 1855, before the first eruption of nationalistic cause in the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. He could also relate the fact that the antiquity of a language is concomitant to the existence of written literature in that language. He took to task the people who were blissfully ignorant about the literary heritage of Assam.\(164\) Besides he was also credited with writing on the hill tribes of Assam in the *Orumodu* under the initial A. The pioneering work done by the missionaries on the language front was vigorously carried forward and widened by the nationalistic genius of Ānandarām.

In spite of Ānandarām’s pioneering zeal the woes of Assamese language did not find immediate alleviation. Even after the final restoration of the Assamese in 1873 Bengali language remained in Assam. It gave scope for Assamese writers, to touch upon the language issue in their own ways. The rehabilitation of Assamese threw up many related responsibilities like writing of text books. The protagonists of Bengali held forth the absence of textbooks in Assam and Orissa as a prime motive for introduction of Bengali in these two provinces. The other motive force, which remain subterranean for obvious reasons, was the expansion of the printing press (see ch. VI) Assorted endeavours like compilation of dictionaries, preparation of grammars, publication of journals, magazines and books on various subjects followed. These activities helped explore the latent possibilities of the language creatively. The Assamese intelligentsia took up the challenge in right earnest and transformed the disadvantages into triumphant identity marks.

Ānandarām was really a renaissance figure in the mould of Rāmmohan of Bengal and rightly he is called the Rāmmohan Ray of Assam whose early death at the age of 30 left Assam guessing the manifold contributions he would have still made. In the field of text-book writing too he was the pioneer. His *Asamiyā Larār Mitra* (The Assamese Boys Friend) was the only text book in Assamese that was there when the language was reinstated. Though he could not see his school texts being in use in his life time, i.e. before 1859 his illustrious predecessor Gunābhirām Baruā edited

\(^{164}\) K. R. Minuguc. 1967: *Rāmmohan*, P-120

\(^{164}\) N. Saikia. op. Cit., P-196
Anandaram's texts to make it suitable for schools in 1884. When the government announced cash incentives for writing school texts,\(^{165}\) In 1873 there were almost fifty-eight competitors who submitted their writings for consideration.\(^{108}\) The large number of entries in the textbook writing competition is indicative of the fact that almost all the sufficiently educated persons took it to be a cause and challenge by itself. Whatever the role of cash incentives behind this, one can hardly miss the level of dedication and hard work. Important luminaries like Hemachandra Barua, Padmanath Gosain, Kamalakanta Bhattacharya and many others were seriously involved in the effort of producing timely textbooks. Textbooks writing was highly lucrative at that time but more than this the task of shaping a new generation of Assamese had drawn the best minds of the time to this task. It was not only a useful but an honourable task during this time.\(^{166}\) Besides introducing various subject hitherto unknown to the students like humanities, social science, scientific subjects, these texts took care to inculcate in the young Assamese mind the values of patriotism and humanism. While humanism was a universal phenomenon patriotism included the typical Assamese identity, its past glory and greatness, its language, literature and way of life. In fact morals and traditional values were given more importance than aesthetic and literary merit.\(^{167}\) Of course it was too early to expect of them to think in terms of an independent India or voice sentiments against the colonial masters.\(^{168}\) The new concepts and ideas embodied in these texts must have awakened the young Assamese students to the new light. Besides they must also have played a catalytic role in giving shape to the Assamese language.

\(^{165}\) Dimbeswar Neog : 1962 : 'New light on History of Assamese Literature', PP. 354-355 Here Dimbeswar Neog gives an information regarding preparation of textbooks in Assamese as below --

The Lt. Governor would suggest for consideration of the commissioner of Assam, that he would offer a reward of Rs. 500 for the best and Rs. 100 for the second best set of Assamese primers, to consist not more than three and not less than two books of twenty duodecimo pages each, the copy right of and property in the prize books to belong to govt.

\(^{166}\) Satyendranath Sarma, op. cit. P-272

\(^{167}\) Here S. N. Sarma gives an interesting information about Hemachandra Barua who was said to have earned Rs. 1100/- from the government for writing school texts and his translation work from English to Assamese.

\(^{168}\) Nagen Saikia, op. cit. P-210

\(^{169}\) Nanda Talukdar(ed) : 1977 : 'Anandaram Dihchid Plukhara Runa Naaradhi', PP. 128-139
While the missionaries were busy giving shape to the Assamese language and lexicography Jaduram Dekā Baruā came out with an Assamese Bengali dictionary following the footsteps of Rabinson, Rev. Brown and Rev. Bronson. His endeavour, therefore, can be counted among the missionary works of the time. Hemachandra Baruā broke new grounds while writing on Assamese grammar. Instead of stressing the structural basis of English grammar which his predecessors did, he made Sanskrit grammar the basis of his work with due stress on the unique characteristic of the Assamese language. His Asamiyd Vyakanuj came out in 1859. Later an enlarged and revised edition appeared coinciding almost with the reinstatement Assamese language in 1873. It established the base on which the superstructure of Assamese language stands today. In the field of lexicography too he left an indelible mark in the form of 'Hem-Koy'. It was the second dictionary written in Assamese containing almost eight thousand more words than Bronson’s.\(^{170}\) This monument of a supreme salutary nature understandably draws comparison with that of Johnson’s Dictionary in English literature.

Assam was fortunate to have distinguished personalities like Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Hema Chandra and Gunabhiram to mould and shape Assamese nationalism at a time when Orissa was still awaiting such men of comparable merit with the exception of Gaurisankar Ray. Their many splendoured genius was aided by the spread of education and the ascendency of journals in Assam. The first journal in Assamese Orunodai (1846) was undoubtedly a momentous one. In Orissa and Bengal too journals bearing the same name came up. ‘Arunodai’, a fortnightly under the editorship of Lal Behari Dey, famous as the novelist of Bengal Peasam Life, came out from Serampore Mission Press in 1856. The Orissa counterpart ‘Arunodaya’ was edited by Rev. Lacy from Cuttack Mission Press in 1861. Therefore, so far as nomenclature go, the Assamese journal is the first of its kind. It diffused a wide range of information which was devoured rapaciously by the educated Assamese for the seminal contribution it has made, one age in the history of Assamese literature has been named after it. It is named the Arunoday Jug. This paper was instrumental in inspiring Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Nidhi Levi Farwell, Hemachandra Baruā, Satyendranath Sarma, op. Cit., P-304.\(^{170}\)
Gunābhirām Baruā and other writers to serve the cause of Assamese literature. 

"In the variety of its content and in the usefulness of its instruction Orumodai maintained a uniformly high standard throughout its period of publication". It brought about a catholicity of taste by covering a wide array of subject matter unheard of before. Besides the religious content.

This paper notices important local and foreign events, as well as inventions, discoveries, and facts of history, geography, chemistry, science etc. The special object of missionaries being to promote the extension of education among the people.

What the periodical Digdāryānum (1818) did to Bengali journalism Orumodai did to Assam. Some Bengali journals found enthusiastic subscribers in Assam before Orumodai. A host of journals and newspapers followed Orumodai at various points of time with varied degrees of success. They played a major role in mobilizing the Assamese towards a new dawn. Even a Sutra institution like Āuniāti brought out a journal named Āsām Vilāsini in 1871. As repository of the age-old value system of the Assamese society this paper understandably geared up to diffuse those values. (Inspite of its religious bias it played a meaningful role in breaking new grounds in the field of literature. Bholanāth Dās published his Nīhā Haran Kāvyā, the first instance of blank verse in Assamese literature in its pages. Meghnād Vadh Kāvyā of Ramākant Choudhury too appeared in Āsām Vilāsini. Yet this paper did not appeal to the Western-educated Assamese elite. Dharmparakāś Yantra of Āuniāti brought out two more papers i.e. Āsām Dūṇik and Assam Turā, after the demise of Āsām Vilāsini. But these papers could not be sustained for more than one year. Two other papers - Āsām Mihir from Guwahatī and Goālparā Hitasādhini from Goālparā too survived only about a year each. The Assamese intelligenstia at Calcutta brought out a journal Āsām Darpan from Calcutta. Under the stewardship of Hemchandra Baruā an Anglo-Assamese journal Assam News saw the day in 1882. In this way there was

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171 Satyendra Nath Sarania, op. Cit., P-288
172 Tilottama Misra, op. Cit., P-70
174 B. G. Vol. I, p.39
175 Bezbarua admits to have assiduously followed the prose style of the Assam News.
a spurt in journalistic activities in the last three decades of the 19th century. There were as many as fourteen papers which made their appearance in between the publication of Oninadoi in 1846 and the disappearance of Asam Tara in 1888 out of these the contribution of Asam Bandhu far outweighs the other paper lived only about two years (1885-86). Yet its pages bore the signature of almost all the important literatures of the period. It the signature of almost all the important literatures of the period. If Asam Vilasini broke new grounds in poetry, in a limited way Asam Bandhu radically altered literary taste by encouraging new genres. In it Assamese poetry saw "its departure from the old Vaishnavite tradition"176 Asam Bandhu, true to its name, was no mere journalistic endeavour. With Gunabhiram it was a passion and a conviction, the spread of which created an intellectual climate shorn of its earlier tentativeness. Gunabhiram who "fostered literary culture among his friends by encouraging them to write, and was thus the central figure of much fruitful literary work,"177 reminds one of Phakirmohan's exhortation to his countrymen to work for the development of the Oriya language and literature.

So far as the literary resurgence of the 19th century goes the Jonaki (1886) occupies a place of preeminence. The committed band of Assamese students in Calcutta made this paper a potent mouth piece for typical Assamese identity. It was at the vanguard of "a conscious programme for the understanding and preservation of the basic Assamese cultural tradition"178 necessitated by the unholy onslaught on the Assamese language even after it was officially reinstated. The clear-headed pragmatism of this group becomes apparent in their effort to assimilate the positive aspects of Western knowledge with the indigenous folk and religious culture.179 This paper marks the beginning of what is known today as the Romanik period of Assamese literature. In the true sense it heralded the birth of modern Assamese literature. Before Jonaki a paper named Man made its short appearance. Published from Calcutta with Harinarayana Bara's signature as editor, the moving spirit behind the paper was actually Balinarayana Borai. Boinarayan did his engineering from

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178 Bhaban Barua, op. Cit., P-22
179 Ibid.
England and his paper, in spite of its daring criticism of the English masters, distinguished itself by its Anglophilism. That was enough to mire the paper in much controversy. It could not have been otherwise since its birth and short life span (Dec 1886 - Mar 1887) coincided with the rise of Assamese nationalism.

The journalistic activities were a sign of the new-found confidence with their ability to reach out to a wide readership. Their role was germinal to the birth of Assamese Renaissance. In fact they were part of the renaissance proper, if awareness about oneself is any indication of reawakening.

News papers and journals are an indirect way of reaching out to the people. The various forums, debating clubs, associations of various hues were better mediums for direct exchange of views. There can be little doubt about their efficacy in moulding and modifying views of people through these associations. The strength of organising like-minded people into cohesive groups and either to voice their grievances or to demand what was their due was felt strongly by the Assamese intelligentsia like their counterparts elsewhere in India. The formation of Indian National Congress in 1885 stimulated people throughout India to form such organizations. Many such organizations sprang up in various Indian provinces. Of course these were not as strong as the Congress. But even before these associations sprang up Assam was fortunate to have seen two outstanding personalities, Ānandrām Dhekiyāl Phukan and Gunābhīrām Baruā. The former in particular was associated with the formation of the Bethune Society of Calcutta in 1852. Ānandrām, who rightly drew comparisons with Rāmmohan Roy, rubbed shoulders with the leading lights of 19th century Bengal like Devendranāth Tāgore, Peārichānd Mitra, K. M. Bānnerjee and European intellectuals like T. J. Mouat, Rev. Long etc. By sheer dint of his genius Ānandrām made his presence felt in the Bethune Society meetings.\(^1\)

Back in Assam Ānandrām formed a discussion group known as the 'Jhum Pradāyinī Sabhā' alongside with Gunābhīrām. Various organisations with their own agendas sprang up all over Assam in the last decade of the 19th century. The 'Tezpur

\(^1\) H. K. Barpujari, Assam in the Days of the Company, P-175
Ryot Sabha, Nowgoan Ryot Association, Shillong Association, Upper Assam Association and Jorhat Sarbojanik Sabha were formed with a view to placing before the government the united voice of the people. It must be noted that these associations followed a plan of action akin to the one held by the I N C, i.e., to oppose all constitutional methods, all official acts or measures opposed to those principles which were laid down by the British Parliament.

In other words, what they fought was not British rule but any injustice perpetrated in the name of that rule. As late as 1902, Surendranath Banerjee spelt out the mission of the Congress in obvious pro-British terms. Presiding over the Congress session that year he declared, “we have no higher aspiration than that we should admit in to the great confederacy of self-governing states of which England is the august mother.”

The intellectuals of 19th century Assam could not be expected to act differently from what the situation of the time permitted. In spite of their pro-British stance in so far as foreign rule was concerned their devotion and love for the cause of their respective peoples and regions is beyond doubt. In the place of political independence what they strove for was independent identity which laid the framework for demanding self-determination at a later stage.

But as far as associations go the momentousness of Asamiya Bhaça Ummati Sadhini Sabha (A. Bhā. U. Sā. Sahbhā for short) is hardly matched by any other formation. Formed in 1888 in Calcutta by a dedicated band of Young Assamese intellectuals, it shaped not only Assamese language and literature but the very destiny of the Assamese people. “It may be noted in this context that in the annual session of the society held in 1891, over which Guynābhirām Baruā Presided, L. N. Bezbarā, in his annual secretarial report, declared that it was one of the aims of the society to discover the lines along which the Assamese mind (asamiya manihar mansikta) had

* See, chapter vi.
evolved since the ancient times. The agenda clearly was self-discovery and from this to self-recovery and self-establishment. It the pages of Jonāki, the mouthpiece of the Saḥhā, this was realised in ample measure. The exuberance of spirit that was characteristic of this golden age of Assamese literature. Nowhere the upsurge was more vigorous than in literature. It was like a nation, long suppressed, finding utterance for self-representation and self-respect.

Bengal was a sort at adversary so far as it tried to dominate Assam and Orissa culturally and politically. And quite understandably it was resisted by its neighbours passionately. But there is no denying its seminal influence in the sphere of literary development in Assam and Orissa. It assumed the form of absorption and adaptation which is also a kind of original creation since these were done in a different medium and different context. Besides it opened up possibilities for the growth of new genius and novel techniques. All these things helped the language and literature based nationalism to be saddled securely. Writers of this time like Hemchandra Goswamy, Lakshminath Bezbaroa, Chandrakumār Agarawāla and a host of others pulled their efforts together “to preserve the originality and typicality of Assamese tradition and culture.” Bezbaroa in particular devoted a considerable part of his intellectual life to the exposition of the unique religious tradition of Assam as manifested in its Vaishnavite saints like Śankardeva, Mādhavdeva and others. Efforts in this regard of course had been initiated by Haribilāś Agarwāla and Kālirām Baruā, who, with a view to popularising old Assamese religious literature printed and published books like Kirti, Nāmghāṣa Dasam (some skandas), Gunamālā, Bhanī, Borgī, Bhaktiratnāvali, Girucharit etc. Their efforts later helped the ABUSS group to bring out a list of old Assamese texts consisting about six hundred titles. For a people seeking their cultural roots this must have given enough reasons to pride in

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185 P. N. Bishi : 1948 : 'Chitra-Charitra', Preface P-3
   Bishi candidly asserts that Bengal, in the last decades of the 19th century, was more concerned about itself than about India. The advantage it gained through its early contact with the West manifested in the tendency to expand Bengali language and literature over her neighbouring provinces.
188 S. N. Goswami, op. Cit., P-53
their cultural heritage. Bezbaroa’s emphasis on Assam’s religious tradition may have been impelled by the canard spread by some that Assamese Vaishnavism was only a variant of Bengali Vaishnavism and Śankaradeva a disciple of Chaitanyadeva. Of course the predominant note of the ABUSS group and the many journal and magazines was a secular one. Even while emphasising the typically Assamese elements Bezbaroa and his associates did not hesitate to borrow and adapt from Bengali and English sources. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee highlights this aspect by using two Sanskrit words Yoga and Kshema. “(H)ere we have both Yoga or the addition of good things from the outside which we require, and kshema or conservation of all great and good things in our own culture.”

Understandably exclusivity of a parochial kind is conspicuous by its absence in the literary renaissance of the period. Across colonized societies self-reiteration and self-assertion incorporated foreign influences in a creative way.

In the social sphere the impact of Western thought current made the educated elite to look upon some of their social and religious practices with a critical eye. The ideas of rationalism as the basis of ethical thinking, the concept of natural rights connected with individualism all had their impact on the intellect of the 19th century. As elsewhere in India the social movements of 19th century Assam were the outcome of Western education and thought. Social evils like casteism, opium addiction, child marriage, problems of widowhood etc stirred the passions of the Assamese elite. Out of these casteism and opium addiction were more conspicuous than the rest. Social reform movement, it should be noted, did not assume the organised momentum that was so characteristic of Bengal and Maharasthra. Brahmoism found some enthusiastic followers in Assam but it never assumed the form of a movement. The Sankarite neo-Vaisnavism based on the monotheistic eka-deva eka-seva principle had a tremendous hold on the popular mind. It did not allow Brahmoism to strike roots in Assam. “The base founded by Brāhma Dharmā in Assam always remained a weak one because the monotheistic approach of Hinduism...”

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189 “The Nineteenth Century in India and Lakshminath Bezbaroa of Assam”, in Maheswar Neog ed. ‘Saithvarathi of Assam’. P-10
190 Ellecke Boehmer, op. cit. P-45
preached by Brāhma Dharma was already familiar to the Assamese people through the preaching of Śankaradeva and Mādhavadeva. Beside this the spread of Brahmoism coincided with the rise of Assamese nationalism. Naturally people were more interested in their own religious tradition then in the imported one. Gunābhīrām Baruā was a staunch follower of the Brahmo faith. His actions often matched his convictions. He married a widow after the death of his first wife. He sent his daughter to Calcutta for higher education, the first such instance in Assam. He was also an eyewitness to the first widow marriage in Calcutta in 1856. The satirical strain in the writing of Bezbaroā and Hemchandra carried forward the reformistic zeal of Gunābhīrām.

Assam did gain in terms of improved communication in the form of new roads, railway line and steamship, spread of education, the coming of tea-industry and so on. The benefits of this accrued largely to the educated few. It did not materially ameliorate the living condition of the teeming millions. Thus what is popularly referred to as the Assamese Renaissance is an intellectual phenomena which gave content and shape to the self-reiteration, the very mark of a reascent nation. All these things put Assam on the track to stand among the comity of developed societies as envisaged by Ānandarām Dhekiyāl Phukan.