Chapter V

Miscellaneous Activities of the American Baptist Missionaries

Reflecting New Academic Approaches:

Assamese Journalism, Collection and Publication of Old Manuscripts, Textual Criticism, Numismatics, Ethnography, Folklore and Material Culture

As with culture in general, Assamese culture is a composite representation of various traditional beliefs and habits and a reflection of ways of life of the Assamese society. The American Baptist Missionaries, particularly Dr. Nathan Brown and Dr. Miles Bronson, studied the deep rooted Hindu religion and Assamese literature. To convince people about the Christian Gospel, the Missionaries often cited examples from the old Assamese religious sastras. While trying to understand Assamese society as a whole, the Missionaries observed many valuable elements such as socio-cultural, historical, anthropological including language and literature. Dr. Brown valued the old Assamese sastras, both secular and religious, and collected the sastras as far as possible from every corners of Assam. Secular literature such as Buranjis, were published in the Orunodoi, the literary organ of the Baptist Missionaries. Other important subjects which the Missionaries valued include Numismatics, Ethnography, Folklore and Material Culture. They valued these matters as subjects of academic importance. From time to time the Missionaries published articles that introduced a concept of academic approach on these matters in the Orunodoi. The Missionaries tried to introduce the modern way not only in the choice of subjects, but also in the writing style. The Missionaries began to value the importance of Textual Criticism. Introduction of journalism was a milestone in the history of Assamese journalism. The American Baptist Missionaries were the pioneers in the field of Assamese journalism.
In fact the beginning of the Orunodoi is recognized as the starting of Assamese journalism.

It is true that the role of the American Baptist Missionaries in some of the major components of Assamese culture, particularly language and literature have received detailed and in-depth treatment at the hands of scholars and been recognised by all sections of the Assamese. But there are other areas which have not been adequately focused. I have tried to highlight these ‘darker’ areas.

Assamese Journalism:

The birth of Assamese journalism is associated with the American Baptist Missionaries. The Missionaries published the magazine the Orunodoi for the first time from the Sibsagor Mission Press in January, 1846. In the first issue of the Orunodoi, the objective of the magazine was stated as ‘The Orunodoi, a monthly paper, devoted to Religion, Science, and General Intelligence, is printed and published at the Sibsagor Mission Press, by O. T. Cutter, for the American Baptist Mission in Assam’. Although religion was one of the objectives, the Missionaries failed to maintain a religious neutrality. The Orunodoi was used as a platform for propagation of Christianity and derogatory remarks were explicitly made against the Hindu religion.

The Orunodoi was successful in creating a consciousness among the Assamese people, and it served as a literary platform for the public opinion. It was a vehicle by which all kinds of news reached the common people of Assam, and extended their mental horizon. The foreign news from the different parts of world, the news of scientific inventions and progress, the astronomical descriptions of stars and planets, and world geography were focused in the articles of the Orunodoi. The Missionaries also inaugurated the past heritage of Assamese in the pages of the Orunodoi. The Missionaries pulled various kind of past socio-cultural materials of Assam and published in the Orunodoi.
The journalism that the Baptist Missionaries introduced in 1846 in Assam is not only history, but is a living present. At the present time, Assamese society is celebrating the occasion of one hundred and fifty years of journalism. The beginning is considered to be the publishing of the first *Orunodoi* in January, 1846. Books on Assamese journalism are published to commemorate the occasion. The effect on socio-cultural transformation on Assamese society is still continuing. On the whole, it is an abiding influence of the American Baptist Missionaries on the Assamese society.

**Collection and Publication of Old Manuscripts**

The American Baptist Missionaries paid a lot of attention to the traditional Assamese written literature. They also valued old Assamese literature and tried to use the old literature wherever they felt it was appropriate. For example, Mrs. E. W. and Rev. N. Brown started a book on arithmetic with a Sanskrit *sloka*. Nidhi Levi Farewell, who followed the syntax of Rev. N. Brown, also wrote poems based on the style of old Assamese literature in the *Orunodoi*.

Dr. Nathan Brown, the early missionary scholar, was the pioneer in collecting the old Assamese *Buranjis* (chronicles) which were mainly Assamese and Sanskrit *pathis*. They placed emphasis on the old traditional Assamese literature, and published a few secular *Buranjis* in the *Orunodoi*. Because of their religious motive, the American Baptist Missionaries did not publish the Hindu sastras in the *Orunodoi*, but they took the initiative to collect the manuscripts and took all possible care to preserve the valuable sastras. The Baptist Missionaries published the *Puroni Asom Buranji* in the August, 1850 to August, 1852 issues of the *Orunodoi* in 22 parts. Eight chapters of *Kamrupar Buranji* were also published in the *Orunodoi* in the January to October, 1853 issues. Another small *Buranji* of *Chutia Rajar Banshawali* was published in the December, 1850 issue of the *Orunodoi*. A brief account of collections of old *Buranjis*
by the American Baptist Missionaries are added below:

The total number of manuscripts collected by the American Baptist Missionaries is not accurately documented, but there is a record of some manuscripts which were with the American Baptist Missionaries at Guwahati centre. On his way to Sadiya, Rev. Brown received a copy of a Shan manuscript as early as 1835 from an English officer Captain R. Boileau Pemberton at Calcutta.

The other American Baptist Missionaries also collected the old manuscripts. A number of old puthis passed from Rev. A. K. Gurney of Sibsagar to Rev. P. H. Moore of Nagaon and finally all the manuscripts were transferred to the Guwahati centre of the American Baptist Missionary. Dr. Nathan Brown left India finally in 1855. So we can ascertain that the old manuscripts were collected in Assam from 1835 to 1855.

A number of old manuscripts, mainly the Buranjis (historical chronicles) of kings families were published in the Orunodoi. Tamuli Phukan’s Asom Buranji was published separately by the Baptist Mission Press, Sibsagar.

The old manuscripts collected by the American Baptist Missionaries were lying in a box in the school house store room of Guwahati centre. In May 1925 Dr. S. K. Bhuyan traced these valuable old manuscripts¹ and received permission to catalogue them and transcribe some for publication. Dr. Bhuyan was helped in this work by Jaygyeswar Sarma, Madhab Chandra Barua and Himoklal Barua.

According to Rev. George Gillespie ¹ Of the fourteen puthis found then, five (Nos. 2, 6, 8 and 10 of this present survey; 10 being then considered as two manuscripts) were turned over to the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies of the Government of Assam by 1931, and the other nine (Nos. 3, 4, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 23 of this survey) along with one more not mentioned in 1925 (No. 12) were turned over to the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in June, 1955 by Miss Burnham¹² (Gillespie 1979:158).
The following is a list of manuscripts with brief descriptions prepared by Rev. George Gillespie. The manuscripts are listed by their languages: Assamese and other than Assamese.

A. Assamese:

1. Rajar Maidam Khana

An article about the digging up of the tombs of Ahom Kings appeared in the first issue of the Orunodoi (January, 1846, Vol. I, No. 1). Its title was Rajar Maidam Khana. However, this was not a reproduction of the manuscript but a contemporary report.

2. Asom Buranji

This Asom Buranji is a history of Assam from the rule of Svargadeo Jayadhvaja Singha to the Kachari wars under Rudra Singha, and therefore covers the period 1648-1707 A.D. The manuscript consists of 54 folios and is incomplete. It was one of the manuscripts found in 1925 at the Baptist Mission in Guwahati. It was turned over to the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in 1931.

3. Bhagavata, Eleventh Skandha

Popularly known as Ekadasa, this section of the Bhagavata Purana was translated by Sankaradeva by order of King Naranarayana of Koch Behar. It is in Assamese verse. This manuscript was with the collection found in 1925 on the Mission compound in Guwahati. It has 62 folios and is incomplete. On its cover is the simple Assamese verse written by Sankaradeva as a child, that begins, "karatala kamala ----"
The manuscript was donated to the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in 1955.
4. Chanakya’s Aphorisms

Among the Guwahati Mission manuscripts found in 1925, and was one of only two folios. This is a very incomplete Assamese version of what is probably Chanakya’s aphorisms. The two folios are numbered 14 and 17. The manuscript was given to Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in 1955.

5. Chutia Rajar Bangshawali

An article appeared in the December, 1850 issue (Vol. V, No. 12) of the Orunodoi called in English, Ancient Chronicle of the Chutias. There it is explained that the Chutias also have described their royal family history (Bangshawali). The editors had obtained one of their old family histories for publishing. The name of William Robinson, Inspector of the Government Schools in Assam (and ex-British Baptist Missionary, cooperating with the American Baptist Mission in Guwahati), is associated with the original discovery and publishing of this manuscript. This chronicle was later published as part of the Deodhai Asom Buranji (edited by S. K. Bhuyan, D.H.A.S. 1932).

6. Deodhai Asam Buranji

This is a complete Assamese manuscript of thirty folios which tells the history of the Ahom kings, beginning with the ancestors of Sukapha (the first Ahom king of Assam, who ruled 1228-1268 A.D.) up to the reign of the Naria Raja (1648). It is a translation, from a chronicle written in Ahom language. There is an appendix showing Hindu Saka equivalents of Ahom lakis (years of the Ahom calendar), and a list of Ahom kings from the time of Khunlunng and Khunlai (the ancestors of Sukapha) to the time of the kingdom’s annexation by the East India company.

The Mission published this Buranji in the Orundoi in 21 installments, without the appendix, under the name Purani Asom Buranji. It appeared in the following issues: August through November, 1850 (Vol. V); January through August, October
and November, 1851 (Vol. VI); and January through June, and August, 1852 (Vol. VII). The serial numbering is odd in the magazine, so that the first and second instalments are called 'No.1' and 'No.2', but the third instalment is called 'No.4'. An impression is therefore given of total of 22 instalments. This manuscript still shows directions in English on it for press preparation. This manuscript was discovered among the Guwahati Mission pithis in 1925, and turned over to the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in 1931.


Jaduram Deka Baruah prepared a Bengali-Assamese dictionary which he gave to Col. Jenkins, Commissioner of Assam, in 1839. It gave Bengali words, with Assamese definitions. Col. Jenkins gave this manuscript to the Mission. Nathan Brown considered its orthography to best correspond with Assamese pronunciation. Its' spelling influenced the Orunodoi and Miles Bronson’s A dictionary in Assamese and English. Unfortunately it was never published and its whereabouts are not known.

8. Kamrupar Buranji

The Kamrupar Buranji, with 78 sanchi bark folios, complete and well-preserved, is in three parts. Folios 1-56 is a history of Assam (mostly western Assam) from the time of King Biswa Singha of Koch Behar (1603) to the battle of Itakhuli in 1682, with particular attention to the Mogul-Koch Behar wars and the Mogul-Assam wars. Folios 57-68 contain copies of 18 letters between Ahom kings and Mogul representatives. Folios 69-78 are four chapters about Jehangir, Shah Jahan and others, along with observations of the Mogul court, written by an Assamese living among the Moguls. The Missionaries published part (folios 1-56) in the Orunodoi in eight issues, January through July, and October, 1853 (Vol. VIII), calling it Kamrupar Buranji.
9. *Kitabata Manjari*

The *Kitabata Manjari* is a work on arithmetic, land-surveying and book-keeping in Assamese poetry, translated by Bakula Kayastha in 1434 or 1508 A.D., from the Sanskrit original of Lilavati. Dimbeswar Neog, Birinchi Kumar Barua and others claim that Nathan Brown published the *Kitabata Manjari* in two parts in 1845.

10. *Lakshmi Singhar Buranji*

The *Lakshmi Singhar Buranji* is an incomplete manuscript of 140 folios, giving a daily record of events during the last part of the reign of Svargadeo Rajeswar Singha and the first of the reign of Svargadeo Lakshmi Singha (covering 1769-1775 A.D.). The author is not known. When these folios were found by Bhuyan in 1925, they were for some time considered to be two separate manuscripts of 117 and 23 folios each, but are generally accepted as one now. It is reported to have been published in the *Orunudoi*, probably in 1860. This manuscript (then considered as two manuscripts) was given to D.H.A.S. in 1931.

11. *Mani Chandra Ghosh*

*Mani Chandra Ghosh* is a popular Assamese verse translation of part of the *Vanaparva* of the *Mahabharata*. It was written by the Assamese poet Rama Sarasvati at the command of the King Naranarayana of Koch Behar in the sixteenth century. This manuscript is 57 folios of loose paper, written only on one side and is incomplete. This copy was written no earlier than 1825. It was found with the Mission manuscripts in 1925, and turned over to the D.H.A.S. in 1955.

12. *Sisupal Badh*

*Sisupal Badh* is an Assamese poem about the killing of Sisupal, the king of the Chedis, by Sri Krishna. This *tulapat* (paper made of cotton) manuscript is incomplete,
containing only folios no. 77-101. Dr. Bhuyan does not mention having found this with the Mission manuscripts in 1925. However, it was turned over to the D.H.A.S. by the Mission in 1955.

13. **Syamantaka-harana**

In 1975, 15 folios of an Assamese *puthi* of bark were sent to the Baptist Historical Library, Rochester, New York State, by someone in U.S.A. Fourteen of the folios (numbered 1-3, 5, 7-16) belong together and the other folio is written on only one side, with a different hand. Of the 14, one had written on the back, “Hindu Shaster, 1878, Stoddard, Assam.” Rev. I. J. Stoddard was living in Nagaon, from 1848 to 1855 and in Goalpara 1867 to 1873.

14. **Tamuli Phukan Asom Buranji**

The Ahom king, Purandar Singh (reigned 1833-1838) ordered Kasinath Tamuli Phukan to compile an *Asom Buranji* in Assamese from old sources, particularly from old *Buranjis* written in the Ahom language. Radhanath Barbarua, who knew the Ahom language, probably collected and deciphered the Ahom texts, and thus also made an important contribution to the work. The resulting *Buranji* normally goes by Tamuli Phukan’s name, but a number of writers attribute to the *Buranji* a dual authorship. This manuscript was eventually prepared for publication by Rev, Nathan Brown and the first edition was published by the American Baptist Mission Press in Sibsagar in 1844, with the title, *Asom Buranji Puthi*, along with the words, *Indrabangsi Asom Maharaja Sakalar Bibaran*.

**B. Other than Assamese**

**Sanskrit**

15. **Bhagavata, Fifth and Sixth Skandhas**

The Sanskrit text of the *Bhagavata*, along with the commentary of Sridhara Svami, is commonly read aloud in the *sattras* (monasteries) of Assam, by a reader...
called the *bhagavati*, who follows the reading with an explanation in Assamese. On each folio of this well-preserved manuscript, the commentary accompanies the text. There are wooden covers, one having paintings. There are 55 folios of the Fifth *Skandha* and 35 of the Sixth. The manuscript was found with the others at the Baptist Mission in 1925, and was given to the D.H.A.S. in 1955.

16. *Jyotish-Samkshep*

*Jyotish-Samkshep* is a work on astrology by Harideva Sarma, mainly for the use of the Brahmins. This manuscript was written soon after 1825 and is complete, consisting of 33 folios. Found in 1925 by Bhuyan at the Baptist Mission, it was given to the D.H.A.S. in 1955.

17. *Jyotish-Tattva*

This astrological work is by Raghunanda, the founder of a school of rituals mainly practiced in Bengal. This manuscript of eleven folios is incomplete and was prepared soon after 1825. It was with the *puthis* found in 1825, and was turned over to the D.H.A.S. in 1955.

18. *Svarodaya*

This Sanskrit *puthi* is on astrology. There are 29 folios and the manuscript is incomplete. The author’s name is not given. However, Bhuyan says, “From the eulogy paid to Prince Sukladhvaja of Koch Behar, and the brief description of Kamarupa, Kamakhya, Kamapitha and Ratnapitha, we conjecture this book to be eminently an Assamese product.” It was found with the other *puthis* in 1925 and donated to the D.H.A.S. in 1955.

19. *Tulasi Duta Kavyam*

*Tulasi Duta Kavyam* was written in 1784 A.D. by the Assamese writer, Vaidyanath Dvija, of Kamakhya (Guwahati). This manuscript was copied in 1799 by Maniram. There are 13 folios and it is incomplete. The poem tells of the love
between Sri Krishna and the gopis. There is also an invocation to Kamakhya. This puthi was found in 1925 at the Mission and turned over to the D.H.A.S. in 1955.

Manipuri:

20. Manipuri Manuscripts

Not long before 1928, some of the American Baptist Missionaries in Manipur found several old Manipuri manuscripts dealing with Assam-Manipur relations in ancient times. Mr. J. C. Higgins, the British Political Agent in Manipur, recommended that the D.H.A.S. of Assam finance their compilation and publishing. Rev. William Pettigrew of Manipur was eventually entrusted with the responsibility, but the work was interrupted when Pettigrew left India permanently in 1933. Mr. Wahengbam Yumjoa Singh, a Meithei scholar, was helping prepare the manuscripts. He was still working on them in 1941. In 1950, Yumjoa wrote to the D.H.A.S. that he was completing his An Early History of Manipur, and asked the D.H.A.S. to publish it. Yumjoa died in 1953. This book was eventually published in Manipur but does not deal much with Assam-Manipur relations.

Shan

21. Shan-Chronicle

In 1835, Captain R. Boileau Pemberton, an English officer, found an ancient Shan chronicle, while living in Manipur. It belonged to an old Shan who did not want to part with it. Capt. Pemberton had it translated into Manipur, and from this translation got information which appears in his Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India. The chronicle tells the ancient and more recent history of the Shan kingdom centered at Mogaung in northern Burma.
Khamti

22. Khamti Sacred Book

Miles Bronson toured among the Singphos in March, 1838. He heard, while at Iagando village, that a priest lived in a nearby village nearby who could speak and write Burman, Khamti, Singpho, and Assamese. He visited the priest, and upon presenting him with a gift of paper, the priest gave him in return "one of their largest Khamti sacred books." This is reported in the March, 1839, Baptist Missioanry Magazine, p.53.

Blank

23. Blank and Unused Folios

Among the manuscripts uncovered in 1925 were 35 blank and unused sachipat folios in two sizes, the larger ones being reportedly very beautifully made. They were given to the D.H.A.S. in 1955 (Gillespie 1979: 158-169).

Textual Criticism:

'The technique of restoring texts as nearly as possible to their original form is called textual criticism. Texts in this connection are defined as writings other than formal documents, inscribed or printed on paper, parchment, papyrus or similar materials. Textual criticism, properly speaking, is an ancillary academic discipline designed to lay the foundations for the so-called higher criticism, which deals with questions of authenticity and attribution of interpretation and of literary and historical evaluation.' (The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 20, 15th Ed. 1990, pg. 614)

Before the invention of the printing press, most ancient writings were copied by hand. In most cases successive copies were each made by different people, and the original autograph was distorted to a greater or lesser extent.
Textual criticism is a highly complex process, whose aim is to ascertain the closest original text of a manuscript. The textual critic collects all available manuscript evidence, compares the various readings of a specific passage, explains how the variation of passage originated, and by a process of elimination, selects the readings that appears to be close to the original text. Sources that the textual critic use, include manuscripts of the original text in the original language (in part or whole as the case may be) early translations of the original book and its commentaries, and available copies of same manuscript copied by others. Some of the variations in the text copied are accidental and in some cases intentional. Example of accidental variations are dropping of a line in between, writing a single word as two words, creating two meaningless words and writing an illegible letter incorrectly which leads to a new word without having any meaning to the original writer. Some other examples are - confusion of similar kinds of letters, adding part of other texts wrongly, displacement of sentences or letters and making copies of notes written by some one, etc. (Neog 1988 : 55).

The Baptist Missionaries understood that the manuscripts they collected from different sources were not all originals. The original content of the texts might have been altered knowingly or accidentally by the copy makers. The Missionaries published the manuscripts in the Orunodoi, as they were, without making any change. This was an example of paying attention to textual criticism (Neog 1983 : 0.97).

The Missionaries adopted the concept of textual criticism and their’s was an early application of textual criticism to Assamese literature.

**Numismatics:**

Numismatics is the study or collecting of coins. The science of numismatics treats of coins and medals. It acquaints us with the metals used in their composition, their various inscriptions and devices, their mechanical execution and artistic merit. It
tells us of the different denominations of coins, their relation to one another, and the laws by which they were regulated.' (The Encyclopaedia Britannica, Ninth Edition, Vol. XVII, pg. 628) Numismatics to some extent illustrates geography and literature of a particular area.

Coins illustrate and confirm history but rarely give us any precise information which would fill in any important details in the meager sketch of contemporary history. Coin engraving is also an art.

Sources for determining the currency system in early Assam are scanty. Coined money was probably not used extensively during the rule of the ancient kings of Kamarupa (ancient Assam). Economic deals were probably transacted by both means of barter and coins. Paddy and cowries were also popular media of exchange.

The early copper plate grants of Kamarupa gives us some indication that various kings made gifts of jewels, gold, silver, elephants, horses and slaves to learned Brahmanas or other kings. Evidence confirms that the king of Kamarupa, Bhaskaravarman, gave gifts to the Chinese pilgrim Huien Tsang which included money and valuable articles. Some evidence points in the direction of the presence of metallic currency in the medieval Kamarupa (Sing 1989 : 16-18). The presence of gold coins in Ancient Assam may be due to the trade and commerce with the neighbouring states.

Copper coins were not common in ancient Assam. However, a few copper coins were discovered in the Dhulapadung Tea Estate, in Darrang district of Assam. These coins bear one letter legend on one side of the coin. The other side of the coin is plain. Dr. J. P. Singh states that the letters found on the known coins of Dhulapadung are Ha and Va. The letter Va found on majority of coins differ from coin to coin. ‘The palaeography of the letter relates them to 9th-12th century A. D. ---- At the present state of our knowledge these are the earliest coins of Assam’ (Singh 1989 : 30).
In later periods, the prevalence of coinage in Assam has been documented by numismatic studies. The Koch king, Nara Narayan, struck coins in his name. At the death of king Raghu Deb, his successor, king Parikshit, issued new coins in 1603 (Gait 1992 : 53 and 60).

The earliest Ahom coins were struck by Suklenmung in 1543, the fourth year of his reign. Later, the Ahom kings only issued coins in the year of their accession (Gait 1992 : 231). Evidence of minting coins are also established by Kachari and Jaintia kings.

Numismatics was considered an important subject in the nineteenth century. The Baptist missionaries enlightened the readers of the Orunodoi by publishing information on coins struck by different kings - Koch, Kachari, Jayantia and Ahoms. These coins had been found at an archeological dig at a site near the Ahom palace at Rangpur. During the dig, some coins made by Muhammadan kings were also found. The Missionaries printed the impression of the coins, giving descriptions of obverse and reverse in detail, along with historical information. These publications contributed to the knowledge of numismatics of the common people, and preserved numismatic lore for future studies.

Ethnography:

A comprehensive definition of anthropology is “the study of man and his works”. Herskovits explains anthropology as follows:

The science of anthropology is divided into two broad fields, physical and cultural anthropology. Physical anthropologists study such matters as the nature of racial differences; the inheritance of bodily traits; the growth, development, and decay of the human organism; the influences of the natural environment on man. Cultural anthropologists study the ways man has devised to cope with his natural setting and his social milieu; and how bodies of custom are learned, retained, and handed down.
from one generation to the next. The field of cultural anthropology is very broad. Cultural anthropology is customarily divided into ethnology and ethnography. Ethnology is a comparative study of culture and the investigation of the theoretical problems that arise out of the analysis of human custom, and ethnography is the description of individual cultures (Herskovits 1955 : 3, 8). Ethnography deals with social structure, culture and customs of a specific group of people of common origin.

Ethnographic study needs considerable time and dedicated effort. Since an ethnographer is a foreigner to the group of people, the entry of his or her into the group is most important. An ethnographer has to be able to analyze the traditions of the people, to understand the values of the people, their cultural behaviour and to be proficient in the language of the group studied. At the same time he or she has to live closely as a part of the community and must be able to evaluate and judge, but must be aware not to attempt to reshape the original culture of the group.

The American Baptist Missionaries focused on ethnography as a matter of study by printing articles and sketches of different groups of people of North-East India and from various parts of the world. This created much interest among the readers of the Orunodoi. The significant aspect of these publications are not on the accuracy of the missionary's studies but it was an introduction to the Assamese people to a new field of study which were unnoticed earlier as a subject of study.

Ethnographic materials published by the Missionaries in the Orunodoi, may be classified in two groups as local and foreign. Some of the published materials are listed below.

**Local ethnographic materials published in the Orunodoi:**

- *Bhotor Deshar Bivaran* (Neog 1983 : 53)
- *Sarak Pujar Bivaran* (Neog 1983 : 59)
- *Garor Deshar Bivaran* (Neog 1983 : 138)
Nagar Bivaran (Neog 1983: 242)
Khamtir Bivaran (Neog 1983: 250)
Mishimir Bivaran (Neog 1983: 251)
Singphor Bivaran (Neog 1983: 255)
Abor, Bar Abor, Miri Aru Daflar Bivaran (Neog 1983: 280)

Foreign ethnographic materials pulished in the Orunodoi:
Sketch of Chinese Man (Neog 1983: 10)
Celebration of Twelfth-Day by the Negroes of Havana (Neog 1983: 239)
Geography of Southern Africa (Neog 1983: 480)
Young Men and Women of Australia (Neog 1983: 503)
Sketches of Afridi People at Khaibar (Neog 1983: 548)
Sketches of Turkey and Arabi People (Neog 1983: 567)
A Georgian Gentleman and Lady (Neog 1983: 569)
Californian Indian (Neog 1983: 677)

Folklore:

"Folklore is the material that is handed on by tradition, either by word of mouth or by custom and practice" (Taylor in Dundes 1965: 34).

The history of folklore is as old as human society, but the adoption of the term 'folklore' is not as old. The concept of folklore was originated in Europe, mainly in Germany, by the end of eighteenth century and its discussion was started in the early part of nineteenth century.

The antiquaries in England and the German philologists started paying attention to the ways of life of the lower class of people. Two brothers, Mr. Jacob Grimm and Mr. Wilhelm Grimm, started publishing the oral folk narratives and interpretations of Germanic mythology. They used the word volkskunde for this subject. Subsequently, on August 22, 1846, Mr. William John Thoms, an English
antiquary, sent a letter to the *Athenaeum*, a magazine for intellectual people, and suggested that the new word ‘folklore’ be adopted henceforth in place of such a vague terms as ‘popular antiquities’ and ‘popular literature’. Gradually, the term ‘folklore’ became popular worldwide and is now used in most countries in the world. However, in some countries, substitutes for the word folklore are used.

The field of folklore is so vast that it is not easy to make a concise definition of folklore. Alan Dundes is trying to define various forms of folklore materials for a better understanding:

Although it may not be entirely satisfactory, a definition consisting of an itemized list of the forms of folklore might be the best type for the beginner. Of course, for this definition to be complete, each form would have to be individually defined. Unfortunately, some of the major forms, such as myth and folktale, require almost book-length definitions, but the following list may be of some help. Folklore includes myths, legends, folktales, jokes, proverbs, riddles, chants, charms, blessings, curses, oaths, insults, retorts, taunts, teases, toasts, tongue-twisters, and greeting and leave-taking formulas (e.g. See you later, alligator). It also includes folk costume, folk dance, folk drama (and mime), folk art, folk belief (or superstition), folk medicine, folk instrumental music (e.g., fiddle tunes), folk songs (e.g., lullabies, ballads), folk speech (e.g., slang), folk smiles (e.g., as blind as a bat), folk metaphors (e.g., to paint the town red), and names (e.g. nicknames and place names). Folklore includes myths, legends, folktales, jokes, proverbs, riddles, chants, charms, blessings, curses, oaths, insults, retorts, taunts, teases, toasts, tongue-twisters, and greeting and leave-taking formulas (e.g. See you later, alligator). It also includes folk costume, folk dance, folk drama (and mime), folk art, folk belief (or superstition), folk medicine, folk instrumental music (e.g., fiddle tunes), folk songs (e.g., lullabies, ballads), folk speech (e.g., slang), folk smiles (e.g., as blind as a bat), folk metaphors (e.g., to paint the town red), and names (e.g. nicknames and place names). Folk poetry ranges from oral epics to autograph-book verse, epitaphs, latrinalia (writings on the walls of public bathrooms), limericks, ball-bouncing rhymes, jump-rope rhymes, finger and toe rhymes, dandling rhymes (to bounce children on the knee), counting-out rhymes (to determine who will be “it” in games), and nursery rhymes. The list of folklore forms also contains games; gestures; symbols; prayers (e.g., graces); practical jokes; folk etymologies; food recipes; quilt and embroidery designs; house, barn, and fence types; street vendor’s cries; and even the traditional conventional sounds used to summon animals or to give them commands. There are such minor forms as mnemonic devices (e.g., the name Roy G. Biv to remember the colors of the spectrum in order), envelop sealers (e.g., SWAK- Sealed With A Kiss), and the traditional comments made after body emissions (e.g., after burps or sneezes). There are such major forms as festivals and special day (or holiday) customs (e.g., Christmas, Halloween, and birthday).

This list provides a sampling of the forms of folklore. It does not include all the forms. These materials and the study of them are both referred to as folklore. To avoid confusion it might be better to use the term folklore.
for the materials and the term *folkloristics* for the study of the materials (Dundes 1965: 3).

According to Richard M. Dorson, all folklore materials may be placed under four groupings as follows:

1. Oral literature (also called verbal art or expressive literature)
2. Material culture (also called physical folklife)
3. Social folk custom
4. Performing folk arts.

These four divisions are 'not all-inclusive or mutually exclusive' (Dorson 1972: 2-5).

The Indian sub continent is full of folklore, and from the beginning of their studies, this subject was given due importance by the scholars of Europe. The picture of the study of folklore in India is somewhat different. At first, the matter was considered to be part of Indian antiquarian studies. Under the leadership of Mr. William Jones, the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal was established in 1784 and a few articles were published in their magazines. Gradually more articles were published in other contemporary magazines. Most of the early writers on the subject were foreigners in India, mainly British administrative personnel, British army officials, the Christian missionaries and to some extent the missionaries’ wives. In Assam, some of the local people also contributed to the study of folklore. (Datta 1997)

The American Baptist Missionaries considered the folklore of Assam a valuable asset, and they published folklore materials in their monthly newspaper cum magazine the *Orunodoi*. This started in January, 1846. It is really a matter of surprise that in the same year, Mr. William Thoms, an English antiquary, proposed the word ‘folklore’ for the first time in a letter to the London based magazine the *Athenaeum*. The American Baptist Missionaries deserve the full appreciation of the Assamese people for their
endeavors to introduce local folklore materials as subjects of literary value to the educated Assamese readers.

The Missionaries published the myths of Christian religion along with appropriate morals, various tales carrying ethics, life-styles of various groups of people of Assam or of various parts of the world. The Missionaries also published riddles in the Orunodoi in November 1849, May 1851, August 1851, September 1851 and November 1852 issues. A few riddles with their meanings are added in the appendix.

The Baptist Missionaries published substantial numbers of tales, mostly fables, in the Orunodoi. Some of the tales along with morals published in the Orunodoi are listed below:

1. The Old man, his Son and the Ass (Neog 1983 : 58)
2. The Tiger and Lamb (Neog 1983 : 100)
3. The Doves and the Mouse (Neog 1983 : 247-248)
4. The Lion and the Jackals (Neog 1983 : 247-248)
5. The Lion and the Elephant (Neog 1983 : 247-248)
7. The Father and his Son (Neog 1983 : 254)
8. The Fox and the Grapes (Neog 1983 : 258)
10. The Blind and the Lame (Neog 1983 : 260)
12. The two Friends (Neog 1983 : 333)
13. A tree summoned as a witness (Neog 1983 : 357)
15. Two Chickens (Neog 1983 : 370)
Material Culture:

Material culture is designated by folklorists as physical folklife. 'Material culture responds to techniques, skills, recipes, and formulas transmitted across the generations and subject to the same forces of conservative tradition and individual variation as verbal art' (Dorson 1972 : 2).

Jules David Prown describes material culture as follows:

Material culture is just what it says it is - namely, the manifestations of culture through material productions. And the study of material culture is the study of material to understand culture, to discover the beliefs - the values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions of a particular community or society at a given time. The underlying premise is that humanmade objects reflect, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, the beliefs of the individuals who commissioned, fabricated, purchased, or used them and, by extension, the beliefs of the larger society to which these individuals belonged. Material culture is thus an object-based branch of cultural anthropology or cultural history (Luber & Kingery 1993 : 1).

The importance of material culture as a subject of study was brought to light by the Baptist Missionaries in the Orunodoi. The Missionaries collected specimens of material culture and reported descriptions or illustration of some of them for the readers of the Orunodoi. A picture of a bronze lion which had been found at Rongpur, and was probably a part of the base of a throne, was published in the Orunodoi in the November 1850 issue (Neog 1983 : 490). In addition we find lot of material on material culture in the Orunodoi such as descriptions of buildings, furniture, a clock, a prism, a globe etc. The material was reported in the Orunodoi with the aim of introducing an educational and scientific approach. This was important in bringing the Assamese masses to a progressive outlook. The descriptions of objects of material culture covered items of both local origin and as well as foreign.
Some of the materials are listed below:

**Materials of local origin:**

1. Image of Budha or Gautama (Neog 1983: 250)
2. A Singpho hat (Neog 1983: 257)
3. A 'da' of Khamti and Singpho (Neog 1983: 257)
5. Bronze Lion dug up at Rongpur (Neog 1983: 490)
7. The Taj Mahal (Neog 1983: 805)
8. Images of Krishna, Bolobhadra and Subhadra (Neog 1983: 819)
10. Sketch of Sibsagar Temple (Neog 1983: 870)
11. Bronze Image dug up near the old palace at Rongpur (Neog 1983: 1189)

**Materials of foreign origin:**

1. Ice houses in Calcutta (Neog 1983: 31)
2. The Euphonia or speaking machine (Neog 1983: 103)
3. Cast iron lighthouse for Ceylon (Neog 1983: 119)
4. Fiji Oracle (Neog 1983: 231)
5. Mexican Warrior with Cuirass and Buckler (Neog 1983: 264)
10. Images from island of South Sea (Neog 1983: 629)
11. Bracelet of Bronze (Discovery of antiquities at Nimroud) (Neog 1983: 726)
14. Aatemi Devi or Diana of Greece (Neog 1983 : 859)
15. Picture of a Burman Monastery (Neog 1983 : 883)
17. Box to keep Opium (Neog 1983 : 901)
19. What O'clock is it? (Clock) (Neog 1983 : 934)
21. South Sea Island Images (Neog 1983 : 1086)
22. Account of the old Sexon Idols (Neog 1983 : 1239)
23. The Chinese "Queen of Heaven" (Neog 1983 : 1250)
Chapter V

Notes & References

1. This discovery is described in Dr. S. K. Bhuyan’s typescript, ‘A Report on the Collection of Old Assamese and Sanskrit puthis in possession of the American Baptist Mission, Gauhati, Assam,’ July 3, 1925, to be found in the Gauhati library of the Council of Baptist Churches in North East India.

2. ‘Old Assamese manuscripts, in possession of the American Baptist Mission at Gauhati Assam’ typescript, containing a receipt for the ten manuscripts, signed by the Director of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam, dated 27-6-55, to be found in the Gauhati library of the Council of Baptist Churches in North East India.

3. DHAS: Director of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam.
Chapter V

Illustration Section

(a) Reproductions of Ethnographic Materials.

(b)-(d) Reproduction of articles of Material Culture.
Chapter V
Illustration-(a)

A Naga man
Source: Orunodoi, June 1848

A Garrow man in his War Dress
Source: Orunodoi, May 1847

Ningrula - Singpho Chief
Source: Orunodoi, August 1848

A picture of a Singpho Chief
Source: Orunodoi, September 1849
Chapter V
Illustration-(b)

A Singpho Hat
Source: Orunodoi, August 1848

Dog-skin Cap of the Mishmis
Source: Orunodoi, July 1848

A Picture of Khanti and Singpho 'Da'
Source: Orunodoi, August 1848

Bronz Lion dug up at Rongpur
Source: Orunodoi, November 1850

An Old pot dug up at England
Source: Orunodoi, December 1850
Chapter V
Illustration-(c)
Materials of Culture of local origin

Image of Budha or Gautama
Source: Orunodoi; July, 1848

Image of Vishnu
Source: Orunodoi; August, 1850

The great Mogul Diamond, Koh-i-Nur, or Mountain of Light.
Source: Orunodoi; December, 1851
Chapter V
Illustration-(d)
Materials of Culture of foreign origin

Chinese Temple.
Source: Orunodoi; July, 1853

The Chinese Goddess of Mercy.
Source: Orunodoi; March, 1853

Image of South Sea Island
Source: Orunodoi; September, 1851

Opium Box
Source: Orunodoi; February, 1853