CHAPTER – 3

THE SUBJUGATED IMAGINATION

The construction of a nationalist identity in Assam during the colonial period took a very complex form of resistance to colonialist agendas which included colonialist representations of the Assamese Other. Examples from other places under colonial rule in India show that the native subjects were never passive receivers of the colonizer's myth-making formulations. There always took place a very multi-layered discourse in the "contact-zone"1 which included collusion with as well as subversion of colonial historiography. The function of the past in the construction of social identities has been justifiably accepted by recent theorists of emergent nationalisms. In the nineteenth century itself, Ernest Renan in his famous work "What is a Nation?" talks about how a nation is constituted of two ideas – the past and the present, and says that a proper reverence for the heroism of the past creates a pride in the present which is a necessary constituent for the growth of a nationalist ethos. He writes, "To have common glories in the past, a common will in the present, to have accomplished

1 "‘Contact-zones’ (are those) social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination." – Mary Louis Pratt, p.4.
great things together, to wish to do so again, that is the essential condition for being a nation.”

In the presence of an alien Western ruler, the colonized nation’s “new”, emerging consciousness, is more often than not, an historical consciousness to contest the colonizer’s belief that the Orient lacks or does not possess “history”. The compelling need of the day, then, was to construct a new nationalist historiography to challenge and oppose the imposition of the colonizer’s hegemonic imagination. Because of the intensity of the demand for the search of one’s past and because of the vastness of the enterprise, the resultant writings were usually suffused with “auto-ethnographic” elements; which involved a complicated participation with, acceptance of and resistance to the colonizer’s jargon. The constructed nature of these writings is obvious because of the deliberate engineering of facts, which take place in order to authenticate and legitimize the new, modern idea of the nation. So while it is claimed that the nation is actually a primordial, antique entity, the symbols and the languages used for the spread of such an idea are largely modern.

Hobsbawm says that the modern ‘nation’ consists of “constructs and is associated with appropriate and, in general, fairly recent symbols or suitably

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3 “Auto-ethnography refers to instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways which engage with the colonizer’s own terms.” M.L. Pratt, p.7.
tailed discourse (such as 'national history'), the national phenomenon cannot be adequately investigated without careful attention to the 'invention of tradition'.

A self-conscious choosing of the "proper" kind of facts usually accelerates the collection of such 'facts', which lead to a conclusion regarding the superiority of the subject nation, or equality with the colonizing nation. Therefore there takes place a careful selection of facts which will create a symbolic universe of their own in the collective memory of the subject nation. This then takes us to the role that the imagination plays in the concocted genesis of the nation. Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities*, does not define a nation by using deterministic, external criteria but asserts that a nation is "an imagined political community," it is "thought out", "created". He uses the term "print-capitalism" to show how print-languages were able to create unified areas of exchange and communications, which was essential for the emergence of national consciousness. It is this "print-capitalism" which creates the space necessary for the growth of the modern "national" language. Ironically, however, we have seen how the first Assamese books were printed under the initiative of the East India Company and the American Baptist Mission. It is only in the middle of the nineteenth century that the new, bilingual Assamese elite started the project of creating a modern, standardized Assamese language to make it suitable for modern

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purposes. Around this time periodicals, journals, newspapers, magazines printing presses, publishing houses mushroomed to give the “mother-tongue” a new shape and flavour.\(^6\)

Various literary and cultural associations were also formed in the second half of the nineteenth century within and outside the Province of Assam. These contributed to the growth of a conscious nationalism among the Assamese people. The \textit{Gyān Prodāyini Xābhā} was found in 1857 in Nowgong under the patronage of Āṇondoram Dhēkial-Phukon and Gunābhirām Boruā. The \textit{Oxom Dēx Hitāixin Xābhā} had been formed still earlier, in 1855, in Sibsagar. In 1872, the \textit{Oxomiā Xāhityo Xābhā} was set up in Calcutta and in 1888 the \textit{Oxomiā Bhāxā Unnɔti Xādhɔni Xābhā} was started with the object of bringing about a total development of the Assamese language. It is seen as one of the key institutions, which brought about a literary renaissance in Assam with the help of its mouthpiece, the \textit{Junāki}.

One point worth noticing here is the role played by the Assamese elite in these ventures for the reinstatement of Assamese glory. Girin Phukon in his \textit{Assam: Attitude to Federalism} has pointed out that during the British rule, they

\(^6\) The main journals in Assam in the latter half of the nineteenth century were: \textit{Oxorudoi} (1846), \textit{Oxom Bilāxin} (1871), \textit{Oxom Mihir} (1872), \textit{Oxom Dɔrpɔn} (1874), \textit{Oxom News} (1880), \textit{Oxom Bɔndhu} (1885), \textit{Mɔu} (1886), \textit{OxomTɔrā} (1888), \textit{Lɔra Bɔndhu} (1888), \textit{Junāki} (1889), \textit{Bijuli} (1890). \textit{Oxom} (1894), \textit{Times of Assam} (1895) and \textit{Oxom Bɔnti} (1899).
grew into "an articulate and homogenous community." Most of the important positions in governmental establishments and commercial undertakings (specially in the tea industry) were occupied by the members of this small, usually Western-educated, group. The urban Assamese middle class grew out of this segment of the Assamese society. The upper-caste and upper class status of this group put them in a privileged hegemonic situation over other people within the Assamese society. Their power over the printing presses, and the fact that most of them wrote and published, show that they controlled public opinion during this period of nationalistic fervour in Assam.

Before I deal with my first sub-chapter, I would like to look at two divergent voices with certain points of confluence within the Assamese elite. Ānandoram Dhêkiâl-Phukôn and Mônirâm Déwân are the only two Assamese men whose voices were heard in the Moffatt Mills Report of 1854. They had both submitted memorials in 1853, the former’s in English and the latter’s, originally in Assamese and later translated into English. The languages that they chose to write in tell us about their educational qualifications and their respective social backgrounds.

Mônirâm Déwân had belonged to the Āhôm aristocracy before the British took away his privileges. Moffatt Mills describes him as “a discontented subject”,

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7 Girin Phukon, Assam: Attitude to Federalism, Sterling Publishers, Delhi, 1984, p.xxii.
"a clever but an untrustworthy and intriguing person."⁸ He was put to death in 1858 because of his involvement with the Revolt of 1857. In the two letters that he submitted, he put forth the grievances of the people and asked for the restoration of power of the deposed Āhōm King, Purandar Xingha. He decried the loss of the social status of the people of the upper classes because of the abolition of their former offices, the freedom given to their former slaves and the taxation of their land.

His feudal, superstitious nature is seen in the way he blames the British for causing natural calamities because of the discontinuation of the pujās at Kāmakhya temple. He is also worried about the loss of caste and prestige among the erstwhile aristocracy. He writes –

"Those whose ancestors never lived by digging, ploughing or carrying burdens, are now nearly reduced to such degrading professions."⁹

And "The convicts being made to eat in messes at present is very objectionable, as it causes them to lose caste."¹⁰

Mōnirām Dēwān also objects to the high taxation on opium. According to him, when opium-eating was an upper-class habit, it was never abused; but now since the lower classes have got their hands on it, they do not have the knowledge

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⁸ Moffatt Mills, p.11, F, 15.
⁹ Ibid., 11, Appendix K, B, p.lxviii.
¹⁰ Ibid., 11, Appendix, K, B, p.lxxvi.
or the experience to handle it. In fact when he talks about opium-addiction having become a lower class problem, he mentions not the men but the women.

"Now-a-days, such low people as Doomonees, Gorionees and Meereeonees (wives of Dooms, Mahomedans and Meerees) have become inveterate opium-eaters and by their allurements have spread the practice universally."

"... And when women become opium-eaters they will sell their domestic utensils without the knowledge of their husbands, and even barter their chastity or forsake the path of virtue to get the drugs."

His insular, aristocratic nature is interestingly shown when he chooses women of a low caste, a different religion and a 'tribe' to prove his definition of "low people". However his memorials can be seen as one of the first attempts at articulating the grievances that the former aristocracy and landed gentry were harbouring under. In histories of Assam, his "martyrdom" is seen as one of the firsts in the freedom struggle and he still survives in the folk-memory of the people.

Ānondrām Dhēkiāl-Phukon, on the other hand, was a totally different kind of man. Born into an affluent, Brahmin family, he had his higher education in the Hindu College in Calcutta. He always believed in the goodness of the British government and remained a loyal government servant until his death. He also

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11 Ibid., II, Appendix, K, B, p.lxxvi.
fought assiduously for the revival of the Assamese language and was a regular contributor to the drunudoi. He began his memorial thus –

“Our countrymen hailed the day on which British supremacy was proclaimed in the Province of Assam, and entertained sanguine expectations of peace and happiness from the rule of Britain. For several years antecedent to the annexation, the Province groaned under the oppression and the lawless tyranny of the Burmese, whose barbarous and inhuman policy depopulated the country and destroyed more than one-half of the population.”

Although aware of the beneficial effects of British rule, he felt that the British were not doing enough for the Assamese. He writes that the present form of administration indicated an “Asiatic” system rather than a system devised by “enlightened England.” Since “Providence” had given Assam to the British, they had a responsibility to fulfill because the British were “admirably qualified to affect” “improvements” –

“The general civilization of the country, the introduction of the arts and the sciences of Europe, the improvement of the civil and the social state of the people, and the enlightenment of their minds.”

Dhekial-Phukan, however, also pointed out the lacunae in the administration and advocated for an increase in the number of mofussil courts and

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12 Ibid., I, Appendix J, p.i.
native judges with more powers. He asked for a lightening of taxes and a simplification of the procedure at law-courts. He also pleaded for the reallocation of temple and religious endowments, reintroduction of "Native Oaths" in the courts and the setting up of an advisory committee of "learned pundits" who could be asked for their opinions during courtroom disputes.

Even while fighting for reinstating the Assamese language in schools and courts, he proposed for the construction of English medium schools. The "English School at Gowhatty" which had been started in 1835 and summarily shut down six years later gave him cause for much concern.

"The slow progress of the school of 1835 disposed the authorities to conclude that the 'Assamese would never improve in European knowledge.' Now we are prepared to dispute the justice and correctness of this conclusion. That the people, especially the higher classes, are still anxious to instruct their children in the knowledge of European science and literature, has been amply proved from the circumstances that several native gentlemen have already sent their youth to the Government colleges in the Presidency for the express purpose of giving them an English education." 14

The fact is Dhékiál-Phukón's credentials can be largely connected to his caste and class identity. As a member of the first modern group of Assamese elites, he spoke for ways and means to make this group more powerful. While

14 Ibid., A, J, p.xii.
talking about the registration of marriages, his prejudices are clearly seen. He is of the opinion that the people of the lower classes are usually ignorant about the importance of the marriage ceremony. He writes—

“Cases of elopement, seduction and dispossession of wives, are of constant occurrence in the courts of the Province, and men fight for their wives in the same manner, as they do for their lands and goods ... generally men and women of the lower orders, live together as husbands and wives without ever undergoing the nuptial rites.”

He feels that “domestic happiness” would be increased among these people if the government made the registration of marriages compulsory which would encourage the people to “observe the rites essential for the validity of marriage.”¹⁵ Dhēkiāl-Phukōn’s shrinking away from the promiscuous follies of the lower classes puts him on the same pedestal as Mônirâm Dēwân. Although both men are totally different in so far as their education is concerned, they actually speak the same language; the language for keeping an old elite in power. Indeed, Dhēkiāl-Phukōn’s negotiations with the language of the colonizer pave the way for the new bilingual Assamese intelligentsia.

RECLAIMING THE PAST:

The nationalist elite in the late nineteenth century, as Partha Chatterjee has pointed out, had to survive under a constant awareness of its political and economic subjugation by the colonial elite. Since this small group was formed because of the fact of subjugation, it could strive for and claim superiority only on the basis of its leadership of the indigenous colonized people. The creation of a Gellnerian "high culture" is what instigates the nationalist elite to re-create and re-present the past for the benefit of the "lower orders". The transmission of ideas of "high culture" for their consumption by the people was accelerated with the help of the printing press.

So how exactly can the nationalist elite impose this "high culture" on a colonized nation? The answer is by giving it a history that is worth delineating to the colonizer as well as to the people. On the one hand to be able to participate in the discourse of power given by tradition, and on the other hand to grant prestige and a sense of being the descendents of glorious ancestors. Mary Matossian in her essay, "Ideologies of "Delayed Industrialization"", identifies two tensions in such


17 "... nationalism uses the pre-existing, historically inherited proliferation of cultures or cultural wealth, though it uses them selectively, and it most often transforms them radically. Dead languages can be revived, traditions invented, quite fictitious pristine purities restored.

"... nationalism is, essentially, the general imposition of a high culture on society."

situations: archaism and futurism. She posits that archaism usually wins in the contest although a desire for the progressive elements in the colonizers also remains. Matossian writes –

"Archaism is an attempt to resurrect a supposed ‘golden age’, or some part of it. This ‘golden age’ is usually not in the disagreeable recent past, but in a more remote period, and it can be recovered by historical research and interpretation."\(^\text{18}\)

The friction between tradition and modernity is something worth taking note of here. Gellner has said that a paradoxical relationship exists between cultural nationalism and modernity. This nationalism is created by intellectuals in “backward” societies, who, when confronted with a modern, scientific-industrial, colonizing nation, find it difficult to compete and advocate for a nostalgic return to a pristine, integrated and glorious past. Gellner also identifies cultural nationalism as a defensive response on the part of the elites to the impact of modernization on existing social hierarchies; which may result in the reaffirmation of traditionalist values in the society.

For the purposes of this chapter I will make a very intensive study of a very significant monthly journal in Assamese, which made its first appearance in Calcutta on 8 February 1889. Named Junāki, (“firefly which glows in the dark”) this journal revolutionized the readers’ minds by its literary crusade and contributed directly to the rousing of national consciousness and the construction

of an Assamese identity. It discontinued publication for some time in 1899 and renewed publication from Guwahati in 1901. Eminent litterateurs like Sôndôr Kumâr Āgôrwâlā, Hêmsôndôr Guswâmi and Lôkhînâth Bêzbûrûa became editors of the Junâki and gave a platform to several educated young men who wanted to radically change the Assamese society. It became so important a journal that an entire age in the history of Assamese literature has been designated as the Junâki jug. In the writings published in the Junâki we see some of the key tensions and contradictions of the day articulated in a language, which was still going through the throes of a very stringent process of standardization.

One of the first problems that needed to be resolved through the writings in the Junâki was the association to be established between Assam and the mainland of India. Various other journals also wrote about the Assamese as linked to the great Indian tradition and also the historical problems arising out of it. Except in very ancient times, Assam had never really been touched by the influences of the mainland of India. Even repeated Mughal invasions could not conquer Assam, then under Āhôm rule. So it was with a very great imaginative leap that the Assamese intellectuals of the period had to connect Assam to the “glorious past” of the Râmâyân and the Mahábhârat.

Indeed, so great was the need to forge a relationship with the high culture of Hindu India that sometimes the presence of Āhôm burônjis was also ignored and the necessity a proper Western-style history was put forward. The lack of a
proper chronological, realistic history in India, which the British found fault with, was sometimes also accepted as a fault among the Assamese elite in order to “belong” to the great Indian Tradition. It was only in the nineteen twenties and the thirties that the Āhōm buronjis (interestingly, after Gait) came to be seen as emblematic of an Assamese literary and historical legacy.

So in May 1901, Dutiram Dāx, in his essay “Reading History” lamented the lack of “proper” history in India and also implicated the Assamese in the erasure of their past. He calls history a “metaphilosophy” which plays a very important role in the creation of a society. He writes –

“For progressive nations, history is a ladder given by God; without a national history (“jāti buronji”) no nation can rise upward … in today’s world, all civilized people have their histories. They spend considerable time in its study, and because of this, have been able to make their nations last. Those nations, which do not possess history, are in today’s world, inferior. If Europeans and Americans can call themselves developed because of the influence of their histories, they cannot be blamed for exaggeration.”

The imperative need for a national history, which could give prestige to India and therefore, to Assam, was much talked about. In fact the Assamese intelligentsia soon began to actually construct pasts for India as well as for Assam. Although much of the jargon used by the Assamese thinker was borrowed from

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19 Junāki. May 1901, Dutirām Dāx, “buronji Poth”, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Guwahati. (All translations from here onwards are mine)
what was being written in other parts of India, it is worth noticing how a fantastic idea of the Indian nation was being created and disseminated.

Krişnō Kumār Sōudhūrī writing in 1915 in the Bāḏi (“The Flute”) gives India a primitive identity and then goes on to talk about her present problems. He begins his essays, “Our Progress” thus –

“Bhāṛot is a very old nation. In age, Bhāṛot is the great grandfather of all nations. When other nations were crawling on their knees, then Bhāṛot was an energetic, skilful young man; talented in all fields, healthy in form and physically strong. When others were roaming around, searching for pathways and groping about in the dark, Indra, the Lord of Heaven had to accept defeat and make his lightening a trusted slave of Bhāṛot. When others were ignorant, Bhāṛot opened the big bundle of knowledge. When others were in a deep slumber; and therefore, unconscious, Bhāṛot had almost completed her responsibilities. When others lived beneath trees, in caves or holes and ate raw flesh, Bhāṛot had made beautiful temples and partook of manna from Heaven.”

This invention or revival, whatever one wishes to call it, of an indigenous high culture in order to eliminate or destroy the alien high culture, became necessary in this stage of nationalism. This gave the new middle class a sense of rootedness in a linear high culture,


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which had existed for centuries but had now been temporarily ruptured and needed to be mended. It also gave the intellectual elite a sense of pride in being able to talk back to the colonizer in his own language.

Behind such evocations, John Hutchinson tells us, "... on the part of intellectuals and the intelligentsia is, first, a dynamic vision of the nation as a high civilization with a unique place in the development of humanity and, secondly, a corresponding drive to recreate this nation which, integrating the traditional and the modern on a higher level, will again rise to the forefront of world progress."21

While writing about the superiority of the Hindus, the notion of "high civilization" comes in through a listing of those inventions which were present in the days of yore. In such writings, I usually found a strange conflation of Hindu India and Assam. It seemed almost as if the writers were trying their utmost to fabricate a non-existent Hindu identity for the Assamese. Lower class, lower caste, and adivasi identities were increasingly marginalized while the language and the politics became gradually more and more Sanskritized. Sondrodhor Borua writing about "The English and Us" compares England and Assam.

"People say that the English are superior to us in every way; everything about them is good, everything about us is bad, they are bigger than us, we are small; they say, our Assam is backward in all ways when compared to England..."

In manly courage has England ever produced someone like our Bhismā, Dróna, Kṛṣṇa or Ājñ?...

In intelligence, we are equal to the English. If they have invented trains, ships, balloons and the telegraph, our Ājñ also had his Māyā roth, ... Kubër his Puspok and someone to go around spreading news, Nārād...

Moreover, we can see that they copied our Kṛṣṇa and made “Christ”...

With our cotton they make shirts and trousers, with our coal from Dibru they move their ships and trains, with our tea-leaves they are drinking tea with milk and sugar, and having made money by selling tea, they are moving around calling themselves “men.”

What is noteworthy about the above passage is the excessive use of the plural possessive pronoun “our”. “Our Bhismā”, “our Kṛṣṇa”, “our Ājñ” to mingle with “our coal”, “our cotton”, “our tea-leaves”. The Mahābhārat and Assam. Ironically, mythological history, tells us that Bhogodottā, the King ruling in Prāgjyutixpur (ancient Assam) during the Mahābhārat was defeated by Arjuna when Arjuna attacked his kingdom. And when the actual battle took place in Kuruksetra, he went with a powerful army for the assistance of Duryodhana. In the battle-field, Bhagadatta saved Duryodhana from the onslaughts of Bhīma and was

22 Junāki, June 1902, Sondodhorer Bora, “Ingraz aru ami”.
later killed by Arjuna with the wily intervention of Kṛṣṇa who rendered harmless the invincible weapon that he had given to Bhagadatta’s father, Naraka.

The style of the essays, poems, plays, short stories published in the journals of the day were usually, from the point of view of genre and form, appropriated from the colonizer. Poetry in the mid and late nineteenth century was written in an overtly Romantic manner. Shakespeare, Milton and Scott were the favourites of translators. The form of the novel was imitated with great energy.* Keeping such trends in mind Elleke Boehmer has written.

“Culture – in the form of reinterpreted history, religious revivals, elegaic and nostalgic poetry – developed into an important front for nationalist mobilization. To this end literary conventions and discourses inherited from the colonizer were appropriated, translated, decentred and hybridized.”23

But the novel came in for quite a lot a criticism from a section of the intelligentsia. At its door were dumped all sorts of “new” evils proliferating in the society, including the act of suicide. Lāmbudor Bora, in a lengthy diatribe against novels and novel-writers wrote, in his “Novels and Suicide” –

“The events and the morals of the stories are against Hindu society, Hindu customs and behaviour and Hindu thoughts. The main feelings of these novels are sexual in nature; they show the uncontrollable waves of love, the madness of love,

* For further discussion on the novel, see Chapter V.

the sacrifice of shame and honour for love, the sins committed for love and committing suicide for love. It is easy to understand that the Bengali society has been harmed because of these novels, although some good novels have also been written ...

Novels should be written according to the needs of the time. The character, habits, morals and dialogues of the heroes and heroines should be beautiful, contextual and ethical. The betterment of the Assamese people and the progress of the Assamese society should be the main reasons for writing these novels ... Rām and Judhisthir, Xitā and Xābitrī are symbols of Hindu religion and Hindu ethics; if you throw away Hindu books today, tomorrow Hindu society will be destroyed.\textsuperscript{24}

So a “literary convention” borrowed from the colonizer is appropriated and hybridized to fit in with the requirements of the times. The requirements are to write about Hindu heroes and heroines with proper virtues who will be able to inspire a love for the nation among the readership. In the essay, the Bengalis are mercilessly flayed for unquestioningly imitating this foreign form of writing and not changing it to suit their own needs.

In fact part of this essay falls within a parallel trend of writing during this period. We see it germinating here, it will flower and spread its ideas in the twentieth century. This was an insular, separatist tendency among a section of the Assamese elite. They felt absolutely no need to connect themselves with the larger

\textsuperscript{24} Junāki, March 1892, \textit{Lōmbudr Bhrā, “Uppnyāx aru Ātmāḥātyā.”}
Indian identity. They wrote with the awareness of never having shared any ideological affinity with the Indian mainland. It was only the fact of British annexation and geographical contiguity which arbitrarily made Assam a part of British India. Most of this anti-Indian feeling was concentrated on Bengal and Bengalis and they are sometimes actually equated with the British.

“Like the English, the Bengalis initially came to Assam only for the purposes of trade and commerce. But after the development that Assam made in this field, other Bengalis have come to settle in Assam... Our boundary, meaning the region beyond Goālpāra is Bōhāl Dex and the people are Bōhāli. Dh ākā, Kōlikātā, Kāsi, Bumbai, Pānjāb, Kābul, eurup; for us all places are equal. Whether Bāmūn, Yāvān or Mléss, people beyond Goālpāra are, for us, Bōhāli.”

Girin Phukon points out how the Bengalis were seen as second in command to the English. Europeans in Assam were actually called “Bā’gā Bōhāl” (white foreigners) whereas the Bengalis were “Kā’lā Bōhāl” (black foreigners). Sometimes even the Nationalist Movement in Assam was characterised as the “Bōhāl Kheda Movement” (Oust Bengali Movement; Bengali here standing for foreigner).

26 See Girin Phukon, p.22.
Corresponding to this circumscribed view of the Assamese identity was the idea of Assam’s own superior past and also sometimes a superior present when compared to other parts of India. In a protest (“protibād”) against an essay on the “Progress of Assam”, Rāmdāx Goswāmi talks about the excellence of the kind of Hinduism practised in Assam.

“In our opinion, the strength of religion, the progressive nature of religion, and the tolerance of religion can best be seen in Assam than in any other part of Bhāravtborx. Those elements which injure the society have been removed from our religion in praiseworthy ways. Unlike other places in Bhāravt, we do not marry off our children when they are still at their mothers’ breasts; except among Bāmuns and Gonoks, widow remarriage is also prevalent. No other place in Bhāravt enjoys such liberal views.”\(^{27}\)

The demand to establish a resurgent Assamese identity was closely related to the efforts of revitalizing the dying arts and crafts of Assam. The lament of the day was the space occupied in business places by rich Marwari and Bengali merchants. The entrepreneurial skills of the Assamese young men were sought to be energized by such writings. The decline of the indigenous cane, jute, silk and pottery industries was seen with much concern. Assamese people who wore Manchester cotton were openly ridiculed...

\(^{27}\text{Junāki, Rāmdāx Goswāmi, October 1890, , “Protibād: Āxmov Unndti”}.\)
In an essay entitled “Our Crafts”, Konoklal Borua writes about the past richness of Assamese crafts and the artistic expertise of the craftsmen.

“Everybody has to agree that Assamese crafts prospered greatly in the past. We can understand that as soon as we see the old objects.

In sculpture, weaving, making of ornaments and utensils, carving on elephant tusks and deer horns; our ancestors were all more talented than us. These qualities are slowly seeping away from us... With the disappearance of king’s rule in Assam, the arts of making the images of gods, stone pillars and stone doors in temples have also disappeared.”

The necessity of making a spirited entry into the world of trade and commerce was written about all the time. Young Assamese men were exhorted not to waste time in idle pursuits or in trying to get government jobs. The dignity of all sorts of work was put forward and a glorious Assam which had been slumbering for centuries could be awakened to participate in the new world.

But the sorrow which was pervasive among large sections of the people was because of the threat that was perceived from the influence of modernity. The contradiction of the time was the difficult cleaving of the past and the present. Sometimes what was seen as noble in the past had to be sacrificed at the altar of modernity. The impossibility of remembering what the past stood for because of the “pollution” of the present was an idea that was articulated time and again. This

28 Jumā, May 1890, Konoklāl Borúa, “Āmār Xilpp”.

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nostalgia for the unadulterated, pristine past usually showed a conservatism of the most extreme kind.

I will quote some stanzas from a poem “The Nation has Fallen Low” subtitled, “A Lamentation for the Lost Jewel of Memory” in order to prove my point.

IV

“Bāmuns read the language of the Mléss
Χῦδρος discuss the Xastros
Yávāns touch the Vedās
Where does religion remain?
O Hṛi, what have you done! The nation has fallen low!

V

Hindus read Bible-Kurān
Germans comment on Vedānta
Pujās and Yogns, nobody
Believes in them
O Hṛi, what have you done! The nation has fallen low!

IX

Hindus eat garlic-onion
Gulp down soda-lemonade
Take medicines from casteless people

101
Such sacrileges take place

O Hori, what have you done! The nation has fallen low!

X

The Bāmūn’s son studies medicine
Is also involved with fish-business

A'rjyobxrɔ today

Has gone totally low.

O Hori what have you done! The nation has fallen low!

XII

Girls have rubbed off the ‘forehead-dot’
Buns have become pony tails.
Wear shoes of cow-leather
What else remains?

O Hori what have you done! The nation has fallen low!

XVII

Girls have gone out of their homes
Educated in books and songs
Have totally removed all distinctions
Equal to men are they

O Hori what have you done! The nation has fallen low!
Women travel all over the world

Give speeches and lectures in public places

Argue with in-laws and husbands.

O Hāri what have you done! The nation has fallen low!”

This poem shows the fear of the collapse of social hierarchies. The present flux of identities which had earlier been fixed and static is seen as the reason for the nation’s sad state of affairs. The comparison between the genuine, perfect past where people knew their place and position in the society; and the polluted present, where co-mingling is the order of the day, was meant to show that the nation can be saved not through dealing in the coarse trappings of modernity but by looking back to the “authentic” past. This kind of voice could not successfully merge the past with the necessities of the present. The breakdown of essential religious, caste, class and gender categories created conflicts and inconsistencies in the Assamese elites’ enterprise of reviving the past.

ALTERNATIVE HISTORIES

The “native” historian was burdened with the responsibility of creating histories for his beleaguered nation. The task was of such overwhelming proportions that the resultant “adjustments” and “modifications” of the original

29  Bāji, (month not clear) 1920, Dandināth Kolitä, “Dex Tōtōloi Gol: Smriti Rōtnor Bilāp”. 

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facts showed very fascinating gaps, additions and shifts. Alternative histories to the ones written by the British, sometimes even separate from the information found in the burônjis, were written during this time. The reasons for taking recourse to such tactics could have been either from ignorance, lack of proper research, or an exceptionally fertile imagination and capacity for invention.

For the purposes of this sub-chapter I will look into an essay written over several months and published in the Junäki in 1891. The topic of this essay by Rotneswor Mohonto was the “Muâmôriä Rebellions” which continued with several interruptions from 1769 to 1794, until this group of malcontents were ultimately defeated by Captain Welsh, in the first real British expedition into Assam.

When Srimonto Xônkordeb, the Vaishnava Saint, spread the idea of Vaishnavism in Assam in the fifteenth century in the tradition of other Bhakti poets of India, several people from the lower castes accepted his preachings and became converted to Vaishnavism. However, on the other hand the Āhóm Kings and nobles gradually became converts to the Xâktô form of worship and sometimes made life difficult for the Vaishnavas. During the time of Rudrô Xînhô, the greatest among Āhóm the rulers, Sudra priests who converted and initiated Brahmins into the Sankariya sect, were called to the king’s court in order
to cite such a precedent in the religious texts. The *Tungkhungi Buronji* chronicles this thus –

"Then the king said, - "There is no passage in these scriptures to support such an initiation. The five Medhis should now proceed to show in which *puthis* or manuscripts they had found such an authority." The five priests failed to refer to any puthi, nor could they cite any authority. They could not utter a single word."

After quoting from "Pemberton Sahab's *Eastern frontier*" and "Robinson Sahab's *A Descriptive Account of Assam*" to resolve the issue of the places occupied by the Muamoriäs, Rotneswor Mohonto writes that the Muamoriäs comprised disciples from the "Kāsāris, Āhōms, Dōms, Hōris and other various xudrā people ... Since they lived in a monastery near a pond in Majuli, they ate the "Muā" fish found a plenty in this pond. Therefore Brahmins and others mocked and laughed at them by calling them "Muamoriäs" (meaning people who fish the Muā)."

During the reign of Xibo Xinho (1714-1744) his Queen Phulēswōri (1722-1732) was made the "Bor Rnjā". He was completely under the control of his

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30 S.K. Bhuyan (ed. & trans.), p.33.
31 Gait writes that although the terms Moran, Matak and Moamaria are used indiscriminately, they are in reality quite distinct. Moran is a tribe; Moamaria a sect and Matak is a region in the Ahom kingdom once ruled by the Bar Senapati. – Gait, p.180.
32 *Junāki*, April 1891, Rotneswor Mohonto, "Muamōriā Bidrōh".
to subvert the prophecy by using the subterfuge of placing his Queen on the throne. Phuléswórî was a strict Xâktô and was annoyed by the pretensions of the Muámôriâ Goxais. During her reign she committed an act of oppression which was to have far-reaching consequences. Since the Muámôriâs did not partake of prasad, offer prayers to idols or participate in animal-sacrifices, Queen Phuléswórî decided to humiliate them in public by inviting the Muámôriâ Gosains to a puja.

Rotneswór Mohonto writes.

“Queen Phuléswórî caught hold of them and smeared their foreheads with the blood of sacrificed goats and buffaloes and made them offer their prayers to the Goddess and gave them the pujâ flowers, prôxâd, xêndûr and sôndôn.”33 This insult lived on as a canker and festered among the Muámôriâs and is cited as one of the main reasons behind the outbreak of 1769.

Rotneswór Mohonto’s essay is important because of the space it gives four women in the telling of this story of lower caste rebellion. Queen Phuléswórî is the first, but since she is historically accurate and since the above incident is based upon factual details, she is not the subject of my sub-chapter. Her arrogance and the power she wielded over her husband makes for interesting reading but I

33 April 1891.
am concerned more about the three other women; about Mohonto’s playing around with stories, the details of which he is not sure of.

The second woman whom he mentions in his essay is a woman called Radharukmini (the Muămriäs were “Krisn-Bhokts”). She was supposedly the wife of a Muămri named Khurā, who was one of the key persons in the first Muămri uprising. The Tungkhungi Buronji takes note of Khurā and mentions in passing that he had two wives – Rādhā and Rukmini. Mohonto however conflates the two names to create one woman of remarkable courage and skill. When he writes about her he uses the word “éjoni” which can best be translated as “this woman”.

“Muămri Khurāmon’s wife was Radharukmini. When Khurāmon came to the battle-field, he also brought this woman with him. With her came her son Rāmakānt.34 In the battle this woman helped the Muămriäs a lot. With her own hands she started using the bow and arrow. The Ahóm soldiers had never seen a woman in the battle-field. When they saw Rādhārukmini wielding the bow and arrow with such extraordinary skillfulness, they became paralysed with fear. In the battle, the soldiers were using rifles and bullets, but Rādhārukmini was so clever and knew so much about the ways of war that not a single bullet touched her body. A rumour started among the soldiers that she caught the bullets in her āsvl and

34 Rāmānond in the Tungkhungi Buronji.
was actually *Ron'sondi* (a form of *Xokti*) who had come to fight with the Āhōm army.”

The language of this passage on Rādhārukmini is marked by pronouns, which do not accord respect to her. That she is the wife of a lower-caste man who has risen in open rebellion against the king, and that she fights in a battle-field, a space not meant for her, places her totally outside the domain of the ordinary.

The third woman that Rotneswor Mohonto mentions is the most interesting in the entire essay. According to him when the Muāmūriās attack the Palace, the King, Lōkhi Xīnhō goes into hiding. They take away his wife, Queen Joi’mōti, instead, tie her to a post and torture her in order to make her reveal her husband’s hiding place. Mohonto here does a little bit of ingenious historical engineering. Joi’mōti had actually been the wife of Godapani who took the name Godadhōr Xīnhō when he became king (1681–1696). Godapani too had gone into hiding because Lōrā Rojā, who was king before him, considered him a rival and wished to kill him. Mohonto erases almost a century in between and makes Joi’mōti Lōkhi Xīnhō’s wife. His style changes; he uses the present continuous tense and he seems to be telling a story rather than recounting historical events.

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35 May 1891.
"The Queen knows where the king is hiding, but she does not reveal the place to the Muāṃriās. The reprobates threaten and torture her in various inhuman ways. The xōtī, xādh’bi Queen, however, refuses to say anything about where her husband had gone. One day the Muāṃriās beat her with sticks, and the Queen, unable to bear such suffering, screams in agony and her screams rent the air in ten directions. The king can hear her from where he hides. He condemns his life and bites into his own flesh.

... That night when everybody sleeps, the King comes out of his hiding place – he could not bear it any more, it was because of him that his beloved wife was being tortured by the barbaric Muāṃriās. What is the worth of a man’s life bought with the death of a woman?...

He comes and talks to his wife but she entreats him to go away or all her suffering would be in vain.

Joi’mōtī also speaks to the Muāṃriās –

"O Muāṃriās, you do not understand how a woman looks at her husband. You can cut me up and rub salt on my wounds, have me eaten alive by dogs; but how can I, when alive, think of some evil befalling my swāmnidebōtī? 36

This tale, selectively shifted, from the late-seventeenth to the late-eighteenth, to a totally different context, raises several issues. ‘Xōtī’ Joi’mōtī’ s

36 June 1891.
“martyrdom” is a very closely linked to the folk-culture of Assam. She had been tortured by the Āhōm King, Ldrā Rojā’s minions and not by the Muāmriās. But by using the new print-culture, Rōneswór Mōhont turns topsy-turvy all ideas of historical authenticity.37

He may have made the mistake because Godādhūr Xinho too had persecuted the Vaishnavas.38 However, the ideological reshaping of the Joi’mot story tells us about how a “Sati” Queen would behave when confronted with a bunch of low caste, ungodly Muāmriās. It is about orthodox, womanly, upper class and caste behaviour which would make the designs of the crafty and cruel Muāmriās to the throne worthless.

The final woman in this essay is Kūrongononi, a Manipuri Princess who, according to Gait was married to two brothers; King Rājēswor Xinho and then, after his death, to king Lōkhi Xinho. But Rōneswór Mōhont writes that she was one among many concubines. When the Muāmriās ultimately came to power in

37 The editor of the Jumāki, however, pointed out the mistake in the July 1891 issue.

38 “Gadadhar Singh feared the physical deterioration that might ensue if his people enjoyed the injunction of the Gosains and abstained from eating the flesh of cattle, swine and fowls and abstained from strong drinks... Under his orders many of them were sent to Namrup and put to death there ... Nor did their bhakts or disciples fare any better. Those belonging to the better castes ... were left alone, but those of low castes, such as Kewats, Koches, Doms and Haris, were hunted down, robbed of their property, and forced to eat the flesh of swine, cows and fowls.” Gait, pp.159-60.
1769, the king was imprisoned and the son of a Morān chief, Rām'kānt was raised to the throne and coins were minted in his name. But the real power was vested in Rāgh', who styled himself Bdr Bāruā. He took into his harem all the women in Lōkhi Xīnhò’s court and married Kurāṅgōnd̓yən̓i, who was also known as the Moglou Princess.

Rotneswdr Mōhantḍ writes –

“All the erstwhile nobles started conspiring with the Ṡṇipuria R ānī, Kurāṅgōnd̓yən̓i, in order to kill Rāgh’ Morān. The nobles told her that if she intrigued with them to kill Rāgh’, she will be made Lōkhi Xīnhò’s wife. The Moglou Princess was taken in by this and told the conspirators that if the Muāmrīās were not overthrown in the forthcoming Bifju, there was no hope for such a possibility later …

… Our king’s men came to Rāgh’’s courtyard and started singing songs and playing their dhōls and tokās (musical instruments). The Moglou Princess knew that our disguised King’s men had arrived and became cautious. When Rāgh’ heard the music, he asked her the reason for it. She said, “These are the sons of respectable people of our country … You have to ask for their blessings.” When Rāgh’ went out with a bowl full of gold and silver and betel-leaf and betel-nut, he had a sword with him. When the Princess saw the weapon, she told him that it was not right to carry a weapon while receiving blessings. Rāgh’ told the Princess to
keep the weapon and went out to kneel in front of the singers. When he knelt, the Princess, with that same weapon, hit him on the calf of his leg and Rāgh' fell on his face.”

Both Gait and the Tungkhungiā Buronji mention Kurongonoyoni in exactly two sentences. But Rotneswor Mohonto gives her the floor, shows her being taken in by clever conspirators, makes her mouth wily dialogues and ultimately makes her the agent of Rāgh’s downfall which ends the first Muāmoriā rebellion.

This account of the Muāmoriās’ rebellion and the fictionalization of three women participants makes clear how the ideologies regarding gender and caste were being shaped in the late nineteenth century. Although the Āhōm monarchy had long since ended, we see Mohonto’s sympathies clearly on the side of the king. The small discontented, persecuted group of low-caste people were seen as presumptuous and evil, so much so that Joi’moti’s story is arbitrarily shifted a hundred years into the future in order to accommodate Mohonto’s ideological stance.

Radharukmini, Joi’moti and Kurongonoyoni – all three women behave in exceptional ways, they are three brave women. But Mohonto’s language and the

39 June 1891.
grammatical and semantic slippages position them according to his own historical needs. Radhārūkminī is low-caste; Kurongonoyonī, is from Manipur and a concubine. They are 'othered' in the telling of the story. By erasing the marital status of Kurongonoyonī, Rotneswor Mohonto makes her act, not out of courage, but out of greed.

The only perfect woman is Queen Joi’mōti. She is the epitome of womanly suffering and self-sacrifice. She is an Āhôm Queen, beloved of her husband and she knows all about how a woman ought to behave for her swāmidebōtiā. In her speech to the Muāmriās, she makes it clear how lowly and uncivilized they were because they knew nothing about a high-born woman's sense of sacrifice. Joi’mōti is brought in by ingenious historical inventiveness in order to put forward two morals in the story – One about gender behaviour and the other, about caste behaviour.40 This particular alternative history, in the final analysis conforms to ancient definitions of such essential categories as “low caste” and “woman”.

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40 Dr. Wade who came with Capt. Welsh to Assam wrote a memoir in 1796 about the reign of Gourināṭh Xiṅhā, during whose kingship, the third Muāmriā Rebellion had taken place. He wrote several unsavoury things about them –

"Before we take our final leave of the Moamrias we may venture to prophesy that the mere name of the British Government will, at any time, prove sufficient to repress the overt resistance of the Boora-Gohaigan or the Moamrias ... The miserable band of cowardly and undisciplined peasants amounting perhaps to six or seven hundred men, armed with awkward weapons which they dare not and cannot use ... would scarcely venture to oppose a single company of sepoys."

In the last couple of decades in the nineteenth century obsessive attempts were on to change certain existing societal equations. These attempts were charged with the subterranean realization that too quick a change would injure the entire age-old fabric of the society. The difficult reconciliation between tradition and modernity can best be seen in the debates which centred around the place of women in the society; her education, her marriage, her social responsibilities and duties as daughter, wife, and mother. These questions became so crucial because the new middle-class realized the significance of the two-pronged nature of subjection and its guilt – (a) of being a colonized people in the “outside” world and (b) keeping women in a subjugated state, “inside” – within the home. As Partha, Chatterjee very succinctly puts it in The Nation and its Fragments,

"The world is the external, the domain of the material; the home represents one’s inner spiritual self, one’s true identify ... (The world) is typically the domain of the male. The home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world – and woman is its representation.""41

The home was an unconquered, spiritual space and had to be protected from the evils of the outside, material world. After the deplorable process of colonization by an alien power, the only space available to the middle-class man where he could be his own free self, was within the home. Tanika Sarkar has pointed out –

41 Partha Chatterjee, p.120.
“Against this fundamental and all-encompassing loss of selfhood, the only sphere of autonomy, of free will, was located within the Hindu family: to be more precise, with the Hindu woman, her position within an authentic Hindu marriage system and the ritual surrounding the deployment of her body.”

The essential biological difference between men and women was put forward as something granted by Providence for special reasons. The nature of love and attraction between the opposite sexes was constructed as the outcome of a symbiotic need. The strong masculine attributes of the man and the gentle, feminine traits of the woman were seen as the reasons behind mutual enchantment.

In “The State of Our Women”, SONDORDHOR BORUA writes,

“In order that love may happen, men and women have been given different qualities. Without these opposite qualities, men and women cannot love each other; they will not be attracted to each other... Men are strong, women weak; men can tolerate hardships, women are fearful; men are ‘hard’ and can bear trials and tribulations, women are soft and cannot face problems. These unequal qualities attract each other and love happens between men and women.”

This traditionalist patriarchal formulation about elemental gender difference is followed in the same essay by the modern requisite of education for women. This glorification of physical difference led to the corollary of conjugal happiness

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43 JUNAKI May 1896, SONDORDHOR BORUA “Amar tirôtar lobostha”.
and therefore, the progress of the nation, lying in the strict adherence to gender roles. Women should be educated alright, not so that they may read and write love-letters, but that they may become better mothers to their sons and better companions to their husbands. Since the husband worked hard outside the home in order to bring security for his wife and children, it was the responsibility of the wife to see that all his needs were taken care of. The husband’s responsibility within the home was not explained but the wife’s duties were enumerated with great detail. Ānondo Sondro Āgōrwālā in his essay “Animal Strength and Moral Strength” puts together certain points of the superior woman.

“Just as it is the husband’s duty to keep his wife’s character pure and chaste; in the same way, it is the wife’s duty to keep her husband’s mind pure and contented. The wife should not try to subdue or control her husband by pointing out his faults or by giving him aphrodisiacs; but should enchant him by serving and caring for him.”

In another essay, entitled, “Women”, Purnōkānto Xormā categorises women into two types. The first women is kind, loving and knows her womanly duties. When her tired husband comes back in the afternoon from working in the field, she takes good care of him, gives him good food to eat, serves him. The husband, then, forgets his exhaustion and feels energised to go out and work some more. The second kind of woman will not be at home when he gets back from

44 Ibid. July 1889, Ānondo Sondro Āgōrwālā, “Pāxob Bōl ne Noitik Bōl.”
work; when she comes back, instead of giving him food will scream and shout at
him. When the husband, in his exasperation, will beat her up, she will wail and
howl. Sharma concludes,

“It is our good fortune that most women are not of the second kind. That is
why this world of sorrows has survived till now – it is still possible for man to
inhabit it. If all women were of the first kind, then this world would have been
totally different.”45

It was precisely to change the second type of woman that education for
women was canvassed for with such vigour. In the late nineteenth century, the
rationale behind women’s education was basically, backward – looking and
traditionalist. Various writers put forward the view that it was for men that women
should be educated. When you are yourself educated, how can you be satisfied
with an illiterate and ignorant life-partner? You will be unhappy and your sons
will be tainted with her low ways. This was the logic behind most writings of this
kind. Moreover, ancient India had already been constructed by then, as the time
when women were free and educated and therefore helped the Āryāvīs progress.

Sondrodhur Bōruā in the essay already cited parrots the same idea.

“The Hindu books scream and say – respect women, venerate women. In ancient Hindu society, women were not slaves like today’s women ... in fact we hear of women’s education, widow-remarriage being prevalent then.”

The intimate connection between the improvement of the condition of women and the improvement of the nation was realized by the middle-class Assamese elite. Since the home was totally his own domain, where the colonizer could not interfere, the nature of the change to be affected was also articulated and controlled by him. Comparisons were made between other civilized nations of the world and the distressing situation in India. Gaūrināth Tālukdār in the essay, “Strixikhya” writes –

“If you open the history books of civilized nations of the world, you will see that their women are civilized and therefore, they have progressed. On the other hand, you can see that those nations which do not understand the meaning of women’s education have no progress in the field of knowledge, crafts, commerce – that nation will never be able to enjoy complete development.”

Along with the question of education for women, cropped up the fear of women changing and becoming “Westernised”. Since the entire debate was voiced by men, they also tried to clamp limits on the type of education women were to possess. The threat of women suddenly becoming their own agents and refusing to

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46 Ibid, May 1896.
47 Junāki, November 1902, Gaūrināth Tālukdār, “Strixikhya”. 

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kowtow to the needs of men, was seen as very real. Sondrodhur Borua also takes note of this, only to disagree—

“Nowadays many people point out problems in the field of women’s education – chief among them being that after being educated, women will “become bad”. Oh! Oh! Is this what we get from education? To this section of people we can only answer that, whosoever thinks that education can harm a person’s character is himself uneducated.”

But Borua’s conclusion, a few sentences later, says that the husband is absolutely accountable for the kind of education he gives his wife. He should decide what she should read and what she ought not to read. The outcome, i.e., whether she will become a better mother and a better companion, or whether she will become a woman without virtue; will depend upon the husband.

“If you give women good advice, make them read good books and in various other ways, give them a good education, then you will see that good education will broaden their views, will improve their character, our Hindu society will progress like before and in Bharat will be born again women like “Potibrata Xabitri”.48

One very important facet of the debate on women was the marriageable age of upper-caste girls. The Age of Consent Bill was passed in 1891, but even before that debates on the problems of child-marriage were taking place in the journals

48 Ibid., May 1896.
and periodicals of the times. Although, it was generally accepted that a girl of five or eight was unable to understand the significance of the nuptial rites, the upper limit was never really extended beyond ten years. Rotneswor Mohonto in a celebrated essay, “Marriage”, looked at the other problems regarding the issue of child-marriage – a girl widowed at the age of five, the husband and wife not understanding each other because they are not allowed to meet before marriage, the problems of in-laws etcetera. Although the essay begins in a very progressive vein, it loses track mid-way in contradictions of the worst kind and ultimately concludes by accepting strange shastraic injunctions like girls with squints, light-eyes or dimples should not be married because they usually lack virtue. He also accepts without question the idea that girls should be married off before they begin menstruating.

“In our place, many parents after marrying off their girl, keep her at home even after menstruation. Wise parents send off their daughter to her husband’s home immediately after the commencement of menstruation. Ignorant people and those who show off by fighting with their sons-in-law, keep their daughters at home even after they had been menstruating for five or six years. This is equivalent to ignoring the xastrās.”

An equally celebrated “Prōtībād” or “Protest” against Rotneswor Mohonto was published in the following month, October 1889. The writer Komolsondro

49 Ibid, September 1889, Rotneswor Mohonto, “Bibāh”.

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XörmA rightly points out that Mohontô’s essay was an opportunistic one, full of contradictions equal to a Vaishnava priest going around praying to Jogdömabā. He says that it is absolutely impossible to decide at what age a girl understands the significance of marriage. It may even be said that a girl of eighteen or nineteen is too young and inexperienced to know what marriage is all about. XörmA writes that he could pin-point two of Mohontô’s firmly held convictions – (a) A girl should be married before she starts menstruating and (b) She should not be kept at her parent’s home after the start of menstruation. Although XörmA disagrees with the second point, he accepts the first, not because it has been written in the xastròs, as Rotneswor Mohontô says, but because he feels that certain changes should take place gradually.

XörmA also berates Mohontô for his misogynistic attitude and writes –

“We are saddened when we see the writer’s ill-will towards woman-kind. He writes that it is in the nature of women to make men deviate from the right-path etcetera. For this purpose he has quoted Mònu. If the writer is a bachelor, then it is alright, but if he is married, one can only imagine how frighteningly poisoned must be his married life.”


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He then goes on to give the examples of Xità and Xàbitrí and the system of self-immolation among Ràjpùt women to prove that innumerable women in the past had demonstrated their chastity.

The above examples amply substantiate the argument put forward earlier that the nationalist project, even while trying to invent a new and dynamic nation by appropriating certain ideas of progress from the colonizing nation, the need to make the modern, consistent with the past, made it a very contradictory and tension-ridden enterprise. In the debates which concentrated on the women, her mobility and also the ritualized control of her body (through fasts etcetera) we see this conflict at its highest.