INTRODUCTION

The grounds for writing patriotic plays in Bengali were prepared much earlier than when it became a trend in early twentieth century. The playwrights in Bengal who had by now become famous tried to rouse patriotism among the people through chronicle plays with a materialist fervour which contributed immensely to the growth of nationalist movement in the country in the early twentieth century. During the period, in Bengal - Calcutta in particular - a number of play-houses were built to stage these plays which were able to imbue the countrymen with a sense of patriotism. A little later, playwrights in Assam also followed the suit. In order to rouse the conscience of the people against foreign subjugation, they also devoted themselves to writing patriotic plays.

Nineteenth century, known as the period of renaissance in Bengal, saw the emergence on the scene, one after another, of men of letters, saints, scientists, poets, painters and literaturs who not only enlightened the masses with their genius in their respective fields, they also earned recognition throughout the world. At Dakshineswar, Shri Kamkrishna propagated the quintessence of Hindu spiritualism...
while his most able follower Vevekananda, was engaged propagating, alongside spiritualism, the gospel of humanism and patriotism. The latter called upon the people to unite for the cause of the motherland:

'bala bhāratāśī amār bhāi, bhāratāśi amār prān, bhārat āśi amār āśi amār āśi, bhārat āśi amār āśi āśi, amār yebamur upan, amār khandhur bānāsī, bala-bhāi, bhārat āśi āśi āśi āśi, bhārat kalyān amār kalyān'

(Say - "The Indian is my brother, the Indian is my life, India's gods and goddesses are my God. India's society is the cradle of my infancy, the pleasure-garden of my youth, the sacred heaven, the Varanasi of my old age".

Say brother : "The soil of India is my highest heaven, the good of India is my good").

It was about this time Sankimchandra's famous slogan 'Vande-Mataran' stirred the whole country. Until before Sankimchandra no one had addressed the country as one's mother. In point of fact since then the slogan 'Vande-Mataran' had become synonymous with the country as a mother cult.

With the freedom of Bengal lost following the defeat in the battlefield of Plassey, the British community spread their tentacle of their domination all over the country. This merchant community soon began to exploit the people in the name of administering them and this gave rise to simmering discontent here and there. With the powers of administration passed contd.....
ever their hand, the British merchants now turned
their attention to introducing English education and
culture, as a means of indoctrination, in the sphere
of influence. With the passage of time, a new-educated
gentry emerged on the scene as a product of this
indoctrination policy. In 1800, Fort William College
came into being in Calcutta and, as a natural corollary,
a section of the educated gentry came under the
influence of Western thoughts and philosophers. Thus:
the contact with the progressively trendy West provided
a new dimension to the unsophisticated wisdom of the East
and the flicker of the rejuvenated wisdom spread in
various directions. This radical change in the education
system came as a boon in disguise for the Bengalee
intellectuals in that this helped them to rediscover
themselves in a wider perspective. They came to feel
the need to assert themselves both intellectually and
politically - and soon made their presence felt by
spreading the ideals of nationalism. The emergence of
stores of intellectuals on the scene stirred the
society with a new awakening. Ram Mohan Roy, a pioneer
in the field, felt the need of a religious concept
which would be amenable to social needs life-oriented,
that - and, with that end in view, founded Brahmo-samsaj.

contd.....
In the years following, this Brahmo-Samaj became a vehicle of the literati in Bengal for articulating themselves more effectively than ever before.

The first revolt against British subjugation took place in 1857, i.e. one hundred years after the battle of Plassey, more widely known as 'Bepoy Mutiny'. this was in fact, Colonial India's first struggle for freedom. Although this revolt failed owing to lack of able leadership and unity among the broad masses of people, it was able to generate people's yearning for achieving freedom. A section of the intelligentsia and the educated came out, albeit covertly, in support of this revolt in an attempt to rescue the people. All this was not in vain. The anger of the people, then reeling under the oppressive Colonial Rule, soon turned into hatred against foreign subjugation, slowly but inevitably paving the way to armed insurrection.

This is precisely in the above background that patriotic plays began to appear on the contemporary literary scene as a weapon for awakening the masses. Dinabandhu Mitra's social play 'Nihispan' published in 1860, further accentuated people's hatred of the British Raj. The people almost burst forth in anger as they witnessed through performance of this play the barbaric methods the British indigo-planters adopted contd....
to terrorise the peasantry into submission. At that
time there was hardly a writer left who did not wield
his pen for the cause of the country and the countrymen.

The following institutions were established to
educate people in the contemporary situation so that
they were able to draw their political sustenance from
the course of events past and present as a necessary
step towards achieving freedom from foreign
subjugation:

a) Sepoy Mutiny (1857)
b) Jatiya Gouraba Sabha (founded by
    Raj Narayan Basu)
c) Hindu Mela (1867-80).
d) Indian League (1875).
e) Indian Association (Sharnat Sabha) 1876.
f) Chatra Sabha (1877).
g) Indian National Congress (1884).
h) N Camapati Utsab (1890).
i) Sibaji Utsab (1893).
k) Amushilan Samiti (led by Pramatha Nath Mitra).
l) Sanga-Shanga Andolan (1905).

The period of 'Sanga-Shanga Andolan' which lasted
for some six years from 1312 (B.S) to 1318 (B.S) is better
known as 'Swadeshi Yug'. Likewise, the body of
literature produced during the period is also known as
(Swadeshi Sahitya).

contd.....
The main objective of founding 'Hindu-Mela' in 1867 was to rejuvenate the indigenous industry in the country. With this objective in view, many songs were composed during the period. At that time people in the country were dependent on imported commodities to meet their everyday needs. This unfortunate state of affairs is beautifully reflected in a limerick composed by Manmohan Basu:

"achhi suta paryanta ese tanga hato
dhakhi hathi taa ese poet
predipti jumlite khota sute yeto
kichhate lok ke ay swadhin".

(Needle, fibre and all that matters fall from the sky,
Matchsticks, too come in a ship
to lit our lamps,
Any you eat, sleep and move,
You are for ever chained in dependence).

The people began to realize that it is to redeem the country from its plight, they needed self potentiality. Even Rabindranath Tagore, then a young poet, voiced his strong condemnation of the imperialist machinations:

"britii bijey hariya hoshana
ye gay gak amara gahana
amara gahana haro gaa
seo go amara ye kajanschi
amara shrikha ar ekatan".

(Not the British imperialists rejoice over their victory; we are not going to lend our voice to it nor shall we play a second fiddle,
Come forward, all those who have not joined the fray, we shall play a different tune).

contd....
The periodicals of the time also played a remarkable role in the propagation of nationalism. In this direction, the journal "Tattabodhini" took a lead and was able to build up an image of nationalism deep down. Both "Bangadarshan" a Bengali monthly edited by Bankimchandra and "Saptahik Sadharani" edited by Akshay Chandra Sarkar, were devoted to the cause. First Sepoy Mutiny and then indigo mutiny - both directly affected social life in Bengal. On the other hand, these uprisings which had shaken the British Empire made the people conscious of their socio-economic and political rights. Between 1870 and 1880 this national awakening was further emboldened, and the year 1872 specially remarkable for more than one reason : First, the periodical "Bangadarshan" was born; second, National Theatre was established. The latter's contribution to the propagation of nationalist ideals was immense.

The resurgence of nationalism in Bengal was the result of fusion between the Eastern wisdom and Western civilisation. Rampant nepotism practised by the British imperialists gave rise to a feeling of deprivation among the educated Bengalees and that was the core point around which they felt the need to unite. Towards the end of nineteenth century a section contd...
of the non-educated youths was only too willing to convert to the apparently attractive ideas of the west and, in course of time emerged out as no better than mobs. It was, again, this section of the youth, who in the early twentieth century, became disillusioned of all that they had stood for uncritically till the other day, and for first time, accepted only those precepts of the West which appeared to them to have some relevance to the national context. In fact, this self-reassessment inspired them in the later years to dedicate themselves to the service of the country and the countrymen.

The more the frontier nationalist awakening spread, the more ruthless became the British rule. As a first step towards suppressing this nationalist awakening the British rulers resorted to fomenting communal discussion among the broad masses of the people. As a logical conclusion of this insidious method came in 1905, the partition of Bengal engineered by Lord Carson. People reacted sharply to this diabolical conspiracy and in 1905 itself, people's reaction culminated into revolt against the British rule, which first began to spread from one corner to another. The movement that was born out of self-powers can, in all fairness, be called the first contd...
nationalist movement in the erstwhile undivided India. As a mark of protest against the partition of Bengal as also as a show of solidarity among the people, a festival called "Sahibbandhan" (bound by mutual love) was observed and all irrespective of caste and creed participated in this festival. Rabindranath Tagore, in commemoration of the event, composed a rousing song:

"বাংলার মাটি হুক বাংলার জল
বাংলার হোয়া বাংলার ফল
পুন্য হুক পুন্য হুক হে কানাহান"

(This soil and waters of Bengal, the air that blows in Bengal, the crops that grew in Bengal, be glory to you, Oh Lord!)

The literary trend at that time took on a new form and left an unmistakable mark of traditionalism, reflecting a struggleward attitude of the literature. The literature produced during the period preceding 'Swadeshi' movement, no doubt bears testimony to the patriotic approach of the writers. Nevertheless, a basic difference - of form and content - blemish between the two trends is clearly discernible. The latter trend played a glorious role in upholding the nationalist awakening that grew out of the nationalist movement.

Unlike other branches of literature, such as short story and novel, the chronicle plays had the advantage of direct communication with the masses...
because of their being an audio-visual medium for
rousing the people with a sense of history. It is
precisely for this reason that the plays written during
the period of 'Swadeshi' movement were based on themes
drawn straight from pages of history. The playwrights
of the time gave up pursuit of mythology and found it
more worthwhile to devote to history. Not that no
chronicle play had been written before - Michiel
Madhumudan Dutta's 'Krishnakumari' (1861), Jyotirindranath
Tagore's "Parabikram" (1874), 'Sarejini' (1878) and
'Ashramati' (1879) belong to the category. Notwithstanding
this, the chronicle plays written in early twentieth
century were more telling from the point of view of
historicity and skillful delineation of backdrop than
those written in the late nineteenth century. The main
objective of the chronicle plays written on
contemporary situation was to rouse the masses with a
nationalist fervour.

Having long been under the ruthless suppression
of British rule, the anger of the countrymen was
boiling up. The role that the British rulers played
was that of exploiters and the reaction of the people
to all this was faithfully reflected in contemporary
art and literature. Particularly the heroic exploits
of the earlier generations attracted the contemporary
playwrights. Eminent playwrights like Girishchandra
contd.....
Ghesh, Kabiodeprasad Mitabendr, Dwijendralal Roy etc. were the forerunners in the field. India which had given birth to a breed of innumerable heroes in its long Indian history had always been the worshipper of heroism. The playwrights of the time portrayed the characters of great historical figures and thus a new trend was set. These plays were essentially propagandish in approach so that these plays could inspire the countrymen to emulate the great historical figures in their efforts to free the country from foreign rule. The effect was far-reaching. The great sacrifice of Pratap Singha, the patriotic deeds of Pratapaditya - all this had gone a long way in inspiring the people for the cause of the country. The Bengalee playwrights were not content with portraying the great historical figures alone; they did also portray glorious characters straight from the history of India. Portrayal of characters of Rajput heroes and depiction of heroic episodes of the Marhattas with an emphasis on unity of the people, irrespective of caste and creed, were quite common with them. In the play 'Siraj-O-douilla' the author Girishchandra set a glorious example of Hindu-Muslim unity. The people who had learnt to be respectful to past glories from reading the heroic exploits of the historical characters or by witnessing the chronicle plays on....
stage, experienced a revolutionary change of attitude to life.

As carried away they were by an indomitable urge for sacrifice, the countrymen soon got involved in a whirl of activity. Writers in Bengal too for their part, became receptive to this new awakening and added a new chapter to the history of Bengali literature, particularly to that of Bengali drama. Most notable of them were Girishchandra (1844-1911), Khirodeprasad (1863-1927) and Dwijendra Lal (1863-1913). The historical role the Bengali plays played, in defiance of the all-pervasive devotional cult that dominated the literary scene, stands out as eminently distinct from the contemporary classical novels. While this is generally true of the category to which the above mentioned plays belong, it has also to be admitted at the same time that not all of them had the desired literary merit. However, lofty the writers' efforts, over-exuberance as well as unbridled emotions killed the possibility of what their works could have been a piece of literature.

During the period prior to the existence of playhouse in Bengal, the late Jyotirindranath Tagore was the first ever playwright to have penned

contd....
patriotic plays. His plays, "Parubikran", "Ashramatí" etc., were staged with much fervour. One of the songs composed by him reads as follows:

"Jauí jauí citá dwígun dwígun
mile x sab bhárat santán,
achtán mana prán gáe bhárat yeugán
bhárat-bhámi'r tulya eíke hon ethán
hon advi hínádi sarán".

(Let thousands of pure be aflate, who cares?
Unite! sons of mother India, soul to soul,
mind to mind, and sing a praise of her. Is there a country equal to India, a mountain
as big as the Himalayas?)

This song used to be sung by all and sundry
in every nook and corner of Bengal. The Bengalee
playwrights set themselves to the task of bringing
into focus, from pages of history, the heroic
elements and their exploits. Those who dedicated
themselves to the herculean task of freeing the
country from the bondage of foreign rule, used to
draw their lessons from the sacrifices made by their
forerunners. Girishchandra discovered in Siraj-G-doulia
the national hero he was looking for as a pivotal
character for one of his plays in order that both the
glory and ignominy of the past could be unfolded. In
selecting Siraj-G-doulia as a national hero
Girishchandra was able to provide a new dimension to
contd....
his chosen theme. What is more important in this context is that Girishchandra felt the need of arousing people against communalism and hence he selected Siraj-O-doulla as a national hero in preference to Pratap Singh, Pratapaditya and other characters of no mean historical significance. He sang:

"Hanger santan hindu musalman
Balbar sadhaba kalyan
Toon sababar yake hastadhargan
Sahe hay phiringi mahar".

(Oh Hindus & Muslims of Bengal, do good to the country hand to hand. You belong to a heritage which had never served alien rulers).

Or

"Bidesi phiringi hubho sahe apar
Swasthapar sake matra moya achikar."

(The aliens can never be of your own. It is the profession of the self-seekers to rob others of their freedom).

That Siraj-O-doulla loved the country heart and soul is evident in the above stanza.

In the play, "Pratapaditya" by Khirdevrscad, we see Pratapaditya hoy waging a death-defying struggle, along with the great Bengalis heroes, Barhor and sixty two thousand Bengalis spearmen, in the battlefield of Jecore, against the heinous aggression by the Mughals.

In the field of Bengali drama Girishchandra was the first playwright to have written plays based on historical facts. While his contemporary, contd....
Dwijendralal, also a major playwright, based his plays mainly on Mughal and Rajput chronicles. The social upheavals that had shaken the country through ages formed the keynote of all of Dwijendralal's popular chronicle plays. A wave of social awakening that swept Bengal as an offshoot of 'Swadeshi' movement was also reflected in his plays in a historical perspective. His chronicle plays were a departure from the run of the mill in that these portrayed contemporary life in relation to the past. In 'Pratap Singh', 'Nobar Patan' and other plays of the genre, the glorious sagas of the Rajput heroes were delineated in remarkably lucid prose.

That even cowardly and stigmatic personalities could transform into great patriots under face of circumstances was shown in the portrayal of the character, 'Sagar Singh', in the play 'Nobar Patan' (The fall of Howrah). The gospel of patriotism as conveyed in this play was beautifully sung in the following ballad:

"hiscer sek karis bhati
abhar toma mane ba
giyche desh dukha mai abar
toma mane ba, parer pore hema e rosh
nijeri yadi satra hoes?
toder o ye nijeri des
abhar toma mane ba".

contd.....
(What are you bemoaning for, my countryman?
Rise again as worthy sons of mother India,
Do not lament over the loss of our freedom,
Rise again as worthy humans.
Why blame it all on others when you are
enemies to your own cause? It is you who
are to blame. So redeem yourselves as
worthy sons of the country).

In the play ‘Chandragupta’, apart from
Chandragupta himself, there is also the presence of
another notable character, Chanakya. This enlaced,
landy Brahmin is promise-bound to revive the power
of Brahmanism on earth. In the dialogues that he
spouts in this play bespeaks of his unflinching
devotion to the country:

“ai prathamātē prajvalita prabhātā maha
srotamā bhavabhi bhūmatēnas parihiṃte
ek sūmānāśāri, pramūnjā, saṃgītā
maḥānā, bāhunmējā jamkHz, jaladhi hate
jaladhi paryanta kistrīte ek maḥāśāmya,
śo mānāyam pratisthātā tān, ar tār
pradhānta ev dasidra brahmaṇa”.

(This is not what we are striving for - a land which
is aflame, where flows nothing but blood, and in
heading for a disaster. But, instead, we are
striving for is a great empire, as bright as flowers,
full of riches and wealth, where music reverberates
in the air, with the divine smile of a mother
casting its loving care all over a great empire
spread over from one corner to another. And it is
you, and you alone. (Chandragupta), on whom rests
the responsibility of building that edifice, of
which this poor Brahmin will become a priestly
counselor.) – (Chandragupta, Act-I, Scene-IV).

Studied by will-power, the personality of this Brahmin
is worth-mentioning. The lower caste mother, Mara, as
contd....
portrayed in this play, appears before us as the
embodiment of the humanity, degraded and humiliating.

Durgadas, in the play 'Durgadas' appears before us as one pre-eminently different from others when judged by the heroism he displayed and the sacrifices he made, and the uncommon self-respect he commanded. Dwijendralal delineated the Rajput episodes in such a manner that these turned out to be a saga of great heroism of the freedom-loving warm people living under alien rule. His narration of the historical episodes acquired a special dimension by the touch of his own patriotic self.

The revolt of the Satnam Community against the Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb, came in handy for Girishchandra as a theme to write his play, 'Satnam'. The Satnam Community's struggle for freedom, their hopes and aspirations as also their desperation, all this is brilliantly manifest in this play.

Kahireswarasad's 'Chandbibi' is a full length chronicle play, based on the character of Chandbibi, the daughter of the Sultan of Ahmednagar. This play portrays exemplary heroism and courage of Indian women.

Sashin Sengupta and others in the field further enriched the trend by their efforts to collect...
material from pages of history and to write
chronicle plays with a patriotic message. Both
'Galvikh Pataka' and 'Simaj-G-doullia' by Sachin
Sengupta are the most outstanding documents of
patriotic chronicle plays.

The trend that was set in Bengal, through
years of devotion, of writing patriotic chronicle
plays, influenced the Assam literary scene also.
Soon the Assamese writers were found to have turned
their attention to writing chronicle plays, with the
Bengali chronicle plays in mind to serve as a model.
It may be noted in this connection that the people
in Assam were stirred by the striving for achieving
freedom long before the Assamese playwrights took
to writing chronicle plays. People in Assam were
highly roused by the patriotic deeds of Maniram
Dwara, the great Assamese hero who sacrificed his
life at the height of Sepoy Mutiny. Piyali Phukan
and others, through their unrest was shortlived and
almost dissipated with the end of Sepoy Mutiny.
Unfortunately, these great events had hardly
influenced the literature produced at that time or
sometime thereafter. One has to trace the reason
for this to the fact that until before 1873 the
Assamese language was at the formative stage and
contd.....
Bengali was the medium of instruction in the educational institutions in Assam. The Assamese language began to develop into a distinguishably original and main through indefatigable efforts of Amarendra Dikship Sinha and others and partly through that of the Christian Missionaries who found it more expedient to use Assamese as the medium of their proselytisation campaign.

The period between 1873 and 1889 was a turning point in the history of Assamese literature. During the period a distinguished group of writers surfaced with the emergence of a number of periodicals on the literary scene. "Assam Samikhi" (1871-83), Hemchandra Sarma's "Assam News" (1882-85), Gobardhan Sarma's "Assam Sandha" (1885-86) were among the most notable periodicals. The avowed objective of these journals, apart from developing Assamese as a language, was to uphold its originality.

A group of young Assamese students studying in Calcutta were highly impressed by English education and culture. This apart, the then Calcutta's cultural milieu a by-product of the nineteenth century renaissance, also made a lasting impression on the young Assamese minds and inspired into them a genuine concern for the development of contd....
Assamese language and also ideals of nationalism. When widespread activity arising out of 'Sundeshi' movement had stirred Bengal (1888), Lakhminath Bisarne and his compatriots formed a society intent on exploring possibilities for the development of Assamese language. As a matter of fact, the onward march of what has today come to be recognised as modern Assamese literature had begun since then.

The ideals set during the period known as "Jomaki" in the history of Assamese literature had dominated the Assamese literary scene till the fourth decade of this century, though the body of literature produced over the period is not distinguishable by any qualitative change. A qualitative change came about only in the third decade of this century, and left its mark particularly on the Assamese plays and dramatics. The plays produced during the decade can be unmistakably identified with Western as well as Bengali plays. Inspired by non-co-operation movement that spread throughout the country at that time, the Assamese playwrights turned to writing patriotic plays based on historical episodes.

The period that began with Lakhminath
Basharma is specially notable in so far as the Assamese literature is concerned. His own stature as a literary personality, on one hand, and his contact with the distinguished Tagore family of Calcutta, on the other, bolstered his efforts to go ahead with his welfare programmes for the country. Great was his love for the country. The poem, quoted below, bespeaks the intrepidity with which he tried to serve the cause of nationalism:

"hera amar jana bhumi
hera amar jana bhumi
one des hate napea hera tami
hera amar jana bhumi".

(Oh this land of my birth,
Oh this land of my birth,
There is not a country
as great as ours,
Oh this land of my birth).

There is not a branch of literature left which does not bear the stamp of his genius. The chronicle plays penned by him bristle with patriotism and what is no less important, also reflects the faithfulness with which he had treated history.

It was not patriotism alone that the Assamese chronicle plays aimed at rousing; enrichment of the Assamese literature as a whole was also one of the tasks they sought to accomplish thereby. That the Assamese language would find a niche for itself in contd....
the world of Indian literature was also one of their main concerns. That the Assamese language took a relatively long time to burgeon into a self-contained literature was due to the fact that it had long been under the suppressive domination of the foreign rulers. With the founding of the journal "Jonaki" the Assamese language and literature found an outlet to prosper. Besides, "Jonaki", in 1896, "Assam Banti", another journal edited by Kamalachanta Bhattacharya and Padmanath Gohainbarua, started campaign for an allround development of Assam. Some of the demands "Assam Banti" listed as part of this campaign were:

1) Establishment of colleges in Assam.
2) Introduction of Assamese in educational institutions, and
3) Introduction of Assamese literature at University level.

The ideal of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, the two most illustrious figures of that time, were also propagated through this journal. It also played a distinguished role in furthering the causes of nationalism. This journal had this to say when it was decided to hold the Indian National Congress at Pundu in 1936:

"A eta asamét spárthé ara akhànàniyà ghàtaná hába. òne ghàtanáy phalât eibhà asambhàsîr háy nák raba, aahay yàba. ethe sodu asambhàsî bhàrat sàntàne ekà patiyâhè yùsèyà lâhà contd.....
This is going to be an epoch-making unprecedented event in the history of Assam. Will the Assamese people rise to the occasion or lag behind? It is time the Assamese people rose as one with the rest of the countrymen and played their part in this great national activity. No matter whether or not they will be able to earn plaudits out of this great activity; what really matters is that they must see to it that their self-respect is maintained at all costs. It is the duty of all and sundry to help make this a great success with whatever resources they have got at their command.

The trend set off by both the Assamese and Bengali chronicle plays which had for a long time past encouraged generations into patriotism made its presence mostly felt in the context of India's struggle for freedom. With the independence of the country, the popularity of these evocative plays has been on the wane. The plays of this genre which, in the early twentieth century, occupied a place of honour in literature, lost much of their charm in the middle of the century.

The Assamese playwrights, while writing chronicle plays, gave primacy to regional history and this is no doubt highly commendable. The plays written by Padmanath Gohain Barua and Lakshminath Barua are based on the heroic exploits of the contd.....
great Assamese patriots. Lachit Barphukan and Gadadhar Singha and the anecdote of Sati Jaymoti. These plays also were intended to serve the cause of nationalism.

The Assamese drama started its onward march through writing of chronicle plays with a nationalist fervour. No less than twelve distinguished playwrights appeared on the scene all about the same time. Most notable of them are Padmanath Gohain Barua, Lakshminath Bhasbarua and Atul Chandra Hasarika. They had enriched the Assamese literature with the power of their pen.

Padmanath Gohain Barua had unfolded the glorious chapter of the history of Assam in his plays "Joymati", "Gadadhar", "Lachit-Barphukan" etc. In Joymati we find, on one hand, her exemplary devotion to her husband and, on the other, her love for the country. The sacrifices she had made for the good of her husband as well as for the cause of the country are rare in history. Lachit Barphukan was a great patriot. Lachit waged a death-defying struggle against the Mughal invaders and saved the freedom of his motherland. He did not hesitate even to kill his own maternal uncle who showed utter carelessness in the discharge of his duties. "Desa khe momai dhar mahay" (My maternal uncle is not above the country) - this famous statement proves his unflinching
devotion to the country. An anthem in the play, which is in praise of the motherland, reads as under:

"Asam desar asam namar
pule jagat prasarn
sattr akrama karinle daman
megal parile alan
yos gea he jatiya gan ".

(The world has now come to know that there exists a land called, Assam. We have sowed down the might of the Maghals, the invaders. Let us sing victory to our motherland).

These plays acquired great significance in the context of the then 'Swadeshi' movement. The Assamese playwrights of the time exercised profound insight in selecting historical characters. Although, to attach primacy to local history was their forte, the Assamese playwrights had not altogether ignored the history of other regions and in some cases, had left their marks on writing plays based on outstanding themes. The Assamese playwrights had been more faithful to history, they, more often than not, had failed to achieve the desired literary success. Assamese chronicle plays lack ingenuity in the sense that these were mostly influenced by Bengali plays. An example - Atul Chandra Hazarika, while writing "Chatrapati Shibaji", allowed himself to be influenced by the distinguished novelist R.C.Dutt's "Maharashtra Jivan Prabhat" as also Sachindranath contd....
Sengupta's "Gairik Pataka". Jnanadan Thakur borrowed freely from D.L.Koy's "Chandragupta" to write "Chanakya". Pasiruddin Ahmed's "Ulemaar" and "Sindhu Bijay" are also not free from the influence of Bengali plays.

The characteristics of the Assamese plays are ingrained in the unstained praise of motherland and of the local heroes. The Assamese playwrights had displayed a zest flair for writing evocative dialogues with a nationalistic overtone. Atul Chandra, while writing on 'Sivaji', used dialogues intended to invoke the spirit of Assamese nationalism. In this play we hear 'Yoshibanta Singh' resurrecting the heroic exploits of the Assamese patriots:

"ki sumilo? punjab, rajasthan adi hindusthannar hone thite yi swadhina nai, sei swadhina ahamantak mani etiyoe sobha bari ache giridurga rani asan desar sirat. sonar asan bhumi i iyar pari rajput yasobantasimar sata - sakasra praman grahan kara."

(Chhatrapati Sivaji, Act-IV, Scene-1).

(Listen, the freedom that the people in Punjab, Rajasthan and other parts of Hindustan have been robbed of, is reigning supreme in Assam, the land of exquisite mountains and valleys in the Northeast. On Assam, golden Assam! 1, Yoshibanta Singh, a humble Rajput, salute thee a thousand times, no matter how far away I am from you). contd....
As the Assamese chronicle playwrights had proved themselves alive to the age in which they lived by writing patriotic chronicle plays, so also they did try to write, leave a stamp of ingenuity on their free from the influence of Bengali plays. But, in most cases, they could not achieve what they aimed at.

The Assamese chronicle plays became as popular as the Bengali chronicle plays. The popularity of these plays can well be attributed to the state of subjugation in which the countrymen lived. Adapted to stage, the plays of this genre served the countrymen as they came to realise their present plight in relation to the glorious past. With the spread of education followed by a cultural revival in the country, the chronicle plays found wider pastures to proliferate.