

A HISTORICAL PROSPECTIVE OF ASSAMESE SOCIETY, CULTURE AND LITERATURE

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Abstract

A well-known English proverb states that "Rome was not built in a day." Similarly, a society's culture can never evolve in a single day. Any culture takes hundreds and hundreds of years to establish it. However, pinpointing the exact date when a culture evolved is extremely difficult. The word 'culture' in English is derived from the Latin word 'Culture' (the root word being 'cult'). 1 Trying to understand culture is the same as trying to understand people. When delving into the historical evolution of Assamese culture, it is important to remember that the rich culture of Assam is made up of various stages and a mash-up of many different elements.

People are central to culture. "Culture is a total system of life that includes all the mental, social, and physical means that make life run its course," writes Malinowski. 2 To understand Assamese culture, it is necessary to first understand how Assam became home to a large population of various ethnic groups. Assam has developed a composite culture as a result of the assimilation and amalgamation of the cultures of the state's various ethnic groups.

The Negritos were the first inhabitants of Assam's hills during the prehistoric period. The Australoids were the next racial group to arrive in Assam. According to some historians, different racial elements first migrated to Assam as early as 3000 BC. During the time of the Ramayana and the Vedas, Mahabharata Assam was known as Kamrupa, and its capital was Pragjyotispur. According to the Mahabharata, Bhaga Datt, the then-king of Pragjyotispur, participated actively in the battle of Kurushetra. The Indian epic Mahabharata was thought to have been written prior to the arrival of Christ. In fact, different racial groups first arrived in Assam thousands of years before the reign of the famous king Bhaga Datt. According to local legend, the first rulers of Assam belonged to the Danava Dynasty, with King Mihiranga Danava being the first of the kings. Before the arrival of the Ahoms, some notable rulers of the land included King Narakasura, King Bhaga Datta, King Bhaskaravarman, and others.

One of the primary reasons for the migration of various racial elements into Assam from various parts of India is Perhaps the world was trade and commerce. There was an international route through Assam thousands of years before Christ. This state is known as the "Sangri-la of North-Eastern India" because of its scenic beauty. Assam has always been known for its fertile plains suitable for harvesting, as well as its vast flora and fauna, hills, plains, and evergreen forests. Assam was well-known for its abundance of 'gold' and 'lac.' As a result of these two valuable materials, Assam became a commercial hotspot.

Keyword: Assamese, Society, Culture, Literature, Lakshminath Bezbarua, Orunodoi, Junaki, and other terms.

Introduction

Assam is unique in that it is a melting pot of various ethnic, religious, and linguistic communities. The result is the development of a great Assamese culture. A look back at Assam's history reveals that the state has seen the intermixing of three racial elements: Australoids, Mongoloids, and Caucasoids. Despite having disparate socio-cultural heritages and speaking different languages, there is a perfect blending of culture and heritage of the various ethnic groups. As a result, Assam has been endowed with a truly diverse culture.

Assam is located in the centre of the land route that connects eastern Kamboj to western Kashgar and northern China to southern Ceylon. Indeed, Assam, particularly the Brahmaputra valley, served as a sort of connecting road between India and Southeast Asia. Various groups arrived in Assam from various directions. Starting from the west from the north and east came the Caucasians and the Mongoloids. Austro-Asians, Mongoloids,

Negritos, Dravidians, Alpines, Indo-Mongoloids, Tibeto-Burmese, and Aryans arrived in Assam in waves. The unique fusion of all of these groups resulted in the formation of a new composite culture known as Assamese. Assam is divided into three geographical areas: the Brahmaputra Valley, the Barak Valley, and the hilly area formed by the Karbi-Anglong and North Cachar hills. The Brahmaputra Valley is divided into three zones: Upper, Middle, and Lower.³

The earliest inhabitants of Assam were most likely of Austric ancestry. They were dubbed "proto-Australoid." They were given this name because it is believed that they migrated from Australia other Pacific Ocean islands to the Asian mainland. The Khasis and Jaintias are descended from the proto-Australoids of Ancient Assam. The pre-Dravidians and Veddids were other names for the proto-Australoids.

The Mongoloids who migrated to Assam are thought to have originated in eastern Eurasia and then spread throughout Asia. The Bodos, Kacharis, Deoris, Rabhas, Sonowal Kacharis, Tiwas, Misings, Karbis, Dimasas, Meches, Garos, and other Mongoloid peoples are currently classified as "Scheduled Tribes" by the Indian Constitution. The Ahoms arrived in Assam as a result of a significant wave of Mongoloid migration. In the early 13th century, the Ahoms arrived from Upper Burma by crossing the Patkai ranges. They belong to the Thai or Shan ethnic group. Later, the Ahoms were joined by others. Shan ethnic groups include the Khamti, Tai Phake, Aiton, Turung, and Khamyang.

India's Mongoloids are known as Indo-Mongoloids. The Indo-Mongoloids of Assam speak a variety of Sino-Indian languages. The Sino-Indian language family is divided into two branches: Tibeto-Burman and Siamese-Chinese. The Tibeto-Burman branch is divided further into Assam-Burma and North Assam. The Assam-Burma division is said to include the Bodos, Rabhas, Tiwas, Meches, Dimasas, and others, while the North-Assam division includes the Misings. Linguistically, the Ahoms, Tai Phakes, Khamyangs, and so on are Thais, who are a sub-branch of the Siamese-Chinese branch.

The Tibeto-Burman group's original homeland was located in the upper reaches of the Yangtze River North-western China's Kiang and Huang Ho. They later relocated to the region of north-east Myanmar. They were divided into two groups at that point. One group travelled all the way to South East Asia. Some, on the other hand, travelled west and settled in north-east India. The second group travelled west along the Himalayan foothills, eventually arriving in Bhutan, Tibet, and Nepal. Some then moved south and entered Assam through the north-eastern passes. They settled in various regions of Assam and are thought to be the ancestors of Assamese tribes such as the Bodos, Kacharis, Rabhas, Tiwas, Dimasas, and others.

Assam's Bodo or Kachari tribe is dispersed throughout the state. These people were previously known as Bodo Kachari, but they are now simply known as Bodo. According to R.M.Nath, this country was known as Bod (homeland).⁴ Originally known as the Boddoficha or Boddoficha (Ficha-ficha-children), the inhabitants of this country were later known as the Boddoficha or Bodo. The Bodos are a significant component of the Assamese population, and they are currently concentrated primarily in the Kokrajhar district, the north belt of the undivided district of Kamrup, and Darrang. The Bodos are primarily farmers. They are also bamboo and cane craft experts.

The Dimasa Kacharis are mostly concentrated in the district of North Cachar Hill. They speak 'Dimasa-Kachari,' a Bengali-scripted language. The Sonowal Kacharis live in the districts of Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Dhemaji, Sibsagar, and Jorhat. It is thought that they were tasked with collecting gold particles by The Ahom rulers sifted the sands of the Subansiri. "It is said that during the reign of the Ahom kings, they used to make gold (son) ornaments, etc., and were known as Sonowal."⁵

The Tiwas are in fact Mongoloid Asians. They are linguistically and socially part of the Bodo group. The Tiwas, also known as Lalungs, are primarily found in the districts of Nagaon and Morigaon. Tiwas can also be found in Karbi Anglong district, the south-east part of Kamrup, and the eastern part of North Lakhimpur. Hill Tiwas or Hill Lalungs is another name for a section of the trail.

According to Sipra Sen, the Deoris are "one of the four Chutiya divisions, namely Hindu Chutiya, Ahom Chutiya, Borahi, and Deori."

⁶ Originally, the Deoris lived on the banks of the Subansiri River Arunachal Pradesh. This small ethnic group can currently be found in the districts of Lakhimpur, Tinsukia, Sivasagar, and Jorhat. The Deoris are divided into three groups: Dibangia, Borgonya, and Tengapani. The Deoris are the Mongoloid people are known for being courageous, tradition-loving, and cultured people with deep agricultural roots. They generally live in joint families and value peace and harmony.

The Karbis are Assam's largest ST (Hills) community. The Karbis were originally from Western China and migrated to Assam from Central Asia. Non-Karbis refer to them as Mikirs, but in their own language, they are known as Arleng (the Man). Linguistically, the Karbis are Tibeto-Burman group, as well as to the Mongoloid group racially. They are mostly found in the Karbi Anglong district (formerly called the Mikir Hills district). Some of them also live in the neighbouring areas of the North Cachar Hills. They live in small villages with one village head and three subdivisions: Ronghong, Chindong, and Amri.

The Mechs are thought to be a subspecies of the Kachari. They are primarily concentrated in the Dhuburi district's Mechpara area, the Dibrugarh district's Khowang area, and the Karbi Anglong district's Parakhowa area. Because of the rapidly changing culture, they prefer to introduce themselves as Kachari. In fact, the Mechs of Dibrugarh district have adopted Assamese as their mother tongue. The Rabhas are a tribe from the plains. They are dispersed throughout the unincorporated districts of Goalpara, Kamrup, and Darrang. According to B.M.Das, the Rabhas are divided into several sub-divisions, the main three of which are the Pati, Rangdani, and Maitori. 7 The Pati Rabhas speak Assamese in the Kamrupi dialect, whereas the Rangdani speak Rangdani Rabha.

The Misings, formerly known as the Miris, are primarily concentrated in the districts of Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, and Jorhat. Mi is man in their language, and shing is white/good. So Mishing is an abbreviation for "good man." 8 It is believed that they once lived in Arunachal Pradesh and had blood relations with the Padam-Minyong. The vast majority of Misings have kept their language, but a small minority has not they abandoned their native tongue and now speak an Assamese dialect.

It is impossible to discuss Assam without mentioning the Ahoms. The Ahoms are said to be descended from a group of Shans from the 'Mau' tribe, also known as Myanmarese in the Upper Irrawaddy. They crossed the Patkai range around 1228 AD and entered the Brahmaputra valley early in the thirteenth century with their own religion, culture, and political system. "They discovered the valley to be fertile and beautiful, so they named it Mong-Dun-Shun-Kham (now Upper Assam), which means a country full of golden gardens, that is, full of golden paddy fields." 9 They made the valley their home and established an administrative system that lasted for about 600 years, from 1228 AD to 1819 AD, until the British arrived Assam's conquest. The Ahoms' first ruler was King Sukapha, and it was under his capable leadership that they gradually extended their territories down the riverbanks.

Following Sukapha's death, many Ahom kings ruled over Assam, but Suhungmung's reign is regarded as one of the most notable in their six hundred years of glorious rule. In 1671, the Ahoms and the Mughals fought a fierce battle known as the 'Battle of Saraighat,' led by the vibrant Lachit Borphukan, in which the Mughals were humiliated. The British were the ones who finally brought their glorious rule to an end.

The Ahoms have their own language, religion, culture, customs, and traditions that give them their distinct identity. The Ahom rulers tolerated all religions, including Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and tribal cults. There was no religious persecution or religious riots between the various communities of the time during the reign of the Ahoms. Originally, the Ahoms spoke Tibeto-Burman languages, but they gradually abandoned them in favour of Assamese as their own.

Culture of Assam

It has been observed that Assam has biologically composite people, which have resulted in a composite culture. Three distinct cultural traits can be found among Assamese people. The Vedic or Hindu culture, the Tibeto-Burman or Tribal culture, and the Tai or Ahom culture are the three.

The Assamese people's cultural background dates back nearly 2000 years, when the first cultural assimilation occurred, with Austro-Asian and Tibeto-Burman as the major components. Assam is home to numerous tribes, each with its own set of traditions, culture, dress, and way of life. Most tribes have their own languages, but Assamese is the state's primary language. As a result, Assamese culture is traditionally hybrid. The people of Assam are a mingling of various racial stocks; including Mongoloid, Indo-Burmese, Indo-Iranian, and Aryan are the four major ethnic groups. The Assamese culture is a rich and exotic tapestry of all these races that evolved over time through assimilation.

A variety of festivals are celebrated in Assam by the various races and groups of people who live there. Assam's rich cultural heritage has resulted from the incorporation of various customs, beliefs, traditions, rituals, and

customs. Bihu, Assam's main festival is celebrated three times a year as Bhogali Bihu, Rangali/Bohag Bihu, and Kangali Bihu. The ethnic tribes observe Bohag Bihu in their own unique way. The Bodos celebrate Bihu as Baisagu, the Rabhas as Baikhu or Khokchi, the Tiwas as Bisu, and the Deoris as Bohagiyo Bihu.

The most colourful festival celebrated by the Bodo Kacharis is Baisagu. It is observed as a spring festival. The Baisagu dance is associated with this festival, and anyone, regardless of age or gender, is welcome to participate. Similarly, the Deoris' Bohagiyo Bihu is a spring festival that is accompanied by the colourful Deodhani dance. Other festivals observed by Assamese ethnic tribes include Me-Dam-Me-Phi, Ali-Aye-Ligang, Kherai, Rongker, Hachang, and Langkhun. The festivals are notable for their connection to nature and for encouraging peace and harmony among the various communities.

Ali-Aye-Ligang is the Mising tribe's agrarian spring festival. The first Wednesday of the month Gunmur Polo (February-March) marks the start of this five-day festival. The primary The Gumrag dance, performed by young boys and girls with great passion, is the festival's main attraction. The Karbis celebrate Rongker as a spring festival at the start of the New Year. The Tiwas celebrate the Langkhun, which is a form of bamboo worship. The Tai-Ahom community celebrates Me-Dam-Me-Phi, which is a death rite. This is a celebration in which the Ahom community honours their ancestors and is held annually on January 31st.

The numerous festivals celebrated by various ethno-cultural groups are marked by a spirit of accommodation and togetherness. These festivals are vibrant, passionate, and mesmerising, and they reflect the true spirit and tradition of the Assamese people.

Assam has had a predominantly rural base and culture since ancient times. Even back in the days of There were very few towns in Assam during the reigns of Bhaskarvarma and other famous rulers. Villages occupied nearly ninety percent of the land area. Furthermore, farming and agriculture employed eighty percent of the population. As a result, it would not be incorrect to say that Assamese culture was founded on agriculture.

The Austro-Asian people had influenced the Dravids in other parts of India. However, in Assam, the Austro-Asian people were influenced by the Tibeto-Burmese, Alpine, and Aryans. Assam, on the other hand, remained primarily a Tibeto-Burmese land. All of these groups primarily settled along the river's banks. Slowly, an Assamese culture developed that was heavily influenced by the Tibeto-Burmese and Bodo cultures. The Deodhanis existed prior to the arrival of the matriarchal Tibeto-Burmese society where the church's official priests. With the spread of Aryan religion, the Deodhanis were forced to leave the temple grounds. Cultivation was Eri and Muga-primary Pat's occupation.

Around 1000 BC, the Aryans arrived in Assam. They were primarily farmers. They brought with them the process of weaving with cotton thread, and it is possible that a mixed culture began to emerge prior to the 1st and 2nd centuries BC.

Assam's historical or ancient age began in the first and second centuries BC. The Tibeto-Burmese influence grew during this period. Tibeto-Burmese culture was extremely rich. Unable to adapt to the superior Tibeto-Burmese culture, the Austro-Asian people moved to the hilly areas.

Bhaskaravarman's Nidhanpur copper slate, as well as later rulers' copper slates, demonstrated that they were the first to do so the practise of primarily animal and, on rare occasions, human sacrifice. The Tibeto-Burmese 'Tameshwari Mandir' and the Austro-Asian 'Kamakhya Mandir' were then fully converted into Hindu places of worship. Aside from religion, they emphasised various forms of art. They were also big supporters of literary works like hymns and 'Saijya-Geet,' Bodo Chanti Das' 'Sri Krishna Kirtan,' Ramai Pandit's 'Hunya-Puran,' and so on.

Another feature of this period was the use of various musical instruments in temples, which gave rise to the song and dance tradition. Assam's rich cultural foundation was first established during this period.

Due to the decline in power of the major ruling parties in the 11th and 12th centuries AD, smaller ruling parties emerged. Groups grew powerful and formed their own individual states. The central feature of this era was the translation of books such as 'Pralhad-Charit,' 'Ramayana,' and 'Mahabharata' into Assamese from various languages. Madhab Kandali translated Valmiki's 'Ramayana,' while Hem Saraswati's 'Pralhad-Charit' and Rudra Kandali's 'Satyaki Pravesh' were also important translations of the time.

Another significant feature of this epoch is the migration of Mongoloids into Assam. They ruled Assam for 600 years and left an indelible mark on the state's history. Assamese people are fundamentally liberal, and one notable example is the 'assamisation' of the Ahoms. Between 1215 and 1230 AD, the Shan prince Sukapha, the founder of the Ahom kingdom, established a strong foothold in Assam as well as 1228 AD. The Ahom rulers

intermarried and intermixed, creating a new blood that could be called Assamese. The Mughals besieged Assam several times beginning in the 13th century. As a result, Islamic culture began to infiltrate Assam.

Approximately one-quarter of the Assamese population is Muslim. Assam's Muslim population is broadly divided into three groups: Syad, Garia (Sheikh), and Maria. According to B.M.Das, Muslims first arrived in Assam in the early thirteenth century, when Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji, a Muslim general of Qutubuddin, led a Turkish army into the region. 10 Later in the seventeenth century, Hazarat Shah Milan, also known as Azan Fakir, a Muslim saint, visited Assam. He was a Syad who advocated for a more stable Islam in Assam. The Syads claim to be the highest social status, followed by the Sheikhs, and then the Arabs because of the Marias Azan Fakir arrived in Assam between 1635 and 1636, during the reign of Ahom king Pratap Singha. He was given the name Azan Fakir because he used to call people to Namaz (prayers). Mahapurusha Sankardeva's efforts at the time helped to popularise Vaishnavism. Azan Fakir realised that Vaishnavism, like Islam, believed in the oneness of God, which inspired him to write religious songs known as Jikirs. Azan fakir, through his Jikirs, appealed to all peace-loving people to maintain brotherhood and equality, putting aside pride and prejudice. The Azan Peer Dargah is a silent witness to the fact that religion can never be an impediment to Assam's cultural heritage. The Assamese Hindus and Assamese Muslims have maintained a cordial relationship throughout the ages, which is a unique feature of Assamese society The Hindu religion and the Vedic civilization serve as the foundation of Assamese culture. The Vaishnavas constitute the vast majority of Assamese (A sect of Hinduism) The Vaishnavas do not believe in idol worship and instead perform Namkirtana, which is recitation of Lord Vishnu's glory.

The fifteenth century was a dark period in Assamese history. During this time, art and culture suffered greatly, society was more concerned with material pleasure, and even religious practises were perverted. Then came Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankardeva, like a breath of fresh air.

In fact, it is impossible to discuss Assamese culture and people without mentioning Srimanta Sankardeva and his spread of the Assamese version of neo-Vaishnavism. Assam's mediaeval renaissance can be credited to Mahapurusha Sankardeva. Sankardeva preached the Bhakti message is a love and devotion to the Lord that is unmotivated. He was a great socio-religious reformer who was also responsible for instilling a scientific and progressive mindset in the Assamese community. Sankardeva established the 'Naamghars' and 'Sattras,' which welcomed all with open arms, regardless of caste, creed, race, or religion. Interestingly, Chandsai, a Muslim devotee of the chanting of 'La illallahu Muhammad Ur rasula Ulla,' erected the first pillar of the Bordua Namghar. 11

Sankardeva praised the Sattvaguna, or "quality of goodness," which includes qualities such as humility, compliance, restraint, benevolence, and nonviolence.

12 He played a significant role in the development of Assamese literature. He wrote the holy book 'Kirtan-ghosa,' which contained many religious hymns. In fact, his magnum opus was the 'Kirtan-ghosa,' a collection of vernacular renditions of Bhagavata episodes highlighting Lord Krishna's majesty Sankardeva found solace in Krishna, the central figure of the Bhagavata. He believed that the greatest religion of man was complete surrender to Lord Krishna without any adherence to ritualism. Thus, Sankardeva adopted the medium of congregational prayer known as kirtan or naamprasanga, which included song chanting as well as dramatic performances. Srimanta Sankardeva was responsible for transforming 'bhakti' into a tool for peace and harmony. Sankardeva was also instrumental in the establishment of the'sattras.' He spread the principle that 'service to God is service to humanity' through the'sattras.' These sattras also served as centres for the study of art and culture. The sattras performed 'bhaonas,' which is a type of devotional theatre utilising songs, dances, dialogue, and characterization Sattras also sang 'Bargeets,' which were devotional songs with literary value.

This great figure was also the founder of the Satriya dance style, which emerged near the end of the 15th century or early in the 16th century. Sankardeva introduced this graceful dance form in his wonderful composition of 'ankiya bhaona,' the Vaishnava theatre. Originally, this dance form could only be seen at the Sattras, a Vaishnava monastery. Satriya is a classical dance form that has been practised in monasteries for centuries. However, this dance form has recently emerged from the monastery and entered the contemporary scene.

Sankardeva preached social equality and was in charge of shaping a composite's future the society and culture of Assam. He was a philosopher who believed that all men shared the same identity and social standing. It is to his credit that even 500 years after his death, the religion he preached is still widely practised today. "The neo-Vaishnavism instilled by Sankardeva brought in its train a literary upheaval, and the fine arts like music, dancing,

and painting also came to have their place in the life of the people," said the late Prof. Dr. Maheshwar Neog. 13 Assam's history went through several stages of formation and fragmentation before taking on its current form. British colonialism created modern Assam. In 1824, the British invaded Assam. The Burmese war, as well as the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826, brought British influence into the state. With the arrival of the British, a new era began.

Assam became a part of the Bengal Presidency after its annexation to the British Empire in 1826 via the Treaty of Yandabo (British territories). Assam experienced significant literary and cultural changes during this period. Due to language and cultural barriers, the British had a difficult time administering Assam when it came under their control. To deal with the crisis, the British hired Bengalis to work as clerks and 'moharis.' They instilled in the British that Assamese was not a distinct language in its own right, but rather a dialect of Bengali. During this time, the Assamese language suffered a major setback, and it was replaced by Bengali in schools, colleges, and courts. This transition occurred because Assamese was nothing more than a dialect of Bengali. At this point, Christian Missionaries made significant contributions to the development of the Assamese language and literature. In 1813, the American Baptist Mission published the 'Dharmapustak Antobhag,' or New Testament in Assamese. William Carey published the complete Bible, or 'Dharmapustak,' which included both the Old and New Testaments, in Assamese in 1833. Atmaram Sharma assisted William Carey with his translation work.

With great zeal and gusto, the missionaries learned the local language, allowing them easy access to the locals. Their primary goal was undoubtedly the spread of Christianity. Whatever their goal, their initiative paid off in 1840 with the establishment of the American Baptist Mission Press in Sibsagar. The name Reverend Dr Nathan Brown is synonymous with the American Baptist Mission Press. In 1833, he was appointed as a missionary to Myanmar by the American Baptist Missionary Union. Dr Nathan Brown travelled to Assam at the request of Captain Francis Jenkins, the then-Commissioner of Assam. This request was made in order to kick off the "Shan Mission," which aimed to assist the British administration in enlightening, refining, and educating the warrior tribes of Shan, Khamtis, and Singphos. He arrived in Assam with Mr. Oliver T. Cutter and a small printing press.

In January 1846, the Mission launched 'Orunudoj,' the first Assamese newspaper. 'The Orunudoj, monthly paper devoted to religion, science, and general intelligence,' the paper's tagline read. The Missionaries realised that religion could not be spread among the masses unless the local language was used.

From January 1846 to 1864, Brown was the editor of 'Orunudoj.' Dr Nathan Brown went to Burma in January 1855, and Dr Miles Bronson took over as editor of the 'Orunudoj'. Dr. Bronson worked tirelessly to reintroduce the Assamese language into schools and courts, and his efforts were rewarded in 1873 when Assamese became the official language of Assam as well as the medium of instruction. Miles Bronson's efforts were rewarded by the assistance of the great Assamese Patriot Anandaram Dhekial Phukan (1829-59), who persuaded the British government to reintroduce Assamese.

The first issue of 'Orunudoj' included a review of national and international events, an article titled "Dharamar Katha," subtitled "Religious Intelligence," and articles on the negative effects of opium and the opium trade tombs of the kings of Ahom. This periodical aided in reshaping the Assamese mind while also glorifying colonialism as beneficial. This periodical provided a form for early nineteenth-century Assamese writers and brought to the forefront three key figures of the Assamese literary world, Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Hem Chandra Baruah, and Nidhi Levi Farewell.

Bengali was the medium of instruction in all Assam schools when 'Orunudoj' was first published. The missionaries attempted to establish Assamese as the official language of Assam through the 'Orunudoj' and letters, petitions, and scholarly works.

The Language Movement

When the British colonised India, they wanted to preserve the traditional legal and administrative systems, as well as the traditional educational system. The Governor-General of India, Warren Hastings, believed that "the British power must be an Indian power." 14 However, Raja Rammohan Roy, widely regarded as the father of modern India, objected to the move, believing it was an attempt "to keep his country in darkness." 15

Raja Rammohan Roy believed that western education was necessary in subjects such as mathematics, chemistry, anatomy, natural philosophy, and so on. In an 1823 letter to Lord Amherst (1773-1857), Roy stated that English provided Indians with "the key to all knowledge—all the truly useful knowledge which the world contains." 16 Thus, the English language gained popularity among Indians thanks to the combined efforts of

Raja Rammohan Roy, Christian Missionaries, and other intellectual Indians. The British progressively declared in 1829, "that it intended to gradually and eventually make English the language of public business throughout the country." 17

In his minute of 1835, Lord Macaulay, who came to India as a Legislative Member of the Supreme Council, also pleaded in favour of English education. English quickly became "the sole means of intercommunication at the all-India level, or the lingua franca, of all persons holding positions of authority or prominence in private and public life." 18

Because Assam came under British control only in the 1920s and 1930s, the seeds of renaissance were sown rather late. Haliram Dhekial made a modest start in 1831 Juggaram and Phukan Khargharia Haliram advocated for women's education and wrote the first historical work on Assam, 'Asam Buranji.' His brother Juggaram was a close associate of Bengal's Rammohan Roy. He was the one who initiated the establishment of English schools in Assam.

During the latter part of the Ahom rule, what is now known as the 'Assamese' or 'Asomiya' community was born. The Ahoms adopted Hinduism, bringing many tribes into the Hindu fold. The origins of Assamese nationalism can be traced back to linguistic nationalism. The question of whether Assamese is a "language" or a "dialect" was a major factor in boosting Assamese nationalism. 19 "One of the major contradictions which the Assamese society has faced is the reiteration of its polyethnic nature on the one hand and the rather obsessive quest for a unilingual identity on the other The Assamese middle class has yet to find a solution." 20 Bengali was the language of Assam's courts and government schools from 1837 to 1873. The Assamese-Bengali language rivalry posed a significant threat to Assamese identity and culture. This linguistic rivalry was linked to the struggle for employment. When Christian missionaries encouraged Assamese people to educate themselves in their mother tongue, there was "also a persistent demand for English education among the middle class aspiring for government jobs. "The British introduced western education with the goal of preparing young people for junior administrative positions. In the year 1830, the East India Company's Court of Directors urged the Government of India "to make English the official language of all government departments, and to begin correspondence in English (in English) with all native princes or persons of rank known to be fluent in that language." Even the most orthodox Brahmins sent their children to school, "having their hair cut in English fashion and abandoning the time-honored custom of keeping a pig-tail."

Raja Rammohan Roy stated in a letter to Lord Amherst (1773-1857) in 1823 that English provided Indians with "the key to all knowledge.....all the really useful knowledge which the world contains."

24 Roy's letter was the starting point for the Oriental-Anglicist debate, which centred on which educational policy would be best for India. The primary reason for the English language's increasing popularity was that it provided opportunities for employment.

Guwahati's first English school opened its doors in 1835. With the expansion of British rule in India as a whole, knowledge of English became a historic requirement for both men and women for administration and expanding commercial interplay The "aim of the English to educate the Indians was either to produce caricatures of European characters willing to accept the Gospel of Christ or to get a regular supply of cheap clerks to serve them in the business organisation of the government of India and subsidiary undertakings of the British subjects," as it has been very aptly stated.

The Assamese intelligentsia who were seen working in government offices initially avoided English. Hem Chandra Barua, the author of the first authoritative Assamese dictionary, had to learn English from Sibsagar missionaries. However, the benefits of English education gradually became recognised and young and ambitious students began to travel to Calcutta for higher education.

Western Influence on Assamese Literature

The socio-political life of the people of Assam came under severe strain in the mid-nineteenth century. The repeated Burmese invasions, which virtually reduced Assam to a wasteland, were a major factor. This was gradually followed by the spread of English education and western thought, which had an impact on almost every aspect of life and society. With the spread of western education and ideas, the form and content of Assamese literature underwent radical changes. "Contact with the British and liberal education through the medium of the English language resulted in a remarkable social and intellectual awakening that resulted in the birth of a new literary era. Orunudoï" was a breath of fresh air that revitalised the Assamese language, which

was on the verge of extinction due to colonial policy of replacing Assamese with Bengali as a medium of instruction as well as the court's language." The movement to develop Assamese literature gained traction after college students founded the Assamese Language Development Society in 1883.

Western influence humanised Assamese literature and gave the language greater tangibility. The novel and short story evolved as a result of the nineteenth-century western influence. The English language, which ushered in Western influence, also aided the development of literary criticism. The search for an Assamese identity took on new dimensions during the "Jonaki" era. In contemporary poetry, a new humanistic movement based on new ideas of science, justice, and human dignity took root. In the nineteenth century, the influence of the west through English gave Assamese literature a new shape and direction.

The publication of the "Jonaki" signalled the beginning of a new era when western literary influences became obvious and direct this journal was the catalyst for the Romantic Movement in Assamese literature. The literature of the time, inspired by English Romanticism, reveals all of the characteristics of Western Romanticism.

"Exaltation of imagination, worship of nature, adoration of beauty, and expression of personal love, revival of interest in folk literature, recreation of mediaeval lore and legends, profound love of the motherland, experimentation with new verse forms, and use of everyday language are some of the period's distinguishing characteristics."

Chandrakumar Agarwala published *Jonaki* for the first time on February 9, 1889. It was the Asamiya Bhashar Unnati Sadhini Sabha's journal (Society for the Development of the Assamese Language). *Jonaki* marked the maturation of Assamese literature the three writers who defined Assamese literature during this period were Anandaram Dhekial Phookan, Hem Chandra Barua, and Gunabhiram Barua. Lakshminath Bezbarua, Chandra Kumar Agarwala, and Hem Chandra Goswami heralded the Romantic Age in Assamese literature. Satirical and humorous writing, short stories, historical novels and plays, lyrical and narrative poetry, personal essays, and literary criticism were all written during this period, and they all contributed to the enrichment of Assamese literature.

Hemchandra Barua (1835-96) has been dubbed the "Father of Modern Assamese Prose." He was a great satirist who exposed the vices and evils of modern society in his writings. His satirical novelette *Bahire Rang Sang Bhitare Kowabhaturi* condemns the evils of social and religious corruption. In 1861, he published *Kaniyar Kirtan*, a satirical farce about the evil effects of opium addiction. He will be remembered for his seminal dictionary *Hemkosh*, which was released posthumously in 1900. His satire exposes society's charades and hollowness, as well as the prevalent social evils of the time.

Ramnavami by Gunabhiram Barua (1837-95) was the first western-style drama written. It was published serially in *Orunodoi*, the first Assamese journal, in 1857. This social play had a tragic ending and revolved around the theme of widow remarriage. He also wrote *Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukanar Jiwan Sarit*, which was a biography that went into great detail about the subject.

Chandra Kumar Agarwala is credited with introducing romanticism into Assamese poetry. He was a true humanist who saw man as God This is evident in his poem *Manav Bandana*, in which he emphasises man's worship because, according to him, there was no God superior to man. His name is *BaanKunwari* appeared in the very first issue of *Jonaki*, where supernatural elements are seen being used in the treatment of a natural theme. *Pratima* and *Bin Boragi's* collection of poems made waves in Assamese literature.

Hem Chandra Goswami was a linguist, historian, poet, and teacher. *Asamiya Sahityar Chaneki*, his compilation, is regarded as a monumental work. His collection of poems, *Phular Chaki*, stands out for its simplicity and exemplifies all the qualities of romantic poetry. Lakshminath Bezbarua is regarded as the dean of Assamese literature. He was a pivotal figure in Assamese literature's Romantic Movement. He was a prolific writer who wrote a variety of lyrics, nature poems, ballads, and patriotic songs. He was influenced by Vaishnava culture, and there is a reflection of classical Vaishnava poetry in his poetry.

Bezbarua, Lakshminath is regarded as the father of Assamese short story. His short stories depict social ills such as pride, vanity, and superstition. Bezbarua was a pioneer in the field of Assamese short stories, equally at home with folk tales and modern stories. Lakshminath Bezbarua is regarded as the high priest of Assamese prose, and he continues to wield power in Assamese literature to this day. *Kripabor Baruah's Kakotor Topola* (*Kripabor Barua's Bundle of Papers*, 1904: first serialised in *Jonaki*) established his reputation. *Surabhi* (1909), *Sadhu Kathar Kuki* (1912), and *Joon-biri* (1913) are three of his original short-story collections (1913).

English literature influenced Lakshminath. Through poems such as Basanta (spring) and Bin Boragi, Bezbarua added a touch of simplicity to the Romantic tradition.

Literary influence from the West brought about radical changes in Assamese literature, and modern drama also advanced significantly in terms of form and content. Previously, the 'ankiya-nat' had flourished. However, drama was now divided into acts and scenes, and various types of comedy and tragedy were introduced.

Shakespeare was a huge influence on young writers, and Benudhar Rajkhowa's Seuti Kiran follows in his footsteps with the introduction of a ghost and the concept of a play within a play. Shakespeare's influence permeated various aspects of Assamese literature. Shakespeare's influence was felt in Assamese novels and poetry, in addition to drama. Shakespeare is directly credited with the division of plays into acts and scenes. The storey of Ramnavami is divided into eight scenes.

It was made possible by the efforts of four young Assamese men studying in Calcutta. It was in college that the first full-scale translation of Shakespeare was published. Ratnadar Barua, Gunanjan Barua, Ghanashyam Barua, and Ramakanta Borkakoti were the names of these young men. They created Bhrmranga, a translation of Shakespeare's 'The Comedy of Errors.' Durgeswar Sarma based his plays Chandravati and Padmavati on Shakespeare's 'As You like It' and 'Cymbeline,' respectively.

In the novel realm, Rajani Kanto Bordoloi's Manomati contains echoes of 'Romeo and Juliet.' Padumkunwari by Lakshminath Bezbarua is also inspired by 'Romeo and Juliet.' Lakshminath Bezbarua and Padmanath Gohain Barua of the Jonaki era were influenced not only by the form and technique of Shakespeare's plays, but also by his method of characterization. Falstaff inspired Gajpuria and Priyaram in Bezbarua's play Chakradhwaj Sinha. The traditional Shakespearean practise of presenting women in Assamese drama, women in the guise of men have found their counterparts. Such characters can be found in Padmanath Gohain Barua's Lachit Borphukan, Sailadhar Rajkhowa's Pratap Sinha, and Gohain Barua's novel Bhanumati.

Shakespeare's influence on Assamese poetry has left an indelible imprint in the form of sonnets. Hem Chandra Goswami was Assamese literature's first sonneteer. Priyatamar Sithi, his love sonnet, was the first of its kind in Assamese and is regarded as one of the finest additions to the literature of the time.

Conclusion

The influence of romanticism was felt in the field of poetry as well. Poetry regained its vigour and vitality. "The new poetry sang of freedom from political dependence, social injustice, religious bigotry, and individual dignity. Nature, in all her beauty and mystery, revealed herself to the poets through their vision." 29

Ramakanta Choudhury (1846-89) and Bholanath Das (1858- 1929) were the first to use blank verse in epic poetry. This new verse form was used by Ramakanta Choudhury in his epic poem Abhimanyu Badh, and Bholanath Das perfected it in his poem Sitaharan Kavya. Bholanath Das is also regarded as the forefather of lyric poetry, which flourished in the early twentieth century. The Romanticism of the Jonaki era had a far-reaching impact that is still felt today. The impact of the West gave birth to two new forms: the novel and the short story. Literary criticism was born with the publication of Jonaki.

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