

CONCLUSION

The study thus underlines how during the colonial period the novel print technology, that was introduced by foreign agencies, was taken up by the indigenous intelligentsia and used to fulfil their aims of establishing the identity of the Assamese language as separate from that of the Bengali language and of nation formation. Intending the project to be a step toward shaping the book history of Assam and thereby also contribute toward the book history of India, I have tried to study the various forces that helped in making the printed book an indispensable part of the modern Assamese society. The theoretical framework for the thesis has been provided by Robert Darnton's model of the "communication circuit", Benedict Anderson's concept of "print-capitalism" and Jürgen Habermas's insights into the "public-sphere". As all these theoretical concepts were formulated by studying socio-political situations different from that of Assam we observe that the state of affairs in the later were not exact replicas of the former.

Of the print genres used by the Assamese intelligentsia, the study focussed mostly on the periodical and the book. With the introduction of the western form of education in Assam by the British, the youth who got exposed to education came in contact with ideas like that of the nation. These young men such as Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Gunabhiram Barua, and Hemchandra Barua were the early members of the Assamese middle class, a product of the British rule in Assam. These members ventured to form a nation out of the various communities inhabiting the region and in this print became a useful tool. The educated few wished to reach out to the masses to inform them of the new ideas that were blowing in from the west and had already reached Bengal. These young men came to know of these ideas through education and also through their contact with the socio-cultural life of Bengal.

Language became a very crucial component in the nation-building venture of the middle class. In 1836 when Bengali was declared as the official language it posed as a hurdle for the Assamese youth who aspired for government jobs and at the same time the misconception floated that Assamese was a dialect of the Bengali language. The indigenous intelligentsia took up the issue of establishing the unique identity of the language. The middle class, that was ever grateful to the British, did not aim at a

politically independent nation but to unite the people using various means of which one was the language. The members of the class equated the progress and development of the Assamese language and its literature with that of the nation. To fulfil these aims the educated youth used print genres.

In the early years the intelligentsia was a very small group due to the abysmal condition of the education of the province but it was a powerful and effective group. The printing press and print genres like pamphlets, books, and periodicals in the Assamese language were introduced in the region by the American Baptist missionaries. The fusion of print with capitalism leading to what Anderson termed as print-capitalism became central to his concept of a nation. Thus when capitalism combined with print, production took place at a large scale; a large number of periodicals and books were produced which spread new ideas like that of a nation to a large number of people and also helped them in imagining as being a part of a larger community. In Assam as well periodicals, books, and pamphlets were used for dissemination of ideas but as there was not much technological development due to scarcity of capital the scale of print production was quite low. Yet print technology had entered Assam and the study underlines that it was soon appropriated by the indigenous persons for their own use. The periodical became the most widely used print genre by the educated middle class to reach out to the masses. *Orunudoï*, the first Assamese periodical brought out by the American Baptist missionaries, functioned as a platform for the upcoming writers to use the Assamese language for secular and creative writing. Through it the people of the region saw the glimpses of a world different from their own and also knew about various genres of writing like short stories, travel writing, etc. The first messages of nationalism were communicated to the Assamese people by Gunabhiram Barua through his letters from Kolkata published in the pages of this journal. Soon the indigenous people brought out magazines and newspapers for reaching out to the masses. In the space provided by these first attempts were made to encourage the people, who were charmed by Bengali language and literature, to take up the Assamese language for literary creation. In the early years, that is, before the publication of the *Jonaki* in 1889, a number of periodicals came to be published in the Assamese language; of these two, the *Assam News* and the *Assam Bandhu*, made significant contribution toward the development of the Assamese language. Through the *Assam News*, its editor Hemchandra Barua paid great attention to the correct usage of the language by the contributors to the newspaper. On the other

hand Gunabhiram Barua provided a space conducive for the literary flowering and thus encouraging writers to take Assamese for literary creation.

Jonaki and *Bijuli* were the mouth organs of literary organisations following the agenda of those associations. These and later *Banhi*, *Usha*, and *Asam Banti* functioned as the platform where endeavour was made to achieve all round development of the Assamese language and its literature by reshaping it after the model of English romantic literature, by trying to establishing its unique identity and its ancestry. Soon these periodicals made the intelligentsia realise the “power in print” and they came to put this print genre to varied uses. Thus the *Assam Bandhav* was published with the motive of resisting the hegemony of a particular dialect of the Assamese language in print and publishing.

With the influence of the Indian national movement certain periodicals like the *Assam Bilasinee* in its second phase and the *Asamiya* became vocal in their criticism of the British policies and came to publish news regarding the movement. These newspapers provided spaces for reaching out to the masses to teach them the message of the movement and to bring in mass participation in it. Many organisations, both religious and secular, also published journals as their spokes organs to present their ideology to the public. Towards the close of the colonial period literary journals were published which did not shy away from criticising government policies. In Assam, where during the colonial period print technology was not very well developed and at the same time expensive, periodicals became a practical and powerful means of reaching out to the people of the region. Many periodicals were short lived but those were attempts at gaining a hold over the genre and at the same time realisation of the utility of it for mass communication.

With the introduction of print in Assam, along with periodicals, books also came to be produced. No doubt Assam had a rich manuscript culture but the manuscripts were considered as sacred objects; with the production of the printed books these became easily accessible to the laymen. Thus, along with periodicals, these were used by the members of the middle class to reach out to the masses. Robert Darnton’s “communication circuit” has been proposed as a model for studying the life cycle of the printed book. In Assam printing presses were established during the colonial period and we see the movement of printed books in such a circuit. However, all the six nodes depicted by Darnton cannot be observed as different roles were very often played by the

same person. Many a times the printer was also the publisher and the bookseller or the author was the publisher of his books. Books were utilised for development and progress of the Assamese language and establishing the antiquity and unique identity of the language. Grammars and lexicons were written and published for organising the language in a scientific manner and teaching the people to use the language in a correct manner. The introduction of the Bengali language had an adverse effect on the language and the need arose to arrest its advance. Collecting folk elements like tales, riddles, chants, poems, songs as well as Vaisnava literary works that were available in manuscript forms and getting them printed and published were also a part of the attempt at establishing the antiquity and richness of the Assamese language. Introduction of the form of education depending on textuality led to the need of textbooks and these soon became institutional spaces for shaping the language. When in 1873 Assamese was made the official language, the local intelligentsia took up the project of producing textbooks to contest the onslaughts of the foreign book companies that had taken up the book market of Assam. Litterateurs, along with the pages of the periodicals, also chose the book form to publish their literary creations. For such matters writers very often depended on Kolkata for its cheap and advanced technology. But soon the presses and publishing concerns such as the Chiddananda Press, Guwahati (1872); Hitsadhini Press, Goalpara (1877); Bhattacharjee Agency, Dibrugarh (1886); Sanatan Dharma Press, Barpeta (1895); Barkotoky Company, Jorhat (1898); Agency Company, Dibrugarh (1906); and Shastra Prakash Press, Barpeta (1910) established in the region took up printing and publishing books whether religious, literary, textbooks or any other genre. For the dissemination of the print genre shops and selling centres came up and very often weekly market also functioned as sites for disseminating books. Frequently the three functions of printing, publishing, and book selling were performed by the same centre. And they came to be established in different parts of the province: Golaghat (Jyoti Prakash established in 1931 by Purnachandra Goswami), Nalbari (Duttabarua and Company established in 1932 by Harinarayan Duttabarua), Tezpur (B.R.Kalita and Company established in 1938 by Bhabiram Kalita), Shillong (Chapala Book Stall 1936, Kamala Agency 1913, and Assam Book Agency), Mariyani (Banti Sahitya Mandir established in 1940 by Chandradhar Barua), Hauli (Pancharatna Firm established in 1941 by Jadav Chandra Das), Guwahati (Lawyer's Book Stall established in 1942 by Bichchitrannarayan Duttabarua), and Tinsukia (Mitra Agency established in 1945 by Narendra Chandra Dutta) . Though in its very nascent stage, we can witness the

emergence of a print culture in Assam and with it a novel commercial enterprise, the book trade, and the appearance of a new public figure, the publisher.

Literary bodies of Assam played a crucial role in shaping the cultural identity of the nation during the colonial period. The study made a critical survey of their formation and the agendas they followed as print and publishing formed a crucial component of their agendas. It could be seen that apprehending the inadequacy of individual effort in bringing about the desired development of the language and achieving cultural upliftment of the region, the educated young, persons exposed to western education and the literary and cultural ferment of Kolkata, made organisational endeavour. A number of literary organisations came up as a result of such efforts of these we have seen that the ABUSS (1888) and the Asam Sahitya Sabha (1917) were successful to a great extent in their undertakings. The ABUSS formed in Kolkata was mostly concerned with establishing the unique identity of the Assamese language and develop the language and its literature in the line of English romanticism. An important achievement of the members was the publishing of a catalogue all the existing books in the Assamese language whether in manuscript or in print form and founding of a library indicating their understanding the importance of print. This realisation is also reflected in their bringing out the periodical *Jonaki* which provided the space for carrying out literary experiments. The Asam Sahitya Sabha strove to function as a literary body for the entire state harnessing the participation of different sections of the society of the entire region. Religiously avoiding political matters, the association devoted its energy in structuring the cultural identity of the nation.

The study thus underlines that with the introduction of print there emerged a public sphere in the province hitherto unknown. Jürgen Habermas's "concept of public sphere" has helped in understanding the emergence and development of the Assamese public sphere during the colonial period. In comparison to the European public sphere which was studied by Habermas, the Assamese public sphere was very small due to various factors like the socio-political conditions of the times and the faulty linguistic and educational policies followed by the colonial rulers resulting in low literacy rate. At the same time the miniscule group which shaped the public sphere was an influential one. The Assamese intelligentsia striving to form a nation out of the different classes and community living in the province and to structure its cultural identity utilised print media in their effort. We witness that these attempts resulted in the emergence of a

public sphere. The print genres like the textbooks, literary works, and periodicals as well as the literary bodies acted as spaces where matters related to the community were discussed and debated. The issues discussed at the early stage were related to language and literature as the educated middle class imbibed the ideology of linguistic nationalism. It was a small section shaping the literary sphere and giving the clarion call to other members of the society to serve the motherland by contributing toward the development of the language and its literature. As the repressive measures of the colonial rulers increased, there appeared other spaces in the public domain where the government policies came to be criticised. For example the *Raijmel*s became the architects of the peasant revolts against the ever increasing taxes of the British Government. Alarmed at the rebellious nature of the *ryot* movements, the Assamese middle class formed other associations like the Sarbajanik Sabha and Ryot Sabha to arrest the aggressive temperament and to be the channel through which the grievances of the poor masses could be communicated to the rulers and the government policies and programs could be made known to the ruled. As the movement for political independence gained momentum on a national level, similar reactions stepped up in Assam and the first political association of a broader base, the Assam Association, was formed in 1905. Ultimately the leaders of this organisation founded the APCC in 1921. Thus the political sphere became vibrant with mass participation and this was possible as the leaders successfully communicated with the common people; in these attempts at mass mobilisation, along with other measures like public meetings, print genres like pamphlets, books, and periodicals were efficiently used as devices. Eventually the literary and the political sphere overlapped to form a complex and energetic public sphere where various groups like the elite, the poor masses, and women all participated with full vigour. The Assamese language that is witnessed in the early part of the colonial period struggling to present itself as a unique, independent, and well developed language becomes a confident means of communication in this lively public sphere.

Thus print ushered in a new age of information in Assam as in other parts of the world where print made its entry. Access to information and knowledge became easier to the common masses. Religion was, and still is, an indispensable part of socio-cultural of the people. Religious knowledge was stored in manuscripts kept away from the polluting touch of the layman and getting those copied was also an expensive matter. Once such texts got printed they could be bought at a cheaper rate. The religious books printed in

the Battala area of Bengal made their entry into Assam and the people of the region had their acquaintance with printed books even before the establishment of the first press in Assam. No doubt literacy rate in the early colonial period was very low and the readership was negligible but the habit of reading out to a large audience resulted in a greater number of consumer of the books than readers or buyers. Textbooks, literary works, and periodicals became sources of information of a new civilisation, of a new world. It created spaces for the educated to reach out to the common people. As education made progress in the region, there were greater numbers of readers than listeners. The Assamese middle class, the members of which became the leaders of the society could utilise the technology to their advantage like spreading the ideology of linguistic nationalism in the early years of the colonial period and political nationalism in the later. Pamphlets also became a useful medium of spreading the message of Gandhiji and the freedom movement. No doubt a great amount of printing was depended on the cheap and advanced technology of Bengal, yet with the establishment of printing presses, publishing houses, and book selling centres came to be established in Assam commercial printing gradually emerged in the province. Printed book revolutionised the way in which information was recorded, retrieved, and disseminated and became an indispensable part of the modern society.

We hence witness that print had far reaching impact on the Assamese society during the colonial period when it was in a state of flux. It became a very effective device in the hands of the Assamese intellectuals in forming the Assamese nation out of the various groups of people living in the region and structuring its unique identity. The use of print technology led to the standardisation of the Assamese language. The printed book helped the Assamese people in establishing the distinctiveness as well as antiquity of their language. Thus print culture plays a decisive role in the construction of modernity and transformation of political, social, and cultural identities of the Assamese society.