

INTRODUCTION

The Assamese language is recognised by the Constitution of India and is listed in its Eighth Schedule. However, the Indian Standard Code for Information Interchange or the ISCII does not recognise the Assamese script as a separate writing system and uses the Bengali script for writing the Assamese language. This apparent denial of independence has been repeated in the Unicode Universal Character Set or the UCS. But scholars in Assam are of the view that the script that has been named as the Bengali script has in fact evolved from the Kamrupi script that had its genesis in the ancient kingdom of Kamrup. As a result, there is currently great discontentment in Assam as the Assamese community does not want its language to be presented as a part of the Bengali language: two letters of the Assamese alphabet, “ra” and “wa” are presented as Bengali letters and another Assamese letter “khyo” is not included at all. Attempts are being made by individuals, organisations, and also the Assam State Government to have this resolved. The deep resentment felt by the Assamese to their language being represented by the Bengali script in the IFSCII and the Unicode can be traced to the issue of the independent identity of the Assamese language vis-à-vis the Bengali language in the nineteenth century when print culture and technology made its advent in Assam.

A raw nerve of the community has been touched for during the colonial period the British rulers declared, in 1836, Bengali as the state language of provincial Assam. When the Bengali language came to be used in the schools and courts of Assam it gradually overshadowed the identity of the Assamese language. Moreover, it created a hindrance for the Assamese intelligentsia for procuring government jobs. Thus the linguistic policy of the British set off a counter-movement for establishing the Assamese language as the official language of the province. In the present information age the Assamese intelligentsia’s protests against the naming of the Assamese script as Bengali in Unicode thus carries memories of the bitter struggle in the nineteenth century to reinstate the Assamese language, largely with the help of print.

Print entered Assam during the colonial period under the aegis of the colonial rulers. The British introduced a new administrative system which ultimately resulted in the emergence of a new society in which gradually print was used by different sections of

the society to achieve certain goals. In this research project I study how during the colonial period the members of this new society, particularly those of the Assamese middle class, used the print technology to serve the purpose of nation building and identity construction of that nation, among others. The project also traces the trajectory followed by the printed book in colonial Assam since its introduction. Print was introduced into the region by the American Baptist missionaries who had come to Assam at the request of the British rulers. But the technology was soon appropriated by the native intelligentsia and was at first used to contest the evangelisation efforts of the missionaries and then more significantly in stemming the destructive effect that the linguistic policy followed by the British had on the Assamese language. The American missionaries Nathan Brown and O.T. Cutter landed on the soil of Assam with a printing press in 1836 and with it a new culture was inaugurated in the region. But the pace with which print culture progressed was very slow, partly because in adjacent Bengal print technology was well developed and available at a reasonable rate. After the establishment of the printing press in Assam by the American Baptist missionaries, presses, publishing houses, and bookselling centres came to be established by the indigenous persons. The first printing press founded by an indigenous person was the Dharma Prakash Jantra in Majuli in 1871 and after that a number of such printing, publishing, and book selling centres were established 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).

Ultimately the members of the Assamese middle class became the major players in utilising print technology and in this they were guided by the ideology of nationalism; this nationalism was linguistic for a considerable part of the colonial period and at a later stage political in nature. The research project studies the socio-political conditions of Assam of the time that were responsible for such ideology being followed by the Assamese intelligentsia. The middle class of Assam was a product of the British rule. Most of the members of this class received western form of education that was introduced into the region by the British and also by the Baptist missionaries. With the downfall of the six hundred years old Ahom rule, a number of persons belonging to the upper strata of the society aspired to acquire jobs in the British administrative system. For this the western form of education was the first requirement. The natives received

education in schools established in Assam by the colonial rulers as well as by the missionaries. Moreover, many of them ventured to Kolkata for higher education. It was through this form of education and also cultural contact with Bengal that the Assamese intelligentsia was acquainted with new ideas like those of nation and nationality. These persons mostly belonged to classes that held leading positions in the society during the native rule but with the introduction of a new administrative system and consequently a new social structure they seemed to be losing their former hold in the society. They aimed to organise the various groups of people living in the area into a single nation, the Assamese nation, once again be at the helm of affairs and for this language became a crucial unifying factor. In this venture print genres like books, pamphlets, and periodicals were usefully exploited by the intelligentsia and successfully used as a tool in establishing the ideology of its class.

In 1836, the British Government declared Bengali as the official language of Assam. Soon the Bengali language was used in schools of Assam and eventually a concept that the Assamese language was a dialect of Assam was floated. Incidentally in the same year the two American Baptist missionaries, Nathan Brown and O. T. Cutter, arrived in the region with a printing press at the invitation of the British rulers, and the policy of these missionaries to spread the word of the Lord in the language of the masses had significant consequence for the Assamese language. Nathan Brown, who was a linguist, soon felt that Assamese was an independent language and it came to be used for preparing the religious tracts and pamphlets and textbooks to be used in schools established by the missionaries. Though the missionaries were on friendly terms with the British rulers, they criticised them on two issues: opium cultivation and enforcement of the Bengali language. The missionaries who established the first printing press in Assam debated with the British on the matter of re-employing Assamese as the state language and through their consistent effort were able to convince the British to do so. In this effort the pioneering members of the Assamese middle class, Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Gunabhiram Barua, and Hemchandra Barua made significant contribution and later on there were others who contributed to the development of the Assamese language. These early indigenous intellectuals wrote books, got those printed as well as made use of the platform provided by periodicals. Gunabhiram Barua and Hemchandra Barua themselves edited periodicals.

To revive the waning Assamese language Phukan's contribution was very crucial. Besides his observations on British education policy and the administration of the province submitted to A. J. Moffat Mills ("Judge of the Sudder Dewanny and Nizamat Adawlat, Calcutta, . . . deputed to make a report on the province of Assam." [Neog 2008: 202]) and *A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language and on Vernacular Education in Assam*, Phukan aimed to write a series of books, *Asomiya Lorar Mitra*, to be used in the schools of Assam. He was able to complete two such books. Gunabhiram Barua made similar contribution through his *Lora Puthi* (1874), *Asomiya Lorar Bhugol* (1879), *Padartha Bidya*, and *Asom Buranji* (1876), written and published to be used as textbooks. *Asamiya Vyakaran* (1859), *Adipath* (1873), *Asamiya Lorar Vyakaran* (1886), and *Podhasaliyo Abhidhan* (1892) are the result of Hemchandra Barua's effort to standardise the Assamese language. These writers also made use of the pages of the first Assamese periodical *Orunudo*, to communicate to its readers about the need to nurture the Assamese language. Hemchandra Barua as the editor of the *Assam News* and Gunabhiram Barua as that of the *Assam Bandhu* were offering their service to the language and thus to their motherland.

The Assamese middle class was deeply grateful to its creator the British and generally felt that Assam that was devastated by internal conflicts like the Moamoria revolt and external invasions like the Burmese invasion in the recent past could regain peace and acquire development only under the British. In 1836 the Bengali language was declared as the official language of the region. In the early colonial days when persons from neighbouring Bengal were placed in administrative posts they became the contenders of the Assamese who aspired for those jobs. Hence a significant aim of the Assamese middle class became to abolish these competitors. But they could not in their wildest dreams think of throwing out the colonial masters. During that period there arose a concept that the Assamese language was a dialect of the Bengali language and the unique and separate identity of the former seemed to be overshadowed by that of the latter. The Assamese middle class tried to form a nation out of the various communities living in the area, structure its cultural identity, and strove for its progress; however, it was not a politically free nation that they wished to form. The most important aspect on which the class focussed was the Assamese language that suffered great set back as Bengali became the official language. Thus the energy of the educated few was devoted to find out means and ways to develop the Assamese language and establish its unique

identity; service to the language had become tantamount to service to the nation. The Assamese language which had a long heritage was standardised and it was modernised on the lines of English literature. In this effort print technology and print genres played a crucial role. Assamese is not used in a uniform way and has its various dialects of which the Upper and Lower Assam dialects are crucial. As print presupposes standardisation of language, in the initial years this process of standardisation is seen at work. The members of the middle class deeply felt that one homogenous language was needed to unify the various groups of people living in the area. Moreover, there arose a conflict between two groups one supporting the dialect of the Upper Assam and the other that of Lower Assam. The tussle between the two was published in the periodicals of the time particularly the *Banhi* and the *Assam Bandhav*. The Tezpur Bandhav Sabha was formed to support the cause of the Lower Assam dialect and the periodical *Assam Bandhav* was its spokes organ. Considering these differences as obstacles in the formation of a single nation, certain leading members of the society like Chandranath Sharma and Sarat Chandra Goswami ardently felt the need for a literary organisation that would take the entire people into its enfold. This led to the formation of literary organisations like the Asam Sahitya Sabha (1917) that endeavoured for the development of Assamese language and literature. By holding its annual sessions and by establishing branches at different parts of the region, it aspired to represent the people of the entire region. The agenda of this literary body that ventured to be a people's organisation is worth studying as print and publication features prominently in it. Following the ideology of linguistic nationalism it kept political matters at bay and focussed on the growth and development of the Assamese language and literature.

Print genres like books and periodicals were utilised by the intelligentsia for the growth of the Assamese language. A very small section of the society was acquainted with the print genres during the early nineteenth century through its contact with Bengal. With the establishment of the printing press in Assam by the American Baptist missionaries a considerably larger section of indigenous people became familiar with books, pamphlets, and periodicals. These American missionaries translated Christian tracts, religious books, and hymns into the Assamese language to reach out to the natives; but along with these they also wrote grammars, dictionaries, phrase books, and textbooks in the same language. They got these printed and published from the Mission Press at Sibsagar. The first periodical in the Assamese language, the *Orunudo*, brought out by

these foreigners also provided a space for participating in the service to the development of the Assamese language.

On the one hand the linguistic policy declared by the British rulers in 1836 and on the other hand the misconception that the Assamese language was a dialect of the Bengali language had baneful effect on the language. A collateral effect was that a section of young men educated in Bengali medium came to consider Bengali language and literature superior to Assamese language and literature. The conscious middle class, aiming at nation building, tried to construct the cultural identity for which among other things it tried to establish the unique identity of the Assamese language and also reshape it on the lines of English literature of the Romantic Age. There was also need to instil love in the youth for their mother tongue, to encourage them to undertake literary activities in it, and in all to transform the language into a grammatically correct and idiomatically strong language to be used in the emerging public spaces. Thus poems were composed, plays written, and novels penned following the English romantic writers. These were published as books printed in the presses of Assam but most often in Kolkata where developed printing technology was available at very low prices. Periodicals were used by different sections of the society for varied purposes such as the first Assamese journal published by an indigenous person, the *Assam Bilasinee* (1871) was brought out with the chief aim of contesting the missionary efforts of the Baptists as well as circulating information of Vaishanava religion. Nevertheless, periodicals were mostly published for developing the Assamese language, encouraging upcoming writers to write in their mother tongue, and establishing the unique identity of the Assamese language as well as creating general awareness among the masses regarding the emerging modern society. As a part of their effort to develop the Assamese language the members of the middle class brought out a number of periodicals but many of them were short lived. Of these in the early years *Assam News* and *Assam Bandhu* were the most influential. The four major journals *Jonaki* (1889), *Bijuli* (1891), *Banhi* (1909), and *Usha* (1907) were guided by linguistic ideology to the core. These journals aimed at modernising the language on the line of English romantic literature and train the upcoming litterateurs to write in a standardised language.

With a change in the political scenario, news and views regarding the national movement against the British rule came to be printed by a section of the periodicals like Krishna Kanta Bhattacharya's the *Assam Bilasinee* (1916) and Chandrakumar

Agarwalla's the *Asamiya* (1919). Even the literary journals like the *Awahan* (1929) became vocal in its criticism of the colonial rulers. As printing and publishing of books by individual persons were an expensive matter during the colonial period periodicals became a significant alternative for the writers to get their literary creations published. Moreover, the middle class found journals and newspapers a convenient medium of reaching out to the masses for conveying the ideas of nation and nationality.

Along with periodicals, books and pamphlets in the Assamese language were also produced depending on the nascent print and publishing industry of the region and also on the well developed print technology available in Bengal. No doubt genres that were first printed were those that were already in circulation; works printed were those related to Vaishnava religion and on folk culture. When print entered Assam the region already had a rich manuscript culture. As a part of the endeavour of the middle class to contribute toward the development of the Assamese language literary works in the language were also printed and published. A very important component of book production in Assam was the publication of textbooks. The American Baptist missionaries were the first producers of textbooks in the Assamese language. They prepared these books to be used in their schools and printed them in the Mission press.

The early members of the Assamese middle class, like Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Gunabhiram Barua, and Hemchandra Barua also wrote books meant for Assamese students and got them printed and published. Particularly in 1873 when Assamese was once again declared as the official language of the region there arose the need for textbooks in the language to be used in the schools of the region. A section of the Assamese intelligentsia, along with other literary creations, took it up as their national duty to prepare textbooks in Assamese so that these could replace the books published by foreign companies (which were mostly translations of Bengali textbooks) that were in circulation in Assam. These writers, printers, and publishers of Assam who particularly concentrated on textbook publication were guided by linguistic nationalism. For example, Padmanath Gohainbarua and Harinarayan Duttabarua exerted greatly to produce textbooks in correct Assamese language to be used in the schools of Assam. Dictionaries and grammars were written to organise the language on scientific lines. In the later colonial period as in the case of periodicals, poems, novels, and plays in the form of books reflecting the political sentiments of the time came to be produced. Like periodicals, books were also used by the middle class to reach out to the masses. Thus

during the colonial period the print genres as well as literary bodies created spaces in the public domain resulting in the emergence of Assamese public sphere. In these spaces topics common to the entire society were discussed. At first these issues were mostly related to the construction of cultural identity of the Assamese nation and the development of the nation through the development of the language and literature; only at a later stage criticism of British policies and ultimately the means and ways of overthrowing of the foreign rule also found place in the public sphere.

In Assam the discussion and debate on a public issue was first initiated by the American Baptist missionaries and was related to the use of Assamese as the official language. The indigenous persons soon took up the matter and made use of the emerging spaces in the public domain in discussing and debating on topics related to the language and its literature. The literary body Asamiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha (ABUSS) was formed as early as in 1888 by the young students of Assam studying in Kolkata who had firsthand experience of the vibrant public sphere of the cosmopolitan capital. Various issues associated with Assamese language and literature were discussed in the meetings of the literary body and these were further published in the journal *Jonaki* which functioned as the mouthpiece of the ABUSS. A study of the agenda formulated by the members of the association shows that the young students had a profound understanding of the crisis faced by the Assamese language.

Gradually with a change in the politics of the region there was a transformation in the type of issues discussed in the spaces provided by books, journals, literary, and other associations. A section of the middle class realised that progress of the region was not possible only through the development of language. But it was the peasants who first initiated the process of actively agitating for the lot of the masses reeling under the pressure of taxes and other oppressive measures. Particularly with the formation of the Assam Pradeshik Congress Committee (APCC), the linguistic nationalism which guided mostly the middle class gave way to a great extent to political nationalism. Even then to the end of the colonial period a certain section of the intelligentsia followed the ideology of linguistic nationalism remaining aloof from the political upheaval of the time. The political leaders along with public meetings and other traditional public spaces like the socio-cultural events, also made use of printed pamphlets, books, and journals to reach out to the masses and train them in political matters.

Thus the project studies how print entered Assam directly and indirectly due to the British and was acquired by the indigenous intelligentsia that comprised of the members of the Assamese middle class and used to fulfil its own aim of nation building. As this project is aimed to be a contribution toward a book history of Assam, it also studies the material aspects of book production in Assam. During the colonial period the persons who established printing presses, book selling centres, and publishing houses were mostly members of the middle class and were guided by the ideology of their class. But with the introduction of print the text which was an object of veneration in its manuscript form metamorphosed into a tradable object. Though books were produced to aid and abet the progress and development of the Assamese language, yet like any other tradable good its production was guided by the conditions of its market. With the establishment of printing presses the emergence of a new commercial venture, no doubt in its very nascent stage, is noticed.

The work involves considerable use of information from texts in the Assamese language and I have translated some of it and referred to as 'my translation'.

The work is divided into five chapters as well as an introduction and a conclusion. The first chapter is a review of the major works of the relatively new field of study which has been designated as book history. It tries to trace the trajectory followed by this field since its inception in the west and its growing popularity in other parts of the world. The focus is mostly on the major works of the scholars in India as they provide a model for my research project. A short account of the political and socio-cultural setting to project is also provided.

The second chapter is an account of how periodicals played a significant role in the cultural life of the people of the region. It is a description of how this print genre became a powerful and oft used tool in the hands of the Assamese intelligentsia who followed the ideology of linguistic nationalism. Here a select number of newspapers and journals are dealt in some detail. But reference has been made to the fact that it was a time when various individuals and organisations ventured to publish periodicals, mostly having a short span of life, indicating on the one hand the aim of every educated indigenous person in contributing toward the development of language and its literature and on the other a lack of a strong readership. It was in the later decades of the colonial period that the periodicals took a somewhat active interest in the political affairs of the

region; in the early periods the journals consciously kept politics and religious matter out of their scope. The chapter thus tries to explore the various factors like the socio-cultural relations with Bengal, the social profile of the publishers, printers, etc. the type of nationalism imbibed at the various stages of the colonial period, the aim of the educated members of the middle class in instructing the common people and shaping the cultural identity of the nation, and the financial aspect that affected the production and circulation of the periodical. The chapter also deals with the impacts of this print media on the socio-cultural and political life of the people. The period witnesses the popularisation of the printed word, constructing the literary culture, the rise of vernacular journalism, generation as well as shaping of public opinion and such other phenomena due to the dissemination of the periodical.

The focus of the next chapter is on the printed book, its journey from being a cultural artefact to a tradable commodity in Assam during the colonial period. When print entered this region there was already a developed system of textual transmission, preservation, and dissemination, through manuscripts and the technology by itself did not create any new genre. But it was indeed a technology novel to the region that enabled textual transmission at a much greater pace and made texts earlier treated as sacrosanct available to a larger number of people at a cheap rate. The chapter makes a survey of the types of books that were produced, the various factors influencing book production, the role of the American Baptist missionaries along with the Vaishnava *Satras* in book production, the other indigenous stake holders of this newly emerging industry, the coming of the new public figure of the commercial publisher, as well as the socio-political situation affecting the spread of books. The language policy followed by the British rulers in Assam from 1836 to 1873, the developed and cheap print technology available in Bengal, and the cultural and literary movements happening there had an enormous impact on the book industry of Assam. Hence the chapter tries to understand these issues.

Literary bodies have had a great impact on the cultural existence of the people of Assam during the colonial period. The Assamese young men receiving western education realising the deplorable condition of the Assamese language and literature very often made organised efforts to contribute toward its development and address a pressing need of the society and serve their motherland. A consequence of the organised efforts was the birth of a number of literary bodies that were formed at various times and had

varying life span. The fourth chapter tries to understand the role of these bodies in influencing the literary culture of the region and put forth an appraisal of the organisation and agenda of the ABUSS and the Asam Sahitya Sabha. Though there were many associations the focus is mostly on these two organisations because their significance could not be matched by any other club or society. Print and publishing activities formed a very crucial aspect of their agendas and hence their importance from book history point of view.

The fifth chapter surveys the formation of the Assamese public sphere during the colonial period. In Assam, as in the other parts of India, public spaces emerged with the introduction of the modern/western form of education and administration. In this chapter, a study of the kind of issues that were discussed in these spaces, the participants, and the various forces affecting the sphere is made. Much importance is given to understanding the role of print in creating and influencing these spaces as this is significant from a book history perspective. Lastly a conclusion, summing up the findings of the project, is provided.

The theoretical framework has been drawn primarily from Robert Darnton's "communication circuit" which allows for a holistic consideration of the key players in the circuit such as the author, publisher, printer, shipper, bookseller, and reader. The framework also draws on the two scholarly concepts of Benedict Anderson's nationalism and Jürgen Habermas's "public sphere" in both of which print occupies a crucial position. "Anderson's articulation of the role of 'print-capitalism' in the emergence of the 'imagined community' of the nation posited the creation of 'national print-languages' and 'monoglot mass reading public' as a powerful factor in forging national identities" (Stark 2008: 8). No doubt Anderson's theory has been criticised over the years in different contexts. Yet his notions of the nation as a socially constructed community or a community that has been imagined into being and that of print-capitalism facilitating the spread of the idea of the nation along with other concept are useful perception in understanding the role of print in constructing the cultural and political identity of people of Assam during the colonial period. On the other hand, Habermas's insights into the public sphere are useful in understanding the nascent stages of the formation of a public sphere in a period when Assam enters the modern age. It helps in comprehending the factors and forces in creating public opinion and debates on issues related to communal or national issues. For Habermas, "the press" is

the “public sphere’s preeminent institution”. Print is essential for the “public sphere” because it enables the rational debate of intelligent citizens, which is at the heart of the concept. Further Robert Darnton’s “communication circuit” which he had developed as a model of studying how the printed texts circulated in a given society, has facilitated in constructing a methodology for this project. “Each node in the circuit is related to a variety of factors, notably other elements in society. These related elements Darnton places in the centre of the diagram: the economic and social conjecture; intellectual influences and publicity; political and legal sanctions” (Howsam 2006: 31). The following chapter which is the first chapter of the project studies the major works in the field of book history and tries to trace the path pursued by this field since its commencement.

CHAPTER ONE

BOOK HISTORY: A CRITICAL OVERVIEW

This research project is a study of the social and cultural conditions governing the production, dissemination, and reception of print and texts in colonial Assam. Most of the scholarly works that concentrate on the print activities in Assam focus on the achievements of the American Baptist missionaries or on the literary and linguistic works of the indigenous writers. They are mostly on the line of traditional literary history. A number of works are devoted to the study of the periodicals of the colonial period. Moreover, the linguistic policy followed by the colonial rulers from 1836 to 1873 and its affect on the literary culture has also been the subject matter of books on the colonial period. Almost each of the works that has reference to print products and print activities is in the genre of traditional literary history, cultural history or at times of bibliography. There are no works that concentrate exclusively on the significant part played by print culture in constructing the cultural identity of the people of the region and also on the social and material aspects of book production. The project is an attempt at constructing a history of the book of Assam during the colonial period.

Book history is a subject of recent origin and is still evolving. Its rising popularity is illustrated by the fact there has been burgeoning studies on the field, establishment of book history societies, publishing of journals, and inclusion of book history as a subject in various universities across the globe. The formation of this new but weighty subject in Europe is conventionally traced to Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin's *The Coming of the Book: Impact of Printing 1775-1800*, and in America to Elizabeth Eisenstein's *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (1979) and Robert Darnton's *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie 1775-1800*, (1979). Darnton in his essay "What is the History of Books?" explains that though interest in books as material objects arose in the nineteenth century this only led to the rise of analytical bibliography in England. The "new strain" of book history developed with the publication of Febvre and Martin's book that was originally published in French as *L'Apparition du livre* in 1958 and later translated into English by David Gerard in 1976. Febvre belonged to the Annales school of History in France. "Anthony

Grafton has observed that the Annales school, especially the work of Lucien Febvre, ‘showed that one could trace, in precise detail, the ways that printing altered the lives of authors and readers, using the new, larger libraries of the age to chart transformations in the climate of opinion’” (Howsam 2006: 47). The themes studied by the Annales School influenced the new book historians. “Instead of dwelling on fine points of bibliography, they tried to uncover the general pattern of book production and consumption over long stretches of time” (Darnton 2009: 177).

The ideas soon spread through Europe and the United States. In England a pioneering contribution was the authoritative work of Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (1979). Her thesis is that “Western European communication patterns had been ineluctably transformed by the introduction of the printing press: the use of the new technology irrevocably altered methods of data collection, storage, retrieval, and communication amongst learned groupings in Western Europe from the late fifteenth century” (Finkelstein and McCleery 2005: 18). The result was what Eisenstein referred to as “typographic fixity”. The new culture enabled the production of a large number of identical and durable texts which could then be disseminated and these qualities ultimately helped Renaissance and Reformation, nationalism, and scientific revolution.

The concept of “typographic fixity” was not acceptable to Adrian Johns as the print culture during the years studied by Eisenstein did not follow any fixed pattern. According to him in that period printed books were not as reliable and did not “embody conditions of standardization, dissemination, and fixity” as they were supposed to do. As Johns writes, “The first book reputed to have been printed without any errors appeared only in 1760. Before then, variety was the rule, even within single editions” (Johns 1998: 31).

In his *Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie 1775-1800*, Darnton associated himself with the socio-historical approach of *histoire du livre* of the 1980s and 1990s. He tried to write the complete history of the publication of the *Encyclopédie*; here he attempted to establish the link between Enlightenment and the Revolution and presented an understanding of the ideas behind the Enlightenment which is considered most complete till date. Based on the material he found in the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel, he provided a definitive account of the origin,

production, diffusion, and influence of the quarto edition and the 1778-1782 octave editions. He tried to keep track of the Enlightenment ideas not in the pages of rare classic texts but in the habitats of commoners, in their correspondence and in the local libraries.

The study of the book in England in the first half of the twentieth century was dominated by the methodologies offered by the New Bibliography School led by scholars like R. McKerrow, W. W. Greg, and Fredson Bowers. The focus was still on the literary meaning as the aim of these bibliographers was to “produce the most complete and least corrupted version of a text possible” (Finkelstein and McCleery 2005: 8). The focus of book studies changed in the second half of the century and this change was inaugurated by McKenzie who was educated at Cambridge and was a New Zealand based academic. McKenzie in his essay “Printers of the Mind” (1969) challenging the methods of the New Bibliographers, stated that the physical production of a text was qualified by the conditions in which it is produced. He was of the view that notion of the book should extend beyond the Anglo-American understandings as other societies would have their indigenous communicating systems which would affect the production of books in their societies. He felt the scholars should move “towards a study of texts as mediated products within which one could find traces of economic, social, aesthetic, and literary meaning”. “‘Current theories of textual criticism, indifferent as they are to the history of the book, its architecture, and the visual language of typography, are quite inadequate to cope with such problems,’ he concluded. ‘Only a new and comprehensive sociology of the text can embrace them’” (11).

The Annales method followed by McKenzie, was favoured by Robert Darnton and others like Thomas Adams and Nicolas Barker. The study of the book is approached by various disciplines from their perspective using their theories and methods ultimately resulting in a confusing state of affairs. Robert Darnton in his essay “What is the History of Books?” describes this as “interdisciplinarity run riot” and provides a model enabling one to study this new subject which he says “might be called the social and cultural history of communication by print, if that were not such a mouthful, because its purpose is to understand how ideas were transmitted through print and how exposure to the printed word affected the thought and behaviour of mankind during the last five hundred years” (Darnton 2009: 176). He describes the circuit through which the book moves in the society; the communication circuit progresses from “the author to the

publisher, . . . the printer, the shipper, the bookseller, and the reader. The reader completes the circuit, because he influences the author both before and after the act of composition” (179-80). Every player in the circuit is subjected to influences by various forces.

Thomas R. Adams and Nicolas Barker are two British bibliographers who in 1993 argued for a need to expand Darnton’s communication circuit stating that it ignored the importance of the book as an artefact. “The text is the reason for the cycle of the book: its transition depends on its ability to set off new cycles” (Finkelstein and McCleery 2005: 13-14).

The first phase of the new field of study saw the beginning of a number of national book history projects “beginning with France, and followed by Britain and those of its former peripheries which can be thought of as originally ‘colonies of settlement’ [G. C. Bolton, *Britain’s Legacy Overseas*, 1973]: North America (the United States as well as Canada) and Australasia [Willison, ‘Centre and Creative Periphery in the Histories of the Book in the English speaking world’, *Publishing History*, 59, no 1]” (Willison 2006: 1). As Darnton writes in his essay “What is the History of the Books?” the activities of the book historians who were influenced by the Annales school came to be appreciated and followed by scholars in Europe as well as in the United States. The book historians interested in similar subject matters congregated resulting in the creation of

. . . new journals like *Publishing History*, *Bibliography Newsletter*, *Nouvelles du livre ancien*, *Revue française d’histoire du livre* (new series), *Buchhandelsgeschichte*, and *Wolfenbütteler Notizen zur Buchgeschichte*. They founded new centres—the Institut d’Etude du Livre in Paris, the Arbeitskreis für Geschichte des Buchwesens in Wolfenbüttel, the Centre for the Book in the Library of Congress. Special colloquia—in Geneva, Paris, Boston, Worcester, Wolfenbüttel, and Athens, to name only a few that took place in the late 1970s—disseminated their research on an international scale. In the brief span of two decades, the history of books had become a rich and varied field of study. (78)

Scholars from various fields made their contributions towards the evolving of the new subject. Those from Bibliography, Literature, History, Economics, Sociology, Culture Studies, librarianship, and art have all left their footprints and this “interdisciplinarity” has created dissatisfaction regarding the title of the new field of study. Various terms have come up like print culture, the sociology of the text, publishing history, and textual bibliography, along with book history. The term print culture is not appreciated by those who are in the field of orality or manuscript studies; similarly those in the field of bibliography would not welcome the term publishing history. The name book history is least unsatisfactory as the word book has been accepted in its widest sense—from multi-volume encyclopedia to graphiti on the wall. In 1998 a journal *Book History* was established to serve as a forum for scholars working in the discipline. According to this journal, magisterial, multivolume national histories of the book (often by teams of scholars) have been produced, or are about to be completed in France, United States, Britain, Scotland, Ireland, Canada, Australia, and the Netherlands. Many book history societies have been formed; among others: Britain’s Book Trade History Group (1985), the International Society for the Empirical Study of Literature (1989), the Early Book Society (1987), the Association quebecoise pour l’etude de l’imprime (1987), the Association internationale de bibliologie (1988), and the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (1991). In the first volume of the journal *Book History*, the editors Greenspan and Rose defines the scope of this weighty field of study

. . . the entire history of written communication: the creation, dissemination, and uses of script and print in any medium, including books, newspapers, periodicals, manuscripts, and ephemera. . . . The social, cultural, and economic history of authorship, publishing, printing, the book arts, copyright, censorship, bookselling and distribution, libraries, literacy, literary criticism, reading habits, and readers responses. (Greenspan and Roses 1998: ix)

The book in book history for a long time meant the book in the west. Certain scholars, however, have criticised the way in which the scholarship of the book history has regarded itself as international in scope, while remaining firmly rooted in western tradition that spans medieval manuscripts, Guttenberg, and Renaissance, through the present day. But there has been change in the attitude of scholars like Robert Fraser who

in his work, *Book History through Postcolonial Eyes*, goes beyond the traditional methods of the Anglo-American bibliographic paradigm and takes up comparative studies of print, script, and speech cultures of South Africa and Asia.

A Companion to the History of the Book edited by Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose and published by Wiley–Blackwell includes a section on the book beyond the West. The section has chapters on the evolving of the book in China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, South Asia, Latin America, the Hebraic Book, and the Islamic book. *The Book History Reader* edited by David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery has an essay by C. A. Bayly, “The Indian Ecumene: An Indigenous Public Sphere” (2002: 190-204). Another work belonging to this category, *Print Culture Histories beyond the Metropolis*, is a collection of essays the focus of which, as the name suggests, lies beyond the metropolis. It “brings together leading scholars of literature, history, library studies, and communications to explore the ways in which residents of smaller cities, provincial districts, rural settings, and colonial outposts engaged with print” (Hall 2016: 4-6). One of the essays in this collection is Kenneth Hall’s “The Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Evolution of Indian Print Culture and Knowledge Networks in Calcutta and Madras”. The focus of this work is on colonial India’s rendezvous with print. Hall recreates the confusing situation of “emerging print culture institutions” in which various forces like the colleges set up for training the East India Company’s civil servants, the English and Indian entrepreneurs, the publishing department of the Baptist missionary societies and other learned societies were engaged in producing print products like textbooks, newspapers, lexicons and legal codes (16).

These steps underline the realisation of these scholars of need for understanding the communication systems and the literary societies existing outside the West in which the book evolved shaped by different forces.

In India book history is in a relatively nascent stage. While Abhijit Gupta and Swapan Chakravorty are the pioneer scholars in this field, a few others like Priya Joshi, Anindita Ghosh, and Ulrike Stark, are actively engaged in locating the history of the book in specific Indian context. The Book History in India series edited by Abhijit Gupta and Swapan Chakravorty is a platform for various scholars trying to locate the history of the book in different regions of India. The first in the series is *Book History of India: Print Areas* and was published in 2004. It opens with an introduction to the history of the

book in general and specifically in India by both the editors. It provides grounding in this field of study to the novices. The book includes eight other essays by scholars searching for the story of the book in varied regions of the country. While Priya Joshi studies the introduction of the novel during colonial period into the Indian literary scene and circulation therein in her essay “Trading Places: The Novel, the Colonial Library, and India” (Gupta and Chakravorty 2004: 17-64), Rimi B.Chatterjee in her essay, “Every Line for India: The Oxford University Press and the Rise and the Fall of the Rulers of India Series” explores the “interaction of the Oxford University Press” with India (65-102).

The role of print in the multilingual literary sphere of nineteenth-century Benares is the focus of Fransisca Orsini’s essay, “Pandits, Printers and Others: Publishing in Nineteenth-Century Benares” (Gupta and Chakravorty 2004: 103-38). She studies the infiltration of print into the scribal world of Benares, the centre of Hindu religion and scholarship, and the rise of commercial publishing, the introduction of new genres as print products as well as the enablers of print during the period of her study. Veena Naregal studies the shaping of the vernacular in Western India with the introduction of the English language along with print. In her essay “Vernacular Culture and Political Formation in Western India” (139-68), she tries to disentangle the various strands that led to the rise of a unilingual Maharashtra. The next writer brings us to the eastern part of the country, the political and socio-cultural heart of colonial India. The introductory sentence of her essay, “Cheap Books, ‘Bad’ Books Contesting Print Cultures in Colonial Bengal” (169-96), gives us a clear idea of the subject matter of her work. “The world of cheap print has gone largely unappreciated in the writing of the social and cultural history of nineteenth-century Bengal” (169). She points out that most of such histories focus on “an undifferentiated, enlightened, Western-educated middle class using the printed medium to establish their social and political ascendancy in Bengali society” (169). She goes on to underline that the cheap print technology that was available particularly in the Battala region of North Kolkata was appropriated by various groups of people in the periphery of the society resulting in the production of cheap, attractive, and often badly printed books and pamphlets. This in varied ways resulted in defying the drive for reforming and standardising the Bengali language of the *bhadralok* section by the groups in the lower rungs of social hierarchy. Hence she discusses the varied “aspects of commercial vernacular publication and its readership in

Bengal in the latter half of the nineteenth century that enables us to see how print was being used in important ways by lesser social groups to challenge the standard literary norms during the period” (170). *Print Areas* also includes an essay by Swapan Chakravorty titled “A Note on Nineteenth-Century Bengali Prose” (197-226) where the writer tries to trace the course taken by Bengali prose during the colonial period and the varied exigencies of the printed Bengali book.

Another essay of this collection is on the Japanese technique of block-printing by P. F. Kornicki, “Block-Printing in Seventeenth Century Japan: Evidence from a Newly Discovered Medical Text” (Gupta and Chakravorty 2004: 227-41). The concluding piece “*Abol Tabol: The Making of a Book*” (242-51) by Siddhartha Ghosh makes for an interesting read. In this essay Ghosh traces the production of a book on nonsense verse by Sukumar Ray. The writer declares that “. . . the focus of my essay is a Sukumar who is also a book designer. In him we find a writer who not only illustrated his own writings but was also well acquainted with state-of-the-art reproduction and printing” (243).

Joshi in her work *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture, and the English Novel in India*, presents an account of the coming of a new genre, the novel, into India under the aegis of the British colonisers, its immense popularity amongst the Indian readers as well as the novels that were greatly popular in India, its indigenisation, and ultimately the rise and evolution of the Indian novel through the nineteenth and twentieth century in the English as well as the Indian languages. In pursuing her work she uses as her tool the “category of readership” used earlier by Q. D. Leavis in her classic work on novels *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932) but as Joshi claims, with different results. She feels “studying readership patterns (i.e., the novel’s *consumption*) from extant records might provide the clearest key to uncovering processes of cultural transmission in a colonial and, later, post colonial context” (4). The official records and “records of the elite” alone cannot present a complete account of the colonial contact and exchange; they are not competent enough in explaining the complex process by which the novel made its appearance and evolved in the Indian scenario.

Gauri Viswanathan in her *Masks of Conquests* writes about the introduction of English literary education, its resultant desire of the Indians for anglicisation, and the masked intention of the colonial masters. Joshi states that Viswanathan whose work is mostly

based on the “vigorous and extensive debates preserved in British *Parliamentary Papers* and the East India Company’s voluminous correspondence on its education policy toward India” (Joshi 2002: 5) talks of the anticipated response and the actual response of the Indians to the education policy. But Viswanathan does not deal with these actual responses as she regards the topic to be complicated and vast enough to be the subject matter of another work. Though Priya Joshi is inspired by many insights and assumptions of Viswanathan, her work differs in the fact that she takes into account both sides of the colonial contact – “my image of the British Empire in India is of two sides facing each other with their arms outstretched, each taking, snatching, pilfering, plundering what and when it could, but also giving, exchanging, and unevenly borrowing, fitfully and sporadically, but persistently from the other” (7).

To understand the entangled processes behind the evolution of the Indian novel, Joshi studies the influence of the British novel on the Indian readers and the latter’s response to the former. Her work is divided into two parts; part one “Consuming Fiction” deals with the consumption pattern of the British novel by the Indian readers and the social setting shaping this consumption and being shaped by it. For this Joshi depended on the “circulation, consumption, and production of print in nineteenth century India” (Joshi 2002: 9). Here she discusses the types of novels that were imported from the metropolis, the novels that were consumed passionately, translated into various Indian languages, and made readers and writers deal with the ideas and issues in them. Part two of *In Another Country*, “Producing Fiction” engages with the rise of the English novel from the late nineteenth century to the late twentieth century and important moments in that enterprise. Attempting to answer questions like:

What did introduction of a hitherto unknown genre do in Indian letters? What was the effect of the newly introduced British novel beyond the institutional spaces of classrooms and universities and in more informal venues such as public libraries, Indian reading groups, and the domestic press where literature was increasingly being discussed and debated in the nineteenth century? What does Indian readers’ relative neglect of the “serious” novels encouraged by librarians and officials in

the Department of Public Instruction tell us about the cultural landscape of the nineteenth century? (8)

Joshi combines “some of the methodological insights from history of the book with the sociology of reading” in her work.

Ghosh in her book *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society, 1778-1905*, demonstrates how cheap prints flourished with great vigour in nineteenth-century Bengal though agencies like the colonisers and the urban indigenous intelligentsia (*bhadralok*) tried to wipe those out. With the establishment of the first printing press in Bengal in 1800 it soon became a site for a thriving print culture. The other crucial issue was that the Bengali language in its print form became important for the colonisers as a language of administration and as a way for gathering vital local information and for the indigenous urban intelligentsia a tool for crafting social identity. Anindita Ghosh writes that the British vernacularists like N. B. Halhed and Henry Pitts Forster as well as the indigenous scholars were of the opinion that there were two distinct styles of the Bengali language. The popular or *alaper bhasa* was used as the colloquial employed for day to day verbal communication and the polite or *sadhu bhasa* was used for written and formal communication. Print language soon became a site for conflict for power, struggle for structuring social identity, constructing the “other” for establishing the self by the indigenous urban intelligentsia, and for contesting by the “other” through print media. The Bengali language during its course of development was influenced by various other languages such as the Prakrit, Sanskrit, and Persian and in the pre-colonial times poetry was the form of literary composition. Ghosh further points out that with the new form of administration Bengali prose gained importance as it suited the needs of the rulers and “It was harnessed by an active vernacular intelligentsia during its most formative phases to ponder and debate on penetrating questions of indigenous identity and social reform”. Thus there arose the need for stamping the language with “authenticity” and “respectability” resulting in a drive for cleansing the language of its crude elements (11).

Anindita Ghosh as a scholar of print culture feels that “studies in print in colonial India” are influenced mostly by studies in high literature but focus should be on the periphery

where “collisions and negotiations, . . . between orality and print resulted in a productive and volatile mix” (Ghosh 2006: 14). The civilising drive of the colonisers and the sanitising mission of the Bengali intelligentsia aimed at the vulgar elements in the language and as Ghosh underlines that it is commonly accepted belief that these elements were either wiped out or pushed to the periphery. Ghosh establishes in her work through empirical data that far from being wiped out these elements thrived with great energy in the vernacular print publications of the Battala area of North Kolkata.

Crowded together in the lanes and by-lanes of Battala were a number of small presses which were doing booming business during the nineteenth century in vernacular print products. “In 1857, the average annual production figures of the individual presses ranged from 8000 to 47000 copies, depending on their size. Works produced ranged from religious and mythological literature, almanacs, legends and romances, to popular dramas, and even school textbooks” (Ghosh 2006: 16). This exceptionally huge output was consumed by an equally large readership though disapproved by the *bhadralok*. The literary output, which was aimed at an audience having pre-print tastes, did not follow the rules of emerging standardised literature of which it became the other. The readership comprised mostly “of urban and semi-urban groups-women, poor Muslims, and petty servicemen”. Ghosh is of the opinion that the spread of education and the availability of cheap print technology opened up various colloquial and popular forms of writing that defied disciplinary mechanisms “that might have been inbuilt in colonial printing” (18).

Focusing on the democratising aspect of print culture, Ghosh underlines the fact that with the spread of education and accessibility to print technology, not only the dominant educated groups but also the marginal groups like petty servicemen, women, and poor, illiterate urban social groups, were able to “influence contemporary notions of literary and cultural propriety” (Ghosh 2006: 19). A great amount of the recreational vernacular print literature which found its readership mostly in these lesser groups could escape surveillance of the sanitising mission of the urban literate groups and the ruling elites. Anindita Ghosh claims that most of the works on the language and literature of nineteenth-century Bengal focuses on the literature produced by the urban educated middle class or *bhadralok* using the “Renaissance models for understanding contemporary culture” (20). According to Ghosh certain scholars like Sumanta Banerjee, Sumit Sarkar, and Tanika Sarkar have made reference to “elite” and “popular”

forms of culture and a popular vernacular print literature along with hints “at the presence of large reader-writer groups surviving at the edges of ‘decent’ literary tastes” yet these scholars could not make substantial contributions in that direction (20-21).

Ghosh further asserts that she endeavours to record the voices of a lesser print culture which remained much active despite attempts by the dominant groups to stifle them. The voices are important as they create important social and historical narratives. Three groups, the lowly classes, the women folk, and the poor Muslims, created print literature in their vulgar languages of *ittarjan*, *mayeli bhasa*, and syncretistic folk Bengali. With the evolving of a thriving print culture in the colonial age different social groups came to consider language as site of constructing social identity. Ghosh says that the middle class was not a homogenous identity but consisted of many sub groups, particularly the lower groups, which were constantly struggling and contesting the disciplining of the elite section.

The writer states that she also tries to re-conceptualise the public sphere of Bengal of the nineteenth century. Citing the example of the world of scandal literature she states that it was “a sphere peopled by not well-educated and cultured Bengali gentlemen, but street people, prostitutes, labouring menials, and illiterate theatre goers, it was brought together by sensational events like the Elokeshi-Mohanta scandal” (Ghosh 2006: 23). Though such subjects were vulgar yet they brought to the fore important social issues and at the same time coalesced various social groups. The Batala region turned out with consistency varied print products. These plays, songs, poems, journals, and newspapers operated as “fertile fields of communication below the ‘high’ politics of power ‘elite’ of the period” (23). The uneducated also gained access to the printed word as they were very often performed in varied forms.

The work on the one hand describes the debates regarding the Bengali vernacular amongst the intelligentsia and the emergence of a print language along with the social and political background. On the other it studies the social groups at the periphery contesting the disciplining and the sanitising missions of the elite groups. The writer provides an appraisal of the nineteenth-century Bengal print market from a historical and social point of view, assessing the producers and the consumers of print products. Ghosh next focuses on “three specific genres”: “Social farces, literature putatively read and composed by women – also known as *mayeli* literature – and fables and romances

based on Persian and Arabic originals” (Ghosh 2006: 27). Thus Ghosh explores the various social worlds of Bengal during the period of her study that is from 1778 to 1905 and how the inhabitants of these worlds contributed towards construction of linguistic and literary sensibilities through their participation in the emerging print culture. At a time when conflicts for establishing identity were first played out in the field of language, at a time when hierarchies were fluid, the book focuses on how the three so called peripheral groups, the petty officials, the women folk, and the Muslims, contested the disciplining efforts of the colonial rulers and *bhadraloks* through their thriving and commercially successful print literatures. It can be stated that during that period print was used not only by the highly educated upper classes at the centre of a society but also by the groups with little education in the fringe to carve out their identity. The new technology proliferated into all the sections of the society.

Another scholar who deals with commercialisation of print in India is Ulrike Stark, who in her monumental work, *An Empire of Books: The Nawal Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India*, studies the history of book in Northern India. Stark uses an individual case study to arrive at general statements regarding the world of commercial printing and publishing of nineteenth-century North India, particularly Lucknow. In the genre of the history of a publishing house, her work traces the history of one of the most successful Indian owned publishing houses in India of its times whose proprietor Munshi Nawal Kishore proved himself to be an entrepreneur par excellence. The period of study is from 1858, the year of establishment of the press to 1895, the year of the death of Nawal Kishore and the end of a formidable period in the existence of the publishing house.

Through her work Stark portrays the role of a new public figure of the Indian printer-publisher and a new institutional space of the publishing house in the colonial public sphere. The year as well as the place of establishment of the press is significant. Lucknow was the centre of *nawavi* culture with scholars, artists, and artisans flourishing under the patronage of *nawabs*. The place was also adversely affected by the mutiny of 1857 and so when Nawal Kishore “arrived in Lucknow in 1858, equipped with an Indian-made hand press and a few lithographic stones, he encountered a vacuum: local competition in the printing business had been virtually wiped out by events of 1857” (Stark 2008: 165). Thus the Nawal Kishore Press (NKP) brought in a new era of commercial printing in Persian and Arabic on the one hand and Sanskrit and Hindi on

the other. Finding a useful patron in Colonel A. Saunders, the printing contracts Nawal Kishore received helped him in setting the press on a sound footing. The enterprise grew into such a volume that Nawal Kishore had to purchase buildings in various commercially viable areas in Lucknow to accommodate his expanding business. Moreover, he had to subcontract a part of his work to other local printers and this ultimately resulted in the existence of hand presses in their homes in the various lanes and by-lanes of the city.

The NKP had published about 5000 titles of which around 2000 were in Urdu; but specific chapters have not been devoted to Urdu publishing as Stark states that she does not have the expertise in dealing with the language and its literature and also it would require a much larger space for an exhaustive reportage on its print publications (Stark 2008: 26). Even then we get a fairly clear picture of the Munshi's contribution in the preservation, printing, publication, and dissemination of religious and literary works in the Urdu language along with those in the Hindi and Sanskrit language. Nawal Kishore has been described as, Ulrike Stark points out, a "Hindu Maulvi and an Urdu Pandit" for producing those works and also "making them accessible to the masses through availability and low prices" (2). The NKP had also brought out works on medicine, philosophy, astrology, poetics, yoga, music, romance, drama, vocabulary, poetry, case history, prose fiction along with textbooks in various subjects. Moreover, presses and sales centres were established in different places expanding his business to Delhi, Lahore, Faizabad and Muzaffapur in Bihar, Kanpur, Patiala, and Bombay. The establishment of centres in these places is a marker of expansion of business in domestic as well as in the international field. Thus Stark notes the fascinating fact that the Arabic and Persian works spread as far as Kashmir, Bukhara, Yarkhand, and Afganisthan through traders coming to Lucknow and Kanpur; Persia, Muscat, Baghdad, and Arabia through Bombay; and also to London through trading links with Nicholas Trübner (170-80). The trade that spread so far and wide was also well organised illustrating the business acumen of Nawal Kishore; there were thirteen separate departments to oversee the various activities such as the Lithographic Press, Lithographic Press Office, Type Press Office, Department of Copying and Calligraphy, Department of Composition, Marketing and Advertisement Department, Sales Department, and Dispatch Department (172). Thus it greatly resembled a modern day publishing house.

Stark also portrays how the publishing house provided for the “intellectual space” lost by the scholars, artisans, calligraphers, poets, and musician due to the annexation of Avadh by the British. “The NKP is an excellent, if extraordinary, example of how a publishing house, notwithstanding its commercial aims, evolved into a vibrant intellectual microcosm where maulvis and pundits worked side by side in translating old texts and generating new ones where *mushāḥiras* were held, and where the urban literati would gather to engage in literary and cultural debate” (Stark 2008: 266). Thus the book surveys the two aspects of the publishing house as “a modern, capital-oriented industrial enterprise and an important site of intellectual, literary, and scholastic pursuits” (3).

Print, Folklore and Nationalism in Colonial South India by Blackburn is a study of the convergence between print and folklore in a colonial context, mostly in Tamil and mostly in nineteenth-century Madras. Stuart H. Blackburn’s study of the print products of the nineteenth-century Madras led to the reiteration of the fact that print produced old books in its early phase. A folklorist, Blackburn realised that the most common print products in the early colonial period were folklores. He states that though folklores existed in their three forms of oral, written, and printed, scholars were reluctant to study the printed version as they felt that “print” and “folklore” were two incompatible categories. This dichotomy is traced by the writer to the eighteenth-century romanticism when the “polarization of the pure oral and the defiled industrial age, of which the printing press was an agent” took place. The falsity of the dichotomy is underlined by pointing to the tendency of folklore to coexist in oral, written, and printed forms in nineteenth-century Madras. Blackburn traverses the extra mile by demonstrating that in the nineteenth century print did not create or increase the rift between literary culture and oral tradition, rather bridged it and brought them together in the form of printed folklore. Printed folklore had a significant place in the literature of the century but was pushed to the periphery by forces “attitudinal as much as technological”. In the modernising project of the nineteenth-century Madras folklore became a marker of the pre-colonial past.

Blackburn presents a history of print in the Tamil country from its entry in the sixteenth century to the late decades of the nineteenth century. He also provides an overview of pre and early nationalism in colonial South India and locates the significance of printed folklore to both. The book is divided into six chapters including its introduction which

states the aims, objects, and limitations of his research, explains the key terms like printed folklore, nationalism, and the dichotomy between the concepts of print and folklore as well as an impression of the pre-print era and a “synthesizing” conclusion. In the second chapter he presents a portrait of the print activities from the beginning in 1556 to 1800, the contributions of the Jesuit and Lutheran missionaries as well as their interesting rivalries and the new literary practices that came up as a consequence of contact with European literature and languages. In the following chapters the narrative flows into the nineteenth century foregrounding the activities of the pundit publishers in Madras, their resisting the activities of the missionaries through print, printing of folklores to be used in schools and later in nationalist discourse, and the educational movements in the college at Fort St. George. Stating his understanding of the role of folklore in the rise of nationalism in Europe, he depicts the role in the Tamil country. Rather than focusing on the effects, the scholar concentrates on the uses of the printed folklore in the early years of the rise of nationalism and concludes his narration in the 1880s when the nationalising project gained great momentum and attitudes toward printed folklore developed changes.

It was during the nineteenth century that print flourished in colonial North India. The region already had an energetic tradition of oral and manuscript culture. Orsini in her book, *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India*, studies the kind of print products that succeeded in circulating in a region which was multilingual and possessed various forms of visual and oral entertainment. The focal point of the work being the popular print of colonial North India, by the genres of commercial publishing of the time, she “indicates only books aimed at entertainment and leisure” (Orsini 2009: 4). Thus, as mentioned in the blurb of her book, she asks questions like, “How did the new technology of printing and the enterprise of Indian publishers make the book a familiar object and a necessary part of people’s leisure in a largely illiterate society? What genres became popular in print? Who read them and how were they read?” (Orsini 2009: Blurb).

Commercial publishing faced challenges like low literacy rate and the existence of various forms of pleasure which were “a visual and oral experience provided by specialist individuals and communities” (Orsini 2009: 9). Orsini charts the story as to how print “infiltrated the existing sites and patterns of leisure” (9). She explores in *Print*

and *Pleasure* the various genres that were responsible for the success of commercialisation of print. At the outset the writer focuses on the *Barahmasas*, a popular poetic genre of the pre-print world. “The female voice – her pining for and devotion to the absent lover – and the calendrical cycle are the core elements of this genre” (51). Though there were many types of *Barahmasas*, both in Hindi and Urdu, Orsini indicates that only two types were successfully used by the publishers for trade and the target audience was mostly the women. These genres did very good business as many of the titles were printed and reprinted for as many as twenty times. The author next explores the songbooks. Like the *Barahmasas*, these books were another genre that was “plentiful, cheap and markedly heterogeneous”. Moreover, they allow the researcher to explore “how the printed book inserted itself into spaces of oral and auditory leisure, and how it successfully captured pleasures earlier embodied in various sorts of singers and discrete singing experiences” (81). Orsini also writes about the tales or *qissa* of both the Hindi and the Urdu languages which were central to commercial publishing in North India. These tales were first printed by Kolkata printers and later taken up by the publishers of North India. The *qissa* booklets were cheap and greatly popular. According to Orsini a significant task accomplished by these tales was that they “created a reading public by bridging the gap between oral storytelling and the printed book” (108). The printed *qissa* preserved the dynamics of oral storytelling for they could not be read in silence.

The genres that Orsini initially focuses on were those favoured by the “neo-literates”, the next genres that hold her attention are whose audience were educated preferring more sophistication. There was a movement from the fantastic to the more real. Subsequently the writer deals with the first experiments in novel writing in both Hindi and Urdu. The first novel in the Urdu language, Orsini points out, *Mir’at ul- ‘Urus* (The Bride’s Mirror, 1869) by Nazir Ahmad, a Deputy Inspector of Schools, was didactic in nature. Though the novel was meant to educate young girls it gained immense popularity unlike other first novels and this is proved by the fact that it “was reprinted many times, totaling 100,000 copies by 1889” (Orsini 2009: 161). Education received by the young men and women at various institutions as well as at home was forming a potential reading public with new expectations. Orsini also writes about *Fasana-e Azad*, another first attempt at novel writing. It was the first novel of Pandit Ratannath Dar “Sarshar” which was serialised in the Urdu daily *Avadh Akhbar* from 1878 to 1885 of

which he was the editor during those years (162). The novel was picaresque in form. Orsini also throws light on the role of *Chandrakanta* by Devikanandan Khatri (1861-1913) in providing entertainment in print to readers and the reason behind its commercial success. This novel she points out as the longest and the first commercially successful Hindi novel in the nineteenth century and its target audience was the ordinary readers without any avowed aim to “enrich” the language. One more popular genre that provided pleasure through print was the detective novel, which gained great popularity amongst the readers. The publication of this type of novel fetched both fame and money for quite a few writers in Hindi. Thus Orsini’s book explicates the challenges faced by commercial publishings in colonial North India for pleasures and entertainment as well as the successful way in which these challenges were faced.

Another recent work on the print culture, a contribution to the history of book in India, is Pinto’s *Between Empires: Print and Politics in Goa*, published in 2007. The work, which is located in colonial Goa, focuses on the growth of print culture in the region. Like most other regions of India Goa was a multi-lingual territory and Rochelle Pinto executes a meticulous study of the available print products of the colonial period in Portuguese, Konkani, and Marathi. Comprehending the socio-political forces at work in Goa which was under Portuguese colonial masters she studies how both the Goan elites and non-elites shaped their identity through use of print. The work comprises of nine chapters along with an introduction. Chatterjee’s *Empires of the Mind: A History of the Oxford University Press in India under the Raj* is one more contribution to the field of book history of India. Rimi B. Chatterjee traces the history of the Oxford University Press (OUP) in India and her period of study is from 1880 to 1947, which is from its foundation in India till the end of the British rule in the country. The story that the writer charts is of how the OUP came to be established in India including the princely states and she also underlines that the venture was not an easy one. This is recorded in the first six chapters of the book whereas in chapters from 7 to 14, the scholar explores the history of the books and various series published from the Press as well as the authors. Her work is based mostly on the private archives of the OUP. Thus while Ulrike Stark’s work charts the trajectory of one of the most successful Indian owned publishing houses in India of the colonial times, Chatterjee’s book is an account of a foreign publishing concern finding its foothold in a new land and expanding successfully.

Thus these are some of the scholars who are actively engaged in research work in the field of book history in India. I have drawn on these works for preparing a framework as well as adopting an approach, perspective, and methodology for my project. The project which is intended to be a contribution to the history of book in India, proposes to study the intellectual and material history of the book in Assam. As seen from the above overview scholars have provided histories of the book in Bengal as well as North, West, and South India, however, no study of the impact of print in Assam has been made even though Assam (where the first printing press was established in 1836 by the American Baptist missionaries at the behest of the colonial rulers) provides an especially good example of how print culture plays a decisive role in the construction of modernity and the transformation of political, social, and cultural identities. The period of study is from 1836 to 1947; 1836 being the year in which the first printing press entered Assam and 1947 being the year of the end of colonial rule.

When print entered the region of Assam, as in most other regions of South Asia, it was not a world of non-communication; Assam had its rich manuscript culture. The history of Assamese script goes back to the tenth and eleventh centuries having its origins in the *Charyya Padas*; from the fourteenth century there was flowering of Assamese literature (Neog 2008: 12). As is recognised by most scholars, print by itself did not create any new genres but it enabled the circulation of new ideas at an unprecedented pace and at the same time thoughts could be disseminated amongst a large number of people. In Assam print came after the entry of the British rulers. The first printing press was brought in by the American Baptist missionaries who came at the request of the British rulers and landed at Sadiya in 1836 at the eastern most corner of Upper Assam. Even this fact had its consequences as it affected the choice of the language to be used by the missionaries for their print activities. Interestingly the first book in the Assamese language appeared much earlier in 1813. It was the *Dharmapustak*, a translation of the New Testament, printed and published by the missionaries at the Serampore mission in Bengal. Moreover, proximity to Bengal had great consequences for the literary culture of the Assamese. There were people travelling to and from Bengal and thus at least a section of the people of Assam had a firsthand knowledge of the cultural happenings of its neighbour. It is found that there were Assamese persons participating in the thriving print culture of Bengal before the establishment of the first press in Assam. People from Assam wrote letters to newspapers and journals published from Bengal like the

Samachar Darpan as well as wrote books and had them published. Jajnaram Kharghariya Phukan wrote *kamakhya-yatra-paddhati* (1829) in Sanskrit and *Asam Buranji* (1831) in Bengali and had them printed at Samachar Chandrika printing press (Neog 2008: 197). When Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, the nephew of Jajnaram Kharghariya Phukan and the son of Haliram Dhekial Phukan, returned to Assam in 1844 after an incomplete education in Kolkata, he brought with him along with artefacts of European culture a number books filling up four almirahs that he set up in his newly decorated house (199). However, it was a small section of the elite class of Assam who witnessed the cultural upheavals in Bengal and participated in its print culture.

It was only after the entry of the printing press enabled by the American Baptists missionaries that a discernible impact of this novel technology on the intellectual and cultural life of the people of Assam took place. Print enabled the Assamese to enter the public sphere and the modern world by creating institutional spaces through newspapers and journals, codes (grammars and dictionaries), and a standard language. In the early part the missionaries were the active producers of print products. The missionaries had undoubtedly come for proselytisation for which they needed to print religious tracts and pamphlets; establishing schools which was auxiliary to their primary mission also led to printing of textbooks and such other teaching materials. After the British Government declared Bengali as the official language of Assam that language came to be used in the government schools importing textbooks from neighbouring Kolkata and mostly published by the foreign companies like Macmillan and Oxford. But the Baptist missionaries recognised Assamese as the language of the indigenous people and adopted it for their missionary activities. American missionaries like Nathan Brown, Miles Bronson, Mrs. Susan Ward, Mrs. Harriet B. L. Cutter, Ward, and Gurney were actively engaged in writing religious as well as textbooks including grammars, dictionaries, and phrase books. It was a part of their effort to organise the Assamese language on a scientific line. The American Baptist Mission Press established by the missionaries in Sibsagar in 1843 was the only printing press in Assam till another press was established in 1871. Thus for almost three decades whatever printing activity was undertaken in the region whether by the missionaries or by the indigenous persons was accomplished in this press. The first periodical in the Assamese language, *Orunudo*, was published from this Mission Press in the year 1846 as a monthly magazine. Besides its various contributions this periodical provided a public space for the indigenous

writers. The pages of *Orunudo* also witnessed the conflict between Nidhi Levi Farwell, the first indigenous convert, and Hemchandra Barua, an Assamese scholar and lexicographer, regarding the language to be used in *Orunudo*, or for that matter for any printing activity in the Assamese language. When the first American missionaries, Nathan Brown and Oliver T. Cutter, had come to Assam, they landed in Sadiya in Upper Assam and started their mission there. They next moved to Jaipur and ultimately settled in Sibsagar. Missions were also established in other parts of Assam as in Nagaon, Tezpur, and Guwahati. However, the activities of Nathan Brown, a linguist, were confined mostly to Upper Assam. There were two major consequences; the dialect used in this part of Assam was adopted for printing activities and a phonetic-orthography was used. “The system of Orthography adopted in the work, . . . much better corresponds with the actual pronunciation of the people than any other system met with” (Neog 2003: 125). Nidhi Levi Farwell who was one of the major contributors to the *Orunudo* was an ardent supporter of the system of orthography for which he was ridiculed and criticised by Hemchandra Barua who advocated the Sanskritised spelling system. He had written articles under the pseudonym Sonarchand on this matter in *Orunudo* in 1856 as well as wrote books on Assamese grammar and dictionary (Sharma 2006: 226).

Thus the American missionaries were active participants of print culture, establishing a printing press, writing books, printing and publishing them, providing public space for the indigenous persons in the pages of *Orunudo*, publishing advertisement for native writers as well as printing and most probably publishing books by Assamese writers. Moreover, they also used indigenous persons in their printing activities. Nidhi Levi Farwell, an Assamese convert, was actively engaged in the printing press of the missionaries from the very beginning. Local artisans were employed to prepare woodblocks to illustrate the periodical (Neog 2008: 227).

The American Baptist missionaries were not very successful in their primary objective of establishing mission in Assam, which was converting people to Christianity. The undeniable reason behind it was the strong hold of Vaishnava religion, propagated by Sankardeva, on a large section of the Assamese people. *Satras* were the religious and socio-cultural centres of Vaishnavism. The *Satradhikar* or religious head of one such *Satra*, the Auniati Satra of the Majuli Island was the first indigenous person to establish a printing press and named it Dharma Prakash Jantra (1871). The use of print by the

Christian missionaries is said to have inspired him to utilise the new technology in reaching out to more people. There is evidence of other *Satras* participating in the new print culture which will be discussed in later chapters. Soon printing presses and book publishing and selling centres were established by indigenous persons in different parts of Assam. These centres began their new enterprise by mostly printing and publishing the works of the Vaishnava saints and ancient scholars along with folklore. Books soon evolved into tradable commodities.

As already mentioned a section of the Assamese intelligentsia had encountered print culture in neighbouring Bengal even before the entry of print into Assam. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan had established a printing press, Calcutta New Press in Kolkata in 1852. Proximity of Assam to Bengal had far reaching effect on the language and literary culture of Assam. The British rulers introduced a new form, i.e. the western form of education in Assam. Soon Assamese young men travelled to Kolkata for higher education and came in contact with the various socio-cultural movements along with the thriving print technology of Bengal. Secular as well as religious books, periodicals, almanacs, and textbooks printed in Bengal and in the Bengali language, had entered Assam and were in circulation. Government policies can greatly affect and alter the collective as well as personal lives of the subjects and this was more so during the colonial period when Assam like any other part of South Asia was undergoing unprecedented changes in its civilised existence. In 1836 the British rulers declared Bengali as the official language of Assam replacing the Assamese language. This was done ten years after their direct interference in the politics of the region through the Treaty of Yandaboo signed in 1826 with the Burmese invaders of Assam. Though this was for administrative facility, a rumour had floated that Assamese was a dialect of the Bengali language and hence had to lose its position of being the official language. Even if Assamese was used as a medium of instruction in schools established by the American Baptist missionaries, Bengali came to be used in the government schools. The language policy followed by the colonial rulers proved to be defective having disastrous affect on the education of the people of the region as well as on the language and its literature. This led the Assamese intelligentsia to come up for the establishment of the unique identity of their language. The Assamese middle class, an outcome of the British administration, imbued with linguistic nationalism undertook to endeavour for the development of the Assamese language. In this attempt the Assamese people were

greatly and consistently supported by the American missionaries, particularly Nathan Brown and Miles Bronson. In the following chapters it can be seen the way in which print became a powerful tool for the enterprise. The pioneering members of this class Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Gunabhiram Barua, Hemchandra Barua, and others wrote books and had them printed and published. They also wrote in journals to reach out to the masses, even edited journals, encouraged new writers as well as kept vigilance on the use of syntax, grammar, and orthography through the journals. These early members of the intelligentsia invoked the country to strive for all-round development also through pamphlets and one of them, Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, established a press though in Kolkata. As already mentioned Hemchandra Barua through his articles in the journal *Orunudoï*, and by writing grammars and lexicons of the Assamese language successfully resisted the phonetic orthography used for the printing activities by the American missionaries who ultimately gave in.

In Assam where there was a thriving manuscript culture, the new print technology was brought in by the agents of a new civilisation. It was thus soon appropriated by the indigenous people for their own use. For the Assamese middle class that aimed at forming a nation out of the various groups of people residing in the region, print media became extremely useful. The type of nationalism followed by them in the nascent stages was linguistic nationalism. The intelligentsia tried to construct the cultural identity of the people mostly by working for the development of the Assamese language and its literature. They tried to develop it on the line of English language and literature and at the same time establish its uniqueness; for this both books and periodicals were used. In the colonial period more than books, newspapers and journals played a crucial role in structuring the literary culture of Assam. They facilitated for the first time a public space for expression of thoughts and ideas along with rational debates leading to formation of concepts and spread of ideology. After the pioneering step taken by the American missionaries by publishing the *Orunudoï*, many newspapers and journals were published by indigenous persons. Most of them were short lived, whereas some enjoyed popularity and gained longevity. But each of them had one objective of contributing toward the development of the mother tongue. Very often the journals followed the policy of non-interference in matters of politics and religion. The editors, proprietors, publishers, and writers had their reasons for taking up such a stand. It was only toward the later years of the colonial period that they became vocal in political

matters. One important factor affecting publishing of periodicals was the economics of print. Printing and publishing involved expenditure and that was quite high for the common man. The newspapers and magazines offered a much cheaper alternative for publishing of the works of the writers. Almost all the great writers and important members of the intelligentsia contributed toward these periodicals in more ways than one.

With the introduction and spread of English education in Assam the young men who received such education became sensitive toward the deplorable condition of the Assamese language and its literature. Along with the strivings on an individual level, these young men also made effort in an organised way leading to the formation of various associations. These organisations like the ABUSS and the Asam Sahitya Sabha formulated agendas where print media had a vital role to play. They had a crucial role to play in the cultural life of the people of the region.

Print and the idea of a nation were brought to Assam by the British Government. The colonial masters introduced a new system of administration gradually replacing the six hundred year old Ahom rule. The Ahom ruling class was so weakened by the onslaught of external enemies and internal bickering that it was rendered incapable of resisting new ideas and concepts. The entire region soon came under British rule. The new rulers had their new ways, new rules, and new laws to facilitate their hold over the occupied land. Although Assam had a thriving manuscript culture, the new administrative system and education system resulted in the need for textual transmission through print technology. The American Baptist missionaries who brought the first printing press to Assam had come to the region at the request of the British ruler. The indigenous people appropriated the new technology and soon became the producer as well as the consumer of print products. The role of the Assamese middle class was crucial since it was mostly the members of this class who actively ventured to shape the socio-cultural life of the people of the region. The project is a study of how print arrives, spreads, and affects the lives of the people.

During the colonial period periodicals proved to be the most effective and practical print genre for reaching out to the masses and then involving their participation in the public sphere. The next chapter is a study of how the Assamese intelligentsia got acquainted with this genre and then put it to their own uses.