

CHAPTER TWO

PERIODICALS IN COLONIAL ASSAM

The chapter explores how the members of the Assamese middle class who embarked on the voyage of nation-building used print media, predominantly in the form of periodicals, as a tool for accomplishing their mission. So, nationalism was the most important driving force behind the journals and newspapers of Assam between 1836 and 1947. The printing-press and the idea of nationalism made a late entry into Assam as compared to other parts of India. This was because it was only in the early part of the nineteenth century that the British made direct intervention in the politics of the region.

Though various factors contributed to the birth of the middle class in Assam, the most significant cause was the British rule. The intelligentsia who were mostly the members of this class tried to form an “imagined community” out of the various groups of people living in the region. However, it was not a politically sovereign nation-state that the class wanted to create. They wanted to organise the people into a community and structure its cultural identity out of new and old elements. For obvious historical reasons the form of nationalism at work in the early part was cultural, or to be more specific, linguistic nationalism. The few persons who received western education tried to reach out to the masses through periodicals to instruct and inform them of the new ideas that were blowing in from Europe and had already reached neighbouring Bengal.

It will be seen how Bengal in two opposing ways influenced the cultural shaping of the region. The social movements of Bengal inspired the leaders of the Assamese society to take similar steps. Moreover, the Bengali language and its literature were reshaped by the influence of European, especially English language and literature. The literati of Assam wanted to develop their language on a similar line. Two things had happened. The people of Assam felt the Bengali language and literature to be greatly superior to their own. So they considered it fashionable to read Bengali books and to use the language for correspondence and other matters. The other was that in 1836 the British Government, for practical reasons, had made Bengali the official language of Assam.

Gradually the concept came to be floated that Assamese was only a dialect of Bengali. Thus it became the mission of the conscious intelligentsia to establish the separate identity of the Assamese language, to compel the government to declare Assamese as the official language, and to motivate and inspire the people of Assam to work for its development and avoid the influence of the Bengali language and culture. As I examine the declarations and policies of the various periodicals of the time I observe that their primary objective was to keep away from politics (mostly in the early part) and to endeavour for the progress and development of language and literature of the region. The periodicals provided a platform to the social leaders to shape and structure the cultural identity of the Assamese people.

Anderson's definition of the nation as an imagined community and the role of print-capitalism in the spread of the idea of nation, in his work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, is a useful concept in understanding the emergence of nationalism and the dissemination of the idea through print genre, particularly periodicals, in colonial Assam. The work was first published in 1983. I have used relevant parts of his theses for facilitating this understanding. Though Anderson's theory has been criticised on various occasions yet scholars go back to it for his systematic approach to the ideas of nation, nationality, and nationalism. Feeling that no other scholar had provided a clear definition of the nation Benedict Anderson offers a "workable definition for the 'cultural artefact'": "In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson 2006: 5-6). The nation is thus a community that has to be imagined for it is not possible for all the members of the community to know each other. The emergence of the concepts of simultaneity and homogenous-empty time in the eighteenth century is of crucial importance in this aspect (24-25). The imagination that is required is made possible through the print genres like the novel and the newspaper. Thus to Anderson print revolution becomes centrally important factor in the rise of national consciousness, for all the members to feel that they belong to a nation though they may not in their entire lifetime get to be personally acquainted with each other. The fusion of print with capitalism, leading to what Anderson termed as print-capitalism, became central to his notion of nationalism. He further underlines how print technology enabled the production of an incredibly large number of books and thus its contents reaching out to

an equally huge number of readers (37-38). Print combined with capitalism created languages far fewer in numbers than the existing dialects and idiolects. “Nothing served to ‘assemble’ related vernaculars more than capitalism, which, within the limits imposed by grammars and syntaxes, created mechanically reproduced print-languages capable of dissemination through the market” (44). According to Anderson these print-languages laid the bases for national consciousness in three distinct ways: they “created unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above spoken vernaculars”, “print-capitalism gave a new fixity to language”, and “print-capitalism created languages-of-power. . . . Certain dialects inevitably were ‘closer’ to each print-language and dominated their final forms” (44-45). Thus print combined with capitalism led to standardisation of languages and made feasible wide spread communication and thereby enabled people to take part in a common discourse and to imagine themselves as a part of a larger community. Thus Anderson’s theory helps us to understand how the cultural identity of the Assamese nation was constructed into being, how introduction of print technology became a crucial factor in standardising the Assamese language, how the dialect of Upper Assam came to be considered as the standard, and how print genres enabled the spread of the idea of a nation in colonial Assam. A contemporary work which has helped in comprehending the construction of identity of the Assamese is Yasmin Saikia’s *Fragmented Memories: Struggling to be Tai-Ahom in India*. The book is concerned with the issue of identity of a group of people in Assam who refer to themselves as Tai-Ahoms. This group in the last decade of the twentieth century generated a movement with the aim of producing a past so as to create for itself a unique identity recognized within contemporary India. Saikia, in her work, underlines how identity of the Tai-Ahoms has been included in the narratives of the postcolonial Indian government, the colonial British government as well as in the early Ahom texts. In this chapter we shall see how periodicals provided the space for common discourse.

As I try to unfold the reasons responsible for the periodicals playing a significant role in shaping the region’s culture I understand that one important factor was the commercial angle. After the first printing press in Assam was established by the American Baptist missionaries, presses gradually came to be founded in different parts of the region by indigenous persons. But print technology was not cheap and as such it was not easy for

the common man to get his book published. Thus periodicals provided an inexpensive alternative for the new writers to get their literary and other compositions published.

In the latter half of the period under consideration, we note that some of the periodicals mostly newspapers showing interest in the Indian national movement. Focus will be on the fact that while still there were newspapers (especially those run by persons who held government jobs, title or enjoyed pensions) that avoided direct confrontation with the rulers, there were others that openly criticised government policies. They published news about the achievements of the freedom fighters.

I shall begin the chapter with a brief discussion about factors and circumstances that created the Assamese middle class as it was mostly the members of this class who were the editors, printers, publishers, and proprietors of the periodicals as well as books. These were the people who were the first recipients of western modes of education. The chapter is not an exhaustive study of all the periodicals of the period from 1836 to 1947. I have selected those periodicals which have been regarded as significant in some way or other by the pioneering works on the periodicals of Assam as well as by me after a somewhat detailed survey of the period. The first focus will be on *Orunudoï* which was the first journal in the Assamese language and among its many contributions one was that it created a public sphere for the people of the region for the first time. Then I continue to trace the story of the periodical as it passes through the different stages of an eventful period in Assam history.

The chapter tries to create social profiles of the persons (writers, editors, proof readers, printers, publishers, etc.) responsible for the production of the periodicals. How had these people created a readership and then tried to cater to that readership? How did government policies, like those concerning education and censor, affect the periodicals? Was *Orunudoï* the first periodical that the people of Assam came in contact with or were they already familiar with the genre? These are some of the questions that the chapter would address.

The first periodical in the Assamese language, *Orunudoï*, was published by the American Baptist missionaries. But it was the members of the Assamese middle class who took up this genre and transformed it into a force to reckon with in the socio-cultural arena. During the colonial period it was the members of this class who were the first to receive western mode of education and were the architects of the modern

Assamese nation. I have tried to understand the formation of this class that played a significant role in the print culture of this region.

The menacing activities of the Burmese invaders in the early nineteenth century resulted in the intervention of the British in the internal affairs of Assam. Ultimately they drove out the Burmese and by “the treaty of Yandaboo, 26 February 1826, His Majesty, the King of Ava surrendered amongst other his claim over Assam and the neighbouring States of Cachar, Jayantia and Manipur to the British government” (Barpujari 1999 [vol i]: 7). The East India Company did not immediately annex the entire region; it was a gradual process. “Thus the process began, though slowly, for the extension of the British dominion into Assam or the North-East Frontier. The people submitted to the inevitable: in fact they ‘hailed with unbounded joy’ their deliverers who saved them from the tyranny of the Burmese, and offered them the most loyal cooperation” (10). When Assam came under British government at the beginning Persian and English were the made the court languages. Persian language hence came to influence the Assamese language as a number of Persian words entered the language. Under the aegis of the same government Bengali later replaced Persian as the court language in Assam (Ahmed 2014: 768). The resistance to the colonial rulers at an early stage came from the ruling and the noble class. When the British introduced their administrative system in Assam the members of the Ahom nobility were employed. But they proved utterly hopeless in adapting to the new system. And therefore the British “had no other alternative but to resort to the employment, in lieu of ‘men of rank’, ‘men of ability and business’, mostly from the neighbouring districts of Bengal, lest they had to ‘relinquish all hope of realizing government due’” (19). Thus these “men of rank” when they found themselves and their relatives and associates out of engagement in the administration of their country, were hurt, enraged, and alarmed. They rose in rebellion against the British from time to time under the leadership of persons like Dhanjoy Bargohain towards the end of 1828, Harakanta and Hemnath (both sons of Dhanjoy), Jeuram Dihingia Barua (son-in-law), Peali (son of Badan Barphukan the ex-viceroy of Guwahati), and others in February 1830, and Maniram Dewan in 1857, but these revolts were all crushed by the government (19-20, 77). The English rulers gradually did away with the six hundred years old Ahom rule and removed the old aristocrats from their positions of power. In place of the Ahom administrative officials and political power wielders, were positioned a group of Caste Hindu officers. Thus from the old social system was born a new social

strata formed of clerks, officers, professionals, and industrialists. Members of this strata belonged mostly to Brahmin, Kayastha, and Kalita castes. These were social groups, who did not themselves cultivate the land; being rich and educated they had great influence over the society. They were upholders of feudalism and the Hindu Varna system. This social group formed the middle class in Assam. Though it did not have political power its land and property were not confiscated by the colonial masters. The middle class of Assam was created by the British and it was deeply grateful to its creator. The members of this class believed for a long time that peace and development of the region could reign only under the benevolent rule of the foreign rulers. Maniram Dewan who dared to stand up against the British rulers was awarded capital punishment and the incident taught a lesson not to be easily forgotten (Sharma 2008: 24-27).

Francis Jenkins, the Commissioner of Assam (1834-61) felt that the service of the people of the soil was to be acquired for which they were to be trained through education (Barpujari 1999 [vol i]: 103). The members of the society who thus received education and instruction under the British were the pioneering members of the Assamese middle class. In the beginning the government posts were filled by Caste Hindus from Bengal; the Bengalis became the contenders of the members of the Assamese middle class. So it became their sacred mission to do away with them. But they could never, in their wildest dreams think of throwing out the foreign rulers. The middle class owed its deepest allegiance to the new rulers. Their attitude was a blend of deep gratitude and servility ever ready to serve and pray for a long life of its new found rulers. The members of this class were the leaders of the new society struggling to be born out of the gradual decay of feudalism of the Ahoms and the rising capitalism of the colonialist rulers. The aim of this class was to form itself into a national class. Though they were in the good books of their new rulers this did not immediately earn them the support of the entire society. Thus this class, born out of fading feudalism and newly emerging capitalism, embarked on the mission of forming a nation. The Brahmins and the other Caste Hindus, who owned knowledge of the Sanskrit language, had exercised great influence during the Ahom rule. The members of these castes were now given western education so that they could assist in governing the land. So they once again received the opportunity of occupying an influential position in the society. In fulfilling their aim of forming a nation the members of the middle class newly discovered certain old institutions and created some new ones. One such was Assamese language and

literature, which existed since many centuries but was now modernised and standardised and this was made possible because of printing press and periodicals (Sharma 2008: 27).

The true character of the colonial masters was not understood by the Assamese middle class. The leaders of the time thought that progress and development of the society was possible only under colonial rule. Moreover, most of the members of this class were either government job holders or tea garden owners or managers and clerks in tea gardens. Consequently their financial condition was directly dependent on British administration. Hence in lieu of a revolution aimed at gaining political liberty, reformation of the society was aimed at. In this context one of the important issues taken up at initial stages was the reformation and development of the Assamese language and literature. It was an issue which would not affect the political design of the rulers and at the same time touch a chord in the heart of all people of the region. Periodical was a medium by which a large number of people could be affected and also provide a public sphere where opinion of the readers regarding language and literature could be shaped.

Orunudo was the first periodical in the Assamese language. But was it the first of the genre the Assamese people came in contact with? Evidence, however, proves otherwise. *Bengal Gazette* or *Calcutta General Advertiser*, the first Indian newspaper was brought out in 1780 in Bengal, whereas the first newspaper in an Indian language *Samachar Darpan* was brought out in May, 1818. The monthly *Digdarshan* was published in the month of April of the same year. The British missionaries, William Carey, John Clark Marshman, and William Ward were the people behind the periodicals published from the Serampore mission. After the pioneering steps being taken, a number of periodicals in Bengali like *Samachar Kaumudi* (1821), *Samachar Chandrika* (1822), *Sangbad Timir Nashak* (1826), *Bangadoot* (1829), *Sangad Prabhakar* (1831), *Jnaneswar* (1831), *Sangbad Purnachandradoi* (1835), *Sangbad Bhaskar* (1839), and *Tatvabodhini* (1843) were published (Bhattacharyya 2007: 75). Most of these were weekly or monthly periodicals. On the one hand these presented themselves as working models for the American Baptist missionaries who published *Orunudo* in 1846. On the other hand, a section of the Assamese people who always had contact with Bengal was familiar with these newspapers and journals.

An issue of *Samachar Darpan* quoted: “The respected citizens of Assam keep in touch with the happenings in Bengal through newspapers published in this province and no single district of Bengal has so many subscribers as there are in Assam. There is hardly a week when letters from Assam do not reach us or other newspapers of this province” (Bhattacharyya 2007: 76). Jaduram Dekabarua (1801-1869), Haliram Dhekial Phukan (1802-1830), Maniram Dewan (1806-1858), the *Satradhikar* of Auniati Satra Sri Sri Dattadev Goswami (1818-1904), Jagyaram Kharghaia Phukan, and Indibar Barua are some of the “respected citizens” of Assam. They were knowledgeable and educated people who subscribed to periodicals from Bengal in the absence of those in Assam (76). Thus when the first periodical in Assamese was published in 1846 already a demand, though on a small scale, for newspapers and magazines was created.

After the Treaty of Yandaboo, 1826, the British rulers gradually took over Assam and the six hundred years old Ahom rule came to an end. The treaty was signed between the Burmese invaders of Assam and the British; interestingly the Assamese had no say in it. The social, cultural, political, and the economic spheres of the life of the region were greatly affected by the new rule. We have already mentioned the circumstances leading to the birth of the middle class. The various laws and policies formulated by the new masters had far reaching effect; one such was the law declaring the Bengali language as the official language of Assam. The year of passing of the law, 1836, was also the year of entry of the American Baptist missionaries.

The principal aim of the missionaries was the spread of the Christian religion. Interestingly it was also the principle of these missionaries that the message of the Lord was to be preached in the language of the people. So when the missionaries had come to Assam they brought along with them a fount of Bengali type along with a fount of Roman type. This was because letters of the Assamese alphabet were similar to that of the Bengali with a few exceptions. The missionaries were also scholars and linguists. Besides religion they had interest in language as well. Nathan Brown soon decided that the Assamese language was different from the Bengali language and not a dialect or sub-group of the latter. We know that the missionaries were hardly successful in their program of evangelisation. Very few natives got converted, as already mentioned in the former chapter, most probably due to the stronghold of the Vaishnava religion propagated by Sankardeva, the Vaishnava saint in the sixteenth century. The next step was an indirect one: an attempt at enabling the ideas and concept of the Christian

religion make their way into homes of the people of the region through a periodical. This led to the birth of the first Assamese periodical, the *Orunudoi*.

It should be noted that since the first publication in 1846 till December 1850, this Assamese newspaper was known as *Orunudoi Sambadpatra*. From January 1851 onwards it came to be known as *Orunudoi* and *The Orunudoi* in English. *Orunudoi* served as the mouth piece of a religious organisation and as such commercial success must not have been the primary aim. But at the same time funds coming from the Home Board were also limited and so a price had to be demanded to at least to recover the expenses of printing and publishing the journal. In the September issue of the year 1846 of the *Baptist Missionary Magazine* published by the American Baptist Board of Foreign Missions an article titled “Newspaper in Assamese” was published in the Miscellany section. It was stated,

The missionaries in Assam have commenced the publication of a newspaper in the native tongue, styled “*Orunudoi*,” translated by Mr. Cutter, “The Aurora,” and by “The Rising”. It is published monthly, and is designed to be the medium of scientific, moral, and evangelical truth. Strong hopes are entertained by the brethren, that it will greatly facilitate their intercourse with the people, and be the means of calling attention to the character and claims of Christianity. (290)

In the Volume 1 of the first part of *Orunudoi Sambadpatra* along with the title we find the declaration made in the name of the printer: “*The Orunudoi*, A monthly paper, devoted to religion, science and general intelligence, is printed and published at the Sibsagar Mission Press, by O. T. Cutter, for American Baptist Mission in Assam. Price, One Rupee per annum, in advance, or one and a half, at the end of the year” (Neog 2003: 16). From its inception *Orunudoi* was published in two forms, the magazine consisting of eight smaller pages and the newspaper containing four larger pages, each having one issue per month. After 1850 the content of the magazine was, however, doubled. “The India Office Library and British Library catalogues designate the magazine as ‘quarto size’. In 1873-74, the size of the magazine was ‘royal folio’ (approximately 50cm x 30 cm). The newspaper contained half the number of pages, approximately 38 cm x 27 cm. This was called ‘folio size’. . . . From January, 1855,

with a change in editor, or in 1854, the newspaper was dropped altogether. The magazine form continued with 16 pages” (Gillespie 2008: 480). Rev. O. T. Cutter was its printer and publisher and Nathan Brown was mentioned as its editor from 1850. A. H. Danforth, Samuel M. Whiting, William Ward, Rev. E. W. Clark, Mrs. Ward, and A. K. Gurney are some of the editors of the journal. There were a number of Christian and non-Christian contributors to it, Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Gunabhiram Barua, Hem Chandra Barua, and Nidhi Levi Farwell being a few.

The content of *Orunudoi* was varied including articles on Christianity, national and international news, information of religion, description of important historical events, scientific matters, insight into the history of ancient Assam, short stories, hymns, geographical information, current affairs, translated parts of the Bible, and description of India. At a time when the journal was published there were no railways or telegraph lines. Hence the news now available in a second then needed a few months to arrive. Yet *Orunudoi* was able to provide news of the world outside along with that of the province for the first time and hence stir the curiosity of the people. *Orunudoi* became a synonym for the term newspaper.

As the missionaries came to Assam at the behest of British rulers they could not have gone against the ruling power on policy matters. This is also pointed out by Dr. Debabrata Sarma in his book *Asamiya Jati Gathan Prakriya Aru Jatiyo-Janagosthigata Anusthan Samoh* (122). No article criticising the government was published in the pages of journal. However, there were two exceptions. One was that the missionaries fought along with the Assamese for making the language of the region the official language. The other was that they never supported and rather criticised the British policy regarding opium. It is easily understood why nothing was written about the fact that true welfare of the people could be gained through political and consequently economic liberty of the people. Political nationalism as a topic was taboo. But the journal offered unflinching support to the members of the Assamese middle class in the matter of linguistic nationalism. Though an indirect consequence of the missionary policy of preaching in the language of the people, it proved a boon for the natives. One very important achievement of the periodical was that it created a public sphere for the people of Assam. Though the people of the region were familiar with the Bengali newspapers, it was a very small section. *Orunudoi* was able to reach out to a larger number of people.

Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Gunanibhram Barua, and Hemchandra Barua were the three pioneering leaders of the Assamese middle class who had taken up the language question in the nascent stage. These three persons expressed their views and called upon the people to do the needful, in the pages of *Orunudoï*. It was the first platform and also a strong one for the members of the Assamese middle class to develop their language and take the first firm steps in proving its distinctive identity. In the pages of this journal people witnessed the duel between Hem Chandra Barua and Nidhi Levi Farewel, the first Assamese convert over the orthography of the Assamese language. The missionaries ultimately agreed to follow the orthography suggested by Barua as the correct one. Though, the prime purpose of *Orunudoï* was the spread of Christianity, yet it was this periodical that provided a platform for secular writing. *Orunudoï* became irregular in its publication after 1861 (Saikia 2007: 63).

Through the periodical, the *Orunudoï*, the print genre reached a number of Assamese people. The question arises how extensive that sphere was. Keeping in mind the educational scenario of the time, it can be surmised that there would be a small section of literate (receiving the British form of education) Assamese people who would buy and read the *Orunudoï*. From the data published in the June 1858 issue of the periodical we come to know that in the period 1846-1854, 357 to 536 individuals subscribed to the *Orunudoï*. These were missionaries, foreigners, and indigenous persons. By making a study of some of the lists of subscribers published in *Orunudoï*, for example those that were published in all the issues of 1854 excepting that of February, we can make an idea of the readership that the publishers aimed for (Neog 2003: 1090, 1122, 1138, 1154, 1170, 1186, 1202, 1218, 1234, 1250, 1266). It can be stated with much certainty that the journal was aimed mostly at the British rulers, traders, tea planters, and local persons belonging to the upper strata of the society. A number of the indigenous persons were government job holders, businessmen, tea planters, and such others dependent on government patronage. The journal was dependent heavily on the financial support of these subscribers. So the actual Assamese buyers were a very small section but due to their position in society they were crucial to the emergence and shaping of the literary sphere. Persons like Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Gunanibhram Barua, and Hemchandra Barua, who contributed articles to the periodical, played the role of giving the clarion call to the masses to participate in the literary sphere.

Table 1Circulation of the *Orunudo* from 1846 to 1854 in Assam

	1846	1847	1848	1849	1850	1851	1852	1853	1854
Foreigners									
Sibsagar	19	19	19	19	27	27	25	25	25
Nazira	1	1	0	10	10	10	10	10	15
Lakhimpur	5	5	5	5	5	5	2	2	2
Dibrugarh	20	21	24	23	39	39	29	44	32
Jaipur	23	18	8	0	0	0	0	0	0
Saikhowa	0	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	12
Golaghat	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Tezpur	44	44	53	29	40	41	40	16	7
Mangaldoi	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nagaon	10	8	6	6	6	6	6	7	7
Guwahati	74	74	65	64	74	76	62	51	56
Goalpara	5	5	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	213	207	195	168	213	216	186	167	158
Indigenous persons									
Sibsagar	44	44	35	38	42	49	34	40	47
Nazira	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Jorhat	1	1	3	3	4	5	6	7	7
Lakhimpur	23	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dibrugarh	16	24	2	4	4	4	4	3	5
Golaghat	13	13	9	9	9	9	9	11	11
Tezpur	31	28	11	3	24	25	25	7	7
Mangaldoi	42	42	11	0	0	0	0	0	0

Nagaon	38	0	4	4	4	12	11	24	25
Guwahati	40	39	39	39	39	35	35	24	25
Goalpara	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bengal	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	2
TOTAL	249	215	114	100	126	139	126	119	131
Missionaries									
Sibsagar	10	10	10	10	10	25	32	25	25
Nagaon	42	42	47	47	50	54	52	52	58
Guwahati	22	22	22	32	25	48	41	33	28
Retained for distribution	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
TOTAL	114	114	119	129	125	169	165	150	151
GRAND TOTAL	576	536	428	397	464	522	477	436	440

Source: *The Orunudo: 1846-1854*. Ed. Maheswar Neog. 2nd ed. Guwahati: Publication Board Assam, 2003. 1169. Print.

- a. *The Orunudo* referred to here is a facsimile edition of the one published by the Sibsagar Mission Press. It includes the issues of *The Orunudo* from 1846 to 1854. It has been brought out by the Publication Board of Assam in 2003 and Maheswar Neog is the editor of this collected volume. This table was published in the June issue of 1854.

In towns like Sibsagar and Guwahati, we find that a greater number of buyers most probably due to the presence of a greater number of schools and thus leading to a higher literacy rate. Nagaon, Tezpur, and Golaghat also reflect an encouraging picture. The smaller number of indigenous buyers in other towns might be affected by lack of proper communication system.

For the people of Assam print media was not an entirely unknown matter. They had been familiar with books and newspapers from neighbouring Bengal. But the Mission Press established by the American Baptist missionaries in Sibsagar and the books,

pamphlets, tracts, and most importantly the periodical *Orunudo* printed and published from there brought print technology closer to them. A few of them could now venture forth to appropriate the technology for their own use. One such was the *Satradhikar* of the Auniati Satra, Sri Sri Dattadev Goswami who established a press in Majuli and named it Dharma Prakash Jantra. Besides publishing religious books, the *Satradhikar* published a monthly newspaper from the press, *The Assam Bilasinee*. “The *Assam Bilashini* [sic] (1871-83), published from Dharma Prakash Press, Auniati Satra (Sibsagar district), though religious in tone, contained news and views as well as general information” (Barpujari 1999 [vol v]: 231). It is the second journal of Assam and first by the Assamese. It is said that Goswami was inspired to take up this venture by the American Baptist Missionaries. He must have realised that the printed tracts, books, and the journal were proving an active vehicle in converting the people into Christianity (Bhattacharyya 1998: 63-64). It was no mean task to publish a journal from the island of Majuli which continued from 1871 to 1883. The periodical enjoyed a longer lifespan than some of its contemporaries. But this good fortune was not enjoyed by the other newspaper brought out from Dharma Prakash Jantra. *Assam Tara* published under Sridhar Barua in 1888 was in circulation for only one year.

To Anderson the act of reading newspaper and novel was of colossal importance to the act of imagining the nation. “For these forms provided the technical means for ‘representing’ the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation” (Anderson 2006: 24-25). One member of the community reading a newspaper makes him imagine his act being replicated by thousands of others of his kind whom he might never meet personally. When the capitalists took up printing as an enterprise they did it in a large scale. Newspapers were printed in huge numbers and hence one reader could think of a large number such other readers. In Assam during the colonial period due to the scarcity of native capital things did not happen in a grand scale yet efforts were being made. The Assamese intelligentsia realised that the periodical could be a powerful medium of bringing together and linking the potential members of the Assamese community.

In the nascent stage of periodicals in Assam its growth was affected by various historical factors. One major factor was the introduction of the British rule. The lifespan of a periodical, its circulation depends on demand, on its prospective buyers and readers, in other words its consumers. To put it in another way, there has to be a market. As already mentioned the colonial rulers had declared the Bengali language as the

official language and thus it became the medium of instruction in schools and the language to be used in offices. Hence in the initial stages clerks and other official assistants were recruited in Bengal. It is not difficult to deduct the fact that these Bengali *babus* were some of the subscribers of newspapers from Bengal. Moreover, when Bengali became the official language the students who attended the government schools received their education in the Bengali medium. In the sphere of education it was a dismal scenario. Another factor was that the region was just shaking off the onslaught of the Burmese invasion. The long Ahom rule was finding it difficult to stand up to the ravages of the times. The novel money economy introduced by the British was taking its toll on the people (Barpujari 1999 [vol i]: 1-15). The publication as well as purchasing of a periodical needed money and its dearth amongst people affected its production, just as its demand was influenced by the education of the people.

From 1873 to 1889 (the year *Jonaki* was published) a number of journals and newspapers were published. Their short life is a pointer to the fact that the kind of atmosphere required for the flourishing of a periodical had not yet developed. Yet each made its own little contribution towards the evolving of the Assamese language and literature; and more importantly, from the book history point of view, they underlined the need of journals and newspapers. Those were pioneering steps in the brave new world of print culture. Just one year was the lifespan of the two Bengali newspapers *Assam Mihir* published from Guwahati in 1872 and *Goalpara Hit Sadhini* published from Goalpara in 1876 (Saikia 2007: 62). *Assam Darpan* published from Darrang in 1873, *Chandrodaya* published from Dihing Satra in 1876, and *Assam Deepika* from Guwahati in 1876 faded from the scene without causing much stir (Saikia 2007: 62-69). However, two periodicals, *Assam News* and *Assam Bandhu*, could not only create ripples on the surface of water but also steer the flow in a particular direction. Their contributions were substantial and formative. *Mou* was another short lived journal which was able to draw the attention of the intelligentsia.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Hemchandra Barua and Gunabhiram Barua played crucial roles in the development of the Assamese language. Hemchandra Barua wrote a number of articles in the pages of *Orunudo*. He was not in the favour of the spelling system followed by the missionaries and strongly opposed it. The missionaries ultimately accepted the Sanskrit based spelling system supported by Barua. The Assamese language was in a very crucial stage and Hemchandra Barua the writer of the

Assamese lexicon, *Hemkosh*, stood like a sentinel of the language ever alert regarding its correct usage. One of the very few business firms of the times, Barua-Phookan Brothers, published a bilingual weekly newspaper *Assam News* in 1882 and appointed Hemchandra Barua as its editor. As an editor too, he continued in his role of being a sentinel. Great attention was paid to the correct use of the language and contributors of articles had to be careful about it (Borua 2007: 6-7). Thus the most important role played by this periodical was standardising the language. Lakshminath Bezbarua in his memoir *Mor Jivan Sowaran* declares that he learnt the language by following the newspaper. "I was greatly afflicted with the disease of reading the *Assam News*. I would be waiting for the newspaper to arrive and would be the first one to read or rather to swallow it. The truth is that it was by observing style of writing followed by the paper that I learnt to write creatively in the Assamese language" (my translation) (65-66). Bezbarua also laments that the periodical reached its closure due to the ill health of its editor and a periodical of that standard did not again appear in Assam (66). The publication of the newspaper came to its end in 1885 (Borua 2007: 7). Gunabhiram Barua's single handed effort resulted in the *Assam Bandhu*. Published from Nagaon in 1885, only fourteen issues could be produced. In the editorial of the monthly periodical, Barua declares that he would steer clear of two things, politics and religion (Bhuyan 2007: 87). Gunabhiram was not a strict disciplinarian regarding grammar, spelling, and syntax. His aim was to encourage new writers. More and more people should try their hand in the use of the Assamese language. He had written from Kolkata under a pseudonym in the pages of *Orunudo* that the need of the hour was to learn to write in one's mother tongue. These letters appeared in the issues of the months of May, July, August, and October 1853 and in that of January 1854 (Neog 2003: 949-50, 986-87, 996-98, 1032-033). Two letters were published in the August issue of 1853 (Neog 2003: 1088). As Dr. Debabrata Sarma points out the first steps toward linguistic nationalism were taken in those articles (Sharma 2008: 124-25). While *Assam News* strengthened the foundation of the language, *Assam Bandhu* provided an atmosphere conducive to literary flowering. It furnished the breathing space required for creative writing. Though the periodical had a short life, its success lies in creating a group of writers writing in the Assamese language.

It was a time when groups as well as single individuals published periodicals which experienced mostly very short life span. This underlines the fact that periodicals were

considered practical means of educating a people who were struggling to be born into a new world. Eight months after *Assam Bandhu* ceased to exist *Mou, The Bee* was published in 1886 by Bolinarayan Bora, an engineer. The name of the editor was given as Harnarayan Bora, the brother of Bolinarayan Bora, as the latter was a government officer, the Assistant Engineer of Nagaon, during that period. Bolinarayan Bora was an intelligent man and he thought about the changing times that Assam had to face. From the name of the articles that were published in the magazine we feel that his main concern was socio-political and socio-economic. He neither pioneered nor participated in any literary movement. At the same time he expected high standard from contributors to the periodical. Ultimately except a couple of articles, all others were written by Bora himself (Sharma 2003). Lakshminath Bezbarua in his memoir has clearly put down how *Mou* met with an untimely death at the hands of the young Assamese students who felt that the periodical was not patriotic enough. Rather it was conservative and at the same time admirer of the British (Bezbarua 2008: 78).

With some improvement in the secondary education scenario the students of Assam began venturing forth to Bengal for higher education. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Assamese students pursuing higher education in Kolkata were greatly energised by the social, cultural, and intellectual activities taking place in Bengal. Organisations and institutions “deeply connected with language, literature and society, such as Fort William College established in 1800, Calcutta University founded in 1857, Asiatic Society of Bengal founded in 1784, Vernacular Literary Society, Oriental Literary Society, Banga Heet Sabha, Bangabhasa Prakashika Sabha, etc. worked to usher in an era of intellectual activity and social regeneration in Bengal” (Saikia 2007: 65). These inspired the students to do something for their mother tongue and resulted in the formation of the ABUSS on 25 August 1888. As the name indicates it was a society pledged to develop its language and literature.

The other side of the story is that the many people of Assam who were educated in the Bengali medium and grew up reading literature in the Bengali language became great admirers of the language. They were much impressed by the literature of the neighbouring region which came to be influenced by English literature. The intelligentsia of Assam felt that it was a matter of concern that many of the Assamese people considered that the Bengali language and literature were superior to their own. Thus the students from Assam who went to Kolkata for higher studies and also some of

those who were in Assam felt that the need of the hour was to do something constructive for the Assamese language. Though Assamese was declared as the official language in 1873, much damage had already been done.

Not only the newspapers and magazines of Bengal but also those of Assam must have underlined the “power in print” to the leading members of the society. The ability of print to reach out to a large number of people and influence them was realised by the young students. Hence a decision was taken by the society to publish in printed form the discussions on various issues done in the sittings of the society.

Chandra Kumar Agarwalla offered to take the responsibility of editing and publishing a monthly journal provided every member of the ABUSS pledged to contribute writing regularly and, in case of default, agreed to pay a fine of rupees fifteen. Thus began in the early part of 1889, the life cycle of Calcutta-based literary journal *Jonaki* which played a vital role in the growth and development of modern Assamese literature. (Saikia 2007: 65)

The four major journals *Jonaki*, *Bijuli*, *Banhi*, and *Usha* were guided by the same spirit—the need to nurture the Assamese language and its literature and thus serve the nation. The urge to do something for the nation, rather the consciousness of being a nation came up when it was felt that there was an opposing force against which there was a need to stand up. Up to that point of time the force was not the British. Nationalism that formed a shape in the minds of the people was not political in nature but it was what has been termed as the linguistic nationalism. The first steps towards this could be seen in the pages of *Orunudo* and *Assam Bandhu* (Sharma 2008: 138).

A brief study of the policies of these four journals would reveal the fact that service towards one’s mother tongue was synonymous with service towards one’s motherland. A short reference to the objectives of the ABUSS is made as not only its mouthpiece *Jonaki* but most other journals that came up upheld its goals. “The mother tongue is in its infancy. Hence the aim of the society would be its growth and development. How the language could be enriched so that it could be at par with the other languages of the world, how like the sun it could enlighten the motherland and from a sick and poor state

could metamorphose into a healthy state was the goal of the society” (my translation) (Bezbarua 2008: 82-83).

Jonaki (1889) functioned as the mouthpiece of the ABUSS and as such the policy of the journal could hardly be different from that of the society. The editorial of the first issue of *Jonaki* states:

Literature, science, society would be the topics of discussion. We would try to comprehend and publish these matters. Each one of us would devote our energy to the newly developing land of Assam. For this country which is enveloped in darkness, even if we are not able to bring forth moonlight, through our individual endeavour if we could create even a spark we would feel that our actions have not gone in vain. We are here to fight against darkness-the aim is the development of our motherland, to create moonlight. (my translation) (Bezbarua 2008: 79)

Bijuli (1891) published by a group of young people who had disassociated themselves from ABUSS, had no clearly defined editorial policy. Rather there was no section demarcated as the editorial of the journal. But there was a segment in which the editor would write on various topics relating language, literature, and social development. Moreover, the various articles published in the different issues are an indicator of the fact that the policy of this journal was no way distinct from that of *Jonaki*. Besides Padmanath Gohainbarua’s various articles and novel, Benudhar Rajkhowa’s “Asamiya Bhasha Kenekoi Beleg Bhasha” (How Assamese is a Separate Language), Lambodar Bora’s “Anandaram Barooah”, Prasanna Kumar Ghosh’s “Goalpara”, Goonabhiram Barua’s “Assam Jatra”, poems by different poets, biographies, and scientific topics published in the many issues of the journal reflect the fact that the group of Assamese youths was bent on serving its motherland in a way identical to that of ABUSS (Borkataki 2007: 144-45). Padmanath Gohainbarua mentions about his experience of working for the journal in his memoir *Mor Sowarani*.

Just about a month of my stay in Kolkata was to be completed, a monthly journal titled *Bijuli* was born as a result of the effort of my friend late Krishna Prasad Duara and from the students’ hostel in No. 4 Pratapchandra Chatturjee Lane. I

was very happy about it and promised my friend to help in every way I could. . . . Along with collecting material to be published in the journal I tried to help it financially. For this during my leisure I would collect advertisement from all big and small shopkeepers and businessmen as much as I could, hence there was always a copy of the *Bijuli* in my pocket. (my translation) (29-30)

Usha (1907) was published a year after the closure of *Bijuli*. Its policy was published in the editorial of the first issue:

In short, the magazine aims at the prosperity of national literature. Along with it, discussion has been initiated on the development of society, science, agriculture, art, and commerce of the country. The magazine excluded topics on politics and religion, because the two topics were supposed to hamper the selfless service to literature. Service to literature irrespective of any religion; it should not be muddled by the discussion of the controversial topics like politics and religion. Of course, religion, and politics are useful for the common masses; hence they would not be totally excluded from the magazine. Whenever a controversy arises, it should be solved through logical argument; the writer should not be put under attack directly. (Borkataki 2007: 147).

When the Assamese middle class embarked on the mission of nation forming it took the help of tools both new and old. The printing press led to the standardisation of the language and its literature. The periodicals became public spaces for training the writers enabling them to write in a standardised language. Other measures like projection of a national leader, national religion, and national festival were played out in the pages of the periodicals. In the pages of *Banhi* (1909), we see Lakshminath Bezbarua trying to establish Sankardeva as the father of the Assamese nation and also Bihu as the national festival of Assam. Bezbarua had written a number of articles on love for one's country as well as national consciousness. These articles were published in the pages of *Jonaki* from its very first issue. A number of lectures on the Assamese language delivered by

Bezbarua in the various sessions of the Assamese Students Literary Club in Calcutta were also published serially in the same periodical. Similar writings on the Assamese nation and its language were published in *Banhi*. The Assamese nation was not a product of the present but that it had a rich history, its foundation formed of ancient Kamrup and medieval Assam history. Bezbarua, through his writings, saw to it that the present and the future generations could take pride in its history. As Dr. Debabrata Sarma puts it, “In short on the basis of linguistic, cultural, and literary characteristics, periodicals like *Jonaki*, *Bijuli*, *Usha*, and *Assam Banti* tried to establish the individual identity of the Assamese nation and were successful to a certain extent” (my translation) (Sharma 2008: 155).

An overview of the profiles of the personalities behind these journals also states why they consciously avoided political nationalism. Chandra Kumar Agarwalla who took up the responsibility of *Jonaki* belonged to a business family. Hence he could not think of going against the ruling power. Some of the important writers, like Gunabhiram Barua and Kanaklal Barua, who contributed to the journal were ones enjoying titles and posts offered by the British rulers. Hence instead of criticising government policies they conferred various epithets on the foreign rulers praising them for their benediction (Sharma 2008: 146). Padmanath Gohainbarua who was deeply involved with *Bijuli*, *Usha*, and *Asom Bonti* was a government employee who had in the editorial of *Usha* clearly stated that politics would be kept out of its scope along with religion (Gohainbarua 2005: 3). Lakshminath Bezbarua was a force to reckon with in the literary field and was a regular contributor of *Usha*. But when the contents of one of his articles “Angloindian” published in *Usha* was greatly resented by the British rulers, Padmanath Gohainbarua apologized officially for publishing the article without first scrutinising its content. Moreover, it was stated that the journal would have no further connection with the articles of the kind. Bezbarua was greatly upset with this testimonial and disassociated himself from *Usha*. This is a well-known episode in the history of Assamese literature. However, a close examination of the article would reveal that Bezbarua was not wishing an expulsion of the British rulers. Rather he wanted that they should reform themselves so that they could prolong their stay in Assam. Bezbarua never accepted a government post; he was a merchant. But at the same time he did not participate in the national movement which had by then spread to Assam. He had made certain satirical comments on the various programs and agendas of the movement such

as boycott and swadeshi in “Bharat Uddhar” and “Bandemataram” which are a part of the series “Kripabar Baruar Pratyagaman” published in 1909 (Mahanta 2009: 245).

At times along with the voice of the publisher, editor, and writers, that of the readers could be heard in the periodicals. Though not a regular feature a few periodicals published letters from readers. An illustration of this is the second issue of the third of the literary journal *Banhi* which included correspondence of readers. Some of these reflected the readers’ reluctance to pay for the journal sent to them through V. P. or value paid post. Many of them also expressed their dissatisfaction as their compositions were not published in the journal. At the same time there were also those who highly praised Lakshminath Bezbarua for his contribution to *Banhi* (Goswami 2001: 39-41).

Gradually things started to take a different turn. The atmosphere seemed to be charged up by the political activities at a national level. “Country” did not just mean the region of Assam but the idea or notion that Assam was a part of India came to be floated. The journals and newspapers came to be influenced by the happenings as well as started influencing them. No doubt there were those periodicals which steered clear of commenting on government matters but there came up others which remarked on those in no unclear words.

From the very first session of the Indian National Congress (INC) the various associations of Assam sent representatives to the sessions. However, the Assam Pradeshik Congress Committee (APCC) was formed only in 1921. Even after the formation of the APCC the leading members of the society were divided as to their political loyalty. There were those who still did not want direct conflict with the British and preferred the politics of prayer and petition. There were yet others who considered the British Government as guest government that always put its own interests above the interest of the subjects. Very soon the struggle of the people of the region came to be considered as a part of a greater struggle at national level. Common people showed their curiosity in the programs of the Indian National Congress under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi and other national level leaders.

A section of newspapers published in the Assam valley as well as the Surma valley imbibed the spirit of national movement. Though they never forgot the interests of the region, they had to deal with the conflict as well as relationship between Assamese and Indian nationalism. For periodicals like *Asamiya*, *Assam Bilasinee* (1913), *The Advocate*

of Assam, and *The Assam Sevak* national development was not only the development of language, literature, culture, and such others. It also included political reforms and progress. These newspapers, by spreading the freedom movement, played a crucial role of converting it into a people's agitation. Throughout India the British Government tried to stifle the voice of these papers by forming various laws such as the Civil Reform Act of 1908, the India Press Act of 1910, and the India Defence Act of 1914. Sometimes the papers also suspended publication as a protest against the atrocities and repressive policies of the foreign rulers (for instance from 16 August to 12 September 1942) (Bhattacharyya 2007: 462-67).

The printing press Dharma Prakash Jantra in which the first periodical by an Assamese was printed was purchased by Krishna Kanta Bhattacharya and brought to Jorhat from Majuli. *Assam Bilasinee* started its second phase in 1913 and was the first newspaper to be published from the town of Jorhat (Borua 2007: 6). Bhattacharya, through his weekly offered unstinted support to the freedom movement spearheaded by Mahatma Gandhi. The paper became the trailblazer in instilling nationalistic feelings in Assam and was later joined by *Assamiya* and such other papers. Though Bhattacharya was a government servant, a *peshkar* (clerk), he was very bold and daring in criticising the activities of the government. The weekly continuously published news about the atrocities committed by the discriminating and repressive British policies. The matters regarding the Assamese language was not forgotten by the weekly. In the editorial of the 12 August 1937 the language of the Assam Assembly should be either Assamese or English was demanded; another demand was that textbooks written in Assamese should be used in place of those translated from Bengali (Sharma 2008: 166).

A person who greatly influenced the policy of *Assam Bilasinee* (1913) was the young revolutionary leader Chandranath Sarma. A number of articles as well as some editorials were written by Sarma (Sharma 2008: 164). The courageous stand of the weekly is reflected by some of its editorials. "In July and December issues of 1923, there were fiery editorials on topics like the safeguard of the interests of the poor peasants and workers; the necessity of separation of the executive from the judiciary; the call for safeguard of honour of the national flag; praise of Mahatma Gandhi, the support of the people's movement under Gazi Kamal Pacha in Turkey, etc." (Bhattacharyya 2007: 464). The weekly was ever ready to point out the injustices of the government and showcase the various steps and programs of the freedom movement.

Fearing the bold attitude of the periodical the British Government filed a suit against Bhattacharya who was then imprisoned. The government further demanded a security deposit of Rs 2000. The publisher of the periodical was also deprived of his pension. Financial difficulties rendered it impossible for him to increase the pay of his employees and at times provide the mere salary. As such he individually had to perform the jobs of the compositor, printer, editor, and publisher. When the government had locked his press he entered it by digging a tunnel from outside, did all the needful during the night and in the morning distributed papers through vegetable vendors (Sharma 2008: 164). The paper, which was black listed by the Deputy Commissioner of Jorhat, ceased to be published in 1924.

A man of letters as well as of business, Chandra Kumar Agarwalla was a successful tea planter. Agarwalla, an experienced man in the field of journalism through his association with *Jonaki*, brought out a new periodical *Asamiya*. It was published from Dibrugarh in 1919. A small town in Upper Assam, Dibrugarh was emerging as a commercial hub due to tea, coal, oil, and timber. The various trades evolving there brought about a demographic change and led to the emergence of a new middle class. For publishing the weekly, Chandra Kumar Agarwalla, a successful business man, formed a company Assam Printers and Publishers to raise capital through sale of shares to leading members of the society. Omeo Kumar Das and Lakshminath Phukan travelled to different parts of the state to sell the shares (Bhagawati 2007: 171).

Agarwalla once felt (while associated with *Jonaki*) that “a subject nation had no politics of its own” (Bezbarua 2008: 79-80); as the publisher of *Asamiya* he became conscious of the all-round development of the Assamese people as such of the government policies. Like most periodicals of the time the aims and objectives of the weekly was stated in the first issue: “To serve and enhance welfare of the Assamese people including all communities living in Assam is our objective. We need a spokesman to express our sorrows and wants. We need determination to dispel doubts and fears and to create in us love, faith, confidence and strength. The people must have a voice to create an opinion” (Bhagawati 2007: 172). This declaration underlines the fact that the periodical was not only cognizant of what happened in the political arena but also felt the need to create public opinion. The creation of public opinion also implies the prerequisite of instructing the common man. *Asamiya*'s success lies not only in creating a readership but also in making the readers conscious of their national identity. One of

the editorials of the newspaper published in 1930 described the English government as a guest government and stated how the British gained Assam under the pretext of saving it from the Burmese. A feature article written by Mohan Chandra Mahanta, it was published by Lakshminath Phukan as editorial. Considering it as an act of treason, the British Government imposed a heavy fine. The weekly had to face the wrath of the foreign rulers also in 1922 when it had written how high level government officials and their assistants had defiled the sanctity of the *Kirtan Ghar* of Barpeta. The problems of the workers and the various strikes of the workers of tea gardens, Dhubri Match factory, Railways, and Digboi Refinery were amply covered. The weekly declared its aim to be the development of all the communities residing in Assam (173-74).

Periodicals became an integral part of the people's life. With the speeding up of political events, in place of monthlies and weeklies there arose requirement for a daily. When *Asamiya* was suspended during the World War II there were no periodicals of consequence in circulation. The need for a daily was greatly felt. On 26 January 1946 the daily *Asamiya* appeared and was greatly welcomed. The newspaper was critically supportive of the INC and "believed that national welfare would be ushered in by the party if its weaknesses and faults were pointed out" (Bhagawati 2007: 184). Whereas the paper was continuously working for the people of the region, it was never opposed to national (Indian) welfare. The daily came to an end in March 1949, the weekly continued till 1958 (186).

A fearless stance was adopted as early as 1903 by Mathura Mohan Barua in his English weekly *The Advocate of Assam*. The paper was printed at Victoria Press, Uzan Bazar, Guwahati. Mathura Mohan Barua had already expressed his explosive opinion on Bolinarayan Bora's support of the inhuman behaviour of the authorities towards the tea garden labourers. Barua had also disassociated himself from Padmanath Gohainbarua's *Asom Banti* because of his uncompromising attitude towards the British. The paper fearlessly spoke in favour of the workers who were poor and destitute. The paper was closed down after a short life in 1912 (Sharma 2008: 162). Years later another weekly, *Assam Sewak*, published by Hari Krishna Das in 1937 was fully supportive of the freedom movement. The others associated with the weekly, Debendra Nath Sharma and Bijay Chandra Bhagwati, were all distinguished freedom fighters. The paper was published from Guwahati for two years and then from Tezpur in 1939. The paper after being closed for sometime in 1942 continued to be published till 1953 (Borua 2007: 12).

The development taking place in the political field made people crave for a constant and continuous supply of news. Due to the lack of proper infrastructure publishing a daily newspaper was not attempted yet. However, spread of education and circulation of magazines and newspapers aroused in the common man the desire to be informed of the activities of the government as well as the national leaders more frequently. Gone were the days when people had to wait more than a month for news of the state and the world around. In July 1935, Mofazzal Hussain published *Nagarar Katha* from Jorhat. It was the first daily newspaper in the Assamese language. However, as it sourced its news items mostly from the town of Jorhat many hesitate to consider it as a newspaper proper. Benudhar Sharma writes in his memoir,

A month before the appearance of *Dainik Batori* on 12 August 1935, Md. Mofazzal Hussain brought out a single page daily paper, *Nagarar Katha* publishing petty news from Jorhat. But the newspaper disappeared after two months. As it was confined only to Jorhat, people from other regions did not hear about it. But *Dainik Batori* was like the spokes organ of entire Assam. Hence this periodical can be pointed out as the first daily newspaper of Assam. (Sharma 1986: 545)

Dainik Batori published by Raibahadur Siva Prasad Barooah on 12 August 1935 was a trail blazer in many ways. Barooah belonged to the illustrious and affluent Khongia Barua family of Jorhat. Both the grandfather and father of Siva Prasad Barooah had received Mauzadarship from the British Government. The family soon acquired a number of tea gardens. Barooah was a successful tea planter but could not attain the same degree of success in the field of politics. He soon entered the field of journalism by publishing a weekly *Sadiniya Batori* on 18 October 1930. The paper was printed at the Assam Printing Works of Das & Company, Jorhat whereas the Head Office was at the Thengal residence of Barooah eight miles away from it. When Barooah decided to convert the weekly into a daily, he made all the necessary arrangements like buying printing machines from Kolkata and having them installed at Thengal. Living quarters were also provided for the employees. Prakash Goswami in his article "*Dainik Batori:*

The First Daily Newspaper of Assam” refers to what Nanda Kanta Goswami the printer of the periodical mentions about the paper:

. . . The Rai Bahadur made arrangements to set up the press. John Johnson Company of Calcutta supplied the printing machinery. A Royal Flat Machine was set up. As many as twenty compositors were engaged. The total number of employees rose up to fifty five. On 12 August 1935, the first Assamese daily newspaper was inaugurated. Printing could be completed within a short period of time as the machine was operated by electricity. On the other hand it was the first machine of automatic set up. The paper would be put in the machine at 4.30 a.m. At 6.30 a.m. the newspaper would be ready for dispatch to their destination from the Titabar Railway Station; and local distribution would be completed between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. (Goswami 2007: 221)

For publishing the newspaper Siva Prasad Barooah took certain bold and novel steps. He dared to publish a daily newspaper from a remote rural area where the basic facilities like telegraph, telephone, bank, post office, and such other logistic support were not available. Moreover, he bought news items from Reuter and Associated Press; *Dainik Batori* became the first newspaper of Assam to receive news from such news agencies. Benudhar Sharma who worked for the newspaper writes about his experience in his memoir. “The job assigned to me primarily was to translate the telegrams from Reuter and Associated Press into Assamese and to provide a sensational heading for those news; of course in consonance with the principle followed by the periodical” (my translation) (546).

That the policies of periodicals are influenced by the ideologies of their proprietors and editors, is a truism proved by almost all newspapers and journals. *Batori* is no exception to this fact. Nilamoni Phukan, who joined *Batori* in 1930 as the editor at the request of Siva Prasad Barooah, was also the proprietor of Nilamoni Tea Estate. He was already associated with two periodicals: *Alochani* published by Asamiya Bhasa Alochani Sabha and Chandra Kumar Agarwalla’ *Sadiniya Asamiya*. Both Phukan and Barooah were nominated to the State Assembly from the seats reserved for tea planters. They were

opposed to the non-cooperation movement of Mahatma Gandhi and responsible non-cooperation of Bal Gangadhar Tilak. The editorial of the first issue of *Batori* declared the policy of the newspaper: Assam for the Assamese. It was the ideology followed by Ambikagiri Raychowdhury and Nilomoni Phukan was greatly influenced by it. Both Barooah and Phookan were supportive of linguistic nationalism and Indian nationalism was never their major concern (Goswami 2007: 229). *Batori* as a weekly was published from 1930 to 1935 and as a daily from 1935 to 1937 (236). The periodical received patronage of the tea planters and a large number of its copies were bought by the tea estates as well as the Indian Tea Association (235).

Many periodicals were born as the organs of various organisations that were formed in those eventful days. Two such periodicals were *Chetana* (1917-1927) and *Deka Asam* (1935-1968). While the former was the organ of Asam Sangrakhani Sabha, the later was that of Asam Jatiya Mahasabha. The chief figure behind these two periodicals was Ambikacharan Raychowdhury, later known as Ambikagiri Raychowdhury. Raychowdhury's career in the political field as well as in journalism was eventful. Influenced by the extremists of the 1905 Swadeshi Movement of Bengal, he was instrumental in forming the Anarchist Party in Guwahati. After taking part in a number of violent incidents, he was kept under police surveillance in Barpeta from 1908 to 1914. Thereafter to prove his change of heart he volunteered to take part in the World War I (Sunil Pawan Barua 2007: 391-93). The British absolved him of the Anarchist brand and he moved on to Dibrugarh where he became associated with *Assam Bandhav*, the mouth piece of the Tezpur Bandhav Sabha (389- 90).

The Tezpur Bandhav Sabha was formed with the specific aim of upholding the case of the Lower Assam dialects. As it has already been mentioned, the first printing press was brought by the American Baptist missionaries who entered Assam through Sadiya at the upper most corner of Assam. They started a small press for printing material for spreading the word of the Lord as well as for teaching in the schools they had established. The press then travelled to Jaipur along with the mission and ultimately reached Sibsagar in Upper Assam. The missionaries used the Assamese language for preaching and teaching as such for printing the material for both. The language used was that of the people of Upper Assam "as it dropped from the mouth of the people"; so it was a phonetical language. Later, at the persistent effort of Hemchandra Barua the language used for printing was based on the Sanskrit language for its grammar, spelling,

and such other aspects. As printing presupposes standardisation and homogeneity of language, the dialect of Upper Assam came up as the standard to be used in writing and printing. Eventually there came up two factions one supporting the dialects of Lower Assam and the other supporting that of Upper Assam which often led to bitter conflicts on the pages of the periodicals of the time particularly *Banhi* and *Assam Bandhav*.

The monthly journal *Assam Bandhav* was published in 1910 from Tezpur by the Sabha for giving due importance and preserving the identity of the dialects of Lower Assam. Its publisher and editor were Kaviraj Maheswar Deva Goswami and Pundit Taranath Chakravorty respectively. The periodical clearly set forth that its sole focus would be to uphold the cause of the dialects of Lower Assam. After some time the monthly came to be published from Dibrugarh (from the eighth issue of the first year) where a number of distinguished persons came to be associated with it. Here the responsibility of publishing the periodical fell on Gangaram Choudhury. *Assam Bandhav* never deviated from its principles as it also acquired animosity and ill feelings of many journals of the times. The monthly came to close after nine years of irregular publication (S. P. Barua 2007: 389).

During his stay in Dibrugarh, Ambikagiri Raychowdhury joined the *Assam Bandhav* first as the assistant editor and then as the editor. It was a time when the conflict and bitterness regarding issues like spelling and syntax were reaching its peak. Despite Raychowdhury's suggestions of ending the disputes by accepting the linguistic features used by the eminent writers, Hari Krishna Das who acted as a supervisor of the monthly refused to do so. Ultimately Ambikagiri Raychowdhury returned to Guwahati with the aim of publishing a periodical of a good standard. For this he bought two hand-machines from Barpeta and established, in 1918, the Aruna Press, the fourth press in Guwahati. In those days as there was no other press functioning in the city, Aruna Press got a number of assignments from individuals, the Congress Party, and also the government. A monthly periodical *Chetana* was published from this press in September 1919. "*Chetana* mainly concentrated upon writings on literature, society, health and hygiene. It was jointly edited by Chandranath Sharma B. L., and Ambikacharan Raychowdhury (later on Ambikagiri Raychowdhury). It was published by Raychowdhury, and the responsibility of the printer was taken by another distinguished personality of Assam associated with the printing technology, Duti Ram Medhi" (S. P. Barua 2007: 391). The first issue of the periodical declared its objective as the all round

development of Assam and Assamese nationalism. The publisher refused to take advertisement from business concerns outside the state as it would not be in the interest of the indigenous businessmen. The periodical openly supported the freedom struggle. *Chetana* gained much popularity and there were about two thousand customers (393). However, in 1927 due to grave financial losses the publication of the monthly came to a close.

Despite being an active member of the Congress Party, Ambikagiri Raychowdhury established, in the year of the Pandu session of the Indian National Congress, the *Assam Sangrakshini Sabha*, the primary goal of which was the preservation of the Assamese nationality. Though he supported as well as participated in the freedom struggle spearheaded by the Congress Party, he felt the need of an organisation to safeguard the political, social, economic, and all other interests of the Assamese people. Nilomoni Phukan, the editor of *Batori*, was greatly supportive of these aims of the *Sabha* but was totally against the Congress Party. *Asam Jatiya Sabha* was formed in 1935 with similar aims. *Deka Asam* was published from the Aruna Press in 1935 as the mouthpiece of *Asam Sangrakshini Sabha*. Its objectives were same as that of the *Sabha* (S. P. Barua 2007: 394-45; Goswami 2007: 225-26).

The driving force behind most periodicals, whether they were the mouthpieces of organisations or not, was nationalism in one form or the other. The first forum formed by the students for the development of the Assamese language was the Asamiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha. The Sabha, which published *Jonaki* as its mouthpiece, was organised in 1888 by the Assamese youths who lived in Kolkata for pursuing higher studies. It was later reorganised as Asam Students' Literary Club (ASL Club). When in 1901 the Cotton College was established in Guwahati, there were very few students travelling to Kolkata for studying; the centre of linguistic and literary activities shifted to Guwahati. As such an ASL Club was formed in Guwahati in 1903. Efforts of many social, political, and literary figures to organise the students of the entire state resulted in the formation of the Asam Chatra Sanmilen. "The first student organisation of the valley Asam Chatra Sanmilen came into existence in 1916. L. N. Bezbaroa was chosen as the president of the inaugural session" (Saikia 2001: 173). Chandranath Sharma was elected the secretary of the same session. The periodical *Milan* was the mouthpiece of the organisation.

Three important members of Asam Chatra Sanmilian, Dimbeswar Neog, Daibwachandra Talukdar, and Sukdev Goswami, brought out an Assamese magazine *Janmabhumi*. The aim of publishing this magazine was chiefly to print the articles and speeches presented at the various sessions of the organisation. It was also to print the series named *Bharat-Garima*. As it was exorbitantly expensive to get individual books published it would be a practical solution for the situation. At the seventh session of the *Sanmilian* it was agreed upon to accept *Janmabhumi* as its journal but due to disagreement with the publishers regarding certain terms and conditions it could not be done so. Ultimately it was decided upon by the working committee of the time to bring out a three-monthly (later on two-monthly) periodical *Milan* (1923-1960) as its mouthpiece. The first issue stated that the objective of the magazine was to organise and mobilise the energy of the young students. The writings and compositions published were by the students but later on creations of eminent writers were also included transforming the periodical into a magazine of high literary standard (Hazarika 2004: 250-51). Like in most literary magazines of the writers of *Milan* focused on the conflict between Assamese and Bengalis language. Loving one's mother tongue was being equated with loving one's motherland (Sharma 2008: 177).

As the people of Assam became politically mature and more aware of the happenings around them, we witness the birth of periodicals either in the form of mouthpieces of various organisations or daily newspapers catering to the incessant thirst of the common man for information about political, social, cultural, and economic changes. But in this second quarter of the twentieth century, there also flourished a number of literary magazines like the *Awahan*, *Jayanti*, and *Ramdhenu* that carried on the legacy of *Jonaki*, *Banhi*, and such others. Like their predecessors these magazines aimed at enriching the Assamese and its literature. The editorial policies and the contents prove that they are now more vocal in their support of the national movement. European literature had deeper influence on these writers just as they were swayed by the political, social, cultural, and economic movements of the world.

Anderson points out that a striking feature of the nationalisms that emerged in Europe in the period between 1820 and 1920 is that in each one of them “national print-languages” were of central ideological and political importance (Anderson 2006: 67). In Assam as well it can be witnessed that the intelligentsia at the outset followed linguistic nationalism and then political nationalism. The various people were constructed into a

community through a common vernacular language which was chosen to be used for print, a language understood by the masses. The print genre, periodical became an easy means of reaching out to the common people. The period 1836 to 1947 was an age of great and significant changes for Assam. From being a region comprised of small kingdoms and tribal holdings, it got transformed into a province that ultimately became a part of a larger nation. It is a cliché to say that the periodicals published during the period portray the history of the period. The newspapers and journals did not merely publish news. Besides other things, the most noteworthy fact is that they were used as tools by the publishers for varied reasons. While there were some like *Orunudo* and *Assam Bilasinee* that were brought out by religious organisations, many others were published for serving the motherland mostly by taking steps to develop the Assamese language. It was a time when new ideas flowed in from neighbouring Bengal and as a result of western form of education. The most important was the idea of a nation referring to a group of people having a territory and a language of its own. As it can be seen in the above study, a very important role was played by the periodicals in the venture of nation building by the Assamese middle class. Nationalism in the first phase took the avatar of linguistic nationalism and attention was paid that the ruling class was not offended in any way. The first steps for developing the Assamese language and establishing its separate identity that were taken in the pages of *Orunudo* became firmer in *Assam News* and *Assam Bandhu*. *Jonaki*, *Bijuli*, *Usha*, *Banhi*, and most other periodicals of the time imbibed the ideology of linguistic nationalism. The focus was on how to remedy the damage done to the Assamese language by the official status given to the Bengali language. Many periodicals emerged as the mouthpiece of various organisations. Print presupposes a standard language and as the first press was established in Upper Assam its dialect consequently became the standard. Thus the Tezpur Bandhav Sabha was formed to uphold the case of the dialect of Lower Assam and its mouthpiece was *Assam Bandhav*. Along with standardisation of the language structuring of the Assamese culture took place in the pages of the periodicals.

As time went on the national movement came to influence Assam and a section of the middle class came to criticise the policies and activities of the British rulers. Chandra Kumar Agarwalla was an interesting example of a transformation from avoidance of political matters to a criticism of those. This change of heart is illustrated by his *Asamiya*. As the movement spread to different nooks and corners of the region, there

were many who supported it while there were some who still felt that peace and development could take place only under the British masters. There was also conflict between regionalism and nationalism as well as compromise between the two. All these notions and perceptions influenced the periodicals of the time. After the publication of *Orunudo*, periodicals came to be published from different parts of Assam which enjoyed varying lifespan. These were all attempts at appropriating a new technology as well as a new genre by the people of the region and putting it to their own uses.

Table 2

Periodicals published in Assam during the Colonial Period^a

Name	Year of Publication	Place of Publication	Period	Name of the 1 st editor	Distinctive features	Press
<i>Orunudo</i> <i>Samba</i> <i>Patra</i>	Januay 1846	Sibsagar	monthly		first Assamese periodical	Sibsagar Mission Press
<i>Assam</i> <i>Bilasinee</i>	1871(in its first part)	Majuli (Auniati Satra)	monthly	Sridhar Ojha	first Assamese periodical published by an indigenous person	Dharma Prakash Jantra
<i>Assam</i> <i>Darpan</i>	1874 (1874-75)	Kolkata	monthly	Lakhikanta Barkakoty		
<i>Assam</i> <i>Dipak</i>	1876 (1876-77)	Guwahati	monthly	Sri Dattadev Goswami		Dharma Prakash Jantra
<i>Chandro</i> <i>d</i> <i>ay</i>	1876	Nagaon	monthly	Jibeswar Barua		Chidanand a Press, Guwahati
<i>Assam</i> <i>News</i>	1882 (1882-85)	Guwahati	weekly	Hemchandra Barua	bilingual Assamese and English	Assam Printing Corporatio n, Guwahati
<i>Assam</i> <i>Bandhu</i>	1885 (1885-86)	Kolkata	monthly	Gunabhiram Barua		the printing press was at 100, Bowbazar

						Street Kolkata
<i>Mou</i>	1886 (December 1886-March 1887))	Kolkata	monthly	Harnarayan Bora	the main driving force was Bolarayana Bora	
<i>Assam Tara</i>	1888	Majuli	monthly	Sridhar Barua		Dharma Prakash Jantra, Majuli
<i>Loraband hu</i>	1888	Nagaon	monthly	Karunubhiram Barua	first Assamese children's magazine	
<i>Jonaki</i>	1889	Kolkata	monthly	Chandra Kumar Agarwalla	mouth organ of ABUSS	
<i>Bijuli</i>	1891	Kolkata(1 st part)	monthly	Krishna Prasad Duara	mouth organ of Assamese Literary Club	
<i>Assam</i>	1894	Guwahati	weekly	Kaliram Barua		
<i>Asam Banti</i>	1900 (1900-44)	Tezpur	weekly	Mathuramohan Barua		Assam Central Press, Tezpur
<i>Dipti</i>	1905 (1905-45)	Kolkata	monthly	Reverend A. K. Gurney	published by Assam Baptist Christian Society.	printed in Kolkata, editorial work done in Dibrugarh
<i>Usha</i>	1907 (1907-12)	Tezpur	monthly	Padmanath Gohainbarua		Assam Central Press, Tezpur
<i>Banhi</i>	1909 (1909-16)	Kolkata (1 st part)' Dibrugarh Guwahati	monthly	Lakshminath Bezbarua		Salokia Printing Works, Howrah
<i>Assam Bandhav</i>	1910 (1910-17)	Dibrugarh, Tezpur	monthly	Taranath Chakravorty	aim was to advocate	Dibrugarh Railway

					the cause of the dialects of Lower Assam	Press, Dibrugarh
<i>Alochani</i>	1910	Dibrugarh	monthly	Durgaram Changkakoty	illustrated	
<i>Assam Ryot</i>	1912	Dibrugarh	monthly	Bholanath Gohain		
<i>Kabitalota</i>	1912	North Lakhimpur	three monthly	Nilakantha Gohain Barua	magazine publishing poetry	
<i>Assam Bilasinee</i>	1913 (in its second part)	Jorhat	weekly	Krishnakanta Bhattacharyya	revolutionary in nature, openly critical of government policies	
<i>Ranar Batori</i>	1914	Dibrugarh	Daily			
<i>Akan</i>	1916 (1916-19)	Kolkata	monthly	Hemchandra Goswami		
<i>Prabhat</i>	1916	Jorhat	three monthly	Sarat Chandra Goswami		
<i>Asamiya</i>	1918 (1918-58)	Dibrugarh, Guwahati	weekly	Sadananda Duara	published by Assam Printers and Publishers	
<i>Chetana</i>	1919 (1919-27)	Guwahati	monthly	Chandranath Sharma and Ambikacharan Raychowdhury	1000 copies of the 1 st issue were printed	Aruna Press, Guwahati
<i>Asam Pradipika</i>	1920	Dibrugarh	monthly	Rajanikanta Bordoloi	religious in tone	Radhanath Press Dibrugarh
<i>Asam Krishi</i>	1921	Jorhat	monthly	Narayan Chandra Barua		
<i>Argha</i>	1922	Guwahati	Fortnightly	Singha Datta Dev Adhikari		
<i>Janmabhumi</i>	1922	Guwahati	three monthly	Daivachandra Talukdar		

<i>Milan</i>	1923	Guwahati	three monthly	Garganarayan Choudhury	
<i>Moina</i>	1923	Guwahati	monthly	Raghunath Choudhury	children's magazine
<i>Jeuti</i>	1924	Jorhat	Yearly	Chandrakanta Pujari and Lakheswar Sharma Barua	
<i>Assam Hitayoshi</i>	1925 (1925-28)	Kolkata	Fortnight ly	Kamalakanta Bhattacharyya	Assam Hitayoshi Printing Division, Maniktala Street, Kolkata
<i>Khetiok</i>	1925	Jorhat	monthly	Narayan Chandra Barua	
<i>Asam Sahitya Sabha Patrika</i>	1926 Continuing till date.	Jorhat	three monthly	Chandradhar Barua	Darpan Press, Jorhat.
<i>Arun</i>	1926 (1926-34)	Kolkata, Tezpur	monthly	Mahadev Sharma	children's magazine
<i>Janani</i>	1926	North Lakhimpur		Sadir Hussain	
<i>Pashu Palan</i>	1926	Dibrugarh	monthly	Kanak Chandra Sharma	first Assamese Science magazine
<i>Prabhati</i>	1926	Dhuburi	monthly	Kirtinath Khakhlari	
<i>Gharjeuti</i>	1927	Sibsagar	monthly	Kanaklata Chaliha	women's magazine
<i>Pracharak</i>	1928	Dibrugarh	monthly	Md. Suleman Khan	
<i>Awahan</i>	1929	Kolkata, Guwahati	monthly	Dinanath Sharma	
<i>Batori</i>	1929	Jorhat	weekly	Sibaprasad Barua	
<i>Golposirij</i>	1930	Jorhat	monthly	Bipin Chandra Barua	
<i>Amar Desh</i>	1931	Jorhat	monthly	Tulsi Narayan Sharma	

<i>Akan</i>	1933 (1933-40)	Nagaon	monthly	Birinchi Kumar Barua	children's magazine	Sewali Press, Nagaon
<i>Ekota</i>	1933	Jorhat	monthly	Lakheswar Bordoloi		
<i>Pakhila</i>	1933	Kolkata	monthly	Harendranath Sharma	children's magazine	
<i>Na Jun</i>	1934	Jorhat	monthly	Nilamoni Phukan		
<i>Nagarar Kotha</i>	1935	Jorhat	Daily	Mafajal Hussain	first attempt at publishing a daily newspaper	
<i>Asam</i>	1935	Jorhat		Kirtinath Sharma Bordoloi		
<i>Asam Raij</i>	1935 (1935-37)	Jorhat	weekly and later every three days	Devendra Nath Sharma	supportive of Gandhiji's ideals and the Indian National Movement	Annada Printing Press, Jorhat
<i>Deka Asam</i>	1935 (1935-44)	Guwahati	weekly	Ambikagiri Raychowdhuri		Aruna Press, Guwahati
<i>Dainik Batori</i>	1935	Thengal (Jorhat)	daily	Nilamoni Phukan		Siv Prasad Barua's printing press establishe d in Thengal.
<i>Asam Sevak</i>	1937 (1937-39) Closed by government Republishe d in 1948 continues till 1953	Guwahati, Tezpur	weekly	Devendra Nath Sharma	supportive of Gandhiji's ideals and the Indian National Movement	Asam Sevak Press, Guwahati and later removed to Tezpur
<i>Jayanti</i>	1938 (1938-53)	Guwahati	Fortnight ly	Raghunath Choudhury		Jayanti Press, Guwahati

<i>Gaolia</i>	1939	Jagiroad	three monthly	Dimbeswar Bora	
<i>Tarun Asam</i>	1939 (1939-42)	Dibrugarh	weekly	Tarun Kumar Bhattacharyya	
<i>Janasikha</i>	1941	Guwahati	two monthly	Upendra Chandra Lekharu	
<i>Nayak</i>	1941		monthly	Mohini Mohan Brahma	
<i>Parijat</i>	1941	Kolkata	monthly	Dinanath Sharma	children's magazine
<i>Pragati</i>	1944	North Lakhimpur	Yearly	Harendra Kumar Bhuyan	
<i>Arohan</i>	1947	Jorhat	three monthly	Baneswar Mili	
<i>Bihlangan i</i>	1947 (1947-53)	Nagaon	Fortnight ly	Mahesh Chandra Deva Goswami	first printed in Surya Press, Nagaon.
<i>Janata</i>	5 th August 1947	Guwahati	weekly	Lakhyadhar Choudhury	
<i>Janmabhu mi</i>	1947	Jorhat, Guwahati	weekly	Dulal Chandra Bhuyan	
<i>Natun Asam</i>	1947	Guwahati	weekly	Dadhi Mahanta	
<i>Paigam</i>	1947	Jorhat	monthly	Sayad Abdul Malik	
<i>Tarun</i>	1947	Dibrugarh	yearly	Prasenjit Duara	

Source: Baishya, Paresh. *Asamar Batari Kakat-Alochanir Itihas: 1846-2014*. Guwahati:

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- a. The table is not an exhaustive list but gives a fair picture of periodical publication in Assam during the colonial period.
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