

CHAPTER THREE

BOOK PRODUCTION IN COLONIAL ASSAM

The chapter attempts to study the history of production and transmission of the printed book in Assam and also the various social, cultural, and legal forces that governed these processes. An effort has been made to give in brief an idea of how in the pre-print era text was recorded, retrieved, and circulated through manuscripts. Moreover, a very short account of the oral and folk culture of Assam is presented as they influenced book production in the early years. In the rich and developed manuscript culture of Assam, the book in its printed form made its appearance and gradually became an inseparable part of the modern society, shaping it and being shaped by it. The first printed book in the Assamese language was the *Dharmapustak*, printed and published by the Serampore missionaries in 1813 (Bhattacharyya 1998: 15). It has been already stated that a small section of the Assamese elite had its first encounter with the print media as a result of its cultural contact with Bengal; here the early printing presses were established in the seventh decade of the eighteenth century. The chapter studies the role of the first printing press, the Sibsagar Mission Press, established on the soil of Assam by the American Baptist missionaries. Its significance in the book history of Assam is manifold; a basic fact is that it brought a wider section of the society in touch with print culture. Beginning with the Dharma Prakash Jantra of the Auniati Satra, a few printing and publishing concerns were established by the Assamese people and slowly the printed book came to flourish under the aegis of indigenous patrons.

The chapter explores the tentative steps taken in Assam in the field of book production by both the religious and secular institutions and individuals during the colonial period. In this context it also becomes necessary to understand the socio-cultural and political setting of Assam in which the book emerged. Thus the chapter tries to throw light on that setting and also on the relationship of Assam with neighbouring Bengal and the Bengali language as this relation influenced the coming of the book in Assam in more ways than one. The government policies of language, education, and censorship are also studied in the chapter as they had far reaching influence on the emergence of the book—its production as well as dissemination. This period sees the dawn of commercial book

publishing albeit in its infancy. The chapter tries to answer certain questions: What types of books were being published and were in circulation? Was the indigenous printing industry efficient enough to print all those books? What was the social profile of all those involved in printing and publishing? What were some of the major obstacles faced by the newly emerging industry?

A section of the chapter also deals with an important aspect of the book history of Assam, that is, the dissemination of the printed book. Information, particularly in the form of publishing history of the region and in house journal of the presses and publishing houses is almost negligible; whatever little is available is scattered amongst sources like biographies, memoirs, and socio-political works. On the whole the chapter tries to trace the story of the book in Assam where the actors in the first part were the American Baptist missionaries who established the first printing press as well as publishing house in Assam. Then appeared a few natives like Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Gunabhiram Barua, and Hemchandra Barua who worked in consonance with Baptist missionaries while acting for the development of their mother tongue. Ultimately it was the members of the Assamese middle class who became the major players. It also tries to understand the major forces that interacted to make the story happen.

Robert Darnton's "communication circuit" facilitates greatly in the understanding of the origin and transmission of the printed text in Assam. In his essay "What is the History of Books?" he proposes ". . . a general model for analyzing the way books come into being and spread through society. To be sure, conditions have varied so much from place to place and from time to time since the invention of movable type that it would be vain to expect the biography of every book to confirm to the same pattern. But printed books generally pass through roughly the same life cycle" (Darnton 2009: 179). As mentioned earlier the circuit runs through six nodes of author, publisher, printer, shipper, bookseller, and reader. As Darnton points out that though the conditions differ from "place to place and from time to time" printed books more or less go through the same life cycle. As a lot of debate arose regarding his model and as his essay was included in the syllabus of many courses he was assigned to reassess the essay in a sequel which he published as "What is the History of Book?" revisited'. In this sequel he claims that he had written the essay in 1982 for he felt that at that time the scholars were engaged with different parts of the field of book history and there was the need to

formulate a strategy to connect them. He also asserts “The tendency toward fragmentation and specialization still exists” and hence the need for a “. . . conceptual strategy for bringing specialized knowledge together and for envisioning the field as a whole” (Darnton 2007: 495). In this sequel Darnton also states why he devised the communication circuit in the first place. While searching through the archives of the Swiss publishing house and book selling centre, Société typographique de Neuchâtel, in 1965 he found a huge collection of letters from “authors, booksellers, paper millers, shipping agents, smugglers, wagon drivers, compositors, and pressmen” (496). By the study of these letters he understands how the contributions of all these persons went into the production of a book during the eighteenth century Europe. The political, economic, social, and cultural conditions in which the printed texts emerged and circulated in Assam were quite different from that of Europe or for that of other parts of the Indian sub-continent yet the “general model” formulated by Darnton has aided in appreciating the passage of the printed text from the author to the reader.

If we consider book as a “means of recording and transmitting in writing a culture’s intellectual tradition” (Robson 2009: 67), then the history of the book in Assam, we may say, goes back to the fifth century. Assam has had a rich heritage of culture and civilisation and rulers were great patrons of art, learning, and scholarship. They greatly encouraged the composition of works on various subjects. These works were recorded on folios prepared from the bark of the *Agaru* (*Aquilaria agallocha Roxb*) tree and came to be known as *Sanchipat* manuscripts, *Sanchi* being a variety of *Agaru*. The earliest definite records of this type of manuscript go back to the rule of Bhaskar Varman (600-650 A. D.). It is known from the *Harshacharita* of Banabhatt that among the many valuable and unique gifts presented to Harshavardhana by Bhaskar Varman was one *Sanchipat* manuscript (Barpujai 2007 [vol iii]: 310). It was during the period of Vaisnava renaissance initiated by Sankardeva that a large-scale manufacture of manuscripts took place. No doubt Sankardeva and many of his disciples composed various religious works for the propagation of their religion. The *Satras* or monasteries were the repositories of these religious works. The novices in the monasteries started their education by copying the existing manuscripts. On the other hand, every follower of the new cult considered it essential to acquire a copy of the *Bhagavata*. Thus Vaisnavism as propagated by Sankardeva resulted in the production of a huge number of manuscripts.

Royal patronage was much essential for the expensive and complex process of producing the manuscripts. Under the rule of the great Ahoms as well a great number of manuscripts were produced. As the Ahom rulers came under the influence of Hinduism they got many of the seminal texts of Hinduism, particularly the *Puranas*, translated from Sanskrit to Assamese. Many works on secular subjects were also translated from Sanskrit into the vernacular. “They deal with medicine, astronomy, arithmetic, dancing, and architecture. In these books Assamese prose was used for the first time for the discussion of utilitarian knowledge” (Barua 1964: 94). A famous manuscript of the age is the *Hastividyaarnav*, a treatise on useful knowledge on elephants by Sukumar Barkath, the work being most beautifully illustrated. Many other manuscripts were copiously decorated with pictures using different colours (95). A very important genre developed under the patronage of the Ahom rulers was the *Buranjis*. These were the official chronicles of the Ahom monarchs. Written in the early years in the Ahom language, the *Buranjis* came to be written in the Assamese language; these were composed by high officials of the royal courts having meticulous knowledge of the affairs of the state. They were written over a long period of time and a large number of them have come down to the modern age (97-100). Manuscripts existed in temples, *Satras*, *Naamghars*, royal courts, and residences of the nobility as well as common people. Though countless manuscripts have been destroyed by the ravages of various factors such as the humid climate of the area, natural calamities like floods and earthquakes, and wars, yet a large number of them still exist. Under the aegis of the National Mission for Manuscript formed by the Government of India a five day survey was conducted in Assam by the Sankardev Kalakshetra in 2005 to locate manuscripts existing in the state. In these five days about 42 manuscripts were found in various places. Moreover, the subject-matter of these manuscripts was greatly varied: the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the *Puranas*, the *Upapuranas*, *tantra-mantras*, dance, music, astrology, grammar, prosody, architecture, methods of purification, and ways of worshipping. (Kalita 2008: 261).

Even at the present date we come to know through the newspapers that manuscripts are being donated by people to libraries and other such organisation. These manuscripts were in their possession since many years acquired by their ancestors. This is but only a cursory picture of the rich and diverse manuscript culture of Assam. In a later section of the chapter reference has been made to how many of these manuscripts were taken up by the indigenous and pioneering publishers for printing and publishing them as books.

Pioneered by Gunabhiram Barua, persons like Haribilash Agarwalla, Sibnath Bhattacharjee, Gangadhar Borkotoky, and Tirthanath Goswami printed and published many works that existed in manuscript forms. Some such works were Sankardeva's *Kirtanghosa* and *Gunamala*, and Madhabdev's *Namghosa*. Preservation of manuscripts and printing them in book form had two facets. One was that many of these were categories with which the masses were familiar with. On the other, these became very important activities for those who were eager participants in the drive to establish the unique identity of the Assamese language. These crusaders realised that these manuscripts would showcase the ancestry and continuing trajectory of the Assamese language. In the later sections of this chapter and in other chapters, study has been made of how these activities were undertaken by literary bodies like the ABUSS and the Asam Sahitya Sabha as well as by individual persons both publishers and litterateurs guided by linguistic nationalism.

The printed book made its appearance in South Asia where there already existed a manuscript culture. According to Graham Shaw, "In the subcontinent, print did not enter a world of non-communication and fill the vacuum. It simply expanded the range of the modes of production and dissemination of texts available within existing cultural parameters, and accelerated the pace of communication within communities" (Shaw 2009: 131). Moreover, print was not just a new technology aiding and abetting an already existing culture. Print had its impact unique to itself like the need for standardisation of language. Likewise the book in its manuscript form was an artefact, an object of veneration. The print version had become a commodity of trade and thus emerged the new commercial venture of printing, publishing, and selling of books. As this was the case in most civilised societies of the region during the colonial period, it also occurred in Assam.

The evolution of printing in Assam is no different from that in other centres of printing. Print developed in various regions of pre-independent India under the Christian missionaries. Under the auspices of the Portuguese Jesuit missionaries "the first book in an Indian language and script appeared in the form of the *Doctrina Christam* (1577), a Tamil translation of a Portuguese catechism prepared by the Jesuit Henri Henriques" (Stark 2009: 29). The primary motive of the missionaries was the spread of Christianity in this heathen world and for fulfilling this aim they used print as a tool. Realising this, the leaders of the indigenous religions appropriated the novel technology for resisting

the advances of Christianity. Even Islamic religion which was at first averse to this technology came to use it for publishing their religious tracts. Stark depicts a lucid picture of such development in North India (30). As has already been mentioned the first printing press was established in Assam by an indigenous person with the foremost aim of resisting the onslaught of Christian religion. Thus while the mission presses printed mostly Christian tracts and books, then presses of the local persons produced books of indigenous religions like Islam and Hinduism. The next important print product that was produced in different regions was the textbook. With the introduction of western form of education, the textbook became focal point of this system of instruction. Though the missionaries were the pioneers in the field of textbook production, the indigenous persons entered this area and textbooks played a major role in book trade. We shall see that the course followed by print production in Assam has much similarity with other regions.

The first Assamese Printed Book

The story of the printed book in the Assamese language commences with the publication of the *Dharmapustak* in 1813. A translation of the New Testament of the Bible, it was a part of “Carey’s scheme of translating the Bible into the Indian languages”. The two British Baptist missionaries, William Carey and John Thomas, had arrived in Bengal in 1793 and at first established their mission at Serampore, nine miles away from Kolkata and within the Danish colony. The translations into the Sanskrit and Bengali languages were Carey’s handiwork whereas he took the help of local pundits in other translation (Neog 2003: .58). As pointed out by Dr Satish Chandra Bhattacharyya in his *Sahitya Samucchaya* the shape of the letters used in the *Dharmapustak* was very similar to that of the letters used in the ancient Assamese manuscripts (20). This was because Carey took the help of an Assamese pundit and this person is referred to as Atmaram Sarma of Kaliabor in the Nagaon district of Assam (Barua 1964: 104). However, in the title page of the book no mention of any translator was made. It was stated that the translation was made from the Greek language and was printed at the Serampore press. A translation of the Old Testament was brought out in 1833 with the same title. In the title page of this second printed book in the Assamese language it was mentioned that the Holy Bible was translated from the “original tongues” into the Assamese language by the Serampore missionaries. As stated by Bhattacharyya, along with the name of the translator, Atmaram Sharma, the language into which the Bible

was translated was mentioned as Assamese and also as Ahomiya. This was the first time that the language of the region was referred to by that name. These were the first two printed books in the Assamese language, though their original purpose of spreading the message of Christ and evangelisation was defeated as they were full of Sanskrit and Bengali words (Bhattacharyya 1998: 22).

Missionary publishing in Assam

William Carey had sent his first convert Krishna Pal to the Khasi hills for spreading the gospel and ultimately a branch of the mission was established in Guwahati in 1829 (Barpujari 1986: xii). Those connected with the Guwahati branch must have used the two Testaments and other Christian tracts printed at the Serampore Mission Press. The mission was ultimately a failure but Carey's underscoring the need that the natives "should be reached only in their own language" was a significant declaration (xii). The American Baptist missionaries who arrived in Assam on an invitation of Francis Jenkins, Agent to the Governor-General, were followers of the same viewpoint. This had far reaching effect on the Assamese language and its book industry. There were many different aspects of this effect of which three had crucial consequences. First, the pioneering periodical in the Assamese language, the *Orunudo*, published by the American Baptist missionaries inaugurated the emergence of a space in the public domain facilitating the easy participation of the indigenous persons in print culture and commenting on issues concerning the entire community. Second, the missionaries had produced textbooks to be used in their schools. The new administrative system introduced by the British required a novel form of education in which textbooks were an indispensable component. Thus the missionaries became the trailblazers in the field of textbook production which later flowered under the aegis of the Assamese intelligentsia. Last, but not the least, the print activities and the consistent effort taken up by these missionaries to reinstate Assamese as the official language of the province ultimately flagged off the standardisation process of the Assamese language. The missionaries by writing dictionaries and grammars tried to organise the language. They followed a spelling system based on the speech sounds which was not appreciated by the indigenous scholar Hemchandra Barua; he recommended that spellings should be based on the Sanskrit language. The missionaries consequently agreed with Barua and thus this led to the final shaping of the language (Neog 2008: 237; Sharma 2006: 266-67).

The American missionaries who established the first printing press in Assam acted as the nodes of the “communication circuit”. They were the authors, publishers, printers, shippers, booksellers, and at times buyers and readers even though their primary motive was not profit-making but spread of Christianity. With the arrival of the missionaries, Nathan Brown, a linguist, and Oliver Cutter, a printer along with their families and a printing press, in Sadiya situated in the eastern most tip of Upper Assam, the inauguration of printing and publishing of books in Assamese took place. The two ladies, Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Cutter, started two schools for young boys and girls and the work in the printing press commenced by bringing out textbooks for the schools and tracts for preaching. Due to various trying circumstances, the mission press had ultimately to be shifted to Sibsagar. Thus by the end of 1843 “Brown and Cutter with the printing press stationed themselves at Sibsagar” (Barpujari 1986: xvii). The Mission Press during its existence provided invaluable service to the Assamese language and it remained the only press in Assam till the Dharma Prakash Jantra was established in about 1871 (Borua 2007: 5). No doubt the most monumental contribution of the press was the journal *Orunudoï*. Besides being the first journal in the Assamese language, it provided a platform to the upcoming writers of Assam. Though the main aim of the press was to assist in the proselytising work of the missionaries, it enjoys the distinction of being the first printing and publishing concern of Assam. The works of the missionaries, Christian and non-Christian natives, that could be classified as religious, secular, and textbooks, were printed at and published from the Sibsagar Mission Press.

As already mentioned in the earlier chapters, the American Baptist missionaries came to Assam in 1836, almost ten years after the signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826. It was as a result of this treaty Assam came under the British rule for the first time. It was a region ravaged by internal conflicts as well as external invasions and was one of the darkest periods in the history of Assam. The British rulers had declared the Bengali language as the official language of Assam in 1836 for administrative convenience, but there was no voice of protest from the natives in the early phase. The missionaries came with the sole motive of converting people into Christianity. For fulfilling this single purpose they chose the Assamese language in a form which was hardly used for written communication. Nathan Brown, a linguist, soon decided that Assamese was no patois of the Bengali language but a language in its own right spoken by people of the Assam valley as well as used by the hill tribes (Barpujari 1986: 12). The Assamese language

was adopted by the missionaries as the medium of communication with the people of the region. Their view was that the people should hear the preacher in the vernacular. “We regard it as a fundamental rule, that all classes must hear in their own tongue the wonderful works of God. We need no reason to make Assam an exception” (117). Assamese became the medium of instruction in the schools established by them around Sibsagar; English and Bengali were taught in the government schools. These were the first steps in providing western form of education in the Assamese language in the region. The need arose for the missionaries to organise the language on scientific principles as there were hardly any grammars or dictionaries that were printed and published. However, mention has to be made of the first modern grammar of the Assamese language. *Grammar of the Assamese Language* was written by William Robinson in 1839 and “published when he was the headmaster of the Gowhatti Seminary”. Later Robinson came to be appointed as the Inspector of Schools of Assam and became one of the strongest advocates of the view that the Assamese language was a dialect of the Bengali language (Neog 2003: .63). The book was printed at and published by the Serampore Mission Press and Nanda Talukdar considers it the first book meant for schools in Assam (Talukdar 1975: 156). Nathan Brown’s *Grammatical Notices of the Assamese Language*, which was published by the Mission Press in 1848, is the second book on Assamese grammar. The third edition of the work was published by the Sibsagar Mission Union in 1893 and this edition was edited by P. H. Moore (156). Another work on Assamese grammar was written by Mr. G. F. Nicholl in 1894 and published along with his *Manual of the Bengali Language*. As Birinchi Kumar Barua comments these works on Assamese grammar were written in the English language and were meant for English-speaking people venturing to learn the Assamese language. “Inevitably they were influenced by the method of English grammar, but they represent the first scientific attempt at studying the Assamese language” (Barua 1964: 105).

Miles Bronson’s *A Dictionary of Assamese and English* 1867 was the first published dictionary in the Assamese language (Barua 1964: 105). A Bengali-Assamese dictionary was compiled by Jaduram Deka Baruah in 1839 and was presented to Colonel Jenkins, Commissioner of Assam, who handed over the manuscript to the American Baptist missionaries. “Nathan Brown considered its orthography to correspond best with Assamese pronunciation. Its spellings influenced the *Orunudo*

and Miles Bronson's *A Dictionary of Assamese and English*." But this work was never published (Gillespie 2008: 456). A number of works on the Assamese alphabet, words and phrases by other missionary writers like Cutter, Ward, Gurney, Mrs. Ward (*Brief Vocabulary in English and Assamese with Rudimentary Exercises, ingraji aru asamiya bakyawali* 1864), and H. B. L. Cutter (*Vocabulary and Phrase in English and Assamese Shavdavali aru khandavakya* 1840) were also written and published by the American Baptist missionaries (471).

Schools were a very crucial constituent of the missionary efforts of the Baptists. The common man could not read the tracts and books distributed by the missionaries. "In Assam not one in a hundred of the common people can read the books issued from the press. . . . Our press, a mighty agent in other lands, is here comparatively silent. We must therefore establish village schools, to impart to the common people a plain vernacular education" (Barpujari 1986: 108). With the establishment of schools there arose the need for textbooks. As already mentioned, as soon as the missionaries arrived at Sadiya they established the printing press where tracts and books were printed for preaching on the one hand and founded schools on the other to educate the natives so as to enable them to read those tracts and other Christian scriptures. The number of schools kept on increasing in places like Sibsagar, Nagaon, Tezpur, and Guwahati, in other words, wherever the missionaries established a station they also established schools hoping to educate the masses in the vernacular. With the establishment of schools there arose the need for textbooks. The very first books meant for schools were prepared by Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Cutter and printed at their press by Oliver Cutter who was a printer. However, at the very beginning the books that were used for instructing the young native scholars were those that were brought by the missionaries along with them from Kolkata. "We teach them from the elementary books published by the American Sunday School Union, such as the Union Primer, Nursery-Book, &c. A collection of these books was generously furnished us at Calcutta by Mr. Trevelyan" (8). By the next year that is by 1837, textbooks and religious tracts were printed following the Union books. These early books were printed in a Romanised script prepared by Nathan Brown in the "printing-office" which had along with other apparatus two printing-presses and a standing press. This press also provides one of the early examples of indigenous participation in print activity (11). However, this was soon changed due to the donation of a fount of Bengali type by Colonel Jenkins. These were used as

Assamese script; Assamese was used as the medium of instruction in all the missionary schools and the missionaries who came to Assam had to learn the language. In the pages of *Orunudo* the information that types were brought from Bengal from time to time was published (Neog 2003: .81-.83). As already mentioned the letters used in the first book printed in the Assamese language, the *Dharmapustak*, had great similarity with those in ancient Assamese manuscripts as well as in the copper plate inscriptions found in Assam. This must have been due to the fact that Atmaram Sharma who aided Carey in carrying out the translation was a *pundit*, that is, a scholar. But the steps taken by the American missionaries brought change in the shape of the Assamese letters as they used the Bengali fount of letters presented to them. Though there are similarities between the letters in the Assamese and the Bengali script, there are some letters which are unique to the Assamese language and these were used by the missionaries from the first issue of the *Orunudo*. These letters were manufactured in the foundry of the Sibsagar Mission press (Bhattacharyya 2013: 60-63). Thus these acts of the missionaries had a far reaching effect on the Assamese script as the Assamese letters as used in the manuscripts, which followed different styles, were transformed and hence the introduction of print inaugurated the standardisation of the language.

In a poem composed by Dayaram Chetiyā describing the functioning of the wondrous printing machine at the Sibsagar Mission Press there is reference to the manufacturing of types in the press. The poem *Chapakhanar Bibaran* was published in the March issue of 1853 of *Orunudo* (Neog 2003: 902). The poem is a simple yet graphic description of the printing process of the journal, *Orunudo*, and of the Sibsagar Mission Press where the printing took place. Thus *Chapakhanar Bibaran* provides firsthand information of the working of the first printing press of Assam in the nascent years. The poet begins by stating that he would depict the way in which the *Orunudo* was brought out every month and would do so by observing the machines within the press. Hence we come to know that a brick building with doors that had window panes housed the various machines in its rooms. The machines, which were never seen before in Assam, were operated by persons who could not be observed easily. The poet then expresses his amazement at the sight of the foundry where the metal types were cast. Describing the various devices and their functioning, he mentions the raised stand called a case which contained various divisions holding the letters. News arrived from a number of countries through post for which money had to be paid and of those the best were

selected for publication. After that the letters were composed for the text to be printed and a paper was pressed over the composed matter; the paper was then checked by a proof reader for detecting mistakes and only then the composed matter was bounded in a forme. The readers are also informed of the metal stands on which the forme was placed and the types are rubbed with ink. Paper was then placed over the types and pressed by cylinders and in that way the matter got printed on to the paper. The way in which a great amount of text got printed in an hour, an amount that would have taken a day or two to be hand written, astonishes the poet. The preparation of the wooden blocks to illustrate the journal is also meticulously depicted. There were about thirty workers who work under the command of a master printer. The fact that all those people were educated pleases the poet and he feels that it must be due to the blessings of God that all that could be achieved. He considered the English, who had come from across vast seas and oceans, were truly praise worthy for they achieved great work with the help of machines and with only a few men. The poet completes the poem by praising the English for bringing such machines which the people of the province of Assam had never seen earlier.

Contribution of the Pioneering Members of the Assamese Middle Class

The American Baptist missionaries struggled much to make the Assamese language to become the official language of the state. A few natives who received English education were active participants in this effort and most important among them were Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Gunabhiram Barua, and Hemchandra Barua. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan who had his education in Kolkata realised the importance of the printed book in the effort to regain the lost dignity of his mother tongue. He planned to write a series of books in the Assamese language titled *Asomiya Lorar Mitra* to be used as textbooks in the schools of Assam. Phukan wrote two of them and got them printed at the Samachar Chandrika Press, Kolkata in 1849. “These were published with subscription received from European officers and the native community” (Neog 2008: 44).

The popularity of *Asomiya Lorar Mitra* is indicated by the fact that it went through a number of editions. The first edition of 1849 had a print run of 1000 copies. The second edition came out some years later in 1873. It was revised by Gunabhiram Barua and printed in Kolkata and 2000 copies were brought out. The next five editions were however, printed in the Hitbidhayini Press of Goalpara in Assam and the eighth edition

was printed in Kolkata with a print run of 1000 copies (Talukdar 1975: 162-63). Another significant contribution of Phukan was his *A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language and on Vernacular Education* which he had written under the pseudonym, A Native. He got 100 copies of the booklet printed at the Mission Press by A. H. Danforth at a cost of forty rupees. These were not sold but distributed among the leading members of the society after sending some copies to the Government of Bengal. An important feature of this booklet was the inclusion of a catalogue of works in the Assamese language to establish the distinctive identity and literary heritage of the language. In it was included a list of works printed and published in the Assamese language which “seems to have been exhaustive, curiously enough including the translation of *The Assam Code* by Rabichandra Dekā Baruwā, and the school books, scriptures, tracts, juvenile tracts and miscellaneous publication of the American Baptist Mission from Sibsāgar in Assam. . . .” (Neog 2008: 63-64). Thus existence of printed books in the Assamese language was used in this struggle for identity as the most powerful evidence, an undeniable proof.

The book became a vital part of the newly emerging modern Assamese society. The message of modernity was blowing in from the west mostly through English education but this education was within the reach of a few; the *Orunudo* was instrumental in conveying this message of modernity to a greater number of people. As already mentioned the Mission Press offered the yeomen service of being the only printing and publishing concern for a considerable period of time. In the issue of the *Orunudo* published in January 1851, there is an advertisement of books meant for school children which is worth mentioning. It refers to the books which were available for purchase in the Mission Press and those were juvenile tracts with illustrations, *Bare Motora* or Assamese Primer, *First Reading Book in Assamese*, *Elementary Arithmetic* in Assamese first and second parts along with bounded volumes of *Orunudo* (Neog 2003: 518). This advertisement can be pointed to as the first of its kind in Assam. Being a lucid description of the goods to be sold along with their prices it was an example for the publishers of the region. The advertisement reappeared in the March issue of the same year (550). Similar advertisements with greater number of titles appeared in the November 1852, January 1853, as well as in March, June, and August 1854 issues of the journal (Neog 2003: 866, 898, 1122, 1170, 1202). From this evidence we can surmise with some certainty that similar advertisements continued to appear in the

pages of the journal. Along with Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, two other Assamese persons who responded to the need of printed books in the Assamese language were Gunabhiram Barua and Hemchandra Barua. Gunabhiram Barua, a close associate of Phukan, was educated in Kolkata and had witnessed the various socio-cultural and literary movements that took place there. In his biography of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Gunabhiram mentions that he was sent to Kolkata for education by Anandaram Dhekial Phukan and that he was greatly influenced by the Brahmo movement (Barua 2008: 68, 107, 133). Besides writing a number of articles and letters in the pages of the *Orunodoi* in which he called upon his countrymen to respond to the need of the times, he penned a number of books. In 1873 Assamese was reinstated as the official language resulting in the need for school books in that language. *Lora Puthi* (1874), *Asomiya Lorar Bhugol* (1879), *Padartha Bidya*, and *Asom Buranji* (1876) were written and published by him to be used as text books in schools. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan's *Asamiya Lorar Mitra* was edited and re-published by Gunabhiram Barua in 1873 to be better suited for schools. *Ram-Navami*, a play on social issues, was written in 1857, printed in Kolkata and published in 1870. One of his great contributions was his *Anandaram Dhekial Phookanar Jivan-Charitra*, published in 1880 (Bhuyan 2001: 28-31).

Contributions of Hemchandra Barua to the newly emerging world of printed books were *Asamiya Vyakaran* (1859), *Adipath* (1873), *Asamiya Lorar Vyakaran* (1886), and *Podhasaliyo Abhidhan* (1892) (Sharma 2006: 266). Barua, who is described as the father of modern Assamese language and literature, had written the first standard work on lexicography, the *Hemkosh* (Barua 1964: 108). The work was not published during his life time. Padmanath Gohainbarua in his memoir *Mor Sowarani* describes his meeting with the grand old man who narrates that he could not trust anyone in getting his work printed in Kolkata and ill health did not permit him to travel there (Gohainbarua 2003: 42-43). The great work was ultimately published in 1900 as a result of the effort made by Hemchandra Goswami and Colonel P. T. Gordon (Sharma 2006: 260-61).

Contribution of the Satras

During the nineteenth century books were printed mostly at Mission Press in Sibsagar or in Kolkata. Eventually presses came to be established by indigenous persons. As

mentioned earlier the first press to be established by an indigenous person was situated in Majuli, the river island of the Brahmaputra which was not easily accessible. Sri Sri Dattadev Goswami (1818-1904), the *Satradhikar* of the Auniati Satra bought the printing machine in Kolkata and had it established at his *Satra* as the Dharma Prakash Jantra. The *Satra* is a centre of Vaishnava religion as preached by Sankardeva and has strong presence in Assam even today. Goswami must have observed how the printing press was used as a tool by the missionaries in their goal of conversion. In this respect Dr. Satish Chandra Bhattacharyya quotes from Tirthanath Sharma's *Auniati Satrar Buranji* (1975), in his book *Sahitya Samucchaya*:

It was in 1793 saka, Lord Dattadev brought a printing machine from Kolkata and established in the eastern side of the *Satra*. The press was named Dharma Prakash Jantra. The name itself is an indication of the aim of establishing the press. The Lord personally saw how the Christian missionaries spread their religion by establishing a press and by publishing the journal *Orunudo*i and various works on Christian religion. After the *Orunudo*i published by the foreigners, the first periodical to be published by the Assamese is the *Assam Bilasinee*. (my translation) (Bhattacharyya 1998: 64)

The press was used to generate a vast “corpus of tract and pamphlet literature” along with the journal *Orunudo*i. Contesting this effort of the Christian missionaries, Goswami published the second Assamese journal, *Assam Bilasinee* (1871-83) as well as a number of works of Sankardeva like the *Kirtanghosa*, *Rukminiharan Nat*, etc. He also printed his own compositions such as *Dhruva Charit*, *Govinda Gunamala*, and *Krishna Lilamrit*, at this press and published them (Choudhury 2010: 20).

The institution of *Satra* was a powerful force in the Assamese society of the times and we see it participating in the emerging print culture. The *Satradhikar* of another Vaishnava *Satra*, the Dholar Satra, Sri Tirthanath Goswami established a centre for publishing and selling of books on Vaishnava literature in 1917 and named it Dholar Satra Library. He did this so that masses could gain easy access to these books at a very cheap rate. At the outset he got the books printed in Kolkata but as it was a time

consuming process, he bought a printing machine in 1922 from the Payne and Sons' company of Kolkata and had it established in the premises of the *Satra*. The press, Jadumoni Chapajantra printed books on various other topics such as oral literature, mantra, musical instruments used in Vaishnava culture, and also old manuscripts. The press was later removed to the town of Golaghat where it is functioning even today (Goswami 2013: 128). Atulchandra Hazarika in his article "Prakashakar Arihona" quotes Purnanda Goswami stating about his father Tirthanath Goswami:

A small incident inspired his Lordship (referring to his father) to take up book publication. During those days the religious head of Letugram Satra of Cinamora took up the publication of religious books. His Lordship bought a book from there paying eight annas. Another person appreciating the book took it paying eight annas to his Lordship. When he went back to the same *Satra* to buy another book the publisher gave it to him for six annas. Hence he got the idea how a publisher could sell a large number of religious books by paying commission and thus focused on publishing religious books. A few days later he met Sibnath Bhattacharjee. Bhattacharjee's publishing house Bhattacharjee Agency was quite famous just as he was a well known scholar and teacher. Thus on his advice my father decided to publish a book on the methods of purification and marriage, *Ripunjoy Smriti*. The book enjoyed great demand and his Lordship published others on ancient literature. For the purpose of spreading religion he wrote a number of religious books and published them. In 1820 saka he instituted an agency, General Agency, for book trade in the Satra premises. He also founded a press, Jadumoni Chapajantra, in 1847 saka. A large number of books were printed in the press. In 1848 saka, a monthly religious magazine, *Dharmapradip*, was published from the press which continued for three years. After that some special issues of the magazine were brought out at irregular intervals. Besides his own compositions, he collected ancient literary works and published them. For this he

established a publishing house Dholar Satra Puthibharal. (my translation)
(Hazarika 1976: 77-78)

In Assam as in many other regions of India or rest of the world, the genres that were printed in the pioneering stages were those that were in circulation either in oral or in written forms. This happened when there was already a well developed linguistic and literary culture. No doubt in Assam the printing press was introduced by the American Baptist missionaries and the first books were printed by them for their own interest of evangelisation. But when the new technology was appropriated by the indigenous persons, both religious (mostly belonging to the Vaisnava *Satras*) and secular (mostly of the educated middle class), the genres were those with which the local people were already familiar with. In the selection of the genres two forces were always at work in the colonial period. First was the ideology of cultural or to be more specific, linguistic nationalism followed by the intelligentsia; the other was the need for readers and consumers of the printed books. In the case of the literary journals and periodicals, like *Assam-Bandhu*, *Jonaki*, *Bijuli*, *Banhi*, and *Usha*, it was declared in no ambiguous term in the editorials or forewords that they pursued the policy of linguistic nationalism. In the case of production of books the same ideology was at work because it was the same group of people who were at helm of affairs during the colonial period. The need to work for the development of the Assamese language and its literature and to stem the destructive effects of an erroneous language policy of the colonial rulers was always influencing the writers as well as the publishers. The progress and development of the nation would have to be brought about through the improvement of the Assamese language. It was an endeavour that would not displease the British rulers. Producing books in the Assamese language would contribute to the establishment of the unique identity of the language.

Commercial Publishing: Genres related to Vaisnavism

The contributions of the missionaries, some of the significant pioneering members of the middle class, and a few *Satras* in the production of the printed books have already been examined and the chapter would now explore the efforts of other indigenous publishers, printers, and book-sellers in this sphere. As for these enablers of print, along with ideology they had to keep another very important fact in mind. Book publishing

and selling was considered a noble profession yet like any other business it needed a market. Thus we see that the first genres that were considered for publishing were those with which the people were familiar in the pre-print era. These were religious texts and books on folklore. The Assamese mostly followed Hinduism albeit in different forms; of these neo-Vaisnavism as preached by the great socio-cultural and religious reformer Sankardeva had great stronghold over the people of Assam. The tracts, psalms, and books composed by Sankardeva and his disciples contained the main tenets of his *Ekasarana-nama-Dharma*. Sankardeva, Madhabdev, Ananta Kandali, Rama Sarasvati, Sridhar Kandali, and many others had composed poems and plays of *bhakti* faith. These books were greatly popular among the people and every household had a copy of any of the major works placed at the altar of their place of worship. The illiterates could acquire knowledge of the religion through the recitation of these works in the village *Naamghar* or prayer hall. The *Satra* and the *Naamghar* are two institutions created by Sankardeva for the propagation of Vaisnavism and have had far reaching effect on not only the religious but also the socio-cultural life of the people. While the *Satras* were the monasteries, the *Naamghars* were the congregational prayer halls. As most of the followers were illiterate it was the duty of the *Bhagavati* at the *Satra* premises and that of the *Pathak* in the *Naamghar* to read out from the scriptures and meticulously explain the meaning to the gatherings (Barua 2015: 578-79). Moreover, the *Naamghars* acted as the community hall where along with regular prayer services, Sankardeva inaugurated the practice of enacting *Ankiyanat* or one-act plays which were based on religious themes. Employing the elements of song, dance, music, and drama these plays were performed in the premises of the prayer hall in the presence of an eclectic group of spectators and these plays became a very successful and popular means of propagation. The scriptures were thus a very integral part of the cultural life of the people, the illiterate were familiar with those through listening to them regularly and could even memorise the psalms. These scriptures were in manuscript form and the common people got them copied by scribes to be kept at the altar or on lofts considered as sacred as the Lord himself (Barpujari 2007 [vol iii]: 419-20). The *Satra* under Sankardeva became a well organised institute and they came to be established in different parts of Assam. These institutes acted as guardian of the various compositions which were in manuscript form (Barpujari 2007 [vol iii]: 238).

By publishing the *Namghosa* of Madhabdev in 1856, Gunabhiram Barua laid the path for the participants in the novel culture to bring out the manuscripts from their sanctum sanctorum into the hands of the masses who for generations grew up listening to what was written there. An advertisement of this book was printed in the July issue of 1857 of the *Orunudo* (Hazarika 2010: 38). The next daring step in the same direction was taken by Haribilash Agarwalla who was an enterprising businessman and was on good terms with the colonial rulers. He got a number of works of the Vaishnava saints, including the *Kirtanghosa* of Sankardeva in 1876, printed in Kolkata and then sold them in Assam. We observe that most of the publishing houses in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the first quarter of the nineteenth century started their enterprise by publishing such compositions; the seminal texts of Vaishnava religion as propagated by Sankardeva, such as the *Kirtanghosa*, *Gunamala*, the one act plays of Sankardeva known as *Ankiyanat*, and the various *Badhakavya*, along with Madhabdev's *Namghosa* were printed and reprinted by the various presses of Assam. Some instances are 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) (38-40).

Commercial Publishing: Genres related to Folk-lore

The printing and publishing centres of this period along with works of Vaishnava saints and other ancient scholars also produced works on oral folk literature. Assam has a rich heritage of this type of literature which is mainly categorised into folk-songs, idioms and proverbs, and folk-tales. Riddles, chants (*mantras*), songs (*naams*) sung during various socio-cultural and religious functions, and proverbs were collected, printed, and published by some of the pioneering participants in the print culture. Sibnath Bhattacharjee who established the Bhattacharjee Agency in 1886 in Dibrugarh was one such person. With great vigour and difficulty he would collect these vital components of ancient Assamese literary culture, print them in his press, and also see to their preservation. This agency is often described as the first commercial publishing concern. It is said that Sibnath Bhattacharjee used to send requests through letters to writers and publishers to keep their books in his book shop. Consequently such was the flow of letters to the company that a separate letterbox was placed there by the postal department. This is confirmed in an interview by Shantanunath Bhattacharjee, one of

the present proprietors of the agency. Some literary works published by the Bhattacharjee Agency were Durgaprasad Mazindar Barua's *Prahari*, Pt. Birendra Bhattacharya's *Proyog Kaumodi*, Durgeswar Sharma's *Partha Parajoy*, Sarbeswar Kotoky's *Asomiya Sahitya Sampad*, and Chandradhar Barua's *Tilottama*. It has been recorded by Harendra Nath Sharma that during his school days he was rewarded with money by Shibnath Bhattacharjee for his script of *Naldamayanti* that he had sent to Bhattacharjee Agency for publication. Certain steps, like asking for scripts for publication, awarding money to the writer, and requesting writers and other publishers to display their products in his bookshop, taken by Shibnath Bhattacharjee present him in the role of the newly emergent commercial publisher (Choudhury 2010: 20-21). Concurrently Bhattacharjee was driven by linguistic ideology; this is proved by the fact that when he participated in the tenth annual session of the Asam Sahitya Sabha held in Goalpara in 1927, he distributed for free books in the Assamese language worth hundred rupees among the people present there. This has been stated in the report of the 1927 session held in Goalpara that was published in the first issue of the second year of the journal of the Sabha, *Asam Sahitya Sabha Patrika* (58). It is to be noted that Bhattacharjee Agency is thriving till date.

Darnton in his essay had pointed to the fact that the figure of the publisher was a later development. "But the evolution of the publisher as a distinct figure in contrast to the master book-seller and the printer still needs systematic study" (Darnton 2009: 196). Thus the role of the publisher, master book-seller, and printer were all performed by the same person; it was at a later stage that these roles were played by separate actors. The same happened in Assam.

Emergence of Indegenous Publishing Houses and BookShops

Bhattacharjee Agency can be taken as a representative case of other successful printing publishing concerns of the time. This is exemplified by the Barkotoky Company established by Gangadhar Barkotoky in Jorhat in 1898 and the Agency Company established by Nandeswar Chakravarty in Dibrugarh 1906. Barkotoky Company was started in 1898 by Gangadhar Barkotoky and his wife Annada Barkotoky as a shop selling a small number of books along with other provisions. The proprietor began his venture of publishing in 1910 with the publication of a few religious books. Then by 1915 he concerned himself with publishing school books and later literary works. In

1930 a printing machine was bought and the Annada Printing House came to be established. Soon the Barkotoky Company converted into a meeting place of intellectuals, writers, government officers, religious men, and supporters of the national movement. Gangadhar Barkotoky profited from the confluence by publishing the writings of these persons. The first Assamese wall almanac was printed in the Annada Printing House which gained great popularity and was in much demand for a long time to come. The proprietor of Agency Company, Nandeswar Chakravorty began his journey in 1906 by selling of books and then was also involved in publishing in 1913. Ultimately in 1923 a press Sadashiv Press was established where a number of books on religion, folk songs, literary composition, and textbooks were printed (Dutta 2013: 122). Thus often we find the same person involved in printing, publishing, and selling of books.

Very soon presses, publishing houses, and bookshops came to be established in various parts of Assam like Golaghat where Jyoti Prakash was established in 1931 by Purnachandra Goswami, Nalbari where Duttabarua and Company was established in 1932 by Harinarayan Duttabarua, Tezpur where B. R. Kalita and Company was established in 1938 by Bhabiram Kalita, Shillong where Chapala Book Stall and Kamala Agency were established in 1936 and Assam Book Agency in 1913, Mariyani where Banti Sahitya Mandir was established in 1940 by Chandradhar Barua, Hauli where Pancharatna Firm was established in 1941 by Jadav Chandra Das, Guwahati where Lawyer's Book Stall was established in 1942 by Bichchitrannarayan Duttabarua, and Tinsukia where Mitra Agency was established in 1945 by Narendra Chandra Dutta (Hazarika 2010: 38-40). With the founding of the various presses, publishing houses, and book selling agencies, book production in Assam was slowly gaining a firm foothold.

Rise of Author-Publisher

Very often the litterateurs themselves participated in publishing. Gunabhiram Barua had inaugurated his career in this field by publishing the *Naamghosa* of Madhabdev. Lakshminath Bezbarua (1868-1938) one of the greatest literary talents of the times was also a publisher. Besides publishing many of the books written by him, he had also published *Bezbarua Banshawali* written by Dinanath Bezbarua and Srinath Bezbarua while he was in Chambalpur in Orissa (Hazarika 2010: 46-47). It is known from the

memoir of Benudhar Rajkhowa, *Mor Jivan Dapon*, that Bezbarua also opened a bookshop in No. 2 Laal Bazar Street, Kolkata (209). Another great writer of the colonial period, Dimeswar Neog (1899-1966) had established a publishing concern in Guwahati, Suwani Prakash, from which he had published a number of his own creations. Of these the major works are *Asamiya Sahityar Buranji* (1937), *Adhunik Asamiya Kabya Pratiha* (1935), *Asamiya Katha Pratibha* (1940), and *Asamiya Sahityar Buranjit Abhumiki* (1940) (Hazarika 2010: 50).

Commercial Publishing: Textbooks

Along with the religious books, mostly Vaishnava literature, textbooks were a very important component of the upcoming book trade of Assam. “The spread of formal education and the colonial state’s increased engagement with the primary and secondary sectors resulted in the urgent need for written instructional material in Indian regional languages. While traditional forms of education centred on the teacher, colonial education was firmly built on textuality, and from the outset gave prime importance to the printed textbook. . . . Under colonial aegis, textbooks came to constitute the most widely produced and distributed matter in modern Indian languages” (Stark 2009: 228-29). Thus the producers of textbooks became important promoters of print culture in the early period. In most parts of India the Christian missionaries were the pioneering producers of textbooks in Indian regional languages; early contributors were the Serampore Mission Press and the Baptist Mission Press in Kolkata. Soon schoolbook societies were established in different important towns such as in Kolkata (1817), Mumbai (1816/1821), Madras (1820), Benaras (1820), and Agra (1833) (229).

In 1836 when the colonial rulers declared Bengali as the official language of Assam, the language became the medium of instruction in the government schools. Those aspiring for a government job needed at least a working knowledge of the language. The new language policy resulted in the use of textbooks in the Bengali language. The General Report on Public Instruction in Assam 1881-82 informs us of the circulation of textbooks in the Bengali language in Assam.

In every district and every sub-division in Assam there are agents of the Calcutta School Book Society, who obtain a supply of text-books from the Society, and sell them by retail to the students of our Assam schools at rates

laid down by the Society. These agents ought to be able, with proper management, to have a sufficient and constant supply of text-books, but I regret to say that such is not the case, and our schools and pupils are often put to great inconvenience for the want of text-books. The difficulty in having a constant supply arises chiefly from the difficulty of carriage and the time occupied in the transit of books from Calcutta to the several districts in Assam from the date on which the indent is despatched: until the books are received by the indenter, there is usually from one to two months interval, and it often happens that during this time number of students have to go without the necessary text-books. (Willson 1882: 59)

Soon the Bengali language became a symbol of a superior culture, the Assamese young men communicating to each other by writing in the Bengali language. Along with school books, periodicals, literary works, and religious books imported from the neighbouring region were in much demand. So much so that use of the Assamese language came to be considered as an act below the dignity of the educated youth. As already mentioned a few leading members of the Assamese society like Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Gunabhiram Barua, Hemchandra Barua, and others with the active support of the American Baptist missionaries fought for gaining official status for the Assamese language. In the schools established by the missionaries Assamese was the medium of instruction and they wrote a number of books in the language to be used in their schools. When in 1873 the Assamese language was once again made the language of the schools and courts, the need for textbooks in the state run schools came up. We find a number of publishers and writers, mostly teachers, making great effort in fulfilling the need. Thus school books became an important component of book production and book trade in Assam.

The contributions of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Gunabhiram Barua, and Hemchandra Barua towards composing of school books have been already mentioned. While some of these books were printed at the Mission Press of Sibsagar, others were printed in the presses of Kolkata. Gradually as commercial enterprises dealing in books came up

under indigenous patronage, textbooks came to be published by them. No doubt these publishing house very often and for long depended on the more developed and cheaper printing technology of Kolkata for printing their books, yet soon printing machines came to be established by them. For instance the Barkotoky Company established in 1898 began publishing textbooks in 1915. Sarat Chandra Goswami's *Bhugol Path*, Harinarayan Duttabarua's *Sishu Sahitya*, and Nakul Chandra Sabhapandit's *Arhi Path* were published by this company in 1920. Then in 1930 when Annada Printing House was founded by the proprietors, books came to be printed at this press. In that year *Chandrakanta Abhidhan* (published by the Assam Sahitya Sabha) and Buddhindranath Bhattacharya's *Anglo-Assamese Dictionary* were printed at this press. The first wall calendar (*panjika/almanac*) in the Assamese language was a production of this company (Goswami 2013: 126-27).

Memoirs and biographies of the members of the educated middle class, particularly of those who were engaged as teachers in the government schools, are a rich source of information about the efforts of them in writing as well as compiling text books. From the memoirs of Padmanath Gohainbarua and Harinarayan Duttabarua we come to know that most of the books that were in use in the schools were of English writers and published by foreign companies. Citing his experience as a school teacher, Harinarayan Duttabarua reveals in his memoir that most of the books used in schools as textbooks were published by foreign companies like Macmillan, Orient Longman, and Oxford. Very often translations were made from Bengali textbooks into Assamese and then were published by those companies. The matter was not appealing to him as he felt that there were educated Assamese persons who could write such books and get them published by indigenous companies (Duttabarua 2004: 23-24). Duttabarua further writes that he reproached Durgadhar Borkotoky for helping the foreign companies when he was the Inspector of Schools (25). Along with his books, he also arranged for books written by other writers like Muktalal Kathbarua (*Bharat Buranji* for class x), Prannath Buzarbarua (books on Geometry), and Gunagobinda Dutta (book on Indian History) to be printed and published by Barkotoky Company (25). While serving as a school teacher in different parts of Assam, he wrote a number of books on subjects like Arithmetic, Geography, and History, very often inspired by those in his vocation. Some of them were *Natun Dharapat*, *Uju Moukhik* co-authored with Rohiteswar Saikia, *Jadav Patiganit* (a translation of Jadav Chakravorty's *Patiganit* in Bengali), *Bhugol*, *Saral*

Bhugol part 1, 2, and 3, Bhugol Prabesh (for class x), *Englandor Buranji* (for which he received an award of Rs. 250.00 from the Director of Public Instruction, Assam), *Adipath part 1 and 2, Sahaj Path, Sahitya Path, Lora Path part 1 and 2, Purani Sahitya,* and *Natun Sahitya Sapon*. There were also other books which were composed or compiled by Duttabarua. He not only wrote the books but also got them selected by the Textbook Selection Committee as well as took steps to publish them. Barua Agency was a joint venture of Harinarayan Duttabarua and Gopal Chandra Barua established in Guwahati in 1908. Some of the textbooks compiled by Duttabarua while he was posted in Guwahati were published by this company (23-26).

Like Harinarayan Duttabarua, Padmanath Gohainbarua, a leading member of the Assamese intelligentsia, also had written a number of textbooks considering it as his sacred duty toward his motherland. In his memoir he writes about the medium of instruction and the textbooks that were followed in the government schools during his young age. The middle section of government schools had two departments, English and Bengali.

In those days the books that were followed in a particular class in Bengal were also used as textbooks in that particular standard in Assam. Accordingly the textbooks followed in the middle section were:-1) Literature- a) Madanmohan Tarkalankar's *Sishusikhsa* 1st, 2nd and 3rd parts, b) Jadunath Chattopadhyay's *Padyapath* 1st, 2nd and 3rd parts, c) Akhsay Kumar Dutta's *Charupath* 1st, 2nd and 3rd parts, d) Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar's *Bodhuday*, e) Tarashankar Vidyaratna's *Ramerrajyabhishek*, f) Hafez's *Sadbhavkrita*. (my translation) (Gohainbarua 2003: 8-9)

It can be easily surmised that those books were written, printed, and published in Kolkata. Even after the Assamese language was declared as the official language, books in the Bengali language were used in the government school. This is attested by the list of books prescribed by the department of Public Instruction for the middle schools of Assam in its general report for 1881-82 (Willson 1882: 32). When Padmanath Gohainbarua, feeling that the situation was having adverse effect on the education of the

Assamese youths, approached Mr. G. Wilson apprising him of the situation, the later pointed out the fact that there was a dearth of textbooks in the Assamese language.

With that aspiration I corresponded with Late Phanidhar Chaliha, an experienced litterateur and my well-wisher, and the helmsman of the education department, the former Inspector of Schools (later Director of Public Instruction, Assam), Mr. G. Wilson and through their honest and substantial advice realised that the very foundation of the house that we were so anxious to build has not yet been laid. . . . Both of them gave me their decisions that we should first eradicate the dearth of books to be used in middle and high school sections of our state, particularly books on literature; only then we shall be able to hope to achieve our goal. (my translation) (Gohainbarua 2003: 50-51)

It was this dearth that was a hindrance to Assamese being used as a medium of instruction in schools. Gohainbarua wrote as well as compiled a number of books to be used for teaching Assamese literature, Geography, History, Moral Science, and also Teaching Methods. He got almost all his books selected by the Textbook Selection Committee at Nagaon and had those printed at Kolkata (Gohainbarua 2003: 51-52). The committee was formed in 1878 and “its duties confined to the examination of existing Assamese text-books for primary schools (páthsálas), and other Assamese books that were submitted to them by the authors” (Willson 1881: 28). Publication of Gohainbarua’s books took place in Assam and most of them were in use for a long time to come (Gohainbarua 2003: 51-52). Like Harinarayan Duttabarua and Padmanath Gohainbarua, it was mostly the school teachers who engaged themselves in the compilation and writing of textbooks. Indeed they had the first hand experience of the lack of instruction material in the Assamese language.

Table 3

The Revised List of Authorised Assamese Textbooks for 1887-88^a

LITERATURE

Sl. No.	Name of book	Author's Name	Where procurable
1.	Láraputhi	Gunábhi Rám Baruá	Nowgong
2.	Hitasádhiká	Padmábati Debi	Ditto
3.	Assamia Larámitra	Gunábhi Rám Baruá	Ditto
4.	Padyamála	Padmaháns Gosvámi	Ditto
5.	Kávyá Kusum	Gunábhi Rám Baruá	Ditto
6.	Sikshásár	Padmaháns Gosvámi	Ditto
7.	Páthmála	Hem Chandra Baruá	Gauháti
8.	Hitakatha Part I & II	Purnakanta Sarma	Dibrugarh
9.	Rijupath	Baladev Mahanta	Nowgong
10.	Jnánámkur	Chandra Shekar Baruá	North Gauháti
11.	Nitikatha	Jajneshvar Sarmá	Sibságar
12.	Nitisár	Syad Taibulla	Gauháti
13.	Jnánámkur, Part I & II	Nara Náth Mahanta	Nowgong
14.	Padyapath	Munshi Sakhawat Ali	Gauhati
15.	Larábodh	Lambodar Baraá	Ditto
16.	Kabitá Málá Part I & II	Bholá Náth Das	Nowgong
17.	Hita Kathá	Jajneshvar Sarmá	Sibságar
18.	Hitopadesh	Tulsi Ram Sarma	Nowgong
19.	Chinta Tarangini	Bhola Nath Das	Ditto
20.	Jnánámkur	Purna Kánta Sarmá	Dibrugarh
21.	Nithikatha	Bishnu Priya Debi	Nowgong
22.	Pratham Siksha	Tulsi Ram Baruá	Ditto
23.	Dvritiashiksha	Ditto	Ditto
24.	Lárápath	Joy Chandra Chakarvarti	Gauháti
25.	Samaybarnan	Chandra Shekar Baruá	North Gauháti

BIOGRAPHY

1.	Biography at the late Ananda Gunabhi Rám Baruá	Nowgong
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PRIMER

1.	Larádarsak	Munshi Yar Muhammad	Sibságar
2.	Larápath Part I & II	Joy Chandra Chakravarti	Gauháti
3.	Adipáth, I, II & III	Hem Chandra Baruá	Office of the Inspector of Schools, Shillong
4.	Lará Nijaputhi	Braja Pati Banurji	Gauháti
5.	Barnabodh, Part	Madhu Ram Dás	Nowgong

GRAMMAR

1.	Comparative Grammar	Hem Chandra Baruá	Gauháti
2.	Assamese Grammar	Ditto	Ditto
3.	Assomia Grammar	Dina Bandhu Tarkálankár	Tezpur
4.	Assamia Lor/ar Vyakaran	Hem Chandra Baruá	Gauháti
5.	Assamese Grammar	Dharmesver Gasvámi	Nowgong

ARITHMETIC

1.	Mental Arithmetic Part I & II	Mahim Chandra Chakravarti	Tezpur
2.	Ganit Sastra	Purnananda Sen	Nowgong
3.	Byabaharik Maukhik Ganana	Rajani Kánta Chakravarti	Barpeta
4.	Karyya Siksha	Káli Rám Baruá	Gauháti
5.	Ganan Pustak	Sakhawat Ali	Ditto
6.	Anka Path	Dibákar Sarmá	Sibságar
7.	Mental Arithmetic	Jajnesvar Sarmá	Ditto

HISTORY

1.	Brief History of Assam	Lakshmi Rám Baruá	Gauháti
2.	Assam Buranji	Gunabhi Rám Baruá	Nowgong
3.	History of India, Part I	Dharmesver Gosvámi	Ditto

GEOGRAPHY

1.	Geography of Assamese Children	Gunabhi Rám Baruá	Nowgong
2.	Physical Geography	Lambadar Dutta	Ditto
3.	Ditto ditto	Isanada Bharali	Sibságar

GEOMETRY

1.	Geometry	Sakháwat Ali	Gauháti
2.	Ditto	Jájesvar Sarmá	Sibságar
3.	Ditto, Part I	Debi Charan Baruá	Ditto

MENSURATION AND SURVEYING

1.	Parimiti	Hali Rám Dás Meddhi	Gauháti
2.	Mensuration and Surveying	Bhola Nath Das	Nowgong
3.	Bhumiparimán, or Treatise on Simple Mensuration in Assamese	Kali Rám Baruá	Gauháti

SCIENCE

1.	Padárthavidya	Munshi Sakháwat Ali	Gauháti
2.	Translation of Dr. Cuningham's Sanitary Primer		Inspector of School's Office, Shillong
3.	Padartha Vijnan	Gunábhi Rám Baruá	Nowgong
4.	Bastu Siksha	Lakshmi Rám Bara	Gauháti
5.	Catechism of Dr. Cuningham's Sanitary Primer	Bápu Rám Sarmá	Ditto
6.	Svásthobodh	Nara Náth Mohanta	Nowgong
7.	Padarthadarsan	Radhakanta Sandique	

Source: Willson, J. comp. General Report on Public Instruction in Assam for 1887-88.

Shillong: Assam Secretariat Press, 1888. 52-53. Print.

a. The books listed in the table are books written in the Assamese language and selected by the Nowgong Textbook Selection Committee in 1887-88 to be used in the government schools of Assam.

Textbook production in colonial Assam was thus the result of the coming together of a number of factors: new form of administration, a new technology, a new system of education relying on textuality and the effort of the American missionaries as well as the Assamese intelligentsia that formed the middle class. No doubt the first textbooks in the Assamese language and in Assam were produced by the American Baptist missionaries: written, printed, and published by them to aid in their primary goal of spreading Christianity. But we observe that the efforts of the persons like Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Gunabhiram Barua, and Hemchandra Barua were made in order to contribute toward the development of the language which was adversely affected by the language policy followed by the British rulers in Assam from 1836 to 1871. The members of the Assamese middle class followed the ideology linguistic nationalism during the early years of British rule. When in 1873 Assamese had been declared as the official language, the need for school books in the Assamese language arose. A number of educated persons came up to fulfil the need. Gradually with the establishment printing presses, publishing houses, and bookshops, a new commercial venture came up and trade in textbooks became a lucrative component of that venture along with religious books and literary works.

The commercial publishing in Assam during the colonial period as mentioned in the very outset was in its nascent stage. It struggled to get a foothold on the soil of Assam with whatever support and assistance it could get help of. Technologically it was heavily depended on neighbouring Bengal. As stated earlier the first books in the Assamese language were printed in the Serampore Mission Press in 1813 and 1833. A very small section of the Assamese elite who engaged in writing books before the

coming of the printing press to Assam had them printed and published in Kolkata. Haldiram Dhekial Phukan, the father of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, had written two books, “*kāmākhyā-yātrā-paddhati*, 1829, in Sanskrit and *□sām Buranji*, Chronicle of Assam, 1831, in Bengali” and had them printed in the Samachar Chandrika Press in Kolkata. Anandaram was the first Assamese person who established a press in Kolkata (Neog 2008: 197). In 1849 Anandaram joined as the Dewan of Bijni Zamindar at Goalpara (201). During those days he found that the “Decisions of Sudder Dewanny and Nizamat Adawlut used to be published every month in English with the Government’s assistance” (213). As Anandaram realised that these were of no help to the people in general he translated them into Bengali. His translations of January and February, 1850 were printed at Messrs Rosario & Co. Kolkata and those of March of the same year in the Baptist Mission Press, Kolkata. “He bought out a printing press, called Calcutta New Press, specially for printing of those Decisions and had it registered in 1852 with the Calcutta Police in the name of Gunabhiram” (214). It was the time when there was a boom in commercial publishing in Kolkata due to a number of factors like development of print technology leading to the establishment of a number of presses particularly in the North of Kolkata and improvement in literacy rate resulting in increase in the number of consumers. Anindita Ghosh in her book *Power in Print* states that in James Long’s report on vernacular presses to the Government of India in 1857, he mentions of forty-six presses operating in and around Kolkata. Referring to the location of the presses she points out that most of them were “concentrated in the Chitpore-Ahiritolla area in the northern part of Calcutta. It comprised the part of the native town called Battala, which was also the heart of the general book market in Bengal” (Ghosh 2006: 119).

The diagram of the “communication circuit” shows that the printing of books is the result of different persons like the compositors, pressmen, and warehousemen. Paper, ink, type, and labour are indispensable items without which printing of books cannot take place (Darnton 2009: 182). Due to the lack of paper, good quality type, efficient binding of books, fast printing most of the publishing houses of Assam depended greatly on the presses in Kolkata. This phenomenon continued from the colonial period to almost to the end of the twentieth century. About seventy percent of printing jobs took place in the presses established in the lanes and by-lanes of North Kolkata where cheap and developed print technology was available. Many of the important journals of

Assam were printed in the letter-press of Bengal; some of these were *Asam Darpan* (1874), *Assam Bandhu* (1885), *Jonaki* (1889), *Bijuli* (1890), *Banhi* (1909), and *Assam Hitayishi* (1925). The presses in Assam were depended on Kolkata for paper, ink, types, and such others; almost all the printing machines were procured from Bengal (Dewan 2010: 95-96).

Though the printing venture of Assam was heavily depended on Kolkata for technology as well as logistics, yet as we have already seen that printing presses came up under the patronage of indigenous persons; some amount of printing work also took place in Assam during the colonial period. A number of persons who started as publishers and got their books printed in Kolkata later established their own presses and did some amount of printing work. We have seen how Sri Tirthanath Goswami of Dholar Satra started as a publisher and seller of books by having those printed at Kolkata but later bought a printing machine and established the press Jadumoni Chapajantra. Similarly Gangadhar Borkotoky who established Borkotoky Company in Jorhat in 1898 started as a book seller, then ventured into publishing and ultimately founded Annada Printing House.

Dissemination of Printed Text

Shippers form the fourth node in the “communication circuit” and Darnton points out that in Europe during the period of his study they were the agent, smuggler, entrepôt keeper, wagoner, etc. These were the people who were responsible in transporting the books from the printing press to the book shops (Darnton 2009: 199). A study of the dissemination of the printed text is essential to understand the entire “communication circuit”. How did the book after being printed and published reach the reader? The establishment of book shops is but a part of the picture. The American Baptist missionaries who founded the first printing press and publishing concern in Assam were also the pioneers in distribution of printed books. As soon as they landed on the soil of Assam they established there a press with two printing machines and commenced printing of school books and religious tracts. The missionaries carried these texts wherever they went and distributed them among those who were eager to accept them. They also took the advantage of the people gathering for various occasions like various *puja* and other socio-religious functions for distributing their tracts (Barpujari 1986: 36). The weekly markets provided a good opportunity for meeting people as well as

distributing tracts. As for the school books the Mission Press established in Sibsagar served as the publishing house as well as book selling centre as indicated by the advertisement for book published in the *Orunudo* which has already been mentioned. The weekly markets and *haats* have always played a significant role in the economic as well as socio-cultural life of the people of the region. When the indigenous people of Assam participated in book trade they found the *haats* and weekly markets a convenient place for dissemination of books. Ajit Bharali writes that in the weekly markets of various places in Sibsagar there would be at least one stall selling books. The seller would bring books in a bundle and spread out his ware on the ground; he would then visit village after village selling books in the same manner (Bharali 2013: 138). This was a common feature in Assam even after bookshops came up, as in different parts of India. In Western Assam bookshops came to be known as “library”. As early as in 1919, Nagendranath Sarma established a bookshop in the town of Kokrajhar and named it Nagendra library. Later a publishing unit was also founded. At that time Kokrajhar and its neighbouring area were covered with thick forests and were inhabited by various tribes of people like the Bodos, Rabhas, Rajbongshis, Chaotals, etc. It was a malaria infested place and not easily penetrable. Yet a primary school was established in 1857 in Chandrapara-Dhauliguri five kilometers north of Kokrajhar. People ventured through these hazardous areas and *haats* and markets were established. Nagendranath Sarma traversed these places carrying his bundles of books for selling them in the local markets, schools, and libraries of the villages. The missionary zeal of the father had been carried forward by the son Kaliprasad Sarma and the firm has grown from strength to strength (Adhikari 2013: 36-37).

A common form of dissemination of books was by post; this was mostly done through V. P. that is Value Payable post. The postal service was the most important means of communication during the colonial period and it functioned very efficiently. Benudhar Rajkhowa writes in *Mor Jivan Dapon* how while he was a very young child he wrote a letter to his father at the request of his mother. The address was not properly written and it was sent as bearing mail from Jaipur to Dibrugarh yet his father received the letter in time (17-18). We come to know of this popular form of distribution through the contents as well as the notices and advertisement published in the journals and books published during those days. The books and periodicals published in Assam as well as in Kolkata used the postal service. The *Milan* was a monthly journal printed in Kolkata

and published from the same place. The address given is No. 8 Subal Chandra Lane. In the last issue of its fifth year (1927) there is a notice which clearly illustrates the distribution of the journal. In the notice it is written:

The fifth year of *Milan* has been completed. Let us say a few words about the sixth year. Even if the editor and manager be changed the publication of the journal will be continued. Most probably the first issue of the sixth year has already been posted. Along with it a few letters will also be sent to the customers. If the yearly subscription is sent at the commencing of the year, the publication of the journal could be carried on without financial deficit. . . . The new customers should direct us to send them the journal through V.P. by writing letters to us. (my translation) (n. p.)

There are four advertisements printed in the last page of the journal. One of them is another example of the dissemination of books through post. It promises that the customers could acquire from the comforts of their home a copy of *Maharaja Naranarayan* written by Binandachandra Barua for which he received the Kamala Debi prize for children awarded by Asam Sahitya Sabha, by sending postage stamp. The address for communication was of Manager, Assam Supplying Agency 110/1 Amherst Street Kolkata.

A copy of *Jayati Bharat* points out that similar method was also followed within Assam. The book is a second edition copy titled *Jayati Bharat* or *Bharat Savitri*; it is a translation as well as publication of Tirhanath Goswami and printed at the publisher's printing press Jadumoni Chapjantra of Dholar Satra. The year of publication given is 480 *Sankarabda*. In the last page of the book there is a notice which gives a list of books along with their prices which were available in the press. The notice states that those could be acquired through V.P. by writing to the proprietor Tirthanath Goswami. The advertisements inform us that along with books, stationery articles and medicine were also available at the press. Thus very often the same institution acted as the publishing, printing, and dissemination centre.

Thus we see that in Assam with a setting very different from the one studied by Darnton book trade emerged with the establishment of printing presses and we witness the printed text moving along the “communication circuit”. In a region which boasts of rich manuscript culture the printed text arrived during the colonial period. They were mostly brought in by the office assistants employed by the British from neighbouring Bengal; the English and the American missionaries were the other carrying agents. We have also seen that native gentlemen visiting Bengal on different pretexts had also carried home books published in Bengal. The production of books in Assam was pioneered by the American Baptist missionaries and the technology was soon appropriated by indigenous persons. Hence printing presses, publishing concerns, and bookshops came to be established in the region and a new culture emerged. It did not replace the old manuscript culture rather it enabled the access of those venerated manuscripts by the masses. Thus the genres that were printed were those that were already in circulation. The introduction of a new form of education depending on textuality led to the production of textbooks. It is to be noted that the indigenous enablers of book production who were mostly the members of the middle class and were guided by the ideology of linguistic nationalism. Non-textbooks like literary creations were also produced though due to high cost involved these were mostly published in the periodicals. Moreover, the availability of developed and cheap print technology in Kolkata led many publishers of Assam to print books in Kolkata. However, with the establishment of printing presses in different parts of Assam commercial printing along with publishing and dissemination developed; soon the text from being an object of veneration metamorphosed into a marketable object.