

A photograph of a sunset over a body of water. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a long, bright reflection on the water. In the foreground, the silhouettes of two people are visible in a small boat, one holding a long pole. The background shows a dark, silhouetted shoreline with trees.

LALIT KUMAR BARUA

**Education and
Culture in
North-East India**

1826-2000

IIAS

This book provides a comprehensive account of the key issues that revolve around the interaction between culture and education in both, the colonial and post-colonial period of north-eastern India. In attempting to do so, the author manages to produce a scholarly and a critical introduction to the cultural history of north-eastern India, providing in the process a theoretical and a critical vocabulary to address as well as make an intervention into the contemporary cultural and political concerns of the region.

The historical account generates an intellectual context to examine as well as critically comment on the key historical events and critical interventions in the period between 1826–2000 in north-eastern India: the redrawing of boundaries and land systems in the colonial period as well as colonial policies towards education and language, the work of the Christian missionaries in creating cultural elites and opening up spaces for different identity formations, Assamese literary renaissance in the late nineteenth century, the impact of nationalist discourse, the policy of education and culture in post-colonial north-eastern India shaped by a dominant nation-state. Given the context of the political mobilisations of identities, which has been the result of the practices and policies pursued during the colonial and post-colonial periods, the author argues for a system of education which resists both, the uniform claims of the nation-state as well as the claims of a unified ethnic subject. In this context, the author also provides a critique of three very significant novels written in Assamese. These novels are important; in that they manage to articulate the material realities and conditions of post-colonial society in north-eastern India, particularly the voices and assertions of certain marginalised groups. A debate on the economic and political complexities of the problem of immigration into Brahmaputra valley provides the outline of a crisis deeply embedded in the identity conflicts in the region.

Lalit Kumar Barua (b 1938) is a well-known Assamese critic and scholar. A former member of the Indian Administrative Service, he studied in Gauhati and Delhi universities.

Barua has authored five books including two in Assamese on literary criticism and social history. He has also contributed to the *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature* (1989) published by the Sahitya Akademi and *Comparative Indian Literature* (1986) edited by Dr. K.M. George and published by Macmillan. His other important work *Oral Tradition and Folk Heritage of North-East India* (1999) contains in an expanded form, the lectures first delivered at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla as a Visiting Scholar. He was awarded a Senior Fellowship of the Department of Culture, Government of India for two years in 1997. He became a Fellow at the IAS in July 2000 and worked there in that capacity for three years.

Education and Culture in North-East India (1826-2000)

LALIT KUMAR BARUA



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY
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Cultural Transitions in Eastern India: Bengal and Assam

In the context of the evolution of modern Indian society and polity, one is sure to find significant differences between certain developments in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. In the eighteenth century, there was near anarchy in Bengal and the Gangetic valley and in the periphery of Eastern India. K.M. Panikkar writes:

Only in Maratha homelands, in Mysore and in the extreme south did normal Indian life continue. In out of the way places like Rajputa and Travancore the art of scholarship continued to be cultivated. In fact India at the end of the eighteenth century in its most widely populated areas and traditional centres of culture lay prostrate and gasping.¹

The important factor at the centre of Indian culture was religion and it was in respect of its position in the nineteenth century that a change could first be noticed.² Secondly, in the eighteenth century, the Orientalists, an exclusive group of scholars brought to the fore an unusual range of interests and attitudes in relation to the classics of the Indian tradition indirectly drawing out the riches of an ancient culture and civilization. The development though small was significant:

The intellectual elite that clustered about Hastings after 1770 was 'classicist' rather than 'progressive' in their historical outlook, cosmopolitan rather than nationalist in their view of other cultures, and rationalist rather than romantic in their quest for those 'constant and universal principles' that express the unity of human nature. And this concept of unity and diversity, of process and pattern, viewed in historical perspective was perhaps one of the most significant ideas to emerge in the eighteenth century philosophy of history.³

While Warren Hastings' interest in Oriental studies had a more practical side to it—he ruled Bengal since 1772—the 'attitudes of scholars like William Jones towards India and Asia were much too complex to be pigeonholed'.⁴ William Jones' deep interest in India was civilizational. It was significant that Jones 'analysed the Hindu pantheon and compared it with the classical one. He came to the conclusion that they all worshipped the same gods under different names.'⁵ He was a man of classical learning whose ideas had nothing in common with the romantic fascination for the Orient or the exotic. It had also nothing in common with those of James Mill who sought to belittle the achievements of Indian culture and civilization in his famous *History of British Rule in India* published in 1817. It is rightly said that 'in contrast to the Orientalism of the nineteenth century with its romanticist view of cultural diversity, the scholarship of Jones was universalist and rationalist'.⁶ The significant contribution of another great scholar with the same kind of approach had even a deeper import for the later development of Indian thought in the nineteenth century. H.T. Colebrooke initiated through his *Essay on the Vedas*, an interpretation of the monotheistic tradition of Indian thought, which became very significant 'in the light of the later history of the Brahmo Samaj'.⁷

The Orientalists were not an isolated group; the dominant meanings that their studies generated helped the colonization process. But they were also precursors of an intellectual dialogue or a debate which was expanded and enriched in a different context by Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1835) in the nineteenth century. Ram Mohan made the re-examination and reinterpretation of the authoritative tradition a positive step to justify reformist modes of thought in philosophy and religion and to promote a syncretic approach to systems of belief, also anchored on reformed Hinduism. It led not only to the establishment of the Brahmo Samaj in 1828 but defined his entire approach in the fields of religion, philosophy, education, political thought and social reform. Ram Mohan 'considered reason as expressed in the Upanishads, the basis of Hindu religion and that all social institutions or customs should be judged from that standpoint. From this he drew two conclusions—that Hindu society needed radical reform and Hinduism could welcome

external influences which were not contrary to the spirit of reason. He also considered that the recognition of human rights was consistent with basic Hindu thought. He expressed this idea in his Brahmo Samaj or Divine Society founded in 1828. He substituted theism for classical monism and denounced suttee, infanticide, idolatry, and polygamy.⁸ The originality of Ram Mohan's philosophical and religious reformism had some unique features: firstly, he combined Upanishadic theism with more than one monotheistic faith,⁹ thereby proving himself to be a universalist. Secondly, his affirmation of Hindu thought or Christian ethic was never at the expense of his belief in reason or science.

Ram Mohan epitomized the best spirit of the Indian Renaissance—rather his own life and thought defined what it was all about—in his uniquely individual and comprehensive response to both the East and the West. He was happy when the Reform Bill was passed by the British Parliament in 1830; it was not unexpected that Jeremy Bentham described him as a collaborator in the service of mankind. Although Ram Mohan adopted at times the language of Utilitarianism, he was definitely more consistent in his passionate advocacy of the religious and social reforms which he never regarded as being divorced from what he thought to be politically good for the people in India. 'The present of religion adhered to by the Hindus,' he once wrote 'is not well calculated to promote their political interest; it is, I think necessary that some change should take place in their religion, at least for the sake of their political advantage and social comfort.'¹⁰ He did not consider the promotion of civil and political rights or reforms of traditional society and religion in isolation from each other. To quote Percival Spear:

Ram Mohan took his stand on the principles of reason and the rights of the individual. These, he said, were both basic to Hindu and Western thought and formed a basis upon which they could mutually borrow. Reason and human right, he considered, underlay the philosophic *Upanishads* and on this basis Indians could claim the same rights as Europeans. By the same token, Hindus could and should reform their own society by removing the accretions of ages. On these grounds, with copious scriptural quotation, he attacked the institution of suttee and the abuses of caste, advocated the raising of the status of and women and abolition of idolatry.¹¹

The first priority of the enlightened section or of those who were the torchbearers of the cultural renaissance of the nineteenth century was to reform Hindu society through a reinterpretation of tradition based on rationality. The greatest obstacle in the way of enlightenment in India during that time was religious intolerance and dogmatism. Ram Mohan, therefore, felt the 'need of recovering from obscurity the exalted religious ideas, which Centuries of neglect had overlaid with a hard cackling of thoughtless customs and beliefs'.¹² The emphasis on rationality led to a preference for Western science and philosophy in the system of education. The same emphasis could be seen in Vidyasagar (1820-1891) and Aksoy Kumar Dutta (1820-1866) in the nineteenth century: Vidyasagar followed Ram Mohan in applying critical methods in the study of scriptures and in extending this approach to propagate his strong advocacy of remarriage of widows and to promote women's education in Bengal in the face of opposition from Hindu conservative leaders. Dutta was perhaps one of the first advocates of the use of science and technology to increase knowledge and remove social inequalities. It has been said of Vidyasagar that 'his reforms aroused bitter opposition in the orthodox quarters, but like Ram Mohan Roy, he was invincible in polemic'.¹³

Both Ram Mohan and Vidyasagar gave their active support to the inclusion, of course, of Western science and philosophy but their intention was neither to ignore the classical heritage of India nor to provide a limited liberal education for a particular class of Indians, who would remain as an appendage to the empire. Unlike Macaulay, they were keen to develop in the educated Indians the spirit of freedom of thought or the spirit of rational enquiry; this was the reason why Ram Mohan helped to found a college of Western learning.¹⁴ Vidyasagar, who became the principal of the Sanskrit College 'modernized the entire system of Sanskrit education in Bengal' and 'brought to the service of his mother tongue the great acquirements of his classical scholarship'.¹⁵ Vidyasagar took a number of important steps to promote Bengali as a course of study, stating that the object was to collect materials from the European sources and convey them in the expressive idiom of Bengali, which could not be done without a proper knowledge of Sanskrit. But it was

imperative that the students of the Sanskrit College were taught English, the real access to enlightenment at the point of time:

To raise up such a useful class of men is the object I have proposed to myself and to the accomplishment of which the whole energy of our Sanskrit college should be directed. That the students of our Sanskrit college, when they shall have finished their college course, will prove themselves men of this stamp we have every reason to hope.

It is very gratifying to observe that they have lately begun to think in such a way as to promise that hereafter every qualified student will be found free from all the prejudices of his countrymen.¹⁶

This new approach provided a dominant meaning in the content of the Indian Renaissance, whether it related to a reinterpretation of tradition on the basis of rationality or in formulating the new object of education different from the one prescribed by Macaulay or James Mill. In the most outstanding exponents of spirit of the Renaissance, it implied a richer understanding of the interacting forces of science and religion. 'Our pursuit of truth', said Rabindranath Tagore 'in the domain of nature, therefore, is through analysis and the gradual methods of science, but our apprehension of truth in our soul is immediate and through direct intuition.'¹⁷

The differences in respect of certain significant aspects of Indian society of the first fifty years of the nineteenth century with those of the second half are not only remarkable, they are also crucial for an understanding of the changing attitudes of the intelligentsia or the changes that were coming over in the social or the cultural sphere. The intellectual ferment, which was the result of an intense debate on the validity of sanctions of tradition or the usefulness of the traditional system of education, was a direct response to the challenge of the western civilization. The dominant ethos of evangelism and utilitarianism which made up the ideological spectrum of British rule upto the forties or the early fifties of the nineteenth century, helped this process. Some of the administrative measures were rewarding for the people of India as a whole. The utilitarian concept of the new land policy was an improvement on the Indian brand of feudalism; it brought about a new agrarian order in the new territories like Assam, Sindh, Punjab, western India and the south.¹⁸

The later half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of

the nation-state model in India although strictly under the aegis of the empire. This led to the beginnings of nationalism as a distinct political ideology either in conjunction with religion or without it; thereby began a process by which the idea of an Indian nation came to supersede that of an Indian civilization. The character of the British rule itself was undergoing a transformation. Hereafter the political consolidation of the empire became an irreversible process. This aspect has been put very forthrightly by A.J.P. Taylor:

The British rulers of India claimed to be there for the benefit of the Indians. In 1857, the Indians disputed the claim. The Indian mutiny was the greatest challenge to the British empire since the revolt of the American colonics. No doubt it was a rebellion in favour of ancient ways, not an explosion of modern nationalism. There were massacres on both sides. The British, in their alarm, were as savage as the mutineers. The mutiny revealed the underlying truth about the Indian empire: the British were not there because they were wanted, but because their troops had superior discipline and superior weapons. Armed forces were the fundamental resource of the British in India as it was for all other empires.

The Indian Mutiny completed the estrangement between the British and their Indian subjects. Henceforth, the British ruled India as if it were another planet. Any idea of educating the Indians into self-government was postponed to an extremely remote future. India became the brightest jewel in the British crown and in 1876 formally an empire. Queen Victoria became the Empress of India—an imperial title never taken for any other of her Dominions.

It was in this period that India brought the most profit to Great Britain.¹⁹

Despite Tagore's defining observation about the important but somewhat limited role of science in the basically intuitive apprehension of truth or reality, the later part of the nineteenth century saw a kind of symbiosis between religion and politics in place of the one that was the dominant note in the early decades—the one between science and tradition, i.e., between rationality and religion. It was also not uncharacteristic of the times that the orthodox sections of the society were more alienated by Ram Mohan's advocacy of social reforms than for his advanced views on education or his religious reformism. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1894) made a fusion of humanism, positivism and scientific education in

formulating his social thought on the bedrock of his Neo-Hindu conservatism which, in a way, dominated the last part of the nineteenth century. Vivekananda (1863-1902) defined his spiritualism or his understanding of the spiritual heritage in more universal terms than Bankim Chandra, for whom nationalism was as important as reformed religion, modern or scientific education.²⁰ It was evident by the last quarter of the nineteenth century that 'the cultural development of Bengal under British rule has mainly been in the direction indicated by Ram Mohan Roy, of a synthesis of the East and West'²¹ but his agenda of reform, which gave a strong liberal content to his social outlook covering a whole range of issues from women's education to women's rights for equality, failed to secure acceptance in the same way or to make any progress. However, the teachings of Vivekananda strengthened the egalitarian trends in Neo-Hinduism.

It would be wrong to say that religious revivalism and religious nationalism—the dominant note of the last quarter of the nineteenth century—led to any kind of total rejection of Western values. Even though literature strongly turned on the native traditions and sensibilities leading to the most creative flowering of the spirit of the Renaissance, Bengali literature being the most original and creatively pathbreaking for more than a century—it was Western influence that set the dominant trend in form if not in content. Bankim Chandra, whose creative work preceded the trends set by Tagore's depth of creativity in the Bengali language, displayed immense capacity to adapt the Western form of the novel to project a new content of religious nationalism, giving it a kind of imaginative strength and force of appeal going beyond the frontiers of Bengal. But Bankim Chandra was also a profound thinker who discussed in his writings almost all the philosophical and social issues that Ram Mohan and his successors in the Brahma Samaj movement or Vidyasagar took up before him; although he found much to disagree with them, he was also for reformed Hinduism. Some scholars have held that Bankim Chandra carried forward a tradition started by Ram Mohan Roy and that he was closer to Brahmos than it was generally recognized. But Bankim Chandra not only rejected the Brahma interpretation of the Vedanta; his view on the issue of gender equality was less liberal.²²

Although Bankim Chandra has been described by some as a counter-reformist, his views were not entirely representative of the religious revivalism because 'Bentham's doctrines had an important place in his *Dharmatattva*' and he was also influenced by Comte's positivism. But his attempt to combine *Sanatan Dharma* with positivism and utilitarianism was certainly not on the same tradition started by Ram Mohan through the propagation of the Brahmo faith; the synthesis that Ram Mohan worked for with such a clear understanding of the major religious traditions of the world was later enriched by Tagore by giving it a more creative dimension. Bankim's reservations on the reforms bearing on ancient tradition and society was based on his idealizing the past and reinterpreting history, cast in the mould of nationalism to later become a political ideology. Although Bankim Chandra's ideas were often ahistorical, they brought to his imaginative work a lasting literary form and a wide-ranging content. His ideas also became Pan-Indian through wider dissemination. But the limitations are also obvious, when one finds that his main stress is on 'Muslim tyranny and mis-rule in pre-British times and in novels his patriotism usually takes the form of 'glorifying Hindus who defy Muslim power' and 'in *Anandamath* he hails British rule with enthusiasm and gratitude for having put an end to Muslim oppression and anarchy, but conveniently forgets the responsibility of the East India Company for the terrible famine of 1769-70 which is the background of that novel'.²³

Bankim Chandra reminded his people of the insults they had themselves heaped on some of them through oppression and injustice. He told the nationalists in ringing words:

The moment is arriving when you also must find a basis of unity, which is not political. If India can offer to the world her solution it will be a contribution to humanity. There is only one history—the history of man. All national histories are merely chapters in the larger one.²⁴

'The religious thought of Tagore', it is said, 'is shot through with humanism. He espouses a theistic view of ultimate reality, preferring it to the Advaitic, thereby creating more metaphysical room for the celebration of humanism.'²⁵ Ram Mohan earlier affirmed a monotheistic faith of the same kind when he founded the Brahmo

Samaj in 1828. Ram Mohan Roy's legacy passed on to Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905), who gave it a new sense of direction by firmly locating monotheism in the Upanishads: the philosophic base of monotheism also became the focus of reformed Hinduism. Outside Bengal, Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883) opposed caste and idolatry on the authority of the Vedas; he also opposed on the same ground, untouchability and child marriage. Unlike the Brahmos, Dayananda resisted Westernization and felt that Brahmoism was too close to Christianity. Nonetheless, the Brahmos admired his enlightened views on reforms in the Hindu society. The *Arya Samaj*, which Dayananda established in 1875, reflected his militant character and it added another dimension to Hindu nationalism in northern India. In Bengal, the devotional fervour of the Ramakrishna and the philosophy of Vivekananda were based on Neo-Vedantism. Significantly, it was representative of a phase in Bengal in late nineteenth century when the reformist urges had waned and the social content of religious reformism came to be reduced.

The void created by the lack of a social content of reformism was taken over by the political content of a militant nationalism. It became embodied in Bankim Chandra's novel *Anandamath*, which became a call to action in Bengal's political activism. The combination of politics and militancy was symbolized by Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920)²⁶, imparting a new dynamism to the anti-British movement all over the country.

Vivekananda's philosophic idealism was also accompanied by a rise in nationalism; it had obvious overtones in the following passages:

If there is any land on this earth that can claim to be called blessed *Punya-Bhumi* (sacred soil), to be the land to which the souls on this earth must come to account for karma, the land to which every soul that is wending its way godward must come to attain its last home, the land where humanity has attained its highest towards gentleness, towards calmness, above all, the land of introspection and of spirituality—it is India.²⁷

It was because of this change that the influence of Ramakrishna Mission and the Arya Samaj continued to grow while that of Brahmo Samaj and the Prarthana Samaj (founded in 1868, modelled after

the Brahma Samaj) began to decrease considerably. Ranade (1842-1901), like Ram Mohan, tried to bring the orthodox among the Hindus to a more liberal plane but seemed to lose his earlier influence in western India. This was because in the last phase of nineteenth century, culture and politics started to develop a new equation and apart from the onrush of nationalist feelings, moderation was giving way to political activism.

However, another dimension was seen in Ranade's thought—something that was not seen in Bengal after Ram Mohan—his study of the economic priorities and his pleading for change.²⁸

The cultural confluence of the streams of the Indian and the Western traditions in the nineteenth century led to a new Indian worldview and imparted an unprecedented philosophical and creative depth to the emerging modernity of Indian culture; it reached an acme of perfection, the highest point of the Indian Renaissance in the life and works of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). Tagore not only belonged to his age, but he also gave it the most significant expression; rather, the most significant part of it found expression in his unique sensibility and creativity, yet it is significant that a contemporary political thinker has called Tagore a 'dissenter among dissenters' for he not only rejected British colonialism but also nationalism and found its alternative in a 'distinctive civilizational concept of universalism' embedded in India's creative cultural traditions and plural society.²⁹ Tagore found an ally in Gandhi—their intellectual differences apart—in their critical appraisal of the West and a strong resistance to nationalist ideologies and ideas of glorifying the nation-state. Together, they added a new dimension to a reorientation of modern Indian thought and culture. Tagore, with his extremely sharp historical sense, identified that the real tradition of India was a harmonization of all traditions and its basis was social and not political. Tagore's central and seminal concept not only enriched and enlarged the wider cultural consciousness generated by the Indian Renaissance, but through its uniqueness and criticality it had established a relevance outside the colonial context. This was the way in which Gandhi too 're-emerged for the moderns as a major critic of modernity whose defence of traditions carried the intimations of a post-modern consciousness'.³⁰

Away from the colonizing modernity of most of the formative ideas of nineteenth century Renaissance which came purely from a Western education or a Western culture related to English education, the ideas central to the vision of Tagore and Gandhi were not part of a hegemonistic discourse; although they had a deep connection with the universal realm of religion, these ideas also emerged out of a private, experiential realm. The non-essentialist and pluralist nature of their basic insights into Indian reality modifies not only the universalist character of their social and political philosophy but also negates the dominant ideology of modernity of colonial India. They also resisted the totalizing tendency of the Western discourses; this is true of several other thinkers of the creative religio-philosophical tradition like Vivekananda and Aurobindo.³¹

The entire gamut of ideas of the intellectual ferment that created a new intelligentsia initially nurtured by English education spread out from Bengal and induced strong movements based on social and religious reformism followed later by phases of political and militant nationalism. The impact of the creative traditions, both in literature and in religio-philosophical thought, was also Pan-Indian, equally strong and widespread in northern, western as well as southern India. The influences of these broadly cultural movement came about as a sequel in many parts of eastern India outside of Bengal; the differences in cultural transitions were obviously of degree, not of kind. The central and the most pronounced aspect of this influence in Assam, for instance, was on language and literature; it created or adapted new literary forms around the themes or their variations arising out of nineteenth century Renaissance and created a new literate culture with an awareness of tradition as well as of modernity.

More than in Aurobindo and Vivekananda, the whole question of tradition and modernity took on an extended meaning in a deeper dimension of the relationships between civilizations, between the East and the West, not excluding the immediate struggle against colonialism. Tagore also went beyond Ram Mohan Roy to cover the entire range of philosophical and cultural concerns that formed the basis of modern Indian thought upto the middle of the twentieth century to which Tagore's own contribution had been creatively original and manifold. Holding India's main strength to be

civilizational, Tagore went beyond the idea of rationality or of progress in the sense of the European Enlightenment, but subtly imbibed some of its elements in his comprehensive understanding of the Indian society and civilization. Rejecting the idea of progress through Westernization or under the hegemonistic British empire, Tagore endorsed certain ideas of the west, contained in the evolutionary notions of late nineteenth century.³²

Today, many social historians are sceptical of the cultural significance of the Bengal Renaissance. The cultural changes brought about by its impact were not as far-reaching as was thought at one time. These changes, touched an intellectual and social elite group, not society at large. And the liberating ideas impinging on a basically feudal society made tradition and conformity much more potent than the need for change. But a truly historical insight would bring out the fundamental nature of this change in relation to developments in Indian thought in the fields of religion, art and literature. Even the history of science should bring to light deep historical links with the Indian Renaissance of the nineteenth century. It was a historical connection that was originally rooted in Bengal but later spread out to different destinations all over the country; the dominant note was felt on education, literature and the creative arts; and its influence remained till the 1950s, the chief means for defining tradition and modernity.

The major social and cultural influences of nineteenth century were quite notable for their reformist zeal, philosophic quest and their understanding of the crucial areas of caste and orthodoxy. These movements raised a range of issues posing a challenge to the existing modes of social thought and attitudes of nineteenth century India. It led at times to radicalism in social reform, new goals in education or positive urges for achieving representative liberalism in politics. It did not envisage a change in the traditional social structure which could have been one of the determinants for lasting social change. Despite being finely nuanced, new modes and cultural values failed to make a breakthrough.

It is significant that Tagore, who was critical of the type of English education, redefined the deeper creative meaning that connected education and culture in the new ambience of the age. This new

spirit led to a questioning of the entire framework of western education that the colonial rule established in the country in the nineteenth century and to the birth of Tagore's *Visva Bharati* or the world university, a radically new concept evolved through Tagore's own creative synthesis of the values of the human heritage. Tagore's effort, like Gandhi's, in a different social ambience or Aurobindo's in another, marked a departure from the trends in education that the nineteenth century set in motion and in respect of Tagore and Gandhi. Their dissent was based on a critical reappraisal of the Indian tradition and the existing social and political structure.

A fuller understanding of Tagore's personality—his contributions as poet, artist, thinker and man of action—is essential to comprehend the breadth and depth of the cultural values brought in by the new Indian thought. Another personality, that of Muhammad Iqbal (1873-1938), provides deep and revealing insight into its multi-dimensional character both as an exponent of pan-Indian nationalism in the early phase and as a re-interpreter of the Islamic traditions in the light of modernity and the West.³³

One of the historical challenges faced by the standard-bearers of the Indian Renaissance—it has been continuing for the last two hundred years—has been that of taking an ancient Indian civilization to the modern period. The Western challenge in the spheres of religion, philosophy, arts and creative literature were deeply felt in the nineteenth century, reflecting the spirit of the Renaissance and the process of social and cultural change that it brought forth, was a development of seminal importance. In the colonial context, one can see this development working out in three different directions: in the lives of the notable personalities of the nineteenth century and of the early part of the twentieth century, in the social movements and in the creative flowering in the field of arts and literature.

In nineteenth century Bengal, Ram Mohan Roy went deeply into the Vedas to understand the Indian spiritual tradition and searched for a new model of an ancient religion. Ram Mohan was as much opposed to the pure Orientalist as he was to the evangelist who sought to uphold the Christian doctrine as the highest. When he

wrote on Christ, he stressed ethical teaching but not its doctrinal aspects. When he translated four of the main Upanishads and reinterpreted, he found the central point in it in the idea of monotheism; he made it the focus of his study of the ancient Indian tradition.

The combined impact of the views of James Mill (*History of British India*), Macaulay and the evangelists had been to suggest that another civilization should be imposed in India in the name of religion and progress. Ram Mohan's reinterpretation of the scriptures negates this view effectively. Ranade too drew a parallel between the medieval poet saints of India and the Protestant reformers in Europe.

The core stream of the ideas of the Indian Renaissance comprised several components of a new and syncretic humanism. The aspiration for new knowledge was similar to that of the European Renaissance and the positive elements marked a major change from the medieval to the modern period. This type of humanism had a social content—the concept of progress was a by-product—and accepted the idea of evolution as understood in Western history. The other type of humanism emphasized the creative and pluralistic aspects of the Indian religious outlook, of which the Upanishads and its essence provided the core and the substance. It was these features of the humanism that moderated the influence of religious revivalism which was a marked feature of the Neo-Hinduism of the nineteenth century. Neo-Hinduism itself was a complex social development because it was often combined with a preference for Western education and it was not at all averse to reassessing traditional notions in the light of the new scale of values it propagated. However, despite these contrary attitudes and inner contradictions or because of them, the intellectual and emotional content of the literature of the period acquired a certain intensity of focus and artistic realisation. In respect of the literary forms, one can say that it is the novel that related itself more significantly and consistently to this new aspect of social history.³⁴

Despite the many accretions of a multi-faceted cultural resurgence in late nineteenth century, the more enduring qualities manifest in the creative literature were derived from elements of humanism embedded in the core values of the Indian Renaissance. These elements subsisted in ways that defined nature, the individual man

and woman and their various relationships, placing them entirely on a new key.

Tagore's most important novels articulate these human engagements built around the themes of the nineteenth century and its aftermath most memorably with his humanist faith emerging as the focus through the lived experience of the novel. Two of his great novels *Gora* (1910) and *Ghare Baire* (1916, *Home and the World*) bring out significant aspects of the human situation in terms of politics and society, individuals and their relationships in the changed context. It is significant that while Tagore's poetry reigned supreme and influenced and informed the literary streams outside Bengal for several decades, his novels with their deep search for the authentically human and the creative—not at all succumbing to nationalist pride or the play of sentiment—moved only a discerning minority in contrast to Bankim Chandra's historical novels with their widespread influence and popularity all over the country.

Throughout the nineteenth century, especially towards the latter part of it, the whole of eastern India was going through a steady cultural transition, mainly through the impact of education under a new regime and a perceptible process of Westernization among the literate middle class. The limitations were numerous but the intellectual content of the Indian Renaissance—the cultivation of the English language, the reinterpretation of tradition, accent on social reform and the critical search for a new identity in literature, history and antiquity—found its way into the society and brought about a qualitative change in the mental image and aspirations that the upper education gentry or the middle class gathered for themselves in this new situation. The impact of the Renaissance traced a uniform general pattern but followed different intrinsic goals of language and self-identity: in Bengal there was a full flowering of ideas and social movements touching on education, religion, social reform and a totally new cultural and literary ethos which influenced similar developments in Bihar, Orissa and Assam nearly half a century later. There were, however, important differences in the ways these developments took place in different regions, depending on the different cultural traditions they inherited.

Historically, Bengal was the dominant partner in more than an intellectual sense and it was because of this reason that the highly developed cultural interaction between Bengal and the rest was built around a complex relationship of conflict and collaboration in the nineteenth century. In the historical perspective, the ground of conflict was less important than the other more constructive aspects of the cultural interface with Bengal. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee has summed this up succinctly:

What is now Uttar Pradesh (or United Provinces of Agra and Oudh) was known as the North-Western Provinces of Bengal, and Bengal comprised not only Bengal proper but also Bihar and Orissa as well as Assam; and even when an extended Assam was separated from Bengal in 1874, under a chief commissioner, it became just a pendant to Bengal. The people of the North-Western Provinces were not very interested in the intellectual ferment that permeated Bengal. But with Benaras as one of their centres, all looked upon Calcutta as their ultimate source of inspiration in intellectualism and of progress in modernism. Punjab was still under the Sikhs right up to 1848; and though in western UP and Punjab as well as the states of Rajputana and Madhya Pradesh (Central Provinces) the progress towards modernism was very slow, owing to the absence of the leaven of English, the intellectuals of the North-Western Provinces throughout the whole of the second period, the nineteenth century, as well as of Orissa and Assam were closely linked with those of Bengal. Through some thoughtless mistake, both in a knowledge of the realities and in statecraft, Bengali language was made the medium of administration and education in both Assam and Orissa, which were looked upon as parts of Bengal. This mistake was rectified later on but from 1826 to 1873, the administrative languages for the Assamese people were English and Bengali, and Assamese children were taught through the Bengali language. Owing to the closeness of these two languages to each other, and because it was a government order, the Assamese people and the Assamese students accepted Bengali, but from the beginning, this was under protest which grew in volume as the years passed. Similar was also the case of Orissa.³⁵

Nearly three generations of the educated elite in Orissa and Assam derived their mental make-up and intellectual aspirations by their study of the English language and contacts with the Bengali intelligentsia. But they were also nurtured by their own native traditions and culture, and felt responsible to their language and tradition which was different. It is correct to say that 'the cultural milieu that gave to Bengal and India the giants of Bengali literature during the second half of the last century also gave to Assam its greatest personality in modern Assamese literature in all its various aspects, namely, Lakshminath Bezbaroa.'³⁶

The protest over the imposition of Bengali as a medium was as strong in Assam as in Orissa;³⁷ it continued in Orissa for a longer period. Moreover, in Assam, the close literary and cultural relations between Assam and Bengal that developed in the last quarter of the nineteenth century blunted the edge of the linguistic antagonism that existed in the previous decades.

Scholars have drawn attention to other factors—racial, geographical, historical—that made the Assamese society evolve along different lines from the Bengali. Assam was an independent entity till the British came. It had, as such, its political identity intact for a far longer period. Caste formation in Assam was not on the same rigid lines, both Aryanism and non-Aryanism having almost an equal share in the social composition. Therefore, the Assamese protest over the imposition of the Bengali language implied the strong need for the recognition of their historical, linguistic and cultural identity.³⁸

Lakshminath Bezbaroa (1864-1938), who spearheaded the Assamese literary resurgence in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and dominated the literary scene for over four decades, gave this historical cultural identity a depth of meaning through his immense versatility and creativity. As a student in Calcutta, his reading of Shakespeare as well as of Bankim and Tagore did not take away his acute awareness of the native strength of the Assamese tradition inhering in the innate resources of the Assamese language and the living literary and cultural heritage of Assam that had been ongoing for nearly five hundred years. He was keen to establish the real status of the Assamese language and to become instrumental in creating

the modern age in Assamese literature. In nineteenth century Bengal, there was a popular view to which even Tagore subscribed at least for some time that both Assamese and the Oriya languages had no independent status and should yield the place to Bengali without murmur. Bezbaroa, who had a very close relationship with Tagore, did not hesitate to refute this claim by writing more than one article in Bengali.³⁹ He argued quite painstakingly to prove that Assamese, not Bengali, was the older language; this inspired a band of young Assamese scholars to devote great energy and to establish through linguistic studies, factors behind the formation and development of the Assamese language and its old classical heritage.

Despite this conflict over language, nineteenth century cultural contacts between Bengal and Assam remained most productive and fruitful. Although Assam did not witness a major social reform movement, Ram Mohan and Vidyasagar in the field of social reform, Bankim Chandra and Michael Madhusudan Dutta in the field of literature had already made a solid impact by the turn of the nineteenth century. Gunabhiram Barua (1834-1894) and Hem Chandra Barua (1835-96) showed a direct influence of the ideas of social reform; both the Brahmo movement and Vidyasagar's campaign in Bengal and his advocacy of widow-remarriage in the 1850s made a deep impression on them, more specially on Gunabhiram whose school and college education in Calcutta for several years (1850-57) inclined him towards the Brahmo faith, which he formally accepted in 1869.⁴⁰

It was significant that Gunabhiram Barua had married a widow himself in 1870 and his social drama *Ram Navami*, which had Vidyasagar's message as its theme, was published in the same year. Significantly, Gunabhiram's education in Presidency College, Calcutta was assisted by Anandaram Dhekiel Phukan, who was in a way the precursor of cultural resurgence and social change in nineteenth century Assam.⁴¹

However, the thrust for social reform was on a low key due to the important differences that existed between the societies in Bengal and Assam. In Bengal, the orthodox type of Brahmanical Hinduism was strong while in Assam, it was neither very strong nor widespread. The practice of *Sati* was unknown although widow-remarriage and

Western education were frowned upon socially. The mainstream Assamese society in eastern Assam derived its strength around the social organization provided by neo-Vaisnavite traditions and social ethos. The problem of cultural and linguistic identity was a major preoccupation with most Assamese writers because of this shared historical experience. Therefore, in the ensuing ferment created by the Indian Renaissance, the eagerness to take in the new spirit manifest in Bengal was also qualified by a search for the native roots of creativity, both classical and folk. In the best creative minds like that of Lakshminath Bezbaroa, these diverse elements were harmonized. The position is neatly summarized below:

Most of the Assamese writers of this period saw a meaning of the new age that had come to their society in the new world of ideas and literature which had already appeared in Bengal, the microcosm of the nineteenth century Indian Renaissance, but were at the same time conscious of their distinct linguistic identity. But in the early period, this consciousness did not solidify into a sort of philosophy about a literary and cultural tradition to be preserved, nourished and developed along essential lines. It was mainly towards the close of the eighties that the consciousness about a distinct linguistic identity developed to a conscious programme for the understanding and preservation of the basic Assamese cultural tradition that lay behind this identity.¹⁴²

The notion of a cultural and linguistic identity had more to do with the historical situation of nineteenth century Assam, the positioning of the middle class and the literary Renaissance that began in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It was also determined by three important factors: a conscious evaluation of the literary and cultural significance of the Assamese cultural heritage and of the religio-social tradition of neo-Vaisnavism in Assam; the articulation of the social and political aspirations not only of the newly formed middle class but of the Assamese people as a whole; and the relations of a special type with the literature and culture of Bengal that became somewhat more intimate by the close of the nineteenth century. There were spectacular developments in Bengali literature in the creative fields which influenced the trends in Assamese literature; social contacts reinforced this cultural

expansiveness even further. An important link, somewhat deeper in its cultural significance was also established through the very close and intimate association of some of the outstanding personalities of Assam with Brahmoism in Bengal.⁴³

The cultural identity that came to the fore at the end of the nineteenth century was certainly not based on ethnicity as it is understood today nor was it related only to language and literature. One of the positive aims it embodied was to promote creativity in a distinctive way—distinctive in the ways in which the basics of the Assamese culture and sensibility formed by the Assamese folk and the creative religious culture could blend with the elements of Western and the nineteenth century Bengali literatures—all in a process of synthesis.⁴⁴ It was significant that by the end of the nineteenth century, the emphasis had fully shifted in creative literature to the vernacular although the English language had become the hallmark of social and cultural progress. In Bengal, the new status of the vernacular and its spread in all branches of creative literature had culminated in the emergence of a poet and thinker of the stature of Rabindranath Tagore. It was natural that Bezbaroa's reference to the inspirational character of poetry had affinities not only with the English romantics but also with Tagore. The resources harnessed in the creative as well as the conceptual framework of his poetry are many and various despite the overarching concern for a distinct linguistic and cultural identity. Regarding these new elements brought into Assamese culture, it has been observed:

The poetry of Campion, Herrick, Marvell, Burns, Wordsworth, Shelley, Darley came to appear through him in an unmistakably Assamese form—no less than certain lines from the poetry of Kalidasa, Jayadeva, Vidyapati, Jnanadasa and Rabindranath. The most important contribution of Bezbaroa to Assamese poetry is this infusion of new blood—of a romantic type—into its veins. In effecting this infusion, he gave the lyricism in Assamese folk poetry a new vitality and a new character. For those who are aware of the sources upon which Bezbaroa drew in the creation of his lyrics, it is quite a thrilling experience to observe what he did in these lyrics.⁴⁵

Although the felt awareness of an ancient tradition, specially of the literary and cultural resources of the literature of neo-Vaisnavism

dating back to the fifteenth century was an important component of the emerging Assamese cultural nationalism, it was largely the creative and critical insights of Lakshminath Bezbaroa and his important contemporaries that could relate it to the spirit of the nineteenth century Renaissance and thus enrich and expand the very notion of cultural and linguistic identity in a new key. On the other hand, it was literature rather than politics or religion that became the medium for the transmission of new values; the adoption of the new Western forms of the novel, short story or the lyric in literature had more than a literary significance. Thus, the publication of *Jonaki*, an epoch-making literary journal in 1889, which ushered in the new age in Assamese literature, was more than a literary event; it was motivated by much more than the preservation of the distinctiveness of the Assamese language and culture. Its core values had been influenced by the liberal temper and spirit of the nineteenth century Renaissance.

It has been said that Lakshminath Bezbaroa 'was like Rabindranath, a Renaissance figure', one of the few of his generation 'who modernized life and literature in Assam, welcoming the new ideas that were coming in from the West and the concomitant revaluation of the past'.⁴⁶

It is significant that Bezbaroa's pleading for a 'national' literature had more to do with the Assamese literary tradition. He was the first of the moderns to reconstruct the biographies of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva, the two great poet saints and the history of Assamese Vaisnavism on the basis of an objective chronology, the first line of distinguished critics and evaluators of the Assamese Vaisnava tradition and its relevance to the new culture. Notwithstanding his intimate affiliations to the life in Calcutta, Bezbaroa escaped the rigours of the *Brahma* morality or the conservatism of revived Hinduism although *Brahmoism* in a way deepened his philosophical outlook.⁴⁷ Although Bezbaroa thought that an understanding of the depth of Assam's classical heritage was central to understanding of the Assamese literary tradition, his sense of a literary tradition not only pointed towards the past heritage but aimed at creating what he called as 'national' literature. The perfect example of national literature, Bezbaroa found in the literature of Shakespeare—the two outstanding

qualities he discovered there were freedom and spontaneity.⁴⁸ Bezbaroa thought that without these qualities, which he also found in the poetry of the great romantics as well as in Tagore, the full potential of the imaginative literature in Assamese would not be developed. The direction of his genius led him to explore the intrinsic resources of the Assamese language where his versatility was remarkable. He could not only transform ballads into lyrics or folktales into stories of great imaginative depth, his creativity also included dramas, short stories and the novels. His writings touched every aspect of Assamese society, investing even the common speech and idiom of the people with rich meaning and significance.

Bezbaroa was the unquestioned leader of the Assamese cultural resurgence till the 1930s. He, in a way, guided the destiny of Assamese literature, influencing two generations of writers. His death in 1838 signalled the closing of a very important phase of Assamese literature, coinciding with some significant aspects of the Indian Renaissance. For 25 years (1889-1915), Bezbaroa wrote lyrical poems, his 'history' plays embodying his vision of Assam's past, and his mature short stories while he stayed in Calcutta first as a student and then in connection with his business. He was in close touch with the best minds of the Bengal intelligentsia. This period could also be termed as the most fruitful in the history of literary and cultural relations between Assam and Bengal. By the end of the second and third decades, another generation of students and promising scholars became committed to enriching the Assamese literary tradition, inspired by Bezbaroa's confident and unrelenting focus on the vital elements of Assamese culture and society. Mostly educated in Calcutta during the second decade of the twentieth century, these young men were also greatly influenced by Tagore's work. For the more sensitive among them, the Tagorean mode became the dominant one in Assamese poetry. Some of them were brilliant students who later gave a new dimension to Assamese scholarship, which became comparable to the best anywhere; their learned and critical approaches in humanistic studies, specially in the areas of language, literature and history infused Assamese culture with a new vigour.

It was in these two decades that a few Assamese scholars achieved academic distinctions of great merit and made manifold contributions

in the intellectual and the cultural fields. Significantly, in the literary field, Bezbaroa was a very potent influence on them; they made rich and valuable contributions to expand the horizon of Assamese intelligentsia and enrich Assamese literary tradition. One of the most distinguished scholars was K.K. Handique (1898-1982), whose contributions in the field of Indology and Sanskrit studies made him internationally known but what was perhaps more significant from the point of cultural history was the fact that shortly after completing his post-graduate study in Vedic literature or Vedic Sanskrit at Calcutta University, he topped in B.A. (Hons.) and stood first class, first in M.A. He chose to study Modern History at the Oxford University, later making a long sojourn in Europe to study European languages. His critical articles in Assamese on Greek, Spanish and other European literatures added a new depth and tone to Assamese literature in a crucial point of cultural transition.⁴⁹

Another important personality in the field of letters was Dr. S.K. Bhuyan. Besides being a first-rate poet and a scholar, he was honoured with a D.Litt. by the University of London. He devoted himself to historical research and was the first historian after Sir Edward Gait to write definitive accounts of Assam's political and social history. Dr. Banikanta Kakati (1894-1952), another brilliant product of Calcutta University, distinguished himself as a linguist, scholar and literary critic whose writings on old Assamese literature have attained a classic stature. Significantly, Kakati was one of the first of the modern scholars to write on the anthropological aspects of Assam's history.⁵⁰

All these representative personalities assuaged the deep urge of the Assamese middle class for higher education and gave it a new dimension. But this phenomena was closely connected with the emerging sense of cultural assertion of the Assamese nationality. These scholars expanded the intellectual content and the mental horizon of the Assamese literary Renaissance that started in 1889 and reached its apex in the first two decades of the twentieth century. This was the period when the new middle class in Assam, somewhat thinly spread at the end of the nineteenth century, showed its entrepreneurial and independent cast of mind and some—at least a few of them—

were seeking Western education in a new key; it was this approach that made K.K. Handique make his study of European literature as well as Sanskrit classics equally relevant to cultivation of literary sensibilities of the Assamese of his generation. This kind of perception also enabled Banikanta Kakati to undertake linguistic research and also write on Dante as well as on the poetry of Assamese neo-Vaisnavism with equal seriousness and critical acumen. Banikanta, who was clearly inspired in his labours by Lakshminath Bezbaroa—who, in his writings, defined the social, religious and cultural contours of the Assamese identity as none had done before him—took his cultural concerns beyond literature to ancient history to define Assamese society. Although S.K. Bhuyan was an exact historian and set the ball rolling in the field of historical research, his poetic imagination—he stopped writing poetry after 1917—helped him to give 'a poetically alluring and concrete shape to the history of Assam'.⁵¹

Kakati's detailed study of the formation and development of the Assamese language as a branch of the eastern Magadhi Prakrit as well as his critical account of the early Assamese literature threw light on the deep linguistic and cultural connection of Assam with the rest of India. This insight was further reinforced by Bhuyan in his studies in the history of Assam.⁵² Kakati had also indirectly proved what Bezbaroa had been saying about the impact of neo-Vaisnavism in the development of the historical Assamese culture and society. All these representative figures thought that they were discharging historical responsibility through their writings: their writings or their intellectual bearings had something to do with the notion of a distinct cultural identity with its enriched tradition and classical heritage, which in a way redefined the literary ethos of an Assamese writer in terms of Assam's history, society and culture. It was because of this distinctiveness that Assamese society in general or even the educated elite or the middle class avoided the extremes of Brahmanical Hinduism based on rigid castes or of an unbridgeable social gulf between the peasantry and the middle class. To the Assamese intelligentsia, including the Western educated elite or even the Assamese in general of this period, cultural distinctiveness or

identity had a historical content; it did go beyond a purely linguistic identity.⁵³

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century as the Assamese middle class consolidated its position, specially in upper Assam, mainly through going into tea plantations and entry into professions, the Assam Association organized them around a positive agenda of social progress. The middle class, though not a large group in terms of number, displayed initiative and independence of spirit, which were entrepreneurial. Quite a few turned down government jobs—Bezbaroa and Jagannath Barua declined posts which would have been considered very important in Bengal—and despite limited opportunities, many explored prospects in other fields besides tea. An important feature that should be stressed is that relatively speaking, Muslims had a share in these opportunities and were not denied what they should feel as their due in the field of higher education.

There were a number of Muslims who opted for tea plantations or achieved other distinctions in the educational field or services. The social cultural background which impinged on the Assamese middle class was different in this respect from that of Bengal. Politics in Assam did not invite a mixing of power cults and mysticism, nor was militant ideology becoming an important element in the political culture. Both the Jorhat Sarvojonik Sabha and the Assam Association (1903) played a constructive role by offering suggestions and 'opposing the unjust policies of the government'.⁵⁴

The gradualist and reformist temper of the Assam Association was in keeping with the middle class aspirations which called for expanded opportunities for higher education or technical education as well as for steady economic progress. The two decades of twentieth century held out this prospect before a larger number of the educated Assamese; most of them saw positive virtues in Western education. The strong cultural component of an Assamese regional identity was an invariable element in this entire process. While moderate politics was giving way to radicalism, the concept of cultural identity was given a more representative character. The earlier phase was fostered not so much by the moderate politics; it was deeply influenced by the temper of the nineteenth century Indian

Renaissance while the later phase was marked by pan-Indian nationalism—the regional cultural perspective adapting itself to social and political transition without undergoing any substantive change. Assam–Bengal cultural contacts were most fruitful till the early decades of the twentieth century. In the emerging cultural identity of the Assamese, not only the traditions of the past but also some aspects of the culture of Bengal had given a new impetus. Very soon, this impetus had transformed a cultural resurgence into a literary Renaissance.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. K.M. Panikkar, *A Survey of Indian History: The Great Recovery*, p. 266.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 267.
3. David Kopf, 'British Orientalism and Bengal Renaissance: The Orientalist in Search of a Golden Age' in *Modern India—An Interpretative Anthology*, (ed.), Thomas R. Metcalf, Macmillan, 1971, p. 132.
4. S.N. Mukherjee, *Sir William Jones: A Study In Eighteenth Century British Attitudes to India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge South Asian Studies, 1968, p. 111.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
6. David Kopf, *op. cit.*, p. 139.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
8. Percival Spear, *A History of India*, vol. 2, Penguin Books, 1970, p. 164.
9. Ram Mohan Roy could draw on his early studies of Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist beliefs and practices and as he turned on to examine the ideas and ways of the West, he was able to choose those that struck him as beneficial (the teachings of Jesus, government guarantees of civil and religious liberty, and modern secular knowledge), and reject those that did not (Christian theology, and British autocratic government in India). At the same time, he singled for attention those classical Hindu scriptures, the contents of which came closest to ethical monotheism, thereby offering his fellow Indians a means of purging themselves of undesirable customs while retaining absence of continuity with the past.' *Sources of Indian Tradition*, (ed.), Stephan Hay, vol. 2, *Penguin Books*, 1988, p. 17.
10. Ram Mohan's letter to John Digby in 1828 quoted in B.M. Sankhdher, *Ram Mohan Roy: The Apostle of Indian Awakening*, New Delhi, 1989.
11. *Percival Spear, op. cit.*, 1970, pp. 161-162.
12. B.M. Sankhdher, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
13. J.C. Ghosh, *Bengali Literature*, Oxford University Press, London, p. 124.

14. Percival Spear, *op. cit.*, 1970, p. 126.
15. J.C. Ghosh, *op. cit.*, p. 124.
16. Benoy Ghosh, *Vidyasagar o Bangali Samaj*, p. 529.
17. Rabindranath Tagore, *Sadhana*, Macmillan, p. 31.
18. For details of the changes in agrarian policy see *The Making of Agrarian Policy in British India*, (ed.), Burton Stein, Oxford University Press, 1992.
19. A.J.P Taylor, *Essays in English History*, Penguin Books, p. 37.
20. 'Bankim's original concept, "the Mother" of *Bande Mataram*, referred at the same time to the land of Bengal and to the female aspect of the Hindu deity. From this fusion of the hitherto separate objects of patriotic or religious devotion, sprang the central concept of modern Hindu nationalism' *Source of Indian Tradition*: vol. II, (ed.), and revised, Stephan Hay, Penguin Books, 1992, p. 131.
21. J.C. Ghosh, *op. cit.*, p. 115.
22. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, *Sociological Essays*, (tr.) and (ed.), by S.N. Mukherjee and Marian Maddern, p. 2.
23. J.C. Ghosh, *op. cit.*, p. 161.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
25. Hal W. French and Arvind Sharma, *Religious Ferment in Modern India*, p. 133.
26. Tilak, who was charged with sedition in 1897 and later imprisoned for his writings wrote his lengthy commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*, which had a great influence on the political thought and ideology of nationalism in India.
27. Quoted in V.S. Naipaul, *India: A Wounded Civilization*, Vintage Books, New York, 1976, p.162.
28. Ranade in 1890, inaugurated the Industrial Association of Western India. 'Ranade's views on economics grew out of his long and patient study of Indian problems. He concluded that their constructive solution lay in a vigorous policy of commercial and industrial development under British Government auspices'. *Sources of Indian Tradition*, (ed.), Stephan Hay, Penguin. 1992. Chapter entitled 'Nationalism takes Roots: The Moderates', p.104.
29. Ashis Nandy, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism*, Oxford University Press, 1998, Preface, p. xi.
30. *Ibid.* p. 2. Tagore's position is stated by another contemporary thinker thus: 'Tagore denounced the authoritarianism of Hindu orthodoxy no less trenchantly than he trounced the authoritarianism of the British rulers of India. Both, he declared, were of a piece.'
31. Aurobindo Ghosh (1869-1948), who in his early years was an ardent nationalist had later set out to create 'a new synthesis of truth by drawing upon both Hindu and Western thought that an original theological and philosophical construct world emerge'. Thomas J. Hopkins, *The Hindu Religious Tradition*, California, 1971 p. 137; quoted in *Religious Ferment in Modern India, Part Two*, Chapter Four, Aurobindo Ghosh, p. 137.
32. The evolutionary metaphysics of the late nineteenth century held that all

- item processes were, as such, progressive in character, and that history is a progress merely because it is a sequence of events in time: thus the progressiveness of nature. But the eighteenth century regarded nature as unprogressive, and thought of progressiveness of history as something differentiating history from nature.' R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History: Lectures* (1926-1928), OUP, 1994, pp. 9-99.
33. Muhammad Iqbal, like Tagore was a poet and a philosopher. He wrote 'with the awakening of Islam, therefore, it is necessary to examine in an independent spirit, what Europe has thought and how far the conclusions by her can help us in the revision and if necessary, reconstruction, of the theological thought in Islam.' Reproduced in Arvind Sharma's Introduction: *Religious Ferment in Modern India*, part II, p. 165.
 34. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94), an advocate of Neo-Hindusim, was also influenced by the ideas of utilitarianism and the social philosophy of Comte and Mill. (See Introduction: *Sociological Essays of Bankim Chandra*, (tr.), by S.N. Mukherjee and Marian Maddern, 1985). Bankim Chandra wrote 14 novels in Bengali. Bankim's first novel *Durges-Nandini* was 'epoch-making', it was first Bengali novel in the modern European style and the first work of creative imagination in Bengali prose'. (J.C. Ghosh, *op. cit.*, p. 152).
 35. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, 'The Nineteenth Century Renaissance in India', in *Lakshminath Bezbaroa: The Sathityarathi of Assam*: Gauhati University, 1972, p. 5.
 36. *Ibid.*, p.6.
 37. After the great Orissa famine of 1866, there was an attempt to introduce Bengali as the court language of Orissa. This was strongly resisted by the Oriyas, including a few domiciled and prominent Bengalis; later, Utkal Sabha formed by leaders like Madhusudhan Das and Fakir Mohan Senapati articulated a strong demand for the unification of all Oriya-speaking areas. In a session of the Utkal Sanmilani held in 1919 under the presidentship of Gopabandhu, a great leader, a strong movement was launched not only for the amalgamation of these areas but for all-round development of the Oriya-speaking people. See Dr Usha Padhy, *Political Social and Cultural Resurgence in Orissa*, Kolkata, 1995, pp. 84-129.
 38. Bhaben Barua, 'The Road to Lakshminath Bezbaroa' in *Lakshminath Bezbaroa: Sahityarathi of Assam*, Gauhati University, 1972.
 39. This wrong notion about the origin of the Assamese language prevalent in the nineteenth century could be attributed to more than one factor, one of which was the influence of Brahmanical Hinduism of the Bengali pattern infiltrating into certain circles of the Assamese society in the pre-British period; it led to a trend of the Assamese prose being mixed 'With Bengali words in a special way.' Bengali came to be imposed as a medium during the first phase of the British rule. This situation continued for several decades in the nineteenth century and 'during this period Vidyasagar's Bengali primers became a feature

- of educational culture in Assam'. Bhaben Barua, 'Vidyasagar and the Assamese Society' in *The Golden Book of Vidyasagar*, p. 273.
40. On the influence of the Brahmo movement in Assam in the nineteenth century, see Amalendu Guha's *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam* (p. 215). The thrust for social reforms focussed on three social evils, namely, the plight of high caste Hindu widows, polygamy and the widespread addiction of opium.
 41. Dhekiyal Phukan's concerns were wider than any of his other contemporaries. They were also economic. He pleaded for reforms of agriculture and for technical education. He wrote in 1853, 'no nation can secure to itself the blessings and comforts of civilized life until it has manufactures of its own; and, in short, no country can rise to wealth that is deficient or imperfectly versed in the art of manufacture' Amalendu Guha, *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam*, p. 264.
 42. Bhaben Barua, 'The Road to Lakshminath Bezbaroa' in *Lakshminath Bezbaroa: Sahityarathi of Assam*, Gauhati University, 1972, p. 32.
 43. Gunabhiram Barua, one of the first to accept Brahmosim published the Assamese Journal 'Asom-Bandhi' from Calcutta in the early 1980s. His daughter was married to a Bengali Brahmo gentleman and his son, Jnanabhiram Barua, a distinguished Assamese writer and the first Bar-at-Law from Assam, married into the Brahmo Tagore family in Calcutta. Lakshminath Bezbaroa, who spearheaded the Assamese literary Renaissance at the end of the nineteenth century also married into the family of Tagores in Calcutta.
 44. Bhaben Barua, 'The Road to Lakshminath Bezbaroa' in *Lakshminath Bezbaroa: The Sahitya Rathi of Assam*, Gauhati University, 1972, p. 32.
 45. Bhaben Barua, 'Lakshminath Bezbaroa's Contribution to Assamese Poetry', *Ibid.*, p. 117.
 46. Annada Sankar Ray, 'A note on Sahityarathi Lakshminath Bezbaroa' in *Lakshminath Bezbaroa: Sahityarathi of Assam*, Gauhati University, 1972, p. 256.
Annada Sankar Ray wrote: 'The Renaissance which swept over the whole of India, producing the India of today, came late to Assam, late by fifty years. Lakshminath belonged to the third generation of Indian intellectuals. Derozio and 'Young Bengal' constituted the first. Michael Madhusudan Dutta and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee belonged to the second. In Assam the first generation was missing. Anadaram Dhekiyal Phukan, Gunabhiram Barua and Hemchandra Barua constitute the second'. *Ibid.*, pp. 258-59.
 47. Lakshminath Bezbaroa, *The Religion of Love and Devotion*, Asom Sahityasabha, 1968. Collection of his lectures delivered at Baroda in 1933, edited by Dr. M. Neog.
 48. Bezbaroa's observations on 'national literature' in his address to the Seventh Session of Asom Sahitya Sabha held in December, 1924 published in Bezbaroa Granthavali (part II), Sahitya Prakash, Tribune Buildings, Guwahati, p. 1855.
 49. A fellow of Deccan College, K.K. Handique's major work in the field of Sanskrit studies included *Naisadhacarita of Sriharsha*, *Yasastilaka* and *Indian Culture and Pravarasena's Setubandha*.

50. Banikanta Kakati's *Assamese: Its Formation and Development*, scientifically traced the Indo-Aryan origins and the distinct path of development of the language.
51. Bhaben Barua, The First Professor Suryya Kumar Bhuyan memorial lecture, January, 1998. The Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam.
52. The valleys and the river banks have been the home of Aryan settlers from ages past. The original Aryan stock has been strengthened from time to time by immigrants from the plains of northern India. The neighbouring hill-tribes have been brought within the influence of Hindu civilization, accompanied by their preference for the softer valleys to their sturdy mountain passes. The gradual enervation of the Aryan settlers has been followed by the establishment of the supremacy of the non-Aryans, who asserted their might from within the province or by entering it from outside. S.K. Bhuyan, *Studies in the History of Assam*, p. 227.
53. Anil Seal's view that only a linguistic identity was at stake in Assam, Bihar and Orissa because of the 'Social Dominance' of the 'small but influential Bengali-speaking communities' in the nineteenth century is an over-simplification. But he has put the whole issue in the proper perspective. See Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, Cambridge, 1971, pp. 47-8.
54. 'The Jorhat Sarvojonik Sabha created a spirit of awakening and the background for democratic and popular movements in Assam'. Prof. J.B. Bhattacharjee, *Nationalist Upsurge in Assam*, p. 98, A. K. Bhuyan (ed.), Guwahati, 2000.