

THE DREAMS OF THE MODERN ROMEOS, THE IDEA OF LOVE AND ROMANCE IN COLONIAL ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

The present paper tries to look the issue of romance and love, in the colonial context in Assam which brought many new questions into the socio-cultural life of the people. But, the trajectory of colonialism and the western ideas with the Indian traditions did not blend properly. Rather, regarding the issues of love and romance an alternate view emerged in which the individual issues should be sacrificed to the broader issue of the love for the Nation. This alternate view had the problem of generalization which neglected many aspects of the practices of the common people. The issue is not still properly been resolved, in spite of the popularity of the Indian film industry which heavily relies on love and romance, as well as the social medias.

KEYWORDS: Love, Romance, Colonialism, Modernity, Hindu-Revivalism, Nationalism

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of the colonial rule in the country brought a new exchange of ideas between the east and the west. With the spread of western education the educated sections of the Indians became more exposed to the western ideas. These ideas made them to re-examine the Indian situation from diverse angles, from socio-religious reform issues, art and culture and literature. Moreover, the criticisms from a section of the British officials and the various Christian missionaries on several aspects of the Indian cultural practices forced the natives to reconsider these issues. But, from the very outset, the educated Indians (both the middle class and the aristocrats) were also critical in blindly imitating the west (with the exception of the Young Bengal Movement). They were selective in adopting the new ideas in the native contexts.¹ These tensions were clearly represented by the contemporary literature which became more developed with the printing press and the emergence of various new genres of literature like novels, short stories, theatres, modern poetry, etc. There was also the issue of comparisons and contrasts, between the east and the west.

The issues of love and romance emerged as major questions for the educated middle class, as it placed them in a dilemma, how far they are to accomodate these ideas, within the framework of the tradition. Most of these traditions had feudal backgrounds and as the question of caste is so intricately related with the Indian society, the new ideas had to face multiple layers of contests and compromises. The contest is still continuing inspite of the various medias print, online and particularly the Indian Film industries efforts to popularise it, as to most of the people there are differences between ideal and reality. With the strong dominance of the practices of patriarchy and the notions of gender as well as the ideologies of the Right wing politics the Indian society is still seeking new answers to the questions of love and romance. The appeals of the western concepts of love like the Valentine Day is becoming popular among a large section of the educated youths but so are the reactions against it. For example, the inter-caste marriage is still a problem for many.

The idea of modern love and romance needs further questioning in the colonial context as, whether they are the results of the colonial rule or they were modified to suit the colonial time by the native middle classes? Whether under the impacts of the west the concept or meaning of love as it was practiced among the common people changed radically? Whether the concept of love and romance are synonymous in the Indian tradition? One of the important markers between the meaning of love between the east and the west depended on the question of sexuality. How the Assamese society tried to situate the issue? Whether the educated middle class actually involved themselves with the Romantic ideals or it remained a dream only? How the Assamese nationalists viewed the issue of personal love with the broader issues of the Nation? The present paper will try to look into the critical relationship of love and colonial modernity. The area will be limited to the Brahmaputra valley as the issues of the Assamese nationalism was valley centred like their Bengali counterpart in the Barak valley.

Romanticism and Women

The Romantic Movement originated in the west as a reaction to the Industrial Revolution towards the end of the 18th century, which emphasised on emotion, individualism and the glorification of the past and nature. It is different from the concept of romance, which is more personal or individualistic.² In this paper the term romance is basically used and only in reference to the genres which the movement influenced in it is used.

One of the inherent dilemmas of the Romanticist Movement was the issue of the women. The Romantics had different notions about the nature of the women, whether they are capable of understanding the basic nature and characteristics of the movement, where physical love transcended to a new level of ideal love. The power relations are also important in this idea where the women had lesser access not only in the outer world but also in education and opportunities against the men.

The Romantics scepticism about women's inferiority was supported by Social Darwinism. George Romanes, an influential comparative psychologist, naturalist and Darwinian in his article, 'The Mental Differences between Men and Women (1887) argued that in relation to intellect, will and emotion women are inferior to men. Women's greater 'sensibility' and 'delicacy' made them physically and mentally weak and, as a result, they are more prone to 'imbalance' superstitions and incapable of 'sound reasoning'. These and other kind of weaknesses as the Social Darwinists and their sympathizers believed made the women more prone to commit immoral acts which harms the society.³

The notion of love began to change significantly during the colonial period. Like the other parts of the country the educated middle class began to make differences between higher level of love and the lower level. Here the issues of sexuality and morality became a marker to differentiate between the two. In a feudal set up, the issues of caste and class also played their role in determining the perception of the nature of people. This was further strengthened by the colonial states policy of the census which categorised the existing caste system. The colonial notion of race also played a determining factor in the construction of identities in colonial India.

Love among the Common People

The idea of love among the common people became a serious question among the educated middle class as well as the American Baptist missionaries. The 'Arunodoi' refers to several incidents whereby a section of the common people showed fewer commitments to their relationships. Not only among the common people, but also among a section of the

higher castes this became a major moral and social issue for the missionaries. For example, In the December, 1852 and March, 1853, of the monthly newsmagazine, it carries a news item from Guwahati, A women from the respectable Barphukan family eloped with a Muslim man, taking along with her, four year old' handsome' boy and two maidservants, in the same town. Her husband lodged a case at the Faujdari Court, against the Muslim man, demanding Rs. 6,000 for the jewelleries of the three women, which he claimed belonged to him. He did not want neither of his wife or the child as well as the maidservants as they had disowned themselves by polluting the norms of caste, class and religion. The colonial judge, Mr. Hudson however, had a different view reduced the claim to Rs. 200 on the accused, with a penalty of six months imprisonment if he fails to do so. The accused had to serve the second option as he did not possess adequate money.

The Assamese educated middle class who idealised the contemporary Bengali counterparts as their role models tried to view relationships between the men and the women only through their caste and class angles. They believed that the lower class and caste people were only practicing immoral love. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, for example, in 1854, appealed to A.J. M. Mills, Sudder Judge on Deputation to Assam to make registration of marriage as a compulsory for the people. According to him,

“cases of elopement, seduction and dispossession of wives, are of constant occurrence in the courts of, are of constant occurrence in the courts of the Province, and men fight for their wives in the same manners, as they do for their lands and goods..... Generally men and women among the lower orders, live together as husbands and wives without ever undergoing the nuptial rites.” (Emphasis added)⁴

The caste and class biasness can also be observed among other reform minded people like Gunabhiram Barua (who was a Brahmo) and Hemchandra Barua (who actively advocated widow remarriage).⁵ But, not every middle class shared these biasness. Lakshminath Bezbarua, for example, through his short stories like Dhanbar- Ratani, Bhadari and others tried to show that the perception of love and its practices among the common people should be respected, if not to be adopted by his own class.

Love among the Educated Middle Class

With the entry of the other new western ideas Romanticism also began to enter into the country. It was not that the Indians did not know about love or romance, in a country of the Kalidasa and the Kamasutra. In the texts like Gita Govindam, the linkage between love for the God and the desires for earthly pleasures are interlinked. The Bhakti Movements also provided several opportunities to negotiate with the heavenly (through Lord Krishna) Divine Love with the mortal love through devotion (like Mirabai, Andal, Lal Dej). The question of carnality and love was infused through by a section of the Bhakti Movement leaders like Sri Chaitanya. But, one of the prime differences between the views of Sri Chaitanya and the Assamese Bhakti Movement leaders was that, the later did not want equality with the God but to serve as servants or slave. Therefore, the concept of love, as advocated by the various leaders of the movement had no clear cut answers. As a result, the ideas of love and romance as advocated by the western tradition became a major challenge for the Assamese society which remained predominantly feudal in character. One of the key issue towards love and romance is related to the question of women's education.

As in many other parts of the country, a section of the Assamese men were against women's education, as it may lead to illegal relationships. Some of the writers tried to use satire as a technique to criticise the contemporary society. For example, Lombodar Borah, (who was inspired by the satirical writings of Bankimchandra Chatterjee and Dinabandhu

Mitra) in his article ‘Sadanandar Natun Abhidhan’ (New Dictionary of Sadananda) expressed these views. He defined the nature of modern women’s education as, ‘*learning to write letters, absorbing in plays-novels, forgetting about domestic chores...physically weaker and thin, light minded, wicked and rough... making women men, flower into thunderstorm...*’⁶ (Emphasis added). In fact, even in contemporary Europe there were several concerns at the impacts of the novels on the minds of the women. The 19th century psychologists believed that since women are more emotional, they are more susceptible to a disease called ‘hysteria’.⁷ This fear was also due to the fact that the novels and plays through their portrayal of romantic relationships promoted impractical ideas about love, which might destabilise the society. In other words, they provided scopes to challenge the existing patriarchal society.

In the colonial Indian context the very idea of Romantic Love was a new concept which became popular among a section of the educated middle class through their readings of William Shakespeare, William Wordsworth, John Keats and other English writers. The reading of their works as well as involving in the new plays based on the western notion of romance was a new development in the country. The idea of courtship, to know about the prospective couple prior to marriage was one of the new ideas. But, it was not easy to adopt in a situation like India, where the society left virtually any spaces for it. One of the best example of this dilemma is Saratchandra Chatterjee’s novel Devdas, where a hero who incidentally had the exposure of England failed to muster the courage to openly declare his love and ultimately took the path of suicide. Why the colonial heroes failed in romance? Was it due lack of courage to stand up against the society? Or, due to their inherent failures of the Indian men shared by the majority?⁸

In the caste Hindu society, marriage relationships were always fixed by the parents, romance develops only after marriage. Among these sections girls were married at an early age, with virtually little scopes for education, whereas the boys had the best of education. As a result, the mental difference between the husband and wife increased. Some educated men tried to address the issue, by becoming teachers of their wives so that they could become mental companions to adjust to the requirements of the new age. To become mental companion was one of the ideals, promoted by the contemporary Victorian ideology.

Lakshminath Bezbarua tried to satire the idea of Romanticism among the contemporary Assamese youths. Although, they were educated (many of them in Bengal) they could not practice it and had to wait for their marriage, arranged by the parents. Were they cowards or lacked self-confidence? In his short story, ‘Seuti’ he tried to show such an imbalance. Seuti, the protagonist was only nine years old (with no formal education), was married to a person, who was studying in Kolkata. He was almost three times older than her. In their first night he tried to impress her, by reciting Shakespearean romantic speeches to impress her. In his romantic excitement he pulled a ‘dao’ (like a sword) before his child wife, who was then thinking about the ducklings at her parental home, to show his ultimate love to her, as a romantic lover. Obviously, this high act of romance only frightened his wife who had never met him as per the custom, considered him as a madman. Interestingly her mother in law was well aware about it and rescued her in time. This, satire was also a reaction on the contemporary debates on the Age of Consent and the author made his position clear.

He also tried to criticize a section of the Assamese youths, who failing to achieve their dream loves were resorting to opium. In his satirical short story, ‘Chenichampa’ inspired by Dinabandhu Mitra, he tried to show the frustrations of these men.⁹ Does it mean that the Assamese youths were cowards who had no courage to go against the existing practices of the society in spite, of his knowledge of the west? Whether caste or class identities were responsible for such kind of

attitudes? In a different sense did these criticisms also reflect the personal achievements of the author who married a Bengali lady, Prajnasundari Devi (a famous writer of the Bengali cookbook) from the famous Tagore family?¹⁰ To a different extent, it also applied to Bolinarayan Borah, the first engineer from Assam, who also married a Bengali women. In other words, the attainment of the Bengali standard was also a kind of standard for a section of the educated middle class. Interestingly, it was also at the same time when the Assamese nationalists were also trying to question not only the Bengal Renaissance but also, the cultural dominance of the Bengali language and culture. This was the rallying point to assert the Assamese identity against the Bengali nationalism where also language and culture were the vital issues of identity formation. Whereas, Bezbarua in spite of his Bengali connections remained a staunch critic of the Bengali cultural dominance over Assam, Bolinarayan was not vocal about it. In his edited journal 'Mou' (The Bee) he rather showed sympathy to the Bengali culture.¹¹

In fact, romanticism had a great value to the concept of separation of lovers, 'biraha'. This can be seen through the works of the Assamese poets like Hemchandra Goswami (who wrote the first Assamese romantic sonnet, Priyatamar Cithi, (Letter of the Beloved) and Chandrakumar Agarwala, and others. In fact, it was not a new issue in the traditions of the Vaishnavite Movement where a section of the saints had lot of attachments to it, like Meerabai. Under the impacts of the Romantic Movement it became secular in nature, and the men also began to show their longings to their earthly lovers. Women had to wait for more time to express their romantic desires, as the society was not prepared to accept. Like the other movements of the time, the Romantic Movement was also dominated by the men. Women writers were regarded as less authentic and less responsive to the ideals of the Movement as unlike the men they had limited intellectual faculties. New genres like novels also helped in the spread of popularity of the concept of love.

The colonial project of introducing English language in the country is also not beyond doubt. In fact, Lord Macauley clearly argued that the main aim of western education was to create a class of people who will remain Indian in colour but, English in their tastes. Gauri Vishwanathan has argued how this colonial agenda was put into practice in India through textbooks which only tried to promote an ideal picture of England, so that the native would remain loyal forever. But, this agenda ultimately failed as English helped the Indians who were divided by languages and cultures made it a common unitary force against the colonial rule. In other words, it was used by the natives to promote nationalism.¹² Priya Joshi has argued that how the circulation of the English books in the country helped in breaking the racial stereotypes as portrayed by colonial state.¹³ Therefore, the impact of the western education in the country had a mixed impact in the Indian society.

The case of Micheal Madhusudan Dutta, a Bengali poet and playwright, in this regard is interesting to examine. Born into a traditional Hindu family in Bengal he became so infatuated by the glamour's of the west, that he not only converted into Christianity and married a European lady and settled for some time in England. But, he was disappointed with his experiences and had to return back to his motherland. This experience had profound impacts on his later writings where he became critical with the west and instead of his early romantic euphoria he began to relook to the Hindu tradition.¹⁴ In colonial Assam, however, followers of Romantic Movement did not go to the extreme of Michael, rather they opted to co-exist with the traditions.

The Hindu-Revivalists and the question of Romance

The Hindu Revivalist Movement had an entirely different concept of love and relationships. Since, the very notion

of revivalism emerged as a kind of opposition to the western moral domination; its reactions to these ideas were situated at a different level. Starting with Dayananda Saraswati they had a fixed notion that, romantic relationships can only be possible between the husband and the wife. Pre-marital love or relationships were not ideal as to them love can only come into fruition through conjugal love. But, as there were also examples as well as practices of love beyond conjugal relations in the Indian society they tried to use traditions selectively. In order to justify their points of view, they tried to idealise the mythical relationships like Nala- Damayanti, Siba and Parvati, Ram and Sita and others. These ideals were made famous by the paintings of Raja Ravi Varma, and the Bengal School of Art.¹⁵ The growth of the print media, as well as the communication systems like railways helped in the speedy dissemination of these ideas. For example, the role of the Gita Press in the dissemination of these ideas was crucial.¹⁶ Likewise, the Arya Samaj and the Bengali Revivalists like Bankimchandra Chatterjee played a pivotal role in the project. Swami Vivekananda provided a different platform to the Indians in which they could challenge the moral domination of the west, through concepts like 'atmashakti' (Inner Power) to recover their inner self. But, at the same time it tried to close its door to the romantic ideas ignoring the feelings of the majority of the common people as they were now appealed to idealise the mythical figures, which again were selective. In other words, the Hindu Revivalists virtually dealt a death blow to the ideas of the Romantic Movement. The same were the case among the other communities; where in the name of reviving the 'ideal' the scope for individual choice was ignored for the greater benefits of the entire community.

The Hindu Revivalist Movement placed several criterion for the ideal love and in order to show this they tried to compare the western and the eastern concepts. One of the important issue was shame. Whereas the western women had less shame in expressing their feelings of love the Indian women on the other hand, it was a major quality for the later.¹⁷

These issues also affected the mindsets of the Assamese educated middle class. As, it was a time when the identity formation of the province was taking a new shape after it was separated from Bengal in 1874 to have a new identity as a separate province, the Assamese nationalists began to seek new identity where imitation of Bengal was questioned. Bengali culture or the Bengal Renaissance no longer remained as the prime model for a large section of the educated Assamese middle class. Did the Assamese nationalists evolve any new solutions for the issue of Love to suit the context of colonial Assam?

The answer is in negative. The Assamese literati class found it difficult like their contemporaries in other parts of the country to challenge the existing caste and class prejudices of the society. In fact, it also created a false notion among a section of the people that everything old was good for the society without rationally questioning whether they fitted with the changing context of the period. For example, Ratneshwar Mahanta felt no hesitation in completely identifying himself with Manu who had no notion of romance, but complete female subordination to men. Or in other words, they believed it should be one one sided, love should originate through the mercy of the husband only. Similarly, Ramakrishna Paramhansa (1836-1886), although a devotee of the Goddess Kali infused women with gold 'Kamini- kanchan' which deviates men from their true destiny, union with the God.¹⁸ In other words, Hindu Revivalist ideas made the issue of love more rigid or more patriarchal. Now, this also involved the issue of responsibility to the traditions, which did not allow free meeting of lovers prior to marriage. As the Indian nationalists were increasingly becoming its adherents the ideal for the new age was situated through the myth like Ram and Sita, Nala and Damayanti. The issue of Sakuntala in this connection deserves special mention. Romila Thapar has shown, how within the 19th century the theme and the context of Shakuntala was changed to accommodate these identities of romance, far different from Kalidasa, who was the original creator.¹⁹

Can the ideas of love and romance be taught to the women? This theme was addressed by Satyanath Bora, through his short story, 'Premar Parhasali' (School of Love) published in the 'Jonaki' Vol. XII, 1904. In this satirical story the author argued that, through the exposure of modern plays the idea of romance cannot be developed. The urban/rural divide as well as the caste and class issues played their active roles in determining the issues of love and romance.

But, at the same time, authors like Rajanikanta Bardoloi tried to seek the answers for ideal love through his novel 'Miri Jiyari', through which he immortalised the love of the Mishing (community) lovers, Panei and Jonki. He also tried to use the concept of romance in his other historical novels like 'Rangili Kunwari' to show that, the pre-colonial Assamese society also had the concepts of love, but different from the contemporary western concept (which appealed to a large section of the educated youths), which was more individualistic. He was impressed by Walter Scott and tried to use history as the background for his novels. Through, his imaginative creativity he tried to introduce concepts like love, courage and love for the nation and link it with the present time with the past ideals, to encourage the people to love the past. Later, Nakul Chandra Bhuyan, Atul Chandra Hazarika and others, also tried to use the technique to idealise the past for the present regeneration of the ideal love. But, in doing so they remained within the parameters of the contemporary society.

Did the ideas of romantic love actually affect the contemporary educated men? Or it remained a dream or wishful thinking on the part of the authors? Bezbarua have mentioned that even writing letters to the husband was considered as unconventional by the contemporary society.²⁰ As the women who possessed the skill of writing, had the potential danger of writing to the other men, leading to illicit affairs. This fear of women's ability to read and write was a common feature in 19th century India, a section of the educated Assamese men were no exception to it. For example, Bolinarayan Bora, the first Civil Engineer from Assam, who studied in Great Britain, in spite of his exposure to the west and marrying an educated Bengali woman, was reluctant for women's education. In his article, 'Tirutar Ban Ki'? (What are the Duties of women?) published in the 'Mou' (the Bee), Vol.I, 1886, emphasised only on homemaking.

This view from a person may seem difficult to understand, but, it fitted well with the dominant Victorian ideology, which tried to glorify women's subordination by heavily emphasizing on women's role as the homemaker. Secondly, the contemporary western knowledge system also made a section of the educated Indians to reemphasize their belief on the patriarchal gendered notions on the nature of the women. The increasing popularity of the Hindu-Revivalist ideas only helped in increasing control over the women by the men. The caste and class trajectory made the issue of romantic love in the western sense as impossible. As a result, the Assamese society like the other parts of the country virtually remained unchanged regarding romance. Therefore, Lakshmidhar Sarma, a noted freedom fighter has shown that in his time it was impossible to know about other girls apart from his immediate family. This was also testified by many others.

But, at the same time the Assamese educated middle class were finding it difficult, to justify some of the popular customs and festivals practiced by a large section of the community, like the Rongali Bihu, and the Barat where love was socially accepted. They were divided on the issue, as some like Anandaram Dhekial Phookan, Ratneshwar Mahanta regarded these practices as immoral or not ideal, (as they did not conform to the Ideal Brahmanic traditions) whereas men like Bezbarua and Nakul Chandra Bhuyan were somewhat sympathetic. This was also the case of a section of the colonial officials. For example, John Butler, expressed his opinion in these lines, "*a period of license; and the exercise of their freedom within that period does not seem to be attended with any stain, blemish, or loss of reputation*".²¹ (Emphasis added)

Interestingly, in spite of the reservations of a section of the Assamese middle class about the Rongali Bihu, by the second half of the 20th century it emerged, as the national festival of Assam.²² Did it reflect any new change in the attitudes of the educated middle class towards the broader issue of love?

To some extent, the growth of the cinemas and the print media and in the recent time, the social media, have shown some external changes in the attitudes of the society, but in some core issues like caste, class and religion it is not that smoother. With the growth of the right wing parties and the ethnic movements have brought new challenges to the concepts and practices of love in the Assamese society.

Love with the Newcomers

Colonial Assam witnessed two major phase of immigration first, in the second half of the 19th century from different parts of the country to work in the tea gardens and other industries and second, by the second decade of the 20th century from East Bengal to settle the 'waste' lands of Lower and Middle Assam. The arrival of these people not only changed the demography of the province but, also affected different aspects of the socio-cultural life. Love or relationships with these newcomers also emerged as a serious issue among a section of the Assamese people. To them these people belonged to the lower sections of the society in their original provinces and they should not be trusted by the natives. Their motives were also not beyond doubt to them. Rudraram Bordoloi, a Brahmo from Nagaon was one of the earliest among the educated native who through his play, 'Bangal Bangalani Natak', he cautioned the natives from refraining relationships with the outsiders. This attitude is interesting, as being a Brahmo, which originated in Bengal he had low opinions on a section of the Bengali population. This can be linked to the to the caste and class prejudices of the Bengal Renaissance.²³

Similar tensions also arose with the second phase of immigration in a different level. Unlike the former the new immigrants were mainly Muslims, whose settlement patterns created several debates among the Assamese middle class.²⁴ These issues apart from highlighting the security of the native women from the new entrants, it showed doubts on the 'women's nature' and 'weakness' who could easily be motivated with potential dangers for the entire community. Therefore, the nature and dangers of these new immigrants were highlighted by the contemporary newsmagazines like the '*Chetana*' and the '*Assam Hitoishi*'. The issue became more serious as the various Census Reports, particularly of 1931 predicted that within a short time due to the influx of immigrants and the their tendency to produce more children the Assamese would become a minority. Even today, the province is still facing this crisis.

Nationalism and Love

The issue of love took an entirely different turn with the growth of the nationalist movement under the leadership of Gandhi. Now, the personal was sought to be situated with the broader issue of the nation. Gandhian strategy needed the women to work with the men to attain independence. Therefore, newsmagazines like the '*Awahan*' tried to highlight this issue that, the personal issues of love should not be equated with the broader issues of the National Independence. This was highlighted by invoking the character of Joymoti, who for the sake of the kingdom sacrificed her life. Interestingly, Mula Gabharu, another woman from the Ahom period who for the sake of her husband actually went to war and died by fighting with the enemy was not highlighted. This shows that the Assamese nationalists approved those acts as the ideal women which fitted with non-violence and not transgressing the perceived gender roles.

CONCLUSIONS

The trajectory of love and romance with the ideas of modernity and the problematics of contemporary realities has remained a critical question for the Indian society. As the above discussion shows that the Indian people had their own notions of love and romance from time immemorial. But, the interaction with the western ideas made a section of the natives to believe that the western notion of love and romance should be the ideal. Although, the Hindu-Revivalists tried to counter the idealization of the west, their solution introduced rather a retrograde step, to imitate the mythical and ideal characters of the past. Same is the case of the Indian nationalists, who in order to promote their interests tried to relocate the personal issues like love and romance into the broader concept of love, for the motherland. As a result, the issue of love and romance remained ambiguous during the colonial period, and even now things have not changed radically.

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5. For Gunabhiram, see, *Assam Buranji* (1874) and for Hechandra, see *Hemkosh* first published in 1900. This was the second dictionary in Assamese, after the American Baptist missionary, Miles Bronson in 1867. Here unlike the former, Sanskrit roots for the Assamese words were used. Both the works of Gunabhiram and Hemchandra clearly showed their caste and class biasness.
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7. See, Nanda Talukdar Edited, *Lombodar Bora Rachanavali*, Publication Board Assam, 1977, p.62.
8. For details on the issue see, Michael Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, The Will to Knowledge*, Vol.I, Penguin Books (1978), 1999.
9. Here, one can easily locate Saratchandra Chatterjee's *Devdas* where the hero instead of challenging the society for his love and assert his own identity resorts to harm himself through excessive drinking. Whereas, in the contemporary west, ideas of machoism or heroism allowed spaces for the men to express their individuality, how

- it influenced the Indian men? Did it signify that the Indian men were less macho unlike the western men, and lacked courage to fight against the society? For details see, Ashish Nandy, tried to show how this failure of Devdas can be linked with the producer and director of the movie, Pramothesh Barua, *Return from Exile*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998.
10. For, Prajnasundari Devi see, Amish O Niramish Ranna, Ananda Publishers, kolkata, 2001, this is still in circulation. She is however, not known to write any books in Assamese.
 11. The case of Bolinarayan Bora is problematic as although he did not openly reject the Bengali culture, and even used the Bengali 'Ra' or R (which is one of the major marker of between the Assamese and the Bengali scripts) he regarded the issues highlighted by his contemporaries as less important than the other serious questions. Later Bezbarua admitted his failure in properly understanding the issues of serious journalism.
 12. For details see, Gauri Vishwanathan, *The Mask of Conquests, Literary Study and British Rule in India* (1989), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2003.
 13. Priya Joshi, *Trading Places The Novel, the Colonial Library, and India*, in *Print Areas, Book History in India*, Edited by Abhijit Gupta and Swapan Chakravorty, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2004, pp.17-64. Joshi argues that one of the major factors for the increasing popularization of English novels was its portrayal of the Victorian England free from the colonial states efforts to glorify the English society. In other words, British Royal and upper class scandals had a lucrative market in India and the British publishing houses took full advantage of the situation. Coralie Younger, in her book, *Wicked Women of the Raj* (2003) Harper Collins Publishers India, New Delhi, 2011, discusses the discomforts and anxieties when interracial relations were strongly discouraged by the state for the cause of racial superiority of the White took place particularly among the Princely states.
 14. See. Bezbarua, *Mor Jivan Sowaran, (My Reminiscence)* in Assamese in Atul Chandra Hazarika Edited, Bezbarua Granthavali, Vol. I, Second Edition, Guwahati, 1988, p.28.
 15. John Butler, *Travels and adventures in the Province of Assam During a Residence of Fourteen Years*, (1885), Munshiram Monoharlal Publishers Pvt, Ltd., New Delhi, 2004, pp.228-29. This however does not imply that the author was free from the colonial racial prejudices of the time.
 16. For Raja Ravi Varma, see, P. Miter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp.69, 193, 208.
 17. For Sakuntala, see, Romila Thapar, *Texts, Readings, Histories*, Kali for Histories, 2011.
 18. For details on the issue see, Himani Bannerjee, *Attired in Virtue, Discourse on Shame (lajja) and Clothing of the Gentlewomen (bhadramahila) in Colonial Bengal*, in *Inventing Subjects, Studies in Hegemony, Patriarchy and Colonialism*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 99- 134.
 19. For details on the issue, see, Anindita Ghosh, *Revisiting the 'Bengal Renaissance': Literary Bengali and Low-Life Print in Colonial Calcutta*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 42 (Oct. 19-25, 2002), pp. 4329-4338. Also see, Amiya P. Sen, *Hindu Revivalism in Bengal, 1872-1905, Some Essays in Interpretation*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1993, for the complexities and dilemmas of the Revivalist ideas in colonial Bengal.

20. For Ramakrishna see, Sumit Sarkar, Kaliyug, Chakri and Bhakti, Ramakrishna and his Times, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 29, Issue. No.29,18 July, 1992.
21. For Micheal Madhusudan Dutt, see, Ghulam Murshid, Ashar Chalane Bhuli (in Bengali), Kolkata, 1993, for the complexities of the life of the poet who ultimately had to return to the traditional root to identify him. In other words, west also failed to answer the growing socio-cultural questions of the time, to its native adherents. Among the Assamese poets Bholanath Das was influenced by his style. Due to the paucity of his personal life context it is difficult to make a proper comparison with his mentor.
22. For the issue see, A.C. Bhuyan and S. Dey Ed, Political History of Assam, Vol. II, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 1977, pp. 300-315.
23. The Gita Press, Mukul Akshya, Gita Press and the Making of Hindu India, Harper Collins India, 2017.
24. for details see P. Majumdar Ed, Deshpran Lakshmidhar Sarma Rachanavali, Vol.II, Guwahati, 1996, pp. 276-79.
25. Although, Rongali Bihu was one of the several practices of popular culture, it was made the cultural symbol of the Assamese identity, ignoring the unique regional forms like the Barat (practiced among the Tiwas of Central Assam), Bagarumba (among the Bodos) it needs further research why Rongali Bihu was chosen, displacing the other variations. Did it reflect the limitations on the question of Cultural identity by the Assamese nationalists who only tried to represent their own limited experiences for the far wider questions of the time? Whether it was one of the prime concerns for the increasing number of the ethnic assertions in the province, whereby many people feel threatened by it?

