

ARRANGING THE CONTRADICTIONS: THE QUESTIONS OF MODERNITY AND MORALITY IN COLONIAL ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

The trajectory of morality and modernity in colonial Assam, made many changes in the traditional life of the Assamese people. The colonial interventions introduced many new issues for the people and like other parts of the country the Assamese educated middle class also tried to situate themselves in the reshaping the mindsets of the people. But, in doing so many of the agendas and efforts of the emerging middle class failed to properly address many of the popular practices in a changing environment. The province with its particular problems and issues had to make several negotiations with the issues of nationalism and identity. This resulted confusion and till now the Assamese people are waiting for alternative answers.

KEYWORDS: Colonialism, Morality, Popular Culture, Caste, Immigration

INTRODUCTION

The British colonial rule in India was a major watershed in the history of the country. For the first time there were several new interactions, political, cultural, social and economic which shaped the course of the subcontinent history. In fact, there are differences of opinions among the scholars regarding the nature of the interactions, whether these were one sided or mutual. William Dalrymple, in his book *The White Mughals* has shown that there were several differences between the early and the later interactions.¹ In the early phase of the interactions race was not the primary demarcating factor between the whites and the natives, rather the later absorbed or even identified with the Indian traditions. Peter van der Veer has argued that, even after the British left the country there are still cultural continuities in Britain, particularly through food.²

But, the racial identity of the English Nation remained very strong and it became more dominant with the increasing hold of the East India Company's over the country. The best examples in this regard are James Mill in his *History of India* (1835) and J.B. Macaulay's *Minute* (1834).³ A kind of racial superiority began to develop among the British ruling class which systematically tried to show that the Indians are inferior to the British. This project was further strengthened by Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer along with the emerging discipline, colonial anthropology. It was substantially aided by the various Christian missionaries, who in order to promote Christianity tried to side with the colonial regimes agendas. The linkage of the colonial state officials (the colonial state however was neutral) and the Christian missionaries for the maintenance of the Raj is interesting to interrogate.

It may be noted that even among the pioneers of the Indian social reform movements like Raja Ram Mohun Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, although they sought the help of the colonial state for legislating against particular social evils they none the less remained dependent on the traditions to reinterpret for their age. Tapan Ray Chaudhuri notes that,

among the Asian intellectuals it was the Indians who had the first critical encounter with the west.⁴ The British attitudes towards the socio-cultural issues of the Indian people also underwent a marked change, after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. It became more cautious in dealing with these. In fact, the British Government by itself rarely had any initiative towards social reforms. It was primarily occupied with its economic interests only.

The question of morality was one of the important issues that the Hindu and the Revivalists tried to encounter. They tried to question the very basis of western moral superiority against their own. Ashish Nandy has tried to interpret it as a process of 'Loss and Recovery of the Self' for the Indian identity.⁵ Himani Bannerjee has shown in the contexts of the Bengali society how these ideas helped in the creation of self confidence to counter the west.⁶ This task became easier to a large extent by the rediscovery of the ancient Indian history through discoveries of new archaeological sites and of old manuscripts,⁷ and the easy availability of the English Royal scandals.⁸ The first issue helped the Revivalists to examine the Hindu civilization through the constructed image of the Vedic period at par with the highest standards of the western civilization.⁹

The present paper will try to look at these interactions at the Brahmaputra valley as there are more sources available. It does not mean that these issues were less relevant in the other areas of colonial Assam. But, given the nature of colonial intervention in the Brahmaputra valley it is more marked out, with several new issues with contemporary relevance. For example, the issue of immigration, which started in the colonial period, has remained problematic till today. The question of morality and modernity is still relevant as even today as the continued dominance of the Victorian ideology particularly relating to the women in the mindsets of the people, which can be witnessed in the educational curriculum, social media, the mindsets of the different ethnic groups, as well as the agendas of the educated elites remained confusing. In fact, many of these issues can be witnessed in the other parts of the country, but what makes it special unlike the others, the very definition of the Assamese are still a problem (even more than after seventy years of Independence) due to several factors, including immigration which unfortunately remained a perennial problem for the province. The issues cannot be simply always interpreted as the binary opposing between the 'self' and 'others' as the later always are asking new answers for their own existence.

Secondly, the relation between modernity and morality is also problematic, as they always do not go side by side in every situation. One issue that remains questionable is whether the new modernity mediated through the western modernity and the Christian ethics (through the missionaries) was more of a kind of imposing to the common popular practices which in many ways were advanced and practical than the new ideas? In other words, issues like morality is difficult to be interpreted everywhere with different cultures and traditions.

The question of Caste

The question of caste and race is important in the colonial understanding of the country.¹⁰ The British tried to relate with the advanced sections of India like the Brahmins through the concept of the mythical 'Aryan' race. Later, with Herbert Spencer these understanding got a definite shape to fulfil the colonial ideology of dominance. In fact, there were differences among the colonial ethnographers and the officials regarding the practices of caste in the different communities but, they were united in their belief in the racial superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race. These understandings also shaped the mindsets of a large section of the educated Indians as the 'scientific' knowledge. It is therefore no surprise that they used these knowledge in understand their own people, with all the inherent biasness. For example, the quest for the Vedic Age

in search of a ‘pure’ or unpolluted national self as done by the Hindu Revivalists by the second half of the 19th century and shared by a large section of the people including M. K. Gandhi is related to these understandings.¹¹ Similarly, these colonial notions were also applied in the case of the tribal’s and the Dalits, who later had to re-invent their own identities within and outside the system.¹² In fact, there were prejudices among the people about the ‘other’ even in the earlier times, the colonial interventions sharpened it, through various ethnographic Census Reports and politics.

The issue of caste in very intricately linked up with the question of public morality. Caste system symbolizes a hierarchy of socio-cultural relations where the Brahmins took the top positions followed by the Kshatriyas, Vaishyshs and the Shudras, who numbered the most. The Hindu caste system, evolved by the later Vedic period tried to accommodate new people mainly in the last category. The case of colonial Assam is interesting as due to diverse nature of the composition of population, the strict practices of the caste were limited among a few of the caste Hindus. The rigidity of the caste system in many cases is not strongly noticeable. Shihabuddin Talish, who accompanied Mir Zumla, in the Mughal invasion of 1662-63 mentioned that there were only two castes in the province, the Brahmins and the Kalitas.¹³ Likewise, a French Traveller, Jean- Baptiste Chevalier, had very low opinions on the morality of the Assamese people.¹⁴ But, whether the existing caste system was successful in the creation of social harmony or equality is an interesting point to examine.

The outsiders were misled on several aspects. First, although majority of the population were clubbed as Kalitas they were also divided by different social norms and practices like food habits, dresses etc. Secondly, the caste systems have no agendas for social equality, but to maintain the existing differences. The best example in this regard is the Neo-Vaishnavite Movement which promotes equality before the God but at the same time rigidly maintains the existing caste distinctions. Thirdly, in the existing feudal set up of the time (in many cases even today) these distinctions were part and parcel of a wider socio-political and economic order, promoted by the state and religion. In other words, caste cannot be separated from the realities of the time and space.

The colonial intervention marked a new phase in reshaping the caste identity in the country. Its understanding of the Indian people as well as the caste system was in many cases confusing and inadequate. As a result, it had to rely on several compromises with the existing traditions or practices. In fact, the colonial state had had very limited social agendas for its Indian subjects, and nearly all the social reforms that were made during the period were first initiated by the natives and state responded by legislations. The pace of the social legislations declined, after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 as they realised that social interventions in India was one of the prime factors for it.

Moreover, the British society itself was divided by the issues of class and religious practices and the existing caste system in India was not very alien to them. With the expansion of European colonization into the different parts of the world the concept of racial superiority also began to develop among the colonizing powers, Britain (being the biggest) was no exempt from it. Rather London acted as a hub for the growth of many of these ideas. The growth of Social Darwinism and the discipline of Anthropology further confirmed the faith of the European racial superiority. Edward Said therefore mentions that although the British intellectuals were very vocals on several issues of the time intentionally tried to maintain silence on the problems of the country.¹⁵

The implementation of the census system by the colonial state from 1871 brought the issue of caste into the forefront in the public for the first time. Earlier, caste remained as practices among the people, now; it became marked out

publicly, with official statistics. It generated new sets of identity movements among the different sections of the people. One may question whether the census operations only created differences among the people so that the colonial policy of 'Divide and Rule' could perform its tasks smoothly? With the spread of the western education the number of the educated middle class began to increase and they tried to get new social spaces for themselves in the existing social orders. It provided two alternatives, one, to adjust with the existing caste system through 'Sanskritization'¹⁶ or to assert new identity as in the case of the Dalit Movements. In the existing Indian situation the Dalit alternative was not so appealing to the majority of the educated middle class, as they wanted to readjust their caste positions with the forward groups of the society only. Therefore, the middle class inherited several dilemmas regarding the socio-cultural issues from the existing feudal practices.

Colonial Assam was no different in the case of the caste prejudices. The newly emerging middle class, who basically came from the higher caste, believed that the morality of the common people of the lower castes were not conforming to the ideal social values and needs reform. They were not alone in believing the prejudices, even in contemporary England and Bengal these views were dominant. In England, the Quakers made several efforts to instil discipline among the poorer classes through instilling values of morality and order through religion. In contemporary Bengal, the issue of public morality also played important role in the debates about modernity. The linkage between morality and modernity is important as the new western education tried to idealize western culture as progressive against the traditional customs of the country. It became an implicit agenda of the new western education in the country to show the cultural superiority of the west so that educated natives should turn out as the loyal citizen of the British Crown. This agenda of the colonial state was highlighted by Gauri Vishwanathan, as well as the ultimate failure as the English language helped in the growth of the Indian nationalism, by bringing the different groups of the people under a common umbrella.(which could not be done through Hindi).¹⁷

As a result, the newly educated middle class concept of caste was both inherited and reinforced by the new education. In fact, cast and class are not same, but colonial India they acted synonymously in many cases. For example, caste in the Indian context categories persons with particular professions whereas in the western view the emergence of the categories like the bourgeois and capitalism is differently linked up. Later, as in colonial Bengal issues like rural/urban dichotomies were also used to categorize particular groups of people.¹⁸ The Assamese educated middle class who were inspired by these tendencies and in many cases trained by the Bengal Renaissance was shaped by the caste biases.

One of the best examples to examine the caste prejudices of the Assamese middle class was the issue of marriage. They believed that marriage is one of the most sacred social practices, but the common people had no sincerity to follow it, which resulted in the growth of immoral practices. In the words of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, one of the pioneer in the growth of modern Assam,

"In no part of India perhaps are the bonds of matrimony so unscrupulously violated, or connubial relation so little regarded by the mass of the population, as in Assam. In some Districts, more than one-fourth of the cases relate to questions of marriage, Cases of elopement, seduction and dispossession of wives, 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. It is often impossible to decide between contending parties who among them have been legally married; the evidence adduced on both sides being equally conclusive in favour of the pretensions of each. Generally men and women of the lower orders,

live together as husbands and wives without ever undergoing the nuptial rites.” In order to overcome this he suggested Shastric marriage and registrations, which would ‘serve to protect inviolate their conjugal rights and domestic happiness’.¹⁹ This concern is also highlighted by the contemporary ‘Arunodoi’ where several incidents of lapses of domestic morality.

The caste biasness of the educated Assamese middle class can also be seen through the writings of Gunabhiram Barooah and Hemchandra Barooah. Gunabhiram Barooah in his Assam Buranji (1873), used the word ‘*itar*’ (primates) in describing some castes and the ‘Arunodoi’ also used it several times.²⁰ Being a Christian missionary initiative the newsmagazine gave special emphasis on morality. Through different news it tried to advice the people not to engage in immoral acts like elopement, respect marriage norms apart from indulging in opium etc. It found many failings among the Assamese people on these grounds and tried to stimulate Christian doctrines. It also criticised some of the religious practices among the Hindus in temples like the Kamakhya. Later, Ramkumar Vidyaratna, a Brahmo preacher who visited the province during 1867-68 also mentioned about the practices of Devadasi in the Hayagriva Temple of Hajo. But, he was also aware about some of the good practices among the Assamese people.²¹

One of the key issues of the debates of the public morality is the free mobility of the common women. The educated middle class became very concerned to it and they believed that it can be resolved if proper age of marriage as prescribed by the Shastras, and western medical science, as well as, following the ideal lives of the Hindu married women. This led to a conflicting position as if one supports traditions then they have also to support early marriage as was the custom among the higher castes which modern education as well as on medical grounds were asymmetrical. This problem remained contentious in the country till the passage of the Sarda Act, 1928. Early marriage became one of the markers of caste upliftment for many, who earlier had no such traditions. Secondly, the prevalence of widow remarriage among a large section of the common people also became a concern for the reform minded men, as they do not follow the Shastras and therefore it was not morally binding. They were inspired by the model of Vidyasagar to introduce widow remarriage into the province. One of the arguments of this school was that due to the ban on widow remarriage (among the higher castes) it led to moral decline. In Assam the issue of female sexuality was however not highlighted by the supporters of the widow remarriage as in the case of Bengal. And if one became over enthusiastic like Gunabhiram Barooah then the result was social boycott.

In other words, the problem before the educated reformers was that they supported the idea of widow remarriage sanctioned only through the Shastras and law. Yet, the caste dominated section of the society was strongly against it to accept. They were equally opposed to the idea of inter-caste marriage. Whereas, as Susan Bayly writes, “Almost everywhere, people whose so-called caste lifestyles permit divorce and the remarriage of widows have been seen as distinct from the more refined populations who regard these practices as low and uncivilized.”²² Sekhar Bandyopadhyaya argues that the efforts of Vidyasagar to introduce legislations for widow remarriage acted against the interests of the marginalized communities where it was a common practice as it involved property issues.²³ Gradually with the spread of modern education and the growth of new cultural tastes among the new middle class of the practices widow remarriage began to decline.

Rongali Bihu

The case of the Rongali Bihu is one of the classic examples of public morality in colonial Assam. The journey of the Bihu from a cultural tradition to become the national festival of the province is interesting. The question of modernity

is always at the conflicting position with tradition. The impacts of the western education made a section of the people to regard some of the popular customs and practices as immoral. Sumanta Bannerjee has shown in the case of colonial Bengal, how the Bhadraloks began to treat several popular festivals as obscene and immoral. They felt that, these practices should be stopped for the betterment of the society.²⁴

Rongali Bihu was practiced among a section of the people through dance and it encouraged the youths to intermingle and elopement. It acted as a sort of marriage practice. According to some educated elites like Anandaram Dhekial Phookan and Ratneshwar Mahanta these practices were immoral. Moreover, the Bihu dance explicitly showed the body movements and the songs were considered as vulgar by many. Dhekial Phookan when was Extra Assistant Commissioner at Nagaon banned it in the district. He instead invited Nutch girls from Kolkata to perform, during the Durga Puja. In fact, not only the Rongali Bihu, the '*Lailing*' songs, among the Tiwas were also considered as obscene. But as it was practiced among a limited community, which did not affect the interests of the majority it did not attract the attention as the Bihu.

Opium

The question of opium was one of the major social evils of the colonial period. It became popular after the visit of Captain Welsh in 1893. The existing political chaos followed by the three Burmese invasions into the province led to rapid social disintegration and the existing social order became chaotic. In the Ahom Kingdom, the Paik system which was its backbone began to decline and the existing feudal social order crumbled. The situation did not improve for a long time even after the British annexation (1826). The *Arunodoi*, the first Assamese newsmagazine published by the American Baptist Missionaries (1846-1883) provides several examples in this regard. In fact, the British had no clear cut policies regarding Upper Assam, and the restoration of the Ahom Kingdom (1834-38) was also a failure in establishing peace and stability.

In this situation the consumption of opium began to spread rapidly among a large section of the people. In fact, there were several other factors responsible for the spread of opium. First, opium was also considered as having medicinal values particularly against diarrhoea which was responsible for high mortality rate in the province. In an area which had virtually no access to the western medicine this factor cannot be ignored. Secondly, opium also acted as a commercial crop and merchandise in the non monetized economy of the province. Thirdly, as Ramkumar Vidyaratna, a Brahmo preacher who visited the province in 1878 mentions it also, acted as social status to indulge in the drug. Interestingly, even in the 'civilised' Europe opium became the status symbol among the higher class. Poet P.B. Shelly was one of its great admirer as well as addict.

Maniram Dewan, in his petition to A.J. M. Mills, wrote on the social evils of opium on the people, including the women as, "Moreover by the facilities afforded now-a days, such low people as Doomnees, Gorionees, Meereonees (wives of Dooms, Moheomedans and Meerees) have become inveterate opium-eaters, and by their allurements have spread the practice universally. Association of opium eaters is the cause of the increase of such characters.....If unable to procure opium, and good food, they are obliged to sell or give in servitude their wives and families. And when women become opium-eaters they will sell their domestic utensils without the knowledge of their husbands, and even barter their chastity or for sake the path of virtue to get the drug."²⁵ Anandaram Dhekial Phukan also urged the government to put ban on opium. John Butler, a British official narratives the evil affects of opium as, "Two-thirds of the population are addicted to

the use of opium, and the tendency to the increase of crime consequent thereon, must be admitted. When individuals are brought up before the magistrate, charged with larceny and burglary, nine out of ten invariably state that they committed the crime to procure opium.”²⁶ Hemchandra Barooah through his satirical play ‘Kaniyar Kirtan’(1861) mentions that consumption of opium was no longer limited to the lower caste it also affected the higher ones. Later, Satyanath Borah and others also tried to show the negative effects of the drug.

But, the issue of opium in Assam was complicated by several factors. First, the colonial government took the advantage of the increase of opium consumption to make it a monopoly in order to substitute the deficit of land revenue. This is interesting as London was the global leader of anti- opium forum. In this sense the colonial state’s morality which tried to position itself as benevolent was also at stake in case of Assam. Secondly, in the other parts of the country the consumption of opium was gradually decreasing the case of Assam was different till 1930’s. Thirdly, The attitudes of the Assamese middle class reformers regarding the total prohibition of opium is also problematic as their positions. For example, Hemchandra Barooah who was a champion against it opposed its immediate ban in the Royal Commission on Opium in 1893. Same is the case with Jagannath Barooah, President of Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha, and the first major public association of the province in the same Commission. They argued it would create problems for the consumers. As a result, opium continued to create problems in Assam till around 1930,s when the Assam Government finally banned it.²⁷

The addiction of opium was not limited to the lower sections of the society; it spread even among the educated middle class. This was regarded as a new moral and social issue for the society. In other words, education always does not mean progress or development (both moral and cultural). Even in the sphere of religious practice as mentioned by Hemchandra Barooah opium took a strong seat. Anandaram Dhekial Phookan mentioned that the goal of the Assamese regarding education was limited in getting of jobs in the tea gardens and they were least bothered by the issues of moral and cultural refinements attainable through modern education. Authors like, Bezbarooah was concerned about it and through his short stories like ‘Chenichampa’ and ‘Kanikhowa’ (opium eater) he ridiculed the modern educated youths, for their indulgence to it. It is interesting to observe critically the indulgence of the educated youths to opium. One explanation is that the Bengal Renaissance offered several examples where modernity meant breaking the established socio-cultural taboos as the Young Bengal did.²⁸ Opium provided a kind of alternative to a section of the educated youths among whom there were no traditions of drinking to show their protest against the society. Secondly, for many educated youths exposures to the modern ideas like Romanticism, Free Love, Courtship etc made the youths to feel depressed as the contemporary Assamese society remained feudal where these aspects had no scope. Thirdly, the issue of employment was one of the major issues for the educated Assamese as they had to fight with the Bengalis (both from the Barak valley and Shylhet) for the limited government jobs available in the province. These social tensions was reflected by Satyanath Borah through his series of articles, ‘Amar Kaniya Samaj’ (Our Opium Addict Society) published in the ‘Jonaki’. Fourthly, colonial official jobs also created some slackness among a section of the educated section who were not much concerned about the issues of social, literary and cultural involvements and opium was rather a time pass for them. Fifthly, the colonial state agendas for the introduction of modern education in the country was not to create independent thinking but to make Britain as the ideal for every aspects of life to continue colonial dependency. In turn, the state was less bothered about these issues and left it to the natives to resolve by them.

Immigration

The rapid immigration into the province from the 19th century from different parts of the country and the influx from modern Bangladesh in the 20th century made several impacts in the Assamese society. These immigrations greatly affected the population balance of the province and the threat of marginalization of the natives began to loom large. Secondly, there were also concerns about the economic dominance of the new entrants. Thirdly, as the natives had no ideas about the particular socio-cultural backgrounds of these new immigrants they began to treat them as inferiors to them. The decline of the ‘paik’ system and the abolition of the system by the colonial state, helped in the growth of new awareness about social status among the common people. Fourthly, the appointment of the Bengali people in the different governmental jobs made many Assamese, to detest these people. In Assam the term Bengali not only meant the people from that province but used to refer a wide category of people, who came to the province through the western boundary. Even the British were called as ‘*Baga Bangal*’ (White Benlali) by the Assamese.

Rudraram Bordoloi, was one of the first to articulate opinions against the new immigrants. In his play ‘*Bangal Bangalani Natak*’ he cautioned the Assamese people not to trust the Bengali people as they had no good intentions towards them. But, at the same time he cannot be termed as anti-Bengali, as he was one of the first Assamese to embrace Brahmoism. Bolinarayan Bora (1852-1927), the first Assamese engineer felt that the tea garden workers (whose plights created several public debates in contemporary Bengal) were not much above the primates.²⁹ It may be noted that the Bengali as a community was not the major issue with these people, they wanted to show that the particular cultural practices of the new immigrants who had less concerns about caste and the preference for the high cultural values as advocated by the leaders of the Bengal Renaissance. In other words, modernity played a significant role in the understanding and categorization of the ‘other’ or the new immigrants.

Durgaprasad Majinder Baruah through his play ‘*Mahari*’ (1895) tried to show that the women tea garden workers dresses as well as jewelleries were below the standard (of good morality of the Valley) and it made them a laughing stock. As mentioned earlier, the Assamese nationalists clearly categorised these people who were not conforming to the ‘higher’ or advanced ideas of the Bengal Renaissance or who did. Their contests lied with the later. For the former they had to wait and observe. The Assamese ‘nationalists’ agenda regarding these sections of population, whether to assimilate them or keep them permanently as outsider remained unclear till 1930’s. What bothered the Assamese educated middle class was the fact that most of the new immigrants particularly relating to the tea industry was that they do not conform to the overall cultural practices of the people of the valley, therefore not to be mingled with.

Assam had to face another phase of immigration from the 1920’s when the colonial government began to encourage people from East Bengal (modern Bangladesh) to settle in the province to reclaim ‘waste lands’. This also led several reactions which can still be reverberated in the Assamese media. Here also culture and morality of these immigrants came into question, as they were very different from the Assamese. The British policy of settling these people known as the Line System created strong resentments among the Assamese people as it was openly violated by these immigrants, taking advantages of the loopholes of the system. This tension was greater than the earlier phase of immigration as it affected the agrarian economy of the province, particularly in the densely settled regions of Kamrup and Nagaon districts.²⁹ The contemporary Assamese newsmagazines like *Chetana* and *Assam Hitoishi* even used words like dacoits, thief etc. Some even went to caution that these immigrants were also eying covetously towards the native women

apart from the land and the cattle's. Therefore, they begin to appeal to the Government as well as the people to do something to prevent the activities of these people through the Legislative Assembly as well as forming organizations like Assam Bhu Sangrakshani Sabha (Assam Land Protection League). This fear psychosis was further fuelled by the publication of the Census Report of 1931 which categorically stated that within a short time the Assamese would be a minority in their own province. Further, the activities of the colonial administration as well as the policies of the Muslim League further complicated the situation.³⁰

Thus, the two phases of the immigrations had different impacts on the Assamese people, although the issue of moral dominance was the common factor, but in case of the later it posed a threat factor as well. Later, the Assamese nationalists in order to increase the number of the Assamese speaking people (to compete with the Bengali Nationalism) began to make efforts to include them in the wider identity of the valley. But, that identity is yet to be achieved and the very definition of the term 'Assamese' is not resolved.³¹

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion it can be argued that the notions of morality and modernity changed significantly during the colonial period. In fact, this not an isolated incident as in the different parts of the country similar developments took place. But, what made the incidents of the valley different from others is the fact that due to the diversity of the population (in a very limited space) and the issue of immigration the dual issues of morality and modernity made many haphazard changes. The educated middle had to renegotiate many of these issues as the growth of the Assamese nationalism also required as in the case of the Rongali Bihu (which eventually became the national festival of the province) to accomodate new elements for the greater identity. But many of these issues are yet to be resolved as in the name of a homogenising Assamese culture many felt themselves as being left out.

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12. For the Dalit experiences, see Christophe Jaffrelot, *Ambedkar and Untouchability, Analysing and Fighting Caste*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2004.
13. The term Kalita includes a conglomeration of different communities, who were divided among different practices, from some of them the Brahmins used to take food and were considered higher in the social rank. The term is limited only to the Brahmaputra valley and presently known as the General Caste.
14. The French traveller, Jean- Baptiste Chevalier, had very low opinions on the morality of the Assamese people. For details see, Caroline Dutta- Baruah & Jean Deloche Translated, *Adventures of Jean- Baptiste Chevalier in Eastern*

- India (1752-1765) Historical Memoirs and Journal of Travels in Assam, Bengal and Tibet*, LBS Publication, Guwahati, 2008, p.188. This view was also reflected by T.T. Cooper, in his book, *Mishmee Hills, An Account of the journey made in an attempt to penetrate Tibet from Assam to open new routes for commerce*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi (1873), 1995, pp.101-102.
15. For details, see, Edward Said, *Imperialism and Culture*, Vintage, London, 1994, pp. xxvi-xxx.
 16. The term ‘Sanskritaisation’ coined by the noted social anthropologist, M. N. Srinivas is problematic as it tried to generalise the ‘upward movement’ of the ‘lower class’ towards the values of the upper caste, once they became educated and became beneficiaries of the upper caste norms, as simultaneously there was also the growth of the lower caste identity movements
 17. For details see, Gauri Viswanathan, *The Mask of Conquests, Literary Study and British Rule in India* (1989), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2003.
 18. Quoted in Lisa N. Trivedi, *Virtually Mapping the “Nation” : Swadeshi Politics in Nationalist India, 1920-1930*, published in *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.62, No.1 (February 2003), pp.11-41, retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3096134>. Also see, Hiteshranjan Sanyal, has argued how the notion of caste in Bengal is complicated and constructed over the centuries. See, *Social Mobility in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1981. But, unlike Bengal there are virtually no professional classes in Assam except the Kaivartas, Sonowals and the Katanis. This can be viewed through the example of the ‘Baria’s, an inter-caste between the Brahmin unmarried women and the non- Brahmins. They were placed at the level of the Shudras with whom there can no social relations. See B.C. Allen, *Census Report of Assam*, Vol. I, 1901, p.64.
 19. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, “Observations on the Administration of the Province of Assam by Baboo Anandaram Dakeal Phookan” in Appendix J. In the Mill’s Report on the Province of Assam, second edition, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 1984, p. 132. It is interesting that the contemporary Bengal also does not portray a better alternative either in case of morality. For details, see Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay Ed, *Sambadpatre Sekaler Katha*, Vol.II, pp. 270-71, Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, Kolkata, 1991.
 20. See Assam Buranji, Publication Board Assam, 1972, p.172, as well as his article, *Agar Din aru Etiyar Din* (Older Days and the Present Time) in his own edited newspaper, ‘*Assam Bandhu*’.
 21. For details see, Kanailal Chattopadhyay ed. *Assame Cha Kuli Andolan O Ramkumar Vidyaratna* (in Bengali), Papyrus, Kolkata, 1989.
 22. See, Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, Cambridge University Press, 1999, New Delhi, p.55.
 23. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, ‘Caste, Widow-remarriage and Reform of Popular Culture’ in Bharati Ray Ed, *From the Seams of History, Essays on Indian Women*, Oxford University Press, 1997, pp.8-36.
 24. Sumanta Bannerjee, *The Marginalization of Popular Culture*, in Kumkum Sangri and Sudesh Vaid Ed, *Recasting Women, Essays on Colonial India*, Kali for Women, 1989, pp.127-179.
 25. Mills Reoprt, ibid, p.619.

26. Mills Report, ibid, also see, Benudhar Sarma, Maniram Dewan (a biography in Assamese) 3rd Edition, Guwahati, 1993, p.270.
27. Ved Prakash Baruah, Addicts, Peddlers and Reformers: A Social History of Opium in Assam, PhD Theses, Cardiff University, 2016.
28. For Young Bengal, see Sivanath Shastri, Ramtanu Lahiri O Tatkalin Bangia Samaj (in Bengali), Kolkata, 2003.
29. See Bolinarayan Bora's essay, 'Chah Bagichar Kuli' in his own edited short lived newsmagazine '*Mou*' (The Bee), 1886. His views were however contested by Lakshminath Bezbarooah and Bora was professional enough to publish the criticism in his magazine. Later, Bezbarooah lamented at his role in killing the journalistic professionalism as showed by Borah.
30. For Line System see, A.C. Bhuyan and S. Dey Ed, Political History of Assam, Vol. II, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, pp. 300-315.
31. Census Report of Assam 1933, Part, 1, by C.S. Mullan, pp.98-103. Interestingly, the colonial state which was mainly responsible in the population reshuffle remained unquestioned. This remained a major lacuna in understanding of the Assamese nationalists even after Independence. Unfortunately, even after Independence Assam was to accommodate a huge influx of immigrants and even today the issue of the Burmese Rohingyas are placed in the shoulders of Assam and the North East.