

Chapter 3

The Dialogic of Assamese Nationalism

As discussed in the introductory chapter, the French Revolution of 1789 saw the widespread adoption of the term nationalism, which played a crucial role in the formation and development of contemporary nationalism. The French held the view that a State should represent and advance the interests of a people, or a "nation," and that this interest was manifested and that there was a sense of unity among those who share a common language, history, culture, race, custom, geographic limits, economic status, and heritage. The ideal foundation for a nation-state was a sense of national identity and consciousness. If we travel back to ancient times, we discover that the word "natio," which we use now to refer to birth or descent, was used in ancient Rome. The question of whether nationalism existed in ancient Rome has been debated in several literature, both for and against the claim. 'Natio' in ancient Rome, according to Ray Taras, meant "birth or decent," and Cicero used it in regard to aristocracy (Taras 1), although Jayaprakash Narayan claims it signified a "backward tribe" (Narayan 257). Recent nationalist discourse holds that modern nationalism only emerged during the French Revolution with the "right of self-determination, ridding itself of alien control and imperialism, setting up a free national state of its own people." (Hayes, 1960, 77). Prior to 1884, according to Hobsbawm, the word "nacion" in Spanish denoted both "a foreigner" and "the total population of a province, country, or kingdom" (Hobsbawm 14). Nation was mostly used to refer to a racial group by the 12th century. There is proof that some medieval historians and socialists frequently used the word "nation" in their writings. However, after World War II, the majority of contemporary philosophers held the belief that nationalism was a recent idea that arose in the 18th and 19th centuries. The term 'Nationalism' had been coined in Europe to indicate the rise of national sentiment within the established nation-state. The concept of nation and nationalism is a relatively new one that emerged from Europe within the last 200 to 300 years, which is likely why there are many different definitions of it and why there is little consensus on any of them. Nationalism, according to Gellner, "is not the awakening of the nation to self-consciousness; it invents nations when they do not exist." (169). According to Gellner, nationalism does not result in a rise in the national consciousness. In this regard, Anderson contends that Gellner overemphasizes the idea that nations are fictitious while neglecting to mention that by doing so, he recognizes the existence of "true communities"

that could later ingeniously pass for nations. He continues by saying that anything that has face-to-face contact outside of a primitive hamlet is predictable in the environment.

The nationalism that we talk about in India falls under the Eastern Nationalism but is influenced by western nationalist ideology. The majority of the early Indian leaders under the British Raj had a sense of nationalism comparable to that of the West. Rabindranath Tagore stated his scepticism over the viability of implementing the Western nationalism in India because the nation-culture and racial variety of the west were not as diverse as those of India. After independence, it was revealed that his fears were accurate because nationalism was solely seen as a means of achieving political sovereignty. Additionally, because of the nation's variety, that includes a wide range of ethnic groups and languages, it created an ongoing difficulty. From the standpoint of India, Assamese Nationalism is somewhat different. It is important to investigate the events that occurred before and after 1826 in order to objectively and historically assess the phenomena of the growth of Nationalism in Assam. This chapter makes the case that the idea of "nation formation" is irreconcilable with any form of contemporary nationalism based on language and ethnicity. What we refer to as *Jatigothon prokriya* in Assamese requires a different kind of comprehension. This chapter makes the case that a nation can be constituted based on the principle of compositeness, which bypasses the restrictive confines of Western nationalism, by rejecting the Western model of nationalism, which is founded on a capitalist-corporate foundation.

Sankardev's reformatory practices through the Bhakti movement might be seen as a dynamic type of composite nationalism because of this. While it rejects the ideas of little nationalism, Sankardev created a wider canvas that was capable of accommodating people from diverse cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds to create a composite nation. To ascertain each group's place within the broader framework of the composite Assamese identity, this study focuses on critically analyzing the sub-nationalist goals of the numerous Assamese ethnic tribal groupings. The chapter argues that the existence of several sub-nationalistic aspirations among different ethno-linguistic groupings in Assam serves as evidence that the Assamese Nation is fictional. "Ethnos" refers to a group of people who are historically rooted in one another and who have distinctive psychological traits, shared cultural characteristics, and a sense of their own identity and uniqueness from other groups.

The chapter explains how Assamese traditional tribal tribes used the idea of indignity to build their "Imagined Community." In Assam, efforts are being made to understand the modern tribal ethnic communities, where people may or may not know one

another but yet consider themselves to be a part of the same group, much like Benedict Anderson suggested in his notion of the Imagined Community. The study also investigates the relationships that exist between the various Assamese ethnic and tribal groupings and determines whether those communities believe themselves to be Assamese.

Ethnonationalism in Northeast India:

Ethno-nationalism in Northeast India is a significant phenomenon that has shaped the region's political and social landscape. The Northeastern states of India, comprising Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim, are home to a diverse range of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups. The region's ethno-nationalist movements are characterized by demands for greater autonomy, cultural preservation, and recognition of unique identity and rights for specific ethnic communities.

Some key aspects of ethno-nationalism in Northeast India are that the region's diverse ethno-cultural groups often seek recognition and protection of their distinct identities and cultures. Ethno-nationalist movements in the region demand greater autonomy, rights over land and resources, and protection of their languages and traditional practices. But we came across that some ethno-nationalist movements in Northeast India have gone beyond autonomy demands and have called for secession from the Indian state. For instance, separatist movements in the Naga Hills, Lushai Hills and Assam, Manipur and Tripura advocated for independent states based on ethnic lines. Separatist violence coexists with interethnic conflicts over opportunities and resources, in which the state feels conflicted and powerless to intervene (Hasan 291). Several ethno-nationalist movements in the Northeast have taken up arms to pursue their demands, leading to prolonged insurgencies in the region. These armed conflicts have posed security challenges and have affected the socio-economic development of the region. These movements in Northeast India often draw upon historical grievances, perceived marginalization, and alleged exploitation by the central government. These narratives have contributed to a sense of alienation among some communities.

The Northeastern states share porous borders with neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Myanmar, Bhutan and China, and it's a highly sensitive location as only 2 percent of its total area of land touches the mainly India. Cross border insurgency and other geopolitical factors are responsible for the ethnic dispute and ethnic insurgency (P Phukon 148). Moreover, concerns over illegal migration have fuelled ethno-nationalist sentiments, which Lt. Gen S.K.Sinha mentioned that, "This led to the start of a students' movement

demanding detection, deletion and deportation of illegal migrants in Assam and later the ULFA was started as an armed wing of the movement with secessionist agenda". (Sinha 32). Some groups view migration as a threat to their identity, culture, and political representation.

Ethno-nationalist movements have also led to territorial disputes between different states in the region, such as the long-standing border dispute between Assam and Nagaland, Mizoram, Assam and between other states also. Ethno-nationalist movements advocate for the preservation and promotion of indigenous cultures, languages, and customs. They seek recognition and protection of their unique cultural heritage. All these movements have sometimes led to tensions and conflicts between different ethnic communities in the region, resulting in violence and social disharmony. Therefore, it is essential to recognize that the region's ethno-nationalist movements are diverse and multifaceted, with varying degrees of popular support and objectives. The complexities of the issues in Northeast India require a nuanced and inclusive approach to address the concerns of different communities and promote lasting peace and development in the region. Efforts to address the root causes of ethno-nationalism, promote dialogue, and strengthen intercommunity understanding are crucial for fostering stability and unity in Northeast India.

Literary works on Ethnonationalism in Northeast India

The issue of ethnonationalism in Northeast India has been explored and depicted in various literary works. These works provide insights into the region's socio-political complexities, identity struggles, and the impact of ethno-nationalist movements. Arupa Patangia Kalita's *The Story of Felanee* (2011) shows the threats of cultural and ethnonational resurgence for hybrid identities. *When the River Sleeps* (2014) by Easterine Kire tells the story of a lone hunter and his journey through the mountains of Nagaland. It captures the beauty of the region's landscapes while reflecting on the impact of historical conflicts and the desire for autonomy. *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* (2006) by Temsula Ao delves into the complexities of Naga society and the effects of conflict and ethnonationalism on everyday life. Her work exemplifies the ethnonationalist resurgence and shows the problems of insider-outsider (Biswas & Das 2021). These literary works offer diverse perspectives on the complexities of ethno-nationalism in Northeast India. They shed light on the region's unique cultural identities, aspirations for autonomy, and the challenges faced by communities amid socio-political unrest. Through the lens of literature, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the multifaceted issues that shape the

region's narrative and its place within the broader Indian context. Ethno-nationalism in the poetry of Northeast India has been a recurring theme, reflecting the region's diverse cultural identities, historical struggles, and aspirations for self-determination. Poets from the Northeast often use their verses to express the complexities of ethno-nationalist movements, the impact of conflict, and the longing for recognition and autonomy.

Here are some poets and their works that touch upon the theme of ethno-nationalism in Northeast India: Mamang Dai's *River Poems* (2004) often reflects the pristine landscapes of Arunachal Pradesh and the connection between the land and its people. Her verses convey a sense of cultural preservation and the desire to safeguard the region's unique identity amid the pressures of modernity. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih's *Moments* (1992) delves into the cultural diversity of Meghalaya, celebrating the Khasi heritage while addressing the challenges of identity and representation faced by the North-eastern communities. His *The Yearning of Seeds* (2011) addresses themes of identity, history, and cultural heritage, reflecting the ethnonationalist sentiments prevalent in the region. These poets offer unique perspectives on the issues of ethno-nationalism in Northeast India through their artistic expression. Their poetry celebrates the rich cultural tapestry of the region, contemplates the impact of historical struggles, and articulates the aspirations for self-determination and recognition. Through their verses, they contribute to a deeper understanding of the sociopolitical complexities and the diverse narratives that shape the poetry of Northeast India. Assamese literature also offer diverse perspectives on the Assam agitations, separatist movement portraying the social, political, and emotional impact of the agitation on the lives of the people. They provide insights into the region's historical struggles for identity, cultural preservation, and the quest for social justice. Through these literary works, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of the Assam Movement and its lasting impact on Assamese society and culture. In the next chapter we will try to elaborate the literary impact of it in Assam Nationalism.

Origin of Assamese Nationalism:

In Assam, nationalism originally came into being throughout the liberation struggle. It developed concurrently with the Indian national movement; hence it shared many of the same traits as Indian nationalism. The Assamese individuals' revolutionary feelings sprang into focus as an outsider seized command of the state's politics and economy. It should be remembered that Assam was independent till the establishment of

the British Raj in 1826 and was not an element of any of the historical dynasties dominating India. The Kamakhya temple, however, serves as historical proof of its numerous cultural ties to the rest of India. In the past, Assam, which is in India's northeast, was known as Pragjyotisha and Kamrupa (S Baruah 71). Assam only became known as "Asama", which means "peerless" or "uneven", during the reign of the Ahoms. Pragjyotishpur was its capital. Later the territory came to be known as Kamrupa where political dynasty like the Barmanas, Salasthambha and Palas ruled for a long time leaving a mark in Indian History. During the medieval period, Assam, which was an independent territory, was mostly ruled by the Ahom dynasty in the Brahmaputra Valley, some parts by the Koches, and few areas were ruled by hilly tribe chieftains. Koch Behar or the Koch kingdom which was related to the Brahmaputra Valley was also an independent territory, but they were the first to become a tributary to the Company in 1773. According to Sir Edward Gait's *A History of Assam*, the Ahom rulers were keenly interested in recording their history and had preserved a full chronicle of their rule beginning in the early 13th Century, unlike the rest of India, which had any sense of history. He refers to Assam throughout this entire book as a separate entity from India and notes that it was able to maintain its independence despite repeated attempts to subjugate it to the Mughals, as opposed to the Mughals and their Islamic authority, which were controlling the rest of India. The Ahoms were essentially a Shan tribe that had migrated to Assam at the beginning of the thirteenth century. The priestly class was given the responsibility of recording this history in *Buranjis*, as Ahom Kings had a strong desire to preserve it. (Gait 318)

We need to note that those *Buranjis* were composed using Pali characters in the erstwhile Shan tribal vernacular. This tradition was continued in the Assamese language when the Ahoms converted themselves in large numbers to Hinduism, which brought their ancient tribal language dangerously close to extinction. H.K. Barpujari adds, "After the conversion of the Ahoms to Hinduism the *Buranjis* came to be written in Assamese" (H Barpujari 2). Therefore, it is asserted that the *Buranjis'* adoption of Assamese rather than their native tongue was a sign of the Ahoms' Indianization and the creation of their Imagined Nation. The Ahom kingdom was in a state of anarchy and internal strife when the Burmese invaded Assam, and overthrew King Chandrakanta Singha, and confronted the British colonies, who up to that point had refrained from meddling in Assam's internal affairs. The atrocity and agony of the people can only be felt who saw the deadly atrocities. The Burmese army's persecution was intolerable because no one could be certain of his

money, reputation, or even his life. They killed many innocent people in addition to robbing anyone who had anything of value, burning villages and even temples, violating the modesty of both old and young ladies, and robbing everyone else who had anything worth taking (Gait 265).

Due to repeated clashes between the British and Burmese as well as aggressive behavior on British soil, the British decided to use force to retaliate. With few options remaining, the shattered Burmese army was pressured in 1826 to unconditionally ratify the Treaty of Yandaboo, which ceded control of Assam to the British. It is stated that at this point, the concept of Assam as it existed during the Ahom Kingdom had disappeared. Thus, the Ahom Kingdom existed from 1228 to 1826, when British India and then Burma signed the Treaty of Yandaboo. The British occupation of this territory was first considered as what S.L. Baruah points out, “In the beginning, the members of the Assamese ruling classes, including the royalist *Satradhikars*, hailed them with ‘unbound joy’ and extended them the most loyal co-operation. They hoped to maintain their power and privileges secure under the Company’s protection” (Baruah457). It is difficult to pinpoint the exact year that Assamese nationalism first emerged, however Anuradha Dutta mentions that it happened in the nineteenth century as a resistance to British colonization (Dutta 56). Whereas Amalendu Guha is of the view that only the older portion of the Ahom kingdom was referred to as Asam (Assam), although Bharata or Bharatavarsha, a term used to describe the geographic unity of India in the Assamese Vaishnava literature of the time, was well-known. One Assamese poet-saint from the 16th century even went so far as to boast about having been born in the holy famed Bharatavarsha. He added, “Both the language and the people associated with it came to be designated, for the first time as ‘Asamiya’ (Assamese) only after the British take-over” (A Guha 89). The Assamese people’s anti-colonial sentiment generated a sense of solidarity in culture, race, language, and custom, which set the ground for the emergence of nationalism, which grew concurrently in Assam.

David Scott, the Governor-General of India’s agent for the North East, said back in 1824, the Company’s presence in the region is not for conquest but for defence against the adversary. The motive behind the British interest in this region of India was stated by Amalendu Guha in his book, “Planters Raj to Swaraj”, where he stated that the Moamaria Civil war, followed by the Burmese occupancy of Assam Lands (1817-1824), culminated a period of disorder, anarchy and persecution that had continue since the 1770s. The Raj arrived on the scene under the pretence of saviors of those who were suffering from this

predicament. But the populace soon realized that the Raj had arrived here to stay. Its goal was to adapt local traditional institution to fit the colonial pattern of exploiting and turn Assam into a British tea-drinking agricultural estate (2). The British first took control of the western Assam, also known as the Lower Assam, since it produced more revenue. Gradually, as the political climate improved, the eastern Assam, also known as the Upper Assam, was added to the British realm in 1838. With the British taking over Assam's administration, the state of the populace began to deteriorate due to new administrative practices, excessive taxation, and poor management. So here started the first Anti-British or Anti-Colonial sentiments among the people of Assam. In between 1828 for the first time, there began a resistance movement against the foreign interference and to restore the Ahom regime, but it could not lead to success.

Formation of Assamese Nationalism:

Assam was introduced to the working class in the sense of business, trade, labour, bureaucrats, clerks, attorneys, physicians, and other professionals by the British in an effort to better their own conditions. Bengali eventually became the official language of Assam from 1837 to 1873 as a result of the British administration system's accumulation of the majority of the working class from Bengal. Ironically, according to Amalendu Guha, the colonial administration established Bengali as the official language of the province after first encouraging immigration into Assam from neighboring Bengal. This served as the initial impetus for the Assamese to develop a sense of community. Additionally, he adds that the "continuous shadow of Bengali-Assamese warfare" played a role in the two-track process of nationalism formation in nineteenth-century Assam. People were becoming more interested in pan-Indian nationalism on an all-Indian level just as much as they were in linguistic-regional nationalism, according to Guha (2006).

H.K. Barpujari added that, after the commercial treaty with the British in 1793, it

Opened the gates to the merchants of Bengal to enter into the interior of the province, it was not until British occupation of Assam when avenues of employment both in office and trade were opened that the inflow of population from the districts of Sylhet, Dacca, Mymensingh and Rangpur actually began. (Barpujari 62)

New arrivals from Bengal worked mostly in the tax and judicial departments, but they were also hired to teach the curriculum in the newly established government schools in Assam because Bengali was the official language of instruction there. S.L. Baruah added that even though they weren't monopolists, some Bengali settlers engaged in trade and commerce and had disagreements with the native traders. But during this juncture while some members of the feudal classes sought to amass riches and fortune with British assistance, many others opposed the British (S Baruah 589). For the Assamese, along with the anti-British sentiments, anti-Bengali feelings started, as Barpujari quoted Robinson's view that,

All that the Assamese knew of the Bengali character from the observation of the life led by the Bengali omlah employed in the country (is that he was) by no means a favourable specimen...they have a very low opinion of the virtue of the Bengali. (Barpujari, 63)

However, because there were no other employment options for the upper classes other than government employment, economic factors more than cultural or linguistic dominance contributed to disagreements among them. Barpujari further added that sympathisers and supporters shared their sentiments to a large extent, which was emphasised during the period of administrative disarray when it was widely believed that the amlahs were the cause of all misfortunes (Barpujari 63). Assamese dissatisfaction was brought about by the arrival of laborers in the shape of officials, investors, financiers, clerks, and laborers in the tea trade. There was some insurrection and popular rebellion in opposition to the Company Raj. The Assamese people were placed in an undesirable and unworthy position by the prevalence of Bengali babus in the administrative offices and the designation of Bengali as the national language. Three major factor influenced the ground for public expression of grievances in the region, as pointed out by Priyam Goswami, "First, the spread of British administration and its associated infrastructure; secondly the cultural activities of the American Baptist Missionaries and thirdly the impact of Renaissance in Bengal" (Goswami 22).

Role of Assamese Press and Public Association:

English schools and printing presses established under the aegis of the government or by missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century served to propagate western education

and ideas among the population. Before the printing of Assamese journal or newspaper from Assam, some periodicals and newspapers published news and articles related to Assam from Bengal. Some of those are namely *Samachar Darpan*, *Samachar Chandrika*, *Somprakash*, *Sanjivani*, *Digdarshan* and *Friends of India* (P Goswami 204). The Assamese Press started with the publication of first Assamese monthly, “Orunodoi” which was said to be as “devoted to religion, science and general intelligence” (S Baruah 510). *Orunodoi* was published by O.T. Cutter on behalf of Baptist Mission Press from Sibsagar in 1846, edited by Nathan Brown in the model of *Samachar Darpan*, and it was basically set up for the publication of Christian literature. But it solidified the Western liberal and secular heritage in Assamese literature. Moreover, for the first time the common got the opportunity of some reading material, which in long run created such an impact that entire period came to call as “Orunodoi era” (P Goswami 205). After few a decade, *Assam Bilasini*, (1871-83) the first newspaper in Assamese was published from Majuli, by Duttadev Goswami, *Satradhikar* of Auniati *Satra*, to promote Vaishnavism and in contrary to missionary activities. Later others like *Assam Mihir*, *Assam Darpan*, *Assam Dipika*, *Chandrodaya*, *Assam News*, *Assam Bandhu*, *Mau*, *Bijuli*, *Usha*, *Banti*, *Banhi*, *The Times of Assam*, *The Advocate of Assam* were published depicting the news and views. From the Surma Valley, *Srihatta Mihir*, *Paridarshak* and *Silchar* were also published. Among the above mentioned, notable was the *Assam News* (1882-85), edited by Hem Chandra Barua which was an Anglo-Assamese weekly, created a public opinion of employment, plantation and other issues. Another notable was the *Assam Bandhu* (1885-86), edited by Gunabhram Barua and the other one was *Mau*, which was monthly newspaper. Though short lived but both provided the platform for development of Assamese literature, and inspiring articles on various issues.

After the Orunodoi era, a new era began in Assam with the publication of *Jonaki* (1889-96) edited by Chandra Kumar Agarwala. This was known as the “Jonaki era”. In his introductory note titled “Atmakatha”, Chandra Kumar Agarwala asserts that *Jonaki* would focus exclusively on literature, science, and society, with a special attention paid to saving the Assamese language from oblivion. *Jonaki* decides it will ignore politics altogether. Promoting Assamese among Assamese citizens was its main goal. Their main strategy was to boost Assamese literary production while also demonstrating the language's long history. (Sengupta, 2016).

Along with the Assamese press, public associations also contributed a major role in raising consciousness among the Assamese. The Assam Desh Hitaishini Sabha, Sibsagar

(1855); the Jnan-Pradayani Sabha, Nowgong (1857-59), Assamese Literary Society, Calcutta (1872) and Assamiya Bhasha Unnati Sadhini Sabha (1888) served as important meeting place for contemporary issues, but most of their agenda were cultural and literary. The Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha, the Assam Association, the Surma Valley Political Association and also the Ryot Sabhas got involved in the serious socio-political activity of the province and highlighted national consciousness and political regeneration. The Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha, founded in 1884 by Jagannath Barua, was the most effective political organisation. The sabha mainly represented the wishes of the people to government, discussed about the government policies and also tried to raise popular discontent and grievances to the government. The Assam Association, which was formed in 1903, at first wanted to pursue an upward movement within the colonial framework, but when they failed to get a listen of the government facing obstacle at every step, “it snowballed into Assamese nationalism” (Goswami 26).

During this time the proposal for partition of Bengal was declared and along with Bengal, the people of Assam were shocked when it was learned that Assam will be a part of Eastern Bengal and its capital will be transferred from Shillong to Dacca. In the Surma Valley, the call of Swadeshi and boycott was responded immediately, and in the Brahmaputra valley, it was spearheaded by the Assam Association. Protest meetings were held in several places.

Among the surveys of Assam's colonial past, the pioneering work of Amalendu Guha is noteworthy. He presents colonial Assam as a case of contending hegemonies in as much as national and regional sentiments co-existed as the two dominant ideologies during the colonial period. According to Guha, it was the colonial state that provided the initial stimuli for the growth of community consciousness among the Assamese by first encouraging outsider immigration into Assam and then by imposing Bengali as the official language of the province. The author states that the outsider agitation in Assam stemmed from the apprehension that the Assamese would be turned into a minority in their own state. In several ways the British also fanned the fire of regionalism in Assam While presenting the census report of 1931, G.S. Mullan, a European civil servant, prophesied that Sibsagar would ultimately remain the only district where the Assamese would find a home of his or her own. Such statements were definitely provocative (Guha 212). In this Gohain adds that, “...but other Englishmen in the Legislative Assembly posed as friends of the immigrants” (Gohain 35). But the most significant motivator, according to Guha, was the economic implications of Bengali middle-class immigration. He identifies four categories of

immigrants to Assam in the nineteenth century- (1) Tea Garden labourers (2) migrants from East Bengal prior to independence (3) Hindus who came as a result of migration and (4) the Nepalis who came in search of livelihood. Of these, the Nepalis and the tea garden labourers did not compete with the natives for jobs, a factor, which rendered them more acceptable to the local people. The case of the Bengali immigrants was, however, different. Guha points out that the immigrant Bengali Hindus competed with the dominant Assamese linguistic group for land, jobs and local power. This led to conflict and tension. Hiren Gohain also attributes the beginning of the community consciousness in Assam to colonial decisions that generated among the Assamese a fear that they would be eventually marginalised in their own homeland. At the same time, he agrees with the former on the economic impulse behind the consolidation of 'ethnic' sentiments among the Assamese. However, the similarity ends here, for Gohain harps on yet another factor that apparently played a crucial role in inspiring mobilisation on the issue of language in Assam- the chauvinistic attitude of a section of the Bengalis in Assam, He claimed that prominent Bengalis frequently seemed to endorse the colonial rulers' policy of ignoring Assam. For instance, they opposed suggestions for a separate university or railway zone for Assam. The common guy, whether Assamese or tribal, frequently met the government in the form of the menial Bengali official, therefore it is claimed that he harbored a blind hate towards Bengalis. Gohain is hardly the first author to hold Assam's Bengali settlers responsible for its problems. (Gohain 173) Many authors have prioritized 'Bengali chauvinism' as the key factor that antagonized the Assamese and contributed to the growth of community consciousness among them. In *India Against Itself* by Sanjib Baruah, offered fresh insights into the historical understanding of the Assamese identity. Baruah states that more than any other factor, "colonial geography" shaped "the projects of people hood in Assam- the Assamese sub-national narrative and the counter-narratives as well as the political agendas that followed from these narratives" (Baruah 47).

The Assamese language received prominence and advancement thanks to the literary works of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan and others. When they returned to Assam from studying in Kolkata, some Assamese students who had experienced the Bengal Renaissance pushed for the improvement of the Assamese language. Nationalism evolved from its early twentieth-century form later, with the growth of linguistic and ethno-nationalism. The publication of the Asamiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha's journal *Jonaki* signalled the start of a new phase in Assamese literature. The invention of the printing press caused literature to flourish and certain political works to emerge, which helped Assamese

tribes and communities feel more united. The development and growth of press in Assam resulted in a general awakening among the people. The Ryot Sabhas, the Assam Association, the Surma Valley Political Association, and the Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha- all participated in the province's significant socio-political activities and emphasized political renewal and national consciousness. Regional allegiances began to form as nationalism in the country grew as well.

In this essay, I try to attempt on how “small nationalism” first appeared in Assamese vernacular history. While examining the role that educated Assamese youth and missionaries played in restoring Assamese to its full splendor after Bengali was replaced in 1873, this paper also highlights the difficulties associated with Assamese “little nationalism” in setting of post-colonial Assam. A brief review of Assam's political history and the resulting language transformation in the first half of the nineteenth century could add to the concerns of this study before presenting the vernacular resurgence of Assamese in the nineteenth century. The formidable Ahom monarchy was overthrown by the Burmese Army after dominating for over six centuries starting in 1228. Between, 1817-1826, the neighboring Burmese ruler invaded three times to the Ahom kingdom, monetarily bringing it under their authority. The Ahom king requested assistance from the East India Company, which dispatched troops to battle the Burmese Army to help him restore his lost realm. The East India Company armies prevailed in the First Anglo-Burmese War, which took place in 1826 and took control of this territory. The Ahom kingdom was incorporated into British India because of the Treaty of Yandaboo, which was signed in 1826. The consequences of Assam's annexation to British India were not simply political; they also began to affect linguistic, cultural, and other aspects of life. The East India Company brought personnel from the adjoining state of modern-day West Bengal to ensure smooth administration. S. N. Sarma, a literary historian, suggests two potential justifications for bringing in outsiders. First, the British likely had trouble trusting Assamese intellectuals and aristocracy, and second, these groups lacked any prior knowledge of the British administrative structure (Sarma, 2009). In truth, David Scott first engaged former Ahom kingdom officials in the tax and judicial departments, but due to their inexperience and unfamiliarity with the new system, they were unsuitable for employment at the lower levels of the administrative hierarchy. The Company's management then began importing Bengali clerks and Bengali was established as the court language in Assam in 1836 by the Company administration since it served as the official language of the Bengali clerks employed by the British in Assam. The authorities of Calcutta were of the impression that, “Assamese was only patois

of the Bengalee language and had no literature of its own” (Barpujari 139). Bengali's adoption as the court language and the primary language of teaching in schools was a major setback for Assamese language and literature, which had developed a sophisticated written heritage of buranjis and Vaishnavite literature during the medieval era.

After the American Baptist Missionaries installed a printing press at Sivasagar (formerly known as Sibsagar) in 1840, however, the situation started to alter. A few years later, at the Mission's request, the government provided some financial assistance to the missionaries without challenging the official position of neutrality in religious matters. Later missionary literature was affected by these political events. It would be exaggerated to claim that the missionaries alone were responsible for pressing Assamese on the British Government.

Assamese people began to worry about losing their people, their own cultural identity shortly after Assam was annexed by the East India Company and after the province was included under the Bengal Presidency, as the rising number of outsiders, particularly Bengalis were immigrated into the province, and also for the subsequent adoptions of Bengali as the official language in Assam rather than Assamese. As a result, the educated and aristocratic class of Assam developed a political consciousness.

According to Sanjib Baruah, “Assamese micro nationalism began in the middle of the nineteenth century as an assertion of the autonomy and distinctiveness of Assamese language and culture against the British colonial view of Assam as a periphery of Bengal” (Baruah:1994). A few Assamese-educated youths who were working hard to restore Assamese to its fallen pedestal joined the efforts of American Baptist missionaries in the middle of the nineteenth century. Among them is Anandaram Dhekial Phukan. Concerning the native language, "Phukan highlighted his onslaughts on the wrong done by the British educational policy in Assam through the twin works, *Observation on the Administration of the province of Assam*, submitted to A.J.Moffatt Mills in 1853, and secondly, *A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language and on Vernacular Education in Assam, 1855*”. (Neog 182, 2013). Maniram Dewan and Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, also protested before Mills about the opium trade in Assam (S Baruah 501). Both of them submitted their views when A.J.Moffat Mills came to Assam to enquire about the condition of the province and the measures to improve the administration of the province. Some of the Assamese students who were in Calcutta for their studies, witnessed the Bengal renaissance and while coming back to Assam, they insisted on the betterment of the Assamese language. The establishment of Asmiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhani Sabha whose motto was the improvement

of the Assamese language was a landmark in the history of Assamese literature. A few Remarks on the Assamese Language and Vernacular Education in Assam, a booklet written by Phukan under the penname “A Native” (Neog 187) and published by the Baptist Mission Press in 1855, was sent out to the officials and academics. To prevent Bengali from being utilized as the primary language of instruction in Assam, Phukan and a few Baptist missionaries claimed that keeping Bengali as the primary language of instruction in vernacular schools would impede the advancement of education. However, Phukan and the Baptist Missionaries were against Bengali language’s total elimination. J.F. Moffat Mills made a remarkable statement in his report on Assam in 1854. “By substituting the Assamese we do not mean to suggest that Bengalee should be eliminated from the schools, we are only opposed to its exclusive adoption as the medium of instruction for people in literature, science and other useful branches of knowledge. On the other hand, we believe that it should be cultivated as a language indispensable to complete the course of vernacular education and that the standard Bengali works, should likewise be introduced in the higher classes” (Mills 1854).

Additionally, the first Assamese journal, *Orunodoi*, played a significant part in this vital intersection of indigenous and missionaries by offering venue for the publication of Assamese work. Simultaneously, translations of several religious and nonreligious publications have been printed, bolstering the opposition to Bengali's adoption. Although Phukan's untimely death in 1859 temporarily slowed the pace of the agitation, it continued until Assamese was adopted in the Brahmaputra Valley's courts and schools. Additionally, it would be dishonest to leave out the names of two administrator and academics from Bengal, Ramesh Chandra Dutta, and Asutosh Mukherjee. Based on the Anglo-Assamese dictionary Dr. Bronson created and released in 1867, the former informed the British government that, despite Sanskrit origin words being similar in Assamese and Bengali, "the Bengalee differs from Assamese in the short familiar words". Assamese was one of the first subjects offered as post-graduate study option at Calcutta University under the initiative of Mukherjee. Hemchandra Barua and Gunabhiram Barua joined the movement to revive Assamese language during the later portion of the missionary era. Additionally, Gunabhiram supported the Assamese language by writing several letters in *Orunodoi* from Calcutta. While reviewing the assistance provided by missionaries to Assamese language and literature during its trying time, S.N. Sarma said that it would be incorrect to claim that they had taken care of them and prevented their nearing extinction. By battling the British authorities, they contributed to the restoration of Assamese in the classroom and the legal

system. Missionaries' writings provided a conduit for the introduction of Western ideas and philosophy into Assamese culture (Sarma: 2009).

Development of Assamese Language and Literature:

The importance of language is without a doubt, one of the most important cultural traits of nationality, and it always has been the role of language in the creation and maintenance of national identity is undeniably important. The present day Assam was never a distinct political state before the East India Company acquired it. Even at its height, the Ahom dynasty was unable to conquer all of modern-day Assam. As a result, there was no such thing as an Assamese political identity. But in the 15th and 16th centuries, NeoVaishnavism which was spread by Saint Sankardev and then by Saint Madhavdev, did make some progress in unifying people of different ethnic backgrounds under a unified religious identity. The development of the Indo-Aryan Assamese language in what is otherwise known as the territory of people of Mongoloid descent tribes can be attributed in large part to Neo-Vaishnavism. The colonial regime helped the process of Assamese nationality creation by adding the last layer of linguistic nationalism, according to Gohain (1985). The seeds of this process can be seen in the old Kamrupa itself. Furthermore, the spread of Western education and the quickening development of communication technologies in the nineteenth century were directly tied to this stratum of linguistic nationalism. It is evident that by treating the Assam region as an extension of Bengal province, the Company administration multiplied the fear of cultural domination by the Bengali among Assamese people. However, there is a disagreement among modern experts as to what is causing the struggle between Bengali and Assamese. While some academics blame the British administration for its "divide and rule" tactics, Assamese nationalists accuse Bengalis, particularly Bengali elites of conspiring against them. One of the most significant events in Assam's history occurred in 1873, when Lieutenant Governor Sir George Campbell declared that Assamese would be declared as the official language of schools and courts (Goswami 221). The Assamese language ultimately restored its ideal position in 1873 after being neglected by the British authority for about four decades (1836-1873 AD).

Apurba Baruah makes the case that both the divide and rule strategy of the British and the Bengali elites of Bengal may have helped the establishment of the Bengali language in Assam. Although the British government recognized the uniqueness of the Assamese

language in 1873 and replace Bengali with Assamese in offices and schools in Assam through a Gazette notification, the Assamese-Bengali language conflict did not conclude at that time. Instead, it continued and created a Pandora's Box in the years following independence. (A Baruah 1991)

Every type of Nationalism, whether it is political or linguistic, is always fought from various outlying perspectives. In 1835, the American Baptist Missionaries, then known as the Shan Mission, made their first attempt to travel from Burma to Sadiya, a location in Upper Assam. A mission facility was established in Sadiya in 1836 by Nathan Brown and Oliver Thomas Cutter, who were called from Burma (Myanmar) with a printing press. Dr. Miles Bronson also joined them in the mission a few month later. Although the British encouraged the use of Bengali as the court language and the primary language of instruction in schools, the missionaries quickly realized that Bengali was not the Assamese people's native tongue and that to convert more people to Christianity, it would be necessary to use Assamese. As a result, they began publishing books in Assamese to promote their evangelistic efforts and expand their audience. They also began printing Assamese-language dictionaries, grammar, and other helpful material at the same time. By 1846, fourteen Assamese-medium schools were operating in and around Sibsagar. The next forty years, from 1830 to 1870 the missionaries carried on with literary activities. The modern age of Assamese literature is thought to have begun in 1830.

The first Assamese language dictionaries and grammar were printed during the missionary era. Oliver Thomas Cutter's wife, Harriet Low Cutter, released English-Assamese Vocabulary and Phrases in 1840. Nathan Brown produced the first grammar of the Assamese language the Gramatical Notices of the Assamese Language and published it in 1848 from the American Baptist Press, Sibsagar, rejecting the official idea that Assamese is a dialect of Bengali. In two volumes, *Pada Ganit* and *Lilavati*, Brown assembled and published Kitabat Manjari by Bakul Kayastha, a prominent mathematician from Kamrup kingdom. Important translations include *Padartha Bidyasara* (1855), a translation of E.W. Clark's *Natural Science in Familiar Dialoge* by Nidihiram Keot, and *Gananar Puthi* (1844). Based on Jaduram Deka Baruah's unpublished dictionary, Nathan Brown with inclusion of almost fourteen thousand words, published the first Asomiya and English dictionary, which was printed at American Baptist Mission Press in 1867. (Neog Rachanavali 230-31). Devendranath Bezbaroa in his *Asomiya Bhasha aru Sahityar Buranji* highlighted that Miles Bronson produced and released Dictionary in Assamese and English

in 1867 in which “The fourteen thousand words here collected will be found primarily in daily use by the people that no Bengali scholar will understand”, he said in the prologue “Many of these words were written as they came out of people’s mouth” (Bezbaroa 16) *Amaar Traankorta Jisu Chirstor Natun Niyom*, a translation of the New Testament into Assamese, was released in 1848. In addition, Brown also released *Christor Bibaran aru Shubhovarta* in 1854, a collection of translation of the Bible’s four Gospels. Its important to note that the Bible was first published in Assamese in 1813 through the Serampore Missionary Press of Bengal, far earlier than the advent of the American Baptist Mission and the establishment of printing presses in Assam. Additionally, the Baptist Missionary Press in Sivasagar printed the first Assamese journal, *Orunodoi* or *Arunodoi* in January 1846. By starting translation projects from the Western kinds of literature, *Orunodoi* gave Assamese literature a fresh perspective. Sanskrit was the only language that served as the source for all translations or adaptations into Assamese before *Orunodoi* began publishing *Jatrikar Jatra*, the Assamese translation of John Bunyan’s “The Pilgrims Progress” in 1850-51. Although the translator’s name was omitted, Brown is widely thought to be the one who translated. Goswami makes the following observation about the language employed in *Jatrikar Jatra*- “This was a conscientious translation; however, the vocabulary of the time seems to be archaic. The missionaries tried to adhere to the Assamese spoken form and avoided adopting Sanskritic-style vocables for new words, nut they were still unable to regulate the language’s sentence structure, which resulted in some funny constructions (Goswami 1970). Intriguingly, even though Miles Bronson and other Baptist missionaries were sent to Assam by British colonialists to advance their imperialist agendas, they realized, “that they need to use the vernacular medium to spread Christianity” (P. Goswami 220). Goswami further added that, the missionaries, who typically sided with the government when it came to social legislation, disagreed with the government’s stance on language, and through the *Orunodoi*, they fervently argued in favour of the Assamese language. Additionally, the Mission’s attitude towards the Assamese vernacular was obviously at odds with British policy, which further deepened the gap between the two (220).

Meanwhile the Christian missionary, with establishment of school imparted western education and publication of *Oronodoi*, the first journal of Assam, renaissance in Assamese literature can be seen. The missionaries though contributed to the enrichment of Assamese literature, but most of the works “lacked originity and were artificial” (Barpujari

136). Nonetheless, it almost opened the door for flourishing of Assamese literature. The American Baptist Mission Foreign Society disseminated Western knowledge and inspired the younger generation of Assamese and paved the way for an intellectual awakening. It was “the trinity” of Hemchandra Baruah, Gunabhiram Baruah and Anandaram Dhekial Phukan who laid the foundation of modern Assamese language and literature. Later the emergence of *Jonaki*, an Assamese monthly, brought a new era in Assamese literature. Chandra Kumar Agarawala, Hem Chandra Goswami and Lakshminath Bezbaroa were instrumental in bringing renaissance in Assamese literature. Moreover, the Assamese press played an important role in the revival of Assamese language. *The Assam Bilashini*, *Assam Mihir*, *Assam Darpan*, *Chandradoy*, *Assam Dipika*, *Assam News*, *Assam Bandhu*, *Jonaki*, *Assam*, *Assam Banti*, *The Times of Assam* and others rendered yeomen service for the growth of public opinion and development of language in Assam.

Impact of Assamese Nationalism:

Assamese Nationality, which has the Assamese language at its foundation, is also under attack from several ethno linguistic groups that are located inside Assam’s legislative boundaries. The state’s language policy is mostly to blame for the birth and expansion of ethno national politics in Assam after Independence. Hundreds of Assamese tribal communities have used the Assamese language as a communication toll for millennia. Since the difficult admittance to these areas from the Brahmaputra Valley before the British established themselves in Assam, the hill tribe traditionally never belonged to either Assam or India (Hussain 1987). The main hill tribes in Assam at the time of its unification, including the Nagas, Mizos, Khasis, Jayantias, Garos, Karbis and Dimasa Kacharis each had their independent states. This is likely the cause of the misconception that Assam never existed, at least not recently, and that it is still very different from reality today. Even after colonial Assam encompassed the entirety of Assam, including the hill parts, the British Government was adamant that the hill be governed differently from the plain districts. Assam’s state government had no authority over the hill regions because they were designated as excluded zones under the 1935 Government of India Act, which gave the Governor direct control over them. That is to say, the hill regions had a unique form of administration, which was the only instance in which the concept of a single Assamese identity appeared to exist because all regions were a part of the whole. The six schedules are essentially an adaptation of the Government of India Act, 1935.

Following independence, several areas in the formerly united state of Assam began to split apart into smaller States in a gradual but inevitable process. It is quite important to recall that only 6 lakh people called Nagaland home when it became a state in 1961(Hussain, 1987). In other words, the foundation of a separate state for the Naga Tribes in Nagaland was motivated more by their distinct identity than by the region's population. The prevalent nationalist ideologies, which advocated for the comprehensive assimilation of all nation-state residents, irrespective of their ethnicity, are in opposition to the ethnic ideologies.

“Ethnos” refers to a group of people who are historically rooted in one another and who have distinctive psychological traits, shared cultural characteristics, and a sense of their own identity and uniqueness from other groups. As Sanjib Barua points out that the term “ethno-nationalism” is used to describe a variety of political phenomena, such as nationalism, separatist, secessionism, sub-nationalism, ethnic insurgency, ethnic militancy, or occasionally just regionalism. The best way to describe it is as a “heterogeneous set of nation-oriented idioms, practices, and possibilities that are always available or “endemic” in contemporary cultural and political life” (Baruah 2010). According to Eriksen (1991), Ethnicity has been intensively studied at the levels of interpersonal interaction, township-level fractioning, and rioting, among other levels. He continues by comparing nationalism and ethnicity to ideologies and asserting that both call for their believers to acquire cultural similarities. Intriguingly, Eriksen believes that both ethnicist and nationalist are highly aggressive in their difference with the “Other” in the event of confrontation, much like Tagore (Chakraborty 2017). Then, he uses a very strong statement to distinguish between nationalism and ethnicity, saying that “Unsuccessful Nationalism”, therefore tend to become Ethnicities, whose members reside more or less uncomfortable under the protection of a state with which they do not identify their own nationality or ethnic category”. If we were to contextualize the stipulations of the sixth schedule, which are special privileges granted to particular areas within the state of Assam and other states in Northeast India, it becomes evident that there is a delicate but continuing need to assert and preserve the identity of the groups residing in the regions. The idea of a single Assamese identity is opposed by the existence of the autonomous areas and their unique style of governance, the independent District Councils. Specific events like the Bengali Language movement in Assam in 1961 and the Bodo Roman Script Movement, which followed the imposition of the Assamese Language, provide additional evidence of the lack of desire on

the part of the various communities in Assam to envision themselves as being a part of the Assamese Nation. The existence of the autonomous regions and their means of government, the separate District Councils, are in opposition to the notion of a common Assamese identity. Additionally, specific incidents like the Bodo Roman Script Movement in 1974, which was a result of the imposition of the Assamese Language, and the Assamese Bengali Language Movement in 1961 demonstrate that the various Assamese communities have little desire to envision themselves as being a part of the Assamese Nation. The Assam Movement, which helped to partially cement the idea of the Assamese Nation and finally led to the Assam Accord in 1985, was only able to get off the ground in response to an "external" threat, in this case, undocumented Bangladeshi immigration. The Nellie Massacre, one of this movement's most horrifying episodes, was a series of targeted killings of the presumed "Other," which only served to confirm Tagore's concerns about nationalism.

Similar statehood movements amongst the Bodos, who have long called for an independent Bodoland as well as for sovereignty from India, are unmistakable evidence that there is a persistent endeavor to exist as one nation or community. Similar claims are made by the Dimasa Kacharis of the North Cachar district and the Karbis of the Karbi Anglong. Statehood movements are undeniably prevalent in both contexts to the extent that they cannot be refuted, not even by secessionist sentiments against the Indian State. As diverse communities continued to assert their unique identities, several autonomous councils were established inside Assam's political boundaries. These include the Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Council for the Karbis, Dima Hasao Autonomous District Council for the Dimasa and others and the Bodoland Territorial Council—renamed Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) for Bodos. Moreover, there are six statutory Autonomous Council established by the State Government which includes the Mising Autonomous Council, Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council, Tiwa Autonomous Council, Deori Autonomous Council, Thengal Kachari Autonomous Council and the Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council, moreover in 2020 another one the Kamatapur Autonomous Council was also formed. In conclusion, dominant nationalism of any kind could expose the many internal rifts in its structure if it takes centre stage in a debate with minor socioeconomic groupings.

Ironically, Bengali, which Assamese had fought to survive against in the nineteenth century, now found itself in a similar situation. By portraying the Assam region as a

continuation of the Bengal province, the Company administration increased the Assamese people's dread of Bengali cultural dominance. A demonstration begun by Bengali speakers in the Barak Valley eventually developed into the Bhasa Andolon.

The colonial history of Assam began in 1826, as was mentioned in the section above when the Treaty of Yandaboo brought British rule to the region that was then known as Assam. The Bengal presidency, which naturally also comprised the erstwhile East Bengal, received the track. Sylhet was ceded to Pakistan in 1947 because of a supposedly fraudulent vote. The Sub-continent experienced the largest human emigration in recorded world history because of the communal devastation that swept the region. The humanitarian crisis also had an impact on India's eastern and western borders after it had been liberated. However, the eastern front's exodus was significantly more intense, numerous and continuous than that of the western front. Even after 1971, cross-border travel remained a common occurrence due to internal political unrest and intercommunal rioting that first broke out in East Pakistan and then Bangladesh. The emergence of the petty political patriarchs who came to power on Assam after the nations' independence is causally related to the colonial rulers' repeated redrawing of the state's political map, which included the twin valleys of Surma and Barak, disregarding the feelings of both Assamese and Bengalis.

The Assamese middle class in post-colonial Assam made an effort to "correct" history because they thought that the British management of Bengali settlement on their "own land" was a pernicious attempt to create linguistic hegemony. The Assamese elites, who by this point had accumulated a sizeable amount of political influence, started to view the Bengali immigrants in Assam as "culturally foreigners" in revenge for what they perceived as a "Bengali cultural invasion" on the Assamese culture between 1826 and 1947.

The Assam Congress secretly supported Sylhet's admission to Pakistan due to similar worries about the Bengali language and culture, which were allegedly used as a barrier to defend the Assamese race. Political events that desecrated culture gave rise to the antiforeigner movement led by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), which was active between 1979 and 1985. The most striking feature is that Assam's print media has never taken into account this colonial past of the state when selecting how to frame the language, identity and citizenship concerns of Bengali settlers who fled Partition and established in the State. By establishing separate administrative system for the hill tribes and the plains people under their infamous "Divide and Rule" policy, the British broke the continuity of

the concept of the “Assamese Nation” with consequences that are still felt today. In short, after independence, statehood movements in the various United Assam regions led to the founding of Mizoram, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh. Additionally, active statehood movements are still going on in Bodoland and Karbi region, indicating that the Assamese nationalism that had previously bound these regions together does not exist anymore.

The researcher believes that the existence of an inclusive Assamese identity is therefore impossible given the current level of division. The Neo-Vaishnavite movement disseminated the concept of global brotherhood at a period when Assamese society was in disarray, was divided, and was rife with factions. As there was no sense of caste, class, or racial discrimination, it aids in the spread of this philosophy. The distinctiveness of the religion lay in the way that Ek-Saran-Hari-Naam-Dharma practiced through a novel manner of religious conduct based on local indigenous ingredients led to ethnic integration and spiritual upliftment. The removal of several superstitious beliefs and practices from Assamese society by Srimanta Sankardev through various institutions had a significant negative influence on the social situations of the Assamese people. His faith is the most open-minded, accepting, straightforward, and capable of upholding societal order. In a single sentence, we can characterize Sankardev as a brilliant social philosopher and thinker who promote equality of existence for all racial and socioeconomic groups.

Sankardev's image of spiritual leadership or the religious revolution he had started was just one of his many missions, in contrast to what most Assamese believed. He was an Assamese polymath, much like Francesco Petrarch, Michelangelo and Leonardo Di Vince, the heroes of the European Renaissance. He was the father of the Assamese Renaissance. Sankardev was a dramatist, athlete, musician, social reformer and many more. As a result, organizations established with his ideology, philosophy and principles should continue to carry out the mission of Sankardev's inclusive nation-building. The more Sankardev is revered as religious figure, the more discord an Assamese society would become. He built a larger framework that could accommodate people from many cultural, racial and religious backgrounds to build a composite nation while rejecting the ideals of little nationalism.

Sankardev always worked to bring together various groups of people. By fostering a sense of “Bharatiya” (Indianness), he pulled Assam closer to India. In his *Bhakti Ratnakara*, he wrote a whole chapter in his book titled “Bharatavarsaprasamsa” in honour of Bharatvarsha, emphasizing how Punya-Bhumi is Bharatvarsha. His *Anadipatana* referred to the magnificence of this country, as “Bharatavarsha”. In most of his works including the Bhagavata-Purana and Kirtana-Ghosa, he utilized the phrase “Bharat”, which

cannot be regarded as accidental. Even his most important disciple, Madhavdeva, related stories about Bharatvarsha. The Assamese people were made aware of Bharatavarsha's spiritual soul by Sankardev. His work encompasses the entirety of India, whether it is in literature, music, drama, painting, sculpture or festivals. Sankardev is not only associated with Assam because of his universal qualities but also with rest of India. Sankardev, the great integrator, not only successfully integrated Assam but also significantly improved Indian culture and nationhood. He saw numerous cultural practices throughout his first pilgrimage comprising twelve years to various locations in India. He then developed a style of art that was acceptable for Assamese audiences while still retaining some Indian flavor. He established Assamese Nationalism through cultural nationalism, merging several tribes and communities to give Assam a language, culture, and literature; later, through composite nationalism, Assam came closer to Indian Nationalism. Sankardev spoke specifically about the orthodox character of Hinduism. He exhorted his adherent to adopt the value of tolerance and Catholicism.

Nation building process of Assamese:

Similar to the nation building process of India, one can observe the existence of parallel process in case of Assam also. In Assam, the process of constructing a country started as early as the nineteenth century, when some educated Assamese young attempted to build the Assamese nation around Assamese language and culture. The promotion of Assamese language and culture and the revitalization of Assamese society were initially the nationalist project's primary goals. But as a result of a tremendous influx of strangers into the province in the 20th century, this nationalist enterprise took on the responsibility of defending the interests of the Assamese people. The nationalist project, according to its proponents, was advanced during the post-independence era in response to various socio-political, cultural, and economic threats that Assamese nation faced. As a result, it was created to protect various socio-political, economic, and cultural interests of Assamese people in the face of these challenges.

After independence, Assam's nationalism movement focused primarily on securing Assam for Assamese citizens. Due to this, the nationalist leaders pushed for two different demands: first, the expulsion of all illegal immigrants who entered Assam after independence; and second, a larger political power share relative to the centre, whether in the form of increased autonomy or total independence. It is important to observe that these two demands are clearly related to one another and that one has had an impact on the other.

The origin of such demands, however, could be traced back to much earlier times. For instance, as back as in the 19th century itself resentment against migration and desire for independence were expressed and such sentiments were reverberated in the views expressed by people like Ambikagiri Roychoudhury, Gauri Shankar Bhattacharya and others in the first half of 20th century (Mishra, 2014).

The demand for more political and financial power, as well as for the central government's decision to rehabilitate Hindu refugees from East Pakistan and its hostility towards the issue of unchecked illegal immigration, increased in vigor and intensity during the post-independence period. Following it the Assamese nationalist leaders launched the six year Anti-Foreigner Movement in 1979 with the aim of expelling all illegal immigrants who had entered Assam after 1971 out of fear of being outnumbered by the outsiders. With the signing of the Assam Accord (1985) between All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the central government, the agitation came to an end. Among other things, the Assam Accord offers Assamese citizens a variety of political, cultural, and economic protections. For instance, the Accord's clause 6 mandates that safeguards be provided for the cultural, social, and linguistic identity and history of the Assamese people in order to maintain, preserve, and advance them (The Assam Accord, 1985).

During this time some Assamese youth got involved with the idea of “Swadhin Asom” (independent Assam), the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) was created on April 7, 1979, with the intention of liberating Assam through armed conflict. It's vital to note that one of the main goals of the Assamese nationalist initiative was to better the economic situation of the Assamese people. Even in the early stages of Assamese nationalism, the need for economic revival was clear. Assamese nationalists began to believe that foreign dominance was the cause of all of Assam's economic woes, much like how authority over the state's economy progressively shifted from Assamese to outsiders with the introduction of British rule. Given these circumstances, it was only logical for nationalists to conclude that if Assamese were to succeed economically, Assam's economy needed to be freed from foreign control and that Assamese community's future as a separate nation depended on its economic development. The Assamese leaders in the constitutive Assembly argued for the province's significant financial autonomy in light of this factor. They insisted that certain clauses be included in the constitution to protect Assam's economic interests. In this regard, they wished for a bigger share of export and excise duty for Assam on goods like tea, jute, and oil, which were mostly produced in Assam. (Phukon, 1984)

However, these concerns of Assamese leaders were not reflected in the constitution that was ultimately adopted. Yet, Assam's economy continued to deteriorate in the years following independence due to the state's complete lack of an industrialization process, a dramatic increase in the unemployment rate, low agricultural production, and mounting pressure on agricultural lands. In response to this climate of escalating economic unhappiness, Assamese citizens started a movement in 1957 calling for the construction of an oil refinery. In January 1968, some young people acting under the banner of the Lachit Sena attacked Marwari business establishments in Guwahati and other Assamese towns in an additional display of patriotic sentiment. Their goal was to liberate Assam's economy from foreign influence. (Deka 2010) The second refinery agitation, which started in 1969 and was led by the All Assam Oil Refinery Sangram Parishad, came after this. The Assam movement served as the final outlet for the Assamese people's growing economic discontent. Although the immediate motivation behind the Assam movement was the fear of Assamese identity being swamped by the immigrants, as argued by the Udayan Mishra, it was in actuality a popular outburst of decades of economic neglect of the state by the central government (Mishra, 2014). Such economic complaints and demands continue to be a major component of Assamese nationalism. Once more, the nationalist goal of the post-colonial era has found expression in its cultural front through an effort to advance and broaden Assamese language and culture. Different socio-political and cultural organizations that were set up from the beginning of 20th century including Asom Sahitya Sabha clearly exhibited this tendency of cultural expansionism. (Choudhury, 2007)

The primary goal of Assamese linguistic nationalism from the start of British rule until independence was to spread the Assamese language among those who had come to Assam from other parts of the country as well as among various plains- and hills-dwelling tribes like the Mising, Karbi, Nagas, and Garos of Assam. Assamese linguistic nationalists continued with their cultural programmes of propagating Assamese language with Asom Sahitya Sabha playing a key role because this anxiety existed during the post-independence period as well. To encourage the use of Assamese in North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), a book titled *The Outlook on NEFA* was published in 1958 (Choudhury). The Assamese elite started the language movement in 1960 with the intention of establishing Assamese the official language of Assam out of a desire to propagate the language throughout Assam. To establish Assamese the only official language of the state in response to this mounting pressure, the Assam government proposed the Assam Official Language Bill in the Assam

Legislative Assembly, and in response to it the Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University introduced Assamese as a medium of instruction (Choudhury).

As a result, Assamese nationalists have continually worked to promote the Assamese language in the years following independence as a way to safeguard their lingo-cultural interests. The linguistic minorities in Assam, notably the various tribal communities, have, however, taken offence to such attempts by the Assamese elite since they view them as an attempt by the Assamese to impose their language and culture on them. In their efforts to create an Assamese nation, the leaders of Assamese society have predominantly defined it in terms of Assamese language and culture. The concept of Assamese language and culture does not take into account the languages and cultures of many ethnic groups, and as a result, these groups have continued to exist outside the borders of the Assamese nation. As a result, Assam's nation-building initiative has effectively evolved into an effort to safeguard and advance Assamese interests without considering those of other Assamese ethnic groups. Assam's nationalist agenda sought to make the state exclusively for Assamese, although the term's definition 'Assamese' (or notion of 'Assamese') excludes people of other ethnicities. In postcolonial Assam, the nationalist endeavour with this goal frequently went against the interests of many ethnic groups. For instance, the Assam Movement, which was purportedly started to drive away outsiders and foreigners from Assam, occasionally also targeted the various Assamese ethnic groups. People from the Bodo community were singled out during the movement in locations like Gohpur and were attacked and sometimes killed (Choudhury). It is essential to point out that while signing the Assam Accord in 1985, different racial and ethnic minorities were not given any privacy and taken into confidence. The upshot was that the Accord included a number of measures that different ethnic groups strongly disliked as being anti-tribal and anti-minority (Deori). The Accord included provisions for the protection of the political, economic, and cultural interests of the "Assamese" people in a number of its terms. However, because the term "Assamese" was not defined, the AGP government narrowly acknowledged it to refer only to Assamese speakers and engaged in a number of activities that were harmful to the interests of Assamese ethnic communities. The Assamese people are unwilling to share political power with the members of Assamese ethnic groupings out of a desire to make Assam for Assamese in the name of nation building. The Assam Movement is said to have been started primarily to guarantee the dominance of Assamese speakers in politics and prevent others from gaining access to it (Guha).

Tribal people in Assam have reacted strongly to policies aiming to establish cultural hegemony, causing a rift between tribal groups and Assamese speakers. The State Official Language Act of 1960 exacerbated cultural tensions, leading to disintegration and hill states formation. Plains tribes also resent the expansionist design, demanding political autonomy. In 1973, the Mikir and North Cachar Hills Leaders' Conference alleged that the Assamese junta aimed to "assamise" linguistic minorities by forcing Assamese language and culture upon them. They argued that the only solution was separation from Assam for a state. Subsequent memoranda objected to the language policy. Similarly, the PTCA, Bodo Sahitya Sabha and All Bodo Students Union also objected the policy of Assamese expansionism and chauvinism and considered this as one of the major causes of their demand for a separate state.

It's interesting to see how the tribal Assamese people have imitated the sub-nationalist movement of the Assamese people in response to the nationalist initiative of the Assamese people. In order to secure their diverse cultural, economic, and political demands, numerous organizations that represent Assamese tribal people have, particularly since the late 1980s, fashioned their agitation after the Assam Agitation in terms of objectives, plans, and tactics. Nationalist project in most of the post-colonial states with multi-ethnic societies bears with some inherent problems. It is in this context that today Assam is witnessing growing ethno-national demands on the part of different ethnic communities of Assam.

As a result, the adoption of the nation-state model in multiethnic populations of postcolonial nations include initiatives aimed at forming a nation through homogeneity, either on the basis of shared political principles or culture, as well as a state that will serve as a representation of this nation. However, third-world countries only had two options for national development: either through cultural homogenization or based on shared political principles. Due to the existence of traditional forms of loyalty, building a national community based on shared political principles has been extremely difficult in these multiethnic republics.

This chapter strongly believes that all forms of modern nationalism based on language and ethnicity are incompatible with the concept of "nation formation". What we call Jatigothon prokriya in Assamese, needs a separate form of understanding. Therefore, by rejecting western model of nationalism which is based on a capitalist-corporate foundation, this chapter argues that a nation can be formed based on the principle of compositeness those by-passes narrow limits of western nationalism. As a point of

departure from this, Sankardev's reformatory practice through Bhakti movement can be considered as dynamic form of composite nationalism. While it rejects the ideas of little nationalism, Sankardev created a wider canvas that was capable of accommodating people from diverse cultural, ethnic and religious background to create a composite nation.