



Missionaries Interface: Comparing the Development of Assamese and Oriya Literary Culture in the Nineteenth Century

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Abstract:

Nineteenth century Indian literary and cultural conventions were the outcome of several historical turning points. One such phenomenon was the intensifying of missionaries' activities with the objectives of Christian propagation and religious conversion in the country. For

the purpose, missionaries wrote, translated and printed massive amount of religious and secular literature and the genre of prose was the vehicle. While doing so, they introduced to the Indian literary soil a new form, and developed an identifiable literary pattern, a common literary core, and interrelatedness throughout the country which can be considered as the result of their taking the stronghold of certain cultural and literary reigns from weaker hands. This essay examines the missionaries' role and functions in the development of the literary modernity in the nineteenth century India by taking a comparative case study of Assam and Orissa. It takes into consideration both similarities and differences in the development of prose, translation, text books and print technology.

Keywords: missionaries; Assamese and Oriya literature; Buranjis; Bakhars, Prabodh Chandrika; Indian literature.

I

In the introduction of his book *Colonialism, Modernity, and Literature: A View from India*, Satya P. Mohanty writes about Ananthamurthy's idea of the current need for cross-regional analysis of the literary traditions in India and the need for textual comparisons that highlight similarities and differences in the way common themes and similar social situations are treated in fiction. This is for, as he suggests, an outcome of a better Indian historical-literary view, an unbiased perception, more translatable value and for systematic negotiations with the identifiable common strands and patterns of the same. Such critical readings are expected to identify relationships between the literatures of India of the interrelated linguistic and cultural groups with common features that move beyond the political, religious, ethnic and linguistic boundaries and thus escaping their limitations. To look for such unifying relationships and interrelatedness in the nineteenth century Indian literary history which is one of the primary aims of this thesis is to recognise the fact that only in the nineteenth century 'a modern

literary-historical sensibility developed ... as part of a gradual movement from merely recording the past to rewriting it within a wider public debate about national origins, linguistic identities and political entitlements.’ And before the nineteenth, ‘literary histories did exist ...and the early compendia were more concerned with chronological listings of literary works, including origins, attribution and textual explications, than with a literary history that attempted to understand texts in their wider cultural and historical frameworks.’¹

Another rationale for this revisit to the nineteenth is also to register the fact that the literary modernity in the nineteenth century colonial India was an outcome of major historical turning points. The turning points provided an understanding of Indian literature in a larger canvas, created ‘a common literary space/place’, possibilities of literary historiography, and new cultural formulations. These developments and other signs of significant changes can be listed as the followings: the consolidation of the colonial powers; introduction, expansion and strengthening of English language which ‘marks the point of departure in the history of modern Indian literature’² ; the establishment of educational institutions such as College of Fort William in 1800, an institution ‘where serious experiments with prose began, and the potentiality of prose as a vehicle of literary and intellectual expression was realized’³ and universities in Madras, Bombay and Calcutta in 1857; the new mode of transmission of texts through modern printing, the first printing press being the Serampore Mission Press in 1800 ; Christian Missionaries’ ventures and the rise and intensifying of Indian nationalism. The major outcomes of these forces in the development of literature and language would broadly include the European literary encounters with the Indian literary sensibilities; the founding of protest literature, an unprecedented development of prose, growth of missionaries’ literature, translation of Indian and Western texts, beginning of journalism and the emergence of the phenomenon called Indian English Writing. At one level, these developments were helpful for theorization, canonization and conceptualization of Indian Literature using possible unifying principles, and at another,

gave rise to uniform, revised, recognizable, and comprehensible literary forms, patterns and trends.

A third premise is to review and revisit the common critical practice of viewing the nineteenth-century literature ‘as a by-product of this political divide, either as a colonial construction or as a nationalist reaction...although we have learned that colonial power was not monolithic and that colonialism cannot be conflated either with Christianity or with European influence.’⁴ In actuality, the colonial century’s literary development was very much informed by the pre-colonial literary practices and not sole responses to any political commonplace or institutional seminarism; it was as much a result of a process that derived from traditions as that of a transition to the literary modernity of the century. Literary cultures of various Indian languages received the century’s impetus, imbibed the national spirit and evolved along with their age old individual and unique characteristics. Simultaneously, their interrelatedness continued cutting across the boundaries; partly responding to and partly protecting their literary heritage from the colonial forces. Instead of being a mere ‘arithmetical aggregation of all literatures’ Indian literature came to include one single cultural zone and refrained from being ‘exclusive expressions of different linguistic groups,’ and generated ‘a common core of metaphors and symbols, myths and legends, conventions and norms... and tendency to converge.’⁵

The major nineteenth century ‘common core of literary conventions’ began emerging with the phenomenal growth of prose literature and translation practices. Prose included revival of books of the past, writings for magazines, journals, newspapers and religious propaganda; production of educational and pedagogical material, and most importantly, creative writing such as the novel and fiction, biography and autobiography, essays, travelogue, character sketches, memoirs and diaries. The initial impulses for prose literature and the early initiatives came from the foreigners, the administrators of the East India Company and, especially, the Christian Missionaries. The missionaries’ contributions to this

important development, though utilitarian, cannot be dismissed as irrelevant and ‘none will disagree that prose in India grew in response to a new set of intellectual, social and economic requirements, but it is difficult not to see the beginnings of that response in the activities of the missionaries ...’⁶ In the field of translation, texts of India’s literary past were selected from Sanskrit and Persian and translated to modern languages for renewal of interest in them. Popular foreign texts, especially fictions and plays were the target of the translators. Translations of books from one Indian language to another were also part of the practice. The translation patterns and the translated texts showed ‘a few trends very clearly. One is the increasing interest in fiction, both Eastern and Western. The other is the habit of translating verse texts into prose. And the third trend is a growing interest in dramatic literature.’⁷ This essay will keep its arguments within these premises and will examine the missionaries’ role, contributions and other objectives to the several aspects of nineteenth century literature and culture. Secondly, the paper will draw a comparison between the missionaries’ contributions to Assam and Orissa in the development of literary modernity in the nineteenth century so as to identify the “common literary core” and the interrelatedness of these developments. The reading would include references to the similarities and differences in the ways the missionaries initiated such developments to take place.

The missionary agencies came to be present in many parts of India and similar, identical and simultaneous innovations and developments took place across the provinces. Serampore Mission in 1800 in Bengal, Church Mission Society in Kerala, Basel Mission in Karnataka, American Marathi Mission in Bombay, American Baptist Mission in Assam, Cuttack Mission Academy in Orissa were institutions engaged in creation of prose in the respective languages both for literary and non-literary purposes; of course, notwithstanding the fact that the purpose was largely/solely the spread of the Words. Beginning with serious enterprises of writing the Christian doctrines and tracts and translating the bible into India

languages, the missionaries expanded their intellectual enterprise to writing the first grammar books and compiling the first dictionaries; preparing text books for modern schools, writing and publishing history, printing magazines, and launching the novel as a literary form. Missionaries translated the Bible widely and in repetition, edition after edition, translated seminal European texts as well as literary pieces; introduced Bunyan, Shakespeare, Defoe, and Milton into the Indian soil. *Tales from Shakespeare*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Arabian Nights*, *Sikandar Namah*, *Plutus*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Fair Penitent* and *Paradise Lost* etc. are some of the major examples. Shakespeare became the most popular European author in India and was influential in 'the emergence of a tragic vision which made the nineteenth century Indian literature distinct from its earlier traditions.'⁸ Not only translations and functional prose but also fictions/novels written by missionaries in Indian languages became part of the 'literary conventions.'

II

A comparison of the Missionaries' role in the modern literary development in Assam and Orissa in the nineteenth century can begin with their participation in the linguistic nationalism of the two regions, fight against the language hegemony of Bengali, ushering the era of print and publish and initiating modern education. The nineteenth century witnessed Assam and Orissa sharing language tensions in their protest against Bengali language, their confrontations against the claims that these two languages are variants of Bengali, and, therefore, Bengali must be the language of instructions of the court and of the offices. In here missionaries played a constructive role; more directly and actively in Assam and with lesser aggression in Orissa. They fought relentlessly with the administrators for the language sovereignty at one level; and at another, continued to write in the local languages so as to give them strength, visibility and attach linguistic significance. As a result, '... while the Assamese language...acted as a cementing force in

Assam, Oriya provided the base for an emergence of a similar consciousness in Orissa during the second half of the nineteenth century.’⁹

In Assam, the American Baptist Missionaries led by Nathan Brown along with Assamese scholars, one like Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, worked for the language consciousness and restoration of Assamese which was banished from schools and the court in 1836, the year that marked these missionaries’ arrival and the British occupation in Assam. Two documentary evidence can be used here towards the claim. One, a footnote in Dr. Banikanta Kakati’s groundbreaking book on Assamese literature and language development *Assamese: Its Formation and Development*. It contains a detailed discussion on the difference between Assamese and Bengali and indicates Brown’s role in the stirring against the imposition. The footnote reads:

‘Most probably, Dr. Nathan Brown was the first grammarian to dismiss this idea that Assamese could be a dialect of Bengali. He wrote in the introduction to the "Grammatical Notes on the Assamese Language" published in 1846: "The Assamese is often regarded as merely a corrupt form of the Bengali, by persons who become acquainted with the language previous to their arrival in Assam. Finding so large a proportion of words common to Bengali and Assamese, and not considering that this similarity necessarily results from the derivation of these languages from Sanskrit, the common parent of both, it has been hastily concluded that the Assamese is an uncouth jargon..."’¹⁰

The second testimonial is the British official Moffat Mill’s report in which he responded to Nathan Brown’s treatise on Assamese language in 1853 saying:

‘...Assamese is described by Mr. Brown, the best scholar in the province, as a beautiful, simple language, differing in more respects from, than agreeing with, Bengalee, and I think we made a great mistake in directing that all business should be transacted in Bengalee, and that the Assamese must acquire it... I would strongly recommend Anandaram

Phukan's proposition to the favourable consideration of the Council of Education, viz., the substitution of the vernacular language in lieu of Bengalee... An English youth is not taught in Latin until he is well grounded in English, and in the same manner, an Assamese should not be taught in a foreign language until he knows his own...'¹¹

While contesting the Bengali claims, missionaries took to the other part of the exercise: the production of Christian and non-Christian literature in Assamese language through the new print technology. Rev. Nathan Brown, Miles Bronson and Oliver Thomas Cutter with their setting the first printing press in Sibsagar, Assam in 1836 brought in a new era of literary development. The printing press was missionary equipment initially. It became instrumental in literary and journalistic productions subsequently and thus the emergence of print changed the relationship between the author and the audience. The American Baptist Missionaries, on the one hand, wrote, published and carried out the evangelical activities, on the other, continued to pressurise the government to replace Bengali by Assamese until 1882 when the same got back its official status.

With an acquired knowledge of the Assamese language, missionaries translated the Bible into Assamese and then moved on to write Christian tracts and hymns also in Assamese. The first printed text to enter Assam literary circle was the Assamese bible called *Dharmapustakar Antobhag* of the Serampore Mission by Atmaram Sarma, a convert and an Assamese scholar, under the guidance of William Carey and Joshua Marshman of Fort William in 1813. According to Kakati, 'With the publication of the Bible in Assamese prose in 1819 the modern period of Assamese begins.'¹² The translation contained many Sanskrit and Bengali loan words and expressions. Therefore, Brown found it imperative to rewrite the text in purer Assamese and wrote the entire New Testament in simple Assamese called *Amaar Traankorta Jisu Christor Natun Niyom*. Nathan Brown's *Grammatical Notes of the Assamese Language* first published in 1848 was the first Assamese grammar book to be widely referred to in schools; although W. Robinson's

Assamese grammar book came earlier, in 1839. They wrote and published textbooks for schools in all subjects such as *Bhugulor Biboran*, (geography) *Pratham Gonona*, *Dutio Ganana*, (arithmetic) *Padartha Bidyasara* (physics); wrote several editions of grammar books and dictionaries and prepared educational resources. These endeavors were largely unprecedented and accelerated the modernization of education. Brown translated *The Pilgrim's Progress* as *Yatrikor Yatra*. It laid the foundation for the novel form and developed a taste in fiction. Sibsagar was the epicenter of the missionaries' intellectual activities. As a result, as Kakati maintained, 'the Missionaries ... used the dialect of Sibsagar for their literary purposes...' and under their influence 'books and periodicals in the language of Eastern Assam were multiplied. Thus the traditions of the Ahom court supported by the mission press established the language of eastern Assam as the literary language of the entire province.'¹³

The most notable literary development was the *Orunodoi* era in Assamese literature in 1846. *Orunodoi* was the first Assamese magazine edited by Nathan Brown, A.H. Denforth and William Ward and printed by the Baptist Missionary Press in Sibsagar. The tagline of the magazine was, 'The *Orunodoi*, monthly paper, devoted to religion, science and general intelligence.' Although it aimed chiefly at Christian propagation but was able to create a new era in Assamese literature when it brought into forefront the four key figures of Assamese literary world of the time. They were Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Hem Chandra Baruah, Gunabhiram Barua and Nidhi Levi Farwell. Prose literature in Assam flourished when under the editorial ventures of Brown the Assamese and missionary scholars began their literary and scholarly productions. The magazine revived the old Assamese chronicles like the *Buranji* papers such as *Chutia Buranji*, *Purani Asom Buranji* and *Kamrupar Buranji*. *Buranjis*, a Tai-Ahom word means 'a storehouse of knowledge' was written both in Assamese and Tai-Ahom languages. Birinchi Kumar Barua describes the *Buranjis* as 'documents... principally the periodic reports transmitted to the court...' by

various agencies and ‘the language of these chronicles is dignified and graceful...they are simple, easy, unpretentious and unquestioningly charming...’¹⁴ By the middle of the nineteenth century Assamese prose has become purer, fortified and free from Sanskrit words and it is difficult to disagree that the revival of the *Buranjis* played a big role. Grierson finds that ‘in no department have’ the Assamese ‘been more successful than in a branch of study in which India, as a rule, is curiously deficient.’¹⁵ *Orunodoi* showed direction to the subsequent literary magazines like *Jonaki* (1889) and *Bijuli* (1891); both fastened the Assamese literary modernity and both were literary institutions by themselves.

Under the patronage of Brown, *Orunodoi* and the Mission Press in Sibsagar, the Assamese men of letters could build capacity for a new literary consciousness. Publications like Kashinath Tamuly Phukan’s *Asom Buranji* (1842), Hem Barua’s play *Kaniyar Kirtan* (1861), a satirical work on the question of opium consumption in Assam, his novel, *Bahire Rang Sang Bhitare Kova Bhatari* (1876), which criticized the social customs and religious hypocrisy through supposedly respectable characters; Anandaram Dhekial Phukan’s *Axomiya Lorar Mitro* (1849) and *A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language and on Vernacular Education in Assam* (1855), Gunabhiram Barua’s *Ram Navami Natak*, Bronson’s *A Spelling Book and Vocabulary in English, Assamese, Singpho and Naga* (1839) are some of important contributions of the time. Bronson’s work did not pretend to be an etymological dictionary but compiled words from the local speech. *Hemkosh*, the first etymological dictionary of the Assamese language based on Sanskrit spellings by Hemachandra Barua was published in 1900, 33 years after Bronson’s dictionary to which it owes much of its credit.

Other missionaries who produced literature of this time are A.H.Denford, C.Barker, W.M.Ward, and A.K.Gurney. The texts that can be called the forerunners of the novel are *Elokesi Veshyar Katha* by M.E.Lesley and *Kaminikantar Caritra* by A.K.Gurney and the translation of *Phulmani aru Karunar Kahini* written by Mrs. Hannah

Catherine Mullen and Gurney's *Koni Beheuar Bishay*. These were books designed for Christian propagation but are called novels because they are long narratives containing a theme. These can at best be called prototypes of novels and they helped in founding the novel genre in Assamese literature. Padmanath Gohain Baruah's *Bhanumati* is generally taken to be the first "genuine" novel in Assamese, first serialized in *Bijuli* magazine from 1890 to 1891. *Padumkuwori* by Lakshminath Bezabarua published in 1891 was the other important novel of the late nineteenth century. Both were inspired by missionary writings. Susan R. Ward's *A Glimpse of Assam* was fashioned as a travel writing inspiring other travelers to visit Assam apparently without any visible Christian agenda and with many references to Hindu Gods and Goddesses. It cannot claim to have great creative value but certainly paved the way for travel writing in India in general and Assam in particular.

While considering the Christian missionaries' writings as preceding literary models Satyendranath Sarma's comments are worth quoting: 'The missionary writers were not creative artists, nor were they actuated by literary urge or inspiration. Propagation of Christianity through the medium of the Assamese language was the motivating force behind their literary activities. But besides being the initiators of the modern Assamese literature, they will be remembered by all lovers of the Assamese language for having for the first time imported western ideas and thought into this literature.'¹⁶ Fortifying Sarma's observations, Maheswar Neog, the famous Assamese and North East scholar sums up the missionary work in the following words:

'by writing and publishing Assamese grammars, dictionaries, primers, books on elementary scientific knowledge; by conducting that best example of a periodical, the Orunodoi, for thirty- seven years; by taking a leading part in the fight for restoration of Assamese in the schools and law courts of Assam; by training Assamese writers in the modern technique of writing, and by infusing English vocables and even syntactic patterns into Assamese, the missionaries gave a new lease of life to Assamese

*language and literature and instilled into the people of Assam a sense of self-confidence.*¹⁷

Echo of this acknowledgement finds place in the Oriya case in the seminal book by the eminent Oriya literary historian and scholar Natabar Samantaray's *Odia Sahityara Itihaasa*, in which while citing reasons for the late onset of Oriya literary modernity in the nineteenth century, he emphasises on the interdependence and interrelatedness of modern education, modern textbooks and the new educated middle class as the reasons for such development. Therefore discussion on the history of any Indian literature, with no exception to Oriya, must take these three into consideration, maintains Samantaray. In the history of a new socio-cultural consciousness in the nineteenth century Orissa, according to Samantaray, the major influences are of the above mentioned factors, and can be traced in several phases, the missionary phase: 1822 to 1847, the missionary-government phase 1848-73, the Brahmo religion phase 1874-98 and then the Hindu phase 1898 onwards. Thus missionaries can be considered as the earliest influence in the building of modern Oriya consciousness and the modern life stream in Orissa and therefore their contributions to the same cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. It is 'our duty as literary historians to give the missionaries their due credit.'¹⁸ Jatindra Mohan Mohanty in his essay 'Modern Oriya Literature' reiterates Samantaray's observations and holds three important factors as the reasons for the new awakening in Orissa in the later part of the nineteenth century which led to the development of modern Oriya literature. They include the impact of the work of Christian missionaries resulting in printing presses being set up and creating a new socio-religious literature of prose; the spread of education, especially English education and the resultant opening of the mind towards new, sometime radical, ideas from the West; and the growth of the press and journalism which created an educated, alert group of people who could highlight grievances and guide public opinion

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III

Like in Assam, the first Oriya text to be written (1807) and published was the Bible in 1809 in the Serampore Mission Press. The September 20th, 1804 notification of the Fort William College includes references of the Oriya translation of the New Testament by Oriya pandit Purushram, a convert and John Carey of Fort William.²⁰ Another source says Oriya pandit Mrutyunjay Bidyalankara, who was the chief pundit of Fort William College, had translated the bible into Oriya. Although translations were ready but printing of the translated Oriya bibles did not take place before 1809.²¹ An uncertainty prevails regarding the identities of the pundits who helped the translation of the *New Testament*. Further debate includes Muhammad Siddiq Khan's opinion that Mrutyunjay Vidyalankar, Chief Pundit of Fort William College, prepared the initial draft,²² whereas Susil Kumar De says he is named as simply 'Poo-roosh Ram' and he is the author not Vidyalankar.²³ (the spellings 'Vidyalankar' and 'Bidyalankar' have been debated also) The absence of clarity, however, does not alter the fact that both in Assam and Orissa the first translation of the *New Testament* was the joint ventures of the missionaries and their local convert scholars. In 1822 a second and much larger edition of the Oriya *New Testament* was printed. The historical records say that besides these major Biblical translations, the Serampore Press had produced a number of tracts in Oriya and at least one important book, namely *A Vocabulary, Ooriya and English, for the Use of Students*, compiled by Mohan-Prasad Thakur, Assistant Librarian in the College of Fort William, and published in 1811.²⁴ Prof. Dr. Bansidhar Mohanty in his introduction to *Prabodha Chandrika* reprint in 1984 claims that the first Oriya bible from Serampore press formalized the beginning of printed Oriya book/literature.²⁵

From first Oriya translation of The *New Testament* to the setting up of the first printing press in Cuttack in 1837 to the publication of *Prabodha Chandrika* in 1856, the contributions of the missionaries in developing modern Oriya language and literature can largely be

found in the works of Revd. William Bampton, Revd. James Peggs, Charles Lacey, Amos Sutton and several others. Long before the Oriya language controversy intensified during 1869-70 with the efforts of Bichitrananda Das (1875), Gourishankar Ray (1838-1917), Fakir Mohan Senapati (1843-1918), Radhanath Ray (1848-1908) and Madhusudan Rao (1853-1912), Amos Sutton registered his displeasure and protest against the bengalisation of Oriya language. Opposed to a biased statement from George Smith that the relation of the Oriya language to the Bengalee is as ‘rural Scotch to English’,²⁶ Amos Sutton in the preface of *An Introductory Grammar of the Oriya Language*, 1831, the first work of its kind,²⁷ wrote:

‘With the exception of those immediately concerned with the propagation of Christianity, perhaps not two individuals exist who know the language with any tolerable degree of grammatical accuracy...The religious celebrity of the province must render the acquisition of the language a desideratum to all who delight in inquiries respecting the history and mythology of the Hindoos.’²⁸

Sutton explained with regret that, because of his isolated position, he has had no-one to assist him in the compilation of the grammar. He ‘has not been able to meet with a Native capable of declining a noun or conjugating a verb . . . nor is a vestige of Native Grammar to be found.’²⁹

In his subsequent works on Oriya-English dictionaries Sutton became more and more aware of the Bengali influence in the earlier works from Serampore Mission under the guidance of William Carey. While Sutton paid tribute to Carey as ‘the first European student of the Oriya language . . . [who] prepared, or caused to be prepared, the first works in Oriya,’ criticized Carey's methods: ‘It is . . . evident that the Doctor knew comparatively little of the peculiarities which distinguish the Oriya from the Bangali; and his pundit, though perhaps the best Oriya scholar of his day, allowed his translations to go forth with the most palpable neglect of those peculiarities.’³⁰ Sutton and his Orissa colleagues came to realize this because they employed a pundit who pursued the same course: ‘It

was obvious that there was a Bangali air about our first publications which attached not to Native works; but our veneration for the Doctor, and the great reputation of his pundit, inclined us to think they could not have erred.’³¹ Sutton also noted the great influx of words of Sanskrit origin into Oriya, ‘much more extensively understood throughout the province . . . than many pure Oriya words...as the proudest Oriya objects not to words derived from this source their employment would gradually tend to a much closer approximation between Bengali and Oriya than now exists.’³² The missionaries’ response to the language tensions in Orissa was of a different scale because ‘while the Assamese had to fight against the *fait accompli* of Bengali as being the language of their schools and offices, Oriyas had to resist the efforts of Bengali officials posted in Orissa to have Oriya replaced by Bengali.’³³ The Oriya language controversy, however, came to an end when John Beames, the Collector of Balasore, and a linguist who knew Sanskrit, Bengali, Assamese, Oriya and Hindi and the Commissioner of Orissa division, T.E. Ravenshaw wrote favourable notes to the government for the promotion of the language.

American Baptist Missionaries worked in Assam whereas in the nineteenth century Orissa received the initial modern literary impetus from British Missionaries. Sutton, like his Assamese counterpart Nathan Brown between 1825 and 1850, wrote and published books that included subjects of science, history, geography, mathematics, language and literature. His *Oriya Dictionary with Oriya Synonyms* between 1841 and 1843 with Bhubanananda Nyayalankarar, Oriya text books like *Prakrutika Darsana*, *Odia Barna Paricay*, *Odia Niti Katha*, *Odia Ganita*, *Orissa Itihaasa*, *Odisa Bhugola*, *Padartha Bidyasara* and *Vernacular Classbook Reader* etc. were printed from Calcutta Schoolbook Society, Puri School Society and Cuttack Mission Press. Sutton translated *Gita Gobinda*, *Batrissa Simhasana*, *Mitralabha*, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* as *Swargiya Jatrira Bruttanta* in 1838 and many more. The 1842-43 Orissa education department report said that Sutton and Pundit Biswambar Vidyabhusan, headmaster of

Cuttack Baptist Missionary School that was taken over by the East India Company were asked to prepare school text books and books on Oriya literature.³⁴

The Baptist Mission Press in Assam in Sibsagar in 1836 by Brown and his team preceded the first printing press in Orissa at Cuttack. The Cuttack Mission Press, established by the initiative of Lacey and efforts of both Lacey and Sutton, became the hub of missionary religious preaching as well as literary activities. It 'played an important part after Serampore in the development of early Oriya printing. It established the printing of Oriya in its homeland for the first time and brought it out of the shadow of Bengali. It also, thanks to the knowledge and industry of Amos Sutton, laid the foundation of modern Oriya philology.'³⁵ The first text to be printed at Cuttack was a tract in the spring of 1838 for distribution to Hindus attending the *Ratha-yatra* or car-festival of Jagannatha in June. With a clearly ironic title *The Wonderful Advantages of a Pilgrimage to Jagannath or in Oriya: Sri Sri Gundica Yatrarr Mahacharya Phal*; it was an attempt to convince the Hindus about the evils of the Jagannatha pilgrimage and religious superiority of Christianity. The other tracts to be published in the first year of Cuttack press were *The History of Little Henry and his Bearer*, the Oriya: *San Henri O tahar Beherar Vrtant*, *Memoir of Pitambar Singh*, the Oriya: *Pitambar Sinhar Caritra*, *God is a Spirit*, or, *Isvar Atmasvarup*, and *Oriya First Catechism* or *Dharmar Bisayare Kathabarttar Pratham Bhaga*. These Christian propagation literatures were not of any literary value. But they introduced to the Oriya literary scene certain modern forms and genres. The contribution of missionary grammarians in developing and refining the language is noteworthy.

The major and most important contribution of the missionaries to the development of Oriya literary culture, like those of Assam, were the publishing and printing of literary magazines. *Gyanaruna*, *Prabodha Chandrika* and *Arunodaya* are the three literary magazines published in 1849, 1856 and 1861 by Lacey and the Christian Vernacular Literature Society respectively. Before

Gyanaruna, the second magazine from Orissa, *Kujibarapatra* was published by Sadhu Sundar Das of Kujibar Matha in Chowdwar in 1840 under the guidance of Amos Sutton whom he met in 1826. *Prabodha Chandrika*, the first complete news and literary magazine from Orissa, marks the beginning of modern periodical literature in Orissa; published from Cuttack Mission Press it did not have any Christian agenda and was free from the linguistic shadow of Bengali. In the first editorial letter of the magazine, William Lacey, addressing the readers, wrote about the nature, purpose, agenda, structure, format, content and subscription detail of the magazine.³⁶The magazine included Oriya translations of Sanskrit texts like *Mitralabha*, *Sita Bruttanta*, *Betal Pancavimsati*, *Hitopadesa* and many others in series. It published news of the foreign countries, news of Orissa, like the uprising in Sambalpur during Sepoy Mutiny. It also brought out literature of reformation like widow marriage and the importance of English education; science news, history of printing and many other topics from life, education, history, science, geography and the Almanac/monthly calendar of Orissa but did not publish any poetry. The magazine opened doors for further such publications and until *Utkala Dipika* came in 1866, the former continued to influence the modern literary developments in Orissa, especially the modern Oriya prose, although it stopped appearing after three years of its first publication.

Modern Oriya literature in a way is an urban phenomenon and is the artistic expression of the developments that took place around the new education culture. Before it came to existence, if a suitable climate for its accommodation had not been created, people would not have accepted and appreciated it. Missionaries are responsible to a large extent for creating the climate and setting the models for native literary forms and spirit. The reigns of the modern intellectual culture, before coming to the hands of modern Orissa makers, had been made stable by the stronghold of the missionaries. The historical literary analysis of nineteenth century Orissa shows two trends; one of decadence and the other of a renaissance. Paika revolt, the famine of 1866 and the language crisis are the harbinger

of the picture of destruction and damage. Modern education, modern books and the new educated middle class, the modern, new everyman heralded the dawn of the new culture.³⁷

A few clarifications are helpful in this discussion. First, foreigners did not enter into a 'literary vacuum' when they came to India. The country had a rich history of poetry, drama and prose literature in Sanskrit, Persian and many other Indian languages. Secondly, prose was not an invention of the nineteenth century purely. Except in Kashmiri and Sindhi, prose existed in all major Indian languages. *Upanishads*, *The Arabian Knight*, tales and romances of Pali and Prakrit languages, commentaries of scholars are early examples of Indian prose writing. Assam had a long tradition of prose, the Burmese chronicles known as *Azawins* and the thirteenth century *Buranjis*. The Marathi chronicles called *Bakhars*, and the Oriya *Madalapanji*, which are the records of Jagannatha temple Puri are experiments of prose in the previous centuries. Summarily, 'two major forces, one the necessity of the royal court, and the other the initiative of the religious groups to preserve the biographical details of the saints...were primarily responsible for the growth of prose in pre-British India.'³⁸ Introduction of the Western prose genre and similar forms of writing to the Indian literary soil created an east-west literary encounter. Western agencies had more of functional objectives and less of literary endeavours in their bringing in the new prose forms. Missionaries' initial objectives for learning local languages, translating, writing, and publishing were the spread of the doctrines of Christianity and not to enrich the literatures and languages of India. Any discussion on the missionary role in modern Indian literary beginnings must build premises keeping in view these points. Also, any discussion on their contributions to the nineteenth century literary consciousness must take into consideration all points of departure in the 'complex cultural interactions that characterizes this century.'³⁹ But important historical turning points in the cultural and literary developments on nineteenth century India certainly were impacted by the foreigners. They influenced the complex cultural interactions that gave birth to a modern historical-

literary sensibility that crystallized both the existing and new literature, as well as the reproductions of the same from Indian past through the ‘European scholarly conventions.’ Missionaries’ work created the common literary and cultural spaces by using these conventions in which regional literary nationalism developed. Assam and Orissa shared the missionary literary space and evolved in similar patterns for long. The missionaries’ spearheading the language movements, introducing print culture, creating the climate for literary modernism, introducing modern education and fighting against evil social practices in both regions generated common frameworks , common definitions and cultural commonplaces. Although these are insufficient for interpretative frameworks, critical perspectives and possibilities of canonization, are important since they nurtured impulses for growth. They mediated the transition from one realm of experience to another in the same ways for both Assamese and Oriya.

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