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## Role of Arunodoi in the Background of Nineteenth Century's Colonial Assam

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### Abstract:

*The birth and development of journalism in Assam may be traced back to the introduction of the first printing press by the American Baptists. In 1846 they published the first printed magazine cum newspaper in colonial Assam, named Arunodoi. In this paper an attempt has been made to have a look at the contemporary condition of colonial Assam (Nineteenth Century) and the response of this newspapers towards several burning topics of that period. It also tries to analyze how much did Arunodoi get success in bringing awakening among the masses and what role did it play in cultural renaissance that took place in colonial Assam in the Nineteenth Century.*

**Keywords:** Arunodoi, baptist missionaries, Assam, nineteenth century, language, literature, magazine, newspaper

### 1. Introduction

The birth and development of journalism in Assam may be traced back to the introduction of the first printing press by the American Baptists who started their operations in Assam in early 1836. Reverend Brown and Oliver Cutter set up the press initially at Sadiya and was shifted to Sibsagar in 1846. Primarily intended for the publication of Christian literature the Press, commonly known as Baptist mission Press, published the first Assamese monthly news – magazine Arunodoi (dawn of the day) in January 1846 under the editorship of Nathan Brown. After Brown it was taken under the care of Danforth, Whiting, Bronson, Mrs. Ward, Clark. Arunodoi was in circulation until 1880. The demand for it, according to Mrs. Ward, 'among the native seems on the whole increase'. For, 'whatever prejudice some may have against its religious character, still they have no substitute for it, for they have the utmost confidence in its statements being reliable.'

### 2. Objectives

- i. To have brief look at the contemporary socio cultural condition of colonial Assam.
- ii. to analyze the importance of Arunodoi in colonial Assam
- iii. Analyze the role and contribution of Arunodoi in the field of literature, education, journalism, diffusion of knowledge and other aspects.

### 3. Methodology

In these papers, data are collected from various books. This paper tries to analyze the facts collected from the sources.

### 4. Influence of Arunodoi

#### 4.1. Impact on Journalism

The Arunodoi gave an impetus to the birth of galaxy of newspapers and magazines in Assam, both in English and Assamese. The close of the nineteenth century saw the 'appearances and disappearances' of over a dozen of newspapers and journals which affords an actual picture of the rise and growth of journalism in the province. The Assam Bilashini {1871-83}, published from Dharma Prakash Press, Auniati satra (Sibsagar district), though religious in tone, contained news and views as well as general information. The first weekly Assam Mihir published from Guwahati first in Bengali and, later in Bengali and English was discontinued for lack of support. The monthly journal Assam Darpan lasted for one year only. On February 1889, the Jonaki, a leading monthly of the period made its appearance from Calcutta under editorship of Chandrakumar Agarwala, followed by Hem Chandra Goswami, Laxminath Bezbarua, Kanaklal Barua, Ratnakanta Barkakoti. Non – political in character the Jonaki brought about a literary awakening dealing with scientific, historical, literacy and useful subjects.

#### 4.2. Literature and Language

Assam came under the British rule nearly a century after East India Company's contact with Bengal. For their administrative convenience in 1836 the British authorities introduced Bengali in place of Assamese in the schools and courts of Assam. Renowned Assamese leaders like Anandaram Dhekial Phukan along with the American Baptist Missionaries criticized the government's policy. It was the American Baptists headed by Nathan Brown and Miles Bronson who initiated the preparatory ground for florescence of Assamese literature. The former wrote the first grammar of Assamese language (1848) and the latter completed and published the first Assamese lexicon (1867). The credit of publishing the first magazine cum newspaper *Aunodoi* rested on these missionaries. Besides translation into Assamese of the Bible, classics like *Pilgrim's progress* and having religious bias, *Arunodoi* published a few works which may be considered as forerunners of Assamese Novel.

In a period where Assamese language had to fight for its survival, *Arunodoi* served as a powerful source for exploring the native language, literature. It showed the way for other periodicals to be published later, both in Assamese and English publishing more magazines in Assamese and helped in the birth of some new Assamese writers who later on proved to be the forerunners of Modern Assamese Language and literature like Hemchandra Barua, Gunabhiram Barua, Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Nidhiram Farewell etc. *Arunodoi* was very popular among the educated middle class of Assam and its style greatly shaped the modern Assamese prose. The missionaries adopted the dialect of Sibsagar and on it modern Assamese subsequently developed. They tried their best to pick up the nuances of the language and it was reflected in the articles published in the magazines. Of the English educated Assamese Youths, the harbinger of the new age was Anandaram Dhekial Phukan. His advanced and liberal views and ardent patriotism found clear expression in the representation he made to Mills in 'Observation on the Administration of Assam' and his articles in several issues in the *Arunodoi*. He also wrote a series of articles in *Arunodoi*, under the heading of "A few Remarks on the Assamese Language and Vernacular Education" in 1859. Gunabhiram Barua wrote a number of tracts under the heading *Lara Bandhu* (Friend of Boys) in *Arunodoi*.

From the point of view of historical literature *Aunodoi* made some contribution in this field also. The *Buranjis* or chronicles were the precious gifts conferred on the Assamese by the Ahom rulers who had ruled the Brahmaputra valley for six centuries. During the period of civil wars and Burmese invasions innumerable old and rare *Buranjis* were lost to posterity and the process was accelerated by the ravages of white ants and repeated floods, fires and earthquakes. In the search, collection, preservation of these *Buranjis* the American missionaries were pioneers in the field. Nathan Brown during his stay at Sibsagar collected major part of a rare manuscript *Purani Asom Buranji* and published in a serial (1850-52) in the *Arunodoi*. This was later published as *Deodhai Assam Buranji* by the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Guwahati. Brown was instrumental in the publication of the *Assam Buranji* by Kashinath Tamuli Phukan (1844). The *Arunodoi* published *Chutia Buranji* (1846) and facsimiles of innumerable coins of the Ahom, *kachari*, *Jayantia*, *Koch kings* and *Mughal emperors*.

#### 4.3. Diffusion of New Ideas

Though the contemporary conservative sections of the society criticized *Arunodoi* for 'Disseminating western thought and learning the *Arunodoi* inspired the younger generation and prepared the ground for intellectual awakening'. Through the pages of the *Arunodoi* pilgrim's progress, scripture narratives, sketches of martyrs, history of Apostles, parable of sower and Accounts of our Savior 'found their way into heathen homes'. Nonetheless illustrative articles on geography, astronomy, natural history conveyed useful information while temperature, truthfulness, self-reliance and themes of similar nature attracted the attention of the reading public. It was *Arunodoi* who for the first time gave the native people ideas about railways, news of America, science and other developments of contemporary period. It describes the workings of railways with illustrative images of rails and engines. In this way *Arunodoi* played a vital role in breaking the isolation of the cultural life of the Assamese people and widen the mental horizon of those who did not know English. In a colonial state by publishing a newspaper journal without making any discriminate among the rulers and the ruled in spreading various ideas, knowledge it in one way created a revolution in colonial Assam. Rightly the *Friend of India* observes; its objects are to kindle and foster a spirit of enquiry among the lethargic people in Assam and to break up that unimpressionableness of character, which is so great an obstacle to their national improvement. We hope it will be useful to the full extent of the wishes formed by its public-spirited projectors'.

#### 4.4. Attitude towards the Socio Economic Problems

Though *Arunodoi* did not want to come into open conflict with the colonial masters yet it did not remained silent regarding some burning social norms and malpractices prevailed in the Assamese society. One was polygamy. In an article *Anek bia kara ajugut* (it is wrong to marry many) in the *Arunodoi* one 'Sri Sonarchand' bitterly attacked the prevailing system polygamy. The writer is believed to be no other than Hem Chandra Barua. He exposed the vices of Assamese society, particularly irreligious acts of the priestly classes. Addiction to opium or *kane* was the greatest evil which was eating into the very vitals of the Assamese society. The drug was derived from poppy, a plant, which was formerly extensively cultivated. As a result, it was consumed by all high and low, rich and poor, old and young converting the Assamese 'once a hardy, industrious and enterprising race into an effeminate, weak and indolent and degenerated people'. *Arunodoi* directly and indirectly criticized the opium problem. The regular writer of *Arunodoi* Hemchandra Barua wrote the famous satire *Kaniar Kirtan*.

**5. Conclusion**

During the colonial period lots of changes came to the Assamese society and culture. In the Nineteenth century Assamese people were introduced with the western culture and tradition. Introduction of printing books and press played a significant role in the modernization process of the nation and Arunodoi was proved to be one of the leading pioneers in this field. Whatever the original motive of the missionaries regarding the publishing of this magazine cum newspaper we cannot deny its contribution towards Assamese literature and cultural awakening. Its influence towards Assamese culture, literature and society was so immense that the period in between 1840-80 (till the publication of Junaki magazine) the whole period can rightly be called as 'Arunodoi Age'.

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