

LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF SILENCE; THE CONCERNS FOR WIDOW REMARRIAGE IN COLONIAL ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

The paper tries to argue the case of widow remarriage, in colonial Assam. Like in the other parts of the country, it was one of the most contentious issues, where new western ideas and the traditional ideas came into direct confrontation. In this contest, there were no victories but compromises, where traditions in contrast with the forces of modernity had the upper hand. But, when the question of legalising particular social practices as unlawful, it did create several problems for the common people.

KEYWORDS: Widowhood, Gender, Sexuality, Social Reforms, Colonialism

INTRODUCTION

The issue of widowhood is traumatic for the women and the society at large, particularly in the caste Hindu society. For centuries it is considered as a curse by the Indian women and the issue of widow remarriage is still not favourably been taken as the ideal course for the women in the society. The colonial intervention made a great breakthrough in the meaning and context of widowhood as for the first time modern education and criticisms from the various Christian missionaries made it a serious issue to be dealt with. From the days of James Mill who categorically stated the status of the Hindu civilization is incomparable to the west as it treated the women (to him, it is the benchmark of the standard of judging a particular civilization) and T. B. Macaulay to the Victorians and even in the last phase of the colonial rule the issue of the Indian women remained a contentious issue for the colonial state.¹ Even today, the issue have remained contentious. The best example in this regard is the film 'Fire' (1996) directed by Deepa Mehta, which tried to deal with the issue.² Edward Said has also argued, how the western notion of understanding the east was mediated by the question of power, which had a binary opposition between the 'self' and the 'other'. The western observers took a self imposed position of superiority to judge the eastern society only through their parameters. The issue of observation and perception therefore, is not beyond question. In this scheme, the status of the native women became a crucial and justifiable point of intervention for the west.³ For example, the issues of the 'harem' and the 'purdah' brought the attention of the western observers to judge the status of the women of the east.

The various Christian missionaries who began to enter the country after the Act of 1813 (prior to which they were not allowed to enter the country for proseletyization), also brought the plights of the Indian women in the limelight. They began to criticize the various aspects of the Indian traditions like sati, polygamy and superstitious to show the superiority of their own religion and culture. The missionaries tried to blend religion and science in a selective way so that, the educated Indians would convert to their religion. The issue of the Indian women, particularly the Hindu (who was and still is predominant in the country) was a special interest as well as concerns for the missionaries.

They knew that it is the native women who were maintaining the traditions and if, their mindsets can be changed the Hindu society as a whole would ultimately convert. In order to achieve it, they took several measures like spread of education and introduction of western medicine, and the printing press etc. The issue of widowhood was one of their prime targets, as it was (and still is) one of the most sentimental issue for the women as well as the society as a whole. But, so strong was the hold of the traditions in the country the missionaries had very limited success among the majority of the people in terms of their basic agendas. But, their activities helped in the growth of awareness among the Indian people about their problems as well as to find avenues to resolve them.

The passing of the Hindu Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 (Act XV of 1856) was one of the major event in the socio-cultural history of India. It sought to remove all legal obstacles regarding Hindu widow remarriage. Like the case of the sati, there were discourse on widow remarriage also generated several debates within the Indian society. Here again the two contending parties, who were for it and against it cannot be straight jacketed as progressive or conservatives. They were fighting within the parameters of the shastras or the Hindu legal traditions. In a context like colonial India, 'it was largely upper-caste norms of the female virtue that pulled together a highly diverse caste spectrum into the semblance of a single community'.⁴ In fact, the ideas of modernity also played important roles in selecting the victorious side. Uma Chakravarty has argued that, it was the second major intervention by the colonial state, after the Sati into the traditional Indian society.⁵ But, unlike the former, it had little success, if not to term as a total failure. Even, Vidyasagar, who was mainly instrumental in the passing of the Act, had ultimately to accept his failure.⁶ The case was not different in the other parts of the country like, Veerasilangham Pantalu in Andhra Pradesh, M. G. Ranade in Maharashtra and many others. One of the prime obstacle in the implementation of the Act was, the widow's rights over the property of her late husband. This made the prospect of the Act, as a failure from the very outset in the joint family system of the country.

Did the colonial state understand the real needs of the Indian women? C. A. Bayly, regards it as one of the major failure of the colonial state.⁷ Susan Bayly also argued that, the very understanding of the colonial state, about the Indian traditions were contentious.⁸ The colonial state, through their own initiatives hardly tried to interfere into the matters concerning traditions of the natives. It was forced to interfere by the Indian social reformers, who wanted certain practices to be abolished through legislations. The colonial state was aware that, if they try to interfere with the traditions, then they have to face united challenges from the natives, who were otherwise divided by different factors like religion, race, culture, language etc. After the Mutiny of 1857, the dilemmas of the colonial state towards the issue of social reforms among the Indian subjects became clearly apparent as they found that one of the prime factors for the Mutiny was the social intervention. Interestingly, only during the last phase of its rule in India the colonial state became concerned with the problems of the Indian women. It tried to introduce several legislations for the benefit of the Indian women, but it was too late, as the majority of the Indian women began to respond to the nationalists.⁹

The issue of widow remarriage have to be examined with the broader social contexts. Firstly, the ban on widow remarriage was mainly confined among the higher castes only, and even among the higher castes also, it needs further qualifications if one critically looks at the situation of the colonial state. For example, in a predominantly agrarian and feudal system, how far caste identities determined the practical needs of people particularly in the rural society which required more workforces. Secondly, one must also look at the regional variations in terms of the practice of the prevalent popular customs. Thirdly, whether the agendas of the social reformers benefitted the women who had the major stake in the issue? In other words, did the women actually need the colonial legislation for widow remarriage? Fourthly, whether the

issue of widow remarriage was generalised or determined by the different contending parties without asking the opinions of the women, who were the main victims as in the case of the sati?¹⁰ Fifthly, whether the Act was actually needed to serve the interests of the Widows?

The present paper will try to examine the issue in the context of the Brahmaputra valley due to the availability of sources and the particular impacts on the Hindu or the Hinduised population.¹¹ It was not a question among the Muslims and a large section of the tribal communities, among whom it was a common practice. The context of widowhood and widow remarriage needs further answers as for the majority of the common people it was not an issue but made an issue by the newly emerging educated middle class. In fact, colonial Assam was not the exception as in most parts of the country it was the common norm, particularly in the tribal dominated areas, where caste norms were not strictly practiced. Therefore, the question may be asked whether introducing it as a serious issue the common practices were marginalised, which was not following the norms of the Victorian modernity? In other words, whether colonial modernity acted against the interests of the women? Secondly, whether by implementing the Act, the colonial state tried to introduce Victorian Morality in disguise? Further, how far the various Census reports made their impacts on the caste mobility, where ban on widow remarriage became a norm? It will also try to look at the reactions of the Assamese women on the issue of widowhood and widow remarriage.

Indian Reformers and the Women

The issue of women was the prime agenda of the Indian social reformers in colonial India. Tapan Raichaudhury has argued that, the Indian social reformers were the first among the Asian intellectuals, in understanding the utilities of the western knowledge in reforming their own society.¹² But, at the same time they also understood that merely imitating the west without contextualizing to the Indian situation is not going to work. Most of the social issues like sati, lower age of marriage among the upper castes as well as prohibition on widow remarriage are critically linked up with the issues of deep rooted traditions of the society. The Indian society is so intensely involved with traditions that without understanding this any social reforms could not be undertaken. Kenneth N. Jones therefore, argues that the Indian social reform movements should be termed as socio-religious reform movements instead of merely as social reform movements.¹³ As a result, from the days of Raja Rammohun Roy, Vidyasagar and till the 20th century this linkage with traditions was repeatedly used by the Indian reformers. The break with the past necessarily did not mean total break up but, also re-negotiations with the past.

The issue of the widows is intricately linked with the nearly all the major social reforms of the colonial period from, sati, early marriage to the Age of Consent. The issue of polygamy was very limited among the majority of the caste Hindus and it had no major impacts on the issues of the widows. The widows were left with no alternatives but, to live the rest of their lives as symbols of pity, sorrow, dependent on other's mercies, who were unwelcomed in any major social functions. In a sense, they were considered as living dead by the contemporary society. Therefore, any major intervention, in this regard was problematic for the colonial state. But, with the growth of western education and the criticisms of the Christian missionaries and a section of the British officials, the unfortunate conditions of the Indian widows continued to be in the limelight. The Indian social reformers starting with Vidyasagar advocated several ideas, to improve the lives of the Indian widows and this could be better performed, through the reintroduction of the Vedic remarriage practices. But, traditions cannot be moulded at ones will and this, became a major challenge for the advocates of the widow-remarriage issue in India.

Hindu Revivalism and the Indian Women

The growth of the Hindu Revivalist Movement is a significant marker in the quest of attaining self identity in colonial India. Although, there were different strands of Hindu Revivalist movements with different techniques the idealization of the past (both mythical and historical) as the solution for several contemporary issues became the binding force. The discovery of the various relics and monuments as well as the availability of the various texts through the emerging 'print culture' (among the new educated sections of the society which was filtered down to the illiterates) helped in the growth of a new appreciation to the past. The colonial state also wanted to take the advantage of it through the newly popular concept of the 'Aryan' race.¹⁴ In other words; it fitted with the colonial concept of racial superiority over the natives.

The root for revivalism was present even during the times of Raja Rammohun Roy, as those who opposed him like Raja Radhakanta Dev were supporters of women's education. They cannot be simply termed as conservatives. The major issue for them was that, they did not want the colonial state to interfere in the traditional or internal matters of the community. Their concern was, if people like Rammohun, appeal the colonial state to interfere into the internal matters of the community then, every aspects of the community will be interfered. It would affect the integrity and identity of the community as a whole. In a country like India where traditions is one of the major linking parts between the past and the present, it was a crucial issue. Although, they did not openly focus the issue at that time, it was later responded by the Hindu Revivalists, who believed that in order to reform the society there are no need to seek help from the state, rather it should be done from within. Therefore, they tried to seek the role model in the Vedic period, unmediated by the others.

This resulted also a comparison between the west and the eastern views on morality where the later tried to score heavily against the former. Himani Bannerjee has shown how this became the dominant view in Bengal.¹⁵ Their views were reinforced by the Orientalists or the Ideologists, who found the examples of ancient India could solve several issues, confronting the western society like materialism, violations of the class boundaries due to the emergence of the bourgeoisie class and capitalism and the breaking up of the traditional social norms etc. can be resituated through the examples of the east.

The socio-cultural interactions between the west and the east through colonial education, print culture, legal institutions, legal systems etc., led to a new awakening in Bengal, known as the 'Bengal Renaissance', whose impacts were felt gradually all over the country.¹⁶ But, the initial euphoria about the west, and its superiority over the indigenous cultures soon began to be questioned by a section of the educated natives. In fact, the western ideas although in many cases appealed to the young men like Young Bengal always remained problematic to adjust with the contemporary Indian realities. The best example, in this regard is Micheal Madhusudan Dutt, who had ultimately to accept the practical situation where socially radical ideas had no place.¹⁷ By the second half of the 19th century, this questioning of the moral superiority of the west was questioned through comparisons between the morality of the east and the west. In these moral comparisons, the Indian women scored higher to the western women over the issues of shame, womanliness and morality. Himani Bannejee has shown how through the questions of Shame (lajja), the moral superiority of the Indian women were situated by the Hindu Revivalists, against views of the western women.¹⁸ This theme was later reiterated by the Indian social reformers, as well as the Indian Nationalists like Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi for example, used it for his utopian concept of 'Ram Rajya'.

The Issue of Widowhood in Colonial Assam

Colonial Assam posed several dimensions to the issues of widowhood and widow remarriage like in many other parts of the country. The issue of widowhood was present in colonial Assam, but except the higher castes it was not a very serious issue. As in the case of the other parts of the country, only the higher castes who were the first to understand the utilities of the western education and therefore, they remained focussed to their own communities. It led in many aspects to overlook several socio-cultural practices of the common people. The question of widow remarriage was also viewed in this context among the educated middle class.

The Assamese middle class from the very outset were intensely observing the contemporary developments of Bengal. Even before the publication of the 'Arunodoi', a section of the educated middle class tried to involve themselves with the contemporary issues of Bengal. Since, till 1901, there was no college in the valley; Kolkata became the only destination for those youths who aspired for higher education. Even those who could not make it like Hemchandra Barua, constantly kept themselves updated with the latest events and issues of Kolkata. The issue of Widowhood and Widow-Remarriage also attracted the attention of the Assamese middle class and they used newspaper as the prime vehicle to argue for the cause.

In colonial Assam the issue of widow remarriage was first put forwarded by Gunabhiram Barua in the 'Arunodoi', in March 1858. He was deeply influenced by Vidyasagar and argued the cause through the Shastric foundations. His views was responded by an anonymous writer Mr, 'Samsari' (a family man), who appealed the Assamese youths from the respectable families should set the examples before the others by marrying widows. Further, the writer appealed Gunabhiram, if he was still a bachelor to show the lead and earn blessings from the widows. Gunabhiram was serious in this cause. A convert of the Brahmo Samaj, he began to publish a play 'Ram-Navami' serially in the 'Arunodoi' from 1858 and it was published in the book form in 1870. This play was inspired by Umesh chandra Mitra's play 'Bidhava Rahashya Natak' (1856). In the same year (1870), he did the heroics, by actually marrying a Brahmin widow, Bishnupriya (he was also a Brahmin), his contemporary Assamese society promptly responded by social boycott.¹⁹

Gunabhiram's views were strongly supported by Hemchandra Baruah. In 1865, when he was only 30, lost his wife, (a young age for a man to remarry as per the customs of the time). But he refrained, although, he had a girl child to look after. He justified his remarriage as-

"I did not marry again. Considering the present situation of our society it was wholly condemnable for a man to remarry after the death of his wife. I thought, 'what would have happened to her if I were to dead instead?' she is dead, yet, if I wish I could marry not once but thrice or more; but after being widowed if she again uttered the name of marriage, she would lose her caste, society would have disowned (her) and she would have be like a dead (body). How unreasonable it is! How illogical!! So it is improper for me to remarry."²⁰ (Emphasis added)

There were also some lesser known authors who also made efforts towards the issue of widowhood. Nilakantha Barua, for example, in his novel 'Mem' (1891), which was serialized in the Assamese newsmagazine 'Bijuli' tried to show the plights of the high caste Assamese widows, who were easily lured to immoral practices due to the absence of the practice of widow remarriage.

Among the noted literary figures, Lakshminath Bezabarua was crusader, for against the sufferings of the widows.

Through his literary works he challenged several social discriminations of his time against the women. He repeatedly questioned the validity of the prevailing view about female inferiority in the society. Bezbarua wanted the women to be empowered through education and spread of social awareness, among them. He wanted to leave the sensitive issue of widow remarriage to the empowered widows to decide by themselves, whether to remarry or not. But at the same time, he was against the idea of blind imitation of other cultures particularly Bengali, which for him lowered the status of the indigenous cultures of the province.

The issue of Widow Remarriage began to take a caste angle when a section of the educated Brahmins became concerned to it. It showed the limited agendas of social reforms among the reformers. In contemporary Bengal also the debates over the issue was dominant. Most of these debates were concerned with the plights of the early widows and possibilities of their remarriages, especially those who had no sexual relations with their husbands. Among these Lakshmidhar Sharma, a writer and a noted freedom fighter made radical demands for the cause of widow remarriage. In his (incompletely available) article, 'Asomiya Nari Sambandhe Ashar Diyek' (Few Remarks on the Assamese Women), published in the Assamese newsmagazine 'Assam Hitoishi' in Vol.I, No. VIII, 22 September, 1925, he argued in favour of widow remarriage. He not only showed great support for the western women's movements and criticised the attitudes of a section of the conservative minded people who tried to limit the issue only to devotion to religion. He argued,

"The biggest objection against the widow remarriage is that it will spoil the Hindu religion. Well, can they explain which part of Hinduism will be spoiled by widow remarriages? In fact, they have always a sympathetic view about the widow's soul. They are scared to think about the impossible item between one, which was gifted to be again be done. It is very shocking to think about the word gifting which is very humiliating to the women. The father of the girl has an item in her person. He earns punya, by inviting someone and gifting that item because he has no place in his house to store it. This means that the women's position is among the gift items." (Emphasis added)

While criticising the rituals as 'uncivilized rites' he argued that 'the status of the Assamese widow's were that of a maidservant, an illiterate maidservant' which was 'worse than death' He criticised the men for imposing strict celibacy upon the widows for their entire lives, while they kept themselves exempt from this requirement. Therefore, he strongly advocated the cause of widow remarriage in Assam.²¹

The issue of widowhood was intricately linked up with the issue of early marriage, mainly practiced among the higher castes. It is one of the major factors which forced the Brahmins to take special interest with the issue of widowhood. The prevalence of early marriage in many cases led to early widowhood and as in the other parts of the country, society was not prepared to accept the widows to remarry.

In many parts of the Lower Assam there was a new issue (which was in many cases unique to Assam), related to early marriage begin to emerge. Due to the strict tradition of the early age of marriage among the caste Hindus, particularly among the Brahmins, reinforced by the contemporary events of colonial Bengal, the search for the ideal age for girls became a major issue among the Brahmins of Assam. It took a new turn when the fathers of the girls found it as a source of income. Unlike, Bengal it emerged in Assam as 'bride price', a tribal practice adopted by the caste Hindus for their selfish gains. But, due to customs as well as the impacts of the contemporary Bengal the lower age of marriage for the Brahmin girls became a new social standard.

The American Baptist Missionaries were keen observers to the problems of the Assamese widows. In order to promote Christianity they were looking for the loopholes in the Indian society. The widows provided a great opportunity for their cause. Yet, in spite of the missionary exaggerations, their observations cannot be overlooked. Miles Bronson writes,

The Sastras forbid their ever marrying a second time. On the death of a husband their ornaments were stripped off and their heads shaved. They became the drudge and servant of the family where they dwell. How cheerless is the life of such!²²

Later, Mrs. S. R. Ward, translated a missionary tract into Assamese, 'Banrir Mitra' (The Widows Friend) in 1879, whereby the Biblical imagery and ideals of widowhood was sought to be integrated with the Indian tradition with placing the Christ as the only saviour. But, Mrs. Ward, a missionary did not advocate widow remarriage in Assam as it would nullify the moral grounds on which the Christian missionaries confronted the educated Assamese elites. Secondly, it was difficult even for the missionary women to challenge the aura associated with widowhood, for example, devotion to God and to the dead husband.²³

Therefore, she had to admit the failure among the Hindu women in the Brahmaputra valley. Sometimes, the Hindu responded to the question of conversion as, "If we had been true to our old religion, we should not have trouble now. It is because you have brought this new religion that we have trouble. We don't want your new religion. The Hindu religion was good enough for our fathers and it is good enough for us."²⁴ (Emphasis added) Mrs. Moore was frustrated that in spite of the best efforts on the parts of Baptist missionaries like spread of education, introduction of the print culture the Assamese women in spite of the various discriminations and evil practices were still attached to their religious and socio-cultural traditions. These aspects forced the Christian missionaries to look for the Hills where they had significant successes.

Issues of Sexuality

The issue of sexuality played a prime role in the debates on widow remarriage. The sexuality of the women was regarded by the traditional society as a matter of personal control and women who became widows were expected to be free from their bodily desires. Widows were regarded as bodily dead person who should not have any sexual desires. But, this did not follow as many women found it hard to do so. Vidyasagar therefore, argued that, due to the ban on widow remarriage some women were forced to indulge in immoral practices as they failed to control their sexual instincts.

But, unlike colonial Bengal the issue of sexuality was not the prime factor of the debates on widow remarriage. Hemchandra Baruah tried to avoid it. But, it was not absent altogether. In the 'Banhi' Vol.VIII, No.I, 1917, Sri Dwarakanath Dev Goswami wrote 'A Letter' which pointed out that due to the ban on widow remarriage several illegitimate relationships were taking place among the Brahmins, harming the morality of the society. Whereas the men got no punishments after they swear out their guilt, the women were always held responsible for committing such acts with punishments. In order to free themselves from the social censures, some resorted to perform feticide or take some indigenous medicines to prevent getting pregnant. This was a risky enterprise, impairing the health of the practitioners.

Yet, at the same time, widow remarriage was practiced among a section of the Brahmins, whose social position was lower. The author, as a remedy to the ban on widow remarriage urged that this system should be accepted and whose

persons who marry a Brahmin widow should be placed as second or third grade Brahmins. With them however, the first grade Brahmins will not have any social relationships. The author seems to believe that if this was done then it will motivate a section of the lower caste Hindus to marry Brahmin widows and thereby improve their caste positions in the society. In fact, in Nagoan there emerged a particular caste known as the 'Baria', resulting from such relationships. Secondly, as with Vidyasagar, those child widows who had no sexual relations with their husbands be treated as virgins and be allowed to remarry.

But, the discourse on widow remarriage got less priority among the Brahmin social reformers to the issue of early marriage. They found it difficult to introduce it as the society was dead against it. They therefore, emphasized that the main cause behind it, early marriage be stopped. With the passage of the Sarda Act in 1928, the incidence of child marriage began to decline and so also a corresponding decline of early widowhood.

Assamese Women and the Question of Widowhood and Widow Remarriage

The reactions of the educated Assamese women towards the issue of widowhood and widow-Remarriage are important to situate the discourse in the colonial context. For the limited numbers of the educated women it was difficult to openly advocate introducing widow remarriage in the colonial context. Even at the present time it remains problematic for the women. Padmavati Devi Phukanani wrote that, the very word of widow is 'harsh' for the women.²⁵ Nalinibala Devi, a poet and the daughter of the famous freedom fighter; Nabinchandra Bordoloi was at pains to explain the agonies of widowhood, which had to face it at an early age. Therefore, in her poems the factor of grief and the search of solace in the God dominated. This also applied to other contemporary women authors like, Jamuneshwari Devi Khataniyar.²⁶ This was not due, according to Sutapa Bhattacharya to the fear of expression but, for the pressures exhorted by the patriarchal ideologies, which (have) been creating 'an imagined icons of a cultural Indian Womenhood'.²⁷ The Hindu-Revivalists also had no serious agendas to reintroduce widow-remarriage, although Dayanand Saraswati, tried to advocate it among the child widows.²⁸ The various women organizations also had no clear cut agendas for the introduction of widow remarriage. They advocated instead, the spread of education which would gradually awaken the mindsets of the people and the Indian women would have better prospects in the future.

Widowhood and the Common People

The issue of widow remarriage among the people is interesting as the practice was common among a large section of the Assamese people. The remarried women were known as the 'Dhemni' or 'Batlu' and the men, who married such women were known as the 'Dhoka's or literally, as support to bending trees. These terms were not accepted as honourable, in a patriarchal society, but, they were not considered as abnormal. Usually, such marriages did not involve little ritual practices or ceremonies. The remarried women usually settled in her new husband's household, and sometimes the widower did it. In an agrarian society like Assam, where women's participation was essential, society accepted such relationships and it was practiced even among the higher castes like the Brahmins. The status of the children's of such remarried women depended on the later husbands. Usually, the remarried women disinherited the rights over her late husband's property.

Among the educated elites it was Gunabhiram Barua, who brought the issue in to the limelight in his 'Assam Buranji' where the remarried women were represented as non-ideal jati. Here, again he only referred to the union of the Brahmin widows and the non-Brahmin husbands. Prior to him, Anandaram Dhekial Phukan also showed resentments about

the violations of the caste norms in the society and so did the 'Arunodoi'. Hemchandra Barua, who was very sympathetic to the plights of the women could not free himself from the existing caste prejudices of the time and did not advocate it as practical option. The decline of the practices of widow remarriage was also due among the majority of the common people to the legal issues it involved.²⁹

The Census Reports also tried to show how the growth of the caste consciousness among a section of the people who wanted to identify themselves as the higher caste began to adopt several upper caste norms including early marriage and ban on widow remarriages, as their socio-cultural practices. In 1901 the number of widows in every thousand was 176; in 1931 it got reduced to 141.³⁰

CONCLUSIONS

The debates on widowhood and widow remarriage are important in the social history as it tried to highlight the limitations of the reform agendas of the Indian reformers. Although, women's issues were the prime agendas of the social reformers, yet, the men demanded and determined reforms in many cases failed to understand the real needs of the women. It is beyond doubt that men like Vidyasagar and Gunabhiram were sincere in understanding the plights of the widows. But, the insertion of the legal factors for its implementation made the Act a failure, from the very outset. More than that, it closed the door for those people who were practicing it, and did not ask for any legislation. In the name of higher cultural values the existing practices were marginalized. Here, the Christian missionaries were also unsuccessful as they had no convincing logic for widow remarriage in the Indian context.

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14. For details see, Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, Yoda Press, New Delhi, 2004. In fact, the notion of the 'Aryan' became a very fashionable topic among a section of the European scholars who were busy in locating a common linguistic origin for a white or 'relatively' white people of Europe and Asia. This led to the marginalization of the Dravidians and the various tribal or ethnic communities. Although, started with a quest of a common linguistic identity it from the very outset failed to accommodate several conflict identities like race and ethnicity.
15. For details see' Himani Bannerji, *Attired in Virtue, Discourse on Shame (Iajja) and Clothing of the Gentlewomen (bhadramahila) in Colonial Bengal*, in *Inventing Subjects, Studies in Hegemony, Patriarchy and Colonialism*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2001,pp. 99- 134.
16. The very term 'Bengal Renaissance' is questioned by the historians from the days of S. Sarkar in the 1970's. Also see, details, Anindita Ghosh, *Revisiting the 'Bengal Renaissance': Literary Bengali and Low-Life Print in Colonial Calcutta*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 42 (Oct. 19-25, 2002), pp. 4329-4338. Also see, Amiya P. Sen, *Hindu Revivalism in Bengal, 1872-1905, Some Essays in Interpretation*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1993, for the complexities and dilemmas of the Revivalist ideas in colonial Bengal. But, Sen failed to situate the caste question in terms of the changing class identities of the colonial logic.

17. For Michael Madhusudan Dutt see, Ghulam Murshid, Ashar Chalane Bhuli (in Bengali), Kolkata, 1993, for the complexities of the life of the poet who ultimately had to return to the traditional root to identify himself. In other words, west also failed to satisfy the growing socio-cultural issues of the time. Among the Assamese poets Bholanath Das was influenced by his style. Due to the paucity of his personal life context it is difficult to make a proper comparison with his mentor.
18. Himani Bannerji, *ibid*.
19. For Gunabhiram, see Nagen Saikia, Ed, 'Assam Bandhu's preface, p.19, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 1984. Also see, P. Choudhury ed, Ram Navami Natak, Guwahati, 1989, pp. 1-8. For the contemporary societies' attitude towards the problems of widowhood and widow remarriage see, Tilottama Mishra's novel 'Swarnalata' based on the daughter of Gunabhiram, Guwahati, 1997.
20. For details, see, 'Atmajivan Charit' (Autobiography) in Hemchandra Barua Granthavali, Guwahati, 1998. Also see, Nirupama Borgohain, 'Nari - Daradi Hem Chandra Barua, in S. Barman and P. Choudhury Eds, 'Adhunikatar Agradut, Pandit Hem chandra Barua', Guwahati, 1996, pp.45-50. It is difficult to argue whether Hemchandra actually read J.S. Mill, but he must have been aware about the contemporary developments in the western societies regarding the women.
21. Lakshmidhar Sharma Rachanavali, Vol.II, Guwahati, 1996, pp. 276-79.
22. H. K. Barpujari Ed, The comprehensive History of Assam, Vol. IV, p.203. In Assam however, widows did not require to shave their hairs. Bronson seems to have used it to rouse the sentiments of the natives to the issue of the plights of the widows. His colleagues however did not mention the existence of the practice in Assam.
23. See, Geraldine H. Forbes, "In search of the 'Pure Heathen' Missionary Women in Nineteenth Century India", The Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XXI, No. XVII. Also see, Indrani Sen, "'Between poor and 'purdah': The White Women in British India, 1858-1900", The Indian Economic and Social History Review, 34,3, 1997.
24. P.H. Moore, Twenty Years in Assam (Or Leaves From Journal) 1991, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, Reprint, 1982, pp.22-23.
25. Padmavati Devi Phukanani, 'Bidhaba' in P. D. Goswami Edited, Padmavati Devi Phukanani Rachavali, (in Assamese) Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 1995.
26. Pritha Dasgupta, Women Alone: The Problems and Challenges of Widows in India, International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (IJHSS), Volume 6, Issue 6, October-November 2017, pp. 35-40
27. For details, see, Nalinibala Devi, Eri Aha Dinbor, Guwhati, (1976), 1994 Reprint, as well as her poems like Sandhiyar Sur. For her poems and other works see, Nalinibala Devi Rachanavali, Guwahati, 1988. Similar anxieties is also to be found in the writings of Nirmalprabha Bardoloi, another poet of later generation, who had to face questions of widowhood as well as illegitimacy. For details, see, Nirmalprabha Bardoloi's autobiography, Jivan- Jivan Bar Anupam, Guwahati, 2004.
28. Sutapa Bhattacharya, Ed, 'Bangali Meyer Bhabanamulak Gadya- Unish Satak, An anthology of women writings in 19th Century (in Bengali), Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, 1999, p.15.

29. Madhu Kishwar, 'Daughters of Aryavarta' in J, Krishnamurty, Ed., Women in Colonial India: Essays on Survival, Work and the State, Oxford University, 1989. Pp.78-113.
30. For details, see Janaki Nair, Women and Law in Colonial India, A Social History, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 59-71.
31. Census of India, Assam Part I Report, 1933, p. 93