

The Gaze

Reflection on socio-political issues



Dr Ranjit Sabhapandit

**The Gaze : A Reflection
on Socio-Political Issues**

Dr. Ranjit Sabhapandit

Published by :
Baosi Banikanta Kakati College
Nagaon, Barpeta, Assam
PIN - 781311

The Gaze - Reflection on socio-political issues :
A collection of articles relating various social and political issues in Assam and North-East after independence, written by Dr. Ranjit Sabhapandit and published by B.B.K. College, Nagaon, Barpeta, Assam.

ISBN : 978-81-954457-6-9

© Copyright Reserved with Author

Published by : B.B.K. College
Nagaon, Barpeta, Assam
PIN - 781311

First published on : 2023

Price : Rs. 200/- only

Printed at : Ashirbad Computer Press
Barpeta, Assam

Dedicated
to
the precious memories of
the founders of B.B.K. College

*"Here they went with smock and crook,
Toiled in the sun, lolled in the shade,
Here they mudded out the brook,
And here their hatchet cleared the glade"*
(Edmund Blunden)

- Author


Preface

Dr. Ranjit Sabhpandit, Vice-Principal of BBK College, Nagaon, Barpeta has been working in the college since 1991 with full of energy, devotion and always in search of writing for Historical evidences that makes people aware of our heritage and socio-economic and political conditions. His recent publication titled 'The Gaze : A Reflection on Socio-Political Issues' is one of his endeavour in this direction.

The Book on the Socio-Political issues of Assam aspires to the rank of a historical and chronological record of the history of Assam and their subsequent embellishment - a subject so intimately connected with history which has been a matter of much speculation to the antiquarian and man of letters as well as of great interest to the people of Assam.

The perusal of works will make things clear on the cost of opportunities for independence of Assam and the role of Assam students community. Role of British and leaders of Assam as well as National leaders which are explained thoroughly in this book. The book emphasises on land dispute of Assam alongwith innerline and security of the indigenous people where as the book will provide an opportunity of consulting the works as reference book for research work as well as for citing theories.

I hope this book will help to understand people of different communities for solving the disputes that will help in turn to live in peace.


16/10/2023

(Dr. Pradip Das)
Principal
B.B.K. College

Introduction

It is my privilege to contribute a few lines to the book authored by my esteemed colleague, Dr. Ranjit Sabhapandit (hereafter, Pandit Sir). My association with Pandit Sir, which dates back to 2010, has been a rewarding journey marked by intellectual growth, inspiration, and mutual respect. Throughout the years, Pandit Sir has consistently exhibited an unwavering dedication to his academic pursuits, achieving remarkable accomplishments along the way.

Pandit Sir is not only a scholar of great repute but also a person with an amicable disposition. His readiness to assist and contribute to any endeavour put forth by the college authority is truly commendable. At B.B.K. College, he has assumed various pivotal roles, including that of a Coordinator, IQAC, and most recently, the Vice-Principal of the college.

As an academician, Pandit Sir has displayed exceptional scholarship and a profound understanding of the intricate historical dynamics of Assam and the wider North East region. His research has illuminated previously unexplored aspects of the region's history, enriching academic discourse and expanding our collective knowledge. The literary accomplishments of Pandit Sir are equally commendable. His authorship of several books, each delving into the multifaceted historical issues of Assam and the North East, has provided invaluable resources for students, researchers, and history enthusiasts. These books serve as a wellspring of knowledge, offering profound insights into the region's past and the challenges it has surmounted.

The present book represents a significant research articulation, addressing a diverse range of historical and socio-political elements that have played pivotal roles in shaping the landscape of Assam and the broader North East region. Its scope is vast, encompassing critical themes that

are of paramount importance in comprehending the region's journey towards independence and the intricacies that persistently influence it.

Central to this book is the narrative of the struggle for independence in Assam, an enduring testament to unwavering determination and resilience, and a cornerstone of the region's historical identity. The role of the Assam students' community in the independence movement is also meticulously portrayed, shedding light on the significant contributions of these young minds.

Furthermore, the book delves into contemporary issues, such as the intricate matters of indigenous rights and security. It offers an in-depth analysis of the complexities surrounding migration in the North East, a region distinguished by its unique cultural mosaic. The Coupland Plan and armed movements in the North East are explored in detail, providing a comprehensive understanding of the historical and political context that has shaped the region's present state.

The book also addresses inter-state boundary disputes, a pressing concern in the North East, providing a valuable resource for those seeking clarity on these complex territorial matters.

In summary, this book is a scholarly masterpiece that weaves together the threads of history, culture, and contemporary issues, offering a comprehensive perspective on the journey of Assam and the North East. It stands as an indispensable resource for researchers, historians, students, and all those interested in unravelling the intricacies and nuances of this region. This book is a significant effort to bring to light the often-overlooked narratives and invaluable contributions of the North East to the rich tapestry of Indian history.

Dr. Gopal Kr. Sarma
Assistant Professor
Co-ordinator, IQAC, B.B.K. College

About the book

The anthology of articles "The Gaze: A Reflection on Socio-Political Issues" is the result of the author's inquisitive mind, and his deep consciousness of the burning issues of Assam, his nationalist stance and yearning for delving deep into the problems historically. The articles included in the book were published earlier in the periodical and Newspaper dailies. The book covers some of the age-old problems of Assam and NE states such as inter-border issues, immigration, insurgency problem, and innerline permit and struggle for Autonomous rule. These issues have carried wider socio-economic and political ramifications and need to study from historical perspective. The book attempts to address all these issues on historical evidence of the past. Major events of Indian Freedom Struggle also find place in the book.

The author attempts to incorporate historical evidence in his articles but is very careful in choosing the evidence so as to support his own view point on a particular issue. The articles, at the same time, would impel the readers to think critically on the issues and inspire them to go for further studies.

A. Rahman
Associate Professor
Ex Co-ordinator, IQAC, B.B.K. College

About the book

The pen has always been a powerful tool for addressing social issues and bringing about change. One such writer who has made significant contribution in this regard is Dr. Ranjit Sabhapandit. It has been a great privilege for me to have been a colleague of Dr. Sabhapandit. From the very first day of my introduction to sir, I have known him to be very dedicated and engaging his time to thorough research, careful fact checks and providing thought provoking insights on a wide range of topics be it politics, social issues, or history. He has taken initiatives to engage the other faculty members into discussions on various topics. He has consistently produced articles that are not only informative but also thought provoking. He has also made efforts to ignite the minds of students by organizing debate competitions on social issues.

Dr. Sabhapandit has been consistently contributing articles to regional newspapers, thus reaching out to a broad audience. What truly makes his writing exceptional is his ability to tackle controversial topics with sensitivity and nuance. He can explore the complexities of modern society without resorting to simplistic or reductive arguments. His writing encourages readers to think critically about the issues at hand and to consider multiple perspectives.

The present work reflects Dr. Sabhapandit's thoughts and views on a wide variety of topics of importance on Assam and North East India. His well researched views would definitely help to tackle controversial topics and also to consider multiple perspectives on burning issues, thus showing ways to a long-lasting solution.

I take the opportunity to congratulate sir on the publication of a thought-provoking book. His dedication and hard work have paid off, and I am thrilled to see his ideas and insights shared with the world. May the book inspire readers to think deeply and engage with the important issues that Dr. Sabhapandit sir has explored!

I wish sir a great success in his writing career!

Dr. Bhupen Rabha
Assistant Professor
Assistant Co-ordinator,
IQAC, B.B.K. College

About the book

The text as a whole is an exceptional piece of work in which each of the chapters being discussed provide a valuable addition in strengthening and enriching one's knowledge regarding various political and socio-economic aspects of Assam & Northeast India. The discussion and debates of numerous issues being channelised into 15 different chapters such as - the interstate border disputes in N. E. India, issues related to the illegal immigrants, presence of armed movements & its effect, land dispute issues, establishment of ULFA and its consequences etc. sheds light on important political discusses of Assam. Moreover, other aspects like the role of Assam student's community during the Indian Independence Movement, remarkable contributions and sacrifices of some heroic figures of the state towards creating an indigenous identity of its own, Assamese people's love for freedom & sense of patriotism for its state etc. reflect an intriguing impression to the readers. By introducing a broad scope of political themes and its analytical study of Assam and Northeast India, the text focuses on how and why political realities need to be unfused, from the beliefs and attitudes of individuals to the policies and regulations of the state. All the chapters carry in depth understanding and critical awakening of difficult parameters related to Assam's history that have long been rejected or rarely discussed within the historical context.

10th Oct. 2023

Anupama Devi
Asstt. Professor, B.B.K. College

From the Author

Sometimes it feels good to rethink and re-analyse about things that we often see around us daily but don't think about deeply. New questions arise in our mind and we frantically seek answers. We are compelled to delve deeply into the subjects.

It is very difficult to analyse something from a neutral point of view. This is the main problem in analysing the problems in our society to take a neutral stand. We always take a side while analysing the problems. We do not have the mindset for self-analysis. It is our basic nature to take one side and then, entertain ourselves by finding faults with the 'other side'.

I always nurtured a dream to arrange my thoughts and views for my own pleasure. The essays included in this book is a result of that 'arranged thinking'. The readers will definitely find scope to criticise and put forward their opinion about these essays. The essays included in this book has already been published in various newspapers-magazines of Assam.

My heartfelt thanks to Hitesh Sarma for helping with the DTP work of this book. I thank the Ashirbad Computer Press Publication and its proprietor, Kailash Das and Ajit Medhi for taking the responsibility of printing the book. The cover page credit goes to Bikash Barua, thanks to him as well. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my college Principal Dr. Pradip Das, my colleague, Dr. Gopal Sarma, Dr. Bhupen Rabha, Dr. Mrinal Misra, Harun

Al-Rashid, Dr. Pranjoyoti Deka, Mrs. Phulrenu Misra, Anupama Devi, Dr. Hiramani Haloi, those who helped me a lot in the completion of this book. By carefully collecting and preserving the essays published in various newspapers-magazines, my better-half Rijumoni Goswami and my son, Pratushraag not only helped but also encouraged me immensely in this book becoming a reality.

I hope the readers will welcome the book and by pointing out the errors-mistakes inspire me to march ahead with my future ventures.

1st December 2011
Swapna-Neer
G.C Lane, Galiyahati
Barpeta.
Contact: 94353-21134

Ranjit Sabhapandit

Contents

CHAPTER 1	Page - 1
INDEPENDENCE OF ASSAM: LOST OPPORTUNITIES	
CHAPTER 2	Page - 13
ROLE OF THE ASSAM STUDENTS COMMUNITY IN THE INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT AND THE CUNNINGHAM CIRCULAR.	
CHAPTER 3	Page - 28
INNERLINE AND SECURITY OF THE INDIGENOUS	
CHAPTER 4	Page - 37
INTERESTS- THOUGHTS OF THE NATIVES IN THE BACKGROUND OF MIGRATION	
CHAPTER 5	Page - 46
THE COUPLAND PLAN AND ARMED MOVEMENTS AGAINST INDIA IN THE NORTH EAST	
CHAPTER 6	Page - 55
KOHIMA TREATY, CHIEF MINISTER BORBORA'S DOIYANG VICTORY FESTIVAL, RENGMA - NAMBAR - DIPHU GENOCIDE AND AGGRESSIVE MENTALITY OF THE NAGAS.	
CHAPTER 7	Page - 63
TENDENCY OF THE HILL TRIBES TO OCCUPY LAND IN ASSAM WHAT DOES HISTORY SAY?	

CHAPTER 8 INTER STATE BOUNDARY DISPUTE: ASSAM AND ITS ADJOINING HILL STATES	Page - 72
CHAPTER 9 ANTI-IMMIGRANT STAND OF CHIEF MINISTERS -MEDHI, AND BANGLADESHI LOVE OF CHIEF MINISTERS CHALIHA, SINGHA, MAHANTA BORDOLOI, SAIKIA AND GOGOI	Page - 80
CHAPTER 10 FROM INDEPENDENT ASSAM TO AUTONOMOUS RULE A LENGTHY CIRCUIT	Page - 95
CHAPTER 11 COMPLETE AUTONOMOUS RULE ULFA-GOVERNMENT DISCUSSION WHAT ARE THE ISSUES THAT THE ASSAMESE PEOPLE WANT TO BE DISCUSSED	Page - 103
CHAPTER 12 DISMISSAL OF THE 2ND ICS OF INDIA SIR SURENDRANATH BANNERJEE: A HISTORICAL GAZE	Page - 110
CHAPTER 13 THE STORY BEHIND DANDI YATRA	Page - 120
CHAPTER 14 INDIAN COMMUNIST AND QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT OF 1942	Page - 130
CHAPTER 15 FLOWERS OF DEBOKANTA'S POETRY & A MISTAKE OF GAUHATI UNIVERSITY	Page - 138

CHAPTER 1

Independence of Assam : Lost Opportunities

The National government of independent India was trying to spread the message of peace and progress among the masses through the development of a pan-Indian consciousness. However, it was easier said than done to wipe away the already rooted suspicion and chaos in the mind of the Indian populace comprising of various languages, castes, ethnicities and communities. In fact, in the post-independence scenario the suspicions and chaos instead of decreasing was gradually increasing. It may be noted that the manner in which the Indian administrative system had been displaying neglect and deceit towards the regional groups and communities, was one of the major cause for this.

The condition and environment of the Northeast cannot be compared with the other regions of India. The expansive area of *Bor Asom* (undivided Assam) and Tripura, Mizoram, NEFA (now the seven sisters) was assimilated with India by the colonial power through dubious conspiracies. In case of Assam, it was seen that the Burmese invasions, weakness of the royalty, the desperation of the subject populace to save their lives- in such a scenario, the British, in the guise of saviours, subjugated the Ahom administered Assam through a specific political understanding. In other words, the British did not occupy Assam through a specific political arrangement.

In 1990, The United Liberation Force of Assam (ULFA) followed the example of the 1967 Kashmiri revolutionary group's

demand for an independent state that led to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution no.1541 and the 1970 Sikh revolutionaries similar demand that led to the UNGA resolution no.2265, and sent an appeal to the erstwhile General Secretary of the UN, Mr. Perez de Cuillar to recognize Assam as an occupied territory. What was the basis of such an appeal from the ULFA? We have ample scope to look into this question. There is no reason as to why the basis of this appeal cannot be discussed even now. History stands witness to the fact that the Assamese had found several opportunities to shape Assam into a sovereign state. In this essay an attempt has been made to sketch and analyse through historical perspective how the Assamese had found and lost those opportunities to shape Assam into an independent sovereign state during the British rule.

Abandoning their own identity, never trying to realise what self-worth is, one section of Assamese has been labelling the ULFA proposal for an 'independent Assam' as dangerous. The psychology of this section, who has always maintained a distance from unbiased historical analysis is no less a danger to the interests of the Assamese community. To say so is no exaggeration. What did ULFA want and why did they highlight Assam as an "occupied territory/region"? There is justification that such questions can still be discussed in the political scenario by drawing from historical analyses.

Some historians write that Assam had to give up independence even before the Yandaboo treaty. However history does not support these comments to be true.¹ It is true that internal conflicts were there but for these conflicts Assam did not come under complete or permanent foreign rule directly or indirectly. On the other hand, the statement, 'It was through the Yandaboo treaty that Assam was occupied or came under the British', in some history books is not completely true. In fact, it can be said

that the terms of the Yandaboo treaty had recognised 'Assam's independent status'. To discuss this issue elaborately it is necessary to refer to Articles no.2 and 4 of the said treaty signed on 24th February 1826 between the King of Ava (Burma) and the British East India Company.

Article no.2 of the Yandaboo treaty states that:

'His Majesty the King of Ava renounces all claims upon and will abstain from all future interference with, the principality of Assam and its dependencies and also with the contiguous petty states of Cachar and Jyntia. With regard to Munnipur it is stipulated, that, should Ghumbheer Singh desire to return to that country, he will be recognized by the King of Ava as Rajah thereof.' It can be concluded from the above Article that -

1. The landmass known as Assam was ruled by the King as an independent principality.
2. Yandaboo treaty recognized the 'independent' status of Assam.
3. There were some vassal principalities in Assam and their administration was directed by the Ahom King.
4. The King of Ava (Burma) renounced all claims over Assam and the vassal principalities of Assam.
5. It was clearly mentioned that henceforth the King of Ava (Burma) will not interfere in the Ahom ruled principality of Assam.

From the above explanations it becomes quite clear that even prior to the Yandaboo treaty Assam has been stated to be a 'principality ruled by the Ahom King' (as per the terms included in the treaty) and the Burmese King renounced all claims over Assam. This amounted to the fact that Assam was a sovereign state and though this sovereignty had been undermined temporarily, the treaty once more established the former 'sovereign' status of the Ahom King.

Article no.4 of the Yandaboo treaty stated :

'His Majesty the King of Ava cedes to the British Government the conquered provinces of Yeh, Tavoy, Mergui and Tenasserim, with the island and dependencies thereunto appertaining, taking the Salween river as the line of demarcating on that frontier; and doubts regarding their boundaries will be settled as specified in the concluding part of article third'.

The point to be noted here is, according to this clause, those areas which the Burmese King ceded to the British were mentioned as 'conquered' areas. But in the case of Assam, no words like 'cede' or 'conquered' can be found. Here, the Burmese King had relinquished his political demands.

Even when one goes line by line through the Yandaboo treaty, one cannot find any word, sentence or clause vide which the British could make any demand over Assam. It was because of the fact that no political demands related to the administration of Assam was left in the hands of the British, that they lured the Assamese people by saying, "*Subjects of Assam, since the last few years you have suffered a lot because of the Burmese invasion. The Burmese expelled the King (Ahom) from the throne; looted wealth; murdered brahmins and cows; killed the religious seers and polluted the temples-Satras-Naamghars, not to speak of their devilish tortures.....supply ration to our soldiers, you will be paid for it. There are still some of the enemies who made your lives a living hell.....we have no come here to conquer your land. We do not aspire for that. We had to enter your land to save ourselves by annihilating the enemy that is creating havoc in our land. As such, till the time we are not able to chase away the enemy from Assam and resettle your province to everyone's satisfaction, you have no reason to worry—We will leave this place only after we chase away the torturing hordes and re-establish an able administration for your peaceful development*".

The British had occupied Uttar Pradesh (Awadh), Punjab, Jhansi, Chaura, Nagpur, etc. either by means of war or diplomacy. The same happened in Assam also and the Assamese people were taken for a ride. To legalize their illegal designs the British made Purandar Singha the king of upper Assam, only in name (1833) in return for 50,000/ rupee³ as annual tax. On the pretext that he had been unable to pay this amount decided vide the treaty to the Company, Purandar Singha was dismissed. [The person in charge of revenue collection, Maniram Duttabarua (later Dewan) siphoned away the money and never deposited it to the Company]. With the dismissal of Purandar Singha on 31st July 1839 the opportunity for the British to fulfil their wishes became successful and the whole of Assam came under their direct rule. By enthroning Purandar Singha the British displayed their sympathy towards the Assamese people and by dismissing him they proved that a peaceful existence of the Assamese people was impossible under the local ruler.

In fact, it was much before the Yandaboo treaty that the greedy eyes of the British had found in Assam. There is ample proof of this. In his report of 1774 George Bogle mentions, '*The Company's trade with Assam is extremely profitable and it is necessary that it should be expanded in the future. Teaching the Ahom King a lesson by a group of Company soldiers will lessen his dominance over the trade activities and all over Assam the English trading activities will be possible*'⁴. The Company appointed a person by the name of Half Bailey in 1774 to investigate the commercial possibilities of Assam⁵. According to sources, the Company had exported One Lakh *maund* of salt from Bengal to Assam at that time itself. On 28th February 1793 Swargadeo Gaurinath Singha had signed a treaty which stated that the people of Bengal and Assam are free to trade in various commercial goods⁶. John Mackosh's *Topography of Assam* (1837), William Robinson's *A Descriptive Account of Assam*⁷(1881), and

Captain R.B Pemberton's *A Report on The Eastern Frontier of British India*⁸ (1835) stand testimony to the fact that such studies about Assam were not carried out by the British merely for trading interests or gaining knowledge about Assam. As per the report of Pemberton Burma and Tibet had their eyes on the commercial goods of Assam and to gain it, both these countries were willing to pay gold, rubber and other valuables worth 70,000/ to 100,000/ rupee to the British.

After Swargadeo Purandar Singha was dethroned there were three attempts made by the Assamese to shake off British rule. They adopted revolutionary means to express the justification of their demands. It was not just the elite section of the Ahom that geared up against the British. Common people like Singpho Gam, Formud Ali and Bahadur Gaonburha also came out to assist them. Some scholars of Assam history who stated, 'the revolutionaries had no connection with the common people' have obviously not gone into any in-depth study of the real situation prevailing at that time. It would instead be more correct to say that the terrified Assamese common people whose entire social, economic and political fabric had been torn to smithereens by the Burmese army did not wish to be associated with the revolutionaries. S.K Bhuyan wrote thus in Buranjir Bani- 'From 1828 to 1858, during these thirty years the Assamese tried all means from arms to petitions to regain independence⁹.'

Jeuram Duliya Barua and Piyoli Phukan while expressing their wish for freedom from the foreign rule by setting fire to the British ammunition dump were caught and sentenced to be hanged till death by the *Sadar Diwani* Court of Captain Newell located on eastern banks of the Joysagar tank. However, the willy British wanted that the death sentence should be announced through the *Panchayat* in the manner it was done earlier during the days of Ahom royalty. The *Panchayat* that supported the British and

consisting of Maniram Dutta Barua, Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, Haranath Parbatiya Barua, Dutiram Kakoty, Madharam Borgohain and his son, passed the same sentence in line with that of the British.

The public hanging of Jeuram and Piyoli could not garner any reaction in the minds of the Assamese people at that time. It should be noticed that the next generation of educated and progressive Assamese also never acknowledged Jeuram-Piyoli's activities as patriotic. Ratneswar Mahanta wrote in the magazine *Jonaki*— 'They never realised the strength of the British nor did they understand what the British wished for. They tried to gain independence through a hot-blooded attempt to chase away the British. It was like moving a mountain with a twig. No wise man will support Piyoli Phukan's deeds. We will not protest against his hanging. Death is the justified punishment for a supporter of sedition¹⁰'. It is obvious from this that one section of the elite supported the British for their vested interests while the middle class did not like any activities against the British. In fact, they acted as spies to foil any such activities and plans.

The British themselves felt that Assam had been incorporated into the British-Indian empire through absolutely unfair means. Even though quite late in time, the British wanted to know how the Assamese people wanted to live, and they opined that the responsibility to take decisions in this regard was to be given to the Assamese people themselves. That was why the subject of Assam was listed for discussion in the 1st Round Table Conference (RTC) in London from 12th Nov. 1930-19th Jan. 1931. However, the National Congress boycotted the first RTC when the Secretary to India vetoed the announcement of the Viceroy Lord Irwin that India was to be a dominion state. Thereafter, when the 2nd RTC was organised from 7th September – 1st Dec 1931 in London, the Indian National Congress (INC) did not send any

representative from Assam even though the subject of Assam was there again in the list of discussions.

The first opportunity for Assam to gain independence:

When the INC refused to accept the decisions of the 2nd RTC, the Secretary to India organised the 3rd RTC (17th Nov.-24th Dec 1932) wherein the subject of Assam was listed for discussion once more. To represent Assam in that conference Chandradhar Barua was selected by the Congress. When questioned as to what Assam wanted, Barua replied in brief (as had been pre-planned) that Assam wished to be incorporated into the pan-Indian flow. At the conclusion of the conference the British MP, Ramsey Macdonald announced on 19th January 1932 that through a federal structure, the first responsible Indian government would be formed keeping in mind that interests of all sections are safeguarded, and Assam would be an integral part of India.

A thought-provoking question here is, why in place of the direct descendant of the Ahom royal family, founder member of *Asom Byebasthapok Sabha* and the first President of the *Assam Sahitya Sabha*, Padmanath Gohain Barua, or Chandra Narayan Singha the Ahom member (nominated) of the *Asom Byebasthapok Sabha*, Chandradhar Barua, a non-Ahom from Jorhat, was bestowed the responsibility by the Assam Congress to speak on behalf of entire Assam in the 3rd RTC. We assume whatever Chandradhar Barua had opined was actually the opinion of the Assam Congress. This issue of Chandradhar Barua's opinion expressed in the RTC had deeply offended the *Ahom Sabha* and the Assam Congress leading finally in 1940 to the former breaking all ties with the latter. It needs to be mentioned that the *Ahom Sabha* had been demanding that Assam should be recognised as a completely independent self-ruled state (the word 'sovereign' was not used). Under the leadership of the President of the *Ahom Sabha*,

Surendranath Borgohain several leaders from the hills and valleys of Assam gathered in a conference in the *Khasi Dorbar* of Shillong on the 21st, 22nd and 23rd of March 1945. In this conference, the 4th resolution which was unanimously accepted, demanded that Assam was to be recognised as a separate independent state. The resolution stated- "*Whether India becomes Hindustan or Pakistan, Assam will remain as a separate independent state. No one can consider Assam as an integral part of India. Assam has never been a part of India. The culture and heritage of Assam is different from India*". To achieve their objective, a political party named 'Tribes and Races Federation' was formed in this conference.¹¹

One section of the casteist Assamese living under the protective umbrella of the imperialist British rule were not at all happy with the resolution accepted in the *Khasi Dorbar*. This section that wholeheartedly wanted to be immersed into the pan-Indian stream left no stone unturned to wile away the simple and innocent Assamese people of the hills and valleys from the *Ahom Sabha* (And they succeeded as well. By enticing the officials of the *Sabha* with promises of posts in the Congress they could tear away the fabric of this Assamese national organization). If we analyse, we see that right from Gomdhar Konwar to Maniram Dewan, those people who led the anti-British revolts had a political agenda, i.e, to snatch away the ruling power from the British. According to Dr.Hiren Gohain, these permanent failures(the revolts)-'on the one hand destroyed the feudal structure and on the other crushed forever the dreams of the Assamese capitalists about economic independence and social development of Assam'.

The systematic imperialistic exploitation of the British began and with it, the foundation of the British administration became concrete. It was under this umbrella that the Assamese middle class began to thrive. From Dhekial Phukan¹² to Manik Chandra Barua, a group of Assamese middle class abandoned the

path of conflict and revolt treaded upon by Piyoli- Dewan and concentrated their energy for the development of the motherland under the shade of imperialist exploitation. It is a fact that these personalities made great contributions to the Assamese society but in exchange that they completely sacrificed the demand for freedom. The consequence of this sacrifice was not at all auspicious for the Assamese nation.

To elect representatives from all over Assam to the People's Council (*Gana Parishad*) that had been formed with the aim of implementing the Constitution as well as to focus on the future interests of Assam, the *Sodou Asom Ahom Sabha* brought out a memorandum by themselves. This Memorandum was handed to the Governor General in Delhi by the *Sabha* President, Surendranath Borgohain on 15th November 1945. The clauses were-

1. In the People's Council, representatives of every ethnic community-tribe of Assam must be given the scope of representation on the basis of separate elections.
2. Any important decision in relation to Assam must have the consent of all the tribes-ethnic communities.
3. Matters remaining undecided through the simple process were to be decided on the basis of the majority opinion.

However, the National Congress refused to accept any of the clauses of the *Ahom Sabha*. The most important thing was that no advice was put forth on their part by the Assam Congress. Only 7 persons representing the populace of an expansive area (Undivided Assam, Tripura, NEFA, Mizoram and Manipur) took the opportunity to sit in the Constituent Assembly and were overwhelmed to be able to decide the destiny of the region. It was sad that apart from Bordoloi no other person from this expansive area could become member of the Core committee.

The second opportunity for Assam to gain independence:

Turning the pages of history one can see that Assam did not avail the second opportunity to become independent from India. Just before independence the central leaders led by Nehru had accepted the 'Grouping' resolution conspiring to include Assam in group 'C', eventually to be incorporated in the proposed East Pakistan. To put it bluntly, the Congress had already taken a decision to leave out Assam from the proposed Hindustan. At the time when the Assam Congress led by Bordoloi disagreed to the 'Grouping' resolution, at the time when Assam had been thrown out of India, even at that time Assam wanted to be immersed with India. When the famous Congress leaders of India had decided to throw Assam out of India, why did the Congress leaders of Assam not demand a separate independent Assam? The resolution which had been taken in the *Khasi Dorbar* earlier with the leadership of the *Ahom Sabha* and consent of all the ethnic tribes and communities could have been brought out and acknowledged by the Assam Congress at this point in time but that was not done. Why? To be very honest, it was only because of the Assam Congress that this golden opportunity to gain independent status for Assam did not materialise***.

Considered to be uneducated and undeveloped, the ethnic/tribal community leaders of Assam had sensed in those pre-independence times that situated so far away from Delhi, the Assamese masses will find themselves lost in the vast ocean of the Indian populace. Today, the Assamese people swayed by nationalist aspirations must acknowledge the farsightedness of those people. We salute those patriots of then undivided Assam, because they understood that Assam will one day become the colony of the new 'black-skinned' *Sahibs* in place of being the colony of the white-skinned *Sahib*. Only a particular group of educated Assamese pretended not to understand this.

CHAPTER 2

Role of the Assam Students community in the Independence Movement and the Cunningham Circular

In the long anti-British movement in India under the direction of *Mahatma* Mahatma Gandhi, the Civil Disobedience Movement holds a special significance. After the Non-cooperation movement, the Civil Disobedience Movement under the direction of the National Congress can be termed as the second well organized movement in the history of National movements. The movement had spread out to the towns-cities and villages in various parts of India. In Assam too the participation of men and women as well as students and youth in this movement is of great significance. In Assam, the student movement and Civil Disobedience movement had merged together and assumed a gigantic form.

A few special events that took place in the interval between Non-cooperation and Civil disobedience movements shaped the background of the movement for the Indians. In 1927, the British government sent a Commission under the leadership of Sir John Simon to take stock of the progress of the Montague Chelmsford Reforms. Enraged that this Commission did not include a single Indian, the Indian leaders, in the Congress Session of 1928 in Calcutta decided to resist the work of the Simon Commission. Similarly, between 1922 and 1929, the Congress leaders were even more enraged when they failed to achieve 'dominion status' for India (In the Canadian and Australian model) after a lot of hope. In February 1927, as soon as the Simon Commission arrived in India, a protest movement was started with slogans of 'Go back

Assam gained freedom just as Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Maharashtra, etc. In the affairs of the United States, we, the Assamese just floated around. Sometimes in the pan-Indian stream and sometimes in love for the world. We never understood our own existence. We even lost what was ours as a result of the conspiracy and deceit of some people. Have we really found our existence in the pan-Indian context? We will have no reasons to oppose being a part of pan-India if we are not deprived of what is rightfully ours.

P.S: It is true that Badan Barphukan brought the Burmese into Assam. But why he did so, for that Purnananda is equally responsible. From 1826 till now, in about 196 years, many Badans have emerged in various forms. Who knows what will be the future

of Assam in the hands of the present Badans?

¹No representative of any Indian political party was invited to the 3rd RTC

²The Ahom Sabha was formed in 1893

³*** It is found in the letter that was sent by Mahatma Gandhi through Mahendra Mohan Choudhury and Bijoy Chandra Bhagawati—"If it is required the people of Assam should go against the National Congress to take decisions in their own interests regarding their future"

⁴Gopinath Bordoloi *Atmajibani*, Asam Prakashan Parishad, p.121

⁵Notun Puruxey *Juktir Adharot Natun Samaj* Garhak; Kanaksen Deka.

⁶David Scott's written speech in the 'Barphukan Darbar' in Guwahati, in the presence of Maniram Dewan and Bholanath Parbatiya Phukan, *Mantram Dewan*, Benudhar Sarma, p.45-49.

⁷Treaty between Purandar Singha and The East India Company, Art.2 [Treaty and agreement concluded between Mr.Thomus Campbell, A.Robertson and Rajah Poorunder Sing in Gowhati in Assam 1833], *The North-East Frontier of India*, A.Mackenzie, p.5.

⁸Anglo-Assamese Relations, S.K Bhuyan, DHAS, Guwahati, pp.80-81

⁹Assam's Manuhor Itihaas, Dr. Nagen Saikia, *Gariyoshi*, August 2009, p.45

¹⁰Ibid

¹¹Ibid

¹²Eastern Frontier of British India, Captain R.B Pemberton, Mittal Publication, New Delhi, p.31

¹³Ho Chokir pora Gana Parishadaloi : S.K Bhuyan in *Bhuyan-Gadyar Sadhana*, Homen Borgohain, p.151

¹⁴Ratneswar Mahantar *Rachanawali*, p.284

¹⁵Itihaasey Kaku Khyama Nokorey: Jagat Chandra Neog, *Asom Bani*, 25th January 1991, p.3.

¹⁶(a) In 1852 when Phukan was appointed as Sub-Assistant with a salary of 250/ rupees, Methi Sahib wrote to him, "See! If you had not gone to Calcutta on Colonel Jenkins and my advice, if you had not studied well, you would have remained a pauper and prestige-less all your life". *Sahitya aru Chetana*, Dr.Hiren Gohain, p.31

¹⁷(b) In 1919 Manik Chandra Barua had kneeled before the English Emperor-Emress in the Delhi Darbar. He felt honoured to have been able to show allegiance on behalf of Assam. *Jiboni Sangrah*, Homen Borgohain(ed.), Asam Prakashan Parishad.

Simon'. In due course of time this movement assumed huge proportions and spread to all parts of India. In such circumstances, igniting the revolutionary spirit, on 29th and 30th December 1929, in the Lahore Congress Session under the presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru, the Congress abandoned the demand of 'dominion status' for India and demanded complete independence. It was decided to celebrate 26th January, 1930 as 'Swaraj Divas'. In this very session it was decided to walk out from the First Round Table Conference (to be held in London as per the decision of the Simon Commission) and boycott parliament as well as all government rules-regulations and to strengthen the Civil Disobedience movement. Through the second proposal it directed all Indian members to resign from the Legislative Assembly and through the third proposal leadership of the movement was bestowed on Mahatma Gandhi.

After 31st December 1929, the last day till which the Indians had been hoping for an announcement of 'Dominion Status'¹, on 2nd Jan 1930, in the Congress Working Committee meeting, a final decision was taken to implement the resolutions accepted in the Lahore Congress Session, and announced the 'Civil Disobedience Movement' against the British². As per the first proposal of the Lahore Congress Session, 26th January 1930 was decided to be celebrated as 'Independence Day' all over the Country. And that, on 12th March, 1930, Gandhiji along with 79 associates started the Dandi March and on reaching the coast in Dandi, broke the 'Salt law'.

As per the Lahore proposals, in Assam also, 26th January was celebrated as Independence Day. On that day, in the Jubilee Park in Guwahati with the association of the local youth club, the President of Pradesh Congress, Tarun Ram Phukan hoisted the flag and several Congress leaders like Nabin Chandra Bordoloi, Ambikagiri Raichoudhury, Siddhinath Sarma along with hundreds

of students and youth also participated³. However, at this point in time there broke out dissensions among the Congress leaders of Assam regarding the Lahore resolution of boycotting the Legislative Assembly. Leaders like Tarunram Phukan, Gopinath Bordoloi, Rohini Kumar Choudhury did not want to participate in the Civil Disobedience movement and resigned from the Congress⁴. On the other hand, leaders like Bishnuram Medhi, Ambikagiri Raichoudhury, Omeo Kr. Das, Siddhinath Sarma, etc., worked relentlessly for implementation of the Lahore Congress Session resolutions⁵. On 12th March 1930, the day of Gandhij's Dandi March, the leaders in Assam congregated in Jubilee Park (at 3.00 in the afternoon) and discussed in depth about the action and direction to be taken by the movement in the contemporary situation in Assam⁶. The public opinion of elderly leader Tarunram Phukan that he will protest against the Civil Disobedience Movement⁷ was a depressing situation for his comrades. In support of Phukan's opinion, on 11th April, in the meeting of the Assam Pradesh congress, the General Secretary Taiyebullah, on the excuse that it would be problematic to break the 'Salt laws' in Assam and pleading financial weakness of the Pradesh Congress⁸, took the decision that Civil Disobedience Movement will not be called in Assam. Bishnuram Medhi (President) and Taiyebullah tried to explain with justification that in Assam the 'Salt laws' were not there (since Assam was far away from the sea coast) and as such the Civil Disobedience Movement will not be taken up here.

The news of Gandhiji reaching the Dandi Sea Shores and successfully launching the Civil Disobedience Movement reached Assam quite late. The entire incident of the 'Salt laws' being broken, the meaning of the Civil Disobedience Movement, as well as its causes were all described in detail in the directive which was sent by Jawaharlal Nehru to be spread among the people in

Assam. (This directive was sent to all other regions of the country also). At this time the environment of the region was more or less peaceful⁹. It may be mentioned here that in the first half of April 1930, Deputy Secretary of the British-Indian Empire, Russell, who came on a visit of Assam (to take part in a feast organized by the British Tea planters in Sibsagar) had expressed satisfaction on the political atmosphere of Assam¹⁰.

The report of the Indian National Congress regarding the Civil Disobedience Movement, published on 12th April 1930 stated that on the pretext of problem of salt production, Assam did not implement Civil Disobedience Movement. This news¹¹ tried the patience of student leaders like Liladhar Baruah of Assam who had taken part in Gandhiji's Dandi March. Student leaders like Barua could not accept the anti-movement position of the Senior Congress leaders, who were swayed by the 'policy of pleasing' adopted by the regional government. However, as soon as the news of the arrest and jail of Gandhi-Nehru and other central leaders spread, the situation in Assam gradually began to change. Two days after the arrest of J.L. Nehru (on 14th April, 1930) a student meeting was organized in Jubilee Park in Guwahati in Association with *Asom Satra Sanmilon* where all the students of Assam were called upon to jump into the Civil Disobedience Movement by Liladhar Barua¹². In that meeting itself, it was decided to distribute in all districts, small amounts of salt that Barua had carried all the way from Dandi to Assam. On 18th April 1930, the students in various educational institutions in Assam went on strike. In the protest meetings organized in various places by the Congress workers with support from the students, a good number of the public from various classes participated¹³. Two days after Mahatma Gandhi was arrested (on 5th May, 1930), hundreds of students in Assam boycotted classes and went on strikes and picketing. As per the announcement of 12th May, 1930 to

implement Article. 144¹⁴ the government put in their full might to resort to lathi-charge etc., on the students protesting through picketing, strikes and congregating in meetings, in order to quell the movement. But on the contrary, this only fuelled the students with new zeal and determination. They distributed salt in Nagao., Darrang and Sibsagar districts in order to awaken the political consciousness among the masses. In Tezpur, while students were distributing salt among the procession organized, police lathi charged them. That very day, the police arrested Liladhar Barua and Debananda Sarma¹⁵. (That day, the vicious lathi charge on the students led Md. Taiyebullah to comment satirically that '*beating up young students with lathis does not show the bravery of the government*')¹⁶. On 15th May the police viciously attacked the public in a meeting (alleging the breaking of Art. 144) in Dhubri. 25 protesters were very seriously injured and among them, many were students. One of them died on the spot¹⁷. On 31st May, the police lathi charged the public in two places in Tezpur. In a meeting organized in the 'Zilla Sadar', the District Commissioner, Harold Denhi ordered the students to disperse, but when they refused to obey, the police lathicharged the gathering. Condition of 13 students were serious¹⁸. The news of students being lathi charged spread outside Assam also (Bengal Provincial Students Federation had strongly condemned the atrocities on the students of Assam).¹⁹ Apart from supporting the protests, strikes, etc., of the students, the Pradesh Congress till then, did not start a movement on its own. In fact, young Congress leaders like Omeo Kr. Das and Hem Chandra Barua requested the *Assam Satra Sanmilon* many times to carry on the movement.

Compared to the Brahmaputra Valley the Civil Disobedience Movement grew stronger in the Surma Valley. Unlike Assam, in the Surma Valley the Civil Disobedience Movement was not started by the students. Mr. Brajendranath

Choudhury (President of the Barak Congress League) started this movement in the Sylhet district and gained huge popularity from the masses. Choudhury requested all to break the Salt law and produce salt individually. On 6th April 1930, Mr. Dhirendranath Dasgupta (founder of Sylhet Kuluwara Vidyashram) led 18 members to Noakhali where they produced salt and distributed it among the people of Sylhet. This same action was repeated for the second time under the leadership of Sri Bidhubhushan Choudhury (Editor of *Yugashakti* published from Sylhet) and for the third time under the leadership of Sri Harendra Chandra Choudhury (Secretary, Sylhet District Congress Committee). The fourth group under the leadership of Sri Dwarika Nath, a 2nd year student of Murarichand College, comprising of 66 members organized several meetings in Cachar District to spread the movement and thereafter reached Noakhali. After that, Sri Sachindra Mohan Dutta, a student of the same college reached Digha in Medinipur alone and broke the Salt law²⁰.

Sri Brajendra Nath Choudhury requested the government not to extract the Chowkidari tax (a local tax which had to be paid by the *ryot* to the government through the Zamindar) in Sunamganj and Habiganj²¹. The non-payment of this tax led to conflict between the government and the masses. The government arrested Choudhury on charges of violating article 124 (A) of the IPC. To protest this, on 3rd May, 1930, devotional institutions of the entire Sylhet district boycotted classes and observed strike. The business establishments also were shut down. It needs mention that on that very day 174 lawyers of Sylhet district quit their profession and took oath to join the movement directly as volunteers²². Dwarikanath Goswami gathered the students of Murarichand College to form an organization named 'Socialist Youth Conference' to spread the Civil Disobedience Movement among the masses. The sudden increase of student members in the

organization attracted the attention of the Principal, D.E Robert who intimated about it to the Education Officer. As a result, on 2nd April 1930 the government brought out a circular which warned that '*students who take part in the movement will be deprived of employment.*'²³ The students, neglecting the circular, observed strike in the College campus on 15th April 1930. To take revenge, Principal Robert expelled 10 student leaders from the College. The other students could not take this lying down and on 16th April observed a general strike in the college campus²⁴. That day, in all schools of the Surma Valley, strikes were observed against the expulsion. The news of this strike that took place in entire valley was sent to the Director Education, Assam, Mr. J. R. Cunningham through two separate letters written respectively by Principal Robert and the Surma Valley & Hill District Commissioner. Realising the gravity of the situation, where the students of all Assam were attracted to the movement, Cunningham approached Egbert Lawrie Lucas Hammond, the Governor of Assam. After discussion with the Governor, on 26th April 1930, Director Cunningham wrote to the heads of the educational institutions to punish those students taking part in the movement. Four days later, as per the written suggestions of the Governor, on 3rd May 1930, Director Cunningham sent the first Circular to the head of the educational institutions which stated, '*students taking part in political matters, through strikes, hartals, boycotts etc., and disobeying authorities of schools / Colleges will be deprived of facilities like scholarship, hostel etc. And in addition, for violating discipline of the school / Colleges, on each charge against each student, not less than a rupee will be taken as fine*'²⁵. On 19th May, 1930 the second Circular that was sent stated, 'Students taking part in the movement will be expelled from school.' This was a warning to the guardians. The Circular also informed the guardians that to re-admit or to newly admit a student, they

(guardians) will have to give in writing in the tabulated form that their wards will not take part in the movement ever again. Moreover, students from the senior classes (VIII to X) had to sign a bond individually that they will abide by the promise made on their behalf by their guardians²⁶.

The vehement protest by the students and their guardians against the Cunningham Circular doubled the wrath and scope of the Civil Disobedience Movement in entire Assam. After this Circular, the Students movement and the Civil Disobedience Movement merged together. On 21st July 1930 an emergent meeting of the *Axom Satra Sanmilon* was held in Hari Sabha in Panbazar, Guwahati, with the objective of spreading Gandhiji's policy of non-violence amongst the students in order to give direction to the movement. In that meeting leaders like Bishnuram Medhi, Hemochandra Barua and Omeo Kr. Das, while addressing the students promised that they will continue the movement along with the students. *On 23rd July 1930 to explain the essence of *Satyagraha* to the students and to direct the movement in a proper direction, a working council was formed (in Nabin Chandra Bordoloi's residence) with Bijoy Chandra Bhagawati as the Secretary²⁷.

At that time, the *ryots* joining the student-movement is a point to be noted. The *ryot* meetings** had already mushroomed during the Non-Cooperation Movement to demand the solution of the peasant's problems with the *ryots* joining the student movement with their own demand of a 50% slash of land revenue, the student movement resulted in a strong movement against the imperialist power.

The student movement that was taken forward inspite of cautions from the guardians and facing very uncondusive situations, reached it zenith after the summer vacations when the school/Colleges re-opened.*** On the 10th of July 1930 (first

day after the summer vacations) the Principal of Cotton College, D. Thomson cancelled all classes in order to thwart the attempts of the students to hold picketing in the College campus. The President of the Governing Body of the college, A.H.W. Bentinck (Commissioner, Brahmaputra Valley Division) praised the quick action plan by the Principal. On that same day student picketing was held in Cotton Collegiate School and Sonaram High School, both located in the heart of the Guwahati. This news that students in two schools in Guwahati got the opportunity for picketing enraged Governor Egbert Lawrie Lucas Hammond that. He opined that this incident in Guwahati would have its repercussions all over Assam. **** Showcause notices were sent to the Principals of the two school as to why they had not taken action earlier to prevent the incidents. Three days of continuous picketing in Nagaon Government School campus by the students led to the school authorities closing classes from 17th July. 9 student leaders were arrested in this regard and after conviction under [Xadharon Faujdari Dandabidhi] and sent to jail. Meanwhile, two former picketeers were released on the ground that they did not apply any force or threat. But the government also felt that their release would fuel the indiscipline among the students. As a result, Md. Syed Saadullah, as a Judicial member of the Legislative Council prepared a note— '*To be arrested under the Picketing Ordinance it is not always necessary that force or threat be used*'²⁸ The government exerted immense pressure on the civil administration to arrest and convict the picketeers indiscriminately. Such steps of the government gradually increased the number of students joining the movement and the Congress workers also, with the support of the students took part in the Civil Disobedience Movement with new zeal. The 'Picketing and Intimidation Ordinance' that was implemented from 2nd June 1930 all over Assam led to hundreds of students being arrested²⁹.

On 8th Aug. 1930 in association of the students of Barpeta Govt. High School, the people of Barpeta organized a public gathering. Next day (9th Aug.), from the procession which started from the High School, and comprised of guardians, students and Congress workers, 18 persons were arrested. The student leaders arrested that day were Rajendranath Deka, Mahendra Chandra Pathak, Rabicharan Das, Achyutananda Das, Guruprasad Das, Bhagaban Talukdar, Prahlad Das, Nagendranath Das, Dinabandhu Oja, Madhab Das, etc. That very day, they were rusticated from the Government School. That day on the orders of the Barpeta administration to arrest the Congress workers, the Police force went searching each worker's residence even in the midst of heavy rains³⁰. On 10th Aug 1930, along Hari Prasad Brahmachari (Dalim Babu, President, Barpeta Congress Committee) 28 Congress workers were arrested. 12 people along with Brahmachari were found guilty and sent to jail.³¹ Through a declaration of 27th August 1930, the Assam government accused the Barpeta and Guwahati Congress Committee along with Assam Youth League of diverting the students towards the movement. Convicted under Art.16 of the Indian Criminal law Amendment Act, the leaders arrested in Barpeta were sent to jail for six months³².

Such steps taken by the government gradually increased the number of students actively taking part in the movement and in association with them, the Congress workers also came forward with renewed energy. The students did not keep the movement confined within the four walls and organized picketing against socially harmful foreign commercial goods like Opium, Alcohol, Cannabis (bhang) selling shops and business centres. As in the Non-Cooperation movement, during the CDM also, volunteer groups were formed at the district level to awaken revolutionary consciousness among the masses, through boycott of foreign and intoxicating goods. As a result of publicity against opium the

number of opium-users and sale of opium dropped in great numbers. The *Burha Xatradhikar* Chaturbhuj Misra Deva of Barpeta imposed tax on the opium and cannabis users³³. This led to a fall in demand of opium in Barpeta.

On the basis of the 'Picketing and Intimidation Ordinance', On 24th July 1930, 4 students of Sibsagar Government High School were convicted and sent to jail. To avenge this, On 26th July 1930, the students set fire to school which completely destroyed three rooms³⁴. On 25-26th August 1930, 7 student leaders of Jagi School went sent to jail. The government announced the closure of grants to Jagi School³⁵.

Inspite of all efforts the Government was not able to contain the gradually increasing student movement in the Surma Valley. The European Principal of Murarichand College, D. E. Robert, to the quell the student movement in the College directed the Professors of the College to stand in the College-gate and stop the student leaders from entering the college. The Professors felt humiliated at this. When the Secretary of the College Teacher's Union, Jyotish Das informed that the Professors were not bound to obey this order, the Principal dismissed him from service³⁶. 3 student leaders were arrested from the College campus and later, the administration through the Intimidation Ordinance, convicted and sent them to jail from 6 months. On 9th July 1930, the Yogendra Kishore Institute (Government aided) at Habiganj was set on fire. This fire also engulfed the Madrasa building next door. On 14th July 193, the day the D.P.I, Cunningham arrived in Sylhet, Raja Girish Chandra High School was set on fire³⁷. On 13th August 1930, when the Govt. School located in Maulavi Bazar was set on fire, it also burnt to ashes three rows of residences of the area³⁸. There is no doubt that the Cunningham Circular of the Education Department of Assam Government, imposed upon the students and guardians, gave a new boost to the Civil Disobedience

Movement in Assam. With the association of the students the Civil Disobedience Movement spread out all across Assam and was converted into a mass movement against the British imperialism. According to government information, till August 1930, only in Guwahati Jail, more than 100 student leaders were serving time. The same source stated that as a result of picketing, 512 students from M. C. College and 433 students from Cotton College had been arrested³⁹. The report of the Education department of 1930 stated that prior to the Cunningham Circular, 15,164 students were studying in the educational institutions of Assam while after the circular the number fell to 11,940⁴⁰.

The strictures imposed by the Cunningham Circular on the educational institutions of Assam irritated the students and guardians. In view of the movement, many guardians of the rural areas who hoped to educate the children by sending them to school had to give up their wishes. In such a situation some responsible guardians and social workers could not neglect their duties towards the future of the children. They made preparations to establish new schools without any government aid, and from donations made by the public. This determined efforts of the guardians and social workers led to the establishment of several schools. On 5th May 1930, two days after the first Cunningham Circular was sent to the heads of the educational institutions of Assam, the public organized the first meeting in the Curzon Hall in Guwahati to protest against the Circular and demand that the government withdraw it⁴¹. The 2nd Cunningham Circular of 19th May 1930 led to a very strong reaction among the people of Assam, and the various meetings organized against it all over Assam strengthened the protest spirit. The guardians who refused to give in writing that school students will never take part in any movement against the government, met on 6th July 1930 in the second meeting in Guwahati where it was decided to establish a new school called 'Kamrup Academy'.

That very day itself a 24-member school managing committee was established with Kalicharan Sen as President, Rohini Kumar Choudhury as Secretary, Gaurikanta Talukdar and Keshabkanta Barua as Assistant Secretary. on 15th July, in a rented house (from a businessman at Rs.100/- per month) in Tokowbari, Guwahati, 'Kamrup Academy' was inaugurated with 148 students, and Keshab Narayan Dutta as the Head Master⁴² (On 25th June 1931, Kamrup Academy got recognition from Calcutta University).

'Tezpur Academy' was the second national school established in the Brahmaputra valley by the public of Tezpur as a part of protest against the Cunningham Circular. On 11th August 1930, with 67 students 'Tezpur Academy' was inaugurated on the stage of 'Ban Theatre' in Tezpur⁴³ (Tezpur Academy was recognized by Calcutta University in 1933).

Protesting against the Cunningham Circular, the people of Barpeta established the 'Barpeta Vidyapeeth'. It was inaugurated in the residence of Mr. Padma Bayan on 28th Aug. 1930, with Jagadish Medhi as the Head Master⁴⁴. The school did not get the required permission from Calcutta University till 1933. As such, the students were directed to go to Calcutta to sit for the entrance exams. After 1933, when the school was recognized by Calcutta University, this problem was solved and henceforth, all old and new students could send their names through Barpeta Govt. High School and sit for the matriculation exams. In 1932 Prassannalal Choudhury adorned the post of Head Master of the school⁴⁵. Similarly, Sibsagar Vidyapeeth (Sibsagar), Dibrugarh Vidyapeeth (Dibrugarh), 'Cachar High School' (Silchar, 7th July 1930), Karimganj High School (Karimganj) and one school each in Habiganj and Maulvi Bazar were established⁴⁶. All the schools mentioned above had been established by the public after great hardships to challenge the absolutely reactionary government education system. These schools established by the public were

recognized as 'public school' on 'national school'. Establishment of these schools compelled the government to relax the conditions of the Cunningham Circular. The national schools gradually gained great popularity. And the best part was that in the subsequent national movement programs, the students of these schools could take part with renewed zeal.

In the long history of the Indian freedom movement the student movement of 1930 has set a shining example. In spite of their inhuman conspiracies to dominate, the British administration could not defeat the great enthusiasm and spirit of the Assamese student force. It will forever stay embedded in history as recognition of the national consciousness, love for freedom, and sacrifice for the motherland and brethren, of the Assamese people.

References:

- ¹ On 23rd Dec. (1929) Mahatma Gandhi met the Viceroy Lord Irwin to discuss about the dominion status of India and 31st Dec. (1929) was fixed by the National Congress to make announcements about the said topic.
- ² On the final day (31 Dec) of the three-day Congress Session in 1929, on the banks of the River Ravi, the President of the session, Nehru hoisted the flag of India in the presence of innumerable people chanting 'Vande Mataram' and 'Inquilab Zindabad'. After that on 2nd Jan 1930, in the CWC meeting, Gandhiji chose 9th January as the date to launch the CDM and as per the proposal in the Lahore Congress, requested the Indian people to celebrate 26 Jan (1930) as Independence day.
- ³ Political History of Assam, Vol-2, P-141.
- ⁴ Planter Raj to Swaraj, Amalendu Guha, P-171.
- ⁵ To smoothen out the confusions in the Assam Pradesh Congress, on 8th February 1930, the Congress meeting tried to revive the Pradesh Congress by vesting the responsibilities of President on Bishnuram Medhi and Secretary on Md. Tayebullah. (Political History of Assam, Vol-2, P-144.)
- ⁶ Landmarks of the Freedom Struggle of Assam, K. N. Dutta, P-58.
- ⁷ As per the decision of the Lahore Congress that the Congress members should resign from the Legislative Assembly membership, anti-Congress feelings rose among the frontline leaders of the Assam Pradesh Congress. (Planter Raj to Swaraj, Amalendu Guha, P-171).
- ⁸ After the Pandu session of the National Congress (1926), the financial condition of the Assam Pradesh Congress deteriorated. (Pol. Hist. of Assam, Vol-II, P-146).
- ⁹ Karagaror Chithi, Md. Tayebullah (1962), P.31.
- ¹⁰ National Upsurge in Assam, A. Bhuyan (Ed.) P-229
- ¹¹ a) It was mentioned in the application- Even those states that did not have the means to produce salt naturally brought salt water from the sea produce salt and distributed that salt among the public to create national awareness. According to the facts in the application the public in Bihar and Rajasthan, in place of violating salt laws, violated the tax laws implemented in their status as part of the C. D. movement. Muruli, magazine of Tezpur School, edited by Padmeswar Borthakur (1961), P-1, 5.
- b) In the meeting of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee of 12 March (1930), Ambikagiri Raichoudhury pointed out the difficulty of breaking the Salt Laws in Assam and had logically suggested that by violation of the Forest Laws in implementation in Assam, the Civil Disobedience Movement could be observed. But this proposal of Raichoudhury was not supported by the members present in the meeting. (Assam Police Abstract of Intelligence, Kamrup March 19, 1930).
- ¹² National upsurge in Assam, P.226.

- ¹³ Krishna Sarma's Diary, Krishnakanta Sarma (1972), P.62.
- ¹⁴ Political History of Assam, Vol-2, P.150.
- ¹⁵ Buranjir Sophura, Benudhar Sarmar Rachanawali, P.225.
- ¹⁶ Political History of Assam, Vol-2, P-150.
- ¹⁷ Ibid, P-150.
- ¹⁸ Bharatar Mukti Jujot Asom (1972), Hamendra Chandra Barua, P.108.
- ¹⁹ Asom Buranji, Dr. D. Nath (1989), P-174.
- It may be mentioned that a student of Victoria College, in Kochbehar at that time, Bishnu Prasad Rabha, protesting against the British as well as the Indian exploiters wrote a poem and hung it on the entrance of the Kochbehar Raj Bhavan to express his ire. The poem went thus
- 'There are two lambs in the kingdom, one black one white. If you wish well for the kingdom, sacrifice both lambs'.
- *Swadhinata Sangramat Asomiya Satror Bhumika (1986) Ramesh Kalita, P.66.
- ²⁰ Political History of Assam, Vol-2, Pp. 152-155.
- ²¹ Civil Disobedience Stir in the Surma Valley, Gautam Kumar Sarkar, P. 162.
- ²² National Upsurge in Assam, P.226.
- ²⁴ Ibid, P-90
- ²⁵ Political History of Assam, Vol-2, P-153.
- ²⁶ a) When the Assam Govt. spread against the Congress that it had instigated young students to take part in the movement, the secretary of APCC, Md. Tayebullah had to give a clarification that not no students had been involved in the CD Movement. ('Roll of Student in the National Upsurge', Sheela Bora, National Upsurge in Assam, P. 224
- b) On 27th July (1930) in the general meeting of the Pradesh Congress, the leadership of APC was bestowed upon the young leaders so that the march forward could be matched with that of the student force. And as such, Hemchandra Barua, Amiya Kr. Das, Siddhinath Sarma and Laksmidhar Sarma were given the responsibility of president, vice-president, secretary and Asst. secretary respectively. (Political History of Assam, Vol-2, P. 156)
- ²⁷ Oxomiya (weekly), Guwahati, 24th Aug., 1930, P.2.
- Due to the Summer Vacations, classes were not taken in the Schools of Assam from 1st June to 17th July and in (High Schools) the 2 Colleges from 10th May to 10th June 1930.
- Governor considered the action at Gauhati to be the Govt. defeat. He supported stern measures against the pickets as he believed that any show of weakness at Gauhati was bound to have repercussion throughout the Assam Valley'.
The students of Assam were very angry by this opinion of the Governor. When the Govt. visited Dhubri on 12th May, 1930 to take stock of the extensive damage by the earthquake there, the students displayed block flag. (Political History of Assam, Vol.2, P. 157).
- ²⁹ National Upsurge in Assam, P.228.
- ³⁰ Political History of Assam, Vol.2, P.164.
- ³² Political History of Assam, Vol.2, P.165.
- ³³ Buranjir Sophura, Bendudhar Sarma Rachanawali, P.252
- ³⁴ Krishna Sarma's Diary, Krishnakanta Sarma (1972)
- ³⁵ Landmarks of the freedom struggle of Assam, K. N. Dutta, P.107
- ³⁶ Swadhinata Sangramat Smriti, Nirod Kr. Dutta (1974) P.91.
- ³⁷ Civil Disobedience Stir in the Surma Valley, Gautam K. Sarkar, P.208
- ³⁸ Swadhinata Sangramat Asomiya Satror Bhumika, (1986), Ramesh Kalita, P.93
- ³⁹ Political History of Assam, P.154.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid
- ⁴¹ Jilingoni (Kamrup Academy Mag), Ed. Gauraga Kanta Talukdar, 1930, P.11.
- ⁴³ Muruli, magazine of Tezpur School, edited by Padmeswar Borthakur (1961), P.5; A brief sketch of Tarun Asam Sangha, Santanu Barua, Prantik, 1-15 March 2005, P.33.
- ⁴⁴ Golden Jubilee Souvenir, Barpeta Vidyapeeth (1980) P.15.
- ⁴⁵ Satapatra, Barpeta Bidyapeeth Magazine (1970) P.56-58.

CHAPTER 3

INNERLINE AND SECURITY OF THE INDIGENOUS

Currently the word 'Innerline' has become very familiar among the nationalist organizations, student unions, and local intellectuals of Assam and a couple of the neighbouring states. It goes without saying that people who love Assam and the Assamese are demanding Innerline as an operating administrative measure to stop the unabated illegal foreign migration into Assam. If one analyses the mental and emotional state of those demanding Innerline, one feels that after all efforts have failed and immense dissatisfaction has set in, as a reaction, Innerline has been taken up as the last resort and its importance is being underlined. In the present situation, why Innerline is being regularly discussed needs to be analysed.

During the 600 year reign of the Ahom rulers there existed a fine harmony and coexistence between the people of the hills and valleys. Though sometimes due to special reasons conflict or even battles did take place with the hill tribes, the Ahom rulers never took any interests in the internal administration of these tribes. In the economic scenario, both hills and valleys were dependent on each other. Generally, the valley residents did not need to go to the hills, but the hill residents needed to come down to the valleys for their requirements. On certain days of the year the hill people came down with their products and stuff, peacefully stayed in the valley, exchanged requirements through the barter system and then go back. During the Ahom reign this system became a tradition. The Ahom kings marked out specific roads

(passages) to be used by the hill people to come down to the valley and carefully monitored so that no problems should be faced by the valley dwellers on account of the visitors. *Swargadeo* Pratap Singha (1603-41) had created the *Posa*¹ system at the junction of the hills and valley. According to it, the hill tribes were allowed to collect taxes and food stuff from certain villages adjacent to the Ahom kingdom.

As a result of the Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26), when, Assam went into the hands of the British, the earlier bond of harmony between the hills and valleys now loosened. Soon after establishing their reign over Assam, this commercial race turned their attention towards the hilly regions around Assam. Ending the neutral policy of the Ahom rulers the British now began to use force against the hill tribes. Unable to stand up against the might of the military supremacy of the British in direct combat, they had to surrender to the British and give up all rights over their land. Eventually with the phase wise attachment of the hill areas with the valleys, the geographical boundaries of Assam expanded and resulted in 'Bor Asom'. These hill areas were named by the British as 'Excluded Area'².

Due to a few specific reasons the British were specially attracted towards the hill areas. The undulating slopes of Assam were a special attraction where they saw the possibilities of economic profits through tea cultivation. Apart from that, they eyed the hills of Assam where Rubber production was done. The British government in order to expand tea cultivation in Assam brought out a new legislation in the meeting of the House of Commons in 1854 which gave special encouragement to the British tea cultivators to grow tea in Assam. According to the new legislation, the tea cultivators would get 500 acres³ of waste (*patit*) land as against the 100 acres previously. As a result, there grew up a huge conglomerate of the private tea cultivators called 'Assam

Company' in England. White skinned tea cultivators made a beeline to upper Assam where for their convenience was established the *Jorihat Tea Company* (1857) and *James Findley Co.*⁴ (1861), grabbed thousands of acres of land and expanded tea-cultivation. Consequently, from the sixties of the nineteenth century, tea cultivation in Assam gradually speeded up. The companies promised to help the educated Assamese youth to open tea gardens, and to spread the taste of tea among the Assamese people organized a '*Saah-Haat*' (Tea-fair) in *Garhgaon* in 1805⁵.

The aggressive, arrogant and cruel tea cultivators' unabated land grabbing created problems for the hill tribes. They hurt the sentiments of these tribes by forcefully taking over the land of their ancestors from yore. As a result, regular conflicts began to take place between the tribes and the owners-workers and labourers of the tea gardens. We find ample accounts of such stories in the history of Assam. For example, the Nagas chopped *Holcombe Sahib* to pieces because the boundaries of *Xukanjuri* T. E. estate in *Namchang* had crossed *Lahdoigarh*. This is just one example. When conflicts began to occur regularly resulting in the death of innocent people, the district administration was perplexed. Realising the gravity of the situation, the District Commissioner of *Sibsagar*, A.E. Campbell wrote about the situation to the Lt. Governor of Bengal, *William Grey*. Grey discussed the matter with Campbell, who was in temporary charge of the Assam sector as Agent and ordered the implementation of the 1st clause of the 3rd chapter of the subsection of the 33rd Bengal Act. (Act XXXIII. Vict. Cp-31 Se-1) in Assam from 1st January (1873)⁶. A year later a new regulation called Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation I, 1893 was brought out and clubbed together with the previously mentioned 33rd Bengal Act⁷. Through this separate arrangement a line of demarcation between the hills and valley was drawn and certain particular hill areas of Assam

from now were to be kept separate from the valley on administrative grounds. This was known as Inner line. According to historian *S K Borpujari*. "... *This line commonly known as the Inner line, it was hoped would put an end to that infinite, slow but certain advance to dangerous exposed position which has been the source of difficulties ... beyond the line the tribes..... should be left to manage their affairs as may be considered calculated to establish a personal influence for good among the chiefs and tribes*"⁸. It was to protect the areas of the hill tribes from the encroachment of the valley dwellers that, this administrative rule was implemented. According to this system, the direct administrative capacity of the British was from the valley to the Inner Line. No person from the valley could cross the Inner Line and enter the hilly area without permission. It was now not allowed to purchase or hoard valuable products of the hill areas specially rubber. On the other hand, specific land area beyond the Inner line was kept away from the direct rule of the British. The tribes in these areas were given the facility to arrange their administration according to their own prevailing ways.

Though the area beyond the Inner line were not under direct British rule but indirectly were still under the British. The hill tribes not restricted in any manner from coming down to the valley or living their lives according to the whims and fancy by the British.

The work of the Innerline which started in 1873 was completed in 1895. It needs to be mentioned that in all of Assam, it was only in the *Naga* and *Lushai* hills plus the *Balipara-Sadiya* Frontier Tract adjacent to the *Abor-Mishmi* hill areas that the Innerline was implemented. After the Chief Commissioner's governance began in Assam in 1874, four hill districts named after the tribes were formed. Consequently, the Innerline system implemented *Naga* hills and *Lushai* hills were also declared as

districts. The hill areas along the *Balipara-Sadiya* Frontier Tract were beyond the reach of the Chief Commissioner governance. The extensive hill areas adjacent to the tracts were later known as North East Frontier Agency (NEFA).

After the independence of India, the father of the Indian Constitution, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar supported the view that instead of uniting the hill tribes of Assam with the valleys, they should be given opportunity of autonomous rule so that their culture and heritage is preserved. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar said, "*The position of the tribes in Assam stand on somewhat different footing from the position of the tribals of other parts of India*". This opinion was shared by *Lokopriya* Bordoloi as well. The Constituent Assembly formed a 3-member Committee known as the 'Bordoloi Committee' to dwell deeply and decide about this matter of Assam. The detailed account of the 'Bordoloi Committee' was included as the 6th Schedule of the Constitution¹⁰. Under this schedule, the hill tribes were given the facility of autonomous rule. The 'Bordoloi Committee' did not discuss anything about the Innerline in use at that time. Commenting on the administrative system in Assam, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar said, "I am convinced of the fact that the policy pursued by the British government was a very sound one..."¹¹. In this context, it needs mention that probably Ambedkar's words 'sound one' was taken by the 'Bordoloi Committee' as reference to the Innerline system and as such, they too supported its continuation. Thus after independence also, in the hill areas within *Bor Asom* (Greater Assam) the Innerline system continued.

In 1971, the Central government passed the North East Reorganisation Act, 1971 in the parliament and formed a new state called Arunachal Pradesh in the border area of the N.E. As per the same Act, the *Lushai* Hills district was named as 'Mizoram', the *Khasi-Jayantia* hills were clubbed with the *Garó* hills and

named as 'Meghalaya' - thus two new states were born. Though Nagaland had gained the status of a separate state in 1963 itself, the Act of 1971 was later implemented there also. On 19th July 1995, Union Home Minister, S. B. Chauhan sat with the Chief Ministers of the Seven States of the N.E in a meeting where he proposed cancellation of the Innerline implemented in Arunachal, Mizoram and Nagaland¹².

The Central government had three arguments in favour of cancelling the Innerline -

- (1) Innerline was an impediment in the development of an atmosphere of industrialization of the three states.
- (2) As a result of Innerline, the progress of the states was hampered, and
- (3) Innerline was facilitating development of anti-government movements in the said states.

The three arguments of the Central government were unacceptable to the citizens as well as the then governments of the three states. Blaming the Inner line for no industrial development led to the counter question- "What then was the reason for stagnant industrial development in the other four states of the N. E. where the Inner line had not been implemented"? The reasons for the very slow industrialization could be listed as-

1. As a result of the partition of the country, 98% of the N.E. borders were embraced by foreign nations, whereas it was through a 'Bottle-neck' of just 21 kms that the N E remained connected with New Delhi. Consequently, there remained a gap in the communication between the N E and New Delhi.
2. Lack of capital and electric power for the industrialization in the N E.
3. Lack of growth of an industrial mindset among the people of the N E.

Whatever that may be, Chauhan had been sure that since

all the seven N E states at that time had Congress (I) governments the proposal would be readily accepted. However, it was seen that the three states immediately called emergent Legislative Assembly sessions and took the resolution for even stricter implementation of the Innerline¹³. At the time when Chauhan had proposed the cancellation of the Inner line, the issue of the illegal immigrants was creating a furore in the states of the N.E.

In every nation, state or region, it is the indigenous nationalities, the tribes and communities who are the deserving, legally supported natural owners that are to be secured, conserved and given first priority. This, however does not mean an enmity towards the non-indigenous. But in Assam, there is an aberration going on. Beginning from the second decade of the last century, the unabated illegal migration into Assam from undivided Bengal, East Pakistan and later, independent Bangladesh has gradually expanded a new demographic scenario wherein the 'sons of the soil' have been relegated to a deplorable condition. Assam is now moving forward in the same path that Tripura went. Even after an intense struggle spanning 6 years, Assam and the Assamese people did not benefit at all. Instead, the illegal migrants are gradually increasing in strength. No concrete steps were taken to send off foreigners from Assam by implementing the clauses of the Assam Accord (14 Aug 1985). On the other hand, though the security of the Assamese people were assured through clause 6 of the Accord, in reality, even after 27 years, the topic never got any special importance. The kind of rules and measures in the lines of the Inner line, that is being demanded by many in Assam today, could have been incorporated as a part of the Assam Accord when it was being charted. However, an important issue like this found no space in the Accord. As against this, those leaders who completed the Accord gave the impression that whatever had been incorporated in the Accord was much more than what the Assamese

people were entitled to. This was very unfortunate for the entire Assamese nationality community.

It is fortunate that in Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh, such a problem is not there and never will - only because of the Innerline system. Though Meghalaya and Manipur do not have the Innerline, in both these states, the rules and regulations regarding the non-natives has been strongly in force since long back. In 1977, the Meghalaya passed the Residential Permit Act, whereby no outsider will be allowed to stay in the state beyond four months without permission. According to this Act, in order to protect the interests of the natives, land cannot be transferred for being sold to outsiders. If there had been a similar Act or law in Assam like Meghalaya and Manipur banning the selling or transfer of land to outsiders, at least the future of the Assamese people would have been secure.

Of course, just passing an Act is not enough. Assamese people are so poor in political consciousness, that there is no effort or wish to even know whether any Act or law passed is actually being implemented. Here is an example- after due considerations, *Lokopriyo* Bordoloi had formed 47 tribal belts and blocks, which in the subsequent years became loose in the hands of those who came to power. The rules of these belts clearly stated that 'if *eksaniya* (where possessor has no legal right) land was occupied by the immigrants or *myadi* (permanent land settlement) land was not sold to qualified people, then in both cases they could be evacuated'. The rulers and the ruled, neither understood the meaning of '*bestoni*' (belts). Large number of outsiders encroached upon these belts, in spite of the law forbidding them from holding or registering these lands in their name. The most important thing here is that, the dishonest officials of Revenue department and the Registrar totally ignored the legal rules and registered land in the name of the outsiders and continue to do so even today. The

saddest fact here is that even after the historical anti- illegal migrant movement of Assam, these things should not have continued like before.

Now, the Assamese are being uprooted from their own base in their own motherland. It is seen that thousands of square kilometres of land on the expansive banks of the Brahmaputra have been occupied by doubtful illegal citizens or Bangladeshis. In such a scenario, it is very essential that over the largest possible landmass of Assam, Constitutional and legal rights of the natives should be implemented for their security. It is very important that serious thinking begins about the future of the Assamese in Assam and even though already late, the need for measures of protection should be felt.

References :

- ¹ *Asom Buranji*, Dr. Dambaru Nath, p.165
- ² *Asomor Janajatiya Swaitto-Xaxon*, Manoj Kumar Nath, *Prantik*. 1-15 January 2006, p.12
- ³ Assam during the later Chief Commissioners, Dr. R Sabhapandit, p.42
- ⁴ *Political History of Assam*, Vol-I, p.65.
- ⁵ *Comprehensive History of Assam*, Vol-I, p.22
- ⁶ *Main Stream*, Vol-XXXIII, No.16, p.11, From the article of S.Chakraborty
- ⁷ *Political History of Assam*, Vol-I, pp.73-80
- ⁸ *Paramountcy in Hill*, S.K Borpujari in *Comprehensive History of Assam*, Vol-IV, p.221
- ⁹ *Gopinath Bordoloi, Indian Constitution and Centre-State Relation*, Nirode K. Barua, pp.55-60
- ¹⁰ The members of the Bordoloi Committee were Rupnath Brahma, Rev.J.M.Nichols Roy and A.V Thakur. It needs mention that the 6th Schedule incorporated in the Indian Constitution was meant only for Assam. For the other states the 5th Schedule was prepared.
- ¹¹ Assam in a Nutshell, p.56
- ¹² *The Assam Tribune*, 20th July 1995, p.1
- ¹³ *Kendriya Sarkar aru Uttar-Purbanchal*, Dr.Ranjeet Sabhapandit, p.27

CHAPTER 4

Interests- thoughts of the Natives in the Background of Migration

The Indian culture is a yogic culture. Through the successive years, the Indian culture that has emerged from the harmony and connection between the various tribes and communities living here, is their soul for the Indians. The words- 'to melt together' - the model on which Indians introduces themselves automatically brings out the fact that every tribe-community has its own cultural identity. These tribes /communities who hold a separate identity (each developed on the basis of their own cultural characteristics) resides in a particular geographical limit. It is a matter of doubt whether the powerful assembled central administrative system has helped to maintain the individual cultural identity of the various tribes - communities, though its name puts forth the idea of inclusive state! In the current situation it is seen that many indigenous tribes-communities, while trying to gain recognition as 'Indian' has already lost their own identity and cultural independence. And some tribes/communities are moving in that direction. The main cause of this is- the official or unofficial patronage of a foreign country or neighbouring state through a particular tribe/community, to target a weaker tribe/community of another geographical area with a plan to evacuate them or in other words, inflicting a continuous silent attack on that area.

If one looks at the demographic background of Eastern India, this subject will become quite clear. The ancient tribes of Tripura have been recognized as minorities in their own motherland. In a very short period of time, the immigrants from

East Bengal became majority in Tripura. The Sikkimese people lost their identity and power over their own homeland only because of the Nepali infiltrators. Similar situations are gradually happening in many other states of eastern India. The weak regional tribes are gradually losing the power to hold on to their rights over their own land in these states and strong tribes or communities from other states (which have already emerged as strong) are imposing their authority over them. For example, Bengalis from North East India, Biharis from North India, Tamils from South, Marathis from West are powerful (in terms of numbers). Their authority over other places catches the eye.

To put it in a simple way, every nationality (community) has certain legal rights over their land as well as their kith and kin. If such a community encroaches upon the rights of another, it will definitely be recognized as injustice. Once, on the same sentiments expressed in Hitler's 'Main Kampf', Mussolini had said- '*The various nationalistic of this world can establish themselves and secure themselves only by defeating and destroying other nationalities*'. These words, in the current scenario of modern nation formation, particularly in a country like India, cannot be said to be untrue. Similarly, it is a matter of grave concern that how far it would be correct in today's super modern times to allow the theory of 'Survival of the fittest' propounded by 19th century zoologist, Charles Darwin to spill over into the realm of competition between the communities. Even *Biswakobi* R. N. Tagore has opined that such competition among communities/ races is the main power behind a deadly homicide.

The thinkers of various countries are trying their best to highlight the importance of the phrase '*son of the soil*' in order to safeguard the interests of the micro communities in the social and economic fields. Most of the countries are compelled to incorporate certain important directives in their constitution for these '*son of*

the soil'. This phrase is now becoming very popular among some ethnic communities of the world. (In India, it is gaining publicity among certain areas, particularly among the weaker ethnic communities of eastern India). Along, with the phrase '*son of the soil*' local, native and aborigine are synonyms that are being widely used. Similarly, the opposites of the above words like foreigner, outsider, etc., are also being used.

The concept of '*son of the soil*' is seen to have been prevailing in various states of India since pre-independence times. After independence this idea took firmer roots keeping in mind the socio-economic and political interests of the states. Particularly in those states which were facing foreign infiltration or legal or illegal migration from neighbouring states, and the interests of the future of the locals were neglected by the ill-wishers. The natives began to fear the gradually increasing aggression of outsiders and felt legal protection was unavoidable to face this. Considerations of only community-centric interests came up for educations, jobs, business etc. They felt the need to be alert for protection of their existing land rights- one of the basic rights. During the last three decades of the last century, movements to protect the interests of the locals were seen in many states of India. The permanent residents of those states were lamenting the threat to their identity. A couple of states in their anguish to safeguard their language and culture from the outside infiltration, even demanded government protection. Some other states went a few steps further and thought of certain rules and regulations in the interest of the locals.

Now, the question has come up, who is a 'local'? Generally, when we say 'local', we understand- 1. People born within a specific geographical area or people residing in a state for a specific period of time. 2. We also understand the affinity and connection of these people with the language and culture

prevailing in the land of their residence. The identity of people living in various places comes forth on the basis of the language they speak, because the parameters of the ethnic communities depend on their linguistic and racial factors. Language is the tool to express cultural characteristics and it is through language that one can enter the realm of cultural traditions. Of course, it is not without complexities to establish the identity of locals on the basis of only language, because in a geographical area, there are minorities residing with their own cultural characteristics and racial existence, without using the language of the majority population. These are ancient residents who have been residing in that particular area since pre-historic times. In fact, the demands of 'local' will apply more for these people. The parameters to identify 'local' as mentioned above are very simplified ideas. Still, we are compelled to accept them. It was based on these ideas (on the basis of the language of the majority) that the post-independence national government had prepared some politically marked boundaries, or had recognized the states through the process of reconstruction on the basis of language. According to such a process Marathis in Maharashtra, Assamese in Assam and Punjabis in Punjab are the 'local'. Here comes up a question- 'What will be the identity of the people from other states residing in a particular state since ages'? The deciding factor in this case will definitely be the measurement of assimilation with the majority population's language and culture of the residing state.

From a simplified angle, those people who come and reside for many years in another state in search of livelihood, but refuse to accept the language and culture of that state are counted as 'foreigner'. In one word, these people are stateless. According to renowned Social Scientist Myran Weiner, "Migrants of descendants of migrants remain in identity territorially stateless people." Keeping the above statement in mind, an example can

be given that even after residing in Assam with land and property, a person from Bengal, Punjab or Kerala who refuses to identify himself as 'Assamese' from the linguistic and cultural angle cannot be said to be 'local'. These people are busy with their own work and do not wish to participate in trials and travails of the locals. Therefore, they cannot demand security and benefits at par with the local people. They are guests as Weiner says, "Guests cannot share same joy and sorrow of those who belong to the state nor therefore are they entitled to all the rights and benefits".

Of course a person who comes from another state and resides in a particular state for years and assimilates totally into the language and culture of the later, will definitely be counted as a 'local'. Here, the question of blind selfishness cannot arise. For example, those immigrants who entered Assam till the 50's of the last century or the Punjabi's residing in Barkola in Nagaon, Assam since ancient times, who have been completely merged into the large umbrella of Assamese culture.

It has already been mentioned that some states in India have defined the meaning of locals and seriously thought about protecting their interests. The Legislative Assemblies of these states have given importance to the matter and consented for proper legal measures. In 1968, the Government of Bihar had declared that the permanent residents of the state will be counted as 'locals' and will be given priority in employment and economic facilities. The Andhra Pradesh government had prepared the public Employment (Requirement as Residence) Act in 1957 whereby it directed that the employment system should be limited to the 'sons of soil' only. Since 1977, the Meghalaya government is up-holding the 'Residential Permit Act' whereby no outsider can reside in the state beyond a period of four months without permission. This Act also completely bans transferring of land to outsiders only in the interest of the locals.

The land called 'Assam' is a melting point of various ethnic communities. The fertile land has seen the maximum flow of immigrants from within and outside the country. Even in the post-independence the flow continued with those people merging into the air, water and land of Assam. But, as a result of the gradually increasing infiltration, the expanding new demography is seen to be trying to impose itself over the 'son of the soil'. In this expanding new demography in Assam as a result of the gradual infiltration, the maximum contribution is that of the Bengali speaking Muslims from Bangladesh (illegal entrants). Since, most of them entered Assam in a clandestine manner, there is no intention of going back. They have a great weakness for land. Wherever they found empty land in the riverine tracts or in the interiors, they settled there building houses and communities. In a very short period of time, they have been able to form a large society, on account of very fast population growth. The locals of Assam are worried because of these people. It is unfortunate that an issue of such magnitude has never been addressed at the national level—no one seems to have the time. The Assam Accord signed as a result of the prolonged Assam Movement seems to have aggravated this problem, because the lack of far-sight of the movement leaders, and political interests of some people which resulted in the I.M.D.T. Act, that led to such illegal entrants getting citizenship. Such an arrangement was recognized by the Assam Accord also. As per the census based on religion conducted in 2001, the information clearly shows that in the entire country, Assam is in 2nd position in the list that shows increase in the number of followers of Islam (Jammu-Kashmir is in the 1st position). Out of 23 districts in Assam (leaving the 3 newly formed districts), 19 districts are inhabited by Muslims and out of the 126 LAC in 38 LAC the Muslims are in majority.

If one scrutinizes closely, one fact becomes clear that the

locals of Assam are gradually losing their Rights over land. Even the 'Tribal Belts' once created to safeguard the interests of the locals are being gradually occupied by people from outside. The situation has reached such a state that the commercially important land has been grabbed by outsiders from the locals. Now, the price of those land is sky high and the locals cannot afford to buy it back.

It is really unfortunate that no one has realized till now the inevitability of protecting the land of Assam in the interests of the locals. It is an unfortunate matter for the Assamese, that even today no importance is being given to the fact there must be control over the buying selling of land. The locals are compelled to sell their land for money. There was nothing objectionable here, if the land went to locals. Since there is no government control the commercial areas of Assam are being occupied by the non-Assamese. Similarly, the alluvial lands along the rivers have also been occupied by the non-Assamese. Similarly, the alluvial lands along the rivers which have been occupied by illegal foreigners to some extent is resulting in locals losing ownership rights to those people. Here, there is no ground for objection since the Assam Accord has recognised them as natives. The matter of concern here is, among those who have acquired land rights and are inhabitants of alluvial riverine tracts are those who entered Assam after 25th March 1971 (As per the confession of Mr. Nilamoni Sen Deka former State Minister, Department of Home, on 11th Nov. 2000 on the floor of Legislative Assembly.)

If there had been an Act in Assam for the interests of the Assamese, the Assamese people would not have been so apprehensive about the illegal infiltration in the present situation and this entire issue would not have assumed such a complex form. Similarly, after the Assam Movement (1979-1985), a strong desire for autonomous rule or power would not have risen within

the ethnic communities. This hostility between the ethnics and non-ethnics would not have been expressed. It needs to be mentioned here that one person from Assam, Prabindra Deka, former MLA from PLP party had raised the Assam Land Transfer (Regulation) bill 2004 twice in the Assam Legislative Assembly for securing the constitutionally Legal Rights of the natives over the major portion of Assam's land. In this bill Mr. Deka had benevolently designated those whose names were entered in the National Register in 1951, as well as those who came to Assam before 25th March 1971 (as per direction of the Accord), as 'natives'. The subject matter of the Bill, placed by Mr. Deka was of immense significance for the interests of Assam and the Assamese people. Mr. Deka had thought very carefully about the future interests of Assam, but the political parties during that time, the MLA's and Ministers, did not express any desire to take this Bill seriously.

In the 6th clause of the Assam Accord it has not only been promised to extend Constitutional and legal administrative protection, to the language as well as cultural-social traditions of the Assamese people but also security for their preservation and development. But the question arises, how can Constitutional security be given without amending the Constitution in favour of Assam? After 27 years have lapsed since the signing of the Accord, this topic has not been implemented. As such, it is time that Assam starts to think on its own about the interests of the locals. Otherwise, the future generations of Assam will blame us for all these mistakes.

To think about the future of the locals of Assam means implementation of the 6th clause of the Assam Accord. It is only in the best interest of the future of locals of Assam, that the politicians and intellectuals of Assam, should seriously think and realise the necessity of protection, even though it is already late.

References:

1. *Assam's Agony*, Amiya Kr. Das, 1982, Lancers Publication, pp.207-209.
2. *The Son of the Soil*, Myran Weiner, 1979, Cambridge University, pp.311-12.
3. *Tholuwar babey xongrokyon ki; Tholuwa kun?*, Bhuban Barua, *Goriyashi*, 2002, p.18.
4. *Dainik Asom*, 26th December 2004, p. editorial
5. *Pressure Groups in Assam*, Indrani Barua, 1990, Omsons Publications.

CHAPTER 5

The Coupland Plan and Armed Movements against India in the North East

On 13th November 1941 at 4.00 pm, Governor of Assam, Robert Neil Reid while addressing the students and guardians in a prize distribution ceremony in the Welsh Mission Girls High School in Shillong said, *"It is being considered to create a huge Crown Colony under direct British rule by joining the entire hill areas of North East India with the North-West Burma till Kachin"*¹. That day he informed that he was happy to publicly disclose for the first time, what was a secret subject. Just six days earlier he had to go through a file wherein, was a very important proposal of 22 pages. As a local head, he approved the proposal. The heading of the proposal said – *"A note on the future of the Present Excluded, Partially Excluded and Tribal Areas of Assam"*. He said that as soon as Whitehall* gave the approval to the proposal, it would be implemented. He questioned the public of Shillong, represented by the students and guardians – *"India is on the threshold of great many changes, where do you come in this picture?"*

Though it has not been published extensively in the political history of Assam or India, the 'Crown Colony' holds a special importance. It was never implemented finally and yet, in the political thinking, discussions and plans about Assam, a direct or indirect effect of 'Crown Colony' can still be felt. A few historians have mentioned about 'Crown colony' very briefly in the history books. A couple of historians have named it as 'Reid's

Plan'². On the other hand, one or two top British administrators, who were in Assam has mentioned it as 'Coupland Plan'³. The reason for this was, Assam's Governor, Reid (5th October 1939- 3 May 1942) after approving the 'Crown Colony' handed it to the erstwhile Secretary General of India, L.S Emery, who passed it to Reginald Coupland, renowned Professor of Cambridge University for a thorough study. Having scrutinised all aspects of the proposal, Coupland wrote a secret report in favour of it and returned it to Emery. That is why it was named 'Coupland Plan'⁴. Thus, the imagined state was 'Crown Colony' and because Robert Reid and Professor Coupland approved of the proposal, it was called 'Reid Plan' and 'Coupland Plan'. We are using 'Coupland Plan' for further discussion.

Though Robert Reid's name comes up in the matter of 'Coupland Plan', 'Crown Colony' or 'Reid's plan', in reality this plan was innovated by two English administrators – N.E Parry and Dr. John H. Hutton. The former was at first, the Chief Administrator of Garo Hills District, and thereafter Superintendent of the Lushai Hills District. The latter was the Chief Administrator of Naga Hills District. These two administrators, on the basis of their administrative experience and thinking, proposed⁵ before the Statutory Commission of 1928 that keeping in view the new reforms to be brought in India in the future the entire tribal areas should be unified together under a separate administrative machinery. They even proposed that the tribal hill areas in Assam should be included in their proposed plan. From 1930 to 1935, Hutton wrote many letters and notes to the departmental authorities to unify the entire tribal areas of the North East with the adjacent hill areas. In his proposed hill area, he mentioned 16 districts and a part of Burma including Kachin. Leaving aside the Burmese region mentioned by him, the huge area included 25 Khasi estates, Manipur, Tripura and Naga, Miri, Monpa, etc., small yet British

administered (excluded and partially excluded) areas. Dr. Hutton's arguments in favour of the tribal Crown Colony were-

1) The Kachin hill areas North West of Burma was linked to the hill areas of Assam. The Kachin region is located in the borders of the then Naga hills district of Assam and the state of Manipur. The majority population here is Christian. Similarly, in Naga, Mizo, Khasi and Garo Hills, etc., plus the majority people in the hill areas of Manipur are also followers of Christianity.

2) There was racial and cultural affinity in the entire area. Language too had similarities. Even their problems were the same. Logically, the people of the two regions (one, Burma and the other Assam and its adjoining areas) belonged neither to India nor to Burma. Establishing connections of a new area with India, which would gain independence in the future, was bound to lead to dissatisfaction among the residents of both sides. Since both areas expand up to the Chinese borders, the indispensability for a universal frontier will be felt.

3) The process of the developmental works done by the Christian missionaries of both sides in fields of religion, education and social reform would become more convenient.

4) This huge region (both regions) is full of oil, coal, tea and forest resources.

5) Way back in 1834, the 3rd British Commissioner of Assam, Major Jenkins had advised that a separate British Colony be established in N.E. India.

6) Even if the British leave India in the future, still the British will have its own expansive christian colony in North East India- the 'Crown Colony'.

It was on the basis of the grounds mentioned above that Dr. Hutton advised that the two parts of the two countries be brought together as one state with a government that will be separate from India and Burma.

Governor Reid did his own study on the advice and logic forwarded by Dr. Hutton. The indifferent attitude of the India Act 1935 towards Assam and the hill areas of the North East particularly attracted Reid towards the 'Crown Colony'. That is why, in the letter written to L. S. Emery, the Secretary-General of Indo-Burma, on 3rd March 1941 mentions- '*The Act of 1935 had not given the hill people sufficient safeguards. As to their future, it would have to be decided by the British Parliament. It can't be left to Indian leaders with neither knowledge, interest or feelings for these areas.*'⁶ It was probably from such a view that Gov. Reid had approved the proposal of the 'Crown Colony'.

However, even before taking any action certain difficulties were seen on the Burmese areas of the Crown Colony. When after eight days of discussions about it in a meeting held from 5th December 1942 saw the failure of the British officials to arrive at a consensus, the Governor of Burma, Dorman Smith took the decision to keep that particular region of Burma under Rangoon⁷. Even after this for some time it was still considered to create the 'Crown Colony' with Assam and its adjoining areas. The situation brought about by the 2nd World War led to Coupland plan gaining separate significance. However, the fiery struggle for independence in India as well as Assam dampened this ambitious plan of the British and in such a situation the prospect that the British will have to leave India foiled the Coupland plan from becoming a reality.

After independence also, the Coupland plan has gained special importance. The reason being, it was the Coupland plan that patronised the 'Crown Colony' that for the first time planted the 'anti-India' poisonous sapling among the states/hill districts of the North East. Post-independence, the sapling thrived into a tree and is alive even today. To understand this issue properly, we will have to discuss since the 2nd World War. During the initial

stages of the 2nd World War, Japan, after destroying the British naval base in Singapore, won Andaman and Burma, took Manipur and advanced up to the Naga Hills. Here, the Japanese and Singaporean soldiers halted for sometime in temporary forts. Considering the continuous bombarding of Calcutta, the British and American military experts felt that Japan would win Calcutta and separate the entire North East from India. Moreover, the British at that time did not have the strength to stop the Japanese. In such a situation, the British, planned to endanger the Japanese stationed in the Naga hills from the rear, in guerilla warfare. For that, they bribed the local ethnic young men in the deep forests of Kachin, quickly trained them in guerilla warfare and created several armed military groups. At the same time, the youths of Naga hills were also given training. Among these Naga's, many of them had the experience of working as war-labourer in the 1st World War. The guerilla armies of both places were trained to use modern weapons made in Britain- America. The Allies, anticipating danger, had even made secret reserves of arms and ammunitions in Kachin⁸. However, the situation completely changed with the atom bombs dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6th and 9th August 1945, respectively. As a result, the Japanese army in Kachin was compelled to surrender. The modern weapons of the surrendered Japanese Prisoners of War (PoW) were left behind in Nagaland and Manipur. On the other hand, the Allies after the war ended never felt the need to take away the arms and ammunition they had stored secretly in Kachin. On the orders of their superiors, they left Kachin with the Japanese P.O.W's. Later, that reserve of American- British weapons became the property of the Kachin guerrilla force⁹.

After the 2nd world war ended, the Kachin guerillas, trained and loaded with foreign weapons, turned the Kachin region into a guerilla training centre. The strong and successful war of

the Kachin guerilla's against Rangoon attracted the neighbouring hill tribes. The neighbouring rebels began to go to Kachin for training, which led to the Kachin training camps becoming busier day by day. Finding a nice way of earning, the Kachin training camps now openly instigated the rebellious groups of various places to come for guerilla training.

Considering their defeat in the hands of the British and acceptance of vassalage as a historical accident, some of the hill tribes of North East believed that once the British left, their former independent status will be restored. Meanwhile, through the Coupland plan, they took a firm stand that the Indian government (formed by Indians) will never understand their wishes and needs. The hill tribes, that had never taken part in the Indian struggle for independence were enraged when without seeking their views and opinions, they were brought under the Indian rule. They were already convinced that an armed struggle was but a very ordinary matter. The Nagaland National Council formed by Phizo, not only rejected the District Council for the hill areas on the basis of '*Gana Parishad*' but demanded freedom and took up arms against the Indian army. Following the same ideology, Laldenga and Biseswar Singha treaded the same path in Mizoram and Manipur, respectively. For all these guerilla warriors, Kachin became the centre for training.

In an article dated 7th December 1966 published in 'The Agentia International' published from London, Dr. Alexander Prince praised the Coupland plan and advised that it should be made active once more as per necessity- from it one can assume that the British had a huge diplomatic political interest in S.E Asia.¹⁰ It was mentioned in the article that the extremely slow development of the North Eastern states of India is to be noticed. They have always been ignored by the government of Delhi. The demands of the naive people of the hills or their wishes have been

cruelly crushed by the police-military. It said, "*the Indian state is not ideal one for safeguarding tribal and backward communities in the frontier areas of North East inequalities in the distribution of income, wealth population has been living in poverty there are a large number of non-tribals who also feel deprived and who also suffer from various inadequacies....*". It may be mentioned that even after India gained independence, the reason why England dragged the Coupland plan into international politics was- India's foreign policy post-independence- particularly India's close relation with Soviet Russia and the vehement and strong criticism of America and England by India's Foreign Affairs Minister, K. P. Menon, in the United Nations. On the other hand, America and England became worried about future danger when in 1962 India failed to oppose Communist Chinese. In such a situation, the CIA had been considering to expand the limits of Coupland plan right up to Dhaka, and in order to oppose China, form a friendly or vassal state under their (CIA) influence. For that, Christian Missionaries, Insurgents groups, Communal groups and sub-groups, organisations and associations, etc., have been helped with money, education and health aid. In Assam also, such groups-associations have been searched out and secretly aided by the CIA. When the limits of the Coupland plan was expanded till Dhaka, the Muslim league that had been formed in Dhaka (1906) demanded that entire Assam should be made a part of East Pakistan. Even now Dhaka has been pursuing its undeclared plan to reduce Hindu numbers in Assam by increasing Bangladeshi majority and occupy Assam.

Assam's troubles that deserve deep consideration are related to the above situation. During the student movement, some students influenced by secessionist and aggressive ideas had taken a solemn vow to create a separate sovereign Assam. To this end, they initially established contacts with the Nagaland insurgents

and sent several Assamese groups to Kachin. Gradually, when Bangladesh emerged as an insurgent's den and training camp for the insurgents of Assam just as Kachin, Bangladesh also became a prime haunt.

It cannot be denied that right from the days of the colonial rule, some people of Upper Assam had been influenced by thoughts of creating an independent state¹¹. Youths of Upper Assam belonging to this school of thought, joined hands with the youths from lower Assam during the student movement (1979-1985) and started an insurgent movement through The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA). These soldiers of ULFA trained in Kachin till 1991. Later on, the major section of this organization found the facility of training in the camps of the insurgents directed by religious sentiments of Bangladesh. This neighbouring country has even been facilitating the 'Secret killings' in Assam by providing safe residence to the leaders of ULFA in the insurgent camps.

It seems there is a difference of thinking between the earlier group of ULFA leaders-soldiers trained in Kachin and the latter group who trained and took refuge in Bangladesh. The former group wanted to work with their conscience towards gaining an independent and clean Assam, keeping alive its racial identity. But the latter, on the other hand wanted returns for the sacrifices they had done as extremists by indulging in luxury and also by catering to the interests of the foreign nation under whose protection they thrived, and as such seems to have totally moved away from the main course and objective of the rebellion. The former group of ULFA leaders feel that Bangladesh has trained and given refuge to a large number of soldiers of the organization only to serve its own interests. One can find such differences of opinion among the two groups. The division that is going on within the ULFA right now can be said to be a division of principles

CHAPTER 6

Kohima Treaty, Chief Minister Borbora's Doiyang Victory Festival, Rengma-Nambar-Diphu Genocide and Aggressive Mentality of the Nagas

Assam now is a victim of aggression from all sides. Arunachalis in the North East, Nagas in the South, Meghalaya in the South West, etc. aggression has resulted in Assam gradually becoming smaller. Among all these states, the aggression of the Nagas can be said to be increasing tremendously. Here, a historical analysis of the Naga aggression is being put forward.

In Assam, when the Janata Dal government (1978, 10 March - 4th Sept. 1979) threw open the Doiyang Reserved Forest, under Sibsagar district, in a suicidal move, the Chief Minister of Nagaland, Vizhole had warned the Assam government thus - "Assam government has opened the Doiyang Reserved Forest in a one-sided decision. If any untoward incidents happen as a result, the Nagaland government will not be responsible for that".¹ Immediately after this warning of Vizhole, from 5th - 11th January 1979 a killing-spree of thousands was unleashed on the Assamese peasants residing inside the Rengma-Nambar-Diphu forests area. It is unnecessary to explain who, and on whose orders this genocide was carried out.

Chief Minister Vizhole wanted that the Doiyang R.F should be free of encroachment from the Assam side. But the Janata Dal government in power in Assam then celebrated the 'Doiyang Victory Festival' by planning to give land in the Reserved Forest to the landless peasants for agriculture. This was vehemently and

between the two groups.

The present rebellious factions in the North East of India are all being secessionist supported directly or indirectly by Bangladesh, Pakistan, China, England and America for their respective selfish interests. Bangladesh aims to occupy a part of the valley region of Assam and to weigh down the demography of the state through Bangladeshi immigration. China's aim is to grab a portion of Arunachal Pradesh. The others' objective is to create a nation comprising of the entire North East India, Bhutan, and up to Kachin of Burma which will be their sphere of influence. Thus, it can be seen that behind the armed rebellious movements that has grown up in the North Eastern states of India is the seed called Coupland plan that was planted by the British.

References:

¹ Burma: *Flirting with Reid's Plan*, D. Syemlieh, p.1

² *New Lights on the proposed Colony*, H.K Borpujari, 4th February 1990, pp.18-21

³ *Future Hills of N-E India 1928-47, Some British Views*, D. Syemlieh, p.2

⁴ *Indian Statutory Commission, Vol-XIV, 1930*, pp.111-18 (N.E Parry and Dr. John H. Hutton had given written suggestions to the Commission)

⁵ Assam, *Journal of The Royal Society of Arts, Vol-XCIII, April 1944*, p.247, where Governor Reid had written - 'They are not Indian in any sense.....neither in origin, language nor in outlook.... historical accident..... to Indian province.'

⁶ *Response of the N-E Tribes of India towards Partition, Independence and Integration-1945-50*, D. Syemlieh, pp.3-4

⁷ *Insurgency in N-E India*, B. Pakem (ed.), pp.31, 345.

⁸ *The Rising Nagas*, Asoso Yonuo, p.168

⁹ (a) *Coupland: Uttar Pub Akaxot punor Dhumketur Abirbhab, Agradoot*, 22nd April 1992, p.7

(b) *Future of India*, R. Coupland, pp.164-166

¹⁰ *Politics of Secessionism in N-E India-A case Of Assam*, G. Phukan in *Insurgency in N-E India* B. Pakem (ed), pp.255-70

clearly opposed by Vizhole on the ground that, this was a violation of the terms of the Kohima Treaty which had been signed on 2nd May 1972. It may be assumed that it was as a result of this, and instigation from the Naga government that the Nagas took such barbaric measures against the Assamese people.

If one looks into clause no. 4 and 5 of the said treaty, Vizhole's comment becomes clear. There is ground for him to blame the Assam government in this matter. The preamble and clause 4 of the treaty says:

Preamble: *The interim agreement between the government of Assam and Nagaland regarding the boundary between Assam and Nagaland from Disoi river to Gorajan stream and from Kakoanga river to Doyang river.*

Clause 4: *The Assam government agrees that the Disoi Reserved Forest and the Doyang Reserved Forest shall continue to be reserved forest and be maintained as such. No settlement of encroachers and no encroachment will be allowed. In dealing with encroachments the Assam government will enforce a uniform policy irrespective of area or state to which the encroachers belong. The Assam government however agrees that the Naga settlements in the Disoi valley Reserved Forest, existing on the date of the agreement will not be disturbed.*

When the treaty had been signed, the Congress government was in power in Assam under the leadership of Sarat Chandra Singha. As a result of the elections of 1977, Golap Borbora formed the Janata Dal government on 13th March. As soon as he assumed power, he granted land in the Doiyang R. F, which had been created by the British with an area of 94.5 square miles³, to the landless of Assam. It may be concluded that, while doing this Chief Minister Borbora was only concerned with his own popularity. By giving land, he turned a Reserved Forest into an unreserved area. Clause 5 of the treaty said—

The Nagaland government agrees not to interfere with or obstruct in any way, the Forest officials and Contractors of Assam government in performance of their function in the said Reserved Forest or the normal maintenance and working of the said Reserved Forest under leases, agreements or contracts already entered into by the Forest Department of Assam. The Assam government agrees to furnish the Nagaland government within fifteen days of this agreement, a full and complete list of leases and contracts already entered into in respect of the said Reserved Forest. The Assam government further agrees that no fresh leases or contracts will be entered into in respect of the said Reserved Forest during continuance of this agreement.

In spite of all such elaborate do's-don'ts in the treaty, it is questionable as to why the government of Assam decided to open the Doyang Reserved Forest? Here, a particular sentence in clause 4 of the treaty needs special attention— *The Assam government however agrees that the Naga settlements in the Disoi valley Reserved Forest, existing on the date of the agreement will not be disturbed.* Here, again another question arises as to why without any mention of the Assamese, only the Nagas were allowed to live in the Disoi Reserved Forest? This neglect towards the interest of the Assamese people by the Assam government during the signing of the treaty, and a lenient attitude towards the Nagas resulted in a weak position for future interests of the Assamese. The Forest Minister of the Borbora government, Samar Brahma Choudhury with a total lack of any farsightedness without verification of any documents gave land to the Assamese landless and by celebrating the Doyang victory Festival⁵ sacrificed innumerable people in Rengma, Nambar, and Diphu in the hands of miscreants. It must be mentioned that in the forest areas cited above, both Nagas and Assamese had set up villages even before the treaty had been signed. If an official government announcement

about the victory festival and granting of land had not been made, the Nagas would not have tried to dominate the Assamese villages in that area. To sum up, in future, that huge area could not have been demanded by the Nagas as a part of Nagaland. Like-wise, the tendency of the Naga's to grab Assam's territories would have also lessened to some extent.

From the dawn of 5th January 1979, the areas where the Nagas embarked on a genocide against the Assamese people, were actually under the forest areas of Golaghat Subdivision (then) in Assam. Stretched till Dimapur that extensive area had three divisions: (1) Rengma Forest Reserve. (2) Block No. 15 Nambar Forest Reserve and (3) Diphu Forest Reserve⁶. The Diphu Forest Reserve expanded right upto Dimapur. Rengma Forest Reserve was between the Naga hills and Rengma River. Between Rengma River and Naujan-Bokajan Ali leading to Chungajan River was block no. 15 Nambar Forest Reserve. And between Chungajan River and Diphu River was Diphu Forest Reserve.

The Dimapur area, that included the Dimapur Railway station which had been a part of the Golaghat Subdivision of the earlier Sibsagar district, was given by Assam to Nagaland when the new state was formed. When from 1st December 1963, Dimapur became a part of Nagaland, the Golaghat-Diphu forest area began to be inhabited by Nagas and as their numbers spread, they began to set up villages with Naga names. In a very short span of time the Naga villages mushroomed. It needs to be mentioned that from 1963 to 1979, in just 16 years a total of 45 villages were set up in the Diphu No. 15 and Rengma forest area. The total land area of the three forests was 300 square miles- 10 miles breadth and 30 miles length⁷. In spite of police battalion of Assam police which were set up in Umianghat, Chungajan and Rangajan located near Rengma Forest Area, the steady increase in number of Naga villages is something to be noted. Here, it hardly needs any mention

as to what kind of duty was done by the police and security personal.

On 8th May 1978, the Agriculture Minister, Sonaswar Bora and Forest Minister, Samar Brahma Choudhury of the then Assam government, after touring those areas (They said that they had gone up to 5 kms near the Nagaland Border, near Rangajan Police camp) informed the Assam Legislative Assembly that more than half the total land area of the Rengma, Diphu and Nambar No. 15 Reserve had been occupied by the newly settled Naga villages.

According to the official and unofficial sources the newly settled Naga villages in Diphu Reserved Forest were: (1) Pohtu Basti (2) Chitai Basti (3) Hebuchi Basti (4) Ganati (5) Pichekhu (6) Zekehi (7) Luptu (8) Badal (9) Hohelu (10) Luchet (11) Hovovi (12) Tukezu (13) Chuhei (14) Hoyetu (15) Khozeku (16) Niheto (17) Tovechi (18) Gotevi (19) Akot⁸.

The Naga villages that were settled by Naga encroachment in No. 15 South Nambar Reserved Forest were: (1) Phakati (2) Nekekho (3) Nekekhi, (Hebukhi) (5) Evet (6) Hebekhi (7) Keizu (8) Bichi (9) Homeland (10) Hochote (11) Binot (12) Kuki (13) Ao⁹.

The New Naga settlements in Rengma Reserved Forest were: (1) Khampha (2) Rengmapani (3) Hanit (4) Habcha (5) Renghai (6) Hohohe¹⁰.

The Assamese (non-Naga) plains peoples settlements in 15 No. Nambar and Rengma areas were : (1) Sonali Beel, (2) Chilamijan Beel, (3) Pithakhata, (4) Dhantola No. 1 (5) Dhantola No. 2, (6) Dayalpur, (7) Pobaighat, (8) Hatdibi, (9) Bardandi, (10) Jurdolong, (11) Haldibari, (12) Hidorujan, (13) Gholapani, (14) Minister Basti, (15) Jahaji Basti, (16) Rengma No. 14, (17) Lachit Basti, (18) No. 1 Mingmang, (19) No. 2 Mingmang, (20) Pub Panjan, (21) Nakhuti Kachari, (22) Tengatol, (23) Mikir Basti,

(24) Rani Pukhuri, (25) Natun Chungajan Basti¹¹.

Many of the non-Naga villages mentioned above were evicted by the Assam government in 1975-76-77. However, no Naga village was evicted. In fact, when the Naga used government bulldozers to construct roads in their areas, the Assam government was silent. The Nagaland government provided electricity and constructed schools for the Nagas. The Naga had planned everything properly, but in the case of the Assamese people, it came down to encroachments. The important fact here was that, on 16th March 1977 and 3rd January 1980 General Elections, Assamese settlements were considered as integral part of the Naga Settlements, and Naga representatives were voted for. In the Voters list, names of residents of the Assamese-majority villages were also there.¹²

On 27th November 2009, the Nagaland Legislative Assembly organised a one-day conference where discussions and deliberations took place on the un-announced 'Greater Nagaland'. At the end of the discussion, the Chief Minister, Neiphiu Rio forwarded a four-point proposal, which was unanimously accepted in the Legislative Assembly. Even the Congress opposition fully supported these proposals. Needless to say, the acceptance of these resolutions turned the proposed 'Greater Nagaland' issue of the NSCN (National Socialist Council of Nagaland) into a certified demand. If this demand is executed with the support of the government, then, those territories of Assam already occupied by the Nagas as well as those territories that are being occupied in bits and pieces till now, will be incorporated permanently into Nagaland.

It needs to be mentioned that when on 1st August 1980, the Central Government officially declared Tuensang attached Nagaland on the basis of the Ordinance of 1926, with the interior parts of Dhansiri and Diphu River as the 16th State of India, the

land area of Nagaland was 16,579 sq.km. But, according to the 1992 data from Assam government from 1963 to 1992, 51,160.45 hectares of forest area and 3,118 hectares of Revenue land of Assam has been occupied by the Nagas. As per the statement given by the Revenue Minister, Dr. Bhumidhar Barman in the summer session of the Assam Legislative Assembly in 2007, Nagaland had occupied a total of Assam's 1,62,491 acre land. Though there is a mismatch of the data, but it is a fact that Assam's territory is shrinking as a result of Naga occupation. This problem has now taken a serious turn for Assam.

The Nagas have not been satisfied with occupying territories of Assam alone. They have also occupied territories of Arunachal, Manipur and even Myanmar. However, of the total territories they have occupied, more than 70% is from Assam. Till now, that state has occupied, in Golaghat district from Merapani (in Dhansiri Subdivision) till Forkating; in North Cachar and Karbi Anglong-Bokajan, Diphu, Howraghat; In Sibsagar district- Geleki, Sonari; In Jorhat district- Mariani, Naginimara and the areas adjacent to Barhola. Apart from that Nagaland has occupied the lions share of the land of 21 Forest areas.

Nagaland has been undertaking these occupation activities in a very systematic manner. The fact that there was never any strong opposition to such aggression has now resulted in the problem becoming serious. In this matter, the indifference of the Central government also needs to be searched.

References:

- ¹ *Saptahik Nilachal*, 25 July 1979, pp.5,9.
- ² *Assam Gazette*, June 1972, p.3
- ³ *Eastern Frontier of British India*, A.C Bannerjee, p.17
- ⁴ *Assam Gazette*, June 1972, p.3
- ⁵ *Saptahik Nilachal*, 12 February 1979, p.3

⁶ Songrakshita Doiyang Mukali kori diya babey dayi kun?, Jiban Das, Saptahik Nilachal, 21 February 1979, p.3

⁷ Asom Simanta Asanta Anchalar Aatha-Samajik aru. Bhaougolik poristhiti, Soneswar Bora (Agriculture Minister), Saptahik Nilachal, 24 January 1979

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Saptahik Nilachal, 17 January 1980, Editorial-p.2.

CHAPTER 7

Tendency of the Hill Tribes to Occupy Land in Assam What Does History Say?

After the Yandaboo Treaty, the British created a 'Greater Assam' by occupying plain territories in the Brahmaputra Valley as well as in the neighbouring hills, where the ethnic tribes resided. The hidden motive of the imperialist power was of course, benefits for themselves. Considering that the climate and natural atmosphere of Assam was very conducive for tea cultivation the British wished to reap the profits from very lucrative tea production. Secondly, they also wanted to exploit opportunities of rubber collection in the hill areas and enjoy huge profits in the international market. Meanwhile, the first tea garden of Assam which was established in 'Sa-bua' (Sah-Buwa i.e. tea plantation) paved the way for expansion of its lucrative production in Assam. To facilitate expansion of tea production in Assam, the British Commons in 1854 created a new law whereby British tea planters were encouraged to grow tea in Assam. According to this law, a tea-planter would get 500 acres of uncultivated land in place of the earlier 100 acres, for cultivation of tea. Many new British tea-planters came and established, the 'Assam Company' in 1838, 'Jorihaat' Tea Company' in 1857 'James Findley Company' in 1861 and thus expanded tea cultivation by occupying thousands and thousands of *bighas* of land in Assam. It must be noted that this expansion of tea cultivation was confined to the plain areas. Realizing the need of sloping land for tea cultivation, the British

tea cultivators began to occupy such lands in the foothill areas. This tendency of the aggressive and rude foreign tea-planters created problems for the hill tribes. They were hurt by the forceful measures of the tea-planters to occupy the land of their ancestors. As a result, regular incidents of conflict between the hill tribes and the tea garden owners-employees-laborers began to occur. Assam history is replete with such incidents. For example, the Naga's chopped Holcomb *Sahib* into pieces because the boundaries of the tea company crossed Lahdoigarh after 'Xukaan Juri Tea garden' was established in Namchang. This is just one example (many such examples can be given from history).

The consequences of the English tea-cultivators occupying the land of the hill tribes were not pleasant. Such incidents led to the tribes trying to defend themselves. Due to the lack of modern weapons³ they could not protest against the British, but the lingering ambers of hatred could be felt even in their activities in subsequent times. It was this hatred towards the plains, born during the British rule, that continued to live on even after the British left. If one analyses, it can be said that the Naga occupation of Assams' territories in the post-independence times is but an after effect of the British rule. Of course, whatever areas of Assam has been occupied by the Nagas and others hill tribes (adjacent to their states) and those interior areas of Assam, which they are demanding to be theirs, the legality of their demand is not certified by history. This issue has a lot scope for discussion from the historical perspective. But before that, it is important to discuss the relation that the Ahom *Swargadeos* had with the hill tribes during the Ahom rule.

There is no historical evidence that the Ahom rulers interfered in the internal administrative matters of the hill tribes. They completely ignored the squabbles and fights between the tribal villages (but the English voluntarily entered the hills to

interfere in such fights and solve them. At the same time, the English Padres' on the pretext of spreading Christianity among the hill tribes destroyed the strong bond that existed with the valley). The hills and valleys depended on each other for economic reasons. Assam history testifies that the Naga, Dafla, etc., tribes did torture the Assamese people residing on the border areas, but these were limited to plundering their paddy, looting domestic animal or sometimes, when possible, kidnapping people. But there was no instance of occupying valley land during the Ahom reign. To find respite from these atrocities, the Ahom kings fixed certain paths rather 'door ways' (*dwar*) through which the hill people could come and go from the valley. Strong vigilance was set up in the borders so that the entrance of the hill tribes would not create any problems for the valley people.

Assam history is replete with instances of Naga atrocities. As a result of these frequent atrocities, the Solal Gohain had a *garh* (rampart) built between Naga territory and Assam territory as border security from the southern border of the Naga kingdom till Naujan River was built the *Naga Ali* and this road was joined with the *Bor Ali* of Namdang. The Nagas used to come to the Ahom Capital Garhgaon or Rangpur via this road. The Ahom Kings did not permit the Nagas to roam around whimsically in the valley. In the political arena also, the Ahom kings followed a policy of friendship with the *Bori* and *Abori*⁴ Nagas. A good friendship was kept with the strong Naga tribe, the *Namchangiya* by the Ahom king with regular gifts and tokens sent. It became a ritual for the Naga kings to come down to the valley in the winters once and have an audience with the Ahom king. Many Naga brave hearts had even sacrificed their lives in the interest of Assam. Who does not know about the contributions of the valiant Konseng Barpatragohain (who was brought up amidst the Nagas.) to the creation of a *Bor Asom*. Konseng had killed Turbak by entering

his camp as a guest. He had also killed Nawab Hussein Khan in hand-to-hand combat. It must be mentioned that when Swargadeo Rudra Singha planned the invasion of Bengal, the Naga king helped him by sending Naga soldiers.

The boundaries of the expansive Kamrup-Pragjyotishpur kingdom of yore under the Varman dynasty spread from the Karatoya to the Dikarbahini⁵ can be assumed on the basis of the *Yogini tantra* and *Kalika Puran*. Before the advent of the Ahoms into Assam, the various rulers belonging to the plain tribes like the Bodo, Kachari, Chutiya, Bhuyan, etc., ruled over the Brahmaputra valley and their specific geographical areas and boundaries can be found from the history of Assam. Similarly, spread across Patkai to the Manah river, the land mass called Assam, ruled valiantly by the Ahom Swargadeos had a specified geographical which can be easily ascertained from Assam history. However, there is no mention in Assam history of the Nagas, Daflas, Khasis or Garos ever establishing their rule in the valley. It must be mentioned that though the English rulers assimilated the hills and vales to create *Bor-Assom*, they never disregarded the acknowledged boundaries between the hills and valley. (In this regard the background the Inner Line can be discussed)

It is desirable that the boundary conflicts between Assam and its neighbouring states; and their causes be discussed and analysed in its historical circumstances. In this regard the historians from the neighbouring states should also take part in the discussions and on the basis of history examine the perspicuity of the boundaries.

During the Ahom reign, the boundary of Assam was high up on the present Tiru Hills because during the 600 years of Ahom rule, the huge territory of Iron Industry of the Ahom Swargadeos expanded till the Bacha-Chang of Joypur. Tiru Pothar, between Charaideo & Nagaland which was the main region of Iron craft

became a part of the Naga Hills without the knowledge of the Assamese masses. 'On Tiru Hills 40 Iron looms(xaal) were set up under the supervision of Jagannath Kakoty of Tiyok'⁶ In the days of Purnananda Burhagohain, 30 to 40 such looms (xaals) were there in Tiru village and Hatigarh⁷.

It is seen that there is a conflict of opinions among modern historians regarding Lahdoigarh. Some of them has named Lahdoigarh as *Nagagarh* and wants to assert that it was the border between the Ahoms and Nagas. However, this is not correct. It is clearly written in the Assam history of Harakanta Barua *Sadaramin* 'Later Swargadeo Pratap Singha encompassed the North and South of the kingdom by constructing the Rajgarh (Royal rampart). This rampart is known as 'Lahdoigarh' or 'Kutuhugarh' on the southern banks of the Brahmaputra. On the banks of Majuli, it is called 'Meragarh'. On the Northern banks it is called 'Chuwatol garh!'⁸ On the other hand, during the reign of this very Swargadeo a huge tract on the foot hills beyond Lahdoigarh was within the Ahom Kingdom. According to facts from Assam history, 'The King built a rampart bordering the Naga hills from Charaideo Hill to Tiru Pathar, in Soiyen Suwa adjacent to the Bailung hills.'⁹ In fact, this can be called the Nagagarh. This garh is also called Xiyal garh. It is beyond Lahdoigarh. The south and north of Lahdoigarh, plus the Majuli portion respectively, were the defence ramparts between the Naga -Ahom and Kachari-Ahom. These were not boundary ramparts. However, some portions of Lahgoigarh did touch the Naga borders.

The border which was fixed during the days of Swargadeo Suhengmung can be brought up to settle the current dispute between Naga Hills on the south of Sibsagar district and Assam. According to *Assam Buranji*- "Thereafter a garh (rampart) was constructed at Dupdor and a haat (market) established. It was decided that Nagas will not enter the rampart without being

accompanied by Chowtang."¹⁰ [Chowtang was a *Khel* (class of people) during the Ahom reign, who were sent as messenger to the Nagas]. The description of the Ahom-Naga boundary during the reign of Swargadeo Dihingiya Raja goes as such- "One day the king decided in his court to construct a rampart till the Naga boundary. Near this rampart is the Deo Parbat and King's Maidam"¹¹. Thus, the Assam boundary was till this rampart. This place is located currently about 3 kms south from Lahdoigarh, on the other side of Geleki Reserve Forest. *Khondo Raja's Maidam* mentioned in the *Buranji* is also known as *Godha Maidam* or *Lakri Maidam*.

A respected elderly member of the boundary deciding Committee said- "There is no information in history to decide the boundary between Assam-Nagaland from Gabharu Parbat till Dimapur." But it is clearly written in Assam History- "In 1555, Swargadeo Pratap Singha established the boundary between the Kachari kingdom and Assam at Na'noi and made Da-dhora Chetiya, Marangi Khowa at Marangi. He constructed the Naga rampart, with Naga duwars through which annual passage with the Chowtang messengers was fixed. From Mahang the rampart was extended to the hills and connected with Murkata. Again from Simoluguri till Diju (near Dimapur) constructed a rampart-road with 3000 mati atey (wide) under the headship of Taulung Gohain"¹²

It has been published in Manik Gohain's article 'Assam Nagaland Boundary in the light of History' that, - 'A formal treaty was concluded in 1401 AD by which the Patkai was fixed as the boundary between the countries (Naras and Ahoms) a statue of stone of them are said to have been carved in the rock there....'¹³ The sign of this boundary still exists about 28 kms to the see of Margherita. It is only natural that on account of the changed names of many places, it is very difficult to ascertain the

locations on the basis of history.

From 'An Account of Assam' written by Dr. John Peter Wade, the first European Historian who wrote about Assam, Basa, Doyang, Kacharighat, Nagakhat, etc., were proclaimed as important places during the Ahom reign because of the fact that they were located inside Assam on the Naga boundary. Basa Rajkhowa, Doyangia Rajkhowa, Marangi Khowa Gohain, etc., were the governors of these places. According to Wade, the river Doyang was on the Eastern boundary of the Naga Hills.

Although Benudhar Sarma has written in his book *Maniram Dewan* that *Dhodhar Ali* was the boundary with the Nagas, it cannot be accepted. Because, in the 13th Century itself Sukapha had established the first Ahom Capital Charaideo beyond the Dhodar Ali. The later *Swargadeos* established cities in places like Mathurapur, Abhayapur, Taukak, Sonari, Namrup, etc. During the Ahom reign the factories of Gold and Iron craft had grown up beyond the Dhodar Ali. In fact, even the *Maidams* (Burial) of *Swargadeos* from Sukapha to Kamaleshwar Singha were done beyond the *Dhodhar Ali*.

The Assam Buranji clearly states the boundary between the Daflas and Ahoms. 'Swargadeo Pratap Singha constructed the Daflagarh and appointed the Garhmuria in charge to monitor the Posa system imposed on the Miris, Dafla's and Abors, wherein these tribes had to enter Ahom territory only through certain doorways (dwars) to pay tributes'¹⁴ 'In 1576 Saka, Swargadeo Sutinpha constructed the Misimi garh (rampart)'¹⁵ 'In 1609 Saka, month of January-February, the Ahom King made Dihing as border and ordered construction of a rampart after taking measurements through the Duwoniyas'¹⁶ 'On 10 Magh 1618 Saka, during the reign of Swargadeo Rudra Singha, the Chetiya Bandar Barphukan constructed the Jayantapur garh (rampart)'¹⁷

It is felt that the above facts that were searched out from

the pages of history will help solve the controversial problems regarding boundaries between Assam, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. Among the states of the North East, particularly these states that seceded from the heartland of *Bor Asom*, Assam's weak and complex border dispute has always been a problem. Though all the heads of state of these states have been trying to bring an end to this problem, nothing concrete has come up as yet.

It must be kept in mind that this issue cannot be solved by neglecting history. The historians of the entire North-East must sit together to look into the history books and all scripts and documents in the interest of ending the boundary dispute. It goes without saying that this is the need of time.

References:

- ¹ From the 20,000 tea-saplings that had been brought from China only 8000 survived. The place where these saplings were planted for the first time under the supervision of Robert Bruce, was later named *Sa Bua (Saah-Buwa)*. *Maniram Dewan, Benudhar Sarma*, p.93
- ² The present name *Jorhat* has been derived from *Jorihaat* of earlier times.
- ³ The Nagas were terrified of the guns. They said guns were canons from which 'babies' emerged. The bullets were 'babies' and the guns were 'females'. *Maniram Dewan, Benudhar Sarma*, p.128
- ⁴ The Nagas were divided into two groups during the Ahom reign. The group that was friendly with the Ahom *Swargadeo* was called *Bori* and those unfriendly were called *Abori*.
- ⁵ The other name of Dikkar is *Dikrang*. The word *Bahini* denotes the flow of the river.
- ⁷ *Asom Buranji, Harakanta Barua Sadaramin*, p.39.
- ⁸ *Asom Buranji*, p.40.
- ⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ *Asom Buranji*, p.68.

¹¹ *Xaatxori Asom Buranji*, p.69

¹³ *Asom aru Naga Rajyor Sima*, Bhuban Chandra Sandikoi, *Saptahik Nilachal*, 8th November 1972, pp.7,8,14.

¹⁴ *Asom Buranji*, p.50.

¹⁵ *Asom Buranji*, p.45.

¹⁶ *Asom Buranji*, p.55.

Though the name of the King has not been ascertained, it can be said that this rampart was constructed during the reign of *Swargadeo Gadadhar Singha*.

CHAPTER 8

INTER STATE BOUNDARY DISPUTE : ASSAM AND ITS ADJOINING HILL STATES

In 2008, it was decided by the state government to establish a Health Sub-centre at Langpih village under Boko Revenue Circle in Assam. When the Assam Health Minister's schedule was finalised to lay the foundation of the sub-centre, the Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Dongkumar Roy called an emergent Cabinet meeting wherein it was announced that a huge tract of land in Assam adjacent to the West Khasi Hill District, including Langpih, actually belonged to Meghalaya¹. A day before the inauguration programme, the Deputy Chief Minister of Meghalaya, H.S. Lyngdoh stated before a press conference that the act of the Government of Assam to lay the foundation of the Health sub-Centre was illegal and an act of encroachment. He complained to the Union Home Minister of state over phone that, "Since 1979 about 40 kms of West Khasi Hills district has been encroached by Assam"².

The incident that took place in the wee hours of 24th August 2010 in Charaipung terrorised the Assamese people living in the border. The incident on the Assam-Arunachal border located in Charaipung was clearly the handiwork of the Naga rebels who wanted to encroach Assam land. In the border areas of Golaghat district, this type of encroachment by the Naga people and the NSCN had been going on since many years. A huge area of Merapani has already been encroached by the Nagas. The Naga

government has renamed this area as 'Meratsu'. The Nagas are continuing their atrocities on the Assamese populace in order to grab the whole of Merapani. All these are mere examples.

These incidents are not new. Among the various North Eastern states, particularly those that seceded from *Bor Asom* (undivided Assam), conflict with Assam over the boundaries have been a complicated matter that has been going on and on. Even after four decades of state formation, the boundary dispute still continues to plague the states. The state leaders have been trying to solve the matter but in reality, nothing concrete is happening.

According to the Assam government, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh has been illegally encroaching upon the territories of Assam. As per the information submitted by the Assam Revenue Minister in the Legislative Assembly, even after 2001, such encroachments on Assam territories were continuing to the result of more than 246 square kms³. On the other hand, the neighbouring states have also brought up various allegations. The Nagaland government, in the name of asserting themselves as land owners indulged in such atrocities in Assam's bordering areas of Golaghat and Sibsagar, leading to such misery and death of innocent peasant population, that the chapter will remain a black blot in the annals of history. People living on the Assam-side of the boundary has had to flee time and again in fear of losing their lives. Taking advantage of such situations, the people of the hill state has been easily encroaching land on the side of Assam.

To discuss Assam-Nagaland border dispute, mention must be made of the Ordinance of 1926, implemented during British rule. As per this Ordinance, the borders of one portion of present Nagaland and the Naga Hills district of earlier days, is very clear. It was on the basis of this very Ordinance that under the aegis of the 'Naga Club', the Naga people, in 1929, demanded before the

'Simon Commission'⁴, that the land of the Nagas should be named as a backward area and it should be separated from the other hill areas and valleys under the Assam government, and placed under a different governing machinery. Meanwhile, the Legislative Council of Assam supported this arrangement and as per the Government of India Act, 1935, the land of the Nagas was named as 'Excluded and partially excluded Area'. In 1937 direct governance of the Governor of Assam over the land of the Nagas was implemented⁵. This system continued till India's independence, when like the other areas of the hill tribes, the land of the Nagas was also incorporated into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. However, the Naga people did not want to accept this. In 1956, in the 'Naga Peoples Convention', they discussed and took resolutions on the two subjects mentioned below⁶, which was then sent to the Central government for implementation- (1) An independent Naga-land. (2) To include Tuensang in Naga-land. The Central government rejected the first, and assured to accept the second. Consequently, from 1st December 1957, Tuensang area under NEFA, was henceforth, a part of Naga-land. It can be mentioned here that from 1st August 1960, the Union government announced creation of a separate state called 'Nagaland', with Tuensang and the expansive Naga-land areas mentioned in the Ordinance of 1926. 320 kms⁷ wide, that included the interior sector of Dhansiri and Diphu rivers, the geographical entity of the state of Nagaland was thus established.

Hardly within a year of the Union government's announcement of the Naga state, the well-organized Naga rebels declared violation of the state boundaries. They demanded that those areas where the Nagas had been scattered during the British Ordinance of 1866, should also be included within Nagaland now. On this basis, they wanted to include North Cachar, Nagaon district and some parts of Diphu Reserved Forest in the Naga state. In

this situation, adopting a tolerant policy towards the Naga rebels, the Naga Congress on 1st July 1960, handed a 16- point memorandum regarding the boundary to the then Prime Minister J.L.Nehru⁸. Though the Union government gave its assurance about the boundary issue, the crisis situation of the country at that time, particularly the Chinese aggression of 1962, did not allow the government to look into the issue. Taking advantage of this silence from the government's side, in June 1965, in the villages of Geleki and Kakodunga, situated in Assam-Nagaland border, a large number of Assamese people were murdered, thus creating a terror situation. Property was taken away from many people. Though the Assam government rehabilitated these people, they could not be freed from a fear-psychosis.

On 10th September 1971 and 9th February 1972, the Nagaland government gave two memorandums to the Union government to include those areas into Nagaland which till then had been 'assumed' to be Naga area. The Union government gave due importance to the matter and that very year set up the K.V.K Sundaram Commission and directed it to investigate the boundary issue⁹. It needs mention that while this investigation was going on, the Union government set up Police guards in the boundary area and this arrangement continued till 1983.

Within three years Sundaram wrapped up the investigation and submitted his report to the Centre. However, the sad part is, this report of Sundaram was never made public. It needs to be mentioned that while the investigation was going on, Naga goons attacked people in Merapani and Chungajan in Golaghat district, destroying and burning their houses, snatching away valuables. According to government statistics, in these two attacks, 320 persons were murdered. The helpless Assam government posted army and B.S.F. personnel in the disturbed areas.

Sources say that Nagas have been encroaching Assam

areas on the instigation of their government. Large parts of Assam, particularly expansive Reserve forest areas were encroached where schools, churches, industries and police outposts were established to totally incorporate the areas into Nagaland. And it was on this basis that at one point of time the Naga rebels could work, though unannounced, towards creation of an expanded huge Nagaland. In the meantime, they have created a district sub-division naming it 'Newland' by encroaching upon the Rengma Reserved Forest area in Karbi Anglong district. In the same district, 'Uriyam Nagar' has been established after encroaching upon Kahabata Forest area. According to government sources, just in Karbi Anglong district, 83,000 hectares of land has been encroached by Nagaland. The 1995 government information states that in Tuli, Nagaland has set up a paper mill and from Sonari to Namtola via Mon, a huge area has been encroached where bank, hospital, forest office and a guest house has been constructed.

When in 1971, by the 'Assam Re-organization Act' a part of *Bor Asom* was severed and the state of 'Meghalaya' was created, its boundary with Assam was 733 kms. Meghalaya was created with the union of Khasi-Jayantia Hills with Garo Hills and a part of the Mikir Hills (except Block 1 and Block 2) which had been created by the Constitutional Provisions of 1951. However, once the states' creation process was complete, Meghalaya began to bring up complaints about the Assam-Meghalaya boundary. A handful of Khasi leaders wanted to convince the hill tribes of the state that the entire territory that had been separated from the Assam Agency on 15th March 1935 by Captain Lister and placed under Khasi Agency for administrative convenience, should now be included as a part of Meghalaya. But this was not possible because to find the clear boundaries of the then Khasi Agency governed areas after independence was simply impossible.

Taking advantage of the Union government's silence

inspite of proposals from both Assam and Meghalaya government to solve the boundary problem, in the period between 1972-88, there was constant efforts from the Meghalaya side to evict the people of the border areas and encroach upon land on the Assam side. In 1990, between January-August, in the 3rd Chief Ministerial level meeting of both states (in Shillong) it was proposed to re-ascertain the boundaries of the three blocks of Kamrup district, which was bond of connection between the two states. In that same meeting, the Justice Chandrachud Commission was organized to solve the issue permanently¹⁰.

In a conducive atmosphere where the Revenue Circle officers of both the states were present, the boundaries of the three disputed places were re-ascertained on the basis of old documents and information, and with the consent of both sides concrete pillars were put up. It must be mentioned that as a result of the new border, Meghalaya had to give up a huge territory which it had occupied previously, to Assam. But within a few days, the new pillars were removed, and this was probably done with the support of the government. In a short span of time, police-outpost, large godowns and churches were constructed in the encroached areas. On the other hand, the Chandrachud Report published in 1991 was completely rejected by Meghalaya.

Recently, the border crisis has once again reared its head in the Langpih area under Boko Revenue Circle. As per the comments of the Assam Revenue Minister, based on government documents and information, Langpih belongs to Assam. On the other hand, Meghalaya claims Langpih to be their territory. After Langpih, new places can become issue of dispute between the two states and if that happens, a feeling of bitterness will be created. In November 1862 the Commissioner of Lakhimpur district, H.S. Beaver had ascertained the boundaries of the Abors, Daflas and Aka's with their six chiefs. As per this discussion, they stated that

the part between hills and valleys will be their boundary and that, they will not have any power over the valley. Later, to keep their territories out of the direct administration of the British, the 'Inner Line-Permit' system was brought into action. After independence, as per the advice of the Bordoloi Committee, the 1951 Ordinance was enforced and this territory was directly governed by the Governor of Assam. This territory, known as NEFA, when declared as the state of Arunachal Pradesh in 1971, had a boundary of 704 kms with Assam.

The boundary dispute between Arunachal and Assam began in the 90's of the last Century. The hill inhabitants of Arunachal have violated the boundary and encroached upon extensive areas of Sonitpur, Lakhimpur and Dibrugarh, where permanent villages have been settled. Some people of the state have been illegally cutting trees in the forest areas of Assam and attacked the villages of Assam near the boundary. The local people near the border areas are naturally terrified by the activities of the Arunachalis. In 1992 April, they barbarously tortured the people of four villages in Lakhimpur district¹¹. Under such circumstances, when the border dispute has reached its peak, both states have met in border related discussions. However, Arunachal has clearly objected to the process of ascertaining the border on the basis of the 1951 Ordinance and has brought counter-allegations that it is Assam that has encroached their land. There is no doubt that such encroachments by the Arunachalis was instigated by their government.

Right from the very dawn of independence, the leaders of Assam had been working to keep intact the unity of the hills and vales together in the entity called *Bor Asom*. When leaders like Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi, with the aim to strengthen the ties between the hills and valley, was organizing the huge 'Harmony Festival' in Shillong, creating 'Tribal Belts' to secure the future

of the ethnic populace, enacting laws to wipe out the evil of smoking opium from the hill people - the Centre was watching this 'love for the hill people' of the Assamese leaders with suspicion. To break the bond of unity, something complicated was included into the Constitution - the 6th Schedule- and *Bor Asom* of yore was broken up into five parts.

Now, the four new states are entangled in boundary disputes with that region that survived as Assam. The North East, connected to the mainland by a 21 km narrow path (98% of the borders are surrounded by neighbouring foreign nations) is at present afflicted with various complicated problems like border disputes, silent invasions by illegal foreigners, etc. Among these, the border dispute is a very sensitive issue. The saddest part is that even after forty-two years of dividing *Bor Asom*, the Central government even today has not taken any enthusiastic role or steps to solve the border disputes. If the Union government's aim is to sacrifice the unity that is possible among the North Eastern states, and fuel the conflicts and bitterness, then in the coming times, the peace process as well as development in this area will be largely compromised.

References:

- ¹ PTI News, Shillong, *Dainik Asom*, 31 May 2008, p.1
- ² PTI News, Shillong, *The Shillong Times*, 30 May 2008, p.1
- ³ *The Assam Tribune*, 31 May 2008, p.1; *Dainik Asom*, 31 May 2008, p.1
- ⁴ *Insurgency in North-East*, Lipi Ghosh, p.344
- ⁵ *Ibid*; *The N.E Frontier of India*, A.Mackenzi, p.83
- ⁶ *Insurgency in N.E*, R.Buragohain & B.J Deb, p.332
- ⁷ *Critical Days of Assam*, K.C Barua, p.40
- ⁸ *The Assam Tribune*, 'Inter-State Border Dispute', Dwaipayan, 29 May 2008, p.Middle
- ⁹ *Ibid*
- ¹⁰ *Ibid*
- ¹¹ *Presidential Address: Indian History Congress*, H.K Borpujari, 1995, p.14

CHAPTER 9

Anti-immigrant Stand of Chief Ministers -Medhi, and Bangladeshi love of Chief Ministers Chaliha, Singha, Mahanta Bordoloi, Saikia and Gogoi

After the expansive area of 'Hindustan' was divided into three parts in the name of religion, and two independent countries emerged, discussions between them led to 26th July 1949 being fixed as the last date for Muslims to go to Pakistan and Hindus to come to India. Since the partition was religion based, India's Home Minister Sardar Ballabh Bhai Patel had proposed that Muslims in India should move to Pakistan. Though the liberal Jawaharlal Nehru did not support this religion-based partition, on the quick initiative of Patel, the Muslims of Punjab province in India were shifted to West Pakistan by the government. On the other hand, though there was no government initiated shifting between East Pakistan and India, as a result of the Noakhali conflict, a huge number of Muslims from India (particularly Bengal and Assam) had to go to East Pakistan.

Hardly within a year of independence, due to the weak international borders without any rules or regulations, East Pakistani Muslim immigrants began to flood into Assam and very soon established themselves in villages and *bastis*(clusters) set up by encroaching the riverine areas, as well as the 'protected' and 'unprotected' government areas of Assam. Comprehending the threat to the future security of Assam and the Assamese people on account of such very fast demographic increase, the first Chief

Minister of Assam, Bordoloi (through incessant efforts) compelled the Central government to conclude two Acts and a treaty between India-Pakistan, with the sole objective of resisting the immigration. The first of these was 'Immigration Act, 1950' and the second - 'Passport Act 1951'. According to the first Act, those East Pakistani immigrants who entered Assam after 26th July 1949, could be chased back to their own country. By this Act, 7,65,000 Hindus who had entered India from East Pakistan prior to the time limit were accepted by India as citizens. But, the refusal of Pakistan to take back those people who fled to Assam after the fixed date¹ led to the 'Nehru-Liaquat agreement' on 8th December 1950. According to the 'Extradition Treaty' that had been signed at the same time, the immigrants who came to Assam before 8th December 1950 would be considered as Indians and those who came later than this date would be taken back by Pakistan.

On 15th December 1950, when Home Minister Patel expired, the Immigration Act was cancelled by the Government of India. Behind this was the liberal attitude of the Prime Minister. With the sudden demise of Patel, the Prime Minister and the Union Cabinet opined that this Act would not be appropriate for the East Pakistani²'s. The reason is being, it related of communalism. They argued that by the Immigration Act only the Pakistani Muslims were being chased out from India. The Union government had a similar attitude towards the Nehru-Liaquat Agreement as well. As a result, the importance of this Agreement dwindled. To save himself from the stains of 'Communalism', Nehru had the Passport Act passed in Parliament in 1951. According to this Act, the issue of East Pakistani immigration was re-considered and as per a clause included in it, an East Pakistani national could be allowed to stay in Assam and India for six months only. But the ground reality was that, in the 1971 Census showed from 1951 to 1971, 1,42,072 East Pakistanis had officially entered Assam with Passports. No

active steps had been taken by the Government of India to send them back. It must be mentioned that the issue of illegal migration into Assam had lost its importance both before and after the Passport Act had been passed. It was seen that the Government of India was oblivious to the matter of illegal-immigration and those in power in Assam have always maintained a silence in this matter. The most important fact is that many Congress leaders of Assam considered this immigration not as a problem but a blessing! Debokanta Barua had boasted that in Assam political power can be prolonged by taking along 'Ali and Kuli'³ (the Bangladeshi migrants and the tea-tribes). These leaders who entered politics only to enjoy power and did everything according to the commands of the Centre, damaged the interests of the nation and the nationality unimaginably. Nowhere in the world will such leaders be found who trampled underfoot the interests of their own people to occupy the seats of power. However, in this matter, the activities of the first and second Chief Minister of Assam, Bordoloi and Medhi, were different- they had strongly opposed the illegal-immigration. With their determined stand, they compelled the Centre to take appropriate steps and even managed to send back a huge number of immigrants.

Since independence itself the problem of East Pakistani or Bangladeshi illegal immigration has played an important role in the political scenario of Assam. In this discussion, we have tried to look into the stand taken and role played by the political leaders of Assam in this particular issue.

On the instigation of the Muslim League and support of the Sadullah government, the huge number of immigrants entering Assam and encroaching land here terrified Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi. To incorporate Assam into East Pakistan the Muslim league planned to increase the Muslim population in the province and the responsibility of executing this plan was given to Sadullah.

With the support of the league Sadullah dreamt of ruling over the enlarged East Bengal and Assam. With this intention, he encouraged the coming of the immigrants and gave them land by talking about self-dependence through increased agricultural production. Not satisfied with this, in 1941 for the first time, Census on the basis of religion was conducted by him whereby it was seen that he had increased the Muslim population of Assam by 25%, thus taking the total population to 35 lakhs. On the other hand, the Hindu population was shown as 45 lakh 40 thousand, 7 lakhs less than before. In this Census, the hill tribes and ethnic population was counted separately and not with the Hindus. It must be mentioned that in contrast to the Census of 1931, that of 1941 showed 7 lakh 47 thousand lesser Hindus. Bordoloi caught the malefied intentions of Sadullah. As the leader of the opposition, Bordoloi took a very strong stand against the immigration. To stop the flood of illegal immigrations, he compelled the League government (1942-45) of Sadullah to sign an Anti-immigrant treaty which came to be known as the 'Sadullah-Bordoloi-Choudhury Tripartite Agreement'. He associated the Chief Minister of the League-Coalition government, Sadullah, League working committee member Maulavi Abdul Matin Choudhury, and two other Ministers- Manuwar Ali and Rohini Choudhury with this treaty and compelled them to execute the system of not giving land to the immigrants. As per the agreement, the government was compelled to take a decision to evict the encroachers and the new-entrant immigrants from the unreserved areas and open up the reserves. Bordoloi also made the government cancel the former land agreement and accept some new proposals. These were: (1) Those 'natives' who had no land or lesser land were to be given land before giving land to immigrants; (2) In the areas inhabited by the 'natives' or 'other backwards', a belt each was to be created that would be made free of immigrants; (3) Before giving land to

the immigrants; land must be kept separately for the 'native'; (4) To evict all immigrants who entered Assam after 1st January 1938. However, through conspiratorial measures Sadullah did not execute the above proposals. Revenue Minister, Rohini Choudhury, also never gave much importance to the subject.

In 1944, when Bordoloi took up the reigns as Chief Minister, he executed the Tripartite Agreement that had not been executed by the Coalition government. Giving responsibility of the Revenue department to Bishnuram Medhi, the immigrants who came to Assam after 1st January 1938 were evicted. In this matter he got complete support from the Union Home Minister Patel and compelled the Defence member Baldev Singh to send additional Central Reserve Police Forces to Assam. Against strong opposition from the League and threats from Jinnah, Bordoloi, in his first working period, evicted immigrants from the huge reserves, four in Mangaldoi and four in Kamrup-Barpeta (Dokokia, Bhangonmari, Kurihamari and Laheswari). As per government figures, 2,886 immigrants were evicted and only 671 among them were given land elsewhere according to the Agreement. This immigrant-eviction work of Bordoloi did not go down well with the then Governor of Assam, Akbar Haidari and taking Sadullah with him, he submitted a report against Bordoloi to Nehru⁴. Taking advantage of Bordoloi not being present in Shillong, Haidari instigated some leaders against him.

On 5th August 1950, when Bordoloi expired, the then Revenue Minister, Bishnuram Medhi accepted the post of Chief Minister and took up the work of chasing out the immigrants from Assam. Medhi requested Nehru to tighten the borders. When Bengal Congress leaders informed Nehru that in Assam there was ample land available to be given to others, Medhi publicly gave a strong reply against it. He opposed the Nehru-Liaquat Agreement because as per that treaty, not a single Hindu who came to Assam

from East Pakistan was able to go back, while on the other hand, Muslim immigrants were constantly coming to Assam. In 1952, Medhi once again formed government, and took up strict measures to stop the flood of immigrants. He tightened the Assam-East Pakistan border security. He ordered shoot-at-sight if any immigrant was seen crossing the border at night. This order gave the desired result. The Deputy Commissioner of Dhubri, Bhagaiwala was ordered to keep a strict vigil over the Assam-East Pakistan border. According to sources, Bhagaiwala became a terror for the immigrants. On the direction of Medhi, he prepared the first National Register on the basis of the Census and Voters List, in 1951. This is known as the 'Bhagaiwala Report'. Till now, this is the only National Register of Assam and on its basis the AASU has been demanding for identification of foreigners. The Assam government has also been assuring that the upgradation work of the National Register will be taken up.

Such activities of Medhi did not satisfy Nehru and the Union Cabinet. Leaders like Mainul Haq Choudhury, Rupnath Brahma, Bimala Prasad Chaliha, Mahendranath Hazarika, Maulabi Abdul Matlib Mazumdar, etc., took part in a conspiracy against him and the leadership was taken by Fakhruddin Ali Ahmad. The only reason they disliked Medhi was his anti-immigrant activities. Their conspiracy was successful and Nehru removed Medhi from the political arena of Assam and made him the Governor of Tamil Nadu in 1958. Even then, Medhi did not stop from speaking on the immigrant issue. The success of Medhi's political life lay in the fact that he was able to (though late in time) compel Nehru to admit to the gravity of Assam's immigrant-problem. The Lok Sabha speech given by Nehru on 27th June 1962 testifies this, when he said, "Infiltration by Pakistanis had been continuing since 1949 is perfectly true. I believe that much of this infiltration took place in the first five years of independence when the border was not

adequately guarded. Probably it will be difficult now to deal with illegal immigrants who came before 1952. We might therefore fix 1952 as a date of inquiry"⁵.

However, nothing happened in reality. The immigrant problem in fact began to take a serious turn. The main reason for this was the cheap politics that was engaged in by the Chief Ministers after Medhi. Their indifference and irresponsible role invited a terrible crisis to the state. If one minutely studies the burning issue of illegal immigration into Assam from the 70's of the last century the gross injustice done to Assam and the Assamese by the Chief Ministers after Medhi becomes crystal clear. From Bimala Prasad Chaliha to Tarun Gogoi, every Chief Minister of Assam indulged in dirty politics with the immigrant issue of Assam. A few examples would suffice to make this clear.

** * * * *

On 28th December 1957 after Medhi was removed, President of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC), Bimala Prasad Chaliha was installed on the post of the Chief Minister⁶. When in 1962, in the elections to the Assam Legislative Assembly (ALA) Chaliha was defeated by Khagendranath Borborua, after six months, through the sub-elections he was brought back, elected from Badarpur constituency of Cachar. In this matter the special role played by Moinul Haque Choudhury increased his importance manifold in the politics of Assam. Since then, Chaliha became a puppet for Moinul Haque. Brainwashed by Moinul Haque in such a way, that he turned his back on the issue of illegal immigrants. During the 1962 Chinese aggression, the illegal infiltrators living in Thelamara, Routa and around Sotiya of Darang district, unfurled the Pakistani flag to save themselves⁷. When the then Judge of the High Court, S. K. Dutta wrote in his report that he had seen the Pakistani flag fluttering in many places with his own eyes, the Central government, in 1968 took a strong

scheme to chase out illegal infiltrations from Assam. This was the famous 'Prevention of Infiltration of Pakistanis to Assam (PIP)' scheme of Bulla Mallik, the Chief of Intelligence, GOI. As per this scheme, (on the basis of the NR) the infiltrators who had entered Assam after 1st January 1951 from Pakistan was directed to be chased out by the Central government. According to the intelligence information published by Mallik in 1964, 2 lakh infiltrators were in Assam- this had been informed by the Assam government. To stop the infiltration of foreigners into Assam, Mallik proposed a scheme of creating a deserted stretch of about a one mile in the border as 'No Man's land'. However, the most important fact here is that the then Chief Minister of Assam, Chaliha, to secure his own political power kept the state administration away from the PIP Scheme. He tried every means to stop the PIP scheme from working. The reason was that out of the 71 Congress legislators in the ALA, 27 were against the PIP scheme and these people convinced Chaliha that if the PIP scheme was executed, the Congress would not be able to show good results in the ensuing election (of 1971). Out of the 27, 17 Legislators belonging to minorities openly expressed that they would bring a motion of 'no-confidence' against Chaliha. They were led by Fakhruddin Ali Ahmad and Mainul Haq Choudhury. The Chief Minister who danced to the tunes of this lobby clearly understood that if 27 MLA's withdrew support, the government will fall. And so Chaliha didn't allow the PIP scheme to be executed. The tribunals that had been formed in various districts were ordered to stop all works of identifying foreigners and the Police force was also ordered to be inactive as far as foreigner issues were concerned. Chaliha demonstrated through his activities that saving his seat of power was above all the interests of the nation and its people.

The insurrection of 1971 in East Pakistan made the

foreigners issue of Assam even more critical. As a reward for India's help to East Pakistan during their independence struggle, Assam got 10 billion foreigners. In the Indira-Mujibur Treaty of 1972, it was very clearly stated- 'The Prime Minister of Bangladesh solemnly reaffirm his resolve to ensure by every means, the return of all refugees who had taken shelter in India since March 25, 1971 and to strive by every means to safeguard their safety, human dignity and means of livelihood. The two Prime Ministers noted with satisfaction that the refugees were to return to Bangladesh in a short span of six-weeks'⁸. Assam was under the impression that with the birth of Bangladesh as an independent nation, the 'illegal-Bangladeshi' problem will come to an end. But, in reality it was seen that instead of the problem being solved, it became even more complicated.

During the 70's the newspapers published from Assam, *Nilachal*, *Asom Bani*, *Dainik Asom*, *Janambhumi*, *Assam Tribune*, etc. published regularly about the illegal-Bangladeshi problem of Assam that had taken an aggravated form. The Nath-Jogi *Mancha*, Koch-Rajbonshi *Sangha* and Ahom *Sangha* expressed their vehement reactions on the matter and was able to attract the government's attention. As a result, in 1973 the Assam Student Union realising the gravity of this dangerous problem had sent 21-proposals to the State as well as Central government demanding the identification and expulsion of the illegal infiltrators. After getting the proposals from the Student Union, the then Chief Minister, Sarat Chandra Singha assured the identification and expulsion of the foreigners. At the same time, the Indira Gandhi led government having won 350 out of the 518 total seats in the first mid-term Lok Sabha polls, was also beginning to think about and discuss this problem of Assam. And according to a letter No. 14011/16/75-III Dated 20th August 1975 (Vide GO IMHA)⁹ sent by Mrs. Gandhi to the Assam government, ordered the removal of

the names of illegal foreigners from the Voter list. But the most surprising fact here was that the then Assam Chief Minister, Sarat Chandra Singha was unwilling to execute this step. Suspecting that 25 Minority MLA's might express 'vote of no-confidence' against him, he neglected this burning issue. He took the side of the Cabinet members like Sayyad Ahmed Ali, Dr. Lutfur Rahman and Idris Ali and took advantage of the impassive role of people like Biswadesh Sarma, Harendranath Talukdar, Upen Das, Gajen Tanti, Paramananda Tanti, Hiteshwar Saikia, Bishnu Prasad, Swarna Prabha Mahanta, etc., to brush the issue under the carpet in spite of fully understanding its gravity.

In 1978 the Chief Election Commissioner S. L. Chakdher landed in Guwahati and informed Chief Minister Singha himself that there were lakhs and lakhs of foreigner's names in the voters list. Chakdher went back to Delhi and immediately on 2nd February 1978 directed that in Assam (before the elections to L.A.) voters I-card with photographs be issued. Chief Minister Singha wrote back to Chakdher that it was not possible in such a short period of time. Many people say that Sarat Singha, with his revolutionary mentality had taken the politics of Assam in a new direction. But in reality, he was a person wearing a 'gentleman's mask'. He exhibited his revolutionary mentality before the public through some cheap activities. In fact, he had committed grave injustices against the Assamese people and Assam. In the selfish interest of saving his power, he played the political game of bringing differences amongst the various ethnic communities by creating OBC and MOBC. Sarat Singha was sharply criticized in the editorial of *Saptahik Nilachal*¹⁰ for this. Editor Homen Borgohain had warned at that time itself, that the impact of this on the Assamese society would be very negative. Singha nourished the idea of dividing the Assamese society and as a result the question- *Who is an Assamese in Assam (?)*- began to emerge in the minds

of many.

It can be said that the race-based power grabbing attitude that grew in the Assamese society originated in the divisive politics of Singha. He tried to gain cheap popularity through activities like travelling in public buses or working as a server in the branches of the *Karmachari Parishad* (Employees Council), but turned his back to the burning problem. Aristotle had said - *Choice reveals Character*. Sarat Singha knew how to make the most of opportunities. Once he lost power, he did a perfect volte-face in order to keep his presence alive. At first, he began to show a soft attitude towards the foreigner expulsion movement under the leadership of the Assam Students Union. Then, after the Assam Accord. When gradually the Assamese common man began to become disenchanted with it, Singha contemptuously commented, "What is there in the Assam Accord to be implemented?"¹¹ His real character became clear when he pretended not to have any knowledge of a problem that he himself had nurtured for so long. For a former Chief Minister, who had taken pledge to serve the nation and its people by touching the Constitution, expressing contempt towards a government treaty was something uncalled for. On 12th March 1978, Chief Minister Golap Borbora and his non-Congress government looked into the issue of immigrants. After *Lokpriya* Bordoloi and Medhi, only Borbora realised the importance of the problem and therefore tried to bring the neighbouring states together. Taking the Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Dwaurni Pak with him, Borbora met the Prime Minister and the Home Minister and took a strong stand about the issue. But, due to the fact that he lost power soon, he was unable to execute any measures in the matter.

Hiteshwar Saikia is a widely criticised person in the politics of Assam. This cunning Chief Minister in his greed to stay in power, gave no importance to the foreigner issue at all. In

The Gaze : A Reflection on Socio-Political Issues / 90

compelling situations though he admitted that there were 30 lakh illegal foreigners in Assam, he also knew how to do a volte-face in order to save his throne. Saikia had the draft of the IMDT Act prepared by his Minister, Abdul Muhib Mazumdar, which he handed over to Indira Gandhi. Fearing that 'the Son will destroy the embankment constructed by the Mother', Saikia sat in a room with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi trying to justify that the IMDT Act must remain in Assam to please the Bangladeshi foreigners, while in a nearby room the discussions of Assam Accord were going on in Delhi. An equivalent of *Janani Janma Bhumisha Swargadapi Gariyashi is Dexot koi Momai dangor nohoi* (My uncle is not greater than my motherland). Jyoti Prasad felt this in his blood and had written, '*Tahani Lachite eri thoi juware pora janani'r dukh....*' But Chief Minister Saikia clearly showed through his actions that patriotism and nationalism were useless illusions in the face of power and position.

Prafulla Kr. Mahanta sat on the chair of the Chief Minister by outwitting the Assamese nationality with glib lies. The fact that the student leaders had own selfish axes to grind through the means of the movement, became obvious from their activities. Mahanta and his cronies had compelled the Assamese public not to vote in the elections of 1983 on the ground that the elections were being organised on the basis of an illegal voters list. However, in 1985, when they contested the elections and came to power, it was on the basis of that same voters list. There is no need to cite any other example to bring to light the real nature of Mahanta. He was the culprit because of whom in 1981 the Census was not carried out in Assam. In his second tenure (1995-2000) he (in order to come to power) allied with the anti-Assam movement camp and completely neglected the foreigner problem. The Central government had voiced its opinion in favour of upgradation of the NR on the basis of the voters list of 1951, during implementation

The Gaze : A Reflection on Socio-Political Issues / 91

of the Accord. But, in his 10 years in power, Mahanta never took any measures for the NR. Instead, of the 10 lakh rupees he received for upgradation of the NR, during his tenure (1999), he bought a few computers and rest of the money was spent under some different heads.

It must be remembered that in a span of one month the Central government had signed two Accords in 1985. One was the Rajiv-Longowal Accord (24th July 1985) and the other was the Assam Accord (15th August 1985). The Annual Report of the Home Ministry, GoI (during Mahanta's tenure, 1986) had published that the Centre was determined to implement the Rajiv-Longowal Accord. However, there was no mention of the Assam Accord in this Report and the reasons for this was never sought by the then Chief Minister, Mahanta and his government that had plans of building a 'Golden Assam'. When 12 years had lapsed and no government had stepped forward to execute the main clauses of the Accord, and the AASU threatened agitation, on 11th August 1997 the Home Department, GoI organised a tripartite meeting (Centre-State-AASU). The saddest part was that to take part in this meeting, as Head of the Assam government and also as former AASU leaders, neither Mahanta nor Bhriгу could find time.

The very weak anti-Congress position is Assam and the intense feeling that had grown in the hearts of the Assamese people towards AGP, has facilitated Tarun Gogoi to enjoy power for 10 years. His stand on the Bangladeshi issue is dubious. He has always had the skills of enticing the minority and winning over the natives with sentences like 'Who is Badar-ud-din (?)'. After the violent activities of AAMSU in Barpeta, when bureaucrats said that work on the Pilot project will continue and Chief Minister Gogoi, in total contrast, announced that the project work will be shut down immediately, Assamese natives very clearly

understood what this implied. Gogoi has always undermined the peaceful movement of AASU for execution of the Assam Accord, identification and expulsion of foreigners, NR upgradation, etc., with his fickle and insulting comments. Whereas, he took immediate action of stopping the Pilot project on a mere one-day violent movement of the AAMSU. In reality, Gogoi had wanted the AAMU movement- because elections were just round the corner, and he needed the vote of the illegal foreigners. Chief Minister Gogoi was caught- He proved that interests of power was much above the interests of the nation and its people.

Now, Assamese people are on the path of becoming like the Tripuris of Tripura. Arnold Toynbee said, 'When any particular nationality faces dangerous threat to its very existence, for its exemption, reviewing itself becomes a prime necessity. Because, on the basis of its history, the nationality can establish its being and decide its future path'.

In history there is ample evidence of the enslaved selfish Assamese cheating the Assamese nation. It was the Assamese who had informed Mir Jumla about the treasures buried in the *maidams* (tombs) of the Ahom Kings. The Burmese who wreaked havoc on the Assamese had been brought in by Badan Borphukan. There is no difference between this act of Badan and the activities of the politicians of modern Assam, who are busy exploiting the 'Bangladeshi-voter' issue to their own interest. For the activities of deceit against their own nation, these people will remain marked as 'unforgivable criminals' in the annals of history.

References:

- ¹ Congessor Kasiyoli Roudot, Benudhar Sarma, P.71
- ² Nehru's opposition to the Immigration Act can be seen from various angles- (a) His adamant attitude against Patel. Many times the strong stand

of Patel against the E-Pakistanis surpassed that of Nehru. (b) On the instigation of the Bengal leaders Nehru dreamt of gaining prosperity by producing food grains in the fertile land of Assam and as such wanted to remove all barriers for the immigrants.

³ In his speech delivered in Nagaon during the campaign for the 1957 LA Elections, Debakanta Barua said that even without the votes of the native Assamese people, they will win the election only with the votes of Ali-Kuli. *Asomor Samasya aru Buddhijibir Bhumika*, Dr. Jiten Das, p. 111

⁴ *Bordoloir Sasankaal*, Naresh Chandra Rajkhowa, p. 17

⁵ *Assam Agony*, Amiya Kumar Das, p. 57

⁶ Chaliha was elected from the Sibsagar Constituency in the Lok Sabha election of 1953. During the second term of the Medhi- government, though he was the President of the Assam Congress, he was not a member of the Legislative Assembly.

⁷ *Bimala Prasad Chaliha*, Asom Prakashan Parishad, p. 99

⁸ *Joint Declaration of The Prime Ministers of India and Bangladesh*, p. 1

⁹ *Assam Agony*, Amiya Kumar Das, p. 59

¹¹ *Agradoot (Budhbaar)*, 15 August 1990, p. 1 (29 Xaun, 541 Sankarabda).

CHAPTER 10

FROM INDEPENDENT ASSAM TO AUTONOMOUS RULE A Lengthy Circuit

Revolution means progress. Revolution in the real sense is to unite all the ethnic communities inhabiting in a society and work towards the development of the masses. This was the feeling on 7th April 1979 when the ULFA was born in the premises of the *Rang-ghar*. From APLA (Assam People's Liberation Army) to ULFA and then after under the Presidentship of Buddheswar Gogoi, a school teacher of Moran School, formation of the formal council of the organisation, to the present times has been more than three decades of struggle. This armed force that was formed in Assam's prevailing political and socio-economic backdrop has always been grabbing the headlines of newspapers of Assam in various discussions.

Now, it is very important to analyse the real picture of ULFA with many cadres surrendering, capture (allegedly surrender) of the Finance and Foreign Secretaries along with the President himself of the organisation; a National Conference in the interests of discussions; with a Seven-point Charter in hand moving towards an autonomous rule from independent Assam; while at the same time, there is a statement from the armed-ULFA faction demanding an independent and sovereign Assam; along with the uncompromising attitude of the Commander-in-Chief of the organisation who has taken asylum abroad, etc. In the present situation it looks like the organisation is facing a calamity. All eyes are on it. There is one question in the minds of the people of

Assam- Will the ongoing process of talks between the ULFA and the government be successful?

Behind the formation of ULFA

ULFA was created as a result of the clash between national funds and regional funds. Keeping the ambitions of the middle-class Assamese in the background, nationalism grew among one group and to take that nationalism to the zenith, one group took up arms as their means. In their own words, 'ULFA is not an extremist or terrorist organisation though it totally believes in revolution and has no similarity with those organisations that are partially reformist. ULFA is not a secretive, secret organisation. If we are in hiding that is because of the enemies and not for the masses'. Keeping in view the activities of ULFA in today's situation and background, their once proclaimed identity is a matter that the masses need to search.

Aims and objectives of ULFA

The aims and objectives of ULFA had been to establish a scientific socialism based on the modern formulas of Political Science. In their statements it was very clear that, "There can be no acceptance about any compromise on independence." Their aim had been establishment of a classless, exploitation-less society. In the society that they wished to create, every citizen would have the fundamental right to food-clothing-shelter and on the basis of these three, the social state of independent Assam would be secular. Every ethnic group would be able to develop their language and culture, and enjoy their own autonomous rule. To sum up, the model announced by ULFA was a scientific socialism established on nationalism.

AASU vs ULFA

In the backdrop of Assam's illegal foreigner expulsion movement, ULFA had expressed itself as an extremist faction of the AASU. If one looks carefully into the days gone by, it can be

seen that ULFA did not have any clash with AASU, but they were different. AASU's concept for 'Golden Assam' or 'New Assam' did not clash with ULFA's proposed 'Independent Assam', there were differences. ULFA had no clash with AASU over the illegal foreigner expulsion issue. AASU too had no opposition to ULFA's idea of saving the identity of the Assamese through a process of de-nationalisation leading to a process of unification. However, unlike the AASU, ULFA has never been able to clearly explain as to who is a foreigner. The activities of ULFA had proven that they tried to establish that, more than the foreign nationals living in Assam, it was the Indians from the other parts of the country who came to Assam, were more dangerous.

Both organisations were run by leadership perpetual to the middle class – both organisations lacked any clear opinion about the rights of landless peasants and the labour-workers. Both advocated a government formed by a regional party and in the elections of 1985, 1991 and 1996, both worked tirelessly for the victory of the candidates of the regional party. Though there were methodical difference between the two, their activities before the eyes of the people spoke of, close attachment. It was obvious that, each was leaning on the other.

ULFA vs AGP

The movement that was started on 8th June 1979 with a 12-hour strike and led to the martyrdom of 800 Assamese young men, was unnecessarily prolonged by the leaders of AASU because of their greed to occupy power. On 14th August 1985 the Assam Accord was signed and a few days later Assam Gana Parishad(AGP) was formed. From the AGP winning the elections held on 23rd December 1985 and sitting in power till 27th November 1990, there were literally no difference between the AASU, ULFA and AGP. With a friendly government at the helm, the ULFA began to become plump. There was rampant violence, murder, loot and

kidnapping in the state but the elected AGP government remained a silent spectator. The AASU and AGP had done two injustices to the Assamese people.— The AASU leaders signed the Assam Accord, while the IMDT was kept intact, to fulfil their ugly designs of capturing power. On the other hand, the AGP in its first term had helped the ULFA to prosper and grow. Seated in power by the wave of a huge public support, the AGP forgot all about the illegal foreigners. Similarly, the ULFA too, kept up the rhetoric of independent Assam and sovereignty, settled themselves in foreign countries and allowed the issue of illegal foreigners to lapse.

Achievements of ULFA:

If we look into the achievements of ULFA, it must be admitted that in the last almost 30 years, the ULFA could shake up the people of the state with some new ideas. The ULFA, right from its inception could broaden the scope of enigmatic discussions and ideas about Assam seceding from India, which had been mooted once by people like Ambikagiri and Jnananath Bora, etc. Topics like the Indian Constitution, Sovereignty, Mass-vote, Nationality, Nationalism, Regionalism, Rationality, Human Rights, etc., now found space in the discussions of both students and seniors of Assam alike. Similarly, much publicised issues like armed struggle, struggle for freedom, exploitation, etc., were raising new questions in the minds of the Assamese masses. It was a good sign that, the Assamese people known as lazy and comfort loving were awakening. And the ULFA contributed greatly to this.

ULFA's failure.

In spite of publishing their objectives, ideologies and aims, the struggle of the ULFA could not bring about an explosion among the masses. To put it simply, the ULFA exposed itself in a devastated state. If the reason for this is analysed, it is seen that they failed to properly execute their ideologies and politics with

rampant misuse of arms, unabated torturing of the unarmed, using murder as a method, they hurt the sentiments of those believing in humanism as well as the family-relatives of the unarmed. It is very important to analyse how the ULFA could punish common people by establishing courts that gave one-sided verdicts. The fact that they would engage in firings just for money, began to create ill-feelings among the people towards the ULFA ethics. Killing anyone became very easy for the organisation. The ULFA completely failed to understand that a society cannot be changed through the means of killing people.

The ULFA has proclaimed that in front of the 3 crores population of Assam, the Indian state machinery's armed force of 20 lakh was nothing. In their statement they recalled Assam history and said that the Assamese nationality that had repulsed the Mughal invasions 17 times will now be able to break the shackles of Delhi's colonialism also, and the ULFA workers will fight for the Assamese till their last drop of blood. However, apart from a couple of defensive encounters, the ULFA was never seen taking on the Indian Armed forces. During the operations like 'Rhino', 'Bajrang' and 'All Clear' which happened because of the ULFA and led to the harassment of the general populace, it was never seen anywhere that the ULFA tried to stop or counter-attack the Indian army. This brings to light the weakness of the war department of the ULFA.

By very easily collecting money from the secret hoarders, wily businessman and dishonest employees-contractors, the ULFA was encouraging these people to engage further in unjust and unfair means. The ULFA could not hold on to their popularity amidst the people by resorting to cheap publicity stunts like uprooting alcohol or closing down tuitions. Another extreme weakness of the organisation was its own cadres (who had taken the oath of death) leaking information about the organisation to the army or

police. In spite of gaining huge support from the masses, the fact that they could not establish themselves as a mass-organisation was a failure for ULFA. Their lack of communication with the people is proven from the fact that they could not build up a strong protest movement in the state against Delhi's exploitation and neglecting attitude towards the Assamese.

In the first half of 1992, a section of the ULFA went to Delhi and sat in discussion with the then Prime Minister, P.V.Narasimha Rao (Rao had gifted Sunil Nath and Golap Barua with a golden pen each). At that time, the mediator with ULFA, Dr. Mamoni Roisom Goswami had said before the press that the draft for the main discussion had been readied by Dr. Manoranjan Mohanty (Social Scientist) and even Paresh Barua himself was impressed by the draft.

The announcement of Dr. Goswami naturally made the conscious populace think—and rightly so—for an organisation that had been carrying on an armed struggle for 14 years since 1979 (till that time) had nothing called a 'base document' of the struggle. The document, on the basis of which they are said to have awakened the masses, the document which they submitted in Delhi had to be prepared by a 'non-Assamese'. This was proof of the fact that there was intellectual weakness within the folds of ULFA. From the side of ULFA the mediator, Rebati Phukan, in his statement prior to the discussion, brought up issues of freeing people held for ransom, surrendering arms and in place of demanding an independent Assam, talked of autonomy. It must be mentioned that Phukan informed—not stopping at only surrendering the demand of an independent Assam, on 13th January 1992, the ULFA accepted its adherence to the Constitution of India. This proposal was sent to the Prime Minister in the presence of the then Chief Minister, Hiteswar Saikia. In the proposal, it was made public that 5 ULFA leaders would sit in the discussions

without any preconditions. However, taking advantage of free passage, Anup Chetia ran away. Such activities of leaders like Chetia, who had sworn to free the nation (Assam) and its people, led to new questions arising about ULFA in the minds of the tolerant Assamese populace.

It can be surmised from comments and behaviour of those leaders who were arrested or surrendered that the condition of ULFA, from the time of its birth till now, has changed immensely. They have also expressed regret for some of their own activities. The 'Dhemaji blasts' on the occasion of Independence Day, for which Paresh Barua himself (though not directly) accepted their mistake is something that needs to be noticed. Though late, we can say that this is a good sign. Probably, this change in ULFA is a reflection of their past experience.

The journey of history is unstoppable. In 1992, one section of leaders of the ULFA born in 1979, had given priority to discussions. Now once again, relinquishing 'Independent Assam' and 'Sovereignty', one section under the leadership of Arabinda Rajkhowa is talking in favour of discussions. After 30 long years the stand of the majority ULFA leaders has brought in tidings of peace to the people of Assam. Everyone wishes for the success of this peace process.

However, it is felt that the ULFA leaders should share the topics of discussion with the Assamese populace beforehand. This can be justified with two arguments :-

1. When ULFA had taken up arms, they never consulted the Assamese masses. From that point, they can still make all decisions themselves. However, the Assamese people should be given equal rights to take part in decisions that will be in the interest of the Assamese nationality.

2. Just as the British had once duped the Assamese people through the Treaty of Yandaboo, in 1985 through 2nd political

treaty of Assam- the Assam Accord- a section of selfish Assamese like 'Satram- Badan' had in the same manner cheated the Assamese nation.

Now, it is time for everyone to be alert beforehand that with sweet talks in the interest of Assam, the third treaty should not cheat the Assamese. It must be kept in mind that to chase away the illegal foreigners, post- 24th March 1971, not a single day of movement, forget six long years, had actually been necessary. Another section of ULFA do not want discussion neither do they desire to return to the mainstream. The ULFA should understand that division always weakens any organisation.

CHAPTER 11

COMPLETE AUTONOMOUS RULE ULFA-GOVERNMENT DISCUSSION

What are the issues that the Assamese people want to be discussed

On 07-05-2011 a National Convention was organised in Guwahati in the interests of Assam and the Assamese wherein incorporating complete autonomous rule and other proposals, a voluminous Demand-Charter of 400 pages was brought out. A concise version of 37 pages of this charter is said to have been published in the newspapers. According to media information, the first issue that has found place in this Charter is 'Complete Autonomous Rule' (CAR) for Assam. In the meantime, the pro-talks faction of ULFA has accepted this Demand-Charter and the President of ULFA, Arabinda Rajkhuwa has labelled the Demand-Charter as a national treasure. The demand of Complete Autonomous Rule in the Charter has proven that the pro-talk faction of ULFA has given up the original ULFA demand of an 'independent Assam' and like paying obeisance to a rock that cannot be budged, has decided to move away from the inconvenient demand of independent Assam and concentrate on a subject like Complete Autonomous Rule.

From the very beginning it was obvious from the comments of the pro-talk ULFA leaders that Assam wants autonomy. Even earlier, in the comments of the spokesperson of the United National Conference, the demand of autonomy was expressed. Much earlier the 'Asom Yuva Chatra Parishad' had demanded Complete Autonomous Rule for Assam. Here, an

important point is that while wishing for complete Autonomous Rule for Assam, almost none of the groups had chalked out in clear terms the basis on which the CAR should be implemented. Even the pro-talks ULFA and the United National Conference which are beginning to a lot of din by bringing up this demand again have not been able to express clearly in the media, on what terms autonomy is being asked for. However, at the same time, one faction of the Pro-talks ULFA (A & C Company units of the 28 No. Battalion) had expressed that they will support 'complete independence'. If one analyses, it is felt that the faction that had given up the demand for complete independence in order the please the Anti-talk faction (those who wanted Independent Assam) had proposed this utopian CAR - they wanted to sit in talks by accepting the Indian Constitution while at the same time also wanted to talk of CAR— Till now, there is no such provision in the Indian Constitution.

Neither the people of Assam, nor India as a whole have any idea about CAR, because there is no such provision in the Indian Constitution. Surely, the National Conference is not wishing for an administrative process like the District Councils based on the 6th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. That is why there is definitely a lot of scope for discussing this matter in detail. If CAR is wanted, then the Constitution will have to be amended or a new Article will have to be incorporated for the interest of Assam through which the CAR demand may be brought up. Constitutional and legal matters are very complicated. Constitution amendment has been discussed and debated in Assam earlier also. Some big *Pandits* had brought up such topics to fool people for their own benefits. Isn't it the only reason that clause no. 6 of the Assam Accord could not be implemented till now—because the Constitution could not be amended? Those people who had instigated the student leaders at the time of the Assam Accord are still alive, but like the student leaders, they too remained silent in

the subsequent times. Now, that it has come out that a demand for CAR will be made, it is of great essence that open debate-discussions on Autonomous Rule should be done. Here, one thing must feature in the discussions—According to Art. 370 of the Indian Constitution, Jammu-Kashmir has been given of 'Special State' status— is the pro-talk ULFA faction wishing for a similar system for Assam? We must understand one thing clearly that though Kashmir had been 'given separate powers and made free from the impact of the Indian Parliament', this is only in name— with the President being given power to interfere in the state indirectly. In one word Art. 370 has no meaning. The state has demanded that the current system be abrogated, and as a result, the state's Legislative Assembly demanded enlarged Autonomous Rule in June 2000.

There is lack of clarity in the first seven demands prepared by the National Conference. These seven demands have been expressed through unnecessary words. The complexity in the syntax has made the meaning of the issue incomprehensible. Like— '*Development may not be possible through political independence*'. Again— '*People of Assam can gain the Right to control their own fate even without political independence.*' And— '*To enjoy economic independence, political power is a must*' (Aamar Axom, 8 May 2011, Pg. 8). Though such issues are important their presentation has been done in a complex form and to some extent, it can be said to be self-contradictory.

Among the total seven issues included in the Demand-Charter the most important issue has been kept aside. The issue of land reservation system for the natives of Assam, control regulations about buying-selling of land and an Act in the interests of the Assamese natives, should have found priority in this Demand-Charter. The 2nd defect of the Demand-Charter is that the issue of illegal foreigners has been kept as the 6th point. There is no need to explain the importance of this matter to those who

love Assam and the Assamese natives. The issue that led to a movement to protect the Assamese identity, about 800 people became martyrs, because of which the foundation of nationalism was built in Assam and to take that nationalism to the strongest zenith of power, ULFA was born as a means. However, this important issue finding place in the 6th point of the Charter is very disheartening.

The Demand-Charter has been said to be an advisory letter. The decision to accept or not accept everything that has been incorporated here lies with the pro-talks ULFA. One thing about this advisory seems to be objectionable. One person from the National Conference has advised that the ULFA should use Assamese language during the talks-It has been asked not to use Hindi or English. Actually, such kind of advice should not be given, because such things are mere nationalistic emotions and not logically acceptable.

The National Conference should have let the pro-talk ULFA think independently about Assam and the problems of the native Assamese. Instead, the members of the National Conference acted like the guardians of the ULFA cadres. These guardians should have given the pro-talk ULFA the opportunity to independently chalk out the subjects to be raised during the talks, and they should have been able to strongly argue *why* it was important that the subjects chosen by the ULFA should be made known to the people of Assam, beforehand. The argument from the National Conference to the ULFA should have been like this—
- 'When the ULFA took up arms, it had not consulted the people of Assam about its necessity. From that logic, now also, the ULFA can take its own decisions. But, decisions in which the interest of the nation is at stake, the people must have an equal say'.

It is necessary that the pro-talk ULFA faction must take into consideration the real problems for Assam. Here, we bring into focus these following problems.

Foreigners Problem:

There was a time when, while 'setting up camps in Bangladesh and issuing 'statements' in the interests of the Assamese, the ULFA had actually turned its back on the interests of Assam. Today, will they tell the illegal Bangladeshi's living in Assam to go back to Bangladesh? For example- In the magazine that had been brought out by ULFA on the occasion of completing 14 years, in 1992 (edited by Aniruddha Choudhury alias Arnab Hazarika) it has been mentioned that '*for the development of agriculture in Assam, the Bangladeshi immigration was necessary*'. It was also written in the magazine- '*The six year long movement of AASU against the illegal Bangladeshi was not necessary*'. It also published that, '*In the background of immigration, the 'Melting-pot culture' that has grown up in America, will be applicable in Assam also in the future*'. The truth is ULFA, that had been nurtured in Bangladesh had no other option but to speak in the interests of Bangladesh. But in today's background, it is necessary that those earlier mistakes should be accepted.

Now the ULFA members who have come out from the clutches of Bangladesh should concentrate deeply on the foreigner-issue. If the ULFA tries to turn a blind eye to this issue, then it will be like they are deliberately keeping themselves away from a main problem of Assam. Even after 25 years of the Assam Accord, the barbed-wire fencing on the Assam-Bangladesh border has not been completed. Where does the mystery lie? The ULFA should remember that within 4 years after independence, the barbed-wire fencing between India-Pakistan was completed. The illegal foreigner issue should be placed as the first issue in the agenda of the talks. This is what the people of Assam wanted.

Border Problem:

The border disputes of Assam with its neighbouring states are a very sensitive issue. It is very sad that even after 37 years

since *Bor Asom* had been divided, the Central government was never seen to have taken any active initiative to settle the border issue. Every state encircling Assam has been encroaching upon Assam's land. As per information of the Revenue Department, adjacent to Assam, the states of Nagaland, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Meghalaya, and West Bengal has, in total, encroached upto 86,993.99 hectares of Assam's land area. Recent Revenue Department information says that, Nagaland has encroached 66,241 hectares, Arunachal Pradesh 13,184 hectares, Meghalaya 5870.92 hectares, Mizoram 1986 hectares, West Bengal 3330 hectares & Tripura 25 hectares, already from Assam. The Assam government has shirked its responsibility by simply filing a case against Nagaland in 1988 (Dewani Complaint no. 2/1988) and against Arunachal Pradesh in 1989 in the context of land encroachment. As per sources, both factions of the NSCN are continuing the process of encroaching land in Assam for the creation of larger 'Nagalim'. Even the government of that state is silently supporting this. Will the Central as well as Assam government be able to give any assurance as to how long this protracted border dispute carry on? The pro-talk ULFA needs to focus on the issue of border dispute and include it in the agenda of the talks.

Unemployment Problem:

As per the statistics of 31st December 2009, the total unemployed figure in Assam stands at 20,79,558. Apart from this, it is very difficult to comprehend the figure of the disguised unemployed. As against this, last year (2010) till November, only 467 persons were given employment. This statistic clearly brings out not only the gravity of the unemployment problem but also the apathy of the government towards solving it. And as a result of its long-term apathy, the path towards the solution of this problem seems to have been almost lost by the government.

It must be remembered that the sanguinary movement had

begun because of the emaciated economic condition. There is hardly any need to analyse the background of the violence ridden movement in front of the pro-talk ULFA.

Corruption Problem:

According to 'Transparency International' India is one of the many corrupted nations of the world. The same survey has published Assam to be one of most corrupted state in India. Corruption is widespread from the Ministerial level to the lowest employee. Without bribing, a patient is deprived of the services-facilities in the Government hospitals and even the elderly needs to bribe for their old-age pension. Who will cure this? There has to be an awakening among a section of the society.

It is accepted that the North East is the most undeveloped area in the country. Statistics is clear proof of this. There is a huge gap between the rich and poor. Today, the condition of Assam is by no means any better than its neighbouring states. The biggest problem for Assam is that a lion's share of the development package has to be given to the extremists. It looks like a lot of money has been invested for rural development but that money benefits only one section. For them, rural development is like a milch cow. 70% of government funds goes into the hands of extremists, contractors, ministers and administrative officials.

Apart from these issues, Assam also has many other problems. Those needs to be chalked out, their scientific solution needs to be invented and based on that the pro-talk ULFA should compel the Central government for solving the problems. Currently in Assam, one thing that is expanding most is the deterioration of Assamese nationality. The pro-talk ULFA needs to take into consideration all aspects in the interest of Assam and the Assamese people.

CHAPTER 12

DISMISSAL OF THE 2nd ICS OF INDIA SIR SURENDRANATH BANNERJEE: A HISTORICAL GAZE

During the colonial rule, Sir Surendranath Bannerjee was the second person who passed the Indian Civil Service examinations with flying colours and, to hold a high-post in the Indian Civil Administration. (The first person to hold such a post was Satyendranath Thakur). On the other hand, during the colonial rule, Surendranath Bannerjee was also the first ICS officer who was dismissed from his post after 13 months of his appointment by the government. It can be said that the reason for Bannerjee's dismissal has never been elaborately discussed anywhere. In most books this matter has been mentioned very briefly and that, as a consequence of this dismissal there was an anti-British awakening among the masses. In this regard we find a brief detail in Prof. Bipan Chandra's book — 'He was unjustly turned out of the ICS as his superiors could not tolerate the presence of an independent minded Indian in the rank of this Service....'¹ On the other hand it looks like in this matter many Indian historians while digressing from the main issue have tried to convert it into a fabricated story. It is clear that the British historians have also treated this matter as not important. A close look into the Bannerjee case clearly

The Gaze: A Reflection on Socio-Political Issues / 110

shows the arrogance of the government and the English writers siding with the interests of their own nation and on the other hand, the flattering attitude of the Indian writers. In this connection, we are reminded of what Philip Mason wrote in his book 'The Man who ruled India'—'When a senior British official asked his name, Surendra Nath replied, I am Surrender, not Banarjee'. This type of confusing examples create problem in the proper analysis of the matter. Though apparently Bannerjee's case is usually taken at face value, there has actually been no detailed account or analysis of why in the circumstances-environment of those days, a person of Bannerjee's exceptional merit had to sacrifice an attractive job like the ICS.

Born in 1848 in the 24 Parganas of Barrackpore, S.N. Bannerjee sailed to London with Ramesh Chandra Dutta and Bihari Lal Gupta on 12th November 1868.³ They arrived in London after 57 days. The three took up residence in a boys-hostel and engaged themselves to prepare thoroughly for the ICS examination. All three cleared the written and interview examinations held in 1869 with flying colours⁴. After that they completed their probationary period* of 2 years successfully and returned home. All of them were posted in high-ranked Civil Administrative posts in different places of India by the British government.

S.N. Bannerjee, after his insertion in the Bengal Cadre was posted as Assistant Magistrate of Sylhet District (presently in Bangladesh) on 22nd November 1871⁵. It needs to be mentioned here that from 1864, when Satyendranath Thakur was appointed as the first Indian in the ICS, till 1886 only 13 Indians were able to successfully clear the ICS examinations. Among them

The Gaze : A Reflection on Socio-Political Issues / 111

was 1 Assamese, 3 Maharashtrians and the rest 9 were all Bengalis. Their names and year of appointment in ICS are:

Sl.no	Name	Year of appointment in ICS
1	Satyendranath Thakur	1864
2	Surendranath Bannerjee	1871
3	Romesh Chandra Dutt	1871
4	Behari Lal Gupta	1871
5	Sripad Babaji Thakur	1872
6	Anandaram Barua	1872
7	Krishnagopal Gupta	1873
8	Brajendranath Dey	1875
9	Carsbetji Rustomji	1876
10	Cawasji Jamasji Badshah	1884
11	Mesarji Pestonji Kharekhat	1884
12	Arther Guddev Chukerburty	1886
13	Lokendranath Palit	1886

Source: *Civil Servant of India*, K.L. Punjabi, 1993, *Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan*, p. 27

*During the probationary period they were given coaching on 'inter alia', British-Indian Law, Jurisprudence and Political Economy, etc.

To become an ICS officer had been the only aim and objective of Bannerjee's life. For that he worked hard from his student days with great dedication and could achieve his goal. But strangely just within 13 months of his service-life, he was dismissed. In the eyes of the people, the reason for his dismissal was not very severely punishable.

At the time of Bannerjee's appointment, the responsibility of the administration of Sylhet district was bestowed on four ICS officers. Apart from Bannerjee, all the others were British. They were, H.C. Sutherland—District Magistrate, S.D. Anderson—Joint Magistrate and A. Posford—Assistant Magistrate. Posford was two years senior in service to Bannerjee⁶. Bannerjee's problems began from him.

According to the Service Rules, in those days the ICS officers had to appear in departmental examinations for their promotions. Bannerjee also appeared in the first departmental

examination of his life and securing good results, became eligible to become a First-class Magistrate. While Posford, even after trying for three times could not clear the same departmental examination. Such success of an Indian like Bannerjee made Posford feel ashamed^{7**}. This progress of Bannerjee created a fear in the mind of Sutherland, the Chief administrator of Sylhet and his other British associate officials. As a result, Sutherland wanted to disregard Bannerjee. Another reason that led to increasing bitterness in his relation with Bannerjee was his personal enmity with ICS Officer, Anderson. With Anderson's transfer to Sylhet district, Sutherland's anti-Bannerjee feelings became acute. Sutherland did not have a cordial relationship with Anderson and later (after coming to Sylhet) struck up a friendship with Bannerjee who was his equal. Sutherland did not like a British officer establishing a good relationship with an Indian. Having failed in all his efforts to take Anderson away from Bannerjee, Sutherland finally got together with Posford and hatched a conspiracy against Bannerjee. They found their opportunity to have Bannerjee dismissed in a very ordinary case of boat theft, which Bannerjee had neglected⁸.

The incident was like this- Resident of Noakata village in Sylhet District, a boatman by profession, Bisheshwar filed a case of boat theft against his neighbour Yudhisthir, in the Sylhet District Court. Though at first this case was given to Posford, on the pretext of him being on leave, it was sent to the court of Bannerjee. Since he was very busy with various works, Bannerjee could not fix a date for the hearing of this case. Moreover, he did not intimate the cause for the delay. On 31st December 1872, though the 'Ferrari' list (Absconding Criminals List) that was published included the name of Yudhisthir⁹, according to the legal system working then, Yudhisthir could not be counted as a 'criminal on the run' till there was a hearing. Maybe due to the delay of the cases' hearing

or to please the complainant party, Bannerjee's *peshkar* inserted Yudhisthir's name in the *Ferrari* list. Bannerjee never realised that this inclusion of Yudhisthir's name in the *Ferrari* list could create any problem in the future. In his own words, Bannerjee said, 'I signed the order along with a heap of other papers. My attention was not drawn to it, nor did I know it or understand the significance of the order.'¹⁰ At that time due to his very busy schedule, he could not concentrate on Yudhisthir's file. As soon as Sutherland, the Chief Administrator of Sylhet district found out about the *Ferrari* List, he sent a show-cause notice to Bannerjee. Though Sutherland had accepted Bannerjee's reply to the show-cause notice himself, he handed it over to the Chief Justice of Sylhet district. The Chief Justice, in order to widely publicise the case, and inform the government did not take any measure himself and sent it to the Calcutta Chief Justice's Court. The Chief Justice of Calcutta Court set up a four-member bench to investigate Bannerjee's case. This four-member bench found 14 offences against Bannerjee and 3 of them were judged to be very serious¹¹. These serious offences were- (1) Yudhisthir's name was inserted in the *Ferrari* List against law without sending him a Summon, (2) Bannerjee lied to the Bench that he did not know about Yudhisthir's case, (3) He went against the law to personally decide Yudhisthir's case and closed Yudhisthir's path to come to the court.

To be put as footnote in page 3 : [**Bannerjee's success created fear in the hearts of the contemporary British ICS officers steeped in nationalist ego and arrogance. They were enraged that their kindred Posford had lost to Bannerjee. After Bannerjee's promotion a few ICS officers of Bengal province, under the leadership to Sutherland, had even requested before the Viceroy Lord Mayo, that the British ICS officers should be exempted from dept. exams.]

As per the judgement of the Bench, the British government in Calcutta dismissed Bannerjee from Service. The job advertisement published mentioned the cause of Bannerjee's dismissal and also about the Rs. 50 that was his due as monthly *bhatta* (stipend)¹². As soon as Bannerjee got this news he set out for London to prove and publicise his innocence, and also in expectation of proper justice. But his objective was not fulfilled. After returning from London, he had to accept the order dismissing him from Service (Issued from Calcutta Viceroy's Office) with his own hands¹³.

This incident of Bannerjee's dismissal from the post of a Magistrate gained special importance in the discussions among Indians. In the eyes of the educated Indians, the incident of boat theft was a minor issue. On that pretext, a talented Indian ICS officer's dismissal in such a humiliating manner did not go down well with them. This dismissal of Bannerjee clearly proved that the British rulers did not want the subordinate Indians to be appointed in high administrative posts. That is why Historian R.C. Mazumdar has expressed, 'S.N Bannerjee was dismissed from ICS for what is now regarded as minor offence of a technical character'¹⁴

The three pillars of the anti-British movement in India- One, among the famous *Trimurti*, Bipin Chandra Pal in his autobiography. 'Memoirs of my life and times' has written that Bannerjee's case was frequently discussed by his father and his likeminded thinkers. (Pal was 14 years old then). Pal has even described beautifully the widespread maladministration and corruption in the British rule¹⁵. In this autobiography we find few examples of how the British, in the name of upholding the legal process, used to take bribes from the Indian people. Pal informs that the British Judges took bribes with the help of the Indian government servants and declared the real culprits to be innocent.

As written by Pal, his father Ramchandra Pal had been a *Peshkar* in the Sylhet Lower Court and once, in a murder case, the convicted party had offered him a bribe of Rs. 300/ (At that time Ramchandra's monthly salary was only Rs. 7/) but he never took bribes. As a result, he had to face the ire of the British government and was compelled to resign from service. In the case of Bannerjee, it cannot be ruled out that Kailash Chandra (the *Peshkar* of Bannerjee's court) had not taken bribe in order to punish Yudhisthir. In the same way, Kailash Chandra might have been bought by the British officials, who wanted to teach Bannerjee a lesson and without Bannerjee's knowledge, the *Peshkar* inserted Yudhisthir's name in the *Ferrari List*. Bannerjee had said himself, 'My attention was not drawn to it, nor did I know it or understand the significance of the order'.

Bannerjee mentions about the busy schedule of his job in these words- 'Owing to my heavy work it had to be postponed from time to time. On December 31st 1872, an order was passed (and it bore my initials) that the accused should be entered in the Ferrari list. As a matter of fact, the man had not absconded and the object of the order was to avoid giving an explanation for the long pendency of the case....'¹⁶ In this regard the comments passed by the Assistant Magistrate of Sylhet district, Moti Kriplani¹⁷ (IAS officer no.42 of the 1925 batch) has made matters more complicated. He refutes Bannerjee's justification of excessive workload that led to Yudhisthir being declared a '*ferrari*'. Kriplani states that Bannerjee actually had no work pressure at all, so much so that it became a problem for him. In fact, to pass time, he started learning Bengali properly and also played bridge and billiards. Bannerjee's and Kriplani's versions are absolutely contradictory and it is felt that in comparison, Kriplani's version is more acceptable. It cannot be said that Bannerjee was completely innocent, because for an ICS officer not to be able to understand

the consequences of declaring a man as a 'criminal on the run' without even trying his case is something very serious. In the eyes of the British government, Bannerjee's actions were punishable. It was only natural that the British government could not support Bannerjee's plea of heavy workload to justify himself and prove his innocence.

S.N Bannerjee has written in his autobiography, *A Nation is Making*, which he penned at 67 years of age that it had been his desire to become an ICS officer right from his student days and for that, he read voraciously, so much so that at times he even forgot to eat or sleep. After clearing the ICS examinations with flying colours, he took his father's permission to go to London but kept this a secret from his mother. When she came to know about this from someone else just before his departure, she lost consciousness. After 3 years in London, when he returned home, Bannerjee saw many changes. Just 15 days after he went abroad his mother expired. During his stay there, his father also passed away. However, no one gave him this news. More importantly, the orthodox conservative Bengali society that was steeped in the narrow boundaries of race and caste, ostracised Bannerjee's family. In return for being an ICS officer, his family had to sacrifice everything. And that is why for Bannerjee, his government job was very dear. But he had to lose such a job for a boat-theft case and that boat was probably not more than even Rs.3/- at that time.

After his dismissal from his job, Bannerjee took up teaching in the Metropolitan Institute which was established by Ishwar Chandra Sarma (Bidyasagar). In between he went to Australia with an objective to take up the Legal profession. However, he came back within a short time and decided to expose (through the educated Indians) the anti-India activities of the British rulers¹⁸. In this regard he is said to have been inspired by the renowned English philosopher Edmund Burke.

He upheld strong arguments in the interests of the Indians. He clearly saw the anti-Indian mentality of the British in their various activities like, the unnecessary Afghan war, spending the lion's share of revenue collected in India in the name of defence, the Vernacular Press Act of Lord Lytton, reduction of the maximum age limit for the Indian Civil Service, etc. He dedicated his life in the interest of the people and tried to implant nationalist identity in the mind of the Indians. He established the first all India organisation called 'Indian Association', through which for the first time, anti-British advocacy was done. Through his efforts, in 1883 a huge National Conference was organised in Calcutta. In one word, from Bannerjee's time the middle class began to rise in the Indian society and this can be said to be the origin of the Indian National Congress.

The second Indian who had cleared the ICS examinations with flying colours- S.N Bannerjee- once had to bear a lot of humiliation from the British. But he was never shaken by that. On the contrary, through his will power, capacity and foresight he stunned the British. In fact, in times even the British were compelled to accept Bannerjee's capacities and they honoured him with the title of 'Knight'¹⁹ This honour was bestowed on him by the Queen of England with her own hands. Even the Viceroy of India wrote 'Sir' before Surendranath's name as a mark of respect. It was as if by bestowing such honour upon Sir Surendranath Bannerjee, the British government was trying to atone for dismissing him earlier from the ICS.

References:

- ¹ *Modern India* (A textbook for class XII), Prof. Bipan Chandra, 1990, NCERT, P.158
- ² *The Man who ruled India*, Philip Mason, 1992, Calcutta, p.252
- ⁴ *Ibid*, p.17
- ⁵ *Ibid*, p.19

⁶ *Ibid*, p.20

⁷ *Public Service Commission in India*, UPSC Golden Jubilee Souvenir, 1926-76; *The Rastraguru from the ICS*, S.N Srivastava, pp.27-33

⁸ *Civil Servants of India*, K.L Punjabi, 1993, Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, p.13

⁹ *A Nation is Making*, S.N Bannerjee, pp.61-66

¹¹ *The Main Stream*, 26 August 1993, p.28

¹² *An Advanced History of India*, R.C Mazumdar, p.848

¹³ *Opcit*, p.29

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.25

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.28

¹⁷ *An Advanced History of India*, R.C Mazumdar, p.848

¹⁸ *Memoirs of My Life and Times*, Bipin Chandra Pal, 1973, p.122

¹⁹ *Ibid*

CHAPTER 13

THE STORY BEHIND DANDI YATRA

As the first agenda of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), the 'Salt *Satyagraha*' bore a special significance in the freedom struggle of India against the British. After the successful conclusion of the Salt *Satyagraha*, salt became the symbol of patriotism, tolerance and sacrifice in the lives of Indian Nationals. Similarly, 'Yatra' became the symbol of faith and co-operation, while 'Dandi' now symbolised achievement of purpose as well as severe hard work. It needs to be mentioned that even after seven decades of independence, millions of Indian still wish to commemorate the 'Dandi Yatra' at the national level and relive its joy. The most important fact here is that just by taking part in the Dandi Yatra, 90,000 Indians¹ courted jail. Through the Dandi *Satyagraha*, the legitimacy of the non-violent movement in India was publicized to the entire world, which terrorised the British Empire, where, it was said, 'The Sun never set'. As a result, the 'Time' magazine of the United States in their 1931 January issue had put Gandhiji's photograph on the cover and proclaimed him as the 'Man of the Year'².

At first glance, the Dandi *Satyagraha* looks like a minor agenda of the entire freedom movement. However, it needs to be analysed as to why Gandhi chose 'Salt' to begin the Civil Disobedience Movement? Furthermore, was there really the need to embark on a yatra with a huge number of associates or, why did he choose Dandi *per se*? These questions need to be asked again to find new views.

In 1929, the Lahore Session had announced *Purna Swaraj* (complete independence) and to fight against the British rule, it had been decided to launch the Civil Disobedience Movement. Though the top Congress leaders expressed their own opinions about the Civil Disobedience Movement, no decision regarding the agenda of the movement was taken in that meeting. Nehru and Bose's proposal to establish a parallel National government in Delhi and Patel's proposal to break the Land Revenue Laws were rejected by Gandhi. The reason behind this was probably, Gandhiji's aim and objective for *Swaraj* was different from others. The Congress workers had to wait and watch as to what Gandhiji wanted the agenda to be of the Civil Disobedience Movement. In his note prepared to say that 26th January 1930 be celebrated as *Purna Swaraj* day, (as had been decided in the Lahore Congress Session under the Chairmanship of Nehru) he merely mentioned how the British had committed gross injustice against the Indians in the matters of salt. On that very day, in the letter he had written to Lord Irwin to notify about the Civil Disobedience Movement, Gandhiji incorporated 11 demands explaining the aims and objectives of the Congress for wanting *Swaraj*. Among these 11 demands, in no. 4 was the demand to *revoke the unjust taxes on foreign cloths* and in no.5 was the demand to *remove the Salt tax and facilitate the Indian people to acquire the necessary salt*.

It must be noted here that much before Gandhiji's emergence in the freedom movement, there had been several attempts to form mass anti-British opinion in India with 'Salt tax' as a subject. In 1844, the first revolt against Salt tax had started in Surat³. Dandi *Satyagraha* took place nearly 100 years after that. Again, in 1885, in the first session of the Congress, the subject of Salt tax had found place in the discussions and a resolution had also been taken to place demand before the British government to *revoke the Salt tax*⁴. In the sessions in the following years, Dada

Bhai Naoroji and Gopal Krishna Gokhale had brought up the subject of Salt several times. During the *Swadeshi* Movement, Surendranath Bannerjee had gone from village to village and requested people to boycott Salt from Liverpool and Cloth from Manchester. During his days in South Africa, even Gandhiji had written against the Salt taxes in 'Young India'⁵. As such there was nothing new about Salt tax. Gandhiji's speciality was that he could stir up a huge strong mass movement under his leadership with Salt tax as the main topic. He was successful in using Salt tax as a weapon against the British. Gandhi had learnt that after the French Revolution, there was a long history of revolt against Salt tax in Europe where the rulers had even been compelled to revoke the Salt tax as a result of demand from the subjects. As such, Gandhi thought that the Indians would be able to gain the sympathy of Europe for the movement. He wanted to achieve his plan through the 'Salt *Satyagraha*'.

There were several reasons behind Gandhiji selecting the subject of Salt tax-- First, salt is used by all; Secondly, to remedy the narrow mentality that prevailed among the various races and classes through the 'salt movement'; Thirdly, he felt the most important task was to close the gradually widening gap between the Hindus and Muslims by creating an atmosphere of harmony through the *Salt Satyagraha*. Gandhiji also knew that simply lecturing about Salt tax and inspiring the masses to join the movement will not fulfil his aims and objectives. His main aim and objective, was to build up a massive movement in India. Thus, his wish was to create an atmosphere for the movement through salt. He made a plan to march through the common people to the place where salt was made without using any vehicle, so that, through a dramatic atmosphere, total support of the masses could be achieved.

He wanted to say that breaking the Salt law, in the interest

of the masses, was a great deed. Two days after deciding on the *Dandi Yatra*, he spoke thus in Sabarmati Ashram to the Congress workers, 'Some of the great deeds in this world had been done by walking. For example, Moses had walked with his followers to the definite place (old Testament); Jesus had also walked with his followers to Jerusalem; Basudev had walked to Nanda's place in order to save Krishna; Rama, carrying out his father's diktat, had walked to the forest; Gautam Buddha had walked out from home in search of enlightenment'⁶. Breaking the Salt law was also a great deed in the interests of the masses and as such he argued in favour of marching to fulfil it.

Though the Congress Working Committee in its meeting of 2nd January 1930 had given Gandhi the complete charge of the Civil Disobedience Movement and its agenda, Gandhi did not disclose his plan to break the Salt law till mid-February to any Congress worker. Gandhiji discussed with his childhood friend Kalyanji Mehta⁷ before deciding to begin the Civil Disobedience Movement by breaking of the Salt law. In this matter, Kalyanji had proposed breaking the Salt law in Dandi, an unknown village, located in the Navsari district (Surat) on the coast of the Arabian Sea. The reason behind this was, at that time the Congress had a strong base in Ahmadabad and Surat districts. As such, marching through these districts to Dandi could lead to a huge mass awakening. After discussions, they decided on 6th April as the day to arrive in Dandi. There was reason behind this date-- Indian people were emotionally attached to this date, since it was on this date, 6th April, 1919 that the Congress had given a call for a country wide movement to break the infamous 'Rowlatt Act'. As a result, occurred the tragic 'Jallianwala Bagh' massacre on 13th April. As far as law and order was concerned, they went to the lawyers and learnt in advance that a peaceful demonstration has no legal restrictions. They also learnt that, even breaking the Salt law in

the coastal area, where it was in force, would lead to any severe punishment.

From 2nd January (1930) till 16th February, after a total of 46 days, at 11.00 a.m. in Sabarmati Ashram, Gandhiji, for the first time announced his 'Dandi Yatra' decision to begin the Civil Disobedience Movement⁸. On the same day he made public his plan to begin his march from Sabarmati Ashram on 12th March and reach Dandi on 6th April. He appealed to all the Congress workers to help for the success of his plan.

78 Congress workers were selected from every state of India to take part in the Dandi Yatra. Apart from Gandhi, this strong team of 78 comprised of 12 Ladies, 24 Muslims, 7 Christians, 28 Lower class (caste) Hindus and 17 Higher class (caste) Hindu representatives⁹. Abbas Tyabji and Sarojini Naidu were made the male and female group leaders respectively. Abbas was made group leader so that, in case Gandhiji was jailed, under no circumstance the program should fail. Gandhi had announced before his arrival that he would reside with a Muslim family in Dandi. This was a diplomatic move to win over the Muslims. One day prior to the Dandi Yatra, Gandhiji wrote a letter to the Viceroy, Lord Irwin where he described the aims and objectives of the yatra. Gandhiji deliberately sent this letter to be hand-delivered through an Englishman named, Reginald Reynolds to Irwin¹⁰. By doing so he wanted to put across the message that his fight was not against the British people but only against the British rule. In this matter Reginald Reynolds, the letter carrier had commented, 'I realised Gandhi's use of me was symbolic—it was to show that this was not a matter of Indian versus British, but of principles.' Beginning the March on 12th March at 8.00 am from Sabarmati Ashram with his 78 associates till reaching Dandi on 6th April, it took Gandhi a total of 25 days. Right from its commencement till its conclusion, innumerable Congress workers plus huge numbers

of common people voluntarily joined and marched along in the yatra. Following Gandhiji's directions, the Congress workers, in these 25 days, organised (as per convenience) a total of 40 public meetings¹¹, and in each meeting 4 to 5 lakh people gathered. In these meetings Gandhi described salt as the life-force for Indians and also explained the importance of breaking the Salt law in the interest of the Indians. Through his bold speech where he drew examples and proverbs from the *Gita* and the *Quran*, he described the act of breaking the Salt law by the Congress as a religious work. He basically delivered his speeches in Gujarati and Hindi. Some of the excerpts are given here:

Speech no.1: 'Nowhere in the world is there a law like the salt law. If there is such a law then it is a demonic law, a satanic law. To be loyal to the government which implements such a law is not dharma but adharm therefore it is your religious duty to break the salt law....God is sure to be pleased with your actions and you will attain salvation'¹².

Speech no.2: 'In this struggle do not be untrue to salt. This tax can be removed only if you are true to salt'¹³.

Speech no.3: 'Do not think that Swaraj exists in a bundle of thread. And prohibition is only one of the pre-requisites of Swaraj'¹⁴.

He boldly stated that though salt and thread cannot bring Swaraj but can contribute immensely to the national independence. In some of his speeches he equated Swaraj to 'God', Dandi to a 'holy site' and the yatra as a 'pilgrimage' and the confluence of the three to be a great and pious deed.

Speech no.4: 'The immediate destination of our pilgrimage is Dandi but the real destination is the Goddess of independence....'¹⁵

He said that in this pious work everyone will have to participate but for that there are two conditions—First, to wear

Khadi and two, to give up Alcohol. He compared the Indian women with Draupadi and Sita and praised their contribution to the Non-Cooperation movement.

Speech no.5: '.....in the non-violent struggle for Swaraj, women's share is larger and in the future our children will say that in this struggle my mother, my sister made a bigger contribution¹⁶'.

6th April 1930 is a memorable day in the freedom struggle of India. At 9.15 am on that day, Gandhiji landed in the 'Salt factory' at Dandi with his entourage and protesting against the British monopoly of salt production took up a fistful of salt and requested everyone else to do the same.

Just after the successful completion of the *Dandi yatra*, Gandhiji and all his fellow *yatris* were arrested, but as the situation gradually heated up, the government was compelled to release Gandhiji. As per the orders of British Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald, Viceroy Irwin invited Gandhiji for discussions basically aimed at coaxing him to abandon the Civil Disobedience Movement. In the first discussion between Gandhiji and Irwin, when the latter offered him a cup of tea, Gandhiji took out a small pouch of prohibited salt from his packet and added a pinch in his tea, making sure that Irwin saw this¹⁷. Through this Gandhiji reminded the entire British nationality of the famous 'Boston tea party'. The British regime had to suffer humiliation in the American War of Independence and Gandhiji reminded Irwin, a responsible officer of that fact. Gandhiji also made it known that the salt *Satyagraha* had shaken the British rule and now, it was only a matter of very short time before their autocratic rule ended.

The cultural aspect spread through the *Dandi Yatra* was of immense importance. The salt *Satyagraha* saw an eruption of patriotism among the Indian people and this resulted in a huge number of patriotic songs. These songs were called '*Dandi Songs*'.

Later, these songs gained great popularity in the entire Northern India and were also translated into other languages. In the backdrop of the *Dandi yatra* emerged '*Dandi Raas Nritya*' and '*Ballabh Nritya*'. Innumerable people had taken part in these dances as they moved along with the main group to Dandi. '*Ballabh Nritya*' was named after Sardar Ballabh Bhai Patel, the leader of the masses

— Sardar Ballabh Bhai Patel was working in Taliya, Gujrat in connection with the *Dandi Yatra*, when he was arrested by Police. The people, on learning this, gathered in Taliya and expressed their anti-government feelings through slogans and a patriotic dance¹⁸. Later this dance was named '*Ballabh Nritya*'.

Though Gandhiji had described the *Salt Satyagraha* as 'religious work' but in reality, this work was above 'religion' *per se*. By 'religious work' he was referring to only the lofty principles connected with religion and not to any specific religious view. In this regard, it becomes clear from the autobiography of Lalaji Parmar (one of the 78 main *Dandi Satyagrahi*) who wrote, '.....So that it (religion) could be used as publicity around the world¹⁹'.

For the common people the aim of the *Salt Satyagraha* was to revoke the salt tax so that they may avail salt at cheaper price. Though the program of *Salt Satyagraha* was designed to touch all Indians, but it could not attract everyone. Gandhiji had wanted harmony between the Hindus and Muslims through the *Salt Satyagraha*. Though he had specially aimed to gain the trust of the Muslims, he could not attract a large chunk of them. Even the Muslim leaders in the Congress, who tried to draw in the Muslims, as per Gandhiji's direction, failed in their efforts. At the same time Md. Ali Jinnah warned the Muslims to stay away from the *Salt Satyagraha* through which, he said, a Hindu rule was being tried to be implemented in India. As such, a large number of Muslims derogated the program of *Salt Satyagraha*.

After exactly completing one year of the *Salt Satyagraha*

Khadi and two, to give up Alcohol. He compared the Indian women with Draupadi and Sita and praised their contribution to the Non-Cooperation movement.

Speech no.5: '.....in the non-violent struggle for Swaraj, women's share is larger and in the future our children will say that in this struggle my mother, my sister made a bigger contribution¹⁶'.

6th April 1930 is a memorable day in the freedom struggle of India. At 9.15 am on that day, Gandhiji landed in the 'Salt factory' at Dandi with his entourage and protesting against the British monopoly of salt production took up a fistful of salt and requested everyone else to do the same.

Just after the successful completion of the *Dandi yatra*, Gandhiji and all his fellow *yatris* were arrested, but as the situation gradually heated up, the government was compelled to release Gandhi. As per the orders of British Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald, Viceroy Irwin invited Gandhi for discussions basically aimed at coaxing him to abandon the Civil Disobedience Movement. In the first discussion between Gandhi and Irwin, when the latter offered him a cup of tea, Gandhi took out a small pouch of prohibited salt from his packet and added a pinch in his tea, making sure that Irwin saw this¹⁷. Through this Gandhi reminded the entire British nationality of the famous 'Boston tea party'. The British regime had to suffer humiliation in the American War of Independence and Gandhiji reminded Irwin, a responsible officer of that fact. Gandhi also made it known that the salt *Satyagraha* had shaken the British rule and now, it was only a matter of very short time before their autocratic rule ended.

The cultural aspect spread through the *Dandi Yatra* was of immense importance. The salt *Satyagraha* saw an eruption of patriotism among the Indian people and this resulted in a huge number of patriotic songs. These songs were called '*Dandi Songs*'.

Later, these songs gained great popularity in the entire Northern India and were also translated into other languages. In the backdrop of the *Dandi yatra* emerged '*Dandi Raas Nritya*' and '*Ballabh Nritya*'. Innumerable people had taken part in these dances as they moved along with the main group to Dandi. '*Ballabh Nritya*' was named after Sardar Ballabh Bhai Patel, the leader of the masses

— Sardar Ballabh Bhai Patel was working in Taliya, Gujrat in connection with the *Dandi Yatra*, when he was arrested by Police. The people, on learning this, gathered in Taliya and expressed their anti-government feelings through slogans and a patriotic dance¹⁸. Later this dance was named '*Ballabh Nritya*'.

Though Gandhi had described the *Salt Satyagraha* as 'religious work' but in reality, this work was above 'religion' *per se*. By 'religious work' he was referring to only the lofty principles connected with religion and not to any specific religious view. In this regard, it becomes clear from the autobiography of Lalaji Parmar (one of the 78 main *Dandi Satyagrahi*) who wrote, '.....So that it (religion) could be used as publicity around the world¹⁹'.

For the common people the aim of the *Salt Satyagraha* was to revoke the salt tax so that they may avail salt at cheaper price. Though the program of *Salt Satyagraha* was designed to touch all Indians, but it could not attract everyone. Gandhi had wanted harmony between the Hindus and Muslims through the *Salt Satyagraha*. Though he had specially aimed to gain the trust of the Muslims, he could not attract a large chunk of them. Even the Muslim leaders in the Congress, who tried to draw in the Muslims, as per Gandhi's direction, failed in their efforts. At the same time Md. Ali Jinnah warned the Muslims to stay away from the *Salt Satyagraha* through which, he said, a Hindu rule was being tried to be implemented in India. As such, a large number of Muslims derogated the program of *Salt Satyagraha*.

After exactly completing one year of the *Salt Satyagraha*

- 2 *Krishna Sarmar Diary, Guwahati 1972, p. 207*
- 3 *Indian Struggle for Freedom, Vol-I, I.Sarma, p. 33*
- 4 *Political History of Assam, Vol-II, p. 144*
- 5 *Ibid*
- 6 *M.K Gandhi, Tushar Pal, pp. 30, 33.*
- 7 *Ibid, p. 27*
- 8 *Ibid, p. 40*
- 9 *What Moves the Masses, Suchitra, The Main Stream (Republic Day Special, 28 January 1995), p. 23.*
- 10 *Dandi Yatra, Ishwarilal Desai, 1972, p. 123*
- 11 *Ibid, p. 128*
- 12 *Dandi Patrika (Hindi), Editor-Kalyanji Mehta, p. 10*
- 13 *Ibid*
- 14 *Ibid, p. 12*
- 15 *Ibid, p. 16*
- 16 *Ibid*
- 17 *What Moves the Masses, Suchitra, The Main Stream (Republic Day Special, 28 January 1995), p. 23.*
- 18 *Ibid, p. 27*
- 19 *Ibid, p. 27*
- 20 *Dandi Yatra, Ishwarilal Desai, 1972, p. 60*
- 21 *Gandhijir path Amar path, Aroon Shourie, Prantik, 1-15 March 1985, 4th Year, 7th issue, p. 21*

on 11th March, 1931²⁰, Gandhi took out a second Dandi Yatra. This time he took a small vehicle and arrived alone in Dandi within 38 hours. The objective of this yatra was a little different — it was to celebrate the Gandhi-Irwin pact of 4th March 1931. But this second Dandi Yatra had actually brought down the excellence of the first Dandi Yatra to a large extent. Even many Congress workers had questioned the necessity of this second Dandi Yatra. India against the British. The reason for this was not only salt, a commodity which was required by one and all (that is why salt was selected for the movement) but also Gandhi's unique personality, his thinking and ideology, which specially attracted the Indian masses. He could enter the hearts of the Indian people with his 'high thinking and simple living'. Abandoning the usual format of movements, in the interest of gathering mass participation, Gandhi moved ahead with attractive ways of thinking, which he himself expressed thus²¹, 'Remember the face of the poorest and most helpless person and ask yourself- whatever you are planning to do, will it be of any use for him? Will your plan bring 'Swaraj' or self-rule to the Lakhs of hungry people suffering from scarcity of food in our country?' He said that the poor people and so, he also chalked out a path wherein lay salvation without depending on the Brahmins-Businessman. India had never seen a leader like him earlier. When a leader like him announced the Salt Satyagraha, it was only natural that it led to a mass awakening.

References:

- 1 *What Moves the Masses, Suchitra, The Main Stream (Republic Day Special, 28 January 1995), p. 23*

CHAPTER 14

INDIAN COMMUNIST AND QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT OF 1942

Born under the patronage of the liberal British rule in the 80's of the 19th century, the Indian National Congress (INC) developed a close relationship with only a handful of educated Indians. Later on, the INC that grew in leaps and bounds became the congregation point of educated Indians inspired by three different schools of thought and principles. Closely associated with the INC were :

1. The thinking, activities and policies of Naoroji-Gokhale-Tilak and M. Gandhi's 'Gandhism';
2. The ideals of 'Marxist Communism' which was brought from Germany and Russia to India by Manabendra Ray, the revolutionary leaders;
3. The progressive Indian leaders like Acharya Narendradev, Achyut Patwardhan, Minu Masani, Ashok Mehta, Yusuf Meher Ali, etc. who wanted to accept the model of 'French Socialism' and apply (1934) it in India through the 'Socialist' model of the Congress.

For all the people inspired by the three ideologies, the INC was a platform for creating the feelings of unity in diversity with the aim to develop an independent India. Though it was definitely not an easy task for the National Congress to keep people of different ideologies together to fight against the British, it did succeed through the Swadeshi movement (1905), Non-Cooperation movement (1921) and the agenda of breaking the Salt law as the first program of the Civil Disobedience Movement

(1930) in spreading a strong anti-British feeling among the Indians. The Communists, keeping intact their ideology, had participated equally with the Congress and the Socialists, till 1942 under the banner of the Congress. But on 8th August 1942 in the Congress Session in Bombay (Mumbai) under the Presidentship of Abul Kalam Azad, they vehemently opposed the Quit India resolution and took the decision not to participate in this movement. The Communist not participating in the famous Quit India Movement was an event of special importance in the history of India's freedom struggle. For this, many had labelled the Communists as 'traitor' to the nation. This topic has been discussed here in the backdrop of international events and the anti-British struggle at that time.

At the time when the anti-British freedom struggle was going on in India under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian masses were considering going to jail for their non-violent movement as a pious act, a book written by Sripad Anrit Dangey, '*Lenin and Gandhi*' became especially popular among a section of highly educated Indians influenced by the Communist ideology². In this book Dangey had sharply criticised Gandhi's 'path of non-violence' and stated it to be a futile and unpractical means for gaining independence. This book led to a change in the earlier attitude of the Communist towards Gandhi's 'non-violence path' and also created many questions in their mind. At the same time, when, to counter Dangey's criticism of non-violence, Aldous Huxley from England's intelligentsia wrote the book '*Ends and Means*'³ glorifying Gandhi's means i.e. non-violence to gain independence, the Indian Communists living in London bristled in anger. A young Indian, Krishna Chelevenkar protested against this and to oppose Huxley through logic wrote '*Ends are Means*' in several parts and distributed them amongst the Indian diaspora.⁴ These books attracted the Indians towards the Communists. At that very time, a young Indian Communist leader living in England,

Rajani Pam Dutta in his book '*India Today*' derogated Gandhi as the '*Joneh*'* of Indian Revolution⁵. This comment instead of benefitting the communists had harmed them much more.

Though the non-violent movement of Gandhi had gained huge popularity through its publicity and became widespread a section of the young Congress workers could not grasp its essence. While the Congress workers were hanging between violence and non-violence, certain Communist leaders like S.G Sardesai, Z.A Ahmad, R.D Bhardwaj, Hiren Mukherjee and Dinkar Mehta⁶, etc., identified themselves as Congress men, and siding with a section of young Congress workers, flouted non-violence to carry on the movement. According to sources, in Bengal and Punjab, many leaders, even being Congressmen carried on the movement through 'unannounced' violent means. In the same way, the Socialists who were opposed to Congress and Communists ideology followed the path of violence⁷

[According to the Old Testament, '*joneh*' means '*minor Prophet*', People did not have any good feelings for him, because he was selfish. Dutta's derogatory comment of calling Gandhi, '*Joneh*' had harmed the Communists much more than benefitting them.]

Even though Gandhiji knew very well about the aggressive activities of the Communists leaders who labelled themselves as '*Congress*', he ignored them in the interests of keeping the Congress together. Gandhi had a liberal view about Communist ideology and during their peril, had even gone ahead to help them. In the Meerut Murder⁸ of 17th January 1929, when several high-profile Communist leaders were jailed, Gandhi not only went to meet them in jail but also turned up in Court to get them released. Similarly, Gandhi personally tried for the release of those Communist revolutionaries who were jailed during the Bengal uprising of 1937⁹. The most important incident was when, in 1940,

while travelling to Ramgarh (Bihar) Congress Session, Gandhi, in order to focus on Communist interests arrived with a dudharxa Communist leader for 'the subject selection meeting' in his car¹⁰.

Even before the Quit India Movement, the Communists of India had displayed their sympathies with the anti-British '*fascists*'. But the situation saw a sudden change when on 2nd June 1941 Germany attacked Russia. Without waiting for the Congress, the Communists of India themselves described this attack on Russia by Germany as '*cruel and barbarous*'¹¹. (In the interests of Russia, they called it '*Peoples War*'). On the other hand, the Congress was in a fix when Japan took part in the war and chased out the British from Singapore and Burma. In such a situation, there was no alternative for Nehru, but to deliver speeches against the fascist in various parts of the country, in the interests of India. But in the midst of this anti-fascist campaign of Nehru, difference of opinion within the Congress became visible. Subhas Chandra Bose created the '*Azad Hind Fauj*' which was marching towards India with assistance from the Japanese army and at the same time, one faction of the Congress considered that the atmosphere of the World War would provide India with the best opportunity to achieve independence. In the Congress working committee meeting on 17th November 1941, there was a discussion on India demanding freedom by taking advantage of the war situation¹². Even before the meeting concluded, the British government came to know about this discussion and published it in the newspapers. Under such circumstances, to discuss all aspects a Congress Session was called on 8th August 1941 in Bombay. It was in this session, against vehement opposition of the Communists, the famous Quit India Movement against the British was announced.

Though the participation of the Communists in the Bombay Congress Session was limited, their representatives who

did participate, very expertly delivered speeches in the interests of the Communists. In the interests of Russia, they proposed that the Congress, instead of taking up the Quit India program against the British, should try to establish good relations with the Muslim league.¹³ This Communist Proposal did not find much importance amongst the Congress representatives— instead, the Quit India resolution was finally passed. In his speech after the resolution was passed, Gandhi acknowledged the Communist- forwarded proposal for Hindu-Muslim harmony and described the Communist decision to stay away from the Quit India Movement *in the interest* of Russia as a clash of ideology between the *Communist & Congress*. He said, 'Learn not to lose courage even when we are a hopeless minority and laughed at.'¹⁴

During the 2nd World War, the Communists described *the war of England-France* against Germany-Italy as an artificial war. They also mocked England as engaging in this war with an ambitious scheme of imperialism. In the 1940 Ramgarh Congress Session, their Slogan was "Ye ladai Samrajya Shahi, Na ek pai, Na ek bhai"¹⁵ (This is a war of imperialists. Neither we nor our brothers will benefit a penny from it and so, there is no need to take part in it).

But, when on 1st June 1941 Hitler invaded Russia, they did a volte face and said, "war of the Common Man"¹⁶—war for the liberation of mankind. They felt that taking part in the Quit India Movement against the British, while staying in the Congress would amount to an act against Russia. In this matter, their logic was, with direct assistance from England, Russia wanted to obstruct the German invasion.

Prior to the Bombay Congress Session, when a large number of Communist leaders were arrested by the police and put in the 'Deoli Detention Camp', it was publicized that the Indian Communists were abandoning thoughts of Russia. B. T Ranadwiv

opposed this¹⁷ and gave a clarification at that time, that their first priority was to save Russia. This clarification was not only approved by the Communist Politburo leaders in Deoli Detention Camp, in addition a statement as to why it was important to think about Russia was attached with it and sent to the press for circulation. At that time, a call from Harry Pollit, the British Communist leader to all the Communists of the world to stand with Russia strengthened the stand of the Indian Communists. Realising the importance of the situation, the 'All India Students Federation' guided by Communist ideology organised a meeting in Patna¹⁸ (21st September 1942) and through the students tried to spread the propaganda that Russia was more important at that time than the Quit India Movement. The division between the Congress and the Communist was gradually becoming wider and the Congress now had to give importance to the activities of the Communists.

Not satisfied with staying away from the Quit India Movement themselves, the Communists called upon the masses to abstain from participating in it. They organised anti-movement meetings in various places and tried to keep the cloth mills, factories, industries as well as markets away from the grip of the movement. However, on account of the very strong atmosphere of the Quit India Movement, they did not get much support. When M.K. Gandhi came out of jail in 1944, a large number of Communist leaders under the leadership of Mohan Kumarmangalam went to meet him with an appeal to diffuse the anger that was built amidst the Congress workers on account of the Communists not participating in the Quit India Movement. They were charmed by the solace extended by Gandhi. Many of this group even expressed their wish to return to the side of Congress.¹⁹ Mention must be made that Kumarmangalam abandoned Communist ideology then itself and came to the

Congress. During Indira Gandhi's Prime Ministership (19th March 1971 – 18th January 1977) he even took the post of a Cabinet Minister²⁰.

After the Quit India Movement, the conflict between the Congress and Communist increased day by day. Particularly when towards the end of 1945 most of the jailed Congress leaders came out, the conflicts resulted in enmity. Incidents like publicly attacking Communist leaders and destroying their property become frequent. On 17th December 1946, the Communists were boycotted from the National Congress and on 2nd October 1948, the Socialists voluntarily left the Congress. This was clear proof that there was no need of 'Non-Congressi's' in the Congress.

Quit India Movement of 1942 can be described as the final phase of the Indian freedom struggle. The bold slogan of 'Do or Die' that rendered through the skies and air of India shook the British rulers. In this situation, the Communists were not satisfied by protesting this strong national movement, but also coined the 2nd World War as a "War for the Masses" and tried their best to help the war efforts. This unimaginable change in the ideology of the Indian Communists astonished the countrymen.

References:

- ¹ *Revolt of 1942*, Amba Prasad, 1958, New Delhi, p.47
- ² *History of National Congress, Vol-II*, B.Pattavi Sitaramaiyya, 1947, Bombay, pp.92-96
- ³ *Ibid*, p.94
- ⁴ *Ibid; Communist and Quit India Struggle*, Nikhil Chakrabarty, *Mainstream*, Vol-XXXII, 13 August 1994, pp.4,5,34
- ⁵ *Indian Response to Second World War*, Mansur Ahmad, 1987, p.63
- ⁶ *Communist and Quit India Struggle*, Nikhil Chakrabarty, *Mainstream*, Vol-XXXII, 13 August 1994, pp.4,5,34

⁸ *Indian Response to Second World War*, Mansur Ahmad, 1987, pp.101-103

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ *India Wins Freedom*, Abul Kalam Azad, 1939, Calcutta, pp.123-130

¹¹ *Communist and Quit India Struggle*, Nikhil Chakrabarty, *Mainstream*, Vol-XXXII, 13 August 1994, pp.4,5,34.

¹² *Ibid*

¹⁴ *Communist and Quit India Struggle*, Nikhil Chakrabarty, *Mainstream*, Vol-XXXII, 13 August 1994, pp.4,5,34.

¹⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁷ *Indian Response to Second World War*, Mansur Ahmad, 1987, pp.101-103

¹⁸ *Communist and Quit India Struggle*, Nikhil Chakrabarty, *Mainstream*, Vol-XXXII, 13 August 1994, pp.4,5,34.

²⁰ *Indian Response to Second World War*, Mansur Ahmad, 1987, pp.101-103.

CHAPTER 15

FLOWERS OF DEBOKANTA'S POETRY & A MISTAKE OF GAUHATI UNIVERSITY

It has been seen that many Universities honour deserving persons for their unique contributions to the society by conferring the Honourable Doctorate degree. This has been thought to be an independent power that can be exercised by any University, the highest institution in the academic world. The Academic Council of Gauhati University¹ is learnt to have taken such a praiseworthy decision to confer the Doctorate Honour upon three very special, talented personalities.

A poet who enriched Assamese poetic literature with his novelty of thought and the physical, a modern poet of renown, the only Assamese who got the opportunity to represent India in the United Nations, Debakanta Barua, was chosen by Gauhati University for conferring the prestigious Doctorate Degree. Along with him, the two other persons chosen for this honour were, first a person who found acceptance among the Assamese masses as a 'national leader' (of the Assamese), a pure Gandhian, freedom fighter, the 2nd Chief Minister of Assam— Bishnuram Medhi—the eminent Assamese, who, in his efforts of placing Assam's interests in front of the Central government, took on the ire of none other than Nehru, and finally was compelled to leave the Chief Minister's chair to be seated as the Governor of Tamil Nadu. Similarly, the third person was the man who had supervised the Research work, 'Assamese: Its Formation and Development' of the world famous Pandit, Professor of Calcutta University and renowned linguist of Assam, Dr. B.K. Kakoty that had established

Assamese language in the world platform—Dr. Suniti Kumar Chattapodhyay.

It may be mentioned that initially in the meeting of Academic Council of Gauhati University, only the name of Debakanta Barua had been presented. This was done by Dr. Bhagawan Lahkar, the then Principal of Guwahati Commerce College and Dr. Malhotra by referring to Debakanta Barua's literary talents. Though almost all members of the Academic Council of Gauhati University had consented to their proposal, after discussions, it was decided to honour Bishnuram Medhi and Dr. Suniti Kumar Chattapodhyay also along with Barua. This decision did not lead to any kind of controversy because both the other personalities chosen for the honour along with Debakanta Barua were established stalwarts in their respective fields.

This proposal of the Academic Council of Gauhati University to honour the three personalities was thereafter approved by Gauhati University under Chairmanship of the then Vice Chancellor, Dr. Hiten Barua. The decision of the Academic Council taken on 11th June 1976, was decided to be implemented by the Executive Council in the next University Convocation². This news, published from the University was of special significance for the intellectual society and everyone hailed this decision of the University.

Unfortunately, on 19th February 1979, an Academic Council meeting of Gauhati University cancelled its earlier decision to honour the three eminent personalities³. What was the mystery behind cancelling a unanimous decision after 2 years, 8 months and 5 days?! What was the reason behind the drama of this cancelation? The answers to these questions have never been given to the people of Assam by Gauhati University till today. Even today, it remains unanswered as to why the intellectuals associated with Gauhati University—the highest academic

institution of Assam cancelled a decision to honour three eminent personalities without any logic, thus humiliating these learned doyens!

A part from of the new proposal accepted in the Academic Council meeting of 19th February 1979 that cancelled its earlier decision went thus ".....of the three personalities Dr. Chatterjee has since deceased. In the changed circumstances after adoption of this resolution by the Academic Council, the issue has led to sufficient controversy for which it will be appropriate to review the decision, resolved that the earlier decision to confer the degree.....persons noted above be made imperative...."⁴. A decision can always be revoked or cancelled with proper logic and justification, but what came to light at that time was definitely not based on any such logic. Moreover, the most important point was the justification forwarded for the cancellation was not acceptable equally or all the three personalities! The real cause for this cancellation was not revealed by the Gauhati University and they were beating around the bush. This in fact, can be said to have slurred the reputation and prestige of the institution. In reality, the University fell prey to contemporary politics and to please the 'nepotism' of the political leaders had cancelled the earlier decision and humiliated the three eminent men.

The decision of the Academic Council of Gauhati University (in the presence of the 40 members) to cancel the earlier decision, was reported in the newspapers that, "*the decision of the Academic Council to honour the three personalities has created a lot of controversy in the 'subsequent changed atmosphere' (meaning after the decision to confer the honour had been taken) and as such, it was necessary to review the earlier decision.*" It was never clarified as to what 'subsequent changed atmosphere' was the knowledgeable learned 40 member Academic Council referring to?

Of course, political change did happen at that time— however it cannot be accepted that this could lead to any changes in the academic and intellectual atmosphere. In the political arena, the 'Emergency' had come to an end and both at the Centre and State (Assam) Janata Dal government came to power. Apart from this, what other 'change' had taken place, the university was silent. And if the political change had led to the changing of the decisions of the Academic Council and Gauhati University as a whole, it can be said that Gauhati University at that time was completely under partisan politics. Apart from political influence, there could be no other reason for the cancellation of the decision to confer the prestigious Doctorate degree on the said personalities. Leaving aside Medhi, the other two persons had been chosen as the pioneers of literature and academic scholars. Even in the case of Bishnuram Medhi it was to honour his service to the motherland, his love for his nationality (Assamese, in this context), his dedication and devotion-- things which had been considered beyond the narrow boundaries of politics— that his name had been chosen. It hardly needs to be stated that the decision cancelling the conferment of the Doctorate degree upon the three eminent personalities had no impact whatsoever on their respective achievements. Dr. Suniti Kumar Chottopadhyay's scholarly acumen did not pale, Medhi's patriotism did not wane and neither did it make any difference to Debakanta Barua's literary contributions. It needs to be mentioned that Gauhati University had sent a letter⁵ personally to Dr. Suniti Kumar Chottopadhyay informing him about the decision of conferring Doctorate degree. Dr. Chottopadhyay expired exactly 2 years and 2 months after this letter had been sent. This eminent scholar, instead of being honoured, left this world with utter humiliation heaped on him by the Gauhati University. On the other hand, when the Academic Council took its second proposal, Medhi was a sick and bed-ridden 90-years old man. His physical ailing

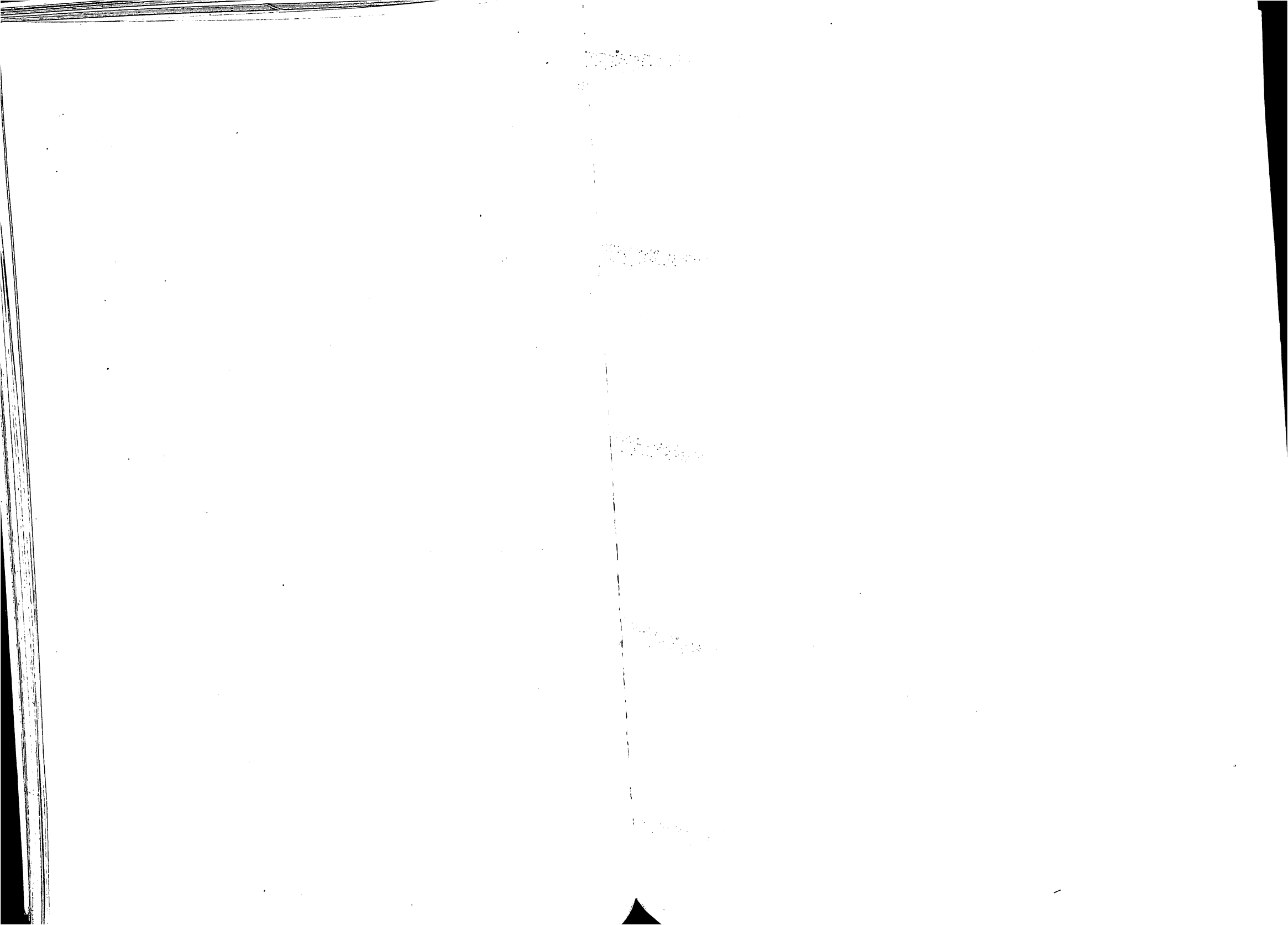
apart, this insult from Gauhati University must have added to his mental miseries⁶.

It needs to be mentioned that when, in the first meeting of the Academic Council, it was discussed about conferring the Doctorate degree on Debakanta Barua, though there was mild opposition from Dr. Hariprasanna Das, Professor, Department of Geography and Sri Tirthanath Sarma, Principal, Pragjyotish College, finally the proposal was accepted unanimously⁷. Similarly, in the meeting of the Executive Council, special member, Prafulla Dutta Goswami had vehemently protested against the approval of the proposal⁸. His argument was 'If the University wishes to honour a politician for his literary creations, then the concerned person should retire from active politics'—this argument, actually, had no logic at all. It seemed like an emotionally motivated statement. Gauhati University (during the Emergency) had wanted to enjoy the blessings of the 'powerful hero' Debakanta Barua and as such, he had been chosen for the Doctorate honour. This became crystal clear in the subsequent times. When the Janata Government came to power in the Centre, the 'powerful hero' became 'powerless', and Gauhati University now felt no hesitation at all to belittle him and cancel its decision. After the Congress lost power, the University was in dilemma whether or not to honour Debakanta Barua with the Doctorate degree. The University began to avoid this issue to the extent that in the 1978 Convocation ceremony, it refused to award the Doctorate degree to any of the scholars who had completed their research⁹. With the refusal by the University to honour Debakanta Barua, the other two personalities were also deprived of the honour. Dr. Deboprasad Barua of the department of History, Gauhati University had opposed conferring the honour on Debakanta Barua, in the Academic Council and subsequently, with his logic sweeping the Gauhati University, it was decided not to honour Debakanta Barua. Dr. Barua's logic was 'during

the emergency period the intellectual society of Gauhati University had been fascinated by the poetic talent of Debakanta Barua, but with the end of the emergency, their fascination has also come to an end'. As such, 'just as the proposal to honour Debakanta Barua had been unanimous, the proposal not to honour him was also unanimous'¹⁰. This comment of educationist Dr. Deboprasad Barua remains a matter of ridicule. Such a light weightless comment from a person like Dr. Barua shocked the educated society of Assam. Along with Debakanta Barua, the other two personalities were also ridiculed by the University. This has remained a **historical blunder** on the part of Gauhati University. It has been accepted that it is the duty of the educated society to show respect to the honourable personalities. If someone neglects this duty, it can still be accepted. But no one has the power to humiliate such honourable personalities.

References:

- ¹ Saptahik Nilachal, Editor, Homen Borgohain, 16 June 1974, p.3
- ² Saptahik Nilachal, Editor, Homen Borgohain, 30 June 1974, p.3
- ³ Nagorik, Editor, Homen Borgohain, 1 March 1979, p.3
- ⁴ Guwahati Bishwa vidyaloye Bishmuram Medhik Apaman Korile, Staff Reporter, Nagorik, Editor, Homen Borgohain, 22 March 1979, p.3
- ⁵ Saptahik Nilachal, Editor, Homen Borgohain, 15 June 1974, p.3
- ⁶ Ibid; Nagorik, Editor, Homen Borgohain, 22 March 1979, p.3
- ⁷ Nagorik, Editor, Homen Borgohain, 1 March 1979, p.3
- ⁸ Ibid
- ⁹ Ibid
- ¹⁰ Nagorik, Editor, Homen Borgohain, 22 March 1979, p.3





Dr. Ranjit Sabhapandit is an Associate Professor of History at Baosi Banikanta Kakati College, Nagaon, Barpeta, Assam. His academic interests include India's North-East Asia, peace and conflict resolution, human development and security, insurgency, ethnicity and identity politics. Dr. Sabhapandit has published extensively in regional and national newspapers and journals and has authored several books. He participates in debates and discussions on multiple issues in the state on various platforms, including print and electronic media. Currently a member of NEHA and IHC, has provided consultancy services to SEBA, AHSEC and has contributed in content writing for class-IX and class-X and reference book for PG. under GU. His books '*From Saiyyad Saddulla to Bordoloi*', '*Prabash Prabrajan Anuprabeshar Chakrabehut Asom*', '*Asomor Rajnoitik Itihas (1952-2021)*', '*Prithibir Somu Itihas*' (Trans.), '*Nilachalar Sampadakiya*', '*Nagarikar Sampadakiya*' etc. are seething undercurrents in responsible society.

Publisher

ISBN: 978-81-954457-6-9



9 788195 445769