

INDIAN FREEDOM MOVEMENT AND NATIONAL AWAKENING IN ASSAM

KEY POINTS

- Growth of Assamese Nationalism and Formation of Literary Associations and Socio-political Organisations
- Role of Assam in the National Movement for Independence
- Ministry of Gopinath Bordoloi
- Some Post-Independence Institutions

4.00 : Growth of Assamese Nationalism

The first Anglo-Burmese war took place in 1825. After the expulsion of the Burmese from Assam, Yandaboo Treaty was signed on 24th February 1826. It resulted in the political annexation of Assam by the East India Company (EIC). After the Sepoy Mutiny, India came under the direct rule of the British Crown on the basis of Queen's Proclamation of 1858. The period from 1826 to 1858 is known as Company Raj in Assam. The British annexation of Assam led to economic and political restructuring of the region. The introduction of English education had dual impact on Indian society. On one hand, it helped the educated indigenous class to critically question their tradition and on the other hand it facilitated the growth of national awareness. Like in other parts of India,

by the end of the 19th century, voice of dissent against colonial dominance began to stir the people of Assam. Gradually the voice of dissent against the British rule found expression in the writings of several prominent personalities of the time arousing feelings of nationalism in the region. Several socio-cultural organisations were formed to highlight the problems and aspirations of the common people.

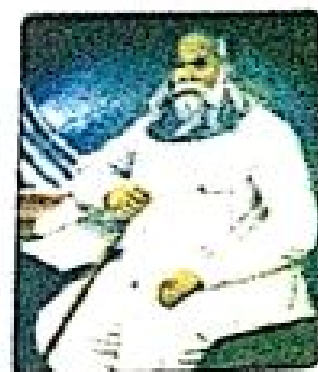
4.01 : Asomiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha

By the middle of the 19th century, Assam witnessed the growth of a newly emerged educated Assamese middle class. Another significant development of the period was the growth of national awareness. As a result, the new middle class made efforts to organise itself. One of the earliest associations was the *Gyan Pradayini Sabha* initiated by Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan and Gunaviram Barua in 1857. Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan strongly opposed the introduction of the Bengali language in schools, offices and courts in place of Assamese in 1836. Consequently, there had been heated debate in the press regarding the independent status of the Assamese language and re-establishing it in schools and offices. This movement for the Assamese language eventually led to the growth of cultural regeneration in Assam. It was only in 1873 the Assamese language was re-established. However, in the process language became a marker of Assamese nationalism.

In Calcutta we find more strong initiatives by the students from Assam to form associations in order to improve the Assamese language and literature. The first known association formed in Calcutta was the *Assamese Literary Society* established in 1872 under the leadership of Devicharan Barua and Gangagovinda Phukan. The proclaimed objective of the society was literary, yet it also played a political role. In 1872, two of its illustrious members, Jagannath Barua and Manik Chandra Barooah, on behalf of the society submitted a memorandum to the Viceroy, Lord Northbrook appealing to take necessary steps for the development of the natural resources of Assam and linking Assam with Bengal by railway. The Society was active till 1885.

With the growing attacks on the Assamese language in the Bengali press the Assamese students in Calcutta felt the need to organise an association to enrich the Assamese language and literature. Consequently in 1888, the *Asomiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha* was formed and it soon matured into a literary organisation under the able guidance of students like Hemchandra Goswami, Lakshminath Bezbarua, Kanaklal Barua, Ramakanta Bārkakati and Chandrakumar Agarwala. The *Asomiya Bhasa*

Utkali Sadhini Sabha aroused a sense of unity and national awareness amongst the Assamese. To develop a strong scientific base for the Assamese language, the *Sabha* took the initiative of adopting a correct and standardised grammatical system in all the vernacular schools of Assam. It also decided to compile a comprehensive social history of Assam and to translate the important Sanskrit works into Assamese. It was due to the initiative of the *Asomiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha*, the government undertook the publication of Hemchandra Barua's magnum opus, *Hemkosh*.



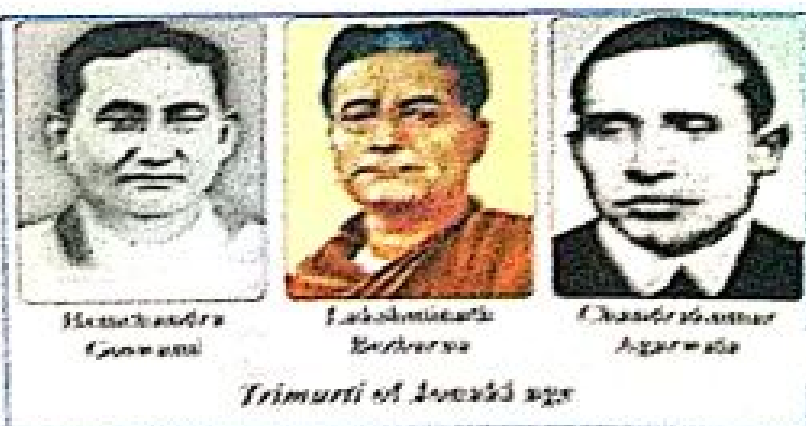
Hemchandra Barua,
the author of *Hemkosh*

The *Asomiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha* used to hold regular scholarly discussions on various subjects like Assam's history, culture, literature and language. It also sought to establish branches in different parts of Assam. Several Assamese students who returned to Assam after completion of their studies at Calcutta formed branches in Kohima, Tezpur, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Nowgong, Golaghat, Barpeta, Goalpara, Jorhat, and Guwahati. The most significant contribution of the *Asomiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha* was the publication of their journal, *Jonaki* which ushered in a new era in Assamese literature.

4.02 : Jonaki Age

Jonaki, the mouthpiece of the ABUSS played a significant role in literary and cultural regeneration of Assam. The cultural and literary renaissance started by *Orunodoi* reached its zenith in the pages of *Jonaki*. Chandrakumar Agarwala was the first editor of *Jonaki*. It successfully brought out new literary talents amongst the Assamese intelligentsia of the period. Chandrakumar Agarwala, the editor of *Jonaki*, in the inaugural issue, made it clear that the politics of the rulers was beyond the purview of *Jonaki*. Consequently, *Jonaki* never dabbled in politics, but the articles and poems published in it reflected the nationalistic views of the authors.

One of the recurrent themes of *Jonaki* was the decline of indigenous industries and handicrafts of Assam after British annexation and about regenerating economic self-dependence. Kamalabai Barua and Kamalabanta Bhattacharya regularly wrote about the numerous handicrafts of Assam and made urgent appeal to revive them.



Trimurti of *Jonaki* age

progress of Assam. Lakshminath Bezbarua's 'Mor Desh', 'Assam Sangeet', 'Peen Boragi' etc. and the writings of Ambikagiri Raychoudhury used to popularise nationalistic sentiments. *Jonaki* was successful in regenerating cultural and social consciousness in Assam.

4.03: Assam Chatra Sanmilan

The growth of national awareness also inspired the formation of the Asam Chatra Sanmilan and its first session was held on 25 December 1916 at Guwahati under the Presidentship of Lakshminath Bezbarua. The founder secretary was Chandranath Sarma. The chief objective of the Sanmilan was to enrich the mother tongue by contributing towards its development and preservation. The Chatra Sanmilan also attempted at exchanging views amongst all the students of schools and colleges of Assam. At its inception, the Sanmilan kept politics away from its purview, yet many of its leaders supported participation of students in national politics. Though it was not a political organisation, it helped in the growth of a conscious group of Assamese students.

Eminent personalities from different fields like education, politics and literature used to participate in the annual sessions of the Sanmilan. Prominent amongst them were Lakshminath Bezbarua, Padmanath Gohain Baruah, Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray, and Krishna Kanta Handique. The mouthpiece of Assam Chatra Sanmilan was MILAN. The Sanmilan made remarkable contribution to the growth of Assam's educational, cultural, and literature and also to the growth of national consciousness.

4.04: Ryot Sabha

By the end of the 19th century, Tezpur Ryot Sabha in Darrang district and Nagaon Ryot Sabha in Nowgong were established to resolve the problems faced by the peasants. In strengthening and executing the action plans of Tezpur Ryot Sabha, Lakshimikanta Barkakoty, Haribilash Agarwala, Lambodar Bora, Bhabanicharan Bhattacharya and many eminent personalities belonging to the newly organised middle class played a major role.

The Ryot Sabha raised its voice against the newly introduced land settlement in Assam by the colonial state. It demanded for the abolition of grazing tax, reduction of land tax, and to ban the migration of peasants from east Bengal. However, the sabha did not play significant role in the peasant movement of 1893-94, which took place at Rangia (Kamrup), Lachima, Sarthébari and Patharughat (Darrang) against the enhancement of land tax.

During Civil Disobedience movement (1930-34), Ryot Sabha was re-established under the guidance of Assam Provincial Congress Committee. Under the banner of Ryot Sabha, the leaders of the Congress attempted at mobilising the peasants. Ryot Sabhas came up in Sibsagar and Darrang districts. The Ryot Sabha of Nagaon and Chayduar were very strong between 1930 and 1939. During the period of the Civil Disobedience the most important demand of the Ryot Sabhas was the reduction of land tax by 50 per cent.

To direct all the Ryot Sabhas towards a common goal or objective a central committee, the All Assam Ryot Sabha was formed and its first session was held near Tilikiyam in Jorhat on 8 April 1933 under the presidency of Congress leader Nabinchandra Bordoloi. In the second session held at Dergaon around 3000 peasants were present. During the period between 1934 and 1939 around 300 Ryot Sabhas were established in different parts of Assam. Gradually, by the end of 1940, the Ryot Sabhas lost its vigour and in many parts the Ryot Sabhas were included within the Provincial Congress Committees.

4.05 : Ahom Sabha

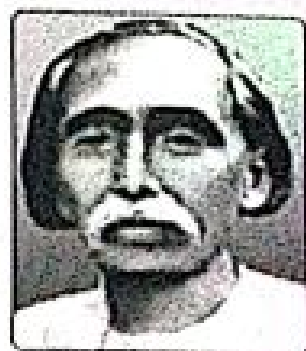
The *Ahom Sabha* was formed in 1893 by Padmanath Gohain Baruah. The first session of the Sabha was held at Sibsagar in 1893. One of the first activities of the body was an anti opium campaign. The chief aim of the Sabha was to demand for privilege for the Ahoms in the British administration and to revive their traditional religion, language and social customs, thereby re-establishing cultural identity of the Ahoms. The Sabha also demanded for providing opportunities to the Ahoms by considering them as separate community in terms of economic and educational backwardness.

In 1910, the Sabha was renamed as the Ahom Association. It became overtly political. A significant political demand of the Sabha was – to get recognition for the Ahoms as a minority community and reservation of seats in the Assembly and a separate electorate for Ahoms. The Association worked hard towards this goal throughout 1930s and 40s. In 1941, the Association witnessed internal division amongst its members. A section of them was inspired by the National Congress and formed a separate organisation, Nationalist Ahom Association. It became gradually weak by 1950.

4.06 : Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha

The *Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha* was founded in 1884 by Jagannath Barua at Jorhat. It was a landmark in the political associations of Assam.

Indian Freedom Movement and National Awakening in Assam



Padmanath Gohain Barua

The Founder President of the Sabha was Raja Narayan Singh and Jagannath Barua became the secretary. Barua while studying at Presidency College, Calcutta was inspired by the work of associations like the Atmiya Sabha, Patriot's Association, Indian Association and others in Bengal. He wanted to form similar association in Assam to represent the aspirations and grievances of the people and to pressurise the government to take steps to develop the province. Thus, the chief objectives of the *Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha* were:

- To represent the aspirations of the people to the government.
- To explain government policies to the people.
- To ameliorate the condition of the people.

Although the Sabha avoided coming into direct confrontation with the government, yet it raised its voice against exploitative government policies. Few such issues taken up by the Sabha were:

1. It raised voice against the introduction of the 'Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act', 1886.
2. In 1892-93, it took up the cause of the ryots who protested against the enhancement of revenue.
3. In 1893, the Sabha submitted a memorandum to the Royal Commission on Opium asking for gradual abolition of opium in Assam.

The Sabha was strongly against the partition of Bengal in 1905. The Sabha opined that the political future of Assam would be endangered if Assam is annexed with East Bengal. The then Chief Commissioner of Assam Bamfylde Fuller arrived at Guwahati (Municipality Office) on 1 Nov, 1905 and explained how the partition of Bengal would benefit Assam. Manik Ch. Baruah the Secretary of Assam Association and Jagannath Baruah the president of Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha were convinced to be benefitted and gave up anti Bengal partition mentality. The Sabha demanded that the interests of the Assamese people should be protected and that certain number of jobs should be reserved for them in the new province. The Sabha became weak after the death of Jagannath Baruah and survived up to 1921.

4.07 : Assam Association

A broad based provincial forum to apprise the Government of the wishes and aspirations of the people of Assam became an urgent need. This led to the formation of the *Assam Association* in 1903 by Manik Chandra Baruah. In 1905, the first session of the Association was held in Dibrugarh. In this session, it formally elected Raja Prabhat Chandra Baruah

as its President, Jagannath Baruah as Vice-President and Manik Chandra Baruah as General Secretary. The Association served as the mouth piece of the people of Assam in presenting to the authorities their '*needs and grievances, hopes and aspirations*'. Until World War I the National Congress had negligible presence in Assam, and the *Assam Association* was the most influential organisation during that period. Like *Jorhat Sarbajamik Sabha*, it did not believe in direct confrontation with the authorities. The Association followed peaceful and constitutional methods to bring change. Some of the members of the Association were also the members of the Legislative Council, and therefore, could influence the government through their speeches and debates on the floor of the Council. Some of the issues raised by the Association were:

1. It was critical of the predominance of government officials in the Municipal Committee and of tea planters in the Local Boards.
2. It demanded democratisation of the local bodies.
3. It opposed enhancement of taxes, excise policy of the government, and demanded absolute prohibition of opium.
4. It was concerned about the development of the province in the field of education. Hence, it negotiated for the representation of Assam in the Calcutta University Syndicate, appointment of Assamese teachers in Cotton College, establishment of technical institutions.

One of the major issues undertaken by the Association was to oppose the incorporation of Assam into a single province named as Eastern Bengal and Assam in 1905. In 1907, the Association submitted a memorandum to the Secretary of State for India to separate Assam from East Bengal. It demanded the introduction of the Montagu- Chelmsford reforms of 1918 in Assam as well. For this purpose the Association sent a team of seven members to Calcutta in 1917. The Association even sent Nabin Chandra Bordoloi and Prasanna Kumar Baruah to London for the same. Due to the pressure built up by the Association, Assam came under the reforms of Montagu-Chelmsford. Another major demand put forward by the Association in 1920 was the demand for the establishment of a university in Assam.

The Assam Association got actively involved in the Non-Cooperation Movement, 1921. Finally its members felt that Association should identify itself with the aims and ideals of the Congress and change its provincial outlook in order to serve the larger interest of the country's ultimate goal in the struggle for freedom. In 1916, the

Association sent delegates to the Indian National Congress and thus established a formal relationship with Congress. The delegates of the Association also attended Nagpur Congress. Over the years, a greater number of delegates from Assam started attending annual conference of the Indian National Congress and in 1921 the Assam association merged with the Assam Provincial Congress Committee.

4.08 : Assam Provincial Congress Committee

Like the Indian National Congress, the *Assam Provincial Congress Committee* was also a result of nationalist zeal against British rule. The formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 marked the beginning of a new era in the freedom movement of India. Many organisations of Assam started sending their representatives to the various sessions of the Congress.

We have already mentioned in the above section that the *Assam Association* had already actively participating in the national politics under the leadership of the Congress. Many of its leaders felt that the Association should identify itself with the aims and ideals of the Congress. At the same time, some other members refused to get amalgamated with the Congress. However, the plans and programmes of the Congress started immensely attracting the middle class. As a result, a discussion to amalgamate the Association with the Congress took place at a meeting of the association held at Jorhat on 18 April, 1921 with Chobilal Upadhyay in the chair. At the initiative of leaders like Chobilal Upadhyay, Nabin Chandra Bordoloi, Krishna Kanta Bhattacharya, Assam Association decided to merge itself in the newly formed *Assam Provincial Congress Committee* in 1921 which was affiliated to the Indian National Congress. It is worth mentioning that the All India Congress Committee in its Nagpur Session in 1920 officially accepted the principle of reorganisation of states on the basis of language which appealed the leaders of Assam as language had been a sensitive issue in Assam.

Subsequently, an ad hoc committee of *Assam Provincial Congress Committee* was formed in June 1921, with its headquarter at Guwahati and Kuladhar Chaliha as its president. Later Tarun Ram Phookan became the president. Under the initiative of the *Assam Provincial Congress Committee*, Gandhi was invited to Assam in 1921 to propagate the message of non-co-operation. His visit tremendously encouraged the congress workers to carry out the non-cooperation movement and implement the principles of Swadeshi. At Pandu in 1926, the 41 All India Congress



Karmabir Nabin
Chandra Bordoloi

Committee session was hosted by the *Assam Provincial Congress Committee*.

In the following years, leaders like Bishnuram Medhi, Siddhinath Sarmah, Maulana Tayebullah, Ambikagiri Raichoudhury and a host of prominent members took the initiative to implement the plans and programmes of the Congress. The first officially elected President of the *Assam Provincial Congress Committee* was Bishnuram Medhi who was elected in 1930 for a period of 9 years. The Congress party could finally secure a major victory in the general elections held in 1946 and Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi became the first Premier of the Assam Province. In 1946 when the Cabinet Mission proposed to integrate Assam and the North East into group C with East Bengal, the Congress party under Bordoloi strongly protested against the proposal. Ultimately, Assam was not included in Group C for the movement led by Bordoloi, supported by Gandhi.

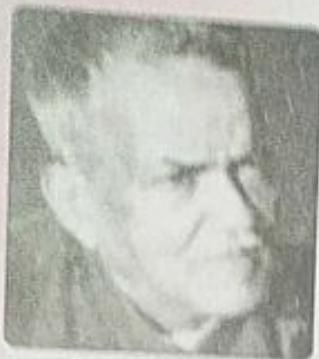
4.09 : Swadeshi Movement and Assam

The new province proposed to be constituted by the British Govt. by combining Assam and Eastern Bengal was first named as Eastern Bengal. Though the vast area of Assam was included in new province, the name 'Assam' was dropped from the title of the province. In other words, Assam was about to lose its identity and existence. The European Tea Planters' Association in Assam was aggrieved with this and objected to this decision. They argued that the name Assam is famous for tea in the international market and it should be there in the name of new province. The British agreed to change the name and the new name became 'Eastern Bengal and Assam.'

The 'Eastern Bengal and Assam' became a province under the Lieutenant Governor right from the implementation of the partition of Bengal on 16 Oct. 1905. The then Commissioner of Assam Fuller became the Lt. Governor of the new province. At the same time the capital of Assam was shifted from Shillong to Dhaka, Dhaka became the new capital of 'Eastern Bengal and Assam'.

The attitude of 'Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha' and 'Assam Association' was flexible on the issue of partition of Bengal. They became supporter of partition expecting certain benefits out of it. But at the same time, the role of the leaders like Padmanath Gohain Barua, Ambikagiri Raychoudhury, Triguna Barua, Raktim Bora etc. was different. They were dead against the partition and made propaganda among the Assamese to protest the partition.

In the meantime, the effect of the Swadeshi movement extended up to Assam. The influence of the movement was seen mainly in Dhubri, Gauripur, Goalpara, Guwahati, Tezpur, Dibrugarh etc. town of the Brahmaputra Valley. Asom Keshari Ambikagiri Raychoudhury and Gobinda Lahiri formed revolutionary organization among the students of Guwahati. They called for using



Ambikagiri
Raychoudhury

indigenous commodities and boycotting foreign goods in the districts of Assam. The people of Assam used local andi, muga, cotton and khadi cloths instead of foreign cloths. A group of students in Guwahati worked as labour in dock twice in a week and donated the money to the fund of Swadeshi movement thus earned. Ambikagiri Raychoudhury wrote a revolutionary drama named 'Bandini Bharat'. The manuscript of this drama was lifted by the police while it was being performed on the stage of Cotton Collegiate High School, on 31 July, 1906. Ambikagiri established a revolutionary organization Sewa Sangha, with the help of revolutionary activists Khudiram Bose, Barindra Ghose, Ullash Kar Dutta etc. of Calcutta. A bomb was planted on Guwahati-Shillong road targeting to kill J. B. Fuller on 7 Sept, 1906. Ambikagiri was interrogated by the police as the prime suspect of the case. As a result he had to stay at Barpeta as prisoner up to 1914. The British Govt. tried to keep aside the Brahmaputra valley people from the influence of Swadeshi movement. To be successful in this objective, they took up some welfare activities. Some of these are-

1. to introduce Assamese language and literature in the syllabus of entrance examination of Calcutta (Kolkata) University.
2. to open bachelor degrees in all departments in Cotton College to revamp the institution as the centre of excellence.
3. to reintroduce Moujadary system in the Brahmaputra Valley.
4. to introduce 20 point settlement of land.

These are some indirect benefits from Swadeshi movement. The movement became much more popular in the Surma Valley under the leadership of the Surma Valley Association. National Schools were set up at Sylhet, Habiganj, Srimangal, Lakhai, Baniachang, Karimganj, Silchar, and other places.

4.10 : The Non-Cooperation Movement and Assam

The Non-cooperation Movement (Asahayog Andolan) was a major event in the Indian struggle for independence. This movement started in 1920 and lasted through 1922, supported all along by the Indian National Congress. Under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership, the movement aimed to get rid of the British rule through non-violence (ahinsa). When the nation was responding to the call of Gandhi, the Assam Association was not sure about joining the movement. A section of the Association, led by Ganga Gobinda Barua, Tara Prasad Chaliha, Ghanashyam Barua and Chandradhar Barua felt that the Association should retain its separate identity in order to deal with the local issues of Assam. However, the majority felt the need of joining the mainstream politics. At the seventeenth session of the Assam Association held at Tezpur in December 1920, the Association after considerable debate

took the resolution of joining the non-cooperation movement and to follow the directives of the Congress on the matters regarding the movement. The movement in Assam soon merged with the national stream with the formation of the Assam Provincial Congress Committee in June 1921. Kuladhar Chaliha and Nabin Chandra Bordoloi were elected as President and Secretary of the Assam Provincial Congress Committee, respectively.

The Non-cooperation movement in Assam reached its climax with the visit of Gandhi to Assam in August 1921. In all the meetings addressed by Gandhi in major towns were attended by large section of people. Responding to the appeal made by Gandhi people joined boycott movement by organising huge bonfires of British goods. Under the leadership of Chandranath Sarma, Hemchandra Barua, Omeo Kumar Das, Muhibuddin Ahmed, the youth of Assam participated in the movement by boycotting government educational institutions. Some of the prominent youth leaders of the movement were, Lakhidhar Sarma, Rohinikanta Hatibarua, Bimalakanta Barua, Kanak Chandra Barua, Benudhar Sarma, Tilak Sarma and so on. Following the students many lawyers like Nabin Chandra Bordoloi, Kuladhar Chaliha, Tarunram Phukan, Kamini Kumar Chanda, Bishnuram Medhi left their legal practices and joined the movement. Many government officials and teachers also left their jobs. With the growing influence of the movement national schools were opened up at Gauhati, Nalbari, Jorhat, Tezpur, Sibsagar, Nowgong, Karimganj and Maulvibazar. The first national school was established at Gauhati in February 1921, which was named as Tilak Memorial School in the memory of Bal Gangadhar Tilak. This school started functioning from Rohini Kumar Chaudhury's residence at Bharalumukh. Later it was shifted to Assam Club at Uzan Bazar. The leaders of the movement also undertook a programme of constructive works.

One of the major impacts of the movement in Assam was the fall in opium consumption. As a result of the vigorous anti-opium campaign led by the Congress workers the consumption of the abkari opium fell from 1615 maunds in 1920-21 to 993 maunds in 1922-23. The revenue earned from the selling of opium decreased by 19 lakhs rupees. Another important constructive work was popularising the use of khadi and increasing the production of khadi.

The movement witnessed unprecedented support from the tea garden labourers. The large population of tea garden labourers took the opportunity to raise their voice against the colonial exploitation on them.

There were records of sporadic strikes and disturbances. In May 1921, around 8,000 labourers of thirteen tea gardens of the Chargola and Longai valley of Karimganj subdivision came together to protest against their colonial masters under the Congress leadership. Demanding a huge wage increase and accompanied by slogans of '*Gandhi Maharaaj Ki Jai*', the labourers came out of their gardens. Unnerved by such exodus of labourers, the planters started pressurising the district administration to use force to bring them back. Hundreds of labourers lost their lives in the turmoil that followed. Others were forced back to their gardens.

4.11 : Civil Disobedience Movement and Assam (1930-34)

Gandhi, who had re-entered active politics in 1928, gave the call for a Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930. Its aim was to paralyse the administration by performance of specific illegal acts. On March 12, 1930, Gandhi along with 78 companions which also included Sarojini Naidu started from Sabarmati Ashram to the sea-coast at Dandi (a distance of 240 miles). At Dandi, he and his followers broke the salt law by preparing salt illegally. The Movement spread rapidly.

In Assam, leaders like Hem Chandra Baruah, M. Tayebullah, Bishnuram Medhi, and Ambikagiri Raychoudhury assembled at Judges' Field at Guwahati and expressed their solidarity with Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha. Leeladhar Barua, then studying at C T College, Calcutta joined the Dandi March. However, at this juncture, the Congress leadership in Assam announced that the province was not ready for a mass movement. Leaders like Tarun Ram Phukan, R.K. Chaudhury and Nabin Chandra Bordoloi were not enthusiastic enough to the Civil Disobedience movement. On the other hand, committed workers like Bishnuram Medhi, Hem Chandra Baruah, Mahammad Tayebullah, and Ambikagiri Raychoudhury were actively engaged in organisational work under severe financial constraints. Under such circumstances, the Congress in Assam needed to be rejuvenated. The task was accomplished under the new leadership of Bishnuram Medhi, Mahammad Tayebullah, and Ambikagiri Raychoudhury. New committees and sub committees were constituted to look into the various matters of the movement. The objectives of the newly formed committees were to raise fund, defiance of repressive laws and ordinances, boycott of the British goods, and anti opium and liquor campaign.

Young leaders like Omeo Kumar Das appealed to the students to join the movement, but response from the students was lukewarm. However,

to protest against the arrest of Nehru on 14 April and Gandhi in 5 May 1930, students participated in hartal in a large number. On 6 and 14 May 1930, students in the Brahmaputra valley resorted to the boycott of their institutions to demonstrate their protest. Meanwhile, the situation became more sensitive when R. J. Cunningham, Director of Public Instruction, issued a circular on May 1930, popularly known as Cunningham Circular asking students and their parents to provide written undertaking guaranteeing that the students would not participate in any kind of political activity. Those found guilty would be punished by imposing fines and depriving of scholarships and also expulsion in case of severe 'crimes'. The students sharply reacted to such humiliating diktat and it further sparked off the Civil Disobedience movement in the region.

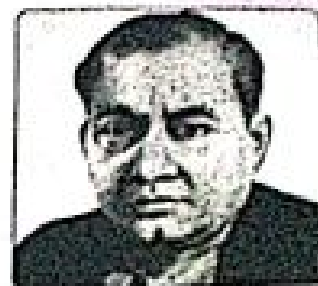
The Assam Chatra Sanmilian organised a special session at Gauhati to discuss its plan of action. They decided to picket government institutions. Around 3,117 out of 15,186 students left their institutions between July and August 1930. Picketing was soon extended to opium and liquor shops. Peasants too got engaged in the movement by demanding reduction of land revenue by 50 per cent. Forest laws were also violated in certain areas. Student unrest took place in Surma Valley as well.

4.12 Quit India Movement and Assam

Japan after overrunning Singapore and Rangoon in 1942, was knocking at the very doors of India. Gandhi and the other Congress leaders felt that the presence of the British in India would naturally invite Japan to invade India. Consequently, after much deliberation, the All India Congress Committee in Bombay on August 8, 1942, passed the famous 'Quit India' or '*Bharat Choro*' resolution. Gandhi's speech at the historic August meeting took place at Gowalia Tank in Bombay and this place is now known as the August Kranti Maidan. A great struggle was launched demanding immediate freedom and end of British rule. It was during the course of this movement that Gandhi gave his powerful slogan, 'Do or Die'. People from all walks of life participated in the movement.

The government on its part suppressed the agitation with an iron hand. The Congress party was declared illegal, and its leaders including Gandhi were put behind bars. Thousands were arrested and imprisoned. A large number of people were killed and many more were wounded.

Indian Freedom Movement and National Awakening in Assam



Omeo Kumar Das

Like in other parts of India, in Assam also the major Congress leaders were arrested and the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee, the District Congress Committee and other subsidiary bodies were declared unlawful. All forms of meeting, *hartals*, and gatherings were banned. The movement in Assam started with non-violent methods of *hartals*, processions, demonstrations, and picketing. However, leaders being in jail and with the growing police atrocities the movement turned into rebellion. The people attacked government buildings, destroyed railway tracks and sabotaged military supply lines. Particularly, in Nagaon and Darrang districts, government buildings were regularly attacked and officers were assaulted. There were incidences of sabotage on railways near Shahabibazar in Habiganj, Sarupathar in Golaghat, Panbari and Rangiya in Kamrup and Sufrai in Sibsagar.

Throughout the country, the British responded to the movement by mass arrests and public flogging. Hundreds of innocent people died in this violence and the Congress leadership was cut off from the rest of the world till the war was over. In Assam too, the government started taking stern measures to repress the movement. Kushal Konwar was hanged in connection with derailment of a train at Sarupathar. He was

the only martyr to be hanged in India during the Quit India Movement. Brutal police firings took place at Patacharkuchi (Barpeta), Fakiragram (Goalpara), Dhekiyajuli and Gohpur (both in Darrang districts) killing hundreds of people including a 14 year old girl, Kanaklata Barua of Gohpur.

It was genuinely a mass movement bringing into it hundreds of thousands of ordinary Indians. Isolated incidents of violence broke out around the country, but the British acted quickly and arrested thousands of people and kept them in jail till 1945. Apart from filling up jails with rebellious leaders, the British also went ahead and abolished civil rights, freedom of speech and freedom of press. The brutal repression did end the mass phase of the struggle, but few leaders who had escaped arrest went into hiding and tried to guide the mass movement by consolidating underground networks. Among them were Jai Prakash Narayan, S M Joshi, Aruna Asaf Ali, Ram Manohar Lohia, Achyut Patwardhan and Sucheta Kripalani. In Assam, such

History



Statue of Kanaklata Barua

underground activities were carried out by Sankar Chandra Barua, Mahendra Nath Hazarika, Jyotiprasad Agarwala, Lakhiprasad Goswami, Brajanath Sarma and Gahan Chandra Goswami. By 1943, there were around 32 underground volunteer camps at Bajali alone. Many such camps were organised in Kamrup, Nowgong, Darrang and Sibsagar.

During the Quit India Movement, parallel governments were formed in a few rural areas in Assam. Village panchayats were established at places like Bajali, Hatisung, Dhakuakhana, Raha, Jamuguri and Bahjani. No – revenue campaign was also carried out vigorously. Despite of the active involvement of the leaderless people in the movement, the movement was snuffed out very soon. By 1944, even when the Congress leaders were still behind bars, the movement was dominated by the Govt. with enormous force. Many nationalists were disappointed that the Quit India Movement had failed.

4.13 Ministry of Gopinath Bordoloi

The elections conducted after the World War II in 1946, the Indian National Congress emerged as the majority party by winning 58 seats out of 108 seats. Thus, Congress formed the government with Gopinath Bordoloi as the Prime Minister (Chief Minister) of Assam. The members of his ministry were Basanta Kr. Das, Bishnuram Medhi, J. Nichols Roy, Ramnath Das, Baidyanath Mukherjee and Abdul Matlib Mazumdar. Till independence Assam hardly had any educational infrastructure. Immediately after independence, the North Eastern region had to face the problem of borderland. In 1947 the partition of India disrupted the communication between the north-eastern region and the rest of India. Only a narrow strip of land of 12 km, joined North-East with the other parts of India. After the partition, railway lines and river transportation between West Bengal and Assam ran through East Pakistan. The partition also disrupted the complex economic ties that existed between Bengal-Assam-Arakan regions. Before the partition, this region (Bengal-Assam-Arakan) enjoyed a dynamic global economy through its agro-industries producing tea, indigo, jute, silk and cotton textiles. After the partition the newly formed states disentangled the global economy in order to build up their own regional economy. Besides economic disruption, the region had to deal with the problem of the immigrants, and geographical reconstruction problem. Thus, the region turned into a geographically isolated area, but at the same time a strategically sensitive area/.



Jyotiprasad Agarwala



Gopinath Bordoloi

Under such circumstances, the region focussed on building up its infrastructure along with overall socio-economic growth. Another important task was to develop its human resource as well. Here, we will briefly discuss a few post independence developments of Assam along with the establishment of a few institutions under the leadership of the ministry of Gopinath Bordoloi.

4.13.1 : Assam Agricultural University

The origin of the Assam Agricultural University can be traced back to 1913 when an agricultural research station was established at Karimganj followed by another at Titabar in 1923. Though the stations continued their research and training, yet it became imperative

to have an agricultural and a veterinary college which led to the establishment of the Assam Agricultural College at Jorhat and the Assam Veterinary College at Nagaon in 1948. In 1969, the Assam Agricultural University was established embracing both these Colleges and shifting the Veterinary College from Nagaon to the present location at Khanapara, Guwahati.



Main gate of Assam Agricultural University

Assam Agricultural University was the first institution of its kind in the

whole of North-East India. The main objectives of the Assam Agricultural University are:

- To produce globally competitive human resources in farm sector.
- To carry out research in both conventional and frontier areas for production.
- To optimise as well as disseminate the generated technologies as public good.
- To expand the use of technology for benefitting the food growers/producers.
- To maintain a balance among all the stakeholders of agricultural sector while emphasising on sustainability, equity and overall food security at household level.

4.13.2 : Gauhati University (GU)

The University of Gauhati, popularly known as Gauhati University, is the oldest and the first public university of North-East India. It was established on 26 January 1948. That a university could easily be established in Assam was opined by Sir Michael Sedlar, Chairman of the *Calcutta University Commission* in 1917. In the same year, the Assam Association made a public demand for a university at its annual session held at Sibsagar. In 1940 the Government appointed S. K. Bhuyan as Special Officer with the task of collecting relevant information on the selection of site and related matters. The university was established under the Gauhati University Act 1947 of the government of Assam in 1948. The first court meeting of the university was held on 26 January 1948, which is considered as the foundation day, of the university. It had 17 affiliated colleges and eight Post Graduate Departments on its establishment. The University which started functioning from the city centre was shifted to the present campus in 1955-56. Now, the university area is known as Gopinath Bordoloi Nagar.

4.13.3 : Assam Medical College

Assam Medical College situated at Dibrugarh is the first medical college in north-eastern India. The history of the college can be traced back to the Berry White School of Medicine which was established at Dibrugarh in 1900 using a donation of Rs. 50,000.00 from Doctor John Berry White, civil surgeon of the East India Company. In 1910 the college imported two x-ray machines from England. After the Second World War the college was shifted to nearby hospital premises that had been used by the US Army. After Independence, on 3 November 1947 the college was formally renamed to become Assam Medical College.

With increasing demands for health care and health education, the need for more medical colleges in Assam was keenly felt. The State Government in 1959 headed by Bimala Prasad Chaliha, the then Chief Minister of Assam, Mr. Fakaruddin Ali Ahmed, the then Finance Minister, and Mr. Rupnath Brahma, the then Health Minister of Assam decided to have a second medical college in Assam. Accordingly, an expert committee was set up on 7 November 1959. The committee submitted its report on 26 April 1960. By a State Government order dated 26 June 1960, Dr. S.N. Sarma, the then Principal and Superintendent of the Assam Medical College & Hospital, Dibrugarh was entrusted with the responsibility to make all necessary arrangements for starting the preclinical classes at Jalukbari from August, 1960 and also for taking

Indian Freedom Movement and National Awakening in Assam



Assam Medical College campus, Dibrugarh

necessary steps for establishment of the proposed medical colleges at Gauhati and Silchar. Accordingly the vacant Ayurvedic College buildings at Jalukbari were taken over and arrangements were started by August, 1960. On the 20 September 1960, the Gauhati Medical College was formally inaugurated. The first batch of the 100 students were interviewed and selected in the AMC, Dibrugarh in the last week of September, 1960. In 1968, Silchar Medical College was also established.

SUMMARY

- By the mid 19th century, Assam like other parts of India witnessed the growth of an English educated middle class. The exposure of the western education led the middle class to look at their society retrospectively. On the one hand, this class moved ahead to reform their society, on the other hand they organised themselves to raise their voice against colonial exploitation. As a result, a number of associations and organisations sprang up. Though the regional aspirations of the leaders of various organisations remained, but with the establishment of strong link with the National Congress by 1920 integrated Assam with the national politics. Thus, Assam made its contribution towards the national movement for independence.
- At the time of independence Assam was not only facing the problem of the immigrants but also the problem of economic and infrastructural backwardness. Gopinath Bordoloi and his ministry had to deal with such acute problems and made sincere effort to bring about an inclusive development of the region.

EXERCISE

Very Short Answer type Questions :

1. When was the Treaty of Yandaboo signed?
2. Which period is known as Company Raj in Assam?
3. When was Bengali Language introduced in Assam?
4. When was Bengali Language replaced by Assamese language?
5. What was the mouthpiece of Assam Chatra Sammilan?
6. What was main objective of the Ryot Sabha?
7. When was All Assam Ryot Sabha established?
8. Who was the Secretary of Ahom Sabha?
9. When and under whose leadership was Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha constituted?
10. Who were the first President and Secretary of Assam Provincial Congress Committee?
11. Who was the first formally elected president of APCC?
12. Who was the first Prime Minister of Assam and when was he elected?
13. On what crime Kushal Konwar was hanged?
14. When was Gauhati University established?
15. When the name Assam Medical College was formally introduced?
16. When was Gauhati Medical College formally started?

Short Answer type Questions :

1. Write a brief note on Assamese Literary Society.
2. Give a brief trace of important nationalist rise in Jonaki Age.
3. Write briefly on the political demands of Ahom Sabha.
4. What were the issues raised by Assam Association before the British Government?
5. Mention about the Assamese leaders who had led the Non-cooperation Movement in Assam.
6. Write about Cunningham Circular.
7. Write briefly about the problems faced by the Ministry of Gopinath Bordoloi after independence.
8. Write brief history of establishment of Assam Agriculture University.
9. Write brief history of establishment of Assam Medical College.

Long Answer type Questions :

1. Discuss the role and activities of Asomiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha?
2. Write about the contribution of Assam Chatra Sammilan.
3. Give an account on the objectives and role of the Ryot Sabhas.
4. Write about the objectives and activities of Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha.
5. Write on the contribution of Assam Association towards social reform in British ruled Assam.
6. Give brief description on the creation and the role of Assam Provincial Congress Committee.
7. Give brief description on the role of Assam in Swadeshi Movement.
8. Give an account on the role of Assam in Non-cooperation movement.
9. Give an account on the role of Assam in Civil Disobedience Movement.
10. Write about the Quit India Movement in Assam.
11. Give a brief description about the institutions established in Assam under the leadership of Bordoloi Ministry.