



INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT: PLACE AND UNIQUENESS OF ASSAM WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO 'SEVA DAL' FREEDOM FIGHTERS

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ABSTRACT

The National Movement of India has its impact in making the contemporary India. The movement broke the isolation in the Indian as well as Assamese society. The movement got the moral and active support from all sections of the society. It resulted in the growth of National sentiment and consciousness among the Indian people. Assam had played a significant role in the struggle for freedom. Different organizations made conscious to the Assamese people for their cultural identities and thus formed the backbone of the movement. The patriot intellectual leadership was torn between two aspects- their love for motherland and their respect for Assamese culture. A special youth volunteer group was active called Mrityubahini and seva Dal during the Quit India Movement. These group of Satyagrahis had emence contribution in liberton of India as well as Assam. The paper intends to discuss on the national movement focussing on Mrityubahini freedom fighters.



KEYWORDS: National, Assam, Mrityubahini.

INTRODUCTION:

The national movement of India during the British period has its epic dimensions. Infact it is regarded as "one of the greatest mass movements in the world"(Chandra, p.7) The nationalist feelings among the Indians got its impetus during the British period as a result of the action and interaction of many general and independent forces and factors developed within the Indian society. It emerged in various forms like political, social, economic, religious and cultural.(Desai, 1948,p.15)Spread of Western Education and infiltration through Western ideas brought forth revolutionary changes in the outlook of the Indian social, religious and political spheres and it got the moral and active support from all sections of the society. Actually, the economic unity of India which was the result of the British rule becomes the objective material base for the stable unity and nationality among the disunited Indian people. It also resulted in the growth of national sentiment and consciousness among the Indian. (Desai, 1948, p.29)

DATA AND METHODOLOGY:

The study is mainly based on both primary as well as secondary data. Primary data mainly Reports, the writings or letters to different people and freedom fighters are consulted in the study and secondary data collected from different libraries, DHAetc. are consulted in the study.

An analytical and empirical method has been used in the study.

OBJECTIVES:

The basic objectives of the study are-

1. To give a brief discussion about the national movement of India.
2. To give an overview of the national movement of Assam, its place and uniqueness.
3. To analyze the role of the Mrityubahini freedom fighters in the movement.

DISCUSSION:

After the penetration of the British into India, they radically changed the economic structure of the Indian society for its own purpose. With the establishment of a centralized administration, they introduced modern education and modern means of communications and other institutions which resulted in the growth of new social forces and changes in the society. These social forces with their own unique nature came into conflict with the British imperialism and provided the motive power for the rise and development of Indian nationalism.

However, a number of statesmen and writers champion that the emergence of Indian nationalism in the 19th century was closely related to the spread of western education and the rapidly developing means of communication in the second half of the nineteenth century. They asserted that the urge for national freedom grew among the Indian people because modern education helped them to study and imbibe the doctrines of liberation propounded by western authors. Commenting on this opinion, A. R. Desai argued that it would be incorrect to conclude that Indian nationalism was the child of this education. Infact, according to him Indian nationalism was, the outcome of the new social material conditions created in Indian and the new social forces which emerged within the Indian society as a result of the British rule. It was the outcome of the objective conflict of interests, the interests of Britain to keep India politically and economically subjugated to her and the interests of the Indian people for a free political, economic and cultural evolution of the Indian society free from the British rule. (Heimsath., 1964,p-133)

In discussing the character of Indian nationalism in the nineteenth century, social scientists have been faced with the complex problem of defining Indian nationalism. Charles Heimsath cited a passage from the government of India's *Report of the States Reorganization Commission* which admits that to the average Indians, the concept of Indian nationalism was generally beyond comprehension. The only kind of nationalism that was easily intelligible to him was a culture- based regionalism, centering round the idea of linguistic homogeneity. Despite the existence of such diversities within the Indian sub- continent, however the Indian nationalists of the freedom struggle were able to spread new ideas of unity among the different population groups of the country which ultimately developed into a new phenomenon known as Indian nationalism. (Heimsath., 1964,p.133-134)

Almost every Indian started feeling a sense of belonging to his or her native land. It was Mahatma Gandhi whose leadership and peaceful style of resistance against the British rule in India sparked everyone's mind and heart and the movement was spread all over the country. The Gandhian ideology was nothing but that the practical application of which brought to an end of British colonialism in India. The Indian National Congress was organized on democratic lines, and it functioned like a parliament. That is why the word 'Congress', borrowed from USA, was used and all major decisions, throughout its history up to 1947 A.D, were taken on the basis of open discussion, open disagreement, and open voting. For example, the decision to initiate the Non- Cooperation Movement was hotly debated in the Calcutta Session of the Congress and in the end was passed with 1886 delegates voting for and 884 voting against the decision. In other words, it was India's freedom struggle which indigence the notion of democracy. (Chandra, p.56)

Again, the Indian freedom struggle was rooted in a very scientific understanding of society and therefore, the vision it was able to form was not just visionary, not something which came out of the heads of a few people, or an ideal but this vision based on a critical analysis of colonialism. The very important aspect of the vision was that it was based upon the understanding that Indian society was to be rebuilt, just as India's freedom struggle was to be fought, not by the intelligentsia alone, not by the middle class alone, but through a movement which was to be participated by and which was to be based upon the struggle of the common people or the struggle of the masses. It is very interesting that even when the movement was confined to middle classes and above all to the intelligentsia during the 19th century, this understanding was there that, it is on account of the common people, when they come on to the stage, that history develops in a proper manner. Properly it was speaking that it is the common people who develop society, it is they who make history and it is they who are responsible for the right or wrong evolution of the society. (Chandra, Bipan, p.)

Thus, the nationalist movement spread like a wild fire and consumed every other thought except the thought of national freedom and within the stir of the times Assam's role was significant. Assam had played a significant role in the struggle for freedom. Different organizations made conscious to the Assamese people for their cultural identities and thus formed the backbone of a movement for national revival of the province. With the formation of *Jorhat Sarvajanik Sabha* (1875) and the Assam Association (1903) a new political awareness developed among the Assamese intelligentsia of the 19th century. (Baruah, Padmanath Gohain, p.47) The emergence of these associations, organizations in the province was a clear indication of the general awakening of the people. However, the voice of these organizations later changed from their earlier tone. An impression of unity in diversity took a feeble shape in the Assamese society also. It is stated that the national movement was built up by yoking the forces of regionalism. (Report, 1955, p.38) The new, English-educated emerging middle class that were the product of the colonial society, foremost among them was the harbinger of the new age - Anandaram Dhekial Phukan. He was both a pioneer and a product of the modern age of enlightenment. Other intellectuals like Gunabhiram Barua, Hemchandra Goswami and many others had contributed a lot in the social formation of the Assamese society with their intellectual thinking. Actually, this was a period of emerging Assamese **linguistic** nationalism against Bengali domination. The importance of the movement for the distinctive identity of the Assamese people bears comparison with other famous movements in different parts of the country and the world at large, for instance the Irish freedom movement which was deeply rooted in the love for the national language.

The Assamese people first developed a **provincial outlook** and motivated for the fulfillment of regional aspirations as like other parts of India. As till then very few were aware that they belonged to the same nation as men from Maharashtra and the people of central India or other province. Therefore the sentiment of regional patriotism had put together to the pan- Indian in the processes of nationalist awakening. They stressed on a regional identity and fought for the protection of regional interests which witnessed the propagation of new ideas, inspiring the growth of a modern political consciousness. Under the influence of freedom movement of India, the Assamese literature helped to arouse and ingrain nationalism among the Assamese people. Assamese *drama* did most to infuse patriotism among the people. Spread of literacy in rural areas was minimal till the attainment of independence. Patriotism was, therefore, sought to be roused among the vast multitude of literate and semi-literate public by means of dramatic performance. That is why, even in the mid- twentieth century Assamese literature was largely nationalistic or patriotic. (Goswami, 2004, p.56)

In the meanwhile the need was felt by the Assamese intelligentsia also for a board based political organization to represent to the government the needs and aspirations of the people. It was in this context

that the 'Assam Association' attempted to articulate the valley's unsettled quest for linguistic and regional identity, people's concern over the opium evil and also the desire to be governed in the lower level by the own people. Though till 1921 A.D. in Assam there was no separate organization of the Indian National Congress, representatives from Assam used to attend the sessions of the Congress since its inception in 1885 A.D. and took active part in its deliberations. The Assam Association later merged with the Congress in 1921 A. D. when the Provincial Congress Committee was formed in Assam. The emergence of a group of Assamese elite, though small, infused with advanced political ideas produced a radical change in Assam politics. Assamese intellectuals of the time wanted to stand firmly on their own land, but their desperation was to look beyond the frontiers. They wanted to get rid of the colonial rule of the British Government and have *swaraj* by all means.

Gandhiji during his visit to Assam in August, 1921 A.D., was so impressed that he "expressed the hope that with a loom in every house Assam could take to *Swadeshi* earlier than other provinces in India." (Home Deptt. Pol. Deposit, March 1921, P36)

The Movement for liberation generated in the Assamese hearts a strong patriotic syndrome. Regional patriotism gave way to national patriotism. Of the early champions of nationalism mention may be made of Nabin Chandra Bardoloi, Tarun Ram Phukan and Chandranath Sarmah, Jyotiprasad Agarwala. It was due to the young nationalists who stir the hidden spirit of the Assamese youths' and inspired them to dedicate themselves to their country's cause. Jyotiprasad Agarwala in his capacity he took on the task of organizing the people of the area to carry on the fight for freedom. He engaged in spreading the concepts of *Swaraj* and *Ahimsa* among the masses. The students succeeded in spreading a net- work in the most interior villages and in bringing about a national awakening among the rural population.

The young boys and girls went round the villages selling cotton and spinning wheels. With this in mind, the Congress leaders of Assam organized a peace force of volunteers called '*Seva Dal*' who would carry on the freedom struggle in a non- violent manner. They organised peaceful processions, rallies and demonstrations and propagate the message of freedom. Again, responding Mahatma Gandhi's "Do and Die" resolution there also organised radical revolutionaries. The another wing of the freedom fighters of youths called '*Mrityubahini*'. Jyotiprasad Agarwala was made the head of the volunteers. He wrote lyrics that can set one's soul on fire even today such as-

"Tai karibo lagibo agnisnan

Saju ha saju ha nabajowan..." ("O youth, prepare yourselves; You shall have to bathe in the pool of fire...")

The song proved one of the most inspiring lyrics of the 1942 A.D. Quit India movement. Many Assamese youths were killed by British bullets during 1942 movement. At the very beginning of the Quit India Movement, most of the all- Assam Congress leaders had been arrested and the danger that in Assam the freedom movement would stray into violence was strong. The success of the movement depended on the organizational and agitational creativity and strength of the people below who were not arrested. Jyotiprasad travelled to Guwahati and was appointed Commander in Chief of the *Seva Dal* or volunteer service force. In his essay *Biyallisar Kahini* (Tale of 1942), Jyotiprasad gave a description of his activities during those days. He wrote that the rebellious excursion began under the leadership of Omeo Kumar and he was the commander of the Tezpur volunteers. The message of the revolution was propagated at electrifying speed, and the command was given to the volunteers to commence revolutionary activities. For the youth organizations of his days he became an icon- whether it is in their political or cultural gatherings

it was Jyotiprasad's voice which continued to inspire. His songs inspired the Assamese nationalists. His songs were like-

*"Mitru bijay karibo lagibo
swadhinatar sulī duwar".*

Both Mrityubahini and Seva Dal were two wings of Indian National Congress freedom fighters. They were different in their ways of activities and designs and contributed immensely towards the freedom movement of India. Seva Dal was older than Mrityubahini in its activities. It is the grassroot front organisation of Indian National Congress. Its trainers were identified by white dress, a symbol of Gandhian idealism. It was first established in Nagaon. Santi Bahini along with Mrityubahini coincided and worked together. Omeo Kumar Das, Pushpalata Das, Chandra prabha Saikiani took leadership in the formation of Mrityubahini. It was an unarmed volunteer group of young people organized to challenge the British through protests, flag hoisting and local resistance. It was the action wing to support the Indian National Movement.

The role of Assamese women in the National Movement was moulded by him. One of the remarkable characters of the Mrityubahini freedom fighter Kanaklata Baruah, a village girl was inspired by him. She wrote her name among the Satyagrahis. Her earlier name was Kali. Jyotiprasad gave her the name Kanaklata. Bhupen Hazarika also viewed that to mould one's hidden personality there needed one mentor. If Arjuna of Mahabharata was best, his teacher or mentor also be the best. Likewise in moulding the nationality of Assamese youths was discovered by Jyotiprasad Agarwala. (Hazarika, 1993, P.8) Activities in villages like Ravapara in Goalpara District, Banglabari and Gossaigaon etc. had recorded in Police Records. In villages of Gossaigaon Chandra Mohan Mazumdar, Sukhdew delivered lecture regarding the movement. They delivered Sukhdew delivered lecture regarding Non- Cooperation Movement. They delivered such lecture which may bring hatred or may be contemplated towards the British Government by the people. Again in some districts leaders were arrested for looting the foreign clothes and burnt them and also for picketing in the Excise shop. (Police Record, Goalpara District 1912-1988)

However, towards the beginning of the period of 1942 to 1947 A. D., there started to emerge a rebellious against the prevailing line of thinking of the elders amongst the younger sections of the freedom fighters. There emerged anew leadership comprising the youths of the valley and they with the help of a section of the leading personalities led the political movements in Assam against imperialism. They had stepped forward from their predecessors who adopted Assamese culture as a tool for propagating and mobilization of the masses. Thus, started with the feelings of conservative and blind regionalism, Assamese nationalism was then reaching the point of universal nationalism.

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