



FREEDOM MOVEMENT IN NORTH SALMARA SUB-DIVISION UNDER BONGAIGAON DISTRICT OF ASSAM

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The present paper is an attempt to show that the Soldiers Mutiny of 1857 was mainly the mutiny of Indian soldiers and aimed at re-establishment of the erstwhile kingdom of Indian states. General people did not participate in this mutiny at large. No any authentic evidences are found about impacts of this movement in the North salmara subdivision under Bongaigaon District of Assam.

Obviously, the Assamese mass people vis-z-vis the people of North salmara subdivision under Bongaigaon District area participated in the Swadeshi movement of 1905 at the guidance of Assam Association. But the historical background and participants of this movement are still a matter of fresh research.

Information and sources available in the reference books indicate that a peasant's conferences were held in Barghola village of Srijangram circle under Bongaigaon District of Assam in 1915, where Loknayak Amiya Kumar Das and another distinguished person of Assam Kuladhar Chaliha participated. This conference decided to protest any peasant rules and high land revenue system of the British government.

In 1920, the Kolkata session of Indian National Congress (INC) approves Gandhiji's Non-Cooperation movement against British rule. Assamese people too supported this movement heart and soul. The visit of Mahatma Gandhi to Assam in company of the Ali brothers in August, 1921, gave fillip to the movement which was already gathering momentum in both the valleys of Assam. Large crowds gathered even at wayside Railway stations to have a darshan of the Mahatma and offer him hearty ovations as he passed through Assam. The meetings he addressed at Gauhati Tezpur, Nowgong, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Silchar and Sylhet and other places drew crowds of thousands of people even from interior villages, and huge bonfires were raised in these meeting for burning large heaps of foreign cloths thrown into them by the people. Gandhiji's



visit was a tremendous success for Non-co-operation in Assam; Gandhiji himself expressed satisfaction with it when he wrote about “Lovely Assam” in his Young India. Late Harendra Narayan Singha of North Salmara and Gaurikanta Chakrabarty of Mazairmukh led this movement in Bongaigaon District area. Later on many other people joined this movement.

As, this North salmara subdivision under Bongaigaon District was a part of Goalpara district at that time, so, Goalpara became the epi centre of non-cooperation movement. On 1st March, 1920 a huge students procession were come out in protest of British misrule where Dharmeswar Das of Pachania village under Bongaigaon District resigned from his government service and led the movement. The leaders of this movement took a constructive decision to establish National School in various places of this area.

The first government prisoners of this movement in North salmara subdivision under Bongaigaon District were Parmananda Das and Dharmeswar Das. They had a very cordial relationship with Karmabir⁵ Nabin Chandra Bardoloi, who was a state leader at that time. Late Brajamohan Barman also resigned from the British emperial service in 1919 in protest of their misrule.

In 1921, the Assam Association gave up its own affiliation and merged with the INC Dharmeswar Das was elected as the first General Secretary of Goalpara district congress in 1921. In the next election of Goalpara district Congress, Mr. Kamakhaya Charan Sen of this locality became the President of the organization. Late Harandra Narayan Singha and Late Gaurikanta Chakrabarty were too elected to the district congress executive body.

In 1921, Gandhiji, Maulana Mahammad Ali and Dr. Sobhani toured Assam and appealed the Assamese people to burn ‘Bilati Kapor’⁶ the cloth manufactured in England. Many Assamese people responded to this appeal in positive, North salmara subdivision under Bongaigaon District was not exception to it. The INC volunteers took many kinds of initiatives and encouraged people to participate in the freedom struggle. In the same year almost 25 leading congress men were arrested for anti government activities. Jogendra Nath, Khabiruddin Ahmed, Samiruddin Ahmed, Brajamahan Barman, Gauri Kanta Chakrabarty were among the arrested persons of this District area. The Condition of the Goalpara Jail was the worst where these freedom fighters were kept. These arrested persons made Slogan inside the Jail and shouted as “Bandematram” Gauri Kanta Chakrabarty, Khabiruddin and Samiruddin Ahmed were ordered for Six month imprisonment for this reason.

Late Bhaben Ch. Ray and Totaram Ray led the thread prepare and cloth making movement in the Srijangram area of Bongaigaon District. They also collected donation from various persons and



run their organizational function. From 1921 to 1939, the organization of Indian National Congress in the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra of the Goalpara district was very strong. Pachania, Malegarh, Deohati, Srijangram, Boitamari, Chipanchila, Kashudoba, North Salmara, Kakojana etc. were the centre of freedom struggle.

In the year between 1921 to 1925, the impact of armed rebellion caught the mind of some local people of this area. They formed “Tarun Sangha”⁷ in Goalpara town. Durga Prasad Ray, Sarat Ch. Das, Baneshwar Ray and Akhil Ch. Das joined this Sangha and took various traditional armistic training. But due to lack of much public support, funds and sophisticated arms their effort were failed.

In 1925, Congress workers like Gobinda Chandra Dev Sharma, Chakrapani Sarma, Umesh Chandra Chacrabarty, Durga Prasad Ray and many others of this area quits their schools and joined the national struggle for freedom. They staged many protest programmes like picketing in the alcohol and antoxicating tobacco shop.

The growth of these organizations did not however affect the popularity of the Congress and Congress leaders continued to propagate the message and the ideology of the Congress. The organization set up of the Congress was being strengthened. On January, 1926 the open session of Indian National Congress was held in Pandu (Guwahati). Many freedom loving people of this area participate this movement and could see, hear the voices of Gandhiji, Pandit Motilal Nehru, Maulana Chaukat Ali, Srinivash Ayengar, Mohanlal Samena etc. The speeches and ideologies of these veteran Indian National Congress leaders influenced all section of freedom loving Assamese people.

On the occasion of Civil disobedience movement of 1930 (which was proposed by the Mahatma Gandhi and accepted in the Lahore session of INC), Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) extended its full supports and joined in the movement Goalpara district vis-à-vis Bongaigaon area obeyed the organizational decision whole heartedly. A group of 12 youth volunteers toured the villages and rural interior areas of this District and encouraged them with performing Songs dances etc. to join and support freedom struggle. This unique programme was displayed in connection with the Break down of Salt Law on March 12, 1930, when this group of youth volunteers reached Abhayapuri area of North salmara subdivision under Bongaigaon District; all students of Schools came out from classes and joined them. Later on many of them activity took part in the freedom struggle. The name of these students workers were: Gobinda Ch. Dev. Sarma and Maheswar Das (Pachania), Sankar Das and Akhil Ch. Das (Piradhara), Gitendra Mohan Das (Dharmapur), Lalit Mohan Das (Mojair Mukh), Uma Kanta Ray (Barghola), Khargeswar Das (Malegarh), Durga Prasad Ray and Baneshwar Ray (Deohati)



Gajendra Narayan Dev. Adhikary (Bishnupur), Umesh Ch. Chakrabarty (Borigaon), Ramdev Maheswari (Abhayapuri) Amrit Bhushan Adhikary (Rangapani) Baliram Nath (Batabari) etc.

One distinctive feature of the movement is Assam was the general student unrest, especially amongst students of Secondary School, caused by the promulgation in May, 1930, of a Circular by the then D.P.I. of Assam, Mr. Cunningham, requiring students and their parents and guardians to give an undertaking in writing that the students would 'refrain from participation of any kind in political activities, e.g. by way of hartals, school strikes, attendance at political meetings, picketing and thee like, and that they will respect and abide by the disciplinary rules and order of the school authority and the Education Department.' The authorities had learnt from experience that student's contribution a great deal to the success of the Congress movement during the Non-co-operation days. With the commencement of the present movement also a considerable number of students were taking part in hartals, political demonstration and the usual Congress propaganda. They were therefore contemplating the adopting of measures to bring the student community under control of the educational authorities in order to arrest the movement now launched by the Congress. The students in general refused to be so humiliated by the orders of an alien government, for they had become conscious of their self-respect as well as of national honour and the Circular was popularly denounced in public meetings held all over Assam. The students and other Congress workers took part in various agitation programmes. They quite and give up schools dit not obey government order, law and many others resigned from government services. In the meantime, the black circular known as 'Kaningum Circular' was announced. This circular clearly stated heavy punishment to those students who will take part in the agitation.

The Congress leaders of Bongaigaon District of Assam took active role in all the programme of civil disobedience movement. As a result, Govinda Ch. Dev. Sarma, Brajan Mohan Pathak, Lalit Mohan Das were arrested and sent to Guwahati jail. But according to the Gandhi – Irwin Agreement of 1931, this movement was temporarily withdrawn. Many of the arrested people were freed from bar. But as soon as Gandhiji returned from London and landed in the Bombay Port (Now Mumbai) he was arrested. This led to the agitation more strong and all section of people of India as well as Bongaigaon District area participated in the movement. Many youths of Bongaigaon District joined as congress volunteer. Persons like Akhil Ch. Das resigned from school teacher's post and joined the movement. This movement was led by a Camp director from Goalpara. Interestingly, the first such camp director was Dharmeswar Das of Pachania of this sub-division area. After the arrest of Dharmeswar Das, Braja Mohan Das was elected to the post that was also belonging to Dharmapur area of the sub-division.



In, 1932, many freedom fighters of Goalpara district were arrested. Among these arrested people, a large number of freedom fighters belong to Bongaigaon, Abhayapuri, & North Salmara, which is now a part and administrative unit of Bongaigaon district area of Assam.

In 1934, “Krishak” Samarah (peasant’s conference) was held in Goalpara. A large number of peasantry class people led by congress workers participate the conference from Bongaigaon District and raise their voice and slogan against anti people policy of British rule.

In the midst of the Second World War, there arose a fear of the war in the North east region of India. All Assamese people were in great tension. Therefore, to cape up with this situation shanty sena⁸ were formed and organized in Assam. Such Shanti sena in Abhayapuri area of Bongaigaon District were formed under the leadership of Govinda Ch. Dev Sarma. This unit of Shanti Sena works hard and achieved tremendous success to reach in its objectives. The Assam Pradesh Congress Committee President Maulana Taibullah termed it as the best Shanti Sena of the State.

In the Quite India movement of 1942, all section of people of North salmara subdivision under Bongaigaon District area took active role. People joined the agitation throwing out governments preventive rules. On 25th August, 1942, a grand procession was organized in Goalpara neglecting the preventive provision of 144. Police and military performed Lathi-Charge in the people. Many of such agitated people were wounded. Akhil Ch. Das were among the seriously injured person. Interestingly, during this quite India movement period, there were no any existences of government administration in the Abhayapuri area of North salmara subdivision under Bongaigaon District. In October, 1942, many freedom fighters of this area were arrested and sent to jail Durga Prashad Ray, Bhabani Prasad Ray, Deben Chandra Das, Nimai Chand Dutta Baruah, Lalit Mohan Das, Maheswar Das, Dharmeswar Ray, Ahi Bhusan Mukherjee, Ratneswar Das, Uma Kanta Ray, Bhuban Chandra Nath, Gauri Kanta Ray, Bhabendra Narayan Ray, were among them. Interestingly, to run the agitation many other congress leaders has hidden themselves in many interior places of the District. Among these leaders some were Govinds Ch. Dev Sarma, Kaliram Nath, Rahit Ch. Das, Jadabananda Adhikary etc.

In view of the above it becomes clear that when the freedom movement was vigorously run in North salmara subdivision under Bongaigaon District of Assam, the British Government were of the opinion that Congress party and its associated organizations as unlawful bodies. So, meetings, hartals, processions, demonstrations were strictly prohibited. Publications of news relating to the movement in the news papers or Medias were banned but special ordinances were published only. Here it is important to note that Police officers were given special power to arrest and detain suspected persons, even to open fire in case of arson and sabotage. Police and military jointly undertook operation in various places to hold back the movement. Due to the tired-less efforts, sacrifice aspiration for freedom of all section of people in the North Salmara subdivision



under Bongaigaon area of erstwhile Goalpara District (present day Bongaigaon district), the people of this area could become a part of India's struggle for freedom. Finally, it can be said that we have free India is a consequence of hard labour and active cooperation of the freedom fighters.

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