



UNDERSTANDING THE PARTICIPATION OF ASSAMESE STUDENT IN INDIAN FREEDOM STRUGGLE

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ABSTRACT:

Indian Freedom Struggle can be regarded as the milestone in Indian history. Although the anti-colonial sentiment of Indian people had already been started prior to Indian Freedom Struggle but it reached its height during historic Indian freedom struggle. Under the charismatic leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, people of India jumped into the movement by ignoring social barriers. Like in other parts of the country, people of Assam had also been participated in different programs of Freedom Struggle. During Indian Freedom Struggle the students of Assam played a significant role by shouldering different critical responsibilities for the greater interest of the motherland. Although colonial government tried to prevent the student community from joining in this mass struggle by adopting different means but such measures failed to deter them. The student of Assam had not only participated in the programs of freedom struggle rather they played the leading role in the process of mass mobilization. This article tries to understand the involvement of student community of Assam in different phases of Freedom Struggle.

KEYWORDS:

STUDENTS, FREEDOM STRUGGLE, ANTI COLONIAL, ASSAM, EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS.

INTRODUCTION:

The participation of student in public sphere is a remarkable issue of Indian history. Even some prominent congress leaders like Surendra Nath Benerjee and Subhas Chandra Bose supported the view of student participation in the contemporary politics.¹ Greatest scholar of Assam, Krishna Kanta Handique said in the fourth conference of *Assam Chatra Sanmilan* (Assam Student's Association) of 1929 that the college students should participate in the social and political movement of the country.² Likewise the other issues, the student community of India played a noteworthy role in Indian freedom struggle. This tendency of student involvement had also been noticed in the political landscape of Assam during freedom struggle. This issue of student participation in public sphere was not an unprecedented issue for the student of Assam. However, Indian freedom struggle had provided the needed ground to raise their voice against the colonial authority.

Due to the absence of congress base till 1920, the *Assam Chatra Sanmilan* played the leading role regarding the development of political consciousness amongst the people of Assam. This association also advocated the theory of active participation of Assamese student in the political sphere.³ This tendency of student involvement in political field of Assam reached its height during Indian freedom struggle. The student community of Assam had not only participated in different programs of freedom struggle rather they used to lead the people in different regions of Assam.

METHODOLOGY:

Both analytical and descriptive historical methodology has

been used in this research article. Primary sources are collected from the unpublished data from state archive, Assam and secondary sources are used from books, journal etc.

DISCUSSION:

From the Swadeshi Movement onwards, active political participation of Assamese student can be noticed. Swadeshi movement of 1905 had given a needed platform to the student community of India as well as Assam to show their patriotism towards the nation. Like in other parts of the country, the student community of Assam had also been jumped into the movement for the greater interest of the country. In this historic movement, the students of Assam in large numbers took part in different anti partition meetings and joined in the public procession by shouting *Bande Mataram*.⁴

After the Swadeshi movement the student community jumped into the Non-cooperation movement with a new courage. Under the guidance of *Assam Charta Sanmilan*, the students from different places of Assam came forward and participated in different programs of the movement.⁵ However, there were an ideological difference amongst the congress leaders regarding the boycott of school and college by the student. Leaders like Tarun Ram Phukan, Nabin Chandra Bordoloi and others did not support the policy of immediate boycotting of government schools and colleges. On the other hand leaders like Chandra Nath Sharma, Bishnuram Medhi, Ruhini Kumar Choudhari supported it. However, in January 1921, student of Cotton College resolved to boycott the institution and jumped into the movement. Moreover, some students like Lakhidhar Sharma and others who were studying in Calcutta

returned back to Assam and led the process of mass mobilization. According to the estimate of Director of Public Instruction, about 15,000 students who joined in the movement had never returned to their educational institutions. Similar simultaneous cooperation of student had also been noticed in Surma Valley where students involved themselves in different program of the movement.⁶ Moreover, this issue of boycotting government institutions by the student led to the establishment of national school in Assam. The first national school of Assam was established in Nalbari.⁷

Like Non-cooperation movement, Assamese students once again showed their valor in Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930s. The congress leaders of Assam were yet not prepared for Civil disobedience and in spite of this attitude of congress leaders, the youths of Assam jumped into the movement. In Assam youth leaders like Liladhar Baruah and Benudhar Sharma were arrested as they were leading a procession of school boys.⁸ Moreover, after the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi in 5th May 1930, people of Brahmaputra valley joined in the movement spontaneously. Prominent Congress leader, Tarun Ram Phukan asked the school and college boys to remain aloof from the *hartal* programs. However, the students of Assam were not in the position to negotiate and renegotiate with the colonial authority therefore, in between 6th and 15th May of 1930, students from Dibrugarh, North Lakhimpur, Golaghat, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Nazira, Nalbari, Guwahati and other regions took part in the picketing program. Moreover, Sibsagar Bezbaruah School and government schools of Dhuburi, Nowgong and Tezpur had remained closed for a long period of time.⁹

The issue of Cunningham Circular of J.R. Cunningham, the Director of Public instruction which tried to deter the students from joining in the movement rather added the fuel to the fire. Under the leadership of Omeo Kumar Das and Hemchandra Baruah, a strong resistance movement of student had been begun in Assam against the Cunningham Circular. Students of Cotton College and Collegiate School of Guwahati started picketing programs.¹⁰ Similar reactions of students had also been noticed in different regions of the province.

As far as student participation in Indian Freedom Struggle is concerned, hitherto unprecedented student participation was visible during Quit India Movement in Assam. Gandhi's idea of "Do or Die" had been interpreted by the student community of Assam in its widest meaning. In Assam, one group of student followed the Gandhian typical non-violent way whereas another group of student who considered non-violent mode as impractical followed the violent way. Ajit Barua, Gopal Goswami, Nilamoni Das and Biswajit Barua were the important leader of the revolutionary group.¹¹ According to an official report, the students participation in Quit India Movement was very active in Darrang, Nagoan, North Kamrup and South Goalpara. (political history of Assam pp 100). Moreover, after 10th August, 1942, under the leadership of Jorhat Student Federation in Sibsagar district, students from J.B.

College and other educational institutions joined in this mass struggle. Similarly, students from different regions of Dibrugarh had also participated in the movement by boycotting their educational institutions.¹²

Moreover, according to the report of abstract of intelligence, Assam police, 1942 & 1943, during Quit India Movement, Madan Barman, a high school student was killed in police firing at Bajali. Apart from this case students of Assam had to face different brutal police atrocities due to their involvement in this mass struggle.¹³ Again according to the daily situation report of S.P. Kamrup, on 23rd November, 1942, five school boys were arrested due to the picketing in Radha Kanta Handique Girl's College, Guwahati. Amongst them Atul Chandra Saikia of Palasbari village and Jay Kanta Das of Sualkuchi were sent to the jail for a period of time.¹⁴

As it is known that simultaneously to the non violent movement, an underground movement had also developed in Assam during Quit India Movement. Some students of Assam involved themselves in this violent task by shouldering critical responsibilities. In Guwahati, students like Ajit Barua, Gopal Goswami, Biswajit Barua and others made several attempt to demolish the government properties. This group of student also set fire on Sub Deputy Collector and made an unsuccessful attempt to demolish the Commissioner's office.¹⁵

CONCLUSION:

From the above discussion we can come to know that like in other parts of the country the student community of Assam had also been participated in different programs of the freedom movement. From the Swadeshi Movement onwards a spontaneous student involvement in different phases of Freedom Struggle had been discerned in colonial Assam. This tendency of student participation for the cause of the motherland had been reached its height during Quit India Movement. In this way for the cause of the motherland Assamese students had shouldered critical responsibilities.

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