

In 3 Volumes

Encyclopaedia of North-East India

T. RAATAN



ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF NORTH-EAST INDIA

(In 3 Volumes)
(Assam, Meghalaya)
(Vol. 1)



T. RAATAN



KALPAZ PUBLICATIONS

DELHI-110 052

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	9
<i>Introduction</i>	11
Section-I ASSAM	
1. The Land and the People: A Background	21
Brief History • British Period • Assam Under Independent India • Consequences of English Rule • (i) System of Education • (ii) Education of Girl Child (iii) Financial Transformation in Assam • (iv) Internal Regulation • (v) Means of Communication and Transportation • Impact of Gandhi and His Movements in Assam • (i) Faith in Non-violence • (ii) Communal Unity • (iii) Famous Montague-Chelmsford Reforms 1918 • (iv) Holding of Assam Chatra Sanmilan • (v) Civil Disobedience Satyagraha of 1929 • (vi) The Latter Phase of Movement. • (vii) Impact in the Hills • (viii) Jadonnang and Freedom Struggle • (ix) The Movement of Rani Gaidinliu • (x) 1942 Movement • (xi) Attainment of India Freedom and Partitions.	
2. Assam in Post-1947 Period	35
Problems After Partition: Inflow of Refugees • Difficulties of Immigrants • Fresh Planning for National Development • Disintegration of States • Emergence of Nagaland • Re-organisation of the State of Assam • Targets under the Five Year Plans • (i) Introducing Five Year Plan • (ii) Five Year Plan from 1956-61 • (iii) Five Year Plan of April 1961 to 31 March 1966 • (iv) War for Formation of Bangladesh • ASU Movement from 1979-85 • (i) Subject of Foreign Nationals • (ii) Success and the Downfall • (iii) Updating of Rolls for Mangaldai • (iv) Severe Step of Agitation • (v) Arrangements for Mid-term Polls • (vi) The Second Phase of the Protest.	
3. Identity Crisis	47
Bengalis in Assam • Conclusion • The Nepalis as Foreigner/Indian • (a) Socio-Legal Status of Nepalis in India • (b) Heterogeneous Nature of Community of Bengalis • (c) Factors behind Migration from Nepal	

• (d) Less Backlash from Bourgeoisie • Bohiragatos—The Indian Foreigners in Assam • The Marwaris in Assam • (a) Factors Behind their Success • (b) Moneylenders' Role of Marwaris • (c) Relations with Local Asamiyas • The Biharis as Hindi Speakers in Assam • Non-Hindi Speaking Indians.

4. Positive Side of Assam Movement

83

The Description • (a) Historical Transformation • (b) Enhancing Land Revenue • (c) Dominance of Dominant Class • (d) Use of Persuasive Methods • (e) Negligible Identity Crisis • The Text of the Memorandum Submitted to the Chief Election Commissioner by Certain Distinguished Members of Parliament, 1979 • This extract is about violence occurred during the Assam movement • They are Burning the Bridges • RCPI • PTCA • JANATA-S • INDEPENDENTS • Assam Accord 1985 (Memorandum of Settlement) • Foreigners Issue • Safeguards and Economic Development • Restoration of Normalcy • The Aims and Objectives of the AGP.

5. Dawn of Consciousness: 1978 to 1981

99

Byelections of 1979 • Various Organisations/Agencies and Leaders Behind the Movement • Collapse of the Borbor Ministry • The Movement Gains Strength • Mid-Term Election Issue • Uncompromising Twin Leadership • Emergency in Assam and Presidential Rule • Agents of Movement; Victims of Atrocities • Anti-social Elements • Open Pledge in Public Meetings • Oil as an Effective Measure • Violence and Victimisation in North Kamrup • Incidents of Duliajan • 26th January Tragedy • Letter of the P.M. and the First Round of Talks • Visit of Giani Zail Singh • AIPP Conference and Third Round of Talks • Beginning on 24th March of the Blockade by the Congress—I • Formation of All Assam Minorities Students' Union (AAMSU) • State Government's Stand Against the Movement • Visit of Prime Minister to Assam and Meghalaya • Suspension of Oil Blockade • April and May Developments • Protest by Foreign Nationals of Bangladesh • The Defeat of Government in Another Legal Battle • Talks between the Government and Students • Development in October and November, 1980 • Elections after the Emergency • The Atmosphere of Terror • Ban on Press • Restoration of Oil Flow • Appeal of the Taimur Government • Duration of Low Profile.

6. Socio-Cultural and Linguistic Set-up of Assam

131

Linguistic Position of Assamese • Script of the Language of Assam • Literature of Assam • Special Features of Assamese Society.

Section-II MEGHALYA

- 7. The Land and the People** 145
 Geographical Position of East Pakistan • (A) Nagaland (the Naga Hills-Tuensang region) • (B) The North-East Frontier Agency • Eco-Political Troubles • The Contributors (A) Capt Williamson A. Sangma • (B) Prof. G.G. Swell • (C) Mr. Stanley Nichols Roy.
- 8. Constitution, the Law and the Local Administration** 163
 The Seventy Third Amendment of 1992 and the State of Meghalaya • The Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.
- 9. Efficacy of Autonomous District Councils** 177
 Efficacy of ADCs in Meghalaya • (a) Judiciary • (b) Administrative Control of the District Council Exercised by the State Government through the Deputy Commissioner • (c) Provision of 12(a) and 12(b) • (d) Relevance of 73rd Amendment • II. Politics behind Para 12A of the Sixth Schedule • Analysis.
- 10. Old Tribal Set-up** 189
 (a) The Traditional Political Systems: A Generalised Approximation • (i) Traditional political system of Khasis • (ii) Traditional Political System of Jaintias • (iii) The Traditional Political System of the Garos • (b) Incorporation, Colonial Intervention and Consequent Distortion of the Traditional Political Systems • (c) Independence and Integration: Sixth Schedule and the Traditional Political Institutions • (d) Concluding Remarks.
- 11. Comparison of Functioning of Old and New Self-Governing Bodies** 203
 1. Full State Darbar i.e., Ka Darbar ka Hima Pyllum • 2. Dorbar of Thirty Villages i.e. Ka Dorbar Raid or Ka Dorbar Laiphew Shnong • 3. Council called Ka Darbar Ki Kyntoit or Ka Darbar Pyllum • 4. Village Level Darbar, i.e., Ka Darbar Shnong (Village or Local Darbar) • 5. Clan Council, i.e., Dorbar Kur • A Brief Description of the Dorbar Shong and PRIs and Comparison between them • 1. Origin and the Background • 2. Locality • 3. Criteria for Membership • 4. Institutional Leaders • 5. Written/Unwritten Laws and Practices • 6. Area of Functioning • 7. The Staff • 8. Party Politics • 9. Power, Autonomy and Control • 10. Monetary Aspects • 11. Possessions • 12. Activities • 13. Issue of Accountability • The Recommendations.
- 12. Women and the System of Local Self-governance** 213
 (A) The State of Meghalaya and The Constitution 73rd Amendment Act • Reservation for Women and the 73rd Amendment Act •

Organisations Working for Women in Meghalaya • I. Political Parties and Women in Meghalaya • (B) Women in District, State and Central Level Politics • (C) Summing Up.

- 13. Concept of New Class** 229
 Different Kinds of Political Pressures • Handling of these Pressures by Bureaucracy • Results of Unfavourable Reaction to Political Pressures • Sum Up.
- 14. Defects with Bureaucratic Functioning** 241
 Corruption in Functioning • I. Ethical Factor • II. Monetary Factor • III. Political Factor • IV. Structural Factor • V. Socio-Cultural Factor • Steps that can be Taken
 Corruption • I. Societal Structure • II. Financial Measures • III Political Aspect • Need for Structural Reforms • Lack of Efficiency I. Administrative Reasons • II. Political Reasons • III. Social Reasons • IV. Personal Factor • V. Financial Factor • D. Remedial Measures Against Inefficiency • (a) Administrative Steps. • (b) Political Steps. • Steps for Improving Personal Standard and Ability.

Index

259



Preface

The series *Encyclopaedia of North-East India* seeks to bring together in one place all information on North-Eastern States in India and particularly included in the Indian Union with great trouble and then finally conferred the status of statehood one by one.

Having always suffered with one lacunae or the other may it be terrorism or below average economic development, these states of store house of rich natural resources and moreover very distinct tribal culture. Despite all this, not much documentation has been done on presenting all the information about North-East in one volume or one series.

Present volume, Vol. I, of the series which is about Assam and Meghalaya is as said, a collection of significant information about the States. Both the States have contributed immensely not only to distinct culture and economy of the North-East region but of India as a whole.

Assam is said to be sentinel of North-Eastern part of India and also a gateway to North-Eastern States. Another significance of the State is that it is very close to India's international borders touching Bangladesh and Bhutan. Assam is surrounded by Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh in the north, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh the East and Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram in the South.

Now coming to Meghalaya, the other State of the present volume, it came into existence as full fledged State on 2nd January, 1972. Meghalaya is surrounded in north and east by Assam and on the south and west by Bangladesh. It is predominantly a hill state and inhabited by Garo, Khasi and Jaintia tribal communities and thus contains important elements of distinct tribal culture.

Having such significant character and so strategic location with international boundaries it becomes highly important to document important information about these states and present them in front of those to whom this is of any use.

Divided in two sections on Assam and Meghalaya each, Chapter 1 of both the sections, i.e., Land and the People—is about basics about the state and people living in Assam and Meghalaya respectively. All other chapters give description of specific of each state.

Chapter 2 of Section I is about problems that Assam had to face in post-1947 period and Chapter 3 about Identity Crisis, crisis of dominant community with inflow of refugees. Chapter 4 and 5 respectively present dialectics of the Assam movement and chronology of sequential development between 1978 to 1981. Last, i.e., 6th chapter is about culture and linguistic set up of Assam.

About Section II, i.e., Meghalaya, Chapter 8 and 9 are on constitutional provisions about local self governance in tribal areas and efficacy of autonomous

district councils respectively. Chapter 10 and 11 are regarding traditional tribal political system and a comparison between marking of old and new self-governing institutions. Chapter 12 is about role of women in newly revived system of local self-governance. Lastly, Chapters 13 and 14 are about emergence of bureaucratic class facing political pressures and; deficiencies with their own functioning styles.

We are sure that the Volume will be of great use to researchers, academicians and to libraries especially in providing all basic important information together at one place.

T. Raatan

Introduction

Assam and Meghalaya are among most significant and naturally affluent States of North-East in India. They are both not only geographically close to each other but they have a lot in common. They share similar culture and tradition, Assam even has strong economy and both the States are very important to India from the international security point of view. We have already given geographical location of each State in the Preface. Here, we shall discuss some important points of each State of the volume that find detailed description in the various chapters of the book.

We shall start with the origin of **Assam**. Term 'Assam' as interpreted by some scholars have been extracted from the Sanskrit word *Asom* that means peerless and unparalleled. Some academicians also claim that the term has come from the original name of Ahomas who ruled over the land for some six hundred years before the entry of the Britishers. Races like Austric, Mongolian, Dravidian and also Aryans who came on the land centuries ago have made great contribution to the composite culture of Assam.

It is said that Assam was also known as *Pragjyotisha* or the place of eastern astronomy in epic period and later came to be known as *Kampura*. The advent of Ahom across the eastern hills in 1228 A.D. became a turning point in the history of the State. They ruled over Assam for almost six centuries. Assam became a British Protectorate in 1826 under the provisions of Treaty of Yandabo.

Assam is basically an agricultural society and its economy is more or less based on agriculture only. Principal food crop has been rice. Besides many cash crops are also grown. According to 2001 statistics, the State has an estimated 39.44 Lakh hectares gross cropped area and new area sown is around 27.10 lakh hectares.

Assam is famous for its rich forest resources also and of total forest area. 21.2 per cent is the reserved forest area. There are also five national parks and eleven wildlife sanctuaries in the State. Kaziranga and Manas National Parks enjoy popularity even at international level.

Despite the fact that Assam has undergone numerous political troubles both in the pre- and post-independence era and the continuous movement for long time shattered its economy and trade to a large extent, there are numerous tea-based industries in the State. Exploitation of mineral resources in the State comprise largely petroleum, natural gas, limestone and coal. There are six industrial growth centres in the State and two such centres are going to be established in near future at Balipara and Natia each. A Central Institute for Plastic Engineering Technology has been established at Amingaon near Guwahati.

Table 1
Population, Decadal Growth Rate, Sex Ratio and Density : 2001

District	Population			Decadal growth rate		Sex Ratio		Density	
	Person	Male	Female	1981-91	1991-01	1991	2001	1991	2001
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Assam	26,638,407	13,787,799	12,850,608	NA	18.85	923	932	286	340
Kokrajhar	930,404	478,242	452,162	NA	15.05	940	945	255	294
Dhubri	1,634,589	840,673	793,916	NA	23.42	950	944	473	584
Goalpara	822,306	420,707	401,599	NA	23.07	947	955	366	451
Bongaigaon	906,315	465,970	440,345	NA	12.23	940	945	322	361
Barpeta	1,642,420	846,106	796,314	NA	18.53	939	941	427	506
Kamrup	2,515,030	1,327,717	1,187,313	NA	25.75	879	894	460	579
Nalbari	1,138,184	587,668	550,516	NA	11.98	936	937	450	504
Darrang	1,503,943	773,982	729,961	NA	15.79	938	943	373	432
Marigaon	775,874	398,930	376,944	NA	21.29	941	945	375	455
Nagaon	2,315,387	1,194,327	1,121,060	NA	22.30	929	939	494	604
Sonitpur	1,677,874	864,125	813,749	NA	17.80	912	942	268	315
Lakhimpur	889,325	455,689	433,636	NA	18.34	931	952	330	391
Dhemaji	569,468	294,105	275,363	NA	18.93	927	936	148	176
Tinsukia	1,150,146	602,515	547,631	NA	19.52	891	909	254	303
Dibrugarh	1,172,056	609,470	562,586	NA	12.43	905	923	308	347
Sibsagar	1,052,802	546,565	506,237	NA	15.95	907	926	340	395
Jorhat	1,009,197	530,240	478,957	NA	15.84	913	903	306	354
Golaghat	945,781	490,370	455,411	NA	14.21	920	929	236	270
Karbi Anglong	812,320	422,599	389,721	NA	22.57	907	922	64	78
N. Cachar Hills	186,189	98,899	87,290	NA	23.47	857	883	31	38
Cachar	1,442,141	741,580	700,561	NA	18.66	932	945	321	381
Karimganj	1,003,678	516,408	487,270	NA	21.35	946	944	457	555
Hailakandi	542,978	280,912	262,066	NA	20.92	929	933	338	409

Assam has always enjoyed highest admiration for her arts and crafts associated with the cottage industries of the State. These industries like handloom, sericulture, cane and bamboo articles, carpentry, brass and bell-metal crafts. Assam is also famous for production of varieties of silk, Endi, Muga, Tassar, etc. For Muga silk, Assam is the only centre in the whole world.

Assam celebrates an exclusive range of colourful festivals. *Bihu* is the chief festival celebrated on three different occasions. Rangoli Bihu/Bohag Bihu indicates the beginning of cropping period and it also ushers in the Assamese new year.

Bhogali Bihu/Magh Bihu is the festival of harvest season. Further, religion accounts for a large variety of festivals. Vaishnavites observe birth and death anniversaries of leading Vaishnav saints with a whole day long singing of hymns and staging theatrical performances in their traditional way.

Table 2
Population, population in the Age Group 0-6 of Assam : 2001

District	Total Rural Urban	Population		0-6 Population			
		Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Assam	Total	26,638,407	13,787,799	12,850,608	4,350,248	2,215,104	2,135,144
	Rural	23,248,994	11,983,157	11,265,837	3,981,910	2,024,362	1,957,548
	Urban	3,389,413	1,804,642	1,584,771	368,338	190,742	177,596
Kokrajhar	Total	930,404	478,242	452,162	169,032	86,482	82,550
	Rural	866,772	444,800	421,972	162,090	82,905	79,185
	Urban	63,632	33,442	30,190	6,942	3,577	3,365
Dhubri	Total	1,634,589	840,673	793,916	331,164	166,907	164,257
	Rural	1,444,043	742,566	701,477	306,551	154,323	152,228
	Urban	190,546	98,107	92,439	24,613	12,584	12,029
Goalpara	Total	822,306	420,707	401,599	155,804	78,883	76,921
	Rural	755,017	385,769	369,248	147,031	74,505	72,526
	Urban	67,289	34,938	32,351	8,773	4,378	4,395
Bongaigaon	Total	906,315	465,970	440,345	160,072	80,933	79,139
	Rural	796,028	408,175	387,853	148,156	74,805	73,351
	Urban	110,287	57,795	52,492	11,916	6,128	5,788
Barpeta	Total	1,642,420	846,106	796,314	301,095	153,339	147,756
	Rural	1,517,280	781,559	735,721	287,526	146,378	141,148
	Urban	125,140	64,547	60,593	13,569	6,961	6,608
Kamrup	Total	2,515,030	1,327,717	1,187,313	335,231	172,922	162,309
	Rural	1,614,512	836,945	777,567	242,107	123,609	118,498
	Urban	900,518	490,772	409,746	93,124	49,313	43,811
Nalbari	Total	1,138,184	587,668	550,516	161,616	82,372	79,244
	Rural	1,110,706	573,269	537,437	158,689	80,845	77,844
	Urban	27,478	14,399	13,079	2,927	1,527	1,400
Darrang	Total	1,503,943	773,982	729,961	261,802	132,598	129,204
	Rural	1,430,099	734,788	695,311	253,439	128,318	125,121
	Urban	73,844	39,194	34,650	8,363	4,280	4,083
Marigaon	Total	775,874	398,930	376,944	144,388	73,472	70,916
	Rural	737,813	378,674	359,139	139,923	71,163	68,760
	Urban	38,061	20,256	17,805	4,465	2,309	2,156
Nagaon	Total	2,315,387	1,194,327	1,121,060	414,086	209,071	205,015
	Rural	2,037,466	1,048,764	988,702	383,266	193,406	189,860
	Urban	277,921	145,563	132,358	30,820	15,665	15,155
Sonitpur	Total	1,677,874	864,125	813,749	264,449	133,365	131,084
	Rural	1,530,043	786,356	743,687	250,404	126,189	124,215
	Urban	147,831	77,769	70,062	14,045	7,176	6,869
Lakhimpur	Total	889,325	455,689	433,636	145,572	74,196	71,376

(Contd.)

(Contd.)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Rural	824,196	421,028	403,168	137,235	69,855	67,380
	Urban	65,129	34,661	30,468	8,337	4,341	3,996
Dhemaji	Total	569,468	294,105	275,363	94,166	48,108	46,058
	Rural	530,138	273,148	256,990	88,628	45,274	43,354
	Urban	39,330	20,957	18,373	5,538	2,834	2,704
Tinsukia	Total	1,150,146	602,515	547,631	179,111	91,208	87,903
	Rural	925,972	481,255	444,717	154,890	78,603	76,287
	Urban	224,174	121,260	102,914	24,221	12,605	11,616
Dibrugarh	Total	1,172,056	609,470	562,586	164,384	84,139	80,245
	Rural	952,080	491,339	460,741	143,428	73,200	70,228
	Urban	219,976	118,131	101,845	20,956	10,939	10,017
Sibsagar	Total	1,052,802	546,565	506,237	142,253	72,363	69,890
	Rural	955,701	493,116	462,585	132,124	67,072	65,052
	Urban	97,101	53,449	43,652	10,129	5,291	4,838
Jorhat	Total	1,009,197	530,240	478,957	124,293	65,395	58,898
	Rural	838,549	439,282	399,267	106,179	56,018	50,161
	Urban	170,648	90,958	79,690	18,114	9,377	8,737
Golaghat	Total	945,781	490,370	455,411	138,178	70,324	67,854
	Rural	866,625	447,942	418,683	129,320	65,789	63,531
	Urban	79,156	42,428	36,728	8,858	4,535	4,323
Karbi Anglong	Total	812,320	422,599	389,721	145,000	73,504	71,496
	Rural	719,569	372,586	346,983	132,420	67,062	65,358
	Urban	92,751	50,013	42,738	12,580	6,442	6,138
North Cachar Hills	Total	186,189	98,899	87,290	29,944	15,349	14,595
	Rural	128,110	67,052	61,058	22,823	11,754	11,069
	Urban	58,079	31,847	26,232	7,121	3,595	3,526
Cachar	Total	1,442,141	741,580	700,561	220,497	112,727	107,770
	Rural	1,240,723	638,561	602,162	199,344	101,885	97,459
	Urban	201,418	103,019	98,399	21,153	10,842	10,311
Karimganj	Total	1,003,678	516,408	487,270	171,185	86,509	84,676
	Rural	930,131	478,582	451,549	164,607	83,118	81,489
	Urban	73,547	37,826	35,721	6,578	3,391	3,187
Hailakandi	Total	542,978	280,912	262,066	96,926	50,938	45,988
	Rural	497,421	257,601	239,820	91,730	48,286	43,444
	Urban	45,557	23,311	22,246	5,196	2,652	2,544

Among worthseeing places of tourism are *Kamakhya temple, Umanand, Navrag, Basishta Ashram, Dolgobinda, Gandhi Mandap*, state zoo, state museum, *Sukheshwar temple, Gita Mandir* and many more. Other important tourist places in Assam are; Kaziranga National Park and Manas Tiger projects (already mentioned), wildlife sanctuaries like *Pobi-tor* and *Orag* Sibsagar and Tezpur temples, Hajo—meeting point of Buddhism, a picnic spot, i.e., Chandubi lake, etc., also appear very attractive to the tourists. In short, the State has all that lures a person to visit the State.

Meghalaya, having its capital in hill town Shillong literally means 'residence of clouds'. This name was given by the great Indian geographer, Sh. S.P. Chatterjee. Meghalaya became a State in the year 1972. One of world's wettest region is

found in Meghalaya, i.e., Cherrapunji which has the maximum rainfall recorded in Asia and second highest in the whole world. The climate of the State generally remains mild.

Besides accounts of more important Khasi Kingdom in the Chronicles of neighbouring Ahom and Kachari, not much is known about Meghalaya prior to the advent of British in the region. It has been recorded that in the early 19th century, the Britishers' desire to construct a road through the State in order to link Bengal and Assam facilitated a treaty in 1827 with the ruler. Opponents of this treaty persuaded the ruler to abandon it in 1829 and following this, an attack on the British led to British military operations against the Khasi. For following one century, the English exercised complete political control over the area called them the Garo and Khasi states, but the tribal clans left to themselves, were able to preserve their traditional style of living in seclusion.

After 1947, struggle for autonomy and self-rule led to agitation and finally Meghalaya was created as full State within Assam which attained full statehood in 1972.

This area is very rich in tribal culture and folklores. Both drinking and dancing are indispensable parts of religious celebrations and social gatherings. Marriages are exogamous. Penetration of Christianity in the mid-nineteenth century accompanied with strict morals has affected many of the tribal and communal institutions. According to a custom among Gaoras, by used to live in father-in-law's house as clan representative after marriage and at the death of father-in-law, he would marry his mother-in-law also, thus husband of both mother and daughter. This custom is now almost dead. Human sacrifice was also initially practised by them. Total population, decadal growth rate, sex ratio, density and population between 0-6 years of age are given as follows :

Table 3
Population, Decadal Growth Rate, Sex Ratio and Density : 2001

District	Population			Decadal growth rate		Sex Ratio		Density	
	Person	Male	Female	1981-91	1991-01	1991	2001	1991	2001
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Meghalaya	2,306,069	1,167,840	1,138,229	32.86	29.94	955	975	79	103
West Garo Hills	515,813	259,440	256,373	31.06	27.98	959	988	108	139
East Garo Hills	247,555	126,312	121,243	38.29	31.10	958	960	73	95
South Garo Hills	99,105	51,051	48,054	23.61	28.59	963	941	42	54
West Khasi Hills	294,115	149,159	144,956	36.26	33.59	951	972	42	56
Ri Bhoi	192,795	99,315	93,480	27.40	51.44	941	941	54	81
East Khasi Hills	660,994	333,187	327,807	30.72	22.88	948	984	191	234
Jaintia Hills	295,692	149,376	146,316	40.97	34.12	973	980	58	77

The population of the State is predominantly rural, with a few towns existing in Meghalaya. Shillong, the capital city, also happens to be the largest town. Plateau region being the hilly with rugged topography, physical and location factors are such that it has resulted in isolation of tribal communities. Almost 80 per cent of the population is of Scheduled Tribes. Khasi and Garo are the main languages and Jaintia and English are the official languages.

Table 4
Population, Population in the Age Group 0-6 of Assam : 2001

District	Total Rural Urban	Population		0-6 Population			
		Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Meghalaya	Total	2,306,069	1,167,840	1,138,229	457,442	231,571	225,871
	Rural	1,853,457	939,803	913,654	392,305	198,408	193,897
	Urban	452,612	228,037	224,575	65,137	33,163	31,974
West Garo Hills	Total	515,813	259,440	256,373	96,482	49,276	47,206
	Rural	457,422	229,592	227,830	88,425	45,100	43,325
	Urban	58,391	29,848	28,543	8,057	4,176	3,881
East Garo Hills	Total	247,555	126,312	121,243	49,242	25,000	24,242
	Rural	211,652	107,935	103,717	42,892	21,735	21,157
	Urban	35,903	18,377	17,526	6,350	3,265	3,085
South Garo Hills	Total	99,105	51,051	48,054	20,892	10,730	10,162
	Rural	90,462	46,449	44,013	19,480	10,005	9,475
	Urban	8,643	4,602	4,041	1,412	725	687
West Khasi Hills	Total	294,115	149,159	144,956	67,321	34,005	33,316
	Rural	260,595	132,293	128,302	59,792	30,130	29,662
	Urban	33,520	16,866	16,654	7,529	3,875	3,654
Rai Bhoi	Total	192,795	99,315	93,480	45,257	22,760	22,497
	Rural	179,630	92,573	87,057	42,449	21,309	21,140
	Urban	13,165	6,742	6,423	2,808	1,451	1,357
East Khasi Hills	Total	660,994	333,187	327,807	112,374	56,775	55,599
	Rural	383,027	193,854	189,173	77,592	39,249	38,343
	Urban	277,967	139,333	138,634	34,782	17,526	17,256
Jaintia Hills	Total	295,692	149,376	146,316	65,874	33,025	32,849
	Rural	270,669	137,107	133,562	61,675	30,880	30,795
	Urban	25,023	12,269	12,754	4,199	2,145	2,054

Like other north-eastern States, in Meghalaya also, religion and festivals are integral part of their life. A five day religious festival of Khasis the Pamblang Nongkrem popular with short name Nongkrem dance is performed every year at village Smil 11 km. away from Shillong. Shord Sukmyniesm is another important festival of Khasis that celebrated at Shillong during the second week of April. Behdiengkholm is the most colourful festival of Jaintias. But later, with the spread of Christianity, changes in religious community of the region have been brought with the immigration of Hindus and Muslims to the State. Christianity, Hinduism and the aministic Hinduism are the leading religions in the State. In very small number, Muslims, Buddhists and even Sikhs are found.

Agriculture is the dominant economic activity of the State upon which 80 per cent of the population depends for livelihood though the net area grown is less than 9 per cent. Land is owned in common but Jhum cultivation has left people poor and also caused soil erosion. The main crops are rice, millet, maize, potatoes, pepper, chillies, cotton, ginger, betel nuts, fruits and vegetables, etc.

The transition in the state from a nomadic to settled life have been due to abundance of labour. The State has unlimited natural resources that have not been tapped well. Its sillimanite deposits are especially the best in the world. Meghalaya has no heavy industries. Small-scale industries include the manufacture of cement, plywood and beverage factories, etc., along with a newly set up electronics plant.

As it is evident that the State is one of the most underdeveloped in India. Only about half, i.e., 49.1 per cent people are even literate. Literacy in urban areas is much higher as compared to the rural ones. There are at present 5,517 institutions in the State for education: North-East Hill University at Shillong is the State's sole university.

In short, though the State is underdeveloped, there is a great scope for development and betterment with awareness generation among the people and development plans and programmes.

1

Land and the People: A Background

Whenever, there is an attempt to study North-East in India, one cannot help starting with Assam because it is not only one of the biggest States of the region but also among the richest and well-developed ones. Assam has contributed a lot to the economy of the region as well as of the country.

Brief History

Assam was famous as Kamrupa and its capital was Pragjyotishpura. King Narakasura and his son Bhagadatta were famous rulers in the 1000 B.C. The Varman Dynasty was established by Puyavarman in 355 A.D. The Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang visited the country in 640 A.D., Bhaskaravarman invited this Chinese traveller. He left a clear account of the Kingdom and its people. Then it is known as Kamrupa, was about 1,700 miles in circuit and included the Brahmaputra Valley, Bhutan, Rangpur district (now in Bangladesh), and Cooch Bihar (now in West Bengal) and extending western part of the river Koshi in Bihar. After at Assam was ruled by various dynasties: Plas, Koches Kacharis, and the Chutiyas, etc. There was no stable Government during this period. In 1236 A.D., a Mongolian tribe Ahoms from Thailand came through Burma and conquered upper Assam. Sukapha was the Ahoms leader who entered Assam with some nobles and about 800 men, women and children. After the Ahom defeated the Koches, the Kacharis and other local rulers of lower Assam including Goalpara. So the whole country was named "Assam" after the Ahoms. The Ahoms had a very good administrative system and Cabinet Ministers under Bargohain and Buragohain. Ahoms reached its top rank during the reign of King Rudra Singha (1696-1715).¹

The Mughals invaded Assam for seventeen times. In the 13th and 17th centuries, the Assamese people are successfully resisted the incorporation of Assam into the Mughal Empire. Lachit Barphukan defended Assam from the Mughals. For tardiness in building a rampart for defense against a Mughal attack, Barphukan who was himself slayed his own maternal uncle, the reason being: "My maternal uncle is not greater than my country." In the seventeenth and last battle, he went to the battlefield of Saraighat riding in his sick bed to fight the Mughals. In the Assamese history his name sparks even today.

Hindu Vaishnavism was known throughout Brahmaputra Valley in the sixteenth century during the time of sage Sankardeva (died 1568). That time Muslim influence was growing all over in India. The Maharaja of Cooch Bihar was a promoter of Sankardeva's Vaishnavism. That's why Sankardeva spent later part of his life in the court of Maharaja and he wrote most of his valuable works. He was also a social reformer.

The Ahoms were originally Buddhists, but married local girls and tried to take up local language and religion. The Brahmins and Kalitas moved to Assam after the invasion of Ahoms from the area around Kanauj in Uttar Pradesh. Thirty years before the Ahoms came to Assam the Muslims came to Kamrup with the invading Army of Mohammad Ibn Bakhtiar in 1206. The historian Dr. H.K. Barpujari said that Muslim settlements might have originated in western Assam before the 16th century. Their movement into upper Assam cannot be discovered the marks of the invasion of Nawab Mirjumla, in 1662. They were employed to make out what obscure and interpreting Persian documents as craftsmen and artisans.

The vocabulary of the Assamese language was enriched by Persian and Arabic words. The 'Zikir' and 'Zari' songs which are known as 'Azan Fakir Geet'. These songs occupy an eminent place in Assamese literature. Shihabuddin Talish had accompanied Nawab Mirjumla, found nothing similar among the Assamese Muslims of Islam except the name; their hearts were inclined far more towards mixing with the Assamese than towards association with the Muslims, he claimed². Some Sikhs, who came with the Mughal invaders settled themselves in Nowgong District. They observe their religion, but culture is quite similar to communicate. During that time Burmese soldiers also settled at Singimari in the Goalpara District. These different ethnic groups mixed up with Assamese society and became one nationality during the 600 years of Ahom rule.

British Period

The Ahom princes were very weakened to rule the Ahom administration. So, Prince Gaurinath Singha welcomed the British in 1786. The British tried to bring peace and returned to Calcutta. The rival Governor, Barphukan Badan Chandra, called the Burmese to fight against the king in 1817. The Burmese invaded Assam three times and brought destruction and misery all over the country. At the request of king Purander Singha the British drove out the Burmese invaders. As a result treaty of Yandabo with Burma, settled down on the 24th of February, 1826. So Assam became a part of British India. The Burmese did not have the right to give up Assam to the British since their sovereignty was not established. Assam was free of the Burmese rule when the treaty was being signed. Any agreement on Assam, should, therefore, have been on tri-lateral basis. Thus the British possessed Assam through evil spirit.

British Agent was administered in 1839 in Assam. The devastated area of Assam was incorporated into the Bengal Presidency. The entire Assam Valley

has come under British rule in 1842. The Sylhet district (now in Bangladesh) and the Cachar district were created in Assam and administered by a Chief Commissioner with its capital at Shillong in 1874. The people of Sylhet protested the merger with Assam. The cultural identity and historic association with Bengal, and Sylhet, i.e., the golden calf. The calf was being sacrificed for a new idol called the province of Assam. The Viceroy did not give up to the protestors. Lord Curzon declared a new province called 'Eastern Bengal and Assam' in 1905. The partition of Bengal was in 1912. This arrangement was turned back to the old province of Assam until 1947.

During the British rule several things were marked revolt against British. Gomdhar Konwar, Roopchand Konwar and Peoli Barphukan in 1828-29. Peoli Barphukan was hanged in 1828. India, revolted against the British in 1857. The Assamese leader, Maniram Dewan was also hanged by British in 1859.

The Bengali language was very popular in Assam from 1831 to 1872. Dr. Miles Brown prepared the first Assamese-English dictionary for Assamese community and published the first Assamese monthly *Orunodoi*. Sir Henry Cotton, Chief Commissioner, who established Cotton College in Gauhati in 1901. The Assamese language was recognised by the Calcutta University in 1903 by Chief Commissioner Fuller.

In 1839, the tea cultivation started by the British. The establishment of saw mills, coal mining and explored oil at Digboi in 1890. The construction of railroads began in 1881. There were 715 miles of railroads. Between 1874 and 1905, the development of tea, coal, oil, saw mills and railways Rs. 315 million were invested.³ Bengalees were to engage for wages as administrators and also operators of railways and other industries started to Assam during British rule.

Bengalee immigration started the Assam Legislative Council was comprising the British, Bengalees, and Assamese. On January 2, 1913, first sitting. It served only in an advisory capacity encountered by were divided by the council. Many problems were political parties. Along the lines of Hindu-Muslim and Assamese Bengalee. The Assamese and the Bengalees wanted linguistic provinces and transferring Sylhet and Cachar to Bengal during 1917-1926. Planned to Saiyid Muhammad Saadulla who was a prominent Muslim leader of Sivasagar district. January 6, 1926, he said that as Sylhet remained in Assam, Muslims who constituted one-third of the provincial population, would remain a minority and hold of Assam's electoral politics in January. If Muslim majority district of Sylhet goes to Bengal, Sylhet would lose that position in Assam forever. The proportion of Muslims in Bengal's population would not have increased. Do not even by one per cent. Sylhet remained in Assam serving the interest of the Muslims.⁴

Self-governing power in 1937 got the Assam. The first Chief Minister was Saadulla. Saadulla had five terms in the next ten years. Gopinath Bardoloi served as Chief Minister for two terms. The National Congress high-command decided not to participate in self-government by Bardoloi to resign. In the absence of

prominent Assamese leaders in the Council and Saadulla was a Muslim League leader and for that he took advantage of grafting thousands of Muslims in Assam.

Assam Under Independent India

It was also decided to give independence to India and partition India. The founder of Pakistan was M.A. Jinnah. He demanded that Assam be included in Pakistan. Assam was almost handed over to Pakistan at the time of partition. The Cabinet Mission included Assam and Bengal were to decide by a simple majority vote and for which one of the two domains they would like to join. Assam would have been outvoted and included in Pakistan. Gopinath Bardoloi, who became Chief Minister of Assam during that year and decided not to sit in the section with Bengal. Backed by Gandhi, this decision also defended Assam's right to provincial autonomy and fought for maintaining its political and cultural identity. He wrote in *Harijan* on December 29, 1946:

No one can force Assam to do what it does not want to do. Not only a Province but even a single individual can rebel against Congress and by doing so, serve it, assuming that the Province or the individual is in the right. I have done so myself. That would be a kind of *Satyagraha* against the Congress for the good of the Congress . . . for the independence of India it is the only condition. Each unit must be able to decide and act for itself.

The Muslim League declared direct action against the Assam Government for its aforesaid decision. Khiliji Dastas of the Muslim League was sent from East Bengal to occur raids on Assam lands. Gandhi by stood Assam at this critical moment and saved her from inclusion in Pakistan.

Assam and the North-East region remained isolated from India for Last two and one-half years. All communications were linked to India, through the Rangpur district. This district had situated Pakistan. Assam was connected to the rest of India by railways and roads through Siliguri.

About 273,000 Hindu refugees, from East Pakistan moved to Assam during the partition of India. The Assamese people were unhappy. But Government of Assam settled them against their wishes. According to M.V. Kamath:

There are other events that the Assamese have not forgotten such as a demand to incorporate the district of Goalpara in West Bengal and to carve out a new State from Assam by the name of the Purbachal, made before the States Reorganisation Commission (1953-55) or efforts to convert Assam into a bilingual State in 1960, at the time of adopting Assamese as the State language of Assam. The Assamese people believe these demands would not have become possible if they were politically strong and economically viable.⁵

The new oil fields were discovered in Assam in the year 1950. The Government of India decided build a refinery at Barauni, Bihar against export-opinion and unemployment and industrial backwardness of Assam. After protests and

demonstrations a small refinery was built by the Government of India in Gauwhati, Assam.

In 1962, China invaded Assam. The Chinese Army crossed the Himalayas only 49 miles from Tezpur. Rana K.D.N. Singh, Deputy Commissioner of Darrang district started the evacuation of Assam by destroying currency notes, coins and records in the State Bank on November 10, 1962. Telephone installations were to be destroyed before his departure. Many of the families who had homes outside Assam evacuated. But the permanent inhabitants of Assam preferred to stay home and face the enemy than die of possible fatigue, starvation and disease on their way to or in refugee camps outside the State.

The Muslim immigrants who came from the East Pakistan by raising the flag of Pakistan to welcome the Chinese. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru virtually abandoned Assam. He made a grief of sorrow and speech farewell address over the radio. On November 12, 1962. "My heart cries for the people of Assam," he said. Due to unknown causes the Chinese restrained back. Assam remained with India. The invasion by the civilians of Bangladesh and Nepal began after that. Assam has been splited into five States in 1963.

In the liberation movement, East Pakistan as Bangladesh was born during 1971. Assam gave refuge to millions who left to save their lives from Pakistani soldiers. Some of them returned to Bangladesh, few of them came back. Since, Bangladeshis can easily move into Assam. The thousands of people are trying to come in the North-eastern Region. In spite of repeated requests by the Assamese people since independence, the Government of India has not decided to take prevention of infiltration and deport illegal immigrants. Since middle part of 1979 popular upsurge against foreign domination was take place in Nepal and Bangladesh.

Consequences of English Rule

In this first half of the chapter, we have seen in brief, how British interference torn of economy and policy of the State. This particular part concentrate on the positive as well as negative consequences of control of Britishers over Assam which last from 1826 to 1947.

English rule in Assam during the 18th century brought tremendous changes in social and political life. The rigidity of the closed society during Ahom period became open to outside influx, destroying the traditional system of aristocracy and the new pattern of social system had come into existence. The British rule had done both destructive and constructive roles during a period of almost more than a century.

System of Education. The indigenous system of education or centre of Sanskrit education under the Brahmin teachers of the Ahom period was discontinued. The main objective of introducing the western education was to make the young people fit for junior posts in administration. The British Government gave little patronage toward the persisting system which did not

contribute anything for mass educational movement. The British thought that the western educational system alone could alter or remove the orthodoxy and superstitions from the society.

However, the Brahmin section was not happy at all and they had been disappointed. When people showed their eagerness to learn, the Government had to start village schools in different parts of the province. The census data relating to literates and literacy rates by sex district wise is as follows :

Table 1
Literates and Literacy Rates by Sex—Assam Census 2001

Union Territory/ Districts	Persons	Literates		Literacy Rate of 2001		
		Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females
Assam	14,327,540	8,324,077	6,003,463	64.28	71.93	56.03
Kokrajhar	400,123	242,482	157,641	52.55	61.90	42.65
Dhubri	649,944	381,442	268,502	49.86	56.61	42.64
Goalpara	390,278	223,407	166,871	58.56	65.36	51.40
Bongaigaon	449,754	264,957	184,797	60.27	68.81	51.16
Barpeta	769,225	456,870	312,355	57.35	65.95	48.16
Kamrup	1,628,088	938,144	689,944	74.69	81.24	67.31
Nalbari	664,886	389,686	275,200	68.08	77.12	58.40
Darrang	694,570	412,510	282,060	55.92	64.32	46.95
Marigaon	375,465	215,215	160,250	59.46	66.13	52.36
Nagaon	1,184,140	675,105	490,035	62.28	68.52	55.57
Sonitpur	852,201	494,298	357,903	60.29	67.64	52.43
Lakhimpur	517,607	298,539	219,068	69.59	78.26	60.47
Dhemaji	313,511	184,856	128,655	65.96	75.15	56.11
Tinsukia	614,461	368,978	245,483	63.28	72.16	53.40
Dibrugarh	717,603	418,053	299,550	71.21	79.58	62.10
Sibsagar	685,949	389,242	296,707	75.33	82.08	68.00
Jorhat	689,414	384,685	304,729	77.91	82.76	72.54
Golaghat	568,250	327,692	240,558	70.36	73.01	62.07
Karbi Anglong	392,589	237,761	154,828	58.83	68.11	48.65
N. Cachar Hills	107,173	63,991	43,182	68.59	76.59	59.40
Cachar	835,888	481,106	354,782	68.42	76.51	59.85
Karimganj	559,512	317,584	241,928	67.21	73.87	60.09
Hailakandi	266,909	157,474	109,435	59.84	68.47	50.65

In this durations, the American Baptist Missionaries pioneered to open hospitals, orphanages and schools for boys and girls. Rev. Nathan Brown and Oliver Cutter started a school at Sadiya in 1837. Various schools had been established in many parts of the province. The people, particularly in Assam, were

initially apathetic towards the medium of instruction both in schools as well as courts. On the other hand, the Christian Missionaries, while they tried to bring the gospel closer to the people, they disregarded the Government's language policy and pushed the people to educate themselves through their own mother-tongues. At the same time, there had also been a persistent demand for English education among the middle class motivating for government jobs. After restoring the position of Assamese language in 1873, the percentage of successful candidates had remarkably increased. Also, the Christian Missionaries like Mrs. Brown, Cutter, Robinson and Barker had initiated for setting up schools for girls. The first girls school was started at Sibsagar in 1840 and then at Nowgong and Gauhati consequently. However, many young girls of orthodox background had lost their privilege of attending schools and their social block had stood as obstacles to their freedom and progress.

The missionaries had tried their best efforts to face the prevailing situation and to encourage female education. They "went out into the highways and byways and sought the orphan and homeless". Even then, the response of the people was very poor. The importance of the western education included scientific knowledge which enabled the people to shed superstitions, magic power and sorcery for healing of sickness. The medical education had become popular among growing generation in spite of contempt for the caste-Hindus. The impact of the western education touched the grass-root of Caste-Hindu society and their way of life. The orthodox Brahmins began to send their sons and daughters to schools "having their half-cut in the English fashion and giving up the time-honoured custom of keeping a pig-tail."

(ii) Education of Girl Child. The female education brought forward new awareness of women status in society which had assumed great importance. Because of this awareness women could participate in the national struggle for freedom, shed the rigid forms of *sati* system and the prohibition of widow re-marriage. The liberal ideas received through the western education made women folk, particularly the upper class, to invite an open challenge to the societal attitude of men towards women. Some of them had realised that liberation of women from social prejudice was inseparable from the struggle for national liberty of India.

(iii) Financial Transformation in Assam. After establishing a stable Government the British turned their interest to economic policy in Assam. The British had taken over the trade and industries and the sources of communication system in the province. But due to prolonged uprising, internal dissensions and Burmese invasions Assam was impoverished.

When the British came to administer, they did not immediately start the land revenue measure but maintained the traditional system of 'paik' which was rendering of personal service to the state at the rate of Rs. 3 per head per annum. When this traditional system was not successful, the Government implemented the Revenue Regulation of 1880 and the revenue paying lands were settled with *rayats* yearly till 1883. A thorough land survey was made and classified it for

revenue assessment. Land was divided into basti, rupit and faringati and in 1838 the Mouzdari system was accepted for collection of revenue.

The lands were again divided into Devottar-lands (revenue-free known as Lakhiraj), Brahmottar-lands and Dharmottar-lands (half revenue paying popularly known as Nisfkhiraj), and other lands of full revenue paying (khiraj or Rayatwari). This new arrangement of land revenue system had affected the interest of the Ahom nobility and aristocracy. At the same time, the prestige and status of Ahoms were lowered down to the level of ordinary land owners.

The old rigid form of social distinction of the feudal sections and the ordinary people was removed. Meanwhile, the increase of land tax, the ban on poppy cultivation, and a permit for sale of opium from Government treasury on high prices were some of the issues of distress among the people. The cottage industries like textile, smiths and artisans were ruined and the country was flooded with the machinery textile products from Lancashire and England on lower rates. The indigenous industries were not encouraged and the prosperity of the country was greatly affected resulting in outbreaks of peasant's problems in various places in the province.

(iv) Internal Regulation. During the Ahom administration there was free intercourse between the people of the plains and the hill tribes in trades and commutation. But in 1873 the Inner Line Regulation Act was introduced to check the free accessibility of the British subjects to the hilly countries. Because of the unrestricted Ahom rule, there had been quarrels which sometimes caused serious disturbances. This was specially mentioned with the traffic in rubber brought down from the hills. In order to stop the recurrence of troublesome disputes with the frontier tribes in their vicinity a Regulation in 1873 had been adopted by the Government to prohibit British subjects generally from going ahead of a certain line, known as "Inner Line" which was not necessarily territorial line but "only the limits of the administered area".

For the first time the internal carved Inner Line Regulation was promulgated in Assam under the Statute 33 Vict. to empower the Executive government to deal with the backward areas. Regulation is distinguished from the Acts or laws enacted in the legislature. Under this Regulation the tea planters were not allowed to acquire land beyond the Inner line. Indirectly therefore this policy also influenced the national unity and integrity.

(v) Means of Communication and Transportation. The British felt the necessity of road-transport in the province from both commercial and defence points of consideration. The unchecked exploitation of industries, the exploration of coal mines and petroleum, the large scale of the plantation were prominent factors which were responsible for network growth of transport and communication lines. In 1842 the Assam Tea Company opened a steamboat service between Gauhati to Calcutta. After 1884 a direct service of steamers was made between Dibrugarh and Calcutta. From 1880 onward railways began to serve the Company's works. The Public Works Department started operating in 1868 for road construction and

maintenance following which post and telegraph offices were established in different parts of the province.

Impact of Gandhi and his Movements in Assam

No state was left unaffected with movements of Gandhi, so was Assam. Here are some Gandhian efforts and ideas which made impact.

(i) *Faith in Non-violence.* Mahatma Gandhi had voiced for spontaneous upsurge of the people throughout the country into a single anti-British mass movement. He decided that the movement should be based on the principle of non-violence and he persuaded the Indian National Congress session held in Calcutta in September 1920 to adopt a resolution on Non-Cooperation with the alien Government. The object of the INC resolution was to attain Swarajya (self-rule) as interpreted by Gandhi as "self-government within the Empire if possible outside, if necessary." Initially, movement in Assam was commenced from the middle class, but quickly touched the entire peasantry and the working masses.

(ii) *Communal Unity.* The leaders of Assam started to organise a Hindu-Muslim unity movement. On March 19, 1920 a Khilafat meeting was convened at Gauhati to observe strike under the chairmanship of T.R. Phukan, but an unanimous decision could not be made. Later, on October 11 in the same year, members of the Assam Association had made unanimous decision to support Gandhiji's draft resolution on Non-cooperation.

The Assam Valley Muslim Association also supported the resolution. The Khilafatists were oathed to Swadeshi and worked for the unity of the Hindu-Muslim in the country against the British rule. Within a short time Non-cooperation became the leading theme of the movement in every household. To spread the idea of Non-Cooperation, leaders like N.C. Bardoloi, T.R. Phukan and Chandranath Sarma escorted by volunteers held meetings in several places in Assam Valley.

(iii) *Famous Montague-Chelmsford Reforms 1918.* The well-known reforms proposed by Montague and Chelmsford were published in July 1918. It was also popularly known as Montford Reforms. Mr. Edwin Montague was the Secretary of State of India and Lord Chelmsford was the Viceroy. In order to ascertain the public opinion of Indian masses, they visited different parts of the country meeting different political parties and delegations. In the proposed Montford Reforms certain political concessions had been made, but put down the popular demand for self-government.

The Montford Reforms created a mixed feeling among the Indian Nationals. In a special Congress session conducted at Bombay in August 1918 the Montague scheme was termed as "disappointing and unsatisfactory." Further the Congress demanded for self-government within the Empire or Swaraj like that of the U.K. In spite of different opinions between the moderate and the radical groups, the Reforms had been accepted for implementation. However, Annie Besant declared the reforms as "unworthy of England to offer and unworthy of India to accept." In November 1918, the Assam Association sent delegations led by N.C. Bardoloi to

Calcutta to put forth Assam's case before Montague for awarding the major provincial status.

In fact, Assam tacitly supported the Montford Reforms without reservation. On the other hand, due to other communal forces being played up against each other the question of inclusion of Assam in the scheme had become a mess. Meanwhile, the national patriotic feelings among the people of Assam was more vigorously pushed forward and plunged themselves wholeheartedly in the national struggle for freedom. They had joined the Non-Cooperation Movement started by the Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

(iv) Holding of Assam Chatra Sanmilian. The first session of the new Assam Chatra Sanmilian was held at Gauhati in 1916 under the presidentship of Lakshminath Bezbarua. The objective of the organisation was to announce their demands of measure for social development and reforms. Later many members of the Sanmilian became prominent during struggle for India's Independence. They were quite active in the Non-Cooperation Movement and identified themselves with the greater interest of the country. Their organisational activity had been expanded to the whole Assam forming the Surma Valley Students' Federation in 1926.

Since students had put their great assertion in favour of the movement they had to leave their studies for propagating the message of Non-cooperation to all sections of the people. During one of their meetings, shopkeepers were forced to make a bonfire of cigarettes to mark protest against the use of forced foreign goods.

(v) Civil Disobedience Satyagraha of 1929. In December 1929 in the Lahore session, the INC had launched a programme of Civil Disobedience declaring complete independence as its goal. The Congress had made decision to boycott the Simon Commission to be held in London in a Round Table Conference and demanded that India should be given a full Dominion Status. Consequently, the whole nation observed the Independence Day (now Republic Day) on January 26, 1930 till the independence was finally achieved. In Assam there was a mixed reaction about the outcome of the Lahore Congress. As expressed by veteran Congress leaders like T.R. Phukan, Bardoloi and B.K. Choudhury, Assam was not agreed to join the Civil Disobedience Movement. In the crisis of the Provincial Congress Office, Bishnu Ram Medhi came forward to accept the responsibility of the President of the APCC.

Certain enthusiasts like Md. Tayebulla, the General Secretary, Sidhinath Sarma, Ambikagiri, Hem Chandra Barua and Omeo Kumar Das conducted a fresh movement. Thus Assam was prepared to have mass Civil Disobedience Movement in the province. When the news of the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru reached Assam an intensified programming had been taken up both by school children and villagers by observing hartal and cease-work. In Surma valley a response came to the appeal for Civil Disobedience forming independent organisations like Sylhet District Congress Committee led by Brajendranarayan as the president and the Socialist Youth Conference led by Darikanath Goswami,

a pupil of Murari Chand College. For the cause of the national freedom even women were not spared, they were dragged into imprisonment. The movement was liquefied on 4 March 1931, for some time.

(vi) The Latter Phase of Movement. In the absence of Gandhiji, the Government let loose its repressive measure on the movement. On the arrest of Jawaharlal Nehru and Khan Bahadur Khan the Working Committee of Indian National Congress had to resume the Civil Disobedience Movement on January 1, 1932. In response to the call of the movement, Assam Congressmen defied the repressive steps of the Government and thousands of people were arrested including 80 women. Subsequently, the Congressmen in Assam suffered due to oppressive and repressive measures taken by the English Government, even Congress offices were burned down. On hearing the news, the AICC led by Pandit Motilal Nehru, Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya and Dr. Rajendra Prasad came to Gauhati for spot investigation.

(vii) Impact in the Hills. In fact, Nagas as a whole were not very much affected by the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League movement because of the strained relations between the Assamese and the Nagas in spite of having been immediate neighbours. In between, the Zeliangrong Nagas living in Manipur, Cachar, North Cachar Hills and the Naga Hills got political inspirations from the plain people, who were fighting for their freedom guided by the Indian National Congress. The name of Mahatma Gandhi was spread out as a great freedom fighter. The visit of Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress session which took place at Pandu in December 1926 left a significant impact in many respects. It inspired the hill peoples to follow the movement for national independence.

(viii) Jadonnang and Freedom Struggle. The news of Indian freedom movement was spread rampant in the Surma and the Brahmaputra valleys, when the presence and integrity of the Zeliangrong Nagas were threatened by the invasion of British as well as the infiltration of Kukis from outside into the hills. Jadonnang emerged as a committed 'Messiah' for the Nagas. He organised some trusted followers including Gaidinliu to establish Naga Raj and to spread the ideology of his movement for independence. Jadonnang did not have a direct link with the INC, but its activities inspired by him to launch a political movement independently.

The first contact he made with the plain people, e.g., Manipuris and Bengalis was very disgusting because they called the Nagas uncivilised and untouchable, and did not allow them to mix with the Hindus. Jadonnang also felt that the spread of Christianity was the policy of the British raj to denounce the tribal religion. He was arrested on February 19, 1931 at Jirighat in Cachar on false allegations of assassination of two Manipuri travellers. Jadonnang was tied and taken to villages and towns to demonstrate to the people that their leader was captured. He was kept in the Imphal jail for more than two months and hanged publicly on Saturday, 29 August 1931 at 6 a.m. on the bank of Nambul river. The last words before he stopped were, "I have done nothing wrong to anybody, whatever I had thought and done was for the cause of my people."

(ix) *The Movement of Rani Gaidinliu.* The expiry of Jadonnang was not the end of the movement. The leadership of freedom movement had passed to Rani Gaidinliu, who became the spiritual and political heir of Jadonnang. Like Jadonnang her cousin, Rani Gaidinliu also urged the people to stop payment of house-tax to the British Government. At this moment, Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movement was launched in full swing throughout the country. She knew well that violence would not respond against the mighty forces of the British. By any means, she had to adopt a method of propaganda saying, "Nagas are free people, the alien pale-race (the British) had no right to rule over us".

She told the people that this pale-race would leave the Naga country sooner or later. She appealed to all the Zeliangrong people not to bow before the British rule. When the British saw the gaining momentum under the leadership of Gaidinliu, she was declared as a "wanted woman" by the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills of Assam State on a deliberate charge of murder, and a warrant was served for her arrest. The Assam Government ordered for the military punitive operation against Gaidinliu.

For three consecutive months desperately, the detachments of Assam Rifles were pursuing her and her party. Finally, an encounter occurred at Hangrum village in North Cachar Hills on February 16, 1932 between the sepoy and Gaidinliu's followers.

In that encounter some persons were killed and entire village was burnt down including paddy granaries so that the people might not get shelter any more. She had escaped and could not be traced out. On March 2, 1932 the Government of Assam gave another report to the Government of India that the escape of Gaidinliu had signalled a grave danger of mass outbreak in Naga Hills, Manipur and North Cachar Hills. As an outcome of the report, the Government was determined to take every possible step for capturing her alive or dead and nib the movement in the bud. To take hold of Gaidinliu was now not as easy as that of Jadonnang. The hunt was very expensive, to quote Ursula Graham Bower, it was "something almost comparable to the hunt for Prince Charlie".

The state Governor-in-Council had sanctioned a large scale operations for the capture of Gaidinliu and her followers. J.P. Mills, ICS the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills District was entrusted to conduct the operation with the 3rd and 4th Assam Rifles. Captain Macdonald, the Commandant of the 3rd Assam Rifles had worked out an elaborate plan to meet the objective. He arranged a column of one hundred Rifles and one hundred Naga, Kuki and Napalese porters from Kohima to proceed to Pulomei village as per the secret report.

On October 18, 1932 she was arrested after frantic search and dismantling houses. Then she was sent for life imprisonment at Nowgong jail and some other places. The arrest and life imprisonment could not bring the movement to an end. The movement was again revived by her followers like Dikeo, Masang, and Haidua of Jengpa village in Tamenglong area of Manipur. Haidua claimed to be the priest who succeeded Gaidinliu. He also preached not to pay house-tax to the British

Government, and not to serve as officials' coolies. It was a kind of Non-Cooperation Movement.

For this cause, he was arrested in May 1932 by the Assam Rifles. After long imprisonment and torture Haidua was released, but shortly after his release he took his last breath. The Assam government put its oppressive and violent hands on the Zeliangrong people, yet the movement had died hard to keep alive the ideals of Jadonnang and Gaidinliu. A number of follow up leaders were either arrested or shot dead. As a precautionary measure to keep under control any uprising or revivals of the movement a bold outpost was maintained at Henima in the Zeliangrong area.

(x) **1942 Movement.** The advancement of Japanese forces toward the frontiers of India through Burma caused a mixed feeling among the National leaders of Congress. At this time, the British Government sent Sir Stafford Cripps to India on a conciliatory gesture. He repeatedly offered the proposal in August 1940 for main changes in the constitution. The mission failed because the Congress as well as the Muslim League had refused to accept the offer, resulted in intensified hostility for the British.

At the same time, confusion held sway among leaders like Subhas Chandra Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru and Abul Kalam Azad because of the rapid advancement of the Japanese forces. Abul Kalam Azad recommended that India should resist the Japanese movement and that a non-violent movement was impracticable at that situation. When INC looked to Gandhiji for his opinion, he concluded that so long as the British domination persisted, the internal problem of India would not be solved. The British must quit India.

On August 8, 1942, the Congress accepted resolution on 'Quit India' which led to the mass civil disobedience throughout the country. In Assam, within a week of announcement of the 'Quit India' Resolution, many important leaders like Md. Tayebullah, G.N. Bardoloi and others who took part in the movement were arrested. The people of Assam had to defy the creed of non-violence and many lost their lives before armed atrocities. In many places like Dhekiajuli, Gahpur and Chaiduar thousands of people marched to the Police stations to hoist the Congress flag and the demonstrators were shot down. In the Surma valley people had responded to the INC's appeal and the Congress workers formed a war-council. The arrest of the top Congress leaders and assassination of the demonstrators could not change the course of the movement. There were leaders among the youths and students who played active role both in open and as underground. They carried on the struggle for independence unabated. About this time, Assam witnessed a new era of pressure when the *Azad Hind Fauj* or Indian National Army (INA) led by Subhas Chandra Bose appeared on the eastern region into Manipur and Naga Hills in March 1944.

Heavy fighting occurred at Imphal, Kohima and elsewhere. However, the British Government suppressed both the 'Quit India' and 'Azad Hind Fauj'. But at the end of the Second World War, one more revolution spread in the navy and the armed forces.

(xi) *Attainment of India Freedom and Partitions.* At last, the British had to recognise the right of India to freedom. The British had agreed to transfer power to the Indians. A British Cabinet Mission was sent to India in 1946 for a dialogue with the Indian leaders. At last, in the midnight of the 14th August 1947, Mountbatten, the Viceroy, on behalf of the British Government, declared India's freedom. Jawaharlal Nehru expressed precisely, "At the stroke of midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom . . ."

Still, the declaration of Indian Independence was followed by the division of the country. The Muslim League had carved out their separate independent country forming West Pakistan and East Pakistan from India. State of Assam had to receive fresh immigration or refugees due to partition of the country. Just after Independence, Lokapriya Gopinath Bardoloi took over as the first Chief Minister, when Sir Akbar Hydari took over as the first Governor of Assam in 1947. Thus the long cherished hope of the Assamese people had been fulfilled. But the unexpected death of Mahatma Gandhi on 30 January 1948 was not only a great shock to the nation but also an irreparable loss to Assam as the Mahatma had a soft corner for Assam and was a means of inspiration to the people in particular.

References

1. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th edition, Knowledge in Depth, Volume 2, p. 307.
2. Dr. H.K. Barpujari, *Assam: In the Days of Company*, Gauhati, Lawyer's Book Stall, 1963, pp. 264-265.
3. Amalendu Guha, *Planter-Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947*, Indian Council of Historical Research, 35 Ferozeshah Road, New Delhi—110 001, 1977, p. 35.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
5. M.V. Kamath, "Neglected Assam", *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, Bombay, January 20, 1980.