

DISTINGUISHED PARTICIPANTS OF THE AUGUST KRANTI MOVEMENT OF BISWANATH SUB-DIVISION, ASSAM:

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Abstract:

Of the freedom movements of India Quit India Movement or August Kranti Movement led by Mahatma Gandhi is very remarkable. It began on 9th August, 1942. This movement widely spread at Biswanath sub-division of Assam also. But in 1942 present Biswanath sub-division was within Darrang district and Darrang played an important role in Quit India movement. There were two parallel organizations in this region like entire Darrang district of that time. These were- 1) Santi Sena Organization – To keep peace and order in the rural areas and another- 2) Mrityu Bahini (death squad) for sabotage activities. This paper will try to highlight the contributions of some of the prominent leaders of the August kranti movement, their effective policies and their various types of sufferings like- rigorous imprisonment and heavy fines, deportation, destruction of their house-hold properties by the British government. Therefore many leaders were compelled to involve in underground activities. It had wide impact on the youth as a result of which they left their schools and colleges and joined the movement. The most striking feature of this struggle of Biswanath sub-division was that in two police stations namely- Sootea and Behali the revolutionaries hoisted the tri-colour flag of India in the month of September 20, 1942. They were able to hoist the flag without any untoward incident like Gohpur. For the first time, women of Biswanath sub-division actively participated in this movement like other parts of Assam. Besides them some joined hands with the British and opposed the movement to fulfil their desires. British took brutal measures to suppress the movement. But the local leaders of Biswanath sub-division continued their political activities and ultimately achieved their goal. Therefore we must acknowledge their love for their motherland and highlight their contribution in the field of national level. The contribution of these local leaders so long neglected and should be placed properly in Indian politics and therefore this paper will try to unveil the unknown facts of this movement in this regard.

Keywords- Mrityu bahini, Santi Sena, acknowledge, suppress.

Objectives:

1. To know about the participants of August Kranti movement of Biswanath sub-division of Assam.
2. To highlight the unknown leaders of Biswanath sub-division and their contribution.
3. To study about their organization to run the movement.

Methodology:

The study has been done on the basis of both primary and secondary sources. Regarding primary source official documents and personal interview with a few freedom fighters are consulted. Again, secondary sources that are followed for this study are like- articles, printed books, local magazines, souvenirs, websites etc. For this study, descriptive method has been

followed. Our study is only confined within the geographical boundary of present Biswanath sub-division of Biswanath Chariali, Assam.

Introduction:

India's freedom struggles have great importance towards India's independence. Among the various anti-British movements the freedom movements led by Mahatma Gandhi can be called as mass-movement. It is only because Gandhi became successful to get the support from the common mass which was not happened in earlier freedom movements. Now, among the three important mass movements quit India or August Kranti Movement is very significant. The reason behind the outbreak of the Quit India Movement is that the viceroy Linlithgow declared India to be a part of World War II without consulting the Central Assembly or Peoples Representatives. The members of Indian National Congress protested and claimed that India would take part in the war only if India would be declared as an independent country. As a result of this British government got convinced to modify certain things of the Government of India Act 1935. The congress offered to co-operate with the British government if a provisional national government was set up at the centre along with British recognition of India's independence.¹ British government on 4th August gave an offer to the Indians to expand the executive council of viceroy by including more Indian members and after the war a representative body of Indians would be formed to frame the Indian constitution. The quit India movement was crushed by the British before it could break out extensively. All the major leaders were imprisoned. In fact, congress was declared as illegal. But besides the lack of leadership, the protesters continued to demonstrate against the British on large scale.²

August Kranti Movement or Quit India Movement in Assam:

Similarly, like other parts of India, the quit India movement of Assam began with the non-violent methods of protests like processions, demonstrations, picketing, *hartals* and hoisting of the Indian flag on government buildings. As a result of the progress of the movement and increase of the violence of the police, it took its rebellious character. The protesters attacked government buildings, destroyed railway tracks and disrupted military supply lines. The important leaders like- Md. Tayebullah, Gopinath Bordoloi, Pitambar Dev Goswami, Sinddhi Nath Sarma etc. were arrested just after one week of the announcement of Quit India Movement. But still Assamese protesters continued their demonstration. At the very beginning of the year 1942, the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) formed an organization named *Santi Sena* that consists of 20,000 workers who belonged to rural areas. The objective of the *Santi Sena* organization was to launch constructive works in order to uphold peace and order in the villages during the war time. At the very outset *Santi Sena* organization did not impact much on the British authority. But gradually it became prominent organization and it challenged the official bodies like village defence party. The *Santi Sena* organization was not liked by the British government as it was a creation of the Indian National Congress. In fact the British government declared *Santi Sena* organization as unauthorised including the congress at all levels. Another important organization was *Mrityu Bahini* (death squad) for sabotage activities.

¹ Navajit Saikia, 'Participation of Assamese women in the quit India movement with special reference to the women of Darrang district', Journal of critical reviews, Vol-7, Issue 18, 2020, p.3629

² Navajit Saikia, *op cit.*, p.3628

Distinguished participants of August Kranti Movement of Biswanath sub-division:

We do not have proper information to know about the participants of the earlier struggles that occurred in between 1828-1857. But the people showed their anger towards the British government in various forms. People were also not happy due to the increase of taxes and involved in various agrarian revolts. Finally at the last phase of the freedom struggles of India i.e. in the quit India Movement indigenous people of the Darrang district participated tremendously. But the Congress leaders like- Gandhiji, Nehru, Azad along with other provincial leaders were arrested on 9th Aug, 1942. It was resulted a spontaneous popular response throughout the country against the British government. People from each part of Assam came forward for a massive protest against the British government. Common people of each and every villages of this district were inspired by Gandhi's message of 'Do or Die'. But the movement took its rebellious character while this movement was led under the hands of the youth and a few Congress Socialists. Darrang district played a significant role in the quit India movement in Assam. Some of the popular centres of this movement are- Dhekiajuli, Tezpur, Jamuguri, Sootea, Behali, Gohpur etc. British government declared illegal and unlawful to congress organization along with its various branches and allied associations. Therefore a few congress leaders like- Jyotiprasad Agarwala, Gahon Chandra Goswami etc. involved in underground and launched sabotage activities in various places. The main objective of these leaders was to dislocate the war supplies. But leaders like Omeo Kumar Das refused to take the side of the extremists. But the over-all activities were directed by Hem Chandra Barua of Guwahati. The *Santi sena* organization was established in Darrang district in order to keep peace and order in the rural areas. The underground leaders formed an organization named *Mrityu Bahini* (Death Squad) in order to do sabotage activities.³ Gradually the village panchayat became more active in some places and some of them even tried to establish parallel government. The main feature of their activities were- they hold big meetings and processions, attempted to unfurl the congress flag on police stations, court buildings and other common buildings. People destroyed government properties and buildings at various places. Attempts were also made to capture the police stations at Sootea and Behali.

The present Biswanath sub-division was within Darrang district during the August Kranti Movement and it was called as *Na-duar*. *Na-duar* included the areas in between Bharali and Buroi rivers. These areas are like- Jamuguri, Sootea, Biswanath and Buroi area. The geographical boundary of present Biswanath sub-division is – the Buroi river on the east, Dikarai river on the west, Arunachal Pradesh on the north and the river Brahmaputra on the south. The role of Biswanath- sub-division in quit India Movement is very important to study. It played an outstanding role in the Indian National movements of the early nineteenth century. The indigenous people and new settlers of Biswanath sub-division played a great role in the August Kranti Movement. They actively participated in the demonstrations, processions and picketing. Among these people most of them were the members of *Santi sena*. Many women also took part in this movement as the male leaders were imprisoned. On the other hand, in the year 1942, the *Mrityu Bahini* (death squad) was established in order to do revolutionary activities systematically.

Participation of Sootea area in quit India Movement:

³ Gazetteer of India, Assam state, Darrang district, District gazetteers, Government of Assam, Guwahati, April, 1978, p.86

Sootea was an important part of Darrang district during the outbreak of the Quit India Movement and presently it is within Biswanath district. From here a large group of both men and women participated in the movement. Under the leadership of Swarna prowa Mahanta an organization named *Mohila Mrityu Bahini* comprised of 350 girls and women took part in this movement. A large group of people gathered in front of Sootea thana and hoisted the national flag on 20th September, 1942 by lowering the Union Jack of the British. It is very interesting to state here that people of Sootea thana were the first in the country who successfully hoisted the flag in government building.⁴ Some of the important women participants are like- Labanya Devi, Ganeswari Bhuyan, Premoda Bormudoi, Padumilata Barua, Basumati Koch, Dineswari Hazarika, Kooseswari Devi, Purnada Devi, Padmini Barua, Padumi Gogoi Barua. Some of the important male leaders from this area were- Mahendra Borkotoky, Boloram Bormudoi, Dimbeswar Hazarika, Buleswar Hazarika, Biman Bora, Kula Hazarika, Deben Borkotoky etc.⁵ Later on August 22, 1942, these leaders were arrested by the British government as they declared flag hoisting as illegal.⁶

Participation of Biswanath Chariali in quit India movement:

In each and every village, security forces, women Red Cross party, training of Santi sena, discussion meeting at village namghars, meeting of village panchayat- all these were very common at that time. Military persons were given training to fight wars. Various persons worked as spy. Except the leaders secret messages were not known by anyone. Sometimes to maintain the secrecy the leaders even sacrificed their lives. At Tezpur, leader like- Bipin Hazarika, Binit Baruah, Bhadrakanta Saikia, Kamala Bhuyan, Hemadhar Phukan and Bhadra Hazarika etc. took training for four months and set up camps at the villages of the three sub-divisions of Biswanath region and also established groups of the volunteers. To hide the identity of Binit Baruah and Bhadrakanta Saikia they disguised as one person by taking the name as Binit-Bhadra. Interestingly, British officers also got confused whether this is the name of two persons or one person. The volunteers of these villages joined *Mukti bahini* and took oath from the popular leader like- Gohon Chandra Goswami, Jyotiprasad Agarwala and Kamakhyaprasad Tripathi. In every villages of Na-duar or Biswanath Chariali organizations were established. The youngsters after finishing their household works took training at these camps and also took part in the rally and organizational activities. In the villages protesters did the rallies by singing the songs of Jyotiprasad Agarwala. The common people also enjoyed at watching them. Each and every villager was asked to contribute one cup of uncooked rice for the protesters who were dwelling at the camps. For the proper functioning of these camps in each and every camp one office was established. The central office was established at Bhirgaon under the supervision of Bipin Hazarika. The office was under the responsibility of Kumud Chandra Barua and Premananda Bora. The British were informed by the protesters to occupy the police stations on 20th September, 1942. Therefore for the safety of the villages at the main paths gates were fixed and inducted security guards. But before 20th September, the local leaders were arrested. It is interesting to note here that it did not hamper in the activity of the local organizations. Before the government's repressive measures protesters chose their successive leaders for the proper functioning of their activities. On 18 September, in the

⁴ Report of the Enquiry Committee of Freedom Fighters, Government of Assam.

⁵ Anjan Baskota, 'The Unsung hero of freedom movement: Hari Prasad Mishra', The hill times, August 15, 2021

⁶ *Ibid*, p.3633

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morning, Baparam Gogoi Barua of Sootea, Madan Saikia of Jamuguri and Nobin Chandra Bhattacharya of Biswanath Chariali were arrested together and imprisoned for 6 months. After their arrest Gohon Chandra Goswami and Jyotiprasad Agarwala secretly continued their political activities. The political activities of Biswanath chariali was under the supervision of Nobin chanddra Bhattacharya. After him it was under the supervision of Jiwon Chandra Barua, Sosodhar Hazarika and Shiva Borthakur. In this movement people from every section of the society including service men participated. Interestingly, a blind person named Gobarkona (Nandi Saikia) also actively participated in the movement as spy.⁷ Last but not the least, on 20th September 1942, the protesters attempted to occupy the Sootea thana and therefore, in the rally Ganganath Saikia and Sonaram Bhuyan hold the tri-coloured national flag on the first row. They were the members of *Mrityu Bahini* and they started their rally by singing the song 'Kadam kadam barhaye ja'. Right after these activities the British government took more repressive measures and the movement took its violent character. The protesters fired at the post office, schools, cut the telegraph lines, destroyed the official documents, railway tracks etc. At Biswanath Chariali, a government M.E. School was burnt down by the underground volunteers. British took fine on the destruction of government properties.

Police started enquiries in each and every villages and damaged its' properties. Its' first victim was Bhirgaon where the central office of the protesters was established. Police enquiries also started in some other village like- Gorehagi, Bamgaon, Lehugaon, Nagaon, Kochgaon, Kamargaon etc. Each and every person of these villages was brutally suppressed by the British government. For e.g. the resident of Loknath Sarma, Cheniram Das were destroyed by the British. Cheniram Das as a fugitive led various political activities secretly. He was involved in various activities like firing at the government buildings, destruction of bridges, destruction of railway tracks, stealing of guns etc. He as a fugitive did the political activities for almost nine or ten months. After that in order to run away from police went to Nagaon and stayed at Amlokhi gaon. Interestingly to give motivation to his fellow followers he organized *Druno Parba bhaona*. Here the tea-garden labourers were also allowed to take part. But finally he was caught by the police and then imprisoned. Besides all this a person named Ganesh Koch permanently became physically handicap by the British atrocities. The British armies also destroyed the main gates of the villages. In order to strengthen the mental state of the common people some of the leaders secretly organized *barechahariya bhaona* at Lehugaon field.⁸ Thousands and thousands of people united together and were inspired to sing *Bande Mataram*. Among these people some of them played the role of terrorist in this movement. For e.g. we can talk about Nobin Bordoloi of Jamuguri, Kamala Bhagawati and Thaneswar Katiya of Sootea, Binit- Bhadra and Nobin Dadhara of Biswanath Chariali. One interesting thing regarding Biswanath sub-division or Naduar area is that no one could openly help the British. Another important fact regarding this movement is that some of the leaders like- Shiva Borthakur, Kan Borthakur, Subudh Das secretly helped some of the fugitives to cross the river Brahmaputra at night. Some of the important leaders of this area who sacrificed their lives are- Jaggeswar Bora, Guluk Das, Chandu Saikia, Bhuwan Sarma, Tirtheswar Sarma, Numol Bora,

⁷ Binit Barua and Bhadrakanta Saikia, 'Swadhinota Andolonot Biswanath Chariali', Biswanath Deepika, Assam Sahitya Sabha, 1990, p.149

⁸ Paramananda Das, *Jiwon Saurabh*, Jiwon prabha prakashan, 1990, pp.28-31

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Gangaram Saikia, Uma Sarma, Durgeswar Hazarika, Harbilash Gajurel, Mahendra Kaphle, Tikaram Upadhyaya, Lalit Saikia, Padum Barua, Kirti Kataki, Thanu Saikia, Haren Sarma etc.⁹

Participation of Behali in quit India Movement:

Some of the participants from this area are- Chobilal Upadhyaya, Bogiram Saikia, Kula Dutta and Bishnunal Upadhyaya etc. Among these persons Kula Dutta took the leadership of the *Mukti Bahini* established in this area. On 20 September, 1942 he also led the people to Behali thana to hoist the tri-coloured national flag. The public of the Behali area gave the slogan as 'Swadhin Bharat ki Jai' and 'Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai'. But one Police officer protected the Behali thana by keeping a group of British armies. But still the common people of Behali successfully hoisted the flag without any hindrance.

Conclusion:

The quit India movement got over after passing so many disastrous days. The British government could not understand the message of the quit India Movement. Gandhi and some other leaders were released by the middle of the year 1945. In June, 1945, Gandhiji took part in Shimla conference with the viceroy Lord Wavell. The general election of the year 1946, in Assam congress occupied fifty seats out of one hundred and eight and in second congress committee was formed under the leadership of Gopinath Bordoloi on February, 1946. After this, the cabinet mission plan came to India. But it was not liked by both the Muslim league leaders and congress leaders of Assam. Finally both the parties rejected and plan and secured the future of Assam.

The importance of Quit India Movement or August Kranti Movement of Biswanath sub-division is that this region is also not lagging behind in the activities of freedom movement of India. All the local leaders and new settlers especially Nepalese were very brave and they were very efficient in their political activities. They established various local organizations and involved people from each and every section of the society. These leaders established various camps in the villages and took proper measures for the safety of the villagers. In order to show their anger towards British they fired at the government buildings, police stations, destroyed railway tracks, cut the telegraph lines etc. The most striking feature of the various political activities of the leaders was that local leaders hoisted the tri-coloured national flag of India in two thanas of this region. This is the very first example of such case in all over India. Another interesting feature of this region is that the local leaders organized various *bhaonas* (a traditional form of entertainment which provides religious message) to motivate the protesters. In fact the local leaders properly maintained their camps. For providing enough supply of food the leaders asked each and every villagers of this region to provide helping hand. Thus, in short we can say that the local leaders of this region were very advanced and they were very efficient in their activities as they successfully led this movement to achieve its goal. Therefore it is very necessary to highlight their great contribution towards this movement and their activities should properly be highlighted at national level.

⁹ Paramananda Das, *op cit.*, p.150.

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