

**Participation of women in the Freedom Movement of Assam, in reference to the women of Undivided Kamrup District (1921-1947)**

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**ABSTRACT**

The independence movement of India was undoubtedly a great epoch in the history of modern India. It was a movement which galvanized millions of people of all classes and ideologies into one political platform, which brought a mighty colonial empire into its knees. The Northeastern region including Assam also participated wholeheartedly in the movement for achieving India's independence from the bondage of the British Empire as did in the other parts of India.

Apart from the role played by the men, the women of Assam in general and erstwhile Undivided Kamrup district particularly, extended their tremendous contribution towards the freedom movement of India.

From the very ancient period of Indian history, women occupied a special position in the society. They were Pala, Ghosa, Gargi and many more. Even during the Muslim period of Indian history, some noble women like Rani Padmini, Rani Durgawati and many others occupied special position in different spheres of the society.

During the Ahom rule, Mulagabharu, an Ahom woman laid down her life to save the Ahom Kingdom from the invasion of Turbok, a renowned Muslim general of Bengal. Apart from heroic sacrifice of Mulagabharu, the three Queens of King Sivasingha of Ahom Kingdom, namely Phuleshwari alias Phulmati, Draupadi alias Ambika and Anadari alias Sarbeswari showed their great ability in Ahom administration and occupies a special mention in the 600 years of the Ahom rule.

With the introduction of western education in India during the British Period, the atmosphere of the society had been changed. Since then, emphasis had been given for introduction of women education though there was not ample scope for higher education for the women. Even conservative minded people of the society did not encourage the higher education for the female members of the family. In the meantime

special reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekananda and others had strongly advocated for the spread of female education in the society. Many women began to take education and they were aware of the contemporary happenings in the world. Many women did not like to keep as house wives and kitchen. They desired to take part in politics. Opportunities came after the foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885. Its impact also felt on women in Assam.

Upto 1900, women did not take part in politics in large scale. It was generated from Gandhi's key role in the freedom struggle that was roughed by him among Indian women. He captured the Indian women community out of the narrow realm of their kitchen to take part in the freedom struggle.

Assamese intellectuals of that period also encouraged women education in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which resulted in the formation of the *Mahila Samities* all over Assam till 1921 and later crystalize the awakening and participation of Assamese women in the freedom struggle. Gandhi's first visit to Assam in 1921 also provided a zeal of encouragement and motivation among the women of Assam to participate in the freedom struggle during the period of 1921-1947. In this context, it should be mentioned that the women of erstwhile Undivided Kamrup district also extended their full cooperation and participation in the movement, as the Guwahati was the main hub of the freedom movement in Assam.

So, an attempt has been made to analysis the paper taking into consideration the following aims and objectives:

- a) An attempt to make an assessment of the participation of women of Assam towards the freedom movement since 1921 to 1947.
- b) To explore the contribution of some unsung women freedom fighters of the state.
- c) To highlight their untold sacrifices during struggle period.
- d) To focus on the underground activities of the women folk with the male counterpart.

### INTRODUCTION

The independence movement of India was undoubtedly a great epoch in the history of modern India. It was a movement which galvanized millions of people of all classes and ideologies into one political platform, which brought a mighty colonial empire into its knees. The Northeastern region including Assam in general and erstwhile undivided Kamrup district particularly, extended their tremendous contribution towards the freedom movement of India.

The present state of Assam is divided into two parts, viz; The Brahmaputra Valley and The Surama or Barak valley. Our study will be confined to Brahmaputra Valley. Assam is in many ways a land of exceptional interest with her multifarious people and different races including tribal races, its strategic position presents a very variegated and engrossing field of study.<sup>1</sup>

Assam is one of the few states in India whose people strongly checked the tide of Muhammadan conquest and maintained the independence of entire Northeast Bharat. Since the inceptions of Muslim rules in India in 1206 CE to the decisive battle of Saraighat in 1671 CE, several attempts were made by the Muslims to bring the whole Assam under its sway. But each and every invasions of Muslims was ably resisted by the people of Assam, especially under the heroic leadership of Lachit Bar Phukan.<sup>2</sup>

The Undivided Kamrup district was created in 1874 CE under colonial rule. The territorial boundary of the district remained unchanged till 1983 CE. It then comprised of three sub divisions viz, Kamrup Nalbari and Barpeta. But since 1983 CE to present day, the three sub divisions are divided among seven independent districts. But our study is confined only to the erstwhile Undivided Kamrup district.<sup>3</sup>

From the very ancient period of Indian history, women occupied a special position in the society. They were Pala, Ghosa, Gargi and many more. Even during the Muslim period of Indian history, some noble women like Rani Padmini, Rani Durgawati and many others occupied special position in different spheres of the society.<sup>4</sup>

During the Ahom rule, Mulagabharu, an Ahom woman laid down her life to save the Ahom Kingdom from the invasion of Turbok, a renowned Muslim general of Bengal. Apart from heroic sacrifice of Mulagabhoru, the three Queens of King Sivasingha of Ahom Kingdom, namely Phuleshwari alias Phulmati, Draupadi alias Ambika and Anadari alias Sarbeswari showed their great ability in Ahom administration and occupies a special mention in the 600 years of the Ahom rule.<sup>5</sup>

Upto 1900, women did not take part in politics in large scale. It was generated from Gandhi's key role in the freedom struggle that was roughed by him among Indian women. He captured the Indian women community out of the narrow realm of their kitchen to take part in the freedom struggle.

Assamese intellectuals of that period also encouraged women education in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which resulted in the formation of the *Mahila Samities* all over Assam till 1921 and later crystalize the awakening and participation of Assamese women in the freedom struggle. Gandhi's first visit to Assam in 1921 also provided a zeal of encouragement and motivation among the women of Assam to participate in the freedom struggle during the period of 1921-1947. In this context, it should be mentioned that the women of erstwhile Undivided

Kamrup district also extended their full cooperation and participation in the movement, as the Guwahati was the main hub of the freedom movement in Assam.<sup>6</sup>

So, an attempt has been made to analysis the paper taking into consideration the following aims and objectives:

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- c) To highlight their untold sacrifices during struggle period.
- d) To focus on the underground activities of the women folk with the male counterpart.

## METHODOLOGY

For this study, basically historical methodology is adopted. However analytical method is also used whenever necessary. Collection of primary and secondary data have also been made at the related offices of the topic. Extensive field survey is conducted. Oral traditional interview of elders are also examined and verified in the light of the information gathered from other sources.

### *Role of women in the Non-Cooperation movement*

The special session of the Indian National Congress was held in Calcutta (now Kolkata) on the 4<sup>th</sup> September 1920. In this session it was decided that “The Congress is further of opinion that there is no course left open for the people of India but to approve of and adopt the policy of progressive non-violent Non-Cooperation, inaugurated by Gandhi until said wrong and righted”<sup>7</sup> and once the Non-Cooperation movement started in all parts of India, it created unprecedented enthusiasm among the people of India in general and Assam in particular.

The women of India responded to Gandhi’s call for Non-Cooperation.<sup>8</sup> They participated in the movement by joining protest march, spinning and weaving, attending procession and meetings, boycotting foreign goods and leaving schools and colleges etc. Some of the national freedom fighters were Kasturba Gandhi (Gujarat), Uma Nehru (UP), Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya (Bengal), Bai Aminan (Lahore), Sarala Devi (Punjab), Sarojini Naidu (Bombay) Prabati Devi (Agra) and many more.<sup>9</sup>

The women of Assam as well as the women of Undivided Kamrup District were also influenced by the ideals of Gandhi and came forward to participate in the Non-Cooperation movement, crossing the barrier of four walls and ignoring the prevailing traditional social restrictions.

The participation of women in Kamrup was most significant. They got stimulated by the clarion call of Gandhi. At the very initial stage of the movement, participation of women were unimpressive. Only a few dedicated women, mostly from urban background belonging to the freedom fighter’s family joined the movement in Guwahati.<sup>10</sup>

Bidyut Prava Devi; wife of Tarunram Phukan, Girija Devi, sister of Tarunram phukan, Nalinibala Devi; daughter of Nabin Chandra Bordoloi, Hemanta Kumari Devi; wife of Nabin Chandra Bordoloi, Dharmada Devi; sister of Nabin Chandra Bordoloi and others played an active role in the Non-Cooperation movement. They visited the interior places within the districts and organized meetings and urged the women of rural areas for spinning and weaving, boycotting foreign goods, and actively participate in the movement. In January 1921, under the leadership of Bidyut Prava Devi, some women arranged a procession to violate Section 144 and got arrested.<sup>11</sup>

Hema Prava Das wife of Dr. Harikrishna Das took the active part in the Non-Cooperation movement in the Dibrugarh District. She travelled different parts of neighboring areas and organized women and motivated them to come out from the four walls of their homes. She also encouraged the women for spinning and weaving and boycotting of foreign goods. Apart from Hema Prava Das; Suprabha Dutta, Joytara Gogoi, Rajabala Das and many others came forward and contributed to the greater cause of the Non-Cooperation movement.<sup>12</sup>

Gandhi visited Dibrugarh during his first visit of Assam in 1921. At that time, Rajabala Das along with her mother met Gandhi and informed him that she left her studies and actively participated in the Non-Cooperation movement. At this, Gandhi was highly impressed and also appreciated her for the sacrifice she made for the country. She was also the secretary of the Dibrugarh Congress Committee women's wing.<sup>13</sup>

The women of Golaghat district also did not lag behind during the freedom movement during the period of 1921-1947. Darika Baruah and Swarnalata Baruah were the two prominent leaders. Promila Medak (Kumari) of Missing Community took an active part in the movement by defying the prevailing social restrictions.<sup>14</sup>

The impact of Non-Cooperation movement was also felt in Darrang district. In this context, the Mongri, alias Malati Mem's death during the freedom struggle was most regrettable. Mungri, alias Malati Mam, a tea tribe woman, belonged to Lalmati tea garden of Darrang district (present Sonitpur district) was the first woman martyr of Assam who sacrificed her life for the great cause of India's independence during the Non-Cooperation movement.<sup>15</sup> Also the women of Sootia in Darrang district made their involvement in the freedom movement during the period of 1921-47 CE. The leading women participants from this area were Maladoi Hazarika, (Sootia), Reboti Bora (Jamugurihat), Nirmal Prava Saikia (Kachari village) and many others. They traveled the interior places and arranged meetings and processions. The leaders urged the people to give up the use of opium and other intoxicants with warning of social boycott.<sup>16</sup>

Puspalata Das; wife of veteran freedom fighter Omeo Kumar Das, was one of the prominent figure among the women participants in the freedom movement. Born on 27<sup>th</sup> March, 1915 in North Lakhimpur, Puspalata Das extended her tremendous contribution in the freedom

movement during the period of 1921-47. As an ardent follower of Gandhi, she took the initiative in organizing the women folk of Assam. She was the convener of the Women Wings of Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC).<sup>17</sup> In the Civil Disobedience movement, she established an association named “*Mukti Sangha*” to mobilize girls to create a sense of nationalism in their minds.

In Quit India movement, Pusalata Das travelled different places of Assam, organized the women folk through procession and meetings urging them to get involved in the freedom movement. She also offered *Individual Satyagraha* in 1940. She was arrested and was sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for three and half years as security prisoner.<sup>18</sup>

Pusalata Das’s mother Swarnalata Das was also a very active women organizer. She was the secretary of the “*Kamrup Mahila Samiti*” during the period of 1930-34.

The impact of Non-Cooperation movement was also felt in Darrang district. Chandraprava Saikiani was a primary teacher in an interior village near Tezpur. She led the movement in Tezpur and some other parts of the districts. Saikiani was closely associated with the ‘*Tezpur Mahila samiti*’ which was formed in 1919.<sup>19</sup> Some of the other women participants were Krishnamayee Agarwalla, Kiran bala Barkakati, Sarabala Das and others. Kiranmayee Agarwalla gave up her luxury life though she belonged to an elite family of a great tea planter and a laureate, Jyotiprasad Agarwalla.<sup>20</sup>

In Goalpara, women participation in the movement was very significant. Processions and meetings were the general programme in the Non-Cooperation movement. The 41<sup>st</sup> session of the Indian National Congress was held at Pandu, Guwahati from 26-28 December, 1926. A decorative *pandal* was made with Assamese Khadi clothes and the female weavers of Assam were credited for this as they made available the required clothes within six months of the event.<sup>21</sup>

Gandhi’s first visit to Assam in August 1921 provided a great zeal of encouragement to the women of Assam and Kamrup district in particular. On 19<sup>th</sup> August Gandhi attended three meetings organized by the Women of Assam which also included Marwari and Bengali women. It was held in the Kamrup Theatre Hall. Gandhi was given a warm welcome and presented him with a *Khaddar Chaddar* woven with their own handspun yarn. Gandhi showed great faith on the capabilities of Assamese women.<sup>22</sup> In this context he wrote an article named ‘Lovely Assam’ published in *Young India*. Through the article he expressed his faith that Assam with her women folk proficient in spinning and weaving could take to Swaraj much earlier as compared to other parts of India. This faith and belief of Gandhi on Assamese women served as a source of inspiration and motivation for the women to work for the freedom movement.<sup>23</sup>

The Assamese women also actively responded to the “*Tilak Swaraj Fund*” collection and donated generously. Apart from women of Kamrup, the women of Sivsagar, Naogaon, Jorhat,

Dibrugarh, Tezpur and some other rural places of Assam also donated money and ornaments towards the cause.<sup>24</sup>

In Nagaon district, Ratneswari Bhattacharyya and Khagendriprya took the main role in organizational work during the Non-Cooperation movement. In meantime ‘*The Nagaon Mahila Samiti*’ was formed in 1917. The Samiti acted as a platform in organizing the women of Nagaon. On 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1921, Gandhi visited Nagaon during his first Assam visit. He addressed a huge gathering urging all to participate in the freedom movement by following the path of non-violence. Another meeting was held at Nagoan Natya Mandir on 24<sup>th</sup> August 1921 which was addressed by Begum Md. Ali. She highlighted the importance of Non-Cooperation led by Gandhi and asked the Assamese women to make the spinning and weaving popular. This movement got intensified in the entire district after Gandhi’s visit. Rongdoi Lalungani of Jagi Bhakat gaon, Pravawati Devi and some others were the prominent members of this movement from Nagaon district.<sup>25</sup>

When Non-cooperation was going on, Madan Mohan Malviya and Babu Rajendra Prasad came to Assam to make an enquiry on the atrocities perpetrated on the people of Assam, particularly on the people of South Kamrup.<sup>26</sup> During their stay in Assam, they visited different places of South Kamrup including Guwahati (30<sup>th</sup> May 1922), Tezpur (31<sup>st</sup> May 1922) and Dibrugarh (4<sup>th</sup> June, 1922). During this period, they also addressed some gatherings organized by Assamese women. They advised the Assamese women to devote more time on the advancement of home-made cloth industry and popularize Khadi. The Assamese women also composed and sung songs on Non-Cooperation, Congress and Gandhi. When Congress leaders returned back to Gujarat, they highlighted the efforts of the Assamese women in their speech made there.<sup>27</sup>

On 5<sup>th</sup> February 1922, at Chauri Chaura, a village in Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh; a crowd of peasants set ablaze a police station and burnt to death half a dozen police members. Gandhi was grieved over this violence and immediately withdraw the Non-Cooperation movement.

### ***Role of Women of Assam in the Civil Disobedience Movement***

The history of national movement from 1929 to 1939 marked an important stage in the political and constitutional history of India. The Congress gave an ultimatum to the British Government in 1928 that it should take step to actualize ‘Dominion Status’<sup>28</sup> by 31<sup>st</sup> December 1929 failing which Congress would launch a mass movement. In reply, Lord Irwin, the then Viceroy of India, clearly stated that ‘Dominion Status’ was the goal of the British policy. But no adequate steps were taken by the British to make it a reality.

Under the circumstance, the significant Lahore Annual Session of Congress was held in December 1929, on the bank of the river Ravi. Jawaharlal Nehru, the young lawyer turned freedom fighter was elected the President of the Congress Session. After a long deliberation, the

Congress adopted the resolution on complete Independence or “Purna Swaraj” on January 1, 1930. The resolution of the Congress observed that<sup>29</sup>

“We believe that it is the inalienable right of the Indian people. The British Government of India has deprived the Indian people of their freedom. We believe, therefore, that India must obtain Purna Swaraj or complete Independence.”

In February 1930, the Congress working committee empowered Gandhi to initiate the Civil Disobedience Movement in any manner he considered best. Thus, Civil disobedience movement was started under the leadership of Gandhi. Its impact was also felt in Assam and in undivided Kamrup district.

Like Non-Cooperation movement, a large number of women freedom fighters of Kamrup district actively took part in the Civil Disobedience Movement.

Anna Baruah, Guwahati, took active part in the Civil Disobedience in 1930-32.<sup>30</sup> She did not care for the British force. She was one of the seven ladies who picketed Cotton College on 10-07-1930 for several days. As a result A.E. Boown cancelled all classes every day. Ratneswar Baruah, Guwahati, was one of the women activists who participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1934-35. She also actively worked in furtherance of the movement in rural areas. Rama Prabha Baruah, Guwahati, was also another lady activist who picketed Cotton College on 10-7-1930 for several days. Smt. Sudhansu Paul, Guwahati, worked for the movement in 1929-30. Took part in picketing in front of Cotton College in 1930. Bhanumati Das of Guwahati was greatly inspired by the ideals of Gandhi. Picketed Cotton College on 10-7-1930 and continued it for several days. Puspallata Das wife of Omeo Kumar Das, Guwahati can be regarded as another prominent woman leader in the history of the freedom movement in Assam during 1930-1947. She was imprisoned for two and a half years for her personal Satyagraha. Later on she got released as per the terms of Gandhi-Irwin Agreement.<sup>31</sup> Durgaprava Borah, Wife of Dr. Bipin Bihari Borah, Uzan bazar, Guwahati, was among the first batch of ladies to picket Cotton College in 1930. Smti. Sudhansu Paul Choudhury, wife of Apurba Nath Paul Choudhury, Lachitnagar, Guwahati actively participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1929. Soroja Choudhury, Ulubari, Guwahati, actively worked in the freedom movement since 1930-1942. She also served as a messenger in 1942. She travelled all over Assam with Smti. Amalparava Das. Kamala Hazarika was an active participant of the Civil Disobedience Movement. She was one of the first batch of ladies to picket Cotton College in 1930. Dr. Tilottama Das, MBBS daughter of Dr. Harikrishna Das, Guwahati made her selfless contribution towards the Civil Disobedience movement. She enlisted her name as a Congress volunteer in 1930. Smt Samapurua, wife of Dharmeswar Rajbongshi, Boko Bazar, participated as an active volunteer during the movement in 1930. She attended the Raipura (Congress) political meeting with Smti Chandraparava Saikiani. Muktaparava Agarwalla, wife of Chandra Kumar Agarwalla, Guwahati was an active member of Civil Disobedience movement. She was among the first batch of ladies to picket Cotton College from July 10<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> July 1930.<sup>32</sup>



The participation of women in the Civil Disobedience movement in Dibrugarh district was most effective. Chandraprava Saikiani organized the meetings in the remote areas of the district and urged the women folk to boycott foreign goods and to fight against the consumption of intoxicants. Monodrama Dutta, Nagendra Bala Kazarika and Sadari Kakati took active role and called upon to take active part in the movement.<sup>33</sup>

The response of women in Civil Disobedience movement in Nagaon district was far reaching. On the day of launching 'Dandi March' by Gandhi on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1930, the people of Kaliabor in Nagaon district decided to symbolically join the march under the leadership of Thanuram Bhuyan and Tuwakanta Goswami.<sup>34</sup> More than four hundred women of Kalibor also accompanied to the march like Guneswari Devi, Darbai Mech, Kisanbala Bora, Mohini Gohain, Muktabala Baisnab, Kiranbala Bora and many others. Some of them were injured in the police lathi charge for taking part in the march.

In Sivsagar Town too, similar symbolic Dandi March was organized with a view to propagating the ideals of Gandhi and significance of Dandi March. The prominent participants were Upama Duarani, Lilawati Hazarika, Gunadalata Phukanani, Jogeswari Duarani, Lilawati Duarani, Khageswari Duarani, Aiti Phukanani, Sundaribala Kakati, Kamalabala Kakati, Sachiparava Chaliha and many more. Significantly, Kamalabala Kakati, the elder sister of Bimala Parsad Chaliha (Ex-Chief Minister of Assam) was arrested and sentenced to six months imprisonment.<sup>35</sup>

The impact of the Civil Disobedience movement was quite effective in Goalpara district. More than three thousand women assembled to attend the women conference which was held at Gauripur town on 20<sup>th</sup> April, 1931. Hemaparava Mazumdar and Nurjahan, a Muslim woman took the leadership as the president of the conference. Hemaparava Mazumdar urged the women to fight for the greater cause of independence by breaking all the traditional barrier of weaknesses. Nurjahan, on the other hand appealed the Muslim women to participate in the freedom movement by keeping aside the prevailing purdah system in the Muslim society.<sup>36</sup>

The impact of the Civil Disobedience movement in Golaghat was also intensive. Darika Baruah was the most prominent leader among others. Some of her associates were Rahila Prava Bora, Bidyawati Baishnar, Navami Sonowalani etc. Significantly, Darika Baruah was martyred in this movement. She was arrested and sent to Sivsagar jail. During that time she was in the advanced stage of pregnancy of five months and suffered from blood dysentery. She did not get proper medical treatment due to the negligence of the jail authority. As a result she died on 26<sup>th</sup> April, 1932.<sup>37</sup>

The women of Jamugurihatin North Lakhimpur district organized a meeting and resolved to join the movement. In June 1931, under the president ship of Ratneswari Phukanani, a grand meeting was held at Lakhimpur town and resolved for mass participation in the movement. Hemlata

Phukan, Jugaleswari Baruah, Safia Khatun, RatnaPrava Das, Hemiban Nissa and Rahima Begum took active initiative for the success of the movement.<sup>38</sup>

The women of Assam staged a strong protest against the unjust Cunningham Circular. The circular aimed to debar students from taking part in the movement. In Guwahati, some women regularly picketed in front of the main entrance of Cotton College. They were MuktaPrava Agarwalla, RatnaPrava Bora, Basantabala Hazarika, Kamaladevi and many more.<sup>39</sup>

Gandhi came to Assam for the third time on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1934 to seek support for the Harijan Movement. During that time, the women of Guwahati, Dhubri, Barpeta, Golaghat, Dibrugarh etc gave Gandhi a warm welcome. They donated their valuable ornaments to the Harijan Fund. It should be noted that Saiphuri Das of Uparhali village in Rampur mauza of South Kamrup, donated all her ornaments to the Harijan Kalyan Nidhi. After that she vowed never to use any ornaments in her life.<sup>40</sup>

### ***Quit India Movement and Role of Women in Assam***

During the period of Second World War (1939-45) Cripps Mission came to India, which was sent by the British cabinet on the 23rd March, 1942.<sup>41</sup> They handed over some new constitutional proposals at the hands of the leaders of the National Congress. But the congress strongly refused it because it did not fulfil the demands of congress as well as the common people of India. So, the failure of the Cripps Mission and the declaration of the war by the British without the consent of the congress, ultimately led to the beginning of the Quit India movement in 1942 which was the last decisive resistance against the colonial rule. Thus the Quit India movement started in India. The congress volunteers in Assam left no stone unturned in spreading the implementation of the Quit India Resolution adopted by the Congress on 14<sup>th</sup> July 1942. They echoed the voice of Gandhi's declaration that "there was no room for compromise and the British must Quit India."<sup>42</sup>

Apart from male counterpart, the women of Kamrup district contributed a lot during the Quit India Movement. Both educated and uneducated women of the district contributed physically and materially, volunteer campaigning, protest campaigning, fasting and donating to the causes of the freedom movement. The freedom movement prepared the women of Kamrup to march together with men. Thousands of women came forward to hold meetings and processions without the help of men. Such women activists were Surabala Baishya Medhi, Sualkuchi, actively participated in the movement of 1942. She organized meeting at villages and urged the people to participate in the movement. Soroja Choudhury, Ulubari, was an active participant in the freedom movement since 1930-42. She worked as secret messenger during Quit India Movement. Hiranyabala Bora, Guwahati, actively participated in August movement. She organized and conducted the congress camps in 1940-43. Ratnaprava Bora, Guwahati also was an active participant in the movement since 1930-43. Surabala Bordoloi, wife of Gopinath Bordoloi, Guwahati, was an active participant of the August movement. Amalprava Das,

daughter of Dr. Harikrishna Das, Guwahati, the first lady from Assam to secure an M.Sc Degree, played a significant role in the Quit India movement. She became the leader of the women's branch of the congress committee. She travelled to different parts of Assam and organized meetings.<sup>43</sup> She was arrested twice in 1943 and imprisoned in the jail. She was set free toward the end of 1944. Bhanumati Talukdar, Palashbari, was an active participant in the movement since 1926-47. She was also an active Swadeshi and anti-opium worker. She offered Satyaghara. She dressed as volunteer and popularly known as "volunteerani Bai. It should be noted that Bhanumati Talukdar whom Gandhi called the 'Sarojini' of Assam left her family to work exclusively for the Congress of Assam. Rukmini Das, Chenga of Barpeta district was also an active participant of the Quit India movement.<sup>44</sup>

Mahimapriya Talukdar, Chenga, Barpeta, actively participated in 1940. She followed the ideals of Gandhi. She also offered *Satyaghara*.

Bhubaneshwari Devi, Patshala, actively participated in the August movement in 1942. She gave food and shelter to the Congress volunteers.

Chandraprabha Saikiani is a well-known in the history of freedom movement in Assam. She was born in a remote village Daisingiri of Bajali area in the then Kamrup district on March 16<sup>th</sup> 1901. She had served as headmistress at Nowgaon Mission School. During that time, she had come into close contact with some prominent leaders like Chandra Nath Sarmah. Amiya Kr. Das, Lakhidhar Sarmah and some others. She got inspirations from them and made up her mind to join the freedom movement. Later on she emerged as a great leader of women in the history of freedom movement in Assam since 1921 to 1947. She was arrested and convicted for several times and sentenced to Rigorous Imprisonment for several months.<sup>45</sup>

The women of Naogaon district actively participated in the Quit India Movement. In September 'Nari Bahani' (Women Force) was formed in Naogaon.<sup>46</sup> The most prominent members of the 'Bahani' as well as freedom fighters were Gunesari Devi, Dharmeswari Das, Dukhuni Bora, Ratna Phukan, Sariful Bora, Elashi Bora, Bhogeswari Phukanani, Dharmeswari Borkakati, Panilata Dharmeswari Borkakati, Panilata Saikia, Padmawati Saikia, Daiman Das. Janaki Saia, Pramila Bora, Maniki Kalita, Seemila Saikia, Tarulata Das, Ratna Phukan and many more. Guneswari Devi of Jakhalabandha took the leadership of Nagoan women and 'Naribahini' respectively. Later she was arrested and sentenced to imprisonment and was sent to Tezpur jail for eighteen month. Joimati Saikia Nagaon joined hands with the revolutionary activities to burn the Bebajia Bridge on 25<sup>th</sup> August. Women like Pitrani Saikia, Kali Saikia, Dagita Bora and Runimai Saikia served for ensuring the security of the male underground workers. Abali Kuchumi of Marigaon was martyred in police atrocity on charge of setting fire to the Government. Inspection Banglow at Monoha. Apart from that the women of Nagaon played an active role in mass procession, organised meetings in the nook and corner of the district and carried out picketing in various places.<sup>47</sup>

During the period of 1942-43, the sufferings of women was beyond imagination. Police and military atrocities became a part of their daily life. In this context the sufferings of women in Nagaon district was most remarkable. Police firing took place at Barahampur, Bebezia, Jongalbalahu and Parpujia in Nagaon district resulting in many casualties. Among those martyrs, the name of Bhogeswari Phukanini shines like a bright star in the history of Quit India Movement.<sup>48</sup>

The women of Darrang district also actively took part in the Quit India movement. Pusalata Das, an ardent follower of Gandhi ideals, took the leadership of the women of the district. She encouraged the government service holders to give up their jobs. Under her active initiative, the women 'volunteer group' was established in May 1942. Beside her, Padumi Golapi, Thumiki, Kan Chutiani, Jeuti, Dalimi Dariki, Madai, Bhogai Lerali and many other women freedom fighters of Darrang district played an active role in the movement. On 20<sup>th</sup> September, 1942, it was Kanaklata Baruah who was martyred in the police firing while going to hoist the National Flag at Gahpur police Thana of the district. She was a great martyred among the women freedom fighters of Assam. Apart from Kanaklata Baruah. Aai Kumari Devi, Kahuali Nath (tender age), Tileswari Baruah and some others succumbed to death in police firing.<sup>50</sup>

The women of Lakhimpur district also extended their tremendous contribution in the Quit India movement. Nandeswari, Hemeswari, Laksheswari and Buddheswari were the prominent freedom fighters among the women in the district.

The women of Sivsagar district also did not lag behind the freedom movement of India. Akamon Bora, Rameswari Devi, Rebati Lahan, Manikan, Nanibala, Sarajbala Kakati. RenuPrava Saikia and AnnaPrava Baruah were the prominent women leader of the district. AnnaPrava Baruah wife of most wanted underground leader, Sankar Baruah did her best in the Quit India Movement. Under her leadership "*Nari Mrityu Bahani*" (Women Death Squad) was formed at Golaghat and Teok in the district.<sup>51</sup>

The impact of Quit India movement also felt in Dhemaji and its neighbouring areas. Dapan Kumari (Dihingiya) Baruah, Bimala Boro, Giribala Dutta and Akanbala Das were the prominent women leaders among others in the Dhemaji.

Lami Dutta an ardent follower of Gandhi, travelled different parts of neighbouring areas of dhemaji and organised the women by holding meetings and processions and urged them for their active involvement in the decisive movement.<sup>52</sup>

Dibyabala Tamuli, organised some women "volunteer groups" in the nook and corner of the areas to aware the women folk, so that they could join the movement.

Gandhi strongly opposed the war policy and Government made preparation to raise fund from the people through the system like holding of war-exhibition, charity game of football, sale of

war-bonds etc. So he launched a new anti-war movement which was popularly known as “Individual Civil Disobedience Campaigning” or “*Individual Satyagraha*” from 17<sup>th</sup> October 1940. According to the new programme an approved Satyagrahi used to go out to the selected places to utter anti-war slogans and get arrested. Acharya Vinoba Bhave was chosen by Gandhi as the first Satyagrahi. The impact of this programme on Assam was also very intensive. Women of Assam actively took part in this programme along with the male counterpart.

Swarnalata Baruah and Haripriya Dutta of Golaghat were the first two women of Brahmaputra valley to get court arrested and undergo imprisonment for offering Satyagraha. The other women who offered individual Satyagraha were Pandupriya Devi at Goalpara, Premalata Bharali at Jorhat. Devajani Baruah and Aidewbala Baruah at Teok, Madhali Sononwal at Golaghat, Sundari Barkakati at Charing. Amalprava Das at Salmara, Puspallata Das at Palashbari, Kusum Kumari Deka at Tihu, Nanibala Devi at Goalpara Town, Subhadra Devi at Barpeta, Dobhogi Devi and Premeswari Devi at Mangaldoi, Jayadabala Duara at Dibrugarh and many more. Most of the women Satyagrahi were court arrested and even sentenced to imprisonment.<sup>54</sup>

From the very initial stages of movement to decisive battle started as Quit India Movement, government had been adopting various types of repressive measures such as indiscriminate arrest of the freedom fighters, simple imprisonment, rigorous imprisonment in jail custody, divide and rule policy etc. Under these circumstances, there emerged an underground revolutionary group drawn from the Congress Socialist party, Forward Bloc (the political party founded by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose) and other militant wings within Congress persons like Jayprakash Narayan, Sadig Ali, Sucheta Kripalani, Aruna Asraf Ali, Subhash Chandra Bose and many others.<sup>55</sup>

Its impact was also felt in Assam too. Brajanath Sarmah, Sankar Baruah and some other Congressmen led the revolutionary activities in Assam.

Apart from men, the women of Assam too did not lag behind the revolutionary activities. Some of the prominent women leaders involved were Jaimati Saikia, Enamai Bora, Punimai Saikia, Dagali Bora, Padmawati Saikia, Bakuli Bora, Ratnabala Phukan, Damayanti Bora of Nagaon, Buddheswari Hazaria of Lakhimpur, Aikan Bhuyan, Kunjalata Gogoi of Teok, Akani Baruah, Anna Prava Baruah, Padmawati Rajkumari and some others.<sup>56</sup>

### **TOWARDS THE FREEDOM:**

The Second World War came to an end abruptly on August 10, 1945. The two atomic bombs dropped by America, had forced Japan to surrender before the allied powers. In the meantime Winston Churchill and the conservative party were defeated in the general election of England held in 1945 and succeeded by Clement Attlee of the Labour party. Significantly, Labour party had long favoured India's independence. Now it had a clear majority in parliament to enable the fulfilment of their promises.

On 24 August, 1945, Lord Wavell, Viceroy of India went to England to discuss the Independence matter of India. After a long discussion with the authority concerned, he announced that election to the central and provincial legislatures would be held within a few months. After publishing its results an Executive council would be set up with the support of the main Indian parties. Moreover, a constitution making body would be convened, and step would be taken for establishment of a self-government in India.

“The fancy of imperial pride, which was so much a reality in India for over a hundred and fifty years, received its death knell with the stroke of midnight on the 15th of August, 1947, on that historic moment India also Assam, as a part of India emerged as sovereign, independent nation.”

It is clear from what has been discussed above that a large number of freedom fighters of undivided Kamrup district made immense contribution to freedom struggle.

## **.OBSERVATION AND CONCLUSION**

The forgoing discussion is just a glimpse of the contribution of some women freedom fighters who selflessly dedicated themselves for the achievement of India’s independence. Among those mostly were from rural areas.

The whole movement in Assam centred on rural areas. It happened because the urban areas were surrounded by the military and police personnel. So, the movement was more intensified in rural areas as the leaders preferred to operate from there and the majority participants in the movement had a rural background. For example Chandra Prava Saikiani and other women folk emerged from backward villages. Evidences often reveal that many rural based women folks were mentally and physically tortured by the British forces. But such repressions were never cared by them. Their spirit and undaunted courage showed through their activities in different phases of the freedom struggle even astonished the mighty British Government. So, it is a wish that their names always glitters in the pages of history of Assam for their indomitable courage, spirit shown towards achieving India’s independence.

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