CHAPTER - IV
Ambikagiri and Indian National Congress

Indian National Congress and Ambikari

The complex and interrelated set of social forces which gathered during the last quarter of the 19th century produced a new social alternative to that based fragmentarily on caste and sect institutions set in regional and local settings. The forces of the contemporary world process towards the formation of national classes, and the social transformation that began during the pre-colonial 18th century was hastened and shaped by the colonial policies of the next century. The religious and social reform movements of the later 19th century reflected and reinforced the growing self-esteem of the Indian middle-classes. “This class confidence soon collided with the social arrogance of that other middle class of Britton’s and ignited the first set of embryonic Indian nationalism, the Ilbert Bill agitation of 1883.”

The Ilbert agitation had multiple significances. One was ideological. The Anglo Indian position was that the British Raj was built upon the unchallengeable superiority of European and that to suggest the equality of Indian ability and character, as Ilbert did, must diminish ‘European character’ and with it British security and power. This open manifestation of social Darwinism signaled to educated Indians that a new and difficult era was at hand. Another outcome of the Ilbert confrontation was the glaring demonstration that far from being encouraged to share the rule of their land, as had been implied in Queen Victoria’s proclamation of 1858, Indians were despised.

In the same year, an Indian National Conference was convened in Calcutta to focus upon a set of Indian grievances and seek their redress. The leadership was taken by Surendra Nath Banerji, one of those able Indians, who had over all impediments, to win a place in Indian civil service by examination and who had been dismissed subsequently.

India’s middle class consciousness expressed itself in diverse ways. Most significantly and generally, middle class Indians dedicated themselves individually and collectively to religious reform and revival-class consciousness was expressed through redefinition of tradition and values. Hence religion remained at the core of nationalist sentiments and communal struggles remind us of this ideologically centering fact. It is well known that the Congress owes its genesis to the initiative of a British civilian, Allen Octavian Hume, who had over the years gained an understanding of the educated as well as of the popular classes. “Hume posed before the intelligentsia the challenge of organizing an all India forum. Where matters of national concern could be debated and the result of such deliberations communicated to the British Government for remedial action.”

While Hume’s role in organizing a national forum for the educated classes of India is well known, it would be simplistic to assume that his initiative was the sole factor behind the genesis of Congress. Indeed there are two cores of political activity which need to be highlighted before appreciating the context in which Congress came to life. At least half a century before Hume’s initiative, the landed gentry, the commercial classes and the intelligentsia in different parts of the country had initiated a process which culminated in the birth of Congress in 1885. The activities of these classes were reflected in the growth of the local and regional associations which mushroomed in the sub continent in later part of 19th century. In Assam, the politicization of the agricultural population and the intelligentsia is a very significant fact of the whole resistance movement against the imperial authority. Most of the usual agitations of the late 19th century had some basis in class conflict and most were peaceful and legalistic. As the century closed however, calls began to be heard for the non payment of revenue or rents unless the violations of regulation and agreements ceased. Rent and revenue strike did occur sporadically in different parts of Assam in the later part of the 19th century (Phulaguri, Rangia, Lacima, Bajali, Patharughat). These movements assume some political significance as nationalistic activities intensified after 1905 and Assam slowly moved into the orbit of a movement much larger in scale.

3. These movements are popularly known as ‘dhewa’ or ‘krisak bidroh’ for details of this revolt one may consult K.N. Dutta, Landmarks of
It has already been mentioned elsewhere how politicization of the western educated middle class organized *Jorhat Sarbanjanik Sabhā* and *Assam Association* and how the later was converted into the Assam, Pradesh Congress committee in view of the growing nationalistic upsurge. These happenings in the public sphere of Assam are significant from the perspective of a truly transformative process of social, political and economic change. Since its inception the INC looked upon itself as a political movement destined to reach out to the Nation as a whole and it is amply demonstrated by its agenda of political action and the ideology which its leaders shaped out in the next two decades. Initially the INC largely concerned itself with questions affecting the interests of the middle classes. The establishment of Congress like other organizations in the early eighties represented the culmination of awareness among educated groups of the need to work together for political ends; it reflected their growing strength and their still somewhat timid sense of national identity and unity. It was national in that those concerned belonged to specific but geographically dispersed elite. It was national also in that by this stage, there was some idea of a common identity, a feeling induced by educational background, promoted by the press to a limited extent in the seventies and more so in the eighties and classified during Ripon’s Viceroyalty when the educated throughout the country joined in opposing European racialism and in supporting the Viceroy in his battle against such prejudice. The INC the product of a range of social forces was mainly confined to one stratum of society. At that stage it was not a mass movement with a larger social base. Likewise it was not revolutionary, belligerent, violent or chauvinistic.

In the first years of the Congress, until Hume returned to England, a concerted effort was made to broaden and deepen its base. The model followed was that of the Anti-Corn Law League and of the more moderate sections of Irish Home Rule League, A programme of active propaganda was adopted. Paid and unpaid missionaries were sent out into the countryside to take the Congress message to the masses. From the nineties (1890’s) the ideas and methods of the first generation of leaders came to be questioned and their power bases within their regions challenged. It was the time that new ideas and methods were put forward which flowered in the first years of the new century.

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One must be very clear that in so many aspects Congress at first like so many of its lesser contemporaries accepted the political structure of the British Raj as by the end of the 19th century the British had fashioned it. It was however the Congress which led the way in breaking loose from its allegiance to the frame work the British had constructed. At first its leaders dared little more than declare that British rule was ‘un British’ in character. In due course however a radical critique of the British exploitation of India began to be advanced which was soon reinforced by more strictly political concerns. The key break came in 1905 in reaction to Curzon’s partition of Bengal and in Dadabhai Naroji’s declaration in his presidential address to the Calcutta Congress in 1906 that the ultimate objective of the Indian National Congress was now Swaraj (self rule). 1916 witnessed the splitting moderates and extremists joining hands and a most vociferous kind of Home Rule Leaguers showing new agitations in different provinces could be linked up with each other.

A civil strife originating from the political movements of the time, of which the most prominent were anti-Rowlatt demonstration and a resurgence of revolutionary fervour not seen since the Bengal partition days. For many politicized intellectuals, their politics were born on a tide of world changes brought by the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. It was into this ferment Gandhi strode to seize the nationalist movement and to redirect its energies and purposes fundamentally. So eventually Congress fell under Gandhi’s sway. He soon showed how the Khilafat and Punjab ‘wrongs’ could be turned into all India ‘wrongs’ in a way the Bengal partition had never quite been.

Each phase of the Indian nationalist struggle began with fairly protracted agitation run-up, especially propelled on each occasion by some great affront to Indian feelings as in the case of anti Rowlatt demonstration eventually leading to a non-cooperation phase.

7. R. P. Masani Dada Bhai Naroji (London 1939) Chapter XXXIII
Gandhi led Congress and especially Gandhian political and philosophical ideas influenced Ambikagiri to an extent to make him an ardent Congress activist as is apparent from his writings. In the special Calcutta Congress of 1919 the non-cooperation resolution was passed and Ambikagiri gives an explanation of why this resolution was passed unanimously, “only 6 crore British has been dominating 31 crore of Indians for more than hundred years suppressing their liberty, self respect and dignity.” He offers a bitter critique of Rowlatt act and its ruthless implementation leading to the massacre of 1919. So, according to him, “Indians got convinced that, there can be no justice when there is a conflict between an English man and an Indian.” To establish Swaraj (Self Rule) there is no other option but to follow the policy of non-cooperation and that is what Gandhi has tried to introduce.\textsuperscript{10} He considered Gandhi’s preaching of non-violence as holy sermon. Ambikagiri gives a long statement on the efficacy of non violent technique as preached by Gandhi in his autobiographical essay. “The thundering speech of Mahatma stirred the soul of 30 crore Indians and they untidily sang ‘Joy Mahatmar Joy, Joy Bharat Matar Joy …”\textsuperscript{11}

It appears that more than Congress he was getting increasingly influenced by Mahatma. “Led by Mahatma, a strongly determined Indian masses proceed to place their motherland on the high alter of the world otherwise their existence as a nation will be extinct and slavery will engulf their life.”\textsuperscript{12} Now it is time to turn to political Ambikagiri. Nationalism in Assam was still in the main a tendency among middle class intellectuals rather than an organized political party. Assam Association was a propaganda society rather than an organized political party. By 1919 the Indian National Congress may be said to have stirred the Assamese intelligentsia to form APCC and to extend its influence to masses and to become recognized organ of political Assam.

Behind and beyond the councils ran the ebb and flow of Congress non-cooperation movement. Gandhi stimulated enthusiasm by promising Swaraj within a year and which the unprecedented support of the Muslim Khilafalists there seemed for a time to be no limits which he might not pass.

\textsuperscript{10} Chetana 2nd Year 1st Issue, Saka 1842 Editorial pp.51-52
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, p.725.
The collapse of the non-cooperation movement in 1922 left India in the relaxed position of a patient released from a bout of fever. There was an internal apathy in public feeling which was used for a reconsideration of policy by the various parties concerned. Within Congress there was much heart searching.

As the disillusionment which came from the failure of non-cooperation led to the decision for council entry, so disappointment with the fruits of constitutional obstruction led to a revival of interest in direct action. By this time the Indian National Congress has almost completed its transformation to a genuine political party. The new provincial Congresses sprang up with the operating logic that mass political work should be conducted within meaningful cultural regions.

In Assam pressures for more radical politics came from Ambikagiri and Chandranath Sharma. This was signaled by the enthusiasm with which non-cooperation was taken up. Anti liquor campaign, meant partly to deprive the government of excise taxes and party to discourage drinking among the poorest was a success. Perhaps most impressive of all was the prominence given to Gandhi’s demand for inclusion of untouchables in all local political program.

From prison Gandhi advocated constructive program through his journal ‘young India’ at the core of which was hand spinning, to be co-ordinated by the Indian Khadi Board to alleviate the plight of the poorest. This program was barely passed by a skeptical working committee of Congress, Gandhi concluded that many Congress man possibly a majority did not favour this kind of politics and actually pinned to re-enter the councils from which they resigned in the early time of non-cooperation and the Swarajists proved that he was right.

The British were for a time greatly perturbed about rural agitation in the aftermath of the global depression of 1929, which had affected the rural peasantry from Gujrat to Bengal, from Punjab to Andhra.\textsuperscript{13} The critical years for the Indian National movement came as the 1930 opened. The British were making strenuous effort, not only with their promise of round table conference in London to split the

\textsuperscript{13} D. A. Low “Congress &The Raj”, p.170.
nationalist forces, but to outmarch them again, while to Gandhi’s dismay, there were clear signs of a slippage on the Congress side into violence.\footnote{\text{14.} The New potentialities for Indian Nationalist Biography in Wang Gungwu (ed.) “Self and Biography essays on the individuals and society in Asia.” Cited in ,D. A. Low p.167.}

It was in these circumstances that in 1930, in the aftermath of his own recruitment tours in the 1930s, Gandhi eventually determined to seize the initiative once again; strove to effect a demonstration of national unity by holding together as much of the movement as he could, and launched not a no revenue, but a salt Satyagraha as a great symbolic defiance of the British. He believed thousands could participate in it, give vent to the frustration and anger they felt, without resorting to the socially fragmenting violence which he dreaded. By the time of his arrest in May 1930 he had the movement solidly behind him – the factions and futilities of the 1920s being pushed aside. By June he had the British badly frightened.\footnote{\text{15.} Viceroy to Secretary of Stated telegram 2nd June, 1930, Home Political 483/30.}

By the following February, he was in personal negotiations with the Viceroy.

Roy Chowdhury was a major player in Indian National Congress organization in Assam. After his release from Tezpur jail in 1923 we see his active involvement in anti colonial struggle as an ardent follower of Gandhi. Moreover Roy Chowdhury’s \textit{Cetana} was a major vehicle of Congress propaganda and other issues of priority as fixed by him. In organizational work, he did contribute in a manner as may be expected of a dedicated Congress activist. Committing himself unequivocally to Congress agitation at another level through the journal Cetana he started appreciating all those people who had given their time and energy for making the non-cooperation campaign successful.\footnote{\text{16.} Chetana 2nd Year 16th Issue, Saka 1842 p.282. In the context of non-cooperation he mention that for the establishment of a just regime Indian social life needs to be enriched and this can be achieved by inculcating the spirit of truthfulness, justice, unity, liberalism, fearlessness etc. The great mass of Indian people must have a great sense of co-operation among themselves for the success of non-cooperation. So co-operation and non-cooperation these two contradictory concept must develop simultaneously.} In this context Roy Chowdhury interpreted non-cooperation in the following words: “in a generalized manner the attempt or preparation to make way for a just regime in place of an unjust, oppressive regime is non-cooperation. In the Indian political sphere bureaucracy is the organ through which this oppressive system is functioning. So for the laymen non-cooperation means anti bureaucracy and
the whole of Indian masses have become excited to avoid the government in every sphere.”

In the same passage Roy Chowdhury discusses at length like a moralist the qualities to be earned by the people and the path to be followed. For him cooperation means the effort to enrich the Indian political life. In another word it is the mutual cooperation among the people in their anti government agitation. So it is the need of the hour to create an atmosphere of cooperation among the people if non-cooperation campaign is to be successful. In a nutshell it is cooperation amongst the masses and non-cooperation against the regime which is a symbol of oppression. Again he says, “these two contradictory way is naturally going in two directions, As a result non-cooperation will wipe out the oppressive unjust regime and cooperation will usher in a just, truthful and religious society ultimately leading to establishment of self-dignity of Indian people.” It appears that this highly moralist religious interpretation was greatly influenced by Gandhi’s concept of ‘Ramayana’ based on justice and truth. He even emphasized the possibility of launching a non-cooperation in the social sphere to root out the evils plaguing the society.

Another matter that he raised in the same issue is the separation of Goalpara from Assam. This he entitled as malicious act of Assamese land lords. Here he referred to the memorandum from a group of Goalpara landlords to the Viceroy for the merger of Goalpara with Bengal. He says “From Viceroy’s reply I have understood that majority view of Assamese subjects is totally against the landlord’s view.” Then he explained the age old cultural and social bonding of Goalpara and Assam and tried to establish that Goalpara is an integral part of Assam. In this elaborate discussion he also criticized the role of Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua.

A very strong statement he made in the editorial discussion entitled. “Who can emancipate India.” Here we see Ambikagiri in his true spirit, forever advocating self reliance in socio-economic and political sphere. “If we are dependent on others for our livelihood, miseries of life will never end. In the same manner India must rely on her self-strength instead of looking at others. The people or nation who cannot make

17. Ibid, p.141.
18. Ibid, pp.142-143.
their destiny with self strength they do not have any right to live as human being. India must assert its right to live independent otherwise no other nation or community not related to Indian national life will ever do it for India. It all depends on Indian people.”

Here he quotes British labour leader colonel Ware Wood to emphasize his view.

In the midst of the non-cooperation movement with an approved program of surrender of titles the triple boycott of schools, college and courts, boycott of foreign goods etc. and Gandhi’s promise of Swaraj within one year’ (first made in a young India article on 22nd September) perhaps implied a tacit understanding that the whole issue could be reopened if Swaraj did not come through non-cooperation within stipulated time. Never the less Roy Chowdhury, as his editorial in Cetana suggests, was not very happy about council entry. He favoured boycott of council. At all India level polling was low in many places in November 1920 elections falling to only 8% in Bombay city and 5% in Lahore, but candidates offered themselves in all but 6 out of 637 seats and council functioning could not be disrupted.

He discusses the whole issue of council election in the context of Assam and compares it with neighbouring Bengal, “council election has just now completed the first phase of non-cooperation in India. In Assam also movement was launched by non-cooperators in this regard. I can not say how far this movement has been successful in other districts of Assam, but in Kamrup districts only 2100 out of 28000 voters have cast their vote. According to the calculation 92% did not cast their vote.” Council boycott has been highly successful in Kamrup. More than the necessity of boycotting reformed council he has mentioned the incompetence of those council members, “Elected by only 8% of voters they cannot be people’s representative. For this reason Rai Bahadur, J. C. Ghose has promised not to enter council if he does not get 50% to 60% vote. I can not say if somebody in Assam has made a promise like this.” This passage is a reflection of Roy Chowdhury’s absolute adherence to Indian National Congress approved non-cooperation program. He expressed doubt about the functioning of the elected council members of Assam. Another editorial passage

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19. Ibid, pp.142-143.
from the same issue, politically very significant highlights his views regarding attainment of Swaraj.22 Here Roy Chowdhury referred to B.C. Pal’s criticism of Reading-Mahatma meeting. He has given a very interesting title to this column, “Reading Mahatma meeting and compromise.” Here he cited Bipin Chandra Pal’s criticism of the meeting like this – that the attainment of Swaraj by non-violent non-cooperation is only possible through some compromise with the British government.23 Then he disapproved of Bipin Chandra Pal’s compromise concept and says, “we are not against compromise because it reduces the degree of unrest. But people have something great called self respect. If compromise is against self respect, we are not in favour of this kind of compromise. Because self respect, is greater of this kind of compromise, because self respect is greater than life. Whether Bipin Chandra Pal’s compromise is going to hurt India’s respect, we need to think over it carefully, if not seriously.”24

Roy Chowdhury conceived non-cooperation as a means to an end that has political, social and moral implication. In the pursuit of that end he combines the strategy of non-cooperation with a higher philosophical idealism. His idea of political emancipation is closely interrelated with self realization, self strength and self dignity. Whatever he perceived of the socio-political reality of Assam, he analyzed it and came to a conclusion that he believed and tried to establish.

The years from 1923 till Pandu Congress are at first sight dominated by constructive activities as recommended by the civil disobedience enquiry committee and modified later by Kakinada Congress session in December 1923. As a major player of the INC in Assam, Roy Chowdhury devoted his time and energy after his release from Tezpur jail in 1922 towards all those works as envisaged by APCC, like promotion of Khadi, antiliquor propaganda and social work among untouchables etc. increasingly bringing out the considerable political importance of Gandhian constructive work in building up rural support for Congress. Meanwhile he revived Aruna press that had been destroyed in fire in his absence and started publishing Congress propaganda along with the notion of Assamese regional nationalism in Cetana.
Seen in the sequence of events Roy Chowdhury seems to appear as a timeless Congress worker propelled by the political reality of the country as a whole. In this phase he is also seen expressing a futuristic world view related with the contemporary happenings. In a situation which was politically very demanding we see Roy Chowdhury is seen as a keen follower of the national scenario going through news reports and his own perspective of nationalism evolving and maturing through different phases of the anti-imperialist struggle. “The last date fixed by Vijaywada session of Indian National Congress of finishing the task is coming 30th June. Within this time frame collection of 1 crore rupees, 1 crore new Congress members, 1 lakh charkha put into motion has to be finished. All national leaders including Mahatma, provincial leaders and Swaraj volunteers have started implementing this program. But more of this task is yet to finish. If this is not done within stipulated period all the efforts to establish Swaraj will go in vain. So Mahatma has made an earnest appeal to his countrymen to finish the program within the stipulated time in his ‘young India’. This appeal by Mahatma has been published in almost all Indian newspapers. He translated this piece from 13th June issue ‘Bombay Chronicle’ into Assamese.\textsuperscript{25} This is a prelude to the translation of Mahatma’s appeal published in ‘Bombay chronicle’ Row Chowdhury concluded this editorial discussion with a very positive note expecting 30 crore Indians to donate 1 crore which in his opinion is not a big deal.\textsuperscript{26} Exploring and understanding a personality who appears as a very political man as well as a poet, a lyricist, an advocate of regional (sub nationalism ?) nationalism and most of all intense lover of Assam through a transitional phase is like rediscovering a man, relocating him in that specific historic period and bringing out the relevance of ideas he propagated. In this chapter we are passing through that phase of Row Chowdhury’s life which seems to be the prelude to the formation of Asom Songrokshini Sabhā in 1926. The years he was released from Tezpur jail, which was an ordeal for him and that he had faced calmly, married Kausalya Devi and started a new life.\textsuperscript{27} His life style remained unchanged, always involved in politics, busy in press facing the hardship of life with no regret at all. His political involvement naturally led to government displeasure and continued police harassment. His home was raided, which was nothing new for Roy Chowdhury and some documents and

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, p.454.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya, “Ambikagiri Raichowdhury”, Makers of Indian Literature, p.12.
manuscripts were seized. One of the manuscript seized was ‘Satadhār’ a collection of essays, the police did not return the manuscript. The book was lost forever.\(^\text{28}\) Probably he retained some of the copies of ‘Satadhār’. His daughter remembered this incident with the following words: “just behind the office we had a small library. There were some shelves in the library full of books. I used to read those books. Some I understood and some did not. Then I got a small book ‘Satadhār’. Father told me that the government had banned this book. When I grew up father told me that he wrote the book in some other’s name. We could not find that book again.”\(^\text{29}\) Government confidential report says, “A book called ‘Satadhār’ was proscribed by this government as seditious. It has been discovered that it was printed at the Aruna press and Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury is being prosecuted, as his name was not published on the book. At the search of the press 795 copies of the book were found and in addition 71 copies of the book found have been seized by the Nalbari police. Probably only 1000 copies were printed, so that there not many still uncovered.\(^\text{30}\) Subsequently ‘Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury, the owner of the press, pleaded of guilty and was convicted under section 12 of the Press and Regulation of Books Act and sentenced to a fine of Rs. 1000 or in default one week’s simple imprisonment.\(^\text{31}\) Probably it was undesirable for the government to allow circulation of a book with a very sensitive content (Jalianalla Bagh Massacre). Suchibrata Roy Chowdhury mentioned about Surya Kumar Bhuyan having one copy. This is the second manuscript he lost during police raid. The first one, ‘Bandini Bharat’ had been confiscated by police in 1906. There is not an iota of doubt that Roy Chowdhury was a committed Congress activist facilitating Congress propaganda as well as constructive work through his extensive travels and meetings with other Congress leaders that had been discussed in the previous chapter. That engagement with Congress continued till 1930 when Roy Chowdhury started articulating a notion of the Assamese as Jati nationality within the great Indian Mahajati (Nation). Through out the year 1923 Bramhaputra valley witnessed a changed political atmosphere. “There has been rather more political activity in the B (Bramhaputra) valley during the last fortnight. The provincial Congress committee met at Gauhati on last February and decided to collect funds,

\(^{28}\) Ibid, p.12.

\(^{29}\) Suchibrata Roy Chowdhury, “Pitrivevar Smriti”, in Jogesh Das & Others (ed.) \textit{Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury} p.100.

\(^{30}\) F/R for the 1st half of February, 1925 confidential.

\(^{31}\) F/R for the 2nd half of March, 1925 confidential.
enlist volunteers reorganize village Congress committees and generally to carry out the Congress program.”

Another official report worth mentioning here, “Steps are however being taken to reorganize the village Congress committees and to prepare the way for carrying out Congress program and there are undoubtedly grounds for uneasiness in spite of the apparent surface tranquility.

In this total context that Roy Chowdhury needs to be placed and his political engagements who never deviated from the principle of non violence once he had imbibed that political ideology propagated by Gandhi, “Non violence or Ahimsa and Satyagraha to Gandhi personally constituted a deeply felt and worked out philosophy owing something to Emerson, Thoreau and Tolstoy but also revealing considerable originality”. Roy Chowdhury whole heartedly believed in this philosophical aspect of non violence. A study of his autobiography ‘Mor Jibon Dhumuhār Esāti’ would convince us that Ambikagiri constantly tried to internalize this concept. A key passage from his editorial states, “sense of patriotism is rising in India along with preparation to establish Swarajya (self rule). But this attempt to achieve the goal of Swarajya is not detached from the entire connectedness of the greater humanity. From the very beginning it talks about world solidarity and guided by that spirit. So contemporary Indian movement is non violent, peaceful and so bloodshed hatred towards others, violence etc. which are against human solidarity is absent. And so it is legitimate for the entire humanity and it is the main principle of the greater humanitarianism.”

In those days of acute strain and tension Roy Chowdhury was involved in Gandhian constructive work. With utmost sincerity and patience spreading the message of self reliance and self help thus giving it a wider dimension, which subsequently took the form of Buy Swadeshi league in 1930 (Swadeshi Kinak Sangha). His involvement in provincial Congress politics will be best testified by the service he rendered many a time holding responsible posts as recorded in official reports. “The special sitting of the Assam Provincial Congress Committee was

32. D.O. letter no. 224 C. dttd-16-02-1923, from A. W. Botham, Chief Secretary to the government of Assam, to- J. Crerar Secretary government of India Home Department.
33. D.O. letter no. 320 C. dttd-16-03-1923, from A. W. Botham, Chief Secretary to the government of Assam, to- J. Crerar Secretary government of India Home Department.
convened at Gauhati on 18th instant. The proceedings were conducted in camera and the following non-cooperators took part in it. Of the 29 members present one was Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury. The committee decided to push on Khadi propaganda effectively and appointed a Swadeshi Board comprising of man from both the parties to see the spread of Charkha and Khaddar in the villages.35 During these years the emphasis was on Gandhian constructive work in villages and a major plank of it was promotion of Khadi along with National school, anti liquor propaganda and social work among low castes and untouchables.36 “It is reported that the All India Khaddar Board, sanctioned the establishment of Bhandars at Gauhati, Nowgong, Jorhat and Tezpur and have authorized the opening of branch centers in important subdivisions where willing and energetic workers can be found.”37 Roy Chowdhury himself stated about his political engagement with APCC. “Under the aegis of Indian national Congress led by Mahatma Gandhi 33 crore Indian men and women are engrossed in a desperate bid to attain independence. As a Congress worker and through Cetana I am also propagating the message of freedom, giving speech in numerous meetings. The whole of India is changed by this revolutionary message. With this background according to the unanimous decision of all of us Chandranath Sharmah and Rohinikanta Hati Baruah attended 45th Kanpur session of India National Congress and offered formal invitation for the 46th session of Indian National Congress in Assam. AICC accepted this invitation.”38 This is followed by a long narrative about the huge preparation for holding the session successfully. Considering all aspects finally Pandu was selected as the venue. “Different committees were formed for collection of money, volunteers, food, health etc. Apart from the general membership of music committee I was entrusted with the responsibility of writing the welcome song of Pandu Congress session.”39 Roy Chowdhury enthusiastically accepted it. For all Congress workers it became a matter of prestige to arrange everything for a successful Congress session, what would be a vast assemblage of humanity, Roy Chowdhury accepted his responsibility with utmost sincerity and devotion. In his own words, “how to welcome this vast humanity, in what verse, what language.” For him it was

35. APAI, Kamrup dtd 22-08-1923
37. F/R for the 2nd half of April, 1925 confidential, from A. W. Botham, Chief Secretary to the government of Assam, to- J. Crerar Secretary government of India Home Department.
38. Chetana 2nd Year 11th Issue, Saka 1843 p.497.
not just a gathering of people, a sort of divinity he felt and became a symbol of god (Naranarayan). “Feelings, rhythms, language spontaneously flew out of my heart.”

He composed two songs for the occasion (Pandu Congress) and these were presented at the open session by a group of local artist led by Prafulla Ch. Barua and Roy Chowdhury himself. “As a lyricist he composed inaugural song for the Pandu session of Indian National Congress and earned appreciation from respectable leaders of India. Everybody acknowledged we love your national song.”

English version of the songs prepared by Ambikagiri’s ardent admirer and eminent scholar Dr. Bani Kanta KaKartik were distributed among the delegates. These inaugural songs were circulated later by the Free Press Agency throughout India. One of these songs, “in what verse shall I sing your welcome (Aji Bando Ki Chandere) has become a classic. All the songs presented in Pandu session were well received by the delegates. Next day also people requested for Roy Chudhury’s song. Perhaps he poured out his heart, his inner inspiration for every word. Next year in Madras session of Indian National Congress Roy Choudhury’s songs were reprinted and distributed among the delegates. “I was selected among others to sing the inaugural song. Before selection Roy Chowdhury took a voice test of all the singers and I passed that test along with others. There was pin drop silence among the audience when we presented the song and the singers perhaps prayed for a flawless performance.”

“I think Roy Chowdhury’s song ‘Bando Ki Chandere’ will be the five best Assamese national song. The kind of appreciation received by this song is rare and Atul Ch. Hazarika lamented that AIR has not done anything to give him the place he deserves.”

Roychowdhury mentioned some of the singers who presented the song, “Among the group of singers were Sri Prafulla Barua, Sri Padmadhar Chaliha, Sri Umesh Choudhury, myself, Srimati Puspalata Das, Srimati Lilawati Devi etc. ‘Bando Ki Chandere’ according to Roy Chowdhury mesmerized everyone present on the first day of Pandu Congress session. These songs were Deshbhakta Phukan and

40. Ibid.
42. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya, Ambikagiri Raichowdhury, Makers of Indian Literature, Sahitya Akademy, New-Delhi -1989 p.12.
43. Ibid.
44. Op cit, p.190.
45. Ibid, p.10.
46. S. N. Sarma (ed.) op cit, p.672.
Lokapriya Bordoloi’s favourite and very often they requested me to sing and I was pleased to sing for them. Those memorable moments of composing ‘Band Ki Chandere’ are still in my mind.”

The year 1926 also witnessed the formation of *Asom Sangrakshini Sabhā* (Assam preservation society). Roy Chowdhury discussed in detail about the aims and objective of the sabhā through *Cetana* and other newspapers like ‘Sadiniyā Asomiyā’. Formation of the Asom Sangrakshini Sabhā and its functioning and the ripples it created in the social and political sphere needs to be analyzed in detail. It will be dealt with subsequently. In a nutshell the whole idea behind the formation of *Sangrakshini Sabhā* was to promote Assamese regional nationalism in an exclusive manner although not detached from the greater Indian nationalism. Even after the formation of ‘*Asom Sangrakshini Sabhā*’ Roy Chowdhury’s engagement with APCC continued as a Congress activist.

What started the immediate train of events that led to the civil disobedience movement was a decision of the conservative government in Britain to take the next step in the constitutional advance towards self-government. Political concession as a response to popular protest followed with a major concern of the government being to win back some of the Indian middle class support. A commission was appointed under Sir John Simon to make suggestions and to take evidence on the workings of the 1919 constitution with a view to reform. At first there was a unified Indian reaction against the ‘all white’ group and was resentfully dismissed by Congress as well as the Muslim League. “They declared this intention to boycott the commission and to co-operate instead on devising a constitution, embodying the principle of dominion status,” inspired by the self-rule that had been conceded to the white dominions of the British Empire by the statute of Westminster of 1926. “Motilal Nehru felt that the commission was just eyewash. Taj Bahdur Sapru of the Liberal Federation saw in it a challenge to Indian nationalism while Jinnah considered it a

47. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. Op cit, p. 672.
‘farce … the underlying idea (being) the arrogant assertion of the principle that Indians can not be allowed to share in the responsibility or in the decisions that are taken concerning the future constitution of India.’ 52

In 1928 a constitutional frame work called Nehru report, largely a work of Motilal Nehru came up, reflecting the views of older politician in and out of Congress. Younger Congressman, including JawAsharlal Nehru were unimpressed by the report mostly because they were of the view that, constitution making whether by the British with their commission or by moderate politicians like the elder Nehru was not the way to achieve fundamental changes in society that were needed. As a nationalistic response to Simon Commission Indian political leaders were provoked also to attempt something much more positive the drawing of a constitution for self governing which would counter anything that Simon might come up with.

The project that went off to a good start, finally Nehru report – as it came to be emerged into as a disfavoured document with stiff opposition from Jinnah and Hindu Maha Sabha. 53 Even within the Congress the report ran into serious difficulties as it aimed at Dominion status rather than complete independence. Once the initial and unifying reaction of anger against Simon Commission subsided division gaped in Congress over the next step, particularly over accepting the Nehru report with its goal of dominion status rather than complete independence. “The lines of divisions were drawn by genuine belief as to what was politically desirable and possible and were underscored by personal antipathies factional and generational cleavages.” 54

Into this critical situation Gandhi stepped in prevailed on by Motilal Nehru to attend Calcutta Congress in 1928. Acting as a compromiser he proposed a resolution to unite those who considered dominion status the right goal and those who clamoured for independence; its terms were that if the British did not accept the Nehru constitution by the end of 1929, Congress would embark on civil disobedience. In spite of continuous resistance from some younger Congress man led by JawAsharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose, Gandhi’s compromise resolution was

52. Cited in M. H. Saiyed, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, A Political Biography, p.177
54. D. A. Low, (ed.) Congress & The Raj, p.135
passed in open Congress by 1350 to 973 vote and a semblance of unity was salvaged conflicting groups accepted the meditation of an outsider aligned with no camp and his offer of a tactic which avoided violence and yet proved capable of exerting pressure on the Raj on a continental scale. Gandhi respected Congress as along established national organization and clearly reorganized its all India potential.\textsuperscript{55} This underlay his desire to avoid a split in its ranks in 1928 and later.

Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury was a central figure in the politics of Assam as one of the acknowledged leader of an imminent or active civil disobedience movement. This phenomenon of one man’s role, heading an organization is particularly striking in the face of accumulating evidence of the roots and rationale of political awareness and activity in modern India. These have often been local and particular as the sub continents varied and uneven experience of change under the aegis of the Raj generated different levels of political concerns and created different arenas in which those concerns were pursued. Studies from a regional perspective of this process pose fundamental questions about the degree and quality of Indian politics. Leaders operated at different levels according to their perceptions and capacities in a particular historical period. In those momentous and difficult period how Roy Chowdhury responded to the emerging national scenario and his attitude towards the national political happenings is of utmost importance for a clear understanding of the variables operating at different levels of politics, for instance issues at stake at a specific time and the organizations and other structures available to political activist. It also becomes a preliminary necessity to define the elements in Roy Chowdhury’s leadership and investigate what impelled him into and enabled him to play that particular role in an ever changing political environment. Let us examine his response to the Nehru report. Even before the project of got off Roy Chowdhury made an appeal to all India leaders on behalf of the “17 lacs of Historic Assamese people.” That was an emotional plea with a specific regional fervour to all India leaders for careful consideration of the problems threatening the existence of Assamese people. It is necessary to understand his articulation of the issue bearing larger political as well as economic implication. In view of the proposed constitution for India to be drafted by a special constitutional convention at Delhi in February 28\textsuperscript{th} in accordance with the

\textsuperscript{55} Gandhi to Andrews, October 1927, CWMG, XXXV, p.68, cited in D. A. Low p.135.
declared wishes of the Indian National Congress. “I on behalf of more than 17 lacs of Assamese people whose ancestors have inhabited the soil of Assam from the beginning of Indian History, whose glorious past is replete with annals of unique interest and whose history cultural as well as political ever sounds a note of independence – the Assamese people who speak the Assamese language and are distinguished in more than one way from the vast majority of the dwellers of Assam who are either hill tribes or people whose affinity to foreigners, mainly to Bengal in clearly marked in their language, manners and customs would strongly urge the attention of the leaders of India and of the framers of the constitution to a problem of grave importance for Assam. It is a problem unique in the whole of India but never the less one of life and death for the historic Assamese people. If the unity of India and the formation of an Indian nation be our goal, it is of vital importance that the component parts of this unity and of the Indian nation would have an adequate and clearly defined sphere for individual growth, consonant to the growth of the nation as a whole.” Ambikagiri firmly belived that the Assamese people hemmed in as they are between an alien people at home (the Sylhetese) and an alien people from without (the immigrants of Bengal constantly pouring into Assam) stand today face to face with a threatening foreign exploitation. The dangers of this exploitation can hardly be over estimated, and are far too serious to escape the attention of, Land, capital, employment, business enterprise – all that contributes the assets of a progressive people – have today in Assam been all but monopolized by aliens leaving the Assamese people depressed, oppressed, distracted from all spheres of actively.

He again more conspicuously advanced his argument when he wrote, “I quite agree with the principle involved in saying ‘India for Indians’ but I do not agree with such statements as ‘Bengal for Bengalese, Madras for the Madrasees and so on, I would regard these later statements as corollaries from the first and would in their light claim an ‘Assam for the Assamese’ for only then can we hope to keep in fact (tact?) the component parts of the proposed commonwealth of India in accordance with the wishes of the different peoples. I would strongly urge upon the framers of the coming constitution the necessity of adopting the principles already approved by the Congress of a general reconstitution of the provinces on linguistic bases so that the
rights and wishes, wants and aspirations of every people may be adequately and definitely safeguarded. The Assamese people depressed and distracted by foreign exploitation, raise a cry which must be heard and complaint which must be redressed by the present builders of India.”

This is a sort of plea which Roy Chowdhury made to the framers of the constitution in 1928, glorifies the past and highlights the socio-economic problems facing Assam at that time and provides explanation concerning these issues. The issue of economic development of Assam that today dominates a major share of public discourse was raised by the man, always in the quest of a better future for Assam. Another crucial issue stressed in the appeal is language to be more precise the linguistic reorganization of provinces, the problem Indian national leaders had to confront in the first two decades of independence and what appeared to some of them to be a real threat of the “Balkanization’ of the Country. Roy Chowdhury could clearly grasp the importance of this complicated issue and made a very strong plea for linguistic reorganization. A sort of exclusive right for Assamese people in the province of Assam that he put forward in the appeal apparently takes a sub nationalistic overtone but the fact of the matter is that he envisages a federal Indian state after independence. In the capacity of the general secretary of Asom Songrokshini Sobhā Roy Chowdhury was instrumental in attracting the attention of leaders operating at all India level to the specific problems of Assam plagued by underdevelopment and other problems like the identity of Assamese. The question of who constitutes Assamese still is a highly contested issue that he raised in the 1930’s when the first constitution project was being pursued as a nationalistic response to Simon Commission.

It is worth mentioning here that by 1928 Roy Chowdhury had already been leading an organization called Asom Songrokshini Sobhā, established in 1926 with the sole aim of promoting the exclusive interest of the Assamese people as the name suggests which will be dealt with in the subsequent chapter. Still an active Congress worker he is seen him preoccupied with efforts linking his organization to all India political happenings. It seems he was eager for a sort of wider recognition for the Sobhā as a leading regional organization representing Assam. His letter to the secretary All Parties constitution committee, Allahabad dated 29-10-28 with a request
to include sobhā to represent at the Calcutta convention is evident of this fact. Meticulously prepared response to the constitution project (Nehru report) comes to light through his correspondence, meetings and resolution regarding the Nehru report. It is a well known fact the constitutional project floundered as a result from opposition from Hindu nationalists and a vain attempt was made in the Calcutta session of 1928 to recapture the unity.

In this context we need to situate Roy Chowdhury and his response. Two resolutions taken by Sobhā is wroth mentioning here where his perceived notion of the constitution which he calls Swaraj constitution comes out in very clear terms. “In view of the fact that Nehru report on the principles of the constitution for India, although subject to necessary amendments is based upon the noble and sincere attempt in the way of establishing as far as possible and feasible a feeling of harmony and peace throughout the country by removing the causes and grievances of the communities and classes in India, this largely attended meeting of the ‘Assamiya Sangrakshini Sobhā’ recommends to all parties national convention that with a view to remove the possibilities and causes of inter provincial conflicts in future the definition of domicile in the provinces, specially in Assam should in the constitution he laid down in such well defined terms that any person or persons from other province or provinces or from out side India residing in the province of his adoption will have no right to vote in the provincial of his adoption will have no right to vote in the affairs of the administration including Local Board, Municipalities, village-unions etc. in matters of education, public service trade and commerce etc. unless the persons become neutralized adopting the nationality and recognized language of the province or area reconstituted on linguistic basis.

Roy Chowdhury was apprehensive of an inter-provincial conflict between regional and national identity leading to his advocacy of very specific provision for maintaining the distinct identity of Assamese people. It is commonly argued that his preference or rather emphasis on regional or provincial distinctiveness is a product of a perspective that was very narrow. In fact it was equally a product of his life long pursuit of a goal concerning Assam within the greater Indian political reality “Roy Chowdhury articulated a notion of the Assamese as Jati sub nation or nationality
within the great Indian Mahajati (Nation). It can be interpreted as his acceptance of India’s linguistic or cultural pluralism which he believed is a necessity for individual and collective self fulfillment. Less talked of these days is Roy Chowdhury’s struggle to establish or to raise issues concerning Assam in the greater Indian political platform when a serious political project was taking shape (Nehru report). He appreciated the pious intention, hard and sincere labour of the Nehru committee in compiling through although subject to necessary amendment by a convention, a report on the future Swaraj constitution for India by removing as far as practicable and feasible the grievances of the communities and classes in India. Keeping the wide national outlook unstained, the conference of All parties of Assam valleys recommends that with the view to destroy the seed of inter provincial conflict in future, a clause in the future Swaraj constitution for India should be added that in a province where reside men from other provinces permanently should have no privilege (privileges) or right to vote for or take any part in the affairs of the administration of the province (Province) unless they become neutralized by accepting the nationality and language of the province. It is essential to study Roy Chowdhury’s response to the constitutional project for an understanding of the political tension between the Raj and the Congress and the local or rather regional response to this crucial issue. Persistent appeals for modification in some clause of the Nehru report represents a certain stage that he has a line of thought which is characteristically his own. His political philosophy centers round the construction of an ideal state upon lines already laid down in the ‘Report’ which according to him should embrace a federalist structure, hence his concern for creation exclusive rights for Assam.

A constitution is not only a way of life for the citizen but also an organization to carry on public business and therefore its political aspects is a matter of serious thought and discussion. To address the issue an all party’s national convention met in Calcutta from 22nd December to 28th December 1928. The late 20’s witnessed the nationalistic initiatives changing dramatically from constitutionalist Swarajists to the younger Congressman like Nehru urging for more fundamental changes in society.

56. op cit, Sanjib Baruah, p.78.
57. Letter to the Secretary All Parties Constitution Committee Congress Camp, Calcutta dtd-18th Dec, 1928.
Nevertheless All parties National Convention met to and a discourse on all political experiment was initiated to embrace wider views regarding the acceptability of the ‘Nehru Report’.

In the course of this highly significant political experimentation Roy Chowdhury responded with a clear line of thought as are reflected in his organized effort to mobilize opinion on this issue. “It is an earnest request for every Assamese to establish branches of *Asom Sangrakshini Sabha* and pass a resolution to the effect that in the Swaraj constitution of India exclusive rights for Assamese people in Assam must be provided. This resolution should reach us before December 1st 1928.” In this notice (undated) Roy Chowdhury also raises a demand for separation of Sylhet. Another notice must be cited here where he expressed concern regarding the fundamental rights to be incorporated in the supplementary Nehru Report. Provided that adequate provision shall be made by the state for imparting public instruction in primary schools to the children of members of minorities of considerable strength in population through the medium of their language and in such script as is in vogue among them.” He quotes the recommendation and then expresses his concern. “Now to take a decision a meeting should be convened of the delegates for the coventionn. I hope all of you will be present in the meeting and help in the discussion.” This notice dated 16-12-1928 was signed by Roy Chowdhury. In all probability the meeting must have taken place as a resolution regarding fundamental rights had been passed.

In some ways it is possible to view Nehru Report as another stage in the evolution of the resistance movement towards an alien rule, a process dating back to the anti partition movement (1905). One quarter of a century of thought and struggle over defining the Indian nation, over freeing the country from alien occupation and over the desirable shape of the social and economic order in a future independent. India had provided the nationalist leadership with a set of ideas and goals that helped tostructure this response to the problems of governing the nation in the making. For a correct and critical appraisal of Roy Chowdhury’s role can be viewed in the context in the context of British imperialism versus Indian nationalism with his profound provincial leaning, in the political setting prepared by arrival of Simon Commission and the resultant nationalist response. One aspect of that resistance being the Nehru Report, how he articulated for special “constitutional provision for Assam becomes
imperative to find out what made him a restless activist throughout his life, seeking emancipation of men in every sphere of life. Inevitably the circumstances in which he worked need to be examined in the broader spectrum of the nature and strength of Indian nationalism. Here we see him persisting for special political safeguard for Assam in the forthcoming constitution. The following content of the letter to the secretary All Parties Constitution Committee Congress camp Calcutta dated 18th December 1928 is worth citing here for a historically objectives assessment of Roy Chowdhury:

‘Dear Sir

We the delegates to the All Parties convention elected by the Assamiya Sanrakshini Sobhā of Assam beg to give notice that we are strongly oppose to the new proviso to clause 4 (V) relating fundamental rights proposed by the Nehru Committee in their supplementary report just published. We shall move the following amendments in the convention to delete the proviso.

‘Resolution’

That the proviso clause 4 (V) at page 102 of the original Nehru Report proposed in the supplementary Report be altogether dropped in view of the fact if the proviso is given affect to there will be practical difficulties in its working and issue to lead to permanent inter provincial and Internal conflicts. Our reasons is that if provinces are redistributed on the linguistic basis according to clause 86, it is not reasonable to ask a province to provide education through the medium of any language other than the language of the province to the children of the members of the minorities. In Assam for instance even after the separation of the Bengalee speaking areas there will be left a considerable number of Marwaris, Bengalis, Santhals, Mundas, Orans etc. and it would not be practical to provide education through the medium of languages and the script of the each of the communities. It is not understood why the province should incur such unnecessary expenditure. Signed by K.L. Boruah, J. N. Baruah, J.N. Borah, S.N. Sarma and Roy Choudhury himself which was sent to the secretary, all parties constitution committee is a clear testimony to his assertive role in a critical period charged with intense political activities. Subsequently Roy Choudhury brought notice of amendment to clause 4 of the Nehru Report that had been included in the published paper of All Parties convention.

58. Letter to the Secretary all parties constitution committee Congress Camp Calcutta dated 18-12-1928. Appendix.
Calcutta, Calcutta 27th December 1928, when he advanced his arguments in the following words:

“Provided that adequate provision shall be made by the state for imparting public instruction in Primary schools to the children of members of minorities of considerable strength in the population through the medium of their own language and in such script as in vogue among them” be deleted. That was how he brought to focus an issue having serious socio-political implications that nobody or no organization from Assam raised. Perhaps APCC was more focused on the interconnectedness of the all India movement and the resultant impact on Assam. Roy Choudhury’s perceived notion of an Assamese sub national identity and a sense of insecurity for that identity, getting overshadowed by outsiders. Security that implies freedom from threats to core values for both individuals and groups. Roy Chowdhury felt it threatened by clause 4 regarding language for instruction for minorities, hence his notice of amendment for the deletion of the particular clause (4) of the supplementary report of the Nehru Committee.

By this time nationalist movement had changed dramatically. “From being complaint participants in empty legislative debates in 1909, nationalists succeeded in winning a large measure of provincial autonomy, which has since continued to order much of the Indian political world.”59 In the course of that transformation, patriotic Indians devised new political ideas and practices and these were to affect the larger world during the 20th century.

It has already been mentioned earlier that a crisis emerged over the acceptability of the Nehru Report and Motilal Nehru having sensed the oppositions pleaded Gandhi’s intervention. Gandhi offered a compromise formula on the issue of dominion status. “By the end of the year 1928 Gandhi stepped in when the storm gathered strength by the crisis of response to British attitude. During 1929 Congress opinion hardened behind the demand for a round table conference as the prelude to the grant of dominion status.”60

60. Percival Spear, (ed.) Oxford History of India, p.794.
In the autumn of 1929 succession of labour government enabled Lord Irwin to make an effort to bridge the gulf between British and nationalist opinion and he declared finally that dominion status was the goal of British policy and that a round table conference would be convened to consider the next step. Irwin made the declaration on 31st October sensing a ground swell of bitter anti imperialist sentiment to work out plan for India’s political future and further that, ‘the entire issue of Indian’s constitutional progress was the attainment of dominion status.\(^61\)

Irwin’s declaration of 1929 obliged Gandhi, Motilal Nehru and other Congress heavyweights of the Congress to reexamine the decision of the Calcutta Congress, that if dominion status was not bestowed upon India by 1929 than a movement would be launched to attain Purna Swaraj. In Congress circles the excitement caused by the direct reference to dominion status however was short lived as scrutiny of the proposal revealed them to be snare and a delusion. The two Congress leaders Gandhi and Nehru who met the viceroy on December 23\(^{rd}\) sought for a definite assurance that dominion status would be granted to India.\(^62\) After appearing to accept the new proposals Mahatma Gandhi insisted on a promise that the round table conference should draw up a scheme for full dominion status with immediate effect with, the Viceroy rejecting these terms the stage was set for another confrontation with the British Raj. And as if to signalize the opening of a new chapter in India’s struggle for freedom, an attempt was made by the Hindustan socialist Republican Army to blow up Irwin’s special train near Delhi.

By this time the burning nationalism of India transcended all barriers of region, religions and other factional interests and a new period of national agitation arose, the civil disobedience led by Gandhi, which was to prove the most massive of all forcing another major constitutional concession from the British and laying the ground work for the final struggles for freedom during the 1940’s. The annual session of the Indian National Congress held in Lahore in December, 1929 under the presidency of Jawaharlal Nehru was mostly a vindication of the stance adopted by

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the radical nationalist vis a vis the liberal movement. Indian National Congress held out an analysis of the world situation as well as of the Indian problem, before the assembled delegates.

In the aftermath of Viceroy’s rejection of Congress’s terms the Congress met at Lahore, 1929 in a tense atmosphere. As the Congress ultimatum had not been met, consequently the Lahore session of Congress at the end of 1929 formally made Purna Swaraj the objective and elected Jawaharlal as president. When concessions of greater self-government were denied Lord Irwin in 1929, the Congress at its annual meeting in December that year, boldly declared that India’s independence would take effect in January, 1930. The Congress under the presidency of young Jawaharlal Nehru, elected with Gandhi’s support as the younger leader was most likely to heed his authority. The deliberations of the Lahore Congress thus placed huge responsibility upon Mahatma Gandhi. The decision to entrust the destiny of India at such a crucial juncture to Gandhi, the veteran of numerous non-violent struggle reflected the root of sentiment within the premiere national organization. Gandhi on his own admission “had to conceive and frame practically every resolution and his own resolution on independence as the goal to be achieved by civil disobedience if necessary was passed.” “This Congress appeals to the Nation jealously to prosecute the constructive program of the Congress and authorities, the All India Congress Committee, whenever it deems fit, to launch a program of civil disobedience including non payment of taxes, whether in selected areas or otherwise and under such safe guards as it may consider necessary.”

Perhaps he was aware of the classic revolutionary situation unfolding as there was economic distress, widespread acceptances of a political doctrine, that of

64. Young India, 20th March, 1930, CWMG, XLM p.43, as cited in History of the Freedom Movement in India, vol-3, p.269.
nationalism, as well as an organized cadre of men willing and conscious to achieve it. Depressed economic condition had led to wage cuts and strikes in the railways and in such major industries as cotton, textile and jute. Attempts to keep trade unionist and worker militancy off the Congress agenda were momentarily defeated when the Congress meeting of December, 1929 was invaded demanding the passage of a series of radical resolutions, including full independence. “The situation in rural India was no less agitated. Militancy among the rural poor-caused by the prolongation of the depressed economic condition of the late 1920 s – did not lag much behind that of industrial workers during the uneasy prelude to civil disobedience.”

Nehru’s presidential speech at the Lahore Congress in December, 1929 set the stage once again for confrontation producing a stirring vision of a republican and socialist India. Subhas Chandra Bose proposed a socialist strategy of non payment of taxes and a general strikes that seemed too radical for the assembly. Finally the issue regarding the positive weapon of civil disobedience, its commencement and the nature of its operation was left to the Congress working committee practically to Gandhi. When Gandhi announced that Congress would mount Satyagraha against salt tax, ever Nehru was appalled. As the sole leader of a Satyagraha reflecting the aspiration of a nation of 400 million, Gandhi selected his battle ground and his tactics with utmost care. The decision to focus on salt tax, the most regressive in India, a perfect symbol of imperialist exploitation of mankind’s neediest was taken after much political thinking.

Focusing on the social forces at work during the civil disobedience movement Percival Spear writes, “The C. D. movement of 1930 differed from the non co-operation movement in 1921 in important respects. Both were avowedly non violent, but whereas the first was passively the second was actively revolutionary. The first hoped to bring government to standstill by withdrawing from the administration, the second sought to paralyze the government by mass performance of specific illegal acts.” Civil disobedience movement converted the scattered potentially radical manifestation into a coherent movement led by Gandhi. Political actions during the movement in 1930 involved new forces which emerged to replace the diminished

participation of students and industrial workers. Within a short time disparagers were forced to express admiration for Gandhi’s selection of a cause that unified all opinion and provided an arena for genuinely massive disobedience. Gandhi launched the movement dramatically with the symbolic march from Sabarmati Ashram to the Arabian Sea at Dandi and violated the state monopoly by collecting sea salt for their own use.\textsuperscript{68} Gandhi began with the defiance of the unpopular salt tax, that manifests his usual insight into popular mind and he received wide response from different quarters.

With this background in view a shift in focus to Assam to examine how the movement unfolded and how Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury responded to the civil disobedience that proved a powerful binding agent among Indians within and across regions under Congress banner. The period 1930-35 is a period of great trials and turbulence for the Indian people. After many good political experiments the Congress had decided upon a scheme of direct action in the form of civil disobedience. The first campaign of which was launched in 1930.\textsuperscript{69}

As has already been referred to Roy Chowdhury formed the \textit{Asom Sangrakshini Sabhā} (1926) to promote Assamese sub-national interest. Nationalism in the colonial world grew out of efforts to search and restore the concrete geographical identity of a place but the process was indirectly polemical shot through with tension. Regional nationalism or rather sub nationalism arose in India simultaneously with pan Indian nationalism. Ambikagiri, an ardent advocate of Assamese sub-nationalism based on the cultural foundation of Assamese language concerned himself with an assertive Assamese public identity. But even with this preoccupation he was not detached from the nationalistic struggle and kept himself engaged in the political program of Congress. These engagements are clearly perceptible through a close examination of official records to be precise police abstracts. “The following delegates from the Kamrup district are reported to be going to the Lahore Congress: 1. Rohini Kumar Choudhury, 2. Gopinath Bordoloi and 3. Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury.\textsuperscript{70} But the subsequent report, confirms that Roy Chowdhury some how

\begin{itemize}
\item[68.] P. Spear, \textit{Op cit}, p.795.
\item[69.] Encyclopedia of the INC, AM & SG Zaidi, vol-10, p.294.
\item[70.] APAI, Kamrup.18-12-1929.
\end{itemize}

Police records also refer to a sitting of P.C.C. on 29\(^{th}\) March in the house of Srijut Nabin Chandra Bordoloi where ‘no outsiders were allowed to attend’. The persons present at the sitting were Srijut Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury, Payodhar Baruah, Rohini Kr. Choudhury, Maulabi Tyebulla, Nabin Chandra Bordoloi.\(^72\) Roy Chowdhury was elected as one of the members of provincial Congress committee, in a meeting held on 19\(^{th}\) April, 1930. It appears that 29\(^{th}\) March meeting preceded the election meeting where some important political decision must have been taken. ‘The committee has been authorized by the meeting to elect members. Significantly Roy Chowdhury was one of the members of the working committee with a specific responsibility of enlisting volunteers for civil disobedience.\(^73\)

The nationalist politics and emerging new forces in it and its dynamism making a country side aflame with demands for actions against the government. In the Bramhaputra valley, there was a drift towards more radical anti government action leading to strikes and confrontation. With the violation of Forest Law a new sphere to Gandhian activism were added, initiated by Roy Chowdhury, accordingly first violation of Forest Law took place in Kamrup district (Kachari Mouza, situated in present south Kamrup) official record states.\(^74\) “In the afternoon of the 12\(^{th}\) instant there was a meeting in the Jubilee Garden under the presidency of Hari Krishna Das. In the public meeting Srijut A. Roy Chowdhury moved a resolution condemning the proceedings against the imprisonment of Sardar Ballav Bhai Patel and said that there is no field in Assam for civil disobedience against the Salt Act, but there is scope for same against the Forest Act which will suit in Assam.\(^75\)

\(^71\) Ibid, 02-04-1930.
\(^72\) Ibid, 09-04-1930.
\(^73\) Ibid.
\(^74\) Home Political File 18/11 F.R 1st half of April 1930.
\(^75\) APAI, Kamrup.19-03-1930.
In the ensuing great confrontation between the Indian national Congress and the Raj which extended until 1934, it was becoming increasingly clear that the government's gamble – that non-interference with the movement would result in its spending itself out, that Gandhi’s salt strategy would fail to take off had not paid off. In fact, the government was in a classic dilemma as to what course it would follow as Gandhi had predicted ‘puzzled and perplexed’. It was a dilemma that the Gandhian strategy of non-violent civil disobedience was designed to create. The volatile political atmosphere unleashed by the movement left the government with no choice but to demonstrate the force that lay behind its benevolent facade. In this widespread popular opposition, marked by a measure of radicalism, the government became more and more disturbed and disliked for its arrogance as it responded to the ensuing movement with Unlawful Instigation, Intimidation Ordinance and other repressive measures. “If Congress decided (Irwin told the secretary of state on 1st February) to carry on civil disobedience movement we may be faced with a situation of great difficulty and even danger in which we would have no alternative but to resist with all available resources.”

On 15th May a member of the Viceroy’s council reported that in Calcutta “there is a wide spread, almost universal anti-government feeling.”

The impact of the civil disobedience movement was felt immediately in the Brahmaputra valley as it had been launched with Gandhi’s symbolic manufacture of salt at Dandi. One major attribute of the civil disobedience was the non payment of taxes. The civil disobedience movement equipped the APCC for a new political dispensation as on the use of the movement it was in a sort of deactivated state at the organizational level. In fact Congress was like an abandoned house. Against this backdrop the movement became a remarkable publicity operation, demonstrating political ideas and action throughout the valley and generating political awareness even in remote villages. The campaigns were also recruiting ground for the Congress involving more and more students and a number of women in Congress organization and activities. It gave them a sense of unity born of shared political activity and jail life. In a politically charged valley Congress activists jumped into the fray with renewed vigour and started organizing publicity meetings for the success of the

76. Irwin to Benn 1st February, 1931, Irwin p.6, cited in D. A. Low, p.171.
78. L. N. Tamuli, Bhāratar Swādhinatā Shangrāmat Asomar Avadān, p.229.
movement. In a huge public gathering Hem Chandra Barua declared, ‘The British Government should either be mended or ended and since mending was impossible it should be ended.’ In Guwahati organizational works were shared mainly by Dr. Bhubaneswar Barua, Dr. Hare Krishna Das, Ambikagiri Roy Choudhury and Payodhar Barua. A non violent civil disobedience committee was formed in Guwahati and as secretary of that committee Ambikagiri Raichoudhury managed to distribute Swadesh (indigenously prepared) salt brought from Bombay or Bengal. He made an appeal to the people (Rajjoloi Nibedan) to enlist as workers who would carry on Gandhiji’s civil disobedience campaign as directed in spite of government repression.

Since there is no possibility of breaking salt law in Assam, “we have decided to bring salt prepared by soldiers of nonviolent freedom struggle as directed by Mahatma in Bombay and Bengal. We will proceed with house to house sell. We have managed to bring in Swadeshi salt.”

A period of great trials and tribulation were awaiting Indian people as the movement unfolded, the first campaign of which had been launched in 1930. The most obvious question regarding the strategy, tools of the movement, changing it, shaping it cutting out its course demanded the attention Congress leaders, contemplating the launch of civil disobedience in the Bramhaputra Valley. An alternative to breaking of salt law in Assam has already been found designed to appeal to the public opinion already transformed by the Lahore resolutions. Roy Chowdhury can be credited for having found a way to confront the authority already alarmed by strident socio-political criticism. Dissent was widespread and originated in part from radical Congress leaders like Nehru. As a radical political thinkers and activist Roy Chowdhury also braced himself for a prolonged conformation with the Raj at the political as well as ideological level. The unfolding struggle steered by popular discontent, conditioned by the circumstances right from the anti Simon demonstration to the Lahore resolution and finally Gandhi’s much thought over strategy of

80. Assam government diary 100, 43 of the political criminal DIG office, cited in Sagar Baruah, Bhratar Swadhinata Andulanat Asom, vol-2 pp.16-17.
81. Asomiya April,1920, cited in Sagar Baruah, Bhratar Swadhinata Andulanat Asom, vol-2 pp.16-17
challenging the established authority. As an office bearer of APCC and shouldering the responsibility of organizational work as had already been referred to, Roy Chowdhury’s engagement in that great struggle was characterized as usual by his restless energy and dedication, putting on a spectacular drive for mobilizing volunteers supplanted by his profound nationalist writings with a regional flavour.

The movement that was launched with the symbolic of violation the ‘obnoxious salt law’ in a much disciplined manner did create a stir in the country side, of India’s which subsequently evolved into a much bigger movement at all India level. In a vast country like India, with so much of diversities on ethnic, linguistic and cultural level Congress was the focus and rallying point of diverse interests as displayed in the unity and cohesion of the Civil Disobedience movement. The then secretary of state for India himself had conceded that ‘genuine national aspiration’ had moved most Indians to follow Gandhi’s leadership and he expressed surprise at the strength of the civil disobedience movement. Highly unpopular state monopoly over salt was made target by Gandhi with a defined objective of mobilizing a wider discontent against the Raj then geared up with the whole machinery of the government.

Contrary to the international media attention on the salt Satyagraha of Gandhi the progression and direction of the movement at the provincial level its success, popular participation that assumed different formation needs to be understood in the broad panorama of events unfolding in different locations, with lesser media attention on it. In fact the movement in the form of peaceful resistance and defiance of laws was a running thread connecting its different forms operating at various levels. More writings on the regional level becomes an imperative for an understanding of the forces unleashed by highly intense political movement and the over all transformation of the society. It can be anatomized in formal terms by means of description of constitutional measures, electoral arrangement as well as in the informal terms of the organizational network which linked politicians capable of exerting influence on the public mind. It is also possible to put diversity first, not by turning to a descending system of national organization one that focuses on and traces the impacts, influences and networks of national organization and politicians but rather by beginning in the regions, in the localities, which should not be ignored.
With the broad parameter of the nationalist movement was also related the political variations at regional level and its dynamics. It helps explain the vitality of the local response to national issues. There was a far more dynamic relationship between the regional and national level and the happenings at regional not simply being a reflection of the national debates, discussion.

Shifting the focus on Bramhaputra Valley a politically charged atmosphere was seen with the selection of some parts of the valley as a field of action by AICC. For felicitation of work the following Congress circles have been declared 1) Gauhati 2) Chaygaon 3) Nalbari 4) Tihu and 5) Rangia. Raichowdhury was one of the most involved felicitator of work in Lower Assam.82 As a member of the working committee of PCC and entrusted with the responsibility of enlisting volunteers for civil disobedience along with Payodhar Barua and Naranath Sharma, Roy Chowdhury was able to give the people the message of peaceful resistance and defiance of laws as defined by Gandhi. Bringing socio-political awareness among the masses in meetings that he addressed anti British slogans were raised amongst the audience with enthusiasm, gusto and war cry. One such incident has already been referred elsewhere.

Taking into account the fragility of Congress organization at that time, any stress on a national issue is not intended to deny the role of regional politics. This was unsurprising given the social politics of the Bramhaputra valley where leadership was almost all the time was with the educated middle class. L. N. Tamuli observes that there was a wide gulf between the Congress leadership of Assam and the vast rural populace of Assam.83 But this gulf was not always a permanent feature as subsequent events proved. It is also necessary to note the role of issues and the extent to which leadership can establish their connectivity in a world in which ideology and conviction played a major role. Sometimes political management alone can not sustain a prolonged movement. There are other issues at hand and in case of Assam there were particular geographical and socio-economic factor.

Nevertheless civil disobedience compelled the leadership of Assam to look for other method of resistance. In this context Tayybullah’s statement is worth

82. Assam ABS No-477 Kamrup –09-04-1930.
mentioning. “On set of salt Satyagraha all over India presented a problem to the provincial leadership of Assam. Problem is salt Satyagraha is not possible in Assam because neither there is sea nor salt mine. On behalf of provincial Congress I appealed to Mahatma and the Congress President to issue special instruction to initiate opium Satyagraha, picketing against the use of exercisable item, boycott of foreign cloth etc. Accordingly instruction came and third phase of opium Satyagraha started in Assam. Thousands of Congress workers, this time more than two thousand suffered repression and were imprisoned.”

With this background of a confused leadership in Assam Ambikagiri Roychowdhury is seen providing a clear idea for pursuing the movement. He advocated violation of forest law and use of swadeshi salt imported from Bombay and Calcutta. As mentioned before the first instance of forest law violation occurred in Kachari Mouza (revenue circle) of Kamrup district. Contrary to the hesitation expressed by the leadership of Assam, we see Ambikagiri imbued with the ethos and practices of contemporary politics was giving a clear direction to the Congress volunteers in that crucial phase of the nationalistic struggle. Congress volunteers picketed in front of liquor shop, opium shop and foreign cloth shop. They also confiscated license of opium users. Here a close look at the statement issued by prominent Congress leaders of Assam gives a different picture marked by apathy for mass political involvement. “He [N. C. Bordoloi] said that a number of ladies and youths have been pressing for picketing and volunteered their services but Mr. Phukan (T. R.) and himself did not allow this. In the present condition picketing will lead to rioting and would not bring about purification in their hearts. So he left it with the Polashbari people to give up foreign cloth and excisable articles giving them a month’s time to see what they do. About Satyagraha he said that the question can not come now – this being very hard. The people should first learn to unite and to work with discipline.

Contrary to this a much more radical view becomes apparent in the clearly defined program outlined by Ambikagiri for civil Disobedience movement and in his

84. Tayyabullah, Kārāgārār Sithi, p.78.
85. APAI – 387 Kamrup. 19-03-1930.
appeal for enlistment of dedicated hard working volunteers.\textsuperscript{88} This suggests one conclusion; there is no ambiguity or hesitation in his direction. He preferred a wider extended role for Congress volunteers. Articulating, representing specific regional views, at the same time always having a national political connection was a relatively rare occurrence in the political culture of Assam. But it is always apparent, defined in the leadership trait of Ambikagiri.

Nevertheless anti opium demonstration assumed an organized political form. “In Kamrup the well known Barpeta Satra (monastery) which apparently combines politics with religion has been inflecting finds on any one using excisable articles. The result has been that the ganja shops in Barpeta sub division, the sales of ganja were only 5¼ seers in June 1930 as compared with 36½ seers in June 1929.”\textsuperscript{89} Political sphere of Assam was then dominated by student activities, mostly picketing. Despite the minimal interest of a section of leadership, civil disobedience in Assam presented a forum for the conduct of public politics; in this case it is an aspect of a wider struggle between the people and an alien authority. Looked at differently, it was fundamentally a matter of responding to the emerging national issue in an intensely political atmosphere, where student played the most important role, motivated by an ideology involving patriotism and nationalism. There are instances of over of enthusiastic volunteers going beyond the restrained instructions of APCC regarding the boycott of excisable articles. “Cases are still pending in which volunteers in Nowgong and Kamrup districts are accused of taking away by force passes from licensed opium eaters.”\textsuperscript{90}

In this crucial phase of the movement Roy Choudhury was instrumental in attracting into the movement a good number of volunteers. A deeply committed activist imbued with a rare kind of humanitarianism Roy Chowdhury was perhaps the least conspicuous, least dazzling of the Assamese leaders one can think of yet he was at the forefront when veteran Congress leaders were unable to get involved the struggle of 1930. Then Roy Chowdhury shouldered the responsibility of volunteer

\textsuperscript{88} Asomiyā, April 1920.  
\textsuperscript{89} Home Political File No -18, July 1930 FR 1st half of July.  
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
enlistment in the restructured Congress.\textsuperscript{91} This sort of commitment and dedication for what he defined is very rarely seen in contemporary political culture. It is a pity we think of him with a lamentably inadequate perspective. We know so little about him. It is instructive to reflect on the situation he worked in where he saw the independence movement as part of a wider Assamese resurgence directing his energies towards this end. Now a look at another aspect of civil obedience, that is Cunningham circular and the anti circular resistance as part of the civil disobedience movement. Interestingly it is this resistance that proved to be the direction, energy of the movement providing a wider political stage for the actors, the students… It is important to consider the political culture marked by an expressed reluctance to proceed with the centrally directed civil disobedience campaign. This reticent attitude of Congress made the government quite complacent and reported, this reticent attitude has been more marked in the Assam valley where local leaders have apparently had their fill of discomfors inseparable from political martyrdom.\textsuperscript{92}

So great was the response to the movement launched by Gandhi in other parts of India that, Congress report on the Civil Disobedience movement suggests an inadequate support for the movement in Assam. In every state except Assam where there are no facilities for salt making, salt began to be prepared in hundreds of places amidst great enthusiasm.\textsuperscript{93}

In an increasingly radicalized political atmosphere elsewhere in the country students in Assam were getting drifted towards political action. The youths of Assam defused to remain mere spectators in this saga of national emergence. For instance Liladhar Barua joined Gandhi in the epic march to Dandi. Returning from the march he addressed a public meeting and emphasized the need to part way with the fence sitting Congress leaders.\textsuperscript{94} Students enthusiastically responded to this appeal by distributing salt at Nowgong and Liladhar Barua along with Bedananda Sarma was lathi charged and arrested while leading a procession at Tezpur. M. Tayabulla, the then general secretary of APCC remarked on the incident “it was a ridiculous sight to

\textsuperscript{92} Home Political File No -18, April 1930, FR 1st half of April.
\textsuperscript{93} File No-G-26-1931, Congress report of civil disobedience.
\textsuperscript{94} Arun Bhuyan (ed.), Nationalist Upsurge in Assam, p.226.
see full grown policeman armed with regulation sticks and batons and chasing school boys in the procession and tussling with them for the National flag.” Distribution of Swadeshi salt was an idea formulated by Roy Chowdhury and subsequently students made an insufficient attempt to implement it. Except for some sporadic student involvement, civil disobedience in Assam was a low-key affair. It could be interrupted as a manifestation of middle class hesitation in a great democratic movement when we see the APCC in a shambles with its senior leaders pulling in a different direction and a section of students getting annoyed by the specter of political indecision and the consequent implications. This comparatively quiet situation reached a sort of momentum interestingly with the issuance of government circular aimed at debarring students from political involvement better known as Cunningham Circular.96

Immediately after the hartal of 6th May as a mark of protest against Gandhi’s arrest the otherwise complaisant Assam government decided to act taking into account parents view regarding students participation in politics. “Government’s decision was to respond to the problem by holding the parents responsible for the consequence of their children participating in politics. J. R. Cunningham, the then Director of Public Instruction issued a circular on 9th May, 1930, proclaiming that after the summer vacation boys would not be readmitted in the government schools unless the parents and in the case of the higher classes the boys themselves also, gave a written undertaking that they would abstain from political activities.97 This circular acted as spark among the student community leading to an agitation that could be termed as a solid resistance to the authority and the beginning civil disobedience in Assam. “Very strong resentment against the circulars could be gauged by the vehement opposition of Raibahadurs and Raisahabs to this circular.98 An actively revolutionary program was evolved at the initiative of the Asom Chātra Sanmilan. How students got inspired by youth leaders like Hem Chandra Barua and Omeo Kumar Das to start a movement against Cunningham circular is well known. Even

95. File No-G-145,193o, Assam Satyagraha File.
96. J. R. Cunningham Director of Public Instruction of Assam issued a circular dated 19-05-1930 Shillong to the effect that students from class VII to X should sign and undertaking that they would not be involved in political activities. The undertaking was also required to be signed by the guardians.
98. HFM papers, R-1 File No 14/3 (NAI)
then APCC secretary Tayyebulla preferred to steer clear from shouldering the responsibilities for student activities.\textsuperscript{99} Subsequently educational institutions of both the valleys became the field of anti imperialist movement arousing general sympathy as well as government wrath.

Cotton College, the premier educational institution in the Bramhaputra valley was the natural choice to start picketing. Cotton Collegiate School then followed the action on 29\textsuperscript{th} July. In the midst of all these Kamrup Academy, a purely non government school was established by the students and guardians who refused to give the undertaking as required by the Cunningham circular. The spread and reach of the student movement finally compelled APCC to join the fray and sanction the DCC to start in the form of picketing under their supervision and direction.\textsuperscript{100} “Gradually picketing spread to almost all the towns in the Bramhaputra valley prompting government to take stern measures against the agitators. A quick glance at the official record in this regard is also necessary to understand the spread and effectiveness of the movement which also included boycott of British goods. “In spite of the attacks on the so called Cunningham circular, the attendance at government High School in the Surma valley is 75 percent of what it was before the vacation. The position is different in the Assam valley. At Nowgong there has been constant picketing at the government High School since it reopened on 19\textsuperscript{th} July in spite of the Deputy Commissioner sentencing to substantial terms of imprisonment nine picketers arrested on the first day.”\textsuperscript{101} The Deputy Commissioner Kamrup reports, that the position of this college (the premier educational institution in Assam) during the last fortnight can only be described as highly unsatisfactory. With the approval of the governing body of which commissioner Assam valley Division, is president the Principal (a European) has been closing down lecturers each morning as soon as picketers have appeared at the front entrance. Reluctance to employ police assistance has resulted in the loyal minorities of students getting no protection.”\textsuperscript{102}

Another component of the movement was the boycott of British goods and promotion of swadeshi goods. \textit{Assam Buy Swadeshi League} has been started at

\textsuperscript{99} Asomiya, 24th August 1930.
\textsuperscript{100} Asomiya, 24th August, 1930.
\textsuperscript{101} Home Political, 1931 File No -15/V/1931, FR for the 1st half of June 1931. NAI
\textsuperscript{102} FR for Assam for the 2nd half of July 1930, HP File No-18.
Guwahati in response to the appeal of Pandit Madam Mohan Malaviya and Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury was very much active in promoting this League. “In Assam also Buy Swadeshi movement was going on led by Ambikagiri. He gave me the responsibility of secretary. In pursuance of the movement we went for collection in Uzanbazar. As far as I recollect we approached Swarnalata Saikia still I remember the poor response we got from Keshab Kanta Barua of Chenikuthi. We took out a procession of “Buy Swadeshi League” with strength of around 50 men and women.”

In this context establishment of Kamrup Mayabini Chemical Works by Ambikagiri inspired by a nationalist ideology of economic self reliance is worth mentioning. Kamrup Mayabini has been discussed in the previous chapter as it involves other aspect of colonialism and nationalism.

Boycott of British goods being pursued vigorously as this official report suggests. “Picketing is now mostly directed against cloth shops and vigorous attempts are being made to prevent the sale of foreign cloth for the ensuing Durga Puja.” Against this background Syed Md. Sadulla’s letter dated 7-10-30 is also suggestive of the prevalent repressive attitude of the government, “As regards your letter of date, I thought I made it clear in our discussion that I do not want our police to sit tight and allow peaceful picketing without any action.”

In the midst of all these happenings the first Round Table Conference was convened to consider the constitutional proposals of the Simon Commission. Congress had boycotted the first Round Table Conference leaving it to others to present their views. Dominion status deemed premature by the Simon Commission was not to be considered, so conference was an exercise in futility although attended by a large contingent of Indian princes.

Gandhi was released following the Gandhi Irwin part of 1931 and Congress agreed to end the civil Disobedience Movement and Gandhi represented Congress at the second Round Table Conference in London. The second conference also proved inconclusive as nothing in the direction of viable constitutions preferred by an Indian majority could be extracted. “In London Gandhi was unable to accept the idea of a

105. District record (Gauhati) on 1930 movement letter from Sadduallah to Friel, Jail Superintendent, File No-76.
separate communal electorate which was favoured by the British, the Muslims and even the representative of the Hindu depressed classes, he began a ‘fast unto death’.

Within three weeks of his return to India Gandhi was once more in prison and the Congress a proscribed organization.

In January 1932 civil disobedience was resumed in response to popular pressure and the government retaliated with new police regulations, allowing arbitrary arrest of leaders and confiscation of their property. This declaration of war against Indian nationalism followed by a resumption of civil disobedience was to continue for another eighteen bitter and futile months. The resumption of civil disobedience followed by repressive government ordinances and proscription of Congress resulted in a defiance of the ordinances as directed by Gandhi. “As in other provinces the Congress in Assam defied them and the movement started again followed by stern repression including cruel treatment of prisoners in jail.” In the course of the next year many of the leaders and volunteers courted arrest. As usual the most active participants of the movement, the students kept the spirit of resistance alive under the aegis of Assam Chatra Sanmilan. Gandhi’s visit to Assam in 1934 gave further impetus to the anti untouchability movement, which had already been going on Assam as well as to the constructive program mostly pursued in rural areas. Gandhi’s persisting concern for untouchable and making it the key element of the Congress program stunned and disappointed many even within the Congress given the staggering array of problems facing Indians. Gandhi’s long commitment for the improvement of life for the depressed classes became key issue in the second phase of the civil disobedience movement. In fact his visit to Assam in 1934 was on the mission of Harijan upliftment alone. “On the day of Gandhi’s fast protesting communal awards the boarders of the cotton college hostel led by their secretary Madhab Chandra Bezbaruah, observed a day’s fast in support of Gandhi’s ideas on Harijan issues”. Even after the abandonment of the second phase of civil disobedience movement a group of students like Liladhar Barua, Golok Pathak, Dharam Kanta Sarma and Naranarayan Goswami set up a Harijan Ashram at Santipur.

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in Guwahati called “Asam Sevashram.” Anti untouchability movement indeed have a pronounced following in Assam as is revealed in official reports. “Further reports received show that 18th December was observed as the ‘untouchable day’ in both the Assam and Surma Valley. The trustee of the Biswanath temple in Darrang on receipt of the resolution passed at one of these meetings requesting him to allow untouchables to enter the temple is reported to have said that he would not allow them to enter but would not put up any resistance to forceful entry. From the same district Darrang it is reported that nearly all the agitators have joined the anti un-touch ability movement.”

Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury initially entrusted with the task of volunteers enlistment subsequently got engrossed with constructive activities like promotion of Swadeshi and anti un-touch ability campaigns in the second phase of the civil disobedience movement. A pronounced exclusivist attitude started coming to the fore through his Sangrakshini activities. One very crucial issue relentlessly pursued by Roy Chowdhury in those days was the transfer of Sylhet. “Among the resolutions passed at a conference of the Assam sangrakshini Sabha held at Gauhati on 30th December were resolutions asking the government to transfer the district of Sylhet from Assam.”

It is pertinent to note here that even in the face of government repression the spirit of civil disobedience was kept alive in the Brahmaputra valley in a form suited to this particular region. “To prevent people from attending the Congress session at Calcutta the Deputy Commissioner Darrang issued orders under the 144, criminal procedure code, and several people who tried to disobey the order were sentenced to 7 days simple imprisonment under section 188/151 Indian penal code. Some Congress leaders of Kamrup at Parbatipur in Bengal on their way to Calcutta despite these measures (twelve Congressmen) made desperate attempt to attend the Calcutta session.” In Assam the civil disobedience movement took a definite shape in the form of anti Cunninghum circular movement. This circular from the director of public

111. Ibid.
112. Ibid.
113. Ibid, File No-18/5/1933, FR for the first half of April, 1933.
instruction generated an atmosphere of resistance among the student community in Assam. Regarding the reach of the movement official records are clearly evident. “The most distributing feature of the education situation at present is the opening of new High Schools on so called national lines at Sylhet, Silchar and Gauhati. During the fortnight under review there have been some 96 prosecution mostly under section 108, CPC. Some of the sentences imposed i.e. in the case of 14 volunteers ordered under section 151 IPC by the late S.D.O., Habibganj to undergo imprisonment till the rising of the court, seem obviously inadequate.” 114 So it is a clear manifestation of the prevailing unrest among the students consequent to the issue of Cunningham Circular. On the whole the second phase of the civil disobedience in Assam was less revolutionary having a constructive social orientation.

Finally the international pressure of the depression of 1930 made manifest the cost of Indian colonial dependency coupled with a less sympathetic public attitude towards Congress, tired of strife and its attendant losses dictated a sort of accommodation with the government resulting in a prolonged series of discursion and particularly inquiries culminating in the Government of India Act of 1935. Thus civil disobedience gradually petered out and a complex combination socio-economic compulsion rendered its continuance impossible.

A quaintessential nationalist Ambikagiri being an integral part of the nationalist movement slowly drifted to a different socio-political formation in the shape of Sangrakshini Sabhā advancing an exclusive regional politicization within the ambit of the Pan Indian nationalism. This drifting was occasioned by his disillusionment with, sometimes very moderate line of thinking of the Congress, and added a new dimension to the contemporary political culture. So a distinct political pattern evolved in the functioning of the Sangrakshini Sabhā led by Ambikagiri, a forum encouraging a change in the nature of the political, debate publicly representing views with a pronounced regionalism right from the beginning of the 1930’s with a national political connection and consciousness. It would be a mistake to see development of national political connection and consciousness in linear terms. In this context how Ambikagiri articulated issues that he considered crucial for Assam in an

wide ranging activities is significant here not least because it represented regional interest, but it is also connected to crucial national issue. Ministry formation by Congress consequent to the government of India Act of 1935 in an intensely political atmosphere and how Roy Chowdhury reacted to this happening with wider political implication needs to be focused as it forms an important ingredient in the transitional phase of our history marked by deep anxiety and expectation. The year 1935 may rightly considered a turning point in time as the Indian National Congress completed half a century of its existence as one of the most remarkable organization in history and all turning points invite qualification and the search for continuity. Nevertheless completion of 50 years of existence of Indian National Congress and the Government of Indian Act of 1935 coincided, led to constitutional change, set a new political agenda and transformed the relationship between the ruler and the ruled. This act was to be the central point in subsequent discussion of the future political system of India. It came in the wake of the civil Disobedience Movement. In fact it was the British response to the 1932-33 civil Disobedience Movement in the shape of a constitution. “A new Government of India Act was promised for 1935 which was to be the last by the British Parliament and the most lasting, for its provisions endured through the reminder of the era of colonial subjugation and were carried over to operate as the fundamental constitutional frame work for the post-independence Indian Republic.”  

Product of a prolonged series of discussion and enquiries, the Act of 1935 prepared the stage for a final showdown with the Raj. “For the Congress; this constitution was a further instrument of bondage and to be fought as such.” It was commonly argued by the British rulers of India that parliamentary democracy was unsuited to a society intensely divided into religions and other communal groupings whose social structure was also imbued with an ideology of hierarchy rather than equality. With this preconceived notion the framers of the 1935 Act worked on the basis of a few constitutional principles for a political settlement in India, already affecters by a radical left consolidation of politics. The 1935 Act did not provide for a federal system. Since 1921, Indian had shown a marked capacity for an orderly conduct of parliamentary business and the act provided for responsible provincial government. Another issue that was taken into account was the growing Hindu Muslim antagonism, while framing the constitution. Another stake holder in the process was

the Indian princes who desired an unchanged relationship with the British. All these factors resulted in a constitution that provided for an essentially strong central structure laying maximum stress on the unity of the country received the royal assent on August 1935. During the prolonged debates in the both houses of parliament it became clear to many members that the proposed constitution was going to give no satisfaction to India."\(^{117}\) Moreover serious political problems were exacerbated by some of Indian princes feeling of insecurity and over anxious attitude. “It was not the federation alone which was subjected but the constitution it self was brought to discredit when during the debate in June 1935 Churchill chose to describe the Bill as a gigantic a quilt of jumbled crochet work, a monstrous movement of shame built by pigmyes.”\(^{118}\) Despite the combined opposition of Indian princes and conservative hostility the Bill finally became an Act on 4th August. The Act proved far short of the general desire and expectation of the Indian political parties and it was received critically. The act envisaged an All India Federation comprising Governor’s provinces, Chief Commissioner Provinces and the Federating Indian states, and Provincial Autonomy with a government responsible to an elected legislature in every Governor’s Province. Although the Act introduced provincial autonomy, extraordinary powers were also given to the Governors’ to refuse his assent to bills passed by the legislature to promulgate ordinances when the legislature was not in session and also issue ordinances in respect of certain subjects at any time. Indeed the vast ordinance making authority given to provincial Governors’ implied a tremendous scope for transgression and provincial autonomy lost its very essence. The Act provided a massive constitutional document but there was nothing substantial within it. “Pandit Nehru rightly criticized the Act of 1935 as a machine with strong brakes and no engine.”\(^{119}\)

The Indian reaction to the Act that emphasized the disillusionment was summed up by JawAsharlal Nehru in February 1936 as follows: “The new Act is deliberately designed to strengthen and consolidate all the vested and reactionary elements in India – the British government, British financial interest, the Indian princes, big semi-feudal land lords and all others who are interested in preserving the

\(^{117}\) Ibid, p.3.
\(^{118}\) Ibid, p.4.
\(^{119}\) J. Nehru, *Discovery of India*, p.39.
present. It makes even minor changes difficult and any major change almost impossible without an upheaval which will wreck the Act and all that it stands for.”

The most crucial issue confronting the Congress at that time was whether to go for election to the provincial legislature and seek office and this issue brought to the fore the ideological differences of the Congress left and right. The younger rank led by Nehru and Subhas Ch. Bose impatient with Gandhi’s methods looked upon socialism as an alternative source for nationalist policies capable of meeting the country’s economic and social needs. On the other hand the right wing with their persisting political weight continued to believe that the way forward to a free Indian was the slow path of incremental constitution that preserved order and property and resentful of the chaos they felt socialism threatened. The Congress politics of this period marked by an apparent surge of the left within the party under the leadership of Nehru proclaiming his commitment to scientific socialism in his presidential address of the Lucknow Congress in 1936. The pressure of the depression resulted in the more pronounced left orientation of Indian freedom struggle with other struggles against oppression abroad as in case of Spain, China etc. A close look at the changing political contours of India is necessitated here to understand the sense of purpose and direction of the Congress in that defining moment as Gandhi urged the election of Nehru to the presidency of Congress. Indeed the manifest radicalism found exclusively in the Congress left eventually subsided. Nehru as Congress President devised a curious strategy for the ensuing election. Congress members were to stand for election to provincial assembly under the arrangements of the 1935 Act, but refuse to take any seat. The events of 1935 – 1937 have to be understood not only in terms of their future significance, but also as a consequence of the division, tensions and fears of the Congress politics in the preceding years. The polarization of Congress politics, rise of Congress socialist party and finally Congress right wing proving it strong enough to survive the internal challenge defines the political culture of that phase. The prevailing political dynamism did reflect an implicit popular desire for some change that was long overdue. Institutional expression of national discontent and offering a clear and prudent political course for those who were disenchanted with Congress could instigate change in policy was slowly striving to create all India national

movement. In a meeting of the AICC held at Bombay, long before the election to the eleven provincial legislatures under the Act of 1935, the Indian National Congress drafted and adopted an elaborate election manifesto making emphatically clear the principle involved in contesting the election. “The purpose was to present the operation of forces calculated to strengthen alien domination and exploitation of Indian people but not to co-operate in any way with the Act, rather to combat it and to end it. The Congress had rejected it in its entirety and had declared that no constitution imposed by outside authority and no constitution which curtails the sovereignty of the people of India and does not recognize their right to shape and control fully their political and economic future, can be accepted.”121

With clearly defined issues and certain program the Congress appealed to the electorate for support urging upon the people of India with full hope and confidence to rally to the cause of the Congress, of India of freedom. The Congress election manifesto was endorsed at the Faizpur (MAsharashtra) session of AICC on 27-28 December 1936. “It called upon candidates standing on its behalf on the basis of the manifesto. It was further resolved that the question of acceptance or non-acceptance of office by Congress members selected would be decided by the AICC as soon after the elections as was practicable.”122 In his presidential address at Faizpur Congress Nehru articulated a clear set of ideological and policy goals which included a commitment to a non-dogmatic form of socialism. “We go to the legislature not to co-operate with the apparatus of British imperialism, but to combat the Act and seek to end it, and to resist in every way British imperialism in its attempt to strengthen its hold on India and its exploitation of the Indian people.”123 Understanding the importance of the political role to be played by the legislatures, a joint statement was issued by Nehru, Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Jamnalal Bajaj from Wardha on 17th November 1936 regarding the selection of quality of the candidates from the point of view of Congress policy reflected a general desirability on the part of those selected candidates for substantial political change. So in the Congress projection of election selecting the right candidate was an important issue. “Only such persons should be chosen as Congress candidates for election who fully

122. Ibid.
supported the Congress objectives of Indian independence and pledged themselves to carry out its policy in regard to the legislatures.”

In so far as the provincial response to the AICC decision is concerned as regard to the election it was similarly guided and directed by the party manifesto and within this broad parameter the happenings in Assam need to be viewed and understood. The Act of 1935 enlarged the legislature in the provinces, Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Bombay, Madras and United Provinces were provided with two houses known as the Legislature Council and Legislative Assembly. The membership of the Upper House i.e. Legislative Council was fixed at 22 out of which 18 were to be elected on the basis of a limited franchise the rest 4 were to be nominated members. “The Assembly was to have 108 seats as per the provisions made in the Communal Award of 1932.”

Although the white paper and the Joint Select Committee’s report did not recommend a second chamber for Assam the letter acquired it almost without asking for it by virtue of the government of India Act 1935. The idea of a second chamber in Assam was opposed initially by both the people of Assam and the government. A meeting of Barpeta Congress committee was held on 14.3.37 under the presidency of Sjt. Bishnu Ram Medhi. All the Gauhati Congress leaders came and attended the meeting. Gopinath Bordoloi, Sidhi Nath Sarma, Liladhar Barua, Bishnu Ram Medhi, Upendra Ch. Das, Mahendra Nath Chowdhury, Debendra Nath Uzir, Omeo Kr. Das and other Congress leaders in their speech advocated complete hartal on 1-4-37, abolition of upper house, not to accept office under the New Government”. Subsequently class interest played its role and to satisfy the commercial interests of Assam Railways and Trading Company, the Assam Oil Company etc. the government conceded to their demand for a second chamber by completely ignoring the general public opinion resulting in the creation of a second chamber for Assam.

In February 1937 a general election under the new Act was held and the Congress did extremely well in the election winning 711 out of 1585 provincial seats having secured absolute majority in 5 out of 11 provinces. Given the complex socio-

125. H.P. File No-18/4/37 Poll F.R. for the 2nd half of April 1937, NAI
126. Ibid.
127. Confidential PHA record, FR from HDO Bapeta to DC Kamrup, 1st half of March 1937.
128. ALCP 1932, vol-12, pp.1127-1157.
political dynamism of Assam a focus on the election preparedness of APCC and how Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury viewed the election is pertinent here. It has already been mentioned that Roy Chowdhury formed *Asom Sangrakshini Sabhā*, an organized political forum with a clearly defined objective of articulating Assamese sub-nationalism. So in the context the response from the Sabhā towards election, the general perception of Roy Chowdhury regarding the participatory democracy and his expectation of an assertive political role in an institutional, political setting must be understood vis-à-vis the pan Indian nationalism. In the political dynamism of Assam it is necessary to reorganize the evolving ideology of nationalism as he understood in the light of an ever growing consciousness of the political reality originating from the Swadeshi. The political conception of nation in Roy Chowdhury’s thinking has the key component of a distinct community based not so much on political identity but on history, tradition and culture. It can be seen as an idea associated with the doctrine of nationalism that a community living in a particular geographical area having a shared history and culture do also have a certain set of shared interests and should be allowed to express their wishes on how there interests should be best promoted. It is this concept of promoting the specific interests of the Assamese in the best possible manner that Roy Chowdhury formed *Asom sangrakshini sabhā* with a clearly defined objective of preserving the distinctiveness of the Assamese identity. Hence there was a disconnection with the greater Indian nationalism but a continuously pursued reaffirmation of its continued distinctive existence within the matrix of the pan Indian nationalism. Always a firm believer in democratic process Roy Chowdhury stressed on representative government as being the most desirable form of political system. In this light decision of the Sabhā to participate in council election needs to be viewed. “Executive committee of the Sabhā has taken a decision to project candidate from some of the constituencies in the ensuing election for the council and assembly. Some members have expressed that this council decision should have been taken in a general meeting.”129

“Irrespective of caste, creed and religion sangrakshini sabhā is a national organization of every Assamese. Since it is an organization of the people of Assam, every Assamese has a right to criticize the activities of the Sabhā.”130 This is a sort of

129. Dekā Asom 2nd Year 2nd Issue, 1858 saka.
130. Ibid.
clarification that Roy Chowdhury offered under the heading *Raijoloi Nibedan*. Roy Chowdhury sought to justify the electoral participation of *Sabhā* with its expressed idea of promoting, enriching and preserving the Assamese nation. For that matter if necessary *Sabhā* must participate in Council, Assembly, Local Board, Municipality election and that is clearly mentioned in the constructive program of the *Sabhā*. *Sabhā* never was in competition with the Indian National Congress perhaps it was an assertion of a distinct political voice that sometimes is not complicit with the Pan Indian discourse of nation building or development. “He emphasises that *Sabhā* never is of the opinion that it is the sole responsibility of this organization to preserve the national interest and every Assamese having a sense of belonging, a respect for Assamese nationalism in variably has the right to think and work for Assam.”

He felt an urgent need to participate in the election process as he was well aware of the wretched condition of his province. It was not an instance of diverse parties competing for mass political support. It will be a mistake to consider that Roy Chowdhury was only negotiating political issue. At the first glance it may seem that the long clarification statement given in *Dekā Asom* is a statement of justification for *Sangrakshini Sabhā* aspiring for and actively political role. Rather it explains the continuous evocation of a regional identity perceived to be threatened by forces both political and social and which needs to be taken up by a local political formation slowly evolving as an institutionalized force. The economic and social dynamism where politics takes place are also relevant to the issue mentioned above. *Sangrakshini Sabhā* was in fact playing a role that was quite distinctive often reflecting the ideologies and interests of a man truly dedicated to the cause of Assam. It was a sort of increased political assertiveness without going into conflict with Congress, the major political force. Going through the responses from *Sabhā* towards crucial political and economic issues it becomes quite clear that the efforts of the *Sabhā* generated ideas and pressure on specific regional issues in a political spectrum dominated by Congress. Given the social background of *Assam Sangrakshini Sabhā* could generate substantial political interest on issues specific to Assam like, Sylhet, immigration, grouping etc. and did aspire for a role in the emerging representative politics in the wake of the 1935 Act. Any stress on regional issues is not intended to deny the major role of Congress and cannot always be separated readily from an

131. Ibid, 2nd Year 2nd Issue, 1858 saka.
approach to politics taking into account the socio economic and demographic profile of Assam. Roy Chowdhury attempted a mobilization of new recruits into the political process and resulted in the rise of new patterns of political cleavage. Hence his greater insistence on performance of the representatives in councils, assembly, local board etc. “So he requested all the branches of the Sabha to convey their opinion with regard to participation in election, whether they endorse or object to the executive committee decision.” Mean while executive committee of the Sabha had formed one parliamentary Board to discuss and take decision on this particular issue. In the same issue Roy Chowdhury offered a very clear statement about the ideas that prompted Sabha to contest election i.e. the sole objective of protecting the interest of Assam could be fulfilled by being a part of government representative institutions.” But this decision of the executive did create a sort of apprehension among some members of different branches of the sabha as is revealed through the letter from Banamali Das member from Barpeta and another letter from Dinabandhu Chowdhury, Kanuram Chowdhury and others. All of them requested Roy Chowdhury to convene one general meeting to discuss the major issue of election.

Next issue of Dekā Asom contained the political aims of Sabha. It is more or less the retention of the basic principle of the Sabha, “to form the Assamese nation encompassing all those people living in Assam accepting Assamese language and nationality as their own to work for the collective and individual self fulfillment of All Assamese and to strive for protection, enrichment and expansion of Assamese nationality. Here he also addressed the issue of imperialism. Imperialism is not acceptable for saba be it British imperialism or Indian and it whole heartedly oppose imperialism. Another political goal of the Sabha as mentioned in this issue is the insistance on the use of indigenous goods produced from available local resource. This idea or goal of Sangarakshini Sabha “to ensure the full control of Assamese over Assam’s land and natural resources, agriculture, commerce and industry, trade, employment, language, and literature, culture and ethos made Roy Chowdhury take the decision to contest Assembly and council election of 1937. It is also very pertinent to refer to a write up where we are given to understand the differences

132. Ibid.
133. Ibid.
134. Ibid.
135. Ibid, 1st Year 1st Issue, 1857 saka, 1st Srawan.
between and similarity of the Sabhā and Congress with regard to ideological priority and political practice in a non-confronting manner. For instance, Roy Chowdhury’s manifest anti imperialist attitude including imperialism of Indians in Assam is very significant as he was almost certain of its future implication. Congress in his view seems to be more concerned about western imperialism only.\textsuperscript{136} It is impossible to miss the line separating the two organizations in a changing political dynamism of Assam and Roy Chowdhury’s perception of Congress.

In response to persistent criticism of Sangrakshini Sabhā mostly in vernacular papers like ‘Asom Raij’ and Dainik Bātori. Ambikagiri again re emphasizes the political goal of the sabhā i.e. what it stands for and discussed in length the future plan of action of the Sabhā in the assembly.” It was basically an election manifesto of the \textit{Asom Sangrakshini Sabhā} with clearly defined policy regarding Sylhet (separation), fiscal matters, agriculture, cottage identity, drinking water and most important compulsory education system with an objective of 100% literacy within ten years and a greater connectivity with the people.\textsuperscript{137} It appears that Roy Chowdhury addressed all the major politico economic issues and also visible are the preparedness of the Sabhā, which he was leading with capacity of General Secretary despite the doubts raised by some members of the Sabhā. All the critique of the Sabhā is based primarily on the very issue of its existence veering round its relevance in contemporary political reality. It also reflects an unsettled political equation in the public sphere of Assam. Roy Chowdhury made it a point to explain in very clear plain language what the Sabhā wants to achieve. Perhaps the repeated publication of the aims and objectives of the \textit{Sabhā in Dekā Asom} was the expression of his resolve to carry forward his plan of action in the face of continuous displeasure of a section of intellectuals and Congressman like Kuladhar Chaliha.\textsuperscript{138}

Nevertheless Sanrakshini Parliamentary Board met to decide the code of conduct and the election manifesto to as per notice published in the 8\textsuperscript{th} issue, 2\textsuperscript{nd} year \textit{Dekā Asom}. Subsequently another meeting was convened on the same issue of the Sangrakshini Parliamentary Board on 4\textsuperscript{th} October 1936 as per notice published in

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid, 2nd Year 3rd Issue, 1858 saka, 18th Srawan.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid, 2ndt Year 7th Issue, 1858 saka, 22nd Bhadra.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
Asom Bātari and Danik Bātori inviting all members of the Board.\textsuperscript{139} Accordingly the meeting held on 30\textsuperscript{th} September 1936 passed some resolutions which are very much reflective of the prevailing confusion regarding the political role of Sabhā. Here we need to focus on the first resolution. It says that the idea behind the formation of the Sangrakshini Parliamentary Board was to promote Assamese national interest work for the welfare of the Assamese people following the defined Sangrakshini policy.\textsuperscript{140} There was no other objective behind the formation of the Board. Since APCC and newly formed Milita Jana Sangha, Assam Valley Muslem conference, the parties going to contest in the election have given clear assurance of not going against the basic principle of Sangrakshini while working in the Assembly, Sangrakshini Parliamentary Board has taken a decision ignoring the difference and with a view to bring in a sense of unity not to contest in election. But at the same time it was also decided to allow any competent member of the Sabhā to stand as candidate in his individual capacity from any constituency but not as candidate of the Sangrakshini Sabhā. Moreover Sabhā will decide a program of action. Any candidate who gives an assurance to follow the program of action in Assembly, Sabhā will campaign for him. So these are the resolutions taken at the Parliamentary Board meeting. Now why was this change of policy? The Answer to this question lies in the problem of political management. The strains of politically mobilizing people on issues specific to Assam was never appreciated sufficiently given the over shadowing political existence of Congress with all India connectivity. Always concerned and worried about Assam, carrying a threat perception from various fronts like immigrants, he did create a political front and his somewhat radical views were unwelcome to some people, hence misrepresentation of ideas in newspapers. In fact APCC deputed Jagadish Ch. Medhi to have a clear view of the ideas, objectives and goals of Sangrakshini Sabhā and its relevance in contemporary political sphere. Almost every issue of Dekā Asom, especially second year is replete with writings on Sangrakshini Sabhā. A prolonged intellectual discourse ensued as a result of the perceived confusion of a section of political leaders regarding Sangrakshini Sabhā. As the mouth piece of Sangrakshini Sabhā, Dekā Asom in its very first issue (1857 Saka 31 Ashar) carried a long essay, reflective of the ideas, principles, plan of the Sabhā to be pursued in the greater

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid, 2ndt Year 11th Issue, 1858 saka, 19th Aswin.
\end{flushleft}
interest of Assam. It was followed by more discussion and lively political debate on Sangrakshini as a regional political formation.

In view of the prevailing political situation in Assam the Sabhā should in all probability seriously consider the matter of contesting in the election. If it becomes inevitable the executive of the Sabhā must determine a clear line of action and issues on which election is to be contested. It is a clearly defined political plan of action, which fulfils the prerequisite of a party in a representation democracy.

For instance to reemphasize the relevance of Sangrakshini Sabhā Roy Chowdhury raised a series of open question to the Congress authority asking to clarify its position on certain crucial political issues like Sylhet, Congress, socialism, Assamese culture, language, immigrants, Asom University etc. It is impossible to miss the importance of these issues confronting Assam, some of which are still lingering, that Roy Chowdhury relentlessly raised and also formulated a plan of action for resolving these issues. In the same issue he again reiterates, ‘Assam for Assamese.’ “Another essay entitled “present Asom and Sangrakshini Roy Chowdhury offers an in-depth analysis of the contemporary political situation in Asom referring to Sangrakshini Sabhā and APCC as the two nationalist political party in Assam striving more or less for the same political goal, i.e. emancipation from an alien rule with Sangrakshini having a pronounced regional orientation. He also draws the thin line of difference between the two organizations. A keen observer of the prevailing political situation he brings forth the similarity of the political goals of the two organizations. “In many respects Congress line of thinking is similar to that of Sangrakshini. He stressed on a more assertive political role of Congress through a continuous presentation of Assam specific issues which APCC usually overlook. It is

141. The issues are as follows:

Issues:
1. Separation of Sylhet.
2. To make a united front on the issue of Sylhet.
3. Provision of adequate facilities of agriculture and health.
4. Compulsory primary education etc.
5. Resolve the issue of Domiciled.

Dekā Asom 1st Year 29th Issue, 1857 Saka, 18th Falgun.

142. Ibid, 2nd Year 5th Issue, 1858 saka, 9th Bhadra.

143. Ibid, 2nd Year 6th Issue, 1858 saka, 15th Bhadra.
a highly significant analysis of the prevailing situation in Assam confronting issue of varied nature and implication. Espousing every element of Assamese nationalism and protesting every policy which is inimical to national interest of the Assamese is a hallmark of Roy Chowdhury’s writings in Dekā Asom as we scan through its pages. It seems that Sabhā played a role not in confrontation with Congress, but complimentary to the Congress pursuit of national independence. Always opposed to the denial of the inherent rights of the Assamese over all the resource of Assam and having an irresistible force he proved himself to be a symbol of sub-nationalism in Assam never detached from the Pan Indian nationalism clearly revealed in the rules and regulation of Sangrakshini Sabhā (modified) regarding membership, starting new branch, terms of office and functions of General Secretary etc.144

As per the decision of the Sangrakshini parliamentary board no body contested election but Maulabi Ikram Rasul, B.A. executive member Sangrakshini Sabhā expressed his willingness for membership in 2nd chamber from Guwahati Muslim constituency.145 Roy Chowdhury’s response to the ensuing election of 1937 is to be understood in the light of his enedeovour to reaffirm the continued existence of Assamese in Assam and the justification and legitimization of some exclusive right of the Assamese over the resources of Assam. In persuance of this goal his effort needs to be focused and analyzed and for that matter whatever he did leading the organization and especially the essays and debates published in Dekā Asom demands analysis. For instance he writes, “from its inception Sangrakshini has only one principle, ‘Assam for Assamese’, that is what the Sabhā is relentlessly striving to make people understand.”

In Roy Chowdhury’s political idealism we see a pronounced anti imperialism and in this context he always supported and believed in the concept of ‘Purna Swaraj’ and the policy of non co-operation to accomplish it. In an essay entitled. “Opinions and principles of Assam” he justifies Congress non co-operation.146 More than a logical explanation of Congress political practice with regard to the British Raj it is also the political belief of a man seeking to interpret and understand that time. In the

144. Ibid, 2ndt Year 10th Issue, 1858 saka, 12th Aswin.
145. Ibid, 2ndt Year 12th Issue, 1858 saka, 26th Aswin.
146. Ibid, 2ndt Year 13th Issue, 1858 saka, 2nd Kartik.
same essay he also highlights Sangrakshini and its political idealism. Very significantly he says “Sangrakshini idea is Purna Swaraj of Assamese nationalism in Assam and to promote Assamese national interest if necessary Sabha will not hesitate to adopt co-operation along with non-cooperation. The Sangrakshini Sabha was committed to supporting government policies that protect the national interest of the Assamese and to opposing policies that were inimical to Assamese national interest. Imbued with Congress ideology and Gandhian technique Roy Chowdhury expressed in unambiguous term that he firmly believes that the only way to independence is the Congress directed path. A clear understanding of the basic objective contradiction between British political and economic domination and most section of the Indian people prompted him to think and act in terms of a political doctrine of nationalism as well as an organized movement to achieve it.

Now we turn our attention to the election issue and Sangrakshini response. As per the decision of the AICC to work the reforms introduced by the government of India Act, 1935 although with expressed dissatisfaction and disappointment with the Act APCC also plunged into action. In the electioneering process although not fielding any candidate Roy Chowdhury was an active political voice, expressing his views in ‘Dekā Asom’ and mobilizing people on issues that he felt crucial in the interest of Assam.

Disillusioned by Congress campaigns, which he felt, was not a clear projection of the future plan of action regarding excessive taxation and other public issues, Roy Chowdhury launched a constant critique of the campaign being run. Inherent in this critique is a continuous projection of issues like Sylhet, protection of interest of the Assamese in all sectors of the economy i.e. control over all resources of Assam and a direction for resolving the persisting problems in the greater interest of Assam. In this context Roy Chowdhury sent an open letter to Governor Michael Keane dated 31st December 1936 expressing his displeasure at the way Governor was asking local people to support Rai Bahadur P.C. Dutta. In his view P.C. Dutta represented the

147. Ibid.
148. Ibid, 2ndt Year 15th Issue, 1858 saka, 30th Kartik
149. Ibid, 2ndt Year 16th Issue, 1858 saka, 7th Agrahayan.
150. Ibid, 2ndt Year 17th Issue, 1858 saka, 14th Agrahayan.
151. Ibid, 2ndt Year 22th Issue, 1858 saka, 20th Paush.
interest of the Surma Valley alone and in total disregard of the legitimate claims of
other parts of the valley. Here he termed Governor’s action as favoritism leading to
the withdrawal of the Congress nominee.

Roy Chowdhury had always maintained that he participated in politics to
attain certain specific ends to be precise to uphold, enrich and expand the national
interest of Assam and not for the sake of political power itself. It is difficult to confine
his ideas within any frame work as he kept himself open to accommodate new ideas,
while being firmly rooted in his own soil. This restless individual committed to the
interest of Assam was not to live himself but was to attain his goal in a social context.
A true convert to Gandhi’s ideology or his method of politics which Roy Chowdhury
expressed quite a number of times in his autobiography and other essays, he had the
courage of conviction to carry forward his views and activities in a manner he
considered proper. While he was busy with his constructive work, keeping a close eye
on the political developments in Assam and educating public opinion through Dekā
Asom, the political temperature continued to rise in view of the ensuing election.
Being well acquainted with the demographic profile of Assam, Roy Chowdhury
offered a brilliant analysis of the population pattern, prospects of the candidates
namely Gopinath Bordoloi, Rohini Kr. Chowdhury and Baliram Das from Guwahati
South central constituency. It is a comprehensive assessment of the support base of
the respective candidates. Their role in Assembly i.e. to what extent they are going to
work for the interest of the people and their past political record. He also brings in to
the analysis the caste factor and its influence on voting behaviour. He concludes this
analysis with an appeal to the people to use their conscience while casting vote and
ensure that Gopinath Bordoloi, Rohini Kr. Chowdhury and Baliram Das get elected.
So it is open canvassing for the above mentioned candidates whom he considered will
work in the best interest of the people. He also made a special appeal to Bengali
voters in favour of Bordoloi, Chowdhury and Das. Same issue carries another
appeal on the eve of the election for the second chamber in Assam. The second
chamber composed of 22 members was in his opinion unnecessary. Nevertheless Roy
Chowdhury makes an assessment of all the three candidates from Kamrup district,

152. Ibid, Special election issue, saka 1858, 5th Magh.
153. Ibid.
Mohan Lahiri M.A., B.L. It is a very interesting analysis of the population pattern and voting behaviour and he has given a systematic account of this activities and past political involvement. Here he makes a prediction that although it is desirable for some Assamese Janaki Nath Nabis gets elected being the only Assamese candidate, there is lesser possibility of his winning given the composition of voters. In his opinion even if Nabis gets elected he won’t be able to play an effective political role in the assembly where stakes will be very high. Considering their political moulding Roy Chowdhury finally gives his opinion in favour of Ram Kr. Himmatsinka.

It was followed by a clarification as Nabis protested against Sri Roy Chowdhury’s prediction. Roy Chowdhury himself gives a clarification on the number of voters for the second chamber as per the list (Assamese 125, Bengali 110 Marwari 131) Hence Roy Chowdhury’s appeal for a judicious casting of vote in view of the assurance of not going against the interest of Assam from Nabis. It is a clear indication of the weightage that Roy Chowdhury’s opinion carried among the people of Assam. The growth of the press as we know was central to the development of public politics and thus to the definition and expression of concepts of politics. Outside the heart of politics press plays a major role eliciting and channeling popular political views. Roy Chowdhury’s *Dekā Asom* the mouth piece of Sangrakshini was instrumental in the process of politicization, the strengthening, sustaining and widening of national political awareness, so in this light his writings need to be viewed as he was moulding public opinion on the eve of the 1937 election.

1937 election gave Congress a comprehensive victory with absolute majority in 5 out of eleven provinces winning almost all the general or predominately Hindu seats in both central and provincial assemblies. For Congress it was an endorsement of the election manifesto and the Faizpur agrarian program. “For millions of Indians, particularly in the Hindu majority general constituencies, ‘the vote for Gandhi and the yellow box’ signified appreciation of patriotic self sacrifice, plus some hopes of socio-economic change.”154 Given the complexity of its demographic pattern Assam comprised a variety of constituencies, and Congress won 33 seats in a 108 member legislature and Gopinath Bordoloi was the obvious choice as the leader of the Congress Assembly party. With a secure Congress win it was immediately obvious

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that the gesture of refusing office could not he sustained.\textsuperscript{155} Electoral success strengthened and soon made irresistible pressure for ministry formation by Congress. The right wing majority of the Congress executive committee in its 1937 session accepted a resolution on conditional acceptance of office moved by Rajendra Prasad and Sardar Patel and defeated a motion from the left moved by Jaya Prakash Narayan to stand by the manifesto promise of declining office.\textsuperscript{156}

Now have a quick glance at Ambikagiri’s response, to the resounding Congress victory. He acknowledged the comprehensive election victory of the Congress and in most unambiguous terms declared that it had been a manifest endorsement of the Congress political ideas and action throughout the land, an appreciation of patriotic self-sacrifice and generation of political awareness even in remote villages. Roy Chowdhury stated that unlike Congress no other political party could prove its dedication and commitment to a higher political idealism as Congress did. Be that as it may other political parties must accept this proven truth that without a clearly defined political idealism and an extreme sense of suffering to accomplish the political goal, nothing can convince the great mass of Indian people.\textsuperscript{157}

Then he went on to explain the limited reach of Sangrakshini political idealism, with its pronounced objectives of Purna Swaraj for Assamese in Assam. He made a very significant statement here that the high political idealism of Sangrakshini Sabhā could not make an inroad in the minds of the Assamese people. Moreover the limited appeal might be explained in terms of the inability of Sangrakshini and in the absence of a whole hearted effort for mobilizing public support. Perhaps he realized that Congress with a long history a legacy of sacrifice and well organized political structure and above all an inclusive, accommodative attitude is more deeply entrenched in the minds of the people. In fact a clear understanding of the realpolitik in Assam prompted Roy Chowdhury not to contest election.\textsuperscript{158} In subsequent issues of Dekā Asom he did an anti introspection of Sangrakshini idealism and political practice and resigned from the post of general secretary.\textsuperscript{159}

\textsuperscript{155} Burton Stein, Op cit, p.339.
\textsuperscript{156} Sumit sarkar, Op cit, p.350.
\textsuperscript{157} Burton Stein , Op cit,  p. 351.
\textsuperscript{158} Dekā Asom, 2nd Year, 24th Issue, 1858 Saka, 26th Magh.
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid, 2nd Year, 25th Issue, 1858 Saka, 3rd Falgun.
The events following the election bring to view the basic difference that existed between the stand of Roy Chowdhury and that of the APCC. The differences were not much on ideological ground but on political exigencies. In post election analysis of Assam politics, one Jadabananda Das who was a Sangrakshini supporter explored the possibility of a constructive co-operation between Congress and Sangrakshini.\(^{160}\) In his opinion, election victory reflects the respect and supports for the AICC rather than the satisfaction of the people from the self less service of Assam Congress Workers. He also highlighted the difference of understanding of Assamese national interest between sabhā and APCC, understanding the limitation of APCC in taking up some exclusive issues pertaining to Assam. Das made an appeal to Congress to co-operate with Sangrakshini Sabhā for the greater interest of Assam. “We need Congress as well as Sangrakshini.” There is a greater necessity of co-operation between these organizations. Next issue of Dekā Asom carried a long introspection about Sangrakshini, background of its establishment, aims and objectives, response from the people then organizational weakness and reason behind his resignation.\(^{161}\) In fact it is entitled ‘why I have given up the responsibility of Sangrakshini? The idea of forming a political organization was slowly evolving since 1924 when Roy Chowdhury had to face the ire of the government following the confiscation of Satadhār along with a fine and a second jail term. Then he was roaming around in different parts of Assam. It was a period marked by contradictory political development and absence of mass political action and a manifestly lesser Congress influence in villages. Congress repeatedly aroused expectation and aspirations which it could not satisfy, hence the disillusionment with Congress and in that political environment Roy Chowdhury was pondering over the idea of a political organization outside Congress hegemony with the sole objective of promoting Assamese national interest and found expression in 1926, the year of Pandu Congress. It was an instance of great political significance, the establishment of an organization with pronounced regional orientation.

After a long and protracted haggling AICC 1937 session the Congress working committee decided to accept Ministry in the Provinces, where it has majority in legislature on a general assurance given by the secretary of state and the Viceroy

\(^{160}\) Ibid, 2nd Year, 24th Issue, 1858 Saka, 26th Magh.

\(^{161}\) Ibid, 2nd Year, 25th Issue, 1858 Saka, 3rd Falgun.
that the Provincial Governors will not exercise their ‘special powers’ in the sphere of
the constitutional activities of the ministry. The committee declared that the
ministers will act consistently with the Congress objectives of combating this
unsatisfactory constitution in view and in furtherance of the constructive program of
the Congress.

Assam having a complex demographic profile comprised a variety of
constituencies’ election results in Assam vindicated a strong political support for
Congress wherein Congress won 33 seats of 108. Out of the 29 contesting from
Brahmaputra Valley 26 came out successful and out of 12 congress candidates from
the Surma Valley 7 got elected. In many cases the Congress nominees were
returned by substantial majorities and in others they gained for spitting of votes
among two or more Congress candidates. Election verdict revealed certain significant
aspects of Assam politics that put APCC in a position short of absolute majority. In
the scenario the question of forming ministry brought the issue of coalition. The
failure of Congress to gain absolute majority was explained in terms of various
factors, one being the communal dissensions generated by the communal award. All
ttempts to achieve coalition, Congress and League politicians in provinces with
numerous Muslims were be devilled by deepening Communal tension. So this
vexed issue of ministry formation was addressed by Nehru in his visit to Assam in
1937 to consolidate party position. His plea to the parties to come over to Congress
and form a ministry as NWFP did not yield any result. In the midst of currents and
cross currents of communal and sectarian views the Congress emerged as the one
single party with a wider national outlook for the people as a whole irrespective of
race, caste, creed and religion and language.

Given the polarization of Assam politics Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury was
pondering over the possible maneuvering by Sir Michael Keane to from a ministry
comprising 1) Maulavi Abdul Motin Chowdhury 2) Rohini Kr. Choudhury 3) Rai
Bahadur Pramod Ch. Dutta 4) Khan Bahadur Keramat Ali and the group of Hocken

162. PHA record, File No-6, p.9, Sub:- Asomiya, 10th August, 1937.
164. HP, file No-18/137, F.R. January 1937, NAI; IAR, January to June 1937, vol-1. p.168 (0) cited
in A. Bhuyan ed. PHA vol-2, p.332.
Hall. Then he made a valley wise analysis of the ministry formation and argued upon the members of the Brahmaputra valley to ensure the prime minister ship from the Brahmaputra Valley. He even went to the extent of predicting a stable ministry that proved wrong after the resignation of Saadullah ministry. In the same issue he also expressed serious concern at the possibility of Babu Basanta Kr. Das from sylhet emerging as the leader of the Congress assembly party. He lamented that Congress members of the Brahmaputra valley were suffering from ‘inferiority complex’ Roy Chowdhury then brought to the notice of Assam Congress the specific issues of Assam like 1) Separation of sylhet. 2) cut in land revenue 3) Reducing bus fare of Gauhati Shilong Road 4) Imparting education to the people from Mymensing through the medium of Assam. 5) Definition of Domiciled etc. It was a matter of grave concern for him and continuously brought these issues to the attention of the people as well as political leaders.

In this context Roy Choudhury’s role as a socio-political activist, his growing anxiety for the political future of Assam can stimulate critical thought at a historical moment of the process. When India was becoming a nation on behalf of Assamiya Sangrakshini Sabha Roy Choudhury submitted a memorandum to Nehru on his visit to Assam in 1937, which is not just an elaboration of the problems facing his province, it also brings forth his ever growing concern about the political and socio-economic future of Assam. This memorandum he presented on behalf of Congress Sangrakshinite Group which is politically very significant in the sense that Sangrakshini sabha’s existence as an organization is not in confrontation to Congress but envisioned and directed with a specific orientation. The members of the Congress Sagrakshini groups within the Congress representing the view point of the “Sangrakshini Sabha” the political and economic ideal of which was not different from that of the Indian National Congress excepting a slight variation of the program in regard to political problems only, could not but avail the opportunity of representing in a few words to Nehru their views on some aspects of the special problems of the whole of the Assamese race. “Roy Choudhury had great faith on

167. Dekā Asom, 2nd Year 26th Issue, Saka 1858, 10th Falgun.
168. Ibid.
169. PHA record 30 File No-P4(1)/22 1937, J. Nehru’s Assam tours.
Nehru’s political outlook and his leadership as he addressed Nehru ‘as the champion of the birth rights of the people and always interested in the welfare and upliftment of the masses. It is instructive to reflect on issues based on the culture and social geography of the province. For instance Sylhet issue was dealt with by him in the memorandum with utmost political urgency. In Assam the transfer of Sylhet to Bengal is the ‘problem of the problems’ With regard to sylhet ‘customs, manners, language cultural and religious tradition are diametrically opposite to Assam, while historical connection with Sylhet there has been none.’ Therefore, the Congress should leave no stone unturned to get the district of Sylhet transferred to Bengal and reconstruct Assam on the basis of linguistic homogeneity which is also one of the ideals of Congress. In fact linguistic constitution of provinces as a pronounced policy was adopted as a resolution in Lahore Congress of 1929. Apart from Sylhet other issues with grave socio-economic implications were tried to be brought home to Nehru like line system,\textsuperscript{170} immigration and the rising communal tension between the Assamese and Bengali living in Assam Valley. Within the broad parameter of Indian national Congress Roy Choudhury desired solution of these vexed issues and urged upon Nehru to direct APCC’s attention to these issues. “We do not advocate narrow provincialism.” It kills the spirit of Indian solidarity. The Assam provincial Congress following your direction fails to tackle all such problems. We honestly believe that a provincial committee is competent without infringing the lofty ideals of the Congress and in this we have the support of a large body of Congressmen in Assam. “Since, there is some misunderstanding somewhere regarding this matter, Roy Chowdhury made strong plea for Nehru’s intervention in this regard. The memorandum dated 28\textsuperscript{th} November, 1937 Rangia, Kamrup was an attempt on the part of Roy Choudhury to assert in a very clear term freedom has to be consistent with the prescribed national ideas of Assam and for that matter wanted the provincial leadership to respond to these issues immediately with an expressed sense of solidarity and unity of greater India.\textsuperscript{171} This also signifies wider political understanding of the reality in Assam.

\textsuperscript{170} To restrict the indiscriminate settlement by immigrants in the Assamese inhabited lands the official of Nagaon District in 1916 divess an administrative measure known as the Line System. The system was first put in to action in 1920 in the Nagoan District and the Barpeta sub-division in Kamrup district and areas were specified by a line where immigrants can settle on one side of it. Report of the Lone System Committee Shillong, 1938 p-27 as cited in A. C. Bhuyan (ed.), \textit{Political History of Assam Vol- II}, p-309.

\textsuperscript{171} Ibid.
There is an obvious practical message that it tried to impart and that message relates to the value of co-operation between the national and provincial leadership.

The manner in which co-operation is expected might be illustrated by referring to a letter dated 30th November, 1937 from Roy Choudhury to Nehru he addressing Nehru as comrade he made strong plea on the advisability of the assimilation Bengalis and others permanently settled in Assam with the Assamese people. This is a matter where Nehru’s cooperation was sought by Roy Choudhury and he even requested Nehru to direct provincial Congress on this issue. “Therefore I on behalf of the Congress Sangrakshini request you earnestly to speak, anywhere in Assam proper (Bramhaputra Valley) in your public powerful voice, a few word advising the Bengalis and others who have permanently settled in Assam that they should identify their interests with those of the Assamese people and to work with them ‘consortedly’ for the common goal of independence, instead adding force to the exploiting Imperial Government by creating separate vested interests.”  

On the issue of ministry formation after the election of 1937, where Congress won a comprehensive victory in Assam, the pronounced Congress policy was not to accept office. A meeting of the Congress Committee was held in camera in the house of Ghanashyam Das Kaviraj, M.L.A. before the public meeting on the same day (14-03-1937). In this meeting it was decided that Congress should not accept office in Assam as they do not command absolute majority. The same decision was endorsed in the public meeting held on 14th March 1937, Barpeta under the presidency of Bishnu Ram Medhi. Much before this, election verdict did create a lot of speculation in Assam given the presence of number of parties and Roy Choudhury was no exception to this as is revealed in the editorial of Dekā Asom.

The United Muslim party was formed with the newly elected Muslim members from both the valleys. In the meantime a sordid political maneuvering and the rising tide of communalism resulted in the coming together of all the elected Muslims members to the assembly from the two valleys. All the Muslim members are trying to combine together at least for the purpose of forming the ministry.

172. Letter to Pandit Nehru dtd-30th November, 1937
173. HP File No -63, 1937 confidential letter from SDO Barpeta to the DC Kamrup
174. Dekā Asom, 2nd Year 26th Issue, Saka 1858, 10th Falgun.
175. HP File No -63, 1937 confidential letter from SDO Barpeta, dated 18-03-1937 to the DC Kamrup.
Eventually a coalition ministry led by Syed. Md. Saadullah, leader of the Muslim group with the help of the European group along with other tribal and non tribal member was formed and formally took the office of the premier (as chief ministers were known) on 1st April 1937. The Congress group was not even consulted before the installation of the ministry. Right from the beginning the Governor had high hopes in Sadullah who according to him had vast administrative knowledge of the province, being at the helm of administration since diarchy had been introduced. It was this reason more than anything else that perhaps impelled the governor to commission him to from a ministry instead of sending for the leader of the largest single party the Congress to do so. The Muslims dominated Saadullah ministry’s sustainability was a difficult proposition having diverse and reactionary element in the ministry. Consequently it set an example of political muddling of an unhealthy kind. The first budget session of the Sadullah ministry was a failure as it had only a working majority of not more than six against the combined Congress and Independent bloc. Roy Chowdhury was very much disillusioned with the functioning of the Saadullah Ministry. In fact he warned the people of Assam as a whole regarding the policy of this ministry, which in his view was anti Assamese. Saadullah’s whole hearted support for the abolition of line system having grave socio economic implications earned the displeasure of Roy Chowdhury. This highly debated issue is a lingering one. Continuous inflow of the immigrants particularly from the Mymensingh district initiated earlier under the ‘grow more food scheme’ constituting a threat to the indigenous people who felt that unless it was checked their economic and cultural life and their very existence would be obliterated.

To address this issue of indiscriminate settlement in the Assamese inhabited lands the official of Nowgong district devised an administrative measure known as the line system. Initially the system was introduced in Nowgong and the Barpeta subdivision in Kamrup district. Roychowdhury’s concern on this issue is well expressed in his memorandum to Nehru (1937). “Almost all the available waste

177. K. N. Dutta , Op cit, p.89
178. Ibid.
180. Dekā Asom, 2nd Year 40th Issue, Saka 1859, 7th Ashar.
cultivable lands in this valley have been occupied by these immigrants. In order to prevent constant friction between the indigenous Assamese and the Mymensingia’s owing to letter’s land hunger habits and criminal propensities and to help the immigrants themselves and to protect the indigenous Hindus, Muslims and the tribal people such as the Kacharis and the Lalungs, the Mikirs and the others, the Assam government introduced what is popularly known as ‘Line system, a system by which immigrants from Bengal are required to settle in certain definite areas and are not allowed to takes settlement of land under government in other areas.\(^{182}\) It is a system of control on the settlement of land under immigrants. Now there is pernicious move in the present Assam Assembly to wipe off all these demarcation.”\(^{183}\) His memorandum explicitly reveals a grave socio-economic as well as political implication of immigrant issue. His perception of the issue in its totality had already been perceived as threat by government officials. “Where there is wasteland, observes C.S. Mullan, the census superintendent, thither flock the Mymensingias, without fuss, without tumult, without undue trouble to the district revenue staff, a population which must amount to over half a million has transplanted itself from Bengal to Assam valley during the last 25 years. Mullan feared that the outcome of this unbridled immigration would be like wiping out the Assamese race and culture more conclusively than the Burmese invasion hundred years ago.”\(^{184}\) He must have gone through the census reports – and other reports of British officials (successive commissioners of Assam Valley, census Commissioner etc.) advocating the retention of line system and referred to these reports in his memorandum to Nehru. Quite apprehensive about the intention of Sadullah Ministry to abolish the line system Roy Chowdhury continuously opposed this move and hence his constant critique of the Sadulah Ministry as anti Assamese and communal.

In view of the agitation against line system a committee was appointed by the government under the chairmanship of F.W. Hockenhall to review the whole situation. While emphasizing the need to develop extensive wastelands, the committee derived the retention of the line system for the protection of tribal settlements. On this persisting issue APCC also constituted a committee in 1938 and Roy Chowdhury

\(^{182}\) Report on the line system committee Shillong, 1938, p.26, cited in PHA vol-2 p.308
\(^{183}\) Memorandum to Nehru from Roy Chowdhury HP File No – 2 – 1937.
\(^{184}\) H. K. Barpujari, *NE India Problems, Policies and Prospects*, p.36.
lamented this life and death question for Assam had not been given serious thought by the committee although eventually he appreciated the Congress stand on the issue. Coalition ministry headed by Saadullah suffered a number of reverses as sustaining itself through political maneuvering. Against this the Congress party was able to impress the House, as also the public outside with its enlightened and progressive topics such as opium prohibition, the line-system, reduction of land revenue, abolition of the office of commissioners, abolition of the Upper House.\textsuperscript{185} In addition to this APCC provided the national political viewpoints whenever it is required. Party politics and Saadullah’s ministry’s growing unpopularity precipitated a political crisis leading to the resignation of this ministry on September, 13\textsuperscript{th}, 1938. An overt communal policy pursued by the ministry in its recent nomination to Local Boards and the settlement of Gauhati Shillong Motor Transport contract favouring Commercial Carrying Company in preference to indigenous concerns earned great displeasure for the ministry and created a huge anti government feeling.\textsuperscript{186} On all there issues Roy Chowdhury as a sentinel of Assamese national interest has always been a voice of protest. He raised Pandu Shillong Motor service as an issue of national interest of the Assamese people. In a long essay entitled ‘About Pandu Shillong Motor Service’ Roy Chowdhury brought the whole issue to the public, highlighted the anti Assamese attitude of Sir Saadullah and Rohini Kr. Chowdhury.\textsuperscript{187} In preference to Assam Motor Transport Company government granted the contract to Commercial Carrying Company and this earned the wrath of Roy Chowdhury who explained the decision as prompted by the self interest of Saadullah and Rohini Kr. Chowdhury.\textsuperscript{188} Apart from fostering public opinion on this issue he encouraged a group of Cottonians to protest against the government decision and display black flag in front of Rohini Chowdhury’s residence at Bharalumukh.\textsuperscript{189}

Inevitable fall of the Saadullah ministry in Assam paved the way for a Congress coalition ministry headed by Gopinath Bordoloi with the support of a number of independents and Muslim members outside the league. This can be seen as significant of a wider failure of the former ministry to address problems confronting

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{185} Dekā Asom, 4th Year 26th Issue, Saka 1861, 22nd Jaistha
\item \textsuperscript{186} Op cit, K. N. Dutta, p.89.
\item \textsuperscript{187} Dekā Asom, 4th Year 2nd Issue, Saka 1860, 26th Bhadra
\item \textsuperscript{188} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{189} Jogesh Das, Op cit, (ed.) pp.6-7
\end{itemize}
the state. Nevertheless the formation of a Congress coalition ministry generated expectations and aspiration of different quarter. Referring to the role played by Subhas Basu, the then Congress president Sumit Sarkar wrote, “in September 1938, a Congress ministry was established in Assam through somewhat sordid assembly maneuvers and floor crossing in which interestingly enough, the left President of the Congress, Subhash Bose played a prominent role.”\(^{190}\) Given the political compulsion of a critical period where a great constitutional experiment with democratic practices was being done, such an exercise gets justified in the game of power politics.

Be that as it may Roy Chowdhury did welcome the new ministry and hailed it as a victory for Congress and showered credit on all the dedicated Congress workers for their propaganda work.\(^{191}\) His commitment to a great national cause gets reflected in the plea he made to other members of the assembly to join Congress. A series of articles in Dekā Asom reflected his view on the ministry along with constructive criticism.\(^{192}\) In fact it constituted a sustained campaign providing a forum for the expression of views and public debates.\(^{193}\) In the same vain Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury in his address at the 8\(^{th}\) (October 1938) annual conference of Barpeta Students Association expressed hope for the Congress coalition ministry established after much endeavour. In his opinion Congress ideology and working system would be the guiding principle in the national life Assam and expressed hope for a stable ministry.\(^{194}\)

In the public sphere of Assam Roy Chowdhury has always been a living force as is evident in his writings. Milieu makes the man: as well said, Roy Chowdhury always well grounded and a committed activist it was for him impossible to evade the onus of providing an outline of activities to be taken up by the new ministry. Having definite ideas about the problems and prospect of the ministry he congratulated Congress ministers namely Gopinath Bordoloi, Fakharuddin Ahmed, Kamini Sen, Akshay Kr. Das, Ramnath Das, Rupram Brahma. Md. Ali Haider Khan, Khan Badadur Mamud Ali and expected that the group of minister would work for the

\(^{190}\) Sumit Sarkar, Op cit, p.361.

\(^{191}\) Ibid, 4th Year 3rd Issue, Saka 1860, 3rd Aswin.

\(^{192}\) Ibid, 4th Year 4th Issue, Saka 1860, 9th Aswin.

\(^{193}\) Ibid, 4th Year 5th Issue, Saka 1860, 30th Aswin.

\(^{194}\) Ibid, 6th Issue, Saka 1860, 7th Kartik.
greater interest of Assam keeping aside narrow communal interest. It was followed by a list of works on priority basis to be undertaken by the ministry. It is very significant that top priority is accorded to land issue to be precise revenue, urging for a reduction of rate by 50% followed by opium prohibition and other excise items, health, education, drinking water, infrastructure. A sort of direction for the Congress coalition ministry followed in the subsequent issues of Dekā Asom. Roy Chowdhury imposed great faith on Bordoloi ministry and urged every one right from politician to public to support the ministry. The Congress coalition ministry did realize the gravity of the immigration problem as expressed by Roy Chowdhury and apprehending unrestricted occupation might drive away the indigenous inhabitants prohibited settlement to persons who came after January 1938.

The Congress coalition ministry from its very inception faced many stresses and strains, pressures and pulls. Behind the scene political maneuvering was very potent in that crucial struggle for power. Roy Chowdhury was well aware of this political game plan and provided necessary support to the ministry through Dekā Asom, applauding its works and pointing to its negligence, Roy Chowdhury openly questioned Saadullah and Rohini Kr. Chowdhury for working against the interest of Assam in their 18 months tenure of administration and working against Bordoloi ministry and urged upon the people to facilitate the functioning of the ministry. Within two months of the formation of the ministry Roy Chowdhury made an assessment of its work and carried a list of accomplishment of the ministry summarized in ten points first being the austerity of taking 600 hundred including allowance as salary in comparison to higher salary and allowances of Saadullah ministry. Another praise worthy work was the rebate in land revenue apart from release of political workers more allocation for education etc. Always following a Spartan life style Roy Chowdhury was quick to appreciate the decision of Bordoloi ministry for accepting minimum salary. Never hesitant in spelling out preferences he

195. Ibid.
196. Ibid, 4th Year 7th Issue, Saka 1860, 14th Kartik.
197. Ibid, 4th Year 8th Issue, Saka 1860, 21st Kartik.
suggested naming the ministry as Congress ministry instead of coalition.\textsuperscript{202} On the other hand he severely criticized Bordoloi for granting permit to only 4 Assamese for lorry service on Gauhati Shillong Road. According to Roy Chowdhury this road belonged to Assamese hence they should have the major share of the lorry service.\textsuperscript{203}

Asserting exclusive control over the resources of Assam, seeking homogeneity, self control and solutions to its economic problems Roy Chowdhury highlighted the limitations of the Bordoloi ministry’s policy on line system.\textsuperscript{204} He ardently believed that line system is a necessity, a life and death issue for every Assamese. Hence his opposition to the government stand on line system, in favour of tribal and domiciled only.\textsuperscript{205} Immigration was a major political issue in Assam, centrality of the issue being the line system. Echoing the gravity of the issue Roy Chowdhury repeatedly engaged himself in responding to the problem. A strong advocate of the system Roy Chowdhury continuously brought the issue to the notice of the government and discussed it with the government.\textsuperscript{206} He published a discussion on this issue on 30\textsuperscript{th} November, 1938. Roy Chowdhury had a clear idea on this issue as he favoured a policy of conditional granting of settlement right to immigrants, condition being that they must identify themselves with the Assamese. It was a very practical idea in view of the fact that there was always a possibility of demographic profile getting altered. In this context Viceroy Lord Wavell’s perception is very much relevant when he says, “Assam is a small province which seems to rub along all right but is not in any way go ahead. The chief political problem is the desire of the Moslem ministers to increase this (Bangali Moslem) immigration into the uncultivated government lands under the slogan of ‘Grow more food’ but what they are really after is ‘grow more Moslems’.”\textsuperscript{207}

It is a clear vindication of what Roy Chowdhury thought much before and carried a campaign in favour of line system in the face of an intense political attempt by immigrant politician like Maulana Vasani.\textsuperscript{208} Their insistence on abolition of the

\textsuperscript{202} Ibid, 14th Issue, Saka 1860, 3rd Paush.
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{204} Ibid, 15th Issue, Saka 1860, 10th Paush.
\textsuperscript{205} Ibid, 16th Issue, Saka 1860, 17th Paush.
\textsuperscript{206} Ibid, 17th Issue, Saka 1860, 24h Paush.
\textsuperscript{207} Penderel Moon (ed.) Wavell The Viceroy’s Journal p.41, entry 22nd Decemder, 1943, Oxford Publication New Delhi 197.
\textsuperscript{208} Sanjib Baruah, Op cit, p.83.
line system was part of a bigger political dream of a Muslim homeland, comprising Muslim majority provinces including Assam, hence the systematic campaign against line system. Roy Chowdhury’s resistance against it included the plan of a volunteer force called Asom Ātmarakshi Bāhini.\textsuperscript{209} A strong protesting voice, Roy Chowdhury wanted institutionalizing the line system, as subsequent history proved it was a much more practical idea to contain the flow of immigrants although it unleashed a flood of reaction in Assam politics.

In a nutshell Roy Chowdhury’s response to the Bordoloi ministry was shaped by his undisputed faith on Congress as representing the forces of freedom. A strong, determined and passionately protective support for the ministry is evident in the pages of Dekā Asom throughout the tenure of the ministry headed by Bordoloi.

British declaration of war against the Axis powers\textsuperscript{210} in September, 1939 brought to end the experimental phase of responsible provincial government taking a right direction. Second World War broke out as a manifestation of the Europe’s deep rooted instability. Fearing an imminent danger of German expansionism threatening their territorial integrity and confronting a complete reordering of the global system leaders of Britain and France determined to go to war with Hitler over Poland in September 1939. It helped bring out fundamental changes in world politics. A profound impact of the war was immediately felt in India as Indians were brought into hostilities without consultation. In India where political consciousness was already strongly established, the war brought the various national, communal political organizations face to face with complex intentional issues.\textsuperscript{211} In 1939 all section of political opinion became involved in the issue considering the broader international implications of the national struggle. The outbreak of the war found India with a divided mind. The public and officials had been absorbed in the unfolding drama of the constitutional experiment. Declaration of hostilities led to the rise of a strong anti Fascist feeling. Indian nationalists as good democrats were strongly anti-Fascist; they joined in the chorus for strong measures without any great expectation of being called to take part in them.\textsuperscript{212} On the other hand the rise of Muslim league, the rift between

\textsuperscript{209} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{210} Axis power consisted of Germany, Italy and Japan formed with an aim to fulfil Hitler’s grand strategic dream to dominate the whole world.
\textsuperscript{211} Jim Masselos, \textit{Indian nationalism a History}, p.195.
\textsuperscript{212} Percival Spear, \textit{Oxford History of India}, p.820.
the right and left wing of the Congress and the fate of the provincial ministries were issues of grave political importance at that crucial juncture. The old slogan of no taxation without representation was translated to read, ‘no popular war effort without responsible government.’

The Vice-regal action of bringing Indians into the hostilities against Nazi Party led to a process of intense political activity and Indian politics became more focused on a much stronger demand for independence. C.W.C. met at Wardha from 8-14 September 1939 to formulate Congress policy and invited the authorities of the Home government to declare the official position with regard to their war aims, in regard to democracy and imperialism and the new order that is envisaged in particular, how these aims are going to apply to India and to be given effect to in the present. Subsequently AICC endorsed the C.W.C resolution and demanded of Britain that India must be declared an independent nation and present application must be given to this status to the largest possible extent.

In the wake of the Vice-regal proclamation on war APCC leaders met at Guwahati to discuss the confronting issue. Not surprisingly APCC expressed satisfaction at the Wardha resolution of C.W.C. and hoped that the British government would make a favourable gesture with regard to Indian problems and the National demands put forward by the AICC. In this context stand taken by Saadullah and Rohini Kr. Chowdhury (belonging to the Assam United Party) is worth mentioning requesting Indians to stand by Britain in these difficult and uncertain time.

Lord Linlithgow’s official declaration on 17th October 1939 ‘Dominion Status’ as the ultimate aim of British policy, dashed all hopes of the Indians nationalists and led to a deep sense of resentment among the leaders of the AICC. C.W.C. met again at Wardha and called upon all the Congress ministries in various provinces to tender their resignation as a first step towards civil resistance. All ministries resigned on the matter of Indian’s participation in the war.

213. Ibid.
215. The Assam Tribune, 22nd September, 1939, as cited in PHA vol-3, p.4.
216. Ibid, 29th September, 1939, as cited in PHA vol-3, p.3.
The issue of resignation of the Congress coalition ministry in Assam led to a difference of opinions as it was placed before the ministry on 30th October, 1939, with one section led by the APCC President Tayyebulla opposing the continuation of the ministry and the other section not in favour of immediate resignation in view of pending resolution regarding the War and the official policy on immigration.\(^{217}\) Notwithstanding the difference of opinion even among the national leaders on this issue. APCC in the plenary session at Sibsagar on 7th November 1939 attended by a large number of delegates from Jorhat, Golaghat, Nowgonmg, Dibrugarh, Tezpur, Gauhati and Barpeta passed a resolution fully supporting the C.W.C. policy with regard to the war and directed the Congress coalition ministry in Assam to tender resignation not later than November 15th.\(^{218}\) Finally Bordoloi ministry resigned on 15th November followed by a public meeting at Curzon Hall Gauhati on 18th November to express gratitude at their resignation.\(^{219}\) Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury was in favour of immediately implementing the CWC’s directive regarding resignation. In the meeting held at Gauhati attended by about 500 persons, mostly students, president Roy Chowdhury along with Gauri Kanta Talukdar, Maulavi Tayyebulla, Jagadish Ch. Medhi delivered speech appreciating the ministers especially non congress ministers for their resignation.\(^{220}\) Explaining the cause of resignation Gopinath Bordoloi stated that, ‘as no definite hope of Swaraj was given in spite of the repeated request of the leaders, the circumstances led the ministers to believe that after resignation, they would get the united support of their countryman when they would able to render much better service to their countrymen and if necessary they would resort to Satyagraha under the order of the All India Congress Committee.’\(^{221}\)

Roy Chowdhury much before the resignation of the ministry endorsed the CWC’s stand regarding the War which he termed as the unquenchable thirst of imperialism and fascism and very significantly stated that no political party except Congress can claim as the representative of nationalist India.\(^{222}\)

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\(^{217}\) Asomiya, 3rd November, 193.
\(^{218}\) PHA vol-3, pp.8-9
\(^{219}\) APAI Kamrup, 18th November, 1939.
\(^{220}\) Ibid.
\(^{221}\) Ibid.
\(^{222}\) Dekā Asom, 5th Year 5th Issue, Saka 1861, 8th Aswin.
Responding to the Congress offer of conditional support to the British war effort Roy Chowdhury stated that Congress had chosen the path of Satyagraha under the leadership Mahatma Gandhi to launch another phase of non-violent Satyagraha as the only weapon of the great populace of India. So congress readied itself under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi to launch another phase of nationalist struggle. In this context he termed the British government’s rejection of the Congress offer as their lack of efficiency. He even expressed concern that Congress may declare independence, may enter into trade pact with Germany, Russia and Japan etc.\(^{223}\) so the British government should sympathetically consider the justified Congress demand. Given the anti fascist stand of a large number of Congress leaders Roy Chowdhury’s concern seems a bit exaggerated notwithstanding Subhas Bose’s deviation from Congress and formation of INA with the help of Japan.

Already antagonized by the Vice Roy’s maladroitness AICC was faced with a dilemma with regard to the next course of action to be followed. Gandhi’s preference for a pacifist method against all odds and an opposite faction represented by Nehru and Azad which accepted non violence not as a creed but as the best policy available for securing independence. The crucial issue at hand was independence and this was what prevented major differences in principle from initially leading to an open rupture in Congress. The Delhi resolution of 1940 crystallized Nehru and Azad’s view that Congress as a political organization was pledged to win independence rather than following non violence as a creed, into a resolution. In return for co-operation they wanted recognition of Indian independence and an interim national government to be ratified by resolution at the conclusion at the war. The British war cabinet replied with the ‘August offer’ containing one new point of substance along with the usual provision of British obligations and minority rights. The post war constitution was to be drawn by an Indian Constituent Assembly whose decisions were virtually accepted beforehand. Thus parliament virtually surrendered its rights of legislating for India, a right which it had hitherto jealously guarded.\(^{224}\)

But a change of situations in international front by August 1940 led to a revival of suspicion regarding the real intention of the British. There could be no settlement except on the basis of independence now and with Congress alone as

\(^{223}\) Ibid, 5th Year 35th Issue, Saka 1861, 30th Baisakh.
representing India. The August offer fell far short of minimum Congress demands leading to its rejection. The League also played its part, newly converted to the idea of Pakistan insisted on a national government on Hindu Muslim fifty – fifty basis, in completing the deadlock.

The Congress, disillusioned with the British was thrown back on Gandhi’s pacifism and non-violence at this crucial stage. Gandhi’s mass popularity helped ease out the situation and he devised an individual Satyagraha campaign limited in scale without assuming mass characters like the 1930’s. It was a carefully crafted device, breaking the restrictions imposed upon freedom of speech, infringement on basic liberties based on non-violence. Selected Satyagraha worker were to offer civil disobedience by repeating a speech: “It is wrong to help the British war effort with men or money. The only worthy effort is to resist all war with non-violent resistance.”

The limited Satyagraha or civil disobedience was a deliberate low key affair as evident by the number of arrests, 14000 in May 1941 as against 75 thousand in the 1930 movement, ostensibly not to hamper the war effort but it did not produce any significant political result. Pearl Harbour and the entry of U.S. into the War practically forced Britain to break the deadlock and make a settlement with Congress. All arrested leaders were released. Sir Stafford Cripps the leader of the House of Commons as well as a member of the war Cabinet was sent on a mission to India with a new proposal. Cripps offer was an explicit commitment towards Dominion status and the right of session from the Commonwealth if desired. A constituent Assembly to be elected by the provincial legislature acting as an electoral college with an option for the provinces not acceding to any constitution framed by the constituent assembly. Cripps Mission failed to produce the desired result. The offer represented almost but not a settlement with Congress on Congress terms as it insisted on a dominion cabinet with full power. The resulting muddle deliberately sown by Churchill persuaded his cabinet colleagues to recall Cripps and declare the talks a failure owing to Indian opposition.”

Cripps mission dashed the hope of all Indian and a wide spread

225. Ibid.
suspicion of British insincerity acted as a catalyst for a new kind of militancy as Gandhi initiated Quit India Movement.

The enigmatic Mahatma, with the Congress rallied behind him refashioned his non-violent technique confronting with the new situation. It was his firm conviction that a free India would effectively deal with the Japanese and resist them. In his opinion, “Above all things it was necessary to quicken among the people a passionate longing for independence which would have to be directed towards immediate attainment.” On 7th August, 1942 AICC passed the resolution and it was a declaration of war. Non-violence was to be maintained but with a relaxation of the tight discipline. The Vice Roy acted swiftly and the whole working committee was interned at Poona. Within a few days of the arrest of the Congress leaders on 9th August massive spontaneous demonstration erupted with the second rank leadership taking control of the situation. India was on the brink of a mass upsurge since 1939. There were signs that popular protest was growing inexorably towards mass revolutionary action. The spontaneity of the movement posed such a serious threat to the British prompting Linlithgow to write on 31st August, 1942 to Churchill. “I am engaged here in meeting by far the most serious rebellion since that of 1857, the gravity and extent of which we have so far concealed from the world for reasons of military security.”

Against the backdrop of this prolonged deliberation between Congress and the government from 1939 to 1942 that set a transitional phase into motion politics in Assam also transformed in a variety of ways. The transformation reflected an urgency as directed by the national policy decisions and in this context how Roy Chowdhury responded to the political happenings and his perceived notion of the movement becomes imperative responding to Gandhi’s call for selective Satyagraha. APCC lent full support to this campaign. Presiding over a meeting in connection with the celebration of the national week Gopinath Bordoloi appealed to all section of people to join the Congress and advised them to get ready to offer Satyagraha as and when Gandhiji called for it.

229. Ibid.
It is not surprising that in the final phase of the freedom movement we see more of Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury as a nationalist journalist shaping and moulding public opinion rather than a Congress activist cum organizer as in 1920’s and 1930’s. This can be interpreted as a more engaged political role in Asom Jāṭiya Mahā Sabhā spearheading an exclusivist campaign in the interest of Assam within the purview of the broad national movement. Then he was in a supportive role endorsing AICC decisions and appealing people to follow Congress line. For instance he expressed happiness at the opening of a Satyagraha camp at Hajo along with other districts like Barpeta, Goalpara, Sibsaga and Golaghat. Here he emphasized the need of efficient leadership for the Satyagraha campaign in the province under the overall supervision of Gandhi. Roy Chowdhury’s response to British war effort in 1939 was similar to that of Nehru and Gandhi. Congress “will never be a party to British war effort to save British imperialism against Nazi Germany.” He wished to carry on propaganda campaigns prompting the Congress movement. He addressed himself to every issues concerning Assam, national movement being the focal point in many of his essays in Dekā Asom like only way for a helpless India, ‘unite for self defense or die.’ In another essay entitled, ‘probable future of India’ he delved into the issue of British imperialism vs India, emphasizing unpardonable British disregard Indian aspiration. Roy Chowdhury stated that in the great struggle for independence against the mighty British empire the number of Satyagraha worker is lamentably few. He made this statement going through the list of volunteers from each district and applauded the effort of Tezpur district Congress Committee which offered 500 volunteer.

While India was struggling against the colonial authority the outbreak of the War altered the situation connecting India with that huge global conflict. Indian nationalist leaders preoccupied with internal development suddenly found themselves confronted with a crisis global in scope and total in nature and the response to the crisis influenced India’s politics to a great extent. In this context Congress policy and action have already been referred to. Likewise politics in Assam were deeply affected

231. Dekā Asom, 5th Year 35th Issue, Saka 1862, 30th Baisakh.
232. Ibid.
233. Ibid.
234. Ibid, 5th Year 38th Issue, Saka 1861, 20th Jaistha.
235. Ibid, 5th Year 37th Issue, Saka 1861, 17th Ashar.
by the war and the related issues. Much was at stake politically for Indians as a period of great transition was unfolding. Let us consider the larger political movement in Assam. Organized in easy stages from the autumn of 1940, the limited Satyagraha after one month passed on to the next stage of representative individual Satyagraha, commenced on 17th November, 1940. For the purpose of launching individual

Satyagraha Gopinath Bordoloi left for Wardha on 26th November with a list of 26 prospective Satyagrahis that included the names of ex ministers and legislators of Assam. With Gandhi’s approval Bordoloi launched the 1st of Satyagraha at Gauhati leading to his arrest and one year imprisonment. In this phase all the 22 legislators from Assam approved by Gandhi offered Satyagraha leading to their arrest and imposition of fines. Second phase of Satyagraha was inaugurated by Tayyebulla on 11th January, 1941 at Sibsagar. This time Gandhi approved a list of 783 Satyagrahis from Assam. Although the limited Satyagraha campaign was envisaged to be a low key affair by Gandhi, it generated enthusiasm among the students and Congress workers.

In all these years right from 1939 Roy Chowdhury is seen as an active political worker leading Asom Jātiya Mahā Sabha and a great mobilizer of public opinion. He never had any doubt regarding the political relevance of Congress as the national representative of Indian people leading a movement for freedom against British imperialism. He was a persistent critique of Saadullah ministry right from its inception in 1939 (second term) for its anti-Assamese activities. He even went to the extent of terming this ministry as a league ministry as he represented league. Saadullah’s praline stand and his opposition to separation of Sylhet had already become apparent in his first term. Saadullah has clearly stated in the Dhubri session of Muslim League attempt to abolish line system through Muslim League 2) Attempt will be made to remove the Congress regulation of the line system 3) land and

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236. H.P. File No-18/11/40 F.R. Assam 2nd Half of November, 1940, NAI.
237. Tayyabullah Between the symbol and the Idol at last, as Cited in PHA vol-3, p.27.
238. H.P. File No-18/12/40, F.R. 2nd Half of December, 1940, NAI.
239. Ibid, File No-18/6/41, F.R. 1st half of June, as Cited in PHA vol-3, p.28.
240. Dekā Asom, 5th Year 13th Issue, Saka 1861, 18th Agrahayan.
241. Ibid.
242. Ibid, 14th Issue, Saka 1861, 2nd Paush.
revenue ministry will be headed by Muslim. This kind of declaration by Saadullah was enough to provoke a nationalist like Roy Chowdhury. Without mincing his words Roy Chowdhury stated that Saadullah’s pronounced view is a revelation of League’s anti nationalist policy.

British vulnerability and continued pressure from America prompted renewed efforts towards a settlement with the Indian and Stafford Cripps arrival in India with the offer of Dominion Status. Ambikagiri’s response to the Mission was not very much optimistic as he expressed doubt regarding the sincerity of British intension. His critique of the mission veers round the manifest appeasement of the League by the British authority. Time and again his words highlights problem of rising communalism and the persistent effort of the government to project League as the true representative of Indian Muslim in the interest of their continued existence.243

Indeed the very stress on the issue of League and its higher political game plan concerning Assam characterized much of the public debate reflected the difficulty of defining and maintaining a coherent position and persuading others to conform to a particular view. Yet Roy Chowdhury consistently brought the issue to the attention of the government as well as the political leaders. Hence he raised question on the sincerity of Rohini Kr. Chowdhury Saadulah and other members of the ministry in view of their pro-league stand.244 In this connection an eulogizing welcome address by some Genda Sikhari on behalf of all colonial subject dated 16-5-40 reflects a persistent effort by Saadullah Ministry to abolish line system and how the efforts were getting appreciated.245 It is a very significant historical document in so far as the immigration issue is concerned. That was a huge congregation of immigrants on the occasion of the arrival of Saadullah (Premier) Revenue Secretary Maulavi Sayadur Rahman and forest Secretary Rupnath Brahna at Dalgaon. In the leaflet an impassionate plea has been made to the ministers to abolish line system in the greater interest of the immigrants with an expressed confidence on political power of the ministry to do likewise.

244. Ibid.
245. Leaflet from Roy Chowdhury’s private collection dtd 16-5-1940. Appendix -
An ever increasing awareness of the grave socio-political implication of the unrestricted settlement of immigrants in Assam prompted Roy Chowdhury to highlight the issue in Dekā Asom. As general secretary of the Assam Jātiya Mahā Sabhā he was making desperate effort to resist Saadulah ministry’s policy on this vexed political issue. He even warned Saadullah, Rohini Kr. Chowdhury and Rupnath Barhma for not taking any step to separate Sylhet from Assam and most importantly their land policy to be precise to declare immigrant as landless and settle them in reserved land keeping 30% of the cultivable waste land for Assamese. So he sent express telegrams to the Governor of Assam and the Vice Roy of India expressing concern at the continuance of the Saadullah ministry. The contents of the telegrams, 1) ‘All sections pray for popular and constitutional ministry public mind greatly perturbed by continuance of Saadullah cabinet unconstitutionally. 2) The continuance of Saadullah Ministry in Assam after a vote of no confidence in face of possibility of another ministry with Congress. Both these telegrams are reflection of Roy Chowdhury’s concern and involvement in the burning issues of Assam and his response. His ideas on the issue of immigrants is very clear in the sense that he specified a particular dateline that is 1926 and appealed to all those people who came before 1926 to assimilate with the Assamese people and stop unrestricted immigration. Very significantly he made an appeal to the effect that they should register themselves as Assamese in the coming census. He expressed ideas in a public gathering at Curzon Hall, 29th August 1940 and passed 7 resolutions on these issues.

His persistent effort to make the already settled immigrants register as Assamese in the census of 1941 were very much successful as is evident from a leaflet published on the eve of the 1941 census requesting, “Bengali peasant brothers living in Assam.” These leaflet contained a long list of signatures who resolved to write Assamese as their mother tongue in the census of 1940. An explanation at the end of the leaflet is given for publishing it in Bengali, “this advertisement should have been published in Assamese but our children do not properly understand Assamese.” It is also very significant that they resolved to do all publicity thence forth in

247. Telegrams dtd-23/12/41.
Asom Sikshā Prasār Samiti established in 1939 with the objective of spreading and teaching Assamese among the people who had permanently settled in Assam was another effort by Roy Chowdhury to prove Assamese as the majority community in the census.

His continuous effort with regard to census 1941 brings to light a matter of grave importance and how it was pursued. For instance immediately after the publication of census handbook part- II he raised serious concern regarding the regulation on language and sent his suggestions to census superintendent Marrar to seriously consider the matter. In a long essay on census published in Dekā Asom the matter was discussed in detail and termed the census regulation as more dangerous than the Communal award. All the efforts made by Roy Chowdhury did have an impact on a cross section people permanently settled in Assam. In a letter to the editor dated 31-10-40 six tea workers appealed to the government as well as to the member of their community to consider themselves as Assamese in the census.

On behalf of Asom Sikshā Prasār Samiti a series of meetings were held in addition to the meetings organized by Roy Chowdhury on the issue of census and the meeting at Khiorabari outlined a program of action to be initiated. Letters published in Dekā Asom reveals that a good number of immigrants both Hindu and Muslim were influenced by Roy Chowdhury and expressed their intention to enroll as Assamese in the census (1941).* 6th year Dekā Asom is mostly devoted to census related issue. It should also be referred here that Roy Chowdhury launched prolonged campaign on census under the aegis of Asom Shiksha Prosar Samiti in different parts of Assam from the month of August 1940.

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249. Leaflet on census, 1941 from Roy Chowdhury’s private collection. Appendix -
250. Dekā Asom, 6th Year 4th Issue, Saka 1862, 31st Bhadra, This issue also contains an appeal signed by a group of immigrants addressed to peasants, Namashudra, Hazong, Rajbongshi and Bengali brothers to enumerate themselves as Assamese in the coming census. The appeal ends with an emotional statement, “The land that offers you bread and butter is your motherland”.
251. Ibid, 6th Year 7th Issue, Saka 1862, 18th Aswin.
252. Ibid, 6th Year 12th Issue, Saka 1862, 9th Agrahayan
253. Ibid, 6th Year 18th Issue, Saka 1862, 10th Chaitra.

* In a Letter to the Premier of Assam (G. N. Bordoloi) a group of immigrants Muslim of Barpeta, is worth mentioning in the context of the efforts of Asom Siksha Prasar Samiti in this letter sign by 9 immigrants including local board mebers and teachers to consider them as Assamese. Dekā Asom 6th Year 14th Issue Saka 1862, 30th Agrahayan.
There are many such instances where his words time and again emphasized the issue having future socio-political implication. A man with radical commitment and intent, Ambikagiri never deviated from the path he had chosen to assert Assamese nationalism in the face of all confronting situation. In this context reference should be made to certain essays in Dekā Asom. These were reminder of the almost inevitable socio-political problem with a changing demographic profile. One such article is about 1941 census wherein he contained a list of suggestion for the government and the people.²⁵⁴

As has already been referred to, a final show down with the imperial authority was launched on 9th August 1942 which was to be Gandhi’s last movement to throw off British yoke. The movement different from the previous ones like (Non cooperation 1920-22, civil disobedience 1930-1934 or the Individual Satyagraha 1940-41) to a great extent. Gandhi wanted this movement to be a fight to the finish. His last massage before arrest was do-or-die. It was a mass movement of unprecedented scale as envisaged by Gandhi and his message had a gospel like impact resulting in the coming together of different forces that had been militating against the continuance of British rule in India. It was not surprising that the impact of the movement was felt immediately in Assam with the arrest of APCC leaders like Tayyebulla, Fakaruddin Ali Ahmed, B.R. Medhi, Debeswar Sharma and other office bearers on 9th August.

The swiftness and strength of the British reaction confirmed that the imperial apparatus had been poised for this eventuality since 1939, when the War began. With the arrest of the leaders masses were left to themselves and initiated a struggle of such tremendous magnitude that, at least for a few months, the regular functioning of the provincial government was made impossible.²⁵⁵ The resulting government response was obviously repression as state machinery geared up for the movement. The following official report is suggestive of the government response. “The S.D.C.’s office, Guwahati was burnt down on the night of the 13th instant. Sixteen days have

²⁵⁴. Ibid, 6th Year 6th Issue, Saka 1862, 11th Aswin.
elapsed and in spite of my telegram no 1078c of the 17th instant, you have not submitted any proposal for a collective fine.”

In the highly charged political atmosphere Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury was playing the role of a nationalist journalist along with the organizational activity of Asom Jatiya Mahasobhā. It would be very much relevant to place Ambikagiri within the board framework of the nationalist struggle conducting a highly motivated campaign with defined ideologies concerning Assam. During the darkest hour of the war this die hard Assamese made a statement that is worth mentioning. “Within the land of Assam Assamese will survive or surrender struggling for their rights.”

This vindicates his position in the context of the politics of Assam and subsequent activities proved that he never budged from that position. Wide ranging analysis of the activities of Roy Chowdhury in these years leading up to independence, exploring the constraints facing Assam on all fronts, making endeavors in the changing contours of anti colonial struggle with a hostile government in the province. Land was one crucial issue taken up and pursued consistently by Roy Chowdhury to establish the right of Assamese people which he felt threatened by the government land policy and openly questioned Saadullah for his pro immigrant policy. Roy Chowdhury was very much apprehensive of Muslim league’s Pakistan plan. He felt that the land policy followed by Saadullah ministry might eventually pave the way for the inclusion of Assam in proposed Pakistan. So he insisted on a deputation to Mahatma to apprise him of the situation in Assam. It needs to be referred here that way back in 1940 Robert Reid the then Governor of Assam ruled out ‘grow more food’ scheme as there was not enough waste land.* Not Saadullah alone, Abdul Matin Chowdhury ex M.L.A. maintained, ‘commonsense’ demands that for the development of the province, settlement of the land ought to be facilitated and unlimited immigration encouraged as a deliberate and definite policy.

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257. Dekā Asom, 6Th Year, 34th Issue, Saka 1863, 26th Aswin.
258. Ibid, 7th Year, 6th Issue, 27th December, 1943.
259. Ibid, 13th Issue, 28th February, 1944.
260. Asom Jātiya Mahā Sabha observed All Assam Land Day, on 25th August, 1943 protesting government land policy. 7 Year 16th Issue, 1944 28th March Dekā Asom.

* Foot Note :-Op cit, H. K. Barpujari , p.38
In view of this pronounced pro-immigrant policy Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury really had to wage a war. He expressed deep resentment immediately after the Shillong Conference on 16th December 1944 for the pro league land policy formulated by the than Assam government. In his own words, for the last thirty years I made desperate effort through Sangrakshini Sabha, Jatiya Mah Sabhā etc. with the aim of protecting the land of Assam from the onslaught of the immigrants. It seems to have ended with the latest government decision.” 261

He suggested the formation of a new ministry which he termed a national government keeping aside narrow political interest comprising Hindu, Muslim, Tribal, Christian and Buddhist scheduled representative of the assembly. 262 For him it was a matter of survival, otherwise Assamese culture and civilization will be obliterated forever. This suggestion generated a great controversy as it also implied the resignation of Congress legislators as is evident from a letter to the editor of Dekā Asom. 263 The controversial land policy eventually led to the formation of a new ministry and Roy Chowdhury appreciated Gopinath Bordoloi and Rohini Kr. Chowdhury for their earnest effort. 264 So it is in fact recognition of Congress’s concern and effort in the national interest of Assam. It seems that Roy Chowdhury gets restless sometimes and makes statement in total disregard of politics involved in sensitive issues like immigration. Resolutions passed at the special emergent session of the ‘Asom Jātiya Maha Sabha’ held on 4th and 5th June 1944 at Sarupeta under the presidency of Maulavi Hersatullah testifies an organized movement against the then Assam government’s land policy. 265 Significantly these resolutions were forwarded to the Governor, the secretary to the premier, the revenue minister, forest minister and the agriculture minister for consideration. Two resolutions need to be referred here 1) This special emergent session of the Asom Jātiya Mahā Sabha emphatically readopts the fifth resolution passed in its fourth Annual session regarding the way of settlement of cultivable waste land of the Assam Valley, and vehemently protests against the continuance by the government of the policy seriously damaging the national interest of the Assamese people in spite of the united countrywide popular opinion to the

261. Dekā Asom, 7Th Year, 18th Issue, 25th December, 1944.
262. Ibid.
263. Ibid, 7th Year, 20th Issue, 7th January, 1945.
264. Ibid, 7th Year, 21st Issue, 14th January, 1945.
265. Private papers resolution passed at special emergent session, Sarupeta, June 4th & 5th, 1944, printed copy. Appendix -
contrary. 2) This Emergent session of the Asom Jātiya Mahā Sabhā emphatically reiterates the sixth resolution regarding the anomalies of the last census, adopted in its 4th annual session held at Gauhati on 12th March 1944. The Chief Minister Sir Saadullah, who promised openly and publicly to set right all wrongs accepted as such, having done nothing up till date, declared in the Barpeta session of the Assam Muslim league held on the 7th and 6th April last that Muslim population in Barpeta subdivision alone had increased by 49% in place of 2% It is therefore afraid, lest Sir Saadullah himself is the moving force behind the despicable policy of ruining the legitimate rights and interests of the majority. Hence, this session of the Asom Jatiya Maha Sabhā, express it’s want of confidence in Sir Saadullah, the premier and minister in-charge of home security for deceiving the people with such irresponsible remarks and creating panic and mutual jealousies among them at this hour of the country’s grave peril. Resolution No. 12 of the same session speaks about an exclusive control of Assamese people on its resource to be precise here, land. It says, ‘This special Emergent Session of the ‘Asom Jatiya Maha Sabhā’ fervently requests the Assam government, the popular representative M.L.A.’s and such other personalities to look to the danger to future of the Assamese people and unite without delay to pass a law so that no local Assamese may sell or transfer any land owned or possessed by him to any outsider who have affiliation with Assamese interest.

In the revolutionary atmosphere of 1942 accelerating the process of transition to independence, various factors were at work, the attitude of the Colonial powers, the role of external powers. 1942 witnessed a campaign of epic proportion with a much harder tone and less conciliatory mood. Quit India was a genuinely mass movement with a varied and spontaneous character and was the beginning of the end of British imperialism in India. In that final resistance Assam played a very significant role brining into its ambit thousands of ordinary Assamese, not surprisingly students and women playing a major role. It was an all encompassing movement accommodating diverse approaches to operate without hindrance. In a highly charged political atmosphere marked by arrests, hartals, picketing, procession, suspension of business, public meeting Roy Chowdhury’s activities got overshadowed. A movement conducted under the aegis of INC having a much wider reach was obviously more focused in those transitional years than whatever effort Roy Chowdhury was making. Although never detached from the nationalist Congress ideology he ceased to be a
member of Congress after 1930 getting more engaged in the *Asom Sangrakshini Sabhā*. From then onwards his activities displayed a more provincial orientation.

During the course of the Quit India movement Roy Chowdhury was more inclined to view and place the issues concerning the political and economic future of Assam. Before the birth of the Indian Republic this man with firm conviction and commitment to his cause was addressing public forum, to make people aware of the immigrant influx affecting economic and social progress of the native people and the larger political issue of Muslim Leagues plan concerning Assam. These activities were in fact a necessity for creating a very strong resistance against grouping subsequently. In a sense Roy Chowdhury was playing a very intense political role that appears complimentary to what APCC was engrossed in. Whatever his approaches maybe it was employed to serve specific purpose to promote the interest of Assam. How issues and events were related to existing political set up is a matter of significance and a meaningful understanding of the process in societal terms is required to appreciate the efforts of a man, many times misrepresented, misinterpreted. Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury’s perceived notion of Muslim league’s plan subsequently became a proven fact. In this context reference should be made to an emotional plea he addressed as appeal to the leaders of Assam proper, in the name of dearest mother Assam to for the rescue of our Home Land.” He was very much agitated by the political happenings to be precise, Muslims League’s plan.²⁶⁶

From 1940 the idea of a separate Muslim home land won the cynical sympathy of the British officials, always interested in division among political groupings, for their continued existence. The emphasis upon a religiously defined conception of nationhood earned league sympathy and support base that was growing since 1940. A separate sub-continental home land for the Muslim as projected by the League was also related to the political future of Assam. In its resolution at the Lahore session the Muslim league openly declared inclusion of Assam in Pakistan along with Muslim majority Bengal.²⁶⁷ During his visit to Assam in 1945, when Mr. Jinnah was questioned by the correspondent of the Hindustan standard, how could he include Assam in his projected Pakistan, as the Moslem population formed only 38.6%

Imminent threat to Assam from League and angst resulting from the crisis prompted Roy Chowdhury to make a desperate plea to the leaders of Assam. The above referred appeal starts with a deeply felt concern about a threatened political existence of Assam after independence. Horrible sinister plan can be easily discerned behind the Muslim league’s demand, Cripps proposal and Reginald Coupland’s scheme for the inclusion of Assam proper in North Eastern Regional Pakistan or in the alternative, for her annexation with Bengal. These has been followed by the Assam government’s pernicious land settlement policy, the ulterior motive of which manifested itself in the public utterances made recently at Calcutta by Sir Saadullah, the premier of Assam and in the Assam provincial Muslim league council meetings at Gauhati on the on the 29th January, 1945 by Maulavi, Manowar Ali, the Revenue Minister to the effect that within 2/3 years all the available land in Assam proper will be settled, which means mostly with immigrants and also in inciting support from League ministers and from Muslim Bengal. Roy Chowdhury perceived a demographic seize by the immigrants with an aim for the inclusion of Assam in Pakistan. “Under these circumstances he appealed, to all the Assamese assembly members, to sink all their difference and be united with bold and grim determination to save our home land from this catastrophe.” “Finally he made a special appeal to Sayed Md. Saadullah and Gopinath Bordoloi to sacrifice their party labels and take up boldly an all embracing united national stand at the moment of national crisis.” It speaks a lot about the desperation Roy Chowdhury felt while pursuing this particular issue, for him it was a matter of survival for the Assamese people. To a great extent he was successful as the response he was getting from different quarters of Assam to resist Muslim leagues plan. Right from 1940’s Roy Chowdhury’s effort on the issue of immigrant did create awareness among the people of Assam. For instance a letter can be referred here addressed to Roy Chowdhury where in the sender mentioned about a secret meeting in Sirajganj. Assadullah Siraji, Kalicharan Sen are hell bent on harming the interest of Assam.

269. Private papers, Asom Jatiya Maha Sabha, leaflet. Appendix -
270. Private papers, letter from Gopi Mohan Baishya, Tihu to Roy Chowdhury, 9-3-41. Appendix –
It is also not surprising that whenever some attempt has been made to resolve the burning problems of Assam, Roy Chowdhury never hesitated to appreciate and encourage such effort we thank Bordoloi (Gopinath) for sending a telegram to Mahatma Gandhi and Maulana Azad to make special arrangement for Assam in the Bombay Congress working committee meeting.271

Meanwhile as the war drew to a close all minds were free to focus on the struggle for independence. Roy Chowdhury as usual apprehensive of the Muslim league plan expressed concern at the failure of the Simla Conference and urged for an all out effort to save Assam.272 On the eve of the conference Roy Chowdhury sent a telegram to the Congress president Maulana Azad to the effect that, “Assamese nation and their homeland with glorious traditions threatened with extinction by Assam’s pernicious Land settlement policy encouraging planned lawless mass communal aggression from Bengal.273 Situation gravely dangerous. Inclusion of a bonafide nationalist Assamese or pro Assamese in Central Executive at this juncture most essential to save Assamese and their homelands pray consideration.” In March 1945 he sent an expressed telegram to Saadullah, Premier of Assam and copies to other members of the ministry praying for the release of Assamese Assembly members, “at least temporarily to enable them to attend the session to take part in the land settlement question.274 Government of Assam turned down Roy Chowdhury’s request expressing inability to act as suggested.”275

A persistent effort by Roy Chowdhury gets testified by the correspondence he made with the government and with nationalist Congress leaders. A clear manifestation of his frustration and anger is his critique of the Congress leadership just an eve of the Simla conference.276 Failure of the Simla conference resulting from the incompatibility of the demand of Muslim League and Indian National Congress the root cause of the failure being Jinna’s intransigence and obstinacy, insisting on a

271. Dekā Asom, 7th Year, 30th Issue, 25th June, 1945.
273. Ibid.
274. Express Telegram dtd-5-3-45. Appendix -
claim to Pakistan and its mistrust of the Congress further aggravated the situation. In fact his (Jinnah’s) attitude hardened during the discussion (Simla). Roy Chowdhury termed Simla conference as a lavishly organized ‘farce’.

The All India Muslim league did carry out a successful propaganda for its perceived Pakistan and constituted a threat to the political existence of Assam is a proven fact and Roy Chowdhury played an extraordinary part in bringing the issue to the public forum as well to the Congress agenda. Here a very interesting propaganda song by one immigrant called Md. Kazemuddin Ahmed is reflective of a very forceful campaign for Pakistan in Assam. His address given as – Pakistan Road Barpeta. Roy Chowdhury wanted to bring this crucial issue to be brought to the notice of all India Congress leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru and urged that in the forth coming visit of Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru to Assam they should be shown how the immigrant settlers are threatening the Assamese national existence.

End of war brought new initiative towards resolving the lingering issue of transfer of power. General election in July 1945 replaced Churchill’s war cabinet Clement Attle’s labour government took office. After 1945 imperialism was viewed with growing international hostility. An anti-imperialist post war climate made it obvious for labour prime minister Clement Atlee to announce something substantial. So came the official announce of Wavell on 19th September 1945 on behalf of the Home Government expressing its intention to convene a constitutions making body through election. Wavell announced fresh election to the Central and provincial legislatures during the coming cold winter. Hectic political activity ensued. Congress campaigned for a single major issue, seeking mandate for united India while the League stressed for Pakistan.

In a significant statement on the eve of the election Asom Jatiya Maha Sobhā expressed its intention of participating in election formally requesting Congress to co-operate in the election endeavour of the sabhā reiterating the ideological similarity of Congress and Sabhā. He even went to the extent of asking a seat for Asom Jātiya

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278. Ibid.
279. Dekā Asom, 7th Year, 39th Issue, 1st October, 1945.
280. Dekā Asom, 7th Year, 38th Issue, 24th September, 1945.
Mahā Sabhā candidate. APCC thereafter turned down his request on the ground that there is no such provision in Congress constitution. The rejection made him realize that participating in election might not be politically viable. It also substantiates his political dependence on Congress for furthering the issues concerning Assam. Roy Chowdhury was well aware of the strong political support for Congress hence he wisely made an appeal through Dekā Asom to offer whole hearted support to Congress in the forth coming election. His indisputable commitment to the cause of Assam is an established fact as is evident from the conditions he offered to the voters to ensure its fulfillment by candidates. The election verdict proved to be a show of strength for Congress and the League. Securing 78% vote the Congress swept the general constituencies and attained the status of single majority party in Assam. By winning 31 out of 34 Muslim seats the league seemed to have received a decisive verdict in favour of Pakistan. The second Congress Ministry headed by Bordoloi was poised for a formidable task ahead of it i.e. Cabinet Mission and the political future of Assam.

Another British Cabinet Mission arrived consisting of Stafford Cripps, Pathik Lawnence and A.V. Alexander to investigate the possibilities for an interim government capable of drafting a constitution acceptable to British authorities’ and made it clear that freedom was no longer an issue only when and under what circumstances. After prolonged discussion the Cabinet Mission came up with a skilful plan that envisaged a regional grouping of provinces, Northwest, Northeast and the rest forming a weak federation. For Jinna this plan implied a separate Pakistan.

APCC leaders of Assam were very much apprehensive of the grouping of provinces. League’s persistent demands for Pakistan frustrated the arrangement for a Constituent Assembly. With regard to Assam it is very much relevant here to refer to the prevailing fearful situation. Cabinet Mission plan clubbed Assam together with Bengal to frame the group and provincial constitution. Grouping raised a hue and cry in Assam. Gopinath Bordoloi as per instruction of the APCC met the CWC members

282. Ibid.
283. Ibid.
284. PHA vol-3, p.333.
in Delhi and submitted memorandum on 19\textsuperscript{th} May opposing the grouping of Assam with Bengal.\textsuperscript{285} A sense of betrayal felt over the state of Assam. In the prevailing gloom and despair Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury gave a clarion call to save Assam and his role was no less important than the role played by APCC leaders. Right from the official announcement of the Cabinet Mission plan Roy Chowdhury launched a publicity campaign against grouping on behalf of Jatiya Maha Sabhā.\textsuperscript{286} That was a great public mobilization by Roy Chowdhury. More than the APCC, Roy Chowdhury and his organization’s desperate efforts helped promote an anti grouping movement in Assam. Roy Chowdhury was also a member of the Congress delegation from Assam that went to Delhi to express their strong opposition to the cabinet Mission Plan.\textsuperscript{287} He was a source of strength in the anti grouping movement in Assam.\textsuperscript{288} On behalf of the Asom Jatiya Maha Sobhā Roy Chowdhury issued a leaflet entitled, ‘Invasion of Assam imminent. It reads, “Hearty appeal to save her in view of the decision of the Bengal Asom Muslim League Joint Committee of Action to send large batches of Muslim National Guard to defy the Eviction order of the Assam government.”\textsuperscript{289} Again it is a clarion call to save Assam from the Muslim League’s plan of its inclusion in Pakistan. The Muslim league, he said is preparing a finishing stroke in Assam – the province whose resistance to grouping began all the woes for the League! He expected on all out effort to forestall the league plan.\textsuperscript{290}

It is a well known historical fact that Jinna withdrew from all discussion with the Congress and the British on the question of joining the interim government and stating ominously to launch ‘direction action’ beginning on 16\textsuperscript{th} August in order to achieve Pakistan. The violence of August and September was in the first instance instigated by the Muslim league, the party which fuelled the movement for a separate state of Pakistan.\textsuperscript{291} The Muslim league hoped to polarize the two communities

\textsuperscript{285} Memorandum of G. N. Bordoloi to CWC APCC papers 1946, APCC office, Ghy, as Cited in PHA vol-3, p.347.
\textsuperscript{286} A. K. Mishra , Op cit, p.127.
* In 1946 there was a movement in Assam against the Muslim League Demand for including it in Pakistan and Roy Chowdhury was actively associated with it, Op cit, Birendra Kr. Bhattacharyya, p.13.
\textsuperscript{287} Roy Chowdhury 1989 pp.78-79.
\textsuperscript{288} Jogesh Das, Op cit, p.44.
\textsuperscript{289} Ibid, p.65.
\textsuperscript{290} Private Papers-leaflet.
\textsuperscript{291} Ram Chandra Guha, India After Independence, p.9.
further by the riot it’s started in Calcutta which spread to Bengal country side Noakhali, Bihar, Gurmukteswar, Punjab. In that agonizing period transfer of power to Indian were slowly negotiated with the inevitable prospect of partition.

Cabinet Mission’s grouping scheme and the subsequent controversy, confusion and uncertainty ushered in a period of consistent political effort by Roy Chowdhury. The trouble in the province of Assam was made worse by a no less militant propaganda of the League against whose effort he mobilized anti grouping movement to raise an army called Asom Ātmarakshi Bāhini. This was prompted by Maulana Asad Bhasani’s threatened direct action in Assam. According to his plan the proposed ‘Bāhini’ will be open to all including permanently settled immigrants. Roy Chowdhury personally met Saadullah to request him to ensure communal peace in Assam. The strong crosscurrents set up among different political groups by the question of grouping have again raised the ‘bogey’ of valleyism in politics with a not remote possibility of regrouping of political opinions. Congress leaders of the Brahmaputra Valley decided to offer a dogged resistance to, “this bartering of the individuality of the province and the special cultural identity of its people for some ‘imaginary’ advantages of administration by grouping with Bengal. They would prefer the grouping of Assam with the entire Eastern Zone of India as an economic unit. “Srijut Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury a nationalist journalist of Kamrup has threatened a ‘fast into death’ if the people of Assam thus lose-their distinctiveness and separate entity.” Across the valley there were meetings, procession hartals and demonstration as Assam concerned herself solely with the grouping question. In these protestations Roy Chowdhury played a very significant role himself organizing, addressing meetings mobilizing public support. Kamal Narayan Chowdhury reminiscences, the desperate anti-grouping effort of Roy Chowdhury, “one day he entered into our mess. He was in a serious mood and told, I have come here with a different task. “One of you must come with me. Assam is almost gone. If Assam becomes Pakistan then I along with your parents will be polishing Jinnah’s 60 pair of

293. Ibid.
294. HP Assam SB No-1089, 8-6-46.
295. Ibid.
296. HP Assam SB No-1140, 15-6-46.
297. Ibid.
shoes. I have come here seeking help from Bengali newspapers. If they help me I will made a last attempt to some Assam from grouping.” In whatever manner possible Roy Chowdhury resisted grouping. In 1946 he collected a map of Assam containing a detailed plan of invasion of Assam by Muslim league. One person named S. K. Kar from Cachar them serving at Khidirpur dock happened to receive a copy of the special issue of Dekā Asom on Muslim league’s plan. At the same time he came across the map and informed Roy Chowdhury, editor of Dekā Asom. Roy Chowdhury spent Rs. 250/- to collect the map. He made a block of the map and attached with his leaflet called ‘Plan of independent Panchayat State.’ It was then widely published among the people.

In those days of great political turmoil Roy Chowdhury’s plan for an *Asom Atma Rakshini BAswini* is yet another example of his commitment to the cause of Assam. It is instructive to look on the prevailing situation in Assam in the aftermath of Muslim league’s direct action. To implement his plan of Atmarakshini Bāhini (self define force) collected signatures from 50000 youth taking an oath to save Assam. INA Lt. Umesh Dev Chowdhury was appointed commander of this force. The concept of Atma Rakshini Bāhini did have its impact in different parts of Assam. One Ratneswar Nath from Lakhi ganj Bajar, Goalpara sought his blessings and help for training of the Bāhini. There are evidences of the formation of the Bāhini at places like Nazira, Jorhat etc.

A successfully organized anti grouping movement in Assam is a highly significant aspect of the history of freedom movement and here the role played by Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury needs to be focused. Roy Chowdhury engaged himself whole heartedly in the anti grouping movement. Quite apprehensive of the dangerous consequences of grouping he sent telegram to Nehru. With the final rejection by the Congress of the plan of grouping Assam survived from a grave

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298. A. K. Mishra, Op cit, p.34.
300. Ibid.
301. Ibid.
302. Letter dtd 19-8-47.Appendix -
303. Letter dtd 28-7-47, from Gopacharan Sandikoi Baruah Nazira to Roy Chowdhury.Appendix -
political crisis. That was a day of great relief for Ambikagiri. Freedom finally came to India on 15th August 1947 after a frustratingly slow and discontinuous negotiation. The freedom he (Gandhi) had struggled so long for had come at an unacceptable price; independence had also meant partition. Partition also brought with it the biggest human migration.

Trauma of partition and the related refuge problem was the most formidable task faced by the government of India as well as Assam. Huge influx of refugees continued to Assam. Roy Chowdhury at the time of independence was a grief stricken men. Influx of refugees in post independence Assam transformed the landscape of the state. Roy Chowdhury’s anxiety never lessened and he continued relentlessly as before projecting the issues concerning Assam. Ambikagiri continued his struggle for the protection of legitimate Assamese interest within the political frame work of an independent India. His political vision, organizational skill his obsession all provoke interest.

Never the less 1947 ended one phase of his intense political life as well as of his revolutionary activities centering round the anti-imperialist movement.

305. Ibid.