CHAPTER - VII
Post independence Ambikagiri

Post independence Ambikagiri: A restless protector of Assam’s interest.

At long last freedom came on 15th August 1947 and India emerged as a sovereign independent nation after a prolonged anti-colonial movement. “The fancy of imperial pride, which was so much a reality for over a hundred years, received its death knell with the stroke of mid night on the 15th of August.”¹ India attained her independence with a multiplicity of heritage and legacies, which influenced its post independence course in complex ways. Very poignantly Burton Stein has written, “frustratingly slow and discontinuous negotiations brought freedom at long last, but freedom entailed death on a scale remarkable even in a world that had been at war for a decade.”²

Trauma, hopes, and despair accompanying the cataclysmic event of freedom and partition is also a saga of common man’s humanity and harmony beneath a violent and painful partition. In our discourse we are not concerned with this side of freedom nor with the “happy infectious celebration blossomed in forgetfulness of the decades of sullen resentment against all that was symbolized by a sahib’s sun-topi.”³

In this chapter the discussion will strictly be confined to post independence happenings in Assam and Roy Chowdhury’s response to these. In this phase appears a personality frustrated and cynical, but still fully engaged in his task i.e. forever linked with the collective interest of Assam. By now quite clearly it is revealed that Roy Chowdhury was an active political figure in Assam right from the days of the Swadeshi movement. A continuousness engagement is also apparently visible in the post independence phase. Roy Chowdhury’s progression, as an advocate of the

collective interest of Assam, reveals certain interesting aspect of the history of Assam, particularly from socio-economic perspective.

Having already come across the maturing phase of his political thinking that established him as a liberal, humanitarian nationalist now a closer look into his ceaseless effort undertaken in this phase to safeguard the specific interest of Assam plagued by various social, economic and political problems becomes necessary here. The developments in a society or economy is generated by the human factors combined with other required components like capital, an efficient and well organized administrative machinery and a highly developed infrastructure. This process can be facilitated by a society that is far from static. In this context Roy Chowdhury can be seen in pursuit of his dream, a vibrant, resurgent Assam and a gradual disillusionment with the established political setup to address the issues that propped up after independence, for instance refugee problem.

Roy Chowdhury as he had previously been concerned, with a secured and better future of Assam was after independence grappling with issues like refugee, underdevelopment, linguistic identity etc. There was an already substantial shift in the demographical profile of the state and after independence it had still been aggravated by a steady flow of refugees from East Pakistan and Roy Chowdhury vigorously pursued this issue as will be evident in the later part of this discourse. It would not be just on our part to present the importance of his post independence activities in terms of his failure to achieve the desired results, as if they were supposed to be heading in such a direction and should only be judged appropriate if they reached it.

What is equally significant is the projection and presentation of issues before the political leadership and exertion of pressure. Roy Chowdhury wanted a sense of progress to be felt by the people of the state, that could he glimpsed visually. He desired a change in state as well as in the life of its people, a change in the direction of an all encompassing development. He pulled every lever to make it happen, but that was a frustrating and agonizing experience for him. Let us consider a few political demands presented to the congress working committee. A huge procession of *Asom Jātiya Mahā Sabhā* on 11-06-49 presented a list of demands more or less in the same tone that was being used in pre independence years to the congress government. Some
of these demands included: 1) Stop the inflow refugees from East Pakistan to Assam. 2) Allotment of land to 15 lakh landless Assamese. 3) Declare any state indigenous developed language as the state language of Assam. The list comprised 10 demands basically on three themes refugee, land and language. It is a continuous projection of lingering issues like land or language.

The mouth piece of Asom Jātiya Mahā Sabhā continued to play its role to the development of public politics identifying priority issues, and showing what is to be done in the greater interest of Assam and thus establishing a connection between the people and the ruling class. This journal idealistic as it had been promoted seemed performing an assigned task i.e. to make people aware of the emerging situation, actuated by the biggest political transition accompanied with its complication, political as well as economic. Taking into account all the complexities Roy Chowdhury urged upon the people of Assam that self defense is the first and foremost responsibility to survive individually and collectively. It is equally significant to assert with dignity and self respect, the distinct identity of a nationality. So he viewed nationalism as the highest ideology and to enrich one’s nationality whole heartedly is the foremost responsibility of every individual. His notion of self-defense had an explicit political element that he explained with conviction that self defense is not violence rather a political responsibility. “Self defense is the primary instinct of all living being.”

Land and language are the most vital elements of human life and those who are not inclined to these that life is a meaningless one. In the light of this statement Roy Chowdhury’s post independence engagements if analyzed brings to the fore enormous efforts directed to the issue of land and language. His pursuance of the vital issues concerning Assam whatever its flaws, could always be relied upon to articulate a robust critique of power and especially of power when it is turned against the very people from whom it ought to derive its legitimacy.

Roy Chowdhury’s writings represented its age in a far profounder way. Here is a true voice of the sensitive Assamese intellectual brooding over the contemporary

4. 9th Year, 9th Issue, Deka Asom, 1949 (Date is not mention in this issue)  
5. Ibid.  
reality laden with crises that he desired to ward off. First issue of 9th year Dekā Asom in fact carried a resolve to the effect that not a single inch of land, business or any other work will be given to any body that is anti-Assamese. Land business or any other work will be in the hands of Assamese in Assam. Establish Assamese as the rightfully recognized language of Assam. It is basically an assertion of linguistic and economic nationalism. In a largely attended public meeting at Hojai, presided by Roy Chowdhury 16 resolutions were passed veering mostly round the basic themes of land, state language and certain basic facilities. It had been termed as an enthusiastic attempt of self defense. Perturbed by an ever increasing refugee flow and the declared refugee policy of the government of India was a source of constant irritation for Roy Chowdhury and he called upon the people of Assam to defend themselves in the face of all confronting problems and angst if necessary to launch Satyagraha.

It is worth mentioning here that parallel with his literary pursuit that is more focused and discussed and undoubtedly connected with it is the increasing interest that Roy Chowdhury had in social and political organization. Since his Barpeta Days we come across a great connectivity that Roy Chowdhury established with socio-political organization, right from Assam student conference, The Assam Association to Congress, apart from the organization he himself established and led. It is in this context we need to view Roy Chowdhury, leading Asom Jātiya Mahā Sabhā as the general Secretary. Under the aegis of the organization Roy Chowdhury carried on his relentless struggle, voicing his concern over all issues minor as well as major. Jātiya Mahā Sabhā’s expansion in post independence era is also an indicator of its reach in society.

One of the major issues confronting Assam was the refugee issue particularly Hindu refugees from East Bengal. Influx of refugees and their settlement was such a daunting task as it claimed the resources and energies of a newly independent nation,

---
8. 9th Year, 1st Issue, Dekā Asom, 1949. (Date of the issue not mentioned)
9. Ibid.
10. The emphasis upon a religiously defined conception of nationhood by the Indian Muslim League eventually resulted in the partition of India. Independence brought in its trail one of the biggest human migrations in the history of the world. One segment of this migration was oriented towards Assam from Eastern Bengal then called East Pakistan. Assam had to bear the brunt of a major chunk of refugees as they had to be housed, fed and managed. Hordes of displaced people entering Assam from East Bengal constituted a big problem for the Gopinath Bordoloi ministry.
trying to gather itself. Sociologist Ram Chandra Guha writes, like the integration of the princely states, the rehabilitation of refugees was a political problem unprecedented in nature and scope. Commenting on the enormity of the task ahead of the new government headed by Pandit Nehru he also writes, “in the history of nation building only the soviet experiment bears comparison with the Indian. There too a sense of unity had to be forged between many diverse ethnic groups, religions, linguistic communities and social classes. The scale-geographic as well as demographic was comparatively massive. The raw material the state had to work with was equally unpropitious, a people divided by faith and riven by debt and disease.”

When the country was grappling with the massive human migration unleashed by partition, it had to deal with unpropitious resources. Settlement of refugees from East Bengal created such a situation that could be best described as a tension between sub nationalism and Pan Indianism. Facing the large exodus of refugees then Assam Premier Gopinath Bordoloi, expressed inability to accommodate very many refugees considering the existence of large section of landless Assamese people. Historian Nirode Baruah made an observation on this controversial issue that the national Congress leaders tended “to think of themselves as more all India minded than their provincial counterparts and claimed superior understanding of the local situation and were determined to impose their will on the Bordoloi government.” It is another revelation of friction between Pan Indianism and sub nationalism where we see Nehru being less sensitive to a regional problem, showing total disregard to Bordoloi’s plea on rehabilitation of East Bengal migrants.

Here in this context Roy Chowdhury is seen being responsive to the issue, as he does in every issue concerning Assam and mounting a publicity campaign and acting as a pressure group on the government of Assam. In view of the grave situation unfolding in Assam caused by an exodus Roy Chowdhury called a conference on October 30th and 31st 1949. For the purpose he published a leaflet and as usual made an emotional plea invoking the past glory of the state and the present challenges. A few lines from the leaflet entitled “Asom Jātiya Mahā Sabha calls a conference to save Assam and her people” reads, “Dear Brother you must have realized by now that

the situation in Assam is fast deteriorating. Our home land is faced today with danger on an unprecedented scale. The apathy of our leaders, the inaction of the Assam government in time and the step motherly behaviour of the centre are leading this beloved land of ours to complete ruin. It would be no exaggeration to say that the indigenous people of Assam are today faced with a thousand times graver peril than they ever stood under during the British regime.”

Drawing attention to the refugee problem he wrote, ‘Inroads of thousands of Eastern Pakistanis are going on merrily under the very nose of our provincial government. Probably he could understand the predicament of the provincial government for not being ‘able to come out with any hopeful solution in the face of an even increasing danger’ to the very existence of Assam.”

The leaflet expressed doubt on the sincerity of the centre. Therefore Roy Chowdhury convened the conference and requested all “who are willing to participate in the proposed conference to work for the safety of our mother land and homeland as well and to gloriously remain in the Indian union, to kindly contact with their names and addresses without allowing a single grass to grow under their feet.”

From another perspective it can be interpreted as an attempt to address an issue that was proving it to be a very complex one, with the financial help from the centre for Assam at stake. Bordoloi (Gopinath) busied himself in a prolonged negotiation with Nehru on this issue, so the issue had been dealt with at two levels, governmental and non-governmental as Asom Jātiya Mahā Sabhā had been trying to find a solution.

A constant focus on the problem through Dekā Asom and combining with it the widely used method of sending telegrams to people at the helm is also seen in the post independence years as Roy Chowdhury had been responding to issues confronting Assam. A headline in Dekā Asom emphatically states that the provincial government or the central government does not have any right to destroy Assam to appease the refugees. Under this headline Roy Chowdhury raised the very important matter of the refugee settlement committee formed by the central committee consisting of three members. He was very much against the composition of this Government and that too without an Assamese member, terming it as a complete lack

15. Leaflet, Private papers. (Appendix)
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
of trust on the part of the central government towards the people of Assam. Roy Chowdhury vehemently opposed the then finance secretary Sri Motiram Borah for extending the date for registration of refugees for another two months. He was a strong critique of the provincial government’s decision to settle 2500 refugee family at Pandu. Finally Roy Chowdhury decided to convene an assembly of 50,000 on 20th June, (1951) the day refugee settlement committee arrived in Guwahati and appraise them of the ground reality.

This was followed by an old tried out method of memorandum and mobilization of public opinion sending a deputation to Sri Sri Prakash the secretary of the committee. On 19th August 1951 *Asom Jatiya Mahā Sabha* convened a special convention on refugee problem and presented a memorandum to refugee investigation committee headed by Sri Sri Prakash (former Governor of Assam). Roy Chowdhury wanted to apprise Sri Sri Prakash of the complexity of the refugee problem coupled with the immigrant settlement policy that had been followed from a much earlier date. Being well aware of the grave socio-political implication Roy Chowdhury made it very clear in the memorandum that Assamese people initially preferred Punjab refugees, instead of Bengal refugees but eventually “Bordoloi government surrendered to Bengalism” and refugees from Eastern Bengal started pouring in. This memorandum should also be understood as a historical document covering detailed comparative study of the economy of Assam in pre and post colonial Assam. Implicit in this document are the fear, anxiety and apprehension of a person desperate to alter the prevailing situation, in a manner, that is mostly non

The decision of the Government of India to merge Coch Bihar with West Bengal prompted Roy Chowdhury to write a letter on behalf of *Asom Jātiya Mahā Sabha* addressed to Sardar Ballab Bhai Patel dated 17th January 1950. Subject matter of this letter was the inclusion of Coch Bihar with West Bengal since he was very much against the merger. “Your decision to merge Coch Bihar with West Bengal in evidently intriguing circumstances has stunned poor Assam beyond description. Assam has been thwarted in her legitimate interests in many respects by the centre.

18. 9th Year, 8th Issue, Deka Asom, 1951.
19. Ibid.
This action of your ministry has made her helplessness most poignant and her frustration almost complete.” Roy Chowdhury termed the Congress logic behind the merger “as a colossal bankruptcy in the knowledge of history” and “complete surrender to the threat of Bengali expansion.” Finally he appealed for the “sake of security and peace in the most easternmost boundary province of India where, aggressive provincialism of expansionist Bengal has added growing strength to the Bengal Pakistani danger in Assam” to ponder over these questions and see if the decision could be revised. This was followed by another letter; wherein he expressed a sense of betrayal on the part of Sardar Patel go with the merger of Coch Bihar with West Bengal. He referred to a public speech made by Patel, admitting the decision of merger “to satiate the hunger of Bengali expansionists.” According to Roy Chowdhury it was a clear vindication of the worst misgivings about the center’s intention and sincerity of purpose.

Another very significant issue raised in the letter was the merger of Tripura and Manipur with Assam (then centrally administered provinces). He urged upon the then deputy prime minister not to contemplate their merger with Assam on the basis of geographical contiguity also as “Assam does not want unwilling and unassimilable (inassimilable) elements thrust upon her” and only add to the woes of this “problem province”. He suggested Manipur and Tripura to be constituted as Chief Commissioner province. This suggestion of Roy Chowdhury if considered from the point of view of cultural distinctiveness and practical politics was a good politically viable suggestion and the subsequent history of N. E. India is a vindication of Roy Chowdhury’s apprehension about the hill districts of Assam unwillingly tagged along Assam. A strong advocate of sub nationalism, Roy Chowdhury was well aware of the aspiration of the people of the hill districts of Assam.

Roy Chowdhury was an ardent believer in a federal political structure of India, with all the components (states) maintaining their distinct cultural identity. An equitable, egalitarian India comprising strong, equally developed states was what he was constantly advocating in post independent period. He wrote a letter

23. Ibid.
congratulating Dr. Rajendra Prasad on becoming the first President of the ‘Indian Republic’. He expressed high hopes that “India will be both enriched and elevated” under his leadership. “I also fervently hope that India’s component units – the states, will also be equally happy and prosperous in your regime. I think, your august self, more than any other leader in India is conversant with the problems confronting this small but ancient province of Assam and how some other units threaten to wipe out the very existence of the indigenous people of the province, the Assam.”24 Here he obviously was referring to Bengal. A deeply concerned Roy Chowdhury expressed grief for Assam being dubbed as “parochial and inhospitable” for her expressed inability to absorb an unending flow of refugees. He ended the latter with positive note that in spite of the constitutional provision for equal and uniform rights for all the citizens of India there would be scope for preferential treatment by the state government concerned for the indigenous people of the state.25 It is a clear indication of Roy Chowdhury advocating dual citizenship. That by antagonizing the local indigenous people of any unit with injustice no greater unity for India could be achieved is a fundamental truth.26 As the General Secretary of *Asom Jātiya Mahā Sabhā*, Roy Chowdhury brought these issues to the notice of people at the higher level of administration. Rise of regionalism in Indian politics is a manifestation of the ‘fundamental truth’ uttered by Roy Chowdhury way back in 1950.

On the auspicious day (26th January, 1950) of the declaration of the Republic different branches of the *Asom Jātiya Mahā Sabhā* like Jorhat, Makum, Tangla, Digboi and Guwahati sent a telegram coagulating the President, the Prime Minister, Governor and the premier of Assam. It reads, ‘*Asom Jātiya Mahā Sabhā*’ offers loyal allegiance to the Republic constitution of India and hopes that Assam’s territorial, economic, linguistic and cultural integrities will not be allowed to suffer by any other Unit or state which is calculated to be harmful for both Assam and India, again a reminder of the specific concerns of Assam as a matter of survival, to the political establishment. Roy Chowdhury’s judicious sensible recommendation and the center’s response was no less important for the growth of a consciousness that can lead to intensifying politics and that has been proved beyond doubt in the history of Assam.

25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
Culture, as well as nature mandates a careful, judicious handling of issues in states like Assam. A careful scan through his statements it appears that a deeply agitated man promoting a movement that entailed a more prudent, responsible and efficient use of states natural endowment, and a more sensible manner in handling sensitive political issues. Roy Chowdhury’s handling of the refuge issue should also be examined. He questioned Bordoloi and Bishnuram Medhi the then revenue minister for the declared government policy of land allotment to 1,20,000 East Pakistan refugees. Moreover he expressed concern that 500 people would be getting allotment in Guwahati itself along with the provision of market specially earmarked for them with a central government grant of Rs. 10,000/-. Even after a public declaration by Bordoloi and Medhi that there already existed 15 lakh indigenous landless people in Assam and it won’t be possible to absorb more refugees coming from East Pakistan. Roy Chowdhury raised doubt regarding the sudden change of policy and stated that the state government should have taken the public into confidence in this matter. Once again he gave a clarion call to the Assamese people to be alert and come forward to protect its rights. In this context it would be imperative to refer to the memorandum submitted by Asom Jātiya Mahā Sabhā to the Refugee investigation committee. “In order to avoid further complicacy of the situation the Asom Jātiya Mahā Sabhā is vehemently opposed to the settlement of further lands with outsiders while available lands have been found quite insufficient for ten lakhs as was enumerated by the Asom Jātiya Mahā Sabhā in the year 1943, of landless indigenous Assamese people do you not support us in this move.”

Post Independence Assam presents a shift in the major thrust of centre-state conflicts and contradiction by virtue of their magnitude and in view of the political actors involved. The logic of economic development under Indian condition of dependence and unevenness has rendered it all the more significant to study Ambikagiri in the changing socio-political dynamism of Assam. In this context Asom Jātiya Mahā Sabhā’s role needs to be focused in those days of tradition from the old political setup to a newer one, the new sense of power accompanied by a new nationalism and a quest for order. Roy Chowdhury had a great faith in republication

27. 9th Year, 5th Issue, Deka Asom, 1950.
28. Ibid. 9th Issue, 1951.
and constitutional institutions and his desired change in the context of Assam was conceived within this defined political structure. Stirred by the unfolding events, *Asom Jātiya Mahā Sabhā* led by radical Roy Chowdhury was striving for a politically conscious and much more active Assamese society as is evident from the available materials and its reaching out to public.

Rama Barthakur, Roy Chowdhury’s accomplice mentioned about a 13 point memorandum on behalf of *Jātiya Mahā Sabhā* to the APCC executive (22nd October, 1948) and cited two very significant points.29 1. That according to the direction issued by the central government dated 17th August, 1948 to all the provincial governments that ‘No government grant in aid or patronage in any form should be given to commercial organization which indulge in political activities. That grant-in-aid made by Assam government to the Bengali and such other educational institutions be withdrawn, since these institution have been the centre of their communal political activities. 2) That the Assam government and the Assam Congress should fight for insertion of Dual –Citizenship in the Draft constitution and get rid of the provisions in it which allow representatives from Autonomous districts to provincial legislature. *Asom Jātiya Mahā Sabhā* then enjoyed considerable public response. A list of donations published in *Dekā Asom* from different quarters of Assam vindicates this point.30

A more pronounced sub-nationalist tendency is visible in Jatiya Maha Sabha’s activities and political statements. For instance Jatiya Maha Sabha gave clear instruction regarding the observation of Independence Day to all its branches. It says, “the national flag is a symbol of national aspiration and culture. Along with the national flag of India the characteristic feature of Assam should also be preserved. So, all the branches of the Maha Sabha this year while observing Independence Day along with the national flag will also hoist another flag featuring a rhino.31 It will symbolized distinctive identity within the great Indian nation that is inseparable.

Another issue, very sensitive in nature is the language and in this regard *Jātiya Mahā Sabhā* made its stand very clear - except the national language Hindi and state

29. Roy Chowdhury, souvenir, p.46.
* Rama Barthakur accompanied Roy Chowdhury while presenting the memorandum to APCC executive.
30. 9th Year, 2nd Issue, Deka Asom,1949.
language Assamese no other language will have preponderance in Assam and Debnagari should be introduced as script of the Assamese language. Government must declare Assamese as the official language in the province.⁴²

Let us refer to a telegram by Roy Chowdhury to Gopinath Bordoloi dated 21-07-1947 the then Assam premiers and member consistent Assembly New Delhi. It expresses his deep concern over the large scale migration of refugees to Assam. It reads, “Possibility of the floating East Bengal people in search of land hoping permanently settle in Assam declares as citizens of Indian dominion feared stop please take action to counteract the move stop Specially East Bengal Squatters must be declared aliens after fifteen August stop.”

Roy Chowdhury established a very good networking with all India leaders. In this context a letter can be cited written by Nand Kishor, Secretary to the Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia dated:- 25-05-1958 wherein it is stated that Lohia had gone through the letter from Roy Chowdhury appraising the former of the prevailing situation in Assam consequent to partition in 1947. Very significantly Lohia requested Roy Chowdhury for suggestion to rectify the policy formulated by the government of India with regard to Assam.⁴⁴

There existed a group of people who continued to impose great confidence on Asom Jātiya Mahā Sabhā and pleaded for a more aggressive political role in Assam not confining activities to sending memorandum or raising demands. A letter from a person called Umananda Barua, from Digboi, Accounts office and dated 11-08-1947 suggested an 11 point plan of action for the Sabhā covering a range of issues from political to economic.⁴⁵

Asom Jātiya Mahā Sabhā did have a good followers of students studying in City College, Calcutta were involved in fund raising for it. Two letters from City

---

* A similar view was also expressed by Bani Kanta Kakati, the author of the Assamese: Its formation and development when he writes Vide Ranjit Dev Goswami (ed.), Bani Kanta Kakati Rachanavalī pp.
³³. Telegram from Roy Chowdhury to Gopinath Bordoloi, dtd- 21-07-1947. (Appendix)
³⁵. Letter from Umananda Barua to Roy Chowdhury dtd - 11-08-1947. (Appendix)
College hostel are marked by a comprehensive presentation of the influence by the prevailing crisis situation in Assam.\textsuperscript{36} There is a marked apprehension of the fact that the overwhelming inflow of refugees combined with an expansionist plan of Bengal might wipe the Assamese culture. These students were highly appreciative of Roy Chowdhury’s relentless effort to establish Assamese nationality on a firm footing. One of these letters referred to the editorial column of ‘\textit{Yugantar}’ (dated 27-03-50) regarding the dominant Bengali culture and language. For these students Roy Chowdhury seems to be the saviour of Assam.\textsuperscript{37}

The months preceding independence were evidently an edgy time for every Indian and Roy Chowdhury was worried about Assam Bengal boundary. As we are well aware of the fact that the task of partitioning Bengal and Punjab was entrusted to a British judge named Sir Cyril Radcliff. Roy Chowdhury expressed concern about the representation of APCC before the boundary commission. In a letter Roy Chowdhury articulated that the APCC’s decision to place the idea of thanawise (police station) division of Sylhet was not a practical idea.\textsuperscript{38} Roy Chowdhury was of the opinion that if APCC place the Sylhet case according to thanawise (police station) division then, Muslim league can claim some areas of Goalpara according to this policy. He very clearly stated that presenting the case of Sylhet was the responsibility of Bengal Congress and warned APCC not do go with the issue of Sylhet in Congress working committee meeting scheduled on 22\textsuperscript{nd} July 1947.

Roy Chowdhury’s influence in the public sphere was not lesser in post independence years and he maintained a good network with other organizations. It is worth mentioning here that some organizations looked forward to him seeking advice. For instance Dimapur Tribal Union formed in the wake of Naga National Council’s aggression in Sibasagar district. Dimapur Tribal Union was an organization of people living in Dimapur revenue circle comprising all sections respective of caste and creed. One emergent session of the organization was held on 10-09-47 and a copy of the resolutions sent to Roy Chowdhury for consideration. Gobinda Ch. Poira, member Dimapur Tribal Union, sent a letter to Roy Chowdhury seeking valuable advice and

\textsuperscript{36} Letters dtd- 13-03-1950 & 29-03-1950 from Makhan Ch. Konwar, Upendra Nath Hazarika, Chandrasekhar Barua, Paresh Ch. Das & Dhanjit Kr. Talukdar to Roy Chowdhury. (Appendix)

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid. (Appendix)

\textsuperscript{38} Letter to Siddhinath Sarma dtd-19-07-1947. (Appendix)
help to pursue the issue of Dimapur. Along with the letter Poira also sent one article, ‘Dimapur in Naga’s grab’ for publication and requested Roy Chowdhury not to publish his name fearing reprisal.\(^{39}\) This is evidently and instance of people expecting from Roy Chowdhury to guide them in a crisis situation. Freedom also brought in its baggage the tragedy of partition. A tense fearful atmosphere prevailed in Assam caused by heightened inter-regional tension and how people responded to the whole episode characterized by sordid motives and human depravity is a matter of serious academic discourse.

Placing Roy Chowdhury in that particular historical situation his varied activities with the sole objectives of promoting the interest of Assam needs to be focused. Keeping in view the inter-regional conflict between Assam and Bengal he sent a memorandum to the state re-organization commission formed in 1954 to fulfill the long held Congress commitment of creating linguistic provinces in free India. A vigorous movement for linguistic province by the Telegu speakers of the Andhra country led to the formation of Andhra Pradesh.\(^{40}\) It also led to an intensification of similar demands by other linguistic groups. The government of India then appointed a state reorganization commission to make recommendation in regard to the broad principles which should govern the solution of this [linguistic] problem.\(^{41}\) To this commission Roy Chowdhury sent a memorandum requesting to consider the question of linguistic autonomy as a measure of unifying India. This was followed by a letter seeking sincere attention of the commission.

Roy Chowdhury was an ardent advocate of linguistic autonomy and he considered it essential for maintaining the integrity of India. In this context it is instructive to reflect on the role played by Roy Chowdhury to establish Assamese as the state language of Assam. The Asom Sāhitya Sabhā, the premier literary organization of Assam, formed in 1917 annually held its session at a chosen place and has since been playing a leading role as a literary forum promoting language and literature. The Margherita session (21st in 1951) of Asom Sāhitya Sabhā was presided over by Roy Chowdhury and in this session a very significant decision on state

---

39. Letter from Gobinda Ch. Poira to Roy Chowdhury, dtd- 16-09-1954. (Appendix)
41. Ibid, p.189.
language was adopted. The most important resolution passed at the Margherita session was the declaration of Assamese as the state language. Accordingly “the Margherita session of Asom Sahitya Sabha urgently demands that the coming legislative assembly session scheduled from 13th March (1951) should declare Assamese as the state language of Assam and declare it as the medium of instruction in all the schools of Assam excepting schools in Khasi, Lusai, Mizo and Garo hills and government should also withdrawn recognition and financial aid from those schools having a medium of instruction other than Assamese”.\textsuperscript{42} So it was a highly significant demand from the Asom Sahitya Sabha that led to a movement subsequently called the ‘language movement’ as the issue was pursued vigorously by Asom Sahitya Sabha and no less vigorously by Roy Chowdhury.\textsuperscript{43}

It is indeed necessary to cite here another memorandum presented to Jawaharlal Nehru on 27-08-55 during his visit to Assam on behalf of Asom Jātiya Mahā Sabhā. It is more or less in the nature of suggestions to be considered for the greater interest of India as well as of Assam. It started with a note of appreciation and followed by his threat preparation of a greater Bengal. Roy Chowdhury endorsed Nehru’s Panchasila principle of coexistence and suggested its application in the interstate relationship “deterring one state from aggression on and interfering with another state in respect of her integrity.” This 7 point memorandum is a reminder to Nehru of a prevailing conflict situation in Assam.

Roy Chowdhury was never disconnected from the happenings in national and international sphere and his unequivocal faith on secularism and democracy as a universally accepted principle and its relevance he always upheld. In a correspondence to Nehru and Liaqat Ali the then Prime Minister of Pakistan in 1950

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{42} Asom Sāhitya Sabhā Ruplekhā, p.279. *
  \item \textsuperscript{43} The 1960 Language Movement in Assam was an offshoot of the decisions of the State Re-Organization Commission regarding formation of states on the basis of language. Assamese was the main language in undivided Assam and according to the census of 1951, 56.29\% of the population in Assam were Assamese speakers but till 1960 the Government of Assam did no implement the recommendation of SRC and Asom Sāhitya Sabhā leading to a movement demanding the recognition of Assamese as the state language. This movement created an atmosphere of mutual animosity between the Assamese and the Bengalis. Leading to an incident of firing in one of the hostels of Cotton College (2nd Mess) where Ranjit Barpujari got killed in police firing.
  
  Mahendra Borah devoted a chapter of his autobiography on the language movement. (Upalā Nadir Dare pp.234-246)
\end{itemize}
when both these leaders were deliberating before the Nehru Liaqat Pact in new Delhi. Roy Chowdhury as the general secretary of Asom Jātiya Mahā Sabhā has in a correspondence appealed to both Nehru, the Prime Minister of India and Khwaja Nazimuddin the Prime Minister of Pakistan “to include in the agenda of your discussion” in the forth coming meeting the urgency of declaring unequivocally Pakistan to be a secular state instead of her remaining a ‘Theocratic state’ for the benefit of both the countries and also to meet the popularly universal demand of mankind throughout the world. Roy Chowdhury sent a letter to Nehru reminding the latter of his previous correspondence and to consider the matter urgently.

By now it has become quite clear that Roy Chowdhury was secular in all sense of the term and carried a relentless struggle to establish exclusive rights of the Assamese over its resources. His public utterances are clear vindication of the campaign he carried through different forums for its realization. He addressed a sitting of Behali Rāyat Sabhā on 15-5-50 and urged in his statement that ‘Assamese Ryots are accredited owner of Assam’s land they must be ready to preserve it at all costs whatever that may be and must resist all sorts of aggression on it.’ The amount of importance Roy Chowdhury attached to land is quite understandable. He very well understood the value of land as a factor of production as well as a symbol of existence and the yields that can be derived from land. Much before independence he conducted a survey of landless Assamese people, once published a leaflet entitled “landless people of Barpeta need land.” Land is a valuable but limited resource and nobody realized it better than Roy Chowdhury in those years of conflict confrontation allotment and settlement quite understandably of land. So he kept declaring publicly the value of land and exclusive right over it of the Assamese people.

Another significant aspect of his activities in post independence days was his persistent demand for jobs for unemployed Assamese youths. It was increasingly becoming apparent in his numerous pleas published in Dekā Asom. If there is an advertisement for job in a government department he would immediately place a demand for giving the job to an Assamese. In this context we may cite one telegram, Roy Chowdhury sent to Nehru appealing him “for good number of bonafide

44. Letter to Nehru dtd- 19-02-1953. (Appendix)
45. Ibid. (Appendix)
46. Bihali Rayat Sabha proceeding. (Appendix)
Assamese candidates in Indian foreign service correspondence with the government of India, with regard to representation of Assamese youth in the foreign service illustrates his concern for Assam, being aware of the economic, educational and administrative life of the state was dominated by an immigrant upwardly mobile Bengali community and the economic future of the mass of the people belonging to Assamese cultural identity getting imperiled by a regular exodus of people from across the border.

Hence Roy Chowdhury’s letter to Nehru dated 11-2-47 emphasized the need of adequate representation of Assamese youth in the Foreign Service. Tarlok Singh, private secretary to Pandit Nehru, immediately replied back to Roy Chowdhury expressing hope that “a number of highly qualified Assamese Youngman will apply” as per advertisement of the Federal Public Service Commission. This was followed by his telegram to Nehru dated 25-03-1947.

By and large ‘federal India’ during the period of 1947-67 was characterized by political homogeneity and in that phase of far reaching transformation Roy Chowdhury carried on sustained effort demanding adequate attention to the problems of Assam as well as North East India. Roy Chowdhury was always preoccupied in his thinking about Assam and here a remembrance by Sadananda Chaliha, a renowned historian can be cited. He used a literary expression ‘fine madness’ to describe Roy Chowdhury and he reminiscences some amazing encounter with Roy Chowdhury. In this context he referred to some comments about Roy Chowdhury by another great poet Raghunath Chowdhury. These comments lovingly narrated by Chaliha reveals a personality always worried about Assam and this worry sometimes transcending to a level of madness. In the final analysis this ‘fine madness’ of a great personality is to be realized to understand him and his relevance in contemporary societal context.

People need to get familiarized with another aspect of the political ideas put forward by Roy Chowdhury. During the last 6 decades the Indian state has addressed the task of coping with the tensions arising in different regions of the country accentuated by economic, political and constitutional issues. One such lingering issue is the Naga problem with one faction of extremist pursuing a secessionist agenda.

47. Telegram dtd- 25-03-1947. (Appendix)
Long back in 1965 Roy Chowdhury sent a letter to the then governor Assam proposing dual citizenship in India for the solution of the Naga problem.\(^{50}\) Government of India is engaged in a prolonged series of discussion with NSCN to resolve the complicated issue bearing serious political implication. Way back in 1965 government of India could have given a serious thought to Roy Chowdhury’s proposal. There is no evidence of the government of Assam thereafter considering his proposal except for an acknowledgement of the letter to Roy Chowdhury. Given the feeling of marginalization, alienation prevailing in the entire North East India, Roy Chowdhury’s proposal was worth considering if not implementing as it also implied a degree of provincial autonomy.

At the conclusion of this discourse reference may be made to an incident just a few days before his death. A deep sense of frustration and disillusionment is apparent in the writings of Roy Chowdhury in his later years for instance *Bedanar Ulka* is an expression of a sense of deprivation. Veteran journalist Satish Ch. Kakati narrates an incident of Roy Chowdhury getting perturbed by news sent by a West German News agency, Agene de Press International.\(^{51}\) That news contained the possibility of the creation of an independent sovereign Bengal comprising West Bengal and East Pakistan. It also carried a hint of including Assam in the proposed state since Nagas and the Mizos were engaged in secessionist movement against India. ‘Going through the news in the office of the Assam Tribune Roy Chowdhury got very much perturbed, as he was well aware of the political moves for inclusion of Assam in Pakistan in the years preceding to independence.’\(^{52}\) He was always apprehensive about the political future of Assam and towards the end of his life he was very much agitated. Satish Ch. Kakati mentioned that Roy Chowdhury was excessively worried about a perceived plan of greater Bengal. Perhaps that news item created an unbearable mental pressure for Roy Chowdhury and after ten days ‘Asom Kesori’ expired on 2\(^{nd}\) January, 1967.

Thus came to an end the poignant saga of a man full of unparallel devotion and dedication to the cause of Assam.

---

52. Ibid