CHAPTER III
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

It is quite evident that when the Great Ahoms were aggressively advancing over the upper valley of the river Brahmaputra and succeeded in establishing their stronghold, the south bank still remained under several smaller independent kingdoms of indigenous people. Amongst these, the kingdoms of Nellig Gova, Topakuchi, Mayang, Dhing, Tetelia, Rani, Dimoria and Beltola etc., were worth mentioning. Besides, a powerful Kachari kingdom existed and it extended throughout the south bank of the Brahmaputra, right from the river Dikhou to Kolong. The Dhansiri valley including north Cachar hills was included within its boundary. Since 13th century, the Ahom Kachari relation started to be strained specially during the reign of chu-tseo-pha (1268 - 1281 A.D.). The Ahom kingdom expanded up to the Namdang river pushing back the earlier boundary between the Ahoms and the Kacharies at Dikhou river. Similarly, another strong independent king was in Jaintia. King Rudra Singh adopted the policy to bring the Jaintia kingdom under Ahom protection.

The relation among the independent kingdoms was not friendly. To save themselves from the Jaintia king, the king of Dimoria and Kachari king made relation with Ahom king Pratap Singh by giving their daughter in 1627 A.D.¹

¹ 'Asom Buranji', edited by Bhuyan, Surya Kumar, page 58.
The Jagial Gohain and Rahial Baruah, the frontier officers of Ahoms, acted as supervising officers. Though the kingdoms of Gova, Nellie, Khola, and Mayang were independent but were weak and could not offer resistance to the Ahom army. The Ahom king swargadeo Siva Singh's great expedition was launched against the kingdom of Gova, Nellie, and Khola. Before expedition was launched, Dhanseng Konwar and Nagaina Konwar of Gova expressed their loyalty to the Ahom king and appealed to withdraw the army. Thus in the reign of Siva Singh, Gova, Nellie and Khola lost their independence and became tributaries.

The prominent historian E.A. Gait in his "A history of Assam" writes that in the ancient times the kingdom of Gova of Lalung origin was under the sovereignty of the Jaintia kings.

The Chronicles (buranjis) of Ahom indicate that 'Dimoria' was an ancient Lalung state in the South west of Nawgaon. It was more or less independent till the 16th century. Its royal house claimed that the Dimoria and the other Lalung chiefdoms, namely Gova, Barpujia, Khola, and Nellie, came under the Ahom and Jaintia kings.

Again Gait mentions that when Koch king Naranarayana annexed the Jaintia kingdom then the Lalung chief came under the control of Koch king. But in 1652, he...
Ahom king Jaidhwaj gave protection to the Lalung chief when he begged help from Jaintia Raja.²

Thus during the period of 1658 - 1824 there were conflicts among Koch, Kacharis, Jaintias and Ahoms and the Lalung chiefs of Gova, Nelli, Khala were harassed by the powerful kings.

In 1824, the Burmese had an invasion upon Manipur. The British political officer David Scott sent a letter to the Burmese forbidding them to enter Jaintia territory.

However the operations of the British army against Burmese had been crowded with success, and the treaty was signed on 24th Feb. 1826. Burma agreed to obtain from all interference in the affairs of the countries which now constitute the province of Assam.³

Most of the records of the Gova kingdom have been lost. We have stray references in the Ahom Buranjees. The official records of the British rule might throw much light on the history of the modern period. But the most unfortunate fact is that no research has been made to unearth these records.⁴

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2. 'History of Assam' by Gait, E.A. page 128 - 129.
3. 'History of Assam', by Gait, E.A. page - 274.
4. 'XII NEIHA Conference's Souvenir, Jagiroad College, Article by Gogoi, Lokeswar.
During the reign of Ahom kings, the king of Gova was ruling in this region. The kingdom covered a vast area comprising the Kolong and Kapilee valleys in the entire south west part of present Nawgaon district including the mauza - Raha, Phuloguri, Bebejia, Barapujia, Charaibahi, Dandua, Ghagua and Mayang etc. Now there is no authentic source of history of this Gova kingdom.

Mr. Gopal Ch. Das tries to prove that Jaintia and Gova were the independent kingdoms. Nelli, Khola and Shaheri were three small principalities under Jaintia king. There were twelve small kingdoms under the king of Gova. They were known 'Sato Raja' (Seven kings) and 'Paso Raja' ('five kings). The Sato Raja' were (i) Tetelia, (ii) Kamoji, (iii) Sukango (iv) Kalbari, (v) Baghara (vi) Ghagua, (vii) Kachari gaon. The 'Paso Raja' were (i) Topakiri, (ii) Barapujia, (iii) Mikir Gaon, (iv) Phuloguri, (v) Khaigarah.

Mr. Bali Ram Das, a retired teacher and ex-M.L.A. has written in the souvenir 'Jagirroador Aitiha' that in the middle of the 16th century when the Ahom rule prevailed in the other parts of Nawgaon district, the Gova kingdom established on the bank of the river presently known as killing, and it was ruled by Lalung king.

In the Book 'A century of tribal politics in

5. 'Asomor Janajati', edited by Bhattacharjee, P. C. and Article by Das, Gopal Chandra.
North East India', 1976, by V. Vankata Rao records the fate of the famous ancient Tiwa Gova kingdom. He had mentioned that this kingdom was the most powerful Tiwa kingdom established 'Melewa' clan. This Gova kingdom was an independent kingdom.

In 1924 A.D. the Britishers took Kaliabar and ultimately all parts of the Nawgaon district. But Gova was ruled independently by the Lalung king.

Again Dr. Rao has mentioned that during the reign of "Chuttar Sing" Raja, the kingdom was charged of human sacrifices by the Lalung. The oral tradition records that four British officers and 150 followers were captured when they entered the territory of Gova kingdom and killed thinking that they were coming to subdue the kingdom. This incident three British officers were sacrificed to the God 'Palakhongor' while one escaped to inform the British high command posted at Gauhati. After a year of this incident the Gova and the other tributories and the Jaintia kingdom were annexed to the British empire in 1935 A.D.

In 1832, the Raja of Gova in the west Nawgaon one of the petty chieftains dependent on Jaintia acted under the orders of his sujertain, seized four British, three of whom were afterwards immolated at the shrine of the 'Goddess Kali'. The fourth escaped and gave information to the
occurrence. At this juncture 'Raja Ram Singh' died and was succeeded by his nephew - 'Rajendra Singh'. For two years the govt. endeavoured to induce him to give up the perpetrator of the outrage, and reminded him of the consequences of refusal and of the solemn warning which had been on previous occasions when similar attempts had been made on the lives of the British subjects in the district of sylhet. The 'Young Raja' however was abdurate, and when he failed to comply with, it was decided to disposses him of his territory in the plains.

On the 15th March, 1835, captain Lister with two companies of the sylhet light infantry, took formal possession of Jaintiapur and issued a proclamation announcing the annexation of Jantia paraganas to British Territory and a few weeks later Gova itself.  

Although the Assam was annexed by the British as a result of the 'Yandabu Treaty' on 24th Feb. 1826, the Lalung king of Gova was ruling up to 1835. The last Lalung king was 'Raisingh' (mentioned as Rajendra Singh by E.A. Gait), whom then chief commissioner of Assam Mr. Pullar appointed as the Mauzadar of Gova.

Thus the Lalung kingdom came under direct British control in 1835. But the Lalung kind and the people

of Gova, Nellis Khala, Raha, Barapujia did not accept the British administration. They did not follow the British order. They wanted freedom. So, they resisted and created troubles to the British. In that time Gova kingdom was divided into two parts - hills and plains. The hills portion was added with Jaintia hills and plains portion added with Nawgaon district. During that time 'Mr. Jenkins' was the British officer of Gauhati and Captain 'White' was also one of the British officer under 'Jenkins'.

Captain White announced that the British government was prepared to recognise the chief on condition of his agreeing to enter into treaty under which he would be required to pay a higher tribute.\(^8\)

The teacher and ex-M.L.A. Mr. Bali Ram Das of Jagiroad who came to know from his grand father, says that there is no authentic history of Gova Lalung dynasty. Their written history is eaten up by White ants. (It was written in sasipat). He says that from 1835-36 the British officer of Gauhati Mr. Fuller was present in I.B. of P.W.D. at Na-khola (Presently I.B. Jagiroad) which was made of straw, invited 'Raja Raisingh' to the I.B. to discuss something about the Lalung kingdom 'Gova'. Raja Raisingh came on 'Dola' carried by four men with some security personnels. He was so fat that he could not sit on the chair. Then the British officer ordered to break both the arms of the chair. Then only Raja

\(^8\) 'Political History of Assam', Vol. 1, edited by Barpujary, H.K. and Bhuyan, A.C. Page - 43.
Raisingh could sit. He was well behaved by the British officer and after taking launch, Mr. Fuller offered the 'Gova' Mauza to Raja Raisingh for the revenue collection. But Raja Raising refused that offer as he was illiterate. But Mr. Fuller did not agree and handed over the 'Gova' Mauza to Raja Raisingh.

As he was illiterate, he collected the revenue with the help of his brother-in-law Dhani Ram Bordoloi (Lalung). After the death of Raja Raisingh Dhani Ram himself became Mauzadar. But after 1885, Dhani Ram Bordoloi joined Indian National Congress, and participated in National Movement. Then the British took over his Mouza and transferred to a non-Lalung and it is still in the hand of a non-Lalung.

Like Gova, the other Mauza - Phuloguri, Bebejia, Chariabahi, Dandua, Ghagua and Mayang were directly controlled by the British and they collected the revenue. At present Ghagua and Pakaria Mauzas are in the hands of tribals and others in the hands of non-tribals. After independence Mayang Mauza was divided into three Mauzas (as it was before) manaha, Mayang and Pakaria.

Though the Lalungs were controlled by the British, they were against the British imperialism, and were preparing for revolution against British government. They got the chance in 1861, when the British government banned the
local poppy cultivation and imposed the taxes on betel - nut and leaf (pan) in entire Nawgaon district.

PHULOGURI DHAWA :

In 1860 the British government banned poppy cultivation. Such a step effected most of the peasant economy in 'Nawgaon'. It was the largest opium producing district of Assam. In the Jaintia hills, peasant had already fought with arms against unfair taxes. At this juncture, the Bengal government called upon its officers in Assam to report on the feasibility of a tax on betel - nut and pan cultivation. This led to agitation in Nawgaon mainly in phuloguri area inhabited by the tribal (Lalung) people.

In Sept. 1861, some 1500 peasants marched to the district town. They demonstrated peacefully before the Magistrate to protest against the act of prohibiting poppy cultivation. It was prayed that no taxes be levied on the betel - nut and pan cultivation. The district Magistrate did not allow them to enter his office and arrested them for marching and making noise within the court compound.

A Raij mel (Peoples Assembly) was there upon held at phuloguri in October, 1861. The Assembly was scheduled
to be in session for five days to ensure participation even from distant villages. Approximately one thousand people assembled by 15th October. Five to six hundred people in that Assembly were armed with 'lathis'. A police party that had come to disperse it on that day, was driven out, save one taken in to custody by the people. By Oct. 17th three to four thousand people assembled there. The police made an attempt to break up the Assembly and arrested some of its leaders. But all of them having been forcibly rescued by the people, the police left the spot. Next day, an European officer Lieutenant Singer, came with a police party and met the leading members of the Assembly. They all reiterated through a spokesman named Jati Kalita, their complaints about the ban on opium cultivation and their apprehensions about the income and head taxes. Singer ordered them to disperse and to seize their lathis. He got himself inadvertently killed in the scuffle. The police force accompanying him fled in panic. Singer's body was thrown in to the river Kalong.

The news of Singer's death accompanied by runners of an intended attack on his reached Nawgaon the same evening. The panicky district Magistrate entrenched himself in the treasury and sent a small armed force to the trouble spot. Their firing on the cursed led to several death. By 23rd all quit again with the arrival of fresh Military forces.
Tezpur and Gauhati, Narshing Lalung and eight others, mostly tribals were punished with long term imprisonment. This episode of the people's heroic resistance to the increasing tax burden and Bureaucratic middleness is still very much alive in folk memory as the "Phuloguri Dhawa".\(^9\)

Regarding this 'Phuloguri Dhawa', historian H.K. Barpujari has mentioned in "A political history of Assam".

In 1860 the government of India introduced income tax to meet their increasing expenditure. Excise duties were levied at the sadar stations in Kamrup, Barpang and Nawgaon but not extended to the tribal areas on the ground that establishment required for the purpose would swallow all the profit.

To make them dependent entirely on government opium, cultivation of poppy was totally banned in 1861. Already hard hit by the increase of taxation on land, the prohibitory order on opium cultivation shattered the economic economy of the tribal areas where per-capita consumption of opium was stated to the highest in the province. About this time the introduction of the license tax confirmed the power of

of the villagers particularly of the tribals at Phuloguri, seven miles from Nawgaon, that before long their pan and betel-nut would be subjected to taxation.¹⁰

In that incident of 'Phuloguri Dhawa' of 1860, some of the policemen were also beaten up by the ryots. Ryots also beaten by police and assaulted were Kiti Lalung, Thomba Lalung, Dhalarai Lalung, Bhogbar Lalung, Dodhi Lalung, Kita Lalung, Jabo Lalung and Katia Lalung on 18th October.¹¹

This was treated as sweeping conclusions by Sir Cecil Beadon, the Lieutenant governor of Bengal who considered, the meeting at Phuloguri leading to be serious murder to be due entirely to local causes. He was convinced that if the ryots had been properly tackled by the Deputy Commissioner, by personally meeting them and attending to their grievances, they would have in all probability peacefully dispersed and accepted the unavoidable financial measures of the government .......in a spirit of loyal...... acquiescence and submission to authority.........". His deputation of the police and subsequently of an experienced young officer with so small a force and without clear instruction to him not to resort to coercive measures was an act of great imprudence.


¹¹ 'NEIHA, proceeding on 10th session, Article by Katia, R.C., page - 317.
conclusion, the Lieutenant governor was constrained to remark.

"That the life of a young British officer has sacrificed and that a number of ignorant and misguided people have been condemned, some to death and others to long period imprisonment, justly indeed, that under circumstances which can't fail to make them the object of sympathy to their fellow villagers and of compassion to all". There is hardly any doubt that the Lalung and the Kacharis of Nawgaon being hard hit by the prohibitory measures of the government were vanguard.12

On 6th Feb. 1874, Assam constituted into a chief commissioner's province. Then all the powers of local government vested to the chief commissioner. The newly constituted chief commissionership of Assam was on the other hand considered to be too small from the administrative and economic point of view.13

By the resolution of the govt. of India dated 12th May and 18th December 1874, the new administration was provided with a separate staff of Deputy and Assistant Commissioner and other officers required to carry out the revenue and judicial business of the country. The formation of

the chief commissionership led to the improvement of the province and for that necessary reforms were introduced for the efficient administration. The British government tried to control peacefully all the Tribal villages.

During the period of 1874 - 1905, Assam had no legislature of its own, and the people there had no chance to participating in legislative activity of any kind. The Chief Commissioner was no doubt a powerful autocrat. 14

In 1885, when Indian National Congress was formed, most of the Lalung people of Nawgaon district joined in the Indian National Congress, fight against the British imperialism. For that cause, Dhani Ram Bordoloi who was then Mauzadar of Gova was suspended and brought the Mauza under British control.

CONVERSION PERIOD :

(a) Language and culture :- During the years from 1881 to 1960, the Lalung population decreased because the Lalung people were converted into Koch community by 'Phuloguri Dhawa' and the influence of non tribals and their religion, the Lalung people began to get converted and changed their dialect. The entire Lalungs of Monaha Mauza and the

parts of other tribal areas also got converted into Koch community. The Lalung living in the plains have been highly influenced by the Assamese culture which was a Hindu variant. The language and culture of the Lalungs were being replaced by those of the stronger Assamese community. The result is the loss of their identity to a great extent.

(b) Influence of religion: - In course of time the plains Lalungs accepted vaisnavism and the hills Lalungs christianity. The acceptance of vaisnavism enabled the plains Lalungs to raise their social status and they claimed to have belonged to the Koch community. The process of conversion was being continued for several decades. Thus the majority of the Lalungs in the plains lost their identity and they identified themselves with the Assamese.

The hills Lalungs were made to accept christianity. It has important impact of their customs, culture and traditions.

"In the period of 4th to 5 decades of the 20th century, there had been a great deal of conversion of the Lalungs to Hinduism for their massive trend of inferiority feeling to the Hindus. They felt proud in calling themselves as 'Na - Koch' after their conversion into Hinduism. When attainment of National Independence this paused a major trend."
of detribalisation of the Lalungs (Tiwas).\textsuperscript{15}

The Hindu converted Lalungs with the loss of tribal status have now failed to enjoy constitutional benefits given under 6th Schedule. They are now rethinking restoring their tribal status to build up their tribal solidarity and try to get as much political and economic benefits as possible. As a result the conversion process has virtually stopped and the reverse process of identifying with their tribal group has started.

The conversion significantly decreased the Lalung population. The converted Lalung naturally liked to declare themselves as belonging to the Assamese community. In the current situation of revival of tribalism the converted would not like to be enumerated as the Assamese.

\textbf{ROLE OF THE LALUNG PEOPLE IN THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT:}

After the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885, Assam had played a significant role in the struggle for freedom. The tribal people including the Lalungs did not have their own organisation. They were unable to organise themselves under a single banner. The 'Devide and Rule' policy of the British government kept them separate from each other. The British government could keep some tribals.

* 'The Lalung' (Tiwa) by Baruah, Anil Kumar, page - 47.
leader in their hand. They did not get any chance to organise themselves. After 1919 when communal award was introduced, several tribal leaders tried to organise their people, to fight for the preservation of these identities.

When the second round table conference held in 1931 failed in the questions of constitutional setting and representation of minorities, in 1932, the provincial government of Assam in its additional explanatory memorandum submitted to the government of India incorporated the allocation of seats to different backward plains tribes (Koches, Miris, Lalungs and other). 16

ASSAM PLAINS TRIBAL LEAGUE:

In 1933, the Tribal League, and in 1936 Bane Kabang was formed which made some demand before the British. The Lalungs joined Tribal League. As a result, for the tribesmen of Assam, five seats in Assam legislative Assembly were reserved, and both hills and plains tribes were recognised as schedule Tribes.

The various tribal committees of Assam like the Ahoms felt unhappy with the role of National political parties. Not only politically but socially also, they felt...

exploited and suppressed. The existing stratification in the Hindu society was the root cause of such a feeling.¹⁷

This feeling of deprivation among these communities thus fostered the growth of a number of local tribal organisations. But during the thirtees all the plains tribals merged with one, named "All Assam Plains Tribal League". under the leadership of Bhimbar Deuri. It was the common platform of all the plains tribes. They determined to stand for their need and aspirations. Their basic aim was to fight for the redressed of the socio-economic and educational problems of the tribals. They felt that the entire socio-economy and culture were hampered by the non-tribal and influence of immigrants. So, they demanded the separate electorate for the tribals.

"This understanding continued even after the resignation of the coalition Ministry. The Tribal League remained hostile to Md. Sadulla for his immigration policy which was termed as a "Policy of invitation" to landless people from beyond the boarders to Assam".¹⁸

The Assam Congress wanted to support the Tribal League, if they desired to help the formation of the

¹⁷. 'Political history of Assam', Vol. 3, edited by Bhuvan, A.C., Page - 311.

government. As the tribals were the minority section of Assam, so, on 10th March 1940, at Shillong, the tribal league decided to support Saadulla cabinet. When Saadulla suggested Hindu tribals to get enumerated as tribals in the forthcoming census of 1941, the tribal league was effected.

Jogendra Nath Hazarika, the editor of tribal league mouthpiece 'Nayak' cautioned his people not to fall into the trap laid by Saadulla and called upon all the tribals to declare 'Assamese' as their major language and to enlist themselves as Hindu during the forthcoming census operation. But Bhimbar Deuri considered the opposition to the demand for enumeration of the tribal people of Assam as "Tribal" in the census as a conspiracy hatched by the caste Hindu.

ROLE IN THE QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT:

Like other parts of India, the people of Nawgaon district (mostly lalung inhabited area of Raha, Bebiana, Barapujia, Kampur and Jamunamukh) joined in 'Quit India Movement'. They were against the British from the very beginning. So, they took part in some extremist activities. The law and order situation of Nawgaon district was deteriorating. The chief secretary to the Govt. of Assam had occasion to assess the situation by 21 August 1942. He noted how Nawgaon and perhaps Darrang were more troublesome than other districts.
To maintain peace, two platoons of Assam Rifles had to be sent to Nawgaon. By the end of August the chief secretary received a report to the effect that there was obviously an atmosphere of rebellion around Nawgaon and from all accounts also in the area around Kampur and Jamunamukh. Nawgaon was considered as the political laboratory of Assam in the year 1942 suspecting that a band of people were out of sabotage movement of traffic on the 'Trunk Road' in the western part of Nawgaon district. The police and the military instituted a reign of terror in places like Barapujia, Bebejia and Barhampur. Till Sept. 1942 five freedom fighter sacrificed their lives - Kalia Koch (Lalung), Hemoram Bora, Hemaram Patar, Gunaviram Borolo (both lalung) and Tilak Deka (converted to Koch). 19

Out of them except Hemoram Bora, all four were Lalung people. According to Lalungs, in that movement Rupsing Lalung and Hebera Lalung were also killed by the British.

In the 'Political history of Assam' described that 'as the situation of Nawgaon was fast deteriorating the trend of events verged on "a mass rebellion" the authorities requisitioned the help of armed forces to guard the railway line and "Trunk Road" in particular. Two platoons of Assam Rifles were engaged to guard the Chaparmukh and Silghat line.

19. 'A seminar paper', on Quit India Movement, at Jagiroad College, 1994, presented by Dutta, Anuradha, Gauhati University, Deptt. PSC.
On 25th August, the people of Kampur took out processions defying prohibitory orders. A crowd there attacked and damaged the local post office, the circle office and railway station. The police O.C. and the railway officials were forced to wear 'Gandhi Caps' and shout 'Bande Mataram'. The police constable was released on the next day at 4 a.m. Another crowd damaged the railway station and set fire to railway shade and railway staff quarters at Phuloguri, a post office at Jajari, and inspection Bunglow at Kathiatoli, circle office at Raha, several excise shops and some cattle pounds and school building at puranigudam, Bebejia and Kailabar. On 25/26th August's night a group of people burnt a bridge at Bebejia. Same day in the morning the police patrol party found another group of people engaged in digging one side of the approach road of 'Dighaliali Bridge' at Jamunamukh balahugarth. The patrol party instantly fired at them and killing Hemoram Patar and Gunaviram Bordoloi (both lalung) and injuring three others.

The police conducted operation in Raha, Bebejia and Barpujia. On 28th August, Tilak Deka who was volunteered 'Santi Sena' was shot dead and then Kalai Koch (both lalung) was shot dead. On August/Sept. all most all the Lalung people of Raha, Bebejia, Barapujia, Jamunamukh, Kathiatoli and Jamu of Nawgaon district actively participated in the 'Quit India'
movement of 1942. Several Lalung people were arrested and tortured by the police. On the other hand both the tribal and non-tribal opposed the Saadulla's immigration policy and demanded for evicting all encroacher from the reserves for the protection of socio-economic, cultural and political rights. When Mr. Saadulla supported the cabinet mission's proposal, the Tribal League denounced the demand for Pakistan and expressed their willingness to participate in the freedom struggle. Then the relation between Saadulla and Tribal League was deteriorated and the Tribal league withdraw their support from Saadulla.

Gopinath Bordoloi took the advantage of the situation and proposed joint electorate with reservation of seats for the tribals and initiated discussion with the Tribal League. His labour bore fruits when Rup Nath Brahm the president, the Satish Chandra Basumatary, the general Secretary of the Tribal League accepted the Congress offer. Following the understanding, the Bhimbar Deuri and Rup Nath Brahm joined the Congress parliamentary party in July 1946 and Rupnath was later inducted in to the Bordoloi's cabinet, Sept. '46 - 14th August 1947.20

All the events and activities are hidden in the past history, because of assimilating with the caste Hindu.

Assamese people. They have lost their socio-culture. But with the modern education they becoming conscious to revive their socio-culture by getting the political power.

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