CHAPTER - V
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1) Rural Development

Bordoloi was an ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi and thus had a firm belief in the latter's constructive work programme. In fact he was so influenced by Gandhi's ideals that at times he thought of giving up parliamentary politics in order to devote himself to constructive work. In February, 1946, Bordoloi with a team of workers from the province, had gone to Wardha to meet Gandhi and had a detailed discussion about such a programme. There were discussions centering around preparing a scheme of work in Assam which included Khadi, village industries, agriculture and basic education. The team bought all the available literature on the subject and extensively studied the work going on in Gandhi's Ashram. Bordoloi also decided to depute two women workers for intensive training there. He realised that the experts at Wardha laid more stress on imbibing the philosophy of the "whole endeavourer of establishing self independent units of villages under Gandhi's leadership."2

Mahatma Gandhi had reminded Bordoloi and his colleagues that, "the programme of constructive work is more than law and parliamentary work. Its compilation means complete swaraj won by truth and non violence ...."3 One of the most important constructive works undertaken by Bordoloi's Government was rural reconstruction of the Province. His basic idea about welfare state centered round the villages since 96 percent of the total population lived in the rural areas and this belief was further strengthened by Gandhian ideals of village reconstruction. Bordoloi's commitment to Gandhi's call of rural reconstruction and promotion of Khadi and village industries was

1. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya, Builders of Modern India, New Delhi, 1986, Pg 73
2. ibid
3. ibid
reflected in the Gauhati session of the Indian National Congress in 1926 where he, as the Additional General Secretary of the Reception Committee, was given the responsibility of constructing the *pandals*, the materials of which were made of *Khadi*. Like Gandhi, Bordoloi believed that the real strength of India lay in her villages. He realised that the development of select belts and blocks could not bring social and economic progress of the State. He wanted that not only the tribal people but also the entire rural society must be inspired to develop their social and political ideas.

He was a devoted follower of Gandhi's decentralized administrative system which he wanted to implement in Assam. But on June 6, 1947, at the meeting of the Union Constitution Committee, the Chairman Jawaharlal Nehru stated that the tentative decisions of the members of his Committee were to make India a federation with a strong centre with residuary powers. The next day a joint meeting of the Union Constitution Committee and the Provincial Constitution Committee was held and the earlier conclusion of the Union Committee to make India a Federation was accepted. Bordoloi, along with his colleagues were totally frustrated as Nehru and his followers had made India a Centralized state without taking into account Gandhi's ideas of decentralisation. As Chief Minister he began the task of decentralising the power of the State. Bordoloi thought that if there was decentralization of administrative power in both the tribal and non-tribal villages, then the rural people would get the taste of democracy and would take the initiative for their development.

Keeping in mind the need to first train the rural people for welfare work for development, Bordoloi's Government undertook the task of establishing Rural Welfare Training Centres with the object of training large numbers of rural welfare workers to cater to the requirements of the rural masses. These training centres would be the nucleas around which would grow a net-work of rural welfare centres which the Government proposed to increase gradually. With the object of raising the standard of

5. ibid
7. ibid

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living of villagers and to help them enter upon a rightful inheritance of a life of contentment and comparative freedom from want, a Five Year Plan for rural development, involving an expenditure of 6 crores of rupees was inaugurated on 2 October, 1947, to celebrate the 79th Birthday of Mahatma Gandhi with the following objectives:

1. Establishment of Rural Development Centres.
2. Establishment of Model Villages.
4. Establishment of a workshop for the manufacture of and research in, cottage industries, tools and implements.
5. Subsidising of village self-help enterprises.
6. Fairs and Exhibitions of local handicrafts and products of different kinds and publicity and propaganda.
7. Establishment of training institute to train up rural development workers.

The plan further contemplated the establishment of 720 rural development centers, at the rate of 142 centres per year, all over the Province. Besides, it was proposed to establish not less than 78 ideal or model villages in the course of five years on scientific lines and on Government waste land, preferably through the agency of Co-operative Societies, formed by groups of families. It was also proposed to assist landless people and people with uneconomic holdings to shift themselves to available waste land and settle there as agriculturists and earn them living. The Government would help these Societies with long term loans and grants with the aid of which the Societies would try to develop model villages with proper housing and water supply arrangement, efficient medical service and better communication system provision for improvement of livestock and development of cottage industries and education. Self-sufficiency and self-help would be the guiding principle on the basis of which these ideals or model villages would be recognized. The Government expected funds

9. ibid
necessary for these developments would be forthcoming from the Central Postwar Development Fund.

A Rural Development Department was created. The Departments of Industries, Co-operative Societies, Sericulture and Weaving were placed in charge of a single Secretary and Director for effective co-ordination, control, supervision and direction. On the basis of the Five Year Plan for Rural Development, Bordoloi tabled the *Asom Gaon Panchayat Bill* on March 11, 1948 in the Assam Legislative Assembly. He observed that the scheme envisaged in the Bill, if worked properly, would go a long way in at least removing the evils of present rural life and in building up a fabric of society in which self-reliance, help and a desire to go forward will be the resultant factors. He stated:

"All the Members of the House are aware of the miserable plight in which the majority of the villages live. Theirs is a very hard existence, with anxiety about food supply and insufficient and unbalanced diet. Chronic indebtedness, disease and pestilence because of unhygienic condition and villagers mass illiteracy which make them a prey to unscrupulous middle man extravagant customs, all these are the lot of our villagers ...........

Sir, it has always been the aim and intension of this Government to do something of a constructive nature for the upliftment of the villagers life. Government have noticed that in spite of their best efforts to secure some objects directly through work of their rural officers they have not been able to secure that result which such efforts actually deserved."¹⁰

The same year the Bill became an Act, *The Assam Rural Panchayat Act, 1948* and received the assent of the Governor General on 23 November, 1948.¹¹ The objective of the Act was to establish and develop Local Self Government in the rural areas of the

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¹⁰. ASA, G. Bordoloi, ALA Proceedings, 11 March, 1948

¹¹. ASA, Orders by the Governor, Legislative Dept. Notification, 15 December, 1948; Assam Gazette 1948, Vol. V
Province, to make better provision for rural administrative reconstruction and to develop self sufficient autonomous units. Through these measures, the Government hoped to change the entire basis of the State's alarming economy. Bordoloi fully appreciated the value of rural industrialization in the context of the needs of economic growth in Assam and the tradition of cottage and village industry amongst the people. So his government took the initiative in developing cottage industries like sericulture, village craft, spinning, weaving, bee keeping, soap making, umbrella making, and establishing the co-operative credit movement which would help to build up self sufficient village units. He believed that in the long run this would bring more revenue which could be utilized for further development of other areas, gradually extending to the entire rural areas of the province through the efforts of the Village Panchayats. The entire rural area of the state was divided into 742 Gaon Panchayats comprising about 10,000 people. There would be one village development organization in each Panchayat to be headed by a Secretary. There would be one court to settle minor issues.

The Government appointed Dévełopment Officers who were instructed to give full attention to the rural development schemes. By March 1949 they submitted proposals for the establishment of 15 Rural Panchayats. A Rural Polytechnic was opened from August 1948 at Jayasagar, where officers of the department and others received training.

The Ministry also tried to establish an agricultural model village to absorb the educated unemployed of the rural areas. Many schemes for providing better marketing facilities to the agriculturist, installation of cold storage and for introducing improved methods of cultivation had been taken up. There were schemes for improvement of rural water supply, communication and sanitation. But unfortunately, because of financial problems the Government could neither carry out the Rural Development Schemes nor

12. ibid
13. ASA, Bishnuram Medhi, ALA, 10 March, 1949, p. 13
14. Key Statement and Details of Individual Schemes for 1948-52, Secretariat Administration, Record & Library Department, Assam Secretariat (C), p. 30
15. ibid
ensure the proper functioning of the *Gaon Panchayats*. The *Gaon Panchayat* Bill put forward by Bordoloi was the first bill based on Gandhi’s ideals to be tabled in Assam Legislative Assembly. Unfortunately very few people know this.

The total stoppage of Post War Development grants compelled the Government to curtail many schemes of Rural Development Department and slowed down others in spite of the Government’s desire to continue and expand the benefits to the rural areas.\(^{16}\) The government decided to retain the existing 15 Rural *Panchayats* of the Missamari Co-operative Colony and also to maintain the Jaysagar Rural Polytechnic.\(^{17}\) Bordoloi suffered great mental agony when his dreams of rural and tribal development projects could not be completed because of the sudden stoppage of Post War Development Grants.

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16. ASA, B. Medhi, Budget Speech, 13 March 1950, ALA Proceedings, p. 57
17. ibid
2) Co-operative and Banking

During the period 1943-1944 when Assam was reeling under the brunt of the Great War there was scarcity of many essential commodities like rice, flour, yarn, cloth, sugar, salt, kerosene etc. Trade had become very difficult during this period because of transport bottleneck and procurement difficulties. During this period of crisis, the Government encouraged the formation of Co-operative societies to distribute essential commodities to the public which gave rise to the formation of several consumer stores all over the state within a year. Since 1947 many of the consumer societies had to face a hard time. Because of decontrol many of the consumer stores had to face competition from private traders.

Gopinath Bordoloi could understand the causes of existing economic condition in Assam and with his ideals of reconstruction felt a new economic order must be brought into existence in the State, where any kind of exploitation would not be possible. He believed that economic exploitation of the common man could be ended through the Co-operative movement.

"If there is one method through which we can meet by action this propaganda of economic exploitation, it is the Co-operative Movement. It would bring down and regulate such profit motives as lead to basic evil. It would also bring about a unity in society of people with various outlook. Then alone could we combat the evil elements which are out to root out the society."

So in 1948 his Government formulated a new policy for the re-organization of the Co-operative movement. The re-organization was achieved by the enactment of bye-laws of the new societies, concentration on multi purpose trading co-operatives and the control of the movement from above.

Though all the major provinces of India had passed Provincial Acts covering Co-operation, Assam remained without any Act of her own. So on 23 March, 1949 the

18. ASA, Gopinath Bardoloi, 15 September, 1949 ALA Debates, p. 855
19. ASA, P. C. Goswami, opp. cit., p.136
Assam Co-operative Societies Bill was introduced in the Assam Legislative Assembly to facilitate the formation and working of Co-operative Societies and to consolidate and amend the law relating to Co-operative Societies in the Province of Assam. Some of the salient features of the Bill which sought to re-organize the Co-operative movement in Assam were:

1. Closer and better supervision over the affairs of the Co-operative Societies by enactment of uniform bye-laws.

2. To wipe out rural indebtedness. The Trading Co-operatives which had been formed throughout the province, would advance short term credit to cultivators on condition that they market their crops through the Trading Co-operatives.

3. Made provision for Government authority above the General Assembly of a Society because close Governmental supervision and control would be necessary for the Co-operatives to be guided on sound lines.

4. The Bill also sought to restrict the indiscriminate issue of loans by Co-operative Societies to members.

5. The net profit of a society was to be distributed by way of patronage dividend. It was also proposed to provide for advance patronage dividend to be given as a means of encouraging members of certain types of societies such as collective farms.

(The Bill was published in the official Gazette of 23rd March 1949)

The Government in carrying out its policy of re-organization made provisions for a Primary Trading Co-operative in each Panchayat area. Several such societies would be federated by forming central trading co-operatives.

20. ASA, Assam Gazette, Part - V, 23 March, 1949
21. ASA, Bimala Prasad Chaliha (Parliamentary Secretary) 31 March, 1949, ALA Debates, p. 777-779
22. P. C. Goswami, op. cit., p. 136
The main functions of Primary trading co-operative were:

(a) to deal in commodities required by the members, (b) to facilitate trade by providing sale and purchase centers, (c) to export the surplus production of members, (d) to provide banking facilities to members, and (e) to provide insurance facilities to members.23

Bordoloi was concerned about ways to improve the condition of the rural masses and he was confident that the 'Co-operative Trading Societies' which were formed at his initiative in 1949 would go a long way in helping the peasants. Through the distribution of yarn for weaving, the villagers were given opportunity to be self dependent under the guidance of the co-operative societies and the Apex Bank was founded to provide money for those societies.24

These multipurpose trading societies were intended to function as village banks and would have links with the Assam Co-operative Apex Bank. Co-operative societies under the guidance of Bordoloi's Government made considerable progress:25

'(a) Progress made during 1948-49 - (i) Eight hundred Trading Co-operative and 18 Central Trading Co-operatives, the Assam Co-operative Apex Bank Limited, the Co-operative Cottage Industries Association Limited, the Fisheries Co-operative Societies, the Assam Co-operative College and two Co-operative Marketing Centres were started. New bye-laws were framed and printed for all these Co-operatives and a handbook giving forms and instructions on the running of Co-operatives was also composed and published.

(ii) A propaganda section had been created in order to instruct the public in general on the value of the Co-operative Movement and the principles of co-operation. This section issued a number of attractive pamphlets, which were widely distributed and the Propaganda Officer toured the Province holding meetings on the subject. This

24. M. Sharma, op. cit, p. 83
25. Key Statement and Details of Individual Schemes for 1948-52, Secretariat Administration, Record & Library Department, Assam Secretariat (C)
section also organized a Co-operative Week in Assam from the 6 November, 1948 which inaugurated the formation of a large number of Trading Co-operatives.

(iii) In order to introduce the Co-operative Movement in the Hill areas, an extra Hill Division was created under an Assistant Registrar of Co-operative Societies with the hope that the movement would be enthusiastically received by the Hill people.

(b). Progress in 1949-50 - By March 1949, 110 Trading Co-operatives, 5 Fishery Co-operatives, The Assam Service Co-operative Association, The Assam Railway Employees Co-operative Association had been set up and had started functioning. 54 students had completed their training course in the Assam Co-operative College and had been employed as officers of the Co-operative Department. 20 training centers for the training of office-bearers of Co-operative Societies had been organized. For this purpose the staff of the Co-operative College had been engaged. The Assam Co-operative Societies Bill was drafted and introduced in the last session of the Assembly and it was under the consideration of a Select Committee appointed by the Legislature.

It was proposed to organize a large number of Industrial Co-operatives, Agricultural Farming Co-operatives, one Provincial Co-operative Wholesale Society and one Provincial Co-operative Insurance Society. During the year it was expected to train 54 students in the Assam Co-operative College. Inspite of the dark financial picture of the province, the Government had not thought it desirable to effect much retrenchment in this Department. As soon as the Government of India announced their intention of re-imposition of control on textile, the State Government decided to re-organize the Co-operative societies in proper line for distribution of cloth and yarn procured by Government through the Trading Co-operatives. The principle of patronage divided was introduced and a new Act was passed and new by-laws were framed to guide the activities of the Co-operative movement and to give it the right impetus. As a result of this drive to organize the Co-operative movement, about one thousand new trading Co-operative societies with a total membership of $3\frac{1}{2}$ lakhs in addition to the existing 1500 Co-operative consumers societies with about $1\frac{1}{2}$ lakhs of membership were
formed and registered throughout the state including the Hills. But unfortunately just at the time the Co-operative Movement was gaining the hold in the mind of the people, inspite of the competition and opposition of individual traders, it received a setback with the relaxation of control and sudden reduction of prices of cloth and yarn by the Government of India.

Inspite of this setback, Bordoloi’s Government continued to make efforts to develop the Co-operative societies. For this purpose it was planned to train forty students and conduct regular Refresher courses for the Departmental staff and office bearers of Co-operative Societies.

27. ibid
3) Development of Transport

Gopinath Bordoloi, who worked tirelessly for the development and modernization of Assam, realized that no scheme of development could be complete unless considerable extension and improvement were made in the sphere of communications. The spread of education, the progress of trade and commerce, industrialization, all depend to a large extent on facilities of communication. Realising that a network of roads was essential to create a link between the urban and rural areas, Bordoloi's Government gave special consideration for improvement of rural roads. After assuming office in 1946, Bordoloi appointed a Committee of Enquiry to report on the past history of Road Transport in Assam as well as the future prospects and plans.

"Assam has in the past lacked good external and internal communication. Good communication are the handmaid of industrial, forest and even agricultural development; and such development can only come about if we have good communications by rail, by road and by air ..."28

The Public Works Department of Assam had been given the responsibility of dealing with National Highways, Provincial Roads and Village Roads of the Province so as to connect them with the main roads and important business centres for the development of rural areas.

The road construction work of this period was taken up under the Post-War Development Programmes. The five year Post War Programme envisaged an increase of 319.05 miles of District Roads and 1857.56 miles of village Roads in the Plains Districts and 38 miles of District Roads and 178.5 miles of village roads in the Hills.29 The Central Government undertook the entire charge for maintenance and improvement of almost all Trunk Roads described as National Highways.30

28. ASA, Address by the Governor ALA, 5 November 1947, Assam Gazette 1947, Part – VI
29. ASA, Bishnuram Medhi, Budget Speech, 10 March 1947, ALA Proceedings, Assam Gazette Part-V, p. 63-64
30. ibid.
As a result of partition of India, the Government was confronted with many difficulties specially those regarding communication. At the time of independence, Assam had only 2,610 miles of motorable roads including the national highways.\(^{31}\) Due to the transport bottleneck, there had been a scarcity of many essential commodities. Direct Road and Rail communication between Assam which formed the North Eastern Frontier, and the rest of the Indian Union was disrupted because of the division of India into two Dominions. After the separation of Sylhet district from Assam, the road communication through the Indian territory between the Surma Valley and the rest of Assam was cut off. A jeepable road was constructed from Shillong to Silchar via Jowai and Haflong.

In his Budget Speech, Bishnuram Medhi observed:

"The Government of India decided to improve and maintain important selected airfields to enable regular commercial flying services not only to connect Assam with the rest of India but also to connect the important town and places within the provinces. This government have decided to establish a Flying Club at Gauhati and have placed an order for the necessary planes for training, with a view to encouraging the young men of Assam to become air–minded. A comprehensive road programme, both in the plains and in the hills, has been put into operation to open up undeveloped tracts and also to connect Cachar with the rest of Assam. The construction and improvement of the Tura-Fulbari Road, diversion of the Assam Access road linking Assam with the rest of the Indian Union and improvement and construction of the Shillong Jowai-Garampani-Haflong-Silchar Road are other schemes which have been given priority in view of the inaccessibility of important strategic positions due to the ‘Radcliff Award’. The total provision of development of the means of communication under different schemes in the next year’s Post-war Budget amounts to Trs. 2,35,00 including an

\(^{31}\) Assam Chief Minister, Bishnuram Medhi's speech in the Indian Road Congress Meeting at Shillong in May 1957. Assam Information, Vol-viii, no 10, p-19
amount of Trs. 1,36,00 for new Roads. In addition a further provision of Trs. 13,70 for the purpose has been made for Excluded Areas. Sums of Trs. 17,11 and Trs. 4,90 have also been provided for improvement of Roads in the normal Budget for 1948-49 for non-Excluded Areas and Excluded Areas respectively."32 (Trs.-rupees in thousands)

Aviation was central subject not administered by the Government of Assam. But its slow progress became a matter of concern to the State Government, so a resolution was moved in the ALA, on 25 September 1948, which recommended that the Central Government adopt a more proactive policy to provide air travel facilities commensurate with the needs of the Province.

Major development of air service in Assam were :33

(1) A regular daily Air service was organized between Gauhati and Calcutta, with extensions on certain days of the week to Tezpur and Mohanbari and to Kumbhirgram and Agartala.

(2) A Weekly services by another Company from Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Tezpur, Bhagalpur to Calcutta.

(3) The construction of a temporary air field at Guwahati and a permanent airfield was sanctioned.

(4) A scheme for establishing a Flying Club at Gauhati was approved.

Satisfactory as these developments were, they were inadequate to meet the necessities. In a province where communication was difficult due to a large extent to topographical factors, there was a great future for air transport which would link the various districts, and would result in a speedy mail services. The Resolution on the improvement of Civil Aviation in Assam, 1948, stated :


"One of the few benefits of the war for Assam has been the legacy of a large number of excellent airfields and this should facilitate rapid development. At present air services are organized largely on the basis of linking the Province with Calcutta; instead we should concentrate in the development of our internal services within the Province."34

Bordoloi's Government, keeping in view the interruption of steamer traffic, which unfortunately had to pass through Pakistan and unnecessary detention of goods worth several lakhs of rupees going out of Assam and coming into Assam on transit by the Pakistan Government, and the detention of Railway wagons, strongly felt the need for development of well planned road transport. Roads as public utility service had increased in importance for political, strategic, as well as commercial purpose to serve as a subsidiary route to help de-congestion of railways and to bring essential commodities to Assam for distribution evenly throughout the state. For this purpose, the Provincial Government undertook the task of Nationalization of the Transport Service, a public utility service, on an experimental basis in 1948.

In the resolution regarding Nationalization of Transport, the Government had stressed on the organization and development of road transport for the greatest benefit of the public and were convinced that the development of motor transport must be kept within the field of planned control. They intimated their acceptance of the Central Government's plans for the operation of road transport.

"The policy adumbrated therein is mainly one of full development of public passenger service and short haulage of goods by roads through the agency of Government as to eliminate uneconomic competition or wastage of capacity and equitable working condition which will yield profits that will be utilized for public benefit rather than for private gain."35

34. ibid
35. ASA, Sri Ramnath Das, Resolution : re-State Operation of Road Transport service,' ALA Debates, 27 September, 1948, Assam Gazette Part-V, pp. 1380-1381
The objective of the scheme was to raise the production of transport both as an earning proposition and as one leading to the industrial nationalization of transport in all important routes. Emphasis was given on regulating road transport in important routes in the interest of essential supplies and services which were likely to be effected by emergencies due to natural calamities.

The important roads which were taken over in the first instance, as stated by Sri Ramnath Das in ALA, were divided into three categories -

(A) Roads which were nationalized by Assam Government:

Gauhati-Shillong Road—On the termination of the agreement with the Commercial Carrying Company (Assam) Limited, Government took over this road from 1 January 1949.

(B) Roads on which Assam Government was required to participate with the Railway (on a 80:20 basis)

(i) Gauhati-Nowgong Road, which had been taken over by Government from the 15 January 1948 came under this category. The Government had offered the Assam Railway, participation in the operation of this road with a financial interest of 20 per cent.

(ii) Nowgong-Jorhat Road, which had been taken over from 1 August 1948. It was proposed to invite the Railways to join the operation with a financial interest of 20 per cent.

(C) Roads on which tripartite schemes would operate on the basis of Assam-Government, the Railway Department and the Public contributing 51 per cent and 29 per cent, respectively: fell under this category

(i) GOALPARA-GAUHATI ROAD

(ii) JORHAT-DIBRUGARH ROAD AND

(iii) DIBRUGARH-SAIKHOWA ROAD,

(D) All other routes, according to plans, were left to private operators.36

36. Ibid.
The first road taken over by the State Transport was the road from Guwahati to Nowgong by replacing the rickety private buses with better ones. The success of this new venture encouraged the Government to extend the State Transport service to Jorhat and also to take over the transport service for goods and passengers over the most important life line linking the capital of the province with important rail and steamer heads from 1 January, 1949.37 Operation of the State Transport Service for goods and passengers had been extended from Jorhat to Dibrugarh from 1 October 1949.38

The transport service for goods and passengers over the most important life-line linking Shillong with important rail and steamer leads, which had been managed efficiently and to the satisfaction of all, had brought a net income of about Rs. 19 lakhs for the year ending 31 December, 1949 after deducting total direct expenditure of Rs. 16,63,000 for staff, petrol, lubricant, maintenance, etc., from the total earnings. Similarly, the net income from other routes from the same period amounted to Trs. 4,34 after deduction of the total direct expenditure of Rs. 2,82,000 from the total earning."39

The government distributed a total sum of Rs. 25,81,766 through the different Local Boards, during the triennium ending 31 March, 1950 for improvement of rural communication in their respective areas.40

Though a vigorous scheme to reconstruct roads was prepared under the Post-War Development Scheme, the programme had to be dropped even before it got half way through for want of adequate financial assistance from the Centre. As a result, the development of road communication in Assam was very slow until the inauguration of the First Five-Year Plan.

37. ASA, Bishnuram Medhi, Budget speech 10 March 1949, ALA Proceedings, pp. 40-41, Assam gazette, Part-VI
38. ASA, Bishnuram Medhi, Budget speech 13 March 1950, ALA Proceedings, Assam Gazette Part-VI, p. 63
39. ibid.
40. ibid.
4) Grow more Food Campaign

At the time of independence India was deficit in food by at least 7 to 10 percent of her requirements and to meet this deficit she had to import about Rs. 100 crore worth of foodgain from outside. In order to meet this deficit the Government of India launched the Grow-More-Food Campaign in order to make the country self sufficient in matters of food.

Inspite of flood ravaging the province of Assam every year, she continued to be self sufficient so far as rice and paddy were concerned. But it was unfortunate that the province with such fertile soil and where 90 percent of the people were agriculturists was almost entirely dependent on other provinces for almost all other food stuff like pulses, mustard oil, molasses, sugar, wheat products etc. On account of the acute shortage of foodstuff throughout India, the provinces and states grossly underestimated their surplus in order to safeguard the interest of their consumers and traders. The Government of India made the allotment on this underestimated surplus declared by the provinces and states. So Bordoloi's Government realized that the scarcity and difficulty regarding the essential foodstuff could be removed to some extent if earnest efforts were made to grow more of the essential foodstuff within the state. Since Assam had no direct railway or road communication with other parts of India, except through Pakistan, there was an apprehension after independence that the import of these commodities may be stopped at any moment which would result in an acute shortage of these articles. Hence Bishnuram Medhi, in his Budget Speech, observed:

"Under the circumstances the only remedy lies in our effort for production of more of these essential commodities instead of depending on other provinces for supply of our vital needs. Assam can hardly afford to allow herself to be drained annually to the tune of Rs. 1,15,71,978 in purchasing essential food crops such as gur*, mustard oil and pulse only."41

41. ASA, Bishnuram Medhi, Budget Speech, 1947, op.cit., p. 51

* -molasses
In September 1946, the Government declared the plan and programme formulated to grow more food in the province.

Some of the steps taken up by the government were:42

1. Seeds Distribution Scheme : To encourage the people to extend the area under rice, pulse, etc., by bringing fallow and waste land under cultivation as far as possible and to use improved seeds for increasing total yield of different crops.

2. Manure Distribution Scheme : To increase the yield of crops by applying manures.

3. Horticultural Development Scheme : To increase the fruit production in Assam by bringing new available area under cultivation to meet the demand from the nutritional point of view.

4. Agricultural Training Scheme : To train moderately educated youngmen of the Province for utilizing their services for the improvement of Agriculture on Scientific line.

5. (i) Minor Irrigation Project : The development of irrigation is one of the main factors to increase the production of the food crops by utilizing waste land and growing a 2nd crop in the land meant for winter crops and to save the people from the famine due to drought and other causes. This schemes has helped to a great extent in increasing the area under Boro paddy.

42. ASA, Abdul Matlib Mazumdar, replying to a question on ‘Grow More Food’ in ALA, ALA proceedings, 20 September, 1946
6. Aus paddy seeds multiplication scheme: For the supply of pure and improved Ahu paddy seeds of high yielding varieties to the needy cultivators at a cost of production price or at the prevailing market price for improvement of Ahu crop as well as for bringing more area under Ahu.

In 1947 a plan was being drawn up to achieve increased production of food materials such as pulses, mustard seed and molasses, specially those which were imported at alarmingly high prices. Through this plan the Government endeavoured to encourage formation of collective farms on co-operative basis in different areas of cultivation of deficit food crops such as pulses, mustard seed, sugarcane over large blocks for production of these commodities on an extensive scale wherever possible with the help of tractors and other modern implements. The Government instructed the Co-operative and Agricultural Department to exercise their utmost to devise ways and means to help the cultivators for the production of deficit food.

With a view to growing more food stuff in order to make Assam a self sufficient unit a separate Ministry had been formed in order to focus public opinion on this important problem of growing more food crops. On 17 February, 1948, Gopinath Bordoloi inaugurated one week's programme of "Grow more Food". This campaign gave details as to how manuals were to be prepared and used and how more of the essential food items could be grown; village Committees were formed to give a drive to this campaign.

In order to provide further impetus to this campaign preventive measures were taken to prevent floods in the areas which are subjected to repeated floods. To encourage and help the farmers in their efforts to grow more food, the Government tried to demonstrate efficient and modern methods of agriculture through pilot schemes.

43. ASA, Bishnuram Medhi, Budget speech, 1947 op.cit., pp. 51-52
44. Dainik Asomiya, 20 September, 1948, DHAS.
45. Dainik Asomiya, 20 February, 1948, DHAS
The Government also took the initiative to organize Co-operative colonies on available cultivable waste land. The Government declared that Co-operative Societies formed by landless agriculturists would be given preference in the matter of settlement of waste land. Provisions were made for the extension of irrigation schemes in some of the areas.

About 10,000 bighas of land had already been placed at the disposal of the Food Department for starting an experimental State Farm. Provision for providing better varieties of seeds and helping cultivators by training them in the use and preparation of manures to increase food production had been undertaken by the Government. The cultivators, who were landless or had uneconomic holdings, were encouraged to form into groups. This scheme was designed not only to improve the economic condition of the common agriculturists, but also to make the province self sufficient in the matter of pulses, mustard, wheat, grams and food crops. With this object in view a large tract of land in the Missamari Chapori in Mangaldoi subdivision with an area of about 14,000 bighas was placed at the disposal of the Food Department.\footnote{ASA, Bishnuram Medhi, Budget speech 10 March 1949, op.cit., p. 42} A Co-operative Colony had been started in Missamari comprising an area of about 14,000 bighas for growing Arhar, Mustard, Linseed, Cotton, Paddy and Potato etc. was settled with around 250 families as a Co-operative Colony under the Rural Development Department.\footnote{ibid.} The Post-War Development Programme also included schemes to increase the agricultural output of the province.

"The new schemes under Post-war Development also include improvement of fodder and grazing and improvement of milk supply to large towns. A sum about Trs\$ 27,96 has been provided under the "Grow More Food" Scheme and about Trs\$ 27,63 had been provided for various other schemes under Post-war development, including a sum of Trs\$ 1.94 for development of agriculture in the hills."\footnote{ASA, Bishnuram Medhi, Budget speech, 11 March 1948, op.cit., 1948 p. 57}
As a result of Lord Boyd Orr's recommendations, the Government of India decided in 1949-50 to intensify the 'Grow More Food Campaign'. The Government of Assam also adopted various measures to increase food production in the State.

The following seven point programme was undertaken:\(^{49}\)

(a) Use of improved seeds and plants; (b) The production and utilization of manurial resources like rural and urban composts, bone-meal and oil cakes; (c) Irrigation consisting of major projects (executed by the Embankment and Drainage Branch of the Public Works Department) and minor projects (executed by the Agriculture Department with the assistance of the villages); (d) Plant protection which included the protection of crops both in the fields and in store; (e) Utilization of Government and tea garden waste land for cultivation—generally by mechanized methods; (f) Encouraging double and multiple croppings wherever possible; (g) The introduction of better cultural practices. With the start of the First Five Year Plan in 1951, all these schemes were merged under the plan projects, and more intensive work with larger financial support was undertaken.

To give training to the youth for the improvement of agriculture an Agricultural College was started at Jorhat in August 1948.

To achieve self-sufficiency in essential foodstuff, India had to grow 48 lakhs tons of food grains more than that produced in the year 1947-48. For this purpose, targets for increased food production had been made for different states and Assam was expected to produce about 1,66,000 tons and 2,35,000 tons in 1950-51 and 1951-52 respectively.\(^{50}\) This target for increased production is proposed to be achieved through big and small irrigation projects to be executed through the PWD and Agricultural Department.

From available figures it appeared that of the entire cultivated area in Assam, only one seventh was used for double cropping, unlike in other states where almost the entire area was utilized for growing double crops.

"If we can increase the area under double crops Ahu and Sali, by about one lakh acres we can easily produce 10,00,000 maunds or 37,000 tons of additional paddy. It is therefore proposed to encourage double crop by supply of oil-cake and bone meal at concession rates in the plains districts and a sum of about 3 lakhs has been provided under the Food Bonus scheme have also been formulated to prepare compost manure about 50,000 tons in 1950-51 for distribution as manure."

In order to ensure the success of the food self sufficiency scheme, the production had to be complimented by an equitable distribution. For that purpose great importance had been given by the Government for maximum procurement. Bordoloi's Government took measures for greater protection of the borders to prevent smuggling. The Procurement Department was reinforced with additional staff for increasing the procurement. The Government also sought the co-operation of the people of the state for the success of the procurement.

51. ASA, B.Medhi, Budget Speech, 1948, op.cit., p. 60.
5) Health Facilities

In Bordoloi's scheme of development, health formed an important feature. He was specially concerned about the health of the rural people who formed 90% of the population.

His government increased the grants to Local Boards dispensaries in 1947 for purchase of medicines to be distributed in rural areas. The existing subsidized dispensaries in the rural areas did not function regularly due to dearth of qualified doctors and adequate grants for medicine. So the monthly allowance of the doctors was increased to Rs. 65/- with a view to attract qualified doctors and the government also had a plan for opening 15 more subsidized dispensaries in backward areas.52

Under the Post War Development Schemes, Government intended to undertake large scale measures of medical service to promote the health of the province by taking up big schemes in connection with anti-malaria, anti-tuberculosis, anti-leprosy, anti-smallpox work, maternity and child welfare and nutrition.53 But the expenditure involved in these original proposals had to be reduced in proportion to the reduction of the Central Government Grant.

The Berry White Medical School was upgraded to a Medical College in November 1947. Provisions were also made for opening a Post Graduate Institute for imparting higher medical training to medical graduates. A sum of Rs. 13 lakhs had been spent in purchasing equipment from America for the Medical College and Post Graduate classes and sufficient equipment for the expansion and needs of the district hospitals.54 The Government opened five Local Board Hospitals at Dhubri, Tezpur, Nowgong, Jorhat and Silchar in 1948. At Dibrugarh a training centre had already been started to train nurses and arrangements had been made for opening another at Guwahati.55

52. ASA, Bishnuram Medhi, ALA Proceedings, 10 March, 1947, op.cit., p.62
53. ibid., p. 63
54. ibid
55. ASA, B. Medhi, ALA Proceedings, 11 March, 1948, p72
As a result of the initiative of the Bordoloi Government the number of dispensaries which was only 9 in 1944-45, increased to 76 in 1950 and the total number of Government Hospitals and dispensaries which were provided with better and adequate equipments increased to 102 in March 1950.56

As there was a considerable demand for Ayurvedic system of treatment in Assam, the Government appointed a Committee in 1947 to prepare a scheme for the study and development of the Ayurvedic system in Assam and in accordance with the recommendation of this committee the Government established a regular Ayurvedic College at Guwahati which was formally inaugurated on 20 December 1948.

Bordoloi also felt the urgent and imperative need of improving the supply of drinking water in the rural areas throughout the state. The Government accordingly made adequate provisions in the Budget every year, to be placed at the disposal of the Public Health Department, for equitable distribution amongst the various local Boards, for providing tanks, wells and tube-wells for supply of good drinking water in their respective jurisdiction. It is noteworthy that inspite of financial difficulties, the Government did not decrease the amount earmarked for Rural Water Supply.

56. ibid, ALA Proceedings, 13 March 1950, op.cit., pp. 65-66
6) Establishment of the High Court:

Assam continued to be under the jurisdiction of the Calcutta High Court, even after the formation of the Province, for which she had to pay a substantial amount as maintenance to the Bengal Government. Between 1920 to 1935 a total of Rs 9,38,400 had been paid by the Assam Government, but in 1935 the Bengal Government demanded enhancement of the maintenance amount. The people of Assam felt that instead of paying this huge amount as Assam's share of maintenance of the Calcutta High Court to the Bengal government, a High court should be established in Assam. It was felt that a High Court in Assam would foster the development of legal talent in the Assam Valley and the people of the Province would get better legal assistance.

But this idea was opposed by many on grounds of finance as the deficit was increasing year after year. The Government felt that the cost of maintenance of the High Court would be greater than income from it. Again, nearly two thirds of the cases were from the Surma Valley and if they refused to remain under the jurisdiction of the Assam High Court, it would not have enough work to justify its existence. The people of the Surma valley were more willing to remain under the Calcutta High Court. There was a great debate on this issue in the Assembly. After repeated unsuccessful attempts in the legislature to get approval for the establishment of a High Court, a motion was moved in the Legislative Assembly in December 1937 in this regard and was carried by a considerable majority. The resolution was eventually accepted by the legislature. But it was not until 9 September 1947, that the Assembly passed a resolution that a High Court be established for the province of Assam. The resolution was submitted to the Governor General who made the following order known as the Assam High Court order 1948 –

"As from the 5 day of April 1948, there shall be a High Court for the Province of Assam which shall be a court of record and shall consist of a chief justice

58. *ibid*
59. *ibid*, p. 260
60. ASA, ALA Proceedings, 9 September, 1947, Vol - IV,
and such other Judges ..."61 Thus a long standing demand of the people of Assam was fulfilled. Earlier to file any suit not covered by the district courts, the appellants had to proceed to Calcutta. Instead of taking the trouble of proceeding to Calcutta many considered it wise to tolerate injustice than seek redressal of grievances in court. Thus under the circumstances the establishment of the High Court in Guwahati was a great relief to the people of the North East and was considered a mark of honour too.


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