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The above pages describes the relentless efforts of Bordoloi towards developing and modernizing Assam during his short tenure in office. Inspite of the innumerable problems of the Province, Bordoloi strived continuously for its development. He had played an important role in shaping the destiny of the people of Assam after independence. He nourished a dream for a modern Assam (during his time Assam comprised present Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram) and worked ceaselessly to fulfil it. He lead a life of dedication not only to achieve freedom but to uphold the principles of secularism and national unity inculcating in the people pride in their own culture and identity.

During his short political career, Bordoloi, both as a Congressman and head of the provincial administration, demonstrated his vision and idealism in laying the foundation of a strong and progressive Assam. He was acutely aware of the formidable complexity and dimensions of social, economic and political problems which had kept the people of Assam in poverty, ignorance and despair for centuries. He had tried to raise the despondent masses of the province and put them on their legs as self respecting persons. His vision, dynamism and popular leadership contributed significantly to the nations efforts to free itself from foreign yoke and emerge as a sovereign, independent nation with the ideas of democracy, secularism and social justice. His name will always be remembered gloriously in the pages of history of Assam as a politician of honesty integrity and vision. Thus Hem Barua had remarked:

"Politics was no poets dream for Gopinath Bordoloi, he saw and understood things in the most correct perspective. His vision of reality had that touch of idealism which raises politics to a higher plane. His methods are always direct and quite behoving of a man whose pre

occupation prior to politics was cricket. He was a cricketer in politics; he did not believe in body line bowling or under hand bowls. That is possibly the reason why his worst opponents did not dislike him."

Incidentally, he was not only a successful politician but was also a great patron of sports and culture. Even after assuming leadership as Prime minister of the state of Assam, he devoted some time and energy at his disposal for the development of sports and culture. He was the first President of Assam Cricket Association and played cricket till the later part of his life till 1947.

It is proper that in commemoration of his memory the main soccer event of Assam carries a trophy in his name. Plato had advocated the idea of philosopher kings, Bordoloi practically demonstrated how a sportsman can be a successful politician and ruler as well. His political outlook, life style and manners were set by his sporting bend of mind.

After analyzing his role in politics, we find that at times Bordoloi was opposed to certain decisions of the Congress. This deviation was only for the protection of interest of Assam. He had actively supported the Swarajist principle of participation in the council. He, along with Tarun Ram Phookan, Rohini Kumar Choudhury, were of opinion that Congressmen should be in the council to oppose government repressive measures. Bordoloi, who was the President of the Guwahati Congress Committee, resigned from his office stating difference with them and the non-cooperators. Similarly he did not join the Civil Disobedience movement, as he was convinced that at that time it would not serve any constructive purpose for the well being of the inhabitants of Assam.

Bordoloi proved to be a capable administrator and a shrewd politician. During the fourteen months of Premiership from 20 September, 1938 to 15 November, 1939 he had no difficulty in getting majority support for his 33 members group in a House of 108 legislators. His Government had a secular democratic outlook and was deeply committed to the welfare of the people. He had made no delay in implementing the promises made by the Indian National Congress during the election held under the Government of India Act 1935. The Assam Agricultural Income Tax Act which was passed by the Bordoloi Ministry, despite the stiff opposition from the vested interests was one
of the most progressive and pro-labour legislations passed ever before in India. The justness of the measures could be realized from the wide disparity in the incidence of taxation that existed between the tea planters and ordinary cultivators. Many schemes for providing better marketing facilities to the agriculturists, installation of cold storage and improved methods of cultivation had been taken up. Special attention had been given towards the educational needs of the people particularly the tribals, scheduled caste and other backward communities.

Bordoloi had an in-depth study of the international situation of his times. The outbreak of the Second World War convinced him of the impending danger of the Japanese Army's advance towards the Assam border. He appealed to the inhabitant of Assam to be alert against imperialist forces, whether they were Germans, Japanese or British.²

His indelible contribution lay in the crucial role he played on the eve of independence by putting a stiff resistance to the Grouping plan initiated by the Cabinet Mission. His timely agitation with great courage and foresight along with Gandhi's support saved Assam from the sinister design of being included in Pakistan. His revolutionary zeal and heroic leadership rescued Assam and her people from the mischievous conspiracy of foreign rules. His relentless fight against the Grouping Clause proved his great concern and love for Assam. Inspite of various odds, he fought single-handed against the Congress Working Committee's decision and in this, his leadership could mobilize popular support of the people of Assam.

"He is much more than a national patriot, he is the personification of a new era in Assam. Bordoloi can easily be used as a telescope through which to view Assam, because he is without controversy the outstanding personality of this far eastern region of India. Perhaps Assam would not have been in the map of India today had it not been for Bordoloi."³

The next challenging task that Bordoloi had to face in the post independence period was building of an integrated foundation of a frontier province comprising one third plains and two third hills. When he had undertaken the constructive work of integrating the hills on the foundation of democracy and freedom he was confronted by the British imperialist legacy, which kept the people of the plains separated from the hills perpetually through regulations. Under the circumstances building of an integrated Assam was a challenging task which Bordoloi could undertake because of his catholic outlook and sympathetic understanding of the spirit of freedom of the hill people. The Sixth Schedule as a constitutional provision for decentralization of political power was a distinct contribution of Bordoloi to the Indian political system. His advocation of a system of full fledged self government in the hill district was a positive expression of good will and love. As the architect of modern Assam he had tried his best to shape composite Assam as the home of contended communities inhabiting the hills and the plains. Thus the special provisions under the Sixth Schedule were formulated with a view to satisfying the genuine and legitimate aspiration of the hill people for shaping their own destiny along with the mainstream of the nation unhampered by apprehensions, sense of deprivations and alienations. His untiring efforts to bring all the hill tribes to the Indian dominion enabled him to get their respect and admiration. He could convince them that he was one of their people. The Goodwill Mission of Naga National Council in their report in 1953 clearly stated that they lost faith and confidence in the Indian Government after the death of Mahatma Gandhi and Gopinath Bordoloi.4

But it is unfortunate that within forty years of his demise, Bordoloi’s dream of building a greater Assam and of evolution of greater Assamese society lay shattered. The love and respect of the Naga people was eloquent in the handsome tribute of the rebel Naga leader, A. Z Phizo, sent on 6 August 1950, after Bordoloi’s death.5 His sentiments express clearly what Bordoloi was to the tribals. He was indeed a true statesman of a very high stature which only a virtuous politician can attain. Bordoloi’s

5. Lily M. Baruah, ‘Bordoloi, An Educationist First’, L.M. Baruah (ed) op. cit., p.235
personality was a significant factor in producing a climate of goodwill among the people and initiating a process of integration in both hills and plains. Unfortunately his vision of a united healthy Assam was shattered by incidents after his death creating a void of wise political leadership.

Being a far sighted statesman he had realized the intensity of the immigration problem. During the tenure of his first premiership, he intended to solve the problem, but before any positive step could be taken, the Ministry had to tender its resignation at the instruction of Congress Working Committee. Bordoloi had paid serious attention to the immigration problems after coming to power in February 1946. Assam inherited this chronic problem after independence which baffles solution inspite of much efforts. Though the Indian Parliament had passed the Immigrants Act on 13 February 1950, infiltration to Assam continued. Bordoloi had been fully aware that if Assam government was authorized to expel certain persons on its borders as proposed by Gopalaswami Aiyengar, "...prevention of entry of undesirable people into India without any hitch or glamour.....", probably then there would have been some effect on the influx of immigrants. But during the fifties the immigration problem was treated by all political parties including the Congress as a refugee problem, a problem of rehabilitation of displaced person.

As Chief Minister he understood the intricate problems of Assam which were retarding its socio-economic growth. He believed that Assam's problems could be successfully tackled only by the people of Assam working in an atmosphere of national unity and center-state and inter-state co-operation. The infrastructure in Assam that he tried to develop was designed to draw upon the national economy for building Assam and to contribute to the national wealth which again would create further potential for prosperity and security. Bordoloi had great difficulty in carrying forward his constructive schemes due to the great financial constraints of the province. But as a zealous builder of modern Assam, he with deep conviction came forward to implement those constructive projects with Post War Development Fund.

6. NMML, Letter of Bordoloi to Nehru, 17 November 1949, File no. PS 4/49

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In the midst of the critical and depressing financial situation, Bordoloi did not lose his patience. Because of his long association with the Congress movement, he did not want to belittle the Central Government before the public. He told the members of the Assembly on March 15, 1949 that Prime Minister Nehru and Deputy Prime Minister were fully aware of the state’s problems and sympathetic to her needs. It was only because of an unusual national calamity that Assam had to suffer.7

Bordoloi was a true Gandhian and a devout follower of Gandhi and his ideals. He had deep faith on Gandhian ideals of village reconstruction. All through his life Bordoloi thought and worked for the poor people. Unfortunately after independence Bordoloi did not get sufficient time to translate his ideas of reconstructing Assam and build a modern state into a reality. Had he had some more time the future of Assam would have been much brighter and possibly would not have faced so many burning problem as has been facing to day.

Bordoloi could rule free Assam as the Premier only for about three years, since he died on 5 August 1950. When he passed away, Mohammad Saadullah, the former Premier had said in the Assam Assembly :8

"When our income from revenue is so poor, when our deficit is 20% of our total income, we need a popular and efficient personality like Gopinath Bordoloi to discuss the financial needs of the state with the Centre. In order to face such a situation, we need the skill and intelligence of a man like Bordoloi."

Bordoloi always tried to make the Centre understand that Assam had her own special problems and conditions, that the Centre must take these into consideration while making policy decisions he had to face one problem after another.

Lack of proper communication facilities due to the partition of the country, trade problems with East Pakistan, attempts to grab Assam’s land, problems of the tribal


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people, the lobby of Bengali-Hindu refugees, problem of infiltrators, the miserly treatment of the Centre on economic matters and finally dictatorial and unfriendly behavior of Nehru and Patel, all these had made Bordoloi totally depressed. It is difficult to imagine today how he devoted himself totally for the development of his state despite his increasingly failing health. All his fortnightly letters to the Prime Minister of India bore his anxieties and forceful arguments for the all round development of Assam. That is why Sardar Vallabhai Patel, independent India's first Home Minister asked the people of Assam to make full use of their Premier, " a self sacrificing man of ability and truly competent." After the demise of Bordoloi, Patel had rightly remarked :

"It is difficult to think of the state without Gopinath Bordoloi. He had identified himself so completely with the interest of his state, and for years the political life had so much intermingled with his great personality that we had come to think of the two entities being always synonymous ..... He died in harness full of glory and achievements ...."

During three years of his Chief Ministership after Independence, Assam got her first University, Medical College, Veterinary College, Agricultural College, Ayurvedic College, Sanskrit College, and also first Forest Training Centre, Police Training College, Co-operative Training Centre, Co-operative Bank and a High Court and more Engineering Schools. Beside it was because of Bordoloi's ardent thoughts, inspirations and industry along with the successful direction of Amal Probha Das that the famous Kasturba Gandhi Ashram was set up atop Sarania Hills of Guwahati in 1946. He was one of the moving spirits behind the formation of the Asom Rastra Bhasha Prachar Samity with Gandhi's help and along with his other colleagues he laid the basis of Hindi education in the Province. Both institution have been doing remarkable good work.

However, Bordoloi's activities were not confined only to the setting up of all the colleges and training centres. He wanted that all the people must get light of Independence and this was reflected in various social development activities advanced

10. 'Obituaries', L.M Baruah (ed), op.cit., p. 254

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by his Ministry. The movement to drive out opium addiction which had started during the first phase of Congress Movement in Assam was completed during his tenure. From the month of February, 1949 Compulsory Primary Education Act came into operation. During the period from 1948-50 a scheme was made to set up 2000 Primary schools in the backward areas, tribal areas and tea-garden areas of the state. Apart from this, the State Government took up the task of centralizing transport system, made arrangements for the development of health, water supply, road construction, weaving industry, silk industry etc. Because of his unique leadership he occupies a special place in the heart of the people and the history of Assam and the nation. His political sagacity and charismatic personality and besides this, his dedication towards the development of Assam earned him the title 'Lokapriya'. He endeared himself to all the people of the province both of the hills and the plains, irrespective of caste creed or religion.

He had close association with quite a few institutions relating to art, culture, history and literature. He was a member of Kamrup Anusandhan Samiti or the Assam Research Society established in 1912. He served this cultural research society as an active member of the Executive Committee. When he became the Premier of the Province he made a proposal in September 1946 in the Legislative Assembly to make a supplementary grant of Rs. 14,894 to the Department of Historical and Antiquarian studies in recognition of the useful work done by the department for the preservation and translation of ancient manuscript. Being himself a student of history he was aware of the remarkable contribution of this department for the development of Assam's history. He was the founder secretary of Kamrup Natya Mandir. He had keen interest in the field of drama but preferred directing rather than acting. He was a lover of music and himself sang songs like Bargeet, Rabindra Sangeet, Bhajan, Namghosa and played the organ himself. In addition to all such activities the Premier of a problem state like Assam found time to devote himself to literary activities. His first published book was the life story of his mentor Tarun Ram Phukan, His other published books are Sri Ramchandra, Buddhadev, Jesus Chirst, Hajrat Muhammad, Gandhi and Anashakti

11. ASA, Bordoloi's speech in ALA, 20 September, 1946, ALAD, 1946, p. 1537
Bordoloi revealed his personality as a patron of sports, culture and literature. He was aware and justly proud of the beauty, richness and ancient origin of Assam's cultural heritage. He tried to make every possible contribution to the growth of Assam's language, literature and culture.

"During his short tenure of life, Lokapriya Bordoloi, both as a Congressman and head of the provincial administration demonstrated his vision and idealism in laying the foundation of a strong and progressive Assam," remarked Dr. S.D. Goswami. He can thus rightly be called the architect of modern Assam and in recognition of his immense contribution Bordoloi had been honoured with the Bharat Ratna award posthumously. Assam can be really proud of having produced such a towering political personality as Gopinath Bordoloi. His constructive work and his dedication to the cause of the people of Assam, his honesty and fairplay in politics have left a permanent impact on the minds of the people of Assam. He is remembered with deep respect and admiration by the people of Assam and will continue to do so far ages. Thus the Vice President of India, Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma had rightly remarked:13

"Such a great Individual-one who suffered personal hardship in the struggle for freedom, a leader who rendered historic service not only for the freedom of Assam but the creation of conditions of growth and well being for the people of Assam, who contributed so richly to political and economic life and to cultural and literary processes, and yet, who always remained modest simple and true to the great mission of national reconstruction, such a person: Lokapriya Gopinath Bordolo, belongs to that band of outstanding Indians whom the nation will always remember with respect and gratitude."

12. S.D. Goswami, 'Gopinath Bordoloi, architect of modern Assam', The Assam Tribune, 17 August 2009