CHAPTER-III

INFLUENCE OF GANDHISM IN THE SOCIO-POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY OF ASSAM

Gandhi influenced not only India but also all over the world. He was such a great soul whose ideology has been followed by many. Tolstoy, the great Russian writer was greatly influenced by Gandhi and in this regard he said, “The Kingdom of God is within you that have a permanent shape on Gandhi’s ideas” (Babu, Ramesh B., Education and ideology of Gandhi and Ivan Illich, 2011, P- 40). Gandhi was also influenced by John Ruskin, Henry David Thoreau etc. Even the great writer like Rabindra Nath Tagore also had a great influence on Gandhi whom he called “Mahatma, the great soul”. Gandhi’s intellectual exercise was variously influenced by his time. Gandhi was in London for a long time. Later on, he came to South Africa where he got a proper training of truth and non violence. Gandhi’s struggle was in South Africa for the emancipation of the oppressed, on Whites basically leading the Freedom struggle in India. After arriving in India he spent one year in touring all over India and got the knowledge very silently.

Gandhi’s simplicity and non-violence policy was very attractive to all. Therefore, Gandhi’s death vibrated the whole world. The whole world sunk into deep grief of his death. Gandhi’s personality was incomparable personality. His aim was to serve the human society. The 19th century India was very backward superstitious and illiterate India. Especially rural economy was very poor. Therefore Gandhi thought himself that if rural economy could not be developed then India would never be prosperous India. So, Gandhi requested people to go back to their village. In order to educate the people of India Gandhi established Ashrams and Sevagrams at Shabarmati Champaran.
and Wardha. Gandhi established wardha Sevagram as his head quarters, which was the central province of British India. He visited to the core and corner of India. Gandhi was in Champaran, a poor village of Bihar for one year and he tried his best to give justice to the villagers and he decided to open primary schools in six villages. Gandhi said, “As I gained more experience of Bihar, I became convinced that work of a permanent nature was impossible without proper village Education.” (Gandhi, M.K., The Story of My Experiments with Truth, 1979, P- 384)

Thus, Gandhi’s ideology was to serve the society to make a reformed India. Gandhi said that the Champaran inquiry was a bold experiment with truth and Ahimsa for him. In this way his selfless service to the society made him a very influential person in India. He never strayed from the path of truth and non-violence and he advised the people of India to use the same ideal in the field of politics, economics, society and also in the personal life.

3.01 THE INFLUENCE OF GANDHI IN ASSAM:

The influence of Gandhi in the socio-political and economic history in Assam had a tremendous effect. Gandhi came to Assam on four occasions. His entire visit was purposive and effective. His first visit was in the year 1921 in connection with non-co-operation movement. His second visit took place in 1926. It was during the 1st session of the congress held in Assam. In 1934, Gandhi came to Assam for the third time. It was exclusively for the Harijan work and his fourth and last visit was in 1946. During that time Gandhi stayed in Sarania Ashram for three days and gave darshan to people. (Kakati, Satish Chandra, Discovery of Assam, 1964, P-2,3).

Gandhi came to Assam for the 1st time in the year 1921 in connection with non-co-operation movement. That was a historic year in Indian modern history when he called upon his country men and women to fight for
independence through the cult of non-violence and truth. In Assam thousands of volunteers took part in the freedom struggle under the leadership of Gandhi. Even literary and cultural personality like Ambikagiri Raichoudhury, Jyoti Prasad agarwala, Bishnuram medhi etc. participated very actively in the freedom movement.

Gandhi in his first visit to Assam was accompanied by Late Maulana Mohammad Ali and Moulana Azad Sobhani. He stayed at the Gauhati residence of late Deshbhakta Tarun Ram Phukan who was a prominent leader of Assam at that time. Gandhi’s virtual lieutenant in this region in participating non-co-operation and other movement initiated by Gandhi. He addressed at Guwahati where more than 10,000 people were gathered. The largest ever seen in a public meeting in Assam till then. (Ibid, P-1,2).

As like as other provinces, in Assam too anti-British sentiment was grown. Many people of Assam such as - Maniram Dewan, Pioli Boruah, Bahadur Gaonbura, Farmud Ali, Mohendra Mohan Choudhury, Bijoy Chandra Bhagawati, Haldhar Bhuyan, Moti Ram Borah, Purna Chandra Sarmah, Pitambar Goswami, Bimala Prasad Chaliha, Kamakhya Prashad Tripathi, Jyoti Prasad agarwala, Sriman Prafulla Goswami, Mohadeva Sharma, Lakheswar Baruah, Rajendra Nath Baruah, Beliram Das, Jinaram Das, Purnanada Chetia, Fakhruruddin Ali Ahmed and other so many persons took active part freedom movement selflessly. They were also tortured by the British for their active participation in the movement. Even women were also not in distance from it. Chandra Probhpa Saikiani, Puspalata Das, Guneswari etc. are arrested by the British Government for celebrating the Independence day at 26 January 1946. In Quit India movement most of the Assamese people were involved actively. Young generation and students Union were also not far from the Quit India movement. In 1942 so many people of Assam such as- Mohammad Taibullah, Debeswuar Sarmah, Bishnu Ram Medhi, Fakhruruddin Ali Ahmed, Harekrishna Das, Lila Boruah etc. were arrested by the British Government. Gopinath Bordoli and Siddhi Nath Sarmah were arrested at
Dhubri when they were returning from the Nikhil Bharat Congress Committee meeting in Bombay. Even the leaders of Assam Pradesh Congress Committee were hidden by the British so that it could not be spread among the people of Assam. The first revolution against the British rule began in 1828 by Gomdhar Konwar, a prince of Ahom Royal family. In 1930 Pioli Phukan openly revolted against British Government. To control the movement many people of Assam were hanged and some were sentenced to long imprisonment. Yet the Assamese people never retreated from the movement. Thus in the freedom movement both Assamese men and women were influenced by Gandhi. Therefore they took active part in the freedom movement and even didn’t care for their life also. In that time the jails in Assam were immediately filled up with more than 4,000 political leaders. Moreover, the 41st annual session of Congress was held at Pandu, at the foot of Kamakhya Hill in December 1926 in Assam with mass support to Gandhi. There was recognition of the Central role played by Gandhi’s leadership. It was a tremendous morale booster for the people of Assam. Gandhi’s participation was an additional incentive. Moreover, majority of the students also played their active role only because of Gandhi’s influences. Assamese young student leaders like Omeo Kumar Das and Hemchandra Boruah appealed to the students to get involved in the movement. (Barthakur, Nipendra Nath, Dainik Agradut, 31st August 2014, P- 10)

Gandhi’s influences were very much in the social life of Assam. He came in 1934 for Harijan upliftment and raised fund for the welfare of Harijan of Assam. A Harijan leader of Assam told Gandhiji at Guwahati “The Untouchability in Assam is much less than other parts of the country in respect of water, temple entry, touches of caste Hindus etc. (Kakati, Satish Chandra, Discovery of Assam, P- 2). At that time Gandhi stayed at Sarania Ashram Guwahati (Now in Ulubari) to give darshana to people of Assam. Therefore many people of Assam including freedom fighters, writers, and novelists felt themselves as a followers of Gandhi till today.
Assamese writers including novelists could not escape from the great influence of Gandhism, which was a spirit of that age. A group of Assamese novelists like Daibachandra Talukdar, Dandinath Kalita, Jogesh Das etc. wrote some social reformation novels based on Gandhi’s philosophy of life and Indian freedom struggle movement. They were volunteers themselves during the freedom struggle. They showed in their novels social reformation programmes like stopping opium eating and untouchability. Communalism also continued side by side under the influence of Gandhism. For that reason it can be said that Assam is a state where the diseases like untouchability, communalism, hatred etc are very less in comparison to other State in respect of Caste, creeds and rituals.

In that time Opium consumption in Assam had became a cause of great concern because addiction to the drug had reached immense proportion and was consumed irrespective of the price demanded. Gandhi’s fervent appeal to the congress workers to make Assam free from opium had a stirring effect “Even woman like Chandra prabha Saikiani and others went to the village of Assam & made aware the villagers on woman education, child marriage etc. Moreover, they took the responsibility to spread Gandhi’s principles of truth and philosophy all over Assam”.

(Barthakur, Nipendra Nath, Dainik Agradut, 31st August 2014, P- 10).

3.02 GANDHI AND ASSAMESE WOMEN:

Gandhi’s influence was very much affected on Assamese women. Before Gandhi’s arrival to Assam majority of the Assamese women were in their four wall houses. But Gandhi’s influence made them to come out and serve for the society. According to Hem Bharali (a freedom fighter) Gandhi was the redeemer of Assamese women. Gandhi’s influence made Assamese women very active and conscious in different fields. Even with the help of Chandra Probha saikiani opened a women school for women education.
Gandhi came to Sarania on 9th January in 1946. Following his direction, all meetings except the evening prayer gatherings were held in Sarania. During that time Gandhi opened Vidyalaya in Sarania Ashram and gave valuable advice to the Gram Sevikas and teachers of the Vidyalaya. His three days stay created an atmosphere of the purity all around. In Sarania Ashram many political leaders like Omeo Kumar Das, Gopinath Bordoloi, Amal Prova Das etc. met Gandhi. The objects of the Kasturba trust and the Sarania Ashram was welfare of the village women and children. Following Gandhi’s advice, some schemes of training and developmental works were undertaken, which are:

1) Nayee Taleem, (2) Improved types of health service, (3) Rural Industries, (4) Village welfare and (5) Miscellaneous etc. Amal Prova Das and other members of the Sarania Ashram have served vehemently for the betterment of the society based on love after Gandhi’s ideal. *(Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, Assam Branch, Sarania Ashram, Ghy-07, July 2000, PP-2, 3)*

### 3.03 GANDHI’S THEORY REGARDING INDIAN ECONOMY:

Gandhi gives his own theory regarding the condition of Indian economy. He was a believer of simple living and high thinking. Gandhi’s economics, specially gave importance on the welfare of the poorest class of the society. According to Gandhi the economic basis of society must be a moral one, society must be based on love and trust.

Gandhi was in favor of small industries. He thought that each and every individual should give importance on crafts like: carpentry, poultry, spinning, weaving or any other similar handicraft. By actually doing manual work while learning, the individual will develop interest in his work and will be able to give out his best. *(Harijan, 31st July 1937, Vol- IX, P- 722).*
When Gandhi came to Assam in 1921, he was deeply impressed by the flourishing state of handloom-based Endi, Muga, Silk and other crafts of Assam. After returned from Assam, Gandhi wrote an article in Young India entitled ‘Lovely Assam’ in which he wrote about the beauty of Assam and he praised for the activities of Assamese women. He saw a great future for the Swadeshi Movement in Assam.

Amal Prova Das was an active social worker, a follower of Gandhi. She started cottage industries in Sarania for Oil pressing, Bee- Having, Paper-making. She also made permanent constructive work in the centre with other workers. So, she picked up some widows and started a weaving centre along with the industries. She wanted to make the institution self-reliant. These small industries spread to the village of Assam for Gandhi’s inspiration and influences.

The non-co-operation movement had tremendous impacts on Assam. In this movement by the influence of Gandhi, people of Assam boycotted foreign goods and gave importance on their own crafts. The concept of Khadi was received with equal enthusiasm in Assam where the tradition of spinning and weaving was already strongly entrenched. Gandhi requested the people of Assam to popularize small industries. Of course, after getting the influence of Gandhi Assamese people gave importance on the small industries. It is because of Gandhi, Assam became one of the developed states in case of small industries. Majority of small industries like spinning, weaving, poultry and such other similar handicraft formed in several villages of Assam. In support of Gandhi’s small industries people of Assam started doing co-operative farming and people began to show more interest in doing agriculture work.

According to prominent freedom fighter Hem Bharali, “Gandhi’s influences in the socio-economic and political history of Assam had effects. He visited to many places of Assam and advised people to make self-dependent village.” She says, Gandhi was much conscious about the problems
of women. In front of the member of the Kasturba Ashram Gandhi said, “I always accept me as women. Therefore, I understand much better about women rather than men.” (Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, Assam Branch, Sarania Ashram, July, 2000, P-37). Of course, it would mean that Gandhi was worried about the backwardness of women. So, he was much interested to make educate and forward women.

Thus, Assamese people give importance on small industries like-spinning, weaving and propagating the use of khadi and Chakra and boycotting the foreign goods. Moreover, the home industries are still flourishing in Assam and there is a good prospect for spinning and weaving in future. Obviously, Mahatma’s visit to Assam was few and far between. So, Assam was dear to him. In the time of distress and calamity, it was he who tuned-up the moral of the people as elsewhere; it was he again who watched and helped in shaping the destiny of Assam. During the Second World War when Assam turned into one of the principal operational bases. Gandhiji sent messages to the Assamese people including women folk, to resist the state from rape, debauchery, murder, molestation and all the views which gushed out of war conditions, regardless of whichever quarters perpetrated them on the innocent people. (Kakati, Satish Chandra, Discovery of Assam, 1964, P-3).

Thus, from the above discussion it can be said that in comparison to other state Assam is developed in khadi and cottage industries. The Khadi Board and Cottage industries is playing important role in the rural economy of the state. It serving on the devlopment of the rural economy and helping the rural poorest class by setting up various cottage industries. Moreover, there is many small industries in the village of Assam. It would mean that though Assam is advanced in small industries from the earliest period yet by the influence of Gandhi Assamese people involving in such small industries for their livelihood.
How devoutly Assam responded to the call of Gandhiji through all the stages of the freedom struggle is illustrated by a remark of the last Viceroy of India, Lord Mountbatten, made at a public meeting at Guwahati in 1947. Lord Mountbatten said: “Assam is one of the provinces where Gandhiji’s ideals followed.” (Ibid, P- 15). Thus, from the view of Lord Mountbatten, it can be said that Gandhi was an influential person in Assam whose ideologies followed by many Assamese people. Even today, Gandhi has remained a factor for motivating the people of the state to move ahead in the path of peace, prosperity and harmony.