CHAPTER IV
Peasant Organisations in Assam 1900 - 1933

As discussed earlier, the British after occupying the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam as per the terms of the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, introduced the new economic policy in the form of Ryotwary system. Consequently, the land became an item in the commodity market which could be purchased or sold or mortgaged. Apart from these, the new system fixed a money payment and assessment based on land and not on the annual produce was introduced. All these eventually led to widespread peasant uprisings which terribly rocked the Assamese rural society as stated in the previous chapter. It has also been focussed in the previous chapter that the majority of the peasantry of the Brahmaputra Valley were the revenue paying peasantry. As a result, they come under the category of holdings of 10 to less than 30 bighas of land. From that point of view, we may say that the large majority of peasantry of this Valley in Assam was basically the middle peasant following the model of agrarian structure drawn up by D. N. Dhanagare. Thus, question of peasant differentiation in the form of Rich, Middle and poor peasantry in the Brahmaputra Valley was significant and large majority of peasantry can be seen as coming basically under the category of the middle peasant. In fact, Eric, R. Wolf argued that, ‘the middle peasantry refers to a peasant population which has secure access to land of its own and cultivates it with family labor. Where these middle peasant holdings lie within the power domain of a superior, possession of their own resources provides their holders with the minimal tactical freedom required to

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1 This has been discussed in details in the Chapter III.
2 D.N. Dhanagare, Peasant Movements in India 1920-50, New Delhi, 1983.
challenge their overlord. It is also the middle peasant who is relatively the most vulnerable to economic changes wrought by commercialism. In the context of Assam, as we have shown in the previous chapter, the largest section of the peasantry could be covered under Wolf’s characterisation of the middle peasantry.

The foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 gave the political consciousness of the Assamese a definite nationalist orientation. Apart from the rise of nationalist consciousness the nature and outlook of the peasantry of the Brahmaputra Valley also began to change from the end of the 19th century. A new awakening marked the close of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century in Assam. The growth of the new awakening was itself largely the result of the spread of English education together with which came ideas of western liberal democracy. As discussed in the previous chapter after 1860, the peasantry of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam organised a series of struggles against the colonial exploitation in their own capacity in connection with the enhancement of land revenue. This mood of expression was found in the revolt of Phulaguri at Nagaon, Ran (battle) of Mangaldai, Lachima, Rangin and Patharughat. “The Raijmels, an organisation of the peasantry, played a very important part in organising these peasant uprisings against the colonial government”. Under the direction of the Raijmels, the militant ryots bravely fought against the British Government with their traditional weapons like Dao(Dao), Jathi(Spear), bows and arrows. Very often, the militant ryots could not stand against the British forces which were well equipped with modern weapons. Towards the end of the 19th century, peasant struggle took a new turn. In this context, Manorama Sharma has rightly pointed out, “The 1894 uprisings, therefore, not only brought into focus the injustices of British revenue policies, but were also the turning point in the history of peasant organisations in Assam. The Raijmels were institutions where the peasants were the most important participating unit. But after 1894 their place was taken by Ryot Sabhas”. In fact, “the Ryot Sabhas, led and organised by the newly emerging western educated Assamese

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3 Manorama Sharma, Social and Economic Change in Assam: Middle Class Hegemony, New Delhi, 1990, p.102.
elite, were more conducive to the western liberal democratic process". By nature, both the Raijmels and Ryot Sabhas were anti imperialist; but their composition and leadership pattern were different. we see, “in the Raijmels, the peasants were more important than leaders, in the sense that the main force of the peasant movement was provided by the peasants and at certain stages the leadership had to fall behind it”. But as Sharma points out “in the Ryot Sabhas, the leadership was more important and the peasants rarely went ahead of the leaders. The Ryot Sabhas thus, could never be as militant as the Raijmels were, because their leadership was in the hands of a groups of people who believed in moderate politics and constitutional agitation and it is this new leadership’s influence over the Raijmels of 1893-1894, that marked a turning point in the history of the Raijmels”.

The origin of the Ryot Sabhas can be traced back to the last part of the 19th century when the first Ryot Sabha was organised at Tezpur in 1882. The formation and growth of the this Ryot Sabha was due entirely to the pioneering efforts of some of the prominent persons like Haribilash Agarwalla, a merchant planter of Assamese birth, Lambodar Borah, a lawyer, Lakshmi Kanta Barkakati, a manager of saw mills, Jaidev Sharma, Mahendra Nath Dey and others. From the memorandum submitted to the government, it is evident that most of the signatories belonged to the newly emerging educated sections. This Ryot Sabha boldly protested the land settlement policy of Ward, the then Commissioner of Assam. In the same way, another Ryot Sabha at Nagaon had come into existence in 1888 under the initiative of Satyanath Borah, a graduate and well known emerging educated person of Nagaon district. It must be noted that Satyanath Borah was the first representatives of Ryot Sabha of the Brahmaputra Valley who participated in the National Congress session held in 1886 in Calcutta. Likewise, Laksmikanta Barkakoti and Ghanashyam Baruah respectively from

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6 ibid., p.102.  
7 ibid., p.102.  
8 ibid., p.102.  
9 Home Political No, 300, 1883.  
10 ibid., Assam Secretariat Revenue B. progs. March, 1892, Nos-311-322.  
11 Home political, ibid.  
12 ibid.  
13 Amalendu Guha, op.cit., p.343.
Tezpur Ryot Sabha and Nagaon Ryot Sabha attended the Indian National Congress sessions held in Madras (1887) and Allahabad (1888). Thus, it is evident from the above that during the last part of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century and since the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the peasant movement had turned into a new direction. In fact, these two Ryot Sabhas were the background of the nature of peasant mobilisation during the first half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. In this context, Amalendu Guha stated that, “the educated middle class element had no action oriented programme of agitation and could not take the popular discontent outside the channel of petition-making. In areas where these modern Ryot Sabhas and associations were in the field, no militant mass struggles on the line of the Raijmels (1893-94) ever took place. Nevertheless, even these institutions were useful in their early stage as organised platforms for the spread of modern political consciousness and the development of nationalism”.

Like many other regions of the country, Assam did not remain untouched by the change in the methods and strategy which became popular in the wake of the foundation of the Indian National Congress. The social consciousness that emerged and developed in Assam throughout the last part of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century can be seen reflected in the perceptions of the Sarvojanik Sabha that was formed at Jorhat in 1884. The President of this Sabha was Raja Nara Narayan Singh, a scion of the last line of the Ahom Kings. The secretary of the Sabha was Jagannath Barooah. The Sabha took up a number of issues with the government for the socio-economic development of the Province and for the protection of the rights and interests of the people. The Sabha criticised the manner of the introduction of Assam land revenue regulation of 1886. In 1892, the Sabha expressed its solidarity with the ryots who agitated against the enhancement of land revenue. The Jorhat Sarvajanik Sabha pleaded against the

\textsuperscript{14}ibid., p.363.  
\textsuperscript{15}ibid., p.63.  
\textsuperscript{16}Assam Secretariat Proceedings, Home, A, July, No 1894, Nos 195-196.  
\textsuperscript{17}ibid. (Jagannath Barooah was the first graduate of Upper Assam and Second in the whole Province. That was why, he was very popular among the Villagers as B.A.Jagannath. The first graduate was Ananda Ram Baruah in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. The importance of Jagannath Barooah is being focused in the Chapter V).  
\textsuperscript{18}ibid.  
\textsuperscript{19}ibid.  
\textsuperscript{20}Royal Commission on Opium, Minutes of Revenue, 18th November, & 29th December, Vol-II, 1893, p.462.
abrupt prohibition of opium which might adversely affect those who could not survive without using the drug. In short, the Sarvajanik Sabha was dominated by moderate nationalists who liked their national counterparts, followed a non-agitational path till the 20th century. Nevertheless the Sabha was looked upon with disfavour by the ruling authority and the agitation against opium launched by this Sabha continued. It is an admitted fact that with the progress of freedom movement, the opium question became a vital issue. The Ryot Sabhas in subsequent period under its sister organisation Kanee Nibarani Sabha (opium eradication committee) agitated for its complete prohibition in Assam. The functions of this Sabha came to an end after the death of Jagannath Barooah in 1907 when there was a split in it. 22

Another powerful organisation which shaped social consciousness was the Assam Association which emerged in 1903.23 The founding personalities were Manik Chandra Barua, Ghanashyam Baruah, Jagannath Baruah, Faijnur Ali and others.24 In this context, J.B. Bhattacharjee is of the opinion that:

“The Assam Association played a key role in the political history of Assam in the beginning of the 20th century when India prepared itself for a representative and democratic policy. It pinned its faith on constitutional agitation and served as the mouth piece of the people of Assam in representing their needs and grievances, hopes and aspiration, stood for the unity and integrity of Assam and its membership was opened to all sections of the population of the province, irrespective of caste, creed or language. It was a federal and democratic organisation with branches in districts and sub-divisions all over the Brahmaputra Valley and opinion of the branches, on all burning questions, received

23 ibid.
due consideration in annual and special conferences of the Association".25

It is true that the Assam Association was instrumental in rousing national consciousness in the minds of the people at a time when there was no other organisation of its kind and it also protested against the imposition of Grazing tax, and Buffalo tax.26

Thus, it is evident from the above that the socio-political organisations within the fabric of the constitutional agitation, strongly raised their voice in favour of the peasantry in the early part of the 20th century.

In the meantime, the nature of political developments in Assam as elsewhere substantially changed as a result of the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi in Indian politics. A brief survey of Gandhi’s strategies and views regarding the mobilisation of the peasants is relevant here in order to understand the Ryot Sabhas and its politics in Assam. Gandhi introduced his methods of non-violent mass resistance through Satyagraha. Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad provided him a trial ground during 1917-18. In fact, Champaran was the scene of first major peasant uprising in Bihar during 1916-17 against the indigo planters under the leadership of M.K. Gandhi.27 The success of the agitation in Champaran provided Gandhian consciousness to those participating in the movement and it gave a new enthusiasm to the peasantry and taught them the lesson of non-violence.28 Gandhi’s mission to Champaran created an impression on the minds of ryots and taught them fearlessness and regard for honesty, which emboldened them later on to meet the ordeals in the course of their struggle for freedom.29 In this first kind of his experience, the local leaders and peasantry not only courageously joined, but Gandhi successfully tried his technique of Satyagraha also and this became an important element in the Non Co-Operation Movement. Similarly, on March, 28, 1918, Gandhi opened the second front of Satyagraha in Gujarat in the

26 Home Political, No, 300, 1883, op. cit.
28 ibid., p.86.
29 ibid., p.86.
district of Kaira where Gandhi was supported by a number of public leaders including Vallabhbhai Patel. On his advice the farmers of Kaira stopped the payment of revenue to the government. In fact, the victory in Kaira marked the beginning of political consciousness among the peasants. It was only Gandhi who first saw the problem of Indian nationalism and social re-construction in a non-elitist perspective, realised that no anti-imperialist struggle could succeed in India without the involvement of millions of village folk and peasants whom the Congress had hitherto ignored. Gandhi, therefore, devised a programme of politically mobilising the rural masses and for drawing them nearer the elitist Indian nationalist Movement. With the participation of the peasantry, Indian Nationalism attained a new dimension and the period of mass-nationalism with new method and strategy began to gain ground. In this process, several other social groups including the middle classes, artisans, working classes and even sections of the landed gentry gradually got involved in it. Describing the influence of M.K. Gandhi in Indian politics, Judith Brown wrote, “With the arrival of Gandhi in Indian politics, the doors of modern politics were opened not only to the masses or even to all those who had participated in Non-Co-operation but to the western educated of the once backward areas and to some vernacular literates from town and countryside who had acted as sub-contractors for Non-Co-operation”. In fact, since 1919, the Indian National Congress became a dynamic organisation and assumed the “look of a vast agrarian organisation with strong sprinkling of the middle classes”. It must be admitted that despite the large scale propagation of the ‘ideology’ of a single peasantry or the Kisan, Bipan Chandra holds the opinion that, peasant ‘class’ consciousness remained on the whole at a very low level. This was because, as in principle, the emergence of the militant trend in the National Movement always appeared to the Indian National Congress under Gandhi’s leadership as a great hindrance to the cause of non-violence and united action against the alien rule. Consequently, since 1922, except few local agitations, there was in fact, no such organised national stir or agitation. All the major National Movements namely those of 1921, 1930 and 1942 were launched

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31 ibid. p.104.
33 J. Nehru, Discovery of India, New Delhi, 1989, p.360.
34 Bipan Chandra, Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India, New Delhi, 1979, p.343.
without any broad based agrarian programmes. One can therefore agree with Bipan Chandra when he pointed out that, “though Indian National Congress took resolutions on agrarian issues several times, it hardly organised any agitations, struggles, or even educational campaigns around these demands”. In spite of such shortcomings, it is true that the emergence of M.K. Gandhi paved the way of radicalisation of anti-imperialist struggle in India.

In the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam also, the emergence of Assam Chatra Sanmilan (Students’ organisation) in 1916 was one of the remarkable development in the history of radical politics in Assam. “The origin of this organisation can be traced back to the socio-political condition, prevailing at the time in the Province, following the British government’s introduction of Bengali in 1836, replacing Assamese as the language of the schools, and courts of Assam – an act which, while posing a serious threat to the very survival of the Assamese nationality dealt a severe blow to nascent Assamese nationalism. The process of formation of this historic Assam Chatra Sanmilan began on 25th December, at Guwahati under the Presidentship of Lakhminath Bezbaruah, which clearly stated that the conference would have nothing to do with any political propaganda or with any political movement of any sort. Although, the students throughout the country had a vital role to play in the freedom struggle, the case of the students and youths of Assam was distinct. According to Shiela Bora, “the distinction lies in the fact that Congress had no base in Assam till 1920 and it was the student community, which was instrumental in rousing political consciousness amongst the people of the Province”. Gradually, Presidents of various conferences of the Assam Chatra Sanmilan often advocated the idea of active participation of students in politics. As the prevailing condition of the times compelled the student community of Assam to take part in politics, this became a second nature with the student

35 ibid., pp.348-349.  
38 Shiela Bora in A.C. Bhuyan(ed), op.cit., p.277.  
39 ibid., p.218.  
40 For a discussion on Chatra Sanmilan, for detail, see, Atul Chandra Hazarika,(ed & compiled), op.cit.
leadership.\textsuperscript{41} It is, therefore, “the politically conscious students decided to invite eminent men of literature to preside over the various sessions of the \textit{Chatra Sanmilan}”.\textsuperscript{42} In this manner, ‘they aimed to fulfill two objectives—firstly, to acquaint the eminent scholars and personalities of India with the condition of Assam and secondly, to provide an opportunity for the student organisation and the people of Assam to imbibe the spirit of nationalism’.\textsuperscript{43} The politicalisation of the \textit{Sanmilan} can be seen in the session held at Tezpur in 1919 in which, Prafulla Chandra Roy, the Scientist and the great \textit{Swadeshi} leader was invited to preside over. ‘P.C. Roy in his Presidential address, exhorted the students to take trade and industry, in view of the abundant natural resources of the Province like its rich forest wealth and the vast expanse of fallow land, which the alien tea planters were exploiting by setting up tea gardens’.\textsuperscript{44} Roy too pointed out the importance of Assamese \textit{Endi}, \textit{Muga} and \textit{paat} which were famous throughout the world and urged the womenfolk not to give up the the act of weaving. Omeo Kumar Das, one of the founders of Assam \textit{Chatra Sanmilan}, on behalf of the student community being influenced by his speech, called upon the people of Assam to be self reliant.\textsuperscript{45} A resolution was also passed for the boycott of all foreign goods and for the promotion of \textit{Swadeshi} or Indian goods.\textsuperscript{46} Similarly, D.R. Bhandarkar who presided over the fifth session of the \textit{Sanmilan} explained to the people that \textit{Swadeshi} was not a political concept, but a purely economic one aimed at bringing about the industrial development of the nation.\textsuperscript{47} It is true that the students of Assam had their true baptism into active politics under the leadership of the \textit{Chatra Sanmilan} only during the Non Co-Operation movement in 1921. In fact, political awakening had gradually infiltrated into the students community of Assam. Thus, there was a difference of opinion between the older leaders and the younger student leaders which became evident in their attitude to the Non Co-Operation Movement. ‘The Assam Association delegation, comprising of Nabin Chandra Bordolai, Chandranath Sarma and Faijnur Ali and others found themselves to

\textsuperscript{42}Shiela Bora in A.C. Bhuyan(ed), \textit{op.cit.,} p.218.
\textsuperscript{43}\textit{ibid.,} p.219.
\textsuperscript{45}Quoted from Shiela Bora in A.C. Bhuyan(ed), \textit{op.cit.,} p.219.
\textsuperscript{46}\textit{ibid.,} p.219.
\textsuperscript{47}D.R. Bhandarkar, “Presidential Address of \textit{Chatra Sanmilan} of Assam” in Atul Chandra Hazarika(ed & compiled), \textit{op.cit.,} pp.70-83.
be divided on the issue of Non Co-Operation’ at the Calcutta session of the Congress in 1920, where the Non Co-Operation resolution was passed. "Although measures like the boycott of excisable goods, the promotion of hand-woven clothes and *Swadeshi* and the boycott of the forthcoming election to the councils were unanimously adopted, it was proposed that the action of the withdrawal of boys and girls from the government aided schools College and boycott of practices in law courts by lawyers was to be gradual". The younger members like Chandra Nath Sarma, Ambikagiri Raychoudhury and Triguncharan Baurah demanded the immediate withdrawal of students from school and colleges and moved a resolution to this effect. But, the resolution did not become effective in Assam due to the opposition from the elder leaders like Nabin Chandra Bordoloi and Tarun Ram Phukan. In fact, both Tarun Ram Phukan and Nabin Chandra Bordoloi instructed the students not to boycott the college abruptly. They asked them to wait and see the course of events. Consequently, disillusioned by this type of attitude of the moderate leaders of the Assam Association, the students veered closer to the Congress point of view, which appeared to them to be more action oriented. The students worked with great enthusiasm at the Tezpur session of the Assam Association held in 1920, where it was proposed that the decision to launch the Non Co-Operation in the *state*, was to be publicized. The reception committee erected four welcome gates in the name of Tilok, Gandhi, Shaukat Ali and *Swaraj*. These gates brought a new impetus during the session. On the importance of Tezpur session, Krishna Nath Sarmah writes, “As the sudden political movement in India clasped Assam, Assamese people now can’t think of starting political movement separately - - - young Assam is all agog to make thunderous participation. I was fascinated at the blessed spirit of young Assam”. Meanwhile, the Non Co-Operation resolution was rectified at Nagpur session of the Congress and here a few Assamese students got an opportunity to listen to the various national leaders. Following the return of these students, Cotton

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50 *Assam Police Abstract of Intelligence, 4-01-1921* (Henceforth *APAI*), For details on this issue, see, Chandra Prasad Saikia & others(eds), *Bordoloi Rasanawalli and Tarun Ram Phukan Rasanawalli*, Guwahati, 1975 & 1977.
52 *ibid.*, p.220.
College hostel became the centre of activity. Hem Chandra Baruah, a student of law college, Omeo Kumar Das, a third year student of law college of Calcutta University and Chandra Nath Sarma were also invited to the Cotton College hostel where the discussion centered around the unanimous boycott of the institution and the future of the students taking part in the boycott programme. In the meantime, Nabin Chandra Bardoloi also acknowledged in his speech at the 41st session of the Indian National Congress of the role of the students of Assam in initiating the Non Co-Operation movement in Assam. After the Nagpur session of Indian National Congress in 1921, the idea of Non Co-Operation filtered in Assam. Besides, Chandra Nath Sarma and some students also attended the All India College Students' Conference at Nagpur on 25 and 26 December, 1920 which were presided over by Lala Lajpat Rai. Supporting the Non Co-Operation decision of the Congress, the conference called for “immediate and unconditional boycott of Government and Government aided colleges and advised the college students of India to respond to it. Gradually the students’ community engaged in propaganda work in the village and tried to educate the rural masses and uplift their living conditions. As thousand of students enrolled as volunteers for the Assam National volunteer corps, the National schools became the swaraj camps from which volunteers were sent out to every village in the district to enrol workers for Gandhi's army. These students volunteers undertook jobs like picketing in excise shops, dissuaded the villagers from paying land revenue and encouraged them to boycott government hats and fisheries, in a bid to cut off government revenues. It is an admitted fact that the beginning of the Non Co-Operation Movement, the demand for the formation of the Assam Provincial Congress on the lines of the Nagpur proposal was gaining popular support and very soon Assam Provincial Congress Committee(APCC) came into existence in 1921. Gradually, the branches of APCC committee were not only set up in the district level, but in the Mauza, village and grass root level also. On behalf of the Assam Provincial Congress Committee, Tarun Ram Phukan, Nabin Chandra Bordoloi, Kuladhar Chaliha and Chandra Nath Sarma attended the Bombay session of

55 Shiela Bora in A.C. Bhuyan(ed), op.cit., p.221.
56 ibid., p.221.
58 ibid., p.17.
59 Shiela Bora in A.C.Bhuyan(ed), op. cit., p.222.
60 ibid., p.222.
61 Sagar Baruah, op. cit., p.35.
the All India Congress Committee in July 1921 and they invited M.K. Gandhi to Assam
to propagate the message of Non Co-Operation among the Assamese people.62

Thus on the basis of above discussion, it is clear that it is the students who
began the Non Co-Operation Movement in Assam 63 and gradually it turned to spread
to the rural sector of the people. In fact, under the leadership of students' community,
peasantry became a dynamic force and came into the path of socio-economic exploi-
tation against the colonial government.

Against this background, the Non Co-Operation Movement had generated a tre-
mendous revolutionary spirit in the rural places of Brahmaputra Valley of Assam and
here the peasantry spontaneously played a vital role under the leadership of Chatra
Sanmilan. Accordingly, vigorous no-tax campaign was started at Boko, Luki, Bangaon,
Chamaria, Jorhat, Golaghat, Sipajhar, Patharughat and the like which resulted in heavy
fall in government revenue collection.64 Needless to say, the visit of Gandhi in 1921
along with Maulana Mahammod Ali, Maulana Saukat Ali, Jamunalal Bajaj and others on
18th August, 1921 to Assam,65 brought a new impetus. So far as the progress of the Non
Co-Operation Movement was concerned, Gandhi addressed the meetings at Guwahati,
Tezpur, Nagaon, Jorhat, Dibrugarh and inspired thousands of people.66 Gandhi's visit
helped in extending the base of the Congress right from the Provincial to the Village
level. However, in the wake of the Non Co-Operation Movement, the rural people
boycotted government courts, took up cultivation of cotton, spinning and weaving,
pressurised government employees to give up jobs, resisted payments of collective
fines imposed upon them for participating in the Non Co-Operation programmes and
stopped food supply to government officials. The tribal people, the majority of whom
depended on agriculture for subsistance, were not left untouched. Some of the villages
of Kamrup district, particularly the Kachari-dominated areas of Boko, Chaygaon etc.

62 Quoted in ibid., p.37.
63 Shiela Bora in A.C. Bhuyan (ed), op.cit., p.220.
64 APAC, Kamrup, 12 November, Nagaon, 2nd October, Darrang, 9th April, Sibsagar, 12th June, 1921.
65 Home Political file no, 42, 1921.
66 Assam Provincial Congress Committee Papers, file No B/1922.
were perceptibly affected by the preaching of Non Co-Operation. At Boko, the tribal ryots decided to stop payment of revenue to the government as a part of Non Co-Operation. The government rushed forces to the area and arrested a large number of peasants who were made to stand in waist deep water of Jaljali river in the month of December. Praising the nationalistic spirit of the peasantry of the Brahmaputray Valley of Assam, Tarun Ram Phukon had rightly pointed out;

"With all that amazing ignorance and absolute poverty I found them (the Tribal people) ready to respond to our call more promptly and ungrudgingly than many so-called educated people did not..... When I recall the enthusiasm and the determined and concerted action of the Kacharis of Boko, their ready response, their sacrifices and sufferings, my heart bleeds even now. The Miris of Sibsagar, the Dufflas of North Lakhimpur became our best workers and gave such splendid demonstrations of their sincerity and ability that the trained soldiers of the government had to look at them with awe and admiration".  

The emergence of the Village Panchayats was the special feature of the movement. The formation of it was necessary concomitant to the boycott of courts and was taken up in right earnest. Accordingly, Panchayats became prominent in Kamrup, Jorhat, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Darrang and Dibrugarh. At Jorhat, 250 Panchayats were formed and at Sibsagar a special Panchayat was formed. Thus, the movement of 1921 had generated a revolutionary spirit all over the Brahmaputra Valley. In this context, realising the growth of consciousness Bijoy Chandra Bhagawati, a prominent freedom fighter of Assam, wrote, “the Non Co-Operation Movement of 1921 created a harmony among the leaders. The unity and communication among the leaders was so successfully ar-

68 Ibid.
70 K.N. Sarmah, op. cit., p.86.
71 APAl, Sibsagar, 12th June, 1921, op. cit.
ranged that the whole movement was converted into a single family where every member was united into a single organisation. Herein lies the importance of the movement for which it is unprecedented in the world".72

But when the movement was suspended after the Chauri-Chaura incident by Gandhi on the plea of violation of Non-violence principle, the newly generated revolutionary urge of the people got frustrated. The frustration was also due to heavy repressive measures by the alien rule including ban on the Congress party and organisation. It was under this condition that the people with more radical consciousness had no other alternative but to express their grievances through local agitations by forming peasant organisations. The ‘local agitation’, according to S.L. Baruah kept alive a round questions of aboliton of the unpopular Grazing Tax, reduction of land revenue for giving relief to the peasants whose economic condition had deteriorated after the first World War and restriction of immigration of East Bengal Muslim to Assam.73 So far as the issues were concerned, the first two were directly agrarian problems, while the third one was a demographic one as discussed earlier, but which also had agrarian ramifications.

In fact, it was since post Non Co-Operation and Civil Dis-obedience Movement period, a number of local peasant organisations emerged either newly started or re-activised on demands such as reduction and remission of land revenue, distribution of agricultural loans, the abolition of cart tax and others. In this context, Amalendu Guha observes, ‘the notable aspects of these organisations were that at grass -root level, they were not primarily politically oriented inspite of their close contact with congressmen.74 As a result, during this period, there emerged Ryot Sabhas in the Brahmaputra Valley districts of Assam. Accordingly, the Naduar Ryot Sabha was held in 1931 in Darrang district which was attended by several hundreds of ryots including

72Debeswar Doloi & Tileswar Bordoloi(eds), Swadhinota Sangramat Jorhat, Jorhat,1995, p.47, (Translation is mine).
74Amalendu Guha, op.cit., p.181.
many women. Harekrishna Das, a retired Surgeon and the President of Sabha appealed to the ryots to assert their rights.\textsuperscript{75} Likewise, the first Chaiduar Ryoṭ Sabha was held at Gamiri which was presided over by Pitambor Dev Goswami, Satradhikar, Garamur Satra, Majuli.\textsuperscript{76} Gradually, similar Ryoṭ Sabhas began to emerge at Biswanath, Charing, Saloguri, Ganak Phukhuri in Darrang and Sibsagar and also in other areas of the Brahmaputra Valley.\textsuperscript{77} In fact, the Ryoṭ Sabhas were particularly found in Tezpur, Sibsagar and Jorhat areas.\textsuperscript{78} For instance, the Hitsadhini Sabha was formed in 1931 under the presidentship of Hem Baruah at the Konwarpur Mauza in Sibsagar District.\textsuperscript{79} In his presidential address, Hem Baruah urged that all revolution had its root in economic problem.\textsuperscript{80} He appealed to the public not to rest and advocated to be united under the Congress and fight for complete independence.\textsuperscript{81}

Gradually, between 1920 and the post 1930 period, many peasant organisations began to emerge. As a matter of fact, the Goalpara Krishak Sanmiloni in 1933 represented the local grievances, particularly those of the tenants of the Mechpara Zamindars' estate from time to time.\textsuperscript{82} As stated above, Assam in the meanwhile had passed through two stages of the Mass Movement— the Non Co-Operation(1920-22) and Civil Dis-obedience(1930-34) Movements. In these phases, the Nationalist and patriotic elements of Assam participated under the guidance of the Indian National Congress. But, like other parts of the country, with the coming up of the Socialist and Communists parties and organisations in the post Civil Dis-obedience Movement in Assam, the freedom struggle underwent an orientation towards the left meaning thereby that the struggle came to mean not only political independence from the foreign yoke; rather, it came to mean the freedom of the workers and the peasantry from all kinds of exploitation—social, political and economic from capitalism and imperialism.\textsuperscript{83} It was, there-

\textsuperscript{75} Abstract of Assam Administrative Report for the year 1931-32, Nehru Memorial Museum Library, New Delhi. The details of Harekrishna Das has been discussed in the Chapter VI.
\textsuperscript{76} ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} ibid.
\textsuperscript{79} Amalendu Guha, op. cit., p.181.
\textsuperscript{80} Home Political file no, 77, 1931.
\textsuperscript{81} ibid.
\textsuperscript{82} ibid.
\textsuperscript{83} Amalendu Guha, op.cit., p.182.
fore, Dhiren Dutta of Golaghat, an active Congress worker with leftist teaching who tried to propagate Socialistic ideas among the peasants. He also distributed his self composed poems printed as Abhijan to inculcate patriotic atmosphere among the peasantry. Not only did he recite these poems but coloured them with the historic slogan uth Kisak Nangal Salai Lagai De Bhai Gondogul (Rise up peasants, use your ploughs to create an uproar). In subsequent period, it led to the emergence of the Halowa Sangha in 1933 at Golaghat with the active participation of Jadunath Saikia, Khageswar Tamuly and others. It is to be noted that the slogan Nangal Jar Mati Tar (Land belongs to him who operates the plough) was the first slogan in Assam to assert the right of the peasants over their lands. In the later phases, Nikhil Goalpara Krishak Samittee which emerged in 1935 drew attention to local problems.

Thus, it is evident from the above that the emergence of peasant organisations raised the National Movement to a new height. Political organisations had become more aware of the need to mobilise and organise the peasantry around their own demands and in their own organisations not only for wider socio-economic aspects; but also political emancipation from the British yoke. The peasants who had shown their discontent against the exploitation and oppression meted out to them by the colonial government were highly influenced by the national movement. The constructive programmes of the Congress like no tax campaign gave the oppressed ryots more strength to organise themselves and to raise their voice demanding the reduction of land revenue. As a matter of fact, the growth of peasant organisation like Ryot Sabhas left a deep mark on the struggle for national freedom. The Congress party in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam found an opportunity to strengthen its solidarity in the grass root level. The study also focussed regarding the emergence of Krishak Sabha under the leadership of a new group who came under the influence of leftist or socialist ideology. It is an admitted fact that although other left-wing peasant organisations had come

84 Dhodhi Mahanta, Asomot Communist Andulonor Janma aru Bikasar Samandhe, Guwahati, 1993, p.36.
85 ibid., p.38.
86 ibid., p.38.
87 Anil Ray Chaudhury(ed), Achinta Rasanawalli, Vol-I, Guwahati, 1999, p.188.
88 Amalendu Guha, op. cit., p.248.
into existence, their activities were confined to a limited area. Rather, the Ryot Sabhas emerged as the only large scale peasant organisation. In fact, as A.C. Bhuyan argues, “in Assam, neither the Communist nor the socialists had any dominating influence in the political field as the Congress organisation had a strong hold over the masses”. It is, however, during this period that the process of development of peasant organisations had begun to emerge in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. Gouri Sankar Bhattacharji, a prominent freedom fighter of Assam has rightly pointed out, “the new generation of young political workers were the main architect of the Non Co-Operation and Civil Disobedience Movements in which the peasantry of the Brahmaputra Valley were the basic strength to make the success of the aforesaid movements”.

Thus, we have seen that during our period of study two types of peasant organisations emerged in the Brahmaputra Valley. One was left backed, where as other was Congress backed peasant organisation. It is to be noted that the activities of the left backed peasant organisations were confined to a limited areas. But, the Ryot Sabhas under the influence of the Congress began to emerge in large scale in the Brahmaputra Valley. In the next chapter, we shall discuss the historical background of emergence of the Ryot Sabha in Sibsagar District because this district had played a significant role in the emergence of the Ryot Sabha in the Brahmaputra Valley.

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Existence of the Ryot Sabha in a selected Mauzas of Sibsagar district

**Jorhat**
1. Jorhat
2. Gayan Gaon
3. Patia Gaon
4. Cinnamara
5. Teok
6. Meleng
7. Mariani
8. Nakachari
9. Titabar
10. Puranimati
11. Borphula
12. Kamalaban
13. Jangraimukh
14. Bongaon

**Sibsagar**
1. Dihing
2. Simaluguri
3. Lakuwa
4. Amguri
5. Jhanji
6. Sapakhati
7. Sibsagar
8. Charing
9. Gaurisagar
10. Namdang
11. Namti
12. Sonari

**Golaghat**
1. Bokakhat
2. Sarupathar
3. Dergaon
4. Dhekjal
5. Golaghat
6. Dakhin Hengera
7. Ghiladhari
8. Misamara
9. Khuntai