CHAPTER VI

NATURE, FUNCTIONS AND ORGANISATION OF RYOT SABHA

As discussed earlier, the emergence of the Ryot Sabhas added a new dimension in the history of the growth of the peasant Movement particularly in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. The erosion of material condition of peasantry which started during the early colonial rule did not stop during the thirties of the 20th Century. In fact, the situation was such that the condition of the peasantry became worse as is evident from the discussion in the earlier chapters. Under these circumstances, it is quite natural to expect that the peasantry would react against such socio-economic injustices. As a result, since the 1930s, there had been the organisation of numerous Ryot Sabhas in the Brahmaputra Valley as discussed in the previous chapter. In course of time, the local Ryot Sabhas were organised which paved the way for the emergence of All Assam Ryot Sabha in 1933 to consolidate the strong foundation of the movement. Under the umbrella of the All Assam Ryot Sabha, the local Ryot Sabhas raised their grievances and vigorously agitated against the existing Colonial Government for the redressal of their grievances. This chapter is an attempt to study the nature, functions and organisation of the Ryot Sabha movement launched during the period of our study.

In order to articulate the nature and functions of the Ryot Sabha, we have to look into the demands of the Ryot Sabha at the different levels in which the Ryot Sabha were organised. On the basis of the evidences available, we can classify the Ryot Sabhas held in the Brahmaputra Valley districts into four levels Viz. village, thana, district and provincial level. In the village level, it is seen that the major demand of the

1For details see Chapter III & IV.
Ryot Sabhas were the reduction of the land revenue by 50% and other taxes to 8(eight) annas per rupee. In this context, the village level Ryot Sabhas like Chaiduar Ryot Sabha, Naduar Ryot Sabha, Nigam Ryot Sabha, Chilamari Ryot Sabha, Baghmora Ryot Sabha of Tezpur, Dimoria Ryot Sabha, Mayang Ryot Sabha, Gerekigaon Ryot Sabha, Bihubori Ryot Sabha, Sapori Ryot Sabha, Khetri Ryot Sabha, Dharmpur Ryot Sabha and others strongly agitated for and raised their voice in favour of the 50% reduction of land revenue. But, in the thana, district and provincial level Ryot Sabhas, we see other demands relating to the socio-economic welfare being raised as well. To illustrate this, a discussion of the demands made at the thana, district and provincial level is made below.

The Chaiduar Ryot Sabha was held at Gamiri, Darrang on 13th and 14th June, 1931. The Sabha recorded its protest against the classification of land in Chaiduar and against the action of the settlement officers not listening to the grievances of the people. It further demanded an enquiry into the matter. The Sabha also strongly censured Rai Sahib Dalim Chandra Borah for voting for the increase of revenue. In another aspect, the Sabha strongly protested against the action of the government in stopping the pension of Dr. Hare Krishna Das. This Sabha supported the Gandhi - Irwin Agreement. Although the attainment of complete independence by violent method was not the creed of the Congress, yet this Sabha expressed its resentment of the execution of Bhagat Singh and others. Apart from these, the Sabha condemned the action of the Tezpur Local Board for not abolishing the taxes on bullock carts used for agricultural purposes and requested the Board to abolish it immediately. The Sabha requested the people to grow cotton and spin in every house and to give up the use of intoxicants. The Sabha requested the authorities to give immediate help to those Nepalis who had settled permanently in Assam.
Another *Ryot Sabha* which was held at Bokial under Golaghat Police Station demanded compulsory education, abolition of cart tax and permission to villagers to use forest product such as bamboos, canes etc.\(^{12}\) Similarly, Nangaltupgaon *Ryot Sabha* held at Borhulla under Titabor police station demanded the Boycott of opium which had caused general deterioration of the health of the Assamese people and asked government to establish schools, hospitals and post offices.\(^{13}\)

Another important *Ryot Sabha* was held at North Mangoldoi under Tangla Sub-division and it passed following resolution in the form of demands.\(^{14}\)

1. Separation of Sylhet from Assam.
2. Need for a high court and a University in Assam.
3. Reduction of land revenue by 50%.
4. Need for a public health dispensary at Tangla.
5. Need for more lower primary schools in the sub-division.
6. Necessity for hanging up notices in ferry ghats and hats showing the rates of tolls.
7. Necessity of fencing the railway line from Tangla to Rangapara.
8. Introduction of voting by the ballots system in local board elections.
9. Disapproval of the system of reserving lands for immigrants from Mymensingh.

\(^{12}\) *ibid.*, 15.4.1936.  
\(^{13}\) *ibid.*, 20.5.1936.  
\(^{14}\) *ibid* 7.10.1936.
Another notable annual sitting of the *Ryot Sabha* held at Naduar under Sootia Police Station, passed the following resolutions.\(^{15}\)

1. Landed property only and not movable property should be attached for non-payment of revenue.
2. The boundary line between the Assamese and the Mymensingh settlers should be settled.
3. A local board dispensary should be established at Jamuguri.
4. The local board *hats* and *ghats* were not to be leased out to non-Assamese.
5. The election to the local boards should be conducted by the system adopted in the Assembly election and local Board election, the *ryots* should give their votes in favour of Congress nominees.

Likewise, the 13\(^{th}\) *Sabha* of the Naduar *Ryot Sabha* held at Borohogia village demanded the following.\(^{16}\)

1. The *Sabha* demanded introduction of *Bills* for fixing prices of Agricultural produces.
2. The *Sabha* asked to control the current of Bhoroli river from damaging the eastern bank.

All the district level demands raised were very similar to those raised at the thana level. For instance, the Jorhat district *Ryot Sabha* condemned the India Bill of 1935 as having been conceived in a spirit of imperialistic domination and economic exploitation.\(^{17}\) The *Sabha* also adopted the constitution as drafted by the provincial *Ryot Sabha*.\(^{18}\) The *Sabha* censured the members of legislative council respectively Kashi Nath Saikia and Sabeswar Baruah for remaining absent from the legislative council during the discussion of the Assam Tenancy Bill.\(^{19}\) The *Sabha* strongly criticised the

\(^{15}\) *ibid.*, 3.7.1937.
\(^{16}\) *ibid.*, 3.6.1937.
\(^{17}\) *ibid.*, 19.4.1935. India Bill of 1935.
\(^{18}\) *ibid.*
\(^{19}\) *ibid.*
activities of the Local Board for the abolition of some primary schools, accepting the
Tenders of foreigners, disallowing press representatives in their meeting, failure to
open hats (market), harassment of ryots in the realization of cart tax and abandonment
of road repairs.20 The demolition of houses of ryots in Amguri and Kherkatia Mauzas
by Revenue officials was also condemned.21 The meeting urged upon the Ryots to sue
home span cloth and dhenki-made rice (hand pounded rice).22

The Lakhimpur District Ryot Sabha demanded the following.23

1. To move the government for the reduction of land revenue.
2. To move the local Board authorities to sanction pucca wells in 13
different villages and to construct bridges over the breaches on the road
from Bogibil to Dibrugarh.
3. To distribute seats in the local Board in proportion to the local rates
paid by the ryots and tea planters.

The fourth Annual district Ryot Sabha of Sibsagar held at Puthinoi Dalang
under Teok Police station, adopted the following resolutions.24

1. This Ryot Sabha reiterates the resolutions adopted by the All Asom
Ryot Sabha held at Dergaon in 1934.
2. The Sabha protested against the system of open voting in the local
Board elections.
3. Ryot Sabha demanded the adoption of a secret voting in the local board
elections and demanded universal suffrage each of the elected members
representing a thousand votes.
4. The Ryot Sabha protested against the candidature of Mauzadars and
ex-government officials (i.e. pension holders), public work department

20 ibid.
21 ibid.
22 ibid.
23 ibid.
24 ibid., 7.10.1936.
servants and government contractors and commission holders for seats in the local board.

5. The *Ryot Sabha* protested against the enhanced rates of fees in the government and aided Anglo-vernacular schools for boys.

6. The *Ryot Sabha* requested government to establish some middle English and lower primary schools at Nakachari *Mauza* for the educations of the both boys and girls of the *ryots* and to award grants to those schools.

All these demands of the district level *Ryot Sabhas* found place in the demands raised by the the first and second All *Asom Ryot Sabha* held at Tilikiam of Jorhat and Dergaon respectively in 1933 and 1934. The provincial *Ryot Sabha* thus raised the consolidated demands of the Assamese peasantry, called the ‘Magna Carta’ of the *ryot* of Assam.\(^{25}\) The following demands were passed.\(^{26}\)

1. Major portion of the revenues to be spent for the improvement of the rural masses.
2. Immediate land Revenue legislation.
3. 50% reduction of the land revenue.
4. Immunity of 20 Bighas of land for each peasant from collectory and civil attachment.
5. Total prohibition of opium except for medical use.
6. Free compulsory primary Education from 6 to 11 years.
7. To cancel all debts which, if found by an enquiry committee, had paid more interest than the principal.
8. 6% to be the maximum rate of interest.
10. Provision for supply of pure water and communication for each village.
11. Rupees. 500/- to be the highest pay for public servants at the present

\(^{25}\) *ibid.*, 22.4.1937.
deplorable condition of the ryots.

12. Universal adult suffrage.

13. Use of only Assamese language in all affairs of provincial government including local legislation, local boards, municipal boards, provincial laws and law courts and educational institutions.

14. Reform of the local self government Act and Municipal Act so as to make them completely elected bodies.

15. Immediate re-union of the district of Sylhet with Bengal.

16. The right of free use of timber, thatches, canes etc of forests by the peasants for their domestic organisation.

In addition to the above, the Sabha also declared the government of India Act of 1935 to be unsatisfactory and detrimental to the interest of the masses.27 The Sabha demanded continuity of recent temporary enactment giving land holders time to recover lands sold in revenue sales on deposit of the arrears with costs and 5% with the change of 30 days' time to 60 days.28 The Sabha protested against the act of the government for bringing Barpathar and Sarupathar Mauzas in Golaghat under Mikir hills tract regulation; against pressure for realization of land revenue from peasants engaged in erecting the Brahmaputra bandha (embankment) at Kunwarpur; against prohibitory orders not to erect the Bhogdoi bandha.29

Not only that, the Sabha demanded 50% reduction of grazing tax at the time of depression, provision by local bodies for imparting education in Assamese to the labourers and other outsiders having business with Assamese peasant; separate University and High Court at Guwahati for Assam government.30 The Sabha also undertook to make primary education compulsory by social sanction and determined to popularise the products of village industries including dhenki-made rice, ghani-made oils, gur and to boycott foreign dresses for country theatre.31

27Home Political, ibid.
28ibid.
29ibid.
30ibid.
31ibid.
The above enumerations of the demands of the thana, district and Provincial level sessions of the Ryot Sabhas reveal that although major demand was for the reduction of land revenue by 50% and taxes by 8 (eight) annas per rupee, yet they raised other other demands relating to the socio-economic welfare of ryots of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam and thus widened the range of the Ryot Sabha’s activities and functions. Here, the nature of the leadership of the Ryot Sabha becomes significant. In fact, Assamese educated intelligentia and local congressmen not only led the Ryot Sabhas, but also mobilised them into the path of socio-economic agitation. To cite a few examples, the Chaiduar Ryot Sabha was held at Gamiri under the presidency of Pitambor Dev Goswami. Dev Goswami was the Satradhikar of Garmur Satra, Majuli, one of the epi-centres of Vaishnavite culture of Assam. Being an ardent follower of Gandhi, he began his political career with participation in the Non Co-Operation Movement. He was one of the forerunners of anti-untouchability movement in Assam. Similarly, Mohan Chandra Mahanta presided over Bokial Ryot Sabha under Golaghat Police Station. Hailed from Karanga Telpoti Satra of the Southern part of Jorhat and had obtained the B.L. Degree. As the freedom movement progressed, he turned his life to the cause of the country and devoted himself in the organisation of the rural people through Ryot Sabhas in the Sibsagar District. The secretary of this Bokial Ryot Sabha was Sankar Chandra Baruah whose father was a government clerk. Baruah lost his father at a tender age which forced him to snap his academic career at early stage and joined a job in 1918 in a tea garden office near Sibsagar. Baruah began his political career from the Non Co-Operation period and contributed in mobilising the rural masses in the Golaghat area of Sibsagar District. During the Quit India Movement, he was able to impress a good number of ryots to resort to the violent agitation within the orbit of Gandhian Philosophy. Likewise, the Nangaltupgaon Ryot Sabha of Borhulla was presided over Debeswar Sarma. At the early part of his life, Sarma was a lawyer;

32 APAI file no 137, 27.6.1931, op. cit.
34 ibid., p. 566.
35 APAI, file no 137, 15.4.1936, op. cit.
37 ibid., p. 155.
38 APAI, file No 157, 17.4.1936
40 APAI, 20.5.1936, op.cit.
but gradually, he participated in the Non Co-Operation Movement and took active part in Congress organisation particular in the Sibsagar District. The Naduar Ryot Sabha was presided over by Mohi Chandra Borah. Hailing from Nagaon, Mohi Chandra Borah obtained B.L. Degree. At the initial stage, he was a tea garden manager and subsequently hold the Mauzadership of Silasendurighup Mauza of Nagaon. But, later on, he participated in the Civil Dis-obedience Movement and took active interest in the organisation of the Ryot Sabha in the greater Nagaon District. The first All Asom Ryot Sabha held at Tilikiam, Jorhat was presided over by Nabin Chandra Bordoloi. At the initial stage, Bordoloi was a Magistrate. He was an active leader of Assam Association also. Later on, he became the founder General Secretary of Assam Provincial Congress Committee. In this All Asom Ryot Sabha, Krishna Nath Sarmah was Secretary. Sarmah was basically a lawyer in the Jorhat Court. But, when the Non Co-Operation Movement launched in 1921-22, he left the practice and became a devoted nationalist. Sarmah was the founder General Secretary of All Asom Ryot Sabha. He was also one of the leading Nationalists of Harijan Movement. Likewise, the second All Asom Ryot Sabha held at Dergaon was presided over by Dr. Hare Krishna Das, an well known medical practitioner.

Thus, it is seen that the Assamese educated Intelligentias played a significant part in organising the Ryot Sabhas in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. In fact, the Assamese educated sections had tried to draw attention of the rural people to the issue of the preservation of Assamese identity in the wake of freedom struggle while at the same time keeping alive peasant interests like reduction of enhanced revenue. As a result of the involvement of the Assamese educated intelligentia the local Ryot Sabhas undertook initiative in the local constructive and socio-economic programmes like boycott of various intoxicants like opium, liquor, cigarettes. The programme also included encouragement of spinning and weaving to make the people self-sufficient and also agitated against untouchability to achieve social harmony and brotherhood in

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41 Debeswar Doloi & Tileswar Bordoloi(eds), *op. cit.*, p.127.
42 APAI, 3.7.1937
44 ibid.
45 Home Political file no 123, 1936.
47 Home Political file no 123, 1936, *op. cit*.
49 Home Political, 123, 1936, *op. cit.*
the grass-root level. In the following, we have discussed the socio-economic programmes launched by the *Ryot Sabhas* which substantiate our point.

In the first two decades of the 20th century, the use of the opium spread in an alarming manner despite growing protests from the people and the public leaders. It appears that the existence of a large number of tribal people and backward communities in Assam and subsequently even a few affluent sections preferred using opium not only in the marriage celebration, but also in other social function. From a contemporary record we come to know that,

"The opium habit in Assam is worst in the villages and least in the towns. It is the outlying parts where the vice is greatest and habit is spread among the poorest. There have been numerous cases of moral and economic evils".  

With the aim of eradicating the opium menace after the Non Co-Operation movement, the All India Congress Committee (AICC) renewed its interest regarding the problem and decided to make a detailed investigation. Under such circumstances, AICC (1923-24) at the personal interest of M.K. Gandhi directed C.F. Andrews to visit Assam so as to collect first hand knowledge of the situation and to form an enquiry committee. Andrews arrived in Assam in May 1924 and helped to constitute the Assam opium Enquiry committee. Accordingly, the committee held its sitting from 13th to 16th July, at Dibrugarh and it was attended by Rohini Kanta Hatibaruah, [Desohneta Rohini Kanta Hatibaruah, the second graduate of the Southern part of Jorhat, took keen interest in the organisational activities of the Congress in Assam. During the Non Co-operation Movement, the Assam Provincial Congress Committe was constituted in which Hatibaruah was one of the leading founders. Then, Hatibaruah turned his attention

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51 *Extract from Young India,* 1924, State Archive, Guwahati.  
53 *ibid.* , p. 128
towards the eradication of opium in Assam. But suddenly, at the age of 34, Hatibaruah
died in 1929] Nobin Chandra Bordoloi, Krishna Nath Sarmah, Maulvi Faizur Ali and
others. The strong protest of Krishna Nath Sarmah against the opium is as follows,

“No opium eater will die for want of opium. If any of them die, it will be
due to old age. I calculate that percentage of deaths among the addicts
are highest during the last five years. In the year of prohibition, we can’t
put a stop to those whose days are numbered, but to save a nation from a
ruinous habit no efforts should be spared. The only way is total
prohibition”.

In addition to Dibrugarh, the committee visited all the opium centres like Jorhat,
Nagaon, Polasbari, Nalbari, Rangia and other places of the Brahmaputra. Following
the support of the Assam Opium Enquiry Committee, the councillors continued their
pressure on the government to eradicate the opium habit of the people. In March, 1925,
Kuladhar Chaliha who was the president of Assam opium Enquiry committee, moved a
resolution regarding the total prohibition of the sale and consumption of the opium in
the Province. To further the programme, Chaliha advocated for adequate legislative
measures. Participating in the discussion, Rohini Kanta Hatibaruah pleaded that excise
should be made a transferred subject and this materialized in 1926-27. However, the
continuous attack on the government compelled it to decrease the treasury issue of
opium and raising of its price. But the most effective policy the government adopted
so far came with the indication to implement the council’s resolution of 18 July 1929,
moved by Rohini Kanta Hatibaruah recommending complete prohibition within ten
years.

But, the first organised mass movement in the Brahmaputra Valley against the

54 Extract from Young India, op. cit., Regarding Hatibaruah, see amongs other, K. N. Sarmah, Krishna Nath
Sarmar Diary, op. cit, T. Bordoloi and D. Doloi (eds), Swadhinata Sangramat Jorhat, Jorhat, 1995, pp.130-
132, Amalendu Guha, Planter-Raj to Swaraj: Freedom struggle and Electoral Politics, New Delhi, 1988,
57 ibid.
58 ibid.
use of opium had been started by the *Ryot Sabhas* with right earnest since the time of the Non Co-Operation movement of 1921-22. The local *Ryot Sabhas* had succeeded to a considerable extent in mobilising the mass opinion against the evils of opium and other intoxicating drug. Picketings and processions were organised by the *Ryot Sabha* before shops of excisable articles. Almost all the districts of the Brahmaputra Valley, the frequent meeting of *Ryot Sabhas* held at Nachanipara of Guwahati, Chinatoli of Golaghat, Sasani of Dibrugarh, Bokota of Sibsagar, Ghilamora of Lakhimpur, Nambor Bhag of Nalbari, Duliapathar of Lakhimpur, Masarhat, Borigaon and Karanga of Jorhat, Nigam and Hatiphukhuri of Sibsagar, Tengakhat of Dibrugarh, Garekigaon of Sootia, Uttarkhula of Nagaon and Uttar Suvansiri of Lakhimpur strongly adopted extensive and intensive work like picketing of Mahals, village to village propaganda and treatment of opium addicts.† In the meeting of the All *Asom Ryot Sabha* held in 1933 at Tilikiam at Jorhat, Nabin Chandra Bordoloi, in his presidential address emphasised the fact that opium addicts made the Assamese society a weak race during that time and appealed to the masses to avoid this intoxicating drug and strengthen the agitation against it.‡ Besides, the district *Ryot Sabha* at Jorhat had urged total prohibition of opium in Assam by giving six months’ notice to the consumers.§ Not only that, during the period, a good number of songs were composed and sung in order to raise consciousness among the rural masses against the evil effects of opium. There were popular songs like the following which expressed this rising awareness:

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“Kani Bhag eri De
Swarajoloi Dhon De,
Swarajor Jujate
Gandhir Jai Ani De.”
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(“Give up taking opium, Give your money for the Swaraj, In the battle for Swaraj bring victory for Gandhi”).∥

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† *Asomiya* 17th August, 24 August, 31st August, 1930.
§ Home political File No. 119, 1933.
Similarly,

"Nakhaba Nakhaba, Nakhaba Bandhoi
Mod, Bhang, Kani Aru Bilati pani,
Dehatiru Hobo Hani, Dhon Hobo pani,
Oh’ Mur Bandhoi, Aea je Bapujir Bani".

("O friend, never take wine, opium and foreign liquor. It will bring harm to your body and loss to your money. O my dear friend! This is the message of Bapuji").

Likewise,

"Bola Jau Bhang Kanir Dukan Bhangugoi
khamegoi Jailore Bhat,
Boga Bongal Ahile, Swadhinata Horile,
Patile Modor Bhangar Beha."

("Let’s go and destroy the shops of opium, To get arrested and to take the food of prison, The white “Bongal” has come and snatched away our freedom, They have started the business of wine and opium").

It is clear from the tenor of these popular compositions that there was a general awareness about the need to eradicate the opium menace. In fact, the opium eradication movement had become a part of the national movement in Assam and there was a popular response to it. In this context, the various local Ryot Sabhas had played an active role and succeeded in their efforts to a considerable extent. Tileswar Bordoloi, a freedom fighter, during our interview with him said that Rohini Kanta Hatibaruah, Krishna Nath Sarma, Kuladhar Chaliha from Jorhat had taken a bold step to make it a movement to save the Assamese society from such a social evil.

Like the opium eradication Movement, the Khadi Movement had precipitated

63 Collected by Promoth Chandra Deka in Nirmal Prova Bordaloi (ed & compiled) ibid., p. 113.
64 Collected by Bandan Chandra Pathak in ibid., p.122. ‘Bongal’ was a word used for all outsiders. ‘Boga Bongal’ meant white outsiders i.e. British.
65 Our interview with Tileswar Bordaloi, freedom fighter, Tarajan, Jorhat on 15/03/2003, see Appendix-F.
the catastrophe for ultimate obtaining for Swaraj during the freedom movement in India and the Khadi Asramas helped in giving a new political dimension. One of the characters of Non Co-Operation movement was directed to promote Swadeshi goods in place of foreign goods. Hence, as a result of the progress of the movement, the Khadi programme had also gained ground. Regarding the importance of the Khadi programme, M.K. Gandhi stated that it provided a supplementary occupation to the semi-starved and semi-employed millions of India on a scale unequelled by and other occupation.66

So far the Khadi programme is concerned, Assam was known for spinning and weaving and that almost all the Assamese people had domestic loom, yet Khadi was practically unknown up-to 1921.67 Hence, the visit of Gandhi to Assam in 1921 aroused an enthusiastic atmosphere among the rural people. Gandhi had the opportunity of seeing few Assamese looms and was impressed. Later on, he wrote in Young India about the spinning and weaving in Assam:

“Every women of Assam is born weaver. No Assamese girl who does not weave can expect to become a wife. And she weaves fairy tales cloth”.68

Thus the Non Co-Operation movement had generated a new impetus and consequently, prominent nationalists like Nabin Chandra Bordoloi, Krishna Nath Sarmah, Kuladhar Chaliha, Kanak Chandra Sarma, Rohini Kanta Hatibaruah and others engaged themselves in the works of Khadi production.69 In 1921, the All India Congress Committee offered an amount of Rupees 25,000/- (Twenty five thousand) to the Assam Congress for the development of the Khadi programme. Although, in the initial period, a Khadi school was opened at Guwahati, yet the school did not last long. But shortly, new Khadi board came into existence in Assam in which Krishna Nath Sarmah was the

66 Harijan Vol III, No. 28, August 19, 1939, NAI.
68 Young India, Vol - III, September, 1st, 1921, NAI
secretary at Jorhat. However, with the emergence of the *Ryot Sabhas* in the post Non Co-Operation period, the *khadi* movement gained a new momentum. Almost all the *Ryot Sabha*, not only appealed to the rural masses to boycott foreign cloth, but also strongly inspired them to come into the path of agitation. Addressing from the presidential chair in the first Chaiduar *Ryot Sabha*, Pitambor Dev Goswami advocated that the determination of the people to break the chains of slavery could only be done by reviving the cottage industries and organising the villages and societies. Nobin Chandra Bordoloi at the Rangia *Ryot Sabha* and All *Asom Ryot Sabha* stressed the boycott of foreign cloth and said that cloth not woven in India was foreign cloth and that 45 crores of rupees are going out every year for foreign cloth. Besides, the local *Ryot Sabhas* of Sibsagar District like Dhekiakhuwa *Ryot Sabha*, Bongalphukhuri *Ryot Sabha*, Meleng *Ryot Sabha*, Jhanji *Ryot Sabha*, Kakajan Sonari gaon *Ryot Sabha*, Teok Jagduar *Ryot Sabha* and others adopted vigorous campaign in favour of *Swadeshi* goods. To add to the colour, the contemporary patriotic songs brought in another tempo. Among these patriotic songs the following extracts highlight the importance given to *Khadi*:

"Gunguni Jatare
pajikata solare
Swaraj Je Labo Lage
Hate kota Sutare."

(“With humming spinning wheel, with fine spindle, swaraj is to be obtained by hand spun yarn”).

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71 APAl, op. cit., 27/6/31.
72 *Asomiya*, June, 9, 1933.
73 *Asomiya*, April 20, April, 27, August 3, August, 17, October 12, 1930.
“Tilak Namar Noukakhani
Gandhi Namar Botha
Swaraj Jodi Lobo Lage
Hate Suta kata”

(“The boat is named Tilak and the oar is Gandhi, If you want to get Swaraj, spin with your hand”).

“Utha utha Asomiya, Sonali Sajug luwa
Kapahar Suta kati, Nijor Mantu Basua
Desi Suta Katute Ami, Desi Suta Katute
Salatut Ar Lagil Valanteers Matute.”

(“Arise and Awake, O the Assamese, Grab the golden opportunity, spin cotton and maintain your dignity, we spin the country thread, we spin the country thread, the spindle developed defects while we were calling the volunteers”).

Regarding the development of Khadi Movement in Assam All India Congress Committee papers stated that,

“In Assam the Movement is steadily appealing into the villages. Considerable progress has been made in connection with boycott of foreign cloth and British goods. Educative propaganda has been carried on. A large number of boycott posters and leaflets have been distributed, spinning and weaving have made considerable headway in villages under the impetus of boycott of foreign goods. Regular picketing against the foreign cloth has been carried on”.

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75 ibid.
76 ibid., p. 90
Thus with the emergence of the Ryot Sabhas the propaganda about Khadi from village to village, door to door, man to man was so intensive that it contributed to mobilisation at grass-root level on one hand and was also able to foster political consciousness among the rural masses of the Valley on the other hand.

Another social evil that confronted the nation was the problem of untouchability. Of course, in Assam the problem was not acute as it was other parts of India. Social reformers in Assam like Sri Sarkardev and Madhabdev in the 15th and 16th century played an important part to remove the caste distinction. Sarkardev strongly protested against caste discrimination. He wrote:

"Brahamana Sandala Nibisari kul
Datato suroto jen Distri Samotul."

("Don’t try to find out the caste and creed of a Brahman and an outcaste or a debased person, Equal look should be cast upon Donors and thieves").

But, inspite of it, the problem of untouchability remained inextricably interwoven in the society and no organised attempts was made to remove this social stigma. The problems of the untouchables Harrijans as they were called by Gandhi, came to the forefront with the declaration of Communal Award in 1932 by the British Government when separate electorate was granted to them. In Assam, the foundation of Assam Pradeshik Harijan Sewak Sangha in 1932 under the presidentship of Pitambor Dev Goswami of Garamur Satra, accelerated the anti-untouchability movement.

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However, unlike some other social movements spearheaded by the Indian National movement, anti-untouchability movement didn’t become a mass movement in Assam, because, in Assam, caste distinction as compared to their parts of India was not deep rooted in the society. But, a considerable amount of local constructive work had been undertaken by the local Ryot Sabhas. Regarding the role played by Ryot Sabha in case of untouchability movement, Anil Ray Choudhury, during our interview remarks:

“Distinctly it can’t be assigned that untouchability movement was the movement launched by the Ryot Sabhas in Assam. Rather, it was initiated by M.K. Gandhi that influenced the Ryot Sabhas of Assam. In order to upgrade the backward sections of the Agricultural society, the untouchability movement merged with the joint movement of the Ryot Sabhas in Assam. How far the movement succeeded, it is difficult to point out. But in the context of social reforms and marginal improvement on education, it was a considerable success in Upper Assam”.

As discussed above, Ryot Sabha has played a pivotal role in the social and political scenario of the society. The Ryot Sabha took up the varied interest of the upliftment of Assamese rural society. In fact, the society as such is always influenced by the leaders who are responsible for translating objective causes into subjective consciousness and mobilising the peasantry. We have discussed in the conceptual chapter (Chapter–II) that the peasantry can’t represent themselves, they must be represented. It is clear from the aforesaid discussion that peasant struggles can never assume a genuinely political character unless they are taken over by leaders belonging to social layers, politically more advanced than the peasants themselves. The peasant movements and the revolutions which occurred in Russia, China, Vietnam, Cuba and Algeria proved that leadership of these movement came from educated intellectuals and the Middle

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82 Our interview with Anil Ray Chaudhury, Chandmari, Guwahati on 6/7/2004, see, Appendix-I.
83 See chapter - II. Here Karl Marx has opined the remark in context of the peasantry.
peasantry. While studying peasants in the context of Indian freedom struggle, Jacques Pouchepadass observes, “The educated intelligentsia provided leadership to most of the peasant movements during the nationalist period.” Similarly, Partha Chatterjee also noted that “the middle class intelligentsia which had lost its ties of material interest with the land, provided the organized cadres of the new parties of mass mobilization.” For instances, “The uprising in Maharashtra in 1879 was led by Vasudeo Balvant Phadke, a Chitpavan Brahman and Commissariat Department clerk who had some English education, the Pune Sarvajanik Sabha which had been captured by Tilak in 1896-97, sent out agents into the countryside to encourage peasants to resist payment of revenue in a period of famine, the peasant movements in Mewar were led by a Sadhu, Sitaram Das in 1913, the Bhils were organised by Motilal Tejawat, an Udoipur spice merchant who claimed to be Gandhi’s emissary, the peasant movement in Darbhanga in 1919-20 was led by Swami Vidyanand, the son of a prosperous occupancy tenant with 30 bighas in Saran, Kisan Sabha Movement that emerged in Awadh in Uttar Pradesh was clearly led by the urban liberal nationalists, the Bihar provincial Kisan Sabha leadership came from middle class professional families of lawyers and western-educated intellectuals who were land holders of moderate means.” These are only few examples in the Indian context in order to substantiate our main discussion regarding the leadership of Ryot Sabha in Assam.

So far as the leadership of the Ryot Sabha in Assam is concerned, it is necessary to trace the historical roots of the peasant uprisings during the early phase of the British rule on one hand and the new socio-economic change on the other hand. We have discussed in the previous chapter (Chapter III) that history of agrarian peasant uprisings which occurred in Assam since 1862 to 1892 was led by the Raij Mel. In the Raij Mel, the leadership had come from the influential landlords, spiritual overlords like the Doloi and Gossains. By a scientific historical enquiry, Manorama Sharma analysed...
that “the new peasant uprisings in Assam occurred in 1893-94, but interestingly these uprisings, unlike the earlier uprisings had two important features. First, the period of violence was preceded by a phase petitioning the government for a redressal of their grievances and secondly, there were two sets of leaders – the traditional leadership of the Raijmels and a new set of leaders who would rather take a constitutional path of agitation and thus create the tendency towards compromising in a section of the peasantry. It is also pertinent to note at this point that the Raijmels of 1893-94 marked the end of the spontaneous militant uprisings of the peasantry which had been the significant feature of peasant uprisings in Assam since the mid 18th century".88 She also states that “from the end of the 19th century the nature of peasant movements began to change. The place of Raij Mels was taken by Ryot Sabhas and under the leadership of the Ryot Sabhas nothing like Phulagurir Dhawa and Patharughatar Ron even happened in Assam again. It is in this respect that the question of middle class hegemony emerges”.89 Citing the example, she opines, “when in 1886 new land laws were introduced into Assam regarding land tenures and patta distribution, mels of the people were called and from these Mels petitions were sent to the government to reconsider the new land laws”.90 “Then again in 1893 when land revenue was enhanced, very well argued memorials were sent in the names of ryots. not only to the chief commissioner of Assam, but also to the viceroy, urging the government to lower the rates of assessment”.91 In this context, we may accept the argument of Manorama Sharma. She said that “in the given condition of educational development in Assam in the 1890s it could not be expected that the ryots could write out such well argued petition and memorandum”.92 Rather, she rightly opined, “this had to be done by people who were well versed in the art of writing petition and memorials and in fact, a memorial of the Tezpur Ryot association of 1892 shows that it was drawn up by pleaders like Lambodor Borah and other educated office Babus like Babu Lakshmi Kanta Barkakati and Moni Kanta Barah”.93

89 ibid.
90 Cited in ibid., pp. 327 - 328.
91 ibid.
92 ibid.
93 ibid.
One can therefore agree with Manorama Sharma when she pointed out that “the Raijmels had their own traditional leadership, but in 1893, when the nascent Assamese middle class took up the cause of the peasantry against the British, the traditional leaders were gradually pushed into the background, because the middle class leadership introduced a method of agitation – constitutional agitation – which was foreign to the organisation of the Raijmels”.

“The middle class of course could not go to the extent to which the peasantry could in its anti-British stand, because it had stake in the British Colonial set-up’. Also, a middle class is more reformist than radical, wanting change through participation in the process of decision making, than through changing the whole system itself, and is ready to compromise rather than tread a violent revolutionary path’. Thus, ‘because of this ideological stance, when this class began to take over the leadership of the Raijmels the whole character of the organisation changed to the extent that after 1893 Raijmels led by traditional leaders and characterised by peasant domination and spontaneous uprisings, ceased to exist and their place was taken by the middle class dominated Ryot Sabhas, which were characterised by western liberal ideas of reforms and constitutional agitation”.

It is evident that “although the British monetized the economy and Assam became a part of the economic-structure of British India, Assamese society continued to nourish its strong semi-tribal and semi-feudal roots. While neither the bourgeoisie nor the landlord class evolved during the period of British rule, yet the ground was laid for the emergence of the Assamese middle classes. This class was not alienated from the land and this gave it a strength and confidence which was quite uncharacteristic of this class. Unlike in states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh where the peasant-landlord relationship has been marked by intense feudal exploitation, the Assamese peasantry, all the struggle and hardships notwithstanding, has been relatively spared from being at the total mercy of the big landlords. The Assamese middle class’s strong cultural links

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94 Manorama Sharma, Social and Economic Change in Assam: Middle Class Hegemony, New Delhi, 1990, p. 140.
95 ibid.
96 ibid.
97 ibid., pp. 140-141.
with the peasantry have given the peasant-middle class base of Assamese Society a distinct character”. A similar view was expressed by Manorama Sharma. According to her.

“A middle class is usually seen as an urban phenomenon, but in the case of Assam the middle class was not a rootless urban class, but a class which had roots and links with the rural sector of the society. That was why it was able not only to reflect the grievances of peasants, but also to gain the confidence of the peasants who did not regard the middle class leaders as aliens in their rural homeland”.

It is true that in the progress of the National Movement in Assam, the role of middle class became more and more active. It is to be noted that the middle class was the architect of the Assam Association, Assam Sahitya Sabha, student organisation and the like. In the same way, “men like Nabin Chandra Bordoloi, Krishna Nath Sarmah, Chandranath Sarma, Debeswar Sarma, Kuladhar Chaliha, Padmodhar Barthakur, Sayed Skhaikut Mashaaek, Lakshmikanta Barua, Amikagiri Roy Choudhury and a host of others, who led the Congress movement in different parts of the Assam, all belonged to the middle class and most of them were either lawyers, government servants who resigned their jobs or school teachers and other professionals.” Hence, at the emergence of All Asom Ryot Sabha in the post Non Co-Operation movement period, the role and leadership of middle class was most remarkable and significant. It not only led the Ryot Sabhas of Assam, but also was able to mobilise the ryots of the Brahmaputra Valley into the path of socio-economic political agitation against the British rule.

Thus, it is clear from the above that the active and dynamic leadership of the Assamese educated intelligentia over the Ryot Sabha in Assam and enabled it to

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99 Manorama Sharma, op. cit., p.141.
100 ibid., pp. 144-145.
establish a link with the Nationalist Movement. In fact, as discussed earlier socio-economic activities like the Khadi, untouchability movements of the Ryot Sabha contributed largely towards organisation of the rural population of the Brahmaputra Valley which strengthened the roots of the Nationalist Movement in Assam. This mobilisation was primarily undertaken under the leadership of the educated elites of Assam.

The need for having an effective organisation to articulate and mobilise the ryots was very much felt by the organisers. In fact, one of aims of organisation was to rouse further consciousness among the ryots who had already been astir during 1931 and 1932 in the phase of Civil Disobedience Movement. In order to strengthen the organisation, various meetings, conferences were held. So far as the organisation of the Ryot Sabhas were concerned, it was directly under the control of the All Asom Ryot Sabha on one hand and the influence of Assam Pradesh Congress leaders on the other hand.

Accordingly, we have stated earlier almost in all the Annual meetings of the Ryot Sabhas, there was a demand for a constitution for the smooth running of the organisation in order to fulfill their objectives. As a result, Asom Ryot Sabha's Niyamawalli (Constitution) was drawn up. The hierarchical structure of the All Asom Ryot Sabha according to the Niyamawalli (constitution) can be demonstrated with a diagram given below.102

Source: All Asom Ryot Sabhar Niyamawalli (Constitution), Published by Krishna Nath Sarmah, 8 April, Jorhat, 1933.

101 Asomiya, 30, June 1933.
102 Asom Ryot Sabhar Niyamawali (Constitution), Published by Krishna Nath Sarmah, General Secretary, Asom Ryot Sabha, 8th April, Jorhat, 1933.
According to this *Niyamawalli*, all the persons who completed 18 years irrespective of sex were entitled to be the members of All *Asom Ryot Sabha*.\(^{103}\) The manifesto and the objective of the *Niyamawalli* (constitution) was to organise the *ryots* in order to promote their existing socio-economic and political condition.\(^{104}\) It fixed 1 *anna* per year as the membership of the *Ryot Sabha* and decided to hold annual conference.\(^{105}\) Besides, in every local *Sabha*, there were some sub-committees like committee for the spreading of Primary Education, Anti-drug, construction and repairing of local road and untouchability eradication.\(^{106}\)

Apart from these Sub-Committees, there was another important Committee that was set up as per the directives of the *Asom Ryot* enquire committee to all the district Congress Committees.\(^{107}\) This committee had to enquire into the deplorable economic condition of the *ryot*, general trade depression, cause of reduction in price of agricultural produce, increase of land revenue after new settlements and frequent floods during the last few years.\(^{108}\) The members of this *Ryot* enquiry committee were Debeswar Sarma, Mohan Chandra Goswami, Krishna Nath Sarmah and Surendra Nath Buragohain.\(^{109}\) It is to be noted that the *Niyamawalli* (*Constitution*) remained silent on the question of land revenue and rural indebtedness. This fact proves the the point we have been making above about the nature of leadership. The issues which were most crucial for the peasants were not internalised by those who drew up the constitution. Nevertheless, the credit of the *Niyamawalli* lies in the fact that through it, the organisers were able to mobilise at the grass-root level where the masses could actively participate. In this context, Bichitra Nanda Mishra’s remark about Orissa appears to be relevant for Assam also. He said, “through such an organizational structure, leaders at the top could be in touch with the immediate problem faced by the peasant and consequently, peasants also considered themselves as a part of the organisation and

\(^{103}\) *ibid.*
\(^{104}\) *ibid.*
\(^{105}\) *ibid.*
\(^{106}\) *Asomiya*, 30th June, 1933.
\(^{107}\) Home Political file, No. 77, 1931.
\(^{108}\) *ibid.*
\(^{109}\) *ibid.*
felt secure".110

The annual session of Ryot Sabhas held in different part of the Brahmaputra Valley and the Speeches of the President and Secretaries played important part in the organisation of the ryots. For instance, in the first session of the Chaiduar Ryot Sabha held on 13th and 14th June 1931, Pitambordev Goswami, the President, hoisted the national flag and later sang the national song with the Volunteers.111 Mahim Chandra Singha, Chairman of the reception committee, delivered an address and referred to the people of the locality who wanted to free themselves from long standing slavery which had taken away their self esteem.112 He referred to the distress caused by foreign rule.113 He spoke of exploitation and plundering which was like decoity under guise of rule.114 The speech of the President of the session was also encouraging. He spoke of the heart rending condition of the Asom ryots which could not be bettered unless they did their duty toward their country.115 He not only stressed unity among the ryots and also among the Hindus and Muslims, but also strongly appealed to the rural masses to bring an end to the poverty of India brought about by foreign rule and exhorted them to boycott foreign cloth and to follow the path shown by Gandhi and the Congress.116 Similarly, in the Jochat district Ryot Sabha held in 1935, Jugananda Baruah, Chairman of the reception committee referred to the deplorable condition of the ryots, oppressive taxation, exactions of money lenders and indifferent attitude of the government towards the ryots.117 Mahadev Sarma, in his presidential address urged the people to accept the leadership of M.K. Gandhi and infused the national sentiment and delivered a bold message to the ryots "Arise, awaken, don’t stop until the goal is reached".118 Likewise, in another Ryot Sabha held at Jhoharbari, the President of the Sabha, Md. Tayebulla addressed the people mainly urging ryots to sacrifice their lives for the national cause and also told them that independence could not be obtained without joint struggle by means of non-violence as instructed by Gandhi.119 The presidential address of Nabin

111 APAI file No. 137, 27/6/31, op. cit.
112 ibid.
113 ibid.
114 ibid.
115 ibid.
116 ibid.
117 APAI, 19/4/1935.
118 ibid.
119 ibid.
Chandra Bordoloi in the first Provincial level *Ryot Sabha* held at Tilikiam, Jorhat in 1933, brought a revolutionary tempo among the masses. He reiterated that the complete independence of our country was the need of the hour. He strongly criticised the colonial Government’s economic policies which had stagnated the economic condition of the people. Bordoloi further argued that by introducing the new economic policy, the British Government not only snatched our land causing the poverty of our *ryots*, but also opened the route for the continuous migration of the tea Garden labourers, Muslim immigrants from East Bengal and merchant class from other parts of India. That is why, it was time that the *ryots* should be united against the colonial Government. He also urged that “once upon a time, the brave Assamese were able to resist the advance of the Mughal and the other invaders successfully, so why not the colonial Government”?

In the three days session of Provincial *Ryot Sabha*, the local *Ryot Sabhas* of Simaluguri, Bamunphukhuri, Chaukhat, Teok, Charigaon, Garamur, Chungi, Rangajan, Karanga, Basagaon of Mariani, Bakial, Dergaon, Kalakhuwa of Golaghat area and the others joined with great enthusiasm. To commemorate the *Sabha*, processions, meetings, exhibition were organised successfully. Sarbeswar Bordoloi in his autobiography states, “almost all the Congress leaders of Assam, Youth, Women, the Congress Volunteers, rural masses from Golaghat and Sibsagar joined and participated in the *Sabha* with new vigore. In fact, this *Sabha* fostered a new national sentiment and imprint among the grass-root level masses”. The subsequent *Ryot Sabha*’s session held in different parts of the Brahmaputra Valley and speeches of President, Secretaries and political leaders on one hand, and the large scale participation of the rural masses indeed attained a new degree of peasant nationalism. In this context, Shrutidev Goswami writes,

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120 *Asomiya*, 28th April, 1933.
121 *ibid.*
122 *ibid.*
123 *ibid.*
124 *ibid.*
125 *Asomiya*, 30th June, 1933.
“These ryot Sammilans (Sabhas) were successful in mobilizing the rural population against the government. On the other hand, the congress party of Assam found an opportunity to strengthen its grass roots links through these organisation”.  

The organisation of women folk was another very significant aspect of the growth of the mobilisation of the Ryot Sabhas. For instance, the Naduar women Ryot Sabha was presided over by Ganeswari Devi on 10th May in 1931. In this session, more than two thousand women ryots participated weaving Khadi in Assamese traditions. The unique character of this Sabha was that almost five hundred women came by procession from ten kilometre distance with tri-colour Congress flag in their hands singing national anthems. Narmada Kumari Devi, one of the organisers, strongly spoke about the duty of women at the moment of National crisis. In this women Ryot Sabha, other patriots like Dr. Hare Krishna Das, Bhubaneswar Baruah, Hemchandra Baruah, Amiya Kumar Das, Amal Prabha Das from Guwahati, Mahadev Sarma, Ram Prasad Agarwala, Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Jwai Prasad Agarwala and the others came forward to make a success of the movement. In another meeting at Hattibor of Nagaon, Chandra Prova Saikiani appealed to the women boldly, “Avail yourself of the opportunity of leaving something for your next generation. Let the freedom of the country be your gift to future generation”. Subsequently, in the 1930s period, the emergence of women folk in other part of the Brahmaputra Valley like Chariduar, Teok, Maleng, Charing, Simaluguri and the like played important part in mobilisation of the rural women into the path of socio-economic agitation. During that period, the editorial of Asomiya giving importance on women’s participation in the Ryot Sabha reflected that, Jui Salor pora Ulai Ahise Desh Udharars Babe Amar Nari Sokal (Women Folk

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128 Home political file No. 77, 1931, op. cit.
129 ibid.
130 ibid.
131 ibid.
132 ibid.
have come forward from the kitchen to rescue the country).\textsuperscript{134}

Likewise, the contemporary patriotic songs also contributed to considerable extent in organising the \textit{Ryot Sabha} on a Mass Scale. It is obvious that the role of poets, artists, literary persons and the like are essential to build up the movement at the grass-root level against the alien rule. In the Indian context, the prominent artist and poet like Bonkim Chandra, Dhijendralal, Atul Chandra, Nazrul, Sukanta, Biresh Nizam, Kubjau Nambir, Valakhul, Kumarun Ahan and others may be well mentioned.\textsuperscript{135} Their revolutionary heroic poems, creative writings, patriotic songs etc. not only contributed a strong revolutionary sentiment in their respective region, but also were able to capture the heart of the common masses against the alien British rule. In the Brahmaputra Valley a new spirit was infused into the nationalist movement through their songs and other compositions. Person like Jyoti Prasad Agarwalla enthused the people through his radical patriotic composition. [Jyoti Prasad was born on 17th June, 1903 and hailed from well-to-do family of Tezpur, Assam. He passed the Matriculation Examination from Tezpur High School in 1921. Then in 1926 he entered the prestigious Edinburh University of Scotland. But there, he dropped education without completing the Higher Education but he obtained film training in Germany. However, after returning from Europe in 1931, he devoted himself to social works. In the mean time, the wave of the freedom struggle spread all over India including Assam and he joined the Movement. In Darrang District, he began to take leading part in organising the \textit{Ryot Sabhas} through various cultural programmes. Apart from it, he was the first Assamese Film maker and made films like \textit{Joimoti} which sought to revive interest in the history of Assam]. His songs with their highly nationalistic and revolutionary content helped to rouse the spirit of the \textit{ryots} in the Brahmaputra Valley. In fact, through \textit{Ryot Sabhas}, he wanted to infuse the nationalist spirit among the rural masses. To emphasis the importance of the Movement, Jyoti Prasad sang,

\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Asomiya}, 23rd December, 1932.
“Luitor pararse Ami Daka Lara Mori Boloi Bhoi
Nai .......... Aji Deka Lorai Jibon pon Korise
Muhar Sakulu Kolijar Aie”.

(“We are the youths of the banks of the Brahmaputra and we know no fear for death.............”). 136

In a similar vein, he sang in the mass Processions from Chaiduar to Biswanath,

“Jaga Jononir Santan, Jaga Saktiman Jaga Mukti
pran Mritu Gasoki Ana Joi Jini, Kori Dujoi Ahbijan”

(“Awake O the sons of motherland, Awake O the streng ones, Awake O freedom loverss, treading over death, conquering the invinsible victory”). 137

Likewise, he also sang,

“Biswa Bijoy Nabo Juwan, Biswa Bijoy Nabo
Juwan........
Mritu Bijoy Koribo Lagibo, Swadhinatar Khuli
Duwar”.

( “O the world conquering new youth ! O the world conquering new youth ! you are to defeat death and open the door of freedom”). 138

The above mentioned patriotic songs had a powerful effect. Those songs were

137 ibid. p. 576.
138 ibid. p. 572.
sung while the freedom loving people marched through procession from Chaiduar to Biswanath over the night under the leadership of Jyoti Prasad Agarwalla (a distance of forty Kilometre from Chaiduar to Biswanath). It is true that this historic successful procession not only was a remarkable achievement, but also helped in mobilising the rural masses and soon became a popular subject of discussion throughout the period. Like the patriotic song, Bihu songs and Bihu dance too played a remarkable role in the mobilisation of the Ryot Sabha. For example, Chaukhat Ryot Sabha organised a Bihu dance in the locality. The Bihu song composed by Ananda Chandra Baruah, one of the doyens of Assamese literature and leading organiser of the Chaukhat Ryot Sabha was sung on this occasion. In this Bihu dance, local ryots sang:

"Motilal Naherur Sat Khalopia Karenghar Korile Dan, Dhesore Karane Dehaku Bilale, Pale Goi Soragot than"

(“The seven storied Kareng of Motilal Nehru was donated. The body was sacrificed for the country and then reached a place in heaven”).

The interesting facts were that by collecting funds from the Bihu dance, the ryots celebrated the Chaukhat Ryot Sabha and Krishna Nath Sarmah presided over it. In an attractive Presidential address, Krishna Nath Sarmah likened the public to a peepal tree with its ability to withstand calamities and providing shelter to the needy (O my people, you public are like a peepal tree). The Tengakhat Ryot Sabhas too organised similar Bihu dances and the Bihu songs composed for the occasion had very deep nationalistic fervour. For instance in the following song we see the expression of

\[140\] Tileswar Bordaloi (ed), Harijan Bondhu Krishna Nath Sharma, op cit, p.13 (The festival of Bihu is prominently a national festival to the Assamese and the Songs sung therein are national to the core. They are set to a particular music and specially adopted to dancing. To a casual reader, these pastorals may appear state and common place having no efficacy beyond affording certain vulgar enjoyment to the rural youths of Assam, but to curious student of literature they are of historic importance forming as they do one of the chief stocks in trade of Assamese literature, The Times of Assam, May, 1923).
\[141\] ibid.
\[142\] ibid.
\[143\] ibid.
\[144\] ibid.
anguish for the condition of the Country:

"Desore Danegoriyai,
Fatekot Asagoi
Desot Lagise Ran
Hiyat Jalise
Bejaror Agoni
Jihetu Nopore Man
Dukhiyar Gharat
Khaboloi Natani
Pindhibor Kapur Nai
Desore Abastha
Vabi Mor Deuta
Sakut Tupani Nai
Ga-dhui uthi
Aitak Khujilu
Bisor Kapor Saj
Suda Jopa Meli
Aitai Kandile
Palu Monote Laj."

(“The leaders of the country are all in the prison, there is battle in the country, the fire of sadness burns in the hearts. The mind does not rest anywhere, There is scarcity of food in the home of the poor, There ares no clothess to wear. When I think of the country, Sleep remains away from my eyes, After bathing I asked my mother for Bihu dress, My mother opened the empty bamboo basket and wept, I got ashamed in mind”).

In order to inculcate and infuse more national sentiment among the ryots, Maura

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145 Asomiya, 14th July, 1933.
Bazar *ryot Sabha* of Amguri sang in the *Bihu* dance,

"*Aji Bihut Gogona Nalage*  
*Bajise Ronor veri*  
*Aha Saji-kasi pranare Logori*  
*Bandhu Akatar Jori.*"

("We don’t need gogener, a small wind instrument made of bamboo, in this *Bihu*, as there is blowing of trumpet for war, comes prepared my friend so dear to my heart, let’s us tie thes thread of unity").

In the Nangaltupgaon *Ryot Sabha* of Borhulla, *ryots* gathered to celebrate *Bihu*, but their *Bihu* songs were filled with patriotic consciousness particularly on awareness of the plight of peasants. This *Bihu* song express that sentiment:

"*Harak pani kori O’ Mur kisak Bhai,*  
*Tejak pani kori O’ Mur kisak Bhai*  
*Sali Toli Korilu Mati*  
*O’ Mur kisak Bhai*  
*Aru Nathaku Sai*  
*Akata gohibor Hol.*  
*Sunali Dhanot O’ Mur kisak Bhai*  
*Jamidar Sarkare O’ Mur kisak Bhai*  
*Melile Boliya Hati*  
*O’ Mur kisak Bhai,*  
*Aru Nathaku Sai*  
*Akota gohibor Hol.*"

("O my farmer friend, the field for Shali cultivation has been prepared, leaving...

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146 *Asomiya*, 21st December, 1934.
no stone untouched, O' my farmer friend, there is no time to wait and ponder now! It is high time to unite. O my farmer friend! The Govt. of the zaminder has let the wild elephant loose on the golden paddy field. O my farmer friend! We should not tolerate any more, It is time to unite and protest”\(^\text{147}\).

In fact, mobilisation of the rural masses through Bihu and its songs, had three important features. First, the membership and involvement of the rural masses increased in the Ryot Sabhas. Secondly, the Bihu songs which were sung in the movement exposed the strong bitter sentiments and protest against the colonial Government. Thirdly, the Bihu played an important part in mobilising a strong democratic front that emerged from the rural areas of the Brahmaputra Valley through the Ryot Sabhas.

Like Bihu, Bhawana, the popular theatre among the rural Assamese people of Assam also contributed more or less in organisation of Ryot Sabha. In fact in Assam, the Neo-Vaishnavite movement launched by Sri Sankardev and his disciple Madhabadev in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century\(^\text{148}\), preached the doctrine of universal brotherhood, created conditions for harmonious living of people of diverse castes, communities and Creed.\(^\text{149}\) Sankardev contributed two legacies to the Assamese society – one is Namghar and other is Bhawana.\(^\text{150}\) Hence, it was seen that on the concluding day of almost all the Ryot Sabha's conferences, Bhawana was performed to commemorate the Sabha and the local people took active part in the Bhawana with much enthusiasm. Besides, the leaders of the Ryot Sabha usually inaugurated the function (Bhawana performance) and delivered speeches pointing out the existing socio-economic condition of the peasantry and also appealed to them to unite against the enemy. For instance, Bangalpukhuri Ryot Sabha, Nakachari Ryot Sabha, All Asom Ryot Sabha at Jorhat, all Charigaon Mauza Ryot Sabha, Kokojan Sonarigaon Ryot Sabha and Karanga Ryot

\(^{147}\text{Asomiya}, 20th January, 1933\)

\(^{148}\text{S.I. Baruah, A Comprehensive history of Assam, New Delhi, 1985, p. 447.}\)

\(^{149}\text{ibid.}\)

\(^{150}\text{Namghar, the centre of the religious life of the village, which promoted its intellectual and cultural activities. The Namghar is not only a mere community prayer hall of the Assamese rural society, but also public institution and affairs were conducted on purely democratic basis. S.L. Baruah in ibid pp 450. It is to be noted that during the early peasant uprisings of Assam, Namghar played most significant role. On the other hand Bhawana, a dramatic performance on religious themes and conducted on indigenous Assamese lines with Sutraddhar, Gayan and Bayan and almost universally with a Bho hue (clown) ibid., p. 674. For details see, S.N. Sarma, The Neo Vaishnavite Movement and the Satra institution of Assam, Guwahati, 1966, Moheswar Neog, Sankardeva and his times, Guwahati, 1974.}\)
Sabha performed Bhawana which indirectly paved the way for the strong root of the Ryot Sabha's organisation.  

In addition too, the native newspapers also indirectly extended contribution for the massive organisation of the Ryot Sabhas. The newspaper particularly Asomiya helped in inspiring a sense of patriotism among the rural masses. The Asomiya was evidently a pillar of strength for the spread of nationalism. This paper not only highlighted the emergence of the Ryot Sabhas in the Brahmaputtra Valley of Assam, but also reflected various demands, functions and meetings of the local Ryot Sabhas. This paper could also take sole credit for publishing with full coverage the presidential address of the first All Asom Ryot Sabha session held at Tilikiam of Jorhat in 1933 under the presidency of Nabin Chandra Bordoloi. Similarly, it also focused in its editorials slogans like Raj Morile Moribo Lage (If the people die, we should also die), Rajohuwa Now Bamedio Sole (The strength of the united people is so great that it can even make the boat run on land). Likewise, Mohan Chandra Mohanta, assistant editor of the same in editorial page, boldly warned the British Government to quit Assam. He cleverly insulted the Britishers as Alohi Government (A guest government) in Assam. Asomiya also stressed through the writings published in it the importance of constituting of village panchayats in Assam. Besides, Dainik Batori, published from Jorhat on 12th August 1935, was specially concerned with what is called ‘existence of Assamese Nationality’ including the other issues like medium of instruction, separate university, separate High Court and separation of Sylhet from Assam. (These were other demands of the Ryot Sabha). In this way, the newspapers more or less helped in the mobilisation of the Ryot Sabha.

Thus, it is clear that the Ryot Sabha which emerged after the Non Co-Operation movement of 1921-22, gradually became the single broad based peasant organisation

\[\text{151 Asomiya, 27th April, 1930, 24th August, 1930, 31st August, 1930, 27th Jan, 1933, 3rd February, 1933, 28th April, 1933.}\]
\[\text{153 Asomiya, 28th April, 5th May, 26th May, 9th June, 30th June, 1933.}\]
\[\text{154 Asomiya, 24 August, 1930.}\]
\[\text{155 Asomiya, 2nd March, 1930.}\]
\[\text{156 Asomiya, 23rd December, 1932.}\]
of the Brahmaputra Valley along with their demands and functions. Although the organisation was named after the *ryot*, it did not represent only *ryot*, but entire masses in general and agitated against the agrarian policy and other socio-economic exploitation conducted by the colonial Government. Though, the activities of the *Ryot Sabhas* were being regulated by the Congress, the supreme body at the top, yet it is true that the strong agitation and protest launched by the local *Ryot Sabhas*, compelled the legislators to legislate bills on land revenue reduction. Accordingly, the Congress coalition ministry headed by Gopinath Bordoloi in September, 1938, took steps to reduce land revenue from 50% to 33% on smaller holdings and 30 to 20% on bigger estates from the year 1938-1939. These measures came as great relief to the peasantry as this covered large sections of them. On the other hand, the most pertinent demand of the All *Asom Ryot Sabha* was fulfilled during the tenure of the Bordoloi Ministry. In addition, Bordoloi took another bold step to eradicate the opium evil by declaring a total prohibition in the of Dibrugarh area of the Lakhimpur District and Sibsagar from 15th April, 1939. Of course, the final step was taken by the Sadullah Government (1939-41) declaring 26th February 1941 as the prohibition day and extended the opium prohibition scheme to the whole province with effect from 1st March, 1941.

On the basis of the above study it can be concluded that during this period, the *Ryot Sabha* transformed into a distinct as well as large democratic peasant organisation in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. Through the demands raised and its methods of functioning it became a massive organisation under the leadership of Assamese Middle Class and not only strengthened its solidarity, but was also able to establish peasant nationalism to a considerable extent. In this context, regarding the importance of the *Ryot Sabha*, Benudhar Sharma remarked that 'when all the Congress committees were announced as unlawful by the Government, in their place, the *Ryot Sabha* acted as the mouth piece and organised the rural masses in guise of the Congress'. Hence, the

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158 *ibid.*, p. 5.
161 Cited in *ibid.*, p. 215.
Ryot Sabhas were looked upon by the Government with great disfavour and suspicious. By and large, the Ryot Sabha helped in the growth of a solid National consciousness or awareness about the alien rule among the rural population in the National struggle for freedom.

Thus, we have seen that Ryot Sabha emerged as one of the leading organisations in the wake of the freedom struggle in the Brahmaputra Valley. That is why, it will be interesting to assess the relation of the Ryot Sabha with the Nationalist Movement in the Sibsagar district because this district played a most significant role in the emergence of the Ryot Sabhas in the Brahmaputra Valley in organising the rural people.

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163 History of freedom Movement papers, Assam Unit, file No. R - I, 1/3 to 11/3, NAI, New Delhi.