CHAPTER-III

HISTORY OF THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF ALL ASSAM STUDENTS UNION.

ORIGIN:

The development of Assamese literature as well as Assamese journalism has a close relation with the emergence of All Assam Students Union. The birth pang of All Assam Students Union is of great significance in the political History of Assam. The students of Assam played a vital role during the pre-independence era. After the independence of India in 1947 the students of Assam under the banner of AASU have left no stone unturned to bring about socio-economic changes in the state of Assam.

In the early days during the British rule there was hardly any facility for higher education. The students aspiring for higher education had to go out of Assam particularly to Calcutta, the then capital of British Government. The students of Assam realising the inadequate facilities for education expressed their resentment and demanded for educational facilities in Assam. In 1869 the students of Assam who were studying in Calcutta at that time were seriously thinking of forming a students organisation for ventilating all sorts of socio-economic problems faced by the students and people of Assam. The dream of forming an organisation came into reality in 1916 with the formation of Assam Chatra Sammilan or Assam Students Asso-
The first meeting of the Assam student's Association was held under the presidentship of well-known litterateur of Assam, Lakshminath Bezborua on 25th December, 1916 at Gauhati. The Assam Chatra Sanmilan sought to bring about students' Unity in Assam through organised action in any matter concerning their welfare and the development of their literary activities. The thrust of the sanmilan was more on literary, social and economic development than on any political propaganda or movement. "Milan", the mouth-piece of the sanmilan not only served the cause of Assamese literature but also paved the way for national unity and progress. It promoted ideals of secularism and brotherhood among people. It encouraged scholars to carry out research in the ancient culture and civilization of Assam through compilation of ancient manuscripts.

The Chatra Sanmilan was engaged in many social reform programmes and received unflinching support of the people at large. A students' social service league was established and publicity campaigns were organised on rural health, prohibition, removal of superstitions and eradication of illiteracy. While the sanmilan kept literary development in mind, it could not alienate itself from the growing political consciousness.

In January, 1921 the students of Assam decided to participate in the Non-co-operation movement started by the Indian
National Congress. Many active leaders of the sanmilan were imprisoned. Undaunted by Government repression, the students devoted their time and energy to teach the gospel of Non-Co-operation to the people at large. They actively participated in the struggle for boycott of foreign goods and campaigned for swadeshi goods. It was really a matter of great pride that for the untiring efforts of the student leaders the Hindu Muslim relations were cordial in Assam throughout the period of freedom struggle although the Muslim league had formed its Assam provincial Branch after 1933 and succeeded in forming the Muslim league Ministries three times.\(^4\) Students of Sibsagar refused to pay their school fees. "The spirit of defiance of authority spread among the students of Mangaldai, who initiated a boycott campaign against the local Government High School, by abstaining from classes."\(^5\) Many students were penalized for their activities. The boycott upsurge among the majority of the students rocked Cotton College in January 1921, resulting in the Government closing down the institution and asking the students to vacate hostels immediately.\(^6\) In the historic session of the bahore Congress, 1929, complete independence was declared to be the goal. Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, a non-violent non-co-operation movement was launched. Its impact on the students of Assam was tremendous. The students of Cotton College defied the Principal's order and participated in the
function to celebrate 26 January 1930 as the first Independence Day in conformity to the resolution of the Lahore Congress.

The Director of Public Instruction, Mr. Cunningham in a circular in May 1930 directed all students and their guardians to give an undertaking that students would not participate in any political activity. But the students of Assam defined the circular and plunged themselves in political demonstrations and courted arrest in 1930 and 1932. While they were devoted to the national cause, they were not oblivious of local interests. They demanded a separate University for the state. In this way the students of Assam played a vital role for the general advancement of the province. In 1939 when the second world war broke out, the All India Students Council made a clarion call to the students of India for the struggle for India's Independence. On 9th October, 1939 the annual meeting of All India Students Council was held at Nagpur. The Council resolved to participate in the freedom struggle and made a clarion call to all students of India to plunge into the movement and transform it into people's struggle. The influence of this call on the students of Assam was tremendous. At that time there were three organisations of the students in Assam: (1) Assam Students Union (2) Assam Students Federation and (3) Assam Provincial Students Federation, Biswadeb Sarma was the
president of Assam Students Union. Students from all parts of the states supported the activities of this union. Even the state leaders of the Congress party were in favour of it. By 1945 the number of the members of ASU increased to about 4000. The leaders of the Congress party endeavoured to unify the three organisations of the students. With this end in view a meeting of the three organisations was held on 11 September 1945 at the invitation of the Congress. Biswadeb Sarma and three other members represented ASU. They did not oppose the move for unification of the three organisations but they expressed it clearly that the three organisations had different goals and were moved by different ideals.

In Assam, the students championed a number of causes which touched the life of every Assamese. Almost in all major issues of importance whether economic, cultural, linguistic and political our young students from primary to University classes actively demonstrated very well their intelligence, ability, energy and patience in expressing a deep sense of patriotism. It is, in need, a remarkable phenomenon.

The students all over the Brahmaputra Valley observed 16th August, 1941 as 'the Assam University Day'. The Assam Students Union celebrated in 1945 the INA day at Dibrugarh, collected funds for INA men, held 'Anti-Repression Day, on 15th
December, 1945 all over the valley and later the anti-partition day in February, 1946.

The students' activities in Assam had great impact in the nationalist movement. So well did the students participate in the non-co-operation movement that in 1945. B.C. Bhagawati, President of the Congress led students union stated in a conference that students' participation in politics could not be avoided till the country achieved its independence. Truly speaking, the attainment of India's independence was in large measure, due to the sacrifice of the student community.

On 13th September 1945 a joint meeting of ASU, ASF and APSF was held. The three organisations resolved to participate in the struggle for independence under the leadership of the Congress. But it was evident that it would not be possible for the three organisations to merge themselves into one union, since there was fundamental difference among their beliefs and ideals. Later ASU unconditionally accepted the leadership of Congress and this was communicated by Mohendra Mohan Choudhury to the leaders of the Indian National Congress on 17th September, 1946.

Soon after the attainment of Independence, the Assam students union which, later on, came to be known as Students' Congress was dissolved in 1948 at the initiative of the Prime
Minister Nehru, Congressmen were convinced that students had no role to play in post-independence politics. Although the Students Federation under communist influence continued their organisation efforts among students after independence, the Congress refrained from large scale student organisation until 1955 when it created the Youth Congress to counter leftist activities, to encourage participation in development programme and to train youthful congress party workers.

From the above it can be said that these organisations were all politically motivated. They owed their allegiance to this or that political party and were often dragged on into the political arena and turned into tools in the hands of the political parties who used them for selfish ends. Therefore, the students of Assam came to feel the necessity of an organisation which would be non-partisan, non-political and above party politics. Such a type of association only could shoulder the responsibilities of the students of a newly independent country.

In 1958, the students of Gauhati organised the Gauhati students union. In January 1959, the students of Sibsagar organised the Sibsagar district students association. In August in the same year the Inter College Students Union was organised at the initiative of a number of students from Shillong. It represented only 34 College of Assam whereas the students of
the schools were excluded from the union. Therefore such an association could not satisfy the aspirations of the students.

In this connection, the student convention of 19-20 September 1959, at Gauhati was very significant. It was called at the initiative of the Gauhati students association with a determination to form an all Assam students representative organisation in order to present a unified standard and to rally under one single banner and provide themselves with a common platform for presenting a bold and united front for the fulfillment of their legitimate demands and safeguarding their interests without being under the subservience of any political party and communal organisation. The convention brought into existence the "All Assam Students Association 15 a secular, non-political and non-communal association which was a long-felt necessity. The convention was attended by representatives from schools and Colleges of Assam numbering about 192.

The All Assam Students Association played a vital role in the language movement in 1960. But afterwards due to the absence of proper representation of the members through organisational election this union could not gain support from the students and became extinct. Though there were some student organisations belonging to the rightist and the leftist parties there was, as a matter of fact, no non-political students organisation till 1966. The student community of the State felt the urgent need
of having a platform to strive for their just causes. In order to evolve a common platform for the purpose an All Assam Student's convention was held on 22nd October 1966 at Jorhat. All the major educational institutions were represented in the convention and a committee was formed through democratic process. Next year in 1967 the first annual Conference of AASU was held from 5th to 8th August under the presidency of Sri Lakshisai Saikia when a written constitution was framed and adopted.16

There was a strong feeling among the young students to create a new sense of nationalism and patriotism. The questions of economic freedom also drew the attention of the student groups. Before independence, the students were united on nationalistic aspirations to gain political as well as economic freedom. The National Congress made the students aware of the inadequacies of the British created educational system which prepared them to be clerks for their British masters. It made them realise that 'swaraj' meant satisfaction of demands and freedom from deprivation as well as independence from alien rule.17 Thus the nationalists were creating a leviathan of aspirations. Now, after independence, as the years rolled by, the high level of aspiration clashed with the apathy of the Congress Government to fulfil its promises. Other factors like the exploitation of Assam of its natural resources, short-sightedness of Assam's political leaders and their lust for power, selfish motives and heavy burden of
taxation on Assamese people counted heavily in the minds of the new generation. Therefore, at the initiative of some enterprising students, the All Assam Students Union (AASU) was organised on 8th August 1967, in Tezpur. 18

From the above, it can be said that there were many factors that contributed to the origin and escalation of student organisations in Assam. Firstly, to begin with, the most original one was the promotion of Assamese Language and literature in the latter half of the 19th century. Secondly, towards the early part of 20th century the students organisation in Assam came to be associated with the nationalistic movement, which in fact strengthened the student unity. Thirdly, in the post-independence era student organisations came to be formed as a result of accumulation of discontent, dissatisfaction with the Congress Government etc. Student groups became acutely aware of the contradictions in the accepted values of their respective society. Student protest became highly articulate and occasional expression of malaise and forces inherent in society which urged social and institutional change. The variables of discontent predominant among the people of Assam and the method of redress formed the starting point and the immediate and symbolic targets of organisations.

It is remarkable that before independence, the student
organisations of Assam were developed in nationalistic line. They were affiliated to the political parties. After independence, however, a feeling was developed among the students to organise students more on non-party lines. The Assam Student's Association which came into existence in September 1952 was organised on non-partisan, non-political and democratic foundation. It came to stand by the larger and collective interests of the students community, endeavoured to solve the problems common to the students of Assam as well as to promote the spirit of culture, literature, sports etc. It was a great contribution of the students of Assam when in 1960 they established the right of Assamese to be the state language through strong movement and great sacrifice. Despite the success of the language movement, the AASA was lacking in proper organisation and strength. This Association could not satisfy the aspiration of all classes of students. On the other hand, because of its participation in Refinery Movement and Language Movement it was branded as partisan and politically motivated. Therefore, there was mounting pressarge for the organisation of a student Union whereby the students of all classes irrespective of language, religion, hills or plains could take a common platform. The students of Assam were aware of the crisis confronting our country. People were in a state of frustration due to economic hardship and rampant corruption. The All Guwahati Inter-College
Student's Union proposed to unite the different student unions of Assam together under the banner of the All Assam Students Union in order to check the spirit of despair among the people of the state. With a constructive outlook they declared, "We are students. We know how to adhere ourselves to our premier objective which is study. But at the same time we know how to feel for the country and how to put on spare time and energy in services to the nation. We will raise our voice against any injustice and any evil, which we come across in the society in our day to day life ... We hate to be influenced by mean political designs. We will remain ever free from the shade of any political party we are students and purely students". 

Thus was organised, the All Assam Students Union in 1967, with a more clarified position with regard to its non-political and non-partisan objectives. It gave a much greater emphasis on the aims and objective of the organisation. To begin with it was not affiliated to any political party. It proposed to develop and deepen a sense of respect for Assam and its people, to involve the students in the movement against all sorts of exploitation on the Assamese people, to encourage the students in progress through socialism, to preserve the independence and integrity of the motherland, to protect and maintain the interests of the indigenous people of Assam, to carry on movements against illiteracy and indifference in educational
set up and establish equal rights of education for all students.\textsuperscript{22} It endeavoured for development of social, political and cultural consciousness, discourage narrow communalism and social ills based on caste and community and religion, and took steps to establish friendly relations with the student organisations of other states in view of national solidarity. In other words, as Prafulla Kumar Mahanta observed in his presidential speech, the association resolved to attain social, economic, political justice, freedom of expression, ideas, truth, self-respect, equality in all respects, national integration and fraternity.\textsuperscript{23}

From the above we can say that the association was broad based. Its outlook was extensive touching not only the literary, educational and cultural aspects but also economic, social and political life of the people. As such, it came to be involved in many types of issues concerning the people of Assam.

The contribution of the first president of the All Assam Students Union, namely Sri Lakhi Saikia (1966-67) was remarkable. He made great effort for the consolidation of the student organisation in Assam. The present constitution was not only formulated but was actually put into effect on August 1967. Besides under his leadership the students of Assam successfully initiated in several movements like Food Movement
and Anti-Federal Plan movement. AASU was seriously concerned with the problem raised by the demand of a section of the hills people for a separate state of their own. It urged the Government that no solution should be "through political humiliation and erosion of our status as designed in the present scheme for reorganisation. "We demand", declared AASU in the open letter to the then Chief Minister of Assam," that you assure us without any less of time that your Government will say no to the central Government to be a party to the scheme for federal reorganisation of Assam".24

The contribution of Sri Pulakesh Barua (1971-72) is no less important. He led the students of Assam in the movement for Assamese as medium of instruction in 1972.25 The students in Assam have played a role extremely well in all concrete issues of importance to Assam's national life. Right from the freedom movement down to the present time the selfless sacrifice of the students upholding the social, economic and cultural values of Assam is remarkable. The students of Assam were always seriously concerned with the growth of regional sentiments in Assam.

The 21 point charter of demands in 1974 was a landmark in the group activities of the students. It was submitted to the Chief Minister of Assam on February 21, 1974 which constitu-
ted the main foundation of solving the various complex problem of Assam through gradual socialisation of our economic system. Therefore, the demands were highly stressed as marks of great social change.26

The demands were as follows:
1. To establish economic equality through real socialist methods, by avoiding the mixed economy.
2. To make arrangement for handing over the land to the actual farmer by translating the land reform laws into action.
3. To make arrangement for irrigation with increased production of hydroelectricity and control of flood.
4. To establish more industries in the Public sector.
5. To nationalise the industrial houses of big capitalists.
6. To nationalise foreign industries without paying any compensation.
7. To remove the impediments in the issue of licences by the Government in the cases of industries and raw materials.
8. To arrange payment of loan from nationalised banks on easy terms.
9. To implement job-oriented education system which is non-discriminatory and needbased.
10. To take over the collection and distribution of all essential food staff.
11. To collect and distribute all other essential items and
fix their prices, keeping in view the purchasing power of the people.

12. To make all necessary arrangements for the welfare of the undeveloped areas and backward classes.

13. To bring about a harmony between water ways and road by strengthening the inland water transport.

14. To stop eviction of cultivators from areas like Dayang, kaki, Rengma, Mingmang, Mridangpara, Philbari etc.

15. To refrain from such accords as are, like Assam Nagaland Intrin Border Accord, defrimental to the interests of people living in the border areas.

16. To employ indigenous people in all Government services below the pay of Rs. 500.

17. To stop the flow of outsiders to the state.

18. (a) To strengthen the facilities for travel by establishing B.G. railway line and constructing bridges over the Brahmaputra at Pancharatna-Jogighopa and Silghat-Bhomoraguri.

       (b) To extend the metre gauge rail line from Silchar to Ziribum.

       (c) To establish a Division of N.F.Railway at Rangia.

19. To establish a refinery near the oilfields so that oil produced in Assam is refined in the state.

20. To order judicial enquiry into the brutal death of Nimilma Bora, a class IX student of Dayang High School, due to eviction operation and punish the guilty.
21. (a) To distribute 3 kgs. of rice at the rate of Rs. 1.20 per kg. and 2 kgs of flour at the rate of 0.75 per kg. to each person per week through co-operatives or fair-price shops

   (b) To distribute sugar in both villages and towns at controlled rates.

   (c) To stop distribution of items unfit for human consumption and destroy them publicly.

   (d) To establish a buffer stock in each district of the state in order to meet emergency situations.

   (e) To increase Central share in foodstuff and other essential items for Assam.27

   It is evident from the charter that the students were greatly worried about the slow economic growth of the region and wanted measures to control their own economic destiny. The charter reflected the feeling of the Assamese people about financial injustice done to the state by the Centre and also a sense of insecurity from the point of view of what they called 'economic exploitation' by the outsiders. As G. Phukan observes, "The scope for Government jobs was limited, the economic infrastructure for industrialization was grossly inadequate and land and forest were not adequately used for the economic development of Assam. Whatever employment opportunities were available, the educated Assamese middle class elite had to face keen competition from the non-Assamese and particularly from..."
the Bengali elite. For this reason naturally, stress and strain had developed among the Assamese elite. On the same day the AASU observed a protest day all over Assam. The students of different educational institutions all over the state abstained from their classes on February 21, protest against Government's failure to curb price-rise and demand rehabilitation of the evicted persons from the Government reserved forests.

**DEVELOPMENT:**

Before the attainment of independence by India in 1947, the university students used to join either the Students Congress patronised by the Indian National Congress or the Students Federation, sponsored by the communist party of India. The school students were not well organised and very few got involved in the students Union activities. After independence till about 1958, the senior students remained rather passive spectators of the performance of the political leaders.

Compared to other states Assam had to face more problems in the economic and political fields due to the partition of the Country which accentuated the fears and anxieties of the Assamese people for their distinct identity. The *Assam Tribune*, in its editorials article 'Refugees' clearly expressed this sentiments and observed, "sine independence, the attack is being carried on from two flanks. First, there are the Muslims immigrants
whose love and attachment to Pakistan are as strong as per. There is no evidence of a change of heart and yet they are finding it much easier to migrate to this province under the shelter of the secular state policy of the Government of India. Then there are the Hindu immigrants who apparently want to create a Bengal in this province". For this reason, The Assam Tribune demanded, "The Centre must not be blind to Assam's interest and must not adopt any policy that will ultimately lead to the annihilation of Assam. The danger point has almost been reached, and the Centre should not expect Assam to commit suicide with her eyes wide open". The rehabilitation of the refugees caused an apprehension in the minds of the Assamese elite that since the Bengalee population had already constituted a sizable section in the province, the new Bengalee refugees would strengthen the cause of the Bengalees posing a severe threat to the Assamese language and culture. In view of this, The Assam Tribune criticised the policy of the central Government regarding the refugee problem, and asked.

"Has Assam no right to exist as the land of Assamese people? Is it the intention of the Government to turn the Assamese people into minority community in their own province and jeopardise their language, culture and their very existence".

Slowly the students community became alive to the prob-
lems and commenced organisation. Because of the changing pattern of population; the danger to the growth of the language and culture of Assam were perceived by them, when other states in India went ahead with the passing of the State Language Act. It was found that Assam was lagging much behind. The politicians played safe, as these Bengali speaking new comers with the help of old settlers would put obstruction in the way of the Language Act. So it was the students movement which speeded up the passing of the State language Act in 1960. The Assamese intelligentsia became increasingly conscious of establishing their language on a sound footing. They wanted to see the emergence of the whole of north eastern zone as a single political unit having a common language, i.e. the Assamese. This led the students to engage themselves in the movement for the medium of instruction in 1972.

Over and above, the students were very much concerned about the economic backwardness of Assam. Despite being potentially one of the rich provinces in the Indian Union, Assam found herself economically backward. Her enormous raw materials such as crude oil, tea, timber, jute, coal etc. contributed a large share to the central exchequer and yet she remained one of the most undeveloped province of India. By and large there was a widespread feeling among the intelligentsia of Assam that they were being deprived by the central government of this legitimate share. In an editorial the Assam Tribune criticised the financial...
policy of the central Government towards Assam and characterised the existing financial relationship as "colonial type of economy".\[32\]

With the submission of 21 point charter of demands on February 21, 1974 the struggle of AASU started. In a joint statement, Sri Lalan Kumar Singh and Sri Jatindra Choudhury, President and General Secretary respectively of the AASU called upon the people and the students "to refrain from all violent activities".\[33\] Since then AASU organised street corner meetings and processions to explain the 21 point charter of demands to the people of Assam. Besides mass pickings in all Government offices excluding essential services like electricity, P & T, Milk, Transport, Medical were held in different parts of Assam. The statement also appealed to the students and the public not to be misled by any provocation during the dehoarding operation and refrain from hatreds and malice towards the families of the hoarders.\[34\] It was declared that the second phase of the agitation would start with picketing in front of all the Government offices from May 6 to 11. However essential services like post and telegraphs, power, Health, Milk and Transport will be exempted from strike.\[35\]

On March 20, 1974 the first meeting was held between the AASU and the Government of Assam. The Government of Assam, accor-
According to the Assam Tribune, agreed with the AASU in principles. Although the Government of Assam agreed in principle with the AASU in the first meetings, but the talks failed in the subsequent meeting.

Since the talks failed, AASU launched again protest movement. The propaganda carried out by the Assam Government against the AASU that they exhibited immaturity by launching the agitation had no foundation. AASU believed in spontaneous participation. It expected the labourers, cultivators and others to plunge into the agitation after a careful consideration of the charter. It was not in a hurry. It wanted to make the charter popular by attracting people's attention to it. It wanted immediate fulfilment of the demands relating to food because in these days of food crisis and sky-high prices of essential items, implementation of these demands would give immense relief to the people in general. AASU took steps to carry the charter among the masses. So there was no question of AASU agitating alone. The Dainik Asom editorially expressed concern at the prolonged agitation launched by AASU and the Government's indifference to the genuine problems raised by the students. It reminded the Government of the terrible academic loss the students suffered because of the agitation. The charter generated a great interest among the people; cultivators and labourers were attracted to its solution of
their problems; intellectuals, specially the teachers accepted the demands as reasonable. AASU hoped that very soon all the poor people of the state would unite and participate in AASU's struggle.\textsuperscript{37}

The Agitation of AASU reached a crucial stage in the month of June, 1974. It began Satyagraha to compel the Government to accept the demands relating to food stuff. As a result of the agitation the Government awoke from slumber and tried to subdue it by torture and threat of death. On June 10, 1974 two young students satyagrahs, Gagen Engti and Putul Saikia at Bhourbanda in the Nowgong district were killed in the police firing. According to eye witness account, the answer to non-violent satyagraha by school children was given by bullets instead of resorting to lathi charge or teargas or any other preliminary step.\textsuperscript{38} Gagen and Putul came from a poor family. The charter of demands was for all the poor and the oppressed. The repression started in Sibsagar much earlier. It continued in Palasbari, Mirza, Barpeta, Dhubri and other areas. No student could come out of the house, even home was not safe because of the police oppression. This was for the first time that Assam Government brought about an insecure condition for citizens of the country after independence. Plans were made by the Government to put the movement off the track. New student organisation were created in the re-
sidence of Ministers under Government patronage to oppose the policy and action of the AASU by issuing statements only in newspapers. On 25 June the repression reached its climax. On that day Gauhati University hostels were subjected to police vandalism and student satyagrahis at Biswanath Charali were put to inhuman torture. Even many people inside their houses did not escape savagery. Hundreds of students and common people were imprisoned in this bloody month of June.39

AASU declared, "we realise that we have to face many obstacles in our struggle for economic salvation. We have to sacrifice our blood. Incidents of June are mere symbols of things to come. This shows how cruel a Government can be to the agitation for the cause of the downtrodden, when that Government is the representative of the rich landlords. The events of June call upon AASU to strengthen the unity, raise dedicated volunteers and continue the struggle in wider forms. Sacrifice of the countless people gives encouragement of all. We remember martyrs Gogen and Putul with great respect and love. They will remain the guiding stars in our struggle for ever. We remain indebted to all those who were injured and those who suffered imprisonment. We shall achieve the result of the suffering and sacrifice of those people when we reach goal.

Our aim Economic Equality

Our struggle for the economically backward".40
On June 12 The Assam Tribune in its editorial remarked, "while we fully endorse the student community's growing concern over the high prices of foodstuff and scarcity, it is difficult to appreciate how the dehoarding by unofficial agencies including the students, picketing and like agitational actions can ease the situation. In a concrete term, the student agitation has apparently diverted the entire Government machinery to the problem of law and order which should have been normally applied to tackle the food situation. For this state of situation the responsibility no doubt lies with the Government because it has failed to enlist the co-operation of the students, let alone the public worse still, the Government has applied its strong arm policy on the students resulting in police firings, lathi charge and other forms of repression". The central leadership expressed its concern about the events in Assam and held the view that the present situation might be ignored only at the peril of the ruling party.

The movement of the AASU in 1974 was mainly for the achievement of economic emancipation of the people. But the Government under the leadership of Sri Sarat Ch. Singha cracked down on the students and tried to divide the unity of people in the name of race, caste, religion and language. 1974 became a year of torture. On 10th June two young students were brutally killed by the police at Bhurbanha in Nowgong district. Students could not walk in the streets of Sibsagar without being harrassed and beaten. The
atrocities on the youth reached the peak in Palasbari, Mirza, Barpeta, Dhubri and other places. On June 12, the police entered into the compound of Darrang College and unleashes terrific atrocities on the boys and girl's. It was a great tragedy for the country that in independent democratic India young students could be put to inhuman torture only because they plunged themselves in a non-violent movement for the economic upliftment of the general people. 42

AASU declared Assam Bandh on June 25th Despite police atrocities. Students wore black badges as a mark of mourning for the police firing victims at Bhurbandha. The Gauhati University Campus incidents of June 25th in which the CRP and the Assam Police RAIDed and ransacked some hostels and inflicted injuries on several students besides arresting many others added a new dimension to the students movement. Students apart, these ruffled the feelings of all connected with the University, teachers, employees and the administration headed by the Vice-Chancellor, the University's Executive Council and University court and by and large, the state's intelligentsia.

The students agitation in Assam reached a critical stage where it was no longer confined to the students. The G.U. Executive Council, in its meeting on June 29, condemning the police atrocities on its campus, urged the Government to release unconditionally all the students and University employees, held in
connection with the Assam bandh on June 25th and to give the University authorities assurances that the sanctity of the academic campuses would be maintained in the future. As the Assam Tribune editorially remarked, "one very deplorable fact that cannot but strike the sensible section of the public is the state Government's determination to put down the student agitation by all means. The police highups too must realize that they do not belong to an alien rule and that they are servants, not masters, of the people. The guardians of law and order must shake off their 'police state' mentality and refrain from wanton repression on the people including the students which had been in cleave evidence during the past few months".

The struggle of the students brought about increased awareness among the people of their rights and responsibilities. The authoritarian character of the Government was revealed to all. The Government did not like to listen any criticism of its policies. It sought to silence all opposition by guns. Hence mere reformist movement would not work; a bigger movement, a social upsurge was felt necessary. It was imperative to bring about political and social consciousness among the youth. Fight against fascism and authoritarianism was not possible on the part of a handful of rebel young men and women. The student community as a whole must be united with the various groups of exploited people and must establish a united front to carry on the
The Assam movement on foreigners issue can be traced in the demand No. 17 of the charter of demands presented by AASU in 1974. It was the demand to stop the flow of 'outsiders' to the state. The avowed aim of the demand was to safeguard the interests of the local people. AASU admitted that in an ideal condition when economic equality was established in the whole country there could be no question of stopping the flow of outsiders to any state. But so long as Assam remained comparatively an economically backward province, exploitation of local resources by outsiders must stop. It may be noted that the feeling of insecurity among the Assamese elite at what they called economic exploitation by the outsiders was very old. As H.K. Barpuzari pointed out, the British brought the outsiders to serve as financiers, entrepreneurs, administrators and technicians, but the local people were never happy with this development and there ensued clashes, some of which had political overtones. Since the influx of outsiders into Assam never ended, the anxiety of the Assamese elite for their distinct existence grew day by day. The movement on the issue of foreign nationals was the manifestation of that anxiety. AASU declared, "our aim is to bring about economic equality among the people of the state irrespective of caste, creed and religion and thereby to eradicate all problems of the state. When this aim is realised, all quarrels relating to caste,
religion and region will cease". 48

It is a matter of great surprise that though the student movement continued for a long period, only a few editorials were written in different newspapers. They expressed concern at the deteriorating food situation in the state but did not endorse students' demand for abolition of private trade in food grains. As the Assam Tribune observed "It is not enough to say that the private trade is eliminated to give place to Co-operatives: the public are not interested who manages the food front: to them the supply of the staple at a reasonable price and in adequate quantity is vital. 49 They were critical of the government's failure to meet the challenge posed by price rise in the food front and the prolonged student agitation. They were also critical of the Government's strong arm policy on the youth, resulting in lathi charge and police firings. But no constructive suggestion was recommended by any editorial. It is also interesting that no editorial highlighted the problem of influx of outsiders.

With the Emergency declared on June 25, 1975 all students movements stopped abruptly. No editorial was written about the problems raised by AASU. Then came the 1977 General Elections. The Janata party came into power with Morarji Desai as the Prime Minister. In February 1978 Assembly elections were held in Assam and a Janata Ministry headed by Golap Borbora assumed office. The rising expectations following the coming to power of the first
non-Congress ministry in Assam after Independence were not borne out and by the summer of 1978 several movements started in the state championing a variety of causes. Two regional parties surfaced about this time, viz. The Purbanchaliya Lok Parisnadv (PLP), led by Nibaran Bora, a Lohia socialist and the Assam Jatiyatabadi Dal led by Nagen Hazarika. Both the parties began to highlight the anxiety of the Assamese intelligentsia about their future in view of the continuous influx to the state. The representatives of the All Assam Students Union held a conference in July 1978 at Jorhat. They prepared a 16 point charter of demands, prominent among which were holding the price rise, better employment opportunities and expulsion of foreigners.

The 17th demand in the 1974 AASU's 21 point charter of demands was to stop the flow of the outsiders. But the 16th demand in the 1978 charter was not only to put a stop to the flow of outsiders but also to detect the foreign nationals illegally staying in Assam, delate their names from the electoral rolls and to deport them from the state. In the appeal to the people AASU observed, "Refugees from Bangladesh staying in India without securing Indian Citizenship according to the 1950 Citizenship Act have no right to stay in India. Steps must be taken to expel Bangladeshis who are not Indian Citizens. The continuing influx of refugees from Bangladesh must end."
AASU was ready to accept those Nepalis who were serving in the police and the Army, it expressed concern at the influx of the nationals of Nepal to Assam and demanded their immediate expulsion.\textsuperscript{52} The Asom Yuba Janata, the youth wing of the Janata Party, raised the issue of influx of foreigners and outsiders in August 1978 in the 10-point charter of demands.\textsuperscript{53}

The new phase of the students movement on foreigners issue started only when Emergency was lifted and the Janata Party came to power in the centre and later in the state of Assam. During the Emergency the press obviously remained silent about the problems raised by AASU. Even when the Janata party came to power in the state, AASU's demands were not seriously taken note of by the press. The role of the press vis-à-vis AASU's agitation during the Janata role will be examined in the next chapter.

The students in Assam have made various attempts as an organized community in bringing about the cultural, educational and social changes and displaying commendable awareness in trying to preserve the identity and culture of the Assamese nationality. Students participation in identity movement is not a recent phenomenon or a current development but a world-wide phenomenon. The fundamental similarity between revolts of the youth all over the world lies in the growing disillusionment of youths with older generation. Very often, it is in the search of autonomy and
identity that the young people became fearless and an easy prey to the instruments of charge. In Assam also, the beginning of the students movement could be traced back to the time when the Assamese students pledged to follow the path of academic, social and cultural uplift of the Assamese nationality. Their interest at that time was mainly literary and only incidentally political. This was possibly the results of the administrative measures of the British Government whose only interest in the Assamese people seemed to centre round the need for producing English educated persons for maintaining written documents, files and accounts.

The recent student movement in Assam launched from June 8, 1979 onwards against the illegal presence of foreign nationals in Assam, may be considered in a way as a legacy of the earlier student movements in Assam. It speaks very highly of the Assamese students that even when they emerged as a distinctive identity as a result of the wider political movement, they never lost track of their distinctive identity. Thanks to the Assam Chatra Sankalan and later developments in the growth of a more nature movement, the preservation of the Assamese language and culture continues to be a live issue in the post-independence period as well. It speaks highly for the Assam Chatra Sankalan and AASU that they could harmonise regional interests with the
larger interests of the nation.

As professor D.P. Barooah the Present Vice-Chancellor of Gauhati University observes, "Faced with the Government's failure to deal with the foreign nationals' issue according to the constitution and the existing Laws, combined with the exasperation generated by the dubious role of the major political parties, the student community of Assam raised the first voice of an organised movement when the All Assam Students Union (AASU) presented a 21 point charter of demands to the Assam Government on February 21, 1974: the detection and deportation of foreign nationals was one of the demands." The mass movement in Assam over the foreign nationals issue began when it was pointed out by AASU that the electoral rolls of Assam were contaminated by the presence of foreign nationals. As such the elections in the fourteen parliamentary constituencies of Assam to the Seventh Loka Sabha should be held only on the basis of a revised voters' list deleting the names of foreign nationals. The movement slowly and steadily organised by AASU captured the imagination of the people of Assam and it was no more restricted to the urban intellectuals and students of universities. AASU carried on the struggle with unflagging zeal and undaunted courage.

A massive rally of students and other sections of the people was held in Gauhati on November 6, 1979. It was resolved
that elections must not be held in the state till the electoral rolls were rerevised deleting the names of all foreign nationals.\textsuperscript{55} A programme of non-violent agitation was chelked out by the AASU and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP), an organisation formed at the initiative of AASU and with AASU itself as one of the constituents. During the GANA SATYAGRAHA the days of 12-17 November 1979, over seven Lakh people including children and old men and women courted arrest at Gauhati alone.\textsuperscript{56} It was this movement which succeeded in stalling the elections in twelve out of the fourteen parliamentary constituencies of Assam demanding the fulfilment of the Three D's- detection of foreign-nationals, deletion of foreign-nationals' names from the electoral rolls, and their deportation from the country acting within the framework of the country's constitution and the laws.\textsuperscript{57}

REFERENCE:

5. AASU's 21 point charter of demand.
8. Ibid, April, 28, 1974.
18. AASU's 21 point charter of demands - Explanatory Note.
20. AASU's 21 point charter of demands - Explanatory Note.
22. See Appendix No. D.
24. Ibid.


34. Ibid, P. 20.


40. AASA: Souvenir, 1959, P. 27.

42. AASA : Souvenir, 1960, P. 57


47. AASU, Mukhapatra, Editorial, 1960, P. 1.


55. AASU, Smaranika, 1985, P. 57.

56. AASU's 21 point charter of demands.


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