8 1942 QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT IN ASSAMESE FOLKSONGS

When you go home
tell them of us and say
for your tomorrow
we gave our today

Kohima war cemetery

This heart moving epitaph on bronze plaque in the memory of the martyrs in the Japanese invasion during the Second World War is an inexhaustible source of inspiration for the patriots of all the ages.

Let us now have a glimpse over the Indian scenario regarding the Quit India Movement.

QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT: BACKGROUND

The invasion of Great Britain on Germany involved India in the Second World War indirectly. Germany's Nazism broke the backbone of Europe. On 22nd June of 1941, Germany invaded Russia. On 7th December of 1941 Japan blew out Pearl Harbour of America. These very two events invited Russia and America to the fighting ground of the 2nd World War. After that Japan fought a series of war and occupied Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Myanmar and soon reached the North-East Frontier of India.

The British government was greatly shocked and soon sent a mission on 22nd March of 1942 under Sir Stafford Cripps to mitigate the inner disputes of India. But the leaders of Indian national congress, Horijon sabha, Muslim league and Akali dall could not find a solution as the proposals of the mission were self contradictory.

Indian leaders were horrified as they thought that the British people would give up the responsibility in this war affected moment and the imminent anarchism would pave the way for certain devastation in front of Japanese bullet.
As an outcome of this fear, congress working committee took a grand proposal “Quit India” in Wardha on 14th July, 1942. Yet they waited few months in the obvious hope of winning the favour of the British people. But the later was quite apathetic to their well and woes. So on 8th August of 1942, Nation Congress accepted the “Quit India” Proposal in Bombay session – where Mahatma Gandhi illustrated the significance of the movement and augmented the patriotic spirit with the slogan *do or die.*

Dramatically, the British army arrested all the harbingers of the movement including M.K. Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Ballav bhai Patel, Sarojini Naidu, Kripalani, Rajendra Prasad at the late night of 8th August. Consequently, hartals, processions, protestation were carried on from 9th August. Lathi Charge, Jailing and other in humane measures were taken in the name of suppression of the movement.

Gandhiji’s movement became no longer nonviolent. Jayprakash Narayan, Ram Manohar Lohiya, Aruna Asaf Ali led an underground movement where Subhash Bose’s ideology *Delhi Chalo, Give me blood, I will give you freedom,* formation of Indian National Army (Azad Hind Fauz) enhanced the violent manifestation twice. The British government adopted every measure to put down the rebellion. Even firing from the sky was witnessed over Patna, Bhagalpur, Munger, Nadia and Talser.

ASSAM IN 1942:

Assam witnessed an unmatched game of tears and blood in this affair. At Gohpur, Kanaklata, a teenaged girl and Mukunda kakati embraced immatured death. In Golaghat, Kushal Konwar, president of the local congress committee was roped around the neck on the false charge of derailment of a train.

The British flag “Union Jack” was flying boldly in the courts and police stations. The revolutionists decided to hoist the Indian national flag by throwing away the British one.

As the thought prevailed in their minds, the revolutionists formed two squads—one is *Shanti Bahini* (peace squad) and the other is *Mrityu Bahini* (death squad). Any native with good temperament can join the *Shanti*
But only determined, courageous and dedicated members are allowed to have an entry in the Mrityu Bahini.

"We decided to have two bahinies (Shanti Bahini and Mrittu Bahini). Shanti Bahini would try to keep peace in the area (because at that time military atrocities were going on the innocent people) and Mrittu Bahini would prepare themselves to face death if death comes while hoisting the national flag in thana—because thanas are the symbol of power."  

GOHPUR EPISODE:

On 20th September of 1942, the revolutionary camps of the Gohpur region of undivided Darrang district decided to hoist the national flag in the local police station. Hundreds of youth joined the Mrityu Bahini who had already crossed eighteen years as per the committee rule. But one seventeen years old Assamese beauty, Kanaklata Barua, an orphan, begged excuse to the leaders to make an entry into it. The existing committee could not help violating the rule being overwhelmed with her irresistible urge.

The congregated agitators, not less than five hundreds, designed themselves into two parallel lines for males and females. The patriotic songs of Jyotiprasad Agarwala, Ambikagiri Raychoudhuri and blended sounds of Dhol-Khol (Assamese drums), sankha (conch shell), ghanta (bell) etc created an environment to be gone mad with optimum patriotic zeal and a loss of self identity.

Kanaklata became the captain of the women cadre and proceeded towards the Gohpur Police Station. Rebati Mohan Som, the officer in charge of the station warned her not to proceed a single step. Kanaklata replied, "We must proceed, what else may happen...you do your duty and let us do the same." Saying this, she marched with the tri-coloured flag. The police fired at her and she fell dead on the spot. One Mukunda Kakati snatched the flag from her before touching the ground and he too faced the same consequence. Yet the rebellious mass hoisted the Indian national flag replacing the Union Jack in the station premises overcoming the British gun.

Just after her departure, lots of folksongs and ballads were generated depicting the tragic massacre to ensure stimuli to the freedom seekers. India
received independence on 15\textsuperscript{th} August of 1947. Indian nationalism for freedom was immensely effected by the folklore created in the name of her.

One popular ballad circulated in the Assam valley is-

\begin{verbatim}
Gandhijir banire o Kanaklata
Loichila ashirbad, o kanaklata
Karia M.V. passe, kanaklata
Jhanda uraote pranti erila
( You took the blessings by the sermons of Gandhi
You passed M.V, oh Kanaklata
Embraced death while hoisting).

"42 chanate, o kanaklata
Dhopabar kempote, o kanaklata
Jhanda uraote pranti erila
( In the year 1942
you embraced death while hoisting
at the Dhopabar camp)

- Ai naikia, o kanaklata
Bopai naikia, o kanaklata
Dodaideur alasar laru kanaklata
Deshare karane pranti erila
(Your father was dead
Also mother was dead
You were the apple of your uncle's eyes
But gave up your life for the sake of the motherland)

Jetia ahil, o kanaklata
Oparar nirdesh o kanaklata
Uraboloi potaka thanat kanaklata
Jhanda uraote pranti erila
(When came, oh Kanaklata
the command from the upper hand
\end{verbatim}
to hoist flag at the station premises

You embraced death)

_Buku bhedi gol, o kanaklata_
_Pulichore guli o kanaklata_
_Bagari parila dholi, kanaklata_
_Deshare karane pranti erila_
(Your heart was penetrated by the bullets of the police
You fell down on the ground
And took farewell for the country)

_Tezere biringi, o kanaklata_
_Tezere rangoli, o kanaklata_
_Tezere prithibi bure, kanaklata_
_Jhanda uraote pranti erila_
(It was bleeding, oh Kanaklata
You turned red, oh Kanaklata
The earth was drowning in the sea of blood
Dedicated your life while hoisting)

_Somadhi kora hol, o kanaklata_
_Barangabarite o kanaklata_
_Dodaideu, kokeideu thaki kanaklata_
_Deshare karane pranti erila²_
(You was cremated, oh Kanaklata
at Barangabari
You had to give up life for the motherland
In the presence of your uncles and brothers)
SARUPATHAR EPISODE:

A special army train was derailed, in Sarupathar Railway Station, on 10th October, 1942, killing three American Officers and sizeable number of soldiers. A folksong depicting the incident of the hanging of Kushal Konwar is heard in the following shape-

\[
\begin{align*}
Jati-drohi mahapapi \\
Naraki puline ahi \\
Misakoi sakshi dile \\
Hamphreyr agat \\
Binadosi kushalak \\
Dharai niyai hai \\
Tulilegoi nirmom \\
Phachir kathat^2
\end{align*}
\]

(Pulin, the traitor of the nation, great sinner, gave false witness to Hamfrey.
Innocent Kushal was caught
and hanged brutally)

\[
\begin{align*}
Jorhat ranga hol \\
Golaghat suda hol \\
kushalar batari pai \\
phachir kathate \\
kushale kandile \\
asomir mukhaloi chai^4
\end{align*}
\]

(To hear the news of Kushal
Jorhat turned red
Golaghat was deserted
Kushal wept on the hanging device
Looking to the heart of mother Assam)
BARAHAMPUR EPISODE:

The peace squad safeguarded the freedom fighters in many occasions specially by rescuing the camps from the British police. On 18th September of 1942, the freedom fighters and the revolutionary people arranged a feast at Barahampur of Nagaon district to celebrate their victory over a camp. At the end of the meeting they sat down in lines for feasting spreading plaintain leaves in front of them. All on a sudden, British captain Flinish appeared in the scene with armed troupe. The feasting party though promised to go back to their homes after the feast, the captain ordered lathi charge and beating with shoes and guns. Eleven members were arrested and sent in a military van. Valuable food items were destroyed.

The congregated mass lost their patience and filled the sky with slogans, "Bande Mataram", "Bharatmata ki joy", Mahatma Gandhi ki joy" etc. The neighbouring villagers also rushed to them and joined in the mission. Ratnabala, one twelve years old girl, led a huge group of participants with tri-coloured flag. Her fifty seven years old mother, Bhogeswari Phukanani also joined them. When captain Flinish tried to snatch the flag from her, Bhogeswari gave a big blow on his mouth with the bamboo stick of the flag. As a revenge, Flinish shot her dead and made firing order. Lakshiram Hazarika, Thagiram Sut and Baloram Sut were shot dead and hundreds were injured. The following ballad cites the incident briefly-

O asomiya saju hobore hol
O bharatbasi saju hobore hol
(Oh Assamese, it is right time to be cautious
Oh Indians, it is right time to be cautious)

Barahampur shibirat brahmabhaj patile
Khowa bhat patote rol
Lora deka burah nirastra janatak
Engraje dekhale hol
(A grand feast was arranged at the Barahampur camp
But could not be celebrated
The British showed their prowess
over the unarmed youths and olds).
Commander chahabe bandukar kundare
Shibirat somale kal
Katar hiya bhage chati phuti kare
Sanginar bajale tal
(The commanding officer ushered omens
by their guns in the camp
Many hearts were broken
As they blew the war trumpet)

Epahi dupahi phule tinipahi
Lagate sambal lole
Ai Bhogeswari loge tini biri
Saragar alahi hole
(Three flowers were
taken as the wealth
Mother Bhogeswari became the guest of the heaven
Accompanying the three heroes)

Lakshmi Hazarika thogi balo sut
Nedekha dhamoloi gol
Ai Bhogeswari chariti swahid
Saragar alahi hol
(Lakshmi Hazarika, Thagi Sut and Balo Sut
departed to the unseen world
Mother Bhogeswari became the fourth martyr
in the cluster of guests to the heaven)

DHEKIAJULI EPISODE:
But the Dhekiajuli episode was second to none in its overall sacrifices. Sarunath Chutia, Manbar Nath, Mahidhar Koch, Mangal Kurku, Dayal Das Panika, Ratan Kachari, Habang Kachari, Tileswari Barua, Kumali
Devi and Khahuli Devi created an epoch making chapter by giving up their lives in the altar of India’s independence.

“During the Quit India Movement the Boro – Kacharis suffered most in Bargaon Barpukhuri area near Thelamara, a few kilometers away from Dhekiajuli.........................More than two hundred tribal people went to participate in that programme, at Dhekiajuli Police Station. They wanted to raise the Congress (national) flag by removing the Union Jack from the top of the police station building”\(^6\)

Freedom fighters late Phanidhar Das and Kamala Das, the two leaders assembled the members of the death squad, Mrityu Bahini, at the present day campus of Jugal High School, ten kilometers from Dhekiajuli. It was Sunday. The weather was quite gloomy. Plantation was just over only. But the poor peasants could not enjoy harvestation.

The members of the death squad marched with tri-coloured flag. There ensured a scuffle between the processionists and the police and their hired guns. Police ultimately opened fire and lathi charged the un armed people. Moniram Kachari, Ratan Kachari and Lerela Kachari died on the spot. Swargeswar Kachari, who had got married only a fortnight earlier, (he was from Barpukhuri) and Lerela Kachari of Bargaon Chapori fell dead at a little distance from the police station. Jaluki Kachari, Chakuli Kachari and Bamuni Kachari – all of Barpukhuri village, were wounded severely in the police action. The former two died on their way to the village. Bamuni died in about two months as she did not get medical treatment. Maila Kachari and Kandu Kachari, of Hojai Siporia, received bullet injuries and died after a few days. Mangal Kurku and Dayal Panika also died on the spot. Regarding this area Medini Choudhuri said, “This area was under the Bargaon Mauza Congress, which had been established in 1921. Madhu Das, a leading Kachari man was its founder secretary. He mobilized the local people to take part in the movement. They had participated in the freedom movement since 1921.”\(^7\)

A folksong rendering veneration to all the martyrs of Quit India Movement experienced in Assam has been discovered like the below-

\(O\) asomiya, o somonia

\(Tor\) juj arambha hol

\(Mahatma\) gandhiye deshare jujaloï
Chinyori koi thoi gol
Gaonwar deka burha jiwari bowari
Hengdang lobore hol
Barhampur shibirat brahmabhoj patile
Pator bhat patote rol
Aidew kanakar bukur tejere
Rangin karile rakshar hat
Paradhin bharatar kalima dhuboloi
Mukundeo tej karile pat
Jananir manalo chai oi Ratane
Bhangale sharirar har
Bogakoi bongale mukhat loi hanhi
Morake marise mar
Mitior salere shatoru shalile
Bukur tej karile pan
Gowa Asomiya gowa samanlya
Gowa swarajare gan
(Oh Assamese, my companions
Your battle has been started
Mahatma Gandhi shouted you
To the battle ground
The young and old, damsels and consorts
Prepared with your hengdang
A grand feast was arranged at the camp of Barhampur
But ended in smoke
With the blood of kanaklata
Devil's hands were reddened
To wash away the scars of dependent India
Mukunda also shed blood
To keep the honour of the motherland
Ratan broke his bones
The white bangals with smiles in lips,
attempted to kill the dead one
They treated us as enemies in the guise of relatives
CONCLUSION:

A very frequent shout on the Dhekiajuli episode is “It is second Jallianabag” (a massacre on 19th April 1919 at Jallianabag of Punjab causing hundreds of death and many injuries by British general Dyre when mass agitation was going on against the imprisonment and lathi charge on a few pioneer leaders) from no definite source. But the episode is quite peculiar and second to none for two or more reasons.

At that time, the Indian National Congress was addressed as the league of caste-Hindus because lower caste (Schedule tribe and schedule caste mainly) were hardly welcomed to share the party affairs. Ironically almost all martyrs and wounded persons in this episode belonged to the lower strata.

The second remarkable point is that half of the martyrs in this incident were women. It is quite amazing to think that how these poverty stricken illiterate women persuaded themselves for this greater cause amidst the four walls of the kitchen where the surrounding was totally male dominated. Assamese society underwent semi feudalism at that time in the fertile ground of imperialism.

The most thought provoking scene in the 1942 movement was that almost all martyrs were from the strata of peasantry and daily wagers-half fed, half cled. Landlords, Mauzadars, Chirastadars and other government employees played a very much discouraging and repulsive role in the movement. Establishment of school and other infrastructures were greatly

*1. Hengdang: A long sword used in battles during the Ahom monarchy.

*2. White bangals: The British were called as white bangals (boga bangals in Assamese) in India.
discouraged by the Upper middle class. If we have a glance at the hanging of Kushal Konwar, we see that the local gaonburah Bhimgram and the two Assamese police inspectors enlisted the name of Kushal Konwar on suspicion amidst forty two victims in the event of derailment of a train. Kushal Konwar was the president of the local congress committee. In the Patharughat massacre (1894), the Phulaguri Dhewa (1861), the raij mels of Barama, Lachima and Rangia, protestations were raised by the peasants for the unbearable enhancement of land revenue. The discussion would become more passionate if it is revealed that one servant Manbar Nath from the Jahamari region came out of the bondage of the owner to join “the Death Squad” and became a martyr in the Dhekiajuli episode of 1942.

Since then, 20th September has been celebrated each year as “Swahid Divas” (Martyrs Day) in Assam to pay them homage and performances imitating those heartrending events are exhibited in the sweet memory of them
NOTES AND REFERENCES


2. Jibakanta Gogoi, Swadhinata sangramar geet, (Guwahati: Express Publications, 1999), 114-115

3. ibid, 132

4. ibid, 132

5. ibid, 124

6. Medini Choudhuri, “Tribals' participation in the nationalist upsurge” in Arun Bhuyan, op.cit, 300

7. ibid, 300

8. Jibakanta Gogoi, op.cit, 126