

History of the Assamese Movement since 1947

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An Outline

The post-independence period of Assam Movement may be divided into four convenient sections.

I. The first section covers the period 1947 to 1956. Genesis of the Language Movement which culminated in the official language Bill of 1960 may be traced during the early 1950s.

Reports of the States' Re-organisation Commission (1956) and the Hills' Commission (1967) throw interesting lights on the language movement and future developments in Assam. Incidentally, discussions on the constitutional aspects of the language issue are also helpful.

Quest for identity as a general fact of political culture explains the language Movement and its merger in the anti-foreigner oriented Assamese Movement and its compromising stance.

It appears from the Census Report of 1951, that about 2.5 laos (2,50,000) Bengali-Muslims were deported by 1950, as a sequel to the Nehru-Liaquat Pact (April 1950). This early period may be regarded as a period of initial tensions.

II. The second section covering the period 1956 to 1972 may be re-divided into 3 phases.

a) In the first phase, the Central issue was whether Assam was to remain one state or be split into many states. As per recommendations of the States' Re-organisation Commission, Assam was to remain homogeneous (i.e. not to be divided linguistically), but the Hills' districts were to be given autonomy. However, the Government of India and Assam Government disregarded the above Recommendations and this led to the dismemberment of Assam. The process started in 1963 with the creation of a separate State of Nagaland. The other states which followed Nagaland were Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh; the process of dismemberment was completed in 1972. In all these cases, the quest for identity proved to be the dominant theme.

Matters came to a head in 1972, when the issue of Assamese as the medium of instruction in schools, Colleges and Universities

gained momentum. In fact, the language Movement of 1960 forms the core of this period. The background on educational expansion may be studied as background for the quarrels about language in the Universities.

b) The second phase covering the period 1968-'72 is also important historically. In 1968, the anti-Marwari, anti-Punjabi, anti-Sindhi i.e. anti-Trading Community Movement was started to highlight the Food Movement in Assam. In 1972, Mizoram was born as a separate state.

c) Phase three is to be viewed as the background highlighting the formation of the A. A. S. U. (i.e. All-Assam Students' Union) around late 1960s, which has played a prominent role since then. The brief note on the A. A. S. U. should figure in the relevant context.

III. The third-period, 1972-1979 is characterised by the renewed Asamiya-Bengali conflict which has a century-old history. During 1977-1978, regional parties like the Purbanchaliya Loke Parishad (i.e. P. L. P. or Eastern Regional Peoples' Council) and the Asom Jatiyatavadi Dal (i.e. A.J.D. or Assam Nationalist Party) took shape. The All-Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (A. A. G. S. P., i.e. All-Assam Peoples' Fighting Council), was made up of these two, besides the Assam Sahitya Sabha (i. e, Assam Literary Society, established in 1917), a cultural organization with political overtone, and a senior constituent of the composite body. The A. A. G. S. P., a loosely organised body embracing political and non-political units like the A. A. S. U. was founded on 27 April 1979, to give the Assamese Movement a heterogeneous leadership. A brief history of these parties is relevant in this context.

IV. Since 8 June, 1979, the Current Assamese Movement began on the Foreign nationals' issue. Its growth may be studied into two stages. The initial period started in June 1979 with the demand for revision of the Electoral rolls on the eve of the bye-election for Mongaldai Parliamentary Constituency, and stretched upto September, 1982 with the ousting of N. Bora, Chairman of the P. L. P. and one of the top leaders of the A. A. G. S. P. from the Movement Leadership. The period that follows may be considered as the second stage that comes full circle with the completion of the Feb. 1983 elections in the State. Incidentally, for the sake of objectivity the present treatise may be terminated at the height of the Movement in late 1980 or early 1981.