

Women and agrarian Struggles in Assam : An Empirio-Historical Approach

R.C. Kalita

The history of modern Assam is replete with peasant movement. The series of peasant movements during 1836-94 left a rich legacy so far as the people's resistance to unjust revenue policy of the Government was concerned. Because of this the Congress and other political parties did not have to exert much effort to bring the peasantry to the fold of the freedom struggle of the early part of the twentieth century, in Assam. Close on the heels of independence Assam witnessed the ripples of the Tebhaga peasant movement of Bengal and a spate of strong movement of the Peasantry under the leadership of the CPI and the RCPI during 1947-52. In this paper an attempt is being made to study the peasant movements of Assam during 1947-73.

To begin with, the organisation of the All India Kishan Sabha in April 1936 in Lucknow marked a turning point in the history of the agrarian struggles in India in general and in Assam in particular. It was the result of constant efforts of the Left Congressmen, Congress Socialists and the Communists.¹ Two prominent Congressmen from Assam, namely Late Bishnu ram Medhi and Sarat Chandra Singha, who subsequently became the chief Ministers of Assam, attended the first session of the AIKS in Lucknow.²

But this does not necessarily mean that they and other Congressmen took the initiative in organising the peasantry in Assam on a class basis either during the freedom movement or after independence. And naturally, the work of organising the peasantry in Assam was undertaken by the Socialists and the Communists. Before the provincial organisation was floated in the Thekaragaon Conference (in Nowgpong district) in 1946, the AIKS had been functioning through several branches under the guidance and of the Communists and the Sociatists in Assam.³

The Tebhaga (one-third share of the produce to the landlords by the tenant-cultivators) peasant struggle of Bengal (1946 -47) and its

repercussions in Assam particularly in the Silchar Subdivision of Cachar district. There the struggle was fought, as in Bengal, under the guidance of the AIKS and prominent leaders were Irawat Singha a Manipuri revolutionary turned communist, Sitaram, Medher Nath, etc. The peasant women folk and agricultural labourers played important roles in this struggle of the share-croppers where thousands of their class brethren participated.⁴ The intensity of the struggle on the other hand invited the wrath of the Government and it soon let loose a police-raj on the peasantry. But because of the participation of a huge number of women and agricultural labourers the policemen had to withdraw from the scene of action for some time.⁵ Achintya Bhattacharya-a veteran communist and Kishan Sabha leader-has recorded the heroic deeds of the peasant women folk in the course of the Tebhaga struggle in the Cachar district thus; "Com. Thetri Rebidas, a woman agricultural worker, handed over her infant child to someone and fought the policemen who had been assaulting the share-croppers. Women workers joined the fight and the police had to retreat for the time being. Thetri, Lalmoni, Latika, Bauri, Imechou, Chaubi and others-the names of women leaders of tebhaga-became known throughout the district"⁶ Imechou and Chaubi women and the others were of ex-tea garden labour community. The Manipuri peasants and their women folk kept alive the spirit of fighting for their cause till sometime later. Bhattacharya continues, "Imechou Devi..... was later killed by the Assam Rifles, when she was defending share-croppers' paddy in 1949. In the same action in 1949, four others-Gaurahari Singh, Gaura singh, Jaychandra-all Manipuri youths and Kishan Sabha cadres and Sanatan Bauri-an-ex-tea garden labourer was killed by the police to enable the landlords to snatch away the share-croppers' paddy".⁷ All these killed belonged to the village of Barkhala Panji of Cachar district. Mallika Bhumij was killed by the police in the village of Joypur. Madhab Nath of Adhartilla of Silchar died as a result of police torture in jail and Chanubabu Singh died in the Cutchery of the local Zamindar at Patharkandi in 1949.⁸

The Tebhaga Peasant struggle was waged in a time when the peasantry of the Brahmaputra Valley had been waging a relentless fight against landlord exploitation and for land to the landless and poor peasants under the leadership of the CPI and the RCPI since the beginning of the forties.⁹ Now close on the heels of these peasant struggles, the Kishan Sabha and the Krishak Banua-Panchayat (Peas-

ant and Workers' Raj) led by the CPI and the RCPI respectively intensified the agrarian struggles in the Brahmaputra Valley in 1948. As usual the tribal peasants of Assam this time provided the best fighting stock against the Government and exploiter-landlord class. In Beltola, Bako, and Chaigaon the peasantry created history by their long-continued fight against their landlords.¹⁰

During 1948-49 peasantry of Beltola, ramcharani, Chayani, Palashabari, barduar, and rani successfully withheld the payment of the landlord's share of the produce.¹¹ Initially the peasant struggle in Beltola was organised and led by a tribal social worker named Deban Khaklari and later it passed under the leadership of the RCPI and the CPI.¹² However, in the course of this struggle (1948-52), commonly known as the Adhiar Movement, the share-croppers and their women folk participated in their thousands and underwent unheard of police torture and incarceration.

The peasant struggle of this period was marked by the mass participation of the tribal people of Assam. The tribal people of Assam as whole had never been under the leadership of the Congress during the entire course of the freedom movement. They were socially looked down upon and oppressed and economically exploited by the caste-Hindus, Brahmans, Kayasthas and Kalitas. They therefore had floated their own socio-political organisations, mostly under Government patronage.¹³ The various tribal people had federated their organisations in a provincial organisation under the banner of the "All Assam Plains Tribal League", while the Ahoms had organised themselves under the "Ahom Association". After independence many in the lurch, joined the Congress while the people in the grass-roots level remained outside the orbit of the Congress politics. And, therefore, after independence, no great effort was required to mobilise the tribal peasantry in the agrarian struggles by the communists and others. It is to be mentioned here that right from the Phulaguri Peasant Struggle (1861) down to the nineteen sixties, the peasant struggles in Assam had been always tribal based. Their participation had always marked the peasant movement with a sense of militancy, a fighting spirit with toughness in action and commitment, and with a capacity to sustain and edure the rigors of police action. The tribal women-folk, as they enjoyed a measure of comparative social freedom at par with the men because of their direct involvement in the various stages of cultivation and the

economic productions, did not lag behind in the battle front when the call to fight reached them. In some cases and locality their participation, in a large measure, was precipitated by large scale police repression. Anyway, they rendered important service in case of supplying information to the different activities, carrying on intelligence on the movement of the police and armed forces in the area or on possible attack by them, and providing food medicines and other necessities to the peasant activists and underground leaders. For instance, the tribal women of Fatashil Ambari (under Guwahati Municipal Corporation) rendered these services while Nandeswar Talukdar of present day CPI (M) had gone underground in the midst of the Adhjar Movement in the Fatashil Hills in 1948-49.

The Karbi and Kachari women of the suburbs of Guwahati acted as the couriers on information to the peasants, peasant activists and leaders during the Adhjar Movement in 1948-49. They frequently used to visit the towns' peoples, particularly the landlord families of Beltola for selling fire-woods etc. The landlords were caste Hindus and were the members of the middle class engaged in lucrative legal professions and other white collar jobs who also combined a little money lending in and around the town. According to 1951 Census Report there were 82,000 such absentee landlords in Assam.¹⁴ Their exploitation of the peasantry was in the extreme in its intensity and dimension. The Karbi and Kachari women of Beltola while selling fire-woods as usual to landlord families and others collected information on the machinations of the landlords and their contemplated actions with police support and on return they quietly passed them on to their brethren, the peasant activists and leaders. In the same period, the peasant struggle in the Narengi-Satgaon area (Pub-Beltola) was under the leadership of the RCPI. The Government let loose a police raj on the struggling peasantry. A women peasant activist of the locality, after being brutally tortured by the police, died after giving birth to a male child. In the same locality, an ex-tea garden labourer of Synsali Tea Garden gave shelter to an absconding peasant activist who was closely followed by the police. In an attempt to hide him from the police, the tea labourer surreptitiously made the absconding peasant activist to lie in the bed of his married daughter and sleep along with her so as to lead the police to mistake them as 'husband and wife' on varification and leave them as such and undisturbed. And the device did work well. In the easternmost part of the Dibrugarh

district some grown-up Phakial girls acted as couriers of information and medicines to the struggling peasantry and leaders. The information were on the movement of the police and military in the area to arrest the peasant activists and leaders including Bishnu Prasad Rabha.

The agrarian struggle of the period rocked the Assam administration of day heavily and it soon engaged the police and other armed forces including the Assam Rifles and the Kumaon Regiment to crush the struggles.¹⁵ Both the communist parties the CPI and the RCPI which spearheaded the struggles were declared illegal and banned in the initial stage and their cadres and sympathisers and followers were meted out with unheard of brutal tortures and punishments. The Assam administration virtually became a police administration and it let loose a reign of terror throughout the province. Innumerable peasants including women were maimed for life.¹⁶ Even pregnant women were not spared. One Rajani Baro of Baghmara village in Kamrup district was brutally tortured by the police to elicit information regarding the whereabouts of peasant activists and leaders. She was then in an advanced stage of pregnancy and died soon after the torture.¹⁷ Janaki Teron, a peasant activist at the prime of her youth died of police torture.¹⁸ It is to be mentioned here that one Pratap Rabha of the RCPI lopped-off his tongue soon after his arrest by the police lest he would give information on the whereabouts of Bishnu Prasad Rabha and Upen Das under police repression and torture.¹⁹ On 26 February 1949, Arbinda Ghose alias Bapuram Talukdar, a leader of RCPI was arrested at Bhakatpara in Darrang district. Several hundred police and army men gheraoed about eighteen villages in search of Bishnu Prasad Rabha and Arabinda Ghose, but the former was then out of Bhaktapara, Thousands of tribal peasants, men, women and children, thronged the police party to get the release of Ghose. The police cleared the way by resorting to firing which resulted in the instant death a tribal peasant, Katiram Kachari, and injuring many more tribal peasants.²⁰

In Sibsagar district too the peasantry rose under the leadership of the CPI and the RCPI in the areas where the incidence of landlord and moneylenders' exploitation was deep seated and crushing. In the Titabar areas the CPI led Kishan Sabhas spearheaded the struggles against the landlords like Kikau Thikadar, Bakt Zamal, Nanda Saikia, Gunin Bhuyan, Thirai Bardoloi, Padmaram Sharma, etc. Barring the

latter all the other landlords were of Jorhat town where they served in the lucrative professions including higher posts in the state bureaucracy.²¹ Padmaram Sharma, a sweet-meat pedlar from Rajasthan, had established his zamindari in the Madhumpur area and became known as Madhupuria. In all they owned hundreds of puras of lands and rendered the peasantry as tenants-at-will. The peasantry consisted of Thengal Kachari, Sonowal Kachari, caste Hindus and other backward people.²² Padmaram Sharma, for instance, owned 1800 puras of lands in 1946-47.²³ These exploited peasantry soon rallied behind the AIKS, and branches and Adhiar Fronts were organised under its guidance in all the villages of Amguri, Kharikatia and Titabar. Through these organisations the peasantry heroically resisted the repeated attempts of the landlords to snatch away their products at harvest times.²⁴ To suppress this struggle of the peasantry the Government sided with the landlords and resorted to all measures of police repressions. The magnitude of the landlord and landlord-money-lender exploitation on the peasantry of Assam and of the struggle born out of this made the Gopinath Bardoloi Government to realise that the repressive measures would not bear fruit at all. And, therefore, to woo the peasantry from the path of struggle as well as to give them some legal protection against landlord exploitation, it turned towards legislative measures. The Government thus passed the Assam Adhiar Protection and regulation Act 1948 towards the end of the year. taking advantage of Section 5 of this Act, the landlords soon started a series of eviction operation against the peasantry occupying their lands for years together. Even the peasantry who paid and offered to pay the stipulated share of the produce, i.e., 1/4 mentioned in the Act, were also evicted from their lands by the landlords. The peasantry on their part resisted this onslaught of the landlords all over the province. The Government never showed its goodwill to implement the Act in its spirit, rather it rendered police help to the landlords to safeguard their interests. It is on record that though the landlords successfully evicted many peasants, mainly the share-croppers with police help, yet in many places the peasantry and share-croppers unitedly baffled the repeated attempts of the landlords and thereby established their possession on lands they had been cultivating for years together under the leadership of the AIKS. For instance, the attempts of Padmaram Sharma at Lahangaon and Bakt Zamal at Patiya Pathar were rendered ineffective by the united efforts of the peasantry and the share-croppers.²⁵ Any-

way, the police hunt of the struggling peasantry did not cease. The police continued to resort to firing even on peasantry and other democratic people who assembled at a peace council meeting all Naliapul in Dibrugarh in July 1949.²⁶ This incident led to the death of several persons including Bina Bora, a girl of a peasant family hailing from Titabar.

Thus it is seen that in the course of the Adhiar Movement, the women did not lag behind and they played their due part in these struggle with exemplary courage and a sense of dedication. Many women, organised through the Nari Mukti Sangha (later re-christened as Pragati Nari Sangha) and Mahila Atma Rakshya Samity under the political leadership of the RCPI and the CPI respectively, contributed much towards the successful termination of the peasant struggles. The Mahila Atma Rakshya Samity, organised in 1947 in Guwahati, soon became popular with the women of the peasant families of Kamrup, Nowgong and Cachar districts. This women front of the CPI worked in league with the Kishan Sabha for the cause of the down-trodden peasantry and their women-folk in Assam. The leaders of the organisation namely Hena Dutta (Bora), Manashi Jaigirdar, Kalyani Mishra, Anjali Das (Lahiri), Gauri Bose (of Badarpur) Usha Dutta etc. had to go underground and they worked among the peasantry during the period of the Adhiar Movement. In 1949 some of the underground Mahila activists organised a state level Mahila Convention at Ramnagargaon (also called Manipuri village) in Silchar. Delegates from all over the state attended the convention. While the delegates session was in progress, the police suddenly attacked and ransacked the delegate camps. The Manipuri women who were at the delegate camps for their safety were lathi-charged and some of them were arrested and taken to the Silchar police station. Being informed of this the delegate session hurriedly drafted and passed a resolution condemning the police action and took out a procession in the Silchar town against the police vandalism as well as demanding the release of the arrested women. The procession reached the police station and gheraoed it for the release of their comrades. Here too the police resorted to severe lathi-charges on the women, but faced with iron determination and exemplary courage of the women they had to release the arrested women volunteers from their custody. Tribal, Manipuri, and Muslim women outnumbered others in the convention by their presence and participation. After the Convention was over,

some of the women leaders were arrested in 1949.

However, Branches of Mahila Atma Rakshya Samity were floated in all over the districts of Assam and the organisation itself was re-christened as the Ganatantrik Nari Sangha in 1951 after the release of the women leaders from jail. With the popularisation of the demands of the AIKS in Assam such as the repeal of Section 5 of the Assam Adhjar Protection and Regulation Act 1948, distribution of lands to the share-croppers, landless and poor peasants etc., the re-christened women front of the CPI got a new lease of life in the post Adhjar Movement period. It grew in organisational strength too, for instance, its membership rose to 8,000 in Kamrup district alone in 1952-53.

Though the police of left deviation committed by both the communist parties in 1948-52 had cast a gloom in the minds of many of their leaders and cadres, yet the AIKS in Assam continued to go ahead towards the fulfilment of its demands mentioned above. The peasantry continued their struggle with redoubled strength after the release of the communist and AIKS leaders and activists in 1952. But the peasant struggles of the post Adhjar Movement period remained almost localised and sporadic in character, though it was replete with the heroic deeds of the participants as in the past. Thousands of poor and landless peasants and share-croppers of Titabar area, for instance, occupied lands for cultivation in the Tarani reserve (later known as the Kakdonga Forest Reserve), Madhupur, Charaipani, Dangdhara and Silikha Grants under the leadership of the AIKS.

They also occupied and distributed among themselves lands in the Gohainjan and Mejangan Grants which were under Fee-Simple Grants and in the grazing reserves of Sadial, Moria and Madal etc.²⁸ Women in large numbers participated in these "land grabbing" movements. In the occupation of lands under the Fee-simple Grants in the Dangdhara Grants in 1954 a tussle ensued between the women peasants and the police, and the latter arrested seven women activists and kept them in the police lock-up. One of the women was in an advanced stage of pregnancy and she gave birth to a son in the police lock-up and so he later came to be known as 'lockup'.²⁹ These women were led by an aged woman of seventy, named Sabahi Kachari.³⁰

In July-August 1956, a big landholder of Guwahati along with a Marwariman, in an attempt to evict the peasantry of Karbi and extra garden labour community from their lands, constructed bar bed wire fencing around it and some houses thereon with CI sheet roofings. These were thrown off by the women stock of the peasant families, and they immediately ploughed the lands and planted paddy seedlings within the night. This naturally invited the wrath of the landholder and police action ensued. The peasants, men and women alike had to face mass repression and while the men folk were rounded up and loaded in the police van the women folk thronged the police squad and jumped into the van and forced the police to take them also to the thana. They did so to forestall the misfortunes that were to befall on their menfolk. It was under the guidance of the local branch of the AIKS and local leaders were Baputi Gaon Burah alias Kashilia, Ghanakanta Deka and Khataram Bhumij.

During 1957-58, the Congress Government in Assam started to acquire agricultural lands belonging to the tribal peasant families in and around Guwahati for establishment of government offices etc., while the Government lands were being parcelled out among the Congressmen including Ministers and Members of the Legislative Assembly. This placed the peasantry in a very precarious position, and they soon under the leadership of the Guwahati Branch of the AIKS organised a demonstration before the Deputy Commissioner's Court in Guwahati in 1958. Fifty percent of the participants were women, some of them with babies in their laps. While the D.C. came to receive the memorandum and hear the demonstration, an aged woman suddenly raised a very pertinent question to the D.C. which exactly runs as follows; "Did we vote this government to power to throw us out from our hearths and homes and lands?" She uttered these words with some emotional fervour. She and all other participating women were totally illiterate. They had hardly any political consciousness either. But they read the language of oppression and exploitation well and hence this sort of uttering and protestation.

This period of peasant struggles in Assam was followed by a period on full in its history. The disorganisation set in motion by the severe police action on the Krishak Banua Panchayat and the AIKS in the preceding period and the division of the CPI into two different political organisations-the CPI and the CPI (M) weakened the cause

of the agrarian struggles in Assam to a great extent. And, therefore, the period from the end of the fifties down to the sixties, the agrarian struggles in Assam drew a low profile, almost with nothing of importance to be mentioned. Only towards the end of 1969 the CPI (M) led KISHAN SABHA took some positive steps towards the revitalisation of the organisation itself as well as the cause of the peasant movement. With a view to strengthening the organisation and broadening its mass base, the AIKS took the programme of intensive membership drive, including the enrolment of women as members in the various branches of the AIKS, education of the members and activists submission of memoranda to the government demanding lands to the poor and landless peasants including the share-croppers and ex-tea garden labourers and holding of mass meeting and rallies in towns and in the mofusail areas. The AIKS also demanded the distribution of the ceiling excess lands including that of the tea gardens among the landless peasants and ex-tea garden labourers.³¹ Antecedent to this action oriented programme the Assam State Committee of the AIKS had announced its policy statements, in its 9th Conference held at Silchar, on the Government land policy vis-a-vis the problems faced by the poor and landless peasants of Assam.³² The AIKS thereafter clearly analysing the pro-landlord policy of the Government of Assam, demanded of it to implement soon the Ceiling Act in its entirety, to stop eviction of share-croppers from ex-tea garden labourers who had taken up lands for cultivation in the forest reserves, Government lands and ceiling excess lands including that of the tea gardens and to preserve the lands in the tribal belts and blocks for future distribution among the tribal peasants of the state.³³

The deliberation and decision of this Conference of the AIKS marked a new landmark in the history of the agrarian movements in Assam. Since then it started to draw the cross-currents of the peasant population of Assam into its fold, and the various tribal, Muslim including the immigrants, ex-tea garden labourers and caste Hindu peasants were fighting their cause unitedly and thereby commented a bond of unity which was lacking the AIKS has been growing from strength to strength during this period and it became a common feature to witness the peasants of various ethnic groups fighting groups fighting shoulder to shoulder for their common cause in which hundreds of women also participated.

The groundwork for effecting this unity among the peasantry of various ethnic groups in Assam under a common platform of their own, i.e., AIKS was done through some local peasant struggles against the Government and the landlords. These peasant struggles, though remained very localised in its intensity and dimension, are briefly mentioned here.

During 1967-68, the peasants of ex-tea garden community under the guidance of the Darrang Zila Kishan Sabha occupied about 3,000 bighas of ceiling excess garden lands under Kalapani Grants. In this incident the women of that community took prominent part.

Lands in the Manai, Jaishidhi and Ghiladhari Grants which consisted of Diplonga Forest Reserve and ceiling lands of neighbouring tea gardens in Darrang district were taken possession of by the poor and landless peasantry of Sootea, Jamugurihat and other surrounding villages in 1967-68. Some of these peasants were tribals. A group of courageous women under the leadership of satyabati Saikia, wife of one Kandura Saikia of Sootea took a prominent part, and they worked day and night among the men and women during the course of this movement. The organisers of this movement also took out a long procession participated by hundreds of women from Sootea and Panpur Ghat to the Deputy Commissioner's Court in Tezpur. They all came on foot-traversing a route of 46 kilometers in length. The peasants and the activities belonged to the AIKS.

In Khudnabari Village (char) near Sarbhog in the Kamrup district, the landlords called Matbars from amongst the immigrants hatched a plan with Government support to put on auction the standing crops of the peasantry of the immigrant Muslim peasantry who were their tenants in 1967-68. It was an attempt at eviction of the peasantry from lands they had been cultivating for several years. Knowing fully well the machinations of the Matbars and the Government, both Hindu and Muslim peasantry resisted all attempts at putting the crops to auction. One Jabbar Ali was arrested in 1969 under MISA and jailed for the anti-landlord anti-government role in the fight.

The Nanai Anchalik Krishak Sabha in Nowgong district was formed in 1867. Under the guidance and leadership of this organisation the women peasantry and other workers succeeded in demanding the

enhancement of the daily wage from Rs.2 to 5 including food in the daytime. The women peasants of Rangaly area (under Kathataklimaauza) led by Hemeswari Devi extended their support to the struggling peasants against the Zamindar Late Samsul Saikia who owned 1200 bighas of lands under Fee-sample Grants. This Zamindar severely exploited the peasants and tenants of the area alike. Then the women peasants of Nanai rose in their feet and supported the peasants of Rangalu area. Soon this movement started to spread over to other areas and it covered Kathiatali and Kandali mauzas and the population involved in this movement was around ten thousand. The peasantry consisted of different communities such as Karbis, Assamese, Muslims-both indigenous and immigrant and Bengali tenants etc. The movement begun in 1967 and it reached the climax in July 1973. The goondas of the zamindars attacked the volunteers and leaders of this movement, including Hemeswari Devi, Hemalata Devi and others; ³³ severely injured activists were hospitalised who recovered after long treatment at the Nowgong Civil Hospital.

In the meantime the zamindars of Nowgong, to counter the growing peasant movement, organised a Pattadar Sangha in Nowgong town and under its aegis they organised attacks and all other physical violence on the peasantry during the movement. The peasantry however established their rights over the lands they had been cultivating as tenants from long since as a result of this relentless and united fight.

Patiladaha witnessed a very curious picture of a peasant struggle during 1969-71. A Bihari landlord of the area, who owned 700 bighas of land, had successfully led an eviction operation against the share-croppers of Oslaiguri with police help and made all preparations for starting his own cultivation. But when the time for planting the paddy-seedlings came, the hired women peasants and agricultural workers of Patiladaha refused on masse to work on his lands. With their help the share-croppers of the area succeeded in taking possession of half of the lands of this zamindar. The peculiarity of this peasant struggle lies in the fact that the landlord was a Bihari, his share-croppers were Bangalis and the supporters of the latter were all Assamese.

Next in importance was the Derapathar (under Kaki Mauza) peasant uprising of 1972 in Nowgong district. The peasantry con-

sisted of Hajong and Koch people—all tribals. They had been long under deep-seated exploitation by the vested interests, government officials and local landholders. But the uprising was the result of the prevailing famine condition caused by draught. While the peasants demanded work under 'test relief' their women folk numbering about 2,000 rose against all forms of exploitation and demanded immediate draught relief measures, water supply and free education for their children. The population involved in this uprising was about 30,000. As a result of this uprising Government sanctioned Rs.75,000 for draught relief measures and development works in the area.

In Meda near Sarbhog in Kamrup district the women peasants participated in an organised way in the share-cropper's struggle for retaining their possession over the lands of the landlords. While male peasants were ploughing the lands the women peasants were planting the paddy-seedlings and thereby they retained their possession over the lands they used to cultivate for long years. This movement of the peasantry of Meda took place in 1972-73.

With the narratives of these peasant struggles in which the women and agricultural workers had played their due part we have come to the concluding part of our paper. In the early phase of the peasant struggles (1946/47-52) women's participation, in most cases, was due to police atrocities and not out of their own political consciousness. In some cases they had toed the political line of their menfolk and thus came to participate in the peasant struggles. Of course, the economic hardships they experienced in their daily life must have had some bearings on their participation or involvement in these struggles. Except in some minor and local cases women had hardly been on the leadership of the movement independent of their menfolk. Their participation added strength to the struggles in different areas and periods and this helped, to a great extent, in the successful termination of the struggles. As has been demonstrated during the whole course of the agrarian struggles from 1946/47/ 73 the tribal women peasants of Assam had thrown up the best fighting stock against the landlords and the government. But as the early phase of the agrarian struggles in Assam remained mostly tribal based naturally the caste Hindu and Muslim peasants, both immigrants and indigenous, kept all of from it and this weakened the struggle to a great extent. Failure of the communist parties and their respective

peasant fronts to draw the peasants of caste Hindu and Muslim community into a common field of battle against their exploiters and oppressors caused much damage in the overall success of the democratic movement of the country. Again, during the whole course of the agrarian struggles we do not find any labour or trade union movement launched in its support. Students and youths also remained indifferent. The settlement of land to the caste Hindu indigenous peasants by foul means as well as the immigrant Bengali peasants, both Hindu and Muslim, in the Tribal Belts and Blocks (created in 1947) helped to create and develop ill-feeling between the peasants and the prospects of the agrarian struggles of the period. Whatever successes the peasant struggles in Assam achieved were partial. Because, in a land inhabited by diverse ethnic groups, the participation of the peasantry of a particular community or caste and their women-folk can never help in the overall success of an agrarian struggle to the extent they desired. Earlier the Line System 'introduced in 1920 to arrange a planned settlement of the immigrants'³⁴ had also created an atmosphere of hatred, suspicion and tension between this section of the immigrant peasants and their indigenous brethren.

In a later stage some big Assamese landholders "who held larger areas on annual lease employed immigrants ostensibly as hired labourers but in reality as tenants who paid rent as a share of the crop or possibly, in a few cases, in cash. Some immigrants having got on the land in this way refused to pay rent and claimed settlement".³⁵ On the other hand, the annual lease-holder could not claim possession rights over these lands tissue thus ensued for the possession of this category of land in Assam created an atmosphere of tension which persisted for long years to come and this stood in the way of forging unity among the peasantry of different communities and castes. So till the later half of the 1960's we do not witness any unity among the immigrant peasants both Hindu and Muslim and the various indigenous peasants including the tribals. This helped to a large extent, in the successful working of the divisive policy of the landlords, other vested interests and government to weaken and frustrate the agrarian struggles. The situation started to alter gradually towards the later half of the '60's under the leadership of the AIKS. The results of this unity would be of much interest to the historian in the course of the agrarian struggles to follow.

Note and References

1. Surjeet, Harkishan Sing, *On to the Golden Jubilee of the AIKS, People' Democrasy*. 18 May 1986.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *All India Kishan Sabha Golden Jubilee Series No. 5*, May 1986, pp. 20-21.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Draft Report of the Assam State Council*, AIKS, Golden Jubilee Session, 2-4 April 1986, pp. 2-3.
9. Dr. Bhuyan, et al, ed. *Political History of Assam*, iii, Govt. of Assam, p. 146.
10. Kakati, Nagen, *Biplabi Ganasilpi Rabhar Sowaranat*, in Dr. Hiren Gohain, ed., *Sainik Silpi Bishnu Rabha*, pp. 4-5.
11. *Asamar Krishakar Samachya Aru Andolan*-Report of the RCPI led Assam Provincial Krishak-Panchayat, adopted at its 7th Conference, 1968, p. 27.
12. See n. 3, p.25.
13. Dr. Bhuyan, ed., n. 9, pp. 293-316; Kalita Ramesh Chandra, *Bharatar Swadhinata Andolanat Asamiya Chatrar Bhumika, 1826-1947*, Nalbari, 1986, pp. 159-60.
14. see n. 11, pp. 4-9.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.
17. Dr. Gohain, ed. ,n. 10, pp. 116-17.
18. see n. 11, p. 28.
19. Dr. Gohain, ed., n. 10, p. 117.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 114; Ghose, Arabinda, *Comrade Bishnu Rabha*, in Bhattacharyya, Nalinidhar, ed., *Bishnu Prasad Rabha : Jiwan Aru Kriti*, pp. 128-29.

21. Hazarika, Suren, *Titabarar Krishak Andolanar Etibritta*, in Saptahik Janajiwani, Guwahati, 13 May 1986.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *bid.*
24. *bid.*
25. *bid.*
26. Naliapular Bipad Sanket, Jyotiprasad Agarwala, in Jyotiprasad Rachanavali, Govt. of Assam, APB, Guwahati, 1986, 2nd edn., pp. 448-55.
27. Hazarika, n. 21.
28. *bid.*
29. *bid.*
30. *bid.*
31. Urgent Circular of the Darrang District Committee, AIKS, dated 20th October 1969; Leaflet of Assam State Council and circulated by the Secretary, Darrang District Committee for Peasant Mobilisation on various demands on 1 December 1969; Memorandum to the Chief Minister of Assam, submitted on 1 December 1969.
32. Draft report of the 9th Conference of the Assam State Council of the AIKS, 1-3 May 1969.
33. *Ibid.*, and the Copies of Resolutions thereof.
34. Dr. Goswami, P.C., *The Economic Development of Assam*, Asia Publishing House, 1963, p. 287.
35. *Ibid.*; For further details see Dr. Guha, Amalendu, *Planter-Raj to Swaraj : Freedom Struggles and Electoral Politics in Assam, 1926-1947*, ICHR, New Delhi, 1977, pp. 206-210; Baruah, Kaustavmoni, "Foreigners" in Assam and Assamese Middle Class, in *Social Scientist*, June, 1980.

The writer also derives much benefit from discussions with Late Achintya Bhattacharyya, Mr. Anil Roychoudhury, Mr. Purnananda Sarmah, Mr. Bhupen Barbara, Prof. Banerwar Saikia, Mr. Hemen Das, Mrs. Hena (Dutta) Bora, Prof. Sashi Sharma, etc. besides providing source-materials, they also supplied a lot of information for writing this paper. The writer owes a lot of gratitude to them all.