

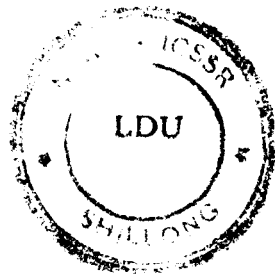
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**YOUTHS
IN TURMOIL
ASSAM**



YOUTHS IN TURMOIL: ASSAM



Kanaksen Deka

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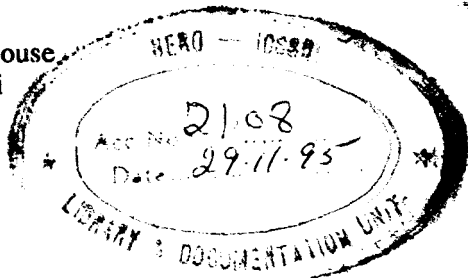
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1 Youths In Turmoil: Assam



In the last 164 years since after 1826 A.D. all the events of rise and fall that occurred in the life of the society of Assam have indeed been full of thrills. The beginning of these events of rise and fall may be traced back in the last phase of the Ahom rule. When we open the pages of history we find :

"The people of Nagaon can seldom forget the reign of terror unleashed by the Burmese in Nagaon when they retreated this time. The place lying to seven miles west of Puranigudam¹ is known as Kakharigaon. The Burmese, when fleeing, wrecked havoc called a "Jaki" in this Kakharigaon. The elderly persons in the vicinities of Puranigudam relate about this 'Jaki' even today. The massacre of Glenko in Scotland or even the inhuman cruelty of torture in the 'Blackhole tragedy' are not comparable with the 'Jaki'. 'Jaki' was executed within a house. In the house two strong bamboo-platforms were made, one over the other. Who-ever was caught was brought inside the house and the door was tightened from outside. Then fire was set to the house. In the apprehension that some one might escape, the Burmese guarded the house in all directions with sticks in their hands. One or two who tried to run away escaping from the house were brought back and thrown into the burning fire. The sky-licking flames rose up with a fearful sound. The helpless creatures started writhing and tossing about in pain. How

1 Puranigudam— A place in Nagaon district in central Assam.

long can they endure the heat of the huge fire? Within a few moments the sky-piercing yelling of the innocent creatures "O they burn us for no reason. O whoever you are please save us" etc. ended in a dead silence. Their bodies turned into ashes. Performing the rite of this devilish "sacrifice of men" by the Burmese the fire resumed its calm posture. Till after about a month of this great carnage near the Kakhari village the shoutings, "O they burn us for no reason" were to be heard in the evenings around the 'Jaki'. It is difficult to get its meaning. Probably the death-time yellings of those creatures remained alive in the ears of the neighbours for a good long time and as such, they felt like hearing those yellings every moment, even during their state of awakening. "After completing the 'Jaki' at the Kakhari village the hellish ruffians started fleeing towards the east. In certain places they entered the houses where they fastened the male members on the poles and violated the chastity of the half-clad women. Then holding their legs apart in two hands tore them asunder and thus killed. At other places where they could not get any women, they flung the male persons headlong on the ground out of sheer revenge and made deep stripes on their bodies with a big sharp knife, as on a fish. Elsewhere they snatched the infant child from the lap of the mother and inflicting immense pain on her, broke the child's skull striking it against an areca-nut tree just in front of the mother and killed her tearing like the wild cardaman. From some places they carried the handsome women away with them after violating their chastity. At places they burnt down the entire villages with the inhabitants. It is difficult to write in details about all the calamities that occurred in our land during that time such as those cruel ones described above. In short, there was no stability of the conditions of the riches and properties, lives and minds of the people. Agriculture, trade, industry and all other activities came to a stand-still. Many people had to forsake their dear sons, wives and daughters in

fear of the Burmese and even discarding their own money and properties, had to flee to other lands with only their own lives. In the fear that the Burmese would reach them hearing the cry of the babies which they failed to stop, the parents killed their own babies. In Bengal and other places the descendants of these refugees from Assam are still to be found”.

The above mentioned episode of the torture of the Burmese has been incorporated in the book entitled “The Days of the Ahoms” (*Ahomar Din*) by Hiteswar Barbarua¹. Our new generation will be much benefited if it treads on the path of progress with the real facts and figures avoiding the misconceived ideas when it takes the pledge for forming a new society. Otherwise it will be a mere wastage of energy and labour if it falls a victim to some illusory conceptions.

For a good long time many of us have reared and rehearsed the opinion that the sunset of Assam took place on February 24 in 1826 A.D. Our freedom was snatched away from us by the English under a treaty with the Burmese. This day has been regarded as a day of great misery for Assam, and it is also believed by many that without this treaty Assam would have remained as prosperous as before. It has now become necessary to discuss how far this conception is correct since only after the revelation of the real truth the next step in the subsequent process will be free from any error.

The first point is that the Ahom kings grew so weak during the time that for many a decade preceding 1826 A.D. there was nothing special to be called ‘Administration’. The Moamaria insurgence made the land so restive that there was absolutely no security to life and property of the people on account of the communal conflicts. It is mentioned in the

¹ Hiteswar Barbarua— Poet & historian of Assam.

chronicles that the insurgents destroyed all the crops (in the fields) and forcibly took away all the foodstuff from the granaries. They pillaged men and cattle as well. In short, there was no end to the miseries of the people due to the shortage of foodstuff and other consummable commodities. The people would have submitted to the insurgents on account of the havoc created by the Moamarias. But Purnananda Burhagohain¹ prevented them from doing so either by punishing those who tried to join the insurgents or by bribing them with food-materials. During this Moamoria revolt some Assamese people fled to the neighbouring hills and some others to Bengal also."

It may be mentioned that during the years 1788 to 1794 A.D. Gaurinath Singha stayed in Guwahati since it was not possible for him to stay in the Upper Assam. From Guwahati he sent emissaries to the kings of Jaintia, Kachari and Manipur praying for help. While the Jaintia and Kachari kings granted no kind of help, the king of Manipur, namely Jaya Singha, recalling the helps of the Ahom king which he received on an earlier occasion, sent a battalion comprising of 5 hundred cavalry and 4 thousand infantry with his son Madhuchandra. They met Gaurinath Singha² at Nagaon in December, 1790 A.D. Although this force advanced upto Rangpur under the Burhagohain, but the Moamarias defeated it deplorably. Finding the Ahom kings bereft of strength, there grew a tendency around the land for claiming independent territories. At Bengmara the Morans³ enthroned Sarvananda the king. At Rongpur the Moamarias declared Bharat Singha as king. Both these kings minted coins of gold and silver with their names.

1 Purnananda Burhagohain— The Prime Minister of Assam during the closing period of the Ahom reign.

2 Gaurinath Singha— King of Assam.

3 Morans— A tribe in the Upper Assam.

Haradutta Choudhury¹ left Kamrup for Darrang where he declared a rebellion against Gaurinath Singha. The king found that it was not safe for him to stay at Guwahati and therefore, went to Nagaon. There also, an army formed by Sindhura Hazarika² rebelled against the king. As all the places in the Upper and middle Assam became unsafe for Gaurinath Singha he returned to Guwahati. Finally he sent Bika Mazumdar and Dutta Khound³ of Guwahati to Calcutta in the middle of 1792 A.D. to appeal the British for help. During that time, according to their adopted policy, the British did not intend anew to intrude in any independent territory. But under the pressure from Gaurinath Singha and apprehending that the unrest of Assam might spread also to Goalpara under the British, at last captain Wales came to Assam with an army. The Captain had the objective of opening a trade negotiation besides creating an atmosphere congenial for Gaurinath Singha to rule comfortably after the establishment of peace in Assam. During that period Assam had to import such goods as salt, mirror etc. from outside. But then Captain Wales had no intention to include Assam in the British empire. Lord Cornwallis was the Governor General of India at that time. The Commissioner of Coochbehar Mr. Duglas and Mr. Rous, the English Officer incharge of salt in Goalpara also fervently appealed to the Governor General for giving help to Gaurinath Singha. In September 1792 as directed by the Governor General Captain Wales granted the prayer of Gaurinath Singha and set out for Assam. Meanwhile some people set fire to the camps of Gaurinath Singha at Guwahati and as such, the king with his family-members fled in fear in boats by the Brahmaputra towards West. The fugitive Gaurinath had an interview with Captain Wales at Nagarbera⁴.

1 Haradutta Choudhury— A chieftan in the lower Assam.

2 Sindhura Hazarika— A strongman in the middle Assam.

3 Bika Mazumdar, Dutta, Khound— Royal emmissaries, under king Gaurinath Singha.

4 Nagarbera— A place in west of district.

The Captain arranged for security for the king and himself went upto Guwahati. On November 24 Captain Wales placed Gaurinath under protection of some soldiers in the Brahmaputranear the Hatimura hill and then seized the city of Guwahati from the insurgents entering the city through the roads of Dharapur, Jhalukbari and Maligaon. On receipt of the news Gaurinath also arrived at Guwahati on November 25 journeying by boats. Although the Captain advised the king to subjugate his enemies by coalition and affectionate behaviour, still Gaurinath defiantly and on the strength of the security he got from the British killed numberless people very cruelly and punished many others by plucking the eyeballs out of their eyes and the knee-caps from the legs. Captain Wales was displeased with the king for his barbaric actions; but the king never regretted for his evil deeds and said that he would rather forsake the kingship if he was deprived of the power for imposing the penalty of death and maiming without trial. However, Gaurinath Singha was compelled to stop such imposition of penalty without trial when he found no other way out at the stricter warnings by Captain Wales later on.

(May 2, 1990)