

Chapter-IV

JYOTIPRASAD AGARWALA AND NATIONAL MOVEMENT IN ASSAM

Breuilly notes that every political movement must have its intellectuals and professionals to promote and help organise it. In another sense, nationalist movements vary as to the extent of involvement of intellectuals and professionals in their ranks. Through their images and symbols, they portray and re-presents to others the significance and distinctiveness of the nation. Which give nationalisms their mobilising appeal and direction. The ability of nationalism to portray and forge a collective cultural identity is integral to its state- capturing capacity, for it seeks state power in virtue of its unique cultural values.¹

The national movement of India has its far reaching influence on the making of contemporary India. It was one of the greatest mass movements in the world history.² Indian nationalism molded as a national movement in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The nineteenth century occupies a unique place in the history of India. It broke the splendid isolation in the Indian as well as the Assamese society. Spread of English education and infiltration through it of western ideas brought forth revolutionary changes in the outlook of the Indian and Assamese social, religious and political spheres.

We know that freedom is a practical assertion and an evolutionary phenomenon. A nation attains it only when this evolutionary process matures. The Freedom Movement of India for the liberation of the country from the British colonial rule directed the moral and active support from all sections of the society. It created a situation by which people were determined to reshape their destiny and re-establish their superiority in world history. The economic unification of India which was the result of the colonial rule becomes the objective material bases for the stable unification of the disunited Indian people into a unified nation. It also resulted in the growth of national sentiment and consciousness among the Indian. It helped in the rise and development of an all India national movement for their political freedom and social and cultural progress.³

¹ Smith., op. cit., P.92

² Chandra, Bipan., *Essays on Indian nationalism*, p.7

³ Desai, A.R.,1948, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, p.29

Moreover, especially after 1919A.D., it was consciously built around the basic notion that the common people had to play an active role in their own liberation. They were to be the subjects and the objects of history. The values of democracy and civil liberty were extensively promoted among the middle classes by the intelligentsia and then after 1919A.D. among the common people in the urban and rural areas by the grass- roots level nationalist political workers. It was the national movement and not the colonial rulers who rooted these values in the Indian soil. ⁴ Infact, the Indian National Congress was organized on democratic lines, and it functioned like a parliament. That is why the word ‘Congress’, borrowed from USA, was used and all major decisions, throughout its history up to 1947, were taken on the basis of open discussion, open disagreement, and open voting. For example, the decision to initiate the Non-Cooperation Movement was hotly debated in the Calcutta Session of the Congress and in the end was passed with 1886 delegates voting for and 884 voting against the decision. In other words, it was India’s freedom struggle which indigenized the notion of democracy. ⁵

Almost every Indian started feeling a sense of belonging to his or her native land. It was Mahatma Gandhi whose leadership and peaceful style of resistance against the British rule in India sparked everyone’s mind and heart and the movement was spread all over the country. The Gandhian ideology was nothing but that the practical application of which brought to an end British colonialism in India. Every Indian citizen had a call from within to assert themselves.

The nationalist feelings among the Indians however also got its impetus during the British period as a result of the action and interaction of many general and independent forces and factors developed within the Indian society. It emerged in various forms like political, social, economic, religious and cultural. ⁶ On the basis of its critique of colonialism, the national movement evolved a broad economic strategy to overcome India’s economic backwardness. It popularized the vision of an independent and self- sufficient economy based on the development of modern industry and agriculture. At the same time the common struggle against foreign domination, anti-

⁴ Chandra, Bipan., op. cit. p.

⁵ Chandra, Bipan., op. cit. p.56

⁶ Desai, 1948, op. cit. p.15

imperialist and anti- feudal struggle and independent development brought the Indian people together and inculcated the feeling of oneness of India.⁷

The emergence of various associations and organizations in different provinces of the country was also a clear indication of the general awakening of the people. The most important phenomenon in India was the growth of a national consciousness which ultimately found active expression in the formation of the Indian National Congress. The Indian National Congress which was destined to play a dominant role in India's struggle for independence was formed at a national convention held in Bombay in December 1885A.D. The foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 was not a sudden event. A retired British civil servant A.O. Hume was crucially involved in this process. Hume's involvement in it gave rise to a lot of controversy regarding the origins of Congress. The safety valve theory or the conspiracy theory, which was deduced from this simple fact, was for a long time subscribed to by all shades of historians. The National Congress tried from the very beginning to eliminate regional differences. It was the culmination of a process of political awakening that had its beginnings in the 1860's and 1870's. It was the process that had begun almost thirty years earlier in different parts of India from the time of the Revolt of 1857. Between the 1870s and the 1940s, a broad all- India nationalist movement rooted in firm anti- imperialism and a programme of social reform developed.⁸

The western educated Indian elite belonging to various linguistic and regional groups infused new ideas of regional consciousness into their respective areas of influence before they began to think in terms of a larger Indian consciousness. The Congress held its first session in Bombay in 1885A.D. It was attended by almost all outstanding leaders of Indian nationalism.⁹

Bipan Chandra argued that Surendranath Banerjee, one of the founders of the Indian National Congress, wrote his autobiography and its title was 'Nation in Making'. Therefore there was a consciousness that India had entered the process of becoming a nation on the basis of its diversity. This notion of consolidation of Indian people into one people on the basis of the acceptance of the full flowering of this diversity was a

⁷ Misra., Udayan(ed.), *Nation Building and Development*, p.7

⁸ Chandra, Bipan., op. cit. p.57

⁹ Chandra, Bipan., op. cit. p.9

very important part of the vision of the Indian freedom struggle.¹⁰ The Indian national movement was based on an understanding of colonialism which it evolved in the last quarter of the 19th century. At the time when it was evolved, this understanding of colonialism was unique to the Indian national movement.

Again, the Indian freedom struggle was rooted in a very scientific understanding of society and therefore, the vision it was able to form was not just visionary, not something which came out of the heads of a few people, or an ideal but his vision, based on a critical analysis of colonialism, because it was rooted in the reality. It was very much capable of being realized and was not just something to be imagined.¹¹ The very important aspect of the vision was that it was based upon the understanding that Indian society was to be rebuilt, just as India's freedom struggle was to be fought, not by the intelligentsia alone, not by the middle class alone, but through a movement which was to be participated by and which was to be based upon the struggle of the common people or the struggle of the masses. It is very interesting that even when the movement was confined to middle classes and above all to the intelligentsia during the 19th century, even then this understanding was there that, it is on account of the common people, when they come on to the stage, that history develops in a proper manner. Properly it was speaking that it is they who develop society, it is they who make history and it is they who are responsible for the right or wrong evolution of the society.¹²

At each stage of its development, the national leadership linked its political analysis of colonialism. The national movement was thus placed on a firm, anti-colonial ideological basis. Cultural, emotional, religious and political aspects were, of course present. However, they were mainly subordinated to a scientific anti-colonial ideology. The national movement gradually involved a large-scale politicization of the people and their active participation in the movement. The task of activating and mobilizing the masses was understood and undertaken after 1918A.D. The Gandhian era politics derived their entire force from the militancy and self-sacrificing spirit of the masses.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Goswami, Chandana., op. cit. p.35

¹² Chandra, Bipan., op. cit. p.

Thus, the nationalist movement spread like a wild fire and consumed every other thought except the thought of national freedom and within the stir of the times, Assam's role was significant. Assam had played a significant role in the struggle for freedom which had just begun, but in the earlier stages her political development was rather slow. Different organizations made conscious to the Assamese people for their cultural identities and thus formed the backbone of a movement for national revival of the province. With the formation of *Jorhat Sarvajanic Sabha* (1875) and the Assam Association (1903) a new political awareness developed among the Assamese intelligentsia of the 19th century.¹³ The emergence of these associations, organizations in the province was a clear indication of the general awakening of the people. However, the voice of these organizations later changed from their earlier tone. An impression of unity in diversity took a feeble shape in the Assamese society also. It is stated that the national movement was built up by yoking the forces of regionalism.¹⁴

The Assamese students studying in Calcutta were directly inspired by the national movement and hence they decided to make intensive efforts to form a provincial organization of the students of Assam dedicated to the cause of the province and the nation. But during the period no definite political ideology had emerged and the Indian National Congress had still not managed to establish itself on the same popular footing as in later decades. Under such circumstances, it was natural that the progressive and pragmatic ideas of the Assamese students should have turned from the uncertainties of the current political thinking to the more articulate field of language and literature. With such a background, it is reasonable to consider the literary movement in Assam as another aspect of the great National Movement rather than looking down upon it as a manifestation of narrow-mindedness.¹⁵

Under the influence of all pervading freedom movement in India, the Assamese literature helped to arouse and ingrain nationalism amongst the Assamese people. Assamese *drama* did most to infuse patriotism among the people. Spread of literacy in rural areas was minimal till the attainment of independence. Patriotism was, therefore, sought to be roused among the vast multitude of literature and semi-literate public by

¹³Baruah, Padmanath Gohain., *Mor Sonwaran*, p.47

¹⁴ Report of the States Reorganization Commission, 1955, Delhi, p.38

¹⁵ Dutta, K.N., 1958, *Landmarks of the Freedom Struggle in Assam*, Guwahati, Pp.45-46

means of dramatic performance. That is why, even in the mid- twentieth century Assamese literature was largely nationalistic or patriotic.¹⁶

In the meanwhile the need was felt by the Assamese intelligentsia also for a board based political organization to represent to the government the needs and aspirations of the people. It was in this context that the 'Assam Association' attempted to articulate the valley's unsettled quest for linguistic and regional identity, people's concern over the opium evil and also the desire to be governed in the lower level by the own people.¹⁷

Though till 1921 A.D. in Assam there was no separate organization of the Indian National Congress, representatives from Assam used to attend the sessions of the Congress since its inception in 1885 and took active part in its deliberations.¹⁸ The Assam Association later merged with the Congress in 1921 when the Provincial Congress Committee was formed in Assam. The early congress sessions created an enthusiasm among the middle classes throughout Assam. Representatives from the various associations of Assam not only attended the successive sessions of the Congress but also expressed their views on various issues.¹⁹ Indian Committee of Dibrugarh sent greeting telegrams to the 1886 Congress session. The achievement of this session was reviewed in *Mou* in its February, 1887 issue.²⁰ However, it was also stated that the first session had a successful gathering of people of various races, religion and linguistic groups who pledged for unity and agreed to surge to achieve a common goal which appeared to be indeed a unique sign of India's unity. Thus it is evident that the early sessions of the Indian National Congress created a good deal of enthusiasm among the people of Assam. They tried to unite their cause under the banner of an all Indian organization.²¹

The foundation of Indian National Congress in 1885 marks the beginning of a new era in the nationalist movement of India and in its first meeting was attended by delegates from Tezpur and Sylhet. The first session of the Congress which was held at Bombay was rather a Congress of volunteers. But, even to that Congress, Assam sent its

¹⁶ Goswami, Pranati Sarma., 2004, *Female Characters in Modern Assamese Drama*, B.R. Publisher, Delhi, p.56

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Goswami, op. cit. p.

¹⁹ Agarwala, Bibekananda., 1998, *The Agarwala family of Tezpur*, Devi Prasad Bagdoria, Tezpur, p.10

²⁰ *The Mau*, February, 1887

²¹ Goswami, op. cit. p.

wishes for its success and welcomed the idea of the Congress through sending a telegram. In the second Congress, Debi Chandra Baruah and Gopinath Bardoloi represented upper Assam Association, Shillong Association was represented by Kalikanta Barkakoti, Satyanath Baruah was a representative of Nagaon Ryot Association, Bipin Chandra Pal represented Sylhet Association. The representatives actively participated in the proceedings of the Congress.²²

At the annual session of the 'Assam Association' held at Tezpur in December 1920 A.D. under the president ship of Prasanna Kumar Baruah, it was resolved to adopt the programme of Non- Cooperation as outlined by the Nagpur Session of the Indian National Congress. Since the Association was required to identify itself with the aims and aspirations of the Indian National Congress, it saw no useful purpose in maintaining its independent existence. In a subsequent resolution, the Association decided to merge itself in the newly formed Assam Provincial Congress which was associated to the Indian National Congress.²³

The emergence of a group of Assamese elite, though small, infused with advanced political ideas produced a radical change in Assam politics. Assamese intellectuals of the time wanted to stand firmly on their own land, but their desperation was to look beyond the frontiers. They wanted to get rid of the colonial rule of the British Government and have *swaraj* by all means. The Movement for liberation generated in the Assamese hearts a strong patriotic syndrome. Regional patriotism gave way to national patriotism. Of the early champions of nationalism mention may be made of Nabin Chandra Bardoloi, Tarun Ram Phukan and Chandranath Sarmah. It was due to the young nationalists who stir the hidden spirit of the Assamese youths' and inspired them to dedicate themselves to their country's cause. At this particular moment Gandhi called the non-cooperation non-violent movement. The nationalists in Assam readily responded and plunged reckless into the struggle.

People were united in an unprecedented way. Assam was never a united land or a united society. It was a mere geographical expression without any unity between the communities. Multiplicity of ethnic groups and dialectal variations created a situation where Assamese people could not stand as an organized one.²⁴ But the Freedom

²²Mazumdar, R.C., op. cit. p.379

²³ Barkakoti, Sailen., 2000, *Asamiya Madhayasreni, Navajivan Prakash*, Guwahati, p.125

²⁴ Goswami, op. cit. p.67

Movement mobilized people for a common cause under the national leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The same situation happened in Assam too. Nationalist leaders rallied around the cause of national independence. A semblance of unity in diversity took a feeble shape in the Assamese society. Cracks in society were temporarily papered over by a noble cause.

Tragic incidents such as the Jallianwallabag massacre had set the country in bonfires. In 1920A.D. Gandhiji announced the commencement of the non- cooperation movement and boycott of foreign goods. Assam also had taken part in the freedom struggle and the Assam Congress had declared non- cooperation with the provincial Government.

With the launching of the Non- Cooperation Movement the agitation against opium eating was given a new direction. Gandhiji's bold declaration make Assam free from opium and have *swaraj* which inspired the Congress workers of Assam. The consumption of opium among the Assamese had become very widespread, mainly due to the indirect patronage of the government which was more interested in earning revenue than eradicating the evil. Consequently, towards the early part of 1924A.D. the Assam Congress Opium Enquiry Committee was formed. The all India Congress Committee offered its support to the said Committee. The struggle carried out by the Congress since 1921 for eradication of this evil.

During the Non- Cooperation Movement of 1921 A.D. Gandhiji had made frequent appeals to the students keeping in mind the potential of the students in providing leadership and mass support to any movement.²⁵ Student participation in the nation- building process is not a recent phenomenon or a current development, but it is a world- wide phenomenon. Looking back half a century, it is seen that students gave an impetus to the process of modernization and also provided the bulk of manpower for any sort of revolution all over the world.²⁶

During the 1921 movement the students were engaged in various propaganda works in the villages. Tarun Ram Phukan addressed letters to the leading citizens of various districts which the students carried with them paintings and pictures to be

²⁵ Bora, Sila., op. cit. p.35

²⁶ Ibid

exhibited in the villages which would make it easier for the uneducated masses to understand the Gandhian ideology of non- cooperation.²⁷

In July, 1921, Mahatma Gandhi made his famous trip to Assam. Accompanied by freedom fighters such as Tarun Ram Phukan and Omeo Kumar Das, he stayed for two days at Tezpur. The Agarwala family played host and he was put up at *Pokee*. Jyotiprasad came into direct contact with Mahatma Gandhi in this time. He not only moved by the objective of liberating the country from the imperialist but also the concept of ahimsa or non- violence, as well as the socialistic message of equality amongst all mankind that he preached.²⁸

Such a situation was enough to stimulating the heart of young Jyotiprasad Agarwala. Before he was at the age of twenty, he was drawn to the cause of the nationalist movement. Without a thought to his own future he flung himself wholly into the movement and became a volunteer of the Indian National Congress. The young boy started holding public meetings and tried his best to mobilize support from the people. It was under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi that Jyotiprasad Agarwala molded to a progressive nationalist, soldier in India's freedom fighter and had plunged into the battle for India's independence. He was jailed for quite a while.²⁹ The fight for India's independence was effectively over by 1944A.D. with the role of some patriots like Jyotiprasad.

In his capacity he took on the task of organizing the people of the area to carry on the fight for freedom. He engaged in spreading the concepts of *Swaraj* and *Ahimsa* among the masses. The student succeeded in spreading a net- work in the most interior villages and in bringing about a national awakening among the rural population.³⁰ The young boys and girls went round the villages selling cotton and spinning wheels. Gandhiji during his visit to Assam in August, 1921, was so impressed that he "expressed the hope that with a loom in every house Assam could take to *Swadeshi* earlier than other provinces in India."³¹

²⁷ Bora, Shila., op. cit. p.36

²⁸ Agarwala, Kamalaprasad., 1977, Tezpurar Pokee, Tezpur, p.5

²⁹ Dutta, Arup Kumar., 2003, *Jyotiprasad Prince of Beauty*, Anwasha, Guwahati, p.20

³⁰ Home Deptt. Pol. Deposit, March 1921, F no 90, NAI, Bora , Shila. Op. cit. 36

³¹ Ibid.41

Like his associates he moved from village to village on a rickety bicycle accompanied by a small group of youthful volunteers. Before his involvement in 1920's, his vision was confined to Assam and her culture only but from 1920 onwards, events in Indian history broadened that vision and helped in developing a pan- Indian outlook in him.³²

His voice against the colonial British rule close with his concern for the common people of the society started ringing within his heart from his early days. Jyotiprasad says, India slumbering over the years has now risen to new consciousness. Gandhiji has brought in a fresh lease of life to his countrymen. He also makes an appeal before his own people saying that this land once had enough stuff to be proud of. This eastern most land was once led by great souls like Prahlad, Basistha, Rukmini, King Ban, King Narakasur, Jaimati, Mulagabharu, Lachit Barphukan, Bir Chilarai, Srimanta Sankardeva and Madhabdeva. They are parts of our glorious history. The people of the land should draw their inspiration from them. They also have to draw inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi from whom he could rebuild their lost heritage.³³

He jumped into the national freedom movement and fired the spirit of the Assamese youths to do or die in the struggle against the imperialists. His involvement in the non-cooperation movement of 1920A.D. and Quit India movement of 1942A.D. was most inspiring for the people. In the non- cooperation movement the intellectuals played vital role. They highly inspired with the annual session of the All India National Congress which was held in 1926 A.D. Jyotiprasad Agarwala also involved in the movement with different constructive activities. His passion for the country took an assertive turn and his political activity received a fresh dimension.

During the Civil Disobedience movement of 1930 he emerged as a leader of the freedom struggle. The patriotic fervour roused by the processions which he had organized and led. Each *Satyagrahi* marched boldly forward with the pledge of sacrifice for the country on their lips. The Tezpur unit of the Congress decided to hold a large protest march and rally on January 16, 1932A.D. in which the responsibility of organising the march fell on the youthful Jyotiprasad. The Civil Disobedient Movement also marked massive participation by women in Prabhat Pheries, public demonstrations,

³² Dutta, op. cit. p.39

³³ Gohain(ed.),2007, op. cit. p.12

picketing of foreign cloth and liquor shops and the salt, forest and other Satyagrahas. But the active movement came to an end with the Gandhi- Irwin Pact in March 1931.³⁴

Jyotiprasad had openly carried out his activities and his activities had not escaped the eyes of the imperialist authorities. He was arrested in 1932 A.D. He had to remain behind the bar for about fifteen months in the Silchar jail. He was found guilty of treason and conspiracy against the Government and was sentenced to 15 months of forced labour and imprisonment and 50 rupees fine.³⁵

As the British prisons were dirty and unhygienic places in those days, he contracted tuberculosis and was seriously ill for long spells. The freedom fighters were also not given special treatment as political prisoners and lodged with common criminals. Though Jyotiprasad wanted to pass the prison days giving rein to his creative imagination, he could not do so.³⁶ His role in the freedom struggle had made Jyotiprasad not only a household name in Assam, but also extremely popular amongst the people. In the election held for the Provincial Legislative Council, the Congress nominated him as its candidate.

Jyotiprasad Agarwala was a progressive nationalist and deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi. Jyotiprasad imbibed Gandhiji's philosophy of ahimsa as well as his concern for the welfare of the Indian people. He too became a non-violent *satyagrahi*. It was, therefore, in striking contrast to the general trend of contemporary Indian films that Jyotiprasad conceived the first Assamese film (1935) as one related to a disturbing period of Assam history with a socio-political background depicting the story of a determined Ahom princess resisting the injustice and the cruelty of a tyrannical child-king and his patron ministers.

Although basically a story of conspiracy and manipulation in a dynastic power-struggle involving the throne, it symbolizes the courage and sacrifice of the young princess in a silent protest for the good of the kingdom and the people. This silent protest was made to symbolize in a way Gandhiji's passive resistance in the non-cooperation movement.³⁷ Jyotiprasad's creative genius as a film maker lies in his

³⁴ Goswami, Chandana., op. cit. p.78

³⁵ Pokee, Personal note book of Jyotiprasad Agarwala

³⁶ Statement made by Mina Agarwal, wife of Kamalaprasad Agarwala in the course of an interview with Rekha Kalita at the former's residence on 9.4.2013

³⁷ Sarma, Apurba., 2005, Jyotiprasad Agarwala as a film maker and forsaken frontier, Gauhati Cine Club, Guwahati, p.48

conception of a national perspective in which he could imagine *Jaymoti's* silent protest and ultimate sacrifice against a tyrannical, unjust king as symbolizing the passive resistance in Indian freedom struggle.

In 1937 A.D. he thought of establishing a permanent theatre house wherein he would be in a position to screen his film both for himself as well as for his people. It was, however, not an easy task to obtain government permission for the same in a small place like Tezpur. Initially he was apprehensive of a refusal from the government. But the government thought it in other way. They wanted to keep the militant youth busy in his creative pastime. The government issued him a no objection certificate and thus the Jonaki cinema hall came into being.³⁸

However, the fourth decade of the twentieth century heralded turbulent times for the world. People died in millions in the Second World War (1939-1945) and its related developments. It was an important global affair in which almost every country of the world was touched directly or indirectly. These marks covered an individual's personal, moral, social, economic and political life. Its impact over India was proved to be more potent in view of the last phase of the freedom movement. Within the Japanese army there was the Azad Hind Fauz under the leadership of Netaji Subash Chandra Bose. Some Assamese officers were also there within the Fauz. Their cardinal objective was to drive out the British from the Indian soil.

In India, on the other hand once more the battle for freedom raged with the Quit India Movement which was launched by the Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi against the British rule. Although the objects were same but their working principles differed from one another. The Second World War acquired a new dimension by these two parallel movements for the independence of India from the British colonial rule. Political development was also disturbing for the nation. The Congress appeared to be a house divided not only the Muslim League but also with the followers of Ahimsa and extreme elements.

Jyotiprasad Agarwala in his early age though was a follower of Gandhian ideology, but during the Quit India Movement of 1942, he developed close association

³⁸ Mina Agarwala, op. cit.

with the revolutionaries and went underground. This was reflected in his early works in different forms and expressions.³⁹

The colonial government wanted to obtain the support of the Indian people towards the British cause in the World War. The Congress discarded the appeal of the government in indisputable terms. Instead, the Congress intensified their political activities. The Quit India movement that started in 1942 was the natural outcome of the anti- British environment in the country. The situation in the North- East too was precarious. Assam was in imminent danger of being submerged in the Second World War. The war was at the threshold of the North- east and the region became the cockpit. Thousands of European, American and Indian soldiers swarmed into Assam and the adverse effect of imperialism became all too visible.

The Assamese people proved their mettle during the Quit India Movement by their persistent involvement with the national cause. Initially the agitation of Quit India Movement was peaceful and millions of *Satyagrahis* all across the nation demonstrated, courted arrest and thronged the confines of British jails. But soon an underground resistance movement, primarily directed towards the British, numerous violent incidents took place. Assam being at the very centre of the war efforts, the militant underground movement was most vigorous with a number of incidents such as blowing up of supply-trains, rail tracks and ammunition dumps taking place.

Jyotiprasad organized peace committees at Darrang district as per the general directives from the Congress leadership. During the time he got the opportunity to work with Omeyo Kumar Das, Pushpalata Das and other political leaders. He addressed innumerable public meetings to spread the message of Gandhiji and the nationalist cause.

Despite his health problem, Jyotiprasad could not but help flinging himself into this final struggle to free the nation. Though for a short time he attracted towards the concept of violent resistance because of the atrocities of the British rule such as unlawful acts of occupying allied forces, including molestation of Assamese women and forcible confiscations of food- stuff and goods revolted him. But he could control his feelings and resolved to stick to the path of the peaceful revolutionary and fight the battle on Gandhian principles.

³⁹ Gohain(ed.), op. cit. p.67

The protest in Assam being directed against the British administration as well as the Allied Army occupation, Jyotiprasad's activities too were towards the both objectives. Through his lyrics and writings he sought to stimulate the people to rise up against the injustices being perpetrated on them. As a freedom fighter and Congress activist, he sought to organise the masses and carry forth the struggle. He also preached that fighting for freedom from the colonial oppression was not merely a matter of transfer of political power, but it was a direct extension of his life philosophy inherent in the fight of culture (*sanskriti*) against the evil (*duskriti*) as a companion of the masses.⁴⁰ His political commitment was genuine, uncompromising and dynamic is stood by the fact that he choose to remain among the masses even after the independence.

With this in mind, the Congress leaders of Assam organised a peace force of volunteers who would carry on the freedom struggle in a non- violent manner. They organised peaceful processions, rallies and demonstrations and propagate the message of freedom. Jyotiprasad was made the head of the volunteers. He wrote lyrics that can set one's soul on fire even today such as-

"Tai karibo lagibo agnisnan

Saju ha saju ha nabajowan..."("O youth, prepare yourselves; You shall have to bathe in the pool of fire...")

The song proved one of the most inspiring lyrics of the 1942A.D. Quit India movement. Many Assamese youths were killed by British bullets during 1942 movement. The inspiration of the character Sontara was evidently drawn from the martyr Kanaklata. The freedom movement in Assam would have lost its momentum had not Jyotiprasad been active to organize things.

At the very beginning of the Quit India Movement, most of the all- Assam Congress leaders had been arrested and the danger that in Assam the freedom movement would stray into violence was strong. The success of the movement depended on the organisational and agitational creativity and strength of the people below who were not arrested. Jyotiprasad travelled to Guwahati and was appointed Commander in Chief of the *Seva Dal* or volunteer service force. In his essay *Biyallisar*

⁴⁰ Gohain., 1976,p.121-126

Kahini (Tale of 1942), Jyotiprasad gave a description of his activities during those days. He wrote that the rebellious excursion began under the leadership of Omeo Kumar and he was the commander of the Tezpur volunteers. The message of the revolution was propagated at electrifying speed, and the command was given to the volunteers to commence revolutionary activities.

He actively participated in the 1942 freedom struggle, went underground but later surrendered and went to prison where he once again fell ill. In the Quit India movement he inspired the youths with his fiery speeches and songs. Jyotiprasad Agarwala with his musical and poetical skills ignited the fire of patriotism among the masses. He considered culture to be the pivot of his activities and culture to be the arena for political struggle and a vehicle for social transportation. According to him, to change a society a cultural change was needed. He realized the value of communicating through culture and the ability of songs to convey messages than speeches or slogans. He emerged as a mass leader who propagated the common people to involve in the movement.

He knew that to mobilize and unite the Assamese as well as the Indian people in a common movement against colonialism it was necessary to have an overarching nationalist ideology as well as a broad strategy. Yet a mass movement by its very nature must incorporate. He was quite clear in his mind that leaders could not create movements. Movements were created by the people. He often compared the mass movement to an army in which both generals and soldiers played an essential role. No mass movement could be waged without a strong leadership which commanded the essential loyalty and obedience of the rank and file. His understanding of the relation between leaders and followers and spontaneity and organisation can also be seen in the style and conduct of the mass movements that he organised. He carefully prepared each movement politically and ideologically.⁴¹

Mahatma Gandhi was able to bring the mass into the anti- imperialist struggle. But it was not just a question of getting mass political backing. It was also a question of proper understanding of what the role of the masses is and therefore the entire vision of the movement was based upon the notion that it was the common people who will be

⁴¹ Gogoi, Akhil., Geetashree Tamuli., 2003, *Urivo pora hale aakau jujiloheten*, Loknath Entra Prize, Panbazar, p.42

making the history of this country as they had done in the past. Likewise, it is the common people who mould leaders and make leaders and not the leaders who make the people heroes and heroines. Movements are not made by the leaders. Movements are made by the masses. Masses moved on their own way and nobody yet knows what enables them to move. A leader is not one who creates a movement or moves the masses but who knows when the masses are getting into motion. Then he comes forth and provides the right type of leadership and a mass movement is launched.⁴² India will be built primarily on the basis of the activities of the masses was the most important part of the vision of our freedom struggle. It is one of the weaknesses of India after 1947 that the common people were not involved in our developmental and our social reform activities.⁴³

One of the most important aspects of India's freedom struggle was its character as one of the greatest mass movements in world history. In its three major waves- 1920-22, 1930-34, 1942-43- millions of men and women were politically mobilized. The leaders of the movement clearly understood that not leaders but the people create a movement.

A mass movement has to be based on the urges of the masses and on popular consciousness. It has to rely on their self- activity. One of the most important points in mass political movement is that of a correct relation between the roles of the masses and the leaders. He was a great political strategist who evolved and practised politics of the capture of state power through a prolonged mass movement, an orthodox religious believer who stood for the social liberation of women, the ending of caste oppression and discrimination and in general, application of reason to all aspects of social life, a person who had the vision of a world where all conflicts would be settled without the use of violence. In other words, a mass movement involves the dual or dialectical process in which the consciousness and the spontaneous self- activity of the masses are integrated with the leadership. The success or failure of a mass movement depends on the correct evolution of this process. Leaders have to respond to this popular consciousness, but they have also to further arouse, educate and guide it. Leadership is also necessary to forge a right type of and effective organisation for politics and mass struggle, to mobilize and unite an atomized and dispersed people- especially in an

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Candra, Bipan., op. cit. p.98

agrarian society- and to evolve correct strategy and tactics which would correspond to the specific historical situation. It was in the Gandhian phase that a better understanding and practice of the dialectic between the masses and the leaders or between spontaneity and organisation were evolved. It was above all Gandhiji who reached out to the masses, mobilized them, and based the national movement on the basic formulation that the masses are the subjects and not the object of politics.

Jyotiprasad was, above all, a great leader of the masses who moved and mobilized people to play an active role in the freedom struggle. In doing so, he had to confront the question of the relationship between the masses and their leaders and spontaneity and organisation. He was clear on one aspect: it was beyond the capacity of a leader to create, “to manufacture”, a mass movement. A mass movement is created by the people. They begin to move on their own in some mysterious fashion. A good leader possesses the quality of “anticipating” the mass mind, of understanding when the masses are going to be on the move and then providing them the right lead, “giving a shape to what was already there”.⁴⁴

He spent the major part of his life fighting colonialism, spending in colonial jail. He imparted it a socialist vision. It shows that his love and respect for the ‘people’ was not an elitist sympathy but an outcome of his deep assurance, understanding and empathy for the masses.⁴⁵ Hiren Gohain states: “the wave of the independence movement brought Jyotiprasad down from the ivory tower of affluence and luxury and made him just one co- traveller among the masses. During this period, on the one hand, he witnessed the preponderance of hunger for power, stratagems, opportunism and ambiguity among the political leaders while on the other, noticed the inspiration and dedication among the masses ready to sacrifice even their lives for their principles. This experience awakened in his mind a deep confidence as well as huge empathy for the masses. He realized that it is the people who are the main driving force of History.”⁴⁶ He was aware that workers and farmers formed the backbone of society and it was in the rural areas, around Tezpur that he carried out his nationalist propagating activities. He was a social- political philosopher who could acquire the experience and had a deep

⁴⁴ Chandra, op. cit. p.18-19

⁴⁵ Sarma, Chandan., Jyotiprasad Agarwala the Enduring Legacy, Dutta Akhil(ed.), DVS publisher, 2012, p.157

⁴⁶ Sarma, Chandan., op. cit. p.154

confidence and realization that it is the people who are the main driving force of history.

The Congress party wanted him to contest a local election at Chaiduar. But he was reluctant to go ahead in the matter. In 1938A.D. he contested a local board election from Bihali Helem constituency with a Congress ticket. All the elected local board members were from the Congress party. The elected members wanted to elect Jyotiprasad as the leader. But Jyotiprasad refused to comply with their request. He said that he was ready to serve the people but reluctant to be the leader of the elected group of the party.

Jyotiprasad also understood the reality of colonial Indian politics and grasped the historical validity of the Gandhian strategy. His practice remained true. Having defined the goal of freedom struggle and its social base and having made a massive effort to give the freedom struggle, he ultimately accepted the Gandhian strategy and forms of struggle for achieving independence.⁴⁷

It is well known that the social vision of the national movement encompassed a secular society and a secular state. It also defined secularism in the same comprehensive manner as brought out above. The deep roots of secularism in the national movement were responsible for the success of the founding of secular constitution. Jyotiprasad even while propagating socialist ideas and trying to establish the hegemony of socialist ideas within the national movement. It was from 1927 that Jawaharlal Nehru began to see India in the perspective of contemporary world, and India's political struggle as a part of the world- wide struggle against colonialism and for liberation of the entire humanity from exploitation and oppression.⁴⁸ But Jyotiprasad Agarwala was a humanist from his time of involvement in the national struggle.

Every effort was made to politically isolate the colonial rulers not only from the supporters of the Congress but also from non- Congress groups geared to the widest possible mobilization of the people. The artisans had been major victims of colonial economy. They formed the backbone of the popular movements against imperialism in the urban areas. A major historical event of the present era was the emergence of India

⁴⁷Baruah, Prahlad Kumar., 2003, *Jyoti Manisha*, Banalata, Guwahati, p.78

⁴⁸Chandra, Bipan., op. cit. p.78

as a nation and the rise of a powerful anti- imperialist, nationalist movement. But a mass movement against imperialism could develop only when different sections of the people became conscious of the contradiction between their interests and colonialism.

Jyotiprasad's songs like "*luitor parare aami deka lora..., Toi karibo lagibo agnisnan; xaju ha xaju ha navajowan..., Biswa bijaye najowan... xantan tumi biplabar...*" etc. the entire region of the Darrang district resonated with the song- "*luitor parare aami deka lora...,*" and later it became an integral theme song of freedom fighters. He created a vibrant, novel trend in Assamese modern song besides being a totally dedicated revolutionary spirit in the country's freedom struggle and also go out jail. He composed his most famous, patriotic and musical songs and poems during these periods. The rendering of which in small marches and gatherings proved to be far more inspiring, especially to the younger generation than any discussion. He, himself was transformed from a stage lyricist, singer and music composer to a true singer of the people.⁴⁹

His songs inspired the Assamese nationalists. His songs were like-

*"Mitru bijay karibo lagibo
swadhinatar suli duwar".*

The role of Assamese women in the National Movement was moulded by him. One of the remarkable characters of the freedom fighter Kanaklata Baruah, a village girl was inspired by him. She wrote her name among the Satyagrahis. Her earlier name was Kali. Jyotiprasad gave her the name Kanaklata. Bhupen Hazarika also viewed that to mould one's hidden personality there needed one mentor. If Arjuna of Mahabharata was best, his teacher or mentor also be the best. Likewise in moulding the nationality of Assamese youths was discovered by Jyotiprasad Agarwala. He inspired Kanaklata and also moulded the personality of Bhupen Hazarika.⁵⁰

Hroch sees a chronological progression from elite to mass involvement in nationalist mobilization. According to him it occurs in three main stages. First, an original small circle of intellectuals rediscovers the national culture and past and formulates the idea of the nation. There follows the crucial process of dissemination of

⁴⁹ Pooke, File No. 19, *Jyoti sangeetar Itibritti*

⁵⁰ Hazarika, Bhupen., 1993, *Jyoti Kakaideo*, Surjya Hazarika Bani Mandir, Panbazar, P.8

the idea of the nation by agitator who politicise cultural nationalism in the growing towns. Finally the stage of popular involvement in nationalism creates a mass movement.⁵¹ He became the leader of Tezpur Congress Volunteers. In the first session he presided over the meeting

Activities during Non- Cooperation Movement in villages like Ravapara in Goalpara District, Banglabari and Gossaigaon etc. had recorded in Police Records. In villages of Gossaigaon Chandra Mohan Mazumdar, Sukhdew delivered lecture regarding Non- Cooperation Movement. They delivered such lecture which may bring hatred or may be contemplated towards the British Government by the people.⁵² Again in some districts leaders were arrested for looting the foreign clothes and burnt them and also for picketing in the Excise shop.⁵³

But Jyotiprasad could not carry on the struggle due to his ill health. He went to Calcutta and took refuge at a rented house there. By then popular sentiment, revolted by the manner in which India had been dragged into a war and a path of non-violence. But Jyotiprasad remained a pacifist till the very end. Due to his efforts the movement in Assam remained peaceful. He not only raised funds at Calcutta, but also gave shelter to some of the revolutionaries who had committed violent acts and had a flee Assam to evade arrest. This showed that though he was a follower of Gandhiji's ideology, he too was a humanist and not averse to helping those who had chosen the path of violence. Like Gandhiji he was of the firm belief that means were as important as ends and that violence would breed only more violence. About Mahatma Gandhi he is greatly passionate. His appreciation, bordering on veneration for Gandhiji is a classic example of it. He described Gandhiji as the God- incarnate in this humdrum world. According to him with the coming of Mahatma Gandhi the history of the oldest civilization is getting a new lease of life. Through him Indian history received a new direction. The people of the country are united for a national cause of independence from the British colonial rule.⁵⁴

However, towards the latter half of 1943A.D. Gandhiji having been released from prison made an announcement that the true *Satyagrahi* did not need to conceal his

⁵¹ Smith, A.D., op. cit., P.56

⁵² Police Record, History of Old Goalpara District 1912-1988

⁵³ Police Record, History of Old Goalpara District 1912-1988

⁵⁴ Baruah, Arup., op. cit. p.45

identity or hide from the authorities. Thus, those Congressmen who had gone underground to avoid arrest took the advice and Jyotiprasad departed from his place of concealment at Calcutta and came to Tezpur on August 15, 1943 A.D., surrendered at the Darrang district court.

Despite the efforts of the authorities to implicate him in various incidents of violence and sabotage that had taken place in Assam, they could not produce a shred of evidence. They put him on trial and tried their best to get him convicted, however, justice finally triumphed. Jyotiprasad was released.

For the youth organizations of his days he became an icon- whether it is in their political or cultural gatherings it was Jyotiprasad's voice which continued to inspire. He warned the youth of Assam against the reactionary governmental and judicial forces which tried to instill a spurious culture among them in order to destroy what he considered to be a genuine movement of the people. His voice against the colonial rule coupled with his concern for the underdogs of the society started ringing within his heart although. Even within the existing social system there were people who wanted perpetuation of the colonial rule for their vested interests. This class was newly taking a definite shape ravaged the Assamese society. Jyotiprasad was for the equality and unity amongst men. A large number of his writings are related to his nationalist feeling and love for common people.

Jyotiprasad Agarwala's nationalism had two aspects. The first is the love for his land of birth. He loved Assam with a passion that flows through his lyrics and prose. He wanted not only to enrich its culture, but also to work towards creating a progressive Assamese society. The second aspect is love that crosses regional bounds and embraces the entire nation.⁵⁵ His goal was to help humanity to keep the cultural resources of human civilization protected from the aggression of the material resources created by human beings themselves to free their needs. He has rightly shown us how culture can create harmony among the common masses which he could have been able to link with the national movement and can contribute towards the social changes of the society. People now regard him as a new inspiring portrait who revived their culture through his 'ideology of beauty'.

⁵⁵ Pokee, File No. 2., Letters to Sukadev

Jyotiprasad inherited the legacy very persistently built up by his uncle. Besides, in British India most of the freedom loving people and the movement leadership took to journalism to articulate their game plans. Even Mahatma Gandhi took to journalism. He started editing a journal named *Harijan* to consolidate the base of the freedom struggle. Jyotiprasad was also the editor of *Sadinia Asomiya* through which he conveyed messages to the common people.

He was a devotee of beauty, but his beauty was not abstract. He perceived beauty both in its internal and external contents and propagated a beautiful world devoid of oppression and subjugation. The central theme of his vision was how to create a humane culture and to defeat the evil- the *duskriti*. His contributions gave a new enthusiasm and rhythms to Assamese culture. His songs were on the lips of the *satyagrahis* which became theme songs of the freedom fighters. In the rise of national awareness in Chaiduar and the historic march to Gohpur by Kanaklata and other freedom fighters mentioned has made on the influencing part played by Jyotiprasad Agarwala in inspiring the freedom fighters of the nationalists movement.⁵⁶

Devabrata Sarma has pointed out that freedom fighters like Tarunram Phukan, Ambikagiri Raychoudhury were sometimes got confused regarding their nationalist activities. Sarma has argued Ambikagiri as almost unstable in his whole nationalistic activities.⁵⁷

But, for Jyotiprasad, his political activity was the other side of his humanism and creative journeys. He was ready to serve the people, but refused to be the leader of the elected group of the party. His attitude to country's freedom was romantic. He thought that freedom would change the destiny of the people. People, he thought will start living in peace and prosperity with an ambience of fraternity all around. Freedom of the country will mean the freedom for the common people from all sorts of oppression, exploitation and poverty. It is expected to usher in a new era in the lives of the people. According to him freedom will bring change all around in terms of peace and material prosperity. People, will have love and respect for each other. His attitude to India's freedom was almost similar to what poet William Wordsworth thought about

⁵⁶ Konwar, Ajit Kumar., *The Quit India Movement in Assam: A study of Kanaklata Baruah and other heading women* of Chaiduar, NEIHA, p.45

⁵⁷ Sarma, Devabrata, 2006, *Asomiya Jatigathan Prakria aru Janagosthigata Anusthansamuh*, Eklavya Prakashan, Jorhat, p.45

French Revolution and the liberation of the French people from the tyrannical rule. But reality was different. After the French Revolution was over, the ideology of liberty, equality and fraternity as envisaged by the philosophers like Rousseau, Voltaire and Montaigne and also by the tender-hearted poets like William Wordsworth appeared to be a day-dream.⁵⁸

After independence of the country Jyotiprasad had to suffer a similar kind of mental breakdown. He was shocked to see the post-independence scenario. Post-independence situation, he felt, was more dangerous than the pre-independence one. Colonial exploitation is being replaced by a new form of exploitation- it was the exploitation between brothers and communities. The war of independence was replaced by war for power. Economic exploitation and social disparity became rampant everywhere. Society was crippled by corruption in high places, creating an atmosphere of demoralization at all levels of public life.⁵⁹

Similar situation prevailed in most of the newly independent nations of the world such like the French Revolution of 1789, the Russian Revolution of 1917. Immortal poet like William Wordsworth's disillusionment with the post-French Revolution, he believed, would bring in liberty, equality and fraternity in true sense of the term. But the aftermath of the great revolution proved otherwise. Disappointment was writ large in the faces of the common men. There was poverty all-around, while a new class went on garnering the resources of the land into their private coffers. Such a situation also disenchanted the heart of Jyotiprasad.

The original idea of people's general wellbeing lost its meaning and content. This disillusionment drew him towards communism. However, Jyotiprasad cannot be called a communist in the sense. His attachment for the wellbeing of the common naturally drew him towards left. In an essay titled '*Silpir Prithibi*' (world of the Artists) Jyotiprasad clearly expressed his displeasure over the prevailing post-independence scenario. He stated that corruption prevailing at all levels of public life in varying degrees has started weakening the nation.

But like in all other spheres, the hopes and aspirations of a freed nation in its cultural field, too, soon got shifted. When freedom got Jyotiprasad himself was

⁵⁸ Dutta, Akil ranjan, 2012, op. cit. p.29

⁵⁹ Gohain(ed.), p.345

debilitated by recurrent illness. But more than physical debility, he was disturbed by the suffocating political and cultural ambience of the independent India. As a nationalist to his last, he gave his all to the freedom movement. Though tempered by his revolutionary instincts, he till the end did not stray from the bounds set by Gandhiji. After independence he saw Assam as a significant component of the pan- Indian cultural mosaic. His love for Assam and its people impart a passion as well as a specific flavour to his creations.

The blow of the World War fell heavily on the people and as a result, some of the established values of life collapsed. There were numerous changes in the social and political life immediately after independence. The attainment of freedom for which people fought so long could not satisfy their hopes and aspirations. The freedom that people got after so much of sacrifices was confined to the political life alone and economic freedom which is much more important than the political one was still a distant cry. Infact, the economic condition of the masses began to deteriorate. The lot of the common people went from bad to worse. A number of problems arose and the social life became really very difficult.

It is one of the weaknesses of India after 1947 that the common people were not involved in our developmental and our social reform activities. Unfortunately the lesson of freedom struggle, the vision of the freedom struggle, regarding the role of the people, has been increasingly ignored, first by the ruling party and the Government.

The nature of governance and the fall in the ideals and the moral of the Congress party left him completely disillusioned. Neither Congress as a political party nor the Government of independent India had any clear- cut plan or policy for the cultural development of an unshackled nation in a new era. Such frustrating politico-cultural situation in the country caused only desperation and disenchantment for a deeply sensitive creative mind like that of Jyotiprasad. It is not surprising, therefore, that late in his life his revolutionary spirit and progressive mind tended to seek a new vision towards similar to Marxist ideology.