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“Assam’s Involvement In The Freedom Movement And The Grouping Plan Of Cabinet Mission”

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Abstract: The state of Assam has a glorious legacy of its involvement in the freedom movement of India. Freedom fighters like Gopinath Bordoloi, Puspallata Das, Mohammad Tayyebulla, J.J. Nichols Roy, Basantakumar Das, F.A. Ahmed, Rohinikumar Choudhury, Aksaykumar Das, Mahendranath Hazarika, Sankarchandra Baruah, Bishnuram Medhi, Hareswar Goswami and many others integrally involved in the freedom movement and dedicated their all energies for the sake of the motherland. On the eve of India’s independence, the colonial government conspired to divide India on the basis of religion. The plan was to create group of Indian states and leave them quarreling forever. In such a crucial and troubled juncture, the farsighted leaders of Assam showed their extra ordinary zeal. They had fought to achieve twin objectives- to win over colonial rule and to save Assam to be a part of proposed Pakistan. The present study is an attempt to reveal, analyze and enrich the contents of unsung efforts of the leaders of Assam to achieve these twin objectives.

Key Words- Assam, Cabinet, Mission, freedom, leaders

Introduction- After the end of the World War II, the attitude of the colonial authority towards the colony went on a dramatic change. As a part of new policy the Government of Great Britain announced the formation of Cabinet Mission. The Mission consisted of three members- Lord Pethick Lawrence, the Secretary of State for India, Stafford Cripps, the President of the Board of Trade and A. V. Alexander, the First Lord of Admiralty. The main objective of Cabinet Mission was “to explore possibilities of drafting a future constitution in consultation with the Viceroy and Indian political leaders” (Bhuyan 1999).

The Cabinet Mission came to India on March 23, 1946 and started discussion with Indian stake holders. After a thorough discussion, the Cabinet Mission announced its plan on May 16, 1946. The Mission divided the Indian states into three Sections-Group ‘A’, Group

‘B’ and Group ‘C’. Group A consisted of Madras, Bombay, U.P., Bihar, Central Province and Orissa.

Group B consisted of Punjab, Sind, NWFP and British Baluchistan. Group C consisted of Bengal and Assam. Muslim League reacted to the Mission plan as their demand was accepted in a camouflaged form (Lahiri and Dev, 1985). The subsequent analysis revealed the unsung efforts of the leaders of Assam during this troublesome period of freedom movement.

Methodology: The proposed research work is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data included archival records. Secondary data were collected from books, newspapers, journals. For collecting relevant data and their analysis, basically empirical and analytical method was followed.

Unsung Efforts against the Conspiracy of Cabinet Mission: Gopinath Bordoloi was the second after Andrew Clow, the Governor of Assam appeared before the Cabinet Mission on April 01, 1946. As a Premier, Bordoloi pleaded the autonomy of Assam and preferred “provinces ought to be constituted on linguistic and cultural basis” (Bhuyan, 1999). Regarding Jinnah’s claim to include Assam in proposed Pakistan, Bordoloi strongly reacted and told the Mission that it was absolutely impossible and preposterous (Bhuyan, 1999). But in spite of logical arguments of Bordoloi, the Mission proposed to group Assam with Bengal for creating a predominantly Muslim Zone in Eastern India like one proposed to be set up in Western India. Assam Provincial Congress Committee (APCC) opposed the plan on the day of its announcement. The plenary session of APCC at Guwahati lodged an emphatic protest (Nath, 2008). Puspallata Das, Mohammad Tayyebulla, J.J. Nichols Roy, Mahendranath Hazarika, Sankarchandra Baruah, Bishnuram Medhi, Hareswar Goswami, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed and Khagendra Nath expressed their resentment against the proposal.

On May 26, 1946 the Working Committee of the APCC formed a delegation with Omeo kumar Das, Tayyebulla, Bijoychandra Bhagawati, Hareswar Goswami, F. A. Ahmed, Nilmoni Phukan, Harendranath Barua, Kamakhya Prasad Tripathi and Puspallata Das to register Assam’s stand before Congress Working Committee (CWC) to be held on June 10 1946 (Bhuyan, 1999). Meanwhile Guwahati emerged as vibrant centre of protest against the Cabinet Mission Plan. It was decided to observe Anti-Grouping Day in Assam on June 05, 1946. APCC appealed to different organizations, students and common people for their support and active cooperation.

In response to the appeal of APCC, Biswadev Sarma and Biswanath Goswami on behalf of All Assam Student’s Union in a letter dated 26th May 1946 to President of APCC assured support and cooperation to APCC. The letter stated “In view of the grave situation arising out of Assam’s grouping with Bengal, we deem it necessary to volunteer our services at your disposal for a country-wide agitation against this nefarious move of the British imperialists to veto the progress of the Assamese people. We are determined to oppose this grouping as it has threatened our very existence”(HomeFile,1946). All Assam Student’s Union took initiative to demonstrate their protest in different parts of Assam and organized meetings and processions simultaneously at Guwahat , Sibsagar, Golaghat and Raha from May 24 to May 27, 1946.

“Ambikagiri RayChoudhury, the General Secretary of Assam Jatiya Mahasabha decided to resort to fast unto death if Assam was compelled to join the group” (Bhuyan, 1999). On May 23, 1946 people from different communities assembled in Curzon Hall at Guwahati and expressed unanimous opposition to the Cabinet Mission Plan. Meetings were also held at Golaghat on May 23, Mangaldai on May 24, and

Tezpur on May 25, 1946 (1946 May 28, Hindustan Standard). The people of Assam participated in all those meetings in a quite befitting manner.

On July 16, 1946 the Assam Legislative Assembly adopted a strong resolution condemning the Cabinet Mission Plan and directed the representatives of Assam to the Constituent Assembly “not to sit in section with any other province for devising the Constitution of Assam” (Nath, 2008). Even after taking such strong mandate by the Assembly, the leaders like Bordoloi, Basantakumar Das, Rohinikumar Choudhury, Aksaykumar Das and many others were not quiet. They were constantly vigilant to the issue and became restive at the trend of events. Bordoloi decided to send two unsung heroes Bijoychandra Bhagawati and Mahendramohan Choudhury to meet Gandhiji at Srirampur on December 15, 1946. Their meeting with Gandhiji was a fruitful one as Gandhiji strongly supported the cause of Assam. The strong support of Gandhiji motivated the Congress Working Committee to reconsider its policy on the issue of Cabinet Mission. It was a great triumph for the leaders of Assam and their efforts which forced CWC to change their policy.

Conclusion: The uncompromised efforts of Assamese leaders revealed different evil aspects of Cabinet Mission Plan. Their efforts became a part which led the collapse of Cabinet Mission Plan. If the Cabinet Mission had succeeded in its plan, the history of Assam would have been entirely a different one. “Had not Assam opposed the grouping scheme, the formal establishment of Pakistan might be delayed for a time, but there would have been no Assam left” (Nath, 2008). The people of Assam remain indebted to all those fighters for their farsighted and dedicated efforts.

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