

# **The Assamese: A Longing for Luminosity**

**Elenchus Vol. VII, 2025**

**Editor: Rashmi Bhattacharyya.**

**Advisors:** Dr. Ranjit Sarma, Principal, Handique Girls' College.

Dr. Madhurima Hazarika Choudhury, (HOD)

Dr. Archana Sarma

Dr. Biswajit Choudhury

Dr. Pallavi Deka

Ms. Niminita Saikia

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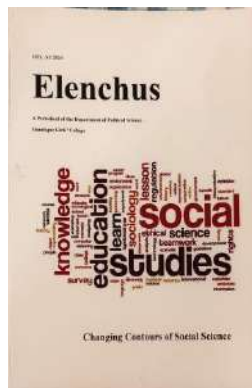
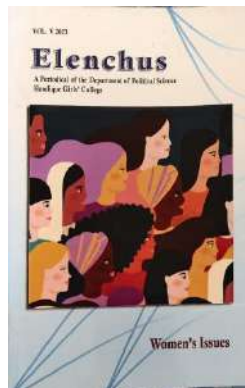
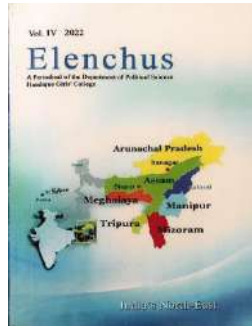
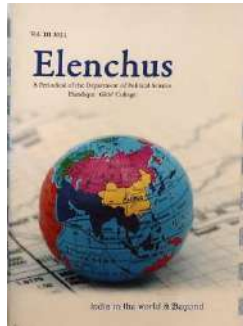
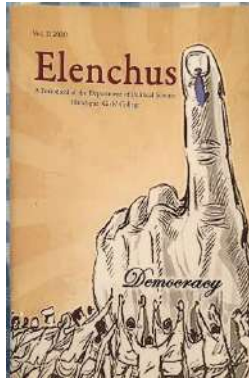
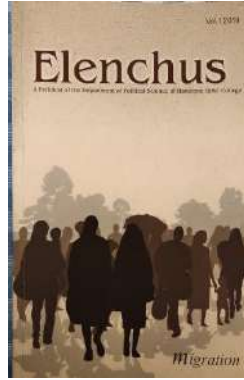
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## **About Elenchus.**

Elenchus refers to the Socratic Method of inquiry—a dialogical form of reasoning that involves asking and answering questions to stimulate critical thinking and illuminate underlying assumptions. It aims not merely at argumentation but at self-examination, intellectual humility, and the pursuit of truth through reasoned discourse. In naming our departmental periodical Elenchus, we seek to uphold this very spirit of inquiry and reflection within the discipline of Political Science. Through its theme-based volumes, Elenchus aims to cultivate an environment of analytical engagement, interdisciplinary dialogue, and reflective scholarship, true to the Socratic conviction that knowledge is born not from assertion, but from questioning. The first volume started with the theme ‘Migration’, the second volume was on the theme ‘Democracy’, ‘International Relations’ was the theme of the third volume, the fourth volume was on ‘India’s North-East’, the fifth volume was on ‘Women’s Issues’ and the previous year’s volume concentrated on ‘Changing Contours of Social Science’. The current volume is on ‘The Assamese: A Longing for Luminosity’.

We apologise for any unwanted mistakes.

**Editor**

## **Editorial Note**

“The Assamese: A Longing for Luminosity” encapsulates the collective consciousness of a society profoundly anchored in its historical, cultural, and spiritual foundations while aspiring toward a trajectory of enlightenment and progress. This theme delineates Assam’s continuum from the eminence of the Ahom dynasty through the disruptions of colonial subjugation and postcolonial marginalization, engendering a persistent desire to reclaim historical dignity and sovereignty. It foregrounds the state’s rich cultural tapestry-articulated through its dance, music, literature, and artisanal traditions-alongside the complexities of its socio-political landscape, where ethnic plurality intersects with movements for identity, unity, and political recognition. Assam’s ecological abundance, at once radiant and fragile, underscores both the aesthetic and environmental dimensions of its quest for sustainability amidst recurrent floods and deforestation. Despite its substantial natural and human resources, structural economic challenges and developmental disparities continue to shape aspirations for education, infrastructure, and equitable growth. Philosophically, the spiritual heritage of figures such as Srimanta Sankardeva reinforces an enduring pursuit of moral and inner illumination alongside material advancement. Collectively, this longing for luminosity articulates an intergenerational vision for an Assam that emerges from the obscurities of historical and contemporary challenges into an era characterized by intellectual vigour, social harmony, and cultural renaissance.

This is the theme of the current issue of *Elenchus* and articles were invited for the same. Mr. Mayur Borah in his article “*The Assamese: A Longing for Luminosity*”, emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the often-overlooked contributions of women in Assamese history, highlighting figures such as Amriprabha, a 1st-century luminary. Despite her significant social work and recognition by Chinese travellers and historians, her legacy remains largely ignored in mainstream historical narratives. The author advocates for a deeper exploration and celebration of these unsung heroes, urging society to recognize the luminous aspects of Assam’s history that have historically been marginalized.

Dr. Biswajit Choudhury in his article “*One Decade of India’s Act East Policy (2014-2024): A Review*”, focuses on how the Act East Policy, has significantly boosted India's regional engagement through infrastructure, trade, and cultural connectivity, especially impacting Assam as a strategic hub. While progress in connectivity, industrial growth, and digital infrastructure is evident, challenges like bureaucratic delays, environmental concerns, and uneven development remain. The article emphasises that future efforts should focus on inclusive, sustainable growth, empowering local communities, and strengthening governance to realize the policy's full potential and ensure balanced regional prosperity.

“*Atheist Who Becomes God: A Tribute to the Legend- Zubeen Da*” by Dr. Pallavi Dekha examines the profound impact of Zubeen Garg's untimely death on Assam and its people, describing how the loss

triggered a wave of collective grief and energized a populist movement seeking justice. The article portrays Zubeen not only as a celebrated artist and musical genius, but as a unifying force who transcended religious, ethnic, and social divisions by remaining steadfastly humane and courageous during periods of turmoil.

*“Spiritual Tourism in Assam: Opportunities and Challenges of the Kamakhya Corridor”* by Urmimala Sengupta examines Assam’s efforts to unlock spiritual tourism through the Kamakhya Corridor, aiming to boost the economy and showcase cultural heritage. However, concerns over ecological damage, disruption of sacred springs, demolition of local homes, and marginalization of indigenous traditions highlight the need for a balanced, collaborative approach that preserves both environmental and cultural integrity.

Dr. Nazneen Sultana’s article *“Invisible Histories, Living Resistance: Gender and the Politics of Labour in Assam’s Tea Plantation”* explores how women in Assam’s tea plantations confront intersecting forms of colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal oppression. Though central to the plantation economy, they remain socially and politically marginalised, burdened with low wages, harsh living conditions, and unpaid domestic labour. The article highlights their quiet resilience—seen in emerging grassroots movements and cultural expressions like Jhumur songs and Karam Puja—which serve as subtle acts of defiance and collective memory. It also reframes these women not as passive victims but as active agents whose everyday endurance and creativity constitute a living form of resistance within oppressive structures.

*“Politics in Assam: From Tea Stall Addas to Campus Elections”* by Samriddha Manisha Handique examines how politics in Assam is deeply rooted in everyday life, from tea stall debates to campus elections, shaped by historical movements like the Axom Andolan and ongoing struggles such as protests against the Citizenship Amendment Bill. It is experienced through both personal and collective sacrifice, resilience, and grassroots participation, reflecting how democracy remains fragile yet vital, carried forward in lived memory, daily negotiations, and a persistent commitment to identity and social justice.

Adrita Parashar in her article “*ভিত্তিবৰ্ষৰ খেলিমেলি আৰু অসমীয়া জাতিৰ ভৱিষ্যৎ*”, explores the illegal immigrant issue posing a threat to the political, economic, cultural and social life of Assam. Solutions to meet the challenges has also been mentioned in the article for the protection of the Assamese community. The article also states that if the problem is not resolved, the Assamese people will become a minority in Assam.

*“Women in Assam’s Politics: Voices of Leadership and Change”*, by Tanishka Kashyap explores that Assam’s political environment has been shaped by the powerful voices and leadership of women, from icons of the independence movement to recent leaders in mainstream politics, who have broken barriers and brought empathy and inclusivity to governance.

*“Untold Stories of the Deori Tribe”*, is the article contributed by Ireen Deori. In the article, the writer discusses about the Deori tribe, who deeply values its spiritual heritage, clan-based identities rooted in river

migrations, and unique priesthood traditions. Despite historical trauma like the Burmese aggression, the writer mentions that the Deoris maintain vibrant cultural practices-animistic rituals, shamanistic ceremonies, and ancestor worship-along with festivals like Bohag Bihu and the Joidaam Mechu festival, which preserve their rich folklore, music, dance, and linguistic heritage.

Gargi Saikia in her article *“Resurgimiento of the condition of Assamese Women during Colonial Era”*, deals with the social challenges faced by the Assamese women during colonial era and the steps undertaken by reformers like Anandaram Dhekial Phukon and Gunabhiram Baruah alongside missionaries for improvement in female education, greater social awareness, and the emergence of women who began to challenge patriarchal norms and seek equality by the late 19th century.

Kabyasikha Kalita in her article, *“Contemporary Issues in Assam”*, explores the contemporary challenges Assam faces including identity and citizenship issues, ethnic conflicts, demands for autonomy, insurgency, border security, uneven economic development, weak healthcare and education infrastructure in rural areas, environmental problems etc. Despite these hurdles, Assam’s rich cultural heritage, youth activism, and new government policies offer hope for balanced progress and social cohesion.

*“From Bard to Rebel: Guardians of Assam’s Sanctity”* the article contributed by Tanisha Sharma highlights how culture and politics are deeply intertwined in Assam, as demonstrated by iconic figures like Dr. Bhupen Hazarika and Zubeen Garg. The article emphasises how

Hazarika's philosophical and folk-inspired music fostered unity, social justice, and compassion, while Garg's direct, rebellious style mobilized youth activism during movements such as the anti-CAA protests. The article embodies Assam's longstanding tradition of using art as a political tool that both preserves cultural identity and drives social resistance.

The article "*Women in Assam's Politics*" by Ankita Deka discusses the vital role Assamese women have played historically and in contemporary politics, from freedom fighters like Kanaklata Barua, social reformers such as Pushpalata Das to political leaders like Syeda Anwara Taimur and Ajanta Neog. The article also explores women's active participation during Assam Movement (1979-85), community organizing, and cultural resistance despite facing patriarchal barriers and underrepresentation in formal politics.

# The Assamese: A Longing for Luminosity<sup>1</sup>

**Mr. Mayur Bora.**

Jyotiprasad's Ture Mure Alukore Jatra, talks about luminosity (puhor aru puhormukhi jatra) and John Keats had said that the poetry of the earth was never dead.

Learning about Assam history has always been affected by toxic patriarchy that is also emphasised in his book *Axomiya Swabhimano Ruprekha*. The intellectual, enlightened and so-called enlightened section of Assamese society was yet to grapple with or acknowledge the issue - that the first historical character of Assam, though the place had not been known as Assam at that point of time but as Pragjyotishpur, had been a woman. They always talked about legends: Bhagadatta, Narakasur, and many others. However, as a student of history, the existence of a historical figure had to be corroborated by at least two different kinds of evidence: numismatic, epigraphic, literary, or other.

The lady who was invoked in the previous paragraph, the personality of whom should not be restricted by calling only a woman, was Amritprabha of the 1st century AD, who had married Meghavahan of Kashmir. First historical account of Amritprabha was given by Dr. Suryya Kumar Bhuyan. Then it had been corroborated by Kanak Lal Baruah. Suryya Kumar Bhuyan had also written about the famous

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<sup>1</sup> Lecture delivered on 13<sup>th</sup> November on the occasion of sixth Annual lecture of Department of Political Science, Handique Girls' College, Guwahati

Chinese traveller. He said they kept invoking Fa-Hien and Xuan Zang. There was another Chinese traveller, Okong, who had come during that period before Fa-Hien, had also written about this Assamese lady, Amriprabha, in his notes.

Yet, even now the Assamese intellectual circle remained silent about it. Here the Virginia Woolf's famous statement: that the history of men's opposition to women's emancipation movement is more interesting than the women's emancipation movement itself. This aphorism that, throughout history, anonymous dynamics of women persisted.

Invocation of Amritprabha is not because had a elite background and that she had got married to a king of Kashmir. Reading Okong, Kanak Lal Baruah and Suryya Kumar Bhuyan one would find that after her husband King Meghavahan's death in Kashmir, she had continued to do many works for the benefit of the common people of that kingdom. Everyone learned about Ashoka and the many things he had done for Buddha, shramanas, Brahmin pandits, saints, and travellers. But Amriprabha's contributions, like the remnants of the building Antabhavan, could still be seen in Kashmir. Amriprabha was not alone who was the luminous figure of Assamese history, but that she was the first one who took them towards a flicker of luminosity, showing that at the end of the tunnel there was light. The emergence of Amriprabha, lightened the historical firmament.

Secondly, reference to the three scholars of Kamrup, who were known as the Brahman pandits of Kamrup is important. Their existence as historical figures was not doubted in the country, but whether they were

born and had flourished academically and intellectually in Assam was still a question.

First reference here is to Kumaril Bhatta. About Kumaril Bhatta, Assamese people generally remembers what Lakshminath Bezbaruah had written in Assam Sangeet: “je sankaracharyar guru axomia, Kumaril bhattor nam jogot gurur u guru hobo pari bhatai dekhale kam.” Some people said, with all due reverence to Lakshminath Bezbaruah, that no - he was not from Assam. He might have inspired Shankaracharya, but he was not from Assam. However reference of Krishnaswami Aiyar’s monumental book Three Great Acharyas, makes it clear, in which Kumaril Bhatta was specifically mentioned as a Brahman pandit from Kamarupa. He added that Vincent Smith, in the Oxford Student History of India, had also mentioned Kumaril Bhatta’s presence and that he was from Kamrup. The name Assam, he said, had come subsequently, initially as a name to denote a particular group of people - the Ahoms.

During Sankardev’s time, the term Assam had appeared. Quoting Sankardev’s Bhagawat, it can be said that the great saint’s work had not only been a transcreation but a work of genius - Sankardev had never popularised aspects unnecessary for Assam, but had highlighted those that needed amplification with great style. That was why Sankardev and Madhavdev lived in the hearts of the people of Assam. Going back to those times, he mentioned Kumaril Bhatta’s uncle, Acharya Dharmakriti, and the big tussle between Acharya Dharmakriti and Kumaril Bhatta. Acharya Dharmakriti had been a radical man of the

7th–8th century. He added that some claimed he might have belonged to the 6th to 10th century, but in any case, he was a radical man. There had been a lot of fights and tussles between the Varnashrama Dharma, the Vedic way of thinking, and different kinds of beliefs-some acceptable and some not. If modern logic, education, and the values associated with modern education were applied, then certain things Acharya Dharmakriti had said appeared very radical. Dharmakriti had been ostracised, and thereafter Kumaril Bhatta had gone to mainland India, received lessons there, and come back. The third person after one or two centuries had been the famous Buddhist scholar Abhinava Gupta, about whom also certain scholars had written. So all three-Dharmakriti, Kumaril Bhatta, and Abhinava Gupta-were from Kamarupa.

When people spoke about luminosity and well-known figures, there were many unsung heroes and personalities about whom little was known in history books. There were corroborated indications and evidence in historical references, but society often failed to highlight, analyse, or discuss them, and hence interpretations remained impaired. This can be compared this to politics, as in graceless political debates, history too contained paradoxes that remained unjustified.

In 13th century when Chaolung Sukaphaa had entered Assam in 1228. Sukaphaa had not united the land by war, matrimony, or diplomacy, but by the principle of love, amity, convergence, and synergy. Sukaphaa and the Ahoms had sacrificed by relinquishing their own language and religious practices and had embraced the culture of the land. A lesson

in accommodation, acceptance, and give-and-take.

Before Prak Sankari Jug, or the Prak Baishnav Jug, Xuanzang had visited Assam in the 7th–8th century. Xuanzang, had stayed for about a month and reported two things. First the language spoken in this part of the country was different, something that Assamese people could take pride in, especially when considered alongside inscriptions like the Lobajori, Umachal, and Kanai Barashibowa inscriptions, which had shown mixtures of Assamese and Sanskrit. Second, Xuanzang had highlighted the valour, aesthetic sense, and historical maturity of the Assamese people. Xuanzang had also praised the refined taste and hospitality of the Assamese.

The five early Assamese scholars-Hema Saraswati, Kaviratna Saraswati, Madhav Kandali, Harihara Vipra and Rudra Kandali-who, had shown that Assamese could be a literary language. However, during Sankardev's time, the whole cultural firmament of Assam had been illuminated, because Sankardev had democratised the language, putting it on the lips of the common people, thereby giving it sanctity and embellishment. Sankardev had introduced an egalitarian philosophy still difficult for many to accept. In the beginning of Kirtan, it is written-“Je prothome pronamo brohmorupi xonaton sorbo abotaror karon Narayan”-this show that even an atheist or a Muslim could find value in Sankardev's works. Referring Sankardev merely a religious guru is restricting his polymathic genius.

Sankardev had simplified religion at a time when it had been elaborate, expensive, and exploitative. This simplification, had parallels across

India with the Bhakti movement. Quoting Madhavdev and citing his verses, it can be found that they believed in profound egalitarianism, where even Brahmans and Chandals could be treated equally. Such thoughts were revolutionary, aesthetically powerful, and spiritually profound.

Being least concerned with religion personally, one still should acknowledge the significance of Sankardev and Madhavdev. However, the way contemporary Assamese society had commercialised and lumpenised religion is the point of concern for us. This is what saddened and frustrated people like Lakhminath Bezbaroa and Bhupen Hazarika and expressed their disappointment at Assamese society's failures. Religion should remain a personal matter indoors, for once it entered the drawing room, it became a matter of superiority and division.

Speaking of luminosity, one should be analysing the rational and logical aspects of tradition rather than engaging in unnecessary counter-narratives that polluted discourse. Without women like Bhuvaneshwari or Kamalapriya-Sankardev's niece who had married Silarai-many of Sankardev and Madhavdev's works would not have been possible. History had not given due attention to such women. Other women like Padmapriya, Gopal Ata's daughter, or Padmawati Devi Phukan, who had courageously questioned Gandhi, points to the fact that women deserved greater recognition in historical analysis.

Coming to modern Assamese history, Bhattadev and others should be mentioned but linear narration will not be justifying in having a holistic view. Instead emphasis should be on the need to examine unsung

heroes and heroines intellectually, something neglected in the past 30–50 years. In the 16th century, when many people in Assam, and in the 20th and 21st century, said that they were not very comfortable with Axomiya or their mother tongue, it was not something unique only to Axomiya. He explained that to some extent, it was unique to Bengalis and others also, but he had seen that the malaise was deeper in Assam.

In such a situation, one should remember that 180 years back, a lady, who had lost many of her relatives and sons, came all the way from the United States of America to Sadiya. Though she could not establish what she initially came for, and though she had come for a different purpose, ultimately she started the first Assamese periodical, Arunudoi. She was instrumental in naming that particular periodical called Arunudoi. That lady was Eliza Brown, the wife of Dr. Nathan Brown, the first editor. How many remembered Eliza Brown today and how many in Sivasagar spoke about her. Nathan Brown, the man who wrote the second Assamese grammar *The Grammatical Notices of the Assamese Language*, also contributed with historical scholarly works aimed at bringing light to the Assamese people. The first man who wrote the Assamese grammar, *The Grammar of the Assamese Language*, was from Great Britain and his name was Robinson. Although Robinson wrote the first grammar of Assamese, he also propounded the theory that Assamese was not an independent language but rather an offshoot of the Bengali language. Nathan Brown countered this theory by academically proving that Assamese was indeed an independent language, not an offshoot or dialect of any other language, even though it might have seemed so because of the larger

Bengali population in certain regions.

When people talked about luminosity, one should take the example of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan. Anandaram's father, in 1826, seven years before the imposition of the Bangla language in Assam, had written a monograph called Axam Buronji, and it was in Bangla. That was seven years before Bangla was imposed in Assam by the British. This showed that Anandaram Dhekial's father wrote in Bengali because, perhaps lacking foresight, he thought Assamese should be used only at home while Bengali should be used for academic and intellectual exercises.

People could still take pride in one fact, provided they knew it. That was, the first modern history book in the Bengali language was written by a scholar from Assam. These were luminous aspects of Assamese history; these were not figments of imagination or mythical legends. They were historical facts that people rarely analysed or celebrated. Instead of celebrating such genuine achievements, people celebrated only when told to do so by someone in power; such celebrations as half-hearted.

Another important aspect was that Anandaram's uncle, Jagyaram Khargharia Phukan, was the first Assamese to learn English. He wrote in a Bengal paper, probably Samasar Darpan, advocating that Hindustani should be used in Assam. That was even before the British imposed Bengali, sometime around the early 1830s. There was also a healthy intellectual tussle within that family. For instance, Haliram Dhekial Phukan, Anandaram's brother, was orthodox and dogmatic, supporting the continuation of sati pratha. When Bentinck abolished

sati, Jagyaram supported the abolition, as he had been influenced by Ram Mohan Roy in Calcutta and was considered to be among the first Brahmos. On the other hand, Haliram never said Bangla should be imposed, but he still wrote in Bengali before it was imposed in Assam. Anandaram came from a family where his father wrote in Bengali, his uncle advocated Hindustani, yet Anandaram himself fought for Assamese.

Anandaram even took 15 days' leave after the birth of his fourth or fifth child to travel to Guwahati to meet Moffatt Mills, leaving his family behind, in order to present a memorandum arguing why Assamese should replace Bengali. That memorandum, was so luminous and beautifully written that it was later included in the report of Moffatt Mills and published by the Assam Publication Board. Anandaram, despite fighting for Assamese, also wrote a Bengali law book in 1855, *Bebosta Xongroh*, which was considered the first modern law book in Bengali. Thus, he showed that these intellectuals did not work for records or recognition but out of pure intellectual exercise.

Assamese people rarely remembered such luminous aspects of history. Even during Bhaxa Gourab, these were not mentioned. Instead, wrong narratives were spread, such as the claim that Nehru gave away Assam during the Sino-Indian war. It should be clarified that in reality, Nehru had expressed sympathy for the people of Assam. To speak about Nehru, saying that despite criticisms, Assamese society owed much of its liberal, tolerant, and scientific temper to Nehru. Recalling Nehru's famous humorous remark that "grey hair should be respected and black

hair suspected,” stressing the importance of humour in intellectual circles.

Assamese women like Rajabala Das, Amalprobha Das, and Chandraprabha Saikiani, had immense contributions. Amalprobha Das declined the Padma Vibhushan in 1965, and Vinoba Bhave had insisted that Amalprobha preside over a meeting in Maharashtra to end his agitation.

Such luminous examples of Assamese women’s courage and dignity were rarely remembered today. Chandraprabha Saikiani, when pressurised by society to abandon her marriage and unborn child due to caste discrimination, had boldly declared that she would not be the mother of a bastard child but of a famous one. Later, her son Atul Saikia proved her words right by dedicating his life to the exploited classes and even becoming an MLA.

These are the luminous sectors of Assamese history, extending back 2000 years, 1500 years, 500 years, 100 years, and even to the present. He said many people among them were still carrying out duties to enlighten, educate, and empower. Bhupen Hazarika’s song Manuhe Manuhor Babe, noting how it had even been translated into Bangla and recognised as one of the greatest songs of the century, ordinary people must reclaim their common sense and live by those values.

## **One Decade of India's Act East Policy (2014-2024): A Review.**

**Dr Biswajit Choudhury**

The year 2024 marks a pivotal moment in India's foreign policy, the tenth anniversary of the Act East Policy, a strategic evolution of the Look East Policy launched in the early 1990s. While the earlier framework primarily emphasised economic diplomacy and engagement with Southeast Asia, the Act East Policy, introduced in 2014, represented a shift towards action, integration, and multi-dimensional engagement. It envisioned India as a diplomatic and economic partner and as a strategic actor shaping the security, connectivity, and development landscape of the Indo-Pacific. Minister of External Affairs Dr. S. Jaishankar remarked, 'Act East is not merely a policy; it reflects India's commitment to responsible engagement, regional stability, and shared prosperity.' This encapsulates the ambition of the policy to combine strategy, commerce, culture, and human development into a coherent vision of regional integration.

India's diplomatic outreach under the Act East Policy has achieved remarkable grip. Bilateral and multilateral engagements with ASEAN nations, Japan, Vietnam, Australia, and other Indo-Pacific partners have deepened through trade agreements, defence cooperation, joint military exercises, and strategic dialogues. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has emphasised that connectivity and cooperation are twin pillars of India's engagement with the East, stating, 'Our eastern neighbourhood is a

canvas for shared growth and peace.’ These strategic engagements have gone beyond rhetoric and materialised in projects such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Project, and numerous road and riverine corridors linking India’s northeastern states to Southeast Asia. These initiatives are designed to facilitate trade and to symbolise India’s commitment to being a reliable regional partner, balancing ambition with operational execution.

The Act East Policy has yielded measurable economic and infrastructural outcomes. India’s trade with ASEAN nations has grown from approximately \$70 billion in 2014 to nearly \$150 billion in 2024, reflecting a more than 100 percent increase in bilateral commerce. Assam has contributed significantly to this growth, with exports of tea, petroleum products, bamboo, and handicrafts accounting for roughly \$2.5 billion annually in cross-border trade. Connectivity projects have also achieved tangible milestones: over 1,200 km of highways and 800 km of railway lines have been constructed or upgraded in the northeastern region, linking Assam with Myanmar, Arunachal Pradesh, and Nagaland. Foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows into Assam have increased steadily, with sectors such as logistics, agro-processing, tourism, and healthcare receiving more than \$1.5 billion in investments over the last five years. Health and wellness tourism has also seen a marked rise, with Assam attracting approximately 50,000 international medical tourists annually, particularly from Southeast Asia, for treatments ranging from Ayurveda and traditional medicine to modern healthcare services. These numbers demonstrate that while challenges

remain, the Act East Policy has delivered measurable progress in connectivity, trade, investment, and regional development, particularly in Assam as the gateway to Southeast Asia.

The northeastern states are witnessing a digital transformation that complements the objectives of the Act East Policy. Tripura has emerged as a significant hub for information technology and data infrastructure, with the establishment of the Tripura Data Centre and associated IT parks facilitating secure data storage, e-governance, and digital services for both domestic and regional stakeholders. This data centre, operational since 2022, is designed to support government services, startups, and businesses while also serving as a potential hub for cross-border digital connectivity with Bangladesh and Southeast Asia. Investment in digital infrastructure in Tripura has attracted over \$120 million in the last three years, enabling the growth of IT-enabled services, fintech, and remote work capabilities. The integration of digital infrastructure with transport and logistics corridors further strengthens India's eastern connectivity strategy, ensuring that the northeast is physically and digitally linked to the wider region.

Industrial development in the northeastern region has received a significant boost with high-profile projects such as the Tata Semiconductor Manufacturing Unit in Assam, which is expected to be operational by 2026. This project, with an estimated investment of \$2 billion, will manufacture semiconductor components for domestic and regional markets, positioning Assam as a hub for advanced technology and high-value manufacturing in India's eastern corridor. The initiative

not only aligns with India's broader semiconductor strategy but also reinforces the objectives of the Act East Policy by promoting industrial growth, job creation, and technological self-reliance in the northeast. It is projected to generate over 10,000 direct and indirect employment opportunities, benefiting local communities while strengthening India's supply chain capabilities in critical high-tech sectors. Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal noted, 'Projects like the Tata Semiconductor Plant exemplify how strategic industrial investment can integrate northeastern India into regional and global value chains, making Act East a reality on the ground.'

Central to the success of this policy is Assam, the gateway to India's northeast. Its geographical location, resource endowment, and socio-cultural diversity make it pivotal for India's eastern strategy. Assam has emerged as a hub of diplomacy, commerce, and strategic connectivity. Guwahati, as the state's economic and administrative capital, has hosted multiple international summits, trade conferences, and ASEAN-India forums. Infrastructure development in Assam has accelerated, encompassing highways, railways, riverine transport, and airport modernisation. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma remarked, 'Act East is not only about strategic connectivity; it is about creating opportunities for our youth, promoting trade, and integrating our communities into regional prosperity.' Industrial corridors, special economic zones, and logistics hubs in Assam reflect the state's growing role as an economic bridge between India and Southeast Asia, showcasing the practical significance of the policy.

The economic dimension of the policy has generated considerable opportunities. Assam's natural resources such as: tea, petroleum, bamboo, and horticultural products are increasingly finding ASEAN markets. SMEs, agro-based industries, and handicraft enterprises have benefited from trade facilitation and improved connectivity. Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal noted, 'The Act East Policy is creating a level playing field for Indian businesses to engage with Southeast Asia. Assam, with its strategic location, can become a powerhouse of trade and industry.' Initiatives such as border haats, riverine transport networks, and targeted investment summits have enabled local communities to participate in regional commerce, offering a rare opportunity for inclusive economic development. Yet, despite these gains, much of Assam's potential remains untapped, and significant gaps persist between vision and execution.

The decade of implementation has not been free from challenges. The difficult terrain of the northeast, environmental sensitivities, and bureaucratic complexities have slowed project completion. Land acquisition disputes, local administrative delays, and logistical bottlenecks have often constrained progress. Security along the India-Myanmar border remains critical; insurgency, smuggling, and occasional geopolitical tensions pose ongoing threats. Union Home Minister Amit Shah stressed at a development summit, 'We must ensure that development in the northeast is matched by security and governance measures that protect both citizens and strategic investments.' These challenges underscore a persistent tension: while India has successfully projected strategy externally, domestic

integration especially in peripheral districts remains uneven. Urban centres like Guwahati have benefited disproportionately, leaving rural and border areas lagging in access to markets, education, and employment. This uneven development reflects a structural weakness in the federal implementation of Act East and raises questions about equitable growth and governance.

A critical observation reveals additional strategic ambiguities. While India has positioned itself as a counterbalance to China's growing influence in Southeast Asia, domestic implementation has not always kept pace. The Kaladan Multimodal Project, designed to provide alternative trade and transit routes to the East, has faced repeated delays. Similarly, the Trilateral Highway remains incomplete in stretches, limiting its effectiveness in boosting trade, tourism, and people-to-people interaction. These gaps illustrate a broader challenge: visionary foreign policy ambitions often confront structural and institutional bottlenecks domestically, highlighting the need for integrated governance mechanisms.

Beyond strategy and infrastructure, the Act East Policy places considerable emphasis on cultural and human connectivity. Educational exchanges, tourism promotion, and cultural festivals have created platforms for people-to-people engagement. Initiatives such as ASEAN-India student programs, cross-border tourism circuits, and art and cultural collaborations in Assam, Meghalaya, and Arunachal Pradesh have facilitated mutual understanding and goodwill. Minister of Education Dharmendra Pradhan observed, 'Connectivity is not just

about roads and ports; it is about linking minds and hearts. Our young generation should be able to learn, work, and travel seamlessly across borders.’ This human-centric approach highlights that sustainable integration requires more than infrastructure it necessitates building social trust, nurturing human capital, and fostering cross-cultural awareness.

A further dimension of critical analysis involves assessing environmental sustainability. Large-scale infrastructure projects across Assam and the northeastern states intersect with fragile ecosystems, river basins, and forests. Without careful planning, road, rail, and riverine projects risk ecological degradation, biodiversity loss, and long-term disruption to local livelihoods. Policymakers increasingly acknowledge that sustainable development must be embedded within strategic infrastructure plans, balancing economic objectives with environmental stewardship. State Minister of Environment Parimal Suklabaidya emphasised, ‘Development must walk hand-in-hand with ecological responsibility; our northeastern landscapes are too precious to compromise.’

Looking ahead, the Act East Policy must evolve into a more inclusive, sustainable, and people-centred framework. Institutional coordination between central and state agencies needs strengthening to accelerate project execution and reduce delays. Northeastern states, particularly Assam, should be empowered to actively participate in policy design and regional diplomacy, ensuring that development initiatives reflect local priorities and aspirations. Human capital development should be

scaled up through vocational training, higher education, and skill-building initiatives, preparing the youth to leverage opportunities from regional integration. Strengthening local enterprises, promoting agro-based industries, and supporting traditional handicrafts will allow Assam and the northeast to emerge as competitive hubs in regional commerce. Union Minister of State for External Affairs Meenakshi Lekhi remarked, ‘The next phase of Act East must prioritise human development alongside physical connectivity. Only then will India’s eastern engagement be sustainable and transformative.’

A critical appraisal also raises broader strategic and governance questions. While the policy aims to assert India’s regional influence and counter external pressures, reliance on centralised planning and large-scale infrastructure projects risks marginalising local communities. Initiatives often prioritise national or geopolitical goals over local development needs, creating corridors that serve trade and diplomacy but bypass immediate social and economic requirements of residents. Balancing geopolitical imperatives with socio-economic inclusivity will define the success of the next decade.

The Act East Policy has important implications for regional cooperation and security. India’s active engagement with ASEAN and Indo-Pacific partners provides opportunities for collaborative infrastructure projects, maritime security, and disaster management. The northeastern states, with Assam as a key player, are central to creating functional regional corridors for trade, logistics, and people-to-people interaction. As Defence Minister Rajnath Singh stated, ‘A secure

and connected northeast is not just a national priority; it is a regional imperative for stability, trade, and shared prosperity.’

The ten-year journey demonstrates that strategy alone cannot achieve development. Assam illustrates both the promise and limitations of Act East. Urban areas have seen economic gains, but rural and border communities still face infrastructural deficits, limited employment, and social challenges. Achieving equitable growth requires decentralised decision-making, community engagement, and participatory planning. Infrastructure projects must integrate local needs, ensuring that roads, highways, and riverine transport catalyse broader socio-economic transformation rather than serving as isolated corridors.

In conclusion it is to be said that the Act East Policy has reshaped India’s eastern engagement over the past decade. It has opened diplomatic channels, enhanced trade, strengthened security partnerships, and elevated India’s strategic position in the Indo-Pacific. Assam and the northeastern states have played a pivotal role in translating national ambitions into regional outcomes, yet challenges persist. The true measure of success in the coming decade will be whether these initiatives improve livelihoods, empower youth, and balance economic growth with environmental sustainability. Celebrating ten years of Act East is both a moment of pride and a clarion call to action. The next decade must transform Act East into Empower East, a vision where strategy, commerce, culture, and human well-being converge. Bold policymaking, persistent execution, and a commitment to people-centric development will ensure that India’s

northeastern frontier emerges not merely as a corridor, but as a vibrant, inclusive, and prosperous gateway to Asia. If realised, this vision will secure India's role as a responsible, constructive, and influential leader in the Indo-Pacific, while delivering tangible benefits to communities along the frontier.

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## **An Atheist Who Becomes God: Tribute to the Legend- Zubeen Da**

**Dr. Pallavi Deka**

Untimely loss of a cult figure Zubeen Garg has led to a sense of unprecedented collective melancholy amongst the people of Assam and the subsequent public outcry for justice has taken the shape of a Populist movement in Assam. From an initial mild unpleasantness led to an ever increasing waves of discomfort, that is never ending; this loss is so personal to everyone in the state and beyond.

Zubeen is an icon in his own style- defying the mainstream. The term 'cultural icon' is generally used to refer to individuals or images, objects, visual sign, monuments, space and so on. In an Indian context it would be more relevant to talk about the more immediate realities of life. The lives and activities of icons become exemplary and normative models that influence public life. To understand the problematic nature of iconization in the context of the North East of India, a hotbed of identity politics, there is a need here to understand the intricate connections between ethnicity, the politics of indigeneity and iconization.<sup>i</sup> But Zubeen was different; he defied all narrowed definitions and boundaries. He is an icon of the 'whole'. He was the icon of ethnic identity, that we witnessed in anti CAA movement in Assam. But random passerby may be witnessing young working-class man from Bihar or anywhere else earning his bread in this part, blasting Zubeen's Hindi and Assamese numbers-Zubeen Garg will continue to

defy all narrow definitions. His death proved as much-with people offering nam-prasanga, recitations from the Koran, the Rabha community's folk mourning Pansuna Dalai and many more.<sup>ii</sup>

Millions of people who had gathered in the procession carrying Zubeen's mortal remains have continued to come together on every occasion held in his memory. Such gatherings are taking place across every corner of the state even today. The question that arises here is - what lies behind this enduring outpouring of love for the icon? Zubeen believed in sheer humanity, not in religion; till his last breath he remained unbowed to power and money. That is what made people madly in love with him; he was the star for everyone. Within popular culture, stars are those who are recognised for their 'well-knownness',<sup>iii</sup> and have high visibility, suggesting people 'whose name has attention-getting, interest riveting and profit generating value'.<sup>iv</sup> In the past this was usually through their actions, whereas within contemporary society stars are icons of consumption, not necessarily having achieved anything in order to be famous.<sup>v</sup> For stars to progress to a point where they are described as 'an icon' requires their achievement of a level of fame at which they are treated with the sort of respect traditionally reserved for religious figures.

Bing Crosby put it 'Every man who likes me sees in me the image of himself'.<sup>vi</sup> Zubeen voiced our love and emotions; at a time when Assam was going through rough patches during hey days of insurgent movements and traumatic repression by the State machineries, Zubeen's songs emerged as a fresh air of life and love. His songs and

personality also echoed our desperation and frustration against a failing system; he was the voice of the generation and love of every generation and now it seems to the posterity. He was a singer- a rockstar; but not limited to it.

In 1990s when Zubeen emerged, Assam needed him as the mirror of the inner contradictions and insecurities so that the lost faith/pride on the culture and language of the state could be reclaimed and also the spirit of love be arisen. His songs sometimes talk about cultural pride and sometimes political defiance. The person, who boasted himself being social leftist, never was swayed away by any partisan character, consumerism or popular jingoism. He gave confidence to the state when it was facing the challenge of globalization and migration; but never made him narrow in his perspective. He remained an out and out humanist. He lived in midst of people and for people.

There will be everyone in the state who has a personal story to tell about the maestro- about his generosity, about his contribution to social cause, about his selflessness, purity of heart and unmatched courage to speak out his mind. In the contemporary times he stood as people's voice- he challenged social hierarchy by declaring 'I have no caste, no religion, no God'; being a proud son of Assam, he challenged ULFA when dictate came to not perform Hindi songs- proving that loving own culture and language does not need to become chauvinist; during anti CAA stir he led the crowd from the front against the present government; as an environmental activist he sat down with youths to

protect trees of hundred years from being cut down for developmental (?) works..

Zubeen was the celebrity who always stood with people challenging authority. That is what made his death not just a personal loss, but a moment of shared, national mourning and remembrance. At a time when being mean is considered to be the recipe of success, he taught love; at a time when hate is the biggest currency he preached love. He was the man whose heart was at the right place.

JOY ZUBEEN DA! REST IN POWER COMRADE!!

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## **Spiritual Tourism in Assam: Opportunities and Challenges of the Kamakhya Corridor.**

**Urmimala Sengupta**

The state of Assam is synonymous for its religious centers as well as scenic beauty, which makes a desired tourist destination. The advent of social media has ushered in a renewed interest in spirituality and religion. This has bolstered an influx of more visitors at ancient places of worship, thereby fueling the tourism economy. Assam presents a unique blend of ancient temples and structures, along with a lush green backdrop full of natural beauty that has not faced a spurt of urban development often seen in places like Himachal Pradesh etc. In addition, the proximity of scenic spots to tier 2 cities make it more logistically appealing for tourists to flock to Kamakhya and other temples that are still steeped in ancient tradition and reverent worship.

Keeping these aspects in mind, the Government of Assam had proposed a Kamakhya Access Corridor to create further opportunities for tourism related commerce. With improved revenue prospects and further job creation, this project was envisioned to be a win-win situation for all stakeholders involved, similar to the Ayodhya model.

However, an unanticipated consequence of the aforementioned proposal was the opposition of various groups within the local population to this project. These groups were concerned about the ecological impact of this Access Corridor, and the potential distortion of the spiritual balance of these religious places due to structural

alterations of the surrounding areas and vegetation. The temples and associated structures themselves are highly fragile, with no active legislative framework in place for optimum upkeep and maintenance along with legal protection to safeguard the architecture, relics, motifs and surrounding sites that have existed for over two millennia. Various petitions have now been raised in the courts that point to the lack of proper geological, hydrological and irrigation surveys, which could have assessed the potential harm to the temple's sacred springs and the broader ecological balance of the area (1).

This raises relevant questions and further warrants debate and deep discussions about the overlap of infrastructure requirements and the resultant infringement on the ecological balance and cultural sensitivities for such projects.

A major apprehension of one or more petitioners opposing this project is that the extensive construction involving soil cutting and earthwork could disrupt the delicate underground water system, particularly the springs that feed the various temples within the complex (2). There is also the socio-economic impact on the local residents to be considered. The affected area boasts of various family-owned shops that have been passed on from generation to generation which are at a risk of being demolished to make way for new construction. The same is also applicable to houses in the vicinity inhabited by various families, many of which date back to over 70 years. Events of the recent past has shown us that rampant deforestation, hill-cutting and flattening to accommodate new roads, concrete structures and resting areas along

such religious places can have drastic ecological consequences. These would include disruption of natural habitat of various species such as birds, soil erosion and depletion, destruction of flora and fauna, and in some cases elimination of crucial groundwater resources. All these could lead to natural hazards such as landslides and floods causing severe damage to life, property, livelihood and create a potential environmental disaster.

Kamakhya, the darshan not only represents a visual experience of the deity and the sanctum, but also allows one to participate in a ritual ecosystem that includes tribal priests, tantric practitioners, and women-led religious practices. This corridor would promote tourism centric commercialization that may risk trivializing or marginalizing such practitioners and rituals. Also worth noting is the cultural alienation resulting from the lack of involvement of local stakeholders, such as indigenous communities and traditional caretakers of the temple (3).

As is widely reported, the Kamakhya Corridor is at a crossroads, juxtaposed between tradition and sanctity on one hand, and modernization and commerce on the other. Any solution needs to involve public-private participation and collaboration so that a viable middle path may be reached. A cross-functional team comprising of ecological experts, ornithologists, geologists, seismologists, civil engineers, concerned religious institutions, archeologists, legal bodies etc. should be constituted to oversee all plans, and apply due diligence before a proposal is taken to the concerned authorities and the local diaspora. In every such problem exists the opportunity to innovate and

come up with a solution that would serve as a template to address similar issues in the future. The time has come for Assam to take the lead and be a shining example for other states on how to promote domestic tourism that captures the cultural ethos, respects the surrounding nature and preserves the sacredness and sanctity of these ancient structures, while being sensitive to the concerns of the locals. It is imperative to find equilibrium between spiritual values, economic growth, and ecological sustainability.

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# **Invisible Histories, Living Resistance: Gender and the Politics of Labour in Assam's Tea Plantations.**

**Dr. Nazneen Sultana**

## **Introduction**

Assam is not merely a geographical region on the map of India but a land where history, memory, and identity intersect. It carries the weight of centuries of traditions, layered histories, and political struggles while also serving as a vibrant melting pot of cultures, ethnicities, and communities. From the legacies of ancient kingdoms and colonial encounters to the lived realities of its diverse indigenous and migrant populations, Assam represents a confluence of stories that continue to shape its society and politics. Within this larger tapestry, women have played defining yet underacknowledged roles, leaving behind legacies of courage, resilience, and cultural stewardship.

Assam's history is marked by influential women. Figures such as Sati Joymoti, remembered for her courage and sacrifice, remain central to collective memory. During the freedom struggle, leaders like Kanaklata Barua and Pushpalata Das stepped beyond domestic confines to spearhead resistance movements. Equally vital are the women who safeguarded Assam's cultural identity through weaving, oral traditions, and folk art. These legacies affirm that women have always been integral to Assam's story, even when their contributions have not been formally recognised.

At the same time, feminist scholarship urges us to look beyond celebrated figures and recognise everyday forms of women's agency. Scott (1985) highlights how resistance is often expressed through 'weapons of the weak', where subaltern groups employ subtle acts of defiance rather than overt confrontation. De Certeau (1984) similarly shows how marginalised communities negotiate structures of power through everyday tactics, whether through silence, compliance, or quiet subversion. These practices complement, rather than oppose, heroic struggles and remind us that survival itself is a form of resistance. Building on this, Mohanty (2003) and Menon (2012) argue that quotidian negotiations, though often invisible in dominant narratives, are central to understanding how women resist and endure within oppressive systems. Recognising these lived forms of resilience alongside iconic struggles provides a fuller understanding of women's place in Assam's past and present.

Mainstream historical and nationalist discourses, however, have often failed to capture these realities. As Chatterjee (1989) argues, colonialism and nationalism together produced the figure of the 'new woman,' celebrated as a cultural icon yet divorced from the lived struggles of ordinary women. This gap between ideals and realities is particularly stark in Assam, where women's hardships rarely find space in historical or political discourse. Their voices are most visible in marginal sites such as tea plantations and other spaces where exploitation, violence, and resilience unfold away from mainstream narratives.

## **Colonial Roots and the Plantation Economy**

The tea plantations exemplify this marginalisation. The origins of Assam's tea labour force trace back to 1840s, when the East India Company first recruited workers to sustain the plantation economy. These workers were largely drawn from marginalised tribal and caste groups of areas like Jharkhand, Chotanagpur, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, (Das, 2020) transported through coercive contracts, deceptive promises, and outright force. Over generations, their numbers expanded, and they became inseparable from Assam's demographic and cultural landscape.

The colonial administration deliberately structured the plantation workforce to depend on women, who were considered more submissive and reliable for the arduous task of leaf plucking (Dutta, 2015). They were paid less than men, assigned repetitive and physically exhausting work, and subjected to constant surveillance both in the fields and within estate housing. Violence, harassment, and punitive measures for defiance were routine aspects of their daily lives. Under this regime, women became indispensable to the industry's survival yet remained invisible within both public and private patriarchal structures.

This invisibility persisted into postcolonial times. Today, Assam produces nearly 700 million kilograms of tea annually, accounting for almost half of India's total output. In 2022-2023, India earned around 63.85 billion rupees from tea exports, with Assam contributing nearly half of this revenue. Yet, as Boruah (2024) observes, the very workers who sustain this prosperity remain excluded from its benefits.

## **Gender, Labour, and Everyday Exploitation**

Women, though forming the significant part of the workforce, remain trapped in cycles of deprivation. They are underpaid, overworked, and malnourished. Malnutrition is widespread among Assam's tea tribe women, whose typical diet largely consists of rice, dry fish, pickles, and chilies. According to a study conducted by UNICEF in collaboration with Assam Medical College, only two out of fourteen weekly meals in a tea tribe household are nutritionally adequate (The Sentinel, 2024).

Living conditions on plantations further deepen the vulnerabilities of workers and their families. Most residential quarters lack adequate sanitation, creating an environment where disease can easily spread. Health problems are particularly acute, with iron deficiency anaemia widespread and diarrhoea common, often linked to unsafe water sources and limited access to clean drinking water (International Labour Organisation, 2018). These conditions, in turn, contribute to high rates of gastrointestinal illness, while maternal healthcare services remain minimal and insufficient. Alongside these health challenges, educational disadvantages reinforce cycles of marginalisation. Many girls are forced to drop out of school early due to poverty, long distances, or early marriage, thereby perpetuating intergenerational patterns of illiteracy and limiting future opportunities. Initiatives such as the Mezenga Female Labour Welfare Training programme under the Assam Tea Welfare Board exist, but they seldom focus on literacy or rights awareness, leaving structural inequalities unaddressed.

Women also shoulder a ‘double burden’ of labour (Niroshini, 2024). After long hours of fieldwork—plucking, weeding, nursery work, factory duties, they return home to cook, fetch water, care for children, and maintain households. Alcoholism among male workers further depletes family resources and shifts the responsibility of sustaining households onto women’s shoulders. Thus, even as they provide the backbone of the plantation economy, women remain socially and economically marginalised.

### **Politics, Unions, and the Limits of Participation**

Despite being trade union members, women rarely participate actively in union activities or hold leadership positions. Entrenched patriarchal norms, domestic responsibilities, and lack of mobility often prevent them from attending meetings or speaking in public forums. Significant family and community decisions are generally taken by men, leaving women excluded from formal decision making processes.

Yet women are not entirely absent from the political sphere. Grassroots initiatives such as the Mothers’ Club under the Assam Branch of the Indian Tea Association have created small but meaningful spaces for collective strength (Borthakur, 2023). These forums provide platforms for women to share grievances, discuss health, and address social issues such as alcoholism and domestic violence. More recently, women’s collectives such as Women’s Safety Accelerator Fund (WSAF), IDH-The Sustainable Trade Initiative and unions such as women under the banner of Assam Cha Mazdoor Sangha (ACHS) have emerged to demand better wages, healthcare, and land rights, signalling new

directions in female leadership within plantation communities. These initiatives demonstrate that women's political presence, though limited, is slowly expanding.

### **Cultural Memory as Resistance**

Beyond wage labour and politics, women in Assam's tea gardens have long acted as custodians of cultural memory. They sustain oral traditions, songs, folktales, and rituals that connect them to ancestral roots while also forging new identities within the plantation environment. Female centered festivals such as Karam Puja, where young women (Karamati) lead rituals, exemplify this role. Performances such as Jhumur Geet and Jhumur Nach articulate both joy and hardship, embedding collective memories of migration, exploitation, and resilience.

These cultural forms are not mere entertainment, they act as living archives of memory and subtle vehicles of resistance. Songs and dances provide 'a voice to the hidden struggles' of plantation women, asserting their presence in systems designed to erase them (Oaklores, 2024). Jhumur music, in particular, is notable for voicing the silent struggles of female plantation workers (Gogoi, 2022; Sarkar, 2025). Its diverse melodies and lyrics weave together tribal, ethnic, and socio cultural influences, enriching Assam's cultural identity while preserving the pain and resilience of labouring women.

Folk songs and parodies, often composed and sung by women, critique patriarchal and capitalist hierarchies within plantation life. Like

rumours or gossip, these songs carry a protective veil of anonymity, enabling women to articulate dissent safely while avoiding direct confrontation. Through humour, satire, or coded metaphors, they critique wage disparities, oppressive managers, and exploitative systems. In doing so, women transform cultural expression into a political act—one that resists erasure and fosters solidarity.

### **Conclusion**

Women tea workers in Assam embody resilience through both labour and cultural practices, despite longstanding exploitation, exclusion, and poverty. Their everyday endurance, whether through songs, humour, or collective solidarity, reveals the political nature of survival and challenges dominant narratives. They are not just marginalised labourers but historical and political agents who sustain dignity, identity, and resistance within oppressive systems.

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## **Politics in Assam: From Tea Stall *Addas* to Campus Elections.**

**Sammriddha Manisha Handique**

Politics, the very word, evokes debates, disagreements, and sometimes surprising agreements. In Assam, politics is not confined to assembly, parliament or classrooms-it permeates every aspect of life. From the familiar *addas* (informal gatherings) over cups of tea at roadside stalls, to small *gumtis* (tiny paan shops) where men come for a smoke or *tamul paan* (betel nut), politics has always been part of everyday conversations. Irrespective of education, each individual pulls an opinion of happenings around him. Some say it out loud, while others observe quietly from a distance. But even silence holds a meaning in politics.

I was reminded of this intensity during a seemingly casual interaction one day while returning home from college. I had booked a Rapido bike, and my rider—a middle-aged man—turned out to be rather talkative, unlike me, who usually prefers observing over speaking (or as Gen-Z might say, I'm not much of a “yapper”). When he asked about my studies, I told him that I was pursuing a B.A. Honours in Political Science. His face immediately lit up. He shared that he too had once been a student of Political Science, though he never got to complete his degree because of the *Axom Andolan* (The Assam Movement).

His words carried both nostalgia and gravity as he began recounting those turbulent years. The *Axom Andolan* (1979–1985) was a mass

movement led primarily by All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP). Its central demand was the detection and deportation of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, who were perceived as threatening Assam's identity, tremendously changing the demography of the state, its economy, and ethnic culture.

The movement drew its strength from students. Classrooms emptied as teenagers and young adults poured into the streets, carrying banners, shouting slogans, and often facing brutal repression. Universities became nerve centres of political activity, and every nook and corner of Assam, the waves of *Axom Andolan* touched even the remotest villages. Its echo felt through night meetings, handwritten pamphlets, and long marches that cut through the countryside. It is said more than twelve hundred martyrs (though it is officially mentioned as more than eight hundred) laid their lives for *Aai Axom (Mother Assam)*. For many, studies and careers were sacrificed. The students of Assam sacrificed one academic year. The movement shaped not just politics but the very consciousness of an entire generation.

During this period, the *xur bahini*-volunteer forces formed by the youth played a vital role. They were not just protestors but also spread awareness about the movement among the locals. Such type of many youth organisations played a vital role for mobilising communities, spreading messages, and maintaining discipline during marches and strikes. My parents often recall how these volunteers became symbols of courage and unity, showing that ordinary young people could

shoulder extraordinary responsibility in a movement that defined an era.

Both my mother and father lived through those years. Their studies were interrupted, their futures uncertain, but their determination never wavered. My mother recalls how her own brother was once beaten by hostile groups, which only deepened their anger and commitment. For them, politics was not abstract-it was curfews, hunger strikes, electricity cutoffs, and lives lived under the constant fear of violence. Yet it was also solidarity, shared meals, and slogans shouted until voices broke. The *Axom Andolan* finally culminated in the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985, which fixed March 24, 1971, as the cut-off date for detecting and deporting foreigners.

If the Assam Accord marked the end of one struggle, the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) decades later proved that history is never truly past-it resurfaces, testing each new generation in its own way. In December 2019, during the mass protests against CAB, I was in school writing my Class 9 examinations. The Bill, which sought to grant Indian citizenship to refugees from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, was widely seen in Assam as a betrayal of the Assam Accord. For us, it was not just a law-it was a wound reopening.

I still remember that day vividly. As I sat writing my answers, faint voices of agitation drifted into the classroom. At first, we told ourselves to focus on the paper. But soon the sounds grew louder-chants, slogans, barricades being smashed. By the time school ended, the main roads

were blocked. I managed to reach home through a shortcut, but many of my friends were stranded. One was stuck in her school van until late at night, while her frantic parents struggled to reach her because the driver's phone had died. That evening was terrifying-burning tires lit up the streets, electricity was cut off in several areas, and a strict curfew blanketed the city.

The protests were not just about anger; they were also about expression. Artists, musicians, and writers poured their voices into the streets. Songs by Zubeen Garg became anthems of resistance, young poets recited verses over megaphones, and walls filled with graffiti carrying messages of defiance. Social media turned into both a battleground and a bridge-posts circulated faster than police announcements, and live streams from protest sites kept hope alive for those locked indoors by curfew.

In the days that followed, our neighborhood became a passage for protesters since the main roads were closed. And though we were only schoolchildren, we found our own way of joining in. With gamochas tied proudly on our foreheads, we lined the roadside with bottles of water, offering them to weary demonstrators as they marched. Each time we raised our voices, it felt like history itself was running through us. We didn't fully understand the intricacies of the CAB or the depth of the political betrayal, but we understood enough: that our land, our culture, and our identity were being threatened. That was reason enough to stand there, trembling but proud, passing water bottles like offerings to a cause larger than ourselves.

I still remember actress Barsha Rani Bishaya's emotional speech during the CAB protests. Fighting back tears, she told the crowd how one mother, knowing the risks outside, still ironed her daughter's mekhela sador early in the morning-preparing her not for a wedding, not for a celebration, but for a protest where she might never return alive. The mother carefully folded the pleats, handed it to her daughter, and with trembling hands tied a gamocha on her forehead. "Go, my child," she whispered.

Barsha Rani paused, her voice breaking as she repeated this story, and the crowd fell silent. For a moment, we were not just protesters-we were children of mothers who were willing to send us into the fire, trusting us to defend our homeland's future. And then, as if on cue, the silence turned into thunderous chants that shook the streets.

That image has stayed with me-the ironed mekhela sador, the quiet dignity of sacrifice, and the bravery of mothers who bore the heaviest burden in silence.

Now, as a Political Science student, I see politics unfolding in a very different form-through campus elections, student union rallies, poster wars, and late-night debates in hostel rooms that swing wildly between genuine passion and blatant manipulation. At times, it feels disheartening. The same ideals that inspired generations-the love for one's land, the desire to serve people-often get reduced to petty fights for positions, promises that are never kept, and alliances that are broken as quickly as they are formed.

Yet, I also realize that this is where leadership is born and tested. The young men and women who stand up in these elections are not just fighting for a title; they are learning how to mobilize people, how to negotiate with rivals, and how to hold their ground under pressure. Even when it feels “dirty,” it is still a stage where conviction and compromise clash, forcing us to question what kind of leaders we truly want to become.

It also makes me reflect on the differences between past and present. The xur bahini of my parents’ time risked their lives for a cause that seemed inseparable from identity and survival. While today’s student leaders, in contrast, may risk little more than reputation or popularity. Perhaps each hold meaning for separate time periods. One reveals how far students can go when pushed to extremes; the other shows the daily grind of politics, where patience and persuasion matter more than slogans.

Politics, after all, is not just about theory or ideology written in books-it is lived in these everyday struggles. It demands resilience, adaptability, and the courage to stand firm when everything around you pushes you to bend. Sometimes it asks you to raise your voice; sometimes it demands your silence. And through it all, it keeps reminding me that democracy, though fragile, is also alive-even in the most unexpected corners of a college campus.

Despite its flaws, politics remains the force that shapes both individual lives and the destiny of nations. For me, the journey from listening to my parents’ stories of the Xur Bahini, to handing bottles of water

during protests, to now witnessing campus politics firsthand, has been a reminder that democracy is fragile but vital.

In Assam, politics is never just an intellectual exercise. It is felt, remembered, spoken aloud, and kept alive. It flows in our tea stalls and classrooms, in our marches and our whispers, in the voices of strangers on Rapido rides, and in the memories of parents who once tied gamosas on their foreheads. Above all, it survives in the collective spirit of people who refuse to forget their history or compromise their identity.

Politics in Assam, whether at a tea stall or in a university hostel, remains a mirror of our society-messy, passionate, and profoundly human. And that, perhaps, is its greatest lesson: that democracy is not just something we inherit but something we must keep building, word by word, act by act, generation after generation.

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# ভিত্তিবৰ্ষৰ খেলিমেলি আৰু অসমীয়া জাতিৰ

## ভৱিষ্যৎ

### আদ্রীতা পৰাশৰ

অসম ভাৰতবৰ্ষৰ উত্তৰ-পূৰ্বাঞ্চলৰ এখন অন্যতম ৰাজ্য। প্ৰচুৰ প্ৰাকৃতিক সম্পদেৰে ভৰপূৰ আমাৰ এই ৰাজ্যখন ঐতিহাসিকভাৱে সমৃদ্ধ। অসম নামৰ উৎপত্তি আহোমসকলৰ অৱদান। অসমীয়া নামৰ সংস্কৃতিৰ ভেটি গঢ়োতা সম্প্ৰদায়টোৱেই হ'ল আহোমসকল। কিন্তু অসমীয়াসকলে আজিকেইবা দশকৰ পৰা প্ৰাণখুলি হাঁহিব পৰা নাই। অন্তৰৰ নিভৃতম কোণত এটা ডাঙৰ বোজা কঢ়িয়াই ফুৰিছে। এই বোজাৰ বাবে প্ৰতিজন অসমীয়া তন্দ্ৰাহীনা নিজৰ অস্তিত্বৰ সংকটৰ উপলব্ধি কৰি প্ৰতিজন অসমীয়া প্ৰতিটো ক্ষণতে চিন্তিত। এই সমস্যাটোৱেই হ'ল অসমীয়া জাতিটোক কোঙা কৰি পেলোৱা অবৈধ বিদেশীৰ সমস্যা। অসমখন বৰ্তমান সময়ত অবৈধ বিদেশীসকলৰ বাবে চৰণীয়া পথাৰতহে পৰিণত হৈছে। প্ৰতিজন অসমীয়াই এই সমস্যাটোৰ বাবে জৰ্জৰিত। এৰাতিৰ ভিতৰত গড় নিৰ্মাণ কৰি মোগলসকলক লাচিত বৰফুকনৰ নেতৃত্বত পৰাভূত কৰি বিজয় ধ্বজা উৰুৱা এই অসমীয়া জাতিটো মানসকলৰ আক্ৰমণৰ পিছত ৰাজনৈতিক আৰু অৰ্থনৈতিকভাৱে দুৰ্বল হৈ পৰে। মানসকলৰ উপদ্ৰৱৰ পৰা ৰক্ষা পাবলৈ ব্ৰিটিছসকলৰ আশ্ৰয় ল'ব লগা হ'ল। ১৮শ্ৰ চনৰ ২৪ ফেব্ৰুৱাৰীত ইয়াণ্ডাবু সন্ধিৰ পিছত অসমত পদাৰ্পণ হ'ল ব্ৰিটিছসকলৰ। ইংৰাজসকলৰ আগমনৰ লগে লগে

আধুনিকতা আৰু শিল্প বিপ্লৱৰ অধিসূচনা হ'ল। ইংৰাজসকলে অৱশ্যে  
 অসমকো শোষণ কৰিবলৈ নেৰিলে। ব্ৰিটিছৰ এই শোষণৰ পৰা পৰিত্ৰাণ  
 পাবলৈ ভাৰতবৰ্ষৰ অন্যান্য ঠাইৰ দৰে অসমতো সুতীৱ আন্দোলন  
 আৰম্ভ হৈছিল। অৱশেষত ব্ৰিটিছসকলে ভাৰতবৰ্ষক এৰি যাবলৈ বাধ্য  
 হ'ল। কিন্তু ভাৰতবৰ্ষক ধৰ্মৰ ভিত্তিত বিভাজন কৰা হৈছিল। দ্বিজাতি তত্ত্ব  
 এই বিভাজনৰ মূল কাৰক আছিল। এই তত্ত্ব মুছলিম লীগৰ নেতা মহম্মদ  
 আলী জিন্নাই আগবঢ়াইছিল। মাউণ্টবেটেন আঁচনিৰ জৰিয়তে দ্বিজাতি  
 তত্ত্ব আঁচনিৰ পূৰ্ণৰূপ ধাৰণ কৰে। ইয়াৰ ফলত অসমত আগমন ঘটিল  
 এক বিশেষ সম্প্ৰদায়ৰ লোকসকলৰ। তেওঁলোকে অসমৰ মাটি দখল  
 কৰিবলৈ আৰম্ভ কৰিলে। অসমত ইয়াৰ প্ৰথমবাৰৰ বাবে বিৰোধিতা  
 কৰিছিল অসমকেশৰী অম্বিকাগিৰি ৰায়চৌধুৰীয়ে। মুছলিম লীগৰ  
 নেতৃত্বত 'অসম দখল অভিযান' আৰম্ভ হৈছিল। ছাৰ চাদুল্লাই গ্ৰ মোৰ  
 ফুড আঁচনিৰ অজুহাতত অসমত পূৰ্ব বংগীয় মুছলমানক সংস্থাপিত  
 কৰিবলৈ অসমৰ মুছলমান প্ৰধান ৰাজ্যত পৰিণত কৰিবলৈ কিন্তু ইয়াৰ  
 তীব্ৰ বিৰোধিতা কৰিছিল গোপীনাথ বৰদলৈ, বিষ্ণুৰাম মেধিৰ চৰকাৰে।  
 তেওঁলোকে আৰম্ভ কৰিছিল উচ্ছেদ অভিযান। উচ্ছেদ অভিযান আৰম্ভ  
 কৰিলেও মুছলিম লীগে অসমক পাকিস্তানৰ অন্তৰ্ভুক্ত কৰিবলৈ  
 সৰ্বশক্তিৰে জঁপিয়াই পৰিছিল। ১৯৪৭ চনৰ ২৩ মাৰ্চত মুছলিম লীগে  
 পালন কৰা "পাকিস্তান" দিৱসৰ দিনা অসমৰ নগাঁও, গোৱালপাৰা,  
 বৰপেটা আদিত বৃহৎ সংখ্যক পাকিস্তান সমৰ্থকে 'লড়কে লেংগে  
 পাকিস্তান, 'চলো চলো -জেলে চলো' পাকিস্তান কায়েম কৰো আদি  
 শ্লোগান দি শোভাযাত্ৰা উলিয়াইছিল। অৱশ্যে লোকপ্ৰিয় গোপীনাথ

বৰদলৈ আৰু বিষ্ণুৰাম মেধিৰ সবল নেতৃত্বই মৌলানা ভাছনী, ছাদুল্লাহঁতৰ এনে ষড়যন্ত্ৰক কলিতে মৰিমূৰ কৰি অসম আৰু অসমীয়া জাতিৰ সুৰক্ষিত ভৱিষ্যৎ নিশ্চিত কৰিবলৈ সমৰ্থ হৈছিল। দেশৰ স্বাধীনতাৰ পৰৱৰ্তী সময়তো লোকপ্ৰিয় গোপীনাথ বৰদলৈ আৰু বিষ্ণুৰাম মেধিৰ মুখ্যমন্ত্ৰিত্বৰ কালত অসমৰ পৰা প্ৰায় কেইবা লাখ মুছলিম অনুপ্ৰৱেশকাৰী তথা বেদখলকাৰীক অসমৰ পৰা বহিষ্কাৰ কৰা হৈছিল। ১৯৭০ দশকত পূৱ পাকিস্তান আৰু পশ্চিম পাকিস্তানৰ আভ্যন্তৰীণ ৰাজনীতিত সংকটে ভয়াৱহ ৰূপ ধাৰণ কৰে। ১৯৭১ চনৰ ডিচেম্বৰত ভাৰত আৰু পাকিস্তানৰ মাজত এখন পূৰ্ণাংগ যুদ্ধ আৰম্ভ হয়। পাকিস্তানে এই যুদ্ধত শোচনীয়ভাৱে পৰাজয় বৰণ কৰে। এই পৰাজয়ৰ ফলত পূৱ পাকিস্তানে স্বাধীনতা লাভ কৰি বাংলাদেশ নামেৰে নামাকৰণিত হ'ল। যাৰ বাবে বৰ্তমান পৰ্যন্তলৈকে সূৰুঙাৰে অবৈধ বিদেশী অসমত প্ৰৱেশ কৰিয়েই আছে। ১৯৭৭ চনৰ মংগলদৈ সমষ্টিৰ নৱ-নিৰ্বাচিত সাংসদ জনতা পাৰ্টীৰ হীৰালাল পাটোৱাৰীৰ মৃত্যুত সমষ্টিটোৰ উপ-নিৰ্বাচনৰ প্ৰয়োজন হয়। উপ-নিৰ্বাচনৰ বাবে প্ৰকাশিত নিৰ্বাচনৰ তালিকাত লাখ লাখ অবৈধ প্ৰব্ৰজনকাৰীৰ নাম থকা বুলি অভিযোগ উত্থাপন হৈছিল। ইয়াৰ পৰাই অসম আন্দোলনৰ বীজ ৰোপণ হয়। এই লোমহৰ্ষক অসম আন্দোলনত ৮৫৫ জন [পিছত ৮৬০] অসম মাতৃৰ সন্তান ছহীদ হ'ল। বহু লোক চিৰদিনৰ বাবে পংগু হৈ পৰিল। তাৰ পিছত ১৯৮৫ চনৰ ১৫ আগষ্টত ভাৰত চৰকাৰ, অসম চৰকাৰৰ প্ৰতিনিধি আৰু অসম আন্দোলনৰ নেতৃত্বৰ মাজত এখন বুজাবুজি চুক্তি স্বাক্ষৰিত হয়। এই চুক্তিৰ জৰিয়তে অসম আন্দোলনৰ পৰিসমাপ্তি ঘটে।

এই চুক্তিখন অসম চুক্তি নামেৰে অভিহিত কৰা হয়। অসম চুক্তিৰ পু  
 অনুচ্ছেদ জঙ্গ অনুসৰি ১৯৭১ চনৰ মাৰ্চৰ ২৫ তাৰিখ তথা তাৰ পাছত  
 অসমলৈ অহা বিদেশী নাগৰিকসকলক চিনাক্ত কৰি তৎকালীনভাৱে  
 বহিষ্কৃত কৰা। অসম চুক্তিৰ পু.জঙ্গ দফাত এইবুলিও উল্লেখ আছে যে  
 অসমৰ পৰা ইতিপূৰ্বে বিতাৰিত কিন্তু বৰ্তমান অনাধিকাৰ প্ৰৱেশ  
 কৰাসকলক চিনাক্ত কৰি পুনৰ বিতাৰণৰ ব্যৱস্থা কৰা। এই অসম চুক্তিৰ  
 পিছৰ নিৰ্বাচনৰ অসম আন্দোলনকাৰীৰ নেতৃত্বত চৰকাৰ গঠন হয়  
 [অসম গণ পৰিষদ]। কিন্তু, চৰকাৰখনে বিদেশী চিনাক্ত আৰু বহিষ্কাৰ  
 কৰাৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত কোনো পদক্ষেপ নল'লে। অগপৰ পিছত কোনো এখন  
 চৰকাৰে অবৈধ বিদেশী বিতাৰণ আৰু চিনাক্তকৰণৰ বাবে কাৰ্যকৰী  
 ব্যৱস্থা নল'লে। মাথোঁ নিৰ্বাচনৰ আগে আগে বজ্ৰৰ দৰে উদাত্ত ভাষণ দি  
 কৈ এইবাৰ আমাৰ চৰকাৰে অবৈধ বিদেশী খেদিবা তেওঁলোকে এইবাৰ  
 টালি-টোপোলা বান্ধি অসমখন এৰি স্বদেশলৈ উভতি যাব লাগিবা  
 নিৰ্বাচনত জয়লাভ কৰি দিছপুৰত তেওঁলোকৰ নিজস্ব আসনখনত  
 অধিস্থিত হোৱাৰ লগে লগে এই অবৈধ বিদেশীৰ সমস্যাটো তল পৰি  
 যায়। সেইবাবে ৰাজনীতিবিদসকলে বিভিন্ন সভাত এইধৰণৰ মন্তব্য দিলে  
 সেই অতীজৰে পৰা প্ৰচলিত এটি ডাকৰ বচন আহক বাৰিষা কাটক  
 পাত ৰৈ যা ভিনিহি খাই যা ভাতৰ লগত তুলনা কৰিব মন যায়।  
 তেওঁলোকে অসমীয়া লোকসকলৰ আৱেগৰ লগত ফুটবল খেলাৰ দৰে  
 খেলিছে আৰু নিজৰ নিজৰ আৰামী চকীতবহি ৰাজনৈতিক জীৱনৰ  
 দেওনাখন পাৰ হৈছে। এই বিতাৰণ ব্যৱস্থাটো ৰাজনীতিবিদসকলে  
 কোৱাৰ দৰে সহজ নহয়। ইয়াৰ বাবে আমি প্ৰথমে বিদেশী চিনাক্ত কৰিব

লাগিবা এই চিনাক্তকৰণ প্ৰক্ৰিয়াটো ভাৰতবৰ্ষৰ অন্যান্য ৰাজ্যৰ বাবে কঠিন হ'লেও অসমৰ বাবে ইমান এটা কঠিন নহয়। কিয়নো? অসমীয়া জাতিটো যেতিয়া এই অবৈধ বিদেশীৰ সমস্যাৰ ককবকাই আছিল। তেতিয়া এজন অনাসমীয়া ব্যক্তি যিজন ব্যক্তিৰ অতুলনীয় পদক্ষেপৰ বাবে প্ৰতিজন অসমীয়া তেওঁৰ ওচৰত চিৰকালৰ বাবে কৃতজ্ঞ হৈ থাকিব লাগিবা সেই ব্যক্তিজনেই হ'ল স্বাধীন ভাৰতৰ আই.চি.এছৰ বিষয়া আৰ. বি বাঘাইৱালা। তেওঁ আছিল অসম, মণিপুৰ আৰু ত্ৰিপুৰাৰ লোকপিয়লৰ অধ্যক্ষ। বাঘাইৱালাই মূল লোকপিয়লৰ নথিখনৰ লগতে ১৯৫১ চনৰ লোকপিয়লৰ পৰিপূৰক তালিকা হিচাপে ৬০ লাখৰো অধিক নাম আৰু পৰিয়ালৰ বিৱৰণৰ তালিকা এখন হাতেৰে প্ৰস্তুত কৰিছিল। বিভাজনৰ পৰৱৰ্তীকালত পূৰ্ণ পাকিস্তানৰ পৰা অসমত প্ৰৱেশ কৰা শৰণাৰ্থীৰ ৰেকৰ্ড ৰখা আৰু কেন্দ্ৰীয় সহায় ল'বলৈ এই পৰিপূৰক তালিকা প্ৰস্তুত কৰা হৈছিল বুলি ধাৰণা কৰা হৈছে। এই তালিকাখন পিছলৈ ৰাষ্ট্ৰীয় নাগৰিকপঞ্জীত পৰিণত হ'ল। ১৯৫১ চনৰ নিৰ্বাচনৰ পিছতো পৰৱৰ্তী কোনো চৰকাৰে নথিখনে উন্নীতকৰণ কৰাৰ বাবে পদক্ষেপ গ্ৰহণ নকৰিলে। অৱশ্যে, অসম চুক্তিত এন.আৰ.চিৰ বিষয়ে উল্লেখ নাই কিন্তু, ২০০৫ চনৰ গুজুলাইত সদৌ অসম ছাত্ৰ সন্থা, কেন্দ্ৰীয় চৰকাৰ আৰু অসম চৰকাৰ মাজত হোৱা ত্ৰিপাক্ষিক বৈঠকৰ সিদ্ধান্তমৰ্মে এন.আৰ.চিৰ উন্নীতকৰণৰ প্ৰস্তাৱ লোৱা হৈছিল, কিন্তু ৰাজনীতিৰ চক্ৰবেহুত পৰি বিষয়টো তল পৰি ৰয়। এই অসহায় পৰিস্থিতিৰ মাজত আশাৰ ৰেঙণী কঢ়িয়াই আনিছিল আসাম পাব্লিক ৱৰ্কছৰ শ্ৰীআভিজিৎ শৰ্মা আৰু তেওঁক সহায় সহযোগ কৰা শ্ৰীপ্ৰদীপ ভূঞাই। তেওঁলোকে

মহামান্য উচ্চতম ন্যায়ালয়ৰ দ্বাৰস্থ হয় আৰু জনস্বার্থ জড়িত আবেদন [পি.আই.এল] দাখিল কৰো মোকদ্দমা নম্বৰ ২৭৪য়২০০৯। সুদীৰ্ঘ দহ বছৰৰ শুনানীৰ অন্তত ৩১.০৮.২০১৯ চনত এখন পৰিপূৰক এন.আৰ.চি তালিকা প্ৰকাশ পায়। য'ত ১৯ লাখ মানুহ বাদ পৰে। যাৰ বাবে এন.আৰ.চিখনৰ এতিয়া গ্ৰহণযোগ্যতা নাই কিন্তু, ২০১৯ চনত কেন্দ্ৰীয় চৰকাৰে নাগৰিকত্ব সংশোধনী আইন [CAA) গৃহীত কৰে। অসম চুক্তি এন.আৰ.চিৰ ভিত্তিবৰ্ষ ১৫ মাৰ্চ, ১৯৭১ কিন্তু হিন্দু বাংলাদেশীৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত কাৰ কাৰণে ভিত্তিবৰ্ষ ধৰা হয় ৩১ ডিচেম্বৰ, ২০১৪। সেই ভিত্তিবৰ্ষটোকে বৰ্তমান সময়ত ২০২৪ চনৰ, ৩১ ডিচেম্বৰলৈ বঢ়াই দিয়া হল। ভিত্তিবৰ্ষৰ এই খেলিমেলিয়ে আকৌ চিন্তা কৰিবলৈ বাধ্য কৰালে অসম চুক্তি এন.আৰ.চিৰ ভিত্তিবৰ্ষ কি হবা।

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# **Women in Assam's Politics: Voices of Leadership and Change**

**Tanishka Kashyap**

The story of Assam's political environment isn't just about men it also includes the powerful, determined voices of women who have been part of the state's democratic journey. From the very beginning of India's independence movement, Assamese women played a critical role in shaping social and political reforms, standing at the forefront of activism. Figures like Kanaklata Barua, who became an enduring symbol of youthful bravery during the Quit India Movement, continue to inspire and motivate Assam's youth even today.

As time went on after independence, women from Assam started to step more confidently into mainstream politics like contesting in elections, becoming part of political parties, and even occupying important leadership roles. Leaders such as Renuka Devi Barkataki, who served as a Member of Parliament, and Syeda Anwara Taimur, the only woman to have held the office of Chief Minister in Assam, mark major milestones in the state's political story. Their achievements not only emphasized their own capabilities but also opened doors for other women to imagine themselves in similar roles.

In recent years, women leaders from Assam have become increasingly active in shaping policies whether it is about education, healthcare, indigenous rights, or gender equality. Despite ongoing challenges like social biases and underrepresentation, women in Assam's politics continue to push forward, bringing a sense of empathy, understanding,

and inclusivity to governance. They are helping to create, a balanced and fair political environment.

Women's participation isn't limited to high-profile politics; their involvement at the grassroots level is just as essential. By engaging in Panchayati Raj institutions and local governance, women are directly addressing community issues, making sure their voices are heard. This grassroots leadership helps ensure that concerns of ordinary people, especially women and marginalized groups, are part of the political conversation and decision-making process.

Today, seeing women actively involved in Assam's political scene is a clear reflection of the state's growing democratic spirit. Even though valuable progress has been made, there is still a lot of room for improvement particularly in increasing representation, ensuring equal opportunities, and breaking down social and political barriers that hinder women's participation. Encouraging young women to step into political roles and engage in public life is critical for building a future based on equality, inclusion, and justice.

Women involved in politics are far beyond representatives they are change-makers. Their journey in Assam's political sphere represents resilience, a clear vision for society, and a collective desire to promote a world where fairness and equal rights are fundamental.

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# Untold Stories of the Deori Tribe

**Ireen Deori**

The word Deori came from "Deu" (God) ori (Priest) meaning servant of the deity. The Deori tribe belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family of Mongoloid stock. Deori are the indigenous tribe of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, recognised as Scheduled Tribes. The Deoris introduce themselves as "Jimochayan" which means children of sun and moon. They historically lived in Joidaam, present day near Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh also called as the hinterland of the Brahmaputra Valley.

During Burmese aggression, many Deoris perished. Many were slaughtered and many taken as captive. They migrated to different places alongside the rivers they floated down. As they entered and landed in their new territory, they took the name of that particular river as their clan names. There are four clans in the Deori tribe. Tegapani river of Tengaponia clan, Dibang river of Dibongia clan, a place called Borgoiya for Borgoyan clan and lastly the pathorgoyan clan, they are believed to be mixed with other tribes.

One fascinating story preserved in oral tradition tells that a Tengaponiya clan priest once performed a powerful ritual under the orders of the Chutia king, making the waters of the Tengapani river turn sour. This legendary act is remembered as a testament to the spiritual authority and mystical powers of the Deori priests.

Deori are known to serve as priests in four temples: The Tamreswari Temple, The Bura - Buri Than, The Boliya Baba Than and Malinithan. It practices animistic, shamanic and ancestor worshipping rituals.

'Deodai' plays a significant role in the priestly order. While in the time of Bihagiyo Bisu or Bohag Bihu it is followed by dance along with beating of drums he is believed to be possessed by their deity and in that mood of transcendental glory.

The Deori people observed three major festivals in a year and the festivals are connected with agricultural activities. The first is called Bihagiyo Bisu or Bohag Bihu and the other is Magiyo Bisu or Magh Bihu lastly kati bisu. The bisu is mainly celebrated on Wednesday of the month.

Joidaam Mechu or the Joidaam festivals, is a significant annual socio - cultural event celebrated by the Deori tribe in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in February 13-14 of every year. The festival is dedicated to the preservation, protection and revival of their aged old cultural traditions. The festival is a vibrant display of Deori culture, featuring traditional music, dance, and rituals. It's a way for the community to preserve and showcase their rich heritage including their unique language, attire, and traditional practice.

Sujen the traditional rice beer has a significant role. It is served in every festival and rituals as a blessing from ancestor and God.

The Deori tribe stands as a guardian of a living tradition, where rituals, folklore, and community life intertwine. Their strong sense of cultural

identity, reverence for ancestral practices, and unique priesthood system not only define who they are but also contribute richly to the cultural diversity of Assam and Northeast India.

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Oral Histories.

## **Resurgimiento of the condition of Assamese Women during Colonial Era.**

**Gargi Saikia**

"Birangana" is the term that Assamese people widely use to describe a woman who is a valiant warrior of her era and so it is a normal deal to see every woman in this land of Assam as "Biranganas" as they have always struggled to live a life of dignity. Assam history is full of proud tales of women who never bowed, never were subordinate in their approach when faced with threatening daggers to their dignity.

Ancient women of this land had been queens to distant lands ruling over subjects with a fist full of love and empathy. The women of this land stands second to none. However, somewhere during the colonial era, the condition of Assamese women looked grim. It is during this period, where the whole society was put into test for uplifting the women section from the dullness that gripped into their dignified boundaries and true to its essence, the budding feminists did not let their voice go down.

The first social reformer of Assam during the colonial rule was Anandaram Dhekial Phukon. He was an ardent follower of Britishers and he opined that only through the administration of the Britishers can the social evils of Assamese society be removed. His connection and communication with the education of Hindu College of Calcutta and the assistance of America Baptist Missionary planted the seeds of reformation and Renaissance of the society. He also had seen the plight

of the women within his household and hence he decided to take actions by cleansing the minds of the people.

At that period of time, polygamy was present in the Assamese society which contributed to the plight of the women and hence he wanted to secure the status of the married women and hence requested the government to take legal steps like registration of marriages. Despite protests from his own family, he taught his wife to read and write. He also wrote books like: Oxomiya Lorar Mitra, A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language and Vernacular Education and many such others. But unfortunately, he died at the age of 29, and his incomplete works were carried on by his Uncle Gunabhiram Baruah.

During Gunabhiram Baruah's stay in mid 19th century Calcutta, he was influenced by the actions of the Brahmo Samaj and Renaissance of Bengal and wanted to bring the same reforms in Assam too. To start social awareness, he wrote an article named (Kolikotaat Ejon Oxomiya) in Arunodoi in 1853-54.

The drama (Ram Novomi) that he wrote in 1857 AD became the base from which modern Assamese drama literature started. The drama written taking the main characters of Ram-Chandra and Navami particularly focuses on the theme of widow remarriage and as a result, the government legalized widow remarriage in 1856 AD.

He himself married a Brahmin widow, named Bishnupriya after the death of his first wife. His daughter, Swarnalata Devi who had higher education was also remarried after the death of her first husband. The

contemporary of Anandaram Dhekial Phukon and Gunabhiram Baruah, Hemchandra Baruah who was nicknamed as (Oximiya Bhaxar Uja), wrote many articles in Orunodoi regarding social reforms and in support of women. He raised the question that when many of the groups of people have already accepted widow remarriage then where is the logic of Brahmans not willing to accept it? To prove his point, he took the help of modern reasonable bases and also used the religious text of Hindus. He proposed many reforms related to marriage in Orunodoi, which are as follows:

- Before marriage, it is necessary for both sides of the parties to meet each other and know about each other.
- A boy has to attain 23 years of age and girl 18 years at the time of their marriage.
- The age difference between the two parties, should be as such that they can develop friendship and shouldn't be like that of a grandfather and a grandchild which will ruin the holy bond.
- Apart from that, girls should be provided with the free choice of choosing their husband by their own rather than someone forcing them to marry someone else.

But orthodox members like Ratneshwar Mahanta, Purnakanta Sharmah and such others stood like a thorn to these suggestions. On top of that, Hemachandra Baruah requested the Assamese youth to stay away from polygamy.

Women's education was also a burning topic at that time. Anandaram Dhekial Phukon created an atmosphere for the ladies of his home so that they receive education, he also sent his daughter Padmavati to formal educational institutions to receive education. Just like that, Gunabhiram Baruah sent his daughter, Swarnalata to Calcutta's famous Bethune School. Reformers like Gunabhiram Baruah, Hemchandra Baruah understood the importance of women education and worked hard to achieve their goal. But even after this, they had to fight with the mindset of the conservatives of the society.

An article published in Jonaki magazine stated that with the influence of women education, Assamese women have forgotten their traditional roots. Some of the reformers carried the opinion that though women education was necessary to an extent it should not be encouraged to the point where women begin to think themselves as equal to men.

After 1836 AD when American Baptist Missionaries came to India, a new hope bloomed in the field of education, just after a few months of arrival in Assamese, they at Sadiya built up a school where boys and girls were taught separately.

In 1938 AD, Mrs. Brown established an All Girls School in Sadiya, just after one year, Mrs.Kattar built up the second All Girls School in the same area. By the report of Moffat Mills, it can be known that in 1841 AD, Mrs.Warker established a girl school in Sivsagar.

In 1850 AD, in Guwahati a school was established with 13 girl students. Though the missionaries were challenged in their work by the

conservatives they did not stop. Just at that period of time, the missionaries started a new kind of school called Zenana school whereby missionaries started visiting the homes of the girls to encourage them for taking up education.

Only after the arrival of Woods Despatch in 1854 AD, after the announcement of formal focus on women education, the government slowly started paying attention to women education. The government could discern the prime roadblocks to these reforms as superstition and lack of education on the part of the guardians, poverty, transport problem, child marriage, unavailability of women teachers, girls employed in domestic chores and so on, which made the government to seriously think upon the matter. Finally, under the care of the government, in 1870 AD, around 8 girls' school were established in Assam. Out of this 8, 5 were in Kamrup, 1 in Darrang, 1 in Nagaon and 1 in Lakhimpur. Contemporarily, the missionaries established schools in Sivsagar, Nagaon, Kamrup, and Khasi Jaintia hills for the development of women's education. In 1874-75 AD, the girls who received primary education were 875. In the following years, this number increased and in 1897-98, mixing the numbers of the 185 primary schools of plains and hills, it was found that around 3825 female students were getting education.

On top of that, three middle schools located in Dhubri, Dibrugarh, and Shillong had 235 female students. But still till the end of the 19th century, the people who were against women education did not lessen. Bolinarayan Bora (editor of Mou Magazine), Lombudor Bora and such

other leaders were against this. In opposition to this, a women named, Deviprabha Dutta though staying in a rented house in Dibrugarh still sent her daughters: Durgaprabha and Hemprabha to Calcutta's Bethune school. Durgaprabha was the first Assamese women to pass the Matriculation examination, while Hemprabha was the first Assamese women to pass the First Arts (FA) examination. And just like that, Sudhalota Duara and Sukhlata Duara became the first (MA.B.T) of Assam. The first Girls' College to be established was Handique Girls' College (1939) and its first Principal was Rajabala Das.

Despite the plight that Assamese women had to go through for a brief period of time, it was the vision of the legendary figures in our history who moulded the pathway and made resurgence of the condition of the Assamese women during colonial era a reality.

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# **Contemporary Issues in Assam.**

**Kabyasikha Kalita**

## **Introduction**

Assam is a North Eastern Indian state marked by its natural beauty, rich biodiversity, tea plantations and rich cultural heritage. From being the heart land of the Ahom kingdom to serving as a centre of colonial economic exploitation through tea and oil, Assam has always stood at the crossroads of history. In the post-independence era, however, the state has faced a series of challenges that continue to shape its politics, society, and economy. While Assam's natural beauty, ethnic diversity, and traditions of communal harmony make it unique, its contemporary issues reveal the tensions between tradition and modernity, regionalism and nationalism, development and displacement.

## **Identity and citizenship issue**

One of the biggest issues in Assam is the issue of identity. Assamese society includes indigenous tribes, castes, migrant groups, and people of various linguistic and religious backgrounds. The anxiety of protecting the "Assamese identity" has historically shaped the state's politics.

The National Register of Citizens (NRC), updated in 2019, was meant to distinguish Indian citizens from illegal immigrants, particularly those who entered Assam from Bangladesh after 1971. While it was hailed as a historic process, its implementation left more than 19 lakh people

excluded, creating fear and uncertainty. Questions about documentation, human rights, and statelessness loom large, with families divided across "included" and "excluded" lists.

The Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), 2019, further deepened the crisis. Unlike the NRC, which was non-religious in nature, the CAA offered a pathway to citizenship for non-Muslim migrants from neighbouring countries. Many in Assam opposed it, not on communal grounds, but because it threatened to legalize migrants regardless of religion, thereby endangering the indigenous identity and fragile demographic balance of the state. The anti-CAA protests of 2019 witnessed strong youth participation, indicating that the citizenship issue remains one of the defining contemporary concerns.

### **Migration and Demographic Changes**

Migration has shaped Assam's history for centuries. From tea garden labourers brought by the British to peasants from East Bengal encouraged to settle in the Brahmaputra valley, Assam has witnessed continuous demographic shifts.

In recent decades, illegal migration from Bangladesh has been a hot topic. Many Assamese fear that the continuous entry of migrants will change the language, culture, and even the politics of the state. In some districts like Dhubri, local Assamese have already become a minority.

But this is not just a political issue. For the migrants, life is very hard. They are often poor farmers or daily wage workers. Families often live in the fear of eviction drives, detention centres and periodic

crackdowns. The challenge for Assam is to protect its indigenous culture while also respecting human rights and ensuring fair treatment for all communities.

### **Ethnic Conflicts and Demands for Autonomy**

Assam is home to many ethnic groups. Each group has its own language, tradition and culture and demands. Sometimes these demands clash with each others, leading to violence.

The Bodo movement for a separate homeland, which turned violent in the late 20th century, witnessed massacres and displacements. Although the Bodo Accord of 2020 created the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) and brought several militant groups into mainstream politics, tensions remain between Bodos and other communities, especially Muslims and Adivasis.

Similarly, the Karbi, Dimasa, and Koch-Rajbongshi groups have long demanded greater political rights and cultural recognition. These movements, while rooted in genuine grievances of neglect and underdevelopment, often lead to armed conflicts and create fault lines among communities.

Ethnic clashes—such as the Bodo-Muslim riots of 2012—demonstrate how identity-based politics in Assam can easily spiral into violence, threatening both peace and social cohesion.

## **Insurgency and Security Concerns**

From the late 1970s, Assam witnessed the rise of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA). The group wanted an independent Assam, claiming that India was exploiting the state's resources like oil and tea while leaving its people poor. Many young people joined ULFA out of frustration with unemployment and corruption.

Over the years, insurgency brought fear, kidnappings, and extortion. Although most ULFA leaders have now surrendered and joined peace talks, a faction called ULFA (Independent) still operates, especially from Myanmar.

Insurgency is also linked to Assam's strategic location, as it shares borders with Bangladesh and Bhutan. Smuggling, cross-border movement, and refugee issues keep the security situation sensitive. Peace has improved, but complete stability is still a work in progress.

## **Economic Development and Unemployment**

Despite being rich in natural resources like tea, oil, coal, and natural gas, Assam lags behind in industrialization. Much of its economy still depends on agriculture and tea plantations, which are vulnerable to market fluctuations. While Guwahati has emerged as a commercial hub, other parts of the state remain underdeveloped.

Unemployment is a major concern. Thousands of educated youths leave the state each year in search of better opportunities, leading to a "brain drain." The lack of large-scale industries, poor infrastructure, and frequent floods hinder investment. Tea garden workers, many of

whom belong to marginalized Adivasi communities, continue to live in poor conditions with low wages and limited healthcare.

Efforts like Act East Policy, aimed at connecting Assam with Southeast Asia, hold promise, but without infrastructural upgrades and political stability, economic growth remains uneven.

### **Environmental Challenges**

Assam's geography, dominated by the Brahmaputra and Barak river systems, makes it prone to annual floods. While floods are a natural phenomenon, their impact has worsened due to deforestation, erosion, and climate change. Every year, thousands are displaced, crops are destroyed, and villages vanish under floodwaters. Erosion alone has wiped out large tracts of cultivable land, particularly in districts like Majuli.

Deforestation in Assam's forests, including Kaziranga and Manas, poses threats to biodiversity. Human-animal conflicts, particularly involving elephants and rhinos, are on the rise as habitats shrink.

Climate change is expected to intensify floods and alter rainfall patterns, making disaster management a critical challenge.

Balancing ecological preservation with developmental needs is one of Assam's biggest contemporary dilemmas.

## **Healthcare and Education**

Another contemporary challenge is the inadequate healthcare and education infrastructure. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of Assam's medical system, with shortages of hospitals, doctors, and oxygen facilities. Rural healthcare remains particularly poor, forcing patients to travel long distances.

Education, while improving in literacy rates, still suffers from poor quality in government schools, teacher shortages, and language debates. The use of Assamese, Bengali, and tribal languages in education continues to be a politically sensitive topic. Private schools and coaching centres are filling gaps, but often at the cost of affordability for poorer families.

## **Conclusion**

Assam today is a state of both challenges and opportunities. On one side are problems like identity struggles, migration, ethnic clashes, insurgency, unemployment, floods, and weak infrastructure. On the other side are signs of hope—youth activism, women's participation, cultural pride, and economic potential.

What Assam needs is a balanced approach. Protecting the identity of its people is important, but so is ensuring fairness and human rights. Development projects must go hand in hand with the protection of the environment. Peace agreements with ethnic groups must be implemented sincerely. And most importantly, the energy of Assam's youth should be guided towards building, not breaking.

Assam's story has always been one of resilience. Despite wars, migrations, and natural disasters, its people have kept their culture alive. If its challenges are addressed with care and inclusiveness, Assam can emerge not just as the gateway to the Northeast but also as a model of unity and progress for the whole country.

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## **From Bard to Rebel: Guardians of Assam's Sanctity.**

**Tanisha Sharma**

In order to know Assam, it is necessary to listen as much as to read. Its politics, society, and history have frequently been conveyed not just by speeches, manifestos, or public documents but through songs, plays, and performances as well. In Assam, culture has never been a static backdrop; it has been an unfolding, kinetic force influencing political awareness. From 16th-century Srimanta Sankardeva's Borgeets to Bhupen Hazarika's emotive ballads in the 20th century and Zubeen Garg's protest ballads in the 21st century, artists have played the role of interpreters of the fears, hopes, and battles of the people.

Two names figure prominently in this dynasty: Dr. Bhupen Hazarika (1926–2011), the "Bard of the Brahmaputra," whose music expressed humanist universalism, grounding Assamese cultural pride, and Zubeen Garg (1972-2025), the flamboyant and iconoclastic voice, who converted concerts into protest rallies during the anti-CAA protests. They show how, in Assam, culture is not only art-it is politics in another language.

Born in 1926, Bhupen Hazarika developed in an era when Assam was struggling to get over the colonial era of exploitation and the pema of modernization. His musical training was influenced both by Assamese folk culture and by global trends, particularly his exposure to Paul Robeson's songs while he was in the United States. His classic "Bistirno Parore"-inspired by Robeson's "Ol' Man River"-converted the

Brahmaputra into a symbol of resilience, oppression, and hope. The river, enduring but insouciant, was a chronicler of the boatmen's, farmers', and workers' sufferings. This was not mere cultural production-it was political education in song, educating citizens to look at their lives as part of broader struggles for justice.

Throughout his time as a public personality, Hazarika had to balance the roles of legislator, artist, and activist. He was an MLA between 1967–72, aligning with left streams that preached social justice. However, even outside official politics, his songs did the work of resistance. He sang of tea workers who had been neglected by Assamese elites, of excluded groups whose voices hardly ever reached the floor of the Assembly. His Assam Agitation-era songs (1979–85) called for restraint from blind ethnic chauvinism, an embodiment of his life-long struggle between affection for Assamese identity and allegiance to large humanism. Hazarika thereby embodied the artist as moral guide-never merely a voice of mass outrage, but urging it towards compassion and brotherhood.

Where Bhupen Hazarika represented the meditative, philosophical, and thoughtful face of politics, Zubeen Garg embodied its more direct, iconoclastic, and performative aspect.

Born in 1972 in Jorhat, Zubeen made his entry into Assamese music in the early 1990s with albums such as *Anamika* before emerging as a pan-Indian star through Bollywood success such as *Ya Ali* (2006). However, even in this national popularity, he never lost touch with Assamese concerns. In fact, his very existence as a singer remained

inextricably linked with the destiny of his homeland. Zubeen's politics became trenchantly apparent during the 2019–20 anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) movement. While politicians exchanged legal arguments, Zubeen took the protest platforms, microphone in hand, converting music into incitation. His song "Politics nokoriba bondhu" ("Don't play politics, my friend") was turned into an anthem, sung during rallies and scribbled on posters. In a protest in Guwahati, he informed the gathering: "We are not singing today, we are shouting. This is not a concert this is our struggle." That was that moment of change-where politics replaced art, and the stage turned into a battlefield. While Hazarika operated through political agencies, Zubeen had opted for direct confrontation, personifying the Assamese youth's anger and frustration.

His personality was multifaceted-occasionally reckless, frequently provocative, yet irresistibly charismatic. To some, he was the de facto leader of Assam's opposition on the street, articulating the voice of the disaffected in the spaces between legislative hearings.

The work of both Hazarika and Garg demonstrates the extent to which art and politics intersect in Assam. This can be described in three broad intersecting dimensions:

### **Identity and Belonging**

Hazarika employed folk-infused songs to remind people of their common heritage, highlighting Assamese uniqueness without denying others. Zubeen, confronted newer challenges such as migration and

cultural insecurity, voices in crisper, more combative registers. His anti-CAA movement was not so much about law as about saving Assamese identity from perceived dilution.

### **Social Mobilization**

Hazarika's songs incorporated tea workers, fishermen, and peasants into the Assamese imagination, incorporating marginalized groups. Zubeen had organized urban, educated youth, turning concerts into protest grounds and Instagram posts into battle cries.

### **Transcendence of Borders**

Hazarika sang in several languages-Assamese, Bengali, Hindi-hence taking Assam's tales outside its borders. Zubeen, while having his roots in Assamese pride, has a fan following across India, so it became impossible for the rest of the nation to deny Assam's protests when Zubeen spoke.

Both Hazarika and Zubeen dismiss the concept of "apolitical art." They are the embodiment of the Assamese philosophy that artists need to be voices of conscience. Both have taken the side of people during periods of turmoil, refusing to distinguish between performance and protest.

Hazarika was a Universalist, philosopher-poet and contemplative while Zubeen was a Rebel-performer, spontaneous and combative. This is partially a generational difference. Hazarika was from an era of ideological movements and institution-building; Zubeen was from an age of street protests, viral clips, and celebrity activism.

The success of Hazarika and Zubeen is part of a larger Assamese tradition. Srimanta Sankardeva during the 15th century employed plays (Bhaonas) and songs (Borgeets) to oppose caste and bring communities together under Neo-Vaishnavism. During the 20th century, Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, poet and movie maker, was also a freedom fighter whose plays combined art with politics.

In this context, Hazarika and Zubeen are not deviations but extensions of a cultural-political trend: when politics hardens or becomes inapproachable, artists intervene to interpret, mobilize, and inspire. Surely, the politicization of artists is fraught with criticism. Hazarika's subsequent proximity to the political parties disturbed many who appreciated his previous socialist inclinations. Zubeen had been charged with being inconsistent or overly emotional, at times reversing stands. However, such criticism also stems from the immense moral burden borne by both figures. In Assam, the decisions of artists are never "private"-they are analyzed as political moves due to their symbolic position.

The lives of Bhupen Hazarika and Zubeen Garg illustrate how in Assam politics is as much sung as it is spoken. Hazarika's ageless ballads and Zubeen's passionate anthems both show how culture is not ornament but an armament-a force of resistance, a call to action, a moral compass.

In other guises-one as philosopher-bard, another as rebel-rockstar-they tell us that when institutions fail, it is art that sustains hope. To learn about the history, society, and politics of Assam, thus, is incomplete

without heeding the voices that emerged from its stages, radio sets, and protest fields.

As long as the Brahmaputra runs, so too will Assam's politics flow in song-occasionally in the soft words of Hazarika, occasionally in Zubeen's literal screams, but ever as a reminder that in this country, history, culture and politics are guardians that protect each other's sanctity.

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## **Women in Assam's Politics.**

**Ankita Deka**

Women in Assam's politics have played a significant role both historically and in contemporary times. From the freedom struggle to present-day governance, Assam's women have been active in shaping political thought and action. Icons like Kanaklata Barua and other women leaders of the Quit India Movement symbolize their early political participation. Despite challenges such as patriarchal norms and underrepresentation in legislative bodies, women in Assam continue to influence political discourse, particularly on issues like ethnic identity, peace, development, and social justice.

### **Historical background:**

The historical background of women in Assam's politics reflects a complex interplay of traditional roles, social reform and active political engagement. The progress of women both in politics and education is unsatisfactory. Custom, tradition and society have been and continue to be the great obstacles in the way of their progress. Assam's women were active in the freedom movement and social reform movements: women such as Chandra Prabha Saikiani and others led social campaigns and local organizing in the early 20th century, laying a foundation for later political engagement.

### **Notable Women figures of Assam:**

Joymoti Konwari (wife of Ahom prince Gadapani) is revered for her courage and sacrifice. Joymoti's resistance against the Ahom military in the 17<sup>th</sup> century is a symbol of strength and resilience. During the Indian freedom movement, Assamese women actively participated, Kanaklata Barua, martyred during the Quit India Movement while leading a group of freedom fighters in Gohpur. She became a symbol of youthful courage.

Pushpalata Das: A prominent freedom fighter, social worker, and later a member of the Constituent Assembly.

Syeda Anwara Taimur, first woman Chief Minister of Assam and also the only woman Chief Minister in Assam's history till date. A trailblazer, she held various ministerial positions including Education and Agriculture.

Indira Miri, renowned educationist and social reformer. Though not a traditional politician but she was nominated to the Rajya Sabha and worked on tribal and women issues. She worked extensively among the missing tribe and other background communities.

Ajanta Neog, the first women Finance Minister of Assam known for being a long-serving MLA from Golaghat and a prominent women leader in state politics.

Above mentioned are some of the key figures in Assam's politics past and present, who have made significant contributions to the political landscape of the state.

### **The Assam Movement (1979-1985):**

This movement is a major political and social uprising demanding the detention and deportation of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, saw significant participation by women both as activists and organizers, though their contributions often remained unrepresented in official narratives. Thousands of women participated in gheraos, picketing, hartals and peaceful protest across urban and rural Assam. Women were involved in mass mobilizations and they often led neighbourhood committees, created protest songs and maintained community kitchens during strikes. Women's involvement brought legitimacy and emotional power to the movement especially, as mothers, students and homemakers took the streets. Women wrote poems, songs and short stories that reflected the hopes and traumas of the movement. Traditional forms like Bihu songs and folklore were used by women to spread political messages. The women played a significant role in the Assam movement.

### **Women's Participation in Political Struggles**

Some research has been undertaken on women's political participation in Assam, including on their emancipation and empowerment. A movement spearheaded by the Bodo community in 1985 had women playing a significant role. Going further back, the Non-cooperation movement portrayed in great measure the spiritual power of Indian womanhood, with Assamese women sharing an equal burden in these struggles. Women in Assam played a significant role between the 1920s to 1940s organising themselves as Mahila Samiti. Based on

Gandhian ideologies, the first Mahila Samiti was established at Dibrugarh in 1915 followed by another at Nagaon in 1971 and the next at Tezpur in 1919. In 1926, the state-level *Asom Mohila Samiti* was formed as Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samiti. Chandraprabha Saikiani was the secretary of this body which resulted in the formation of various other district and primary or village level Mahila Samiti.

Women in Assam have been active participants in social and political life, but their representation in formal politics has remained low over the decades. Despite playing key roles in movements like the Assam Movement (1979–85) and contributing significantly to the socio-political fabric, they have often been underrepresented in legislative bodies and decision-making positions. The political representation of women in Assam reflects both progress and challenges. Despite their active involvement in grassroots movements, cultural preservation, and social reforms, women remain underrepresented in the state's legislative and decision-making bodies. Pioneering figures like Kanaklata Barua, Swarnalata Baruah, and others have inspired greater participation, yet structural barriers such as patriarchy, limited party support, and socio-economic constraints continue to restrict women's entry into mainstream politics. However, growing awareness, educational advancement, and the role of women in local governance through Panchayati Raj institutions highlight a positive shift. For a more inclusive democracy in Assam, it is essential to ensure greater political empowerment of women through reservations, supportive policies, and changing social attitudes.

### **Importance of women in politics:**

The participation of women in politics is essential for building a just, inclusive, and representative society. Women bring unique perspectives, empathy, and attention to social issues such as education, health, child welfare, and gender equality, which often remain underemphasized in male-dominated political systems. Their active involvement strengthens democracy by ensuring that the voices and concerns of nearly half the population are heard in decision-making processes. Moreover, women leaders serve as role models, inspiring younger generations and challenging traditional gender stereotypes. By promoting equality and social development, women in politics play a crucial role in shaping policies that benefit the entire society and foster sustainable progress.

In conclusion, women in Assam's politics have made significant contributions despite facing social, economic, and cultural challenges. Their participation in grassroots movements, local governance, and state-level politics highlights their potential to influence policy and drive social change. While underrepresentation remains an issue, increasing awareness, education, and supportive measures are gradually empowering more women to take active roles in political decision-making. Strengthening women's political presence is essential for a more inclusive, balanced, and progressive Assam.

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## About the Contributors

**Shri Mayur Bora** is an Indian writer, critic and public speaker from Assam. He is one of the versatile writers on multidisciplinary issues related to society and people.

**Dr. Biswajit Choudhury** is presently working as an Assistant Professor (Selection Grade), Department of Political Science, Handique Girls' College, Guwahati, Assam. He can be reached via E-mail: [cbiswajnu@gmail.com](mailto:cbiswajnu@gmail.com)

**Dr. Pallavi Deka** is presently working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science, Handique Girls' College, Guwahati, Assam.

**Ms. Urmimala Sengupta** is an alumna of the Department of Political Science, Handique Girls' College. She is presently serving as a State Programme Lead in an international organization.

**Dr. Nazneen Sultana** is an alumna of the Department of Political Science, Handique Girls' College. She has been awarded Ph.D. in the month of April from Noth Eastern Hill University (NEHU)

**Ms. Tanishka Kashyap** is a 5th Semester (Major) student of the Department of Political Science, Handique Girls' College.

**Ms. Tanisha Sharma** is a 5th Semester (Major) student of the Department of Political Science, Handique Girls' College.

**Ms. Sammriddha Manisha Handique** is a 3rd Semester (Major) student of the Department of Political Science, Handique Girls' College.

**Ms. Adrita Parashar** is a 3rd Semester (Major) student of the Department of Political Science, Handique Girls' College.

**Ms. Ireen Deori** is a 3rd Semester (Major) student of the Department of Political Science, Handique Girls' College.

**Ms.Gargi Saikia** is a 5th Semester (Major) student of the Department of Political Science, Handique Girls' College.

**Ms. Kabyasikha Kalita** is a 3rd Semester (Major) student of the Department of Political Science, Handique Girls' College.

**Ms. Ankita Deka** is a 5th Semester (Major) student of the Department of Political Science, Handique Girls' College.