

Cachar: The Hub of National Leader's Visit During The Freedom Movement of India.

Habibullah Mazumder.

ABSTRACT:- Cachar occupied an important position in the national politics of India during the colonial period. It had been a centre of visits of many national political leaders and the presidents of Indian National Congress in the first half of 20th century. Cachar, a Bengali speaking people, was associated with Bengal before its inclusion with Assam in 1874. Cachar was fortunate enough for producing a number of intellectual genius, academicians and farsighted politicians, who had guided the people in many directions. As a result, the leaders of Cachar like Din Nath Datta, Kamini Kumar Chanda, Mahesh Chanda Datta, Kali Mohan Dev had maintained close association with the Indian National Congress from the beginning session of it. For example, Sri Mohitosh Pirkayastha, a veteran Congress leader and freedom fighter of Surma Valley wrote in his *Cachar Congresser Sankipto Ithihash* that Sir Din Nath Datta, Manager of Cachar Native Joint Stock Company, had joined the 2nd session of Indian National Congress in 1886 as a representative of the company. This was the beginning of joining of Cachar with the Indian National Congress almost from the foundation year of the Congress. Later on, Ramani Mohan Das, had participated in the 5th session of Congress in 1889. Ramani Mohan Das also had participated the 16th session of Indian National Congress held in Lahore. In 1901, Kamini Kumar Chanda (Silchar), Ramani Mohan Das (Karimganj) and Sachindra Chandra Singh had participated in the 17th session of Indian National Congress held in Calcutta. Sri Kamini Kumar Chanda, Mahesh Chandra Datta, Kali Mohan Dev also attended the Calcutta session of Indian National Congress held in December, 1906 as the representative of Cachar. So, the background behind the visit of national leaders in Cachar had already been set up by the educated leaders of Cachar, who had maintained their connection with the Congress programmes and activities by attending the different sessions of Indian National Congress. It was under their guidance, Cachar had been able to attract the attention of many national politicians and intellectuals of India. The people of Cachar under the shade of their leaders like Arun Kumar Chanda, Satindra Mohan Dev, Abdul Matlib Mazumder, Gulam Sabir Khan, Hurmat Ali Barlasakar, Sanat Kumar Das and others had participated in the Gandhian phase of nationalist politics from the non-co-operation movement (1920-22) onwards. With a view to encourage the people of Cachar towards the nationalist upsurge, many national political figures had visited Cachar and delivered lectures in the different parts of the district. The objective of writing this paper is to find out the visit of prominent leaders in Cachar district of Assam in details.

Key words: Cachar, Non-co-operation, Gandhi, Mohammad Ali, Nehru, Subhash Bose, freedom movement, Silchar.

I. INTRODUCTION:

Cachar stands in the central part of many important neighbouring states like Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya and also it is related to Bengal in western direction. It had witnessed and observed many historical events in the entire process of its state formation, right from ancient to modern period. Cachari kingdom had been prevailed till the establishment of the colonial rule in Cachar in 1832, when its last ruler Gobinda Chanda was assassinated leaving no heir to throne after him. After the annexation of Cachar by the English in 1832, it was placed under the Dacca administration of Bengal. Cachar came under the colonial administration of Assam in 1874, when Assam was created as a Chief Commissioner's province. Cachar due to its geographical location, emerged as an important political centre of regional and national leaders of India. Cachar was adjacent to Bengal province and had the test of political awakening, which had been occurred in Bengal time to time. Cachar had witnessed the rising consciousness among the people of Bengal after the revolt of 1857 due to its union with Bengal till 1874. With the foundation of Indian National Congress in 1885, the political awareness in Cachar was further developed due to the visit of many national leaders in Cachar and it's Headquarter in Silchar. Hailakandi was also not exception from the visit of the prominent figures of India. The visits of national leaders like Bipin Chandra Paul, M.K.Gandhi, Mohammad Ali, Saukat Ali, Subash Chandra Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru and others is briefly discussed below.

II. BIPIN CHANDRA PAUL:

Bipin Chandra Paul was a popular figure in the modern history of India. His name was associated with the "Lal-Bal-Paul" group of Indian history, which indicates the names viz Lala Lajpat Roy, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Paul. B.C.Paul was a great orator and used to deliver fiery speeches in public platform throughout the whole of India, particularly during the swadeshi movement in 1905-06. He had visited Silchar many times on the different occasions. In 1899, he came in Silchar as a preacher of Brahmanic religion and delivered a number of lectures in the different gatherings in Silchar.¹ His meetings were basically attended by the educated section along with some English people. In 1906, B.C.Paul came to Silchar for the second time on the issue of preaching swadeshi movement.² He had delivered a number of lectures in Silchar. One at Malugram, near the Godown of D.N.Datt's house, which was attended by many students of Silchar Govt. Boys High School. Another gathering of women was organized in the house of Mahesh Chandra Datta, in which B.C.Paul had addressed the women and urged them to boycott the English schools and goods of the British. In 1908, B.C.Paul had again visited Silchar.³ On the occasion of his coming in Silchar; a swadeshi meeting was organized at Katigorah Barni Mela. Barni Mela is a fair, which is held in every year at Katigorah in the district of Cachar. Many thousands of people from all walks of life assembled at this Mela (fair) from the different parts of Cachar and sometimes from the neighbouring district like Sylhet also during the pre-independence period. Many times, this gathering was used as a means of expanding the political activities by the Indian freedom fighters. So, the arrival of B.C.Paul in Silchar in 1908 was a kind of big opportunity for the leading political leaders of Cachar to held a meeting at Barni Mela, Katigorah. Sri Kali Mohan Dev, Mahesh Chandra Datta, Nagendra Nath Datta along with B.C.Paul left Silchar for attending the meeting at Katigorah. But before their arrival, the president of Mela Committee (Deputy Commissioner, Silchar) had issued a notice that no political meeting can be organized inside the mela campus.⁴ Kali Mohan Dev, though disappointed, but immediately purchased a land (approximately 18 kathas) with the co-operation of his two clients at Katigorah.⁵ Notably, Kali Mohan Dev was an advocate and political leader of Silchar. On the purchased land, finally, B.C.Paul had delivered his swadeshi lecture and thus, the prestige of the leaders of Cachar and the Government order, both maintained. B.C.Paul stayed for two days after Barni Mela in the house of D.N. Datta at Malugram and in the house of Mahesh Chandra Datta at Ukilpatty, Silchar.⁶ In 1927, B.C.Paul had visited Silchar for the last time. He was accompanied by Dr. Sundari Mohan Das.

III. M.K.GANDHI:

Mohan Das Karam Chand Gandhi known as Mahatma Gandhi is considered as the central figure of India's struggle for freedom. Mahatma Gandhi had come to Silchar on August 1921, as a part of his campaign for the non-co-operation movement. The anti-British movement in Cachar went to develop with the visit of Gandhi, M. Ali and others in Silchar.⁷ M.K. Gandhi and Moulana Mohammed Ali came to Silchar on 26 August 1921 and stayed in Chanda Bhawan as the guest of Kamini Kumar Chanda.⁸ They came to Silchar by train from Lumding. Gandhi was accompanied by Mohammad Ali, his wife Begum Mohammad Ali, Seth Jamun Lal Bajaj, and others. They urged the people to boycott the British goods, resign from government institutions and to maintain Hindu-Muslim unity etc. Thousands of people took oath in front of Gandhi and Ali Brothers that they would not wear foreign cloths and sell British goods henceforth. Later on, the mob at Fatakbar, organised bonfire of foreign cloth in the presence of national leaders amidst shouting slogans like Gandhiji ki joy, Ali Baiya ki joy, Hindu Muslim Bai Bai etc.⁹ After completion of his speech at Fatak Bazar, Gandhi visited the National School ie Swadeshi School, which is now known as D.N.N.K.Girl's High School, Silchar Club Road. Gandhi had spun the Charka on the verandah of the school, which is preserved for the decades as a mark of the visit of Gandhi in connection with the non-co-operation movement. His visit also marked the beginning of women's participation in the political arena of Cachar. Before him, the women section of the society was basically confined to their houses during any political campaign and gathering, though B C Paul had tried to break this system earlier during his visits in Cachar. But during the visit of Gandhi, the women for the first time came to the streets of Silchar to look him and listen to his lecture. Many folk songs were also composed, which were related to the visit of Gandhi. It was out of divine spirit, a marble statue of Gandhi was placed nearby the Deity at Annapurna Temple at present Annapurna Ghat by Vishun Lala. So, Gandji's visit at Silchar had left a deep socio-cultural, political and spiritual impact on the life of the people of Cachar. In addition to this, a statue of Mahatma Gandhi at Fatak Bazar, where Gandhi had delivered his lecture is even today carries the memory of his historic visit in this region.

IV. MOHAMMAD ALI:

Mohammad Ali Jauhar was a nationalist leader and had struggled for the independence of India. During the non-co-operation movement (1920-22), Mohammed Ali along with M K Gandhi toured all over India and delivered speeches against the British rule in India. He urged the public to give up their titles, boycott the British goods, use the swadeshi goods and set up native schools and colleges. As a part of his campaign, Mohammad

Ali with M K Gandhi came to Silchar and delivered a lecture on the non-co-operation movement at Fatak Bazar in Silchar. Mohammad Ali was an advocate of Hindu-Muslim unity and appealed to both the communities to maintain it in their daily life. He came to Silchar along with M.K. Gandhi on August in 1921.¹⁰ Mohammad Ali had delivered lecture at Fatak Bazar, Silchar, in which many thousands of people had attended. The participants had burnt the foreign clothes and the British goods.¹¹ He also stayed in Chanda Bhawan as the guest of Kamini Kumar Chanda. M. Ali addressed a public meeting attended by 10,000 people at Fatak Bazar, Silchar. He urged the people to boycott the British goods, resign from government institutions and to maintain Hindu-Muslim unity etc. Thousands of people took oath in front of Gandhi and Ali Brothers that they would not wear foreign cloths and sell British goods henceforth. Later on, the mob at Fatak Bazar, organized bonfire of foreign cloth in the presence of national leaders amidst shouting slogans like Gandhiji ki joy, Ali Baiya ki joy, Hindu Muslim bai-bai etc. Begum M. Ali also addressed a woman's meeting at Theatre Hall. Mohammad Ali's mother was an inspiring lady, who injected the spirit of struggles into the brain of her sons for the cause of India's freedom. Mohammad Ali's mother Abadi Begum, was affectionately known as Bi-Amma. He was a renowned leader of Indian national movement. Mohammad Ali's another brother Saukat Ali was also a popular national leader of India, who dedicated his life for the cause of India's freedom. Saukat Ali had delivered an inaugural lecture in Fourth Surma Valley Rastriya Sanmilon held in Karimganj, in 1920, which was presided by Bipin Chandra Paul. M. Ali was popularly known as Mohammad Ali Jauhar of "Ali Brothers".

V. JAWAHARLAL NEHRU:

Jawaharlal Nehru, the son of Motilal Nehru, was one of the front ranking leaders of India's struggle for independence. Jawaharlal Nehru had visited twice in the district of Cachar, Silchar in Assam during the colonial period of India. J Nehru as President of Indian National Congress, arrived Silchar in 1937 to spearhead the Congress activities in this region. A public meeting was organized in Silchar on the arrival of Jawharlal Nehru. J. Nehru had delivered a number of lectures in Silchar on the different occasions. In one gathering, Hurmat Ali Barlaskar, a veteran Congress leader, had presented a Memorandum to Pandit Jawharlal Nehru, on his visit at Silchar on the eve of provincial election in 1937 on behalf of Cachar Krishak Sramik Samiti. The Memorandum urged the Congress to take more steps for the upliftment of the condition of the peasantry. J.Nehru had visited Cachar and Silchar for the second time, as the president of Indian National Congress. Pandit Nehru arrived at Silchar on December, 19, 1945, as a part of electioneering campaign and addressed an assembly of 5,000 persons. In Silchar J. Nehru accompanied by speakers Basanta Kuamr Das, B.N. Mukarjee, G. N. Bordoloi, K.N. Bhattacharjee. An address of welcome was given to him on behalf of the Cachar District Congress, The Silchar Municipal Board, The Silchar Mahila Samittee, The Cachar Merchant Association, The Silchar Student's Congress, The Hindustani Janasadaran. The following purses were also presented to him by the different societies.¹²

1. A purse of Rs. 1251 by INA Relief Fund Committee.
2. A purse of 1625 by Silchar Treaders Union.
3. A purse of 1501 by Cachar Merchant Association.
4. A purse of 501 by Silchar Mohila Samiti.
5. A purse of 151 by Silchar Student Congress.
6. A purse of 51 by Cachar Motor Drivers Association.
7. A purse of 21 by Boys and Girls Association, Tulapatty.

Jawaharlal Nehru among other things emphasised on Hindu-Muslim unity and described Pakistan scheme of Muslim League as impracticable. Khan Shaheb Rashid Ali Laskar, a nationalist Muslim (Silchar) thanked Pandit J. Nehru and condemned the demand of Pakistan by the communalist group stating that Pakistan was not clear to him as he failed to understand how the Muslim could shift to the Pakistan area leaving their immovable properties behind. Nehru, later on, went to Hailakandi via Duarbond by motor car and addressed a crowd of about 4,000 people at Hailakandi. Many nationalist leaders accompanied him in his tour. At Hailakandi, Nogendra Nath Deb Choudhury, the student and the ladies of Hailakandi gave an address of welcome to J. Nehru and the following purses were also given to him.

1. Rs. 451 and 601 by Merchant Association.
2. Rs. 105 by ladies of Hailakandi.

In fact, Pandit J. Nehru, president, Indian National Congress, visited Hailakandi for delivering lecture on the request of Abdul Matlib Mazumder, a nationalist Muslim Congress leader. Pandit Nehru was supposed to attend the programme at 8 am in the morning but he reached at 8 pm at Hailakandi. But the people had waited for him till night and did not leave the meeting ground till the end of Nehru's speech.¹³

VI. SUBASH CHANDRA BOSE:

Popularly known as Netaji Subash Chandra Bose, was another outstanding figure of Indian national movement. Subash Bose had played a significant role in India's struggle for freedom. He was a prominent leader of the Indian National Congress and served its national president in 1938 also. But due to ideological differences with Gandhi and others, he left Congress and formed Forward Block. He, later on, left India during the world war second (1939-45) and organized the Indian National Army and shouted with his famous slogan 'Give me blood, and I will give you freedom'. He had visited Silchar in April 1938 and delivered lecture in public gathering.¹⁴ Netaji was feliciated at Silchar Municipality Ground, Silchar. He had urged the people to "work for the present and prepare for the future". It was said that he had visited the house of Rukmini Das, Ukilpatty, Silchar. Subash Chandra Bose had visited Hailakandi also in 1938 at the invitation of Abdul Matlib Mazumder.¹⁵ Subash Bose as president of Indian National Congress, delivered lecture at "Kachari Maidan" in Hailakandi, which was presided by Abdul Matlib Mazumder. In spite of heavy rain during the time of meeting, the people listened to the lecture of Netaji till the end of his lecture.¹⁶

Smti Aruna Asaf Ali also visited Cachar, Silchar during the second world war (1939-45). The Indian National Army or Azad Hind Fauz had arrived up to Mairang, Imphal, Manipur with a view to defeat the British soldiers. There were a good number of followers and activists of Azad Hind Fauz in Cachar and observing the movements of the Azad Hind Fauz. In such a situation, Aruna Asaf Ali had arrived from Calcutta secretly to Silchar to look after the situation in Cachar. She had stayed in the Bungalow of an ICS officer and toured many areas like Joypur, Jirighat, Maniarkhal etc and made contacts with the Azad Hind Fauz activists. During her visit, she was accompanied by Ali Barlaskar and others.¹⁷ Though many literatures did not make any reference of her visit due to her confidential journey. Hurmat Ali Barlaskar, a freedom fighter and leading congress leader of Cachar mentioned in his paper *Azad* regarding her tour in Silchar. It can be said here in this connection that during the second world war, Japan had tried to drop bombs in Silchar Railway Station with a view to cut supply of the British to Silchar, but unfortunately, due to wrong location, they dropped in the Derby Tea Estates, which caused the death of many animals. Realizing their mistake, they again circulated some leaflets appolozing for their wrong.

Apart from these national leaders, many regional leaders and Ministers to the Govt. of Assam had arrived Silchar and toured the different parts of the district to spearhead the political activities to drive out the British from the Indian sub-continent. Sri Basanta Kumar Das (Home Minister, Govt. of Assam), Rabindra Nath Aditya, Baidya Nath Mukarjee, had visited Cachar on 8th June, 1947, to participate in a meeting, convened by Sri Satindra Mohan Dev, M.L.A and Chairman, Silchar Municipality Board. Sri Bojendra Narayan Choudhury of Sylhet also attended the meeting.¹⁸ On February, 1947, the student of Cachar had organized a conference in Silchar. The conference was attended by the people of the district and the speeches were delivered by many leaders including A. C. Chatterjee (Major Gen. Azad Hind Fauj, Calcutta), Sri Niharendu Datta Mazumder and Dr. Amiya Chalkrabarti from Calcutta.¹⁹

V. CONCLUSION:

Cachar is considered as the "little extension of Bengal" due to its close affinity with Bengal province so far as the socio-cultural, political and economic aspects are concerned. So, any socio-political development took place in Bengal, it had its direct impact among the people of Cachar. Bengal was the hot centre of political discussion and intellectual awakening, which was reflected in the district of Cachar also. As a result, Cachar was visited by Bipin Chandra Paul in the beginning of 19th century. His visit was later on continued by many national leaders like M K Gandhi, Mohammad Ali of Ali Brothers, J. Nehru, Subhash Bose and others. Thus, Cachar became the hub of the tour of the nationalist leaders during the first half of the 20th century.

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+ Hurmat Ali Barlaskar was a freedom fighter and senior journalist of Surma Valley. He was the editor of *Surma* (a leading newspaper of the Valley) in 1949, *Azad*, *Cachar Samachar* (newspaper) etc in post-independent period. In all his papers, he vividly described the different phases of freedom struggle of India and the role of Cachar, Karimganj and Assam. He was also one of the members of the Enquiry Committee of Freedom Fighters of Assam, which was formed by the Govt. of Assam. The Report of the Enquiry Committee of Freedom Fighters was published in 1979 by the Govt. of Assam.

Habibullah Mazumder.