



Impact of Imposition of Bengali Language in Assam as Official Language after Yandaboo Treaty

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Date of Submission: 22-02-2021

Date of Acceptance: 06-03-2021

ABSTRACT:

After Yandaboo treaty of 1826 whole Assam became part of British India. In 1836 Persian was Replaced by Bengali as court language. Replacement of Assamese by Bengali language, and Bengali Language becoming medium of instruction in schools instead of Assamese. Dominance of Bengali Speaking people in administrative services of Assam and dominance of Bengali intellectuals and Settling of Muslim farmers from Eastern Bengal into Assam and ethnic conflict like bongal kheda Movement. During the dark age of Assamese language the social gap between Bengali and Assamese Community started to increase. This paper attempts to look onto the impact of Bengali language in Assam by Britishers and roots of ethnic conflicts.

KEYWORDS: Yandaboo treaty, ethnic conflict, Dark Age and etc.

I. INTRODUCTION

Assam became the part of British India after signing of Yandaboo treaty on 24 February 1826. After annexation Assam was under the administrative control of Bengal Presidency. Assam before pre British period (Brahmaputra valley) was ruled by Ahom Kingdom, a race from the northern Shan states of Upper Burma, who, at the beginning of the thirteenth century around year 1288, crossed the Patkai and settled in the territory around Sibsagar. It's first king was Sukhapa and this kingdom was known for it's closed door approach. They maintained cordial relations with their neighbors. The Ahom kingdom was about 500 miles in length with an average breadth of 60 miles; the kingdom was bounded by Habraghat Pargana of Rangpur district of Bengal in south, on north by a mountain range inhabited by Bhutanese, in the west by the Manas or Manaha River on north bank. Even Assam also had a trade relation with china

also. Even before the first Anglo-Burmese war Britishers were in contact with semi-independent chiefs and tribes of North-Eastern frontier areas because for exploring trade opportunities with China and Burma and partly due to invitation for defense by local native people. Around 18th century Assam royal court started become instable was mainly a place of intrigues and Conspiracies, Mamoria rebellion of 1769 was result of religious intolerance of royal family. In 1788 rebels captured the capital and seized the reins of governance and reigning King Gaurinath Singha was forced to flee to Gauhati (Guwahati). In 1792 after appeal for aid King Gaurinath Singha Lord Cornwallis sent six companies of British forces under captain Welish and reinstated Gaurinath Singha as king. However due to "Non-intervention" policy of British for Ahom Kingdom companies of forces was called back. Finally after victory of Britishers in First Anglo-Burmese war Assam, Manipur and Arakan became part of British India. This was starting of colonial rule in Assam.

In 1836 Persian language replaced by Bengali language as court language which was not their

Mother tongue. Britishers initially considered Assamese as mere dialect of Bengali language, This language imposition saw widespread protest across the Assamese community In 1852, Assamese nationalist Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan petitioned to Moffat Mills against instruction in the vernacular schools being imparted in foreign language, that is, Bengali (Baruah 1999: 71) this language imposition caused social dominance of Bengalis in Assam. Even Britishers were also referred as "Boga-Bengali" means white Bengalis, sri Maniram Dewan (Maniram Dutta Baruah) who was once British loyalist and he was also instrumental in establishing tea plantation in Assam turned into Anti British, he was vocal about reinstating Assamese language was giving



preference to Assamese local youths for jobs in administration instead of Marwaris and Bengalis he also took in 1857 revolt, after 1857 revolt Britishers found him guilty and sentenced to death. This language imposition was starting point social gap between two linguistic communities. In 1873 again Assamese language was reinstated as court language. But various intellectuals consider the time period of 1836 to 1873 as Dark Age of Assamese language. It is also said that during this dark age of Assamese language various original Assamese words were replaced by Bengali. The main credit of reinstating Assamese language as court language in Assam goes to an American Missionary Nathan Brown. In 1846 first Assamese magazine 'Arundo' was published by American missionary who was also responsible for creating awareness among Assamese people especially youths about their mother tongue Assamese. During the dark age of Assamese language Bengali language was taught in schools and most of the text books used were in Bengali language. Even after the chief commissioner's assurance that Assamese wouldn't be supplanted, Bengali remained the medium of instruction in middle grades till the late of 19th century (Chattopadhyay: 20-21). It also led to protest by Assamese speaker that why Bengali was medium of instruction in medium and high schools. Britishers required the help of Bengali speaking people for administrative purposes. In administrative jobs Bengali people outnumbered Assamese people, Bengalis were having the administrative jobs and it is also contributed due to better infrastructure of Bengal and the series of migrants came into Assam after Yandaboo Treaty. Assam was sparsely populated and even in the pre British era Ahom aristocracy used to depend on bonded system of labour (chattel slaves), the Brahmin and Mahanta landowners had to depend on bonded slaves for cultivation of devottar, brahmottar and dharmottar lands. Though this system of bonded slavery/chattel slaves was abolished in 1848. During colonial period large scale of migration took place in Assam because of its sparse population. The migration in Assam can be categorized into five types (Goswami, 1985). First, laborers to work in the tea gardens of Assam coming from Bihar, Orissa, Chotanagpur, Madras, West Provinces, Central Provinces and United Provinces. Britishers also brought Chinese planters to work in tea gardens of Assam. Second, farmers settling in the agricultural lands of the valley and coming largely from the districts of East Bengal; Third, immigrants from Nepal engaged in live-stock etc; Fourth, traders and artisans; and Fifth, other migrants such

as salary earners, planters, miners, administrators, laborers etc. coming from various parts of India and abroad. In this paper we would focus on migration issues related to migration of people of Bengal into Assam. The process of bringing migrants into Assam was started by Britishers during colonial rule. The Jenkins scheme of colonization 1833 supports the stated fact of process of bringing vagrants into Assam was begun by Britishers. In this plan permitted Europeans to hold land outside Presidency town. This plan of colonization was essentially the brainchild of Francis Jenkins in a report dated 22 July 1833 supported for speculation of capital of Englishmen on Wastelands. Jenkins was even prepared to uproot nearby ryots through biased land approach of Britishers for white colonialist. Britishers encouraged immigration in Assam purely on economic ground. Colonialist extended the policy of immigration to cultivation of wastelands and it got immense response from outside Brahmaputra valley (H Bareh, Encyclopedia of North East India Vol. II Assam, Mittal Publications Delhi, 2001). Initially people of Brahmaputra Valley welcomed it and praised it because due to its economic development of the province. Later the attitude of people of the valley changed due to continuous inflow of migrants where most of them were Muslims from Mymensingh district of Bengal. The population of Muslims in Brahmaputra valley in 1911 was 3,65,540 which rose to 5,94,981 in 1921. Large scale of migration cause (i) demographic shift favoring Muslims (ii) affecting rural economy (iii) Ecological threat due to occupation of wastelands, grazing lands and forest (iv) Communal tensions between indigenous community and immigrants in rural areas. To prevent clashes between two communities colonial district officials devised a measure called Line system in 1916 but implemented in 1920. In this system indiscriminate settlement of immigrants in Assamese inhabited areas were prohibited and there was demarcation of areas of immigrants and indigenous people (A Guha, Planters Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle & Electoral Politics in Assam, 1826-1947, New Delhi, ICHR, 1947). In 1871 first census of India was conducted there it showed altering demography of Assam because of settling of people of Bengal and migration of people of Bengal for various job opportunities. At the beginning of 20th century most of the teachers, doctors, journalists and clerks were Bengali speakers. The population of Bengali speakers in Assam in 1931 was 39,54,035. According to 1931 census report Assamese speakers constituted 31.42 percent. The population of Assam increased at rate of 1.38 to 2.10 percent



during period 1940-41. During this population of Bengali speakers increased rapidly. In 1937 during Nehru's visit to Assam, two members of Assam Pradesh Congress Committee Ambikagiri Rai Chowdhury and Nilamoni Phukan presented a memorandum to Nehru. Various Assamese leaders also raised slogans of "Assam for Assamese". The eve of Indian independence was very much crucial for Assam province because various parts of Assam province had Muslim majority, the main event was partitioning of various districts of Assam into either dominion of India or dominion of Pakistan and the former Prime minister of Assam Janab Muhammad Sadullah wanted that Assam should be under dominion of Pakistan. Various Assamese wanted for linguistic homogeneity. During the time of partition there was a tension in Brahmaputra Valley regarding Barak valley and Shylet. After Shylet referendum Shylet went in favour of merger with Pakistan, but various Assamese leaders and people Brahmaputra valley were happy with this referendum. Especially people in Brahmaputra Valley wanted merger of Cachar and Shylet district with Pakistan so that Assam could get out of the clutches of Bengali babus. On 18 February 1948 Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi wrote to Sardar Vallabhai Patel that "Maulana Sahib (e.g. Azad) seemed to come to the conclusion that the only alternative to this state of things is to separate the Bengali district of Sylhet and a portion of Cachar from Assam and join these with Bengal as a consummation to which the Assamese people are looking forward for the last 70 years." In 1945 general election in Assam, Pradesh Congress manifesto mainly focused on preservation of Assamese identity and Assamese language. During Gopinath Bordoloi's regime in 1945 his government stopped giving ownership of lands to Muslim farmers from East Bengal. He also worked on protecting land rights of indigenous people of Assam. But there was also a tension among various Assamese nationalist regarding safeguarding of culture; various Assamese nationalist was also in favour of secession from India if Indian government was able to accept the proposal to control the influx of people of Bengal into Assam. Assam Sahitya Shabha was also vocal about protecting Assamese culture and its rights. Assam Sahitya Shabha was very much vocal about having Assamese as sole official language in the state, they also conducted various important events to reach out to the mass people of Assam of getting them realize about the importance of having Assamese language as official language. Even they reached to the tribal chiefs to get their support of having Assamese language as official language. Though Amalendu Guha viewed

the efforts of ASS as chauvinistic one. In 1937 Muhammad Sadullah government in Assam launched a program called "Grow more Food" which encouraged settlers from East Bengal to come in Assam by opening the grazing reserves. However Lord Wavell described it as "Grow more Muslims". The language was termed during 18th century as Assamese; before it was known as *Desi Bhasha*. This language belongs to family of Indo-Aryan languages.

II. AFTERMATH INDIAN INDEPENDENCE:

On 15 August 1947 India got its independence from British Empire which was the dream of Indians. On the other side Pakistan was carved out of India. Pakistan was based on M.A Jinnah's two nation theory. The new nation was formed by carving out Muslim majority areas of British India. Where Bengal and Punjab was partitioned on a communal line and lot of non Muslims took refuge in India. In Assam also lot of refugees came from East Pakistan and population of Assam increased rapidly. This created a concern among Assamese about preservation of their identity, culture and language. In 1951 census the population of Bengali speakers increased. Bengalis had the best of the jobs and education. This also led to a sense of deprivation amongst Assamese youths. In various times Bengalis used to consider Assamese as inferior quality to them. Once Gopinath Bordoloi requested Jawaharlal Nehru to limit the number of refugees to Assam. In 1951 census the number of Bengali speaker increased. The population distribution of Bengali speakers was not uniform rather population distribution of Assamese speakers was found to be uniform. After partition lot of refugees from East Pakistan moved to Assam which is also main cause of population increase and increase in number of Bengali speakers. In 1951 process of "National Registration of citizens" was initiated to counter illegal immigration in Assam. In 1955 Government of India passed 'Citizenship Act' that mentioned the cutoff date for migrants. This act supported the vision of NRC.

During colonial time policies of Government affected the rural economy a lot. In 1917 Assam Sahitya Shabha was formed to promote Assamese language and its literature, they started an official language movement that Assamese should be state official language and it was supported by student community under the banner of All Assam Students' Federation (under the banner of the Students' Association of Gauhati). In



APCC meeting there was a proposal of having Assamese as sole link language in the state. The cultural rift between Assamese and Bengali speaking people took shape of “Bongal kheda movement” Bongal means Bengalis and kheda means ouster collectively it means ouster the Bengalis from Assam. It sooner turned into a violence when Assamese mob started attacking Bengali speaking people, destroying shops owned by Bengalis. The violence started after the first attack on Bengali started at Cotton College in Guwahati. Assamese mob entered the District magistrate’s bungalow and stabbed him even Deputy Inspector General of Police was not also spared and both of them were Bengali. Later one man enquiry commission was set up by Justice Gopal Mehrotra. In the report it was found that nine Bengalis were killed and more than one hundred were injured.

In 1959 Assam official language movement got momentum under the pressure of Assam Sahitya Sabha and in 1960 then Chief minister of Assam Sri Bimala Prasad Chaliha passed Assamese official language act in Assam legislative Assembly. This act saw huge protest from non Assamese in Shillong and Bengalis from Barak valley. Later due to intervention of Lal Bahadur Shastri solution was found (Shastri formula) and Bengali was given official language status in Barak Valley.

III. CONCLUSION

The mistake of imposing Bengali language in Assam as court language by Britishers resulted into a cultural rift between Assamese and Bengali speaking people and bittered the relation between two linguistic communities. This single mistake of imposition of language later turned into an political issue. Aftermath Indian independence cultural rift turned into a violent clash. It also later gave birth to an insurgent movement. It also influenced the political movements in the state. It had a propounding effect on judiciary, politics and cultural effect on both communities and their relation.

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