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## Student Movements in Assam: A Study from the Pre Independent to Post Independent Era.

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### ABSTRACT:

Student's movements in the Assam are the most vocal, influential and articulate group. Entire region have witnessed student's movements to varying extent. They have addressed all kinds of issues in their respective areas which pertain to the academic institutions, ethnic or tribal identity, migration, boundary disputes, political autonomy of their respective regions, corruption, social issues, environment, development. Since the colonial rule, The priority given to these issues varies according to the political and economic context of the students' movements in different period of time. Although students' movements in the Assam became more visible in the public space in the post-Independence period, they were active in pre-Independence period too. It is becoming clear that students are seen as the catalyst for social transformation. the perception of student politics in Assam and their continuing role in state and politics have to be understood within the context of historical socio-cultural and economic grievances. it is also has the manifestations of deep-rooted youth frustrations against the institutional failure of the governmental machinery. In the maddest of cultural pluralism the students organizations in Assam creates mass awareness of the rights and entitlements among the common people.

**Keywords:** Colonial period, Post-colonial, student movement , Student Organization, Political-participation, Cultural Pluralism, Autonomy movement, AASU, ABSU, Post- Assam Movement.

### OBJECTIVES :

The study intended to understand the process of student politics in pre and post colonial Assam from a theoretical perspective . This paper also made an attempt to analyse the role of the student organizations in holding a vibrant and virtuous democracy .

### LITERATURE REVIEW:

Several works on student movement, both pre and post colonial Assam had already been done . The following brief literature review outlines the focal points of scholarly research. Among those, the works of R.C. Kalita, Meeta Deka, Shiela Bora are prominent in this regard. There are varied ideas among the intellectuals on the question of student's politics. According to Meeta Deka the growth of student's movement is imperatively accelerated when they become conscious of hegemonic influences of a bourgeoisie socio-economic background on proletariats . Romesh Ch. Kalita in his work „Bharotor Chatro Aandolonot Asomiya Chatror Bhumika' (a study on the role of Assamese students in the struggle for freedom movement of India 1826-1947) tried to understand the student's movement of Assam and their role in the freedom struggle through a standard Marxist perspective. Meeta Deka in her wok "Student Movement in Assam" threw light on the politics of the pre-independence era of Assam. After R.C Kalita, others like Shiela Bora and Meeta Deka attempted to systematically study the student's movement of Assam. However, they seem quite insufficient. Keeping this view in mind, a humble attempt is being made to frame a theoretical concept of the student movement of Assam.

### Methodology :

The study is basically descriptive and analytics based both primary and secondary sources . The secondary data are collected from various source like books, journals, television, newspapers and internet. Also, the researchers eye observations and internal criticisms are used for further analysis .

### Introduction:

In every society of the world students have remains as a prime agents of social change. In culturally pluralistic society of Assam also there are various student groups demanding their own political cultural and socio-economic rights. Their participation in the political affairs brings a very positive sign for

a democratic government as well as for political development of any society. The students participation in the political mobilization of Assam can be seen as a result of the feelings of their relative deprivation. They have addressed all kinds of issues in their respective issues which pertain to the academic institutions, ethnic or tribal identity, migration, boundary disputes, political autonomy of their respective regions, corruption, social issues, environment, development, Inner Line Permit, citizenship, etc. This paper tries to examine the contribution of student organizations in holding a vibrant and virtuous democracy in the political landscape of Assam.

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### **Student movement during freedom struggle :**

During the Indian independence movement, students played an important role in the struggle for freedom from British colonial rule. Students were involved in a range of activities such as boycotts, protests, and demonstrations, and played a key role in organizing and mobilizing support for the independence movement. Many student leaders emerged during this time, and their contributions helped to shape the future of India. It was noticed that political leaflets and pamphlets were widely and regularly circulated among the students right from the beginning of the Swadeshi Movement . During Swadeshi movement Even the students were required to commit to memory the patriotic songs of Bankim Chandra's Anandamath. There was an exhibition at the Habiganj National School in 1909 where nitric acid and hydrochloric acid prepared by the students were exhibited. Besides this, the paintings on Lala Lajpat Rai, Aurobindo Ghose and Ajit Singh were also shown. The National Schools in Sylhet were used like those in East Bengal as centres for spreading the antiPartition agitation. The student community, thus, played an important role in the Swadeshi movement in Assam. They were at the forefront of the Swadeshi campaign and remained effective in places like Barpeta, Tezpur in the matter of popularizing the use of Swadeshi items. Their role was vital in the urban areas of the both the valleys in organizing meetings and demonstrations. But the Government was alarmed of their activities and R. W. Carlyle, the Officiating Chief Secretary to the Government, issued a confidential circular to the District Magistrates and Collectors. He directed them to take severe action against the educational institutions if they failed to prevent their students from participating in anti-Government activities. The non-cooperation movement, launched under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, was a massive success in the colonial province of Assam. This was made possible by the participation of the people en masse, especially of students from different schools and colleges. Like in other parts of Assam, students of the Sonitpur district (a part of the Darrang district in the 1920s) led by figures like Omeo Kumar Das, Lakshmidhar Sarma, Chandranath Sarma and others, played an active role in the movement. Many students from Assam participated in the All India Students' Conference held in Nagpur in 1920, where the future course of action for the Movement was discussed. Upon their return, the students began the Non-Cooperation Movement in Assam with the boycott of government educational institutions in January 1921. This boycott led to the formation of alternative spaces for education. National schools and colleges now began to appear in different places. A Jatiya Vidyalaya was founded and run by the leaders of the movement in the Tezpur town of Sonitpur district. The students of Sonitpur also travelled to various rural and urban areas to picket shops selling foreign goods and to discourage the people from consuming intoxicants like opium. The commitment and patriotism of the students of Sonitpur contributed significantly to the success of the Non-Cooperation Movement in Assam and the larger struggle for India's independence .

When the whole country was preparing for the start of the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930, students in Assam also played a key role. To discourage and stop students to participate in the Civil Disobedience Movement, J.R. Cunningham, the then powerful Director of Public Information of Assam, issued the Cunningham circular in 1930 imposing a blanket ban on any anti-British and pro- swadeshi activity by students. It forced parents, guardians and students to furnish assurances of good behaviour and also asked them to sign an undertaking that they would have to quit their schools and colleges if they participated in anti-government demonstrations or movements. The circular was aimed to forbade students from participating in political activities and so, it raised a very strong response. Thousands of students, throughout Assam, left their educational institutions. Many swadeshi educational institutions like Kamrup Academy of Guwahati and Sibsagar Vidyapeeth were also established at the same time to accommodate the students leaving British Govt. school & colleges. The Kamrup Academy, the first swadeshi school in the Northeast, was conceived with Rai Bahadur Kalicharan Sengupta as its president and Gaurikanta Talukdar as its secretary. The school started functioning on July 15, 1930 and initially, lessons were imparted in both Bengali and Assamese language. Physical education was greatly stressed upon and many students became disciples of Khudu Mahanta, the legendary sword and stick trainer who taught the skills of self defence in the academy. Many other prominent educational institution of Guwahati like B. Baruah College and J.B. Law Colleges started from these premises of the Kamrup Academy. The school stands as a symbol of a great heritage, sacrifice and commitment During Shyama Prasad Mukherjee's visit to the school as the Union education minister, he was very impressed and said, "What India needs is man making education as prescribed by Swami Vivekananda. Nationalist institutions like Kamrup Academy should serve as the model for the country."

Assamese students played a crucial role in the Quit India Movement. After the arrest of the Congress leaders and workers, the students became active, took the initiative and led the movement for more than four months. A large number of students were arrested and convicted for their participation in the movement. At Lakhimpur, Tilak Datta, Khareswar Sarma, Lakshi Sarma were cruelly assaulted for picketing at schools and courts. Students' processions in Nowgong town, Dergaon, Barpeta, Sibsagar were lathi charged and many students got injury as a result. In Sibsagar, girl students like Kalpana Barua, Lili Bora, Bijoy Hazarika and many others were injured because of lathi charge. At Jorhat, a notorious incident took place. Arrested students were left near a forest or desolate place. But in spite of all these repressive measures, the administration failed to suppress the rising temper of the students.

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### **Student Movement in Assam after independence :**

The students' activism in Assam inherits the legacy of India's struggle against the British Colonialism. During the post-colonial Assam, the student community as a whole played a significant role behind the outbreak of the Refinery Movement in 1956, the Language Movement in the 1960s and even in the movement against the food crisis in the 1960s and it's afterward. But, the birth of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) in 1967 had brought

some significant changes and the trend of independent students' movement in Assam was started. Eventually, AASU becomes one of the strongest leaders of social and democratic movements in post-colonial Assam. Instances of two major movements in this regard are the Movement for Medium of Instruction in 1973, the Assam Movement of 1979-85. The question of citizenship, the issue of illegal immigrants and the apprehension to the question of identity among the diverse ethnic groups of Assam are deeply rooted in these movements of post-colonial Assam. Besides, they have been also playing a major role in the electoral politics of the state. Besides AASU, some other students organisations such as the All Assam Minority Students Union (AAMSU), All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), Karbi Students Association (KBA), and Dimasa Students Union (ADSU) and All Cachar Students' Association (ACSA) have been mobilising students in Assam. The six year movement against the foreign nationals led by the AASU is the most important example of one the longest movements in the country. This movement became a reference point of the students' movements in the Northeast India from 1979. This movement began in 1979 and ended in 1985 with the signing of Assam Accord between the AASU, state the central government. The movement was led by the AASU, in which other organisations such as Asom Gan Parishad participated, and other sections including the plain tribes such as Bodos had participated. The students belonging to the Bodos had participated in the movement. But they developed differences with the clause 6 of the Assam Accord.

Recently while the Centre is preparing to implement the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 (CAA) across the country, All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and other students' organisations in the north-eastern region have intensified their agitation against the contentious law. North East Students' Organisation -- comprising All Assam Students' Union (AASU), All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU), Khasi Students' Union (KSU), Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP), Garo Students' Union (GSU), Naga Students' Federation (NSF), Twipra Student Federation (TSF), All Manipur Students' Union (AMSU) -- observed Friday as 'black day' across the region.

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### Conclusion:

The student movement under the period of study was influenced by three basic concepts of student's politics i.e. the idea of student's power, idea of a political student movement and the idea of study and struggle. The student's power is a concept where the ideologue speaks for independent or political student's movement. Student's movement believes that they can work for revolutionary transformation of the society. The trend would not like to confine student's movement within the educational campus or only to protest against the flawed educational system. Rather they believe in taking active participation and even leading participation towards social change. They consider their struggle as a political struggle. The most important findings from the above discussions is the emergence of new students groups after the Post-Assam Movement period. And these organizations are more identify conscious which leads Assam a hub of 'identity politics'. Second important observation is due to the emergence of different kinds of protest platforms like social media in comparison to protest of 1980s, in present context physical mobilization of Students becoming less. Thirdly, Students groups are very successful regarding political articulation and political interest aggregation of societal issues.

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