

Silent Manifestation of Student Movement : A Case Study of Literary Activities of Students in the Barak Valley of Assam during 1980s

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Abstract :

Normally we view any mass movement as an organised effort where people take to streets with a goal to achieve and fulfil their demands with varied types of slogans, placards, festoons, etc. But here an attempt is being made to highlight a movement that was undertaken by the students of Barak Valley of Assam comprising the three districts of Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi from a different perspective. The movement was launched by them against linguistic and cultural chauvinism that affect the people at large of Barak Valley. The movement was carried out both actively and silently. Here we are going to highlight the silent manifestation of student movement through literary activities especially through little magazines. It needs mention here that this study is entirely carried out on the basis of primary data as no official document was made available except a very few stray references in some souvenirs and books.

Key words : *Student Movement, Little Magazines, Anti-Foreigners' Movement, Barak Valley, Linguistic Chauvinism*

It has been found that students of the Barak valley, situated in the southernmost tip of the state of Assam, were very much alive on various issues which affected the interest of the greater section of the society during the 80s of the last century. They were not only active in their movements on the roads, but they also laid their footprints in this struggle for socio-cultural as well as all round economic development of the society through various innovative procedures.

Statement of the Problem :

It is known to all that 'Anti-Foreigners' Movement' in Brahmaputra Valley of Assam, spearheaded by All Assam Students' Union (AASU), was at its peak in early 1980s which had its impact on the masses in the whole State. The movement was targeted, to all intents and purposes, against the migrant Bengalis who, being the victims of partition of the country, were bound to migrate from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The students of the State had to lose their one valuable academic year due to such movement as no examination could be arranged by any Board, Council and University of the State (ACKHSA Booklet, 2010:7; Jugasankha, 1980a, 1980b, 1980c, 1980d; Kar, Subir, 2010: 26; personal interview

with Pradip Dutta Roy, the then ACKHSA President dated Silchar, November 28, 2015 and Partha Ranjan Chakraborty, former General Secretary, ACKHSA dated Silchar, February, 13, 2016). The students of the Barak Valley, a Bengali dominated region of the State, were the worst victims of AASU's movement because they could not sit for their HSLC, HSSLC, Pre-University and Degree examinations for one year (1980) although there was no agitation in the Barak Valley and all academic programmes in the schools and colleges were held normally (ibid.). Further, the normal relation between the two major linguistic groups of Assam (Assamese and Bengalis) sharply deteriorated due to this movement. Under the circumstances, there started a noble process of various types of protest in Barak Valley against the AASU movement. This paper is an attempt to throw light on such a movement that was carried out by the students of Barak Valley of Assam. In fact, it was a silent manifestation of student movement through literary activities especially through little magazines. The movement was launched by them against the Anti-Foreigners' Movement of AASU which was nothing but a political conspiracy to make the Bengalis of Assam a stateless entity (ACKHSA Booklet, op. cit.; Kar, Subir 1998: 112; Roy, Sabyasachi 2022: 79-95).

The Concept of 'MOVEMENT':

The word 'movement', apart from having varied other connotations, also implies "an endeavour by a group of people with a common ideology to achieve certain general goals" (eLook.org). Encyclopaedia Britannica also gives the meaning of 'movement' in different contexts; and with reference to the social movement, it says that social movement implies "loosely organised but sustained campaign in support of a social goal, typically either the implementation or the prevention of a change in society's structure or values". As the student-folk of the Barak Valley were generally 'loosely organised' and as the activity of the students had been aimed at attaining diverse goals, ranging from socio-economic to political goal, the word 'movement' has been used here in the context of the present Study.

Review of literature on student movement :

A movement or any social phenomenon for that matter needs to be studied in the context of the development of that society. Student movement is also no exception. It has already been mentioned that the word 'movement' refers to the actions and efforts of a number of people working together for a social goal. In the Barak Valley, during 1980s, students are found to play a predominant role in the socio-economic development of the region.

For a proper analytical study of the student movement in Barak Valley, it is necessary to examine the concepts that have been developed to discuss exclusively the student movements of different regions. We can start with Badruddin Umar, a renowned scholar of Bangladesh who, in his edited volume *'Bhasa Andolon Prosongo: Kotipoy Dalil'* (Umar 1984: 360-376) described the history of a very powerful student movement that took place in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in 1952. The movement originated on the question of the official language of the State in 1948 when the Govt of Pakistan wanted it to be *Urdu*,

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in spite of the continuous and vigorous demand of the Bengalis of East Pakistan to have *Bengali* as the second official language of the country. By 1952, the situation became explosive when the P.M. of Pakistan openly declared in Dacca that they were going to accept *Urdu* as the only official language of the State. The students played the most important role in the movement and the leadership in this movement was provided by 'Vishya Vidyalaya Sarbadaliya Sangram Committee', an organisation of the University students of East Pakistan. On 21st February 1952 when a procession at Dacca violated section 144 declared by Government, police resorted to firing. As a result, 12 persons were killed, of whom 3 were students. Thus, in East Pakistan, as Umar observes, a characteristic socio-cultural feature in the form of linguistic dominance of one group over the other is found to be responsible for a large-scale student movement in 1952.

In the context of Assam or for that matter NE region as a whole, a study on student activism cannot properly take off without making a reference to the writing of Apurba Kumar Baruah who is probably the only as well as pioneer scholar to have proposed to understand the study in a theoretically focused manner. Although his study '*Middle Class Hegemony and Student Power in Assam*' (Baruah 1991: 106-113) is confined to the Brahmaputra Valley primarily; yet Baruah has drawn up a conceptual framework for studying student movements in countries with colonial experience. In his conceptual framework, as hinted earlier, Baruah follows Antonio Gramsci's concept of 'cultural hegemony' which refers to the existence of a culturally dominating class in each society. Baruah has stated that although in Marxist approach the relation of production divides the society into various classes and each class has its own consciousness determined by mode of production and although students come from different classes with their respective class consciousness, yet in the period of student-hood, they get influenced by the ideas of that particular class which is culturally dominant in the society. In the student movements of the Brahmaputra Valley, as Baruah feels, the views and ideas of the ideologically dominant class in that society is reflected. In the Brahmaputra Valley Baruah finds that the views of the educated middle class coming from the culturally dominating section of the society are reflected in the activities of students of this region. However, while explaining the student movements in the Brahmaputra Valley, Baruah has given emphasis on some factors like colonial rule, linguistic diversity of Assam, partition of India, etc. As he feels, all the above-mentioned factors are important in respect of the socio-political developments of the Brahmaputra Valley in the post-independence era and as such he has applied his concept to understand the role of these factors while studying the student movements of the Brahmaputra Valley after 1947.

Besides A.K. Baruah, another major book, published on the activities of students in Assam, is '*Student Revolution in Assam*' authored by Sheila Bora where she states the facts about the involvement of the students in the anti-British nationalist struggle in Assam from 1916 to 1947 (Bora 1992: vii). The study was intended, as Bora says herself, to make an attempt to examine the role of the students of Assam as an organised community in bringing about cultural, social and educational changes as well as their role in the freedom

movement. According to her, the study traces the role played by the students of Assam in the struggle of the Assamese people to preserve their identity and culture as well as the role the students played during national freedom movement. The year 1916 was chosen as the starting point of this study as it marks the beginning of the Assam Chhatra Sanmilan, an organisation through which the student community of Assam carried on their various activities. The study is ended in the year 1947 spanning the national freedom movement where, according to the author, the students had played a vital role (ibid.). The book gives a chronological account of the events but makes no attempt at conceptualisation or theorisation. Further, the author neither explains why she suffixed the word 'revolution' with the word 'Student', nor furnished any data to show that a revolution did take place in the time and sphere under study. The term 'revolution' has a predominant and specialised political meaning involving a major social upheaval often followed by a wholly new social order and therefore, any agitation cannot be termed as revolution. Further, the entire work seems to be a compilation of different facts, records and information. In other words, 'who, what and when' questions, in the context of student activism, remains the focus of her study. To quote A.K. Baruah in this context, "There is no asking why and how! There is no effort in asking why they do, what they do!" (Baruah 2002: 6) Bora does not try to examine even the social background of the student activists or their leaders to see how and why they got interested in an issue which should normally have been left to mature sections of the society. It seems from the entire study that she completely missed the implications of using the word 'examine' in the objectives of the book. A.K. Baruah goes to the extent of saying that the distinction between the terms 'examine' and 'describe' seems to be lost on her (ibid.). Moreover, though in the first part of the statement of objectives, she uses the words "to examine the role of the students of Assam as an organised community", yet there is no attempt on her part to show that the student of Assam acted as a 'community'.

Meeta Deka, another scholar on student movements in Assam, covers in her study the entire period from 1853 to 1985. In her book *'Student Movements in Assam'*, she makes an analytical study on the political, cultural and socio-economic roots of student protests in Assam. The stated objectives of her study also include, on the one hand, identification of the factors that motivated students for political action highlighting the intensity, continuity and special features of student movements in Assam and also comparing the same with student movements elsewhere in the world on the other (Deka 1996: xi-xii). She initiates her study with a fairly comprehensive statement of the theoretical perspectives on student movements but ignores the same in the main part of her work on the students of Assam. In the epilogue of the book, she asserts that student movements in Assam can be seen as social movements, but to quote A.K. Baruah again, "there is no attempt on her part to examine the activities of the students in a movement framework" (Baruah 2002: 7). However, a serious effort is found on the part of the writer to show that students in Assam have been greatly influenced by the major political trends of their time. In the epilogue of her book, she writes :

"The discussion in the foregoing chapters attempted to focus on the origin and growth of the

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student movements in Assam in the colonial conditions and in the post-independence period. In the primary societal conditions under colonialism, the Indian National Movement played a significant role in moulding student movements in Assam." (Deka, op.cit: 212) But, nowhere in her book, has she showed that the participation of the students of Assam in the 'Indian National Movement' took the shape of a student movement. Like Sheila Bora, she also merely records the participation of the students in that movement. To quote A. K. Baruah again, "she too remains firmly with the tradition of history writing where mere statement of facts is considered enough" (Baruah, op cit). This does not surprise a reader familiar with the trends of history writing in the region, because the dominant trends in Assam and also the rest of North East India have been plagued by theoretical innocence and a tendency of chronologically arranging officially recorded facts.

Moreover, though Meeta Deka in her book has also attempted to give a reference on the language movement of Barak Valley in 1961, but her attempt has not been fruitful and based on facts. She has attempted to mislead the readers by giving a partially wrong statement "The 'Bhasa Andolon' (language movement) in Cachar resulted in the death of eleven students in a police firing at Hailakandi on June 1961" (Deka, op cit.) which is neither corroborated by any official record nor has she given any reference in support of that statement to substantiate it. The record reveals that the police firing on the peaceful language movement activists that resulted in the death of eleven people (of whom only two were students) took place in Silchar railway station and not in Hailakandi and the date was 19th May, 1961 (Census of India 1961, Assam: 523; Paul Choudhury, Paritosh 1972: 46-47) and not June 1961 as stated by Deka. Her reference of the date June 1961 relates to the police firing on the rioters in Hailakandi (ibid.).

Furthermore, she has made a reference about the official Inquiry Commission headed by Justice Gopalji Mehrotra that was appointed to probe into the disturbances in Goreshwar in 1960, but preferred to remain silent about the same Inquiry Commission that was again appointed to probe into the police firing at Silchar on 19th May, 1961 (Deka, op cit: 177). Again, while narrating the details about aftermath of language movement, she again prefers to ignore the fact that Bengali was also made the official language of Assam for the then Cachar district which is presently the entire Barak Valley (Section 5, Safeguard for the use of Bengali Language in Cachar, Assam Act No XVIII of 1961).

Coming to the context of the Barak Valley, Arunima Bhattacharjee's book '*Student Movement in Barak Valley with special reference to Language Movement*' is the pioneer and only work on student movements of this valley, where she finds that it had originated from determinate situation. She undertakes the study from the historical perspective and opines that student movements of Barak Valley are to be studied in the context of certain elements, e.g., the early history of the region during the pre-colonial and the colonial rules, partition of India in 1947, the linguistic composition of the state of Assam in relation to the socio-political developments in the Brahmaputra Valley in the pre-independence and post-independence periods. Following the line of argument of A.K. Baruah who explained the student movements in Brahmaputra Valley with reference to some factors like colonial

rule, linguistic diversity of Assam, partition of India, Arunima Bhattacharjee also feels that these factors are equally relevant to the Barak Valley situation (Bhattacharjee 2011: 51-52).

As Arunima Bhattacharjee feels that the above-mentioned socio-political features are common in the Barak Valley also, she made an effort to test Baruah's model to see whether it is applicable in understanding student movements of this region. After a detailed historical study, she came to the conclusion that A. K. Baruah's concept of cultural hegemony of a particular class in a society and its impact on the student activism is appropriate in explaining the student movements of the Barak Valley from 1947 to 1972 (ibid: 212).

Thus, from a study of the student movements of East Pakistan or Assam or for that matter Barak Valley in particular, it is revealed that there may be some determinate situation, either socio-economic or political or cultural from which a student movement may originate. These socio-political factors have been emphasised by A.K. Baruah and Arunima De Bhattacharjee in the context of the student movements of both Brahmaputra Valley and Barak Valley respectively.

Objectives :

The present Study was carried out with three objectives in mind - to understand the social context influencing the students to go for literary activities cum movement during 1980s, to study the nature of the movement and also to investigate the socio-political impact of the movement.

Data & Methodology :

Since the present study is basically analytical in nature, efforts were made to collect data both from primary and secondary sources. For the purpose of primary data collection, one structured interview schedule was framed and data were collected from fifty respondents. It was primarily meant for the student leaders and activists of various student organisations selected by a method of random sampling to collect data relating to their socio-economic background. Besides, relevant data were also collected from different Higher Secondary Schools as well as colleges of the valley, newspaper archives, offices of the student organisations and personal files of the activists. Books, journals, souvenirs, periodicals, newspapers and internet were also consulted for the purpose.

Little Magazines of Barak Valley : A case study of literary activities cum movement of students of Barak Valley during 1980s

Literary activities played a predominant role in disseminating the message of peace and harmony among the masses of the State in 1960s and 1970s also (Sengupta, Jyotirmoy 2012: 50). At the same time, through this medium, students also registered their note of protest against the Official Language Movement of 1960-61, medium of instruction circular by Gauhati University in 1972 and various SEBA circulars in 1970s and 1980s which had its effect of dividing the people of the State on the basis of language (ibid.). These developments

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in the Brahmaputra Valley refer to the fact that the State Government had tacit support towards such developments. Thus, the literary exercises took the form of an anti-establishment character (ibid.; personal interview Prof. Topodhir Bhattacharjee, former VC, Assam University, Silchar dated Silchar, July 3, 2016) and the students in the Barak Valley vowed to protest against such developments through the medium of 'little magazines' during 1960s, 70s and 80s. The study of the contents of various little magazines reveals that in most cases the contributors tried to impress upon the masses about the evil effects of 'linguistic chauvinism' and 'sub-regionalism' in Brahmaputra Valley (Sengupta 2012: 29-33). Thus, a 'silent movement' was visible through the literary exercises in Barak Valley which simultaneously served two purposes : i) to cultivate the Bengali language and literature more and more and ii) through this cultivation, sounding a note of protest against the linguistic aggression (ibid.). The record reveals that during 80s, there was a wave in the publication of little magazines in Bengali language in both the Brahmaputra Valley and Barak Valley. It is also on record that a good number of little magazines were published during this period in the urban and sub-urban areas of Barak Valley and behind all these publications, the role of students and youths was spontaneous.

Investigation reveals that starting from late 70s, during the entire period of 80s, a good number of little magazines were published under the exclusive initiatives of students. A list of the magazines, numbering 46, published from the Barak Valley of Assam during this period is given in the appendix. Out of these 46 magazines, 13 magazines were chosen as sample for analysis. These are *Chinta* (1979) from Badarpur, a railway town of Karimganj district, *Bijnan Taranga* (1980) and *Tritiyo Kontho* (1984) from Karimganj town of Karimganj district, *Mati* (1981), *Udharband* (1983) and *Ordhek Akash* (1989) from Udharband, a sub-urban area of Cachar district, *Kaliyug* (1983) from Swadhinbazar sub-urban area of Cachar district and subsequently from Silchar town of Cachar district, *Srotoswini* (1984) from Dewan tea garden of Cachar district, *Pratisrot* (1984) from Silchar town of Cachar district, *Pritam* (1982) and *Prabaha* (1986) from Lala sub-urban area of Hailakandi district, *Batayan* (1986) and *Champakali* (1987) from Algapur area of Hailakandi district. (personal interview with former VC Prof. Tapodhir Bhattacharjee dated Silchar, July 3, 2016; Param Bhattacharjee, media personnel cum progressive writer, Silchar, Cachar dated Silchar, April, 25, May 13, August, 17, October 5, 2016; Partha Pratim Maitra, film maker, Kolkata (over telephone) dated February, 17, 20, 23, 28, 2016; Subhankar Chanda, retired teacher cum progressive writer, Udharband, Cachar dated Silchar, September 16, 18, 20, 2016; Rahul Dasgupta, State Government official cum social and cultural activist, Patharkandi, Karimganj dated Karimganj, April 30, 2016; Sujit Das, Prasara Bharati official cum literary activist, Silchar, Cachar dated Silchar, May 5, 2016; Anupam Chakraborty, retired APDCL official, Karimganj dated Karimganj, October 20, 2016; Dr. Sushanta Kar, faculty, Tinsukia College, Tinsukia (over telephone, Facebook and WhatsApp) dated November 19 & 20, 2021; Malay Kanti Dey, literary activist cum retired bank official, Kolkata (over telephone, Facebook and WhatsApp) dated November, 19 & 20, 2021; Shantanu Gangaridi, literary activist, Kolkata (over telephone, Facebook and WhatsApp) dated November, 19 & 20, 2021; Ashis Ranjan

Nath, literary activist, Lala, Hailakandi (over telephone, Facebook and WhatsApp) dated December, 2, 7, 15, 16, 2021, Milan Uddin Laskar, literary activist cum media person dated September, 15, 2023).

The idea behind the publication of *Tritiya Kontho* (1984), edited by Sabarni Purkayastha and Dipankar Som, was to encourage the readers to judge a particular situation rationally on the one hand and to spread the message of the importance of cultivating healthy culture on the other (Choudhury, Sujit 2006: 67; personal interview with Param Bhattacharjee dated Silchar, April 25, 2016 and Anupam Chakraborty dated Karimganj, October 27, 2016). The motto behind the publication of *Bijnan Taranga* (1980), the first Bengali science magazine in Assam, was to spread scientific temper among the public that would enable them to judge a particular situation rationally (personal interview with Raj Pradip Chakraborty, retired BSNL Official, Silchar, Cachar dated Silchar, May 18, August 3, September 26, 2016, Anupam Chakraborty dated Karimganj, October 27, 2016 and Debasish Bhattacharjee, Eastern Railway Engineer, Kolkata (over email) dated August 15, 2016). The magazine *Chinta* (1979) was the mouthpiece of *Jhinuk Natyagosthi*, a drama group of Badarpur. This magazine used to be published during the annual Drama Festival of *Jhinuk Natyagosthi* at Badarpur Railway Institute (Maitra, Partha Pratim, 2013:26; personal interview with Partha Pratim Maitra over telephone dated February 17, 20, 2016; Subhankar Chanda dated Silchar, September 16, 18, 2016; Rahul Dasgupta on April 30, 2016; Biswarup Bhattacharjee, cultural activist, Badarpur (over telephone and WhatsApp) dated September 14, 2021, November 23, 2021 and Param Bhattacharjee dated Silchar, May 13, 2016). This drama-group was founded by some progressive youths and students who were the ardent followers of leftist ideology. Some of the members of this drama-group that deserve mention were Partha Pratim Maitra, Biswarup Bhattacharjee, Kamal Chakraborty, Tirthankar Chanda, Subhankar Chanda, Rupak Rakshit and others. Some of them had 'Naxalite' background also (ibid.). As such, the articles that were published in *Chinta* depicted progressive outlook. It needs mention here that the dramas that were staged had invariably political overtones so much so that in the event of dearth of any suitable political story, the group used to stage a drama based on the political story composed by the group members themselves. An interview with Partha Pratim Maitra, presently a resident of Kolkata, reveals that it was the novelty of the drama group that the dramas that were staged used to be directed by a group of directors instead of one director and the actors and actresses used to be drawn from all sections of society including those from 'Horijon Colony'. This indicates the progressive outlook of the *Jhinuk Natyagosthi*. The interviews with Partha Pratim Maitra, Subhankar Chanda and Param Bhattacharjee also reveal that a special edition of *Chinta* entitled 'Dateline Assam 1983' was published in 1983 to highlight and register their protest against the genocide at Neli and Gohopur in Assam. It deserves special mention here that this group made an attempt to help the victims of the genocide at Neli and Gohopur out of the sale proceeds of this issue of *Chinta* (Maitra, op. cit.: 25). They were so keen to help those victims that they even did not hesitate to take the pains of selling this issue in the Silchar - Karimganj passenger train regularly (ibid.).

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The contents of the little magazine *Mati* published by Subhankar Chanda from Udharband of Cachar district in 1981 reflected the progressive outlook of the contributors and the editor of the magazine. It basically contained political articles based on contemporary issues besides stories, poems and dramas. Similarly, another little magazine *Udharband* started by Sankar Kumar Deb from Udharband in 1983 also contained vivid description on tea garden life and culture which included local sports and other issues pertaining to local problems and daily struggles of tea garden labours. (Personal interview with Param Bhattacharjee dated Silchar, May 13, 2016 and Subhankar Chanda dated Silchar, September 18, 20, 2016). The magazine *Srotoswini* was published in 1984 by Subrata Majumder, also a student, having progressive outlook, from Dewan Tea Estate. Like the magazine *Udharband*, it also contained articles as well as stories, poems and lyrics that highlighted the struggling life of tea garden labourers (ibid.). The magazine *Ordhek Akash* (1989) edited by Bijoya Kar of Udharband published articles depicting the various problems faced by womenfolk due to patriarchal culture which she feels, is the root of women subjugation of society (ibid.).

A personal interaction with media person Milan Uddin Laskar reveals that during his student-hood, he also used to publish one little magazine *Kaliyug* from Swadhinbazar area of Cachar district and subsequently from Silchar town. It started its journey in May, 1983 with a special issue on the historic language movement of Barak Valley that occurred in 19th May, 1961. The subsequent issues contained a variety of literary works like articles on local problems, political articles, short stories, poems, comics, etc. (Personal interview with Milan Uddin Laskar (over telephone and WhatsApp) dated Silchar, September 15, 2023)

An interview with Param Bhattacharjee, Sujit Das and Rahul Dasgupta reveals that the little magazine *Pratisrot* started its journey in October, 1984. The very name '*Pratisrot*' indicates that this little magazine adopted the ideal of moving against the '*Srot*' or the '*established system*'. The distinctiveness of this little magazine, published by few students of progressive outlook, was that the contents advocated for judging every socio-literary issue from the political perspective and accordingly all the articles and features published in the magazine had the political overtone. It also adopted the ideal of following honesty and authenticity and to publish the articles based on survey reports on different contemporary local issues like flood havoc in Barak Valley in the year 1985-86, the outbreak of fire at Fatakbar area of Silchar town, various aspects of the sorry plight of primary education in Cachar district, struggle of small entrepreneurs of Silchar, poor condition of brick-kiln in Cachar, to name a few (personal interview with Param Bhattacharjee dated Silchar, May 13, 2016, Sujit Das dated Silchar, May 5, 2016 and Rahul Dasgupta dated Karimganj, April 30, 2016). It deserves special mention here that the persons associated with the publication of '*Pratisrot*' were subjected to physical assault and harassment on various occasions for their anti-establishment outlook (Personal interview with Anupam Chakraborty dated Karimganj, October 27, 2016, Raj Pradip Chakraborty dated Silchar, September 26, 2016 and Debasish Bhattacharjee (over email) dated August 15, 2016). As commented by

Prof. Sujit Choudhury in one of his articles: “The dirty politics that had its effect of overcasting the Silchar town was openly denounced by this group” (Choudhury, Sujit, op cit). The chief editor of the first issue (October, 1984) was Partha Pratim Maitra, the eleven members of the group of editors being Partha Sarathi Gupta, Partha Pratim Maitra, Soumitra Baisya, Pradip Paul, Param Bhattacharjee, Sujit Das, Bhaskarjyoti Deb, Tushar Purkayastha, Dodul Roy Choudhury, Santanu Bhattacharjee and Rahul Dasgupta.

The magazine *Pritam*, a mouthpiece of Sanchari Literary Group (*Sanchari Sahitya Gosthi*), was perhaps the first printed little magazine of South Hailakandi region. Started in March, 1982, this magazine used to be edited by Jaharlal Sen, Mrinal Chakraborty, Prithwish Deshamukhya and Atik Uddin Choudhury who were the pillars of Sanchari Literary Group. It provided a platform to the new writers and motivated them in pursuing more and more literary activities. It needs mention here that *Pritam* used to receive special encouragement from renowned painter of the region Prof Moynul Haque Barbhuiya of NEHU, Shillong whose artworks had frequently been used for the cover-page design of many issues of the magazine (Nath, Asish Rn, 2003: 14-18). *Prabaha*, another little magazine edited by Asish Ranjan Nath from Lala was first published in 1986 with a motto of presenting research oriented literary articles and the editor was determined to maintain the quality of the magazine. It needs special mention here that this magazine is known for its distinctiveness and continues to be published regularly till date (Personal interview with Asish Ranjan Nath (over telephone and WhatsApp) dated August 24, 2021).

Investigation also reveals that two young men Jalal Uddin Laskar and Jashim Uddin Laskar of Algapur of Hailakandi region with progressive outlook were instrumental in publishing one literary magazine named *Batayan* (1986). Another magazine *Champakali* (1987) was published by them and this time another literary activist Snigdha Nath joined the venture. In this context, it would not be exaggeration to say that it was because of the wholehearted contribution of these young hands that a small backward area like Algapur got introduced with the greater literary world. In fact, publication of *Batayan* and *Champakali* with progressive thoughts became the example of the fact that living in a small and backward locality cannot become a hurdle in the way of greater thoughts and thought-provoking works. (Nath, Asish Rn, 2005:19-28)

It will be in the fitness of things to mention here that there were some ideological similarities among some little magazines like ‘*Pratisrot*’, ‘*Tritiyo Kontho*’, ‘*Bijnan Taranga*’. All these magazines adopted the principle of following progressive ideology, rational thinking and the ideology of protesting against oppression of any kind (Personal interview with Anupam Chakraborty dated Karimganj, October 27, 2016 and Raj Pradip Chakraborty dated Silchar, September 26, 2016). This similarity of principles brought the associates of three magazines nearer to one another and they created a platform entitled ‘*Barak Upatyaka Little Magazine Samannoy Samiti*’ (Barak Valley Little Magazine Co-ordination Committee). The primary motive of creating such a platform was to help one another in their effort to keep the magazines going (Personal interview with Anupam Chakraborty dated Karimganj, October 2016 and Rahul Dasgupta dated Karimganj, April, 30, 2016). An interview with

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Rahul Dasgupta and Param Bhattacharjee reveals that in 1985, the 'Language Martyrs Day' was observed on 21st February for the first time in Barak Valley under the initiative of Niranjana Roy Choudhury, a left minded social activist of those days, who was also the General Secretary of the '*Barak Upatyaka Little Magazine Samannay Samiti*'.

By going through the records, some specific characteristics of little magazines, published from Barak Valley are identified. As hinted earlier, the little magazine movement in Barak Valley could be basically characterised by its anti-establishment nature. However, apart from its anti-establishment characteristic, study reveals that the little magazines were also utilised to fight against conservatism, communalism, and fundamentalism which were the potent forces that were responsible for dragging the society backward (Personal interview with former VC Prof. Topodhir Bhattacharjee dated Silchar, July 3, 2016). Besides, the contradiction between different ideologies and counter-ideologies was also reflected in the little magazines (ibid.). This literary forum was used not only for the cultivation of language and literature such as writing stories, poems, essays, and research-based articles, but was also used to fight against cultural and linguistic aggression. Besides, apart from cultural and linguistic aspects, various other national and international issues also tempted the students and the youths of the valley to express their views over those issues through the little magazines. Thus, from the above discussion, it is evident that the students and the youths of Barak Valley found in little magazines a platform to express their views on various issues on the one hand and to raise their voice of protest against any form of onslaughts on the society on the other.

Major Findings of the Study :

From the analysis of the responses of the respondents, some important facts have come out with regard to the context, nature and impact of literary activities cum movement of the students in the Barak Valley from 1973 to 1994. However, to understand the context or reason behind their activities, the respondents were asked to identify the specific or dominant issue which influenced them to go for such activities. It is found that most of the respondents consider the 'need to agitate for the cause of culture and language' as the most dominant issue because, according to them, it was related to the very existence of the Bengalis of the State. The issue was very much potent especially during 1980s as all the movements on the issue took the form of an outburst against AASU's Anti-Foreigners' movement in the early 80s and the Assam Accord in 1985. The Language Movement of 1986 and the ACKHSA's decade long movement for a Central University (1983-1994) were two important incidents of student movements that come under the purview of the issue. It would not be out of context to mention here that the movement for Central University in the valley is the offshoot of the Anti-Foreigners' movement. As hinted earlier, the students of the Barak Valley could not sit for their examinations for one year (1980) due to this movement in spite of the regular classes in the schools and colleges. Had there been a separate Board/ Council/ University for the students of Barak Valley, the students would not have to lose a valuable academic year in their life. All these factors motivated the student activists to register

their protest in different modes and little magazine was one of the potent platforms to express their thoughts, opinions and creativity.

In an attempt to fulfil the second objective of the present Study which focuses on the nature of the movements, some questions were asked to the respondents with regard to the ideology, organisation, leadership, background of the leadership, etc.

In response to the question relating to ideological factor, 43% respondents opined that leftist ideology played the key role during 80s in organising various student movements in the valley. During 80s, behind the movement against 'Anti-Foreigners' issue' through cultural activities, publication of little magazines and making of short-length films, leftist ideology was the driving force which influenced the students so much so that they spontaneously got involved in the said movements. However, barring the leftist ideology, some activists were also influenced by the ideology of patriotism and nationalism. But their number was insignificant- only 5%. The rest 52% respondents asserted that they joined the student movements not because of any ideological reason, but due to the importance of the various issues like imposition of controversial SEBA circular of 1986, need for a Central University in the Barak Valley and various issues concerning campus problems. It is thus amply clear that the opinions of the majority respondents regarding the dominant factors behind the student movement were spread over multiple issues. This aspect can be well explained by the fact that these issues were intimately related with the question of 'existence and identity' of the Bengalis of the State. It is quite obvious that the concern for existence got priority over the ideological factor.

In response to the question relating to the existence of organisation to lead the movement, it has been found that 60% respondents said that as the literary activities were of creative in nature, the efforts were carried out jointly without any organisational support while 40% respondents argued that they carried out their activities under the banner of some organisations like SFI, *Jhinuk Natyagosthi*, *Bijnan Taranga*, etc.

In order to understand the nature of the movements, another question was asked to the respondents as to whether the movements or agitations got spread in the rural areas. The answer of the 72% respondents was affirmative. The history of the student movement in Barak Valley reveals that the movement of SFI in the 1970s, Language movements of 1961, 1972 and 1986, ACKHSA's decade-long movement for a Central University were found to penetrate even to the remote areas of the region. Barak Valley is often identified with the struggles for existence that are undertaken primarily by students and youths. With regard to the movements through literary exercises also, it has already been mentioned that a host of little magazines were published from different rural and remote areas of the Barak Valley. As hinted earlier, a 'silent movement' was visible through the literary exercises in the Barak Valley which simultaneously served two purposes, firstly to cultivate the 'Bengali' language and literature intensively and secondly, through this process, sounding a note of protest and anguish against linguistic chauvinism. This aspect confirms the fact that without the open support of the mass people living in rural and remote areas, no movement can be successful. Since majority people live in rural areas, their involvement

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makes the effort meaningful and thus the voice of mass people is reflected through the movements. In case of the Barak Valley also, on different occasions, the students were successful in transforming their agitations into mass movements. Feeling the heat of the situation, the government, on many occasions, had to concede to many legitimate demands.

The Study also reveals that the leadership from among the students of this region has played a positive role in all the literary initiatives. All the respondents have agreed on this point that the initiatives were first undertaken by some enthusiastic student leaders. In fact, it is generally acknowledged that an effort to fight for a common cause becomes movement only when some persons with special organising ability can lead the masses towards the desired goal.

Again, all the respondents are of the view that the leaders of the movement had educated middle class background. This point has been analysed in the following three-fold manner. According to them, students of the Barak Valley during those days used to come generally from middle class family. People of higher income strata of the society who were very few in number, generally used to send their wards outside the valley, sometimes abroad also for studies. On the other hand, very few people from lower income strata of the society could afford to send their children to schools or colleges. Even if, some of them managed to send their wards to the schools, they could not afford to send them to the colleges for higher education. Many of them were even not aware of the need and utility of education and thought it fruitful for them to involve their wards in any type of vocational work so that they could earn their living. Moreover, during those days, government facilities like Mid-day Meal, Sarvo Siksha etc were not there to support the students coming from lower income group of people. Thus, it can be deduced reasonably well that students from middle class background only were involved in different types of creative activities cum agitations and movements.

Further, they also opined that during those days, though middle class families had to face severe financial hardship, yet the parents and guardians in general tried their level best to keep their wards free from the family burdens and responsibilities so that their wards could devote maximum time for their studies and career. Students thus used to get much spare time even after their studies and the student-activists utilised that spare time by providing social service and getting themselves involved in various creative activities.

Besides, according to a number of respondents, the students from middle class background were socio-politically more conscious than their counterparts from economically lower and higher-class background. They were found to be very much conscious of the fact that this particular region was the victim of socio-economic deprivation since the dawn of independence of the country as compared to the Brahmaputra Valley. This sense of deprivation compelled the people with educated middle class background to fight for a 'change' in the existing system. According to the respondents, due to lack of education, people from lower income group did not have that consciousness and the higher income group of people normally did not feel the urge to bring any change in the structure as they were least affected by the established system.

The analysis, thus, reveals that it was mostly the student folk from the educated middle-class families who used to engage themselves in the literary activities of the Barak Valley during 1980s.

The third objective of the Study was to study the impact of the silent movement on socio-political life of the people of the Barak Valley. So far as the impact of the silent movements through literary activities is concerned, it is found to be partially successful. Although the dream of the left minded activists to transform the state into a socialist one remained unfulfilled, the activists were however, successful in sending a message to the concerned authorities about the strong holds of Bengalis in both the valleys of the State and at the same time sounding a strong note of anguish and protest against the linguistic chauvinism in the Brahmaputra Valley as reflected in the Anti-Foreigners' Movement of AASU in early 80s which was culminated in signing of the Assam Accord in 1985. By that time ACKHSA's movement for a Central University reached its climax and the sense of disillusionment and anger of the people of the Barak Valley against the controversial SEBA circular of 1986 sent a strong signal to the Government. The Government could feel the pulse of the public sentiment and the issue of determining 'foreigners' or 'illegal migrants' remained pending over the years. Both the Central and the State Governments are yet to take any final decision over the issue because it has become such a sensitive issue to both the major linguistic groups of the State that any controversial decision may bring forth grave repercussion in the State. Thus, the aforesaid movements in the Barak Valley cannot but be given credit in the sense that in spite of tremendous pressure from a certain section of the public, student organisation like AASU and cultural and literary organisations of the Brahmaputra Valley, the Government so far could not concede to the demand of making Assam a unilingual State.

Thus, from the above discussion, it is observed that the contribution of the students of Barak Valley towards building a healthy society through publication of little magazines was a laudable venture. Amidst social indiscipline, immorality and corruption all around, the creative, honest and bold efforts of the students to cleanse the society as also to rise in protest against any onslaught on the society cannot be over-emphasised (Choudhury, Sujit 2006: 68). It is in this sense that such creative efforts of the students can undoubtedly be considered as a strong movement against linguistic chauvinism.

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Annexure

List of Little Magazines published during 1980s from Barak Valley*

Cachar : Silchar Town	Year of first publication	First Editor
i. Abhash	1980	NA
ii. Anishwar	1981	Debasish Chanda
iii. Pratisrot	1984	Partha Pratim Maitra and his 10 associates
iv. Rituporno	NA	Sujit Nath
Cachar : Udharband		
i. Mati	1981	Subhankar Chanda
ii. Udharband	1983	Sankar Kumar Deb
iii. Ordhek Akash	1989	Bijaya Kar
Cachar : Pailapool		
i. Anirban (Registered as Anirbanshikha)	1988	Swapan Dasgupta
ii. Sagnik	NA	Jiban Nath
Cachar : Dewan Tea Estate		
i. Srotoswini	1984	Subrata Majumder
Cachar : Nagdirgram		
i. Troyee (Handwritten)	1984	Snigdha Nath
ii. Aikyadoot	1989	Jalal Uddin Mazumder
Cachar : Swadhinbazar		
i. Kaliyug	1983	Milon Uddin Laskar
Cachar : Sonai		
i. Ujala	NA	Joynul Haque Mazumder
ii. Du kotha	1985	Mrinmoy Nath & Mihir Nath
Cachar : Berabak		
i. Khelaghar	1985	Tushar Kanti Nath
Hailakandi : Hailakandi Town		
i. Amanat	1981	Abul Hussain Mazumder
ii. Paromita	NA	Arabinda Chakraborty
iii. Nilanjan	NA	Amitabha Choudhury
iv. Alok	NA	Rabindra Paul
v. Antarin	NA	Ram Ranjan Chakraborty
vi. Srijan	NA	Uttam Kumar Shee
vii. Udayan	NA	Mashuk Ahmed

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viii. Sundaram	NA	Mashuk Ahmed
ix. Shilimikh	NA	Mashuk Ahmed & Atik Uddin Choudhury
x. Jyotsna	NA	Ramani Deb
xi. Belabhum	1983	Ashutosh Das
xii. Jagaran	1989	Rajat Paul
Hailakandi : Algapur		
i. Batayan	1986	Jashim Uddin Laskar, Jalal Uddin Laskar
ii. Champakali	1987	Jashim Uddin Laskar, Jalal Uddin Laskar & Snigdha Nath
Hailakandi : Lala		
i. Pritam	1982	Jawaharlal Sen, Mrinal Chakraborty, Prithwish Deshamukhya, Atik Uddin Choudhury
ii. Prabaha	1986	Ashis Ranjan Nath
Karimganj : Karimganj Town		
i. Tonkar	1980	NA
ii. Prantik	NA	NA
iii. Simanter Sahitya	NA	NA
iv. Bijnan Taranga (Subsequently registered as Jnan-Bijnan Taranga)	1980	Mihir Kumar Deb Purkayastha, Anupam Chakraborty & Partha Pratim Sen
v. Tiritiyo Kontho	1984	Sabarni Purkayastha & Dipankar Som
vi. Akasmik	1987	NA
Karimganj : Badarpur		
i. Chinta (Mouthpiece of Jhinuk Natya Gosthi)	1979	Subhankar Chanda
ii. Oporupa	1983	Ranjan Dutta
iii. Prayas	1985	Didarul Islam
iv. Eishan	1988	Pranab Halder
Karimganj : Ramkrishna Nagar		
i. Naa	1988	Ashit Chakraborty, Shyamal Nath
Karimganj : Mullaganj		
i. Milaner Daak	1983	Imran Uddin Tapadar
Karimganj : Ratabari		
i. Bhorer Sanai	NA	Abdul Khalik Bangal

NA: Not Available

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