

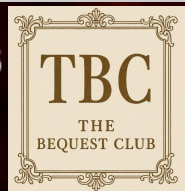
SEPTEMBER 2025  
A CHRONOLOGICAL  
HISTORY OF ASSAM

ARRIVAL OF BRITISH  
EAST INDIA  
COMPANY

ARRIVAL OF BRITISH  
IN ASSAM

CHANGES BROUGHT BY  
THE ADVENT OF BRITISH

START OF UPRISINGS  
IN ASSAM



# THE HISTORICAL

CHAPTER I

*Chronicles of Modern History of Assam*

# GAZETTE



# *Arrival of* **BRITISH EAST INDIA COMPANY**



As we go through this section, we will find out how the British first landed on the Indian territory at the turn of the century around the 1600s. What was the East India Company that came to India? What was its ambitions during the earlier years of its stay in India? How was it able to establish control over the subcontinent of India? Well, we have tried to answer these questions through this section of the magazine.

# Arrival of the Company

The British East India Company was formed in 1600 and was given a royal charter by Queen Elizabeth I. The Royal Charter granted the East India Company the sole right to trade with the East. It gave the Company some sort of a monopoly in trade and also guaranteed that no other company from Britain will compete for market of the East with the East India Company.

The East India Company had the exclusive right to trade with the East Indies including India. The historical records tell us that the first ships of the British East India Company under Captain William Hawkins landed in India on August 24, 1608 at Surat. Initially they sought trade opportunities, particularly in spices, a very important commodity in Europe back then as it was used to preserve meat. Apart from that, they primarily traded in silk, cotton, indigo dye, tea and opium. After seeing the returns on the first few voyages from India, the British wanted to set up factories in India.

Captain William Hawkins was sent to Jahangir's (Mughal Emperor) court to obtain permission to open a factory in Surat. But the Portuguese who had already set up an economic infrastructure in India stopped his attempts to come in negotiations with the emperor of the Mughals. In 1611, the British navy helped the Mughals defeat the Portuguese at Surat and gained the right to establish a factory there. After this many factories, like Masulipatnam, opened on the East Coast.

In 1615, Sir Thomas Roe was sent as an ambassador to the Mughal Court. He used his diplomatic skills to obtain a Royal Farman to open factories and trade in any part of the Mughal Empire. Several factories were set up at Broach, Ahmadabad, Madras and the factory at Surat was fortified. In 1680, during Aurangzeb's (Mughal Emperor) rule, The British EIC (East India Company) got a farman to trade customs-free throughout Mughal rule. This made the British a formidable force in India.

## Battle of Plassey

### Background of the War

By the mid-18th century, the Mughal Empire, which had once controlled most of the Indian subcontinent, was in a state of collapse as native Indian and European states attempted to carve out their own political and economic power bases. The EIC was one of these competing powers. While battling the French for trading supremacy, it simultaneously began to involve in local politics, especially in Bengal, India's richest province.

The Bengali ruler Siraj-ud-Daulah had been in dispute with the Company for some time. A year before the Battle of Plassey, when the Company refused to halt military preparations against the French, he had attacked and captured its stronghold of Fort William in Calcutta. The company decided a change of regime was needed to achieve its political and financial goals. It was not alone in wanting Siraj gone. Mahtab Rai, head of the Jagat Seth Bengal Banking family was concerned that the Nawab would seize his huge wealth, so Jagat seths and Robert Clive secretly offered to make one of Siraj's army commanders. Mir Jafar, the new Nawab of Bengal, if Siraj was defeated in the battle.

### End of the Independent Nawabs of Bengal

The battle of Plassey was fought between the troops of the British EIC, led by Robert Clive, and forces led by Siraj-ud-Daulah, the last independent Nawab of Bengal, on June 23, 1757. A decisive Victory for the British EIC marked its transformation from a mere mercantile presence into a military and political power in India and marked the end of the independent Nawab lineage in Bengal. This battle is also considered to be the starting point of British rule over the subcontinent.

### Aftermath of the Battle

Mir Jafar later killed Siraj and was appointed nawab in his place. Mir Jafar was appointed nawab of Bengal, but he was no more than a puppet ruler, and he ceded control over most of Bengal to the British through several treaties. Siraj's defeat also meant that the French were no longer a force in Bengal. Unhappy with his situation, Mir Jafar would go on to goad the Dutch into attacking the British before being ousted after a British Victory at the Battle of Chinsura.

The EIC appointed Robert Clive governor of Bengal, and in 1765 he secured the right to collect taxes called 'diwani' and revenues for Bengal from the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II. The taxes collected by the British allowed them to buy Indian goods for export abroad, effectively financing further trade and conquest. This confirmed British military supremacy in the region and gave the Company a political stake in India.

### Bengal Black Hole

The Black Hole Tragedy is one of the most infamous incidents in British India's history. It occurred in June 1756 when the Nawab of Bengal, Siraj-ud-Daula, captured Fort William in Calcutta. He allegedly led to the confinement of the British residents, including women and children, in a small, airless room overnight, resulting in numerous deaths due to suffocation and heat. According to accounts, 146 prisoners were held in the room, with only 23 surviving until morning.

# Battle of Buxar



Fig - Battle of Buxar

## The Victory of British

The Battle was fought between 22 and 23 October 1764, between the forces of the British East India Company, under the command of Major Hector Munro, against the combined armies of Balwant Singh, Maharaja of the Benaras, Mir Qasim, the Nawab of Bengal, Shuja-ud-Daula, the Nawab of Awadh; and Shah Alam II, the emperor of the Mughal Empire. The battle was fought at Buxar within the territory of Bihar. It ended with a challenging victory for the British EIC. The war was brought to an end by the Treaty of Allahabad in 1765. It granted the EIC Diwani rights, which allowed them to collect revenue from the territories of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa

## Aftermath of the Battle

The Battle of Buxar had far-reaching consequences that reshaped the political landscape of colonial India. Its aftermath witnessed significant shifts in power dynamics and set the stage for British dominance in the Bengal region. The Battle was the beginning of the end for the Mughal Empire's political control, as the Company continued to consolidate its influence over vast territories. After the battle of Buxar, Robert Clive introduced the dual government system where both the Company and the Nawab had a role in governing Bengal. The dual system led to an administrative breakdown and had disastrous consequences for the people of Bengal. Eventually, in 1772, Warren Hasting abolished this system and took complete control of provinces of Bengal-Bihar.

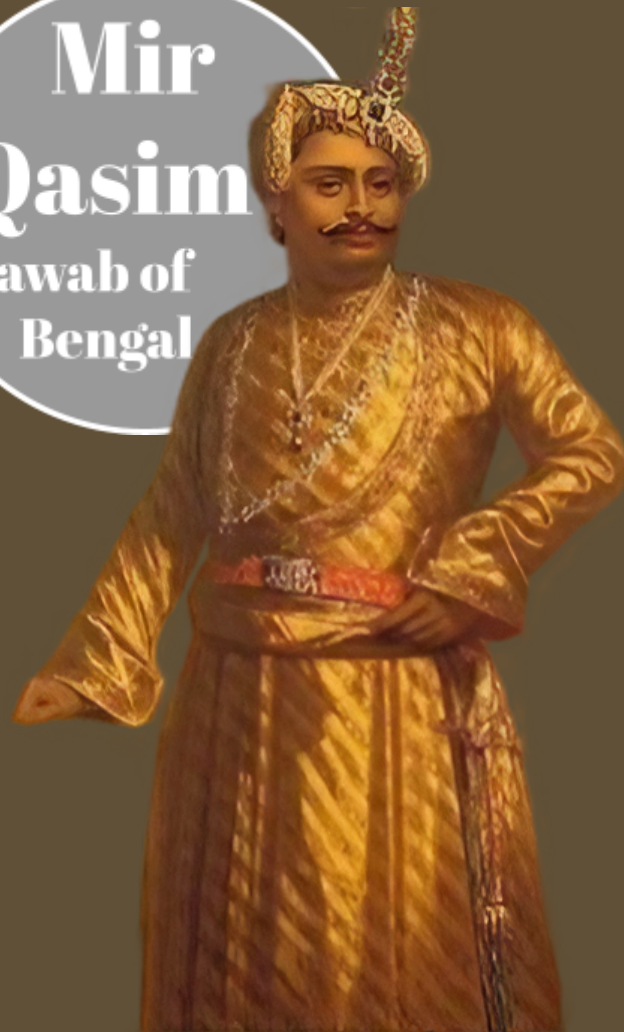
## Change in Puppet Ruler

Mir Jafar was appointed as the puppet Nawab of Bengal. However, he eventually ran into disputes with the East India Company and attempted to form an alliance with the Dutch East India Company instead. The British eventually defeated the Dutch at Chinsurah and overthrew Mir Jafar, replacing him with Mir Qasim

## Background of the War

The British East India company had initially expected Mir Qasim, the Nawab of Bengal, to be a compliant puppet ruler. However, Mir Qasim defied the Companies expectations. Mir Qasim decided to abolish the duties altogether, but the British protested and demanded preferential treatment. The Dispute over transit duties escalated into armed conflict, leading to wars between the English and Mir Qasim in 1763.

Mir  
Qasim  
Nawab of  
Bengal



# Anglo-Indian Wars



## Introduction

In order to establish power in India, the British East India Company fought a number of wars from the 17th century to the 19th century with the different Indian states, mainly the Mughal Empire, Rohilkhand, Kingdom of Mysore, Subah of Bengal, Maratha Confederacy, Sikh Empire of Punjab, Kingdom of Sindh and others. These wars are termed as the Anglo-Indian wars.

## Carnatic Wars

The Carnatic wars were a series of military conflicts in the middle of the 18th century in India's coastal Carnatic region. Three Carnatic wars were fought between 1746 to 1763. The conflicts involve numerous nominally independent rulers and their vassals, struggles for succession and territory, and furthermore included a diplomatic and military struggle between the French East India Company and The British East India Company. As a result of these military contests, the British East India Company established its dominance among the European trading companies within India. The French company was pushed to a corner and was confined primarily to Pondicherry. The East India Company's dominance eventually led to control by the British Company over most of India and eventually to the establishment of the British Raj. The war concluded with the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763.

## Anglo-Maratha Wars

The Anglo-Maratha Wars were a series of three wars between the British EIC and the Maratha Empire, ultimately leading to the decline of Maratha power in India. These wars marked a critical turning point in Indian history, facilitating British expansion and establishing dominance over the subcontinent. The primary cause of the Anglo-Maratha Wars was the succession crisis following the death of Peshwa Madhavrao I in 1772. This led to internal conflict within the Maratha Empire and provided an opportunity for the British East India Company to intervene.

## Anglo-Maratha Wars

The Anglo-Mysore wars were a series of four wars fought during the last three decades of the 18th century between the Sultanate of Mysore on the one hand, and the British East India Company, Maratha Empire, Kingdom of Travancore, and the Kingdom of Hyderabad on the other. Hyder Ali and his succeeding son Tipu Sultan fought the wars fronts with the British attacking from the west, south and east and the Nizam's forces attacking from the north. The fourth war resulted in the overthrow of the house of Hyder Ali and Tipu and the dismantlement of Mysore to the benefit of the East India Company, which took control of much of the Indian Subcontinent.

*Arrival of*

**BRITISH**

*In Assam*



## **Section II**

As we go through this section, we will find out how the British first Entered the territory of Assam during the Maomorian rebellion.

But how were they able to enter the political scenario of Assam? What were the developments that led to the British occupation of Assam? And finally what was the Treaty of Yandaboo that transferred political control of Assam to the British. Well, we have tried to answer these questions through this section of the magazine.

# Introduction to the History of Assam

The history of Assam can be divided into four eras: the ancient era (from 4th century AD to 11th century AD), the medieval era (from 11th century AD to 1826-Treaty of Yandaboo), the colonial era (1826 to 1947) and the post-colonial era (from 1947 onwards).

In medieval Assam, the region was a formidable state governed by the Ahom dynasty in the east and the Koch dynasty in the west, along with other kingdoms such as Chutia, Kachari, and Jaintia. The Koch dynasty collapsed towards the end of the 17th century, while the Ahom dynasty served as the central force unifying Assam. However, following the death of Rudra Singha, the Moamoria Rebellion erupted (1769-1805), severely damaging Assam's economy and fragmenting its unity. Ultimately, this led to the downfall of the Ahom dynasty, which never recovered.

During the period of Moamoria Rebellion, Ahom ministers sought the assistance of British soldiers to suppress the rebellion. Despite this, the Ahom dynasty was in a state of decline. Prior to that, Major James Rennell, an official of the company, had surveyed the frontier of Assam and collected information about the region. Realizing that the lucrative trade with Assam would eventually open up new markets for European commodities in the hills of the northeast India, trade in Assam had now acquired a new dimension and was viewed with renewed interest.

The British support proved to be a temporary solution, and in 1821 AD, the Burmese (Myanmar) king attacked the Ahom kingdom. Assam experienced three Burmese invasions between 1817 and 1826, leading to Burmese control from 1821 to 1825. This occupation resulted in increased interactions between the Burmese and the British, culminating in the First Anglo-Burmese War and the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826. This treaty ended Burmese rule and initiated British governance in Assam.

## The Period of Terror

### Period of Political Instability

The period of Maomorian Rebellion was a period of political instability in Assam. During this period, Gaurinath Singha, the reigning monarch deposed and forced to flee from his capital to take shelter in Guwahati from where he sent a frastic appeal to the British for help in the year 1788. Lord Cornwallis, the Governor-General, was at first not inclined to involve the Company in the internal affairs of the frontier kingdom but prompted by "motives of humanity" as well as a desire 'to be better informed of the interior of the state of Assam, its commerce etc', Cornwallis decided to dispatch a small contingent of troops under the command of Captain Thomas Welsh.

Lord Cornwallis specifically instructed Welsh to enquire into the economic potential of the region. He had written to the Governor-General of his confidence that with restoration of peace and order in Assam, 'a new source of wealth and riches must flow to the company.

Gaurinath was reinstated on the throne, the resistance of the Maomarias in Upper Assam was broken and some semblance of law and order was restored in the Territory.

### A State of Turmoil

A radical change in policy occurred following the appointment of John Shore, the new Governor-General. Shore was not prepared to take on any avoidable political commitment, especially in a region that lay outside the sphere of the Company's domain. Therefore, Welsh was recalled despite Gaurinath's repeated pleas for the retention of the British troops. As a result, Assam lapsed into the former state of anarchy and internal strife.

### Burmese Intervention in Assam

The Burmese were ever anxious to extend their dominion westwards, made their appearance to the scene in 1817 when the political scenario in Assam was in a very sensitive phase with succession issues and internal power struggle. The Burmese army crossed the Patkai, reinstated Chandrakanta Singha (son of Gaurinath singha) to the throne and returned with huge indemnity and an Ahom princess for the Burmese monarch.

In 1819, the Burmese once again returned to Assam with an even larger force to instate Chandrakanta to the Throne as he was disqualified from being the king shortly after the Burmese had left Assam in 1817.

However, Chandrakanta soon realised that Burmese attitude towards Assam had undergone a change. The new Burmese king was determined to make Assam a part of the Burmese Kingdom. In this circumstances, Chandrakanta found himself being increasingly sidelined and a mere puppet in the hands of the Burmese. Chandrakanta had no other option but to flee to British Territory from where he made abortive attempts to recover his lost position. The Burmese king in 1822 sent one of his greatest generals with 30000 men to bring Chandrakanta into submission. This brought an end to the Ahom rule in Assam.

Assam came under the control of the Burmese and Jageswar Singha was installed as the new puppet ruler of the region. They plundered and burned villages and committed terrible atrocities while the helpless people suffered untold misery. Meanwhile, the relations between the Burmese and the British had become strained. Burmese control hindered British commercial interest in the region. So, the company was compelled to review its policy of non-intervention.

# Transfer of Power



## First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26)

In November 1823, David Scott was appointed as agent to the Governor-General of the North Eastern frontier in addition to his duties as Commissioner of Rangpur. Reviewing the encroachments of the Burmese in Arakan, Assam and Cachar, the council adopted a Resolution concluding that the activities of the Burmese, must be regarded as having placed the two countries in a state of actual war. The British declared war against the Burmese in 1824.

Some British forces were led by Lieutenant Colonel Richards who advanced up the Brahmaputra and occupied Rangpur. Soon after, the Burmese were also expelled from Cachar and Manipur. Soon after, simultaneous campaigns in Arakan, Tenasserim, Pegu and Upper Burma had taken a heavy toll on the Burmese. The death of Mingi Maha Bandula (King of Burma) in April 1825 compounded the problems for the Burmese and by the beginning of 1826 the Burmese were no longer capable of offering any resistance to the British. When the main British Army under General Archibald Campbell reached Yandaboo, a village in the neighborhood of Ava, the Burmese king was prepared to accept any terms the British imposed on him. Thus, the Burmese King and the British signed a peace treaty on 24th February 1826 at Yandaboo.

## The Treaty of Yandaboo

The Treaty of Yandaboo contained several clauses but the only article in the Treaty that vaguely referred to the disposal of the Burmese conquests in the northeast frontier of Britain, was Article II. It is generally assumed that under the terms of this treaty, Assam was ceded to the EIC. But this concept of Assam being ceded was a loose interpretation of the Treaty of Yandaboo by the authorities of the company. Article II merely stated that, 'His Majesty, the king of Ava. renounces all claim upon, and will abstain from all future interference with the principality of Assam and its dependencies, and also the contiguous petty states of Cachar and Jyntea' (Jayantia).

From the above mentioned article, it was not clear that the Treaty did contain an indirect recognition of the EIC to establish political control over the region of Assam. If Assam was to be automatically retained by the British by virtue of the Treaty of Yandaboo, a provision of this nature would have been inserted.

The treaty effectively ended the six-century old sovereignty of Ahom kingdom, which had previously ruled Assam. It changed the political landscape bringing the entire North East under British control. The Treaty permanently altered Assam's history ending its century old independence. The treaty left the British Government to settle its terms with the legitimate rulers.

*Changes brought  
by the*  
**ADVENT OF BRITISH**



## **Section III**

As we go through this section, we will find out about the reforms introduced in Assam by the British just after the Treaty of Yandaboo. What were these reforms ? What impact did it have on the people of Assam? And finally what was the period of literary renaissance in the history of Assam? Well, we have tried to answer these questions through this section of the magazine.

# Some Reforms

## Administrative Changes

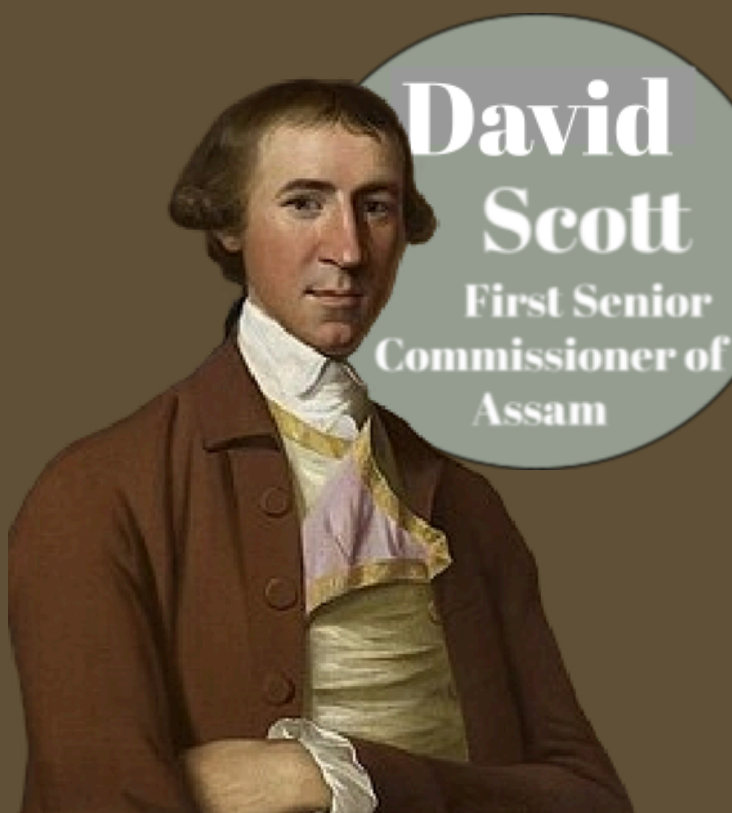
David Scott was the first and foremost British administrator in Assam who, after the annexation of Assam, as per the Treaty of Yandabo, brought significant changes in Assam's administration. The British East India Company capitalized on the weaknesses of the Ahoms and neighboring tribal states in the region, initiating a restoration process under British initiative. David Scott restored Raja Gobinda Chandra of Cachar to his former position in exchange for an annual tribute of Rs. 10,000. Similarly, Raja Ram Singha of Jayantia was reinstated on the condition of accepting British suzerainty. Furthermore, Raja Gambhir Singh was placed on the throne with the support of a British-maintained army in his state. These tribal states were given their autonomy on the agreement that they will not enter in any alliance with other power without the consent of the British. The British East India Company's intention was to annex the entirety of Assam, but they were waiting for an opportune moment. However, due to Upper Assam's vulnerability to Burmese invasions and attacks from neighboring hill tribes, the Company initially refrained from annexing this region, perceiving it as prone to political crisis and instability. The Company decided to restore Purandar Singha as the Ahom ruler in Upper Assam, specifically from Biswanath to the Burhi Dihing River maintaining a friendly relationship with the Ahom kingdom.



Fig - Indentured labourers working in the plantations of Assam

## Economic Changes

British annexation of Assam brought significant economic changes, primarily driven by the establishment of tea plantations and the introduction of a cash-based revenue system. The British recognized Assam's potential for tea cultivation and established large-scale tea plantations, transforming the region into a major tea producer and exporter. However, this development came at a cost, as the plantation system relied heavily on indentured laborers, often from other parts of India, who endured harsh working conditions and low wages. The British introduced a cash-based revenue system, replacing the traditional system of payment in kind. The British invested in infrastructure such as railways and roads in Assam, primarily to support the tea industry and facilitate trade. This development enhanced connectivity and trade within the region, while also integrating Assam more closely into the British colonial economy, serving colonial interests. British colonial policies transformed Assam's traditional economy, shifting focus from self-sufficiency to commercial agriculture and resource extraction. The introduction of a money-based economy and emphasis on cash crops led to significant changes in agrarian life, displacing traditional farming practices and altering the local economic landscape.



# Literary Renaissance

## Dark Age for Assamese language

The Dark Age of the Assamese language is a 37 year long time-frame, from 1836 to 1873, during which Bengali eclipsed the Assamese language. During British India, the Bengali language was imposed over Assamese as the British took over Assam. The clerical and technical workers that they brought were Bengali, in order to impose Bengali as the medium of instruction in schools and colleges, and for all official purposes. This policy led to a decline in the use of Assamese in official settings and a sense of cultural suppression among the Assamese people.

## Anandaram Dhekial Phukan's Early Life

Anandaram Dhekial Phukan was born into a family committed to social and cultural reform. His father, Haliram Dhekial Phukan, was a distinguished historian who authored *Assam Buranji*, one of the first comprehensive historical accounts of Assam. More than just a historian, Haliram was a visionary who saw education as the foundation for societal progress, and he was particularly supportive of women's education, a cause not commonly advocated during this time. These influences shaped Anandaram's worldview and set him on the path of enlightenment, making him a pivotal figure in Assam's renaissance.

Anandaram was deeply committed to the cause of education, and his central belief was that no society could progress without education in its mother tongue. He understood that the key to a person's advancement was through language - the language of their land, their heritage, and their heart.

## Advocate of Vernacular Education and Assam's Cultural Revival

In the era of colonial India, education was largely imparted in foreign languages like English and Bengali. Anandaram realised that while learning foreign languages was necessary for global communication, neglecting one's mother tongue would ultimately erode the cultural foundation of society. Phukan argued that true education could not take root unless it was in a language that the people could fully understand and engage with.

Phukan's resistance to the use of Bengali as the medium of instruction in Assam's primary schools was particularly significant. In his seminal work *Observations on the Education of the People of Assam*, he argued that primary education should be imparted in the mother tongue. He pointed out that Bengali, being a foreign language in Assam, created significant obstacles in education, as neither the teachers nor the students were proficient in it. The result was a gross misunderstanding of concepts, with students unable to grasp the full meaning of the subjects being taught. Furthermore, Phukan criticized the education system for using textbooks in Bengali, which were inaccessible to most of Assam's population.

Anandaram also recognised the importance of using Assamese in courts and administrative matters. He strongly objected to the imposition of Bengali as the court language, emphasizing that it violated the rights of the Assamese people. His fight to restore Assamese as the language of the courts was ultimately successful, marking a significant victory for the Assamese people.

Anandaram  
Dhekial  
Phukan



## Struggle against the imposition of Bengali

The imposition of Bengali in Assam had its roots in colonial administrative policies. British officers, who lacked the initiative to learn Assamese, mistakenly regarded Assamese as a mere dialect of Bengali. This misconception, combined with the shared alphabet of Assamese and Bengali, led to the erroneous belief that the two languages were essentially the same. Bengali was adopted as the official language in Assam's courts and schools, leading to widespread discontent among the Assamese populace.

Anandaram Dhekial Phukan was at the forefront of the movement to dispel this misconception. He believed that the imposition of Bengali threatened to erase Assamese cultural identity. Phukan meticulously documented the differences between the two languages, proving that Assamese was a distinct language with its own grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. In his work 'A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language and on Vernacular Education in Assam', Phukan provided concrete examples to illustrate the linguistic differences between Assamese and Bengali. Through comparative analysis of everyday works, literary passages, and even Sanskrit texts, Phukan demonstrated that Assamese was not a mere variant of Bengali but a unique and independent language. He argued that while Assamese and Bengali shared certain commonalities due to their Sanskritic origins, this did not make them the same language. His meticulous research and clear arguments helped establish Assamese as a language in its own right, distinct from Bengali. This intellectual defence of Assamese laid the foundation for the eventual restoration of Assamese as the official language of

### Philosophical Vision: Language as the Soul of a Nation

Anandaram Dhekial Phukan's fight for Assamese language was not just a linguistic battle - it was a philosophical and cultural one. Phukan understood that language was more than just a means of communication; it was the soul of a person, the vessel of their culture, history, and identity. He believed that the survival of Assamese culture depended on the preservation and promotion of the Assamese language. Without a strong linguistic foundation, Phukan argued, the Assamese people would lose their unique identity and be subsumed by larger, more dominant cultures.

Phukan's philosophical outlook aligned with the ideas of other great thinkers of his time, such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Mahatma Gandhi, who also recognised the importance of cultural and linguistic identity in the process of nation-building. Phukan believed that true progress could only be achieved through a synthesis of tradition and modernity. While he advocated for the learning of foreign languages like English and Bengali for practical purposes, he insisted that Assamese must remain at the heart of Assam's educational and administrative systems.

## The Restoration of Assamese as the Court Language

One of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan's most significant achievements was the restoration of Assamese as the language of the courts. For many years, Bengali had been imposed as the court language in Assam, creating a barrier between the legal system and the Assamese people. Phukan's tireless efforts to replace Bengali with Assamese culminated in the successful reintroduction of Assamese in Assam's judicial system.

Phukan argued that the use of Bengali in the courts was not only impractical but also unjust. He pointed out that most Assamese judges and court officials were more comfortable with Assamese than Bengali, and the imposition of Bengali created unnecessary communication gaps. Furthermore, the general populace found it difficult to understand legal proceedings conducted in a foreign language, which undermined their access to justice.

Drawing on the provisions of the Act XXIX of 1837, which had abolished Persian as the court language in Bengal and Hindustan and replace it with local languages, Phukan argued that the same logic should apply to Assam. If Persian could be replaced by Bengali and Hindustani in other regions, then Bengali could similarly be replaced by Assamese in Assam. Phukan's arguments were compelling, and after years of advocacy, Assamese was finally restored as the court language in Assam, a victory that was warmly welcomed by the Assamese people.

### A Lasting Legacy

Anandaram Dhekial Phukan's life was tragically short, but his legacy endures. His tireless efforts to restore the dignity and prominence of the Assamese language laid the groundwork for future generations of Assamese scholars, writers, and activists. Phukan's contributions to education, language, and society earned him a place among the greatest figures in Assam's history. Through his writings, his advocacy, and his unwavering commitment to the cause of Assamese cultural revival, Phukan gave the people of Assam a renewed sense of pride in their heritage. His work ensured that Assamese would not be relegated to the status of a 'mere dialect' but would be recognised as a distinct and vibrant language with its own literature, history, and intellectual tradition.

Anandaram Dhekial Phukan's life and work reminds us of the importance of language in shaping our identity and our future. His vision of an enlightened, educated, and culturally vibrant Assam continues to inspire us today, as we strive to preserve and promote our linguistic and cultural heritage in an increasingly globalized world.

*Start of*

# UPRISINGS

*In Assam*



## Section IV

As we go through this section, we will find out what the Sepoy Mutiny was that was considered as the first fight against the British for Independence. .

And what was the impact of this movement on the people of Assam? Who were the leaders from Assam who organised and lead the people of Assam? And finally what was the consequence of the movement on the political scenario of Assam and the political awareness of its citizens . Well, we have tried to answer these questions through this section of the magazine.

# The Great Indian Rebellion Of 1857

## First Independence Movement of Assam

After the treaty of Yandaboo, Assam entered into a new political and socio-economic phase. Initially, the British rule was welcomed by both the common people of Assam and the nobility of the Ahom Monarchy. The common people viewed the British as saviors after the menace of Burmese invasion and atrocities committed by the Burmese.

Soon the colonial juggernaut of the British began to roll in Assam, exploiting the common people and depriving the nobility of the Ahom dynasty from any power. They gave more importance to the collection of taxes than the plight of common men and nobility. All these grudges against the British contributed to the first independence movement of Assam which became a part of the pan-Indian phenomenon of Sepoy Mutiny of 1857.

In Assam, however, the uprising differed from other parts of India. It was not led by soldiers or sepoys but by the Ahom nobility and aristocracy, with the support of the common people. During this period, the number of soldiers from Assam or Northeast India was limited or negligible, and those present were not in a position to revolt. Despite this, the Assamese people initiated their own uprising in 1857. Thus, the Sepoy Mutiny in Assam is also considered the first war of independence against the British, in line with the broader Indian context.



## Early Life of Maniram Dewan

Maniram Dutta Barbhandar Barua popularly called Maniram Dewan (17 April 1806 - 26 February 1858) was one of the most prominent noble man in the early part of the British rule in Assam. He remained loyal to the rulers as long as cooperation with them served his interest. Beginning his career as a loyal servant and friend, he held important offices of administration and excelled in every situation. A man of dash and determination, he was the first among his compatriots to find each new avenue of success under the alien rule; yet he was also the first to raise the standard of revolt against it.

Born at Charing in Sibsagar district, his ancestors came to Assam from Kannauj in the early 16th Century. He was the son of Ram Dutta who served as the Dulakasharia Baruah of Ahom King Kamaleshwar Singha and Kaushalya Dutta who was from the Baro-Bhuyan dynasty. The family background provided Maniram with proper atmosphere to mould his career. Maniram at first served as the medium of communication between, Swargadeo Purandar Singha and British rule. But he lost the post of Sheristadar cum Tehsildar of Upper Assam after Purandar Singha's lost the state. In 1839, he joined the Assam Tea Company at Nazira as its Dewan or Chief Executive. Again however, he was infuriated by the overbearing attitude of the small minded Sahibs subordinate to him and retired from his office.



## Maniram and the Assam Tea Company

After being appointed as the Dewan of Assam tea Company, he was able to prove his efficiency by opening several new gardens and raising the profits of the company. But in 1844, the British appointed two more dewans in the Assam Tea Company and reduced the salary of Maniram. As a result of this eccentricity Maniram resigned as the dewan of Assam Tea Company in 1845.

## The First Assamese Tea Farmer

Maniram Dewan was one of those involved in the discovery of tea trees in Assam. He was the man who helped Robert Bruce, who is said to be the inventor of tea in Assam. He informed Robert Bruce about the tea trees.

Being disappointed with the British policy and discrimination towards him by the European Maniram Dewan gave up the Dewan and established his own tea garden at Chenimora in Jorhat, thus he became the first Indian to grow tea commercially in Assam. He established another plantation at Senglung at Sibsagar. He had a lot of experience working as a Dewan of Assam Tea Company for which he achieved impressive success by opening the tea garden. He wanted to make Assam self-reliant through all kinds of enterprise.

But the important thing is that British were alarmed by Maniram's success and devised various tricks to destroy his tea business. Maniram realised that there was no future for him and his countrymen under the colonial rule which would never allow the growth of any independent enterprise by an Indian. He developed a sense of resentment towards them.



## Role of Maniram Dewan in the Revolt of 1857

To highlight the plight of the Ahom people, Maniram initially presented his case before, A.J. Moffat Mills, a prominent Calcutta judge who was sent to Assam on an official tour in 1853 by the lieutenant Governor of Bengal, Sir Jon Campbell. But in his report, Mills made adverse comments on Maniram, Maniram's disaffection with the local authorities in Assam had compelled him to represent his grievances before the Governor General. He went to Calcutta in April 1856. At Calcutta Maniram came into contact with several notable personalities and merchants. Thus in Calcutta, he received an intellectual backing, which he needed most before plunging into a new course of action.

About this time, there occurred the insurrection of the sepoys at Meerut, Delhi, Lucknow, and Kanpur. Maniram calculated the possibility of organising a similar insurrection in Assam for overthrowing the British Raj and considered the situation there very favourable. Maniram communicated all the developments in other parts of India to his friends and associates in Assam through messengers in the guise of fakirs called bhats. Letters addressed to the charging Raja were delivered to Peoli Barua, who acted as his chief advisor in the absence of Maniram.

The native soldiers also agreed to help the rebel. Negotiations were carried on under similar terms with sepoys of Sibsagar, Dibrugarh and Saikhowa. The date of the uprising was set to coincide with Durga Puja, when Maniram would return to Assam and crown Kandarpeswar Singha as the Swargadeo. Rumours were afloat that a steamer was on the way and the Sahibs were preparing to depart and the English planters were on the run for a possible rebellion. All the conditions were favourable for Maniram Dewan

Peoli  
Baruah



Everyone was eagerly waiting for him. Before Maniram could come to Assam to take the lead, a few letters were intercepted by the Principal Assistant of Sibsagar, Captain Charles Holroyd through the instrumentality of Haranath Parvatia Barua, the Police Daroga of Sibsagar and a most trustworthy person of the Europeans in Assam. On September 7, Holroyd with a detachment under captain Lowther made a night raid into Kandarpeswar Singha's palace and arrested him. He was immediately sent to the Alipur jail for detention. Maniram was arrested at Calcutta, detained for a few weeks in the Alipur jail and then brought to Assam for trial. Other implicated in the plot were all apprehended. thus , the plan to revolt against the British was proved failure in Assam.

Maniram Dewan and Peoli Barua, both of them being convicted of treason, were publicly hanged at Jorhat on February 26, 1858. Many other such as Madhu Mallick, Kamala Barua, Dutiram Barua, Marangi Khowa Gohain received transportation for life. Some were deported to the Andamans with confiscation of property. Maniram's death was widely mourned in Assam and several tea garden workers struck work to express their support for the rebellion.



## Who was Peoli Baruah?

Piyali Barua was hanged in 1858 along with Maniram Dewan in Jorhat. Peoli Barua was born and raised in the dual atmosphere of reverence towards and resentment against the British and their ways of life. The man who goaded him to join 1857 war of Independence and shared the execution plank with him was Maniram Dewan. While Dewan was all throughout busy in Calcutta mobilising anti-British elements, his most trusted ally Piyali Barua was meticulously executing his plans in and around Jorhat. Through fiery speeches, he managed to win the support of Indian sepoys based at Nogra in Golaghat.

Peoli's heroism, however, gradually slipped into the backyard of public amnesia as historical accounts crystallized to produce a picture that is, in reality, not quite correct. The similarities in the names of Piyoli Phukan and Piyali Barua also created a persistent confusion, although their hangings were separated by 28 years.

## Conclusion

The Revolt of 1857 is an important event in the history of India. In Assam Maniram Dewan played a significant role in the initial stages of the revolt. He was instrumental in organizing the local population in support of the rebellion. The revolt ended with failure but its impact is noteworthy which gave the revolt a special place in the history of colonial Assam. Several folk songs were composed in his memory. Beside a statesman, he was also a man of literary talent. He composed "Buranji Vivek Ratna", "Bara-Bhuyan Charitra" and "Bhakti Pradip" The petition that Maniram submitted to the government from time to time, bear testimony to his sound knowledge of different problems of his society. However, freedom fighters in Assam with the progress of the freedom movement in the country looked Maniram Dewan as their pioneer, as a hero who sacrificed his life for the cause of his motherland. The martyr to the people of Assam, Maniram Dewan continues to be an inspiration for the Assamese.

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BEQUEST CLUB

### Editor's Note

Through the magazine, the Bequest Club has tried to hand the readers with the Modern history of Assam from The Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 to the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857. Stay tuned for our upcoming magazines. Peace out..

Chief Editor :  
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**Debamit Dey**

Special Thanks to our  
Club Coordinators :  
**Antara Borah**  
**Ma'am**  
**Sumona Borkotoky**  
**Ma'am**

# Our Upcoming Events

## *Letter to the Past*

For this event students are asked to write letters to eminent Historical figures and thank or criticize them for their what they did in the past. The students can write about their personal opinion about the person's contribution in the past and how it shaped the present society. The best letters out of all will be published in our monthly magazine of the club.



## *Historical Detective*

For this event, students are asked to create a creative and critical hypothesis on a statement that would be provided by the club beforehand. The statement would be pinned in the softboard of the club and a time period for submission of the hypothesis would be mentioned. The best hypothesis will also be published in the monthly magazine of the club.

## *Today's News is tomorrow's History*

For this event, the students would be asked to collect fascinating news related to the present events of the world. A box will be provided and students will be asked to submit their findings in the box. By the end of each month, the members of the club would select the most fascinating news from the box and pin it in the softboard of the club.



FOR ANY QUERIES RELATED TO THE EVENTS, CONTACT THE CLUB CAPTAIN AND VICE CAPTAINS.