

The Role of Maniram Dewan in Mediavel Assam

Bhaba Jyoti Nath

Abstract

Maniram Dutta Barbhandar Barua Popularly called “Maniram Dewan” was the most prominent Assamese elite in the early part of British rule in Assam. The 1857 Rebellion and the name of Maniram go together in Assam. Maniram started his career as a most loyal servant of the British extending his help to the Government even to suppress the early liberation movements organised by the members of the aristocracy against the British regime. He brooded hopes of restoring this old Government and looked for supporters. Then came the Great Rebellion of 1857. In the wake of the rebellion, he attempted to take up arms to overthrow the British rule. But before his plan could be materialized, the secret was divulged. Maniram was arrested and thrown to the gallows along with his lieutenant Piyali Barua in February 1858. His determination, intelligence and efficiency and his influence and power made him a legendary character in Assam. Folk songs called ‘Maniram Dewanar Geet’ are still recited in some country sides in upper Assam from which he hailed him. It was Maniram who informed the British about Assam tea grown by the Singpho people, which was hitherto unknown to the rest of the world. When the Tea committee visited Assam for the study about tea cultivations. He rendered services to the British as Tahisildar, Shiristadar, in recognizing the khel for a new source of revenue. The small minded subas subordinate to him and retired him from the office. He decided not to go back to the British and started tea gardens of his own. Thus he was recognised as a pioneer of Assam tea cultivator.

Keyword: Maniram Dewan, Tea, Maniram Dewanar Geet, Rebellion of 1857.

Introduction:

Maniram Dewan was born into a family that had migrated from Kamauj to Assam in the early 16th century. He was born on Baishakh 13, saka (17 April) at Saring under the district of Rangpur is one of the four families of Changkakti. The name of his father was Ramadutta and his mother name was Koshalya devi. Maniram Dutta Barua belongs to a respectable Assamese Kayastha family¹. The family background provided Maniram with proper atmosphere to mould his career. The promising child

Maniram as legend goes began to show indication of a great personality from his very Childhood. Maniram's relation with the British East India Company was a remarkable chapter in the History of Assam and it has far-reaching consequences. Maniram cooperated with the British since they decided to entire Assam for repulsing the Burmese. He and Bhulanath Parbatia Phukan acted as guides to David Scoot when he entered Nowgong through the Jayantia Kingdom. They showed him roads through Chouripur, Jayantiapur, Mantrong, Mukjee, Lunting, Chouri, Rahachoki and Nowgong. Maniram had also rendered great services to the British in establishing relation with the Singphoes and Matak. Maniram helped the British to establish their rule over all the tribes and acted as the mediator between British and jayantia to construct a road for the movement of Light Infantry Battalion to jayantia hill². He had to leave the new assignment of revenue shirastadar cum Tahsildar under capt. Neufville in 1828. As a result of his duty the revenue increased within a single year after his becoming Tahsildar from Rs.38863 in 1827-1828 to Rs.78453 in 1828-1829. Maniram brought changes in the judicial administration and introduced 3 new panchayat- Bar-Panchayat, Saru-Panchayat & charachari Panchayat. With the introduction of new administration machinery Maniram became the pioneer of Assamese administrator and he laid the emphasis for future administrative structure of Assam.

Methodology

The study is descriptive in nature and it was based on various secondary sources like Books, Magazines, Journals and internet.

Discussion

Maniram and early anti-british movement: The Assamese people had initially welcomed British rule because it had ensured peace and security, the assurance of the British to restoration of the Ahom monarchy, but it was felt hopeless when British annexed lower Assam. The establishment of a hierarchy of new officials operating through new legal and administrative machinery, and that too through a new language, opened the way for widespread corruption and extortion. This inevitably produced a deep sense of resentment; and this resentment manifested itself in a series of attempts by the nobility to overthrow the Government. The first attempt was made towards the close of 1828 when a group of nobles under the leadership of Dhanjoy, The second attempt to overthrow British rule was made about a year later by Gadadhar singha. Maniram being a servant of British helped them to suppress the movement and give strict punishment to the rebel. Maniram was enthusiastic in taking action on the rebel leaders that he didnot hesitate even to insult Piyali Phukan with some touring

remarks³. Thus his character was being seen as a traitor by the Assamese revolutionaries. Rebellion of Dhanjoy, Piyali and Jiuram which suppressed with hardly by the Government. It is to be noted that these cases were judge by the Jorhat Barp-anchayat where Maniram acting as a judge, found them guilty and punished them

Maniram as the Chief advisor to restore Ahom Monarchy: when British annexed the Lower Assam and install a vassel ruler in the upper Assam, thus Maniram who was the Raja's chief advisor his efficiency in revenue, Military and Judicial affairs. Maniram soon became the right hand of the new Raja who was then in his thirties. Having passed most of his life in Bengal, the Raja had to depend largely the advice of Maniram in administration of the country. Maniram tried his best to reform in the revenue department and also had reform in the khel system for increase revenue to pay the company's govt. Therefore, under such difficulties, Purandor with the help of Maniram paid first year tribute in time⁴.

Maniram Dewan of the Assam Tea Company: Being disappoint with the British policy and discrimination toward him by the European Maniram give up the Dewan and established his own tea garden at Chenimora in Jorhat, thus he becoming the first Indian to grow tea commercially in Assam⁵. Jorhat later become home to the tea research laboratory Tocklai experimental station. He established another plantation at Selung at Sivsagar. A part from the tea industry, Maniram also ventured into iron smelting, gold procuring and salt production he was also involved in the manufacturing of goods like matchlocks, hoes and cutlery. His other business activities included handloom, brick making, coal supply, elephant trade, construction of building for military head quarters and agricultural products. Some of the markets established by him include the Garohat in Kamrup, Nagahat near Sivsagar, Borhat at Dibrugarh, Sissihatat Dhemaji and Darrangia 'Haat in Darrang'⁶. Thus, we can say that Maniram played a significant role the establishment of the tea plantation in Assam.

Role of maniram in 1857 revolt: Maniram's disaffection with the local authorities in Assam has compelled him to represent his grievances before the Governor General. He went to Calcutta April 1856. He met several people there and dicuss several topics, on hearing the possible sepoy mutiny and Bahadur Shah had been proclaimed Emperor of Hindustan at Delhi by the rebels and many princes were regaining their lost possessions. Maniram calculated the possibility of organising a similar insurrection in Assam for overthrowing the British Raj, and considered the situation there very favourable. He communicated all the developments in other parts of India to his friends and associates in Assam through messengers in the guise of fakirs called Bhats⁷, who had been regularly visiting Assam. Letters addressed to the Charing Raja were delivered to Piyali Barua, who acted as his chief

advisor in the absence of Maniram. Absent of English soldiers the native soldiers were agree to help the rebel. Negotiations were carried on under similar terms with the sepoys at Sivsagar, Dibrugarh and Saikhowa. 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 this condition was favourable for Maniram, everyone was eagerly waiting for him come. Before Maniram could come to Assam to tape the lead, a few of letters intercepted by The principal Assistant of Sivsagar. After spread their plain and Britishers take firm action against them. On September 7, Halroyed with a detachment under capt. Leather made a might raid into KandarpeswarSingh house and arrested him. Maniram was arrested at Calcutta, detained for a few weeks in the Alipur Jail and then brought to Assam for trail. Other implicated in the plot were all apprehended. Thus, the plan of to revolt against the British was proved failure in Assam. Maniram Dewan and Piyali Barua, both of them being convicted of treason and were publicly hanged at Jorhat on February 26, 1858. . Kandarpeswar Singha was not brought for Trial; he was detained at Burdwan till 1860⁸, after which he was allowed to settle at Gauhati as a pensioner, where he died in 1880.

Conclusion

Maniram's career had started with his early contact with David Scott in 1824 till his execution in 1858 for attempting to expel the British from Assam in the wake of the Rebellion of 1857 bringing out the points of his success and failure in relevant places. Beside a statemen, Maniram was also man of literary talent. He composed "Buranji Vivek Ratna". Beside it, he also composed Bara-Bhuyaan charitra and the 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. The credit yet goes to Maniram Dewan that he was more practical than his contemporary, educated Assamese elites in the sense that he was no more under the illusion that prosperity to his country would come only under the British rule on the other hand, he took an anti-imperialist stance, rose in arms against the British imperial government and finally died as a Martyr. For this rule, he has been acclaimed as one of the early freedom fighters and has become almost a legendary figure in Assamese society. It he had been supported by all section of people, particularly by others member of the middle class, thus making a common form of economic, culture and political independence against the British, he could have at least one temporary success against the imperialist.

However, freedom fighters in Assam with the progress of the liberation movement in the country looked to Maniram as their pioneer, as a hero who sacrificed his life on the altar of his motherland. It is with this tradition that Maniram's still living in the Assamese society, commanding respects from all

who have love for freedom. Maniram Dewan's tea estates were sold to George Williamson in an auction after his death. Several folk songs, known as the "Maniram Dewanar Geet" were composed in his memory. The Maniram Dewan trade centre of Gauhati and the Maniram Dewan Boy's Hostel of the Dibrugarh University is named after him. In 2012, the planning commission Deputy Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia announced that he planned to declare tea as the national drink of India to coincide with the 212th Birth anniversary of Maniram Dewan.

References

1. Dutta, Dr. A. K; "Maniram Dewan and the contemporary Assamese Society,"(1990) Jyoti Prokasan Gauhati,
2. Hazarika, Bijay Bhusan; "Political life in Assam," Gyan publishing house, Delhi 1987
3. Dutta, Dr.A. K.; "ManiramDewan and the Contemporary Assamese Society ," (1990) Jyoti prakasan Gauhati
4. Kalita, Romesh Chandra; "Assam During the Colonial period , Ashok book stall, Gauhati-2008
5. Sarma Benudhar ; "Maniram Dewan, publication Board of Assam, Gauhati- 2007
6. Goswami, Mridupawan ; "History of Modern Assam, ArunPrakasan Gauhati-2007,
7. Barua, S. L; "A Comprehensive History of Assam, M.M published New Delhi – 2012
- 8.** Kar, Subir; "1857 in North- East,"akansa publishing house, New Delhi-2008