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## JYOTIPRASAD AGARWALA AND NATIONALISM IN ASSAM

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### Abstract:

*Jyotiprasad Agarwala was born in 1903 C.E., a period of transition which showed a new era in every aspect of Assam. The 19th century Assamese renaissance had its rays in Jyotiprasad Agarwala's life and being a product of early 20th century, his social ideas were remolded with the changing needs of the Assamese society.*

### KEYWORDS:

Nationalism , Assamese Society , Jyotiprasad Agarwala .

### INTRODUCTION :

Since the annexation of Assam by the British Government, Assamese society underwent different changes which also had its effect on the cultural and social life of Assam also. In such an atmosphere Jyotiprasad Agarwala had stepped forward from his nineteenth century predecessors locating the central theme of his intellectual thinking on humanity, culture and nation.

Though Jyotiprasad Agarwala was mostly projected as a cultural icon, his cultural mission had a political vision. His dream was to work for a progressive Assamese society free from exploitation, poverty and social inequality. Jyotiprasad Agarwala through his new ideas of juxtaposing Assamese culture with nationalism added a new dimension to the available legacy.

Jyotiprasad Agarwala belonged to a period which heralded a new era that was dawning upon Assam. Born in the transition period (1903 CE), Jyotiprasad Agarwala had the opportunity to ingrain within himself the rays of the 19th century Assamese renaissance with a strong faith in western education and rationalist thinking. Beyond that, during the period the Assamese attained the consciousness of modern self entity in all aspects of literature, art and culture. Being a product of the age, his social ideas were also remolded in accordance with the changing needs of the Assamese society.

We know that, there are important differences in ways of defining the concept of nationalism. Some equated it with 'national sentiment', others with 'nationalist ideology and language' and others again with 'nationalist movements'. There is also a difference between those who stress the cultural rather than the political aspects of nationalism.

But the general view is that nationalism was, first of all, a doctrine of popular freedom and sovereignty. A very striking feature of Indian nationalism was that it emerged under conditions of political subjection of the Indian people by the British. Nationalism in India, in modern terms did not exist prior to the establishment of British rule. But there is little disagreement that the Indian nationalism was a product of colonial modernity.

There are different theories of nationalism. The most important schools regarding the theories of nationalism are 'early nationalist', 'neo- Traditionalist', 'Cambridge school', Marxist school", and 'Subaltern school'. The 'early nationalist' as well as some of its later followers focused primarily on the nationalist ideology and a national consciousness to which all other forms of consciousness were assumed to have been subordinated. Prasenjit Duara has critiqued such formation as 'Teleological model on Enlightenment

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History' which gives a false sense of unity of Indian nationalism. However, the 'Cambridge School' interpreted Indian nationalism as nothing more than a battle between the two men of straws. In other words this school completely denied the role of a nationalist ideology in Indian nationalism.

On the other hand the Marxist tried to explain Indian nationalism in terms of the economic developments of the colonial period. They identified Indian national movement as directed by the bourgeois leadership to suit their own class interests which neglected the mass interests. Sumit Sarkar however, qualifying this view recognized the legitimacy of nationalism and does not ignore the 'internal tensions' within it. Bipan Chandra also argued in similar way that Indian national movement was a popular movement of various classes not exclusively controlled by the bourgeoisie. He demonstrated two types of contradictions in colonial India. As the anti-colonial struggle made progress, the secondary contradictions were comprised in the interest of the primary contradiction and thus the hegemony of a nationalist ideology was established.

Further, the 'Subaltern school' stated that the organized national movement which led to the foundation of the Indian nation-states was a hollow nationalism of the elites.

This notion has undergone considerable shifts in recent years from national analysis to culture, mind and identity. The most important contribution has made by Partha Chatterjee. His assertion on Indian nationalism was that it was essentially a 'different', but derivation discourse from the west. According to him there were two domains of action in Indian nationalism. In the inner spiritual domain the Indians tried to fashion a 'modern' national culture that however was not western and in the outer national world nationalism was already sovereign in which there was little scope for the influence of western models. Indian nationalism was a rethinking and critiquing of the western modernity from the point of India's spiritual-cultural heritage, combined with a scientific approach. Benedict Anderson has categorized nationalism from a different standpoint where he related print capitalism with nationalism. He also pointed out that technology of print and the capital involved which created reading public which ultimately helped shaping a war nation. According to him the nationalism in Asia and Africa had a modular form of the west.

Similarly, modern Assamese nationality formation began with the penetration of British capitalism in the second decade of the nineteenth century. New consciousness flourished among the Assamese elites. The progressive winds from the west entered Assam through Bengal, thereby enabling the region to emerge from the physical and cultural isolation into which it had lapsed, during the long period of Ahom rule. Such consciousness was elementary for the birth of a modern nationality, not on individual basis but collectively.

The impact of the new ideas or renaissance had its impact on Assam for the first time when the region came under British rule in 1826 CE. Growing contact with western ideas coming through Bengal and the aspirations of the emerging Assamese middle classes for a greater share of jobs under the British led to the growth of a new sense of national awareness among the Assamese people. However the imposition of Bengali as the only recognized language during 1836-1873 CE, mutual territorial claims of the two neighbouring provinces, competition for jobs etc., were also responsible for the genesis of nationalist feelings among the Assamese people. One of the major demands of the situation was the identification of the Assamese as Assamese and this identification could be primarily done only through the attribution of a language to them to project the unique and separate identity of themselves against others. Jyotiprasad Agarwala added a new colour and a new dimension to his nationalist feelings by adopted Assamese culture as a major tool to mobilize the Assamese masses.

Being a cultural nationalist he frequently driven into state politics to defend the cultural autonomy of the nation. A numbers of his speeches that he had delivered are testimonies to his political and ideological penetration into the socio cultural issues of Assam. The central theme of his vision was how to create a humane culture and to defeat the evil- the duskriti. His goal was to help humanity to keep the cultural resources of human civilization protected from the aggression of the material resources created by human being themselves to free their needs. His different contributions gave a new vibrance and rhythm to Assamese culture. According to him, to change a society a cultural change was needed. He realized the value of communicating through culture and the ability of songs to convey messages than speeches or slogans. It was with his song "Luitor parore ami deka lora, mariboloi bhoi nai....." on the lips of the satyagrahis which became a theme song of the freedom fighters. He was aware that workers and farmers formed the backbone of society and it was in the around of Tezpur that he carried out his nationalist propagating activities. In his first film "Jaymoti" through choosing an inspiring episode of Ahom history, Jyotiprasad Agarwala displayed his nationalistic fervor and love for the land of his birth.

Jyotiprasad Agarwala was not an ordinary nationalist. John Hutchinson revealed that the dynamics of cultural nationalism has a separate entity and it mostly focused on the moral regeneration of the community. Jyotiprasad Agarwala through his new ideas of juxtaposing Assamese culture with nationalism added a new dimension to the available legacy. Further it proves that nationalisms in Asia and

Africa were not totally derived from a "modular form of the west." His nationalistic ideas had partly similarities with Bipan Chandra's concept of homogenous nationality. Since, Jyotiprasad Agarwala had tried to mobilize all the different sections or classes of the Assamese society into one national banner. Again his ideologies had partly similarities with Partha Chatterjee's concept of nationalism. As Partha Chatterjee had articulated, Jyotiprasad Agarwala tried to link the 'inner spiritual domain of culture' with the 'outer domain' of the Assamese people. Jyotiprasad's efforts to link up the 'inner domain' of nationalism with its 'outer domain' as Partha Chatterjee has articulated, further proves the distinctiveness of Assamese nationalism.

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