



## ANECDOTES OF MALEGARH AND RONTILLA OF BARAK VALLEY, ASSAM, PERTAINING TO THE SEPOY MUTINY 1857

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### ABSTRACT

Indian history is memorable for many epoch making event including revolts, wars, protests which eventually led to a series of historical events and eventually end of the British rule in India. The year between (1857 – 1947) marked various stages of national movement which prompted the nationalists spirit in every nook and corner of India. The concept “nationalism” triggered due to organized national movement under one banner. The making of national identity goes back to ancient era of Indian history but it gained its base after the British East India Company stepped in India. Their struggle in social, political and economic field had inspired people to acknowledge their national identity and eventually led to the united front against their struggle for colonization.

Key words: revolts, historical, national, sepoy, mutiny, company, uprising

### INTRODUCTION

Anti – British feeling and passion to end colonialism in India resulted in many uprisings which culminated in the famous “Sepoy Mutiny of 1857”. The impact of mutiny also left its mark in Barak valley. Malegarh ( Karimganj district ) and Rontilla (Hailakandi district ), both in Barak valley are the only two centres where the spark of Sepoy Mutiny were deeply felt. But unfortunately both “Malegarh” and “Rontilla” mutiny were not brought into the mainstream of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 and so missed a page in Indian history.

The 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries were epoch making in Indian history as India entered into national and international trading relations with European countries. Spices, textiles and other material products made their way to the European countries. In this connection, the merchants of Arab, Italians, the Mediterranean, European, Venice, Genoa and other sailors played a dominant role in increasing the prosperity of Europe. These activities culminated in geographical discoveries. Thus, Columbus discovered America in 1492 and Vasco da Gama reached Calicut in 1498.

The trading activities led to the imperialistic expansion of multiple European countries to India. In 1595, the Dutch made their first landmark in India followed by the Portuguese, French and eventually English. Other nations like Prussians, Swiss, Danes, Austrians also stepped in India for trading purposes. But it was the English who successfully defeated all the European countries and made their landmark in India.

The Dutch dominance brought to an end by the English by defeating them in the battle near Hooghly. The Anglo- French rivalry was a turning point in the history of India as it resulted in overthrow of France by the English. The Austrian War of Succession which broke out in March 1740 and ended with the conclusion of Seven Years War resulted in the famous Anglo-French rivalry in India (1746-1763).It resulted in the supremacy of the English over the trading activities in India.

Bengal turned to be the main trading centre of the British and it was here that the English first laid the foundation stone of the Company. It was in 1651 that the first English factory was established in Bengal under permission from Subedar of Bengal, Sultan Shuja. He also granted the company the privileges for free trade throughout Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in 1651 for a nominal amount of rupees 3000.

SPARK OF “ THE REVOLT OF 1857 “

The death of Aurangzeb led to the disintegration of the various parts of the Mughal empire under different heads during the later part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Bengal, the then comprised of the present province of Orissa. Taking advantage of the weakling position of Mughal empire, Murshid Quli Jafar Khan declared himself to be the independent ruler of Bengal. In 1713, he discarded all the trading privileges enjoyed by the company and demanded the same duties as paid by the local merchants. But the 1717 royal farman ( order ) granted by the Mughal emperor Farukhsiyar had granted the company the freedom to export and import their goods in Bengal.

In 1727, Murshid Quli Khan died and was succeeded by his son- in- law, Shuja-ud-din. Shuja-ud-din died in 1739 and was succeeded by his son Sarfraz Khan. Sarfraz Khan was succeeded by his Deputy Governor, Alivardi Khan. All these nawabs from Murshid Quli Khan to Alivardi Khan had objected to the English interference by the Farman of 1717.

The turning point came in 1756, when Alivardi Khan's grandson Siraj-ud-daula succeeded him for the nawabship of Bengal. The Seven Years War ( 1756-63 ) resulted in miscellaneous war between French and English in India also. Thus in order to secure their position , both the parties began fortifying their settlements. When Siraj-ud-daula ordered the English to demolish their fortifications at Calcutta, the English refused him. Offering shelter to a rich merchant of Bengal against the wishes of Siraj-ud-daula and the abuse of the trade privileges by the Englishmen- all these led to the circumstances that led to the "Battle of Plassey" in January 2, 1757 where the British defeated Siraj-ud-daula and occupied Bengal. Thus, the British made their first landmark in India by occupying Bengal.

The Battle of Buxar (1764), Anglo- Mysore War (1765-1792), Anglo- Maratha War (1775-1818), Anglo-Sikh War (1845-1846)- all these provided the British for their imperialistic expansion in India.

The various Constitutional developments between (A.D 1773- 1853) like the Regulating Act (1773), Pitt's India Act (1784), Charter Act of 1793 etc led to the changes in constitutional machinery that invoked the British to form their political stronghold in India upsetting the Indian citizens.

The introduction of various revenue settlements was another stroke on Indians. The Permanent Settlement introduced by Lord Cornwallis in 1772 in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa; the Ryotwari Settlement introduced by Thomas Munro and the Mahalwari Settlement introduced in major portions of the U.P, the Central Provinces, Punjab. (DHANAGARE, 1983) All these settlements were meant to exploit the farmers by levying huge tax with much benefit to the zamindars and the Britishers that ignited the revolutionary spirit of the Indians.

Adding to these circumstances, some activities on the part of the British sparked the anti-british upsurge among the Indians. Dalhousie's "Doctrine of Lapse" was the most potent factor that ignited the fire of the revolt. In addition to this, the cancellation of pension of the adopted son of the ex- Peshwa Baji Rao II by Dalhousie, the annexation of Nagpur and Satara upon whom the Marathas looked with pride, the removal of the titular Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah II from Delhi, from his ancestral palace, the deprivation of Rani of Jhansi from her ruling rights of her palace, the annexation of Avadh, the abolition of titles and pensions of the native princes, all these added to the grievances of the Indians. It was estimated that Lord Dalhousie annexed eight states in course of eight years.

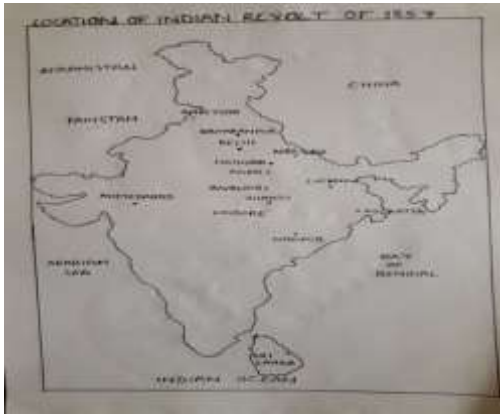
The encroachment of unrestricted entry of Christian missionaries by the Charter Act of 1813 led to the conversion of many Indians to Christianity which wounded the religious sentiment of the Indians.

The British interference into the religious and social life of the Indians which ignited the revolutionary spirit can be proved from numerous legislations passed by the British government like – the suppression of Sati in 1829 by Warren Hastings, female infanticide, the Hindu Widow Remarriage Act, 1856 drafted by Lord Canning; introduction and promotion of western education and so on.

The economic exploitation of the country in terms of drain of wealth from Bengal, de-industrialisation , imposition of heavy protective duties of Indian goods in Britain, the flooding of machine-made British goods in Indian markets – all these led to the growth of anti-british movement. (SARKAR, 1983)

But the immediate cause that led to the Revolt 1857 was the introduction of new enfield rifle cartridges that was greased with cows and pigs fat which had to be bitten off before the cartridge was loaded into the rifle.

On 10<sup>th</sup> may, 1857, the sepoys broke out in open rebellion with the cry "Delhi Chalo" in Delhi.



## CHITTAGONG REVOLT

The Mutiny of 1857 centered around the garrison town at Merrut on 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1857. Eighty five members of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bengal Light Cavalry refused to use cartridges smeared with animal fats and they were put behind the bars. Liberated by their counterparts, they rampaged some British military stations and became determined to kill European officers.

The news of this rampage and uprising spread all over India like wildfire. It effected Delhi as the mutineers in Delhi adopted the same path. It also left its mark in Bengal where 10 Bengal Light Cavalry Regiments and the 74 Bengal Native Infantry had been stationed. The skirmishes of the Revolt of 1857 in Delhi and Meerut left its mark in Barrackpore and Chittagong. The impact of the revolt was first felt in Barrackpore on 29<sup>th</sup> march, 1857 under the leadership of Mangal Pandey.

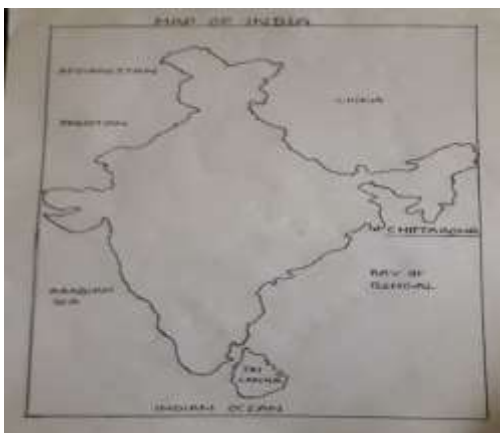
Mangal Pandey joined the Bengal army in 1849 and in march 1857, he was appointed as sepoy in the 5<sup>th</sup> Company of the 34<sup>th</sup> Bengal Native Infantry. Under the influence of nationalism, on 29<sup>th</sup> march 1857, Mangal Pandey openly revolted against the British along with some others. He tried to gun down Lieutenant Baugh, but failed. He was executed on 8<sup>th</sup> Aril, 1857. The skirmishes of Mangal Pandey soon spread to Sylhet, Jessore, Rangpur, Pabna and Dinajpur. The whole Bangladesh was in extreme chaos .

On 18 december, 1857, the sepoys of 34<sup>th</sup> Native Infantry revolted against the British in Chittagong. They adopted the following various aggressive mode as a means of protest.

- i) Breaking the prison cell.
- ii) Setting free all the prisoners which also included their inmates.
- iii) Robbing the British of their arms and treasures.
- iv) Ablazing the army barracks.

Alarmed by this grave situation in different parts of Bangladesh, especially in Sylhet, Dinajpur, Jessore and Mymensingh, the British authorities undertook the following special defensive steps to prevent such uprisings in the whole Bangladesh—

- i) The British authority dispatched three companies of the 54<sup>th</sup> Regiment and one hundred seamen to Dhaka.
- ii) A Naval Brigade was dispatched to some districts of Bangladesh like – Rangpur, Dinajpur, Jessore.



The immediate effect of this step arrived when the forces of the Naval Brigade began disarming the naval of Dhaka. In retaliation, the sepoys of Lalbagh revolted the British action of disarming the sepoys. Following several skirmishes, many sepoys were killed and some were arrested. In the Court Martial, eleven sepoys were executed, while others sent to life imprisonment. The effect of the revolt varied depending upon surroundings. Some regiments were ordered to disarm themselves to obstruct the uprising. The mode of uprising was different for Indians. Some took up arms against the Britishers, while some resisted to take side of the British and remained aloof. Some fled to Mymensingh , while some made their way to Manipur, via, Tripura and Cachar.



After approaching Barak valley, the mutineers received the news of barricading the common route to Panchgram by British army commanded by Lt. Ross. The report of Lt. Ross revealed the fact that the mutineers had grouped themselves and were approaching towards Cachar. These group forwarded through haphazard and rough mountainous terrain and passed through Sarespore hills and many villages of Companygunge at night aided by the Manipuris. The Manipuris instructed by Narendrajit Singh helped some of them to load themselves equipped with arms and ammunitions in a boat and tuck away in Kalapahar ( Jaribond).

#### ROLE OF NARENDRAJIT SINGH IN THE REVOLT OF 1857

Narendrajit Singh, better known as Chahi Ahum played a decisive role in the Revolt of 1857. During the revolt, the king of Manipur stood in support of the British, but his sub – ordinates extended their full support to Narendrajit and his allies by declining to get recruitment in ‘ Manipur Rally ‘ that was prepared to check the revolt. A long story in the development of Manipur ignited Narendrajit to take part in the Revolt of 1857. It all started in 1813 when Raja Chourjit Singh, father of Narendrajit Singh, , resided in Cachar under the Kachari kingdom along with his brother, Gambhir Singh, as both were ousted from Manipur by his brother, Marjit Singh in 1813. Within a very short span of time, Gambhir Singh was appointed Commander – in – chief of the Kachari army under Raja Govinda Chandra ( 1818 – 1830 ). Very soon both occupied South Cachar and started ruling from 1818 by expelling Raja Govinda Chandra.

Thus from 1818 onwards, Cachar was ruled by the Manipuri princess, with Chourjit Singh ruling over the South – eastern part with Dungurirpar as its capital, Gambhir Singh in the northern part with Gumra as its capital and later Marjit Singh, who joined his brothers in Cachar in 1819 in Hailakandi ( the then a part of Cachar ). It was during this time, that on 27<sup>th</sup> April, 1819, Narendrajit was born on Dungurirpar. But he was nurtured in Jaribun in Hailakandi and it was during this period that he became acquainted with serious British activities in Barak valley.

#### REASONS FOR THE REVOLT OF NARENDRAJIT SINGH AGAINST THE BRITISH

1) On 9<sup>th</sup> January, 1834, Gambhir Singh died and Nur Singh became the regent of Raja Chandrakirti Singh. Taking advantage of this precarious situation , Tirhubanjit Singh, an elder brother of Narendrajit revolted in 1841, he was mercilessly killed at Manipur. In retaliation, princes Pabitra Singh, Khoiraba ( Neelaambar ) and young Narendrajit himself assembled and decided to revolt against the British.

2) To suppress them, Captain Lyons, the then Superintendent of Cachar arrested the three princes on 16<sup>th</sup> October, 1841 and exiled them to Dacca.

3) In the later period, at the request of Raja Chandrakirti Singh, those three princes were released from Dacca on 7<sup>th</sup> November, 1851, but Narendrajit was kept under strict vigilance at Tejgong ( Dacca ) which lasted for the next ten years.

4) The unrest mind of Narendrajit realized the necessity of a united move against the British and this scope was provided by two significant events in India – i) when the sepoys mutined at Meerut and Delhi on May 1857 declaring Bahadur Shah Zafar as king, ii) when the sepoys of the 34<sup>th</sup> Native Infantry in Chittagong revolted against the British on 18<sup>th</sup> November, 1857 and then proceeded towards Dacca to join the 73<sup>rd</sup> Native Infantry.

5) This united front was intended to move to Delhi but as this route was blocked by the Britishers, they turned eastwards to seek help from the Manipur Raja.

Narendrajit was aided by different rebels from Assam. Mohima Boro Prochand, Laochiklang and Moalu Shikla secretly established co – operation with Narendrajit against the British atrocities. (MISRA, 2012)

[ The 1857 revolt of Delhi and Chittagong was supported by many communities of Assam as its effect can be felt in Assam also. Tribes and communities of Assam like – Manipuris, Bengalis, Bodo, Kacharis , all provided their full support to the sepoys of 1857 uprising as they rendered their loyalty to the Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Jafar.

Laochiklang was a Bodo warrior who was aided by Ali Bengali ( a muslim bengali peasant ) in his revolt against the Britishers. Both rendered their friendship to Mohima Prochand, a Kachari – Bodo royal prince. Trio joined their hands with Narendrajit Singh against the British atrocities.]

Jaintia and Khasi communities also helped the sepoy of the 34<sup>th</sup> Battalion Native Infantry against the Britishers. The combined forces of 34<sup>th</sup> Battalion Native Infantry, Narendrajit and his troops, Khasis and Bodos of Meghalaya, Muslim – Bengalis, Kacharis and plethora of other tribal communities jointly advanced towards Manipur for a joint adventure against Britishers. Moreover, Pangal Muslims of Manipur also joined them against the Britishers.

### MARCH TOWARDS ASSAM (MALEGARH)

The sepoy of the 34<sup>th</sup> Native Infantry then marched towards the way to Coomilla. They directed themselves towards Assam. Turning into the jungles of hill Tippera, they marched steadily towards the south – east of the Sylhet district. They entered Tripura. They moved through the highly haphazard terrain and mountainous region of Tripura and Sylhet before reaching Malegarh and Rontilla. Perhaps they crossed the rough mountain ranges like – Boromura, Atharamura, Longtharai, Shakhan and Jampui hills with other intervening hills. The revolutionaries faced a difficult and rough journey as is evident from the fact of the geographical location of Tripura. Perhaps they preferred long walks or might used local transport to make their approaches to Assam. The existence of rivers like – Khowai, Dholai, Manu, Longai, Juri between Tripura and Assam proves the fact that boat might be their chief means of transport.

A group of revolutionary groups advanced towards Tripura mastered by Havildar Rajabuli Khan, plundered treasure, burned down police stations and released the prisoners while they marched towards Tripura. As soon as the news of their march towards Tripura reached the then king of Tripura, he sent a large troops, well equipped with arms and ammunitions to stop their revolutionary activities. Probably Ishan Chandra Manikya (1849 – 1862 ) was the ruler of Tripura during that period. The Tripuris wanted to be in amicable relationship with the British because at that time Barak Valley, which was under the British rule of the Kachari kingdom, came under the British in 1822. After the reign of Govinda Chandra, Kachari kingdom was annexed by the British by the theory of ‘Doctrine of Lapse’. When the British annexed Cachar, it consisted parts of Nagaon and Karbi – Anglong; North Cachar; Cachar and the Jiri frontier of Manipur.

As soon as the news of the march of army against the mutineers reached them, their hopes and aspirations of getting help and shelter from the king of Tripura shattered in a moment. As a result, the hopes of the mutineers that their life would be safe in the independent territory of Tripura just shattered in a moment. This was the reason for the rapid movement of the mutineers to Malegarh and Rontilla simultaneously.

Their plan was to move through the south of Cachar and emerge in Manipur. During night, crossing the villages of Coomilla district, they halted at Karimpur of Shahbazpur pargana situated on the border of Latu police station and reached Latu (presently situated in Karimganj district ). They moved inside the jungle of Malegarh (Latu), which was situated on the India-Bangladesh border.

Earlier Malegarh was under the Sylhet district of Bangladesh. But before independence, it came under Karimganj district. It is placed along the Indo – Bangladesh border and so both guards of BSF and Bangladesh border placed their border fences to prevent this site from falling into a forbidden territory.

The group that marched towards Malegarh was the 26<sup>th</sup> cadres of the 34<sup>th</sup> Native Infantry Regiment. But unfortunately, the news of their movement reached Mr. Allen ( Member of the board of revenue ) who was determined to intercept them. Being determined to intervene the sepoy, Mr. Allen ordered Major Byng ( the commandant of the Sylhet Light Infantry, now known as 8<sup>th</sup> Gorkha Rifles ) to rampage the sepoy. Major Byng, accompanied by 160 men reached Pratapgarh, covering 80 miles within a long span of 36 hours.

Hearing the news of halt of sepoy in Latu, which was almost 28 miles away from Pratapgarh, Major Byng decided to march towards Latu. They left Pratapgarh leaving their untouched food and passed the night covering the distance and arrived Latu stealthily with his mass soldiers in the next morning. The British troops and the rebels faced each other within a distance of 30 yards. Major Byng encountered the rebels which numbered total 200 in Latu bazaar. The rebels halted stealthily in a hillock on the bank of the river and the British soldiers halted themselves below the bank. Initially, the rebels tried to win their heart and solace the British troops which consisted of Hindustani sepoy by hitting upon their religious sentiment and nationalists feeling, but of no use. Failed to win them on their side, the rebels started rebuking the British troops with lalochezians like – ‘kootas’ and ‘gulams’. The British troops opened fire on those 200 sepoy and soon a gun battle started between the two groups. Twenty six rebels lost their life while others escaped Malegarh to save their life. Major Byng also lost his life in the first round of gun battle. In the second round, five British soldiers were killed with one seriously wounded. After killing Major Byng, the mutineers addressed the Indian sepoy of the British army, ‘ Now we have killed the Sahib, come and join us’. C.E Buckland addressing these mutineers wrote, ‘ The rebel sepoy by solicitations and taunts, tried all in their power to prevent the Hindustanis who formed half of the small force of British’. The British won the battle. Subedar Ajodhya Singh from British troops displayed his valour and helped British won the battle. His immediate commander ordered to drop the idea of pursuing the rebels who had eloped into deep jungles.

On the otherside, when the news of the mass massacre of Latu reached the British on the night of 19<sup>th</sup> December, Robert Stewart to prevent further uprising arrested six Manipuri princes of Cachar, viz, Khem Singh, Sangie Thapa, Mypha, Hawjaw, Kunnai Singh and Khoirakpa. Narendrajit in order to escape this arrest, had gone underground and so escaped imprisonment.

#### ROLE OF ZAMINDARS IN MALEGARH MARTYRDOM

The zamindars also played a decisive role in the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 in Malegarh. Some zamindars like Kalamia of Latu and few others obscuranted and aided the rebels, but lacked courage to take arms against the British.

These twenty-six martyr were buried in Latu which earned a historical importance for their martyrdom. Some other troops of Indian rebel force also marched towards Tripura, Lushai Pahar and Manipur in order to save their lives and also to ignite the spirit of freedom in the heart of commoners.

A marble and stone plaque were placed to commemorate the martyrs so that pupil can acknowledge the story of the Revolt of 1857 of Malegarh. Two other points, viz, Malegarh – Sepoy Mutiny Point – 1 and Malegarh – Sepoy Mutiny Point – 2 also steal the eyeball of tourists. This event now bears the epithet ‘‘ THE MALEGARH WAR MEMORIAL’’ or ‘‘WAR OF LATU ‘‘.

The graveyard of the valiant sepoy of 34<sup>th</sup> Battalion Native Infantry namely – Rizbul Khan, Sher Khan, Shamsher Khan from Orissa, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh can be seen in the battle arena of Latu.

The means of communication to reach Malegarh crematorium were – buses, rickshaws, cabs. The place is also well – equipped with good infra – structure.

#### RONTILLA MUTINY IN MOHANPUR VILLAGE ( HAILAKANDI)

The Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 had an intense impact on other side of Barak valley too. After the Chittagong raid, a group of mutineers moved towards Hailakandi with the hope of getting security.

Hailakandi is the 27<sup>th</sup> district situated in the southernmost part of Assam. It is surrounded by river Barak, Cachar district in the North & East respectively, Mizoram state in the south and east respectively and Karimganj district in the west. The district consists of inter – state border with Mizoram on its south. Its length is 76 km and had inter – state border on sides with Karimganj district and Cachar district.

As is evident from the geographical fact, the mutineers moved towards Hailakandi because it was full of forests and considering this as a countryside, the mutineers thought their life to be secured in such isolated place. Again they also had the intension to spark the revolutionary spirit in the interior part. Enlightened with these thought, the mutineers moved to Mohanpur ( Hailakandi ) which was a hilly region surrounded by forests.

Rontilla of Mohanpur village of Hailakandi district is situated 14 km away from Hailakandi town. It was here where some wings of the 34<sup>th</sup> Native Infantry Regiment of Chittagong took shelter to serve their dual purpose – self security and to bring the locals within the ambit of the Revolt of 1857. After the Malegarh execution where their co-partners and activists of Chittagong raid were assassinated by British Major Byng who was a Major of Sylhet Light Infantry Brigade of the British East India Company, a group of mutineers under the leadership of Rajob Ali marched towards Mohanpur (Hailakandi) on 22<sup>nd</sup> December, 1857. The reason behind their halt in Mohanpur (Hailakandi) was that the king of Manipur, Prince Narendrajit Singh had rendered his helping hand towards these martyrs. While moving to Manipur, they decided to take rest in a hilly area surrounded by jungles near Mohanpur. They reached Mohanpur via places like Shonbill, Gamharia, Sharaspur and Barni river in Kathakal. They took a temporary halt in the hill for rest which was surrounded by jungles. But the basic necessities of life like food and other commodities compelled them to move to nearby areas and markets. They also urged local people to join their struggle for independence. But some localities informed about the whereabouts of these martyrs to the British. When the news of the halt of the mutineers of the 34<sup>th</sup> Native Infantry Regiment of Chittagong reached the British Superintendent, Robert Stewart who was at a camp in Panchgram immediately deputed British troops under the leadership of Lieutenant Ross to Mohanpur on 21 december, 1857. But to the unfortunate of the Britishers, a part of the army had left Mohanpur and forming groups scattered across Dhuarbond, Jhalenga, Chatla etc. The exhausted and wounded mutineers regrouped themselves and marched through the rough forested terrain of Duhalia. The British troops encircled the tilla taking advantage of the jungles that surrounded the place. In the next morning, i.e, on 22<sup>nd</sup> December, 1857 when the rebel army began to had their breakfast, Ross ordered fire and a heroic battle was fought between them in which the native army fought bravely but as it was a surprise attack on the British side, they failed to defend their life. Well equipped with latest and infinite ammunitions, the British started bombarding the place and opened fire upon the Indian rebels. It was figured out that twelve of the revolutionaries lost their life and some injured mutineers were arrested who were hanged to death on a banyan tree near the ‘‘ferry ghat’’ of Mohanpur village.

Two troops of the Indian rebel army moved towards Jhalenga and Binnakandi area respectively. On 24 december, 1857 the British brutally crushed a troop of the Indian rebel in Jhalenga area. It so happened that on the way to Binnakandi near Bhuban hills, the rebels happened to face another bloodshed with the contingent of Lt. Ross. In this ensuing battle, eighteen mutineers lost their life including two British soldiers. Local communities of Lushai and Kuki rendered their support to the British army.

Narendrajit awaited these sepoy in Bhuban Pahar. He had already joined these mutineers when they reached Cachar on 20 december, 1857. With the objective of expelling the British from Cachar and to set free all the six Manipuri princes, he conspired against the Britishers. He involved some local inhabitants of Cachar and some sub – ordinate officers of jail by luring their national sentiment. But unfortunately, a traitor ( major ) of the Manipuri army, Longjam Roma Singh informed the British

superintendent about this escape. On 10<sup>th</sup> January, 1858, the six princes managed to escape but were unable to join the war at Binnakandy. (SINGH, 2019) The Superintendent investigated the matter and found the sub – ordinate jail staff responsible for this. One hundred rupees was announced as a reward for informing about the princes. A group was dispatched immediately for hunting these princes, but all seemed to be futile. . The valiant of the sepoys can be found in one of the letter of R.Stewart, “When the mutineers of the 34<sup>th</sup> Native Infantry entered Cachar and their strength and intentions were unknown, the agitation amongst the Munnipoorie population was extreme, and the station was threatened each day with attack.”

On January 1858, the last surviving troop of the Indian rebel army was brutally crushed by the British in Binnakandi area. The Britishers last stroke was the arrest of Prince Narendrajit Singh who felt it honour to be a part of the Sepoy Mutiny. He was arrested and badly tormented by the Britishers. But Rontilla rebel leader Rajob Ali Khan and his wife being wounded, somehow managed to escape in the dense forest of” Bhuvan Pahar”.Till date no trace could be found about them, but it has been assumed that they met their doom in the forest.

The British government thought the Manipuri princes to be a dangerous hurdle for establishing a peaceful government, and so fourteen Manipuri princes were arrested from Cachar and were shifted to Nuddea in West Bengal. Gonjer Ali and Ghouse Ali, the zamindar of Pratapgarh and the zamindar of Pritampasha of Barak valley were severely punished by the Britishers for rendering help to the sepoys. (PRADEEP KUMAR DEEPAK, 2017)

#### ROLE OF LOCAL INHABITANTS OF HAILAKANDI (MOHANPUR) IN RONTILLA MARTYRDOM

A close connection is being established behind the march of Chittagong revolutionaries from Tripura and their defeat in Malegarh and finally Rontilla. Cachar was annexed to the British dominion in 1824 after the assassination of the last of the Kachari king, Raja Govinda Chandra by some of the personal attendants on April 24, 1830 at Haritkar. On August 14, 1832, the plain portion of Cachar was annexed to the British dominion. Again North Cachar was annexed to the British dominion in 1854 after the death of Senapati Tularam. Thus Tripura and the entire Cachar which was a part of Tripura dominion during the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 was completely annexed by the British.

So when the Chittagong revolutionaries made their approach to Tripura in 1857 for shelter, they suffered a setback. Perhaps the king of Tripura was compelled to maintain an amicable relation with the British against their wishes. The assassination of Gobindra Chandra in 1830 and annexation of Tripura created havoc among the inhabitants of Tripura which symbolized the suzerainty of British raj. The Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 that spread across the whole country during the domination of the East India Company across the Indian sub- continent resulted in the beginning of the revolts, mass protests and innumerable massacre. So, the British kept a close eye in Lower Assam after the annexation of Kachari kingdom after 1822. They considered the entire district of Sylhet and Cachar as unsettled, hostile, accompanied with supportive zamindars, landlords and local inhabitants of the Sepoy Mutiny. Being unable to gather support from Tripura, the mutineers skilfully and stealthily marched towards Malegarh and later towards Rontilla (Mohanpur). The massacre of the revolutionaries in both these places reveal the fact that the British had prior information of their movement. Many reasons can be placed behind the success of British in brutally suppressing the mutineers in Rontilla.

Firstly, the zamindars and landlords always had close affinity with British East India Company. As the various land settlement reforms like Permanent settlement, Ryotwari and Mahalwari system always kept these zamindars and landlords in a profit margin stage, they always exhibited their loyalty to the British. It can be assumed that they might have informed about the existence of mutineers in Rontilla. But it can also be assumed that as these class were submissive to the British, they might have been compelled to dispatch all information.

Secondly, the British were highly alarmed by the revolutionary uprising in every nook and corner of India. They developed a strong spying network to suppress these revolutionary groups.Perhaps they fetched the information of the halt in Rontilla from them.

Thirdly, the villagers of Mohanpur village might be the potent factor behind the massacre of revolutionaries in Rontilla. The news of their halt in Rontilla might have been delivered by the local inhabitants to the British. Desire for money, loyalty to British, rewards in terms of job etc might be the factors that had prompted them to work as a messenger of the British. As the entire Cachar went under the British dominion , they thought it safe and sound to be loyal to the British rather than the revolutionaries. Again ,besides massacre of Rontilla, the British also arrested some mutineers and hanged them in the ‘‘ferry bazar’’ of Mohanpur to terrorise the local people so that they remain submissive to the British declining the revolutionaries.

The despatch of the British troops with well – equipped arms and ammunitions, under Lieutenant Ross and encircling the jungle of Rontilla with well equipped British army on 21<sup>st</sup> December, 1857 was taken to be a pre – planned strategy on the part of the British which would not have been possible without authentic information.

Again the surprise attack on the martyrs in the early morning,i.e, on 22<sup>nd</sup> December,1857 in a slumberous position of the revolutionaries proved planned strategy of the British which could have based on the full – proof report about the revolutionaries. The name ‘‘ Rontilla’’ has a unique existence. In Bengali which is the local language of Barak valley, ‘‘Ron’’ means battle and ‘‘Tilla’’ means hilltop. Thus, the name came into existence.

## ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE SEPOY MUTINY OF 1857 IN HAILAKANDI

The role of women in the sepoy mutiny of 1857 in the North – Eastern region is noteworthy. Wives, mother and many other female members of these mutineers who accompanied them in this brave revolt suffered extreme agony and miseries like their male counterparts. Lack of food, shelter, physical and mental agony, rough and forested area, loss and death of their male comrades in the Latu execution could not resist them as a result of which many of them died in action and others were arrested by the Britishers and executed mercilessly.

The ‘‘ Sepoy Mutiny of 1857’’ left a touching impression in the history of India. But the ‘‘Rontilla’’ event was unable to make a strategic position in Indian history. So local inhabitants, clubs, institutions, local MLA’s and social activists came to the forefront to make the ‘‘Rontilla’’ event an important page in history. They held copious meetings, cultural programmes, discussions to make an impression of the martyrdom of mutineers in Rontilla for the sake of motherland. In this regard ‘‘Rudrani Club’’ and ‘‘District Youth Club’’ of Hailakandi had organized a cultural event to pay homage to the martyrs. Every year, 22<sup>nd</sup> December is being observed when people pay tribute to the valour of these unsung heroes who sacrificed their lives for the freedom of India. These clubs in association with a number of activists, **politicians like Jagdish Das, additional Superintendent of police, Amitabh Rai**, a close associates of **Kaushik Rai of BJP (Assam) and many other poets, litterateurs and social activists** had sent a memorandum to the honourable Chief Minister of Assam to provide recognition to Rontilla and turn it into a tourists place.

The present scenario of ‘‘Rontilla’’ will steal the eye ball of everyone as it is surrounded by Mohanpur tea – estate on one side and on the otherside steps have been taken by the government of Assam for constructing concrete road. After entering Mohanpur village which is inhabited by Muslim community, I and one of my friend ( Mr. Bibhash Roy ) went through the concrete road and came to see a steel bridge. Crossing the bridge, I found a muddy road and moving through it, I found my destination. The hill was labelled and formed a table-land. Concrete staircases had been built. Upon a raised platform, a curved shaped pillar bearing two Indian tricolor flags and a slab mentioning the ‘‘Rontilla’’ event was found. It is surrounded by a railing. But this dilapidated structure require government attention. Recently rupees 10 lakhs have been sanctioned to modify this wrecked place into a tourist centre.

Thus, ‘‘Rontilla’’ event being tried to bring into the mainstream of Indian National Movement.



### TRIBUTE PAID TO MALEGARH ( LATU ) SEPOYS

The first historic tribute was paid to the martyr of Malegarh on 18 december, 2011 at about 12.00 a.m. This ceremony was organized by an NGO ‘‘ Patkai Trekker ‘‘ who worked for the popularization and preservation of historical site. The tribute was initiated by unfurling the tricolor flag for the first time in Malegarh. They also displayed some belongings of the martyrs like – pistol, two swords and three canons which the martyrs utilized for self – defence.

Addressing the local inhabitants of Malegarh, Mriganka Krishna Gogoi, a reputed member of the organization said, ‘‘ We have taken a resolution to press the government to take some steps. Since Latu bears a historical mark, it should be included in the school and college curriculum of the state, detailed research should be done on the topic, the place should be declared a national heritage site and a war memorial should be erected on the site.’’

Gogoi further made an appeal to the Department of Archaeology to take initiative to provide recognition to Malegarh as a tourist place. He also appealed to the members of the Patkai Trekker to appeal to the DoNER ministry for the mass development of this site.

[ DoNER stands for ‘‘ The Ministry of Development of North – Eastern region is a ministry of Government of India. It was established in September, 2001. Its main function is to deal and work for the socio – economic development of the North – Eastern states, viz, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim.]

This function was also attended by veteran personality like Historian Dayanand Borgohain; H.N Dutta, director of state archaeological department and social worker – Kailash Sharma and Bhaben Sharma.



In 2015, while celebrating the 158<sup>th</sup> anniversary of martyrdom of Malegarh, a tribute was paid to the sepoys of Malegarh in 18 december, 2015. Arup Roy, the Karimganj district co – ordinator of the NGO, expressed his dissatisfaction towards Assam government .

The BSF 133 battalion along with other dignitaries like Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha ( MLA, North Karimganj ), the Parliamentary secretary; Syed Mujib Ahmed, the state chief co – ordinator of the Patkai Trekker and Mriganka Gogoi, the commandant of 133 battalion of BSF; Deepak Kumaya , Monalina Nandi Roy, a lecturer of Karimganj College and many others paid floral tribute to the martyr along with lighting of 158 lamps. In the same ceremony, Manoj Kumar Deka, Deputy Commissioner of Karimganj promised to take initiative to convert Malegarh into a tourist place.

In 2019, the BSF organized a ceremony to commemorate the sacrifice and to pay tribute to the 26 martyrs of the Revolt of 1857 at Malegarh, in Karimganj district. The honoree of this ceremony was Karimganj D.C , M.S Manivannan and S.P Manavendra Debroy. To immortalize the martyrdom of these soldiers, a wreath was laid down by D.C Manivannan in Malegarh ( Latu ).

In his speech, he delivered the decision of Assam government to develop Malegarh a tourist place. He also revealed that Sarbananda Sonowal, the then Chief Minister of Assam was planning to appeal to the Central government for opening a border like Affari Wagah at Sutarkandi in the memory of these martyrs of Malegarh.

Moreover, the reason behind the historic decision of converting Malegarh as border area is to bring the episode of 1857 revolt of Malegarh in the mainstream of Indian history.

In 18 december, 2020 a historic decision was taken to consider 18 december as ‘‘ National Integrity Day ‘‘. This historic decision was taken by the NGO ‘‘Patkai Trekker ‘‘ along with BSF to pay homage to the martyrs of Malegarh.

This ceremony was attended by Anbamuthan AP, Deputy Commissioner of Karimganj; Mayank Kumar Jha, Superintendent of Police; Manish Kumar, Commandant in Chief of 7 battalion BSF; Manish Kumar, Deputy Commandant, Sajaddul Haque Choudhury, district information and public relation officer; Syed Mujib Ahmed, Chief convener, Sudip Das of Patkai Trekker. They offered prayers at this memorial site and also paid guard of honour to the mutineers.

#### TRIBUTE PAID TO THE SEPOYS OF 1857 IN HAILAKANDI ( MOHANPUR )

On May 3, 2010, a function was organized jointly by Thougan Marup and Assam Manipuri Sahitya Parishad to commemorate the valour of Narendrajit Singh in his 199<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary at Rajyeswarpur ( Hailakandi ). Addressing the local inhabitants of Hailakandi and some dignitaries like – Thougan Marup, President of the Hailakandi District Committee; Radheshyam Biswas, M.P of Karimganj; Anwar Hussain Laskar, MLA of Hailakandi; N.G Madhuchandra Singha, chairman of the Manipuri Association, North – East India and many others; Manipur Deputy Chief Minister Joykumar Singh delivered the story of valiant Narendrajit Singh.

In 2017, a cultural event was organized by both socio – cultural organizations – ‘‘ Rudrani Club ‘‘ and ‘‘Club District Youth Development Forum ‘‘ to pay tribute to the martyrs of ‘‘ Rontilla ‘‘ in Hailakandi. This function was attended by Jagdish Das, Superintendent of Police and many other political leaders, poets, cultural activists, student and local inhabitants. A mass rally was organized from Mohanpur bazaar to Rontilla and a floral tribute was paid to them. (REPORTER, 2017)

In 2018, in another attempt to secure govt attention towards ‘‘ Rontilla ‘‘ in Hailakandi, delegations of two notable clubs and organization of Hailakandi, namely, ‘‘ Rudrani Club’’ and ‘‘Assam Tourism Development Corporation ( ATDC ) met the then Chief Minister of Assam, Sarbananda Sonowal and placed a memorandum demanding to declare ‘‘ Rontilla ‘‘ a heritage site. Both Abrangshu Choudhury, general secretary of Rudrani club and Jawahar Nath Majumdar, general secretary of DYDF aimed to develop all the historical places of Barak valley to develop tourism.

Thus ,the struggle of Indian heroism can well be felt in Latu and Hailakandi and initiative should also be taken to bring this episode in the mainstream of Indian history.



MY PERSONAL VISIT TO MALEGARH ( LATU )



MY PERSONAL VISIT TO RONTILLA ( HAILAKANDI )

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