



Amalprava Das and Kasturba Ashram's Contribution to Assamese Freedom Struggle: A Brief Study

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Abstract: This paper investigates the positive initiatives implemented in Assam to combat colonialism in its cultural and social forms. Gandhi, the head of the Indian independence movement, had two plans for expelling the British: first, satyagraha and large-scale campaigns; and second, positive initiatives founded on nonviolence and the truth. While constructive programs tended to have a social and cultural bent, mass movements tended to have a political bent. Therefore, in order to attain complete independence or Poorna Swaraj, both types of protest were required. In addition to encouraging individuals to participate in the nonviolent independence movement and become independent, constructive programs aimed to inform the public about British oppression. It aimed to enhance and safeguard the welfare of women, children, and socially excluded people. By incorporating Gandhi's ideas and philosophies into its operations, the Kasturba Ashram in Assam made a substantial contribution to the liberation cause. Without Amalprava Das's unwavering resolve and leadership, the Ashram would not have been able to be founded. In addition to fostering communal development, Das and her associates' Gandhian lives had a profound impact on a number of independence warriors, including Dwarika Barua.

Keywords: Constructive Programmes, Kasturba Ashram, Freedom Movement, Women leadership.

Introduction: The leader of our country's fight against British hegemony was Mahatma Gandhi. In addition to fighting for political freedom, he aimed to prepare the people for a new, just social structure that would lead to total independence. He battled for Poorna Swaraj or freedom for all people, irrespective of their caste, class or religion. This meant building the nation from its smallest unit based on self-reliance utilising honest, nonviolent approaches. To make political freedom more important, the Indian social structure needs to be improved in a number of ways. Conflicts between different religious groups, untouchability and economic disparity, the decline of our villages, the suffering of adivasis, farmers and workers, and the status of women were all significant concerns. In a brief pamphlet titled Constructive Program: Its Meaning and Place, which he wrote while travelling from Sevagram to Bardoli in 1941, he asked all Congressmen and other participants in the freedom fight to address these issues.

He believed that both require training and that civil disobedience, whether done individually or collectively could be a complete substitute for armed insurrection. Only the techniques are different. In both cases, action is only taken when the circumstances demand it. Training for a military rebellion includes learning how to use weapons, including the atomic bomb. According to Gandhi civil disobedience refers to the necessity of implementing the constructive program in the nonviolent endeavour to attain independence.

The program's main elements included the eradication of untouchability, prohibition, khadi, village industries, village sanitation, Nai Talim or basic education, adult education, women, health and

hygiene knowledge, provincial languages, national language, economic inequality and the advancement of labourers, farmers, adivasis, lepers, and students. As a result, he used the 18-point constructive program as a model for the future India he had in mind.

Positive initiatives were implemented under the sponsorship of numerous organisations. One such significant organization was the Kasturba Ashram which was founded nationwide by the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust. The Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Fund was founded in memory of Gandhi's wife, Kasturba Gandhi who died on February 22, 1944, while incarcerated. Gandhi wanted this Trust to support the development of rural Indian women and children. The Trust established 22 State branches around the country, one of which was located in Assam on the Sarania Hills.

Objectives:

1. The paper aims to examine the historical context, specifically the liberation movement.
2. It emphasises the necessity of Gandhi's beneficial initiatives.
3. The purpose of the paper is to trace the establishment and function of Kasturba Ashram in Assam.
4. It also highlights Amalprava Das's efforts as a Gandhian, social worker, and freedom fighter, as well as her part in the establishment of Kasturba Ashram.

Materials and Methods:

The work was shaped using a descriptive-narrative technique. To obtain pertinent data, primary and secondary sources were examined. To evaluate the institutions and its leaders' contributions to the freedom fight and its post-independence accomplishments, in-person interviews with Kasturba Ashram members were undertaken. The interviews about the lives of the well-known female social workers of that era are insightful.

Discussion: The country as a whole was gaining momentum in response to Mahatma Gandhi's plea for our nation to be freed from British rule. Although nearly all other notable Assamese independence movement leaders were imprisoned during the Quit India Movement, Gopinath Bordoloi and Amalprava Das (1911-1994) were primarily responsible for setting up this branch. They were motivated by the fervour for the freedom struggle. Mahatma Gandhi's appeal for our country's liberation from British domination was gathering traction throughout the entire nation. Gopinath Bordoloi and Amalprava Das (1911-1994) were principally responsible for establishing this branch, despite the fact that almost all other prominent leaders of the Assamese independence movement were imprisoned during the Quit India Movement. The zeal for the fight for independence inspired them. When Dr. Harikrishna Das gave the Ashram 58 bighas of land and his Sarania home, the dream came true. Gandhi's principles had a profound effect on Dr. Das, his wife Hemaprava Das, and their youngest daughter Amalprava. When he stayed at Dr. Das's home in Barpetiapaara, Panbazar, during his second visit to the state in 1934, they were acquainted with him and were greatly impressed by him. At this point, Amalprava, Hemaprava, and Harikrishna Das started their road toward being involved in the independence struggle.

Gandhi's constructive programme significantly influenced Amalprava. On Gandhi's advice, she and her mother visited Moganbari in the year 1930, where they learned about various crafts such as edible oil extraction, creating a "MaganChulla", producing soap, manufacturing paper, sugar, etc. Upon their return, they established a production centre for village industries at Sarania Hills, which later served as the site for Kasturba Ashram. They began oil pressing and beekeeping, among other activities. She made the decision to dedicate herself to these endeavours at this time because she thought they may advance the cause of the independence movement and benefit the general populace.

Under Gandhi's direction, Amalprava was finally lured into the fight for freedom. Amalprava led the movement when Gandhi called on Assamese people to participate in individual satyagraha in 1941. She

visited numerous areas to acquaint the locals with every aspect of the independence fight. Being from a rich upbringing, she was unfamiliar with the hardships and day-to-day existence of the locals. After that, she decided to leave her family behind and devote herself fully to helping the nation.

Amalprava courageously spoke at a public gathering in Baihata Chariali on March 3, 1941, which was chaired by renowned lawyer Jagadish Medhi. After the encounter, she was taken into custody from her home. Since there were no separate cells for female inmates, she was held in the "Dhekishal" (rice mill chamber) connected to the Guwahati prison. After that, she was transferred to the Jorhat prison. After serving 15 months in prison, she was freed. However, she resumed her involvement in the independence movement after being freed. She soon became the head of the Women's Wing of the Congress Committee. As she performed her tasks, the movement grew more intense. Gandhi's 1942 "do or die" demand sparked a huge backlash, to which the British responded with horrific forms of repression. Prominent movement leaders, including Kanaklata, Bhogeswari, and Kushal Konwar, were detained. On the other side, the social workers who were given specific responsibilities and tasks related to the movement went underground. By housing a number of underground leaders at her home, Amalprava's mother played a pivotal role. Brave Amalprava continued to serve the people underground after her father was arrested on August 9, 1942.

Amalprava met notable people like Hemapraava Kakati and Hem Baruah while travelling to several places, such as Nalbari, Sibsagar, Barpeta, and Tezpur. On July 27, 1943, she was detained once more in Guwahati. In prison, she met Pushpalata Das and Chandrapraava Saikiani. These female inmates started doing social work while incarcerated. They imparted both fundamental knowledge and useful skills like spinning.

Kasturba Gandhi died in prison in Pune on February 22, 1944. All of the inmates fasted for a day in remembrance of the deceased soul. At the end of 1944, Amalprava was freed from detention. Around the same time, her father was freed from prison after serving two years and four months. Meanwhile, a fund-raising campaign had started to raise money for a national program honouring Kasturba Gandhi. In Assam, a State Fund Collection Committee was formed, with Amalprava as its secretary and Gopinath Bardoloi as its chairman. Her mother fell severely ill during the campaign and died on January 15, 1945. She was stunned and devastated. She grieved and mourned for a while before accepting the situation and resuming her career on her father's advised.

The establishment of the Kasturba Gandhi Memorial Trust was being planned in several states. Before starting work for the Kasturba Trust, Amalprava thought it was essential to educate people about Gandhi's Nai Talim beliefs. In July 1945, she went to Gandhi's ashram in Sevagram, where she received basic education instruction from Sree Aryanayakam and his wife Asha devi Aryanayakam. Gandhi was dissatisfied with Gopinath Bardoloi's proposal and asked Amalprava to discuss the trust in Assam. "I want real work to be done... a scheme based on self-help and self-maintenance... it seems you will be capable of shouldering the responsibility," he declared."

Amalprava created a plan in response and gave it to Gandhi with the assistance of Asha Devi and a few Assamese students. Her abilities pleased Gandhi, who received assurance that she was competent to handle the task. He gave his approval to her plan and sent her a letter outlining the specific regulations for how the trust should be operated. The foundation of the trust in Assam was thus prepared as a result of this. The establishment of Gram Sevika Vidyalayas, which would train female volunteers in maternity and child welfare as well as other developmental duties, was the first prerequisite. While searching for female workers, she encountered Gandhi supporters and independence warriors, such Ghana Kanti Phookan and Hemapraava Kakati. After then, the Kasturba trust got to work on its initiatives.

Mahatma Gandhi spent four days in the "Gandhi-Ghar," a bamboo house constructed within the Ashram property, during his fourth and last visit to Assam in 1946. On January 9, 1946, Mahatma Gandhi officially opened the Kasturba Gram Sevika Vidyalaya and the Trust's Assam branch, also referred to as the

"Kasturba Ashram". It is noteworthy because Gandhi himself founded this branch, which was the only one in the nation. Gandhi selected Amalprava to be the regional representative of the Kasturba Trust and the director of the Gram Sevika Vidyalaya. Gandhi developed a daily curriculum that is currently mostly followed. Assamese from all walks of life contributed a total of Rs. 1,44,052, annas 13, and pies 6 to this cause. A meeting of local pratinidhis was held in the village of Uruli Kanchan in Maharashtra on March 27 and 28, 1946. Gandhi attended the meeting. Assam was represented by Amalprava Das.

Gandhi went into great length about the things that needed to be done and the tasks to be completed in detail. As Gandhi put it, "the conception underlying both the Nai Talim and the Village industries programme... was rooted in... the concern for the dignity and status of the village unit as against the big cities and of individual against the machine". He believed that "true Swadeshi consists in encouraging and reviving these home industries". He further added that the small-scale industries would add to the national wealth. Following Gandhi's advice, some schemes of the training and development works in the Kasturba Ashram included:

1. Nai Talim which included basic and adult education.
2. Improved health services which included cleaning, prevention of diseases, nursing the sick, child welfare, midwifery and other works.
3. Rural industries for weaving, sewing and other crafts.
4. Village welfare and village development
5. Miscellaneous works such as cow protection, gardening etc.

With the help of twenty-four Shanti Sainiks, Das assumed charge of the Ashram. On 15 August 1947, India finally achieved independence after a long struggle, but constructive programmes continued for years. She continued to attend meetings held by Gandhi to promote grassroots activism. Das needed strong bedrock of credibility to function due to the increased responsibilities. That is when she discovered Shakuntala Choudhury as her major support. Shakuntala Choudhary was a fellow Gandhian who entirely dedicated herself to social work under the influence of Amalprava. They both united to take over the charge of the Ashram. Their union is famously known as the "Manikanchan Jog". Through their knowledge, experience and perseverance, they made it to the forefront of Assam's social activists and played a significant part in the Bhoodan movement, offered assistance during the 1950 Great Earthquake, and provided aid to those who had been impacted by Chinese aggression in 1962 and the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971. Subsequently, they successfully built a number of centres in different regions of the north-east in the later years.

Conclusion: Gandhi's all-encompassing strategy for revitalising the country sought to establish a nonviolent, truth-based societal structure. Integrating the heterogeneous Indian society was possibly more challenging than attaining freedom since there was a chance of violence between various classes and segments of our own people during this process. Gandhi's positive agenda was essential to bolstering the nation in this circumstance. Gandhi's programs were first implemented in Assam by Kasturba Ashram, which significantly benefited the freedom fight both covertly and explicitly. On the outside, Amalprava Das, one of its important members, actively participated in the mass movement and had a big influence on many other freedom fighters on the Gandhian ideas. On the inside, it organised women and children, supported awareness campaigns, and promoted independence. However, the historical records conceal the contributions of both Amalprava Das and Kasturba Ashram.

During a time when women were hesitant to leave their houses for fear of British attacks, Amalprava had no fear of British guns or sticks. Despite being imprisoned multiple times, she reappeared and made a commitment to exterminate the British. She deliberately and fully embraced Gandhi's ideals, adhering to them until her death. Her ascetic lifestyle, which she maintained at the ashram until her death, makes this evident. It was customary for Indian women of that era to be devoted to their spouses. In order to fulfil their duties as wives, they were known for adhering to "Stree-dharma," or the strict code of behaviour. Unmarried women were despised in that society. However, Amalprava did not conform to these pervasive societal preconceptions.

She had a distinct personality that was imbued with the highest modesty and wisdom because she had been celibate her entire life. She was also quite intelligent and had a noble personality. As a postgraduate in science, she had successfully combined spirituality and science in her life. Like Gandhi, Vivekananda, and Rajaram Mohan Roy, she fought against all social issues. Because of her excellent leadership, passion, modesty, and charisma, Amalprava Das's contributions to all parts of society should be recorded in history and inscribed in our memories for all time.

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