

**NORTH-EAST FRONTIER  
IN THE WAR:  
State and Its Subjects (1939-1945)**

Raj Kumar Thakur

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After capturing Burma, in March 1944 the Japanese forces made a determined attack upon the Chin Hill, Manipur and Naga Hills and entered deep into the territory capturing Kohima. A determined fight followed on both sides, forces moved back and forth, bombs, air raids, bullets kept falling, houses and granaries were burnt, cattle's and villages destroyed and by the month of September 1944, the Japanese forces were exhausted.<sup>1</sup> The allied powers prevailed over the axis powers and Japanese were driven out of the frontier. Voluminous literature on Second World War has kept coming and shall keep coming.<sup>2</sup> What is the departure that I bring? I bring to you a provincial experience which unfolds some unknown aspects of the war. While exploring the Assam State Archives I was struck by the body of fresh data on Second World War which has been clubbed under the categories of Home Confidential files. These files have been utilised to explore the diverse experiences of state and its people who were caught in the war. I have also engaged with the reports by medical personnel's and diaries of civil servants, military commanders and the reports of Indian Tea Association. Although the sources used are official, it doesn't hamper my narration because the sources bring forth the unequal power relation in which the people were caught during the war. I begin by asking the following question: What was the military preparedness of the colonial state in the eastern frontier? How did the people in the eastern frontier respond to the call for the 'Second world War'? What were the propaganda measures of the state? Who were the security prisoners? What happened to them? War brought censorship to many political parties and press, what was its nature? What was the status of the communists and the diverse political parties who were operational in the province? How did the youth respond? Was there a role for women? How did the women

<sup>1</sup> N. L. Bor, *A Report on the measures of rehabilitation and reconstruction undertaken by the government of India in the Naga hills and Manipur state in 1944-45, in order to repair the ravages caused by the Japanese Invasion of 1944*, Assam Relief Measures, Assam Secretariat Press, Shillong, 1946, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed account of the efforts and effects of Second World War in Asia, see the following: Yasmin Khan, *The Raj at War*, Random House, Gurgaon, 2015; Viscount Slim, *Defeat into Victory*, Natraj Publishers, Indian Edition, Dehradun, 2014; C.A. Bayly, and T. N. Harper, *Forgotten Armies: Britain's Asian Empire and the war with Japan*, Penguin, London, 2005; C. A. Bayly and T. N. Harper, *Forgotten Wars: The End of Britain's Asian Empire*, Allen Lane, London, 2007; Sanjoy Bhattacharya, 'British Military Information Management Techniques and the South Asian Soldier: Eastern India during the Second World War', *Modern Asian Studies* 34, No. 2, May, 2000, pp., 483-510; Andrew N Buchanan, 'The War Crisis and the Decolonization of India, December 1941-September 1942: A Political and Military Dilemma', *Global War Studies* 8, No. 2, 2011, pp., 5-31; Lizzie Collingham, *The Taste of War: World War Two and the Battle for Food*, Penguin, London, 2012. Fergal Keane, *Road of Bones: The Epic Siege of Kohima*, Harper Press, London, 2011; Hugh Tinker, 'A Forgotten Long March: The Indian Exodus From Buram, 1942', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 6, No. 1, 1975, pp., 1-15; Indivar Kamtekar, 'A Different War Dance: State and Class in India 1939-1945', *Past and Present*, No. 176, August, 2002, pp. 187-221; Andrew J. Grajdanzev, 'India's Wartime Economic Difficulties' *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 16, No. 2, June, 1943, pp. 189-205; Jangkhomang Guite, 'Representing Local Participation in INA- Japanese Imphal Campaign: The case of the Kukis in Manipur, 1943-45', *Indian Historical Review*, NO. 37, 2, 2010, pp. 291-309.

respond? Who were the refugees? What happened to orphans? What happened to the 'enemy missionaries'? The war also generated scarcity in terms of food and rationing, which led to the introduction of food programmes. Who gained from this programme? What was the nature of relief and rehabilitation programme? The war ended in 'celebration' and wide publicity was given for the pronouncement of 'victory' in the form of dance and songs. The story that I shall tell is a provincial experience of state and its people and it recovers the many music of war.

### Preparing for War

Let me begin by asking, was the state prepared in the North-East frontier? During the First World War Assam had raised 942 combatant recruits. However the drive for joining the defence services did not have much appeal in the province. George Dunbar rightly pointed out that 'in normal times' it was difficult to 'find any recruits for the regular Indian army'. The only military front, Assam rifles was not full to its capacity and the greater proportions of the men were Gurkhas. In the year 1928, Assam government had pointed out the importance of strengthening the North-Eastern Frontier to save it from 'dangers of invasion'.<sup>3</sup> No definite enemy was identified but the memorandum submitted to the Simon Commission urged for placing North-East Frontier on equal footing to the North-West Frontier. By the year 1932, Assam Rifles was the only fighting brigades in the province along with one regular Indian Army Battalion stationed at Shillong.<sup>4</sup> Although the importance of strengthening the frontier force was realised but no concrete steps were taken. With the outbreak of Second World War, military strategy went topsy-turvy and preparations were made in haste. The empire gradually rose to the challenges of strengthening the North-Eastern Frontier, and the policies it adopted were defensive rather than offensive in nature. At a cabinet meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1940 the proposal of 'enabling all classes of Assamese to join the armed forces' was discussed which took a 'concrete shape in due course'.<sup>5</sup> In a Civil Defence Conference held at New Delhi on 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1942 it was decided that there 'should be active war planning, in close consultation with the command in which the province is situated'.<sup>6</sup> The Provincial governments were ordered to engage in 'active consultation with the military authorities' and were to work out 'practical plans'.<sup>7</sup> For Assam, it was recognised that the area was vast, and Shillong was far from Calcutta, local problems were special, higher personal of defence departments were small and any personal contact with District command was difficult to secure. Hence, an Additional Secretary for the purpose of

<sup>3</sup> Assam government had submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission which read, 'The Time may soon come, when the North-East Frontier of India will become no less, if it is not more, important for the defence of India than the North-West Frontier'. The above excerpt has been extracted from George Dunbar's *Frontier*, Omson Publication, Gauhati, reprinted 1984, see the introduction. The book was first published in 1932 and it takes us back and forth in time and space and compares the defence of frontiers in Gibraltar, France, North West frontier to North-East Frontier and gives a detailed account of the explorations and defence measures in the North-East Frontier.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 286-287.

<sup>5</sup> Amalendu Guha, *Planter Raj To Swaraj*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, reprinted, 1988, pp. 264-265.

<sup>6</sup> Assam State Archives (hereafter ASA), Home Confidential B, March, No. 263-C/41, 1941.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

planning for the war was suggested to the Government of Assam.<sup>8</sup> The preparation for the war began.

The first important matter which was of concern to the state was over the recruitment of army and preparing them for war. A letter was issued from Adjutant General's Branch, New Delhi to the recruiting officers of the armed forces which included Corps, Battalions, Companies and training units.<sup>9</sup> The motto of the recruiting directive clearly stated that the recruiting officers were 'not to wait for the recruit to come' instead they were to 'go out into the country and fetch the recruit'.<sup>10</sup> The Area Recruiting Officers had to carry out propaganda for recruitment, for which touring the areas was made compulsory. As the demands of the army was increasing day by day, hence, all training units and establishments were to be kept 'full to capacity', to achieve this objective the 'ground headquarters were instructed to provide the recruiting staff and training units with a general forecast of the numbers, classes and type of recruits required'.<sup>11</sup> 'No recruits of another class or of another area', according to the directive was 'to be rejected under any circumstance'. 'Co-operation by units' was made mandatory and the units were not to carry 'conservative prejudices against alternative sub-classes'. The recruiting officers were also required to carry an attitude of 'consideration and friendliness' with the recruits.<sup>12</sup>

If one is to analyse the composition of one of the fighting brigades i.e., Assam Rifles, it had five Battalions in the province. The composition was arranged on the following lines- The Lushai Battalion had 50 percent Gurkhas, 37 and half percent Jharuas, Cacharies and Assamese and 12 and half percent Lushais, The Lakhimpur Battalion had 62 percent Gurkhas, and the rest were Jharuas, Cacharies, Ahoms and other Assamese. The Naga Hills Battalion had 50 percent Gurkhas, 12 and half percent Nagas (Semas and Angamis) and 37 and half percent included the Jharuas, Cacharies, Ahoms and other Assamese. The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion had 50 percent Gurkhas, 12 and half percent Kukies and the rest included the communities mentioned above. The Fifth Battalion had 50 percent Gurkhas and the rest 50 percent included Jharuas, Cacharies, Ahoms and other Assamese.<sup>13</sup> By the year 1941 there were 2750 Gurkhas, 341 Assamese (including 3 Manipuris), 130 Lushais, 6 Lakhs, 218 Kukies, 22 Garos, 5 Tangkhuls, 5 muslims, 2 Dogras, 27 Nagas and 5 Khasis, serving in the Assam Rifles. Additional Secretary directed the Commandants to make every endeavour to 'recruit local hill tribes up the full percentage'. Owing to very few Muslims in the Battalion, Maulavi Saiyid Sir Muhammad Sadulla expressed his desire of 'sending more Muslim men from Sylhet'.<sup>14</sup> He also emerged as one of the most important leaders of Muslim league who garnered his efforts in campaigning for the war. Assam had turned into a 'war base' and in the words of Amalendu Guha 'it was burdened with a field army of six divisions under British Command, besides, there were

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> ASA, Governor's Secretariat (hereafter G.S), Home Department, Military Brach- B, March, Nos. 283-285, 1942.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Assam Legislative Council Debates, hereafter (ALCD), June Session, Vol. V, No. 5, 1941, pp. 313-314.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 316.

American armed forces too... Assam railways catered primarily to war needs'.<sup>15</sup> Although no definite statistics is available for the number of recruits who joined the military services but the enthusiasm of the Youth of the province shall be discussed in my next section. By orders of the Governor of Assam, a 'war allowance' was granted to the military personnel serving in the frontier. It was a device to lure new recruits and boost the morale of the older ones; it was a mechanism to keep men bounded to their duties. The war allowance was meant for married officers inclusive of widowers with dependent child or dependent children, who drew a salary up to Rs. 1,000, they received an allowance equal to ten percent of their pay. The allowance was also extended to all government servants (whether married or single), who drew a salary between Rs. 250 to Rs. 1000.<sup>16</sup>

Apart from army, air force was also strengthened. To guard off the enemy air raids, a passive air defence scheme was devised. As Shillong was the headquarter and also the principal military station of the province, hence, it became essential to protect it. The objectives of the scheme included the following: protecting the military and civilian population, protection of animals, provision of adequate warning system, and provision of medical organisation.<sup>17</sup> The Shillong military station was divided into 9 sub stations which was controlled from area headquarter.<sup>18</sup> In each substation provisions were made for the protection of military and civil personnel and animals, local warning system was devised, fire fighting measures were adopted, rescue parties were recruited, and military police patrolling was organised.<sup>19</sup>

Gallantry and pride constituted one of the chief driving forces of army, the state therefore brought forward schemes to keep the 'morale of the soldiers high'. The Defence department of army branch directed the provincial government to 'welcome the soldiers who returned from overseas'. This step according to the department was quintessential for 'enhancing the prestige of the army in general and of fighting soldiers in particular'.<sup>20</sup> Small entertainments were arranged for the returning soldiers and they were made guests of honour, they were received by the district Soldiers board and by the civil and police departments with a ceremonious welcome, they were given prominent positions in durbar, were mentioned in official newspapers, and were asked to lecture and give accounts of their experiences.<sup>21</sup> In addition to the above mechanisms of boosting the morale of the army, Sanads were to be awarded to the army personnel for 'recognition of meritorious services rendered during the war'.<sup>22</sup> Several other awards were awarded for military, medical and civil services. These awards were given on New Year's Day 1944, on account of outstanding and

<sup>15</sup> Amalendu Guha, *Planter Raj to Swaraj*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, reprinted, 1988, p. 278.

<sup>16</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, C 210/44, 1944. By the orders of the Governor of Assam, dated, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1944. The allowance took effect from 1<sup>st</sup> July 1944 and continued for the period of the war.

<sup>17</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, December, No. 234 C/41, 1941.

<sup>18</sup> The sub stations included the following- La Bassee lines, Dudgeon lines, I. M. Hospital, Shillong cantonment (bungalow area), Shillong Cantonment (Jhalupara Area), Shillong Cantonment Bazaar area, Happy Valley, Happy Valley I, Happy Valley II.

<sup>19</sup> Home Confidential B, December, No. 234 C/41, 1941.

<sup>20</sup> ASA, G.S, Home Department, Military Branch B Progs, March, No. 294-295, 1942.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> ASA, G.S, War Branch B. Progs. No. W. 151/44, 1944. Sanads were certificate of merit accompanied by a medal.

valuable work in furtherance of the successful prosecution of the war.<sup>23</sup> Babu MonMohan Lahiri was recommended for the honour of Rai Sahib for his exception service in evacuation of the refugees from Burma. Babu Kumud Chandra Datta was also recommended for Rai Sahib honours of 1944 for his work related to war in Silchar. Kailash Chandra Pradhani had contributed Rs. 5000 to the Red Cross fund and had invested an amount of Rs. 15000 as war bonds. He was also recommended for the title of Rai Sahib. Khan Sahib Zahiruddin Ahmed a retired school master was recommended for his services to the National War Front. Zakahie Angami an interpreter in the Naga Hills was responsible for despatch of rations for all forward parties on the frontier, he also helped in building roads, he was recommended for the British Empire Medal. Dr. Sevilie Angami was in charge of the Phekekedzumi dispensary and he devoted his service to the military and also helped in getting Angami labourers in the construction of roads, he was recommended for Kaiser- I-Hind Bronze medal. Mr Lombodar Saikia, Dandi Datta Lahkar, Mon Bahadur Lahkar, and Moshahid Ali were recommended for the Indian Police Medal to be awarded on the Kings Birthday 1944.<sup>24</sup>

Security of property, commercial establishments and industries was of prime concern to the colonial state. Accordingly a provision of 'denial by destruction' was adopted whereby it was mentioned that 'if bulk stock of petrols, oils and kerosene were to fall in enemy hands than it should be destroyed'. There were four stages in which the 'orders of destruction' were to be carried out. First stage was the 'issuing of warning orders' this was to be done when invasion threat was imminent. The second stage was called the 'stand by stage', in this stage the troops had to move out of their targets. The third stage was called 'prepare to demolish'. In this stage, the plants were to be stopped, and all necessary preparations were to be made for destruction. The fourth and the final stage was the 'demolition stage', here, the order demolish, culminated. In Assam Valley 10,9201 Tank age Gallons of petrol, 16,345 licensed packed stock gallons of petrol, 45,700 tank age gallons of Kerosene and 62,160 packed stock gallons of kerosene were handed over to army for protection and destruction in case of necessity. Similar arrangements were made in the Surma Valley. In addition to army, petrol and oil stocks were also placed in the responsibility of police in both the valleys.<sup>25</sup>

Financial establishments were also guarded. The Currency Officer of the Reserve Bank of India issued an instruction to the Secretary to the Government of Assam Finance department to make necessary arrangements for the 'removal of Surplus Currency'. The instructions clearly stated that 'if invasion occurs and if it is in the preliminary period, the currency balance should be reduced to the

<sup>23</sup> Letter No. 759 c. dated 6<sup>th</sup> July, 1943, Gauhati, From G. S. Gunning, Commissioner of Divisions, To the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam. ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 233/44, 1944.

<sup>24</sup> ASA, Home Confidential, C 233/44, 1944. The following details shall elaborate on the number of persons who were recommended for awards for their services rendered during war. Two persons were recommended for Order of British Empire, Three were recommended for Medal of the order of the British Empire, six were recommended with Khan Bahadur title, 4 were recommended with Rai Bahadur title, ten were recommended for Khan Sahib title, 16 were recommended for Rai Sahib title, Four were recommended for Indian Police Medal, 1 was recommended for Kaiseri-hind medal Ist class, two for Kaiseri- hind Medal second class, one for Kaiseri- Hind Medal third class, two for Kaiseri- Hind Bronze Medal, five for British Empire Medal, two for Imperial service medal, One for Sirdar Bahadur Medal, and one for Sardar Sahib medal.

<sup>25</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, Civil Defence Department, No. XLVIII/D-1, 1943.

minimum, and the remaining balance should be taken before the enemy arrived'. In case, it was not possible to take the balance, than officers were instructed to 'destroy the notes under a certificate duly signed by the officer in charge'. While burning the notes every possible care was to be taken to 'completely destroy them', and if time wasn't available, than the notes were to be sunk in the sea or in a river. As coins could not be burnt so they were also to be 'sunk in the sea or river'.<sup>26</sup>

The government was quick to learn from the experiences of Malaya. In Malaya, the Japanese forces used the country boats for infiltrating in the country. Hence in view of the danger of invasion threatening the coastal districts of Bengal, it became imperative to devise measures of control of country craft so that their use is effectively denied to the enemy.<sup>27</sup> Census of the country boats were done, registration and licensing was re-ordered. An order called the Country Boats Registration and Licensing order was enacted in on 27<sup>th</sup> March 1942, and it was applied in the coastal districts.<sup>28</sup> Owing to the reliance on country boats for means of communication in Assam, the orders were also applied in Assam. A Conference was held on 29<sup>th</sup> September 1942 at Shillong in which the agents of River Steam and Navigation Company and military officials discussed the scheme to be followed. The Committee recommended that Census of boats was to be conducted by special officers. Accordingly Census was conducted and by November a detailed list was prepared. There were 1,978 boats plying in the Assam valley and 3,552 boats plying in the Surma valley. Accordingly the Civil Defence issued the order of 'denial of river craft to the enemy' by removing all boats in case of necessity or by sinking them.<sup>29</sup>

Bayly rightly argues that 'without good political and military intelligence the British could never have established' and 'consolidated' their rule in India.<sup>30</sup> Intelligence service became vital to garnering information and mapping activities of political organisations operating within the nation. It was the time of war and any information which was designed to break the British hegemony was crucial for the state. Accordingly the provincial intelligence services were reviewed during the war. The D.I.G of Assam suggested that an intelligence branch was essential for collection of information which would help in ascertaining the subversive politics in the province. The demand for an Intelligence branch became essential owing to the circumstances and anti-war propaganda carried out by several political parties in Assam. Anti-war propaganda was believed to be carried out by the Communists hence the intelligence officer of Sylhet described that 'he was perturbed at his inability to provide watchers for the numerous suspects from Bengal'. They not only paid visits to Sylhet but maintained close connections between Habiganj, Comilla and Agartala. The total strength of the Intelligence staff was small hence it was 'physically impossible to provide watchers' for any

<sup>26</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 299/44, 1944.

<sup>27</sup> Letter No. 258 (12), Government of Bengal, From K. Kirpalani, Joint Secretary to the Government of Bengal, addressed to all District Magistrates, dated 27<sup>th</sup> March, 1942. ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 238/44, 1944.

<sup>28</sup> The districts of Midnapore, Hoogly, Howrah, 24 Paraganas, Jessore, Khulna, Bakarganj, Faridpur, Tippera, Dacca, Noakhali and Chittagong.

<sup>29</sup> From the Office of the Director of Civil Defence, Assam, dated 15<sup>th</sup> may, 1943. ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 238/44, 1944.

<sup>30</sup> C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2007, p. 10.

suspects, wrote the Superintendent of Police of Sylhet.<sup>31</sup> Several organisations according to the Superintendent of Sylhet were hiding under the 'guise of anti-war committees, and were spreading in the district at a definitely alarming pace'. Organisations such as Mazdoor Sabha, Kishan Sabha, Student Federation were emerging as the principal propagandist against the war, and were spreading the message of revolution.<sup>32</sup>

A detailed note was prepared on the activities of 'subversive organisations' in Assam. These organisations included the following- 1. Congress Socialist party. It was a branch of the Communist party of India which worked under the following fronts in the Surma Valley- Congress front, Student front, Youth front, Labour front, Peasant front, Women front and propaganda and education front. 2. Peasant front. This front was primarily active in Sylhet and Cachar districts, 3. Surma Valley Students Federation, active in the Surma Valley, 4. Trade Unions were active in Oil establishments and Tea gardens, 5. All Assam Progressive Youths Union, and 6. Assam Provincial Student's Federation.<sup>33</sup> Gauri Sankar Bhattacharji a fifth year student of history in Calcutta University was the General Secretary of the Assam Students' Federation. He along with Amiya Das Gupta (a student agitator and member of the Communist Party), Prafulla Goswami (student, Cotton college), Ranadhir Singh (Manipuri Student of the Cotton college), Phani Talukdar (member of All Progressive Youth League) and Khagendra Borborah (student Cotton college) were identified as 'supporters of communist ideals and were suspected of preaching communist doctrines, especially amongst youth and students'.

In absence of any intelligence bureau in Assam, a need was felt to regulate and control the 'subversive activities' and to garner information around the diverse political directions which the province was heading towards.<sup>34</sup> The Governor General of India, Lord Linlithgow directed the Governor of Assam to immediately restore the Intelligence Bureau.<sup>35</sup> The Council of ministers were consulted and in 1941 by the orders of the Governor the Intelligence Branch was constituted.<sup>36</sup> By 1942 the following intelligence bureau became operative at the provincial level- Cahcar Intelligence Screen, Barak River Patrol, Frontier Intelligence Staff employed in the districts of Sibsagar and Khasi- Jaintia Hills, and Intelligence Bureau in the districts of Kamrup, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur and Sylhet district.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>31</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, September, No. 48-C/40, 1940. Extract from D.O. No. 2940 dated 30.12.39 from S.P. Sylhet to the D.I.G of Police, Assam.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. D.O No. 30. Dated Sylhet, the 5<sup>th</sup> January 1940, addressed to H. G. Bartley, D.I. G of police, Assam.

<sup>33</sup> A brief Note on the Activities of Subversive Organisations in Assam, By Deputy Inspector General of Police, Assam, 6<sup>th</sup> February, 1940. ASA, Home Confidential B, September, No. 48-C/40, 1940.

<sup>34</sup> In August 1937, the Assam Legislative Assembly had passed a resolution which decreased the police budget, as a result of this the establishment of the Intelligence branch was abolished. Hence during the time of war a need was felt for an adequate intelligence branch in the province.

<sup>35</sup> Letter dated 21<sup>st</sup> of May 1940. ASA, Home Confidential B, September, No. 48-C/40, 1940.

<sup>36</sup> A meeting of the council of ministers was held on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1940, and powers were vested on the governor to accordingly arrange for the intelligence bureau.

<sup>37</sup> Security Scheme to Combat Enemy infiltration from the East, ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 71/44, 1944.

The war was fought on people's money. In July 1940 the Assam government contributed rupees one lakh to the War Fund, and local boards were forced to contribute to the War fund.<sup>38</sup> Almost every department in the provincial government of Assam was re-organised, and preparation was made to deal with the ongoing threat of war in the frontier. Indivar Kamtekar rightly argues that the colonial state was 'caught looking the wrong way' in the frontier<sup>39</sup>, but what has not been emphasised is that the colonial state was quick in learning. The military and security arrangements in the province which has been discussed in detail hints towards the direction that the provincial government re-organised itself. Although its policies were defensive in nature, yet, it went a long way in strengthening the defence of the North-East Frontier.<sup>40</sup>

### War, Youth and Communists

War was perceived with anxiety and the romanticism in the province. It touched the people of the province differently; some youths allied with the British and displayed their loyalty to empire. There were others who stood firmly with the axis powers.<sup>41</sup> Let me engage with those experiences whereby the youth chose to go with empire. In this case, the excitement of the *Myntris* of the Myllem state demands engagement. The *Myntris* wrote a letter to the Governor of Assam stating that 'they were much pleased to have been given the opportunity to move the people of the state to help the benign government at this great hour of need resulting from this 'Second world War''.<sup>42</sup> The letter further mentioned about the efforts of the *Myntris* in contributing to the war. It read-

That we are trying our utmost by putting forth whatever energy we have in order to satisfy the requirements of our benign British Government, which we regard as our mother, and that we have been able ...to give about 200 or more men from the state...we shall ever remain grateful to your Excellency if our state is given an educated new *Siem* as early as possible, in order that we may be more able, through his guidance, to contribute towards the war efforts with all our might at this hour of great trial and distress for all of us caused by this Second world War, so that we may be able to bring about an early victory over our common enemy.<sup>43</sup>

The Governor warmly acknowledged the *Myntris* and 'appreciated the local sentiments' which was 'pro-war'. The war also provided the newly educated youth of the province with an opportunity to

<sup>38</sup> Amalendu Guha, *Planter Raj to Swaraj*, p. 265.

<sup>39</sup> Indivar Kamtekar, 'A Different War Dance: State and Class in India 1939-45', *Past and Present*, No. 176, August 2002, p. 189.

<sup>40</sup> Indivar Kamtekar, 'A Different War Dance: State and Class In India 1939-1945', *Past and Present*, No. 176 (Aug., 2002), p. 189. He argued that the colonial state expected the 'attackers would be Russian', and attacks would commence from the 'north-west through Afghanistan'.

<sup>41</sup> War had mixed response, and it was perceived differently by different communities in the administrative province of Assam. Many Kukis from Manipur associated with the axis powers and supported the Indian National Army and Japanese forces by joining the fighting brigades and intelligence organisations. For details see, Jangkhomang Guite, 'Representing Local Participation in INA- Japanese Imphal Campaign: The Case of the Kukis in Manipur, 1943-45', *Indian Historical Review*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 2010, pp., 291-309.

<sup>42</sup> ASA, G.S, Miscellaneous Branch, B. Progs. No. Misc/155/42, 1942.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., Letter dated., 1<sup>st</sup> May 1942, To His Excellency The Governor of Assam, R. N. Reid, addressed from 16 *Myntris* on behalf of the *Myntri* Community, through the Political Officer Khasi State, Shillong.

earn employment. Kumudini Kanta Misra Bhagabati a graduate from Tezpur wrote to the Governor that he was 'willing to join the military department as a clerk' and asked him to 'grant him the opportunity to serve'.<sup>44</sup> A youth named Devendranath Bezbaruah from Sonari, district Sibsagar expressed his desire to join in the King's Commission. He wrote-

I have come to know that there are many jobs under you in the Political areas. If so, you may appoint me in some good job there. I may work in any job in a higher scale of pay but I hope your honour would not try to appoint me in petty clerical jobs. I do not like to remain confined in the office. You may appoint me as a touring officer, ration officer as you like. Hope to get the reply soon.<sup>45</sup>

The letters clearly emphasize that for some educated youths, war became an opportunity of seeking employment. In 1942 a need arose in the Lushai Hills for the appointment of an executive officer in connection with the war. The Superintendent of Lushai Hills wrote to the Secretary to the Government of Assam for appointing a 'second officer in the Lushai Hills'.<sup>46</sup> The government directed him to 'find a Lushai'.<sup>47</sup> Accordingly local Lushai named Pu Sainghinga was found. He was a graduate, aged 40 and had passed his B. A in 1926. He was appointed as Assistant Superintendent at Lungleh, and was made in charge of the treasury and also as a permanent Head Quarters Officer for the period of the war.<sup>48</sup> Despite the 'love and hate' relationship between the 'hill tribes' and the colonial state, the Nagas remained loyal to the British and acted as comrade in arms with the allied forces.<sup>49</sup>

While a fraction of the unemployed youth found an opportunity in the war, there were some Communists too who expressed their desire to 'propagate for the war' and 'serve the motherland'. The status of the communists is interesting, for they changed their political position owing to the change of political circumstance.<sup>50</sup> In the first phase of the war i.e., from 1939 to 1941 the provincial

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., Letter dated, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1942.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., Letter dated., 6<sup>th</sup> April 1942, From, Devendranath Bezbaruah, Sibsagar, addressed to J. P. Mills, Secretary to the Governor of Assam, Shillong.

<sup>46</sup> Letter dated., 12<sup>th</sup> March 1942, From, Major A. G. Mc. Call, Superintendent of Lushai Hills, addressed to The Governor's Secretary, Assam. Governor's Secretariat, Excluded Branch B. Progs, No. Ex/ 232/42, 1944.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., Letter dated 20<sup>th</sup> March, 1942, From J. P. Mills, Secretary to the Government of Assam, addressed to the Superintendent of Lushai Hills.

<sup>48</sup> He was appointed on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1942.

<sup>49</sup> The Nagas served as constables, soldiers, guides, porters, spies, stretch bearers, and dug trenches for the British. For a detailed study of the role of Nagas in the Second World War, see, Khrienuo, 'Nagas Role in World War II', *Journal of North East India Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, July- December, pp. 57-69. The Battle of Kohima fought in 1944 in which the Naga actively participated was a part of the Burma Campaign which began on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1944 and ended on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1944, was voted as the Britain's 'greatest battle'. For details see, <http://in.reuters.com/article/britain-kohima-imphal-nagaland-manipur-w-idINDEE93K04W20130421>, accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2015.

<sup>50</sup> In the first phase of the war (1939-41) Russia adopted the position that it was an 'imperialist war' and hence every effort was to be made to sabotage the war efforts of the British government. But in 1941, the international scenario changed. Germany attacked Russia and now it became People's War, owing to the change in position, the Indian

branch of the Indian communist party propagated against war. To the communist it was essential to appeal to the students. A pamphlet titled- *Students and War* found circulation in Assam. The pamphlet was the resolution of All India Student's Council adopted at Nagpur session. It talked of responsibility of the youth during the war. It stated-

Our duty is clear. We cannot and shall not fight on the side of British Imperialism. The primary task that we have to perform is the attainment our own freedom...No more waiting. No more Delay. No Co-operation in imperialist war. No subscription to war loans. Resist recruitment. Let the masses rise. Let their united strength smash British Imperialist to pieces.<sup>51</sup>

The message given to the youth was loud and clear, Britain was an 'imperialist power', and its power was to be 'smashed'. Another pamphlet written in Bengali found circulation throughout the province which read *Juddhar Samaya Swadhinatar Jannya Juddha Karo* (During War: Fight for Independence). Some excerpts from the pamphlet are being produced-

The war is nothing but a creation of the well- to-do persons of all countries. The rich men of our country are making the masses to fight in order to protect their business and earnings there from...Due to the war the market has gone up and will go further up in future but the wages of the labourers have not been increased, the salaries of service holders as well as the prices of the agricultural products, have not been increased. Further there has not been any decrease in the rates of liabilities of land revenue or house rent. The peasants and the labours are being further suppressed in the name of the war...the newspapers of our country are allowed only to publish the government views and you should not allow yourselves to be misled by them. The supremacy of the British Government is in the wane today. They are losing in the war. They have lost a good number of their ship. The real things will be out soon. Taking advantage of this we should reply to the kick from our government. The bond of slavery as placed on us by this oppressive, satanic British government should be kicked at and broken. Commence the fight for land, bread, clothes and for Independence. Arrange for a revolution in India too.<sup>52</sup>

The above pamphlet was immediately banned from publication under rule 40 and 34 of the Defence of India. The intelligence officers of the province tracked the movement of communists, intercepted their telegram, and restricted their mobility by interning them under the provisions of Defence of India Rules. The internees began appealing to the government to release them. Two of the cases will further clarify the changing position of the Communists. Ramesh Chandra Sarmah was a member of the Assam Valley Communist Party since 1940. Since June 1942 he was interned in his native village Bamunchuburi in Tezpur, district Darrang and was held as a security prisoner. He argued that during 1941 the 'official stand of the Communist Party of India was anti-war', because the party believed it was an 'imperialist war'. Accordingly his position then was 'anti-war'. But in December 1941 he represented the Assam Students Federation at the Patna Session of All India Students Federation. In the session a 'pro-war resolution was adopted, and he supported this stand whole

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Communists along with their provincial units changed their position and started a propaganda against fascism. From 'imperialist war' it became a 'fascist war'.

<sup>51</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, September, No. 48-C/40, 1940. The resolution was believed to be distributed in the province by Amiya Das Gupta. He got five hundred copies of the above pamphlet for distribution among the students of Gauhati.

<sup>52</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, September, No. 48-C/40, 1940.

heartedly'. Since then up to his internment he propagated the view representing the AISF and tried mobilising students in support of the war. He began touring districts of Assam and propagated this view. He seconded the Pro-War resolution in the Jorhat Session of AISF and presided in the anti fascist meeting in June held at Sibsagar. He therefore wrote to the Chief Minister of the Government of Assam to release him from internment, for 'his internment was unjustified', and he had changed his political position from 'anti-war to pro war'. He appealed to the government that he was willing to 'serve his motherland' at this 'critical juncture when it is threatened by Jap fascist', and expressed his desire that he wanted 'freedom to mobilise his fellow students to defend our sacred soil'.<sup>53</sup>

Another Communist named Phanindra Nath Datta of Bhojpur (Sylhet district) was served an internment order on 28<sup>th</sup> May 1942, which directed him to reside in his village under the provisions of rule 26 of the Defence of India Act. He was earlier convicted by the Chief Magistrate of Calcutta in 1941, but since then he wrote:

...my change of position is evident from the representation I made along with the other fellow Communist prisoners in the DumDum Central Jail to Sir Stafford Cripps as well as to the speaker and president of the Bengal Legislature declaring our whole hearted and unconditional support to the war, appealing our fellow patriots to do the same.<sup>54</sup>

The Government of Assam had imposed a ban on him, so he appealed for freedom so that 'he may be allowed to carry on legitimate activities and throw...full weight in support of the war efforts to fight the fascists outside'.<sup>55</sup> While to the youth of the province, the 'Second world War' brought them opportunity in terms of employment, to the members of political party it brought censorship, detention and jail. The appeal of the above two Communists to secure release from internment and serve their country men went in vain. Suspects were too interned, this was the directive of the state, hence no relaxation was granted. The changing position of the communist was constantly reviewed by the intelligence department. All their communications, pamphlets and telegrams were continuously intercepted, and translated. In 1942 a leaflet found circulation in Karimganj. The pamphlet read-

...Fighters of all countries against the fascism menace are the comrades of one camp. Their goal is the same, their ideal is common. No racial, religious or colour distinction should stand in the way of this unity of our fighters. All such distinctions must be abolished at once, so that unbreakable anti-fascist unity is maintained in our camp. Hail the anti-fascist fighter. Long live unity in the anti-fascist camp.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 235/44, 1944. Restriction Orders imposed under Defence of India Rule 26.

Ibid. Letter dated., 10<sup>th</sup> January 1943, To the Chief Minister of Assam, From, Ramesh Chandra Sarmah, forwarded through the Deputy Commissioner, Darrang.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. Letter dated 13<sup>th</sup> February 1943, To the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam, Forwarded through Superintendent of Police and Deputy Commissioner Sylhet.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> The leaflet was written by Suresh Chandra Deb a member of the All India Labour Party. It was written in Bengali under the following heading- *Joyer Pathey Aage Badh* its English translation read- *March to Victory*. ASA, Home Confidential B, C263/44, 1944.

The government kept itself informed of the policies of the communists, although the communists kept changing their positions and displayed their loyalty for the support of the war, the policy of censorship and confinement of the communists continued.

### Imprisoning the 'suspects'

The Governor of Assam, directed the Provincial Government to exercise the powers conferred by the Defence of India Act XXXV of 1939. The Act was devised as a 'special machinery for carrying on the administration in the event of hostile action within India'.<sup>57</sup> On 17<sup>th</sup> September 1941, orders were issued. According to the act, powers were conferred on the District Magistrate to close roads which was specified by (rule no. 12), to restrict suspected persons (rule no. 26), declaring curfew (rule no. 53), control of processions and meetings (rule no. 56), power to obtain information (rule no. 116), power to search (rule no. 126), powers to restrict the use of motor vehicles (rule no. 57), general control of industry (rule no. 81) etc.<sup>58</sup>

The rule no. 26 and 56 of the Defence of India Act was applied rigorously at the provincial level. 'Suspected' persons were clubbed as 'security' and 'political' prisoners and were either kept in house arrest or were imprisoned. By the order of the Governor, Jajneshwar Das a resident of Khasir (Sylhet district) was interned and kept in house arrest. He was suspected of 'acting in a manner which was prejudicial to public order', hence, he was banned from attending any meeting or procession of the Student's Federation, Congress, Kisan Samiti, Rail and Road Workers Union or any other public meeting.<sup>59</sup> Under the Section 3 of the Restriction and Detention Ordinance 1944, it was directed that 'any person suspected of acting in a manner prejudicial to the Defence of British India, the Public safety and the maintenance of Public order was to be prevented from mobility'. He was made to reside within the limits of village which he could not leave without permission, he was not to associate with other internees and detainees, should respond to the call of any police officer authorised in his behalf, and was to be present between the hours of sunset and sunrise at the place of his stay.<sup>60</sup> Upendra Chandra Das of Barpeta, Dinanath Medhi of Gauhati, Lakshinidhar Borah of Gauhati, Dehram Barman of Gauhati, Santiram Lahkar of Rangiya, Ramnath Sarmah of Pathshala, Ramhari Pathak of South Bank, Homeswar Chowdhury of Patacharkuchi, Pabindranath Sarma of Gauhati, Hari Chandra Kalita of Soalkuchi, and Dharanidhar Sarmah of Soalkuchi, along with many others were detained under the Defence of India Act during 1942 and released in early months of 1945.<sup>61</sup> By 1943 there was in total 3,463 cases of detention under the defence of India rules of which 2,033 persons were convicted.<sup>62</sup> The draconian nature of the law can very well be understood from

<sup>57</sup> Letter dated., 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1941, From, H. G. Dennehy, Esq., C.I.E., I.C.S., Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam, addressed to the Commissioner of Divisions. ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 225/43, 1943.

<sup>58</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 225/43, 1943. Order of the Governor dated., 17<sup>th</sup> September 1941.

<sup>59</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 235/44, 1944. Restriction Orders imposed under Defence of India Rule 26. Order by Governor, dated 15<sup>th</sup> July 1941.

<sup>60</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 275/43, 1943.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. The file gives a detailed account of the people who were clubbed as prisoners under the heading- *List of Restricttees who have been released from restriction.*

<sup>62</sup> ALCD, June July Session 1943, pp. 326.

the large number of arrest and the convictions which were carried thereon. It not only brought about a restriction on their mobility but also infringed their ways of livelihood. My next section shall touch on the specific theme of livelihood and the everyday trauma generated by the imposition of the above rules.

### Prisoner's Grievance

Rule no. 468 of the Assam Jail Manual clearly directed that letter could not be delivered or sent by a convicted person until it was 'examined by the superintendent or jailor'.<sup>63</sup> Censorship became vital to the functioning of the colonial state especially at a time when the state was fighting the Second World War. The prisoners including the political and security prisoners who were convicted and kept under detention which was ratified by the Defence of India Act were kept under surveillance and special instructions was issued for the censorship of their letters. During the time of war special instructions were issued from the Home Department and it was mentioned that 'letters which are sent outside India should also be subject to censorship'.<sup>64</sup> However the state was 'liberal' enough to allow them the right to expression, they were provided with writing materials including non-official postcards, but before that they had to seek permission to write a letter from the jailor or the Superintendent.<sup>65</sup> It was the Superintendent who fixed the time, date and place to write letters. Sunday was the preferable day fixed for correspondence.<sup>66</sup>

The prisoners began writing letters to the government and some demanded release, some transfer and some family and personal allowance. A political prisoner Srimanta Chakravarty was confined in the Sylhet jail under the Defence of India Rules. He wrote,

I have no political activity. I never took part in the present movement. But unfortunately I was made a prisoner for no fault of mine. However I give you assurance that I will not participate in any political movement in future and I will always remain loyal to the government.<sup>67</sup>

His appeal reached the ears of the government and an enquiry began. The Magistrate of Habiganj who had convicted him stated that 'he was rightly convicted', hence he did not recommend his release. According to the Magistrate he took part in an 'unauthorised public procession and shouted congress slogans and carried congress flags'. He was therefore an offender.<sup>68</sup>

Another prisoner Joy Chandra Choudhuri who was a pleader from Gauhati, wrote to the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup to transfer him to the jail in Gauhati on the ground that he had lost his

<sup>63</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, September, No. 185-C/41, 1941.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. Letter dated, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1941, Simla. From, Richard Tottenham, Secretary to the Government of India, addressed to The Chief Secretary of Assam.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. The Rule No. 470 of the *Assam Jail Manual* mentions the instructions for writing letters.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 264/43, 1943. Letter dated., 20<sup>th</sup> January, 1943.. Addressed to the Deputy Commissioner Sylhet, addressed through the Superintendent of District Jail, Sylhet.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. Statement of Magistrate of Habiganj dated., 29<sup>th</sup> January 1943.

son.<sup>69</sup> On enquiry it was found that he was sent by Nalbari police for addressing a meeting of about 400 persons on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1942 at Village Amoni. He had asked people not to render any help in prosecution of the war, deny any help to military and stopping food supply etc. Hence he was arrested and convicted by the Magistrate. However the government was 'considerate enough' for his release and chose to grant him freedom, he had to write an undertaking which clearly mentioned that he would not engage in any unlawful association, or subversive political activity which was prejudicial to the war effort.<sup>70</sup>

Detention of people as security prisoners also meant that now their family would be denied the basic minimum of livelihood. Wives of prisoners began writing letters and demanded release of their husband. Rukmini Debi wife of Ramnath Sarma demanded a family allowance of rupees 80 per month- (Rs. 30 for the education and upkeep of her son who was studying in Gurukul (Punjab) and Rs. 50 for the maintenance of her family which was inclusive of two sons and two daughters).<sup>71</sup> Her husband was detained in Gauhati Jail as a political prisoner, her demand was based on the ground that the only source of income stopped after the conviction of her husband. Ramnath Sarma too wrote a letter to the government stating that 'very difficult and dark days have come on his family and owing to higher prices of food stuffs and other necessities of life his family was starving from want of help'. He too demanded that Rs. 80 should be sanctioned for his family and Rs. 10 for his personal allowance.<sup>72</sup> Based on his and his wife's appeal Rs. 50 was sanctioned as family allowance.<sup>73</sup> Minaram Chutia was a cultivator with four puras of land and he used to support his family which was inclusive of his wife and five children by cultivating. He was arrested as a security prisoner on 13<sup>th</sup> October 1942 and was confined in the Jorhat Jail. He therefore demanded Rs. 70 as family allowance, for there was no adult member to pursue cultivation. He also demanded Rs. 5 per month as personal allowance. The government sanctioned Rs. 30 per month as family allowance.<sup>74</sup>

However there were instances where prisoners were denied any allowance. The above instances already reflect that personal allowance was never considered. In the case below even family allowance was denied to Bimolananda Deva Nath. He was kept under detention as a security prisoner from 5<sup>th</sup> of April 1943. Prior to his detention the Sericulture department had sanctioned him a house which was maintained by him. With his detention the 'house' he wrote 'was damaged'. He demanded a family allowance of Rs. 100 and personal allowance of Rs. 10. On enquiry it was found that the house sanctioned by the Sericulture department was being managed by his elder brother and father. His family possessed 8 puras of land and they were cultivators. Hence the Deputy

<sup>69</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 267/43, 1943, Memo No. C.141/42-V/48, dated 16<sup>th</sup> April 1943.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. Letter dated 17<sup>th</sup> April 1943, From S. K. Datta, Deputy Commissioner Kamrup, addressed to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam. On 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1943 he was released on an undertaking.

<sup>71</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 275/43, 1943. Petition dated 1<sup>st</sup> of April, 1943, addressed to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. Letter dated, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1943, Gauhati Jail, addressed to The Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam.

<sup>73</sup> By the Memorandum issued by the Chief Secretary dated 9<sup>th</sup> September, 1943 Rs. 50 per month was sanctioned as family allowance for the family of the security prisoner with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1943.

<sup>74</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 276/43, 1943. The family allowance of Rs. 30 per month was sanctioned on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1943.

Commissioner of Sibsagar did not recommend his allowance for he believed that the detention of the prisoner 'did not deprive the family of a legitimate source of income'.<sup>75</sup> In 1944 around 140 security prisoners applied for family and personal allowances, of which 61 prisoners were refused any allowance. Owing to a large receipts of applications for allowance, the government ordered the Deputy Commissioners to base their proposals on 'absolute or proved necessity of the family'.<sup>76</sup>

### Enemy Missionaries

With the coming of the war the state began registering foreigners and levying restrictions on their mobility. Medical professionals, missionaries and all other professionals were surveyed, Registers and rolls were prepared according to nationality of the foreigners. The idea of British subject and enemy aliens became an everyday binary in the province. Italians, Germans Hungarians, Romanians, Bulgarians, Finns, were clubbed under the headings of whether they were Aryan, Jews or missionaries. Their marital status as to whether they were single or couple was also regularly checked. Foreigner's nominal roll was prepared and they were regularly kept under check under the Foreigners Registration Act. In the year 1945 there were 21 missionary single men from Italy who were registered under the above Act and had been granted 'liberty' to work in Assam, in addition there were 24 missionary single women of the above nationality. There was one German missionary of Salesian congregation in Haflong (district Cachar), who had been operating in the area since 42 years and claimed himself to be a British subject. There was another German women missionary- Mary Saint Elizabeth who served in the Sister of Charity wing at Shillong. None of them were willing to be repatriated, and all of them claimed permanent residence for religious service in the province.<sup>77</sup> One Indian Muslim women had married John Francis Farnandis who was a Japanese missionary operating in Khatkhati (sibsagar district). She was identified as Azizunnessa Farnandis married on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1937. Her husband was interned under the above act, and here fate was depended on the fate of her husband.<sup>78</sup> Furer Haimendorf Christoph who was appointed as an anthropologist by the government of India under the adviser to the Governor of Assam for tribal area and states, was a German by birth. He along with his wife Furer, Haimendorf Elizabeth were exempted from the provisions of Enemy Foreigners Order 1939 for their services to the crown.<sup>79</sup> Even the 'messengers of god', weren't spared from the task of censorship and their mobility was constantly measured and checked, the binaries of enemies and friends guided the state, and its subjects were made to regularly display loyalty and bow before it.

### Campaign for food

<sup>75</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 280/43, 1943.

<sup>76</sup> No. c. 27/42/145, Orders by Government of Assam. ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 219/44, 1944.

<sup>77</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 82/45, 1945. The list was prepared by the provincial government and sent to the Home Department of Government of India on 26<sup>th</sup> June, 1945.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., Letter No C. 82/45/8, dated 26<sup>th</sup> June 1945., from Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam, to the Home Department, Government of India.

<sup>79</sup> He was exempted from the Enemy Foreigner Order by the Government of India's Order No. 27/6/41- Political (W) dated 6<sup>th</sup> June 1944.

The cost of war and the requirements of goods and services by the military were borne by the people.<sup>80</sup> Necessitated by the conditions of war it was very essential to procure goods and services so that the military requirements accelerated by the war could be taken care of. Indivar Kamtekar rightly argues 'states inaugurate wars and then try to make them the business of the people'.<sup>81</sup> To meet the rising demands of food, the colonial government started a programme called 'Grow More food Campaign'.<sup>82</sup> Under the campaign government prepared five schemes. The first scheme was called 'seed and manure distribution scheme'. The second was called the 'irrigation small projects scheme'. The third was called the 'temporary staff scheme'. The fourth was called 'live stock products and fodder extension scheme' and the fifth and final scheme was called 'seed distribution scheme in the excluded areas'. Fallow lands in the excluded areas were brought under cultivation and seeds were distributed for growing Boro paddy and Sali paddy (varieties of rice), pulse crops, oil seeds, potatoes, wheat, barley and vegetables. For the extension of rice irrigation works, an amount of Rs. 35,0000 was sanctioned.<sup>83</sup> Several campaigns were organised under the heads called- Pulse Campaign, Rice Campaign, Potato Campaign, Sugarcane Campaign and Manure Campaign. Provisions were also made for increasing live stock products, i.e., poultry, eggs, goat production and fodder extension. The Deputy Commissioners of respective districts transferred temporarily settled lands to the cultivable class. In addition, the agricultural department carried out large scale production of vegetables to meet the military demands for vegetables.<sup>84</sup> Food committees were formed and meetings were regularly held to discuss the cultivation and distribution of food supplies to the military stations. Stocks were regularly checked and price was regularly interfered with. In the District of Darrang it was found that the stock of mustard seed was in good stock, owing to purchases being made by the local mill before 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1944. Prices of the following articles- Onion, fish, oranges, eggs, pine apples, milk, ghee, fowls, duck, and potatoes were fixed. The price for goat and cattle was 8 annas and 4 annas per lb. In 1944, around 10,000 maunds of table and seed potatoes each were imported from Shillong in the district of Darrang. Owing to the hoarding being made for the supply of army, the Extra Assistant Commissioner of Tezpur requested the army representative to release 200 maunds of onion from the army stock for sale to the civil population.<sup>85</sup>

The rice supplies in the province was in a state of crisis owing to the failure of Monsoon crops in 1944. The area commander therefore directed that in cases where labour drawn from the cultivating classes is required by the Deputy Commissioners to leave the engineer works or other works on which it is employed in order to cultivate its land, such absence during the next three to four weeks should be permitted.<sup>86</sup> This was brought to the notice of all labour employers under the military

<sup>80</sup> For details, see, Anirudh Deshpande, *The Contours of British Military Policy of India, 1900-1945*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2005; Indivar Kamtekar, 'A Different War Dance: State and Class in India'.

<sup>81</sup> Indivar Kamtekar, 'A Different War Dance: State and Class in India 1939-1945', p. 189.

<sup>82</sup> ALCD, 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 1943, p. 329.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 330.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Proceedings of food committees held on 10<sup>th</sup> August, 1944, Darrang District. ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 190/44, 1944.

<sup>86</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C. 167/44, 1944.

command. The Chief Secretary also issued orders to all the Deputy Commissioners of the plain districts to take all possible steps at once to induce labour of cultivating classes to undertake transplantation of winter rice.<sup>87</sup> In Darrang steps were taken and cultivators were induced to accelerate transplantation of crops. The sub-deputy collector, mouzadars, and tea planters began supplying labour for the production of rice. The Deputy Commissioner of Cachar did not see any cause of worry because drought of any serious proportion had not visited his district.<sup>88</sup> Food committees were also established by the provincial branch of the Communist party. Government had fixed the price of rice as Rs. 30 and 8 annas per maund. To the Communist party this was a faulty step. The observation made by the provincial branch of the Communist party on the policy of price is worth noting. It read –

Instead of the price control, the government could have started rationing, in the absence of which the people are finding it hard to obtain their daily necessities, at present the shop keepers are not selling their goods according to one's requirements. On the other hand the unscrupulous shop keepers are selling their goods at an exorbitant price. Some articles are going to the black market in huge quantities. At the time when the government issued licenses to the merchants, the greedy mahajans bought huge stocks from the government godowns in the name of the public, but the people didn't get those things as the merchants sold them the hoarders and smugglers. The officers, whom the government have approved appointed to run the food godowns are in league with the greedy merchants and are mostly responsible for raising the prices and hoarding of food grains.<sup>89</sup>

Hoarding of food grains by the merchants and shopkeepers and selling it at exorbitant prices therefore becomes clearly evident. While war brought hardship to the general public who fought hard for daily necessities, to the mahajans, merchants and shopkeepers it brought prosperity.

#### War and Women

Women were not to sit idle in the war, although they were not expected to display 'physical prowess', yet they were expected to work as associates in carrying out relief and rehabilitation. The division of labour was clear cut. It was a time of national emergency, and the Department of Civil Defence instructed the Provincial government to allocate the 'responsibility of women' during the war.<sup>90</sup> Amy H. Ried who was the president of Assam Women's Voluntary Service, appealed to the members of the organisation to 'give their services'. Women were to be active participants during air raids, and they were to assist the A. R. P officials in carrying out rehabilitation. She therefore wrote that 'it was a moral obligation on every woman to volunteer for the following duties'-<sup>91</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Telegram No. 9461-68.c dated 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1944, From Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam.

<sup>88</sup> Letter dated 13<sup>th</sup> September, 1944, addressed to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam. ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C. 167/44, 1944.

<sup>89</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, No. 263/44, 1944.

<sup>90</sup> Letter dated 1<sup>st</sup> December 1941, From the Director of Civil Defence Department, New Delhi, addressed to the Chief secretary of Assam. ASA, Home Confidential B, March Progs. No. 259- C/41, 1941.

<sup>91</sup> A pamphlet was distributed which had detailed instructions on what was to be done by the Women Voluntary Service members. It was titled- *To all Women's Voluntary Service Members*.

*Panic is inevitable-* hence it will be the duty of the Women's Voluntary Service wardens to prepare the people before hand.

*Panic is contagious* and spreads like a forest fire, when once it gets a hold, it is very difficult if not impossible to control.

*Panic is dangerous* to everyone but most of all to the children and the weak and helpless.

*Panic can be prevented.*

These four captions explain the task which the voluntary organisation was to perform. It was responsible for boosting the morale of the people and 'by doing so' according to Amy H. Reid 'they will render a great service to the country and to the citizens of their towns'. Maintenance of morale among women was the task of the Wardens of the Women Voluntary Service. Vulnerable areas were identified at Digboi, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh and Shillong an accordingly responsibilities were allotted. At Digboi, a Chief warden of Women's Voluntary Service named Mrs Fleming was appointed who was assisted by four Indian Ladies, at Tinsukia the Chief warden was Mrs. Finlayson who was assisted by twelve Indian ladies, at Dibrugarh Mrs. R. K Barua was the Chief warden who was holding meetings of Indian ladies, and at Shillong Mrs. Small had enrolled 45 Indian ladies for carrying out the relief works. The wardens held open air meetings, and explained in vernacular 'what women should do in an air raid'. Propaganda was also carried out in schools and colleges and meetings were organised, first aid supplies were kept ready, and a mobile canteen was run in a ford van, which was kept ready for supplying tea, cocoa and other refreshments.<sup>92</sup> The organisation became an active participant in carrying out relief and rehabilitation in the province, for details see my section on Burma Refugees.

While on the one hand women were being organised by the state, to serve it, in times of necessity, the war also generated widows, and grieving families, women kept enquiring about their husband and wrote letters to the government and asked for their whereabouts. Hamida Khatoon Lasker from Silchar enquired about her husband Captain Sonawar Ali Lasker who had joined the war as a medical officer and was posted at Malaya She was well aware with the situations of war, and wrote 'in view of fall of Malaya and recently of Singapore, I am in great concern about him...and request the favour of your kindly moving the army authorities for any information about him'.<sup>93</sup> Women kept visiting the bungalows of the Deputy Commissioner and asked him to enquire about the whereabouts of their husbands. The Deputy Commissioner of Darrang wrote a letter on behalf of Meera Sen. Her husband Captain J. R. Sen was posted at Malaya as a medical officer, and her family members were extremely anxious about his whereabouts. The enquiry produced uncertain results. The Government wrote-

as soon as General Military headquarters receives information of casualties, they inform the next of kin direct and after that a public pronouncement is made through press or Fauzi Akhbar...many people have relations or

<sup>92</sup> Report on the Maintenance of Morale Amongst Women, By Amy H Reid, 6<sup>th</sup> January 1942.

<sup>93</sup> Letter dated 16<sup>th</sup> February, 1942, addressed to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam. ASA, G.S, Home Department, Military Branch, No. HML-39/42, 1942. She had heard from her husband on 5<sup>th</sup> January 1942 and after that she sent him registered letter but had gained no response.

friends in a similar position and government can do nothing but advice patience. No news can be taken as being good news, under the circumstance.<sup>94</sup>

News was certainly uncertain, for the Japanese had already occupied the territory, and all channels of communication had been disrupted. The most the government could do was to keep the families assured. A petition was submitted by Mulukjan Bibi wife of Fidrat Ali of Mirzapur district Sylhet. She asked the authorities to send her husband back from duty for she had no other means of subsistence, and she was 'sure to die of starvation' for he had not been sending money to her. Faced by the repeated enquiries the Indian Soldiers board directed the provincial government and the State Soldiers board to issue instructions to 'allay the fears of the relatives' and give wide publicity of the steps which were being taken by the military authorities to 'obtain information through channels which have access to the Japanese government'. Delay in retrieving information was expected hence the families were to be assured that 'as soon as the authorities obtain any news it will be communicated to them'.<sup>95</sup> The Government of India issued a Press Note to do away with the fears of the relatives on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1942. It read-

Enquiries from relatives of military personnel who are serving in Eastern Areas now in Japanese Occupation still continue to be received in large numbers at General headquarters. It has already been stated that every effort is being made to obtain information about the welfare and whereabouts of the personnel but that there is bound to be delay in receiving this information which can only be obtained through the International Red Cross. It has been stated that as soon as information is forthcoming, it will be conveyed immediately to the next of kin...<sup>96</sup>

Families kept grieving and war went on for three more years, the most we can expect from archives is the retrieval of communications related to enquiries, but the anxiety and trauma of grieving families, lonely women and fatherless children are surely not to be found.

### Censorship and Propaganda

While on the one hand there were political parties and organisations preaching against the war. On the other hand government began organising people at the provincial level through the 'National War Front'. In villages the publicity was 'direct and oral'. The National War Front used to issue a 'news sheet', mainly to schools. The publicity department of the war front 'carried loud speakers, lantern slide and silent cinema' for carrying out propaganda for the war. The National War Front started a paper of its own and through its columns it carried on publicity. In each village the War

<sup>94</sup> Letter dated, 4<sup>th</sup> March, 1942, From the Under Secretary to the Government of Assam, addressed to Hamida Laskar and Mrs. Meera Sen.

<sup>95</sup> Letter dated, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1942, From the Secretary Indian Soldiers Board, New Delhi, addressed to the Provinces, State Soldier Board and secretaries and residents of states and provinces.

<sup>96</sup> The above note was published in The Assam Gazette on 1st July 1942. The instructions for the publication were issued by the Defence Department on 29th April 1942, and was accordingly given wide broadcast through microphone stations and through Provincial and district war committees.

Front appointed a person who was called the 'talker'. Papers were sent to the talker and he used to 'read out to villagers assembled to hear him'.<sup>97</sup>

The Department of Information and Broadcasting clearly stated that 'the movements of troops, aircraft and shipping were not to be published in the press unless officially announced'. The memorandum was prepared by the Chief Press and Adviser and on 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 1942 and forwarded to all Press advisers. In the interest of the security, all ranks were forbidden for the duration of the war to enter into personal correspondence with strangers, or newspaper officials, and were also forbidden to respond to any queries.<sup>98</sup> Press instructions were issued to the respective press in the province and censorship was exercised on their activities. However as it was impossible to totally regulate the publication of news, hence the provincial press advisers were asked to do the following-

If publicity cannot be entirely avoided, the title of Burman Free Army should not be used for Burmese traitor forces assisting Japanese. It is suggested that they should be referred to as Burmese quislings, pro-Japanese Burmans, Burmese Traitors or Burman Traitor force.<sup>99</sup>

Taking due recognition of the war situation 'prompt action was to be taken against defeatist or other prejudicial writings in the press'.<sup>100</sup> The Notice No. VI in the *Press Instructions for War* was titled 'Air Matters'. It prohibited publication of news related to the name, location, number, description, armament, performance, movements of Royal Air Force, Indian Air Force, United States Army Air Force in India or any other allied personnel and aircraft. No photos or aircraft, no information concerning methods of attack or defence was to be published.<sup>101</sup> Censorship was exercised on the publication of meteorological data, no information regarding the weather was issued to the press, references to current weather e.g rainfall and temperature observations within three days prior to the date of publication must not be published in the press, descriptions of photographs of weather conditions must not be published, information relating to severe storms, hailstorms, heavy rainfall which may be considerable value to the enemy should not be published.<sup>102</sup> No information on routes of communication to Burma, the transport facilities in the eastern borders, reports of act of sabotage or attempted sabotage, reports of strikes or interruption of work in factories, reports on any kind of interruptions on road and railway communication was to be published.<sup>103</sup> The operational newspapers and periodicals in the province was mapped. There were 84 Newspapers and Periodicals in existence in the province during 1940, of which thirty dealt with political matters, thirty

<sup>97</sup> Assam Legislative Council Debates, 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 1943, Section titled- Publicity in the Villages, p. 330.

<sup>98</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, March, No. C 239/44, 1944. Indian Army Order No. 77/42.

<sup>99</sup> Express letter No. 128/42, dated. 12<sup>th</sup> March, 1942, by the Chief Press Adviser Department of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, to all provincial and Special press advisers.

<sup>100</sup> Express Letter to the Provincial Governments, From Richard Tottenham, Additional Secretary to the Govt. of India, dated 27<sup>th</sup> April 1942.

<sup>101</sup> Press Notice No. VI- Air Matters, issued by Chief Press Adviser, New Delhi on 28<sup>th</sup> April, 1942.

<sup>102</sup> Meteorological Reports, Memorandum By Chief Press Adviser, New Delhi, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1942, to all Provincial press advisers.

<sup>103</sup> Press Notice No. XIX- Internal Security, issued by the Chief Press Adviser, dated 17<sup>th</sup> August, 1942

concerned with religious and social affairs and remaining twenty four dealt with miscellaneous subjects. The tone of the press in both Assam and Surma Valleys was reported to be moderate.<sup>104</sup> Official Passes were issued to press correspondents so that they could visit the site of air raid. The press correspondents had to write a letter to the Deputy Commissioner of the district, seeking for permission, the letter had to include his name and address, the press agency or newspaper he represents, the area within which he conducts his profession, height, colour of eyes and hair and any distinguishing marks. The holders of such passes had to submit their accounts on any air raid to the provincial or district press adviser for scrutiny before publication.<sup>105</sup> Applications kept coming, Romesh Chandra Changkakti, height 6 feet, black hair, brown eyes, with a long cut scar on the left hand side of the chin was a pleader and Journalist from Ujanbazar, Gauhati and represented the Associated Press of India and the Statesman was issued a pass on 7<sup>th</sup> July, 1943.<sup>106</sup> However there were instances when journalists were denied passes. Dwijendra Mohan Das and Gopesh Chandra Chakrabarti were representatives of Abhijan a Bengali Weekly and Babu Rajani Nag was the editor of Janamat, Habiganj, both were residents of Sylhet district. While Dwijendra had taken part in Civil Disobedience Movement and was the Vice President of South Sylhet Congress Committee in 1940, Gopesh was twice convicted under the Defence of India rules for taking part in subversive activities, and Ranajit was convicted under the Defence of India rules. Hence passes were denied to them.<sup>107</sup> The following correspondents were issued pass, Akhil Ch. Bhattacharjee representative of Amrita bazaar Patrika, Mr. Sudhindra Bhusan Chaudhuri, editor United Press of India.<sup>108</sup>

The preparation and propaganda of the state faced a tough test when the actual air raids began. On 13<sup>th</sup> December 1943, six bombs were dropped by the Japanese aircraft bombers in Tinsukia, 38 in Panitola, 15 in Indian Tea Association camp, 28 in Dinjan airfield and 4 in Labour camp at 11. 45 a.m.<sup>109</sup> On 15<sup>th</sup> April 1944, Imphal was raided at 8. 30 a.m. by more than 20 Japanese aircrafts.<sup>110</sup> On 5<sup>th</sup> of November 1944, at around 5 a.m. Imphal and Palel were raided by 15 Japanese fighter aircraft.

<sup>104</sup> *Short Note on the Press and Statement of Newspapers and Periodicals Published in the Province of Assam During the Year 1940*, Shillong, 1940.

<sup>105</sup> No. C. 36/43/28, Passes of Press Representatives, From the Chief Secretary to the Deputy Commissioner of Plain and Hill Districts, dated 18<sup>th</sup> May, 1943. ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 306/44, 1944.

<sup>106</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 306/44, 1944. Memorandum No. C36/43/33.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. Memo, No. C36/43/39. dated 17<sup>th</sup> July 1943. The Deputy Commissioner of Sylhet wrote that Ranajit Nag was not a suitable person to be granted a pass. In view of the police reports, passes were denied.

<sup>108</sup> Memo No. 182. 26<sup>th</sup> October 1943, by the orders of the Deputy Commissioner of Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

<sup>109</sup> Preliminary Air Raid Report, dated 15<sup>th</sup> December, 1943, ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 344/44, 1944. The report described the following- two formation of 9 bombers accompanied by a number of fighters came in from south east passed over Tinsukia and proceeded North west to Dinjan airfield. In total there were 21 casualties 9 casualties were taken to Nonkhroy Tea Estate Hospital, 6 were admitted and 3 discharged. Five deaths were reported.

<sup>110</sup> Air Raid Report on Imphal. ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 75/44, 1944. Going by the report, bombs were dropped by Japanese forces, two of their aircraft was shot, 2 were on the possible list and 1 was damaged. There were 12 military casualties on the British side and 5 were injured, there were no civilian casualties.

The raid lasted for ten minutes.<sup>111</sup> Air raids by Japanese aircrafts became a repeated feature, On 10<sup>th</sup> April 1944 Tuliha was raided by two enemy planes, on 17<sup>th</sup> April six bombers and 50 fighters raided Palel, however no casualties were reported.<sup>112</sup>

All district officers were ordered to daily communicate the situation of their districts to counter rumours related to war.<sup>113</sup> Owing to the attack of the Japanese forces in Manipur and Naga hills, civilians began congregating in Lumding, the coolies working on the Lumding- Manipur road withdrew, and labourers of Indian Tea Association caused congestion at Lumding.<sup>114</sup> Rumours circulated by the Japanese forces were to be countered by propaganda, this was the directive of the Government of India. It read- 'everyone should be on guard not to believe in any unauthorised statements in such times as these, when the authorities are concentrating on the job of defeating the enemy'.<sup>115</sup> The following rumours were circulated by the Japanese forces:

- a. The Governor of Assam and the political agent of Manipur had gone to Delhi
- b. That a raid on 31<sup>st</sup> had damaged the refinery and destroyed oil well and storage tanks at Digboi
- c. That the enemy would take Imphal on the 27<sup>th</sup> March.<sup>116</sup>

Countering the reports circulated by Japanese, the government made its position clear and all district officers were continuously kept informed about the developments throughout the districts of the province. A Press Communiqué was prepared which clearly stated that 'Military security was vital to any nation at war' and every effort was to be made to 'stop careless propaganda and careless correspondence'.<sup>117</sup> No good news came from Kohima and it remained in the hands of Japanese forces. All India Radio kept delivering the bulletin from the war fields. All India radio began a 5 minute counter propaganda at 9.15 am on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, beginning on Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> April. Transmitters D III, D IV and D IX (Eastern Beam) was used on wave lengths of 41, 15, 31.3 and 25.27 respectively.<sup>118</sup> The Commissioner of Divisions, Gauhati, suggested that to counter the propaganda it was essential that the 'tone to be adopted was aggressive', and suggested that the propaganda officials of All India Radio should extend their programme throughout the week. Counter propaganda became a regular

<sup>111</sup> Preliminary Report on Air Raid. ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 197/44, 1944. The Royal Air Force fired Machine guns and 3 enemy aircrafts were shot down, 1 was on the probability list and 3 were damaged, no civil damages or casualties was reported

<sup>112</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 75/44, 1944.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. Memo No. 3671-87C, issued by the Government of Assam, dated 31<sup>st</sup> March 1944.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. Daily Report - Dated 29<sup>th</sup> March 1944, From the Superintendent of Police, Nowgong, to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam.

<sup>115</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B. No. C 75/44, 1944.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. Memo. No. C. 65/44/11, Shillong, 7<sup>th</sup> April, 1944, addressed to all district officers. The district officers were informed that they should not believe in rumours and they were not to panic, the Governor was in Shillong, the political agent of Manipur was in Imphal, no raids took place on 31<sup>st</sup> March, and on 27<sup>th</sup> March it was the Japanese who suffered a big defeat in the air, and the Imphal plain was completely in the hands of British.

<sup>117</sup> The Communiqué was dated - 14<sup>th</sup> April, 1944. ASA, Home Confidential B, C 229/44, 1944.

<sup>118</sup> Order No. C. 65/44/20, dated 18<sup>th</sup> April 1944, Daily appreciation of the situation.

feature, The following phrases were used in the broadcast by the All India Radio- *Maut ke ghat utara, sar tor muqabila kia*.<sup>119</sup> The broadcasts of both the allied and the axis powers were 'listened eagerly and extensively in the province'.<sup>120</sup> In a battle where Japanese were in the offensive and the British were in the defensive, the above phrases might have gone a long way in boosting the morale of the fighting soldiers. Radio kept the soldiers informed, radio kept the province informed.

### Refugees and Orphans from Burma

With Japan's invasion on Burma, 'a mass exodus' of Indians began from Burma and they marched towards India.<sup>121</sup> An immediate necessity arose to relocate the British subjects in Burma and arrange for their relief and rehabilitation. Hugh Tinker has vividly described the long march and has called it the *Forgotten Long March*. Going by the official statistics around 50,000 refugees marched towards India of which more than 50,000 died.<sup>122</sup> Geoffrey Tyson through his book *Forgotten Frontier* has offered a firsthand account of the role played by the Indian Tea Association in 'assisting the escape of refugees into India from Upper Burma'.<sup>123</sup> What was the role played by the colonial state in the rescuing the refugees? Did the relief and rescue measures offer them opportunities for building a new life? Let us evaluate the status of refugees.

Mr. Justice Sharpe was made the in charge of the air evacuation from Burma. The evacuation involved the assistance of air force, army, steamer companies and the railways. The evacuees boarded the flight from Myitkyina in Burma and they were landed in Dinjan cantonment in Assam. The Indian National Airways carried out the principal task of evacuating the evacuees. Two twin engine aircraft operated three times a day bringing around 40 evacuees daily. The other agencies assisting the air force were the China National Aviation Corporation and Douglas aircraft which operated three times a day.<sup>124</sup> Burma Refugee Camps were constructed, it involved the construction of rest rooms at Dinjan. The rest rooms were called *bashas* which was made of bamboo and thatch, in the absence of rest rooms, schools and cinema halls as well as private houses of people volunteering to aid the evacuees were used. Nurses and doctors were deployed for the health of the evacuees and voluntary organisations like Assam Woman Voluntary Service came forward to help.<sup>125</sup> The Assam Woman Voluntary Service began running canteens and supplied meals to the refugees. Arrangements were also made by the government to provide meals to the refugees. Dal, potatoes, salt, sugar, flour was kept in storage for feeding the refugees. On the arrival of the evacuees they were to rest, food was to be offered, and they were to be medically examined, and

<sup>119</sup> Extracts from the Fortnightly Report for the fortnight ending 15<sup>th</sup> May 1944, prepared by the Deputy Commissioner, Sylhet. ASA, Home Confidential B. No. 65/44, 1944.

<sup>120</sup> Amalendu Guha, Planter Raj to Swaraj, p. 278.

<sup>121</sup> Hugh Tinker, 'A Forgotten Long March: The Indian Exodus From Buram, 1942', p. 2.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 3-5. He raises doubt over the authenticity of official statistics and concludes that the calculation was on the lower side.

<sup>123</sup> Geoffrey Tyson, *Forgotten Frontier*, W. H. Targett and Co., Limited, Calcutta, 1945.

<sup>124</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 91/42, 1942.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., Letter Dated 5<sup>th</sup> April 1942, From the Director of Civil Defence, Assam, to the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur.

then they were made to board either trains or steamers and proceed to their respective provinces. For the European evacuees special arrangements were made for their temporary accommodation in Assam.

On 8<sup>th</sup> April the first batch of around 120 refugees arrived at Dinjan. They were given food and they rested in empty schools and some rested in the private house of Babu Murleidhar Jalan. Next morning they were taken to the railway station at Tinsukia. They were registered by the police and customs officer and after registration they were provided with railway tickets, while the Anglo Indians paid for their tickets, the Indians had received railway warrants in Burma, they were issued tickets on the basis of railway warrants.<sup>126</sup> On 9<sup>th</sup> April 50 evacuees arrived. After adequate food and rest, they were sent to the railway station where they boarded a 'coolie special train' which was designed by the railway officials for the transport of refugees. On 10<sup>th</sup> April, 42 evacuees arrived, rest was arranged for them in the cinema halls and they boarded the coolie train.<sup>127</sup> While the above account reflects the story of those refugees who arrived at Dinjan, now let's read the story of those refugees who boarded the steamers from Lakhimpur, and proceeded towards Tezpur and Pandu port.

Three vessels were deployed by the River Steam Navigation Company for the 'clearance of the evacuees' from Dibrugarh to Tezpur.<sup>128</sup> The official correspondences stated that 'owing to quick disembarkation of Burma evacuees inconveniences was caused to a large number of evacuees especially women and children'.<sup>129</sup> Medical facilities were lacking, arrangements for food was negligible, and the refugees had to go without food, rest houses were meagre and women and children at Rangapara suffered on a stormy and rainy weather. There were also instances where the evacuees were denied blankets, and some of the lady passengers were rushed out of the Steamer Duffla.<sup>130</sup> Taking note of the meagre arrangements for the refugees, the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam, instructed the Deputy Commissioner of Darrang to immediately construct rest houses in the form of temporary buildings. Flour/atta was not available at Gauhati hence he instructed the Deputy Commissioner to procure his purchases directly from Calcutta.<sup>131</sup>

In the process of relocation of the refugees many people died, leaving widows, widowers and orphans. Now let me answer to my question as to what happened to the orphans? Adding to the woes of the people the 'Second world War' generated Orphans. Refugees kept coming from Burma, evacuation measures were devised and relief camp was organised. In the first instance let me begin with the status of those orphans who according to the official records found guardian and were 'taken care of' by their guardian. Fakhrunnessa was a 12 years old Muslim girl. She had arrived at

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., Letter dated, 12<sup>th</sup> April 1942, From the Deputy Commissioner Lakhimpur, addressed to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Letter dated 9<sup>th</sup> April 1942, From, River Steam and Navigation Company, addressed to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam.

<sup>129</sup> Letter dated 14<sup>th</sup> April 1942, From the Chief Secretary to the Deputy Commissioner Darrang.

<sup>130</sup> Letter dated 14<sup>th</sup> April 1942, From the Deputy Commissioner Darrang, addressed to the Deputy Commissioner Lakhimpur.

<sup>131</sup> Letter dated 19<sup>th</sup> April 1942, From the Chief Secretary, addressed to the Deputy Commissioner of Darrang.

Manipur on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1942 through one of the evacuation channels from Burma. Her parents were from Goonda district of United Provinces and they used to work in Burma. Khan Sahib Shahabuddin Ahmed was the Chief Guard on duty at the time of removal of evacuees from Dhubri steamer-ghat to railway. Both her parents died in Dhubri hospital and Khan Sahib took over the charge of education and the upkeep of the girl.<sup>132</sup> The colonial state had brilliant expertise in mapping and numbering people. Fakhrunnessa was accordingly, marked by age, sex, religion, and hometown. In the form of 'benevolent' Khan Sahib the state effortlessly got a Muslim guardian for a Muslim girl.

Sukrashi was a Hindu girl of 18 years who along with her father, mother and brother arrived in India by Hukowang Valley route. Her father used to work as contractor in Burma, and on the way her parents deserted her. She was taken care of by M. D. Jalan, who was the proprietor of the Chota Tingrai Tea Estate and had 20 members in his family. She was handed over to the above person by the additional Deputy Commissioner Lakhimpur, who according to the Commissioner was 'clothing and treating her as a member of the family'.<sup>133</sup> The terms under which she could have been treated can be easily concluded, in a house of 20 members, she would have been employed as a servant. However as a historian am I supposed to speculate...?

Another orphan Miss Phulmati aged 9 years a Brahmin girl came through Burma in 1939. She was handed over by the authority of the relief camp at Dimapur to Mr. R. N. Barua, who was the Member of Legislative Assembly from Golaghat. He was 'taking care of the girl' hence the Deputy Commissioner did not recommend any allowance for her.<sup>134</sup> While the above cases brings before us the plight of those orphans who were able to secure guardianship and were according to the archival records 'taken care' by the their guardians. The account below shall track the status of the definitional aspect of some of the orphans, and how they were caught in the bureaucratic violence of definitions and relocation.

Ram Devi was an 8 year old Hindu girl from Punjab. Her father Badkar Ram was a Subedar in the army in Burma who died in action against the enemy; she escaped along with her mother and brother and came by Hukowang Valley route. Her brother died on the way and she was under the care of Ram Nath who worked as a contractor in Digboi. The custodian took the mother of the child as his wife but 'they are not putting on well', wrote the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur for they had 'frequent quarrels'. The custodian Ram Nath had agreed to take care of the orphan as his own child and agreed to be appointed as her guardian. However, seeing the strained relationship between the girls' step- father and her mother, twenty rupees per month was recommended for the upkeep of the orphan. Now questions arose over the definition of Orphan. The Government of India decided that Ram Devi cannot strictly be termed an 'orphan' and was to be looked upon as a subject whose 'both

<sup>132</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 68/45- GLP, 1945. The Deputy Commissioner of Goalpara wrote that the girl was happy in her present abode, and the custodian was educating and treating the girl as a member of the family hence she did not require any guardian.

<sup>133</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C. 68/45-SIB, 1945.

<sup>134</sup> No. 84/J., dated 28th February 1946, From the Deputy Commissioner of Sibsagar, addressed to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam. ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C. 68/45-SIB

parents were alive and she was in contact with them'. The step father was identified as a person with 'intemperate habit' and it was found that orphan's mother was not 'putting well together'. The Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur allotted a monthly allowance of Rs. 20 to Ram Devi for 6 months for her maintenance and elementary education.<sup>135</sup> The Government of Assam asked the Government of India that as the girl was Punjabi so her cost was to be borne by the Government of Punjab.<sup>136</sup> Accordingly it was communicated to the Government of Punjab. As the Government of Assam had already spent Rs 120 on her upkeep, so the Government of Punjab agreed to bear half the cost, and sanctioned Rs. 60 for the orphan.<sup>137</sup> The status of the Ram Debi clearly brings the definition of orphan in a state of flux. Her mother was in a dependent position caught in an unequal power relation, she was alive and voiceless who was dependent on her husband. Was the girl an orphan? At least for 6 months she became one. While in the above case the amount was settled, but it is difficult to trace the history of the women who was subjected to repeated outrageous behaviour from her husband. Her marriage to Ram Nath was necessitated by the trauma generated by war, and she chose to settle with the man, seeking a good deal for herself and her child, unfortunately her choice to marry a man with regular liquor habits hints towards endless suffering.

Another case of orphan will further complicate the picture. Debi Bahadur Sarma was a Nepali Brahmin boy aged 9 years, his father and mother were from cultivating class and they died on the way near Palel. He was picked up in the Marwari Relief Society Camp Dimapur on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1942, and was being educated from the 'poor fund' in a Hindi M. E school, Golaghat. He was placed in the custody of Babu Dhijan Das a teacher of the Hindi school Golaghat. He was recommended an allowance of Rs. 20 by the Deputy Commissioner.<sup>138</sup> The Government of Assam however decided that the boy was a 'Burma domiciled Nepali' hence it was the responsibility of the Government of Burma, and accordingly his case was referred to the Burmese government.<sup>139</sup> No further records of Debi Bahadur could be traced, but it is certain, that there were hundreds of orphans, who failed to find any guardianship, orphans were marked and numbered according to their place of birth and nationality, and it was on the nationality and home town of the orphans their status was to be considered and economic arrangements made. A Punjabi child was to be taken care by the Government of Punjab and a Burmese child was to be taken care by the Government of Burma. What about those children, whose nationality could not be known, what about those children who failed to remember the names of their parents? The above cases reflect that even if a few orphans found guardians, they were caught in definitions and everyday power relations between the state and

<sup>135</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C. 68/45-L, 1945. Letter No. 1863 G. dated 27<sup>th</sup> February 1946, From I Majid, Deputy Commissioner Lakhimpur addressed to Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., From the Chief Secretary, Government of Assam, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Commonwealth Relations, no. c 68/45-1/14, dated 12<sup>th</sup> August 1946.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. Letter No. 4379-PG-48/34522, dated 26<sup>th</sup> June 1948, from Home Secretary to Government of east Punjab, addressed to the Assistant Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations, New Delhi.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. Letter No. 84/J., dated 28<sup>th</sup> February 1946, From the Deputy Commissioner of Sibsagar, addressed to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam.

<sup>139</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, NO. C. 68/45-SIB. From H. G. Dennehy, addressed to the Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Commonwealth Relations, dated 9<sup>th</sup> March, 1946, no. c.68/45-Sib/12.

the guardians. The state shied away from its responsibility by transferring guardianship and the orphans were allocated or relocated as statistics. War did not offer choices, the state acted as the *mai-baap* and the decisions made could not be altered.

### Rehabilitation in Naga Hills and Manipur

Food shortage gripped the province, and it took a toll on human life. The devastation carried out by the Japanese forces left the province wanting in food and resources. Naga Hills and Manipur were the principal areas which faced the highest damage. The supply department was requested to make the necessary arrangements and the stocks available with Indian Tea Association Q base at Dimapur were ordered to further build up stocks and distribute it. On 20<sup>th</sup> March 1945 the following despatches of food stocks was received from Indian Tea Association- Salt- 5630 maunds 1 seer, Flour/atta- 376 maunds and Sugar- 275 maunds.<sup>140</sup> The commodities required for rehabilitation in Naga Hills and Manipur were kept at Q base camp at Dimapur. Following quantities of supply was sent to the base camp at Dimapur every month for distribution in the respective areas: Salt- 1000 maunds for distribution in Golaghat, 500 maunds for Saikhowaghat, and 500 maunds for Margherita, and 500 maunds for Jorhat. Flour and atta- 295 maunds to Golaghat, sugar 200 maunds to Golaghat and 300 maunds to Jorhat and Dal- 400 maunds to Golaghat.<sup>141</sup> In addition to the above food articles, other necessities like blankets, mosquito nets began to be distributed. By 12<sup>th</sup> June 1944, 2458 villages were destroyed in the Naga Hills, hence the Deputy Commissioner of Naga hills asked the supply department for further stocks of rice, and other goods.<sup>142</sup> The Japanese forces lived on rice and livestock collected from Naga villages. They brought practically no rations with them and many villages were entirely denuded of everything. Three lists were prepared by the D. C. Naga Hills for carrying out relief operations. List A included villages which were being rationed- it had 6,995 villagers. List B included those villages which would probably be rationed from about 15<sup>th</sup> June, it had 7,704 villagers, and list C included those villages which will possibly have to be rationed from 1<sup>st</sup> July and it included 13, 986 villagers. Relief measures began operative, and large scale relief measures known as the Assam Relief measures were carried out in the province.<sup>143</sup> Food was distributed in the Naga Hills and Manipur. A weekly scale of five seers of rice per adult and 2 and

<sup>140</sup> Government of Assam, Supply Department, letter no. S. D. 108/43, shillong the 19<sup>th</sup> April 1944, From H. G. Dennehy to the Commissioner of Divisions, C. S. Gunning. ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C 81/44, 1944.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. Letter No. c.81/44/18, From Supply Department Assam, To Messrs Shaw Wallace and Co., 4, Bankshall Street, Calcutta, dated 21<sup>st</sup> April, 1944.

<sup>142</sup> *Note on Relief in the Naga Hills*, By, C. R. Pawsey, D. C, Naga Hills. Houses destroyed- Kohima- 950 houses, Chedema- 186, Merema- 132, Dihoma- 99, Cheswema- 25, Thizama- 31, Kenoma- 60, Punglomi- 40, Birema- 120, Viswema- 549, Kidima- 266. Total Houses- 2458.

<sup>143</sup> Before the Assam Relief measures became operative there were several other relief camps organized under the Burma Refugee organization at Bokajan and Dimapur. However, on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1944 the Government of India consulted the Governor of Assam and formed the Assam Relief organization and appointed Dr. N. L. Bor as the in charge.

half seers of rice per child was adopted. The rations were distributed against ration cards.<sup>144</sup> To the colonial state, the relief measures were one of the last chances to recover its lost hegemony. It wanted to retain the morale of the masses and hence the relief measures were intended on a large scale. Building materials were supplied to villagers in Naga and Manipur Hills, where no building materials could be furnished cash was supplied. Agricultural equipments were also supplied. Daos, axes, hoes, and ploughshares were purchased and supplied for hill jhums, hill terraces and rice fields.<sup>145</sup> Loss of Pigs, poultries, and cattle's were calculated and cash relief was paid. In the Naga hills the amount paid in cash was Rs. 4,57,152 and in the Manipur state the amount paid was Rs. 16,86,246.<sup>146</sup> Grafts and seeds of fruit trees and vegetable seeds of paddy, maize, papaya, brinjal, turnip, carrot, potato, cabbage, beans, tomato, mustard, and cauliflower were distributed to re-organise cultivation and to bring back normalcy in the hills. The director of the relief organisation noted the following, 'with their food supply assured, a good roof over their heads, with good implements and blankets...it is certain that the tragic events of 1944 will soon become only a bad memory to those who suffered'.<sup>147</sup> But did the relief and rehabilitation measures save the empire from decolonisation? The people in the eastern frontier could not erase the memories of economic hardship, political censorship which was escalated by the war. The state lost its hegemony and the people clamoured for a regime change. However the theme is beyond the scope of this paper.

### Celebrating Victory

With the victory coming on the western front, announcements were made to celebrate the victory on a grand scale. 'Selling of victory' was the last effort which the colonial state made to save itself from decolonisation. At the Collapse of Germany, victory celebrations were made throughout the province. In the Tezpur subdivision the celebrations began on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1945 at 7-30 a.m. It began with sports organised at polo field which was followed by thanksgiving services. Separate arrangements were made for Hindus, Muhammadans and Christians. For Hindus, the services were conducted at Mahabhairab temple, Bharabi temple, Ramakrishna Mission, Sankardev Mandir, Deswali Thakurbari, Marwari, and Sanatan Dharma Mandir between 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. For Muhammadans it was done between 1 p.m. to 2 p.m., at Boro Masjid, and Deswali Masjid. And for Christians it began at 11 a.m. at the Catholic Church and the English Church.<sup>148</sup> Prayers were followed by a Military parade at Thakurbari Club Ground on 14<sup>th</sup> May at 9 a.m. At 11 a.m. a parade was organised at the polo field by police, A. R. P., Boy scouts, and civic guards and at 11.30 a.m.

<sup>144</sup> In Naga hills relief depots were opened at 12 centres and 57 villages with a total population of 28, 796 persons were served rice from the depots. In Manipur the base for distribution of food was at Imphal with 24 depots throughout the Manipur state. It covered 622 villages which had around 103000 population. For details see, N. L. Bor's, *A Report on the Measures of Rehabilitation and reconstruction Undertaken by the Government of India in the Naga Hills and Manipur State in 1944-45*, Shillong, 1946,

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 21. The following numbers of implements were distributed in Naga Hills and Manipur State: Daos- 29,623, Axes- 4851, Hoes- 25204, and ploughshares- 6099.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. p. 26.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid. p. 33.

<sup>148</sup> ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C. 188/44, 1944.

alms were distributed to the poor at the Kutchery compound. Further arrangements for sports and amusement were organised:

1 pm to 3.30 pm- Cinema at Anwar talkies (for troops only)

3.30 to 5.30 p.m.- Sports and distribution of prizes ( Polo field)

6 p.m. to 9 p.m. - Variety show at the Bengali Theatre hall- for troops and public

6.30 p.m. to 8 .30 p.m. - Cinema at Jonaki Talkies- for ladies, school boys and children

9.30 p.m. - Variety show at the Kamrup Sanatan Sabha (for public and troops)

9.30 p.m. to 12 midnight- Theatrical performance by Ban theatre party( for public and troops)

In rural areas programme for celebration was drawn according to locality and on tea gardens managers were made responsible for the programme.<sup>149</sup> On the Defeat of Japan, an expenditure of Rs. 7000 was allocated for the victory celebrations in Assam.<sup>150</sup> In Shillong the celebrations began on 16<sup>th</sup> August by free cinema shows at Bijou and Kelvin and Shillong Club, which was followed by free refreshments in canteens for troops on 19<sup>th</sup>, on 20<sup>th</sup> August football, local dancing was organised, victory dance by troops from U. S. A was organised and the programme ended with the victory dance of the officers at the Shillong club on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup>.<sup>151</sup> In schools the principals gave lecture about the defeat of Japan, and the efforts of army, navy and airforce of the allied forces were thanked and celebrated.<sup>152</sup> In Jagannath temple at Thana road Shillong, special prayers were organised by Joyram Misra(Shabait Jagannath Temple), which lasted for four days beginning on 15<sup>th</sup> of August and concluding on 19<sup>th</sup> with devotional thanks to lord Jagannath for the successful end of the Second world War.<sup>153</sup> In the province, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of August were declared public holidays and 19<sup>th</sup> was fixed as Thanksgiving Day in the district of Kamrup. All temple dalais, churches and mosques were requested to offer prayers for the victory.<sup>154</sup> In Lushai Hills, Manipur, Naga Hills, Cachar, Sylhet programmes were drawn and celebrations held.

Muzammil Ali Chaudhury, had been working on the government recruit supplies during the period of the war and expressed his desire to perform victory celebration in a suitable manner in the local area of Sylhet. He therefore asked for the consent for celebration and asked for extension of pecuniary help for the purpose of entertainments.<sup>155</sup> His efforts were duly acknowledged by the

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Miscellaneous expenditure connected with the war during 1945-46, by Department of Information and Broadcasting, 12<sup>th</sup> August, 1945. ASA, Home Confidential B, No. C. 188/44, 1944.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid. Arrangement and programme at shillong.

<sup>152</sup> Surma valley Technical School organized a meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1945 to commemorate the victory.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid. Letter from Joyram Misra, Jagannath Temple, Thana road, Shillong, dated 19<sup>th</sup> August, 1945, addressed to the Governor of Assam.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. Letter from N. N. Phukan, Deputy Commissioner, Kamrup, to the Chief Secretary, Govt of Assam, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 1945.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid. Letter dated 28<sup>th</sup> August 1945, to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam.

Governor of Assam and he thanked him for his expression of loyalty.<sup>156</sup> The industrial houses in the province including the tea industry granted paid holidays to their workers.<sup>157</sup> The Nazira Coal Company granted a one day extra pay to the labour, and entertainments were held in the form of dancing displays, feasts and distribution of sweetmeats.<sup>158</sup>

### Conclusion

While Second World War and military history has led to numerous write up, a theme which was on the margins was the behaviour of the state and its people in the north east frontier. War was not fought in the imagined threatened land of the North-West Frontier, rather it was in the hilly terrains of the North east one heard the bombs and bullets of the war. The colonial state militarised the territory and every sector of the economy was garnered to fund the appetites of the military. Politics of any kind which proved to be hindrance in garnering support for the war, was banned, politicians detained, meetings and conferences were kept under surveillance, telegraphs, letters were censored. Mobility of people was constantly checked. The state identified the enemy and friends within. War generated prisoners, war also generated loyalists. War generated refugees, orphans, loneliness, anxiety and fear. The people were caught in an unequal display of power; they were caught in the grandeur of war, and were forced to contribute. War to Axis brought defeat, war to the allied brought victory, war to the patriot and loyalist brought awards and medals, but war to the province brought an unforgettable and unhappy memory.

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid. No. 3426 M. S .G, Governor of Assam, dated 11<sup>th</sup> October 1939.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. Letter From Labour Commissioner, Shillong, dated 28<sup>th</sup> August, 1945, to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.