

## Chapter : 3

### Anti-British Rising and Peasant Revolts in Assam

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#### PART-I:HISTORY

#### VERY SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS :

**Q1.** After the establishment of the British rule in Assam how did the system of revenue collection change ?

Ans : After the establishment of the British rule in Assam in 1826, the revenue system changed from kind to cash. The British began to collect all taxes in cash.

**Q2.** In which year did Moffat Mills come to Assam ?

Ans : 1853.

**Q3.** Who were the Keyas ?

Ans : Keyas were the immigrant Marwari Mahajans in Assam who earned a living by lending money on interest to the Assamese populace.

**Q4.** Who led the revolt of 1857 in Assam ?

Ans : Maniram Dewan.

**Q5.** In the revolt of 1857 the rebels of Assam wanted to re-establish which Ahom prince on the throne ?

Ans : The Ahom prince, Kandarpeswar Singha.

**Q6.** Who was the Bengali Muktiyar who helped Maniram Dewan ?

Ans : Madhu Malik.

**Q7.** Who was hanged along with Maniram Dewan ?

Ans : Piyoli Barua.

**Q8.** Who tried the case of Maniram Dewan ?

Ans : Captain Holroyd.

**Q9.** Mention two causes of the failure of the Revolt of 1857 in Assam.

Ans : Two important causes for the failure of the Revolt of 1857 in Assam were :

(i) The number of rebels was very few, and that too only in Jorhat and Sibsagar. Dewan could not garner any support from Nowgaon, Kamrup and Gauhati.

(ii) The chief organiser of the revolt, Maniram Dewan, was far away from the center of revolt. He was in Calcutta and tried to control the revolt through letters which proved impractical. He should have worked from Gauhati.

**Q10.** In which years were the Stamp tax and Income tax implemented ?

Ans : Stamp tax was implemented in 1858 while Income tax was implemented in 1860.

**Q11.** Write two causes of the pitiable condition of the peasants of Assam during the British rule.

Ans : Two main causes for pitiable condition of the peasants of Assam during the British rule were :

(i) Heavy taxation by the government during British rule.

(ii) Natural calamities like flood, drought and epidemics.

**Q12.** Who was Lieutenant Singer ?

Ans : Lieutenant Singer was the Assistant Commissioner of Nowgaon during the time of Phulaguri revolt in 1861. He died when the peasants hit him with sticks while he was talking to the agitators.

**Q13.** When did the Phulaguri Dhawa take place ?

Ans : 1861.

**Q14.** When did the peasant's revolt of Rangia take place ?

Ans : 1893.

**Q15.** Where is Lachima located ?

Ans : Lachima is located in the Bajali region of North Kamrup district of Assam.

**Q16.** When did the peasant revolt of Lachima take place ?

Ans : 1894.

**Q17.** When did the peasant revolt of Patharughat take place ?

Ans : 1894.

**Q18.** Who led the Jaintia revolt of 1861 ?

Ans : Ukiang Nonbah.

**Q19.** Who led the revolt of the ethnic tribes of North Cachar in 1881 ?

Ans : Sambudhan Kachari.

**Q20.** Who punished Tikendrajit with the death sentence ?

Ans : The British.

**Q21.** In which year was J.W. Quinton murdered ?

Ans : 1891.

### **LONG ANSWERS TYPE QUESTIONS :**

**Q1.** Discuss in brief the causes of the revolt of 1857-58.

Ans : The rebellion of 1857 in Assam was an offshoot of India's First War of Independence which commenced in Meerut on 10th May 1857 with the mutiny of the Indian soldiers. The basic reason for the outbreak of the rebellion in Assam was the dissatisfaction of the people with the British administration, for which the following factors were responsible :

(i) Defective land revenue system : The first major factor that prepared the ground for the outbreak of the rebellion of 1857 in Assam was the introduction of the new revenue system by which land revenue and other taxes began to be collected in cash. It broke the backbone of the Assamese peasantry. The British focused on collecting tax due and not on enhancement of agriculture by way of better embankment and irrigation system. The common folk were also fleeced by the Mahajans or money lenders from whom they had to borrow money to pay revenue.

(ii) Spread of epidemics: Upper Assam suffered greatly from epidemics like cholera and measles which led to several villages being wiped out in the years 1839, 1847 and 1852. No help from the British and non-exemption of tax alienated the common people.

(iii) Exemption of tea gardens from land revenue: The additional tax burden had to be borne by the peasants.

(iv) Deterioration of cottage industries: The British administration policy of importing foreign cloth affected the Paat and Muga silk cottage industries of Assam,

causing the people associated with them to face great hardships.

(v) Lack of employment: The upper class society of Assam were lacking in modern education and hence could not find employment in the East India Company administration. Moreover, they lost their position to educated Bengali babus who were imported by the British from Bengal.

(vi) Abolition of slavery : The abolition of slavery in Assam in 1843 was not accepted favorably by the aristocratic class as they now had to do all the manual labour themselves. This loss of prestige also created ill feeling. The freed slaves were employed in the tea gardens, but no measures were adopted for their benefit. Hence, they too remained dissatisfied.

(vii) Re-assessment of Lakhiraj lands : The Brahmins, priests and religious pontiffs resented the British administration's taking away of the excess Lakhiraj lands that they had been occupying since ages, and also fixing of tax on their revenue-free lands.

(viii) Various prior rebellions : Soon after the occupation of Assam by the British, there occurred several rebellions with a view to bring back the Ahom monarchical rule in the state. This included the rebellions of 1828, 1829 and 1830. The revolt of 1857 is considered to be a continuation of these rebellions.

**Q2.** Discuss the role of Maniram Dewan in the revolt of 1857-58 in Assam.

**Ans :** The rebellion of 1857-58 in Assam was mainly led by Maniram Dewan. He was the planner, adviser and the organiser of this rebellion.

In the early part of Maniram Dewan's career he was employed in the service of the British in Assam, but because of the British policies he lost his power and position and had to live the life of an ordinary citizen. Hoping that restoration of the Ahom monarchy would bring back his lost position, he submitted an application in this regard to Moffat Mills, Chief Justice of Calcutta High court, in 1853, but received no sympathy and was instead declared a conspirator. In early 1857 he went to Calcutta to convince the British authority to hand over Assam to the Ahom prince, Kandarpeswar Singha, but did not even get an opportunity to meet the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal. In Calcutta he came to know about the Sepoy mutiny that had broken out in Meerut. He saw this as an opportunity to rise against the British in Assam and achieve his goal of re-establishing Ahom rule in the state.

In Calcutta, Maniram Dewan met Madhu Malik, a Bengali Muktiyar with whom he hatched a conspiracy to oust the British from Assam. They received the support of Assamese elitists like Bahadur Gaonburha, Phormud Ali, Dutiram Barua, Mayaram Nazir, Mahbir Muktiyar, etc. It was decided that Kandarpeswar Singha would

lead the revolt, while Maniram Dewan would arrange for the arms and weapons. Maniram Dewan wrote letters from Calcutta to the prince and other trusted members of the Ahom nobility, asking them to get ready for a rebellion and to contact the Indian soldiers at Dibrugarh and Golaghat. It was decided that the rebellion would take place during the Durga puja festival in October 1857. According to the plan, Kandarpeswar Singha would be set up as the King of Assam and Maniram Dewan would become Prime Minister.

However, the British got whiff about the rebellion before the leaders could do anything, as they intercepted Maniram Dewan's letters wherein the conspiracy against the British government was clearly outlined. Immediately they swung into action and arrested almost all the leaders associated with the rebellion. Maniram Dewan was arrested from Calcutta and brought to Assam to face the trial for his role in organising the rebellion. He was found guilty of treason and was hanged to death at Jorhat on 26 February 1858 along with Piyoli Barua.

**Q3.** Discuss the reasons why the revolt of 1857-58 failed in Assam.

**Ans:** The revolt of 1857-58 in Assam was master-minded by Maniram Dewan and he was assisted by a few Ahom nobles. It did not succeed in its aim of establishing Ahom rule once again in the Brahmaputra Valley due to the following factors:



(i) Rebels were too few : Maniram Dewan had supporters only from Jorhat and Sibsagar. He could not garner support from Nowgaon, Kamrup and Gauhati.

(ii) Delay in executing the plan: Even after all preparations were done, the rebels delayed in executing the revolt. Resultantly the British had plenty of time to organise counter-measures and suppress the rebellion.

(iii) Lack of leadership : The main organiser of the rebellion Maniram Dewan, tried to mastermind the revolt from far-off Calcutta through letters, which was impractical. He should have returned to Assam at the earliest opportunity and organised the rebellion leading from the front. Maniram himself was a good administrator but not a good revolt leader.

(iv) Lack of popular support: The members of the new Assamese middle class were not sympathetic to the rebellion. They were more inclined to the Bengali lifestyle than to life under the Ahom monarchy. Maniram Dewan and his associates also made no attempt to involve all sections of society in the revolt.

(v) Lack of secrecy: The letters of Maniram Dewan written from Calcutta to his associates in Assam were intercepted by the British and hence the cover from the entire conspiracy was blown. As a result the revolt was suppressed even before it started.

(vi) No access to arms : Maniram Dewan was himself supposed to bring weapons and ammunition with him to

Assam. Until then however, the rebels had no access to them. The revolt was discovered and suppressed even before Dewan could bring in the arms.

(vii) Lack of support from soldiers : The Indian rebellion of 1857 had its backbone in the sepoys who rose together in revolt against the British. However, in Assam it was chiefly the work of a few disgruntled nobles who could not get the support of the local army units.

**Q4.** Discuss the importance of the revolt of 1857 in Assam.

**Ans:** The revolt of 1857 in Assam stands as a landmark event in the history of Assam. Although the revolt failed in its purpose of expelling the British from Assam, yet the rebellion had far-reaching consequences for the state as well as for its people. Its importance lies in the following aspects.

(i) Assam became a part of the national movement: Assam's participation in the revolt of 1857 is considered to be the first event where the people of Assam joined rest of India to expel the British from the country, and became part of the national movement for freedom.

(ii) Set an example: After the revolt of 1857 many peasant's revolts occurred in different parts of the state from 1860 to 1894. The patriotic deaths of Maniram Dewan and Piyoli Barua inspired the people, and many

historians consider the peasants ' revolts to be reactions of the failed Rebellion of 1857.

(iii) Hindu-Muslim unity: The chief organisers of the revolt consisted of eminent men from both Hindu and Muslim communities. This unity greatly boosted the spirit of nationalism as well as brought communal harmony in the state.

(iv) Great inspiration: The failed rebellion encouraged hundreds of freedom lovers of the state to take active participation in the national movement for independence led by Mahatma Gandhi. These men were greatly inspired by the activities and sacrifice of patriotic men like Maniram Dewan, Piyoli Barua, Bahadur Gaonburha, Sheikh Formud Ali, etc. who played commendable roles in the revolt of 1857.

**Q5.** Write a note on the Phulaguri Dhawa.

Ans: Phulaguri Dhawa of 1861 is considered to be the first of the first of the series of peasants ' revolts that engulfed Assam for several years. The condition of the peasants had deteriorated from bad to worse with the introduction of the new revenue system introduced by the British. The causative factor of the Phulaguri revolt was the government order banning the cultivation of poppy and imposing tax on tamul pan. The Tiwa community which lived in Phulaguri village in Nowgaon district and survived on the commercial poppy cultivation, was severely affected.

In order to register their bitterness against the government order, the people of the area organised people's assemblies or Raj Mel where such problems were discussed and awareness towards them spread. One such Raj Mel was held on 17th September 1861 at Phulaguri in Nowgaon district to oppose banning of poppy cultivation, where over 1500 people gathered. They submitted a petition to the Deputy Commissioner Herbert Sconce, requesting removal of ban on poppy cultivation and of tax on tamul pan. When he misbehaved with them, another Raj Mel of peasants armed with sticks gathered on 15th October 1861 at Phulaguri. This gathering grew to 4000 on the 18th October. When Lieutenant G.B. Singar, Assistant Commissioner refused to be sympathetic towards the requests of the people and ordered his guards to snatch away the sticks, a tussle ensued in which Singar was attacked with sticks and he died on the spot. His body was thrown into the River Kolong by the agitators. This incident was the Phulaguri Dhawa. The guilty were awarded death sentence, and other accused sent to Koliapani.

The Phulaguri Dhawa is important in that it had true mass character having seen voluntary participation by various ethnic communities, the middle class, the educated elite, businessmen and even some Maujadars. It also displayed the common man's attempt to free himself from British imperialism. Most importantly it set an example and was an inspiration for peasants from other parts of Assam to rise against British oppression and deprivation.

**Q6.** Discuss the peasant revolt of North Kamrup in 1894.

Ans : Peasant Revolts continued to be organised against the repressive policies of the British who despite the Phulaguri revolt. increased the land revenue by 100% in 1892 and arranged for its strict collection. This created public outcry and people started to meet in Raji Mels to register their strong protest. The Raji Mels in Barama in Bajali region and the biggest one at Panagaon Sapor were participated in by peasants of Lachima, Choukhuti, Panagaon, Sarthebari, Patachakuchi, Rangia, Nalbari, Dharmapur, Bajali, etc. of North Kamrup. On 21st January 1894, the Moujadar and his Mondol who went to collect tax, were badly beaten, as a result of which the Moujadar died. The Circle Officer of Barpeta, Madhab Chandra Bordoloi, arrested 75 people and took them to his rest camp at Lachima. However, threatened by 3000 peasants, he had to release them. The very next day, the Deputy Commissioner McCabe arrested 59 rebels and jailed them. He refused to bow down before crowd pressure. All the arrested were awarded various types of punishment. The main leaders of the revolt were Pushparam Kalita, Debi Dutta Sarma, Jayanti Bez, Nirbhasa Kalita and Monglu Kalita. This peasant revolt of Lachima, is the main revolt of North Kamrup of 1894.

**Q7.** Give an account of the peasant revolt of Patharughat in 1894.

Ans : The British had to face numerous peasant uprisings during the period from 1861 to 1894 as a result

of their repressive economic policies. Many parts of Kamrup, Darrang and Nowgaon districts rose up in rebellion but most were severely suppressed by the British.

The peasantry of Patharughat in the Darrang district also rose in rebellion on January 28, 1894. A lot of preparation and planing had taken place before the outbreak of the rebellion. The peasantry of Kalaigaon, Mangaldoi, Sipajhar and Patharughat Tehsils of Mangaldoi sub-division first organised Raj Mels in their own areas, and then intended to gather at Patharughat from 26-28th January. The British got a whiff of this and on 27th January, the Deputy Commissioner, the Police Superintendent with police and military forces came to Patharughat. They confiscated the property of those peasants who refused to pay the revenue. They angry mob of 200 peasants surrounded Superintendent Berington, who escaped to take refuge at the rest camp. A crowd of 2000 peasants armed with sticks then marched to the rest camp. The Deputy Commissioner ordered use of force to disperse the crowd, which retaliated with a volley of throwing stones and pebbles. Unable to control the crowd, the Deputy Commissioner asked Berington to order firing upon the crowd. As a result of the firing almost 140 peasants died while over 150 were wounded, though according to official estimates, 15 peasants died and 37 were wounded. The government also arrested 37 peasants and tired them for their involvement in the rebellion; 6 were punished and the other released. This was the last of the series of

rebellions in Assam that were organised against the exploitative British economic policies.

**Q8.** Write a note on the Jaintia revolt against the British in 1860.

Ans : One of the first hill tribes of Assam to fight against the British was the Jaintias. The Jaintias were freedom-loving tribal people who found it difficult to accept the occupation of their land by the British in 1835. The high handedness of the British like continuously finding fault with their own appointed dolois, banning of community fishing and collection of firewood so that they could earn revenue themselves, interference in religious and traditional customs, etc. sowed the seeds for a revolt. The discontentment deepened with the imposition of a new house tax and income tax on the people, a tribe that had never paid tax in cash. The people with the Sardars and Dolois began to make preparation for the rebellion.

The rebellion of the Jaintias commenced with the removing of the Tehsildar of Jowai soon after the imposition of the house tax. This triggered off revolts in Jayantipur, Mulagul, Jaflong, Cherra areas. But the British government tried to suppress the rebellion with a strong hand. The people of Jaintia hills rose under Ukiang Nongbah and on 17th January 1862, they suddenly attacked the British camp at Jowai. They also blocked the arterial roads, and killed members of the Police forces who had been torturing them. In the midst of the rebellion, the British government appointed Brigadier-General G.D. Showers with military and civil

authority over the entire Jaintia hills, and B.W.D. Morton as the Deputy Commissioner of Khasi-Jaintia hills. Due to severe suppression initiated by the government, the rebellion started to decline. The government also declared that they would grant general amnesty to all voluntarily surrendering rebels and offered a reward of rupees 1000 for anyone who would hand over Ukiang Nongbah alive. Ultimately Ukiang Nongbah fell into the hands of the British and was publicly hanged to death at Jowai. With the hanging of Ukiang Nongbah, the other rebels were disheartened and surrendered to the British in 1863 and thus the rebellion came to an end.

**Q9.** Write about the anti-British revolt of 1891 in Manipur under the leadership of Tikendrajit.

**Ans :** For a long time Manipur was recognised as a native kingdom under British protection. In 1890s when a royal feud broke out for the throne, the British Chief Commissioner of Assam interfered without reason. Taking advantage of British presence, the crown prince Kulachandra dethroned King Surachandra, and occupied the throne on 21st September 1890. The British turned a deaf ear to King Surachandra's appeal for help, and used their position to put pressure on the new king to dismiss his commander-in-chief (Senapati) Tikendrajit, who was secretly planning a revolt against the British. However, Kulachandra found it difficult to remove his popular commander-in-chief. Under these circumstances when the Chief Commissioner of Assam, J.W. Quinton and four other officers came to Manipur to capture Tikendrajit, the rebel Manipuris killed all of them.



The British then sent a strong force and captured Tikendrajit. He was then hanged for his anti-British activities. A minor, named Churachandra was made the king of Manipur in September 1891. The political agent of the British government was given all responsibilities of the administration of Manipur. Manipur was forced to pay rupees 2.50 lakhs to the British as compensation suffered by the British during the revolt. Besides, the kingdom also had to pay an annual fee of 50,000 rupees to the British. Thus the British established their domination over Manipur.

### **WRITE SHORT NOTES :**

**Q1.** The Revenue system implemented by the British in Assam.

**Ans :** Assam became a part of the British empire by the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826. Eventually they completely took over the administration of the state. Within a few years a strong revenue collection machinery was set up which introduced a new revenue system. This revenue system gave more importance to collection of revenue than on improving agriculture or alleviating the suffering and poverty of the peasants. During the Ahom period the people paid their dues in kind, but the British introduced the systems of taxes in cash. This only increased the woes of the peasants as they had little cash in their hands to pay the taxes. The peasants were forced to borrow money from the opportunistic Marwari and Bengali Mahajans who charged exorbitant interest rates making their condition most miserable. Thus, the

new land revenue policy and money economy introduced by the British government created a lot of resentment among the people and this eventually led to several revolts in the subsequent years.

## Q2. Maniram Dewan.

Ans : Maniram Dewan was the man who sowed the seeds of the revolt of 1857 in Assam. He was a shrewd politician and administrator. His full name was Maniram Borbhandar Barua. He was employed by the British and eventually became a Dewan under King Purandar Singha. Later he set up his own tea garden in Jorhat but unlike the British planters could not get exemption from revenue payment. This and other factors made him turn against the British. Inspired by the sepoy mutiny, he planned a revolt in Assam in 1857 for which he was able to gather the support and participation of a few patriotic elitists of Assam. However, before they could put their plan into action, their conspiracy cover was blown. Maniram Dewan and one of his co-conspirator, Piyoli Barua, were caught and hanged publicly by the British at Jorhat on 26 February 1858. His life and activities inspired hundreds of young men and women who thirsted for freedom. No doubt his patriotic sacrifice for the state is revered and he is remembered as one of the greatest men of Assam.

## Q3. Phulaguri Dhawa.

Ans : The Phulaguri revolt of 1861 is considered to be a revolt of great importance in the history of Assam. This

was the first of a series of peasants' revolts that rose up against the exploitative economic policy of the British. The causative factor was the British government order banning poppy cultivation. The British banned the Tiwa community from producing and selling opium as they themselves were selling opium. The ban profoundly affected the Tiwa community and they revolted in an uprising that took place in a village called Phulaguri near Nowgaon. In the mutiny that ensued one Lieutenant Singer, who was the Assistant Commissioner of Nowgaon, was killed. Many were arrested for this crime and thousands were imprisoned. This revolt had certain unique features-it had mass character and it reflected the common man's and the aristocratic class's common desire to free themselves from British imperialism.

#### Q4. Peasant revolt of Lachima.

Ans : Among the peasants' revolts that ravaged Assam from 1860 to 1894, an important revolt was the Lachima revolt in the Kamrup district that took place in January 1894. The main cause for the revolt at Lachima was the enhanced tax imposed by the British. The people demanded the authorities to reduce the tax and when not heeded, they revolted. Lachima lay in the Bajali region in North Kamrup. The people of the region conducted a Raj Mel wherein they decided not to pay the enhanced revenue fixed by the government. When the revenue collectors came, they were beaten up and one of them died. The British authorities then sent the circle officer of Barpeta, Madhab Chandra Bordoloi who arrested 75 persons and took them to the rest camp at

Lachima. when the peasants surrounded the camp he was forced to release all the prisoners. Later Deputy Commissioner McCabe arrived with a stronger force and arrested over 59 rebel leaders. Over 6000 people signed a document demanding the release of the peasants whom the Deputy Commissioner had arrested. But he refused to release them. The arrested were given various types of severe punishments publicly to deter others from revolting against the British. The main leaders of this revolt included men such as Gosain Doley, Pushparam Kalita, Debi Dutta Sarma, Jayanti Bez, Nirbhasa Kalita and Monglu Kalita.

#### Q5. Battle of Patharughat.

Ans : Assam witnessed a series of peasants' revolts from 1860 to 1894 mainly due to the high taxation and economic exploitation of the peasants by the British. People of Phulaguri, Rangia, Lachima etc, had already revolted against the British exploitation. The peasant revolt of Patharughat took place in January 1894. The people conducted several Raj Mels wherein they decided to oppose the increased revenue as well as its collection. The peasants of this region planned to organise a big rally over three days, 26-28 January, 1894 in Patharughat. The British got to know of this and on 27 January a large force of armed forces reached the place and captured everyone who refused to pay the revenue. This angered the peasants and 200 of them surrounded Berington, the Police Superintendent, who had gone for revenue collection. He escaped and reached the rest camp. A mob of about 2000 peasants,

armed with sticks, marched to the rest camp. They refused to heed to Deputy Commissioner J.D.

Anderson's order to disperse, and the latter had to finally use force. When the peasants retaliated with sticks and stones, Anderson ordered firing leading to 140 peasants being killed and over 150 peasants injured. Official records showed that only 15 were killed and 37 peasants were injured. 37 were arrested and tried. Aklu Sheikh and 6 others were punished.

#### Q6. Importance of peasant revolts in Assam.

Ans : The British took over the administration of Assam by the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826. Becoming the masters of the land they introduced their revenue system which completely ruined the peasants of Assam. The revenue demanded by the British was high and that too in cash which the poor peasants of Assam found difficult to pay. As a result of the all round discontent against the British, from 1861 onwards there occurred several peasants' revolts in various parts of the state. Some of these revolts included the Phulaguri Revolt (1861), Peasant Revolt in lower Assam (1892-93), revolts at Rangia (1893-94), revolt at Lachima (1894), revolt at Patharughat (1894), etc. The noted features of these revolts was that it was a common man's revolt and not only of the aristocratic class. Secondly, the revolts were against the high taxation imposed by the British government. They had no political or social aspects, they were caused purely by economic factors. Moreover, these revolts show the emergence of the common man in the forefront of the fight against the

British. These revolts boosted the thirst for freedom in the state and became great examples for the succeeding generations.

#### Q7. Tikendrajit.

Ans : Tikendrajit is one of the most noted personalities in Manipur history. For several years, he served the kingdom of Manipur as its commander-in-chief (Senapati). He was a true patriot who worked for the wellbeing and welfare of the kingdom of Manipur. Therefore when the British, under whose protection the kingdom existed, tried to interfere in the affairs of the state, he turned against them. Eventually he became the leader of the anti-British movement in the country. The British found him to be an obstacle in their plan of controlling the affairs of Manipur. Hence they wanted him captured and exiled from the kingdom. But unfortunately, when the Chief Commissioner of Assam, J.W. Quinton and four other officers came to arrest the popular Tikendrajit, they were murdered by the freedom loving Manipuris. However, Tikendrajit was captured by the British and hanged in public for his anti-British activities. His actions and fight against the mighty British remains one of the fascinating stories of courage and devotion to one's motherland.