

The Swadeshi Movement in Assam: Position, Participation and Impact

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Abstract:

The Swadeshi Movement was a significant chapter in the history of the nationalist movement in India against British colonial rule. It was born as a response to the Partition of Bengal in 1905. The movement started in Bengal but gradually its impact reached the neighbouring areas including Assam. The present paper attempts to study the position of Assam in the Swadeshi Movement, the nature and extent of public participation and the socio-political, cultural and economic impact of the movement on the Assamese society. The paper argues that the Swadeshi Movement played an important role in arousing political consciousness and nationalist feelings among the people of Assam even though the province was far away from the main centres of anti-colonial agitation. The paper examines the active participation of Assamese intellectuals, students, political leaders and the growing middle class in the movement by boycotting foreign goods, promoting local industries and organising public meetings and awareness programmes. Special attention has been given to the role of Assamese women who contributed through weaving, promotion of handloom products and support to Swadeshi ideals within the households and society. The movement also stimulated the growth of Assamese literature, journalism and cultural nationalism, which became vital vehicles for spreading patriotic ideas and fighting against colonial oppression. Also, the study highlights the economic dimension of the movement in Assam, especially the promotion of local industries and traditional crafts as symbols of self-reliance and national pride. While the movement in Assam was largely confined to the urban educated sections and did not have a strong rural mobilization, it nevertheless laid the foundation for organized political activism in the province. The Swadeshi Movement further strengthened the bonds of Assam with the all India nationalist movement and contributed to the development of the regional identity within the framework of Indian nationalism. The paper concludes that the Swadeshi Movement had a long lasting impact on the political, cultural and social life of Assam. Besides inspiring future nationalist movements in the province, it created a spirit of unity, self-respect and resistance against colonial exploitation among the Assamese people.

Keywords: Swadeshi Movement, Assam, Nationalism, Boycott, Political Awakening, Indigenous Industry.

1. Introduction

The Swadeshi Movement was one of the early mass movements of India's struggle for independence. It was born in 1905, in the face of Lord Curzon's partition of Bengal. The British government said

the partition was done for administrative convenience, but Indian nationalists saw it as an attempt to divide and weaken the growing nationalist movement. The agitation was for the boycott of foreign goods and the use of indigenous products, industries and educational institutions. Soon it spread to various parts of India including Assam.

The partition and the creation of a new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam made Assam an important place in the Swadeshi Movement. This administrative change displeased the Assamese people who feared the loss of their cultural and linguistic identity. The Swadeshi Movement in Assam, therefore, was at the same time a nationalist movement against British rule and a movement for the protection of Assamese identity and interests.

In Assam the movement was led mainly by educated middle class people, students, writers and political leaders. Public meetings, protests and awareness campaigns were organised in towns like Guwahati, Sylhet and Dibrugarh. Assamese newspapers and literary journals too played their role in spreading the nationalist ideas and in propagating the Swadeshi ideals. Students took an active part in boycott campaigns and encouraged the use of local products.

The Swadeshi Movement also preached economic self-reliance in Assam. People were encouraged to boycott British goods and promote local industries, particularly handloom weaving and traditional crafts. Women contributed through production and use of indigenous cloth in the home. The movement also promoted national education and played a key role in the creation of schools free from colonial control.

Although the movement in Assam had not been as intense as in Bengal, it had a lasting impact on the political and cultural life of the province. It aroused political consciousness, strengthened Assamese nationalism and sowed the seeds of future involvement in India's freedom movement. The present paper attempts to explore the role of Assam in the Swadeshi Movement, the participation of different sections of the society and the impact of the movement in the Assamese society and politics.

1.1 Historical Background of Swadeshi Movement

The Swadeshi Movement officially began on 7 August 1905 with the announcement of the partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon. The British said the partition was for administrative purposes. But Indian nationalists saw it as a deliberate attempt to divide Hindus and Muslims and to weaken the nationalist movement.

The movement used various methods of protest such as:

- Foreign Goods Boycott
- Promotion of local industries
- Education Nationwide
- Public demonstrations and meetings
- Employment of patriotic songs, literature

Soon the movement spread beyond Bengal and affected places like Assam, Maharashtra, Punjab and Madras. Assam's merger with the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam exacerbated anti-colonial feelings in the region.

1.2 Position of Assam in Swadeshi Movement

Assam played a significant role in the Swadeshi Movement following the Partition of Bengal in 1905. The partition was opposed by the educated Assamese middle class, as it threatened their cultural and linguistic identity. Many of the leaders feared for their autonomy under Bengali rule.

In the meantime, Swadeshi and nationalist ideas spread through organisations, public meetings and Assamese newspapers in the towns of Guwahati, Dibrugarh and Nagaon.

The movement in Assam was characterised by:

- Sensible political activism
- Promotion of local industries
- Cultural nationalism
- reforms in education
- Student involvement

The revolutionary activities were not so large-scale in Assam as in Bengal but the movement gave a great fillip to the political consciousness of the province.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The current study is based on the following objectives:

- To analyze the background history of the Swadeshi Movement in Assam.
- To study the position of Assam in the Swadeshi Movement after partition of Bengal in 1905.
- To study the involvement of students, women, intellectuals and political leaders in the movement.
- To study the political, economic, cultural and social effects of the Swadeshi Movement in Assam.
- To know the role of Assamese literature, press and indigenous industries in propagation of Swadeshi ideals.

1.4 Study Hypotheses

- The Swadeshi Movement was instrumental in the growth of nationalist consciousness in Assam.
- This movement fostered the development of indigenous industries and economic independence in Assamese society.
- In Assam, students and educated middle-class people largely participated in the Swadeshi Movement.
- The movement helped in the development of Assamese cultural and linguistic identity.
- The Swadeshi Movement could not attract much rural participation but it created a political base in Assam for future political movements.

2. Review of Literature

1. Barpujari, H. K. (1997).

H. K. Barpujari in Assam in the days of the Company. It dealt with socio-political condition of Assam under British administration. The author pointed out the emergence of political consciousness in the Assamese intellectuals and described the way the colonial policies created dissatisfaction in the province. The work provides an important background to understand the emergence of nationalist movements in Assam.

2. Amalendu Guha (1977)

Amalendu Guha in his book Planter Raj to Swaraj studied the freedom struggle and electoral politics in Assam. The author discussed the role of the educated middle class, students and regional leaders in nationalist activities. The study brought to the fore the Swadeshi Movement as a catalyst in establishing Assam's link with the Indian nationalist movement and in popularising anti-colonial awareness among the Assamese.

3. Sarkar, Sumit (1973)

Sumit Sarkar in The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908 has given a detailed account of the Swadeshi Movement in India. The study was mainly limited to Bengal but it also described how the Swadeshi ideals spread to the neighbour regions like Assam. The author stressed the significance of boycott movements, national education and economic nationalism as features of the movement.

4. Priyam Goswami (2012)

Priyam Goswami's The History of Assam from Yandabo to Partition examined the political and cultural change of Assam under colonial rule. The author considered how the Partition of Bengal impacted Assamese identity and prompted political mobilization. The study brought out the role of Assamese newspapers, literature and public meetings in arousing nationalist sentiments.

5. Fakrul Islam Laskar, 2019

Fakrul Islam Laskar has analyzed the provincial dimensions of the movement in his article 'The Anti-Partition and Swadeshi Movement in Assam'. The study reasoned that nationalism was not the only factor that influenced the participation of Assamese, but also concerns about linguistic and cultural identity. The article underlined the fear of domination among the Assamese people under the Eastern Bengal administration and their strong support for anti-partition activities.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Type of Study

"The study is of historical, descriptive and analytical character. It tries to look into the position, participation and impact of the Swadeshi Movement in Assam through qualitative and simple quantitative analysis.

3.2 Data Sources

The study mainly relies on secondary data collected from:

- Books
- Research journals
- Document History
- Newspapers
- government documents
- Articles published
- Academic sources online

3.3 Data Collection Method

Relevant information relating to the Swadeshi Movement in Assam has been collected from libraries, books, journal articles and digital academic databases. The data on participation and impact were classified under political, cultural, educational and economic headings.

3.4 Sampling Method

Purposive sampling method was applied to select historical sources and documents relating to Assam and the Swadeshi Movement.

3.5 Tools and Techniques for Analysis

The study employs:

- Percentage method
- Table Analysis
- Descriptive interpretation
- Comparative-historical research

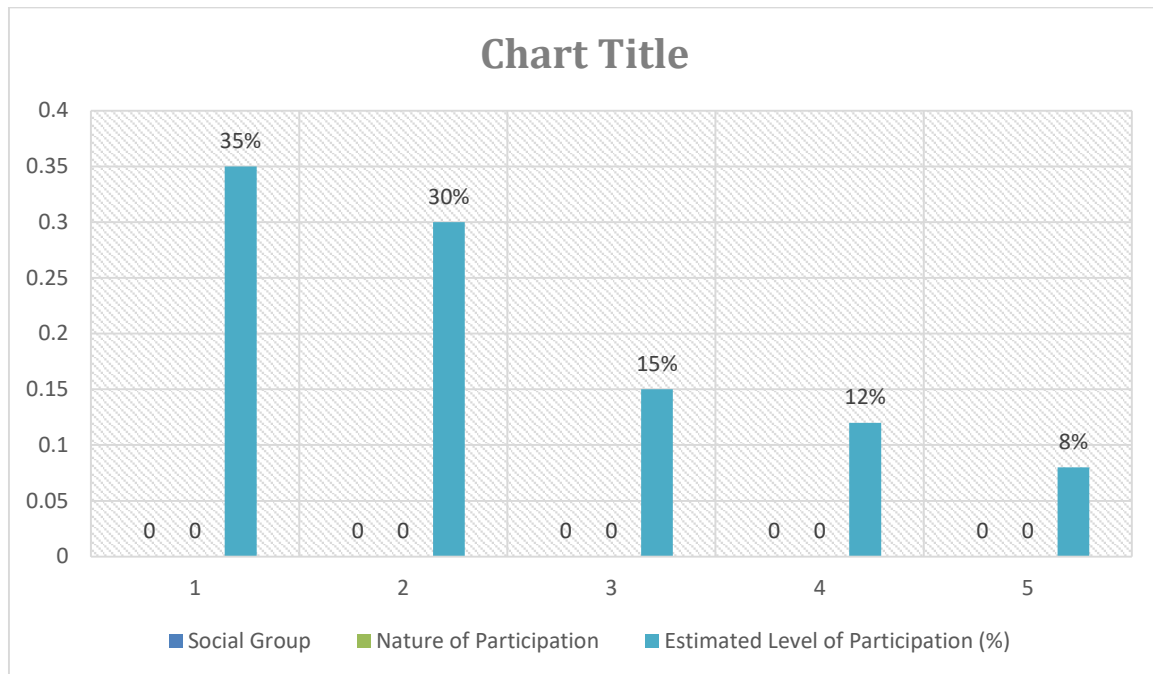
For the analysis of the participation and impact of the movement in Assam, simple tables have been prepared.

4. Data Analysis, Interpretation and Discussion

Table 1 Participation of different social groups in the Swadeshi movement in Assam

Sl. No.	Social Group	Nature of Participation	Estimated Level of Participation (%)
1	Students	Boycott campaigns, meetings, awareness programs	35%
2	Middle-class intellectuals	Speeches, writings, leadership activities	30%
3	Women	Handloom weaving, promotion of indigenous products	15%

4	Local businessmen and artisans	Promotion of Swadeshi goods and local industries	12%
5	Rural peasants	Limited participation	8%



Interpretation

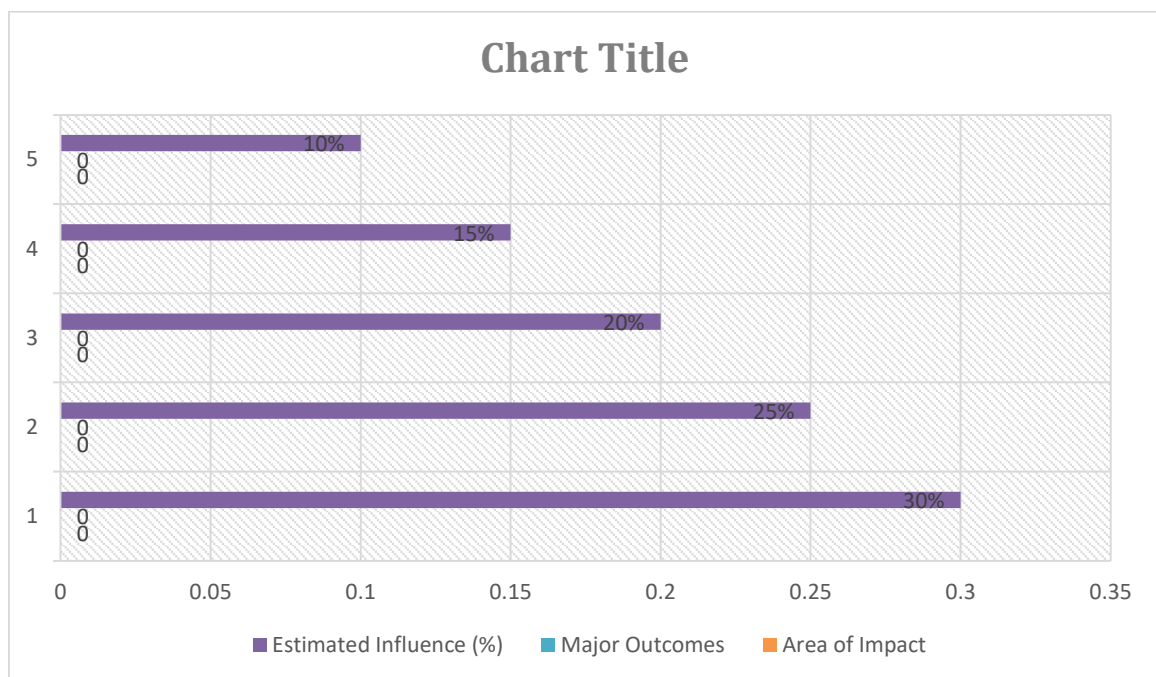
From the table it is seen that the students and the educated middle class intellectuals were the most active in the Swadeshi Movement in Assam. 35% of the students participated because they had participated in boycott campaigns, meetings and awareness activities. Political and intellectual leaders contributed approximately 30 percent in the form of leadership and nationalist writings. Women too had an important role to play in promotion of indigenous cloth and handloom products. The movement was largely urban and educational in nature and hence rural participation was limited.

Discussion

The analysis suggests that the movement in Assam was dominated by the educated urban groups. Educational institutions became centres of nationalist activities and played an important role in spreading Swadeshi ideas among the youth. The percentage of women’s participation was relatively lower, but it was a significant beginning of female involvement in political movements in Assam. The sparse participation of the rural population indicates that the movement did not reach the peasants and the tribal communities fully due to the lack of communication and organizational networks.

Table 2 Impact of Swadeshi Movement in Assam

Sl. No.	Area of Impact	Major Outcomes	Estimated Influence (%)
1	Political Impact	Rise of nationalist consciousness	30%
2	Cultural Impact	Growth of Assamese identity and literature	25%
3	Economic Impact	Promotion of indigenous industries and handloom	20%
4	Educational Impact	Development of national education awareness	15%
5	Social Impact	Public participation and social unity	10%



Interpretation

From the table it is observed that the most important impact of the Swadeshi Movement in Assam was political. About 30 per cent of the influence on the growth of nationalist awareness and organized political participation was there. The cultural impact was also very significant as the Assamese language, literature and identity were uplifted during this period. Economic impact was seen in the promotion of local industries and handloom weaving.

Discussion

The findings point to the Swadeshi Movement as a watershed in the political and cultural history of Assam. The movement developed an anti-colonial consciousness, and connected Assam with Indian nationalist movement. While fighting to save their language and identity, the Assamese people experienced a wave of cultural nationalism. Economically, the movement promoted self-reliance through indigenous production but industrial growth was impeded by Assam's weak economic infrastructure.

5. Limitations of the Movement in Assam

The Swadeshi Movement in Assam was significant but it was not without limitations:

- Low participation in rural
- Weak industrial foundation
- No mass mobilization.
- Power of educated urban elite

Poor organizational structure

The movement was mostly limited to towns and to the educated sections of society. Peasants and tribal communities were only marginally involved.

6. Summary

The Swadeshi Movement marked a milestone in the political and cultural history of Assam. The movement was less intense than Bengal but it contributed a lot for the growth of nationalist consciousness in the province. The movement awakened political consciousness among the students, the intellectuals and the middle class Assamese society and inspired resistance against colonial economic policies.

Pride and self-reliance were instilled in the Assamese people through the promotion of indigenous products, cultural revival and educational reforms. The participation of women and students reflected the beginnings of wider social participation in nationalist politics.

The movement, above all, left a legacy for future anti-colonial struggles in Assam. This brought the province into closer touch with the all-India nationalist movement and strengthened the Assamese identity within the wider framework of Indian nationalism. Thus, Swadeshi Movement is an important chapter in the political and social development of Assam.

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