

*Plains Tribals Before The  
Simon Commission*

**OR**

**THE INDIAN STATUTORY COMMISSION**

Edited by :- BINAI KHUNGUR BASUMATARI

Published by :-  
THE BEACONS  
Harisinga, Darrang  
Assam :: INDIA.

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Edited by :- BINAI KHUNGUR BASUMATARI

Price: Rs. 7.50

8 100

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Printed by :-  
MAAINAO PRINTERS  
TANGLA, Darrang (Assam)  
INDIA.

For the BEACONS  
Harisinga, Darrang  
Assam :: INDIA.

Price :- Rs. 7.50

\$ 1.00

With Compliments,

to :- Dr. Bipen Sarma, Ph.D.  
K.K. Bhatta Road,  
Cherikenthi,  
Guwahati. - 781 007.

"LORD, you know the hopes of humble people. Surely you will hear their cries and comfort their hearts by helping them. You will be with the orphans and all who are oppressed, so that mere earthly man will terrify them no longer". :- Psalms : 10 : 17. 18.

"He will not delay his help. The nations rant and rave in anger— but when God speaks, the earth melts in submission and kingdoms totter into ruin".

- Psalms : 46 : 5, 6

"... There is no government anywhere that God has not placed in power". :- Romans : 13 : 1.

Dr. Binai Kungu Barman  
Dewguni, Harimoye,  
Dermany.

## DEDICATION

To the indomitable spirits of our predecessors who  
lighted the path of struggle and showed  
us the way. So that we live  
as humans and not as  
primitives.

— \* \* \* \* \*

## PREFACE

When I first stood on the Floor of the Assam Assembly in 1978, I could not decide what line to adopt in highlighting the issues of the Plains Tribals. Just having the demand for UDAYACHAL was not enough. Were there any precedents?

Then I rummaged in the newly transferred Legislative Assembly Library and was not happy at all.

On an impulse, I wrote to the British Prime Minister ; Mrs. Margaret Thatcher. She was indeed very kind to instruct her people to enable me a research in the India Office Library in London.

So I certify as to the exact copying of the memorandas submitted by the primitives and the excerpts of the Simon Commission quoted in this booklet.

I also assure the reader, I am neither a writer nor a researcher.

It is just a humble effort to delve into our past with a hope that it may show us the way for future.

So I thank the Commonwealth Office and to the British Government for preserving— and allowing me to look through— all records.

It is my fervent hope that more educated primitive boys and girls will take up the cudgels to show us the way. It is also hoped that the mistakes will be tolerated but rectified for future.

*Binai Khungur Basumatari*

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**PLAINS TRIBALS BEFORE THE  
SIMON COMMISSION  
( Or The Indian Statutory Commission ).**

The Simon Commission or The Indian Statutory Commission was constituted at St. James, London, on November 26, 1927 with the following persons :- 1) Sir John Alles-brook Simon, Chairman, 2) Mr. Harry Lawson Webster, 3) Baron Strathcona and Mount Royal, 4) Viscount Burnham, 5) Mr. Donald Sterling Palmer, 6) Mr. Edward Cecil George Cadogan 7) Mr. Stephen Walsh, 8) Mr. George Richard Lane Fox, and 9) Mr. Clement Richard Atlee.

On December 7th, 1927, Mr. Stephen Walsh resigned and Mr. Vernon Hartshorn was appointed in his place.

The Royal Notification throughout the Indian Dominion on March 6, 1928, called for Memorandums, to be submitted to the Simon Commission.

Memorandums were desired from officials, non-officials, representative associations, local bodies and responsible individuals on any of the subjects which fall within the limits of enquiry, and to be submitted in writing and the last date for the first batch of memorandas to be received by the Commission was fixed on March 31, 1928:

The final date for receiving all memorandums were fixed on June 1st, 1928, and these were required to be submitted in twelve copies.

**TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE COMMISSION :**

"To enquire into the working of the system of Government, the growth of education, and the development of representative institutions in British India and matters

connected therewith" and it is "to report as to whether and to what extent it is desirable to establish the principle of responsible government, or to extend, modify, restrict the degree of responsible government, then existing therein, including the question whether the establishment of Second Chambers of the Local Legislatures is or is not desirable"

The Commission was also to acknowledge interviews with representative bodies and deputations both at Delhi and in several provinces,

The Commission was to attach special importance to written material and were expected to appendix certain topics and written representations,

All memorandums were required to be signed, dated, by, or on behalf of the persons or bodies submitting them.

Memorandums of representative capacities were required to contain a clear statement of the nature, extent and membership of the organisation—submitting them.

#### ASSAM VISIT :

As per the terms of reference, the Simon Commission had to visit Assam. Therefore, to facilitate a complete assessment of the problems of the state of Assam and to help in recording its findings and also to help in preparing its report, pertaining to Assam, an "Assam Committee" was constituted under the Commission which consisted of persons well conversant with the situations then existing in Assam. The members of the "Assam Committee" were :-

1) Lt. Col. W. D. Smiles, 2) Mr. Amarnath Ray, 3) Mr. Munawar Ali, 4) Mr. Arjan Ali Mazumdar, 5) Mr. Keramat Ali, 6) Mr. Sadananda Dowerah and 7) Mr. M. N. Borooah.

The Simon Commission reached Assam in late 1928 and its activities continued till January, 1929. The then Assam Legislative Council consisted of the following members :- 1) Rai Bahadur Promod Chandra Dutta, 2) Rai Bahadur Amarnath Ray, 3) Rai Bahadur Siva Prasad Baruah, 4) Srijut Nilomani Phukan, 5) Mr. D. S. Withers, 6) Mr. Basanta Kumar Das, 7) Mr. Brajendra Narayan Chaudhuri, 8) Mr. Krishna Sundar Dam, 9) Mr. Copendra Lal Das Chaudhuri, 10) Mr. Kshirod Chandra Deb, 11) Mr. Bipin Chandra Ghosh, 12) Mr. Kamaykhya Ram Barooah, 13) Mr. Mahadeb Sarmah, 14) Mr. Padmanabh Sarmah, 15) Mr. Tara Prasad Chaliha, 16) Mr. Kuladhar Chaliha, 17) Mr. Rohinikanta Hati Baruah, 18) Mr. Sadananda Dowerah, 19) Mr. Sarveswar Baruah, 20) Abdul Rahim Chowdhury, 21) Abdul Hanan Chowdhury, 22) Muddafir Hussain Chowdhury, 23) Faiznur Ali, 24) Mr. W. K. Warren, 25) Lt. Col. Garbett, 26) Mr. M. H. Clarke, 27) Saiyid Mohammad Saadulla, 28) Dewan Md. Wasil Chowdhury, 29) Rev. J. C. Evans, 30) Khan Bahadur Abul Fazl Ahmad, 31) Rev. J. J. M. Nichols Roy, 32) Rai Bahadur Bipin Chandra Deb-Laskar, 33) Rai Saheb Har-Kishore Chakravarty, 34) Mr. Rashid Ali Laskar, 35) Mr. Krishna Bahadur Allauddin Ali Chowdhury, 36) Maffijuddin Ahmad, 37) Mr. J. C. Dawson, 38) Mr. H. B. Buchanan.

The Simon Commission asked members from the "Primitive and Backward Tribes" of Assam to depose before it at Shillong on January 4th, 1929 at 2-30 P.M. The Plains Tribals were then classified as belonging to "Primitive and Backward Tribes" In this interview, the "Memorandum- E Assam 733" was the matter of scrutiny. This memorandum is as follows :



**To: INDIAN STATUTORY COMMISSION,  
MEMORANDUM BY BODO COMMUNITY OF  
GOALPARA DISTRICT.**

**By: Mr. Ghyasuddin Ahmad, B. L. Dhubri.**

We, the undersigned, on behalf of the Bodo community of the district of Goalpara of Assam, beg to submit the following memorandum, some of the important points touching the enquiry with a special reference to the district Goalpara and to the Bodo community of the said district.

1] The Bodo community forms a considerable portion of the population of the district of Goalpara and its numbers about one Lac and fifty thousand. In the whole province of Assam it numbers about eight lacs. A large number of Bodos live in the district of Jalpaiguri and Kochbehar in the province of Bengal. Out of one lac and fifty thousand, some thousands have been treated as Hindus which is the cause of the decrease in the number of the Bodo population of the district of Goalpara. The Bodos have a distinct civilisation of their own. There should be a separate category the "Bodos" in the census report. The history shows very clearly that part, this community has been playing in the history of Assam since the time of Bhagadutta who ruled over Assam during the time of the Great Epic-the Mahabharata. Many Kings who ruled over Assam belonged to this race. Vishak Raja, Bali Raja, Ban Raja and Biswa Singha all belonged to this race and history will prove how influential once they were. The people of this race are born warriors and even now many people have enlisted their names in the military under the British Govt. The original proprietors of the Bijni Estate and Kochbehar Estate were people of this race but in course of time, they styled themselves Hindus. These estates are still existing but we are being

totally ignored.

2) We being backward failed to gather the opinions of our community before, so we could not submit the memorandum in time and we hope that you will be pleased to accept it and to consider it favourably for your decisions as regards Indian Constitution will make a distinctly new stage in our political life.

3) Electorate : In our opinion there should not be mixed electorate. Each section of people should have the liberty of sending in their representative in the local council. The peculiar position in which we are placed offers us practically no chance of sending our representative in the council, though there is a large number of voters in our community. Out of the total population of the whole district of Goalpara which numbers about 685, 882 lacs, 369, 397 lacs fall under the head of Non-mohameddan, Non-mohameddians means Hindus, Christians, Jains, Sikhs and the like. A liberal view of the thing will show that we can not enjoy the advantages of the reforms as the other community does. In spite of our being such a large number all advantages of the Reform are being enjoyed either by a Brahmin or by a Kshaitreya, or by a Sudra. So in order to safeguard the interests of our community we should have a separate representative in the Council.

4) In our opinion there should not be a Second Chamber in the Local Council.

5) At present there are certain restrictions which debar many to exercise their right of franchise. These should be removed and more liberty be given for that purpose.

6) There should be 4 seats for Assam in the Central Legislature : 1 for Mahammadan, and 3 for non-Mahamma-

dans and one of the 3 non-mahammadan seats should be reserved for the Bodos of Assam.

7) TERRITORIAL REDISTRIBUTION : Some interested persons of our district are agitating for the transfer of the district of Goalpara over to Bengal. So far as we are concerned we oppose to it. Goalpara is a part and parcel of Assam and history will prove what part she has been playing from time immemorial. The habits and customs of the people of this district are more akin to Assamese than to Bengalee. We the Bodos can by no means call us other than Assamese. The transfer of the district to Bengal will be prejudicial to the interests not only of this community but of all other communities and this transfer will seriously hamper our progress in all directions.

8) We also desire to put it before you that if there be a sub-division either at Kokrajhar or at Haltugaon within the sub-division of Dhubri this community will be benefitted as it will give the community more openings.

9) EDUCATION AND APPOINTMENTS : We the undersigned beg to lay before you that this community should receive special treatment at the hands of the Govt. in matters of Education and Appointments. Our community is most backward in point of Education. Such being the case our people are always misled, they can not understand the value of the Reform, they can not save themselves from the hands of the foreign money-lenders. To remove this drawback there should be compulsory free primary education and special scholarships for giving facility to higher education of the Bodo students be provided for. As stated before that a large number of our people are serving in the military and thereby rendering loyal service to the British government,

we claim certain provincial and executive posts for some of our people who are getting higher education,

10) A large number of Bodo sepoys are included in the Gurkha Regiment and are generally known as Gurkha. To our opinion, there should be a separate Regiment as the Bodo Regiment for the Bodo people of Assam.

11) LOCAL BOARDS : The Chairman of the Boards during the term of their office and big land-holders should not be allowed to stand for election in the general constituency. There is no objection they are given special seats in the Boards.

12) In matters of Board election under the Dhubri Local Board, our community should have separate electorate just like the Mohammedans, under the thanas Bilasipara, Kokrajhar, Bijni and Dhubri the Bodos people number the majority and as such we pray that we should have separate seats in the Dhubri Local Board. As stated before our people are illiterate and ignorant so they easily mislead by others at the time of election and consequently people of other community are elected. In view of the illiteracy, ignorance and influence of other community, we earnestly pray that we get separate seats in the Dhubri Local Board. Such is also the condition of Goalpara Local Board. There too we want separate seats.

13) In the conclusion we beg to lay before you that if required any one of us is willing to appear before you and to give evidence.

Yours faithfully,

S/d. Ghyasuddin Ahmad.

(Spelling mistakes and grammatical errors not mine-Editor)

From : The Secretary, Assam Kachari Jubok Sanmiloni,  
Bijlibari, P. O. Hoogrijan.

To :

The Secretary, Indian Statutory Commission.

New Delhi, the 14th Sept. 1928.

Sir,

I have the honour to inform you that at a conference of the representatives of the Kachari community held at Titabar, Jorhat, Assam on the 12th August 1928, it was resolved to co-operate with the Commission and to submit a memorandum to the Commission from the Assam Kachari Jubok Sanmiloni on behalf of the entire Kachari community of Assam (vide resolution No. 2 & 3 adopted at the conference copy of all the resolutions being enclosed herewith).

I therefore, take this opportunity of submitting herewith a memorandum on behalf of the community with the hope that you would be pleased to condone the delay in its submission and place the same before the commission for favour of considerations.

Your obedient servant,

S/d. Jadav Chandra Khakhlari

General Secretary

Assam Kachari Jubok Sanmilani.

MEMORANDUM OF THE KACHARI COMMUNITY IN  
ASSAM BY THEIR REPRESENTATIVE SREEJUT JADAV  
CHANDRA KHAKHLARI? THE SECRETARY OF THE  
KACHARI SANMILONI.

The Kacharis are one of the principal races of Assam and held an exalted position in History. They had

a vast kingdom extending from Upper Assam to East Bengal with their capital at Dimapur, historically known as Hirimbapur called so after the name of Hirimba one of the most powerful of Kachari King whose sister was married by the 2nd Pandav Bhimo of Hastinapur. When the most powerful of Ahom kings invaded the Kachari Kingdom, the Kacharis sustained a defeat and removed their capital from Hirimbapur to Maibong in the district of Cachar. The Kacharis lost their kingdom only about 74 years back. This community still rendering a great service to the British Govt. being enlisted in the military department. Their descendants are now spread all over Assam and form an important community. The Kacharis are divided into several sub-races. The Ravas, Sonowals, Meches, Thengais, Lalongs, Saranias, Dimachas and Husai etc. all from different ramifications of the same community e. g. the Kacharis. The census report does not show the whole community under one head Kachari. The number of people shown under the head Kachari is misleading. It will be found that the Kacharis number about sixteen lakhs and form one fifth of the total population in Assam. Numerically the Kacharis are a strong community, but want of education the bone of human progress has relegated them to a minor position. Socially they are regarded as untouchable. To call them Hindus will be a misname in as much the Hindus do not receive them into their society, do not dine with them and are mostly unsympathetic with their ideals and aspirations. They are thus an isolated backward community and therefore look up to the Statutory Commission to lend them a helping hand by recognising their position, and granting them their legitimate rights and privileges and giving them facilities in education and in the matter of administration of the country.

This community as has been alluded to above, does not bind itself to the chariot wheels of the big Hindu community but prefers to take its stand above and independent of them and earnestly hopes that the Commission would be pleased to class them under a separate headings together.

Historically and traditionally, they stand on a very high level and socially they enjoy splendid isolation, and educationally and politically they are backward having fallen on evil days.

In the circumstances they appeal to the Statutory Commission to preserve their integrity and independence and grant them all sorts of facilities for making rapid studies in the path of progress.

This community forming about one fifth of the total population can justly claim a separate representation for them in the legislatures. In this connection, they may be allowed to submit that the division of constituencies into Mahammadan and non-mahhamaddan is very unsatisfactory. Under the very wide term non-mahammadan all the diverse communities and creeds have been huddled together. So far only the Hindu of upper castes have got into the legislatures and the minor communities have gone almost unrepresented. It is time that the term "Non-Mahammadan" should be subdivided into two sub-heads, e. g. Hindus and Non-Hindus. This community is spread over both the valleys. So it is prayed that for an adequate and effective representation of this important community two seats be reserved in the local legislature e. g. one for each valley, the members to be elected by a separate electorate.

In the local bodies also, separate representation for this community as ever they are in a majority is earnestly solicited.

This community prays for a due share in the administration of the country. Its representation in the services according to its numerical strength is humbly prayed for.

This community shares with other communities the belief that Indians are fit for self-govt., the Dyarchy is unworkable and that provincial autonomy should be granted immediately.

Lastly, this community urges for grant of inward facilities for spread of education amongst them. As the students of their community are not allowed to mess together with those of the Hindus they naturally look for provision of separate messings in all the schools and colleges of Assam.

They asked for more scholarships, from studentships and facilities for going abroad for the purpose of higher studies in Agriculture, Engineering, Commerce and science.

S/d. Jadab Chandra Khakhlari,  
Secretary,

Assam Kachari Jubok Sanmiloni.

The above memorandum is submitted by as the Secretary of the Assam Kachari Jubok Sanmiloni on behalf of the entire Kachari community in Assam. The association is ready to tender the following witnesses for cross-examina-

tion by the Commission if necessary.

Witnesses :— 1. Jadab Chandra Khakhlari,  
2. Raj Kumar Janmejoy Barman, BL.  
3. Rup Nath Brahma, B. A.

COPY OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE HELD AT TITABAR ? JORHAT, ON THE 12TH AUGUST 1928 AMONG THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE KACHARI COMMUNITY FROM DIFFERENT PARTS OF ASSAM.

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1. Resolved that this representative meeting of the Kachari community of Assam express their loyalty to the King of England and the Emperor of India.
2. Resolved that this meeting is of opinion that the Kachari Community of Assam ( Surma Valley and Assam Valley ) should co-operate with the Simon Commission and that they should produce the necessary evidence before the commission.
3. This meeting is of opinion that considering the vast number of Kachari population in both the valleys of Assam, 2 members from this community, one from the Surma valley and the other from the Assam valley, be granted to the legislative council of the Assam Govt. to represent the Kachari community.
4. Resolved this meeting is of opinion that free student-ships and scholarships in school and college be granted to the Kachari students according to the percentage of their population in Assam.
5. Resolved that as the Kachari students are not allowed to dine together with other Hindu students, this meeting is of opinion that seperate dining rooms be provided in each M. E. schools, High schools and in colleges.

6. Resolved that this meeting is of opinion that a member from the Kachari community be granted in each local board where the Kachari population are in great number.
7. Resolved that this meeting is of opinion that the services be distributed to the Kachari community according to the percentage of their population.
8. Resolved that this meeting is of opinion that a scholarship be granted to a Kachari student in each year for some technical lines of education in foreign countries, specially in military department,
9. Resolved that this meeting is of opinion that as this community was once the ruling race of Assam, they should be given opportunity to have hands in political matters even now.
10. Resolved that all the different sections of the Kachari community such as Rava, Sonowal, Thengal, Dimacha, Lalong etc. of both the valleys be counted and recognised as the Kachari community.
11. Resolved that this meeting is of opinion that the Kachari community of Assam do not recognise themselves as a lower class of Hindus or untouchable and do hereby declare that they are quite independent from the Hindus community in all respects such as political, social, and religious etc.
12. Resolved that the General Secretary, Assam Kachari Jubok Sanmiloni will arrange a deputation to be sent to the Simon Commission and the members for the deputation will be appointed by him including himself.

13, Resolved that the memorandum be submitted to the Simon Commission from the Assam Kachari Jubok Sanmiloni on behalf of the entire Kachari community of Assam.

S/d. Bharat Chandra Khakhlari,  
President.

Dated Titabor, Jorhat,  
the 14th August, 1928.

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To : His Excellency the Governor of Assam in Council.  
The Humble Memorial of the Boros, Garos,  
and Rabhas of the Goalpara sub-division  
in the matter of the transfer of Goalpara to Bengal,  
Most Respectfully Sheweth :

May it please your Excellency,

That your Excellency's humble memorialists hear a strong rumour that the Zemindars of the Goalpara district have addressed your Excellency, praying for the transfer of the district to Bengal. If it is true, then your excellency's memorialists must state humbly the Zamindara have done so quite against the will and interests of their tenants and the majority of the bona-fide inhabitants of the whole district.

That your excellency's memorialists beg to state that the Boros passed a resolution against the transfer of Goalpara in the last sitting of their conference (Boro Maha Sanmilon) and the Rabhas also did the same in the last sitting of their conference (Assam Rabha conference). This will go to show that the people in general like your excellency's humble memorialists are never in favour of the proposed transfer and formally have been objecting to it from the beginning.

That in the last sitting of the Assam Literary Conference also the people of Goalpara have expressed their opinions through the resolutions adopted and representation made to the Govt. for introduction of Assamese in the Govt. Courts and against the transfer of Goalpara.

That the Zemindars of Goalpara are so powerful that the vast uneducated tenants living in their estates can scarcely withstand their influence and obstruct their self-asserting and aggrandising movement set on foot.

So, your excellency's memorialists beg most respectfully to pray that your excellency will be graciously pleased to consider the general opinion and interests of the great bulk of population of the Goalpara district and hold out this view of the question of its transfer to the Simon Commission, and for this act of kindness. Your humble memorialists will as in duty bound ever pray.

Dated, ) Harish Chandra Das, Darrangiri,  
The 8th August 1928. ) and others.

To : The Secretary,  
Indian Statutory Commission,  
New Delhi Office, New Delhi.

Dated, Dhubri the 30th December 1928.

Sir,

We, the undersigned, on behalf of the Bodo Jubok Sanmiloni of the district of Goalpara, beg to lay before you the following memorandum on some of the important points touching the enquiry with a special reference to the district

of Goalpara and to the Bodo community of this district.

1. The Bodo community forms a considerable portion of the population of the district of Goalpara. That this community is living in this district since time immemorial and the Bodos are the original inhabitants of the district and the history will show how influential once they were. This community is a prominent factor not only in this district but also in the province of Assam and in the neighbouring Bengal districts.

2. We, being backward, failed to gether the opinion of our community before and thus failed to submit the memorandum in time and we hope you will be pleased to accept it and to consider it favourably.

3. Amongst the Non-Mohameddan inhabitants of this district the Bodos are the prominent factors but we are sorry to say that they have not got any representation in the local council. Taking into considerations the backwardness of the community and its number it is hoped that this community in the district will have a special representation in the council.

4. The Bodos were originally a warrior class and large number of them join the military service, but they are generally styled and classed as Gurkha regiment. To our opinion they should be designated by their own name, as Kachari or Bodo regiment, so that their ancient heroic memories may be maintained.

5. To our opinion the district of Goalpara should be retained as a part and parcel of Assam even if the district of Sylhet be transferred to Bengal, as the people of Goalpara is more akin to Assamese than to Bengalees in all respects. The transfer of this district to Bengal will be prejudicial to

the interests not only of this community but of all communities, of the district.

6. We, the undersigned, also beg to lay before you that considering the backwardness of this community, this community should receive a special treatment at the hands of the Govt. in matters of appointment and education. Special scholarships for giving facility to the education of this community should be provided for, and special seats in all grades of the govt. services should be reserved for them.

7. We also humbly desire to put it before you that if a sub-division either at Kokrajhar or at Haltugaon, within the sub-division of Dhubri be created, the community will be benefitted as it will give the community more openings.

8. That the Bodos have all along traded in timber, grown in their district by taking lease of the same. But for some years past the Forest Mahal is put up to auction and outsiders of the district bid them at fabulous price and it is not possible for the Bodos to compete with them. The Bodos have thus going to loose their right of trading in timber of their district and thus to be deprived of a great source of income, which are now being captured by the outsiders of the district. That the old system of leasing out of the forest mahal should be introduced again, and thus the Bodos should be given again the right of trading in timber of the forests of this district.

9. That the Goalpara Tenancy Bill, as recommended by the Select Committee should be passed as early as possible and a Regulation for the betterment of the status of the tenants of the Khash Mahal and for the protection of their rights and interests should also be passed as early as possible,

10. In conclusion, we beg to say that if required, any one of us is willing to appear and make our submission before you.

We have the honour to be, Sir,  
Your most obedient servants,

S/d. Shyama Charan Brahma, Secretary Dhubri  
Boro Jubak Sanmiloni.

S/d. Rupa Ram Brahma,

— 0 —

As we have seen, the "Memorandum-E Assam 733" was not one but four separate memorandums submitted by four different organisations belonging to "Primitive and Backward Tribes". The Simon Commission for reasons best known to it, decided to treat it as one. Accordingly, the "Primitive and Backward Tribes" were given only one interview by the Simon Commission. The recorded proceedings are as follows :-

"The deputation of the Primitive and Backward Tribes called and examined. The deputation consisted of :-

- 1) Srijut Sonadhar Das (representative-Bania Samaj),
- 2) Rai Saheb Pyari Mohan Das (Rep.-Mahisyas),
- 3) Srijut. Nilakanta Hazarika (Rep.-Kaivartas),
- 4) Jogesh Chandra Nath (Rep.-Yogis)
- 5) Mahi Chandra Miri (Rep..Miri)
- 6) Jadav Chandra Khakhlari (Rep.-Kachari),
- 7) Kali Charan Brahma (Rep.-Bodo),
- 8) Mahendra Lal Das (Rep.-Lalungs and Mikirs),
- 9) Ramesh Chandra Das.

( LORD BURNHAM IN THE CHAIR )

Question No. 108 : ( Lt. Col. Smiles ) :- I think you have seen the memorandum, E-Assam-733 ?

Answer ( Mahendra Lal Das ) :— Yes.

Q. No. 109 : This memorandum is submitted by Mr. Ghyasuddin Ahmed, who, I understand is not a Bodo but a Mohammaddan ?

Ans. : Yes, just before we entered the conference room, we were told by the Chairman that he would not like the idea of the Bodo community being represented by a Mohammedan or by one belonging to some other community. It was for this reason that he has been kept outside and one Mr. Kalicharan Brahma belonging to the Bodo community has taken his place.

Q. No. 110 :- I take it that you are to act as the spokesman, because the Bodo community can boast of no one who could be able to press their claims equally well ?

Ans. :- Yes.

Q. No. 111 :- Whom do you actually include under the term 'Bodo' because we do not find that term mentioned in the Census Report of 1921 ?

Ans. :- A Bodo is a general term and includes Kacharis, Meches, Rabhas, Lalungs, Thengals and Sonowals.

Q. No. 112 :- Do you consider Meches as Hindus ?

Ans. :- Meches are Hindus but not good Hindus, they are within the Pale of Hinduism.

Q. No. 113 :- Among the Bodo community, is it not a fact that there are several well organised Associations ?

Ans. :- Yes, there are.

Q. No. 114 :- How is it then that the memorandum of the Bodo community is submitted by a Mohameddan and not by one of these Associations ?

Ans :- The reason is that there are no literate persons. I was told that they asked one of their students in the College to write out the memorandum but he said that his examination was drawing nigh and he could not devote any time. So they were driven to the necessity of hiring a Mohammedan lawyer. This Mohammedan lawyer used to take great interest in the Bodo community from his childhood, he is their neighbour. He knows the deplorable conditions of these people and he is always sympathetic towards them. It was with the idea of helping them that he undertook to write out the memorandum and not as a professional pleader.

Q. No. 115 :- Is it not a fact that the Bodo Community of the Goalpara district lives mostly in the temporary settled areas of the district ?

Ans. :- They live in permanently settled areas also.

Q. No. 116 :- Do you consider that the ex-tea garden coolies who are now living in the bastis and villages of Assam would not get proper representation unless they had a seat reserved for them ?

Ans. :- Yes, I do.

Q. No. 117 :- In the present council do you not consider that there is any one who will really represent the views of the depressed classes ?

Ans. :- No.

Q. No. 118 :- ( Mauivi Keramat Ali ) :- Mr. Das, you said that this Bodo gentleman has come from Goalpara ?

Ans. :- Yes.

Q. No. 119 :- And he lives in a Goalpara Zamindari ?

Ans. :- Yes.

Q. No. 120 :- Will you please ask him whether he wants to go to Bengal ?

Ans. :- He says that they were born and bred up in our country and that their interests are interwoven with those here, he would never go to Bengal.

Q. No. 138 :- (Sadananda Dowerah) :- Who represents the Kacharis here ?

Ans. :- A Srijut Jadav Chandra Khakhlari.

Q. No, 139 :- Will you ask him whether he inter-dines with you ?

Ans. :- He says, he will interdine.

Q. No. 140 :- Do you admit that even among the Kalitas and others there are some, who dine with you ?

Ans. :- They do not dine with me.

Q. No. 141 :- Have they never dined with you ?

Ans. :- I do not remember,

Q. No. 142 :- Did you invite me and did I dine with you ?

Ans. :- If on medical grounds somebody dined with me, I can not say.

Q. No, 143 :- But did you not invite me and did I not dine with you ?

Ans. :- I could not venture to invite you,

Q. No. 144 :- You have never invited me and I have never dined with you ?

Ans. :- I do not remember.

—: O :—

We have therefore seen, that the Assamese member of the Provincial Committee of the Simon Commission was successful in sabotaging the interview by forcing it to end in a disastrous, callous and petty note. We shall try to conduct an assesment of this interview at a later stage.

Whatever may seem so far, the Committee of Assam made its recommendation to the Simon Commission. Relevant points of interests regarding the Primitive and Backward classes are excerpted below.

The Assam Committee of the Simon Commission Submitted its report on May 12th, 1929.

#### REPORT OF THE COMMITTEES—1. Explanatory.

1. Introduction.
2. Introduction of full responsible government in the province.
3. We have given anxious thought to the subject of Police in particular and have come to the conclusion that it should be transferred to popular control along with other provincial subjects. Besides the general grounds already mentioned, we have in this instance been moved by certain special considerations :—

a) To transfer all other subjects and reserve only the subject of Police would inevitably result in concentrating the attack of the legislature on the Police Department.

b) The Assam Police Association of the Inspectors, S-Is and ASIs of the provincial Police Administration, in the memorandum that was summarised at the joint conference of January 5, 1929 in Shillong have by majority recommended the transfer of police in order to rid the department of its present unpopularity and for other reasons. These officers know their own daily difficulties best and their opinion should not be ignored.

c) The IGP, Assam, in his evidence before the Joint Conference admitted that recruiting would be more satisfactory if the leading non-officials of the province co-operated and that co-operation on the part of the people at large would make for greater efficiency in the force. His exact words

are worth quoting— "without their help, I do not think that we shall be able to do very much more than we are doing now. We are doing our best with the force we have, the force that comes to us, and the officers who apply for appointment. If you want anything better, then we want the assistance of the leading people in the province." We doubt if the necessary co-operation and assistance will be forthcoming until the department is placed under popular control.

d) No department can be run efficiently unless it can get the legislation it needs from time to time. For example, there is well known section in the Indian Penal Code of Criminal procedure (Section—162) which has frequently been criticised as a serious handicap to the police in their daily work. But the legislature can hardly be expected to remove this or any other handicap and entrust larger powers to a body of man over whom it has no effective control".

4. Interference by the House and Government.
5. Safeguards, suspend constitution by the King in emergency.
6. Cabinet with advisory council ( Administrative ).
7. Advisory council necessary as ministers are to educate public opinion.
- 8, Administrative Council to be non-political, quasi-judicial body.
9. Central financial share for Primary Education.
10. Relation between Governor, Cabinet and Legislature similar to that of Crown, Cabinet and House of Commons.
11. Provincial Legislature in Assam Unicameral.
12. Recommended Universal Suffrage or Universal household suffrage.

13. Composition of Council, 95 elected and 5 nominated. Recommended :- 14 seats for Europeans, at least 31 to Muhammedans, 50 general.
14. Distribution of Legislative power :- Provincial legislatures competent to legislate on Central subjects and Central legislature on state subjects.
15. Provincial legislature competent to appropriate funds.
16. The Central Government to have certain measure of control.
17. ICS, IPS to be all India Services.
18. Extension of the field of liability of the state to suit.
19. Sub-section (7) of section 67 and 72 D to be clear.
20. Allocation of Revenue between Central and Provincial governments.
21. No recommendation upon Constitution of the Central government,
22. No legislature to have power for Constitutional ammendment.

#### PART— II, RECOMMENDATIONS.

1. a) Franchise :- In the General constituencies, we recommend universal suffrage for all persons of not less than 25 years of age, with open voting for those who can not read and write, We are aware of the arrangements against universal suffrage but it does away with the need for special representation for backward communities, reduces the temptation to bribery by increasing the number of votes to be bought, makes the council more representative of the province, and on the whole, presents advantages which in our opinion outweigh its disadvantages. We advocate open voting for the illiterate\*\*\*\*

- b) As an alternative to universal suffrage . . . we would suggest universal household suffrage, i. e. one vote for each occupied house.
- c) The qualification of electors for Governors legislative council shall be such as the council may be law prescribe . . . .
- 2r Council to consist 95 elected and 5 nominated members,
3. i) Of the five members that may be nominated by the Governor, one must represent the backwad tracts \* \* \* \*  
The other four nominations should be optional. Two as per provision (b) to section 72 A (2) of Govt. of India Act, two non-officials for securing adequate representation for any important communities or interests\* \*  
\* \* and not for the purpose of stabilising the Ministry.
- ii) a) 13 from Tea Industry including 2 Indians.  
b) 2 Europeans, 1 each from Brahmaputra and Surma valley.  
c) 2 seats for Commerce and Industry. 1 each from Europeans and Indians.  
d) 2 for landholders of Goalpara and Sylhet.  
e) One from British portion of Khasi & Jaintia Hills.  
f) 31 to Mohammedan and 41 to Non-Mohammedan communities.
4. We have anxiously considered the question of representation for labour and have arrived at the conclusion that the most satisfactory solution of the problem is to be found in an extension of the franchise rather than in the creation of special constituencies. It seems to us that if any form of special electorate had been practicable,

it would perhaps have been prescribed by now by regulation under Assam Electoral Rule. 3 e. We have therefore, proposed, instead, a large extension of franchise. With the suffrage we have suggested, labour may be able to secure adequate representation through the general constituencies, failing which the Governor would doubtless use his power of nomination to make up the deficiency. Similar observations apply to the primitive races and backward classes in the province.

#### TERRITORIAL CONSTITUTION OF PROVINCE.

2. a) Backward Tracts :- We are of the opinion that the "Backward tracts" also should continue to be part of the province of Assam. They are a potential source of wealth, they add to the attractions of the province from the point of view of recruitment, and contact with the more civilised parts of the province is likely to benefit them, they should therefore be retained in Assam, instead of being segregated into a separate province.

Mr. M. N. Boroah submitted a note of dissent, stating Goalpara and Sylhet should not be in Assam for it "will be insoluble in future with Bengali and Assamese standing out equally powerful, to be the language of the provincial administration."

—O—

#### VOLUME— IV.

The question of the transfer of Sylhet from Assam to Bengal was not raised during the lifetime of the first Reformed Assam Legislative Council. In the Second Council

it was brought up by one of the leaders of the Nationalist Party ( Babu Brajendra Narayan Chaudhuri ) in the shape of a resolution which, after being ammended so as to recommend transfer of Cachar as well as of Sylhet, was carried by 22 votes to 18.

This council recommends to the Governor-in-Council that the district of Sylhet be transferred to Bengal :

The question was put and a division taken with the following result :- AYES = 26, NOES = 12.

These, then, are the proceedings of the Simon Commissions, which, according to me, are of interest to the present Plains Tribals of Assam from the historical point of view.

The government of Assam also submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission and the points of interest to us are :-

Chapter— 1 :- Dealt with the representative system of government as applied to British India. The following paragraphs of this chapter are of interest to us :

Para : 37 : The following castes or tribes sought nomination to the Council :-

- 1) The Khasis, particularly of Jowai sub-division, a backward tract.
- 2) The Kacharis— about 2,50,000 persons.
- 3) The Marwaris— about 16,000 persons. They are not British subjects, but were enfranchised in 1923. The request was not accorded as they take little part in public activity.
- 4) Ahoms— about 2, 00,000 persons.
- 5) The Bodos of Goalpara-some 60,000 persons.

- 6) The Mahisyas-about 1,00,000 persons.
- 7) The Kochs-some 2,25,000 persons.
- 8) The Nepalis-some 1,04,000 persons.
- 9) The Maharas-some 2,000 persons.

Of the above, only the Ahoms have received nomination basing on the population figure according to 1921 census, which are : Kacharis- 2,50,000, Koch- 2,25,000, Mech 1,00,000, Mikirs- 30,000, Miris- 68,000, Rajbangshis- 1,00,000 persons.

Para : 53 : Apart from labour population there are included at present in the non-mohammedan constituencies a larger number of different races, which can not at any rate for many years to come ever hope to secure adequate representation. For instance, the population of the plains districts of Assam include more than 5,00,000 animists, who like the tea garden labour force, have little or nothing in common with the rest of the electorate, and have in fact no chance of obtaining any adequate representation. They belong to numerous indegenious or primitive races, the most important of which with their approximate population in the plains districts of the province are noted in the margin (preceeding figures above). Some of these races have adopted Hinduism, at least nominally, but the facts regarding successful candidature in the past hold out little hope that those who have done so will obtain any real representation in the Legislative Council. Even those, who have done so obtain no real representation from the Hindus, who alone can secure election in the constituencies as now framed . . . .

. . . .The govt. of Assam, therefore, are constrained to advocate the formation of seperate constituencies, two in the Surma valley for the backward classes, and six in the Assam valley, one in each district, for the indegenous primitive races

and the backward or depressed classes of that part of the province. To be eligible for election to represent any of these constituencies, a candidate must be registered on the electoral roll of that constituency. The other qualifications of an elector should be the same as in the main general constituencies. It should also be provided that any person should have the option of registering himself as an elector in one of these separate constituencies, or in the general non-mohammedan constituency of his area, but he should not be registered as an elector in both.

Para : 60 : If these proposals be accepted, the total number of elected members will be 60, as detailed below :-

<u>General Constituencies.</u>	<u>Special Constituencies.</u>
Mohammedans = 15,	Land holders = 2,
Hindus = 20,	Tea Planters = 7,
Europeans = 1,	Commerce = 1,
Ahoms = 1,	Total, 10
Marwaris = 1,	
Shillong Urban = 1,	
Primitive races &	
Backward classes = 8,	<b>GRAND TOTAL = 60.</b>
Labour = 3,	
<hr/> Total 50.	

Chapter— II :- Dealt with the suitability of existing areas for Legislative and administrative purposes and for growth of representative institutions.

PROVINCIAL :- A chapter on the province was made. Interesting paragraphs are :

Para : 5 : The province of Assam is young and yet not fully developed. Sylhet and Goalpara were taken over with the "Dewani" of Bengal in 1765, but when the first expedition went to Assam in 1792, the rest of the country was

divided between warring princes, the Ahom, Kachari, Jaintia Manipuri and their tributaries and independent tribes or sects such as the Moamarias. The expedition was withdrawn in 1793 despite reports that confusion, devastation and massacre would ensue. It was the occupation of the country by the Burmese between 1819 and 1824, and the oppression and massacres of which they were guilty, which, coupled with the activities of bands of native marauders had in parts completely desolated the country, that made occupation of Assam proper necessary, though effort was first confined to stopping slavery and placing the revenue upon a proper basis. The process of annexation was gradual. Upper Assam and Sadiya being annexed only in 1838—39 and the Mattaka territory in 1842. The occupation of the Hills was still more reluctant. The aggression of the tribes, which led to ten military expeditions within sixteen years into the Naga Hills, rendered it necessary to occupy and administer in 1866 the Naga Hills in 1869 the Garo Hills and in 1899 the Lushai Hills. The Sadiya and Balipara Frontier Tracts were separately formed in 1914. The regular codes were introduced into the plains only in 1860—1862, while the province was constituted as a separate unit, and the laws applying therefor defined, only in 1874. The administration was until then almost entirely in the hands of Military Officers, seconded from the local regiments, of which there were four, occupying 14 outposts distributed over the country. The pacification of the country was acknowledged in 1879 by the withdrawal of the armed police from their 35 outposts to station on the frontier, their constitution as a protective force and the gradual withdrawal of regular units. Since then there have been numerous conflicts with border tribes resulting from what were in essence rather assertions of independence than civil disturbances, of which the most recent was

the Abor War of 1811 and the Kuki operations of 1918 . . .

Para : 12 : A movement emanating from the Zemindars has followed, for the transfer of Goalpara also. The zemindars of Goalpara memorialised the Vice-Roy in 1919 for inclusion in Bengal, and a counter memorial was made. There had been some protest in 1909 and again on the reconstitution of Assam in 1912. There have, since the announcement of the commissions visit, been further representations that the zemindars are not safe in the alien Assamese Council, and counter representations by the Bodo peoples. The chief source of contention is, however, the language question . . . The zemindars represented in September in a deputation to the Governor, that their interests were not safe in the Assam Council . . . They were informed that there was no justification for the assumption that they would not get justice in the Assam Legislature and that the legislation could not be postponed . . . The Boro ar Mech community have passed counter resolutions against transfer. They form nearly one-tenth of the population of the district, many of them being animistic.

Para : 43 : Mean while a curious aspect of the ferment was the accompanying recurrence of Child-kidnapping scares, which are a common characteristic of the animistic tribes of Assam proper, and of the tea recruiting districts. Excitement has since died down.

Para ; 40 : For these reasons the Govt. of Assam are convinced that in the interests both of the backward tracts and of the rest of the province, the present artificial union should be ended. The backward tracts should be excluded from the province of Assam and administered by the Governor-in-Council, as agent for the Governor-General-in-Council, and at the cost of the central revenues. If it be contended that the charge of these areas can not reasonably be transferred

from the provincial tax-payer to the general tax-payer or India, it may be stated in reply that the Naga Hills, Lushai Hills, and the Sadiya and Balipara Frontier Tracts are frontier districts occupied to protect India as well as the province from invasion and attack, and that though for the moment the North-East frontier may not be a serious menace to the peace of the rest of India, there was a time not long ago when attention was directed to that frontier, and the time may soon come when that frontier will become no less, if not more, important for the defence of India than the North-West frontier, the administration of which is a charge on the Central Revenues.

With the above recommendations ( of interests to the Plains Tribals of Assam ) we may consider the main activities of the Simon Commission closed in relation to Assam.

The final recommendation of the Simon Commission to His Majesty, the King of England, contain some points of interest relevant to this subject. The following are the excerpts :

**TRIBAL RELIGIONS ;** A word should be added on the ancient and obscure faiths which the census groups together under the head of "Tribal Religions". There are still found, in various parts of India, and especially in certain Hill and Jungle regions, aboriginal Tribes, whose belief as to the unseen world are bound up with the practice of worshipping or propitiating the forces and objects of nature and the spirits, which they conceive to reside in natural phenomena. Primitive people do not claim to belong to any particular religion, they only know of their own beliefs, and are therefore unconscious of religious classifications . . . . . All that is necessary to record in the present sketch of

religious communities of India is that there are some ten millions of people of various aboriginal stocks whose beliefs can not properly be classed as falling within any of the great organised religious systems to which we have previously referred.

**THE DEPRESSED CLASSES :** At the lower end of the complicated scale of castes, and definitely below all others are found, in every province of India except Burma, very large numbers, to whom in recent years the term "Depressed Classes" has been applied. These comprise some 20% of the total population of the British India or some 30% of the Hindu population. They constitute the lowest castes recognised as being within the Hindu religions and social system. In origin these castes seem to be partly 'functional' comprising those who followed occupations held to be unclean or degrading such as scavenging or leather working, and partly "tribal" i. e. aboriginal tribes absorbed into the Hindu fold and transformed into an impure caste. Their essential characteristics is that, according to the tenets of orthodox Hinduism, they are, though within the Hindu system "untouchable"—that is to say, that for all other Hindus they cause pollution by touch and defile food or water. They are denied access to the interior of an ordinary Hindu temple though this is also true of some who would not be classed an "untouchable".

**ESTIMATED NUMBER OF DEPRESSED CLASSES :**  
Assam—population : 1.0 million, Hindu—24%. 13% of total population.

Smallest, least developed. Originally constituted a separate province in 1874 in order to relieve the Lt. Governor of Bengal of a portion of the large territory under his charge. On the partition of Bengal in 1905, the area became part of

the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, but when this arrangement was reversed in 1912 Assam again became a separate unit . . . .

These special features are explained by the fact that the effective size of the province of Assam is far smaller than its total area would suggest, for of its 77,500 sq. miles more than half is made up of hill and frontier tracts sparsely populated and still in large measure unsurveyed . . . .

**BACKWARD TRACTS OF ASSAM :** The backward tracts of Assam are of great importance and extent, and nowhere in India is the contrast between the life and outlook of these wild hillmen and the totally distinct civilisation of the plains more manifest. The main areas classed as backward tracts are the Lushai Hills, the Naga Hills, the Garo Hills, the North Cachar Hills and the British portion of the Khasi & Jaintia Hills. To these must be added the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract, the Balipara Frontier Tract and the Sadiya Frontier Tract—the last running upto the Abor country and the borders of Tibet . . . . . To the loss of self respect, of confidence in their warlike prowess, of belief in their tribal gods, and of unfettered enjoyment in their patriarchal ( or rather, in some tribes matriarchal ) customs—changes which tend to exterminate so many primitive races—there has now been added the curtailment of freedom to burn down the forest and sow seeds in its ashes. The process has already begun, and the best judges doubt how far the recent quiescence of the Hill Tribes—for the 1st expedition against them was in 1918 is due to contentment . . . Lushais and Lakhers made three murderous raids in 1917 . . . , the last Mishmi raid was in 1918--19, Aka, Dafla, Apatanang and Hill Miri Tribes—whose last serious raid was made in 1918.

**AREA AND POPULATION : ( 1921 Census ) Assam :—**  
 Area= 49,000 sq. miles. Total Population= 7,458,000.  
 ( Hindu= 4,130,000, Sikh= 1000, Jain= 3000, Budhist=  
 13,000, Mohammedan= 2,202,000, Europeans= 3000,  
 Indian= 114,000. Tribal= ,992,000 )

Some recommendations in Vol. II of the Simon Commissions report dated 27. 5. 1930 contains the following points of relevance.

#### REPRESENTATION OF THE DEPRESSED CLASSES :

There is no depressed class representative in the Punjab or the Assam Legislature.

#### SHOULD THEY HAVE SEPERATE ELECTORATES ?

Seperate electorate would no doubt be the safest method of securing the return of an adequate number of persons, who enjoy the confidence of the depressed classes, but we are averse from stereotyping the difference between the depressed classes and the reminder of the Hindus by such a step, which we consider would introduce a new and serious bar to their ultimate political amalgamation with others.

#### RESERVED SEATS FOR DEPRESSED CLASSES :

In view of the possibility of a member of the depressed classes being put forward as a mere nominee of the higher castes, it will be necessary to devise some means for securing that candidates for these reserved seats are genuinely representative of their order. There are associations representing the depressed classes in, at any rate' some of the provinces, and we think that rules might be made providing that the governor, after consultation with such associations or otherwise, as he thinks best, should certify which candidates are authorised to stand for the depressed class seats.

Anxieties are expressed in some quarters that, at first, sufficient candidates may not be found in the ranks of the depressed classes themselves, qualified by education and experience to represent them in the provincial legislatures . . . . . The proportion of the number of such reserved seats to the total number of seats in all the Indian general constituencies should be three-quarters of the proportion of the depressed class population to the total population of the electoral area of the province.

It will be seen therefore that we do not recommend allocating seats to the depressed classes on the basis of their full population ratio . . . . . The poverty and want of education which so widely prevail amongst them make it extremely doubtful whether a large number of adequately equipped members could be at once provided, and it is far better that they should be represented by qualified spokesmen rather than by a larger number of ineffectives, who are only too likely to be subservient to higher castes. The redistribution of seats which is now being attempted among different kinds of representatives can not be permanent, and provision must be made for its revision . . . . .

**THE BACKWARD TRACTS :** The responsibility of Parliament for the backward tracts will not be discharged merely by securing to them protection from exploitation and by preventing those outbreaks which have from time to time occurred within their borders . . . . . Only if responsibility for the backward tracts is entrusted to the Centre, does it appear likely that it will be adequately discharged. (Para—129).

As we have said, we have no doubt, whatever that for the really backward tracts, such as those of Assam (except perhaps the Khasi & Jaintia Hills) the alternative of complete

exclusion must be adopted. But we do not propose that they should be placed, like the "minor administration" entirely outside the borders of the Governor's provinces. This would involve unnecessary expenses and would be attended by other disadvantages. Some of the "typically backward" tracts are very small in size, all of them are in administration and development linked with the provinces, though it is very desirable that the officers employed in them should be specially qualified for the work. Thus, though exclusion from the sphere of the provincial executives involves centralisation--for the Governor-General-in-Council is the only alternative authority to which they can be entrusted--the Central Govt. should use the agency of the Governors for their administration. The development of a consistent policy towards these tracts, based on a wide knowledge and experience of their conditions, as well as the provision of funds adequate to implement it, are matters of the greatest importance. Another duty which might usefully be undertaken by the Central Authority responsible for the backward tracts would be the simplification of the many overlapping enactments which authorise special legislative and administrative procedure within their borders. By virtue of its control of the All India Services, the Govt. of India would be able to obtain from the provinces officials familiar with local methods and languages. We contemplate that members of the provincial, and possibly of the subordinate services as well, should also be obtained from the provinces, wherever it is expedient that this should be done.

With the above, the main portion of the Simon Commission's report dated 12th May 1930, can be considered as having dealt with our subject and I wish to conclude the excerpts here.

The Simon Commissions reports are voluminous, divided into many chapters in each of the several volumes and a detail research into it would take several months, if not years.

But, before I finally close, a few paragraphs from Part-II, Vol. : V. Chapter—XI makes interesting reading, which are :—

**Para—4 : THE EDUCATION OF THE DEPRESSED CLASSES :**

... The details for All India include the figures for Madras, Bombay, Bengal, the United Provinces, the Punjab, Bihar and Orrissa and the Central Provinces. The figures for Assam have not been included owing to the impossibility of distinguishing satisfactorily between the actual depressed classes in that province and the aborigines, who are not outcasts, in a population of which over 50% is classified as backward,

**ASSAM :** Owing to the large variety of tribes in the province of Assam, it is almost impossible to give anything like even approximately correct figures for the depressed classes population. The total population of all the aborigines, hill and forest tribes and depressed classes is however, nearly four millions or 50 percent of the total population of the province. The following figures, which can not be regarded as strictly accurate, for the number of pupils under instruction exclude hill tribes, but includes aborigines living in the plains, separate figures not being available for depressed classes pupils only.

In 1917 there were 29,505 pupils under instruction in all grades of institutions and in 1921 there were 22,739 such pupils. No figures are available for subsequent years.

The figures for aborigines, Hill tribes and Depressed classes show that in 1917 there were 2 scholars in Colleges

and 1832 scholars including 54 girls, at the Secondary stage and in 1921 there were 57 scholars in colleges and 1781 including 28 girls at the Secondary stage. The fall in the number of scholars between 1917 and 1921 may probably be accounted for by inaccurate figure and differences in classifications. From 1917 onwards depressed class pupils have been encouraged by fee remissions, special scholarships and the provision of separate schools and hostels.

THE DEPRESSED CLASSES : The statistics of Depressed classes :- ASSAM ;

No less than 163 different tribes and castes are entered "as depressed classes and aboriginals living in the plains" "as distinguished" from "Hill or aboriginal tribes living in the Hills". They range from the khawas who number 100 in the province to the Ahoms who number 197,444.

... In Assam, as distinct from other provinces, hill or aboriginal tribes living in the plains were specifically included in the same category as the depressed classes.

With the above, I finally conclude my excerpts of the Simon Commission.

Now, before I proceed to make my own evaluations and comments, I wish to quote the then Editor of "The Statesman"— Mr. S. K. Ratcliffe.

The learned Mr. Ratcliffe wrote—

If any one thing is certain in the relations between Britain and India, it is the year 1930 will be known as the year of the Simon Report. This historic document, as all the world now knows, is the work of a special commission consisting of two peers and five members of the House of Commons. In form it is a govt, blue—book of the familiar

kind, though a good deal longer (two volumes, making 750 pages) than blue-books usually are. And it is written in a style of severe detachment, without a trace of over emphasis or rhetoric. That fact is worth nothing, because the Report itself is a portent of destiny, Whether it is or is not to be made the basis of a new constructive policy, its publication must do one momentous thing. It will mark for India the end of an age. It draws a line between the British India, we have known and the India of an incalculable future . . . .

. . . . In the press of the world they (India) have been given an amount of attention never before known, and since 1927 specially, the public mind of Britain has been increasingly occupied with them. Why? The reasons are mainly three :-

- 1) The whole enormous problem of relations between East and West, and particularly the problem of European power in the East, is now recognised as a matter of urgent world concern,
- 2) India is the theatre of a movement of insurgent nationalism which, after passing through many pages, has come under the direction of a unique leader— M. K. Gandhi— admired on this side and attacked on that, as the most extraordinary man in Asia :
- 3) Britain has solemnly committed herself to a policy of advance towards responsible self-government in India, a policy for which no parallel can be found in any other imperial system known to history . . . .

A great survey : . . . . They have produced a survey of India as well as of its govt. that becomes at once a work of reference, an indispensable hand book of India. . . .

The Report is a reminder, and the most weighty reminder our generation has had, of the greatness and complexity of the problem now confronting the British democracy . . . . .

At the last census ( 1921 ) the population of India was roughly 319 millions, of whom 247 millions were in British India and nearly 92 million in the Indian states. This great multitude speaks a bewildering variety of languages : the census names—222 in all. No single native language has so wide a range as English, and yet in 1921 only  $2\frac{1}{2}$  millions in all India were literate in our tongue. That means 16 in every 1000 males and two in every 1000 females. Taking India as a whole, 17 out of every 100 men and two out of every 100 women twenty years of age and upwards were entered as literate, in any language.

**Caste and outcaste :** The social aspects of Hinduism are of necessity summed up in the system of Caste, which is India's peculiar institution. Its elaboration in the modern world of Hinduism is indescribable. The census gives a list of 2,300 castes and sub-castes, which through the ages have grown out of the original four broad divisions of Hindu society. Every Hindu belongs to the caste of his parents and in that caste he remains. The Report expresses the view that the caste system is giving way, though slowly, to modern influences. Trains and Trams can not make provision for caste distinctions. Labour, trade travel, and politics combine to hasten the change, and the influence of the educated classes tells inevitably in the same directions.

And then, at the lower end of this infinitely complicated scale, outside and below all, the castes, are the depressed classes, the untouchables. These comprise about 60 millions in all India, some 20% of the total population, or 30%

of the Hindus, in British India, 44 millions. They include the aboriginal people and the workers employed in unclean labour. They are the disinherited of the Hindu system, untouchable, because to all caste Hindus they bring pollution. In many parts of India they are denied access to wells and tanks, and their children are either excluded from the schools or made to sit apart. The commissioners remind us that the cause of the untouchables has been for Mr. Gandhi a main concern since the beginning of his swaraj crusade. . . .

The proposals : . . . . No adequate summary of even its most important points would be possible in a small pamphlet. What follows must be taken as the barest outline of the Commission's proposals.

The first principle which the Commission lay down is that a new constitution should contain within itself provision for its own amendments and growth. . . . The Commissioners develop an elaborate argument for an All India Federation, with the Central Govt. becoming "an association of units formed mainly for the purpose of performing certain functions on behalf of all."

The provincial cabinet should be unitary, and every member of it should be required to take responsibility for the whole policy of the Govt

EDITORIAL : With the above, an account of the Simon Commission, from its very inception upto its completion in the briefest form has so far been placed before you.

I shall now try to evaluate its implications. The terms of reference of the Commission clearly implies, that the then system of governing India became inadequate and impractical. Therefore, a new system and direction had to be found to retain the brightest jewel of the British Crown, in what-

ever form it was possible. The surging movement for Independence by Indians made it inevitable for the British to look for such avenues. Though the terms of reference is garbed in genteel official language-- the meaning of these are in fact sweeping, to say the least-which say-for example-"to report as to whether and to what extent it is desirable to establish the principle of responsible government"... . . . It seems, the Britons had for the first time admitted that so long India was governed without a "principle of responsible government."

It is therefore, clear that the officers from Britain normally behaved only as colonialists and not as servants of the British Crown or a responsible government. This attitude of the British officers should have changed when it was no longer the "East India Company". This behaviour of the colonialists definitely embittered the relations between them and the natives of India, whom they governed. Perhaps, these officers had some unwritten understanding with the crown that they shall forward all the proceeds and profits of their fief, in return for the feoff of India-- reminiscent of the Company days.

So much for the reasons of constituting the Simon Commission, even if there are others. Then comes the procedures and methodology of working of the Commission in a pyramidic formation, giving equal importance to the provincial governmental memorandas, as one base, and the other being the recommendations of the provincial committees, directly taking the soundings from the population, with the Commission itself at the apex.

As such the Provincial Committees were the most important sounding boards for the population of the provinces,

This brings us to the then political establishment of the state of Assam, or rather the political elements constituting the then Assam.

We have already found that the Assamese were outnumbered in the then Legislative Council, and the plains tribals, then known as "the primitives" had no part in the political establishment of the state,

We have also seen that the "primitives" started their political activity through the Simon Commission, in the form of representing and appearing before it-itself a maiden venture of the primitives. But, what a dismal performance it was !

The Bodos of Goalpara took the help of a kind Mahammedan, and also desired that the draftee should represent them while appearing before the Commission also. However, as the Commission wanted to feel the pulse of the "primitives", the intermediary was left out. The Bodos admitted that they had no one to help them, even from amongst their own people ; Even their memorandum was not submitted in time and in due form, as declared by the memorialists themselves. But the Bodos were lucky to have help from an unforeseen quarter.

But of course, Shri Jadav Chandra Khakhlari was able to present a semblance of an united stand of the Kacharis, which included the Lalungs, Ravas, Meches, Thengals, Saranias, Dimachas and Hojais etc. of their own volition.

It was the leadership of Shri Jadav Chandra Khakhlari, which brought "the primitives" together and rightfully claimed their place in the History of India, beginning from the earliest of times. So, we may say that the Kachari Jubok

Sanmiloni started the historical trend of the originality of "the primitives" or the now known Plains Tribals. Because the originality of the plains tribals or "the primitives" are unchallengable. It is not known only because no one had bothered to locate their originality, least some unfounded foul stories are uprooted.

It was the Kachari Jubok Sanmiloni, who claimed that the primitives numbered sixteen lacs then and that they are not of the Hindu Society, which had excluded them always. It was the Kachari Jubok Sanmiloni, who took an independent and fearless stand before the Commission.

Perhaps it was too much for the Assamese members of the Provincial Committee of the Simon Commission, as a result of which Shri Sadananda Dowerah took the policy of deriding and rebuffing the representatives of "the primitives" in the official interview, as if to say— "you have the audacity to come here and tell the world that you primitives are ostracised from the advanced and civilised world" ?

Let us now peruse the memorandas submitted by "the primitives". They naturally highlighted the issues that vexed them most, such as :-

- 1) That primitives were forcibly counted as Hindus, but were ostracised from the society at large. Therefore, the primitives should be counted and classified as "independent of Hindu Society",
- 2) The primitives were excluded from political rights and were debarred from political activity through crafty political arrangements and that from thenceforth these injustices should be remedied.
- 3) The primitives of Goalpara district considered the interest of Assam very important and opposed the transfer of Goalpara to the then East Bengal.

There after, we have to assess the performance of the primitives before the Commission. What a sight it must have been. Primitive galoots having a go at the British Lion.

It was only the Lalung gentleman— Shri Mohendra Lal Das, who brought respectability to the deputation by his clearcut answers— who knew English and understood the implications of the questions. This was what excited Shri S. Dowerah, and that is why he decided to deflate the “primitive respectability” by the later’s Achilles heel— the proverbial Sivaite temper.

In the interview, “the primitives” had to explain first, why they could not prepare their own memoranda. The reply was that they had no one literate enough and the only one who could do it was a student who was very busy preparing for his examinations.

This attitude of the student was both good and bad. Good— that he was his father’s diligent son and student. Bad— that he was concerned only with his own future and his kinsmen did not count. Unfortunately, this student was Late Rupnath Brahma, who became the guide and destiny of “the primitives” for long 28 years in his capacity as a Cabinet Minister of Assam of the Pre-and-Post Independence period.

Another thing that becomes apparent is that “the primitives” were disorganised and particularly the Bodos— who had many organisations could not unite to raise their voice together

The next startling thing was the performance of the Britons in the Assam Committee, I had the good fortune of being with the British for two months in 1981 and had seen their pre-occupation and full participation in their own History and historical events. In fact, they are ready to die for their history’s sake.

But, Lt. Col. Smiles was so very unlike a Britisher—while his compatriots were busy collecting historical facts about the Bodos—in his mental getup, that he professed ignorance of the Bodos and their history. On second thought—could it also be a stiff upper-Lip of the Britisher ?

Perhaps, the British at that time recognised only a full-throated blood-curdling war cry. Nothing more and nothing less.

So, to sum it up, it was an opportunity lost by “the primitives” and to say the least—missed “the portent of destiny”. Because, on the basis of the report of the Simon commission, India was reorganised, new states like Orrissa came into being and the basis of India’s independence was laid. “The primitives” of Assam thus failed to chart their own course within the history of India.

The Assam Committee was also very parochial and partial in its report towards “the primitives”. They gave nothing to the down-trodden 50% of the population of the state, which comprised “the primitives” and classified them as “depressed classes”. It seems they made sure that “the depressed” are further pushed down to keep them “depressed” perennially. Such has been the political jockeying and positioning of political situation in Assam—a politics of depriving the primitives.

These unfairness was somewhat balanced and redressed by the memorandum submitted by the provincial govt., of Assam, who recommended political participation by “the primitives” in the affairs of the province.

Lastly, it is apparent that “Assam” as such is a political conjecture, whose boundaries and its very constitution did not have definite demarkations till 1874, and the ‘final Assam’ emerged only in 1912 : which hardly lasted half a

century if we ignore the passing away of Sylhet. Even this, was not final and Assam continues to be an unstable political as proved by the creations of Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Megha'aya, Arunachal and Mizoram out of it.

Therefore, it is high time that "the primitives" or the present Scheduled Tribes of Assam should now unite and make an united stand to demand and avail of the fruits of their labour, heritage, culture and political struggle.

Shall we be able to unite? Will our students also think of their kinsmen? These are some of the great questions of the tribal society. For we can not expect any justice and fairplay in the state of Assam, as is now constituted.

Will the past educate us? Shall the posterity invite us to a united stand and a place to stand? If we had looked after the interest of Assam, has it looked after us?

What is more important, shall we continue the process of unification amongst all tribals initiated by Late Jadav Chandra Kakhlary & Co. and also demand an independent position from the society, which has eternally betrayed and buffeted us? In other words shall we fight to have our own domain, where we can live as we please as a part and parcel of the great human race with dignity and humanity? Shall we continue the fight started by Kachari Jubok Samiloni?

I close with a hope, that the great Indian Nation shall respect our humble aspirations.

THE END