

CHAPTER-VI

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The Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti/Assam Research Society is now all set for its centenary celebration in a splendid manner. During this long period it has passed through considerable odds. Like any voluntary efforts, the Samiti did the tasks it had set for itself, sometimes exceedingly well, some times in a workman like, perhaps even a pedestrian manner. It is the first institution of such kind in North East India. Under its influence and initiative similar nature of institutions have grown up in later period. These institutions are well looked after by the government and the public, but the Samiti's activities confine, and a limited people know even its existence at the gateway of North East. The institution that paved the way for organized historical research and earned fair reputation in those days and the colonial government came forward to patronize it with government grant is now surviving at its own fate. The samiti is facing hardship to carryout its activities as per its objects. Nor was it able to show some extra importance at the present socio cultural aspects. The institution has grown old not only by its age but its ideas are also found to be obsolete seeing the involvement of the public.

To make a thorough analysis of the available information about its formation, development, activities and achievements, some factors are identified

which are responsible for its declining condition enumerated in the following paragraphs.

The initiative for founding such a research organization, with its focus on the sacred history and geography of the land Kamarupa was taken in the course of deliberation of an older and corresponding research organization, the *Uttar Banga Sahitya Sanmela*n. The idea of establishing an antiquarian society comprising the geographical territory of ancient Pragjyotisa-Kamarupa was conceived by Professor Padmanath Bhattacharyya, Vidyavinod, a Sanskrit scholar and researcher on the history and culture of Assam at a time when the *Swadeshi* movement was creating ripples in the province of Assam as well.¹ The Samiti had twelve founding members, almost all of them involved in matters of study and research. But all of them were not professionally engaged in study, teaching and research. Most of them were high caste Hindus and from the professional class teachers from traditional Sanskrit *Tols*, members of the bureaucracy and so on. It was purely the result of the private initiative with membership on a nominal subscription. It received official patronage and initially a grant of two hundred fifty rupees was received on 18th December 1915². From the following year the Government of Assam granted an annual recurring grant of rupees one thousand. Babu Sasadhar Ray, the president of the session at *Kamakhya*, made the first donation to the Samiti and Babu Annada Prasad Sen donate later on. Interestingly one does not find any donation or patronization of the Assamese gentlemen who were present there. The activities of the Samiti were dependent on the financial

grant received from the government and the meagre amount collected through membership subscription. There was no initiative from any personage who came forward to bear the financial burden of the Samiti. Nor was there any one who can guide the affairs of the Samiti with confidence. This drawback has been rightly mentioned by the Secretary of the Samiti in the prospectus published in 1914.³ He knew that Kumar Sarat Kumar Ray and Promada Nath Roy, king of Dighapatia patronized the Varendra Anusandhan Samiti by donating Rs. 62,545/- and two acres of land respectively. Akshay Kumar Maitreya was the Director, who guided all affairs of the Samiti⁴. Therefore though the nature of the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti was similar to other research bodies its mode of working had to differ considering its deficiencies. Thus it marked lack of patronization in matters of money and men to guide the Samiti's affairs. It may be mentioned that there was an expectation among the founders that the Samiti may be looked after well like the *Varendra Research Society* established at Rajshahi on 1910.

Unfortunately in Assam there was want of a class of landed aristocracy. It was therefore necessary to seek for patronage of the high placed personages and to appoint as honorary members who had distinguished themselves in the field of research. Considering the limitation in the financial and organizational matter the Samiti was not in a position to undertake any independent plan, however it provided support to the honorary members and individual members to carryout researches and approached government for necessary help.

From the initial stage, the Samiti's activities were confined in and around greater Guwahati and mostly within the Guwahati city itself. Kamrup district, as might be expected from its comprising the ancient religious capital of Gauhati, had a larger number of Hindu population of higher caste than any other district of Assam. More than one half of the total numbers both of Brahmins and of Kalitas in the entire province are to be found in this single district ⁵. The literacy rates of these castes were higher than other castes. As a result, initially more people from this district enrolled themselves as members. However, it could not attract the attention of the people of other districts. There was very low public interest that could be noticed from the enrolment of membership records. ⁶ The numbers of members residing at Guwahati were fifty-five, it was the highest representation compared to the other districts. The members were either government servants, advocate, teacher and *panda* of Kamakhya temple. Their interest in the field of historical research was unpredictable as few members only contributed towards research activities. Similarly the distant members whose names were recorded in the membership record ⁷ also belonged to the similar categories. It may raise a question whether the membership was spontaneous or there were any government directives to enroll as members. The report of the year 1916-17 further reveals that out of eighty-five members many of them did not pay their subscription for 1916-17 and subject to the provision of Rule 7 ⁸.the number of members dwindled to thirty-six. Perhaps that who did not find any interest or which was not at all their business might have skipped off.

The Samiti was not able to bring out any independent research work through publications except some papers read in its anniversary meeting where limited members were present. At the initiative of Chandra Nath Sarma the founder Secretary of the Samiti the first research publication was published in 1920 with six articles written by reputed scholars in Assamese, Bengali and English ⁹. For five years from its establishment (1912-17) the Samiti was functioning from its temporary office at *Kamakhyadham* ¹⁰. On allotment of a piece of land for construction of the proposed Museum by the Government and with the permission of the Government the Samiti constructed its own house in 1917¹¹ and shifted to its permanent as well as present location.

The First World War (1914-1919) imposed a severe financial burden on Assam. The economic consequences had been felt gradually after 1915-16 when stringency in public expenditure had to be resorted to in response to the imperial order ¹¹. Large amount was spent in urgent needs like relief works. The rise of prices of essential commodities affected the rich as well as poor. As a result of financial stringency the annual grant of Samiti was reduced to six hundred rupees, which had a direct effect on the progress of the Samiti.

It is pertinent to mention that till 1897 there was not a single person in Assam with Post Graduate qualification ¹². There was no institution of higher education in Assam. From the time of establishment of British rule, Assam was beginning to keep pace with other provinces of India in educational and literary activity. Calcutta was the place to which Assamese students would resort in good

numbers, particularly from the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century when the University of Calcutta became the premier seat of Western education in Eastern India. Thus the process of modernizing Assam in thought and culture began. In course of time Guwahati and Jorhat and some other towns of the province also became center of intellectual development ¹³ The Assamese who went to Calcutta for higher study came in contact with Bengal renaissance directly and indirectly and influenced by European education and culture. The outstanding figures were Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Gunabhiram Barua and Hemchandra Barua ¹⁴. Most of the Assamese members of the Samiti were also associated with the *Assam Association* ¹⁵ and *Assam Sahitya Sabha* ¹⁶ in different capacities. The Assam Association patronized by Manik Chandra Barua as Secretary and Prabhat Chandra Barua as President held its annual conference in 1920 at Tezpur. An important decision was taken on this sitting to merge the association with the Indian National Congress and a resolution was adapted to effect in the Nagpur Session of the Indian national Congress. As a result majority of the members of the Assam association cut off themselves from their original interest and took part in the non-cooperation movement to join hand with Mahatma Gandhi. The general environment of Assam changed to political environment of non cooperation movement and a considerable number of the members of the Samiti especially the advocates and the other non government members including teachers from government and government aided schools and colleges resigned from their services in response to Gandhiji's call ¹⁷ According to the official report threat

insult and social boycott were frequently resorted to by the supporters of the movement against those who were still in government service ¹⁸. The Congress laid down some stages in the progressive scheme of non cooperation in which surrender of titles and honorary offices and resignation from local bodies, refusal to attend Government meetings, *Durbar* (an assembly) and other official and semi official functions held by the Government ¹⁹. Under the circumstances the position of government servant was most uncomfortable. Under the directives of the Indian National Congress ²⁰ Assam Provincial Congress committee was preparing the ground for a mass civil disobedience. The people of Assam came forward to face all sorts of hardships and indignities with calm fortitude and inflicting devotion to attain *Swaraj*. ²¹. On the other hand to dissuade the people from participating in the movement the Government adopted a number of other measures such as holding of counter propaganda meeting, publication of pamphlet and enforcement of prohibitory orders where necessary. To carry out counter propaganda measures anti Non-Cooperation committees like the *Aman Sabha* ²² were organized where government officials, pensioners, pleader were asked to organize meetings at different places and to address the public against the non cooperation and its evil effects. Two prominent members of the Samiti ²³ took part in it. An anti- non cooperation meeting was held in the *Curzon Hall* at Gauhati on 5th January, 1922 under the Presidentship of the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup where Rai Bahadur Kalicharan Sen, a civilian made a scathing attack on the Non Cooperation Movement ²⁴. At the initiative of a number of local government

officials another counter propaganda meeting was organized on 10th January, 1922 at Kamalpur²⁵ which was presided over by the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup and where Hem Chandra Goswami a government servant narrated the evil effects of non cooperation²⁶. They were marked as anti non-cooperation staff and Government of Assam paid remuneration for that. Interestingly Hemchandra Goswami and Kalicharan Sen were the then President and Secretary of the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti. On the other hand nationalist and patriotic minded members of the Samiti, who took part in the non-cooperation movement, were arrested and imprisoned²⁷. The arrest of the veteran congress leader throughout Assam has created hatred towards the British administration in Assam. The movement had a far-reaching effect on the progress of the Samiti. The non-cooperation movement was suspended in 1922 as per the decision of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee and it was a considerable period for the Samiti to march ahead. After retirement from Government service in 1926, Hemchandra Goswami could pay more attention towards development of the Samiti²⁸ and meanwhile Surya Kumar Bhuyan of Cotton College Guwahati, a true lover and researcher of history was elected as Secretary of the Samiti. At the initiative of Surya Kumar Bhuyan, the Samiti got a new life. He chalked out various programme to make public aware about the need and importance of the institution. To bring home about the working of the samiti he published the *Report and conspectus of the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti* in the year 1927 covering the retrospective activities of the samiti from its inception.²⁹The purpose was to

generate public interest so that public would come forward with material help as there was an urgent need of the men and money to continue the functions of the Samiti. However it seemed that Professor Bhuyan was not very satisfied with the working of the Samiti as its main activities were collection and preservation of antiquities, which needed trained manpower and sufficient monetary support. But the Samiti lacked on both aspects, as there were no full time workers. No independent research activity was possible without the support of a full fledged research institute, which needed some criteria to be it recognized. The Government of Assam deputed Hemchandra Goswami for collection of manuscripts from October 1912 to March 1913³⁰. The manuscripts collected were finally preserved in the library of the *Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti*. There was a constant pressure from the western educated Assamese to establish a full fledge research institute under the direct control of the Government being managed by provincial revenue. On the other hand the ethnography department of Assam also necessitated a government department for the furtherance of pre historical studies. The Ethnography department of Assam was mainly pre occupied with anthropological work though in the beginning its interest was collection of materials of a historical character as anthropological studies had not then attained the importance.³¹

The government of Assam on recommendation of the Director of Public Instruction Mr. J.R. Cunnigham³² established Department of Historical and Antiquarian studies in June 1928 for the promotion of historical research with

A.H.W Bentinck as Honorary Director and Professor S.K. Bhuyan and J.P. Mills as honorary Assistant Director. But it was Bhuyan who became the life and soul of the department by putting in all the time he could spare at the service of the department ³³. Hemchandra Goswami , the president of the Samiti died on 2nd May, 1928 ³⁴. Prof. Bhuyan resigned from the post of secretary on 13-11-29 ³⁵. Thus the Samiti was orphaned on the demise of the President and resignation of the Secretary. Chandra Kumar Agarwala being appointed in the place thus made vacant ³⁶. The Samiti accepted Dr. Bhuyan's resignation with regret that he had not found it possible to continue, and with thanks for his ungrudging services rendered to the Samiti during the past few years.

During the presidentship of Rai Bahadur Kanak Lal Barua (May 1928 to January 1940) the samiti made remarkable progress ³⁷. On his initiative the mouthpiece of the Samiti came out in 1933, which was named as *Journal of the Assam Research Society*. He was the contributor, as well as publisher of the journal and bore the cost of it for three years. ³⁸. He moved to start the construction of the Museum building with the public donation collected amounting about eighteen thousand rupees. On his suggestion the Executive Committee decided to appoint a Curator for the Museum of the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti. The other appointments were a clerk cum librarian, a manual, a punkha pullar, and a safaiwala. ³⁹ When the final preparation to open the Museum was on Kanak Lal Barua died on January 8, 1940 at Calcutta while he was there for attending the conference of the *Indian History Congress*. The sudden death of K.L. Barua

pushed back the Samiti's endeavor for attainment of its glory and infact it was a turning point from where Samiti's activities were lacking patronage and leadership. The Statement of accounts of the year 1940 marked the change as appended below ⁴⁰.

Statement of Income and Expenditure, 1940.

Table -XI

Month	Income	Expenditure	Balance
January	Rs. 1750	Rs. 201	1548
February	1548	12	1536
March	1536	774	761
April	761	461	300
May	300	293	07
June	10	00	10
July	10	07	03
August	6608 (Govt. Grant Rs. 6585. Dt. 9.4.40	982	4113
September	4123	375	3748
October	3748	2367	1380
November	1382	222	1159
December	1159	242	917

To meet the expenditure, the Samiti took a personal loan of Rs. 180/- from Jogendra Nath Barua and a bank loan of Rs. 200 from Gauhati Bank Limited, Guwahati through Mr. Kaliram Medhi at the rate of interest of Rs. 9/- per annum ⁴¹.

The effect of the Second World War on the people of Assam as a whole was severe. During the period of War Gauhati was used as a stronghold of the British Army ⁴². People lost peace of mind and sense of security. In the prevailing situation it was beyond imagination to think of the study of history and archaeology. The whole area was converted to army cantonment. The price of essential commodities rose up and there was scarcity of papers for printing work. Another incident i.e. the gutting of the Samiti's premises by the accidental fire that broke out in the adjacent Railway colony. The damage caused a heavy financial pressure on the Samiti. This compelled the Samiti to delay its publication for four years ⁴³ The Samiti's house required reconstruction after the damage. Kaliram Medhi the President of the Samiti remarked:

“It may be said that Samiti suffered heavily during these years ravaged by the ill effects of last war”.

After the independence the government did not take much initiative to improve the condition and status of the Samiti. The establishment of the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies(1928), the Assam Provincial Museum (1940) and the University of Gauhati further lessened the importance of the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti to a great extent. The government interest on

the newly established institution got more priority and privilege and the Samiti remained on the same condition as started during the Colonial rule. There was no increase of fund or other facilities. The number of institution for carrying out research increased no doubt, but proper correlation and cooperation in pursuits of historical studies and researches tended to disappear⁴⁴. During 1952-59 the Samiti suffered some irreparable loss due to the passing away at short intervals of reputed scholars like Dr. Banikanta Kakati⁴⁵, Rai Bahadur Kaliram Medhi⁴⁶ and Professor Uma Kanta Goswami⁴⁷ who were the bulwarks of the Samiti's activities. The unexpected death of three prominent figures consecutively within a short duration the activities of the Samiti came to a halt. Similarly the historians of the other regions who took great interest in the history of Kamarupa started disappearing as a natural decay. Demise of Prachya Vidyamaharnava Nagendra Nath Vasu, Puratatva Vicaksana Jogendra Nath Ghosh was another great loss to the Samiti. Mr. Ghosh was a frequent contributor to the journal of the Assam Research Society and to several other periodicals devoted to indology. Death of Dr. Kishori Mohan Gupta M.A., Ph.D of the Murari Chand College, Dr. N.G. Mazumdar at the attack of dacoits at Beluchistan border was another loss. As Superintendent of Eastern Circle he was rather closely associated with the Samiti. He provided training to Mr. Premadhar Choudhury, the first Curator of the Samiti museum for exploration work⁴⁸

Under such a declining condition a batch of young scholars headed by Professor B.K. Barua⁴⁹, came forward to revive the Samiti's activities. He was

associated with Professor H.K. Barpujari ⁵⁰ Dr. S.N. Sarma ⁵¹ A.C. Barua ⁵² and thereafter followed by M. Neog ⁵³ and D.P. Barua ⁵⁴ . However no remarkable progress could be noticeable and the Samiti was surviving hand to mouth. The irregular government grant of one thousand rupees was insufficient to carry out the developmental work. From 1949 to 1959 the Samiti was not able publish its journal which shows its financial and organizational deficiency. We have at our disposal to establish the fact that during 1952-59 the all-round activities were totally discouraging. The statement of accounts ⁵⁵ appended below shows the actual picture.

Statement of income and expenditure

From September 1952 - December 1953

Table -XII

Month/Year	Income	Expenditure	Balance	Remarks
September'52	Rs.1021	Rs.731	Rs.289	
October	289	34	255	
November	264	30	234	
December	234	30	204	
January' 53	204	30	174	
February	1174	40	1127	Annual Grant Rs. 1000/-
March	1127	209	919	
April	929	199	729	
May	729	235	494	
June	528	01	527	
July	528	12	515	
August	515	4 annas	515	
September	515	2 annas	515	
October	515	92	472	
November	422	6annas	422	
December	422	09	413	

Statement of income and expenditure

From January 1954 – August 1955

Table -XIII

Month/Year	Income	Expenditure	Balance	Remarks
January ' 54	413	04	409	
February	409	242	166	
March	1165	01	1164	Annual Grant Rs. 1000/-
April	1165	00	1165	
May	1165	25	1140	
June	1140	177	962	
July	965	3 annas	965	
August	965	05	960	
September	1966	13	1956	Annual Grant Rs. 1000/-
October	1956	00	1956	
November	1956	4 annas	1956	
December	1959	80	1878	
January' 55	1878	9 Paises	1878	
February	1878	00	1878	
March	1878	2 annas	1878	
April	1878	1anna 6 Paisa	1878	
May	1882	00	1882	
June	1882	223	1860	
July	1860	00	1860	
August	1860	00	1860	

Statement of income and expenditure
From September 1955- December 1956

Table -XIV

Month/Year	Income	Expenditure	Balance	Remarks
September	1860	00	1860	
October	1860	4 annas	1859	
November	1881	123	1757	
December	1757	2 annas	1757	
January ' 56	2757	60	2697	Annual Grant Rs. 1000/-
February	2697	00	2697	
March	2697	80	2617	
April	2617	54	2612	
May	2612	306	2333	
June	3349	22	3327	Annual Grant Rs. 1000/-
July	3327	00	3327	
August	3327	00	3327	
September	3327	00	3327	
October	3327	00	3327	
November	3327	00	3327	
December	3327	27	3299	

Statement of income and expenditure
From January 1957- March 1958

Table -XV

Month/Year	Income	Expenditure	Balance	Remarks
January ' 57	3299	00	3299	
February	3299	13 NayaPaisa	3299	
March	3299	150	3149	
April	3149	00	3149	
May	3149	111	3037	
June	3037	15 N.P	3037	
July	3037	530	2507	
August	2507	00	2507	
September	2507	00	2507	
October	3550	24	3525	Grant Rs. 1000/- (56-57)
November	3925	108	3817	
December	4817	00	4817	Grant Rs. 1000/- (57-58)
January '58	4817	00	4817	
February	4817	00	4817	
March	4817	13 N.P.	4817	

Moreover after the establishment of the University of Gauhati with its various departments scholars became interested to prosecute research under the auspices of a full-fledged university instead of striving under a voluntary institution, which did not, has any schedule plan. The Samiti was not able to attract the new generation scholar, as it could not bring any innovation. The new generation became more interested towards readily available archival records available at

different State archives, National Library and those having sound financial background moved to foreign countries. Thus research in ancient history of Assam became almost obsolete.

The state Department of Archaeology and Museum and the Universities located in Assam (Gauhati University established in 1948, Dibrugarh University established in 1965) did not take any interest to supplement the work being done by the Samiti. Even the textbook writers also did not refer to the new information came to light in the history of ancient Assam.

There were no full time workers of the Samiti. Till 1950 the President, Secretary and the members' whole-heartedly worked for the Samiti. Example may be sought from the initiative and interest of Rai Bahadur K.L. Barua as cited by Dr. Maheswar Neog:

“The institution thus developed in to a jealous mistress for Barua so much so that a murmur of complaint went up to the Governor that the Minister(Rai Bahadur Barua was appointed as Minister of Local self government of Assam in 1929) gave more time to the journal than to the Local Self Government”⁵⁶

He bore the cost of the journal for the first three years. He was the contributor and editor, publisher and patron⁵⁷. In the later days such initiative was lacking among the members. Moreover the activities of the Samiti totally turn over to literary activities and publication of its Journal and other volumes being financed by Government partially or completely.

The efforts of the members of the Executive Committee in the late sixties did not show much interest for revival of the Samiti's declining condition. Their sole business was confined to publish the journal. Being the prominent persons of that time this group could have given a new shape to the institution. Some of them were holding important position in the State Government and in the university. Few of them also donated handsome amount to other institutions. But surprisingly none thought about the future of the Samiti and its survival in a better condition. Therefore this period has been marked as lull due to various reason ⁵⁸. The new Executive committee members were mostly the residents of Guwahati having their permanent engagement either with state or central government or in the university or colleges. They could not devote much time for revitalization of the Samiti. The financial crisis was the main handicaps. As there was no fund there was any interest to get involved. The Samiti was to carryout its business under great pressure. The capital of Assam was shifted from Shillong to Guwahati (Dispur) in 1973 ⁵⁹. The government was busy with settlement of its own establishment. The State Museum complex is developed with new building and infrastructure occupying almost all the space in the campus with a step motherly attitude towards the Samiti. There was also a proposal from the Museum authority to shift the building of the Samiti to anywhere outside the campus. The front side of the Samiti was covered with multistoried building of the Museum and the campus administration was taken over by the Museum authority. Accordingly the Samiti was instructed to carryout its business during the office hours.

The Government of Assam, Department of Education stopped the annual grant of the Samiti that was continuing for last sixty years on the plea that it is a cultural institution and as such department of cultural affairs will grant money for it ⁶⁰. Thus the Samiti was deprived of its age-old financial assistance provided by the British Government considering its necessity. However, the constant appeals from the Samiti and with the initiative of the then Minister of Cultural and Home affairs Hiteswar Saikia who was also the chief patron of the Samiti the annual grant of four thousand rupees for the year 1974,75,77,and 1978 was released. The Samiti further requested the Government to raise the annual grant from one thousand to five thousand rupees from 1979 ⁶¹. It also appealed for a non-recurring grant of rupees ten thousand for renovation of the Samiti's house ⁶².

During the National Emergency ⁶³ the activities of the Samiti suffered to a great extent. The leading members of the Samiti, most of them were the public servant, had to keep themselves busy with their parent engagement. The distant members had a very casual role. Their contribution to the Samiti was totally negligible. All the burden of the Samiti lay with the Secretary and President. Under the prevailing situation of financial scarcity and manpower management one can imagine the functioning of the Samiti. For a long time there was no permanent employee, even a Grade IV. Important books and reading materials of the library have been misplaced or missed during those days when there was no one to look after it.

In a letter addressed to the Samiti by the Education (CTM) Department, the Government of Assam Dated. 4.6.76 directed the Samiti to furnish the details showing estimates of receipt and expenditure for further consideration, which reveals that the Government was not aware of the activities and progress of the Samiti and without detail information further assistance to the Samiti will not be made ⁶⁴. In those days one thousand rupees was not sufficient to bear the expenses of office contingency, yet the Government was reluctant to pay the said amount. The Grant was stopped from 1978. However the Ssamiti managed its own affairs from its meagre income of Membership fee and sale of publications etc.

The Assam Agitation affected the state from 1979 to 1985. The progress and prospects of the state in general was pushed back. Samiti's activities again suffered as the Agitation turned to a mass public movement. There was frequent *Bandh, Satyagraha* and *Hartal*. The agitation disturbed the law and order situation and violence spread to different places. Under the prevailing situation the Executive Committee appealed to the President of India, the Prime Minister, Union Home Minister and Government of Assam for an amicable settlement within the Constitutional framework for which the people of Assam striving for ⁶⁵. The Assam Sahitya Sabha made similar appeal ⁶⁶.

The establishment of a more sound organization further lessened the importance of the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti. The North East India History Association was established at headquarter of the North Eastern Hill University, Shillong on 27th April 1979 ⁶⁷. The initiative for founding an organization like

North East India History Association was the effort of Surya Kanta Barpujari, Jayanta Bhusan Bhattacharjee and Imdad Hussain. Amalendu Guha and Heramba Kanta Barpujari supported their ideas. The principal objective of the proposed association spelt out as ⁶⁸

“Promotion and encouragement of the scientific study of the History of North East India viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura and the adjoining areas historically connected with the region”.

No doubt, the establishment of NEIHA increased the progress of historical research activities covering almost every aspect of the history of North East, but it is sorry to say that a team of prominent historians of this region who were associated with the Samiti for a long time and contributed for the development of the Samiti left their involvement with the Samiti, and it was indeed a great loss to the Samiti. The on going agitational programmes that paralyzed the academic environment of the state was also responsible for that which divert the attention of the scholars to join a similar organization outside the state.

Before the independence the historical research in this region was mostly through individual efforts of scholars. The two important research bodies were one through private initiative and the other under the patronage of the Government. Those two bodies were concerned more with collection, preservation, compilation and translation and publication of historical records than innovative research ⁶⁹. The University of Gauhati established in 1948, in the beginning could not give the

necessary lead in the matter of historical research. However within a short time the constraints were removed and a large number of scholars from different parts of the region registered themselves with university for research work. The subsequent establishment of the University at Dibrugarh (1965) and Shillong(1973) accelerated the space of historical research in this region. The Calcutta University's Post Graduate Centre at Agartala (Now Tripura University) and the Manipur University started recently have also given a good account of research work undertaken in tribal and regional history. Under the auspices of the newly established Central Universities ⁷⁰ of the region different non-official research organizations have done commendable work as they are provided with sufficient fund and experienced manpower.

There is no linkage of the Samiti with the University of Gauhati or any other Government aided research organization. The university also does not want to take the burden as it is already suffering from financial crunch. The university being a state university, is not able to extend its activities due to financial constraints. There are almost two hundred degree colleges in Assam where history is taught. But it is a pity that not to talk of the students, but most of the teachers of history are not aware about the institution and its contribution. There is no mention in the textbook regarding the establishment and activities of the Samiti, may be in brief. The press and newspapers, from time to time, are publishing articles on the deplorable condition of the Kamarua Anusandhan Samiti urging that how a prestigious institution is facing hardship and leading towards extinction.

Leaving the financial crunch on one side we may look in to the other side, i.e. the organizational problem. Due to state reorganization policy the territory of ancient Assam has been fragmented in to different states. The newly created states are empowered to run their own administration. Most of the archaeological and historical sites falling under those states became irrelevant for the newly formed states as they were not much interested to study about the past history of Assam as the archaeological objects bearing the evidence of Hindu religion and carrying the past history of the region, rather in a sense of headache in the presence of Church culture (Nagalannd, Mizoram and Bodoland).

In Assam the conversion of a large number of tribes to Christianity and at the same time lack of missionary zeal, love and respect for the religion of the Hindus such institutions of importance started declining. The internal clash for the cast status and rigidity are also responsible in this context⁷¹ Lack of unity and common interest among the historians of the region are also to be noted. While the founder of the Samiti was more interested to study the pre Ahom history of Assam, which do not have a chronology depending on the archaeological and written records, their interests were confined to the collection of sources and its interpretation. The other group of historians devoted to the chronicles i.e. the *Buranji* dealing with the Ahom age, whose importance is considered to be more important. The third group was considering the archival records as the most authenticated source. This conflict of interests is also a factor for involvement of the members on the progress of the Samiti.

For the proper study and interpretation of the inscriptions and ancient manuscripts the knowledge of Palaeography is essential. But there was no facility to impart training for this skill. The Samiti proposes to conduct a course on Palaeography but it did not receive due recognition from the Government or University. Amidst problems the Samiti is surviving at its own capacity with the encouragement received from some of the older generation scholars.

The major drawbacks, which brought the Samiti's declining condition and with no sign of further improvement may be identified as follows:

Lack of proper accommodation and infrastructure, Land possession, Permanent officials as Research officer, Assistant, Librarian etc. adequate Government grants, Collaboration with other research bodies engaged with similar work and recognition of the Institution as a full fledged research institution by University Grants Commission or Government of India.

J.P. Mills, M.A, I.C.S, while contributing an article on the first issue of the journal of the Samiti elaborately explained the special scope that Assam seemed to offer to a research society. He laid stress on collection and interpretation of old manuscripts, i.e. the written records and cautioned that the interpretation to be done from a strictly objective stand point-the standpoint of a true scientist. Most of the written records were not written objectively, but from a Hindu standpoint of view ⁷². The study of the verbal records, i.e. the Oral History, the archaeological evidences, the Megaliths⁷³ and Monoliths⁷⁴, the ceremonies performed by different castes and tribes, the folklores, the temple and temple ruins. These source

materials are to be utilized by the historians for understanding the spirit of an age. The concept of history does not now reel round the pomp and panoply of the court; it seeks to study man in relation to his environment, irrespective of any social distinction. The hut and palace have the same significance in the eyes of a modern historian ⁷⁵. For this extended approach of history it is necessary to examine, analyze and utilize all types of source materials, which was earlier considered irrelevant, or beyond the purview of historians. But the Samiti could not make use of this extended approach and therefore its popularity started decaying.

In the *Puranas*, Naraka, the ruler of Videha, made the ancient text mention about the old kingdom of Pragjyotisa; Pragjyotisa as referred to, was situated on the extreme fringe of *Bharatvarsha*, and its earliest inhabitants were popularly known as the Kiratas ⁷⁶. The Kiratas of Pragjyotisa can be identified with the Khasis, the Jaintias, the Garos, the Kacharis, the Chutiyas, the Tipperahs, the Nagas and other neighbouring tribes of North East India living during the time of Naraka ⁷⁷. Till twelfth century there was no state known as Assam. Therefore there were no people identified as Assamese. As the state later came to be known as Assam the inhabitants were also subsequently termed as Assamese ⁷⁸. But in the post independence period the concept of Assamese has been radically changed to Assamese ethnicity and linguistic chauvinism. This was an impending danger to the Samiti. The alternative identification of the Samiti "The Assam Research Society" which itself was a debatable issue long back in 1916 when the Samiti

was at its infant stage⁷⁹ The concept of Assam was a narrow perspective than the concept of Pragjyotisa-Kamarupa.

The Assam Sahitya Sabha, a socio cultural and literary body was acknowledged by University Grants Commission as a research body in 1950⁸⁰ but as a cultural organization the Sabha's initiative to protect the Samiti's interest was sadful. The Sabha's activities created strong resentment among the non Assamese⁸¹ residing in Assam. It was sowing seeds of dissension among the various linguistic minorities residing in Assam from ancient times. Interestingly, since 1930 the Sabha spread and popularized little nationalism and chauvinism⁸². The contribution of the hills to the Samiti is totally absent as the government of India Act, 1935 categorized the hills as excluded area⁸³ or partially excluded area⁸⁴ and unadministered area⁸⁵. No act of the Assam or Indian legislators could apply to those two hill divisions unless the Governor in his discretion so directed. Therefore the sentiment of the people of the Assam differed from those of the hills. But the present area of 54,000 square miles, of which little over 24,000 square miles constitute the plains districts and 19,5000 the southern hill tracts and the rest the tribal hill tracts to the north constitutes the ancient Assam province⁸⁶. The Samiti did not make any effort to make a cordial relation with the different hill tribes from the historical influence of the tribes in the composite culture of Assam. When the Samiti was busy with the study of old Hindu culture and religion, the hill tribes came under the influence of Christianity. The Hindu history became meaning less for them.

The Samiti's endeavour for collection of Assamese and Sanskrit manuscripts and its preservation and publication clearly marked its interest on the tracing of the glory of Brahmanical Hindu religion. Hem Chandra Goswami's mission on 1912 under the directive of the Government and Pratap Chandra Goswami's effort at the initiative of Asom Sahitya Sabha during 1926-27⁸⁷ unearthed valuable manuscripts pertaining to the tradition and culture of Kamarupa. But it is surprising to note that none of the scholar came across any Persian or Arabic manuscripts, which were also equally considered to be important sources. There were considerable Muslim population scattered all over Assam and it is believed that there might be numerous such old chronicles for the use of historians. However, it was a matter of satisfaction that Moidul Islam Borah,⁸⁸ a scholar from Sibsagar (Assam), inspite of the constraints, translated the original Persian chronicle *Baharistan-I-Ghaybi*, written by Mirza Nathan⁸⁹, and discovered by Sir Jadunath Sarkar in 1920-21. The translated versions consist of two volumes, first published by Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam in 1936. It is a fact that no true

History of Assam can ever be written unless all available sources of information are studied and utilized; and the Persian *tawarikh* are as invaluable for the history of the Muslim wars as their Assamese counterparts the *buranjis*.⁹⁰ Events and personalities dimly narrated or portrayed in the one are elaborated in the other; matters left out in one source as trite and commonplace are described in the other with special vigour. The two sources thus complete the cycle of available

information and they both deserve careful and diligent study in the hands of historians of Assam. It is a pity that the Samiti library does not possess any Islamic chronicles or manuscripts. So far the journal published only four articles related to the Islamic events:

(Barua K.L., Stemming of the tide of Muslim conquest in Eastern India, JARS Vol. iii, No. 2, pp.47-58,.

D.N Mukherjee ,The date of Bukhtiar Invasion of Assam, JARS vol. iii, No3,1935, pp89-91.

Barua K.L., Mirza Nathan's narrative, JARS Vol. v, No.3, 1937, pp.65-79

Goswami S.C. Land Grant to the temple of Umananda at Gauhati by Badshah Ghazi Aurangzed Salerkhan, JARS Vol.ix, No1&2, 1942, pp.1-13.

It appeared that in course of time the activities of the Samiti pertaining to the history, literature and culture become more and more specific to the Assamese. It failed to analyze the distinction between the history of ancient Assam and the history of the Assamese. The history of ancient Assam as one perceives is the story of ancient dynasties, the story of the kings, of kingdoms, the capitals of the kingdoms, warfare and victories and defeat in those wars. The society described there is the society seen in a narrow perspective of the higher caste and not the common people. It is the people's history, which is the real history and a people's history is to be discovered in the folkways, the folk religion, and ultimately the socio-political institutions based on the economic life of the people.

The most serious factor is the degradation of Assamese culture. The composite culture of Assam broke in to pieces and thus there were no serious sentiments among the people of Assam to preserve it. As the people are less interested to preserve its history heritage and culture who else is there to do so. The apathy of the Government, the lack of interest of the educated intellectuals and the negligence on the part of the Universities made the institution to decay and in the near future many important sources are likely to disappear if the Samiti leads to extinction.

In spite of all these constraints, the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti may feel proud of setting a trend of historical research in the region and collection and preservation of the antiquities. Under the inspiration during twentieth century at various places historical research society had been established along with the Museum at districts, sub-divisions, academic institutions, and villages and micro level studies are going on which may bring out new light to the history of Assam.

Notes and references.

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12. Bhuyan.A.C(ed) *Political History of Assam*, second edition, Guwahati, 1999, p.51 *Political History of Assam*, second edition, Guwahati, 1999, p.223.
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22. Peace Committee.
23. Hemchandra Goswami(Extra Assistant Commissioner) and Rai Bahadur Kalicharan Sen (Government Pensioner).
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41. Ibid.
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43. *Journal of the Assam Research Society*, vol.xiv, Guwahati, 1949, editorial.
44. *Journal of the Assam Research Society*, vol. xxii, 1974.
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46. Rai Bahadur Kaliram Medhi (1880-1954) was the former Deputy Commissioner and President of the Samiti during 1950-51.
47. Umakanta Goswami (1897-1953) was the Principal of Cotton College, Guwahati, during 1948. He was the President of the Samiti during 1952-53.
48. *Journal of the Assam Research Sociiety*, vol.vi, No.2, Guwahati, 1938, Obituary Note.
49. Birinchi Kumar Barua (1908-1964), former head of the Assamese department, Secretary, University classes and dean faculty of Arts, University of Gauhati.

50. Heramba Kanta Barpujari (1912-2002) former Asst. Director of Public Instructions, Govt. of Assam, Professor and head, department of history and professor Emeritus, University of Gauhati.
51. Satyendra Nath Sarma , former Tagore Professor of Gauhati University.
52. Ananda Chandra Barua (1907-1983) a reputed littérateur and former president of Assam Sahitya Sabha (1970).
53. Former Jawahar Lal Nehru Professor of Gauhati University, Sahitya Academy awardees and president of Assam Sahitya Sabha (1974).
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