

# **SIGNIFICANT ROLE OF AN EMINENT TEACHER SHYAMAKANTA SINHA FROM BISHNUPRIYA MANIPURI COMMUNITY IN THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE MOVEMENT OF INDIA**

**Suhrid Sinha,**

Ex Student of Master's, Department of Education, I.G.N.O.U

Email: [suhrid.sinha591@gmail.com](mailto:suhrid.sinha591@gmail.com)

**Subhash Sinha,**

Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Swami Vivekananda College,  
Chandkhira, Karimganj, Assam

## **ABSTRACT:**

Freedom struggle is the ultimate response of the nation towards many centuries' suppression and discrimination by the foreign invaders in our own land. And in this holy cause people across India participated with their heart and soul to get independence. In this article the research is done to find out any freedom fighter having education as a profession, who also hails from any micro, indigenous, disadvantaged group or community from the remotest part of the nation. The study was done in one of the remotest state of India i.e. Assam. In Assam one of the remotest district was taken as Karimganj and in Karimganj, Patharkandi is the remotest and bordering block, where the locality of the Patharkandi Bazar area is surrounded by a special micro, indigenous community recognized by Govt. of Assam as indigenous and OBC and from that group after primary survey and studying related reference books, many persons were found to be freedom fighters. But they were forgotten with time and out of them one significant person was Shyamakanta Sinha. He was a teacher, politician, freedom fighter and social activists. Some significant moments of his freedom struggle and his life-long works and family background is mentioned thoroughly with proper documental evidence. Documental evidences of the indigenous community are also given in the study with a suitable and much needed conclusion for recognizing his efforts towards India's freedom Struggle movements.

**Keywords:** Freedom Fighter, Pension Paper, Indigenous groups/ communities, Freedom Struggle.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

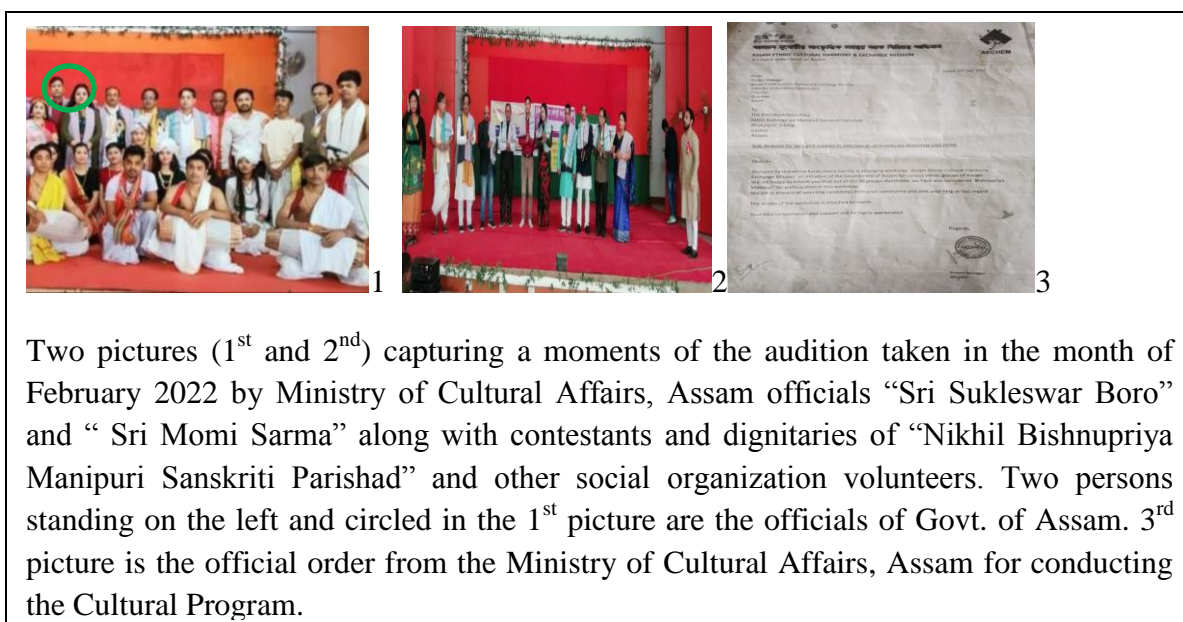
This article is dedicated to teachers who were also freedom fighters but unrecognized nationally and unknown to the nation. This is mostly for the reason of the backwardness of the location and also for belonging to a micro, indigenous and uneducated community. Being unknown to their rights and duties till date it is out of the box for any person associated from the community to take any step to write down something for the honor of “Freedom Struggle Hero Shyamakanta Sinha”. Moreover, in his lifetime also being a teacher, the back bone of the society and the human engineer and as a freedom fighter and also a social worker by heart, he also never tried to get any recognition from the government and till his last breath he tried his level best for the development of his society and locality and ultimately for the development of the nation. His journey of life clearly explains the importance of teacher in a society and a community. It was seen that in major Independence related movements Shyamakanta Sinha played a major role from organizing and gathering masses to mass mobilization. In his leadership only, major agitation which could take place in this remote place took place. He is a role model for the society in Assam. Being a bit more qualified than others in the locality he could have opted for a government job and could not go against the government policies. But he chose the route of a national hero. It is very pathetic, like him many stories of freedom fighters are not told or known to the society. The more we learn about their lives the more social, patriotic and nationalism sentiments will grow in young learner. This kind of inspiration from the known books is only Masterda Surya Sen from Bengal who conducted the 1930 Chittagong riot and was involved in revolutionary activities in that time and ultimately was hanged death in 1933. His story was highlighted because he was martyred in the process, presence of more educated Bengali writers or authors and also the government sentiment. But Shyamakanta Sinha was a little bit unfortunate to not to have at least the last two privileges which Masterda Surya Sen had. Apart from him from indigenous tribes “Bhagwan Birsha Munda’s” name is also highlighted though he also does not have any of the privileges Masterda Surya Sen had. But Birsha Munda had a lot more tribe population than Shyamakanta Sinha and will of the concerned stakeholders to highlight his name. It seems a bit unrealistic also to compare these two legends with the likes of Shyamakanta. But, even a small contribution in freedom struggle had same importance to the greatest of sacrifice and if this logic is applied in this case then the concerned stakeholders should take appropriate actions to make Shyamakanta Sinha a known freedom fighter to the nation.

The area of the research region is chosen as North-East India, where the research area is chosen as Patharkandi previously known as Pratapgarh of Karimganj district in Assam. This area is specifically chosen because north-east is known as the remotest region of India and in it Karimganj district is one of the remotest districts in Assam, which actually a bordering district of Assam sharing inter-state borders with Mizoram and Tripura and international border with Bangladesh. Patharkandi is the only development block of Karimganj which shares all these national and inter-state borders. Till now after 75 years of Independence, the mode of

communication in this rural part of Assam is only road ways and railways. But access to these media of communication is limited to weather conditions, which was recently proved in this monsoon of 2022. In the research it is also looked for finding some freedom fighters from education background or educationist. This is because being a research scholar for aspiring definitely teaching profession in education it is always a dream and passion to find out some teachers like “Masterda Surya Sen” of Bengal who idealize and set the social status for teachers as freedom fighter. Moreover, this is to justify the phrase “Teachers are the backbone of the society” in true sense.

It is found in the study that at Patharkandi an indigenous micro community resides with quite a sound and dense population surrounding the Patharkandi Bazar and adjacent to international and national borders of Assam and India. This community is known as “Bishnupriya Manipuri” or “Manipuri Bishnupriya” community who migrated from Manipur state during Barmese invasion and majorly due to linguistic persecution by fellow “Meitei Manipuri” Community and as a result migrated to various parts of Barak Valley of Assam, Bangladesh and Tripura. It is the only community in the world history which suffered persecution followed by exodus due linguistic difference. This community is purely a “Hindu Baishnav Community” and people of this community are very orthodox in obeying and maintaining their cultural and community faiths, beliefs, language and culture. The main festivals or occasions this community celebrates are: “Rathyatra of Bhagvan Jagannath” for Nine consecutive days starting from the day on which the Rathyatra of Puri conducted, “Rakhal Leela” and “Rashleela” of “Bhagvan Shree Krishna”. This community claims their ancestral roots are connected to “Pandavas” from “Mahabharata”, especially they claims themselves as the predecessors of “Arjuna” the third “Pandava”. Due to this reason this community claims themselves as the “Ksatriyas” or fighters who protect their lands, culture, religion and identity. Supprisingly, in this community no beggar or no terrorists exists till date. In the study it is also observed that people of this community basically dependent upon government jobs in the sector of teaching and defense.

After their exodus from the state Manipur they settled in various states of India and Bangladesh now. In Bangladesh this community is considered as indigenous and Schedule Tribes. Whereas in India, this community is considered in the list of “Other Backwards Castes” in Tripura (Both State and Central list) and in Assam also included in the state list of state “OBC” but the inclusion of central list of “OBC” is under process. Recently the government of Assam had tried for an initiative where almost all indigenous tribes/ communities of Assam were being called for a cultural exchange program at the “Shankardev Kalakhetra”, Dispur, Guwahati, Assam. The name of that program was “Axom Ethnic Cultural Exchange Campaign” or “AECHEM” conducted by Ministry of Cultural Affairs of Assam. The government of Assam is pledged to give some special benefits or advantages to these indigenous groups. In the list of indigenous tribes the code of “Bishnupriya Manipuri” or “Manipuri Bishnupriya” is “E4”.



## REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE:

U. Sinha, (2011), in his book “Swadhinata Andolone Pratapgarh” revealed that the freedom movements and struggle that occurred in the then Pratapgarh now Patharkandi. Apart from mentioning various freedom struggle movements and freedom fighters he also explicitly revealed one incident which put a lot of impact in the demography of the nation. After Sylhet referendum a portion of Sylhet including now Karimganj to Ratabari to Patharkandi were annexed to India and is a crucial part for connecting India with Mizoram and also with Tripura. But as the leadership of Pakistan cruel and cunning, they tried to forcefully occupy this important part of India for enlarging Pakistani territory. For that a train loaded with Pakistani Army and a Pakistani Flag on front was marching towards Patharkandi crossing Karimganj, the district headquarter and Nilambazar and Baraigram for illegally occupying the area. But a huge crowd of Bishnupriya Manipuris of Patharkandi attacked that Pakistani Army train at Patharkandi railway station and forced the train and those soldiers to move backwards and thus saved the demography of the district, state and the nation. But ill luckily due to lack of education and less interest in history writing and negligence and avoidance of fellow history writers this important incident of the history is not known to even the localities of Patharknadi, Karimganj or Assam. And till now that significant railway station is not upgraded and now is demoted to a railway stoppage only for limited trains. The study is based upon direct questioning among the public who are aged enough to see freedom struggle. The author also takes data from the writings of various authors who wrote about the contributions of the locality. A shortfall of the study or the book is monolingual i.e. the book was written only in Bishnupriya Manipuri language, which makes its readers limited to Bishnupriya Manipuri community only. But one point is clear that he wanted to make the people of the community aware of their history, and is a positive sign of education. In his book he also mentioned about the mindset of Bishnupriya Manipuris from the evidences taken from the British officers writing as “Manipuris are by nature a turbulent and

unruly people, and have little respect for the majesty of the law”, etc.- The Assam District Gazetteers, Vol. (Sylhet) Chap. III P 78. Then in Sylhet the community Manipuri referred to Bishnupriya Manipuri as they are in majority amongst other Manipuris.

B. G. Sinha (2020), in his book “Bishnupriya Manipuris in Freedom and Other Movements”, wrote about the contributions of Bishnupriya Manipuri freedom strugglers across India and Bangladesh. In his writing he explicitly wrote about the Bishnupriya Manipuri freedom strugglers from Patharkandi, Karimganj, Silchar, and various places of Bangladesh. B.G. Sinha in his book wrote about the contribution of Bishnupriya Manipuri community in the freedom struggle of Bangladesh and in the Bengali Language movement in Barak Valley of Assam in pre-independence era. Surendra Kumar Sinha and Nanda Kishore Sinha are amongst the significant freedom fighters from the Bishnupriya Manipuri community of Silchar who in the post-independence era became influential politicians and persons in the society. In this book it was also mentioned that Nanda Kishore Sinha was a consecutive three times M.L.A. from Silchar constituency and is the only M.L.A. who for the sake of recognition of Bengali language in Assam gave up his M.L.A.-ship and goes against his party. There were 12 Bengali speaking M.L.A.’s in Assam at that time out of which 11 (eleven) M.L.A.’s are from Bengali community itself but Nanda Kishore was from Bishnupriya Manipuri Community (who could speak fluent Bengali).

W. Theiss & M. Bron Jr. (2014), the models and solutions present in other Western countries are different than the process of the development of the adult educator profession in Poland. Two main reasons for this are: firstly it sought its theoretical background in education work or pedagogy and not in psychoanalysis. Secondly, for raising national awareness resulting from education system a need for patriotic educational work is needed and lack of state independence is also another reason. The formation of a new profession requiring a committed preserved national identity and an agent of social development was contributed by a concept of socio-cultural work, alongside with charitable work in Poland. The tasks were carried by an activist known as a freedom fighter at first. After regaining its independence in 1918, a freedom fighter of Poland became an instructor and finally after 1925 a professional.

M.Z. Sahgal, G.H. Forbes & B.K. Nehru, (2016): An Indian freedom fighter recalls her life. Routledge in their study stated that Manmohini a family member of Motilal, Jaharlal and Indira Gandhi family recalls her years in the anti-British agitations, her family and marriage, her prison terms and her work in women’s organizations and politics.

B. Chandra, M. Mukherjee, A. Muherjee, S. Mahajan, K.N. Anikkar, (2016) in their study about Surya Kumar Sen popularly known as Masterda Surya Sen was a Bengali revolutionary born on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1894 and died on 12 January 1934. He was a influential person in the Indian independence struggle especially the 1930 Chittagong armory raid. Apart from a freedom fighter he was also an eminent teacher and was influenced by the nationalist ideals in 1916 while he was a graduate student of Arts in Berhampore College (Now Krishnath College). He was once selected as president of the Indian National Congress, Chittagong branch. He recruited and created a revolutionary group known as Chittagong group by Ananta Singh, Ganesh Ghosh and

Lokenath Bal to fight against the Britishers. He was imprisoned for 2 years (from 1926 to 1928) for his revolutionary activities. After Chittagong raid in 1930, 80 British Indian Army soldiers and 12 revolutionaries were killed but Sen and other surviving revolutionaries escaped in small groups. He was arrested on 16 February 1933 and was sentenced to death on 12 January 1934 along with his fellow revolutionaries.

Ghosh, R. (2020), The Northern Sociological theory was considered to be incomplete due to non-inclusion of global dynamics, struggle, survival and existence of Southern people were also not considered and moreover, socio cultural changes in the lives of Southern people due to colonialism and globalization was also not discussed. To emphasize the intellectual power and political relevance of social thought taken from British colonized countries, Raewyn Connell introduced the term Southern Theory. The theories that incorporate new ideas to represent the experiences of unequal development are imperative in a globalized world, the term Southern Theory can be confusing. Gandhi's education experiments and theories, the ideas of non-violence and moral togetherness are discussed in this paper. After centuries of colonial subjugation, the country wanted to "catch-up" with the development countries after independence, hence Gandhian educational ideas were not accepted in India. A new way of looking at society and education is needed to for understanding Gandhian ideas of achieving political/social change through non-violence and his ideas on education for working towards a social order free from exploitation and violence.

S. Molla, (2021), in the study mentioned about continuation and inevitable consequence of the Kol Rebellion (1831-32) and the Santal rebellion (1855-56) causes the Birsa Munda involvement in the historic peasant revolt and democratic struggle in India. The Mundas are one of the significant indigenous communities of Austrian group belonging to socially lower classes having occupations limited to agriculture and animal husbandry. In Eastern and central India Munda, Oran, Santal, Kol, Birhor, Lodha, and in the South India Sabor, Kurumba, Chenchu, Badama are in this category. The Mundas lifestyle was simple, straightforward, primitive social system, and independent.

This study refers to the eminent teacher and freedom fighter from a remote area and from an indigenous community because it is seen that most of the indigenous communities living across India do not know about their basic rights. But when it comes to national duties they do their best for obeying the law and for the wellbeing of the nation. But due to lack of their consciousness they are now depriving of many basic rights, their lack of education lead them to the darkness of political, social misuse. Their lack of consciousness and education lead them to gradually loss their identity, culture, their own land. But our nation is known for its "Unity in Diversity". So preserve and sustain the diversity of this great nation this study was done and many more studies like this highlighting the indigenous and marginalized communities and ethnic groups needs to be done in large scale in future.

## **OBJECTIVE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY:**

The main objective of this article is to find out at least one person belonging to micro-communities or indigenous tribe from very backward regions of India who played his/ her significant role in national freedom struggle of India.

There are many freedom fighters from Indigenous groups across India. This study meant for studying and putting the life of such a freedom fighter who was also a teacher. This study reflects on the area or the part of India which he belongs, about his role, his role models or ideals. To find reflect the occupation and the social background of that freedom fighter.

## **ROLE OF SHYAMAKANTA SINHA IN FREEDOM STRUGGLE MOVEMENTS:**

Belonging to this particular marginalized, underprivileged for ages, indigenous group and ethnic group from the remotest district of Assam, some persons were found involved and struggled in the Indian Independence struggle. Out of those people only one person meets all the above mentioned criteria of research i.e. a teacher, freedom fighter, belonged to one of the micro and indigenous community from remotest part of remotest district and the remotest state of India. The name of that person is “SHYAMAKANTA SINHA”, son of Lte. Gokul Chand Sinha of village Satragram now known as Hazarichowk of Patharkandi. He was born in 1904 and was an eminent teacher of Patharkandi. His Siblings are (in Chronological order):- (i) Shyamakanta Sinha (ii) Gundoi Devi (iii) Thorosena Devi (iv) Krishna Kanta Sinha. His wife’s name is Nungaleima Devi, who as per their living son Sri Kanta Mani Sinha’s statement was also struggled for India’s independence and accompanied his husband in all his ventures. His children are (in Chronological order):- (i) Lte. Purna Lakkhi Devi (ii) Raj Lakkhi Devi (iii) Lte. Manikuntala Rajkumari (iv) Lte. Rama Kanta Sinha (v) Umakanta Sinha.

He rendered his services in three lower primary schools of Patharkandi educational block namely: 242 No. Kabaribond Jr. Basic Institution, 197 No. Kanaibazar L.P. School and 210 No. Hoitorkha L.P. School. He was an inspiration to the then society and put a huge impact in the micro and indigenous Bishnupriya Manipuri community and also in the Meitei Manipuri, Bengali (both Hindu & Muslim), tea tribes and other tribal communities in the locality. He studied up to class Six (VI) or Minor passed during British period and that qualification was enough for him to get to a lower primary school teacher job. During the freedom struggle he was mainly inspired by M.K. Gandhi, Jogyeswar Das of Surma Valley Congress. He has many allies of freedom struggle from his locality, out of them some significant names are: (a) Rabindra Aditya (Ex-MLA, Karimganj), (b) Khan Bahadur Mohammad Ali, (c) Sonachand Sinha of Village Jamirala, PO: Tinokhal, 788724, (d) Sukhamoy Sinha, ( e) Koireng Sena Sinha both of village Rajargaon, (f) Jilla Khamba Sinha of N. Bilbari of Patharkandi, Karimganj, Assam.

During British Raj he participated in “Satyagraha” and “Peasant movement”. Shyamakanta Sinha was arrested at Baithakhal T.E. along with large number of Bishnupriya Manipuri youth for being a part of “Satyagraha Peasant Movement” and were arrested by Banamali Kewte (the then S.I. of Patherkandi) and Binoy Gupta (the then CID police Inspector). They were marching towards Bazaricherra at that time. They were arrested in the mid-week of January 1941 and thereby sent to Sylhet Jail.

He was arrested again in the midweek of August 1942 and sent to Karimganj Jail along with Kuber Sinha, Tarachand Sinha, Sukhamoy Sinha, Taraleima Devi, Koireng Sena Sinha of Phatherkandi for being a part of “Quit India movement”.

Shyamakanta Sinha convened a Congress meeting at Patragram Sri Mondop and organized the Bishnupriya Manipuris to join the Civil Disobedience and Salt movement to protest against Salt Tax. But due to economic crisis to run the movement Badan Sinha, Tuku Sinha, Dhanhani Sinha of Tinokhal, Ballavi Sinha of Kachubari, Madan Chand Sinha of Bilbari, Gopi Mohan Sinha of Hailakandi loote Hundi (Labour wage) from Chandkhira and Medley T.E. and even Sonachand Sinha of Jamirala boycotted class from Kumilla College. As a consequence Badan Sinha of Tinokhal was arrested and sent to Tezpur jail for 10 months during the Civil Disobedience Movement.

Shyamakanta Sinha was a good organizer since the days of freedom struggle and wanted to spend his rest of the days in the service of the society. That is why after independence he opted to go for the job of a teacher, a nation builder and the back bone of the society. He wanted to connect to the young learners of the society irrespective of the caste, creed, sex, community and religion. And as a privileged freedom fighter having so much importance in the then society was welcomed to join in politics in Indian National Congress party after his retirement in 1964. He was an active member of Indian National Congress. His highest responsibility in Congress was of Karimganj Congress District Committee President.

During his lifetime he achieved the freedom fighter pension benefits of both state and central government, records of which are given hereunder. After all this life time services and struggle he died on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1987 due old age.



Shyamakanta Sinha & Nungaleima Devi (W)



F.F. Bronze Certificate by Govt. of Assam



Nungaleima Devi F.F. P.P.



F.F. State F.F. P.P.



F.F. Central P.P.



## **CONCLUSION:**

From the above study it can be concluded that there are many unknown freedom fighters from even the micro, indigenous communities belonging to extreme rural part of the nation. The freedom struggle lit the heart hearts of every Indian across the nation and “Shyamakanta Sinha” is one such freedom fighter but the recognitions that he got from the government during the tenure of his life was just limited to state and central pensions and after his demise his wife got those pensions. But in true sense “Shyamakanta Sinha” and many like him were totally forgotten as in today’s date except his family members his contribution towards the freedom of this nation and society are totally unknown due to the negligent behavior of the concerned stakeholders and the department of education itself. As from Bengal province, they have got the story of a freedom fighter “Master Da Surya Sen”, but unluckily for Assam and the nation itself struggle and contribution of many freedom fighters are totally not practiced, told or recognized and ultimately forgotten. If their stories be told, written or scripted in school text books then definitely in the current evolving scenario of education the status of teachers would be more influential and respected. Moreover, if stories like “Shyamakanta Sinha” be included in our text books then at least the micro, indigenous, disadvantageous, backward communities like “Bishnupriya Manipuri” and other communities would be morally boosted to serve more for the glorious future of the nation. At the end this significant teacher and freedom fighter should deserve well recognition from competent authorities and should be known to the young generations across the state and the nation. If “Birsha Munda” is a hero of freedom struggle to the indigenous Munda Community and others and is worshipped or remembered as “Bhagwan Birsha Munda”. Then Shyamakanta Sinha of Patharkandi Assam should also be known to the rest of India by the name “Shyamakanta Sinha”.

## **FURTHER STUDIES:**

- (i) More intensive study is required to identify more freedom fighters from Bishnupriya Manipuri Community.
- (ii) More intensive study is required to identify more freedom fighters from other micro and indigenous communities from other parts of the nation.
- (iii) More comparative study is required for knowing the lifestyles and socio economic and educational backgrounds and also demography of micro, indigenous and disadvantaged groups/ communities/ tribes of the nation.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

Burt, R. A. (1984). Coercive Freedom: A Response to Professor Chambers. *U. Mich. JL Reform*, 18, 829.

- Chandra B., Mukherjee M., Muherjee A., Mahajan S., anikkar, K.N. (2016), [ First Published 1987] *India's Struggle for Independence (Revised and updated)*. Penguin Books. P. 252. ISBN 978-0-14-010781-4.
- Cohn C. & Tien L. (2007), Peter Junger, Digital Freedom Fighter. *Case W. Res. L. Rev.*, 58, 315.
- Dun E.W. (1992), *Gazettier of Manipur (Reprint)*, Manas Publication, Delhi, Page-15.
- Dr. Sinha K.P. (1986), An etymological Dictionary and Bishnupriya Manipuris, *Calcutta Publication*, Page – IX (Introduction).
- Dr. Ahmed K.U. (2013), Karimganjari Itihas, *Silchar Publication*, page-87.
- Dr. Choudhury S. (May, 1981), The Mutiny Period in Cachar, *Silchar Publication*, Page-6/14/26/27/28/30.
- Dr. Choudhury S. (May, 1981), The Mutiny Period in Cachar, *Silchar Publication*, Page Appendix II.
- Ghosh, R. (2020). Gandhi, the freedom fighter and educator: A Southern Theorist. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 19(1), 19-29.
- Graves, D. (2004). Freedom fighter for literacy. *Journal of Prisoners On Prisons*, 13, 92-95.
- Hodson T.C. (1975), The Meitheis (Reprint), *Western Book Depoo Gowahati*, Page-4.
- Molla, S. (2021), Birsa Munda- A Real Freedom Fighter. *LIFE AND MOVEMENTS OF BIRSA MUNDA*.
- Madikwa, Z. (2007). Tambo, Oliver Reginald Kaizana OR Tambo: Teacher, lawyer and freedom fighter. *Biography*, 30(2), 296-297.
- Narjee B. (1971), Boro Kacharir Samaj Aru Sanskriti, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition *Lawyers Book Stall, Guwahati*, Page No- 17.
- Nath R.M. (1978), The Background of Assamese Culture, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, *Barua Publication, Guwahati*, Page No-91.
- Ogunbanjo, G. (2013). Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela: the iconic freedom fighter. *South African Family Practice*, 55(6), 490-490.
- Prof. Sinha N. (2006), History of Manipuri, *Bishnupriya Manipuri Text Book Production Committee*, Page No- 27.
- Ramaswamy, S., & Ayothi, V. (1997). Our Teacher. *Indian Literature*, 40(5 (181), 109-117.

Sahgal, M. Z., Forbes, G. H., & Nehru, B. K. (2016). *An Indian freedom fighter recalls her life*. Routledge.

Sinha U. (2011), *Swadhinata Andolone Pratapgarh*, *Silchar Publication*, Page-14.

Sinha M.K. (1968), *Manipurar Prachin Itihas*, *Cachar Press, Silchar, Assam*, Page No. 50-55.

Sinha R. (2000), *Swadhinata Sangrame Bangladeshar Manipuri Samaj*, *Reprint 2000 A.D. Dhaka Publication*, Page No-17/19.

Theiss, W., & Bron Jr, M. (2014). Freedom fighter–instructor–professional: On becoming an adult educator in Poland. *Pedagogika Społeczna*, 13(2 (52)), 49-64.