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A Short Account of the Statues and Monuments installed in Guwahati after 1970: Representations of Assamese identity in Public Space

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Since the British period, installing statues in public space became a very popular custom in India. This tendency can be seen as a colonial imperial legacy. In the British period, the urban places emerged with the distinct notions of the public and the private. The public places soon turned into sites for displaying the marks of their superiority before the native. In Calcutta, the capital of the British colony, the custom of naming a site after a person's name and installing a statue in memory of the person was something very common. It can be argued that those statues and monuments symbolized the establishment of the authority and power on the conquered land. The idea of the public space often replaces something similar to democratic, autonomic and accessible space for every individual to activate, functionalize and use the space for common purpose. But in reality public sites always function as representative of the power of the state as is the case for the statues of British generals and rank holders installed in that period. Some of such statues of those persons were Governor General Marquis Cornwallis (installed in 1803), Marquis Hastings (1829), Sir Edward Hyde East (1830), Warren Hastings (1830), Lord William Bentinck (1841), Marquis Dalhousie (1863), Earl Mayo (1876), Queen Victoria (1878), Lord Curzon (1913), Lord Clive (1913), Lord Minto (1915) etc. There were also some monuments which



Figure 1: Statues of Gandhi in Santiniketan (Left) and in Sarania Hills, Guwahati, (right), artist Ramkinkar Baiz



Figure 2 : Statue of Nehru, Nehru Park, Guwahati



Figure 3: Martyr's memorial, Jalukbari, Guwahati



Figure 4: Martyrs' Memorial of AASU at Nehru Park, Guwahati



Figure 5: Statues of Bishnu Prasad Rabha, Jyoti Prasad Agarwala and Phani Sharma, Directorate of Library Service, Guwahati.



Figure 6: Statue of Lachit Barphukan installed in the middle of the river Brahmaputra near Machkhowa, in Guwahati, 2016



Figure 7: Respresentations of ethnic culture, Nehru Park, Guwahati



were constructed within the domain of the public space. Those were the Ochterlony Monument (built in 1848, now called as Sahid Minar), Victorial Memorial (1921).

In Assam, any record of statues and monuments installed during the British period is very rare to find today. A monument known as Northbrook Gate, which is also known as the Gate way Of Assam, was constructed by the British near Sukreswar Ghat, at the bank of the river Brahmaputra, in Guwahati. It was to welcome the Governor General Lord Northbrook who visited Assam in 1874. Even in the post-independence period till the 1960s, the custom of erecting statues was probably not so popular like today. Most of the statues and memorials, which are available today in public spaces, were installed after 1970s. The aim behind installing statues and memorials in the province are chiefly for the representation of distinct identity of the Assamese state, local legends, cultural aspects, incidents from political history and icons of the state. The statues and memorials in the post-1970's Assam can be categorized according to their political context too. Those categories are-

Statues of national icons, which represent nationhood, glory and martyrdom in Independence movement.

Statues of local icons, which represent Assamese nationalism

Monuments that represent distinctness of Assamese cultural identity In Guwahati

Since the Ahom period, Guwahati has been an important centre of the region. And during the British period it gradually became the capital city of Assam. Officially the capital of Government of Assam is Dispur, which is located near Guwahati. But in N E region, Guwahati is the most happening city in the practices of art and culture, media and journalism,



sports, trade and commerce, heritage and tourism, education and politics. Having that centrality in the region, the art practices in public space of the city always drag the attention of the other localities. The centrality of the place also makes it a common venue of local nationalism, and so it appears as the exhibition venue from where the foreign world is addressed by local representatives.

Statues of Martyrs and Freedom-Fighters of Independence movement

In the category of statues which includes the statues of martyr and leaders of the Independence movement, the statue of Mahatma Gandhi, which is placed in the Gandhi Mandop of Sarania Hills, is a significant one (see figure 1). The statue was installed there in 1969. This statue of Gandhi is replica of the statue made by the sculptor Ramkinkar Baiz. The original monumental statue is in the Kala-Bhavana campus of Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan. In the statue installed in the Sarania Hills, there are few reworking and changes done. The statue is coloured white. In the original statue in Kala-Bhavana, the typical spectacles with round lenses, which is popularly used to depict the identification feature of Gandhi's portrait was not added by the artist Ramkinkar. But in the statue of Sarania Hills, that typical identification mark is added and changes were also made in the base of the statue as well. In the statue at Santiniketan, we can see that the right foot of Gandhi steps on a human skull. Below the statue, on the pedestal a text was engraved. That is 'The posture of Non-Violence'. It was Ramkinkar's theme behind making the statue. The 'step on skull' is a symbolic representation of the theme - 'violence which falls down under his foot'. That symbolic element is absent along with the text in the statue placed in Sarania Hills. Here the pedestal is very different than the original one. Here it is a painted pedestal. On the pedestal



a stone wall is painted with white lines on Indian red coloured surface. That appears as an ornamental pattern. As the allegorical representations are changed here, hence it symbolizes something different than the previous theme. From 'The Posture of Non-Violence' it changed to the iconic image of the nation. The statue of Gandhi in Santiniketan retains the material quality of cement. The volume and solidity of the sculpture merges with the narration of the 'personality' or physical characteristics of the icon. Those material quality, volume and solidity were the metaphor and idiom used by the pioneer modern sculptor. In the replica installed in Sarania Hills, as it is coated with white paint, the earlier materiality, solidity and volume which produce a sense of physical character in the figure do not exist anymore. Ramkinkar had an artistic approach and conceptual perception while making the sculpture, which were significant characteristics of modernism. But in the replica of that those were replaced by the local-popular customs of making statues. The white coloured statue detaches itself from the surrounding environment and that adds an unreal, unnatural but superior value to the object. Simply the white coat is to make that statue distinct in the space. That focus on distinct and loud presence of the statue in public space is also for distinguishing the idea and image of nation, state, authority, history and heritage value from the other matters. The artist's individual skill, craftsmanship, concept and signature style became secondary in this replicated monumental statue. It clearly reflects the difference between the disciplinary practice of art and the popular image representation culture. The notion of detailing in art or realistic art is not same as the realism in the popular representation culture. For the artist Ramkinkar such paint over the statue probably was something extra and insignificant to portray the image of the icon. But for the representations in popular culture that is very essential. The paint over the statue erases all the authorship of the artist and brings it into the



authorship of the state. It is no more an artwork of the artist but it is now a property of the state.

There are also statues of Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose placed in public sites of Guwahati. A statue of Nehru is placed in the Nehru Park, near Kachari or the High Court (see figure 2). The composition of the statue depicts 'Nehru adoring children of North East.' Here the first Prime Minister Nehru is represented as a fatherly figure. The propaganda of popularizing solidarity, nationhood and building relationship between the central state power and the periphery is reflected through the statue to elaborate that, the statue becomes representative of the Congress party. The statue has a historical backdrop and a popular myth about Nehru's affection to children. In 1951 and 1952, Prime Minister Nehru visited Assam. At that time, in Naga Hills, which were part of Assam, the political movement demanding independence and separate sovereign state from India started rising up. Against those separatist movements, various measures had been taken by the Government of India to negotiate with the issue. In fact, some of the measures were very violent and impact of those measures in public sphere was not at all suitable for establishment of democracy. Later through this kind of representations through art object there was the attempt to give a message encouraging unity, solidarity, nationhood to the people of North East. Where the statues of Gandhi and Subhash Chandra Bose represent the pre-independence political movements in India, the statue of Jawaharlal Nehru represents the post-independence situation in North East India. The Nehru Park was inaugurated by the CM of Assam on 12th June, 2004. In post-independence Assam, in memory of the local martyrs of the independence movement, many statues, memorials were installed in public places of different



districts. Surprisingly such martyr's memorials are very rare in Guwahati. There is one martyr related memorial in Jalukbari in memory of the eight freedom-fighters of Assam (see figure 3). Those martyrs were Kanaklata Barua, Kushal Konwar, Maniram Dewan, Piyoli Barua, Kamala Miri, Bhugeswari Phukanani, Piyoli Phukan and Gamdhar Konwar. The memorial was unveiled by the Chief Minister of Assam on 12th February, 2011. The memorial was made by artist Biren Singha. The structure of the memorial is composed of three horizontally parallel parts and those are attached to a rectangular pillar made of stone pieces. The middle part of the memorial contains reliefs of the busts of the martyrs. Below each of the portraits their names, date of birth and death are mentioned in a separate plate. On the top there is a relief illustrating a scene of revolt against the British authority. Both top and middle section is made of fibre-glass resin. In the relief work of the middle, each of the portraits is emerging from the background which resembles a hill. The reference of the famous Mount Rushmore National Memorial of USA can be traced in the depicted image. But here it is the martyrs' memorial.

Martyrs' Memorial of All Assam Student Union at Guwahati

The Nehru Park also contains a martyr's memorial erected by Guwahati Student Union and All Assam Student Union (see figure 4). The memorial represents three movements of Students Union, the movement of 1972, Assam Agitation and the movement of 1974 (Khadya Andolon). The pedestal of the memorial contains quotations of Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Bhupen Hazarika and Bishnu Prasad Rabha which are mentioned as words of martyrology. Those quotations are taken from the poems and songs of those three legendary figures originally written in different time and context but reused here for another context.



Those quotations are charged with nationalistic sentiments, which were to motivate the Assamese youths in the movements. The memorial is composed of three tall steel pillars in wave pattern and figures of two butterflies and leafs at the bottom of those pillars. The wavy pillars resemble smoke or fire. So the memorial is composed of metaphors and symbols. Around the memorial a small pond has been dug out and there is electric light arrangement for its display in night.

There is another martyrs' memorial constructed in Chandmari, as homage to the martyrs and protestors of All Assam Student Union's protest against the state on 23rd April, 1980. It was called 'Assam Agitation' (1979-85) which was to claim the aboriginal people's right on the revenue of oil, to solve the issue of immigration and issues of aboriginal people's life conditions. This memorial is an abstract structure made of black marble plates and designed with rectangular cube like blocks. It has two rectangular blocks aligned to each other diagonally. On top of the blocks two irregular shaped objects are fixed. Those irregular shaped objects represent the crude oil. On the surface of the memorial, the slogan of the movement which became a legend in Assam is mentioned. That is "Tez dim, Tel nidiu", which means, [we will give our blood but not the oil]. The text is written in golden colour. The emblem of the AASU is attached to the memorial. On the top block footprints are printed on the surface. Then there is a note declaring that 'in the memory of Assam Agitation, the memorial is dedicated to the martyrs.' In Assam such memorials are placed in many places. While the memorial of freedom-fighters and cultural icons are realistic statues, most of the martyr memorial of Assam Agitation lead by AASU are abstract and symbolic objects.



Statues of cultural icons at Guwahati

Except the Vaishnava saints of 15th century, the cultural icons of Assam are mostly from 19th to early 21st century. Laksminath Bezbarua, Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Bishnu Prasad Rabha, Phani Sharma all of them were pioneers of modern Assamese literature, drama and music. Jyoti Prasad as a pioneer in modern Assamese music, theatre and cinema turned into a cultural icon of the Assamese culture. He was a nationalist in his early artist career and later he became an active member of communist movement. Jyoti Prasad, Bishnu Rabha and Phani Sharma were associated with IPTA activities. Another popular figure Bhupen Hazarika emerged from the same school. Today these icons are remembered as artists but not as activists of leftist political ideology.

The statues of the trio Bishnu Prasad Rabha, Jyoti Prasad Agarwala and Phani Sharma are installed together in front of the building of Directorate of Library Service, Guwhati (see figure 5). The memorial of the trio is made with fibre-glass resin. The statues are facing the street and people can see them passing by the road. The figures do not have any specific gesture but it seems that they are walking and discussing as if they are unaware of the surrounding. The statues are free-standing and not connected to each other. All the statues are in the same horizontal line. With a flat background provided by the building of Directorate of Library Service, the composition appears more as picture with single dimension rather than sculpture. Or simply they are supposed to be viewed from the front. There is also a fountain in front of the statues with light projection system. Like most of such statues of icons, these statues were built under the patronage of the Government of Assam. The script below the statue declares that, the memorial was proposed by the president of Assam Sahitya Sabha,



Kanakshen Deka and constructed by the Government of Assam. The statue was inaugurated by the Chief Minister of Assam Tarun Gogoi in presence of other ministers, on 10th February, 2011. In the script of the pedestal, the three icons are entitled with honorifics such as Kalaguru, Rupkonwar and Natosurjyo respectively. Opposite to the Directorate of Library Service building there is a historical site called Dighaoli Pukhuri, which is now changed to a park. In the park facing the road, two statues were installed. One is the statue of Radha Govinda Barua (1900-1977) and other is the statue of Bhupen Hazarika (1926-2011). The effigy of Bhupen Hazarika was installed when he was alive. He himself inaugurated the statue. The statue was installed in 2009 and he died on 5th November, 2011. However, this monumental statue was constructed under patronage of All Assam Students' Union, Assam Unnati Sabha and Assam Sena. The emblem of AASU is attached on the pedestal. Bhupen Hazarika was a popular singer and a large number of his songs were motivated by socialist ideology. He was an active member of IPTA. Also Dr. Hazarika was one of those artists who popularized traditional folk songs of Assam. This statue of him was made by sculptor Biren Singha. The whole statue along with its pedestal is placed on a platform and it is a fibre-glass statue. The figure is not proportionate, with a heavy and bigger upper portion of the body. Below the pedestal in both left and right side there were two objects with abstract form. It is not very clear that for what reason artist has placed those there. Besides the portrait, the whole body of the statue contains not any gestural meaning. Especially position of hands, feet are there just only to depict a full figure. In case of the statues of Radha Govinda, Bishnu Rabha, Jyoti Prasad, Phani Sharma too, the bodily gesture-postures do not contain any specific meaning. Whereas in case of the statues of martyrs, freedom- fighters and war-heroes, the bodily gestures become essential to produce symbolic meaning and also to



represent the specific moment of the history.

The statues of the native war heroes at Guwahati

In imagination of the war-heroes there is a great influence from Assamese literature. Especially Assamese plays, poetry and stories have played a very significant role to portray the characters as legend. The statues of Lachit Barphukan, Bir Chilarai are of such category. In Guwahati there are two statues of Lachit Barphukan are installed. One is placed in Jalukbari and other one is installed in the middle of the river Brahmaputra. Lachit Barphukan was Ahom General in the Saraighat war (1669-1671) against Mughal army sent by Aurangzeb. Under his command the mighty Mughal army was defeated and Guwahati was regained by the Ahoms. So, that victory made Lachit Barphukan a legend. The story became popular through many historical story books, novels, poems etc. The play Chakradhwaj Singha (1915) which was written by Laksminath Bezbarua and a book titled as Lachit Barphukan (1971) which is a history based life-sketch of the legend, written by Suryakumar Bhuyan are some remarkable literature among those books.

The statue of Lachit placed in Jalukbari is composed with other three statues of Ahom soldiers. The statue was inaugurated by former Chief Minister Prafulla Kuma Mahanta in 16th January, 1989. In that time the political party Assam Gana Parisad was in government (from December, 1985 to November, 1990). Notably most of the leaders of the party were former leaders of All Assam Student Union and campaigners of Assam Agitation. However the composition of the monument depicts Lachit Barphukan commanding the soldiers to the battle. It is an imaginary depiction of a moment of the battle. Here the hands of the



commander are raised up and stretched; he is holding a sword in his right hand and his eyes are fixed at a distant point. A soldier in his right side is holding a flag and blowing a horn. In his left there are two soldiers in different forward moving postures. One of them is with a pair of sword and shield and other one is about to fire the cannon placed near his feet. All the figures are depicted with kurta-pajama. The costume of the Ahom commander is more fictional than historical. The crown, body armour and the sword of the commander are such marks of the fictional representation. The whole composition is placed on a high pedestal. On the pedestal a legendary quotation “Deshotkoi Mumai Dangor Nahoi” [Uncle is not greater than the country] is inscribed in golden letters. It is popularly believed that it was said by Lachit Barphukan when he killed his own uncle for disobeying his order at the war against the Mughal army. The quotation was first used in Laksminath Bezbarua’s play Chakradhwaj Singha and then kept appearing in all kind of literature works on the legend. There are also texts and a relief work added to the pedestal, which narrate the legend of the Saraighat war.

There is a new statue of Lachit Barphukan installed in the middle of the river Brahmaputra near Machkhowa, in Guwahati, which was inaugurated by the Chief Minister of Assam on 31st January, 2016 (see figure 6). This 35 feet high bronze statue of Lachit is the tallest statue in Assam. There are also eight fibre-glass figures of soldiers (18 feet high) and two cannons (32 feet long) lying on the pedestal. The pedestal (of size 12 X 12 X 1.5 X 8.5 meters) is 5 meters above the High Flood Level (HFL). The monument was constructed by the sculptor Biren Singha. The project was done under the supervision of Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC). Since it has been constructed the statue invited a lot of controversy. Even though for ATDC it was installed with the aim of city beautification and



tourism development, but the nationalist and provincialist intentions behind the installation cannot be overlooked. Some people questioned the authenticity of the statue and some questioned the direction of the statue. There is always a debate on the image and attire of the historical figures. There is also demand to represent them authentically with reference from history. The direction of the statue appeared very controversial as it is facing the city.

According to some people it should be positioned in the North West direction, facing to the downstream of the river, because the Mughal army attacked from that direction. However, the composition of the statue may indicate to influence the popular cinema posters. Generally in a movie where a war hero holds the centrality of the narration, the movie poster is composed by keeping an enlarged or highlighted image of the hero in the centre. Images of other supporting characters are placed surrounding the hero. Here in this composition the statue of Lachit is placed in the centre. It is bigger in size than the other figures. The statue is holding a Hengdang (Ahom sword with long handle and blade) in the right hand and the left hand is pointing towards the front. According to history, the war of Saraighat in 1671 was fought in the river Brahmaputra and so the statue represents that moment of war. There is violence in the expression given to the face. The neck is overly exaggerated with veins. The other figures are too in various postures. From their right side, we can find that the artist depicted the war scene with these postures- two soldiers are trying to fire a cannon, one soldier, with a hand above his eyes, is watching the enemies and other soldiers who are with swords and spear are about to attack. Representation of Lachit Barphukan as a national hero, symbol of pride or icon of the Assamese becomes a good example of ultra-provincialism in contemporary Assam. It was also about essentialism through which the contemporary Assamese nation is trying to claim its singularity.



Apart from Lachit Barphukan, Bir Chilarai is another legend adopted from history.

The statue of Lachit represents the Ahom-Assamese community, whereas the statues of Bir Chilarai represents the glory of Koch-Assamese community. Chilarai (1510-1571) was general of Kamata Kingdom which was ruled by his brother king Nara Narayan. Shuklashwaj was Chilarai's actual name. According to the legend, he was rapid like a kite (chila) and so he was known as Chilarai. The general Chilarai attacked neighboring states to expand his brother's Koch Empire. In the 16th century, with the power of Chilarai, Kamata kingdom became very powerful state in the region. Chilarai attacked Bhutia, Kachari, Ahoms, Manipuri states and tried to bring them under Koch kingdom. Nara Narayan and Chilarai had rebuilt the Kamakhya temple in 1565. The statue of the legendary Chilarai was installed in North Guwahati. The statue is placed on a high pedestal. Like many statues of war-heroes around the world, here too, the figure is riding a horse. It is an equestrian statue which reminds us of the painting titled as Napoleon Bonaparte crossing the Alps (1801-1805) by the artist Jacques Louis David. All over the world it has been a popular posture that is used to adorn the icon with heroic grace. Chilarai statues are installed in many places of Assam under the patronage of the Government of Assam and some nationalist political parties. Apart from the government, for the political parties such as the All Koch-Rajbongshi Students Union (AKRSU) and Assam Jatiyatabadi Yuba Satra Parisad, AASU, the installing statues of Chilarai and Lachit have become their agenda to place their voice in identity politics. In the name of both the legends there are two localities in Guwahati. These localities are Chilarai Nagar and Lachit Nagar. There are also two official holidays allotted in the name of the two legends Lachit Divas and Chilarai Divas. In Chilarai Nagar, a bust of the legend was



installed, which was inaugurated by the minister of State Cultural Affairs in 3rd February, 2015 on the occasion of Chilarai Divas.

Representation of ethnic cultural practice in Guwahati

Not only icons or legends but there are also many sculptures which represent the ethnic cultural identities of Assam. Such representations are found in Nehru Park, Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakheta and the Assam State Museum. However, the sculptural representation of the cultural heritages is one such medium through which distinct identity of Assamese is projected in the public sphere by manifesting particular elements and essential characteristics. The Nehru Park was named after the former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. The park was inaugurated by the Chief Minister of Assam on 12th June, 2004. The park contains effigies, sculptures, National emblem pillar etc. The park is maintained by Guwahati Municipal Development Authority. In the Nehru Park apart from the effigy of Nehru, which is discussed before, there are sculptures depicting the indigenous cultural practices, such as Bihu dance, Jhumur dance, Satriya dance, Deodhani dance, Ojapali dance, Bhor-taal dance, Bagurumba dance, Mising Bihu dance, Jikir, Deori Dance etc (see figure 7). The park appears as archive of sculptural representations of the essential cultural heritages of Assam. The approach is demonstrative and educative as they introduce the varieties to the viewer. As the park is surrounded by many educational institutions, so a large number of the regular visitors are students.

The sculptures are made with mostly fibre-glass. In the representation of each distinct cultural dance form basically the essential gestures-postures, ethnic attire, musical



instruments are depicted. There occurs encoding of identity marks of the community in each representation and so these appear as sign and symbol of those tribes and races. This is the spectacle of the provincial- sub-nationalism.

All the compositions in different groups display separate categories, specific cultural identities. Those are to promote cultural identities and ethnic identity, to educate the young generation especially children about their indigenous cultural heritage, to display the cultural heritage before the foreigners, and to encourage the patriotic feelings towards the nation.

There is another institution Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra where such outdoor works are displayed for the same purpose. The Kalakshetra is situated in Panjabari. It is a non-profit cultural organization which was part of the Assam Accord 1985 under the clause VI. The initiative to establish the Kalakshetra started in 1986 and it was inaugurated by the President of India K.R. Narayanan in 9th November, 1998. The Kalakshetra is working in the field of indigenous art and culture with the aims of preservation, demonstration and representation of the cultural practices. There is also a park with many sculptural representations of indigenous cultural items.

Those objects explain the essentialist practice where image of the nation is constructed with materials of culture. In post 1970's Assam, the concern of the government and non government organizations were limited to only homogenizing the idea of Assamese identity and in launching cultural representation projects with some limited methods.



Few current issues of the art objects in public spaces of Guwahati

Undoubtedly, the statues are used as publicity image of political organizations. From the above mentioned data, it is very clear that in Guwahati, the contemporary statue and memorial installing practice after 1970s occurred basically under patronization of the two kinds of institutions of the same political discourse. One is the Government of Assam and other is the opposition parties or the political organizations like AASU, AKRSU, AGSU, Assam Sena, Assam Unnati Sabha etc. From 24th December 1985 up to 2016, mainly two parties- Assam Gana Parisad and Indian National Congress (INC) formed the Government of Assam alternatively one after other for 7 times. The timeline also includes the President's rule for 7 months from 28 December, 1990 to 30 June, 1991. So the ownership of these statues belonged to only these political institutions. So actually the statues symbolize not the icons but the political concern of representing singular provincial and racial identity.

In Guwahati apart from the political parties, the institutions like Guwhati Municipal Development Authority, Assam Tourism Development Corporation, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, University and Colleges are involved in installation of memorials and statues in public spaces. But these institutions are not independent from the supervision and patronage of Government. Hence these institutions, by taking part in installation and maintenance of the public art objects, assist in such government initiatives. In the last term of Congress Government, lot of such projects were considered. Some of them are still in progress to be published. Those are statues of Chaulung-Su-Ka-Pha (the first Ahom King, 1228-1268), Ambikagiri Rai Choudhury (nationalist, poet, and writer), Hem Barua, Lakshminath Bezbarua, and Mahatma Gandhi etc.



To represent a historical icon realistically a reference or model is required. But without those the representation is always the subject of imagination of the artist. And in that case, often that imagined image and representation becomes the subject of debate. In case of this statue which is not yet installed, those issues may appear in the public sphere. However, in case of the statues of Lachit Barphukan, Bir Chilarai the same issue of representation appeared. Even though statues of Kanaklata, Kushal Kunwar are popular in public sphere, but in portraying them too a lot of ambiguity can be noticed. The availability of photograph (which is considered as certificate of authenticity in the modern world) of those freedom fighters are very rare today. So there are different portraits of Kanaklata available in Assam. However in such cases, the portraits are supported with certain posture, attire and name-plate to depict the image. So, in the statue of Kushal Kunwar in Nehru Park the posture with a flag in hand, the typical Gandhian attire of freedom movement are used to depict the image.

The issue of protecting the historicity of a site appeared when in the northern bank of the historic Dighali Pukhuri, an NGO started construction of a space for installation of a war memorial. A civil society group formed by activists and intellectuals including the writer-professor Dr. Hiren Gohain objected the project and filled a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in Guwahati High Court. The objection was on the issues of harming the ecology and historic value of the site by installing the war memorial. But the court has dismissed the objection. On the issue Hiren Gohain said, “We do not want any distortion of the natural and aesthetic grandeur of the historic water body through any kind of concrete construction.” The war memorial will include sculptures illustrating the battle of Saraighat, statues of the Ahom soldiers, Lachit Barphukan, an symbolic monument of Amar Jawan Jyoti, statue of a



uniformed soldier of Indian army with his rifle reverse arm salute, murals, a old Vijayanta Tank and a MiG24 aircraft etc. When the intellectual groups raised their objection then organizations like Patriotic People's Front Assam and All Assam Ex-Servicemen's Association urged the government to expedite the war memorial. This issue has not been settled yet. But from all the examples placed above it is clear that after seeing an episode of Assamese nationalism in turmoil situation of 1970s and 1980s, the 'contemporary' identity consciousness is more engaged in representations of historical glory in order to re-'member' and re-present those ideological manifestations of 1970s. So the installations symbolize the national identity issues of the state. In Assam, there are many diverse ethnic communities with their sub communities coexisting together. There are also different historical and cultural practices found in each community. But, any memorial or statues which represent those communities are very rare in the central city of Assam- Guwahati. Such memorials which represent the historical incidents of an ethnic community can be only found in their own localities. So we can see that statues and memorial indirectly encourage marginalization of the others and in the process of establishing nation those carry marks of hegemony and homogenization. If we make a comparative analysis between the present-day public statues and the public statues of British period then there are not too many changes that will be found. Only the people in the power have changed along with their emblems. Or one may find a shift from the imperial marble statues to the fibre-glass or cement statues of today. Other than that, there is not very much change noticed in this colonial custom of installing statues and memorials in public spaces of a city.



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