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The Contemporary Relevance of the Principles, Values, and Ideals that Shaped Assam's Freedom Movement

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Abstract

This article explains the connection between the vision that inspired India's freedom and what is recognized today as essential values and principles for making freedom, justice, self-determination, and peace possible.

The article focuses on the discourse of Assam's movement as a methodology for determining the principles that shaped the movement and developing a theoretical framework on the movement. This is compared with what is celebrated today as essential principles of human rights, justice, sustainability, and self-determination.

Assam contributed an integrative approach to freedom and self-determination that, although met with resistance, is now regarded as a state-of-the-art model for realizing the goals that human social action aims to achieve.

The article not only stresses the principles, values, and ideals of the freedom movement but indicates their relevance for shaping the future and as a unifying force. It also explains a state-of-the-art means for fully realizing the future envisioned by the movement.

The article adds to the historical analysis of the freedom movement by indicating its contribution to a new discourse on social, cultural, and sustainable development.

Keywords: Self-determination, decolonization, immigration, socio-cultural value, social progress, freedom.

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Right forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne. Yet it is that scaffold that shapes and guides our future (Lowell 2016).

1. Introduction

The region north of the Brahmaputra River in Assam was historically characterized as a composite of liberal cultural groups that embraced living in a pluralistic society (Mahanta, 2021, p. 11). This composite of liberal cultural groups is recognized for initiating some of the earliest phases of India's freedom movement and, in particular, for its stance on the principles, values, and ideals that the movement stood for. In fact, a social movement advocating living in accordance with Assamese cultural values and traditions dates back to the early 1800s. The movement was inspired by the desire (i.e., hope, vision, and/or conviction) to live in accordance with values that are deeply rooted in the heritage, identity, and traditions of Assamese people. Thus, the freedom movement started with peaceful protests and organized efforts to uphold the dignity and morals of the people and cultural groups of the region. As the movement progressed it was characterized as a *Satyagraha* against what would have a debilitating effect on the people and society. In other words, the freedom movement began as an effort to protect the pride that the cultural groups had in their identity and heritage, which was increasingly threatened with erosion by various disruptive forces (Mahanta, 2021, pp. 14-18). The earliest stages of the Assamese freedom movement generated participation from a wide section of society that felt a sense of common purpose, shared values, and a common goal.

What initially was a consciousness-raising movement (i.e., the rise of an inclusive nationalism based on Assamese cultural values and principles) gradually gained momentum as it evolved into agrarian uprisings that occurred in different parts of Assam in protest of the oppressive policies of the colonial government. In fact, it is interesting to note that the resentment was heightened by the British approach to the social and economic development of the region. The British were responsible for introducing a colonial system that distinguished people based on their ability to monetize their assets, which widened social and economic inequity by creating two sections of society: those who are privileged enough to participate in the newly established socio-economic regime and those who fell out of favor with the monetary elite thus were regarded as underprivileged. In addition, the British allocated land (that would otherwise be used by the local people for their subsistence) for their tea plantations, and they tried to meet their revenue demand by requiring increased tax from the local people. Although the region established some of the British empire's most profitable tea plantations, the wealth produced was not evident in improving the social and economic conditions of the region (i.e., the people of Assam were stigmatized as being tribal and backward). In addition, because the local population resented the working conditions on the plantations migrants were brought in as a workforce. The increase in migrants resulted in the local people feeling inundated by the impact of foreigners in Assam.

Finally, there was, as well, the fact of British pride (i.e., a sense of superiority), which was connected with their strong belief in Neo-Darwinism, which inclined emphasizing the idea that Western European countries represented the apex of evolutionary development to which the underdeveloped and developing countries should adapt. The feeling of being made to feel like a second-class citizen in their own homeland led to the rise of a movement that encompassed all segments of Assamese society. The movement became more resistant with the realization that they were becoming increasingly marginalized in their own homeland. Thus, what started out as a movement to protect the dignity of the local people gave birth to a more progressive and futuristic political consciousness (Guha, 1989, p. 90). This progressive and futuristic vision was based on the intention to uphold the rights of the people and cultural groups in the region. Thus, the movement ultimately attracted women, youth/students, peasants, workers, and the Adivasi.

Although the movement met with opposition, what they fought against (e.g., colonial exploitation and oppression, a lack of a fair distribution of the wealth generated from the local natural resources, and sectarianism) came to be recognized by the most progressive social and political leaders of the time as taking steps to eliminate what had been holding society back from achieving a more just socio-political order. However, equally important is what they were fighting for, e.g., a participatory approach to governance, the rule of law, a pluralistic society, the realization of the goal that social action aims to achieve, and democracy. They were fighting to realize an approach to development that is inclusive of cultural heritage, values, and identity, and for the right to self-determination. Although the freedom pioneers were met with opposition (and in many cases, violent opposition), they are now recognized as having taken the moral high ground, which continues to be regarded as a vision of social progress that is consistent with current state-of-the-art ethical, political, social, and environmental ideals. The ideals they stood for are widely embraced today because they reflect, for example, what the world community aspires to in terms proposed by the Global Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Sustainability Goals, the statement in the United Nations Charter declaring the right to self-determination, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

This article argues that understanding the nature of those principles and values, their significance to cultural heritage and identity, and their role in creating a better future is the best way to show respect for the goals and ideals that the movement stood for. That is to say, to honor the movement in our lives today, we should ourselves continue to promote those principles and values, and we should devote our lives to making them the basis of how we live, how we interact with each other, and the basis of how we work together to shape our future. This article provides an explanation of the principles, values, and ideals that inspired the vision of the freedom pioneers and guided the actions of the movement in ways that contributed to the independence of India. The article also explains the connection between the values and principles that shaped the movement and those rooted in the fabric of the culture and heritage of the peasants living in the region north of the Brahmaputra River. Finally, the article points out why those values and principles continue to be appreciated by the most progressive thinkers locally, regionally,

nationally, and internationally, thus why they continue to be recognized as essential for making peace, freedom, justice, and self-determination possible.

The following section of the article (section 2) provides a brief overview of the freedom movement, with a special emphasis on what the Assamese freedom fighters were opposed to, what they were trying to achieve, and the principles, values, and ideals that shaped the movement. Section 3 explains a viable framework for analyzing the significance of the movement. By clarifying the theoretical framework, the article transforms the principles and concepts into the foundation of a philosophical explanation of the Assamese freedom movement (i.e., *philosophy* in terms of a systematic *inquiry* into the *principles* of a field of inquiry). Although there have been and continue to be many historical accounts of Assam's contribution to India's freedom movement, there is little (or perhaps no) systematic analysis from the perspective of philosophy. Section 4 provides a summary of what we learn from a study of the movement and draws conclusions about why the values and principles underlying the movement continue to be essential for achieving natural rights, self-determination, good governance, and the goals of human social action.

2. An Overview of Principles, Values, and Vision Shaping the Assam Freedom Movement

During the time when the cultural groups in the region north of the Brahmaputra River lived under the rein of their respective kingdoms, they enjoyed living in accordance with their cultural traditions and practices; thus, they experienced contentment and meaningful fulfillment in their relationships with each other, with their authorities, and with the environment. When the colonial period began, the culture and heritage of the local people were threatened and they could not live their lives with dignity. During the time when the British ruled over India, the people of Assam were denied social, economic, and political rights. The British governed the region in an imperialistic fashion, which resulted in relegating the local people to a subordinate status in their own homeland. Even the educated and elite class of Assam was given little chance to play a role in the British administration, or even if given the opportunity, their roles were negligible. In addition, the British introduced "Changes in the agrarian structure that altered the rural society" in a way that had a disruptive impact (Baruah, 2019, p. 145). Equally disruptive, the British also allowed landless peasants to migrate from the densely populated bordering districts of Bengal (now Bangladesh) to the sparsely populated districts of Assam's Brahmaputra Valley. Thus, there was a growing feeling that the British approach to ruling the Assamese people was oppressive. This realization heightened discontent with British rule, and the local populace increasingly asserted the need for a participatory approach to governance, equal rights, and greater possibilities for self-determination. Thus, the initial phase of the movement involved a process of reconstructing a sense of identity.

The peasants of the region north of the Brahmaputra River were among the first to address the grievances in the form of a series of agrarian movements. The initial movements of the region were inspired by a rallying cry for Satyagrahi/Satyagraha, "Uphold what is personally and socially uplifting, and you will get Swaraj" (i.e., *self-governance or self-rule*). In other words, the movement

arose from a conviction deep-rooted in the Indian worldview, that there is a connection between Satya (truth, authenticity, connecting with the inner self, or self-realization) and liberation (Upanishads, 1950, p. 461). A basic assertion of India's reformers was that Satyam awakens the individual to a type of knowledge that impels right thought, which is followed by right action. It is in this respect that Satyam inclines individuals to act in ways that are in their best interest (i.e., to act in ways that enable them to experience their highest good). They shared the belief that "Truth of thought creates truth of vision and truth of vision forms in us truth of being, and out of truth of being (Satyam) flows naturally truth of emotion, will, and action. This is indeed the central notion of the Veda" (Sri Aurobindo, 1998, p. 100). There was a belief in the claim deeply-rooted in Indian tradition that the gateway to freedom is through the cultivation of the self, one's whole being (e.g., body, mind, and spirit). In addition to the conviction to live a life of integrity (i.e., truth and sincerity), in the Assam context, Satyagrahi/Satyagraha meant a refusal to do anything that would have a debilitating effect on the person or society.

This stage of the movement was based on the conviction that there are principles and values rooted in the culture, the traditional practices of the local people, and their cultural worldview that should be revived. In other words, the initial phase of the movement reflected the values and modeled the types of social relations that the freedom fighters envisioned they could draw from their past to shape future socio-political relations. In fact, the most outstanding pioneers of the movement were referred to as "Architects of the Future" (*bhabikalarkhanikar*) (Gohain, 2003). The initial freedom fighters organized themselves in the form of *mels* (i.e., open and participatory public communal meetings), which were a time-honored institution and a recognized feature of the social life of the local people. In this respect, the *mels* reflected a progressive approach to relating to other members of society, addressing officials regarding important social matters, addressing and dealing with injustice, and an approach to resolving pressing social and economic issues. Eventually, the convictions and ideals of the peasant movement began to impress the literary class, students, and regional landowners. Together, they organized to regain the freedoms that were denied them by British rule in their own homeland.

Subsequently, the *mels* were expanded to the point of ultimately being composed of people from different ethnic groups, levels of status, and religious persuasions. The enlarged structure of the movement was organized into *Raij-mels* (i.e., peaceful people's meetings, assemblies, or conventions) where the literary class and the landowners played a greater role in expressing the concerns of the peasants, spearheading what became known as the *Rayat Sabhas* movement (a movement aimed at asserting the significance and necessity of human rights and, as well, the *welfare of all human beings*). Through the activities of the *Raij-mel*, the pioneers of the freedom movement tried to fulfill the aspirations of the masses, safeguard the cultural heritage and values of the region, and realize better social and economic conditions. Among the members of the *Raij-mel* movement, three notable socio-political organizations made major contributions to the larger movement: the Sarbajanik Sabha, The Assam Association, and Chatra Sanmilian.

The villagers of Assam envisioned a revival of their time-honored tradition of Panchayat. Panchayat meant decentralized planning, participatory governance, local self-government, and

village-level development institutions based on the philosophy of self-reliance, which were important ideals embodied in Assam's freedom movement. The Panchayat approach to socio-political activity was intended to bridge the gap between the government and the people by implementing a strategy for good governance. In other words, the gap between government and civil society would be bridged by establishing active and participatory governance processes. This was based on a model of socio-political activity that is closer to the people, ensures that the decision-makers are more effectively accountable to the governed, increases local vigilance, and decreases corruption. The concept of the traditional village Panchayat formed an integral part of the movement for freedom and was emphasized as a means for developing vibrant instruments of self-governance and for empowering the people (Sarma, 2015, p. 63). The Assamese tradition of Panchayat was revived as a means to an end. The end value was the cultivation of the *capabilities* of individuals as a means of empowering them to realize desired *functioning* and, in doing so, participate freely in socio-political affairs in the larger society.

The movement united people because it was inspired by a very positive vision and ideals, because it was based on convictions and beliefs that were dear to the hearts of the local people, and because they all shared a passion for freedom, liberation, and independence. It was in this way that a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic community (made up of people of various cultural groups, ethnicities, classes, and levels of status) became a cohesive political body that was organized with Assamese nationalism as the core element of their unity (Deka, 2005, p. 190). They were also bound together by the vision of achieving an improved quality of life by integrating human, social, and sustainable development with good governance. That is to say, they realized that there was a basic flaw in the British approach to governance and development thus the British approach was not sustainable. The local people recognized that there was something fundamentally wrong with the assumptions about progress based solely on a materialistic approach to economic development while disregarding human and social development and higher order human values. Thus, they were motivated by a rallying cry that inspired the movement, "Not mass production, but production by the masses" – as was emphasized in the Swadeshi Movement. This meant that there was an emphasis on the "value in use" perspective of economic value theory (i.e., individuals, social groups, and village cultural groups should play a role in deciding what has value for them, their community, and their society).

3. Developing Philosophical Perspective on the Freedom Movement

The philosophy of a field of inquiry discloses knowledge about a phenomenon, its principles, and its presuppositions. Philosophy is a systemized study that allows us to better understand and explain the general aspects and features of a phenomenon. Thus, "An explanation of the fundamental principles upon which a field of inquiry is grounded is described as the philosophy of that field of study (e.g., the fundamental principles of law are described as the Philosophy of Law, and those of medicine are described as the Philosophy of Medicine)" (Miller, 2022, p. 189). However, although the notion of a philosophy is central to every field of inquiry, the development and use of a philosophical perspective may be the least understood aspect of a field of study (Lester, 2005, p. 458). Because the concepts freedom, independence, and liberty are among the

highest values of a people, culture, and society (i.e., because those values are believed to characterize the very essence of human and social existence), the principles associated with freedom and the factors that make independence and liberty possible should be subject to more in-depth analysis. In addition, a philosophical analysis of the freedom movement not only explains the significance that the values, principles, vision, and ideals have for winning independence but, as well, the role they play as a unifying force that has the power to bind a diverse population together into a single collective aim.

The Philosophy of Science and the Philosophy of Social Science both agree that all systems operate on the basis of certain principles. In this respect, the philosophy of a field of inquiry can prescribe the principles that ensure that a particular system operates at its highest level of efficiency and effectiveness. Social systems are the same in that, according to both classical and contemporary socio-political philosophy, adherence to certain principles is necessary for realizing the goals that human social action aims to achieve (e.g., social harmony, stability, order, coherence, solidarity, prosperity, social justice, and sustainable peace). Thus, the principles stress that social action is aimed at structuring or ordering a social system in such a way that there is an improvement in the quality of life and an elevation of both human and social existence. In this respect, the principles explain the norms that establish and justify societies, determine the rights and responsibilities of a society, and how to apply the principles in ways that ensure social justice, human rights, and liberty. Therefore, all social action is “In itself a directedness towards knowledge of the good: of the good life, or the good society” (Strauss, 1957, p. 343). The philosophical analysis undertaken in this section of the article provides the groundwork for such knowledge. Thus, this section of the article explains the philosophical perspectives on the concept freedom that inspired and guided the Assam freedom movement. In doing so, this section clarifies the principles that ultimately act as factors for making freedom, social justice, social harmony, and sustainable peace a social reality.

The concept of freedom is deeply rooted in Indian philosophical and spiritual traditions. Freedom, in the traditional Indian worldview, is an ultimate life goal or value. “Freedom is the one goal of all nature, sentient or insentient; and consciously or unconsciously, everything is striving toward that goal” (Vivekananda, 1965, p. 108). The pre-independence reformers agreed with the fundamental claim of ancient and classical Indian social theory and philosophy that the goals of human action (i.e., the elevation of the human experience, in terms of both social psychology and political economics) can be empirically proven to have an ontological basis that prompted humanity to establish culture, progress civilization, and consequently more complex multi-level social existence (i.e., a social reality that includes people still attempting to live in pristine tribal village states, those who live in complex urban settings, and the necessity to engage in multi-national social relationships). In fact, the ontological basis continues to represent the necessity of living in harmony with natural laws (i.e., living in harmony with what is ordained by the forces that shape the nature of existence).

By reviewing the principles and ideals of the Assam movement, which inspired a unifying force, we “Better understand how to transcend the phenomenon of India's persistent dilemma of micro-

nationalist politics that from time to time seems to be fundamentally at odds with India's macro-nationalist project” (Baruah, 1994, p. 649). The Assam movement was based on the principle of equal respect for each of the myriad communities of Assam and that each could find its identity reflected in the greater collective of an Assamese cultural identity, which was committed to each community having the same dignity. Thus, Assamese society was envisioned as an all-encompassing socio-cultural system in which all members are a part of a greater collective in which all the communities would have the same rights.

The pioneers who sparked the movement regarded themselves as “the children of the soil of the land”. In fact, it was this identity consciousness (which was hurt by the socio-political, caste, and colonial factors that then dominated) that sparked a latent identity-consciousness movement directed towards self-determination, social justice, and equal rights. Consequently, the initial stages of the Assam freedom movement were influenced by conceptualizations of the meaning of identity (vis-à-vis people and community) and the relationship between people and community, how to determine and manage the right to inclusion into the community and/or exclusion, the relationship between their environmental surroundings and their sense of identity, and the relationship between their traditional approach to subsistence horticulture and the ethos of their lifestyle. The extent of diversity, in terms of ethnicity, culture, language, caste, class, religion, etc., which was exasperated by migrants, made the question of community, inclusion, and exclusion extremely important to the freedom movement. However, the common plight of not only the tribal groups of the region but, as well, of the other segments of the Assam community, sparked a heightened awareness of the politics of human rights, the relationship between the rights of the individual and the common good, and the fact that freedom would necessarily mean improving the socio-political conditions for all the people of Assam. The notion of the oneness of Assamese peoples was conceived of at this point, or it emerged as an effort to fuse the peasant identity with that of Assamese nationalism (Sengupta, 2016, pp. 183-195 for a comprehensive analysis of how the Assamese sense of identity evolved into the sense of a composite unity – people held together by a shared goal based on common values).

Thus, the basis of the Assamese perspective on community during the initial stages of the freedom movement can be defined in terms of the social contract theory, which explains the relationship between what is in the best interest of the individual compared to what is in the best interest of society. However, because of the nature of peasant culture during the period of the initial stages of the Assam freedom movement, individuals began to think and act on the basis of the principle that to protect and promote what is in their best interest, they must promote and support the common good. The notion of the common good during the freedom struggle transcended concerns with caste, ethnicity, and class by focusing on the shared vision of living in accordance with what would elevate both individual and social existence.

The pursuit of the common good led the people of Assam to ask a crucial question: how does our shared commitment to realizing the socio-political goals that the Assam freedom movement aims to achieve influence what it means for me to act in a way that is in my best interest? The answer was that it is in my best interest to promote, uphold, and protect the rights of all people regardless

of class, caste, ethnicity, language, or gender. Thus, the shared value and common goal resulted in a sense of community that was very inclusive. This principle was manifest in the Assam freedom movement in the form of the founding of Jorhat Sarvajanik Sabha. The meaning of this aspect of the movement can be understood by translating the term *sarvajanik*: for all the people, of the people, and by the people, which was stated as a principle that they desired to enact as their social reality. It was by initiating social action on the basis of such principles that the sense of a people united emerged or, in other words that the power of a people united was generated and put into action.

Human freedom is generally regarded as having two dimensions: external and internal. External freedom includes political freedom and social freedom. Internal freedom includes intellectual freedom, moral freedom, and spiritual freedom. *Freedom in an external sense, in terms of the Assam movement, was influenced by the philosophical assertions of one of its pioneers, Joytiprasad Agarwala. He asserted that the movement involved engaging in the type of social, political, and economic activities that would contribute to co-creating "xundarar prithivi" (i.e., a beautiful world). This was an idealistic view of social relations, community, social formation, beauty, and eco-aesthetics based on the practical and realistic principle that justice is achieved by means of co-creating social reality. From this perspective, the co-creation of reality is one of the most important features of social life and of socio-political philosophy. In fact, freedom based on cooperating to co-create social reality is one of the ideals of political philosophy and a fundamental goal that human social action aims to achieve. In other words, external freedom involves engaging and relating to each other in such a way as to minimize oppression, coercion, tyranny, dominance, and dictatorship. It can also be defined positively as creating a society in which individuals can develop their full potential and realize the functionings that allow them to live a rewarding, fulfilling, and satisfying lifestyle with dignity (Sen, 1999, pp. 10 & 25).*

Equally important to the external commitment to freedom is the influence that concerns about eco-justice and conservation had on the movement, which historians of Assam stress is typically under analyzed although it clearly played a role in what acted as a force that united several segments of society in a common cause. In terms of the way it influenced the philosophical aspect of Assam's freedom movement, eco-justice can be defined as the recognition of human emotional and psychological problems resulting from fragmentation and imbalance. The eco-justice movement gained prominence by stressing that environmental problems are consequences of humanity's social and psychological problems, thus raising environmentalism to a focal point in issues of social justice. The problem is most evident in the split between material values and higher-order human values. This split is then also evident in problems regarding social harmony, the dichotomy between the ego and authentic self, the nature-human relationship, and the disharmony in relationship to gender and class. Although the pursuit of eco-justice is celebrated today as a liberating force that contributes to raising consciousness and elevating the human experience by promoting holistic well-being and environmentalism, it is clear that concerns about eco-justice (i.e., deforestation, land erosion, and the extraction of natural, forest, and mineral resources) surfaced in the political discourse of the Assam freedom movement. The initial assertion

was that a lack of a holistic view toward existence was evident in the colonial authorities phrasing their approach to development as a “civilizing mission”, “transforming the wasteland into a commercially profitable region”, without regard for the resulting depredation of the environment of Assam (Saikia, 84, pp. 98–104; also see Saikia, 2011, pp. xiii–viv, and 1–20 for a detailed account of the conservation concerns generated by focusing on the commercial profitability of Assam’s natural resources).

The internal perspective on freedom was influenced by the pre-independence reformer’s admonition regarding the role that the concepts dharma, satya, and ahimsa play in liberation. The term dharma (i.e., *duties*, rights, laws, conduct, virtues, and the right way of living) has to do with the responsibility individuals have toward themselves to cultivate qualities that contribute to a better life and a better society. In this respect, dharma can be thought of as cultivating the best qualities in the individual as the basis for developing a society where its members enjoy the best possible quality of social life. Therefore, from the philosophical perspective of the reformers, the improvements we desire in social and economic conditions begin with the cultivation of the self. Freedom/liberation, in this sense, involves coming to understand the difference between actions stemming from both satya and ahimsa (i.e., actions stemming from a realization of the authentic self, interpenetration, and mutuality) as opposed to actions stemming from the ego. Actions stemming from satya and ahimsa unite (thus creating social harmony and sustainable peace), while actions stemming from the ego divide (resulting in social discord and conflict). From this philosophical perspective, “The way to achieve freedom/liberation is to do pure and good deeds; to have compassion for all living beings and to live truth” (Gandhi, 2005, p. 37).

The freedom fighters based their vision on the Indian philosophical claim that social and economic progress is the outcome of balancing what will enrich social existence materialistically with enriching society on the basis of higher-order human values (Mukerjee, 1942, pp. 28 & 196). They believed that imbalance results in fragmentation in the human experience, which contributed to raising attention to the need for a more theoretically and methodologically inclusive approach to development, progress, and individual and social well-being (Mukerjee, 1997, p. 68). Thus, the freedom fighters recognized that there was a problem connected with social and economic planning based on an inadequate theory of value. The prior approach did not contribute to freedom because it confused means and ends. In the colonial approach to development, the domination of nature and the application of industry and technology toward generating wealth were regarded as the end within itself not as a strategy for improving the well-being of the local people. For the rural people of Assam “Economic prosperity is no more than one of the means to enriching their lives. It is a foundational confusion to give it the status of an end. Secondly, even as a means, merely enhancing average economic opulence can be quite inefficient in the pursuit of the really valuable ends” (Sen, 1989, p. 42).

The colonial authorities showed little interest in improving the quality of life, building relationships based on equal respect, nor upholding the very liberal principles that were supposedly the basis of Western notions of justice, rights, and the social contract. Thus, the colonial authorities failed to operate in accordance with principles that could supposedly promote social enlightenment

(e.g., the principles of mutuality and equal respect as a moral necessity, treating others the way you would want to be treated, self-determination, and people are to be treated as ends in themselves and not as a means of fulfilling your aims) (see Kant, 2006, pp. 14–16, 38–41, and 53–54). Instead, the colonial authorities operated on the basis of the theory of social and political order developed by the English political philosopher Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes asserted that “the proverbial other” posed a threat that either had to be controlled or eliminated. This realistic perspective on social relations holds that control is a matter of amassing and exercising power advantage, particularly material and economic advantage. Consequently, it became evident that the colonial authorities failed to take the moral high ground.

4. Summary and Conclusion

India’s freedom movement has been subjected to numerous analyses, both from a historical perspective and also from the perspective of analyzing the motivations of the characters that pioneered the movement. However, this article adds to the scholarship on the movement by developing a philosophical analysis based on the principles and values that guided their actions and were the basis of their vision. This article argues that such a theoretical account is important to determining the factors that played a significant role in the movement. In addition, it is important to explaining why the movement is recognized locally, regionally, nationally, and worldwide as a model for shaping diversity into social solidarity and cohesion, for establishing a model of a participatory approach to social democracy, and as a framework for achieving self-determination. Explicating the factors is important for those who are currently still struggling to realize the aims of their own independence movements and for providing inspirational support to those who are striving to live in accordance with the values that guided the lives and actions of freedom pioneers.

This article focuses on the socio-political discourse of the Assam freedom movement as a means of determining factors that can apply to realizing the goals that human social action aims to achieve, reducing conflict and establishing peace, and that act as a unifying force. By analyzing Assam’s freedom movement from a philosophical perspective, the article provides an explanation of the principles that play a role in reconciling what often seem to be irreconcilable differences in the interests of the different ethnicities and classes of Indian society. The analysis also explains how and why the principles and values shaping the Assam freedom movement were expressed in terms of a futuristic vision for improving the quality of life by integrating human, social, and sustainable development. Expressing the principles in the form of factors generates a model of freedom and good governance that is in line with state-of-the-art approaches to co-creating social reality. Thus, the article explains the conceptual framework for a model of social action that should be put into practice because of their effective for co-creating desired social outcomes and establishing a common goal. An analysis of Assam’s freedom discourse reveals that there are nine factors that indicate the connection between the principles of the freedom movement and a state-of-the-art approach to good governance:

1. A participatory approach to decision-making
2. Co-creating social reality (Stoker, 2006, pp. 41 & 51)
3. Promoting the ability to choose goals and the power to act to achieve those goals (i.e., agency)
4. Self-cultivation – the freedom to develop one’s capabilities and realize desired functionings.
5. Congruence between individual and collective goals and values
6. Self-determination (Stoker, 1996, p. 6)
7. A strong actively engaged civil society that interacts within integrated social networks (Stoker, 2006, pp. 47-48)
8. Eco-justice – increased nature-human beneficial interactions (Stoker, 1996, p. 26)
9. Integrated social networks and partnerships that link various segments of society and also promote public-private cooperation and collaboration (Stoker, 2006, pp. 41 & 47)

This article approaches the freedom movement from a philosophical perspective to explain how adhering to certain normative principles and socio-political ideals have liberating power. The pioneers of the freedom movement of Assam envisioned paving the way for a Sahakari Samaj (i.e., implementing a strategy for human and social development that would result in self-sustainability, the empowerment of the disadvantaged and marginalized, and self-reliance, although at the same time appreciating interdependence). The philosophy of Assam’s freedom movement can be summarized by using the term *Sarvodaya*, which generally means “universal uplift”, “progress of all”, or “the elevation and uplift of all”. The concept also represents a conviction that it is in one’s best interest to pursue the common good (i.e., the welfare of all). *Sarvodaya* is regarded as a progressive philosophical principle that, when put into practice, enables people to live in accordance with the constitutive principles for freedom and social justice: e.g., self-reliance, interdependence, mutuality, equality, and self-determination for all strata of society, as well as a social entrepreneurial approach to economic development. The regional proponents of *Sarvodaya* shared the conviction that government should not reflect power over the people nor authoritarian rule but instead should portray governance devoted to enacting the will of the people (i.e., *Loknity*). In other words, the government should truly be of, by, and for the people.

The freedom fighters endeavored to live in accordance with those values because they shared the conviction that they are tantamount to the principles espoused by their cultural heritage and are the very values that shape their identity. Although the freedom pioneers met violent opposition, the principles they stood for were eventually acknowledged by the international community as factors that contribute to achieving peace, freedom, human rights, and justice. In fact, those principles are expressed in the UN Charter for Improving the Quality of Life, the UN Human Development Index, as well as its declaration for the right to self-determination. In other words,

this article explains that although the ideals have yet to be fully realized in all of India, nor in other freedom struggles around the world, they continue to be emphasized as a theoretical model of what freedom movements are all about and as representing values and principles that the global community believes are important for completing the unfulfilled mission of the movement. The hoped-for socio-political ideals that the freedom fighters envisioned can be realized when we continue to live in accordance with the primordial values and principles evident in our conception of natural rights, natural law, and living in harmony with the forces shaping the natural order.

The vision of independence (as well as the principles and values the movement was based on) served to unify India and to focus the nation on a common goal (Kothari, 1961, p. 757). However, as the article stresses is that vision continues to be relevant for our lives today. In other words, we should all reflect on the fact that there is a clear connection between freedom, a people devoted to the good and well-being of all, and the elevation of our social existence. Another way of looking at this is to consider that there are aspects of the movement (like good governance, sustainability and eco-justice, distributive justice, solidarity, social harmony, transparency, and accountability) that remain a part of our social mission. In this respect, we fail in our lives today to fully live up to the principles of freedom if we allow anything that causes social fragmentation. Thus, an important question the article raises is how relevant are those principles, values, and ideals for our lives today and in what ways can we show honor for the movement in our own lives, how we interact, and what we do to improve society? In other words, how can we live in such a way that the principles become evident in how we relate to each other today? Do we believe that there are still things that we can do for freedom? Do we have a responsibility to act in ways that make the ideals that the freedom fighters willingly sacrificed more evident in our social context? The answer is, of course, we do have a responsibility to live in accordance with those principles and values. And we should strive to overcome anything that would cause individual or social fragmentation thus we should do everything we to realize the unifying power of those principles.

India prides itself on its aim to fully realize the ideals of the freedom movement in order to become not only the largest but also the best functioning democracy in the world. But achieving the nationwide reform necessary for this to happen remains an enormous challenge. However, this article argues that it is possible to establish micro level models of the democratic ideal and the ideals of the freedom movement. If we work within a micro context where three things are prominent, we can establish award-winning models of participatory democracy, good governance, conflict reduction, and self-determination: (1) a civil society and governance network that continue to espouse the principles, values, and ideals that the freedom fighters tried to achieve; (2) a civil society and governance network where individuals view the ideals as reflecting their deeply cherished values, and (3) individuals who view the values and ideals as reflecting their identity and their personal convictions. Then the only thing remaining for realizing the ideals (as the very nature of our socio-political system and our daily interactions) is that we ourselves establish a network of stakeholders who collaborate within a social network to put those principles into practice – with the assurance that they are state-of-the-art factors for realizing the goal that we continue to dream of (see Moore, 1995).

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