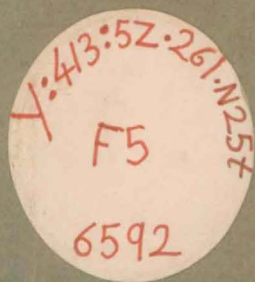


ASSAM CONGRESS  
OPIUM ENQUIRY  
REPORT □ □ □ □ □

SEPTEMBER, 1925

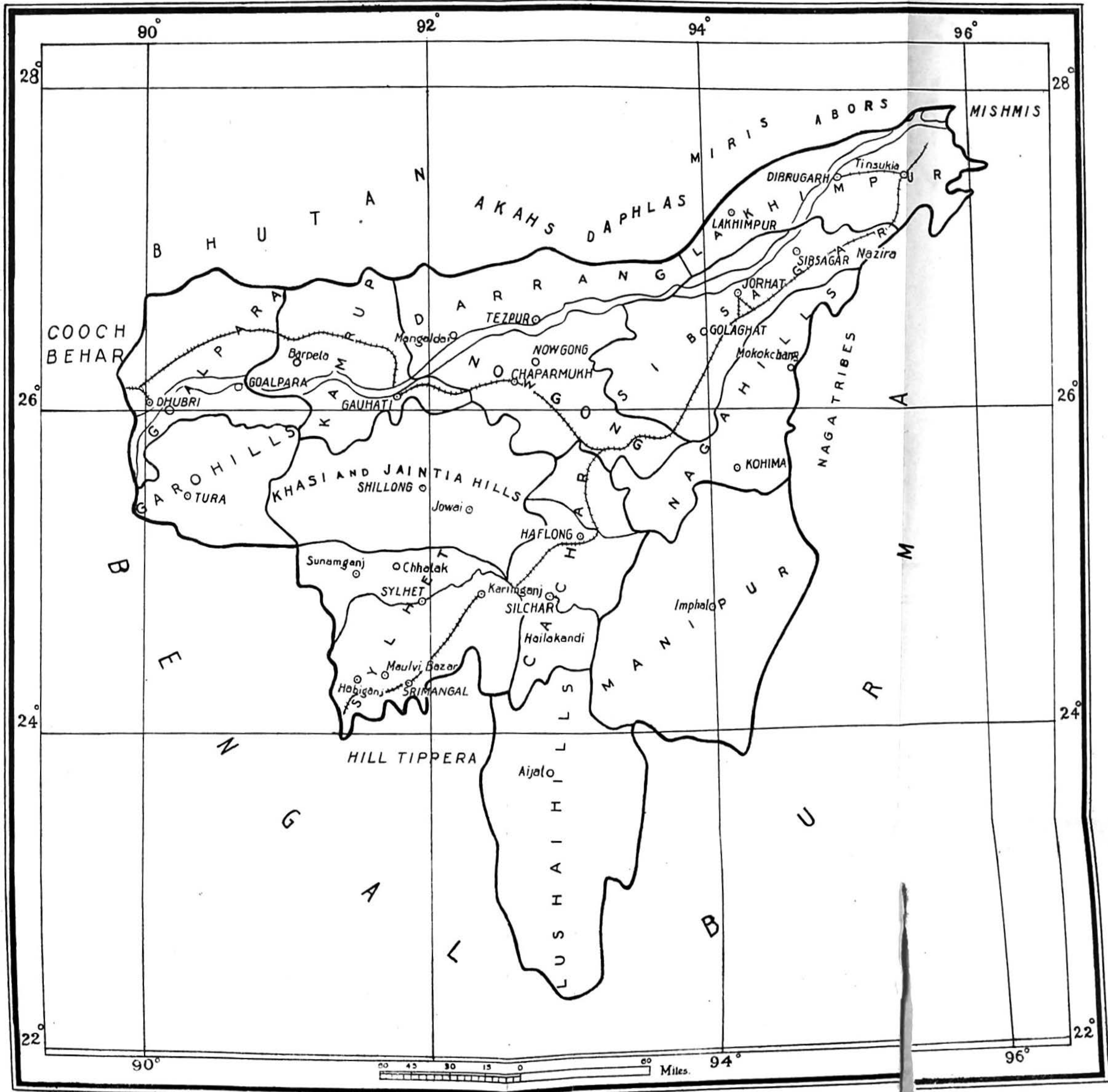


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# ASSAM



## CONTENTS.

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	PAGE
1. Introduction by C. F. Andrews ... ..	1—4
2. Members of the Committee ... ..	5—6
3. Questionnaire ... ..	7—8
4. Chapter I.—Preliminary statement ... ..	9—12
5. Chapter II.—Assam and its people ... ..	13—16
6. Chapter III.—Opium consumption in Assam ... ..	17—26
7. Chapter IV.—The Non-co-operation movement ... ..	27—31
8. Chapter V.—Tea-gardens and Hill tribes ... ..	32—36
9. Chapter VI.—Opium smoking ... ..	37—41
10. Chapter VII.—The Government contention ... ..	42—47
11. Chapter VIII.—The treatment of addicts ... ..	48—50
12. Chapter IX.—Recommendations ... ..	51—52

## APPENDICES.

13. Appendix	I.—Inspection notes at Tinsukia Borpathar Nodial Village ... ..	53—54
14. Appendix	II.—The Non-co-operation movement. Statement of Sjt. N. C. Bordoloi ... ..	54—57
15. Appendix	III.—Periods of Opium Policy ... ..	57—58
16. Appendix	IV.—Questions and Answers in the Assam Legislative Council regarding Opium ... ..	58—72
17. Appendix	V.—Official statement concerning Opium in Assam ... ..	72—75
18. Appendix	VI.—Extract from Mr. Moffat Mills' Report ... ..	75—86
19. Appendix	VII.—Statistics of Assam, 1853 ... ..	87
20. Appendix	VIII.—Consumption by castes and tribes ... ..	88
21. Appendix	IX.—Statement concerning Opium Taxation, 1904—1924 ... ..	89
22. Appendix	X.—Opium Statement for Assam Province, 1873—1924 ... ..	90—91
23. Appendix	XI.—Opium Statement for Durrung, Lakshimpur, Sibsagar, N o w g o n g districts ... ..	92—95
24. Appendix	XII.—Opium Statement for Sub-divisions in Assam, 1923-24 ... ..	96

	PAGE
25. Appendix XIII.—Index figures, Population, Consumption and Revenue at each Census ...	97
26. Appendix XIV.—Extracts from evidence of witnesses	98—133
27. Appendix XV.—The problem of Goalpara ...	134—136
28. Appendix XVI.—Note on the Botham Committee's Report ...	136—139
29. Appendix XVII.—Note on Opium smoking and the Botham Report ...	139—143
30. Appendix XVIII.—Extracts from Government Reports	143—159
31. Glossary ...	160—162
32. Index ...	163—165

## INTRODUCTION.

The origin of the present Opium Enquiry is partly to be found in the preparations for the World Conference at Geneva in 1924-1925. The reform proposals at that Conference, with which the Indian people as a whole were fully in sympathy, were grouped under two main heads: (1) the complete abolition of opium smoking, (2) the reduction of opium consumption to the medicinal and scientific needs of the world. When the question of the internal consumption of opium in India came forward among public workers, it was clear from practical experience that both in opium smoking and in opium eating for non-medicinal purposes, Assam held by far the blackest records in India.

It is necessary to explain that the full medical requirements of each 10,000 of the world's population, according to the League of Nations, are 6 seers, or 12 pounds avoirdupois. Having regard to this index figure, we find the following rates of consumption in the five upper districts of Assam:—

District.	Population.	Issue of Opium in seers.	Consumption in seers per 10,000.
Kamrup	... 762,671	3,472	45.524
Darrang	... 477,935	5,101	106.729
Nowgong	... 397,921	6,909	173.627
Sibsagar	... 823,197	9,133	110.945
Lakhimpur	... 588,295	11,176	189.972
Sadiya Frontier Tract.	... 39,531	937	237.029
Balipara Frontier Tract.	... 3,819	52	136.161

It will at once be seen how altogether excessive the sale of opium has become in these districts. Furthermore, it needs to be stated, that if the figures had been taken before the Non-co-operation Movement began, in 1921, the consumption, as shown above, would have been far greater still, the number of seers consumed at that time being between 200 and 300 per 10,000.

When we turn to the question of opium smoking, the state of things is no less serious. In the Botham Committee Report,

drawn up in 1913, but only recently made public, the following statement is made concerning opium smoking with regard to the five districts of Assam mentioned above :—

“Probably, over the five districts, one half would be a moderate estimate of the proportion of those now smoking to the total number of consumers. Many witnesses place the proportion much larger, but it is likely that their estimate is exaggerated.”

Since this state of things was fairly widely known in India among the public workers, it appeared to be of great importance to make a detailed enquiry into opium smoking and opium eating among the indigenous races in Assam, in order to present the facts before the Opium Conference, when it should meet at Geneva in November, 1924. For that purpose, I was asked by the All-India Congress Committee to undertake an investigation in Assam with the help of the Congress workers in that province, and if possible to bring out a Report in time for the Geneva Conference. With that object in view, I went up to Assam in May, 1924, and helped to form an Enquiry Committee, which should make full investigation in conjunction with all other political parties in the province.

It had been my intention personally to take part in the Enquiry, as a member of the Committee, but I was called away to the Far East in order to accompany the poet, Rabindranath Tagore, on his tour in China and Malaya. The Enquiry, however, was not delayed on this account; and all through the monsoon weather of last year, under the greatest difficulties and hardships, the members of the Committee steadily went on with their work. After my return from the Far East, very serious and important duties prevented the Report from being finally revised and concluded by means of a personal visit, which I had intended to make in the month of October. Nevertheless, the preliminary evidence, that had been obtained, was sent in an abbreviated form to Geneva and circulated among the members of the Conference. Also, through the press, some of the facts concerning opium smoking and excessive opium eating in Assam were made widely known. After the Geneva Conference had finished its sessions, one delay after another occurred, until at

last in the months of April and May it was possible for the Committee to reassemble and for me to pay a visit personally to Assam, and to remain there for several weeks, corroborating the evidence and revising all the conclusions. Many sessions of the Committee were held late in April and in the month of May at which I was present; and when everything on the spot had been done, the Secretary accompanied me to Santiniketan in order to complete the work.

Although the Report, which is now presented to the public, has thus been much delayed and the difficulties connected with it have been greater than had been originally expected, yet the facts which have now become clear through the work of the Committee should convince, not merely the Government of Assam and the Government of India, but also the Opium Advisory Board which is in permanent session at Geneva, that the official contentions brought forward at the Geneva Conference itself about India, when it was stated, (1) that opium smoking (outside Burma) was practically non-existent, (2) that opium consumption was not in serious excess of the medical needs of the population, are both proved definitely wrong. Furthermore, it is hoped that the work that has been done by the Committee and the evidence which has been collected will be a potent instrument in the hands of reformers in Assam in their great struggle to put down altogether the opium evil among the indigenous population and the Hill tribes.

It is a satisfaction to know that the work which has thus been undertaken by reformers in Assam has already led to other enquiries being inaugurated in other parts of India, where the opium consumption is markedly in excess of the medical requirements. In Orissa, in Godavari Delta, in the central Punjab, in Sind and Gujarat, enquiries on the lines of the present investigation in Assam are now being set on foot, and an examination of the consumption at the industrial centres is also being started. Little by little in this way, by persistent work, in which the co-operation of the Government wherever possible will be invited, we hope that the consumption for the whole of India will be so reduced as practically never in any area largely to exceed the average consumption laid down in accordance with

the League of Nations' index figure. If this aim can be accomplished, then the difficulty in remote villages with regard to the demands of a Dangerous Drugs Act, by which opium should only be sold under medical prescription, may be obviated. It may be found possible to keep the consumption down within the League of Nations' limit, in the agricultural areas, without the need of any Dangerous Drugs Act at all. In the towns, however, where medical prescription could easily be obtained, and where the dangers of excessive consumption among the labouring classes are already alarming, it may be found possible to bring into force a Dangerous Drugs Act, and to prohibit the use of opium altogether, except under medical prescription.

It needs to be stated that our aim throughout is to bring the great population of India in the East under the same conditions which prevail in every country in the West. We believe that if opium, as a poison, is regarded as a dangerous drug in the West, it should equally be regarded as a dangerous drug in the East. We do not think that human nature in the East is different from human nature in the West. If there is no objectionable restriction of personal liberty in the imposition of a Dangerous Drugs Act in the West, then there can be no danger to personal liberty by such restriction in the East.

In conclusion, I wish to express my sincere admiration for the devoted courage and perseverance of the workers on the present Committee, who have sacrificed time and ease and leisure and business occupations in order to do this service to their country. I feel certain that their labour will be rewarded by the triumph of their cause and that opium will soon be strictly prohibited in Assam.

C. F. ANDREWS.

SANTINIKETAN.



## ASSAM OPIUM ENQUIRY COMMITTEE.

---

### MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE.

#### PRESIDENT:

SJT. KULADHAR CHALIHA, B.L., M.L.C.,  
*President of the Assam Provincial  
Congress Committee.*

#### MEMBERS:

- \*SJT. TARUN RAM PHOOKAN, BAR-AT-LAW, M.L.A.  
(*Gauhati*).
- SJT. NABIN CHANDRA BORDOLOI, B.L. (*Gauhati*).
- SJT. KRISHNANATH SARMA, B.L., *Secretary of the  
Assam Provincial Khadi Board.* (*Jorhat*).
- SJT. AMBICAGIRI ROY CHAUDHURI, *Editor of  
"Chetana"* (*Gauhati*).
- \*SJT. OMEO KUMAR DAS, B.A., *Editor of  
'Assamiya'* (*Dibrugarh*).

#### SECRETARY & MEMBER:

SJT. ROHINI KANTA HATI BARUA, B.A., M.L.C.,  
*Secretary of the Assam Provincial Congress  
Committee.*

\*Sjt. T. R. Phookan felt it necessary for a time to resign his membership owing to his being frequently away from Assam to attend the sittings of the Legislative Assembly in Delhi and Simla. He assisted the Committee, however, when it reassembled in April and May, 1925.

Sjt. Omeo Kumar Das, Editor of 'Assamiya', could not attend the Committee during its sessions in 1924 owing to illness, but worked with the Committee when it reassembled in April and May, 1925.

## CO-OPTED MEMBERS.

1. SJT. T. P. CHALIHA, B.A. (CAL.), LL.B. (LON.),  
BAT-AT-LAW, M.L.C., *Chairman, Sibsagar Local  
Board (Sibsagar).*
2. SJT. DURGAPRASAD BORTHAKUR, B.L., *President,  
District Congress Committee (Sibsagar).*
3. SJT. PRASANNA KUMAR BARUA, B.A. (Dibrugarh).
4. MAULVI FAIZNUR ALI, B.L., M.L.C., *Leader  
of the Assam Nationalist Party of the Assam  
Legislative Council (Dibrugarh).*
5. SJT. SARBESWAR BARUA, B.L., M.L.C., *President,  
District Congress Committee, N. Lakhimpur.*
6. SJT. CHANDRANATH SARMA, B.L., *Pleader (Tezpur).*
7. DR. JYOTISH CHANDRA DAS, B.Sc., M.B. (CAL.),  
L.M. (DUBLIN), *Medical Practitioner, Gauhati.*

During the months of April and May, 1925, when the closing sessions of the Committee were held, Mr. C. F. Andrews was co-opted as a member and attended all meetings.

## QUESTIONNAIRE.

1. Can you give any historical synopsis as to how and when opium, or poppy cultivation, was first introduced into Assam and the effects of the opium habit on the people up to the advent of the British in 1826?

2. What was the attitude of the Ahom kings towards the opium habit and poppy cultivation? Was the habit prevalent amongst the common people or was it confined to the higher classes as is generally believed?

3. What was the policy of the British Government from—

- (1) 1826 to 1860 when the poppy cultivation was prohibited,
- (2) 1860 to 1874 when license-fee was first levied,
- (3) 1874 to 1894 when the Royal Commission on Opium submitted its report,
- (4) 1894 to 1912 when the Botham Committee sat,
- (5) 1912 to 1921 when the Non-co-operation movement was started?

4. Can you support your statement by any statistics? If so, please give them in detail.

5. What was the effect of the Non-co-operation movement on this opium habit?

6. Do you think that Government have ever had any policy of systematically reducing the opium consumption in Assam? Do you know the Botham Committee's recommendations? Was any effect given to those recommendations?

7. Will you state how the Government policy has affected the Assamese people and neighbouring hill-tribes?

If the effects are baneful and disastrous to the people, are you in favour of total prohibition of sale and consumption, except for medicinal purposes?

If so, how would you effect it? Please give your suggestions.

8. (a) Can you trace any moral, physical and economic effects of the consumption of opium by the purely Assamese population and by the hill and other tribes? What, in your opinion, will be the percentage of opium-eaters amongst the Assamese and other tribes?

(b) Have you got any personal experience of the people who are addicted to the opium habit and under what circumstances they generally contract the habit first?

9. Do you advocate any legislation in favour of total prohibition of opium? If so, please give your outlines?

10. What acts of repression were committed by the Government against the temperance workers in the great movement of 1921? What was the object of the opposition by Government?

GLOSSARY OF PECULIAR TERMS USED IN THE REPORT  
AND APPENDICES.

---

- ✓ Abkaree—Excise.
- Abor—A hill-tribe inhabiting the hills at the north-east corner of Assam.
- Affing—Opium.
- Ahom—A Mongoloid tribe who ruled over Assam from the thirteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century.
- Aman-Sabha—A counter-organisation of the people set up by the supporters of the Government, during the Non-co-operation Movement.
- Barkandazes—Mercenary Soldiers.
- Borgohain—One of the three ministers of the Ahom Kings of Assam.
- Buragohain—Another of the three ministers of the Ahom Kings.
- Buranji—History.
- Chandu—A preparation of opium for smoking mainly used by the Chinese.
- Chur—A small area cut off from the banks in the bed of a river.
- ✓ Criminal Law Amendment Act—An Act in British India, by the provisions of which the executive is empowered to declare any association in the country unlawful and to prosecute any member of such associations.
- Daffâ—A hill-tribe inhabiting the hills below the Himalayas.
- Dào—A big knife.
- Deputy Commissioner—The Chief Civil Officer in charge of a district in British India.
- Dewan—The chief official in a State.
- Dhan—Rice crop.
- Ganja—A preparation from the flowers of the hemp.
- Heta—A ladle.
- Hoka (Hooka)—A pipe in which smoke is passed through water.
- Kala-azar—An epidemic disease prevalent in East Bengal and Assam.
- Kani (or Kanee)—Opium.
- ✓ Kania (or Kaneeahs)—Opium-consumer. (The word is used for both opium-eaters and opium-smokers).
- Kani Khowa (or Kanimoli Khowa)—Opium-eating.
- Kanipan Khowa—Opium-smoking.
- ✓ Kavirajes—Medical practitioners practising Ayurvedic system of medicine.
- ✓ Kania-seba—An entertainment of opium-smokers.

- Kayas—Traders from Marwar.
- Kerahi—A pan made of cast-iron.
- Khamtis—A hill-tribe inhabiting the sub-montane tracts of the Lakshimpur district.
- Khan Saheb—A subordinate title conferred on Mohammedans by the Government.
- Legislative Assembly—The law-making body under the Government of India Amendment Act, 1919, for the whole of the British India, where the principle of the responsibility of the Ministers to the House has not been introduced.
- Legislative Council—The law-making body in the provinces of the British India, under the Government of India Amendment Act, 1919, where the principle of responsibility of the Ministers to the House has been introduced to a very limited extent.
- Madak—A preparation of opium with calcined leaves of certain plants.
- Mahal—A sub-division of a district.
- Maskalai—A kind of pulse.
- Maund—A weight = 82.28 lbs.
- Mauzadar—A revenue-collector.
- Miris—A tribe inhabiting the banks of the Brahmaputra and other rivers of the upper districts of the Assam Valley.
- Mishmis—A hill-tribe inhabiting the hills on the border of the Lakshimpur district.
- Moamorias }  
Muttock } A religious division of a Mongoloid tribe in Eastern Assam.
- Morân—A Mongoloid tribe in Eastern Assam.
- Moga (or Mogah)—Yarn or cloth made from a kind of cocoon.
- Mohamuntree Saheb—A King's chief representative.
- Nângoâ—A religious ceremony where hymns are sung in chorus.
- Poorah (or Pura)— $1\frac{1}{2}$  acres.
- Prasad—Fruits etc. distributed after a religious ceremony is over.
- Rai Bahadur—A title conferred upon Hindus by the Government.
- Rai Saheb—A subordinate title conferred upon Hindus by the Government.
- Rayats—People.
- Reah (or Riha)—A kind of plant, fibres of which are used in making ropes.
- Rishi—A sage.
- Rupee—A silver coin now worth about 1s. 4d.
- Seer—A standard weight = 2.057 lbs.
- Singphos—A hill-tribe inhabiting the hills on the border of the Lakshimpur district.
- Sursoo—Mustard-seed.
- Swadeshi—Country-made.
- Tola—A standard weight of 180 grains.

Transferred Departments—Departments in the Provincial Governments of British India under the Government of India Amendment Act, 1919, which are under the control of the Ministers responsible to the Legislative Council. (In Assam, Excise is not a 'transferred department'.)

Turaon—A tribe living in the sub-montane tracts of Sadiya Frontier Tract

## SUBJECT INDEX.

---

- Abors, opium habit amongst, 34.  
Act, Dangerous Drugs, 4, 51.  
Ali Maulvi Faiznur, 6.  
Allan, Mr. W. J., 35.  
Aman-Sabha, 28.  
Andrews, C. F., 4, 6, 10, 54.  
Anti-non-co-operation league, 27.  
Anti-opium-societies, organisation of, 51.  
Assamese speaking people, districts of, 13.  
Assam, account of Dr. W. B. Long about (from M. Mills' Report), 85-86.  
Assam Administration after the treaty of Yandabu, 19.  
Assam, extracts from Moffat Mills' Report concerning, 75-77.  
Assam, Anandaram Dhekial Phookan's about, (from Mills' Report), 79-80.  
Assam, Lieut.-Col. Mathie's Report on, (from Mills' Report), 78-79.  
Assam Legislative Council, Questions and Answers, 58-72.  
Assam, Major Vetch's Report on, (from Mills' Report), 77-78.  
Assam, population of, 14.  
Assam Province, Opium statement for, 90-91.  
Assam Royal Court, 17.  
Assam, statistics of 1853, 87.  
Assam Valley, 13.  
Assam Valley, population of, 14.  
Assam and its people, 13-16.  
Assam and its boundaries, 13.  
Assamese Kingdom, old, 13.  
Balipara Frontier Tract, 13.  
Bordoloi, Sjt. N. C., 6, 27, 52.  
Barry, Dr. John, 21.  
Barua, Kamakhayaram, 64.  
Barua, Sarbeswar, 6, 63.  
Barua, Prasannakumar, 6.  
Beltola, 18.  
Botham, Mr. A. W., 15, etc.  
Borthakur, Durgaprosad, 6.  
Brahmaputra Valley, 13.  
Breaking the habit, opinion on, 104-106.  
Buranjis, 17.  
Butler, Captain, 19.  
Cachar, consumption, in, 13.  
Campbell, Mr. John, 39.  
Census, population, consumption and revenue at each, 97.  
Chaliha, K., 5, 52, etc.  
Chaliha, T. P., 6, 67.  
Chandu, 39.  
Chaudhuri, A., 5, 52.  
Clayton in Geneva Conference Mr., 46.  
Congress Committees, district, 28.  
Congress Committee, Assam Provincial, 9.  
Consumption of opium by districts, 1.  
Consumption of opium by castes and tribes, 88.  
Co-opted members of the Enquiry Committee, 10.  
Cosgrave in the Legislative Assembly, Mr., 46.  
Contention, Government, 42-47.  
Daflas, opium habit amongst, 34.  
Das, O. K., 5, 52.  
Das, S. C. Dr., 6.  
Deficiencies of the enquiry, 11.  
Dejoo Tea-garden, 33.  
Dewan of the Assam Tea Co., 40.  
Dewan, Moniram, 18-20, 25.  
Dhekial Phookan, Anandaram, 20, 25.  
Districts affected by opium habit 16.  
Districts, population of the different—of the Assam Valley, 14.  
Distribution of opium at Namgoã, 41.  
" " at religious services, 41.  
" " for semi-religious purposes, 41.  
Driberg, Mr., 34.  
Durrung district, opium statement for, 92.  
Durrung, report on, (from Mills' Report), 83-84.  
Education department's expenditure. 45.  
Effect of the decrease of number of shops, 23.  
Effect of the raising of the price of opium, 24.



- Enquiry into the opium habit by the Deputy Commissioner of Khasi Hills, 35.
- Excise revenue, total, 45.
- Excise, extracts from Government reports, 143-158.
- Ex-opium-eater witnesses' opinions, 98-99.
- Expenditure under transferred departments, 45.
- Gandhi-men (temperance workers), 28, 30.
- Ganja, fall in consumption, 28-29, 42.
- Gaurinath Singha, Raja, 18.
- Goalpara, statement relating to, (from Mills' Reports), 72-73.
- Goalpara, district of, 15.
- Goalpara, Dr. John Barry's Report on, (from Mills' Report), 81.
- Goalpara, the problem of, 134-136.
- Garos, population of, 13.
- Hatibarua, R., 5, 52, etc.
- Hill-tribes, consumption among, 15-16, 24, 32-36.
- Index figures of consumption at each Census (per 10,000 people in seers), 97.
- Indigenous Assamese speaking population, 14.
- Introduction to the report, 1-4.
- Is the policy of Government based on consideration of revenue, 121-123.
- Itinerary of the Committee, 10, 15.
- Jaipur Tea Coy., 23.
- Kacharis, opium habit amongst, 35, 36.
- Kacharis, population of, 13.
- Kamrup, report on, (from Mills' Report), 81-82.
- Kamrup, Assistant Surgeon Maclean's report on, (from Mills' Report), 82-83.
- Kani Khowa, 37.
- Kanimoli Khowa, 37.
- Kania-Seba, 40.
- Kanipan Khowa, 37.
- Khamtis, opium habit amongst, 34.
- Khasis, opium habit amongst, 35, 36.
- Labourer, ex-tea-garden, 32-36.
- Labourer, opium habit among tea-garden, 32.
- Lakshimpur, Moffat Mills' Account of, 66.
- Lakshimpur district, opium statement for, 93.
- Lakshmi Singha Raja, 18.
- Liquor, consumer of, 29.
- Liquor, fall in consumption, 29.
- Literature, Vaishnava, 17.
- Maclean, Dr. John, 21.
- Madak, 39.
- Malwa opium, danger from, 44.
- Mahatma Gandhi, visit of, 27-36, 52.
- Maximum of revenue with minimum of consumption, 24-26.
- Medical opinions on the evil effects of opium habit, 106-109.
- Medical use of opium, opinions on, 46-47.
- Mikirs, population of, 13.
- Mikirs, opium habit among, 34.
- Miju Mishmis, opium habit among, 34.
- Miris, opium habit among, 34-35.
- Miris, population of, 13.
- Mishmis, opium habit amongst, 34.
- Moghul Court at Delhi, 17.
- Nagas, opium habit among, 36.
- Namgoá, 41.
- Nichols-Roy, Rev. J. J. M., 25, etc.
- Non-co-operation movement, 27-31.
- Non-co-operation movement, influence of, 30.
- Non-co-operators, object of (from Government standpoint), 29.
- Non-co-operators, testimony given to, 30.
- Non-co-operation and illicit poppy cultivation, 43-44.
- North-Lakshimpur, sub-divisional officer of, 33.
- North Lakshimpur, addiction in, 15, 32-33.
- Notes, inspection—at Tinsukia Barpathar Nodial Village, 53-54.
- Note on Botham Committee's Report, 136-137.
- Note on opium smoking with reference to Botham Committee's Report, 139-143.
- Nowgong, district of, 15.
- Nowgong, statement relating to, (from Assam District Gazetteer), 73-75.
- Nowgong, report on, (from Mills' Report), 84.
- Nowgong district, opium statement of, 95.
- Opium dens, 22, 40.
- Opium-eating, 2, 37.
- Opium-laws, 43.
- Opium laws, offences against, 43.
- Opium, illicit possession of excise, 43.

- Opium, introduction of Government, 20.  
 Opium habit among, young men, 40.  
 Opium-eating witnesses' opinions, 99-102.  
 Opium monopoly, Government, 20, 21, 44.  
 Opium policy, Government's defence of its, 46.  
 Opium-smoking, 1, 37-41.  
 Opium smuggling, 43.  
 Opium shops in 1873-74, number of, 22.  
 Opium-smokers, number of, 38.  
 Opium smoking in company, 40.  
 Opium revenue, total, 45.  
 Opium, retail vend of, 21.  
 Opium, unlicensed sale of, 43.  
 Opinions on physical suffering from giving up opium habit, 49.  
 Opinions on temporary hardship in giving up habit, 49.  
 Opinions regarding non-violent preaching of temperance, 102-104.  
 Opinions with regard to compensating the loss of revenue due to immediate total prohibition, 123-125.  
 Opinions on opium problem unanimity of, 50.  
 Opinions of the Indian non-official members of the Assam Legislative Council, 49.  
 Opinions on physical, moral and economic conditions of opium-eaters, 129-133.  
 Percentage of excise revenue to total revenue in the provinces, 45.  
 Personelle of the Committee, 5.  
 Petition, Moniram Barua Dewan's (from Mills' Report), 84.  
 Phookan, T. R., 5, 52.  
 Phookan, Nilmoni, 59, 60, 61, 65.  
 Points to be considered for final extinction of opium habit, 48.  
 Policy, periods of opium policy, 57-58.  
 Poppy cultivation, suppression of, 19, 20.  
 Poppy cultivation, illicit, 43-44.  
 Poppy cultivation, history of, 18-19.  
 Processes by which opium is prepared for smoking, 37.  
 Prohibition, opinions on, 48.  
 Prohibition, witnesses' opinions on total, 109-121.  
 Questionnaire, 7.  
 Rationing of opium shops, 23, 25, 43.  
 Recommendations, 51-52.  
 Registration of addicts in Burma, 25.  
 Registration of addicts, 25.  
 Reid, Hon'ble Sir William, 69, 70, 71, 72.  
 Report, Moffat Mills', 18, 19, 20, 21.  
 Report, Captain Welsh, 18.  
 Report, Botham Committee's, 15, 26, 33, 38, 39, 41.  
 Result of Mahatma Gandhi's visit to Assam, 28.  
 Revenue considerations, 25.  
 Revenue of Assam, total, 45.  
 Revenue Excise, 29.  
 Royal Commission on opium, 34.  
 Sadiya Frontier Tract, 13.  
 Sarma, Mohadev, 69, 70.  
 Sharma, K., 5, 52, 54, etc.  
 Sibsagar (Sebsagar), report on, (from Mills' Report), 84.  
 Sibsagar district, opium statement for, 94.  
 Singphos, opium habit amongst, 34.  
 Statement of Sjt. N. C. Bordoloi, 54-57.  
 Statistical accounts, Hunter's, 36.  
 Story, Mr., 33.  
 Sub-divisions of districts of Assam, opium statement of, 96.  
 System, fixed-license-fee, 22.  
 System, mahal, 22.  
 System, Vend-fee-per-seer, 23.  
 Sylhet, consumption in, 13.  
 Taxation from 1904-1924, opium, 89.  
 Treatment of addicts, 48-50.  
 Tribes inhabiting sub-montane tracts of the Assam Valley, 13.  
 Tribes inhabiting the hills of Assam, 13.  
 Tribes and population affected by the opium habit, 15-16.  
 Treaty of Yandabu, 19.  
 Turaon, opium habit among, 34.  
 Villages in Assam in 1873-74, number of, 22.  
 Webster, Hon. Mr. J. E., 58, etc.  
 Witnesses, classification of, 10.  
 Witnesses, extracts from evidences of, 98-133.  
 Witnesses, opinion of majority of, 49.  
 Workers imprisoned under Criminal Law Amendment Act, number of, 29, 50.  
 Young, Mr. A. R., 35.

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