The Revolt of 1857, often described as India’s First War of Independence, was a watershed in Indian colonial history. While the major centres of the revolt were in northern and central India, Assam also witnessed a notable strand of resistance against British rule. The most prominent figure in this regional uprising was **Maniram Dewan**, a pioneering Assamese nationalist and one of the earliest martyrs in India’s freedom struggle.

Background of British Colonialism in Assam

Following the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826, Assam came under British control. The British introduced exploitative economic policies, centralized administration, and disregarded local sentiments. The traditional elites, especially the Ahom aristocracy and landholding classes, were sidelined. This created widespread discontent, laying the groundwork for rebellion.

Maniram Dewan, once a supporter of the British, became disillusioned with their governance as he witnessed the economic ruin and political subjugation of his homeland.

Maniram Dewan: The Visionary Nationalist

Born in 1806 in a noble Ahom family, **Maniram Dutta Baruah**, popularly known as Maniram Dewan, was initially appointed as a Dewan (minister) under the British. He later became Assam’s first Indian tea planter, establishing private tea estates when the industry was still nascent. However, his entrepreneurial efforts were obstructed by discriminatory policies favoring British planters.

His growing frustration with the British turned into active resistance. He maintained secret communications with the exiled Ahom prince, Kandarpeswar Singha, and hoped to reinstate the Ahom monarchy with the support of the local population.

Role in the 1857 Revolt

Inspired by the nationwide anti-British sentiment in 1857, Maniram Dewan attempted to organize a coordinated revolt in Assam. He sent secret letters to Indian sepoys stationed in different parts of the region, including Dibrugarh and Golaghat, urging them to rise against the British.

His plan was to:

- Instigate a sepoy mutiny in upper Assam.
- Restore the Ahom monarchy under Kandarpeswar Singha.
- Mobilize native rulers and disgruntled local communities against colonial rule.

However, the British intercepted his letters and uncovered the conspiracy. The rebellion was crushed before it could gather momentum. Maniram and his associates, including Piyali Barua, were arrested.

Trial and Execution

In a highly publicized colonial trial, Maniram Dewan and Piyali Barua were sentenced to

death. On **26 February 1858**, they were **hanged in Jorhat**, making them among the earliest martyrs from the northeast in the national freedom movement.

His death sent shockwaves across Assam, igniting a nationalist spirit that would grow in the decades to follow.

Significance of Maniram Dewan and the Assam Revolt

- **Symbol of Resistance**: Though limited in scope, the revolt in Assam marked the region's contribution to the all-India struggle for freedom.
- **Economic and Cultural Awakening**: Maniram's efforts to revive Assamese industry and resist colonial exploitation reflected a broader cultural assertion.
- **Inspiration for Future Movements**: His martyrdom inspired future leaders like Ambikagiri Raichoudhury and others in Assam's nationalist struggle.

Conclusion

Though the 1857 revolt in Assam did not evolve into a mass uprising, it symbolized the region's early resistance to colonial domination. **Maniram Dewan's role stands as a testimony to the fact that the flame of independence burned across all corners of India**, including the remote valleys of Assam. His life and sacrifice remain a powerful reminder of the spirit of resistance that eventually led to India's independence.