

CHAPTER – FOUR

ASSAMESE MIDDLE CLASS: ROLE IN THE PEASANT MOVEMENTS OF ASSAM

The middle class people everywhere played a major role in the movement. However, the controversies still persist pertaining to the exact connotation of the term 'Middle Class'. Hence the question arises who the middle class people are. Generally, the middle class people are those who are neither rich nor poor. They may be divided into two groups – the lower and the upper middle class. The position of the middle class is in-between the higher and the lower class. This middle class emerged owing to development of economic disparity in the society.

Middle class people are found in almost all the countries of the world. They play an important role in the construction and destruction of a nation. The rich have become richer and the poor becomes poorer but the middle class people have been adversely affected. That is why there is too much criticism against the Government. The middle class people make the intelligentsia of a nation. They regularly read newspapers and form opinions in the light of day-to-day achievements and failure of the Government and mould the public opinion.

The people below the middle class criticize them out of jealousy; the people above the middle class criticize them because they are afraid of them. Besides this, they criticize one another on account of envy and emulation. The middle class people always face a conflict between their vain show and empty pockets with the result that they are snobs in majority. It is stated that the middle class people are the unhappiest creatures in the society. They try their best to become rich and remain worried. The people below and above them oppose them tooth and nail. In consequence, there is a constant struggle in the society. In the long run, this develops into a social problem.¹

Middle class people are always considered the most useful group in any society and a country's welfare depends to a large extent on this class. If there is ever to be a social or any other movement, it is by this class.

The middle class is essentially an urban concept which originally developed in Europe with the break-up of feudalism followed by the emergence of commercial and industrial bourgeois in the newly developed towns and cities. It emerged in the West basically as a result of economic and technical changes. In India, on the contrary, they emerged most in consequence of the changes in the system of law and public administration.²

II

19th century is wonder for entire India as a new wave of change penetrated in the eco-political and socio-cultural field of India. The direct rule of the imperialist British gave birth to a middle class in India. This elite middle class imbibe the spirit of western thought and ideology and began to criticize the feudalistic and traditional system of India and with the association of the ruling class, gave birth to renaissance and reformation movement in their society. In Bengal, this movement was led by the Zamindars and officials of the East India Company. Under the aegis of Raja Rammohan Roy, Dwarka Nath Tagore, Debendra Nath Tagore, K.C. Sen, Swami Vivekananda and Henry Derozio's Young Bengal movement, this renaissance and reformation movement received tremendous impetus in Bengal. In Bombay the rich and wealthy class and in Madras the business class took the leadership of this movement.

Slowly and gradually, the English education expanded and as a result, a new bourgeois class comprising of engineers, doctors, lawyers and businessmen emerged in the Indian scene who fetched messages of new age to their society. This newly-emerged middle class totally depended for their change and development on the Colonial Government and therefore expressed their allegiance to the Government. Indeed, the Indian middle class prior to 1919, showed their allegiance to the Government as their economic life was entirely depended on the Government. The newly-emerged middle class understood that they were unable to throw off the yoke of the British rule and therefore, accepted their rule and demanded certain facilities from them. The Landlord Association of 1837, the Bengal British Society of 1843, the British Indian Association of 1851, the Indian Association of 1875 and the Indian National Congress of 1885 were some middle class organizations and these organizations confirmed the aims and objects of the middle class through prayer and petitions. Ram Mohan Roy, the father of Indian

renaissance, was a true supporter of the British imperialism. He and his contemporaries even welcomed the British rule. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, an eminent social reformer of 19th century, also supported the British rule and sincerely believed that the British would bring peace and prosperity to the country and under their shade, reform of the society would be possible. Ram Mohan and his contemporaries noticed the superstitions and prejudices that prevailed in the society and condemned them tooth and nail. But surprisingly, they rarely criticized the exploitation and appropriation policy perpetrated by the White Government on the masses. To reform their society was their primary concern and country's liberation on the contrary was secondary one.³

The Indian middle class could not become independent due to their loyalty and slavish mentality towards the Colonial Government. Lock and key to the trade and commerce was at the hands of the Government and the capitalist and this newly-emerged class carried on their business under them by keeping good relation with them.

Towards the close of the 19th century, industry and commerce developed by the British capital gave birth to a bourgeois class in India. This bourgeois class was independent in wealth and money. But the problem was that despite having capital, the indigenous capitalist classes could not compete equally with the white capitalists due to their biased and partial trade policy which finally forced them to support the independence movement against the Government of India.

The British administration was scared of introducing higher education in India but for their administrative interest, they contemplated for introduction of primary education. The landlords were dead-against of imparting primary education to the lower classes as this would end their exploitation and supremacy over them. So, they tried their level best to dash the noble attempt of the Government to the ground. They favoured illuminating the higher classes than the lower classes and even took step for that. Vidyasagar was not dead against of the primary education like the landlords. But his class weakness was detected when he set certain rules that women education should be kept restricted to the rich and the higher caste Hindu families.⁴

Indian nationalism was not the outcome of any anti-imperialism struggle and because of this; the middle class had no relation with the peasant class. Middle class witnessed the distress, ups and downs of the peasant classes but despite that they did not

come to their rescue. Due to their allegiance to the Government, the Indian National Congress comprising of the bourgeois class from the very beginning had not relation with the peasant class. Prior to 1919, the nationalistic movement that began in India was not transmuted to the war of independence. Free participation of the peasants and the labour class made the independence movement dynamic, strong and alive. The Congress did away with their parochial and conservative character by freely allowing the lower class to become its member and made thus the independent movement strong.⁵

Assam came under the Colonial rule just after the occupation of other provinces of India. As a lately developed and emerging class, the influence of all India middle class especially the Bengali middle class was clear on the Assamese middle class. According to Guha, three types of influence are clear on the newly developed Assamese middle class: (i) The spread of British administration and its associate infra-structure (ii) the cultural activities of the Christian missionaries, particularly the American Baptists (iii) The direct and indirect impact of the Bengal renaissance.⁶

III

The industrial revolution of England in the 18th century brought some socio-economic and political changes which gave birth to a new middle class in England. But their taste, mentality and outlook were totally different from the middle class of pre-industrial revolution era. But in India, a westernized intelligentsia had emerged among the Indians by the sixties of the 19th century and they became the torchbearers of new modern India.⁷

But the middle class existed in Bengal even towards the close of the 18th century. On the consolidation of the British rule, the growing demand for administrative and professional skill created the urban middle class educated on western lines possessed of professional qualifications.⁸

Upto 1860's, the number of middle class was small in Assam. This class emerged as a class by the close of the 19th century and began to make its influence in the social life of Assam. Although the middle class is an urban and modern concept in Assam, middle class had their moorings in the rural areas. Even in Bengal, many of the *Bhadralok* class

in the past wanted to live and die with their kith and kins in the villages. Towns and cities attracted them a little later. The Assamese middle class like the moderates was the product of the Colonial age and their appearance as a class was primarily an urban phenomenon.

Anil Seal and John Broomfield termed the English educated as “elite” and there were more tendencies among the high-caste Indians to include themselves under the banner of this group. According to Sarkar, the very use of the term “elite” is dubious as the genuine and exclusive elite in Colonial India consisted of the Whites.⁹ If we accept Sarkar, then Indian elite is not genuine elite.

The trading and commercial classes in Kamrup and Goalpara with direct contact with the European and English traders in the last quarter of the 18th century, the land revenue system in the district of Goalpara, the Mughal land revenue system introduced in Kamrup and the material foundation laid by the British rule in Assam accelerated the pace of development of these segments as middle class on one hand and contributed towards the creation of this class in other parts of Assam as a distinct social entity on the other. Among the factors responsible for the rise, growth and development of the Assamese middle class were the increasing trade and commerce, the paraphernalia of a bureaucratic administration and courts, a new system of education based on western ideals of civil liberty, social ethics, legal procedure, notions of state and political theories and organizations, the creation of private property inland in absolute terms with the right of transfer, sale and mortgage and the introduction of the institutional devices for the collection of land revenue and the opening up of modern system of roads and communication, the railways and the tea industry.¹⁰

The social roots of the Assamese middle class can be traced back to the *maujadars* and the Vaishnava *Satras* of Assam. Dutta Dev Goswami (1818-1904), Hem Chandra Goswami (1872-1928), Pitambar Dev Goswami (1885-1962) hailed from three *Satras* of upper Assam and Abdul Majid (1867-1924), Ghanashyam Barua (1867-1923), P.N.G. Barua (1871-1946), hailed from the *maujadars* families contributed lots towards the emergence of early educated elite and middle class in Assam.

Like the Indian middle class of the 19th century, the newly-emerged Assamese middle class also expressed their deep loyalty to the Colonial Government and wanted

change and development of Assam under their tutelage. This allegiance they showed to Colonial Government gave birth in their mind to a colonial outlook and with such outlook; they judged their society and literature. This clearly safe-guarded their class-interest rather than the collective interest of Assam.

The Assamese middle class was the compound product of the colonial bureaucracy, English education and tea industry. Though the three components played mutually supportive role, the social formation of the class was flexible and it was capable of absorbing newer elements.¹¹

Though the Assamese middle class was not a ruling class during the Colonial period, it was able to maintain dominance over the Assamese society. Along with the middle class, another two classes emerged in the society. According to M.L. Bose, 'New Industrial and commercial enterprises created new conditions and generated a new class of big businessmen and industrialist or planters who swelled the bourgeois rank. A class of labourers who were completely dependent on wages for their subsistence - a phenomenon entirely new in the history of the region - emerged in the economy of the province.'¹²

Redundance to say that a great wave of change came in the socio-economic aspect of Assam just after the arrival of the British East India Company. Money economy was introduced in place of feudal economy based on *Paik* System. Slowly and gradually, Western system of education engulfed the old system of education. As a result, a new Assamese middle class emerged on the debris of old social system. The birth and development of the Assamese middle class is the output of the British rule. Capitalist economy and education culture carried by the British gave birth to the Assamese middle class. The newly emerged middle class was comprised of two classes; one comprising of *mouzadars*, *gaonburhas*, *mandals*, *satradhikars*, Brahmin intellectuals who resided at villages. This class welcomed and co-existed with the new social system, but did not want to cut off their relation with the feudal social system. They were scared of losing their social status if the feudal system was eschewed. But the British dashed their so-called social status, dynastic splendor, arrogance - all - to the ground. The other was comprised of magistrates, munshifs, clerks, doctors, lawyers, engineers, police inspectors who resided at towns. Undoubtedly, the middle class of towns were more radical than

that of the villages. Western education, culture and rationalism made the minds of the middle class of towns more progressive, liberal and dynamic. But the fact is that despite having progressive and dynamic minds, this section still then was stuck to the feudalistic culture of their ancestor.

Therefore, the nature and character of this radical middle class of the towns also became half-feudalistic. As a result, confrontation between the old and the new thought became clear and discernible in their mental world. For instance, Haliram Dhekial Phukan, A. D. Phukan, Gunabhiram Barua, K. K. Bhattacharjee and some other western educated Assamese middle class of the 19th century who advocated the education and rights of the women and introduced themselves as the radical, some also criticized the Bihu song and Bihu dance of the lower class by becoming the blind followers of Western education. Ratneswar Mahanta who represented the feudal and male class by advocating against the rights and education of the women, the same Mahanta again tried to introduce himself as a radical by shrinking his nose with disdain terming the *Bihu* songs as the shameless songs. These were some of the self-contradictory and weakness of the Assamese middle class of the 19th century.¹³

The Assamese middle class did not rise as a result of a single historical event and had passed through four stages of development.¹⁴: (i) The period of gestation – from latter half of the 18th to about 1820, (ii) Rise and growth from 1820 to 1850, (iii) Further growth from 1850 to 1880 and (iv) Further development of expansion from 1880 to 1947.

The middle class of Assam is the outcome of the Colonial era but the way it emerged in the province is unlike in the other provinces of India. In the process of Colonization, a dependent Colonial middle class was automatically and integrally created, sick and deformed though from its very birth and inception. It was, therefore, incapable of growing into a mature bourgeois class and leading the mass struggles with courage and conviction against imperialism. In other words, Colonial capitalist development was a distorted development.¹⁵

The middle class of Assam, though an outcome of the Colonial regime, had their inspirations from their neighbouring Bengal. Under the Colonial shade, a new Calcutta- oriented Assamese middle class slowly developed in the late 19th century. It was obviously a small and imbecile middle class located in the Colonial hinterland. This

tiny middle class was mainly composed of high castes like Brahmins, *Kayasthas*, *Ganakas*, *Kalitas*, *Gosains-Mahantas* and few Assamese Muslims. The Colonial situation imposed on the Assamese middle class a stiff competition from the migrant Bengali middle Class in Assam. Unfortunately, the Colonial Government was not interested in educating the Assamese which delayed the process of class formation in Assam. They served their administrative purpose by importing Bengali *baboos* from Bengal. The Assamese middle class, in such a situation, had to play a collaborative role with the Colonial rulers to keep pace. However, with the emergence of a national movement for independence, the growing popularity of the Congress and the consolidation of Assamese middle class in the 20th century, a large section of this class could gradually overcome this collaborative role and step into newer roles. With the merger of the Assam Association with the Indian National Congress, the Assamese middle class gradually abandoned its collaborative politics with Colonialism.¹⁶

The Assamese Middle class accepted bondage unconditionally and thought of their development under the aegis of the Colonial Government. Like the Bengali middle class, the Assamese middle class also expressed their allegiance to the Colonial Government. The feudalistic gesture still then stuck to their behaviour and contemplation. Many Assamese bureaucrats under the Colonial Government involved in corruption in addition to the exploitation of their own people. With the establishment of some organizations, viz. Jorhat *Sarbojanik Sabha*, Assam Association etc. some middle class like J.N. Barua, M.C. Barua, D.C. Barua and other came forward to safeguard the class interest of the middle class. In matters of religion, there was division among the middle class. None came to reform their society out of their religious boundary. Assamese middle class was not self- dependent in the field of trade and commerce and had to rely, therefore, on the British for capital. On the question of women education, there was division of thought and action among the Assamese middle class. Haliram, Anandaram, Gunabhiram, and Lakshminath - all raised voice on behalf of women education. On the contrary, Lambodar Bora, Bolinarayan Bora and Ratneswar Mahanta opposed it tooth and nail. Regarding the extension of support to the peasant movement of Assam, there was also division among the Assamese middle class. The elite and middle class did not come to take the leadership of these movements in apprehension of losing their jobs and

sympathy from the Government. Same was the condition when the European planters harassed and exploited the tea labourers of Assam. On the question of extension and introduction of higher education in Assam, lots of debates cropped up among the Assamese middle class. Some favoured higher education whereas some favoured primary education in the province. Finally, unlike the all India middle class, the birth of nationalism in Assam under the middle class leadership was not the outcome of anti-British uprising.¹⁷

IV

Occupation of Assam by the British in 1826 ended the six hundred years of the Ahom monarchy and heralded the modern age in Assam. The British rule carried with it the message of new age in one hand and new and developed means of exploitation by the imperialistic class upon the Assamese on the other. People of Assam welcomed the British rule and hoped that the new Government would end the anarchy and disorder from the province. But the members of the royal family, aristocratic and nobility did not accept the alien rule easily. Gomdhar Konwar and Piyali Phukan adopted the armed path to annihilate the British imperialism for the restoration of monarchy but their efforts ended in smoke. Slowly and gradually, a new class emerged in Assam at a time while confrontation between the alien Government and the feudalistic aristocratic class went on. This new class, instead of criticizing the British rule, praised their rule and they surprisingly even did away with the demand of freedom. The Colonial apparatus in India created a market for the employment of English educated Indians in the various administrative departments.¹⁸ Probably because of this, the elite class did not oppose Colonialism initially. According to Srinivas, the new elite had two faces. One face turned towards their own society while the other turned towards the west.¹⁹ According to him, westernization is a fundamental process and the fact is that the Indian elite took up the great task of modernizing Indian Society. In Assam also, we find some sections that had their inclination towards the European style and system and on the contrary, some showed their weakness towards their own society and culture. Assamese middle class reconciled with the British rule and they formed an organization 'Assam Association'. As it was partly a political organization, so the Government officer kept aloof from this.

Assamese middle class did not take part in any political movement against the British imperialism; on the contrary, they selected the flag of language to unite the entire people.

The Assamese middle class did not take rest by showing their allegiance to the British rule; they rather started to imitate them also. Some of the English educated youth saw their local good goods as bad and foreign goods as good. The educated youth even started to imitate the English in the dresses and costumes. To them, those were the symbol of the development of civilization. Traditional dresses, to them, created problem on their lips in speaking English. This section sank into western thought and lost their indigenous heritage. It seemed that their relations were only with English costumes, English menu, English temperament, English cap, English step, English tradition and custom.²⁰ George Bernard Shaw termed the Greek scholars as the privileged men. To him, few of them knew Greek and most of them knew nothing. Similarly, some of the middle class of Assam in 19th century neither had command on the English nor had the overall knowledge on any subjects. Despite that, they tried to show themselves as scholars and intellectual class. In the words of Gunabhiram Barua, he is fool who can and he is wise who cannot '*Narai Adhyapak, aru Ramai Pandit*'.²¹

The attitude of the Assamese middle class of the 19th century towards the British imperialism is discussed as under.

Haliram Dhekial Phukan

In addition to becoming the chief associate of David Scott in matters of the land settlement, he also became the *Seristadar* of lower Assam and assistant magistrate of Guwahati and thus introduced himself as one of the faithful officials of the Colonial Government. Being enchanted, he praised the British rule in his work "*Assam Buranji*" saying that people of the province would become more civilized if the British rule continued.

Maniram Dewan

He was a prominent and influential leader of then Assam who expressed loyalty towards the British prior to 1857. He helped the Government from all corners starting from collecting revenue mercilessly from the people to the curbing of the revolts.

Instead of helping Piyali Phukan against the Government, he rather helped the Government. Enchanted with the British rule, he even prayed to the Almighty to give

long-life to the British rule. Undoubtedly, his help to the Government revealed his parochial self interest. But his sweet relation with the British began to turn bitter when the British started to consider him as their business rival. Ultimately, such a situation developed when he had no other option left than to oppose the British. It is obvious that had his personal interest not been received blow at the hands of the British, probably he would not have gone against the British.

Harkanta Sarma Majinder Barua

Majindar Barua was an outstanding and magnificent personality of then Assamese society. First as *Seristadar* and next as *Sadaramin*, he became able to extract praise from the British Government. He did not co-operate with those people of Assam who opposed the British rule. Even, he abandoned Maniram at a time when the latter became enemy of the British and asked people to boycott Maniram. The Government satisfied at his royal allegiance bestowed him with various presents.

Jaduram Duttabaruah

The first Assamese dictionary writer Jaduram was also an obedient British employee. He was given the post '*Sadaramin*' by the British. He became highly appreciative of the British rule and never tolerated its opposition. For example, when the trial of Gomdhar went on at *Panchayat*, he along with Maniram, Madhavram Borgohain and others gave verdict against Gomdhar.²²

Jagnaram Khargharia Phukan

Khargharia Phukan, the brother of Haliram Dhekial Phukan, was the high official of the British administration. He became the police superintendent at the beginning and the *Sadaramin* later on. At each and every moment, he had his British gesture and style. He sat and ate together with the British and expressed loyalty to the British. He was more enthusiastic about the development of the English and the Bengali language rather than the Assamese language. For example, when some elites of Gauhati took initiative for setting up of the Bengali and English schools, he assisted them even financially. Thus, he expressed his hatred and disdain towards the Assamese culture and language.

Anandaram Dhekial Phukan

Anandaram is recognised as the father of Assamese nationalism and the harbinger of the new age. He sought development of Assam under the shade of the British and believed that modernization of Assam was possible only under the British. He dreamt of

building a beautiful Assam under their rule. Surprisingly, he did not want freedom from the British. Being a high official, he expressed his disdain to them who opposed the British rule. He promised to the Government that the Assamese would not resort to the path of revolution against them. Anandaram had an unflinching faith in the British rule and his practical insight must have felt that at that time there could be no better substitute for it. He was certainly not a revolutionary like Maniram, but that does not mean that he was less patriotic.

Gunabhiram Barua

He was an obedient official of the British Government and in 1887; he was given the title of '*Raibahadur*'. Due to having deep faith and love, he unconditionally supported and praised the British rule. He saw all round development of Assam under the British and thanked God for their rule in Assam. The Assam, Barua said, got lot from the British but the British in return, whatever exported from Assam that was their due.²³

Dinanath Bezbarua

He had his deep faith and love towards the British rule. He was a *seristadar* under the British Government and expressed his loyalty and sincerity to the Government. His son Lakshminath wrote about his father that he did not support any work that went against the British rule and advised people to accept their rule.

Radhanath Changkakati and Bolinarayan Bora

Radhanath, the founder Secretary of the 'Times of Assam' and Bolinarayan, the editor of '*Mou*' – both were loyal to the British. Radhanath through his paper expressed allegiance to the Government.

Bolinarayan wrote in '*Mou*' that lots of progress India achieved under the British and the British queen. He wrote that the English rule was necessary for long for the welfare and betterment of the Indians and India. Bora possessed a deep understanding of the basic malady of Assamese society. But instead of removing these maladies, he put his energies in cultivating English ways of life.²⁴

Hemchandra Barua

He also exhibited his allegiance and loyalty towards the British Government and paid attention to the cultivation of Assamese language and literature.

Manik Chandra Barua & Jagannath Barua:

M.C. Barua, J.N. Barua, Gobinda Bezbarua, Ganga Gobinda Phukan – they all accepted British rule unconditionally and sought progress of the province under the British. M.C. Barua and J.N. Barua submitted a petition before Northbrook, the Viceroy of India, in 1872 on behalf of the '*Asomiya Sahitya Sabha*', through which they revealed their allegiance and loyalty to British rule. M.C. Barua and J.N. Barua both could not give up their affection towards the British rule. Ganga Gobinda Phukan, Gobinda Bezbarua and J.N. Barua criticized the revenue hike through 'Assam Association' and 'land and jungle rule' through Jorhat *Sarbajanik Sabha*. Though protesting on behalf of the peasant, they did not stretch out their open hand to root out British imperialism.

Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy of India, came to Assam in March, 1900 and was welcomed by the Assamese middle class. J.N. Barua in his address even expressed loyalty on behalf of the people of the province to the British Government. To retain the memory of Lord Curzon 'Curzon Hall' was built on the west direction of the Dighalipukhuri of Guwahati.

Lakshminath Bezbarua

The representatives of 'Jonaki age' accepted the bondage of alien rule and tried their level best for the amelioration of language and culture of Assam. Of them, the name of L.N. Bezbarua deserves special mention; he was the pioneer of the middle class of the Jonaki age. Though he expressed liberal view towards the alien rule, sometime he also criticized their imperialistic design. Nevertheless, he never wished the sunset of British rule from India and always kept himself away from the independence movement. Absence of anti-imperialism found manifestation in his writings as he had his deep inclination towards their rule.

Harbilas Agarwala

He also expressed his deep loyalty towards the British in the early part of their rule. Basically being a businessman, he kept good relation with the Government. He had his deep love towards Assam but despite that, he kept his relation with his original homeland Rajasthan. He, instead of employing local masons and carpenters in building house brought them from Rajasthan. He had his disdain and doubts towards the skill of the local artisans and labourers. On the question of opium, he did not take strong stand against its prohibition, rather favoured its slow and gradual eradication. He had several business

viz. timber, rice, rubber, and banking and had sixty shops in the entire Assam. He had a tea garden at Tamolbari. But, bad eyes of the British fell on his garden also. His saw mill opened at Tezpur had to shut down due to the conspiracy of the British. While many of the tea labourers after the expiry of their term had left their garden jobs due to the indescribable and inhuman exactions of the British planters, some of them worked in the saw mills of Harbilas. Ultimately, this invited wrath of the British and gave birth of conflicts between the planters and the manager of Harbilas.

Pandit Dhireshwaracharyya

The king of England Edward VII died and George V ascended the throne of England in 1901. Regarding the two events, he composed two verses. One was expression of condolence and another was that of joy. Same year when Viceroy Lord Curzon came to Assam in 1901, he greeted him with Sanskrit language and thus proved his scholarly excellence in Sanskrit. Due to his allegiance shown to the alien Government, he was bestowed with the title '*Mahamahopadhyay*' by the Government.²⁵

Hemchandra Goswami and Padma Nath Gohain Baruah

Goswami and Gohainbarua both were the pioneers of Jonaki age of Assamese literature. Both of them were British loyal officials. L.N. Bezbarua was loyal to the British but some time he criticized their rule. But Goswami and Gohainbaruah neither participated in the war of independence nor pointed to the Government of their shortcomings.

When Bengali was introduced in Assam for the interest of the administration, he instead of criticizing the British criticized the Bengali bureaucrats and held them responsible for that. Being overjoyed and enchanted, Gohainbaruah unhesitatingly praised the British rule. He said that unlike the pre-British rule, there was no want during the British rule and there was, according to him, no sound ground to express dissatisfaction under the British rule.

Chandra Kumar Agarwala, Ananda Chandra Agarwala and Uttam Barua

C.K. Agarwala unconditionally accepted the bondage of the alien rule and A.C. Agarwala rendering his duty in police department, embraced the British rule with supreme joy. He expressed his royal allegiance even through his poetry. The Government being pleased with him honoured him as *Raisahib* in 1916 and *Raibahdur* in 1921.

Supplying boats and labourers to the British in 1911 in their Arab expedition, first Choudhury of Borbhag Purgunnah, Uttam Chandra Barua introduced himself as a faithful and obedient servant of the British Government.²⁶

Kamalakanta Bhattacharjee and Ratneswar Mahanta

Among the Government employed Assamese middle class of the 19th century, the name of R. Mahanta and K. K. Bhattacharjee are especially significant. Mahanta by terming the revolt of Piyali Phukan as 'seditious' tried to convince his allegiance to the British.

K.K. Bhattacharjee who ended his life for the development of his people and land and alerted and awakened the people, bowed down to the British imperialism with honour and respect. Bhattacharjee believed in the British rule and thought of his native peoples welfare and progress under their rule. He even said that the British were fit to rule the country and people should remain satisfied with their rule and imitate them. He even appealed to his countrymen that they should not ask the British to quit the land as their departure would not be good for the native people. He in the 80's and 90's of the 19th century, did not want the British to leave Assam or India – rather welcomed the British Prince Albert Victor at Calcutta writing a poem 'Prince Albert Victor *Adarani*'.²⁷

We have found that the Assamese middle class, instead of taking anti-British attitude, considered the British imperialism as blessings. It is to be noted that not only the middle class of Assam but the middle classes of other states of India class also express their natural allegiance and support to the British imperialism. Right from Raja Ram Mohan Roy to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Michael Madhusudan Dutta, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Dinabandhu Mitra and others harbingers of Indian renaissance wish stability and permanency of the British imperialism. This middle class thought that the onus was to point out the loopholes of the British rule giving them opportunity to be reformed. Reminding and remembering the heterogeneous good heritage of India, middle class like Rabindra Nath Tagore believed that the British would also submerge one day within the Indian society like the Huns, Pathans and the Mughals. But it is true that culturally and educationally a rich nation would never want to assimilate or mingle with a nation that culturally and intellectually poor; rather they would try to impose their culture and education on others which is a main characteristic of

imperialist class. Culturally and educationally developed British did not come with the object of getting them assimilated with the Indians, rather to get assimilated the Indians with their culture and education. Why the Indian middle class could not feel the exploitative nature of the British, pointed to the intellectual poverty of the middle class!

Prior to 1920, natural allegiance towards the British imperialism was the characteristic features of the Indian middle class. They sought and wished development of their land remaining under the British umbrella. To work under the British, praise their rule and lead a peaceful and comfortable life - was the objects of the Assamese middle class. They spent less time to think of the exploited masses of the province and the shrewd and astute British liked this. Loyalty and allegiance that Assamese middle class had towards the British, brought a negative influence on the society of Assam and because of this, anti-British uprising instead of accelerating it rather halted.

Nevertheless, we can say that the middle class contributed lot in the field of language and culture of India. They expressed their loyalty and allegiance not only to the Colonial Government but also to the European Scholars who helped them to know of their past. European Scholars translated the Sanskrit books of Indian Scholars in English which benefited the Indian middle class and the elite to know of their own past and the people. Getting the taste of rich thought of their great Sanskrit Scholars' writings through English books is a great discovery for intellectuals who discovered real India.²⁸

V

The lion's share of the income of the Government came from the middle class people. The rich can pay taxes easily because they are industrialists, manufacturers, businessmen and highly-placed officials. Sometime they evade tax, befool the Government and cause financial loss to the nation. The middle class people are the real consumers. When the Government imposes new taxes upon different commodities, the poor are less affected as their standard of living is low and wants are a few. Therefore, the middle class people are badly hit.

In Assam, when the Government was contemplating to prohibit the opinion, the fear of other taxes was there all the time in the minds of the people of the middle class

society.²⁹ In 1860, on the advice of James Wilson income tax was introduced and this was extended in the following year-1861 to the province of Assam. The middle class consisting of small land owners, Government servants, *Mauzadars*, traders and merchants all were affected by recent taxes on income.³⁰

The British motive behind the imposition of income tax was to make their economy sound and powerful. But there might have other motives also. To bend the backbone of the middle class so that they may not lead the local society, the peasants and the masses and also lend money to the local peasants for cultivation was probably the other motive behind its imposition. Anyway, the Colonial apparatus sought to cripple the indigenous and traditional agricultural economy of Assam and thereby make the local people totally parasite on them.

About the economic and political condition of Assam, most of the Assamese middle class were not found to be serious. Those who were found to be serious, their role were also not satisfactory. Their grievance was confined in the papers only. For example, a letter entitled 'Distress in Assam' was written by an inhabitant of Guwahati in the 'Samachar Darpan' where he had given a vivid description of erstwhile British occupied Assam. It was mentioned that the people of Assam had to pay less revenue during the Ahom period than during the British.³¹

In the 19th century, many problems engulfed Assam. Some of them, mainly the revenue hike, were highlighted by A. Dhekial Phukan. Regarding the hike of revenue, he wrote to Mills – 'the present rate of taxation, however, has far exceeded the limit and the assessment on some of the poorest classes of *rupit* lands is nearly equal in value to one half of their produce. In illustration to this fact, we would beg to point out that a *poorah* of high *rupit* land yielding twenty or fifteen maunds of rice valued at from 2 to 3 Rs. is loaded with a tax of one rupee and four annas! Unless, therefore, the Government provides the people with better and improved means of cultivating their lands, increase of assessment will inevitably lead to an increase of the unhappiness of the people.'³² Revenue hike was on kind of exploitation but Anandaram Dhekial Phukan did not accept it. To him, the British came to Assam not for exploitation but for the development of the region. It is because of this that he neither participated nor supported the anti-British

uprisings. Indeed, his concept of development of Assam was based on theoretical contemplation, nothing else than that.

The British administration hiked the rate of revenue double in 1868 and peasants of Nowgong reacted sharply against it. Gunabhiram, on the other hand, supported the hike, saying that the prospect of development of Assam was high as a result of revenue hike. But he had his apprehension in mind that if the revenue hike affected the priestly class as well as the gentry whose caste rules and family traditions compelled them to engage in other pursuits of life, they would be obliged to use hired labour to till their lands.³³

There were anomalies in the revenue system of the colonial period, which had been described by a correspondent of the 'Indian Nation'. The paper described that formerly the ryots of Assam were the proprietors of their land and if they made any default to pay revenue, their land was sold at auction, the surplus of the sale-proceeds being paid to them after deducting arrear costs. But during the Colonial regime, they were neither land-holders, settlement holders nor tenants-at-will liable to be ejected or to have their lease cancelled on breach of any of the conditions of lease.³⁴ The paper described how the Colonial Government exploited and harassed the peasants through the revenue hike and ejection. Thus, the paper became successful in bringing the local issue to the national level.

The middle class who were working under the colonial Government did not criticize the land revenue policy scaring of losing their jobs. Moreover, they had fear in their mind that if they opposed revenue-hike, the Government would then impose tax on them to meet their loss. Those middle class, who attempted to raise voice against the hike of revenue, had been silenced by giving them lucrative and covetous posts. Ultimately, the peasants got no respite from the exactions of the revenue and revenue officials.

VI

Opium smoking and opium taking were the blackest chapters in Indian history. In Assam, most of the smokers and takers were the local Assamese people. The Opium Enquiry Committee and the leaders of the Congress brought into focus the disastrous

effects of opium in Assam. The influence of opium was so bad that some even gave false evidence in exchange of opium. The excessive use of opium had converted the Assamese into effeminate, weak, indolent and degraded people. Though, high consumption of opium by the local people was a burning problem, the anti-opium agitation took time to gather momentum. The dependent educated middle class with their vested interest in tea plantation and in the bureaucratic distributive system appears to have been not fit for the step. Despite that, the question of opium was raised and mooted in right earnest by some of the influential members of the community. But due to the conflicting and contradictory views of the members, the Royal Commission ended in nothing but it roused public consciousness which led to the emergence of '*Kani Nibarani Sabha*' in several districts to combat the opium evil.³⁵

That the opium is injurious to health was known to the Colonialists very well. But they observed the business prospect of it and brought this lucrative business to their hand by banning local opium cultivation in 1860-61. The Government became able to earn more profit by introducing their abkari opium. From 1873 to 1893, the Colonial Government of Assam sold a total of 31,392 maunds of opium and realized a net price of Rs.3, 14, 55,576 and a license fee of Rs.47, 60,657 from the opium sellers. In this way, they exploited the people of Assam in terms of opium revenue itself to the tune of Rs.3, 62, 16,233.³⁶

On the question of opium ban, the middle class was divided into three groups. One section did not want its ban as they had their narrow vested interest on it. They guessed that its banning would lead the Government to loss of revenue and then the Government would impose tax on them to meet their loss. According to Kalita, the fear of other taxes being raised in the event of the suppression of opium was there all the time in the minds of the people of the middle class society.³⁷ In 1860-61 when opium was banned, discontent started against the order. Merchants and local traders suffered lot due to this ban as they had to shut down their shops. Again, some sections were in favour of the opium ban. These sections were deeply concerned of its destructive affects on their people and society.

There were still others who neither supported nor opposed its ban. They totally remained neutral on this core issue. They were scared if they opposed it; The

Government would then impose other tax on them to meet their loss and would also lose their jobs. Local people would disdain them if they supported the ban. So, they thought it better to remain neutral and indifferent towards it.

The middle class of Assam in colonial period were more or less concerned on the question of opium. Some even remained totally indifferent to it. However, the role of the middle class of Assam in the 19th century can be evaluated in the following manner.

Jagannath Barua

J.N. Barua played a very negative role with regard to the suppression of opium in Assam. His role in this regard was most detrimental so far as the interest of the Assamese people were concerned. His enlightenment and public service served the British interest best and a little of the Assamese tea planting class. As in the case of other middle class men of his period, with little exception, he could not rise above his own class interest and could do nothing for the amelioration of a public vice which had attained the magnitude of a national vice even before his birth. He expressed his opinion against the suppression of the consumption of the opium by the people of Assam with a striking clarity of purpose and without any hypocrisy and did not maintain a double-standard in this regard. Barua gave evidence before the Royal Commission on opium in Calcutta on 28th Dec, 1893 and told the Commission that opium was a necessity in a jungle and malarious province like Assam. The use of opium had been prevalent from time immemorial. During the regime of the native Government in Assam, a large number of people of all classes indulged in opium. Opium was highly useful in alleviating pain and in removing disorders of the stomach and was also a prevention of fever to some extent. He held the existing policy of the Government on opium to be the best and said that the people of Assam would consider that Government would not be justified in adopting any change in the policy hitherto pursued. Barua expressed his opinion against the suppression of the consumption of the opium by the people of Assam and did not maintain a double standard in this case.³⁸

Hemchandra Barua

Hemchandra was the lone-crusader against the use of opium. He was called by the Indian Opium Commission but could not attend due to physical ground. But a copy of English translation of '*Kaniyar Kirtan*' (Opium eaters' carol) was sent to a member of the

commission. *Kaniyar Kirtan* was perhaps the first manifesto in the world. Referring to the dreadful effects of opium eating, he in his '*Kaniyar Kirtan*' writes –

Kepa Kani Bihor Ses

Kaniar Nai Gynar Les

Hai Hai Ki Ghor Kles

*Kaniai Khale Asom Des*³⁹

Thus, he exposed the evils of the opium eating and ridiculed the vices of the Assamese society. He lamented that there was hardly any other more deadly poison than opium and it was the root to the ruin of Assam. In a note dispatched to Indian Opium Commission, it was said that addiction to opium by the Assamese was a natural instinct and his suggestion was clear. 'Sale of opium by the Government should not, I think, be prohibited for non-medical purposes'. Hemchandra wanted to save the Assamese society from the influence of opium. But after meticulous study, it is found that he was not at all bothered of the bad habits of opium prevailing among the lower classes.

Anandaram Dhekial Phukan

Regarding the opium policy of the Government, Phukan commented in this manner – 'the tree will go so long as the root is not destroyed. The source must be completely exhausted and the introduction of fresh supplies (from) out of the country carefully be suppressed'. To eradicate the evil, he suggested to Mills total stoppage of Government opium and restriction of the cultivation of poppy subjecting it to heavier taxation.⁴⁰

Opium and prostitution was well known to the people of Assam and it engulfed the entire society. A. D. Phukan expressed his deep concern and disdain on it and dreamt of a noble dream and prayed God for the betterment of Assam. 'When none will give false evidence for two tolas of opium and will rather throw aside lacs of rupees in such cases. prostitution, opium and wine will be unknown in the country, that time, O God, the Almighty Father, bring about in no time'.⁴¹

Lakshi Nath Bezbaruah

Bezbaruah paid no heed to the opium debate which was going on in the 19th century. He never associated himself with the anti-opium campaign in the State.

(iv) Gunabhiram Barua

One significant issue that confronted the middle class was the addiction of the Assamese to opium. Gunabhiram said that opium came as a destroyer of disease and finally it turned out to be the root of diseases.⁴² He spoke out against the abuse of opium in the Provincial Legislative Council and exposed the hollowness of the Government Policy on opium. Appearing before the Royal Commission on Opium in 1891, he demanded its total abolition since the opium-eaters themselves felt the term '*Kania*' was a byword of reproach.

Padma Nath Gohain Barua

Among the leading members of the Assamese community, only P.N.G. Barua continued to give vent to his indignation and never betrayed his consistent opposition to the use of opium under any pretext.⁴³ On 10th April 1913, in the Provincial Legislative Council he said in his maiden speech, 'if the British really sought to reduce opium consumption, then why did they seek again to introduce abkari opium? Actually, by this step, they wanted to root out the local poppy cultivation and thereby wanted introduction of abkari opium as they saw it more lucrative.

Harbilas Agarwala

He ran an opium shop on one hand and recommended to the Government a policy of gradual eradication of the evil on the other. This revealed his double standard nature.

Madhab Chandra Bordoloi

Bordoloi, an Extra Assistant Commissioner, never found fault with any Government policy. On 29th December, 1893, he said before the Royal Commission on opium, 'In my humble opinion, I think that opium is one of the choicest gifts of Heaven which God has for the relief of suffering humanity as far as the ignorant people of my country are concerned'.

Maniram Dewan

Dewan depicted a bad picture of the Assamese society during the Burmese rule due to his people's addiction to opium. To him, the withdrawal of old penalties against the opium-eaters was mainly responsible for this. The Burmese were responsible for creating such a bad environment in Assam. The British would have seen possibly an opium-free Assam if the old penalties against the opium eaters were not withdrawn. To Maniram, the continued sale of abkari opium by the Government had made the people

unfit for agriculture. He, in his petition to Mills, condemned the introduction of Government opium as people were becoming unfit for agricultural pursuits but he took a realistic view when he recommended a policy of gradual eradication of poppy cultivation.

P. Chaliha

Chaliha spoke out against the abuse of opium in the Provincial Legislative Council. He even resigned his seat in 1919 and thus exposed the hollowness of the Government policy on opium.

Chandra Kumar Agarwala:

Agarwala was silent on the issue of opium. His father Harbilas owned an opium shop and probably because of this, he was silent on this burning and detrimental issue. This interest of Agarwala manifested his parochial character.

Manik Chandra Barua, Bolinarayan Bora, Hem Chandra Goswami

Barua, Bora and Goswami, never troubled themselves with the thought of opium.⁴⁴

Radhanath Changkakati

Changkakati, the editor of the 'Time of Assam,' urged the Royal Commission on Opium to prohibit the drug altogether making up the loss of revenue.

S. N. Barua

He expressed his opinion in favour of the suppression of the opium evils. He said to the Royal Commission on Opium that opium was not a preventive to malaria and it was never prescribed either as a preventive or a remedy. In his words 'it is never considered to be a protective against malaria. I belong to Kamrup. I was born there. A bad type of malaria known as *Kala-azar* has been raging there for about ten years and in these ten years; I have never known a man who took opium as a remedy for that type of fever. I have never heard even that opium is prescribed as a remedy for malaria.' He said that the educated Assamese people wanted the prohibition of opium and he also supported them.⁴⁵

Lalit Mohan Lahiri

Lahiri of Nadia (West Bengal) who had spent about 9 years in Assam by 1893 said that opium was considered as a good preventive of and a remedy for malarious fever was certainly new to him. He never heard of opium being prescribed by doctors either as

a preventive or as a remedy. He, on the other hand, said that the habitual opium eaters and smokers had largely and easily fallen victims to such fever.⁴⁶

Jawaharlal Nehru was dead-against the opium and its use. According to J. Nehru, probably, it could have been stamped out almost completely, if the Government had pursued a more rigorous policy during the past dozen years or more.⁴⁷

VII

The introduction of English education created an enlightened middle class who took the initiative in the formation of regional organizations for socio-economic and cultural development of the province and heralded an era of reawakening.⁴⁸ In the second half of the 19th century, there also emerged several associations and organisations mostly of cultural and literary character which provided meeting places for exchange of views. Priyalal Baruah gave birth to '*Assam Desh Hitaishini Sabha*' in Sibsagar in 1885, Anandaram and Gunabhiram '*Gyan Pradayini Sabha*' in Nowgong in 1857, Ganga Gobinda Phukan '*Asamiya Sahitya Sabha*' and 'Upper Assam Association' in Calcutta and in Sibsagar in 1872 and 1880 respectively. '*Asamiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha*' was also the product of this period.⁴⁹ In the 19th century, most of these organisations were led by the planters and the landlords classes as they were the influential and powerful persons in the society. Actually, land conferred them 'Power and Prestige'⁵⁰ in the society and facilitated upward mobility.

Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha

It was formed most probably just some time before the promulgation of the 'Assam Land and Revenue Regulation of 1886'. In 1884, this was given shape with the object of representing the wishes and aspirations of the people of Assam, to the Government explaining to the people the objects and policies of the Government and generally ameliorating the condition of the people. The *Sabha* criticized the land revenue policy and exposed the cause of the Assamese *ryots*. The *Sabha* took up a number of issues for the socio-economic development of the province and for the protection of the rights and interests of the people. In 1886, it deplored the introduction of 'The Assam

Land and Revenue Regulations' without consulting the people. In 1892, the *Sabha* expressed its solidarity with the *ryots* who agitated against the enhancement of land revenue.

J. N. Barua played a positive role in the organization of public meeting at Jorhat against the 'Land and Revenue Regulations of 1886' where about 10,000 people gathered. The members of the *Sabha* expressed their deep concern in the wake of the appointment of the Royal Commission on Opium by the British Home Government in 1893 for the fear of imposition of tax on them. They actually wanted gradual abolition of opium business. As against the suppression and prohibition of opium, their arguments were (i) Opium had useful medicinal value (ii) fall in excise revenue would lead to an increased taxation (iii) Opium use was not barred by any religious principle.

The *Sabha* adopted a resolution to support the policy of the Government on the ground that if opium be altogether prohibited, the people were quite unwilling to bear any further taxation and also that it would be hardship to those who took opium to be deprived of it at once. Also the *Sabha* said that the people of Assam were unable to bear any further taxation if opium was prohibited.⁵¹ In 1893, the *Sabha* submitted a memorandum to the Royal Commission on Opium recommending the gradual abolition of opium and expressed concern that sudden prohibition would be disastrous to those who were already addicted to it.

The *Sabha*, on the question of lease term, favoured the grant of long term leases with the right of sub-letting the land and expressed concern that the short term leases had failed to improve the condition of the *ryots* or extend cultivation. Like the *Sarvajanik Sabha* of Jorhat, there was also the same *Sabha* in Pune. In Maharashtra in 1896-97, the '*Poona Sarvajanik Sahba*' which had been recently captured by B.G. Tilak, sent out agents into the countryside 'to encourage peasants to resist payment of revenue in a period of famine'. After the famine of 1899-1900, no revenue combinations allegedly led by rich peasants and moneylenders were reported from Surat, Nasik, Kheda and Ahmedabad, though the Pune *Sarvajanik Sabha* had by then become quite inactive.⁵²

Tezpur Ryot Sabha

It was a broad-based common platform of the ryots. Organised chiefly to protest against the enhancement of land revenue, Tezpur *Ryot Sabha* had a wide base in the villages. It collected small subscriptions from hundreds of peasants and in 1887, built the Tezpur Town Hall, the first of its kind in Assam.

By 1886, the Shillong Association, the Nowgong *Ryot Sabha* and the Upper Assam Association came into being which were composed of ryots of the area to represent popular grievances and protest against any enhancement or fresh imposition of taxes. The new elite made a united front with the proprietary peasants against the rulers on all common issues.

Opium attracted the attention of the *Brahmas* also. The *Brahmas* pointed out the devastating and degrading effects of opium and pleaded for its total eradication. They declined to concede the Government stand to continue with it on ground of loss of revenue. Ram Durlabha Majumdar, an advocate of Nowgong, pleaded with the Royal Commission on Opium to stop opium trade on the ground that the lower classes had suffered a lot by it.⁵³

From 1886 to 1892, the members of different associations and *Rayat Sabhas* from the Brahmaputra valley took part in the sessions of the Indian National Congress held at Calcutta, Madras, Allahabad, Bombay, Nagpur etc. and placed their demand through this platform (Indian National Congress) to the Government. S.N. Bora represented Nowgong *Rayat Association* at Calcutta in 1886; Lakshmi Kanta Barkakati represented Tezpur *Rayat Sabha* at Madras in 1887. From Nowgong *Rayat Association*, Ghanashyam Barua took part at Allahabad session in 1888 and Haridas Roy from Dibrugarh took part at Bombay session in 1889. But their participation failed to fetch fruits and therefore, all became futile. That's why, in the years 1893 and 1894, these associations and *Sabhas* did not take part in the further session of Indian National Congress and extended their support to the ongoing peasant-uprising of Assam 1893-94. Though the question of opium was discussed and debated in right earnest by the leading members of various organizations, it could not be rooted out altogether. Several decades after in 1921, leaders of the Assam Association strengthened the movement against opium at the time of

Gandhiji's visit to Assam and it became an integral part of the Non-Cooperation Movement in Assam.

Though the consumption rate decreased, still the rate and incidence of consumption of opium in Assam was much higher than the medical requirements of the League of Nations. In the World Conference on Opium in Geneva in 1924, the All India Congress Committee asked C.F. Andrews to undertake an enquiry in Assam and this led to the existence of the Assam Congress Opium Enquiry Committee. The report of the Enquiry Committee was published in September, 1925. The report revealed that the opium consumption of Assam had exceeded the medical requirements of the League of Nations.⁵⁴

VIII

The so-called elite and the educated, shrewd and intellectual gentlemen in a society are called the middle class. At each and every movement, they are guided by some vested interest. Division starts among them while their interest and intention receive withstand. In the colonial regime, the so-called middle class and the rural elite sections of Assam were divided on the questions of some issues, viz. revenue, opium, plantation, abolition of *Paik*, migration, the peasant uprisings of Assam and others, etc. The divided sections may be termed as the (i) Imperialists (ii) Patriotic or Nationalists and (iii) Semi-imperialists and Semi-Patriotic.

On the question of plantation, the Imperialist Section of the Assamese middle class gave their whole-hearted support to the alien Government due to their own vested interest. Planters, businessmen, traders, merchants, magistrates and Government servants were within this group. Hemdhar Barua, Ganga Gobinda Phukan, Dinanath Bezbarua, Narayan Bezbarua, Kaliprasad Chaliha, Radha Nath Neog, Ghanashyam Barua, Gunindra Nath Barua, Guru Prasad Kakati, A. Dhekial Phukan, Gunabhiram Barua, P.N.G. Baruah, B.N. Bora, Sheikh Shahnur Ali, Harbilas Agarwala, J.N. Barua, Radhanath Changkakati, Bistu Ram Barua, Bishnu Ram Dutta Barua – all supported the Government due to their own interest. They accepted the British rule as the blessings of God. They also liked the European planters run tea gardens in Assam. They had their tea gardens at Banamali, Barding, Chenimara, Chinglou, Daloujan, Besabari, Gosaibari, Naharani, Thengalbari,

Roroia, Letekujan, Madhpur, Matijan, Singhaduar, Rajabari, Lahowal, Narajan, Tamolbari and Tipamia. When the Colonial Government engulfed the forest and the naturally enriched land in the name of wasteland rules, this section supported the Government as this rule benefited them also. Actually, the Government reserved such land in the name of wasteland for the plantation. The tea industry created a stable middle class in Assam especially in Upper Assam. Without tea industry, a stable middle class would not have come into existence in Upper Assam.⁵⁵ The alien Government gave much more interest on plantation rather than the traditional crops. But they had to face some problems like the shortage of labours as most of them were engaged in traditional crops. To flush out the local labourers (*Paiks*) from the traditional crops, they abolished the *Paik* system in the name of the emancipation of the slaves. But that was an eye-wash. The middle class of Assam especially the imperialist section did not raise voice against it because they were also in need of labours in their tea gardens. Abolition of the *Paik* system also could not solve the labour problem as the local labourers were not interested to work in the tea gardens. Finally, the Government had to import labourers from outside the province. Most of the labourers, whether outside from the state or the local was not interested to work in the tea gardens due to certain reasons viz. unhealthy environments, deadly diseases, exactions and exploitation of the tea-planters.

Surprisingly, the middle class of Assam did not mention the exactions of the European planters on the coolies of Assam. They rather showed their decisive apathy towards the British planters' indescribable exactions on the coolies of the gardens. They even praised the planters and became their supporters.⁵⁶ Bolinarayan Bora was the blind follower of British rule and in his '*Mau*' tried to draw up some lists of benefits that the coolies derived from their masters (Planters). The role of '*Mau*' was praised by the British mouthpiece 'Englishman'. But some of the middle class like L.N. Bezbarua did not support the view of '*Mau*'. Bezbarua rather lauded the honest role played by the Bengalee press. The editor of '*Mau*' was more conservative and of pro-British bent of mind.⁵⁷

The greatest social evil in the 19th century Assam was the pitiable condition of the indentured teagarden coolies, the 'beasts of menagerie' in Fuller's words, which attracted the attention of the Bengalese but not of the Assamese nor of the Bengalese in Assam

None dared to defend the causes of the coolies in Assam except L.N. Bezbarua and 'an unknown gentleman' to ameliorate the condition of the coolies, the target of lash and lust of the European planters – the lords of the wilderness.⁵⁸ Instead of criticizing and condemning the exactions on the coolies, M.C. Barua even expressed happiness and opined- "it is superfluous for me to state here that, were it not for the Tea Industry, Assam would not have been what she is today". The planting community have the pioneers of progress and enlighten in Assam.⁵⁹ Barua was right, no doubt but it would have been better had he or they condemned the atrocities of the planters on the coolies. But the halcyon days of the imperialist sections were about to set in when they began to understand the real motives of the Colonial Government Wasteland rules and other tea-related benefits all of which went in favour of the European planters. They got nothing from it and started to express their disdain and anguish against the Government. Sometime even under Colonial pressure and conspiracy, they had to sell their gardens to the European planters. Indeed, European never wanted local planters as their rivals in this lucrative and covetous business. In one words, they sought monopoly in the field of tea-sector by kicking out the Assamese tea planters. The position of the Assamese tea planters was that of a 'Liliput surrounded by the British Gulgivers' from all sides. Nevertheless, the Assamese tea planters were significantly the first group of Assamese capitalists though they were very weak and insignificant compared to their British Counterparts. They obviously became a collaborator class under the Colonial constraints.⁶⁰

The relation between the European tea planters and the local tea planters began to deteriorate day by day. What privileges were granted to the British planters by the Government in matters of rebate in land revenue, fee simple grants, the same were denied to the local planters. For example, the Government declined to give privileges to Maniram Dewan but he took up the challenge which led his relation with the Government estranged. Thus, finally he had to earn the resentment of the alien Government.

The Patriotic or Nationalist Sections of the middle class raised their voice for the sake of their motherland. At each and every issue, where people's interests were there, they instantly reacted on behalf of them. On the question of plantation, abolition of *Paik*-system and migration, they reacted sharply. This section understood the real motives of

the Government. The British came to Assam, to them, to dismantle the traditional crop-system of the land and to introduce in that place plantation industry in the province. They also criticized the Wasteland rule of the alien Government. They opposed Mills when he strongly deprecated the granting of waste land to the natives in 1853. Moreover, to the patriotic section, abolition of *Paik*-system in the name of emancipating them from the yoke of the aristocrats and nobility was just an eye-wash. Their motive behind this abolition was to create some labour class and attract them towards their tea gardens on one hand and ruin and dismantle traditional agriculture on the other. But abolition of the *Paik* could not solve their problems as the local people were not interested to work in their gardens. The Government then resorted to other means. They began to encourage migration from other states to Assam. Due to abundance of land, there were no protest against this at the early stage but when it started to change the demographic and population pattern of the land, they began to shout against it tooth and nail. Kamala Kanta Bhattacharjee in his poetry collection entitled '*Chintanol*' (burning thought, published in 1890 in Calcutta) regretted through his poem '*Udogoni*' (inspiration) that the immigrants who had settled in Assam were intelligent and wicked and became the virtual overlords of Assam exploiting Assamese resources. He appealed to the Assamese to shed off their lethargy and take lessons from the humiliation they were being subjected to. He through his poetry '*Udogoni*' (Inspiration), '*Purnimar Ratiloi Chai*' (looking at the full-moon night), '*Ei no Assam, Nohoi ne Smashan*' (is this Assam, not a graveyard), '*Jatiya Gourav*' (national pride), '*Marishali Endhar Nisha*' (the dark midnight), '*Bhiksha*' (alms) – raised voice against exploitation and wanted to awaken his countrymen from slumber. His purpose was to make people conscious of their real plights and duties.⁶¹ Like Kamalakanta, Krishnakanta Bhattacharyya and L.N. Bezbarua were also patriotic middle class of Assam. C.K. Agarwala also contributed lot through his two papers '*Jonaki*' and '*Asamiya*'. But his activities reflected his dual character – inhuman and capitalists.

Migration created problem for the educated middle class of Assam as they had to compete with the educated Bengali middle class in the field of Government jobs and this gave the British an opportunity in creating fear in the minds of the Assamese middle class. Moreover, increasing population created pressure on the agricultural land and also

altered the demographic pattern of the province which found manifestation at the resentment of the middle class towards the close of the 19th century.

The Semi-imperialist and Semi-patriotic sections of the middle class were just like the bats – neither birds nor animals. They neither wanted to incur enmity from the Colonial Government nor from their own society and thus enjoyed privileges from both wings. On the question of plantation, abolition of *Paik* and migration, they kept their mouth shut. To give support to plantation, abolition of *Paik* and migration would invite problem from their society and to oppose those would anger the alien Government. After contemplation, this section thought it wise to remain neutral. This section can also be termed as weak, imbecile, intellectual, astute, shrewd class in the society. Astute, shrewd and crafty in the sense that they maintained good relation and kept away from incurring enmity from the Government and the people of their society and weak and imbecile in the sense that they lacked courage to face the Government and the society. Actually, this section was indifferent towards their own society as well as towards the ruling class. Moreover, they probably had to face opposition from the leaders of orthodox opinion. The latter had the power to fine and to excommunicate temporarily or permanently. Excommunication was a serious matter as no member would have social intercourse including marriage, with the excommunicated person and his family. Until they increased substantially in numbers, they were subjected to harassment at the hands of the orthodox.⁶²

IX

Several peasant uprisings took place in Colonial Assam in 19th century against the exploitation and revenue hike of the Colonial Government. Revolt of Phulaguri (1861), Patharughat, Rangia and Lachima (1893-94) were some of the gorgeous and garish chapters in the history of Assam. Surprisingly, the middle class of Assam neither supported nor participated in the uprisings collectively. But some sections of them stretched out their helping hands to the Colonial Government. Most of them found less time to think of the distress and agonies of the poor peasants. They wore colorful spectacles and saw all things colorful. Wealth and prosperity flourished their life and led them to guess the same prosperity in the life of the poor peasants also. They even never

felt hesitation to pass out comments that the peasants of Assam were happy and peaceful under the British. Some of the middle class truly and sincerely supported the peasants in their uprisings and some others surprisingly maintained neutrality and indifference. Still, there were others who maintained dubious and double-standard role in the uprisings. But all sections, no doubt, had their vested interests. Abolition of *Khat* system hurt the prestige and standard of living of the higher classes. They had to work hand in hand with those who had been their sub-ordinates. The *khats* which they held rent free were now assessed. Abolition of slavery (1843) made their position like ordinary ryots. They had to lose their former privileges and had to sell or mortgage their property to meet the rising demand of the Government. They held the Government responsible for their pitiable condition and extended support to the peasants in their revolts against the administration. The middle class who were kicked out of the employment by the British also joined in the revolt against the British. Moreover, the Government encouraged tea-cultivation and prepared certain favourable rules in favour of the European planters. The local planters expressed their concern and disdain against these rules as such rules went against their interest. So they also gave their support to the peasants.

When some of the middle class exploited and harassed the peasants for the interest of their own and the Government, some even raised their voice for the betterment of the poor peasants. Madhab Chandra Bordoloi, the Extra Assistant Commissioner and Sub-Divisional Officer of Barpeta, at the time of the peasant movement of 1893-94 was the prime mover of the governmental oppression in and around Sarthebari, Bajali and Lachima.⁶³ He inflicted indescribable atrocities on the peasants of that region. Rebel peasants were fastened with the plough and dragged like animals. Hem Chandra Goswami even presided over the atrocities and torture on the peasants of Boko and Chaygaon.⁶⁴ Bhabani Chandra Bhattacharjee was the *Tahsildar* of Patharughat during the time of the revolt in 1893-94 and was instrumental in organizing governmental offensive against the peasantry in and around his *Tahsil*. Radhanath Barua held the *Tahsils* of Rangia and Tamulpur and became the symbol of terror to the people in both the *Tahsils*. He earned bad name for his oppression of the peasantry.⁶⁵

Ganga Gobinda Phukan and Gobinda Bezbarua criticised the revenue hike through 'Assam Association' and 'Land and Jungle Rule' through Jorhat *Sarbajanik*

Sahba. Though they protested it for the interest of the peasants, they did not stretch out their helping hand against the Government. A.D. Phukan was more concerned of the agriculture and peasants of Assam. He submitted memorandum to Mills in 1853, where he detailed the drawbacks of the prevailing system of agriculture and appealed to improve the agriculture system for the betterment of the Assamese peasants. He expressed his sorrowness and concern for not adopting slightest step for improving agricultural prospect by the Government. He thought some irrigation and embankments projects for Assam like some of the contemporary states of India and suggested to the Government for its implementation but no response evoked from the Government. Phukan stated in his memorandum to Mills on the 24th July, 1853—‘an enhancement of the rates under the present circumstances of the province without any marked improvement in agriculture and commerce, would be overburdened to the people with taxes which they could but ill to bear’.⁶⁶

J.N. Barua was also more concerned of the peasants and criticized the long term leases of land and favoured the annual lease. The settlement policy of the Government to cut down the annual lease facilities was looked upon by him as ‘deprivation of their rights’. He did not agree with the repeated assertion of the Government about the happiness and improved condition of the peasantry of Assam. He said that the ryots were in no way better off. Kefayat Ullah, a Sadar Munsiff of Guwahati, was more concerned of the benefits of the Assamese cultivators. He even wrote a book entitled ‘*Krishi Darpan*’ in 1853 for the cultivators of Assam.⁶⁷ Maniram Dewan was also concerned of some of the evils of Assam. Amongst the evils, he referred to the Government was the introduction of Government opium, the destruction of indigenous artisans, the neglect of the study of the *Satras*, appointment of *Marwaris* and Bengalese as *maujadars*. Had the Government heard of Maniram, probably the revolts of 1861 and 1893-94 could have been averted.

The peasants’ issue entered even in the Imperial Legislature. R.B. Ghosh put as many as eight questions on the ‘Assam riots’ at the meeting of the Imperial Legislature on the 29th March, 1897. But Government’s reply was far from satisfactory. The repressive measures of the Government to suppress the popular movement tarnished their fair name.⁶⁸

There were some middle class who did not view with any favour the out-break of the peasant movement. Nidhi Libai Farowel, an Assamese convert to Christianity and a middle class man, spoke ill of the Phulaguri peasant movement of 1861. In his article captioned '*Nagaya Drohi Lokar Charitra Barnan*' published in '*Orunodai*', he ridiculed leaders and peasants who organised and led the movement against the Government and said- 'these were fools and self-seekers'. Gunabhiram, instead of criticising the revenue hike in 1868, supported it. He wrote the happenings at Phulaguri of 1861 in 1875 and said 'the punishment meted out to the people was commensurate with their crimes and as per law was justified. Balinarayan Bora was not at all concerned of the peasants and he termed the *Rayat Sabha* in his article in '*Mau*' 'if one fox howls, others in the group follow suit'.⁶⁹

As said earlier, in 1886 the Jorhat *Sarbajanik Sabha* deplored the introduction of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulations without consulting the people. In 1892, the *Sabha* expressed its solidarity with the *ryots* who agitated against the enhancement of land revenue. For the improvement and betterment of the *ryots*, the *Sabha* favoured the long term lease as the short-term leases had failed to improve the condition of the *ryots*. The *Sabha* also favoured gradual abolition of poppy cultivation. According to the *Sabha*, if poppy cultivation immediately stopped, then Government would increase revenue on other land and its affect would fall on the peasants.

Press highlighted the grievances of the peasants of Assam before the Indian public. A middle class from Guwahati wrote a letter entitled 'Distress in Assam' in '*Samachar Darpan*' and the letter mentioned that the people had to pay more revenue in Colonial period than the Ahom period.⁷⁰ In 1867, the '*Somprakash*' protested against the frequent reassessment which compelled the *ryots* to migrate to areas where revenue was lower making difficult thereby for the *maujadars* for the collection of revenue.⁷¹ '*Jonaki*' the literary journal of '*Asamiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhani Sabha*', Calcutta did not carry in any of its issues any sort of writings on the contemporary peasant movement of Assam. This was because none of the Assamese middle class had any compassion towards the cause of the peasantry. But the Bengali middle class, on the contrary, played a laudable role towards the cause of the peasantry. Dinabandhu Mitra's drama '*Nildarpan*' (1860) was a better example of it.⁷²

The members of the Indian National Congress from Assam took part in several sessions and placed their demands but all their efforts ended in smoke. So, they did not take part in the sessions of 1893-94 and decided to give whole-hearted support to the peasants in their revolts of 1893-94.⁷³

Almost all the movements from below, leadership was ostensibly provided by the 'elite' elements. Probably, some of the higher castes gave up their traditional value and had interacted with the lower classes. This section stretched out their helping hand to the movements of the lower class. The elites were never out of sympathy with the cultivators and the cultivators in turn never doubted their sincerity. The middle class even helped the lower class and the peasants in their upward mobility. They were not jealous of their upward mobility.

The nationalist and imperialist historians defy the role of the peasants in their movements against the British. They rather emphasized to study it through their own eyes and leadership.

Prior to 1857, peasants took the leadership of the resentment against the dominant classes. But after 1857, the leadership changed and elite took the leadership of that.⁷⁴ The challenge of the British rule produced in the minds of these elite Indians, an urge to free themselves from all shackles of imperialism and for the first time, they learnt the art of mass mobilization for a movement of a new type.⁷⁵

Some sections of the Assamese middle class being influenced by westernization tried to change their societies and gave their helping hands to the peasants in their exploitation by the alien Government. Moreover, the Assamese middle class emanating largely from landlord class and marginally from upper strata of the peasantry made common cause with the peasantry and helped them keeping alive their new-born spirit of militancy.⁷⁶

According to Manorama Sharma, with the emergence of Assamese middle class as a dominant class in Assamese society, the peasantry lost its earlier leadership and began to accept the leadership of Assamese middle class who not only changed the leadership of the peasant movement but also changed the nature of the movement.⁷⁷ R.C. Kalita while studying the 19th century peasant movement of Assam as well as the socio-economic roots of the Assam middle class is of the opinion that the middle class of

Assam or its members did not take part in or lead the peasant movement at any stage against the British Government in Assam. The peasants launched and led their movements against the Government without elite and middle class leadership.⁷⁸

Generally the *Brahmins*, *Mahantas*, *Gosains* and the *Dolois* were the landowners in the villages of Assam. They did not plough their land and therefore, had got their land ploughed and cultivated by lower class agricultural labourers and tenants. Moreover, they were not at all concerned of the problem of the lower classes. When revenue hike brought anathema in the life of the ordinary peasants, this higher class was not at all concerned of that. Revenue hike did not affect them severely as they had the capacity to bear that to some extent. Therefore, peasants themselves had to gird their waist for their destiny. The first and rather the basic characteristics of the new elite was that they were indifferent towards their own societies.⁷⁹

The peasants had no planned and long-term scheme at their hands. Probably, because of this, the elite and the middle class did not come to take the leadership of their uprisings of 19th century. They scared anti-British movement lest they might lose their jobs and sympathy from the Government. So, the middle class failed to usher a deep and standing impact on the mass people of Assam. The middle class did not make common cause with the peasant movement of the 19th century.

According to Kalita, middle class participation in the 19th century peasant movement of Assam is a sheer myth. The Assamese middle class was not so much progressive at that distant date as to lead them to participate in the peasant movement. The emergence of the middle class in Assam was the result of direct Government patronage and their interests were also inextricably linked up with the British administration. The Assamese middle class was a social buttress of the Colonial Government right up to 1920. Therefore, the participation and leadership of the middle class in the peasant movement of Assam was historically impossible. According to Kalita, *Raj Mels* assumed the leadership in 1861 and 1893-94.⁸⁰

But according to Sumit Sarkar, the no-revenue movement between 1885 and 1905 were characterized by the 'leadership of local notables'. To him, the movement of Assam in 1893-94 was led by the rural elite. The uprising of Maharashtra in 1879 was led by Vasudeo Balvant Padke, an English educated Chitpavan Brahmin who seems to have

been influenced by Ranade's lectures on drain of wealth. The three principal leaders of Pabna agrarian league were the petty landholder Ishan Chandra Roy, the village headman Shambhu Pal and the Muslim Jotedar Khoodi Mollah. The Deccan riots of 1875 were an example of 'a type of rural protest' deriving its leadership and much of its supports from relatively better off sections of the peasantry.

In Maharashtra in 1896-97, 'the *Poona Sarbajanik Sabha*' sent out agents into the country side to encourage peasants to resist payment of revenue in a period of famine. After the famine of 1899-1900, no revenue combinations allegedly led by rich peasants and money lenders were reported from Surat, Kheda, Nasik, and Ahmedabad. The better example of emergence of leadership 'from below' is that of Birsa Munda, the son of a share-cropper who received his education from missionaries.⁸¹ In the Tebhaga movement of Bengal (1946-47), the leadership was taken by the upper caste Communist party and the *Kisan Sabha* which came either from the urban middle class or from the well-to-do-rural families.⁸²

The revolts of the peasants of Mewar were organised by a Sadhu, Sitaram Das in 1913 and Maniklal Verma and Vijay Singh Pathik from 1916 onwards. In Marwar, no revenue movement was led by Jai Narayan Vyas. The Bhils were organized by Motilal Tejawat, a spice merchant from Udaipur who claimed to be the emissary of Gandhiji. Darbhanga Peasant revolt of 1919-20 was led by Swami Vidyanand, the son of a prosperous occupancy tenant who was inspired by Gandhiji's Champaran Campaign.⁸³ In the Indigo revolt (Blue Mutiny, 1859) of Bengal, the organizers came from Zamindari-based intellectuals, money-lenders, substantial peasants, headman of villages, Calcutta-educated attorneys and journalists and missionaries. The patidars and Brahmins and intelligentsia took the leadership of the peasant movement of Bordoli and Kheda (Gujarat). Rich peasants, local money-lenders, school teachers and members of urban intelligentsia provided leadership in Champaran besides Gandhiji.⁸⁴

Notes and References

1. Banerjee, B. & Singh, K. : 'Middle Class people and rising prices' in *Competitive Essays*, Prakashan Kendra, Lucknow, 1997, pp. 21-22.
2. Barpujari, H.K. (ed) : *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Vol.-V, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, 2004, p. 363.
3. Borkataki, S. : *Asomiya Madhyashreni*, Navajeevan Prakash, Guwahati, 2000, pp. 17, 18, 20.
4. *Ibid.* : p. 24.
5. *Ibid.* : p. 25.
6. Guha, A. : *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam*, K.P. Bagchi and Co. Calcutta, New Delhi, 1991, P.213.
7. Srinivasa, M.N. : *Social Change in Modern India*, Orient Longman Ltd., New Delhi, 1995, p. 78.
8. Barpujari (ed.) : *op. cit.*, p. 363.
9. Sarkar, S. : *Modern India (1885-1947)*, Mac Millan, Delhi, Reprinted, 2008, pp. 66-67.
10. Kalita, R.C. : 'The 19th century peasant movement and the Assamese middle class', *NEIHA-XV*, 1994, pp. 200-201.
11. Saikia, R. : *Social and Economic History of Assam (1853-1921)*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 160, 163-164.
12. Bose, M.L. : *Social History of Assam*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 76-77.
13. Borkataki : *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.

14. Kalita : *op. cit.*, pp. 200-201.
15. Guha, A. : 'Saga of the Assamese middle class' (1826-1921) -a review article', *NEIHA XXIII*, 2002, p. 20.
16. Hussain, M. : *The Assam Movement: Class, Ideology and Identity*, Manak Publications Pvt. Ltd. in association with HarAnand Publications, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 49-51.
17. Borkataki : *op. cit.*, p. 31.
18. Josh, B. & Joshi, Shashi. : *Struggle for Hegemony in India (1920-1947)*, Sage Publication, New Delhi, p. 28.
19. Srinivasa : *op. cit.*, pp. 81, 95.
20. Bhuyan, J.N. : 'Assam Bandhu aru Asamor Samasamayikata' in J.N. Bhuyan's '*Unavimsa Satika: Shristi Aru Chetana*, Lawyers Book Stall, Guwahati', 1998, p. 71.
21. Bhuyan, J.N. : 'Gunabhiram Baruar Kathin Sabdar Rahasya Byakhya' in J.N. Bhuyan's – *op. cit.*, p. 93.
22. Borkataki : *op. cit.*, pp. 34-35.
23. Choudhury, P. : 'Bir Bandana Aru Bouddhik Byadhi: Ounoish Satikar Asom Aru Baopanthi Iti hash Sarsar Ati Dis' in S. Barman's (et al) *Oitihya aru Iti hash*, Journal Emporium, Nalbari, Assam, 2005, pp. 52-53.
24. Guha, A. : *Planter Raj to Swaraj (1826-1947)*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2006, p. 51.

25. Borkataki : *op. cit.*, p. 39.
26. *Ibid.* : p. 41.
27. Sharma, G.P. : 'The Assamese Literature and the Nationalist Upsurge' in A. Bhuyan's (ed) *Nationalist Upsurge in Assam*, Government of Assam, Guwahati, 2000, p. 346.
28. Saikia : *op. cit.*, p. 175.
29. Kalita, R.C. : 'Opium Prohibition and Rai J.N. Barua Bahadur', *NEIHA-XVI*, 1995, pp. 188-189.
30. Dutta, Ajit Kumar : 'The background of National Awakening in Upper Assam' in A. Bhuyan's (ed), *op. cit.*, p. 67.
31. Majumdar, Paramananda. : 'Samachar Darpanat Asamar Katha' in S. Barman's (et al) *op. cit.*, p. 145.
32. Mills A.J.M. : *Report on the Province of Assam*, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, Second Edition, 1984, p. 102.
33. Barpujari (ed) : *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Vol. V, p. 28.
- Choudhury : 'Bir-bandana aru Bouddhik Byadh: Ounoish Satikar Asom aru Baopanthi Iti hash- Sarsar Eti Dish' in S. Barman's (et al) '*Oitihya aru Iti hash*', Journal Emporium, Nalbari, p. 54.
- Guha, A. : *Asamor Iti hash Adhyayan aru Rasana*, 1979, pp. 8-9.
- Barua, Gunabhiram : *Assam Buranji*, Guwahati, Reprint, 1972, p. 171.
34. Barpujari (eds.) : *Political History of Assam*, Vol-I,

- (1826-1919), Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, Second Edition, 1999, pp. 99-100.
35. *Ibid.* : p. 134.
36. Kalita : 'Opium Prohibition and Rai J.N. Barua Bahadur', *NEIHA-XVI*, 1995, p. 187.
37. *Ibid.* : pp. 188-189.
38. *Ibid.* : pp. 185, 187-188.
39. Barpujari (eds.) : *Political History of Assam*, p. 133.
40. Barman S.N. (ed.) : *Adhunikatar Agradoot Pandit H. Ch. Barua*, Guwahati, 1996, p. 110.
- Choudhury : "Bir-bandana aru Bouddhik Byadh: Ounoish Satikar Asom aru Baopanthi Iti hash- Sarsar Eti Dish' in S. Barman's (et al) '*Oitihya aru Iti hash*', Journal Emporium, Nalbari, p. 64.
- Mills : *op. cit.*, Appendix (J) p. XLIV.
41. *Ibid.* : Appendix (J) p. XLIV.
42. Barua : *op. cit.*, pp. 120-121.
- Saikia : *op. cit.*, pp. 214, 218-219.
43. Barua : *op. cit.*, pp. 120-121.
- Saikia : *op. cit.*, pp. 214, 218-219.
44. *Ibid.* : p. 220.
45. Kalita : 'Opium Prohibition and Rai J.N. Barua Bahadur', *NEIHA-XVI*, 1995, p. 189.
46. *Ibid.* : p. 189.
47. Nehru, J. : 'The Brahmaputra Valley' in A. Bhuyan's (ed), *op. cit.*, p. 375.
48. Bhattacharjee, J.B. : 'Regional Organizations and National Awakening' in A. Bhuyan's (ed), *op. cit.*, p. 94.

49. Barpujari (eds.) : *Political History of Assam* ., pp. 157-158.
50. Srinivasa : *op. cit.*, p. 12.
51. Kalita : 'Opium Prohibition and Rai J.N. Barua Bahadur', *NEIHA-XVI*, 1995, p. 189.
52. Mookherjee, Mridula : 'Peasant Resistance and Peasant Consciousness in Colonial India-Subaltern and beyond', *Economic and Political weekly*, 8 Oct., 1988, p. 2114.
53. Saikia : *op. cit.*, p. 218.
54. *Ibid.* : p. 220.
55. *Ibid.* : p. 182.
56. Borkataki : *op. cit.*, p. 31.
57. Guha : *Planter Raj and Swaraj*, pp. 53-54.
58. Sengupta, S.C. : 'The Bengalese in Assam in the 19th century', *NEIHA - X*, 1989, pp. 373-374.
59. Choudhury, P. : *Asamar Saah Banua Aru Ounoish Satikar Bidwan Samaj*, Students' Store, Guwahati, 1989, p. 78.
60. Hussain : *op. cit.*, p. 44.
61. Nag, Sajal : 'Social reaction to Bania exploitation' in J.B. Bhattacharjee's (ed), *Studies in the Economic History of North East India*, NEHU Publications, Shillong, 1986, p. 367.
62. Srinivas : *op. cit.*, pp. 78, 81.
63. Kalita : 'The 19th century peasant movement and the Assamese middle class', *NEIHA-XV*, 1994, pp. 204-205.
64. Tamuli, L.N. : *Bharatar Swadhinata Andolanat*

- Asamor Avadan*, Sept. 1988, pp. 110, 121.
65. Kalita : 'The 19th century peasant movement and the Assamese middle class', *NEIHA-XV*, 1994, pp. 204-205.
66. Mills : *op. cit.*, p. 102.
67. Saikia : *op. cit.*, pp. 113, 116.
68. Barpujari (eds.) : *Political History of Assam*, pp. 67-68, 102.
69. Kalita : 'The 19th century peasant movement and the Assamese middle class', *NEIHA-XV*, 1994, pp. 203-204.
70. Majumdar : 'Samachar Darpanat Asamar Katha' in S. Barman's (et al) *op. cit.*, p. 145.
71. Barpujari (eds.) : *Political History of Assam*, pp. 150-151.
72. Kalita : 'The 19th century peasant movement and the Assamese middle class', *NEIHA-XV*, 1994, p. 204.
73. Guha : *Planter Raj to Swaraj*, p. 284.
74. Saha, S. : *1942 Struggle – a study of grass root nationalism in the districts of Darrang and Nowgong of Assam (1942-45)*, NEHU, Shillong, 1984, pp. 15-16.
75. Choudhury, Medini : 'Tribals' participation in the Nationalist Upsurge' in A. Bhuyan's (ed), *op. cit.*, p. 296.
76. Goswami, S.D. : 'The Nationalist Upsurge: its impact on Peasants and Tea garden workers' in A. Bhuyan's (ed), *op. cit.*, p. 189.
77. Sharma, Manorama. : 'Peasants uprisings and middle class hegemony: the case of Assam', *NEIHA*

- X, 1989, pp. 328-329.
78. Kalita, R.C. : ‘The Phulaguri uprisings of 1861: a peasant mass movement’, *NEIHA-X*, 1989, pp. 310, 324.
- Kalita : “The 19th century peasant movement and the Assamese middle class’, *NEIHA-XV*, 1994, p. 199.
79. Srinivasa : *op. cit.*, p. 78.
80. Kalita : ‘The 19th century peasant movement and the Assamese middle class’, *NEIHA-XV*, 1994, p. 203.
81. Mookherjee : *op. cit.*, p. 2114.
82. *Ibid.* : p. 2115.
83. *Ibid.* : p. 2114.
84. *Ibid.* : p. 2115.