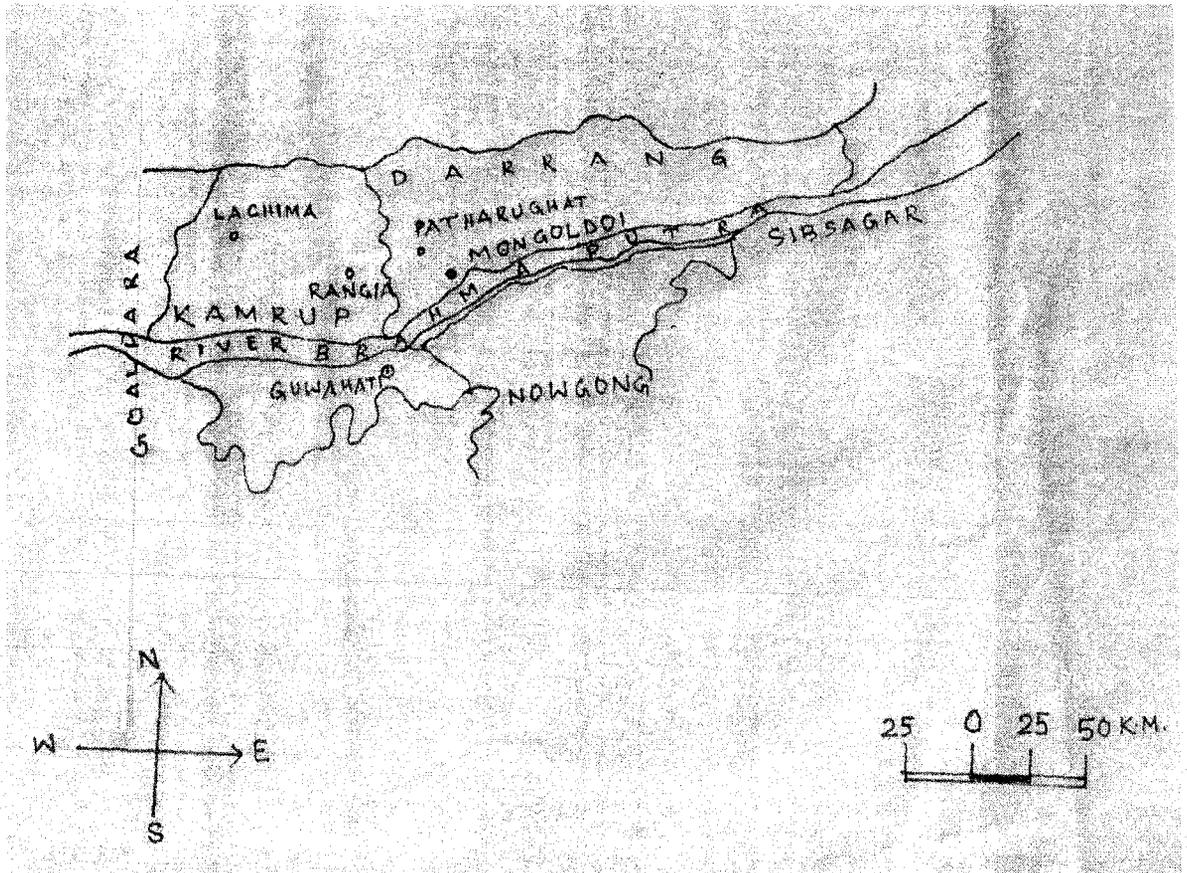


## CHAPTER- EIGHT

### PEASANT UPRISINGS OF 1893-94

Kamrup in Colonial period was bounded on the west by Goalpara, on the north by Bhutan, on the south by the Khashi hills, on the east (north of the Brahmaputra) by Darrang and (South of the Brahmaputra) by Nowgong. M'Cosh while describing the revenue system of Kamrup, says that *zillah* of Kamroop is divided into 54 *Pergunnahs*, 5 *Deshes*, 9 *Dwars* and 7 *Choumoos* and these when large are subdivided into *Talooks* and *Mouzahs*, with a still further distinction into *Kiraj* and *Lakiraj* lands; *Kiraj* being applied to lands assessed to full amount and *Lakiraj* to privileged lands which are assessed at a low rate.<sup>1</sup> The soil of the most part of the Brahmaputra valley is composed of rich black mould. The Brahmaputra may be called the great drain of Assam<sup>2</sup>.

In Kamrup, all the three varieties of rice- *Ahu*, *bao* and *sali* were cultivated. Due to available production of rice, it was comparatively cheaper in Kamrup. In 1878, 14 *seers* rice could be purchased for a rupee.<sup>3</sup> Other crops included mustard seed, *til*, *matikalai*, *mug*, *masuri*, hemp, jute and sugarcane. In Kamrup, cultivation of rice was common to every family engaged in agriculture. The area of rice cultivation was started to have increased by 27% in between 1850 and 1875. The exact return for 1875-76 showed that out of 4,50,792 acres under cultivation, 3,42,481 acres or more than 76% was covered by rice, 24,363 acres by other food-grains, 55,335 by oil-seeds, 3,391 by sugarcane, 2,351 by cotton, 4,515 by tea and 19,352 by other crops<sup>4</sup>.



Northern Central Assam or Darrang lies entirely on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. She is separated from Kamrup on the west and from Na-duar on the east; on the north, she is bounded by Bhutan and the land of the *Akas*, *Daphlas* and on the south by the Brahmaputra<sup>5</sup>.

*Sali* rice was the staple crop in Darrang. *Ahu* occupied a small percentage of cultivable lands. For sixteen years from 1850 (1850-1866) there was a gradual increase in the area under rice cultivation. In 1850, it covered 1, 45,109 acres of land and by 1866 it registered a downward trend. In 1870, the area under rice cultivation was recorded 2, 11,023 acres; the figures further went down to 1, 82,172 acres in 1875. The approximate area under different crops in 1874-75 was: rice cultivation occupied 1,82,172 acres, mustard 3,644 acres, sugarcane 1,126 acres, *matikalai* 1,828 acres, *mug* 955 acres, *til* 116 acres, cotton 850 acres and jute 184 acres only<sup>6</sup>. It remains expressed that rice was costlier in Darrang and Lakhimpur. In Kamrup and Nowgong while 14 and 13 *seers* rice

was obtainable for a rupee in 1878, on the contrary, 10 and 9 *seers* rice could be obtained in Darrang and Lakhimpur in the same year<sup>7</sup>.

## II

The impending enhancement of land revenue rates under the new settlement of 1892 led to a widespread discontentment in the minds of the Peasants of the Brahmaputra valley. The Chief Commissioner who was on a tour of the Brahmaputra valley in the winter of 1892, received complaint from the ryots that they were unable to pay the enhanced land revenue as they had to pay the government an exorbitant price for opium. The Jorhat *Sarbajanik Sabha* also protested the government policy by holding a series of meetings from October 1892 to Feb-1893<sup>8</sup>.

The new settlement fixed the land value and the rate on the basis of the population density and the demand for land in each village. Initially in the Brahmaputra valley, the revised rates involved an enhancement of 53 percent on average but in many villages it was as high as 70 to 100%. The Chief Commissioner though in the beginning declined to pay any attention to the complaints of the ryots, but finally passed orders to reduce the increase to an average 37%. But the ryots were not satisfied at this and demanded postponement of the collection even at that reduced rate until the last orders of the government of India on the pending appeals were received. The Chief Commissioner was reluctant to any such postponement.

The People of Kamrup and Central Assam organized themselves once more against the Government's move and convened *Mels* to decide upon their fate with 'no-rent campaign. According to Guha, the demand for enhanced land revenue would push them further into the grip of *Marwari* traders to get advances for paying the land revenue and caught thus in a vicious circle of intensified exploitation, they started agitating not only against the government but also against the *Marwari* traders<sup>9</sup>. Kalita also says that regular enhancement of land revenue and tax had become a great source of misery and discontentment among the Peasantry in India and it was more so in the Brahmaputra valley<sup>10</sup>.

The Peasants when (again after 1861) found the government ruthlessly imposing higher rates of assessment, rose in rebellion towards the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century inviting a series of protests beginning with December, 1893. If Nowgong led the way of peasant unrest via the Phulaguri of 1861, then the turn of Kamrup and Darrang was the next to take-up the cudgels on behalf of the oppressed peasantry of Assam via the Rangia and the Lachima uprisings of Kamrup and the Patharughat uprising of Darrang.

For nearly three decades after 1861, there was no outward movement in Assam except a bubble in 1868-69. But the whole course altered in 1892 when Sir William Ward, the Chief Commissioner of Assam, augmented the rates of revenue on land in the new settlement to 70 to 80% and sometime even 100%. Finally, the simmering discontent of the people took terrific turn against this assessment in Kamrup and Darrang in 1893-94.

It is noteworthy to mention here that despite the decreasing production rate of crops, there was no respite from the proposed rate of assessment on land. Even going ahead, Colonial apparatus forcibly realized taxes from the impoverished peasantry. Seeing such deplorable and awkward position of the people, the *Keyas* intensified their exploitation scale. The People also fell in their trap. The people, when finally understood the motives of the *Keyas*, started to ventilate their grievances not only against the government but also against them which one day morning the 24 Dec, 1893 found expression with the looting of the Rangia *bazaar* by a crowd of 200 to 250 people, mostly of Kacharis<sup>11</sup>.

In the evening of 24 December, when the Peasants returning from Belagaon *mel* near Rangia, they gutted down the huts at the Rangia *bazaar* and threatened a *Keya* shopkeeper that his shop would be looted on 30 December as their presence had increased the revenue burden on land<sup>12</sup>. They considered the traders to be in hand in glove with the British.

On 30 December, 1893, there was a massive gathering at Rangia where about 2500 to 3000 people participated. This massive gathering held demonstration all the night and threatened destruction of the *Thana*, post-office and the *tahsildar's* bungalow. The people of Rangia had their tremendous disdain towards Radhanath Barua, the *tahsildar* of Rangia. Almost all people of seven *mouzas* of Rangia Tahsil (East and West Badigog,

East and West Barbhag, Kaurbaha, Panduri, East Cutcherry Mahal) never forgot his exaction and Radhanath Barua was finally targeted by them<sup>13</sup>. Threatening of destruction of *thana*, post-office and the *tahsildar*'s bungalow was taken seriously by the government and armed-police was summoned to stop it but failed completely.

On 6<sup>th</sup> January, 1893, R.B. McCabe, the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup arrived at Rangia with a Police Party under Padmaram Kachari, the *daroga*<sup>14</sup> and arrested some persons alleged to have been implicated in the incident of 24 December, 1893. The arrests, however, did not prevent the people from further attacks. On 10 to 17 Jan, 1894, a large crowd of about three thousand gathered at near Rangia *Thana*. Castes and tribes coming from far-flung villages like Koch, Kalita, Saloi, Kaivarta, Namasudra, Nath, Napit, Sonari, Baishya, Bania, Bodo-Kacharis and Muslims assembled at Kadamtal-Pandarthan and took decision and began to march towards Rangia. The tribal farmers along-with their counterparts in other communities took part in it<sup>15</sup>.

They, with cries of 'we won't pay at the increased rate' started coming closer to Rangia *Thana*. They were asked by the Deputy Commissioner to disperse but they refused his order and even dared to release forcibly of their comrades – Praneswar Goswami (Kon), Abhay Choudhury, Kirti Lahkar, Joltiram Kalita, Muktaram Bayan Kalita, Rahmat Khalipha, Parashuram Baro who were detained and locked-up at the time of submitting memorandum to Deputy Commissioner for decrease of the rate of revenue. For taking part in the *Mel*, Joltiram Kalita, a *mandal* of Batakuchi, was dismissed from his service<sup>16</sup>.

Disobedience of order compelled Mc Cabe to open fire on the gatherings which forced them to retreat. In response to the violent outbursts, the Colonial government effected a reign of terror. There were huge casualties in Rangia upheaval but what was shown that was few. Hiding the actual number and fact was an easy matter for the Colonial government. Finally, notices were issued for the maintenance of peace and harmony and the leaders of the affected areas were appointed as special constables. A detachment of the 44<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Rifles, armed Police units and the Volunteer Force were requisitioned to suppress the defiant people. All licensed guns in Rangia, Barama, Nalbari and Bajali *tahsils* were seized<sup>17</sup>.

*Mels* at Patidarang, Nalbari, Barama, Bajali, Hajo, and Tamulpur and under Sarukhetri *mouza* without prior permission and approval of the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup was prohibited. However, the situation in the northern Kamrup did not change and the ryots continued to decline to pay the enhanced rent by organizing *Mels* at Pandarthan of Nalbari. As a result, out of the total revenue demand of 10.5 lakhs in the Barpeta subdivision not more than 1.5 lakhs could be collected<sup>18</sup>.

Moreover, the *Mels* were said to have appointed their own *dak* peons to carry out their dictates from one village to another and organized *lathials* to resist attachment of assets. As a result, the ryots were placed in between the edges of blade and fire.

In spite of Government's ban, the *Mels* continued in some part of northern Kamrup like Sarukhetri *mouza*. People from all walks of life: the ryots, bell metal artisans, *Chahuas*, Brahmins, Muslims, *Satriya Gosains* and the villagers from the entire Sarukhetri *mouza* assembled at Panagaon-tup, a mound like area between Lachima and Sarukhetri on Jan. 1894. Lachima is a village under Sarukhetri *mouza* and the river Alpa flows between Lachima and Sarthebari. The Villages- Sarthebari, Karakuchi, Gomura, Palla, Namsala, Helsa, Bengapara, Baniakuchi, Haldhibari, Kapla, Byaskuchi, Majdia, Belbari, Baghmara, Lachima, and Amrikhowa were under erstwhile Sarukhetri *mouza*.

In the Panagaon-tup, Jogeswar Goswami, the *Satradhikar* of Byaskuchi *Satra*, presided over the *mel*<sup>19</sup>. It remains expressed here that altogether 140 Muslim inhabitants of Lachima, Panagaon and Sarthebari took active part in the *Mels* and by their participation; they sacrificed lot for the cause of Sarukhetri. Babari Fakir was their prominent leader<sup>20</sup>.

Enhancement of revenue in 1892 by 70 to 80% and sometime even at 100% made the situation of entire northern Kamrup volatile as it was the highest of the districts of the Assam province. On January, 1894 when they assembled at Panagaon-tup, there they decided not to pay the enhanced rate of revenue to the government. To them, in lieu of settling the land and calculating the revenue from each assessee was in reality "*tekeli-bhanga*" (jar-breaking) over their heads<sup>21</sup>.

In the meantime, on 21 January, 1894, when Dasaram Choudhury, a *mauzadar* accompanied with Haliram Misra, a *mandal* of the area reached Kapla village near Lachima in the Sarukhetri *mouza* of Kamrup to collect revenue, the peasants declined to

comply with the order. But when they insisted on forcible collection of revenue, a group of ryots assaulted both the *mauzadar* and the *mandal*. M.C. Bordoloi, an Extra Assistant Commissioner was fined Rs. 5 for his ill behaviour towards the *Mels*. Seeing all this, the Sub-Divisional Officer ordered the police to break the *Mel* which further excited them. The administration apprehended 75 persons finally in connection with the incidents. Arrested persons were Ananta Dev Goswami, Debi Nath Sarma, Makuram Talukdar (90 years), Mangalram Talukdar (96 years), Achyutananda Goswami (70 years), Sampadram Deka (40 Years), Yogeswar Goswami (65 years, Byaskuchi), Pusparam Kahar (60 Year, Sarthebari)<sup>22</sup>. But soon they were forcibly released. Realizing the gravity of the matter, the Deputy Commissioner himself arrived at Lachima and 59 leaders were arrested by 25 Jan, 1894 and were compelled to construct a temporary lock-up for themselves<sup>23</sup>.

About six thousand people in the same evening drew them near the Deputy Commissioner's camp and placed a mass petition for the release of the detained persons. But their petition was turned down and forced to disperse when a bayonet charge was ordered.

The people who suffered lot on behalf of the people of Sarukhetri were Jaycharan, Simbhu and Dandi of Baghmara; Leita Pitharam, Mitharam Aklu, Puspa Adhikari, Saona, Bansita Kankata, Kala Das Dehi, Dharani Mahanta, Gauri Rajot, Bolu of Kapla; Akalosa, Uma Jagatsa of Lachima; Yogeswar Goswami, Ranga, Kalduma of Byaskuchi; Mangala Kahar and Puspa Kahar of Sarthebari<sup>24</sup>.

*Patharughat outbreak (Darrang)*: January 28, 1894 is a dark and black spot in the history of British rule in India that cannot be effaced easily. It is a black day not only for the people of Patharughat but also for the people of the Brahmaputra valley where about 140 innocent peasants embraced bullets on their breasts. Determined to crush the movement, the belligerent Deputy Commissioner of Darrang arrived at Patharughat with a force. The people who had gathered in thousands in anticipation of his arrival, sat down on the field facing the rest-house where he encamped. He first ordered them not to hold any *mels* and warned of the inevitable consequences of denial to it. In spite of his threats, the *mel* declined to disperse until and unless their honest demands were solved. A bayonet charge and volleys of firing followed, causing deaths and injuries to many.

According to official source, the number of dead was 15, wounded 37; but the number was much higher than that; Lieutenant Berrington who carried the order of firing and was on the spot, reported that it was impossible to ascertain the exact number of casualties. Special constables were ordered to persuade the ryots to take their comrades to the Mangaldoi dispensary<sup>25</sup>. This reveals that the number of wounded was heavier. It is said that altogether 140 people died at Patharughat. Of them, the name of 64 had been traced out and 7 of them were muslims<sup>26</sup>.

Eventually, they had to meet defeat before the power of arms of the British though they resisted till last with cheering slogans 'Jai Hari', 'Allah-Ho- Akbar' and answered back by throwing bamboo sticks and clods of earth to their enemies. The rebels, however, could not keep up their heroic resistance movement for long in the face of unprotected and naked repression of the Colonial guns. The ryots were tortured and their assets were seized and looted. Ultimately they had to surrender before the Govt.'s demand by paying an enhanced revenue<sup>27</sup>.

'*Dolipurān*', a semi-contemporary Assamese metrical work by Narottam Das provides a description of the upheaval of Patharughat.

### III

In Colonial exploitation system, those who suffered and harassed at best at the hands of the British were the subaltern groups. That's why they were the first to react against it. The causes that led to the outbreaks of 1893-94 can be categorized into two- (i) Common and general causes and (ii) Uncommon and immediate causes.

The causes that generally found similar in the outbreaks of 1861 and 1893-94 are termed as common and general causes. On the contrary, others are termed as uncommon and immediate causes.

*Common & General Causes:* The heaviest burden that the peasants had to bear was the land tax which was the root of all major social conflicts. The fiscal policy of the government was the cause of great social tension in Assam. In the fast changing situation, the peasants were forced to live in the most dissipated manner and in the absence of any comprehensive plan to mitigate their growing grievances; their conditions worsened with

the progress of the British rule. Frequent enhancement of land revenue added fuel to the fire<sup>28</sup>.

The Colonial government and its apparatus by initiating an endless process of raising revenue demand created tremors and turbulence in the hearts of the Peasantry. Moreover, people could hardly forget the exactions of the *Choudhuries* and the *tahsildars* and their thundering voice-‘if you do not pay, your property will be attached.’

The Colonial government by imposing high rate of revenue upon the land, not only made people poor but also distorted their hope, dream, social status and glorious traditions. Enhancement had become a great source of irritation and dissatisfaction among the Peasantry of the Brahmaputra Valley. According to Sarkar, it provoked a different type of rural protest in the districts of Kamrup and Darrang of Assam in 1893-94.<sup>29</sup>

The excessive zeal shown by the local authorities in improving the revenues of the government caused considerable hardship, irritation and resentment of the *ryots* to take law into their own hands. The reassessment made on the basis of a new classification of the soil and the hurried manner in which rates were even doubled in some cases, could not but arouse suspicion in the minds of the unsophisticated *ryots* that the government was out to fleece them<sup>30</sup>.

The Assam Land and Revenue Regulations of 1886 introduced an elaborate tenancy system, tightened the loopholes and brought all and sundry under a common code. The traditional landed gentry though secured concessions but they did not welcome the Regulations. These disgruntled men were waiting for a chance to wreak vengeance on the government and instigated the Peasantry to move forward. The Peasantry could not ignore them as they were their source of credit in the villages<sup>31</sup>.

The condition of the Peasantry worsened very much in 1891 onward due to the further rise of the prices of *Abkari* opium<sup>32</sup>.

In 1893 when Resettlement of Assam Valley was made again and revenue was raised from 70 to 80 percent and in some cases to 100 percent, people throughout the valley protested against this measure and sent memorandum even to the Chief Commissioner. But the administration put a deaf ear to it<sup>33</sup>.

There are also some other exceptional aspects which ignited peoples' mind. The members of the royal family of the Darrang *Raja* and some of the direct descendants of the Ahom *Raja* – they were exempted from the payment of revenue when they had sought remission for that to the government. Though this is not directly related to the outbreaks of 1893-94 but indirectly and possibly made people ignited. If the Royal family can be exempted from payment of revenue in spite of having their capacity comparatively to the peasants, why not to them? Moreover, they did not want remission; they wanted only minimization of revenue rate. Probably, because of this, they expressed their anguish and disdain towards the discriminatory and biased nature of the government.

The planters were the biggest landholders but the revenue they paid per acre of holding was the lowest. It ignited the minds of the small land-holders as they had to pay more. This difference compelled the small land holders to come into direct clash with the big<sup>34</sup>.

This planter community even wanted to destroy the traditional agriculture system of Assam and urged the government to augment revenue so that poor peasants could be flushed out of their traditional agriculture and work for wages on the tea gardens.

The priority of the government was always on quicker and larger collection of revenue rather than on increased production and efficient distribution. Encouragement was rarely given to induce the ryots to extend and improve their holdings. Complete protection of the Peasants from the oppression had been a mere dream in Assam under the British<sup>35</sup>. The British revenue reforms and their agrarian policy did no good to the peasants. The present agrarian problem of rural India is the outcome of the Colonial policy adopted by the British<sup>36</sup>.

Krishna Sarma strongly criticized the agrarian Policy of the Colonial government by depicting the wretched condition of the ryots. With the grant of *pattas* for 10, 20, and 30 years, the rate of land revenue went on augmenting which aggravated further the condition of the rural Peasants<sup>37</sup>. Moreover, the conduct of the Cadastral survey was more defective. Fields measurements were not carefully and systematically tested; peasants complaints were hardly discussed and examined<sup>38</sup>.

Revenue Policy of the government dissatisfied the People of Colonial Assam. Arbitrary and unjust settlement, classification of land was neither based on scientific nor

on actual productivity of the land. In addition to that, no permission was required for transfer of land during the Ahom regime but now they could not transfer their land without the permission of the Deputy Commissioner. The number of *Pattas* (lease) had been multiplied and the *ryots*, therefore, had to bear extra-stamp duty for that. The *ryots* of Assam under the British rule were neither land holders nor tenants at-will and they could be ejected or their leases could be cancelled on breach of any of the conditions<sup>39</sup>.

The Secretary to the government of Bengal concluded that the infliction of numerous fines and taxes on the people was a major cause of the revolt<sup>40</sup>. The middle class, merchants and traders did not welcome the government's move of the imposition of taxes on their income; rather they opposed it. But the government was indifferent to them. The government, even going ahead a step, imposed license tax for collecting forest products. Some agricultural items were also not spared of paying taxes to the government. In addition to that, people in Pre-Colonial Period grazed their cattle freely and openly under the sky but covetous eyes of the government fell there also and brought these grazing fields under assessment<sup>41</sup>.

The tea plantation industry was one of the sources of Colonial exploitation in Assam<sup>42</sup>. The plantation industries gave birth to two classes in Assam - the Capitalists and the Workers. The workers mostly belong to the Kachari tribe of Kamrup district<sup>43</sup>. The local labourers especially the Kachari tribe of the Kamrup and Darrang districts worked in the tea gardens but they were paid low rate of wages which compelled them to resort to the path of strike for high wages. In 1864, while a free labourer was paid as wage Rs. 7 per month, the going rate of wages in the Assam Tea Company was only Rs 4 to 5 per month. They finally resorted to strike against this disparity but were dealt with badly. The planters made the worst use of semi-feudal methods of reducing the condition of the labourers to a kind of serfdom<sup>44</sup>.

Sometime by selling cultivators' land as wasteland to the tea companies another way of exploitation was perpetrated. In Kamrup, some forest land had been made over to the Lower Assam Tea Company as waste land. In Darrang and Nowgong also best *sal* trees areas had been sold as wasteland<sup>45</sup>. By purchasing the forest land at a nominal and cheap rate in the name of wasteland, they thus exploited the natural resources of the province.

The area of wasteland in the Assam province was so large that no necessity had till then arisen for checking the freedom of the ryots to transfer their land<sup>46</sup>. But the matter of concern was that towards the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the freedom of the peasants had been checked. The grazing fields where cattles had been grazed freely, were brought under assessments and reserved as wasteland. They not only usurped the grazing fields but also encroached upon the *jhum* rights of the tribal shifting cultivators<sup>47</sup> which ignited the minds of the peasants.

Settlement of wasteland especially in Kamrup and Darrang was loudly decried by the *Mauzadars* while the ryots had complaints of false measurements and exactions. The *Chowdhuries* of Kamrup were dissatisfied with the operation of Captain Dalton's arrangements regarding wasteland<sup>48</sup>.

Two very important things to be noticed here are that the planters were the largest land-owning class, but surprisingly they paid the lowest revenue to the province. While the common peasant paid between Rs. 1.8 and Rs. 3 per acre annually towards the land revenue, the planters held most of their land rent-free<sup>49</sup>. The other thing to be noticed is that due to the rise of the tea industry in Assam, the demand for productivity of foodgrain increased which led to the importation of immigrant labourers from Bengal. These labourers and tenant cultivators were settled on their holdings.

The government and Planters, thus at each and every moment, were busy for fulfilling their vested interest, not at all for the welfare of the local people. The government encouraged plantation sector, not agriculture at all. Even, for the interest of plantation industry, they grabbed more and more lands in the name of waste land. Not only that, they prepared certain favourable rules for their planters' interest which was greatly resented by the local planters.

Each and every family of Assam was engaged in agriculture and it provided them almost all the necessaries that required for leading a happy and prosperous life. They cultivated rice, pulses, fruits and vegetables to supply their tables, mustard to light their houses and silk and cotton to provide their garments. But there was no improvement of ploughs, harrows, hoes, spades etc. and the breed of cattle, seeds, plants. Truly speaking, government totally neglected this. Despite maximization of land revenue, nothing was done to improve the condition of agriculture in the State. In Assam, unfortunately

industrial growth and development had no links with the agriculture sector<sup>50</sup>. By bringing the vast area under cultivation, improving the nature of crops and extent of the livestock, the Colonial government could have fetched revolutionary change in agricultural sector. The apparatus and process and methods of agriculture throughout the region, both hills and plains, remain till date almost same. There were no available irrigation facility and fertilizer-application system in Colonial period. To avail the services namely credit and marketing services, there was lack of Co-Operative offices in Assam<sup>51</sup>. The great harm that the British had done to the agriculture was the diversion of fund towards plantation sector. By ignoring the agriculture sector, they distorted the dreams and hopes of the village people. By introducing Agriculture Technology Information and Development Centre, Animal Health Care Centre, Meteorology Department, Disaster Management system, the Colonial government could have fetched green revolution in agriculture sector but by neglecting all these they dashed the hopes of the people to the ground.

Disease of men and cattle, calamities of flood and fire, lack of cheap credit facilities and wiles of moneylenders contributed to the impoverishment of the peasantry. Moreover, assessment had been a continuous source of irritation for them. Finally, their wild anger burst out in Lower Assam. The Colonial government only cared for revenue, not for the people and their livelihood. In 1891-1901, many Kachari People had to migrate from Kamrup and Mangaldoi and worked as tea labourers to get respite of the epidemic havoc like black-fever. (*Kala-azar*)<sup>2</sup>.

As a result, the production of agriculture dwindled. It again aggravated when the Bhutias carried on their atrocities to the people of North Kamrup. Many people abandoned Kamrup and took asylum in Darrang. The role of the government in this case was far from satisfactory. It added fuel to the fire when Sir William Ward augmented the rate of revenue in 1891<sup>53</sup>.

The government by adopting certain measures would have checked the inter-district migration. But due to lack of farsightedness or other, it expedited further resulting in tremendous set back on agriculture. Heavy Cattle mortality also deteriorated their condition which was the backbone to Indian agriculture. Moreover, the Peasants produced only for their annual need. Scarcely was there a surplus for sale or for rainy season. Their condition became bad in the event of failure of crops due to drought or

flood. There was no crop insurance system to compensate the Peasants from the damage of crops. As a result, their condition deteriorated more and more at the time of natural calamities.

Forests are a handmaid to agriculture as it influences climate, rain-fall, water supply, flood-control, soil erosion and fertility of the soil<sup>54</sup>.

The British government, though reserved forest land in the name of wasteland but their main intention was not conservation. Their covetous eyes were only on the rich natural resources of the forests. They exported forest products by carrying on their wanton destruction of forest. Destruction of forest invited bad impact on climate whose impact directly fell on agriculture resulting flood and drought. It can be inferred that the government was also responsible for inviting natural calamities. The Colonial government kept one eye closed at the time of natural calamities and kept another open for revenue.

Immigration was not a problem at all for the people of Assam in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as there was abundance of land and less number of populations. But advent of the plantation industry and need of out-side labourers for that and also the increasing number of local educated people began to create problem towards the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The advent of the plantation met only the demands and interests of the British Planters but the burden of these labourers fell on the agricultural land of Assam. By enacting a series of legislations from 1863 to 1901 and completing the Assam Bengal Railway, the Colonial government tried to meet their labour problem on one side and these immigrated labourers created multi-dimensional problem on the other. Immigration affected not only one section of the society. All sections were terribly affected by its evil effect. It created problem for the local labourers, craftsmen and artisans, cultivators and educated middle class. Probably, because of this, the educated middle class who were silent in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century on this migration issue, started to raise their voice towards the close of the century. For the encouragement of the immigrant-labourers, fares of trains and ships were decreased and even land free of revenue was given to them. But no such step was seen taken by the government for the welfare of the local people. Due to the incentive of the government the population of Assam increased from 12 lacs in 1853 to 24 lacs and 76 thousands in 1891.

The immigrants posed a serious challenge to race, religion, economy and culture of Assam becoming a source of social tension in later period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Kamalakanta Bhattacharyya through his Poem '*Udgoni*' (Inspiration) regretted that the immigrants settled in Assam were wicked and intelligent who became the virtual overlord of Assam exploiting the resources of Assam. He, therefore, appealed to the Assamese to shed off their lethargy and take lessons from the humiliations they were being subjected to.<sup>55</sup>

Money economy was the outcome of commercialization of agriculture. The people were traditionally accustomed to barter economy and they were content with this system. Introduction of money economy created problem for them as they were totally unaccustomed to this system. People confronted lots of problem due to the introduction of this new system. Currency was not available at that time and introduction of money as the medium of exchange without substantial increase of currency created problem for them. Peasants had to walk long distances for two or three days to get their goods converted into cash.<sup>56</sup> Sometime for cash, they had to sell their land or to take loan from the money lenders. Thus, indebtedness of the peasants began to grow.

Money economy was introduced at a time when there existed no trade to dispose of their goods whenever necessary. As a result, they could not pay their revenue in cash to the government in time which ultimately worsened their relation with the authority. The rural peasants of North Kamrup and Mangaldoi faced lots of problem in adjusting with the new system as they got less scope to sell their goods in cash. As a result, smoldering fire of protest and hatred against the government began to increase.

The Village industries gave rural people a second source of income. Its decline deprived them of their subsidiary occupation, thereby considerably reducing their income and compelling them to take recourse to borrowing<sup>57</sup>. The ruin of village industries invited pressure of population on agriculture leading to the inevitable sub-division and fragmentation of the peasants' holdings. The fragmentation of lands resulted in the limitless growth of uneconomic holdings leading to the growth of poverty. The decline of Cottage industries also created a vast numbers of landless rural labourers.<sup>58</sup> The decline of local industries on one hand and limited cash on the other, made the condition difficult for the people to go to the market to seek relief. Throughout the British rule, India was

mercilessly impoverished. Her famous manufactures were ruined and poor artisans and craftsmen driven to make out a living from primitive agriculture<sup>59</sup>.

By exporting raw materials from India and importing cheaper and better qualities of goods and skilled labourers and craftsmen, the Colonial government converted Assam into their colony. Almost all the local industries were either abolished or recast and certain new arrangements were introduced. The abrupt change of their industrial policy created internal instability leading to great social unrest<sup>60</sup>.

The peasants in colonial period took recourse to borrowing generally during the time of famine and failure of crops. Social ceremonies also compelled them to take loans<sup>61</sup>. Indebtedness turned the peasants into dishonest debtors, inefficient farmers, thriftless heads of the families and irresponsible citizens. Finally, it made their position like medieval serfs. According to the Census Report of 1891, there were 1793 moneylenders in the Brahmaputra Valley and of them, 1211 were in Kamrup alone<sup>62</sup>. The loanees took asylum to them for loans and fell into their traps. They had to mortgage their movable or immovable property such as land or land documents, ornaments, utensils etc. Sometime, they had to lose their mortgaged forever. Honestly speaking, peasants had no hope of escape from debt. According to Kaushal, a society steeped in debt is necessarily a social volcano which is always dangerous<sup>63</sup>.

Girted almost on all sides by mountain barriers, Assam remained practically isolated and geography had imposed a formidable barrier on her contact with the rest of the world. The people of this province led a happy and contented life. But their halcyon days one day disappeared. Confrontation started with the coming of the British into the land. Their food-abundance land transmuted to the land of scarcity and poverty. Freshness and moistness disappeared from the land and dryness appeared on the scene. The people held the British and the outsiders responsible for their miserable and deplorable condition.

Abolition of the *Paiks* was good as it freed them from the clutches of the Ahom nobles and aristocrats. People in general appreciated their humanitarian, holistic and equalitarian approach. But finally people understood their double standard. Behind the abolition of the *Paiks*, the motive of the government was different. The government abolished this system only to remove the scarcity of labourers in their tea gardens. So,

*Paik* abolition was just an eye wash and hypocritical step. The *Paiks* and labourers who welcomed the initiatives of the government at its initial stage, started to express their anguish when they were forced to work in their gardens; on the contrary, the aristocrats and nobles who enjoyed the labour of the *Paiks* and maintained their royal standard, also started to ventilate their grievances in later period when they were deprived of their privileges. They were joined by the *Brahmins* and the *Mahantas* of Kamrup<sup>64</sup>.

The Colonial bureaucrats formulated and shaped the policy of the government into practice. They spent each and every moment for their colonial interest neglecting the greater interest of the ruled. The ruled, however, expressed their disdain against the bias and discriminating policy of them. The bureaucrats spent both public and private funds mainly for the tea plantation, prepared wasteland rules for their men's interest, framed revenue and agrarian policy for their colonial interest. Their land reforms measures favoured them, not the Indians. The *tahsildars*, *mauzadars*, *choudhuries* they carried on their atrocities and exactions upon the people at the time of collection of revenue and their exaction had become proverbial. People inferred the hands of bureaucrats behind all these. The corrupt practices and intrigues of the bureaucrats ignited the minds of the people and it added fuel to the fire when they approved revenue hike frequently.

The picture of education in erstwhile Assam was far from satisfactory. The role taken by the government in setting up schools and colleges was also not satisfactory. Though they spoke of humanitarian and holistic words, all of them were only on lips. Slow progress of education produced less number of educated persons in Assam. As a result, government got all the posts filled-up by the outsiders which gave birth to problem in further days.

Lease system introduced by the British irritated the indigenous people of Assam. The land of Assam, according to them, belongs to them. To them, foreign government had no authority to give lease right to the native as they themselves were the owners of the land<sup>65</sup>.

The Christian Missionary encouraged local People for conversion to Christianity and asked them to utter the name of Jesus Christ at the time of natural calamities. To them, only Jesus could lighten and heal their miseries and calamities. But people were not satisfied with this. They wanted practical step from the government what they did not get.

The main motto of the Colonial government was collection of revenue, not welfare of the people. Similarly, main motto of the Christian missionary was conversion, not humanitarian. Had it been so, they would have protested the indifferent role of the government at the time of natural calamities. Their duty ought to have been to ask the government for rendering relief and medical facilities to the victims at the time of natural calamities like flood, drought, earthquake, fever etc. But they neglected all these; they only insisted on conversion which ignited the general people. People placed them in same line with the government.

It is said that the British judicial system established the principle of equality.<sup>66</sup> But it cannot be accepted wholly. Their activities sometime revealed their double standard. For instance, government eradicated slavery system in Assam. Outwardly, their motive was good but their inner motive was to attract the freed people towards the tea gardens.

In addition to that, the servants of the Colonial government forcibly took away the goods of the *ryots* and the merchants for one fourth ( $\frac{1}{4}$ ) of their value; and by ways of violence and oppression, they obliged the *ryots* to give five rupees for governments which were worth but one rupee<sup>67</sup>. In this way, the government machinery exploited and squeezed the ordinary peasants. People sought justice against this, but failed to get that in the Courts as the Courts were run by their Colonial men.

Nepotism, discrimination, bribes all these engulfed the engulfed surroundings of the Courts. Only Europeans and well-to-do families got justice from the Courts. Hope for justice from the Courts was just like cry in the wilderness. Judiciary and police system were inactive and helpless to save the *ryots* against the exactions and extortions of the foreign apparatus<sup>68</sup>.

The Courts and legal system gave a further fillip to the dispossessors of land and encouraged the rich to oppress the poor. The ordinary People were also hard hit by the prevalence of corruption at the lower levels of the police, judiciary and general administration.

The *Banias* and moneylenders of India put her people in a very deplorable condition.<sup>69</sup> During the British rule, *marwaris* took advantage of trading and commercial opportunities not only in their home regions but also outside<sup>70</sup>. The exploitation of the peasantry at the hands of the *keyas* and the local traders shattered the peace and harmony

of village life and created in its place tension, anger and a smouldering feeling of revenge. Statistics since 1862 to 1900 shows a general rise in prices of essential goods. Taking full advantage of the situation and hardships of the masses, the *keyas* and the local moneylenders took the opportunity to snatch away the ryots' last hold of land at a cheaper rate in the name of helping him<sup>71</sup>.

Kamala Kanta Bhattacharyya through his poem '*Purnimar Ratiloi Chai*' (Looking at the full moon night) described how the *marwaris* trapped the innocent and simple-minded Assamese in their vicious money-lending network by means of their sweet and soft words and made them sign in their long red coloured books (*Khatas*)<sup>72</sup>.

Year after year, the *ryots* had been pledging their crops to *marwari* traders to get advances for paying the land revenue to the government. The demands for enhanced land revenue pushed them further into the grip of usurious capital. Thus, caught in a vicious circle of intensified exploitation the *ryots* started agitating not only against the government but also against the *marwari* traders<sup>73</sup>. The *marwaris* by their trade network earned huge profits in Assam but the profits thus earned were not accumulated in the province and was sent to Rajputana to enrich their land<sup>74</sup> which probably ignited the minds of the people of Assam.

Like the *marwari* traders, local traders also exploited the people of Assam. For example, *ryots* of Kamrup district were exploited not only by the *marwaris* and foreign rulers, they were equally exploited by the local traders internally<sup>75</sup>. But surprisingly, local people did not express their grievances against their local traders.

*Uncommon and Immediate Causes:* There are some causes which were not found similar with the outbreak of 1861. These causes are termed as uncommon and immediate causes:

The highhandedness of Radhanath *tahsilder* was mainly responsible for the revolt of Rangia. Almost all the *tahsilders* of Kamrup opposed the revenue hike but he supported it and even encouraged the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup in this. Those who could not pay revenue in time, were forced to render their physical labour at the residence of *tahsildar*. Even the widows of the peasants were not spared and had been compelled to render their services from dawn to dusk. The *mandals* and *gaonburhas* had to give bribes to the *tahsildar* what they did not like. So, almost all sections had their

disdain towards him<sup>76</sup>. Inhuman exactions of Radhanath Barua compelled the peasants of Rangia to react against him.

The impending enhancement of land revenue rates under the new settlement, as notified in 1892, led to a widespread dissatisfaction that rocked the rural society. The ryots complained that as they had to pay the government an exorbitant price for opium, they were unable to pay the enhanced land revenue. The revised rates in the Brahmaputra valley initially involved an enhancement of 53 percent on average; but in many villages, it was as high as 70 to 100 percent and the highest was in Kamrup. Though the rates were reduced finally to an average 37 percent, the ryots demanded postponement of the collection even at that reduced rate until the final orders of the government of India on the pending appeals were received. The Chief Commissioner disallowed any such postponement which led to organize the peasants through the *Raijmel* and decided upon a no-rent campaign<sup>77</sup>.

The authority with the intention of increasing the amounts of revenue made settlement of the infertile lands also in the name of the local people. Where local people were in the mood of surrendering their lands to the government to get rid of taxes, the news of settlements of infertile lands in their name added fuel to the fire. People began to term it as '*Tekeli Bhonga Piyal*' (Jar breaking settlement). What the local people felt was that the '*Tekeli Bhonga Piyal*' in lieu of settling the land and calculating the revenue from each assess was in reality '*Tekeli Bhanga*' over their own heads. Yogeswar Goswami of Byaskuchi *Satra* and other prominent persons of the locality protested it and decided to launch no-revenue campaign leading to the arrest of several persons and their lodging up in temporary lock-up<sup>78</sup>.

Madhab Chandra Bordoloi, the Extra Assistant Commissioner of Barpeta Sub-division, came to *Mels* as a government representative. The Peasants requested him for the remission and exemption of revenue. But he was more adamant even to listen to their problems, rather threatened and behaved like beasts. His rude and harsh behavior, therefore, compelled the *Raij* to be ignited<sup>79</sup>.

Assault on the *mandal* and the *maujadar* by the people of Lachima was also responsible for the revolt of Lachima of 1893-94. The situation could have been evaded and if not, minimized its intensity, had the people of Kapla village refrained from

assaulting on the *mandal* and the *maujadar* on the 21<sup>st</sup> Jan, 1894. Assault on them, however, made the situation inflammable leading to the arrest of several persons and their lodging up in temporary lock-up<sup>80</sup>.

In 1893, the land of Sarukhetri *mauja* was surveyed. According to the Survey, the lease was given for non-arable land and as a result, people had to pay revenue for their non-arable land also. Formerly, there was an advantage that if a cultivator neither cultivated a land nor gave revenue to the government, then the lease-holder could surrender his land to the government. But Survey of 1893 wiped-out this system forbidding the people to surrender their arable and non-arable land even at the time of their worst financial condition. Some time, of course, they could do so at the cost of giving bribe to the *mandals*. Ultimately, all this gave birth to widespread dissatisfaction in the minds of the lease-holders of land<sup>81</sup>.

Maujadar Das Ram Choudhury and Hali Ram Mandal gave more importance in collecting revenue. They were the sincerest servants of the government and always cried for their master, not for their own people. Their collection nature became so much dreadful that whenever they visited the houses of peasants of Lachima for collecting revenue, the sound of crying of the householders rocked the sky. Their rapaciousness sometime even went beyond imagination. They seized ornaments, utensils, cattle and even the cloth of hand-looms. Finally, disdain and anguish penetrated in people's mind against them. Rent became the talk of the day wherever and whenever two or three people assembled<sup>82</sup>.

Banning of *Rajmels* by R. B. McCabe, the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup, neither solved the problem of the government nor the peasants. The government by its ban tried to curb the rising tide of the *Mels* but failed. The banning made both side belligerent and both took it as their prestige question. The Deputy Commissioner became adamant to curb it and the people also on the other hand become competitive to show their power and existence. In spite of his order, the *Mels* declined to be banned and continued to be as active as before at Nalbari, Barama, and Bajali. Finally, this gave birth to confrontation between the government and the ryots as both sides were firm in their determination and deliberations.

#### IV

The uprisings of 1893-94 failed but it had challenged the defensive capability of the Colonial government. The basic causes that led to the failure of the uprisings of 1893-94 can be studied in this manner.

Use of traditional weapons as against the modern weapon was the main reason of the defeat of the peasants of Kamrup and Darrang. The Peasants of Rangia, Lachima and Patharughat used traditional weapons like spears, bows, arrows and *daos* as against the modern weapons of the British. Their weapons could not be compared with that of the British. The Peasants sought to vanquish the mighty British with their bamboo Pop guns. The Peasants of Patharughat failed as they fought pitched battle with the help of their fish-spears, branches of trees bamboo sticks and clods of earth. They used these as missiles on the gunmen. While the arms men of the colonial power fought with their dresses and shoes, the peasants fought with scanty wearing, barefooted and bare-handed.

Underestimation of the power and number of the British was the main reason that led to the hasty defeat of the peasants of Kamrup and Darrang.

Seize of license guns was one of the causes of their quick defeat. People of Kamrup could have used their guns had their guns not been seized by the government. All license guns in Rangia, Nalbari, Barama and Bajali *tahsils* – the storm centres were seized following the order of R. B. McCabe, the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup<sup>83</sup>.

Lack of unity and worth organizers among the local leaders and absence of proper leadership precipitated their haste defeat. Compared to the military skill, efficiency, decision making and adroitness, the local leaders were inferior to the Colonial leaders. They had no any planned and long-termed scheme at their hands. Lack of common cause and different interest among the leaders brought their downfall. They failed to show the peasants the right way to fight. They could have gained something from the government by pursuing the conciliatory and moderate way. Idea of compromise did not develop in their mind and most of the time the revolts became inflammable due to their inept-handling.

R.B. McCabe, the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup, became successful in winning some of the leaders to his side<sup>84</sup>. Probably he won them by fulfilling their narrow

interest. Moreover, by appointing the rebel leaders as constables at the disturbed areas, the power of the rebels was weakened. Thus, the shrewd and astute British created division among the leaders.

Most of the time, it was found that the leaders of the *mels* had no control upon their people. For example, Kan Goswami appealed to the people not to give high revenue to the *tahsildar* of Rangia. Though initially his appeal was welcome, but finally his appeal was dashed to the ground by Rudra Sarma of Septi<sup>85</sup>. In addition, the leaders of Patharughat wanted to resist those who would be paying revenue to the government. It means that somebody wanted to pay defying the order of their leaders. It proves they had no control.

The people of Assam at that time groaned under economic hardship. Probably because of this, they could not fight a decisive battle against the administration as economy has a great role to play in the revolt.

Strong espionage system also helped the government in curbing the tide of the revolt. The administration could know about the rebel leaders and their *mels* through their spies. Some native also informed the government about the rebels and their whereabouts. As a result, their secrecy leaked. Unfortunate is that native betrayed native only for coins and brought ultimately their tragic ruin.

Rumour and false propoganda from the side of the government also brought success to the government. On the other hand, the innocent peasants did not resort to such policy.

The strong British intelligence and quick and timely decision of the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police brought easy victory for the government. The government could collect secret information of the rebel leaders and their sitting of the *Mels* through their intelligence at a regular basis and took quick and haste decision on it which brought failure of the peasants. If sometime the number of troops sent to quell and disperse the *mels* was found short; immediately additional troops was sent on the basis of the reports of the intelligence. For instance, the situation of Lachima became tense following the assault on the *mandal* and the *maujadar* on 21 Jan, 1894. But timely arrival of R.B. McCabe, the Deputy Commossioner of Kamrup at Lachima on the 24 Jan, 1894, saved the situation from being conflagrated.

The quick and prompt decision of J.D. Anderson, the Deputy Commissioner of Darrang, to open fire on the mob who continued to approach towards him in spite of his order to leave the place resulted in scores of them lying dead and wounded along the Mangaldoi road. His immediate decision brought governments victory on one hand and defeat of the peasants of Patharughat on the other.

The uprising of 1893-94 was confined at the two districts only. Moreover, entire Darrang and Kamrup districts especially South Kamrup was not influenced by them. The revolt was highly localized and restricted to some areas. Many areas remained undisturbed. So, the administration found no problem to curb them. Sporadic outbursts helped the government to quell the uprising of the peasants instantly.

The uprising failed to embrace all sections of the society. Had all sections irrespective of high and low, rich and poor, governmental and non governmental employees stretched out their helping hands to the peasants and fought sincerely for them, probably, there was scope of lasting the revolts for more time. Many did not help the peasants in spite of having sympathy due to losing their jobs. For example, Sonaram Talukdar, a school teacher had been discharged from job due to his taking part in the *Rajmels*. Even his primary school of Byaskuchi was also banned. This, however, created scare in the minds of people and therefore, they remained silent<sup>86</sup>.

Some sections supported the peasants but they did not stretch out their helping hands to them. For instance, some Barua of Jayantipur told Kan Goswami, Rahmat Khalipha and Abhay choudhury that he would not go openly against the government<sup>87</sup>. Moreover, the incident of Lachima and Patharughat failed to stir the imagination of the educated minds<sup>88</sup>. In addition to that, though all peasants fought together, their social and economic disparity created division among them. How sincerely the rich peasants did fight with the poor, is under suspicion.

Some of the leaders did not join openly against the British in spite of having their grievances against the government. These disgruntled men were waiting for a chance to wreak vengeance on the government. The uprisings of 1893-94 gave opportunity to this sections who wasting no time began to instigate the peasants to move forward. The peasants could not ignore their leaders' command as they were the source of credit in the villages. They appeared as saviours but they were the first to retreat<sup>89</sup>. According to

Saikia, in the face of government repression, the peasantry stood their ground, made sacrifices but the leaders betrayed them and disappeared. Their proxy resistance broke down<sup>90</sup>.

Ever-preparedness and ever-readiness also brought victory to the British government. They were ever ready to face any type of situation. The rebels, on the other hand, whatever they did, they did that secretly. Ever preparedness and ever-readiness was not found in them.

As against the cool, meticulous and contemplated decision of the administration, the rebel-leaders took prompt and haughty decision which precipitated their ruin.

The British administration always resorted to well-equipped strategy and maneuver. But the peasants' mode of protest was obsolete and outdated. Defamation, nameless sabotage, tales, jealous gossiping, rumours, character-assassination and nicknames – these were probably the symbolic resistance of the peasants against the government<sup>91</sup>. Foot dragging, house burning, hypocrisy, petty thief - these were probably resorted to by the peasants which evaporated in front of the gun-fire of the government. British language of protest was guns and brains. But the peasants of Kamrup and Darrang fought with passions and emotions. Their main weapons were their bombastic words. The leaders assured the mob not to scare of colonial guns. Emboldened by this, the mob jumped onto the fire like moth and brought their ruin.

To bring all under the one umbrella, the leaders of the *Mels* resorted to some psychological strategy like blessings and cursing. But how such strategy acted, it cannot be said. Had the *Mels* adopted some better, practical and well-equipped strategy to unite their men, probably they could have won. Their utopian, traditional, obsolete, superstitious strategy brought their failure.

Awkward position of the peasants might also be responsible for making the condition of the peasants unstable and fragile. The *ryots* were in between two fires. If they supported the government, they were socially ostracized and if supported the society, their property was seized. They, therefore, felt unstable, insecure and nervous which precipitated their fiasco.

Ban on the *Mels* on Jan-10, 1893, by R.B. McCabe, the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup gave birth to crestfallen in the minds of the peasants. The ban disheartened and

dejected their mind. They probably began to think that if the government could put ban on the *mels*, it was too easy for the administration to quell them personally. So, ultimately, it resulted in their degradation.

## V

Almost all the movements from below, leadership is ostensibly provided by elite elements. The uprising of Maharashtra in 1879 was led by an English educated Vasudeo Balvant Phadke; the Deccan riots of 1875 were led by better-off sections of the peasantry. In Maharashtra, the poona *Sarvajanik Sabha* took the dominant role encouraging peasants to resist payment of revenue from 1896-1900. In the famous Indigo revolt of 1859, the leadership came from *Zamindari* based intellectuals, Calcutta educated *mukhtars* or attorneys and journalists. In Champaran in 1917, school teachers and members of urban intelligentsia also provided leadership. In Kheda and Bordoli of Gujarat the leadership came from the upper castes *Patidars* and Brahmins. In the Tebhaga movement of Bengal (1946-47), initiative was clearly taken by the upper caste leadership of the Communist Party and *Kishan Sabha*. The peasant movement of Mewar (1913) and Durbhanga (1919-20) were also led by the men of same categories<sup>92</sup>. The no revenue movement between 1885 and 1905 were characterized by the leadership of local notables. The no-revenue movement in Assam was led by the rural elite in 1893-94<sup>93</sup>.

There are two sets of leaders in Assam in 1893-94, one traditional and the other new elite. As the Assamese middle class began to emerge as the most dominant class in the society, it not only changed the leadership of the peasant movement but also brought a change in the nature of the movement. The peasants lost its own leadership and accepted the leadership and ideas of the most dominant class<sup>94</sup>.

The non-cultivating classes like *Brahmins*, *Gosains*, *Mahantas* and *Dolois* apparently took the initiative and a leading role in the revolts of 1893-94. But it was the poor peasantry and other sections of the rural poor including artisans who gave it a militant character<sup>95</sup>. For example, Pusparam Kahar, a plebian militant bell metal artisan of Sarukshetri is still remembered in folk memory of Kamrup for his role in the revolt of Lachima of 1893-94. The other example of emergence of leadership from below is that of Birsa Munda who was the son of a share-cropper.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, R. B. McCabe, the Deputy

Commissioner of Kamrup reported that in addition to *Dolois, Gosains, Mahantas* and Principal landholders, others who gave leadership were the dismissed head constables and released convicts<sup>97</sup>.

## VI

Basically, the insurrections of 1893-94 were secular in character. All sections irrespective of castes and creeds, rich and poor, high and low united and fought against the Colonial government.

By nature, the revolt of 1893-94 was not a freedom movement. It was a no rent campaign organized with the object of compelling the government to yield to the will of the people by the withdrawal of unpopular measures of taxation. Compared to the Phulaguri upheaval of 1861, the no-rent agitation of 1893-94 was more organized and disciplined though failed. It was not a sudden and sporadic outbursts<sup>98</sup>.

The revolt of 1893-94 was a mass revolt as all sections cultivating and non-cultivating, Peasantry and non-Peasantry took part in it. Despite having economic and social disparity and variations among the Peasantry, all Peasants rich and Poor fought jointly against the *Raj*. Non-Peasantry classes like *Dolois, Gosains, Mahantas, brahmins*, artisans, local planters, local traders- also hard pressed by the measures of the government. Abolition of posts and privileges, plantation and wasteland policy of the government, migration and industrial policy, various kinds of taxes made them vex and ultimately the revolts assumed mass character by their participation. Flexibility in Assamese Society also contributed lot to unite them together. Desanskritization also helped lot to assume the revolt a mass character as many higher castes gave up their sanskritic value in order to have interaction with the lower castes. Thus, all joined hands together to show mobility and solidarity for establishing their own rights.

It remains expressed that the leaders of different Associations and *Rayat Sabhas* of the Brahmaputra Valley took part in the sessions of Indian National Congress from 1886 to 1892. But when their participation bore no fruits, then they also stretched out their helping hands to the peasants boycotting the sessions of Indian National Congress in 1893 and 1894<sup>99</sup>.

By nature, it was the Peasants and State direct confrontation. The absence of intermediaries between the State and the Peasantry was mainly responsible for the Peasants and State direct confrontation. The fury of the ryots was directed against the moneylenders in the Deccan, against the Indigo planters in Bengal in 1860 and against the Zamindars in Pubna in 1872. But in Assam, it was an open rebellion against the government in 1893-94<sup>100</sup>.

## VII

After 1894, there was no outburst of peasants in Assam. But that does not mean that they reconciled to the British rule. As a result of 1893-94's revolt, consciousness and awareness started in Assam. In fact, they provided the mainstay of the freedom struggle in Assam<sup>101</sup>. The martyrdom of the peasants of Patharughat, Rangia and Lachima is the bench mark in the history of struggle for freedom of India.

As a result of increased taxation, peasants abandoned cultivation leading to the stagnation in agriculture. Due to the involvement of the peasants in the *Raijmel* and their flying to neighbouring villages, production of goods began to decrease resulting in famine like situation in Assam.

The cleft between the ruler and the ruled widened after 1893-94. Suspicion, enmity, racial bitterness developed between them. The number of Colonial force was increased to strengthen the British control over the province so that further revolts could be averted in Assam.

The *Raij-mel* were suppressed ruthlessly which caused great indignation throughout the province. Finally, the government of India had to concede to the partial reduction of the rates of assessment. At last, the government realized the folly of using force on an unwilling people and communicated its decision of further diminishing the rates of revenue to 32.7% and also limiting the increase on an individual holding to about 50% on the previous rental<sup>102</sup>. The reduction of the land revenue ultimately by the British government speaks for itself the success of the peasants' revolt which could be considered as enough groundwork and a stepping stone to the national movement.

Peasants' movements did not remain confined to the rural areas; gradually the urban elite also began to make a united front with the proprietary peasants on all common issues against the rulers<sup>103</sup>.

As a result of the outbreaks of 1893-94, the twinkling sounds of the bell metal industry of Sarukhetri *mauza* was silenced. Annual festival of Sarthebari (*Sabha*) was closed down for three years as a mark of homage to the martyrs who fought for noble cause<sup>104</sup>.

Many became martyrs, many injured and many lost their properties as a result of the outbreaks of Kamrup and Darrang.

The revolt of 1893-94 failed but it inspired the people of other places to revolt against exploitation in future. It made an impact on the contemporary Assamese society.

The price of goods in Assam in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was cheaper. But due to the increase of revenue of the government's *haats* (markets), the price also began to increase. The villagers, when they instead of bringing their produced goods for selling at markets began to exchange that at the villages, it brought bad effects upon the government's *haats*. Many *haats* collapsed as a result of this<sup>105</sup>.

The no-rent campaign of 1893-94 was no more successful than other resistance movements of its kind if far reaching changes in the agrarian structure are taken as the exclusive criterion<sup>106</sup>. Despite that, it received adequate media coverage and the matter was raised even in the Imperial Legislative Council by Rashbihari Ghose.

The impact of the revolts of 1893-94 fell in Sibsagar also. At a public meeting, the inhabitants of the district vehemently resented the sudden increase of land revenue<sup>107</sup>.

Though the lower strata of the Peasantry had nothing in comparison to the dominant land owning caste, they did not revolt against them. Rather, forgetting their social and economic disparity, they fought together under one roof against their common enemy British.

The revolt of 1893-94 failed but it is a matter of great pride that the peasants of Assam became able to fight against the mighty British acquiring power to defend them. It is also because of their movement, the rate of revenue was reduced to 53% first and finally to 32.7%. The revolts of 1893-94 may not be famous like the chivalrous and gallant deeds of Mangal Pandey or Lakshmi Bai; nevertheless, how the peasants of those

regions fought against the mighty British, is a rare instance in the history of India. Whatever might be the result of the revolts of 1893-94, the Colonial government could realize the united strength and might of the peasants in their revolts.

The revolts of 1893-94 paved the way for organized challenge to British rule. It heralded the beginning of a new era of peasant awakening in Assam by effectively upholding the value and utility of organized resistance to governmental injustice<sup>108</sup>. The Cultivating and non-cultivating classes took part in the revolts of 1893-94. But, the rural poor gave them militant character.

One noticeable aspect is that in spite of Government of India's abatement of announcement of revenue, the order of abatement did not reach Assam soon due to the red-tappism of the Colonial bureaucrats<sup>109</sup>. But so honest and innocent the peasants of Assam were that they did not revolt against the authority in spite of having all probability. It proved the patience of the peasants

Revolt of 1893-94 was guided by reasons, not by passions and emotions. The peasants reacted against exploitation and injustice, not for their rights, privileges and social status. "The Indian Nation" on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1894, regarded the demands of the *Rajpels* as real, not sentimental. According to the paper, the demand of revenue was heavier in Assam than in Bengal.

Though quelled with brute force, the uprising not only exposed the defects of the British rule but also proved beyond doubt that any attempt at socio-economic reconstruction without corresponding improvement in the moral and material condition of the people was bound to be abortive. What was needed in Assam was the infusion of energy and enterprise into individual character and not malicious disregard for the problems of the ryots<sup>110</sup>.

The peasantry and the workers who constituted the majority of the Indian masses had showed their historic resentment against the government in 1893-94 without waiting for elite leadership though the latter also took decisive role later.

As against the Brahmins of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan who were occasionally found working as tenants of Rajputs and Jat landowners,<sup>111</sup> the Brahmins of Assam got their land ploughed by others. The Brahmins of Assam in Colonial period were high and educated class and gave even the leadership in the outbreaks of 1893-94.

As against the two Tamil Peasants castes – *Vellalas* and *Padaiyachis* who wanted to be recorded as higher *Varnas* like *Vaishyas* and *Vanniyakula Kshatriyas*<sup>112</sup>, there was no such upward caste mobility among the peasants of Assam.

A most important value of westernization is humanitarianism which means welfare of all human being. Equalitarianism and Secularism are both included in humanitarianism<sup>113</sup>. Significantly, the government neglected all these human values. Otherwise, there would have been no revolts in 1893-94. When most of the educated and well-to-do sections of the society tolerated the exploitation of the government and remained silent, the illiterate rural masses protested the policy of the government and had taken the path of revolt. It is really an important aspect to be noticed.

In the revolts of 1893-94, we find some important thing. Some of the higher castes gave up their Sanskritic value (Desanskritisation) in order to have interaction with the lower castes. For example, we can mention the name of Jogeswar Goswami of Byaskuchi who in spite of his high position in the society, mixed up with the masses in general.

Significantly, the peasants of Assam of 1893-94 gave importance only on their economic problems forgetting their religious and community bar. The Muslims of Assam took a leading role in 1893-94. For example, the Muslims of Patharughat took a vital role in the revolt of 1893-94 maintaining their legacy of enmity that their ancestors had against the British. Of the 140 who died in 1894 at Patharughat, 64 had been identified. Of them, 7 were Muslims. In addition to that, the main leader of the *Panatup-mels* of Lachima was Babri Phakir<sup>114</sup>.

The revolt of 1893-94 was a dispute between the ruler and the ruled. The Colonial government blamed the peasants of Assam exonerating itself for all acts. They kept concealed all these acts only for their own interest. The dead were buried but how the sins could be!

The demands of the peasants were real, not sentimental. The burden pressed upon the land was heavier even than in Bengal. So, their movement against the authority could be totally justified. But, late arrival of abatement order of revenue due to the red tapes of the Colonial bureaucrats could not be justified. The rightful demand of the peasants placed before the authority for compliance and consideration could not be a

crime using lethal weapons on them. The Colonial government could have evaded the mass slaughtering with patient consideration adopting give and take policy instead of shooting and slaughtering the mass people whimsically. A black spot on the civilized British nation, of course, not desired by the British Commons, but caused by their trigger happy cynics without trying to understand the wants of their subjects<sup>115</sup>.

## Notes & References

1. M'Cosh, John : *Topography of Assam*, Logos Press, New Delhi, Second Reprint, 2000, pp. 84, 121.
2. *Ibid.* : pp. 5-6.
3. Saikia, Rajen : *Social and Economic History of Assam (1853-1921)*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2001, p. 110. (Table- 3.5).
4. *Ibid.* : pp. 84-85.
5. M'Cosh : *op. cit.*, p. 93.
6. Saikia : *op. cit.*, p. 85.
7. *Ibid.* : p. 111.
8. Guha, A. : *Planter Raj to Swaraj (1826-1947)*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2006, p. 41.
9. *Ibid.* : p. 42.
10. Kalita, R.C. : 'The Phulaguri uprising of 1861; A Peasant Mass Movement', *NEIHA-X*, 1989, p. 311.
11. Guha : *op. cit.*, p. 42.
12. Barpujari, H.K. (eds.) : *Political History of Assam (1826-1919)*, Vol-I, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, Second Edition, 1999, p. 97.
13. Kakati, Mayaram : 'Asamiya Terasa Sanat Rangia' in Pabin Kalita's (ed), *Rangia Raijmel*, Raijmel Krishak Martyrs Memorial Committee, Rangia, 2005, p. 3.
14. Anonymous : '1894 Sanar Rangia' in P. Kalita's (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.
15. Deka, M. K. : 'Rajkadamtalar Oitihya- Bartaman aru Bhabisyat' in K. Kr. Deka's (ed.), *Raijmel*

- Kadamtal Swahid Smriti Sangha,  
Paikarkuchi, Nalbari, 1996, pp. 10-11.
- Choudhury, Medini : 'Tribals' Participation in the Nationalist  
Upsurge' in A. Bhuyan's (ed), *Nationalist  
Upsurge in Assam*, Government of  
Assam, Guwahati, 2000, p. 296.
16. Anonymous : '1894 Sanar Rangia' in P. Kalita's (ed),  
*op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.
17. Karna, M.N. : *Agrarian Structure and Land Reforms in  
Assam*, Regency Publications, New Delhi,  
2004, p. 38.
18. *Ibid.* : pp. 38-39.
19. Pathak, Moushumi : 'Peasants' revolt at Sarukhetri- the  
Raijmel', *NEIHA-XXIII*, 2002, p. 113.
20. Barua, R. Hussain : 'Krishak Bidroh aru Asamar Musalman'  
in K. Kr. Deka's (ed), *op. cit.*, p. 17.
21. Pathak : *op. cit.*, pp. 112-113.
- Sil, Upen : 'Namani Asamor Brihattam Raijmel –  
Panagaonar Tup' in A. Kr. Das & H.  
Sarma's (eds.), *Sarukhetri Raijmel  
Satabarshiki Smriti Grantha*, Sarukhetri  
Raijmel Smriti Raksha Samiti,  
Baniakuchi, 1994.
22. Bora, Durgeswar : 'Raijmel: Sarukhetrir Krishak Bidrohar  
(1894) Eti Samiksha' in A. Kr. Das & H.  
Sarma's (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 19.
23. Karna : *op. cit.*, p. 39.
24. Sil : *op. cit.*
25. Barpujari, (eds.) : *op. cit.*, pp. 99-100.
26. Barua : *op. cit.*, p. 17.
27. Karna : *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40.

28. Goswami, S.D. : 'The British Taxation Policy in Assam' in J.B. Bhattacharjee's (ed) *Studies in the Economic History of NEI*, Har Anand publications, New Delhi, 1994, p. 96.
29. Sarkar, S. : *Modern India (1885-1947)*, Mac Millan, Delhi, Reprint, 2008, p. 53.
30. Barpujari, H.K. (ed.) : *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Vol-V, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, 2004, pp. 34-35.
31. Saikia : *op. cit.*, p. 108.
32. Guha : *op. cit.*, p. 41.
33. Bose, M.L. : *Development of Administration in Assam*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1985, p. 59.
34. Karna, M.N. : 'Historical Studies in the Agrarian Problems of North East India', *NEIHA-VII*, 1986, p. 393.
35. Goswami : *op. cit.*, p. 95.
36. Doshi, S.L. & Jain, P.C. : *Rural Sociology*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, New Delhi, 2006, p. 119.
37. *Krishna Sarma's Diary* : Assam Publication Board, Guwahati, 1972, p. 249.
38. Gait, Sir E.A. : *A History of Assam*, LBS Publications, Guwahati, Assam, 1984, p. 343.
39. Barpujari, (eds.) : *Political History of Assam*, p. 100.
40. Guha : *op. cit.*, p. 6.
41. *Ibid.* : pp. 74-75.
42. Kalita, R.C. : 'British exploitation in Assam: The Opium Policy and revenue (1850-94)', *NEIHA-XII*, 1991, p. 343.

43. Sarma, N. : *The rise and growth of the Peasant movement in Kamrup district – 1826-1900* (Ph D thesis), GU, Guwahati, 2003, p. 34.
44. Guha : *op. cit.*, p. 13.
45. Saikia : *op. cit.*, pp. 226-227.
46. Allen, B.C., Allen, C.G.H., Gait, E. A. & Howard, H.F. : *Gazetteer of Bengal and NEI*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2001, p. 105.
47. Guha : *op. cit.*, p. 12.
48. Mills, A.J.M. : *Report on the Province of Assam*, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, Second Edition, 1984, pp. 13-14.
49. Goswami, P. : 'Colonial Penetration and the Emergence of Nationalism in Assam' in A. Bhuyan's (ed) *op. cit.*, p. 15.
50. *Ibid.* : p. 18.
51. Bhalla, G. S. : *Condition of Indian Peasantry*, National Book Trust of India, New Delhi, First Edition, 2006, p. 7.
52. Guha : *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.
53. Kalita, Mohan Ch. : 'Raijmel' in Pabin Kalita's (ed) *op. cit.*, p. 29.
54. Desai, S.S. M. : *Economic History of India*, Himalaya Publishing House, Bombay, July, 1990, p. 70.
55. Nag, Sajal : 'Social reaction to Bania exploitation' in JB Bhattacharjee's (ed) *Studies in the Economic History of NEI*, NEHU Publications, Shillong, 1986, p. 367.
56. Guha : *op. cit.*, p. 7.
57. Kaushal, G. : *Economic History of India (1757-1966)*, Kalyani Publishers, New Delhi, Reprint,

- 1991, p. 180.
58. Chopra P.N., : *A Social, Cultural and Economic History*  
Puri B. N., & of India, Vol-III, Mc Millan India Ltd.,  
Das, M. N. Madras, 1990, p. 183.
59. Kaushal : *op. cit.*, p. 8.
60. Goswami, S.D. : *op. cit.*, p. 95.
61. Goswami, P.C. : *The Economic Development of Assam*,  
Bambay, 1963, p. 60.
62. Guha : *op. cit.*, p. 39.
63. Kaushal : *op. cit.*, p. 83.
64. Saikia : *op. cit.*, p. 39.
65. Raja, Purnanada : 'Phulaguri Dhewar Para Ajiloike  
Phulaguri' in J. Medhi's (ed), *Phulaguri  
Dhewar Rengani*', Reception Committee,  
143<sup>rd</sup>. Anniversary of Phulaguri Dhewa,  
Phulaguri, Nagaon, 2004, p. 19.
66. Srinivasa, M.N. : *Social Change in Modern India*, Orient  
Longman Ltd., New Delhi, 1995, p. 51.
67. Chopra, : *op. cit.*, p. 167.  
Puri &  
Das
68. Sarma, N. : *op. cit.*, p. 41.
69. Doshi & Jain : *op. cit.*, p. 120.
70. Srinivasa : *op. cit.*, p. 65.
71. Saha, Subhas : *1942-Stuggle - a study of grass root  
nationalism in the districts of Darrang  
and Nowgong* (M. Phil), NEHU, Shillong,  
1984, pp. 75-76.
72. Nag : *op. cit.*, p. 367.
73. Guha : *op. cit.*, p. 42.
74. Ghosh, Lipi : 'Indebtedness in Peasant Sector: a stud

- of Assam proper in late 19<sup>th</sup> Century' in JB Bhattacharjee's (ed) *Studies in the Economic History of N.E. India*, Har Anand Publications, New Delhi, 1994, p. 340.
75. Sarma N. : *op. cit.*, p. 41.
76. Kakati : *op. cit.*, p. 3.
77. Guha : *op. cit.* pp. 41-42.
78. Deka, Rajendra Nath : 'Swadhinata Sangramat Sarukhetrir Avadan' in A. Kr. Das & H. Sarma's (eds), *op. cit.*, p. 24.
79. Deka, K. B. : *Alpar paror Biplab*, Kalindi Prakashan, Sarthebari, Barpeta, 1995, p. 10.
80. Barpujari (eds.) : *Political History of Assam*, p. 98.
81. Sil : *op. cit.*
82. *Ibid.*
83. Guha : *op. cit.*, p. 43.
84. Barua, S.L. : *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2005, p. 504.
85. Kakati : *op. cit.*, p. 14.
86. Deka, Bhabananda : 'Britishar Biruddhe Asamot Pratham Gana Andolan' in A. Kr. Das and H. Sarma's (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 96.
87. Kakati : *op. cit.*, p. 5.
88. Saikia : *op. cit.*, p. 107.
89. *Ibid.* : p. 108.
- Guha : *op. cit.*, pp. 44-45.
90. Saikia : *op. cit.*, p. 108.
91. *Ibid.* : pp. 108-109.
92. Mookherjee, Mridula : 'Peasant resistance and Peasant

- consciousness in Colonial India – Subalterns and beyond’ in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Oct-8, 1988, pp. 2114-2115.
93. *Ibid.* : p. 2114.
94. Sarma, Manorama : ‘Peasant uprisings and middle class hegemony: the case of Assam’, *NEIHA-X*, 1989, pp. 328-329.
95. Guha : *op. cit.*, p. 44.
96. Mookherjee : *op. cit.*, p. 2114.
97. Kalita, R.C. : ‘The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Peasant movement and the Assamese Middle Class’, *NEIHA-XV*, 1994, p. 205.
98. Karna : *Agrarian Structure and Land Reforms in Assam*, p. 36.
99. Guha : *op. cit.*, p. 284.
100. Barpujari (eds.) : *op. cit.*, pp. 101-102.
101. Saikia : *op. cit.*, p. 109.
102. Goswami, S.D. : ‘The Rajmels: Their historic role in Peasant movements of Assam’, *NEIHA-X*, 1989, p. 306.
103. *Ibid.* : p. 306.
104. Pathak : *op. cit.*, p. 115.
105. Kalita, Mohan Ch. : *op. cit.*, p. 30.
106. Karna : *op. cit.*, p. 40.
107. Barpujari (eds.) : *op. cit.*, pp. 100-101.
108. Goswami : *op. cit.*, p. 306.
109. Barpujari (eds.) : *op. cit.*, p. 101.
110. Goswami : ‘The British taxation Policy in Assam’ in JB’s *op. cit.*, p. 96.
111. Srinivasa : *op. cit.*, p. 70.

112. *Ibid.* : p. 100.
113. *Ibid.* : p. 51.
114. Barua, R. Hussain : *op. cit.*, p. 17.
115. Ali, M. Abid : *Pothorughat- Indianised*, Published by P. Sikdar, Mangaldoi, 2007, p. 25.