

CHAPTER – ONE

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

The peasants, who constitute the largest single segment of mankind, play a special part in shaping our destinies. Chayanov and Mao Tse-tung have interpreted the historical qualities of the peasantry and they offer two widely different, even opposite, outlooks. Yet they inspired into the past of the peasantry for discovering its capacity for change and resistance.

In order to reconstruct the peasant-history in India, D.D. Kosambi and R.S. Sharma, together with Daniel Thorner, brought peasants into the study of Indian history for the first time.

Literally, a peasant is one who tills the land. Raymond William says that peasant, a word of French origin, came to be widely used in English from the 15th century for one who worked on land and also lived in the village ¹. Oswald Spengler portrayed the peasant as an organic, rather than historical figure. The peasant in the legal sense was not an ancient figure unaffected by history but rather a historical figure that emerged in the high middle ages. Evidence reveals that the word 'peasant' did not appear before those engaged in agriculture became legally distinguishable.² But such a definition is not so simple as it appears to be. It is naturally elusive to give a rigorous definition of the peasant. Habib takes the peasant to mean – "a person who undertakes agriculture on his own, working with his own implements and using the labour of his family".³ This definition is acceptable to Marxists as well as to Chayanov. In general, a peasant is one who generates income out of the land owned by him.

Revolutionary transformation has become a world-wide process. "Hardly a year passes without a revolutionary change in some or other part of the world"⁴. This change began to attract the attention of the social scientists since 1960. Prior to that, there was only political history as historians had concentrated their attention on that. Recently, some social scientists turn their attention on peasant-study "in a class framework that is rooted in Marxism".⁵ Sometime, on the contrary, movements hope to preserve the status-

quo in the face of threatened changes. In this case, social movement can play a vital role in changing the pattern of society according to its desire.

The term like rebellion, revolution, revolt, uprisings, movement and insurrection, has been used synonymously. Dictionaries, encyclopedias and glossaries have given different meanings to the term 'movement'. According to Chamber's Dictionary, movement means 'general tendency of current thought, taste, opinion or action or mere drift'. So, a series of combined action and endeavour of a body of persons for a special object is called movement. According to Lenin, "revolution is a profound, difficult and complex science".⁶ Revolutions are not made to orders; they cannot be timed to any particular moment. They mature in a process of historical development and break out at a moment determined by a whole complex of internal and external causes. Revolution breaks out when tens of millions of people come to the conclusion – 'it is impossible to live in the old way any longer' - he said.⁷

Revolutions are inevitable in the process of social development. Political and social revolutions are not the same thing. 'Every revolution dissolves the old society and to that extent, it is social' – wrote Marx. 'Every revolution overthrows the old power and to that extent, it is political'. Revolutions affect the foundations of the 'rule of one or another class, but coups only replace persons or groups of persons in power'. Similarly, reforms help to overcome social contradictions but revolutions not.⁸

Peasants throughout the world have displayed a great role in various movements and their participation in all such movements catapulted the movements to a new height. Indian scholars were largely influenced by various peasant movements that took place both within and outside India. Chinese revolutions and number of agrarian movements in Latin America are special among them. Naxalite Movement in the second half the 20th century also provided more scope to Indian Sociologists, Political Scientists and Scholars. Peasants played a predominant role in bourgeois revolutions which helped in ushering capitalist society in England and France and communist societies in China and Russia. Regarding the rebellious nature, Barrington Moore Jr. said that the Chinese peasants were more rebellious than the peasants of India. But A.R. Desai in 1979, Dhanagare in 1983, R. Guha in 1983 and Kathlene Gough in 1974 disagreed with Moore's comment. Gough counted 77 revolts and classified them in terms of their 'goals,

ideology, methods and organizations as restorative, terrorist, mass, religious and social banditary'.⁹ But she overlooked some peasant movements which were linked with the nationalist movement in some way or other.

According to Marx, peasant movement took place in response to extraction of surplus by landlords, moneylenders and the state. In the rural society of India, caste and economic interest play an important role in all respects. 'Class conflict is based on exploitation of peasantry'- Marx said. He treated the peasantry as a secondary social class and criticized the French peasantry for not taking side with the industrial proletariat in their struggle against the bourgeois in 1848.

It is noteworthy to explore why Indian peasants couldn't achieve their goal what the European and the Chinese peasants could. Scholars in their studies find the fact. Caste system and the Hindu religion is an obstacle for which poor peasants could not organize against the exploitation. Like Marx, Ranajit Guha also mentioned about the primary and secondary discourse – terrible insurgencies and elite leadership. He, in order to understand the peasant movement, gives importance to exploitation on peasantry.

Some scholars want to explain the peasant-movement as predominantly middle-class movement. But it is not true in the case of the south. The poor peasants and the labourers are the 'backbone of resistance from the beginning till the very end'.¹⁰

The emergence of innumerable social movements with a multitude of issues, values and demands are very noticeable phenomenon in all contemporary societies. With the gradual transformation of the economic and social structure of the society and as a result of industrial revolution, various social movements emerged. Industrial revolution tore the structure and relations of feudalism and replaced it with capitalism. Development of capitalism and its inherent contradictions gave birth to many social movements in history. Fundamental rights have also played a significant role in the emergence of various contemporary social movements. Most of the historically significant political movements by nature and implication are social movements.

Many social scientists have attempted to provide definition of a movement. The earliest definition perhaps was provided by the Danish historian Lorenz Vonstein in 1852. In his analysis of the French revolution, he defined social movement as people coming together to change the conditions of society. According to him, masses were the

volatile element in society which was capable of bringing about social disruption and political change.

In order to reach its goal, a social movement needs collective action, a social mobilization. For social mobilization, a social movement needs to depend on some kind of organization to provide leadership and direction. For this, the leadership needs some kind of ideology to explain a situation convincingly which it wants to change through mobilization. With the help of ideology, the leadership justifies the existence and continuity of a social movement. A social movement cannot exist without some goals, social mobilization, organization, leadership and ideology. These are the foundations on which 'the edifice of the movement stands; the stronger the foundation, the stronger is the movement and its impact on society and history'.¹¹

The term 'Peasant Movement' and 'Agrarian Movement' refer to all kinds of collective attempt of different strata of the peasantry either to change the system which they felt, was exploitative or to seek redress for particular grievances without necessarily aiming at overthrowing the system. The rural sociologists have analysed the peasant unrest in different terms. For instance, A.R. Desai calls the unrest as 'the peasant struggle', Kathlene Gough terms it as 'peasant uprising', for N.G. Ranga again 'it is a struggle of the peasantry' and according to Hamza Alavi- 'it is a peasant revolution'. It appears that the sociologists who are oriented to Marxism have analysed the peasant agitation as struggle on the pattern of class struggle and class war. These sociologists look at the peasant agitations from the perspective of class antagonism. D.N. Dhanagare reviews the peasant agitation as 'a peasant movement'. The dictionaryal meaning of 'agrarian' means anything related to land, its management or distribution. Agrarian system also includes land tenure system. Andre Beteille in his book *Studies in Agrarian Social Structure* says that agrarian system does not mean only peasantry.¹²

It is argued by economists and sociologists that the present agrarian problem of rural India is the 'outcome of the colonial policy adopted by British in pre-Independent India'.¹³ The process of Sanskritisation and Westernisation brought socio-cultural change in India which broadened the mental horizon of the people and brought a revolutionary change in their socio-economic life. Imbued by this, they tried to break hitherto-prevailing obsolete system. This gave birth to confrontation. It does not mean that the

people never sought change before the process of Westernization had started. But it became imminent after the process.¹⁴

In recent years, peasants study receives much importance at the hands of sub-altern groups. It may be noted that earlier the historians, particularly the Imperialist and the Nationalist historians have paid less importance on the role of the peasants in their movements. They emphasize to study their history through the eyes of the elite leadership.

Those who believe in Marxist-Leninist-Maoist formulations regarding peasant movements, assign the role of motive force in such movements to the urban proletariat and in the rural areas, the poor peasantry. Middle peasants are taken to be firm allies and on occasions, alliance is envisaged even with the rich peasants. Counter to this, in recent years, a school of peasant studies has sprung-up which sees the middle peasant as the class most liable to rise in revolt and feels that the socio-economic condition handicaps the poor peasants, including agricultural labourers and it makes them more revolutionary. To these social scientists, 'assigning primacy in peasant movement to the poor peasantry is no more than conforming to Marxist Orthodoxy'.¹⁵

II

The land known as Assam is situated to the extreme north-east of India. Assam in different periods was known in different names. Her earliest name was Pragjyotishpur. The name Pragjyotishpur is found mentioned in the epic *Mahabharata* and in the *Puranas*. Narakasur, Bhagadatta, Ghatotkacha, Bana (the father-in-law of Lord Krishna's grandson Aniruddha) – all were from Pragjyotishpur. The great king Bhagadatta took part in the battle of Kurukshetra. Pragjyotishpur later came to be known as Kamarupa. The earliest reference to the name of Kamarupa is found mentioned in the Allahabad Prasasti of Samudra Gupta of the great Gupta dynasty. Regarding the origin of the name of Kamarupa, there is a legend in the *Purana* but without any historical value. The more reasonable view is that the term Kamarupa is derived from Kambru or Kamru, the name of a non-Aryan god. According to *Yogini Tantra*, Kamarupa in ancient time was divided into four parts- Ratnapitha, Kamapitha, Svarnapitha and Soumarapitha. The first

three historical and royal dynasties of Kamarupa – the Varmanas, the Salastambhas and the Palas ruled over Kamarupa from the 4th century to the beginning of the 12th century. The name Kamarupa continued to be used till the advent of the Ahoms in the Brahmaputra Valley in the 13th century. With the coming of the Ahoms, Kamarupa came to be known as Assam. The arrival of the Ahoms is a decisive factor in the history of Assam. The Ahoms, a Shan tribe from Burma, wandered into the Brahmaputra Valley about the year 1226. Established once firmly in the upper Brahmaputra Valley, they followed a policy of expansion and by 1700 A.D. had conquered the territories once included in the kingdom of Kamarupa. The Ahoms had to fight a line of serial battles with the Kochs and the Mughals, with the Kacharis and the Jayantias, with the Chutias and the Bara-bhuiyans and had to defend and sometime to offend the hill tribes. Notwithstanding that, Assam did not become a part of other and thus they proved their might. Moamoria uprising shook the very foundation of the Ahom kingdom and in utter distress, the king had to seek help to the British in quelling the same. Moreover, internal dissension, feud, internecine conflict, intrigues, mal-administration, and sycophancy- all these made the foundation of Ahom kingdom fragile and topsy-turvy. There prevailed social distinctions like ‘kings only could build houses of bricks and mortars, nobles could wear shoes, ride on horses, travel in palanquin but same were denied to the ordinary people. People of humble birth were obliged to fold *chaddar* over the left shoulder, not over right like the nobles. All these social disparity gave birth to discontentment amongst the subjects. This and such type environment encouraged the Burmese to interfere into the internal affairs of the Ahom kingdom and precipitated her collapse.¹⁶

III

On the north-east corner of the Republic of India lies the present state of Assam, situated between the twenty-fourth and twenty-eight degrees of north latitude and eighty ninth and ninety-seventh degrees of east longitude. The long alluvial valley of the Brahmaputra or Assam proper extended at the beginning of our period from the river Manah on the north bank of the Brahmaputra to the foot of the Himalayas close upon the frontier of China. On the north, it is bounded by the hills of the Bhutias, the Akas, the

Daflas and the Abors. The hills occupied by the Mishmis, the Khamtis and the Singphos separate Assam from China and Burma. On the south-east lie the states of Cachar and Manipur. From the Patkai hills, which form the natural boundary with Burma, runs the irregular chains of mountains commonly known as the Assam Range occupied by the Nagas, the Jayantias, the Khasis and the Garos westward in succession. Guarded thus almost on all sides by mountain barriers, Assam remained practically isolated. Geography had imposed a 'formidable barrier on her contact with the rest of the world'. Navigation along the river Brahmaputra before the steam-age was always uncertain and at times extremely hazardous.¹⁷

The interference of the Burmese in the internal affairs of Assam is a dark chapter in the history of Assam, who unleashed a region of terror. Plunder, devastation, murder and desecration became the order of the day. There was whole-sale depopulation, industry collapsed, agriculture was neglected and trade, if any, was at a standstill. Major John Butler and Maniram Dewan described the outrages of the Burmese. 'The dreadful atrocities perpetrated on the helpless Assamese could better be imagined than described'.¹⁴

In 1825-26, British appeared on the scene in the guise of saviours and expelled the Burmese from Assam. So, people at large naturally welcomed their advent and expected that their troubles would end and peace, prosperity and normalcy would return. But the hopes entertained by the people with unbounded joy were soon turned to bitter disappointment and the first flush of popular enthusiasm gave way to growing discontent while it dawned in their mind that the British had come to stay and their motto was to turn the land into an agricultural estate of tea-drinking Britons, transform local traditional institutions to suit the colonial pattern of exploitation. The people found out from experience that 'the new master's immediate concern was extortion of land revenue, even to the detriment of the welfare of their subjects'¹⁹. Shorn of their power and privileges, the official aristocracy of the former government (Ahom government) 'gave vent to their bitter feelings and hostility in a number of abortive attempts to overthrow the alien rule'.²⁰

The disaffected section of the nobility was the first to strike at the alien rulers, albeit with the avowed purpose of restoring its own social status and privileges. 'Upper

Assam was the mainstay of the Ahoms and the haunt of the European tea planters; the anti-British uprisings occurred in Upper Assam within a few years of British occupation'.²¹

The old aristocracy which had lost its offices of profit was the first to react violently to the alien rule. The first revolt was at the initiative of Gomdhar Konwar, a prince of the Ahom royal family in 1828. Dhananjoy Borgohain, his son Haranath and many members of the dispossessed nobility were a party to this rebellion in 1828. But the ill-organised revolt was suppressed by Lt. Rutherford in October, 1828. The second revolt took place in 1829 under Gadadhar Singha but this also met with failure. The third attempt was made in 1830 on behalf of Konwar Rupchandra, Haranath, Harakanta, Hemnath and Jiuram Dihingia Barua and others helped him in this venture. The British crushed the third attempt too. Some leaders were sent to Dacca for detention and Piyali Barphukan and Jiuram Dihingia Barua were hanged in August, 1830. The revolt of 1830 was much more organized than those of the 1828 and the 1829.

Within four years of the treaty of Yandaboo, revolts began in Assam. The Khasis fought under the leadership of U Tirat Singh and the Singphos under a Khamti Chief. Thus, 'alongside the dwellers of the plains, the hill men also made their mark as rebels'. The Khasis fought the British for four years from 1829 to 1833. As for the Singphos, they were in contact with the leaders of the Khasi insurrection and of the 1830 of Assam.²²

The system of British administration reduced vast masses to poverty. The result was mal-administration as the foreign Government cared more for revenue than for the philanthropic work. For example, Nowgong became depopulated in 1832-33 due to the hike of revenue and ¼ of the total population abandoned their houses and took asylum in Jayantia, Kachar and Yamunamukh and four years later in 1836, some peasants of Nowgong revolted against revenue-hike.

'The attempted reform and reorganisation of the administration could not eradicate the evils of an alien Government and their satellites whose interest was more of economic exploitation than improving the lot of the masses or redress of their augmented grievances'.²³

Like the other parts of India, the echo of revolt of 1857 was found in Assam also and it was fuelled by Maniram Dewan. The revolt of 1857 had imposed severe financial

strain on the British Indian Government. Local authorities in Assam began to tap new sources of revenue to meet their increasing expenditure. The Government increased the revenue demand by 3 to 4 times. Stamp duties and income tax were introduced in 1858 and 1861 respectively in addition to excise duties and taxes for grazing and cutting timber and reeds. To make the large number of opium-eaters dependent entirely on Government opium, cultivation of poppy was totally banned in 1861. The increase of land revenue on dry crop lands in 1861 was much resented in Nowgong but the ban on poppy cultivation affected the peasant economy of Nowgong the most. People were also apprehensive about the imposition of tax on betel-nut and *pan* cultivation. All these led to an agitation mainly among the Lalung tribe of the Phulaguri in Nowgong in 1861. All sections came out in support of the Phulaguri rebels but it was a failure.

In 1868–69, the Government had increased the rates of revenue on *rupit* and non-*rupit* lands from 25% to 50%. The people particularly in the districts of Kamrup and Darrang reacted against this enhancement through *Raij-Mels*. The people launched no-tax campaign against ruthless imposition of higher rates of assessment in Kamrup (La Chima; Rangia and neighbouring areas) and Darrang (Patharughat) towards the close of the 19th century. Both the Hindus and the Muslims met together in the *mels* and naseated their protest against the revenue-hike on land. Anyway, the movements of Rangia, Lachima and Patharughat lost their edge and met ultimately fiasco. Indeed, all revolts against the British from 1828 onward failed to achieve their goals. P.N. Gohain Barua, the founder of the Ahom Sabha, observed: 'The period from 1838 to 1893, was a season of dead-march for the Ahom community'. Within these years, he said, they became 'insignificant and neglected'.²⁴

IV

The area of the study is within the three erstwhile districts of Assam province viz- Kamrup, Darrang and Nowgong. The western part of the Brahmaputra valley came under the alien rulers while they had already occupied Kamrup, Darrang and Nowgong since 1825.

Kamrup is situated on either side of the Brahmaputra. According to Mills' Report, then Kamrup was divided into North and South Kamrup. The central part is thickly

populated and the soil was extremely fertile. Mills also reported that among the population, there were Mohammedans, Hindus and other tribes. The population in 1848 was estimated at 3,87,775 souls, viz- 2,15,210 males, 1,72,565 females of whom 35,863 were Mohammedans, 2,76,083 were Hindus and 75,829 were tribes. The chief products were rice and mustard and chief food was rice and wheat.²⁵

The population of Darrang in 1835 was 89,519 souls and 1, 85,569 in 1841-42. Chief products were rice, mustard-seeds, *kulai dal*, sugar cane, cotton etc. The district is bounded on the North by the mountainous ranges of hills and the south by the river Brahmaputra.²⁶

The number of square- miles in the whole district of Nowgong is estimated to be about 8,769. Capt. Butler states that no regular census of the population has ever been taken but estimating each house to contain five persons the calculations gives 2,41,300 exclusive of about 1,00,000 Angamee Nagas. The district is situated in the south bank of the river Brahmaputra and is inhabited by rude tribes of Mikirs, Nagas, Kacharis, Kookis and Lalongs.²⁷

Though the movements of Patharughat (Darrang) Rangia, Lachima (Kamrup) and Phulaguri (Nowgong) are the main areas of this study, the persistence of these movements were seen in other segment also which were within and beyond the periphery.

The period 1858 to 1894 has been chosen for two major considerations. (1) Peasant movement of Kamrup, Darrang and Nowgong particularly of this specific period have not been studied systematically though lots have been made in brief, narrative and casual type. That's why they have not received its due attention as is given to the same phenomena in other parts of India. So, attempts have been made to give a systematic and clear-cut picture of this. The North-Eastern regions including Assam had fiercely resisted the colonial domination. But little is known of the peasant of this region who resisted revenue hike of the alien Government. (2) The year 1858 has a special importance in the history of Assam. After the great mutiny of 1857, Assam also like other parts of India went into the hands of the British Crown in 1858. The Crown contemplated and finally decided to increase revenue on land in this year (1858) so as to remove their loss in the mutiny of 1857. Augmentation of revenue gave birth to direct confrontation between the

Government and the peasants. As a result, there took place peasant movements in Assam which came to an end in 1894.

The movement had a few salient features. It was not spread uniformly in the entire Assam. Its intensity was felt mainly in Rangia, Lachima (Kamrup) Patharughat (Darrang) and Phulaguri (Nowgong) only. The movements did not get adequate momentum at all places. Zamindari system was not prevalent in our three districts. Ryotwari system was prevalent there. Moreover, distinction was very much less between the rich and the poor peasants. Both agricultural and non-agricultural classes took active part in the movements. The peasant-movement of Assam was an open rebellion against the state - open rebellion not for freedom from foreign yoke but for emancipation from revenue-burden and exploitation. The Peasant Movement of Assam could be termed as popular movement as all sections of people irrespective of caste and creed took active part in it.

Another noticeable fact is that peasants organized themselves through Raji-Mels. Raji-Mels were mainly peasants-mobilization campaign. Peasants, non-peasants, etc. assembled for a common purpose under the leadership of Gossains, Dolois, Gaonburhas or landowners. Numerical strength to the movement was given by them. Non-political character of the union was another feature of the Peasant Movement of Assam and it was the starting point for the peasants to enter in a system of organization.

The significance and peculiarity of the study is that though revenue and agrarian policy was the main cause of the revolt of peasants, there were other causes that led to the peasant's movements of Assam. Another significance of the study is that mainly peasants related matters were discussed in the Raji-Mels, but less number of peasants became its leaders. The study will also demonstrate that all sections of the people irrespective of caste and creed joined unitedly against the revenue-hike of the Government. It is also interesting to note that the Peasant Movement of Assam was not for freedom from foreign yoke, but for the emancipation from the exploitation and revenue-hike. Moreover, the salient feature of the peasant movement of Assam, unlike the south Indian peasant movements, was open rebellion against the state which is one of the noticeable peculiarities and significance of this study.

Keeping these distinct natures of the peasant movement in the region under review the main objectives of our study will primarily be concentrated on the following points:

The main objectives of our study which are discussed here are-

- i) To investigate the root causes of the uprisings of 1861 and 1893-94 and also the multi-dimensional causes of their fiasco.
- ii) A systematic and elaborate study of the Peasant Movement in the Brahmaputra valley in the latter half of the 19th century.
- iii) To study the nature of the uprisings in questions with Indian perspective.
- iv) To study the impact of the uprisings under survey in succeeding days.
- v) To enquire the role of the Assamese Middle Class in the uprisings.
- vi) To highlight the methods, techniques and operations of Raji Mels with special reference to the Peasant Movement.
- vii) To examine the agrarian policy of the British in the perspective of the uprisings of Assam.
- viii) To critically analyze the period between 1862 and 1892 with profundity.
- ix) To highlight some Peasant Movements of India and abroad from ancient to modern times along with some of the tribal peasant movements in 18th and 19th centuries.

In course of our study, an attempt will be made to throw light on the following questions for the enrichment of this study:

- 1) How far were the British land revenue and agrarian policy and bureaucratic mindlessness responsible for the peasant uprising of Assam?
- 2) How did almost all sections of the society feel to fight unitedly against the British in spite of their caste and religious differences?
- 3) Could only the use of traditional village weapons, traditional strategy of the Raji Mels or the existing circumstances be attributed to the easy failure of the uprisings as against the modern weapons and western crisis management?
- 4) Why did no movement of a serious nature occur for nearly three decade between 1862 and 1892?

- 5) How far is it justified to gloss over the Phulaguri affair as a mere riot or merely a *dhewa* or a movement of the tribes alone as well as to describe the revolts of 1893-94 as the Assam riots?

To present the project in an exhaustive as well as critical manner we would follow the recent technique and methodology. Our study thus is based on a thorough examination of a wide range of literary sources and the correlation of the data gleaned from them with an equally wide range of allied data. The aims of presenting a true and clear picture of the peasant uprisings in the Brahmaputra valley is realized with the help of an analytical method consisting of extreme and interpretative criticism of all the data. Sense of sustained narrative and complete freedom from legendary matter is given due emphasis. A comparative method is also attempted to ascertain the true nature of the uprisings. Not only historical but descriptive methods also applied in the study.

Similarly our study will also enlighten us with following features of the peasant movements in Assam and its neighboring regions:

- i) British land-revenue policy, imposition of various taxes and indifference to improve agriculture and check natural calamities were largely responsible for the Peasant Movement in Assam.
- ii) Migration of people from neighboring states to Assam created pressure on land and posed a menace to the indigenous making them worried, aggressive and rebellious in nature.
- iii) The fact that the educated and the middle class were no less affected by recent taxes on land and income which might have brought them to the support of the rebelling peasants.
- iv) Easy defeat of the peasants was mainly due to the use of traditional weapons of their forefathers. The traditionally organized Raj Mel system must not have been a match to the well organized British administrative machinery.
- v) Peasant Movement of Assam was self-moving, spontaneous and the joint effort of the different categories of people against the colonial Government.

Data have been collected from different sources such as studies conducted by research scholars and social scientists which are constellated in the form of books,

journals, souvenirs, articles, reports etc. Needless to say, the activities of the participants of the movements are confined in the official records but most of them are one-sided and biased. In addition, though the state archive preserves the records, it has taken lots of time to locate the data due to not maintaining the same in accordance with today's modern technique of data preservation.

Before proceeding to the chapterisation of our research work, it is a prerequisite to make a historiographical presentation of the subject. There are, of course, scattered essays and studies on different aspects of the history of Assam but no systematic and comprehensive work on the Peasant Movement in Assam is found even in the list of recent publications. Some of the relevant works may be mentioned in the following:

Borpujari, H.K. (Ed.), *Political History of Assam, Vol. I: 1826-1919, Gauhati, 1977.*

The book throws light on the social, political and economic condition of Assam from the early 19th to early 20th century. Study here on reorganization, resumption and annexations of the British provide us lots of information. Agrarian revolts have also found place in the book. However, they have been treated just in a few pages and that too in a very descriptive manner. So it requires deep study especially in the field of administration and land revenue leading to the agrarian uprisings.

Guha, Amalendu, *Planter Raj to Swaraj – Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam – 1826- 1947, Revised Edition, New Delhi, 2006.*

Out of nine chapters in this book, only two chapters (I & II) are devoted to the period from 1826 – 1905. In the first chapter (1826-73) Guha studies the British conquest of North India, early anti-British movement, the national revolt of 1857 and its impact, peasant struggle of a new type, Planter Raj's striking roots and land to the planter. The second chapter (1874-1905) deals with the impact of National Congress, westernization and Sanskritisation, growth of modern political consciousness, peasant uprisings etc. Needless to say, there has been a very scanty treatment of the Agrarian movement in such a noteworthy title. Guha has also contributed another publication entitled *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam: Society, Polity and Economy* (Calcutta, 1991) dealing mainly with ethnic, economic and ecological factors. Here he has sought to prove the dynamics of

social change peculiar to medieval and early colonial Assam. We can have a living picture of society, polity and economy of British Assam through this work. However, it does not incorporate any important theme like peasant uprising and its aftermath.

Borpujari, H.K., *Assam in the Days of the Company: 1826-58*, Gauhati, 1980.

Borpujari discusses here almost all the aspects of British Assam like British revenue account, their administrative system, problems and difficulties of Ahom monarchy and their last bid for sovereignty. Borpujari's treatment of pre-mutiny period failed to foreshadow the background of the peasants' uprisings that began to take place as one of the off-shoots of the Mutiny.

Borpujari, H.K., *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Vol. IV (1826-1919) & Vol. V (1826-1919), Gauhati, 2004.

Vol. IV narrates the successive stages in the extension of British dominion and introduction of Indo-British administration in both the hills and plains of Assam. The emergence of the middle class receives due attention in this volume. Vol. V, a supplement to volume IV, deals with the political, social, economic and cultural renaissance in Assam. These two volumes are priceless gifts to the Assamese society. Nevertheless, he has neglected some important things like the peasant revolts and their nature and impact, which should have found places in his two volumes.

Choudhury, Birajananda (Compiled), *Paradhinatarpara Swadhinataloi (From bondage to Freedom)*, Margherita, 1996.

Choudhury discusses administrative and revenue policy of the British and how these systems brought untold miseries to the people of Assam in the early part of his book. However, no detailed study on the agrarian uprisings of then Assam is found mentioned in the book.

Gait, Sir Edward, *A History of Assam*, Gauhati, 1905.

Gait discusses all the things very briefly and that is why, clear picture can not be had. However, his book provides a lot of information in our study.

Saikia, Rajen, *Social and Economic History of Assam (1853-1921)*, New Delhi, 2001.

Saikia has given an account of the poverty and increasing inability of the old ruling elite to cope with the changes wrought by the extension of British rule over Assam. He has also noted that by 1921, the middle class established its social credibility in Assam. However, he has neglected the root causes of uprising of 1861 and 1893-94 and remains silent about the cause of their failure. Moreover, the peasant uprisings have been described in a very brief manner.

Barman, Santo, *The Raij-Mel: A Study of the Mel System in Assam*, New Delhi, 2005.

Raij-Mel in Assam was a system of Judicature having mass public participation. Whenever there were any laps in social behaviour leading to either breach of privilege or an omission or commission of the established norms, there was a Mel according to the dimension of the problem, summoned for the redress of the matter. The Raij-Mel was involved in the anti-imperialist struggle under the colonial regime. No doubt, this is a good work. While Barman discusses about the origin, organization and function of the Raij Mels in details, he leaves most of the major issues untouched viz. agrarian policy of the British, role of the middle class, nature and character of the movement except in brief.

Bose, M.L., *Social History of Assam*, New Delhi, 2003.

Here Bose has described how Assam came under the British rule. He has also given a vivid social description of Assam before the British advent to Assam. Physical geography and demography of Assam have also been described by him in his book. But he neglects some vital issues viz. anti-British uprising – early and later phases, agrarian policy of the British etc. which should have been found incorporated in his study.

John, M'cosh, *Topography of Assam*, Logos Press, New Delhi, 2000.

The book, first published in 1837, offers a view of different aspects of Assam in a concise manner. The cultural and demographic trends among the sons of the soil have

been outlined to provide a clear perspective of the subject covered. Along with information on economic, trade, revenue and wild life aspects, a thorough study has been made of the geographical features of all major towns and the countryside. This book gives an account of the life of the local people, their customs, arts and religions and social patterns. However, the problem is that John M'cosh was a British medial officer and so the information he has given is not only incomplete but also biased. Our study seeks to remove this.

Bhuyan, Arun (Ed.), *Nationalist Upsurge in Assam, Gauhati, 2000.*

The book seeks to cover the nationalist upsurges in undivided Assam from 1857 to 1947. It has also given more stress on the freedom movement of India and the role of different sections in it. Less importance has been given on the incident and episodes that occurred between 1858 and 1900. Our study wants to cover this.

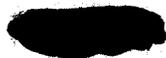
Sharma, Dineswar, *Patharughator Ron (Battle of Patharughat)*, in Assamese, Mangaldoi, 1957.

Sharma's book is an important document for the erstwhile Darrang district where people were happy under the Ahom King but confrontation started with the advent of the British and their imposition of taxes on land and agricultural products. However, the limitation of the book lies in its short and brief description in addition to its treatment of one district only. Attempt is, however, made here to cover all the three districts.

Kalita, Benudhar, *Phulaguri Dhewa (Phulaguri Riot)*, in Assamese, Nowgong, 1994.

Kalita's book comprises of six chapters. Chapter I deals with the Sepoy Mutiny in Assam while the Second with the political condition of Assam from the Burmese invasion of Assam to the Sepoy mutiny. The third describes the socio-economic condition of Assam after the Burmese invasion and the fourth gives us the picture of then Nowgong. Fifth and sixth describe the opium cultivation in Assam and the revolt of Phulaguri. The book undoubtedly provides lots of information to a researcher but we cannot entirely rely on the book due to its casual and narrative character.

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All the books and works mentioned above are excellent in understanding and deciphering different perspective of history and society of Assam. Most of them have given the scholar lots of information for the study.

In the light of the earlier discussion, we would like to confine our study on the following chapters:

The theoretical frame work of the peasant movement: viz. definition of movement and social movement and agrarian movement as a social movement has been incorporated in the initial chapter. The background of the peasant movement of Assam (1826 – 1860), a glimpses of ancient Assam from Pragjyotishpur to Kamrup and socio-political condition of medieval Assam (1228 – 1826) have been incorporated here so that there can be an acquaintance with this study. A glimpse of the thesis has also been included in the chapter.

The second chapter starts with the Peasant Movements of India and abroad from ancient to modern time. Moreover, some tribal peasant movement of the 18th and 19th centuries in India also find place in the chapter.

The study of the agrarian policy of the British and reaction of the peasants against this is the subject matter of the third chapter.

The chapter fourth includes emergence of Assamese Middle Class in the 19th century and their voice on opium, migration, plantation and slavery issues in addition to their role in the peasant movement of Assam – 1861 and 1893 – 94.

The fifth chapter deals with the Rajj-Mels and their organization and leadership, methods and techniques. Rajj-mels played significant role in different districts during the time of peasant movement of Assam. All these are included in this chapter.

The chapter sixth begins with the root causes of the revolt of Phulaguri (1861) of Nowgong. What were the root-causes that led to their fiasco, what was its nature and character, what were its effects and significance- all are dealt with in this chapter.

The causes of three decades' unrest and irritation among the peasants- from 1862 to 1892 - are critically analysed in chapter seventh. Also the circumstances what forced them to remain silent in spite of having tremendous grievances in their mind – all these are comprehensively included within this chapter.

In order to give justice to the subject properly we have an endeavor in the eighth chapter in tracing the root causes and causes of the failure of the revolts of 1893 – 94 along with the significance, nature and character of the revolt are included.

While summing up the entire work in the concluding chapter, we have also made an attempt to find-out the actual fact which stimulated the peasants to adopt revolutionary path against the existing system of the colonial rule. Briefly, what have been found from the study – all are wrapped-up in this chapter.

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