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RESEARCH ARTICLE

POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF COLONIAL ASSAM IN NINETEENTH CENTURY.

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Abstract

Nineteenth century has given rebirth to Assamese people in anthropological, political, economic, academic, linguistic, cultural and literary manner. This time is the witness of confliction and union of heritage and western modernism. It's the British ruled era starts from 1826 AD to 1947 AD. As a modern Era, it is fulfilled of own character and specifications. The change occurs in every era has different factors in its background. Due to such reason belongs to Colonial issue, Assamese people had to face lots of problems, but it's paved the way of different possibilities in socio-cultural fields. Aim of this study to discuss the remarkable political and socio-economic incidents happened in colonial time of nineteenth century. It will helpful for the study of historical background of modern Assamese society.

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Introduction:-

According to the treaty of Yandabo in 1826 as the control of the Assam province has gone to the British government, changes in socio-cultural environment of Assam occurred. To resolve the circumstances evolved due to political instability after Moamoria revolt British moved on with their own imperial policy and became succeed. Because of which they were praised by the local victim. But as soon as time passed, with immediate effects of their capitalist vision was implemented and it resulted a traumatic shakes in the socio cultural fields. In Parallel mode, due to lost of political and cultural identity, Assamese intelligentsia had to struggle for it in painful and distressing manner. Thus after the arrival of British officers, Christian missionary, educated middle class and businessman from outside of Assam contributed to the birth of new Assamese society. So the political and social incidents of Colonial time have been considered as the historical documents of modern Assamese intellectuality, birth, development and puberty of modern Assamese language and literature. These are the social and political factor for which through a medium of confliction modernity get arrived in the province.

Aim of the study

1. To study the political and socio-economic incidents of nineteenth century in the history of Assam.
2. To find out the political and socio-economic background of Colonial Assam.

Methodology:

Various textual sources like research papers, research articles are used as secondary data published in books, research journal, periodicals and internet. Historical and comparative methods are used to find out the political and socio-economic aspects.

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Discussions:-

The political and social upheaval of Assam begins at the early stage of nineteenth century had its origin at the end of the eighteenth century. In the same time Moamoria revolt broke out explosively. Expecting an enthusiastic response from governor general Lord Cornwallis, the king Gaurinath Singha fled away from his capital. In the leadership of Captain Wales, Lord Cornwallis with his sixty soldiers dominated the riots of Moamoria.¹ The king Kamaleswar Singha (1795-1811) occupied the throne after the reign of King Gaurinath Singha. Again the political condition of Ahom dynasty became instable because of some inner and outer conflict of royal family including the conspiracy against the chief minister of the kingdom Purnananda Buragohain and the revolt of Haradutta and Biradutta at lower Assam, most importantly the robbery of lower Assam by the forces of Bengal. After death of Kamaleswar Singha his brother wrote a letter to the governor general of Bengal, there he made a proposal of being a taxpayer and requested him to save the nation. In midst, Badanchandra was ornamented with the title of "Borphukan" and tied with Chandrakanta Singha to plot against Buragohain. Badanchandra Borphukan visited to Burmese king after getting no response from British government. Responding to the request to Badanchandra, Burmese king sent eight thousands soldiers to invade Assam. At the beginning of 1817, sixteenth thousand Burmese soldiers added in the time of action. That strike of Burmese smashed Assam into a thousand pieces of leading the way to darkness. Putting Chandrakanta Singha as a king for name, actual power was in the hand of Badanchandra Borphukan. The forces of Burmese attacked Assam for second time regarding the issue of the murder of Badanchandra in 1819. The king Chandrakanta Singha saved Gauhati by joining hand with British in 1822. On the other hand, from the north side of the river Brahmaputra, Purandar Singha raised his voice against the force of Burmese and emerged a revolution, but the Burmese commander Mingimaha Tilwa reciprocated the revolution by action of war and again reigned upon Assam.

After occupation of Assam, Burmese army had given eye upon the British Empire. In the 5th march of 1824 AD, the British government had declared war against Burmese. The British army defeated Burmese king in the war of Assam, Arakan and Yangon.² The British government and the king of Burma signed a treaty in which it was suggested that Assam would become a state under British government in 26 February of 1826 AD. Understanding the imperialistic motive of the British government some people of Assam rose with revolution against them. Gomdhar konwar, belongs to an ahom royal family imprisoned for seven years only because of his raising voice. In 1830, Pioli Phukan and Jeuram Dulia Baruah both were hanged by the government for the same reason. On the other hand, British government put Purnananda Singha as the king of Assam with the agreement of collecting taxes of fifty thousands from him yearly. Incapable of paying taxes the king surrendered himself in front of British government and they had started to rule over the Assam province.

The economic system of Assam was still the same under the administration of British. The new appointed representation of Governor General of North East David Scott took the responsibility of transmission in the socio economic field. The land agreement policy was reformed through dismissing the rule of occupation of land by the high rank officer rather provided land for industry in a cheap price. The old Payik System reformation was also the sign of the beginning of currency based economy. To govern the system of collection of taxes created various posts like Chaudhuri, Kakoti, Patgiri. Same way, the system of collecting revenue was conducted by the appointed people of the post of Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, Maujadar, Mandal etc.

The new economy of Assam composed because of establishment of business and Industry. They were much more enthusiastic about the production of tea, oil and limestone. In 1823 Robert Bruce discovered tea in Assam.³ Assam Tea Company constituted in 1837. They took labours from outside of Assam. In a same time, plywood factory, wood mills, industries, Water Resources and railway system all were established. The Assam tea company introduced streamers in 1847 for the first time. The Assam-Bengal railway service started in 1892, for connection with other places. The development in communication system makes easier to importing and exporting of tea, wood, jute. Simply blossoming consumerism, Bengali and Marwari people of the other part of India came after the establishment of different industry. The new industry demanded some officials and clerks, to control the system need a police force for proper execution of law.⁴ The intellectual Bengali clerks helped British to ruled Assam in a

¹Nagen Saikia, *Background of Modern Assamese Literature*, p. 22

² Ibid, p. 32

³ Birendra kumar Bhattacharya, *Derkho bosoror Asamiya Sankskritit Abhumuki*, p.5

⁴ Ibid, p.2

systematic way. The working class industrial era and officials created a new social class. The increasing population of this class had impact upon socio-cultural life of Assam.

A middle class was created in nineteenth century patronized by British government. Maniram Dewan started a business of tea garden and became successful. He was a regular customer of *Arunodoi* magazine and contributed money to increase its distribution. After him Jaganath Barooah, Sumeswar Sharma, K K Boruah, Narayan Bezbarooah, Radha Handique, Chandra Agarwala also tried to achieve success in tea business but failed. We can take the names of Haribilash Agarwala, Bhoolanath Barooah, Laxminath Bezbarooah as the successor in this field. Haribilash Agarwala took initiative to publish *Kirtaan-Ghosa* in 1876.⁵ In the midst of the century, the middle class Assamese family realized the importance of their culture and language, gathered in a intention of its development with organization themselves for it, but maximum among them were temporary.

In 1855, Priyalal barooah organized “Assam Desh Hiteshani Sabha ” at Sibsagar. With a aim of greater knowledge and its purpose of spreading of those knowledge Anandaram Dhekial Phukon and Gunabhiram barooah constituted another organization “Gyan Pradayini Sabha” in 1857. In this organization, one third of fifty or sixty members met on the Sunday. Purnananda Sharma, the secretary of the organization, forced the Bengal governor Frederik Hallyday to hear their accusation regarding the problem of common people.⁶

For the overall development of literature, language Assamese students studied at Calcutta toke some steps in 1870. In behalf of organization 'Asamiya Satra Sahitya Sabha', Jaganath Barooah, Manik Chandra Barooah gave a memorandum for the railway service between Assam and Bengal. Ganga Govinda Phukon constituted another organization “Upper Assam Association” in 1880. “Sarbanjanik Sabha” organized by Jaganath Barooah contributed another political, historical change because of its secular point of view towards religion, caste and community. According to Jaganath Barooah, For the purpose of representing the wishes and aspirations of the people to the government, explaining to the people the objects and policies of the government and generally ameliorating the condition of the people.⁷

The birth of Indian National Congress emerged a nationalist movement in India as a whole. Beginning from the first conference of congress to the last, the Assamese middle class of Assam representative stand make this remarkable : Devicharan Barooah, Gopinath Bordoloi, Satyanath borah, Radhanath Changkakoty, Laxmikanta Borkakoty are the names of worth remembering. In 1888, Assamese students stayed in Kolkata organized “Asamiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha” inspired by social unity and nationalist thought. In 25 August of 1888, in a tea table discussion and debate on 67 no Mirzapur Street of Calcutta witnessed the rise of “Asamiya Bhasa Unotti Sadhini Sabha”. The committee put forward importance on preservation and publication of ancient books, the publication of proper grammar, responsibility of government for better education among child, writing history of political and social matter for common and to develop a standard Assamese language also. The debates regarding history, culture, literature and language usually published in two magazines *Jonaki* and *Bijuli*. Coming back to Assam, students belongs to Calcutta university open branches of the organization. Within a few years, ten committees were formed in Kohima, Tezpur, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Nagaon, Golaghat, Jorhat, Goalpara and Gauhati.⁸

Conclusion:-

From the above discussion, we may conclude that the British government ruled Assam with an imperialistic and capitalist nature. But it had reduced the political unrest raised in the beginning of nineteenth century creating new administrative and revenue system. It also results the swelling of a new social class including non-Assamese peoples. In the economic history of Assam a new chapter was opened along with the implementation of transport and communication system. The activities of socio-cultural and academic institution led by the Assamese middle class had contribution to the growth of modern society. In lieu of awakening the nation with political emotions the educated middle class were quite serious about their own culture and language.

⁵Nagen Saikia, op.cit., p. 227

⁶H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam, Vol.V*, p. 238

⁷H.K. Barpujari, (ed.), *Political History of Assam, Vol. One*, p. 159

⁸Nagen Saikia, op.cit., 275

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