UNIT 10: SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION OF ASSAM DURING COLONIAL PERIOD

UNIT STRUCTURE

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10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to–

- explain the changes brought within the sphere of economy during the colonial rule
- describe the social changes in Assam during the British rule
- discuss the various types of agrarian revolts and the causes behind the frustration of the peasants

10.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previos unit, we discussed about the establishing of British rule in Assam and the response of the natives towards them. In this Unit, we will be discussing the changes brought in by the colonial policies in matters of the society and economy. The British introduced many agrarian policies that had a deep impact on the native peasants. It ultimately led to the rise of the local farmers against the British.

This Unit will give us an overview of the response of the local people to the changes they encountered. Let us now look into the economic changes brought during the colonial rule.

affluent. However, there were cases of indebtedness in both the Brahmaputra as well as the Surma valley. With the introduction of the Railways and related economic development, the self sufficient nature of the village was long gone. Traditional industries were on the decline and land holding was becoming smaller. Exploitation of the *mahajans* increased adding to the plight of the farmers.

Popular discontent increased with every new assessment of the land revenue at enhanced rates or with the imposition of new taxes. Maniram Dewan protested against the opium trade of the East India Company in Assam. But his protest was unheeded and opium and salt continued to yield large revenue for the government. R*aij Mels* were held in different parts of the state under the leadership of local leaders like *Gossains, Dolois* or influential land-owners to ventilate their popular grievances. Ryots both Hindus and Muslims became united under the *Gossains, Dolois*, or *Gaonburhas* of their respective areas to lodge their protests against the arbitrary and unjustified revenue assessment of the British Raj.

The continuous increase of revenue and taxes was not justified as the British had hardly taken any measures in the development of agriculture.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: Answer the following as True or False:

(i) It was in 1866 that income tax was introduced. (True/False)

(ii) Land tax was introduced in Sibsagar. (True/False)

(iii) The traditional cottage industries were on the decline. (True/False)

(iv) Colonial rule ushered a period of prosperity for the peasants. (True/False)

(v) Maniram Dewan protested against the opium trade. (True/False)

10.4 AGRARIAN REVOLTS

Thus, discontent against the alien rule, which in earlier period was

withdrawal of the unjust orders which affected their economic stability that was solely based upon land and agriculture. The people of Rangia and Lachima in Kamrup, and Patharughat in Darrang launched a "no tax campaign" declaring excommunication to be the penalty for anyone who disobeyed the *Raij* (people).

- **Rangia**

The movement at Rangia started with the looting of the Rangia bazar. The Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup McCabe arrived on the spot and arrested many leaders. On 10th January, several thousand people assembled in the field close to the Rangia police station demanding the release their arrested leaders. When McCabe ordered them to disperse they shouted "We won't pay the increased revenue." Finding the situation critical McCabe called for additional reinforcements. Many of them lost their lives and many were arrested. This uprising was suppressed with a strong hand.

- **Lachima**

It began with the assault of a mauzadar and a mandal on January 1894, near Lachima who had gone there for collection of revenue. Seventy five persons were arrested in this connection. The threatening attitude of the ryots compelled McCabe to arrive at Lachima and he adopted very strong measures to suppress the uprising.

- **Patharughat**

A similar uprising took place at Patharughat in Darrang District in January, 1894. Not only did the ryots refuse to pay the increased amount of revenue but they also stopped those who sought to pay revenues to the government. To deal with the situation, J.D. Anderson, the D.C. of Darrang, arrived at Patharughat with a band of military police under Lt. Berrington. Next morning a huge crowd assembled in a paddy field in front of the rest house where Anderson was staying. Anderson asked them to disperse but the people would not listen and began to throw sticks and clods of earth at Anderson. There was an open firing, which resulted in the death of fifteen people and injury to many ryots. The Patharughat incident is still remembered as the *Doli Ran* as the people attacked the British with clods of earth.

Assamese youths who were education on western lines suddenly started following the culture of the west. The rigid customs followed by the Brahmans were now becoming relaxed. There was a crying demand for the eradication of social evils and also reforms like the advocacy for widow re-marriage. Female education received widespread attention and a strong public opinion in favour of it was raised.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q3: Fill in the blanks:

(i) The Vaishnavite movement is related to the teachings of _____.

(ii) The practice of _____ was encouraged in the Assamese society during colonial rule.

(iii) The _____ who had been suffering from various social disabilities were now in a better position.



10.6 LET US SUM UP

After going thorugh this Unit, you have learnt:

- the economic transformation of the society during the colonial rule
- the impact of the colonial policies on the peasants and their immediate response
- the various peasant revolts that erupted in different place in Assam
- the changes within the society brought because of the British rule

10.7 FURTHER READING

1) Barpujari, H.K.(2003)*: The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Vol. IV, V 2nd edn, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati.
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