UNIT 11: EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1. Learning Objectives
11.2. Introduction
11.3. Rise of Assamese Nationalism
11.4. Causes for the rise of Assamese Nationalism
11.5. Establishment of different organisations
11.6. Let us Sum Up
11.7. Further Reading
11.8. Check your Progress
11.9. Model Questions

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the rise of nationalism in Assam
- explain the causes behind the rise of nationalism in Assam
- describe in details about the establishment of different organisations

12.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Unit, we had discussed the structural changes brought in the social and economic sphere of Assam by the British. The changes had far reaching impact on the people as it developed anti-colonial feelings.

In this Unit, we will discuss the factors that led to the rise of nationalism in Assam. With the rise of Assamese nationalism, many political organizations grew up and it was through the activities of these organizations that the people of Assam were inspired to participate in the fight for freedom.

The next Unit will be an attempt to look into the various liberation movements and the level of popular participation in Assam.

11.3 RISE OF ASSAMESE NATIONALISM

The establishment of British rule brought about far reaching political,

like the grazing tax (levied as cattle fee), taxes on river ghats, taxes on markets, taxes on fisheries, etc caused tremendous discontentment among the people and united them against their common enemy, the British.

- **Opium Policy**

In 1860 the government banned the cultivation of opium. But the volume of trade in opium increased, with the government acquiring monopoly over it. By levying an excise duty the government realised a large amount of money from opium in Assam which was a heavy burden on the people. The government did not restrict the sale of opium and large scale consumption continued.

- **Decline of Local Industries**

The British rule set in motion a process of de-industrialisation with the entry of British manufactured goods in the markets of Assam and the ultimate ruin of the traditional industries.. The people lost their subsidiary sources of income.

The tea, coal, oil industries failed to absorb the displaced local population as they provided no source of employment. Managed and owned by Europeans and worked with immigrant labour force, industrialisation in Assam was confined to certain sectors only.

- **Immigration**

There was the large scale immigration of tea garden labourers, and workers in the coal and oil sector. The immigration of people increased the population of Assam with no corresponding increase in the production of the cultivators in Assam. Under pressure the subsistence economy steadily eroded resulting in growing dependence on imported food grains.

- **Introduction of Western Education**

The introduction of Western education and the infiltration of new liberal ideas and knowledge through it instilled a spirit of rational enquiry. This led to a growing demand for economic and social reforms. The students from Assam often had to go to Bengal for higher education which was the epicenter of rising Indian nationalism. It was here that they imbibed the idea of nationalism and on their return spread new ideas among the people of Assam.

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11.4 ESTABLISHMENT OF DIFFERENT ORGANISATIONS

With the growing resentment among the common people towards the British colonizers, there emerged many organizations. *Raijmels* played a crucial role in providing a platform for the people to put forward their grievances. Before the birth of the Indian national Congress, organizations like the Ryot Sabha formed by a group of enlightened people to protest against the increase in land revenue played a major role. In Assam, traditionally, the *Raij-Mels* were there as an assembly of village people for discussing the socio-political issues.

The Congress was not functional in Assam (1885), and hence the delegates from different *Raijmels* or sabhas of the province were sent to attend the congress sessions. The *Raij-mels* were active in Sibsagar, Nagaon, Darrang, Kamrup and Lakhimpur and were instrumental in increasing popular participation. The *Tezpur Ryot Sabha* established in and around 1884 had a wide base in the villages. The Ryot Sabhas was basically formed at ventilating the grievance of the peasants against the hike in revenues.

The *Assam Desh Hitaishini Sabha* in 1885, at Sibsagar and *Gyan Pradayini Sabha* in 1857 at Nagaon were formed under the capable leadership of Anandaram Barua and Gunabhiram Barua. The *Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha* founded in 1884 by Jagannath Barua marks a milestone in the history of political association in Assam. The *Sarbajanik Sabha* demanded the abolition of the cultivation of the poppy and also a large employment of the natives of the soil. In 1903 the educated intelligentsia class led by Manik Chandra Baruah, Ghanashyam Barua, and others founded the Assam Association. The agenda of the *Assam Association* and the *Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha* were mostly to organise protest meeting against undesirable tagging and formation of new states. *The Assam Chatra Sanmilan* in 1915 was one organisations which initially pressed for regional

- the role played by these associations in creating awareness among the common people.
- the role of eminent luminaries of Assam in the functioning of these associations

11.6 FURTHER READING

1) Barpujari, H.K.(2003)*: The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Vol. IV, V 2nd edn, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati.
2) Baruah, S.L.,(1996): *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi.
3) Bhuyan, A.C., (1999): *Political History Assam*, Publication Board Assam, Vol. III 2nd edn, Guwahati.
4) Bora, D (1983): *Moamariya Gana Abbhyuthan*, Vol. I & II Banlata.
5) Dutt, K.N. (1993): *Landmarks in the Freedom Struggle in Assam*, Lawyers' Book Stall.
6) Gait, E.,(2004): *A History of Assam*, Eastern Book House, Revised, Guwahati.

11.7 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No.1: The officials who came from Bengal and worked for the British in Assam were termed as *Amolahs* by the Native people.

Ans to Q No.2: The new Intelligentsia class of Assamese society comprised of those who were educated on western lines and equipped with knowledge on modern ideas and western values.

Ans to Q No.3: The impact of de-industrialisation were:

- The local artisan faced a loss of income
- The traditional industries were ruined
- There was increasing unemployment among the local youths

Ans to Q No. 4:

(i) *The Assam Desh Hitaishini Sabha* ———— i. 1885
(ii) *The Sarbajanik Sabha* founded ———— ii. 1884
(iii) *The Assam Chatra Sanmilan* ———— iii. 1915
(iv) *The Gyan Pradayini Sabha* ———— iv. 1857
(v) *The Assam Sahitya Sabha* ———— v. 1872