

CHAPTER -I

INTRODUCTION

Change is a fundamental aspect of nature mostly triggered by external agency that brings changing of existing structure and institutions in a new course of development. The agrarian transition of the Brahmaputra valley is the phenomena that represent socio-economic, institutional and structural transitions integrated with land, its processes of utilization and supervision giving way to intensification of agricultural production that shifted the process of production from traditional food production to commercial crop production for overseas markets. In the second decade of the nineteenth century the East India Company has annexed the Brahmaputra valley with the British empire. Following the occupation of the Brahmaputra valley, the colonial government was in urgent need of huge capital to meet the expenses as a result, the colonial authority has made changes in land administration and revenue system. The only prospect for maximum revenue generation was found in land where agriculture constituted principal agrarian economy of the region. So as to meet the colonial expectation, institutional reform was needed for smooth flow of revenue to the state treasury. Thus, by abolishing old agrarian institution new land administration were introduced as per the interest of the British. As a result, all the land was surveyed for ascertaining exact revenue from land thereafter land was classified into *basti*, *rupit* and *faringahti*. Following the cadastral survey, more realistic of land assessment was carried out and rate of land revenue fixed accordingly. For the efficient revenue collection, earlier system of payment in kind no longer remained as mode of revenue payment instead monetized form of revenue payment was introduced in 1840.¹

The vast tracts of the Brahmaputra valley having low density of population offered living space for outside settlers. Since ages, Brahmaputra River has been serving as a lifeline

to social livelihood that occupied an extent of over 78,496 km hectares.² Due to its abundant land resources, the colonial administration has undertaken multiple colonizing schemes to bring large acres of wasteland under cultivation for which a considerable extent of land was given on lease for tea and other valuable crops cultivation. However, the irony is that, the local inhabitants refused to extend physical assistance to the planters due to low wage and paucity of competing working spirit. As a result, a large number of agricultural working forces was brought from central India for tea cultivation and peasants from East Bengal for jute and other cash crops cultivation.

The penetration of immigrant settlers benefited the British by expanding agriculture and exposed a new working spirit and technique of growing commercial crops having more economic potential for self-empowerment in monetary terms to meet the needs of the household maintenance and revenue demand of the revenue officials. The money agencies such as Marwari traders and Cooperative Societies facilitated the monetary assistance for the cultivators especially for commercial crops cultivation. During the colonial period, use of modern technology embedding non-organic substances, mechanical power, and improved varieties of seeds were adopted. The Department of Agriculture and Cooperative Societies took an effective role in intensification of agricultural output.³

1.1 Significance of the Agrarian Transition

The agrarian system of the Brahmaputra valley has brought a scene of unusual transition during the colonial period. The advent of British administration brought dynamism and transition of pre-colonial pattern of agrarian system in the Brahmaputra valley in a holistic manner. Few years down the line, the British had turned the Brahmaputra valley into an agricultural colony of capitalism and supplier of raw materials for international markets.⁴ Indeed, change is a continuous process thus its occurrence is inevitable. The agrarian change of the Brahmaputra valley was the phenomena that represented socio-economic, institutional and structural transitions integrated with land and its process of utilization and supervision gave way to enhancement of agricultural production by prompting level of production beyond traditional subsistence economy for overseas markets. Undoubtedly, during the colonial period, profit-oriented agricultural production meant for overseas markets and investment in land emerged as a significant tendency by cultivators. So as to materialize the colonial prospect, it has carried out modification and liquidation of erstwhile agrarian

systems that subsequently favoured the investors, cultivators and administrators from land. The process of transformation was shaped by a multidimensional range of global and local factors. The flow of investment and rural credit facilitated intensification of cash crop production and consumable crops as well. To this extent, the British favoured the intrusion of East Bengal settlers into the Brahmaputra valley which later added greater proportion of land utilization and mass production followed by the colonial economy gaining much benefit from this development.

The immigration of skillful labourers had added significant impact on extension of commercial crops production and developments of barren land into productive land i.e., *char* areas of land which were often left out by indigenous ethnic communities. Thus, the pre-British epoch of Assam by and large represented a semi-feudal system of socio-economic structure based on joint proprietorship of land and absence of private property of land for common masses providing limited access to economic prosperity. Paucity of equal distribution of land and right to ownership put impediment to intensification of economically more valuable crops and large-scale agricultural production for export. Several factors were attributed to have caused the subsistence economy of the Ahom period. The slow pace of economic progress was viewed as an encumbrance to the colonial master for their thirst for accumulation of wealth from the colony.

The Brahmaputra valley is an agricultural region where it has contributed towards the empire building and large group of population. Since the Ahom period, the entire population was organized into a *paik* system allowing limited access to land holding and rights over use of land. In the process of land utilization and accrue ment of cultivable land condition was applied where men had to join the organization of militia and labourers better known as *paik* system. There were no independent ownership rights over land which was imperative for sustainable and surplus production. Thus, the economic status of the family in general and state in particular. However, during the colonial period, land was classified into various categories due to fixation of assessment and revenue accumulation.

A series of agrarian reforms took place between 19th and first quarter of the 20th centuries by the colonial master in Brahmaputra valley that allowed liberalization of land holding and accrue ment of more land to the peasants. The concept of tax proliferation and cash payment of land tax have compelled the cultivators to work harder to meet the revenue

demand. The land reform policy ensured permanent security to the land owners by issuing land *patta* and also invited the capitalist to invest their capital in land for surplus production of cash crops meant for supply to world markets. The development of capitalist form of agriculture in the Brahmaputra valley had resulted in augmentation of substantial markets. The expansion of markets had offered a platform of commercial transaction for cultivators as well as the British agents to gain more profit from agrarian production. The development of commercial activity had established a flow of currency that was required for payment of cash revenue to the British revenue officials. The development of economic activity and colonial interest in the development activity of cash crops cultivation has eventually established a close network of export markets with global markets which never happened prior to the administration of the British in the Brahmaputra valley.

The agrarian system of the Brahmaputra valley is marked by unequal distribution of land and its productive utilization, cropping pattern, income etc. The proliferation of population triggered by immigration of East Bengal settlers intensified the conversion of forest areas into agricultural land for cultivation. In addition to this, *char* areas or the sandy soil was not even spared by the immigrants; instead, it was turned into agricultural land by growing cash crops. The development of cash crop cultivation was induced by the global network of trade. Indeed, certain ethnic groups could not keep pace with the growing revenue demand of the British revenue officials that resulted in relinquishing of land and internal migration to escape payment of cash revenue.

1.2 An Outline of the Pre-colonial Agrarian System in the Brahmaputra Valley

The agrarian change in the Brahmaputra valley in colonial times without addressing the agrarian system of the pre-colonial period structured on semi-feudal nature where its primary economy was based on agriculture having limited access to global market and modern capitalism. The stable agriculture was also seen during the rule of Varman dynasty, Salashthamba dynasty and Pala dynasty⁵ where rice occupied the main occupation crop.⁶ Along with cultivation of rice, cultivation of sugarcane, muster and pulses were carried out in small proportion. The method of cultivation was mainly shifting cultivation followed by burning forest and scratching the surface of the soil for sowing seeds and *Jhum* was seen in hills areas.

The use of plough, construction of artificial canal or irrigation was carried out to maneuver the streams of water especially for the high land which could not receive an adequate volume of water for growing rice. In this regard, the Chinese traveler Yuan Chwang or Hiuen Tsang and clearly made a reference to artificial irrigation adopted by the Kacharis of ancient Assam living in the Brahmaputra valley.⁷

From 600 CE to 1200 CE, the issuance of land to the religious groups and institutions became a common phenomenon in Kamarupa corroborated by the epigraphic records and mandated by the king.⁸ According to H.K. Barpujari, “Land as usual formed the main source of revenue to the state and its proper utilization, thus was the chief concern of administration.”⁹ The Nidhanpur Copper plate inscription and Doobi Copper plate of Bhaskaravarman were the most famous grants of ancient Assam corresponding to the Varmana dynasty. The copper plate inscriptions of Nidhanpur supplied valid information as to the granting of land to about two hundred and five Brahmanas in the Chandrapuri Vishaya.¹⁰ The main purpose of land grant was to remunerate the individuals in the form of land for extending service to the state. So as to disseminate Aryanism through *Varnasrama dharma*, a policy of land grant was practiced which would serve a deep sense of respect for the ruler and ensure a strong central authority.¹¹ The constant land grant promoted the active role of the grantee’s participating in expansion of agriculture converting virgin land into agricultural land bearing an independent right of utility.¹²

During the Ahom rule, the practice of land grant was continued. According to Assam Buranji, ‘Pratap Singh set the debut of religious grant of land viz. *Debottar*, *Brahmottar* and *Dharmottar*. The land accrued by Brahmins was known as *Brahmottar*.¹³ Namgarh, Temple and Mosque were another religious institution being donated by the king with land for the maintenance which was known as *Debottar*. Besides, for the maintenance of deities, groups of religious faith were being granted land which was known as *Debottar*. However, these lands possessed special privilege of tax exemption and beneficiaries availed the benefit of exhaustive autonomy and permanent inheritance. In the process of land utilization, aforementioned lands were by and large cultivated by unfree labourers who were mostly attached to the temple. On the other hand, the king had granted vast tracts of land to the high-ranking Ahom officers (*Satgharia*). The *Satgharia* accrued several acres of land on account of joint participation in conquest of territory of neighbouring states. These high ranking aristocrats occupied an important official post.¹⁴ In the 13th to 19th centuries, marked the

hegemony of Ahom who had adopted the administrative system in the line of the South Asian country of Burma. The economy of Ahom was largely dependent upon agriculture having self-sufficiency in domestic food production ensuring food security without promoting intensive external trade with mainstream of India and outside the country except having trade network with the countries of Bhutan, Burma and Tibet where some trade activity was witnessed in the *duars* of Bhutan or border areas of the Brahmaputra valley. The colonization of Ahom in the Brahmaputra valley added a new phase of economic boost and intensive use of land for agriculture stressed on wet rice cultivation facilitated by ploughshare.¹⁵

The *paik* system was initially introduced by Momai Tammuli Barbarua during the reign of Ahom king Pratap Singha.¹⁶ The *paik* system is a part of Ahom administration where men of 16 to 50 ages are inducted to the state service. The main role of *paik* was associated with engagement in agriculture at times of peace and they extended military assistance to the king at times of war. Since the economy of the Ahom was dependent upon agriculture as a result, the state claimed complete monopoly over land and *paiks* were directly engaged in production of agriculture for the purpose of utilization of land from where revenue is generated in the form of labour especially in times of peace. During the time of war, they were inducted as militiamen. For the greater economic interest two *puras* of land were being allocated to the members of *paik*.¹⁷ Due to being an integral part of the egalitarian and semi feudal socio-economic structure *paiks* were provided limited access to land and proprietorship. The *paik* system had similar characteristics with the *pronoia* system of Byzantium; under this system the usufruct of the greatest part of public land was ceded to individuals in exchange for their providing services, mostly military.”¹⁸

The *paik* system was a systematic state organized mechanism that engaged the entire adult men as a labour force for extensive utilization of vast tracts of cultivable land. They worked as labour in the agricultural land in alternative months among the members of *got* (unit) constituting three to four members of *paiks*. As such a large number of *paiks* were turned as voluntary labourers for agricultural production and to engage them in public work, for which each of them was allocated with two *puras* of land designated as *gomati* or usufruct land for their service.¹⁹ *Gomati* lands did not possess transferable, salable and heritable rights. For exhaustive efficacy, the entire *paiks* were split into unit embedding of either three or

four *paiks* where $\frac{1}{4}$ of the members of the *got* had to extend his labour over a period of 3 to 4 months for utilization of land.²⁰

The *paiks* were directly regulated by the king as well as Gohains. Accordingly, Buragohain, Bargohain and Barpatragohain constituted a fold of military officers entrusted with big numbers of *paiks*. Following the Gohains, Phukan commanded over 6,000 *paiks*, Bar Gohain 4,000 and Barpatra Gohain 6,000 respectively. Apart from them there were junior officers being inducted in the Ahom administration and placed next to Gohains, commanding over a smaller number of *paiks*, for example Hazarika commanding over 1000 *paiks*, Saikia about 100 *paiks*, Bora about 20 *paiks*.²¹

The land system in the westernmost part of the Brahmaputra valley i.e., Goalpara possessed a distinct mixed system of *zamindari* and *ryotwari* systems. This region was under the administration of several rulers, as a result, a dynamic land system was rolled out that remained the legacy of their predecessors. As per the reports, practice of private property existed in lower Brahmaputra valley that covered parts of Kamrup and Goalpara districts which were part of the Mughal and Koch empires. To this extent manifold reports were being recorded as regards the practice of limited monetization in rural society attributed to rudimentary ethnic based socio-economic agrarian structure. These factors, restrained greater circulation and minting of coin currency. However, the Ahom accepted that exchange of labour as equal to payment of rent for land used. Thus, paucity of available cash money for transaction forced the Mughal administrators to roll out an innovative mechanism to be materialized for the efficacy of revenue exploitation promoted private ownership of land that subsequently resulted in land sale across the plain districts of lower Assam. Thus, when the Ahom recovered the territory of western Assam, they retained the former practice implemented by Mughals.

In the Brahmaputra valley there prevailed considerable extent of wasteland and char land created by human act and natural phenomena. Various diseases and anti-social elements were attributed to creation of waste and char land. The mighty Brahmaputra river, and its tributaries persistently triggered seasonal inundation that sometimes changed the landscape and damaged the crops. One of such examples can be referred to Majuli, the largest island of Asia, which was created by natural disaster.²² Another factor behind the creation of wasteland happened to be *Kala Azar* disease that spread across the Brahmaputra valley

forcing many families to leave the land. As reported by the Mills, ‘long civil and internal wars attributed to the accession of throne by Gaurinath Singh in 1780 to 1826 caused displacement of cultivators leading to without cultivation.’²³ At the time of internal unrest, Goalpara district turned out to be a safe refuge for thousands of men of ranks and priestly families of the Ahom under whom a large amount of land was possessed. Atrocities and unrest had a negative impact on the socio-economic life of the Brahmaputra valley that resulted in mass displacement and abandonment of large acres of land without cultivation. In fact, in the case Goalpara district, large portion of char areas were created by inundation of the Brahmaputra river that often raised its water body covering low lying plain areas and constantly dumping silt that normally covered the fertile riverbank land and made the agricultural field unproductive until it was reclaimed by the Eastern Bengal settlers.

The cropping pattern of the Brahmaputra valley in pre-colonial period mainly embedded mono-cropping and fallowing systems. It was a tendency of the *ryots* who cultivated the land for a maximum period of one to two years following that land was kept for improvement of soil productivity for a certain period of time. Due to abundant land, the practice of fallowing was largely adopted by the local inhabitants. The absence of a scientific way of farming and being obsessed with the traditional methods of farming provided less efficacy in agriculture. Furthermore, domestic food production having no commercial interest was witnessed during Ahom hegemony. Indeed, rice cultivation was found as intense food production of pre-colonial Assam. Cultivation of rice was usually carried out in two seasons i.e., summer and winter. *Bao* or *Sali* is represented as summer crops and *Ahu* rice represented as winter crop. The *Ahu* or summer rice embeds process of cultivation that involves weeding, sowing and transplantation and sowing of seed is done in the months of March or April and harvested in June and July. Thus, cultivation of *Sali* rice considered as a winter crop underwent the process of sowing, seedlings, irrigating and transplantation. However, the process of sowing *Sali* rice is carried out in June and July and harvested in the months of November and December.²⁴ Interestingly, cultivation of substantial cash crops was not being developed during the Ahom period. However, cultivation of poppy, cotton, oilseeds was performed for the household use regardless of sale. Of domestic production, rice cultivation accounted for the largest food production that had supported the non-farming section of town dwellers. Transplantation of rice also resulted in surplus produce for domestic consumption. Indeed, agricultural implements facilitated greater operation of

agricultural land and resulted in surplus production and boost to the economy. There are certain agricultural implements that contributed tremendous transformation in agricultural production. These agricultural tools entailed ploughs, plough-beam, phal, ploughshare, yokes (jhungal), Bamboo-harrow (mai), hoe, sickle, cold-breaker (dalimariya), rake (jabka), iron hand bill (sika), large rake dragged by bullocks (bindha), iron spade, iron *kurpi*, *Ruah* (axe), weeding knife, wooden long-handled mallet for breaking colds etc.²⁵

1.3 Review of Literature

On this topic the agrarian change in the Brahmaputra valley, a considerable extent of work has been developed in certain aspects of agrarian system in Assam in general. However, no such systematic and comprehensive study on agrarian change has been attempted in particular. Therefore, following books are being reviewed for scope of the study and kind of information it can supply on the working proposition of the study.

Leslie Waterfield Shakespear (1918) in his book *History of Upper Assam, Upper Burmah and North Eastern Frontier* author has clearly mentioned as regards the border trade between Assam and the hilly regions of North East India where Assam or Brahmaputra valley being a plain area it has supplied its agricultural crops in exchange of some organic articles. Here, the author has also thrown some information regarding the network of trade, geography, political history and boundary extension Assam. In his work the author has supplied an account of external and internal aggression which triggered severe impact on agrarian life of the Brahmaputra valley, however the author did not attempt to provide substantial information concerning the agrarian system of the Brahmaputra valley.

Irfan Habib (1963) in his book *The Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707* provided a significant insight about extent of cultivation, trade in agricultural produce especially long-distance trade and internal movement of trading activity, means of cultivation and irrigation, material conditions of the life of the peasantry, revenue assignment consisting of Jagirs and Khalsa, land revenue administration constituting process of land revenue collection, medium of payment, role of *zamindars* and agrarian crisis of the Mughal Empire. Though, his work didn't extensively touch the agrarian system of Assam but it has supplied good knowledge about how to proceed with the proposed area of study.

B. K. Barua (1969) in his book *A Cultural History of Assam* (1963) author has brought to light scanty information as regards the land system. It also contained little

information about agriculture, crafts and industries and trade routes. However, works of the author did not supply comprehensive information regarding the agrarian change and the factors that triggered transition in agrarian structure.

Debabrata Dutta (1982) in his book *History of Assam* author has delineated the Ahom administration consisting of *paik* and *khel* system, proper description of Brahmaputra valley, social and cultural condition of pre-Ahom period, administrative control of British in Assam. The Burmese aggression and Mughal invasion in the territory of Assam or Mohammedan wars was also touched by the author. The author mainly stressed on the brief historical outlines while supplying broad insight about the content. However, in his historical literature, the author has attempted limited coverage of information regarding agrarian perspective and no such analysis of pre-colonial and colonial agrarian aspects was attempted.

Rajen Saikia (2000) in his book *Social and Economic History of Assam 1853-1921* author has thrown a pertinent light on certain aspects of land system, internal trade, cultivation of cash crops and decline of handicrafts. However, no such extensive work in agrarian change is fully outlined in his work.

Jairus Banaji (2001) in his book *Agrarian Change in Late Antiquity, Gold, Labour and Aristocratic Dominance* author has delineated the late antiquity economic system, rural landscape, estate, rural labour market and peasantry of Byzantine period. Though it does not have association with a particular period and its economic dominance, it gives insinuation to trace the pre-colonial economic system of the Brahmaputra valley.

N. Jayapalan (2001) in his book entitled *Economic History of India, Ancient to Present Day* author has supplied good information regarding some agrarian aspects of ancient, medieval and modern period. The economic condition and development have been stressed entailing trade and commerce, revenue administration of pre-medieval, sultanate, Mughal, Maratha and British. In his work, the author has mentioned about the tea cultivation of Assam well. Though this work is primarily emphasized on Indian context, yet, it provides immense clues for aspects of agrarian change from the changing scenario it has covered in the author's literary work.

Jahnabi Gogoi Nath (2002) in her book *Agrarian System of Medieval Assam* presented the system of land and agrarian structure of medieval Assam stressing on the Ahom period. Classification of land during the pre-Ahom and Ahom period was also being

highlighted. Absence of private ownership of land by the individual except land grants donated to the Brahmanas, the priests, religious institutions and nobility has been discussed in this book. However, the extensive work on the colonial period has not been touched. Factors why upper Assam did not introduce a uniform system of private ownership of land were not fully specified.

Kalayan Choudhuri (2002) in his book *New History of Assam and India* presented the *paik* system that had been introduced by the Ahom king Sukhapa. Under the *paik* system, all the male persons between the age of 16 and 50 were registered to render services to the state. This system has been divided into two *Kanri paiks* and *Chamua paiks*. *Kanri paiks* were known as peasants who were entitled to render as soldiers in times of war and labourers in times of peace. *Chamua paiks* were the junior officers who were appointed in the administration. However, his writing entirely didn't touch the agrarian change of the Brahmaputra valley.

M. N. Karna (2004) in his book *Agrarian Structures and Land Reforms in Assam* presents the concept of land reforms, structure of land and process of agrarian change. He also stressed on the rural upheavals and peasant movement that were attributed to the agrarian change associated with land reform. However, his writing failed to focus on the factors that impacted agrarian change.

Stephen K. Wegren (2005) in his book *Land Reform in the Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, author has supplied good information about land reform former Soviet Union consisting present independent countries of Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and other European countries of Bulgaria, Hungary, Albania, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. In his work author has worked on wide range of agrarian system embedding to land holdings of peasant farms, structure of land ownership, Individual land use, factors constraining sale of land, distribution of individual farms by size, government support programs for agriculture, growth of peasant farming, structure of livestock sector, laws to implement land reform, food consumption pattern, structure of agricultural production, private farm development, areas of major crops before land reforms. From this book, valuable insight can be drawn to develop research work in the line of proposed study.

Ramesh Chunder Dutt (2006) in his book *The Economic History of India Vol-Two*, author has explicitly thrown a light on the commercial policy of Great Britain towards India

in the eighteen and nineteenth century. Besides, policy of revenue administration has been delineated about the taxation system that triggered mass production and greater operation of land for cash crops in particular and food crops in general. Some effects of the Land Revenue system during colonial period also fell in Brahmaputra as well that brought to surface in his writing. However, the author did not touch the entire North Eastern region but his writing was mainly focused on north India.

H. K. Barpujari (2007) in his book *The Comprehensive History of Assam, Volume-I*, author has provided some conspicuous information as regards the agrarian structure, the process of Aryan migration to Assam, geographical setting, rural economy. The historical literary work developed by the author was mainly confined to the ancient period of Assam. However, the author did not attempt to cover the colonial period and there is no such reference to agrarian change in his work.

Edward Gait (2008) in his book *A History of Assam* author presented a few lines regarding administrative system, land revenue system, division of cultivated land, assessment of land before collection of revenue from the cultivators. Author has brought forward the initial writing about the political history of Assam. But, no such reference to the agrarian change in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam was mentioned in his writing.

Archana Verma (2010) in her work *Land Relations and Agrarian Change*, author delineates aspects of agrarian relations and how the land played an important role in the Indian economy. The composition of agrarian society, land settlement policy and exorbitant revenue generation was mentioned in her work. Besides, landlord and peasant relations were outlined in her historical literature. The work, author carried out mostly centered on Oudh region but despite its paucity of nexus with the Brahmaputra valley, it has provided similar relevance to proposed research work.

Arupjyoti Saikia (2010) in his work *Landlords, Tenants and Agrarian Relations: Revisiting a Peasant Uprising in Colonial Assam* has provided flagship information concerning curtailment of land rights of the landlords and burden of tax on peasants that eventually triggered the peasant violence. But his work failed to bring sheer insight on the *paik* system and ‘waste land grant rules’ that mandated the British to occupy more land for plantation of tea and for other purposes.

Arupjyoti Saikia (2011) in his book *Forests and Ecological History of Assam, 1826-2000* articulated the policy of Imperial Forest Department that allowed the British tea planters to occupy vast forest land and peasants from East Bengal reclaimed the grassland and floodplains of the Brahmaputra valley. The extensive work on the change in land system and mode of production and the British's policy is absolutely not being touched by him.

Stein T. Holden, Keijiro Otsuka and Klaus Deininger (2013) in their book *Land Tenure Reform in Asia and Africa* authors have conspicuously outlined the land distribution Reforms of Nepal, West Bengal, South Africa Malawi. Besides, Tenure Security and transfer of tenure rights, access to land, Forest management, forest rights, challenges of land tenure reform and market participation of small farmers are delineated. Though, their literary provide does not have close coverage of Brahmaputra valley but a wide range of Asian and African land tenure and its reforms can be taken as an important tool to develop historical literature of different aspects of agrarian change of the Brahmaputra valley.

Bollikonda Veeraiah (2013) in his book entitled *The Impact of Globalization on Changing Agrarian Relations*, author has supplied significant insight about the Indian agriculture, agrarian resources and agrarian relations and the impact of globalization that integrated into the global economy through trade, capital flows, information and communication technologies resulting in changing of agrarian structure. This perception was emphasized in the Indian agrarian context. In the same way, it can be taken as an example to relate its significance to the proposed research study which resembles in a similar manner.

Manoj Goswami (2014) in his book entitled *Char Settlers of Assam, A Demographic Study*, author has supplied valuable information concerning occupation of *char* or uncultivated land that could be known as wasteland lying in on the banks of rivers that was prone to inundation due to low terrain. The migration of the agricultural population of Eastern Bengal and cause of immigration to Assam was outlined in his historical literature. It also contained easy access to land reclamation of char areas by immigrants, where cultivation of jute and other crops were carried out.

Martin Empson (2014) in his book *Land and Labour, Marxism, Ecology and Human History*, author has mentioned about early human history, hunter gatherers, early agriculture, class, society and crisis, rise of peasants, development of modern agriculture, agriculture in 20 century, capitalism, urbanization and climate change. Here, the author has emphasized

capitalism as organized production, accumulation of wealth. The development of agriculture shaped the class society by liquidating egalitarian society following the change that underwent from subsistence to surplus production. The emergence of human dominance came from the level of surplus production people engaged in land. The author has given clear analysis about the role of technology that changed the world beginning from the Neolithic period 12000 BP that was marked as a technological development of stone tools and the inception of farming.

Amalendu Guha (2015) in his book *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam: Society, Polity and Economy* author has slightly catered relevant information regarding, geographical setting, social structures, migration of Tai Ahom, land rights, shift from tribalism to feudalism, colonization, intrusion of hardworking and skilled peasants to the Brahmaputra valley, some aspects of agrarian structure of late nineteenth century. However, the author did not attempt to provide extensive insight regarding the agrarian change of the Brahmaputra valley.

Sangamitra Misra (2015) in her book *Becoming a Borderland: The Politics of Space and Identity in Colonial Northeastern India* author has attempted to delineate the land, political and economic aspects of North Eastern India. Here, the author has contributed some accounts of Eastern Bengal cultivators who took shelter in the Brahmaputra valley and transformed the economy by proper utilization of waste and uncultivable land through cash crops and food crops growing. Indeed, it's a great literary work; the author did not cover a wide range of agrarian change of the Brahmaputra valley.

Amalendu Guha (2016) in his book *Planter-Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam, 1826-1947*, highlighted some aspects of agrarian policy covering Charter Act of 1833 that gave impetus to the East India Company and other Europeans to venture beyond the Presidency towns and occupy the land. The wasteland settlement rules of 1838 and 1854 have been included in his historical work of literature. However, the author did not attempt to cover the major aspects of agrarian life and no further reference to agrarian change was mentioned in his work.

All the aforesaid reference gives knowledge and information about the curtailment of the land rights enjoyed by the landlords and negligence of the peasants and agrarian

structure of Assam by the British administrators. However, literature on peasant's detachment of land and causes moving towards interior places hardly took a shape.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

With the fall of the Ahom political power in the Brahmaputra valley, the East India Company emerged as dominant political power that set colonial rule in from the 'treaty of Yandaboo' in 1826 A. D. At that period, the rural economy of the region was on the verge of exhaustive destruction mainly triggered by Burmese invasion. Now the question arises as to how was the colonial authority able to accumulate maximum profit from land despite slow growth of agriculture and presence of large waste and *char* lands? The change is a law of nature mostly triggered by inbuilt elements and enforced by external agencies. As such, agrarian change is a colonial framework associated with changing agrarian relations triggered by the role of the state resulting in proper utilization of land for economic benefit. The region could not hinder British colonization due to acts of external aggression triggered by the Burmese that eventually brought East India Company's intervention to help the deteriorating Ahom power.

The first quarter of the nineteenth century marked the debut of agrarian transformation in the Brahmaputra valley ranging from subsistence rural economy to mass production of commercial crops.²⁶ The change in the method of production consolidated by technology helped surplus production that was able to supply local agricultural output to the national and international markets. The process of agrarian transition has two dimensions: spatial and timeframe. However, the study is mainly focused on the spatial dimension of agrarian change. At the time of British occupation of the Brahmaputra valley, the rural economy was dependent on agriculture and agrarian structure was under feudal system. Following the political ascendancy in the region, the well-established British administration was in urgent need of perpetual flow of revenue to maintain the colonial expenses. But on account of cultivator's limited access to agricultural land not having permanent rights over land, agricultural production was mainly centered around food crops production. On the other hand, exaction of revenue in the form of labour service, absence of monetized payment, partial operation of the cash transaction in revenue payment failed to meet the expectation of the colonial government that prompted them to initiate reform in land and revenue system. The British government took an active role in formulation of agrarian policy that clogged

the old socio-economic institution and new system of land settlement and revenue system was introduced in the line of colonial prospect.

The introduction of new agrarian policy replaced the institution of *paik* system with *ryotwari* and *zamindari* system. The achievement of the colonial agenda was closely linked to agrarian policy resulting in curtailment of landlords having large acres of land without valid records of proprietorship. Thus, the *satgharia*'s (royal officials) land having special privilege of revenue exemption were also brought under assessment. Furthermore, the lands previously granted to the religious institutions and priests by the Ahom kings viz. *Devottar*, *Brahmottar* and *Dharmottar* were brought under assessment and failure to prove its legitimacy was seized by the government. The policy of land revenue enhancement worked as a tool for further aggravation of the condition of the big landholders that eventually resulted in relinquishment of large acres of land. In 1843 the colonial administration introduced abolishment of slavery that liquidated old customary practice in the region causing a punitive blow to old Ahom aristocracy, Brahmanas and Mahanta land owners, whose cultivation was mainly dependent on landless marginalized peasants. The emancipated individuals of preceding institutions subsequently engaged in agrarian occupation by reclaiming new lands and some turned as *adhiar* or usufruct who usually took land on contract from other proprietors on agreement to supply half of the produce at the time of harvest.

The colonial prospects of mass production of agriculture and maximization of profit promoted the introduction of new schemes for proper utilization of large acres of waste and *char* land lying on the bank of Brahmaputra. Through the scheme of Wasteland Grand Rule a large number of lands was allocated to the European capitalists for enterprise. Under this scheme the landholders were granted maximum flexibility in proprietorship. Besides, the *char* areas of land which were easily inundated due to low laying of land located in close proximity of Brahmaputra river, which was often neglected by the local cultivators were settled with peasant immigrants of Eastern Bengal. However, these *char* lands were reclaimed by the immigrant settlers of Eastern Bengal who were brought by the British. The hardworking and skilled peasants from Eastern Bengal changed the landscape of the *char* areas of land by cultivating commercial crops and the multi-cropping process of cultivation that marked the debut of surplus production having the potential to supply large agricultural output to the national and international markets.

After establishing the imperial rule in the Brahmaputra valley, the British have ascertained urgent needs of reformation and reorganization of the existing agrarian system for greater benefit of commercial interest of maximization of profit and accumulation of wealth. The development of capitalism in the Brahmaputra valley was represented by commercialization of agriculture that resulted in greater output of cash crop production and selection of crops cultivation mean for export that possessed more economic advantage and rural credit system operated by traders especially Marwaris, Bengalis and some local rich peasants provided security to the cultivators to purchase agricultural implements and maintain agricultural expenses. In addition, the Cooperative Societies undertook an active role in providing loans to the peasants at the rate of relatively less interest than the usual creditors operated by the traders. On the other hand, the influx of hard-working peasants of Eastern Bengal intensified reclamation of a greater proportion of land for expansion of agriculture.

Following the development of the international trade network and improvement of transport and communication left no stone unturned to integrate the rural agricultural economy of the Brahmaputra valley. The profit-oriented colonial administration of the British in the region, intentionally systematized its policy to work in the line of utmost revenue generation. The integration of commercial networks between India and international markets eventually materialized the transition of agrarian systems in the Brahmaputra valley. The agrarian revolution was a repercussion of revenue vested interest of the British.

The colonial government rolled out a new proprietorship, cash revenue payment, commercial crops production. Profuse uncultivated lands were brought under commercial crops cultivation by reforming land regulation as per the convenience of the entrepreneurs and systematic policy of immigration that welcomed skilled agricultural labourers from East Bengal for non-tea cultivation and indentured labourers of central India for tea cultivation. The British had achieved their objective of profit maximization by bringing new agrarian legislation that allowed penetration of capitalist's form outside the province, traders, flow of capitals and new technique of agricultural operation supplemented by use of inorganic substances, use of stronger agricultural implements and new varieties of seeds. Indeed, several scholars have worked on different aspects of the agrarian system of Assam in general.

The use of tools and technology in agriculture supplemented a significant assistance to agricultural production. The iron-based plough, tractors, irrigation and fertilizers were the

primary factors contributing towards intensification of agricultural production. The agricultural output improved the economic condition of the small landholders. Thus, substantial agricultural production consolidated in building a strong British imperialism in the Brahmaputra valley.

The British authority had played a crucial role in the development of commercial crops cultivation and integration of rural agricultural production with the international markets. The invitation of skilled peasants from neighbouring provinces meted out by the British for proper utilization of unused land, remained one of the colonial agrarian policies of “colonizing scheme” and “Grow more Food” that flocked numbers of non-indigenous labourers in the Brahmaputra valley who had contributed toward the economic progress of the region.

1.5 Objectives

1. To study the agrarian system and land administration of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam during colonial period.
2. To highlight the process of agrarian transition and commercialization of agriculture.
3. To study the socio-economic impact of agrarian change.

1.6 Area of Study

The study has been conducted within the plain districts of the Brahmaputra valley consisting of erstwhile Kamrup, Lakhimpur, Sivsagar, Nowgaon, Darrang and Goalpara where its territory was integrated with the mighty river of Brahmaputra. However, the research study did not cover the Surma-Barak valley and Kapili valley but the sources of these areas provide immense help for the development of historical literature.

1.7 Research Questions

1. How far was the British policy successful in agrarian life of the Brahmaputra valley?
2. In what ways did the colonial authority change the agrarian system in the Brahmaputra valley?
3. Whether the global trade network established by the British induced greater levels of commercial crops cultivation in the Brahmaputra valley for export?

4. Whether policy of profit-maximization and accumulation of wealth was attributed to appropriation of land reform and revenue administration?

1.8 Methodology

The proposed study “Agrarian Change in the Brahmaputra Valley (1826-1947)” is a historical perspective dependent on scientific textual analysis of historical data under qualitative research. All primary data such as colonial reports, secretariat files, private letters, official minutes, dairies, land revenue files and gazetteers are extensively examined under scientific observations to fulfill the objective of the study. Moreover, in historical study, scientific technique of interpretation is carried out to synchronize the phenomena of the study that follow generalization. First of all, the secondary data helps to get basic information about the work done by previous researchers from where we can detect the research gap of a particular area.

For the fulfillment of the research study, all the materials of Assam State Archive, Bengal State Archive, National Archives, Delhi, Department of Historical, Antiquarian Studies and other libraries are assessed. Additionally, a thesis repository website, Shodhganga which provides relevant thesis for writing proposed research works, is being consulted.

1.9 Organization of the Chapters

The thesis has been organized into six chapters including the introduction and conclusion. For conspicuous discourse each chapter was concisely discussed below.

Chapter-I: This Chapter deals with introduction, statement of the problem, political history of the Brahmaputra valley and geographical outline, significance of the study, methodology, area of study, central argument, research questions, review of literature, objectives and organization of chapters. This chapter also concentrated discussion about critical analysis on the system of land and preceding agrarian system.

Chapter-II: In this chapter discusses the stages of land reform, land settlement, land revenue system and the process of transformation that occurred in the system of land holding, distribution of land, and the changing pattern of pre-existing British revenue collection.

Chapter-III: This chapter discusses the transition of the agrarian system that underwent the process of transition from subsistence economy to surplus economy promoting towards development of capitalism.

Chapter-IV: It will deal with the factors and process of commercialization of agriculture that brought integration of domestic agriculture with global trade.

Chapter-V: It analyzes the socio-economic impact of agrarian change. In this chapter, the emphasis will be stressed on how the changing character of the agrarian system brought dynamism in the society and economic system of the Brahmaputra valley. It also discusses how British policy promoted economic development and social change.

Chapter-VI: It deals with summary of findings, further scope of research study.

Endnotes

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