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RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN COLONIAL ASSAM

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ABSTRACT: Rural development is the process of improving the quality of life and economic well-being of people living in relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas. Rural development has traditionally centred on the exploitation of land-intensive natural resources such as agriculture and forestry. In the socio-cultural and economic history of Assam the issue of rural development is a glorious chapter of our discussion. Especially, due to the arrival of the British a new era came into existence in the Assam province after 1826. Under the British colonial government till 1947, people of rural areas of Assam improved their conditions through the policies of the government. Without proper study on those social welfare activities, we can't understand the actual development of our country under colonial rule.

Keywords: Rural Development, Colonial Assam, Government.

INTRODUCTION: The treaty of Yandaboo (1826, 24 February) between the British East India Company and the Burmese brought a new era to the history of Assam. Through this treaty Assam came under the British East India Company's rule. Till 1826 to 1947 Assam was ruled by British imperial power. In that particular period the programs of rural development in Assam captured a prominent status. Especially the introduction of western education and religion, development of better transportation and communication systems, expansion of tea, coal and oil industries in Assam, this particular region of North-East India became an important income source of colonial administration. For these reasons some activities of rural development came into existence during the time of colonial Assam. They included education, transportation, communication, better health and medical facilities etc. On the other hand, in spite of these developments there were some limitations in the program of rural development of colonial Assam. Through this paper we want to discuss the efforts of rural development in colonial Assam and its limitations. Besides we want to highlight the status or several conditions of rural peoples in colonial Assam with their progress and problems.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER: Activities of rural development in colonial Assam were playing an important role through some activities of colonial government. Through this paper we want to discuss these rural development programs, its background or development causes in different times and places. Besides, by this paper we also want to highlight the limitations of the rural development programs in colonial Assam.

AREA AND SCOPE: The issue of rural development programs in colonial Assam has been covering a vast field. In this paper as our discussion, we have covered present Assam, its different places; where the colonial government directly and indirectly introduced some new systems to develop the general peoples and their several conditions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: Basically, we have applied historical analytical methods to explain this paper on Rural Development in Colonial Assam. To write this paper we are basically depending upon the secondary sources like books, journals, articles, data of colonial government and some research papers of scholars.

DISCUSSION: Through the Yandaboo treaty of 1826 British East India Company came into Assam. Gradually they monopolised both political and economic powers of Assam. They had found some new aspects to develop their several conditions. Some factors especially helped to develop their conditions in Assam. Which factors also helped to develop the people of rural areas and their conditions. Therefore, we should discuss those factors which had greatly helped the development of both the colonial government and rural people.

Role of Tea Industry: Discovery of tea in Assam brought some new aspects. Through this tea industry of colonial Assam, a large number of rural people became closer with the colonial government. Besides, some new systems came into existence. In some areas of tea estates of the colonial period, the government tried to establish some primary hospitals to provide healthcare for the general people or workers of tea industries. Besides, the development of tea industries in different areas of Assam became more important to transportation and communication systems. Therefore, the government gave the importance of developing the roads of Assam, which also helped to the rural development in colonial Assam. In spite of these examples a large number of rural people were living under the poverty line. On the other hand, the colonial government imported a group of workers from outside of Assam to do the work in the tea factories. Therefore, a large number of rural people of Assam were faced with a great challenge to their economic conditions and



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their existence. Therefore, gradually the labour movements came into existence, which was also a new aspect or feature of the rural development programs of colonial Assam.

Role of Christian Missionaries: Role of Christian Missionaries to the upliftment of general or rural people in colonial Assam were most important. The aim of these missionaries was to expand their religion in new areas. Besides they also were doing some other important activities to promote the several conditions of general or rural people. In different areas they established some schools to educate the general people. The Christian Missionaries tried to establish some girls' schools to develop the women's education in colonial Assam. Most of all they greatly helped to the reforming of the Assamese societies. Through some efforts the Christian Missionaries tried to eliminate social evils from contemporary societies. It is remarkable that for the activities of Christian Missionaries in Colonial Assam a number of rural people earned some important knowledge to uplift their own status or self-protection.

Role of Transport and Communication Systems: We have already found that the tea industry greatly helped the development of transport and communication systems in colonial Assam. Through these systems general people of Assam became more concerned, they became more concerned with their development issues. Now they easily knew about their progressive works. Because through these systems they then could easily move and find some new information to promote their conditions.

Impact of Coal and Oil Industries: In these industries a large number local and rural people got their economical support. Sometimes they got some compensation, which people generally were shifted from those industrial areas. But this issue is still controversial.

Impact of Bengal Renaissance: The Renaissance of India firstly broke out in the sky of Bengal. On the other hand, Assam was a large part of Bengal for a short period during the time of colonial rule. In that particular time some young boys went to Calcutta (Now Kolkata) to learn their higher education. In Bengal this young boys or new generation had earned some new progressive knowledge. Because in that particular period Bengal was a fertile land of new thoughts of new thinkers. Therefore, through the impact of the Bengal Renaissance some Assamese students like Hemchandra Baruah, Gunabhiram Baruah, Anandaram Dhekiwal Phukan etc. brought some new aspects to the Assamese society. They bought the social reform movement to uproot the social evils. For examples in that particular period these social reformers with the help of colonial government tried to uproot the Sati system, Polygamy, Female Infanticide, Dowry system from our societies. They also gave the importance of widows' remarriage in our societies. Through these examples we have found that this Bengal Renaissance both directly and indirectly greatly helped to uproot the social evils and helped to the development of general and rural people in colonial Assam.

LIMITATIONS: From above discussion we have found examples of rural development programs and its development causes and their interaction but there were some important limitations of rural development in colonial Assam. Because although the colonial government tried to develop the rural people and their several conditions with the processes of directly and indirectly, their development was not more illustrious. Because, proper developments could not able to touch the all-rural people of colonial Assam. There were some factors: 1/ Lack of proper planning by the government. 2/ Apathy of general or rural people of colonial Assam. 3/ Lack of proper transport and communication systems all over Assam. 4/ Self-interest of the colonial government.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION: Through these discussions we have seen that during colonial Assam under the colonial government a number of causes helped to the outbreak of the issue of rural development in Assam. But there were some limitations of that development. In spite of those limitations, those activities of rural development of colonial Assam will always keep a good status in our socio-cultural and economic History of Colonial Assam. However, in the end we can undoubtedly say that the issue of rural development in colonial Assam is covering a vast field and it is a critical concept of discussion. To know this issue, we should read properly our social, cultural and economic history of colonial Assam. Because the programs of rural development of colonial Assam are always related with the issues of social, cultural and economic improving conditions of the rural people of colonial Assam.

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