

## **Chapter- IV**

### **Socio-Cultural Change in the Ahom Society during the British Period**

This chapter discusses socio-cultural change in the Ahom society during the Colonial Period in a macro sociological point of view. Therefore, in this chapter analysis that what type of Socio-cultural change had been taken place in Ahom society as well as Assamese society through the impact of Colonial rule from macro sociological point of view.

#### **Ahoms Revolt against the British and Restore Ahom state**

In the history of Assam, the period of British rule is called the modern period. Because the British started the process of modernization through the introduction of universalized modern education, established new administration, legal law, development of communication system, establishment of industries particularly tea and oil industries, which brought radical changes in the economy and social life of the people of Assam. Ahom is one of the major communities of Assam and they closely related to growth and development of Assamese culture and society. The modern thought and culture had also influenced the Ahom community in particular.

The British annexed Assam after the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, the Ahom lost their political power and at the same time Assam lost sovereignty. The main cause of fall the Ahom rule was due to internal conflicts among the rulers which brought the Moamoria rebellion and Burmese invasion. After that all the people of Assam came under the single umbrella of British administration.

The Ahom nobles and royal family member opposed the British rule in upper Assam of Brahmaputra valley, because they lost the power and prestige in the hand of the British. In these circumstances, the first revolt against the British was led by Ahom prince Dhananjay Borgohain and Gamdhar Konwar in 1828. The Ahom

nobles and former minister Dhananjoy want Gomdhar, son of Phena Konwar, as their prince. At the same time, the British had withdrawn their army from Rangpur, the capital of Assam, and a few soldiers that might be left on guard there. The Assamese nobles thought that it was the great opportunity to attack Rangpur. In this regard Gamdhar Konwar was formally enthroned near Jorhat according to the Ahom rites and recruited arms and men from neighbouring areas. But, Lieutenant Rutherford was detachment the resistance. Gomdhar fled to Naga Hills and a few days later Gomdhar Knowar surrendered himself to the British. The punishment of Gomdhar was sentenced to seven years in prison and Dhananjoy was sentenced to death. But, Dhananjay Borgohain fled to the Matak kingdom. At the same time Dhananjay secretly joined hands with his own sons Harakanta and Haranath, son-in-law Jeuram Dulia Baruah, and many others and made plans to attack Rangpur. Within a short time they organized their plan and sent out secret letter to the chief of Moamoriyas, the Khamtis, the Singphos, the Khasis, the Garos, and the Manipuries. But, this revolt was not success, some members of the gang were hanged and others expelled from country.

Meanwhile, another Ahom prince named Gadadhar, a relative of Jogeswar Singha, who appears to have been moving in the Burmese frontier in the guise of a Khamti priest, roused the people to fight the invaders and proposed assassination of the British officers. Latter, he attempted to win over the British regiment at Sadiya by diplomatic means, which was thwarted by Jalim Singh, the Subedar of the Regiment, who handed him over to the Agent to the Governor General. At last the British government arrested him and nothing was known about him after the arrest (Baruah, 2007).

Therefore, it can be observed that after the annexation of upper Assam by the British, the Ahoms revolted against the British to revive their lost power and social status. The revolutionary attitude had been grown and which changed the values,

attitudes of the Ahoms. On the other hand, they also tried to adjust the new system which was imposed by the British.

Thus the British Government checked the anti British movement of the Ahom nobility in Upper Assam. The British authorities concerned over the dissatisfaction of people toward the British rule in Upper Assam. Therefore, the British took an attempt to satisfy the people; in 1832 A.D the British government considered restoring Upper Assam to the former Royal family as a tributary prince. In 1833, Purandar Simha was appointed as a prince of Upper Assam with a capital Jorhat excluding Sadiya and Matak regions. As a tributary Ahom ruler had to pay Rs.50,000 rupee out of an estimate revenue of Rs.1,20,000 (Banerjee, A.C, 2007) annually to the British government. It was highest rate of revenue which was not possible to pay by the Ahom prince and later in 1838 the British government annexed Upper Assam permanently.

#### **A brief note on British administration**

At first, the British government could not change the Administrative system of Ahom kingdom in the Brahmaputra valley. They could only modify the old Ahom administrative system. The main principle of the British administration was to revive the old system with some modification for making effective influence on the inhabitants of the people of upper Assam.

The condition of Brahmaputra valley, at the time of the expulsion of the Burmese, was most deplorable. During the transition period, the civil administration of Assam was entrusted to David Scott with the title 'Agent of the Governor General for the whole eastern frontier' from Cachar and Sylhet in the south to Sikkim in the north. He was at the same time Special Civil Commissioner of North-East Rongpur, i.e., Goalpara and the Garo Hills. Mr.Robinson says, 'Hithero the affairs of the province had been conducted on much the same system that previously prevailed before the conquest. In Upper Assam, the old 'Paik' and 'Khel' system was retained

and the Barbarua was appointed to collect the tax. Later, the personal basis of tax collection was changed to territorial basis. The whole areas of the district was parceled into block called *Mouza* or *Mahals* , and the tax were collected from all person of the resident by officer in charged, Known as *Mouzader*.

After the annexation of Purandar territory the British imposed new administrative policies in Assam, i.e. legal law, set up administration, districts and sub-division, established police out post, introduced revenue system, private ownership of land, set up district headquarters, etc. They established uniform system of legal rights which was based on equality and abolished many social customs which violated the human dignity, personal security and freedom. For juged the criminal cases they established high court and judicial committee which changed the Ahom punishment system. Thus it can be said that the new legal laws modernized the people of Assam.

### **Change in Population Complex**

The British rule also changed the population complex in Assam. The British brought large scale of immigration to this province from different parts of India for the purpose of labour in the tea gardens and tea industries. The most of the labourers were brought from the tribal belt of Orissa, Madras, Bihar and other place of India. Those people were heterogeneous in nature, which were settled in the different parts of the state where the British opened tea gardens. According to Gait (2005) in 1923 there were 5,27,000 garden labours in Assam province.

The British also brought Indian collaborators- the Marwari Businessman and the English-educated Bengali clerks, doctors and lawyers with them. It is also noted that in course of time some of the Marwaris co-operate with Assamese culture and identified themselves Assamese i.e. Chandra Kumar Agarwala, Ananda Chandra Agarwala both noted Assamese poet, Jyoti Prasad Agarwala was well known literary and also played an important role in freedom movement (Boruah, 2007). A good

number of Nepali people also entered in Assam during the British period. The British recruited them mainly for military purpose and created a separated regiment called *Gurkha Regiment*.

The British also annexed hill territories like Naga Hills, Lusai hills, Garo hills, Khasi Hills, Jayantiya hills and Sund tribes of North-East-India which were submerged in the province of Assam. Thus the boundary of Assam which was ruled by the Ahom had been increased and came under the British rule. Thus the population of Assam was increased by adding neighbouring hills and plains people. Further, immigrant people from Bengal, Rajasthani traders and Nepalis were settled in the province Assam.

Thus, changed had been taken place in population complex through newly entered groups, those linguistically and culturally differ from local people of Assam. The people of Assam came to contact with the different cultural groups of people which resulted the impact of Hinduthani culture. As a result, the diverse groups of population belong to different culture and all the cultural group of people changed the homogeneous Assamese culture and homogeneous nature of Ahom society into heterogeneous society. The Ahom people of Assam also came into contact with different cultural group of people and which made an impact on their social life.

### **Effect on the British rule in Assam**

The British rule had brought significant changes to the medieval Assamese society in Assam. The old Ahom aristocracy was destroyed and new form of social and administrative system was introduced. The new administrative systems like formation of districts and sub-divisions in this province were formed. In 1834, the British portion of the Assam valley or Brahmaputra valley was divided into four districts, viz., Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang (including Biswanath) and Nagaon. After the annexation of Purandar Singha's dominion of Upper Assam in 1839, it was constituted into two districts, i.e. Sibsagar and Lakhimpur.

## **Education and its Impact**

From the sociological point of view, education plays an important role for change and development of a society. In the field of education the British introduced modern education system in Assam. They established schools in different parts of the state. Along with British, Christen Missionary came to Assam and the Missionaries also established educational institutions in different parts of the state. They encouraged the people to learn education and also gave more emphasis on female education. The first English school was set up at Gauhati in 1835 and Sivasagar in 1840. Later, government had established schools in the different parts of Assam.

Meanwhile, Christian Missionaries, particularly American Baptist Missionaries also established Hospitals, orphanages and schools for boys as well as girls. Reverends Nathan Brown and Oliver cutter had started a school at Sadiya in 1837. The missionary had also opened several schools in the different parts of the state. The Christian Baptist Missionaries also gave the importance of female education. During that time women missionaries' like- Mrs Brown, Robinsion, Cutter, Barker who mainly gave the importance of female education. Thus they set up schools for girls at Sivasagar (1840), Nowgaon (1843), and Guahati (1850). Hemachandra Barua and Gunaviram Boruah supported female education in Assam, but they did not take concrete steps to that end. Gradually, Christian missionaries established different girl schools in the different part of the province for the encouragement of Female education. At first time public responses regarding female education were very poor, but when middle class people came into the contact of the liberal ideas of west, their attitude become changed. Later, a good number of girls sent to Calcutta to receive higher education.

In the mid of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the British government or the missionaries established various English school and printing presses to spread the western education among the people of the state. The Christian missionaries established

printing press for the first time at Sibsagar in 1844. 'Orunodoi', was the first Assamese monthly newspaper which was mainly devoted to religion, science and general intelligence, published by the Baptist Missionaries in 1846 from their own printing press. This newspaper played the most important role not only spreading new ideas and learning but also inspiring the younger generation to express their views and opinion on them.

The spread of western education including scientific knowledge helped to remove orthodoxy, superstitions and magic power from the Assamese society. It also changed the caste based Hindu society and their way of life. The orthodox Brahmins began to send their children to school in an English Fashion. The study of Medicine, which was earlier a taboo for the caste-Hindus, became popular among the students of growing generation. At the same time female education brought a new awareness of women status in Assamese society which had assumed great importance. This awareness made a mass participation of women in the national struggle for freedom. The liberal ideas received through the western education and learnt to challenge the social attitude of men towards women. These women from lower strata, enjoyed free life and relatively the higher status women upheld a new slandered of public conduct which great influence on those living in upper class exclusiveness.

Thus, it can be observed that changes had been taken place due to influence of western education in socio-cultural life of the people of Assam. This process also changed the way of life style including dress pattern, occupational mobility, food habit and animistic beliefs in Ahom society in particular and Assamese society as a whole. The educated middle class people accepted a new liberal culture which freely emulated the western style of living. A number of Assamese middle class youth went Calcutta for study; it was the nerve-centre of modern education at that time. The Bengali mode of life style and culture of Calcutta was also impacted on those Assamese Youth. Assamese youth learnt Bengali language and some of them made their early attempts at literary composition in the Bengali language. For example-

Haliram, Jaduram and Yajnoram contributed to Bengali newspapers like Samachar Darpan and Samchar Chandrika, which also subscribed some Assamese people (Barpujari, H.K. 1977). Haliram wrote a history of Assam in Bengali and Anandaram a book on law etc. The Bengali manners and customs like *Sntipuri Dhoti* and *Panjabi Shirt* were used by Assamese middle class and also some musical instrument were borrowed from Bengali culture.

The development of education had also created a new market for newspapers, magazines and reading materials for general people of Assam. A new educated people had emerged in Assamese society, who wrote texts books, general books, published magazine etc. Thus, a large number of book sellers, suppliers of stationary and others were required for supply these items and a new kind of enterprises were established in Assam and it also created some *bazaar* (markets) and town areas in Assam. Therefore, the growth of towns and *bazaars* (Markets) was a new phenomenon on Assamese society.

After the spread of western education, a new class was developed which was known as Middle class. Thus, the British rule had done both constructive and destructive roles during a period of more than a century. The education also gave a rational outlook and ideas which changed the attitudes, beliefs, social status of a people in the society. In case of Ahom society, it may be said that the social status and privileged was traditionally determined by birth. During the Ahom rule the Ahom royal family and noble family member got high status in society. But when the spread of modern education this social system was gradually changed from ascribed social status to achievement (Person, T).

### **Impact on new revenue system introduced by the British**

The economy of Assam under the Ahoms was rural-cum-agricultural pattern and villages were largely self sufficient (Boruah, 2007). The British first observed the economic condition of Assam and they did not introduce any land revenue



measure in Assam but at the same time they maintained the traditional '*Pike*' system which was replaced by personal service to annually per head rate of Rs-3.00. The British failed in this experiment; they introduced land revenue and classified land into *basti*, *rupit* and *farngati*. For collection of land revenue, they adopted *Mouzadari* system in 1838. But land was again divided during the days of Jenkins into Devottar-lands(revenue free known as Lahiraj), Brahmottar lands and Dharmottar lands(grant half revenue paying known as Nisfkhan), and other type of lands of full revenue paying. The paying revenue lands were settled with *rayat* paying revenue annually till 1883, when the Revenue regulation act 1880 was implements. According to this Act settlement was made under the settlement Rules 1870, *rupit* and *bari* lands were settled for a period of ten years at fixed rate and other categories of land suitable for dry crops continue to settlement on an annual basis only, as the relevant cultivation was of shifting in Nature.(see Boruah, 2007, pp-638).

From 1868-93, the land revenue rate remained unchanged. But the total land revenue demand increased substantially because of new addition to the settled areas and the detection of concealed cultivation (Guha-1977). The settled area in the Brahmaputra valley increased, by 15 percent between 1881-82 and 1891-92. In 1927, land revenue was increased, which tolled heavily upon the poor peasants, who had already been stricken by the price of the First World War. Thus agreements of new system of land revenue system had affected the Ahom noble and the aristocrats' family of Assam. This revenue system was downward the prestige and status of the Ahom nobility and they were lower down to the level of ordinary lands owners. The old rigid form of social distinction of the feudal classes and the ordinary people was removed (Acharyya, 2007).

This system also effected in the Ahom society, because they were wet rice cultivators and ownership of land was on the basis of communal relationship at the Ahom period. Their economy was very simple one with land communally own and

batter as the chief means of exchange. But, with the end of that old order, its norms and values had become weaker, although feudal norms and values had entered the Ahom system. The British appointed nobles and offices of the Ahom rule, as a revenue collector like *Mauzadars*. Therefore, the new economy system introduced by the British in Assam brought in its whole range of changes in the socio-economic life of Assam. (Sharma, 1990).

### **Agricultural system**

Ahom were wet rice cultivators and rice was the major crops of Assam during Ahom period and present day also. According to Ahom system of government the land was distributed three '*puras*' of each '*paiks*' for ploughed free of tax, but in lieu of tax each *paik* had to serve the state for three month in a year. The variety of rice was cultivated in that period such as Ahu, Jaha, Bao, bara, jahingia etc. These are still cultivated in upper Assam. Ahom also names of some village which are suggestive of importance of agricultural operations in the life of people like Tamul Bari, Kathalguri, Amlakhi, Simaluguri etc. (Basu, N.K. 1970).

The British made a begging of cultivation such as mustard, tobacco, mulberry, lac, sugarcane and vegetables on commercial basis. In 1930, the agricultural department was created and various agricultural farms at Jorhat, Shillong, Karimganj and Guahati were established to improve varieties of paddy, sugarcane, potatoes and other vegetables in the province. They discovered tea and opened tea garden in the different parts of the state.

From the above discussion it is observed that, the British changed the indigenous system of enforced labour to money taxes. For collection of taxes appointed Chudharys. This system created difficulties to the local people of Assam, because they were unable to pay tax in cash. As a result the local people like Ahom, Chutiyas etc. moving different place for search revenue free waste land. The Ahom economy began to disintegrated and the new economy which introduced by British

brought a weak of whole range of change in socio-economic life of Assam (Sarmah, 1990). This created new force and new order with a new norms and values, and developed new social group that were being formed.

### **New economy Policy**

The British introduced new economic policies in Assam, which gave birth a new socio-economic force on the processes of development of Assamese society and it transformed semi-tribal, semi feudal economy to capitalist order. This process had some happy and progressive consequences, but by and large, the pulling of a backward economy through almost two stage of economic development had the most unfortunate consequences for Assamese economy affecting various classes of people in the society (Sharma, 1990).

### **Establishment of industries by the British**

As early as in 1815, the British government came to know the presence of tea-plant in upper Assam. Major Robert Bruce actually discovered the tea plant in Assam in 1823. After that the British introduced tea plantation in Assam and import labourers from the outside of Assam.

The coal mining and petroleum industry was also introduced by the British in Assam. In the year 1882 Assam railways trading company opened coal field in Ledu and continue up-to-date. The British in Assam also discovered oil in the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but scientific operations on the oil fields were neglected as most of the roads not being motorable, the local demand for mineral oil was extremely limited (Boruah, S.L 2007). After the developments of road transportation, in 1889, the Assam Railway Trading Company had started the operation at Digboi and later 1899 Assam Oil Company was formed.

At the same time the cottage industries like textile, smiths and artisans were slowly destroyed during the British periods and flooded with the machinery textile

products from Lancashire and England on cheap rates. The indigenous industries were not encouraged and prosperity of the country was greatly affected resulting in outbreak of peasants' problems in different place in the province (Acharyya, 2007).

The growth and development of industries led the process of industrialization, which creates some urban centres near the industries and increases the population. The increase of population of the cities not only declines the family control but also decline the influence of religion. The process of industrialization developed the communication system, transform economy from agricultural to industrial economy.

In Assam after the growth of tea industry, coal industry and petroleum industry, the British improved the communication and transportation system in Assam. The different cultural groups of people came to Assam for work in those industries. These industries created a new class of people who made contracts with the company for shifting oil, coal and tea for export. But this new class of people belongs to immigrant group out of state.

In case of Ahom society due to influence of industrialization during the colonial periods which directly or indirectly impact their way of life style. The British also appointed the nobles and royal family as *Mauzadars* and other officers who hold very important places in the society. On the other hand petroleum workers, tea garden worker and coal mine workers are brought from out of the state. The Marwari were take advantage in trade and commerce. The economic system of Ahom society did not change immediately; they engaged in agriculture and increased revenue effect in their economic life. But later commercial basis production system was gradually adopted by them. Except a few people most of the people were gradually going to backward during the British rule.

### **Started the process of urbanization**

The establishment of industries by the British in Assam also started the process of urbanization. The process of industrialization is closely link with urbanization. However, the establishment of industries in Assam creates some urban centers where school, college, various offices like district headquarters, quarters for European employee etc were set up. Thus, the process of urbanization also started by the British in Assam which growth various towns or cities in this province. According to sociological point of view urbanization is a process of change which led to emergence and development of a human settlement with an ecological milieu and a style of life that marks a shift away from tribal and rural settlement and lifestyle (Singh, 2010). The process of urbanization is a multi-dimensional process link with rural to urban migration. The main characteristic of urbanization is that it gives rationality, scientific temper, individualism, secularism among people of the entire society.

From the above observation it can be said that the growth of urban centres or towns developed a new culture, called urban culture where the people mainly related to different non-agricultural activities. The urbanization changes the socio-cultural life of the people in the state. Urbanization is a process implying economic development and social change. However, in Assam urbanization changes the homogeneous Ahom society to heterogeneous Society and increases the rural urban migration which impacts the social life among the people of Assam.

### **Development of Transportation and Communication**

The process of industrialization always brings material progress in the state. The growth of industries in Assam brought about certain changes which transformed the province to a large extent, breaking not only her isolation but also earning for her a place in the economic map of the world (Goswami, 1999). During the pre-British period in Assam, most of the areas were covered by think jungle. The only

communication at that time was boat, elephant, bullock cart etc. The British developed new transport and communication in this province. The establishment of industries, the exploration of coal mines and petroleum, the large scale of the plantation were major factors for developments of transport and communication lines.

In 1847 a steamer service on the Brahmaputra River was established by the government, but the boats ran only at uncertain intervals and they did not proceed beyond Gauhati. After that two private companies were formed for the purpose of navigating the Brahmaputra and Barak valley. In 1883, a daily mail steamer service was introduced on Brahmaputra River by the Joint Steamer Company (the Indian General Navigation and Railway Company Ltd and the Rivers Steam Navigation Company Ltd.). This service had gradually been improved until, at the present time, the fleet consists of large, powerful and well equipped boats, which performed the upward journey from Goalundo to Dibrugarh in less than a week, compared with the three weeks, or even longer, required by the old cargo steamer (Gait, 2005). In the year 1884, daily steamers started plying Dibrugarh to Dhuburi and a direct steam service from Dibrugarh to Calcutta was also opened a little later. A similar service was also established on the Surma (Barak) valley.

In the year 1880, Assam Railway and Trading Company opened Dibru-Sadiya railway line to link the tea gardens along Dibrugarh Steamer-ghat and Jaipur road in the year 1885. After that company also extended this railway up to Makum and Ledo for the transportation of coal to tea gardens. At the same time Company opening different railway lines in different parts of Assam, the government opened the Jorhat Provincial Railways and a decade later, the Tezpur Balipara Railways. The Dibru-Saikhua railway line brings a great part of Lakhimpur district into communication with the Brahmaputra. Chittagong was joined by railways with Dibrugarh in the year 1904.

The British also developed the road-transportation system in Assam for both Commercial and defence purposes. The British's first attempt was to make a road to link Gauhati with Sylhet through Cherapunji in 1827. In the year 1842-43, the construction of South trunk road was started and a decade later the North Trunk road was constructed. After the formation of Public work Department in 1868, most of the road were constructed in the different part of the province.

Thus the development of transport and communication has very fast the communication system. It intermixing the different people of the state which impact on the beliefs, ideas and gave rationalistic knowledge of people. So, this process impact on the Socio as well as cultural life of the Ahoms in Assam.

### **Cultural Profile**

The annexation of Assam by the British (i.e. the East India Company) brought the people of this region into greater and deeper contact with socio-political currents then prevailing in the rest of the country. The channels of contact and the levels of communication were further accentuated in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The British established political and administrative dominance over the people of India as well as Assam. The British's policies and the activities of Christian missionaries who came into the region contributed significantly in creating a freeze effect on the communities and social formations. The British ruled in Assam created a new social structure with a new variegated pattern of culture. It was a synthesis of the renaissance Bengali, European, rather Victorian British and traditional Assamese culture with slight mixture of Hindustance (Bose, M.L, 1989).

It is mentioned that Ahom developed Assamese culture which was a composite on interaction of tribal or mongoloid people and non-Aryan Hindu culture. This culture was homogeneous in nature because Ahom inter-married with the local tribal people. But, the British accelerated migration of numerous Indian peoples (from Bihar, Rajasthan, Utter Pradesh, Orissa) to Assam, brought English

educated Bengali people for administrative work, the Marwari Traders and European employees all of were belonged to different cultural groups. Besides them, some of the Marwaris belonging to the landed gentry had identified themselves with the Assamese culture and few even got themselves wholly Assamesied. Chandra Kumer Agarwala, Ananda Chandrea Agarwala, Joti Prasad Agarwala were members of such Assamese Maruwari family and played important role in freedom struggle in Assam (Baruah, 2007). Although Bengalis language was introduced by the British in Assam from 1837-1874 and most of the Bengalis settled in the different urban areas of Brahmaputra valley. So, it may be observed that due to contact with different cultural groups of people cultural, exchange between Assamese and other culture took place.

### **Family and Housing type of the Ahoms**

Family is an important unit of any society. In the pre-British period, Joint family was common phenomena in the Ahom society as well as Assamese society. In the field of agriculture more manpower was needed to work for gaining crops. The eldest male members were generally head of the Ahom family, all the land and property of the family was recorded in his name. In such cases all the brothers live together and they jointly cultivated their land. They live in a one roof, worshiped commonly worshiped, take food and related each other in some particular type of kindred. But, in the British period, with the establishment of industries, urban centers, development of transport and communication system and modern education system brought some changes in the family structure of the Ahom society. This change impacted on educated elite class people only.

The housing pattern of the Ahom families was mainly constructed by bamboo, *Ikra*, wood. The Ahom people constructed their house in the center of their compound with provision for front yard (in Assamese *Chotal*) which was kept neat and clean by female members. The whole compound is surrounded by a fence of



split bamboo presented a fine picturesque scene. But during the British period some changes had come in the housing pattern of the Ahom society as well as Assamese society due to influence of western culture. The aristocratic families of rural areas constructed their house in a new style like, L-Pattern, U-Pattern house etc. half wall and tin roof.

### **Religious life of the Ahoms in the British period**

Christianity was spread during the British period in Assam, but this religion did not influence the religious life of the Ahoms as well as Assamese society. Towards the end of the Ahom rule, Ahoms came almost completely under the influence of decadent Hinduism and sectarian development. They became divided into Sakta and Vaisnava. Only Ahom priest classes such as Deodhai, Mohan and Bailung have been continuing to follow the Ahom religion till today. The sectarian division among the Ahoms divided into different groups and each group follows its own food habit and distinct form of worship. Therefore no more change had been taken place in case of religious life in the Ahom society under the British rule.

In this period the Ahoms followed religious rituals according to the Vaishnavic rites. But it can be assumed that some Ahoms accepted Vaishnavism of Hindu religion and took *Saran* under the *sattradhikar* or *Gosain*. They also performed some rituals like, Habi Dangari puja, mitokar hokam, etc., in animistic nature and worshipped different gods and goddesses by offering animals. At the same time this group of people also followed vaishnavic rite such as Naam-Kirtion (devotional song), Bhagavat Path etc. Thus, it can be said that continuity and change played an important role in the Ahom society in case of religious rites during the British period.

It is also observed that the *Sattra* (religious institution) established by the great Vaishnavite Saint of Assam Sankardeva, played an important role in the emergence of caste system among the people of Assam. But it was not the

philosophy of Sankardeva's Neo-Vaishnavism religion. Hence, the original message of Sankardeva was corrupted. Therefore, some ardent followers of Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva formed an organization in 1930 at Palasani (Nowgaoan District) to remove the discriminatory attitude by the hereditary *Sattras*, known as Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha. The organization based on the Philosophy of Srimanta Sankardeva Ek –Saran-Nam-Dharma to establish an egalitarian society. It has become the leading socio-cultural organization, which has been rendering valuable service in the field of cultural integration and social upliftment in addition to its regular activities in art, culture, literature and education covering all sections of the society.

Actually there had been a revival of reform activities of Eka-Sarana-Nama-Dharma all over the state since 1909-10 A.D. All those scattered units now came together under the same umbrella of Sankaradeva Sangha as it showed ray of hope to them that reform activities will actually gather momentum. The Sankara Sangha was formed with the active help of the residents of Ouana village, Karaioni village, Lataimari village etc near Palasani village. Sankara Sangha convened a state level conference in 1932 A.D. at Palasani. Moreover Annual conferences were also held in the District level regularly till 1935 A.D. These were however confined to the Nagaon District at that time. The first ever state level committee was formed on February 4, 1934 A.D. in Sankaradeva Mandir premises of Nagaon town (source: [www.srimantasankardevasangha.com](http://www.srimantasankardevasangha.com)). Thus it can be assumed that some Ahom people also influence the doctrine of the Sankardeva and they joined in this organization.

The study of religious rites and practices were also important to understand socio-cultural change in any group of people. During the British period, there was no more changes observed in the Ahom society. They performed the vaishnavitic ritual like Nama-Kriton, Bhagavat Path, religious festivals like Krishna Janmutsab, Sankar Janmutsab and also continued to follow the traditional Ahom custom and

rituals. Namghar played an important role in socio-religious life of the Ahom society. Namghar is not only a religious institution; it also developed their socio-culture and united the people at village level.

### **Development of Assamese literature and Print media**

The modern education is the foundation of modern Assamese literature. The Christian Missionaries were also responsible for growth and development of Assamese literature. For spread of Christianity in Assam they had done some progressive work in the field of Assamese literature. W. Robinson published a *Grammar of the Assamese Language* (1840), Brown wrote *Grammatical Notice of the Assamese language* (1848), Farwell translated the *Bharatiya Dandabidhi Ain and Natural Science in Familiar Dialogue from Bengoli* (1855) and Bronson composed a *Dictionary in Assamese and English* (1867) were the notable works of the Christian missionaries in Assam. Through this they gave the rationalist outlook in the Assamese people.

The tradition of comedy and satire in Assamese literature begun with the writings Hemchandra Borua, who also the author of two monumental works, *Asamiya Vyakarn* or *Grammer of the Assamese Language* (1856), and the *Hemkosh* an Assamese dictionary (1900), Gunabhiran Baruah wrote the first modern drama in Assamese, *Ram Navami* (1858), the first biography in Assamese, *Anandaram Dhekial Phukanar Jibon Charitra* (1880), and a history of Assam on modern line (1884). Beside these first Assamese journal *Asam Bondhu* (1885) was published in Assamese language (Baruah, 2007)

Print media is an important media for communication system which impact on the socio-cultural life of the people. Print media included newspaper, magazine, periodical journal and other writings. The Christrain missionaries were decisive to institute the first printing press in Assam at Sibsagar in 1836 and begun to composite local Asamiya dialect. The Journey of Print media in Assam was started in 1846

when the first Assamese monthly magazine *Orunodoi* was published from Sivsagar district. After that many newspaper and magazine were published and all of them contributed Assamese society, language and media. S.L. Boruah (2007) writes that “the *Orunodoi* which continued to be published with occasional breaks till 1882, encouraged studies devoted not only to religion but also ‘Science and general intelligence’, and while laying the foundation of the modern Assamese literature, it also helped to growth of a rationalistic outlook.” So, this magazine gave the new idea among the people of Assam and developed the rationalistic outlook. Another monthly journal *Jonaki* was first published in 1889 which began to start the modern Assamese literature.

After that Hemchandra Boruah published weekly tabloid *Assam News* in 1885 both Assamese and English. But three years later this newspaper was stopped and another weekly newspaper *Assam* was published in 1894 by Manik Chandre Boruah and Kaliram Boruah and in the same year Rajanikanta Bordoloi released the first Assamese novel *Mirijiori*. In 1895 an English newspaper was published by Radhanath Changkakoti entitled *The Times of Assam (1895)* from present Dibrugarh District.

Later number of newspaper and magazine were published in Assam such as weekly newspaper *Assam Bonti* (1900) by Padmanath Buragohain, in 1902 two English newspapers namely *the Easten Herald* and *Citizen of Assam* daily, *Dainik Batori* (1929), *Dainik Asomiya* (1946) etc.

Thus the educated people of Assam expressed their feeling through print media and their feeling had great influence on the all section of people of Assam. Through print media they were able to bring awareness among the people of the Assam about the exploitation of the British role and also placed Assamese as a standard language. The writers also inspired the people of Assam to grow the spirit of national consciousness through their writings; express their feelings in

newspapers, periodicals. So it can be said that during the British period print culture was developed which provided cultural knowledge among people of Assam.

### **Introduced modern health care system**

The British introduced modern health care system in Assam. The British took measures for different kind of disease like Cholera, Melariya, kalzar, Small Pox and so on. They established hospitals and dispensaries. Along with British the Christian missionaries also established mission hospitals in some parts of Assam. The British also established hospitals in tea garden areas for health care of the people. For protection of disease they introduced vaccination and appointed western doctor in the hospitals.

Thus, the traditional health care system was gradually changed in Assam. In the pre-British Assamese society medical treatment was very much localized. The people used indigenous medicine and the medical practitioners called *Bej*. The *Bej* provided medicine for various disease and they mainly used plants, herbs, different parts (of body) of birds and animal as a medicine. In Ahom society people also beliefs accidents were the cause of evil practices, so they offer meat, rice beer, fowl etc to the spirit. This practice is locally known as *Habidangriya Puja*. But this system of medical treatment was replaced by modern universalistic treatment of west. The new education system also changed the outlook of the superstition beliefs and practices among the people of Assam.

### **Growth of Film industry in Assam**

The development of film industry in Assam was the impact of the British. The history of Assamese cinema traces the origin of the films was creativity of Rupkonwar Jyotiprasad Agarwala, well known freedom fighter playwright, poet and composer. The first Assamese film that was produced due to his initiative was “Joymati” in 1935. The next film that was produced was “Indramalati” (1939). Dr

Bhupen Hazarika, who was instrumental in changing the fortunes of Assamese cinema. During that time Assamese film was mainly in classic manner. Therefore, the film focused on family and social themes and few of the Assamese directors tried to assert a form of regional cultural.

### **Role of elite class people**

After getting western education, few elite class people was emerged in Assamese society. The elite class peoples of Assam formed various associations in Assam for different purpose in the field of literature, politics etc. According to Maciver and Page (1959), “Association is an organization deliberately formed the collective pursuit of some interest or a set of interests which its members share”. In Assam, the first literary association was formed in 1872 by a group students at Calcutta, under the leadership of Ganga Govinda Phukan and they called them it *Asamiya Sahitya Sabha*. Earlier 1857, Anandaram and Gunabhiram organized the Gyan Pradayini Sabha at Nowgong. The objective of this Sabha was to spreading advance knowledge among the people. In 1885, the ‘*Asam Desh Hitaisini Sabh*’ was formed at Sibsagar under the effort of Piyalal Baruah. The Assamese youth formed a new society at the time of their studying in Calcutta called ‘*Asamiya Bhasar Unnati Sabha*’ (Assamese language improving Society) in 1888.

The *Axom Sahitya Sabha* was the most important literary organization of Assam established in 1917. It provided the common forum to the literatures of the province where possible to exchange views and to take concrete steps for the development of Assamese language and literature. The aim of this *Sabha* is to develop Assamese Language and bring all other indigenous languages of Assam under one umbrella. The organisation also published dictionary, research journal, awarded young and talented writers, organized seminars and workshops, art, culture and sculpture,

The local political Associations such as *Jorhat Sarvajanic Sabha* were formed in 1875 under the leadership of Jaganath Boruah to protest against the enhancement of land revenue. Through this the educated Assamese youth published newspaper and periodicals to growth of national consciousness among the people of the province. *The Sillong Association, Nowgong Rayat Sabha* and the *Upper Assam Association* were to protest against enhanced taxes which imposed by British.

*The Assam Association* was an association formed in 1903, but the inaugural session was held only after two years. Prabhat Shandra Barua, Manik Chandra Barua, Phanidhar Chaliha and many others were the members of this association. The method of working of this Sabha was similar to the Sarbajanik Sabha. They believed in constitutional form of movement. They made resolutions first, and then appealed to the British government. They opposed the partition of Bengal and the grazing tax and realization of money by the government from the immoral trade of opium. But gradually they decided to join the freedom movement. In 1921, the Assam Provincial Congress Committee was formed and this association became its part.

In 1916, a new organization was formed, named *Assam Sattra Sanmilan*. The objective of the organization was to raise their demands of measure for social development and reform. In 1925, the first session of this organization was held in Guwahati. The president was Lakshminath Bezbarua. It was basically a literary organization. But later, many members of the Sanmilan were actively participating in the Non-cooperation movements. They carried on the call for using home made articles and boycott of foreign goods. They also demanded a separate University for Assam. This organization wielded much influence upon the student community and it spreaded its activities all over Assam. This association, through its activities imparted a sort of political training to the students who later on emerged as important political leaders at provincial and national level.

In case of Ahoms from micro sociological point of view, when they lost their political power they could not reconcile themselves to this new situation under the British' (Boragohain, 1994). As a result the socio-economic conditions of most of the Ahoms were going to be backward. Although the modern education and new mode of communication directly or indirectly impact their social life but they want to separate state under the British government for development of their socio-cultural and economic life. Therefore, the Ahom elite people formed an organization known as *Ahom Sabha* in 1889. They realized that from a position of dominance they sank low to a position of 'backwardness' in spite the fact that they contributed enormously to the emergence and consolidation of the Assamese society. In the Hindu Assamese social structure they were at the bottom of the ladder. Therefore, rightly or wrongly, most of the Ahoms believed that their attachment to Hinduism was the root cause of their social degradation (Baruah, 1971).

The main aim of the organization was to demand the special place and privilege for the Ahom in the British administration and at the same time to revive the traditional religion, language, social customs and practices and re-established their cultural identity. The Sabha also demanded for the providing special opportunity to the Ahom by treating them as separate community in terms of economic and educational backwardness (Doley & Gogoi, 1998). Although, Ahom adopted the Assamese language as their mother tongue in place of the emergence of greater Assamese Society, they did not want all their 'Ahom identity' should completely be swallowed up by the Assamese caste Hindu culture (Buragohain, 1994).

From the above discussion it can be observed that the elite people of Assam delivered their feelings through this organization among the masses. The leaders also demanded the British government to give employment opportunity to the local people and also created national consciousness to fight for freedom. So, the British



rule developed national sentiments, gave new idea which brought from the west through western education.

### **The Freedom Struggle in Assam (1921-1947)**

In 1919-20 Assam too plunged into the non-cooperation movement launched by Gandhi. The objective of this movement was to attain Swaraja (self-rule). Assam's participation in the mainstream of the country's politics had begun way back in 1886 AD at the second session of Indian National Congress held at Calcutta, where Debi Chandra Baruah, Gopinath Bordoloi, Kamini Kumar Chandra, Satyanath Baruah and Joy Gobindasom represented Assam. At the first time the movement was initiated by the middle class people, but the voice of Gandhi quickly touched the entire peasantry and the working masses. The leaders like-N.C. Bordoloi, T.R. Phukan and Chandranath Sarma accompanied with volunteers held meetings at several places in Assam to join anti-British movement.

In 1921, the Provincial Congress Committee of Assam (APCC) was formed. Kuladhar Chaliha was the first president of the Provincial Congress. The APCC covered the six districts of Brahmaputra Valley, set up a district Congress Committee in each sub-division with village committees and Mouza committees at lower level. The delegates from APCC attended the meeting of the All India Congress Committee at Bombay in the July 1921 and invited Gandhiji to visit Assam. Thus, Mahatma Gandhi visited Assam in August 1921 and attended a large number of meetings at several places of Assam and delivered speech about exploitation of British rule. Those speeches were deeply touched the minds of the people of Assam and the lawyers, government officers, and teachers left their jobs to devote themselves for the nation.

Assamese women are very expert in weaving, therefore 'Khadi' and 'Chakra' became immensely popular in Assam. Gandhiji's was impressed by the weaving industry of Assam. After visiting of Gandhiji the national movement had been

spreaded in all parts of the state and the leaders organized strikes, processions and boycott of foreign goods. The people of Assam successfully implemented the Non-Cooperation Movement. The student community played a significant role to make the movement success. Gandhiji had praised the progress of the movement in Assam in his Article “lovely Assam” published in ‘Young India’, where he expressed the hope that Assam, with her womenfolk proficient in spinning and weaving could take to *Swaraj* earlier than other provinces of India (Das, 1969). In 1923, the Assam branch of ‘*Swaraj party*’ was formed at the initiative of Tarun Rum Phukan as president, R.K. Choudhury as the Secretary and G.N. Bordoloi as the Assistant Secretary. This party emerged from some local organizations. They began to organize agitation on social and economic issues. The ‘Asamiya Sabha’ was founded by Ambikagiri Roy Choudhury. The Sabha launched an intense propaganda for preserving the cultural identity of Assam. The ‘Krishak Sanmilini’ was another organization which operated at the economic level. They organized protest against the oppression of the peasantry.

Assam joined the rest of India in the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930 launched by Gandhi. The leaders of Assam organized several meeting in different parts of the valley urging upon the people to follow the congress programmes. In 1927, the Simon Commission was appointed. In 1929, in Lahore session the National Congress Committee declared the demand for complete independence. A fake celebration of ‘Independence Day’ was celebrated on 26th January 1930. It was the preparation for the launching of the Civil Disobedience movement. The student community of Assam played an important role here. Arrest of Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru touched the hearts of the Assamese people. They tried to oppose the British every possible way. In 1930, the ‘Cunningham Circular’ was implemented, which forbade students from joining any political activities. The students all over Assam protested against this circular. But the British did not spare the agitating students. As a result new schools were established – these were the

Kamrup Academy of Guwahati, Sibsagar Vidyapith and so on. The impact of the civil disobedience movement was also felt among the hill tribes. All the people of Assam joined in this movement and a number of leaders were arrested by the British. Finally, British had to recognize the right of India to freedom.

### **Freedom struggle and Ahoms in Assam**

The British rule in Assam brought to develop the national sentiment among the people of Assam and all caste, race, tribes and community people joined in freedom struggle. At the same time another sentiment was also developed among the tribal and non-tribal people of Assam which related to community sentiment and reflects in the period of freedom movement. The character of this movement is local between caste Hindu, the Assamese ruling class and the Ahom. It is true that Ahom ruled Assam before British and got assimilated with the people they met there. During the Ahom ruled the high caste-Hindu people got high status in the Ahom administration and also in the British administration. In this regard S.L.Boruah (2007) writes that “among the non-Ahom, the caste Hindus were the first joined hands with British administration and then again to rise the revolt against it under the leadership of INC”.

Thus, some of the Ahom elite observed this situation and they opposed to join the freedom struggle. They believed that Congress was the enemy of Ahoms (See. Buragohain, 1994, Pp-175) and they opposed the Congress in Assam. The Ahoms elites observed that the socio-economic aspirations of the vast majority of the people belong to the Ahom community and diverse plain tribes. For this reason the Ahom elites played an active role in the formation of “All people Party”, popularly known as *Sarba Doll* on May 1941, with the representatives of Tribal league, Muslim League, Ahom Sabha, Hill Tribes and Tea Garden Communities (Gogoi, 1949).

From the above observation it can be said that during the British period not too much changes had taken place in socio-cultural life of the Ahoms. The new administrative system, legal laws, western education had changed the attitudes of the Ahom people and give rationalistic idea. In the socio-religious life, Christianity could not impact and Ahoms followed vaishnavatic religious rites and practices in this period and continued to follow some traditional religious rites like- *Mitok Diya*, *Me-Dam-Me-Fhi*, *Aai Sakam*, *Lakhi Puja*, *Durga Puja*, *Bihu* festivals. Most of their social rites and ceremonies are same to the common Assamese people because during the last part of the Ahom region they totally assimilated with the vaishnavatic Assamese society. The Ahom's economy mainly agricultural economy but some of the educated elite class people worked under the British administration and they also changed their way of life style.

The industrialization, urbanization process was started by the British and these two processes had changed the socio-cultural life of the people. The new education system also impact on the social life of the Ahom people which changed the traditional medical system among the Ahom and give new idea. Thus the British ruled directly or indirectly impact on the socio-cultural life of the people of Assam and it helped to growth the national sentiment among the people of Assam.

### **Summery**

During the British period called modern period in Assam History. After the treaty of Yandaboo in 24 February, 1826 A.D. the upper Assam was annexed by the British and formally end the Ahom political power. The treaty had not only ended the political power of the Ahom kingdom but also ended their power, prestige and sovereignty of Assam state. After the treaty all the people of Assam both tribal and non-tribal group came under the umbrella of British administration.

Thus, some of Ahom noble revolted against the British to restore their old administration and political power in the upper Assam of Brahmaputra valley. The

first revolt against the British was led by Dhananjay Borgohain and Gumadhar Konwar in 1828 AD. This revolt was not succeeding. After the revolt British discussed about feasibility of restoring Upper Assam to an Ahom prince continued to discuss. At last on June 1833, on the recommendation of Robertson, successor of D. Scott, Purandar Singh was placed in charge in Upper Assam when he agreed to pay Rs. 50,000 an annual tribute to the British Government. But within three years Purandar Singha began to default in payment and begged for reduction of his tribute. In 1838 British government annexed Purandar territory to the Assam Administration.

The process of modernization was started by British in Assam. The British established a new administrative system, court, hospitals, tea gardens, educational institution in the province. The district and sub-divisional system of revenue and judicial administration was set up. To maintain law and order, they established police stations and outposts. They also set up local board and Town committees to carry the local administration both rural and urban areas.

They introduced modern education system by establishing educational institution in different parts of the state and encouraging women education. With the spread of education an educated middle class people was emerged in Assam.

In macro sociological point of view, the modern education changed the social structure of the Ahom society. Education inculcates liberal progressive ideas into the minds of people and thus prepares them for reorganization and reforms society (Bose, 2003). By the influence of modern education the Ahom society have changed. In pre-British period the Ahom Royal family, nobles got high status in the Ahom society within their social structure. On the other hand social status also determined in Ahom society through work and performance rather than educational qualification. Ahom Monarch, nobles and highest dignitaries' officers got high status in the society but education brought changed in this system. Modern

education also changed some orthodox belief and practices among the people of Assam which was closely related to Hindu religion like caste system, evil practices.

It is here mentioned that at initial stage in the Ahom society there was no caste system but after they convert to Hinduism mainly Brhminical cult brought caste system in Ahom society. But it was quit flexible than other societies of India.

For communication system postal services and telegraph lines were established and also developed the transportation and communication system, Railways for trade and commerce, discovered tea garden, oil, and coal and also established health centers etc. on the other hand at the same time a number of Bengali educated people came to engage under the British government. The British also established hospitals and charitable dispensaries. Through development of road, water and railway communication, Assam had been connected to other parts of the India, which help to growth of the process of modernization and urbanization. Due to development of communication system they communicated with the other people of the country and share their feelings with them. Assamese people had participated in war of independence viz. swadesi and non-cooperative movement in Assam; democratic ideology replaced the monarchy system.

All these created a new pattern of social structure in Assam. Some of the elements of Ahom society also change in this new system like housing pattern, dress pattern, food habit etc. The British brought educated people such as bankers, Clark, lawyers and Doctors from Bengal. They also brought tea garden labours from outside of the state (from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Orissa etc.); the Maruwaries Businessman also came along with British and established their business in the different part of the province. Nepalis also came in military services. Thus the population structure of Assam was changed and all people added existing mosaic of Assamese culture.

The educated Assamese also created a market of newspaper, magazines and reading materials for general people. As a result a new class of writers, book-sellers

and suppliers were emerged. The first Assamese newspaper Arunodoi was published in 1846. This newspaper socially and intellectually created the consciousness among the people of Assam. The Assamese intellectuals realized that there ought to be an element of cohesiveness in the social fabric of the state, so that the fight for liberty could percolate to every strata of the society. Therefore, it can be said that in the British period the process of modernization was slowly developed. In the field of education a number of Assamese educated people were emerged and they literally, socially and politically united the people of Assam to stand against colonial exploitation.

The British changed the homogeneous Ahom society to heterogeneous society and disintegrated the self sufficient village economy. The self sufficient village economy (agricultural) had been shifted to industrial economy.

From the above discussion it may be said that no more changes had been taken place in the Ahom society during the British period. It may be assumed that after the lost of power and prestige in the hand of British. So, the Ahom royal family members, nobles and high officers were not adjust the new system introduced by the British. For the begging of the British rule, Ahom princes Gomdhar Konwar and others tried to restore political power, but they failed in the hand of British. The Ahom kingdom accepted Assamese language, at the same time they could not give up their own language. The king's family, nobles and other high ranking official spoke Tai language. But during the British period within the new administrative system Ahom people lost their Tai Language. Although the high caste Hindu people were get same preference in the Ahom administration and then British administration. Under this circumstance the concept of revivalism was emerged in the mind of Ahoms people and they demanded that separate state under the British territories.

On the other hand the British established tea Graden, road, water and Railway transportation intended of their personal gain rather than to develop Assam.

The education system was developed in order to flourish Christianity and took the advantage of business point of view. Most of the education institution worked more towards the upliftment of English language rather than Assamese language and those school flourished Christian religion in Assam as well as India. Therefore, no more changed have been directly observed in the Ahom society during this period but whole system had changed the social life of the Ahoms as well as Assamese people.