



Opium: Popularity and Consequences in Colonial Assam, India

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Abstract

Opium which was used by the Assamese people as a medicine and also confined only with the nobility and upper classes as a luxury item during the Ahom rule, colonial British Government made the drug as easily accessible with the motives of maximisation of revenue collection in the province. The paper thus attempts to highlight how the opium popularity among the Assamese people caused the large-scale labour importation into Assam as there was popular notion amongst the British officials that Assamese were mostly opium addicted and unfit as labours. The paper also tried to understand the changes that occurred in socio-economic life of Assam and even how the opium issues organised the Assamese people politically, through 'raij mel' to oppose British Colonial Government.

Keywords: Opium, Indolent, Lazy, Immigration, Raji Mel, Kala-azar.

Introduction

Opium had been the most popular commodity and widely discussed issue in Assam during the colonial rule. There is no authentic record of the date when the opium drug was first introduced in Assam. But it believed that Assamese people were introduced to the poppy plant and its use during the days of the Mughal invasion of Assam in the seventeenth century. However, until the middle of the 18th century, opium-addiction remained a vice and was confined only to a few noble and rich men of the society in Assam¹. Assamese people cultivated poppy in their *bari lands* (homestead) for their own consumption. Though it believed that poppy was cultivated and consumed by the Assamese people even during the Ahom rule, but it was alleged that British Colonial Government made it a commodity of universal consumption. Trade and maximization of revenue collection had been the prime objectives of the British East India Company Government in Assam. Accordingly when the company government came to know the opium weakness of the Assamese people, made the opium as popular commodity. The drug used to be collected by saturating strips of coarse cotton cloth-each about three inches broad – in the juice obtained from incisions made into the poppy plant. Dried and lightly rolled up, these strips of cloth, known as *Kanee*. Poorer people prepared a drink by dissolving this *kanee* in water. Richer people extracted *madak* from it by evaporating the water, and they smoked it².

Cultivation of Poppy in Assam: According to Maniram Dewan, poppy was first cultivated by Rajput Barkendazes at Beltala in the vicinity of Guwahati during the reign of Swargadeo Lakshmi Singha³. It was through their agency that the opium habit spread through its length and breadth. Thomas Welsh, in 1792 observed that "poppy was growing in luxuriance in most of the lower provinces of Assam and Swargadeo Gaurinath Singha was an opium addict"⁴. In 1809, Buchanan

Hamilton wrote that opium in Assam was 'raised in abundance for consumption and there is much used'⁵.

Anandaram Dhekial Phukan witness a great change in the case of poppy cultivation, he noted in 1829 that there was almost no place in Assam where poppy was not cultivated². Opium became a common drug to all Assamese that even A.J. Moffat Mills, when visited the province in 1853 to enquire into the local conditions, he was convinced that "three-fourth of the population are opium eaters and men, women and children alike use the drug"⁶.

The people have, however, brought opium habit upon themselves. When *kala-azar* made its appearance, an idea was floated by some cases it bore fruit, and several young men and women took to the drug in apprehension of an attack by the malarial fever. Kali Ram Chaudhari, Extra Assistant Commissioner, Nagaon wrote-

"I myself have seen instances of conversion of total abstainers into opium-eaters. I should not be understood to say that there was no opium-eating before the appearance of the *kala-azar*. There were certainly a large number of people who used to take opium in one kind or other"⁷.

But when the British government had the knowledge that the general people of Assam also have weakness to opium, taking advantage of this situation the British made it an article of universal consumption of the people of Assam and by doing so they augmented their revenues by leaps and bounds. For which the number of opium eater growing rapidly. Sir Andrew John Moffatt Mills, in the course of his official tour and inquiry in 1853, found that 75% per cent of the people of Assam were opium eaters⁷. It was presumed rightly that within 28 years of

British rule (1826-53) the use of opium became most universal. While Government was convinced of the injurious effects resulting from taking the drug in excess, it was of opinion that "it use has, with many, almost become a necessity of life, and in a damp climate like Assam, it is perhaps beneficial if taken with moderation"⁸. In the same vein, Johnston Long, Civil Surgeon of Sibsagar also wrote in 1853 that "...the lower orders in Assam were not permitted to grow the poppy or to use opium in any way" and the "unrestricted use of opium amongst the peasantry of Assam were not permitted to grow poppy, or to use opium in any way, and the "unrestricted use of opium amongst the peasantry of Assam are not of very old data"³.

Effect of the Habit: Opium has also its share in degrading its consumers. Opium is a habit forming drug, even when taken in moderation; it is perfectly clear that certain deterring effects manifest themselves. The most noticeable physical effect is a gradual weakening of the body which is accentuated when the addicts in his craving for the drug stains himself or the bare necessities of food and clothing. It undoubtedly leads to physical, mental and moral deterioration. Addicts lose their will-power, their judgment become defective. The habitual use of opium incapacitates the individual from discharging his duties if the dose is not forthcoming at the right time⁹. Those who take to opium eating are generally averse to labour. According to Gunabhiram Barooah "the consumers are weak in body and in mind, slow, lazy, forgetful, with willingness to swear and tell lies and commit petty thefts"¹⁰.

Mills wrote in his Report thus: "The use of opium has with many almost become a necessary of life, and in a damp country like Assam it is perhaps beneficial if taken with moderation, but experience has shown that to allow every man to grow the plant and manufacture the drug unrestrictedly is almost injurious to the morale of the people. Opium they should have, but to get it they should be made to work for it"³.

Though Mr. Mills supported the consumption of opium but he advocated the abolition of cultivation of poppy and production of drug locally. Because

"deficiency of available labour in a province so thinly populated but greatly aggravated owing to the immoderate use of opium" consequent on the cultivation of poppy throughout the province of Assam being unrestricted, the Assam Company solicited the Governor- General of India that 'the cultivation of the poppy either altogether (be) prohibited or its cultivation heavily taxed; with the simultaneous introduction of Government opium for sale so as to realize a sizable amount of revenue for the Government and thereby to force the Assamese opium-eaters to labour to purchase the luxury"¹¹.

Therefore British intension on the one hand was to root out the source of indigenous supply of opium so as to make room for the sale of the government opium, and on the other hand forced the opium eaters to offer themselves as labourers to the tea

garden. Because the economy of Assam still remained in a state of non-monetization and the money remained a scarce commodity with the people. The scheme was very clear to Mills. In his word: "It seems to me that the simplest and most effectual plan into the stations and into the Mofussil, at certain places, a sufficient quantity of Government opium for consumption of the people"¹².

Colonel Francis Jenkins, Agent to the Governor General, North-East Frontiers, was the prime mover for both the suppression of the poppy cultivation and introduction of sufficient quantity of government drug for sale in the province. In reply to an official dispatch of the Bengal Government dated 20th January 1860, Jenkins while expressing his opinion in favour of immediate suppression of the poppy cultivation with effect from 1st May 1860, said; "there will be no difficulty in supplying any part of Assam with the government drug through ordinary vendors and in fact the necessary measures to this effect have already been established." Further Jenkins made it known to the Bengal Government that the measure would result in "a very large increase to the Government Revenue provided no stoppage in the necessary full supply of the drug to the collectors asks place as has hitherto on more than one occasion occurred." He also suggested for the introduction of the same *Abkaree* laws for the sale of opium in Assam which were in force in the Bengal province¹³. Accordingly the poppy cultivation in Assam was banned in May 1860. It may be mentioned in passing that during a 20 years period from 1879-93, the British Colonial Government in Assam sold a total of 31,392 *maunds* of opium and realized a net price of Rs. 3,14,55,576, and a license fee of Rs. 47,60,657 from the opium sellers. In this way they exploited the people of Assam in terms of opium revenue itself to the tune of Rs. 3,62,16,233¹². The following extract from the statistics shows that increase of revenue have been steadily accompanied by diminished consumption:

Prohibition of opium: The discovery of tea in the jungle of Assam attracted large number of British businessmen to invest in tea plantation in Assam. British planter have immediately experience that the scanty populated province, local people were opium eaters which make them a lazy to work which make acute shortage in the plantation. British tea planters appealed for a ban on opium. But the government was not in favour to lose revenue which collected from poppy cultivation. Mills recommendation was that 'the simplest and most effectual plan is to suppress the cultivation at once and pour into stations and into Mofussil, at certain places, a sufficient quantity of government opium for the consumption of the people. To solve the labour shortage in the province Mills concluded- 'opium they should have, but to get it they should be made to work for it'³. Government finally banned poppy cultivation with effect from 1st May, 1860 and allowed the government to operate opium monopoly in the province. In 1873-74 there were as many as 5,137 licensed opium shops to vend the drug at the grassroots⁴. The consumption of opium during the past five years in the five districts of Assam proper was¹⁵:

Table-1
The statistics of opium in Assam

Year	Population of the province	No. of shops	Treasury price of opium per seer	Total consumption (opium and its compounds)	Total revenue collected	Consumption per head of population	Revenue per head of population	Revenue per tola of consumption
1873-74	4,094,972	5,137	Rs. 22 & 23	Mds. 1,856 S. 32 c. 0	Rs. 11,71,816	Tola 1.45	As. 4 P. 7	As. 3 P. 2
1881-82	4,881,426	1,404	26	1,582 37 6	15,53,600	1.03	5 1	4 11
1891-92	5,433,199	977	37	1,369 25 4	19,16,369	.80	5 7	6 11
1894-95	5,433,199	845	37	1,376 28 11	19,36,037	.81	5 8	7 0

Table-2
Consumption of Opium in the Brahmaputra Valley

District	1890-91	1891-92	1892-93	1893-94	1894-95	Increase or decrease in 1894-95 as compared with 1893-94
Kamrup	Mds. 1451/2	Mds. 154	Mds. 1501/2	Mds. 154	Mds. 1471/2	Mds. -63/4
Darrang	1883/4	178	2001/4	208	1943/4	-131/4
Nowgong	2023/4	2311/4	2111/4	2033/4	2091/2	+53/4
Sibsagar	3571/2	3553/4	351	3601/4	3653/4	+51/2
Lakhimpur	3133/4	3531/2	3293/4	353	3553/4	+23/4
Total	1,2081/4	1,2721/2	1,2423/4	1,279	1,273	-6

Opium and Importation of Labour from outside of Assam:

The total acreage under tea in Assam proper increased from 2,311 acres in 1841 to about 8,000 acres by 1859, and the output of tea from 29,267 lbs to more than one million lbs. Faced by an acute labour shortage, the planter community urged the government in 1859 to further enhance the land revenue rates so that poor peasants could be flushed out of their villages to work for wages on the plantations. Another recommendation of theirs was to put a ban on poppy cultivation and sale of opium, the widespread consumption of which was believed to have made the local people apathetic towards work¹⁶. The cultivation of poppy in Assam proper had almost trebled while the population had increased by 10 per cent or so under British rule between 1826 and 1853¹⁷.

After some initial hesitation, the government ordered a 15 to 30 per cent increase in the land revenue rates on the dry crop lands of four districts- Lakhimpur, Sibsaigar, Darrang, and Nawgong¹⁸. It also placed a ban on the cultivation of poppy in 1860, but the lucrative monopoly sale of Company's readymade opium, that had been yielding a profit to the government, was continued. The sale price of this opium was increased; however, from Rs. 14 per seer in 1860 to Rs. 20 in 1862 and Rs. 23 by

1873³. The addicts were thus forced to purchase high-priced government opium instead of growing it themselves. It appears that prohibition of the cultivation of poppy- practically the only crop peasants could readily dispose of for a cash earning- and raising of the opium price were both motivated nor so much by humanitarian as by revenue considerations¹⁷.

The beginning of modern political consciousness in the Brahmaputra Valley can be traced from 1853, when Maniram Dewan and Anandaram Dhekial-Phukan (1829-1859) submitted their memorials to A.J. Moffat Mills, who had come to enquire into the conditions of the province and to recommend measures for improvement¹⁹. One of his two memorials, Maniram Dewan charged that the continued sale of *abkari* opium by the government had made the people unfit for agriculture. The memorial recommended both an immediate stop to the sale of monopoly opium and a phased programme of gradual prohibition of poppy cultivation within twenty years. As to the opium policy, Dhekial Phukan warned that the replacement of locally produced opium by *abkari* opium, sold on a monopoly basis by the government, would not at all lead to eradication of the evil. He rather suggested that the sale of government opium be discontinued forthwith and that local poppy cultivation be

subjected to heavy taxation- the tax being enhanced progressively from time to time. Thus the opium policy advocated by him was basically the same as Dewan's¹⁷.

The land revenue rates on both dry and wet crops were uniformly and arbitrarily doubled in 1868, throughout Assam proper²⁰. As a result of these enhanced rates, which were implemented during 1860-71, the total land revenue demand jumped up from Rs. 1,001,773 in 1864-65 to Rs. 2,165,157 in 1872-73¹⁷. In some parts of Assam, people reacted to the new assessment by organising *raij mels* (people's assemblies). This was at a time when the acreage under food grains was failing to increase sufficiently to meet the rising local demand for food. Food prices were higher in Assam than in any part of neighbouring Bengal.

The increase in land revenue on dry crop lands in 1861 was much resented in Nagaon. However, it was the 1860 ban on poppy cultivation that affected the peasant economy of Nagaon the most, as poppy was largely cultivated in the district. At the same time British Government again tried to impose tax on betel-nut (*tamul*) and betel leaf (*paan*) cultivation which added fuel to fire amongst the peasants of Nagaon, mainly the tribal (Lalung) people of Phulaguri area²¹.

A number of more than 1,500 peasants from Nagaon and neighbouring areas were marched peacefully to the District Magistrate Office in September 1861 to give a petition to the Magistrate. District Magistrate treated the demonstrator *ryots* in a high-handed and provocative manner, and even did not allow them to enter his office compound. They were even fined on several occasions for allegedly making noise within the court compound.

A *raij mel* was thereupon held at Phulaguri in October 1861. The assembly was scheduled to be in session for five days to ensure participation from distant villages. Approximately 1,000 people assembled by 15th October, 500-600 of who were armed with *lathis*. To handle the situation, armed police force was sent but assembled people driven them out. Then Deputy Commissioner sent Lt. Singer an ADC to study the situation. By 17 October, 3,000 to 4,000 people had gathered in the *raij mel*. On the same day police tried to disperse *raij mel* by arresting few of their leaders. They were asked to vacate the place and Mr. Singer ordered to seize their bamboo *lathis*. This action made the people infuriated, which ultimately led to the clashes between the police and the peasants. In the clash, Lt. Singer was beaten to death. This episode of heroic resistance by the people to the increasing tax burden and bureaucratic mindlessness is still very much alive in folk memory as the '*Phulaguri Dhawa*'²¹.

It was popular notion amongst the British officers about the indigenous people was that most of them were opium addicted, which made them indolent and lazy. Along with this popular notion, local Assamese people on the other hand denied to work

as a labourers under the Company Government. The self-sufficient village economy as a rule, neither included, nor compelled by circumstances to have come in search of work²². But changes occurred on the socio-economic scenario of the Assam when indigenous tea plant, coal and oil were discovered in Assam. Defying as wage-earners by the Assamese local people, British capitalist had to face a serious labour shortage in to the province. Hence, large numbers of cheap labours were recruited from outside of the province.

Conclusion

Opium had been the most important discussing matter both inside and outside of the Assembly throughout the Colonial rule in Assam. It was said that opium was introduced in Assam during the days of Mughal invasion of Assam in the seventeenth century. However, opium-addiction remained a vice and limited only to a few rich men until the middle of 18th century. But taking advantages of the Assamese people's weakness to opium, the British made it an article of universal consumption. The Colonial Government put on the poppy cultivation and supplied their readymade opium through the vendor system and by doing so they augmented their revenues by leaps and bounds. But changes occurred on the socio-economic scenario of Assam when indigenous tea plant, coal and oil were discovered. For the extension of the garden and other avenues of employment need pliant labour force. The British Capitalists find it difficult as there was labour shortage in the province. As it was popular notion against the Assamese people and widely circulated that Assamese people were mostly opium addicted and unfit for the hard labour. But restriction imposed on cultivation of poppy which ultimately help to rise political and socio-cultural Renaissance in the form of '*Raij Mel*' in Assam. The '*raij mel*' which was initiated during the '*Phulaguri Dhawa*' also played an important role in the Indians freedom struggle against the British.

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Nepalis in Assam: A Historical Perspective (1816-1985)

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Abstract

Several streams of migration had occurred towards Assam during pre and post independence period. Among them, a group of martial races of poor country Nepal migrated to Assam in search of food and employment during the colonial periods. The migration and settlement of Nepalis in Assam have played a pivotal role in the formation into the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society of the region. Most of the Nepalis were soldiers, graziers, coolies, peon and chaukidars. Apart from the deployment in army and police, a section of Nepalis took grazing as a profession. Encouragement from the part of the British number of Nepali migration was increased leaps and bound. As the population of Assam increased in a considerable amount which ultimately led to the ethnic movement and deliberate attempts to define as foreigners. The present study is a descriptive study of the Assam-Nepal relation their settlement in the region.

Keywords: Acculturation, Assamese, Assimilation, Nepali, Gurkha, Gopalak, Graziers, Khuti.

Introduction

The Eastern most part of Indian State, Assam is the land of exceptional interest which covers area of 78,438 sq km. with the population of 3,11,69,272¹. Assam is situated in the extreme North-east frontier of India in between 24°10' and 27°58'N Latitude and 89°49' to 97°26'E Longitudes and borders are touched on the north by Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh, and Nagaland, and Manipur in the east, Mizoram and Tripura in the south and Meghalaya in the west. Famous for green tea and one horned Rhinoceros to the world are known to abroad by its earlier name Pragjyotishpur and Kamrup, also known as the land of magic and witch craft with its famous *Tantrik* shrine Kamakhya. In the epigraphic record the name Kamakhya first mentioned in the Samudra Gupta's famous Allahabad Pillar Inscription². Assam is situated in one of the greatest routes of migration of mankind. Across the geographical boundaries there came men, ideas and means of production to mingle together with the aboriginals and shape a new mode of living and rich culture³. The contacts so achieved, with both inside and outside India, were lasting and ever increasing. People of Assam from the ancient periods not only maintain trade, but also for the exchange of ideas between China, Tibet, Nepal, Burma and others. In different periods of time different races and tribes entered Assam and constitute a composite Assamese culture. The modern name 'Assam' is associated with the Shan invaders who under the leadership of Sukapha invaded and penetrated to this land in about 1228 A.D. They established the Ahom rule for about six hundred years upto 1826 A.D. Finally the British occupy this land and incorporated within company's territory. As the country lies in the migration routes, people of different origin, such as Mongoloid, the Austric, the Negriots and Aryans entered Assam become the meeting ground and the place of

cultural interchanges of these races, enriched Assamese culture at large.

Historical Background

This is the worldwide phenomenon that the history of the people of the world is the history of migration. The history of man is not static rather it is ever changing. From the time immemorial different groups of people entered this part of the land and constitute composite Assamese culture. It is found in the Puranas, Epics, Yoginitantra and other historical sources that from the olden times Nepali speaking people migrated and residing in different parts of Assam. The anthropological and cultural history of Assam is the history of the admixture of the races, tribes, languages, customs, rites and rituals, manners and behaviors and other aspects of civilization. It is found that some tribes of Assam and Nepal are of the same origin. Both the countries viz. India and Nepal and their parts referred as *Kirata desa* and the aboriginals were known as *Kiratas* of the Tibeto-Burman groups⁴, perhaps migrated to this region. References of the relation between Assam and Nepal are found from the remote past to the recent time. In the different periods of history the boundary of the two states touched each other boundaries. Having racial and cultural similarities with the people of Assam they are not so negligible in numerical strength and found in the process of acculturation. In some places, the process of assimilation is also found with the Assamese society. The role of the Assamese-Nepali in the economic growth of the state, Assam, is not ignorable at all.

But it is not possible to cover all the aspects the in the limited scope, the present study aims at making a comprehensive analysis of the perspective of the life and problems of Nepalese

in Assam and to find out the status quo of the ethnic Nepali community in Assam.

Colonial Impetus and Nepali Migration into Assam: The colonial period has witnessed the greatest human movement and settlement of people resulting in the transfer and distribution of diverse population group in different parts of the world. The commercialization and industrialization of the economy under the aegis of the colonial state also served to stimulate the natural migratory movement of the people. After the British occupation of Assam, under the patronage of the colonial government large number of Nepalese migrated to this region in search of life as *Gopalak* and Soldiers. The British came to Assam with a lot of hope and aspiration, but they could not reach their goal, as Assam was not a populous state. The devastation and wholesale depopulation during the period of civil wars and Burmese invasions left 'vast tracts of waste land throughout the province'. Every encouragement should be given to the immigrants to come and settle in the province. In an industry less country, Assam had no other option rather than to increase in land revenue. Lands were leased out to the people in favourable terms. British government had not missed any opportunity to maximize their revenue collection. Accordingly grazing which was free from time immortal in Assam was taxed. To attract the people and increase the revenue of the region, Company introduced the Wasteland Rules on 6th March, 1838. According to the Rules, one-fourth of a land grant was to remain revenue-free in perpetuity. The remaining portion of the grant, too, was to remain revenue-free for initial five to twenty years, the period according to the nature of the waste land concerned⁵.

'Large scale' Nepali migration into the Assam began only with the colonial intervention. British official view toward the native people was that they are 'lazy', 'opium addicted' and 'indolent' and encouraged the surplus Nepali population to immigrate Assam. The active policies pursued by the colonial government opened up the valley to the Nepalis. The colonial government required a pliant labour force for all and sundry work from clearing forests to lumbering to domestic help, which was effectively provided by the 'versatile Nepali'. Apart from the recruitment of Nepali martial classes in police and military, what seems to have attracted the Nepalis most to Assam were the vast expanse of greenery dense forests and hills, abundance of wastelands which was full of lush green vegetation. This was, indeed, an ideal scenario for cattle-breeding.

Gurkha Soldier: One of the important migratory movements took place in the subcontinent during the nineteenth and twentieth century's were that of people of Nepal, an independent state subsequently having treaty relationship with the British Govt. in India.

The Anglo-Nepali war 1814 came to an end with the treaty of Sougulee on 2nd December, 1815⁶. The permanent settlement of the Nepalese people in the North-Eastern region began after the

treaty of Sougulee. The British quickly recognized the magnificent fighting qualities of the Gurkhas. A large number of Gurkhas were recruited in the Cuttack Legion (later known as the Assam Light Infantry), which was formed in Cuttack in 1817⁴. It was transferred to Assam under Captain Neufville. This Cuttack Legion took part in the Sylhet operation ostensibly to drive out the Burmese which had 1000 Hindustani and Gurkha soldiers⁷. In 1835 the Assam Rifle was formed and the Gorkha presence was enhanced. In 1865 after the disastrous performance in the Bhutan war, Hindustanis were ordered to be replaced by "Gorkhas, Nepalese and Garhwalis⁸". At Gorakhpur and Darjeeling a depot was opened to recruit Gurkha soldiers.

The number of Gurkhas in the Assam Rifles remained substantial as the class composition return of each battalion in 1922 would show⁸

Table-1
Number of Gurkhas in the Assam Rifles

Assam Rifle	Gurkhas	Jharuas	Hill Tribes	Others
1 st Battalion	762	48	39	3
2 nd Battalion	647	137	1	9
3 rd Battalion	592	166	35	38
4 th Battalion	614	108	79	2
5 th Battalion	552	200	38	3

Constituting a sizeable component in the Gurkha Rifles and in Assam, Nepalis were encouraged to settled in Assam. Suitable men for the army were not easy to enlist. Therefore the Gurkhas who were brought to North-East region different regiments were settled by British after their retirement so that it would be easier for the British to recruit their sons in the army. The census reports shows that Nepali Population from 21,347 (.35%) in 1901⁹ to 88,306 (1.02%) in 1931⁹.

Table-2
Growth of Nepali population in Assam, 1901-1991⁹

Year	Nepalis in Assam	Percentage of total population in Assam
1901	21,347	0.35
1911	47,654	0.67
1921	70,344	0.94
1931	88,306	1.02
1951	1,01,338	1.26
1961	2,15,213	1.98
1971	3,49,116	2.38
1991	4,32,519	1.93

Nepali Graziers: In Assam what seems to have attracted Nepalis most were the vast expanse of greenery dense forests and hills, abundance of land and the ‘Chars’ of mighty Brahmaputra and its tributaries, dotted with verdant full of lush green vegetation. This was, indeed, an ideal scenario for cattle-breeding. Some of pensioners of the retired soldiers took milk production as their occupation. In a land-abundant Assam peasant enjoyed from time immemorial the traditional right to graze their cattle freely on the village commons and neighbouring forests, colonial British government imposed tax on grazing¹⁰. Accordingly in 1886 tax of 4 annas per buffalo was imposed as a grazing tax, which was raised 8 annas in 1888 in Lakhimpur district. In 1890 a definite instruction were issued to levy of grazing fee at the rate of 8 annas per buffalo and 4 annas for other horned cattle. The continuous Nepali migration in the province as a grazier, increased the grazing fee in time to time. In 1907 grazing tax was raised to Re. 1 per buffaloes raised Rs. 2 and 6 annas for other horned cattle in 1915¹¹. This rate of grazing fee was again raised Rs. 3 per head per buffalo and annas 6 for other horned cattle in the province¹². Thereafter, this grazing fee continued to be Rs. 3 per head per buffalo and annas 6 for other horned cattle.

Table-3
Increasing the grazing cattle and Revenue 1910-1925 in Assam

	1910	1915	1920	1925
No. of cattle Assessed	12993	44199	135690	182605
No of Professional graziers	90	184	6626	9165
Total Revenue collection	12525	64007	301077	361947

Source: ALCP, 1928, Vol.I, part IV, pp. 81-89

No doubt most of the professional graziers in the province were Nepali *khutiwalas*. According to A. Guha “the overwhelming bulk of these cattle, excepting a few hundred, all were Nepali professional graziers⁵.”

Role of Nepalese in India Freedom Struggle: The Nepali community of Northeastern region took active part in the freedom movement from 1920. The freedom movement took a new turn after the visit of Mahatma Gandhi to Assam as the Assam Association led by Chabilal Upadhyaya ceased to function. Chabilal Upadhyaya took the leadership of Nepali community in the Non-Cooperation Movement in Assam. Chabilal and his brother Hari Prasad Upadhyaya was sentenced a period of three month imprisonment¹³. During the Civil Disobedience movement Dalbir Singh Lohar, Bir Bahadur Chettri, Anantalal Sarma, Bhakta Bahadur Pradhan were punished imprisonment¹³. During the Quit India Movement, the Nepali freedom fighters of Assam were also sentenced to rigorous imprisonment and kept in different jails of Assam.

More than three hundred Nepali volunteers were recruited in *Shanti Sena* and *Mrityu Bahini* from different places of the Brahmaputra Valley.

Nepalese in Assam after Independence: The Nepalis in Assam have preserved and maintained their own traditional social customs. In the process a certain degree of assimilation with the Assamese society has been noted. This is evident from the festivals celebrated, food habits and matrimonial relation where a high degree of assimilation is noted.

There are some ceremonies performed by the Nepalis in Assam in addition to their traditional religious ceremonies. This shows a high level of assimilation into the Assamese fold. Besides these, the Nepalis of Assam actively participated in the local festival called *Bihu*. Assam celebrated three *Bihus- Magh, Rangali* and *Kati*. The *Magh Bihu* celebrated in the month of January/*Magh* has a Nepali equivalent in *Makar Sankranti*. The *Bohag/Rangali Bihu* celebrated in April or *Baisakha*, is also equally participated by the Nepalis of Assam.

The history of the people of Assam is the history of the migrated people. People of different caste, religion, language had been migrated into the province from the time immemorial. Among these migrated people, Nepalis are also one of the groups. It should be mentioned that though technically Nepal is foreign country, the Nepalis were never treated as foreign nationals in India, so was the status of the Indians in Nepal. This was obviously a mutually accepted understanding between two nations with a history of cordial, social, political and economic relations without a natural physical boundary to demarcate distinctly. The Indo-Nepal Friendship Treaty in 1950, the Tripartite Delhi Agreement of 1951 and Revised Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1956 cleared the way for free interchange, and flow of Nationals of both countries with the right to own property and accord citizenship¹⁴.

Assam witnessed a popular mass movement against the illegal immigrants that continued from 1979-85, popularly known as Assam Movement. As a result of Assam Movement, a settlement treaty (Assam Accord) was signed in 1985 with Central Government. According to ‘Assam Accord’ all those foreigners those who entered Assam after 1971 were to be deported under the Illegal Migrants Determination by Tribunal Act (IMDT), 1983 as amended in 1985. The political status of the communities of Nepali origin continued to remain confusing even after the Assam Accord. On the one hand, in Assam, all foreigners entering without valid travel papers after 25 March, 1971 were to be considered illegal immigrants, on other hand, the 1950 Treaty continued to grant the Nepalis a reciprocal right to settle in India (with no time-bound curtailment). The irony of the situation is that this tension between central government directive and sons-of-soil movement over the political status of the communities of Nepali origin in Assam was an unnecessary byproduct of the Assam Movement¹⁵. Although Nepalis were part and parcel of the

collective past of the region they hardly find any space or mention in the history of the region¹⁴. Prof. Sajal Nag arguments in this matter as “Nepalis are often seen as ‘rejected’, ‘excluded’, and ‘historyless’ people” is somehow acceptable¹⁴.

Conclusion

In the conclusion, it may be referred that absorption and integration of the people is the main characteristic of the history of Assam. Under the patronage of the British government Nepalese were permanently settled here. As a result, they become bonafide citizens and showed their contribution for the promotion of political, economic and cultural life of Assam. They have sacrificed their lives for the preservation of national unity and integrity being the protector of border as well as freedom fighter. Many races and tribes are found mixed up with the Assamese people and constitute a composite Assamese culture. Now in Assam Nepalese also liked to give their identification as ‘Asomiya Nepali’ continuing their own traditional socio-cultural life like others of Assam and is seen in the process of acculturation with it. Nepalis in Assam make the Assamese society and culture more extensive.

In the different periods of history many people migrated from Nepal, established themselves permanently in Assam and integrated with the Assamese society and culture by process of acculturation and in some localities assimilation in the aspects of language, culture and education. Assimilation also found in food habits, social, religious and matrimonial relations. The Nepalis who came to these parts of the land since long back and in the early rush of the colonial conquest assimilated into the host society and contributed much to the social, economic, and political development of the state. The Assamese Nepali had actively participated in the freedom struggle led by Indian National Congress. In various phases of the National freedom struggle, their wholehearted participation and their courage to face adverse consequences thereof were really praiseworthy. But where by the Indo-Nepal treaty of 1950, 1951, and 1952 grants to the Nepalis a reciprocal right to settle India, on the other hand IMDT Act 1885, make the political status of the Nepalis continued to remain confusing.

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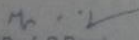


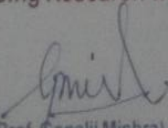
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
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Shree Sanjib Kumar Chetry, Ph.D. Scholar, Department of History.

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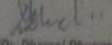
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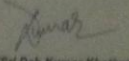
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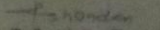
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He/She has Presented Paper entitled "Nepalibaroko Paramparik Chikichya Pasabati; Ek
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Certified that Mr./Ms./Dr. Sanjib Kumar Chetry has participated from 12.01.2016 to 13.01.2016 as an Expert/Participant in a Seminar / Workshop/Training Programme on Use of Technical Terminology in Assamese Language in Humanities & Science organized by Commission for Scientific and Technical Terminology at Kalabari College, Kalabari, Sonitpur, Assam.

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