IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY:

The economy of Assam was basically agrarian; agrarian even today. Land produce was the only source of living for almost all the people. And as such land had been forming the base of superstructure of the society in the state. But the tillers of soil had no rights to their lands which formed a problem leading to unrest amongst the agricultural classes as a whole under the colonial rule. The problem remains unsolved even today.

The agrarian structure of the state had passed through different phases. Its feudalistic pattern of pre-British era assumed new turn during colonial regime which witnessed variety of changes in the agrarian structure.

The term ‘agrarian structure’ covers the institutional framework of agriculture and it includes distribution of ownership of land, forms of land tenure, the pattern of agricultural employment etc. Therefore, agrarian relation i.e., different interests concerned with land are inter-related with
each other, forms an interesting topic of indepth study. The term 'ownership' of land implies the right to sell, mortgage, lease or transfer of property. Possession of rights to the use of land is called tenure. There were various kinds of right to the use of land. In the two extremes were the owner cultivators and the landless agricultural labourers. Between these two extremes there remained the under- rayots, share-croppers etc. Relationship in between these different interests was sensitive in all the time. It may thus be termed as 'agrarian problem' which had been pressing up the whole of the alien rule. Towards the end of the rule, the problem assumed much importance in the sphere of social life of the state. Thus, this study has been undertaken to scrutinize the 'agrarian problem' in the district of Kamrup under colonial rule.

Mention may be made that in the real sense of the term no indepth study has yet been made on the agrarian relations of the rayotary region of the state. It is true that certain research works have been completed on the Zamindary tenure of the state. An indepth and scientific study is made by Dr. S. Barman on the Zamindary system in Assam during British regime. Scholars like Dr. S. K. Bhuyan and Dr. H. K. Barpujari are found to have

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1 Barman, S., Zamindary system in Assam during British rule (A case study of Goalpara District) Gauthali, 1994
thrown some lights on the British revenue administration.\textsuperscript{2} Dr. A. Guha\textsuperscript{3} has advanced a sketch on the agrarian relation in Assam as a whole. Some other scholars have attempted here and there to highlight the land problem and land reforms in Assam. Dr. N. C. Dutta\textsuperscript{4} and Dr. R. Borgohain\textsuperscript{5} have advanced a step in this direction. Dr. M. M. Das\textsuperscript{6} and Dr. P. C. Goswami\textsuperscript{7} also throw some light on the peasant problems in Assam.

But the problem of land relations in the \textit{rayotary} areas was not singularly treated by the scholars. And as such, the importance of the study of agrarian relations of the \textit{rayotary} areas of Assam cannot be minimized.

In fact, almost all the countries of the world are, more or less, having the agrarian problem. So far as India is concerned, many factors are there which have contributed to its complexity. The most important factor is that the colonial administration did not invest its energy and will to upgrade the interests of the agrarian society. In case of the state of Assam, the colonial Government guided by its selfish interests, did everything possible for its own benefit irrespective of the development of the agrarian structure. As a result, its agrarian structure, i.e., the land system of old kings, chiefs and

\textsuperscript{2} Bhuyan, S. K., Anglo-Assamese Relations (1771-1826) Gauhati, 1948, Barpujari, H. K., Assam in the Days of Company (1826-1858), Gauhati, 1980

\textsuperscript{3} Guha, A., Medieval and Early Colonial Assam, Society Polity Economy, Calcutta, 1991

\textsuperscript{4} Dutta, N. C., Land Problems and Land Reform in Assam, New Delhi, 1988

\textsuperscript{5} Borgohain, R., Politics of Land Reforms in Assam, New Delhi, 1992

\textsuperscript{6} Das, M. M., Land Holding Structure, A problem in peasant Agriculture in Assam, New Delhi, 1995

\textsuperscript{7} Goswami, P. C., The Economic Development of Assam, New Delhi, 1963
emperors was found to have been passing off by inequalities. The adverse affect of this inequality was bound to fall in other spheres of social life.

It is found that the alien Government of India had very little concern regarding the proper development of the agrarian sector of the country. In the history of colonialism, it is seen that its basic aim was to acquire more and more revenue from the agricultural sector, because the scope of collecting revenue in other sectors was very scarce.

Therefore, the British concentrated their energy to ensure maximum flow of revenue to their coffers neglecting the interests of the peasantry. Every experiment initiated by the British in the field of revenue administration aimed at enhancement of revenue. With that end in view, they introduced temporary settlement, permanent settlement, rayotary system, mahalwary system etc. It is to be noted that the land tenure system determined the relations between land owners and tenants. It determined the rights and mutual obligations of the concerned parties. However, it is obvious that whatever might have been the system introduced by the foreign Government, it was highly exploitative in nature. Exploitative in the sense that the vast peasantry had to suffer both at the hands of the Government and the landlords. As has been pointed out by A.

\[^6\] Uppal, J. S., India's Economic Problem (Tata Mc. Grow publishing Co. Ltd.) New Delhi 1979, PP 109-110
M. Khusru, the foreign government gave Indias' agriculture a strait jacket within which alone it was to function for decades to come.⁹(a)

It seems that the British sought to retain the zamindars of the country. As a matter of fact, the purpose of the permanent settlement was to solve social and economic problems of British India by creating a class of alliance in the class of zamindars⁹(b). Even in the rayotary system they retained a class of petty zamindars, i.e., landholders as they were called. That is why the British enthusiastically examined so called high-blood and high origin in case of appointment of indigenous people in the Government departments.

Sometimes, it was seen that the alien Government took measures for land reforms. But the pertinent question is to what extent did the Government try to do away with the defects of the agrarian sector? Land reform should mean to be an integrated set of measures designed to eliminate the obstacles of economic and social development arising out of the defects of the agrarian structure. But the British land policy was not framed in that light. To speak precisely, it was aimed at fulfilling the colonial interests of the alien government. As a fallout, a landed aristocracy emerged out of the existing royal or religious or landed aristocratic origin.

⁹(a) Khusro, A. M., The Economies of land Reforms and Farm Size in India, Delhi, 1973, P. 3
⁹(b) Barman, S., op.cit., p.p. 197-198
This class of people acted as an ally to the government till the end of the alien regime.

The permanent settlement system was found to have involved in three interests on land i.e., the Government, the landlords and the tenants. But the rayotary system which was first introduced in Madras in 1772 by Thomas Munroe, preferred to two interests on land, i.e, the Government and the owner cultivators. In this system there was only one payment, viz., the owner cultivators paid revenue directly to the government. But with the passage of time, the rayotary system also became exploitative like the Zamindary system. Because its provision of subletting paved the way for emergence of the third interests, i.e. the rayots. The landholders superior to the rayots may be termed as petty zamindars.

Ownership of land proves to be the prime mover of agrarian relations. The system of land tenure is closely related to ownership. This system of land tenure in this country has been standing as a long rope. In its one end there were the owner cultivators and in the other the landless labourers. Between these two extremes, there were many groups with varying degrees of interests. Thus the unequal economic differentiation is found to have a complicated social relationship between various groups.
The land policy of the foreign government did not try to alleviate the complicated socio-economic relationship of the rural masses. As a result, the rural masses were being increasingly oppressed. But, in course of time the oppressed peasantry came under the influence of revolutionary ideologies and sounded the death-knell of landlordism. But without sympathy and cooperation of the government the well-settled landlordism could not be uprooted. It is an irony that whenever there was peasant unrest, the landed aristocracy sided with the government for protection. Obviously the reforms initiated by the foreign government did not aim at annihilating landlordism. Even after independence the agents of landed aristocracy who were in different political parties, particularly the congress, kept alive the British legacy. As a result, in the post independence period also, the problem more or less remains the same as before.

In this study, an attempt will be made to review all these aspects in the rayotary districts of Assam with special reference to Kamrup under colonial rule.

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Sadullah, M. S., Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, March-April, 1948, vol.1 No-2, State Archives, Dispur, P.129
LIMIT OF THE STUDY:

As a matter of principle, there should be no middlemen in rayotary settlement system. The rayots hold land for a given number of years and remained responsible for the payment of revenue. After the expiry of the stipulated period of settlement the land was again assessed by the government and the rate of revenue was decided on the basis of that assessment. In fact, in Kamrup both annual and periodic settlements were made. Primarily it is seen that the government made settlement with the owner cultivators. But besides the petty Zamindars, there was a large number of grants in perpetuity, granted to temples, religious and charitable institutions. Such estates were made revenue free. In course of time, the owners of such estates came to be known as lakhirajdars. In fact, the ancient rulers of Kamarupa made those perpetual grants. The Koches, Mughals and Ahoms made such grants. The British administration of Assam had also recognized such grants of the earlier kings. Out of the five districts of the Brahmaputra valley, Kamrup was conspicuous with enormous grants. There were three categories of such grants viz., the Debottar or temple grants, the Brahmothtar or personal grants to the Brahmins for religious purposes and Dharmothtar or grants to the religious communities.
Be that as it may, the pertinent question is whether there was any virtual difference between the Zamindar of permanent settlement system and the lakhirajdars or nisfkhirajdars of the rayotary areas. Though lakhiraj estates were not considered as Zamindary estates and it was believed that the lakhirajdars formed a class by themselves, yet the truth is that there was very little difference between the Zamindars under permanent settlement system and the lakhirajdars, nisfkhirajdars chamuadars, khatdars and others in the rayotary sector. However the British administration scrutinized the legality of the revenue free status of the lakhiraj estates and most of the lakhiraj estates were made half revenue paying or nisfkhiraj estates. Their owners came to be known as nisfkhirajdars. Besides this, there were a large number of holders of big khiraj or full revenue paying estates, commonly known as khatdars, chamuadars, mauzadars etc. By status and position they were no less than Zamindars.

Therefore the periodic and annually settled estates like lakhiraj, nisfkhiraj chamuas, khat etc. were prevalent in the district. The nature of their management and the incidence of the under tenures involved are to be dealt with in this study. Besides these, the reform measures introduced
in this area of administration and their resultant consequences are to be reviewed in the study undertaken.

As a matter of fact, in the rayotary system there should be no intermediary between the government and the actual tillers of the soil. And it claimed as such. But the question is how far such claim was justified. If such claim is justified, what was the status of the lakhirajdars, nisfkhirajdars, chamuadars, khatdars and others, who could enjoy the services of the tenants and could lead a life of prestige and position. It is important to point out that these categories of landowners acted as intermediary class. When a large number of landowners acted as intermediary, automatically there appeared a good number of rayots. They cultivated the land of such owners as under tenant. But the lions share of produces was appropriated by the owners. In course of time the whole picture became critical. The intermediaries sought more and more benefit at the cost of the tenantry. Therefore the outstanding features of the agrarian structure in the district were the existence of intermediaries, high-rent insecurity of tenure, increasing number of uneconomic holdings, a large number of landless population and finally the discontentment of the oppressed peasantry. Peasants discontentment created disturbing atmosphere which compelled the alien government to execute reforms.
Such compulsion led the government to pass three tenancy Acts besides the Assam land and Revenue Regulations, 1886. The tenancy Acts were-

i) The Goalpara Tenancy act 1929

ii) The Assam (Temporarily settled areas) Tenancy act, 1935

iii) The sylhet tenancy act, 1936.

These acts were the effort of the alien of government to improve the landlord tenant relationship. But even after enactment of these acts, the structure of the agrarian society particularly in Kamrup as elsewhere in the rayotary areas was dominated by big and influential landlords. The man behind the plough continued to lead miserable life. The benefits of the Tenancy Acts failed to satisfy the oppressed peasantry. It was due to this reason that the governments of the post-independent era had to take fresh reform measures. The outcome of such measures of the nationalist governments were the enactment of the following Acts-

(i) The Assam Adhior Protection and Regulation Act, 1948

(ii) The Assam Fixation of ceiling on land Holding Act, 1948
(iii) The Assam state Acquisition of Lands belonging to Religious or charitable institution of public Nature Act, 1959
(iv) The Assam Gramdan Act, 1961
(v) The Assam Bhudan Act, 1965
(vi) The Assam Consolidation of Holdings Act, 1960

All these exercises of the national government are also to be included within the area of our study.

So far as the *rayotary* districts of Assam are concerned, to the best of our knowledge no extensive or systematic case study on land relations has been done. In spite of being an important district of the *rayotary* areas of the Brahmaputra valley, Kamrup still remains unexpected in respect of its revenue history. It is intended for getting better understanding of the agrarian problems of Kamrup tapped in the study.

**Method of the study:**

Our approach in the study is entirely analytical. It is an indepth study of the agrarian relation of the undivided Kamrup district with reference to
the agrarian history under colonial rule. Efforts of the nationalist governments for land reforms in the post-independence period are also assessed in the study. Therefore, basically primary sources are utilised in an elaborate manner. However the weight of the secondary sources is duly considered. Besides these, open interviews were undertaken for having firsthand knowledge of the agrarian problem in the grassroots level.

**CHAPTER SCHEME**

In order to deal the topic methodically, the study has been divided into seven chapters which are closely related to each other.

In the introductory chapter the importance and significance as well as limit of the study has been dealt with. Historical background has been presented in the second chapter. It deals with the naming and revenue history of the district since the time of the ancient Kamarupa kings. This chapter ends with the Ahom land system prevalent in the district.

In the third chapter, land system under British regime is dealt with in an elaborate manner. In the fourth chapter, an exhaustive account of the tenantry and the incidences there of is given in details. The socio-economic conditions of the *rayots* are also dealt with in this chapter. Fifth chapter critically examines the landlord tenant relations which led to the
peasant movements in the district. Tenancy Legislations, with cautious
move of the government both before and after independence has been
fairly dealt with in chapter sixth. In order to quell the peasantry as well as
to subside the revolutionary propagandas, the government brought several
legislations to reform the land system. Importance of these legislative
measures and their impact will be dealt in this chapter. The concluding
chapter (seventh) is intended for asserting the gravity and inevitability of
the study of agrarian problem which is still an unresolved question of
Assam inclusive of Kamrup.

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