



Economic Evolution of Assam: A Comparative Analysis of the Ahom Dynasty and Colonial Rule

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ABSTRACT

This piece of work explains the economic transformation in Assam, especially the two distinct economic states under the Ahom Dynasty and the colonial rule. The comparison of these epochs highlights the dynamic nature and consequences of socio-economic changes on Assam's society. Initially, the economic foundations of Ahom Dynasty, including their agricultural based economy, trade networks and administrative processes are discussed. The subtle economic policy of the dynasty has demonstrated their contribution to peace and social harmony. And then the article moves to the era of the colonial rule, where it analyses the diverse effects of the British involvement on the Assamese economy. It examines the imposition of colonial systems, exploitation of resources, and integration into global markets, unveiling the sophisticated linkages between colonial initiatives and indigenous economies. Moreover, such analysis would define the continuity, disruption and adaption of the economic system of Assam during the regime change from Indigenous rule to Colonial reign. It attests to the interlocking indigenous economic ways during colonial assaults and

also explores the enduring impact of both eras on present Assamese economy and society. This article, through the application of historical scholarship, archival records, and theoretical frameworks, synthesizes a holistic understanding of the economic trends of Assam during the Ahom Dynasty and colonial reign. It reinforces the necessity of historical research in the revelation of the contemporary economic issues and identification of the development paths that will be sustainable in Assam.

Methodologies:

The multifaceted methodological approach adopted for this comparative research into economic development of Assam under the Ahom regime and the colonial rule is meant for comprehensive exploration and rigorous analysis. As a first step, thorough archival research was undertaken to collect the historical information, documents, and scholarly works regarding the economic policies, practices, and results of both periods. The research in the archives gave me a basis for the historical background and enabled me to pick the main issues and patterns. Moreover, qualitative techniques like historical narrative analysis were used to scrutinize and decode primary sources within their sociopolitical and economic settings, providing further insight into the underlying actors and effects of economic variation. Additionally, comparative analysis was used to contrast the economic paradigms, policies, and legacies of the Ahom Dynasty and colonialism, facilitating a better understanding of similarities, differences, and continuities. Consequently, the chosen methodological approach combined different kind of evidence and perspectives so as to reach the most comprehensive understanding of Assam's economic development and its impacts on present day development issues.

Literature Review:

1. Goswami (2012) analyses the transformative effects of colonial rule on Assamese society, focusing on Westernization. In such a context, Western educational institutions as well as Christian missionary activities led to essential cultural changes, including changes in social norms, decline in some of the indigenous practices, and emergence of a new class of elitist personalities who are Western educated. Goswami makes pointed comments on how such transformations



culminated in a hybrid identity—a cultural integration of traditional Assamese virtues with the ideals of the West.

2. The study by Baruah (1999) discusses the role of the educational reforms initiated by the British in fostering intellectual awakening and socio-political awareness in Assam. Institutions like Cotton College became centers for disseminating Western knowledge while encouraging the development of critical thinking. Baruah emphasizes how Western education played a dual role by empowering Assamese society and challenging the existing socio-cultural hierarchies, thereby laying the foundation for modern Assamese nationalism.
3. Sharma (2017) tries to highlight the role of Christian missionaries in assimilating Western values and practices in Assamese society. Though they enriched education and health, many of their ways and means ended up destroying the ancientness of Assam's cultural heritage. Sharma is highly critical of the missionary agenda pushing religious conversion at the cost of indigenous cultural heritage, leading to a cultural dichotomy in Assamese society.
4. Das (2010) explores the legacy of the colonial period in shaping gender constructs in Assam, especially with regard to women's education. However, limited in nature, these reforms sparked some thoughts in society about gender parity and women's emancipation. According to Das, Western education did slightly disrupt patriarchal values, but it restricted its advantages to urban elite women alone, making hardly an impact on rural women.
5. Bhuyan (2008) looked into the cultural consequences of British policies in Assam, shedding light on the erosion of traditional institutions within Assamese society. The study underscores the manner in which colonial administrative practices and economic exploitation displaced indigenous systems of governance and community life. Bhuyan concludes that these disruptions created a complex cultural legacy, in which modernization was accompanied by the loss of cultural identity.

1. Introduction:

The Ahom Dynasty that ruled over Assam for over six hundred years also held great sway on the economic scene of the region. At the core of the Ahom economic system was an agro-centric model which laid emphasis on rice cultivation, employing cutting-edge irrigation techniques and land management strategies to strengthen agricultural outcome (Gogoi, 2012). This concentrating on farming not only supported the growing population but also promoted surplus production, which in turn helped trade networks to develop, both inside the realm and the regions beyond borders.

Moreover, the ruling class of the Ahom established a strong administrative system, which helped them in economic governance and trade relations. The strategic placement of the kingdom at the trading route junction of Southeast Asia and South Asia gave it the pivotal role of a commercial hub (Baruah, 1986). The Ahom state involved itself in trade to a great extent, forming economic ties with the neighbouring regions and distant empires, which eventually enriched the coffers of the Ahom state, and promoted cultural exchange.

Furthermore, the Ahom Dynasty's economic policies attempted to promote the welfare of its subjects, as demonstrated through measures to minimize the damage of natural disasters on crop production and the creation of markets for a fair trade (Gogoi, 2012). The royal's support of indigenous crafts and industries also immensely strengthened the kingdom's economic stability and social cohesion (Baruah, 1986). Having this in mind, Ahom Dynasty's economic power and governing strategy were what changed the face of Assam during their reign.

The economic structure underwent radical changes under the colonial rule in Assam that led to a revamping of the societal fabric. The British colonial government, motivated by the imperialist goals and the mercantilist policies, induced a number of reforms which affected the economy in Assam in a big way. The imposition of colonial system, while the introduction of plantation agriculture, commercialization of resources, and the establishment of extractive industries such as tea, jute, and oil, completely transformed the traditional ways of production and resource use (Roy, 2014). These interventions not only shifted Assam's economy towards serving the colonial interests but also provoked socio-economic divisions and environmental disruptions, which caused the opening of cracks within local communities.

Besides, the colonialism in Assam made the region joining global markets and this shift was from self-sufficient economic systems to the interconnected networks of trade and commerce. The construction of infrastructure, such as railways and ports, helped the extraction and transportation of raw materials from rural areas to urban centers and overseas markets and concurrently reinforced Assam's position within colonial economic hierarchy (Bose, 2018). In addition, while the administration enjoyed the benefits of integration, the majority of the commercial interests remained a part and parcel of it. On the other hand, the indigenous people were being disposed and exploited in their own land.

Colonial heritage is still a significant factor in the contemporary history of Assam, as it shapes the economy, land ownership, and social ties. The institutional legacies of colonialism such as land tenure

systems, legal frameworks, and bureaucratic structures are still in place and these continue to influence economic policies and post-colonial governance in Assam (Baruah, 2016). Furthermore, the outcome of such socio-economic unevenness and environmental degradation continues to be systematic problems that require historical reconstruction of contemporary situations related to economic inequalities and environmental vulnerability.

2. Agricultural Practices and Land Revenue Systems:

Agriculture was the main source of economy during the days of the Ahoms. The Ahom kings considered agriculture as a noble profession and some of them before coming to Assam earned their livelihood through agriculture. Dignity attached to agriculture can be proved from the fact that the newly enthroned Ahom monarchs had to perform the ceremony of sacrificial ploughing at the time of his coronation (Bhuyan, 1965). It is also known that Sukapha, the founder of the Ahom kingdom in Assam, himself took to agriculture for three years before establishing his permanent capital at Charaideo.

Women took active part in the rearing of crops. They had to carry all the manual works. In the areas where there was no provision of ploughing or where cultivation was carried on by slash and burn method (Zhuming), women had to take the major part in cultivation. Transplanting and harvesting of crops were usually done by women and above all husking and grinding of crops were considered as a sole duty of women. Sugarcane planting was done by women alone. Many women also maintained kitchen gardens where vegetables, flowers and some medicinal plants were grown.

Under the rule of the Ahoms all land was considered as the property of the king. The people had no right in the soil, the land was parcelled out to them under certain regulations according to the will of the ruler. The Ahoms must have been a legacy of their ancestors. W.A Graham, a noted writer holds that from ancient times possessed a system whereby every man was allowed to hold a certain amount of land regulated in accordance with his position.

The Ahoms in the beginning of their reign did not collect any revenue on land. Lands allotted to paiks as gamati and to the officers as manmati were revenue free. Besides these, lands allotted to the members of the royal family, relatives of the kings and lands allotted to the officers were revenue free. A widow was also not required to pay tax on the lands in her possession. The lands allotted by the Ahom kings to the temples, religious institutions and to pious and meritorious persons were called Nisf Khiraj or half revenue paying estates. They were different from Khiraj or full revenue paying estates. But in

course of time these lands were made revenue free and the owners called themselves Lakhirajdars which meant total exemption from payment of revenue (Bhuyan, S.K, 1949). But David Scott stated that the Ahom kings occasionally imposed tax on Lakhiraj lands at 5 annas per pura. He continued this tax at the old rate but subsequently this tax was increased to 7 or 8 annas per pura by introducing a tax called Police Baragani. Later Lakhiraj lands were divided into several heads - Debottar lands were given for the maintenance of temples, Brahmottar lands to the Brahmanas and the Dharmottar lands were granted for religious and charitable purposes i.e. for reading the Bhagabata, performing Nam-kirtana and feeding pilgrims. In the 18th century the Ahom kings like Siva Singha (1714-44), Pramatta Singha (1744-51), Rajeswar Singha (1751-60) and Gaurinath Singha (1780-95) granted vast areas of revenue free lands to the temples and to the Brahmanas mostly in Kamrup and Darrang district. Maffat Mills in 1854 estimated that the total area of revenue free lands granted to the temples were 77,50,468 puras. The Madhaba temple of Hajo enjoyed the highest revenue free estate of 12,650 acres. The Parbatiya Gosain, the religious head of Kamrup was also assigned the largest half revenue free estates of 41,172 acres (Assam Revenue & Agricultural Proceedings, 1884). The Ahom kings also granted revenue free lands to the Muslims for the construction of the mosques or dargahs or tombs of the saints and pirs (Jenkin's Francis, 1849).

There was no aspect of trade in agricultural products prior to the coming of British East India Company in Assam. The practice of barter system was the dominant medium of socio-economic life among the people of Assam. Involvement of commercial aspect in agricultural products began after the introduction of permanent settlement in Bengal which was linked to the trade and revenue policy of the British East India Company. The treaty of Yandaboo ended not only the political problem of Assam but also transformed the economic system as a whole. In due course of time, land became the primary source of revenue for the Company. The Company encouraged the peasants to proliferate agricultural products based on the demand of overseas trade. Thereafter, they began the collection of cash revenue from the peasants which became a new system of land revenue collection. Besides, the former native rulers collected the land revenue either in the form of kind or through voluntary service to state known as the paik system. The agricultural products of India attracted the overseas market and gave considerable revenue to the British and it had also influenced colonial market interest in the agriculture products of Assam. However, British could not carry out trading activities efficiently due to less productivity of agriculture and shortage of skilled manpower. Though self-sufficient village economy was prevalent at that time, but it could not meet the demand of the commercial purpose of the British

Company. Less population in certain areas of Assam was due to epidemic diseases and political upheaval and huge acres of fertile land remained vacant. The demand for cash crops in the market encouraged the British Company to call outside cultivators to grow cash crops which eventually led to green revolution in Assam as well as commercialization of agriculture. The outside cultivators who were enterprising and skillful introduced different types of agricultural activities in Assam later, the local inhabitants along with the outsiders began to adopt cash crop cultivation.

When the British extended their rule to Assam in 1826, they recognised certain estates created during Ahom rule. But for the convenience of land revenue administration, the existing system had to be reviewed and alterations made when necessary (Goswami 1969). In Assam, 'Land and Revenue Regulation 1886' governed the land relations during the colonial period and continued after independence. The 1886 Regulation provided for state ownership of lands. The Ahom King in Assam claimed to be the owner of all lands within his territory and made extensive grants to temples, priests and charitable institutions. These were revenue free and were known as Lakhiraj grants. But the bulk of the lands were allotted to paiks instead of services. According to a set pattern, a paik was an ordinary citizen who had to render assistance to the king or his officers or the temples. When the British annexed Assam, they welcomed the theory of state ownership of all land due to two reasons: (1) in England, the same theory prevailed since the Norman Conquest and (2) it opened the prospect of reaping a rich harvest of revenue (Das 1986). The British rulers recognised only the Debottor lands as Lakhiraj and assessed all other grants by Ahom rulers for half-revenue and known as Nisf-Khiraj. The large scale depopulation on the eve of annexation enabled the British to restructure the landholding pattern for revenue maximisation. This was effected by two methods: by recognising the private ownership of land and secondly by encouraging immigration from outside. They found that only one-fifth of the total areas were under actual cultivation. They declared the existing individual occupants as the owner granted them pattah and declared them to be Mirasdars as they paid rent directly to the Government. The forests, mines, fisheries and ferries were made reserved. The rest of the tract was declared wasteland, and the Bengal Waste Land Rule was brought in to operation. The Government then began to settle newcomers in these wastelands (Roy 2007). Excepting Goalpara district and Karimganj subdivision of Cachar district, the whole of the Assam plains, by and large, has the ryotwari system of land tenure. The tea grants given under the Waste Land Settlement Rules constitute another type of estates. The principal types of land tenure in Assam at the time of independence were: (1) permanently settled estates; (2) revenue-free estates; (3) wasteland settlement grants; and (4) temporarily settled estates. Under the

temporarily settled estates, there are annual and periodically settled estates. Periodically settled estates are settled for 10 to 30 years. After the expiry of the period Government may alter the land revenue but cannot evict the landholder. Even before independence, attempts were made to regulate tenants' status and rights by the Goalpara Tenancy Act of 1929, Sylhet Tenancy Act of 1936 and Assam (Temporarily Settled District) Tenancy Act of 1935 (Goswami 1969). During the British period, the state was the ultimate owner of all lands and recognized three classes of persons who held lands under it, namely, proprietors, landholders and settlement holders. Six prominent Zamindar families of Goalpara and thousands of petty Zamindars of Sylhet (including Karimganj), the Lakhirajdars of temples and satras and the owners of fee-simple tea estates roughly comprised the class of proprietors. The periodic leaseholders, including Nisf Khirajdars and numerous revenue paying tea estates, were the landholders. Annual leaseholders were the settlement holders.

3. Trade and Commerce:

The Ahoms, who ruled Assam for centuries, that is from the 13th to the 19th century, are known to have actively promoted trade and commerce, especially in silks and teas. The geography and climate of the area permitted high-quality silk production within the region, especially muga - a variant known for being "strong and fine". The Ahoms built an industrious silk industry, whose complex weaving technique was of the highest value in both the domestic and export markets. Silk export, mainly to Bengal, Myanmar, and further regions, constituted a significant sector of the Ahom economy (Barman, 2004). This commerce was not only in terms of income generation but also assisted in integrating Assam into broader regional trade networks, furthering its influence into Southeast Asia and Southern China.

The tea industry, like silk, was another area promoted by the Ahom rulers, paving the way for Assam's eventual status as a world leader in tea production. Tea cultivation, though still limited, expanded more in the latter half of the Ahom rule, especially in the Brahmaputra Valley. Even though it was the British East India Company who would later make Assam a globally major producer of tea in the 19th century, the Ahoms had already started cultivating and using local tea varieties, as reported by Patgiri in 1999. This early exposure to tea, accompanied by other agricultural products in the region, accelerated the enhancement of the trade potential and diversification of Assam's economy.

The Ahom also had an extensive system of inland and foreign trade paths that allowed the accommodation of people and goods. Key trade paths cut across Assam from Central Asia, Southeast Asia to the Bay of Bengal. The Brahmaputra River was an important inland artery for commerce, as

commerce merchants were transporting goods such as silk, tea, rice, and salt on boats. In addition to inland trade, the Ahoms also traded with foreign kingdoms such as Myanmar, Tibet, and China and traded at sea through the Bay of Bengal. These routes not only ushered in economic growth but also helped ensure exchange in cultures for the prosperity of Assam in matters of heritage-rich state, Hazarika, (2004).

In the colonial phase of Assam, the trade and commerce of the region experienced a tremendous shift, especially after the tea plantations came. British East India Company, after realizing the potential of Assam's fertile lands for tea cultivation, initiated the process for tea plantation development in early 19th century. Although tea plants are native to Assam, it was the British who started its mass commercialization. In 1823, the British started systematic tea cultivation in the Brahmaputra Valley after discovering wild tea plants in the region, which later was cultivated in plantations (Patgiri, 1999). By the 1850s, Assam had emerged as one of the largest tea-producing regions in the world, and the tea industry quickly became the mainstay of Assam's economy under British colonial rule. This rapid expansion of tea plantations reshaped the economic landscape, replacing the earlier, more diversified economy with one heavily dependent on export-oriented agriculture.

Policies of the British East India Company saw the operations being handled within Assam with great influence towards attaining control over the resources and the production going into the imperial purse. Policies were created, and strict methodology was adopted by the Company to guide the flow of Assam's natural production, including tea, into the world market. The East India Company monopolized the tea of Assam, sending it to Europe through British merchant networks - essentially to Britain, where it became a very lucrative item (Mackenzie, 1995). In addition, the British sought to replace indigenous networks of trade with their own imperial commercial networks. Establishing tea plantations involved a far-reaching reorganization of the patterns of landholding as well as the adoption of exploitative labor systems, starting with indentured labor recruited from other regions of India, which has had long-lasting consequences in terms of social and economic dynamics (Goswami, 2006).

The economic policies followed during the colonial times also influenced the overall trade environment in Assam. The British sought to create a highly centralized economy focused on the production of raw materials, including tea, for export to European markets. This shift had significant consequences for traditional trade routes and local industries. While Assam's silk and other traditional goods were still produced, the focus on tea cultivation and export marginalized other forms of

production. Additionally, British trade policies, such as the imposition of export taxes and the regulation of transport routes, further consolidated the control of colonial authorities over local resources. The impact of these policies extended beyond the tea industry, influencing the structure of Assam's economy well into the 20th century, as the region became increasingly reliant on the export of a few key commodities (Bose, 1998).

4. Taxation and Revenue Collection:

In the Ahom Dynasty under the ruling state of Assam, taxation and revenue collection were essential to the maintenance of the administrative system and the state economy. The Ahom Dynasty's taxation system mainly involved land revenue, and the income of the state was mainly dependent on this. The kingdom introduced a way known as 'Barang' or land grants in which cultivators received land for paying of taxes. Furthermore, the state collected trade and craft dues, which were the main source of income.

Nobles of the Ahom administration were "Borphukan" and "Borpatrogohain" who had to contribute greatly in revenue collection. These nobles were tasked with tax collecting in their respective land holdings and making sure they followed taxation laws. They exercised their power and acted as tax judges on revenues issues. Alongside the nobility being involved in the collection of revenues, this also helped in the proper administration of taxes which further strengthened their power in the political system of the Ahom Dynasty.

However, Ahoms had established a very flexible tax system with its provision for variations in tax rates depending on parameters such as land fertility and crop yields. This intelligent way of assessing tax contribute greatly to the reduction of disparity and ensured that tax burden was distributed equitably among the citizens. Also, Ahom coffers were augmented by tributes received from subsidiary states and trade routes, resulting in enhanced economic stability and political standing of the kingdom within the region. The economic policies, social structuring and political dynamics in the medieval Assam was entangled in the relationships between taxation, revenue collection and governance of the Ahom Dynasty.

Throughout the colonial era, Assam has experienced substantial change in revenue and tax collection policies under the British Government. The imposition of new tax policies by the colonial administrators was a symbol of colonial economic exploitation as the main objective was to obtain

maximum revenue from the region. The British authorities created land revenue systems like the Permanent Settlement and later the Ryotwari system that changed the balance of power between the state and the landholders. These taxation systems often led to huge burden on peasants which often in addition to the agrarian distress further contributed to the socio-economic inequalities (Das, 2018).

Besides, colonial authorities exploited the abundant natural resources of Assam for their own economic benefit, thereby aggravating the economic domination of the region. The colonial administration extracted a variety of resources such as tea, timber, and minerals primarily for export to Britain. Besides the loss of natural reserves, it also prohibited both the growth of indigenous industries and local economies. The revenue collection tools were often coercive, with punitive measures being applied to communities that failed to meet tax targets, leading in turn to general poverty and mass destitution (Baruah, 2016).

Therefore, the colonial period saw a major restructuring of Assam's economic dynamics, dominated by oppressive tax policies and raw material extraction at the expense of local population. These policies not only disrupted the indigenous economic systems but also solidified the colonial domination and extended the socio-economic degradation. The historical colonial taxation methods and revenue collection mechanisms that are still shaping modern economic challenges in Assam highlight the perpetual impact of colonialism on the path of the region's development (Saikia, 2019).

5. Infrastructure Development:

The Ahom Dynasty that ruled Assam for nearly six centuries proved itself highly innovative in infrastructure building, mostly in the construction of roads, bridges, and water management systems. Road construction was taken up particularly because the rulers envisaged connecting administrative and trade centers in well-designed road patterns to improve governance and transaction of trade. Such road infrastructure often entailed following natural terrains to make entry and exit from difficult regions of Assam easy. This also facilitated the economic integration of regions and sturdied administrative control (Sarma, 1991).

Probably one of the great engineering feats of the Ahom Kingdom was the construction of massive wooden bridges across the Brahmaputra and all the tributaries. As indicated by the engineering of the then time, which made use of locally sourced timber, these bridges played a very important role in keeping open the trade routes and military movement. This was because of the indigenous techniques

that ensured durability and ease of repair, given the heavy monsoons that were characteristic in the region (Baruah, 2005).

The Ahom rulers were also adept at the proper management of water resources. They constructed reservoirs, canals, and embankments to further facilitate agriculture. Such water management systems ensured that floodwaters and resulted in availability of water throughout the whole year for rice cultivation by ensuring an un-interrupted supply of water for rice cultivation. Such infrastructure ensured increased agricultural productivity, economic stability, and food security of the people (Gogoi, 2002). The innovative approaches of the Ahom Dynasty toward infrastructure building reflect the dedication of the rulers toward a sustainable and prosperous economy.

Infrastructure Development in Colonial Assam- This phase of colonization saw significant infrastructure building with largely economic and administrative objectives in mind by the British colonial rulers. It is in this phase of transformation that the railways were first discovered in Assam in the late 19th century when the Assam Bengal Railway came up. It was aimed to facilitate transport of tea, coal, and other commodities from the region to ports like Kolkata and greatly enhanced communication inside Assam and with the rest of India. During the early 20th century, the development of railways changed Assam's economic activities by offering freer commodity transportation while opening up opportunities for subsequent economic activities (Baruah, 1999).

Another important role which the colonial period played was the establishment of the telegraph system. A mid-19th-century technological innovation, the telegraph transformed communication-theoretically, the use of a telegraph line connecting Assam to other major centers of administration and commerce would bypass earlier delays in conveying information that retarded decisions to varying extents in each sphere. This inclusion of Assam into a broader communication framework underscored the colonial objective of making resource extraction more efficient and sustaining the colonial state's leverage over the region (Guha, 1983).

Transport and communication aside, new infrastructures such as bridges, roads, and urban planning efforts also began to gain importance during this period. The colonial state focused on all-weather roads connecting tea gardens to administrative centers. Urban centers like Guwahati and Shillong began to develop, with facilities like public buildings, drainage systems, and educational institutions. However, these projects predominantly catered to colonial economic interests rather than

local welfare. The benefits, while significant in the long term, were unequally distributed, with indigenous communities often excluded from their advantages (Misra, 2011).

6. Impact on Local Industries:

While the Ahom Dynasty ruled Assam, there was an evident impact on the local industries, and there was a surge in cottage industries as well as handicrafts and local production. The Ahom dynasty promoted the development of local fine arts and crafts, which in turn, were the cornerstone of Assam's economy. Cottage industries, including weaving, pottery, metal, and woodwork, were trained and favoured by the state of Ahom. The dynasty's policies promoted self-sufficiency and local production, which in turn generated economic resilience and the chances of community livelihoods (Barua, 1986).

The Ahom Dynasty's assistance in the development of local industries not only brought about economic progress, but also served as a medium of cultural preservation and identity formation. The popularity of Assamese handicrafts was largely due to their high quality and excellence of artistry, which made them attractive both within the region and beyond its borders. Ahom Kings stood for promoting local talents and skills thus ensuring the transfer of traditional knowledge from generation to generation, which in turn lead to the creation of beautiful craftsmanship and cultural heritage of the indigenous people (Gogoi, 2013).

Along with this, the booming of local industries under the Ahom Dynasty was another factor that assisted in the consolidation and the economic empowerment of the Assamese society as a whole. The network decentralization of production and distribution created an equitable distribution of wealth and resources that reinforced community ownership and solidarity. The local Ahom rulers gave preference to local industries instead of the centralized economic structures. Therefore, the economic ecosystem was more resilient and could withstand the external pressures. This, in turn, ensured the prosperity of the Assamese people (Sarma, 1992).

In the colonial period, it is noteworthy that Assam underwent a major shift in terms of its economic structure, especially in the sphere of local industrial sector. The arrival of colonial power weakened the local production sectors that had prospered under the rule of the Ahom Kings. Traditional artisan practices were standing in front of a wall as colonial policies preferred the promotion of British industries and denying local production. This change had a pivotal influence on the well-being of

artisans and craftsmen, who were disregarded in an economy that was moving headlong into the industrial sphere.

Modern factories, which coincided with efforts by colonial powers to exploit resources and establish their authority over Assam's economy, became a prominent feature of the colonial economic agenda. British money and technologies gave rise to the creation of modern industrial enterprises which were primarily focused on proceeding the extraction and processing of natural resources including tea, oil, and timber. These modern factories, owned and run mostly by British companies, significantly reshaped the economy of Assam, forcing out the local industries and changing the well-established methods of making and using products.

The consequences of the colonial economic policies on local industries were not just economic, but also had social and cultural dimensions. The decline of indigenous industries resulted in a breakdown of traditional knowledge passing systems and craftsmanship which disrupted age-old social structures that were centered around artisanal communities. Furthermore, the concentration of economic power in the hands of the colonial authorities and British industrialists contributed to the perpetuation of inequalities and exploitation within Assamese society. Consequently, the emergence of modern factories during the colonial time did not only enhance the economic situation but also exposed the intricacies and inequalities of colonial economic order which made a significant mark on the socio-economic fabric of Assam.

7. Social and Cultural Influence:

The Ahom Dynasty ruled Assam nearly for six centuries and had played a vital role in infusing the socio-cultural fabric of that region. The Ahom rulers were great patrons of arts, literary, architectural, and artistic gains that energized the Assamese culture. They encouraged classical works in the Assamese language like Buranjis that served as records and literary jewels. Temples like Kamakhya were not only meant for spiritual worships but also aesthetic sites. The patronage of the Ahom kings established unique art forms and customs that define the Assamese identity today (Baruah, 2013).

Culture exchange was the other arena where the Ahom Dynasty could be felt in their influence. The Ahoms-a dynasty that migrated from Southeast Asia with their own Tai-Ahom traditions and beliefs which eventually merged with indigenous practices-became a union which has resulted in the development of an independent Assamese culture that features inclusivity and diversity. The open Ahom

administration further made it easier to ideas from intercommunity coexistence become a richer tapestry of cultural elements, such as dance forms like Bihu and traditional crafts like weaving and pottery, according to Gait (1967).

The society structure under Ahom rule was hierarchical and efficient, yet effective. The system of feudalism stressed collective responsibility and social cohesiveness. Economic self-reliance through the division of labor under the Paik system further bonded the members in the family. Additionally, the Ahom kings implemented policies of social reforms that reduced social inequality by integrating other ethnic groups into the larger Assamese fold. Such measures resulted in a sense of unity and cultural pride even as outer pressures persisted (Sharma, 2011).

The colonial period in Assam quite distinctively marked a departure from the otherwise traditional socio-cultural fabric of Assam. Through western ideologies, it gave shape to modernization in the region. This has been characterized by wide-scale westernization epitomized by the adoption of European methods of education, legal frameworks, and structures of governance. This period had deliberate attempts to form classes of western-educated elites to assist in administrative tasks as well as spreading western ideologies. It enormously exposed the influences of Western culture and values, stripping off many old Assamese customs, imposing new social order with its implementation (Goswami, 2012).

The colonial plan greatly targeted education reform. The imposition of Western-style institutions of education came with schools and colleges such as Cotton College in 1901, initiating a new wave of intellectual awakening among the Assamese. Not only did these institutions promote Western science and literature, but they also brought about critical thinking and a sense of nationalism among the Assamese youth. The reforms will gradually saw questions over orthodox practices and eventually some socio-political movements over retrieving Assamese identity (Baruah, 1999).

Social changes within this era also reflected the changing nature of cultural and gender dynamics. Exposure to Western education and ideals began slowly grading the ground for the erosion of caste-based discrimination and patriarchal structures again within the more urban and educated circles. Education for women was still very meager, yet it would one day lay the grounds for Assam's future gender equality movements. At the same time, however, colonial policies generally conflicted with more traditional village economies and indigenous cultural institutions, thus leaving Assamese society wrestling with the conflicting forces of modernization and cultural preservation (Sharma, 2017).

8. Legacy and Continuity:

The economic legacy of the Ahom dynasty still persists in the form of a strong influence on contemporary Assam. It was during Ahom rule that Assam saw the flourishing of a strong agrarian economy built upon the backbone of the complex irrigation systems and land administration. The Ahom rulers felt an environment for trade, national and international, and contributed to the integration of Assam into the wider market system. In addition, this dynasty focused on infrastructure development, including roads and waterways, thus paving the way for future economic prosperity in the region (Goswami, 1995).

The Ahom Dynasty's lasting legacy in modern Assam's economy can be seen in various contexts. Agrarian practices and land tenure systems developed in the Ahom period are consolidated in villages and are responsible for people's livelihoods and shape land-use patterns. Further, the spirit of business and trade that the Ahom rulers crafted is still present in Assam in modern trading practices, although in an evolved form. In addition, the architectural extravaganza as well as cultural heritage left behind by the Ahom dynasty acts as powerful symbols of Assam's enduring resilience and powerful economy which in turn boosts tourism and cultural industries of the region (Goswami, 1995).

Along with future modernization and external factors impacting economy, the glory of the Ahom dynasty remains as a reminder of ancient history. Its economic principles and infrastructural investments still sustain the development agenda of Assam, and at the same time, reaffirm the resilience and adaptability of indigenous economic practices despite varying global dynamics (Goswami, 1995). In the process of tackling the economic issues of today, one cannot avoid the historical episodes, especially those related to the Ahom Dynasty, because they are essential for the creation of sustainable development strategies that agree with the economic and cultural fabric of the region.

The impact of the colonial era on Assam's economy was immense, and it continues to be felt to this very day. The British intervention had a profound impact on the economic structures and saw the introduction of new systems of land tenure, taxation, and resource extraction. The colonial rulers' harsh economic policies, which only aimed to benefit the British empire, continued to influence the economic outlook of Assam, causing long-lasting inequalities and underdevelopment.

The vestiges of colonial economic policies continue to echo in the present-day Assam in distinct ways. The lasting influence of monoculture, which was introduced by colonial authorities for

commercial value, remains prevalent to this day in numerous areas. Furthermore, infrastructural development during the colonial period usually focused on resource extraction instead of local development, which often results in hinterlands with poor networks and infrastructures even now. These historical legacies are the barriers for modern developments toward economic diversification and equitable growth.

The sustainability of the colonial-era economic structures demonstrates that it is necessary to analyse the historical continuities that lead to the present economic realities. Through recognition and critical examination of such legacies, policymakers may unveil the systemic inequalities and design policies that promote sustainable and equitable economic development in Assam.

The vestiges of colonial economic systems still echo in the contemporary way of life in Assam, and express themselves in various forms. The trace of the monocultures, brought in by colonial authorities for commercialization, is still dominating the landscape in many places (Bose, A. (2004). *Agrarian Change under Colonialism: The Example of Assam, 1826-1947*. Routledge). Further, the colonial era infrastructure development mainly emphasized the extraction of resources rather than the local development which have led to underdevelopment and the poor quality of connectivity even today (Guha, A. (2011). *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam, 1826-1947*. Oxford University Press). These historical legacies present obstacles to the modern pursuits of economic diversification and inclusive growth.

9. Findings:

1. Ahom Dynasty Economic Model:

- (a) Agrarian-centric economy with a focus on rice cultivation.
- (b) Development of trade networks, both intra-regional and interregional.
- (c) Establishment of administrative mechanisms to support economic activities.

2. Colonial Economic Impact:

- (a) Introduction of exploitative economic policies serving colonial interests.
- (b) Imposition of monoculture and commercial agricultural practices.
- (c) Infrastructural development prioritizing resource extraction over local needs.

3. Enduring Legacies:

- (a) Persistence of monoculture and exploitative economic structures in present-day agriculture.
- (b) Lingering infrastructural imbalances and inadequate development in certain regions.



(c) Cultural and social resilience shaping local initiatives and community-driven development.

4. Challenges and Opportunities:

(a) Contemporary economic challenges stemming from historical legacies.

(b) Opportunities for inclusive development through harnessing indigenous strengths.

(c) Integration of historical insights into policy frameworks for more contextually relevant strategies.

5. Pathways for Sustainable Development:

(a) Recognition of indigenous resilience as a foundation for economic autonomy.

(b) Collaboration and innovation to navigate economic evolution with resilience.

(c) Embracing a holistic approach that honours the past while embracing future possibilities for prosperity and inclusivity.

10. Suggestions:

1. Promotion of Economic Diversification:

(a) Encourage diversification of economic activities beyond traditional sectors such as agriculture.

(b) Support the growth of industries like tourism, renewable energy, and small-scale manufacturing to create job opportunities and stimulate economic growth.

2. Investment in Infrastructure Development:

(a) Prioritize infrastructure projects that improve connectivity, such as roads, bridges, and ports, to facilitate the movement of goods and people within Assam and with neighbouring regions.

(b) Enhance access to basic amenities like electricity, clean water, and healthcare services, especially in rural and remote areas, to improve living standards and attract investment.

3. Empowerment of Marginalized Communities:

(a) Implement policies and programs aimed at empowering marginalized communities, including indigenous peoples and minority groups, through education, skill development, and access to resources.

(b) Foster inclusive decision-making processes that involve marginalized communities in the planning and implementation of development initiatives to ensure their voices are heard and their needs are met.

4. Sustainable Resource Management:



- (a) Adopt sustainable practices for the management of natural resources, including forests, waterways, and mineral deposits, to ensure their long-term viability and minimize environmental degradation.
- (b) Promote community-based natural resource management approaches that empower local communities to sustainably utilize and conserve their natural resources while promoting economic development.

5. Promotion of Entrepreneurship and Innovation:

- (a) Support entrepreneurship and innovation by providing access to financing, mentorship, and technical assistance to aspiring entrepreneurs and small businesses.
- (b) Foster an ecosystem that encourages innovation and technology adoption in various sectors, such as agriculture, healthcare, and manufacturing, to enhance productivity and competitiveness.

6. Enhancement of Trade and Investment Opportunities:

- (a) Facilitate trade and investment by improving trade infrastructure, reducing bureaucratic hurdles, and promoting Assam as an attractive destination for investment.
- (b) Strengthen international trade linkages and explore opportunities for cross-border trade with neighbouring countries to expand market access and promote economic integration.

11. Conclusion:

Concluding this comparative study of Assam's economic progress under the Ahom Dynasty and the colonial rule indicates the continuing effects and continuities which make up the current economic picture. The Ahom Dynasty set the Ahom Kingdom on agrarian prosperity and trade networks on which a cohesive society was established. However, with the dawn of colonialism arose myriads of changes that were characterized by exploitative economic policies as well as infrastructural imbalances. Even though the years have passed, traces of colonial economic institutions survive, which continue to pose obstacles to the present endeavours towards economic diversification and equitable growth.

Knowledge of historical tracks are vital for developing strategies to cope with economic problems currently prevailing in Assam. By recognizing and critically studying the legacies of both eras, policymakers are able to cope with the complexities of the area's economic factors more easily. This includes too supporting inclusive development initiatives that take local needs into account and empower the marginalized communities so that the economy of the state becomes more resilient and

equitable. In the final analysis, this comparative study shows that historical inquiry can be used in providing theories for modern economic discourse and designing for paths of sustainable development in Assam.

Additionally, this analysis demonstrates the adaptability of Assam's economy and populace in the wake of past disruptive forces. In spite of the oppressive imposition of colonial economic policies, indigenous patterns of behaviours and cultural resilience remain, giving a cornerstone for the local projects and community-driven activities. Through acknowledging and utilizing these indigenous assets, Assam can blaze a trail to economic independence and self-reliance. In order to have development strategies that are rooted in the local context, and responsive to the needs of a diverse population, the insight of history should be integrated into the policy frameworks. The future course of action should be in line with this principle. With a shared vision that preserves the past while encouraging innovation, Assam is enabled to sustain the economic transition, which will lead to a more prosperous and growth-oriented environment.

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