

Geographical Factors And Economic Development In The North East India; A Historical Perspectives

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Abstract-

This article tries to trace out the economic development in the history of the North East of India. The region is having lot of diversity and so development pattern in the different pockets were also different. However with the passage of time and in spite of many difficulties agriculture, manufacturing and trade developed. North East of India had trade relation not only with the rest of the part of India but with other countries as well. The article covers following points.

1. Changing perception of development.
 2. Difficulty of understanding development in the North East India.
 3. A brief historical background.
 4. Agricultural development.
 5. Tea industry
 6. infrastructure
 7. Minerals.
 8. Manufacturing
 9. Trade.
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INTRODUCTION

Past illuminates present and enables us to look at a greater distance with clarity. Background knowledge of development in the past helps us to set and realize viable goals of development in the future. As Newton said, "If I have seen further it is by standing on ye sholders of Giants". Development is a dynamic concept and meaning of development goes on changing from time to time and place to place. Few decades back rise in per capita income was considered as adequate parameter for measuring development, but that is not the case now. Now development is measured in terms of people's accessibility to clean drinking water, education, road and electricity. In short what we have today is called 'inclusive and holistic' development.

However while studying development in history; same parameters cannot be applied for the simple reason of non-availability of data. Traditionally history writing is mainly focused on the life of royalty and life of masses hardly finds any place in it. Thankfully, there is some positive change in the trend and people are thinking about the history of the commoners i.e. Subaltern history. But there is a long way to go before we have a relatively clear picture of life of the commoners in ancient and medieval period.

Understanding development in the history of North East is all the more difficult. The resources are relatively scanty and the region is also very diverse in terms of population and geographical variations. This diversity and rugged terrain had restricted the growth of economic activities.

While tracing the historical development of any economic activity like agriculture, it becomes difficult to reach a conclusion about when the particular development had taken place. Like it is difficult to ascertain, when some of the tribes had left shifting cultivation and took to settled cultivation. Therefore the picture of development in the Ancient and Medieval period is quit vague.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND CLIMATIC CONDITIONS IN NORTH EAST INDIA -

Geographical and climatic conditions play an important role in deciding the course of development and more so during Ancient and Medieval period. It is imperative to take an overview of the geographical and climatic

condition of the North East region to understand the pattern of development historically. Towards North and East, the region is surrounded by the Himalayan ranges and extension of the Himalayan ranges like Manipuri hills, Naga Hills, Mizo hills, Khasi Hills, Jayantiya Hills and Garo Hills. Due to its peculiar geographical location at the foothills of the Himalayas, the Monsoon gives very heavy rainfall in this region (more than 250 Cm/ year at some places). The Himalayas stands right across the flow of monsoon and causes heavy rainfall.

Out of 262,230 Sq. Km.¹, More than 70% of total area in the North East is hilly and nearly 50% is under forest. Major part of the forest comprises of rain forest. Valleys in the North East provided required fertile land for the development of agriculture. Assam, Manipur and Tripura have considerable area of valley lands. They are the Brahmaputra and the Barak valleys in Assam, the Imphal valley in Manipur and the Gomati, the Khowai, the Howrah, the Manu and the Muhuri valleys in Tripura. Some flat valley lands between hills and hillocks are there as well in all these states.

The Brahmaputra valley is an alluvial plain, about 725 km in length and average breadth of about 80.4 km. The valley covers an area of approximately 55000 sq. km. (Ganguly, p.7 21)

The states surrounding Assam like Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram and Tripura have more mountainous terrain.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND-Tracing historical background of such a diverse region like North East India in short space is a very difficult task. The Brahmaputra valley and The Barak valley with its plain cultivable land had different history than surrounding hill states like Manipur and Arunachal. The North East resembles a basket overflowing with colorful flowers, each having its own unique beauty, which can be better appreciated than described.

Geographical and climatic conditions in North East India prevented the growth of an extensive empire. Excess of rainfall, flood and humid weather had also created havoc with the historical resources and destroyed them. Same must have been the case with the developmental work that might have taken place in the past. It is lost to posterity due to the ravage of time.

The largest among the river valleys is Brahmaputra valley. It was in this valley and in the surrounding area that the kingdoms flourished in the past.

While studying about the ancient period, the history and myth gets mixed up. It becomes difficult to fix a reference point. The Mahabharata refers to the kingdom of far east as Pragjyotispur. Its ruler Bhagdatta fought on the side of the Kauravas in the great Mahabharata war, which was fought approximately around 1400 B.C.² Bhagadatta also presented valuable gifts and elephants to the Pandavas during *Rajsuya Yagya*. The description of presenting valuable gifts and elephants gives an indication that the kingdom must have been prosperous. Arjuna, the hero in the Mahabharata also believed to have married the daughter of the king of Manipur.

The Mahabharata and the Puranas mention some powerful rulers of North East India like Narakasura, Bhagadatta and Banasur. The appellation '*Asura*' shows that they were of Non-Aryan origin. Their period is shrouded in mystery of mythology, but repeated reference to them in the ancient literature indicates that they were powerful rulers and ruled over strong kingdom.

Some reliable information about the ancient period in Assam is available from the 4th century onwards. Pushyvarman is believed to have laid the foundation of the Varman line of kings in Kamrupa. However the Varman kings also traces their origin to mythical Narkasura.

Bhaskarvarman was one of the greatest monarchs of the Varman dynasty that ruled over Kamrupa. His alliance was sought by Harsha(7th century). According to '*Harshcharita*' by Bana, when Harsha ascended the throne of Thanesar, ambassador named Hamasavega arrived from Bhasakarvarman and brought many valuable presents of articles. (Gait P.26).

Mentioning of the valuable gifts and friendship between Harsha, the great monarch of his time and Bhaskarvarman indicates that Kamrupa was an important kingdom of that time.

In the eleventh century the Pala dynasty came to the power in Kamrupa. Ratna Pala, the second ruler of this dynasty was a very powerful ruler. He built a strong fortified capital on the bank of the Brahmaputra. Many

wealthy merchants lived there in safety, and it boasted of many plastered turrets. Learned men, religious preceptors and poets, encouraged by the king made it a place of resort. He is said to have derived much wealth from his copper mines. (Gait P.34)

However the hold of the kings of Kamrupa and Ahom was precarious on the surrounding hill tribes. The hill chiefs accepted the sovereignty of the king when the king was strong, but centrifugal tendencies surfaced time and again. It was difficult to march a huge army and chastise the rebellious chief. The geographical factors proved main hindrance in consolidating the authority of the central power. The same geographical factors also helped the Ahoms to protect their independence from the Mughals.

Excluding North East frontier province (Present day Arunachal Pradesh) Tripura and Manipur, other states i.e. Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram were together known as Assam in the Indian History. The name also went on changing. During Medieval period we have reference to Kamrupa and Ahom kingdom. The western part of Brahmaputra valley was known as Kamrupa and the Eastern part as Ahom kingdom. When the name was changed to Assam is difficult to ascertain. Kamrupa was referred to as Pragiyotishapur in the Mahabharata and name Kamrupa came into use from the time of the Puranas.

The Ahoms, a branch of the Tai or Shan race, conquered Assam and established their kingdom in the thirteen century. They first established their kingdom in the Upper Brahmaputra valley and over the centuries extended their rule into the entire Brahmaputra valley. They also resisted the Mughals from extending their empire into Assam. The Ahoms ruled over Assam for about 600 years and built up a moderately prosperous kingdom. Under them rice cultivation was expanded and arts and crafts were developed. Trade with neighboring hillmen, Bengal, Bhutan, Tibet, Manipur and Burma expanded. Slowly they established their control over large part of Assam and many times came into conflict with Koch kingdom towards west. 'Padishahnamah' (Biography of Emperor Shah Jahan) mentions about the king of Assam as 'An infidel who has a thousand elephants and a hundred thousand foot'. (Gait P.123). This indicates that the Ahom kingdom was very powerful. Assam attracted the Mughals for elephants and other forest product. This led to many wars, but in the end the Mughals failed to establish their control over Ahoms.

Mir Jumla, the Mughal governor of Bengal invaded Assam in 17th century. He was accompanied by a writer named Shihabuddin, who wrote a detailed description of country. His account is a valuable source of Medieval Assam. According to him,

"There are cultivated fields and gardens. From Lakhugarh to Garhgaon, also there are roads, houses and farms in the same style; and a lofty and wide embanked road has been constructed up to Garhgaon for traffic."(Gates P. 145)

During the period of Ahom rule Assam achieved unprecedented improvements in the field of agriculture, infrastructure, industries, internal and external trade and social and cultural aspect as well. This was possible on account of the political-economic structure gradually built up by the Ahoms.

Wealth accumulated by the rulers were mainly in the form of idle assets like gold, silver, jewellery and imported costly articles of dress, furniture, utensils etc. There was hardly any investment for increasing production. Some investments were made in buildings and public works.

Moamaria rebellion that continued for 40 years from 1769 to 1806 A.D. disrupted the development in Assam. The rebellion was suppressed with the British help. However the British withdrew from Assam and taking advantage of the situation Burmese army entered in Assam. They overran almost the entire Brahmaputra valley and the neighboring kingdom including Manipur. They also reached British territories in India. This led to conflict between British and Burmese. The Burmese were defeated. Assam was annexed by the British (1826 A.D.).

In the early 16th century Bisva Singh established a powerful Koch kingdom and built Koch Bihar a fine city. Nar Narayana of Koch kingdom was a powerful ruler in the middle of the 16th century. Guwahati and Kamkhya were the part of the Koch kingdom. The Koch kings often came into conflict with their neighbor, the Ahoms in the east.

In the early 16th century Kachari kingdom with its capital at Dimapur was a flourishing kingdom. The Ahoms defeated them. The Kacharis were forced to leave Dimapur and retreated further south. Though they ruled there for many years, their power slowly reduced and they ceased to play any important role in the history of the North East after 17th century.

After occupying Ahom kingdom, the British slowly established their control over Cachar, Jaintia, Khasi hills, Lushai hills and Naga Hills. The process and resistance of the tribal continued till up to independence in 1947 A.D. and the boundary of the British India in the North East was never clearly defined.

The colonial rule engendered significant structural changes in social, cultural, political and economic dimensions of lives of people of the region, besides administratively integrating the areas in varying degrees of effectiveness into the rest of India.

In Assam and the adjoining areas the British started the process of directly introducing administrative, judicial and revenue reforms in order to modernize these systems. Even though Manipur and Tripura were not directly ruled by them, British political agent was appointed there in 1835 in Manipur and 1871 in Tripura. They tried to mould the administration of these states on the British pattern.

The colonial rulers established a civil government after suppressing the prevailing chaos. It built up a functional bureaucratic set up. The total change in the administrative structure was welcome for the people of Assam, who tasted an environment of peace and security after a long time. The colonial government of course took many unwelcome and oppressive measures that hit people very hard.

The revenue system was reorganized for the purpose of appropriating as much surplus of income generated as possible. The *Paik* system was replaced by the ryotwari system. Slavery was abolished in 1843 and the slaves were released.

Though the political agents posted at Imphal and Agartala the British intervened into the affairs of Manipur and Tripura. The political agents advised the princes to bring about reforms in the system of administration, ensured maintenance of peace and orderly fiscal management. The rulers were also persuaded to develop infrastructure and development of trade was encouraged.

British government in India imposed state monopoly over forest resources and regulated the access of the local people to forest. Their attempt of commercialization of forest resources disturbed the traditional mode of resource use. This development resulted in basic economic changes in the region. The entire period of the colonial rule had been a period of integration of the region's economy into colonial economy of India.

The colonial policy of economic exploitation had created lot of resentment and resulted in revolts in the North East like the Jayantiya Rebellion (1860-63), The Phulaguri Uprising (1861) and Assam Riots (1893-94). The British managed to suppress the revolts. However some changes like reduction in land tax were introduced in the economic policies to contain the grievances of the people.

The colonial rulers pursued the policy of raising revenue collection by encouraging settlement of waste-lands, which encouraged immigration of different groups of people from outside. Growth of tea industry also resulted in the migration of labours from outside. Availability of cultivable land for settlement on easy terms and conditions induced migration of landless peasants from the neighboring provinces of Bengal. Apart from the peasants many other people from Bengal also came to Assam as government servant, doctors, lawyers, teachers,

businessman as well as other professionals. The Marwari businessmen also migrated to North East for business. On account of such immigration, population of Assam steadily grew and fueled the growth of economic activity and expansion of the area under cultivation.

Colonial rule of 121 years in Assam was very favorable to tea industry. It also put an end to Assam's long period of isolation from other parts of India and carried out programme of modernization in social, political and economic sphere.

The kingdom of Manipur has its own unique history. The tradition traces the beginning of the royal family of Manipur to 33 A.D. The Meities have a rich cultural heritage. The written Meitei language and literature have long history. Their state chronicle written in Meitei dates back to first century A.D. In the early 12th century the first written constitution of the Manipur kingdom was written. The Meities are spirited people, skilled horse-riders and fierce cavalymen in wars. Over the period of time Manipur emerged as a distinct political entity with the territorial spread extending from Manipur hills to surrounding hills. There were times when territorial boundary included part of Burma. The history of Manipur is replete with Meitei-Burmese conflict. The latest invasion of Manipur by Burma took place in 1819 which ended with the conclusion of the treaty of Yandabo in 1826 between East India Company and the king of Ava (Burma). The structure of political and economic institution built by the king of Manipur over the centuries crumbled as Manipur was devastated and depopulated during the Burmese occupation.

Under the British influence through Political agent stationed in Imphal administrative structure of Manipur was streamlined. The British looked upon Manipur as a defense base against the aggressive design of Burma.

The state economy was reconstructed by the King Gambhir Singh after 1826 with the British support. The state slowly recovered. But in 1834 fertile Kabaw valley covering an area of 1200 sq. miles was handed over to Burma. This was more than Manipur valley having an area of 650 sq. miles. This gave some setback to economic development.

In 1835 British political agent was posted at Imphal. Over the years the influence of the political agent grew. They also played an important role in succession to the throne and the ruling king always looked towards the political agent for support to retain his throne. After the death of King Gambhir Singh in 1834, there was a long conflict for the throne. Finally Chandrkriti Singh gained possession of the throne and was recognized as king in 1850 by the British. In the India's war of independence in 1857 Chandrkriti Singh supported the British. During Anglo-Burmese war also he supported the British leading to the annexation of Burma to British India in 1885. He also received help from the British against the Nagas, Mizos and Kukis.

British government often intervened in the internal affairs of Manipur, this angered the people and resulted in Anglo-Manipuri war in 1891. The Manipuri were defeated. Though the king was reestablished, his position became much inferior to the British. A yearly fine of Rs. 50000 was imposed on the king. British introduced many structural changes in the administration of Manipur.

Like Manipur, Tripura kings also traces the history of their kingdom to the remote past of the Mahabharata. According to the historical evidence, the state formation process in Tripura took shape in the 15th century. Until Tripura's integration into the Indian union in 1949, it was a princely state known as 'Hill Tipperah' because of its predominantly hill terrain. Roughly 2/3rd of its total area of 10477 sq. kms are hilly. About 3000 sq. km. of area of the state is suitable for wet rice cultivation. In course of time the Tripura kings became very powerful and they extended the boundary of the kingdom to the west beyond the Tripura hills and occupied large part of Bengal. But they were thrown back by the Mughal, leaving them finally with a Zamindari estate named 'Chakle Roshnabad' in the plains bordering Hill Tipperah, for which an annual rent payable to the Mughal was fixed at Rs. 50000/-. A similar arrangement continued even after the British came to power. The area of Zamindari estate

was 1476 sq. km. The Zamindari yielded an annual income of about Rs. 6 lakh, which was much higher than the total revenue of the Hill Tipperah state at Rs.150000 in 1871-72.

In the 18th century the British started intervening in the affairs of Tripura. That time condition in Tripura was not good. There were palace intrigues over the succession, wars with the Nawab of Bengal and Kuki raids. All these had adversely affected the economic progress of the state. It was during the period of King Birchandra Manikya (1862-1896) the process of modernization began under the pressure of British government.

Hill Tipperah was an isolated small feudal state where majority of the subjects were tribal belonging to different ethnic groups. By the end of 18th century Tripura's isolation started dissolving on account of some historical changes occurring in and around the state.

The members of the feudal nobility in Tripura were known as Kartas and Thakurs. The highest administrative posts were occupied by them. They were not salaried class, but collection of some taxes was assigned to them on a very attractive terms. This practice rendered the revenue structure and the system of revenue administration very uneconomical and insufficient. It created powerful and exploitative rentier class.

In Assam and Manipur the king earlier claimed the ownership right of land and cultivator had no right to transfer the land. However the British changed this. Now peasants were given permanent right to hold and transfer he land. Thus land now became an exchangeable commodity.

Tribes in Arunachal and Meghalaya continued to live their isolated existence with minimum contact with the outside world through markets at the foothills and fairs.

DEVELOPMENTS OF AGRICULTURE- In adaptation to physiographical features different systems of agriculture practices have been developed in the North East. While the hill forests have been the sites of shifting cultivation, the valley lands have been in use for practicing settled wet cultivation. In some parts of Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh system of terraced cultivation was developed.

Most of the tribes of North-East India practiced *Jhum* cultivation.³ Besides cultivation and processing of crops, productive activities of the shifting cultivation includes horticulture, animal husbandry, fishing, collection of forest products, hunting, weaving, making nets, mats, baskets. The *Jhumias*⁴ did not produce everything they need. But they produce some surplus crops and collect forest produces in excess of their requirements. They took part in trading activities with other tribal and non-tribal.

In *Jhum* system, production was for subsistence only. It did not produce any effective surplus which can be utilized for expanding the production.

In most cases, people dependent on shifting cultivation have been unable to attain self-sufficiency in food production. Therefore they have to procure food from the plains where wet-rice cultivation system yields sufficient quantum of rice, the staple food of the people of the region.

In the past, periodically the hill men raided the villages in the foothills and looted food stock and other necessities and even took away men and women as captives to use them as slaves. The Ahom rulers, during medieval period introduced a system of paying in cash/kind some compensation called '*Posa*' to certain border tribes in exchange for a pledge that no such plundering raids would be committed by them in future. The hill farmers produce some non-food crops and collect forest products for which there is a great demand from the plainmen. This is how a relation of economic interdependence for the hill-dwellers and plain-dwellers has developed.

However, historically there is a tendency to shift from shifting cultivation to settled cultivation. But geographical factors like hills had prevented the growth of agriculture, which was the main basis of growth of sustained and stable economic development.

Suitability of the Brahmaputra and the Barak valley for the settled cultivation had attracted the people and the population had increased in Assam with the density of population rising up to 286 and it remained low in the hilly areas like 33 in Mizoram and 10 in Arunachal Pradesh.

Since when the people living in the Brahmaputra valley had changed over to settled cultivation from shifting cultivation is difficult to ascertain. But according to S.L. Baruah, it must have happened before the 4th century A.D. (P.163). Rice cultivation was the main agricultural activity. Since it required co-operation in ploughing, irrigation, harvesting and cattle grazing, it demanded concentration and grouping of dwelling and so led to the formation of villages. Assam land was very fertile and fit for the cultivation of different varieties of crops. Irrigation was developed in Assam by 7th century as mentioned by Yuan Chwang.

Apart from rice other agriculture products were pulses, mustard, sugar-cane, various kinds of fruits and vegetables. Yuan Chwang speaks of abundance of jackfruit and coconut. Processing of agriculture product was also done. Among the present sent by Bhaskarvarman (7th century) to Harsha there was *Gur* (jiggery), prepared from sugarcane and a preparation of mango juice in bamboo tubes. During Ahom days many villages in the valley were formed at the instance of the ruling monarchs from time to time by transplanting families from thickly populated areas. The products of the field were sufficient enough to meet requirement of individuals and the state. Agriculture was looked upon as a noble profession, and every Assamese, except the Brahmins, knew how to plough. Manual labour was not looked upon with disgrace. Overflowing rivers in the north east usually provided fertile soil as they deposited a fresh top-dressing of silt every year.

The *Paik* system was unique in the administration of Ahom kingdom. It had also helped in the continuation of the agricultural and economic development. Under this system the whole adult population except nobles, priests and persons of high caste were known as *Paik*. They were under obligation to render service to the state as laborers and soldiers. They were organized in *Goats*. A *Goat* contained four *Paiks*. One member of each group was obliged to be present for the government service and during his absence from home, the other members were expected to cultivate his land and keep his family supplied with the food. This system enabled the continuation of the agriculture production along with the war and other public work. Under this system the able bodied men was trained as soldier as well as cultivators. Apart from the continuation of the cultivation during the war, it also reduced the burden of the state as it does not have to support the huge standing army. However the system was harsh on the commoners as they were compelled to go for the state service.

In matters of land, the Ahom kings followed the general tradition as followed in the Northern India and claimed that all land belonged to the crown.

In Assam two main varieties of rice was grown, namely, *ahu* (a short maturing dry rice) and *Sali* (a long maturing wet rice). For raising *ahu* paddy, seeds were simply broadcast on the fields where standing water was not required for the plants to grow. But *Sali* paddy was grown following a method that first needed raising paddy seedlings in the nursery and then later transplanting seedlings into the irrigated field where standing water was required. The Ahoms encouraged plough cultivation and more and more area was brought under *Sali* cultivation. This involved use of iron implements and use of buffalos. In the closing decade of the 17th century new crops like pineapple and tobacco were included in the list of horticulture crops grown in the region. These two cash crops occupied an important place in the economy.

The *Angamis* and *Chakesangs* of the Naga Hills, the *Tongkhul Nagas* of Manipur, the *Apa Tanis*, the *Khampits* and the *Monaps* in the north east frontier hills (present day Arunachal) developed practice of settled cultivation by

terracing hill slope. They adopted a highly effective system of irrigating the rice field by suitably channeling of waters of their respective hill streams into the successive rungs of terraces.

The system of terraced cultivation practiced by the *Apa Tanis* in the present day Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh is one of the most successful and efficient system of wet-rice cultivation. They have succeeded in ensuring irrigation of their rice field on perennial basis. (Ganguly P. 76)

In the hills, traditionally, the land was owned by community as a whole in those places where shifting cultivation was practiced. Contrary to this general practice in the hills, the *Apa Tanis* and the tribes practicing wet rice cultivation on the terraced field has well-defined system of private ownership of land. The model of land use as developed by the *Apa Tani* and their ecological and sustainable technique of settled wet rice cultivation is appreciated by all.

Apart from the *Apa Tanis* and the *Angamis*, the *Bhutias* and the *Khampits* of Arunachal also had developed a system of settled terrace cultivation. They were economically much better than the other hill people whose economies were organized around the practice of shifting cultivation. *Aram* is most popular and widely grown vegetable in Arunachal.

Later, as the Ahoms learnt about the Mughal system of land measurement, which helped to estimate correctly the liabilities of the tenants to pay land revenue to the state, a countrywide land survey was undertaken by surveyors employed for the purpose from Koch-Bihar and Bengal. This work was nearly completed by 1751 A.D.

In 1826 A.D. British established their supremacy over Assam by driving out the Burmese invaders. That time agriculture was in a shattering condition. The Burmese destroyed more than half of the population and took away not less than 30000 as captives. (Ganguly P.118).

During Burmese occupation of Assam, cultivation was given up by many of the peasants. Immediately after annexation of Assam, the British tried to reorganize the system of assessment and collection of revenue. In the initial years, the rent was so high that many peasants stopped cultivation and fled to the neighboring kingdom. A land survey was carried out and it was found out that nearly 2/3rd land had remained uncultivated.(Ganguly P.120). Corrupt practices of the *Chaudhuris* caused distress to a number of peasants. The British changed the system of revenue collection and appointed Tahsildars to collect the revenue.

Colonial government pursued the policy of monetization of all public transactions. In 1835 A.D. coins minted by the government were proclaimed the sole legal tender in the country. This raised the demand for cash. The peasants, artisans and others had to obtain cash for meeting their tax and other liabilities to the government. Therefore they sought to sell their products, commodities and services in the market in exchange of cash. But market was not developed in Assam and people were forced to sell their products at a very cheap price. Some traders took advantage of the situation and provided loan to the needy farmers at a very high rate of interest. The revenue and monetary policy of the government caused peasant lot of sufferings. Many of them gave up and fled to forest. Instead of transferring surplus cash revenue to Calcutta, had the government spent it on rebuilding the infrastructure, the situation would have improved.

Since the early decade of 20th century, large number of Bengali Muslims migrated to Assam. These settlers had augmented the supply of rural wage labour and contributed to the economic development. The new settlers increased the land under cultivation by clearing the forest and introduced the cultivation of jute and many varieties of vegetables. Local people also started cultivating these crops after witnessing this from the immigrants. However as the number of immigrants increased steadily, they also encroached on the village common land and government land creating conflicting situations.

Under the ryotwari system of land settlement, the peasants directly held the land under the government. Though this had some advantages, the high rate of revenue discouraged many of the cultivators. The colonial government who was more interested in the development of tea industry also did not take any steps to stop this trend as the peasants who abandoned the cultivation will be available in the tea industry as labours.

The Meities living in the Manipur plains acquired the technique of growing rice a long time back. The rich alluvial soil flooded by the numerous rivers and waters of lakes in their respective valleys were highly suitable for growing rice. No wonder the productivity was much higher than the rice grown by the practitioner of *Jhum* cultivators. 15 varieties of rice were grown in Manipur valley. Some of them matured in three months and some took six months.

Similar to *Piak* system of Assam, *Lallup* system was developed in Manipur. Under this system, every male between the age of 17 and 60 was required to render free service to the king for ten days in every forty. In return he was given 3 acre of land for cultivation on payment of prescribed tax. Besides every male could be conscripted by the kings for waging wars with other powers. It was possible for Meitei men to go for war as Meitei women looked after the cultivation, animal husbandry, cottage industry and also trade apart from their domestic responsibilities.

In the early part of the 19th century the area of the territory under the rule of the Raja of Manipur was estimated at 7000 sq. miles, of which 650 sq. miles constituted Manipur valley of rich alluvial soil and the remaining 6350 sq. miles consisted of hilly and mountainous terrain surrounding the valley. Apart from Meitheis other major ethnic group in Manipur were Nagas and Kukis. Nagas and Kukis practiced shifting cultivation. However the Tungkul Nagas in Manipur practiced wet rice cultivation in the terraces. The Kukis mainly subsisted on shifting cultivation. Due to the practice of wet rice cultivation and system on individual ownership the conditions of Nagas was much better than the Kukis.

Out of the total land in Tripura (4086 Sq. Miles) nearly 60% is hilly area and marshes, which are not suitable for the plough cultivation. The indigenous population belonging to the different tribes practiced shifting cultivation on the hill slopes. There were no separate holdings owned by the individual. Some form of community ownership of land was in vogue. Cultivation in the plains was done by mostly Bengali settlers. The King also encouraged the Bengali settlers to settle in Tripura as the settled cultivation yielded better yield and more revenue for the state. The king encouraged the immigration by following liberal land tenure system, known as *Jangal Abadi* leases. Under this system the settlers were encouraged to clear the forest and start settled cultivation and no rent was charged for few years. Some of the population used to come to the territory of the Tripura king from British part of Bengal to cultivate the land and used to go back after harvesting season. They were known as *Ziratia* tenants.

For centuries the economy of Tripura remained stagnant and outside the market mechanism. The life of the tribal remained simple and stationary and they felt no urge to grow more to improve their life. Taking to settled plough cultivation was taboo to many of them. Due to immigrant population the area under cultivation expanded. Some hill tribes also took up settled cultivation and this led to increase in production.

People of North East practiced horticulture as well. Cultivation of varieties of fruits like lemon, orange, olive, tamarind, mango and pineapple was common. Areca-nut and betel vine were indispensable part of Assamese hospitality. They were extensively cultivated.

Apart from cultivation supporting activities includes rearing of domestic animals like pig, cow and *mithun*. In Arunachal *mithun* is most important and valuable domestic animal and usually yardstick of wealth of rich.

In a nutshell, the agriculture in the North East is varied. There are systems of settled cultivation, terraced cultivation and shifting cultivation. Though the general tendency is to shift from shifting cultivation to settled cultivation. Rice is the main agriculture crop. With the mass migration in Assam and Tripura more and more

land was brought under cultivation. This led to increase in production as well as introduction of more varieties of crops.

As North East gets abundant rainfall, there are large number of rivers, streams and lakes. Fishing as a profession developed naturally in this region. There are references to *Kaivarta* community who mainly lived on fishing.

DEVELOPMENT OF TEA INDUSTRY- In the pre-colonial period, lot of land in the North East was not used for cultivation. The land already under cultivation was sufficient for the small population to meet their requirement of food and other necessities. However the land which was not under cultivation and was covered by the forest also had its utility as it was a source of timber and many other forest products. But British colonial government considered this land as waste land and started thinking how to best utilize the land for increasing revenue and for economic development. The British were also finding it difficult to get supply of tea from China. The circumstances were suitable for the growth of the tea industry in Assam. Tea committee for Assam was appointed in 1834 A.D. In 1836 A.D. an experimental tea garden was started and tea was manufactured in 1837 A.D. The Bengal tea association was formed in Calcutta. It was a joint venture of the British and Indian entrepreneurs. About the same time some resourceful investors became interested in growing tea here. In 1839 A.D. Assam Company was formed. After initial years, the government decided to withdraw and encouraged Assam Company to take over the government tea gardens. The government also encouraged other people who were interested in taking up development of tea gardens. Under wasteland grant rule of 1838 land was allotted to the developers. Assam Company made rapid progress and in 1859, it had 4000 acres of land under tea garden and output of 760000 pounds of tea. Apart from this there were other private gardens in Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Kamrup and Darrang.

Initial success of tea industry attracted many investors and there was a mad rush for the land. People invested money without giving thought to the difficulties like suitability of the land and shortage of labour. Such mad rush finally resulted in general collapse of the industry. The demand for tea at the international level also slumped and from 1862 to 1869 there was a depression in the tea industry. However after this there was a gradual recovery and tea gardens increased. In 1878 the total production of tea in the region was 28.5 million pounds which increased to 53.5 million in 1885 and to 134 million pounds in 1901. In 1920, the output reached 234 million pounds. By 1923, the total area under tea gardens was 412,000 acres. (Ganguly P.147)

Share of tea from India in the import in England had also increased. In 1866 it was 4% of the total tea imported in England and 96% was contributed by China. In 1903 India's contribution in the total tea import in England was 59%. (Ganguly P.147). In spite of periodical slump in demand the output of tea industry increased up to 297 million tons in 1947. The development of tea industry yielded many benefits to the people and economy of Assam.

Rising of tea plantation caused heavy loss of forest wealth. Tea planters also caused lot of waste of timber as they turned timber into charcoal for use as fuel in the tea factories.

Many of the tea planters were from outside the state and by occupying the large area in the beginning itself, they restricted the entry of local entrepreneurs. However some local entrepreneurs started their plantation, but their area was so small that they could not afford to have processing unit and had to send their leaves to nearby factory owned by the Europeans to process the tea.

As there was shortage of labour in Assam the labour were brought from the provinces of Bihar, Bengal, United and Central provinces, Madras and even Bombay. They were brought as indentured labour⁵ and were paid very less money. Lot of restrictions were put upon their movement. They were exploited and tortured.

Tea industry occupied an important place in the industrialization process initiated by the colonial government in Assam. The area of land used for productive purpose for tea plantation yielded higher rates. It created

employment opportunities. It also augmented the process of monetization. It also boosted the growth of other industries, such as oil, coal, plywood and transportation including steamship navigation.

Development of tea industry in the colonial period signified the beginning of wide ranging changes in the region. Tea industry became one of the very profitable businesses for the British. Tea became important item of consumption in Europe and the industry also provided opportunities for the investment of the surplus capital from Europe. The expansion of the tea industry also enlarged the market for the British made goods.

MINERALS- Important minerals that are found in the North East are coal mainly in Assam, Eastern Naga Hills, Khasi Hills and Garo Hills, limestone in Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Iron ore in Assam, Khasi Hills and in small quantities in beds of small streams in Manipur, corundum in Khasi Hills, kaolin in Garo and Jaintia Hills. Apart from this gold mixed with river sands in upper Assam and salt springs in upper Assam, Cachar and Manipur.(Ganguly P.24).

Gold washing in different gold-dust bearing fast-flowing streams in upper Assam was yielding quit a considerable amount of gold every year. This was a craft of a small number of people belonging to a particular professional caste known as *Sonuwals*. This trade gradually died as the Gold-dust borne by the river streams became insignificant. The crafts of gold-smithy and silver-smithy provided occupation to about two thousand artisans during Ahom period. Shihabuddin (17th century) refers to the business of gold and other metals in Assam.

“Gold is washed from the sand of the Brahmaputra. Ten to twelve thousand Assamese are engaged in this employment, and they pay to the Raja’s government one *tola* of gold per head per year.-----Silver, copper and tin are also obtained in the hills” (Gates P.146)

The indigenous population in *Khasi* and *Jaintiya* hills and the *Nagas* had acquired the art of smelting iron ore into iron. This enabled them to use iron hoes and even iron-tipped ploughs and weapons. The *Meiteis* of Manipur also had their indigenously developed system of recovering iron and manufactured axes, hoes, ploughshares, spear, iron heads and daos.

In the colonial period the growing practice of importing iron and steel from Bengal led to a gradual abandonment of the indigenous system of iron smelting.

At Digboi in Upper Assam, petroleum was found in the course of the construction of railway line. The Assam railway and trading company took up the work of drilling mineral oil in 1889. In 1899 the Assam oil company was promoted by the Assam Railways and trading company and it starting producing petroleum on large scale. In 1919 production of petroleum was 18000 gallons a day. It increased to 30,000 gallons in 1925 and further to 180000 gallons a day in 1931.

Mining of coal in Lakhimpur district began in 1882. (Ganguly P.222). In 1930 more than 30000 tons of coal was extracted.

MANUFACTURING- Handloom weaving of cotton, silk and woolen textile was the most important and extensively pursued cottage industry in the region. According to S.L. Baruah, silk was manufactured in Assam since the days of the *Ramayana* and the *Arthshastra*. Women in some part of Assam specialized in the art of rearing three varieties of silk worms namely *eri*, *muga* and *pat*.

The Meitei women of Manipur also excelled in the art of handloom weaving of textile of exquisite designs, patterns and textures.

Since the region had an extensive forest area including bamboo forests, handicraft like basketry, mat making, making of bamboo utensils, various artifacts, such as box, comb, hand fan, umbrella, sun and rain hats, musical instruments, fishing baskets and nets were common in hill villages.

Wood carving and ivory carving were well known crafts of the region. But the number of artisans engaged in these crafts were small as the demands for these products came from the nobility. Shihabuddin (17th century) refers to industries,

“Flowered silk, velvet, tat-band and other kinds of silk stuff are excellently woven here. They make very nice and neat trays, chests, thrones and chairs, all carved out of one piece of wood” (Gates P.151). The writer also praises the boats and warships made by the Assamese.

“They build most of their boats of Chambal wood; and such vessels, however heavily they may be loaded, on being swamped do not sink in the water.”(Gates P. 151). Officer *Naosaliya khel* was engaged in building of boats of different shapes and size.

He is also highly appreciative of the firearm manufacturing of the Assamese.

“They cast excellent matchlocks and *bachadar artillery*, and show great skill in this craft. They make first rate gunpowder, of which they procure the materials from the imperial dominions.”

Industry was highly developed in the Ahom period. There are references to weavers, spinners, goldsmiths, potters and workers in ivory, bamboo, wood, hide and cane, According to Shihabuddin people were very skillful in the weaving of embroidered silk cloths. They made their boxes, trays, stools and chairs by carving out of a single block of wood.

Ivory industry was one of the important industries. Rudra Singha, the king of Ahom From 1696 to 1714 sent mats, fans and chessmen made of ivory as presents to the Mughal Emperor at Delhi.

Assam enjoyed a high reputation for producing silk of fine texture. Shihabuddin noticed that the silk of Assam were excellent and resembled those of China. They manufactures three principal varieties of silk, called *Pat*, *Endi* and *Muga*. The first variety is the finest quality. *Endi* is of the coarsest quality and is generally used by the poor. The last is variety *Muga* is stouter and more durable fabric, but coarser and less glossy. Assam silk especially *Muga* was very much in demand in Europe, and it formed the staple trade of the East India Company during the 18th and 19th century. Skill in the art of weaving and spinning has always been held as one of the highest attainment of an Assamese woman.

One of the unique manufacturing activities of the tribal was manufacturing of salt from brine springs wherever those existed. Number of such springs existed along the foot of the Naga hills which were shared by the Naga tribes and the Ahoms. In the absence of brine springs, ash produced by burning some species of banana plants was used as the substitute for salt. This was done until salt became obtainable from outside.

In western Kameng (Arunachal Pradesh), a few families of Monpas tribe produced paper from local material. The paper was used by literate Lamas for their correspondence and religious books. (Ganguly P.87).

Carpentry, house-building with bamboo, thatch and wood and decoration of dwelling house were also commonly practiced craft. Some of the tribal made beautiful toys for their children.

In Assam there was no caste wise specialization of artisans as in other parts of India.

Development of modern industries started following the development of transport and communication service. Swedish Match factory at Dhubri employed 300 workers during colonial period. There were also few saw mills, edible oil mills, engineering workshops and printing presses.

The Manipuris produced a number of consumer and simple goods both for internal use as well as for export. Cotton textile woven by Manipuri women are well known for its beautiful and colorful design. Manipur also produced a considerable quantity of silk textile. In Manipur the group of people who practiced silk culture were known as *Lois*. Another group known as *Kubo* procured raw silk from the *Lois* and wove silk textile.

By the middle of the 18th century the Manipuris also learnt the technique of tanning of leather. Saddles, shoes, belts, pouches were made using leather. Metal jewellery works also developed as a small scale industry. They turned out gold ornament, such as rings, bracelets and necklace and armlets.

Other industry like carpentry and lock making also developed in Manipur. The industry was patronized by the royal family. Under the influence of British some men from Manipur were also sent to Kanpur for training in the art of carpet weaving and manufacturing of leather goods. The British political agent also tried to improve the productivity of the artisans.

Rajmala, the chronicle of the king of Tripura contains detailed account of the wide ranging productive activities in Tripura like manufacturing of cotton and silk textiles, leather goods, ivory, gold and silver ornaments, wood carvings, iron tools, brass and bell metal utensils. Tripura is particularly known for bamboo and cane crafts. According to '*Tripura Buranji*', Udaipur, the capital city was a thriving center of manufacturing and business.

INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT- Infrastructure like roads plays a very important role in the economic development of a region. Transport and communication in the region remained grossly underdeveloped for centuries. There were only few unmetalled mud roads, the only wheeled means of transport was bullock cart. People covered distance mostly on foot. Palanquins were used by some who could afford them. The kings and his kin rode elephants. Rivers like the Brahmaputra, the Barak, the Gomati, the Howrah and the Manu were navigable by boats. Bamboo, timber and some other forest products were floated downstream to bring them to plains. Elephants were used for moving heavy timber loads from the forest to the river points.

King Nar Narayana of Koch Bihar in the 16th century got constructed an embanked road from their capital in Koch Bihar to Narayanpur near Lakimpur in Assam. This was a distance of nearly 350 miles. As the work was carried out under the supervision of Gosain Kamal. Part of that road is still existence and is known as 'Gosain Kamal's road' (Gait P.52). Nar Narayana managed to build an extensive empire. He also rebuilt the Kamkhya temple.

Apart from this Nar Narayana executed many useful public works. He constructed many roads and planted trees along with them.

An elaborate economic infrastructure was built up during the Ahom rule in the forms of embankments about the Brahmaputra and many of its tributaries and ridges around paddy fields. The embanked road built on the south bank of river Brahmaputra linking upper and lower Assam facilitated movement of troops, people and transportation of goods. It also protected rice fields from floods. Most of the vital public works were damaged, and even destroyed during the Burmese invasion.

Colonial government built some roads and opened lines of communications for the movement of troops for conducting military expeditions into some tribal areas. Development of infrastructures like roads, river ways, railways, communication system was undertaken on large scale to meet the need of tea industry in the mid 19th century. In 1868 the department of Public Works was established for the purpose of carrying out the public works programme. Road board was constituted in 1926-27. By 1929 the length of metallic roads went up to 565 miles and the Kaccha(earth) road measured 4362 miles. By 1937-38, the length of metallic road increased to 737 miles. The total length of the all type of road was increased to 5412 miles.

Following the advance of Japanese forces near Assam during Second World War, the construction and maintenance of road achieved great significance. Dimapur-Kohima-Imphal road and its extension up to Tomu on the Indo-Burma border was constructed. Another famous road constructed during the period was the road running from Ledo in Assam to Bhamo in Assam and further to Yunan province in China covering a distance of 1043 miles.

To meet the demand of growing tea industry the colonial government also started steamer service in 1847.

The first railway line was opened in Assam in 1882 from Dibrugarh to Jaipur road. The railway network slowly went on increasing and facilitated the need of tea industry. In 1905, Assam- Bengal state railway company began operating railway transport service connecting Chittagong port with several places in Assam. This line passed through the district of Tipperah, Sylhet and Cachar.

The steady growth of railway transport service remarkably strengthened the economic infrastructure of Assam. It helped the growth of tea industry and development of other industries like coal, mineral oil and postal communication system. This development resulted in the easy flow of goods and movements of people within Assam and with Bengal and other parts of the country. It opened up Assam to immigrant peasants, workers, professionals and others. Flow of capital into Assam from outside for investment was also facilitated. During the Second World War, the railway services were streamlined and improved.

Along with the railway network postal and telecommunication services also improved facilitating the economic development.

During British period an attempt was also made to connect the hilly area with the plains. In 1833 A.D. a road was constructed linking Imphal, capital of Manipur with Silchar in British India. The construction of this road was the joint venture of the British and Manipuri government. The road became the vital channel of flow of goods and movement of people and livestock between Cachar (Part of Assam) and Manipur.

Roads were also constructed to connect Manipur with Burma border and Naga hills.

North East is full of rivers and streams and as a result, the people slowly developed a technique of building bridges by using locally available material. Bamboos were prominently used in this.

TRADE AND TRADE ROUTES IN NORTH EAST - The history of trade and exchange between the tribal and their neighbour in and outside India is very old. However the volume of trade remained small due to different reasons like lack of infrastructure and insecurity. Yet such trade brought some dynamism in the tribal economy. Assam was noted for her textile and various valuable forest and mineral products. Many of these articles were not only exported to neighboring provinces but found their way to Tibet and Bhutan. The trade with the neighboring inland provinces was mainly carried out by river transport through the Brahmaputra and the Ganges.

Silk from Assam was brought to Malabar through Ganges. Gold from Assam was sent to rest part of India through Tripura. (S.L.Baruah P.165). Ornamental umbrellas made of bamboo and leaves of *takau* plant were another important article of trade. Shihabuddin describes the trade between Mughal and Assam,

“Every year in normal times, quantities of aloe wood, peppers, spikenard, musk, gold and a variety of silk were offered in exchange of salt, saltpeter, sulphur and several other products of Mughal India at the Ahom-Mughal check-post” .(S.L.Baruah P.437).

Trade between Assam and Mughal India during Medieval period was carried out through Bengal. According to S.L. Baruah, there were four routes from Bengal to Assam, one by water and three by land. For conducting trade with Bengal, *choukis* or outposts were established at important centers and placed under the control of officers called *Duaria Barua* or *Chakial Barua*.

There was a network of markets in the foothills of the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo hills, Naga hills, Mizo Hills, Karbi. The chief items of exports from Assam were rice, cotton, oilseeds, dried fish, timber, lac, black pepper, elephants, and ivory, and cotton textiles, silk, brass and bell-metal utensils. Main items of imports were salt, woolens and blankets, beads, ponies, several other animal husbandry products, Chinese silk, gold dust and precious stones.

From Bengal, Assam mainly imported salt and some quantity of betel and tobacco in exchange for silk, ivory and timber. The Garos exchanged their products such as, cotton, agar, lac and some other forest products for various consumable items like cloths and household necessities. Golpara and Sylhet were the important trade centers. Lime stone and iron of very superior quality were the two important of export of Khasi hills. The exportable items from Cachar were timber, ivory, lac, wax, elephant, cotton, agar, bamboo, rattan etc.

British introduced the system of ‘Inner line permits’⁶ which reduced the interaction between the hill and plain people. On the one hand it restricted the trade flow and maintained the relative isolation of the hill people. But it did have some positive effect as well. It regulated the migration of the plain people to hills and eliminated any possibility of alienation of tribal from their lands, forest, water, mineral and other resources.

The record of Ralph Fitch, the British who visited Koch kingdom in the 16th century writes about the prosperity of the kingdom. According to him the people had much silk, musk and cotton cloth. He also refers to the trade relation with China. (Gait p.62)

The Nagas also disposed their surplus in the markets in the plains. The surplus included salt as well.

The king of Manipur consistently discouraged growth of external trade in rice grains. With the excess of amount of rice they built up stock of rice to meet the shortfall if any. This ensured food security for the people of Manipur. Fish was another important item of trade.

Embroidered silk cloth from Manipur was also exported to Burma and Cachar in British India. During colonial period also the king of Manipur followed the policy of protecting and patronizing Manipur’s cottage industries. The government levied custom duties on all articles imported in Manipur and also on export. The British government successfully persuaded the king to lower the import duty so that the volume of trade between British India and Manipur can grow.

The important items of export from Manipur were ivory, wax, silk, dyed yarn, mosquito net, garments, bead sheets, silk, ponies and elephants. The import consisted of satin, steel, carpet, brass, copper, paper, soap, woolen *chadar* and umbrella.

In the pre-colonial period, internal trading activities were mostly in the hands of Manipuri women and the volume of external trade was small. The colonial ruler following the policy of free trade encouraged external trade. Due to this non-Manipuri traders also started operation in the state. Among such traders the Marwaris were the most resourceful in mobilizing the capital. Gradually they acquired near monopoly of the wholesale trading. The Marwaris also established rice mills in Manipur. Due to export of rice from Manipuri, there was a shortage of rice in the local market and this led to protest in 1939 Manipur.

Imphal was traditionally an important administrative and commercial center. The important market in Imphal was women's market and the Sadar Bazar.

The Tripurians had a business relation with Cachar and Manipur on the one side and Bengal on the other side. The important markets were at Agartala, Udaipur. Large amount of cotton grown in the hills was brought to Udaipur. The main exports from Tripura were cotton, timber, bamboo and canes and import was dry fish, tobacco and salt. Trade was mainly in the hands of traders from Bengal.

According to account of Yuan Chwang, the kings of Kamrupa had the sea route to China under their protection. So most probably the merchants from Kamrupa carried their goods through the Brahmaputra to sea for further trading. (S.L.Baruah P.164). The trade was also carried out between India and China through the Assam-Burma routes as mentioned in some Chinese source. Buddhagupta, a 16th century Indian Buddhist monk followed a land route connecting Kamrupa with Burma. (S.L.Baruah P.165)

For the tribes of Arunachal, the fairs held at different places at the foothills were important. These fairs played a very important role in the economic life of the hill people. During these fairs the tribal people used to collect Assamese goods and sell their own.

Numerous passes and ways, known as *Duars*, still exist between Assam and Tibet through Bhutan. The route to Tibet runs across the Himalayan Mountains parallel with the course of the Brahmaputra. British in the 19th century identified five roads leading from Sadiya in Brahmaputra valley to Tibet and China. The most important route was on the North-Eastern side over the Patkai to the upper district of Burma and then to China.

In the Ahom period Assam had a flourishing trade in several export and import goods with Bhutan, Tibet, Yunnan province of China, Burma (Myanmar) and tribal communities of the surrounding hills. During those days transactions were carried out mostly by exchanging goods. According to *Tabaquati-Nasiri* there were 35 mountain passes between kamrup and Tibet, through which horses were brought to Lakhnauti.

At *Bahmo* in the Northern Burma bordering Yunnan Province of China a big trade fair was held every year in the cold season. The Chinese traders came to this fair to sell silk, spices, Chinaware, vermilion, tea, honey, musk and dried fruits.

Trading activity was one of the important sources of income for some of the tribes in Arunachal as the Khampas, Nishis, Mishings, Mishmis, Singphos, Khamptis. These tribes were engaged in importing goods from Tibet or procuring products from fellow tribal for reselling to the traders in Assam. Assam's trade connection with Bhutan, Tibet, China and Burma could be maintained through these tribal who acted as middlemen (Ganguly P.88). The Mishmi tribe, who occupies the hills between the Dibang valley and the Indian border with Burma are considered as very effective traders. Trade between Tibet and India via Tawang continued throughout the British period.

Most of the business transition during those days was done through barter. Though there are references to gold coins, not a single of them belonging to ancient period was discovered. *Cawries* were used as medium of exchange. As in other parts of the country, the British trade policy led to the destruction of tribal cottage industries and crafts. Imported salt sold at cheap rate destroyed the production of salt in the hills. Influx of mill-made goods and yarn now discouraged spinning and weaving. Same thing happened to the iron smelting and forging and many other industries. Slowly they lost market to the factory made goods and increased the pressure on land thus aggravating rural and tribal poverty.

Even in the post independence period, the North East regions have remained economically underdeveloped in comparison to other parts of the country. However in last few years it is drawing serious attention of the policy makers and academicians and the things are turning little better.

EXPLANATORY NOTES-

1. The area also includes Sikkim. However Sikkim is not covered in the paper due to lack of space.
2. Majumdar R.C in 'History and culture of the Indian People' Vol. I p.273 gives this date. However the date of Mahabharata war is controversial issue.
3. *Jhum* cultivation is also known as slash and burn or shifting cultivation. In this a forest area is burned and the land is cleared for cultivation. The cultivation is done with very primitive method, without any equipment or manure. Between April and June, seeds of paddy, Maize, Millet, sesame, cotton, pumpkin, brinjal, chillie and few other grains were dibbled into ash-filled holes dug by *dao* (A big knife). All these crops grow up together and harvested at different time of the year. People live on the field in a hut and leaves the plot after harvesting all the crops. The *Jhum* plot is abandoned after cultivating it and the people moves to new plot. They will return to the same plot after couple of years. For how many years a particular plot is to be cultivated is depends upon the availability of land.
4. *Jhumiyas* means the people who practice *Jhum* cultivation.
5. Labour who is bound by agreement in known as indentured labour.
6. Inner line permit- Under this system a British subject in the plains had to take special permission to enter in the hill areas. The system is still in practice in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram. The plain people had to take Inner line permit to enter in these states.

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