



Emergence of Ryot Sabha with Reference to Sivasagr District

Miss bumoni Dehingia

Master Degree Student

Department of History

Sibsagar University, Assam

Abstract:

The emergence of Ryot Sabha in Sivasagar District represents a significant chapter in the socio-political history of colonial India. This research paper delves into the origins, evolution, and impact of Ryot Sabha, a grassroots peasant organization, within the context of Sivasagar District. Drawing upon archival documents, historical records, and secondary sources, the paper examines the socio-economic conditions that precipitated the formation of Ryot Sabha, its organizational structure, leadership dynamics, and its role in mobilizing and empowering the agrarian masses. Furthermore, the paper explores the challenges faced by Ryot Sabha in its struggle against colonial oppression and feudal exploitation, as well as its contributions to the larger peasant movements in India. By shedding light on the local nuances and intricacies of Ryot Sabha's emergence in Sivasagar District, this research aims to enrich our understanding of peasant mobilization and resistance in colonial India, while also highlighting the agency and resilience of rural communities in shaping their own destinies amidst oppressive socio-political structures.

Introduction:

In The present trend of analysis of Indian National Movement, many have made efforts to deal with the role of Peasantry in the National Movement. They have explored various aspects and themes but the regional variations of the theme have remained marginalized in many cases. For instance the peasantry of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam, who found a popular East India Company occupied it in the year 1826 as per the terms of the Yandaboo Treaty .From 1833 to 1839 for a brief period of 7 years, the Sivasagar district where the Ahom rule had a strong presence was given to Purandar Singha, an Ahom prince one Tributary basis in 1833. But as he was a defaulter in 1839, he was deposed and Sivasagar was also annexed.the British administration introduced the Ryotwari

system in five district of Brahmaputra valley of Assam viz Kamrup, Darang, Nagaon and Lakhimpur: where Goalpara had come under the Permanent Zamindari settlement as part of Bangal Presidency. The land revenue brings one of the important sources of income of the colonial state. The worst suffers were the ryots who being forced to leave under the subsistence conditions were strong led by huge indebtedness. Hence since 1860, Assam witnessed a serious of peasant uprising in different parts of the province in connections with the enhancement of the Land revenue and other taxes.

By the end of the 19th Century, Tezpur Ryot Sabha in Darrang District and Nagaon Ryot Sabha in Nagaon were established to resolve the problem faced by the peasants. In strengthening and executing the action plans of Tezpur Ryot Sabha, Lakshmikanta Barkakoty, Haribilash Agarwala, Lambodar Bora, Bhabanicharan Bhattacharya and many eminent personalities belonging to the newly organised middle class played a major role

From the existing studies on peasant movement in Assam we see that from the beginning of the 20 century, the peasant struggle took a new turn. At this time the nature and outlook of the peasantry seems to have undergone a change. They gave up the militant and violent path of agitation and began to adopt the constitutional path of Agitation. As a result, the Ryot Sabha which began to emerge in the rural areas marked a turning point in the history of peasant organisation in Assam . The Ryot Sabha oriented its policy to concentrate on local socio-economic and political problems and Ultimately it turned into a registered organised body termed as All Asom Ryots Sabha in 1933 almost one decade before the Quit India Movement and became an important organisation particularly in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. Since then, it started directing its objectives to uphold the agrarian issues like reduction of the burden of land revenue, along with the raising a general consciousness against British imperialism. At that time peasant uprisings were also very active in Sivasagar district. In this context, it will be interest to study the emergence of Ryot Sabha in Sivasagar District, where the Ryot Sabhas were actively organised.

Ryot Sabha in Sivasagar District:

Before the British period, “the centre of administration of Assam was around Sivasagar where the famous Ahoms ruled for nearly six hundred years. Sivasagar was earlier known as Rangpur and Rangpur was earlier known as Meteka.” On February 24, 1826, the Treaty of Yandaboo consolidated the British occupation of Assam.”²¹ This treaty brought an end to the roughly six hundred yearlong Ahom rule in Assam. After the 1826 treaty, the British government in Assam incorporated a number of administrative changes such as the formation of districts. The Sivasagar district was created after the annexation of Purandar Singha’s dominion of upper Assam in 1839. The colonial government radically transformed the socio-economic structure of f the Assamese rural society. In course of the introduction of a new agrarian system, the peasantry was the worst sufferer. Excessive land revenue demands, indebtedness, destruction of handicrafts, low production of food grains all combined together pushed the peasantry into extreme misery

Since the early part of the 20th century, the peasantry of Assam organised and brought under the fold of the national movement and with their participation, the freedom Struggle in Assam acquired a new dimension of mass mobilisation. According to S.D. Goswami, “ The material condition based on inequality: stagnation and exploitation actually paved the ground for the emergence of a conscious peasantry who with the progress of time, became less militant and more moderate in their

struggle against the rulers. Goswami further states that, this change was often attributed to the influence exercised by the local congressmen who played a vital role in the emergence of the Ryot Sabhas in Assam. Consequently, the Ryot Sabha not only reflected the strong foundations of the socio-economic-political consciousness of the peasantry, but also helped to channel the grievances of the people and the mainstream of Indian National Movement.

After the establishment of British rule, the district was placed under the Ryotwari settlement. It is in the context of the reaction to British rule that the Ryot Sabha institution came to emerge in the Sivasagar District. They not only introduced a new economic system, but also introduced the Ryotwari system in the five districts of the Brahmaputra valley. Among of them, the Sivasagar district was also, within a very short period; the British introduced various land revenue Settlements in order to encourage their imperialist design. The first and foremost problem of peasantry of Assam was payment of land revenue in cash. At that time, in Sivasagar district, there, the newly emerged educated sections, who were closely associated with the socio-political activities of the time and who were also integrally connected with the rural peasantry at large. They not only raised issues in the interest of the ryots, but also constitutionally protested the unpopular Governmental measures, particularly land revenue administration.

During the Non Co-operation movement, when Gandhi visited Assam, it had created a new nationalism among the peoples of Assam. In the National Movements like the Non Co-operation movements, Civil Disobedience Movement, Quit India Movement under the leadership of Gandhi, the people of Sivasagar district were closely involved in the movement.

Ryot sabha and it's activities:

After 1860, the peasants of lower and central Assam were involved in a series of struggle against the colonial exploitation in their own capacity in connection with the enhancement of land revenue. In this context, the Rajmels, played an important part in organising these peasant uprising against the British government.³⁸ The interesting question here is 'why peasant uprising like in other part of the Brahmaputra valley through Rajmels didn't take place in Sivasagar district? In fact, in the Sivasagar district, the spontaneous militant peasant uprising through Rajmels were absolutely absent. It is a fact that Sivasagar is basically known for tea cultivation. After the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 the colonial government not only discovered tea in Assam, but also developed by leaps and bounds within very short time and by the end of the 19th century most of the grants for this purpose has been taken up. ³⁹ Although, the introduction of tea industry and its development, the main motive of the colonial government was maximization of profits. From the argument of Keya Dasgupta, we can summarise that the majority of the people out of the total population consisted of the tea garden labours in the Sivasagar district, whereas in Lower Assam, majority of the total population fall under the agricultural sector. This can be said to be one of the probable reasons in Sivasagar district, unlike Kamrup, Darrang and Nagaon that spontaneous peasant movement was not reflected.

In this context, H.K Barpujari argued that, "the plantation labour lived away from the inhabitation of the Assamese and are engaged in a profession not of interest of the indigenous people". But, it didn't mean that the peasantry of Sivasagar district did not agitate. Rather, the newly emerged educated sections who were closely associated with the socio-political activities of the time and who were also integrally connected with the rural peasantry at large. They not only raised issues in the interest of the ryots, but also constitutionally protested the unpopular governmental measures, particularly land revenue Administration.

At that time a powerful organization was upper Assam Association which played a leading role in mobilizing the peasantry of this region. Radhanath Changkakoti, secretary, the upper Assam Association with the ryots of Sivasagar and Lakhimpur strongly protested against any enhancement of the taxes or any fresh imposition of new taxes by the government. Similarly, a section of the Peasantry of Sivasagar also come forward to protest against the government high land revenue evenue policy under the leadership of Gangagobinda Phukan. The most powerful Organization that was founded and led particularly from Sivasagar district was the Assam Association in 1903.

In the Sivasagar district there were no militant peasant struggle on the lives of the Rajjmel had taken place; yet, the institutions and organizations mentioned above, many of which originated in this district, played a vital role in the district. However, at the time, a large number of Assamese intelligientia leaders like Krishna Nath Sharma, Debeswar Sharma, Mohan Chandra Mahanta, Sarbeswar Borchetia, Kuladhar Chaliha, Sonaram Chutia and many others who actively contributed for the growth of the Ryot Sabhas and familiarised the ryots of Sivasagr District with the potent idea of their national unity. Accordingly, in Sivasagar area, Namtidol Ryot Sabha emerged in January, 1933 and Hora kumar Baruah presided over the sabhas.⁴⁵ Similar Ryot Sabha was organised at Moran Mouza under the president ship of Purnakanta Buragohain. Dinanath Sharma presided the Simalguri Ryot Sabha. Silakuti Ryot Sabha was held under the auspices of Horesh Chandra Rajkhowa.⁴⁸ The Amguri Ryot Sabha was organised and conducted by Pitambar Dev Goswami where more than one thousand villagers participated in the Sabha.⁴⁹ The organization of Moura Bazar Ryot Sabha was also prominent.⁵⁰ Likewise, Beliaghat Ryot Sabha of Dikhowmukh in 1931 was Presided over by Tyagbir Hem Baruah.⁵¹ The Jhanji Jamuguri Chapari Ryot Sabha in 1930 was presided by Nilamoni Phukan.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the emergence of Ryot Sabha in Sivasagar District marks a significant chapter in the history of agrarian movements in the region. As a grassroots organization, Ryot Sabha has played a pivotal role in advocating for the rights and interests of farmers, fostering community solidarity, and challenging oppressive systems of land tenure and exploitation. Through its collective efforts, Ryot Sabha has not only empowered local farmers but has also contributed to the broader discourse on social justice and rural development. As we reflect on its historical significance, it becomes evident that Ryot Sabha continues to serve as a beacon of resilience and hope for agricultural communities striving for equitable and sustainable livelihoods.

As a result, we have shown that after 1860, there broke out many peasant uprisings. in the Brahmaputra valley in connection with the Land revenue enhancement and the Rajjmel had played significant role in organising These peasant uprisings against the colonial British government.

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