

Colonialism in North-East India

A Historiographic Query

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I

As Gunnar Myrdal had so rightly pointed out, the world political scenario in the post Second World War period was marked by the "almost complete liquidation of the colonial power system."¹ This very clearly depicts a situation where colonialism was definitely a force to be reckoned with in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Thus, whether one talks about underdeveloped economies, or about the political structures and social institutions that evolved in countries like India, Vietnam, Algeria, Cuba, Brazil or Argentina (to name only a few) there is no getting away from a discussion of the category called colonialism. In fact this is an ideology that cannot be swept under the carpet as many had sought to do at times. The credit of seeing colonialism as a holistic system must go to the Indian nationalists who, beginning with Dadabhai Naoroji, between 1870 and 1905, developed a detailed critique of colonialism.² Addressing the delegates to the Lahore session of the Indian National Congress in 1893 Naoroji categorically blamed the entire colonial system set up by the British as responsible for the poverty of India. He said, "This poverty we attribute to the system, and not to the officials who administer the system."³ Perhaps one of the best

contributions to the understanding of colonialism came from R.P. Dutt, who in his book *Indian Today* developed a structured critique of colonialism. In fact greater and greater interest was evoked by the different forms and aspects of colonialism as the anti-imperialist movements gained momentum in the world. Different aspects of colonialism were emphasized in different parts of the colonized world. While in India the focus was primarily on the economic aspects the attack on colonialism by stalwarts like Frantz Fanon⁴ or Aimé Césaire⁵ emphasized also the cultural aspects of colonialism. In this context an early major breakthrough on the subject was brought about by Andre Gunder Frank⁶ who defined the parameters of the underdeveloped economies of the world in the light of their interface with colonialism. He viewed colonialism, imperialism and capitalism as part of a single system of relationships. According to him, "the fact that 'colonialism and imperialism have been used, especially in reference to certain phenomena of the period 1870–1960, almost interchangeably... suggests that the colony, by common understanding, is the dominant part of a system in which the imperialist is the dominant part. In short, 'colonial', 'imperial', and 'capitalist' all refer to a set of relationships, and more importantly as a *system* of relations, in which domination, super-subordination, exploitation, and of course, development and underdevelopment, play a central part."⁷ In talking about a system of relations Gunder Frank no doubt referred to both the economic and cultural dimensions of this relationship of dominance and domination because the societal repercussions of economic domination will no doubt be manifested in institutional and cultural terms. In more recent times Edward Said added strength to the cultural dimensions of colonialism by viewing it as the 'appropriation of one culture by another, apparently [by the] stronger one'.⁸ Thus gradually studies on colonialism, while gathering momentum also acquired more comprehensive forms although many aspects of colonialism still require further elaboration. But generally colonialism has been viewed by most scholars as "extension of national power" although the debate continues on whether the main motive for this expansion was military or economic.

In an interesting comparison between Chinese and Indian discourses on Colonialism Manoranjan Mohanty refers to the

fact that China seems to have withstood the western pressures and been able to retain 'Chinese Characteristics' despite economic reforms and spread and use of western and developed technology. India on the other hand lost the battle against colonialism although, time and again, there was struggle against the imposition of colonial preferences on the country.⁹ Referring to a work by a Chinese scholar Ngugi wa Thingo¹⁰ Mohanty discusses the human and psychological aspects of colonialism. "... colonialism robbed the people of the colonies not only of natural resources and enslaved the human being but 'one of the worst robberies is that of the means of perceiving all that'. It colonises the values of the local people by a variety of means including the most effective means of colonising the imagination by imposing the colonial language... ." ¹¹ Taking this argument further Mohanty comments that colonialism "snatched away the colonised people's right to imagination, rights to understand history in their own way, right to interpret nature from their vantage point."¹² The various debates on colonialism through the years have therefore focussed on the fact that colonialism has had far deeper consequences for the people of the colonised or 'colonialised' countries than mere economic expropriation of resources although the process of subordination and domination did begin with the former. Therefore, any understanding of the phenomena of colonialism has to begin with a deep comprehension of the economic and the resultant societal and human consequences.

Despite the variegated ideas on colonialism, yet, the result of the focus on the understanding of this important phenomenon was that there was at least a delineation of certain of its basic characteristics, and there seems to be a certain amount of general acceptance of these features. These features actually disproved the expectations of the early Indian nationalists like Raja Rammoham Roy and the pre-1870s Naoroji and even of many of the classical economists or even Marx and Engels that if a country is occupied by a developed capitalist nation then the path of capitalist progress would be opened up in the former country.¹³ The 19th century Indian Nationalists and even later scholars have in fact set down quite carefully the features of the economy which developed in the countries occupied by more developed capitalist countries. Bipan Chandra has done a very

clear dissemination of these characteristics and his exposition of the features include: (a) the integration of the economy of the occupied country in a "subservient or subordinate position"; (b) "The twin notions of unequal exchange (as discussed by Aghiri Emmanuel in *Unequal Exchange: A Study of the Imperialism of trade*) and the internal disarticulation of the colonial economy and the articulation of the disarticulated parts through the world market under imperialist hegemony" (as for instance the subordinated country's agriculture not relating itself to the country's industrial development, i.e., not articulating internally but responding to external demands of the metropolitan market). In this context studies of colonialism have also pointed to the colonial structure of production, "the role of railways in subserving the interests not of Indian industry and trade but the needs of British production"¹⁴ and the level of technological development, production and labour organisation; (c) The "transfer of social surplus to the metropolis" which the Indian Nationalists made the core of their critique of colonialism as the drain of wealth; and (d) the foreign domination of the polity and economy or the role of the colonial state. "This feature was recognised by most of the 19th century Indian nationalists only after bitter political experience"¹⁵ but Marxist scholars have given full attention to this aspect in their analysis although a lot more remains to be done on the nature and role of the colonial state. From this it becomes quite clear that any attempt at understanding the economy and society of any part of India in the 19th and 20th century, in short attempting an economic history of the period, would definitely require an engagement with these basic features of colonialism even if one were to attempt a negation of these aspects. (Many of the writings in the *Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol. II* for instance, definitely try to disprove the fact that colonialism had played any role in the underdevelopment of India).¹⁶ However the historiography that suggests that India's economic development on the eve of independence was impressive "does not ascribe as much of a role to the form of state and its intervention in the economy as to the operation of market forces."¹⁷ Elaborating on the question of the market forces' interface with the different sectors of the Indian economy Banerjee concludes that "this method of analysing the economic history of India enters a blind alley as soon as it

confronts, in reality, the underdevelopment of price-making markets.”¹⁸ It is in the light of these views that an attempt is made here to review a few major works of scholars of North east India to assess how their works have or have not engaged in the understanding of colonialism vis-à-vis the society and the economy. There has been one major criteria of selection — that the works are those which are usually referred to as basic works of economic history of the region. It is therefore necessary to understand whether they are economic histories or compilation of economic information, for a true economic history of the last two centuries would have to take up the exercise of critiquing colonialism.

One needs to explain here why an economic history, in the true sense of the term, of countries like India, Africa or China, would take up a critique of colonialism. These are countries which have experienced the vagaries of colonialism in some form or the other and the economic subversions have resulted in important developments in social formations. So if these two aspects are to be studied then an understanding of the phenomena of colonialism should become an integral part of an economic history. The question however is how have historians looked at economic history and what has been sought to be projected through works which have been referred to as economic history. This brings us to the question of “what is Economic history?” R.H. Tawney, one of the important exponents of the ideas of economic history, describes economic history in terms of being “concerned with the acquisition of a livelihood in a world of limited resources, the social groupings which arise from them, and the problems they produce.”¹⁹ A much earlier and more conventional view of economic history was presented by William Ashley as early as 1927. He held that economic history meant “... the history of actual human practice with respect to the material basis of life. The visible happenings with regard — to use the old formula — to the ‘production, distribution, and consumption of wealth’ from our wide enough field...”²⁰ From such and many other conceptions of economic history one thing becomes clear — that economic history does not refer only to the collection of economic information but to a more integrative process of analysing historical changes in terms of economic activities of human beings. A number of such

works do exist in the field of historical research although they may not have been strictly categorised as 'economic histories'. For example works like C. Daryll Forde's *Habitat, Economy and Society*, or Perry Anderson's *Passages From Antiquity to Feudalism*²¹ or D.D. Kosambi's *Introduction to the Study of Indian History* provide us with a view of the advancement of human civilisation which weaves together the society and the material (economic) conditions in a manner which tells the tale of how human development is closely associated with the changes in habitat, economic activities and the related processes of change. Such studies present models of how society and economy can be integrated to present economic histories in the real sense of the term. Economic information therefore becomes economic history when that information is integrated with the processes of social change.

Scholars have in fact tried to work out a definite methodology to arrive at the kind of integration mentioned above. In this effort it has been possible to chalk out three major approaches based on the kind of data used and the generalisations and conclusions arrived at. In a work on the methodology of economic history Elias H. Tuma presents the following conclusions regarding the major approaches. He says that there are three main approaches which have emerged — the descriptive, analytical and the synthetic.²² He further writes:

"These approaches usually overlap in any given study, the line of demarcation between them being not clear or precise. It is possible, however, to specify one or the other of these approaches as the main feature of a study. An author may also have stated his purpose... Marx's contribution is a composite of all three approaches."²³

It is not the purpose of this paper to delve into the details of these approaches but it needs to be pointed out that a work of economic history which does not remain merely descriptive but also adopts the analytical and synthetic tools would definitely take up for discussion important issues like the interface between colonialism and the status of the economy and the resultant societal developments. It is from these methodological and conceptual dimensions that, as mentioned above, a few

important works, popularly seen as economic histories of North East India, are taken for a review below.

II

A work which is always useful to understand major aspects of the economy of the region is P.C. Goswami's *The Economic Development of Assam*, (1st edition 1963, 2nd edition 1988).²⁴ Although the title of the book refers to Assam one must remember that when the first edition was published Assam referred to the then composite state of Assam. In the 2nd edition Goswami refers to this and writes that in analysis of the post 1972 period he "tried to give data for the present Assam" but "reference to other state of old Assam was also given to make the account continuous."²⁵ The work thus more or less encompasses the North East of today. There is no doubt that so far as information about the economy of the region is concerned the book is a pioneering work and it is extremely well researched. The work begins with a detailed description of the geographical features, the natural resources and the climatic conditions of region. This is followed by a demographic profile of the area where Goswami provides very clear statistical data on the density of population, immigration into the region, the sex ratio and rural urban divide and livelihood patterns. In this chapter there is also a section on social structure but this section is mainly confined to the enumeration of data on the schedule tribe population (as per the Constitutional provisions) and a linguistic and religion based break-up of the total population of the area. There is a small concluding section on the "social structure of the tribals" and the "social intuitions of the non-tribal area"²⁶ but this sketchy representation does not relate to any kind of economic organisation of the society and also some of the contentions are based on popular non-academic misconceptions.²⁷ In the other sections on immigration to Assam, particularly in the post 1947 period, he comes to some conclusions like: "The inflow of foreign national belonging to different linguistic groups has created serious socio-political and economic problems for the indigenous population of the state."²⁸ But conclusions such as these seem to be motivated more by the political environment of the time

rather than by the synthesis of economic data with social structures. The work also gives a lot of very important information on the economy of the state pertaining to both resources and economic organisation as in agriculture, industry, land use and land reforms and development of transport and communication. Collecting the kind of detailed statistical information that he has presented has definitely meant putting in long hours of arduous work. This information will definitely be of use for any researcher looking for economic information on Assam. The focus of the work is the need for systematic administrative organisation to develop the underdeveloped sectors of the economy of the region. Where however the work falls short of an economic history is that there seems to be no awareness of the realities of colonialism, and what relations there could be between economic underdevelopment of the region and colonialist policies. Although the work begins with 1826 there is primarily no issues raised about the colonial state and the relation to the economy. Interestingly one rarely finds a reference to the idea of colonialism even while discussing a sector like the plantation sector. Because there is no discussion of either the colonial state *per se* or its interface with the society and the people in Goswami's work therefore the economic impact on social processes remains a completely untouched area. Not that there is no awareness of issues like the importance of agricultural development for industrial development to remove underdevelopment, but the issue is grasped only at the administrative policy level. The information available in the work however can become rich material for an analysis of colonialism in North East India, but as it stands now it would be difficult to categorise it at the level of economic history.

H.K. Barpujari (ed.) *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Vol. IV and V (published in 1992 and 1993 respectively) is another important work which definitely contributes to adding to the knowledge on economic affairs of the composite state of Assam till 1919.²⁹ Chapters ten and eleven of Volume Four deal with Transport Communication and Urban Development and the last two Chapters discuss social issues like the education and emergence of the middle class. This last section has been contributed to entirely by Barpujari himself in this edited work by him. In his characteristic method Barpujari has provided very

detailed information, collected primarily from British official records, about the development of the railway system, road and river communication and the development of urban centres. The analysis which is contained is therefore also confined to the internal criticism of the archival materials and one does not really find much of an integration between the economic information and the social issues discussed in the subsequent chapters. This separation of issues comes perhaps from the perceptions of history writing of Barpujari as he himself very clearly states in the preface of Volume five of *The Comprehensive History of Assam*. He regards political history, administrative history, economic history and social and cultural history as separate compartments of history and not as an integrated whole called history.³⁰ The fifth volume of *The Comprehensive History of Assam* is confined mainly to what has been generally viewed as economic history by historians. It contains presentation of materials on imposition of land revenues by the British, agricultural development, the beginnings of the tea plantations, availability and the working of mines and mineral resources, trade and commerce and the various crafts and industries that existed in Assam. Interestingly after the information provided in all these earlier chapters there is a separate chapter on economic conditions, giving the impression that the earlier information did not pertain to economic conditions. The work also includes chapters on social life, progress of education, reform and regeneration and the early rise of national consciousness. All the information that is contained in these chapters is strictly from the British records and carefully presented in a detailed manner. Although there appears to be a dividing line between the economic processes and the social and political transition that is presented yet one cannot fail to see that Barpujari does attempt to raise issues like the drain of surplus from Assam while discussing the balance of trade. He writes: "The process of drainage of vast resources of the province, thus began, continued any without break till our own times."³¹ He of course sees this drain from the point of view of the fact that the beneficiaries of the favourable balance were not the indigenous people of Assam but either immigrants like the Marwaris or the British owned companies having their head offices in London.³² Here he definitely seems to be influenced by the views of R.C. Dutt and he even quotes Dutt

on this issue when he writes in the preface to this work that although the “balance of trade was in favour of Assam, but the entire surplus or profit went out of the province never to return.”³³ To that extent he does seem to be aware of at least one important feature of colonialism. It is however in the matter of discussing the nature of colonialism and the colonial state that the work seems to falter. While agreeing that the British conquered and ruled Assam for their own exclusive interest Barpujari however seems to also find a justification for *Pax Brittanica* in a way which may not survive very minute analysis of colonialism in North East India. He argues that British rule “ensured security, stability and peace.”³⁴ The question definitely would be that even if there was security it was security at what cost? The answer to this question is interestingly there in the information so meticulously provided by Barpujari if only one makes a more holistic connection between the economic data and the social transition that is presented. It must be acknowledged that within the paradigms of the historiographic tradition to which Barpujari subscribes he provides valuable insights through the interpretation that he does by the internal criticism of the sources. It is because of this that the more basic issues of colonialism and the colonial state; remain unchallenged because these issues do not get directly reflected in the data. If in addition to the internal criticism an interpretation is advanced on the basis of an external criticism also, then the required integration of economic and social forces which could be developed into a true economic history would definitely become possible. In fact Barpujari himself lamented, in the preface to the work, that economic history was the weakest link in the development of historical studies in Assam. There is no doubt however that there is some advancement in the study of society and economy between 1863 and 1993 although understanding of colonialism as a system of subversion and lop-sided articulation still remain very marginal.

Another important work that is usually referred to by historians and other social scientists of the region in looking for an ‘economic history’ is S.B. Medhi’s *Transport System and Economic Development in Assam*.³⁵ This is in fact one of the earliest and the most comprehensive accounts of the development of transport and communication in Assam. Medhi begins his work with an introductory chapter in which he goes into the

theoretical debates that exist on the importance of railways in the economic development of a country. In covering this debate his discussion ranges from the views of scholars from across the world to important views that developed in India in the late 19th and 20th centuries. The work then provides a clear picture of the historical evolution of the transport system in Assam through four identifiable phases. The first was the early period of "low mobility and the subsistence economy."³⁶ The second was "the era of mechanised river transport (1847–1965);³⁷ the third was "the era of steam railways ... and [fourth] the emergence of mechanised road transport (since the Second World War)."³⁸ In discussing each of these phase Medhi has based himself on a lot of primary sources drawn from various categories of official records, both of the British period and the post 1947 period. There cannot be any doubt about the fact that his work contains a wealth of information on the subject that he is dealing with. The main focus of the work is however on the discussions on railway development although he throws some light on the other modes of transport as well. Therefore when he comes to the section on the impact of the development of the transport system he concentrates only on the impact of railways. This analysis he confines to a sectoral impact on the economy detailing the impact on agriculture, industry, plantations and the population.³⁹ In this last sector [the population] he views the impact only in terms of the fact that:

in "Assam the most general effect was that railways increased mobility (and immigration) to a greater extent as compared to the river transport This in turn made up the shortage of labour force and made possible large scale production in the economy. In the beginning of this century railways altered the spatial distribution of population in a manner favourable for growth and development of certain industries. The cumulative effect was the increased rate of population growth in the economy. The railways also facilitated urbanisation, especially since the Second World War."⁴⁰

The observations made by Medhi in the lines quoted above are very significant and could have indeed thrown much light on the society and economy in Assam if the question of impact had been seen in terms of the society and social structures and not

merely in terms of the economy. After all what does 'economy' mean? Does it not refer to the society as well? The economy is not an abstract phenomenon. It exists not in a vacuum but is rooted to the society, so what happens in the economy definitely affects the different classes of people in the society in different ways. Changes in the economic organisation or the material conditions of the society would therefore lead to important transformations in the society and a work which has the purpose of looking into the economic development in relation to the evolution and organisation of the transport system would have definitely risen above economic information if this social transformation had been integrated into the discussion. Besides, Medhi's work also suffers from the other analytical problem of not raising the issue of 'colonialism' and the colonial state in any significant manner. The colonial state would have been a very important factor in the policies on the development of the means of transport and therefore in analysing the true impact of this sector the understanding of the colonial state or 'colonialism' would have been an important point of departure. A major problem seems to have arisen in the work because of the fact that the theoretical discussions of the introductory chapter seem to have somehow lost itself in the large mass of economic information that is contained in the work. For instance, in Medhi's discussion on the railways the important issue of railways as a major factor in colonialism does not find the place one would have expected.

Amalendu Guha's writings on "Colonialization", the "Big Push without a Take-off", and "Agrarian Structures the Late Nineteenth Century" in Assam as incorporated in his book *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam: Society, Polity Economy* published in 1991 are of a slightly different genre from the works discussed above.⁴¹ This is because Guha seems to begin from a better grasp of colonialism when he uses a term like colonialization. The approach is also different because Guha is far more critical of the British economic policies and of their impact on the local economy. Being a trained economist he is perhaps able to evaluate economic consequences more adroitly. The essay on agrarian structure also definitely provides new dimensions for understanding the impact of land policies like introduction of the *raiyatwari* system in Assam. His findings in

this area do not remain mere economic information because he relates the broad agrarian changes to "the formative process through which new classes emerged in the Assamese agrarian society — some really new in the sense that they were adapted to the new colonial situation."⁴² In fact his writing on the "Agrarian Structures the Late Nineteenth Century" Assam clearly shows how economic information can be transformed into economic history by relating the economic changes to the resultant social differentiation. He writes, for instance that "the temporary ryotwari settlement of Assam Proper nurtured a numerous class of peasant proprietors and, alongside of it, also a much smaller class of landed middlemen of superior status and means so that the former could look forward for guidance to the latter in their mutual efforts at improving agriculture."⁴³ The aspects of colonialism like the integration of the economy in a subservient and subordinate position and the drain of social surplus also find a place in his discussions on the plantation sector and the stagnation of the economy. This than, is definitely breaking new grounds and provides a model of how economic information can become the basis for an analysis of the material conditions and the consequent social structures. Where one could have expected more from Guha's work is in the sphere of achieving the kind of synthesis of the economy and society that one finds, for example, in Irfan Habib's work on the Moghul economy. Perhaps Guha could have brought into greater focus the role of the colonial state in the economic underdevelopment of Assam. In fact there seems to be some amount of ambiguity regarding his views on the nature of the colonial state. In fact this is an area where a lot more work needs to be done not with regard to economy and society in Assam but also in the larger context of Indian economic history. Also, even while talking of 'colonialization' Guha does not discuss the importance of the instruments of such a process like railways or give much space to discussing issues like the interface between the traditional economy and the colonial economy. There may have been constraints of time and space for the author but for a comprehensive understanding of society and economy this exercise has to be undertaken. Even Guha's work gives more emphasis on the economy and although society is not studied as a parallel or separated phenomenon, yet one is left looking for more



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integration and synthesis between the economy and society *vis-à-vis* the colonial state.

III

In this brief historiographic survey made above where an attempt has been made to critically assess a few important works frequently referred to as economic histories, we see a general trend of dissociating economics from the society or social structures at large (the exception being the writings of Guha). It is because of this lacuna in the conceptualisation of the disciplines, not only in the context of history but generally in all the social sciences in North East India that we see this shortcoming in the ability to adopt an analytical approach which can synthesise information with processes of social development. There have been some exceptions to this no doubt but, despite the encouraging breakthroughs made over the years from the 1960s to the 1990s the conventional approach to history writing of stating facts and not relating them to processes of historical evolution seems to have been the bane of 'economic history' also. One can therefore perhaps still agree with Barpujari that economic history still remains the step child of history in North East India. What has generally been regarded as economic history has largely been economic information and not economic history *per se*. The most serious drawback seems to have been the fact that scholars have not given due importance to the phenomenon of colonialism. This concept, in all its manifestations — economic, social, cultural, and political — has to be grasped in a much more holistic manner and societies in North East India, as elsewhere in India also, studied against the backdrop of such an understanding. This perhaps would be a major step taken in the writing of true economic histories of the region.

END NOTES

1. See Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations* [Abridged in one Volume by Seth S. King] (Penguin Books, 1972), p. 5.
2. See Bipan Chandra, *Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India: Economic Policies of National Leadership, 1880–1905*, (New Delhi, 1966); Bipan Chandra, *Essays on Colonialism* (New Delhi, 2000 [rep.]).

3. Rakesh Batabyal (ed.), *The Penguin Book of Modern Indian Speeches, 1877 to the Present* (New Delhi, 2007), p. 38.
4. Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (Penguin).
5. Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* [translated by Joan Pinkham] (New York, 1972).
6. André Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (New York, 1967);
 ———— *On Capitalist UnderDevelopment* (OUP, 1975).
7. André Gunder Frank, *On Capitalist UnderDevelopment*, *op. cit.*, pp. 2–3.
8. Bill Ashcroft and Paul Ahluwalia, *Edward Said* (London, 2001), p. 59.
9. Manoranjan Mohanty, "Colonialism and the Discourse in India and China" in Tan Chung (ed.), *In the Footsteps of Xuanzang: Tan Yun-Shan and India* (http://ignca.nic.in/ks_40033.htm).
10. Ngugi wa Thiongo, "Decolonising the Means of Imagination" in *Symphony of Freedom* (Hyderabad: AIPRF, 1996) cited in *Ibid*.
11. Manoranjan Mohanty, "Colonialism and the Discourse in India and China", *op. cit.*
12. *Ibid*.
13. Bipan Chandra, *Essays on Colonialism*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
16. See Dharma Kumar (ed.), *The Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol. II c. 1757–1970* (Cambridge, 1983).
17. Debdas Banerjee, *Colonialism in Action: Trade, Development and Dependence in Late Colonial India* (New Delhi, 1999), Preface.
18. *Loc. cit.*
19. R.H. Tawnwey, "The Study of Economic History," as cited in Elias H. Tuma, *Economic History and the Social Sciences: Problems of Methodology* (Berkeley, 1971), p. 11.
20. Sir William Ashley, "The Place of Economic History in University Studies", *Economic History Review* 1, No. 1 (January, 1927), pp. 1–2 cited in Elias H. Tuma, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
21. See C. Daryll Forde, *Habitat, Economy and Society* (London, 1970 [rep.]); Perry Anderson, *Passages From Antiquity to Feudalism* (London, 1992 [rep.]); D.D. Kosambi, *Introduction to the Sturdy of Indian History* (Bombay, 1956).
22. Elias. H. Tuma, *op. cit.*, p. 152.
23. *Loc. cit.*
24. P.C. Goswami, *The Economic Development of Assam* (New Delhi, 1988 [2nd ed.]).
25. *Ibid.*, p. ix.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 47–48.
27. For instance Goswami refers to the Khasi and Garo societies as matriarchal rather than matrilineal systems and states that women have the dominating voice in the society. One can perhaps understand the lack of information on these issues in 1963 when the first edition of the book was published but in the second edition in 1988 it could have been expected that the emerging new perceptions on these matters could have been

incorporated if there was a more analytical approach to the study of economic history.

28. P.C. Goswami, *op. cit.*, p. 49.
29. H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam, Volume Four: Modern Period: Yandabo to Diarchy, A.D. 1826-1919* (Guwahati, 1992). *Volume Five* (Guwahati, 1993).
30. *Ibid.*, Vol. V, Preface.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
33. *Ibid.*, see Preface.
34. *Loc. cit.* This justification given by Barpujari almost echoes the justifications provided for British imperialism by historians like Vera Anstey.
35. S.B. Medhi, *Transport System and Economic Development in Assam* (Gauhati, 1978).
36. See *Ibid.*, p. 353.
37. *Loc. cit.*
38. *Loc. cit.*
39. See Medhi, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-213.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 184.
41. Amalendu Guha, *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam: Society, Polity, Economy* (Calcutta, 1991). The two articles mentioned are the ones that deal with the 19th and 20th centuries and we are taking only these for discussion in keeping with the theme of the seminar.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 239.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 270.