

Topic:= Native Response To The Colonial Medicine

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Abstract: Colonialism can be best defined as geographical and cultural acquisition of an alien land under its fold. The process of physical acquisition of land is much easier to them in comparison to the colonization of mind. The advent of the colonial rulers to Assam results in certain changes in the political, social and economic sphere of the region. *Health* and *medicine* were the two basic aspects which undergone a mixed response from the native Assamese people to the colonial medicine. This is a little attempt to throw light how native people respond to the colonial medicine.

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Colonialism maintained its hold over any colony with a basic force of dominance and violence without any room for mutual understanding. Geographical canvas of the of the northeastern region of the Indian subcontinent is an important aspect of the socio-cultural studies of the region. Assam situated in the core region of the northeast with a “Tropical Monsoon Rainforest Climate”. Due to its geographical locations, Assam managed to defend itself from the outside attacks in several times.

Territorial conquest of Indians was quite easier for the Britishers in comparison to the colonization of mind. Indians for a long time inclined more and more towards the traditional methods of healing and curing than going for the colonial medical practices. Because, Indians has the tendency of associating each and every diseases with some sort of divine power, whereas for the colonial rulers this divine theory seemed to be illogical but it was a very difficult task for the Europeans to convinced the native people the fact that disease is a disorder within the human body and cured through proper medication than the traditional practices. There comes the confrontation between the approval and resistance to the colonial medicine.

The issue of health and disease became a matter of concern to the colonial rulers as more and more Europeans died of tropical diseases, thereby they made detailed study on the understanding and possible conquest to these diseases¹. They began to redefine the things on the basis of their own perceptions. Which made the whole scenario between the natives and the colonial rulers a bit bitter. As these diseases were not new to the native people and the treatments were very localized with an involvement of Vaidyas, kabiraj who had a strong hold over these diseases.² Small pox has an age old belief with the Hindu goddess ‘Sitala’ which could be cured through songs ,prayers and devotional offerings and traditional medicines prescribed the traditional practitioners. Hornbill is said to have a lasting effect in a pregnant women for a better delivery of a child. Cow bile is also a cure for many diseases³.”

“ *Hospitals* ” were another sphere which could not attract any of the Indians for a very long time, for the upper caste Hindus going to a hospital and get cured by a man of another caste and the vaccination was an another potent threat to their caste purity same goes for the upper caste Muslims as well. They considered these new medical measures as a heaps of pollutants. Where as the response of the lower caste to the colonial medical initiatives were a bit different as they don’t carry the ego of the caste barrier, they used to visit the hospitals and they even go for the preventive measures like vaccinations. i.e, *coolies* of tea gardens, who were forced to go for these by the colonial rulers as they were the products of the new govt settlements.

This was the scenario of the first phase of the introduction of the colonial medicine/health initiatives.

Where as in the second phase, the situation was a bit different after the introduction of the permanent settlement, which somewhat altered the prevailing social strata, the old gentry of the medieval period was in the position of breakdown, And the newly emerging middle class was the product of the colonial bureaucratic order has a positive response towards the colonial rule and showed a warm response towards the colonial medicine. And this class became a nexus between the traditional methods of healing and curing and the colonial medical practices. Like *Gunabhiram Baruah* ,*Anandaram Dhekial Phukan* who pressurized the not only in establishing

¹ Deepak Kumar, “Disease and Medicine in India”, A historical Overview, Delhi 2001,p;47

² W.W Hunter, “ Statistical account of assam”, Vol I,1879, p;284

³ B.B Ghosh, Mokakchong District Gazetter, p; 227

hospitals and made the colonial medicine for curing various diseases like *small pox, malaria, kala-azar, cholera* and so on. But also put a demand for teaching of the western medical system to the natives.

But even these changes could not change the response of the upper caste Hindus and the Muslims. Gender raised as an important issue for them. A female body is always the bearer of the family's honor, so coming in touch with an alien medical system which believed in the physical diagnosis of the diseases. Where as the traditional method of curing was contactless.

Thus, it can be said that there were mixed response of the different section of the native Indians towards the colonial medicine in its natal phase of the colonial rule.

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