

## Book Review

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*Administrative History of Undivided Assam (1826-1947): An Account of British Administration in Assam., Edited by Jatin Hazarika and Dhruva Pratim Sharma., Assam Regional Branch, Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA) and Anwasha Publications, Guwahati. Distributors: Anwasha Publications, 44, Bhuban Road, Uzanbazar, Guwahati.*

### Revisiting the Colonial Administration of Undivided Assam

The volume entitled “Administrative History of Undivided Assam (1826-1947): An Account of British Administration in Assam” edited by Jatin Hazarika and Dhruva Pratim Sharma and published in 2021 by the Assam Regional Branch of Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA) jointly with Anwasha Publications, Guwahati is a noteworthy contribution to the study of Assam’s colonial administrative history. This work of documentation of administrative history can be regarded as a major step towards helping the scholars pursuing research work in public administration in the North Eastern region.

Consisting of nine chapters and three appendices, the book covers in detail the initial decades of British rule from 1826 to 1874, period during which Assam was a Division of Bengal Province, followed by the period from 1874 to 1921 when Assam became a Chief Commissioner’s Province, and subsequently the period from 1921 up to the end of British rule in 1947 during which Assam existed as a Governor’s Province. Separate chapters in the book are devoted to British policy towards the hill tribes, municipal administration, land tenure system, development of Assam Secretariat, and aspects of society and economy in Assam under British rule, while the appendices include the text of the Treaty of Yandaboo, the provisions relating to Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas, and excerpts from the Reports of the Government of Assam. A select bibliography and a voluminous index at the end serve as useful aid for the reader.

The exhaustive Preface and the introductory chapter dwell upon the trajectory of British rule in the province which was initially necessitated by security concerns of the

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East India Company on the eastern borders of its empire. The gradual incorporation of territories under the ambit of British rule, the initial rumblings of anti-British sentiment among the Assamese ex-nobility and the hill tribes, and the administrative issues leading to establishment of a Chief Commissioner's province are described in detail in the second chapter entitled "The Initial Decades: Assam as a Division of Bengal Province". The third chapter "Assam as a Chief Commissioner's Province (1874-1921)" dealing with the intricacies of establishing a provincial administrative set-up in the remote region characterised by difficult terrain and a vast area with diverse communities reveals the process of consolidation of empire on the eastern frontier and also covers the period of formation of the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam in the early twentieth century, which was annulled within a few years leading to re-establishment of Assam as Chief Commissioner's Province. The events resulting in the transformation into a Governor's Province and the laying out of an elaborate administrative machinery equipped to deal with the changing political realities are explained in the next chapter, "Assam as Governor's Province (1921-47)". It is noteworthy that along with the changes in administrative machinery, the changes on the socio-political front including the attempts of revolt against the British rule and the course of the movement for freedom from imperialism are covered in detail in these chapters.

The setting up of a separate system of administration for the hill areas of the Province is covered in detail in the fifth chapter "Policy towards the Hill Tribes", while the next chapter examines the development of Municipal Administration, followed by the one on Land Tenure System. The eighth chapter on "Development of Assam Secretariat" throws interesting insights into the process of formation of administrative machinery at the secretariat level within severe constraints of resources-financial and personnel. The final chapter on "Aspects of Society and Economy in Assam under British Rule" highlights the far-reaching changes taking place on the socio-economic front under the colonial regime including migration of populations from other parts of the country and their settlement in the sparsely populated province, and the development of tea industry as well as the emergence of new social classes. The educational policy and development of modern education is dealt in detail in this chapter. It may be noted here that a plethora of useful information is provided in the three Appendices at the end, and some of the material included in the final appendix entitled "Excerpts from Reports of the Government of Assam" could have been gainfully included in the main chapters. The authors could have enriched the book further with a concluding chapter summing up the trajectory of development outlined in the previous chapters with inferences into the overall course of development of administration in Assam under British rule. It is also noteworthy that the book contains in-depth information not only on the colonial history of Assam and its neighbouring states including the erstwhile princely state of Manipur, but also on Sylhet district in present-day Bangladesh which had been a part of Assam province between 1874 and 1947.

In case of Assam, the Treaty of Yandaboo of 1826 formally marks the beginning of British rule, which lasted till India's independence in 1947. Though the British colonial administration was guided by a set of goals and principles different from the present ethos of popular government and people-centric administration, it provided the basis for many of the later administrative structures and practices. "Administrative History of Undivided Assam (1826-1947)" focuses on those aspects that have a bearing on present-day politics and administration of the state. It also throws light on the political developments including the freedom struggle, and on socio-economic aspects of the erstwhile province. Brought out in an attractive hard-bound format and moderately priced, the book would serve as an interesting guide to administrators and academicians as well as to the general readers interested in learning about the transformation of the traditional pre-colonial polity into the administrative machinery of the modern state.

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