

“17th century Assam through the eye of Tavernier”***Bhaba Jyoti Nath***
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Jean- Baptiste Tavernier (1603-1689) was a famous games trader and traveller in the seventeenth century. He was on business trip to Persia and India between 1630-1681 AD and visited India 6 times. His book *Les six voyages de Jean- Baptiste Tavernier*, published under the patronage of Louis XIV. The second part was published in 1677. The first English translation of the two part was published in 1678 by JOHN PHILIP in 1678. John Philip who was niece of John Milton. The travel of Tavernier to Assam was in the 17th chapter of the book. The chapter of the book of Tavernier travel to Assam was named as “Du Royaume d’Asem”. Though the date of visit was not mentioned, but he assisted Mirzumla, so the date of his travel can be traced as 1664- 1668.

Keyword: Tavernier, Les six voyages de Jean- Baptiste Tavernier, Louis XIV, Du Royaume d’Asem

1. INTRODUCTION:

Jean Baptiste Tavernier was one of the most famous travellers of his time. He was born in a protestant family in Persia and his father was a cartographer. He enjoyed travelling from an early age, and as a teenager he was able to travel to several European countries several times and learn different languages. Tavernier was best known for his **116-carat Blue Diamond** piece, which was brought light on the 18th century. This piece is popularly known as “**Tavernier Diamond**”. He sold this diamond piece for a France price of 120000 French Livre.

In 1669, he brought ownership of the Swiss town of Aubonne for 60000 Livre, for which he was known as the **Baron of Aubonne**.

The book was so popular among masses that it was published in English, Italian, German and Dutch during his lifetime.

John Philips translation of the original French *les six voyages de Jean Baptiste Tavernier* was entitled as “the six voyages of John Baptiste Tavernier”. The book was again published in 1889 by the Director of Science & Arts Museum, Dublin **Mr. Ball** and entitled as “Travels in India by Jean Baptiste Tavernier”. Tavernier describe that Mirzumla invade Assam and he assisted him. Mirzumla invaded Assam in 1662 AD and died on his way back to Dhaka from Assam in January- February in 1663 AD. Though the exact date and ruler of Assam was not mentioned in the book, but from the invasion of Mirzumla it can be exactly said that he came to Assam in between 1662-1664 during the last period of Ahom Rule. During the 600 year of rule of Assam by Ahom, it was retaining free from any influence. But toward the last period

the rulers became weak and it was becoming an easy target for Mughal, who extended their empire toward Bengal. Mirzumla was the general of Bengal and He led the invasion of Assam for the Mughal. The continuous attack of Mughal started by the invasion of Mirzula. The book mentions the greenery and richness of Assam in the 17th century. Though Tavernier mention Assam as “Afem”.

2. METHODOLOGY:

The study is descriptive in nature and it was based on various secondary sources like Book, Magazine, Journal and Internet.

3. DISCUSSION:

3.1: Du Royaume d’Asem (of the kingdom of Asem):

Tavernier entitled one chapter of the book as Du Royaume d’Asem, in which he elaborates on the social life of that time. It is also to be noted that in his description, Tavernier does not mention the name of any king who ruled Assam at that time. In contrast, his account reflects the invasion of mirzumla and socio-economic aspect of Assam.

In the first three paragraph of the chapter, he mentions the invasion. Mirzumla, who held a very important position in Aurangzeb’s Imperial court. Mirzumla planned to invade assam on the pretext of losing this importance in front of Aurangzeb, as Tavernier said. There was no major war in almost five hundred years and it was relatively peaceful. Mirzumla planned to invade assam through water way, for this purpose he came through Ganga river and entered Assam on the way from “Shyam Lake”¹. One interesting fact that Tavernier mention that the people of assam were the first to learn how to make gunpowder and they were the first to use it in the battle ground. The technology was later passed on to the hands of the people of Pegu (Current day BAGU, Myanmar) and finally the skill was entered China². He said that Mirzumla had taken a large quantity of ammunition, cannons etc. during his return from Assam. All temples found on the road Mirzumla returned were destroyed and looted and devastated. Tavernier referred to the present day HAJO as AZOO. At that time there were many tombs of the kings and nobles at Hajo and according to Ahom belief and tradition, a lot of wealth and Gold ornaments were buried with the dead in the tombs³. Being aware of the wealth Mirzumla Looted a lot of wealth and valuable from those tombs.

3.2: SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF ASSAM:

“Assam is one of the best state of Asia” he remarks, because Assam produced all the necessities of life and no goods were imported from other states. According to Tavernier there were mines of Gold, Silver, Iron, Steel and Copper. He also mentions about the MUGA tradition in Assam⁴. Assam produce the best quality of LA in Asia and it exports it to China and Japan. Gold could be used by all even though there was no permission to export gold outside of Assam. The king introduces coins in the form of Polygons⁵, such coins were not prohibited to take outside the kingdom.

Chicken meat was very popular among the people of the state and it was sold in large quantities in the Bazars which are held every month. Grape production in the states was substantial and grapes were dried and made into wine. On the other hand, two artificially made salt or Nimokhs were made⁶. In the first method, the special aquatic plants, which were eaten by frogs and ducks, were collected, dried and then burned in the fire. The ashes found after burning were collected and soaked in hot water. The salt thus prepared was of very high quality. In the second method, a special species of tree (Adam's fig tree) is first dried and burned. The ashes are then collected and specially prepared from them in a special way.

3.3: THE MENTION OF KAMRUP:

Tavernier mentions the city of Kamrup as the city of Kemmerof, in which the king of Assam kept his courtiers. The name of the capital was though the same, according to him. The journey from the city to state capital took twenty- five or thirty days⁷. Noting that the king did not collect any taxes from his subjects, the king, on the other hand, owned all the mineral resources, including gold and silver. In his book, Tavernier mentions that the king had hired labourers from the chuburia kingdom to work in his mines. Peaceful society and richness of the old days of Asem (Assam) and social condition of the society as well as the context of the funeral of their deceased.

4. CONCLUSION:

Les Six Voyages de Jean- Baptiste Tavernier made him world famous. For the study of Assam though we can take the help of regional sources like Ahom Buranji, but it did not focus much on the verse of social and economic life of people. The account of Tavernier gives us light on the richness of the state and the starting of the Ahom- Mughal conflict. Mirzumla's invasion and plunder of his invasion which make the Maidam (Burial place) devastated. Tavernier tried to focus on the social- economic aspect of the of the countries he visited in detail. Although he was a businessman, he travelled extensively in purpose of business and it can't say his mention was accurate enough to possibly study his visited to Assam and India in a short period of time.

The writing of Tavernier can be accepting by the way he focuses on the 17th century assam that no writer of that period did not mention about the society like he does. Though he was a French man to travel to India, but devoting a chapter on his book on Assam can be traced the importance of Assam in the eyes of foreigner. Assam was regarded as a powerful and prosperous states in the 17th century.

5. REFERENCES:

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