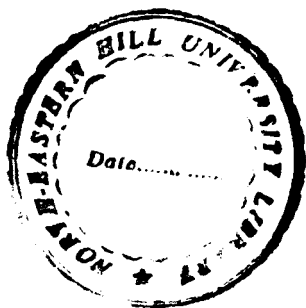


**PROCEEDINGS OF
NORTH EAST INDIA
HISTORY ASSOCIATION**



**TWENTY SIXTH SESSION
KOKRAJHAR CAMPUS, GAUHATI UNIVERSITY
KOKRAJHAR
2005**

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Preface

The Twenty sixth Annual Conference of the NEIHA was hosted by the Kokrajhar Campus, Gauhati University at Kokrajhar from 24th to 26th November, 2005. Sri Emmanuel Mushahary, President of the reception Committee welcomed the guests and delegates in the inaugural function, and Sri Hagrama Mahilary, Chief B.T.C., addressed the gathering as the Chief Guest. The 26th Session was inaugurated by Dr. R.N. Mushahary. The three days of the Conference was very well attended by historians and other social scientists from different parts of the region and also from other parts of the country and the academic sessions, the most important part of the Annual conference of NEIHA, saw the active participation of all NEIHA members present. We would like to record our thanks to the Joint Registrar, Kokrajhar Campus, Gauhati University for having hosted the Twenty Sixth Session of NEIHA and also our very sincere thanks to Dr. Sekhar Brahma, the Local Secretary, and his colleagues and students who worked untiringly to make the session a success.

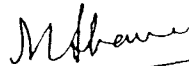
This Volume is a collection of the papers presented in the various academic panels of the XXVIth Session and also the proceedings of the business meetings of the session.

The Association is grateful to the Indian Council of Historical Research for the financial support advanced towards the publication of the Proceedings volume. Here we would again like to remind the esteemed members of NEIHA that they should take care to see that their papers follow the NEIHA style of referencing and also to ensure that the revised papers reach us within the last day announced in the business session. Without this co-operation from the members the work of the Editorial Board gets held up and it also becomes difficult to meet the deadlines of the press. It was mainly for these reasons and also of course for the considered opinion of the Panel Chairpersons, whose comments on every paper were clearly recorded and the deliberations of the Editorial Board, that a number of papers had to be abstracted or listed. The task of editing, proof reading etc. of such a large number of papers within a very limited period is very time consuming and we can do the work to the satisfaction of all NEIHA members only with the co-operation of all the paper presenters.

This volume also includes the papers which were presented in the symposium on "**Methods of Historical Research**" that was held during the XXVIth Session as per the decision in NEHA that the year when there are no Endowment Lectures to be organized a symposium on some topic of historical significance would be organized.

Finally I would like to say a very special word of thanks to the members of the Editorial Board, Prof. J. B. Bhattacharjee, Prof. Mignonette Momin and Prof. D.R.Syiemlieh who made my work much lighter by giving a lot of their time to sit through the Editorial Board meetings to decide on the status of the papers and not only editing the papers but also helping out with a lot of the proof reading of the papers. I would also like to thank Mr. Pradeep Shaha and his staff of Modern Offset for their interest in the work and getting the volume ready in time for release in the 27th session.

Shillong
10th August, 2006



(Manorama Sharma)

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Administration of the Devottara, Brahmottara and Dharmottara Lands in Assam in the Medieval Period

Manju Gogoi Dhar

Land grant to the Brahmanas and religious institutions was well known in early Assam. All the Kamrupa kings continued the process of land grant to Brahmanas and religious institutions. The Ahom rulers also continued the practice of land grant. The Ahom kings used to gift lands to the Brahmanas and also to different religious establishments, like temple, Satra, Dargah, etc. The copper plate inscriptions of the Ahom rulers show that they have made land endowment in different heads, variously called *Dharmottara*, *Devottara*, *Brahmottara*, *Nankar* and *Pirpal* depending upon the nature of established to which these were made¹. Usually the grant issued to the deity of a temple was called *Devottara*. Personal grant made to a Brahmana was called *Brahmottara*. Like wise the rent free lands received by temple servitors were known as *Dharmottara*. The *Nankar* grants were similar with the *Dharmottara* grant². The *Pirpal* lands were granted to Mahmmedan pirs for maintenance of their religious institutions. According to chronicles king Pratapsingha introduced the system of making land grants to Brahmanas and religious institutions under different categories such as *brahmottara*, *devottara* and *dharmottara*³.

The Ahom kings not only endowed the Hindu temple and Vaishnavite satras with paiks and rent free grants in the form of *debottar*, *brahmottara* and *dharmottar* tenures, but made adequate provision for their management and supervision from the early period of their rule. According to chronicles, it was king Sukapha who for the maintenance of religious institution, called Deosals, had appointed two state officials, called Deosular Phukan and Deosalar Baruah⁴. Subsequently during the reign of Dihingiaraja and Pratapsingha for the management and supervision of the religious endowments specially in Upper Assam an officer was appointed known as Deolia Phukan who was aided by a Deolia baruah. Each Devalay had a number of other junior officers like Boras, Tekalas, Kakotis etc. It was on the advice and general supervision of the Deolia

Phukan and Deoha Baruah that the Boras and other petty officials had to discharge their respective duties in the institutions).

In Lower Assam administrative arrangements in the religious establishments began from the reign of king Sivasingha⁶. Parvatiyagosain Krishnaram Nyaybagish was made the Nilachalar Baruah and was placed in charge of the civil and revenue administration in the Kamakhya temple⁷. In general the Barphukan or the viceroy of Guwahati supervised the religious endowments on behalf of the Ahom king. The Barphukan was entrusted with the entire administration of the Desa Kamrup, for which it appears that the religious institutions were under direct control of the Barphukan. It was he who issued royal ordinances to the temples on behalf of the king, including the grants of land and men. The Barphukan built or rebuilt the temples at the order of the king, and he also issued the grants to the temples. The Barphukan acted as the chief Justice in settling the disputes relating to the temple land and men. From copper plate land grant charters it is known that for the use of the Barphukan a number of *lickcau* were assigned in the temple, and he had constantly supervised the temples and their establishments and received secret information through his *lickcaus*⁸. Towards the later part of the Ahom rule it seems that the Barphukan also issued grant in his personal capacity and in one or two cases even by his wife⁹. On the basis of information given in the chronicles and inscriptions it is came to be known that a number of functionaries like *Sewachalluah*, *deoris*, *Bordeoris*, *Gita Pathak*, *Supkar* were appointed for the purpose of temple administration.

For every temple there existed a *Sewachalluah* or a temple superintendent. He was appointed by the king and was responsible directly to the Barphukan¹⁰. It was the duty of this officer to see that the income from temple was realised and properly utilized in the performance of rituals and maintenance of the temples and buildings in good order. He had a general control over the temple affairs and functionaries. The copper plate grants of Ahom kings record that a number of *lickcaus* were provided in every temple¹¹. As his remuneration, the *Sewachalluah* received grant of *Brahmottrara land*. The office of the *Sewachalluah* was continued till the early part of the British occupation of Assam.¹²

The civil and revenue matters of a temple were managed by the *Dolai*. He was the custodian of all properties of the temples, which consisted of the offerings of the people and the proceeds of rent free

Debottar lands including the donations and gifts received either from the royal side or from their disciples. The Dolai had to work under the instruction of the Sewa-challuah.¹³ The Dolai and his subordinates were generally appointed by the Barphukan of Guwahati during the later period; but in the principal temples of Kamakhya, Hajo and Umananda, the Dolais are said to have been nominated by the king.¹³ The Dolai also received land, men and other peoperty out of grants made to temple. It appears that the Dolai was assisted by the Bardeoris and other functionaries like Bhandar Kayastha, Mazumdar, Mudiar, Mena, Meteri, Melacaloo and Thakuria etc.

Some other people belonging to different castes who had rendered their service to the temple were also related with the supervising machinery of the temple management. The servitors were Nilakanta Pathak, Rudrapathak, Bhagavati, Super or Bhog Randhani, Dibagon or Gonak. All these servitors were from Brahman caste. From Non-Brahman caste some other functionaries were known as Athparia, Baricoa, Botadhara, Bolikata, Bhogar Aldhara etc.

All the land grants and inscriptions of the Ahom rulers record about the host of paiks who were assigned with the gifted land. The CP inscriptions record about the duties of these ryots. The servitors or paiks had an important part in the day to day management of the temple. For the maintenance of the servitors some land were also granted by the king known as Bhogdhoni and Paikan. The ryots on the paikan lands were required to render services to the temple, while the ryots of Bhogdhoni lands were bound to supply *bhog*. It was under the instruction of the Brapukan that the Dolai was required to distribute land among the paiks and other functionaries.

Each of the *Satra* was given revenue free Debottara, Dharmottara and Brahmottara land along with a number of Sebviks and paiks by the Ahom rulers. Affairs of each of the *Satras* in upper Assam were managed under the charge of a state official called Satriya Barua whose duty was to keep the royal court informed of the conditions prevailing in different *Satras*.¹⁴ He was to inspect various *Satras* occasionally and to recommend steps to be taken in various matters concerning the *Satras*. The state control over the *Satras* of Lower Assam was different. According to Maniram Dewan¹⁵, there was only one Satriya Baruah appointed for the *Satras* of Lower Assam. According to chronicles¹⁶, the Baruah working in the *Satras* of Kamrup was known as Mazindar Baruah as his duty was

different from the Baruah appointed as supervising officer of the *Satras* of upper Assam.

The Satra institutions enjoyed a great deal of autonomy in their internal management. Heads of the *Satras* commonly known as the *Satradhikar*, was all in all in the affairs of the Satra administration. The *Satradhikars* were not like the *Sewachalluah* of the temples and *Devalays* who were nominated by the king.¹⁷ They were succeeded hereditarily. In some cases, the disciples elected their *Adhikars*. When a new *Adhikar* was selected or nominated generally he had to be finally recognized as such by the king. The inscriptions issued to upper Assam *Satras* like those of Benganaati and Auniati *Satras* refer to the *Satradhikar* as the head of the *Satra* administration, in whose name the land grants were issued¹⁸ together with list of *paiks* including other functionaries. The inscriptions issued in Lower Assam *Satras* like that of Borpeta *satra* makes specific reference to the *Satra* officials like *Satriya*, *deka satriya*, *Pujari* and *Bhakat* with a detailed list of the *paiks* and other functionaries.¹⁹

To maintain relations with the court a functionary, known as *Khataniyar* was appointed from the side of the *Satra*.²⁰ He had to maintain relation with the royal court in all matters. In some of the *Satras*, notably the prosperous *Satras* of Majuli, the functionaries were granted in two or three categories. The chief duty of the *Khataniyar* known as *Barkhataniyar* was to function in the royal court. The *Barkhataniyar* acted as the manager of the *Satra* in the royal house and discharged the functions relating to justice. The *Sarukhataniyar* used to help the *Barkhataniyar* while discharging the duties on behalf of a *Satra*. But in the later period, these functions came to be discharged by the *Muktiar* who represented a *Satra* in the royal court in matters of dispute or suit against the institution.²¹

Generally the *Adhikar* of a *Satra* had the right to control and administer the land and other properties of the *Satra* and for that purpose he used to maintain personal staff in his house, headed by *Mazindar Baruah* who used to keep the daily accounts of income and expenditure in *Gosain's* house and dealt with various correspondence on behalf of the *Satra*. In the *Satra* of Kamrup in general there was one *Dhandia Bħarali* who was in charge of the money transaction together with an accountant called *Gananik* whose duty was to keep accounts of receipts, while in the *Satras* of upper Assam three classes of *Kakotis* and *Barkakotis* were appointed for the purpose. The *Barkakotis* were engaged for writing all correspondence of a *Satra*. They had to look after the *khats* and *paiks*.

Debottara and Dharmottara lands.²² It is known that some of the prosperous satras of upper Assam imitated the Ahom system of administration in managing the Satra affairs. For example, the Satradhikar of Auniati had a large number of retainues and attendants in his establishment.²³

The Adhikar of the Satra generally appointed a number of officials to maintain contacts with the disciples in different villages. In fact the entire structure of administration was carried on by the Satradhikar through a set of officers belonging to different caste and position. There are Rajmedhi, pachani, Barmedhi, Medhi, Majumder, Lekheru, Bara, Hatimata, Nishaphora, Mandal, Mazumdar etc. which resembled the state administration of the Ahoms days.²⁴ Only those persons who had intelligence and sharp memory could be appointed as Medhis. The position of the Medhi is very unique. In some of the Satras of lower Assam the land grants were issued in the mane of the Medhis as well. In some respects the Medhis acted as the Adhikars of the Satras.²⁵ There were more than one Medhi in the Satra.

Some of the Medhis, known as Rajmedhi, were appointed in charge of the revenue administration in the khats of the Satras. Such Medhis had to maintain personal contacts with all disciple residing in the area. Several villages constituted one *Cahar* over which a Rajmedhi exercised his religious power. Next to Rajmedhi is Bormedhi who is usually assisted by a few Medhis, Sajtolas, and Pacanis. In return for their service, they are exempted from any payment of tax to the Satra.²⁶

There are some other functionaries who are connected with the management of some of the departments of the Satra. The Satradhikar appointed these functionaries from among his devotees. They were Bar-Deuri, Bhagati, Pathak, Dhan-Bharali, Caul-Bharali etc. Then there are a few more functionaries who are directly not connected with any of the above departments but worked for the general management of the Satra. They were bilaniya, thai-macha, ath-pariya etc.

The paiks who had rendered their duty for the day to day management of the Satra were given shares of the Satra land which they cultivated and utilized for their benefit. However by way of granting a share of the assigned lands, the paiks were provided with the means of livelihood of their own. Some land grant charters of the Ahom rulers also mentioned the name of the paiks and functionaries among whom the

shares of the satra land were distributed. In the CP inscription they made some specific direction how the income of the gifted land was to be spent as per royal instruction. As for instance, the land grant charter issued to Sundaridiya Satra,²⁸ suggests as to how the income of the twenty Puras of assigned land and two fisheries were to be utilized for meeting the expenses of the Satra.

All the Satra and temples of Assam possessed Devottar, Brahmottar and Dharmottara land grants ranging from few acres to several thousand acres of such land. According to the District Gazetteers of Assam, (1905), Auniati, Dakhinpat, Kamalabari and Bengana-ati Satras possessed 21,000, 5,900 and 2,500 acres of revenue free land respectively, besides a large amount of half revenue free estates.²⁹ The temples which were situated in different part of the kingdom also received vast land from the Ahom rulers. According to an early estimate the thirty seven temples in Kamrup, received nearly half of the cultivable lands in Kamrup.³⁰ These religious endowments were under a fair system of administration. One important point of the administrative system was that the state officers took direct part in the management of these religious endowments. While the priest and other functionaries were allowed free hand in respect of day to day management of the temple affairs, the ultimate responsibility was retained by the king himself. In the CP inscriptions it is recorded clearly that the donar king permanently alienated the land to the donee, and the doner king would never exercise his power of collecting revenue and other taxes from the donated land. At the same time it was also implied that inspite of all rights being relinquished, the king retained his overall supervision over the gifted land and the right of adjudication. The donar king had the responsibility of protection of the donated land.

Towards the later part of their rule some of the Ahom rulers extended the state control over the donated land. They used to maintain an effective control on the revenue administration of the religious endowments, as king Gadadhar Singha made a forceful exaction of contributions from the Satra of Majuli. During the time of the Moamaria revolts, the Khatamars of the Satras were summoned to collect money from the Satra of Majuli. During the Moamaria rule the said Satras were required to pay contribution as per their establishment. After the Moamaria revolts, the Barphukan seized the silver and golden utensils of Kamakhya and Madhaba temples and paid a sum of Rs.60,000 to the foreign soldiers. Thus the later Ahom rulers changed the policy towards the religious endowments.

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