

## Aspects of conspiracies against the Ahom Monarchs and the Nature of punishments imposed on conspirators

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During the six hundred years of Ahom rule in Assam, they gave her a distinct political entity, a unique cultural identity, a well organised government, a well protected frontier and, as P. Gogoi says, "introduced an administrative system which had a number of features quite new to the people of this land."<sup>1</sup> Theirs was a monarchical form of government where administration of justice was efficient and impartial. David Scott in his notes on Welsh's Report of Assam (1794) described the Ahom administration of justice in the following words, "The administration of justice is said to have been speedy, efficient and impartial".<sup>2</sup> In this article, some of the conspiracies and punishments meted out during the Ahom rule has been listed.

Probably, the first conspiracy recorded in buranjis was during the reign of King Su-Khram-pha (1332-64). It was organised by Ta-phi-khen to set up Chao-pu-tai, the younger half-brother of the king on the throne. When it was detected, the two main culprits first fled to Kamata Kingdom, but were forced to return. After trial Ta-phi-khen was found guilty and was executed.<sup>3</sup>

When Tao-Kham-ti, who became the king in 1380, was found to be under the influence of his wife and could not stop her acts of oppression on the subjects, a sense of insecurity prevailed in the kingdom, and finally, the nobles decided to act. They dethroned and later assassinated both the king and the queen in the year 1389.

King Su-hum-mung (1497-1539) who was, perhaps, the greatest conqueror among the Ahom monarchs,<sup>4</sup> who was an enterprising and able administrator, was overthrown at the fag end of his rule by his own son Prince Su-kleng-mung. The Prince engaged some men to kill his father. But after he became the king, he got them executed.

So-kham-pha (1553-1603) faced a plot to overthrow him within

a year of his accession. The group consisted of among others seven princes. The rebels were rounded up but later let off at the intervention of Ton-kham Bargohain. But in 1559 this group got together once again and rebelled against the king. They were arrested and executed.

During So-ching-pha's (1644-48) reign his eighth son Lapet in alliance with La-kaio Barpatra conspired against the king. One of king's wife reported the matter to him and after enquiry he invited his son Prince Lapet to dinner and treacherously killed him. Next he got La-kaio Barpatra executed alongwith his sons and brothers. Also, he removed Barpatra's daughter, who was his chief queen.

When king Su-tam-ta alias Jayadhvasimha (1648-63) came to the throne, he too had to put down several conspiracies against him. First the Buragohain along with his sons and brothers were all seized and killed. Again after an enquiry the king put Barukial Bargohain and his family to death by burning their mouths.<sup>5</sup> There was another plot and this time the conspirators fled at the approach of the king's men and later they were given shelter by the Bargohain. After enquiry the king found Bargohain guilty and made the latter's son to eat the flesh of his own breast and thigh and drink his urine. Then the Bargohain was made to eat the liver and marrow of his own son. Finally he was beaten to death.<sup>6</sup> It was then proclaimed by king that conspirators would be punished in this manner if they dared to conspire against the king.<sup>7</sup>

In the reign of So-nyat-pha (1669-73), his religious fanaticism enraged many of his nobles and subjects because he ordered them to become the disciple of a Bairagi. The rebellious group made the king's younger brother their leader and was able to depose the king and later got him executed along with his three queens.<sup>8</sup> The Bairagi was caged and set adrift on the river Dikhrai.

During the reign of king Su-pat-pha (1681-96) alias Gadadhara-simha, he too had to face conspiracies which he put down with an iron hand. One was spear-headed by Phukans.<sup>9</sup> The two Phukans, Barphukan and Pamiphukan, were made to wear iron chains and imprisoned in Hatisal or elephant stall. Thereafter, they were killed and their bodies were placed in a frame on a barge of plain-tain trees with areca-nut and kerchiefs on their necks.<sup>10</sup>

Also king Su-khrung-pha alias Rudrasimha (1696-1714) on accession had to face conspiracies. The Chering Raja who in alliance with Chungi Barua plotted against the king was caught and the former after having his knee-caps extracted was deported to Namrup and the latter was executed. Next the king extracted the eye-balls

of the two Deodhais after enquiry, when it was found that they had given shelter to a prince who was a conspirator. Even his relatives and children were banished to Namrup. Then there was another similar case when Sarujan Gohain was deported and his accomplices were expelled after their noses and ears were chopped off. The king even extracted the eye-balls of his rebellious brother.<sup>11</sup>

The above mentioned conspiracies and punishments are only few of the many such court intrigues involving princes and high officials. What is important to be noted is that in most cases proper enquiries were made before giving the final verdict. It can also be mentioned that in most cases of conspiracy, the conspirators were nobles and princes and this means that common people were rarely involved in it. Also, in most cases the Ahoms suffered the punishments because only they enjoyed the high posts.

Finally, it can be concluded from the above discussion that the rebels were always hunted down and rebellions were crushed mercilessly. The punishments meted out by the Ahom Government on conspirators were very harsh and sanguine. It was mostly physical torture and indeed very severe. But what is note-worthy is that Ahoms considered family as a single unit and for any offence of any member of the family in most cases the whole family was punished alongwith the culprit. This has been corroborated by Shihabuddin Talish in his account of Assam.<sup>12</sup> It would also be worth mentioning that the Ahoms followed the principle in any cases of offences "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."<sup>13</sup> For them, before the code of law all men were equal and there was no discrimination as was in the cases of British colonizers. This is why probably they could rule for such a long period of six hundred years.

### Notes & References

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3. *Ahom-Buranji*, (Tr. and ed.) by G. C. Barua, Assam Administration, Calcutta, 1930, p. 48.

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4. Padmeswar Gogoi, *The Tai and the Tai Kingdoms*, p. 310.
5. *Ahom-Buranji*, p. 149.
6. *Ahom-Buranji*, p. 154.
7. *Ahom-Buranji*, p. 159.
8. *Ahom-Buranji*, p. 228.
9. *Satsari Buranji*, p. 111.
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3. *Assam Buranji*, Tr. and ed. by G. C. Barua, Assam Administration, Gauhati, 1936, p. 154.

4. *Assam Buranji*, ed. by S. K. Bhuyan, Gauhati University, 1933, p. 149.