

“Kachari Buranji” :
Myth of a Chronicler Source of the History of Cachar

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The *Kachari Buranji* ¹, edited by Professor S. K. Bhuyan and published by the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam under the Directorship of Professor Bhuyan himself in 1936, as claimed in the title page, is “Collated from old Assamese Manuscript Chronicles.” The English sub-title runs as follows : *A Chronicle of the Kachari Rajas from the earliest times to the Eighteenth Century A. D., with special reference to Assam-Cachar political relations.* The narrative precisely ends in 1714 A. D. A confusion has, therefore, been created by involving ‘Cachar, in the sub-title. It is further confounded when the learned editor says in his ‘Preface’, “The prefatory portion of the Chronicle embodies an account of the legendary origins of the Rajas of Cachar.....”² etc. Again, in the same section, he refers to king Rudra Singha’s Cachar expedition. ³ Similarly, the opening sentence of his ‘Introduction’ is as follows : “The present Publication *Kachari Buranji* is primarily a chronicle of the relations of the Ahom government with the Rajas of Cachar.” ⁴ The ‘Raja of Cachar’, ‘ruler of Cachar’, ‘Cachar Raja’ etc have been mentioned in several places in this section. ⁵ It also says that the “Barbaruah personally led Tamradhvaj to Khaspur , ⁶ and discusses “Rudra Singha’s subjugation of Cachar’.⁷ There is also an addenda (in English, again) entitled “An Episode in the History of the Kacharis” wherein the expressions like ‘Raja of Cachari’, ‘Cachar Raja’ and ‘Khaspur’ as the capital have been freely used. ⁸ The statements are almost similar in the synopsis of the passages of the text in English provided at the end of the book.⁹

Cachar in 1714 A.D.

The *Kachari Buranji* ends with the death of the Ahom king Rudra Singha in 1714 A.D. It may, therefore, be worthwhile to look into the political setting of Cachar at that point of time to objectively examine the claim of the *Buranji* as the history of ‘Assam-Cachar political relations.’ It is perhaps also necessary to clarify here that Cachar, for our purpose, is the modern district of Cachar and we have no doubt that the editor also referred to the same territory.

Cachar had no identity of its own in ancient times. It must have been covered in such political formations which included Sylhet from time to time. In fact, it certainly formed part of the Deva state of Bhatara copper-plates which included Sylhet, Cachar and some more areas of South-East Bengal before the rise of Harikela.¹⁰ As Professor H. K. Barpujari says, "Geographically, culturally and ethnically the Barak-Surma Valley is an extension of the Gangetic Valley of Bengal."¹¹ While interpreting the account of Huen Tsang, Raisaheb K. L. Baruah suggested that Sylhet at that point of time was "confined on the north and south by the Assam range and the Lushai Hills respectively."¹²

In the early mediaeval period the valley was ruled by the Tripuris. As a matter of fact, the Tripuri state formation process started in Cachar, gradually spread over Sylhet and Tripura, and ultimately Agartala became their capital.¹³ In 14th-15th century, three small states, viz. Gaur, Laur and Jayantia came into existence in modern Sylhet portion of the valley.¹⁴ Cachar continued to be under the Tripuris, although their authority gradually weakened in this portion of the state when some local chieftains like Madan Raja of Katgarh, Harischandra of Sakala and others became powerful in their respective areas.¹⁵ The Dimasa state was then limited to North Cachar Hills and parts of Kapili and Dhansiri valleys, with Maibong as the capital.¹⁶

In the 16th century the Coach Behar state rose into prominence under King Naranarayan. His brother and general, Chila Roy led successful military campaigns against the Ahoms, Dimasas (Maibong), Manipur, Jayantia, Sylhet and Tripura in 1582 A.D. and the rulers of these states agreed to pay tribute to Coach Behar. It was during this campaign that the Khaspur state in Cachar came into existence. The Cachar Valley, extending from the foothills of Barail (North Cachar Hills) to Longai (in Karimganj district) was ceded by the Tripuris to the Koches who retained it as a 'Crown Colony' under a Governor, with headquarters at Brahmapur, to maintain relations with the newly subdued states.¹⁷ A division of the Koch army was garrisoned at Brahmapur which since then came to be known as Kochpur, and ultimately, as Khaspur.¹⁸ After the death of Chila Roy the rulers of these subdued states declared independence and Kamalnayan himself laid the foundation of the independent Khaspur state in Cachar in 1590 A.D.¹⁹

Kamalnayan was succeeded by seven rulers in Khaspur, viz. Uditanarayan, Bijoyarayan, Dhirnarayan, Mehendranarayan, Ranajit, Nara Singha and Bhim Singha. The last ruler, Bhim

Singha had no son. His only daughter, Kanchani, was married to prince Laksmichandra of the Dimasa Raj family of Maibong in 1745 A.D.²⁰ It was on the basis of this marriage that after the death of Bhim Singha both Khaspur and Maibong states came under a common crown and Maharaj Gopichandranarayan (1745-1757) became the first ruler of the twin state. Gopichandra, Harischandra and Laksmichandra were brothers and they ruled in succession (1745-57, 1757-72, and 1772-73). C. A. Soppit tells us clearly that "...about the year 1750 the a Raja, his Court and the Barmans (the aristocracy) crossed the Barail range and established the Raj, in the Plains at Khaspur."^{20a}

It is clear from the above that at least till 1745 A.D. Maibong and Khaspur were separate and independent states. The possibility of the Dimasas to be the rulers of Khaspur before 1745 A.D. is thus ruled out. It is, however, a fact that a portion of the Barak Valley had passed under the rulers of Maibong during the reign of Pratapnarayan (1583-1613) who claimed himself as *Srihattavijayina* in one of his coins.²¹ A Persian chronicle²² suggests that in about 1612 A. D. the Dimasa Rajas had strong forts at Pratapgarh (Patharkandi) and Asuritekar (Badarpur) both in Karimganj district, where the Mughals clashed with them. This acquisition must have been for a short time as the present Karimganj district formed part of the Sylhet *sircar* of Bengal for the rest of the Mughal period and for more than first one hundred years under the British. Nevertheless, the Dimasas continued to exercise control over a small portion of the Cachar plains. That is why Tamradhvajnarayan (1699-1708) introduced a code, called *Cacharir Niyam*, in Bengali, for the administration of this Bengali-inhabited plains tract.²³ It is also known from the local sources that Tamradhvaj had pitched his temporary capital at Bikrampur when the Ahoms sacked Maibong.²⁴ It was this division of the state which generated powerful cultural influence on the royal court which was adorned by a galaxy of scholars who rendered some *Puranas* into Bengali during the reign of Raja Suradarpanarayan (1708-1720) and the Raja himself composed some *malsi* in Bengali.²⁵ A few Brahmin and artisan families from the plains were encouraged to settle down in Maibong and the names of the settlements around the palace like Brahmanbra, Kumarpara, Kamarpara, Dhamadi Haor etc.²⁶ suggest the demographic pattern and the Hindu influence in the erstwhile Dimasa capital. The appointment of one Maniram Laskar of Barkhola as the *Uzir* of the area by Kirtichandranarayan (1735-1745) is known from his two copper-plate inscriptions in Bengali,

dated 1658 *saka* (1736 A. D.)²⁷ The portion of the Cachar plains then under Dimasa rule could be Bikrampur and Barkhola parganas which were adjoining to the North Cachar Hills. It could not, however, have included Khaspur which was the capital of another state.

Acceptability of Information

Although the editor claims the *Kachari Buranji* in its sub-title to be "A Chronicle.....with special reference to Assam-Cachar political relations", Cachar or Kachar is no where mentioned in the text. It has although used 'Kachari' as a people and their ruler as 'Kachari Raja' or 'Kacharir Raja'. Apparently therefore, it is a problem of identification and interpretation, and not of information. But unfortunately, some information given in the text are also misleading. It is stated that Barbaruah occupied Maibong, but Tamradhvaj, the Kachari Raja, fled to Khaspur.²⁸ Rudra Singha then ordered the Barbaruah to march against Khaspur.²⁹ As the Barbaruah fell ill, Paniphukan was asked to command the forces to Khaspur.³⁰ The commanders resumed their march to Khaspur.³¹ They pitched their camp at Sampani and sent a messenger to Khaspur asking the Kachari Raja to submit.³² The expedition, however, had to be abandoned due to sickness in the Camp³³. Mean while, the Raja of Jayantia visited Khaspur and took Tamradhvaj to Jayantiapur as a prisoner by stratagem.³⁴ An expedition was then sent by the Ahom king to Jayantiapur and both the Rajas were taken as prisoners to Biswanath where they renewed their allegiance to the Ahom king. Tamradhvaj was thereafter led by the Barbaruah to Khaspur and reinstated on the Kachari throne thereo³⁵

The mention of Khaspur creates the confusion. According to the *Buranji*, the Kachari expedition was planned in 1706 A.D. (1628 *Saka*) and the Kachari and Jayantia Rajas were taken to Biswanath in 1707 A. D. (1629 *saka*). Tamradhvaj, therefore, could be, if at all, led by the Barbaruah to Khaspur for reinstatement in 1707 A.D. or 1708 A.D. This is impossible from the fact that Khaspur was then the capital of another state. Tamradhvaj could be in Khaspur as a political fugitive, but this was neither his capital nor could he be taken there for reinstatement. Moreover, the capital during the reign of Tamradhvaj's son Suradarpa (1708-1720) was at Maibong where Bhubaneswar Bachaspati composed *Naradiya Rasamrita* in 1642 *saka* (1720) A.D.³⁶

In the *Jayantia Buranji*, also "A Chronicle Compiled from old Assamese Manuscript Chronicles" and edited by Professor

S. K. Bhuyan, the passage stating that Tamradhvaj was taken to Jayantiapur as a captive from Khaspur by the Jayantia Raja by a Stratagem is repeated. ³⁷ But this information is contradicted by the *Tungkhungia Buranji*, which is also compiled, edited and translated by Professor S. K. Bhuyan. Referring to the same Kachari expediteion of King Rudra Singha, it says, ³⁸ "The two contingents proceeded by two separate routes and reached Demera and Maibong. The Kachari Raja fled and escaped into Jayantia. Our men sent a request to the Jayantia Raja to deliver up the Kachari chief, but the Jayantia Raja refused to comply with the demand on the principle that a refugee should not be betrayed.

The last passage of the *Kachari Buranji* gives a list of places,³⁹ which according to the editor,⁴⁰ are 'the stages in the route between Assam and Cachar', but none of these are comparable with any place-name in Cachar.

Dependability as a Source

In its English sub-title the editor has claimed it to be "A Chronicle", while a citation in the title-page says, "Collated from old Assamese Manuscript Chronicles". Under the heading "Original Sources of Kachari Buranji",⁴¹ in another page, there is a list of 8 sources (3 of them are mentioned twice each to take the serial to 11) from which the "Chronicle" has been collated. Interestingly none of these sources is titled as *Kachari Buranji*. This gives us the impression that the title *Kachari Buranji* has been coined by the editor himself. In his 'Preface to the First Edition', the editor says, ⁴²

"The main bulk of the present publication has been reproduced from an old Assamese manuscript chronicle recovered from the family of the late Srijut Hemchandra Goswami. The chronicle deals exclusively with Ahom-Kachari relations from the end of the Fourteenth Century to the beginning of the Eighteenth. The prefatory portion of the chronicle embodies an account of the legendary origin of the Rajas of Cachar, connecting them with the earliest Kachari monarchs recorded in history. Goswami's manuscript is, however, incomplete ; but we have been fortunate in finding the omitted or lost portions in other chronicles obtained from the Ahom Juvak Sanmilani, the American Baptist Mission at Gauhati, the Indian Office Library, London, and from Srijut Mohar Singh Deka of the Topakuchia Raj family. A complete account of the subsequent phase of King Rudra Singha's Cachar ex-

xpedition could not be found in either of the above chronicles, and hence the account in English, inserted in Dr. John Peter Wade's *Account of Assam*, has been retranslated into Assamese, constituting paragraphs 198-202 and 217-259 of this book. The sources laid under contribution have been mentioned in a Note after the Preface. In the chronicles dealing with the general history of Assam we come across copious accounts of Ahom-Kachari relations; and the detachable ones have been inserted in an Appendix constituting paragraphs 260-281. The book has been divided into chapters on the basis of the reigns of the Ahom monarchs as their limits are well defined. The contemporaneous Kachari rulers have been mentioned at the commencement of a chapter, and the same procedure has been adopted in the Synopsis in English as well."

The facts about the preparation of the chronicle so stated naturally do raise some methodological questions. The 'chronicle' is a conventional term and the researchers are required to examine its authenticity through 'internal,' and external criticism before using it as a source. The method of preparation is always an important item of verification. The researcher has also to be satisfied that the original text has not been tempered with. In the present case this task is almost impossible as some of these 'original sources' are no longer available. The mention of Khaspur as the capital before 1714 A. D. in a few passages has already created doubts about the virginity of at least those passages. In his 'Preface to the Second Edition', the editor tells us, "This book (which book?) was compiled in early part of the eighteenth century," ⁴³ Our doubt is that the compilation must have been much later when Khaspur had already become the capital of the erstwhile Kachari (Dimasa) state and this influenced the mind of the compiler. Moreover, as many as 148 paragraphs (out of a total of 281) in the *Kachari Buranji* has been 'retranslated' into Assamese from J. P. Wade's *Account of Assam* (which is in English). In any case, a compilation or collation from various sources, however authentic the 'original sources' might be, do hardly meet the requirement of a chronicle. Such "a chronicle" is 'no chronicle'. As J. N. Phukan tells us, "We are in possession of two types of Assamese Buranjis— (i) original Assamese buranjis and (ii) translated or compiled Assamese buranjis. Whereas the original Assamese buranjis generally adhered to the principles of Ahom buranji writing, it was the translated or compiled Assamese buranjis which greatly devia-

ted from these principles.”⁴⁴ But the *Kachari Buranji* (and for that matter, *Jayantia Buranji*) is perhaps the example of a third type. It is compiled by a modern scholar on the basis of ‘original sources’. Its dependability as a source, therefore, is not unquestionable.

Summing-up

This presentation has been provoked mainly by the title-page of the *Kachari Buranji*, published by the DHAS. The questions that naturally followed are, how could (i) the chronicle that ends in 1714 A. D. be claimed as one of Assam-Cachar political relations, (ii) the Dimasa Rajas before 1745 A. D. be called the Rajas of Cachar, and (iii) Tamradhvaj be led to Khaspur by the Barbaruah of the Ahom monarch for reinstatement? The evidences available with us do squarely contradict these contentions. The content analysis of this particular *Buranji* further convinces us that it fails to justify its claim as a chronicle. On the otherhand, many researchers have been citing it as a source in their studies. There is, therefore, a need to satisfy ourselves about the real nature of the publication.

Notes & References

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