

LAST DAYS OF AHOM MONARCHY

A History of Assam from 1769 to 1826

S.L. Baruah

The present work gives a critical and comprehensive account of the last phase of the Ahom sovereign rule in Assam beginning with the first popular challenge to the Ahom monarchy in 1769 till its extinction and introduction of the British rule in 1826. The study gives an introductory but clear idea of Ahom administration and socio-economic life of Assam under the Ahoms and discusses in detail the popular rebellions against the Ahom government, the court intrigues and the external aggressions of the period, all of which worked to bring about the disintegration and downfall of the Ahom kingdom.

The study presents an objective study of the life and works of Purnananda Burhagohain, who had been the Premier of the Ahom kingdom from 1783-1817 and the most noted figure of the last days of Ahom rule. It clears many of the controversial points centering round that great personality. It also deals with Assam's relations with the neighbouring powers including Burma and the English East India Company with its headquarters in Bengal.

The authoress makes full use of the original sources, both published and unpublished, available in different libraries in the State, including the National Archives of India, West Bengal State Archives and Assam Secretariat Records Office. Inscriptions and coins have also been consulted and interviews with the descendants of Purnananda Burhagohain and Sarbananda, a prominent Matak chief were taken. Oral history has also been utilised.

Swarna Lata Baruah is Professor in the Department of History, Dibrugarh University. She obtained her Ph.D. degree from Dibrugarh University for her dissertation 'Rajamantri Purnananda Burhagohain and His Times' in 1972.

Professor Baruah was a member of the Executive Committee of the Indian History Congress, Vice-President of the North-East India History Association and of the North-East India Council for Social Science Research. At present, she is actively associated with women's studies and writing profusely about women's problems. She has specialisation in the history and culture of North-East India and published numerous articles on the subject in scholarly journals. Her other book *A Comprehensive History of Assam* published in 1985 has received wide appreciation. Professor Baruah has also written book in Assamese language for the school and college students of history.

ISBN 81-215-0462-7

Jacket by Rathin Sengupta

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AHOM MONARCHY

A HISTORY OF ASSAM FROM 1781 TO 1826

By J. H. H. H.

Part of the series of the

Assam Series

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S.L. Baruah

Professor, Department of History,
Dibrugarh University



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to
my husband
Professor K.P. Baruah, M.Sc.
of
D.H.S. Kanei College, Dibrugarh

The publication of this book was financially supported by the Indian Council of Historical Research. The responsibility for the facts stated, opinions expressed or conclusions reached is entirely that of the author and the Indian Council of Historical Research accepts no responsibility for them.

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ISBN 81-215-0462-1
First published 1993
© 1993 Baruah, Swarna Lata (b. 1939)

Typeset, Printed and Published by Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd.,
Post Box 5715, 54 Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi-110 055.

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Preface

THIS present work is a revised presentation of my Ph.D. thesis *Rajmantri Purnananda Burhagohain and His Times* or a History of Assam from 1783-1817 and gives an account of the last phase of the Ahom rule in Assam beginning with the first popular challenge to the Ahom monarchy in 1769 till the formal extinction of Ahom sovereign power in AD 1826. The period is marked by peoples' uprisings against the Ahom government, serious court intrigues and external aggressions. All this created a sea of troubles in which sank the six hundred year old throne of the Ahoms. The monarchy resolving to preserve its traditional structure and the power-hungry nobles fighting amongst themselves dragged the country to misery and despair. The imperialist powers, the Burmese in the east and the British in the west exploited the situation, and in the contest the British becoming victorious, took possession of the smiling valley of the Brahmaputra. This work discusses, as objectively as possible, the different forces working on and under the ground to bring about this catastrophe. The epic incident of 1769, when the Ahom monarch was temporarily deposed by his own subjects to make room for one of them was briefly discussed in the thesis as a retrospect for the events of the period. This has now been expanded and so also the portion dealing with the events from 1821-26 to make the contents suit the new title, while necessary compression has been made at proper places. However, the basic approach to the problem and the main contents of the original thesis remain unchanged.

The period under study in this work has been partially covered by Sir Edward Gait in his *A History of Assam*. Dr. S.K. Bhuyan also in his *Anglo-Assamese Relations (1771-1826)* gives a narrative of the events but that is only to understand the theme of his work. The subject, a topic of amazing interest has not therefore been properly dealt with by any previous scholar. This is therefore an attempt to give a full account of the last days of Ahom rule in Assam drawing conclusions on the basis of historical facts and highlighting the people's struggle for

freedom and justice. However, this can not be the last say on the problems nor can I claim perfection. I shall consider my labour amply rewarded if the present work can inspire the scholars to take up further investigation of the problems. The publication of the work is financially supported by the Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi, but I am alone responsible for the facts stated, opinions expressed or conclusions reached and the esteemed Council has nothing to do with them.

The narrative is based on the indigenous *Buranjis* or chronicles, which is a valuable source for the history of medieval Assam, as well as, on official documents, both published and unpublished. Inscriptions and coins have also been consulted and interviews with the descendants of Purnananda Burhagohain, in the main, who had been the de facto ruler of Assam during the period of his Premiership (1783-1817) have also been taken. Besides, works of the earlier scholars have been consulted. The details of all this are appended in the bibliography.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge my debt of gratitude to late L.P. Dutta, the first Rector of the Dibrugarh University who had greatly inspired me to go for research and to Dr. M. Neog, formerly Guru Nanak Dev Professor of the Punjabi University, Patiala, who helped me with valuable suggestions in the early stage. I am grateful to my supervisor Dr. P.C. Choudhury, Ex-Director of the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, Gauhati and to the learned examiners of the thesis Prof. J.N. Sarkar of Jadavpur University and late Prof. D.C. Sircar, the internationally reputed Carmichael Professor of Calcutta University, for their valuable suggestions. It is my pleasant duty to offer my gratitude to the Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi for its financial support to get the book published.

Among my friends, I am particularly thankful to late H.P. Neog, the then Secretary of the Text-Book Production of the Dibrugarh University, Prof. P. Hazarika and Prof. S. Barthakur of D.H.S.K. College, Dibrugarh, Dr. H. Goswami, Professor in Economics and Sri A.C. Goswami, Lecturer in English of the Dibrugarh University and to Dr. B.K. Pandey and Sri P.K. Shukla of the Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi, for their inspiration and help in different matters. Sri T.N. Chakravarty, Sri S. Borah and Sri G. Borah took the pain to type out the manuscript either in the preliminary or in the final stage; I am thankful to all of them. My mother-in-law late Hemalata Baruah, my mother late Hema Prabha Dutta, my aunt late Kanti Borah

and my maternal uncle Sri Nandeswar Borah used to look after my children and family affairs when I was out of my home for research work. My father late K.C. Dutta, B.A. (Hons.), who had been formerly a teacher of English language and history gave me valuable suggestions and had even gone through most part of the thesis. I owe my gratitude to all of them. I am also very grateful to Shri Dhaniram Borah of Barwari, Guwahati and his family, my cousin sister Smt. Sushila Borah and to Smt. Labanya Rongpi of Guwahati who had very cordially hosted me whenever I visited the place for the purpose of research. I also pleasantly acknowledge the help which I got from my eldest son Maram (Aniruddha), and daughter Mamani (Pallavi) in the process of preparing the final copy of the manuscript. My husband Prof. K.P. Baruah of D.H.S.K. College, Dibrugarh had helped me in manifold ways all throughout and I, with a sense of deep gratitude, dedicate this work in his name.

S.L. BARUAH

Dibrugarh

1 August 1993.

Abbreviations

AAH	Account of Assam by Hamilton
AARB	Anglo-Assamese Relations by Bhuyan
AAW	Account of Assam by Wade
AB	Ahom Buranji
ABNP	Asam Buranji by Nao-baicha Phukan
ABHB	Asam Buranji by Barua Sadax-Amin
ABSM	Asam Buranji, obtained from the family of Sukumar Mahanta
ABTP	Asam Buranji, by Tamuli Phukan
ACMSV	Sri Sri Aniruddhadevar Charitra aru Mayamara Gosain Sakalar Vamsavali
ADHB	Ahomar Din by Barbarbarue
APB	Asamar Padya Buranji
BI	Bibliotheca Indica
BPC	Bengal Political Consultations
BPG	Barphukanar Git
BSC	Bengal Secret Consultations
BSPC	Bengal Secret and Political Consultations
BVRD	Buranji-Vivek-Ratna by Dewan
DAB	Deodhai Asam Buranji
DAW	Documents Illustrative of the Burmese War by Wilson
DHAS	Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, Gauhati
HAG	A History of Assam by Gait
HND	Historical Notes of David Scott
NEFBM	History of the Relations of Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal by Mackenzie
PAB	Purani Asam Buranji
RAW	Report on Assam by Welsh
SAB	Satsari Asam Buranji

TB Tungkhungiya Buranji

TBE Tungkhungiya Buranji, English trans.

MS. chronicles of *Asam Buranjis* consulted are referred to as MS. chronicle no. 1, MS. chronicle no. 2 and so forth according to the serial number in the bibliographical list.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

THE Ahoms exercised uninterrupted sovereignty in the Brahmaputra valley for nearly a period of six hundred years beginning with the early part of the thirteenth century till the annexation of their kingdom to the territories of the British East India Company in AD 1826. They came to Assam from upper Burma and set up a small kingdom in the south-eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley in AD 1228. But gradually extending their sway westward and northward, they ultimately became the lord of the entire valley upto the Manaha river, subjugating the ruling dynasties and resisting the eastward expansion of the Turko-Afghans and the Moguls. They reached the climax of their power and glory during the reign of the early Tungkhungiya kings in the first part of the eighteenth century, and their great king Rudra Singha (1696-1714) even mobilised his army with a view to extending his arms to the Karatoya river,¹ the western boundary of the erstwhile kingdom of Kamarupa and thereby liberating the whole of eastern India from the yoke of the Moguls.

But, meanwhile, the process of disintegration had also set in. No sooner the Ahoms solidified their strength than they distinguished themselves as members of the ruling class and got divided even amongst themselves as the ruler and the ruled. The more the ruling class aspired after wealth and power and recognition among the ruling dynasties of India, the greater was the exploitation of the ruled. Soon after the threat of external aggression was over, it became engrossed in personal conflicts, creating an atmosphere, in which clans stood against clans, families against families and men against men. Further, the rulers became so much priest-ridden that worship and oblations overtook their duties to the State and power-loving nobles and officers overrode the authority of the king. When mutual rivalries

and intrigues made the court a charnel-house wherefrom had evaporated the most pestilential vapours affecting the vitals of the members of the ruling class, the oppressed commonalty was brooding a rebellion against the oppressive government.

✓ In fact, even as the clash with the Moguls was going on, which covered almost the whole of the seventeenth century, forces bringing profound changes to the socio-economic structure were generated by the neo-Vaishnavite movement sponsored by Sankaradeva and his disciple Madhavadeva in the sixteenth century.² Although a response to the Indian *Bhakti* movement, it was not merely a religious dogma propagating undivided loyalty to one Supreme Being but also a new way of life, revolutionising the very face of the society of the Brahmaputra valley. It led to large-scale detribalisation, broke grounds for the growth of feudalism, fostered community feeling and taught human equality on the spiritual sphere. In the economic plane, it favoured a comparatively free peasant community and encouraged trade. ✓ These ideologies stood diametrically opposed to the principles of the Ahom government which had been rigidly controlling the movement of the individual subjects and maximally exploiting their labour in the interest of the ruling class. The government, realising the strength of the Vaishnava preceptors, pursued different policies of peace, patronage and persecution, depending upon the exigencies of time, but a conflict with the people, who, being inspired by the humanistic and liberal principles of the new faith were resolved to fight the oppressive government, could not be avoided.

The decadence of the Ahom monarchy began with the reign of Lakshmi Singha (1769-80), the youngest son of king Rudra Singha. Soon after his accession, a section of the Vaishnavas, the Moamariyas, long seething under the oppression of the Ahom government, organised the first popular challenge to the Ahom monarchy, deposed the reigning king and placed their own nominee on the throne. This success of the Moamariyas, though short-lived, had far-reaching consequences on the history of Assam. This was a challenge not only to the concept of divine right of kingship but also to the seven collateral Ahom families enjoying that right and forming the core of the Ahom bureaucracy. The popular rebellion thus shook the very foundation of the Ahom kingdom. It proved to the subject population that the Ahom power, so long considered unassailable, rested on so weak a foundation that any ambitious and courageous person com-

manding a few hundred men could pose a potential threat to it or even aspire after suzerain power. This belief became so widespread that ambitious persons raised their heads in different parts of the kingdom, often exploiting the popular resentments to their own advantage.

The monarchy, instead of making any attempt to heal the wounds of the people, pursued a vigorous policy of ruthless persecution, which created wide resentment throughout the kingdom. As a result, all the disaffected elements rose to action and the Ahom monarchy found itself in a sea of troubles. It was at this crucial moment that the royalists got the man of the hour in the person of Premier Purnananda Burhagohain. In the face of the opposing forces, the Premier strove to maintain the tradition of the Ahom monarchy by pursuing a double-edged policy of arms and conciliation. But the rebelling people, who were resolved to overthrow the Ahom government, joined hands with the Moamariyas and compelled king Gaurinath Singha (1780-95) to take his flight to Gauhati. Once more the insurgents became the masters of the Ahom metropolis and had their own king. Most of the neighbouring hill tribes too lent their support to the Moamariyas. Under the circumstances, Gaurinath Singha sought help first of the Barkandazes and then of the Company government, and thereby opened the gateway of the kingdom for the alien powers.

Meanwhile, the Burmese government had been pursuing the policy of territorial expansion towards the west and with the conquest of Arakan in 1784, Burma frontiers had touched the borders of the British possessions in India. Relation of the two governments soon becoming strained over the question of the Magh or Arakanese refugees making their escape to the British territory, a clash became inevitable. The Burmese court had already been looking to Assam and taking interest in its internal affairs with a view to having it as a base in its imminent war with the British. When at this moment, a request for help came from the Ahom king Chandra Kanta Singha (1811-17) through one of his most trustworthy officers, Badan Chandra Barphukan, the Burmese Emperor Badawpaya (1781-1819) considered it a god-sent opportunity and immediately responded to it by extending armed assistance. This eventually led to the Burmese invasions of Assam and finally to the first Anglo-Burmese war (1824-26), which sealed the fate of the Ahom monarchy and introduced the British rule in Assam.

Historical Background

The Ahoms are members of the Shan branch of the great Tai or Thai race of Southeast Asia.³ They claim Mungrimungram, a kingdom in the Hukong valley as their original homeland and it was at Maulung, a division of Mungrimungram that Sukapha, the founder-king of the Ahoms was born.⁴ Sukapha left his homeland possibly as a result of a dispute with one of his brothers⁵ in AD 1215, accompanied by a few nobles and a few hundred soldiers.⁶ He moved via Mungkong, called 'Narades' or Nara country in Assamese chronicles, en route to the Brahmaputra valley. The war-like tribes inhabiting the region between the Hukong valley and the Patkai hills offered him such stiff resistance that he took thirteen years to subjugate them. Overcoming all the obstacles that came on his way, Sukapha reached the south-eastern corner of the Brahmaputra valley in AD 1228.

The eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley was at that time ruled by a number of Indo-Mongoloid tribes like the Marans, Barahis, Kacharis and Chutiyas, the last being the most powerful. Sukapha won over the first two tribes by a twofold policy of arms and conciliation. Because of their numerical inferiority, Sukapha and his followers decided to get themselves completely assimilated with the autochthonous by adopting their culture and accepting their daughters as wives. Their friendly gesture, knowledge of advanced methods of cultivation including of astrology so impressed the conquered tribesmen that they ascribed divine origin to the Shan conquerors and it is generally believed that from the appellation 'Asama' meaning 'unparalleled' applied to them by the conquered tribes, the name of the country as 'Asam' or 'Assam' had originated and the Shan conquerors came to be known as 'Aham' or 'Ahom'.⁷

Sukapha was succeeded by his son Suteupha (1268-81), who extended his overlordship to the Namdang river, pushing back the Kacharis. This had considerably strengthened the power of the new conquerors. Suteupha's grandson Sukhangpha (1293-1332) led a victorious expedition to the Hindu kingdom of Kamata in the western Brahmaputra valley and won the hands of the Kamata princess,⁸ which marked the beginning of the process of Hinduisation of the Ahoms.

The next important king was Sudangpha (1397-1407), popularly called Bamuni Konwar, as he happened to be born and brought up in a brahmin family of Habung. Sudangpha introduced the worship of Lakshminarayan *Salagram* along with the Ahom tutelary deity

Chom Cheng. He was the first Ahom king to perform the coronation ceremony called *Singari-ghar utha*. He subjugated the Khamjangiya and the Aitoniya Nagas. A rebellion of the Tipamiyas brought him into collision with the kingdom of Mungkong on the east and that of Kamata on the west.⁹ The clash with the former was concluded by a treaty in 1401, by which the Patkai hills were fixed as the boundary between the Ahom kingdom and Mungkong.¹⁰ His expedition against the latter not only won him the hand of the Kamata princess but also the credit of winning victory over the army of the Bengal Sultan, Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah (1393-1410), who had meanwhile invaded the Kamata kingdom. According to the Assamese chronicles, the united Ahom-Kamata army pursued the invaders beyond the Karatoya, the western boundary of the kingdom of Kamata, and excavated a tank on its bank to commemorate the victory.¹¹

The real expansion to the Ahom kingdom was made by Suhungmung (1497-1539), popularly called Dihingiya Raja, as he had his capital at Bakata on the bank of the Dihing. In 1512, Suhungmung occupied Habung and Panbari in the north bank.¹² In 1523, he conquered the kingdom of the Chutiyas,¹³ which extended from beyond the Subansiri river in the north bank to river Burhi Dihing in the south bank. He also took possession of the northern part of the Kachari kingdom covering the Dhansiri valley and the areas extending upto the river Kalang. Thus, he converted the small state of Mung-dun-sun-kham, meaning the country full of golden gardens, built by Sukapha, into a big kingdom, covering the entire region of the eastern Brahmaputra valley. He had also successfully resisted the invasions to his kingdom led by some Bengal generals, the most prominent of them being Turbak Khan. His soldiers defeated and killed Turbak in AD 1532 and pursued after the retreating army as far as the Karatoya.¹⁴ By this brilliant achievement, Suhungmung won the friendship of the rulers of Gauda and Orissa. The former even offered him his two daughters with the five *praganas* of Ghoraghat, Fariabad, Patladoh, Eghara Sendur and Sherpur, as dowry.¹⁵ Suhungmung had the qualities of both a warrior and an administrator. He had well consolidated his conquests and built a powerful navy. He took a census, organized the subject population on the basis of clans and put them under strict control of the princes and the high dignitaries.¹⁶

Suhungmung's reign saw the growing influence of Hinduism in the Ahom court. He assumed the Hindu title 'Swarganarayan' and

used the Saka era in place of the Ahom *laklis*.¹⁷ It was possibly from his reign that Assamese became the court language of the Ahoms, as the earliest *buranji* or chronicle written in that language is dated AD 1526¹⁸, the earlier of the kind being done in Tai-Ahom. This was also the period when Sankaradeva launched his neo-Vaishnavite movement.

This growing power of the Ahoms suffered a temporary setback during the reign of the two immediate successors of Suhungmung, at the hands of the Koches, a Mongoloid tribe, who built their kingdom, Kooch Behar, on the ruins of that of Kamata in the early part of the sixteenth century. In fact, Chilarai, the brother and general of the great Koch king Naranarayan (c. AD 1540-84) established Kooch overlordship, though for a short while, over the major part of north-eastern India. But the division of the Koch kingdom in AD 1581 into Kooch Behar (the western part) and Kamrup (the eastern part, also called Koch Hajo), greatly weakened the Koches. Court intrigues and mutual rivalries of the two kingdoms soon paved the way for the intervention of both the Moguls and the Afghans in Kooch politics. This resulted in the vassalage of Kooch Behar to the Moguls in AD 1596 and the annexation of Kamrup to Mogul India in AD 1613. This was followed by a direct clash of arms between the Ahoms and the Moguls and the protracted conflict covered almost the whole of the seventeenth century. In the long run, the Ahoms came out victorious. They thus succeeded not only in maintaining their independent status in Mogul India, but also in stemming the tide of Mogul conquest towards Burma and beyond.

Pratap Singha (1604-41), the great Ahom king had engineered the growth of the Assamese civil society by contributing towards the working of an identity of interest amongst the diverse communities of the Brahmaputra valley, in the conditions created by the Mogul wars, and by providing the subject population, whose cultural unity was meanwhile fostered by the neo-Vaishnavite movement, with a uniform administration resting upon the *paik* or *khel* system. In the reign of Jayadhvaj Singha (1648-62), Mir Jumla, the great general of Aurangzeb led an expedition to Assam in 1662-63¹⁹ with a powerful force, which contained 'extraordinarily mounted' Muscovites (Russians) and European sailors.²⁰ Jayadhvaj Singha's soldiers had offered him little resistance and Mir Jumla entered triumphantly the Ahom capital at Garhgaon on 17 March 1662. Eventually, a treaty was concluded in January 1663 by which the Assam king agreed to send his daughter to

the Mogul harem, pay a war-indemnity as well as an annual tribute and also cede Kamrup, which he had occupied taking advantage of the war of succession at Delhi, to the Moguls. But that was an illusory success achieved at the cost of the life of Mir Jumla. Jayadhwaj Singha's successor Chakradhwaj Singha (1663-70) soon played the offensive, and his efficient general Lachit Barphukan inflicted a crushing defeat on the Moguls in the famous naval battle at Saraighat in March 1671. Thenceforth the Manaha river became the western boundary of the kingdom of Assam.²¹

The end of the Mogul wars was followed by court intrigues, conspiracies when a line of nobles became *de facto* ruler of the kingdom. The last was Laluk Sola Barphukan. This noble had treacherously handed over Gauhati to the Bengal Sultan, Muhammad Azam on an assurance of getting armed help from the latter to make himself the king of Assam. The Moguls did come and occupy Gauhati, but before Laluk Sola could sit on the throne, he was assassinated by his own personal attendants.²² Gadapani, a member of the Tungkhungiya royal family, then became king with the Ahom name Supatpha and the Hindu name Gadadhar Singha (1681-96). This dynasty remained in power till the end of the Ahom rule in Assam. Gadadhar Singha first recovered Gauhati from the possession of the Moguls by defeating them in the battle of Itakhuli in September 1682.²³ Gadadhar took effective measures to restore normalcy in the kingdom, undertook works of public welfare and started surveying of lands with the help of experts brought from Kooch Behar and Bengal.²⁴ Considering the *satra* institutions or Vaishnava monasteries a potential threat to the Ahom monarchy, he adopted a policy of Vaishnava persecution in course of which many *gosains* and *mahantas*, as the Vaishnava preceptors were called, lost their lives and properties or suffered mutilation and banishment.²⁵ He patronised Sakta Hinduism with a view to counteracting the power and influence of the Vaishnava preceptors.²⁶

Gadadhar Singha's son Sukhrangpha alias Rudra Singha (1696-1714) is considered the most illustrious of the Ahom kings and his reign witnessed the zenith of Ahom power and glory. Considering his father's policy of Vaishnava persecution detrimental to the safety and integrity of the Ahom kingdom, he adopted a conciliatory attitude towards all Vaishnavas and restored the *gosains* and the *mahantas* to their respective places.²⁷ He then received initiation from the Auniati *gosain*, Haridev, who was the most influential of the brahmin

satradhikars.²⁸ However, he soon created a dissension in the Vaishnava camp by promulgating a synod, which debarred the sudra *mahantas* from initiating the brahmins,²⁹ and which was completely against the principles of the creed propagated by Sankardeva.

Rudra Singha subjugated the Kacharis and the Jayantiyas, who became virtually independent during the period of the Mogul wars. He then began to make elaborate preparations for a fresh war against the Moguls with two ends in view, namely to oust them from their sovereign power in eastern India and to expand the western limit of the Ahom kingdom up to the Karatoya river. To achieve this objective, Rudra Singha even attempted to organize a confederacy of the *rajas* of Hindustan and mobilised a strong force of 4,00,000 soldiers. But just before he started on his projected expedition, he died at his camp at Gauhati.³⁰ His successors did not follow up his plan nor did they entertain his idea. Rudra Singha greatly contributed to the cultural progress of Assam by patronising learning and education, music and dance, games and sports and art and architecture.³¹ He built a new capital at Meteka and named it as Rangpur. Rudra Singha abandoned the policy of isolation followed by his predecessors and encouraged commercial and cultural intercourse with Mogul India.³² With a view to using Saktism as a weapon against the Vaishnavas and having cultural relations with the neighbouring Bengal, he summoned a Sakta priest, Krishnaram Nyayavagish, a brahmin from Navadhip in West Bengal to Assam to give him initiation, promising the priest the care of the temple of Kamakhya on the Nilachala hill, Gauhati. But owing to some eventualities he could not accomplish his objective. However, he instructed his sons to accept the Bengali priest as their preceptor.³³ This factor had a great significance in the religious history of Assam, which in the long run led to dissensions among the priestly clans in the kingdom. In violation of the law of primogeniture followed in the right of Ahom kingship, Rudra Singha expressed his will from his death-bed that all his sons should become kings one after another. This had subsequently led to various conspiracies and court-intrigues in the reign of his youngest son Lakshmi Singha (1769-80).

Rudra Singha was succeeded by his eldest son Siva Singha (1714-44), who was a staunch Sakta and was greatly influenced by brahmin priests and astrologers. He received the Bengali priest, popularly called the Parvatiya Gosain, as his abode was on the Nilachala hill, as the royal preceptor. He made a large number of land-grants to

temples and brahmin priests. Thus, under his patronage, as pointed out by Gait, "Hinduism became the predominant religion and the Ahoms, who persisted in holding to their old beliefs and tribal customs came to be regarded as a separate and degraded class."³⁴ He abdicated the throne in favour of his chief queen, Phuleswari, in AD 1722 being predicted by his spiritual guides and astrologers an end of his rule in near future due to the evil influence of the stars. Phuleswari, accordingly took the regalia to her hands, assuming the name Pramatheswari Devi and the title 'Bar Raja' or 'the great king'. She minted coins in the joint name of her and her husband where she used Persian legend,³⁵ the first of its kind in Assam. Phuleswari was more under the influence of the brahmins, particularly the Parvatiya Gosain, than her husband had been. It is believed that being instigated by this *gosain*, she attempted to make Saktism the State religion. With that objective, she ordered the Vaishnava *gosains* to worship the goddess Durga. She then forbade the worship of other deities and personally supervised the act of desecration from the Sonarijan camp. Learning that the Sudra *mahantas* were strong monotheists, she held a Durga *puja* in the capital at Rangpur and forced the *mahantas* to offer oblations to the goddess.³⁶ This created strong resentment among the *mahantas*. After the death of Phuleswari in 1731, Ambika and Sarveswari, two other consorts of Siva Singha continued to rule the kingdom as 'Bar Raja'. Siva Singha was a great patron of literature and music. He had elaborated the system of espionage and had the land surveyed in Kamrup and Bakata.

Siva Singha was succeeded by his brother Susenpha alias Pramatta Singha (1744-51), who devoted his attention to the construction of temples and buildings. At his death, he was to be succeeded by his brother Barjana Gohain, alias Mohanmala, but the latter was debarred from exercising his right to the throne for having pock marks in his body, by the instrumentality of a powerful officer named Kirtichandra, who was made Barbarua by Pramatta Singha.³⁷ Kirtichandra then placed Surampha, the fourth son of Rudra Singha on the throne, who took the name Rajeswar Singha (1751-67).

Rajeswar Singha sent an expedition to Manipur to recover its throne from the possession of the Burmese. The first expedition commanded by Haranath Senapati Phukan having returned halfway across the Naga hills,³⁸ the king asked Kirtichandra to proceed along the old route across Raha and the Kachari kingdom. The expedition succeeded in its mission. The Manipuri king, as a token of gratitude

then married his daughter Kuranganayani to the Ahom king. This achievement made Kirtichandra more powerful and overbearing than ever before, which created great displeasure amongst other nobles. Numali Bargohain wrote a chronicle captioned *Chakaripheti Buranji*, wherein he described Kirtichandra's father Rupchandra as having been brought up in an ordinary Muslim family of the Jalambata *khel*. Kirtichandra took offence at the statement and influenced the king to scrutinise all *buranjis* of the kingdom and burn all those alleged to contain so-called objectionable statements.³⁹ This massacre or historical chronicles was an irreparable loss to Assamese historical literature. Further, the hostile attitude of the Barbarua towards the Mayamara *mahanta* and his disciples served the immediate pretext for the first popular uprising of 1769.

The reign of Rajeswar Singha was apparently and comparatively peaceful. But it was also the period, which saw the "signs of approaching decay." Rajeswar Singha was an orthodox Hindu who spent much time in offering oblations to the deities to the neglect of his kingly duties.⁴⁰ This predominance of Saktism in the Ahom court made both the king and nobles priest-ridden and "sectarian disputes began to strangle over their patriotic aspersions."⁴¹

At the death of Rajeswar Singha, Kalsiliya Gohain, the youngest son of Rudra Singha, aged fifty-three, became king with the Hindu name Lakshmi Singha and the Ahom name Sunyeopha (1769-80). His legitimacy was doubted on several quarters. The Parvatiya Gosain also refused him initiation on grounds of his doubtful origin.⁴² But all obstacles and objections were overrode through the machinations of Kirtichandra Barbarua. Lakshmi Singha accepted Ramananda Acharyya, an Assamese brahmin, as his religious preceptor and established him at Pahumara for which he came to be known as the Pahumariya Gosain. This led to a dissension between the followers of this preceptor and those of the Parvatiya Gosain, which further complicated the situation in the last days of the Ahom monarchy. It was in the reign of Lakshmi Singha that the Moamariyas broke out into open rebellion creating a course of events which eventually led to the fall of the Ahom monarchy and implementation of the British rule in Assam.

Ahom Administration

Kingship: The form of the Ahom government, as stated by Captain Welsh in 1794, was 'monarchical' and aristocratical.⁴³ The monarchy

was the monopoly of the descendants of Sukapha, who, in course of time got divided into seven collateral families, named after the places of their establishment—Charingiya, Tipamiya, Dihingiya, Chama-guriya, Tungkhungiya, Parvatiya and Namrupiya. As the first executive officer, the king was the head of every department of the state, and distributed honours, titles and offices “without the concurrence but not without the counsel of the aristocracy.”⁴⁴ In theory, he was also the lord of the soil and could alienate lands among the officers in order of hierarchy. He could declare war and conclude peace but with the concurrence of the nobility.⁴⁵ Again, he was the highest court of appeal, who alone could execute death sentence in a form by which the blood of the criminal might be shed.⁴⁶ The right of succession was generally hereditary on the male line with due regard to the law of primogeniture. But in case of absence of a legal claimant, the throne was offered to the king's brother or his nearest relative.

Divinity was attached to Ahom kingship. The king was called Swargadev or Swargadeo, an Assamese equivalent to the Tai-Ahom word Chaopha (the king of heaven). As such he was expected to be physically free from any scar or blemish.⁴⁷ But prior to the rise of Laluk Sola Barphukan, this custom was not followed rigidly. The insistence on physical purity for succession gave rise to numerous court intrigues in the later part of the Ahom rule and it became a usual practice for a new king to kill or maim the legal claimants to the throne. Great importance was attached to the coronation ceremony,⁴⁸ which was performed with great pomp and grandeur for seven days. It was called *singari-ghar-utha* because the main chamber where the coronation took place was constructed with *singari* wood. Its performance cost about four lakhs of rupees.⁴⁹ The king could mint coins only after ascending the *singari-ghar*. The last two kings, Kamaleswar Singha and Chandra Kanta Singha, were, however, exceptions as their coronation had to be withheld by Purnananda Burhagohain on financial grounds.

Nobility: The Patra-Mantris

The nobles played a very important role in Ahom polity, so much so that often the monarchic government turned into an oligarchy when a weakling sat on the throne. Originally, the king was assisted by two counsellors, Burhagohain⁵⁰ and Bargohain,⁵¹ and since the days of Suhungmung Dihingiya Raja (1497-1539) a third, called the Barpatra Gohain was added, which formed the famous triumvirate

in Ahom administration. Pratap Singha created the offices of the Barbarua and the Barphukan.⁵² These together constituted the council of the five, called the *patra-mantris*. The three Gohains occupied an exalted position in the Ahom polity next only to the king. They alone were entitled to the dignified appellation *Dangariya*, meaning 'great'.⁵³ It was their duty to select a king from amongst the legal claimants should there be a problem of succession. If united, they could depose a monarch. There are three instances in the early part of the Ahom rule when the Burhagohain and the Bargohain ruled the kingdom and for a considerably long period of nine years as it happened in the last occasion.

The offices of the Gohains could be filled in only from the direct descendants of the nobles who accompanied Sukapha to Assam. The *Dangariyas* and so also every officer in Ahom administration were paid in terms of land, *paiks* and servitors. In the territories assigned to the *Dangariyas*, they exercised most of the rights of independent sovereignty.⁵⁴ The jurisdiction of the Burhagohain extended from the north of the Dikhou river to Sadiya.⁵⁵ He was conventionally regarded as the seniormost of the *Dangariyas* and was next to the king in rank and position⁵⁶ before the creation of the portfolio of the *rajmantri*. The Bargohain governed the territory from the south of the Dikhou river to Kaliabar. These two Gohains were allotted 10,000 *paiks* each for their maintenance whereas the allotment of the Barpatra Gohain, who belonged to the royal family far exceeded this number. The Barpatra Gohain governed the territory from the foot of the Dafala hills in the north to the Brahmaputra in the south and from the Gerelua river in the east to the Pichala river in the west.⁵⁷ Within their respective territories, the Gohains could even inflict the penalty of death, but not in a form which involved the shedding of blood.⁵⁸

There was no separate office called *rajmantri* in Ahom administration. It was in the reign of Supimpha (1493-97) that the Burhagohain Khampeng, was first conferred with the honour of *rajmantri*.⁵⁹ Later, any one of the *patra-mantris*, whom the king considered most trustworthy and expedient was made the *rajmantri*. When endowed with this honour, the noble got the service of one thousand additional *paiks* of the village called Jakaichuk.⁶⁰ The *rajmantri* could in special cases, inflict capital punishment accompanied by the shedding of blood, pending to the approval of the king.⁶¹

The offices of the Barbarua and the Barphukan could be filled in

by any member of certain specified families excluding those of the hereditary Gohains. The Barbarua was the chief executive officer and the head of the judiciary.⁶² He had in his court seven Phukans⁶³ or executive officers each commanding usually six thousand men. But he could not act independently of the Gohains. He was allotted territories from the east of Kaliabar which lay outside the jurisdiction of the three Gohains.⁶⁴ He was also the commander-in-chief of Upper Assam. Reflecting upon his power, certain English writers observed that he ought to be the Prime Minister.⁶⁵ But he had no right to execute death sentence. He was appointed and could be removed from office with the concurrence of the Gohains. He had control over 14,000 *paiks*, but they were bound to render service to the king. He could utilize the service of seven per cent of this total allotment for his personal use.⁶⁶

The Barphukan⁶⁷ was the viceroy of the territory to the west of Kaliabar. Initially he governed the tract between the Brahmaputra and the Kalang with his headquarters first at Kaliabar and then at Kajali or Kajalimukh. With the extension of Ahom suzerainty, his jurisdiction also extended till it included the entire western part of the kingdom from Kaliabar to Goalpara. He then lived at Gauhati⁶⁸ and conducted the diplomatic relations with Bengal and Bhutan and the chieftains of the Assam passes. Placed as he was at a distance from the capital, he enjoyed a great amount of executive power and could even inflict death sentence not accompanied by bloodshed.⁶⁹ He could recommend and in exceptional circumstances nominate the *rajas* of the vassal states. He collected the revenue of those areas in Kamrup which were not included in the territories of the latter or allotted for religious purposes. He too, like the Barbarua, had under his control 14,000 *paiks*, seven per cent of which he could employ for his personal services,⁷⁰ but his office was considered of higher importance than that of the Barbarua.⁷¹ He had in his court six Phukans.⁷² He enjoyed the service of 100 attendants and was allotted 1,000 *puras* or 4,000 Bengal *bighas* of land.⁷³ Regarding his powers and prerogatives, Dr. John Peter Wade who accompanied Captain Welsh's expedition to Assam in 1792-94 and who left a largely reliable account on the working of Ahom administration made the following observation:

Possessing as Commander and Judge-in-chief a control on many occasions nearly independent over a great extent of the kingdom, he rivalled the

Gohainghs themselves in power though by no means in Rank.... In many instances, he was enabled to dictate to the Triumvirate of Gohainghs and even to the Monarch himself.... In the public hall of state at Goahawtee surrounded by the Fokuns and numerous Rajahs of the Western Provinces he received the prostrations as well as the despatches of foreign ambassadors. An ambassador to the Sovereign could not be received unless he was entrusted with a separate address to the Burro Fokun and each of the Patra Muntrees.⁷⁴

Such prerogatives and wide autonomy induced a Barphukan to attempt at acquiring suzerain power.

Local Governors

The princes and the near relatives of the reigning king were appointed as governors in certain areas and they were given the title 'Raja'. They were the Charing Raja, the Tipam Raja, and the Namrupiya Raja.⁷⁵ Of them the Charing Raja was usually the heir apparent and the Tipam Raja was next in order of succession. These *rajas* exercised powers in their territories similar to the *patra-mantris*. The frontiers of the kingdom were placed under wardens called Datiyaliya Gohain. There were five such wardens—the Sadiya-khowa Gohains, the Marangi-khowa Gohain, the Kajali-mukhiya Gohain, the Jagiyal Gohain and the Solal Gohain—who were in charge of those frontiers as indicated by the prefixes used before the names of their offices.⁷⁶ They were always selected from the families of three great Gohains, to whom they were little inferior in rank.⁷⁷

Other Members of the Nobility

Besides the *patra-mantris* and the local governors, the nobility included certain other classes of officers of various grades and responsibilities like the Phukans, the Rajkhowas and the Baruas. The Phukans were executive officers of civil or military establishments, the rank of the military Phukans being higher than that of the civil Phukans. They commanded a minimum of six thousand men. Their offices were not hereditary but were monopolised by the descendants of those nobles who accompanied Sukapha in his conquest of Assam. There were about twelve civil Phukans, e.g., the Cholahdara Phukan or the Lord Chamberlain or the Master of the Great Wardrobe, the Nyaya-sodha Phukan or the Judicial Executive in the Barbarua's Council, the Gandhiya Phukan or the Executive officer of the Record Department etc. The Rajkhowas were governors

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of small areas, whose fighting strength did not exceed three thousand men. There were twelve Rajkhowas governing areas like Bacha, Dayang, Sologuri, Abhaypur etc. The Baruas were another class of officers who superintended various arts, sciences, employment of the king's household and many other departments. There were some other officers entrusted with some curious duties. For instance, the Bartamuli was the head of the attendants appointed to supervise the supply of betel-nuts, the Bartekela was the head of the emissaries of the king and his officers, the Bura-pachani was the head of the superior attendants etc. All these offices which involved military duties were usually recruited from amongst the Ahoms "but for such as did not involve military services, the high classes of non-Ahom natives of the country were eligible and also persons of foreign descent, provided their families had been domiciled in the country for three or four generations."⁷⁸

The Vassal Chiefs

The vassal chiefs like those of Darrang, Rani, Beltala, Luki, Barduar, Dimarua, Tapakuchi etc. enjoyed complete autonomy in their internal administration. All of them except the Raja of Rani had to pay an annual tribute. The king could dismiss a Raja for misconduct and appoint his son or brother in his place.⁷⁹ All those vassal chiefs were bound to furnish the king with the service of a stipulated number of *paiks* or commutation money instead. In times of war, they were to assist their overlord with their contingent of *paiks*, when called for.

Decentralisation of Power

There was thus wide decentralisation of power in Ahom administration. In case of the vassal chiefs, this policy helped the Ahom monarchs in getting lasting obedience from them. But it had another aspects as well. As the Ahom officers were paid in terms of land and *paiks* over whom they exercised all control and as the superior appointments were often hereditary, many such officers, in course of time, converted themselves into a class of feudal lords. Often they combined among themselves or hatched conspiracies to usurp political power. This created tensions for a weakling and led to serious conflicts between the king and the nobility towards the close of the Ahom rule.



The Paik System

The administrative machinery and the social organization of the Ahoms rested upon the *paik* or *khel* system. It grew out of a relation which the conquering Ahoms as advanced agriculturists established with the subjugated tribes like the Marans and the Barahis of the south-eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley, who had not yet passed over the stage of tribalism. Exploiting the backwardness of these people, Sukapha acquired personal service from them by appointing them as fuel or honey suppliers, waterdrawers, etc.⁸⁰ In course of time, when the Ahoms became eager for territorial expansion and the exigencies of their daily life increased, they had to elaborate this system to get the service of the conquered tribes as soldier-cum-labourers. Meanwhile, the Ahoms acquired personal or private property and got divided among themselves into two classes—the rulers and the ruled—the latter tending to identify itself with the rest of the subject population. Subinpha (1281-93) distinguished the seven noble families called Satghariya Ahoms from the rest of their kinsmen and distributed the conquered people amongst himself and his two counsellors—the Burhagohain and the Bargohain.⁸¹ Suhungmung established the princes of the royal blood at different places and obviously with service of some men. With the extension of Ahom power, the load of administrative work also increased which necessitated the appointment of different new officers with allotment of servitors. Meanwhile there was considerable increase in the number of the ruling tribe both by natural process and by conversion and to some extent also by fresh immigration through marriage ties.⁸² This necessitated the growth of more crops and hence clearing of more lands. Naturally the conquered people were employed in this job.⁸³ Suklenmung therefore introduced the system that one man from each family was bound to give his service to the State.⁸⁴ But even this was not sufficient to meet the growing internal demands and also to face the potential threat of the great Moguls. Under the circumstances, the existing procedure of exacting personal service from the subjects was elaborated and systematised through a system called *paik* or *khel* by Momai Tamuli Barbaruah at the instance of king Pratap Singha. The system was so arranged that it met the economic as well as the military needs of the state.

Under this system, every adult male between the age 16 to 50 was registered as a *paik* for state service. In the early stage, four *paiks* and since the reign of Rajeswar Singha (1752-89) three *paiks* formed

a unit called *got*. The *paiks* in a *got* rendered service to the State in rotation, one *paik* serving for a period of three to four months a year. The cultivation or domestic concerns of the *paik* on duty was looked after by his comrades in a *got*. The first levy in a *got* was called *mul*; the second, *dewal* and the third, *tewal*. Some *paiks* were also organized into professional *khels*, each rendering a particular kind of productive work like boat-building and arrow-making for the State. The larger *khels* like that of the boat-builders were placed under the charge of a Phukan (e.g. Naosaliya Phukan) and the smaller *khels* like that of the bow-makers were placed under the charge of a Barua (e.g. Dhenu-Chocha Barua).

The *paiks* were organized on a decimal system, twenty *paiks* being commanded by a Bara, a hundred by a Saikia and a thousand by a Hazarika, over whom was a Phukan commanding 6,000. One *paik* in each *got* was always to be available for service. In times of emergency, a single *paik* in a *got* had to carry the workload of his other comrades, which made his life miserable. The concealment of a *paik* was considered to be a serious offence, which was dealt with very severely. The *paiks*, besides rendering their personal service to the state, had to fulfil some feudal obligations to their masters as well. For example, when called upon they were to cultivate the lands of their masters and had to offer them gifts on certain specific occasions. Being tied to a fixed *khel* or territory, they were not free to pursue independent trade and thereby to improve their material conditions. Their pattern of living was fixed by the State, which they had no right to alter. Only by paying a commutation money of three rupees per head per annum could a *paik* sometimes obtain exemption from personal service. In order to enjoy this privilege, some *paiks* borrowed money from the well-to-do and unable to pay the debt, became bondsmen and consequently slaves. Some even bribed the officers to get their names concealed, whereas some took shelter in the *satras* (Vaishnava monasteries).

The *paiks* were broadly divided into two classes—*kanri* and *chamua*. The regular peasantry, which was bound to give its service to the State as a soldier in times of war and as a labourer in times of peace were called *kanri paiks*. Those *paiks* working as tenants in the private landed estates of the nobles were called *bilatiyas*, and those allotted to the temples and *satras* were called *dewaliyas*. These two classes of *paiks* were exempted from paying a number of taxes and were not required to proceed to the battlefield unless the situation so

demand. Besides there was another class of *paiks* called *bahatiyas*, who were to render service to their respective hill masters. Peasants of good birth or relative affluence were called *chamua paiks*. They could invariably enjoy exemption from personal state-service by paying commutation money. The junior offices like those of Bara, Saikia, Hazarika, Tamuli, Pachani, whose appointments were made by the senior officers were given to them. A *kanri paik* if he proved his valour and efficiency in the battlefield or otherwise gained the favour of the king was promoted to the *chamua* class.⁸⁵ Each *paik*, in return for his service to the State, was allotted two *puras* of best arable land called *ga-mati* free of charge. The land, however, belonged to the *khel* and a *paik*, who held his share of land, had no hereditary claim to it.

The *paik* system enabled the king to have maximum utilization of the manpower both in times of war and peace. It proved an effective weapon to fight the external enemies, and therefore, continued to thrive till there was an external threat. However, no sooner the danger of external aggression was over that the *paik* system also began facing popular resistance. As the Ahoms fought the Moguls and the rebellious chiefs, the need for more men in armed forces and in war-time constructions and more money to meet the expenses thereof compelled the king inevitably to resort to a policy of ruthless exploitation. Consequently, peoples' dislike for this system grew silently and their resentment took the form of popular rebellion towards the close of the Ahom rule.

Military Administration

The military organization of the Ahoms was "founded on feudal tenure with respect to the tributary princes, but on a militia within the limits of the kingdom."⁸⁶ The *paiks* could be mobilised at a short notice by the respective heads of the *khels* working through their subordinate officers, some preliminary knowledge of his duties, civil and military, being implanted in each *paik* by his previous service to the state. But he had to undergo a refresher's course at his allotted headquarters or the metropolis and an intensive training, specially needed for the occasion before he proceeded to the battlefield.⁸⁷ The Barbarua was usually the commander-in-chief of upper Assam and the Barphukan of lower Assam. In times of emergency, the three Gohains and also the king took the battlefield.

The full contingent of an Ahom army consisted of infantry, navy,

artillery, elephantry, cavalry and spies. During the Mogul wars, the technical skill, courage and general excellence of the Ahom infantry received high appreciation from the Persian chroniclers. The infantry soldiers were very expert in guerilla fighting and could put the enemy to serious straits by surprise night attacks. The chief weapons of war were swords, spears, bows and arrows, clubs, guns, firearms etc. Elephantry formed an indispensable part of the army as an auxiliary to the infantry. It was placed under the supervision of an officer called Hati Barua. A section of the Maran tribe, called Hati-chungi, was to supply elephants to the State. An officer called Kharghariya Phukan supervised the manufacture of firearms and gunpowder. The navy was very strong. The famous naval engagements at Kaliabar and Saraighat surprised the Moguls. The war-boats were commonly termed *bacharis*. The central workshop of the navy, called *barnaosal*, was located at the Ahom metropolis. There were smaller workshops at Jaypur, Majuli and Dergaon. The care of the navy was placed under an officer called Naosaliya Phukan. The Ahoms did not have a cavalry worth the name. Although, there was such a department under the Ghora Barua, it was more decorative than effective. During the Mogul wars, the Ahoms constructed impregnable forts at strategic places which evoked the admiration of the enemy. Their espionage system was highly developed.

On the strength of such military strategy and efficiency of the army, the Ahoms earned the credit of being "one of the few races in India, who could stem the tide of Mogul conquest."⁸⁸ Yet face to face with the rebellious subjects of the kingdom, their military organization soon showed up its defects. It broke into dismembered bands, even before the British and the Burmese armies were on their rampage. The first of the defects was the absence of a regular and disciplined army which created insuperable difficulties towards the close of the Ahom rule. Although there was a household troop of 6,000 men commanded by the Bhitaraual Phukan and a unit, of musketeers called Konwar Hilaidaris,⁸⁹ consisting of the king's sons, relatives and very trustworthy youths of the kingdom, this was absolutely nothing for the king's defence when the subject population rose in rebellion against him and the loyalty of these soldiers towards the monarchy eroded. Besides, the combination of civil and military functions in the same official having the *paiks* at his command favoured him opportunities to organize rebellions at opportune moments. Further, the techniques and weapons of war were very

outdated. As a result, Captain Welsh with a handful of soldiers could overtake thousands of them. However, after the return of Captain Welsh, a standing army was organized by the Premier Purnananda, where there was a number of Hindustani sepoys.

Judiciary

The Ahoms had no written code of law. Initially, therefore, the judges decided the cases according to the customs of the country and their own standards of right and wrong. In later times, when they came under the influence of Hinduism, the Hindu law, as expounded by the brahmins was generally followed in civil matters. The king was the supreme court of law. The *patra-mantris* and the frontier governors, exercised judicial authority within their respective areas. Executive officers like the Phukans, Rajkhowas and Baruas had also judicial power over the *paiks* under their control. Appeals from the lower courts in upper Assam could be made to the Barbarua and in lower Assam to the Barphukan. No records were kept in criminal cases, but in civil cases, a summary of the proceedings was drawn up and a copy of it was given to the winning party.⁹⁰

Trials for crimes were characterized by extreme and horrible sternness. In cases of political offences, capital punishment was extended to all members of the traitor's family, the guiding principle for dealing with such offences being the roots as well as the leaves of a bitter tree are bitter.⁹¹ So long this policy was pursued in the interest of the safety and integrity of the kingdom, there was no resentment against it, but after the end of the Mogul wars when it was applied with greater vigour for fulfilment of personal interest of the ruling tyrants, there was widespread hatred against the government paving the way for the downfall of the Ahom monarchy. Some British officers later commented that administration of justice under the Ahom rule was fairly liberal, and that it was speedy, efficient and impartial in former times, but a great deal corrupted since the commencement of the disorders occasioned by the Moamariya insurrection.⁹²

Land Holdings and Revenue Administration

The king in theory was the lord of the land and could distribute lands among the officers 'on a graduated scale' according to their rank and status. As the entire scheme of administration was based upon the obligation of personal service due from every individual, "it was not the soil, so much as the cultivators of the soil that were

regarded as the property of the state.”⁹³

Although the two *puras* of arable land, *ga-mati*, allotted to a *paik* in return for his services to the State was neither hereditary nor transferable, he was allowed to hold *bari-mati*, that is, land for garden and homestead, without limit and on hereditary basis. This land was initially free of charge which he held as his private property. Towards the latter part of the Ahom rule, as enterprising sections of the population cleared more and more waste lands and private property in the form of *bari-mati* increased, a poll-tax of rupee one “as an equivalent for the exemption of these lands from assessment” was imposed. The mode of its collection was determined according to the custom of the locality. For example, in Kamrup, it was a house-tax called *ghar-kar*; in Darrang, it was a hearth tax called *juhal-kar* or *charoo-dhan* and in eastern Assam, it was a poll-tax called *ga-dhan*.⁹⁴ Any one clearing land other than the above for the purpose of settlement, was allowed to hold it on payment of one rupee per *pura* per annum.⁹⁵ This type of land was called *opar* or *katani mati*. The reclamer could hold it so long as it was not required by the State. Waste lands which the *paiks* themselves reclaimed were held by them rent-free and as hereditary in their families. As there was no restriction to occupying waste lands, the nobles as well as the heads of the temples and the *satras* who used to employ the *paiks* in their establishment for reclaiming waste land, started their *khats* or *pams* and grew rich. The hill tribes cultivating dry or highlands for growing cotton etc., who did not use the plough, paid a hoe tax of rupee one per annum. With the breaking up of the *khel* system individual *paiks* also began to clear more of the highlands, when he was made liable to pay a tax at the rate of one rupee per *pura* per annum. This was probably the *khatani-matiadhan* mentioned by Maniram Dewan, which, according to him, was first levied by Kamaleswar Singha (1795-1811).⁹⁶

The revenue administration of Kamrup was different from that of upper Assam. It followed the *pargana* system introduced by the Moguls during the period of their rule there. The Ahoms, instead of abolishing this system, mixed it with the *paik* system in a way so as to suit their administrative requirements. Accordingly, Kamrup was divided into twenty-six *parganas*, each in charge of a Choudhury, who received as remuneration a certain portion of the land under his management. A *pargana* was divided into *taluks* consisting of four or five villages and placed under a Talukdar, who received no

salary but held lands granted to him. The Talukdars were assisted by junior officers like Thakurias and Patgiris, who were also allowed to hold lands as remuneration for their service. The revenue administration of Darrang was in line with that of Kamrup.

Again, in Darrang and Kamrup, following Mogul pattern, cultivable lands for revenue purposes were divided into three categories—*kheraj* or revenue paying, *nisf-kheraj* or half-revenue paying and *lakheraj* or revenue-free. The Ahom kings also, after their occupation of Kamrup, followed the same practice. They made large grants of land for religious or charitable purposes. Such lands were classified into several categories depending on the nature of their assignment—*brahmotter* to brahmins, *dharmottar* for religious and charitable purposes as for holding a *nama prasanga*, and *devottar* for the maintenance of temples. For the support of the mosques, lands categorised as *peerpal* or *peernum* were granted. Chandrakanta Singha imposed a tax called *khari-katana* on *lakheraj* lands in Kamrup at the rate of six *annas* per *pura*, which was continued to be levied by the Burmese after their occupation of the country in 1823.⁹⁷

The Ahom kings also undertook survey and resurvey of lands. It appears that the first survey was undertaken by Chakradhvaj Singha. But it was Gadadhar Singha, who worked out a detailed survey based on Mogul system of land measurement. The process continued during the reigns of his successors and completed in the reign of Pramatta Singha. But unfortunately the findings are not known.

When private land rights grew up, transactions also took place. It appears that in western Assam, transactions were taking place since the sixteenth century.⁹⁸ In eastern Assam, on the other hand, land transactions could be possible only after the break-up of the *paik* system. A document belonging most probably to the reign of Kamaleswar Singha records the sale of four *puras* of land for sixteen rupees. The parties involved were three Gohains.⁹⁹ But this right was not extended to the commoners.¹⁰⁰

Sources of Income

A *paik* could sometimes obtain exemption from personal service by paying three rupees per annum as *ga-dhan*. Artisans and other non-cultivating classes paid a higher rate of poll-tax depending on the nature of their occupations, e.g. gold-washers and brass-workers paid five rupees, oil pressures and fishermen three rupees and silk-weavers two rupees, annually.¹⁰¹ Washing of gold from sands of the

rivers was an important source of income to the State. Shihabuddin estimated that the value of gold thus collected would come to 80,000 to 108,000 rupees annually.¹⁰² During the days of Rajeswar Singha 16,000 Sonowals or gold-washers contributed seven thousand *tolas* of gold per year to the royal treasury.

Other sources of revenue were the tributes paid in cash or in kind by the subordinate rulers like the Darrang Raja who paid 58,000 rupees annually and various custom duties like *dan* (sale tax), *phat* (duty on marketing places), *hat* (tax on buying and selling in a market), *ghat* (tax on river crossing), *jalkar* (tax on fishing in rivers and lakes), *yavakshar* (tax for preparing gunpowder) etc.¹⁰³ According to an estimate made by Maniram Dewan, custom duties from various markets during the decadent period of Ahom rule came up to 116,400 rupees.¹⁰⁴ Contemporary sources give a list of other taxes like *ghamesa* (tax for performing a wedding ceremony), *maresa* (tax for acquiring land through a marriage performed according to Vedic rites), *panchak* (contribution or subscription), *khut* (tax on moveable articles), *chaki* (tax on the outposts), etc.¹⁰⁵

State Policy

Lord William Bentinck, Governor-General of British India from 1828 to 1835, observed that 'there must have been something intrinsically good in the constitution of the Ahoms',¹⁰⁶ for which they could enjoy an uninterrupted sovereignty for six centuries. But the Ahoms had no written constitution. The principles underlying their state policy therefore, are to be deduced from the available information of the policy at work. The Ahom rulers described Assam as *Sonar Saphura* (a casket of gold), which must not be opened to the foreigners.¹⁰⁷ So long as the monarchy preserved the tribal values of its own and practical liberalism towards the diverse religious and ethnic elements in the society, its policy could rouse to action the noble spirit of patriotism and harness their full strength to fight the enemy. Foreigners were termed as 'Bangals' and were looked with suspicion and distrust and their movement in the country was kept under strict vigilance. Any relation with them, thought to be detrimental to the interest of the country, was dealt with very severely. Diplomatic relations with the neighbouring kingdoms and tributary states were carried on through the *katakis* or envoys. Their relation with the monarch was compared with that of gold with borax.¹⁰⁸

In their dealings with the numerous hill tribes, the Ahoms reveal-

ed a sense of practical statesmanship. In order to stop the inroads of the hill people to the border villages in their kingdom, the Ahom government gave them either of the following privileges. Fertile lands at the foot of the hills, called *khats*, along with access to certain fisheries in the plains were allotted to the tribes like the Nagas and the Mikirs (Karbis). Other tribes like the Akas, Dafalas and hill-Miris could collect a stipulated amount called *posa* consisting of such articles as rice, cloth, cattle etc. from a class of *paiks* called *bahatiyas* assigned to them. All the tribes got the privilege of having commercial transactions with the plains. In return for the privilege of the *khat* or the *posa*, they were to acknowledge the suzerainty of the Ahom king and pay him an annual tribute consisting of the articles produced in their respective hill areas.¹⁰⁹ Even so, the Ahom tribal policy was not based on a rigid overlord-vassal relationship, because the aim of the government was not extension of its sovereignty over hill areas but establishment of friendly relations with them on the basis of mutual benefits and understanding. What mattered to the Ahom government was not non-payment of tribute by the hill people but their making inroads to the plains, in which case the government had to take some action against them.

Further, by their liberal norms and practices, the Ahoms created a wholesome atmosphere for mixing of the tribes. They inter-dined and intermarried freely with the tribesmen which greatly impressed the latter.¹¹⁰ Pratap Singha married with the Jayantiyas¹¹¹ and Gadadhar Singha accepted two Naga princesses as his consorts.¹¹² Kancheng, the first Barpatra Gohain was born and brought up in a Naga family.¹¹³ If found efficient, the tribesmen, who got assimilated with the Ahoms, were recruited to important administrative posts. Thus the second Barphukan was the son of a Naga of Banfera clan,¹¹⁴ Queen Phuleswari appointed a Bhutanese as her page.¹¹⁵ By thus maintaining cordial relations with the hill people, the Ahoms could harness their strength or secure their neutrality at the times of external threat. The Ahoms were proud of the tribal legion in their army,¹¹⁶ which was also noticed by the chronicler who accompanied Mir Jumla to Assam.¹¹⁷ But this traditional pattern of relations between the hills and the plains was disturbed by the internal crisis of the Ahom monarchy and subsequent foreign entanglements.

Although the Ahom rulers had their own language and culture, they did not impose it on the conquered. On the other hand, by intermarriage and by adoption of culture and language of the

indigenous people, they gradually became one with them. Consequently, the Ahoms did not remain Tai-Shans but became a distinct element in the Assamese society. In course of time, they were Hinduised and became great patrons of Hinduism. They also adopted Assamese, the lingua franca of the Brahmaputra valley, as the language of the court. Tai-Ahom came to be used only on ceremonial occasions and as an alternative medium of expression on some inscriptions and coins.

The Ahoms followed a policy of isolation towards the west as they feared that any relation with Mogul India might result in the loss of their territory or independent existence. Besides, they wanted to resist the intrusion of alien ideas from the west as they were guided primarily by the necessity of organizing the non-Aryan tribes of eastern Assam. The first Ahom king to break this isolation and to establish cultural relations with Delhi and other Hindu rulers of India was Rudra Singha.¹¹⁸ But this change of policy ultimately brought disaster to the Ahom monarchy. During the last days of their rule, Ahom kings even sought the help of the Barkandazes and the British to suppress the rebellion of their own people which ultimately brought ruin to the monarchy. On the other hand, the Ahoms maintained close relations with the state of Magaung in Burma and also with Manipur. So long the court of Amarapura did not resolve to pursue a policy of territorial aggrandisement, this friendly relation with Magaung and Manipur proved beneficial. But things changed since the days of Alaungpaya and soon Assam became a prey to Burmese aggression, which led to the first Anglo-Burmese war and paved the way for British rule in this land.

Socio-economic Trends

✓ *Social stratification:* The society under the Ahoms was broadly divided into two classes: the privileged aristocracy, and the peasantry. The former consisted of the king, the nobility and the religious heads. They lived upon the land and labour of the *paiks* allotted to them and were exempted from rendering compulsory personal service to the State. The ruling Ahom aristocracy considered of the descendants of the seven principal Ahom *phaidis* or clans called Satghariya Ahoms¹¹⁹ literally meaning 'the Ahoms of the seven houses', whose progenitors accompanied Sukapha from Maulung and assisted him in laying the foundation of the Ahom kingdom in Assam. Of the seven houses, the first three were those of the king, the Burhagohain and the Bargohain

and the remaining four were the Deodhai, Mohan, Bailung and Chiring families of priests and astrologers. In course of time, the secular families of Lahan, Sandikai, Dihingiya and Duara joined the aristocracy and tried to supercede the families of priests and astrologers. The original Barpatra Gohain family was only a branch of the royal family, its founder Kancheng being a prince of the royal blood. Later on, non-royal families of Kalugaon or Garhgayan Patar and Maran Patar whose founders were originally non-Ahoms, were included in the Barpatra Gohain family. At the time of Mir Jumlas' invasion to Assam, number of the nobles was about 20,000.¹²⁰ The ladies in the royal court were also assigned lands with the service of *paiks*. Such assignments were called *mels* and each of the kind was placed under the care of a Phukan or a Barua.¹²¹

In between the aristocracy and the *paiks* was a class of gentry called *chamua*, who depending on their skill as well as caste and tribal identities enjoyed junior offices in the military and administrative establishment. A few among them, usually of the high-caste group enjoyed offices of civil Phukans and Rajkhowas. They could invariably enjoy exemption from personal labour by paying a commutation money. Roughly they constituted the middle class in the society. But they were not intellectually enlightened and powerful enough to form an active social group.

The common men, the peasants and the artisans, called *paiks* formed the labouring class, who also constituted the militia of the kingdom. There was also wide prevalence of slavery. The difference between the *paiks* and the slaves was only in degree and not in kind. Rather, the slaves, being the personal property of their masters, usually got better treatment than the *paiks* attached as servitors to the household of the nobles. Moreover, they were not required to proceed to the battlefield. It was perhaps for this reason that after the Ahom-Mogul wars, many *paiks* took shelter in the establishment of the nobles as slaves.

Social Distinction

There was rigid social distinction between the nobility and the commonalty and also among the different grades of officers, which was observed in the pattern of living and in receiving royal honours, titles, insignias etc. In the royal court, the distinction between the superior dignitaries and heads of the *satras* was maintained by allotting them different seats in different positions in order of hierarchy.¹²²

There were caste distinctions among the Hindu population of the entire valley, even though, the system, as such, was not enforced in Assam with all its rigidity. Brahmins of lower Assam considered themselves superior and did not intermarry with their counterparts in upper Assam.¹²³ There was no intermarriage or interdining between the brahmins and the sudras. Amongst the latter also, there was a hierarchy of caste with the Kayasthas at the top and the Kaivartas, Haris, etc. at the bottom, and the so-called upper castes did not intermarry or interdine with the so-called lower castes. Caste-rules, which were quite flexible, particularly in upper Assam where the base of the society was essentially tribal, became more rigid since the coming of the Bengali priest, who wanted to reorganise the society on the basis of *smarta-marga* of Raghunandan and strongly advocated these rules.¹²⁴

Family and Position of Women

Joint family was, as it had been in earlier times, the normal practice. The father was the head of the family and women had no right to property.¹²⁵ When individual property rights grew up, she could claim her husband's property at his death. In royal and aristocratic circles, however, women exercised their individual rights to landed properties. Queen Phuleswari for instance made a gift of land to a brahmin couple as dowry on the occasion of their marriage.¹²⁶ Sayani, the first wife of Kalia Bhomora Barphukan donated a family of *paiks* and also a plot of land for their maintenance to the Hayagriva Madhava temple at Hajo during the days of Purnananda Burhagohain.¹²⁷

Though the position of women was subordinate to man, she enjoyed great freedom in the society, where the tribal outlook still prevailed. There was no *purdah* system, neither child marriage nor any restriction on widow remarriage, except amongst the brahmins and the Kayasthas. Dowry system was non-prevalent amongst all tribes, Hinduised or not, which had its impact on the upper-caste circles. As a result, the system, as it was understood in other parts of India, could not gain any ground among all classes of commoners in Assam. In upper circle however, girls were given ample gifts befitting the status of the family at the time of her wedding.

(Women in the ruling circles sometimes played important role in politics. Reference has already been made to the three queens of Siva Singha who actually took the reins of government to their hands.) Among the noted women of the period were Kuranganayani, the

Manipuri queen of Rajeswar Singh, and later of his brother Lakshmi Singha, Rani Kamaleswari Devi, wife of Gaurinath Singha, and Numali Rajmao, the queen mother of Kamaleswar Singha and Chandrakanta Singha. During the period of the Moamariya Revolts, hundreds of women proceeded to the battlefield, some like Radha and Rukmini being in the first line of the army, and thousands perished before the swords of the royalists.

Diet and Food Habits

Rice, pulse, vegetables, fish, milk, etc. were the staple diet of both the aristocracy and the commoners. Some idea of the varied delicacies of the upper strata in the society can be gathered from the *Kumar Haran* of Ramananda Kayastha. Salt was dear for the commonalty, who used an alkaline preparation called *kharani* as its substitute. The practice of chewing unripe areca-nut with betel vine was universal.

Games, Sports, Theatrical Performances etc.

The Ahom kings took keen interest in games and sports. Rudra Singha appointed officers like Rangiyal Barua and Kukurachowa Barua for the promotion of varied pastimes. This included the fights of different animals and birds like elephant, buffalo, tiger, bear, crocodile, cock, hawk, etc. between their own species or with others.¹²⁸ Hawk-fight was their favourite pastime and for the training of these birds, there was a well-organized *khel* under an officer called Senchowar Barua. Ahom kings were also fond of elephant catching and hunting excursions, and used to take pleasure trips to different places of the kingdom. In the later part of their rule, new pastimes like wrestling, jugglery and acrobatic feats were imported from Bengal.¹²⁹ The venue for the performance of games and sports in the capital at Rangpur was the Rupahi Pathar. The king and the nobles witnessed the performance from the Rang-ghar. *Bhaonas* or theatrical performances, on religious themes which were introduced by Sankaradeva and originally performed in the *satras* and the village *namghars*, were latter held also in the royal courts.¹³⁰ When the Ahom kings accepted Saktism, the worship of Durga was performed in the royal courtyard with pomp and grandeur.

Learning and Education

The Ahom rulers were initially concerned mainly with the compo-

sition and compilation of a class of historical chronicles called *buranjis* which is a unique contribution made by them to the domain of Indian historiography. Earlier the *buranjis* were written in Tai-Ahom but since the beginning of the sixteenth century, they were written in Assamese as well, which language probably by that time, if not earlier, became the court language of the Ahoms. Since the reign of Rudra Singha, the Ahom kings started patronising Hindu religious and different branches of secular literature. But the works produced from the royal court were mainly of the nature of translations and compilations. However, towards the later part of the Ahom rule, a new type of drama, pseudo-classical or Sanskrit-cum-Assamese were written under royal patronage. Of these, the *Dharmodaya* by Dharma-deva Sarma is an allegorical play, which was staged at the royal court on the occasion of the reinstallation of Lakshmi Singha,¹³¹ in which the Moamariyas were portrayed as an immoral batch of rascals.

The royal court served as the centre of learning for the members of the royalty and the nobility and knowledge of the *buranjis* was the most important part of their education. Traditional education consisting of Sanskrit grammar, lexicon, Hindi religious texts, etc. was imparted, as in ancient days, in the Sanskrit *tolas* under brahmin teachers. But this education was confined to the brahmin and Kayastha pupils only. In the *satras*, the disciples were imparted not only spiritual and moral education but also training in certain crafts and fine arts. In the villages, the *namghars* as the centre of culture, education and learning set the ideals of life for the village-folk.

Religion

The tenets of the Ahom faith have not yet been properly examined. But from the Pali chronicles, corroborated by archaeological evidences, it is learnt that the Thais had come under Buddhist-Hindu influences¹³² at least by the end of the ninth century and the Ahoms as members of the Thai race had also been influenced by Buddhist-Hinduism. Definite traces of Buddhist-Hindu influences are found in the Ahom scriptures, the most important of the kind being *Phuralung* or *Phralung*. It expounds the virtue of non-violence and is still venerated by the Ahom priests. One of their classics is the *Pung-Gao-Kham*, popularly called the *Ahom Ramayana*.¹³³ The Ahoms had also worshipped a number of gods and goddesses with sacrifices and offerings. The principal of them were Phuratara (creator), Lengdon (god of heaven), Jasingpha (goddess of learning), Phai (god of fire)

and Kao-Kham (god of water). Their tutelary deity was the image of Chom-Cheng, later called Somdeo, whom they continued to worship till the end of their rule. It was believed that worship of this deity would bring success in war and also peace and prosperity.¹³⁴

The Ahoms were accompanied by their own priests—the Deodhais, who also acted as their political advisors in the beginning. But gradually their role in politics was overshadowed by the brahmin priests. The Ahoms looked upon Charaideo as the most sacred place of their faith. Since the reign of Sudangpha or Bamuni Konwar, the Ahom kings became interested in Hinduism. However, Jayadhwaj Singha was the first Ahom king to formally accept initiation of a Vaishnava priest named Vanamalideva, whom he had brought from Kooch Behar and established with land grants at Dakhinpat.¹³⁵ His successors up to Sulikpha Lara Raja accepted Vaishnavism as their creed, which became the predominant faith in Assam by that time. But Gadadhar Singha lent towards Saktism and persecuted the Vaishnava *mahantas* and *gosains*. His son Rudra Singha in the later part of his rule became an open supporter of Sakta faith and from his death onwards that faith became the creed of the Ahom monarchs and of the principal nobles and officers. Thus Saktism became the religion of the rulers whereas the subject population, in general, were followers of Vaishnavism. The monarchy therefore tactfully shaped a liberal policy towards all the creeds which, however, they could not continue for long because of the threat of danger inherent in Vaishnavism. To quote S.K. Bhuyan,

by adopting the Sakta faith, by supporting the Vaishnava monks and satras and by maintaining the Ahom rituals and ceremonies, the Ahom rulers encouraged a state of triarchy in religious matters leading to a considerable amount of rivalry between the three groups.¹³⁶

They also entertained Muslim priests in their court and sent them to pray for their welfare at the principal Muslim shrine at Poa-Mecca hill in Hajo.¹³⁷ Muslim priests were also endowed with land grants.

Alongside the organized religious practices, there were widespread practices of magic and incantation which attracted the notice of the Persian chroniclers, and people at large, including those in ruling authority, were swayed by their influence. It was believed that those who possessed magical power were able to propitiate the deities as well as the demons representing forces of immutable nature. By

performing magical feats, some persons could even command followers during the period of the Moamariya uprisings. Further, there were many a superstition shared by the people of all classes. It was the usual practice of the Ahom kings to call upon the Deodhais to consult the omens by examining the legs of the fowls before leading a war.

Economic Conditions

Agriculture: Washed by the life giving Brahmaputra river, which may be classed amongst the largest in the world, and its numerous tributaries, Assam is well-adapted for the cultivation of every kind of crop. The Persian chroniclers and the British writers were unanimous in their opinion regarding the richness of the Assam soil. Agriculture was the main occupation of the people and ploughing was looked with respect, which, however, was not performed by the brahmins. But the progress of civilization in the valley being uneven, use of the plough till the coming of the Ahoms was mainly confined to its western part. It was the Ahoms who first introduced wet-rice cultivation in the eastern Brahmaputra valley and the process of ploughing lands by using buffaloes.

There were three main varieties of paddy—*Sali*, *Bao* and *Ahu*, each of which had numerous sub-varieties. Hamilton, describing the economy of Assam in the beginning of the nineteenth century observed that *Sali-dhan* or wet rice grown by the transplantation system formed three-fourths of the entire crops.¹³⁸ Side by side, *Ahudhan* and *Bao* or *Uridhan*, both sown by the broad-cast system, were also cultivated pretty considerably. The next important crop was mustard and in the early part of the nineteenth century, Assam used to export 15,000 maunds of mustard annually to Bengal valued at rupee 1.33 (approx) per maund.¹³⁹ Contemporary sources evidence the cultivation of different varieties of pulse-crops, oil-seeds, vegetables, spices, fruits and flower plants.¹⁴⁰ Later on, wheat, barley and millet were also grown in small quantities.¹⁴¹ There was cultivation of poppy too, but it was used mainly as drug and its consumption was confined to the kings and the nobles.¹⁴²

Further, Assam was very rich in its natural products. The Moguls were particularly interested in its elephants and *agar* wood, the latter being an important article of trade between Assam and Mogul India. Tavernier informs us that Assam produced an abundance of shellac of a red colour, which was the best of its kind in the whole of Asia.¹⁴³ Further, Assam used to export a considerable quantity of stick lac

and *majathi* or Indian madder to Bengal¹⁴⁴ Shihabuddin Talish had estimated that "if this country were administered like the Imperial dominions, it was very likely that forty to forty-five lakhs of rupees would be collected from the revenue paid by the *raiya*s, the price of elephants caught in the jungles and other sources".¹⁴⁵ Natural calamities and epidemics sometimes affected cultivation adversely. During the period of internal disturbances arising out of the Moamariya rebellion, when a terrible famine broke out, the price of all eatables went up to an unprecedented level and "even persons of the highest castes, it is said, were reduced to eating wild fruits and roots, and flesh of cows, buffaloes, dogs and jackals."¹⁴⁶

Cultivation was extensive throughout the country and except on occasions of war and natural calamities, people did not suffer from acute scarcity of foodstuffs. Apart from the wealthy few, the rest of the people lived neither in plenty nor in poverty because their wants were very few and the existing social relations hindered a free economic growth.

Strength of the Population and Extent of the Kingdom

The population of the kingdom before the Moamariya rebellion was estimated at about two million and a half.¹⁴⁷ This does not seem to be an exaggerated figure even against that of seven lakhs estimated by the British immediately after the Moamariya rebellions and the Burmese invasions, because with a population less than this, it would not have been possible for Rudra Singha to mobilise an army of 4,00,000 consisting of the *muls* or the first levy of soldiers from a *got* of four *paiks* for his proposed expedition against the Moguls. In extent, the kingdom was about 500 miles (800 km) in length with an average breadth of 60 miles (96 km).¹⁴⁸ It roughly corresponded to the six present districts of the Brahmaputra valley—Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, Nagaon, Darrang and Kamrup. The *uttarkul* or northern bank was more populous and fertile but the Ahom kings set up their capital in the *dakhinkul* or south bank because it had more inaccessible strongholds and defensible central places.

Village and Town

With the implementation of the *paik* system, village organization in the Ahom kingdom underwent significant changes which had to a great extent determined the economy of medieval Assam. Under this system, families of different professions and ethnic origins were

settled side by side in a single village. This had obstructed the growth of a guild system, so necessary for the development of trades. However, certain villages like Kamargaon, Da-dhara in different areas were conveniently organised on occupational basis for supplying the royal store with necessary weapons which might have been kept under strict royal supervision. In the western valley, where the *paik* system was not introduced, there appeared guild-like formations of craftsmen in villages like Tantikuchi and Kamarkuchi, where professional workers competed for excellence in their respective crafts.

Life in the villages was simple but hard. The *satra* institution introduced some new elements into the village life. Being obliged to render his service to both the king and the *guru*, a villager, no doubt, found his life hard. While working under the rigours of the *paik* system, he at the same time had to pay a religious tax to the *guru*. In course of time, however, the image of the *guru* tended to overshadow that of the king. This was due to the fact that a *satra*, exploitative though it was, imparted to its disciples such teachings as were most suitable to their needs. The new ideas promoted unity and harmony among diverse ethnic and occupational groups and served the ideological basis for a new society. Slowly, the tribal societies disintegrated and were remoulded into a higher form of social organization, a more homogeneous civil society, with a wider and stronger basis. In spite of the apparent conflict between the *paik* system and the *satra* organization, they both, however, worked together for the disintegration of the tribal communities and thereby contributed towards the formation of the new society.

Life in the towns was usually an extension and continuation of the life in the villages, the only difference being that there was a far greater concentration of people in the towns than in the villages and that each town had a mart, whereas a village had not. Garhgaon "figured in the imagination of the multitude as the premier city of Ahom supremacy."¹⁴⁹ The new capital at Rangpur had its own importance and at time of Captain Welsh's expedition to Assam, it had a population of about ten thousand.¹⁵⁰ Dichai commanded a strategic importance for which it was selected by Purnananda Burhagohain as the site for the last of the Ahom metropolis. Besides, a number of marts were opened by the Ahom kings at places like Simaluguri, Nazira, Titabar, Janji, Bebezia, Marangi, Dergaon, Kajalimukh, Kaliabar, Sadiya, Narayanpur, Biswanath, etc., where small township grew in course of time. In the western valley, the towns of Gauhati

and Hajo were important trading centres directly connected with the western gateway of Assam. Pandu was a very thickly populated town and Rangamati as early as 1606 had lines of shops in the streets including two churches and a small Portuguese population.¹⁵¹ All these towns had a fort each.

Crafts and Industries

Sericulture and the rearing of cocoons for the manufacture of varieties of silk were known to the Assamese people from very early times. Textile industry reached a very high point of perfection under the Ahom rule which was also noted by Tavernier.¹⁵² The three different varieties of Assam silk are *muga*, (*Antheroea assameoea*) *edi* or *erandi* (*Attacus recini*) and *pat* (*patta*). *Muga* silk was an article of trade in Bengal as well as in the Coromandel and Malabar coasts in the early seventh century.¹⁵³ Fine cotton cloths were woven with a kind of locally made threads called *Nara-kata-suta* at Kamarkuchi and at Nagaon¹⁵⁴ for use of the royalty and the aristocracy. Assamese women excelled in spinning and weaving and they prepared all cloth required by the family. Women were also skilled in embroidery and dying. Woodwork was excellent. The palace building at Garhgaon, the houses of the nobles and all items of furniture were made of wood and their workmanship was highly appreciated by the chronicler of Mir Jumla's Assam expedition. Gold was found in the sands of almost all the rivers of Assam and the metal was extracted by a professional community called Sonowals. Iron-smelting was done extensively from the Tipam rocks. There were also large quantities of iron deposits at Jaypur, Wazira, Bacha and Dayang and each *paik* of the Losaliya *khel* (guild of iron-smelters) had to supply 20 *seers* of iron to the State per annum.¹⁵⁵ Salt-manufacturing was mostly prevalent among the Nagas and salt was an important article of trade between them and the people of the plains. But it was very costly and not easily available. This made Assam to import large quantities of salt from Bengal towards the later part of Ahom rule. Many people of Kamrup were engaged in ivory industry. Rudra Singha sent mats, fans and chessmen made of ivory as presents to the Mogul emperor at Delhi.¹⁵⁶ The Naosaliya *khel* was engaged in building boats and Silakuti *khel*, members of which were generally Muslims, did stone-engraving. Bricks were also made in an indigenous way for the construction of temples, bridges and other buildings. Tanks also were excavated in different parts of the kingdom. However, the bigger

tanks were excavated in the new capital at Rangpur. A speciality of these tanks was that their level always remained the same, which was done by putting a proportionate amount of mercury in copper tubes in the bed of the tanks by a process called *Rah-dhala*¹⁵⁷ and by connecting the tanks with the water springs.

Trade-routes and Trade

Trade was carried on with Mogul India through Bengal. There were four routes from Bengal to Assam, one by water and three by land. The river route ran from Goalpara down the Brahmaputra and via the Jennai from Jamalpur, and then after some distance along the Pabna river, a navigable branch of the Ganges. After proceeding up the Pabna river for two or three days, the boats came to the Ganges, which they ascended for three or four more days, till they came to the mouth of the Matabanga or the Jelligi either of which led to Calcutta. As these two rivers became almost dry during winter, the boats followed the route through the Sunderbans. It took 25 to 35 days to reach Calcutta from Goalpara and 33 to 40 days from Calcutta to Goalpara. The first overland route lay through Murshidabad, Maldah, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bagwa and Goalpara; this was also the line of the Calcutta *dak*. The second route was via Dacca, Dumary, Puculoe, Jamalpur, Singimari and Goalpara. The third route was through Sylhet, Cherra, Moplung, Nungklao, Ranigaon, Khanamukh and Gauhati. The last two overland routes were almost impassable during the rains. The river route and the first overland route were the most popular.¹⁵⁸

The Ahom rulers followed a policy of isolation so far as their relations with the west, meaning Mogul India, was concerned. No Assamese trader was allowed to leave his country and strict vigilance was kept over the movement of Mogul traders. After the Ahom-Mogul wars, however, this restriction was relaxed and the facility was best utilized by the European merchants. A number of outposts were established to check the transit of goods but all duties were to be paid at the frontier outpost at Hadira or Kandahar, usually called *Assam chaki* by the British. This *chaki* was superintended by one and occasionally two officers called Duaria Barua. The territory around the *chaki* was administered by another officer called Kandahar Barua. The Duaria Barua was to pay an amount of rupees 90,000¹⁵⁹ to the Ahom government but only rupees 26,000 of this amount reached the royal treasury.¹⁶⁰ All trades with Bengal were conducted by the

Barphukan. The Duaria Barua, who had wide discretionary powers used to inflate the rates of the custom duties fixed by the government and receive advances from the Bengal merchants for Assam goods. Sometimes he would refuse to carry on trade with particular individuals and also breach the terms of contract.¹⁶¹ Hence, the officers associated with Assam-Bengal trade, the Duaria Barua and the Barphukan, in particular, and also the merchants concerned could amass a considerable wealth.

The Bengal merchants carried on their trade with Assam from the outposts of Goalpara on the south bank and Jogighopa and Rangamati on the north bank, all being located in the district of Rungpore, which became a territory of the East India Company in 1757. From 1770 to 1782, Rungpore was administered by a collector through whom all correspondences between the Governments of Bengal and Assam were made. From 1793, the office of the Judge and the Magistrate was separated from that of a collector and relations with Assam were thenceforward conducted by the new official. The Commissioner of Kooch Behar also occasionally remained in charge of Company's relations with Assam.¹⁶²

The chief exports from Assam to Bengal consisted of *muga* silk, stick lac, *majathi* (*munjit*) or madder, *agar* or aloe wood, elephant tusks, cotton, pepper and mustard seed. The principal important was salt. Assam usually imported 120,000 maunds of salt annually from Bengal but the quantity fell to 35,000 maunds after the Moamariya rebellion.¹⁶³ The prime cost of Bengal salt ranged from rupees 70 to 120 per 1000 maunds in about 1780 which got increased to rupees 400 at the time of Captain Welsh's expedition to Assam in 1792. The selling price of Bengal salt in Assam was rupees two to four per maund in the first period and rupees five to ten in the second.¹⁶⁴ It was the prospect of profit in salt which mainly attracted the European merchants of Bengal to the Assam trade.

The first European to carry on trade in Assam was Colonel James Mill who was originally in the service of the Ostend East India Company.¹⁶⁵ He was given facilities for trade in Assam by king Siva Singha in 1739.¹⁶⁶ The next noted European merchant was a Frenchman, Jean Baptist Chevalier, who later became the governor of Chandernagore. He set up a factory at Goalpara which continued to function till 1778 even after his departure from the place in 1763. Having obtained permission from the Assam government, Chevalier advanced as far as the Ahom capital in 1757 with a fleet of boats

loaded with articles worth about a lakh of rupees. But having been deprived of all intercourse with the inhabitants, he had to deliver his goods to an Assamese merchant named Sibrum Sarma Bairagi.¹⁶⁷ Paul Richard Pearkes also established trade with Assam creating a factory at Jogighopa.¹⁶⁸

The East India Company was evincing keen interest in carrying on trade with Assam since 1765, when the Society of Trade was established. The Society had even appointed Hugh Baillie as its agent at Goalpara. But the Society was withdrawn in 1768, which brought a large number of European merchants to the field, some pursuing unauthorised trade. Amongst the latter group, the most noted was Daniel Raush,¹⁶⁹ who was carrying on salt trade at Goalpara since 1769 as the Agent of David Killican, a Bengal civil servant and Calcutta merchant. Raush played an important role in Assam politics of the period by procuring the service of the Barkandazes for both the Ahom king Gaurinath Singha and the Darrang prince Krishnanarayan. A number of Indian merchants, mostly Bengalis, were also engaged in Assam trade. Sooberam Palit and Gunny Sam Sarkar were granted *parwana* for monopoly of salt trade in Assam for three years by Muhammad Reza Khan, Naib Dewan of Bengal. Ganganarayan Roy got particular *rawanahs* for salt trade in the Assam marts and his agent Robert Brigger established a factory at Jogighopa with special permission of the Governor-General. Jagat Seth, the famous banker of Murshidabad had also trading concerns at Goalpara, Jogighopa and Gauhati, which continued up to 1815 and even after.¹⁷⁰ Badan Chandra Barphukan after his flight from Gauhati in October 1815 proceeded from Rangpur to Murshidabad counting upon the help of Jagat Seth. The Assamese clients of Jagat Seth also utilized the bankers' hospitality when they visited Murshidabad to bathe in the Ganges or for other purposes.¹⁷¹

In 1771, the Company's Directors recognised the possibility of trade with Assam and three years later entrusted George Bogle who was sent on a deputation to Tibet with the duty of collecting information about Assam and soon afterwards appointed Hugh Baille as the company's agent at Goalpara.¹⁷² But meanwhile stiff competition among the European merchants at Goalpara for Assam trade was going on, which led to constant disputes and quarrels not unaccompanied by violence and aggression. A common complaint of these merchants was the non-payment of dues by their Assamese debtors. In attempting to realise their claims, some of them like Laval and

Lear who were agents of Chevalier even forcibly entered Assam in 1777 and proceeded as far as Pandu.¹⁷³ Such attitude of the European merchants was a matter of concern for the Ahom monarchy which had already been facing a crisis after the first popular rebellion of 1769. In fact, from 1769 till peace and order was restored by Purnananda Burhagohain in the early nineteenth century, trade and commerce in Assam was at a standstill which made certain European merchants pessimistic about a prospect of trade in this State. An idea of Assam-Bengal trade as it was carried on in the year 1808-9 can be gleaned from the following tables showing the exports of the two countries.¹⁷⁴

EXPORT FROM BENGAL TO ASSAM

<i>Commodity</i>	<i>Value in Rupees</i>
1. Salt at 5½ rupees	192,500
2. Fine pulse	800
3. Ghee (1000 maunds)	1,600
4. Sugar	1,000
5. Stone beads	2,000
6. Coral	1,000
7. Jewels and pearls	5,000
8. Cutlery and glassware (European)	500
9. Spices	1,000
10. Paints	500
11. Copper	4,800
12. Red lead	1,000
13. English woollens	2,000
14. Tafetas	2,000
15. Benaras silk called <i>kinkhap</i>	500
16. Satin	1,000
17. Gold and silver cloth	1,000
18. Shells	100
19. Muslin	10,000
Total	2,28,300

EXPORT FROM ASSAM TO BENGAL

<i>Commodity</i>	<i>Value in Rupees</i>
1. Stick lac 10,000 maunds	35,000
2. Muga silk (65 maunds)	11,350
3. Muga cloth (75 maunds)	17,500
4. Manjit or Indian madder	500
5. Black pepper (50 maunds)	500

6. Long pepper (50 maunds)	300
7. Cotton with seeds (7,000 maunds)	35,000
8. Ivory	6,500
9. Bell-metal vessels	1,500
10. Mustard seeds (15,000 maunds)	20,000
11. Iron hoes	600
12. Slaves (100)	2,000
13. Thaikal (Thekera), 50 maunds	150
Total	1,30,900

The balance amounting to Rs. 97,400 against Assam was paid in gold and silver.¹⁷⁵

Trade with Tibet and Bhutan, on the other hand, was profitable. M'Cosh refers to as many as five routes leading from Sadiya into Tibet or China proper.¹⁷⁶ They are: the Dibang Pass, the Mishmi route, the Phungan Pass to Manchee and China, the route by Manipur to Irrawaddy and the Patkai Pass through which the Ahoms came to Assam. The Burmese invaders also availed themselves of the land route which was the easiest. Another route to Tibet runs across the Himalayan mountains parallel with the course of the Brahmaputra. The *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* says that there were 35 mountain passes between Kamrup and Tibet through which horses were brought to Lakhnauti.¹⁷⁷ Lt. Rutherford stated that Khampa Bhutiyas and Lassa merchants, just before the Burmese invasions, had "unreserved commercial intercourse with Assam."¹⁷⁸ The commercial intercourse between the two countries was carried on in the following manner. At a place called Chouna, on the confines of the two countries, two months journey from Lassa, there was a mart established and there was a similar mart at Geegunshur, four miles distant from Chouna on the Assam side. An annual caravan would repair from Lassa to China conducted by about twenty persons, converting silver bullion to the amount of one lakh of rupees, and a considerable quantity of rock salt for sale to the Assamese merchants. The latter brought rice, which was imported to Tibet from Assam in large quantities, silk, iron, lac, skins, buffalo-horns, pearls, etc.¹⁷⁹ The trade with Bhutan was regulated from the custom house at Simliabari, which was placed in charge of a hereditary officer called Ujir Barua. The Bhutiya traders were also allowed to bring their goods to Hajo¹⁸⁰ when they visited the place on the occasion of the Buddha Purnima (a Buddhist festival). In 1809, trade between Assam and Bhutan amounted to two lakh rupees.¹⁸¹ At Salalpath, in the district of Darrang, duties were levied on all goods

passing between Kamrup and upper Assam under the management of a Barua at Rs. 6000 per annum.¹⁸²

For internal trade, marts were established at various places of the kingdom like Dihing, Bakata, Kacharihat, Barhat, Namchang, Abhaypur, etc. where different kinds of commodities including birds and animals and even slaves were sold. To carry on trade with the hill tribes, marts were established at the foothills. The market at Sadiya was the central one for the hill people inhabiting the extreme north-east. To this marts, the Singphos and the Khamtis brought their swords and spears, medicinal plants, ivory, copper and silver, which they procured from China; and the Adis and the Hills Miris brought spicy vegetables, Indian madder, wax and cotton blankets, which they exchanged for produce of the plains. The Nagas mainly sold salt and cotton and the Khasis and the Jayantiyas mainly iron implements and honey. The Garos served as intermediate links connecting the trade between Assam and the Surma valley. They brought salt from Sylhet and cotton from their own hills.¹⁸³

Currency

Marketing was carried on usually through barter and circulation of money was limited. According to Shihabuddin, currency in the Ahom kingdom consisted of cowries, rupees and gold coins.¹⁸⁴ *Buranjis* make reference to *mohar* (coin), *taka*, *sicca rup* or *rup* (rupee), *adhali* (half rupee), *siki* or *maha* (quarter rupee), *ad-maha* (one-eighth of a rupee), *charaliya* (one-sixteenth of a rupee) and *kara* or *kari* (cowrie). *Ad-maha* and *charatiya* were minted for the first time during the reign of Gaurinath Singha. Koch coins called Narayani were also accepted in Assam. With the increase of external trade since the reign of Rudra Singha, there was a corresponding increase in the circulation of money. Certain inscriptions dating from the reign of Siva Singha, give the price of a number of commodities like rice, ghee, oil, pulses, goat, pigeon in connection with worship in different temples of the kingdom.¹⁸⁵ This indicates that barter economy was in the process of being replaced by money economy, which was the outcome of Assam's developing economic ties with the neighbouring countries.

REFERENCES

¹TBE, pp. 38f; BVRD; ABTP, pp. 41f; SAB, pp. 150f; AAW, p. 312.

²For details on the Neo-Vaishnavite movement, see M. Neog, *Sankaradeva and His Times*; S.N. Sarma, *The Neo-Vaishnavite Movement and the Satra Institution of Assam*.

³The Shans derived their name from the place of their first habitat, Tyai-Shan, located on the bank of the river Tarim flowing to the north of Mongolia and China. Therefrom they migrated to China in about the first century of the Christian era and then to Mungri-mungram in Yunan. They expanded gradually to the whole of the Hukong valley and established there a group of states. The most powerful of these states was inhabited by the Mao branch of the tribe. They called in Mungmao, and the Manipuris, their immediate neighbours in the north-west called it the kingdom of Pong, which term sometimes denoted the entire collection of the Tai-Shan states in the Hukong valley, P.K. Burhagohain, *Ahomar Adi Buranji*, p. 7.

⁴AB (pp. 41-43) mentions twelve divisions of Mungrimungram, of which Maulung was one. According to ABTP (p. 17), Sukapha was born at Mungmit, another division of the kingdom of Pong.

⁵Burhagohain, op. cit., p. 45; *Imperial Gazetteer of India, Eastern Bengal and Assam*, p. 17.

⁶As to the actual strength of Suka-phas' men, varying numbers from four hundred eighty to one thousand eighty are given in the Assamese chronicles. The AB (p. 44) and the DAB (p. 6) on the other hand, put the number as nine thousand. It may be that Sukapha originally started with a few hundred men but their number increased to several thousands after he subjugated the tribes of the Hukong valley, the Nagas of the Patkai hills and the plains tribes of the Brahmaputra valley living in the Namrup and Tipam areas.

⁷HAG, appendix G; SAB, p. 6; ABHB, p. 12. But it is doubtful how a Sanskrit derivative can be associated with Mongoloid tribes of Bodo speech. It is more probable that the term *Asam* has a non-Aryan origin. The Bodo speakers of eastern Brahmaputra valley called the Tai-Shans as Sam. Subsequently, the country they occupied came to be known as A-sam or 'the country of the Sams', which was later Sanskritized into *Asama*, from which the term, *Asam*, *Assam* and Ahom gradually rose—P. Gogoi, *The Tai and the Tai Kingdoms*, p. 19. For other theories on the origin of the name 'Asam', see S.L. Barua, *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, pp. 76f.

⁸DAB, p. 10; AB, pp. 47f; MS. chronicle, no. 3.

⁹See PAB, p. 49.

¹⁰ABHB, p. 18; PAB, p. 49.

¹¹MS. Chronicle, *Swarganarayan Maharajar Akhyan*.

¹²AB, p. 54.

¹³For details see PAB, pp. 51 ff; DAB, pp. 22ff; SAB, pp. 56ff; AB, pp. 54ff.

¹⁴The first invasion in 1527 was led by a general called Bar Ujir in Assamese chronicles. It is not known whether the expedition was sent by Nusrat Shah himself or by some petty chieftains of Bengal. Bar Ujir was accompanied by two other commanders called Bit Manik (Bit Malik) and Laipat (Luput)—ABSM, p. 20; AB, pp. 66ff.

¹⁵ABSM (p. 20) names the first three *parganas* only. SAB (p. 69) mentions Kampur and Dhekera in place of Ghoraghat and Fariabad. From Gauda, Suhungmung sent a peace mission to the king of Orissa with a view to forming an alliance against the growing Muslim power in the east. The mission offered worship to the Jagannath temple at Puri and excavated a tank near by—ABSM (p. 20) names the king as Vikram-sena, who can be identified with king

Prataprudra of Orissa (1497-1540).

¹⁶ABHB, p. 25.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 23, 28.

¹⁸H.C. Goswami, *Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts*, p. 175.

¹⁹For details see J.N. Sarkar, *Life of Mir Jumla*, chap. 10 and S.K. Bhuyan, *Atan Burhagohain and His Times*.

²⁰Glanus, *A Relation of an Unfortunate Voyage to the Kingdom of Bengala*, pp. 144-47; *BI*, p. 24.

²¹AB, pp. 215-17; *PAB*, pp. 147-49; *ABSM*, p. 103.

²²*Asam Buranji* (1648-81) ed., S.K. Dutta, p. 52; *TB*, pp. 9, 13; *SAB*, p. 106.

²³*PAB*, p. 128.

²⁴*ADHB*, p. 230.

²⁵AB, p. 270; *SAB*, pp. 117f; *TB*, pp. 26f.

²⁶The temple of Umananda on the Peacock hill opposite Gauhati was built under his patronage.

²⁷*TBE*, p. 30; *ABHB*, p. 64.

²⁸*ABHB*, p. 64.

²⁹*TB*, pp. 38f.

³⁰J.P. Wade, *An Account of Assam*, ed. B. Sarma, pp. 13ff; *AARB*, pp. 5f.

³¹*ABHB*, p. 63; *DAB*, p. 62.

³²*Ibid.*; G.R. Barua, op. cit., p. 93.

³³*ABTP*, p. 41; *BVRD*.

³⁴*HAG*, p. 189.

³⁵*ABHB*, p. 71.

³⁶*Ibid.*; *TBE*, p. 41; G.R. Barua, op. cit., p. 99.

³⁷*BVRD*; *AAW*.

³⁸The new route across the Naga hills was extremely hazardous. It involved continual fighting against the natives and clearing the forests full of jungle creepers resulting in nothing tangible. The Assamese people therefore called the expedition *Lata-kata-ran* i.e., a struggle to clear the creepers.

³⁹*ABHB*, p. 75; G.R. Barua, op. cit., p. 102.

⁴⁰It is said that the king would not touch his meal unless he received the *nirmali* from the Siva temple at Dergaon carried daily by couriers on horseback.

⁴¹*HAG*, p. 193.

⁴²G.R. Barua, op. cit., p. 104.

⁴³*RAW*.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, *BVRD*; P.N. Gohain Barua, *Asam Buranji*, p. 123.

⁴⁶*ABHB*, p. 108; *BVRD*.

⁴⁷*ADHB*, p. 411; U.N. Gohain, *Assam Under the Ahoms*, p. 94.

⁴⁸For details see *ADHB*, pp. 410-14; *BVRD*.

⁴⁹*BVRD*.

⁵⁰The office in Tai-Ahom was called *Chao-phrang-mung*, meaning 'god of the wide country'. In the process of Hinduisation of the Ahoms, Assamese equivalents were given to the names of their offices. Accordingly to the word 'chao' meaning 'great' or 'god', the Assamese equivalent 'Gosain' was given. But the word was corrupted into 'Gohain' and the spelling altered accordingly. The prefix 'Burha' meaning 'old' or 'senior' indicates the seniority of the office. P.K. Burhagohain, *Ahomar Adi Buranji*, (p. 48) mentions an office called Burha-Kunhai, which was one of the two counsellors attached to the administrative machinery of all the Tai-Shan states in the Hukong valley. It is therefore more possible that the term 'Burhagohain' is a corruption of its Tai-Ahom equivalent *Burha-Kunhai*.

⁵¹The office was called *Chao-thao-lung* or *Khao-thum-lung* in Tai-Ahom—*ADHB*, p. 528.

⁵²*ABHB* pp. 39f; *ADHB*, pp. 83, 102.

⁵³*ABHB*, p. 112; *ADHB*, p. 418.

⁵⁴*RAW*.

⁵⁵*TBE*, glossary, p. 20.

⁵⁶*HAG*, p. 80; *ABHB*, p. 118.

⁵⁷J. Borgohain, *Asamar Arthanaitik Itihas* (in Assamese), p. 7.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 245; *AAH*, p. 19.

⁵⁹*ABHB*, p. 22; *ABM*, p. 53.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, *TBE*, glossary, p. 238; *ADHB*, p. 534.

⁶¹*BVRD*.

⁶²*RAW*; *HAG*, p. 246.

⁶³They were Nao-Baicha Phukan, Dihingiya Phukan, Deka Phukan, Neog

Phukan, Bhitaraal Phukan, Na-Phukan and Nyay-Sodha Phukan.

⁶⁴*RAW; HAG*, p. 246.

⁶⁵*AAH*, p. 19; Robinson, op. cit., p. 190.

⁶⁶*ADHB*, p. 531; *HAG*, p. 246.

⁶⁷The office in Tai-Ahom was called Phukan-King, see *ADHB*, p. 532.

⁶⁸Regarding the residence of the Barphukan, see *infra*, chap. 5.

⁶⁹*ADHB*, p. 119.

⁷⁰*AAW*, p. xxiii; *RAW*.

⁷¹*Ibid.*

⁷²They were Pani Phukan, Deka Phukan, Dihingiya Phukan, Neog Phukan and two Chetiya Phukans.

⁷³*ABHB*, p. 96.

⁷⁴*AAW*, pp. xxii-xxiv.

⁷⁵*TBE*, p. xxx; *HAG*, p. 247, Gohain, op. cit., p. 107. The office of the Charing Raja was created by Sukhrangpha (1293-1332), who appointed his son Chao Pulai through the Kamata princess to this post. The offices of the Tipam Raja and the Namrupiya Raja were created by Suhungmung (1497-1539), who appointed his second and fourth sons respectively to these posts.

⁷⁶The rank of the last two was a little inferior to the first three.

⁷⁷*ABHB*, p. 119; Gohain, op. cit., pp. 107f; *TBE*, pp. xxvii-xxix.

⁷⁸*HAG*, p. 247.

⁷⁹*RAW; HAG*, p. 248.

⁸⁰*AB*, p. 34; *ABHB*, p. 12.

⁸¹*ADHB*, pp. 25f; *SAB*, p. 8.

⁸²Suklenmung married a princess from Mungkong.

⁸³When some of them declined, king Suklenmung had to persuade them personally to get the work done—*SAB*, pp. 20f.

⁸⁴*SAB*, p. 21.

⁸⁵*ADHB* (pp. 499f) states that there was a definite procedure which a *kanri paik* had to follow in order to get his name cancelled from the register of *paiks*, otherwise he was not relieved of his duties as a soldier, even though he might be holding a senior executive office.

⁸⁶*AAW*, p. ii.

⁸⁷S.K. Bhuyan, *Studies in the History of Assam*, p. 154.

⁸⁸*AARB*, p. 7.

⁸⁹This regiment was first created by Sukhampha Khora Raja (1552-1603). It had two divisions—the Bajua Hilaidari Konwar looked after the protection of the capital and the Bhitaraal Hilaidari Konwar took care of the palace and its environs.

⁹⁰MS. chronicle, no. 8 gives a model of deciding such a case.

⁹¹*ABSM*, p. 64.

⁹²*HND; AAH*, p. 49.

⁹³*Military Report on Assam, 1908*, p. 144

⁹⁴*ADHB*, p. 496.

⁹⁵Gait, *Assam Land Revenue Manual*, p. xxviii.

⁹⁶Memorandum containing abstracts of the receipts and disbursements in the province of Assam during Purnananda Burhagohains Administration by Maniram Dewan in Mills, *Report on the Province of Assam*, appendix K-B.

⁹⁷*BVRD; Report on the Administration of Assam, 1892-93*.

⁹⁸*Katha-guru-charita*, p. 179.

⁹⁹*Prachya Sasanavali*, p. 134; plate no. 156.

¹⁰⁰*TB* (p. 113) informs us that a commoner was axed to death for selling a plot of land.

¹⁰¹Gohain, op. cit., p. 117.

¹⁰²*JBORS*, 1915, I, p. 187.

¹⁰³*Prachya Sasanavali*, pp. 132f; *ADHB*, pp. 502f.

¹⁰⁴Loc. cit.

¹⁰⁵*Prachya Sasanavali*, pp. 132f; *ADHB*, pp. 502f.

¹⁰⁶*BPC*, 2 Sept. 1831, nos. 2-3.

¹⁰⁷Bhuyan, *Studies in the History of Assam*, p. 150.

¹⁰⁸MS. Chronicle, no. 5.

¹⁰⁹For details on Ahom tribal policy, see L. Devi, *Ahom Tribal Relations*.

¹¹⁰*DAB* (p. 122) states that when Ahom soldiers leading an expedition to the Mikir hills partook of their food and

drinks, the hill people commented in great delight, "These men eat the things we eat, they are therefore men of our fraternity."

¹¹¹AAW, pp. 45f; ABHB, p. 37.

¹¹²TB, pp. 25f.

¹¹³PAB, p. 41.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 39.

¹¹⁵Bhuyan, *Studies in the History etc.*, p. 50.

¹¹⁶S.K. Bhuyan, *Lachit Barphukan and His Times*, p. 71.

¹¹⁷Shihabuddin, observed: "Although most of the inhabitants of the neighbouring hills pay no tax to the Rajah of Assam, yet they accept his sovereignty and obey some of his commands. The Dufla tribe alone does not place its fleck in the skirt of obedience but occasionally encroach on his kingdom"—JBORS, 1915, I, pp. 184f.

¹¹⁸DAB, p. 99; SAB, p. 4; BVR; AAH, p. 53.

¹¹⁹The Satghariya Ahoms were a group of exogamous families, each of which was divided into a number of sub-groups, generally named after the places they inhabited. Thus, there were seven sub-houses of the royal family, eight of the Burhagohain family, sixteen of the Bargohain family, twelve of the Deodhai, seven of the Mohan, eight each of the Bailing and the Siring families. All the superior exogamous families were further subdivided into the two main divisions, the Gohains and the Gogois.

¹²⁰Fathiya, loc. cit.

¹²¹ADHB, pp. 421, 430ff.

¹²²For details see, ABHB, chaps. 14, 17.

¹²³BPC, 12 Aug. 1793, no. 8; H.K. Dhekial Phukan, *Asam Buranji*, p. 86.

¹²⁴Dhekial Phukan, op. cit., p. 39.

¹²⁵ADHB, p. 435.

¹²⁶Prachya Sasanavali, pl. no. 130, pp. 115f.

¹²⁷Ibid, pl. no. 501, pp. 139f.

¹²⁸DAB, pp. 149-54.

¹²⁹TB, pp. 47-51, 175-79.

¹³⁰Ibid.

¹³¹R.M. Nath, *Background of Assamese Culture*, p. 150; S.N. Sarma, *Prabandha Sayanika*, p. 28.

¹³²AARB, p. 12; ADHB, p. 389.

¹³³Ibid.

¹³⁴DAB, p. 89, pp. 15ff, state that Lengdon gave to the two progenitors of the Ahoms images of two deities called Somden and Sengdan. According to orthodox Ahom tradition Somden was in possession with the Hkun-tai branch of the Tais of whom Sukapha was a descendant—AARB, p. 17.

¹³⁵ADHB, pp. 142f.

¹³⁶AARB, p. 19.

¹³⁷cf. ibid., p. 14.

¹³⁸AAH, p. 58.

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁴⁰Asiatic Researches, II, p. 173; AAH, p. 46.

¹⁴¹AAH, p. 58.

¹⁴²AAH (p. 59) observes that poppy was cultivated widely for consumption.

¹⁴³V. Ball, *Tavernier's Travels in India*, II, pp. 28f; M. Neog, *Purani Asamiya Samaj aur Samskriti*, pp. 128-38.

¹⁴⁴AAH, p. 46.

¹⁴⁵JBORS, 1915, I, p. 184.

¹⁴⁶AB, p. 349.

¹⁴⁷G.R. Barua, *Assam Bandhu*, 1885, vol. I, p. 3.

¹⁴⁸W. Robinson, op. cit., pp. 2f; M'Cosh, *Topography of Assam*, p. 1; G.R. Barua, *Assam Buranji*, p. 1.

¹⁴⁹HAG, p. 269. For a description of the city see, L. Gogoi, *Buranje Parasa Nagar*, pp. 17-34.

¹⁵⁰AAW.

¹⁵¹C. Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia*, p. 123.

¹⁵²Ibid.

¹⁵³Ball, *Tavernier's Travels in India*, p. 281. According to Shihabuddin, "Every year in normal times, quantities of aloe wood, peppers, spikenard, musk, gold and a variety of silk were offered in exchange of salt, saltpetre, sulphur and several other products of Mughal India at the Ahom-Mughal check post."—Fathiya, loc. cit.

¹⁵⁴Gohain, op. cit., pp. 185f.

¹⁵⁵Ibid.; M.R. Dewan, 'Native Account of Washing for Gold in Assam', *JASB*, July, 1838, pp. 621-28.

¹⁵⁶*AAW*, pp. 130f.

¹⁵⁷For details see, *ADHB*, pp. 473f.

¹⁵⁸M. Cosh, op. cit., p. 9.

¹⁵⁹*HAG*, p. 275; *AAH*, p. 42 puts the figure at rupees 45,000.

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

¹⁶¹*AARB*, p. 51.

¹⁶²Ibid., pp. 51f.

¹⁶³*AAH*, p. 43; *HND* states that the quantity of salt imported during the year 1824-25 was only 25,000 maunds.

¹⁶⁴*Report on the Administration of Assam for 1874-75 and 1875-76*, part II-A, Permanent chapters, chap. 1, sec. 48, pp. 19f.

¹⁶⁵Grose, *Voyage to the East Indies*, vol. I, chap. 7, pp. 317-20 cited in *AARB*, p. 63.

¹⁶⁶*AB*, p. 274 gives the names of three Europeans—Gudimbill, Distirbill and Mistirbill, paying a visit to the court of Siva Singha one of whom must have been Col. James Mill.

¹⁶⁷J. Rennell, *Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan*, 2nd edn., p. 95; *AARB*, p. 64.

¹⁶⁸*AARB*, pp. 64f.

¹⁶⁹The nationality of Daniel Raush cannot be precisely known as he has been variously described as a Dane, a German, a Hanovarian and a Greek.

Before coming to India, he had served as an officer under Frederick the Great of Prussia and sustained an injury in the famous battle of Minden.

¹⁷⁰*MS. Chronicle of Lakshmi Singha's Reign*.

¹⁷¹*AARB*, p. 101.

¹⁷²G.R. Barua, *Anandaram Dhekial Phukanar Jivan Charitra*, p. 26.

¹⁷³*AARB*, appendix Hugh Baillie, pp. 89-95.

¹⁷⁴*AAH*, pp. 45f; Pemberton, op. cit., pp. 82f.

¹⁷⁵*AAH*, pp. 46f. states that the gold mine at Pakariguri produced Rs. 15,000 weight of gold-dust annually.

¹⁷⁶*Topography of Assam*, p. 10.

¹⁷⁷*Trans.*, Raverty, pp. 567f.

¹⁷⁸Pemberton, op. cit., pp. 84f.

¹⁷⁹Ibid.

¹⁸⁰*AAH*, p. 84, states that the Uzir Barua was not to pay any tax to the king except as presents.

¹⁸¹Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁸²*BVR*; according to *AAH* (p. 48) the amount fixed was Rs. 5,000. Duties collected at Batakuchi on the bank of the Mangaldai river amounted to Rs. 6,000.

¹⁸³*BVR*; Bhuyan, *Early British Relations with Assam*, p. 15.

¹⁸⁴*Fathiya*, loc. cit.

¹⁸⁵See Gohain, *Assam Under the Ahoms*, p. 166; *Prachya Sasanavali*, pp. 177f, 184.

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