

## The Process of Detribalization and the question of Feudalism in Medieval Assam

Ratanlal Hangloo

To discuss the question of Feudalism in the context of medieval Assam we can not avoid entering into a large field of long standing controversy in pre-colonial Indian historiography. In the recent past volume of literature has considerably grown on the subject and has proved the fallacy of long argued Indian Feudalism (on western European lines) in its inconsistency with the empirical knowledge. At this stage let us leave aside these opinions of various scholars on the subject to the effect that no analysis can prove more useful unless tested at the regional level.<sup>1</sup> With this object in view we chose to understand the nature of various structural elements of pre-colonial Assam.

From early times the socio-economic structure of Assam rested mainly on agrarian economy like other parts of India. The varied important elements of this agrarian structure in Assam were the state, with its secular elements (agrarian bureaucracy), the religious elements (brahmins) and the Peasants on whom rested the entire structure.<sup>2</sup> One thing that convinces every one easily was the regulation of states' authority through agrarian bureaucracy and payment of the salaries through land and its revenues to these members of agrarian bureaucracy.<sup>3</sup> Before we tell the usual story of exploitation in these secular grants and measure the consequences on the overall production relations let us look at the other aspect of state i.e. the nature of religious grants to Brahmins.

It deserves to be noted here that the large amount of inscriptional evidence illustrates that vast tracts of agricultural land were granted to the religious elements by the State for being pious, meritorious in spiritual exercises and for their mastery of *Vedas*. Now here emerges a very crucial question but before we turn our attention to this, it will be unhistorical to evade the evidence to this effect, provided by M. M. Sharma. The evidence regarding the grant of *Haposagrama* reads, "By this grant, the village called *Haposagrama* belonging to *Savalpamangoka* district of the *Uttarakula* (i.e. the northern division) is rendered free from visits of policemen and army men and also from (the obligation to pay) the taxes payable by temporary tenants as far as its eight boundaries, viz. *Aksidahika* in the east, the tank of *Candika* in the south-east, *Dirgahanga* in the south, a banyan tree in the south-west, a bamboo

bush in the west, a *Salamali* tree in the north west, the highroad or high embankment, in the north and the tank of *Dhavala* in the east. There lived a great Bhatta (i.e. learned Brahmin) named Jejjata who was munificent, absolutely truthful, engaged in doing good to others, honest and respected by good men, whose intellect became contended by drinking a nectar in the form of meaning of *Sastras*, who was the sole repository of (knowledge) the three *Vedas* in *Kaliage*, who was regularly engaged in the reading (i.e. recitation of Vedas) . . . . the king of commendable nature has been pleased to donate the village named *Haposa* to the Brahmin. . . . . The gift has been made for increase of the merit and fame of his parents and also of himself and hence this should be approved by all. . . .”<sup>4</sup> Like wise there are various other references stating the nature and the spiritual merit that went in favour of Brahmins for getting these large assignments of land, according to official version. These lands so granted were completely free from the state’s control. It is clearly stated in the charters, “Let it be known to you that this plot of land consisting of homestead land, paddy fields, ponds and mounds, standing as it is up to the boundries of its own . . . . is rendered free from all troubles on account of the fastening of elephants, searching of thieves, inflicting of punishments, tenants taxes, duties due to different causes and grazing of different animals, such as elephants, horses, camels, cows, buffaloes, goats and sheep, as recorded in the charter.”<sup>5</sup> It is important and interesting to observe that even the interference of “*rajani* (queen), the *rajaputras*, the *ranaka*, the favourites of the king, the old female guard of the harem, the collectors of *Hastibanda* tax and *Naukabanda* tax, the officer incharge of the stolen property, the plicemen, the inflictor of punishment and the collector of tenants taxes and the duties and the royal umbrella bearer”.<sup>6</sup> Hence the grants did not include land alone but the authority to exercise full control over peoples labour, residing in these grants. In what way was this privileged position of Brahmins useful to the state becomes clear from the plural ethnicity of the population. Since the brahmins played a very important role and exercised tremendous influence over peoples minds, the state utilized the brahmins for consolidating its position and in extending its area of influence. The brahmins advanced the process of *Varna* orientation to subject the varied tribes to states authority. It was not the theological aspect alone which favoured these religious elements in being considered for these grants but the urgency of the state to establish itself firmly in an area which was predominantly tribal in nature. The religious elements worked

as an ideological mechanism to widen the mass base of the state. In course of time one finds that the ruling dynasty of *Varmans* and *Salastambas* also emerged from strong tribal base and for legitimizing their positions. These dynasties also promoted the growth of religious elements. Vanamala is said to have sent gifts of prostitutes (*vesyas*) with Tezpur grant which was dedicated to *Matakesvara Siva* but in actual practice formed the property of the brahmins.<sup>7</sup> The *Salimpur* grant illustrates that King Jayapala "persistently pressed the brahmins of pundara to accept nine hundred gold coins in cash and a grant of land yielding an income of 1000 coins"<sup>8</sup>. According to *Kamuli* grant the gifts and donations to brahmins were regarded good fruits and fresh sprouts.<sup>9</sup> All these pieces of evidence suggest the utility of the religious elements for the state.

Gradually these ecclesiastical establishments evolved an agrarian aristocracy based on the tribal labour potential. What we should seriously question here before turning our attention to other aspects is ; (a) When did the process of detribalization commence in Assam ? (b) To what extent the assimilation of tribes took place in pre-Ahom period ? and (c) what was the nature and attitude of tribes towards non-tribal elements ?

True that the process of detribalization was a historical inevitability in changing social formation. Because by the time the process of advancing the *Varna* based societal format began the tribal units of plural ethnicity must have reached a stage of transition by gradual disappearance of kinship forms and the evolution of the preliminaries of division of labour, the gradual emergence of priesthood and the ritual status.<sup>10</sup> These could be regarded as the internal factors for the detribalization process and the external factors included influences exercised by religious elements of the state. The brahmins adopted the mechanism of accommodating the chiefs of tribes into a *Kshtriya* fold and the other members into to *Sudra varna*, as happened in case of East Bengal and Orissa.<sup>11</sup> But if this was the case then their material position was to be taken care of within the given social structure. This was possible only by seating the Chiefs into the aristocracy of secular elements or the religious elements and in both the cases the state had to share its power and resources with them. How passively the other members of the tribe accepted their condemnation to lower social position will remain unanswered at this state. Since the tribal unit was so well organised, how the mere application of a *varna* could dissolve them can be argued with slight hesitation. It seems that the brahmins could do little to dissolve the internal organization of tribes but

what they did was to put in to the mind of the members of tribe that the king stood outside and above the society entrusted to him by the divinity. To all the people kings appeared nothing else but God's chosen ruler. Hence, on one hand, the changes within the structure were introduced by the changing nature of material forces and, on the other hand, the brahmins supplied the technical equipment in the shape of verbal expressions, allegories and nomenclatures which developed as a social cementing in this process of detribalization.<sup>12</sup> At this time the intra-tribal conflict must have also played a vital role in reproduction of the relations of dependence and exploitation which determined the nature of social stratification in the long run. To this argument the existence of the plural ethnicity lends credence.<sup>13</sup> In this entire process of transition the role of environmental and demographic factors also can not be evaded.

However, what emerges from all these developments is the transfer of a large proportion of arable to a small group of brahmins. The landed aristocracy of both the religious and secular members reached prodigious heights where its members surpassed themselves in extravaganza. The relations between the state, its secular and religious elements and the peasants (mostly from among the tribes) manifested in two tendencies. On one hand there was a tendency to maintain the autonomy of the basic political unit at a village level or a group of villages, depending on the nature of the area over which the clan or tribe was spread over. On the other hand there was a tendency towards Centralization from above. This contradiction must have sustained the historical process. Because the very nature of interdependence was seriously linked with the mode of exchange and indeed with the mode of production. It was this tendency towards centralism and the other antagonistic tendency of tribal autonomy which prevented the total absorption of tribalism into a non-tribal structure almost down to sixteenth century. The religious elements in spite of their extensive privileges could not totally change the earlier existing forms of tribal organism. As a result of this, when degrees of economic decline set in with the frequent invasions, the system took no time to fragment into small chiefdoms on pre-existing tribal organism.

The various invaders who devastated the pre-Ahom Assam included Bakhti ar Khalji (1205-06), Ghyas-ud-din (1227), Ahoms (1228), Ikhtiyar-ud-din Yuzbek (1257), and Muhammad Shah

(1337).<sup>14</sup> Of all these it were Ahoms who settled in Assam permanently. But before they could politically structure as a ruling class over entire Assam there seems to have commenced a period of crisis in Assam from 12th century which lasted upto almost 16th century. One important consequence was that during this period the various tribal chieftains were militarily exposed before the Muslim and other invaders and it was their much needed protection that ultimately threw these elements into the hands of Ahoms who had already established themselves in the upper Assam.<sup>15</sup> The net result was the emergence of Ahom power by liquidation of various tribal elements into a centralized structure which rested on the *Paik* system.<sup>16</sup> The other features generally reveal that the king was the head of entire administrative structure. Apart from him there was an elaborate administrative apparatus attached to King's council and supported by a large number of *Paiks*. The king's council of ministers, *Patramantri*, included the *Bar-Gohain*, the *Bura-Gohain*, the *Bar-Barua* and the *Bar-Phukan*. These various ministers were assisted by a number of *Phukans* in running the machinery of the state. The other layer below the *Phukans* was that of *Baruas*. The judicial administration was carried out by twelve *Rajkhawas*. A few more *Rajkhawas* also existed at the district level to supervise the works of *Paiks*. In course of time the number of the members of state machinery seems to have increased from time to time. The *Paiks* were under the immediate supervision of a *Kheldar*. The unit of *Paiks* was known as *Got*. Each *Got* was of four persons but in course of time it was reduced to three. The labour unit of one *paik* was known as *Mul*, of the two was *Dowal*, and of the three was *Tewal*.<sup>17</sup> A unit of twenty men was commanded by *Bora*, 100 by *Saikia*, 1000 by *Hazarika*, 3000 by *Rajkhowa*, 6000 by *Phukan*, *Bar-Barua* and *Barphukan* commanded 12,000.<sup>18</sup>

Before we cross over to discuss the other aspects let us elaborate the evidence to make the *Paik* system more clear and see how it sustained the system. According to Sir Edward Gait, "With the exception of nobles, priests and persons of high cast and those engaged in replaceable by occupations the whole adult population were liable to render service to the state as labours and soldiers. They were known as *Paiks*, or foot soldiers a term which was formerly common in Bengal, where for instance it was applied to guards who surrounded the palace of the independent Muhammadan kings. *Paiks* were organised by *Gots*. A *Got* originally contained four *Paiks* but in the reign of Rajeshwar Singh the number was reduced

to three in upper Assam ; one member of each *Got* was obliged to be present, in rotation, for such work as might be required of him, and during his absence from home, the other members were expected to cultivate his land and keep his family supplied with food. In time of peace it was the custom to employ the *Paiks* on public works ; and this is how the enormous tanks and the high embanked roads of upper Assam came into existence".<sup>19</sup> The other evidence is provided by David Scott, "there is no division of land in Assam amongst a comparatively small number of individuals such as seen in feudal countries of Europe and in Bengal, and the cultivated soil may be considered as the property of the *Paykes* or peasants owing service to the State to whom it is allotted".<sup>20</sup>

Now given these features, what character a social formation could assume ? Here we need not give any instances before pointing to the argument, very seriously pursued by Amalendu Guha. Amalendu Guha observes, "The society that was being integrated by twin processes of (i) the neo-vaishnavite movement from below and the (ii) the political unification from above continued to be feudal in its essence, both in its political and manorial aspects. The element of political feudality was only marginally undermined by the aforesaid reforms, which were more anti-tribal than anti-feudal in their nature. Infact during the same period half a dozen or so of the border tribal states with hereditary tribal Rajas besides *Darrang* and *Kachari* kingdoms were established as vassals (*thapita-sanchita*) vis-a-vis the Ahom state as their patron. As to the monorial aspect, the priests of temples together with the nobles including the King, constituted the dominant class. They had their tax free private agricultural farms comparable to lords demense which were cultivated by their own slaves and attached serfs, settled there upon. These slaves and attached serfs were not numerous and together accounted for 10 percent - perhaps much less - of the total population. Another estimated 25 to 30 percent of the entire *Kanri paik* labour force (i.e. of free peasantry) was allotted as *Likhou* (personal attendents) by the state to the office holding nobles. These too were a specialised category of collectivised quasi-serfs enjoined to work on the big private farms. They directly worked for the parasitic class to provide them with a surplus and together with slaves and attached serfs formed about one third of the population. Apparantly the *Likhous* were treated worse than the slaves for where as the master had to feed the slaves and was materially effected if the latter died or ran away, the self-maintained *Likhou* involved not such investment by the master and was only

temporarily assigned to him during the tenure of his office. The Likchou was therefore liable to unbridled exploitation subject only to customary checks.<sup>21</sup>

Now this statement has thrown us back on the problem of feudalism and we have got to look at the conceptual handle of this aspect. True that feudalism emerged between the periods of ancient tribalism and modern capitalism but at the same time we can not ignore the fact that feudalism lacks the universal applicability. Under feudalism the actual producers possess the means of production, the material labour conditions required for the realization of their labour and the production of their means of subsistence. In a feudal social formation the cultivator was related to land by specific social relationships. The agricultural property was under the class of feudal lords who "extracted a surplus from peasants by politico-legal relations of compulsion".<sup>22</sup> This was exercised on both the lands - the manorial demesne and on the strips of tenants lands cultivated by the peasant. Besides there was a hierarchy of relationships. The property right of the lord over his lands was invested in him by as superior noble to whom he would owe Knight services during war time. There would be a Vassal of feudal superior and a chain of such dependent tenants and freemen, linked to military services.<sup>23</sup> The estates were divided into lords demesne directly organised by stewards and tilled by his villeins, peasants and tenants from which lord received a surplus but in this system the control of production was in the hands of villeins themselves. So the relations of production were mediated through a dual agrarian statute within the manor. Though surplus was extracted from peasants it contained the overlapping claims and powers. In the feudal system the plurality of the instances of exploitation had made a unified juridical and economic system impossible.<sup>24</sup>

Keeping all these characteristics in view it becomes impossible to translate the social formation of Assam into a feudal formation. Because if the grants to neo-vaishnavite *satras* and other religious establishments can be interpreted as the basis of manorial structure then what explanation can be offered for the similar grants made to various ecclesiastical establishments in pre-Ahom period? The land grants to Neo-vaishnavite *satras* and other religious establishments were completely free from the state's control while as in case of feudalism there was a chain of relationships under which the monarch was the supreme sovereign set above his subjects and was related to common man through a number of layers of sub-infeudation. The serfdom conferred the right to occupy and right

to portion of the produce of land to serf and was thus an incentive to production.<sup>25</sup> But this was not the case in Assam. In Assam the *Paik* system did not alone determine nature of agrarian economy. The institution of *Paiks* was completely different from serfdom. To understand the institution of *Paiks* one has got to analyse the basis of hierarchy within the *Paik* system, their role in the production process of secular holdings and the nature of their rights in land. A *Paik* "could obtain exemption from personal service by payment of money"<sup>26</sup>. But a serf was tied to lord by ties which were peculiar to his status. On the death of a serf lord claimed Heriot and relief. Serf had also to compensate for the lack of labour supply or the manor, Serfs' conditions were completely different than *Paiks*.<sup>27</sup> A serf's work was measured in the number of tasks he performed and not by merely labour time. There is evidence to show that *paiks* could cultivate more land for which they had to pay rent other than the land that required their services. We can not deny the fact that the degree of exploitation could be same or some times even more in case of Assam but then the conditions for carrying out agriculture, the nature of methods in application and the land based relations should also be taken into consideration. We find that there existed no coercive machinery in *satras* in case the cultivators abandoned cultivation. The *Satras* had their own system of manning their affairs where the control rested with the chief of the *Satra*. This system of management was not uniform, it differed from *satra* to *satra*<sup>28</sup>.

When we look at both the cases we find that in a feudal system the unit of social organization was manor, consisting of local lord, his subject serfs forming a complete self sufficient and self reproducing production system. The *Satra* was an ecclesiastical establishment where no self sufficiency existed. It became a land based institution out of state's search for political ideology. Because when Ahoms felt that their Tai-Ahom religion could not speedily achieve them mass base and found that the neo-vashnavism had become popular with the masses they started asserting themselves by promotion of *Satras* to legitimize their position in a society which was increasingly coming under the Shankar Deva's (1449-1569) neo-vaishnavism. According to Gait, "as the Ahom kings came more and more under the influence of Hindu priests, large number of *Paiks* were removed from the *Khels* assigned for support of temples or of Brahmanas, some *Paiks* purchased exemption from service."<sup>29</sup>

Here it becomes clear that Ahoms felt that their *Tai-Ahom* religion could not speedily find favour with the masses who came

from plural ethnic groups. The Ahoms found that neo-vashnavism was becoming popular with the masses so they tried to demonstrate their strong affiliation by promoting *Satras* with landed assignments.<sup>30</sup> This worked as a strong mechanism for providing legitimacy to the Ahom rulers. These ecclesiological premises of the Ahom state transformed these *Staras* into institution of land based relations in the long run.

The *Satras* appointed their own officers for the various functions connected with the collection and assessment of revenues of *Satra* holdings. These officers would get 4% to 6% of commission for their subsistence.<sup>31</sup>

Generally in various *Khels* these *paiks* were classified on the territorial and occupational basis and their labour was realised by a kind of rotation. "..... One member of each *Got* was obliged to be present, in rotation, for such a work as might be required of him, and during his absence from home, the other members were expected to cultivate his land and keep his family supplied with food. In time of peace it was the custom to employ *Paiks* on public works ; and this is how the enormous tanks and the high embanked roads of upper Assam came into existence."<sup>32</sup>

From this analysis it is evident that *Paiks* were peasants with their own lands but what the state did was to realise their surplus labour for sustaining the state's apparatus. Hence the state had right to *Paiks'* labour under the administrative cover but not right to peasants' land. For denouncing the applicability of feudalism, therefore, we do not think much detailed commentary is called for. Of what nature was the social formation in Medieval Assam shall be evaluated in the second part of this paper which is under preparation.

### Notes and References

I am grateful to Prof. Harbans Mukhia, and my colleagues, Prof. J. B. Bhattacharjee, Prof. J. P. Singh, Mrs. M. Momin and Dr. G. Sengupta for their valuable suggestions.

1. In the last few decades enough literature has grown on pre-capitalist socio-economic formations in India. These studies have not only opened new areas of research but also explored some more sources for the study of such themes in various regions. But in the process of testing these materials with some of the widely applicable generalisations-Feudalism, notions of medieval Indian economy, free peasant economy,

the concept of State and Social formations—the regional variations have amply demonstrated that the pre-capitalist socio-economic system of entire India cannot be blindly translated into any of these concepts. In case of Assam among other things the tribal component has contributed significantly in evolving a pattern of its own. However, some of the attempts provide a lot of insight in understanding various aspects of India's economy and society of early medieval times. See, R. S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism*, Delhi ; 1965, Harbans Mukhia, "Was there feudalism in Indian History", *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 8 No. 3, 1983. Burton Stien, "Integration of Agrarian System of South India" in *Land Control and Socil Structure in Indian History*, London, 1969 ; Irfan Habib, "Peasant in Indian History", Presidential address, *Indian History Congress proceedings*, 43rd Session 1982 ; D. D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to Study of Indian History*, Bombay 1967 ; B. N. S. Yadav, *Society and Culture in Ancient India*, Allahabad, 1973 ; D. N. Jha, "Early Indian Feudalism : Historiographical Critique", Presidential address, *Indian History Congress*, 40th Session 1979 ; J. B. Bhattacharjee, "State Formation Processes in Pre-Colonial Tribal North-east : A Case Study of Dimasa State", *The NEHU Journal of Social Sciences*, 1984, Vol. II. No. 3, pp. 1-28. For detailed discussion see *Journal of Peasant Studies*, edited by T. Byres, and Harbans Mukhia, Vol. 12, No. 2, Jan. to April 1985.

2. Since the economy was Pre-dominantly agrarian in nature the burden entirely fell on the peasants.
3. Infact some of the scholars generally believed that the early Kamarupa Kings granted *Agraharas* because they were imbued with religious zeal. B. K. Baura, *A Cultural History of Assam*, Calcutta, 1969, reprint, pp. 51, 117 ; M. M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Assam*, pp. 124, 135-36, 147-48, 165-187. But scholars working on economic history of Assam should carefully examine these pieces of evidence. The *Agraharas* given in Assam were both of secular and religious nature. In return for secular grants the grantee had to render civil service to the State and the religious grantee seems to have served the State as an ideological instrument in maintaining society in complete subjection to hierarchical order.
4. M. M. Sharma, *op.cit.*, p. 124. It is interesting to observe in early documents the categories of cultivators referred as *Ravas*, *Kaivartas* and *Nokkas*. The later were boatmen by pro-

- fession but they also cultivated land. Nokkas are mentioned as *cande*, *Daksapati*, *Sadhava*. There are also references of land being communally held by *Kaivartas* and *Nokkas* for cultivation. *Sualkucigrant* line nos. 58-63. See also *Gauhati grant*.
5. M. M. Sharma, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-148.      6. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
  7. Such women who were dedicated to various services to Brahmins in these temples were known as *Nati* and *Daluhanḡa*. B. K. Barua, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-135; *New Indian Anriquary*, vol. IV, p. 390. These *Nati* were generally from *Kalita* caste, *Census of India*, 1901 Part I on Assam, p. 141.
  8. *Ibid.* See also *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XIV, p. 246.
  9. B. K. Barua *op. cit.*, p. 117 ; P. C. Choudhury, *History of Civilization of Assam*, Gauhati 1959, pp. 110, 122, 150.
  10. David Laibman, "Modes of Production and theories of transition" in *Science and Society*, vol. XVII No. 3, pp. 257-275.
  11. R. S. Sharma, *Social Change in early medieval India*. See also *Indian Fedualism* by the same author, Calcutta, 1985, pp. 215-217 ; R. C. Majumdar, *History of Bengal*, Dacca, 1943, p. 343. In fact for dissolving the tribal structure in Western Europe a system of hospitality was adopted almost on similar lines. The chiefs of the Germanic tribes were accomodated in the class of Lords and other members were enrolled as Serfs.
  12. The tribal religious rituals were not much different from the early Hindu rituals of sacrifices. Even *Kamakhya* is also essentially a tribal Goddess or the *Hygreva* is tribal God and was equally revered by Hindus as well.
  13. Since there were various tribes, clans and sub-clans so the chances of intra-tribal warfare and inter clan feuds were many.
  14. Minhaj-urs-Siraj, *Tabkat-i-Nasiri*, Eng. translation by Raverty, pp. 263, 594, 595 ; J. N. Sarkar, *The History of Bengal*, Dacca 1948 Vol. II, pp. 9-11 ; K. L. Barua, *Early History of Kamarupa*, Shillong, 1933, pp. 132-159.
  15. E. A. Gait, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-163. See also P. Gogoi, *The Tai and the Taikingdom*, Gauhati 1968, pp. 251-393.
  16. The Ahoms invaded Assam in 1228 A.D. but it was finally in the last decade of 15th century that they established their power and authority over major portions of Assam. N. K. Basu, *Assam in the Ahom age*, Calcutta, 1970, pp. 17-50 ; E. A. Gait, *History of Assam*, Calcutta, 1963, pp. 71-108 ; Lakshmi Devi, *Ahom Tribal Relations*, Gauhati, 1968, pp. 3-12 ; S. K. Bhuyan, ed. *Assam Buranji*, D.H. A.S, Gauhati 1930, pp. 90-91.
  17. *Ibid.*, pp. 541-552. See also Kasinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam-Buranji Puthi*, pp. 77-105.      18. *Ibid.*

19. E. A. Gait. *op. cit.*, p. 251.
20. P. Gogoi, *op. cit.* p. 552.
21. A Guha, "Tribalism to Feudalism", *IHR*, Vol. 1, No. 1 March 1974, pp. 71-72.
22. William Doyle, *The Old European Order*, London, 1984, pp. 96-117. Marc Bloc, *Feudal Society*, 2 vols, Chicago 1964.
23. Marc Bloc, *op. cit.* 24. *Ibid.* 25. *Ibid.*
26. S. K. Bhuyan, *Introduction to Tungkingiya Buranji*, O.U.P., 1933. pp. XXIX-XXX. See also *Prachya-Sasanavali*, edited by Maheshwar Neog, Assam, 1974., p. 132.
27. Even from all the punitive taxes and heads the *Paiks* were exempt. *Pracha-sasanavali*, p. 32. The *Paiks* had to pay a hoe tax in case they were provided with. S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations, Gauhati* 1974, p. 11.
28. A Barua and M. Sharma, "A note on the land system of *Satra* Institutions of Assam", paper presented in Seminar on Agrarian relations, Sociology Department, NEHU (Unpublished). Dr. Barua and Dr. Manorama Sharma were kind enough to provide some materials.
29. E. A. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 250. A *Paik* could be exempted from the services on payment of rupees six, for one *Gott* rupees eighteen only. P. Gogoi, *op. cit.*, p. 552.
30. It must be noted that when Assam was passing through this critical phase due to deteriorating economy, foreign invasions and the internal feuds the *neo-vaishnavism* had made its appearance in Bengal in the neighbourhood and later enveloped whole of Assam and Orissa. Assam had witnessed the *Tai* Ahom religion and Islam but it was *neo-vaishnavism* which appealed to the masses, particularly to tribals because they found it easy to change from one flexible frame into another. Besides the *neo-vaishnavism* had opposed the caste rigidity and advocated the cause of down trodden. In this way *neo-vaishnavism* centres found strong support in various areas. The Ahom rulers patronized it to consolidate their position. In a way they were only re-affirming the process begun by early Kamarupa rulers when they started giving generous grants to the *neo-vaishnavite Satras*. B.Pal, *Bengali vaishnavism*, Calcutta 1962; R. K. Chakravarty, *Vaishnavism in Bengal*, Calcutta 1985. For *neo-vaishnavism* in Assam See N. K. Basu, *op. cit.*, pp. 223-250; S. N. Sharma, *The Neo-Vaishnavite Movement and the Satra institutions of Assam*, Gauhati 1966.
31. Benudhar Sarma, *Dakhinpat Satra* (undated) Gauhati, p. 18.
32. E. A. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 249.