

**PROCEEDINGS OF
NORTH EAST INDIA
HISTORY ASSOCIATION**

TENTH SESSION

SHILLONG : 1989

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The Tenth Session of the North East India History Association was held at the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, amidst great enthusiasm and gaiety. This was indeed a memorable occasion in the history of the Association. The Decennial Celebrations aspart, a session was being held for the second time in the same institution and in the same venue that the Association was born ten years ago and the First Session held a year later. The Association is thankful to the authorities of the North-Eastern Hill University and organising it in the befitting manner.

Shri P. G. Marbaniang, Speaker, Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, inaugurated the session which was graced by Shri P. A. Sangma, Chief Minister of Meghalaya, as guest of honour. Professor Iqbal Narain, Vice-Chancellor, and Professor J. P. Singh, Head, Department of History, North-Eastern Hill University—did the Association a great honour as the Chairman of the organising committee and Local Secretary respectively for the session. It was presided over by Professor J. N. Phukan of the Gauhati University. The release of a commemorative Publication of the Organising committee entitled NEIHA DECENNIAL by Professor H. K. Barpujari, the first President of the Association, a decennial symposium on 'A Decade of Historical Research in North-East', and colourful cultural programmes of songs and dances of the seven states of the region by the students of NEHU are among the special features of the decennial Celebrations. A record number of one hundred and eighty delegates attended the session in which ninety research papers were presented and discussed in eleven panels.

The present volume is the proceedings of the tenth session of the North East India History Association held at the North-Eastern Hill University on October 12-14, 1989. I am thankful to my colleagues Dr. J. P. Singh, Dr. M. S. Sangma, Dr. Gautam Sengupta, Dr. Soumen Sen, Shri Atul Dev Sarmah and Shri Amitabha Deb for the help in selecting and editing the papers and publishing the volume. We must also thank the Indian Council of Historical Research for generous financial assistance to the Association for the session and for publication of the proceedings.

J. B. Bhattacharjee

General Secretary,

Shillong,

The 25th August 1990.

North-East India History Association.

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Organisation of Villages Under the Ahom Rule

K. C. Phukan

From early times, the mainstay of the people of Assam was predominantly agriculture. Agriculture being the chief pursuit or occupation, the people generally lived in villages for arable and pasture lands. The usual name for a village was 'Grama'. The name of the villages generally owe their origin to the caste or tribe inhabiting there, geographical and physical features such as lakes, rivers, hills, trees, religious character, flora and fauna of the locality.¹ A village included "not merely the inhabited locality with its cluster of dwelling houses with gardens attached, but comprised the whole area within the village boundaries including not only the residential part (Vastu bhumi), but also the cultivable fields (ksetra), land under pasturage (go-cara), the waste land that remained untilled, streams, canals, cattle paths (go-marga), roads and temples."² A large village was divided into wards called Cuburi, Hati, Para and Badi.³ There were castewards, better called guild wards—wards occupied by persons following the same occupation, forming corporations organised to regulate their professional business.⁴ According to P. C. Choudhury, beginning at least with the sixth century A.D., the rulers of Kamarupa followed a systematic policy to create Agraharas for the Brahmins.⁵

The Ahoms were adept in setting up well-knit self-sufficient villages in the country in a planned manner. Villages were organised not only for social purpose, but also for economic, political and security reasons. Many villages were formed at the instance of the ruling monarchs from time to time by transferring families from the thickly populated areas.⁶ We have on record that king Suklengmung (1539-1552 A.D.) forced the villagers to clear jungles on the bank of the Dikhau river so that new villages might grow on the new site.⁷ By raising embankment, the Ahom rulers converted the low-lying and inundated areas discarded earlier by the people as unfit for agriculture and habitation into habitable and cultivable tracts. For such laudable policy and work of the Ahom rulers even Moamaria Mahanta who rose in revolt against the Ahom

Government admitted : "The Ahom rulers conquered the country after undergoing great hardship and difficulties. They deserve our gratitude for having converted this forest clad wilderness into a settled habitation." ⁸

Village life under the Ahom rule was primarily reorganised to achieve social cohesiveness, unity and comradeship amongst the castes and communities living in the village and to make every village economically self-reliant. Momai Tamuly Barbarua in the reign of Pratap Singha (1603-1641 A.D.) was said to have reorganised the village life in such a manner that each village would contain families belonging to different tribes, races and communities. He settled in each village two families of each of the following castes, communities and tribes, such as Brahmin, Ganak, Kathar, Kalita, Keot, Koch, Chutiya, Buruk, Bariya, Ahom, Gariya, Mariya, Dom and Hari besides those engaged in different trades to serve the economic and socio-cultural needs of the society. Amongst them, mention may be made of Teli (oil presser and seller), Mali (gardener and flower seller), Dhoba (washerman), Chamar (shoe maker and leather dealer), Kamar (blacksmith), Tanti (weaver) Sonari (gold and silver smith) etc. ⁹ Momai Tamuly Barbarua organised villages mainly in the areas wrested from the Kacharis i.e., in the Doyang-Dhansiri valley and the Kalang valley of the present districts of Golaghat and Nowgong respectively. His name is also connected with the establishment of such villages as Dhamadharia, Bhuya, Tetoia, Dolamari, Barchari etc. Reference may be also made to Abhoypur village established by Phul Barua Piksai, Solguri village and Namdang village by Tangshu Handique. ¹⁰ The practice of creating villages with people belonging to different castes and communities began since the time of king Pratap Singha. But it should be also mentioned that villages were also set up with people following the same trade and occupation. For example, in Kamrup, the Tantis (weavers) from different tribes and sections of people on the south bank of the Brahmaputra and of other places were settled at Soalkuchi while the Telis (oil pressers and sellers) at Ramdia. ¹¹ Since villages were composed of persons belonging to different trades and occupations, every village became economically self-reliant. Again since every village contained different castes, tribes and communities, it certainly developed fellow feeling and comradeship amongst the villagers. Thus villages helped in promoting unity and cohesiveness at the grass root level ultimately to forge wider range of unity at the higher level by eliminating narrow caste and community feeling from the minds of the people. It widened

the scope of inter mingling of all sections of people.

The Ahoms, with a view to wiping out the separate political identity of the conquered and to do away with the parochial racial or communal unity of the conquered followed a policy of deportation and then settlement of people of the annexed territories in scattered manner in different parts of the kingdom. Such a policy, to speak in modern terms, 'Deport, Settle and Rule' enabled the Ahoms not only in checking the political ascendancy of groups and communities in future, but also led to the formation of and reorganisation of villages to a great extent. After the conquest of the Chutiya kingdom, while some of the descendants of the Chutiya royal family were killed, some others were installed as rulers of a separate region away from the paternal kingdom.¹² The conquest of the Chutiya country brought numerous peoples, namely, the Brahmins, the Kayasthas, the Kalitas, the Ganaks, the Sonaris, the Kahars and other artisans who were settled in different parts of the kingdom¹³ During the reign of Pratap Singha (1603-1641 A.D.), the Chutiyas along with some others were established in different places.¹⁴ After the subjugation of the Bhuyans, Suhungmung (1497-1539 A.D) led most of them at Bordowa. According to one chronicle, the Twelve Families or Bara Bhuyans of the Rata Temoni with other Sub-Bhuyans were transferred to and settled at various places on the north bank of the Brahmaputra river. The Lacam Kalita Bhuyan family was placed at Bahbari while one of them was settled on the bank of the river Sonari and another on the hills.¹⁵ Later some of the Bhuyans proved to be refractory. King Pratap Singha killed them and removed the rest to other parts of the country and settled them in a scattered manner debarring them to cross the river Brahmaputra.¹⁶ The Kacharis though driven out from their original abode by the Ahoms, yet a large part of their population remained within the Ahom kingdom in scattered manner, King Pratap Singha collected many of them and settled them at different places¹⁷ The Koch artisans sent by Koch king Nara Narayana were settled by Pratap Singha at a place by the side of the river Namdang which came to be known as Bhatiyapar.¹⁸ The same king imported a number of good men from the country of Chandra Narayana, a Koch prince and established them at such places which were thinly populated.¹⁹ Bali Narayana, also known as Dharma Narayana, was installed as tributary Raja of Darang. Several Koch princes including Rup Narayana and Chandra Narayana, the two sons of Raja Parikshit of Koch Hajo, who took refuge at the Ahom kingdom were settled at Janji. Villages along with present of girls

and servitors were conferred upon them.²⁰ Chandra Narayana was later installed as a vassal in Dakhinkol (Solmari).²¹ Ahom king Jayadhvaj Singha (1648-1663 A. D.) established Jay Narayana, son of Chandra Narayana, as the Raja of Kamrup with his capital at Ghila Bijoypur by the side of the river Manaha.²² Durlov Narayana, the Zamindar of Budhnagar was also established and allowed to govern Nowgong.²³ Kandarpa Narayana was installed as the Raja of Koch Beltola under the name of Gandharva Narayana by king Jayadhvaj Singha.²⁴ Mahidhwaj Narayana was sent to rule Bittungpur, although he was compelled to come back and to remain at Darang.²⁵ The installation of Koch Princes at various places with their followers and retinue had brought about a wide dispersal of Koch population to settle along with other native people throughout the Ahom kingdom and led to the creation of villages. As a matter of fact, Ahom policy of settlement brought about a wide distribution of all kinds of populations including Muslims in the Ahom kingdom. Apart from the people referred to above, the Mikirs, now called Karbis, were settled within the Ahom kingdom.²⁶

Villages were also established along the border line on security ground. To stop incursions of the Kacharis into the Ahom kingdom, the Ahom government preferred settlement of villages of other communities of people along the border line.²⁷ Thus villages of Assamese subjects were established by the side of the river Doyang. Pratap Singha transferred and settled a great number of inhabitants from Abhoypur, Dihing and Namdang to Marangi situated on the western side of the river Dhansiri to which Doyang flows in. This was done with a view to establishing permanently the Ahom authority on the region wrested from the Kacharis and to protect the frontier properly.²⁸ After the expulsion of the Kacharis from the area between Raha and Kaliabar, Pratap Singha deputed Momai Tamuly Barbarua to reorganise this area by establishing villages and settlements. This new settlement was therefore called 'Nagaon' or a new village settlement.²⁹ This place is still known in the name and it constitutes the central district of modern Assam.

Some of the characteristic features of village life of Assam under the Ahom rule are worth mentioning. It was marked by *highest form of simplicity in the pattern* of living. The peasant ploughed the lands and produced his own food, he built his house with thatch and bamboos collected locally. The woman also took an active part in rearing of crops. Village life was self-sufficing. Manual labour was never looked with any odium or disgrace. There are instances of royal princes who remained as a plough man in his own

farm before being appointed as king. There are also examples of kings who embittered by political machinations and intrigues preferred to go back to their pastoral surroundings to lead the life of a common farmer. Dividing line between the life in the village and the life in the town was not much pronounced. Life in the town was but an extension and continuation of the life in the villages. Villagers in Assam were not to live a life of isolation and seclusion. Graded administrative system, involvement of the Paiks in nation-building work, royal tours, roads and communications could bring the people living in the far-flung villages nearer to the Government.

Notes and References

1. B. K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam*, p. 75-76.
2. Ibid, p. 76.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid, p. 77
5. P. C. Choudhury *The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam*, p. 335.
6. E. Gait, *A History of Assam*, p. 269.
7. S. K. Bhuyan, *Satsari Assam Buranji*, p. 20.
8. Tr. No. .08, *Assam Buranji* or *Buranji Viseka Ratna*, Part II.
9. S. K. Bhuyan, *Deodhai Asam Buranji*, p.130.
10. S. K. Bhuyan, *Satsari Assam Buranji*, p. 29.
11. H. K. Barua, *Assam Buranji*, p. 40.
12. Ahom chronicles contain different accounts in this regard.
13. S. K. Bhuyan, *Deodhai Assam Buranji*, p.126.
14. S. K. Mahanta, *Assam Buranji*, p. 40.
- H. C. Goswami, *Purani Asom Buranji*, p. 56.
15. H. C. Goswami, *Purani Asom Buranji*, p. 27 ff.
16. E. Gait, *A History of Assam*, p. 121.
17. S. K. Mohanta, *Assam Buranji*, p. 50.
- H. C. Goswami, *Purani Asom-Buranji*, p. 56.
18. S. K. Mahanta, *Assam Buranji*, p. 38.
- H. K. Barua, *Assam Buranji*, p. 36.
19. G. C. Barua, *Ahom-Buranji*, p. 109.
20. S. K. Mahanta, *Assam Buranji*, p. 50.
- S. K. Bhuyan, *Kamrupar Buranji*, p. 24.
21. S. K. Mahanta, *Assam Buranji*, p. 56.
22. H. C. Goswami, *Purani Asom-Buranji*, p. 90 ff.
- S. K. Dutta, *Assam Buranji*, p. 17.
23. G. C. Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, p. 160 ff.
24. Ibid, p. 161.
25. Ibid.
26. S. K. Bhuyan, *Deodhai Asam Buranji*, p. 132 . ff
27. S. K. Mahanta, *Assam Buranji*, p. 53
28. G. C. Barua, *Ahom-Buranji*, p. 111.
29. S. K. Bhuyan, *Kachari Buranji*, p. XIX.