

ASSAM IN THE AHOM AGE

1228-1826

[Being Politico-Economic and Socio-Cultural Studies]

NIRMAL KUMAR BASU, M.A., B.L., D.PHIL.

Principal, D.H.S.K. Commercial College, Dibrugarh



SANSKRIT PUSTAK BHANDAR

38, Bidhan Sarani, Calcutta-6

No part of this book may be translated or reproduced in any form, by print, photoprint, or any other means without written permission from the publisher.

© 1970, by the Author.

FIRST EDITION, August, 1970

Price : Rs. 35'00/ \$ 8'25/Sh. 53.

Published by : Shyamapada Bhattacharjee, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 38, Bidhan Sarani, Calcutta-6, India and Printed at Arunima Printing Works, 81, Simla Street, Calcutta-6.

TO
THE MOTHER
SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM, PONDICHERI

ASSAM IN THE AHOM AGE

FOREWORD

Dr. Maheswar Neog

Jawaharlal Nehru Professor, Gauhati University

I am indeed very happy in having to introduce Dr. Nirmal Kumar Basu's *Assam in the Ahom Age* to the public. This is an eminently readable narrative made out of an account of the political and economic conditions, social and cultural developments during the six centuries of Ahom rule in this north-eastern corner of India. Dr. Basu has pleasantly drawn from all available sources, primary, secondary and tertiary, in his attempt to find a continuity in the great historical events. After an useful introduction, the political history of Assam is recounted here in one chapter (ch. II) while polity (ch. III) and economy (ch. IV) engage him for two further chapters. The rest of the work forms the real body of his work, which in its original form as *Studies in the Social and Cultural Conditions of Assam under the Ahoms* was accepted for the Doctor of Philosophy degree of Gauhati University (1967). Here for the first time we get a comprehensive story of the cultural life of the people of Assam during the Ahom period. Some of the Ahom sovereigns prided that they "rendered eleven houses into one." The reader may probably observe the forces which made this integration of many races and tribes possible while the Ahoms, who gave up their own language, religion and way of life, merged into the Assamese people and contributed to the growth of Assamese language, literature and culture. Dr. Basu, depending mainly on secondary sources though, renders an immensely interesting account of society, religion and education; language and literature; traditional sciences and fine arts (music, dance, painting, architecture and sculpture) of the period. In the concluding chapter he tries to assess the contribution of the Age to the cultural life of Assam and the causes—which form a controversial subject—that brought about the decline and fall of the Ahoms.

I believe that the reader will find an absorbing interest in the thesis, which is characterised by industry, fulness of information and ease and facility of narration.

PREFACE

Born and brought up in Assam, I had a long-cherished desire to know more of the life and culture of the peoples inhabiting this beautiful land than could be possible by casual observation. This desire became keener and I got ready for the arduous search and deep Study involved, nearly ten years ago, when on my expressing a wish to take up some work in Delhi, Shrimati Indira Gandhi, now our Prime Minister, advised that I should rather take up some work in Assam instead. I have ever since felt grateful for the valuable advice. I began enquiries regarding sources, original and secondary, that might be helpful for the Project. All my colleagues in the Kanoi Colleges of Dibrugarh including Principal Dr. J. R. Basu, Principal L. P. Dutt, Principal S. C. Dutt and Principal B. C. Bhattacharya, Profs. P. C. Jain, B. P. Chakravarty, S. N. Barua, N. Choudhury and M. L. Bose, Profs. (Mrs.) Beena Choudhury and (Mrs.) Sharadamma Rao, Dr. B. N. Choudhury and Dr. C. D. Mishra and others were unfailing in their encouragement to my endeavours, particularly whenever I had worries over the very slow progress of the work, consequent on the unavoidable necessity of continuing the research and my normal teaching and administrative work simultaneously. Principal Basu's researches on Indology, then being carried on, were a great impetus. Principal L. P. Dutt, at present Rector, Dibrugarh University, assisted all along. It was he who personally took the trouble of taking my petition for a Book-Grant to Shillong for submission to the Education Directorate. It was he who later introduced me to Dr. Birinchi Kumar Barua, one of the great scholars of Assam. My heartfelt thanks go to all my colleagues. I gratefully remember the valuable suggestions that Dr. A. K. Barkakoty, Registrar, Dibrugarh University kindly offered regarding my work. Dr. P. C. Goswami, then Assistant Director of Public Instruction, Assam, promptly took action on my petition for a Book-Grant and this facilitated early sanction of a Book-Grant by the Central Govt., which enabled me to purchase much-needed books and journals. I have never tired of expressing my gratitude to Dr. Goswami for this timely help. I feel indebted to the Govt. of Assam and the Govt. of India for the help and encouragement.

Dr. P. C. Choudhury, a most reputed and outstanding Scholar of Assam, and Director, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Gauhati was kind enough to permit me to study in the Department's Library and to consult rare manuscripts preserved there. I gratefully remember his ready advice and assistance in the matter of research generally and of scrutiny and use of manuscripts in particular.

I convey my grateful thanks to Shri Premadhar Choudhury, then Curator, Assam Museum, who was good enough to allow me to work in the Museum and also to consult rare books from his personal Library. I am also grateful to Shri J. Sarma, Librarian, Gauhati University, and Shri Gajendra Nath Phukan, Librarian, Assam High Court, and Shri P. D. Rajkhowa, Librarian, D.H.S.K. College for having always readily helped me with books, journals, manuscripts and Gazetteers etc., which facilitated research and for offering me all opportunities for work in their respective Libraries.

I sincerely thank all my friends, relations, acquaintances, and also Office Staff of D.H.S.K. College and D.H.S.K. Commerce College, Dibrugarh whose help in various ways and encouragement immensely contributed to the progress of this long-drawn Project.

I am also deeply indebted to Dr. Bisheswar Prasad of Delhi University and Dr. J. N. Sarkar of Jadavpur University, renowned scholars for their very kind advice and valuable suggestions regarding my work.

Dr. Birinchi Kumar Barua kindly agreed to guide my research. I remember what he told me once, "Basu, research takes time. There cannot be a rigidly fixed time-schedule for research as in the case of construction of a building. Be patient and carry on." I shall ever cherish as a prized possession the letter that he appeared to have hurriedly written to me, busy as he was, only a few days before his sad, sudden demise and wherein he listed a few books for my careful study.

Dr. Barua introduced me to Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, the pre-eminent Scholar of wide repute and the great pioneer of historical research in Assam. I shall not forget the days I spent in his Study, taking notes from his rare collections and the affection and

care with which he advised me on methodology of research and how to proceed. He said one day, "Research is 'Sadhana'. Basu, Don't spoil your work by making undue haste." The passing away of Dr. Barua and later of Dr. Bhuyan meant a sorrowful set-back to the momentum of progressive research in Assam. Personally, I was left confused at a time when my researchs were yet to be carried on and I required continued help and guidance.

I approached Dr. Maheswar Neog, Jawaharlal Nehru Professor and Head of the Department of Assamese, Gauhati University whose researches on literature and culture of Assam have earned him wide acclaim, and he kindly and very readily agreed to accept me as a research worker under him. I am laid under a deep debt of gratitude to him. He tirelessly and painstakingly guided my work ; he was not only my 'Guide' but became a 'Friend, and Philosopher' as well, whose assistance, advice and guidance smoothened and opened up the ways to fascinating discoveries for me and enabled me to have glimpses of the different facets of the life and culture of the Assamese people during the six hundred years of Ahom Rule, preceding the British occupation of Assam.

In this work attempts have been made to correlate and render these glimpses into a comprehensive picture of the times. The picture drawn, I most admit, is neither complete nor perfect. I shall consider my endeavours rewarded if this picture is completed and perfected by fresh researchers in years to come.

In conclusion, I convey my sense of grateful appreciation to Shri Shyamapada Bhattacharya of Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, Calcutta, whose very sincere and hard labour has made possible the speedy publication of the present work.

Dibrugarh, Assam
June, 1970.

Nirmal Kumar Basu

CONTENTS

	Page
ABBREVIATIONS	xvi
CHAPTER I	
INTRODUCTION	1—16
General : Geographical Factors : Population : Pre-Ahom Conditions : Rulers—Muslim Incursions-Kacharis (Bodos)—Khasi—Syntengs—Political Conditions—Social Conditions—economic conditions—cultural conditions—education and literature—religion—Fine Arts.	
CHAPTER II	
POLITICAL HISTORY	
SECTION 1. The Rise and Consolidation of the Ahom Kingdom :	17—29
Sukapha, Sutenpha, Subinpha, Sukhangpha, Sukhrangpha, Sutupha, Tyao-Khamti, Sudangpha, Susenpha, Suhenpha, Supimpha, Suhungmung, Suklenmung, Sukhampha.	
SECTION 2. The Period of the Muhammadan Wars :	30—50
Pratap Singha, Surampha, Sutyinpha, Jayadhvaj Singha, Chakradhvaj Singha, Udayaditya.	
SECTION 3. The Climacteric of Ahom Rule :	51—73
Ramdhvaj, Suhung, Gobar, Sujinpha, Sudaipha, Sulikpha, Gadadhar Singha, Rudra Singha, Sib Singha, Pramatta Singha, Rajeswar Singha, Lakshmi Singha.	
SECTION 4. The Decay and Fall of the Ahom Kingdom :	74—102
Gaurinath Singha, Kamaleswar Singha, Chandrakanta Singha, Burmese Invasion, Purandar Singha, Burmese Rule, Burmese Wars and British Occupation of Assam.	

CHAPTER III

POLITY

103—148

Nature of Constitution : Succession, Political Authorities, Political Ideology, Officers, Relations between the Rulers and the Ruled : Khel System : Public Works : Revenue Administration—Tax System—System in Kamrupa : Currency and Coinage : Judicial Administration : Military Administration : Frontier Administration and External Relations—Relations with Moguls and other States : Relations with Tribes.

CHAPTER IV

ECONOMY

149—198

Agriculture—Management of land—Special Rights in Land—Survey Operations—Villages--Agricultural Implements—Domestic Animals.

People and Their Occupations : Industries—Spinning and Weaving—Dyeing—Guna (Gold and Silver Wire)--Sewing—Silk—Pat Silk—Tusser—Eri—Muga—Ivory and Wood Works—Boat Making and other Wood Works—Brass Vessels—Pottery—Jewellery—Lac, Shellac—Poison Berry—Elephant Catching, Kheddas : Mineral Productions--Gold--Gold Washing—Iron--Salt--Limestone etc.—Amber. Towns—Rangpur—Gargaon—Gauhati. Trade and Commerce—Imports and Exports--Assam Choky--Duaria Baruas : Commerce with Hill Tribes : Custom Houses—Customs Baruas : Assam-Bengal Routes : Commercial Policy of Ahom Monarchs.

General Economic Conditions.

CHAPTER V

SOCIETY**SECTION I : The People :**

199—222

Different Sections of the People—Castes and Occupations—Ethnic Divisions : Slavery : Other Social Relations : Position of Women : Joint Family System. Crimes and Punishments : Civil Justice : Bhetis (Presents). Food : Dresses : Ornaments, Utensils, other conveniences. Coronation Ceremony, Rikkhvan Ceremonies, Royal Tours. Chaklang Marriage Ceremonies : Ahom Burial Procedures : Games & Sports. Ahoms and Social Relations.

SECTION II : Religion :

223—250

The Ahom Faith : Tribal Beliefs : Buddhism—Later Buddhism : Saivism : Saktism : Tantric Vaisnavism : Neo-Vaisnavism-Sattras-Village Nam-ghars.

SECTION III : Education :

251—257

Limited Formal Education : People's Education : Military Education : Naval Training : Training in Medicine and Veterinary Science : The Imparting of Skill in Cottage Industries : Learning of Language—Knowledge of Buranjis—Ahom Language : Education among Women : Sanskrit Learning : Instruction in Ethics and Religion : Higher Learning.

CHAPTER VI

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**SECTION I : Assamese Language and Literature :**

258—281

Assamese Language, Its Origin and Development ; Assamese Literature—Pre-Sankarite Literature—Neo-Vaisnava Literature—Ankiya Nats—Oja-pali Performance—Cihna-Yatra—One-Act Dramas—Sutradhara—Plethora of Songs—Nandi, Prarochana, Prastavana—Duta and Bahuwa—Mukti-Mangal Bhatima—Portrayal of Marriage, Battle, Love etc.—Dramatic Characters—Dramas Further Vaisnavism—Bargits—Charit-Puthis.

Sakta Literature : Islamic Influence : Royal Patronage : Buranjis : Vamsavalis : Translations from Sanskrit : Incantations and Mantras : Manuscripts : Secular Literature.

Sanskrit Learning and Literature.

Tai-Ahom Literature.

SECTION II : Folk Literature :

282—286

Aphorisms : Folk-songs : Ballads : Proverbs, Riddles, etc. : Tales

CHAPTER VII

TECHNICAL SCIENCES & FINE ARTS**SECTION I : Music :**

287—294

Tradition of Music : Charyas : Durgavar's Songs and other Pachali Songs and Music : Vaisnava Music—Bargit—Ankiyagit—Kirtana-ghosa-Namaghosa : Ragas : Raga-Malita : Rhythm and 'Vadya-pradipa' : Musical Instruments : Ahom Kings and Music.

SECTION II : Dancing :

295—311

Tribal Dances : Bihu Dances : Dance Forms in Assamese Marriages : Manipuri Dances.

Ojapali Dances : Deodhani-nach : Natinach.

Sattriya Dances—Sutra-bhangi—Krishna-bhangi—Gopi-bhangi—Cali-nach—Jhumura, etc.

Ahom Monarchs and Dances.

Performance of Ankiya Nat—Profusion of Dances—Dramas staged in Sattras and Village Namghars—Participants—The Village Khanikar—Costumes—Make-up—Effigies and Masks—time of Performance : Dramas carried to Royal Court : Abiding Influence of Dramas : Royal Patronage.

SECTION III : Painting :

312—319

Vaisnava Renaissance and Painting : 'Chitra-Bhagavata' : Assam School of Painting : Mural Paintings, etc., in Sattras : Royal Patronage—Illuminated Manuscripts : Tai-Ahom Painting : Manuscript Production, Preparation of Writing Materials : Making of Ink : Script and Calligraphy.

SECTION IV : Architecture and Sculpture :

320—330

Architecture—Records of archaeological Value : Architectural Specimens—Temple Architecture : 'Ahoms as Builders—Stone Bridges—Maidams : Architectural Developments—Constructions during the reign of Ahom Monarchs of the climacteric period.

Kachari Architecture—Rock-cut Temple, Maibong, Ranchandi Temple, Khaspur : Snan Mandir at Khaspur.

Mosque and Town at Rangamati :
 Sattra Architecture : Bhanjghar.
 Sculpture—Specimens of Sculptural and
 iconoplastic Art :
 Kamakhya Hill Sculptures : Terra-Cotta
 Plaques : Ahom Rulers and Sculpture.

SECTION V : Ayurveda and Veterinary Science : 331—333

SECTION VI : Astrology and Astronomy : 334—335

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION 336—355

Contributions of the Ahom Age to the
 Life and Culture of the Assamese People.
 Causes of Decline and Fall of the Ahom
 Power.

BIBLIOGRAPHY 357—365

MAP OF ASSAM Fontispiece.

ABBREVIATIONS

D.H.A.S. ... Department of Historical and Antiquarian
 Studies, Assam, Gauhati.

J.A.S.B. ... Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.

J.A.R.S. ... Journal of the Assam Research Society,
 Gauhati.

J.R.A.S.B. ... Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of
 Bengal.

K.A.S. ... Kamrup Anusandhan Samiti, Gauhati.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

GENERAL :

India is a great country and Assam is an integral part of it. The life and culture of the great Indian people have been an amalgam and synthesis of the life and culture of the diverse peoples, living in different parts of the country. The life and culture of the people of Assam also have contributed to the flow of Indian life and culture through the ages. Therefore, the study of Indian history is incomplete without a study of regional histories including the history of Assam, which happens to be a necessary, important component of the history of India.

The people of Assam with their achievements and failures, their qualities and failings, their customs and habits are as much the products of their history, environment and other circumstances as any other people living in any other part of this country or Indians as a whole. To be able to gain knowledge, therefore, of different aspects of life as it was lived in Assam in the past, a critical study of the chequered course of her history is indispensable.

It is in this perspective that in the following pages, an attempt will be made to study and examine events, trends and ideas prevalent in Assam, particularly in the age of the Ahoms. How was life in Assam in this period that saw uninterrupted freedom for the Assamese people for six hundred years? What were the elements in the political, economic, social, and cultural life of the people that helped the sustenance of this long-drawn freedom? What were the weaknesses and failings in the regime that caused and ended in the ultimate fall of an one-time opulent kingdom? How did Ahom rule affect and influence the life and culture of the Assamese people? An attempt will be made to answer these and similar other queries with a critical commentary on the facts and ideas of the age.

GEOGRAPHICAL FACTORS :

India presents a picture of great variety. The same is true of Assam with its diverse peoples and races in the various stages

of civilisation, hills and forests, the big river Brāhmaputra and small streams, elevated plateaus and wide valleys, heavy rainfall, luxuriant vegetation and fertile lands, moist climate and magnificent natural scenery, expansive greeneries and rich minerals, abundant harvests and again devastating floods and earthquakes. Assam is not only an integral and important part of India ; she epitomises India in a very real sense, she being a replica of India in miniature. Intrinsic similarities apart, it must not be difficult for a keen observer to discern the unique resemblance between the outline political maps of pre-partition India and Assam. There are thus points of similarities between the whole and the part in respect of their common problem and solutions thereof to be achieved.

Known by different names at different periods, Pragjyotisa, Kamarupa or Assam, this State of India is as old as India and had political, cultural and commercial contacts with the rest of India through the period of its recorded history and has traditions of such contacts even during pre-historic times. These contacts were not confined to India only but extended to other lands in the East and the West¹.

It is said that geographical configuration with the country intersected by mountain ranges and also bordered by the same including the majestic Himalayas on the north, with communications made difficult by uneven terrain and dense forests, has served as natural barriers isolating Assam and making the Assamese people exclusive. This view can at best contain a partial truth. True, geographical factors have made Assam an 'anthropological museum' by reducing contacts inter se amongst the diverse races and tribes living in the hills and the plains and causing wide divergences between the levels of life attained

1. Dr. V. S. Agrawala says that owing to its topographical features, this ancient land was named in olden times as Pragjyotisha, a geographical appellation based on Pragjyotika, i.e., the eastern path or mountain passage or Purvajyotika passing over the Patkai hills towards China and North Burma and several Duars leading from the hills to the plains of the Brahmaputra Valley, his Presidential Address, All India Oriental Conference, 22nd Session, Gauhati, 1965, pp. 1-ff.

by the tribes in the border areas, hill peoples and plains peoples. Yet these geographical barriers have not been insurmountable obstacles to successive streams of migrations into the land through the mountain passes and 'Duars' in the North and the North-East and both-way traffic in goods and movements of peoples between Assam and the rest of India through the great artery of contacts, the navigable Brahmaputra. There are copious references in Assam's history of international contacts that were maintained by India and Assam through Assam. During Bhaskarvarman's time, the sea-route to the East was said to have been controlled by Assam². Thus the Assamese people can be said to have been exclusive to the extent necessary for diplomatically and zealously guarding their freedom against foreign aggression. Internally also, this was true in Assam, considering how turbulently and surely, with a great measure of success over long periods, the hill tribes resisted interference with their tribal freedom and customs. To say Assam has been made exclusive in any other sense by her geography will not be correct; and the coexistence in this land even upto this day of such variety of races, communities, customs, cultural standards, is at once a standing refutation of such an assertion. Assam has been a cauldron of diverse racial strains and cultures and the intermingling and assimilation and synthesising have been proceeding through the centuries slowly but surely towards making Assamese life and culture a distinct, typical strain³ in the great pattern of variegated but basically unified Indian ways of life and culture.

All this is not to say that geography does not condition history nor that geography did not help or hinder the Assamese people. Difficulties of communication caused by geographical factors were surely one of the cogent causes of the ability of the Ahom rulers in repelling attempted foreign aggressions and preventing foreign aggressors having foot-hold on Ahom land except for brief periods. Mir Jumlah's chronicler, Shihabuddin complains⁴ of the unsuitable climate, prevalent diseases, excessive

2. K. L. Barua, *Early History of Kamarupa*, p. 80.

3. P. C. Choudhury, *The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*, p. 118.

4. Gait, *A History of Assam*, pp. 141-ff.

rains and floods and consequent difficulties of movements, and Mir Jumlah's retreat and discomfiture may surely be attributed to these factors amongst others.

The broad lands of the fertile Brahmaputra valley have been the seat of the growth and decline of successive spurts of civilisation from very early times. Good, salubrious climate, on the banks of the Brahmaputra, ease of navigability of the river, great fertility of the area, all combined in sustaining civilised and progressive life, while the very advantages mentioned made for ease of life and easy life in course of time, sapped the energy and vitality of the residents of the Valley, turning them lazy and unnerving them and making them unfit for the struggle for existence and continuous progress⁵. Virile hordes from across the borders or from the hill areas in such circumstances ousted these peoples who had already become soft and took possession of the Valley for fresh spurts of civilisation under them to be driven out again with the setting in of their degeneration with the lapse of time⁶. Thus geography as everywhere else played its full part in Assam also.

Assam broadly divided into the Brahmaputra Valley and the Surma Valley and into hills and plains and comprising Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Sylhet, Cachar, Manipur and Tripura and the Garo, Khasi-Jaintia, Naga, North Cachar and Mikir and Mizo Hills and NEFA area, is the picture that comes before the minds' eyes of most people contemplating of Assam as it has been through the ages with addition at times of Northern Bengal as also Eastern Bengal down to the sea⁷.

It may be mentioned here that the Ahoms designated Assam as Mungdunsun Kham or the country full of golden gardens⁸. The Ahoms surely came upon a beautiful, fertile country possessing immense natural and mineral resources, present and

5. Ibid p. 7.

6. Ibid p. 8.

7. K. L. Barua, *Early History of Kamarupa*, p. 10; B. K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam (Early Period)*, vol. i, p. 3.

8. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, p. 25.

potential. The land over which they spread their dominion was in early times known as Pragjyotisa or Kamrup and came to be known as Assam only since and after their advent.

According to some, 'Assam' is derived from the word 'Asama', meaning 'uneven' as distinguished from 'Samatata' or the level plains of Bengal. The tradition amongst the Ahoms is that 'Asama' in the sense of 'unequaled' or 'peerless', as the Ahoms were, as distinguished from the native populations whom they conquered, was the origin of the present name of the land over which they spread their sway. The Ahoms called themselves Tai (glorious, celestial) and their exploits here earned them local admiration as expressed in the appellation 'Asama' from which 'Assam' seems to be derived. This explanation of the origin of the name seems most plausible⁹. Or, as suggested by Dr. B. Kakati, 'Assam' might have come from 'Asama' which in its turn was the Sanskritisation of 'Acham' (Tai Chām, meaning to be defeated, therefore, Acham, with the Assamese prefix ā, meaning 'undefeated'—'unconquered'¹⁰. Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji points out that the Burmese came to know the Shan section of the Thai-s who settled in North-Western Burma, and who form an important element of the population of Burma now, by a name which in old Burmese was written down as 'Rham' but in modern Burmese this form 'Rham' is read as Shan. He affiliates the Indian forms Acama-Asama-Ahom (Ahama) to the Burmese, Rham (Rhwam)-Growth-Gywom-Klom and says that "the word Ahom therefore is just an Indian modification of the Burmese Rham" and that similarly 'Assam' is also to be explained as being based on a later sibilant modification in the word 'Rham', which also gave the names Siam and Shan.¹¹ The name may also be traced to the Boro word Hā-com (meaning the low or level country)¹². It may also be mentioned

9. B. K. Barua, A Cultural History of Assam, p. 4.

10. Ibid.

11. S. K. Chatterji, The name 'Assam-Ahom', Journal of the Asiatic Society, letters, vol. xxii, 1956, No. 2, pp. 147-153; S. K. Chatterji, The place of Assam in the History and Civilisation of India, pp. 41-43.

12. B. K. Barua, A Cultural History of Assam, p. 4.

that according to the account of the early history of the Mikirs, prepared by Theng Kur Sing Ingti of Golaghat, 'Assam' or 'Asam' or the 'uneven country' is the name of the new kingdom that was established by the Mikir prince, Singbarbe from whose name which meant 'uneven', the kingdom set up by him got its name¹³.

After the recovery of Western Assam from the Moguls in July, 1682, during the reign of Gadadhar Singha, the boundaries of Assam remained fixed and unaltered till the occupation of the country by the British. Thus the kingdom of Assam, as it was constituted during the last 140 years of Ahom rule, roughly corresponded to the five present districts of the Brahmaputra Valley—Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur, and portions of the Sadiya Frontier Tract, and was bounded on the north by a range of mountains inhabited by the Bhutanese, Akas, Duflas and Abors; on the east, by another line of hills peopled by the Mishmis and Singphos; on the south, by the Garo, Khasi, Naga and Patkai Hills and on the West, by the Manas or Manaha river and the Habraghat Pargana in the Bengal district of Rungpore. The kingdom where it was entered from Bengal commenced from the Assam Choky on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, opposite Goalpara; while on the south bank it commenced from the Nagarbara hill at a distance of 21 miles to the east of Goalpara. The kingdom was about 500 miles in length with an average breadth of 60 miles¹⁴.

Dr. John Peter Wade in his Geographical Sketch of Assam; says :—

“The kingdom of Assam is seven hundred miles in length and from sixty to eighty in breadth. In a few places however of Upper Assam, where the mountainous confines recede farthest, the breadth greatly exceeds this proportion; and it will be within a very moderate calculation to consider the surface as containing about sixty thousand square miles; an extent much superior to that of England, which is stated at forty-nine thousand four hundred and fifty. From this computation may be deducted

13. S. K. Bhuyan, *Deodhai Assam Buranji*, Introduction, pp. XXXIV-XXXV.

14. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tung-Khungia Buranji*, Introduction, pp. XXVI-XXVII; S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, p. 1.

the numerous rivers which every where intersect the country. I shall not offer a vague conjecture on the sum of this deduction ; but it will not be exaggeration to say, that the remainder exhibits a highly fertile soil throughout ; for even the great number of hills, which are interspersed in every part of Assam, are susceptible of cultivation, and increase considerably the arable superficies.”

“From this computation of square miles are excluded all the dependencies and conquered countries, in or beyond the mountainous limits which surround Assam in every direction, as well as several provinces of Eastern Bengal, which formerly acknowledged their subjection to the Assam Government.”

“Assam is a Valley, and extends between the 25th and 28th degrees north latitude, and 94 and 99 degrees of longitude E. from Greenwich. This extent to the East-ward beyond the capital Gargaon is of course conjectured, for it was not my fortune to fall in with a single native who had travelled to the utmost limits of Assam in that direction. The kingdom is separated by the great stream of the Brahmaputra into three grand divisions called Uttarkol or Uttarpar, Dakhinkol or Dakhinpar and the Majuli or great island. The first denotes the provinces lying on the north side of Brahmaputra, the second those on the south. The Majuli is a large island in the middle. It is also divided into Upper and Lower Assam ; the first includes the country above Kaliabar, where the river diverges into two considerable streams as far as the mountainous confines to the north and south. This division included the whole of Assam at an earlier period ; but the lower provinces to the Westward having been afterwards annexed by conquest to the dominions of the Swargadeo, became a separate Government under an officer entitled Bura-Phukan with the powers of a Viceroy. The distinction of Uttarkol and Dakhinkol were previous to the period in question, applicable to Upper Assam ; and the more learned among the natives affect to confine those appellations even now to the Eastern provinces only”¹⁵.

Such is the geographical variety of a land whose history, which is no less varied, we should study.

15. J. P. Wade, A Geographical Sketch of Assam, 1800, pp. 2-ff.

POPULATION :

The population of Ahom Assam before the commencement of the Moamaria revolt in 1769-1770 was estimated by Guna-bhram Barua to be about two million and a half. The Burmese are said to have diminished the population by half during 1817-1825 ; and similar reductions had occurred during the Moamaria disturbances. The population was on the increase since 1825 and the total population of the Assam Valley in 1931 was 4,855,711 according to the Census of 1931¹⁶. Assam today is inhabited by more than a crore of people according to the latest Census.

As today the population of Assam has always been a mixed one, comprising various racial elements. Assam has become a museum of races, being situated in one of the great migration routes of mankind. The possible routes of migration were : through the north or the mountain passes of Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan ; through valley of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra from India and the West ; by sea or the Bay of Bengal, passing through Bengal or Burma ; and the Assam-Burma routes, one over the Patkai passes in the north-east, leading from the Ledo-Margherita road to China through the Hukawang Valley in Burma and the other through Manipur and Cachar in the South-east or south of Assam. The various racial elements from India on the one side and from South-east Asia on the other, passing through Assam left their substratum in both the hills and the plains¹⁷.

There has been intermingling of races on so wide a scale that pure types are difficult to point out here as any where else in a greater or lesser degree. The Negritos, the Austro-Asiatic Mon-khmar Khasi-Syntengs, the Indo-Chinese, Tibeto-Burmans comprising Aka-Dafla-Miri-Abor-Mishmi Group, Naga Group and Bodo Group, the Alpine Aryans, the Aryans, the Dravidians, the Tais or Shans, all came, lived and mingled ; and have left their traces on the peoples of the State in varying degrees and in differing combinations and proportions, but in the total popu-

16. S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, p. 1; Tungkhungia Buranji, Introduction, p. XXVII.

17. P. C. Choudhury, *The History of Civilisation of the people of Assam to the Twelfth Century A. D.*, p. 82.

lation both in the hills and the plains, the Tibeto-Burman element may be said to be the most pre-dominant and prominent today¹⁸.

The population being a composite one, the culture of the State has been heterogeneous in content¹⁹, but with the passage of time and the growth of the spirit of toleration, so characteristic of life in the whole Indian subcontinent, a spirit of homogeneity has come to underlie the complex life and culture of the Assamese people ; and this development has been fostered by gradual process of mingling of peoples and of fusion, assimilation and synthesis of thoughts, ideas and customs and also of successive conquests of the weak by the virile²⁰, and of domination of the inferior civilisations by the superior with their higher standards of attainments in the fields of language, literature and culture²¹. The Bodos who dominated the Assam scene for long are progressively taking to the Assamese language. The virile Ahoms who were masters of the land could not escape the slow but sure process of Hinduisation and gave up their own language and adopted Assamese²².

Animism, Buddhism, Tantrikism, Vaisnavism, Ahom beliefs thrived here ; and have left their impress on the pattern of life of the people ; they all persist even to this day in a greater or lesser degree ; and the different communities, Hindus and non-Hindus, and peoples speaking different provincial languages besides Assamese with those speaking Assamese coexist and cooperate for the good of the State ; and Assamese, developed out of Sanskrit, tends to be the lingua franca within this State²³, serving as a great cementing force without suppressing linguistic variety.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 86-117; S. K. Chatterji, *The place of Assam in the History and Civilisation of India*, pp. 9-ff.

19. P. C. Choudhury, *The History of Civilisation of the people of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*, p. 117.

20. Gait, *A History of Assam* pp. 7-ff.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 7.

22. S. K. Chatterji, *The Place of Assam in the History and Civilisation of India*, pp. 36-38, 40-ff.

23. P. C. Choudhury, *The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*, p. 117.

After all, as we look at life in Assam in the present, we cannot miss the great extent to which it has been permeated and overlaid by the Aryan influence and Aryan culture. Certain distinguishing marks of this influence stand out. The philosophical attitude towards life, reinforced by Sankarite Vaisnavism, the spirit of hospitality and of mutual toleration facilitated in no small measure by the historical necessity of living together, the growing desire to understand the Indian heritage and unlock its storehouse with its powerful key which Sanskrit is, admission and assimilation²⁴ of the 'non-Aryan' peoples, customs, ways and beliefs with reorientation or adaptation, when necessary or without it into the Aryan fold and participation by all on social levels at least in the special festivals of some and peculiar to them, may be religious or social, e.g., the Bihu festival, the Durga Puja, Tribal Folk Dances etc., are only a few of the indications of the vitality and penetrating power and pervasive influence of the Aryan temper which now suffuses, and saturates the whole pattern of Assamese life.

The multi-coloured texture of the Assamese population has attracted admiring glance through the ages and has been called upon to bear the heavy weight of responsibility involved in cooperative life on the same soil for enjoying the blessings of strongly guarded freedom and the benefits of settled, civilised life.

PRE-AHOM CONDITIONS :

For a proper understanding of the age of the Ahoms, we have to go beyond the Ahom period and have glimpses of Assam as it was before and on the eve of the Ahom period. This is essential, for history is a continuity and yesterday merges into today and today extends to tomorrow. It would be wrong to think that Assamese life and culture as we find them today are the products of the six hundred years of Ahom Rule only. The history of one epoch affects, influences and shapes the history of the succeeding epochs. History is a continuous flow passing from one end of time to another, at times coursing slowly and smoothly from one stage of time to another, at others, gushing forth, and rushing and jolting down from epoch to epoch ; but

24. S. K. Chatterji, *Kirata-Jana-Kriti*, p. 36.

whatever the manner of this movement, it deposits its accumulations, big or small on the pattern of life and culture of a people all through its tortuous course. There may be revolutions or apparently violent breaks with the past, but at no time can a succeeding generation have a clean state handed down to it by the preceding for drawing life a new thereon or beginning life afresh. This is true of the different periods of Assam's history as well. Life under the Ahoms was as much conditioned by life in the pre-Ahom period as life in Assam today has been conditioned by life in the Ahom and pre-Ahom ages. This is not to say, however, that each period had not its distinctive and additional contributions to make to the contents of life on the march.

Rulers : We know of the long lines of kings who ruled in Assam (then called Prag Jyotisa or Kamarupa), not to speak of those like Naraka and Bhagadatta who ruled in pre-historic times according to tradition. The Varman line, with important rulers like Mahendra Varman and Bhutivarman and the illustrious monarch, Bhaskarvarman whose fame spread far and wide ; the line of Salastambha with a great conqueror in Harsadeva, Harijjarvarman, the great king, and Vanamalavarmadeva, the empire-builder of Assam ; the Palaline, with the founder of its greatness in Ratnapala, a conqueror of repute in Indrapala, and an accomplished monarch in Dharmapala²⁵, followed by the later Kamrupa kings, controlled Assam before the advent of the Ahoms.

Even after the Ahoms made their appearance in North-East Assam in 1228 A.D., and gradually extended their domain over different parts of Assam, portions of Non-Ahom territories of Assam to the west were under the control of rulers of Kamata in the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries down to Nilambar²⁶ and subsequently, under the Koch kings, Viswa Singh and Naranarayan in the Sixteenth century ; and to the east ruled the line of Chutia kings between 13th and 16th centuries (Ratnadhvaj

25. P. C. Choudhury, *The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*, pp. 139-277.

26. K. L. Barua, *Early History of Kamarupa*, pp. 242-269.

Pala to Dhiranarayan)²⁷ following the Hindu dynasty founded according to tradition at Kundil near Sadiya by Bhisma, the father of Rukmini.

Since the transfer of the capital of Kamrupa to Kamatapur about 1260 A.D. after the retreat of the invading Muhammadan army under Tughril Khan Malik Yuzbeg, real control of Eastern Kamrupa bounded by the Subansiri in the North and the Kapili in the South passed into the hands of Bara-Bhuyan Chiefs who were nominally feudatories of the Kamata kings, but actually petty independent Chiefs over their respective domains. They, however, used to combine to resist common dangers like Muslim incursions into the country ; with the end of the rule of the Kamata king, Nilambar after the capture of Kamatapur in 1496 by Muhammadans under Hussain Shah, Bara-Bhuyans were freed from the nominal authority of the Kamata kings. Since they joined hands and destroyed the Muslim garrison at Hajo left by Hussain Shah and until the accession of Viswa Singh, the Bhuyans reigned supreme²⁸.

Muslim Incursions : The Muhammadan intrusions into Assam began in the first decade of the 13th century.²⁹ The expedition of 1205-06 A.D. under Muhammad Bin Bukhtiyar proved a disastrous failure. Kamrupa rose to the occasion and dealt a heavy blow to the Muslim expeditionary force. Ghiyasuddin Iwaz in 1227 A.D. entered and ascended up the Brahmaputra Valley only to meet with similar reverse and had to hurry back to Gaur. Within two years subsequently, Nasiruddin is said to have over-thrown the Kamarupa king, placed a successor on the throne on promise of an annual tribute, and retired from Kamarupa.

The next invasion was that of Tughril Khan Malik Yuzbeg about 1257 A.D. He met with a better fate initially and celebrated his success by erecting a mosque but with the setting in of rains, the invading army was reduced to great straits and

27. S. K. Bhuyan, *Deodhai Assam Buranji*, Introduction, XXVI-XXVIII.

28. K. L. Barua, *Early History of Kamarupa*, pp. 277-284.

29. *Ibid.*, 201-241; J. N. Sarkar, *The History of Bengal*, Vol. II, pp. 9-11, 22-ff, 43, 53-ff, 110, 118, 134.

had to retreat. The Sultan was killed and the army lost and only a few could ultimately make good their escape. There is mention of Muhammad Tughlak's invasion of Kamarup in 1337 A.D. which is said to have ended in disaster. Some authorities also speak of intrusions into Kamrupa by Sikandar Shah in 1357 A.D. and Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah in 1393 A.D. Sometime between 1397 and 1407 the Muslims invaded Kamata but were repulsed with the Ahom king Sudangpha's assistance. About 1473-74 A.D. there was conflict between the king of Kamatapur and Sultan Barbak Shah of Bengal whose General was defeated.

KACHARIS (BODOS) : The Kacharis, known also as Bodos in the Brahmaputra Valley and as Dimasas in the North Cachar Hills, were perhaps the earliest known inhabitants of the Brahmaputra Valley and the duration of their domination over the Valley must have been very long, as evidenced by the Bodo names of many of the rivers of Assam even upto this date.³⁰ The Kacharis were so called long before a section of them took possession of the district of Cachar. In the thirteenth Century the Kachari kingdom was along the south bank of the Brahmaputra extending from the Dikhu to the Kallang and including the valley of the Dhansiri and what was later known as the North Cachar Sub-Division.³¹

Khasi-Syntengs : The Khasis and Syntengs represent the remnants of the first Mongolian migration into India and speak 'Khasi' of Mon-Khmer family of languages.³² About the State of Khairam or Khyriem with the capital at Nongkrem (near present Shillong), inhabited by the Khasis, not much historical data of early times have come down to us. For the State of Jaintia, the habitat of the Syntengs, a traditional list of kings is available, beginning with Parbat Ray (1500 A.D.). There are references in Ahom Buranjis to the seventh ruler in the list, Dhan Manik (1596 A.D.-1605 A.D.).³³

30. Gait, A History of Assam, p. 6.

31. Ibid., pp. 247-ff.

32. Gait, A History of Assam, p. 259.

33. Ibid., pp. 160-ff.

Political Conditions : With the above political background in the pre-Ahom age, the peoples of Assam can be said to have attained fair standards of progress in different aspects of life. Politically conscious rulers guarded freedom and foreign aggressions, particularly Muslim adventurist designs were effectively countered. Monarchy was the prevalent form of government and benevolent monarchy was practised and extolled. The kings were not averse to wars of conquests for expansion of their kingdom. Diplomacy and foreign relations received careful attention. Religious toleration was professed and practised by the rulers.³⁴

Social Conditions : In social relations, achievement of harmony was the keynote, though the Varnasrama system prevailed. Non-Aryans were gradually admitted to the Aryan fold. Non-Aryan customs and tribal customs found their way into Hindu practices and the process of gradual assimilation never stopped. Heterogeneous character of the population made for loss of rigidity, e.g., in the caste system, dietary practices and marriage procedures.³⁵

Economic Conditions : Economy was by and large agricultural and rural. Cultivation was the mainstay of the people. Grazing, fishing, hunting were also usual. Industries were small-scale and pursued in cottages with an eye to perfect finish and refinement. Weaving, sericulture, embroidery and dyeing, working in metal, salt and ivory, wooden work, and manufacture of aromatics were important. Internal and external trade grew, waterways, roads, sea-routes serving as arteries of commerce. Silk, raw and manufactured, lac, amber, buffalo and rhinoceros hide and horns, iron, aloe, musk, cloth, ivory etc., were a few of the diverse articles of trade that also found export markets.³⁶

34. P. C. Choudhury, *The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*, pp. 278-327; B. K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam*, pp. 39-67.

35. P. C. Choudhury, *The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*, pp. 328-357; B. K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam*, pp. 103-133.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 358-389; B. K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam*, pp. 68-102.

Cultural Conditions : Education and Literature : Education was intensive rather than extensive. The masses might not have access to formal education, but even the most modest Hindu peasant imbibed the spirit of the Epics and the Puranas and had knowledge thereof—the spirit and the knowledge which were handed down from the father to the son. The tribal elements in the population had not much access to Brahmanical learning and therefore, there were gaps between intellectual and cultural standards of the learned minority and the ignorant many. Sanskrit learning flourished. Assamese literature that swiftly advanced from the thirteenth century onwards had been passing through the formative stage. There was patronage of literary talents by non-Aryan and Hinduised Kachari, Kamata and Koch kings also ; and later progress in education and literature owed a great deal to this patronage. Tantric education and practices gained many adherents and were forceful influences until the universalism of Vaisnava education and literature promoted and nourished by neo-Vaisnavites headed by Sankardeva and Madhavdeva had greater unifying and ennobling effect on the whole population.³⁷

Religion : Diverse Aryan and non-Aryan cults prevailed. The rulers and the peoples alike showed highly developed sense of religious toleration. Siva and Vishnu, Buddhism and Hinduism, Animism and Aryan beliefs coexisted in perfect peace and amity. As years rolled by, the non-Aryan ruling families and tribes were Hinduised and brought within the fold of Hinduism, e.g., the Manipuris, the Kacharis, the Chutias as also the Ahoms in the later age. Despite persisting variety of beliefs and religious practices, social harmony was not disturbed.³⁸

Fine Arts : Architects, masons, sculptors and painters had skill and reputation. Closer were Assamese art on the one hand and Gupta art of Pataliputra and Benares Schools and those of Bihar and Orissa on the other rather than the arts of Assam and

37. P. C. Choudhury, *The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*, pp. 390-414; B. K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam*, pp. 133-141.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 415-459; B. K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam*, pp. 142-166.

of the contemporary Pala School of Bengal. Though fundamentally based on the Indian traditional system, the fine arts of Assam exhibited peculiarities of their own, largely because of the effective presence at all time of considerable proportions of non-Aryan elements in the population, as illustrated in the ruins from places like Dimapur, Sadiya, Nowgong and Deopani. These peculiarities of compromise and combination in fine arts and other aspects of Assamese culture have persisted throughout.³⁹

Life in Assam had such politico-economic and socio-cultural setting by the time the Ahoms appeared on the scene, destined to play a historic role that has today become a precious part of the history of the land and of its people.

39. P. C. Choudhury, *The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*, pp. 460-510; B. K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam*, pp. 167-196.

Chapter II

POLITICAL HISTORY

Section I

THE RISE AND CONSOLIDATION OF THE AHOM KINGDOM

In the beginning of the thirteenth century a band of hardy hillmen found their way into the eastern extremity of the Brahmaputra valley. They were the forefathers of the Ahoms who were destined to set-up and rule over a kingdom in Assam for more than 600 years. They were a branch of the great Tai race and belonged particularly to the Shan Section thereof, which occupied the northern and eastern hill tracts of Upper Burma and Western Yunnan.

Divine ancestry was attributed to the Ahom kings both by the Deodhais or the Ahom priests and also by the Brahmin priests at later date. According to the Deodhais, Lengdon (or Indra of the Hindus) asked his son Then Kham to go down to earth to establish a kingdom there. As he was unwilling, his sons, Khunlung ('prince-elder') and Khunlai ('prince-younger') descended to earth from heaven by a golden chain in the year 568 A.D. and set feet on Mungri-mungram. Lengdon presented them an idol called Somdeo, which was to be the tutelary deity of the Ahom kings, a magic sword or Hengdan, two drums for invoking divine notice and aid and four cocks for telling the omens. Khunlung and Khunlai built a town at Mungrimungram.¹

Khunlai ousted Khunlung from Mungrimungram whereupon Khunlung with the Somdeo came to and founded a new kingdom in Mungkhumungjao. He left seven sons of whom the eldest, who got as his share the kingdom called Mungkang, inherited the Somdeo.² Khunlai at Mungrimungram was succeeded by his son Tyaoaijeptyatpha who is said to have founded the

-
1. Gait, *A History of Assam*, pp. 73-75; Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, pp. 1-3.
 2. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 6.

Aijepi era ; Tyaoaijeptyatpha died childless ; then a descendant of Khunlung and Khunchu came to occupy the vacant throne. On the death of this descendant of Khunlung and Khunchu, the kingdom was divided, Mungrimungram going to one of his sons and Maulung to another. The son who got Maulung and his descendants ruled for 333 years and the line then becoming extinct, another of Khunchu's descendants was elected king of Maulung.

Sukapha : Sukapha, the founder of the Ahom kingdom in Assam was one of the grandsons of this descendant of Khunchu, who was elected king of Maulung. In consequence of a dispute with his brothers, Sukapha left the country for Assam in 1215 A.D. carrying the Somdeo with him after having dispossessed the Raja of Mungkang of it without his knowledge.³ For thirteen years Sukapha wandered about the hilly country of the Patkai with his followers, horses, and elephants till in 1228 A.D. he arrived in Khamjang. Crossing the Khamjang river in rafts he came to Nongnyang lake. He occasionally raided Naga villages. Nagas attempting to resist his advance were defeated and dealt with severely. He caused some of them to be killed and roasted, compelling their relatives to eat their flesh. The morale of the resisters thus broken, the Nagas in the neighbourhood hastened to make their submission.⁴

Sukapha moved from place to place in search of a most suitable habitat to settle down upon. Dangkaorang, Khamhangpuna, Namrup, the Sessa river, the Dihing, Tipam, Abhaypur, Habung, all lay on his route. At Habung, the Ahoms started cultivation. Then to the mouth of the Dikhu, Ligorigaon and Simaluguri. In 1253 Sukapha arrived at Charaideo. At Charaideo a city was built. There was rejoicing, horses were sacrificed and prayers were offered.⁵ Sukapha subjugated the Morans and the Borahis who were in possession of the neighbouring country. He adopted conciliatory measures towards them after having once defeated them and treated them as equals and by encouraging

3. Gait, A History of Assam, p. 75.

4. S. K. Bhuyan, Assam Buranji (S.M.), pp. 6-ff.

5. S. K. Bhuyan, Assam Buranji (S.M.), p. 7.

inter-marriage⁶ helped their fusion into one common nation. These tribes used to supply elephants, dye, honey and mats and other products of the jungle in lieu of revenue to the Ahom kings. He maintained contact with his brother rulers at home by sending presents of gold and silver. He died in 1268 A.D.⁷

Sukapha was a brave and enterprising prince, fired by pioneering zeal and the adventurer spirit. Sukapha made appointments to two great and important offices of the State, the Bar Gohain and the Bura Gohain—offices whose incumbents were to play important and powerful roles throughout the Ahom rule. Sukapha was wise and judicious in his treatment of the conquered Morans and Borahis but his treatment of the hostile Nagas was ghastly.⁸

Suteupha : Suteupha succeeded Sukapha. In his reign the Kacharis left the country east of the Dikhu to the Ahoms and there was an expedition against the Naras, which was defeated and its commander, the Buragohain slain.⁹ The next king Subinpha distributed Ahom subjects between the Bar Gohain and the Bura Gohain.¹⁰

Sukhangpha : There were hostilities between the Ahoms and the Raja of Kamata with heavy losses on both sides. The enemy was weakened and sued for peace and Rajani, the daughter of the Kamata king was given in marriage to the Ahom king.¹¹ The ruler of Mung kang demanded of Sukhangpha payment of tribute which the latter refused.¹²

Sukhrangpha : Sukhrangpha's half brother, Chao Pulai (son of Rajani), the Saring Raja conspired against him and fled to the Raja of Kamata who marched to Athagaon and to Saring. Sukhrangpha opened negotiations and made up differences with Chao Pulai.¹³

-
6. Maniram Dewan, M.S. Buranji Viveka-Ratna (D.H.A.S. No. 272), f. 4b.
 7. Gait, History of Assam, p. 78.
 8. Ibid., p. 79.
 9. Gait, History of Assam, p. 79.
 10. Ibid., p. 80.
 11. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, Assam Buranji, p. 13.
 12. Gait, History of Assam, pp. 80-ff.
 13. Golap Chandra Barua, Ahom Buranji, p. 48.

Sutupha : Sutupha, brother of Sukhrangpha succeeded. There were disputes with the Chutiyas. In 1376, the Chutiya king visited Sutupha and invited him to a regatta on the Safrai river. While on board the Chutiya king's barge without attendants, the Ahom king was treacherously murdered.¹⁴ No prince worthy of the throne was found by the great nobles and so the country was ruled for four years by the Bar Gohain and the Burha Gohain.¹⁵

Tyaokhamti : In 1380 the third son of Sukhangpha, Tyaokhamti was raised to the throne. He marched an army against the Chutiyas to avenge the assassination of Sutupha. When the king left, placing the elder queen in charge, she conspired against the king's favourite younger queen who was ordered to be beheaded on a false charge. The ministers helped by setting her adrift on a raft on the Brahmaputra, as she was pregnant. The king returned victorious but he was so much under the influence of the elder queen that he could not punish her for her cruel but unjustified treatment of his favourite wife nor prevent her committing numerous acts of oppression. The irritated nobles caused him to be assassinated in 1389.¹⁶

There was no suitable successor and the great nobles ruled without a king. One Thao Cheoken came across a youth of royal presence named Sudang in a Habung village where Cheoken had gone for trade in cattle and on enquiries found that he was the son of Tyaokhamti's younger queen. A Brahmin gave shelter to the queen who died after the birth of Sudang and brought up Sudang with his own children. The Burha Gohain on coming to know of the facts, consulted the other ministers, brought the youth to the capital and placed him on the throne.¹⁷

Sudangpha : The reign of Sudangpha also called 'Brahman Prince' marks the first stage in the growth of Brahmanical influence amongst the Ahoms. Many Hindu rites and ceremonies began to be observed. The Brahmin who brought up the king

14. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 14; S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji (S.M.)*, p. 7.

15. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 14.

16. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 14-ff.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 15; Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, p. 49.

was appointed adviser to the king and his sons important officers on the frontier.¹⁸

The Tipam chiefs who conspired against the king were invited to a feast on the occasion of successful catching of elephants in the royal stockade and overpowered and put to death at the height of festivities when all grounds for suspicion had been disarmed. The king then conciliated the Tipamias by marrying the daughter of a Tipamia Chief Khuntai. A Tipamia, Tao Sulai, who had already been enamoured of the queen before her marriage presented her a ring. The king demanded explanation. Tao Sulai fled for help to Surumpha, king of Mungakang who sent an army against Sudangpha. In a treaty in 1401 the Patkai was fixed as the boundary between the two countries after Sudangpha had personally defeated the invaders at the head of his army.¹⁹

Tao Sulai then fled to Kamata. An expedition was sent to Kamata but the Raja avoided war by giving his daughter Bhajani to Sudangpha. Sudangpha completed the subjugation of the Tipam, Khamjang and Aiton tribes. He remonstrated with the Nara Raja for his having encouraged these tribes to withhold payment of tribute²⁰. He built a town at Dhola and later made his capital at Charguya near the Dihing river²¹. Then ruled Sujangpha (1407-1422) and Suphakpha (1422-1439). Their reigns were uneventful.

Susenpha : Susenpha led his troops in person against Tangsu Nagas who had committed raids and routed them in a serious engagement that cost the Ahoms 140 lives²². Presents are said to have been sent to the king by a ruler of some country to the east as a token of friendship and by Akhampa Nagas as a token of their submission. He appears to have been a good monarch during whose reign the country is likely to have enjoyed comparative peace, prosperity and contentment²³.

18. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, pp. 15-ff.

19. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, pp. 49-ff.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-ff.

21. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 17.

22. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji (S.M.)*, p. 8.

23. Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 84-ff.

Suhenpha : There was renewed warfare with the Tangsu Nagas who routed an Ahom detachment and cut off the head of the Bargohain, but were ultimately defeated. In 1440 war broke out with the Kacharis who defeated the Ahoms who had to sue for peace and send a princess to the Kachari king. In 1493 Suhenpha was assassinated by some men of the Tairungban clan, who had been punished for stealing paddy from the royal granary²⁴.

Supimpha : Supimpha set himself to tracing out and punishing those who were responsible for his father's murder. The Burha Gohain who was suspected of complicity revolted. It is said that the king sent away one of his wives who was pregnant to a Naga Chief, because the queen had praised his beauty in the king's presence on his coming to pay tribute. The king died or was assassinated in 1497²⁵.

Suhungmung, the Dihingia Raja (1497-1539) : Suhungmung assumed the Hindu title Swarga Narayan. The Brahmanical influence was on the increase. He is also known as Dihingia Raja because he made his capital at Bakata on the Dihing. In 1504 the Aitonia Nagas revolted. They were defeated and acknowledged Ahom supremacy by sending to the Ahom king a daughter of their chief and four elephants and agreeing to pay annual tribute of axes, gongs and amber. In 1512 the Habung country was annexed to the Ahom dominions²⁶.

In 1513 hostilities with the Chutiyas began with the Chutiya Raja, Dhir Narayan invading the Ahom territory. The Chutiya forces were defeated on land and in a naval encounter. Suhungmung took possession of Mungkhrang and the country round Namdang. The Chutiyas tried to recover lost territory and in 1520 attacked the Ahom fort at Mungkhrang. The Chutiyas had success and got back the lost territory. Two years later the Chutiyas suffered defeat near the mouth of Sessa river

24. *Ibid.*, p. 85; S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), p. 9; Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, pp. 52-ff.

25. Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 85-ff; S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), p. 9.

26. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 86.

and the Ahoms advanced and erected a fort at the mouth of the Tiphao river. In 1523 the Chutiyas besieged the Tiphao fort. Suhungmung arrived with reinforcements and routed the enemy who sued for peace. Peace overtures fell through because of Suhungmung insisting on having the heirlooms of the Chutiya king, his gold cat, gold elephant, and gold umbrella²⁷. The Chutiyas fortified their position near Sadiya but were dislodged and pursued as far as the Chautan (Chandangiri) hill. The Chutiyas kept the Ahoms in check by rolling down heavy stones²⁸. As frontal attack was of no avail, the Ahom soldiers were ordered to climb up the precipitous hill and attack from the rear; this they did with great difficulty by holding on to creepers, reached the summit and surprised the Chutiyas who fled. The king and his eldest son fell and the principal queen killed herself. The heads of the Chutiya king and his son were buried under the steps of the temple at Charaideo²⁹. The whole Chutiya country was annexed and a new officer, the Sadiya-khowa Gohain was appointed to administer this conquered territory³⁰. On return to Charaideo, Suhungmung signalled his victory by performing the Rikkhvan Ceremony. The Chutiyas later revolted but were put down. The Sadiya-khowa Gohain was attacked by Phukangmung, a chief of a neighbouring hill tribe. Phukangmung was defeated and killed. Another troublesome local Chief now submitted and sent his daughter to the royal seraglio³¹.

Suhungmung proceeded to the Dihing country and appointed officers to administer the frontier provinces of Habung, Dihing and Banlung. Suhungmung saw Senglung and was struck by his dignified appearance and coming to know that Supimpha's queen was pregnant before she was sent away to the Naga Chief, became favourably disposed towards Senglung, her son and created the high appointment of Barpatra Gohain for him and made it equal in rank to those of the Bargohain and the Burha

27. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), pp. 10-11.

28. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 19.

29. *Ibid.*

30. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji*, (S.M.), p. 12.

31. Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 88-ff.

Gohain despite the latter's protests. The Barahis, Chutiyas and Morans were placed under the Barpatra Gohain³².

In 1526 Suhungmung marched against the Kacharis, in the Dhansiri valley. At Barduar a bathing ghat and at Marangi a fort with brick walls were constructed under his orders. Though the Kacharis defended themselves valiantly with bows and arrows, they were ultimately defeated with a heavy loss of 1,700 dead on the battlefield. Later the Kachari king, Detsung began to give trouble again, whereupon an army was sent against him accompanied by Suhungmung himself upto Marangi. Troops were sent up both banks of the Doyang. Detsung retreated and fled to his capital Dimapur. Detsung was pursued farther till he was at last captured and put to death. The Kachari resistance was crippled. Detsung's head was buried in the Charaideo hill. Three princesses were taken to the king's harem³³. The Ahoms became masters of the Dhansiri valley and of the whole of the Kachari possessions north of the Kallang river in Nowgong. A permanent official, the Marangi-khowa Gohain was appointed for the Dhansiri valley. Suhungmung after the victorious campaign offered oblations to the dead and sacrifices to the Gods. The Ahoms and the Kacharis used cannon in this war³⁴.

In 1537, Viswa Singh, the Koch king visited the Ahom Raja and offered presents. Suhungmung also gave presents to the Koch Raja in return. Envoys were also sent to the Raja of Manipur and presents were exchanged³⁵. There were expeditions against the Khamjang, Tablung and Namsang Nagas, under the king's son, Suklen. The Khamjang Nagas yielded but the Tablung and Namsang Nagas made the Ahoms retreat, though later they also submitted³⁶.

The year 1527 saw the first Muhammadan invasion under the great Vazir of Ahom land recorded in Ahom history. The Ahoms hotly pursued the intruders and captured forty horses and about twenty to forty cannon. Suhungmung proceeded to

32. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, p. 21-ff.

33. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), p. 14.

34. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, p. 60.

35. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, p. 22.

36. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 95.

Sala. Duimunisila was taken possession of, a fort was constructed at the mouth of the Burai river and a detachment was placed at Phulbari. Subsequently, expeditions were sent down the Kallang and up the Bharali. Slaves and booty were taken. The king left a strong guard at Narayanpur. Muhammadans renewed hostilities and advanced up the Brahmaputra. The Ahoms won the battle at Temani and placed garrisons at Sala, on the Bharali and at Singiri. Singiri under Barpatra Gohain was attacked but the Muhammadan force was defeated and pursued as far as Khagarijan (Nowgong) and their commander, Bit Malik was slain³⁷. Horses, Cannon and guns were taken. Barpatra Gohain was presented with a beautiful girl by the king, and honoured by the performance of the Rikkhvan Ceremony for him.

In 1532 a Muhammadan commander named Turbak with elephants, horses, artillery and foot soldiers invaded the country and encamped opposite the fort at Singiri. Suhungmung's son, Suklen crossed the Brahmaputra and attacked the Muhammadan encampment disregarding astrologers' advice only to meet with a crushing defeat, with eight Ahom commanders killed. The Muhammadans halted at Koilabar for the rainy season. The Muhammadans surrounded the Ahoms under Suklen at the fort of Sala and their attempt to storm the fort was repulsed by the Ahoms pouring boiling water over them,

Success, however, rested with the Muhammadans in the subsequent encounters. At last the fortunes of the war turned in favour of the Ahoms who gained a great victory in the naval engagement near Duimunisila in 1533, with losses on the side of the enemy between 1,500 and 2,500 men³⁸. Turbak reinforced by Hussain Khan took up position at the mouth of the Dikrai opposite the Ahom Camp. The Muhammadans were beaten in a series of engagements. The final battle was fought near the Bharali. Elephants and horses bogged in a morass, Turbak transfixed by a spear and dead³⁹, the enemy line was thrown into

37. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, pp. 67-ff.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 70-ff.

39. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji (S.M.)*, p. 22.

confusion and the defeat became a rout. The pursuit was carried as far as the Karatoya river on the bank of which a temple was built and a tank excavated to commemorate the Ahom victory⁴⁰. An envoy was sent to the king of Gaur who sent a princess for the Ahom king. Hussain Khan was caught and put to death. Elephants, horses, cannon, match-locks, gold, silver and other booty were taken. The head of Turbak was buried on the top of the Charaideo hill. The Rikkhvan ceremony was performed. The use of fire-arms by the Ahoms dates from the close of the war⁴¹.

Suhungmung built a town at Namdang after capturing it from the Chutiyas. After making his capital at Bakata on the Dihing, Suhungmung settled a number of Ahoms in the neighbourhood. After annexing the Chutiya country, he removed 300 Ahoms of the Gharphaliya clan with families and twelve chiefs from Garhgaon to Sadiya and another contingent of the same clan to the banks of the Dihing. A number of Brahmins, blacksmiths and artisans were taken from Sadiya to the Ahom capital. After defeating Turbak's forces, he settled the Muhamadan prisoners of war in different parts of the country. Successively they were employed as cutters of grass for the king's elephants and as cultivators, but having proved inefficient in these duties, they took to working in brass, an occupation which their descendants, the Morias, carry on to this day. In 1510 the king got an enquiry made into the number, condition and distribution of the people who were divided into clans⁴².

In 1534 a great number of cattle died because of a very severe outbreak of cattle disease. The Saka era of the Hindus was adopted in place of the Jovian Cycle. This reign not only witnessed the growing influence of the Brahmans, but also the spread of the Vaisnava reformation introduced by Sankar Deva. Suklen got estranged from the king for various reasons and got a Kachari servant of the king, Ratiman to stealthily creep into his bed room while he was asleep and stab him to death⁴³.

40. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, p. 22.

41. Gait, *A History of Assam*, p. 94.

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 86, 88, 95.

43. Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 95, 97.

Suhungmung was a bold, enterprising and resourceful ruler and during his reign the Ahom dominions were extended in all directions. The Chutiyas were subjugated, the Kachari power was broken, the Muhammadan invasions were repulsed and the Naga raids were effectively dealt with⁴⁴.

Suklenmung : Suklenmung shifted his capital to Garhgaon and so was known as Garhgaya Raja⁴⁵. He ordered death sentence for the brothers of his father's assassin. He paid repeated visits to the country conquered from the Kacharis to bring order and settled government to the area. He got the turbulent petty Chiefs or Bhuiyas who interfered in his efforts transported nearer headquarters for stricter supervision. There was a Chutiya raid in 1542⁴⁶.

Series of conflicts commenced with the Koch king, Nar Narayan, by this time, a most powerful ruler. In 1546 Sukladhvaj alias Chilarai, Nar Narayan's brother and General advanced with a Koch force. The Ahoms met the Koches near the Dikrai river and in the ensuing battle heavily lost and retreated. A less decisive action was fought at Koliabar. Subsequently at Sala, the Ahoms were put to flight⁴⁷. The invaders remained in undisturbed possession of the country they had occupied. They hurriedly built a road from their capital in Koch Bihar to Narayanpur in North Lakhimpur and moved to Narayanpur and fortified it. Suklenmung now made supreme efforts, mustered his forces, cut off the enemy's communications. Attempting to take Ahom positions by storm, the enemy suffered defeat and retreated with heavy loss⁴⁸. Suklenmung regained his lost possessions and performed the Rikkhvan ceremony⁴⁹.

In 1548 there was a terrible earthquake. A conspiracy by Dighalmar Sandikai was unearthed and the conspirators were put to death. The king at their request aided the Banpara Nagas against the Banchang Nagas who were defeated. Suklenmung

44. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

45. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, p. 23, Assam Buranji.

46. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 98.

47. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, pp. 79-ff.

48. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji (S.M.)*, p. 30.

49. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, p. 81.

was the first king to strike coins. This was indicative of greater intercourse with the countries west of Assam. In 1552 the king died⁵⁰.

Sukhampha : Sukhampha was also known as the Khora Rajā. He hurt his foot, while out hunting elephants⁵¹. Fond of sport, the king used to be present at 'Kheddas' or elephant-catching operations. Seven princes plotted against him but were mercifully pardoned. This unusual clemency failed and when they rebelled again, they were put to death⁵².

In 1562 a Koch army under their General named Tipu advanced as far as the Dikhu. In the subsequent engagement that followed, the Ahoms lost. Next year Chilari himself came up and the Ahoms were routed. The king, it is said, was alarmed when a kite had carried off one of his ornaments lying on the river bank, while he was bathing and considered this to be an adverse omen, foreboding the success of Chilari, "the king of kites"⁵³. The Ahom king with his nobles fled to Charai-Kharang in Namrup. The Koches plundered the country and Chilari entered Garhgaon. Later the Burha Gohain, Aikhem, came suing for peace, which was granted on acknowledgment of Koch supremacy, cession of considerable territory on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, delivery of sons of chief nobles as hostages⁵⁴ and delivery of sixty elephants, sixty pieces of cloth and gold and silver as indemnity.

After Chilari left Sukhampha returned to his capital, instituted an enquiry into the causes of Ahom reverses, dismissed the Burha Gohain for negligence in defence preparations, appointed one Kankham in his place, ordered elaborate fortifications and military and defence arrangements. Narayanpur was recovered. Sala was occupied. Forts were constructed at the mouth of the Dikhu and at Sala. Hostages taken by the Koches were returned. A number of Koch artisans came with the Ahom hostages, including potters skilled in the art of making images

50. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 99.

51. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 24.

52. Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 99-ff.

53. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 26.

54. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, pp. 87-ff.

of the Durga and other Hindu deities. Finally the Koches under Tipu and Bhitarul were defeated at the mouth of the Dhansiri in 1570. In 1577 rebels against the Koch king, Nar Narayan numbering more than 1,400 were given political asylum and settled in Ahom territory by Sukhampha. In 1585 the Koch king, Raghu Deb gave his daughter Sankala in marriage to Sukhampha with dowry of elephants, horses and a hundred domestics. Sukhampha gave in return twentytwo elephants and twelve horses⁵⁵.

In 1563 the Chutiyas carried out raiding expedition. The Bar Sandhikai marched to Sadiya and defeated the Chutiyas, killing a thousand and taking three thousand prisoners. There was also an invasion by a Dhekeri Raja from Nowgong Chapari, which ended in the rout of the invading force⁵⁶. There was a successful expedition against a chief named Bhela Raja whose capital was occupied by the Ahoms. An expedition against the Aitonia Papuk and Khamteng Nagas was successful as also another against a rebellious grandson of a Bhuiya Chief named Pratap Rai. A Naga named Phusenta was defeated. In 1576 the Nara Raja of Mungjang advanced upto Khamjang but hostilities were avoided under a treaty whereby Sukhampha paid 16,000 rupees. Nara Raja having failed to fulfil his part of the treaty, hostilities ensued ending ultimately in the defeat of the Nara Raja's forces near the Sessa River⁵⁷. In 1574 there was a virulent epidemic of small-pox. In 1596 there was a bad earthquake in which one of the king's palaces collapsed. The king married a number of wives. The palace he built at Sonapur and the one at Salakhtali were destroyed by lightning and by fire respectively. The Vaishnava tents were being preached and propagated by disciples of Sankar Deb and Madhab Deb, numerous Sattras were being set up and many people including some of the highest officials embraced the Mahapurusia Dharma. Sukhampha died in 1603⁵⁸.

55. Gait, History of Assam, pp. 101-103.

56. S. K. Bhuyan, Assam Buranji (S.M.), p. 41.

57. Gait, History of Assam, pp. 100, 102-ff.

58. Ibid., pp. 102-104.

Section 2

THE PERIOD OF THE MUHAMMADAN WARS

Susengpha—Pratap Singh (1603-1641) : Susengpha was also known as Burha Raja, as he was already advanced in age when he ascended the throne. For his wisdom, he was called Buddha Swarga Narayan¹ and for his great deeds and exploits and prowess, he was called Pratap Singh. Jasa Manik, Raja of Jaintia offered Pratap Singh his daughter, asking him to fetch her by a route through the Kachari territory of the Kachari Raja, Pratap Narayan². Pratap Narayan refused necessary permission and raided Ahom territory. In 1606 Pratap Singh sent troops to Raha. The Kalharis retreated to Maibong. Pratap Singh sent fresh reinforcements up the Dhansiri valley. The Jaintia princess was ultimately successfully brought to Ahom country through Raha³. The strong garrison left at Raha in charge of Sundar Gohain was put to flight by the Kacharis under Bhim Darpa, Pratap Narayan's eldest son. Sundar was amongst the killed⁴. The disaster was due to Sundar's indifference for which the responsibility was of his son Akhek who poisoned his mind against the king⁵. Pratap Singh came to terms with Pratap Narayan by giving him a daughter of one of his chief nobles. Indra Ballabh who succeeded the Kachari king Bhimbal in 1637 sent envoys to Pratap Singh to enlist his friendship. His requests did not find favour in the Ahom Court, as the same were considered not to be couched in sufficiently respectful terms⁶.

Pratap Singh married Mangaldahi, the daughter of the Koch king Parikshit by giving twentythree elephants and receiving with the princess, twenty female slaves and six families of domestics. In 1615 brother of Parikshit, Bali Narayan, defeated by Muham-

1. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 27.

2. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji (S.M.)*, p. 50.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, p. 29.

5. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 51-ff.

6. Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 107, 118.

madans, was given shelter by Pratap Singh⁷. Also a Muhammadan trader, suspected of being a spy, was murdered near Koliabar and his two boats were looted⁸. Shekh Qasim, the Governor of Bengal sent a punitive expedition to invade the Ahom country under Saiad Hakim and Saiad Aba Bakr with upwards of ten thousand horse and foot and four hundred large ships, accompanied by Sattrajit, the Thanadar of Pandu and Gauhati and also by Akhek Gohain. The invaders reached Koliabar and won the first battle against the Ahoms. Another Ahom army came, but its commander being timid, was superseded; his successor surprised the Muhammadans in a night attack both by land and water and totally defeated the Muhammadans. Saiad Aba Bakr and other leaders were killed⁹; Sattrajit's son was sacrificed to the Goddess Kamakhya¹⁰. Elephants, horses, warships, boats, cannon, guns etc., fell into Ahom hands. Pratap Singh triumphantly returned to the capital and performed the Rikkhvan ceremony. Bali Narayan was installed as tributary Raja of Darrang with the title Dharma Narayan¹¹.

In 1617 Pratap Singh, accompanied by Dharma Narayan and other chiefs including the Dimaura Raja advanced with an army towards Hajo. Pandu was taken and fortified. The Muhammadans defeated at Agiathuti retreated to Hajo. Reinforcement with a thousand horse, a thousand matchlock men and over two hundred boats and war sloops came to the Muhammadans. Despite royal instructions to the contrary, some hot-headed Ahom commanders went to the attack prematurely and invested Hajo. The attack and the siege failed; the Ahoms retreated to Srighat and were defeated in several engagements, with a large number killed and wounded. Pratap Singh ordered the scattered forces to rally at Samdhara. After an enquiry, officers

-
7. M. S. Assam Buranji (D.H.A.S. No. 58) f. 24b, f. 25A.
 8. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, Assam Buranji, p. 30; M. S. Assam Buranji, p. 30; M.S. Assam Buranji (D.H.A.S. No. 58) f. 25b.
 9. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, Assam Buranji, p. 30.
 10. S. K. Bhuyan, Assam Buranji (S.M.), p. 59.
 11. Gait, History of Assam, p. 108, Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, Assam Buranji, p. 29.

found to have neglected king's orders were beheaded or starved to death or confined in royal pigsties¹². A new post of Bar Phukan or Governor of the conquered provinces west of Koliabar was created ; Langi Panisiya who rallied the fugitive soldiers at Samdhara was made the first incumbent¹³. Another new post of Bar Barua was also created, the first incumbent being Momai Tamuli, the king's uncle. The tracts east of Koliabar outside the jurisdictions of the Bar Gohain were placed under the administration of the Bar Barua¹⁴.

In 1619 hostilities were renewed ; the Muhammadans besieged Dharma Narayan ; the Ahoms came to his aid. In an engagement the Muhammadans were worsted and fled leaving cannon, guns, horses, buffaloes and cattle. Lakshmi Narayan, Raja of Koch Bihar, with the consent of the Nawab of Dacca, sent one Biru Qazi for peace negotiations. Sattrajit, Thanadar of Pandu, wanted to make friends with the Ahoms and exchanged presents with Pratap Singh¹⁵. The Nawab of Dacca sent fresh messengers. Biru Qazi was confined¹⁶ and these messengers got no audience of the king. Sattrajit through the Bar Phukan mis-represented the mission of the messengers. Sattrajit did not arrest one Masu Gobind who conspired against Pratap Singh and fled¹⁷. The Bar Phukan who came under Sattrajit's influence did not arrest him as desired by the king ; on the contrary, exchanged presents with him at Umananda opposite Gauhati¹⁸. The Bar Phukan was imprisoned. Neog succeeded him as Bar Phukan¹⁹.

Fresh frictions arose after some years. Some Muhammadan subjects were killed in Ahom territory. Pratap Singh disclaimed any knowledge. A defaulting fiscal officer of the Nawab,

12. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, pp. 103-ff.

13. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 31, S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji*, (S.M.), p. 62.

14. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 31; S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), p. 64.

15. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), pp. 62-ff; M.S. *Assam Buranji* (D.H.A.S. No. 57) i-f. 11a, f. 11b.

16. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), p. 62.

17. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), p. 62.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 64-ff.

19. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, p. 110.

Harikesh was sheltered by Pratap Singh who refused extradition on the ground that Ahom subjects were being given asylum by the Nawab. A Muhammadan force sent to seize Harikesh was defeated²⁰. Pratap Singh sent presents and induced frontier chiefs of Dimarua, Hojai, Barduar, etc., to join him and determined to carry the war to the enemy's territory, he reduced a number of Muhammadan forts ; Hajo was also invested. The Muhammadans were defeated in several engagements and large booty including 360 cannon and guns was captured²¹. At the urgent request from Abdussalam, Governor of Hajo, large reinforcements including one thousand horse, one thousand matchlock men, 210 war sloops and boats were despatched from Dacca. The Ahoms were defeated at Pandu, were driven from Agiathuti and running short of ammunition were forced to retreat from Srighat also. When reinforcements arrived for the Ahoms, they drove the Muhammadan fleet back to Sualkuchi. A European in the employ of the Muhammadans strayed away to shoot birds, was captured and sent to the Ahom king, this being the first record of a European entering Ahom territory.

Zainul-abidin left to join Abdussalam at Hajo. The fleet remained in charge of Muhammad Salih Kambu, Sattrajit and Majlis Bayazid. The Ahoms with nearly five hundred ships gained a decisive victory over the hostile fleet, the greater part of the same including 300 boats, three hundred cannon and guns etc. falling into their hands²². Hajo was closely invested ; the enemy was reduced to great straits ; Abdussalam agreed to surrender. Abdussalam with his brother and a considerable part of his forces on arrival at the Ahom camp were arrested, and sent up country²³. The leaders were settled in Silpani and other places and given land and slaves and the common soldiers were distributed as slaves among Ahom officers and nobles. Saiad Zainul-abidin, with the rest of the garrison attempting to force their way out, was routed and killed. A large quantity of loot including two thousand guns and seven hundred horses was

20. S. K. Bhuyan, Assam Buranji (S.M.), p. 68.

21. Golap Chandra Barua, Ahom Buranji, pp. 113-ff.

22. S. K. Bhuyan, Assam Buranji (S.M.), p. 69.

23. Ibid., pp. 69-ff.

taken by the Ahoms at Hajo. The Bar Phukan, who mis-appropriated a number of pearls and other presents sent by the Muhammadans for the king for securing favourable terms of surrender, was arrested and put to death. By and large, the Muhammadan yoke in Kamrup and Goalpara was thrown off²⁴.

The Nawab of Dacca sent Mir Zainuddin at the head of a big force of four thousand matchlock-men and fifteen hundred horse, together with large stores of grain, ammunitions, weapons and money. Zainuddin set himself to restore Muhammadan supremacy in Lower Assam. The Goalpara Zamindars on the South bank submitted, so did the leading Zamindars on the North bank. Sattrajit was arrested and sent to Dacca. The Ahoms collected a force of twelve thousand and a numerous fleet. In several engagements they were defeated. The Muhammadans crossed the Monas. Their army was "a great host". Muhammad Zaman after successful encounters against the Ahoms, entrenched himself at Bishenpur for the rainy season to pass²⁵. Reinforced, the Ahoms strength mounted to forty thousand men who encamped within three miles of Zaman's Camp.

The Ahom Generals to prevent junction of the main body of the Muhammadans with Zaman's forces at the close of the rains, made an attack on Zaman's position ; they had, however, to retreat with heavy losses. The Muhammadans could unite their forces and inflicted a crushing defeat on the Ahom army now depleted and entrenched at Barepaita²⁶. The scattered remnant fled to Srighat where Pratap Singh was encamping. The Muhammadans advanced to Pandu, captured the Ahom fort at Agiathuti and signally defeated the Ahom Navy at Srighat²⁷. The Kajali fort at the mouth of the Kallang was taken. Nearly 500 sloops and 300 guns fell into the hands of the Muhammadans. Koliabar became the rallying point of the fleeing Ahom force²⁸. Pratap Singh contemplated removing to the hills with his valuables from the capital. The Muhammadans pursued Dharma

24. Gait, History of Assam, p. 114.

25. Golap Chandra Barua, Ahom Buranji, p. 122.

26. S. K. Bhuyan, Assam Buranji (S.M.), p. 71.

27. Ibid, p. 71.

28. Ibid, p. 72.

Narayan who was killed. They consolidated their rule in Kamrup and effected a financial settlement of the country²⁹.

In 1683 the Muhammadans advanced up the Brahmaputra and encamped at the mouth of the Bharali. The Ahoms entrenched themselves on the opposite bank. To gain and complete preparations, the Ahoms secured armistice by offering to supply elephants, aloes, wood and other articles³⁰. The Bar Barua returned to attack at the opportune time; the invaders defeated, retired to Gauhati³¹; Kajali was reoccupied by the Ahoms. A treaty was negotiated under which the Barnadi on the north bank of the Brahmaputra and the Asurar Ali on the south were fixed as the boundary between the Ahom and the Muhammadan territories³². For twenty years the Muhammadans remained in undisputed possession of the country west of this boundary and the traces of their system of administration there still linger³³.

Pratap Singh was capable, energetic, ambitious, vigorous in war and efficient in peace. He put down several conspiracies with severity. The petty chiefs or Bhuiyas who gave trouble were brought under effective control, their power broken. One of them, Uday who declared himself independent, was arrested and executed. The Bhuiyas were dispersed³⁴. A census of people was taken. People were also divided off into clans with officers above them³⁵. To protect the Kachari frontier, four hundred families of Ahoms from Abhaypur, Dihing, Namdang were settled around Marangi. Families were transferred from thickly populated areas of Lower Assam to sparsely populated areas higher up the river. Immigration of artisans of all kinds was encouraged. The king was alive to the need of developing backward tracts. The country round the Dihing was opened out by roads to Charaideo and Dauka. The towns of Abhaypur and

29. Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 117-ff.

30. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji (S.M.)*, pp. 72-73.

31. *Ibid*, p. 73.

32. *Ibid*, pp. 73-ff.

33. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 118.

34. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji (S.M.)*, p. 76.

35. *Ibid*.

Mathurapur were built. Jamiraguri and the palace at Garhgaon were protected by embankments ; the Ladaigarh was constructed as an embankment for defence. The embankment, Dopgarh was put up as a protection against Naga raids ; no Naga was to cross it, unaccompanied by a peon or Katakis³⁶. The king also thought of constructing an embankment on the Kachari frontier ; but the nobles advised otherwise, saying that the kingdom was a growing one in that direction³⁷.

Katakis were appointed to watch over Miris and Daflas and report their movements to the authorities as a precautionary measure. Once during this reign the Ahoms had to retreat while attempting a reprisal on these hillmen after a raid by them. Many forts were erected e.g., at Samdhara, Safrai, Sita. A stone bridge was built over the Darika river ; many bamboo bridges were made. Numerous markets were established and trade flourished during peace time. Addicted to elephant hunting, the king used to be present at the 'Kheddas'. He came to own a thousand elephants and assumed the title of Gajpati and renamed Jamirguri as Gajpur³⁸. 'Padishahnamah' describes him as "an infidel who has a thousand elephants and a hundred thousand foot". He had powers of organisation ; kept an eye on all branches of administration ; maintained his authority firmly ; meted out punishment to all including the highest nobles, should he consider they deserved punishment. The Bharali Barua who very much enjoyed his confidence was nevertheless sentenced to death on proof of embezzlement and misconduct.

The Ahom language was the medium of conversation between the king and his nobles. Hindus were often appointed as envoys (Bairagis and Katakis) for their intelligence in preference to the Ahoms³⁹. The Brahmanical influence increased. Hindu priests were encouraged. The tank of Misagarh was consecrated by Brahmins. Siva temples were erected at Dergaon and Bishnath ; grants of land were made to Brahmans and Hindu

36. S. K. Bhuyan, Assam Buranji (S.M.), p. 68.

37. Gait, History of Assam, p. 120.

38. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, p. 31.

39. S. K. Bhuyan, Assam Buranji (S.M.), pp. 46-ff.

temples⁴⁰. When a son of Pratap Singh died after he had made gifts to Brahmans, he persecuted the Brahmans for a time. At the instigation of Brahmans, the Mahapurushias were persecuted; several of their Gosains were put to death⁴¹. The Somdeo continued to be worshipped. Before battles Deodhais or tribal priests continued to be called to tell the omens by examining the legs of fowls⁴². Lightning destroyed two palaces, the Somdeo's house, the temple at Bishnath and the king's elephant house or 'falkhana'.

According to the 'Padishahnamah', the Ahoms of this period shaved the head and clipped off beard; the chiefs travelled on elephants or country ponies; the army consisted of foot soldiers; the fleet was large and well fitted out; the soldiers used bows and arrows and matchlocks and were very brave in naval engagements; on the march they quickly and dexterously fortified their encampments with mud-walls and bamboo palisades and surrounded the whole with a ditch⁴³. After a very eventful reign of 38 years, Pratap Singh died in 1641.

Surampha: Pratap Singh had three sons, Surampha, Sutyinpha and Sai. Sai conspired to usurp the throne but Surampha assisted by Sutyinpha could frustrate his designs. On Pratap Singh's death the chief nobles offered the throne to Sutyinpha but in deference to his elder brother, he declined and Surampha became the king. Surampha was bereft of morals. Having first lived with one of his father's wives, he married a married woman of the Chetia clan after poisoning her husband, declared a nephew of her first husband, now adopted by her, as the heir-apparent to the throne, and on his death, asked the chief nobles to furnish a son for burial with his dead adopted son. Exasperated beyond endurance, the nobles approached and persuaded Sutyinpha to supersede his brother; Sutyinpha agreed reluctantly. A body of armed men surprised Surampha who

40. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 33.

41. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji (S.M.)*, p. 76.

42. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 121.

43. Blochmann, *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1872, p. 55.

was deposed, removed and ultimately poisoned to death⁴⁴. The Kachari envoys sent to congratulate the king on his accession were ignominiously expelled as the letter they brought bore the seal of a Singh (an independent ruler) and not of a Phukan (a subordinate Chief)⁴⁵. For his deposition, Surampha is known as the Bhaga Raja.

Sutyinpha :

Sutyinpha had indifferent health and suffered from curvature of the spine. He was known as Nariya Raja and was sometimes nicknamed 'Kekora' (crooked). In 1646 an expedition was sent to subjugate the Daflas. The troops were so harassed by the Daflas that they had to retreat. The Burha Gohain and the Barpatra Gohain were dismissed⁴⁶ and were made to appear in public in female attire. The second expedition next year was successful and the Daflas aided by the Miris were brought under full submission⁴⁷. An expedition against the Khamting Nagas was fairly successful. The Tipam Raja who withheld payment of tribute was put to death⁴⁸.

The installation of this king was attended with great pomp. There were amusements ; there were fights between elephants, between an elephant and a tiger and between a tiger and a crocodile. He put to death officials suspected of being opposed to his usurpation of the throne. Instigated by one of his wives, sister of the Burha Gohain, he had his son by his Chief Queen, daughter of Barpatra Gohain, and Barpatra Gohain himself treacherously killed and executed respectively for suspected conspiracy. The scheming wife was made the Chief Queen ; the Barpatra Gohain's daughter was deposed from her rank of Chief Queen⁴⁹. The new Chief Queen sought to get another son of the king, Khahua Gohain also murdered but was unsu-

44. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 36; S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji (S.M.)*, p. 79.

45. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji (S.M.)*, pp. 78-ff.

46. *Ibid*, p. 80.

47. *Ibid*, p. 81.

48. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 124.

49. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji (S.M.)*, pp. 79-ff.

ccessful. Her son, Kukure Khowa Gohain by his cruelty⁵⁰ and overbearing and insulting behaviour alienated the people and the nobles, who were unable to secure any redress from the king. Further, the sick king could not attend to public business and became very unpopular. The nobles headed by the Burha Gohain deposed him. The king was poisoned and according to some, the Chief Queen, who was responsible for so much mischief, was buried alive with him in his grave⁵¹. The Kachari king objected to being described as "established and protected by the Ahoms" but waived his objection on promise of an Ahom prince in marriage⁵². Sutyippha's son Sutamala was made king in his stead.

Jayadhvaj Singh (1648-1663) : Sutamala assumed the Hindu name, Jayadhvaj Singh. On his accession, entertainment, e.g., fights between wild animals, was arranged. Somdeo was placed on the throne ; guns were fired, bands played and largess was distributed. Presents were made to Brahmans. The Kachari king, the Daflas, the Muhammadan Governor at Gauhati, the Raja of Jaintia sent congratulations and presents. The Jaintia Raja's request for return of the provinces of Dimurua and Kuphanali ceded to Ahoms previously, was turned down. Several conspiracies were detected and the conspirators punished with ferocious severity. The Burha Gohain who was implicated was tortured with others by placing live coal in mouth. For helping accomplices escape, the Bar Gohain was stripped naked, whipped and made to eat the flesh of his own son and tortured to death⁵³.

In 1650 the Lakma Nagas committed a raid and an expedition was sent to punish them. They were put to flight ; but fresh raids were perpetrated and another expedition was sent. A detachment of Dafla archers accompanied the Ahoms. The Lakmas were armed with spears. Fortunes changed as the operations continued, neither party giving way. When the nimble

50. M. S. Assam Buranji (D.H.A.S. No. 44) ; S. K. Bhuyan ; Assam Buranji (S.M.), p. 83.

51. Gait, History of Assam, p. 124.

52. S. K. Bhuyan, Assam Buranji (S.M.), pp. 81-ff.

53. Gait, History of Assam, p. 125.

Lakmas took refuge in the hills, the Ahom soldiers found it difficult to follow them on account of the stony ground to which their bare feet were unaccustomed ; but the Lakmas' houses and stores of grains were destroyed⁵⁴. The Naga Chief eventually made his submission and agreed to pay tribute and in return was given a hill the possession of which was the subject-matter of a previous dispute⁵⁵. In 1655 the Miris raided and killed two Ahom subjects. The Miris were defeated with heavy loss ; twelve Miri villages were destroyed ; they agreed to pay an annual tribute of bison, horses, tortoises, swords, and yellow beads (probably amber) and gave up 12 men to the Ahoms.

In 1647 the Raja of Jaintia seized an Ahom trader ; Jayadhvaj Singh arrested Jaintia traders at Sonapur ; diplomatic relations ceased for eight years, whereafter the Jaintia Raja having made overtures to the Bar Phukan at Gauhati, friendly relations were re-established⁵⁶. In 1658 Pramata Rai, grandson of the Jaintia Raja, Jasa Manta Rai, rebelled, and the tributary Chief of Gobha having turned down his request to come to his aid, destroyed four of his villages. The Gobha Chief sought help of the Kacharis who were prepared to help ; but the local Ahom officials said that the Ahoms were the paramount power and their protection should be sought. Accordingly he went with seven hundred men to Jayadhvaj Singh and begged for help. The Bar Phukan on orders from the king established him in Khagarijan (modern Nowgong)⁵⁷.

Shah Jahan, the Mughal Emperor of Delhi fell sick in 1658 and Pran Narayan, Raja of Koch Bihar wanted to take advantage of the confusion caused by the wars of succession to throw off the Muhammadan yoke. He raided Goalpara ; two local chiefs who fled to Beltola got Jayadhvaj Singh's protection ; Pran Narayan's army defeated the Muhammadan Fauzadar of Kamrup and Hajo, who retreated to Gauhati⁵⁸. Jayadhvaj Singh, alert to take advantage of the dissensions amongst the Mughals,

54. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), p. 85.

55. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 126.

56. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), pp. 85-ff.

57. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, pp. 156-ff.

58. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), p. 89.

assembled a strong army and advanced towards Gauhati ; the Fauzadar had already fled to Dacca⁵⁹ ; twenty cannon, horses, guns etc., fell into the king's hands. Pran Narayan proposed offensive and defensive alliance against the Muhammadans and division of their possessions but his advances were rejected⁶⁰. The Ahoms marched against the Koches, drove them across the Sankosh and for nearly three years became the undisputed masters of the whole of the Brahmaputra valley⁶¹. A number of villagers of Lower Assam were transported to the eastern provinces.

According to 'Alamgirnamah' the Ahoms plundered and laid waste the country to the south of the Brahmaputra valley almost as far as Dacca itself. When Mir Jumlah became Governor of Bengal, Jayadhvaj Singh sent an envoy to him to say that he was prepared to hand over to an officer of the Governor the country he had taken possession of to protect the same from the Koches⁶². Rashid Khan was deputed for the purpose ; the Ahoms abandoned Dhubri and fell back beyond the Manas river. This retreat was not to the liking of the Ahom King who got the two Phukans responsible arrested and chained, ordered the strengthening of the Jogighopa fort at the mouth of the Manas and the construction of a new fort on opposite bank of the Brahmaputra and asked Rashid Khan to withdraw. Mir Jumlah took the field to "punish the lawless Zamindars of the province, especially those of Assam and Magh (Arracan) who had caused injury and molestation to the Muslims" ; occupied Koch Bihar⁶³, left a garrison of five thousand men there and on 4th January, 1662 set forth on his invasion of Assam. The route of march lay through dense jungle and numerous rivers and the journey was most tedious, the daily marches rarely exceeding five miles⁶⁴.

Mir Jumlah arrived at Jogighopa with twelve thousand horse and thirty thousand foot. The garrison, twelve thousand strong, suffering from a violent epidemic disease, probably Cholera, was

59. Ibid.

60. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), pp. 90-ff.

61. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 128.

62. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), p. 92.

63. Ibid, p. 93.

64. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 129.

overawed, gave a feeble resistance and evacuated and retreated to Saraighat and Pandu⁶⁵. The author of the 'Fathiyah-i-Ibriyah' gives a graphic description of this large and high Ahom fort at Jogighopa on the Brahmaputra. Mir Jumlah divided his army into two divisions, one marching up the South bank and the other up the north bank. The fleet kept pace with the army. There were the large vessels or 'ghrabs' carrying fourteen guns and fifty or sixty men each towed by 'Kosahs' or lighter boats. European, particularly Portuguese officers were in charge of ghrabs. Jayadhvaj Singh despatched reinforcements to Saraighat and Pandu. The Ahoms retreated with losses. The fort at Saraighat, protected by a palisade of large logs of wood was demolished, Gauhati was occupied ; Beltola fort also succumbed.

The Ahoms fled to Samdhara⁶⁶ and made strenuous efforts to check the further progress of the Muhammadans. The fortifications at Samdhara and Simalagarh on the opposite bank were strengthened and surrounded by trenches, in front of which holes were dug and planted with 'Panjis'. The Darrang Raja and the Dimurua Raja made their submission to Mir Jumlah. After halting at Gauhati for three days, Mir Jumlah started on his march for Garhgaon, the Assam Capital.

The Muhammadan force arrived near the Ahom fort of Simalgarh, situated at a very strong, strategic position, protected by the Brahmaputra and a range of hills and walls with battlements with numerous cannon mounted thereon. There were trenches outside the walls and pits studded with 'panjis'. The walls of the fort were so thick that cannon balls made but little impression. The fort was besieged and when the final assault was delivered, the resistance was feeble and the enemy having scaled the wall and broken open the gate, the defenders fled leaving their guns and war material to fall into the victors' hands. Mir Jumlah was surprised at the strength of the fortifications and considering the bravery of the Ahom soldiers at this period, perhaps it was because of timid and inefficient leadership that they did not make a more stubborn resistance⁶⁷.

65.. S. K. Bhuyan, Assam Buranji (S.M.), p. 93.

66. Ibid, pp. 93-ff.

67. Gait, History of Assam, pp. 131-ff.

The garrison at Samdhara destroyed their store of gun-powder and fled.⁶⁸ Mir Jumlah placed a garrison there and a Muhammadan Faujadar at Koliabar. Marauding was forbidden; villagers brought in supplies freely. Mir Jumlah resumed his march from Koliabar. The Ahoms with seven or eight hundred ships attacked the Muhammadan fleet. When re-inforcements from the army which was marching along a level route some distance inland, arrived, the Ahoms took fright and fled; the Muhammadans captured three hundred of their ships. The march was continued and the Ahoms evacuated Salagarh.⁶⁹ Jayadhvaj Singh's peace overtures through officials at this stage were rejected as these were suspected to be delaying tactics of the Ahoms.

The retreating Ahom force under the Bar Gohain on the north bank laid waste the country and forced the inhabitants to leave their villages to deprive the Muhammadans of supplies of any kind. On royal orders, the Ahom commanders concentrated with their forces at Lakhau or Lakhugarh, only to retreat further up on Mir Jumlah's arrival. Jayadhvaj Singh ordered collection of a thousand boats to remove his property, left Burha Gohain and some others at Garhgaon and accompanied by a number of nobles and five thousand men fled to Namrup.⁷⁰ He sent envoys with presents, suing for peace but his overtures were rejected. Mir Jumlah left the fleet at Lakhau. He was joined by deserters from the Ahom cause and with his land forces he set out for Garhgaon, through Debargaon, Gajpur. On 17th March, 1662, the Nawab entered Garhgaon and occupied the Raja's palace.⁷¹ During the whole expedition the Muhammadans had taken 675 cannon including one which threw balls weighing more than two hundred pounds, 9,000 matchlocks and other guns, large quantity of gun powder, iron shields, sulphur and lead and more than a thousand ships, many accommodating from sixty to eighty sailors.

68. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), p. 94.

69. *Ibid.*

70. M.S. *Assam Buranji* (D.H.A.S. No. 44); S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), p. 95.

71. M.S. *Assam Buranji* (D.H.A.S. No. 44).

Mir Jumlah opened a mint at Garhgaon and caused money to be struck. The Nawab camped at Mathurapur. A garrison was left at Garhgaon. Many outposts were established e.g., at Ramdang, Trimohini, Gajpur, Dewalgaon, Daspani, Silpani, Abhaypur and from Lakhau westward along the Brahmaputra all the way to Gauhati. 'Maidams' (burial vaults) of Burha Raja, Khora Raja, Bhaga Raja and Naria Raja were opened up and riches therefrom taken out.⁷²

The rains set in ; locomotion became difficult ; the troubles of the invaders began. The Ahoms had not been crushed and were not inclined to submit to permanent occupation of their country by the Muhammadans. They cut off communications and supplies, seized and killed stragglers from the main body, harassed the Muhammadan garrisons by repeated surprises, specially at night. Inhabitants of villages also joined these operations. Supplies could not be brought from Lakhau ; it became difficult to maintain the outposts which were withdrawn to Garhgaon and Mathurapur which alone remained in Mir Jumlah's hands, but closely invested by the Ahoms who repeatedly attacked Garhgaon ; the Muhammadans were reduced to severe straits.⁷³ The only food available was coarse rice, and limes.⁷⁴ Salt sold at thirty rupees per seer, butter at fourteen rupees a seer and opium at sixteen rupees a tola. Famine conditions prevailed. The besieged Mughals had to feed on horses and cows. Fever and dysentery prevailed. Men, horses and draught cattle died. The soldiers and commanders alike wanted to return home.

At the close of rains, communications could be re-established with the fleet and large quantities of fresh supplies arrived. The Mughals quickly recovered their morale ; their cavalry were on the move. The Baduli Phukan was worsted in engagement and deserted to Mir Jumlah and submitted a plan for hunting down Jayadhvaj Singh.⁷⁵ Again there was trouble ;

72. Ibid; S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), p. 96.

73. Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 135-137.

74. M.S. *Assam Buranji*, (D.H.A.S. No. 44); S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), p. 97.

75. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), p. 97.

there was a famine in Bengal ; supplies did not come ; Mir Jumlah fell seriously ill ; his troops were discontented.

The Ahom king threatened to leave the country in case the land could not be cleared of the enemy. "I go to Nara," he said.⁷⁶ Peace overtures were renewed. At last Mir Jumlah listened to Raja's overtures and peace was concluded. Jayadhvaj Singh would send a daughter to the Imperial harem ;⁷⁷ twenty thousand tolas of gold, six times this quantity of silver and forty elephants would be delivered at once ; three hundred thousand tolas of Silver and ninety elephants to be supplied within twelve months ; six sons of the chief nobles to be made over as hostages pending supply of silver and elephants within twelve months, as stipulated ; twenty elephants to be supplied annually ; the country west of the Bharali river on the north bank of the Brahmaputra and of the Kallang on the south, to be ceded to the Emperor of Delhi ;⁷⁸ all prisoners and the family of the Baduli Phukan to be given up.

On 9th January, 1663, Mir Jumlah gave the order to his army to return to Bengal. On the return journey his army was not harassed by the enemy, but was frightened by a terrible storm of thunder and lightning followed by a severe earthquake, the shocks of which continued for half an hour. Rashid Khan was installed Faujdar at Gauhati. The Nawab who was seriously ill grew worse and died just before reaching Dacca on 30th March, 1663.

Mir Jumlah was accompanied on his invasion of Assam by a writer, Shihabuddin who wrote a detailed, critical and interesting account of the expedition and of the people and the country. This account mentions many matters on which the indigenous records are silent.

Jayadhvaj Singh returned, he dismissed the Bar Gohain beating him ignominiously and similarly dealt with officers who

76. M.S. Assam Buranji (D.H.A.S. No. 44).

77. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, Assam Buranji, p. 39; S. K. Bhuyan, Assam Buranji (S.M.), pp. 100-ff.

78. M.S. Assam Buranji (D.H.A.S. No. 44); S. K. Bhuyan, Assam Buranji (S.M.), p. 102.

faltered in the conduct of the war. He constructed a stronghold at Namrup and collected a quantity of treasure there. He came under the influence of Brahmans; became disciple of Niranjan Bapu and established him as the first Gosain of the great Auniati Sattrā; hearing of his fame, brought Banamali Gosain of Koch and gave him land for a Sattrā at Jakhala-bandha.⁷⁹ Instigated by Brahmans, he persecuted the Mahapurushias and killed some of their leading members. The chief Queen and her married sister with whom the king had a scandalous intrigue and whom he married later, brought him completely under their control. Jayadvaj Singh died in November, 1663.

Chakradhvaj Singh (1663-1669) :

Jayadvaj Singh left no sons; the nobles called in the Saring Raja and placed him on the throne. The Deodhais christened him Supungmung; he assumed the Hindu name Chakradhvaj Singh. At the ceremony of installation, Brahmans and Ganaks were entertained and given valuable presents. The Jaintia Raja, the Koch Raja of Darrang sent envoys conveying congratulations. The Muhammadan officials arrived with presents and a reminder that the balance of the indemnity was overdue. They were received coolly⁸⁰ and were told that their master had not respected the boundary agreed upon nor released prisoners. Aurangzeb promised to make amends, but Chakradhvaj withheld payment. Rashid Khan, Faujdar of Gauhati sent a messenger who was refused audience for not agreeing to make the customary obeisance on entering the royal presence until he at last gave way, but could not get any portion of the unpaid indemnity,⁸¹ on the excuse that the treasury was empty and that the elephants were not yet properly trained. Neog Phukan and others found to be in treasonable correspondence with the enemy were put to death.

79. M.S. Assam Buranji (D.H.A.S. No. 44); S. K. Bhuyan, Assam Buranji (S.M.), pp. 88-ff.

80. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, Assam Buranji, p. 40.

81. M.S. Assam Buranji (D.H.A.S. No. 44); S. K. Bhuyan, Assam Buranji (S.M.), p. 105.

In 1667, Rashid Khan's successor, Saiad Firuz Khan demanded payment⁸² in strong language. Chakradhvaj Singh had repaired the forts at the Samdhara and Patakallang and restored efficiency in the army and on receiving Firuz Khan's letter, made up his mind to fight despite nobles' advice to the contrary. The Deodhais predicted success; sacrifices were made to Indra; a well-equipped army under Lachit, appointed Bar Phukan, set out to wrest Gauhati from the Muhammadans.⁸³ The Muhammadan outposts at Kajali and Bansbari were taken with numerous prisoners, horses, cannon and other booty. The Ahoms constructed forts at Kajali and Latasil. Gauhati and Pandu were invested and captured after a siege of two months. Prisoners taken by the Ahoms were massacred. Warships and reinforcements arrived for the Muhammadans, but they were driven from Agiathuti, suffered defeats, fell back on the Manas river;⁸⁴ here also they were surrounded and worsted, with many killed and captives. The captured officers were sent to Garhgaon.

An Ahom fort was erected near the Mani Karneswar Temple in Kamrup in 1667 A.D. "after the defeat and death of Sana and Saiad Firuz," as recorded in an inscription in Assamese on the Kanai Barasi rock. An old cannon at Silghat and another at Dikom also bear inscriptions which refer to Chakradhvaj Singh's victories. The king was overjoyed and showered presents on his generals. Gauhati was chosen as the headquarters of the Bar Phukan.⁸⁵ Pandu and Saraighat were fortified; prompt arrangements were made for the administration of the conquered territory; a survey was carried out and a census of the population was taken.

In 1668 there were hostilities with the Muhammadans at Rangamati under a Raja named Indra Damān. The Ahoms had to fall back on Saraighat. Aurangzeb appointed Raja Ram Singh to the command of the Imperial army.⁸⁶ Accompanied by

82. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), p. 109.

83. *Ibid*, p. 109.

84. *Ibid*, p. 109-ff.

85. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), p. 111.

86. *Ibid*, p. 112.

Rashid Khan, assisted by troops of the Bengal command, Raja Ram Singh reached Rangamati at the head of 18,000 cavalry and 30,000 infantry, with 15,000 archers from Koch Bihar. The Ahoms opened negotiations to gain time and complete preparations in the meantime. Ram Singh demanded evacuation of the territory west of the Barnadi and the Asurar Ali. The Bar Phukan replied that he would rather fight than yield an inch of the territory which providence had given to his master.⁸⁷ In two battles fought near Tezpur, the Ahoms were worsted, but they gained a naval battle; Ram Singh had to retire to Hajo where he quarrelled with Rashid Khan.⁸⁸ The Muhammadans were also defeated near Sualkuchi, both on land and water. Ram Singh challenged Chakradhvaj Singh to a single combat; the invitation was declined and Ahom generals were ordered to renew attacks. The Ahoms won a double engagement near Sessa, took the fort at Agiathuti and massacred the garrison there. Soon afterwards Ram Singh attacked the Ahom army and routed it.⁸⁹ The Bar Phukan hurried up with reinforcements but had to retreat with the loss of all his ships. Raja Ram Singh opened negotiations for peace; hostilities were suspended for the time being.⁹⁰

In 1665 the Banpara Nagas, attacked by the Banchang Nagas, invoked the assistance of the Ahoms. Two expeditions had to be sent against Banchang Nagas who put up a stubborn resistance from the fort they had erected until cannon were brought up. Their houses and granaries were destroyed and then they submitted. The Miris also raided and destroyed a small expedition against them. The Miris aided by the Daflas and Deo Chutiyas were 7,500 strong, but overawed by a larger force now despatched against them, dispersed. Their villages were sacked and captives were taken.⁹¹

Udayaditya : Soon after suspension of hostilities with the

87. Ibid, pp. 113-ff.

88. Ibid, p. 115.

89. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), pp. 116-ff.

90. Ibid, pp. 117-119.

91. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, pp. 193-ff.

Muhammadans Chakradhvaj Singh died. Chakradhvaj Singh's brother Maju Gohain, Sunyatpha succeeded him and assumed the Hindu name Udayaditya Singh and married his brother's wife. The negotiations with the Muhammadans continued.⁹² But Ram Singh suspecting the sincerity of the Bar Phukan returned to the attack. Udayaditya thereupon renewed the war and ordered the Burha Gohain to march with 20,000 men from Samdhara to Saraighat. The Ahoms were successful on land but their navy was forced to retreat. The Bar Phukan arrived with more ships and now the Muhammadan navy was beaten,⁹³ and a second land victory was gained by the Ahoms. The Garos and the Raja of Rani came to the assistance of the Ahoms. Ram Singh weakened by repeated losses retreated to Rangamati in March 1671.

Udayaditya loaded the Bar Phukan with presents. Hadira opposite Goalpara became the Ahom frontier outpost. Chandra Narayan, grandson of Bali Narayan was installed as tributary Raja of Darrang and Gandharba Narayan as Raja of Beltola. The Bar Barua and the Bar Gohain were ordered to arrange for the defence of Upper Assam. The Muhammadans were evicted from Kamrup ; strong fortifications were constructed at Gauhati.⁹⁴

An expedition of one thousand men under the Bar Barua was sent against the Daflas who refused to pay tribute, raided a village, killed three men and carried off forty women and children. The Daflas hid themselves in dense jungle and wiped off the Bar Barua's advance guard. The Bar Barua twice retreated during the course of the campaign. He was ordered by the king to be stripped naked and put to death but on the intercession of the queen mother was only dismissed and banished.⁹⁵ By this time the Ahoms were able to make their own cannon. A cannon at Gauhati bears an inscription that it was made under the orders of the Sola Dhara Barua in 1672.

A treasure house at Hilika, containing a great store of gold and silver, was burnt down, as a result of the Bharali Barua

92. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), pp. 119-ff.

93. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), pp. 121-124.

94. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 157.

95. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), pp. 124-ff.

carelessly leaving a lighted pipe near inflammable materials. He was compelled to smoke elephants' dung. After cessation of hostilities, vigorous enquiries were set on foot for arresting and deporting to Namrup all chiefs and prominent people who had been disloyal to the Ahom cause.

Chakrapani, a priest and descendant of Sankar Deb was said to be in collusion with the Muhammadans, but the King impressed by accounts of his learning and piety invited him to his presence by promise of pardon, gave him land grant at Samaguri, made him his spiritual preceptor and ordered his officers and people to follow him. The nobles, greatly offended, persuaded his younger brother to conspire with them against the king. The king's brother with his adherents entered the city in the middle of the night by breaking down one of the gates and seized the person of the king who was poisoned.⁹⁶ Chakrapani was impaled and set adrift on the Dikhu river. The king's three wives were put to death. His brother was hailed by the people as the king.

96. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), pp. 126-ff.

SECTION 3

THE CLIMACTERIC OF AHOM RULE

Ramdhvaj : The fratricide ascended the throne and assumed the Hindu name Ramdhvaj. The ring-leader of the conspiracy that made him the king, Debera alias Lachai was made Bar Barua. The Bar Gohain who conspired in favour of the Saring Raja and the Saring Raja were put to death. The Deori Chutiyas who were guilty of insubordination were reduced to order, many of their males were deported and they were made to pay a yearly tribute of boats. The Mishmis raided Ahom territory ; they submitted on the arrival of a strong force and gave up the men responsible for the raid.¹

The king became seriously ill and the question of succession was being hotly discussed by the nobles. The Bar Barua, Debera was bent upon preventing the succession of Udayaditya's son. The Bar Barua collected a band of armed men, killed all those who opposed him or he suspected to be his enemies and caused the king to be poisoned.² The nobles in council decided to raise Udayaditya's son to the throne, but the Bar Barua, helped by his band of armed men, seized and put to death his chief opponents and placed a prince from Samaguri, Suhung on the throne.

Suhung : Suhung took as his chief queen one of the widows of Jayadhvaj Singh. The Tipam Raja, a rival claimant to the throne raised an army but was caught and executed by the Bar Barua who also put to death a number of his private enemies from Gauhati. Suhung finding himself to be merely a puppet wanted to kill this crafty and overbearing Bar Barua who thereupon caused the king to be assassinated after a reign of twentyone days only³.

Gobar : The Bar Barua brought from Tungkhang a

1. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 161.

2. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji (S.M.)*, pp. 128-ff.

3. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 161.

prince named Gobar and made him king ; he asked Bar Gohain at Gauhati to send the Bar Phukan. The Bar Phukan suspecting that his life was in danger induced the Bar Gohain and Sangrai Burha Gohain to join with him in ending the reign of terror⁴ ; they raised an army and marched against the Bar Barua who was captured and executed. Gobar was also taken and put to death after he was king barely for a month.

Sujinpha : After prolonged discussion a prince of the Dihingia clan, a descendant of Suhungmung, the Dihingia Raja, Sujinpha was made king. Large sums of money were distributed and festivities lasted for seven days on the occasion of his installation. The nobles had appointed a new Bar Barua.

The king wanted an oath of fealty from all his officers. Cannon were posted at the gates of the city ; streets were lined with soldiers and officers were called in to take the prescribed oath. Incensed by order, many of the officers entered into a conspiracy with the Burah Gohain but were caught and pardoned on their swearing to be faithful. The oath taken was a two-fold one, one in the presence of Brahmans before a Salgram of Lakshmi Narayan, a copy of the Bhagavat and a tulsi plant, and the other according to the old Ahom method, by the shedding of blood before the great drum⁵. The Burha Gohain escaped ; the king sent the Bar Gohain and the Barpatra Gohain to induce the Burha Gohain to come back⁶ ; but this was of no avail. The Burha Gohain advanced with a force and defeated one sent against him by the king who was seized, blinded and stoned to death ; his two sons were also put to death.

Sudaipha : The nobles urged the Burha Gohain to become king but the Bailong Pandits were strongly opposed as he was not of royal blood. He therefore with the assent of the nobles installed Khamcheo of the Parbatiya clan from Charaideo, a grandson of a former king, as king under the Ahom name Sudaipha. Sudaipha performed the Rikkhvan ceremony, offered sacrifices to Siva and to the Ahom Gods ; married the Burha

4. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), p. 131.

5. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, p. 246.

6. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), pp. 134-ff.

Gohain's daughter⁷ and gave him landed estate, presents and a high-sounding title. The Burha Gohain became too powerful; dismissed the Bar Barua, disgraced the Belmela Phukan who determined to kill the king, killed by mistake the king's mother and fled. The Burha Gohain was on the look-out for an opportunity to oust the Bar Phukan also who entered into a conspiracy with the Muhammadans and surrendered Gauhati to them in 1679⁸. It was too late for the king to resist the advance of the Muhammadans and to save Gauhati though he sent an army for the purpose on coming to know of the plot.

Envy, jealousy and dissatisfaction spread; officials allied themselves to the Bar Phukan who raised an army and advanced towards the capital; there was practically no resistance; the Bar Phukan made himself master of the kingdom by the end of 1679, seized the king and caused him to be put to death⁹. Without even consulting the other nobles, he raised a prince, Sulikpha to the throne.

Sulikpha : Because of his tender age, Sulikpha was known as Lara Raja or the 'boy king'. At the instance of the Bar Phukan, Lara Raja got Sangrai, the Burha Gohain executed. The Bar Phukan now occupied the position recently held by the Burha Gohain and previously by Debera Bar Barua; he went a step further and wanted to assume the rank of king, asserted his equality with him and clothed himself in garments which the king alone was allowed to wear. His triumph was shortlived. His overweening arrogance set the nobles against him and he was assassinated¹⁰. His brother, the Bhatdhara Phukan sought the help of the Muhammadans to avenge his brother's death and received some encouragement from prince Muhammad Azam who, however, had not sufficient force at his disposal to attack the Ahom country with any prospect of success.

In order to remove all possible rivals, the Lara Raja maimed or killed several hundred scions of the royal family; he could not find one most formidable rival, Gadapani, son of

7. Ibid, p. 136.

8. Ibid, pp. 139-ff.

9. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, Assam Buranji, p. 43.

10. Ibid, p. 143.

Gobar, who eluded his pursuers¹¹. Lara Raja proved to be a most unsatisfactory ruler. His incapacity, want of aptitude for public business, tyrannical conduct alienated the nobles. The Bar Phukan espoused the cause of Gadapani¹² who was in hiding near Rani in Kamrup in the house of a Garo woman, dressed as a common peasant and working in the fields. The king could not resist the advance of the rebels ; his army melted away. The Dakhinpat Gosain, the Guru of the king and the Bar Phukan, asked the Bar Phukan in vain to return to the king's allegiance¹³. The king was caught and banished to Namrup and later put to death for intriguing to recover the throne.

The eleven years between the death of Chakradhvaj Singh in 1670 and the death of Sulikpha and accession of Gadapani in 1681 were years of weak and incompetent princes and of unscrupulous and ambitious ministers, of internal corruption and dissensions and intrigues, that undermined Ahom rule and power and prevented the Ahoms presenting a united front against their external foes. In the short space of eleven years there were no less than seven kings, not one of whom could die a natural death ; Debera Bar Barua, Sangrai Burha Gohain, Laluk Bar Phukan, the scheming ministers shared no better fate. There were collusions with the common foes with a view to inducing them to attack the Ahom territory, Gauhati was surrendered to the Muhammadans ; the era was one of political instability and internal turmoil¹⁴.

Gadadhar Singh (1681-1696) : Gadapani assumed the Ahom name Supatpha and the Hindu name Gadadhar Singh. He made Barkola his capital. He equipped the army to oust the Muhammadans from Gauhati. The forts at Bansbari and Kajali fell ; a great naval victory was won near the mouth of the Bar Nadi ; the enemy fleet fell into the hands of the Ahoms ; the Faujdar of Gauhati fled, pursued by the advancing Ahoms upto the Manas¹⁵. At Gauhati gold, silver, elephants, horses,

11. Ibid, p. 44.

12. S. K. Bhuyan, Assam Buranji (S.M.), p. 145.

13. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, p. 45, Assam Buranji.

14. Gait, History of Assam, p. 166.

15. S. K. Bhuyan, Assam Buranji (S.M.), pp. 146-148.

buffaloes ; cannon, guns, swords, spears were taken ; the spoils offered to the king were distributed by him amongst the victorious officers. The Bhatdhara Phukan who had incited the Muhammadans to invade Assam was captured, made to eat the flesh of his own son and later put to death¹⁶. A captured Muhammadan spy was taken round the camp, shown the dispositions of the Ahom commanders and then killed¹⁷. This was the last Muhammadan war. Henceforth the Manas river was accepted by both sides as the boundary. Three cannon at Dikom, in the Indian Museum and outside the house of the Deputy Commissioner, Lakhimpur bear the inscription : "KING Gadadhar Singh, having vanquished the Mussalmans at Gauhati, obtained this weapon in 1604 Sak (1682 A.D.)" ¹⁸.

There were conspiracies. The Bar Phukan and Pani Phukan were arrested and tried by the three Gohains and were found guilty ; for past services their lives were spared ; but they were dismissed¹⁹ ; some minor officials were put to death. For a second conspiracy, the ring-leaders had death penalty. A searching enquiry was made ; the Burha Gohain, the Bar Barua, the new Pani Phukan were dismissed ; many were executed or banished to Namrup. The new Burha Gohain proved to have misappropriated stray cattle was put to death along with his sons²⁰.

In 1685 the Miris raided and set fire to the Sadiyakhowa Gohain's house. A punitive expedition was sent and they were defeated with four killed, many made prisoners and much booty taken. Embanked roads were constructed from the Brahmaputra to two forts in the Miri country and were furnished with fortified gateways as a precautionary measure against further raids²¹. The Sadiyakhowa Gohain was dismissed for apathy during operations. The Nagas raided the Doyang valley ; a punitive

16. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, p. 262.

17. *Ibid*, p. 263.

18. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 167.

19. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 19.

20. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, pp. 268-ff.

21. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, pp. 24-ff.

expedition was sent ; their houses were burnt down ; they submitted and gave compensation for the losses caused to the villages²². Against the Namsang Nagas also an expedition was sent because of a raid by them ; many including their chief were captured and beheaded.

The neo-Vaishnava sects founded on Sri Sankar Deb's teachings now attained remarkable dimensions. There were many religious preceptors and their followers who claimed exemption from the liability to fight and assist in the construction of roads, tanks and other public works. The Sakta Brahmans who had the king's ear exaggerated the serious inconvenience thus caused.

Gadadhar Singh was a good liver ; he was afraid that his people would physically deteriorate if they ceased taking flesh of cattle, swine and fowls and strong drinks, as enjoined by the Gosains. He had also a personal grudge against some of the leading Gosains for refusing him shelter when he was in hiding and for dissuading the Bar Phukan from setting him up as king in the place of the Lara Raja. He resolved to break their power ; many were sent to Namrup and put to death ; the Auniati Gosain, Keshab Deb saved himself by hiding in a Chutiya village ; the Dakhinpat Gosain was deprived of his eyes and nose, his property was confiscated and his gold and silver idols were melted down²³. The Bhakats did not fare better. Ganaks, Kayasthas, Kalitas were spared ; Kewats, Koches, Doms and Haris were hunted down, robbed, forced to eat the flesh of swine, cows, fowls, or deported or made to work as coolies on roads or mutilated, sacrificed to idols or put to death. The persecution was widespread ; no one of any persuasion, having anything worth taking, appeared to be safe. When the climax was reached, the king ordered stoppage of persecution and restitution in cases where people were wrongfully despoiled²⁴.

When Gadadhar Singh ascended the throne, the kingly office was fast sinking into insignificance and authority was being monopolised by the nobles ; very soon he broke their power and

22. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, pp. 267-ff.

23. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assamar Padya-Buranji*, p. 32: *Tungkhungia Buranji*, pp. 27-29.

24. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, pp. 271-ff.

vindicated the supreme authority of the monarch. At the time of his accession, the Ahom power was being weakened by internal dissensions ; patriotism was on the wane, there were desertions to the Muhammadans who reoccupied Gauhati ; the emboldened hill tribes harried and raided submontane villages. Before his death he quelled internal disputes, revived the national spirit, drove the Muhammadans beyond the Manas, stopped raiding and restored the prestige of the Ahoms among the turbulent frontier tribes.

He patronised Shakta Hinduism. The temple of Umananda, on Peacock Island, opposite Gauhati, was built under his auspices²⁵. It is from his reign that the earliest known copper plates recording grants of land by Ahom kings to Brahmans or Hindu temples date²⁶. His brutal treatment of Vaishnava sects cannot be justified. There can be no doubt, however, that their priesthood was already becoming excessively powerful and the inordinate growth of this power became in later times a bar to political stability and progress and serious menace to established institutions and the consequent Moamaria insurrection ultimately convulsed and shattered the Ahom kingdom to pieces.

He commenced a detailed survey of the country. When in hiding in Lower Assam, he got acquainted with the land measurement system of the Muhammadans and issued orders for introduction of a similar system throughout his dominions. Surveyors were imported from Koch Bihar and Bengal. The work was first begun and pushed on vigorously in Sibsagar but was not completed until after his death. The method of survey was probably that which obtained when Assam was occupied by the British, i.e., the area of each field was calculated by measuring the four sides with a 'nal' or bamboo pole, 12 feet long, and multiplying the mean length by the mean breadth. The unit of area was the 'pura' or four standard bighas of 14,400 square feet each.²⁷

The king was a man of very powerful physique with a gross

25. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assamar Padya Buranji*, p. 39.

26. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 170.

27. *Ibid*, pp. 170-ff.

appetite, his favourite dish being coarse spring rice and a calf roasted in ashes. Gadadhar Singh died in 1696. The body of the king was interred at Charaideo with great ceremony. An effigy of the king was made and adorned with fine clothes ; appointed men for the purpose made daily offerings of pigs, fowls, fish and wine to it. The Ahoms were feasted on the flesh of swine and buffaloes²⁸.

Rudra Singh (1696-1714) : Gadadhar Singh's elder son ascended the throne at Garhgaon, taking the Hindu name Rudra Singh and the Ahom name Sukhrungpha. The king reversed his father's policy regarding Vaishnava Gosains²⁹. The Brahman Gosains were permitted to resume their positions and normal³⁰ work but they were to have their headquarters on the Majuli. The Auniati Gosain was recalled from exile and was honoured, the king appointing him his spiritual preceptor. The persecution of the Sudra Medhis also stopped ; they were to wear as their distinctive badge small earthen jars hanging from a string round the neck ; the Brahmans were not to bend their knees before them³¹. Rudra Singh desired to build a palace and city of brick, but there was no one in his kingdom who knew how to do this. An artisan named Ghansyam was imported from Koch Bihar and under his supervision numerous brick buildings were made at Rangpur and Charaideo. The king rewarded Ghansyam richly but a document containing full account of the country and the inhabitants was detected in his possession before his departure and on suspicion that he would betray the Ahoms to the Muhammadans, he was arrested and put to death³².

The Kacharis became reluctant to acknowledge the Ahom hegemony and Tamradhvaj, their king, boldly asserted his independence ; Rudra Singh despatched two large armies to reduce him to submission. The Bar Barua with over 37,000 men and the Pani Phukan with 34,000 were to march into Kachari country

28. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 171.

29. Maniram Dewan, *M.S. Buranji Vivekaratna* (D.H.A.S. No. 272), f. 15b.

30. S. K. Bhuyan, *Asamar Padya Buranji*, pp. 45-ff.

31. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 171.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 171-ff.

via the Dhansiri Valley and the valley of the Kopili (and Raha) respectively³³. The Bar Barua's route lay through Raha, Samaguting fort, Namira fort on Nomal Hill, Lathia Hill, Amlakhi, Tarang and Nadereng to Maibong and Mahur. In order to maintain communications and facilitate transmission of supplies, forts were constructed and garrisoned on the route. The Nagas gave trouble on the way but were effectively dealt with. The Kachari offered sporadic, though feeble resistance but could not prevent the Ahom advance. A large booty including a cannon and 700 guns was taken by the Ahoms at Maibong.

The Pani Phukan's route lay through Raha, Salgaon, Lambur, Dharmapur, Demera and Nadereng to Maibong. As there was no regular road, the army had to cut its way through dense jungle. A garrison of 3,000 men was left at Demera which was occupied; other places were sacked; 322 prisoners were taken. The superior strength of the Ahom army overawed the Kacharis who could not repel the invasion. At Maibong the troops suffered greatly because of the pestilential climate and many including the Bar Barua fell ill. Supplies ran short. Inaction in place of vigour seized the camp. The king ordered to press on to Khaspur. The Pani Phukan marched upto Sampani; the Bar Barua, now seriously ill, died during the return journey to Demera³⁴.

In March 1707 the king recalled the Pani Phukan who brought back the whole force after demolishing the brick fort at Maibong, burning down houses there and erecting a thirteen feet high pillar to commemorate his success. Fortifications were made at Demera where a strong garrison was left, which, however, had to be withdrawn by the king owing to sickness and mortality with the setting in of the rains³⁵. Terrified by the advancing Ahom armies, Tamradhvaj fled to Bikrampur and sent an urgent appeal for help to Ram Singh, Raja of Jaintia; on the withdrawal of the Ahom forces, he sent a second message to Ram Singh, saying that help was not necessary. Ram Singh

33. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 34.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 174.

now decided to take advantage of the dispersal of the Kachari troops by the Ahoms to seize the person of the Kachari king with a view to gaining possession and control of the Kachari kingdom ; under the pretext of a friendly meeting he seized Tamradhvaj and carried him off to the Jaintia capital, Jaintiapur.

Tamradhvaj managed to send a message to Rudra Singh through a 'Bairagi', asking for forgiveness and begging for deliverance from his captor. Rudra Singh sent word to Ram Singh through the Ahom officer in charge of the Ahom outpost at Jagi, demanding immediate release of Tamradhvaj. Ram Singh refused ; Rudra Singh closed the market at Gobha on which the Hill Jaintias depended for their supplies. Rudra Singh made preparations for invasion of Jaintia territory. The Bar Barua with 43,000 men was to march on Jaintiapur via the Kopili valley and the Kachari country and the Bar Phukan by the direct route through Gobha and the Jaintia Hills³⁶.

The Bar Barua reached Sampani easily and here a Kachari deputation assured that nothing was to be feared from the neighbouring Naga tribes. He proceeded to Bikrampur and during his march he sent messengers in advance to reassure the people who came and paid their respects and were glad that the forces needed no supplies of provisions from them. Jaintia outposts were taken. Ram Singh was called upon to surrender Tamradhvaj and his family and officers ; this he did ; but the Bar Barua continued his march to Jaintiapur. Ram Singh prepared for flight ; but the nobles who tried to dissuade him from his present adventure would not allow him to escape scotfree. He therefore proceeded towards the Bar Barua's camp for making his submission, escorted by twenty elephants. Near the camp he was made to dismount and ride on horse-back, unattended. After the interview he was not allowed to return but was made a captive by the Bar Barua³⁷.

The Bar Phukan conciliated the Chiefs of Gobha by presents. His forces on the march were harassed by the Jaintias at several places. His route from Jagi lay through Gobha,

36. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 35.

37. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 35.

Athitbhaga Lachor Hill, Buritikar Hill, the Barpani River banks and Pavanai to Jaintiapur. In certain engagements the Jaintias fared well but were ultimately worsted by the Ahoms who had the advantage of superior number and strength and reinforcements at crucial moments. At one stage the Ahoms went to the attack and with success after consulting astrologers on a day chosen as auspicious by the latter.

Rudra Singh ordered the captive kings to be brought to him along with the Jaintia King's garments, jewels, arms, elephants and horses and the Jaintia king's treasures to be divided amongst the troops. The Ahom subjects who had fled to Khaspur during Mir Jumlah's invasion were brought back and an army of occupation under the Bar Barua and the Bar Phukan was stationed at Jaintiapur³⁸. Envoys were sent to the Muhammadan Faujdar of Sylhet to announce that the Kachari and Jaintia kingdoms had been annexed to the Ahom dominions. These measures greatly irritated the Jaintia nobles who induced the Bar Dalai, the Raja of Khairam and the inhabitants of two hundred independent Khasi villages to join them in expelling the invaders.

The Jaintias could not rescue their Raja as he was being taken to Gobha by a strong force ; but they attacked eight forts with garrisons left by the Bar Phukan and took three of them. A detachment that was taking the copper image of the Goddess Jaintesvari to Rudra Singh was put to flight and the image was rescued³⁹. The Ahom soldiers, seized with panic, fled, pursued by the Jaintias. Rudra Singh sent up reinforcements including four thousand men under the Burha Gohain. The Jaintia strategy of dispersing when attacked and of returning to the attack themselves thereafter made decisive victory impossible for the Ahoms. The Bar Barua and Bar Phukan sent reinforcements from Jaintiapur, no doubt, but with the approach of the rains, it was thought unwise and dangerous to remain in hostile territory and retreat to Gobha was decided upon. Before departing, the Ahoms put to the sword a thousand inhabitants of Jaintiapur and destroyed surrounding villages.

38. Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 176-ff.

39. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 35.

For the ultimate failure of the expedition Rudra Singh thought of punishing the Bar Barua and the Bar Phukan but pardoned them on the intcession of other nobles. In the course of the Jaintia rising, the Ahoms lost 2,366 men including 12 high officers. About 1,600 persons, chiefly Assamese refugees were brought from Khaspur and 600 from Jaintiapur. During the expedition 3 cannon, 2,273 guns, 109 elephants, 12,000 pieces of silver of the Muhammadan, Ahom, Koch and Jaintia mints and numerous utensils of gold, silver and other metals were taken. Certain articles of jewellery misappropriated by some officers had to be disgorged by them on detection⁴⁰.

Rudra Singh now moved his camp to Sala and the Jaintia and the Kachari kings were kept in separate camps at Bishnath. Rudra Singh, surrounded by all his chief nobles, received Tamradhvaj at a grand durbar in a tent supported by posts of gold and silver. The captive was carried across the Brahmaputra in the royal barge and on landing rode on an elephant with a golden howdah. Nearing the camp he dismounted and rode on horseback to the durbar tent where he again dismounted and advancing on foot prostrated himself and knelt before the king. The Bar Barua introduced him, narrating the events leading to his detention. The king offered Tamradhvaj a seat and addressed him in a language repetitive of the Bar Barua's. He gave a submissive reply⁴¹. He was given numerous presents and formally permitted to return to his country. He was received in a second Durbar also. He worshipped the idol of Siva in the temple of Bishnath and was escorted by Ahom troops on his return journey⁴².

A few days later, the Jaintia Raja was received in the same way but was told that his nobles should appear and make their submission before he could be allowed to return. The nobles sent only submissive messages but these were considered insufficient. In the meantime Ram Singh died of dysentery. His son gave two of his sisters in marriage to Rudra Singh.

40. Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 178-ff.

41. S. K. Bhuyan, *Kachari Buranji*, pp. 148-ff.

42. Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 179-ff.

A few years later Rudra Singh proposed to invade Bengal⁴³ and made thorough preparations against the Muhammadans. He came to Gauhati and organised a great army and a powerful fleet, strengthened by all available cannon and reinforced by 600 Daflas and by the Kachari and the Jaintia Rajas with 14,000 and 10,000 men respectively. His idea was perhaps victory and glory for himself or his ambition was perhaps to include a portion of the Ganges within his dominions⁴⁴. Surely, one of his objectives was to create a confederation of Hindu States as a formidable obstacle to Muhammadan expansionist designs and as a bulwark of strength against further extension of Muhammadan power towards the east. Before, however, his preparations could be completed, he died in August 1714.

Rudra Singh is considered by many as the greatest of all the Ahom kings. Rudra Singh was by no means a mere military adventurer. Although illiterate, he had a retentive memory, exceptional intelligence and great drive and initiative. Besides the brick city at Rangpur, he had the masonry bridges over the Namdang and Dimau rivers constructed, the great tanks and the temple at Jaisagar and the temple and tank at Rangnath and the Kharikatiya, Dubariyam and Meteka roads made. He received the submission of all the hill-tribes.

Dr. S. K. Chatterji considers him to be Shivaji of Eastern India. He established an extensive trade with Tibet. He encouraged intercourse with other nations and sent envoys to visit contemporary rulers of other parts of India. He studied foreign customs and adopted those that he thought good⁴⁵. He imported many artificers from Bengal. He established many schools for Brahmans and sent many Brahman boys to study at the great centres of learning in Bengal. The survey of Sibsagar was completed. Nowgong was surveyed; the settlement that followed was supervised by Rudra Singh himself.

His Hindu proclivities increased as he grew old and he decided to become an orthodox Hindu by "taking the Sharan", which involved prostrating oneself before one's Guru. Rudra

43. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, pp. 38-ff.

44. S. K. Bhuyan, *Asamar Padya Buranji*, pp. 52-ff.

45. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, pp. 31-ff.

Singh could not bear the thought of humbling himself before one of his subjects and invited Krishnaram Bhattacharya⁴⁶, a famous Mahant of the Sakta sect from the Nadia District of Bengal. The king changed his mind and refused to become his disciple when he arrived though he had promised him all this and also the care of the temple of Kamakhya. After the priest departed there was a severe earthquake that shattered several temples. Rudra Singh thought he had attracted divine displeasure by hurting a favourite of God and recalled the Mahant and satisfied him by ordering his sons and Brahmans of his entourage to accept him as their Guru. It is said, though denied by the Ahom Buranjis, that his body was not interred at Charaideo according to Ahom custom, but was cremated on the Mani Karnesvar hill and that the Rudresvar temple built in his honour later by Pramata Singh, stands where his body was burnt. He left five sons by four wives.

Sib Singh (1714-1744) : Rudra Singh's eldest son, Sib Singh ascended the throne. He gave up the projected invasion of Bengal. He became a disciple of Krishnaram Bhattacharya and gave him management of the Kamakhya temple and large areas of land in various parts of the country for the maintenance of the temple⁴⁷. The modern Saktas of Assam are the disciples of the Parbatiya Gosains (as Krishnaram and his successors are known as) or of the Nati and Na Gosains.

The Daflas raided ; an expedition was sent and they were reduced to submission ; an embankment was constructed along the foot of the hills inhabited by these turbulent and restless mountaineers as a protection against future inroads. But for this expedition, there was unbroken peace during this reign.

Sib Singh was completely under the influence of Brahman priests and astrologers. Their prediction in 1722 that his reign would come to an end shortly alarmed him beyond measure⁴⁸.

46. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 49; Maniram Dewan, MS. *Buranji Vivekaratna*, (D.H.A.S. No. 272), f. 15b, f. 16a.

47. S. K. Bhuyan, *Asamar Padya Buranji*, p. 62-ff.

48. *Ibid*, p. 65.

He made numerous and lavish presents for the support of Brahmans and of temples. His prestige diminished when he made his Chief Queen Phuleswari 'Bar Raja' of chief king, gave her the royal umbrella (the Ahom emblem of Sovereignty) and got coins struck jointly in her name and his⁴⁹. Phuleswari assumed the name of Pramateswari (a name of Durga). Her authority was real; she was also under the influence of Brahmans and had consuming zeal for Sakta Hinduism. The Sudra Mahantas of the Vaisnava persuasion having refused to worship Durga, Pramateswari ordered the Moamaria and several other Gosains to be brought to a Sakta Shrine where sacrifices were being offered and caused their foreheads to be marked with the distinguishing marks of the Sakta sect with the blood of the victims⁵⁰.

This insult to their spiritual leader was never forgotten nor forgiven by the Moamarias and fifty years later they rose in open rebellion. This act of oppression of Pramateswari had thus in years to come disastrous consequences affecting peace in the Ahom dominions and stability of the Ahom rule. On Phuleswari's death, the king married her sister who was made Bar Raja with the name Ambika. When Ambika died, another wife named Enadari became Bar Raja assuming the name Sarbesvari⁵¹.

Sib Singh is noted for having established an elaborate and efficient system of espionage that placed at his disposal accurate information of all that was done or even spoken in all parts of his dominions. Surveys were effected in Kamrup and Bakata⁵². The Register or 'Perakagaz' based on this survey of Kamrup was still extant at the time of the British conquest and contained a list of occupied lands, except homestead, with areas and particulars of all rent-free estates⁵³. In 1739 four Europeans, Bill, Godwin, Lister and Mill, met the king at the principal gateway of Rangpur and did him homage by prostrating themselves at

49. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 51; S. K. Bhuyan, *Asamar Padya Buranji*, p. 65.

50. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 51.

51. S. K. Bhuyan, *Asamar Padya Buranji*, p. 69.

52. *Ibid*, pp. 64-ff.

53. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 185.

his feet⁵⁴. The king made many temples and gave lands for the support of Brahmans. He wrote a number of hymns. Because of his patronage, Hinduism became the predominant religion.

The Ahoms who persisted in holding to old beliefs and tribal customs were regarded as a separate, degraded class. The Deodhais and Bailongs succeeded with difficulty for some time in enforcing observance of certain ceremonies like the worship of the Somdeo. The people, however, gradually took Hindu priests and abandoned the free use of meat and strong drinks. The consequence was disastrous. By accepting a subordinate position in the Hindu hierarchy, the Ahoms lost their pride of race and martial spirit; by taking to less nourishing diet, they undermined their health and physique. The deterioration has been phenomenal over the course of years; and looking at average Ahoms of today one wonders that they are the descendants of a sturdy race of conquerors who, though small in number, gradually extended their rule over the whole of the Brahmaputra Valley and successfully resisted the Mughals even at the zenith of their power⁵⁵! Sib Singh died in 1744.

Pramatta Singh : On Sib Singh's death, the nobles passed over his sons and raised Rudra Singh's second son, Pramatta Singh to the throne. The Deodhais formally installed him. A conspiracy was detected and the culprits were punished with mutilation and stripes. In 1745 a fresh survey was made; a census was also taken⁵⁶. New buildings and masonry gateways at Garhgaon and the Rangghar or Amphi-theatre for animal fights at Rangpur and the Rudreswar and Sukreswar temples at Gauhati were constructed⁵⁷. A kind and lenient ruler, Pramatta Singh died in 1751 after a prosperous, though uneventful, reign.

Rajeswar Singh (1751-1769) : Rudra Singh's third son, Barjana Gohain, pitted with small-pox marks, was considered ineligible and the fourth son, Rajeswar Singh was installed as

54. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, p. 274.

55. Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 184-ff.

56. S. K. Bhuyan, *Asamar Padya Buranji*, p. 72.

57. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 52; S. K. Bhuyan, *Asamar Padya Buranji*, pp. 71-ff.

king. Barjana Gohain was exiled to Namrup. The Ahom astrologers recommended Taimung and the Hindu astrologers Rangpur for the king's residence. The king accepted the advice of the Hindu astrologers⁵⁸. He built his palace at Rangpur and afterwards a second residence at Taimung, both of brick and of considerable size.

The king was able but given to pleasures and State affairs were left to his Bar Barua, Kirtichandra Gendhela. The Bar Barua of overbearing disposition was disliked by the nobles. The Numali Bar Gohain wrote a Buranji which contained aspersions regarding the purity of his descent. The Bar Barua got the assent of the king to the detailed examination of all the Buranjis then extant and had all those which contained anything objectionable, burnt on the plea that otherwise even the origin of the king himself may be impugned some day⁵⁹. As a result the Bar Barua's unpopularity grew. An attempt to assassinate him failed; he escaped with wounds; two ringleaders were impaled, one was fried to death in oil and others were deprived of noses and ears.

In 1758 the Daflas committed raids near Ghiladhari. Forts were erected on the frontier and entry into the plains by the Daflas was prohibited. The blockade was successful. A deputation with captives and presents came but members of the deputation were arrested. Thirtyfive Assamese and 2 cannon were seized by the Daflas in retaliation. Now there was exchange of captives and an agreement was arrived at whereby the Daflas would refrain from aggression and in return would be permitted to levy yearly from each family in the Duars or submontane tract along the foot of the hills, a pura of paddy and 320 cowries⁶⁰.

In 1765 two forces were sent against the Mikirs via Chapanala and the Kopili and Jamuna rivers; they defeated the Mikirs and burnt down their houses and granaries; the Mikirs came with tribute, begging for forgiveness⁶¹. Rajeswar Singh

58. Golap Chandra Barua, Ahom Buranji, p. 284.

59. S. K. Bhuyan, Asamar Padya Buranji, pp. 78-ff.

60. Gait, History of Assam, pp. 186-ff.

61. Golap Chandra Barua, Ahom Buranji, pp. 285-ff.

sent messengers to summon the Kachari king, Sandhikari but he refused to receive them. The Bar Barua proceeded with an army to Raha. The Kachari king came and made his submission and was admonished by Rajeswar Singh⁶².

Raja Jai Singh of Manipur who came with Sandhikari appealed to Rajeswar Singh for help to expel the Burmese from his kingdom⁶³. The king consulted the nobles and agreed to send a force to reinstate him⁶⁴. A number of officers had to be dismissed and deprived of their property for refusing to accept the command and go on the ground of ill-health. The march through the hills south of Charaideo was difficult, clearing a road through dense jungle was arduous and slow ; exposure, insufficient food, snake-bite, death at the hands of the Nagas and sufferings generally of the troops made the king order their return⁶⁵. A second force was despatched by way of Raha and the Kachari country ; the main body halted at Raha⁶⁶ and a force of ten thousand men accompanied Jai Singh who raised also a force of Nagas and drove out the usurper, Kelemba, placed on the Manipuri throne by the Burmese.

Jai Singh sent valuable presents to Rajeswar Singh, and gave him a daughter in marriage. A number of Manipuris accompanying the Manipuri princess were settled near the mouth of the Desoi at Magaluhat or "the Manipuri Market"⁶⁷. In 1769 the Jaintia Raja moved with a force towards the Ahom frontier. The king thought of summoning him to appear and explain, but the nobles suggested nothing should be done until hostile intentions were clear. The Bar Barua marched to Raha in full force ; the Jaintia Raja withdrew in fear⁶⁸.

The king was a strict Hindu. He paid a long visit to Gauhati to worship at temples there. He erected many temples

62. Ibid, p. 286.

63. S. K. Bhuyan, *Asamar Padya Buranji*, p. 75.

64. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 54.

65. Ibid, p. 54.

66. S. K. Bhuyan, *Asamar Padya Buranji*, p. 77.

67. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 54-ff.; S. K. Bhuyan, *Asamar Padya Buranji*, pp. 77-ff.

68. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, p. 291.

and gave much land to the Brahmans. He took the 'Sharan' from a relative of the Parbatiya Gosain known as the Nati Gosain and gave him a temple at Pandunath. He greatly patronised learned men.

The Manas was the Ahom boundary now on the north of the Brahmaputra and on the south of the Brahmaputra, the boundary was 21 miles further east. The king was a capable ruler, though indolent. The people enjoyed internal order and immunity from external aggression. The people were now very prosperous. But signs of decay were also appearing. The warlike spirit characteristic of the Ahom ancestors almost wholly evaporated. For the first time high officers refused to go on active service⁶⁹. The society became priest-ridden; patriotic fervour and aspirations were being strangled by sectarian disputes. The Moamaria Gosain forgetful of wrongs and insults secretly spread disaffection amongst his disciples. The king died of a serious illness lasting twenty days. His remains were cremated on the bank of the Brahmaputra and the ashes were interred at Charaideo.

Lakshmi Singh (1769-1780) : The nobles differed as to who should succeed Rajeswar Singh. Kirti Chandra Bar Barua supported the Namrup Raja, Lakshmi Singh, the youngest son of Rudra Singh who, he said, wanted that all his sons should become king in turn. The Bar Gohain and others supported the eldest son of Rajeswar Singh and raised doubts about the legitimacy of Lakshmi Singh, who was so different from Rudra Singh in complexion and features. Ultimately, however, Lakshmi Singh, already 53, was selected; the Parbatiya Gosain refused to recognise him on the ground of illegitimacy; Lakshmi Singh imported from Bengal a new priest, a Sakta, who was the first Na Gosain; and banished Rajeswar Singh's two sons, the Rajas of Tipam and Saring, to Namrup.

The Bar Barua in whose hands the management of affairs was left by the king became all the more arrogant and insolent. One day he abused in most disparaging term and insulted the Moamaria Gosain, standing on the river bank, because though

69. Ibid, p. 288.

he saluted the king, he took no notice of the Bar Barua who was accompanying the king in a royal barge. Again the Chief of the Moran tribe, Nahar was seized and beaten and his ears were ordered to be cut off by the Bar Barua⁷⁰, because he went direct to the palace and brought the king's elephants without first meeting and paying the Bar Barua his respects. A disciple of the Moamaria Gosain, Nahar hastened to him.

The Gosain at once resolved on rebellion. He collected his disciples, made his son Bangan their leader, entered Namrup and was given a warm welcome. The Morans and Kacharis became his disciples. The king's eldest brother joined the rebels on promise of elevation to the throne; other banished princes followed suit. Bangan assumed the title of Raja of Namrup⁷¹. Men sent by the king to capture Bangan were taken and put to death. The insurgents advanced to Tipam. The first engagement with the King's troops took place on the banks of the Dibru river. For some months the opposing parties stayed in entrenched positions and there was stalemate and no progress on either side.

In October 1769, a Moran named Ragha, who styled himself Bar Barua, advanced up the north bank of the Brahmaputra with an insurgent force and worsted the royalist troops in several engagements. The alarmed king called a council of his nobles. The Burha Gohain advised negotiation of terms with Ragha but was over-ruled by the Bar Barua and other nobles who counselled flight to Gauhati⁷². The king left for Gauhati and reached Sonarinagar; many officers deserted him; Ragha sent men in hot pursuit and the king was brought back and confined in the temple of Jayasagar⁷³. Of the arrested nobles, a few were put to death and others kept in confinement. The Barjana Gohain who hastened towards the capital was put to death under Ragha's orders. Kirti Chandra and his sons were killed and his wives

70. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, p. 293.

71. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, p. 294.

72. *Ibid*, p. 298; Maniram Dewan, MS *Buranji Vivekaratna* (D.H.A.S. No. 272), f. 92A.

73. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 58; Maniram Dewan, *Vivekaratna* (D.H.A.S. No. 272), f. 93b.

and daughters distributed amongst the Moamaria leaders. Lakshmi Singh in captivity appeared so cringing when Ragha visited him that Ragha thought he had nothing to fear from him⁷⁴.

The Moamaria Gosain forbade his son Bangan to become the king⁷⁵ and Ramakant, a son of the Moran Chief Nahar was raised to the throne⁷⁶; two other sons of Nahar were made Rajas of Tipam and Saring and other leaders of the insurgents were raised to various high offices of the State and given possession of the houses of the previous incumbents they supplanted. Ragha remained the Bar Barua and took into his harem the wives of the deposed king and the widows of Rajeswar Singh including the Manipuri princess who was taken as wife by Lakshmi Singh also. Coins were minted in Ramakant's name, dated 1769 A.D. Ragha had real power and he disposed of all important public business. Also the Gosains of Upper Assam were forced to acknowledge the spiritual supremacy of the Moamaria Gosain; large sums of money were extracted from them. As the people in the interior still looked upon Lakshmi Singh and his officers as their real rulers, Ramakant decided to kill the king and all the old officers.

The royalists determined to overthrow the usurpers; the majority of the insurgents had left for home; Ramakant's supporters present in the capital were a small number and in April 1770 on the night before the Bihu festival, Ragha's house was surrounded and he was dragged out and put to death, the first blow from behind being by the Manipuri princess⁷⁷, it is said. Ramakant's father and relatives and many officers were put to death.

Lakshmi Singh was brought back in triumph. A vigorous persecution of the Moamarias was launched⁷⁸. The Moamaria Gosain was tortured and impaled; Ramakant with followers fared no better. Most of those who fled to Namrup were captured and killed. These severities of the Vendetta led to a

74. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, p. 304.

75. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, p. 301.

76. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 58.

77. S. K. Bhuyan, *Asamar Padya Buranji*, p. 94.

78. MS. *Assam Buranji* (D.H.A.S. No. 38), f. 8a, 8b, 9a.

fresh rising led by the Chungis of Namrup. Initially the royalists met with scant success and the Moamarias advanced ; later, the Moamarias were defeated by some mounted Manipuri mercenaries on the bank of the Desang. The Moamaria resistance, however, was not broken. They constructed a fort in some remote part of the forest, which served as their refuge and rallying point. The Moamarias waited until a suitable opportunity should present itself for renewing their struggle⁷⁹. Lakshmi Singh's installation ceremony was now performed with grandeur.⁸⁰ Two conspiracies were detected and the conspirators were put to death.

The Kalita Phukan was dismissed for complaints of exactions by people of Narayanpur or at the instance of the nobles ; thereupon he proceeded to Tamulbari on the north bank of the Lohit and proclaimed himself king and assumed the name Mirhang, collected a force and constructed a fort at Kechamati. An army was sent against him ; he could escape by bribing his captors but was recaptured and executed⁸¹. In 1779 a Nara of Khamjang, a refugee from his own country and settled near Sadiya, headed a local rebellion at the head of a body of Chutiyas and Mishmis and killed the Sadiya Khowa Gohain, but retreated on the arrival of re-inforcements from Rangpur. His followers took refuge in a forest, but were hunted down and many of them were captured and punished.⁸²

Never a strong prince, the Moamaria rising shattered Lakshmi Singh's nerves. The Deodhais tried to regain their former influence,⁸³ ascribed the misfortunes to the adoption of Hindu beliefs and practices and abandonment of the old tribal practices and observances, and miscarriage of projects to starting them on days selected by Ganaks as auspicious, but inauspicious according to Ahom astrologers' calculations. To undo the mischief resulting from the cremation of Rajeswar Singh's body, they

79. Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 192-ff.

80. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 83.

81. *Ibid*, pp. 84-87.

82. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 193.

83. MS. Assam Buranji (D.H.A.S. No. 38), f. 4a, 4b.

made an effigy of him in clay and having performed the Rikkhvan ceremony for the restoration of life and offered sacrifices to the Gods, interred it with the usual rites⁸⁴. Though for sometime Lakshmi Singh became favourably disposed to the Deodhais, the Hindus soon regained their influence ; at the suggestion of the Na Gosain, the Goddess Tara was worshipped with great ceremony and immense money was distributed to Brahmans ; the Deodhais refused participation⁸⁵.

Several Hindu temples and the great Rudra Sagar tank were made. He demolished one of the towers of his palace and a lofty building known as the Talatulgarh to find materials for a bridge over the Dikhu river which was not built. The king made his eldest son Jubraj. He suffered from chronic dysentery and died in December, 1780. His body was cremated and the ashes were entombed at Charaideo after a funeral ceremony performed according to Hindu rites.

84. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, pp. 325-ff.

85. *Ibid*, p. 327.

Section 4

THE DECAY AND FALL OF THE AHOM KINGDOM

Gaurinath Singh (1780-1795) : The nobles placed Gaurinath Singh on the throne and he was installed with the usual ceremonies. He caused the other princes of the blood to be mutilated to disqualify them for succession. The Bar Barua was chosen by him as his Chief adviser and at his instigation the Bar Gohain and several of his near relatives were beheaded on the allegation that the Bar Gohain was against Gaurinath Singh's accession. The Bar Barua himself offended the king by transacting affairs without consulting him and was dismissed and deprived of his possessions¹.

Gaurinath became the disciple of a son of Ramananda Acharya. A bitter enemy of the Moamarias, he lost no opportunity of oppressing them and goaded them into a fresh rebellion. One night in April, 1782 a band of Moamarias attached themselves to the king's party, disguising themselves as torch-bearers, when the king was returning to Garhgaon after a fishing expedition and thus gaining admittance to the town, attacked and killed several of the king's attendants. The king could escape to the palace on an elephant. The insurgents who wanted to set fire to the town were driven away by the Burha Gohain who arrived with soldiers in time². The insurgents next marched to Rangpur, broke open the gates of the town, paraded the streets, killed whomsoever they met and set fire to houses and put local officers to flight. The Burha Gohain came and dispersed them³.

The energetic and capable Burha Gohain advised conciliatory methods for winning over the malcontents and had his advice been followed, the Moamarias perhaps would not have given further trouble. The new Bar Barua advised whole-sale extermination of the Moamarias, which commended itself to the

1. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 195.

2. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, pp. 91-ff.

3. *Ibid*, pp. 93-ff.

cruel and vindictive nature of the king. A general massacre of the Moamarias was proclaimed ; many thousands including women and children were put to death ; four sons of the deposed Bar Barua were blinded for having been cognisant of the rising⁴. These atrocities fanned the flames of disaffection. A Mahanta of the Jakhalabandha Gosain's family hatched a conspiracy at Jayasagar and was caught and blinded while three of his followers were fried to death in oil. The Morans under Badal Gaonburha rebelled in the extreme east but were dispersed⁵. In 1786 there was a more serious revolt of the Moamarias on the north bank of the Lohit. An expedition against them was cut up ; fresh troops sent were also defeated near the Garaimari bil⁶.

The Chiefs of Rani, Luki and Beltola on being asked, sent up a force to Pahamara in the Majuli. The Moamarias attacked and took the Goramur Sattrā and put the Gauhati levies to flight with heavy loss⁷. The Burha Gohain entrenched at Sonari was attacked and defeated and retreated to Gaurisagar and re-joined the king at Rangpur. The Moamarias advanced, laying waste the country and burning the villages along their line of march and made their headquarters at Bhatiapar. They failed to take Rangpur. Gaurinath made frantic appeals for help from the Manipuri, Kachari and Jaintia Rajas and the Bar Phukan at Gauhati. The Moamarias by bearing down all resistance appeared before the gates of Ranpur.⁸

The king, panic-stricken, fled to Gauhati, accompanied by most of his officers⁹. The Burha Gohain with the Bar Barua and a few others courageously stayed back to stem the tide of rebellion. The king despatched from Gauhati under the Pani Phukan thirteen thousand men to reinforce the Burha Gohain. Meantime the Moamarias beat the royalists and took possession of Garhgaon, burnt down the palace and destroyed

4. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 95.

5. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 196.

6. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, pp. 99-101.

7. *Ibid*, pp. 101-ff.

8. S. K. Bhuyan, *Asamar Padya Buranji*, pp. 103-ff.

9. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 60.

many neighbouring villages ; the unprotected common people began to throw in their lot with the rebels¹⁰.

The Pani Phukan with reinforcements met the Burha Gohain who had retreated as far as the Kaziranga river. The Burha Gohain now assumed the offensive. But a force under the Pani Phukan was cut up in a night attack and a force under the Dhekial Phukan dispersed in confusion mistaking fugitives for Moamarias. The Burha Gohain wanted now to prevent a further advance by the rebels and built a line of forts¹¹ along the Namdang river and held them till March, 1788 when a son of Raja Rajeswar Singh, the Patkuar with a force joined him. The Moamarias suffering from shortage of supplies having relaxed, the Patkuar occupied Sibsagar but was soon taken prisoner and put to death by the Moamarias.

In February 1789 the Burha Gohain advanced with success, aided by fresh reinforcements from Gauhati but was driven back to Gauri Sagar and closely invested there, he had terrible time ; provisions running short, troops subsisting on flesh of horses and elephants and many dying of starvation and dysentery¹². The Burha Gohain retreated to Taratali and then to the Desoi where he erected a fort and left it under the command of Japara Gohain who took the opportunity of declaring himself independent but was imprisoned and blinded.

In April, 1790 the Burha Gohain constructed a fortified position at Jorhat and placed an outpost at Meleng ; with the aid of four hundred Bengal mercenaries sent up by Gaurinath, the Burha Gohain made a fort at Teok. On the approach of the rains he again fell back behind the Desoi river¹³. The Moamarias were repelled with heavy loss in an attack on a fort near the Bar Ali on the right bank of the Desoi and disheartened, they now started guerilla tactics, harassing the inhabitants of the tract held by the Burha Gohain by constant night raids and plunder.

10. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 197.

11. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, p. 353.

12. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 116.

13. *Ibid*, pp. 118-ff.

The people lost heart and would have accepted the Moamaria supremacy but for the untiring efforts of the Burha Gohain who gave them food and clothing and punished them severely for disobedience or disloyalty¹⁴. The sufferings of the people living in the territory held by the Moamarias were greater—there burning of villages, looting of supplies and wanton destruction of crops¹⁵ led to a terrible famine ; rice was unobtainable, many abandoned their own children ; even the high castes were reduced to eating the flesh of cows, buffaloes, dogs and jackals ; some wandered in the jungle, subsisting on wild fruits and roots ; others fled to the Burha Gohain's tract or the neighbouring hills or to Bengal.

Numerous petty Rajas appeared on the scene ; on the north bank of the Lohit, at Japaribhita, a weaver set up by the Moamarias, east of Dihing at Bengmara, one Sarbanand, acknowledged by the Morans, at Sadiya a Raja and Deka Raja of the Khamtis, and in the Majuli one Howha, exercising authority.¹⁶ The Moamarias placed Bharat Singh on the throne at Rangpur. Bharat Singh and Sarbanand opened mints ; their coins are still extant—of the former dated 1791, 1792, 1793, 1795 and 1797 and of the latter dated 1794 and 1795, the former describing himself on his coins as a descendant of Bhagadatta and the latter using the Ahom title Svargadeb on his.

Gaurinath appealed for help to the kings of neighbouring States. The Kachari and Jaintia Rajas refused assistance to their once dreaded neighbour, now in difficulties. The Manipuri Raja ; grateful for the services rendered him by Rajeswar Singh a few years ago came to Nowgong with five hundred horse and four thousand foot and as desired by Gaurinath, marched to the Burha Gohain's assistance. The Manipuri Raja moved towards Rangpur, but Moamarias gave battle and put his troops to flight with many killed. The Raja hastened back to Manipur, leaving with the Burha Gohain a thousand men who also deserted on the approach of the Moamarias.¹⁷ The Burha Gohain

14. Ibid, p. 119.

15. Ibid.

16. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 120.

17. Ibid, pp. 127-ff.

still managed to hold his own and in 1792 advanced his line of defence to the Ladaigarh.

Gaurinath's followers exasperated the people of Nowgong by exactions of supplies and oppression and led them to an open revolt under Sindhura Hasarika. The king was attacked and fled ; took shelter in the Sattras of the Auniati and Dakhinpat Gossains for some time and then came to Gauhati. Gaurinath had treacherously seized and put to death Hangsa Narayan, the tributary Raja of Darrang on suspicion of sedition and set up in his place Bishnu Narayan, another member of the family ignoring the claims of Krishna Narayan, son of Hangsa Narayan. Krishna Narayan sought the help of the British through Mr. Douglas, the Commissioner of Koch Bihar for reinstatement but in vain. He then collected a force of Hindustanis and Bengalis, drove Bishnu Narayan and proclaimed himself Raja of Darrang ; finding no opposition he proceeded to annex the northern part of Kamrup and even took possession of North Gauhati.¹⁸

Gaurinath appealed to the collector of Rangpur, Mr. Lumsden for help. A merchant named Mr. Raush, the farmer of the salt revenue at Goalpara also wrote for him. The matter was referred to Lord Cornwallis, the Governor General.¹⁹ Lord Cornwallis thought that steps should be taken to restore order, as bands of marauders from British territory had created troubles. Leaders of these gangs were ordered to return ; they refused to do so ; it was, therefore, decided to expel them by force. In September, 1792 six companies of sixty sepoy each were sent to Goalpara under the command of Captain Welsh, with Lieutenant Macgregor as Adjutant and Ensign Wood as Surveyor.

The modern district of Goalpara became a British possession in 1765 when the whole of the Muhammadan possessions in Bengal were ceded to the East India Company. The town of Goalpara was the great emporium of trade with Assam.

18. Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 200-ff.

19. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 131; *Asamar Padya Buranji*, p. 110.

Captain Welsh reached Goalpara on 8th November, 1792. He obtained detailed information from Mr. Raush and the fugitive Raja, Bishnu Narayan ; and being convinced that prompt measures were necessary, decided at once to proceed to the Ahom Raja's relief. On 16th November, he started up the river towards Gauhati. Three days later, three miles below the Nagarbera hill,²⁰ a few canoes were sighted, carrying Gaurinath and his attendants. A mob of Doms or fisherman from Pakariguri under a Bairagi had raided and set fire to some houses near the king's residence ; and the king and his advisers, already much unnerved and demoralised, were seized with frantic terror and fled precipitately without the slightest resistance.²¹

The advance was continued by Captain Welsh accompanied by Gaurinath and the Bar Barua and also the tributary Chief of Rani who had joined the party at Hatimora ; and a point eight miles from Gauhati was reached. Leaving a company in charge of the boats and the Raja, the remaining five companies under Captain Welsh made a night march to Gauhati. Near the gateway, men with torches went out on hearing footsteps but on seeing Sepoys, fled away. The troops crossed the wooden bridge that then spanned the Bharalu river and surprised and overpowered the occupants of the Bairagi's house. Sixty persons were taken prisoners. There was no resistance. The Raja thereafter arrived and entered the town in great state. He was given a guard of Sepoys.²²

Negotiations were started with Krishna Narayan and the leaders of his mercenaries or 'barkandazes'. But the response though respectful was evasive and the mercenaries showed no intention of leaving for home. Krishna Narayan was called upon to come to Gauhati. Gaurinath now finding that he could no longer stand alone and unaided, sought British assistance against the Moamarias also and placed himself unreservedly in the hands of the British. His petition was referred to the Governor General and was recommended by Captain Welsh who asked for two more battalions, a couple of six-pounders and

20. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 131.

21. *Ibid*, p. 130.

22. *Gait, History of Assam*, p. 203.

sufficient transport cattle, which could not be procured in Assam in case he was to bring the Moamarias also to submission.

Lord Cornwallis highly commended Captain Welsh for his conduct of the expedition and wished that the Raja should pacify his subjects by conciliatory measures and that Krishna Narayan might be induced to submit by restoration of his ancestral rights.²³ Captain Welsh was convinced that Krishna Narayan was trifling with him ; so he crossed the Brahmaputra and landed with two hundred and eighty men near a small hill with a temple on it, probably Asvakranta, on and around which Krishna Narayan's troops, three thousand strong, were posted ; they could not withstand the steady discipline and superior arms of the Sepoys and fled with the loss of several killed, wounded and prisoners ; forty cannon mounted on the hill were taken. Krishna Narayan rallied his men and commenced ravaging the tract east of the Bar Nadi (now the Mangaldai Sub-division). Lieutenant Williams was sent ; he engaged 500 'Barkandazes' at Khatikuchi and worsted them ; a hundred were killed or wounded and the rest fled across the Bhutan frontier, which at this time extended into the plains as far as the Gosain Kamala Ali.

Gaurinath did not conciliate his enemies by acts of clemency because of his vindictive nature and also of the evil advice tendered by the Bar Barua and other ministers. Since his return to Gauhati 113 persons were murdered including 24 for whose good treatment Welsh himself had given orders. Seventy were in prison dying of starvation. Strong measures were taken by Welsh to stop these atrocities ; the Bar Barua and Soladhara Phukan were arrested ; the Bar Phukan's dismissal was demanded ; the king was rebuked.²⁴ The king was not repentant ; he accepted responsibility for the brutalities and declared that he would rather abdicate than forgo the power of killing and mutilating his subjects at will.

A new Bar Phukan was appointed. Two manifestoes were issued, one promising righteous administration of justice and redress of grievances after hearing of complaints on appointed

23. Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 204-ff.

24. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 131.

days and the other inviting the Chiefs and nobles to come to Gauhati for consultations and for concerting measures for ameliorating the condition of the country. Gaurinath signed an agreement consenting to the dismissal of the Bar Barua and other officers proved guilty of treachery and oppression, the proclamation of a general amnesty, the abolition of all punishments extending to death or mutilation except after a regular trial and convocation of all the Chiefs and nobles at Gauhati for framing measures for re-establishing king's authority and good government of the country. The Bengal mercenaries in Gaurinath's employ were found oppressing the people and carrying information of Welsh's movements to the Darrang Raja's camp and were deported to Rangpur.

Krishna Narayan was induced to march into Gauhati with his remaining 400 mercenaries, who were sent off to Rangpur under escort on payment of arrears of pay amounting to six thousand rupees. Krishna Narayan took customary oath of allegiance and was installed as Raja of Darrang. He refunded 6,000 rupees paid to his mercenaries, agreed to pay an annual tribute of fifty eight thousand rupees in lieu of the feudal obligation to supply soldiers and labourers and became a land-holder, really speaking, the political and administrative control vesting in the Bar Phukan. Of fifty eight thousand, three thousand rupees was in lieu of customs duty between Darrang and Bhutan. Krishna Narayan's mercenaries who had fled to Bhutan, re-appeared but were dispersed easily.²⁵ The task of restoring confidence and consolidating the Raja's position proved difficult. The dismissed Bar Barua and Soladhara Phukan were intriguing and causing mischief and were deported to Rangpur. Now the three great Gosains and many officials and feudatory Chiefs signified their adherence to Captain Welsh.

Lieutenant MacGregor was sent to Koliabar and supplies were sent up to make Koliabar the base of operations against the Moamarias. The pacification of Nowgong was effected; the Banditti that infected the river and interrupted communications between Gauhati and Goalpara were suppressed. With great

25. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 207.

difficulty could Gaurinath be persuaded to leave Gauhati, such was his mental torpor and physical lethargy due to excessive consumption of opium! He had doubts whether Welsh with his small force could withstand and overcome the Moamaria host.

In 1794 the whole expedition advanced to Koliabar. Here Gaurinath complained of his bad ministers and officers with whom he had neither ability nor inclination to transact business and asked Welsh therefore to concert the necessary measures with them; Gaurinath also wrote to the Governor General to permit Captain Welsh to use the troops under his command in any manner he thought fit to restore order and undertook to pay 3 lakhs of rupees annually for their maintenance, half to be collected by the Bar Phukan from the districts under his control and the other half by the Bar Barua from the rest of the Ahom dominions.²⁶ In consultation with the Bar Gohain, the Bar Patra Gohain and the Solal Gohain, Captain Welsh appointed the Panisilia Gohain to be Bar Barua; the two princes who had escaped the general sentence of mutilation passed by Gaurinath on the royal family on his accession were made Saring Raja and Tipam Raja respectively. A letter was despatched to the Moamaria Chiefs to settle their differences with the Raja.

Lieutenant MacGregor went ahead and paid a three days' visit to Jorhat to interview the Burha Gohain who was still maintaining his unequal struggle against insurgents. After his return to Debargaon, he got an urgent appeal for help from Burha Gohain who was being approached by very large numbers of Moamarias. A Subadar and twenty men, out of MacGregor's total of forty six, were immediately sent to Jorhat; leaving a naik and eight sepoy to guard the boats and accompanied by Ensign Wood, a havildar and fourteen men, he also followed and reached Jorhat pushing through jungle and avoiding Moamarias.

The Moamarias had also advanced quite close to Jorhat and two thousand of them attacked the two officers at the head of the small party of twenty men under the Subedar. The sepoy behaved with great coolness and inflicted such heavy losses that

26. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 208.

they were soon in full retreat. MacGregor's loss was only four wounded whereas Moamarias' about eighty killed and wounded. Captain Welsh got information and set out with his troops from Koliabar via Debargaon. He reached a place about twelve miles from Rangpur and was furiously attacked by a large number of Moamarias armed with matchlocks, spears, and bows ; but the assailants were beaten off with heavy loss and their leader himself was seriously wounded. Captain Welsh who had taken up a strong position on a brick bridge over the Nadang river about five miles from Rangpur, now hastened to Rangpur²⁷ which had just been evacuated by the enemy who had left behind them in a great hurry large quantities of grain, cattle and treasure. The booty was sold and the sale proceeds, Rs. 1,17,334 were distributed amongst troops as prize money with Gaurinath's approval.²⁸

On Gaurinath's arrival at Rangpur on 21st March, 1794 Captain Welsh held a grand Durbar and in the presence of the nobles enquired of the Raja if the help of the British troops could now be dispensed with. The Raja and his ministers were unanimous that if these forces were withdrawn, the country would again relapse into anarchy. Welsh induced the Raja to write to the rebels promising them pardon if they would come in for a peaceful settlement, but there was no response. He despatched three companies to attack the Moamaria headquarters at Bagmara near Rangpur but in the meantime, orders were received from the government prohibiting further offensive operations and so the expedition had to be recalled.

Sir John Shore succeeded Lord Cornwallis and non-interference was the keynote of the policy of the new administration. Captain Welsh, a good organiser and a bold and determined leader, displayed consummate tact and singular administrative ability and succeeded admirably in his task. Gaurinath had several times written to Government expressing his appreciation of his services and praying that he might be permitted to stay

27. S. K. Bhuyan. *Asamar Padya Buranji*, p. 111; *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 133.

28. Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 210-ff.

on for some time longer. Captain Welsh himself reported that if the detachment were withdrawn, "confusion, devastation and massacre would ensue." But all these representations were of no avail.²⁹

The Moamarias now emboldened by the withdrawal of the troops sent against them advanced and plundered granaries within the environs of Rangpur. Welsh determined to disperse them, marched against them and drove them from their encampment; they retreated but continued guerilla tactics. Welsh with all available troops crossed the Dikhu and was attacked by a Moamaria force of four thousand men using bows and arrows and guns but their courage oozed away and they broke and fled with heavy loss³⁰ as Welsh's troops continued to advance. Despite entreaties from the Raja and petitions from various people, urging him to stay on, Captain Welsh had to leave Rangpur on his return voyage in accordance with the Governor General's imperative orders; and on 3rd July, 1794 the expedition reached British territory.

Gaurinath despairing of holding Rangpur left with his chief nobles for Jorhat which now became the capital. The garrison at Rangpur also fled to Jorhat and Rangpur fell into the hands of the Moamarias. All officers and others who had been favoured or protected by Captain Welsh now became the victims of Gaurinath's vindictive wrath. The Bar Barua was dispossessed and dismissed. The Bar Phukan accused of disloyalty was barbarously murdered; the Solal Gohain had the same fate. The Bairagi under whom Gauhati had been attacked was beheaded; all persons of Moamaria persuasion within the king's tracts were hunted down, robbed and tortured to death and the brutalities were so appalling that many committed suicide to avoid arrest by the persecutors. Captain Welsh's gloomy forecasts came true quickly.

The greatest confusion ensued; the central Government lost control over outlying provinces. At Gauhati a Bengali mercenary Hajara Singh usurped power, sold the office of Bar Phukan

29. Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 211-ff.

30. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 133-ff.

to one condidate for ten thousand rupees and then supplanting him sold it to another who promised sixty thousand rupees and raised the amount by despoiling the Kamakhya, Hajo and other temples of their gold and silver utensils.³¹ Hajara Singh could ultimately be defeated and killed.

In Upper Assam the Burha Gohain created a standing army modelled on that maintained by the East India Company and recruited from those who served with credit in the Burha Gohain's operations against the Moamarias. They were given uniform, armed with flint-lock guns purchased in Calcutta, drilled and disciplined by two of Captain Welsh's native officers who had been heavily bribed to stay on in Assam. Aided by this force, the King's officers began to be able to deal with the insurgents boldly and firmly and but for the intervention of the Burmese, the downfall of the Ahom dynasty might have been prevented or considerably delayed. Previously flint guns were not in use in Assam. There was a plentiful supply of match-locks. Captain Welsh found twenty thousand match-lock guns at Gauhati but the officials had so neglected their duties that "there were few who knew how to use them."³²

About sixty years previously the Khamtis had descended from the hills to the east and settled on the bank of the Tengapani with the permission of the Ahom Raja. In 1794 they took Sadiya, defeated the Raja set up by some Doms of the Moamaria sect and reduced the local Assamese to slavery. The Khamti Chief made himself the Sadiya Khowa Gohain. The Ahoms lost control over Sadiya.

Gaurinath was the most incompetent of all the Ahom Kings. According to Captain Welsh, he was "a poor debilitated man, incapable of transacting business, always either washing or praying, and when seen, intoxicated with opium." He was vindictive and his treatment of the Moamarias and other enemies was cruel, but the stimulus of hatred or revenge was not always needed ; he would frequently perpetrate the grossest barbarities

31. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 136.

32. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 214.

merely for the sadistic pleasure that he found in inflicting sufferings on others. He had a body of executioners ready to carry out his sanguinary orders. One of his servants having inadvertently answered a question meant for another, his eyeballs were extracted and his ears and nose were cut off.³³

Gaurinath neglected his kingly duties and left these to his intriguing and corrupt favourites who, according to Captain Welsh, were "a set of villains, all drawing different ways". The excesses of the king and his parasites coupled with the physical and moral deterioration of the people were responsible for the ignominious overthrow of his government by the Moamara rebels. The signal success of Captain Welsh's small force clearly shows what contemptible foes the Moamarias were. It is unthinkable that the Ahoms would have been unable to repel the Moamaria rebels, had they presented a united front, undistracted by jealousy and mutual mistrust and unalienated by the excesses of their monarch and of his scheming ministers. The people had hitherto enjoyed a fair measure of happiness and prosperity but during his reign they were plunged into the depths of misery and despair.

Where the Moamarias held sway, whole villages were destroyed, inhabitants were robbed of their possessions, forced to flee the country or subsist on the flesh of unclean animals or wild fruits and roots. Gaurinath in his letter to Sir John Shore said that the Moamarias had destroyed "Cows, Brahmans, Women and Children"³⁴ to the extent of one hundred thousand lives. The country between Dergaon and Rangpur, once so highly cultivated, was desolate, with many large villages entirely deserted. In lower Assam the Bengal mercenaries and gangs of marauding banditti caused havoc. Where Gaurinath held power, barbarities and persecutions ran rampant against all persons belonging to the Moamaria communion. Captain Welsh's reports contain interesting information regarding the condition of the country towards the close of the eighteenth century. In December, 1794 Gaurinath Singh died. The Burha Gohain under

33. Ibid, p. 215.

34. Gait, History of Assam, p. 216, footnote.

a pretence got the Bar Barua, his most powerful rival, arrested and put to death and raised a descendant of Gadadhar Singh, Kinaram, to the throne, saying that he had been nominated by Gaurinath Singh himself.

Kamaleswar Singh (1795-1810) : Kinaram on ascending the throne took the Hindu name Kamaleswar Singh. He left the government of the country in the hands of the Burha Gohain who was by far the most energetic and capable noble in the country. In the previous reign the Burha Gohain had steadfastly set himself to resist the Moamaria rebels. Now he made a clean sweep of the officials opposed to him and devoted his energies to the restoration of order in the country. The system introduced in the last reign of having a disciplined body of soldiers was continued and extended and to provide funds for its maintenance, the Adhikars or spiritual heads of Sattras were called upon to make contributions amounting upto thousand rupees according to their means.³⁵

Two brothers named Har Datta and Bir Datta aided by the Rajas of Koch Bihar and Bijni raised a band of Kacharis and Punjabi and Hindustani refugees and declared themselves independent. Nick-named Dumdumiyas, the rebels took North Kamrup and a part of the South Bank also according to some and killed Mr. Raush of Goalpara who was on a trading mission to Darrang and plundered his boats. The Bar Phukan raised a force of Hindustanis and with these and local levies obtained from the Rajas of Beltola and Dimarua attacked and defeated the rebels and killed Har Datta and Bir Datta who had by their arrogant and overbearing conduct alienated the sympathies of the local people of the better class.³⁶

A mixed body of Daflas and Moamarias also revolted on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. The newly raised army of regulars defeated them with many killed and captured. Those captured were beheaded and their heads were stuck up on stakes

35. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 143.

36. In recognition of his services, the Bar Phukan was awarded the title of Pratap Ballabh. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 62 ; S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 141.

as a warning.³⁷ The Burha Gohain was engaged in restoring order in the south bank and in renovating the town of Rangpur damaged during the long civil War. When he was free he crossed to Tezpur and reduced the Daflas to submission. He proceeded to Goramur, defeated rebel bands and put to death their leaders including Phophai Senapati.³⁸ Next he subdued Moamaria rebels at Kherketia Suti and Singaluguri and their Mahanta Pitambar was captured and put to death. A large booty was taken; prisoners were deported to Khutiapota. In 1799 the Moamarias under Bharat Singh Raja rose at Bengmara. An expedition was sent and they were put to flight and their leader was shot in action.³⁹

The Khamtis were defeated in 1800 with many killed including their Burha Raja. The prisoners were taken to Rangpur and settled on the Desoi river north of Jorhat and at Titabar. In this battle the Khamtis were aided by other Shan tribes, Naras and Phakials and also by the Abors. Previously the Khamtis had been defeated by the Abors for having kidnapped some Miris owing allegiance to the Abors.⁴⁰

The Burha Gohain induced the fugitive cultivators to return to their homes; he offered pardon to those of them who sided with the rebels. The Moamarias who had taken refuge in Jaintia and Kachari territory preferred to stay away. Long correspondence ensued; the Kachari and Jaintia Rajas refused to drive away their new subjects. An envoy sent by the Jaintia Raja, Ram Singh was ignominiously expelled because the letters he brought were considered to be discourteous as not containing the adulatory epithets customary in the intercourse between oriental rulers.

A force was despatched against the Kachari king, Krishna Chandra in 1803 to recover the fugitives most of whom settled round Dharampur. A combined force of Kacharis and Moamarias was beaten back at Jamunamukh. The enemy rallied and began raiding and burning villages near Nowgong town and

37. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, pp. 142-ff.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 147, 150-ff.

40. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 220.

gained a complete victory over the Ahom troops who retreated to Gauhati with 540 killed and many wounded and prisoners. The Burha Gohain sent reinforcements from the eastern districts. The Moamarias were put to flight near Nowgong and they were pursued by the Ahom force who sacked and destroyed all the hostile villages at Doboka. At this stage the Moamarias and their Kachari allies fell out and some of the Kachari deserters to the Ahom camp were given land near Bebejia. In 1805 a signal defeat was inflicted on the Moamarias and Kacharis with large numbers killed ; some survivors returned to their old homes, others fled to Khaspur and the Jaintia parganas.⁴¹

In 1805 the Moran Moamarias under their Chief, Sarbananda Singh of Bengmara rose but suffered defeat at Bahatiating and hastily retreated to Solongaguri where they suffered hardships during rains and many died of fever and dysentery. They submitted and were settled at Ghilamara.⁴² Meanwhile the Moamarias had sent one Ramnath Bar Barua to invoke the aid of the Burmese monarch. Parties of Burmese were twice brought into the country but were won over by the agent of the watchful Burha Gohain. The Burha Gohain became conciliatory and gave the title of Bar Senapati to the Chief of this section of the Moamarias. This measure seems to have succeeded as the Bar-Senapati seems to have fulfilled his obligations and collected and paid over the stipulated revenue from his people.⁴³

Krishna Narayan fell into disfavour and was superseded by his relation Samudra Narayan who was strictly enjoined to prevent the Bhutias from encroaching ; and to recover and bring back fugitives and settle them in their old villages⁴⁴. During the disturbances of the previous reigns the Bhutias had seized a tract of territory as far as the Gosain Kamala Ali which now they claimed to be their boundary and the intention of the Burha Gohain would appear to have been to win back the said tract.

With vigour the Burha Gohain dispersed all rebel forces, inflicted punishment on the disaffected, and showed toleration

41. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, pp. 199-ff.

42. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 178.

43. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 222.

44. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 187.

and granted pardon to those who submitted and his policy bore fruit ; the country enjoyed profound peace during the closing years of this reign.

The power of the Moamarias was broken ; order was restored ; the people again became fairly prosperous. As the king was a puppet in the hands of the Burha Gohain, the credit was the able and energetic Burha Gohain's. He upheld the Ahom cause during Gaurinath's reign. He conceived and carried out the idea of maintaining a properly disciplined standing army. He led the new troops in their earlier engagements and later supervised their operations. His lenient treatment of the rebels who submitted and wise and equitable system of administration were responsible for his success in restoring peace and quiet. He distinguished himself in war strategy and peace measures. He restored Rangpur to something like its former condition and did much to improve the new town at Jorhat. The Bhogdai was excavated to provide Jorhat with a better water supply ; and its communications were improved ; a road was constructed connecting it with Basa. Colonel Hannay in his notes on the Moamarias says : "Purnananda (i.e. the Burha) Gohain may be said to have been the protector and regenerator of his country for a period of twenty years"⁴⁵. In 1810 there was a bad epidemic of small-pox. Kamaleswar Singh died of Small-pox.

Chandrakant (1810-1818) : Nominated by the Burha Gohain, Chandrakant, the brother of Kamaleswar Singh, became king. Being a boy he was unable to take much part in the government of the country ; the Burha Gohain remained in control. The Bar Phukan proposed that the country should become a tributary to the British Government. The Burha Gohain and other nobles discussed the proposal and rejected it as it would be very unpopular.

Chandrakant began to fret at Burha Gohain's influence. He befriended⁴⁶ a youth of his age, Satram, son of an Ahom soothsayer and would listen to his advice in preference to that of his nobles and began to give them audience with Satram by his side⁴⁷. The nobles remonstrated, but in vain. Satram grew

45. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 223.

46. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 64-ff.

47. S. K. Bhuyan, *Asamar Padya Buranji*, p. 127.

insolent and conspired to assassinate the Burha Gohain. The conspirators were put to death by the Burha Gohain. Satram was surrendered by the king and was deported to Namrup where he was killed by some Nagas. It is said that the king was privy to Satram's conspiracy and that Satram was murdered at the Burha Gohain's instigation⁴⁸.

The Bar Phukan died and one Badan Chandra was appointed Bar Phukan. This appointment was a most disastrous one. Badan Bar Phukan's oppressive behaviour and gross exactions soon acquired notoriety. His sons' conduct was outrageous. They would intoxicate an elephant with Bhang and let it loose at Gauhati and roar with laughter from a safe distance as it would demolish houses and kill people coming in its way. The Burha Gohain determined on Badan Chandra Phukan's removal. It is said Badan Chandra was also suspected of having favoured Satram's conspiracy. Men were sent to arrest him, but, being warned in time by his daughter, who had married the Burha Gohain's son, he escaped to Bengal. He sought in vain the Governor General's intervention by calumniating the Burha Gohain⁴⁹.

Burmese Invasion : Meanwhile, Badan Chandra struck up a friendship with the Calcutta Agent of Burmese Government, went to Burma and got an audience of the Burmese king. Here also he accused the Burha Gohain of gross misrule which had brought the country to the verge of ruin, reduced the king to non-entity and endangered the lives of all, high and low and sought Burmese intervention. Towards the end of 1816 an army of eight thousand men was despatched from Burma ; en-route it was joined by the Chiefs of Mungkong, Hukong and Manipur and when it reached Namrup its number rose to sixteen thousand. The Burha Gohain sent an army ; a battle was fought at Chiladhari ; the Burmese were victorious. At this stage the Burha Gohain died or, as some say, committed suicide by swallowing diamond⁵⁰.

48. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, pp. 376-ff.

49. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tunkhungia Buranji*, pp. 202-ff.

50. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 225.

The Burha Gohain's son, though untried, became the Burha Gohain, as there was no other leader of proved ability. A fresh army was sent to resist the invaders but was utterly defeated at Kathalbari, east of the Dihing. The Burmese advanced, pillaging and burning the villages along their line of march. The king could not be induced by the Burha Gohain to retreat to Lower Assam; the Burha Gohain fled to Gauhati⁵¹. The Burmese occupied Jorhat and the Bar Phukan was formally reinstated and became all-powerful. Chandrakant remained as the nominal king. The Bar Phukan plundered and slayed all relations and adherents of the Burha Gohain. The Burmese were paid a huge indemnity and returned in April, 1817 with a girl for their royal harem, palmed off as a daughter of the Ahom king⁵².

There was a quarrel between the Bar Barua and the Bar Phukan. The king's mother and some nobles supported the Bar Barua and caused the Bar Phukan to be assassinated by a foreign Subadar, Rup Singh.⁵³ The Burha Gohain was invited to return to Jorhat. He could not forgive the king for throwing him over when the Burmese came, offered the throne to Brajnath, a great grandson of Rajeswar Singh, then residing at Silmari, and advanced to Jorhat with a force of Hindustani mercenaries and local levies. Chandrakant fled to Rangpur. The Burha Gohain entered Jorhat in February, 1818.

Purandar Singh (1818-1819) : Brajnath struck coins in his name : but it was now remembered that he was ineligible for the throne as he had suffered mutilation; his son, Purandar Singh was made king instead; Chandrakant was seized and his right ear was slit to disqualify him for the kingly office⁵⁴. The friends of the murdered Bar Phukan fled to Burma and apprised the Burmese monarch of the events in Assam. A fresh force was despatched under Ala Mingi (Kio Mingi) and reached Assam in February, 1819. The Ahoms resisted at Nazira, but the commander lost nerve and they were defeated. Purandar Singh

51. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 65.

52. *Ibid*, p. 66; S. K. Bhuyan, *Asamar Padya Buranji*, pp. 139-ff.

53. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 66.

54. S. K. Bhuyan, *Asamar Padya Buranji*, pp. 145-ff.

fled at once to Gauhati. Chandrakant was formally reinstated by the Burmese⁵⁵.

Burmese Rule (1819-1824) : Chandrakant now became a puppet in the hands of the Burmese commanders in whom the real authority was vested ; they hunted down all the adherents of the Burha Gohain and put to death the Bar Barua and others⁵⁶. Purandar Singh escaped to Silmari and solicited the help of the East India Company by offering an annual tribute of three lakhs of rupees and all expenses of the expeditionary force required to reinstate him. The Burha Gohain's force could not resist the Burmese advance to Gauhati and dispersed. The Burha Gohain applied to the Governor General for assistance which was refused. Chandrakant and the Burmese asked for extradition of the fugitives but nothing was done by the British Government⁵⁷.

A Kachari named Patal was made the Bar Barua but he incurred the displeasure of the Burmese and was summarily put to death without even the pretence of approval from Chandrakant⁵⁸. Chandrakant was alarmed and fled to British territory. The Burmese could not persuade him to return and put a large number of his followers to death. Chandrakant retaliated on the Burmese officials sent to him to bring him back. The Burmese set up another prince, Jogesvar as king and their grip on the country became firmer⁵⁹. The tract between the Burhi Dihing and the Brahmaputra only escaped the Burmese domination. There the Moamarias under the Bar Senapati maintained a precarious independence.

The numerous Burmese troops and their followers were distributed and scattered in small detachments about the country to make provision of supplies possible. Chandrakant took advantage of the position, took Gauhati and advanced upstream.

Three divisions of the Burmese army were sent against Chandrakant who with his weak force had to flee again to Bengal.

55. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 227.

56. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, p. 383.

57. Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 227-ff.

58. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 69.

59. *Ibid*, p. 70.

The Burmese reduced the Darrang Raja to submission and returned to Upper Assam plundering villages on the way. In 1821 Chandrakant with a force of about two thousand men, chiefly Sikhs and Hindustanis re-entered his old dominions and re-established his authority over the western part of the country. The reduced Burmese garrison could not resist him⁶⁰.

Purandar Singh collected a force in the Duars then belonging to Bhutan, aided by Mr. Robert Bruce of Jogighopa who also procured for him fire-arms and ammunition from Calcutta. This force with Bruce in command entered the country but was defeated by Chandrakant's levies; Mr. Bruce was taken prisoner but was released on agreeing to enter the victor's service. Later the Burmese defeated Chandrakant who retreated and rallied his men in the Goalpara District and procured through Bruce 300 muskats and 9 maunds of ammunition from Calcutta. He returned to the attack and reoccupied Gauhati in January, 1822. The Burmese forces on the north bank of the Brahmaputra were being harassed by Purandar Singh's forces who were carrying on repeated incursions across the Bhutan border. The Burmese commander's protests and demands for extradition evoked no response from the Governor General; the Burha Gohain was, however, temporarily detained for intercepting and delaying the Burmese letter of protest⁶¹.

Mingi Maha Bandula at the head of large reinforcements arrived from Ava and thoroughly defeated Chandrakant, though he displayed great personal bravery, in a battle at Mahgarh⁶² in June, 1822 with a heavy loss of fifteen hundred men. Chandrakant escaped across the border. The Burmese commander sent an insolent letter to the British Officer commanding at Goalpara, warning him that if protection were granted to the fugitive, a Burmese army of 18,000 men commanded by 40 Rajas would invade the Company's territory to arrest the fugitive. Additional troops were sent to the frontier from Dacca and the Burmese

60. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 229.

61. *Ibid.*, pp. 229-ff.

62. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahem Buranji*, p. 384.

were told that they could advance at their certain peril. Chandrakant was ordered to be disarmed and removed to a safe distance ; but Chandrakant's whereabouts could not be ascertained perhaps because heavy bribes had been paid to conceal his whereabouts. Previously, a sum of twenty-one thousand rupees had been offered to the British Officer commanding at Goalpara for permitting raising of troops in that district.

Small parties of Burmese crossed the Goalpara frontier and plundered and burnt villages in the Habraghat pargana. The Burmese oppressions became unbearable. No one could be sure of wealth, reputation and life. They robbed everyone having anything, burnt down villages and temples, violated the chastity of young and old women and put large numbers of innocent people to death⁶³. Major J. Butler in his 'Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam' says that at Chotopotong fifty men were decapitated in one day. A large building was then erected of bamboos and grass, with a raised bamboo platform ; into this building were thrust men, children and poor innocent women with infants, and a large quantity of fuel having been placed round the building it was ignited : in a few minutes two hundred persons were consumed in the flames. All who were suspected of being inimical to the reign of terror were seized and bound by Burmese executioners, who cut off the lobes of the poor victims' ears and choice portions of the body, such as the points of the shoulders, and actually ate the raw flesh before the living sufferers : they then inhumanly inflicted with a sword, deep but not mortal gashes on the body, that the mutilated might die slowly, and finally closed the tragedy by disembowelling the wretched victims⁶⁴.

Bands of native marauders disguised as Burmese went about the country committing depredations ; the hill tribes followed suit. The sufferings of the people were unspeakable, many fled to the hills, to Jaintia, Manipur, British territory etc., others started guerilla warfare ; the chief resistance was on the north

63. Ibid. ; S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 212 ; Asamar Padya Buranji, pp. 172-180 ; Maniram Dewan, MS. Buranji Vivekaratna, Part II, f. 188 (a), f. 188(b).

64. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 231.

bank, aided by the Akas and the Daflas. But with overwhelming force the Burmese crushed all opposition. Chandrakant was at last persuaded to come, only to be seized and confined at Rangpur. Owing to sickness and shortage of provisions, Mingi Maha Bandula with the bulk of his forces returned to Burma ; a new Governor was appointed and he tried to improve matters ; rapine, pillage and punishment without a cause were stopped, settled administration was introduced and officers were appointed, unlimited exactions and extortions were replaced by regular taxation, better treatment of the inhabitants was initiated. The sands, however, had run out. The Burmese were now to pay for their oppressions of the hapless Assamese and for the insults they had thrown at the British authorities by the loss of the dominions which they had so easily conquered and well-nigh ruined and of which they were now in effective possession.

Burmese Wars (1824-1826) and British Occupation of Assam : The Burmese conceived the greatest contempt for the British. This was perhaps due to their own easy victories in different directions, the paucity of British troops along the frontier and inefficiency of the Ahom standing army dressed and drilled on the model of the Company's sepoys. The first active measures were taken in the Surma Valley. The Burmese Governor of the Brahmaputra Valley contemplated the invasion of Cachar. Three Burmese forces marched towards Cachar from three different directions, from Nowgong through North Cachar, by way of Jaintia hills and from Manipur. On 17th January, 1824, the British Commandant at the head of a detachment of sixteen hundred men, who had already reached the frontier of Sylhet, marched to Bikrampur and put the enemy who had stockaded there to flight.

The Burmese erected stockades on both banks of Barak river and their forces there consisted of the Burmese, the Assamese and the Kacharis. They were attacked and put to flight. The Nowgong contingent, driven out, made their way back to Nowgong. The Manipur contingent strongly entrenched at Dudpatli repelled British attacks but lost heavily and fell back to Manipur. The British forces went into cantonments at Sylhet, leaving only a detachment, owing to scarcity of supplies in Cachar.

The Burmese forces invaded Cachar according to the statement of their commanders to carry out the orders of their king to replace on the throne of Cachar, Gobind Chandra who had been ousted by three Manipuri Chiefs. The formal declaration of war against the Burmese took place on 5th March, 1824. A force of 3,000 men with several cannon and a gun boat flotilla was assigned the task of turning the Burmese out of the Brahmaputra Valley. After a toilsome journey of 15 days through jungles and trackless swamps, it reached Gauhati on 28th March. The Burmese who erected strong stockades at Gauhati retired to Mara Mukh in Upper Assam after massacring many inhabitants whose barbarously mutilated dead bodies were found by the advancing British.

A long halt was made at Gauhati. David Scott who had accompanied the Cachar Force marched across the Jaintia hills with three companies to Nowgong, arranged for holding the town and thence marched to Gauhati. After April, the Burmese advanced to Koliabar, but on the approach of a British force from Gauhati retreated to Rangaligarh. Several attempts of the Burmese to push back the British failed and they suffered considerable loss, including many killed and fell back on Mara Mukh again⁶⁵.

Colonel Richards who had established his headquarters at Koliabar had to return to Gauhati as the rains set in because of the difficulty of procuring supplies. The Burmese thereupon occupied Koliabar, Raha and Nowgong and revengeful of the friendly disposition of the Assamese towards the British troops, plundered the surrounding villages and committed appalling atrocities; some they flayed alive, others they burnt in oil and others they burnt alive, crowded in village 'Namghars' which they set on fire. Many thousands fled into the hills and jungles, where large numbers died of starvation or disease; a small number managed to reach the plains of the Surma Valley and their descendants still speaking pure Assamese inhabit several submontane villages of Jaintia. People speak of Manar Upadrab with much horror even to this day; the depopulation of the region round

65. Gait, History of Assam, pp. 282-ff.

Doboka and the Kopili Valley dates from this disastrous time⁶⁶.

About the end of October, two divisions were despatched, one by way of the Kallang and the other up the main stream of the Brahmaputra. The former well-served by its intelligence Officer, Lieutenant Neuville surprised several Burmese detachments at Raha etc. and just failed to capture the Governor himself at Nowgong. Koliabar was secured. In January, 1825 Maramukh was occupied and successful operations were carried out from this base. The Burmese forces concentrated at Jorhat. There were internal dissensions amongst the Burmese. The Burha Raja or the Burmese Governor was murdered by a rival leader, the Shan Phukan. The Burmese set fire to their stockade at Jorhat and retreated to Rangpur. The British troops arrived at Jorhat and then reached Gaurisagar. On 27th January, the enemy attacked an advanced post holding a bridge over the Namdang river ; a retreat was feigned and the Burmese, lured into the trap, were attacked and put to flight with heavy loss⁶⁷.

On the 29th January, 1825 Colonel Richards resumed his march towards Rangpur. The approach of the capital had been fortified by the enemy ; a stockade had been drawn across the road. When the defences were approached, the assailants were saluted by a heavy fire : but the column advanced and the stockade was carried and the south side of the fort was completely invested. The Burmese got dispirited. The two chiefs, the Sam (or Shan) Phukan and the Bagli Phukan wanted to stipulate for terms, whereas subordinate chiefs with numerous followers were bent upon resistance. The former prevailed ; and through the mediation of a Buddhist priest, native of Ceylon but brought up in Ava, Dharmadhar Brahmachari, sent to the British Commander to negotiate, terms for surrender of Rangpur were agreed on. According to the settlement, the Sam Phukan and about seven hundred of the garrison surrendered themselves ; the rest, about nine thousand of both sexes and all ages including two thousand fighting men, withdrew to the frontiers ; but many dropped off on the retreat and established themselves in Assam.

66. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 283.

67. *Ibid*, p. 284.

With the surrender of Rangpur and its occupation by the British, the main object of the campaign, the expulsion of the Burmese from Assam, was promptly and substantially secured.⁶⁸

During the Burmese occupation the Singphos had made constant raids on the Assamese, carried off thousands as slaves and almost depopulated the eastern part of the country. 7,500 of them shut up the Sadiya khowa Gohain within his stockades and attacked the Bar Senapati in his territory. In June, 1825 about six hundred Burmese appeared on the Patkai and the Singphos made common cause with them. Captain Neuville defeated the allies and destroyed Singpho villages around Bisa. The Burmese made their exit from the country; the Singphos submitted. Captain Neuville restored six thousand Assamese captives to freedom⁶⁹.

Meanwhile, fresh operations became necessary in Cachar as the Burmese again occupied stockades at Talain, Dudpatli and Jatrapur. In June, 1824 Colonel Innes with twelve hundred men occupied Jatrapur but could not capture Talain. A further force of 700 men was collected to free Cachar and Manipur from the enemy. The Burmese evacuated Talain because they suffered much from disease there. Dudpatli was occupied without opposition. The great efforts to make and carry a road through to Manipur failed because of the serious obstacles caused by the mountainous character of the country, the clayey nature of the soil and the unusually heavy rainfall and the loss of large number of elephants, bullocks and other transport animals.

Gambhir Singh with an irregular levy of 500 Manipuris and Kacharis, provided with arms by the British Commander, advanced to Manipur, accompanied by Lieutenant Pemberton. After great difficulty and privation and often marching through torrential rains, he appeared in the valley of Manipur. The Burmese left Imphal, and left the State, as Gambhir Singh continued his advance. Later a considerable number of the Burmese who had occupied stockades at Tammu and on the bank of the Ningthi river were ejected. Large numbers of Manipuris who

68. Gait, History of Assam, pp. 284-286.

69. Gait, History of Assam, p. 286.

had been taken as slaves by the Burmese were restored to freedom. Manipur was cleared of the enemy.

The operations of the British arms in Burma had also been crowned with success ; the king of Ava was compelled to accept the terms of peace offered him by the Treaty of Yandabo concluded on 24th February, 1826. The Burmese agreed, amongst other things, to abstain from all interference in the affairs of the countries which now constitute Assam⁷⁰.

The condition of the Brahmaputra Valley at the time of the expulsion of the Burmese was most deplorable. About thirty thousand Assamese had been taken away as slaves and according to Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, the Burmese invaders had "destroyed more than one-half of the population, which had already been thinned by intestine commotions and repeated civil wars"⁷¹. Cultivation had almost been given up ; famine and pestilence carried off thousands and many had to live on jungle roots and plants. The Ahom nobles and the great Gosains, pauperised, had retired to Goalpara, followed by large numbers of common people. While the former returned, many amongst the latter stayed on and their descendants form a large proportion of the present inhabitants of eastern Goalpara⁷².

The situation in the Brahmaputra Valley was difficult. The Burmese had overthrown most of the old administrative landmarks ; the people were hopelessly divided amongst themselves ; the elevation of any particular pretender to the throne would have led to dissensions and civil wars with the withdrawal of the British troops. In the circumstances, the whole of the Brahmaputra Valley with the exception of Sadiya and Matak was taken over for administration as a British Province and Mr. David Scott, Agent to the Governor General for the Eastern Frontier was entrusted with its management⁷³.

The question of restoring the Brahmaputra Valley continued to be discussed and ultimately it was decided to reinstate

70. Gait, History of Assam, p. 288.

71. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, 'Observations on the administration of the Province of Assam'. Mill's Report, Appendix.

72. Gait, History of Assam, p. 289.

73. Ibid, p. 290.

Purandar Singh in the country east of Dhansiri river and accordingly early in 1833 the whole of Upper Assam except Sadiya and Matak was formally made over to Purandar Singh. By a treaty made with him at the time of his installation, Purandar Singh was placed on the footing of a protected prince, with civil administration in his hands and his territory secured against aggression ; he would pay a yearly tribute of Rs. 50,000 out of an estimated revenue of Rs. 1,20,000⁷⁴.

Purandar Singh was preferred to his only rival, Chandrakant for the dignity of being the head of this newly created State ; he appeared to be dignified, respectable, mild and pacific ; high hopes were placed on him. But in less than three years he began to make defaults in the payment of the yearly tribute and begged for a considerable reduction. On enquiry it was found that mismanagement and general corruption connived at or encouraged by him were responsible for the fall in his revenues and in case things proceeded in this way, very soon he would be incapable of paying even one-half of the stipulated tribute. Further, his subjects were oppressed and misgoverned and his rule was very much disliked by the bulk of people.

McCosh wrote, "The present representative of this once powerful dynasty (Svargadeo or Lord of Heaven, as he is pleased to call himself) now resides at Jorhat in noisy pomp and tawdry splendour ; his resources limited to that of a zamindar ; his numerous nobility reduced to beggary or to exist upon bribery or corruption ; and his kingly court (for he still maintains his regal dignity) more resembling the parade of a company of strolling players than anything imposing or sovereign"⁷⁵.

His administration having proved a failure, Purandar Singh was deposed and pensioned off in October, 1838 and his territories, divided into two districts of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur, were brought under direct British administration. Thus the last vestige of the once great Ahom power was obliterated.

The foregoing paragraphs of this Chapter give a brief account of the rise, growth and fall of the Ahom Power in Assam.

74. Gait, History of Assam, pp. 296-ff.

75. Quoted by Gait, History of Assam, p. 308.

Facts are facts and they have their inescapable impact on life ; and the variegated facts of the Ahom age, touching almost all facets of life had theirs on contemporaneous life of that age ; further, the life in the Ahom age has left its deep and indelible impress on the life and culture of the Assamese people for all time, present and future, for the acts and exploits and omissions and commissions, merits and successes and failings and failures, gains and glories and losses and achievements in different fields of that age are now inextricably diffused in and inalienable parts and parcels of the historical inheritance, traditions and culture of the people, and many strong and beautiful threads of the warp and the woof of the present texture of the life of the Assamese people cannot but be admitted to have been derived from the fabric and pattern of life and culture, as they developed in the Ahom age.

Chapter III

POLITY

In the background sketched in the preceding pages, Assamese life and culture evolved in the Ahom period and it is in the perspective set forth there that Assam's life and culture in the age of the Ahoms have to be studied, understood and interpreted. Assam's polity, economy, society and culture during the period were profoundly affected and influenced by her natural environment and geography and population—complex from times immemorial, and past and contemporaneous history, as much as her present life and culture bear the unmistakable impress of the totality of her past inheritance including the legacy left by the Ahom age. A close and earnest enquiry into the diverse elements of that Ahom legacy of the Assamese people, is therefore, indispensable to a proper understanding of the Assamese people and their ways of life.

The nature of the polity and political arrangements as well as the economic circumstances of the peoples of Assam under the Ahoms were contributory to and actually conditioning factors of the general structure of society, social arrangements and social conditions of the period, as much as general social conditions influenced cultural conditions and standards of the times. In fact, as every where else and in every age, political, economic, social and cultural conditions or aspects of life were mutually inter-relative and reactive in Assam also under the Ahoms.

Nature of Constitution : Though the constitution was not mainly written, as many constitutions are today, the constitutional principles and conventions were of an enduring nature and yet capable of adaptation to meet the requirements of changed circumstances. The constitution was a blend of monarchy and aristocracy. The king was the head of the State ; all honours, titles, offices, decisions and war measures emanated from him. He was known as 'Swargadeo' (Heavenly Lord) ; theoretically at least endowed with divine attributes, he was supreme and commanded respect and unquestioned obedience. He had, however, in practice to act with the advice of the three hereditary

Councillors of State, the Burha Gohain, Bargohain and the Barpatra Gohain. These three nobles had the duty of selecting a king from among the qualified members of the existing princely families. It is said that if the three were united, they could even depose a monarch. This was more a right in fact, exercised when circumstances favoured its exercise rather than a constitutional right or a right in law. A king was not considered to have been legally enthroned unless the three Ministers had concurred in proclaiming him as king.

The powers of the king vis a vis those of his three great ministers, historically however, varied from time to time according to the personal influence and character of the king, on the one side, and of these great nobles on the other. Some kings like Pratap Singh, Gadadhar Singh, Rudra Singh appear to have acted almost independently, while others like Sudaipha, Lora Raja and Kamaleswar Singh were reduced to the position of mere puppets under nearly complete ministerial control. Sometimes the Gohains took common action to eject unpopular rulers like Surampha and Sutyinpha—they then took advantage of popular opinion in their favour; there were instances when dethronement or assassination of monarchs was the outcome of independent intrigue and machination of a single, very powerful Gohain or other noble.

Succession : Succession to the throne was governed generally by the law of primogeniture, the eldest son succeeding the father; but this principle was in later times departed from. Sometimes brothers took precedence of sons; at other times cousins or more distant relations were preferred to nearer relatives. The wish of the previous ruler, the power and influence of the rival candidates to the throne, the wishes and the predilections of the Chief nobles and their mutual relations inter se and in reference to the claimants—all had much to do actually with the final selection. The unwritten law of the constitution would sometimes be set aside by some noble or other acquiring such preponderance of power as enabled him to act independently and arbitrarily in his own interest. Thus were Suhung and Gobar raised to the throne by a Bar Barua, Sujinpha and Sudaipha by a Burha Gohain and Sulikpha by a Bar Phukan. No one could however be

a king unless he were a prince of the blood and belonged to one of the royal families—Dihingia, Charingia, Tungkhungia, Namrupia, Samaguria and Parvatia. The person of the king was sacred and any noticeable scar or blemish, even the scar of a carbuncle, was a bar to the succession. This prohibition was strictly followed; and hence the practice followed by some Ahom kings of mutilating possible rivals, as a security against intrigues and rebellions. Slitting the ear of a rival prince or depriving him of his eyesight or putting him to death etc., was resorted to.¹

Political Authorities : The right to rule and administer was based on the right of joint conquest and accordingly political authority was vested in Sukapha the conqueror and his commanders and followers and their descendants. The Burha Gohains and the Bar Gohains could be appointed from the descendants of Sukapha's Burha Gohain and Bar Gohain only. Any appointments to the highest offices from families that were not Sukapha's followers in the common adventure of the conquest of Assam, used to be looked with disfavour by the ancient aristocracy as being infringement of their vested interests. The appointment of a Kayastha, Manthir Bharali Barua of the Bezdoloi family as Parvatia Phukan and Sirdar of the Army during Mir Jumla's invasion of Assam in 1662 aroused resentment and evoked protests of the Ahom commanders; the Ahom nobles were seriously offended at the growing power of a non-Ahom, Kekeru Kalita Choladhara Phukan in Lakshmi Singha's reign; Captain Thomas Welsh considered the conferment of the office of Bar Barua on Rupchandra, on his son, Kirtichandra and on the latter's grandson, Jainath as one of the sources of the prevailing discontent and disaffection that ultimately called for British intervention in Assam at the Ahom king's request, as Rupchandra did not belong to an appropriate family from which a Bar Barua could be recruited.²

-
1. Gait, *A History of Assam*, pp. 233-235; S. K. Bhuyan, 'The Administrative System of the Ahoms', *Aspects of the Heritage of Assam*, pp. 89-ff.
 2. S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, pp. 7-ff.

Political Ideology : The Ahom political ideology was saturated with ideas of unity, benevolence and justice. The following advice was given to Khunlung and Khunlai when they left for this earth to rule over it :—“Just as man loses his wife if he quarrels with his father-in-law and brother-in-law, and just as a mother-bird guards her nestlings with her wings and protects them from rain and storm, and rears them up by feeding them herself, so you two brothers should protect your subjects and desist from quarrelling with your friends and supporters.”³ The following statements of Prime Minister Atan Bura Gohain Rajmantri Dangaria also bear testimony to the Ahom ideals of harmony and unity in orderly society and of righteous rule for justice and happiness in State life :—“Love was the order of the time. Men used to take food in the same dish like sons of the same mother ; and nobody entertained any jealousy or hatred towards any other person”. “During his rule the sufferings of the people came to an end, and they became happy as before. He governed his subjects as his own sons. There was no taxation in his time. He lived in the ways of righteousness according due punishment to every guilt, and rewards and honour to virtue and merit.”⁴

The Ahoms later had contacts with different religious faiths ; and these influenced their political concepts. In the beginning their political conduct was mainly governed by the instructions which were given by Jasingpha, god of learning to Khunlung and Khunlai on the eve of their departure to rule upon the earth as representatives of their grand-father Lengdan or Indra. According to the sacred books of the Ahoms, instructions such as the following were delivered :—Jasingpha said, —“If there be a battle, inform me, and I shall send down eight lakhs of gods who will cut down all the enemies to pieces I give you a sword ; all the people of the country will pay you homage. You must always be alert in carrying out State affairs. At the end of a year, you must wash and sharpen the sword. I give you the rule of a wide country. You will

3. S. K. Bhuyan, *Deodhai Assam Buranji*, pp. 1-ff.

4. S. K. Bhuyan, ‘Atan Bura Gohain’s Buranji’, in *Deodhai Assam Buranji*, pp. 88-ff.

never be overcome or defeated by others. I give you Somdeo (Chum-Cheng) ; you will never leave the idol. You must be careful not to let the idol fall to the ground. You will then be endowed with long life. No king will disobey you." Lengdan said,—“There are innumerable number of people in the country. The country is full of Tais and slaves. They cannot distinguish right from wrong. They are in the habit of taking other's property and wives by force. If a person commits a crime, do not kill him at once without fair trial. There are people of various communities on the earth. It is very thickly populated. You must rule with a firm hand.”⁵

During later periods, the Ahoms were imparted scientific knowledge of Hindu political treatises, e.g., Arthasastras and Dandanitis through learned Pandits attached to the royal court and to the families of the leading Ahom nobles. The following advice tendered by Kirtichandra Bar Barua to the fugitive king Lakshmi Singh on 24th November, 1769, bears distinctive marks of Hindu political thought on Ahom political concepts :—“The duty of a Kshatriya”, said Kirtichandra Bar Barua, “is to fight as long as there is life in his body. If victorious he enjoys the powers and blessings of sovereignty ; if dead he goes to heaven. If he desists from fighting he earns disgrace in the life hereafter, while in this world he has to lead a life of subservience to others. As he has perpetually to carry out the commands of others, he becomes subjected to fright, humiliation and pain. He has to live in eternal solicitation of death. This is certainly a dire distress. When a king becomes subjected to the monarch of another country, diplomatic measures should be adopted so that the conqueror may return to his own kingdom. On his retirement the subdued prince should remain in preparedness with his army ; and when opportunities present themselves for action he should strike promptly and reinstate himself in his lost suzerain power. The wicked have never consistently maintained their vows of friendship with the pious. The wicked have no forgiveness nor any piety ; so none of the king's adherents will be spared by the rebels. If nothing untoward happens to His Majesty he will at least have some mental anxiety

5. Golap Chandra Barua, Ahom Buranji, pp. 11-15.

and displeasure, his nobles and followers also will share the same ; it will then be impossible for the king to collect adherents like ourselves. A person acquires a petty job by parting with large sums of money and other articles ; still he is reluctant to give it up. If any body asserts that the Moamarias will retire to the forest after attaining the position of a Raja-Chakravarti your Majesty should by no means believe in such words.”⁶

Officers : Until the reign of the Dihingiya Raja there were only two great officers, the Burha Gohain, and the Bargohain. Though these offices were ordinarily hereditary, the king could select any member of the prescribed clan for the office and could dismiss a Gohain if he so wished. The office of the third great Minister, Barpatra Gohain was created by the Dihingiya Raja. Any one of these three could be appointed ‘Rajmantri’ or Prime Minister. They were advisers to the king in the day to day affairs. When necessary they used to go to war as Commander. They had within their respective jurisdictions about a lakh paiks each. For service to the king and in lieu of salary, the Burha Gohain was allotted for personal use 10,000 paiks, the Bar Gohain, 4,000 paiks and the Barpatra Gohain, 6,000 paiks besides rent-free lands.

With the extension of the Ahom dominions were created the offices of Barbarua and Barphukan during the reign of Pratap Singh. These offices were not hereditary and could be filled by any member of twelve specified families other than those from which the great Gohains were recruited. The Barbarua was the head of the Executive and the Judiciary. When necessary, he had to go to war in the capacity of Commander. He also received revenues in his jurisdiction in the eastern provinces from Sadiya to Koliabar outside the jurisdiction of the Gohains. He had control over 14,000 paiks. The Barbarua could not act independently of the three Gohains ; any matter placed before the monarch by the Barbarua used to be considered in the presence of the Gohains, and in case the matter were of great importance, the Phukans and Baruas also used to be summoned for giving their opinion.

6. MS. Chronicle of King Lakshmi Singha's reign (D.H.A.S. No. 38), quoted by S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, p. 22.

The Bar Phukan acted as the Viceroy in the whole country between Koliabar to Gauhati. with Koliabar and subsequently, Gauhati as his head-quarters. He had to look after collection of revenue, administration of paiks and safety of frontiers. He had the charge of administration of justice in Lower Assam. He could sanction the execution of criminals by drowning. He conducted the political relations with Bengal and Bhutan and the Chieftains of the Assam passes. When required, he had to lead armies to battle.

Frontier and local Governors had also to be appointed with the growth of the Ahom kingdom. The Sadiya khowa Gohain ruled at Sadiya since the overthrow of the Chutiya kingdom. The Marangi khowa Gohain was Governor of the Naga marches west of the Dhansiri. There were also the Solal Gohain, the Jagial Gohain and the Kajali Mukhia Gohain. The Raja of Saring and the Raja of Tipam used to be the heir-apparent to the throne and the next in order of succession respectively.

There were numerous other officials who were generally recruited from the fifteen Ahom 'Phoids' or clans that had the virtual monopoly of the highest appointments. For appointments that did not involve military service, the higher classes of the non-Ahom natives and also persons of foreign descent, domiciled in the country for three or four generations, were eligible. Amongst these other officers, the highest in rank were the Phukans. The Ahom king had 24 Phukans. Six of these were the 'Charuwa' Phukans, who formed the council of the Bar Barua and also were attached to the royal court for advising the monarch. They had charge of six thousand paiks each. The Naobaicha Phukan had an additional allotment of a thousand men who manned the royal boats; other 'Charuwa' Phukans were the Bhitaraual Phukan, the Na Phukan, the Dihingiya Phukan, the Deka Phukan and the Neog Phukan. The Nyayshodha Phukan represented the sovereign in the administration of justice and was attached to the court.⁷ Subject to the king's

7. Mackenzie, *History of the Relations of the Government with Hill-tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal*, Appendix A, Welsh's Report on Assam, 1794, p. 380.

approval, he used to dispose of appeals from decisions of lower local courts.

The other Phukans were Changrung Phukan (Chief Engineer), Parbatia Phukan, Raidangiya Phukan, Gandhia Phukan (Incharge, Royal Archives and Stores), Khangiya Phukan, Tamuli Phukan (Incharge of royal gardens), Choladhara Phukan (Keeper of royal wardrobe), Khargharia Phukan (Superintendent, Gun Powder Factories), Naoshalia Phukan (responsible for the fleet), Dhekial Phukan, Dewaliya Phukan (Incharge, Hindu Temples), Chiring Phukan (Incharge of Somdeo, Ahom priests, Ahom Pujas, and writing of history), Charingiya Phukan, Tipamia Phukan, Jalbhari Phukan, Raj Guru Phukan, Rahial Phukan.

Next in rank were the Baruas. There were many of them, e.g., the Bhandari Barua (Treasurer), the Duliya Barua (Incharge of king's palanquins), the Chaodangiya Barua (Superintendent of Executions), the Khanikar Barua (Chief of artificers), the Sonadar Barua (Mint Master and Chief Jeweller), the Bej Barua (Physician to the royal family), the Hati Barua, the Ghora Barua etc., Chetia Patra Barua, Bar Chiring Barua, Bar Bhandar Barua, Gharphalia Barua, Dola Kashariya Barua, Tipamia Barua, Moran Barua, Namrupia Barua, Chand Chukia Barua, Rahial Barua, Kharangia Barua, Charingia Barua, Pakhiamaria Barua, Kathkatia Barua, Ghiu Barua, Phulpani Barua, Malia Barua, Charaimaria Barua, Dhenuchocha Baruah, Joradhara Barua, Chaodang Barua, Kakati Majindar Barua, Gandhia Barua, Shenchoa Barua, Changmai Barua, Shilakuti Barua, Duaria Barua, Bharali Barua, Hiloidari Barua, Darabdhara Barua, etc.

The Baruas used to be appointed in consideration of merit. The majority of the Baruas were connected with the departments of supply. A few, however, had local administrative duties. The Phukans and the Baruas had control over those Paiks, i.e., the 'Muls', who were summoned to duty and actually served and worked for the king at the time, the other officers being Hazarika over 1,000, Saikia over 100 and Bora over 20. The Rajkhowas were local Governors with command over 3,000 men. The Rajkhowas administered justice in their allotted districts. There

were 18 Rajkhowas, twelve in Upper Assam and Six in Lower Assam. They were also employed as Superintendents of public works. They were recruited from 'Chamua' Ahoms (belonging to Ahom nobility). There were Rajkhowas in Nibuk, Bacha, Dihing, Salaguri, Abhoypur, Namdang, Dikhounukh, Gajpur, Doiang and Ghiladhara areas.

There were Kakatis (writers) of different categories—Barkakati, Pakhikakati, Changkakati, Tirukakati, etc. There were Katakis, agents for the king in his dealings with foreign States or members of the diplomatic corps—Barkataki, Maju Katakai, Saru Katakai. There were Chorang Chowas or members of the Intelligence Service. 'Bairagis' used to be sent to foreign lands to surreptitiously study conditions and customs there. There were also Khaunds, charged with the duty of carrying the ashes of deceased Hinduised Ahom kings to the Ganges or to places of pilgrimage like Gaya. There were Dolois—Bar Doloi, Maju Doloi, Saru Doloi—or Hindu astrologers in addition to Ahom Deodhais and Bailungs⁸.

The Non-Ahoms and the Muslim did not suffer disability on account of religion. Upto 1772, however, the Gohains and the Phukans were recruited from amongst the Ahoms; and the highest office open to a non-Ahom, whether a Hindu or a Muslim, was Baruaship. A large number of Muslims were appointed in several departments of the State, e.g., minting of coins, painting, carpentry, embroidery work, sword-making, gun-casting, and the manufacture of gun powder. Learned Muslims, Parsiparhias, or Persian readers, were attached to the Ahom court for deciphering and interpreting of Persian documents and draughting, and supervision of the government's Persian correspondence.⁹

Even a causal look at the detailed list of officers of the Ahom Government gives an impression of the extent of prevalent social and economic activities during Ahom times, that were considered important matters of State concern, worthy of governmental control and regulation. Pani Phukan, Chetia

8. Gait, *A History of Assam*, pp. 235-239; Lila Gogoi, *Ahom Jati Aru Asamiya Sanskriti*, pp. 62-76.

9. S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, p. 14.

Phukan, Changrung Barua, Kath Barua, Khargharia Barua, Sulpani Barua, Majindar Barua, Kukurachowa Barua, Gajpuria Barua, Jutkia Barua, Tipamia Rajkhowa, Raidangia Barua, Parbatia Barua, Majumelia Barua, Sarunelia Barua, Puranimelia Barua, Mahimelar Barua, Na Melar Barua, Gabharumelia Barua, Khangia Barua, Kahchengar Barua, Enaigharia Barua, Debaliya Barua, Satriya Barua, Nek Phukan, Deodhai Phukan, Bailung Phukan, Chengdhowa Phukan, Chungdhowa Phukan, Dolchowa Phukan, Maidam Phukan, Mochai Phukan, Deorgoyna Barua, Deodhai Barua, Bailung Barua, Bandhai Barua, Nagaria Barua, Chingkari Barua, Ramkhan Barua, Madgharia Barua, Malaigharia Barua, Mehenga Barua and Ayubriya Barua etc., added to the names of officers already mentioned, surely make an impressive list¹⁰.

An officer was generally mentioned with reference to his family, as Bakatial Barbarua, Sandikai Barphukan, Kuoigayan Buragahain, Madurial Bargohain and so on. Personal names were used scarcely and there was eclipse of personal names in the brilliant effulgence of official titles. This indicates the importance that was attached to official positions.

Relations between the Ruler and the Ruled : The king was revered as the Heavenly Lord. The king was also loved and feared, in as much as the king loved his country and subjects. There was of course a distinction between the king as a person and the 'king' as an institution. Whereas the institution was sacred and sacrosanct, the person had to keep up the dignity and discharge the duties of the institution conscientiously and properly. Whenever he failed and committed excesses, he had to pay a heavy price : popular discontent, ministerial disapproval, revolt and intrigues and ultimately dethronement or death were the grim prospects in such circumstances. The three principal ministers advised the king on the state of the nation and depending on their personality, could exercise enormous power and influence and serve on occasions as spearheads of democratic opposition to royal prerogatives exercised to the disregard of factual needs and demands and in violation of people's

10. Lila Gogoi, 'Ahom Jati Aru Asamiya Sanskriti', pp. 175-176; Haliram Dhekial Phukan, Assam Buranji, pp. 60-65.

real well-being. Normally, therefore, the king kept himself in touch with his people and endeavoured to endear himself to them, *modus operandi* being, amongst others, public works, games and sports, Coronation Ceremonies, Rikkhvan Ceremonies, tours etc.

Khel System : The adult population of Assam was divided into 'Khels' charged with the duty of rendering diverse specific services to the State such as arrow-making, boat-building, boat plying, house-building, provision-supplying, fighting, writing, revenue collecting, road-building, catching and training of elephants, superintendance of horses, training of hawks, superintendance of forests, etc. The Ahom Khel system was organised by Momai-tamuli Barbarua in Pratap Singh's reign.

Barring the nobles, priests and persons of high caste and their slaves, the whole male population between the ages of fifteen and fifty were liable to render service to the State. They were known as 'paiks' (originally meaning foot-soldiers, 'Padatika'). Four 'paiks' and since the reign of Rajeswar Singh three 'paiks' constituted a 'got'¹¹. One man in a 'got' had to serve the State for four months in a year and then his place was taken by a second man from the same 'got' and so forth. While one served the State, others looked after the cultivation and other concerns of the absent comrade. In emergencies, two men and even three men might be called for State service. The levy of one man from a 'got' was known as the 'mul', of two men as the 'dowal' and the three as the 'tewal'. This system was of advantage in times of war and of peace. The 'paiks' employed on public works during peace time were responsible for the enormous and high embanked roads in Upper Assam, which are a source of wonder to all those who see them even today.

There was a regular gradation of officers over the 'paiks'—over a thousand, a Rajkhowa or a Barua over two to three thousand, a Phukan over six thousand—the whole were under a rigid discipline of a regular army. The paiks had a valued, democratic privilege of nominating and claiming dismissal of their Boras and Saikias and some-times of their Hazarikas. This ensured

11. Haliram Dhekial Phukan, Assam Buranji, p. 52.

a needed check on officers, should they tend to be oppressive. Each official of the Khel had a certain number of paiks assigned to him in lieu of pay. In course of time, large number of paiks were assigned for the support of temples or of Brahmans also. A paik could sometimes obtain exemption from personal service by payment of money, Rs. 2. This privilege was invariably enjoyed by all 'Chamus' or the higher rank of subjects. For services to the State, each paik was allowed two 'Puras' of the best rice land, free of rent. He was given land for his house and garden, for which he paid a poll or house tax of rupee one only.¹²

The pyramidal administrative structure with the king and his ministers at the apex and the 'paiks' and the 'Karis' (Shaftsmen) at the base was strong and well-knit; efficiency and discipline were the outstanding features thereof; economically also, this paik and Khel system of State organisation was advantageous. There was no issue from the treasury for the pay of any officer, nor indeed to any person except the foreign soldiers, merchants and mendicants. The vast number of men employed to work in king's farms, gardens, fisheries, mines, arsenals and manufactories and to man and construct his vessels, laboured without any expense to the Treasury. An officer's outlay of money was also trifling for he had his personal allotment of paiks in lieu of pay, who cultivated his farm, built his house, made his boats and made his furniture and clothing.

Lord William Bentinck rightly inferred that there must have been something intrinsically good in the constitution, and referred to the long continuance of Ahom rule in Assam as "almost without example in history". Similar views have been expressed by other scholars. Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji says: "The gift of the Ahoms to Assam was primarily in their military organisation and their administration. Nothing so practical and elaborate and efficient appears to have existed not only in Assam but also in the whole of Eastern India. The Ahoms were so

12. S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, pp. 10-ff; Gait, *A History of Assam*, pp. 239-ff; Mills, *Report on the Province of Assam*, p. 2, *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. VI, pp. 89-ff.

powerful that the kingdom that they carved out for themselves came to be associated with their name as a nation"¹³.

Public Works : Public works that were of benefit to their subjects were almost a passion with the Ahom rulers who were surely motivated by the love of their country and by sleepless solicitude for the welfare of their people. During the reign of almost all Ahom rulers public works of one type or other were executed. Roads, tanks, embankments, temples, being gifts of the Ahom times and inherited by the present generation, testify to the practical application by the Ahom monarchs of ideas of benevolent monarchy or of Welfare State, to speak in present terms. The following works executed during the Ahom age could bring credit to any administration anywhere :—

Sudangpha (1397-1407)—Rajmao Ali ; Susenpha (1439-1488)—Nagshankar Debalay ; Suhungmung, Dihing Raja (1497-1539) Karatoya Dol, Karatoya Pukhuri, Athabari Pukhuri, Dihingar Mathauri, Harmati Garh ; Suklenmung (1539-1552)—Garhgaonr Pukhuri, Padum Pukuri, Garhgaonr Ali, Naga Ali (from Bar Ali to the Naga Hills) ; Kahikuchir Mathauri, Nimana Garh, Changinimukhar Mathauri ; Sukhampha (1552-1603) — Nahar Pukhuri, Jethi Pukhuri, Mechlau Pukhuri, Sondar Pukhuri, Nahar Ali, Pengera Ali, Debera Parar Garh ; Pratap Singh (1603-1641)—Mai Dol, Biswanath Dol, Maheswar Ghar, Dergaonr Purani Dol, Mechagarh Pukhuri, Rupahi Pukhuri, Teliadonga Pukhuri, Phulchengar Pukhuri, Taokakar Pukhuri, Dergaoner Pukhuri, Bah Garh, Mera Garh, Choatal Garh, Ladoi Garh, Raj Garh, Kotoha Garh, Numali Garh, Rangali Garh, Chamdhara Garh, Dafala Garh, Chaiyangar Garh, Naga Garh, Mahangar Garh, Chinatoli Garh, Solal Garh, Bar Ali, Chatai Ali, Haripara Ali, Jabakar Ali, Baktar Ali, Parbatar Ali, Mekurikhowa Ali, Shukati Ali, Chaiyangar Ali, Katarikhamar Garh, Hati Garh, Lakhau Garh ; Surampha (Bhaga Raja)—1641-1644—Solguri Ali ; Nariya Raja—(1644-1648)—Mishimi Garh, Engera Garh, Sarihaw Burhagohain Ali ; Jayadhvaj Singh (1648-1663)—

13. According to Dr. Grierson, "The Ahoms have left at least two important legacies to Assam—The sense of the importance of history and the system of administration"; Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. II, p. 62.

—Rahdhala Pukhuri, Athaisagar Pukhuri, Tenga Pukhuri, Baduli Pukhuri, Neoggohain Pukhuri, Lakhimi Pukhuri, Tank at Bhatiapara, Machhkhowa Garh, Bhomoraguri Ali, Cheuni Ali, Road from Ali Kekuri to Namdang ; Chakradhvaj Singh (1663-1669)—Road from Teliadanga to Jhanzimukh, Bura Gohain Pukhuri, Gauhati Nagarar Garh, Itakhulir Garh ; Udayaditya (1669-1673)—Gauhatir Bam Garh, Gauhatir Pani Garh, Bairagi Ali, Momaikata Garh; Sudaipha (1677-1679)—Chintamoni Garh, Kirai Ali, A Sil-sako ; Lora Raja (1679-1681)—Dauki Ali, Sola Phukanar Ali, Gadadhar Singh (1681-1696)—Maibelar Dol, Lankuri Dol, Bashistha-Ashramar Dol, Rohdoir Dol, Umanandar Dol, Thaora Dol, Bhogdoi Pukhuri, Rohdoi Pukhuri, Bauli Pukhuri, Mitha Pukhuri, Borkolar Pukhuri, Joha Pukhuri, Thaora Pukhuri, Shukan Pukhuri, Aghoni Pukhuri, Panibil Pukhuri, Achubulia Pukhuri, Dhodar Ali, Ramani Ali, Barbarua Ali, Halau Phukanar Ali, Khara Garh, Rohdoi Ali, Akar Ali, two Stone-bridges; Rudra Singh (1696-1714)—Joi Dol, Baidyanath, Siva Dol, Devi Ghar, Sri Surjya Mandir, Sri Ganesh Mandir, Rangnath Siv Dol, Fakuia Dol, Joi Sagar Pukhuri, Rangnathar Pukhuri, Sontola Pukhuri, Barpatra Dol (Kenduguri), Barpatra Pukhuri, Rangpurar Kareng, Chhara Pukhuri, Dubarani Ali, Metekar Ali, Kharikatiya Ali, Darika Ali, Tejir Garh, Barpatra Gohain Ali ; Sib Singh (1714-1744)—Siv Dol (Gauri Sagar), Visnu Dol (Gauri Sagar), Devi Dol (Gauri Sagar), Siv Dol (Sibsagar), Devi Dol (Sibsagar), Visnu Dol (Sibsagar), Keri Rajmao Dol, Asvkrant Mandir, Ugratara Mandir, Barpatra Dol (Kalugaon), Sibsagar Pukhuri, Gaurisagar Pukhuri, Rajmao Pukhuri, Lakhimi Sagar Pukhuri, Dhai Pukhuri, Dhai Ali ; Pramatta Singh (1744-1751) Sukreswarar Janardan Mandir, Rudreswar Mandir, Hajor Mandir, Rang Ghar ; Rejeswar Singh (1751-1769)—Vashisthashramar Mandir, Monikarneswarar Mandir, Chitrachal Mandir, Naba Graha Mandir, Negheriting Debalaya, Har Gauri Dol, Sukreswar Mandir, Kamakhyar Nat Mandir, Dirgheswari Mandir, Kedar Mandir, Moglau Pukhuri, Sil Pukhuri, Gauhati, Rangpurar Talatal Ghar, Nati Gosainr Dol, Rangpurar Saru Rangghar, Garhgaon Talatal Ghar, Bahikhowa Bar Phukanar Ali, Luthuri Kath Katiya Barua Ali, Deka Barbarua Ali ; Lakshmi Singh (1769-1780)—Bogi Dol, Rudrasagarar Dol, Gauri Ballabh Dol, Iswaneswar, Siv Dol, Hajor Jay Durga Mandir, Janardan Mandir,

Bogi Dolor Pukhuri, Rudrasagar Pukhuri, Gauri Ballabh Pukhuri, Ligiri Pukhuri ; Gaurinath Singh (1780-1795)—Nafuki Rajmao Dol, Aideo Pukhuri, Kuari Pukhuri, Namti Dol, Barbarua Pukhuri, Burhi Gosani Debalay, Bibudhi Garh, Aideo Ali ; Kamaleswar Singh (1795-1810)—Chhatrakar Debalay, Kamakhyar (Silghat) Tamar Ghar, Hayagrīb Madhav Debalay, Bahar Guri Debalaya, Cheuni Pukhuri, Mahebandha Ali, Kamarbandha Ali, Chuchande Bandha Ali ; Chandra Kanta Singh (1810-1818)—Hatigarh Debalay, Visnusagar Pukhuri, Bongal Pukhuri, Burha Gohain Pukhuri. Besides the above, there were other roads, tanks, temples and embankments, etc., which were also made during the Ahom period¹⁴.

Revenue Administration : Generally speaking, revenue was not collected in cash or corn, nor were the officers paid pay in money. The subjects were divided mainly into Chamuas—high class Ahoms, Kheluas, members of Khels, Meluas, members of Mels. Chamuas were exempted from personal service ; they had to owe allegiance to the king and render active military service in times of war ; otherwise they had ample freedom. They freely cultivated their plots without interference ; and also used to get estates as rewards by showing gallantry in war.

Tax System : The paiks got two puras of rent-free lands each for agricultural purposes for services to the State. For exemption from such service, they had to pay Rs. 2 each to the State. Generally, however, exemption was not sought, for people considered it wiser to show proficiency in State Service for betterment of prospects. For additional land occupied beyond two puras, revenue fixed was Re. 1 per 'pura'. For land for house and garden, a paik had to pay a poll or house tax of one rupee only. In Darrang where settlement and census operations were not carried out, there was a hearth tax of Rs. 2 per family for a separate cooking place. In the rest of the Ahom dominions, regular settlement and census operations were carried out and the paiks got 'pera Kagaz' (pera Kakat) or title deeds. Any one clearing land other than the above, could hold it for one to two rupees a pura until the same was resumed by the State

14. Lila Gogoi, 'Ahom Jati Aru Asamiya Sanskriti', pp. 168-172.

for reſettlement. Rice-lands were redistributed from time to time ; but not the homestead lands which descended from father to ſon. In the inundated parts of the country, the land was chiefly cultivated by emigrating rayats or 'pam' cultivators who paid a plough tax. No revenue was payable for lands allotted to officers or granted to temples and Brahmans (Devottar—Brahmottar lands). A widow had not to pay revenue for lands in her occupation. A widow with a minor ſon was accorded the benefit of paik's ſervice during the child's minority.¹⁵

The hill tribes who grew cotton paid a hoe tax. Artisans and others, not cultivators, paid a higher rate of poll tax, five rupees per head for gold waſhers and brass workers, three rupees per head of oil-ſpreſſers and fiſhermen. Workers in iron had to make an annual payment in kind. Other ſources of revenue were royalties on elephants and timbers and rent paid by farmers of mines and frontier traders¹⁶.

The markets uſed to be opened and maintained by the king. One-twentieth portion of commodities ſold in the markets was the State's ſhare. Further, for every market a ſpecified ſum was payable to the royal treasury. The Hatkhawas aided by 10 'Gots' of paiks each had to manage markets¹⁷. Properties of perſons dying without heirs belonged to the State ; ſo alſo properties captured in war. Diverſe preſents of wealth and goods made by frontier kings and tribal Chiefs alſo augmented the royal exchequer¹⁸.

System in Kamrup : Except in Kamrup where a ſystem of collecting revenue according to local diſiſions, called parganas, had been introduced by the Muhammadans, the Khel ſystem of general revenue adminiſtration was in vogue in Assam even at

15. Lila Gogoi, *Ahom Jati Aru Asamiya Sanskriti*, pp. 80-ff; Mills, *Report on the Province of Assam*, pp. 2-ff.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 78-81 ; Gait, *A History of Assam*, pp. 240-ff; Mills, *Report on the Province of Assam*, p. 3.

17. S. K. Bhuyan, *Deodhai Assam Buranji*, 1962, p. 142.

18. Revenue uſed to be collected by levy of 'Hatkar', 'Phatkar', 'Danda', 'Khut', 'Dan', 'Ghamesha', 'Dhumachh', and 'Jalkar', etc., alſo. Lila Gogoi, *Ahom Jati Aru Asamiya Sanskriti*, p. 83; Benudhar Sharma, *Maniram Dewan*, p. 157.

the time of the British occupation. In Kamrup the Muhamadans adopted or retained the same system of revenue as prevailed in Bengal because they were in possession of that district for a long time. The district was divided into parganas each in charge of a Chaudhury. The Parganas were in their turn subdivided into taluks each in charge of a Talukdar. The Chaudhuris and the Talukdars were assisted by their sub-ordinates—the Thakurias, the Patgiris and Gaon-Kakatis who kept the village and pargana accounts. Though in the rest of Assam the Khel or 'paik' system prevailed, yet ".....Upper Assam was divided into recognised local Districts, Mauzas and Tangonis, which appear to have had little or no connection with the Khel system, and perhaps were the remains of a preceding system under former dynasties."¹⁹

The Muslim Chronicler accompanying Mir Jumla to Assam computed that if Assam were administered like the Mughal dominions, the total collections from the revenue paid by the ryots and from the price of elephants caught in the jungles and other sources would come up to forty to fortyfive lakhs of rupees and that the value of gold washed from the sands of the Brahamaputra would come to Rs. 80,000 to Rs. 1,08,000.²⁰

Currency and Coinage : The currency of Assam consisted of gold and silver coins and conchshells or cowries. Copper coins were not current. The standard coin of the Ahoms weighed a tola (two-fifths of an ounce) or 96 ratis. The coins were octagonal, perhaps in accordance with a sloka in the Jogini Tantra. In some manuscript Buranjis on Sanchi leaves, however, it is mentioned that the coins were octagonal to indicate the eight kingdoms, Kachari, Barahi, Chutia, Kamata, Bhuya, Patilajaha, Aghersundari and Chungi (Moran), subjugated by the Ahoms. The earliest coins bearing the date, 1543 A.D. were struck by Suklenmung.²¹ Later it became the

19. Report on the Revenue Administration of Assam, 1849-50.

20. J. N. Sarkar, Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society, Vol. I, 1915, p. 187.

21. It is said that Sudangpha, Bamuni Konwar (1397-1407) struck coins in his name on his accession to the throne. These coins, however, are yet undiscovered. P. D. Chaudhury, Archæology in Assam, p. 14.

practice of Ahom monarchs to commemorate their accession to the throne by issue of new coins bearing their names. Rudra Singh opened a mint that was kept constantly at work and coins weighing 48 and 24 ratis were issued. Sib Singh issued coins weighing 12 and 6 ratis and Gaurinath, coins weighing 3 ratis. Sib Singh introduced a regular gold currency. Gold coins of Suklenmung and Udayaditya are also extant. Rounded balls of equal weight and value with gold and silver coins were also in use. 'Narayani' coins of Koch Bihar also used to circulate in Lower Assam.

For the coins, Suklenmung used the Ahom language and character, Jayadhvaj Singh and Chakradhvaj Singh, Sanskrit legend and Assamese script, and the next three rulers, 'Ahom' and Rudra Singh onwards, Sanskrit. True, Pramatta Singh and Rajeswar Singh struck coins with Ahom legends also. Square coins with Persian legends were issued by Sib Singh and by Rajeswar Singh. A square coin with Sanskrit legend was issued by Lakshmi Singh. Generally, the obverse of a coin gave the name of the king and the date of issue, and the reverse, the name of his favourite deity. The deities commonly mentioned are Tara (Suklenmung's coin), Siva and Rama (Chakradhvaj Singh's coin), Indra (coins with Ahom legends), Siva with or without consort (coins with Sanskrit legends), Krishna (Vaishnava Ususpers, Bharat and Sarbananda's coins), and Radha and Krishna (Brajnath's coins).²²

Judicial Administration : The Ahoms did not have a separate judicial branch of Government as, it is stated, should exist in a modern developed constitution according to the theory of separation of powers. The king was the fountain of justice : other high executive officers had also judicial functions. The chief judicial authorities were the three Gohains, the Bar Barua and the Bar Phukan. Other Phukans, Baruas, Rajkhowas also

22. Gait, *A History of Assam*, pp. 242-244; Lila Gogoi, *Ahom Jati Aru Asamiya Sanskriti*, pp. 86-ff; P. D. Choudhury and M. C. Das, *Ancient-treasures of Assam*, pp. 20-22; M. C. Das, 'A study on Ahom Coins', *Pragjyotisa, Souvenir, All India Oriental Conference, XXII Session, Gauhati, 1965*, pp. 39-44.

had judicial authority in their respective jurisdictions and over the Paiks under their charge. An appeal lay from the subordinates to the Bar Barua and the Bar Phukan. From judgements of the Bar Barua and the Bar Phukan, appeal lay to the sovereign who disposed of cases through the Nyayshodha Phukan. Each court used to be assisted by assessors—Katakis, Ganaks, Pandits, etc. Prior to the Moamaria revolution, justice was said to have been speedily, efficiently and impartially meted out.²³

For cases coming to the royal court, evidence of witnesses for the plaintiff and the defendant or the appellant and the respondent used to be taken and recorded by Kakatis. A 'Buranji' refers to and details a trial held in Lakshmi Singh's reign for treason.²⁴ Many small cases used to be decided in village councils or 'Raij-Mels' and in village Namghars and settlements and decisions thus arrived at were conventionally accepted by the State and the parties concerned.²⁵

The officers also had charge of police work in their respective jurisdictions, maintained law and order therein, and settled disputes amongst people under their charge. The Ahom criminal law was characterised by great thoroughness and different forms of graded punishments including capital punishments of varying degrees of severity were a special feature of the same.²⁶ Punishments were inflicted in a rigorous manner, the common punishments being extraction of eyes and knee cups, slicing off of noses and ears, hammering by clubs, throwing off into water, hanging by a hook, pressure between two wooden cylinders, and hoeing from head to feet. A traitor was punished by execution which

23. Gait, *A History of Assam*, pp. 240-ff; Lila Gogoi, *Ahom Jati Aru Asamiya Sanskriti*, pp. 81-ff.

24. 'Barpahi Buranji' cited by S. K. Bhuyan, 'Konwar Bidroh', Preface, pp. X-ff, 22-29, 41-52; S. K. Bhuyan, *Studies in the History of Assam*, pp. 116-123.

25. Mention may be made in this connection of 'Adi Kabangs' of NEFA which discharge similar functions of People's Council and Court till today. Verrier Elwin, *A Philosophy for NEFA*, pp. 156-159.

26. William Robinson,—*A Descriptive Account of Assam*, pp. 196-ff.

on occasions used to be extended to the leading members of his family. A very severe form of execution consisted in cutting off slices from the body followed by final decapitation. Crimes were perceptibly reduced as the people dreaded the inevitable consequences of violation of law and order. In later times, the Hindu Law as expounded by the Brahmins, was generally followed in deciding civil matters²⁷; earlier, however, the judges used to rely on their own sense of right and wrong and the custom of the country.²⁸

Military Administration : The Paik system of the Ahoms obviated the necessity of maintaining a huge standing army at the head-quarters. The non-serving paiks formed a standing militia that could be drawn upon and mobilised at short notice. No formal conscription was necessary and the whole body of adult effectives could be requisitioned to service, if necessary, under the normal administrative procedure. Normally, each paik had in turn some knowledge and practical experience of his duties, military or civil, and whenever necessary, he was given a refresher course and also intensive training specially needed for a particular situation. A kheldar, could, at short notice, assisted by his hierarchy of subordinate officers, mobilise his quota of soldiers for the army or the navy.

The king was in supreme command. All officers from the highest to the lowest were liable to military service, and generally, there could be no exemption from the duties of military command and obedience; this general principle applied to other subjects. The rigorous, almost military discipline of the paik and Khel system, with people under constant, vigilant watch of superior officers even during peace times, fitted them to be efficient, effective, alert and disciplined soldiers in times of war.

The Ahoms equipped a strong navy under the Pani Phukan or the Naosaliya Phukan. Elaborate arrangements of military

27. A. Mackenzie, *History of the Relations of the Government with Hill tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal*, Appendix A; Welsh's Report on Assam, 1794, p. 380.

28. See *Supra*, Chapter V, Society, 'Crimes and Punishments', 'Civil Justice'.

preparedness were always ready to meet with any emergent situation for a kingdom that was expanding and had to deal with frontier tribes and neighbouring States, particularly Bengal under the Muhammadans. War materials like guns, gunpowder, bows and arrows, etc., were in charge of officers like Hiloidari Barua, Khargharia Phukan and Dhenuchocha Barua, etc. There were Hati Baruas and Ghora Baruas to look after war elephants and horses. Decisions on war and peace were the king's. The king, however, used to consult his chief ministers before embarking on war. Whenever, exigencies arose, the king appointed the Commander and the Deputy Commander of his forces from amongst his superior officers after due consideration of their respective capabilities for such military assignments.

The Ahom soldiers were adept in war strategy of advance, retreat, scorched-earth policy, procrastination for gaining time for preparation, out-flanking movement, causing diversion in enemy's ranks, guerilla tactics, etc. Very swift in movements of advance and retreat, they were very difficult to deal with for the enemy. They could quickly make very strong forts, fortifications, embarkments, ditches for defence, obstruction and offensive operations, even on the march. Mir Jumla admired their proficiency. The walls of the Ahom fort at Simalgarh were so thick that even cannon balls could make but little impression. Mir Jumla wondered at the strength of the fortifications.

The author of the 'Fathiyah-i-Ibriyah' describes the Ahom fort at Jogighopa in the following terms :—"It is a large and high fort on the Brahmaputra. Near it the enemy had dug many holes for the horses to fall into, and pointed pieces of bamboos (Panjis) had been stuck in the holes. Behind the holes, for about half a shot's distance, on even ground, they had made a ditch, and behind this ditch, near the fort, another one three yards deep. The latter was also full of pointed bamboos. This is how the Ahoms fortify all their positions. They make their forts of mud. The Brahmaputra is south of the fort and on the east is the Monas."²⁹

29. Gait, A History of Assam, p. 129.

But for extra-ordinary military efficiency and iron discipline, admirable patience, perseverance, and tenacity, robust optimism that bended but did not break and unusual bravery and gallantry and sincere love for the king and the country, it would have been almost impossible for the Ahoms to stem the tide of recurring Mughal invasions and prevent the break up of their kingdom which was exposed to attack both from within (from the tribes from the mountains and the disaffected who occasionally sprang up in the plains) and from without (from the Koches and the Mughals for example); nor would it have been possible for a comparatively handful of a foreign tribe entering North-East Assam in the thirteenth century to have carved out a strong, extensive kingdom in an alien land where they could continue their dominion for an unusually long period of six hundred years.³⁰

Frontier Administration and External Relations : The frontiers of the kingdom were under the surveillance of several frontier wardens, the Sadiya Khowa Gohain, the Marangikhowa Gohain, the Solal Gohain, the Jagialia Gohain, and the Kajalimukhia Gohain, who protected the kingdom from the incursions of the hill peoples. These officers were selected from the families of the three Gohains at the metropolis. To wean away the tribesmen from raiding, they used to be allowed black-mail in money or goods or servitors.

There were dependencies and vassal States and they enjoyed practically full autonomy in internal matters. The province of Darrang enjoyed complete autonomy in internal administration. The Ahoms were the paramount power. The Raja of a dependency or vassal State had to supply stipulated number of paiks to work on the king's account or pay commutation money in case of exemption from personal service. Further, he was to render military aid to the liege-lord at the time of war at the head of his contingent of paiks. Rani, Beltola, Luki, Barduar, Bholagaon, Mairapur, Pantan, Bangaon,

30. S. K. Bhuyan, 'The Military System of the Ahoms', Pragjyotisa, Souvenir, All India Oriental Conference, XXII Session, Gauhati, 1965, pp. 29-38.

Bagaduar, Dimarua, Neli, Gobha, Sahari, Dandua, Barepujia, Topakuchia, Khaigharia, Panbari, Sora, Mayang, Dhing, Tetelia, Salmara, Garakhia, Baghargaon, Bhurbandha were dependencies of the paramount Ahom Sovereign.³¹

The Bar Phukan, the king's viceroy, who lived at Gauhati conducted political relations with Bengal and Bhutan and the chieftains on the Assam Passes. The Choladhara Phukan or the master of the regalia, at the head-quarters, was like a minister-in-charge of foreign affairs, both political and commercial.

Assam had political relations with Mughal India including the Subah of Dacca and the Thana of Rangamati, Cooch Behar, Cachar, Jayantia, Khyrim, Bhutan, Manipur, Tripura, Nara and Munkang. Assam had a body of disciplined, well-trained, erudite and astute envoys known as Katakis, who conducted diplomatic relations with these States on behalf of the Government. Within the framework of the general policy laid down by the government, they had enough scope for exercise of discretion, originality and inventiveness; and on their powers of advocacy and exposition and persuasive capacity depended the proper settlement of grave issues. They carried written epistles which they had to explain and sometimes supplement by 'mukh-jevan' or oral submissions. According to diplomatic usages, they were not responsible for the contents of messages they carried and were immune from the consequences thereof, but sometimes they had to suffer at the hands of short-tempered, haughty monarchs and nobles who broke diplomatic convention in this regard because the messages the Katakis carried were not to their liking. Strictest honesty was enjoined on the Katakis. Pratap Singh executed several of them for receiving gratification. Lachit Barphukan punished some of them for accepting tiny presents and for attempting to entice away an Assamese astrologer to the Mogul Camp. Formerly Ahoms were recruited to the diplomatic services. Later Pratap Singh reorganised the service by recruiting Katakis from the Brahmans gifted with nimble tongues and persuasive ways of speaking.

31. S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, pp. 9-ff.

King Pratap Singh once addressed the following words to his Katakis :—

“I am highly pleased with the manner in which you have conducted yourselves and asserted your views in a foreign place (court of the Mogul commander Allah Yar Khan). Katakis should be like shieldsmen. Your words alone constitute your rice and cloth; more specially the relations between ourselves and yourselves are like gold and borax ; the former is refined with the help of the latter. You have been able to vindicate your cause in a foreign Durbar, and thereby to protect the interests of your government, without paying any heed to your own personal safety. Therefore, O Bamuni-puteks (Katakis), have I got anyone dearer to me than yourselves ?”³²

Knowledge of Persian was a qualification for high appointment in the State services including the diplomatic service. Knowledge of Hindusthani and of Bengal affairs qualified members of the leading non-Brahman families for diplomatic assignments in the courts of the officers of the East India Company.

The ancient Hindu kingdom of Kamrupa was bounded on the west by the Karatoya river and included roughly, the Brahmaputra Valley, Bhutan, Rangpur and Behar.³³ The Ahoms had always in mind the restoration of the old limits of the kingdom upto the Karatoya river and at times they partially succeeded. Suhungmung, the Dihingia Raja took the first step in this direction. His forces under Chankham Ghar-Sandikoi “washed their swords in the waters of the Karatoya”. Ghar Sandikoi constructed a temple on the banks of the Karatoya and excavated a tank in the neighbourhood. The Padshah of Gaur entered into a friendly alliance with the Ahom monarch and presented to him the princesses Khanbibī Harmati and Darmati with three perganahs as dowry.

“During the reign of Dihingia Raja”, said king Pratap Singh to his Katakis, “his army proceeded down the Brahmaputra in

32. MS. Assam Buranji (obtained by D.H.A.S. from S. C. Goswami) quoted by S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, p. 31.

33. Gait, *A History of Assam*, 1906, p. 10.

a fleet of seven mar-nao (mar-nao=several boats tied together) and Chankham Ghar-Sandikoi, son of Phrasengmung, marched along the banks. They washed their swords in the Karatoya river, and constructed a small temple, and excavated a tank on its bank as a mark of victory. They then established friendship with Padshah of Gaur. They also established Biswa Singha in the government of Cooch Behar as a friend, and he paid his homage to Dihingia Raja with two pots of gold and silver. Our soldiers were rewarded with suitable presents and Ghar-Sandikoi was given the title of Bar-Azam".³⁴

King Rudra Singh convened a 'War Council' because he launched elaborate preparations and was determined to invade Bengal. The Barpatra Gohain said,—“The territories bordering on the Karatoya are ours. The enemies have got possession of them only on account of our indifference and inaction. The duty of the king is to destroy the enemy, and to recover his lost possessions with a view to preserve the ancient boundaries of his kingdom.”³⁵ The Kuoigayan Buragohain said,—“The ancestors of our king had, by virtue of their prowess and courage, crossed the boundaries of Rangamati, and washed their swords in the Karatoya Ganga. They found it inconvenient to fix the boundaries of Assam at the Karatoya, so they made the river Manha the western limit of Assam, and established a garrison at Gauhati.”³⁶ The same sentiment was expressed in Rudra Singh's death-bed injunction to his five sons,—“Old and young, you shall all be kings successively. I have subdued the countries that surrounded my dominions ; I proposed the reduction of the provinces contiguous to the Coroteea (Kartoya) river ; but my design must perish with me, for who will be found capable to pursue my plans ?”³⁷

Thus this desire to push the boundaries of the Ahom kingdom to the old limits of the ancient kingdom of Kamrupa

34. Ms. Assam Buranji (obtained by D.H.A.S. from S. C. Goswami) quoted by S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, p. 25; S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji (SM)*, pp. 23-29.

35. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 38.

36. *Ibid.*

37. J. P. Wade, *An Account of Assam*, p. 136.

was a basic objective of Ahom foreign policy that was never lost sight of. That the Ahoms retraced their steps eastward and selected the Manah river as their western boundary was a matter of strategy and practical expediency. The hills in the neighbourhood of the Manah were easy to fortify and gave the Ahoms a commanding position from where they could oppose an invading army from Bengal. The region between the Karatoya and the Manah was like a buffer-State with Koches sandwiched between Mughal India and Assam. To gain time for preparation, the Ahoms could divert the first burst of a Mughal attack to Cooch Behar. The Ahoms were careful enough to select strategic positions with the advantage of hills like Gauhati and Samdhara as their other rallying points, from where they could carry on their guerilla tactics. Whenever the Ahoms considered themselves powerful, they wanted to extend the limits of their kingdom to the Karatoya. King Jayadhwaj Singha overstepped the thus voluntarily contracted frontier in 1658 and carried his victorious arms to the environs of Dacca. The reprisal was Mir Jumla's invasion of Assam in 1662-63.

The established Governments of the Moguls and the Koches flouted agreements if expediency demanded such transgression and if the same could be practically supported and upheld by application of force. In the circumstances, the Ahom strategy was no different ; it was not unusual for the Ahoms to contravene treaty terms. It was good, they thought, that a powerful enemy should be removed from the land even by accepting humiliating terms and that whenever opportunities reappeared, hostilities should be resumed in defiance of the treaty terms. They realised that promises made under duress did not deserve fulfilment by the promisor State if such fulfilment was seriously prejudicial to its interests.

Relations with Moguls and other States : Assam's relations with the Muslim powers in Bengal and with Cooch Behar were systematic and continuous. After Cooch Behar came under the Mughals, the Mughals came nearer to Assam and became her immediate neighbours towards the west. Suhungmung's expedition to Gaur was at a time when the independent Afghan Sultans ruled there. The Mughals established their

supremacy over that province in 1576. The Ahom-Mughal hostilities began from 1614 in consequence of Mughal encroachments and raids which were resisted by the Ahoms. The wars continued with varying fortunes and neither side giving way finally until 1639 when according to a treaty Lower Assam from Gauhati to Manah passed into the hands of the Moghuls. The Ahoms re-acquired the territory in 1658 only to cede it again in 1663 and recovered it in 1667. The Ahom Viceroy, Laluk Barphukan treacherously surrendered Lower Assam to the Moguls in 1679 and the Ahoms finally recovered it in 1682 and the Manah remained the western boundary of Assam until the end of their rule when the British took over. The Ahom-Mughal wars put to test Assam's administrative system and military organisation, meant a heavy strain on Assam's economy and introduced for the Assamese people a period of ordeal through fire, which they ultimately passed out with success, thereby proving the existence of some intrinsic worth in them as a people and in their various institutions and arrangements of life under the Ahoms. These wars were a boon in disguise in the sense that the latent sentiments of unity were brought into full play for the growth of a strong-knit nation of diverse peoples of the plains and hills under the guidance of the ruling Ahoms, in the face of a common national danger, which otherwise could not be averted, and to the suppression of forces of disruption, disaffection and treachery. King's love of their country and peoples, subjects' devotion to their 'heavenly' monarchs, soldiers' iron discipline and unquestionable capacity and generals' bravery and intrepidity made no mean contribution to the ultimate success of the Ahom arms and the discomfiture of the Mughal power in this easternmost State.

The Ahom attitude towards the Moghuls was one of watchful friendship in peace times accompanied by armed preparedness against potential aggression. The Mughals were unsuccessful in their Assam adventure and they admitted the difficulties of war against Assam, occasioned by nature combined with the steel-frame organisational set up in the country and the intrepidity and gallantry of the generals.³⁸ Assam's name

38. S. K. Bhuyan, *Lachit Barphukan and his times*, pp. 152-158.

for Mughal strategy was Moguly-phandi, which the Assamese by an large capably mastered through detailed information placed at their disposal by authorised and unauthorised Assamese messengers sent to Mogul India for collection thereof and by Mogul subjects who stayed on in Assam and did not return with the expeditions with which they came to the country.

As Biswa Singha made submission to the Dihingia Raja, the Ahoms used to look upon the Cooch Behar Raja as belonging to 'thapita-sanchita' category—i.e. rulers first set up and settled by the Ahoms in a particular State. Naranarayan and Chilarai, Biswa Singha's sons, repudiated this claim, carried their victorious arms to Cachar, Manipur, Jayantia, Tripura, Khyrim, Dimarua and Sylhet and vanquished the Ahom king and compelled him to sue for peace. The Ahoms got involved in Cooch Behar politics in consequence of rivalries between the descendants of Naranarayan and Chilarai. Cooch Behar was partitioned into two—the western portion, Cooch Behar under Naranarayan's descendants and the eastern portion, Koch Hazo under Raghudeb's descendants. The mastery of Koch Hazo changed hands between the Moguls and the Ahoms. Koch princes ruled in Darrang and Beltola as vassal Chiefs under the Ahom monarch. The Rajas of Darrang contended that Kamrup or Lower Assam was their natural heritage and Krishna-narayan positively demanded the same and openly rebelled, whereupon king Gaurinath Singh sought the intervention of the East India Company for his suppression³⁹.

Cachar was considered by the Ahoms to be another State of the 'thapita-sanchita' order, as its ruler Nirbhaya-narayan was placed on the throne by the Dihingia Raja and was accorded all the paraphernalia of a ruler. There were frequent frictions between Cachar and Assam and at times the Cachar Raja sought to be fully independent and defied the Ahom authority. King Rudra Singh re-subjugated Cachar and its Raja was given a semi-independent status.

Jayantia proved recalcitrant and had to be frequently subdued. It availed of opportunities to question Ahom paramountcy.

39. S. K. Bhuyan, Kachari Buranji, 1936, pp. 68-113.

King Rudra Singh finally subjugated it. Jayantia declared,—“Jayantia and Gargaon are not separate and divisible,” but Jayantia’s professions were not serious. In a speech in connection with King Pramatta Singh’s coronation in 1745, his Prime Minister said,—“The two principalities of Jayantia and Cachar have been recognised and protected by the Heavenly king since the days of his ancestors. The father (Rudra Singh) of your Majesty, in order to punish their untoward attitude invaded their territories and brought down their chiefs together with their ministers and potentates. Cachar has abided by the terms settled with its ruler at that time, but Jayantia has failed to carry out the terms of the agreement. So its ruler has been imprisoned for fourteen years. Cachar should be invited to send its representative to witness the festivities of the coronation, but it is not proper that this privilege should be conferred upon Jayantia. If the consul for Jayantia be shown round the amusements now going on in full swing, then there was no necessity of imprisoning its ruler for fourteen years”⁴⁰.

There was conflict between Assam and Jayantia over paramountcy rights over the intervening State of Dimarua. The Ahom Premier Atan Buragohain wrote to the Jayantia Raja in 1675,—“About your claim on Dimarua, we have got possession of Darrang, Beltola and Dimarua, after having vanquished Sayed Babakar (Abu Bakar) and his twenty-two Omraos. Very recently we have obtained mastery over Dimarua after defeating Sayed Phiroz Nawab and other Omraos.”⁴¹ About 1665 Jayantia promised to send a contingent to help Assam in its conflicts against the Moguls through Dimarua ; actually, however, a different route most suited to the Ahoms was followed.

The State bordering on Assam offered to aid Rudra Singh in his plan to invade Bengal. Jayantia, Cachar, Darrang, Naduar, Rani, Topakuchi and Dimarua provided forty thousand soldiers⁴². The Ahoms allowed the conquered territories and vassal States to retain autonomy in internal administration. They had to pay

40. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 47.

41. S. K. Bhuyan, *Jayantia Buranji*, p. 45.

42. J. P. Wade, *An Account of Assam*, p. 132.

some tribute in cash or in kind or in both and supply stipulated quotas of men and provisions when called upon to do so by the paramount power. Their rulers had also to attend ceremonial functions—coronation, victory celebrations etc., of their liege-lord. Rudra Singh wrote to the Nawabs and princes of Bengal,—“We formerly possessed the provinces on this side of the Corotea (Karatoya) river, and we are now desirous to resume them. Do not prove inimical to us. If we remain friendly everything will succeed. Be yours the countries, the government and the Revenue ; mine the name. Act in a manner to preserve peace. Fear not our approach”⁴³.

The Ahoms' diplomatic connection with Manipur began in 1765 when its ruler Jai Singh Karta Maharaj visited Swargadeo Rajeswar Singha's court, soliciting the Ahom king's aid in expelling the Burmese who occupied Manipur. The Manipuri princess Kuranganayani was offered to the Ahom monarch. A force was despatched under Harnath Senapati Phukan to re-establish Jai Singh on his throne, but the force had to return on account of extreme privations on the route of march which lay through dense forests. At the invitation of King Gaurinath, Jai Singh came at the head of a Manipuri force thirty years later to assist in the suppression of the Mayamara disturbances. Previously, Princess Kuranganayani played a gallant part in the rescue of king Lakshmi Singh from his captivity at the hands of the Mayamara rebels.

The Ahoms tried to set up diplomatic ties with Tipporah in 1710. King Rudra Singh sent an embassy to Raja Ratna Manikya. According to Dr. S. K. Chatterji, Rudra Singha wrote :—“This has become very widely current amongst the people that owing to hostile action of the Moguls the religion as inculcated in the Vedas does not get any protection. For this if it appears to be the right thing to put a stop to the situation by some action, then please write to me in details about your strength and attitude after discussion with the high personages with whom you have friendship. Other matters you will hear

43. Ibid, p. 131.

from Ratna Kandali and Arjun Das, the emissaries"⁴⁴ Ratna Manikya said,—“Our men have never visited that country and what will be the best method of sending my men now ?” The last embassy left Assam in 1714 but before terms of friendship could be finalised, king Rudra Singh died at Gauhati⁴⁵.

Assam had mainly commercial relations with the khasi State of Khyrim. The trade between Assam and Khyrim suffered considerably in Rudra Singh's reign as a consequence of interference with the trading activities of one Santosh Bangal of Pandua (Sylhet) in Dimarua by one Kina Barua and consequent apprehensions of the Khyrim merchants that they would also be ousted from the Assam trade. The Khyrim merchants came to the markets on the Assam frontier properly armed. Negotiations started between Barmanik, Raja of Khyrim and the Ahom government to ease the situation. There were exchanges of embassies. A Khyrim embassy met the Barphukan in 1704. An Assamese embassy to Khyrim, following soon, assured Assam's friendly attitude towards the Khasi State. Another embassy from Khyrim in 1786 was received with due honour and ceremony at Gauhati by the Barphukan under Gaurinath Singh's orders. The Khasi embassy led by Manurai and a Kharkowanr, represented the Khyrim Raja's solicitude for Ahom protection.⁴⁶

Relations with Tribes : The Ahom rulers of Assam had not only to maintain peace and tranquility within the country and to protect the country against foreign aggression ; they had the additional responsibility of protecting the subjects from the raids of the hill tribes inhabiting the hills on the borders of the State.

Expeditions against the tribes were attended with extreme difficulty and great hardship as they lived in inaccessible hills and forests. The tribesmen used primitive weapons effective in close range fights, whereas the Ahom army used matchlock and guns ; even then it was difficult to engage the tribesmen in open contests, as they resorted to guerilla tactics and ambushade methods.

44. Quoted by Biswanarayan Shastri, 'History and Culture of Assam', This is Assam, Jorhat, 1958, p. 12.

45. S. K. Bhuyan, Tripura Buranji, D.H.A.S., 1938.

46. S. K. Bhuyan, Jayantia Buranji, pp. 140-152.

It used to be difficult for the Ahoms to maintain the lines of communication open and intact and supplies used to be cut off. The paths or tracks lay over precipices and slopes and through jungles and woods infested by hillmen. An expedition was proposed to be sent to punish the Duflas. The very astute and far-sighted Prime Minister Atan Buragohain said,—“The Dufla miscreants can be captured only if an elephant can enter into a rat-hole”.⁴⁷ The expedition was sent but there were heavy losses in men and provisions.

The expedition to Manipur in 1765 to restore the throne to the lawful ruler Jai Singh also encountered enormous difficulties, two-thirds of the men and provisions being lost and only a third coming back. Harnath Senapati, the Ahom General, submitted to the king,—“The Manipuri Raja promised to conduct us by showing the way, and so we undertook the march. On entering the forest we could not trace the way by any means. Besides, many of our soldiers died of blood dysentery, and our food-provisions also failed. There were no provision-suppliers, and the Nagas did not allow us passage; they used to roll down stones from hill-tops and kill our men by that method. We proceeded one month’s journey by clearing the jungle, but could not find any clue whatsoever. So, I, His Majesty’s slave, have been made liable to blame”.⁴⁸

The inhabitants of the territory lying between the foot of the hills and the extremities of the plains were particularly exposed to the inroads of the hillmen. This fertile belt of land producing abundance of rice, cotton and other staples was intersected by a number of Duars or passes. Its ownership was claimed and enforced by the Ahoms when their government was strong to oust tribal intrusions. When the government was weak, the hillmen swept down the plains, carried off crops, cattle and other property and men from the Duars, claimed ownership over this zone and forced the Duar people into compulsory servitude

47. MS. Assam Buranji (Obtained from family of H. C. Goswami) quoted by S. K. Bhuyan, Atan Buragohain and his times, p. 80.

48. S. K. Bhuyan, Tungkhungia Buranji, pp. 59-60.

in the hills. Constant vigilance on the part of the Ahom Government was a continuing necessity. Only a strong government in the plains could keep these tribesmen within their proper bounds, by preventing their incursions.

The Bhutanese possessed a systematic government. They appeared at times to be subordinate to Tibet and indirectly to China. The Bhutanese had their intercourse with the plains through the Duars. There were eleven Duars in Bengal and seven in Assam. In Darrang there were two Duars—Buriguma and Killing ; in Kamrup there were five—Gharkola, Baksa, Chapaguri, Chapakhamar and Bijni. These Duars normally belonged to the Assam Government, but the Deva Dharma Rajas of Bhutan took possession of them in the eighteenth century. The Ahom Government made over the Derrang and Kamrup Duār̄s to Bhutan for an annual tribute of yak tails, ponies, musk, gold-dust, blankets and daggers of an estimated total value of Rs. 4785.⁴⁹ The Kariapar Duar east of Darrang was independent of the Bhutanese Government. The Bhutias of Kariapar, the Mombas were governed by a council of Chiefs known as Sat Rajas (not necessarily seven) who owed allegiance to Towang Raja, a tributary of Lhasa. All the Assam trade with Tibet passed through the Kariapar Duar at a place, Chouna, two months journey from Lhasa ; in the first decade of the nineteenth century, the value of this trade amounted to about two lakhs of rupees per year⁵⁰. The Char Duar and Na Duar to the east of Kariapar Duar were protected from independent Bhutia and Dafla tribes by allowing them black-mail.

During the Moamaria and Burmese disturbances, the Bhutanese carried off to their hills large number of Assamese subjects as slaves ; many Assamese subjects took shelter in the Bhutan Duars ; the Duars also sheltered rebellious Assam princes and potentates for maturing their plans of revenge and freebooters and robbers from Bengal for carrying on from there plundering excursions to the Assamese villages.

The first formal embassy from Assam, consisting of pankaj Chaudhury, Athir Bara and kapchiga Lekharu, was sent to Bhutan

49. S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, p. 34.

50. Mackenzie, *North East Frontier etc.*; p. 15.

in 1802 by pratap Vallabh Barphukan to adjust strained mutual relations. The Assamese envoys returned from the Dev Dharma Rajas of Bhutan accompanied by thirty six Bhutanese headed by two Jing Kaps or messengers, Jiva and Dindu. The Bhutanese messengers brought two epistles from the Deva Dharma Rajas of Bhutan and presents including a silver box, a gilded-saddle, two bales of blankets, two ponies, four bullocks of Bhutanese breed. The envoys complained to the Ahom monarch of oppressions committed near the borders by Kamrup officers—the Bujar-Baruas, Barkaiths and Chaudhuris ; they declared that the Bhutanese had regularly delivered the stipulated articles—musks, cowtails, gold, pines, blankets, ‘Chep-chongs’ or daggers. They also communicated the following message of the Dev Dharma Rajas :— “There had existed cordial and indissoluble friendship between the previous Swarga-Maharajas (of Assam) and the ancient Dev-Dharma Rajas (of Bhutan), on the strength of verbal messages and communications, though unlinked by any physical sight. There had however been no exchange of embassies and epistles. Now, as commanded by the Swarga-Maharaja, the Barphukan Barnawab of Barpani (Brahmaputra, i.e., Lower Assam) had despatched envoys and letters making enquires about our prosperity and welfare. From this, the Deva-Dharma Rajas have been convinced of the presence of inseparable ties of friendship (between the two kingdoms). They have been exceedingly happy at the fulfilment of their hearts’ desire caused by the pleasure arising from personal sight. We Jingkaps have in consequence been sent by the Deva-Dharma Rajas to enquire about the peace and happiness of the Swarga-Maharaja. Our Rajas have also sent with us letters and presents”.⁵¹

The vassal Raja of Durrang was mainly responsible for protecting the Assam subjects from the inroads of the Bhutias. In 1805 the newly appointed Darrang Raja, Samudra Narayan was instructed to push back the Bhutias to their original limits as they had occupied portion of Ahom dominions by transgressing the old boundaries.⁵²

51. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 154; Jayantia *Buranji*, p. 156.

52. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 187.

The Akas or Hrusso are divided into two clans,—the Hazari-Khowas, or eaters of a thousand hearths and Kapah-chors or thieves who lurk amidst cotton plants. To prevent their inroads and oppressions, the Ahom Government assigned to the Hazari-khowas a number of Assamese families. From each such family the hillmen could levy 'Posa'—stipulated quantity of articles viz. a portion of female dress, one bundle of cotton thread, and one napkin. The Ahom Government allowed tax concessions to these families to the extent of the articles of the 'posa'. The members of these families were known as 'Bahatias'; the 'Bahatias' were settled in the Aka Duars and had to serve as labourers under the Akas when required. The Kapah-chors were a terror of Darrang. Their leader, Tangi or Taghi Raja murdered the Assamese Governor of Charduar just before the British occupation.⁵³

The tribes near the Darrang Duars are known as the Paachima Duflas and those on the border of North Lakhimpur as Tangi Duflas. The raiding habits of the Duflas made them dangerous neighbours and an expedition against them was considered a hazardous enterprise. They were conciliated by assigning to them a number of paiks in the Duar areas, known as Dafala-bahatias or the serfs of the Daflas. The Dafala-bahatias constituted an independent khel and were generally recruited from culprits convicted of various offences. The Dafala-bahatias, originally Assamese, gradually adopted Dufla ways of life and manners. Every ten houses of Dafala-bahatias were to make over to the Duflas per year one double cloth, one single cloth, one napkin, one "dao", ten heads of cattle and four seers of salt. Each 'got' of Dafala-bahatia 'paiks' had to pay to the Assam Government only three rupees and not the usual nine. This Dafala-bahatia system was introduced by the Ahom monarch Gadadhar Singh to conciliate the Duflas who were thereby deterred from the commission of wide-spread raids and crimes.⁵⁴ During the reign of Gaurinath Singha and Kamaleswar Singha, the Dafala-bahatias joined the Moamarias and revolted in several places in the north

53. S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, p. 37.

54. S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, pp. 37-ff.

bank. A resourceful Assamese Officer, the Baskatia Bar Barua could raise a contingent of Duflas, Dafala-bahatias and Miris to help Premier Purnananda Buragohain against the Moamarias in the north bank.⁵⁵

The Apatanangs or Ankas, or Apatanis have a comparatively high degree of organisation. They live in a well-cultivated plateau to the north of the Dufala hills. They are about 20,000 souls and can put into the field a body of fighting men at a short notice.⁵⁶

The Abors or Adis and the Miris or Mishings represent the later and earlier migrations of the same tribe. Having lived long in the plains and the lower hills, the Miris have become comparatively docile and peace-loving. The different branches of the Abors and the Miri tribes represent different Strata of civilisation. There are the Bar Abors of the interior lofty summits and the Padam Abors; the Ghasi Miris or Parvatia Miris and the Miris of the plains. The Miris of the plains rear mustard plant, ply boats, weave 'Miri-Jims' or blankets of cotton wool and live a life of pastoral contentment. The Abors considered the Miris slaves and employed them as intermediaries in the Assam trade. The Ahom Government accepted this claim and relieved the Miris of all taxes and obligations, so that they could pay to the Abors. The Abors claimed a right to all the fish and gold found in the rivers flowing through their territories and compelled the Bihia gold-washers, employed by the Ahom Government to deliver to them regular conciliatory presents.⁵⁷

At times the Miris gave trouble. In 1683, the Sadiyal Miris set fire to the house of Kanu Gohain Rup Sandikai, the Ahom Governor of Sadiya, and burnt the children and inmates to death. They also killed 200 Assamese subjects and plundered villages. Maupia Naobaicha Phukan at the head of a strong force, brought the Miris to submission. The Naobaicha Phukan constructed ramparts upto the Brahmaputra enclosing the Assa-

55. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, pp. 95, 98-ff, 128-ff, 142-ff.

56. Allen, *District Gazetteer (Lakhimpur)*, pp. 74-ff.

57. S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, pp. 38-ff.

mese villages. He completed the regulation of Sadiya in 1687. The son of the Dihingia Phukan, a member of the Miri Sandikoi Bura Gohain family, was appointed Governor of Sadiya. Known as 'Buragohain of Sadiya', he fixed the habitation of the Mishmis, as a restrictive measure for their complicity in the Miri insurrection of 1683—this is mentioned in an inscription contained in a stone pillar found near Sadiya.⁵⁸

The Mishmis are divided into several clans e.g., Chulikata and Mezho Mishmis and live to the east of the Abor country. Their raids and incursions caused annoyances to the Governors of Sadiya. They are interested in trade, markets and fairs. They obtain swords, woollen cloth and salt from the Tibetans in return for 'Mishmi-Tita', a kind of poisonous aconites which they produce. The fighting strength of the Abors was estimated in 1883 as 10,000 men; of the Dufas and Miris as 3,000 and of the Mishmis as 500.⁵⁹

The Khamptis belong to the same Shan stock as the Ahoms. They originally lived in the Bar-Khampti country. They are Buddhists and have their own literature. Their country abounds in pagodas, one being 95 feet high and 125 feet in circumference.⁶⁰ They came to Assam towards the end of the eighteenth century and settled at Tengapani. Pressed by the Singphos, they crossed the Brahmaputra and about 1794 expelled the Ahom Governor of Sadiya. The Khampti Chief made himself the Sadiya-khowa Gohain and Gaurinath Singh did not interfere. On their occupation of Assam in 1825, the British found the Sadiya tract under Khampti control.

Assam's most troublesome neighbours on the Sadiya frontier were the Singphos. They came into prominence in the weak reign of Gaurinath Singh. They drove the Khamptis from the Tengapani area and settled in the Upper Buri-Dihing and in Namrup areas. The Moamarias allied with the Singphos and sometimes Burmese mercenaries and pillaged Assamese villages.

58. S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, pp. 39-ff.

59. Capt. St. John F. Michell—*Report on the North East Frontier of India*, 1883, p. 39.

60. W. W. Shakespear—*History of Upper Assam etc.*, p. 130.

Purnananda Buragohain presented for appeasement an Ahom girl, Rangili to Bichanong, the Singpho leader who in turn presented her to the Burmese monarch, Bodawpaya. The Singphos carried off a large number of Ahom subjects as captives. Captain Neufville, the first British political Agent of Upper Assam recovered from the Singphos 3,000 Assamese captives. The Singpho Chiefs who entered into an agreement with the British in 1826 described themselves and their dependent Singphos as being formerly "subjects of the Assam State".⁶¹

The Nagas are one of the most numerous tribes inhabiting the borders of Assam. They occupy the whole hill country bordering upon the plains districts of Nowgong, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur (i.e., from the Kapili river on the west to the Buri-Dihing on the east). They also live along the northern slopes of the Patkai mountain. They are divided into several tribes, each with distinctive characteristics. Head-hunting was originally widely prevalent amongst the Nagas and their women refused to respect men who had not taken heads or demonstrated valour in raids.⁶² Except in the inaccessible interior hills, head-hunting has practically ceased with the extension of settled administration. Naga Hills—Tuensang Areas have recently been constituted into a separate new State of Nagaland of the India Union.

The Ahom Government had mainly to deal with the Naga tribes that inhabited the low hills south of the Sibsagar and the Lakhimpur Districts, from the Dikhow to the Buri-Dihing. They were Namchangias or Jaipurias, Barduarias, Banferas or Jabakas or Abhoypurias, Changnois, Tablungias, Mooloongs, Jaktungias and Paniduarias; claimed as Ahom subjects, they paid taxes of slaves, ivory, spear shafts, cloths and cotton. Their chiefs were granted land and retainers. These estates known as 'Nagakhats' were managed by Assamese agents, Naga-Katakis. Raja Purandar Singh successfully asserted his claim to the produce of the several salt mines in this Naga area.⁶³

61. S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, p. 41.

62. Shakespear, *History of Upper Assam, etc.*, pp. 198-ff.

63. M. Neog, 'Nocte', 'Wancho', 'Tangsa', *Asamar Janajati*, pp. 236-247, 248-251, 252-255.

There were sporadic clashes with the Nagas on the immediate frontier throughout the entire period of Ahom rule in Assam. The Ahoms constructed a Naga Ali or embankment to protect the country from Naga raids. About 1530, the Namchangia and Tablungia Nagas defeated an Ahom force and captured several guns. In 1692 they killed 23 Assamese subjects. King Gadadhar Singh adopted stern measures to bring the Nagas to submission. The Naga Chief Latha Khumbao was executed; other leaders visited the capital and reaffirmed their allegiance to the Ahom sovereign. Nagas of the Dayang area also rebelled; Tancheng Duara Phukan subjugated them; they presented two Naga princesses to Gadadhar Singha. The Nagas on this occasion said,—“For ages past we have been eating the crumbs thrown off from the dishes of the Swargadeo. We have not committed this misdeed; the Abors have done it. But still as we have been defeated we shall offer to the Swargadeo two of our princesses with slaves and female attendants. The Phukan should intercede on our behalf at the feet of His Majesty and bring about our salvation”.⁶⁴

The Mikirs or Arlengs live mainly in the forest-clad hills between the Kapili and Dhansiri rivers in the Districts of Nowgong, Sibsagar, Kamrup and at the base of the Jayantia and Cachar hills. They are most numerous in the Nowgong District. Dabaka of the once flourishing Hindu kingdom of Dabaka is one of their principal habitats. The docile Mikirs gave very little trouble to the Ahom rulers and a section of them voluntarily migrated to the Ahom territories to avoid the matriarchal law of inheritance prevalent amongst them.⁶⁵

The Garos live mainly in the region west of the Khasi hills. The old Assam Government had practically nothing to do with the real Garos of the interior hills. The Government's contacts were with the Garos who lived in the vassal States on the extremities of Assam in the south bank of the Brahmaputra, whose Chiefs were, according to Buchanan-Hamilton, of Garo origin. The Government did not attempt to dispossess these Chiefs of

64. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 27.

65. S. K. Bhuyan, *Deodhai Assam Buranji*, pp. 209-214.

their dominions, were satisfied with a moderate tribute and conciliated the friendship of the independent mountaineers by a free commercial intercourse.⁶⁶

The old Assam Government scarcely came in contact with the tribes living in the Lushai Hills. The two Assamese envoys deputed by Rudra Singh, however, did know the Kukis on their way to Tripura through the Cachar Hills. They proceeded up the Barak river for four days and reached Lakhipur. They wrote,—“Having halted there (Lakhipur) for two days, we proceeded for five days and reached the mouth of the Rupini river which is the boundary between Cachar and Tripura. There is no human habitation in that place. There are hills on both sides. After three days we arrived at Rangrung within the jurisdiction of Tripura. The hills on both sides of the Barak river are inhabited by a tribe called the Kukis who are like the Daflas and Nagas here. There will be about three hundred men at that place ; their weapons are arrows, bows, shields and Naga Spears. The Tripura Raja appoints a governor over this place, and he is called Halamcha, who is like the Naga Khunbaos in our country. He has under him one Galim, one Gabar, one Chapia and one Doloi. They eat and dress like the Nagas, but they do not eat beef”.⁶⁷

The Shan tribes of Upper Burma, particularly the inhabitants of Nara or Mogaung, Maulung, Mantara and Munkong kingdoms, had more or less peaceful relations with the Ahoms. The Shan Chieftains considered the Ahom kings “Bhai-Rajas” or brother monarchs as they were descended from the same Shan stock and Sukapha belonged to a ruling Shan dynasty of Upper Burma. In times of difficulties, the Shan Chieftains used to appeal to the Ahom Government for help and protection. The orthodox Ahoms, particularly the priestly clans used to maintain contacts with their Shan homeland. Shan monks visited Assam on religious missions and established ‘Bapu-Changs’ or Viharas with schools for teaching the Shan language and the

66. Buchanan-Hamilton, *An Account of Assam*, p. 86; Mackenzie, *North-Eastern Frontier*, etc., pp. 245-249.

67. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tripura Buranji*, pp. 21-ff.

tenets of the Shan faith. The Shan Chiefs were proud that their kinsmen were sovereign in Assam. After termination of Ahom rule in Assam, a Shan Chief sent agents to Assam to enquire about the Bhai Raja or the Ahom king. Sukapha was admitted to the Shan pantheon and was offered periodic worship in his original native city of Mogaung where his remains were buried in a monastery. British officers who visited Mogaung in 1836 found the worship of Sukapha still prevalent.⁶⁸ The Ahom king Jayadhwaj Singh, having fled to Namrup on Mir Jumla's victorious march to Gargaon, threatened to go to Nara or Mogaung if his ministers failed to secure the withdrawal of the Mughals from Assam. That was another evidence of the feelings of mutual affinity subsisting between the Ahom monarchs and the Shan Chieftains. The messengers employed by the Ahoms in their intercourse with Munkong were known as 'Tsai-Kaus' and they lived generally at Namrup. In spite of these sentiments of attachment, the Ahoms did not relax their vigilance, as Nara Chiefs at times aspired to extend their domination over the territories of the Ahom monarchs.

The policy towards foreigners was ably expounded by Swargadeo Pratap Singh before his trusted emissaries, the Katakis. He said,—“The Gargayan Raja, a predecessor of mine on this throne, married the daughter of the Nara Raja by performing the Chaklang ceremony and made her his Chief Queen. This happened after the defeat of the Nara Raja at the hands of the Mantara Raja. The Nara princess did not abandon her hostile attitude. While living at Gargaon she pretended to be ill, and attributed her ailment to her being possessed of the devil through the machinations of the Assamese people. She therefore threw many men into water, and killed others having first subjected them to severe tortures. About that time one Ratnakhari of Nara used to live at Gargaon; and there was no love lost between him and the Assamese astrologer or Ganak named Achit Dolo. The king conferred upon Ratnakhari the title of Sagar-khari, who received the honour by kneeling down before the

68. Hannay and Pemberton, quoted by U. N. Gohain, *Assam under the Ahoms*, pp. 2-6, 10-ff.

Gargayan Raja. This roused the suspicion of my predecessor and he said,—“This man professes to be a Ganak ; but why did he kneel down before me ? I am sure he is not a Ganak ; he has come to our country with a definite ulterior motive.” Still then, the Gargayan Raja did not take any step against Sagarkhari Ganak on account of his affection for the queen. The Ganak counted all the subjects of Namrup and communicated the information to the Nara Raja, on the strength of which the Raja invaded our territories. Chao-aikhek Bargohain proceeded to the Nara campaign riding on an elephant. When he approached the enemy’s camp, the Nara Raja accosted the elephant in the customary language, in response to which the animal lay itself flat on the ground, and the Nara soldiers cut the Gohain with scythes used for mowing grass. The elephant, afterwards, picked up the head and the body of the Gohain and brought them to our camp. We also suffered heavy losses of men. The Gargayan Raja then pursued the Naras and put them to the rout. So we cannot fathom the inner working of the minds of foreigners. This slave (Bhelai’s son) is as unreliable as the Paschima or western Dafalas. My brother-in-law (Momaitamuli-Barbarua) will please teach him a good lesson.”⁶⁹ One Bhelai’s son was found guilty of collusion with the enemy, having visited the camp of the Mogul Commander Nawab Allah Yar Khan, promised to deliver to the Nawab elephants and secret information about Assam and brought from him two pearl chains as presents to the Swargadeo.

The relations with the tribes were conducted by duly appointed wardens or governors. The Sadiya-khowa Gohain was incharge of the tribes of the Sadiya country, the Marangikhowa Gohain and the Rahial Barua of the Kacharis and Miris, the Jagiyalia Gohain and the Kajalimukhia Gohain of the Jayantias and the Barphukan and the Darrang Raja of the Bhutanese. In their establishments were men versed in the languages, customs and habits of the tribes. In the king’s court also there

69. MS. Assam Buranji (Obtained by D.H.A.S. from S. C. Goswami), quoted by S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, pp. 44-ff.

were tribal experts who served in connection with peace missions and military expeditions. Brahman ambassadors were appointed to the States of Western India ; but tribal experts took their place in conducting negotiations with the bordering races, for in the latter case were needed forbearance, understanding, sincerity and straight-forwardness more than subtle logic, sophistry and propaganda. For diplomatic service in the tribal areas were generally harnessed the Ahom diplomatic families—Chiring, Chengeli, Naga, Bakatial, Ramu and families—Chiring, Chengeli, Naga, Bakatial, Ramu and

The policy of the Ahom rulers towards the tribes was one of conciliation backed by the display of force when necessary. Complete subjugation of the tribes and annexation of their territories were never envisaged nor attempted. The Ahom policy may be summarised thus,—“Conciliate these tribes by promising to furnish them their necessaries as far as possible. If they indulge in wanton pillages, pursue and capture the miscreants, but never over-step the limits.”⁷⁰ Moderation in dealing with the tribes and friendly intercourse with them were objectives to be adhered to and any deviation therefrom in an excess of enthusiasm by any frontier commander was followed by regrettable consequences. That the Ahom policy towards the tribes generally succeeded was testified to by the Mogul chronicler Shihabuddin Talish who accompanied Mir Jumla’s expedition in 1662-63 and said,—“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 feet in the skirt of obedience, but occasionally encroaches on his kingdom”.⁷¹

That the Ahom policy succeeded is also proved by the fact that they had the uninterrupted enjoyment of sovereignty in Assam for six hundred years and the unavoidable occasional frontier troubles could never grow to such dimensions as to jeopardise Ahom domination. These troubles were kept within

70. Mackenzie, *North-East Frontier, etc.*, p. 369.

71. *Fathiyah-i-Ibriyah*, tr. J. N. Sarkar, *Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, 1915, pp. 184-ff.

limits and suppressed with tact, diplomacy, conciliation and application of such force and coercion as circumstances demanded as being unavoidable. The Ahoms were realistic. They did not allow their friendly approach and conciliatory measures to pass off as signs of weakness and therefore, did not hesitate to use coercive measures when necessary. An officer or noble, who could bring to submission a refractory tribe by the minimum application of force, received very high credit at the Ahom Court.

The Ahoms were comparatively free from caste prejudices. This created a great impression on the tribal mind. During an expedition against the Mikirs, the Ahom soldiers partook of the food and drink available in the houses of the Mikirs. The Mikirs said,—“These men eat the things we eat ; they are therefore men of our fraternity.” The younger folk who had fled on the approach of the Ahoms, returned, and several families of Mikirs and Lalungs migrated to the Ahom territories to take advantage of the non-matriarchal system of inheritance there.⁷² The Ahoms admitted members of the tribes into their racial fold and the new entrants enjoyed all the privileges of the ruling class. One Banfera Naga’s son became Barphukan ; one Miri became Miri-Sandikai and he and his descendants enjoyed the governorship of Sadiya.

The Ahoms enlisted the sturdy and courageous hillmen for military service also. Captain St. John F. Michell writing in 1883 said, “The Assamese army appears at this time (1660) to have been largely recruited from Nagas and Miris ; and it is evident that they were quite able to hold their own against the well-trained armies of Hindustan.”⁷³ The Assamese Ambassador, Madhab Charan Kataki told the Mogul Commander Raja Ram Singha,—“Numerous chieftains of the mountainous regions have become our willing allies in the campaign. They consist of a total strength of three lakhs of soldiers. They are not amenable to any consideration of right and wrong. Their participation in this campaign has been directly sanctioned by His Ma-

72. S. K. Bhuyan, *Deodhai Assam Buranji*, p. 122.

73. *Report on the North-East Frontier*, 1883, p. 30.

jesty, and they rush furiously against the enemy without waiting for the orders of the general. They are quick and sudden in their attacks, and their movements and actions cannot be presaged".⁷⁴

The long continuance of Ahom rule in Assam was "almost without example in history", said Lord William Bentinck, Governor-General of India from 1828 to 1832. The Ahoms could stem the tide of Mogul conquest. Mir Jumla was in possession of the Ahom Capital for ten months during 1662-1663 ; Kamrup annexed to the Ahom kingdom in 1615 was in the possession of the Moguls for 26 years—1639 to 1658, 1663-1667 and 1679-1682. The political arrangements made by the Ahoms—their system of administration, military organisation, handling of foreign relations and relations with the tribes—were no doubt contributory to their long, enduring dominion in Assam. Their highly developed political sense, mastery over State-craft, strategy and diplomacy, militaristic cult and spirit of religious toleration, detachment and neutrality helped the Ahoms consolidate and maintain their supremacy in Assam for such a long period. The Ahoms knew how to adapt themselves to their environmental circumstances. Sukapha came with a handful of followers, but he and his successors were far-sighted enough to strengthen themselves by admitting into the Ahom fold members of the old martial races of Assam. For several centuries the Ahoms kept themselves aloof from the Hindu influences, followed their old rites and ceremonies and maintained intercourse with their original homeland in Upper Burma, but later became true children of their new country by giving up their Ahom language and adopting Assamese instead and embracing the Hindu faith and customs, though still partially adhering to their Ahom usages, customs and ceremonials in certain matters. This also indicates the political sagacity of the Ahoms and their capacity to quickly grasp the realities of the situation and to remould and refashion their policy and action accordingly. Their political instincts and innate historical sense made them record the chief events of the reigns of sovereigns in officially compiled

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

chronicles or Buranjis. This system was responsible for the unique distinction that the Assamese people have of possessing historical masterpieces in prose. The first Ahom conqueror, Sukapha commanded,—“The Pandits should write down all particulars, whenever an incident takes place, when a person dies and when we acquire new followers”.⁷⁵ The Buranjis served as a record of precedents and encouraged great and valorous deeds and discouraged evil ones. The Ahoms fully deserved the power they acquired and consolidated and wielded in the Brahmaputra Valley for 600 years.

75. S. K. Bhuyan, *Deodhai Assam Buranji*, p. 90.

Chapter IV

ECONOMY

In considering the economy of Assam under the Ahoms, the mainly rural-cum-agricultural pattern of the society then prevailing in feudal environment should be constantly kept in view. The civilisation was more rural than urban, the social set-up feudalistic rather than modern, mainstay of the people agricultural pursuits and cottage industries and not industries, big or medium, as we know of today. Within the limits thus set, the people were by and large economically well-off and happy.

Agriculture : Shihabuddin who accompanied Mir Jumlah on his invasion of Assam in 1662, wrote :—“From Koliabar to Garhgaon houses and orchards full of fruit trees stretch in an unbroken line ; and on both sides of the road, shady bamboo groves raise their heads to the sky. Many varieties of sweet-scented wild and garden flowers bloom here, and from the rear of the bamboo groves upto the foot of the hills there are cultivated fields and gardens. From Lakhugarh to Garhgaon, also, there are roads, houses and farms in the same style. In this country they make the surface of fields and gardens so level that the eye cannot find the least elevation in it upto the extreme horizon. Uttarkol has greater abundance of population and cultivation. The trees of its hills and plains are exceedingly tall, thick and strong. Many kinds of odorous fruits and herbs of Bengal and Hindustan grow in Assam. We saw here certain varieties of flowers and fruits, both wild and cultivated, which are not to be met with elsewhere in the whole of India. The cocoanut and nim trees are rare, but pepper, spikenard and many species of lemon are abundant. Mangoes are full of worms, but plentiful, sweet and free from fibre, though yielding scanty juice. Its pineapples are very large, delicious to the taste, and rich in juice. Sugarcane is of the black, red and white varieties and very sweet ; but so hard as to break one’s teeth ; ginger is juicy. The chief crop of the country is rice, but the thin and

long varieties of the grain are rare. Wheat, barley and lentils are not grown. The soil is fertile ; whatever they sow or plant grows well".¹

Dr. Francis Buchanan Hamilton's 'Account of Assam' describes Assam's economy in the beginning of the nineteenth century just before the Burmese invasion. "Salidhan or transplanted winter rice", he says, "forms three fourths of the whole crops". Ahudhan, or summer rice, and Uridhan, or winter rice, that was sown broad-cast in low land, were also pretty considerable crops. A little Borodhan, or spring rice was also raised. Next to rice the most considerable crop was a kind of mustard called Vihar. It was the oil of this that was chiefly used. The quantity of sesamum was very inconsiderable. Wheat, barley and millet were very little used.² Dr. Hamilton refers to cultivation of 'Cytisus Cajan' or 'Garo Mas', for rearing the lac insect and for its pulse, of other pulses also, e.g., 'Phaseolus-max' or 'Matimas', 'Mug-mas', the 'Kola-mas', the Borkola-mas and the Mohu-mas. The Assamese raised black pepper to a great extent. They had also as warm seasoning long pepper, and the pepper called 'choyi', ginger, turmeric, capsicum, onions, and garlic. Their acid seasonings were Tamarind, Autengga (*Dillenia Speciosa*), Amra (*Spondias Amara*), Jolpayi (*Perinkara H. M.*), Kamrangga (*Averrhoa-Carambola*) and Thaikol of two kinds, the Bara, which was the largest and best, and the kuji, called in the Botanical Garden in Calcutta, *Garcinia pedunculata*. The betel-leaf was raised on trees in every garden. There was plenty of betelnut and of tobacco. Opium³ was raised in abundance for consumption. Sugarcane thrived, most of it was eaten fresh. A little extract was prepared ; but no sugar was made. Cocoanuts were very scarce, and no palm-wine was extracted. The kitchen-gardens and fruits were much the same as in Rangpur ; only the pome-

-
1. J. N. Sarkar, *Fathīyyah-i-Ibriyyah*, Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society, Vol. I, pp. 179-ff.
 2. Hamilton, *Account of Assam*, p. 58; Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers*, Vol. IV (Kamrup), pp. 117-154.
 3. *Imperial Gazetteer*, Vol. VI, pp. 95-ff.

granate was said to be very common and there were plenty of oranges.⁴

Shihabuddin wrote : “Cocks, waterfowl, geese, goats, castrated goats and game-cocks are large, plentiful and delicious.” There were large, high-spirited and well proportioned elephants, fighting ram, the deer, elk, Nil-Gau, etc. “In Kamrup oxen are the common labouring cattle ; in Assam proper many buffaloes are employed in the plough.” (Dr. Hamilton). Sheep were very scarce, and goats were not numerous. Ducks were more so than fowls ; but many persons kept game-cocks. There were very few horses and no asses.

That agriculture was the most important means of livelihood can be clear from the foregoing paragraphs and that it was also paying from the following statement of Shihabuddin : —“If this country were administered like the Imperial dominions, it is very likely that forty to forty-five lakhs of rupees would be collected from the revenue paid by the Raiyats, the price of elephants caught in the jungles and other sources.”

That agriculture was basic to the whole economy is evident from the varieties of crops raised and also from the numerous names of categories of rice cultivated, that have come down to us since those times. A few names given below is only illustrative of a very lengthy list of varieties of rice cultivated :—

Ahu, guni, phapari, pijli, nilaji, ahubari, pharma, Bao ; Lahi, Kharika Jaha, gidapuri, bhabli, gobind-tulsi, Saru-jul, jahinga, mathanga, malbhog, dalkachu, barmathanga, paru jahinga, Chakhru, Charibuli, bara, bagitara, nekera, batakpahi, dhankhau, Chakoa, boka jahinga, Kataridabua, phatakatha bara, Kangabara, bar sohagmoni, Saru sohagmani ; Sali, Bar Sali, Saru Sali, ankisali, ranga sali, malchur, kala sali, Sagar Sali, Kaldharm, Barjuls, gendhali sali, maguri.⁵

4. Hamilton—Account of Assam, pp. 58-59; Mackenzie, North-East Frontier, Appendix A, Welsh's Report, pp. 387-390; Mills, Report on the Province of Assam, Report on Darrang, p. 3 and Report on Lakhimpur, p. 6.

5. W. W. Hunter, A Statistical Account of Assam, Vol. I, pp. 251-ff.

Mention may be made of other cereal crops like gam-dhan and Kanidhan ; pulse crops like Mati Kalai (*Phaseolus radiatus*), Mug (*Phaseolus mungo*), Khesari (*Lathyrus Sativus*), Mirior ahrar (*Cytisus cajan*), Lessera-maha and urahi-maha (varieties of beans), Sarisha or mustard ; fibre crops like Rhea grass, Kapas or cotton and miscellaneous crops like sugar cane ; indigo, pan-shrubs, betelnut palms and plantains etc.,⁶ mulberry, lumi ; black pepper (jaluk), capsicum (Jalukia), Yam or Kachu and pumpkins,⁷ and jungle products like silk, bees wax and india-rubber, Mishmi-tita, Mejati or madder etc.,⁸ and fruit trees like Samathira (Orange), Mitha-nebu (Sweet lime), Patinebu (lemon), panimari, Jatimari, halanga mari and mithamari (varieties of citron), jaratenga, ranga rabab, бага rabab, bartenga, Sakla, Sekera, jamira, karja tenga, jalpai (olive), Karday etc.⁹

Assam abounds in many parts with valuable timber, not of the ornamental but the useful type, adapted for building or for canoes etc. M'cosh refers to 90 varieties of timbers of Assam, e.g., Jotikorai, Kornī, Chatiyān, Dudkuri, Bhela, Uriam, Boro-helock, Aggur and Langchi, Kangtali Chama etc.¹⁰

Management of Land : In a predominantly agricultural economy, management of land was naturally of paramount importance. Each paik was allowed two puras ($2\frac{2}{3}$ acres) of the best rupit or rice land, called gāmāti (body land), free of charge. When he was on State duty, his land used to be cultivated by the rest of the 'got'. The paiks were also allowed to hold land for garden and home-stead, called 'bari' land, without limitation as to extent and free of assessment, in acknowledgement of which they paid one rupee each annually either as house tax or poll-tax or as hearth-tax according to the custom of the District concerned. In Kamrup it was a house-tax called Kharikātāna ; in Darrang it was a hearth-tax called choroō (a tax upon every

6. Ibid, p. 252.

7. Ibid, p. 371.

8. Ibid, p. 300.

9. Hunter,—Statistical Account of Assam, Vol. I, p. 371.

10. M'Cosh, Topography of Assam, pp. 36-43; Allen, Assam District Gazetteers, Vol. V (Darrang), pp. 148-149; Vol. VIII (Lakhimpur), pp. 143-185.

family or person cooking separately); and in Nowgong and Upper Assam it was a poll-tax called *gādhan* (body money) on each paik of full age. If a paik cultivated any rice land in excess of his two puras, he paid one rupee per annum per pura to the State.¹¹ The *gā-māti* or body land was considered as the property of the State and theoretically was neither hereditary nor transferable. The *rupit* lands were duly registered as such as the subordinate officers had to provide each working paik with his share of land, allotting it from the land lapsed by death or other casualty; and when the *rupit* lands were limited, or the population great, the paiks "had to put up with less than their legal share, or they could take up inferior lands in a proportion of double or treble quantities according to the presumed qualities of lands".¹²

Artisans and other non-cultivating classes paid a higher rate of poll-tax,¹³ amounting to Rs. 5 per head for gold washers and brass workers, Rs. 3 in the case of oil pressers and fishermen and Rs. 2 in the case of silk-weavers. The aboriginal and other wild tribes cultivating dry or hilly land for cotton etc. and not using plough paid a hoe-tax of Re. 1.¹⁴

"The salaries," says Alexander Mackenzie, "of all Government Officers, favourites, and retainers, and the maintenance of the numerous religious institutions of Assam, were provided for by the assignment of paiks, along with their *go-muttee* lands, to the persons to be benefited. The estates of the native gentry were supplemented by the *Khats* or lands, which they had themselves reclaimed from waste by slave labour, and which were held by them rent-free and as hereditary in their families". "All lands," says the Report on the Revenue Administration of Assam, 1849-50 "in excess to those required as *Pykar*, or not otherwise appropriated, were *Ubar* or surpluses, and these lands were obtained by anyone at a fixed low rate of rent."

11. U. Gohain, *Assam under the Ahoms*, pp. 115-ff; *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. IV, p. 86.

12. Report on the Revenue Administration of the Province of Assam for 1849-50.

13. Mills, Report on the Province of Assam, p. 2.

14. *Ibid*, p. 3.

“As in Upper Assam the great Officers of the State were allowed a certain number of Pykes, then called Liksoos, they possessed no fixed estates cultivated by the Pykes, for the Liksoos were attached to the Officers and resumable. There was in consequence, very little alienation of land from the Government, though any person of rank could take up and clear jungle lands with their slaves, and these estates, called khat, were hereditary, and paid no rent to Government.”¹⁵

Each of the royal consorts or other ladies of the Court received large grant of lands or particular districts for her maintenance. “She received the title”, says Wade, “annexed to the Fokun’s Office who had charge of those lands. When the royal consorts were not numerous, the monarch conferred the lands etc., on any favourite of the Royal family.” The ladies managed the affairs of their estates through their ‘Mels’. The Chief Queen was granted the Raidangia Mel, the 2nd Queen, the Parvatia Mel and the other queens, the Purani Mel, and the na-Mel. The king’s mother was granted the Khangia Mel, the step mother, the Mahi Mel, the grand mother, the Enaigharia Mel and the nurse, the Kolichengar Mel. The daughters, sisters, nieces and daughters-in-law were granted the Gabharu Mel. This system of granting lands to the palace ladies the Ahoms brought from their original home. Such a system existed amongst the Shans of Upper Burma till a very late period.

Special Rights in Land : Other special rights in land also were allowed to grow up, e.g., Nisf-kheraj tenure, Lakheraj or debattar grants, dharmattar, brahmattar and nankar. According to the Report on the Administration of Assam, 1892-93, the history of the nisf-kheraj tenure in Assam, is a curious example of the manner in which rights in land are sometimes allowed to grow up. Former rulers of the country had granted certain lands rent-free for religious and other purposes (that is, had assigned to persons or institutions the government right to the revenue, then taken mostly in labour, of these lands). The last

15. Report on the Revenue Administration of the Province of Assam for 1849-50; Mills, Report on the Province of Assam, p. 3.

Ahom ruler, however, Chandrakanta Singh, imposed on the lands in question a tax, called 'Kharikatana', of six annas a pura (a measure of 4 bighas) which continued to be levied by the Burmese invaders after their conquest of the country. Three-fourths of the total number of nisf-kheraj estates are situated in the district of Kamrup and date from the last period of the Ahom rule, when the seat of government had been transferred from Garhgaon to Gauhati, and the Ahom kings gave away lands wholesale with all the zeal of recent converts to Hinduism. The Lakheraj¹⁶ or debattar grants on the other hand, are usually of older date, the most ancient being ascribed to kings Dharmapal and Vanamala, who are said to have reigned between 1100 and 1200 A.D.

According to the Report on the Revenue Administration of Assam, 1849-50, "The alienations of land in Lower Assam were considerable, and consisted of durmootur, debutur, brahmatur and nankar". The dharmattar lands were those granted to Sattras, the most ancient religious institution in Assam, and much of these lands were alienated at a time preceding any existing records. Very many of these grants were subsequently confirmed or enlarged by the successive Rajahs or governors of country, but many of the heads of those institutions, in Nowgong specially, have no written documents or registers to produce for their grants.

The oldest titles existing to any Lakheraj lands in this Province are grants of Dharmapala of Brahmattar lands, two such being engravings on sheets of copper held together by a copper ring. One was casually found, and no claimant has come forward to assert a right to the land, but the copper plates (called Phullees) were found amidst the ruins of a deserted temple in the mouza named in the Phullee, which mouza was all granted away for the support of the temple. In the other instance a large body of brahmins hold the lands named in the

16. Report on the Administration of Assam, 1892-93; Mills, Report on the Province of Assam, Appendix XXIV-XXVI (No. 327 of 1853 dated 13th June, 1853 from Lt. Col. Jenkins to A. J. M. Mills).

grant, and the grant has been confirmed by every succeeding dynasty. The next oldest titles to lands are documents granted by the kings of Delhi or the local Governor of Rangamati, mostly confirmatory of grants made by Dharpala, the originals of whose documents are not now forthcoming. The Mahomedans also granted away a very small quantity of lands as 'pirpal' for the support of mosques over the tombs of saints.

The next grants were those made by the Ahom Rajahs, which were registered down to the reign of Raja Sib Singh ; many of the registered grants are mostly confirmations of former grants by Dharpala and the Mahomedans, and the terms generally used are "granted by the Bengals". But from the time of the conversion of the Ahom Rajas to Brahminism, a very large extent of land was also granted away by them to Brahmins called in from Hindustan and Bengal. From this period the institution of many of the Temples in Kamrup, dates ; they are numerous, and the grants are all engraved on Phullees. Officers of these temple lands had separate grants as Brahmattar for their families, and the Brahmins not attached to temples received—occasional grants for personal services to the court.¹⁷

Of the numerous Sattras Gosains of the Sibsagar district, the Gosain of Auniati had revenue-free grants of about 22,000 acres, and the Gosain of Dakshinpat of over 12,000 acres made by the Ahom kings and confirmed by the British Government. As for the Garamur Sattras, another of the four principal Sattras of the district, the Imperial Gazetteer of India, E. B. and Assam, 1909, says :—"It is said to have received a grant of nearly 4,000 acres of revenue-free lands from the Assam Rajas, but the proofs of title were destroyed by the Burmans".¹⁸

Survey Operations : The survey and re-survey of lands were undertaken in the days of Ahom rule. "A survey of the country", says Gait, "was carried out and a census was taken of the population" in the reign of Chakradhvaj Singh. A

17. Report on the Revenue Administration of Assam, 1849-50, quoted by U. Gohain, *Assam under the Ahoms*, pp. 124-126.

18. Imperial Gazetteer of India, East Bengal and Assam, 1909, quoted by U. Gohain, *Assam under the Ahoms*, p. 127.

detailed survey, based on the land measurement system of the Muhammadans, was started in the reign of Gadadhār Singh, continued in the reign of Rudra Singh and Sib Singh, and completed in the reign of Pramatta Singh (1774-1751). "The area of each field was calculated", says Gait, "by measuring the four sides with a nal, or bamboo pole, 12 feet long, and multiplying the mean length by the mean breadth. The unit of area was the pura, which contained four standard Bengali bighas of 14,000 square feet".¹⁹ The Register or Pera Kagaz was prepared. It contained a list of all occupied lands, except homestead, with their areas and particulars of all rent-free estates.

Villages : Agriculture being the main occupation, the majority of the people lived in villages. Even as late as 1951, according to the Census Report of 1951, 74 p.c. of the population depended on agriculture and only 14 p.c. lived by occupation other than agriculture. The dividing line between the life in the village and the life in the town was not much pronounced. Life in the towns was but an extension and continuation of life in the villages, both being inter-dependent, many villages supporting and sustaining the few towns and the towns with glamour of king and court and wealth and some measure of urbanity about them, surely having attractions for the villages. But in the main, Assam was a peasants' land par excellence ; not only her economy but also her social and cultural patterns were determined very largely by agricultural pursuits in rural surroundings. There was a net-work of villages and the villages were mostly self-sufficient in their economy. Simplicity in the patterns of life was their keynote. The peasant ploughed the land and produced his own food ; he built his house with thatch and bamboos collected locally. The women-folk reared silk-worms and wove raiments for themselves and their family ; they also took an active part in the rearing of crops.

The Ahoms were adept in setting up well-knit self-sufficient villages in the country in a planned manner, and villages set up by them exist to this day. The Ahoms showed originality in this work and set up villages wherein they settled communities

19. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 171.

and castes practising different occupations, thereby promoting social cohesiveness, unity and comraderie among different classes of living together in the same villages.

Dr. John Peter Wade says, "Having collected one family from every twenty in Deccanpar, he (Rajah Prehtab Singh) established them in a tract of uncultivated country to which he gave the name of Bassa Doyungh and appointed his mother's brother Momai Tamoolie Burro Burrowah to accomplish the population of these wilds".²⁰ Momai Tamuli Barbarua settled in each village 2 families of each of the following classes and castes of people :—Brahmans, Ganaks, Kathar, Kalita, Keot, Koch, Chutia, Buruk, Boria, Ahoms, Gariya, Moriya, Dom and Hari etc. He populated Bassa Doyung and settled the country generally on the principle that in each compact village should be represented these classes as well as others like Teli, Mali, Dhoba, Chamar, Kamar, Tanti, Sonari etc., thereby helping formation of strong united village communities²¹.

Names of some villages are suggestive of importance of agricultural operations in the life of the people, e.g., Tamol Bari, Sariyahtali, Mahar Ati, Bengenabari, Mah Bandha, Nangal Kona, Gohali Kona, Phulani, Padumoni, Kenduguri, Bahbari, Amlakhi, Simaluguri, Ahatguri, Kathalguri, Palasbari, Silikhaguri, etc. Other villages and places bear names that indicate diverse facets and concomitants of predominantly rural life in Assam, e.g., Kamar Gaon, Kumar Gaon, Kahar Kuchi, Mudoijan, Bamunkuchi, Ganakkuchi, Kalitachuk, Gakhirkhowa, Sibthan, Rauramari, Kawaimari, Singimari, Michhamari, Goraijan, Pabhajan, Goraimari, Kokorajhar, Dhuliya Habi, Bir Jara, Komorakata, Baghmari, Bhalukmari, Chari Gaon, Panch Gaon, Chhoi Gaon, Satgaon, Ath Gaon, Sialkhati, Sapekhati, Pheurakhowa, Maukhowa, Pichchala, Patuachal, Kuliya Habi, Mahakhala, Dadhara, Chabukdhara, Chaulkhoa, Oujari, Naharani, Wating, Negheriting, Dhekiajuli, Rangjuli, Maragang etc.²²

Agricultural Implements : Agricultural implements used were ploughs, ih, plough-beam, phal, plough-share, yokes, (joyal),

20. J. P. Wade, *The History of Assam*, p. 265.

21. S. K. Bhuyan, *Deodhai Assam Buranji*, pp. 119-ff.

22. B. K. Barua, *Asamiya Bhasa Aru Sanskriti*, pp. 197-200.

Bamboo-harrow (mai), hoes, sickle (Kachhi), clod-breaker (dalimariya), rake (jabka), iron hand bill (dao), large rake to be dragged by bullocks (bindha), iron spade (khanti), Kuthar, Kor, Kanti, Weeding-knife, dalamari, a wooden long-handled mallet for breaking clods, Kachi, reaping knife etc.

Domestic Animals : Domestic animals used for agricultural and other purposes were oxen, bullocks and buffaloes used in agriculture ; horned cattle, cows, goats, elephants, horses, ponies, pigs, fowls, ducks, geese, pigeons.

Agricultural operations used to have occasional set-backs no doubt owing to floods, droughts, pestilence and epidemics, cattle mortality, Locust invasions etc. Suhungmung erected an embankment along the Dihing to prevent inundation. In 1534 a great number of cattle died because of a very severe outbreak of cattle disease. In 1569 a swarm of locusts did great damage and in 1570 there was a flood which resulted in loss of crops and famine. In Pratap Singha's reign there was an outbreak of cattle disease which carried off many cows and buffaloes and a locusts' flight caused wide-spread damage resulting in famine. There were heavy flood and severe earthquakes in 1642. In 1665 during Chakradhvaj Singh's reign, the rains failed and there was a severe draught. In consequence crops failed and there was a famine. Deep wells had to be dug. This is the only occasion in Assam's recorded history when rains failed to such an unprecedented extent as to cause a complete failure of crops. During the Mayamara Revolution particularly in Gaurinath Singh's reign, owing to unsettled conditions in the country, agricultural operations practically came to a stand-still and famine conditions prevailed. Similar was the condition of the Brahmaputra Valley when the Burmese were expelled from the country and pestilence stalked the land. But these were abnormal times. Normally agricultural operations continued with regularity from year to year and people enjoyed fair degree of self-sufficiency.

People and their Occupations : The following further details about the economic life of the people can be gathered from Dr. Hamilton's account :—

The cotton weavers were mostly foreigners, Jogis and Jolas and both men and women worked. They had a little capital to

enable them to purchase thread. Small dealers purchased the cloth and hawked it about ; for there were no shops and a few markets. The cotton cloth was mostly used as turbans, as veils, and as Wrappers for the shoulders, and towels. The finest which they made sold for ten rupees a piece and was twelve cubits long by three wide. There were no dyers nor printers of chints. The small proportion of silk that was dyed had this operation performed on it by women by whom it was woven.

Turners were of all castes. They worked in buffaloes' horn and ivory. Different sets of chess-men used to be made of horn and ivory. They made also a kind of tables used in gaming-on which four persons played with men and dice as in back-gammon. They also made cups and toys of ivory²³. The king had in his house some men who made very fine mats, fans and head-scratchers of ivory. "These people are said to be able to straighten the tooth of an elephant, by covering it with a thick coat of clay and cowdung, and then exposing it to the fire"²⁴. Many people could make mats—some of a species of 'Thalia' and some of the 'Sola' or 'Aeschynomene diffusa'. There were stone-cutters who made plates, cups and stones for grinding curry-stuff out of indigenous stone.

There were oilmen. "They use both the mill commonly employed in Rangapur and also press the oil by two boards, which are acted upon by a long lever. In Assam proper the mustard seed is usually parched and powdered in a mortar before it is squeezed"²⁵. Garlands and artificial flowers of 'Sola' used to be made and sold. A few workmen introduced from Bengal, besides the natives, Kalitas and others, carried on this work. There were a few brick-makers and brick-layers who were employed by the king. Other persons were not permitted to use bricks. Every family used to curdle its own milk. The potters merely kneaded their clay into form. "No one is allowed to wear shoes without a special license from the king, and it is an indulgence that is very rarely granted. At the capital there are

23. Hamilton, *An Account of Assam*, pp. 62-ff.

24. Hamilton, *An Account of Assam*, p. 63.

25. *Ibid.*

a few Bengalese shoe-makers, who are ready, whenever His Majesty chooses, to have a pair of shoes, or to indulge one of his chiefs with that luxury.”²⁶ There were no butchers.

There were blacksmiths²⁷, mostly Kolitas and Koch ; locks, padlocks, sacrificial knives, spears, spike-nails and clamps for building boats and match-locks were made by ‘Kamars’. “Scissors are still unknown.” Plough-share, bills, hatchets, hoes, pick-axes, knives, spindles for spinning, the rod for cleaning the implement used in smoking tobacco, lamps of different kinds, pots for boiling milk or water and stoves for cooking used to be made by indigenous workers. The goldsmiths²⁸ were mostly Kalitas. They had not much capital but some tools. “The person who wishes anything made furnishes the metals, of which the workmen receive a share for their trouble.”

The coppersmiths²⁹ were mostly Kalitas. None of them had a capital more than a hundred rupes. “They were reckoned by the Bengalese very skilful in working in bell-metal, so that some is sent to Bengal, although all the copper comes through that country.” Much copper furniture was in use. Some people of the Hira and Moriya tribes made brassware³⁰, of which they prepared several small articles of furniture. There were many carpenters of the Kalita and other tribes and they were chiefly employed to construct boats and canoes. They also made very coarse chests and bedsteads with the implements of agriculture and the posts, beams and doors of houses. They lacked capital³¹. Men of all castes could work in bamboo³².

The tradesmen in general had farms or lands and some of their family cultivated them ; for persons who cultivated for

26. Ibid.

27. Allen, Assam District Gazetteers, Vol. VII (Sibsagar), pp. 80-94.

28. Allen, Assam District Gazetteers, Vol. VII (Sibsagar), pp. 80-94.

29. Ibid, pp. 157-168.

30. Ibid.

31. Hamilton, An Account of Assam, p. 60.

32. Allen, Assam District Gazetteers, Vol. III (Goalpara), pp. 84-90, 106.

a share could seldom be procured, servants could very rarely be hired, and people who had no power could not keep slaves. Every man who had a farm had, in general, to work it himself for labourers could not be procured either for a share of the crop, or for money. The only assistance that could be procured, was that of slaves, and a good many were employed by persons who had influence sufficient to secure property so tangible³³.

Thus agricultural operations used to be supplemented by various economic occupations and avocations. There were also different cottage industries and home manufactures and arts and crafts of which the following³⁴ are illustrative.

Industries : Spinning and Weaving : There was a considerable amount of cotton produced in the country. In North Lakhimpur and Mangaldoi there was one variety of cotton grown. In Jorhat and Nowgong there were two, while in Kamrup three varieties were grown. H. F. Samman in his "Monograph on the Cotton Fabrics of Assam, 1897", says :—"From time immemorial the inhabitants of this Province have spun cotton thread and woven cotton. The home-spun thread and home-made cloth are now giving way before those imported from the West." "The weaving of the cloth of every kind", says Hannay, "as well as the process of dyeing, is carried on exclusively by the females, and all are engaged from the Gohain's family to the poorest in the villages." "Weaving", says Samman, "among the Assamese forms a part of a girl's education and part of a woman's ordinary household duties. The women of the family are expected to make their own cloths and those of the men as well. In former days they certainly did so, but now a change is coming over the country." In days of old, it is true, there were a few professional weaving castes such as the Tantis and Muhammadan Jolas, but the Jolas have now almost entirely disappeared, and the other weaving castes have long since abandoned their professional occupation for trade and agriculture. But even in their days of prime, these weaving castes did not supply the

33. Francis Buchanan Hamilton, *Account of Assam*, p. 64.

34. U. N. Gohain, *Assam under the Ahoms*, pp. 183-211.

masses with their cloths. They were engaged rather in weaving the finer fabrics required by the royal family and others of high caste. These royal weavers received a grant of rent-free land and other favours in return for their services. At present spinning is an almost forgotten art, it lingers on only among the Hill - tribes and in the most remote villages of the plains ; and even here imported thread is daily gaining ground.

In North Lakhimpur the Kacharis of Kadam Mauza are considered the best weavers. In Golaghat and Jorhat the Miris are celebrated for weaving a kind of rug called Mirjin. In Jorhat, too, some Naras make a sort of bag (thung) unlike anything made by the Assamese ; and some Muhammadans of Jorhat town make a peculiar kind of embroidered shawl. In Nowgong the only weavers of any particular note (Muhammadan women of Puranigudam) confine their exertions to the manufacture of silk cloth³⁵. In Kamrup, Saulkuchi and Kamarkuchi of Hajo, Lahkarpara of Rangia and North Gauhati are said to be famed for the manufacture of fine and skilfully embroidered fabrics. Kamarkuchi is famed for the finest kind of cotton cloth made with locally made thread called nurākatā suta, but now-a-days the thread has ceased to be employed. In Nowgong, too, this thread was made in the time of the Rajas of Assam for weaving into cloths used by the royal family. Now-a-days there is no royal family and no nurākatā thread³⁶. Besides ordinary cotton there is another kind of cotton used in Assam for making fabrics, viz., the Simul or Bombax hepta phyllum. The use of the down of this tree for weaving purposes has long been known to the Assamese.

Dyeing : The practice of dyeing of cotton articles was prevalent. "It may be stated briefly," says Samman, "that dyeing among the people of Assam is an art of the past, at one time universally known, but now being rapidly forgotten. The

35. Allen, Assam District Gazetteers, Vol. VI (Nowgong), pp. 141-153.

36. H. F. Samman, Monograph on the Cotton Fabrics of Assam, Calcutta, 1897, quoted by U. Gohain, Assam under the Ahoms, pp. 183-186.

most usual practice, however, was to dye not cloth but thread, and it is the dyeing of thread that has now been almost entirely discontinued." The Phakials, Khamptis and Mataks prepare dyes of their own. The Turungs and Noras of Jorhat Sub-Division dye cotton thread and cloth with the Rom plant, which, according to J. W. Masters, (Vide his Memoir of some of the Natural Productions of the Angami Naga Hills), produces "a good blue dye". This colour is again converted into black by the bark of *Barāsiākorā latā*. The bark is obtained and cut into small pieces, which are either boiled or steeped in cold water in an earthen or metal vessel till the water attains a reddish black colour. The blue cloth is then put into the liquid for some minutes, and then dried in the sun. The process goes on twice or thrice according to the depth of the dark colour required. The Singphos dye their thread before it is put into the loom. "The colours," Says Hannay, "given are Indian red, brown buff and various shades of green and blue. Their dyes are rom, a kind of indigo, 'Seing loug' or 'Assoo khat' (a kind of wood found in the jungles of Assam), and the root of a creeper 'Khai Khien' of the Shans, of a bright yellow." "The Angami Nagas grow a species of plant, called 'Kelia purr' (*Marsdenia tinctoria*, brown), from the leaves of which they extract a blue dye.

Guna (Gold and Silver wire): "In former days," says Samman, "the gold and silver wire (guna) used for embroidery was made within the Province by a class of workers called Guna Katia; the process of manufacture was a trade secret. The class of Gunakatia is rapidly becoming extinct." At the present day the gold and silver wire used for embroidery is imported from the west. The wire is far inferior in both quality and appearance to that of the Guna-katia. The latter was of pure material, never tarnished and was very lasting; the former is a mere imitation, and after passing once or twice through the washerman's hands, it tarnishes and gets distorted with the result that the embroidery is ruined.

Sewing: The art of sewing was in vogue. Samman says that in Assam, "the needle has been used from time to time"

and quotes the following age-old saying of Dak, so common among the Assamese people :—

“Dakar bachan burar katha

Beji gandat Chaul Katha.” i.e., four needles could be got for one katha or half a seer of rice. The Assamese all over the valley used brass needles manufactured by Banias or goldsmiths. For sewing ‘Kathas’ and other coarse cloths big needles were used, and for sewing mekkelas etc., small and fine needles were used.

Silk : Pat Silk : A most characteristic industry of the Assam Valley was the rearing of silk worms and the manufacture of cloth from their thread.³⁷ “The peculiarity,” says Stack (in Indian Museum Notes Vol I, 1889-1891), “of the ‘Bor Polu’ or large pat silk-work, is that the period of hatching lasts ten months. To this circumstance it owed the name of ‘lehema’ or slow.” During this time the eggs are kept in a piece of cloth deposited in a wicker basket (‘Japa’), which is carefully placed out of the reach of rats and insects. The cultivators look for the appearance of the young ones about the time of the 1st of Magh, that is, towards the middle of January, when the mulberry is putting forth green shoots. The youngs are fed at first on young mulberry leaves cut into pieces and shred over them. They change their skin four times. After the second moulting they are able to feed on entire leaves. A hundred worms in this stage will eat about one seer of leaves in a day. The life of the worm lasts 30 to 40 days, of which 10 or 12 days elapse between the final moulting and maturity. The mature worms are removed to a basket into compartments, each allotted to 2 or 3 silk worms. There the cocoons are spun. The cocoon is completed in about 6 days. Those selected for breeding are placed in a siever. The moths emerge in about a fortnight (the time is also stated as 10 to 20 days, according to the heat of the weather), and remain in pairs on the sieve for three days, when the females are taken away and placed in a cloth suspended in some quiet corner.

37. Allen, Assam District Gazetteers, Vol. VII (Sibsagar), pp. 157-168.

The cocoons intended for use are placed in the sun, to destroy the life of the chrysalis. This having been effected, a score of cocoons are thrown into a pot of scalding water, and stirred with a splinter of bamboo; the fibres attach themselves to the bamboo, and a thread is thus carried to the reel and reeled off. Sometimes the bamboo fails to pick up the filaments, and a twig of the 'makundi' creeper, with the leaves on, has to be employed. The cocoon is of bright yellow colour, but the silk, when boiled in potash water, becomes perfectly white. From the breeding cocoons after the escape of the moth, and also from the refuse of reeled cocoons, a coarser thread, called 'Lat', is made by spinning.³⁸ The breeding of the worms is restricted by custom to the Jugi caste (called also 'Katani'), who used to supply the requirements of the Ahom kings and nobles. The production of pat silk greatly declined since the annexation of Assam by the British.

Tusser : Tusser was cultivated in the palmy days of the Assam silk industry, but it is now entirely neglected as being inferior to muga. The worm is called 'Kutkuri', because it feeds principally on the Kutkuri plant (*vangueria spinosa*). It also feeds on 'phutuka' plant which is one of the commonest shrubs in Assam. It yields three breeds while muga yields five breeds. Another worm of tusser variety is loosely called by the Assamese as 'Deomuga'. It feeds on 'Phutuka' plant. The wild silk worm called 'Salthi' by the Kacharis is also another kind of tusser. It feeds on 'Kam-ranga or Kordoï' (*Barringtonia*) and *Hidal* trees. The silk obtained was sometimes used for mixing with 'eri'. To extract it the cocoon was first boiled in a strong alkaline solution, and then bruised in a mortar. The hollow cocoon was often converted into a tobacco box or used to keep lime in for eating with betel nut, or as a cup for dipping oil out of a jar.

Eri (*Attacus ricini*) : Eri is a multivoltine silk worm. It is called Eri³⁹, as it is fed on the castor-oil plant (*Ricinus*

38. Stack, Indian Museum Notes Vol. I, 1889-1891, quoted by U. Gohain, Assam under the Ahoms, pp. 189-191.

39. Stack, Silk in Assam (Notes on some Industries of Assam, 1884-1895).

Communis) called 'Era' in Assamese. It also feeds on 'Keseru' (*Heteroponax fragrans*), the Gulancha (*Jatropha curcas*), the Gomari (*Gamelina arborea*) and also the common 'Bogri' or 'Ber tree' (*Zizyphus jujuba*) on which the worm can thrive in its later stages, if other food is not procurable in sufficient quantity. As many as 8 broods can be obtained in 12 months. The number of moultings is four known as 'haladhia', 'duikata', 'tinikata' and 'Charikata'; the first term denotes the yellow colour of the worm; the three others merely mark the order of moultings. "In preparing the cocoon for use", says Stack, "the first step is to destroy the life in the chrysalis. For this purpose exposure to the sun during one or two days is usually sufficient." When fire has to be employed, it is applied under bamboo trays upon which the cocoons are placed. Cocoons intended for immediate use are boiled for 2 or 3 hours in an alkaline solution. This serves the double purpose of killing the chrysalis and softening the cocoon. After this the cocoons are opened and the chrysalis is extracted; they are next washed white, slightly kneaded in the hand, dried in the sun, and are then ready for use. At the time of spinning the empty cocoons are placed in an earthen bowl containing water, with which a little cowdung is sometimes mixed. Each cocoon is taken up separately, and the silk is drawn off in a coarse thread. Uniformity of thickness is roughly preserved by rubbing the thread between the finger and the thumb, and in this way also new cocoons are joined on. The rearing and spinning of eri is still extensively done by non-Aryan tribes of Assam, specially in sub-montane areas. The Bhutanese, who import a large quantity of yarn, dye and weave it into gaily coloured coats and striped cloths, some of which find their way back to Assam. In 1834 the selling price of the yarn was Rs. 2 per seer.

Muga (*Antheroea Assama*): The 'Sum' tree (*Machilus odoratissima*) furnishes Muga's favourite food. It is also extensively bred in the 'Sualu' tree (*Tetranthera monopotala*). The leaves of certain other forest trees, the 'Dighlati' (*Tetranthera glanca*), the 'Pati-chanda' (*Cinnamomum obtusifolium*), and the Bomroti (*Symplocas grandiflora*) can be eaten by the worm in its maturer stages, if the supply of its staple food begins to fail. The 'Sum'-fed worm yields the most delicate silk; and the genuine

muga is distinguished by the title of 'Sumpatia' muga, i.e., the silk yielded by the worm that feeds on the 'Sum' leaf. Five successive broods are distinguished by vernacular names roughly denoting the months in which the worms are bred and spin their cocoons. These are the 'Katia' brood in October-November, the 'Jarua' in the coldest months of December and January, the 'Jethua' in the month of Jeth, the 'Aharua' in Asar and 'Bhadia' in Bhada. The Katia and Jethua broods yield the most silk.

"The silk of the 'Muga', says Stack, "is reeled". The life of the chrysalis having been destroyed by exposure to the sun, or by fire, the cocoons are boiled in an alkaline solution. When required for use, their floss is plucked off, and they are placed in a pot of warm or cold water. Two persons are employed, one to take the silk from the cocoons, the other to reel it. The former brings together the filaments of silk from a number of cocoons, varying from 7 to 20, and hands them off to the reeler, who rubs them into a thread by rolling them on his thigh with the palm of his right hand and the underpart of the fore-arm, "while with his left hand he turns the fly-wheel of the primitive reeling apparatus ("Bhangori") that stands beside him, an axle turning in the notches of two uprights, with the aforesaid wheel at one end or often merely a cross-stick in the middle to serve the purpose of a flywheel". In this way the whole of the cocoon can be unwound, except the innermost layer next to the chrysalis. The thread is reeled off on the axle in skeins of about half a seer at a time.

No part of the muga cocoon is rejected as useless. The floss plucked off before reeling, the innermost layer, next to the Chrysalis, and the cocoons kept for breeding, though unfit for reeling, are spun by the hand into a coarser kind of thread, called 'era' or waste, which is used for mixing with eri thread, and is woven by itself into rough but warm and durable fabrics. The muga worm assumes two other varieties when fed on the 'Champa' or 'Chapa' and on the 'Mezankari' or 'Adakuri' (*Fetrathera polyantha*) trees⁴⁰. The champa silk is almost forgotten now. It

40. E. Stack, *Silk in Assam* (Notes on some Industries of Assam), 1884-95, pp. 13-21; B. C. Allen, *Monograph on the silk cloths of Assam*, 1899.

is described as a **very fine white silk**, which used to be worn only by the Ahom kings and their nobles. Mezankari silk is still to be found, but with great difficulty. It is a fine silk of almost pure white, about thrice as valuable as the common muga, in fact, the most costly of all the silks of Assam. It is altogether an article of luxury. In 1883 the thread was sold in Jorhat at Rs. 24 per seer.

Ivory and Wood Works : The arts of carving in ivory and wood were in vogue. Dr. Wade in his 'History of Assam', says that "mats of ivory, fans of ivory, Chessmen of ivory" were sent by king Rudra Singh as present to "the king of Delhi". Ivory boxes, ivory pots, ivory articles were also made and used in Assam. Tradition says that in the days of Ahom rule elephant tusk was thrust into one or more gourds which were boiled for some time. The tusk was taken out and then split into desired pieces.

Boat making and other Wood Works . The people made their boxes, trays, stools, chairs and other wooden articles by carving them out of a single block of wood. Canoes were manufactured out of trees, which were hollowed out till only an outer skin about one inch and a quarter in thick remained. If a large boat was required, the shell was plastered over with mud and steamed over a fire, and the sides were then distended by the insertion of thwarts ; if, as usually happened, it split in process, the rent was patched up with a piece of wood fastened in by clamps. In this way boats 60 feet long by 6 or 7 feet in breadth were constructed, capable of lasting, if the wood be good forest timber, for 10 years or even longer. The Ajhar (*Lager-stroemia reginoe*) and Sam (*Artocar-frus chaplasha*) wood were adjudged the best for canoes. The present country boat is the legacy received from the days of native rule. It had served the Ahom kings well enough ; and they possessed a numerous and well-equipped fleet as well as trading boats. Many of the war sloops accommodated "three to four score sailors".

Brass Vessels : Brass vessels were made by the Morias out of thin sheets of brass beaten out and pieced together. Nicks were cut in one edge of a sheet, into which the other edge was fitted ; and the two were then beaten flat. A rough paste made

of borax and 'pan'—a substance consisting of three parts of sheet brass with one part of solder—was then put over the joint. The process is still in use. The brass is heated, the 'pan' melts, and the union is then complete. Bell-metal utensils were cast in moulds⁴¹.

Pottery : There were two classes of potters—the Hiras (a caste peculiar to the Valley) and the Kumars (a section of the Kalita caste). The Hiras are distinguished from Kumars by the fact that their workers are women who shape the vessels by hand without the help of the potter's wheel. The moist glutinous clay, being freed from extraneous substances, is added strip by strip and beaten out between two flat pieces of stone. The males simply bring fuel from jungles for baking the moulded pots. The Hiras do not, like the Kumars, use a furnace for the purpose, but merely fill the vessels on an open space with the fuels in layers between.

The Kumar's wheel (chak) is about three feet in diameter, which rotates **horizontally on a piece of hard pointed wood**, fixed firmly in the ground. A well-kneaded lump of clay is placed on the wheel. As the wheel revolves, the potter works the clay with his fingers and gives it the desired shape. The vessel is then sun-dried, placed in a mould (athali), a hollow basin about $7\frac{1}{2}$ feet long and $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches deep, and beaten into final shape with a mallet (pituni), a smooth stone being held the while against the inner surface. It is then again sun-dried, and the surface is polished with a polisher (chaki), after which it is ready for the kiln. The collection of the clay and firewood, the shaping of the vessels on the wheel and the stacking of them in the kiln, form the men's portion of the work. The polishing and the final shaping are done by the women⁴².

Jewellery : Jewellery of various patterns set with diamonds, rubies and other precious stones used to be made in Assam and worn by the aristocracy, both male and female. It is said that

41. Allen, Assam District Gazetteers, Vol. IV (Kamrup), pp. 155-165.

42. Allen, Assam District Gazetteers, Vol. VIII (Lakhimpur), pp. 186-212.

the rich dowry of valuable jewels and other articles, which **Badan Chandra Bar Phukan** gave to his daughter **Pijow Gabharu** at her marriage with **Purnananda Burha Gohain's** son, **Oreshanath Dhekial Phukan**, excited the envy of the **Burha Gohain**, and was one of the main causes of enmity between the two great nobles. **Jorhat** was famous for the art of enamelling and **Barpeta** for filigree-work. **Assamese women** showed disinclination to allow their gold to be melted for fear of it being alloyed by goldsmiths. Besides various ornaments, lime-pots, tobacco-pots, betel-pots, cups, plates, **Ahom-jora** (a kind of casket) etc., some of silver and some of gold, sometimes set with gems, were made in Assam and used by the aristocracy⁴³.

Lac : Shellac : Indigenous lac was produced in the Assam forests, but the staple was also cultivated to some extent by artificial propagation. The Garos generally reared it on the 'Arhar' plant (*Cajanus Indicus*), while the Assamese preferred some kind of ficus or the 'Kukur-suto' (*grewia multiflora*) or **Moj** (*albezzia Indica*). The method of propagation is described in Allen's Gazetteer of Kamrup :—

Pieces of stick lac containing living insects are placed in baskets and tied on to the twigs of the tree on which the next crop is to be grown. After a few days the insects crawl on to the young branches and begin to feed and secrete the resin. They are left undisturbed for about six months, and the twigs encrusted with the secretion are then picked off. "A good-sized tree yields from 30 seers to two maunds of stick lac, the best results being obtained from trees of moderate growth which do not contain too rich a supply of sap." Two crops are generally obtained in the year, the first being collected in May and June, the second in October and November. Shellac, when made, is prepared in the following manner. The stick lac is pounded and sifted, and then repeatedly washed and dried to free it from all tinctorial matter. "When the desired result has been obtained the resin is put into a bag heated over a slow fire. The bag is squeezed till the melted lac is forced through the cloth, and it is

43 Allen, Assam District Gazetteers, Vol. V (Darrang), pp. 152-163.

scraped off.” Sometimes the raw product is treated by a much simpler process, and the stick lac is merely boiled for some hours and then pressed into cakes, which contain, of course, the whole of the colouring matter. “A dye is also prepared by pounding the stick lac into a fine powder, mixing it with water in the proportion of one to four and boiling it for two hours. The tincorial matter is then strained off and the refuse, which is known as ‘Shera’ is exported”⁴⁴.

Poison Berry : S. E. Peal in his ‘Notes on a visit to the tribes inhabiting the Hills south of Sibsagar’, describes the use of varieties of poison berry, e.g., Koni Bih, Naga Bih, Lata Bih, Bar Bih etc :—“The seeds of this shrub or tree (Koni Bih) are used by the Assamese to kill and intoxicate fish in the rivers.” They usually select the deep pools, after the floods have subsided, and stake both the outlet and inlet, so as to prevent the fish from escaping. Both the leaf and the bark are capable of poisoning but the seed (husk and all) is far more effective. The custom is to collect rather old and half-rotten seeds some days before the poison is required, and steep them in water. When soft, they are pounded up, seeds and husk, and all, with some water, care being taken to protect the face and specially the eyes. When thoroughly reduced to a pulp, the mass is allowed to stand a day or two, and is then ready to be thrown into the stream a little above the place selected to catch the fish. “About five pounds of seed will poison a dhubi (pool), and, of course, affect the stream a long way down. It seems universally agreed that if the seeds are kept for a long time in a pot, moistened and allowed to rot (ferment), the poison is far more active than if only kept in a few days.” Naga Bih is another poison, used to intoxicate and kill fish. The tree known by this name grows to a large size, often 2 to 4 ft. in girth, and 50 to 80 ft. high. Unlike the Koni Bih, the seeds must be used, when rather unripe, or at least not old ; but all parts of the tree seem to yield the active principle, though the seeds contain most for a given weight. The poison is also most virulent, if used immediately. “It is

44. Allen, Assam District Gazetteers, Vol. IV (Kamrup), pp. 155-165.

produced much the same way as Koni Bih, that is, pounded up with water and macerated"⁴⁵. There are other kinds of poison, called Lata Bih or Deo Bih and Bar Bih etc.⁴⁶ Bar Bih (Aconite) is brought down by and had from the Mishmis and other tribes of the north-east.

Elephant-catching : Kheddas : Elephant catching had always been a great hobby with the Ahom kings. Elephants were caught not only for riding, hunting and war purposes but also for carrying loads and dragging wood and for their tusks. The Muhammadan historians have frequently referred to the catching of elephants by the Assamese. Pratap Singh after being the owner of a thousand elephants assumed the title of Gajpati, and caused the town of Jamirguri to be renamed Gajpur in commemoration of the event. The circumstance is alluded to in the Padishahnama. His father Sukhampha had got the name 'Khora' (lame) Raja for having hurt his leg while out hunting elephants. He was frequently present at the Kheddas when elephant-catching operations were in progress. Jayadhvaj Singh once caught 160 elephants in a Khedda at Larapara. This took place in February, 1654. The following passages are from Baharistan-i-Ghaybi translated by Dr. M. I. Borah :—

"Raja Baldev and Shumaruyed Kayeth with a force of two hundred thousand infantry, one hundred and eighty elephants consisting of mast (heated) and hushiar mast, i.e., the elephants who have not yet come to the state of mast or heat, were to go along with him (the 'Raja of Assam') by the other side of the river (the Brahmaputra) in order to fall upon Shaykh Kamal, to sweep him off and not to allow even a bird to fly out of the cordon by a charge from the rear"⁴⁷.

In the jungles where elephants live and where the paiks were posted for pali, i.e., to watch that the elephants might not go away, they used to sit constantly in their 'Chawkis' to guard the elephants and would not go to any distant place even for the

45. S. E. Peal, Notes on a visit to the tribes inhabiting the Hills, south of Sibsagar, Assam, quoted by U. Gohain, Assam under the Ahoms, pp. 208-11.

46. Sachin Roy, Aspects of Padam-Minyong Culture, p. 149.

47. M. I. Borah, Baharistan-i-Ghaybi, Vol. II, p. 488.

purpose of drinking water lest the elephants might get away. The palis were posted from the beginning in batches of two after every hundred cubits. The general rule observed by them is this : They cut bamboos and thrust into them at either side a piece of bamboo of the size of one cubit. These are heaped together. Dry straws are placed beneath them and these are spread from one end of a 'Chawki' to the next 'Chawki'. When the elephants try to get out of the enclosure, one of these (palis) immediately runs from the left and from the right with fire in their hands and set fire under these heaped-up bamboo pieces. The fire makes the joints of the bamboos crack in such a way that they produce sounds like the reports of big guns, and at this the elephants turn back into the enclosure. Thus they are stopped from going out. Besides these they use an entire stump of bamboo, half of which is cleft in the middle and a rope is tied to one of its halves. One of these two palis pulls that rope and it produces a sound at all hours. It is called 'Taka'. "They also use two pieces of bamboo⁴⁸, one of which is carved and the other is carved in the middle and these are perforated at every two fingers breadth. These are beaten with sticks like a kettle drum. In the language of the Kutch it is called 'Danka-Danka'."

The method of catching elephants by Mela Shikar is described by B. C. Allen in his Gazetteer of the Darrang District :— Mahuts mounted on staunch and well-trained elephants pursue the herd which generally takes to flight. The chase is of a most arduous and exciting character. The great animals go crashing through the thickest jungle and over rough and treacherous ground at a surpassing pace, and the hunter (phandi) is liable to be torn by the beautiful but thorny cane brake, or, were he not very agile, to be swept from his seat by the boughs of an overhanging tree. After a time the younger animals begin to flag and lag behind, and it is then that the opportunity of the pursuer comes. Two hunters single out a likely beast, drive their elephants on either side, and deftly throw a noose over its neck. "The two ends of the noose are firmly fastened to the 'Kunkis' as the hunting elephants are called, and as they close

48. Ibid., pp. 680-ff.

in on either side, the captured animal is unable to escape, or to do much injury to his captors who are generally considerably larger than their victim." The wild elephant is then brought back to camp where it is tied up for a time and gradually tamed⁴⁹.

Mineral Productions : Gold : Mineral Productions occupied an important place in the economy⁵⁰. In the time of the Ahom kings gold was regularly washed from many of the rivers in the Assam Valley. Rajeswar Singh is said to have taken as much as 2,500 ounces of gold every year from the people of Upper Assam. The Sonwals or gold-washers were taxed at four annas weight, or Rs. 5 worth, of gold per annum. The Assam gold was of a fine quality. "About ten thousand persons were engaged in washing for it. Gold mohars and rupees were coined by the Raja" (Gait). In the islands of the Brahmaputra and along the lower courses of its northern tributaries were numerous villages of Hindu gold-washers, who in pursuit of their avocation were accustomed to frequent the Dihong, and other streams ; and from them the Ahom Government derived no small part of its revenue from the gold-dust of the rivers. "The rivers of Assam which have yielded gold are those of the Darrang and Lakhimpur districts north of the Brahmaputra, the Brahmaputra itself in its upper course, the Noa Dihing and Buri-dihing, and a small stream called Jaglo, which rises in Tipam Hills and falls into the Buri Dihing."

"In the Sibsagar District the Dhansiri, the Desoi and the Jhanzi are said to have been auriferous. Of these streams, the Bhoroli, the Dikrong, and Subansiri (Ahom name is Kham-nam-time) in Darrang and Lakhimpur appear to have formerly given the largest quantities." (Reports on the Administration of Assam 1892-93 and 1901-02)⁵¹. Dalton says that the sands of the Sisi river were highly auriferous. Twenty grains of gold was

49. Allen, Assam District Gazetteers, Vol. V (Darrang), pp. 148-163.

50. U. N. Gohain, Assam under the Ahoms, pp. 171-182.

51. Quoted by U. Gohain, Assam under the Ahoms, p. 171.

not an unusual return on one day's labour by three men, who between them could wash about a ton of rubble ; 11 grains were extracted from 22 cwt. of gravel in his presence. According to Dr. Wade, the gold found in the Borgong in the Darrang District is much superior even to the gold of the Dikrong, the colour being deeper and more vivid. "It is deemed so much more precious than any other that the price, even in Assam, is eighteen or twenty rupees, whereas the Dikrungh gold is only twelve or fourteen rupees, per tolah. It is said to fly in pieces under the stroke of a hammer, when not alloyed by a little silver ;on the addition of the smallest possible quantity of silver it becomes malleable. The Dikrungh gold is softer, and malleable without the addition of silver" (Dr. Wade). According to Scott, "Gold dust is found in conjunction with a black sandy ore of iron, probably produced from the disintegration of granite. The gold is ultimately separated in the usual manner by long washing and subsequent trituration with mercury"⁵².

Gold Washing : The gold-washers usually employed the following system of washing for gold : The gold-washers select a gravelly shore opposite to a falling bank, where the current flows past a round corner. The stream is diverted over the selected spot till the surface sand has been washed away and the gravelly strata exposed, and is then turned back into its former channel. The auriferous sand is thrown on to a bamboo strainer placed over a wooden trough, and water is poured over it, the trough being tilted at a slight angle, so that the water and lighter substances run off, while the gold and the heavier matter settle down at the bottom. When a sufficient quantity of this matter has been collected, it is placed in another vessel, and quick-silver added to attract the grains of gold. The mixture of quick-silver and gold is then placed in a shell and put in fire. "The shell is converted into lime, the quick-silver evaporated, and the gold is left lying in the lime. The lime and gold are then thrown

52. A. Mackenzie, *History of the Relation of the Government with Hill tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal*, Appendix A, *Welsh's Report on Assam, 1794*, pp. 387-390; Mills, *Report on the Province of Assam*, p. 30.

into a vessel full of water, when the precious metal at once sinks to the bottom" (J. A. S. B. Vol. VII, p. 621)⁵³.

Iron : Iron exists in Assam in great quantity and in various forms;⁵⁴ and in the days of the Ahom Kings the smelting of iron-ore was extensively practised. According to Capt. Hannay the workers numbered about 3,000; naturally the indigenous industry could not stand foreign competition under British regime. The Muhammadan historians frequently refer to the large number of cannon possessed by the 'enemy', and these guns, some of them of great size and weight, are found scattered over the Assam Valley even at the present day. Mir Jumla is said to have captured 675 guns, one of which threw a ball three maunds in weight, besides a large number of match-locks and other field pieces. The match-locks and cannon are said to have been well-cast. A very large number of cannon balls of various sizes were discovered at Kharghuli near the present Gauhati town.

It is stated by Dr. Wade that musketry had not been made in Assam prior to the invasion of the Province by Turbak and that the artists employed by the Ahom kings "formed them after the mode of those which Turbak had brought from Bengal in 1543". On the other hand, Tavernier in narrating the result of Mir Jumla's expedition to Assam says: "This thought that these (Ahoms) were the people that formerly invented gun-powder; which spread itself from Assam to Pegu and from Pegu to China, from when the invention has been attributed to the Chinese. However, certain it is that Mirjimola brought from thence several pieces of cannon, which were all iron guns and stores of excellent powder, both made in the country. The

53. Maniram Dewan, Native Account of Washing gold in Assam, Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, July, 1838; Hannay, Further information on the gold Washing of Assam, Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, Vol. VI, 1839.

54. Mills, Report on the Province of Assam, p. 30; A. Mackenzie, History of the Relations of the Government with Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal, Appendix A, Welsh's Report on Assam, 1794, pp. 387-390.

powder is round and small like ours and of excellent quality.”⁵⁵ According to U. N. Gohain, some Ahom gentry used to say that Assamese gun-powder was prepared from a compound of salt-petre (which was procured everywhere in Upper Assam in considerable quantity), sulphur and the charcoal of a local plant of the *Adhatoda Vasica* species.

“The iron-ore formerly smelted in Sibsagar⁵⁶ was derived from the clay iron stones in the local coal measures (chiefly those of Nazira field), and from impure limonite which occurs in great abundance in the Tipam rock south of the Dhodar Ali ; the former was the source most used.” (Report on the Administration of Assam, 1892-93). Hunter says :—“The process of smelting is very rudely carried on in charcoal fires, blown by enormous double action bellows worked by two persons, who stand on the machine raising the flaps with their hands, and expanding them with their feet.” Neither furnance nor flux is used in the process. The fire is kindled on one side of an upright stone, with a small arched hole close to the ground for the nozzle of the bellows. The ore is run into lumps which are afterwards cleft nearly in two, to show the quality of the metal.

The Khasi Hills iron which is still made in small quantities and exported to the submontane bazars, is derived from the minute crystals of titaniferous iron-ore, which are found in decomposed granite on the central dyke of that rock, near the highest portion of the plateau. The decomposed granite is rolled down in a stream, where it is washed to separate the iron sand, which is collected in wooden trough, dried, and reduced with charcoal in small furnaces. “The quality of iron is excellent, and it is still sought after to some extent for manufacture into hoes and daos. . . . Its great extension in former times is evidenced by the remains of smelting furnaces which cover the surface for many miles, from the brow of the hill below

55. J. B. Tavernier, *Travels in India*, London, 1678, Part II, Book III, p. 187.

56. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Assam*, Vol. I, p. 231.

Cherapunji as far north as Myllem and beyond." (Report on the Administration of Assam 1901-02).⁵⁷

Salt : Salt springs are found in conjunction with petroleum in the Upper Assam Coal area at Borhat,⁵⁸ Jaipur and other places. In former times their brine was largely used for conversion into merchantable salt, and to this day a small quantity of salt so made (the brine being boiled down in joints of bamboo) is imported by the Nagas into Jaipur. The Nagas living near Jaipur lived chiefly by manufacturing salt, which they retailed to the people of the plains. There were 85 salt wells in the low hills. The salt was of reddish brown and chocolate colour. The method of manufacture is as follows :— Wells are sunk at various places and lined with hollow tree-trunks. From these water with a slight saline taste is baled out and stored in rough bamboo vessels. Each well has close by one or more rude furnaces of baked clay, open at the top. The furnace is charged with fuel ; the bamboo vessels are placed side by side across the opening ; and a fire is maintained till the process of evaporation is complete, and only salt crystals are left in the vessels. Lt. Wilcox in his "Memoir of a Survey of Assam and the neighbouring countries executed in 1825 to 1828", says :—"Near to Borhath are several salt springs, whence a considerable quantity of salt used formerly to be obtained. . . . The evaporation is carried on in green bamboos, and the salt presented was generally of a grey colour, extremely hard and compact, having the form of the bamboo in which it had been boiled, and possessing radiated structure in perfection."⁵⁹

An alkaline solution, prepared from the ashes of plantain and some aquatic plants (Sotkhar) is often used as a flavouring with curry, and, by the poor people as a substitute for salt, a practice which is mentioned by the Muhammadan historians of Mir Jumla's invasion. The sheaths of plantain trees are sliced, dried and reduced to ashes. The rind of plantain is also dried and burnt. The ashes are placed in an earthen pot, in which there are several holes lightly plugged with straw. Water is

57. Quoted by U. N. Gohain, *Assam under the Ahoms*, pp. 176-ff.

58. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Assam*, Vol. I, pp. 231, 299-ff.

59. Quoted by U. N. Gohain, *Assam under the Ahoms*, p. 178.

poured over them, which dissolves the alkali and trickles through the holes into the receiver below. The resulting product, which is known as khār-pāni or Kharani, is used, not only as a seasoning and a substitute for salt but as a hair-wash, and as a mordant with certain dyes.

Lime Stone, etc. : Lime Stanes⁶⁰ found near the Nambor, Deopani, Hariajan and Jamuna rivers, were worked for the construction of royal palaces, bridges and temples. According to the Muhammadan historians, silver, copper and tin were obtained from the hills. U. N. Gohain says that a certain quantity of silver was brought by the Singphos from Yun and from the Shans ; and there are silver mines in the Hukong Valley. Copper was used for coinage. Copper plates or Phullees and copper utensils were also manufactured out of it. Copper vessels, inlaid with silver, were more valued by the Assamese gentry than ordinary brass vessels.

Amber : Amber was found in great quantities in the Hukong Valley. "The solid and perfect coloured specimens," says Hannay, "are manufactured on the spot by the Singphos and Shans into ear ornaments which are worn, stuck through the lobe of the ear by both Burmese and Assamese". One kind is a bright ruby colour, and called by the Burmese Mec Payen, or fine amber, another description which is much prized is opaque with delineations and figures like a handsome agate, and is called Meehoorwah. The next common colours, however, formed as ear ornaments, are the golden and oil green.⁶¹

Towns : The Ahom monarchs were town-builders ; and with the making of towns, economic activities, e.g., manufacturing, trade and commerce shifted partially to the towns inhabited by royalty, nobility and bureaucracy etc. To such towns were naturally attracted builders, artisans, craftsmen, manufacturers and traders etc., who came in to avail of new economic opportunities and prospects. There are copious references of town-building by the Ahom kings.

60. Mills, Report on the Province of Assam, p. 30.

61. U. N. Gohain, Assam under the Ahoms, p. 179.

Rangpur : "Rungpoor," says Dr. Wade, "is the capital of Assam, or the military station of the real capital, Gargown. The Dhekow (Dikhow) river flows on the north, the Namdang on the south. Singhdewar (Singhduar), or Sinadewar, and the Duburriuniali rampart, or high road, form its security on the east. Around, at a considerable distance, the towns of Caloogown, Gaurisaghur gown, Kerimerialigown, Dooboorialigown, Mutteimaragown, Khoomargown, Maitaka, and Bhogbari, form a circle round Rungpoor, which is twelve miles in length and ten in breadth." The banks of the Dikhow were connected by a lofty rampart with the southern mountains, through an extent of 10 or 15 miles ; it was constructed in remote antiquity for the protection of Gargaon, which was the principal residence of the monarch, and of all the great officers of State. The distance from Rangpur to Gargaon is about 10 miles. The Sil-Sako or the stone bridge on the Namdang was like the western gate of the military capital, or fortress of Rangpur and was capable of being rendered a post of great strength, as the Moamarias experienced. The fortress of Rangpur was accessible only, through this post to the westward, as the river in this quarter was seldom fordable. It was protected on the south by an immense causeway, or line of fortification, which extended from the Namdang, to the Dikhow. The city contained the well-known Talatalghar, a palace, now in ruins, of seven stories (with some stories underground) which protected king Lakshmi Singh from the search of the Moamaria rebels, "who misled by the flight of steps, forming a labyrinth could not discover the retreat of the Monarch".

Gargaon : Gargaon was the principal capital of the Ahom kingdom, and the usual residence of the Monarchs of Assam. It was about ten miles in length and five miles in breadth. "The fort and palace of Garhgaon," says Hunter, in his 'Statistical Account of Assam', "are situated on the banks of the Dikhu river, some distance to the southeast of Sibsagar town. The fort had bastions at the corners, but they are now destroyed. The magazine was situated a short distance east of the fort." The royal palace, one of the oldest buildings in the Province, is described by Robinson in his 'Descriptive Account of Assam',

as having been “surrounded by a brick wall about two miles in circumference ; but the whole town and its suburbs appear to have extended over many square miles of country. The ruins of gateways, built chiefly of masonry, are still to be seen within the fortified circumvallations which surround the town.” It may be observed that one of the gateways is composed principally of large blocks of stone bearing marks of iron crampings, which show that they once belonged to far more ancient edifices.⁶²

“The account,” says Mr. Allen, “given of the palace at Gargaon by the historian of Mir Jumla’s invasion is pitched in a more exalted key. Twelve thousand workmen had been engaged on its construction for a year, and the audience hall was 120 cubits long by 30 wide.” “The ornaments and curiosities,” says the Muhammadan historian, “with which the whole wood work of the house was fitted defy all description : nowhere in the whole inhabited world would you find a house equal to it in strength, ornamentation and picture.” “The whole”, says Hunter, “is now overgrown with dense jungle ; and the natural course of decay has been hastened by the hand of man, for the old bricks are found serviceable on the tea gardens of the present day”. The Survey Report for 1867-68 states :—“It is a great pity that the Assam Company are allowed to carry away the bricks ; they have already pulled down the gates, a portion of the palace, and the wall enclosing the palace.”

Gauhati : Gauhati was one of the most important cities of the Ahom kingdom. It was the capital of Lower Assam, and the residence of the Bar Phukan. Describing its ancient prosperity, Robinson says : “During the splendour of the Assam dynasty, Gauhati was one of the largest cities in the kingdom. It enclosed within its fortifications a vast extent of country on both banks of the great stream ; the hills on either side forming a spacious amphi-theatre, equally well-fortified by nature and by art.” It was the capital of all Lower Assam, and the residence of the Viceroy or Bar Phukan. The entrances into the

city were by guarded passes or ‘Chaukis’, of which there were 62. U. N. Gohain, *Assam under the Ahoms*, p. 224.

five on either bank of the river. The ruins of the gateways of some of these passes are still to be seen (they have since entirely disappeared) ; and the remains of the extensive fortifications may to this day be traced for miles, in the mounds and ditches that now serve only to mark the extent of the ancient capital. Besides these relics, but a small portion of its former grandeur remains. Its brick, its mortar, and earthen-ware constitute in some places a large proportion of the soil. "Carved stones and beautifully finished slabs, the remains of once noble temples, are frequently found beneath the surface ; its many spacious tanks, the work of tens of thousands, the pride of its princes, and the wonder of the present day, are now choked up with weeds and jungles, or altogether effaced by a false though luxuriant soil, that floats on the stagnant waters concealed beneath."⁶³

Mention may be made of a few other towns, e.g., Sibsagar, Jorhat, Charaideo (built by Sukhapha), Dhola (by Sudangpha), Charguya (Capital of Sudangpha), Namdang (built by Suhungmung), Bakata (Capital of Suhungmung), Abhaypur and Mathurapur (built by Pratap Singh), Boka (by Sudaipha), and Barkola (Capital of Gadadhar Singh) etc.

Trade and Commerce : The Ahom kingdom was bounded almost on all sides by lofty hills with narrow and difficult passes here and there for the access of the neighbouring hill tribes. The Brahmaputra was the great highway which connected Assam with Bengal, but the journey up the river for any boat of ordinary size was a very lengthy business. McGosh, writing in 1837, stated that a large boat took from six to seven weeks to come from Calcutta to Gauhati, though the post, which was conveyed in small canoes rowed by two men, who were relieved every 15 or 20 miles, reached Gauhati in ten days and Bishnath in three days more. Thus difficulties of communication stood on the way of development of trade and commerce. Furthermore, Assam had to be constantly on the alert against foreign invasions, specially of the Muhammadans. The Ahom Government had, therefore, to take precautions against and put restric-

63. Robinson, Descriptive Account of Assam, p. 286.

tions on strangers, traders and others, lest they should subvert the freedom of the country. This also retarded commercial intercourse.

In the reign of Pratap Singh a Muhammadan trader was murdered near Koliabar, about the year 1608, on suspicion of being a spy, and his two boats were looted. "It is recorded," says Gait, "in one of the Buranjis that a Feringi, or European, in the service of the Muhammadans, who had gone off by himself to shoot birds, was captured and sent to the Ahom king. This is the first instance recorded of a European entering Ahom territory."

In the circumstances, "In the 17th Century," says the Clarendon Press edition of the Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol. I, 1908, "the Ahom rulers seem to have adopted a policy of isolation, and forbade people to enter or leave their territories; and trade was carried on by a caravan which proceeded once a year to Gauhati with gold, musk, agar, pepper, and silk, and exchanged their products for salt, salt-petre, sulphur, and other articles".⁶⁴ At the end of the 18th century, the trade of the Valley was in the hands of two men, who farmed the customs and established a monopoly at Hadira, on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, nearly opposite Goalpara. On the British side there was a colony of European merchants, who had forcibly seized the monopoly of the trade from Bengal, and unsatisfactory though these arrangements were, the volume of business declined, on the occupation of the Province, owing to the abolition of the monopoly and the bad faith of the individual Assamese merchants. The imports, which consisted almost entirely of salt, were valued at 2½ lakhs of rupees; the exports at 4½ lakhs, three-fourths of which represented the price of lac, and the greater part of the remainder that of silk, mustard seed and cotton.⁶⁵

Gait in his 'History of Assam', says that in the reign of Pratap Singh numerous markets were established and that trade

64. Quoted by U. N. Gohain, Assam under the Ahoms, p. 163.

65. Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol. I, 1908, quoted by U. N. Gohain, Assam under the Ahoms, p. 164.

flourished greatly during the interval of peace between the two wars with the Muhammadans. "The river traffic was very great, and, in the report of a Gauhati official for the month of Ramzan 1662, thirty-two thousand boats of various kinds are stated to have arrived there."⁶⁶ King Rudra Singh is said to have established "an extensive trade with Tibet".

S. N. Bhattacharyya in his 'A History of Mughal North-East Frontier Policy' says that trade and commercial cupidity of the Mughals, was to a great extent the key-note to their repeated conflicts with the Assamese. They were inspired by an ambition to participate in the natural wealth of Assam, even at the risk of incurring the enmity of its king. The cessation of hostilities in 1639 was followed by trade and commercial intercourse with Assam. In exchange for elephants' tusk, hide of 'Chamari' cow, pepper, musk, silk-cloth, lignum-aloes, and 'Jaluk' and other kinds of aromatic plants, abundant in Assam, the Assamese used to import from the Mughal domain various kind of winter clothings, e.g., "Lahori," "Bapta" and "Banat," articles of daily consumption—sugar, salt and spices, as well as chemicals, such as, salt-petre and sulphur. Merchants moved to and fro, carrying on a brisk trade in the two realms. The Mughals in Kamrup looked with tempting eyes upon the rich zoological and geological resources and forest produce of Assam, and burnt with a desire to have a share in them. One of the most favourite pastimes of the Mughals, was the undertaking of Khedah operations in the hills of Darrang, which were full of wild elephants. Interruption in this profitable enterprise, was very often the topic of diplomatic correspondence. The Mughals over-stepped the limits of their own domain into the wilds of Darrang to capture elephants and into Assam realm as far as Singri, Balipara and Bargaon to carry on a brisk trade informally in Assam. Such Khedda and trade operations were resented as being abuses and declared illegal by Assam Officials.⁶⁷

Imports and Exports : Despite drawbacks, a considerable volume of trade and commerce, internal and external grew.

66. Gait, History of Assam, p. 147.

67. S. N. Bhattacharyya, A History of Mughal North-East Frontier Policy, pp. 261-ff, pp. 288-291.

Below is a summary of Capt. Welsh's Report, 1794, on the imports and exports of Assam :—Commercial articles of import from the eastern confines or Sadiya were copper, cotton, spring salt and fir trees (Agar). From the northern confines the Miris supplied copper, manjistha, ouka ; the Daphlas, Manjistha, long pepper, ginger, goomdhan, bison ; and the Bhutanese, musk, blankets, cow-tails, small horses, gola borax, rock salt, Nainta (a kind of cloth), goom sing (an embroidered cloth), and Daroka (a silk of a mixture of green, red and yellow colours). From the southern confines, the Nagas brought cotton, Lucki-billa (a silk cloth), toat-bound (a silk cloth), Nara Kapor (embroidered silk cloth), red hair and Naga Zathee (Spears), and the Garos, Cotton, Copper, iron and coarse cloth. From the western confines or Bengal came copper and other metals, red lead, woollen of Europe, chiefly of the coarse kind, Chintz particularly of kingkhaps, clover, Nutmegs, mace, cinnamon, blue vitriol, assafoetida, alum, darmook, orpiment (a variety of drugs) and salt. Exports to Bengal were cotton, mujistha, fir trees (Agar), gold, borax, musk ponies, mustard seed, tobacco, betelnuts, lac, endi and muga silk, elephant tusk, rhino's horns etc.⁶⁸.

“The quantity of lac”, says David Scott, “annually exported previous to the troubles amounted to about eight or ten thousand maunds. The quantity of salt imported during the year 1824-25 was only 25,000 maunds.”

Through the intervention of the Mishmis traffic was carried on between the Assamese one side and the people of the Hukong and Lama Valleys and the Abors on the other. The articles for barter were the valuable medicinal plant coptis teeta or Mishmi teeta, musk bags, gatheon (an aromatic plant), bee-wax, honey, ginger, Tibtan rock-salt, cloths of Tibetan woollens, Ahom-etha, ivory, gold, amber (from the Hukong Valley), fowls, eggs, pigs, cattle and articles of hardware.⁶⁹ Trade and commerce gradually developed and progressed. There was a considerable

68. A. Mackenzie, *History of the Relations of the Government with Hill tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal*, Appendix A, Welsh's Report on Assam, 1794, p. 387.

69. U. N. Gohain, *Assam under the Ahoms*, p. 169.

trade with Bengal as may be evident from the following figures of export from Bengal and Assam. The exports from Assam to Bengal were mainly muga silk, stick lac, munjit or madder, elephants' tusks, cotton, pepper and mustard seed⁷⁰ ; the principal imports into Assam were salt, copper, English woollens and spices.

Export from Bengal (1808-1809) : Salt, 35,000 maunds at 5½ rupees per maund—192,500 rupees ; ghee, 1000 maunds—1,600 rupees ; fine pulse,—800 rupees ; sugar,—1,000 rupees ; stone beads,—2,000 rupees, coral,—1,000 rupees ; jewels and pearls,—5,000 rupees ; European cutlery and glass ware,—500 rupees ; spices,—1,000 rupees ; paints,—500 rupees ; copper,—4,800 rupees ; red lead,—1,000 rupees ; English woollens,—2,000 rupees ; Tafetas,—2,000 rupees ; Benares Khinkabs,—500 rupees ; Satin,—1,000 rupees ; gold and silver cloth,—1,000 rupees ; Shells,—100 rupees ; and Muslin,—10,000 rupees ; Total—228,300 rupees.

Exports from Assam (1808-1809) : Stick lac, 10,000 maunds,—35,000 rupees ; muga silk, 65 maunds,—11,350 rupees ; muga cloth, 75 maunds,—17,500 rupees ; munjit,—500 rupees ; black pepper, 50 maunds,—500 rupees ; cotton with seeds, 7,000 maunds—35,000 rupees ; ivory,—6,500 rupees ; bell-metal vessels,—1,500 rupees ; mustard seed, 15,000 maunds,—20,000 rupees ; iron hoes,—600 rupees ; slaves, 100,—2,000 rupees ; Thaikol fruit, 50 maunds,—150 rupees ; Total 130,900 rupees⁷¹.

The balance of trade amounting to 97,400 rupees against Assam was paid in gold from the mines and in silver. Assam was reputed for gold. It is believed that almost every river in Assam contains more or less gold in its sands which is washed down from the auriferous rocks in the neighbouring hills. A special class of Assamese subjects called Sonowals were employed

70. A. Mackenzie, *History of the Relations of the Government with Hill tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal*, Appendix A, *Welsh's Report on Assam*, 1794, pp. 387-ff.

71. Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, pp. 53-54 ; Mills, *Report on the Province of Assam*, *Report on Lakhimpur*, p. 6, *Report on Goalpara*, pp. 2-ff, *Report on Darrang*, p. 3.

by the government in gold washing and according to Maniram Dewan as much as 7,000 tolas used to be annually received. Gold attracted Bengal merchants to the Assam trade. Dr. S. P. Wade wrote—"Assam is not a country for diamonds, but it is for gold dust. I think I shall do well in it." Dr. Hamilton also speaks of the adverse balance of trade being paid in gold and in silver. "The balance is paid in gold from the mines, and in silver."

Muga cloth (i.e., muga dhuti and muga silk) was in great demand in Bengal on account of durability and texture and used to be a regular article of trade in the Coromandal and Malabar coasts. Munjit or Majathi (*Rubia mungista*), a creeper growing wild in the eastern hills of Assam, was employed in dyeing cotton fabrics into various shades of scarlet, coffee-brown or mauve. Another product was Agar or aloe wood (*Aquilaria Agallocha*) from which was extracted an oil called Agar-Attar. Elephants' tusks and Agar wood were principal articles of export during the Mogul period. A noble of Cooch Behar said to a Mogul commander,—“If it is desired I can establish friendly relations between the Nawab and the Assam Raja and procure for him (Nawab) Agar wood and elephants' teeth”⁷².

Bengal Salt was in very great demand in Assam and about 100,000 maunds used to be imported annually. During the Moamaria disturbances the quantity fell off considerably. “The prime cost of Bengal salt ranged from Rupees 70 to 120 per 100 maunds about the year 1780, and 400 rupees for the same quantity twelve years later. In the first period the price at which Bengal salt was sold in Assam ranged from rupees 2 to 4 per maund ; and in the second to rupees 5 to 10. It was the prospect of profit in salt which mainly attracted Bengal merchants to the Assam trade”⁷³.

Assam Choky : Duaria Baruas : The Agent of the Assam government, the Duaria Barua resided at the Assam Choky at the mouth of the Manas river. He enjoyed exclusive privilege of the trade with Bengal ; for this he had to pay annually

72. S. K. Bhuyan, Kamrupar Buranji, p. 20.

73. S. K. Bhuyan, Anglo-Assamese Relations, p. 53.

Rs. 90,000 to the Assam Government. Sometimes this privilege was granted to two men. The administration of the district round the Assam Choky was the charge of an officer, the Kandhar Barua. The Duaria Barua or Baruas received the goods of the Assam merchants and exchanged them for Bengal products and they realised the duties on all exports and imports. The rates equitably fixed by the government of Assam underwent fluctuations at the hands of different Duaria Baruas. They received advances from the Bengal merchants for the delivery of Assam goods, or accepted Bengal goods on credit. "The high rates of duties demanded by the Duaria Baruas, the non-fulfilment of their contracts or their refusal to carry on trade with particular individuals led to constant frictions with the Bengal merchants"⁷⁴.

Hamilton says : "The custom-houses (Chaukis) towards the frontier of Bengal, have been farmed (Korok) to two Rarhi Brahmans, Kamal and Parasuram, who are called Boruyas. The chief custom-house, Kandar, or Kangrar, usually called Assam Chauki by the English, is situated at a place called Hadira in Pergunah Bausi, nearly opposite to Goyalpara." The Baruas had some land in the vicinity. There were seven subordinate custom-houses on the bank of the rivers, that formed the boundary, and several on various routes, by which goods might pass but all the duties were paid at Kandhar, the others were merely to prevent an illicit transit of goods. The Baruahs paid annually 45,000 rupees to the king, and ought to levy only the very moderate duty of ten percent, on exports and imports ; but the custom had long been to leave this entirely to their discretion and although there was no absolute law to prohibit the merchants of Bengal from carrying goods to Jorhat or Gauhati ; yet the speculation had in general turned out very ill, and the Barua might be said to have a complete monopoly, while the whole trade passed through his hands. Merchants occasionally had gone to Gauhati and Jorhat, and had procured orders, that nothing should be taken from them except the regular duties. To procure these orders cost much trouble and expense. The Baruahs still found means to occasion delay and difficulty, and

74. S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, p. 51.

when the goods arrived at their destination, they were, it is true, sold at an exorbitant price ; but payment could not be procured⁷⁵.

The Ahom Viceroy at Gauhati, the Barphukan conducted the Assam Government's relations with Bengal. The Barphukan and the Duria Baruas used to be carefully selected for on their discretion and judgment depended the good-will and harmony between the two States. The Barphukans were Ahoms ; the Duria Baruas from 1771 to 1826 were Brahmans.

Commerce with Hill Tribes : Assam carried on a considerable commerce with the neighbouring hill tribes and with Tibet and China. The trade with Tibet was of the order of 200,000 rupees a year. The exports from Assam were lac, muga silk, endi cloth, and dry fish. The imports from Tibet were smoking pipes of Chinese manufacture, woollens and rock salt. The imports from Bhutan were woollen cloths, gold dust, Rock salt, cow-tail, musk and Chinese silks.

Dr. S. K. Bhuyan writes :—“A caravan consisting of nearly 20 men used to meet the Assamese merchants at a place near Chouna, at a distance of two months' journey from Lhasa.” The Assamese used to receive from the Lhasa merchants, or Khumpa Bhutias as they were called, silver in bullion to nearly a lakh of rupees, and gold to the value of upwards of 70,000 rupees. “Assamese merchants also went to Yunnan in China by the line of trade through Sadiya, Bisa and across the Patkai range of mountains, and through the Hukong Valley to the town of Munkong from where they ascended by the Irrawady to a place called Catmow.” The goods were disembarked at Catmow from where they were conveyed on mules over a range of mountainous country inhabited by the Shans into the Chinese province of Yunnan⁷⁶. Assam depended for silver on supply from China, Tibet and the Barkhampti country near the sources of the Irrawady.

Pemberton in his Report on the North-East Frontier, has given the following interesting account regarding the state of commercial intercourse between Assam and Tibet : “At a place

75. Hamilton, Account of Assam, p. 42.

76. S. K. Bhuyan, Anglo-Assamese Relations, pp. 54-ff.

called Chauna, two months' journey from Lassa, on the confines of the two States, there is a mart established, and on the Assam side there is a similar mart at Geegunshur, distant four miles from Chauna." About twenty persons, conveyed silver bullion to the amount of one lakh of rupees, and a considerable quantity of rock salt for sale to the Assam merchants at Geegunshur and to Geegunshur the Assam merchants brought rice, which was imported to Tibet from Assam in large quantities; Tussa cloth, a kind of coarse silk cloth, manufactured by the women in Assam from the queen downwards; iron and lac found in Assam and skins, buffalo horns, pearls, and corals, first imported from Bengal⁷⁷.

"In 1809", says Mackenzie, "this trade amounted in value to two lakhs of rupees, even although Assam was itself in a most unsettled state." The imports from Tibet, in the shape of woollens, gold-dust, salt, musk, horses, chowries and Chinese silks, were especially noticeable. The protracted troubles of Assam ultimately affected the traffic, but even in the year before the Burmese invasion, the Lassa merchants were said to have brought down gold amounting in value to Rs. 70,000.

The Mishmis brought Lama swords and spears and the vegetable poison known as Mishmi tita and exchanged these for glass beads, cloths, salt and money. The Abors and Miris brought pepper, ginger, munjit and wax. The Singphos used to bring in considerable quantities, ivory and Nagas, cotton, ginger and a little salt produced in their springs⁷⁸. 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 hills⁷⁹. The trade with the frontier tribes was conducted on a small scale, as large-scale production was naturally unknown to the frontier tribesmen. Necessary protection was afforded to the traders by the frontier wardens known as Dativalia Bisayas and Duarias. One object of the East India Company in seeking commercial relations with Assam was the

77. Pemberton, *Eastern Frontier*, pp. 78-83.

78. Robinson, *A Descriptive Account of Assam*, pp. 242-244.

79. S. K. Bhuyan, *Early British Relations with Assam*, p. 18.

prospect of participation in the trade with the frontier tribes and if possible, with China.

Custom Houses : Customs Baruas : Hamilton mentions four other Baruas, besides the Duaria Baruas, in charge of collection of customs in his 'Account of Assam'. At Salalpat, there was a custom-house on the Brahmaputra, where duties were taken on all goods passing between Kamrup and Assam proper. It was farmed to a Barua at 5,000 rupees a year. At Raha on the Kallang river, was a Barua, who collected duties on the transit of goods, and paid annually a fixed rent. Another Barua farmed at 6,000 rupees a year, a custom house, the duties of which were collected at Darrang-Bata-Kuchi, about two miles from the Brahmaputra, on the Mangal-Dahi river. These duties consisted of four annas on each of the 6,000 paiks sent from Darrang to work for the king, of a hoe and some rice, which each of them paid in addition, and of from four to eight annas on every cow or ox that was sold in Darrang.

A person called the Wazir Barua, of the Kalita family, that is in hereditary possession of the office, had charge of the intercourse with Bhutan. He resided at Simliabari, one day's journey north from the house of the Darrang Raja. He had some lands, and paid nothing to the king, except presents. All the messengers and traders of Bhutan, all servants of the Deva Raja, must go first to Simliabari. The Barua there levied no duties, but generally received presents, in order to prevent his throwing impediments in the way of business, and no one was allowed to purchase at Simlia, without employing him as a broker. The Bhutias were allowed to take part of their goods for disposal to Hajo which they visited every winter, being a place of sacred pilgrimage, associated with the 'Mahamuni' or Buddha⁸⁰.

Assam-Bengal Routes : There were four routes from Bengal to Assam, one by water and three by land. The river route from Goalpara was down the Brahmaputra, and via the Jennai from Jamalpore, 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

80. Hamilton, *Account of Assam*, pp. 47-ff ; S. K. Bhuyan, *Early British Relations with Assam*, p. 18.

to the Ganges which they ascended for three or four days more till they came to the mouth of the Matabanga or the Jellingi down either of which they proceeded to Calcutta. As these two rivers became almost dry during the winter, the boats followed the route through the Sunderbans. Time taken used to be 25 to 35 days from Goalpara to Calcutta and 33 to 43 days from Calcutta to Goalpara. The first overland route lay through Murshidabad, Maldah, Dinajpore, Rungpore, Bagura and Goalpara and this was the line of the Calcutta Dak. The second route was via Dacca, Dumary, Puculoe, Jamalpore, Singimari, and Goalpara. The third route was through Sylhet, Cherra, Moplung, Nungklao, Ranigaon, Khanamukh and Gauhati. The first two overland routes were almost impassable during the rains. The river route and the first overland route were most popular⁸¹.

The most important trade centres of the Assam trade on the Bengal side were Goalpara, Jugighopa and Rangamati. Important internal trade centres were Sadia, Barhat, Odalguri, Daranga besides Kandhar or Hadira, Gauhati, Salalpat, Raha, Simliabari etc., already mentioned.

Commercial Policy of Ahom Kings : The Ahom kings promoted trade and commerce and on many occasions their diplomatic relations with neighbouring States and tribes were motivated by the desire to promote free commercial intercourse to the advantage of both the parties. The Ahom Government wanted to make markets free and secure, so that people of adjoining territories could come with their commodities for trade and contribute to the inflow of a steady income from market duties and customs revenue. The Ahom Government considered petty trading outside the scope of inter-State trade regulation by the Government. They were unwilling to set up an elaborate machinery for the purpose of safeguarding small quantities of articles as subject-matter of trade. The matter was different when the volume involved was large and therefore, they recognised the need of governmental protection of the traders of Bengal and Assam and of the supervision and control of the frontier

81. S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, pp. 55-ff ; M'Cosh, *Topography of Assam*, pp. 8-ff.

officers and collectors of duties for the sake of free and growing commercial intercourse with Bengal. In reply to a request by the Mogul Fauzadar of Rangamati for establishing commercial relations with Assam, King Rudra Singh in June, 1713, said,—“Is it called trade if it be limited to the import of a few maunds of salt from Bengal, and the despatch of two or four boats from our place? If the Nawab is intent on the establishment of regular commercial intercourse with us he should send his merchants (Shah-Mahajans) to Jogighopa and Goalpara, and our leading traders (Bar-Mudois) will proceed to Kandhar Choky with large quantities of valuable articles. If matters could be arranged on this line then only they can well deserve the status of hat-bat or trade”⁸².

The implications of trade and business, involving, as they do, risk and uncertainty and profit and loss, were clear to the Ahoms. In 1696 in his court at Gauhati, the Barphukan thus addressed the Jayantia envoy who compared a ‘Bepari’ to a black-bee :—“What you have said is correct. The black-bee settles on a number of flowers with the object of sucking honey from them. Having extracted honey from these flowers it settles with the same object on a lotus. But suddenly the sun sets, the lotus folds up its petals, and the bee becomes shut up there. With the rise of the sun next morning the lotus unfolds itself again, and the bee sets itself on its wings”⁸³.

Politics and trade, however, were treated on different footing. Over-all security of the State was considered more important than trade. Strict, ever-vigilant watch was maintained over merchants of foreign countries and they were not allowed to settle in the country lest they should create disruption as secret agents of designing States. The foreign traders had to complete their commercial transactions in Assam in all haste and return to their own land.

Some agents of the Rangamati Fauzadar were rebuked by the Barphukan when they pressed for discussion of commercial

82. MS. Assam Buranji, 1630-1744 (obtained by D. H. A. S. from S. C. Goswami), quoted by S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, pp. 49-ff.

83. S. K. Bhuyan, *Jayantia Buranji*, p. 62.

matters in the full court. "It is an affair relating to trade, and it is not a fit subject for being taken up in the Durbar. Still then, I must admit that our trading activities have become more vigorous than before. The agents have spoken about multiple trade, but we have appointed one man for this purpose, namely the Duaria"⁸⁴.

The version of a Katakai was considered more reliable than that of a mere trader in case of doubts. Merchants were forbidden to meddle in politics. Three Assamese traders in a bid to establish friendly relations between the Nawab of Dacca and the Ahom monarch, brought to Assam with them a couple of diplomatic agents of the Nawab together with letters and presents for Pratap Singh. The king said, "He is a merchant and should have confined himself to trading activities. What business had he to bring envoys from Bengal?" The traders and their forty oarsmen were executed⁸⁵.

General Economic Conditions : When in 1662 Mir Jumlah entered Garhgaon and occupied the Raja's palace, eighty-two elephants and nearly three lakhs of rupees' worth of gold and silver were found at Garhgaon and also about 170 store houses, each containing from one to ten thousand maunds of rice. A few of the terms of the peace the Nawab ultimately concluded with Jayadhvaj Singh were :—

- (1) Twenty thousand tolas of gold, six times this quantity of silver and forty elephants to be made over at once.
- (2) Three hundred thousand tolas of silver and ninety elephants to be supplied within twelve months.
- (3) Twenty elephants to be supplied annually.

When in 1792 Captain Welsh formally installed Krishna Narayan as Raja of Darrang, the latter agreed to pay an annual tribute of fifty-eight thousand rupees in lieu of feudal obligation to supply soldiers and labourers. The sum was made up as follows :—for Darrang, Rs. 50,000 ; for Chutiya, Rs. 2,000 ; for Koliabar, Rs. 3,000 ; in lieu of customs duty between Darrang and Bhutan, Rs. 3,000.

84. S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, p. 50.

85. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji (S.M.)*, p. 67.

In 1794 Gaurinath Singh wrote to the Governor General for retention of Captain Welsh and the British troops in Assam and offered a large subsidy of Rs. 3,00,000 annually for their maintenance at a time when prices were low and money was dear. When later Captain Welsh captured Rangpur from the Moamarias, they left behind them large quantities of grain, cattle and treasure; the booty was sold and realized a sum of Rs. 1,17,334. The above give us an indication of the resources of the country through the centuries and even after it had passed through the great privations of the Moamaria Insurrection.

Captain Welsh's description of the country towards the close of the eighteenth century is of interest. Gauhati was an extensive and populous town. Rangpur was a large and thickly populated town, twenty miles in extent. The surrounding country had been very highly cultivated. The nobles held large tracts of land, which were tilled by their slaves, "but the produce was never brought to market, and it was all but impossible to buy grain". "Salt and opium were found more serviceable than money as a means of procuring supplies." "At the sale of the loot taken at Rangpur, rice in the husk was sold at the rate of six hundred pounds per rupee, while buffaloes fetched five rupees, and cows two rupees each."

"The trade with Bengal was considerable, and the officials who farmed the customs revenue paid Rs. 90,000 a year to the Bar Phukan of which, however, only Rs. 26,000 reached the royal treasury⁸⁶. Before the disturbances the registered imports of salt from Bengal amounted to 120,000 maunds a year or barely one sixth of the quantity imported at the present day. At that time, however, a certain amount was produced locally, and some, no doubt, was smuggled past the custom house. The money price was three times as great as it is now, while measured in paddy, it was more than forty times as great. It was thus quite beyond the means of the common people."

Economic conditions were at a very low ebb because of the Chaos and confusion created by the Moamaria Revolt and even in such circumstances, the reserve power of the country occasioned

86. Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 216-217.

by material well-being of normal times and potential resources was such as to embolden Gaurinath to promise a large subsidy for the retention of the British troops. In a copper plate deed of grant of 1661 Sak, i.e., 1739 A.D., prices of various commodities are quoted as below :—Rice, $2\frac{1}{5}$ annas per maund ; milk, $2\frac{1}{2}$ annas, gram, 4 annas, salt and oil, $4\frac{3}{4}$ annas ; gur $1\frac{1}{4}$ annas and black pepper, Rs. 20 per maund ; betal leaf, 1 anna per 40 bundles ; earthen pots or Kalsis, Re. 1 per 643 ; areca nuts, Re. 1 per 5,120. In similar records of the same period, the following figures are available :—Rice, 4 annas or 8 annas per maund ; gur, Rs. $2\frac{1}{2}$; mati kalai 5 annas ; or 10 annas per maund ; pulse and ghi, 10 annas, and oil Rs. $3\frac{1}{3}$ per maund ; earthen pots, Re. 1 for 224 and betal leaf, 1 anna per 20 bundles of 20 leaves each ; goats, Re. 1 each ; ducks, 1 anna each ; pigeons, 1 pice ; dhutis, 5 annas and gamchas, 6 pice each ; salt Rs. 5 to Rs. 10 per maund⁸⁷.

Generally speaking, prices as above during periods of peace and normalcy and comparative prosperity as Assam enjoyed just before the start of the Moamaria disturbances, are indicative of a comparatively sound and stable economy that meant for the Assamese under the Ahoms a life if not of material excesses and extravagances, not also of chronic insufficiencies and deficits but one of economic contentment that could be the basis of an easy, comfortable and cultured life. Plain living for the people in general, accompanied by high thinking, could be possible in such an economic set-up. A strong material base for a cultured life could be assured by the Ahom Government to the people by securing, by and large, political stability by repelling foreign aggression and tribal incursions and putting down with a strong hand, aided or unaided by allies, internal disturbances and by pursuing suitable politico-economic and commercial, socio-cultural and religious policies.

In sylvan surroundings and mainly rural setting, people carried on agricultural pursuits, cottage industries and small industrial endeavours under royal supervision or patronage or on individual and group initiative ; the agricultural products and

87. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 217, foot note.

the products of manufacture were both diverse and pervasive of a very wide arena of the requirements of life ; refinement and special skill were attained in many fields of cultivation and manufactures and artistic productions ; and the reputation of the land and its special products were a constant source of magnetic attraction to foreigners and neighbouring lands.

Vast natural and economic resources of the country, yet untapped and unexploited fully, were nevertheless constant, potential reservoirs of strength ; and sturdy, human materials, with robust optimism, indomitable courage and patriotism and unexampled tenacity and perseverance towards fixed, cherished objectives even in the face of great peril and at a time when all seemed lost, were most powerful national weapons ; these the peoples of Assam under the Ahoms perpetually fell back upon and used for recuperation, recovery, onward march and triumph over political or military reverses, internecine unrest and economic ills that naturally beset the course of history of the six hundred-year old Ahom rule in Assam. The least that can be asserted with justification is that the economic pre-condition of a full, vigorous and varied life of culture was amply fulfilled in Assam under the Ahoms.

Chapter V

SOCIETY

Section I

THE PEOPLE

Shihabuddin Talish who accompanied Mir Jumlah in his expedition to Assam, has left accounts of the social conditions of Assam in 1662¹. He refers to hill tribes, Ahoms (Assamese), non-Ahom Assamese, Mussalmans etc. Sankaradeva in his verse adaptation of the Bhagavata-Purana mentions the Kiratas, the Kacharis, the Khasis, the Garos, the Miris, the Yavanas, the Kanvas, the Gowalas, the Asamas, the Malukas, the Rajakas, the Turuks, the Kuvacas, the Mlecas and the Candalas².

Different Sections of the People : Hamilton writing in the beginning of the nineteenth century reports on various tribes, castes and sections of the people of Assam. "The Rarhi Brahmans of Bengal", he continues, "have obtained the spiritual guidance of the king and principal officers of the court, and it is probably through their influence that two men of the same caste have procured the lucrative farm of the trade with Bengal. The spiritual guide and officiating priest of the king (Guru and Purohit) are men of great reputation for learning."

There were Assamese Brahmans. They were Vaidikas of Kanyakubja, introduced from that place by Viswa Singh, the Koch Raja. Before their arrival there were learned men amongst the Kalitas, who were Gurus for the people. Many Kamrupi Vaidika Brahmans were settled in Assam proper and among them there were many persons learned in Hindu Science. They were chiefly of the sect of 'Vishnu'; very few among them worshipped 'Shakti'. There were a few academics (Chauvaris) where the grammar called the Ratnamala, law and metaphysics

1. Quoted by Gait in History of Assam, pp. 141-150.

2. M. Neog, Sankaradeva and His Times, p. 75.

were taught and some Pandits were skilled in astrology and magic. The grand study with the Mahajans or spiritual guides was the Sri Bhagawat. Some of the Vaidikas in Assam degraded themselves and became 'Varna'. The persons called Man Singha's Brahmans were pretty numerous and were employed in low offices unconnected with religion.

The Kalitas were numerous in the country west of Koliabar. They were numerous in Assam proper also³. According to Katha-guru-carita, Bar-Kalitas were Saj (good or pure) Kalitas and there was a country of Kalitas, Kalita-desa to the north of the hills occupied by the Abors and the Hill Miris⁴. Those Kalitas who could read were called Kayasthas and were the religious guides for most of the others and for many of the Koch. The others followed all manner of trades and occupations. Most trades were carried on by the Kalitas without Caste-prejudice. They inter-married with the Koch. They had nearly the same customs with the Hindus of Bengal. Their features were less strongly marked as being of Chinese origin than those of the Koch.

There were the Kayasthas. That the Kayasthas in the eastern part of the country were taking to the plough or to the carrying of loads on their shoulders is indicated in Katha-guru-caritas⁵. The Nodiyals or Dom were numerous, as they extended over both Assam proper and Kamrup. There were a good many Heluya-Keyots who cultivated the ground and the Keyots who used to fish. The former assumed the title of Kaibarta. There were the Moriyas. There were the Rabhas, the Mech, the Kacharis⁶. The Hiras made pots. Many artists and people had lately come from Bengal. The Malakors called Phulmalis made artificial flowers. The Notis or dancers and musicians were employed in the temples and were considered pure and their women were not common prostitutes. Even the purest Brahmans condescended to give them instruction. The washermen refused to perform their office for any persons except the

3. B. Kakati, *Kalita Jatir Itibritta*, pp. 5-8, 16-ff, 45-54.

4. M. Neog, *Sankardeva and His times*, p. 76.

5. M. Neog, *Sankardeva and His Times*, p. 75.

6. S. K. Bhuyan, *Kachari Buranji*, Introduction, pp. XIV-XVIII.

royal family and Brahmans. Many cotton-weavers had been introduced. They were partly Jogis and partly Muhammadans, called Jolas. Some Haris or scavengers had been introduced. There were also fishermen called Chandals.

In the eastern part of Assam and exclusive of the Miris and Duflas etc., the most numerous class of inhabitants were the Ahoms, or governing nation. Those legitimately descended still retained the principal offices of the State. They were considered as the nobility and were now said to be reduced to twenty-six families, two Dangorias, one Duara, one Dihingia, one Lahon, one Sandikai, and twenty Hatimuriayas. It was generally admitted that the Ahoms on their arrival had no women, but espoused those of the country; and the royal family had since had frequent intermarriages with the daughters of neighbouring princes; but since the introduction of caste, the Ahoms confined their marriages to their own tribe. They had by now adopted Assamese and had relinquished the use of beef; but about a fourth part had yet no other priests than the Deodhains. The remaining three-fourths had adopted the religion of the Hindus, chiefly as taught by the followers of Sankaradeva and of Madhavadeva.

The seven principal Ahom clans or 'phoids' were known as Satgharia-Ahom or the Ahoms of the Seven houses. The first three houses were the royal family, the Buragohain family and the Bargohain family. According to some, the remaining four 'phoids' were the Deodhai, Mohan, Bailung and Siring families of priests and astrologers; according to others, they were the secular families, Lahan, Sandikoi, Dihingia, and Duara. Each 'phoid' was divided into a number of sub-groups, generally named after places where they settled after branching off from their original families. There were seven Sub-houses of the royal family; eight of the Buragohain family; twelve of the Deodhai; seven of the Mohan and eight of the Bailung family. The original Barpatra Gohain's family, known as Kenduguria Barpatra phoid, was absorbed in the royal family, as its founder Kancheng was a prince of royal blood. The non-royal Barpatra Gohain families were Kalugayan or Gargayan Patar and Moran Patar.

The Deo-dhains were now thirty men, besides women and children. Their chief was called Deo-Dhain Barua and had the

charge of the god Chung, of his worship and of the royal insignia, e.g., the sword Hyangdang and the sacred feathers. The Deo-dhains had their own learning and language. They were highly respected.

In the parts east from Koliyabar the tribe next most numerous were the Chutiyas, divided into two classes, Hindus and Ahoms. West from Koliyabar, the most numerous tribes and nearly equal in strength were the Kolitas and Koch. The Koch were very numerous in Kamrup and especially in Darrang, the Raja of which was one of their number. Most trades were carried on by the Koch without caste-prejudice.

In the province of Kamrup, there were many Moslems, but so degenerated into heathen superstition, that even those of Goalpara refused their communion. The government gave them no sort of molestation. "On the whole, the most numerous tribe is the Dom, next come the Kolita and Koch, nearly equal, then the Ahom, then the Keyot, then the Chutiya. The number of any other tribe, when compared with these is inconsiderable."⁷ In his "A statistical Account of Assam,"⁸ Hunter notices and discusses different ethnical divisions and castes in the population of different districts of Assam on the basis of C.F. Magrath's District Census compilations and the Census Report of 1871-72. The prevalent social set-up may be gleaned from a few of them mentioned below :—

Castes and Occupations : Brahman (Vaidik and Rarhi)—
 "The Vaidiks were introduced into the country in the early part of the sixteenth century from Sylhet," says Hunter, "and received the title of Kamrupi Brahmans." The Rarhi Brahmans emigrated to Assam in the time of the Ahom dynasty, as the religious preceptors of the kings after their conversion to Hinduism. Some Brahman families long settled at Jorhat claim to have originally

7. Hamilton, *Account of Assam*, pp. 51-55 ; Haliram Dhekial Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, pp. 85-91.

8. W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam*, Vol. I, pp. 29-35, 113-118, 180-187, 235-243, 306-362, 417-420.

come from Kanauj (Oudh) ;⁹ Ganak or Acharjya (astrologers and fortune-tellers) ; Rajput (Soldiers, policemen, doorkeepers) ; Kayastha¹⁰ (said to have been originally imported into Bengal along with five Brahmans from Oudh by king Adisur) ; Kalita—Barkalita, Saru Kalita,¹¹ Nat Kalita (the ancient priesthood of Assam before the introduction of Brahmanism), Baidya (physicians) ; Bhat (heralds and genealogists) ; Baniya (traders) ; Napit and Bej (barbers) ; Kamar (blacksmiths) ; Kansari (braziers, coppersmiths and wire-makers) ; Kumbhar (Potters) ; Keut (Fishermen) ; Subarnabaniya (jewellers and bankers) ; Sonar (gold and silver-smiths) ; Kahar (Palanquin-bearers) ; Sutradhar (carpenters) ; Teli (Oil-pressers and sellers) ; Dhobi (Washermen) ; Duliya (Palanquin-bearers) ; Kandu (preparers and sellers of parched rice and other cooked food) ; Barui (growers of 'pan' leaf) ; Mali (gardeners and flower-sellers) ; Halwai (confectioners and sweetmeat-makers) ; Bhaskar (stonecutters) ; Laheri (lac-workers) ; Madak (Confectioners) ; Basiya (cultivators) ; Bihiaya and Bori¹² and Chasa (cultivating castes) ; Halgir (cultivators) ; Kaibarta (cultivators) ; Koeri (cultivators) ; Koch ;¹² Dom ; Nadiyal Dom (A section of the low caste of Doms) ; Sunri (wine-sellers and distillers) ; Ahoms ;¹³ Katuni (weavers) ; Jugi (weavers) ; Chunari (makers of shell lime) ; Kapali (cotton-weavers and spinners) ; Patua (weavers) ; Tanti¹⁴ (weavers) ; Patuni (fishermen and ferrymen) ; Jaladhar (fishermen) ; Jhalo (fishermen) ; Tior (fishermen) ;¹⁵ Kibari (sellers of fish and vegetables) ; Bhuiya ; Chamar (shoe-makers and leather dealers) ; Chandal (labourers, cultivators and fishermen) ; Hindu Chutiya ; Chutiya ; Hari (sweepers) ; Mal (Snake-charmers) ; Bhuimali (sweepers) ; Dhanuk (employed in personal service) ; Dhaniya (weavers) ; Kashta (weavers) ; Jaliya (fishermen) ; Kora (excavators and diggers) ; Bathua (fishermen) ; Chodang ; Ghasi and Mihtar (Scavengers) ; Pasi (makers of date-juice toddy) ; Khelta (dancers and musicians) ; Nagarchi (drummers) ;¹⁶ Gandhabanik (grocers and spice-dealers) ;

9-13. Allen, Assam District Gazetteers, Vol. VII (Sibsagar), pp. 80-94 ; Assam District Gazetteers, Vol. IV (Kamrup), pp. 74-90 ; Vol. VIII (Lakhimpur), 97-142.

14-16. Allen, Assam District Gazetteers, Vol. V (Darrang), pp. 72-112 ; Vol. VI (Nowgong), pp. 62-105 ; Vol. VII (Sibsagar), pp. 80-94.

Koshta (Jute spinners and weavers) ; Kheri (weavers) ; Bajua (drummers and musicians) ; Bagdi and Baheliya (labourers and cultivators) ; Kaora (swineherds) ; Patia (mat-makers) ;¹⁷ Ganar (preparers and sellers of parched grain) ; Aguri and Das and Sut (cultivators) ; Barahi (Chang Barahi, Mati-Barahi) ;¹⁸ Matiyal (diggers and day-labourers) ; Nuniya (Salt makers) ; Shikari (hunters) ; Deori¹⁹ (an order of priest-hood) ; Khatri (traders and merchants) ; Hunwai (cultivators and gold washers) ; Chapwal (weavers) ; Ghatwal ; Baiti (musicians and dancers) ; Agarwala and Oswal (traders and merchants) ; Hira (potters) ; Bari (labourers and cultivators) ;²⁰ Shaloi (cultivators) ; Muriyari (fishing and boating casts) ; Jarua (cultivators) ; Badiyar (cultivators) ; Sankhari (makers of shell bracelets) etc.

Ethnical Divisions : (1) Non-Asiatics ; (2) Mixed Races (Eurasians) ; (3) Asiatics—Bhutia, Nepali, Chinese etc ; Aboriginal tribes—Doanniya, Garo, Cachari,²¹ Khasi, Lalang, Miri, Manipuri, Mikir, Rabha, Saraniya, Uran, Nat, Hill tribes etc ; Semi-Hinduised aboriginals—Ahom, Bediya, Bhuiya, Chamar, Chandal, Chutiya,²² Dom,²³ Nadiyal,²⁴ Dasadh, Hari, Kaora, Koch, Mal, Mihtar, Bhujmali etc ; Hindus—Superior castes—Brahman, Rajput ; Intermediate castes—Kalita, Kayastha, Baidiya ; Trading castes—Agarwala, Gandha Baniya, Jaswar, Oswal, Marwari, Subarnabaniya ; Pastoral castes—Gareri, Goala ; Castes engaged in preparing cooked food—Kandu ; Agricultural castes—Aguri, Barui, Basiya, Boria, Hala, Kaibarta,²⁵ Kalita, Koeri, Kurmi, Mali, Rai, Shaloi, Tatla ; Castes engaged in personal service—Dhobi,²⁶ Duliya, Hajjam or Napit,²⁷ Bej, Kahar ; Artisan castes—Kumar,²⁸ Kansari, Kumbhar, Hira (potter), Sonar,²⁹ Sunari (Distiller), Sutradhar, Teli ; Weaver castes—Hangsi, Jugi,³⁰ Kapali, Katuni, Patua, Tanti ; Labouring castes—Chunari, Madashi, Matiyal, Patiyal ; Castes engaged in selling fish and vegetables—Kibari etc ; Boating and Fishing castes—Jaladhar, Jaliya,³¹ Jhalo, Keut,³² Mala, Patuni, Tior ; Dancers, Musicians,

17-20. Allen, Assam District Gazetteers, Vol. V (Darrang), pp. 72-112 ; Vol. VIII (Lakhimpur), pp. 97-142 ; Vol. VI (Nowgong), pp. 62-105.

21-32. Allen, Assam District Gazetteers, Vol. VII (Sibsagar), pp. 80-94 ; Vol. IV (Kamrup), pp. 74-90 ; Vol. VIII (Lakhimpur), pp. 97-142.

Beggars etc.—Khelta, Nagarchi ; Persons enumerated by Nationality—Bengali, Hindusthani etc ; Persons of Hindu origin, not recognising caste—Vaisnav, Gosain, Matak etc ; (4) Muham-madans and (5) Burmese (Maghs) etc.

The above accounts give us a fair idea of the pattern of social life in Assam under the Ahoms. Though the caste system was never as rigid in Assam as in the rest of India, with the Hinduisation of the Ahom rulers and the Ahoms and with the introduction of different castes and section of people from Bengal to Assam, social stratification on lines of castes became a reality in Assam also, though in a somewhat limited measure.

Slavery : Slavery was extant. The chief nobles had their private estates cultivated by slaves taken in war or purchased from the hill tribes. Not only nobles, persons of respectable position also owned slaves for performing household drudgery and labour of the fields. David Scott released 12,000 slaves in Kamrup alone. Many of the slaves were actually freemen who had lost their liberty by mortgaging their persons for a loan or their descendants. Slaves were bought and sold openly, the prices ranging from about twenty rupees for an adult male of good caste to three rupees for a low-caste girl.³³ "All the domestics," says Hamilton, "are slaves, and they are pretty numerous, every man of rank having several. The slaves are procured from among the necessitous who mortgage themselves, in the same manner as in the eastern divisions of Ranggapur." Some are exported. About a hundred of pure caste were annually sold to Bengal. They were mostly children ; the girls were chiefly bought by prostitutes, and cost from twelve to fifteen rupees. A Koch boy cost twentyfive rupees, a Kolita fifty ; slaves of impure tribes were sold to the Garos, and many were said to be sent to Nara, from whence they were probably exported to Ava.³⁴

Slavery was in vogue amongst the Hill Tribes also. Slavery in the fullest sense of the word, existed from time immemorial in North East Frontier Agency ; and people became slaves there

33. Gait, *A History of Assam*, pp. 241-ff ; M'Cosh, *Topography of Assam*, pp. 26-ff.

34. Hamilton, *Account of Assam*, p. 64.

for a number of reasons. They were captured in war, or were purchased, or sold their freedom and became slaves, unable to repay debts, or were born slaves. Sometimes a man became a slave because he had committed a serious offence against the community and could not afford the fine demanded. In N.E.F.A., slaves could win a good position in their masters' homes after a period of years when they came to be accepted as members of the family. The owner provided his slave with food, clothing and shelter ; arranged his marriage and paid the bride price ; bought him ornaments, weapons and tools ; in some areas, allowed him to keep part of any earnings he might receive. Despite all this, however, there was an emphatic belief in the social inferiority of slaves and there was a strong taboo on marriage relations between slave and free. Even a freed slave who could rise up to the position of headman of his village, was barred from marriage with a girl of a free family. Many N.E.F.A. slaves were used as merchandise, and in the course of a life time were bought and sold a dozen times. True, slaves could ransom themselves if they could find the necessary money. Though the process of liberation of slaves in N.E.F.A., has made considerable headway since Independence, slavery is still a reality in the remote areas of N.E.F.A.³⁵

Other Social Relations : The society was not fully immune from class distinctions in some forms or other as between the aristocracy and the common people and from caste distinctions as between the higher and the lower classes in later times. "None but the highest nobles had the right to wear shoes, or to carry an umbrella, or to travel in a palanquin, but the last-mentioned privilege might be purchased for a sum of one thousand rupees."³⁶ Persons of humble birth who wished to wear the Chaddar, or shawl, were obliged to fold it over the left shoulder, and not over the right, as the upper classes did. The common people were not permitted to build houses of masonry, or with a rounded end, and no one but the king himself was allowed to have both ends of his house rounded. "Musalmans, Morias, Doms and

35. Verrier Elwin, *A Philosophy for N. E. F. A.*, pp. 229-239.

36. Gait, *A History of Assam*, p. 242.

Haris were forbidden to wear their hair long, and members of the two latter communities were further distinguished by having a fish and a broom, respectively, tattooed on their foreheads."³⁷

Position of Women : The Ahoms like the Shans and the Burmese held their women folk in honour. The 'purdah' was unknown. According to Shihabuddin, the wives of the Rajas and peasants alike never veiled their faces before any body, and they moved about in the market-places with bare heads. Shihabuddin also speaks of womanly beauty and says : "The persons of their women are marked by beauty and delicacy of features, blackness and length of hair, softness of body, fairness of complexion and loveliness of hands and feet."³⁸ Allen and Robinson writes about women of Assam in similar language.³⁹

The Ahom princesses took prominent part not only on ceremonial occasions ; some of them exercised considerable influence on affairs of State. It was at the instance of Queen Chau-ching, who was both beautiful and learned, that Suklenmung, Gargayan Raja had walls constructed round the capital of Gargaon and a new minister, namely, the Barpatragohain, added to the Ahom Cabinet.⁴⁰ Sib Singh abdicated in favour of his queens, one after the other, Pramateswari, Ambika and Sarbeswari who successively became 'Bar Raja' or Chief King, wielded royal authority and had coins struck in their names. Gaurinath Singh consulted his mother on affairs of State. The Victory over Turbak is partly ascribed to the courageous action of the widow of Kaku Buragohain who had been killed in a previous engagement. She put on armour, mounted on elephant, rode into the ranks of the enemy and fought. Though she herself fell, her example emboldened the Ahoms who advanced the attack and defeated the Muhammadans.⁴¹ Princess Jaymati suffered inhuman tortures and sacrificed her life, for the sake of her husband, Gadapani whose whereabouts she did not disclose. Her self-immola-

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid. p. 146.

39. B. C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers*, Vol. VII (Sibsagar), p. 50 ; Robinson, *A Descriptive Account of Assam*, p. 254.

40. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), p. 32.

41. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers*, Vol. VII (Sibsagar), p. 51 ; S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji* (S.M.), pp. 21-ff.

tion is a shining instance of exemplary wifely devotion, which saved Gadapani's life and therefore, largely contributed to his subsequent elevation to the throne as Gadadhar Singha.⁴²

Polygamy was in vogue. Shihabuddin remarks, "Few of the men have two wives only ; most have four or five."⁴³ It was usual for the kings to have more consorts than one. Women generally had very restricted property rights. Daughters were debarred from any share in the inheritance of their fathers. Women could lay claim to certain presents : those given in the bridal processions, or given as tokens of affection, or those received from a father, a mother, or a brother. The widows were acknowledged by law to be entitled to a maintenance from their sons during their life-time, or until they should marry again. Among the lower classes, the brother of the deceased had the power of sending back the widow to her parents, "at the same time that he might claim back all the presents made to her either by her late husband, or his relations at the time of their marriage."⁴⁴

The position of the ladies of the royal family was, however, different. The wives and near relations of a reigning monarch were maintained out of public funds. The estates granted to them were known as 'Mels', each managed by a Phukan or a Barua. As already mentioned, 'Mels' were allotted to the queens, the queen-mother, the King's grandmother, Step-mother, Nurse, daughters, sisters, nieces and daughters-in-law.⁴⁵

Joint Family System : The joint family system was prevalent, but amongst all except the highest classes, the family usually separated on the death of the father and then the sons took equal shares to the exclusion of daughters. The usual arrangement was that the different members of the family should live together, and possess the property in common. The father was the head of a number of partners and not the sole proprietor. On his death, there was no transfer of property but a continued

42. S. K. Bhuyan, *Asamar Padya-Buranji*, pp. 13-16.

43. Gait, *A History of Assam*, p. 146.

44. Robinson, *A Descriptive Account of Assam*, p. 199.

45. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, Introduction, p. XXX ; See Ante-Chapter IV, Economy, 'Management of Land.'

possession, the co-partnership being deprived of one of its members.

During the father's life time, the property was held jointly in his name. On his death, separation and division took place, particularly among the lower classes. The lands were divided off into long strips either in length or the breadth of the estates under division, as might be agreed upon by the sharers themselves or by arbitrators appointed for the purpose, and "the youngest son was allowed the first choice of the shares, and so on in succession to the eldest."⁴⁶ Among the richer families the usual custom was to hold the land in joint partnership, the brothers keeping a manager between them, and dividing the profits at the end of the year. As this arrangement was not resorted to among the lower classes, the consequent sub-division of land could not but adversely affect agricultural yields. The idea of a joint interest in the family property, had originally an effect even upon the power of donation. Individuals were not at liberty to alienate by gift any part of the common stock. "This rule was, however, not unfrequently violated by the parent during the minority of his sons."⁴⁷

Crimes and Punishments : The criminal law was harsh. Mutilation, branding with hot irons and more terrible punishments were in vogue. In the case of offences against the person, the culprit was punished with precisely the same injury as that inflicted by him on the complainant. The penalty for rebellion was various forms of capital punishment, such as starvation, flaying alive, impaling and hanging. Hanging was deemed the most honourable punishment. The death penalty was often inflicted, not only on the rebel himself, but on all the members of his family. No record was kept in criminal trials, but in civil cases a summary of proceedings was drawn out and given to the successful party. Prior to the Moamaria disturbances, the administration of justice is said to have been speedy, efficient and impartial⁴⁸.

46. Robinson, *A Descriptive Account of Assam*, p. 198.

47. *Ibid*, pp. 198-ff.

48. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 241.

Hamilton says : “The capital offences are treason, murder, rape, arson and voluntary abortion. Rebels are never excused ; for other offences pardon may be purchased.” Capital punishment extended to the whole family of a rebel, parents, brothers, sisters, wives and children. Offenders were put to death in various manners, by cutting their throats, by impaling them, by “grinding them between two wooden cylinders, by sawing them asunder between two planks, by beating them with hammers, and by applying burning hoes to different parts until they die. This is the most horrible.” The above punishments though severe, were deterrent. There were few robbers and atrocious house-breakers or pirates “except the gang from Bengal”. Such persons were punished in a summary manner by thrusting out their eyes, or by cutting off the knee-pans. The wretches usually died of the latter operation, but survived the former. “Both punishments are inflicted by the sole order of the Chief Minister in Assam proper, or of the governor of the two other provinces”⁴⁹.

Hamilton came to know that petty thefts were very common and were punished by whipping or by cutting off the nose or ears. “The first punishment may legally be inflicted by any considerable officer, such as a Raja or Phukan ; but the two latter can only be inflicted by the Chief judge of the district.” Police duties were widely distributed. The officers under whom the Payiks or servants of the crown were placed, the persons (Chaudhuris) who farmed the revenue of the lands which were let for rent ; and every one who had received free lands had charge of the police within the bounds which their people cultivated ; they also settled small disputes that arose among their dependants and all assumed the right of whipping, but “this seems illegal”.⁵⁰

The power of inflicting punishments was reserved for the principal officers and Raja ; and in all civil cases, “except in the men granted to the three great counsellors of State,” there was an appeal to the three provincial courts in which the Barbarua, the Barphukan and the Sadiya Khowa Gohain presided. These

49. Hamilton, *Account of Assam*, pp. 49-ff.

50. Hamilton, *Account of Assam*, p. 49.

had full jurisdiction in all cases, civil and criminal, and without reference to the royal authority, could inflict punishment short of death ; but no person was put to death without an order from the king, and that order was always communicated in writing, and was procured by a written account of the proceedings having been submitted to the royal consideration. In such cases the trial was carried on openly, and the chief judge or governor of the province appeared never to condemn without the concurrence of his assessors, who in Kamrup were six Phukans, so that unfair trials were not usual ; but “it is alleged, that the guilty, who can bribe, are often allowed to escape with impunity, while the punishments inflicted on the guilty poor are exceedingly severe”. In fact the possession of jurisdiction in police, and in civil and criminal law, without any salary or regular fees, was considered as a valuable and productive authority⁵¹. The three great counsellors of State possessed the same jurisdiction over their own people that the governors of provinces did in their respective countries.

Civil Justice : Hamilton refers to administration of civil justice and the system of raising a revenue by presents. Hamilton, however, speaks of a period when the country had just passed through unsettling social convulsions. “The administration of civil affairs seems to be worse arranged than the criminal law ; and less odium being attached to injustice in this respect, the judges seem to be uncommonly venal.” In the Barbarua’s court he received all complaints verbally, and immediately gave some person orders to investigate the cause, and to report the truth, and the cause was always decided according to the report of the umpire. Many officers attended the court, who received allowances with a view of rendering them fit to be entrusted with this delicate office. These were ; three Tamulis, one Naosalya, one Taklabora, one Majumdar-barua, one Duliya-barua, one Chabukdhara Barua, one Keulya-Barua, and twelve Rajkhowas. “Even these are accused of taking bribes very openly ; and the accusation seems to be well-founded, as the judge often sends

51. Hamilton, *Account of Assam*, p. 49 : Mackenzie, *North-East Frontier*, Appendix A, Welsh’s *Report on Assam*, Justice, p. 380, and notes on Justice by David Scott, p. 380.

a menial servant or needy follower to settle disputes and to give them an opportunity of a little gain”⁵².

Bhetis (Presents) : “The system of raising a revenue by presents is almost universal in eastern countries, and in none is it carried to a more pernicious extent than in Assam. The tenant, who for a plough-gate of land pays only two rupees to the king, in various other kinds of exactions pays an addition of between four and five. Each petty officer has a share, part of which he must disgorge to his superiors, while these again are finally squeezed by the king.” The Rani-Raja was estimated to pay 5,000 rupees a year to various persons at Gauhati. The composition of fourteen rupees, sometimes accepted by the king in lieu of the service rendered by three men, was not what these men paid, but only what went immediately to the king. The management of 1,000 Paiks was considered as a sufficient reward for a considerable officer of government, even when he received their composition, and remitted it to the treasury, or when he exacted their labour on the king’s account : for his trouble he was only allowed a commission of five per cent and from his profits he was to make presents to all his superiors, until a share reached the throne, to whom offerings were made by between twenty and thirty of the principal persons of the kingdom. The presents were made on holidays, and were called Bhetis. The two chief Bhetis were on the last days of the months, Chaitra and Paush. The two next in value were on the occasion of the festivals, called Dolyatra and Durgapuja. “On each of these occasions each of the tenantry, Payiks, and petty officers, present the commanders of a thousand, or Rajas, or Zemindars with rice, pulse, extract of sugar-cane, and oil perhaps to the value of half a rupee.”⁵³

Food : The Ahoms were liberal in their dietary habits. According to the Padishahnamah, they ate “every land and water animal”⁵⁴. According to Faithiyyah-i-Ibriyyah, they ‘partook of

52. Hamilton, Account of Assam, p. 50.

53. Hamilton, Account of Assam, p. 51.

54. Blochmann, Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1872, p. 55.

every kind of meat"⁵⁵. King Gadadhar Singh's favourite dish was coarse spring rice, and a calf roasted in ashes⁵⁶. At the consecration ceremony of the tank at Misagarh, cows and buffaloes were slaughtered in honour of king Pratap Singha⁵⁷. Meat and wine were usual in the Ahoms menu. The Ahoms feasted on flesh of cattle, buffaloes, swine and fowls. The Ahoms and the non-Ahoms ate fish. Rice formed the staple food which was accompanied by pulses and vegetables. Salt and its substitute, 'Khar' were in use.

Neo-Vaisnavism brought about a certain change in the food habits of the Ahoms in as much as the meat of 'unclean' animals became a taboo. Otherwise, among the common people, Ahom and non-Ahom, food habits have not undergone spectacular changes. Hunter says that the Assamese cultivator has generally three meals a day. Early in the morning, before going to the field, he takes rice and split peas and vegetables. At noon he takes Kamal rice with molasses and plantain, if he is in the field ; if he is at home, he takes boiled rice with fish curry. His evening supper is the same as the morning meal, but fresh-cooked. For pulses, 'Matikalai' and 'Masur' are chiefly used by the common people ; 'Mug', 'but' and 'Arhar' by the wealthier classes. Vegetables chiefly consist of leaves and tender stems, called 'Sag'. Other items that require mention are seasonings, potash, spices, chillies, mustard oil, clarified butter ; potatoes, carrots, cabbages, turnips, onions ; fowls, eggs ; and milk. Tobacco is in wide use, and now-a-days tea. The indispensable betel-leaf (Pan) and betel-nut (Tambul) have been in extensive and intensive use through the ages⁵⁸.

Dresses : Hamilton enumerates the following items of dress :—“(1) Dhuti from 8 to 16 cubits long, and from 2 to

55. J. Sarkar, *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, Vol. I, pp. 179-194.

56. Gait, *A History of Assam*, p. 171.

57. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji (S.M.)*, p. 61.

58. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam*, Vol. I, pp. 44, 250-ff, 368-ff ; B. K. Barua, *Asamar Lokar Sanskriti*, pp. 154-166 ; Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers Vol. VII (Sibsagar)*, pp. 172-ff.

2½ wide. One end is wrapped round the waist, the other end is thrown round the shoulders. They are used both by men and women. (2) The Rihe is wrapped round the waist of the women, but being short, does not admit of passing round the shoulders. The pieces are 6 cubits long, by 1½ wide. (3) Mekla seems to be the original female dress of Kamrup, and is the same with the dress of the Koch women in Ranggapur, and with the female dress in Ava, and of the Shepherd tribe in Mysore. (4) The Chheleng is a piece for wrapping round the shoulders of men in cold weather ; it is 6 cubits long by 3 wide. (5) Jhardar, or Mongjuri, is a piece used by women for the same purpose. It is from 4 to 5 cubits long, and from 2 to 2½ wide. The Jhardar is of a flowered pattern, the Mongjuri is plain”⁵⁹. Haliram Dhekial Phukan mentions 50 categories of dresses.⁶⁰ Well-to-do persons had bedsteads and curtains. ‘Mosaris’ were pieces, 30 cubits long by 1¾, or 2 cubits wide, and were intended for curtains. They were of a very thin fabric, and were flowered. Each item of dress had many varieties, e.g., approximately, ‘Khania Kapor, had 11 varieties ; ‘Chheleng Kapor’ had 12 ; ‘Barkapor’, 14 ; ‘Riha’, 7 ; Mekhela, 10 ; ‘Chhola’, 19 ; ‘Pag’ (head dress), 11 ; ‘Churia’, 6 ; ‘Hachati-Tangali’, 11 ; and Japi (indigenous umbrella), 13 varieties.⁶¹

Ornaments : Utensils : Other Conveniences : Ornaments were varied—rings, chains, bangles, bracelets, pendants etc. Approximately, ‘Anghi’ had 9 categories ; ‘Moni’, 22 ; and ‘Keru’, 15 ; and other ornaments, 19 types. Approximately, utensils were of 34 kinds ; ‘Asans’ (Sitting materials), of 18 ; ‘Bahan’ (Conveyance), besides elephants and horses, of 19 kinds (Boats 13 types and ‘Dolas’ or ‘Dulis’ 6 types). Approximately, weapons of defence and offence were of more than 25 kinds. Basket-type conveniences for keeping articles were approximately of 10 types.⁶²

59. Hamilton, Account of Assam, p. 61.

60. Haliram Dhekial Phukan, Assam Buranji, pp. 112-ff.

61. Lila Gogoi, ‘Ahom Jati Aru Asamiya Sanskriti’, pp. 176-178.

62. Haliram Dhekial Phukan, pp. 111, 114-ff ; Lila Gogoi, ‘Ahom Jati Aru Asamiya Sanskriti’, pp. 178-ff.

Coronation Ceremony : The coronation ceremony was an elaborate one. The king wearing the Somdeo (or image of the tutelary deity of the Ahom kings) and carrying in his hand the Hengdan or ancestral sword and in his turban the feathers of 'Deokukura' (*Pavo bicalcaratus*), proceeded on a male elephant to Charaideo where he planted a Pipal tree (*Ficus-Religiosa*). He used to be accompanied by his chief queen on a female elephant. The royal couple then entered the 'Patghar' for libation of water from 'Dakshinavarta' Sankha (conch shell) to be poured on them by the presiding priest. Later they sat on a bamboo platform in the 'Holong Ghar', and under the platform used to be placed a man and specimens of all procurable animals. Consecrated water from nine 'Tirthas' (holy places of pilgrimage) was poured on the royal couple and this fell on the animals below. The king and queen then proceeded towards the 'Singarighar' and before entering there, the king with his sword killed a man (a criminal selected for the purpose) or a buffalo since Rudra Singh's time. In 'Singarighar' they sat on a throne of gold and the leading nobles came, made obeisance and offered presents.

New money used to be coined and gratuities given to principal officers of the State, and presents to Brahmins and Deodhais and mendicants and provisions to the multitude. In the evening the king and the Queen dined with people of high rank. During the next thirty days, tributary Rajas, landlords and State officials, not present at the installation, used to come to do homage and tender their presents⁶³. The elaborate coronation ceremonies, accompanied by minting of new coins, holding of 'Durbars', splendid entertainments and feasts, distribution of gratuities to officers and to religious mendicants and of provisions to the multitude assembled to witness the show, spreading through a whole month, if necessary to complete obeisance to the monarch by all tributary Rajas, landlords and officers including those of lower grades, were spectacular events that caused public enthusiasm.

63. Gait, A History of Assam, p. 235 ; Hamilton, An Account of Assam, pp. 17-ff.

Rikkhvan Ceremony : Rikkhvan ceremony performed by the Ahom monarchs had popular appeal as the same was associated with victory in war or with the king's installation or with desire and determination to ward off dangers. Sir Edward Gait in pages 88 and 89 of his 'History of Assam' describes the Rikkhvan ceremony. "This is an Ahom ceremony for obtaining long life (from rik, 'revive ; and Khvan, 'Life'). It was generally performed at the installation of a new king, or in time of danger, or after a victory. The procedure was as follows. The king sat in full dress on a platform, and the Deodhai, Mohan and Bailong pandits, i.e., the tribal priests and astrologers, poured holy water, purified by the recitation of sacred texts, over his head, whence it ran down his body through a hole in the platform on to the Chief Bailong, or astrologer, who was standing below. The king then changed his clothes, giving those which he had been wearing and all his ornaments to the Chief Bailong. The same ceremony, on a smaller scale, was also frequently performed by the common people, and still is, on certain occasions, e.g., when a child is drowned."

Royal Tours : The Ahom monarchs maintained contracts with their people by extensively and frequently touring their dominions ; and considering the comparatively greater difficulties of communication then than now, their travels speak highly of their hardy nature, sense of duty, persevering zeal for the good of their people.

Chaklang Marriage Ceremonies⁶⁴ : Brahmanical rituals were observed when the Ahom kings married Hindu girls. When, however, they married Ahom damsels, Chaklang rites, i.e., rites of original Ahom form of marriage or Chaklang, used to be gone through. In Chaklang marriages, the kings had the prerogative of performing their marriages or of their daughters in their own residences. A very important part of the Chaklang marriage was the recital of the achievements and triumphs of the ancestors of the bride-elect. A Barua or a Phukan conversant with the pedigrees of the leading Ahom families, did the recital ; and in these Chaklang ceremonies, a thorough knowledge

64. S. K. Bhuyan, Deodhai Asam Buranji, Introduction, pp. XIV, XV and pp. 134-137.

of the Buranjis displayed by the officers doing the recital, was considered to be a matter of high credit and distinction. When the kings gave away princesses, the exploits of the bridegrooms and their ancestors had to be narrated. The king's condescension to marry the daughter of a noble or to give his daughter in marriage to a noble was deemed to be the consequence of his appreciation of the past services of the family of the other party concerned, being honoured by royal alliance. The priest presiding over the ceremonies delivered, in highly elegant language, injunctions to the bride and the bridegroom to remain faithful and affectionate to each other. Chaklang ceremonies for marriages of other Ahoms were practically the same as those prescribed for Ahom royal marriage⁶⁵.

Ahom Burial Procedures : Before becoming Hindus, the Ahoms used to bury the dead. Shihabuddin describes Ahom burial procedures. "The common people bury their dead with some of the property of the deceased, placing the head towards the east and the feet towards the west." The death of a monarch was not announced till the appointment of a new king. The new sovereign had to order for arrangements in connection with the burial of his predecessor. The personal attendants of the deceased king were buried with his body and they were recruited from the Lukhurakhun and Gharphalia Khels, who also supplied the pall-bearers. The pall-bearers passed orders on complaints submitted to them during the progress of the funeral procession and their verdict was fixed and unalterable. In a lofty vault erected to house the remains of the sovereign, a bed was prepared with the customary articles and paraphernalia of a royal bed-chamber where the coffin was placed. The attendants selected to be buried alive with the king would then be placed alive in the vault. Such attendants got whatever they choose to demand⁶⁶. Wives and servants of the deceased together with necessary articles for a few years, including various kinds of gold and silver, vessels, carpets, cloths, and foodstuffs, would also be placed in

65. J. N. Sarkar, *Fathiyyah-i-Ibriyyah*, Journal of the Behar and Orissa Research Society, Vol. I, Part 2, p. 193.

66. S. K. Bhuyan, *Deodhai Assam Buranji*, Introduction, pp. XVI-XVIII; pp. 155-162.

the vault. Shihabuddin refers to a bunch of betel-leaves found green in a vault constructed eighty years ago and says : "They cover the head of the dead very strongly with stout poles, and bury in the vault a lamp with plenty of oil and one living lamp-attendant to remain engaged in the work of trimming the lamp." The door would then be shut and earth piled up on the wooden roof of the funeral chamber. Rudra Singha prohibited the burying alive of queens, guards, attendants, slaves, elephants etc., at his decease. Charaideo, described as 'The Jerusalem of the Ahoms', served as the necropolis of Ahom royalty⁶⁷.

Games and Sports : The Ahom monarchs were sports enthusiasts. Besides hunting, Fishing and elephant catching which had fascination for them, there were other royal recreations which were open to the public and were equally enjoyed by them. The chronicles give interesting account of various pastimes, e.g., hawk-fights, elephant-fights, buffalo-fights, tiger-bear contests etc. The Ahom kings maintained regular aviaries for the training of hawks. These aviaries were known as 'Charai-Chongs' and there was a well-organised 'Khel' or guild to look after work connected with this royal pastime, with officers, e.g., Senchowa Baruah, Senchowa Bara etc. Hawks trained for the pursuit of games used to be let loose by their trainers and the contest used to take place in ethereal heights where the hawks and the birds looked like very tiny specks against the blue. The Senchowas or aviarists used to spread a cloth to receive the victorious falcon dropping down with its beak fixed in the bosom of its game. The trainers of the victorious hawks were rewarded by the monarchs and his nobles. In case the hawks took to flight without entering into contest, their trainers were punished with heavy blows on their backs.

The fight of elephants with clashing teeth was a very spectacular game. The lives of the 'Mahuts' or drivers were at serious stake ; the king and other spectators enjoyed the game in safety, as they watched the same from a distance sitting on lofty pavilions or 'machangs'. Buffalo-fights were also thrilling shows. Mixed fights in which tigers, bears, tusked boars and

67. Ibid.

alligators participated were also used to be organised for the diversion of the kings and their nobles and subjects. These games were very effective means of contacts between the rulers and the ruled in an atmosphere of free and playful gaiety participated in by all⁶⁸. Demonstrations of juggleries and acrobatic feats also used to be arranged from time to time for the edification of monarchs and subjects⁶⁹.

Ahoms and Social Relations : The Ahoms were very liberal in their social outlook. They were moved by considerations of practical necessity and political expedience ; they were not actuated by any unrelenting desire to propagate their own view of life. The number of Ahoms who came with the first conqueror Sukapha was very small and those who came later were also very limited. With such small number, therefore, the Ahoms found it impossible to maintain their extensive dominions, inhabited by heterogeneous tribes and races, and shadowed by ever-present potential danger in the powerful Muslim and Koch rulers on the west. The Ahoms in the circumstances increased their community by conferring upon the new entrants the Status and privileges of the members of the ruling race.

The records of these affiliations or naturalisations were carefully maintained and checked. A most exhaustive scrutiny of these records was carried out in the reign of Swargadeo Pratap Singha. From these records, some leading Ahom families appear to have been founded by patriarchs belonging to the following non-Ahom races, tribes and communities :—Barahi, Chutia, Garo, Koch, Kachari, Moran, Hindu Kalita, Hindu Dhoba, Miri, Mogul and Muslim.⁷⁰

The non-Ahom families were generally admitted to the Ahom fold because of heroic and meritorious deeds on the part of their founders or of their particularly attractive manners and features or of indications of their special and potential capacity. Thoroughly assimilated, these new families had no disabilities in regard to holding of offices of rank and enjoyment of other usual

68. S. K. Bhuyan, *Deodhai Assam Buranji*, Introduction, XV & pp. 137-142.

69. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, pp. 50-ff, 184.

70. H. C. Goswami, *Purani Assam Buranji*, pp. 24-ff.

privileges. At the initial stages, no doubt, the new entrants faced annoyance and countered some opposition of the orthodox and the 'blue' section of the Ahoms, which, however, died down with passage of time, as the new nationals proved their ability, earned fame, indentified themselves with the ideals and aspirations and adopted the manners and customs of the original stock.

In the beginning the Ahom rulers married from recognised Ahom families including those of the new entrants. Later they occasionally married from Hindu families also. Khora Raja married two Sonari Hindu girls who became his great favourites. This caused resentment amongst his other wives and displeasure of the nobles. To humble the pride of his other wives, the king conferred the status of princes on a number of handsome youths, equipped them with gold-mounted muskets and declared them as belonging to his family ; these princes got the title, 'Kowanr-Hiloidaris' or musketter princes. Siva Singha married an exceptionally beautiful and accomplished Nat girl, Phulmati, and after her death, her sister Damayanti. They were elevated to sovereign ranks. They assumed the names Pramatheswari Devi and Ambika Devi respectively and became patronesses of art and literature. Their brother Harinath was admitted to the Ahom fold and made Barpatra Gohain. Their other relatives and their mother, Sita were also similarly honoured. Pramatta Singha also married a number of Hindu girls. King Chandra Kanta ignored Prime Minister Purnananda Buragohain's opposition and married Padmavati, the daughter of a devotee attached to Bengena-Ati Satra.⁷¹

The Ahom kings were not bigots in their religious faith, nor did they force their religion on any one. They warmly embraced all men into their social fold if such absorption added to their political strength. They punished the priests whose predictions went wrong and produced untoward results. They kept open minds and yielded to new influences provided they were of practical value. May be, as some say, the adoption of Hinduism by the Ahoms was also the result of a deliberate policy. The dangers inherent in their being in a hopeless minority in a kingdom where the majority were Hindus must have been crystal

71. S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, pp. 16-ff.

clear to the Ahoms. They thought they would add to their strength if they became one with their subjects by embracing the latter's faith. The Ahoms also gave up their own language and adopted Assamese. A race of conquerors losing their identity in the conquered, by adopting the religion and language of their subjects and by giving up their own, was surely unique in the history of the world and a rare example of the moulding of a nation by the fusion of two races, one of dominant, sovereign, victorious conquerors and the other of weak, vanquished, numerous subjects.

The Ahoms continued to adhere to Hinduism and patronise and support its institutions, though they were not admitted by the orthodox and the older Hindus into their social fold and to the privileges of inter-marrying and interdining. This was in sharp, perplexing contrast to the behaviour of the Ahoms who embraced the new entrants with open arms without attaching to them any social or political disability.

The Ahom rulers zealously guarded existing usages and customs for ensuring peace and tranquillity in the kingdom and preventing drastic innovations and heterodoxy in any form that might lead to inter-communal discord and growth of revolutionary propensities which might reappear some day in the political sphere also. They, therefore, suppressed disturbance of the social and religious order. During the invasion of Assam by the Koch general Chilarai, the Ahoms dressed up their soldiers as Brahmans, each wearing a sacred thread and seated on a cow. The killing of a Brahman or of a cow being taboo to a Hindu, Chilarai desisted from attacking the Ahom army. This incident, however, had serious social repercussions. Most of these 'war-Brahmans' refused to give up their sacred thread, began to live the life of Brahmans and claimed the privileges and respect due to Brahmans. King Pratap Singha appointed a commission with an Ahom Officer, Lekai Chetia as its head, who went round the villages, scrutinised the claims, and separated the spurious Brahmans from the genuine ones. The doubtful claimants were given a special appellation to be used as a distinguishing mark.⁷²

72. Maniram Dewan, (MS) Buranji Vivekratna, (D.H.A.S. No. 272), f. 10a, 10b.

Pratap Singha also punished two hundred Brahmans by ordering their conversion to the Kaivarta caste. These Brahmans had eaten with and accepted in their society, though after a ceremony of purification, a co-caste man who had commeced with a Kaivarta woman.⁷³

The Hindus and the Muslims lived in perfect amity and peace. Shihabuddin Talish wrote—"As for the Mussalmans who had been taken prisoner in former times and had chosen to marry here, their descendants are exactly in the manner of the Assamese and have nothing of Islam except the name; their hearts are inclined far more towards mingling with the Assamese than towards association with Muslims."⁷⁴

The Ahoms tried to lay the foundations of a stable society in Assam, where peace and security could facilitate and promote progress and prosperity. No doubt there were disturbances to peace from within and without, but the society had acquired a remarkable capacity of resilience and flexibility to with-stand and overcome the jerks and jolts and surmount the obstacles and resume its normal flow of full life—a life that had much room for cultural pursuits also.

73. MS. Assam Buranji—upto 1714 (obtained by D.H.A.S. from S. C. Goswami), cited by S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, p. 20.

74. Gait, *A History of Assam*, p. 149.

Section II

RELIGION

Despite the mainly militaristic cult of the Ahoms, Assam under the Ahoms saw a unique efflorescence of art, literature and culture. The Vaisnava Renaissance under Sankar Dev and his followers had a tremendous impact for all time on the life and culture of the people. Along with Neo-Vaisnavism flourished literature, music, dance, drama, painting. The Ahom rulers had considerable contributions to the flowering of life in diverse aspects ; their patronage was invaluable.

The Ahom Faith :

The Ahoms had their own tenets and faith. From Pali Chronicles corroborated by archaeological finds, it is learnt that the Thais had come under Buddhist-Hindu influences ; and the Ahoms, being members of the Thai race, had also come under these influences. Yunnan, the most powerful Thai principality, was called Nan-Chao by the Chinese, and Gandhara by the Indo-Chinese ; its capital was known as Mithila, and a part of the kingdom as Videha-rajya. Yunnan adopted Buddhism through the preachings of an Indian Saint named Avalokiteswara. In the ninth century A.D. it was visited by an Indian monk from Magadha named Chandragupta. The Hinduised Thai kingdom of Gandhara or Yunnan flourished till 1253 when it was over-run and conquered by the great Mongol Chief Kublai Khan.¹ It is believed that the Thai States to the west and south of Yunnan, and to the east of the mountain ranges which border on Manipur and Assam had colonies of Hindus or had settlements of Hindus in large numbers. A writer has remarked 'that the main spring of the civilisation of most of the Thai states lay in India and not in China'.²

Definite traces of Buddhist-Hindu influences are found in the Ahom scriptures, including Phura-Tara-Alam (or Phura-Alang

1. S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, pp. 12-ff.

2. R. C. Majumdar, *Hindu Colonies in the Far-East*, 1944, pp. 225-229.

or Minmang Phuralung), which is the most important and venerated by the Ahoms priests even upto this day. The book expounds the virtue of nonviolence in deed and thought; the Almighty God Sikia exhorts Lengdan and other deities to rule the earth according to the principles of Ahimsa; in violation of his teacher's injunctions, a disciple partakes of the flesh of a fowl and consequently the teacher dilates on the virtue of Ahimsa of which non-slaughter and non-participation in animal flesh constitute the first step. According to Ahom traditions, Minmang Phura Lung, the Bible of the Ahoms, was brought to Assam by the priests who accompanied the conquerer Sukapha, Another classic Pung-Gao-Kham, also known as the Ahom Ramayana, contains an account of Ramchandra, called by the Ahoms, 'Chang-Gao-Kham'.³ The Ahom priests called Deodhais, Mohans and Baillungs preserved and continued the original Ahom traditions by conducting worship at the Ahom shrines according to their own sacred codes.

The Ahom monarchs followed a liberal religious policy. In the beginning of the Ahom rule, Deodhais acted as political advisers, but gradually their work was confined to priestly function and the divining of events. Sacrifices in the orthodox Ahom fashion were continued to be performed till the end of the Ahom rule and the Deodhais and other Ahom priests were invariably connected with all ceremonial functions. These sacrifices were considered conducive to the welfare of the kings and their people. They were also performed for bringing victory to Ahom arms or in celebration of victories in War. Ahom priests were indispensable to coronation proceedings at the installation of an Ahom monarch. They blessed the monarch by uttering old-time verses in a musical tone reminding him of the primordial Gods 'Phura-tara' or Creator, 'Lengdan' or Indra, 'Jasingpha' or the God of Learning,—'Phai' or 'God of Fire' and Kao-kham or God of Water and also of the royal ancestors, Khunlung and Khunlai of divine origin. The image of Chom-Cheng which Sukapha brought with him was the tutelary deity of the Ahom rulers till the end of their rule. The maintenance of the regular

3. S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo Assamese Relations*, p. 13.

worship of this image was the concern of the State and a charge on the revenues. Charaideo, their first capital, was looked upon by the Ahoms as the most sacred place of their faith.⁴ This latter became their necropolis. There were many shrines where Ahom worship was regularly maintained.

Both accidental circumstances and deliberate policy coupled with broad outlook and adaptable nature were responsible for the Hinduisation of the Ahoms. Hindu influence entered the Ahom court during the reign of King Sudangpha Bamuni-Kowanr who had been brought up in a Brahman family. Hindu influence was on the increase in the reign of King Pratap Singha who was grateful to Brahman priests for ridding him of a 'demon' which had possessed him during his princehood and thereby restoring dignity to the royal personage. Jayadhwaj Singha wanted to propitiate the gods by devotion to religion and to atone for his patricide and was the first Ahom king to accept Hinduism formally. Jayadhwaj Singha and his successors upto Sulikpha Lora Raja took their initiation into Vaisnavism which was the predominant faith in Assam at that time.

Gadadhar Singha who succeeded Lora Raja in 1681 had decided leanings towards Saktatism. He considered Vaisnavism to be too passive and mild for a ruling class required to maintain their domination by force of arms. He disfavoured the growing wealth, grandeur and influence of the Vaisnava pontiffs who, he thought, were potential sources of danger to monarchy and capable of diverting the loyalty of subjects to themselves. Gadadhar Singha, therefore, initiated plundering of Vaisnava monasteries and killing or expelling of their heads. This persecution was later stopped by him. His son, King Rudra Singha was tolerant ; but became an open supporter of the Sakta faith towards the end of his rule ; and since his death onwards, the Sakta faith became the creed of the Ahom sovereigns and their principal officers and nobles.

The Ahom rulers, therefore, generally speaking, showed due respect and courtesy to the Vaisnava monks and made grants and endowments for the maintenance of the Vaisnava Satras and

4. Maniram Dewan, (MS) Buranji Viveka-Ratna (D.H.A.S. No. 272), f. 2a, f. 2b, f. 3a, f. 3b.

monasteries. They simultaneously patronised the Ahom priests and allowed them to perform their rituals, and to participate in the royal ceremonies as prayermen. Thus by adopting the Sakta faith, by supporting the Vaisnava monks and Satras, and by maintaining the orthodox Ahom rituals and ceremonies, the Ahom rulers encouraged a state of triarchy in religious matters. This no doubt led to considerable rivalry amongst the three groups. The monarchs also treated the Muslim priests well, who carried on without interference and at the instance of the monarchs, prayed for their welfare at the principal Muslim shrine at Poa-Macca hill in Hazo. A general spirit of religious toleration was pervasive in society.

Catholic in their social and religious outlook, the Ahoms were extremely tolerant of the views of others. King Udayaditya strayed from the path of toleration by pressing the Assamese Vaisnava monks to become the disciples of the up-country Sannyasi, Paramananda Bairagi who had magnetic influence over him; but his was the private action of the monarch, that had neither the backing of the government nor the support of the people including the Ahoms. The king was engulfed in a revolution and lost his life and throne; Paramananda was executed. Queen Pramatheswari's humiliation of some Vaisnava monks by compelling them to bow before the Durga image was an un-premeditated act of impulse of a zealous neophyte and a woman, called upon to wield sovereign power without having the requisite equipment, either of birth or of training.

Even after adoption of Hinduism the Ahoms did not completely give up their religion and customs. Every king used to assume two names on ascending the throne, one in Assamese Hindu form and the other in Ahom, e.g., Jayadhwaj Singha, Rudra Singha, Gaurinath Singha and Chandra Kanta Singha had also the Ahom names of Sutamala, Sukhrangpha, Suhitpangpha and Sudingpha respectively. Coins continued to be struck in Ahom and Assamese scripts, and land-grants on copper plates were inscribed in both Ahom and Assamese. Since the death of Rajeswar Singha, the funeral ceremonies of the Ahom monarchs were performed according to both Brahmanical and Ahom codes.

Muslim religious leaders or Pirs used to visit Assam to minister to the spiritual needs of the Muslims. They were encouraged by the Ahom monarchs to settle down in Assam by grant of revenue-free lands, known as Pir-pal lands. Some of them were known as Dewans and wielded great influence over the masses. Dr. J. P. Wade, who was in Assam from 1792 to 1794, in reference to a Muslim, said,—“the gooroo-general of his persuasion in Assam from about the time of Roodur Singha. He had numerous attendants dressed in the high Mussalman dress. He resided at or near the capital and frequented the durbar ; and the Swargadeos used to despatch him to pray at Hadjoo after the Mussalman fashion for their prosperity. He was usually succeeded by his nearest relations.” Dr. Wade found ten or twelve houses of instruction for Muslim children at Gauhati, and more than twenty at Rangpur, the capital of Assam.⁵

Tribal Beliefs : With considerable non-Aryan and tribal elements in the population of Assam, naturally tribal beliefs and animism claimed very large number of adherents in the country. The cults of fertility, head hunting and human sacrifice, and fetishism were in vogue. The other manifestations of animism were faith in reincarnation, ancestor worship, belief in heavenly bodies, magic and sorcery, attribution of spirits to all things and in the final analysis, belief in souls and in a future state like reincarnation or transmigration thereof. The phallic megaliths of Assam were symbolic of the fertility cult and fetishism. There is no denying the fact that non-Aryan and tribal beliefs contributed to the development of the worship of Siva and of Sakti and to the foundation of Tantrikism in Assam.⁶

Buddhism : “Kamrupa”, according to Dr. P. C. Choudhury, “became a strong-hold of later Buddhism and this happened at a time when no sharp distinction remained between Brahmanical and Buddhist gods.”⁷ In the Tantrik-Buddhist days, Kamrupa was one of the important pithas in Eastern India and the faith was patronised by the Pala rulers of Assam. The land became

-
5. S. K. Bhuyan, *Annals of the Delhi Badshahate*, Introduction, pp. 1-27.
 6. B. Kakati, *Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, pp. 35-ff.
 7. P. C. Choudhury, *History of Civilisation of Assam*, p. 432.

associated with a good number of noted Siddhas. The existing materials prove that both Mahayana and Vajrayana prevailed in the land, and various activities of the Vajrayana Siddhas are associated with many places of Assam. The prevalence of the faith is also supported by the existing ruins of temples and icons of the Buddha.⁸

The constant association of Matsyendra with Kamarupa and its various places confirms the belief that he was from Kamrupa. He promulgated the Yogini Kaula doctrine in Kamakhya. The composition of another work, the Bahyantara—*boodhicitta*—*bandhopadesa*, is also attributed to him, and it is remarkable that the language of his works corresponds to the old Kamarupi dialect. In the Savara Tantra, Minanath is included among the 24 Kapalika Siddhas. It appears from the account that most of the Vajrayana Siddhas were associated with Kamrupa and the Pala line of kings, who patronised the system and some of whom became converts and attained the status of preceptors. The widespread prevalence of the faith is proved by voluminous Tantrik works of the period, dealing with magic and sorcery. The hold of the faith could not be entirely wiped out, and it continued to be practised by its followers who performed their rites in secrecy at the dead of night and were, therefore, called 'Ratikhowa Sect' (practisers at night).⁹

The Kamakhya temple at Gauhati, the Kechaikhati temple at Sadiya, the Mahadeva temple at Dergaon and the network of Sakta temples in North Lakhimpur area bear proofs of the extent of Tantrik influence in Kamrupa. Hindu and Buddhist preachers tolerated and sanctioned the rites of the aboriginal tribes, read an esoteric meaning into them and absorbed them into their respective cults.

It is held that Mahayana Buddhism, propounded by Nagarjuna in the first century A.D., assumed a new character on

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 432-ff.

9. P. C. Choudhuri, *History of Civilisation of Assam*, pp. 454-457; Haliram Dhekial Phukan refers to the Ratikhowa Sect as 'Aritiya' and mentions their practices in his *Assam Buranji*, p. 96.

the recrudescence of Brahmanism during the early Gupta period, and gradually developed into Tantricism from the eight century during the rule of the Pala kings of Magadha and Gauda. Images of Buddhas and Bodhisatwas with their female energies were worshipped ; and other Buddhist gods gradually came in which developed into mysticism and sorcery. The magic rites began to be tolerated by the teachers of spells called Mantracharyyas. Hinduism, ever anxious to imbibe the spirit of the time, absorbed the Buddhist Tantric rites into its system.¹⁰

Tantric rituals were practised in Assam in the centuries preceding the Vaisnava revival. The practice of sacrifices of ducks, pigeons, goats, buffaloes, and even men, to Sakti or Durga was in vogue. Other striking features of Tantrik worship in Assam were magic rites, wine drinking and divination by ripping open the entrails of a pregnant woman. Peripatetic Buddhist monks preached and popularised these rites. Sankaradeva had encounters with Buddhist magicians (Baudhamatiyatatakiya). Sankaradeva is said to have defeated two such persons in arguments, whereupon they fled the country. The whole body of Tantric rituals was known in Assam as Bauddhachara or the usages of Buddhists.¹¹ It was against this Bauddhachara that Sankaradeva (1449-1568), the great Vaisnava reformer of Assam, waged a life-long crusade. There are references to Crypto-Buddhism in Sankaradeva's and Madhavadeva's writings.

In his Kirtanaghosa, Sankaradeva says that God incarnated as the Buddha only to destroy the way of the Vedas and to confound people with the left-hand scriptures (Vamanaya Sastra) and that the Kalki form of God will descend on earth towards the end of the Kali age, kill the Mlecchas and all the 'Budhas' and establish the truth. There seem to be references here to the excesses committed by the tantric or Vajrayana Buddhists, mixed up with other tantric practices. Vajrayana Buddhism which was a queer mixture of monistic philosophy, magic and erotics, with a small admixture of Buddhist ideas,

10. S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, pp. 190-ff.

11. Maniram Dewan, (MS) *Buranji Viveka Ratna* (D.H.A.S. No. 272), f. 5a.

admitted the five M's (Makaras) as indispensable for the votary and held that the seekers of salvation should enjoy prajnaparamita or perfect truth that resides in every woman; in the Vajrayana scriptures, Sadhanamala, the four pithas of the cult are mentioned as Kamakhya or Kamarupa, Sirihatta, Purnagiri and Oddiyana, the first two at least being evidently in Kamrupa. In Madhavadeva's Namaghosa references are made to curious creeds, the adherents of which had no discriminations in matters of food and sex and administered evil mantras to people in secret. Vamsigopaladeva met with great opposition and bitter enmity of the 'Baudhas' when he tried to propagate Vaisnavism in the Ahom kingdom.¹²

Later Buddhism : Reference may be made here to later Buddhism in Assam as it is professed and practised in this state by certain tribes and communities. Living Buddhism of Assam can be divided into two categories : (1) The Hinayana or Theravada Buddhism of Burma spread into Assam with the advent of the tribes, Khamti, Singpho, Dowaniya, Phakiyal or Taiphake, Nara, Turung and Aitan or Aitaniya from the Hukong Valley, the Barkhampti land and the Shan States. (2) Lamaism or Tibetan Buddhism is professed by some of the tribes of the North-East Frontier Agency—the Sherdukpen and the Monpa of the Kameng Frontier Division and the Memba and the Khamba of the extreme north of the Siang Division. The Bhutiyas belong to this category. They are, however, mostly of a migratory type.¹³

Initially about 5,000 Khamtis emigrated to India from Bar-Khamti in the latter half of the eighteenth century and made their first settlements on the Tengapani river. In 1835, when the two eastern districts of Lakhimpur and Sibsagar were being ruled by Purandar Singha under the British, there was an immigration of 230 Moonglary Khamtis. After their rebellion in 1839, the Khamtis were dispersed and settled in different

12. M. Neog, Sankardeva and his Times, pp. 88-ff; 'Crypto-Buddhism in Kamarupa', Pragjyotisa, Souvenir, All India Oriental Conference, XXII Session, Gauhati, 1965, pp. 115-120.

13. M. Neog, 'Living Buddhism in Assam', Pragjyotisa, p. 121.

parts of the Lakhimpur district—Chunpora, Saikhowaghat, Damadaji and Narayanpur. The Khamtis profess a pure variety of Buddhism after the Burmese Church. They maintain contact with Burma and Burmese Phongyis through their bapus or priests who receive their appointment from the Buddhist church of Burma. The doctrines of their religion are contained in sacred books written in Khamti character, but believed in some cases to be of the Pali language. The bapus follow the Vinaya in matters of food and general conduct, but the laity are free to take fish and animal food. The bapuchangs have the outward appearance of Burmese pagodas and are built of timber and thatch. Dr. Maheswar Neog visiting the Vihara in the principal Khamti village, Chaukham, found inside on the pedestal at the centre a number of Buddhas, being specimens of Burmese and South-East Asian sculpture and also a number of printed paintings depicting the tales of Jatakas like those of Vessantara and Bhuridatta with legends in the Thai language. The Khamtis have two great festivals in the year—one to celebrate the birth, the other to mourn the death of Gautama. Of the other festivals, one known as paicamken is held at the time of the Bahag Bihu festival of the Assamese, when the Buddhas in a bapuchang are taken out to the open and sprayed with water.¹⁴

The Singphos, living in the Tirap and Lohit Frontier Divisions of the N.E.F.A., number at present about 2500. First appearing in the Brahmaputra Valley about 1793, they settled on the Tengapani river east of Sadiya and in the Namrup tract on the Buri-Dihing under the Dapha, the Bisa, the Latora, the Latao and other powerful gams or village chiefs. Buddhism among the Singphos is nominal. Though in the big villages, there have been bapus and bapuchangs, the Singphos do not have regular priesthood amongst them and they greatly revere the phongyis. Not having any clear notion of a supreme being, they worship some nhats or malignants spirits—the MuNhat or spirit above, the GaNhat or Spirit below and the household Nhat, the Sham Nhat, and the Palat Nhat.¹⁵

14. M. Neog, 'Living Buddhism in Assam', Pragjyotisa, pp. 130-132; 'Khamti', Asamar Janajati.

15. M. Neog, 'Singphau', Asamar Janajati; 'Living Buddhism in Assam', Pragjyotisa, pp. 132-ff.

In 1911, the Dowaniyas numbered 1,847 (Lakhimpur—1,544, Sibsagar—30). Considered to be a mixed race, descended from Singphos and their Assamese slaves, they now live in about ten villages, with about eighty houses in each, round about Margherita and Digboi. The Dowaniyas are Buddhists and took their formal religion from some phongyi only in the beginning of the British regime. In the bapu-changs or Viharas live the bapus or monk priests and the attendant monks and the monks get their training in Pali and Buddhism from books in Burmese character.¹⁶

The Phakiyals or Tai-phakes belong to the Tai race and entered Assam from Mungkong about 1760 and settled on the Buri-Dihing. They were then taken from there by the Ahoms and settled near Jorhat. At present they number about six hundred divided in about 150 houses in a few villages—Nam-phakiyal and Tipam-phakiyal near Naharkatiya, Bar-phakiyal and Manmau near Margherita and Nanglai and Lang near Ledo. Each Phakiyal village has a bapuchang where several bapus live. These monks learn Burmese, Tai and Pali to be able to read Buddhist scriptures. They initiate the laity to the 'panch-sila' and 'asta-sila' mantras. Those who take asta-sila mantra may kill no animals. On the occasion of the Bahag-Bihu the Buddhas of a vihara are washed.¹⁷

Nara is the name by which the Mungkong Shans were known to the Ahoms. The Buranjis refer to Ahom-Nara hostilities as also to marriages of Ahom kings with Nara princesses. There are Naras in the Disangpani, Chalapathar and other villages in the Sibsagar Sub-Division. They profess Buddhism and have viharas. There are a few Turung villages at Titabar in the Jorhat Sub-Division and at Barpathar in the Golaghat Sub-Division. The Turungs are Buddhists. Their priests are to be celibates. The Aitans or Aitanias, a section of the Mungkong Shans, are at present to be found in the Barpathar and Sarupathar regions in the Golaghat Sub-division. They are

16. S. Rajkumar, 'Dowaniya', Asamar Janajati.

17. M. Neog, 'Living Buddhism in Assam', Pragjyotisa, pp. 134-ff; S. Rajkumar, 'Phakiyal', Asamar Janajati.

Buddhists and get their priests from the Khamti villages in Lakhimpur.¹⁸ The Burmese invasions of Assam between 1816 and 1825, left behind three to four hundred of Mungkong Shan auxiliaries who account for the Shan or Man population of Kamrup, Goalpara and Garo hills. These scattered Buddhists have almost lost their beliefs.

The Census of 1881 showed a Bhutiya population of 1,340 in Assam; the number increased to 1,503 in 1891. In these enumerations, of course, were included the Bhutiyas who came down from the hills in the cold season for trade mainly in the Daranga (Kamrup) and Udalguri (Darrang) fairs and for pilgrimage to the temple of Hayagriva Madhava in Hajo. The Bhutiyas are nominally Buddhists, who have mixed up a great deal of animism with their professed beliefs. The common Bhutiyas make offerings of flowers and bits of rags to a host of spirits. The village Lamas and the people generally count their beads, repeating 'Om-Mani-Padmi-Om'. The praying machines are also in use for this purpose. The playing of Clarionets, reed-pipes, horns, shells, cymbals, drums and gongs accompanies their other religious observances.¹⁹

The Sherdukpens are only about 1,200 in number. They live mainly in the villages of Rupa, Jigaon, and Shergaon in the Kameng Frontier-Division of N.E.F.A. According to their tradition, they originally came from Tibet. Their Buddhism has been greatly mixed up with animism consisting of worship of a number of spirits and deities through their priests. The three-storeyed Gompas or Buddhist temples at Rupa and Shergaon enshrine, images of Konchosum or the Buddha and his disciples in the Tibetan style and have wall paintings done by Tawang artists, Tibetan scrolls hung from the walls, libraries and prayer-wheels. Beside the temples, flutter prayer-flags on tall poles. The local Lamas, some of them trained at Tawang, are in charge. There are at Rupa and Shergaon elaborately painted holy gates, called Kakaliang, with conventional designs and

18. S. Rajkumar, 'Nara-Turung-Aitaniya', Asamar Janajati.

19. M. Neog, 'Living Buddhism in Assam', Pragjyotisa, pp. 136-138.

figures of the Buddha. Mention may be made of a number of stone shrines, known as 'Mane', in the shape of walls with niches holding tables with the inscription, 'Om-Mani-Padme-hum' and a lotus design or a Buddha, said to have the power of warding off dangers of demons, etc. There is also a structure looking like a Stupa, called 'Chorten' where the Lamas lead community prayers. The Sherdukpens have a number of holy festivals. During their 'Chakur' festival, the Lamas chant the holy books for six days.²⁰

The Monpas live in the north-western part of the Kameng Frontier Division, round about Tawang and Dirangdzong. They speak a dialect of Tibetan. "Quiet, gentle, friendly, courteous, industrious, good to animals, good to children, you see in the Monpas the influence of the compassionate Lord Buddha on the ordinary men. They may have little theology : they have a great deal of religion."²¹ The Monpas are Lama Buddhists and accepted their faith with strong tantric leanings during the reign of the sixth Dalai Lama, born at Ojeling in the Monpa country, the imprint of whose feet is preserved in the Tawang monastery. The great Tawang monastery is the heart of Monpa life and culture. On way to this monastery one passes through gate after village gate, the roofs of which are finely painted by local artists with scenes from the life of the Lord Buddha. "The Monpa Lamas are not perhaps very learned, but they have an infinite reverence for literature. There are some 700 books in the Library and their great treasure is the Getompa, three volumes of which are lettered in gold. There used to be a printing press here, and there are still hundreds of oblong wooden blocks carved with Tibetan characters."²² The temple also contains its colossal image of the All Compassionate, other smaller images and relics of the mother of the sixth Dalai Lama.²³ Along the international frontier to the

20. M. Neog, 'Living Buddhism in Assam', Pragjyotisa, pp. 138-ff; 'Sherdukpen', Asamar Janajati.

21. Verrier Elwin, A Philosophy for N.E.F.A., p. 10.

22. Verrier Elwin, A Philosophy for N.E.F.A., p. 11.

23. Ibid, p. 12; Usha Deka Mahapatra, 'Monpa', Asamar Janajati.

extreme north of the Siang Frontier Division are two small Buddhist tribes, the Membas and the Khambas. They are much poorer than the Monpas economically and culturally but the essential spirit of their Buddhism is equally strong.²⁴

Saivism : Hariya Mandala, father of Koch King, Visva Simha and twelve other Mech Chiefs associated with Mandala are described in the Raja-Vamsavalis as devotees of Siva. Visva Simha's birth is ascribed to Siva and Koch Kings are known as descendants of Siva. Siva was worshipped according to Hindu scriptures and also in accordance with tribal rites. Before his military expedition against the Ahoms, Naranarayana made arrangements for performance of Siva worship with tribal rites by his Kachari soldiers on the banks of the river Sonkos. There were offerings of Ducks, pigeons, wine, cooked rice ; sacrifices of buffaloes, swine, cocks, he-goats, and Kachari dances by beating of drums (Madala). According to Naranarayana's edict, the worship in the temples on the northern side of the Gohain Kamala road could be carried on by the Koch, Mech and Kachari people, whereas the worship in the temples lying south of the road was left to the Brahman priests.²⁵ Among different Bodo tribes Siva is worshipped as Batho, Bathau, Bathau-brai, or Bathau Siv-rai. The Mech describe themselves as Hindus of the Saiva Sect, and worship Siva under the name of Batho, and his consort Kali as Bali Khungri. To Siva the Agnia-Mech sacrifice buffaloes, goats and pigeons ; while his wife has to put up with the less respectable offerings of pigs, fowls, and goats.²⁶ The worship of Mahadeva (Siva), set up by the sage Aurva at Dergaon was administered under Kachari kings with wine and flesh.²⁷ Later a magnificent temple was built at that place by the Ahom king, Pratap Singha, who describes himself as 'devoted to the feet of Hari and Hara' (Hari-Hara-Charana-Parayana) in a coin dated 1570 Saka/1648 A.D. Saivism was a living religion when Sankaradeva was

24. Verrier Elwin, *A Philosophy for N.E.F.A.*, pp. 19-ff ; M. Neog, 'Siyang Simantar Anyanya Janajati', *Asamar Janajati*.

25. M. Neog, *Sankaradeva and His Times*, p. 80.

26. Gait, 'Animistic Tribes of Bengal', *Census of India I, i*, p. 414.

27. Maniram Dewan, *Buranji-Viveka-ratna*, f. 1b.

born. Sankara's father worshipped Siva. Siva appears in the Yogini-tantra as in the Kalika-purana oftener as a Bhairava than as a normal deity and could, therefore, be adored with extreme left-handed (Vamachara) practices.²⁸

Near about 1479 a stone image of Bhairava used to be worshipped by people on the day previous to their marriage with offerings of twenty rupees, two black he-goats, eight pairs of ducks, eight pairs of pigeons and other things or simply with five rupees by poor people.²⁹

Saktism : Saktism or the worship of "a goddess of many names and forms, who is adored with sexual rites and the sacrifice of animals, or when the law permits, of man" (Elit, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, I Intro, p. XXXVI), is considered to have been born in the north-eastern region of India (Assam and Bengal), where it still holds some ground. The Sakta sect was the most powerful one in Kamarupa³⁰ by the twelfth century, by when its chief scripture in that land, Kalika-purana was written. But when the Yogini-tantra came to be written in Kamarupa in the last part of the sixteenth century or in the seventeenth, much of the left-hand excesses was toned down.³¹ But the worship of Kamakhya and of Kali, Durga, Ugratara, Chinnamasta and Bhuvaneshvari finds place in the Yogini-tantra. Both the chief scriptures of Assam Saktism, the Kalika-purana and the Yogini-tantra belong to the 'left-hand' school of Saktism and enjoin blood sacrifices and various esoteric rites. The ritual consisting in the partaking of the five elements (Tattva), better known as the five M's (Panca-makara), namely, madya (wine), mamsa (meat), matsya (fish), mudra (parched grain) and maithuna (sexual union), forms a prominent feature.³² Another note-worthy form of ritual is virgin worship, in which a virgin is considered as representing the deity. The temple of Kamakhya near Gauhati, which is now the chief

28. B. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, p. 22.

29. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji (S.M.)*, p. 15.

30. B. Kakati, *Purani Kamarupar Dharmar Dhara*, pp. 18-25.

31. M. Neog, *Sankardeva and His Times*, p. 82.

32. *Ibid*, p. 83; B. Kakati, *Purani Kamarupar Dharmar Dhara*, pp. 31-39.

centre of Sakti worship, was rebuilt in 1563 after an older shrine in the place had been destroyed by the Musalmans. Near the principal shrine of Kamakhya is the smaller temple of Bhairavi or Tripura Bhairavi : here human sacrifices were once held. In 1615 Karmachand, son of Satrajita, a commander of an invading Musalman army, was sacrificed to the goddess Kamakhya.³³ In the Tamresvari temple near Sadiya, the ruling Chutiyas administered worship under their Deoris or tribal priests, with animal and human sacrifices. Human sacrifices seem to have been continued here upto the end of the 18th century. The care of the temple seems to have been taken over by the Ahoms after the subjugation of the Chutiyas in about 1523.³⁴

Most of the Bara-Bhuyans and the ancestors of both Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva were staunch Saktas. Both the ten-armed and the eight-armed forms of the Devi are mentioned in the Caritas³⁵.

Tantric Vaisnavism : The Yogini-tantra gives an account of the origin of the stone image of Hayagriva-Madhava of Hajo in the light of the story of the wooden icons of Krishna, Balbhadra and Subhadra of the great Jagannatha temple at Puri as recounted in the Brahma-purana. The system of worship and the various mantras of Hayagriva worship in the final chapters of the tantra are all based on, or are mere copies of, the code of Jagannatha worship as given in the Brahma-purana. The present temple of Madhava was built in 1583 by Raghudeva Narayana (1581-1593) over the ruins of an earlier shrine. Hayagriva is to be worshipped with various mantras and the Purusa-sukta. In 'Nyasa' three (Vasudeva, Samkarsana, and Pradyumna) of the four forms of the deity (Caturvyuha) of the Pancaratra code, along with Trivikrama, Garuda, Bhumi, Lakshmi, Pushti, some of the weapons and ornaments of Visnu, Isana of the pitha and his Saktis, and other deities are to be mediated upon³⁶. Cow's milk, fish,

33. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 108 ; S. K. Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji (S.M.)*, p. 59.

34. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 20 ; Gunabhiram Barua, *Assam Buranji*, p. 95.

35. M. Neog, *Sankaradeva and His Times*, p. 85.

36. M. Neog, *Sankardev and His Times*, p. 86.

and vension, goats, salanas and hare, among different offerings are delectable to Visnu. The pancaratras do not stick to strictly vegetarian offerings.

The Kalika-purana treats elaborately Vasudevism, though the Yogini-tantra takes no notice of it. The Yogini-tantra refers to a Visnu-pitha among nine sacred regions of Kamrupa. Two copper-plate grants dating 1392 and 1401 have been discovered in the sub-division of North Lakhimpur and from these we get the impression of the continuation of Vasudeva worship after the date of the Kalika-purana³⁷. These two grants were issued by the king Satya Narayana of Sadhayapuri and his son Laksmi Narayana respectively. In the first inscription a gift of land is made to one Narayana Dvija, and it begins with an invocation to Vasudeva, Isana and Amba. The second grant records Laksmi Narayana's land gift to the Brahman Ravideva, a devout worshipper of Vasudeva in the Suvansiri Valley. Visnu mages of various dates have been discovered. Sankaradeva is said to have discovered a four-armed Vasudeva image of shining black stone at Bardowa and also to have found a tiny manuscript with the text of the whole of the Bhagavad Gita, floating down the Brahmaputra, at the time of his deserting Bardowa³⁸.

Neo-Vaisnavism :

Sankaradeva was born to the family of the Sakta Kayastha overlord of the Bara-Bhuyas at Bardowa. At the age of twelve, he was placed under the care of a learned Pandit, Mahendra Kandali. He had thorough education in grammar and Sanskrit lore. He married and performed the duties of a Bhuya Chief. His young wife passed away, leaving a girl child. At the age of thirtytwo, he went on pilgrimage to Puri, Vrindaban and other holy places. At Puri he seemed to have received his illumination ; he bowed to Jagannath and resolved not to bow down to any other god. Sanakaradeva composed lyrics in Brajabuli during his travels in Northern India.

37. Sarveswar Barua, 'Some Ancient Relics found in North Lakhimpur', *Journal of Assam Research Society* III, pp. 40-46.

38. M. Neog, *Sankaradeva and His Times*, p. 87.

After twelve years he returned home, a saint. He had to reluctantly marry for a second time³⁹. He rendered parts of the Bhagavata-Purana into Assamese for propounding and propagating the cult of Bhakti through the medium of the people's own language, intelligible to them. He also wrote 'Kirtana-ghosa' and other books. He held Kirtana or mass prayers and dramatic performances. He made a temple (Kirtanagrha or Namghar) at Bordowa and this institution became the nucleus of the characteristic Vaisnava organisation of 'Sattras' and 'Namghars' throughout Assam, Kamrupa and Koch Behar.

Sankara renounced his Bhuyaship. He migrated to Majuli in the Ahom kingdom. Here a Sakta youth Madhava (1489-1596) engaged in a religious disputation with Sankara as he was weaning away people from the worship of and sacrifices to the Mother Goddess. The disputation ended with the conversion of Madhava to Vaisnavism. Madhava remained a celibate. He became Sankaradeva's closest disciple⁴⁰, always helping the master in his proselytising and literary activities. After Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva became the greatest apostle of the new faith.

The Vaisnavas had uneasy times. The Brahman priesthood was openly hostile, for their importance and hold on the people were undermined. Universalism of Vaisnavism and the democratic spirit underlying it made it popular. The Brahman and the Sudra were placed on the same footing; sacred knowledge was thrown open to the common man by rendering religious texts into Assamese. In place of ritualism was substituted 'Kirtana' form of worship; monotheism was introduced in place of worship of many gods. At the instance of the opposition, the religious rebel, Sankaradeva was brought before the Ahom monarch Suhungmung for trial; the saint acquitted himself well and was let off with honour by the king. Hostility continued. At the request of Madhavadeva, Sankaradeva had to go underground; but his son-in-law, Hari Bhuya was arrested, taken to the capital, Garhgaon, and beheaded; Madhava was kept under detention for about nine months and later released.

39. Upendra Chandra Lekharu, *Katha-Guru-Carita*, pp. 20-34.

40. *Ibid*, pp. 66-99.

Sankara and his followers left the Ahom kingdom for the Koch State. They settled at Barpeta. The creed began to thrive and the order began to swell. The rich merchant Bhavananda (Narayana Thakura), a Muslim tailor, Candsai (Cand Khan)⁴¹, some Brahmans like Damodaradeva and some officers of State, amongst others, joined Sankara. For the eighteen or twenty years of his life, his Sattrā at Patbausi (Barpeta) became the centre of dissemination of the new light that Bhakti brought. He made a second pilgrimage to Puri for six months. He was all along busy writing books that were to be the gospel of the new faith. His prestige made Brahmans in Koch kingdom also jealous. There was some persecution of the Vaisnavas. Sankara came to Narnarayana's court and engaged in a battle of arguments with Brahman controversialists of the capital; the triumph was his. The king and the saint became permanent friends. The Vaisnavas now felt secure and filled the land with their holy music. Sankara's "soul and his message of love have permeated into the national consciousness and the very being of the people. His name is ever on his nation's lips, and his music in the country's heart"⁴².

Sankara Deva nominated Madhavadeva as his successor to hold charge of the order⁴³. Madhavadeva set up his Sattrā at Sundaridiya (Barpeta). He wrote his chief work, 'Namaghosa' here. He erected a temple for the purpose of dramatic performances, but this grew into the Barpeta Sattrā. Hostile people were busy all the time and Madhavadeva had to move out and had no rest till at last the profundity of his learning impressed king Lakshmi Narayana of Koch Behar so much that he declared the new faith, the State religion of Koch Behar. Sankardeva delegated to his Brahman follower, Damodardeva the power of administering ordination, as this was considered expedient in the

41. Also known as Kabir Gosain or Kabir of Assam. S. K. Bhuyan, 'Assam in the Eighteenth Century', *Assam Review*, May, 1929, pp. 313-315.

42. M. Neog, 'The Vaisnava Renaissance in Assam', *Aspects of the Heritage of Assam*, p. 34.

43. Maniram Dewan, (MS) *Buranji Viveka-Ratna* (D.H.A.S. No. 272), f. 60b.

case of Brahman neophytes. Damodara seceded from the main order, however, hostility pursued him also ; and he went to Koch Behar capital where he built himself the Vaikunthapur-Sattra. Another dissenter was Harideva. Only a few Sattras of his followers are confined to the present Kamrup District. Sankaradeva's family priest and friend, Ramarama remained loyal and the family springing from Ramarama supplied Patbausi and Barpeta Sattras with superiors.

Madhavadeva sent out holy men as apostles of the Bhakti faith. The chief among them were Gopaladeva (Vamsigopala). They and their deputies established Sattras mostly in Asama i.e., the Ahom kingdom ; and some of their Sattras were very rich and claimed large following. Madhava's sister's son, Ramacarana and Mathuradasa were placed in charge of Sundaridiya and Barpeta Sattras. Sankaradeva's grandsons, Purusottama and Caturbhuja and Caturbhuja's wife, Kanaklata appointed their deputies, who organised Sattras at various places ; and these Sattras looked up for inspiration to Bardowa, the birth place of the great Master. Damodaradeva's three nominees stayed in Sattras in Kamrupa. Vanmalideva, a Brahmn monk of Vaikunthapur Sattra, migrated to the east and established a powerful Sattra (Dakhinpat) under the patronage of the ruling Ahom king. Persons connected with Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva set up some Sattras. Some of the Sattras set up as above branched off in course of time into petty establishments.

Thus the three Assamese States in eastern India, namely, Asama, Kamrupa and Koch Behar, were covered by the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century with a net work of these Vaisnava establishments, and almost the whole population was now divided amongst them. Some of the adherents of the Vaisnava order have made serious departures from the original tenets of the faith or have relapsed into heterogeneous doctrines discarded by the gurus. Others again have carried the puritanic zeal of the new faith very far indeed. The followers of Gopaladeva formed into a school characterised by catholicity and democratic outlook and freedom from tyranny of creeds. It particularly thrived and acquired large followings in the north-eastern parts of Assam with their

Tibeto-Burman population, and reclaimed large numbers of people from animistic practices. "The followers of the Nowamara or Mayamara Mahanta within Gopaladeva's order rose in revolt as one man against royal oppression (1769) and succeeded in subverting Ahom power for a time"⁴⁴. Gopaladeva of Bhabanipur, deputed by Madhavadeva, came to Eastern Assam or Upper Assam which was governed by the Ahoms. He spread the message of the Bhagavata among the Ahoms, Morans, Kacharis, and Chutiyas, in addition to Brahmans, Kayasthas and Kalitas. Twelve Sattras were established under the auspices of Gopaladeva, six presided over by Sudra Mahantas and six by Brahman Mahantas. On Madhavadeva's death there were differences of opinion between his followers of the Brahmanical and of the Sudra orders. Bangsi-gopaldeva, a leading Brahman Vaisnava preacher founded two Sattras in Upper Assam, named Garamur and Kuruabahi. These together with Auniati and Dakhinpat were known as "Bamunia Sattras" as opposed to the twelve Sattras established under the authority of Gopaldeva and the twentyfour Sattras founded by Sankaradeva's two grandsons.

The Dihing Satra and the Mayamara Satra were the most prominent of the six Sudra monasteries of Upper Assam associated with Gopaladeva. These Sattras became extremely popular as they admitted converts from non-Aryan tribes. They had amongst their disciples Brahmans, Kayasthas, Kalitas, Kacharis, Ahoms, Kaivartas and Brittials and also Chutiyas and Morans and all disciples were placed on the same footing. They were run on democratic lines and therefore, could draw new converts to their fold in ever-increasing number. In course of time the Dihing and the Mayamara Sattras grew to be strongholds of Sudra Vaisnavism in Upper Assam as opposed to the Brahmanical Monasteries. The Sattras of the Kala-Samhati order, including the Dihing and the Mayamara Sattras had their distinctive features. Their procedure of initiation, the relationship between the disciples and their Gurus and between co-disciples

44. M. Neog, 'The Vaisnava Renaissance in Assam', Aspects of the Heritage of Assam, p. 36.

were some what different from those in other monasteries. The hymns used in Kala-Samhati Sattras varied from Sattras to Sattras ; the original ones were composed by Sankaradeva, Madhabdeva and Gopaldeva but additional hymns were composed by the pontiffs. The Mahantas were regarded as supermen and they appropriated all the honours due to human beings.

Each Kala-Samhati Sattras enjoyed autonomy and could develop on distinct lines within the general tenets of the Samhati. The independent growth of the Mayamara Sattras was characteristic. Amongst the following of the Mayamara Sattras were also the Chutiyas, and a very considerable number of Morans. The Morans were the earliest disciples of the Mayamara Sattras, as Aniruddhadeva first preached amongst them from his monastery at Tengapani in the heart of the Matak country. Living in this compact and homogeneous territory comprising about 1,800 square miles, the Morans found it easier to organise a mass movement than was possible for the scattered disciples of any other Gossain. The Mayamara Mahanta ministering in a territory like this peopled by his own disciples found himself in the position of a temporal lord which he had to retain by being more democratic in his dealings with them. The Morans rewarded the liberal views of the Mahanta by placing implicit faith in him and considering him the only object of veneration. They refused to bow their heads before any object, not even before the king. The Mahanta's disciples grew in number, and were found outside the Matak country, and the Guru became prosperous and wealthy. The inventory of the Mahanta's property in the reign of Rajeswar Singha has been given as follows : "Several wicker barrels loaded with gold and silver, ten to twelve thousand Bhakats or monks, eight to ten thousand attendants and maids, ten to twelve khats or estates, and four to five thousand buffaloes."

The message of the Kala-Samhati Sattras reached the very masses of the Assamese nation. Those castes which are now denominated as 'depressed' were freely admitted into the fold of these Sattras, and they gradually imbibed refined and enlightened ways of living. In other parts of India, the humiliation to which these unfortunates were subjected, drove them to the

bosom of other religions ; in Assam the liberal policy of the Kala-Samhati Sattras endowed them with a sense of self-respect and individual value. These Sattras made a great appeal to the unsophisticated Assamese people and thus they commanded unprecedented popularity. Speaking of the Dihing Sattra and the Mayamara Sattra, Dr. S. K. Bhuyan says that "On account of the characteristic physical vigour of the large majority of disciples of the two Sattras they were likely to make a more enterprising band of soldiers than the comparatively ease-loving and refined followers of the other Gosains", as was actually proved on the outbreak of the Moamaria insurrection.⁴⁵

Sankaradeva's main articles of faith were Satsanga (the assembly of bhaktas as a means of bhakti), Ekasarana (Shelter in one God, Visnu-Krishna alone) and Nama (Kirtana or prayer, as the main form of devotion) and he accepted these from Bhagavata-purana, the Bhagavad Gita and the Sahasra-Nama section of the Padma Purana. The writings of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva and few other works approved by them or the order provide the gospel of the faith and have canonical authority. Among Sanskrit works, the Bhagvata-purana and Bhagavad Gita are used in ceremonial readings.

Sankaradeva's creed is popularly known as Mahapurusiya Dharma. The official name of the creed is Ekasarana Nama Dharma. The worship of one God is enjoined and also the utterance of the holy names of the Lord. The Bhakta is not to cast either adoring or hateful glances on the idols of other gods ; nor should he visit places of their worship. This religion is a religion of implicit love and faith, Bhakti. The ideal Bhakta's love of God should ask for no return, not even salvation. Of the eight modes of bhakti (Sravana, Kirtana, Smarana, Pada-sevana, Arcana, Vandana, Dasya, Sakhya, Atmanivedana), Sravana and Kirtana, accessible to the highest and lowest alike are considered sufficient as the religious endeavour of man towards the highest spiritual consummation. Sankaradeva realised that God lived broadcast in the hearts of all creatures ; if we miss this truth, we try to seek him outside. Idol

45. S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, pp. 194-197.

worship does not play any important part in Sankaradeva's system ; a novice may worship Visnu-Krishna in an image but the most palpable image of God is his ardent Bhakta whose company should be always sought.

In Sattras prayer services are held, divided into day-long programme of three to fourteen parts, each called a prasanga or nam-prasanga. These are held in the congregation hall (Kirtana-grha, Namghar), where the object of veneration is the 'Guru-Asana' with some works of the Masters in ancient folios. The secret formula imparted by the Superior to the novice at the time of initiation into Bhakti consists of four names of the Lord : Rama-Krishna, Hari-Narayana. Four 'Vastus' are real : 'Nama', 'Deva', 'Guru' and 'Bhakta'. Of the different attitudes of Bhakti, Sankaradeva advocated 'Dasya' and not 'madhurya', 'Sakhya', or Vatsalya'. The votary should consider himself to be the servant of God and God to be his Master. The Radha-Krishna cult is not recognised in this system of Vaisnavism.

Sankaradeva was a Sudra but accepted Brahmans as disciples. In Sankaradeva's system, there were Brahman disciples of Sudra Mahantas and the so-called 'untouchables' in the following of Brahman Mahantas. There were instances of Brahmans occupying Superiorship of Sattras in succession to Sudra Superiors. No one was considered unfit for initiation into the Bhakti cult on grounds of caste. Amongst the disciples of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva were Candsai and Jayahari, Mussalmans ; Govinda, a Garo ; Jayananda, a Bhutiya ; Madhava of Jayanti of the Hira or potters' profession ; Srirama, a Kaivarta ; and Damodara, a Baniya. Sriramadeva administered ordination to Nagas. Ahoms, Koches, Miris, Kacharis, Morans and other tribes were freely converted. The catholic outlook of Sankaradeva's religion could unite different peoples into one spiritual fraternity and help evolve a great cultural synthesis in the country.

Sankaradeva was a house-holder ; Madhavadeva was a celibate. One need not give up the world to find God, the Master thought. Personal life of Madhavadeva, however, brought into being an order of ascetics (Kevaliya) in the Sattras where both married persons and monks could live as divines or as ordinary residents. There was no order of nuns. There were, of course, instances of women holding the position of superiors.

Sankaradeva's grand-daughter-in-law, Kanaklata made a definite valuable contribution to the growth of the Sattra system. She organised the Bardowa group of Sattras and appointed twelve deputies, all men, as heads of Sattras.

Sankaradeva combined and tempered the severe monistic idealism of Advaita with the emotionalism of Bhakti. In Sankaradeva's system of thought 'Mayavada' persists and goes along with 'Bhakti'. The ideal Bhakta should not seek 'Nirvana' or other forms of Moksa but should beseech the Lord to bestow on him ever-present and never-failing Bhakti. With the inculcation of Vaisnavism upon the people of Assam, the Vedanta was imbued into the general consciousness of the people and became a common property.⁴⁶

Sankaradeva could not abolish caste divisions but the rigours of the caste system were toned down and relaxed by his Bhakti movement. In Vaisnava congregations all members of the fraternity were equal. Irrespective of social standing and caste, capable people could conduct prayer services and reading of sacred texts. Men of any caste could distribute the offering to the deity. People flocked round Sankaradeva and other divines to listen to the message of love and meet as equal sons of God. Sankaradeva initiated a great change in social psychology and cleaning of hearts. Personal cleanliness, general 'Sadachar' or good conduct and correct social behaviour were encouraged. A person admitted to the faith had to give up unclean ways—the taking of intoxicants, keeping of unclean animals and birds, cultivation of poppy for opium. Though killing of animals was deprecated, monks and lay disciples could take fish and meat. Sankaradeva held up an ideal of balanced life, not of indulgence and license, but, at the same time, not of renunciation and self-mortification. Exclusion of Radha from the worship and of women from the quiet life of the Sattras helped save the order of Sankaradeva from possible degradations.

The Sattras played a great role in the social life of the people. The Ahom kings and nobles who accepted Vaisnavism thereby strengthened the Sattras as a great social force. The

46. M. Neog, 'The Vaisnava Renaissance in Assam', *Aspects of the Heritage of Assam*, p. 42.

Hindu Assamese had now two unavoidable affiliations, temporal allegiance to the State and the king and spiritual allegiance to the religion and the Guru. Hence the popular saying, 'Rajar Khajana Gurur Kar'—'rent for the lands to the king, and holy tax to the Guru' (in a Sattra). People acquired a new dignity of personality and a balanced view of life and became God-fearing and moral beings. Devotees appreciated that they were all equals and must be above the evils of caste prejudices and social stratification; the spirit of toleration tended gradually to be pervasive in Assamese society. Vaisnavism became a vital, unifying force. During the Moamaria disturbances, whereas the royolist camp suffered from frequent land-slides, betrayals and treachery, the Mayamara Vaisnava rebels acted as one man, inspired by crusading zeal and unflinching devotion to the Guru and his righteous cause.

Sattras : Each Sattra consisted of Satradhikar, Bhakats and Sisyas. The head of the Satra was known as Adhikar. He was the religious head and spiritual guide of all under his care. He initiated disciples and conducted religious functions. Bhaktas were devotees who held ecclesiastical office under the Sattra or led intensely devotional life within the campus of the Sattra, remaining celibates throughout life. In purely monastic Sattras celibacy was strictly observed. Celibate devotees were known as Kevaliya bhakats. The celibates were recruited in their teens by elderly celibates and remained as apprentices under them for a few years to learn the manners, customs and secrets of the cult. The lay devotees or disciples of a Sattra, called Sisyas, lived in scattered villages, leading the life of house-holders. Every Assamese Vaisnava family is affiliated to one or the other of the five hundred and odd Sattras of Assam.

The Sattra institution began with Sankaradeva. He laid the foundation, the superstructure was raised gradually thereafter. Madhava Deva and Damodardeva contributed a great deal towards giving a definite shape to the structural and organisational aspects of the Satra institution. Madhavadeva reconstructed the Barpeta Satra and divided prayer services into fourteen units. Damodardeva attached definite functions to different individuals and fixed the procedure of daily religious service in his Satra. The Satra institution took a monastic turn in the hands of Vamsigopaldev who introduced changes in his Kalabari Satra

in eastern Assam towards the third decade of the seventeenth century. His Satra at Kuruwabahi provided rooms for five hundred celibate devotees. The next stage in the growth of the Satra institution was reached with the extension of royal patronage to all important Satras. The successive Ahom kings placed at the disposal of different Satras certain number of persons to act as paiks and granted lands free of charge. This act of royal patronage placed many Satras on a sound economic footing. Further, to look into the affairs of Satras and to keep the court well-informed of situations at different Satras, an officer known as Satriya Barua was appointed. Thus some sort of contact developed between the royal court and the Satras.⁴⁷

The primary functions of the Sattras were propagation of monotheistic Vaisnavism, initiation of disciples, provision of ethico-devotional codes and rules of conduct for neophytes and holding of religious festivals. Sattras were guardians of religion and morality and kept close watch over disciples. The heads of Satras maintained agents at different localities and paid personal visits and thereby tried to elevate the moral and spiritual standards of the villages.

The Satras helped maintenance of harmonious social relations and development of spirit of cooperation amongst villagers and provided facilities for dissemination of ancient learning. They tried many cases relating to social matters and dispensed justice on social and religious controversies. The income of Satras was from lands granted by the kings and from religious tithes contributed by disciples and from occasional donations and subscriptions from disciples and devotees. All important Satras possessed land-grants ranging from a few acres to several thousand acres. Payment of 'Guru-kar' was considered as indispensable as payment of government revenue. The Adhikar, in consultation with the senior devotees, appointed functionaries of different gradations and rank from amongst the disciples to manage different departments of the Satra. A set of functionaries were selected from amongst the villagers and they enabled maintenance of contacts between the Satra and the disciples of

47. S. N. Sarma, 'The Satra Institution of Assam', Aspects of the Heritage of Assam, p. 52.

the far-flung villages. Generally the functionaries were nominated by the head, but in some Satras, the system of election was in vogue. The Satra property was either vested in the chief idol of the deity of the Satra or collectively in the community of devotees of the Satra or as was very usual, in certain families.

The Satra institution played an important role not only in the sphere of religion but in other fields also. It enriched Assamese life socially and educationally and contributed a great deal to the realm of literature and art. The upliftment of the backward classes was one of its very important social contributions. The so-called untouchables and backward classes were freely initiated into Vaisnavism. Though interdining and intermarriage were not prescribed, the spiritual bond of fellowship fostered by the atmosphere of freedom and equality, generated by the Satras, considerably reduced the rigours of caste distinctions. The institution rendered unique services to some of the tribes of Assam. The Koches, the Morans, the Chutiyas, the Ahoms and the Kacharis were brought within the fold of Vaisnavism ; missionary activities were conducted amongst the Miris, the Nagas and the Aitonyas. Sankardeva in his translation of the Bhagavata-Purana referred to the tribes of Assam coming under the liberating influence of Vaisnavism. Aniruddha Deva confined his proselytising activities to the north-eastern region of Assam, peopled mainly by the Chutiyas, the Morans and other indigenous non-Aryan tribes. The Kala Samhati Satras, Mayamara, Dihing, Ceca, Budbari, Bareghar, Katanipar, were noted for missionary activities amongst the backward and tribal population.

The Satra institution contributed considerably to the spread of learning and education in medieval Assam. All principal Satras used to maintain Sanskrit tols and services of reputed scholars were utilised to run these tols. A Satra was a religious centre, a school and a library also. Existing books were preserved with care ; books were imported from other places of India. Books used to be carefully and laboriously copied, so that worn-out ones could be replaced by new copies. The Satras contributed considerably to the development of literature. Devotional lyrics, dramas and religious Kavyas were composed ; dramatic performances were regularly held to entertain and

enlighten the masses. It became a custom with every Satradhikar to perform a play, composed by him, on his accession to Superiorship. Biographies of Saints (Carit-puthis) and Satra Chronicles (Satra-Vamsawalis) were important literary-cum-historical contributions of Satras.

Satras developed a school of classical dance and music in Assam. It was entirely religious in outlook and motive. The art of wood and ivory-carving was practised in Satras. Figures of deities and masks were carved out of wood and little doll-like figures of gods and goddesses were beautifully carved out of ivory by artisans of some Satras. The epics and the puranas were generally illustrated and pictures had all combination of colours. In the religious atmosphere of the Satras, the art of book illustration by means of miniature was assiduously developed by unknown painters. The artists were more concerned with the natural unfolding of illustrated narratives than with mere technical skill in execution of the illustrations. The cultural life of Assam since the sixteenth century largely centred round the Vaisnava movement and the Satra Institution.⁴⁸

Village Namghar : The institution of the village Namghar was the decentralised replica of the Satra. The Namghar was the centre of village activities. It was the village club and theatre. It exercised a close spiritual control over all members of the village community and kept them on the right track and prevented them going astray. This was like a village parliament run on democratic lines. It was the village court ; trials of disputes and crimes were held in it ; and the judgement pronounced by the elders of the village could not be disregarded ; an ex-communication could be decreed and nothing could be dreaded more than ostracism. Only difficult cases were referred to the Superior of the Satra or to the Government judiciary. Through the twin institutions of Satra and Namghar Assamese society was neatly organised ; the moral tone of the people became high. The Cultural Renaissance initiated by Sankaradeva wrought itself into fulfilment in many ways and marked out a definite place for Assam in the cultural map of India.

48. S. N. Sarma, 'The Satra Institution of Assam', Aspects of the Heritage of Assam, p. 55.

Section III

EDUCATION

Limited Formal Education : During the Ahom age, though the vaidik educational system lingered on, that was in effect restricted to the Brahmans or the nobility, and the masses usually had not much access to the benefits of education in schools run by Gurus, e.g., 'tols' etc. The nobles, members of the king's family, the Gossains and Brahmans and members of the priestly class could afford education in tols or at home for their wards ; the 'Karis', the 'Paiks', the labourers could not usually have the advantage of formal education. In the tols the medium of instruction was Sanskrit and the subjects taught were Dharma Shastras, Niti Shastras, Puranas and studies connected with the priestly function. For the members of the royal family and for members of the Ahom nobility and bureaucracy, study of history or Buranjis was indispensable. Among the Ahom priests, instruction in Ahom religious scriptures and Buranjis, was in vogue from generation to generation.

People's Education : Though arrangements on modern lines for imparting education was generally absent, education in different branches spread through media and methods peculiar and adapted to the age. To mention only a few, the tols, Sattras, Namghars ; the Bhawanas, dances, music ; painting, art, architecture, sculpture ; the literature, folk-literature ; folk-music, folk-dances ; Vanchanavalis of Dak Mahapurusa, proverbs ; the khel system, cottage industries ; knowledge of medicine, of religion and ethics, tantras and mantras ; art of warfare and artisans' arts and so on, were the characteristic media that simultaneously conserved and embodied knowledge and experience and accomplishments of the ages in different fields and helped dissemination and promotion thereof in the country and created popular learning, interest and enthusiasm therein. Audio-visual education and knowing by actual working were more important and more effective for the generality of the people than mere book knowledge of the formal type. Basic education, in other words, was

more natural and in tune with the circumstances and surroundings of the age.

Military Education : Wars and conflicts account for a considerable part of the history of the period. Though there was no special institution for military training, before wars, military training used to be imparted. King Chakradhvaj Singha attended the Training Camp set up for preparatory training for the armed forces and personally supervised and directed the training before the battle of Saraighat.¹ The 'Hiloidari Konwarhs'² were imparted training related to musketry, cannonry, use of gunpowder and ammunition etc. Horses and elephants used to be trained for use in war.

The one work that was most important for the high class Ahoms, Chamuwas, was to go to war for the defence of the country and to show proficiency in Warfare, which was followed by royal recognition, rewards from the king and grants of lands or office. This accounted for their keen desire to be efficient warriors, that became evident from childhood and at home they learnt archery, Swordsmanship, handling of spears etc., from father to son. Home in reality was the Training centre. It was compulsory for the youngmen of the royal family to take military training. In fact in the Ahom administrative system, there was no branch that was purely civilian and non-military. All Officers and 'paiks' were bound to go to war when required and therefore had to undergo a course of military training.³

Naval Training : The Navy was very powerful ; at Garhgaon and Gauhati there were a number of 'Naoshals' or naval establishments where there were numerous boats and training in

-
1. S. K. Bhuyan, Lachit Bar Phukan and His Times, pp. 15-ff.
 2. i.e., 'the Musketeer Princes'.
 3. 'Nitalatankur', a treatise on politics and warfare was compiled by Bagis Sarma (of late 18th or early 19th century) under the patronage of Sarat Chandra Duara Phukan who must have been an Ahom Official. This indicates the importance attached to knowledge about administrative and Military affairs even in the decadent period of Ahom rule. Sarat Chandra Goswami and Joy Krishna Misra, Nitalatankur, Introduction, pp. V-XI.

naval warfare used to be imparted. The victory at the naval battle of Saraighat could be possible because of preparatory training.

Training in Medicine and Veterinary Science : There were arrangements for treatment of human beings as well as animals and birds. There were many 'Bej' or medicine men (or doctors) who were maintained by the king by grant of land, attendants etc. These 'Bej' could treat patients in the royal household as also amongst subjects. Herbal medicines, chemicals, tantra-mantras (charms and incantations) were used for treatment and related training could be had only at the residence of the 'Bej' or 'Oja' and those interested had to go to the 'Bej's' house for learning medicine and had to pay high fees for the same. Initially the students had to learn how to identify and collect medicinal herbs from jungles and bushes, combination and preparation of medicines and recognition of symptoms of diseases. The training ended at a pretty late stage with reading of relevant medical treatises. That medical Science was well-developed can be appreciated from the numerous medical treatises of the period still extant. Only very trust-worthy 'Bejs' were attached to the royal household and to supervise their work was appointed an officer called Bejbarua.

Elephants, Horses and Hawks etc., were scientifically treated for different ailments. Treatises on treatment of diseases of hawks, of elephants ('Hastividyarnava'), of horses ('Ghora Nidan') are illuminating in this connection.

The Imparting of skill in Cottage Industries : The Cottage industries of Assam had reputation from early times. Architecture and sculpture, etc., also developed considerably. Learning in these arts was handed down from generation to generation. During King Pratap Singha's reign Momai Tamuli Barbarua reorganised the villages and set up separate classes of potters, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, silversmiths, etc., knowledge in their respective arts became hereditary. The Khel (Guild) system with diverse Khels or Guilds of Paiks, e.g., Japisajiya, Jathipatiya, Dhenuchocha, Shilakuti, Khanikar and so on, also made professional skill in different Cottage industries hereditary amongst the members of the respective guilds and their successors.

Changrung Phukan was in-charge of architectural work, e.g., planning and making of temples, palaces, 'Maidams (Burial Vaults or Mounds)', bridges, etc. Not book knowledge but knowledge through work and practice was most emphasised for artisans' efficiency and skill.

Learning of Language : Knowledge of Buranjis : The Ahoms considered knowledge of Buranjis indispensable. Every respectable Ahom considered writing and preservation of Buranjis to be a sacred duty. Naturally the Ahoms had keen interest in the study of history. Learning of language which only could facilitate study of Buranjis, was also therefore looked upon as a part of duty. During Chaklang or Ahom marriage ceremonies there was the practice of reciting Buranjis and so whether by reading or by listening to recitation, the Ahoms, learnt history. In the schools run by Ahom Pandits, Buranjis used to be taught. Many Buranjis were written during the Ahom period.

Ahom Language : With the adoption of Assamese by the rulers, the use and culture of the Ahom language no doubt diminished, but the same continued to be learnt and used till the end of the Ahom rule. Ahom Pandits were employed to teach 'Ahom'. The Chief Pandit for service to the State was granted 7,000 puras of land and 20 attendants ; the Pali Pandits or subordinate Pandits were also allowed 6 puras of land and 2 paiks each. There were two officers, Chiring Phukan and Bar Chiring Barua who had the charge of subjects like teaching of the Ahom language, promotion of study of Buranjis and writing of books in Ahom and their preservation etc.. After learning the Ahom alphabets, the students had to learn grammar and commit the same to memory before passing on to the reading of books and ultimately to the study of Ahom religious lore and Buranjis. Sons of almost all respectable Ahoms and particularly of Deodhais, Mohans and Bailungs of the Ahom priestly class used to be trained in the Ahom language.

Education among Women : There is evidence of limited education among women. Chauching Kunwari was an enlightened, educated lady. According to her advice, the 'Garh' of Garhgaon was made and the office of Barpatra Gohain was created. According to Buranjis, she had superiority both in

quality and beauty and she could write 'Ahom' even with the help of her toes. Because they could pick up knowledge about political affairs, a few Ahom ladies could substantially help in and even control the management of State affairs. The three Queens of Siva Singha may be mentioned in this connection. Phuleswari Kunwari set up a school in the capital to teach ladies spinning and weaving. Rani Ambika, Phuleswari Kunwari, Promoda Kumari were lovers of education and hence encouraged literary productions by liberal patronage.

Sanskrit Learning : The Ahom kings adopted Assamese. They also encouraged Sanskrit learning in the land. They considered education in Sanskrit indispensable to the growth and development of Assamese language and culture. They had to establish and Sanskrit Pandits settled with endowments of land. Schools exclusively for teaching the Sanskrit language were set up at different places. Sanskrit schools existed from the sixteenth century onwards at places like Bardowa, Banduka, Sri-Hati on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, Vyasakuchi, Hajo, Ratnapura etc. Among the subjects taught were the four Vedas, the fourteen Sastras, the eighteen Puranas, the Mahabharata, the sixteen Vyakaranas, the eighteen Kavyas, the eighteen Kosas and Arthasastra, besides Yoga-Sastra and texts on Kaithili or Mathematics. For advanced studies, Assamese Students used to go to Mithila (Darbhanga), Santipur, Navadwip and Banaras.⁴

During Rudra Singha's reign, Brahmin boys were sent to Navadwip, Kashi (Benaras) etc., for learning Sanskrit. Lakshmi Singha before becoming king, had education in the Tol of a Pandit named Ramananda. King Rudra Singha had 'Bhaswati' (Jyotish Shastra) translated from Sanskrit to Assamese by Kaviraj Chakravarty to enable education of the princes. Ramchandra Barpatra could translate Jogini Tantra into Assamese because he had adequate Sanskrit education. Considering the number of books translated from Sanskrit to Assamese during the Ahom period, Sanskrit learning can be said to have developed fairly in the country during that period. True, higher learning

4. S. K. Chatterji, The Place of Assam in the History and Civilisation of India, pp. 73-75.

in Sanskrit was generally confined to highly educated Hindus, particularly Brahmans.

Instruction in Ethics and Religion : Instruction in religion and ethics was imparted through the Sattras and the Namghars. The kings extended patronage to the Sattras and this enabled them to function effectively through the Namghars as agencies for dissemination of knowledge of religious lore and principles. They had tremendous educative value and extensive moral influence over the masses. The Satradhikars used to visit villages and explained religious Shastras to their vast bodies of disciples. The village Gaonburhas (headmen) were expected to set standards of good conduct in the villages. The Ahom priests also, Deodhais, Mohans and Bailungs, preached Ahom codes of conduct. King Kamaleswar Singha's mother had 'Hitopadesa' translated into Assamese by a Brahman poet called Bagis to facilitate knowledge and practice of moral codes.⁵

Though there was no State-maintained system of regular public education for the masses in consonance with modern ideas, popular education or folk education, though not of the formal type, had a wide sweep covering vast numbers and diverse subjects. Tremendous was the impact of varied and rich Vaisnava literature on popular learning. Without the aid of a slate and a pencil, Bhavanipuria Gopala Ata made Laksmana Ojha remember the entire Book XI of the Bhagavata.⁶ Reference may be made to an arrangement made by an old couple according to which the wife managed the house-hold duties and the husband daily attended the Nama-kirtana party held by Gopala Ata and his disciples during the day and in the evening recited the verses learnt during the kirtana to his wife.⁷ The Bhawanas served as most powerful educational media. There could be found people who could not, for example, read 'Rukmini-Haran', but could recite the same. The neo-Vaisnavite movement and its rich gifts to the nation worked wonders in the domain of bringing education, religious and ethical, to the very door steps

5. Sarat Chandra Goswami and Joy Krishna Misra, 'Nitala-tankur', Introduction, pp. VII-VIII.

6. Upendra Chandra Lekharu, *Katha Guru Carita*, p. 270.

7. *Ibid*, pp. 331-ff.

of the masses of people in an age when literacy was confined to the privileged, and learning was essentially aristocratic.⁸

Higher Learning : Higher learning, though confined to classes, yet was not inconsiderable, because of Tols run by Sanskrit Pandits and Schools run by Ahom Pandits. That a continuous flow of a good number of learned men could be maintained, is clearly proved by the great number of books and treatises written, compiled or translated on diverse subjects during the period under review.

8. S. K. Bhuyan, *Assamese Literature, Ancient and Modern*, pp. 2-ff.

Chapter VI

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Section I

ASSAMESE LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Assamese Language—its Origin and Development : Assamese language developed out of the Sanskrit language. Its direct ancestor was Magadhi Apabhramsa. Grierson says that Magadhi was the principal dialect which corresponded to the Eastern Prakrit. East of Magadhi was spoken Prachya Apabhramsa. It spread to the south and south-east and here became the parent of modern Bengali. “Besides, spreading southward Prachya Apabhramsa also spread to the East keeping north of the Ganges and reached the Valley of Assam where it is represented by Assamese.” Each of the three descendants of Magadhi Apabhramsa, namely, Oriya, Bengali, and Assamese, is equally directly connected with the common immediate parent.¹ Dr. S. K. Chatterji also classified Eastern Apabhramsa into four dialect groups (1) Radha dialects which comprehend western Bengali which gives standard Bengali colloquial and Oriya in the south-west. (2) Varendra dialects of North Central Bengal (3) Vanga dialects comprehend the dialects of East Bengal and (4) Kamarupa dialects which comprehend Assamese and the dialects of North Bengal.² From Hieuen Tsang’s account about the language spoken in Kamrupa in the first half of the 7th Century A.D., it is known that by the 7th Century A.D., the Indo-Aryan language had penetrated into Assam and that this Aryan language spoken in the State differed to a certain extent from the Magadhi dialects then current in Mid-India. According to

-
1. G. A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. I, P.I.T. pp. 125-ff ; B. Kakati, *Aspects of Early Assamese Literature*, pp. 2-ff ; *Assamese, its Formation and Development*, p. 6.
 2. S. K. Chatterji, *Origin and Development of the Bengali Language*, 1926, Vol. I, p. 140.

Dr. Chatterji, in the middle of the 7th Century, as the testimony of Hieuen Tsang would seem to suggest, "there was one language spoken in Bihar and Bengal; only in Assam there was a distinction." Specimens of the Assamese language in its formative period can be found in place-names and proper-names occurring in old inscriptions and in the songs and aphorisms composed by the Buddhist Siddhacharyas between the 8th and 12th centuries A.D. and known as Charyas and Dohas ('Hajar Bacharer Purana Bangla Bhasai Baudha Gan o Doha' edited by M. M. Haraprasad Sastri).

The people of Assam were a mixture of different races speaking various languages like Austric or Mon-Khmer (Khasi), Sino-Tibetan (Bodo, Kachari), Tai, or Ahom. Naturally these languages greatly influenced Assamese. Dr. Kakati traces Austric elements in Assamese and holds that there are words in Assamese which have been taken over from the Austric speakers. The Bodo rule and the Ahom rule in Assam also led to the enrichment of Assamese with vocables from these languages.³

The history of the Assamese Language may be broadly divided into three periods : (1) Early Assamese—from the fourteenth to the end of the sixteenth century. This period may be subdivided into (a) the Pre-Vaishnavite and (b) the Vaishnavite Sub-periods. To the pre-Vaishnavite sub-period belonged Hema Sarasvati, Harihara Vipra, Kaviratna Sarasvati, Rudra Kandali, Madhava Kandali. Sankaradeva, the great Vaishnavite reformer and his followers embellished the Vaishnavite sub-period. Bhatta Deva's translations of the entire Bhagavad Gita and the Bhagavata Purana into Assamese Prose in about 1593, are specimens of early Assamese Prose-style. (2) Middle Assamese : From the Seventeenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century. This is the period of the Prose Chronicles of the Ahom court. In the Ahom court, historical chronicles were at first composed in Ahom language, but with the adoption of Assamese as the court language,

3. B. K. Barua, 'Assamese Language and Early Assamese Literature', *Aspects of the Heritage of Assam*, pp. 56-ff; B. Kakati, *Aspects of Early Assamese Literature*, pp. 9-14; *Assamese, its Formation and Development*, pp. 26-ff, 42-52.

the Buranjis began to be written in Assamese and in large number from the beginning of the Seventeenth century. (3) Modern Assamese : From the beginning of the nineteenth century till present times. With the publication of the Bible in Assamese prose by the American Baptist missionaries in 1819, the modern period began. The starting of the monthly periodical Arunodaya in 1846, and the publication of William Robinson's 'A Grammar of the Assamese Language' in 1839 and N. Brown's Assamese Grammar in 1848 were important landmarks in the modern period. The missionaries made Sibsagar their headquarters and used the dialect of Sibsagar for their literary purposes. Under their influence a set of native writers grew up and books and periodicals were being written in the language of eastern Assam, which became established as the literary language of the entire province.⁴

Assamese Literature : Pre-Sankarite Literature : The Assamese language was cultivated in the royal court of Durlabhanarayana, the king of Kamata who possibly ruled at the end of the 13th century A.D. The Kamata kings encouraged poets to write verses in Assamese. Both Harivara Vipra and Hem Saraswati who were contemporaries praised king Durlabhanarayana for his patronage. About the same period Madhava Kandali undertook the stupendous work of translating the whole of the Sanskrit epic Ramayana into Assamese verse. A great Sanskrit Scholar, Madhava Kandali was the court poet of king Mahamanikya and was known also as Kaviraja Kandali. Of vernacular translations of Valmiki Ramayana, Madhava Kandali's appears to be the earliest. Hindi, Bengli and Oriya versions appeared about a century and a half later. Sankara Deva who gave the greatest impetus to the cause of Assamese literature later, was greatly influenced by the legacy of rich and beautiful diction Madhav Kandali left in his Ramayana ; he held Madhava Kandali in high esteem. In his rendering, Madhava Kandali constantly kept in view two things—literary beauty and popular taste.

4. B. Kakati, Assamese, its Formation and Development, pp. 13-17 ; M. Neog, Asamiya Sahityar Ruparekha, pp. 13-19.

Neo-Vaisnava Literature : The Sankarite movement produced far-reaching religious and social effects and gave a great impetus to the advancement of learning, literature, art and culture. A distinguished Sanskrit Scholar, Sankaradeva (1449-1569) wrote mainly in Assamese. He was a versatile genius and wrote poetry, songs and plays. Sankara Deva drew inspiration chiefly from the Bhagavata, being the quintessence of the Vedanta philosophy and made an early attempt to translate it into Assamese. Sankaradeva was accused before the Koch king Nara-Narayana by the Brahmans as an ardent reader, teacher and translator of the Bhagavata.

Sankaradeva's next outstanding literary production was the 'Kirtana-ghosa' (Lyrics in Praise of God's Glory). Even today it is a perennial source of spiritual elation in Assam and is as fondly revered in Assam as is Ramacharita-Manasa of Tulsidas in Northern India. There is no Assamese Hindu home which does not possess a copy of Kirtana either in manuscript written on Sanchi-leaves or in print, no house which does not recite some of its verses on religious occasions and during illness.

Ankiya-Nats : Sankaradeva was a pioneer in two other branches of Assamese literature, Ankiya-nat, one-act play and Bargit, devotional song. These plays appealed to all and became natural food of spiritual and emotional life of the masses, carried education and culture to them and represented ancient lore in intelligible and enjoyable form, and led to the development of music and dancing. Sankaradeva was a preacher first and artist afterwards ; though first used mainly for promoting Vaisnavism, the Ankiya-nats came to exercise abiding influence on Assamese life.

The subject-matter of the Ankiya plays is mostly drawn from the Bhagavata Purana. The subject-matter of Rama-Vijaya is from the Ramayana. The Ankiya-play is a short one-act one ; therefore brevity has to be the characteristic feature of the play. The prose of the dramas of Sankaradeva and of the succeeding Vaisnava dramatists was an artificial diction, Maithili-mixed Assamese, which gave dignity to the dramatic characters and was at the same time generally understood. Scholars from Kamrupa

visited Mithila or Bihar, attracted by neo-Vaisnavism of Vidyapati and learnt Maithili, the language of the neo-Vaisnavite literature ; back home they composed songs in imitation of Vidyapati in their mother tongue, profusely mixed up with the Maithili vocabulary ; this led to the growth of a new literary dialect, the Brajabuli, 'the speech of Vraja', commonly used in the writings of the Vaisnava poets of Assam, a similar one having been used by the poets of Bengal and Orissa. The plays of Sankaradeva are interspersed with beautiful Sanskrit verses, remarkable for their sweetness and charm.

The genius of Sankaradeva found expression in drama. There were of course rudiments of dramatic entertainments in Assam in Deodhani-nach, Putala-Nach and Ojapali performances.

Ojapali Performance : In interpreting the Verse-narrative in an Oja-pali performance, the Oja or the leader used dramatic gestures, expressions and movements ; he paused and conversed with Daina-pali or his right hand companion for expounding the story and gave the entertainment the appearance of a dramatic dialogue. This pre-Vaisnavite medium of dance recitals was also used by Sankaradeva for his Kavyas ; but the master-mind as he was, he transformed and elevated this rudimentary play into a drama built on classical concept.

Cihna-Yatra : Sankaradeva organised a dramatic performance called Cihna-Yatra (or Pageant in Painted Scenes). The Cihna-Yatra was a pantomimic show with a scenic back-ground to emphasise the effect. The use of painted scenery by Sankaradeva in the fifteenth century was remarkably significant.

One-Act Dramas : This pageant show was later developed by Sankaradeva into regular plays with music, dance, and dialogue, styled Ankiya-Nat. The Vaisnava saint brought about a revolution in dramatic art and stage-craft in Assam. Ankiya-Nat means dramatic compositions in a single act depicting the articles of Vaisnava faith. These are also known as Nat, Nataka, Yatra, Nrita, and Anka. The Ankiya Nats follow to a certain extent the texts on Sanskrit dramatic theory ; there are the Nandi introduction, the role of the Sutradhara, performance of preliminaries (Purba ranga) and the use of Sanskrit verses etc.

Sutradhara : The Sutradhara is an integral part of the Ankiya Nat. The Sutradhara remains all along on the stage ; he is the producer and the running commentator. He dances with the orchestra, recites the nandi verse, introduces the characters, gives them directions, announces their exit and entrance, sings, dances, speaks, discourses on ethical and spiritual points of the plot ; he is a man of no mean talents, he is an actor, a trained musician and an accomplished dancer. The most artistic-minded man of the village only can be chosen for this role and he has to be trained from childhood in music, dancing and dramaturgy. There are no acts or scenes in an Ankiya play and changes of scenes are announced by Sutradhara's dialogue or orchestral singing.

Plethora of Songs : The Ankiya Nat is characteristically lyrical with a plethora of songs and dances. It is a 'lyrico-dramatic spectacle'. The dialogue is thin, though musical. Many situations, incidents are suggested by descriptive verses uttered by the Sutradhara ; minor incidents, feelings and sentiments are expressed through songs. The songs and verses are of special types called Ankar-git and Bhatima—in some plays Bargits are introduced. Each Ankiya-git has a dhuwa or refrain, a particular raga or melody, tala or time measure and 'māna' or rhythm. The various melodies used are : Ahira, Asowari, Bellowar, Bhupali, Dhanasri, Gauri, Gandhara, Deva Gandhara, Kau, Kalyana, Kanada, Kamoda, Kedara, Lalita Mallada, Maura or Mahura, Mahura-Dhanasiri, Nata, Nata-Mallada, Puravi, Ramagiri, Syama, Syamagada, Sri, Sri Gauri, Sri Gandhara, Sindhura, Suhai, Tuda, Tuda-Bhathiyali, Tuda-Vasanta, Varari, and Vasanta. The Bhatimas serve as epilogues and prologues. Some Bhatimas are panegyric in nature.

Nandi, Prarochana, Prastavana : Most of the Ankiya plays have nandi, prarochana and prastavana, as prescribed by Natya-Sastra. In earlier plays there are two nandi verses—one is benedictory and the other suggests the subject matter of the play. In later plays nandi verse in Sanskrit is replaced by a benedictory poem in Assamese. In the Ankiya Nat the nandi is recited by the Sutradhara. After nandi, the Sutradhara announces the subject matter in a Sanskrit verse accompanied by a long poem in Assamese called Bhatima. Then follows prastavana ; the Sutradhara

hears a celestial sound, and in the subsequent discussion with his companion or Sangi, the Sutradhara announces the names of the approaching personages.

Duta and Bahuwa : There are also the duta and the bahuwa who are outside the dramatic personnel but serve as a herald and a jester respectively. They explain interruptions in the progress of the play, announce change of scene and entrance of new characters etc. The Bahuwa further relieves the monotony and amuses the audience by comic skits and jokes.

Mukti-Mangal Bhatima : The play ends with a prayer in Assamese called mukti-mangal bhatima where the Sutradhara begs forgiveness of God for omissions or commissions in the management of the drama. In conclusion, the Sutradhara points the moral of the play and urges the audience to profit by it and to follow the path of righteousness.

Portrayals of Marriage, Battle, Love etc. : Some prohibitions against certain portrayals on the stage as enjoined by canons of Sanskrit dramaturgy are not observed in the Ankiya plays and scenes on marriage rites, battle, killing, amorous dalliances are elaborately represented on the stage. The dramatic devices of 'svagatam' or aside and 'apavritam' or whisper are excluded.

Dramatic Characters : The characters are not numerous ; much emphasis is laid on portraying the principal hero and heroine. Krishna depicted as a youngman or as a child is almost always the principal hero. The leading female characters are Rukmini, Satyabhama, Yasoda, Sita etc.

Dramas further Vaisnavism : The plays were written to further the cause of Vaisnavism and to create devotional sentiments in the audience. The effect is attained by narration, characterisation and through song, dance and dialogue. The dominant sentiments of Sankaradeva's plays are love and devotion, heroic and filial.

Bargits : The Bargits were far more poetical than the Kavyas and more passionate than the Akhyanas of kirtana. Sankaradeva composed a large number of Bargits, which became the most beautiful psalms in Assamese literature. Sankaradeva's Bargits dealt with religious experiences, philosophic reflections on the world and mortality, and poignant introspection of the

self ; speculated about the nature of God, His boundless compassion, the way of liberation ; exhorted men to 'Chant the name of Hari', 'to rest on the feet of Rama' and so forth. In Bargits Sankaradeva reached exalted heights. Here he blended philosophical thoughts and lyrical feelings and expressed the same in graceful language. The Bargits became rapidly popular ; a large number of Bargits were composed by later poets amongst whom were women.⁵

Madhavadeva, the favourite disciple of Sankaradeva, was the next outstanding figure in the Assamese Vaisnavite movement. The religious movement initiated by Sankaradeva, was carried forward by Madhavadeva who had force of intellect, strength of character and unflinching devotion to the cause. Madhavadeva's supreme achievement in Assamese hymnic literature was his *Namghosa* (or *Hajari Ghosa*-the book of a thousand couplets). This was widely read, memorised and freely quoted as scriptural text and became an enduring prop of Assamese Vaisnavism. *Namaghosa* contains hymns on repentance and entreaty, self-discipline and self-reproach, dedication and devotion to and faith in God and is universal in appeal. Madhavadeva's Bargits made him very popular. He was also a mellifluous singer ; some of his Bargits contain descriptions of Vrindaban with child Krishna at the focus.⁶

Next to the *Bhagavata*, the *Mahabharata* exercised very great influence on the Vaisnavite poets as this epic was also considered as a Vaisnavite scripture. The Vaisnava poets translated sections from the *Mahabharata* or adopted a story therefrom to inculcate devotion to Visnu or Krishna and to propagate and spread Vaisnavite ideals of renunciation, simple living, love toward all sentient beings, charity, piety, truthfulness, pilgrimage, and study of hagiography. Amongst the *Mahabharata* poets in Assamese, Kavi Rama Sarasvati was the foremost. Under the patronage of King Nara-Narayana, this popular poet and voluminous writer coordinated the literary activities of the contemporary poets. The translation of the *Mahabharata* gave impetus to the growth

5. M. Neog, *Asamiya Sahityar Rupa-Rekha*, pp. 84-101.

6. *Ibid*, pp. 102-111.

and popularity of Assamese literature. To the village people this was not only an entertaining Kavya but also an authoritative apocalyptic text.

Assam Vaisnavism placed emphasis on devotion and self-surrender ; it had therefore not much scope for development of doctrinal works in large number.⁷ The Vaisnava writers contributed to Assamese philosophical writings by making numerous commentaries on the Gita, both in prose and verse. Relevant verses from the Gita were first rendered into Assamese by Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva to expound their doctrine of devotion, liberation and incarnation.

Charit-Puthis : Another very important type of literature developed, namely the Charit-Puthis, the biographies of Sankaradeva and later of other Vaisnavite saints. Recitations from biographies of saints at congregational prayers at Sattras were a source of inspiration to devotees. According to Katha-Guru-Charita (a prose biography of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva), Madhavadeva introduced this practice and undertook a daily recitation of his Guru's biography.⁸

The Vaisnavite renaissance ushered a new era in Assamese literature, as in the other phases of national life. Young scholars flocked to Banaras, mastered the Sastras, acquired urban tastes, and carried them back to their own State. People went on pilgrimages to come in touch with holy seers and to enlarge

7. Of the few Synoptic Gospels that dwelt on Vaisnava thought and theology, mention may be made of :—Sankaradeva's *Bhakti Ratnakara* and *Bhakti Pradip* ; *Bhakti Ratnavali*, Namghosa of Madhavadeva ; Bhattadeva's *Bhakti-Viveka* in Sanskrit and *Bhaktisara* ; Ramcharan Thakur's *Bhakti-Ratna* ; Narottama Thakur's *Bhakti-Premavali* ; and Gopala Misra's *Ghosa-Ratna*.

8. Mention may be made of some other works of the Vaisnavite era : *Haris Chandra Upakhyana*, *Rukmini-harana*, *Bhakti-pradipa*, *Anadipatana*, *Gunamala*, *Keligopala* by Sankaradeva ; *Arjunabhanjana*, *Coradhara*, *Pimparaguchuwa*, *Bhumi-lutiwa*, *Bhojanavyavahara* by Madhavadeva ; *Brahmamohana*, *Bhusanaharana*, *Rasajhumura*, *Kotorakhelowa*, said to be by Madhavadeva ; *Bhimacharita* by Ramasarasvati ; *Kankhowa* by Sridhara Kandali ; and *Bhaktiratnakara-katha* by Gopala Carana Dvija.

their mental horizons. Often the pilgrimages of poets were triumphal marches and every eminent poet in those days was sure of royal patronage. The Koch kings were liberal patrons of the arts and learning. One may have an idea about the royal patronage by reading what Rama Sarasvati says of king Naranarayana in one of his 'Bhanitas'. He wrote : 'My Sovereign commanded me to translate the Mahabharata into Assamese verse. He offered to place before me all the commentaries available at the royal court. He sent cart-loads of texts to my residence and encouraged me in my work with adequate money, clothing, apparel and servants.'⁹

Sakta Literature : The Ahoms constructed temples dedicated to Sakta gods and goddesses and these temples became the seats of Sakta culture. Sakta religious texts both in Sanskrit and Assamese used to be recited and explained in the temples ; Sakta literature came to be written and developed in Assamese.¹⁰

Islamic Influence : The Mogul invasions brought Assam into contact with the rest of India again ; the contact was considerably lost in the 11th and 12th centuries. With these invasions came into Assam the thought of other people—specially of the Islamic people on life and art, particularly painting and music. Based on the Sufi religious preachings, the Jikir and Jari songs grew up in Assamese.¹¹ A large number of Perso-Arabic words found place in the Assamese language.

Royal Patronage : Ahom kings, ministers and nobles patronised poets and writers by making land grants ; the recipient-poets and authors eulogised their patrons in their verses. Glorification of monarchs and nobles led to some changes in the complexion of literature. Penegyric lyrics were composed by poets like Rama Misra, Kaviraj Chakravarti, Ruchinath

9. B. K. Barua, 'Assamese Language and Early Assamese Literature', Aspects of the Heritage of Assam, p. 63.
10. A few Sakta-songs were written by Rudra Singha and Siva Singha, Ramachandra Barpatra composed Yogini Tantra and Ananta Acharya Dvija wrote Ananda Lahari. Rucinath Kandali compiled Chandi Akhyana.
11. Syed Abdul Mali, Asamiya Zikir Aru-Jari, Introduction, pp. 1-55 ; M. Neog, Chahapari-upakhyana or Mrigavati-Charita by Dvija Rama, Introduction, pp. 13-90.

Kandali, Vidya Chandra Kavisekhara who received liberal patronage from the Ahom monarch. These eulogistic writings were full of glitter and sparkle of artificial literary expression. A note of artificiality made its appearance in the new literature in place of the sincerity and austerity of the Vaisnavite era. The new literature threw off the shackles of Vaisnavite times. The court was a centre of love and romance ; kings, queens and nobles preferred love stories to devotional ones. Poets composed love stories or tinged religious stories with colours of love. Ahom monarchs encouraged poets and authors to render into Assamese love anecdotes in the Puranas. God was the subject-matter of literary treatment in the Vaisnavite era, man became the centre of literature in the Ahom period ; the shift was from idealism to realism. Poems and romances began to deal with men and women of the common work-a-day world.

Buranjis : The greatest development in Assamese literature under the Ahoms was in the Buranjis, the chronicles of the Ahom court. The Ahom rulers in the beginning tried to make Ahom the language of the court and culture and Buranjis, Chronicles of the court and other documents were actually recorded in the Ahom language. But as the bulk of the subjects who were Assamese-speaking could not understand the alien language, the practice was developed of writing these records and land-grant charters both in Ahom and Assamese. Later on, this policy was also given up and Assamese completely replaced the Ahom language. The 'Ahom'-speakers merged themselves with the Aryan-Assamese-speaking population. Nevertheless, Ahom words and expressions found easy access to Assamese and Ahom thought began to influence Assamese writings and literature and particularly the manner of writing Buranjis. The Buranjis were compiled under the orders of kings, feudal lords and high dignitaries of the State who could grant access to State documents for the purpose. The Buranjis had to be based on State documents, e.g., periodic reports from military commanders and frontier governors, diplomatic epistles, sent to and received from foreign rulers and allies, judicial and revenue papers submitted to kings and ministers for orders, day-to-day annals of the court, including all transactions done, important utterances made, and significant occurrences reported by reliable eye-witnesses. Buranjis cons-

titute an unprecedented golden chapter in Assamese literature. It is through these Buranjis that the modern Assamese prose emerges in full panoply. Sir G. A. Gierson observes : "The Assamese are justly proud of their national literature. In no department have they been more successful than in a branch of study in which India, as a rule, is curiously deficient. The historical works or Buranjis are numerous and voluminous. A knowledge of Buranjis was an indispensable qualification to an Assamese gentleman."¹²

The language of the Buranjis was dignified and graceful. Couched in easy, straightforward, and unambiguous language, they were charming and admirable writings,¹³ though bereft of sentimental rhetoric, being factual records. These were prepared by men commanding comprehensive knowledge of State affairs and amongst authors were some high government officials. The compilation of Buranjis was considered a sacred task and hence it was customary to begin with a salutation to the deity.

Vamsavalis : There was another class of historical writings composed both in verse and prose known as Vamsavalis. They recorded the genealogical history of the different families of the kings or sketched the lives and careers of important nobles. Authentic records of noble families were considered necessary for receiving royal patronage, grants and office. A notable Vamsavali, 'Darang-Raj-Vamsavali' was composed in verse by Suryakhari Daivajna during the latter part of the eighteenth century under the patronage of Samudra-Narayan, the Koch chief of Darrang. The Darrang-Raj-Vamsavali is an invaluable source book for all studies connected with the early history of the Koch rulers.

Translations from Sanskrit : Besides scriptures and religious texts many Sanskrit books were translated into Assamese prose at the instance of the Ahom kings. They related to medicine, astronomy, arithmetic, dance and architecture. In them Assamese prose was used as a medium for utilitarian

12. Grierson, Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. V, p. 396.

13. M. Neog, Asamiya Sahityar Rupa-Rekha, pp. 203-207; S. K. Bhuyan, Studies in the Literature of Assam, pp. 32-46.

knowledge. They were literary-cum-technical documents and important specimens of contemporary prose for scientific expression. Most important was Hastividya of Sukumar Barkath, compiled in 1734 under orders of King Sib Singha and his consort Queen Ambikadevi. Along with texts on medicine, were compiled books on astrology and divination both in Sanskrit and Assamese. Treatises on medicine included chapters on astrology also, as they discussed astral nature of diseases.

Incantations and Mantras : Divination was resorted to for diagnosis and cure of diseases. Incantations and mantras were practised to cure diseases. Mantras were used to exercise devils and spirits supposed to cause human ailments, to cure snake-bite, to remove the scourge of bad dreams, to secure release from misfortunes, to free the fields from pests, for domestic prosperity, rich harvest and many other purposes. The Ahom chronicles and accounts of Muhammadan historians report the use of charms or spells or witchcraft for bewitching the army of the enemies and killing oppressive officers. An Ahom Buranji reproduces the following deposition by a witness in a conspiracy trial : "I am told one Baga possesses an old puthi with the help of which all can be subdued, including the king and his subjects." A mass of writings on mantras, in prose and verse, came into being, e.g., Sagar-dharani mantra, Karati-mantra, Sarvadhak mantra, Kamaratna-tantra, Bhutar-mantra, Khetra-mantra, and so on. These compilations on incantations, spells, nostrum and conundrums are interesting documents throwing light on some aspects of social life viz. social customs, folk-beliefs and popular superstitions etc.¹⁴

-
14. Mention may be made of some of the works of the period:—
 (i) Utilitarian and Scientific or Technical: Sri Hasta Muktavali (on dance technique) in Assamese from the original Sanskrit text by Subhankar Kavi; Hasti Vidyarnava (on elephantology) by Sukumar Barkath written in 1734; Aswanidan (on horses) written by Surjyakhari Daivagya in 1806; Bhaswati (on Astronomy) by Kaviraj Chakravarty; Kitabat Manjari (on Arithmetic written in verse); Nitalankur (on moral code). (ii) Historical:—Deodhai Asam Buranji (1648), Padaha Buranji (1650-1780), Asam Buranji (1681), and Tungkhungia Buranji (1804) by Srinath

Manuscripts : The intellectual and artistic inclinations of the period found expression in numerous¹⁵ manuscripts produced with much artistic and orthographic ability and calligraphic skill. The production of a manuscript was a laborious process involving much leisure and money, and only royal munificence made possible production of large number of manuscripts. Each manuscript produced in the royal court is to this day a priceless treasure of art for its calligraphy ; for the materials used for writing on and for the valuable information contained.

Secular Literature : Under the Ahoms, there were the growth of prose and secular literature,¹⁶ the tendency to exalt the individual, particularly the saints and the kings, and the dawn of scientific curiosity. Along with prose, developed naturally interest in diverse utilitarian and scientific studies. There was study of mathematics and of architecture and of astrology and astronomy. In the treatises on Jyotisha the authors described

Barbarua etc. (iii) Biographical: Charit-puthis by Daityari Thakur, Ram Charan Thakur, Bhusan Dwija, Ramrai and Aniruddha. (iv) Literary : (a) Kavyas—Gita Govinda, translated from Sanskrit to Assamese by Kaviraj Chakravarty, court poet of Rudra Singha, and copiously illustrated; Sakuntala Kavya by Kaviraj Chakravarty; Shankhachuda Vadha by Kaviraj Chakravarty; Harivamsa, by Vidya Chandra Kavishekhar; Mrigavati Charit by Ram Dwija; Sial Gossain by Kaviraj Misra; Ananda Lohori by Ananta Acharjya; Putala Charit by Ram Misra. (b) Sanskrit-cum-Assamese Dramas—Kama-Kumar-Haran by Kavi Chandra Dwija; Dharmodaya by Dharmadeva Bhatta; Vighnesh-Janmodaya by Gauri Kanta Dwija. (c) Religious : Kalkipurana and Markandeya Chandi by Ruchinath Kandali; Prakriti Khanda of Brahma Vaivarta Purana, by Durgeswar Dwija; Jogini-Tantra, by Kendugurya Barpatra Gohain Ramchandra. M. Neog, Asamiya Sahityar Rupa-Rekha, pp. 192-207.

15. S. K. Bhuyan, Assamese Literature, Ancient and Modern, pp. 2, 5; also Preface to Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts; Studies in The Literature of Assam, pp. 47-63.
16. B. K. Barua discusses 'Prose' of Bhattadeva's Katha-Bhagavata and Katha-Gita and of Buranjis and Utilitarian and secular treatises. Asamiya Katha Sahitya, Purani-bhag, pp. 16-24, 25-35, 40-46.

planetary motions and natural phenomena. In the treatises on Ayurveda, pharmaceutical, botanical and zoological observations were made together with therapeutic and pharmacological reflections. The rationalistic temper of the later Ahom age had a direct effect on arts and literature which enriched and sweetened the life of the people.¹⁷

Sanskrit Learning and Literature : One may wonder how Assam being a land with predominantly non-Aryan population could be a centre of Brahmanical culture and Sanskrit learning and literature from very early times. But it is a historical fact. Reference should be made to the copper plate grants of kings of Kamarupa in this connection. Besides having great historical value, these copper plate inscriptions are remarkable for their literary value and poetical fervour.¹⁸ They bear eloquent testimony to the ornate prose style in Sanskrit that had developed.¹⁹ Dr. P. C. Choudhury lists 443 Sanskrit manuscripts in his 'A Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts at the D.H.A.S.', being works on Abhidhana, Ayurveda, Chandas, Darsana (Dharma Tattva), Jyotisha, Kavya, Kriya Kanda, Nataka, Niti, Purana, Puja Vidhi, Smriti, Stotra, Tantra and Vyakarana. Some of the noted works listed in the catalogue, were composed in Assam, e.g., Hastyayurveda or Gaja-Chikitsa by Palakapya Muni in 16 Chapters (5th-6th century), Yogasataka, a medical treatise containing one hundred prescriptions, and Booddhi-Cittavivarnana by Nagarjuna of the 10-11th century, Kaulajnana-nirnaya, Akula Viratantra and Kamakhya Guhyasiddhi, attributed to Minanatha, Goraksa Samhita and Kamaratna Tantra, attributed to Goraksanatha, Sahaja-Yoginicina's Vyaktabhavanugata-Tattva-Siddhi, Laukika-Padamanjari, a voluminous work on grammar by Purusottama Vidya-Vagisa (16th Century), Brajanatha Sorma's Vaidya - Saroddhara on Ayurveda (Saka

-
17. B. K. Baruah, 'Assamese Language and Early Assamese Literature', Aspects of the Heritage of Assam, p. 69.
 18. Dimbeswar Sarma, 'The Literary Value of the Copper plate inscriptions of Kamarupa', Summaries of Papers submitted to XXII Session, All India Oriental Conference, Gauhati, 1965, Ed. by M. Neog, pp. 62-ff.
 19. Biswanarayan Shastri, 'Contribution of Assam to Sanskrit', J.A.R.S., Vol. XIV, 1960, p. 91.

1772), Narayanadasa Kaviraja's Vyadhi-Samakara and Dravya-Guna, Ramachandra Bhatta's Rasendrakalpadruma and Saravali, Smriti Sagara by Damodar Misra of the 14th century, Laksmipati Dvija's Jyotirmala (Saka 1613), Nitivarman's Kicaka-Vadhakavya (12th-13th century) and Rucira Misra's Smritisagara, etc.²⁰

The Kalika Purana was composed in Assam, probably before 1200 A.D., by the end of the period of Copper-plate inscriptions of the Kamarupa kings.²¹ A detailed geography and history of ancient Assam is included in this Tantric work. The Yoginitantra appears to have been compiled in the early part of the 16th century, if not later, for it refers to Visvasimha of Koch Behar. The first part of the work deals with Tantrik subjects in general and the second part centres around Kamakhya and her domain, Kamarupa.²² Other Sanskrit works of Tantraism were Kamakhya-tantra, Saktisangama-tantra, etc. Gait notices Tiksakalpa and Hara-Gauri-Vilasa. Hara-Gauri-Samvada was probably written during the reign of the Ahom king Kamalesvar Singha.²³

The extant copies of the manuscript volumes indicate that the writers and the scribes of Assam covered almost every branch of learning known to the Indian writers. In writing or compiling of the texts a link with the Indian traditional system was largely maintained. The outcome was treatises of all-India importance as well, e.g., the voluminous and exhaustive classic work on Vyakarana, Prayoga Ratnamala Vyakarana by Purusottam Vidya Vagisa Bhattacharyya, Laukika Padamanjari, Ratnakosa and Ankuravali Kosa (on lexicography) by the same author, and texts on Smriti by Pitambarasiddhanta Vagisa Bhattacharyya and Damodara Misra.²⁴ Local influences and characteristics are noticeable in treatises on Ayurveda, Jyotisha,

20. P. C. Choudhury, A Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts at the D.H.A.S., Preface, pp. XI-XII.

21. M. Neog, Sankaradeva and His Times, pp. 37-ff.

22. Ibid, p. 38.

23. Ibid, p. 37.

24. P. C. Choudhury, A Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts at the D.H.A.S., Preface, pp. VII-VIII.

Smriti and Tantra. In Jyotisha, local characteristics have predominated and astronomical calculations are found to have been based on the Kamarupa Nibandhaniya Khanda-sadhya (7th century). Smriti writers Pitambara Siddhanta-Vagisa Bhattacharyya, Damodara Misra and others developed what may be called a Kamarupa School of Smriti. Reference in this connection may be made to the Kamarupa Smriti Gangajala embodying the doctrines of the Kamarupa School of Smritis.²⁵

It was royal patronage that helped in the dissemination of Sanskrit learning and culture of Sanskrit literature. Under the royal patronage of Nara Narayana, the great grammarian Purusottama Vidya-Vagisa wrote Prayoga-Ratnamala and other lexicons and Pitambara Siddhanta-Vagisa wrote many treatises on Jyotisha and Smriti. The poet Ratnakara Kandali's good commentary on the Gita Govinda, written under the orders of king Sukladhvaja, Kavi Karnapura's Chhandas Sastra, Vrittamala composed under Naranarayana's orders, the prolific Vaisnava writer Bhattadeva's famous work Bhagavad-bhakti-viveka composed in Saka 1543 under Koch royal patronage, Kaviraja Chakravarti's treatise on Jyotisha, Dina Kiranavali (Saka 1645) and Kavya texts written under the patronage of the Ahom king Siva Singha and Anang Kaviraja's noted Ayurveda work, Vaidya-Kalpataru written under the patronage of the Ahom king Lakshmi Singha, are a few instances that indicate the extent of royal patronage extended to learned pandits who were given special facilities for producing works on varied subjects. Scribes were also employed for transcription of the valuable treatises, and expert painters were maintained at the royal court for illustrating the treatises.²⁶ Subhankara Kavi's Hasta-Muktavali on dance technique and his later work on music, Sangita-damodara were written sometime between the middle of the thirteenth century and the middle of the sixteenth.²⁷ Some say that Hasta-mukta-

-
25. P. C. Choudhury, A Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts at the D.H.A.S., Preface, p. VIII.
26. P. C. Choudhury, A Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts at the D.H.A.S., Preface, p. X.
27. M. Neog, 'Subhankara Kavi and his Works on Music and Dance', Dr. S. K. Belvalkar Felicitation Volume, pp. 175-181.

vali was written in Assam.²⁸ Under orders from Nara Narayana, Sridhara composed his work on astrology, *Sadhyakhanda*. Astrology and Astronomy were widely cultured in the land and there are numerous manuscripts.²⁹ H.C. Goswami in his 'Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts', notices 24 Sanskrit manuscripts on astronomy.

There was a steady growth of Smriti literature. Mention should be made of Nilambara's *Sraddha-prakasa* and *Kala-kaumudi* (13th century), Vedacharya's *Smriti-ratnakara* written in Kamarupa (early 13th-late 14th century), Sridhara Bhatta's *Varsapradipa* (probably 14th century), Kavibharati's *Makha-pradipa* and *Smritipadma* in manuscript, recently discovered. The biggest authority on the social code anterior to Sankaradeva was Damodara Misra who compiled *Brihadgangajala* (1434 A.D.), *Smritisagara* and *Dasakarmadipika*.³⁰ Pitambara Siddhanta Vagisa, as already referred to, was a brilliant Smriti-nibandhakara who compiled eighteen or more Smriti-nibandhas, including *Grahana Kaumudi*, *Samkranti Kaumudi*, *Dasa-Karma-Kaumudi*, *Pitrikriya Kaumudi*, *Ekadasi-Kaumudi*, *Sraddha Kaumudi*, *Tirtha-Kaumudi*, *Durgotsava-Kaumudi*, *Sivaratri-Kaumudi*, *Gudhartha-Kaumudi*, etc.³¹

For an account of the doctrines of Assam Vaisnavism in a single work, one has to turn to Sankaradeva's *Bhakti-ratnakara* and Bhattadeva's *Bhakti-Viveka*. These doctrinal works in Sanskrit exhibit wide learning and analytical scholarship.³²

With the decline of the Koch power and the ascendancy of the Ahom power, the centre of literary activity shifted from Cooch-Bihar to Eastern Assam. The Ahom monarchs during the zenith of their power extended patronage to poets, scholars and artists. They did not neglect the cultivation of Sanskrit language and literature. Reference should be made to the three

28. M. Neog, *Purani Assamiya Samaj Aru Samskriti*, p. 122.

29. M. Neog, *Sankaradeva and His Times*, p. 97.

30. *Ibid*, pp. 92-ff.

31. Manoranjan Sastri, 'The Kamarupa School of Dharma Sastras with particular Notice of Pitambara Siddhanta Vagisa', *Pragjyotisa*, pp. 104-112.

32. M. Neog, *Sankaradeva and His Times*, pp. 208-222, 374.

pseudo-classical or Sanskrit-cum-Assamese dramas written under Ahom patronage : (1) The Kama-kumara-harana, written by Kavi Chandra Dvija under the patronage of Siva Singha and his ruling consorts, Pramatheswari and Ambika-devi, (2) The Vighnesajanmodaya of 'Kavi-surya' Gaurikanta Dvija written in 1799 during Kamaleswar Singha's reign, (3) The Sankhacuda-Vadha of Dina Dvija written in 1802 under the patronage of Pratapa-Vallabha Barphukan during Kamalesvar Singha's reign. Two other Sanskrit plays were also written : Sri Krishna-prayana by Vidya-Pancanana at the instance of Gadadhara Duwara Barphukan during Pramatta Singha's reign and Dharmodaya by Dharmadeva Goswami during the reign of Lakshmi Singha, which gives a picture of the contemporary Vaisnava revolt against the Ahom regime.

These plays bear testimony to the love of Sanskrit learning and literature on the part of Ahom royalty and nobility. These Sanskrit plays are called pseudo-classical or Sanskrit-cum-Assamese, because they do not represent an urge to revive the drama in the line of the great masters like Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti or of any of the latter-day Sanskrit playwrights. There is Act-division in these plays, of course, but the new code established in the 16th century Assamese Brajabuli drama of Sankaradeva, is followed. The Sutradhara here plays a predominant role as in a Sankaradeva play, being the master of the whole show from the beginning to the end ; songs and dances preponderate as in a Sankarite play.

The language of these plays happens to be a very late variety of the Sanskrit tongue with apparent renderings of the Assamese idiom in many places ; again these plays are interspersed with Assamese lyrics, "some of them with frank and genuine folk character". Kama-Kumara-harana has gone so far as to introduce Assamese nuptial songs (biyanam) sung by women-folk. In Vighnesajanmodaya, the songs are in Sanskrit, but the metres employed therein are Assamese. All the songs of Sankhacuda-Vadha, set to classical ragas, are Assamese.³³The play, Kama-kumara-harana deviates from the original sources of Harivamsa

33. S. N. Sarma, Ed., 'Rupakatravayam', Introduction, pp. O. 3-0.16, Preface by M. Neog, pp. 0.1-0.2.

and the Bhagavata-purana to follow the story of Usa and Anirudha's love, as in Kumara-harana of Ananta Kandali. These pseudo classical dramas exhibit strong local influence and colour. The Assamese writings of the 18th and 19th century Ahom court possess an erotic note, with inspiration drawn mainly from the Brahmavaivarta-purana and the Gita-govinda and these plays are no exception.³⁴

There is no denying the fact that Sanskrit learning was an important component of the cultural attainments of the people of Assam and that Assamese scholars could claim no mean a share in the contributions to the advancement of Sanskrit learning and literature in general.

Tai-Ahom Literature : The Ahoms brought with them their canonical classics when they first came to Assam from their Shan homeland. Their literature consists of worship manuals, astrological treatises, chronicles and romances. Living in Assam for a long time, they wrote the story of the Ramayana in the Ahom language, compiled lexicons from Ahom to Assamese and from Assamese to Ahom. Their greatest book is Min-mang-phuralung which elaborates the gospel of Ahimsa in the form of a simple story.³⁵ Another classic is Pung-Gao-Kham, i.e., the Ahom Ramayana.

The Ahom manuscripts are on diverse subjects. Much of the wealth of Ahom literature is being gradually lost to us because of the growing paucity of men today, conversant with the language and capable of translating the manuscripts. Even among the Deodhais and Bailungs, the remnants of the orthodox priestly clans of the Ahoms, there are now few who can read and interpret the Ahom language with any amount of accuracy. Hemchandra Goswami in his Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts notices an Ahom book, Amar, being a dictionary of Ahom language, containing Ahom words with their Assamese equivalents and also Deo Buranji I and Deo Buranji II, which give an account of the creation of certain heavenly beings and of Lengdan's sending down Khunlung and Khun Tai to the earth

34. M. Neog, Loc. Cit., pp. 0.1-0.2.

35. S. K. Bhuyan, Studies in the History of Assam, p. 9.

respectively.³⁶ An Ahom book, *Laitu* or *Laophala*, published by Rai Sahib Golap Chandra Barua, deals with the Ahom version of the creation of the world. *Bancheng Dinchowa* is a very small pocket book on astrology for consultation in any emergency, each page containing a sentence open to elastic interpretation. To ascertain the success of any enterprise, the enquirer has to put through a slender stick into any page, when the sentence in the page is interpreted to answer the query.³⁷ Reference may be made to the following Ahom puthis also : (1) The famous *Chaklang-puthi* describing the rituals to be observed in an Ahom marriage, (2) *Kukura-theng-puthi*, a book on divination, describing the processes involved in the calculation of the future with the help of the legs of a fowl, having illustrations of circles, parabolas, and triangles, with indications as to the respective positions of the sooth sayer and the victimised fowl, (3) An Ahom puthi containing the criminal code of the Ahoms, which constituted the statute book of the Ahom sovereigns of Assam, (4) A voluminous Ahom puthi acquired from a descendant of *Purnnanda Buragohain*, being an invaluable treatise on Ahom cosmology, (5) An Ahom pocket-book containing sixty leaves, each of the size of 1½ inches by 3 inches, being a *mantra-puthi* with invocatory addresses to the deities of the Ahom pantheon, (6) An Ahom puthi entitled *Malikha*, Sir Edward Gait gives in his *Report on the Progress of Historical Research in Assam*, the substance of this book "which corresponds to weird Alexandrian romances of the Mediaeval Age," (7) *Bar Amra* and *Phul Amra* or *Lati Amra* (i.e., Ahom Lexicons), (8) Ahom '*Thamkara-puthi*', containing prayers to gods.³⁸ Besides chronicles in the Assamese language, many more were compiled in the Ahom language, e.g., *Lailit Buranji*, *Laitu Buranji*, etc. Gait refers to the following Ahom *Buranjis* : (1) *Buranji* from *Khunlung* and

36. MSS. Nos. 2, 39 and 40 respectively deposited in the library of K.A.S. Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts, pp. 3, 46-ff.

37. D.H.A.S. MS. No. 51.

38. S. K. Bhuyan, *Studies in the Literature of Assam*, pp. 50, 57; '*Ahomar Abhidhan Sastra*', *Tai Sanskriti*, the quarterly Journal of the Tai Historical and Cultural Society of Assam, Gauhati, March, 1956, pp. 1-16.

Khunlai, (2) Buranji from Cantaikha to Cukapha, (3) Buranji from the death of Supatha alias Gadadhar Singha.³⁹

Buranjis written in Ahom could contain details which could not be recorded in chronicles written in popular Assamese. Further, the Ahom priests who compiled the Ahom Buranjis, naturally wanted to show their superiority over the Brahmanical priests. They would also occasionally attribute in their compilations national or royal calamities to the disregard and neglect of the advice and warnings of the Ahom astrologers and the non-observance of Ahom rites and customs.

The Khamptis and the Phakials, who came to Assam in the latter half of the eighteenth century, possess a splendid literature on Buddhism, which deals with Buddhist tenets, way of life, cosmogony and mythology. There is one Khampti manuscript, which contains a complete criminal code, enumerating punishments for both trivial and serious offences. Bai-cha-li-cha, Asam Desar puthi, in Tai-Phake gives an account of Badan Chandra Barphukan's visit to Burma and return to Assam with the Burmese Army.⁴⁰ There are also other manuscripts containing miniatures of Buddha in the customary postures.

The Phungchin manuscript,⁴¹ dated 1473 A.D. and in Ahom language and script, gives a description of the sixteen heavens and an equal number of hells according to the Theravada as well as Ahom conception. Female souls cannot go up to the highest heavens and can reside in one particular heaven only. Sikkiya, i.e., Indra lives in one of the heavens and rides on his five-headed elephant Ailavana, i.e., Airavata. The Ahom concept of transmigration of the soul is described in the manuscript and each concept is illustrated. The illustrations are manuscript miniatures in the real sense of the term. They successfully represent the teachings of the Buddha for the laity. The illustrations of Buddha in bhumisparsa-mudra, Buddha's parinirvana, the Pillar of Dharma, and the dancing scene from the heaven of Sikkiya,

39. Gait, Report on the Progress of Historical Research in Assam, paragraph 22.

40. D.H.A.S. Ms. No. 1198.

41. D.H.A.S. MS. No. 25.

etc., deserve notice.⁴² Another illustrated manuscript, contemporaneous with the Phungchin, the Suktanta-Kyempong⁴³ is from Namphakial in the Lakhimpur District. It is a treatise of 300 pages on various aspects of Lokadharmā of Theravada Buddhism in Tai-Phake language and Ahom script. There is a painted drawing of Lord Buddha in bhumi-sparsa-mudra on folio 2A. The Phungchin and the Suktanta Kyempong manuscripts represent the earliest phase of Tai-Ahom painting in Assam.

Mention should also be made of other Tai works on Buddhism like Vessantara-jataka and Bhuridatta-jataka. There are treatises on Jyotisha, called Kanagi. The Khamtis and the Phakiyals have prayers, etc., which they chant on the occasion of the paicamken festival at the time of the Bahag-bihu when the Buddhas in the bapu-chang are taken out and sprayed with water and washed.⁴⁴ Dr. S. K. Bhuyan rightly observes that the riches of Tai-Ahom literature should engage the serious attention of scholars, since Buddhism is being studied more widely and closely than before.⁴⁵

Six hundred years of Ahom rule present, indeed, a panorama of rapid development in all departments of life, political, economic, social, religious, literary and cultural.

42. Rajatananda Das Gupta, 'Tai-Ahom Painting in Assam', Pragjyotisa, pp. 82-85.

43. D.H.A.S. MS. 1197.

44. M. Neog, 'Living Buddhism in Assam', Pragjyotisa, pp. 131-ff, 134-ff.

45. Mention may be made of some Tai-Ahom works. (A) Ahom works with D.H.A.S. Manuscript Nos. preserved in D.H.A.S. Library, Gauhati:—(i) Astrology—Phe Phatu or Dinchowa (MS. No. 1), Bardinchowa (MS. No. 3), Churaputhi, astrology and divination (MS. No. 1156), Phe Ban (MS. No. 1162), Mangalchowa Kapor, an astrological device, (MS. No. 1163), Ahom Jyotisha (MS. No. 795), Khamti-puthi (Khamti), (791, MS.). (ii) Divination—Bar Mangal or Barkukura Theng (MS. No. 5), Saru Mangal or Saru Kukura Theng (MS. No. 8), Saru Bar Mangal (MS. 12) or Saru Bar Kukura Theng, Kathi Bancheng, Split bamboo sticks for divination, etc., (MS. No. 1195). (iii) Mantras—Charaideo Barbidhi (MS. No. 10), Bar Phaikhan (MS. No. 13), Jhangri jhara Apnam or Ahom Karatiputhi (MS. No.

16), Ayustula II (MS. No. 17), Bar Tappang (MS. No. 19), Taptang (MS. No. 20), Aptang (MS. No. 1149), Bagdan Puthi (MS. No. 1167). (iv) Omens and Remedies—Adbhut, as designated in D.H.A.S. Catalogue of Manuscripts, (MS. No. 6 and 1157). (v) Cosmogony and Cosmology—Pungkamung or Anadipatan (MS. No. 4), Laikamung (MS. No. 7), Deo Buranji (MS. No. 15), Lailit-puthi (MS. No. 1159), Doilai I, II, III (MS. No. 1164, 1165, 1166), Saikal (MS. No. 1174). (vi) Buranjis—Laitu Buranji (MS. No. 2), Lailit Buranji (MS. No. 9 and 34), Tokolai Buranji (MS. No. 24), Ahom Buranji (MS. No. 1158 and 1160), Khunlung Khunlai puthi (MS. No. 1161). (vii) Lexicons—Lati Amra (MS. No. 14), Bar Amra or Ahom Abhidhan (MS. No. 31), already published in one volume as 'Ahom Lexicons' by the Government of Assam. (viii) Invocations and Prayers—Litmit or Bidhi-puthi (MS. No. 28), Kencha (MS. No. 45), Bankham (MS. No. 1184). (ix) Puja Procedures and Ceremonies—Bidhi-puthi (MS. No. 277), Kheklai (MS. No. 1172 and 1187), Laka Puja (MS. No. 1189), Ayustula (MS. No. 11). (x) Scriptures—U Rakpha Phura (MS. No. 1147), Phuralung (MS. No. 1148), Phura Puthi (MS. No. 1185). (xi) Legends and Traditions—Doilai (MS. No. 18), Ahom Janasruti (MS. No. 1186), Ahom Akhyan (MS. No. 1175). (xii) Almanac—Ahom Lakli (MS. No. 1180), Ahom Lakli II (MS. No. 1190). (xiii) Household Manual—Panjika, Tai (Ahom), (MS. No. 1196). (B) Tai works in Buddhist Viharas like those at Barpathar, Dubarani and Barhola, (Sibsagar District), and Bargaon, Ahumuni and Naojan (United District of Mikir and North Cachar Hills): (i) Scriptures—Chhuk-ma-ha-ba, Phura Alang, Hau-tham, Pitakat (Tripitaka), Vine (Vinaya), Phra-Alang-haikhao, Phra-chao-miteya. (ii) Legends—King-na-ra, Chhung upuk. (iii) Tales—Chhuk Thanuk, Chheng Phaku.

SECTION II

FOLK LITERATURE

Folk literature of Assam is rich and has developed through the ages including the Ahom period and throws a flood light on the diverse facets of life and culture of the people and happens to be a store house of delight for the Assamese people for all time.

Aphorisms : The aphorisms of Dak Mahapurusa constitute the earliest didactic composition in Assamese literature. The Vachanawallis or sayings of Dak are popular not only in Assam but also in Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Nepal ; these wise maxims tell peasants and people, mostly in verse forms, when and how they should perform certain tasks relating to agriculture, marriage and other social behaviour.

Folksongs : Assamese literature is rich in folksongs ; the characteristics of these folksongs in general are spontaneity and simplicity. Long before the people wrote down their thoughts and emotions, they expressed them in songs. The Bihu-songs, connected with a nature festival of mid-April, called Bihus, constitute a most important variety of such folksongs. The Bihunam number more than two thousand. The Bihunam or Bihu songs are a most lyrical type of Assamese folk songs. The Bihu is held from the last day of C'at (Chait) to the sixth day of Ba'hag (Vaisakh) ; this period is known as Ba'hag Bihu. The second Bihu is held in Magh after harvesting is over. In social manifestation the Bihu now has a Hindu colouring but it has its roots in the fertility cults of the primitive inhabitants of the land. People dance and sing and make preparation for the ploughing season. The dances and songs express joys of spring and youth ; they are exotic and woven round themes of love. In one form of the dance in some areas, of the two girls dancing, one impersonates the role of a male. In rural areas the dance used to serve as the occasion for the choice of life partners. Among the Miri tribals when there are two competitors for the hand of the same girl, the one who gets beaten in singing or

drumming may have to serve for a term at the house of the successful wooer.

Being the language of love, the Bihu-nam describes beauty, adores the sweet-heart, expresses yearning, feelings of frustration and sorrow on the one hand and those of mirth, gaiety and joy on the other. These songs, sweet, lucid and tender are a social document and throw light on the social and economic life of the people. They refer to popular beliefs and superstitions of the rural folk, use of arecanut as love charm, paying of bride-price, incurring debts in order to be able to marry, a high premium put on ability to spin and weave etc. Some of the customs observed at the Bihu are common to both the plains Assamese and tribals. The first Bihu day is called Garu-Bihu and assigned to ceremonies associated with cattle welfare ; the second day is for man and known as Manuh-Bihu. Social visits start on the second day ; on the first day green mango, neem-leaves and pulse etc., are taken. Clearing of debts, feasting and merry-making are usual in Bihu. In matters of popular culture the tribals and the Hindu Assamese have much in common.

The Bongits are similar to woodman's Ballads in the West and allied in thought and spirit to the Bihugits. The land, its mountains, woods, plateaus and rivers have given rise to these songs—melancholy, emotional, and mystical, sometimes riotous and buoyant. The gleaner sings as he works in the fields, the peasant-spinner, as he rears endi and muga cocoons in the mulberry groves. The Nawaria gits or boatman's songs are similar to Bongits. The Nawaria gits arose as boatmen drifted along the current of the water and sang, as happens in riparian civilisations. Major John Butler wrote in 1885,—“Assam is intersected by rivers, the Assamese prefer moving about in little canoes to travelling by land ; watermen seem greatly to enjoy these boat trips, always singing songs as they paddle along.”

There are ballads that describe life of the rivers and allude to an extensive river-borne trade in the past. The Baramahi-git describes the separation of a woman from her husband away on marine traffic. The Kaina Baramahi is another poem of an identical theme. There are other popular compositions of great wit and light-hearted mirth as the Pachala-kirtan, the Sipini-kirtan etc.

The Biya-nam or marriage songs are associated with marriage and are characterised by great tenderness. At every stage of the celebration women sing appropriate songs. There is a Namati or leader of the chorus, who sets the melody while others follow her. The language of the songs is homely. They have been influenced by Vaisnavite scriptures and other epic legends also and refer to Madhaba (Krishna), Hara-Gauri, Ram-Sita, Usha-Aniruddha, Rukmini-Krishna; sometimes they are secular in sentiment. Some marriage songs are teasing songs—satirical and amusing—with which women from the groom's house or from the bride's house try to irritate the women of the other house. These are known as Khija-git in Lower Assam and Joranam in Upper Assam. Women constantly add to the traditional stock of marriage songs and teasing songs by composing fresh ones.

Women folk sing a variety of imaginative songs steeped in reverence on the occasion of popular religious ceremonies, connected with Goddess Small-pox or Ai (Mother), Lakhimi (Symbol of welfare and Paddy) or Apeswari (Fairy invoked in times of children's illness). Rooted in Tantric background, there are philosophical Deh-bichar songs (songs on consideration on the body), now overlaid with Vaisnavite influence. Wandering mendicants sing these songs to the melody of the 'Tokari', a stringed instrument. Jikir songs are traced to the teaching of one Ajan Phakir or Pir who had come to Assam about three centuries ago. The cradle songs or Nīchukani-gits are popular and tender in sentiments and feelings. Lullaby or nursery rhymes like 'Lai hale jale abeli batahe' and 'Siali-e-nahibi-rati' are attractive.¹

Ballads : The Malita or the Ballads form another important type of folk songs. The oldest ballads in Assamese literature are Phulkonwar and Manikonwar. The Boragis, a class of minstrels, used to recite these ballads on festive occasions in ceremonial gatherings. These ballads grew through the ages and reflect different stages of the social growth. One of the longest ballads, that of Phulkonwar is made up of a ride on a magic horse and the hero's securing of a princess. The ballad of Jana-gabharu describes similar magical incidents. An amusing shorter

1. P. Goswami, Folk-literature of Assam, pp. 7-20, 41-57.

ballad, *Pagala-Pagalir-Git* is a beautiful fancy woven around an imagined quarrel between a husband and a wife. There are also historical ballads. The most important of these is the ballad of the *Barphukan* or Viceroy, which describes the Burmese invasions and gives information on the confused political situation of the time ; competitiveness among the nobles, the *Barphukan's* invitation to the Burmese, the atrocious ravages committed by the invaders and the helplessness of the people. Another historical ballad describes the hanging of *Maniram Dewan*.² There were minstrels who used to eke out their living by reciting ballads.

Proverbs, Riddles, etc. : Proverbs and riddles give us interesting glimpses of the folk mind or the social scene. In Assamese society *sathar* or riddles are used for recreational purposes. A considerable number of current riddles were probably made by scholarly persons. Then there are *Phakaras* (riddle-like compositions) used by *Vaisnavite Bhakats* or initiates of certain esoteric-sects. They are short cryptic verses couching religious lore.

Tales : The tales of the land are related to tribal background also because of the composite nature of the Assamese people and their culture. Puranic tales have been absorbed by tribals also with modifications. Tales from the *Jatakas* and the *Panchatantra* have been naturalised in Assamese with modifications. There are Assamese tales closely related to tales current in Gond areas and recorded by Dr. Verrier Elwin. The trickster tales appear to be Mongoloid contributions to Assam's folk-literature. There are moral tales, about animals and birds and tales related to natural phenomena. The *Marchen* or wonder tale is most popular. Those tales that give pure pleasure and treat of the world of imagination have the widest currency, e.g., the trickster tales centering round '*Tentan*' or '*Teton*' (a fox type of man, sly and roguish). *Teton* stories are current amongst the Assamese-speaking population as also among the tribals.

Another well-known group of tales describe the sorrows and sufferings of children in the hand of step-mothers. *Tejimala*

2. P. Goswami, *Ballands and Tales of Assam*, pp. 15-53.

(story of Teja and Teji) of the cinderella type is the most popular. Here is a specimen of what the step-mother can do to poor Tejimala³ :—

“Do not pick the lau, do not pick the leaves, wherefrom do you come, you beggar woman, only for the silk clothes did step-mother crush me, poor Tejimala I am.”

The tribes of Assam also possess a considerable body of myths and these myths have considerable poetic beauty and even poetic grandeur, as pointed out by Dr. Verrier Elwin in his book ‘Myths of the North-East Frontier of India’.⁴

A brief survey of the nature, range and constituents of the folk-literature of Assam indicates how the people’s ways of life and culture have been affected by and reflected in their folk-literature⁵ since early times through the Ahom age down to the present and leaves no doubt about its abiding influence for all time to come.

-
3. P. Goswami, *Ballads and Tales of Assam*, pp. 109-148.
 4. Verrier Elwin, *Myths of the North-East Frontier of India*, Introduction, pp. XIX-XXII.
 5. P. Goswami, ‘Folk Literature of Assam’, *Aspects of the Heritage of Assam*, pp. 75-81; ‘The Folk-tales of Assam’, *Pragjyotisa, Souvenir, All India Oriental Conference, XXII Session, Gauhati, 1965*, pp. 64-69.

Chapter VII

TECHNICAL SCIENCES & FINE ARTS

Section 1

MUSIC

Tradition of Music : Assam has a long tradition of culture of music in the land. Hiuen-Tsiang used to be entertained with music and dance almost every day for a month on his visit to Bhaskar Varman's Kamarupa in the Seventh Century. In the temple of Hatakasulin Siva erected by Vanamalavarman (9th century), there were danseuses. In the Bargaon inscription of Ratnapala obeisance is paid to Natesvara Sankara, the master of dances (and Tandava). Among the sculptural relics are to be found many dancing figures, men playing on drums, flute and vina. In the Kalika-purana written in the 11th or 12th century, references are made to vocal and instrumental music in connection with rituals—the sixteen-armed Mahamaya to be worshipped with music, the eighteen-armed goddess to be adored with music, the army of kings seeking victory in wars to be worshipped with women performing music and dances, the Sabara ceremony on the Vijayadasami night to be celebrated by young men and women dancers performing to the music of 'Sankha', 'turva', 'mridanga', and 'pataha'. The Kalika Purana describes 108 mudras or hand poses of worship akin to those employed in dances, and mentions a hillock, Nataka-Saila, being a place for dramas and dances, associated with Natakessvara Siva. An inscription of Iṣvara Ghosa (10th, 11th centuries) refers to professional singers called 'Sutas'.

Charyas : The Charyas written from 8th to 11th century A. D. by Buddhist Siddhas were tuned to classical ragas—Patanjari, Gavada, Aru, Gujari, Devakri, Desakha, Bhairavi, Kamoda, Dhansi, Ramakri, Varadi, Baladdi, Sabari, Mallari, Malasi, Malasi-Gavada, Kahnu-Gunjari and Vangal. The eighty-four tantric Buddhist Siddhas exerted immense influence and their songs carried the rhythm of raga music far and wide in Eastern-India.

Durgavar's Songs and other Panchali Songs and Music : Before the neo-Vaisnavite movement in Assam, the Ramayana and portions of the Mahabharata were rendered into Assamese verse ; and these verses were put to ragas or recited to tunes. The 16th century poet, Durgavara Kayastha rendered Madhava Kandali's Ramayana into Lyrics and made new ones of his own, both totalling fiftyeight ; and these songs were put to ragas—Ahir, Akash-mandali, Kambar, Gunjari, Chalani, Davajini, Devamohan, Dhansari, Patamanjari, Varadi, Vasanta, Belowar, Bhathiyali, Manjari, Marowar, Malachi, Meghamandal, Rangiri, Sri-gandhakali, Srigandhar, Suhai. In the 17th century biographies are mentioned ragas, Vayumandali, and Meghamandali.

The Panchali songs of Durgavar, Mankar, Pitambara and Sukavi Narayanadeva were popular. Songs of Durgavar's 'Geeti-Ramayana', and 'Manasa-Kavya', Mankar's Sravaner Geet' (Manasar Geet) and Padmar Panchali and Pitambara's 'Usha-parinaya' and 'Markandeya Chandi-Akhyana' and Sukavi Narayanadeva's 'Padma-Purana', appealed to the masses. Related as Ojapali performances on the occasion of singing of verses from the Ramayana or the Mahabharata, known as Vyah-gowa or Sabha-gowa or on the occasion of the worship of Durga or of the Serpent goddess Manasa, known as Marai-gowa, Rang-gowa or Suknanni, these lyrical, Panchali-songs held full sway until under the influence of the neo-Vaisnavite movement, there were wide-spread culture and remarkable development of Vaisnava music. Panchali music carried and continued the tradition of Pre-Sankarite Assamese music to neo-Vaisnavite times and beyond.¹

Vaisnava Music : The neo-Vaisnavite movement brought in its train a very wide culture of music in Assam. The Vaisnava music of Assam is rich and remarkable in its tone and variety and greatly helped the new religion to spread fast. A rich merchant, Bhavananda was attracted to the message of Sankaradeva by Bhaskara Vipra who used to sing the master's lyrics on the 'rabab'. Sukladhwaja, the great Koch Commander overheard his wife singing a song of Sankaradeva on the 'Cherengdar' ('Sarinda') and resolved to accept ordination to the Bhakti-cult.

1. M. Neog, Asamiya Sahityar Ruparekha, pp. 112-134, 212-ff.

Bargit : Ankiya-Git : Among the different forms of Vaisnava music of Assam, Bargit or noble songs and Ankiyagit, songs in a drama, are tuned to ragas. The name of the raga in Bargit and Ankiyagit is indicated at the top.

In all Ankiyagits and in three Bargits (known as Shad Chandargit), talas are also mentioned. In other Bargits no name of tala is given. Time need not always be kept in singing Bargit. An individual Bhakta pours forth his devotion in public or in a domestic temple in bargit ; he does not generally submit himself to the control of time-beats. At other times, specially in congregations tala is maintained in performing Bargits. Some particular talas are attached to particular ragas and the adept know the tala to be adopted in executing a particular raga. The Asowari raga is timed to Yati-tala, Kalyana to Khar-man ; Belowara is known as Rupaka Belowara because the Belowara melody mode is generally timed to the Rupaka-tala. There are instances of the application of quite a few talas in the course of the singing of one song in one raga.

At the end of the second line of each bargit or Ankiyagit, the syllable 'dhrum' is placed. This indicates that the first two lines constitute the dhruva or refrain to be repeated in the course of singing of the succeeding verses, called pada, which consist of a few couplets. The name of the writer occurs in the last couplet. A bargit may be compared to the Dhrupad style of Northern India, or it may be compared to Prabandha Sangita with its four parts of dhruva (asthavi), antara, Sanchari, and abhoga. The bargits are religious in content and devotional in purpose ; some concern themselves with the early life of Krishna ; they are free from the erotic element of Radha-Krishna lyrics of North India and Bengal and from the sportiveness of the Kheyal type of music.

The Ankiyagits are not different from Bargits in musical execution except that the Ankiyagits are almost always executed with tala. In the execution of a Bargita or Ankiyagita there are the usual two parts of raga music, alapa or anibadha part and the gita or the nibaddha part. In the alapa or 'raga-diya' or 'ragatana' words like Rama, Hari, Govinda are used ; it is generally divided into four parts, the third part being 'tolani'

(raising of the voice to a higher pitch). The singing of the text follows and is timed to a tala. A tala has two parts, 'mulbajana' or 'ga-man' (the main part) and 'ghat' (sharp extensions of the main pattern of the tala). The ga-man is played on the khol or mridanga and cymbals as the text of the song is sung; when the singer is at rest at intervals, the drummers play the intricate patterns of ghats.²

Kirtana-ghosa : Namaghosa : Mention should be made of two other popular forms of Vaisnava music of Assam, Kirtana-ghosa and Namaghosa. A great number of people cannot generally participate in Bargita or Ankargita performances. Not so with the kirtana or Kirtana-ghosa type of music. All male members of a village, including boys, join congregational prayers in the form of singing of Kirtana-ghosa. Parallel congregational kirtana is held in Sattras. Kirtana-ghosa recital, covering about ten minutes, can be lengthened to an hour, is sung to the accompaniment of drums (khol, mridanga or nagara), cymbals (bar-tala) and clapping of hands and gives a pen-picture of Krishna or Narayana or describes a situation or a little action. A person called 'nam-lagowa' is responsible for leading the chorus. Nama-ghosa, i.e., 'announcement of the names of God', purports to include singing of the glory of God (Visnu-Krishna-Rama). Each ghosa consists of a couplet of verses and is executed without raga and sometimes without the beating of rhythm³.

Ragas : Pitambarakavi, a contemporary of Sankaradeva used these ragas in the lyrics in his Usha-parinaya—Ahir, Gunjari, Gondagiri, Dhansri, Naga, Nata, Patamanjari, Pahari, Varadi, Vasanta, Bhatiyali, Bhairavi, Mallar, Suai. Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva used these ragas in their Bargits and Ankiyagits—Ahir, Asowari, Kalyana, Kanada, Kamoda, Kedara, Kau, Gauri, Tud, Tud-Vasanta, Tud-Bhatiyaii, Dhanasri, Nata, Nat-Mallar, Purvi, Varadi, Vasanta, Belowar, Bhathiyali, Bhupali, Mallar, Mahur, Mahur-Dhansari, Ramagiri, Lalit, Syam, Syam-gada, Sri, Srigandhara, Sindhura, Srigur, Sareng, Sahai. New

-
2. M. Neog, *Svararekhat Bargit*, pp. 1-32, 36-41; M. Neog and K. Changkakati, *Rhythm in the Vaisnava Music of Assam*, pp. 5-24, 25-39.
 3. M. Neog, *Sankaradeva and His Times*, pp. 279-ff.

names of melodies appear in devotional lyrics composed after the time of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva, e.g., Karnata, Gunja-Kedra, Geda-kalyana, Gurjara, Chalengi, Chorat, Jayasri, Paschima-Dhanasri, Vanga-Bhathiyali, Vihagada, Malancha, Multana, Ramkeli, Reli, Sruta-Mallara. Different melodies are ascribed to different watches (eight watches or praharas) of the day by Indian musicians and theorists on music. Opinions, however, differ. Among the Satra Ojas or traditional musicians of Assam, also, there is their independent time theory. Puravi, commonly known as an evening melody, is placed by the Ojas in the early dawn. Vasanta, placed by Narada in the morning, is assigned by the Assamese Ojas to the afternoon.

Raga-Malita : Attempts were made in India to visualise the melodies as persons. The tendency to deification of ragas took definite shape in the 16th/17th centuries. Raga-mala paintings of Northern India much popularised 'Ragarupa' or 'Raga-lakshana'. Such visualisation was prevalent in Assam also since pre-Sankaradeva times. A contemporary of Sankaradeva, Rama Sarasvati gave Raga-lakshanas in his rendering of the Gitagovinda and used the term 'Ragar Malita' (small poems giving mythological origins of ragas) to signify Raga-lakshana. Sukladhvaja, the general and another contemporary, in his commentary on Jayadeva's original text, quoted Raga-lakshanas from the Sangita-damodara of Subhankara. A copy of Subhankara's other Sangita-work, Hasta-Muktavali, on the language of fingers in dancing, with a later Assamese gloss thereon, has also been discovered in Assam.⁴ The popular Raga-malitas, however, differ from raga-lakshanas as given in Sanskrit treatises on music. The Raga-malitas of Assam had an indigenous growth. The following Assamese Raga-malita of 'Malava' is from Sangita-damodara of Subhankar : "Adi Nirranjan destroyed the world of beings. The lord then slept upon the bed of Ananta. He then stood up and crowned Malava king on a throne. When Malava became a king, Malavati became his queen. Acharya became his Chief Minister and Dhansri another minister of State. The melody Purvi served karpura and tambula to Malava, and Gandhara with his

4. M. Neog, Sankaradeva and His Times, p. 277.

retinue provided the song. The raga Vasanta stretched the royal canopy over Malava, and Sindhura waved a Yak's tail. Four damsels, Gauri, Bhairavi, Suhai and Lalita, made salutations to the king on four sides, and attended him through day and through night."

Rama Saraswati renders Raga-lakshanas into Assamese verse with much that he adds from himself. He enlarges upon the description of Malava as given in Sangita-damodara and writes : "Listen, Jayadeva describes in song the characteristics of the melody. The lady with handsome hips began singing ; and Malava became king of all melodies. When the day was closing upon the evening, this melody was born, and the melody was born with thirty-two (good) qualities. When the melody was born, there was music on different musical instruments, and the forty-two melodies held his (royal) umbrella and staves (on and around him). The king of melodies, Malava, had Malasi as his queen. Desaga became the minister of State and Dhanasri was the prince. The melody Beli (Keli ? Reli ?) became the door-keeper, and Syama the watch-man. The peerless melody Kalyana was the cuta-dhara. Four (other) melodies waved Yak's tails on four sides".⁵ The following again shows that sometimes malitas did not give personified pictures of ragas but connected them to some incidents in the life of Krishna, Visnu or some other god : "When Kanai (that is Vishnu) restored the Vedas from the demons, Madhu and Kaitabha, by killing them, the Lord sang the melody, Sindhura."

Rhythm and 'Vadya-Pradipa' : A work in Assamese Verses (of 17th century) on musical tala, 'Vadya-Pradipa' has been discovered. This work declares on the authority of the Hari-Smriti-Sudhankura⁶ that music signifies the union of the pentad : singer, instrument player (drummer), dancer, musical voice (kanthitala) and mridanga⁷ and mentions more than fortyone talas and describes twenty six in some detail.⁸

5. M. Neog, Sankaradeva and His Times, p. 285.

6. D.H.A.S., MS. No. 569.

7. M. Neog, Sankaradeva and His Times, pp. 287-ff.

8. M. Neog, 'Music in Assam', This is Assam, Jorhat, 1958, pp. 74-79; 'The Vaisnava Renaissance in Assam', Aspects of the Heritage of Assam, pp. 45-47.

Musical Instruments : Madhava Kandali's Ramayana mention Natas and Natis and enlists a great number of musical instruments—mardala, Khumuchi, bhemachi, dagar, garatal, ramtal, tabal, jhajhar, jinjiri, bherimahari, tokari, dosari, kendar, dotara, vina, rudra-vip-anchi. Other musical instruments were mentioned by another poet, Harivara Vipra. Poet Suryakhari Daivajna gave a very detailed list of musical instruments in his Darang-raj-vamsavali ; this list included dundubhi, nagara, rambona, Kavilas, khanjarika, dotana, rabab, Sarinda, rudrakatokari, turi, khol, gogona, murali, upanga, gomukha, dholok.

The tradition of Assam's music had to be carried and borne through the centuries in a considerable measure by religious circles. The contributions of the Vaisnavite movement in this regard were unique. The variety of folk songs including Bihu music current in the land indicates the extent of people's natural participation in their aesthetic and cultural growth. The Ahom kings also played a significant part in the promotion of music, dance and drama.

Ahom Kings and Music : King Rudra Singha was a patron of music. Hindusthani music was introduced into Assam during his reign. He himself wrote Thungri, Gajal, and Tappa songs. His sons, kings Siba Singha, Pramatta Singha and Rejaswar Singha wrote many Kheyal and Tappa songs dedicated to Sakti worship. Rudra Singha's 'Khaunds' brought from Hindusthan some people capable of singing, dancing and playing on musical instruments ; and some from Assam went to Delhi to learn music and playing on 'Pakhowaj' and other musical instruments.⁹ Tripura Buranji records that musicians from Tripura sang kirtans, played on flute, and danced before Rudra Singha, in Tripura style.¹⁰ To encourage indigenous music, Rudra Singha instituted a number of khels, e.g., Khuliya, Kaliya, Mridangiya, Dhuliya, Negeria, Khutitoliya, Nachaniyar, Talowa, Beenowa, Biyah-gowa, Padgowa, and appointed an officer, Gayan Barua to look after them. During Siba Singha's reign, Krishnam Bhattacharya had influence on both religious and cultural matters and he helped learning of non-indigenous music.

9. Gunabhiram Barua, Assam Buranji, p. 125.

10. S. K. Bhuyan, Tripura Buranji, p. 2.

When the Ahom king used to go out of town, it was the practice of Dhuliyas and Mridangiyas, as a mark of honour to royalty, to accompany him in front, playing on Dhol, Khol and Mridanga. This honour used to be shown to Burhagohain, Bargohain and Barpatragohain also. Composition of songs got an impetus under the Ahoms under encouragement from kings and officials. Prema Bhusan's Gits, Kaivalyananda's Gits, Sunanda Deva's Gits, Sri Ram's Gits and Ramananda's Gits are worthy of mention. Geeti-Malika', a work written during the Ahom period has also been discovered. 'Gits' with 'Bhanitas' of Jayadhvaj Singha, Rudra Singha and Siba Singha are extant. In the 'Gita Puthi' compiled by Kaviraj Chakravarty, court poet of Rudra Singha and Siba Singha, are mentioned 'Ragas' and 'Talas' current at the time. Hem Chandra Goswami says in reference to 'Gita-Puthi', : "It contains numerous religious songs composed by different poets in the reign of Rudra Singha and Siba Singha. There are several songs composed by Rudra Singha and Siba Singha themselves." The Bairagis of the Bairagi-khels organised by Rudra Singha had to acquire proficiency in 'Bairagi Git', 'Tokari Git' and 'Deh-Bichar-Git', etc., before they could engage in their usual work of spying.

Royal patronage was extended to the Bihu festival in the Ahom period and this became thence-forward the national festival of Assam. The festival of Bihu songs and dances began to be staged in the arena in front of 'Rang-ghar' to the joy and delight of royalty, nobility and the masses and became a great cementing force for unifying all.

Section II

DANCING

Inhabited by a composite people, Assam evolved her indigenous dance forms, tribal and other, and varied folk dances. The Neo-Vaisnavite Renaissance also introduced, evolved and left a rich legacy of a characteristic style of classical Indian dancing in Sattriya dances. The art of dancing along with the companion gestures seems to have been cultured in Assam prior to Sankaradeva as is evident from references in copper-plate grants and from cultural relics. The Siva temples in particular and the Hayagriva-Visnu temple of Hajo had the institution of nati or dancing women attached to them till recent times.¹ Gestures of hands were used in the worship of gods and goddesses; and although different in purpose, the origin of such gestures was not different from that of gestures used in dancing. The Kalika-purana sets forth 108 such mudras, which are considered propitiatory to deities.²

Tribal Dances : The Kherai Dance held during Kherai Puja amongst the Bodos has 12 varieties—Bathan Giding groi, Chhatrali Mochhanoi, Khafri Chibroi, Khajjoma Pono, Gondowala Bonnoi, Chhagolan, Maichho Jelenoi, Naobonoi, Gorai Dabrai, Nafur Golonoi, Dao Thoi Longnoi, Papla Mochanoi.

The Moon Dance (Chandra Nritya) amongst Nagas held at night is charming. Two rows of girls face each other in this dance. The Nagas dance in celebration of 'Mithun' sacrifices to gods. This dance performed by the Ao Nagas is known as 'Tsong Sang'. In this dance men and women stand in a circle, holding arms and chant 'mantras'. Amongst the Miris there are dances connected with birth, attainment of puberty, marriage and death. Amongst the Lushais, there is a gorgeous festival

-
1. M. Neog, 'The dancing maids of Pariharesvara Siva', Souvenir, Assam Sangeet Natak Academy, Sixth Session, January, 1959; Dance tradition in Assam, Dance Seminar, Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, 1958.
 2. M. Neog, Sankaradeva and His Times, p. 292.

called 'Mitthiop Lam'. In this festival people dance with effigies of deceased ancestors. Amongst the Garos, in their 'Mon-Gona' ceremony connected with death, dances are unavoidable features.

War dances are arranged by the tribals aiming success of arms, in celebration of victories in war or for promoting communal harmony. There used to be village feuds in tribal areas. At the end of a feud, the victors used to dance in the village fields with daos and spears in their hands to celebrate their victory. Amongst the Nagas, the people had the right to celebrate victory dances if the warriors brought the heads of their enemies. The Nagas still celebrate victory dances if a warrior is successful in a hunting expedition. During victory dances, the warriors danced with war cries and shouts and narrated to the admiring audience how they vanquished their enemies. The Sema Nagas dance with daos in their hands and jump high into the air with terrible war-cries. A mock battle also takes place in which two dancers take part and indulge in weapon thrusts at each other with great skill. The Nagas have many dance numbers, but the war theme is very popular with them. Almost all the Naga tribes dance with decorated spears in their hands.

In Angami Naga War dance, an Angami youth armed with 'dao', spear and shield, jumps about, moves the spear and yells, as if challenging the enemy to battle. The Garos have war dances. Two persons stand opposite each other with swords and shields in their hands; they call each other and shout threats. According to Butler, the Kukis used to carry enemies' heads to their villages after winning wars and danced war dances in warriors' dresses immediately on entering villages.

The Hunter's dances amongst the Assam tribes, express their joy over success in hunting. The Lushais after a successful hunting expedition, dance on return to their village. There are varieties of Shikari-dances amongst the Manipuris.

There are dances connected with agricultural operations, aiming at better yields or expressing jubilation over good harvests. The Garos dance 'Mi-Gi-O' in which men and women of any age can participate. Dancers stand in two rows, men

in the rear row and women in the front row ;—men play on instruments and women dance in imitation of sowing and transplanting operations. There are different Naga dances centering round agriculture. Harvesting ceremony constitutes the main festival amongst the Rengma Nagas and continues for many days. The fourth day of the festival is called 'Kuni Hungjung' or Dance Day ; on this day, the Rengmas wear good dresses and dance and sing in praise of the great men of the past.

Amongst the Lakhers, the 'Pakhupila' Dance is very important and follows cultivation and harvesting on Jhum lands. In the village lanes, the youths, boys and girls, dance ; in a circle they stand, a girl standing by the side of every boy ; in the centre of the circle a man stands, plays on the 'Gong' and directs the music and the dance. The dancers go round the village, singing and dancing. Another similar Lakher dance is known as 'Paju Taola'. Amongst the Kukis there are similar agricultural festivals of dances and songs. Amongst the Khasis, dances are important in different festivals. Their Nongkrem festival is connected with agriculture. The Nongkrem dances are expected to propitiate the presiding deity, 'Kacklei Chin Shcar' ; some of the dances are performed round the altar and the sacred pole, 'Rishchat Mei' ; not much movements are there—only the feet are slowly moved forward and backward. Amongst the tribals, there are 'Peacock dances', 'Tiger dances', 'Fish dances' etc. In Angamalu dance of the Ao Nagas, the different rows of dancers, four in each row, dance in imitation of swimming fish.³

Community dancing and community singing are established institutions in the tribal areas of Assam. They are rhythmic expressions of joys of life of the tribal peoples who have lived through the years and still live their fine community life in which community dancing and community singing are still popular.

The Jaintias of Assam dance on the occasion of 'Bedinkhallam' festival. Each participant moves his limbs freely and to the rhythm of loud drumbeats. The 'Laho' dance of the Jaintias is interesting. In this dance, a girl gets in between two boys and

3. B. K. Barua, *Asamar Loka Sanskriti*, pp. 191-202; M. Neog, 'Folk Dances: Assam', *Classical and Folk Dances of India*, Bombay, 1963, Part VI, pp. 9-20.

they float in a comfortable rhythm. The Jayantias have also their popular 'Shukra dance'. In this dance a girl and a boy dance as if in the court of a king. This was very popular in the Jaintia court.

The Adis and Tangsas of NEFA also dance on religious occasions. The Adis can be called a dancing tribe. The Adi boys and girls dressed up in colourful clothes form a big circle with joined hands and dance with quick steps. The leader takes his place in the middle with a dagger in his hands and sings. In the Kameng Frontier Division, the Monpas and Sherdukpens have their various dances inspired by their faith.

The tribals dance on religious occasions and also at the time of harvesting. Agriculture is very important, their economy depending on it. Many tribal songs centre round agriculture. 'Ja Mogapa' or 'Rang Chugala' dances and 'Wangala' dances of the Garos are very important dances connected with agriculture. The former celebrate the dedication of the first produce of agriculture to the god of agriculture ; the latter are held after harvesting and continue almost for a month. In these festivals of dances the women participate enthusiastically. The Wangala dances have many numbers. The Garos wear turbans and decorate them with feathers. The men dance with large drums and provide the rhythm. The number in which each drummer slowly moves to the line of dancing women and selects a bride for himself is very amusing. The Garos also perform a dance number in which harvesting is imitated in a perfect manner. The Mikirs and the Bodos also celebrate the Festivals of Harvests through the media of thanks-giving dances.

The Miris are another dancing tribe. They have dances with agricultural themes. Miris dance in an exciting manner and have very swift movements. While dancing, their hands fly in the air and their hips sway to the rhythm of drum-beats. They wonderfully preserve the Bihu dances. In Bihu dances the Miri girls tremble and quiver like leaves swept by a strong wind. Some Miri dance numbers have romantic themes. The Miri girls put their souls into their dances. The Miris have flutes and drums. In some dance numbers, the dancers also sing while dancing. They pause to sing a few verses and then depict them in dance.

The Daflas of NEFA are a tribe of violent dancers. With daos in their hands, they jump high into the air and yell war-cries. The Kacharis and the Lushais have very soft dances. Some of the tribes have musical instruments like drums, pipes and flutes. Blowing of horns and beating of drums are popular. In Mizo Hills, there is the bambo dance. The tribal songs and dances are beautiful and portray all themes that have importance in human lives.⁴

Broadly speaking, there are two types of dance practised by most tribal peoples : one is ceremonial, and it is normally taboo to perform it except on the occasions of festival, wedding, funeral—established by tradition ; the other is recreational and may be danced at any time ; boys and girls dance, not to please the gods, but to please themselves. In NEFA many of the dances are ceremonial or ritualistic. The Monpas and Sherdukpens, the Membas and Khambas have ceremonial pantomimes. The mummies perform in gorgeous dresses and finely carved and painted masks during the chief Buddhist festivals, accompanied by drummers, trumpeters and Lamas clashing great cymbals in front of the local Gompa or temple. These pantomimes have stories to tell or morals to inculcate and have humorous interludes provided by clowns. For recreation boys and girls have simple dances.

The Akas, Buguns and Mijis have charming dances, performed mostly by girls. The Daflas or Bangnis and the Apa Tanis have vigorous dances. Some of their performances are games-cum-dances, e.g., the snake Game or the Dance of the Short-tailed Bird. The Mishmis have ceremonial dances danced by priests in all their finery. The Tangsas had their dances. The Noctes and Wanchos of Tirap had splendid War dances. The Adis of Siang and north-western Lohit are great dancers. Their 'Ponung' dance is famous, having large variety of steps and movements. This is a ceremonial dance—the leader chants the traditional epics of the tribe at certain festivals ; this is

4. J. D. Baveja, *Across the Golden Heights of Assam and NEFA*, Calcutta, 1961; pp. 139-144; M. Neog, 'Folk-dances of Assam', *The Marg* (Art Journal Ed. by Dr. Mulk Raj Anand), *Folk Dance Volume*, Bombay, 1959.

also performed for recreation. The Mishmis and the Monpas have drums, and the Wanchos and Noctes have great log-drums or Xylophones in their Morungs. The Jew's-harp, a variety of fiddles and the flute are found.⁵

Bihu Dances : The Bihu dances are strictly speaking an enactment of agricultural and pastoral experiences of the people. The Bihus are a fertility festival. The Bihu dances with their different postures and accompanying songs have erotic features. The people sing and dance together, young boys and girls drawn to each other in the golden lure of dreams, songs and the plaintive Bihugits and Bongits. The light of spring illumines and the message of love overflows the dancers' soul with joy and happiness ; these dancing scenes of romance do often ripen into life-long partnership in marriage. The Bihu dances are a superb expression of manly art and disport—to the accompaniment of songs and native drums called 'dhols' and 'mahar-singar pepa' (flute made of buffalo horn), the people dance in gay abandon. The Bihu festival of music and dances has become a national festival of the Assamese people. The Bihu dances reveal Austro-Asiatic influences and are robust relics of the ancient, pre-dominantly agricultural, Austro-Asiatic civilisation, gradually developed and modified, attuned and adapted to the aesthetic needs of the composite Assamese Society.

Dance Forms in Assamese Marriages : Dance forms are evident in some of the ceremonial functions of Assamese marriages also, e.g., when the groom is welcomed, a company of ladies go for and bring water and so on.

Manipuri Dances : Manipur is often described by Western writers as a 'Paradise of Civilisation' because of its dances and music. The Manipuris are an artistic people and have a strong aesthetic sense. 'Fougouroba' dance of the Manipuris, danced by priests, is connected with agriculture. Manipuri marriages start with Sankirtan and during Sankirtan, there are Tindan, Rajman, Tanchup, and Menkup dances. The Lai Haraoba and the Ras Lila dances are Manipur's two most 'precious jewels'. Amongst the Manipuris, Lai Haraoba dance is for pleasing gods

5. Dr. Verrier Elwin, *A Philosophy for NEFA*, pp. 265-267.

and goddesses. There are different varieties of Lai Haraoba, e.g., Nongdon, Jagoi, Leitai-Mungdai and Leinet Jagoi. In these dances, the priests dance. Other men and women dance the Laipou dance. The Lai Haraoba is essentially a village dance. The whole village participates in it and its purpose is to ensure the continued productivity of the land. During almost any month of the year some where, in some locality, this dance is being given.⁶ Vaisnavism amongst the Manipuris had led to the evolution of other religious dance-forms, particularly Ras-Nritya of which there are different types, e.g., Bhangi, Khurumba, Pareng, Vrindaban Pareng, Chanchenwa, Aichei, etc. In full dress, a Raslila performance is a splendid spectacle.

The Manipuri dance technique appears to have affinity in its modus operandi with the dance technique of the old Kamrupi School of dances. The orchestra is composed of one or more drums and a stringed instrument or two. The performers keep time to the tune and music. Sometimes the dresses used are extremely colourful, bright and picturesque.

Sankaradeva left no aspect of the cultural life of the people beyond the bounds of his transforming, magic touch. He said that his father Kusumavara was a Gandharva incarnate and himself created a new style of classical Sattriya dancing in Assam.⁷ The Sattriya style evolved and established itself earlier and the Manipuris evolved their classical dancing later, after Vaisnavism came to their land in the 18th century. It is likely, therefore, that the Manipuri style had the impact of and was influenced by the Sattriya style of dancing.⁸

Oja-Pali Dances : The Oja-Pali dances were extremely popular and are so even today as a very common entertainment in rural Assam. The Oja-pali party usually consists of four to

-
6. M. Neog, 'The Gods' pleasure dance of Manipur, Meitheis, *Journal of the Music Academy, Madras*, Vol. XXVIII, 1958.
 7. Santidev Ghose, 'Address of President of Music Section', *Assam Sahitya Sabha Varsiki, Thirty-first Annual Conference, Assam Sahitya Sabha, Dibrugarh, 1964*, pp. 65-74.
 8. M. Neog, 'The Vaisnava Renaissance in Assam', *Aspects of the Heritage of Assam*, pp. 46-47; Hem Barua, *The Red River and the Blue Hill, Gauhati*, 1962, p. 202.

five singers, and is divided into two groups, each singing in chorus. The leader is called Oja and his companions are called Palis. One of the Pali is called Daina-pali, the right hand companion. The leader extemporises or unfolds the story, recites the refrain, and the Palis repeat the refrain by playing on cymbals and keeping with the movements of their feet. In interpreting the verse-narrative, the Oja uses dramatic gestures, expressions, and movements. Occasionally, in the middle of the performance, the Oja pauses and converses with Daina-pali by way of expounding the story in order to give the entertainment the appearance of a dramatic dialogue.⁹

That the choral institution of Oja-pali belonged to a period anterior to Sankaradeva has been inferred from the lyrical form (appropriate to Choral singing) of the poetical works of Durgavara, Mankar and Pitambara, contemporaries of Sankara, considered to be free from neo-vaisnava influence. The Oja-pali chorus which used to sing stories in verse from the Ramayana or the Mahabharata, came to be known as Vyas or Vyahgowa or Sabhagowa Ojapali. The last vestiges of 'hands' (hasta or mudra) are still to be recognised in the Ojas' performances. Among the glances (dristi) mentioned by the Ojas are : neula cawan (mangoose-glance), bagula cawan (paddy bird glance), Madan cakhu (Cupid eye), and ghata cakhu. Gaits (pada, gati) have such names as hatthi-bulan (elephant gait), ghora bulan (horse gait), Simha bulan (Lion gait), hamsa-bulan (goose-gait). These seem to echo classical names like Gajalila-gati, turangini gati, asvotplavana or asvakranta gati, Simhigati, hamsi-gati.¹⁰ The Ojapali institution, performing ritualistic dances on the occasion of the worship of the Serpent goddess, Mansa or Marai, is known as Marai-gowa, rang-gowa or

9. B. K. Barua, *Sankaradeva Vaisnava Saint of Assam*, p. 69. It may be mentioned here that under Viswa Singha's patronage, Durgabar, a non-Vaisnavite poet composed his songs of the Ojapali dances, known as Durgabari songs; Narayandev flourished under the patronage of the king of Darrang—his songs known as 'Suknanni' also accompany Ojapali dances.

10. M. Neog, *Sankaradeva and His Times*, pp. 292-ff.

Suknanni (Suknanni-Sukavi-Narayani, of Sukavi Narayana, a poet of the Manasa Saga, 17th century). The leader of the chorus also dances as he sings the songs ; and there is also a danseuse, deodhani (deva-dhani, 'God-woman'), attached to the group, whose frenzied dances are remarkable.¹¹

Deodhani-Nach : Deodhani-nach was also popular. Deodhani (the female dancer) used to dance for hours before the Goddess till she attained almost a half-conscious state, when she was expected to secure divine powers from the Goddess. The Deodhani dance used to be performed during Manasha Puja, Kumari Puja at Kamakhya (here the dancer used to be a man), Kherai Puja of Bodo-Kacharis ; it used to be arranged also to ward off the evils of bad days and of wartime etc.

Nati-Nach : Nati-nach of Assam, as at Hayagriva-Madhava temple, was similar to Devadasi dance of South India. In old Tantrik texts and in Ahom Buranjis, there are references to the prevalence of Nati Dance which used to be performed particularly in Saiva and Sakta temples of Assam.¹²

Sattriya Dances : The Sattriya dances possess a number of 'hastas', intricate and developed choreographical patterns, distinctive costumes and a variety of masks. The accompanying music depends on the khol or mridanga, various forms of cymbals, supporting songs with appropriate ragas and talas. There is no order of nuns in the Sattras ; women dancers and actresses are not allowed in this school. In the village performances also, the women's roles, are played by the boys.

The Sattria dances centre round Ankiya Nats of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva. These dramas are but songs and dances and the narration of the whole story progresses through dances. The Sutradhara or the master of the whole show is the main dancer. The major dance forms of an Ankiya Bhawana are Sutradharanach, Krishna-nach or Cali-nach. These dances are more or less adopted from classical texts on dancing. Before the actual performance of the play, the orchestra or the Gayan-Bayan party

11. M. Neog, Sankaradeva and His Times, p. 293.

12. M. Neog, 'The dancing maids of Pariharesvara Siva', Souvenir, Assam Sangit Natak Academy, Sixth Session, January, 1959; 'The art of dancing in Assam', Jhankar, Vol. I, 1954.

led by the Sutradhara display a prolonged series of dances to the accompaniment of khol (drum) and tala (cymbal). These preliminary dances are known as sarudhemali, bara-dhemali, deva-dhemali, ghosa-dhemali and are intended to invoke the favour of God for the play to be presented. The dhemali on musical prelude is also called ranga and resembles the purvaranga mentioned in the Natya Sastra. War dances also are a notable feature.¹³

The Sattrā circles distinguish the dances of the Sutradhara, Krishna (or Rama) and the Gopis or Women characters from other varieties in a dramatic representation and some times call these Sutra-bhangi, Krishna-bhangi, and Gopi-bhangi respectively. Even today these possess a tone superior to that of the other dance elements. They also follow an elaborate scheme of choreography and occupy each a sufficient amount of time.

Sutra-bhangi or Sutradhara Nach : The Sutradhara enters the stage under the cover of a curtain. When the curtain is taken off, he is in bowing posture with head, hands upto elbows and knees fixed to the ground. Musicians play gently upon instruments, the Sutradhara keeps dancing as he slowly rises and stands. Music and dancing increase in tempo and intensity. The performance of the dance is divided in some quarters into two parts—the first and gentle part, saru-bhangi (minor-postures) and the last and vigorous part, bar-bhangi (major postures).

Krishna-bhangi or Gosain-Pravesar Nach : As the Pravesagita is sung, Krishna (or Rama) enters the stage with the required retinue, with dancing movements. The 'hands' employed are not too many but includes Krishna's characteristic 'hand', displaying the playing of his flute, which is unique. The dance is characterised by pleasant agility.

Gopi-bhangi or Gopi-Pravesar Nach : The dance of the milkmaids of Vraja, of Yasoda and other women characters,

13. M. Neog, 'The Vaisnava Renaissance in Assam', *Aspects of the Heritage of Assam*, pp. 46-47; *Dance traditions of Assam*, National Dance Seminar, Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, 1958; B. K. Baruah, *Sankaradeva Vaisnava Saint of Assam*, pp. 78-79.

characterised by very subtle circling movements, is a special attractive feature of Sattriya dances.¹⁴

Cali-nach or Natuwa-nach : The dance resembles Cali or 'the spreading out of the tail of a peacock or similar bird'. Some bargitas and songs from the dramas representing actions and sentiments of women are presented in this dance form, performed by young monks dressed as women as in Gopi-bhangi. There are different varieties of natuwa nach, e.g., twelve different types in rich Sattras of the Majuli. Then there are the Hajowaliya and Pakhauji styles imbibing features from dances of temple-women of Hajo and of some style of Northern India respectively. There are apsara-bhangi (Nymph dance) of Auniati-Sattras and patchah calam (Badshah Salam). In some features, particularly in the costumes, natuwa-nach seems to have some sort of relation with the Manipuri School of dancing. This dance requires extra-ordinary flexibility of the body and thorough training of the limbs of the boy monks through difficult physical exercises.¹⁵

Jhumura etc. : In Sattras like Kamalabari Jhumura is performed by boy monks. Nritya-bhangi—This is performed by three pairs of Gopas and Gopis to the tune of a Bargita or one of the five songs, Rasa-jhumura of Madhavadeva. Rasa-nritya—This is the popular Rasa (circling) dance the Gopis of Vrindavana. Radha, however, does not play the predominant role among the gopis and does not share the centre of the dancing circle with Krishna. Then there are Yuddhar-nach (fighting-nach), Bhawariar-natch (dance of the general body of actors), Ariyanach or torch-dance etc.¹⁶

Ahom Monarchs and Dances : The Ahom monarchs also encouraged dances. Many of the reputed Sattras in Upper Assam were established during the Ahom reign and Ahom monarchs' patronage helped the development of the Sattras and the promotion of cultural activities therein, including dancing, singing, dramaturgy and painting. The king's 'Kareng Ghar' ('Ka' meaning Dancing Girl and 'Ren' meaning House) was also

14. M. Neog, Sankaradeva and His Times, pp. 294-ff.

15. M. Neog, Sankaradeva and His Times, p. 298.

16. Ibid, pp. 299-ff.

a centre for the culture of the dance art, for here in this house the king used to sit for enjoying dances and music performed by artistes. For dancing in Kareng-Ghar and temples, from certain definite families of Chinatoli, Kalugaon, Dergaon and Dubi, dancing girls used to be recruited. Rani Phuleswari Kunwari was the daughter of a dancer of Chinatoli. Devadasi and Deodhani dances were in vogue in temples. Koch and Ahom kings brought people of Nat or Gandharva caste from different places, granted them lands and settled them near about the temples of Umananda Siva of Gauhati, Hayagriva Madhava of Hajo, Swayambhu Linga of Dubi, Siva of Dergaon for dancing and singing before the gods. Men and women of this caste used to sing and dance in temples to the accompaniment of Mridanga, Nagra, Patital, Khutital, Tokari, and Dotara etc. The kings used to encourage the staging of Ankiya Bhawanas replete with songs and dances. There was a tremendous progress of dance, drama and music during the Ahom age.

Performance of Ankiya Nats : Profusion of Dances : Preponderantly dance-dramas, the Assamese Bhawanas strikingly co-ordinate and harmonise four elements—song, rhythmic representation by dance, melody emanating from appropriate instruments and dialogue. In the lyrical Assamese Bhawana abounding in songs, dances, the characters rhythmically dance through from the beginning to the end with appropriate step, gesture and abhinaya postures. In this dance drama, the Sutradhara is the main dancer, he dances throughout the play ; other dances as mentioned before, are Krishna-nach, Gopi-nach, Rasa-nach, Natuwa-nach or Cali-nach, dances by the Gayan-Bayan party led by the Sutradhara in Dhemali or ranga (Sarudhemali, baradhemali, deva-dhemali, ghosa-dhemali) to the accompaniment of singing with 'khol' and 'tala'. The Dhemali is in the nature of 'Purvaranga'. Sometimes dhemali continues for hours. At the end of an incident in the play or at the end of the performance, orchestral music and dances are repeated.

Dramas Staged in Sattras and Village Namghars : The Ankiya-Nats were written with a religious motive and they were usually staged in Sattras and in village Namghars or prayer halls on occasions like Janmastami, Nandotsava, Dol-Yatra, Rasapurnima and on Saints' days. Later on, they came to be staged

on other festive occasions as well, as on full-moon nights, during seed-time and harvest. Sometimes temporary sheds or rabhas used to be constructed for dramatic performances. Madhava-deva set up at Barpeta a big hall, Bar Ghara or Rangiyal-ghar to stage his Bhojana-Vihara and Dadhi-mathana.

The Namghar is a two-roofed thatched structure measuring generally more than forty feet in length and rectangular. Close to it, at one end is built a small house called the 'manikut' or 'garbhagriha' where a copy of religious scripture is kept on a singhasana or a wooden throne. The side near the manikut is reserved for the Adhikar and for the Brahmans. The side close to the entrance forms the general auditorium (ranga-mandapa). About two-thirds of the space between the rows of pillars make the stage or rangabhumi. The orchestra and the actors sit surrounding the space meant for the stage. An 'Ar-Kapor' or a white curtain is used when the principal actors come out from the Cho-ghara or green-room near the Namghar. The actors are called bhawariyas and the dancers, nartakas, natuwas or natas. Those who supply the orchestra are known as Gayan-Bayan (Gayan, singers; Bayan, instrumental musicians).

Participants : Actors were recruited from the villagers. Handsome youngmen specially of high castes portrayed the roles of Krishna, Rama and their consorts; they kept fast before the presentation of the bhawana. Female roles were played by teen-aged youths. Even men of erudition, great artistic attainments and of high social, religious and political status played roles in Assamese bhawana without loss of prestige and honour. There was nothing disreputable about acting.

The Village Khanikar : The village Khanikar, a painter and maker of wooden and earthen images by profession, rendered important services in relation to staging of dramatic performances. He made image of God, prepared the Cho (effigies) and Mukha (masks)—lifesize, grotesque and fantastic, arranged necessary costumes, improvised weapons of battle, such as sword, shield, bow, arrow, discus and club, helped in general make-up of the actors in the green-room etc. He had to be a man of many attainments.

Costumes : The Sutradhara wears a ghuri or flowing skirt with broad lace button and reaching to the ankle, a 'phatua'

or a vest with or without sleeves, and colourful Karadhani or waist-band. He ties a type of turban, a 'pag' on his head. The Gayan-Bayan have similar costume but of simple design. The male characters put on dhuti coming down to the knee and waistcoat—these may be coloured and embroidered according to the rank of the roles. Costumes for women roles are carefully chosen, the main dress consisting of mekhola, riha, and chadar ; ornaments are worn in profusion.

Make-up : Paints are used for make-up. Conspicuous paints are prepared by mixing 'hengul', cinnabar, and 'haital', yellow-orpiment. Colours or combinations of colours used have traditional significance. Krishna for example is painted in syama, blue-black, a Brahman or a mendicant in white, a violent and brutal man in red, the devils in black.

Effigies and Masks : Effigies and masks were in use in popular dancing even before Sankaradeva's times. In Cihna-Yatra produced by Sankaradeva, mask was worn by 'Garuda'. Masks used are of three types : grotesque or hideous ones worn by, for example, Ravana, Kumbhakarna, Yama, Hanuman ; those worn by different animals, monkeys, bear, Kaliya-Serpent, Garuda, Jatayu bird ; queer and comic ones worn by buffoons and jesters. Masks generally cover the head and the face. Elaborate life-size effigies are also indispensable in performances like Ravana-Vadha, Kaliya-daman and Syamanta-haran. Ravana wears a life-size mask with ten heads and hundred hands. Life-size masks are also worn by Kaliya serpent, by Jambubanta, the bear, by Kumbhakarna and Hanuman. Life-size or huge masks are made out of bamboo splinter-bars and cloth ; buffoons' masks are prepared from clay, cloth, rough paper and bark of trees ; sometimes bark of plantain tree is used as a temporary expedient ; head dress and upper masks (masks for head and face) are carved out of wood and of hard bark-sheet.

Time of Performance : Generally bhawana starts in the evening and continues through the whole night. Smaller plays like Madhavadeva's Coradhara, Pimpara Gucuwa require shorter period. Bhawanas are mostly presented during the winter months—Magha (mid-January) to Vaisakh (mid-April) i.e. after the harvesting season and before the commencement of the ploughing season. On occasions, several villages co-operatively present

different plays both day and night continuously, for several days ; these are known as Bara-kheliya bhawanas (performed by several 'Khels' or Guilds).

Dramas carried to Royal Court : Sankaradeva's dramas were mainly religious in content and objective. In course of time, however the dramas came to be staged on festive occasions and then the main purpose became recreative rather than religious ; of course the underlying religious spirit always persisted. The Ahom rulers gave a great impetus to the dramatic art. From the Namghars the performances were carried to the royal court for enjoyment of royalty, nobility and distinguished visitors. In the royal court, dramas were staged on the occasions of receptions to foreign kings or other dignitaries or royal marriages or victory celebrations. The Buranjis refer to such dramatic performances in the royal court. The Ravana-Vadha Bhawana was held on the occasion of the visit of the Rajas of Cachar and Manipur to the Ahoms court during the reign of king Rajeswar Singha ; 700 actors and musicians participated under the direction of Kirtichandra Barbarua's son.¹⁷ Na-gosain's son directed Padmavatiharan Bhawana performed before Gaurinath Singha.¹⁸ Rukminiharan Bhawana was staged before Kamaleswar Singha on the lines of the Ankiya drama, accompanied by the exhibition of the image of a black serpent, a bear and a pair of elephants.¹⁹ Akrura-gamana bhawana was also performed before Kamaleswar Singha—here there were no comic interludes.²⁰

Abiding Influence of Dramas : Sankaradeva's Bhakti movement contributed immensely to the development of art, literature and drama in Assam. The Bhawana, the religious spectacles, was also an off-shoot of this religious renaissance. The Bhawana caught the imagination of the Assamese people and developed on lines in consonance with their spiritual tradition and their environmental and temperamental requirements. Unlike the Sanskrit play which demanded a cultivated, critical and experienced audience, and which did not admit the ignorant

17. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 55.

18. *Ibid*, p. 97.

19. *Ibid*, p. 186.

20. *Ibid*, p. 188.

men, heretics and those belonging to the lower strata of society, the Assamese bhawana is a type by itself, and entirely a popular representation that breaks all social barriers and not only provides enjoyment to the village community with occasional recreation and diversion, but also acquaints them with the episodes from the epics and the Puranas. The Bhawana became a popular educational medium and a most powerful agency for dissemination of religious and ethical ideas amongst the masses.

Sankaradeva's invaluable services and contributions have made Assamese life and culture what they are and the debt the Assamese people owe to the great saint can never be repaid. Sankaradeva's writings have been for the last five centuries a source of delight, inspiration, consolation and wisdom to the Assamese people. Sankaradeva's thoughts and expressions have so pervaded their national life and literature that it is impossible, so long they speak the Assamese language, to escape his influence. In his own age Sankaradeva was acclaimed as a master poet, and his compositions became the touch-stone and criterion of poetic excellence during the succeeding generations. They honour him for greatly developing the resources of the Assamese language, for widening the imaginative range of Assamese literature and for raising it to classical elegance and richness by imparting into it what is good and beautiful in Sanskrit. In the significant expression of Madhavadeva, it may be said that 'formerly the stream of love-nectar flowed only within the confines of Heaven, until Sankara came and breached the embankments; and to now it flows tumultuous through the world.' Despite a change of outlook, shifting of ideals and birth of new literary forms, Sankaradeva's literature has come to stay as a standard and measure of great poetry. Even today his Ankiya Nats are acted, Bargits are sung and Kavyas are read with great enthusiasm. The Assamese people treasure them as a part of their national culture and spiritual heritage.²¹

Royal Patronage :

Rajeswar Singha wrote Kichak-vadha. At the instance of Kamaleswar Singha, Bhawakanta Vipra Mahanta wrote Sam-

21. B. K. Barua, Sankaradeva Vaisnava Saint of Assam, pp. 69-86.

barasura-vadha. King Chandrakanta Singha patronised the writing of the drama, 'Kumara-Harana' by Lakshminath Dwija. Both writing and staging of dramas received encouragement and patronage of the Ahom monarchs. Writing of Sanskrit dramas on the lines of Assamese Ankiya Nats was also encouraged ; among such dramas were 'Kamakumar Harana' written by Kavi Chandra Dwija at the instance of king Siba Singha and his wife, Rani Phuleswari Kunwari, 'Dharmodaya' by Dharmadeva Bhatta in king Lakshmi Singha's reign, 'Vighnesha-Janmodaya' by Gaurikanta Dwija during king Kamaleswar Singha's reign, 'Sankhachuda-vadha' by Dinanath Dwija at the instance of Kaliya Bhomora Bar Phukan, and Srikrishna-prayan by Vidya Panchanan Kavi, in Pramatta Singha's reign. Further, some dramas written at the instance of the Ahom monarchs are yet un-published. Towards the end of the eighteenth century a few dramas of a new type were written ; though these dramas were in the Assamese language, they bore the marks of the technique of the 'Yatras' of Bengal ; this happened at a time when the Bengali singers began to receive recognition in the Ahom royal court. The Ahom monarchs were not averse to, but actually aided the absorption of non-indigenous cultural traits in the life and culture of the Assamese peoples.

Section III

PAINTING

No specimen of paintings done in Assam anterior to the time of Sankaradeva is available. Copper-plate grants of early centuries of the Christian era casually refer to palaces decorated with pictures (Sachitra Prasad).¹ Bana in his Harsa - charita included among presents from Bhaskarvarman to Harsavardhana such objects as drinking vessels, embossed by skilled artists and carved boxes of panels for painting with brushes and gourds.²

Vaisnava Renaissance and Painting : The Vaisnava Renaissance of India manifested itself in the development of the art of painting also. Painters illuminated Vaisnava and other texts like Tulsidas's Rama-Charita-Manasa, Jayadeva's Gita-govinda, the old Gujarati Vasanta-Vilasa. Painters' brush touched on subjects like the amours of Krishna and Radha. The Bhagavata Purana in original Sanskrit, annotated form or translated form, was illuminated in different parts of India.

To Assam also with neo-Vaisnavism came the practice of illuminating the holy books with small illustrative paintings. Sankaradeva was a painter as well. He painted on 'tulapat' or ginned cotton paper scenes of 'Seven Vaikunthas'. He painted with vermilion and yellow arsenic the picture of an elephant and pasted it on a wooden book-case for presentation to the Koch king Naranarayana. He got scenes of Krishna's life in Vrindavana woven into a piece of cloth 180 feet long—each miniature was provided with a caption. In the Cihna-Yatra organised by Sankaradeva painted scenes were used.

Citra-Bhagavata : A copy of Sankaradeva's rendering of the first half of the tenth Skandha of the Bhagavata-purana found in the Bali-Satra of the Bardowa group, contains illustrations. These illustrations have been reproduced in a recent publication, Citra-bhagavata. These illustrations are likely to date from the

1. P. C. Choudhury, History of the Civilisation of the People of Assam, p. 505.

2. M. Neog, Sankaradeva and His Times, pp. 303-ff.

late 17th century. The technique and finish of the work exhibit all-India affiliations as well as local conventions. There is rhythm in the charming scenes of musical and dancing performances, accompanied by mudras and dynamic movement of groups. Landscape or other background is scarcely attempted. Successive scenes are flatly brought on the same plane in arched or zigzag panels. Pouring rain water, rivers and lakes are represented conventionally. Mountains look like cross sections of them as in geological diagrams. The figures are mostly in profile. Physiology and physiognomy do not seem to have received full treatment. Nature of figure drawing, fish-shapes eyes, arched eye-brows, pointed nose and sloping forehead allude to ancient tradition. Dr. Motichandra points out that "the lyrical draughtsmanship, simple composition, dramatic narration and splendid colours give the Bhagavata illustrations a charm which distinguishes them from similar Bhagavat paintings from Udaipur and elsewhere." As the original manuscript was in Bali Sattrā, these paintings were done in that Sattrā.

The paintings of the Chitra-Bhagavata are the work of some Sattrā artist and representative of the Assam School. In spite of Rajput - Mughal influences, on technique and finish, local elements stand out. K. K. Handique draws attention to the maneless Indian Lion, so common in old Assamese painting and architecture and the methan (Assamese Bison). Angular convention is maintained ; individualisation or characterisation is not attempted ; perspective seems to be unknown to the painter. All these characterise Assamese branch of medieval painting and serve as limitations on art.³

A copy of the original Purana with Sridhara's commentary is in the Karchung-Sattrā in Nowgong. There are illustrated margins in this work. In the Dinjay-Sattrā was found a copy of Sri-bhagavata-matsya-charita by Nityananda Kaystha of Mayamara-Sattrā. The wooden covers and some extra folios of this work bear paintings of several of the ten incarnations of

3. M. Neog, Sankaradeva and His Times, pp. 306--ff; S. K. Chatterji, The Place of Assam in the History and Civilisation of India, pp. 57--ff.

Visnu and other figures. In Bareghar-Sattrra there is a copy of Ramananda Kayastha's Kumara-harana.

Assam School of Painting : Assam Vaisnavism thus led to the development of the Assam School of painting. This art was patronised by the Ahom monarchs and Koch chiefs of the 17th and 18th centuries. Painting was practised in the numerous Sattras and in the Ahom and Koch royal court circles, where the artists enjoyed royal patronage ; but this does not probably mean a hiatus between the art of the Sattrra painter and that of his fellow artist in the capital, as the same features appear and reappear in both these branches of the art except perhaps some happy ones like land-scape and perspective, characterisation and portraiture and a little more infiltration of Mughal influences.⁴ It is rather unique that in the manuscript Lava-Kusar Yuddha there is a thin attempt at characterisation through facial expression and colour of the body. It is in the Hasti-Vidyarnava (1734), done in the Ahom Court Circle, that land-scape and perspective appear in their glory.

Mural Paintings etc. in Sattras : There were in some Sattras beautiful mural paintings and wood carvings with folk art elements in them. The Barpeta-Sattrra Kirtana-griha had engraved and painted wooden panels, portraying scenes from religious texts. The art of ivory carving also developed in Barpeta. Wooden posts and post-plates in Sattras and book rests, raised trays (Sarais) used for purpose of making offerings, plasure-boats etc. also bore paintings. Neo-Vaisnavism left its unmistakable impress on fine arts of Assam including painting⁵.

Royal Patronage : Illuminated Manuscripts : The Ahom monarchs encouraged painting. A number of magnificently illuminated manuscripts were the outcome. 'Illustrated Dharma-puran' was written by Kavi Chandra Dwij and 'Hasti-Vidyarnava' was written by Sukumar Barkath and illustrated by Dilbar and Dosay under instructions from king Siva Singha and his consort. Copiously illustrated were Gita Govinda by Kaviraj Chakravarty

4. M. Neog, *The Art of Painting in Assam*, Gauhati, 1959, pp. 10-12.

5. M. Neog, 'The Vaisnava Renaissance in Assam', *Aspects of the Heritage of Assam*, pp. 47-48.

and Samkha-Chura Vadha by the same author, the former having also five miniatures depicting the king's court. Another work was 'Ananda Lahari' by Ananta Acharya. The paintings in these works were not only religious⁶ pictures, but secular ones also, e.g., of kings and court life; Hasti-vidyarnava contained varieties of pictures of elephants. Beautifully illustrated Darang-Raj-Vamsavali was composed by Suryakhari Daivajna under the patronage of Samudra Narayan, the Koch Raja of Darrang. There are other illuminated manuscripts in Assam; the Lava-Kusar Yuddha of the pre-Sankara poet Harivara Vipra⁷; the Vanamali-devar Charita of Ratikanta Dvija, illuminated by one Vijay Khanikar; the isolated last folio of the Bhagavata-purana VI, in Assamese, recovered from Burma; an incomplete manuscript of Madhava kandali's (14th century) Assamese Ramayana, Lanka-kanda, written and painted on tulapat⁸; an illustrated copy of Rama Sarasvati's (16th century) Mahabharata, Udyoga-parvan, the ornaments in which were painted with real gold⁹.

Tai-Ahom Painting: There has been another school of painting in Assam, that may be termed Tai-Ahom and that seems to be an off-shoot of the Buddhist art of Upper Assam; this is to be seen in many Buddhist and semi-Buddhist manuscripts in languages of Shan origin. This school seems to have made some infiltrations into Assam's Vaisnava school as is evident from the Bhagavata-purana III, in the Kamarupa Anusandan Samiti collection¹⁰.

The large number of manuscripts produced during the Ahom rule were themselves priceless treasures of art for the artistic, calligraphic skill akin to painting and laborious orthographic ability they embodied, not to speak of the enduring materials,

-
6. S. K. Chatterji, *The Place of Assam in the History and Civilisation of India*, pp. 55-57; R. Das Gupta, *The Art of book Illustration in Assam*, Pragjyotisa, Souvenir, All India Oriental Conference, XXII Session, Gauhati, 1965, pp. 77-81.
 7. K. A. S. Library.
 8. With U. C. Lekharu, Gauhati.
 9. With Bangshidhar Barua, Charigaon, Jorhat.
 10. Rajatananda Das Gupta, 'Tai-Ahom painting in Assam', Pragjyotisa, Souvenir, All India Oriental Conference, XXII Session, Gauhati, 1965, pp. 82-90.

'Sanchipat' particularly, made with such great care, skill, and labour, on which the words were written.

Manuscript-Production : Preparation of Writing Materials : with manuscript production was connected the art of painting. Some of the magnificently illuminated manuscripts produced during the period contained not only religious paintings but also lovely portraits of kings and court life.

Preparation of writing materials and manuscripts involved elaborate, laborious processes and required much time and patience. The Yogni-tantra mentions earth, barks and leaves of trees, gold, copper, silver among writing materials. Clay seals of Bhaskarvarman have been discovered at Nalanda. Books written on strips of bark of Saci tree (*Aquilaria Agallocha*) were presented to king Harsa by Bhaskara-Varman¹¹.

The Ahoms employed strips of bark of the Saci tree (*Aquilaria Agallocha*) as writing material and Gait describes the manner of preparing the bark for use as writing material. "A tree is selected of about 15 or 16 years' growth and 30 to 35 inches in girth, measured about 4 feet from the ground. From this the bark is removed in strips, from 6 to 18 feet long, and from 3 to 27 inches in breadth. These strips are rolled up separately with the inner or with part of the bark outwards, and the outer or green part inside, and are dried in the sun for several days. They are then rubbed by hand on a board or some other hard substance, so as to facilitate the removal of the outer or scaly portion of the bark. After this, they are exposed to the dew for one night. Next morning the outer layer of the bark proper is cut into pieces of a convenient size, 9 to 27 inches long and 3 to 18 inches broad. These are put into cold water for about an hour, and the alkali is extracted, after which the surface is scraped smooth with a knife. They are then dried in the sun for half an hour, and when perfectly dry, are rubbed with a piece of burnt brick. A paste prepared from matimah (*Phaseolus radiatus*) is next rubbed in, and the bark is dyed yellow by means of yellow arsenic. This is followed again by sun-burning, after which the

11. M. Neog, Sankaradeva and His Times, p. 301.

strips are rubbed as smooth as marble. The process is now complete and the strips are ready for use"¹².

Sacipat was profusely used in writing and preparing copies of books as the same was easily available and lasts sufficiently long. The treatment of the strips with the alkaline preparation of matimah is known as Jaodiya (rubbing). This process is used on beams of old-type houses to make them smooth and shining. Sacipat, ink and painting materials like hengul (vermilion), haital (yellow arsenic), indigo and chalk (dhal) were to be found in Daksinakula in sufficient quantities¹³.

Dr. Bhuyan in his 'Note on Assamese Manuscripts' describes Sac-pat puthis thus: "The leaves were numbered, the figures being inserted at the second page of a folio. The centre of each leaf was perforated for the fastening string to pass through. Leaves thicker than those used in the body of the manuscript were used for covers; and occasionally wooden pieces were also used. There were always some spare leaves or pages to record changes of ownership, or other important events in the life of the owner or his family. These additional leaves were known as Bati-pat, or attendant leaves."¹⁴ A manuscript could be as small as the thumb of a man's hand, and yet contain the whole text of the Bhagavad Gita; one such manuscript was found by Sankaradeva as it floated down the Brahmaputra. Dr. Bhuyan mentions an Ahom Mantra-puthi with 60 leaves each measuring 1½ inches by 3 inches only.¹⁵ Some times a long strip of Saci-pat is made into a 'folder' to contain a number of pages of some text, such a work being known as bakala-puthi. An example is the Gitar-Bakala with songs "written on a long strip of Sanchi bark, some 8 feet long and 6 inches broad folded in the shape of a small square booklet"¹⁶.

Widely used, but not as enduring as Saci-pat, was tula-pat, cotton leaf. In the Caritas tula-pat is mentioned especially in

12. Gait, History of Assam, p. 375.

13. M. Neog, Sankaradeva and His Times, pp. 301-ff.

14. H. C. Goswami, Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese manuscripts, p. XV.

15. Ibid, pp. XV-ff.

16. Ibid, p. 56.

connection with painting. Tulapat looks more like fine lint than paper and was made by ginning, felting and pressing cotton (tula) into sheets.¹⁷ Among the Ahoms and other Shan people of north-eastern Assam there has been a process of making strong and tough writing sheets, these being known as tulapat, from a pulp obtained by the beating of the barks of a few varieties of trees, e.g., maihari and yamon in the Tai-phake language, the latter being the hsa of the Shans and nuni (paper mulberry, *Bronsanettia papyrifera*) in Assamese.¹⁸ Cloth does not seem to have been used by the Vaisnavas for the making of books. But verses from the holy books are sometimes woven along with various floral designs into pieces of cloth, meant for Guru-asanas or as book covers¹⁹. Among other writing materials, bamboo strips, silk treated with matimah paste, palm-leaves (tal-pat) treated with lac resin, smoothed animal hides and even bamboo sticks were considered to be of a magic value.²⁰

Making of Ink : Ink used for writing was of a very fast colour, and as deep as chinese black. It is also water-proof and does not fade even after long exposure. The main ingredient of this ink is Silikha (*Terminalia Citrina*). A few fruits of this variety are kept in water in an earthen bowl for a few days. The bowl is then exposed to dew for several nights, with a non-porous basin below it. The water, which turns black by this time, percolates through the earthen bowl and drops into the non-porous vase in the form of deep black ink. Some people add iron and iron-sulphate, and others put in the blood of a variety of fish known as Kuciya.²¹

Script and Calligraphy : Related to manuscript preparation and calligraphy is the question of script and style of writing.

17. M. Neog, *Sankaradeva and His Times*, p. 303.

18. Rajatananda Das Gupta, 'Tai-Ahom Painting in Assam', Pragjyotisa, Souvenir, All India Oriental Conference, XXII Session, Gauhati, January, 1965, p. 88.

19. M. Neog, *Sankaradeva and His Times*, p. 303.

20. Lila Gogoi, *Ahom Jati Aru Assamiya Sanskriti*, Sibsagar, 1961, pp. 126-129.

21. Kaliram Medhi, 'Likhari Sajuli' (Writing materials), *Assam-bandhava*, Vol. I.

The Assamese script is derived from the Kutila style of writing, prevalent in Northern India roughly from the 6th century, being in itself a development of the earlier pan-Indian Brahmi script. The stone, copper-plate and clay seal inscriptions of the Kamarupa kings from the 5th century onwards give us the early history of the Eastern script, which became the mother of the Assamese, Bengali, Maithili and Oriya scripts. There are numerous manuscripts and inscriptions on metal-plates and stones belonging to the period posterior to the time of Sankaradeva. Some Sattras claim to possess manuscripts in the hand of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva. The Assamese script developed three distinct types—Gadgaya, Bamuniya and Kaithali or Lahkari as it was known in the Kamrup district. The Gadgaya style centred round the Ahom court, Gadgaon and was connected with administration ; it became most widely used even in Sattra circles. The Bamuniya was the style of Sanskrit pandits, used by them in copying of the Sanskrit lore. The Kaithali Script probably originated with the Kaiths or Kayasthas and was used by them in official documents and books of accounts. This might very well have been the script practised by Sankaradeva. The famous metrical work on Arithmetic, Kitabat-manjari, and Sukumar Barkath's Hasti-Vidyarnava with its calligraphy of a great charm have been found written in this style.²²

22. M. Neog, Sankaradeva and His Times, p. 308; H. C. Goswami, Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts, pp. 65-ff, 93-95.

Section IV

ARCHITECTURE AND SCULPTURE

Architecture : Records of Archaeological Value : A few copper plates of Bhaskara Varman (593-659), the Umacal Rock inscription near Gauhati of Surendra Varma (alias Mahendra Varma—480-500), the ruins of a temple with a rock inscription at Baraganga, Mikir Hills, of Mahabhuti Varman (520-560) are the only available dependable records of archaeological value of the Varman dynasty (354-654). The kings of the Salastambha dynasty (655-985) who ruled after the Varmans were great builders. So also were the Bhauma Palas who followed.

Architectural Specimens : Mention should be made of the following architectural specimens : A frieze of a temple at Gharpura-Chupari near Tezpur containing facsimiles of three Sikharas carved in bold relief of the Vesara type ; Ruins of an ancient city at Nij-Barchola village (twentyseven miles west of modern Tezpur) including a huge stone architrave containing three-dimensioned bold reliefs of three Buddhist Catyas of the Nepali temple pattern, three Bodhi and two Nyagrodha trees ; Siddheswari temple at Sualkuchi (18 miles west of Gauhati) with Sikhara combining features of Vesara and Dravida ; Extensive ruins of vast temples near Yogijan in Hojai (Nowgong District) including the main kalasa of the main temple and scattered specimens of architectural floral designs ; ruins of innumerable temples in the Kapili and Yamuna river valleys—two architraves at Kawaimari village depicting six Sikharas of the Nagara type ; a frieze at Mahadeosal near Dharmtul with facsimiles of five temples with Nagara Sikharas ; the frieze at Akasi-Ganga near Parokhoa, depicting facsimiles of two temples with Nagara--Sikharas.

Temple Architecture : The shrine of the Great Mother Kamakhya on the top of the Nilacala hillock about 2½ miles west of Gauhati town is rich in hoary traditions. A few stone slabs of parsva devatas now embedded in the panels of the present structure appear to be replicas of similar images found in ancient sites. According to a stone inscription embedded in the inner wall of the temple, Sukladhwaja, Koch king Nara-Narayana's

brother and general, built the temple in 1565 A.D. The general lay-out of the temple conforms to the Sri-Cakra plan and has the Nat-mandir or Mandapa, the Gopuram and the Garbha-grha. The Sikhara of the Kamakhya temple is a combination of Nagara and Vesara and may be called the 'Nilacala type'. A few hundred yards south of the Kamakhya temple is the temple of Goddess Tara of the same design and pattern with an imposing gate on the approach road to the temple. The Umananda temple on the Peacock island is an adjunct to the Kamakhya Shrine. On the collapse of the old temple due to earthquake, the present temple was constructed by the Ahom king in 1694 A.D. Sukladhwaja's son Raghu Rai constructed the Hayagriva Madhava temple on the hillock at Hajo. But for the Sikhara, Raghu Rai's architect followed the usual principle of general lay-out for the temple and its adjuncts.

Ahoms as Builders : After the Koches the Ahoms were the greatest builders in Assam. Shihabuddin describes magnificent wooden palace and elegant wooden mansions of Ahom times. The Raja's audience hall, called 'Solang' was 120 cubits long and 30 cubits broad, measured on the inside. It stood on 66 pillars, each of them about four cubits round. These huge pillars were so well smoothed that at first sight they seemed to have been turned on a lathe. "My pen fails to describe in detail the other arts and rare inventions employed in decorating the wood work of this palace. Probably no where else in the whole world can wooden houses be built with such decoration and figure-carving as by the people of this country." The sides of this palace were partitioned into wooden lattices of various designs carved in relief, and adorned, both within and outside, with mirrors of brass, polished so finely that when sunbeams fell on them, the eye was dazzled by the flashing back of light. This mansion was completed by 12,000 men working for one year. "As for the many other wooden mansions—carved, decorated, strong, broad and long, which were inside the palace enclosure, their elegance and peculiar features can better be seen than described."¹ The Ahom kings, after embracing Hindu-

1. J. N. Sarkar, *Fathiyyah-I-Ibriyyah*, Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society, Vol. I, Part 2, pp. 179-194.

ism particularly of the Sakta cult, began to devote, with great zeal, a very good portion of their revenue to the construction of temple, specially in honour of Siva and Durga. The following need special mention : The great Sibdol temple at Sibsagar has the Gopuram, the Mandapa and the gate. The Sikhara is a modified Nagara, surrounded by so-called hugging Sikharas known as 'Uramanjari'. The Devidol temple at Gaurisagara in the Sibsagar District. The Gopuram has Bangagrha roof with bricks. The top of these temples does not have the familiar 'amloka' but a tier of gold-plated 'Kalasas' in gradually diminishing sizes, placed on a solid circular base made of bricks. The Devi temple on the bank of the Joysagara tank is of the same pattern as the Sibdol temple.

Some Ahom palaces and court buildings, all constructed with bricks, are still extant. They have their own characteristic pattern and style and architectural designs, peculiar to Assam. The following were constructed between 1700 and 1750 A.D. : The Talatalighar is the under-ground cellar palace of the Ahom king at Rangpur, three miles west of Sibsagar town. The four-storeyed Kareng-ghar or the royal palace is at Gargaon near Nazira about 9 miles south-east of the Sibsagar town. The two-storeyed Rang-ghar or the pavilion stadium in the parade ground at Rangpur also has wide reputation and popularity in Assam.

The architectural designs of Rangghar, Kareng-ghar, Talatal-ghar, Rangpur deserve notice. Talatal Ghar and Kareng Ghar had underground cellars—the Buranjis also mention that these two palaces were connected by an underground tunnel eight miles long. A mixture of 'Mati-Mah' (*Phaseolus Max*), 'Borali' fish, ducks' eggs, 'gur', milk, mustard oil, lime, resin etc., was used as cementing material for Rangghar and Kareng-ghar. Dragons made of such cement appear to have adorned the entrance to Kareng-ghar.

Stone Brigdes : Some stone bridges (silsakos) made in Ahom times are still in good condition. Of these stone bridges, the Silsako made in 1703 during Rudra Singha's reign is the best. This bridge was made by tunnelling through a massive stone. Of about 10 Silsakos mentioned in the Buranjis, only the Namdang, Darika, and Dijai Sakos are intact ; those of Dimau, Rahdoi and Nafuk are in ruins.

Maidams : Before conversion to Hinduism, the Ahoms used to dispose of their dead by burial.² About three hundred 'Maidams' (Mounds) or Burial Vaults made during Ahom reign are lying scattered in Assam. The dead bodies of Ahom kings and Ahom nobles used to be buried and over their graves used to be made these expensive 'Mounds'. Colonel Dalton reported that several Maidams were opened and were found to contain the remains of slaves and animals and also gold and silver vessels, raiment, arms etc³. Some of the Maidams were strong, brick-built ; others have been found with ruins of pucca structures. Very interesting details are available from Changrung Phukans' (Chief Engineers') Buranjis about measurements and constructions of Maidams or Burial Vaults of Ahom kings, materials used etc. It is understood from such records that besides other materials including huge quantities of different categories of stones, cement, broken bricks and inferior bricks etc., about half a crore good bricks were used for king Rudra Singha's Maidam and connected structures.⁴

'Changrung Phukans' Buranjis embody account of materials used and men employed in construction of buildings and palaces, temples and Maidams, roads and tanks etc., and contain measurements, plans and specifications of such works in revealing details.

Architectural Developments : Constructions during the Reign of Ahom Monarchs of the Climacteric period : Rudra Singha's contributions to architectural developments were considerable. Mention may be made here of the following works executed during his reign : Kareng-ghar at Rangpur ; Eastern portion of Talatal Ghar ; Joysagar's Keshabrai Visnu Dol, Vaidyanath Sibdol, Devi Ghar, Sree Surjyya Temple, Shree Ganesh Temple ; Rangnath Sibdol and Fakuwa-Dol ; a Rangghar made of timber and bamboos at the place where later the brick-built Rangghar was constructed ; Khari-Katiya Ali (Road), Meteka Ali ; Dubarani Ali—this road was made with fine earth dust, sifted with sieves

2. C. Clayton, 'Description of the Tomb of an Ahom Noble', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, June, 1848.

3. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 149, footnote.

4. Lila Gogoi, *Ahom Jati Aru Asamiya Sanskriti*, p. 141.

and trampled upon by elephants and overlaid with soft 'Dubari' (durva) grass ; excavation of Sonai Nai and Rupahi Nai (streams or canals) for facilitating direct water communication to the Brahamaputra ; Silsako over the Namdang river (1703 A.D.), two Silsakos over the Dimou river. Rudra Singha imported from Koch Behar an artisan named Ghanasyam and under Ghanasyam's supervision numerous brick buildings were erected at Rangpur and at Charaideo. Many of the temples made during Ahom rule were Siva temples. The Ahom pantheon had gods and goddesses similar to gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon, e.g., Lankuri, Ai-Me-Nang, Khabkham, Jasingpha of the Ahom had counterparts in Siva, Kechaikhati Goddess, Lakshmi and Saraswati respectively of the Hindus. Siva was revered as Lankuri by the Ahoms. Gadadhar Singha, who was not a Hindu, nevertheless built a number of Siva temples.

Of the temples made by the Ahoms, the Nagasankar Temple built during the reign of Susenpha (1439-1488) was the oldest. In 1532 during the reign of Suhungmung, Dihingia Raja were built a temple and a tank on the bank of the Karatoya to signalise Ahom Victory over the Muhammadans. The structural strength of Joydol of Joysagar deserves mention. Many temples were built during Siva Singha's reign, e.g., Sibdol, Devidol, Visnudol at Sibsagar (1734) ; Sibadol, Visnudol and Devidol at Gaurisagar ; Temple at Aswakranta (1720) ; Ugratara Temple (1738). Sibdol of Sibsagar is very big and lofty. Both bricks and stone were used in the construction of the temples. King Pramatta Singha gave particular attention to building of palaces. During his reign were constructed Rangghar, Talatal Ghar, and Garhgaon's Karengghar and also Rudreswar Siva Temple and Temple at Hajo and Visnu Janardan Temple at Sukreswar. During Rajeswar Singha's reign many temples were erected namely, in Upper Assam, Temple attached to Talatal-Ghar, Hara Gauri Temple ; in Lower Assam, Temple at Vasisthasram, Navagraha Devalaya, Sukreswar Temple, Nat Mandir at Kama-khya Dirgheswari mandir, Kedar Mandir, Manikarneswar Mandir and Sibdol at Negheriting. The above are only a few of the temples made by different Ahom kings. Temples were built under the patronage of Queens, Queen-mothers, nobility and high officers of State also.

Kachari Architecture : The Kacharis ruled in different parts of Assam from very early times. Ruins of several of their ancient cities with sculptures and architecture have been discovered in several sites in Assam.

Rock-cut Temple, Maibong : A specimen of a rock-cut temple of the Kachari king of the 16th century A.D. has been found at Maibong, on the bank of the Mahur river in the north Cachar Hills District.⁵ The temple was carved out of a huge rock of black sand-stone with a fairly commodious plinth area of rectangular dimension. The temple housed the tutelary war-goddess Ranacandi or Mahamaya of the Kachari king.

Ranacandi Temple, Khaspur : Later when the capital of the Kachari king was shifted to Khaspur near Silchar, the goddess was housed in a building enclosed with thick brick-walls and roofed over with four-planed curved roofs. Raj Mohan Nath gives the following description of the roof of this building⁶ : “The design and construction of this roof was ingenious : Pantiles 3 ft. to 5 ft. in length were made with baked earth, in the shape of a half-bamboo with its internodes scooped out. Two such tiles were placed side by side longitudinally along the slope of the roof on timber rafters with their concavity facing upwards and over the longitudinal joint was placed another similar tile with its concavity down-wards. Joints were flushed with lime and surki mortar. This alone was sufficient to prevent rain water from percolating down into the room below. As a sufficient further precaution the whole roof of tiles was covered over with a thick plaster of lime and surki beaten down slowly. This made the building completely leak-proof. The poor Kachari people living in the hills still adopt this method of roofing their houses with pantiles scooped out of bomboos which grow abundantly in the hills.”

Snan-Mandir at Khaspur : The Kachari king at Khaspur who came in contact with the Ahom court improved the architecture in his capital. He constructed the ‘Snan Mandir’ or the bathing temple for the deity with a Vesara dome with cornices

5. S. K. Bhuyan, Kachari Buranji, Introduction, p. XVIII.

6. R. M. Nath, The Back-ground of Assamese Architecture, Aspects of the heritage of Assam, pp. 8-ff.

all round the dome. Probably he had the help of masons from Rajputana.

Mosque and Town at Rangamati : The Muhammadans built a mosque and a town at Rangamati in the Dhubri Sub-division of the Goalpara District when they gained mastery over western Assam between 1594 and 1654 A.D., despite troubles and reverses inflicted by the Ahom kings. Hussain Shah is said to have built the mosque in 1594 A.D.

Sattra Architecture : 'Bhanjghar' : The Atharva Veda refers to common houses, built of bamboo posts with raised up bamboo roof frames covered up with grass, with two or four roofs. The Rig Veda speaks of mud houses in which poor men lived. Lord Buddha mentioned 'Ardha Yoga' or 'Suvarna Vanga-grha' or do-cala thatched houses. The houses of the common men in Assam were similar to these patterns—the thatched buildings had slanting or curved roofs in Assam with naturally heavy rainfall. A 'Bhanj-Ghar' of Assam, with bent or curved roofs, freely thatched with the common 'uloo' grass of golden colour appears to answer well to the description—'Suvarna-banga-grha'. The Vaisnava Shrines in western Assam still house the deity in a rectangular room with carved roofs of the same pattern as the Ranacandi rock temple at Maibong and this is known as 'Bhanjghar'.

The Sattras managed to retain the traditional culture of the country even at times when the country had to pass through political turmoils. The Sattra artists took to indigenous products—the timber, bamboos, and thatching grass to give vent to their ingenuity in sculpture and architecture. The Manikuta was constructed as a separate house with two curved roofs or four flat roofs. The Mandapa or the kirtana-grha was a very commodious building 50 to 100 ft. long with wide verandahs on two sides parallel to the length—the roof was covered with thatching grass on a timber queen-truss constructed with timber with artistic design ; the huge truss was supported on timber pillars 9 to 12 ft. in circumference. The two roofs were of the 'docala' pattern but the front of the house was provided with a rounded slanting roof of the same pattern as the vestibule in front of the Gopuram of the Kamakhya temple. The ridge of the kirtan-ghar and the Manikuta was provided with a round-roofed garret over it called

the Stupi or the tupi. The influence of the Dravidian architecture was evident. The 'Bat cora' or the gate house, a few hundred feet away from the kirtan-ghar, was a two-roofed small building without any walls. On four sides of the Sattra were four rows of huts known as 'Hati' where bhakats of various categories, celibates and married devotees, resided.⁷

Sculpture : There are valuable references and authentic evidences regarding existence of sculptural and architectural activities in Assam since early times. Assam sculpture falls into the category of the fourth school according to Gopinath Rao. He says,—“ The fourth school, which resembles closely to the third in respect of ornamentation and grouping, is chiefly represented by the sculpture of Bengal, Assam and Orissa. It is at once recognised by the human figures therein, possessing round faces, in which are set two oblique eyes, a broad forehead, a pair of thin lips and a small chin.” According to Rao Bahadur K. N. Dikshit, “The affinities of Assamese art would seem to lie more with the Schools of Bihar and Orissa than with the contemporary Pala art of Bengal. This is not un-natural as of the streams of influence that have moulded the culture of Assam, the strongest current has always been from North Bihar and Mid-India.”⁸

Specimens of Sculptural and Iconoplastic Art : Mention must be made of the following specimens of sculptural or iconoplastic art in Assam : The temple stone door-frame at Dah-Parvatia (Darrang) with two goddesses, Ganga and Jamuna with garlands in hand in artistic pose and elegant posture and door jambs decorated with beautiful ornamental foliage (5th or 6th century) ; Bamuni hill ruins (Darrang District) of 9th/10th century including two massive ornamental stone pillars ; carved images found at Gauhati and its neighbourhood—the huge rock-cut Vishnu group at Sukreswar, the Ananta-sayi Vishnu at Asvaplanta, the rock-cut figures near the Gauhati water-works and in the Urvasi island ; the sandstone Nataraja Siva, the

7. Raj Mohan Nath, 'The Back-ground of Assamese Architecture', *Aspects of the Heritage of Assam*, pp. 9-17.

8. *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India, 1927-28*, pp. 112-ff.

Nrittyarata Ganapati, the black stone images of Vishnu, Brahma, Indra of 10/11th century A. D., the metal images of Vishnu and Durga ; ruins of 10/11th century A. D. at Davaka (Nowgong)⁹ including the neatly carved image of Umalingana-murti ; Numaligarh ruins in Sibsagar District of a Siva temple of 10/11th century, including a most striking frieze with a row¹⁰ of busts with hands holding lotuses, tiara on the head, a big 'tilaka' mark on the forehead and with a sweet smile in the face ; Deopani Vishnu image (Sibsagar District) bearing an inscription in corrupt Sanskrit verse of 9th century ; remains of a Vishnu temple of tenth /eleventh century (Sibsagar)—a collection of huge stone images of Gaja-Lakshmi, Varahavatara, Kamadeva, Saraswati etc ; a number of terracotta plaques showing the nice poise and naturalism of human figure discovered at Dah-Parbatia (Darrang District) : carved tiles discovered at Bhismanagar near Sadiya ; ruins at Sree Surya Pahar (Goalpara) of 9th/10th century including rock-cut figures of images of Durga, Siva and Manasa ; and a few specimens of Buddhist sculpture¹¹ so far discovered in Assam etc.

Kamakhya Hill Sculptures : On the Kamakhya hill a good number of sculptures of archaeological interest dating from 8th to the 17th century A. D. have been found. The main stone gateway dates back to the 16th century Koch King, Naranarayana, the rebuildler of the temple of Mother Goddess Kamakhya. It has a pointed arch and the wall surface is decorated with lotus medallions and heraldic-looking lions.¹² The Ahoms built a stone and brick house of the Bhajghar type in front of the main shrine and in continuation of it.

Terra-cotta Plaques : A good number of terra-cotta plaques have been discovered in the Goalpara district, e.g., the dancing

9. R. M. Nath, Journal of Assam Research Society, Vol. I, 1937.

10. R. M. Nath, Journal of Assam Research Society, Vol. II, No. I ; T. N. Ramachandran, Annual Report of Archaeological Survey of India, 1936-37.

11. P. D. Chaudhury, Journal of Assam Research Society, 1944, pp. 39-ff.

12. P. D. Chaudhury, 'The Sculpture of Assam', Aspects of the Heritage of Assam, p. 19.

and the hunting scene and also the lively figure of the fighting bull. These plaques have been assigned to the 17th century.

Ahom Rulers and Sculpture : The Ahom rulers after turning full-fledged Hindu converts, gave support, sympathy and encouragement to sculpture and architecture. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they turned zealous attention to building and rebuilding of Hindu temples. Fine images mounted on some of the Ahom temples were recovered from old ruins and new sculptures also were carved out. The specimens of sculptural and architectural skill of the Ahom period are to be found in abundance, particularly in Sibsagar (Upper Assam) where the Ahoms had their Capital for a long time. In the seventeenth—eighteenth centuries they erected palaces and lofty temples which attract the attention of the archaeologists. The palaces were well-decorated and the walls of the temples were inset with icons of various denominations. The Ahoms erected lofty and magnificent temples with sculptured walls not only in the district of Sibsagar but in other parts of their kingdom also.¹³ The walls of the temples used to be inset with images carved out of stone and adorned with sculptured creepers, flowers, animals, gods and goddesses and natural scenery. The sculptured panels of Devi Temple, Gaurisagar (Sibsagar) attract attention. Terra-cotta sculptures found in the walls of Nati Gosain Dol of Rangpur are of high standard. Rangnath Dol also deserves mention.

Pratap Singha introduced Durga Puja into his kingdom. He sent Marangial Khanikar to Koch Behar to master the art of making earthen images of the Goddess Durga. This gave an impetus to later construction of Devi Dols in the Ahom kingdom. Rudra Singha not only gave attention to improved architecture but tried to beautify buildings and temples with sculptures by Assamese sculptors. The Joy Dol temple walls sculptures testify to his keen interest in the plastic art. It may

13. P. D. Chaudhury, 'The Sculpture of Assam', Aspects of the Heritage of Assam, pp. 18-21; 'The Archaeological Wealth of Assam', Pragjyotisa, Souvenir, All India Oriental Conference, XXII Session, Gauhati, 1965, pp. 33-38; P. D. Chaudhury and M. C. Das, Ancient Treasures of Assam, pp. 15-20; S. K. Chatterji, The Place of Assam in the History and Civilisation of India, pp. 59-ff.

be mentioned that some images were carved on the Sil-sako made in 1703 during his reign. Sculptured panels with sculptures of Visnu, Devi, Ganesh and Suryya etc., all round are most attractive features of the Sibdol at Negherfing, built during Rajeswar Singha's reign.

There is no doubt that the Ahom monarchs had keen artistic sense and did not lose sight of the urgency of reviving and promoting architecture and sculpture in the land and spared no pains, whenever they were free from wars and internal dissensions, towards building cities and adorning them with attractive buildings, palaces and temples and beautifying the latter with fine specimens of sculpture.

Section V

AYURVEDA AND VETERINARY SCIENCE

The earliest written work on the science of Ayurveda is said to be the Samhita ascribed to Charaka, court physician of king Kaniska. The next important treatise is that of Susruta and one Nagarjuna is said to have worked on Susruta's treatise. The name of one Nagarjuna, a Tantrik Siddha and an alchemist, is associated with Kamarupa. A native of Kamarupa, he flourished towards the end of the eleventh or the beginning of the twelfth century A.D. MM. H.P. Sastri found the manuscript of a medical treatise, entitled Yogsataka in Nepal. The work, with one hundred prescriptions, is attributed to Nagarjuna and his remedies are considered to be efficacious even today by the village medicine men of Assam. In the Kamarupi Ayurvedic pharmacopoeia there are prescriptions which are associated with Nagarjuna.

Local records mention Vaidyas or physicians and Bhisajas or surgeons who practised Ayurveda in Assam. During the Ahom rule there were separate departments under trained officers and physicians to look after and prescribe indigenous medicine for patients, both human beings and animals.¹ The extant manuscripts on the subject in Assam substantiate the practice of Ayurvedic treatment. Mention may be made of the following works on Ayurveda; Vaidya Saroddhara in Sanskrit language and Assamese script (121 folios) by Jagannatha Sarma, Cikitsa Samhita (19 folios) by Sri Damodar, the Vaidyavati, an Assamese work on Ayurveda (27 folios) dealing with fever and prescribing medicinal herbs for treatment, Cikitsa Grantha in Assamese (13 folios), Vyadhi Gusivar Katha, Cikitsa Mantra Tantradi in Assamese (21 folios), dealing with tumours, carbuncles, boils etc., and prescribing medicinal herbs.

The system of Ayurvedic treatment and of healing with mantras were considered almost inseparable in Assam. Medicinal

1. There are references to Ayurvedic treatment in Katha-Guru-Charita and Darrang-Raj-Vansavali and to Viswa Singha's Raja Vaidya in the latter work.

herbs were extensively used ; at the same time incantations and mantras were freely used for healing of patients. The herbs and the healing mantras were inextricably ingrained in the nature of people and the patients did not feel at ease and relieved unless help and blessings of both Kamarupa Kamakhya and Dhanvantari were sought and the 'demons of illness' were driven out by medicine men uttering mantras. The Village Ojhs using both mantras and medicinal herbs were likely to be preferred to the physicians relying only on Ayurvedic treatment. This superstition is popular and persists even today particularly among the tribes who believe that all diseases are caused by the demons of illness. Kamarupa became a noted centre for practice of magic and mantras and for use of medicinal herbs which the village Ojhs could find out without much difficulty from the neighbouring jungles. A Kamrupi system of indigenous medicine was worked out with details. The Ayurvedic treatment and particularly of the Asuri type is still popular, specially in the villages.²

There was another side of the practice of Ayurvedic treatment in Assam. The Ahom and contemporary rulers established separate departments for looking after and treatment of animals. They maintained officers-in-charge of elephants and horses. The veterinary science was well-developed. Ralph Fitch who visited the Koch capital during the reign of Nara-Narayan in the 16th century observed, : "They have hospitals for sheep, goats, dogs, cats, birds and for all living creatures. When they be old and lame they keep them until they die."

One Palakapyamuni probably from Kamrupa compiled a scientific treatise on elephant diseases, Hastayurveda with 160 chapters on Maharoga-Ksudraroga, Salya (Surgery) and Uttara (therapy). A profusely illustrated work in Assamese, entitled Hastividyanava was compiled by Sukumar Barkath in 1734 A.D. under orders from king Siva Singha and Queen Ambikadevi ; based on Gajendra Cintamani of Sambhunatha, it is a voluminous work (193 folios), dealing with different types of elephants, their ailments and treatment with medicinal herbs. Mention should

2. P. C. Choudhury, A Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts at the D.H.A.S., pp. II, VIII.

5

be made of valuable treatises like 'Ghoranidana' of Sagarkhari in Assamese (39 folios), dealing with different kinds of horses, symptoms of their diseases and treatment, 'Aswanidana' written by Surjyakhari Daivagya in 1806 and 'Ghorar Vyadhir Puthi'.

Medicinal herbs were used for the treatment of diseases of both the human beings and the animal life. The masses had great faith in the Kamrupi system of indigenous medicines, which contributed a great deal towards the Ayurvedic science in general. General health conditions in the country were good. Shihabuddin observed in 1662 : "The people of this country are free from certain fatal and loathsome diseases which prevail in Bengal. They are free from many other lingering maladies."³

-
3. P. C. Choudhury, 'Kamarupi Systems of Ayurveda, Astrology and Almanac', *Aspects of the Heritage of Assam*, pp. 22-27; 'Kamrupi System of Indigenous Medicine', *Ayurvedic Medicine in Assam*, 6th Session of the Assam Ayurveda Mahasabha, 1961 pp. 5-13; M. Neog, *Purani Assamiya Samaj Aru Samskriti*, pp. 138-140.

Section VI

ASTROLOGY AND ASTRONOMY

The people of Assam made significant progress in another important branch of human knowledge i.e. in the the allied subjects of astrology, astronomy and the preparation of the almanac. The place names like Pragiyotisa, Navagraha or Citrasaila, relevant references made to Pragjyotisa in Sankhyayana Grhya Samgraha, Markandeya Purana, Varaha Purana, Kalika Purana (10th/11th century A.D.), etc., and voluminous manuscripts lying scattered all over Assam, indisputably indicate the study of these sciences in Assam. Rulers maintained Daivajnas, known today as Ganakas. They had State duties under the Ahom monarchs also¹ ; no big undertaking could be possible without consulting them. Omens and divinations had a special place in the private and public life of the inhabitants of this land ; equal importance was given to astrological calculation.²

Mention may be made of the following treatises, amongst the others : 'Kamarupa Nibandhaniya Khanda Sadhya' (665 A.D.), on astrology and astronomy ; an Assamese work 'Bhasvati' on astronomy by Kaviraj Chakravarty (32 folios)—based on Suryya Siddhanta of Satananda Bhattacharyya and Mahajyotisa ; a voluminous astrological treatise in Sanskrit language, Jyotisa-tattva (90 folios) by Raghunandana Bhattacharya, 'Adbhutasara' in Sanskrit (24 folios) by Sri Mahadeva Sarma, copied in Saka 1760, dealing with extraordinary events caused by the evil influence of stars ; Astavargidasa in Sanskrit (5 folios) with occasional explanations in Assamese, dealing with astrological formulae for calculation of stars at one's nativity ; a Sanskrit manuscript, Ayanamsam, copied in Saka 1756, describing preparation of a life's chart and the influence of stars ; astrological work, Jyotisa-darpana by Bhuta Ratnakara describing determination of

-
1. Reference may be made to Chandibar Daivajna's Kahini, Deodhai Asam Buranji, p. 115.
 2. According to instructions from Naranarayana, Sridhara wrote Sadhykhanda following Bhaswati.

the 'lagna' of a new-born baby ; astrological primer, 'Jyotisa Muktavali' in Sanskrit (23 folios) by Vansivadana Dvija ; 'Jyotisa Ratnamala' (66 folios), dealing with calculations for preparation of horoscopes ; Jatakachandrika by Jagadisvara (67 folios) in Sanskrit with occasional explanations in Assamese, dealing with varas, nakshatras, tithis and preparation of horoscopes and astrological topics ; Yuddhajayarnava dasa (19 folios) on astrology, dealing with 'dasas' ; Dvadasarasi-nirnaya in Sanskrit (11 folios) on astrological calculations of the 12 constellations (signs of the Zodiac) and on an almanac and important events of the year during different tithis ; Grahavija-jnana in Sanskrit (12 folios) copied in Saka 1760, dealing with movements of stars ; Grahana-aryya in Sanskrit (18 folios) by Garga Acharyya, copied in Saka 1772, dealing with solar and lunar eclipses—based on Bhasvati Khanda Sadhya ; Jyotisa Chakra (14 folios) with calculations based on 64 chakras ; a valuable treatise on Hindu Almanac, Jyotisa (30 folios), copied in Saka 1754, dealing with positions of the sun and the moon and calculations of an almanac ; and Samvatsara Ganana in Sanskrit (16 folios) on the Hindu Almanac, dealing with detailed calculations for finding out the important, coming events in each year.³

The Kamarupi Pandits are adept in the preparation of the annual almanac, based on the old and somewhat distinct system of astronomical and arithmetical calculations. Assam has made through the ages considerable and remarkable contributions towards the study and development of the allied sciences of Astronomy, Astrology, Almanac and Arithmetic and Palmistry.⁴

-
3. In his 'Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts', H. Goswami describes twentyfour treatises written in Sanskrit and one in Assamese on Jyotisa (Astrology and Astronomy).
 4. P. C. Choudhury, 'Kamarupi Systems of Ayurveda, Astrology and Almanac', *Aspects of the Heritage of Assam*, pp. 27-30; M. Neog, *Purani Assamiya Samaj Aru Sanskriti*, pp. 134-137; S. K. Bhuyan, 'Introduction of Hindu Astronomy into Europe —The Part played by Assam', *The Cottonian*, March, 1933. In 1691 Giovanni Dominico Cassini published an account of astronomical rules taken from Assam by M de la Loubiere (J.A.R.S., I, p. 31).

Chapter VIII

CONCLUSION

Contributions of the Ahom Age to the Life and Culture of the Assamese People : The Ahoms ruled over Assam for Six hundred years and left their indelible impress on the life and culture of the Assamese people for all time. The Ahom Age was a fruitful period in all departments of life in the history of the land and its people. The foregoing pages afford only glimpses of the extensive panorama of life as it rapidly developed in all spheres during the Ahom rule.

A handful of Ahoms under Sukapha came to Assam and obtained a foot-hold in the land. Their successors carved out a big kingdom and ruled over it for six centuries. A politically disunited country was unified and brought within one State and under one strong government that ensured political stability, peace and prosperity despite successive Muhammadan invasions. Petty principalities were liquidated and there emerged one closely knit geographical and political unit named Assam.¹ The Ahoms could not remain aloof from the conquered people who far outnumbered them. Far-sighted as they were, the rulers developed social intercourse with their subjects. They increased their number by marrying from the Hindu and other non-Ahom families. Some non-ahom families were admitted to the Ahom fold and granted full privileges and status of the ruling race. The Ahoms in course of time adopted Hindu manners and customs. They adopted the language of their subjects, Assamese. They accepted the Hindu faith. They repelled Muhammadan aggressions and countered the spread of Islam in Assam and considered themselves as protectors and defenders of the Hindu faith. Thus political and geographical unification was followed by social, linguistic and religious integration, which ultimately led to a cultural synthesis in the land, leading to the growth of nationalism.

1. S. K. Chatterji, *The Place of Assam in the History and Civilisation of India*, pp. 54-ff.

The process of gradual conversion of the Ahom monarchs and other Ahoms to Hinduism is interesting. Hindu influence, as we have pointed out, entered the Ahom Court during the reign of king Sudangpha alias Bamunikowar and the same became marked in Pratap Singha's reign. Jayadhvaja Singha formally accepted Hinduism, and he and his successors up to Lora Raja were initiated into Vaisnavism. Gadadhar Singha persecuted the Vaisnavas but bestowed royal patronage upon the Saktas. Rudra Singha reversed this policy and was generally tolerant towards the Vaisnavas. Siva Singha, Pramatta Singha, Rajeswar Singha, Lakshmi Singha and Gaurinath Singha were devoted followers and energetic patrons of Saktism. The Ahom monarchs generally followed a policy of religious toleration. This policy of toleration made them popular amongst their subjects. Trouble arose in the Ahom kingdom when during the reigns of Ahom monarchs initiated into Saktism, there were deviations and deflections from this policy. The Ahoms constructed temples dedicated to Sakta gods and goddesses and these temples became the seats of Sakta culture. At the same time the Ahoms did not wholly give up their Ahom faith and practices. Both Ahom and Hindu rituals continued in the coronation ceremonies; the Rikkhvan ceremony persisted; kings did not fail to assume Hindu and Ahom names. The Ahom kings considered themselves descendants of Indra and the royal dynasty was known as Indra-vamsa. The Ahom gods and religious myths and legends came to be identified with Hindu gods and Brahmanical lore. The Ahoms brought about a cultural synthesis.² They respected Hindu scriptures, honoured Brahmans and Vaisnava Mahantas, and made endowments and grants of lands and servitors for the maintenance of Hindu shrines and Vaisnava monasteries. The Ahom priests were also patronised and allowed to perform their rituals and to officiate in ceremonies connected with marriages, deaths, burials, coronations and worship of Ahom deities, etc. Muslim priests and preachers were given due honour and lands were bestowed on them to carry on their work in ease and comfort.

2. S. K. Chatterjee, *Kirta-Jana-Kriti*, p. 57.

The growth of one synthetic Assamese culture was also facilitated by the language policy pursued by the Ahoms. Though initially the Ahom language was the language of the court, ultimately it was replaced by Assamese, and the Ahom-speakers merged themselves with the Assamese-speaking population of the land. Ahom words, expressions and ideas, however, found easy access into Assamese language and literature, particularly through the Buranjis.

The successive invasions of Assam by the Muslims had a great unifying effect on the diverse peoples of the land and made a strong, integrated national life possible in the face of a common danger. The Koches, the Kacharis, the Ahoms and the general body of Assamese people—all became united under one powerful king. National consciousness developed, patriotism took place of parochialism and separatism. At the time of the advent of the Ahoms, the country not only presented a picture of political fragmentation but also exhibited signs of social degeneration. People had more faith in magic and charms than in effort and aplomb and realities of situation. The Muslim invasions roused the people to heroic deeds, self-reliance and patriotic organisation, awakened them to a sense of realities, and helped them extricate themselves from superstition and idle speculation. Assam considerably lost contact with the rest of India in the 11th and 12th centuries ; the Muslim invasions brought Assam into contact with the rest of India again. With these invasions came into Assam the thoughts notably of the Islamic people on life and art.

The Ahoms defended the country against external aggression ; they also fortified the country on sound lines. They built good and wide roads for communication and transport, organised a postal system, opened up markets, constructed towns and temples and reconstructed villages and reorganised the social life of the peasantry. These developments had important political, economic, social and cultural consequences : people were brought together, bonds of national unity and feelings of oneness were fostered, areas of social contacts, cultural exchanges and commercial intercourse were widened and amenities of life generally were bettered. A composite Assamese culture gradually but surely evolved.

The shift was from sentimentalism to realism in the field of literature. Buranjis were business-like and free from sentimental rhetoric. The rationalistic temper of the age found expression in the growth of prose and secular literature and in the dawn of scientific curiosity finding satisfaction in utilitarian and scientific studies on mathematics, architecture, astrology, astronomy, and Ayurveda, etc. Not only Bhakti, but human love began to find place in literature ; literature became earth-bound and ceased to be purely other-worldly and idealistic.

One of the greatest contributions made by the Ahoms to the culture of the Assamese people was the custom of compiling chronicles or Buranjis. All political transactions, good deeds and bad deeds were scrolled fearlessly and impartially in the Buranjis. The Buranjis were store houses of useful information and customs and conventions of the people and constitutional precedents for the Government. They served as impetus to heroic deeds and accomplishments in the present and the future in consonance with past traditions and as discouragement to ignoble acts and failings and falling off from high standards established in the past. The scope of the historical literature of Assam extended beyond the borders of the Ahom kingdom to neighbouring races and tribes and States of India : Tripura Buranji, Jayantia Buranji, Kachari Buranji, Padshah Buranji (Annals of the Delhi Badshahate) deserve mention in this connection. The Ahoms reduced all useful information into writing ; each department of the State could have a staff manual for ready reference ; there were treatises on fortifications, building construction, order of precedence of nobles and officers and also on elephants, horses and hawks and so on, compiled under official auspices.³

The Ahoms described Assam as a casket of gold or 'Sonar Saphura' and they would not like to allow outsiders to have a footing in the land lest they should subvert security and tranquillity and prospects of orderly progress in the country. They would subdue with a strong hand any misdeed that might tarnish the fair name of Assam or imperil its independence and jeopardise

3. S. K. Bhuyan, 'The Administrative System of the Ahoms', Aspects of the Heritage of Assam, pp. 94-ff.

its prosperity. Their precautions were not the same as narrow-minded exclusiveness but were symbolic of their love of their country and consequences of their vigilant and diplomatic endeavours for safeguarding the freedom and real interests of the country. They would not mind outsiders permanently settling in the land and identifying themselves with the interests of the country.

Assimilation and absorption in the body-politic were welcome but continuance of extra-territorial allegiance and maintenance of outside affiliations to the detriment of the country's interests were disfavoured, looked down upon with suspicion and prevented as a matter of State policy. An explanation for this policy of the Ahom rulers is to be found in history : hordes of invaders, both Afghan and Mogul had entered Assam through Bengal to subvert the independence of the land and they had to be resisted with all might. Naturally people from the west of Assam and also Europeans at a later stage were suspects, for having separate loyalty, they might have nefarious designs against the best interests of the country. Assam, however, wanted men to work in several avocations—accountants, artisans, architects, mechanics, artists and priests, and their introduction was freely encouraged and arranged and they were permanently settled in Assam by the Ahom monarchs by grant of lands and servitors. These newcomers were gradually assimilated with the people of the land.

Temporary failures or discomfitures in wars never dismayed the Ahoms. "If the sun is once eclipsed, does it not make its appearance again⁴?" was the question they would ask themselves and they would apply heart and soul to retrieve the lost ground. The kings loved their country. The ninety-seven-year-old monarch Pratap Singha sailed along the Dikhow river in a barge, baring his body, and bidding farewell to his subjects lined on both banks of the river ; and the people gathered there offered to sacrifice 100 from amongst them if that could bring back health to the monarch. King Jayadhvaj Singha wept bitter tears when he peeped through the gate of the capital city of Gargaon devastated by the Mogul invaders under Nawab Mir Jumla.

4. S. K. Bhuyan, *Lachit Barphukan and His Times*, p. 176.

The Ahoms had the special ability to take full advantage of their surroundings and circumstances ; they could adapt their policies and actions to the needs and requirements of the environment in which they found themselves and in consonance with the resources and opportunities of the prevalent conditions.

The Khel system with paiks and gradation of officers was unique and inculcated national discipline. Every male subject had compulsorily some experience in State service, military or civil, as a soldier or a labourer or an artisan or a provision-supplier and came to know of the state of the country and its particular problems, needs and requirements. His home-keeping comrades had to assist in the cultivation of the land and in other normal work of the paik absent from the village on State service. Civic consciousness developed, and also there grew a sense of civic obligation to fellow-citizens along with the spirit of allegiance to the State. A feeling of comradeship amongst the members of the Khels naturally arose. The paik system obviated the necessity of maintaining a huge army at the headquarters even in peace times at considerable expense to the Exchequer, for the non-serving paiks were always there to be called up at short notice through the Kheldar and subordinate officers. Only a signal had to be given and "the machinery of mobilisation moved on apace"⁵ and successfully during emergencies ; formal conscription as a special measure was not necessary.

Economy was not allowed to go out of gear ; much stress was laid on effective agriculture. Extremely fertile lands with deposit of silt left by numerous monsoon-fed and flooded streams, yielded a variety of crops. It was an objective of State policy that the vast tracts of arable lands should be efficiently cultivated to feed and maintain the whole population including officials and princes and also to provide sufficient reserves for emergencies like wars and famines. A contingent of paiks was placed at the disposal of an officer and these paiks ploughed his lands and produced the needed crops. In emergencies urgent and rigorous steps used to be taken for enforcing all-out efforts on the part of the villagers to grow more food. Even some princes

5. S. K. Bhuyan, 'The Administrative System of the Ahoms', Aspects of the Heritage of Assam, p. 91.

would sometimes say that ploughmen, subsisting on land were much happier than princes elevated to the throne and entangled in political controversies.

Severe punishments used to be inflicted in a very rigorous manner. Crimes were perceptibly reduced ; normally law and order could be efficiently maintained. People dreaded the inevitable consequences of violation of law and order.

To sum up : The Ahoms brought into being during their reign in Assam a stabilised polity, a balanced society, a liberalised economy and an efflorescent cultural life. Their endeavours left their impress on all aspects of life and culture. Literature, music, dance, darma, architecture, sculpture, painting even today bear testimony to achievements made in these fields during the six hundred years of Ahom rule. In the words of Dr. B.K. Barua, "The most distinctive aspects of the period were the geographical and racial unification of the country, stabilisation of the political institutions, organisation of the economic, social and religious systems, and finally the rise of nationalism."⁶ Dr. S. K. Bhuyan rightly remarks : "The Ahoms as a Sovereign power have ceased to exist since the year 1826, but visible traces of their rule still exist in different forms."⁷ The common Assamese titles, Phukan, Barua, Rajhkowa, Hazarika, Saikia, Bora, Katak, Kakati, Bujar-Barua, Patwari, Chowdhury, are still used by the descendants of the original holders of the respective offices. Land grants made by the Ahom monarchs are still held by the successor individuals and institutions. Worship is still going on in the temples erected by the Ahoms. The tanks excavated under their orders are still used as water reservoirs and fisheries, and their highways traversed by thousands of travellers till this day. The Khel system so much in vogue during the Ahom days still influences the social order of the Assamese people. Sir David Scott initiating revenue measures after British occupation retained the Khel system intact in Upper Assam. In Kamrup with 26 parganas he continued settlement with the existing Chaudhuries

-
6. B. K. Barua, 'Assamese Language and Early Assamese Literature', *Aspects of the Heritage of Assam*, p. 68.
 7. S. K. Bhuyan, 'The Administrative System of the Ahoms', *Aspects of the Heritage of Assam*, p. 95.

who were to be aided by Patowaries (Accountants) and the Thakurias (Subordinate Collectors).⁸ For administration of justice, the previous system was not totally done away with but modified and adapted to changed requirements.⁹ Ahom monarchy was given another trial under Purandar Singh though in a limited area.¹⁰ Thus early British administration was also influenced by the Ahom regime in matters like revenue administration,¹¹ justice etc. All this shows how intimately and extensively the impact of the rule of the Ahoms had permeated the country and the masses. The valuable contributions of the Ahom age to their life and culture have become the perennial inheritance of the Assamese people.

Causes of Decline and Fall of the Ahom Power : One wonders how and why even such a strong power as the Ahoms, who were in the political arena of Assam for six centuries and with so much valuable work to their credit in different departments of life, should ultimately decline and fall and their kingdom break up in chaos and confusion. The reasons are not far to seek. Some of the very factors of Ahom rule, that were its strong points and merits, actually turned to be weak points in different conditions and circumstances and with passage of time. The constitutional practices and conventions and State policies that were sources of strength when the Ahom power was growing and was being consolidated, became disruptive factors when the growth of that power reached its climax and common danger from foreign invasion was no longer present. The country was in enjoyment of comparative peace, security, progress and prosperity and human elements tended to deteriorate because of ease of life accompanying better times. There was softening of life, caused by geographical and climatic influences and change of religion, and also by change of language, assimilation of the weaknesses of the ruled and abandonment of their original qua-

8. H. K. Barpujari, *Assam in the days of the Company, 1826-1858*, pp. 23-28.

9. *Ibid*, pp. 28-30.

10. *Ibid*, pp. 100-104.

11. *An Account of the Province of Assam and its Administration*, pp. 90-92.

lities by the Ahom rulers, who tried to become one with the indigenous population of the land by imbibing their customs and manners. Though the constitutional forms remained, the spirit behind the same was lost sight of by the leaders and the rank and file amongst the Ahoms, called upon to work the constitution ; the original objectives of State policies no longer inspired the nobles who preferred personal aggrandisement to country's well-being, opportunism to allegiance, defeat of rivals and fulfilment of personal ambitions to success of the country's or the king's cause and promotion of people's interests.

The Moamaria Revolution sparked off the conflagration. It was the beginning of the end which was wrought by the Burmese invasion and subsequent British occupation of the country, after the defeat and capitulation of the Burmese by the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826. Nevertheless, far more deep-seated causes were there for the decline and fall of the Ahom 'Empire'.

Surely as there were intrinsic merits in Ahom institutions, there were some fundamental defects also. The Ahoms were feudatory lords in the country and all appointments, as far as practicable, were retained amongst them and the higher offices were hereditary in the descendants of the chiefs who accompanied Sukapha in the invasion and conquest of Assam. This naturally made the Ahoms a class distinct from and superior to the rest of the citizens, with the consequent estrangement, at least psychological, between the Ahoms and the non-Ahoms.

The Khels were organised on an occupational and territorial basis and consisted of men of all castes and denominations. A certain spirit of fellowship developed amongst the members of the Khels and one section would naturally transmit its sympathies and antipathies, thoughts and feelings to other sections of members. The Moamarias found it easy to tamper with the loyalty of the non-Moamaria section of a Khel and the latter found it difficult to strike against the former when rebellion and conflicts started. Further, the natural loyalty of the paiks was to their immediate overlords, the Kheldars, who could divert the paiks' allegiance from the king or his government situated in the distant capital to themselves for their own advantage. The Kheldars, the provincial governors, frontier wardens and tributary princes could defy the authority of the government, sow

seeds of disaffection and subvert law and order, if they so wished, and this they actually did during the troubled times of Moamaria disturbances.

Most of the Khels got reduced in number because of death of members in ravages, wars, massacres, transfer of Moamarias' allegiance to their own leaders, deflection of non-Moamarias from their own to Moamaria ranks, and flight of people from their villages to neighbouring territories. This meant less number for armed forces and the labour corps for construction of royal camps, public buildings, tanks and roads and for supply of necessaries to the royal household and the public stores like gold, food provisions, saltpetre, bows and arrows, boats and elephants. The Sonowal or gold washers' khel of Upper Assam of 1829 men came down to one of 738 during Gaurinath Singha's reign; expected to furnish six to seven thousand tolas of gold annually, this Khel could only contribute four thousand tolas to Gaurinath Singha's treasury. Out of 80,000 paiks usually under the charge of the Buragohain only 43,000 remained after the disturbances. Reduction in supplies of men and materials at a time when they were most needed was a great handicap to the Ahom government.

The numerical inferiority of the standing army under the Bhitaraal Phukan, employed in guarding the government buildings and the city out-posts, was a great drawback. This could do for normal times but was thoroughly inadequate in times of emergency, particularly if and when the Kheldars and local governors proved recalcitrant and disloyal and the reserves called up did not respond, as actually happened during the Moamaria disturbances. Purananda Buragohain's army in 1793-94 was described by J. P. Wade as a "miserable band of cowardly and undisciplined peasants amounting perhaps to six or seven hundred men, armed with awkward weapons which they dare not and cannot use, the small body of unwilling and unpaid Burkendazes not exceeding the number of sixty or seventy Bengal subjects".¹²

12. J. P. Wade, Manuscript "Memoirs of the Reign of Surgi Deo Gowrinath Singh, late monarch of Assam", quoted by S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, pp. 413-ff.

The standing army and the local levies could do well and succeed when they fought against a common enemy, e.g., the Moguls, the Kacharis or the Jayantias ; but there was treachery and collusion when they were sent against their own countrymen. Hence there was necessity for Sepoys from Bengal ; but there was corruption, and timidity affected the Ahom commanders when selfless and patriotic commanders were most urgent.

The Mayamara Mahantas, Aniruddhadeva and others, who mainly preached amongst the Morans of the Matak country and initiated tribesmen also to Vaisnavism, enjoyed considerable power and prestige and exerted powerful influence towards unification amongst their numerous following who considered their Gurus superior to the Gods and therefore to mortal kings. Their liberalism, unorthodox and democratic methods, recognition and admission of tribal ways of living and practices, endeared them to their devotees and made them popular. When the Mayamaras rose in revolt, therefore, they rose as one man. The revolt primarily intended to oust and destroy Kirtichandra,¹³ soon exceeded its bounds and produced a complete though temporary collapse of the powerful Ahom regime. Lakshmi Singha regained his throne but his expulsion and the usurpation of the Morans showed the vulnerability of Ahom authority. There was therefore recrudescence of troubles which could be put down only with the help of the expeditionary force led into Assam by Captain Welsh. On withdrawal of Captain Welsh and his detachment from Assam, the country again relapsed into chaos and confusion and anarchy and fell an easy victim to schisms, rivalries and internal dissensions, followed by invitations to the Burmese to intervene. The riches of the Brahmaputra Valley were laid bare before the rapacity of the Burmese who subverted freedom, plundered and laid the country waste and reduced the population by half. Circumstances then compelled British intervention climaxing in expulsion of the Burmese and occupation of Assam by the British.

There were numerous exiled princes, the sons, nephews and grandsons of reigning sovereigns, living in the pestilential

13. Maniram Dewan, Buranji Viveka-Ratna (D.H.A.S. MS. No. 272).

wilds of Namrup. Most of them had suffered compulsory mutilation for no faults of their own except that they were prospective claimants to the throne. Wrongful advantage was taken of the Ahom convention that no man could ascend the throne if he had upon his person any blemish or scar, whether of wound sustained in games or military action or of smallpox. The claims of an heir-presumptive or a near relation of the king would be invalidated by having his eyes put cut, or his ears or nose slit or a finger, a hand or a foot cut off. Such mutilated princes would very often be banished to Namrup. Namrup was near the Moran country; the Assamese naturally had sympathy for near relations of Sovereigns so inhumanly treated and the insurgents would exploit popular sympathies and set up some one or other of these princes as claimant to the throne and espouse his cause to gather recruits to the insurgent forces and to paralyse the opposition of royalist soldiers convinced of the righteousness of the particular prince's claims. The princes' problem was never solved properly and this greatly affected the stability of the Ahom rule.

The initiation of the Ahom rulers and nobles into the Sakta faith and enthusiastic patronage of Sakta priests and their ceremonies irritated the non-Sakta sections of the community. The Vaisnavas felt aggrieved. The Vaisnava Gosains lived detached lives and did not interfere in State affairs; the opposite was the case with the Sakta priests who lived close to their royal converts and maintained constant contacts with them through Sakta sacrifices and did not hesitate to meddle in matters of political consequence. Vaisnavism had evolved out of the peculiar requirements of the Assamese temperament and society and had become a part and parcel of the life of the people. The Vaisnavas no longer felt safe and secure, because they found to their utter dismay that the policy of religious neutrality was being given up by the Ahom rulers in their zeal for the Sakta cult. The Vaisnavas themselves were a divided house. They had their internecine disputes, and schisms. The Gohaingharia Barua had to deal with their affairs. In 1799 Purnananda Buragohain and Bhadrakanta Barbarua had to go in person to Bardowa Sattrā to settle a dispute pertaining to Namghar lands be-

tween two cousins, Ramcharan and Ramdeva of Salaguri and Narowa branches respectively.¹⁴

The Ahom priests were also deeply aggrieved. They looked upon the Ahom government as their own handiwork sustained by their spiritual ministrations. The spread of the Sakta influence and the preference given to the Sakta priests and their practices and counsel, hurt the feelings of the Ahom priests. They resented that Rajaswar Singha's corpse was cremated in violation of Ahom customs. They said,—“The Raven has plucked out the eyes of Garuda ; his wings have dropped off into the sea. What can he do now with the mutilated remnant of his body ?”

There were schism and rivalry in the Sakta camp. The Bengali priest, Parvatia Gosain, the Guru of Siva Singha, Prammatta Singha and Rajeswar Singha, refused to give initiation to Prince Kalsila Gohain because of his dark complexion and alleged illegitimacy. The prince was initiated into Saktism by an Assamese Brahman, Ramananda Acharyya. The prince became king Lakshmi Singha and bestowed favours on his Guru who came to be known as Na-Gosain or Pahumaria Gosain ; many nobles became disciples of the Na-Gosain. The Parvatia Gosain supported conspiracies against the king and was expelled from the kingdom. There was considerable acrimony between the followers of the two Gosains. Thus there were internal dissensions all round.

As the Ahoms did not upset the old social structure and did not introduce any drastic reform and adjusted their government to the customs and usages of the people and themselves accepted the language, manners and religion of the subjects, the masses accepted the Ahom rule as a tolerable dispensation of fate. They had affection and veneration for the Ahom king and his persons so long as he exercised his lawful authority, and the institution of monarchy found traditional acceptance in the land, but they had no special enthusiasm for the system of Ahom government as a whole, particularly for some of its features and specially when that government went astray and deflected from

14. Harinarayan Dutt Barua, *Prachin Kamarupia Kayastha Samajar Itivritta*, pp. 130-ff.

the path of rectitude. The people tolerated the government as long as it could give them peace and protection to pursue their normal avocations. Once the Ahom government failed in these primary duties of government, the people's indifferent acceptance of the government turned into antipathy and hatred against it and some of the iniquitous measures and methods of the Ahom government appeared glaringly so to the people's eyes and looked unbearably oppressive to deserve stiff resistance.

The Ahom penal law, for example, was severe and punishments were heavy even for trivial offences. The penalty of death might be meted out to the whole family of a rebel. A person who incurred the particular displeasure of the king might be made to eat his son's flesh. Extraction of knee-pans and eyes and slicing off of noses and ears were common practices, besides different cruel forms of execution. Though most of these punishments were in vogue in other parts of India, in Assam they produced the impression that the government of the Ahoms was inhuman and cruel—an impression that made the Ahom government unpopular. Particularly during troubled times there used to be gross abuse of the penal law and ruthless infliction of indiscriminate punishments which naturally exasperated the masses.

The political sympathies of the nobles and the officials who constituted the steel-frame of the administration were no longer governed by considerations of State but by personal considerations. Subordination of individual passions to the exigency of the State became a thing of the past. The nobles were interested in seeing the ruin and destruction of their rivals and in furtherance of their own ambitions. Insertion of a couple of treasonable letters in the house of a rival to incriminate him for his punishment and ruin was readily resorted to. In their rivalry the nobles totally lost sight of their duties to the State and forgot that ultimately personal interests could not be safe without safeguarding the State and by weakening its very foundations.

The following remarks of king Lakshmi Singha regarding the conduct of the Ahom nobles vis-a-vis that of a non-Ahom official, the Kalita Phukan are revealing: "I still recollect with horror the atrocities committed by the Moran rebels after the occupation of the country. There were my Ahom nobles

living in comfort and luxury and enjoying the titles and honours conferred on them by us. But none of them came forward to rescue me and my throne from the hands of the Morans. It was through the ingenuity of a solitary Hindu lad that my life was saved. The nobles have continued to enjoy their old privileges, holding offices as Bargohain and Buragohain. Why should not they tolerate the favour I have conferred on a Hindu in recognition of his destruction of the Morans? Should they speak like that in my presence? Who can protect them if I do something to them?"¹⁵

The nobles no longer concerted measures to counteract intolerable troubles but began to beg exterior powers to come to their rescue and invited foreign intervention in their State affairs or deserted their homes and sought refuge in neighbouring territories.

Defeatism and fatalism crept into the psychology of even the leaders and commanders. A reverse in the battle field unnerved them. Bhagati Barbarua said to Purnananda Buragohain, "Fighting with these archers and shieldsmen our sovereigns had vanquished the Moguls on numerous occasions, but the very same soldiers become terrified and demoralised at the sight of the Moamarias and take to their heels. All this has taken place because the gods have so ordained it. The wheel of Time being so powerful nothing can be presaged."¹⁶

Since the death of Rudra Singha in 1714 the Assamese had not known any real war. The nobles got accustomed to ease and comfort of life, caused by long-continued peace, security of food from fields cultivated by paiks and slaves and dependants and of office which meant power and prestige. They become averse to the exertions of military operations. Whereas in previous centuries, man's excellence was judged by his performance on the battlefield or by his service to the State, in the eighteenth century, it began to be based on patronage offered to Brahmans and number of sacrifices performed. This changed attitude of

15. MS. Chronicle of Lakshmi Singha's Reign. (D.H.A.S. No. 38).

16. S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, pp. 110-ff.

life deadened springs of action and caused passivity, fear and imbecility.

Intimate intercourse with the subject races by adoption of their languages, manners and religion made the Ahoms lose their sense of superiority. By association with their non-Ahom subordinates, they were infected by their subordinates' defects which they imbibed and lost their manliness, independence, imperiousness and intelligence. According to the Alamgirnamah the Ahoms had never "bowed the head of submission and obedience to the most powerful monarch (the great Mogul), who have curbed the ambition and checked the conquests of the most victorious princes of Hindustan." The same Ahoms in course of time became ease-loving, cowardly, priest-ridden, selfish and intriguing.

Buchanan-Hamilton writing in 1809 says,—“Hitherto the Assamese had been a warlike and enterprising race, while their princes had preserved vigour that in the east is not commonly retained for so many generations ; but their subjection to the Brahmans, which was followed by that of the most of the nation, soon produced the usual imbecility, and the nation had sunk into object pusillanimity towards strangers and into internal confusion and trubulence.”¹⁷

Gunabhiram Barua says,—“In course of time the Ahoms gave up the manly and arm-strong character of the Kshatriyas, and imbibed the lip-strong traits of the Brahmans.”¹⁸

Unlike the Royalists, the Moamarias were united. Treachery, desertion or cowardice were unknown in their ranks. They were animated by the sole objective of upholding and promoting the cause of their Guru. They would not mind shedding the last drop of blood in avenging deaths inflicted and insults and humiliations heaped on their Gurus and common oppressions suffered at the hands of the Ahom kings and their nobles and officers. The Moamarias had in their ranks diverse peoples whether belonging to the different tribes and communities—Morans, Chutiyas, Kacharis, Bihias, Kaivartas, Brittials, or caste Hindus, Brahmans, Kayasthas and Kalitas and even Ahoms

17. Hamilton, Account of Assam, p. 7.

18. Gunabhiram Barua, Assam Buranji, p. 138.

and Ahom nobles—all those who belonged to the Mayamara Satra and/or had grievances against the Ahom ruling authority. There was never a distinct tribe called the Moamarias but they were all united as one man for the purpose of resistance to the Ahom Government. A religious sect, they turned into a fighting and ruling body. The transformation of a religious sect into a military body in the case of the Moamarias in Assam as a result of clashes between Gurus and Government, had a parallel in a similar, though more enduring transformation of the Sikhs in the Punjab. The Moamarias and the Sikhs effectively contributed to the subversion of Ahom authority in Assam and the Mogul authority in India respectively.

During the Mogul Wars of Assam the smithies and the gunpowder factories worked day and night under the direct supervision of the monarch ; the civil government was intact and officers and men performed their allotted duties. But during the troubles in the reigns of Lakshmi Singha, Gaurinath Singha, Kamaleswar Singha and Chandra Kanta Singha, the situation was completely different. The iron ore remained unworked ; local gun-making was not possible ; necessary ingredients for preparing gunpowder were not available ; subjects of Darrang ceased to supply Saltpetre ; normal functioning of administrative machinery became progressively difficult. The Assam Government had no alternative but to depend for supply of fire arms on the East India Company and purchases made in Calcutta from private dealers. Without men and materials, without arms and ammunitions, it was really a miracle that Prime Minister Purnananda Buragohain could succeed, with less than a thousand soldiers under his command, to maintain some sort of peace in the country. It was really creditable that by superhuman efforts Purnananda for a time could keep the subjects under proper control and also could for some time ward off the invasion of the Burmese. But the results of his efforts were short-lived. The collapsing State of Assam with its internal dissensions presented a fitting field for the realisation of the greedy ambitions and expansionist designs of the Burmese.

Purnananda Buragohain himself was said to have committed grave errors and caused discontent. He was not above criticism and was accused of megalomania, nepotism, exactions and

oppressions which had the effect of alienating the sympathies of the royalists and the nobility and stiffening the opposition of the Moamarias and other disaffected elements in the land.¹⁹ The Assamese had to pay a heavy price for their mistakes. They neglected the lesson that the fortunes of individuals are inseparably connected with those of the State. They plunged deep into mutual animosities and rivalries. A large section of the Ahom subjects cooperated with the Moamaria rebels. The Burkenadzies and the Burmese were both introduced by Assamese Chiefs. Many Assamese joined the Burmese in their plundering excursions. In the pervading chaos and devastation selfishness became more profitable and secure than public service and resistance to the invaders ; the general inhabitants dependent on the Ahom rulers for defence and protection and long unaccustomed to the use of arms, fell an easy prey to the rapacity of the Burmese. The Ahoms living long in the Brahmaputra Valley lost their former martial ardour ; reinforcements from their Shan homeland beyond the Patkai Hills ceased ; the ruler became one with the ruled in course of time. The Ahoms lost the pride of the ruling race ; adoption of rigorous measures against refractory subjects became difficult because the subjects were now, in the eyes of the rulers, fellow-citizen , co-religionists, neighbours and comrades. In many cases the Ahoms became champions of the rebels' cause.

All Ahom institutions, religious, social and political were designed to make the rulers good soldiers and good governors. Natural disadvantages played an important part no doubt in

19. Rani Kamaleswari Devi, Gaurinath Singha's widow, complained that within one month of making Kamaleswar Singha king, Purnananda Buragohain executed about five thousand men, her letter No. 101 dated 11th Asar, 1216 B.S. to the Governor General, in S. N. Sen, Prachin Bangla Patra Sankalan, pp. 120-122. Chandra Kanta Singha charged Buragohain with nepotism, oppressions and executions etc., his letter No. 140A dated 28th Kartik, 1222 B.S. to the Judge, Rangpur and letter No. 140B to Badan Chandra Barphukan in S. N. Sen, Prachin Bangla Patra Sankalan, pp. 170-ff & pp. 171-ff respectively. Benudhar Sharma, Durbin, pp. 51-65.

enabling the Ahoms to inflict reverses on foreign invaders of Assam for centuries, but these alone would not have conferred sovereignty on the Ahoms for such a long period without an efficient military organisation and gallantry in arms. The Ahoms were also free from caste prejudices and religious bigotry. The conversion of the Ahoms into Hinduism and of the later Ahom kings with a section of their nobles, officers and Ahom subjects into Hinduism of the Sakta cult, changed their outlook on life and human relations, and politics which had been their absorbing passion in the preceding ages, now became less important than before ; their new religious interests acquired a new-found importance. This powerfully reacted on their martial qualities and political virtues and affected their strict religious impartiality and neutrality ; there were deflections from the liberal policy of religious toleration.

Siva Singha used to spend most of his time in Sakta worship. His voluntary retirement from State duties to avert the impending dethronement predicted by priests and astrologers, and humiliation of Vaisnavas by his queen, showed that the Ahoms in their fanatic zeal for their new religion had turned indifferent to the political consequences of their actions. The Ahoms now became unmindful of the effects of their 'religious' conduct on the stability of their government. In being patrons of Brahmans, the Ahom sovereigns encouraged learning and scholarship. This patronage would have been an embellishment, had it been accompanied by the maintenance of their original military character and virtues and political activities. Such patronage now became the criterion of excellence of kings and individuals rather than gallantry in arms and creditable State service. The Sakta worship made too heavy demands on officials' time to enable them to function effectively and efficiently in the State services. But unfortunately the fall had already begun down the precipice, and there was no stopping till the final crash.

Various factors thus combined to bring about the decline and fall of the Ahom power. Had the Ahoms retained their military character and maintained a proper balance between the softening influences of life and surroundings in the Brahmaputra Valley and of their new faith on the one hand, and the vigorous demands of their militaristic cult and original politic principles

of toleration, adaptation and sleepless vigilance for guarding freedom and ceaseless work for progress and prosperity on the other, perhaps, they could have continued in power for a still longer period. By ruling with a strong hand as before, the Ahoms could then have probably prevented internal dissensions and personal ambitions of discontented nobles playing havoc with the interests of the State by making foreign intervention and invasion at the invitation of their own nationals impossible. The continuance of strict neutrality and moderation in exercise of political power could have perhaps averted or at least shortened and made possible the speedy putting down of Moamaria disturbances. Ultimately falling off from high standards of conduct and propriety on the part of the Ahoms—rulers, and nobles and officers—spelt the ruin of the kingdom. Disunity, selfishness, gross abuse of authority, abandonment of ideals of patriotism, allegiance and loyalty to the State, impartiality and equitableness in discharge of State duties and of religious toleration, love of ease and relaxation and resignation to fate, surely hastened the fall of such an opulent and powerful kingdom as the Ahom kingdom admittedly was.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. PRIMARY SOURCES

I. UNPUBLISHED

ASSAMESE :

Assam Buranji, D. H. A. S. Manuscript No. 44, Folios 52, from the Cachari Wars of Pratap Singha to the diplomatic negotiations of Laluk Sola Barphukan with Prince Azamtara, son of Emperor Aurangzeb, for the possession of Assam.

Assam Buranji, D.H.A.S. Manuscript No. 38, Folios 24, Reign of Lakshmi Singha.

Assam Buranji, D.H.A.S. Manuscript No. 57, Folios 36, from Khora Raja to Rudra Singha with historical letters relating to Cooch Behar, Jayantia, and Gauda.

BARUA, MANIRAM .. Buranji Viveka-Ratna, 1838, D. H. A. S. Manuscript No. 272, Trans-script No. 108, dealing with the political, administrative and religious history of Assam.

II. PUBLISHED

A. ASSAMESE :

BURAGOHAİN,
BAHGARIA

.. Assam Buranji, D.H.A.S. Manuscript No. 58, inserted in Deodhai Asam Buranji.

- BHUYAN, S. K., Ed. . . . Deodhai Asam Buranji, Gauhati, 1962.
Asamar Padya Buranji, Gauhati, 1932.
Assam Buranji, Gauhati, 1945. Obtained from the family of Sukumar Mahanta. Referred to as Assam Buranji (S.M.).
Satsari Assam Buranji, Gauhati, 1960.
Tripura Buranji, Gauhati, 1962.
Padshah Buranji, Gauhati, 1935.
Kachari Buranji, Gauhati, 1951.
Kamrupar Buranji, Gauhati, 1958.
Jayantia Buranji, Gauhati, 1937.
Assam Buranji, by Harakanta Barua, Gauhati, 1930.
- BARUA, HARINARAYAN DUTT . . . Chitra-Bhagwata, Nalbari, Assam, 1949.
- BORAH, M. I. . . . Baharistan-i-Ghaybi, Vol. I & II, Gauhati, 1936.
- BARDOLOI, K. C., Ed. . . . Sadar-Aminar Atmajivani, North Gauhati, 1960.
- BHATTACHARJEE, TARINICHARAN. . . . Ghora Nidan, Shillong, 1932.
- CHOUDHURY, P. C., Ed. . . . Asom Buranji Sara of Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, Gauhati, 1964.
- GOSWAMI, H. C., Ed. . . . Purani Asam Buranji, Gauhati, 1922.
Kamaratna Tantra, Shillong, 1928.
- GOSWAMI, CHIDANANDA. . . . Mayamara Satrar Vamsavali, metrical chronicle of Aniruddhadeva and other Mahantas of the Mayamara Sattra, Tinsukia, 1933.
- LEKHARU, U. C., Ed. . . . Katha-Guru-Charita, Gauhati, 1952.
- NEOG, MAHESWAR., Ed. . . . Chahapari-Upakhyana or Mrigavati-Charita of Dvija Rama, Gauhati, 1958.
- PHUKAN, Kasinath & BARBARUA, RADHANATH. . . . Assam Buranji, Sibsagar, 1844, Calcutta, 1906.

B. AHOM :

- BARUA, GOLAPCHANDRA., Ed. .. Ahom Buranji, with English Translation.

C, BENGALI :

- DHEKIAL PHUKAN, HALIRAM. .. Assam Buranji, in Four Parts, first-edition, Calcutta, 1829 ; Edited by J. M. Bhattacharjee, Gauhati, 1962.
- SEN, S. N. .. Prachin Bangla Patra Sankalan, Records in Oriental Languages, Vol. I, Bengali letters, Calcutta University, 1942.

HISTORY*D. ENGLISH :*

- BHUYAN, S. K., Tr. & Ed. .. Tungkhungia Buranji, Gauhati, 1933.
Annals of the Delhi Badshahate, Gauhati, 1947.

DOCUMENTS & REPORTS

- CHOUHDURY, P. C., Ed. .. A Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts at the D.H.A.S., Gauhati, 1961.
- DHEKIAL PHUKAN, ANANDARAM .. Observations on the Administration of the Province of Assam, in Mills' Report on the Province of Assam, 1854, Appendix—J.
- GOSWAMI, H. C. .. Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts, Calcutta, 1930.
- JENKINS, FRANCIS. .. Report on the Revenue Administration of Assam, 1849-50 ; Selection of Records of the Government of Bengal, Vol. XI, Calcutta, 1853.
The Progress and Prosperity of the Province of Assam, Mills' Report, 1854.
- MILIS, A. J. MOFFATT .. Report on the Province of Assam, Calcutta, 1854.

- PEMBERTON, R. B. .. Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India, Calcutta, 1835.
- WELSH, THOMAS. .. Report on Assam, 1794, with additional observations by David Scott, 1826. Reproduced in Mackenzie's North-East Frontier of Bengal, pp. 377-394.

ACCOUNTS-MEMOIRS-JOURNALS

- BUCHANAN-HAMILTON, FRANCIS. .. An Account of Assam, 1807-14, Gauhati, 1840.
- BUTLER, J. .. Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam, London, 1855.
A sketch of Assam, with some account of the Hill Tribes, London, 1847.
- DEWAN, MANIRAM. .. Native Account of Washing Gold in Assam, Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, July, 1838.
- HANNAY, CAPTAIN S. O. .. Further information on the Gold washing of Assam, Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, Vol. VI, 1839.
- M'COSH, J. N. .. Topography of Assam, Calcutta, 1837.
- ROBINSON, WILLIAM. A Descriptive Account of Assam, 1841.
- SARKAR, J. N. .. Fathiyyah-i-Ibriyyah, Portion translated, Journal of the Bihar & Orissa Research Society, Vol. I, Part 2, pp. 179-194.
- WADE, J. P. .. An Account of Assam, inclusive of 'The History of Assam' and 'A Geographical sketch of Assam, 18800 A. D.', compiled about 1793-1800, edited by Benudhar Sharma, Sibsagar, Assam, 1927.
Geographical sketch of Assam, compiled during 1796-1802, edited by S. K. Bhuyan, and Published as a Serial in the Assam Review, Silchar, 1928-29, under the title, Assam in the Eighteenth Century.

- WILCOX, LIEUTENANT. .. Memoir of a Survey of Assam and the neighbouring countries, executed in 1825-1828, Asiatic Researches, Vol. 17, 1832.

E. SANSKRIT :

- GOSWAMI, SARAT-CHANDRA & MISRA, JOYKRISHNA. Ed. .. Nitilatankur of Bagis Sarma, Gauhati, 1941.
- SARMA, SATYENDRA NATH Ed. ... Rupakratrayam, Jorhat, 1962.

B. SECONDARY WORKS

A. ASSAMESE :

- BHUYAN, S. K. .. Ahomar Din. Jorhat, 1918.
Konwar-Vidroh, Gauhati, 1962.
Jonaki, Gauhati, 1955.
Ramari Gabharu
Mirjumlar Asam Akraman.
- BARUA, HARINARAYAN DUTT .. Prachin Kamarupia Kayastha Samajar Itivritta, Nalbari, 1941.
- BARUA, GUNABHIRAM. Assam Buranji, Calcutta, 1876.
- BARUA, B. K. .. Asamiya Bhasha Aru Sanskriti, Gauhati, 1957.
Asamar Loka Samskriti, Gauhati, 1961.
Asamiya Katha-Sahitya, Purani Bhag, Gauhati, 1950.
- BHATTACHARYA, PROMODCHANDRA Ed. .. Asamar Janajati, Jorhat, 1962.
- GOHAIN, BARUA, P. .. Asamar Buranji, Tezpur, 1859 Saka.
- GOGOI, LILA. .. Ahom Jati Aru Asamiya Sanskriti, Sibsagar, 1961.
- KAKATI, B. .. Kalita Jatir Itivritta, Gauhati 1962.
Purani Kamarupar Dharmar Dhara, Pathsala, Kamrup, 1955.

- MALIK, SYED ABDUL. .. Asamiya Zikir aru Jari, Gauhati, 1958.
Compiled & Ed. ..
- NEOG, MAHESWAR. .. Asamiya Sahityar Rupa-rekha, Gauhati, 1962.
Purani Asamiya Samaj aru Samskriti, Dibrugarh, 1957.
Asamiya Giti-Sahitya, Tezpur, 1958.
Sri-sri-Sankaradeva, Gauhati, 1963.
Pavitra Asam, Jorhat, 1960.
Svara Rekhat Bargit, Shillong, 1958.
- NEOG, MAHESWAR. .. Sanchayana, New Delhi, 1959.
Ed. .. Asam Sahitya Sabha Varsiki, Jorhat, 1964.
- SHARMA, S. N. .. Asamiya Sahityar Itivritta, Gauhati.
SHARMA, BENUDHAR. Maniram Dewan, Gauhati, 1950.
Durbin, Gauhati, 1961.
- B. ENGLISH :* .. An Account of the Province of Assam and its Administration, Assam-Secretariat Printing Office, 1903.
- ALLEN, B. C. .. Assam District Gazetters :
Vol. III (Goalpara),
Vol. IV (Kamrup),
Vol. V (Darrang),
Vol. VI (Nowgong),
Vol. VII (Sibsagar),
Vol. VIII (Lakhimpur),
Shillong, 1905.
- ANAND, MÜLKRAJ. Ed. Classical and Folk Dances of India, Bombay, 1963.
- BHUYAN, S. K. .. Anglo-Assamese Relations, 1771-1826, Gauhati, 1949.
Atan Buragohain and His Times, Gauhati, 1957.
Lachit Barphukan and His Times, Gauhati, 1947.
Assamese Literature—Ancient and Modern, Shillong, 1936.
Studies in the History of Assam, Gauhati, 1965.
Studies in the Literature of Assam, Gauhati, 1956.
Early British Relations with Assam, Shillong, 1928.

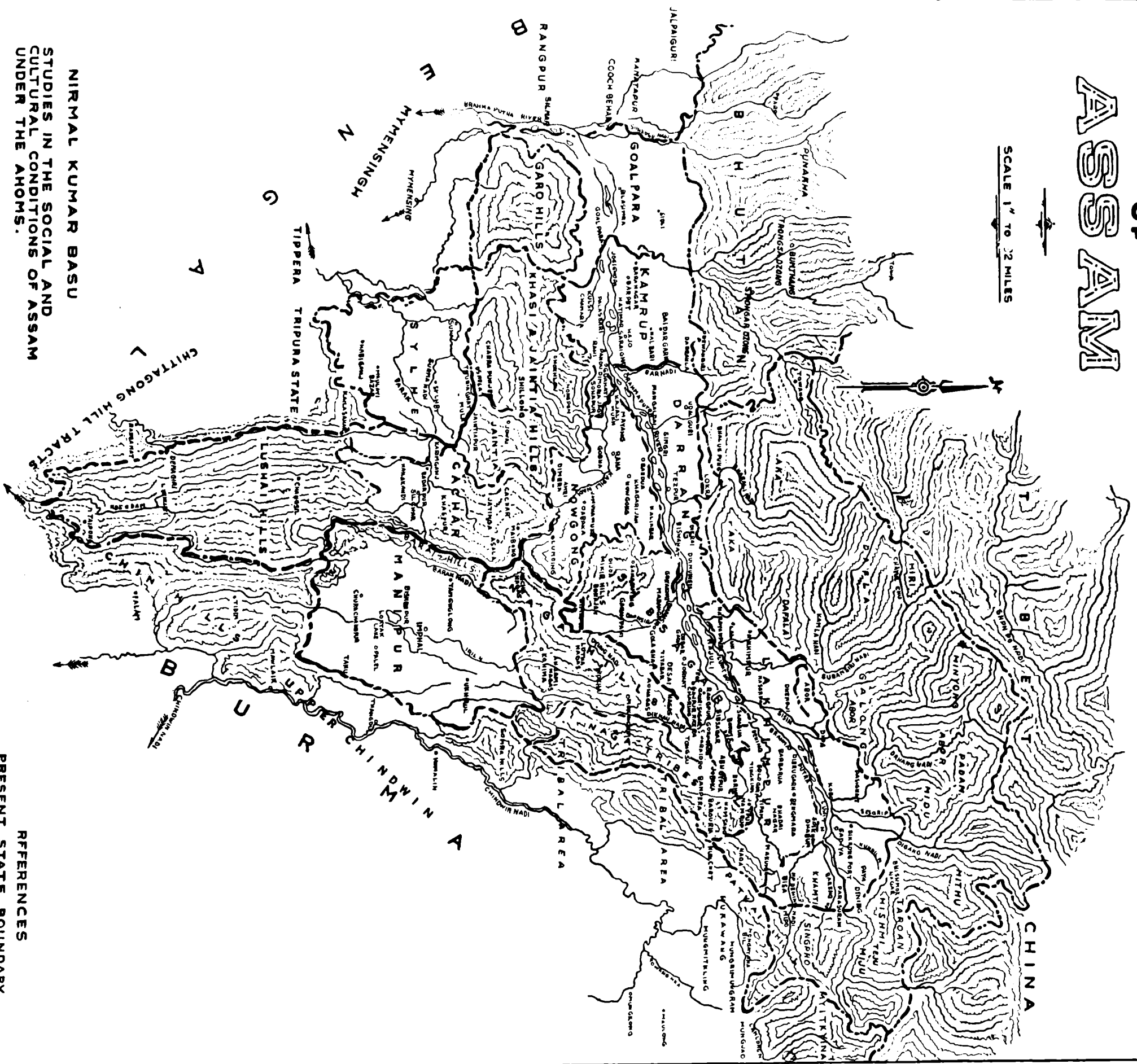
- BHUYAN, S. K. Ed. .. Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies (Government of Assam), Bulletins, No. 2, 3, 4 and 5, Gauhati, 1934, 1936, 1941 and 1951 respectively.
- BARUA, B. K. .. A Cultural History of Assam, Early Period, Vol. I, Gauhati, 1951.
Sankaradeva Vaisnava Saint of Assam, Gauhati, 1960.
- BHATTACHARYA, S. N. A History of Mughal North-East Frontier Policy, Calcutta, 1929.
- BARUA, K. L. .. Early History of Kamarupa, Shillong, 1933.
- BANERJEE, A. C. .. The Eastern Frontier of British India, Calcutta, 1946.
- BARPUJARI, H. K. .. Assam : In the days of the Company, 1826-1858, Gauhati, 1963.
- CHOUDHURY, P. C. .. The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A. D., Gauhati, 1959.
- CHAUDHURY, P. D. .. Archaeology in Assam, Gauhati, 1964.
- CHALIHA, P. D. .. Ancient Treasures of Assam, Gauhati, 1959.
and DAS, M. C.
- CHALIHA, P. Ed. .. The Outlook on N.E.F.A., Jorhat, 1958.
- CHATTERJI, S. K. .. The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language, 1926.
Kirata-jana-Kriti, Calcutta, 1951.
The Place of Assam in the History and Civilisation of India, Gauhati, 1955.
'The Name Assam—Ahom', Journal of the Asiatic Society, letters, Vol. XXII, 1956, No. 2, pp. 147-153.
- DUTT, K. N. Ed. .. Aspects of the Heritage of Assam, Gauhati, 1959.
- ELWIN, VERRIER. .. A Philosophy for N.E.F.A., Shillong, 1959.
Nagaland, Shillong, 1961.
India's North-East Frontier in the Nineteenth Century, 1959.

- GOSWAMI, P. .. Folk-literature of Assam, Gauhati, 1954.
Ballads and Tales of Assam, Gauhati, 1960.
- GAIT, SIR EDWARD. .. A History of Assam, Calcutta, 1926.
Report on the Progress of Historical Research in Assam, 1897, (Shillong).
- GOHAIN, U. N. .. Assam Under the Ahoms, Jorhat, 1942.
- HUNTER, W. W. .. A Statistical Account of Assam, Vol. I and II, London, 1879.
- KAKATI, B. . .. The Mother Goddess Kamakhya, Gauhati, 1961.
Assamese. Its Formation and Development, Gauhati, 1962.
- KAKATI, B. Ed. .. Aspects of Early Assamese Literature, Gauhati, 1953.
- MACKENZIE, ALEX- .. History of the Relations of the
ANDER. Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal, Calcutta, 1884.
- MICHELL, CAPTAIN- .. Report on the North-East Frontier
St. JOHN F. of India, 1883.
- NEOG, MAHESWAR. .. Sankaradeva and His Times, Gauhati, 1965.
Sankaradeva and His Predecessors, Gauhati, 1953.
The Art of Painting in Assam, Gauhati, 1962.
The Dancing Maids of Pariharesvara Siva, a notice of temple Nati-dancing at Doobi, Kamrup, Assam-Sangit Natak Academy, 6th Session Souvenir, Gauhati, 1959.
Folk-dances of Assam, The Marg, Bombay, 1959.
- NEOG, MAHESWAR. .. The Gods' pleasure dance of Manipur, Journal of the Music Academy, Madras, Vol. XXV-III, 1958.

- NEOG, MAHESWAR, .. Pragjyotisa, Souvenir, All India-
Ed. Oriental Conference, XXII Ses-
sion, Gauhati, 1965.
- NEOG, M. and Chang- Rhythm in the Vaishnava Music of
KAKATI, K. .. Assam, inclusive of 'Vadya-
pradipa' by Yadupati, Edited
by L. Das and M. Neog, Gau-
hati, 1962.
- NATH, R. M. .. The Background of Assamese Cul-
ture, Sylhet, 1948.
- ROY, SACHIN. .. Aspects of Padam-Minyong Culture,
Shillong, 1960.
- SARKAR, J. N. .. The History of Bengal, Vol. II,
Muslim Period, 1200-1757,
Dacca, 1948.
- SHAKESPEAR, L. W. .. History of Upper Assam, Upper
Burma and North-Eastern Fron-
tier, London, 1914.
The Imperial Gazetteer of India,
Vol. IV.
The Imperial Gazetteer of India,
Vol. VI.
-

MAP OF ASSAM

SCALE 1" TO 32 MILES



NIRMAL KUMAR BASU
STUDIES IN THE SOCIAL AND
CULTURAL CONDITIONS OF ASSAM
UNDER THE AHOMS.

REFERENCES
PRESENT STATE BOUNDARY
SHOWN THUS... ---

MARCH, 1966.