UNIT 5: SOURCES OF HISTORY OF MEDIEVAL ASSSAM

UNIT STRUCTURE

5.1. Learning Objectives

5.2. Introduction

5.3. Literary Sources

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5.5. Let us Sum up

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5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to–

- discuss the different sources for the study of Medieval Assam
- explain in details the literary sources, and
- describe the archaeological sources

5.2 INTRODUCTION

Unlike the sources for the study of Ancient Assam, the sources for the study of the history of medieval Assam are abundant. We have a number of *Buranjis* on the history of the Ahoms, and also on their contemporary rulers.

Besides these historical chronicles, there are a number of *Charita Puthis* or biographies of saints, Persian accounts as well as inscriptions, coins and an abundance of temples and other structures that provides an invaluable insight into the history of Medieval Assam. In this unit, we will be discussing the sources in detail.

5.3 LITERARY SOURCES

Among the indigenous literature of the medieval period, the *Buranjis* were the foremost one. The Ahoms started a procedure of keeping records

The *Padshah Buranji* dealt with the Badshahs of Delhi, from the establishment of Muslim supremacy in India, upto the second half of the 17th century. The Muhammedan wars during the reign of the Ahom kings Pratap Singha, Jayadhvaj Singha, Chakradhvaj Singha and Gadadhar Singha are narrated in detail in the *Kamarupar Buranji***.** The *Asam Buranji* deals with the history of Assam from the commencement of Ahom rule till the accession of Gadadhar Singha in 1681 C.E.

Vamsavali, was the genealogical account maintained by the Assamese noble families and the royal families of the various kingdoms. The *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* was the most comprehensive one providing an account of the Koch kings from their rise to power till the death of Parikshit. The *Bhuyans* had their genealogy and history maintained in a class of Vamsavali called *Bhuyar Puthi*. There are also *Satriya Vamsavalis* providing information on the history of the foundation of *Satras*, life and career of their religious head and their relation with the ruling power. Most important of them are *Mayamara Satrar Vamsavali* and the *Dihing Satrar Vamsavali*.

Besides the Buranjis, there are vast Vaishnava literatures providing information on the socio-economic history of medieval Assam. The central theme of the Vaishnava literature centred round religion and dealt mainly with the lives and works of the Vaishnava religious heads. These works are known as *Charit Puthis* or hagiographies (biographies of saints) like the *Kathagurucharita*.

The indigenous sources on medieval Assam are occasionally supplemented by accounts of contemporary foreign travellers and adventurers. The *Tabaquat-i-Nasiri* written by Minhaj-ul-Siraj gives a detailed account of the first three Muslim invasions of Assam. *Tarikh-i-Firoz-Shahi* by Ziau-din-Barani contains rare materials regarding the history of Kamatapur. The *Akbarnamah* and *Ain-i-Akbari* by Shaikh Abul Fazl throws light on the beginning of the aggressive Mughal North-East frontier policy and the subsequent Koch-Mughal relation. *Muntakhab- ut- Tawarikh* of Abdul Qadir or Badauni throws light in a descriptive manner upon the contact between Assam and the Mughals. *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, the autobiography of Emperor Jahangir refers to the Ahom-Mughal conflict during the last quarter

The second refers to the rebuilding of the Hayagriva Madhava temple on Mani hillock at Hajo by Raghu Deb, king of Koch-Hajo. The Darrang *Rajavamsavalis* refers to a *Copper Plate Sasana* issued by Naranarayan dedicating the services different categories of *Paiks* (servitors) for the service of the Kamakhya temple which he rebuilt.

The earliest inscription of the Ahom period is the *Gachtal Rock Inscription* issued in the year 1362 C.E. Engraved in Sanskrit, it records Sultan Sikandar Shah's invasion of Assam in 1284 Saka i.e., 1362 C.E. The *Samdhara Rampart Rock Inscription* of 1616 refers to the victory of the Ahom king, Pratap Singha. Two *Kanai Barasi Rock Inscriptions*, refers to the construction of an Ahom fort there in the month of December after the defeat and death of Sayyid Sana and Sayyid Firuz by Lachit and records the names of different Ahom officials. The *Phatasil Rock Inscription* of 1667 in Sanskrit briefly records the defeat of the Mughals by Lachit Barphukan.

Inscriptions on religious buildings also provide genuine information on the medieaval history of Assam. For eg., the *Munger Shah Nafah Inscription* in Persian on the Eastern wall of the *dargah* of Shah Nafah refers to the Assam campaign of Alauddin Hussain Shah (1498). The Persian inscriptions on the Hajo mosque built by Mir Lutfulla Shirazi, Mughal Faujdar of Guwahati shows that it was built to propagate Islam in Kamrup.

Coins as historical sources throw immense light on the economic and social conditions of its time. A standard Ahom coin called *Takka*, weighted a *tola* or 176 gram. The earliest known Ahom coins belong to Jayadhvaj Singha (1648-63 C.E.). Three scripts, Ahom, Devanagari and Assamese were used in the Ahom coins. The Koch king Naranarayan used to issue coins on a regular basis. These coins were cast in various metals like gold, silver, copper and brass. Again, these had legends and epithets on the obverse and the name of the king and dates in the *Saka* Era on the reverse in Sanskrit and Bengali script. The Koch ruler lost the right of minting full *tankas* after the acceptance of the Mughal alliance. The Koch coins were known as *Narayani*, from the ending of the names of the rulers.

The historical value of the numerous public works of the Koch and the Ahoms helps us in corroborating the existing literary and numismatic sources and reconstructing an authentic history. The most important of the



5.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through this Unit, you have learnt about:

- the rich literary sources written by indigenous and foreign scholars on the history of medieval Assam
- the archaeological remains of the ruling dynasties that ruled Assam in medieval times
- the importance of the sources in writing an authentic history

5.6 Further Reading

1) Barpujari, H.K. (2003)*: The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Vol. II & III 2nd edn, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati.
2) Baruah, S.L.,(1996): *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi.
3) Bhuyan, A.C., (1999): *Political History Assam*, Publication Board Assam, Vol. II & III 2nd edn, Guwahati.



5.7 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to the Q No. 1: Tai-Ahom language

Ans to the Q No. 2: They are genealogical accounts maintained by the Assamese noble families and the royal families of the various kingdoms.

Ans to the Q No. 3: Abdul Hamid Lahori

Ans to the Q No. 4: *Fathiyyah-i-Ibriyyah*

Ans to the Q No. 5: Biographies of saints

Ans to the Q No. 6:

(i) Jayadhvaj Singha
(ii) *Narayani*,
(iii) Poa Mecca
(iv) Pramatta Singha
(v) Gadadhar Singha

Ans to the Q No.7: The *Phatasil Rock Inscription*

Ans to the Q No. 8: Ahom, Devanagari and Assamese scripts