GHT S5 01(M/P)

Exam Code : HTP 5A

History of Assam upto the 16th Century AD

SEMESTER V

HISTORY

BLOCK 2

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BACHELOR OF ARTS

HISTORY OF ASSAM UPTO THE 16TH CENTURY AD

DETAILED SYLLABUS
BLOCK - 2

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

This is the Second block of the course *History of Assam up to the 16th century AD* and it consists of eight Units. The Block will highlight the history of medieval Assam in detail.

The eight unit is the *Sources of Medieval Assam*. The unit discusses different sources of medieval Assam.

The ninth unit *Early Muslim Invasion of Assam* discusses the Turko-Afhgan invasion, invasion of Muhammad- Bin- Tughlaq, Ghiyasuddin Azam and Hussain Sahis of Bengal.

The tenth unit *State Formation in Medieval Assam* discusses the state formation process of the Ahoms, The Chutiyas and the Bhuyans.

The eleventh unit *Expansion and Consolidation of the Ahom Empire* throws light on the expansionist policies of the Ahoms and consolidation of the Ahom empire in detail.

The twelfth unit *Society, Economy and Religion During the Ahom Period.* The unit discusess the society, economic condition and religion during the Ahom rule.

The thirteenth unit *The Koches.* The unit discusses the origin of the Koches, role of Viswa Simha and Naranaryana in the establishment of the Koch kingdom.

The fourteenth unit *Cultural and Architectural Developments in the Medieval Period.* The unit deals with the literary developments, cultural developments and the origin of the Vaishnavite movements in medieval Assam.

The Fifteenth unit is Women in Medieval Assam. This unit discusses the political, social and economic condition of the women in the medieval Assam.

While going through this paper, you will notice that some boxes are put in the left hand or right hand side of the text. These boxes are meant to serve the purpose of in-text glossary for you. Again, you may find some boxes marked with: “LET US KNOW”. These boxes will provide you with some additional interesting and relevant information. The boxes marked with “ACTIVITY” will help you in making your learning more active and efficient. And, at the end of each section, you will get “CHECK YOUR PROGRESS” questions. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study. It will be better if you solve the problems put in these boxes immediately after you go through the sections of the units and then match your answers with “ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS” given at the end of each unit.

UNIT 8: SOURCES OF MEDIEVAL ASSAM

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Learning objectives

8.2 Introduction

8.3 Sources of Medieval Assam

8.3.1 Literary Sources

8.3.2 Archeological Sources

8.4 Let Us Sum Up

8.5 Further Reading

8.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

8.7 Model Questions

8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- identify various literary sources of medieval Assam,
- discuss the archeological sources of medieval Assam.

8.2 INTRODUCTION

Sources are the backbone of any historical study. Like the ancient period of Assam history, there are various materials to study the medieval period of Assam history. Now in this unit, we shall discuss the sources of medieval history of Assam**.**

8.3 SOURCES OF MEDIEVAL ASSAM

8.3.1 Literary Sources

For the reconstruction of the past, literary sources are very important. We can further sub-divide the Literary Sources into Indigenous and Foreign Literature. Now we are going to discuss both the Indigenous and Foreign literary sources.

- **Indigenous Literature :** Among the indigenous literature of the medieval period, the **Buranjis** were the foremost one. The Ahoms

started a procedure of keeping records of all events of the time in a set of documents called Buranjis. Buranji is an Ahom word meaning "a store house of knowledge that enlightens the ignorant". Basically, it is a chronicle dealing with the political events of the period. Some of the Buranjis are much bigger in volume covering all the topics related to political history and are called *Lai-Lik-Buranji* in Tai Ahom language. Other Buranjis are small, narrating a single event only and are called *Lit Buranji* in Tai Ahom language. In Assamese the Lai-Lik-Buranji is called *Barpahi Buranji* and the Lit Buranji is known as *Katha.* The earlier Buranjis were written in the Tai-Ahom language. However, from the time of Suhungmung (1497-1539), the Buranjis were also written in the Assamese language. An officer called *Gandhia Phukan* was in charge of the Buranjis in the royal possession. Buranjis were made up-to-date with fresh information and later additions.



LET US KNOW

The reports of the frontier officers, reports of the ambassadors, architectural plan, accounts of the *Satras*, etc were also termed as Buranjis with different appellations like *Datiyalia Buranji, Kataki Buranji, Changrung Phukanar Buranji* and *Satria Buranji*.

The Ahom Buranji from Khunlung and Khunlai covers the period from the reign of the Ahom rulers from Khunlung and Khunlai to Rudra Singha. It gives a systematic and most complete indigenous history of Ahom-Mughal relations. But it is silent on Koch Bihar and Kamrup affairs. Then there is an almost complete and comprehensive *Ahom Buranji from the earliest time down to the reign of Purandar Singha* (1832-1838) in Tai-Ahom language. It is divided into two parts namely *Deo-Buranji*, consisting of the mythical and heavenly history upto descent of Khunlung and Khunlai and *Din-Buranji*, history of the rise and fall of the Ahom power in Assam involving actual historical figures.

The *Purani Asam Buranji* covers the period from Sukapha to Gadadhar Singha. It provides us a full record of the Muhammadan wars in Assamese. The *Satsari Asam Buranji* is a collection of seven old Assamese Buranjis. The *Deodhai Asam Buranji* is a collection of some old chronicles in Assamese describing the earlier period of Ahom history. It includes the relations of the Ahom with the neighboring tribes namely, the Koches, Jayantias, Kacharis, Mikirs, Chutias, Naras and Mantaras, the Ahom-Mughal relation, social customs, administration of the Ahoms, etc.

Assam Buranji Puthi is a history of the Ahom rulers from the earliest times to the British occupation of Assam. It is apparently based on older Buranjis. It was completed by Kashinath Tamuli Phukan and revised by Radhanath Barua. *Asamar Padya Buranji* has two metrical chronicles, *Kalibharat Buranji* and *Belimar Buranji*, covering the period from 1679 to 1858. It provides the history of internal dissensions and foreign invasions at the close of the Ahom rule along with the early days of the East India Company's rule in Assam. The *Tungkhungia Buranji* was written towards the close of the Ahom rule by a member of the Ahom cabinet, Srinath Duara Barbarua, and deals with the rule of the Tungkhungia clan of the Ahom kings from Gadadhar Singha to Kamaleswar Singha (1681-1810 A.D.).

There are some Buranjis on the tribes of Assam. There is the *Chutia Buranji* found in the year 1850 by Robinson who published it in the *Orunodoi*, the first Assamese newspaper. It describes the history of the Chutiyas from 1189 to the dismemberment of their kingdom in the 16th century. The names of the kings are chronologically arranged and the dates are mentioned in the *Saka* Era. The *Kachari Buranji* was written in the early part of the 18th century and deals with Ahom-Kachari relations from the end of the 14th century to the beginning of the 18th century. It provides glimpses of the earliest settlements of the Kacharis and the different centres of their government till a powerful section of them established a new capital at Dimapur and then at Maibong and Khaspur. This

transfer of the capital was due to the pressure upon the Kachari monarchs by their powerful neighbour and rival- the Ahoms. The *Jayantia Buranji* and the *Tripura Buranji* deal with the diplomatic relations of the Ahom with the kingdom of Jayantia and Tripura respectively.

The *Padshah Buranji* acquainted the people of Assam with the history of the rise and growth of the Muslim Power in India and the manners and customs of the invaders. This Buranji dealt with the Badshahs of Delhi, from the establishment of Muslim supremacy in India, upto the second half of the 17th century. The *Kamarupar Buranji* compiled towards the end of the 17th century deals with the war of Assam (including Koch Bihar) with the Mughals. The Muhammedan wars during the reign of the Ahom kings Pratap Singha, Jayadhvaj Singha, Chakradhvaj Singha and Gadadhar Singha are narrated in detail. An *Asam Buranji* obtained from the family of Sukumar Mahanta provides us information on the Ahom ancestors and on their ancestral kingdom. It also deals with the history of Assam from the commencement of Ahom rule till the accession of Gadadhar Singha in 1681 A.D. in a very lucid manner.

The Assamese noble families used to keep a *Vamsavali*, which was the genealogical account of the family. This represents the life and career of the family ancestors. Some of the royal families like Koch Rajas of Darrang and the Chiefs of the tributary states like Rani and Dimarua maintained their own *Vamsavalis*. These *Vamsavalis* along with furnishing an account of their respective families throw light on their relations with the Ahom kings and socio-political conditions of the period. 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*.

The Koch chronicle, the *Rajopakhyan* written by Jadu Nath Ghose, a Koch Bihar official under king Harendra Narayan in the first quarter of the 19th century provides us a coherent account of the entire Koch rule. There is the Tai-Ahom chronicle *Weissalisa* providing us information on the Burmese invasions of Assam.

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*. They also provided information on the socio-economic life of the people, not found in the Buranjis. Assamese literature has a large stock of a variety of folk-songs, wedding songs, nursery songs, ballads, etc. Besides, there were the *mantras* or incarnations. All of these offer a glimpse into the religious and socio-cultural as well as economic life of Assam.

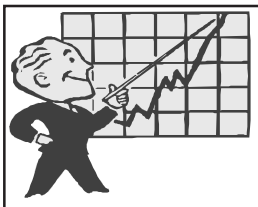
- **Foreign Literature** The indigenous sources on medieval Assam are occasionally supplemented by accounts of contemporary foreign travellers and adventurers from about the end of the 16th century.

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 on a descriptive manner upon the contact between Assam and the Mughals. *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, the autobiography of Emperor Jahangir refers to the hostility between Lakshmi Narayan, king of Koch Bihar and Parikshit Narayan, king of Kamrup (Koch Hajo),

leading to the Ahom-Mughal conflict during the last quarter of 16th century and the conquest of Koch Hajo by the Mughals. *Baharistan-i-Ghaibi* by Mirza Nathan, primarily a memoir also provides information on the history of the Mughal conflict with the Koches and the Ahoms in the early part of the 17th century. *Padshahnamah* by Abdul Hamid Lahori, the official history of the first two decades of Shah Jahan's reign also throws light on the domestic conflict between Lakshmi Narayan of Koch Bihar and Parikshit Narayan of Koch Hajo.

Alamgirnamah by Mirza Muhammad Kazim is the official history of the first decade of the reign of Aurangzeb. It gives information on the Ahom-Mughal conflict of that period. It includes Mir Jumla's aggressive imperialism in Koch Bihar and Assam. *Fathiyyah-i-Ibriyyah* written by Shihabuddin Talish is the history of Mir Jumla's conquest of Koch Bihar and of Assam till his death in March, 1663 and the return of the victorious army. Besides, the *Farmans* of Emperor Aurangzeb to Raja Ram Singh form another important source for the Assam-Mughal conflict of 1667-1671.

There are also the accounts of the foreign travellers and adventurers from about the end of the 16th century. The English traveller, Ralph Fitch visited Koch Bihar from Bengal and left a vivid account of it. Father Stephen Cacella and Father John Cabral visited Koch Bihar and Kamrup up to Pandu in the first half of the 17th century. Their account throws light on the Koch-Mughal and Mughal-Kamrup relation towards the end of Jahangir's reign, on the problems of the reign of Lakshmi Narayan, on the Mughal commander Raja Satrajit, economic condition of Koch Bihar and her commercial relation with Bihar and Bengal. We have several foreign travellers' account of the invasion of Mir Jumla.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1: Match the following:

AUTHORS	**BOOKS**
a) Abdul Qadir	1. Tarikh-i-Firoz-Shahi
b) Abdul Hamid Lahori	2. Tabaquat-i-Nasiri
c) Minhaj-ul-Siraj	3. Muntakhab- ut- Tawarikh
d) Ziau-din-Barani	4. Padshahnamah

Q.2: Who wrote the Fathiyyah-i-Ibriyyah?

.....

Q.3: Which English traveller has left an account of Koch Bihar?

.....

8.3.2 Archaeological Sources

The Archaeological Source materials are very useful for the reconstructing the history of medieval Assam. They can be classified as:

1. Inscriptions or Epigraphical Sources
2. Coins or Numismatic Sources
3. Material Remains

- **Inscriptions:** Inscriptions are valuable, contemporary and authentic source materials for reconstructing a particular period of history. They supply genuine information regarding chronological, political, military, religious, economic and social aspects of a period of time. There are several inscriptions, dealing with the matters of Koch Bihar, Kamrup and Assam. From dynastic point of view, the inscriptions may be classified as Koch, Ahom, the Bengal Sultanate and the Mughals. The scripts used in the first two classes of inscription were mostly Sanskrit and Assamese, while Persian was used in the inscriptions of the last two categories. The inscriptions are found engraved on walls of temples, rocks, stone pillars, mosque and cannons. Their contents vary with some being detailed ones, while some are brief.

There were only two Koch inscriptions during the second half of the 16th century. The first one, dated 1487 Saka or 1565 A.D., is on the Kamakhya temple issued by Sukhladhvaj. The second one dated 1505 Saka or 1583 A.D. refers to the rebuilding of the Hayagriva Madhava temple on Mani hillock at Hajo by Raghu Deb, king of Koch-Hajo. In the 17th century Pran Narayan's *Lolarkakunda inscription* gives his genealogy from Lakshmi Narayan. 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 A.D. It is engraved in Sanskrit on a Rock at Gachtal, two miles west of Doboka in Nagaon district. It records Sultan Sikandar Shah's invasion of Assam in 1284 Saka i.e., 1362 A.D. The *Snake Pillar Inscription* of the 16th century A.D of Sadiya is a royal proclamation. The *Samdhara Rampart Rock Inscription* of 1616 refers to the victory of the Ahom king, Pratap Singha builder of the fort as *Visama- Samara Vijayinah* (i.e. victor in grim battle) without mentioning the defeated enemy. Two *Kanai Barasi Rock Inscriptions* in Assamese both dated 1589 saka or 1667 A.D. during the time of Chakradhvaj, are on two sides of the rock near the Manikarneshvar hill on the North bank of Brahmaputra. The one on the West side of the hill is 3.25 meters high from the ground level and is more detailed. It 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 in 1589 *Saka* or 1667 A.D.

There are two Kachari inscriptions, one on a rock cut temple at the Kachari capital Maibong, stating that it was excavated during the reign of Harish Chandra Narayan, Lord of Hidimba in 1643 saka or1721 A.D. Another inscription records of the construction of a palace at Khaspur in 1771.

The inscriptions on cannon are extremely interesting and valuable. Some of them belonged to the Koch rulers, some to the Ahom kings and some to the Mughals. Usually the writings are in Sanskrit or in Persian. Mughal cannon-pieces captured by the Ahoms have been found scattered at various places in Assam like Tinsukia, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Guwahati and Silghat. Some of the pieces have been reinscribed by the Ahom rulers. A Mughal cannon, manufactured by Md. Zaman during the reign of Jahangir, has two inscriptions. The Persian text is brief, stating that it was placed under Sayyid Ahmad Darogha. The Sanskrit version refers to Gadadhar Singha's victory over the Mughals and capture of some cannon. However, the oldest cannon piece so far discovered in Assam belonged to the Koches and was of the end of the 16th century. It was owned by the Raja of Gauripur and recorded that it was manufactured by the Koch king Raghu Deb in 1519 *Saka* or 1597 A.D. There were six cannons of various sizes within the Koch Bihar palace, three having illegible Arabic writings. The Assam State Museum has only one Koch cannon of Parikshit Narayan dated 1632 A.D.

Inscriptions on religious buildings like dargahs and mosques provide information on the Muslim advance into the area. 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. Another Persian inscription is on the Mankachar hill mosque built in 1689 in Goalpara district.

- **Coins:** Coins help a lot in the reconstruction of the history. They indicate the status and chronology of rulers by providing their names, titles, dates and some idea of the extent of the dominion. The purity of the metal and the weight of the coins throw light on economic condition of the kingdom. The legends and images on the coins indicate the language and the script and the religion patronised by the rulers.

The earliest known Ahom coins belong to Jayadhvaj Singha (1648-63 A.D.). Subsequently, smaller coins of lower weight and value were issued. A standard Ahom coin called *Takka*, weighted a *tola* or 176 gram. Gold coins (*Mohar*) were issued by Chakradhwaj Singha and Udayaditya Singha and regularly by Siva Singha. The Ahom coins were octagonal in shape and is said to have represented eight sides of the country according to the *Yogini Tantra*. Three scripts, Ahom, Devanagari and Assamese were used in the Ahom coins. The coins of the early part of their rule were in Ahom script, those of the middle part in Devanagari and those of the latter part in Assamese. However the legends were in Ahom language, Sanskrit and Persian. Siva Singha in 1729 struck square coins with Persian legends.

The chronology of the earlier Koch kings, Naranarayan and Lakshminarayan and their contemporaries in Kamrup, Raghu Deb and Parikshitnarayan, can be determined only with the help of their coins. The inter-relation between the Koch, Kamrup and Mughal rulers were also very complicated. As coins are symbols of sovereignty these help in resolving a ruler's status. 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. But only silver ones are available. These were di-struck and round weighting 172 grains or 11.15 grams like the *tanka* of the Bengal Sultan, but thinner and larger in size. 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 epithets indicate the deities worshiped namely *Siva-charana-Kamala-madhukar* (for coins of Naranarayan, 1477 *Saka*) or *Hara-Gauri Kamala-Madhukar* (for these of Lakshminarayan, 1509, 1549, 1559 *Saka*), *Hara-Gauricharana* (for these of Raghudeb *Saka* 1510 and Parikshit, 1525).

The Koch ruler lost the right of minting full *tankas* after the acceptance of the Mughal alliance. The existence of full as well as

half *tankas* of Lakshmi Narayan's grandson Pran Narayan has been found. The successor of Pran Narayan had only half *tankas*. In the Eastern Koch Kingdom of Kamrup, Raghudeb and Parikshit minted full *tankas* resembling those of Naranarayan. The Koch coins were known as *Narayani*, from the ending of the names of the rulers.

E.A.Gait also refers to Jayantia coins with dates in the *Saka* Era. Gold coins of the Kachari Raja Bhimdarpa Narayan (1630 A.D.) and Harishchandra Narayan (1720 A.D.) have also been found.

Coins of the Sultans of Bengal from 13th to 16th century who had invaded or conquered Kamrup or portions of Assam have been discovered in different parts of Assam, probably indicating the extent of their advance. In the Guwahati hoard of coins found in November, 1880 there were three coins of Sultan Malik Ikhtiyaruddin Tughril Khan minted at Lakhnauti in 1257 A.D. Not many coins of the Mughal Emperors have been found in Koch Bihar, Kamrup and Assam.

- **Material Remains :** The Koch and Ahom rules have to their credit numerous public works: tanks, embankments, roads, forts and roads. The historical value of the surviving ones is that apart from supplying corroborative evidence in general they help us in solving problems of chronology and throw light on the state of religion and culture.

The most important of the Koch monuments are in the form of temples Saiva, Sakta and Vaishnava. Visvasimha (c.1515-40 A.D) the founder of the undivided kingdom of Koch Bihar is said to have revived the worship of Kamakhya and his sons rebuilt the temple on Nilachal hill in Guwahati. The inscription in the temple states that it was built by Sukladhwaj (son of Visvasimha) during the reign of his elder brother Naranarayan (1540-48) in 1487 Saka (A.D. 1565). Raghudeb (son of Sukladhwaj), king of Koch Hajo(1581-1603) had the Vishnu (or Hayagriva Madhava) temple on Mani Hillock (Manikut) at Hajo, built by the skilled and efficient artisan Sridhar in 1505 *Saka* or (A.D. 1583) as is known from an inscription inside the temple.

Ahom rulers distinguished themselves by constructing

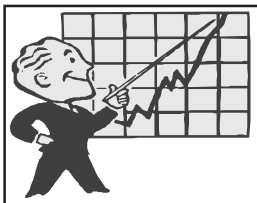
numerous public works. Rudra Singha built a brick city at Rangpur, while Pramatta Singha built new buildings and masonry gateways at Garhgaon and an amphitheatre (Rang-ghar) at Rangpur. He also built the Rudresvar and Sukresvar temples of Guwahati. Numerous temples were built in the days of later Ahom rulers testifying to their patronage of Hinduism. Pratap Singha is credited with the construction of the Siva temples of Dergaon and Biswanath, Gadadhar Singha built the temple of Umananda on Peacock Island opposite to Guwahati and Rudra Singha built temples at Guwahati, Jaisagar and Ranganath. Siva Singha built several temples at Gaurisagar, Sibsagar and Kalugaon. Besides, these rulers excavated many tanks and constructed innumerable roads, embankments, masonry bridges and mausoleums (*maidams*).

The conquering Sultans of Bengal also left a few archaeological remains in the form of buildings, which are mostly mosques. Most reputed of these was the Poa Mecca near Hajo built to perpetuate the memory of a Muslim divine, Sultan Ghiyasuddin Aulia. Of the Mughal monuments there was the mosque at Hajo built by Mir Lutfulla Shirazi, Mughal Faujdar of Guwahati. Another mosque was built at Mankachar hill in 1689 in Goalpara district. The Gurudvara at Damdoma was constructed after the visit of the Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur, who had accompanied Ram Singh's invasion of Assam, to ward off the ill effects of Sorcery in Assam.



ACTIVITY – 8.1

Visit a nearby temple of the medieval period of Assam and write a note on its history.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.4: Fill in the blanks:

a) Pran Narayan's……. inscription gives his genealogy from Lakshmi Narayan.

b) The earliest known …….. coins belong to Jayadhvaj Singha.

c) Rudra Singha built a brick city at …….

Q.5: Write True / False:

a) The earliest inscription of the Ahom period is the Gachtal Rock Inscription. (True / False)

b) The Koch coins were known as Narayani, from the ending of the names of the rulers. (True / False)

c) The mosque at Hajo was built by Mir Lutfulla Shirazi, Mughal Faujdar of Guwahati. (True / False)



8.4 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learnt,

- different sources of medieval Assam history,
- the importance of Buranjis in reconstructing the history medieval Assam,
- besides *Buranjis*, the Vaishnava literatures and also foreign literatures are of immense imporatance to reconstruct the history of medieval Assam.
- there are various archaeological sources such as coins, material remains and inscripmtions, which provided valuable informations about the medieval history of Assam.



8.5 FURTHER READING

1. Barpujari, H.K. (2003): *The Comprehensive History of Assam* (Volume- I) Publication Board, Assam, Guwahati
2. Choudhury, P.C.: *The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the 12thcentury A. D.*

8.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: a) 3, b) 4, c) 2, d) 1

Ans to Q No 2: Shihabuddin Talish

Ans to Q No 3: Ralph Fitch

Ans to Q No 4: a) Lolarkakunda, b) Ahom, c) Rangpur

Ans to Q No 5: a) True b) True



8.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Very Short Questions (Answer each and every question within 50 Words)

Q 1: Mention two indigenious literary sources of medieval Assam.

Q 2: Who composed *Fathiyyah-i-Ibriyyah?*

Q 3: Which languages were used in the inscriptions of medieval Assam?

Q 4: .....was the standard Ahom coin.

B) Short Questions (Answer each and every question within 150 words)

Q 1: Write briefly about *Buranjis* of medieval Assam.

Q 2: What do you know about Naraka?

Q 3: Write short notes on the following:

a) Indigenous literature

b) Inscriptions

c) Coins

C) Long Questions (Answer each and every question in between 300-500 words)

Q 1: Discuss the literary sources for reconstructing the history of medieval Assam.

Q 2: What are the different archaeological sources to study the history of medieval Assam? Discuss the importance of archaeological sources in reconstrucing the history of medieval Assam.

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UNIT 9: EARLY MUSLIM INVASION OF ASSAM

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Learning Objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 Turko-Afghan Invasions

9.4 Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq

9.5 Ghiasuddin Azam of Bengal

9.6 Hussain Sahis of Bengal

9.7 Let Us Sum Up

9.8 Further Reading

9.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

9.10 Model Questions

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- describe the Turko-Afghan invasion of Assam,
- discuss the invasion of Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq,
- also discuss the invasions of Ghiassuddin Azam of Bengal and Hussain Sahis of Bengal.

9.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will have a discussion on the early Muslim invasions of Assam which included the invasion of Turko-Afghans, Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq,Ghiassuddin Azam of Bengal and Hussain Sahis of Bengal. Ancient Kamarupa shared a common frontier with Bengal, and acted as a gate to enter Assam. After the fall of the Palas in the mid-twelfth century, the Brahmaputra valley was divided into numerous but independent principalities.By the beginning of 13th century when the Turks occupied Bengal,the kingdom of Kamarupa extended from Karatoya in the west to modern Darrang and Nagaon districts in Assam and opened the path of natural expansion of Bengal on the east and the north. Thus in the 13th

century there was no strong political authority in Assam to check the borders and it gave a golden opportunity to the invaders.

9.3 TURKO-AFGHAN INVASIONS

The Turko-Afghans conquered North India in the early years of the 13th century A.D. and spread eastward. Bengal came under the rule of the Delhi Sultanate in 1205 A.D. Then the invaders turned towards Kamrup. The first Turko-Afghan invader of Kamrup was Ikhtiyar-ud-din Muhammad Bakhtyar Khalji. He invaded Kamrup in 1205 A.D. which was also the first Muhammadan invasion of the land. After overpowering Lakshmansena, the last Sena king of Bengal, Bakhtyar with a grand army of 10,000 as well as a well equipped cavalry led an expedition to Tibet. During the expedition he reached the North-Western boundary of the kingdom of Kamrup.

Kamrup was then ruled by a powerful kingdom, the *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* of Minhajuddin Siraj calls him the 'Rai of Kamrud' or Raja (King). The king asked Bakhtyar to give up his risky expedition as the season was unsuitable. But Bakhtyar paid no attention to his advice and entered Kamrup. Initially Bakhtyar made rapid inroad into the territory of Kamrup. However, after they crossed the Barnadi, a channel of the Brahmaputra over a stone bridge, the Raja of Kamrup and his men launched a surprise attack at night. When the invaders tried to escape they found that the stone bridge had been dismantled. It was a rout, as the invaders found themshelves trapped between the river and their attackers.

The victory of the king of Kamrup is commemorated in the *Kanai Barasi Bowa Rock Inscription* at North Guwahati. It records that the Turks who had entered Kamrup on the 13th day of the month of *Chaitra* in the *Saka* year 1127 (1205 A.D.) were totally destroyed. The *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* written by Minhajuddin Siraj gives graphic details of the total defeat and subsequent retreat of this first Muhammedan invasion of Kamrup. His retreat was a very disastrous one. His army was almost completely destroyed. It was only with a few hundred soldiers that Bakhtyar could go back to Gauda (Bengal) where he soon died grief stricken. The disastrous invasion of Bakhtyar touched only the Western part of Kamrup. However, it marked the beginning of the settlements of Muslims in Assam.

After Bakhtyar Khalji, Sultan Ghiyasuddin Iwaz-i- Hussain Khalji (c.1213-1227 A.D.) of Gauda invaded Kamrup in 1226-1227 A.D. Sultan Ghiyasuddin was a contemporary of Sultan Iltutmish of Delhi (c.1211-1236 A.D.) who subdued him in the year 1225. It is said that from the Mymensingh side he advanced along the Brahmaputra up to Sadiya, but this does not appear to be borne out by any source. He too was repulsed. As per the numismatic evidence Sultan Ghiyasuddin came up to Guwahati and Nagaon which is also supported by the *Gachtal* inscription found at Nagaon. It is stated there that the Muhammedans advanced to Nagaon, but were defeated.

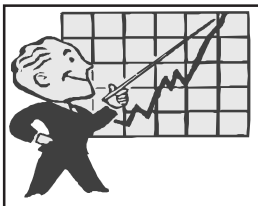
In the meantime, Lakhnauti, the capital of Sultan Ghiyasuddin's kingdom of Gauda was captured by Nasiruddin Mahmud, eldest son of Sultan Iltutmish of Delhi. As such, Sultan Ghiyasuddin hurriedly returned to his kingdom where he was imprisoned and killed by Nasiruddin Mahmud. Then for a short time Nasiruddin Mahmud ruled over Bengal as the viceroy of his father, Sultan Iltutmish of Delhi. He attempted to annex the neighbouring kingdom and through Jalpaiguri advanced into Kamrup in 1228 A.D. The king of Kamrup, probably Prithu, tried to defend his advance, but was worsted and killed. Nasiruddin Mahmud appointed a tributary king on the throne.

Nasiruddin Mahmud died in the year 1229 A.D. after which there prevailed political instability in Bengal for over two decades. During this period seven governors ruled over Bengal. Finally in 1255 A.D. Malik Ikhtyaruddin Yuzbak Tughril Khan established his sovereignty over Bengal as Sultan *Mughis al duniya wa al din Abul Muzaffar Yuzbak al Sultan*. In the meantime a king named Sandhya (c. 1250-1270 A.D.) established his rule over the kingdom of Kamrup with its capital at Kamrupanagar in North Guwahati. With Lakhnauti, Bihar and Oudh under his control, Sultan Malik Ikhtyaruddin decided to bring Kamrup also under his control.

On the plea that the ruler of Kamrup did not pay tribute to him, Sultan Malik Ikhtyaruddin in 1257 A.D. led an expedition to Assam. Without offering any resistance king Sandhya fled away and the Sultan easily occupied his kingdom and in the capital city Kamrupanagar he established a Mosque to spread Islam as he wanted to establish permanent rule over the rich and

prosperous kingdom. From his hideout king Sandhya tried to make a settlement by offering to pay annual tribute in gold and elephant as well as subservience as a vassal. But this was rejected by Sultan Malik Ikhtyaruddin. But with the beginning of the rainy season when the entire kingdom was flooded, king Sandhya came out from his hill refuge and launched an attack upon the invaders with the local guerilla techniques forcing them to retreat. With a handful of soldiers, Sultan Malik Ikhtyaruddin managed to escape to Bengal after being wounded by an arrow.

The next invasion was led by Sultan Ghiyasuddin Bahadur Shah who attacked Kamrup during 1321-1322 A.D. Due to increasing danger from both the East and the West, the kingdom of Kamrup was reorganized as a new kingdom of Kamata by its king Sandhya with the capital being shifted to Kamatapur. After Sandhya, Sindhu, Rupa and Simhadhwaj ruled over the kingdom of Kamrup or Kamata. Simhadhwaj was killed by his minister Pratapdhwaj who usurped the throne and ruled in between 1305-1325 A.D. It was Pratapdhwaj who ruled over the Kamrupa-Kamata when Sultan Ghiyasuddin attacked it and he failed to resist his advance. With his plundering raids Sultan Ghiyasuddin advanced up to Nagaon where the Kacharis were then ruling. The Kacharis repulsed Sultan Ghiyasuddin's attack and he had to suffer heavy losses. Sultan Ghiyasuddin was killed six years later by Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq of Delhi who annexed Bengal in 1327-1328 A.D. Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq also attacked Kamata-Kamrup about which we will discuss in the sub-section 8.6 of this unit.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1: Write True/False:

a) Ikhtiyar-ud-din Muhammad Bakhtyar Khalji invaded Kamrup in 1208 A.D. (True/False)

b) Lakshmansena was the last Sena king of Bengal. (True/False)

c) Nasiruddin Mahmud was the eldest son of Sultan Iltutmish of Delhi. (True/False)

Q.2: Fill in the blanks:

a) Sultan …….. was a contemporary of Sultan Iltutmish of Delhi.

b) Sultan Malik Ikhtyaruddin in ……. A.D. led an expedition to Kamrup.

c) Simhadhwaj was killed by his minister ……

9.4 MUHAMMAD-BIN-TUGHLAQ

Sultan Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq of Delhi killed Ghiyassuddin Bahadur Shah and annexed Bengal in 1327-28 A.D. He sent an expedition to Kamarupa-Kamata in 1332-33 A.D. But nothing is known about the outcome of this expedition from our sources.

The earliest reference to a Muslim invasion in Assam in noted in the *Alamgirnamah*. It mentions that Muhammad Bin Tughlak (son of Tughlak Shah), invaded Assam with a large and well-armed troops but was devastated in the battle with no remains found of them. A second expedition was sent to avenge the earlier defeat, but it met with the same fate. This event has been dated at 1332-33, based on the evidence from numismatic sources found in Mymensigh district. It might be assumed that the sultan's army made Mymensingh as the base and pushed into the interiors of Kamarupa. The reference of Alamgirnamah about the invasion suggests that the expedition did not last long. The *Ahom Buranji* gives a clue to this event, wherein it refers to the conspiracy hatched against the Ahom king and the subsequent invasion by Muhammad Tughlak.

9.5 GHIYASUDDIN AZAM OF BENGAL (1393-1410)

Next invader was Ghiyassuddin Azam, who by taking an advantage of the conflict between the king of Kamata and the Ahom king Sudangpha(1397-1407 A.D.) led an expedition to Assam. It is told that Sudnagpha the Ahom ruler jointly fought the Muslim army of Bengal under Ghiyasuddin Azam of Bengal. He was better known as *Bamun Konwar*, due to his upbringing under the shelter of a Brahmin after his mother was expelled

by his father from the palace. The Buranjis suggests that Sudangpha waged war against Kamata for capturing Chao Tasulai for illicit affair with the queen and also for hatching a plot against the king. However, with the onrush of the Muslim army of Bengal under Ghiyasuddin to Kamata, the ruler of Kamata sued for peace with the Ahom ruler and also gave his daughter, Bhajani, in marriage to the king, Sudangpha. The combined

Ahom-Kamata armies checked the advance of this expedition and pushed it back beyond the river Karatoya.

9.6 THE HUSSAIN SHAHIS OF BENGAL

With the establishment of the Hussain Sahi dynasty in Bengal, the Ahoms had to face a series of conflict with the Sultans of Bengal.The founder of this dynasty,Allauddin Hussain Shah(1493-1519)led an expedition into Kamrup-Kamata in the second decade of the 16th century and conquered it. He next marched forward and defeated the Ahoms who, under their ruler Shuhungmung(1497-1539),were advancing towards Kamrup. But later,the Ahom army inflicted a crushing defeat on the invading Bengal army killing even a son of the Sultan.Then Shohungmung came down the Brahmaputra Valley and established a military outpost on the North bank at Narayanpur,threatening the Muslim base. With the rainy season setting in, the Muslim army was attacked from all sides, as the native people blocked all the roads. The campaign of Hussain Shah thus ended with a disaster. The sources available for this event are mainly literary, numismatics. Literary sources include the *Ahom Buranjis from Khunlung Khunlai*, The *Ahom Buranji*, *Purani Assam Buranji*, Wade's *Account of Assam*, the Persian chronicle *Fathiyyah-i-Ibriyah*(Shihabuddin Talish), *Alamgirnamah*, *Riyaz-us-Salatin* and the Tripura chronicle, *Rajmala*. There are also certain numismatic sources.

9.7 NUSRAT SHAH (1519-32):

It was believed that soon after the disastrous campaign of Hussain Shah, the Bengal army came down heavily on the Ahom kingdom. But this

can be hardly agreed upon because Hussain Shah's successor, Nusrat Shah, was busy resisting the advance of the Mughal army of Babur. However, in 1527, the Ahoms marched against the Muslims at Hajo. The Ahom ruler at this time was Suhungmung. With the end of his campaign against the Mughals, Nusrat Shah now turned his attention towards the Brahmaputra valley. His army reached down to Sonitpur district and here the Ahom pushed back the Muslims to the Buroi river. The Ahom king well guarded his frontiers and deputed his ablest soldiers and generals. Meanwhile, the Kacharis entered into a war with the Ahoms in1531. The Ahoms defeated the Kachari army under Detcha, brother to the Kachari king Detsung. Detsung fled from the scene fearing for his life and the Kachari throne was usurped by one Khunkara. This resulted in Detsung signing a truce with the Ahoms by which he gave his sister to the Ahom king and also accept his suzerainty. On hearing this Khunkara fled and sought the help of the Bengal chief to regain his position. Detsung on his part pledged to capture Khunkara and hand him over to the Ahom ruler.

Turubak or Turbak was the commander of the Muslim force. Though the Persian chronicles are silent regarding it, yet sources found from the family of Sukumar Mahanta and the Purani Assam Buranji describe him as a commander of the Bengal army sent to Assam by the Sultans of Bengal. The invasion of Turbak was duly because of the adultery of the queen of Kamateshwar, who was a Gaur (Bengal) princess. The Kacharis, Ahoms, and the ruler of Kamateshwar were all interlinked in this warfare due to the queen. The king of Kamateshwar expelled his queen from the palace because of her unfaithfulness towards the king and her growing relation with the son of the royal priest. Hence the queen sought the refuge of the Kachari king and soon became his companion. In the meantime, the Sultan of Bengal was furious towards the treatment meted out to his daughter and in order to save his family honour, sent out Turbak to invade Kamata and bring back his daughter. The Kamata ruler seeing the inrush of the huge army of Turbak, sought the help of the Ahom king. On reaching Kamata, it is believed that Turbak found the place deserted and hence started to establish an independent territory. Inaction on the part of Turbak thus led

the sultan of Bengal to send an army under the "Bara Wazir" who was alongside accompanied by someone named "Bit Manik".

When the ruler of Kamata got to know the whereabouts of his queen and that the Kachari ruler had given her shelter, he raised a force and marched against the Kachari ruler. The Kachari ruler was now surrounded on all sides by their enemies, the Ahoms, the Kamata force and the force under "Bara Wazir" of Bengal. Detsung, the Kachari Raja fled from the battle field leaving the queen and her son (from the Kachari king). Meanwhile the Ahom king made the queen and her son captive, but he was enamoured by the beauty of the queen and married her ultimately.

This brought the Ahoms into a straight clash with the Sultan's army of Bengal under the "Bara Wazir". In the subsequent clash that followed the Ahoms had to face defeat initially, but in the second naval encounter, the Ahoms had the upper hand. The commander deserted the rest of the army and he fled away. The Ahoms now began a wide scale preparation to thwart off any advances on the part of the Bengal army.

Meanwhile, the sultan of Bengal was not ready for a defeat and hence sent again another force and with more troops. The Bengal army attacked from two directions using both the land as well as the water route. But they had to face defeat at various points and "the Great Wazir" managed to flee. Thus the evil designs of the Bengal Sultans under Hussain Shah and Nusrat Shah ended in a disaster.

After the death of Nusrat Shah, the conflict between the Ahoms and the Bengal Sultans declined, due to his weak successors. However, the Muslim chiefs stationed at Kamrup did try to create trouble, time and between, because of their need to maintain their position. The rise of the Koch kingdom was also a rising problem.

- **RE-EMERGENCE OF TURBAK**

After Nusrat Shah, Turbak re-emerged on the scene and carried on a prolonged war with the Ahoms. Some scholars point that Turbak took to the battle field as the general of the Bengal Sultan, while Gait opines that the conflict was more between the Ahoms and the Muslim freelance chiefs who roamed about in the city. Whatever, the story, yet this was true that

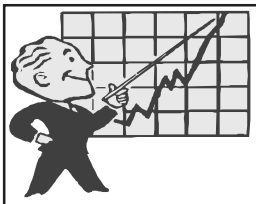
Turbak re appeared on the scene and carried on with the struggle. He had, in his earlier attempt, failed to make a mark when he was sent to invade Kamrup Kamata. Therefore, this time he took upon himself the charge of his incomplete mission and hence encamped opposite of the fort Singiri. The Ahom king had placed Barpatra Gohain as the commander along with two princes and Phrasenmung. The long wait made the Ahom army impatient and hence, the prince crossed the Brahmaputra and attacked the Muslim army. Though he was successful in the initial phase, however, at the end it was the Musims who gained an upper hand. It the battle of Kachuchilai, the ahom were routed and their army slained. This historic battle is a reminder of "conjugal love and unique valour". It was in this battle that Thaomung Phrasenmung Bargohain, rushed towards the Muslim army and as killed. It is believed that his wife, Mula Gabharu, could not prepare the *kavach kapur* (talisman cloth that serves as a protection) in time and hence was killed in the battle field. As soon as Mula Gabharu got the news of the death of her husband, she resolved to die like her husband, fighting the foreign army. She marched along with five other ladies, towards the army and fought bravely, but was killed by a bullet from Turbak. However, her chivalry and spirit is still an inspiration to the people of Assam.

Meanwhile the Kacharis has made up with the Ahoms and now were jointly battling against the Muslims. The enemy army marched up against the Ahoms and pushed into the interiors of Assam, thus terrifying the Ahom king. The battle continued for many days, both on the land and water. The Muslims were routed at Sala. Though reinforcements came to the Muslims, yet at Dikrai, they had to face defeat again. In a final battle in 1533, the Muslim army was massacred at a large scale. Turbak was also killed, which was believed to be due to treachery.

As a result of the long battle, the Ahoms brought home huge profits as, horses, elephants in large number, cannons and match locks, golds and other precious metals. Turbak's daughter was taken captive and put into the Ahom kings harem. The downfall of the Muslim army was due to their weak naval strength, delay in reinforcements from Bengal and lastly due to the excellence shown from the Ahom side in matters of strategy, and archillery.

The battle marks the use of fire arms for the first time, as claimed by the Ahom scholars. The large number of Muslim captives were given different jobs but were good for none. However, they showed much interest in brass making. Hence they got the name “Mariyas”.

The Kamata ruler accepted the suzerainty of the Ahom king. The Ahoms had now extended their dominion and subdued their rivals. The Sultan of Bengal too made up peace with the Ahoms. The Koch ruler under Visva Singh accepted the Ahom protection. The Sultan of Bengal was now surrounded on all sides by powerfull enemies and was thus compelled to leave Kamrup- Koch Bihar for good.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.3: Name the literary sources for the study of Muslim invasion in Assam?

.....

Q.4: Name the princess of Kamata who was given away to the Ahom ruler, Sudangpha in exchange for peace terms?

.....

Q.5: Name the brave lady who died in the battle of Kachuachilai?

.....

Q.6: Who were the Mariyas?

.....

Q.7: Who was the successor of Hussain Shah, the Sultan of Bengal?

.....



9.8 FURTHER READING

1. Barpujari, H.K (2003): *The Comprehensive History of Assam: Vol. II, Publication Board, Assam, Guwahati*
2. Gait,Edward (2005) :*A History of Assam, LBS Publication, Guwahati*

9.9 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: a) False

b) True

c) True

Ans to Q No 2: a) Ghyasuddin Iwaz -i- Hussain Khalji

b) 1257

c) Pratapdhwaj

Ans to Q No 3: The literary sources include the *Ahom Buranjis from Khunlung Khunlai*, The *Ahom Buranji*, *Purani Assam Buranji*, Wade's *Account of Assam*, the Persian chronicle *Fathiyyah-i-Ibriyah* (Shihabuddin Talish), *Alamgirnamah*, *Riyaz-us-Salatin* and the Tripura chronicle, *Rajmala*.

Ans to Q No 4: Bhajani.

Ans to Q No 5: Mula Gabharu.

Ans to Q No 6: The Muslim soldiers, who were held captives by the Ahoms, were assigned different tasks, but they excelled in brass making and hence they pursued it for many generations to come. This community was named "Mariyas".

Ans to Q No 7: Nusrat Shah.



9.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) VERY SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 150 words)

Q 1: Who killed Ghiyassuddin Bahadur Shah?

Q 2: Who was Turbak?

Q 3: Who authored *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri ?*

Q 4: Who was Mula Gabharu?

B) SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 150 words)

Q 1: Write briefly about the Hussain Sahi dynasty in Bengal.

Q 2: Write briefly about the Ghiyassuddin Azam of Bengal.

Q 3: Write short notes on-

a) *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*

b) Re-emergence of Turbak

C) LONG QUESTIONS (Answer each questions between 300-500 words)

Q 1: What led to the invasion of Kamrup-Kamata by the Muslims?

Q 2: Describe in brief the Ahom Muslim struggle and its consequences

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UNIT 10 : STATE FORMATION IN MEDIEVAL ASSAM

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Introduction

10.3 Definition of State Formation

10.4 State Formation of the Ahoms

10.5 State Formation of the Chutiyas

10.6 State Formation of the Bhuyans

10.7 State Formation of the Kacharis

10.8 Let Us Sum Up

10.9 Further Reading

10.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

10.11 Model Questions

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- have an idea about the state formation theories and its implementation
- know the political condition of the medieval Assam and the system of medieval state formation
- discuss the state formation of the Ahoms
- discuss the state formation of the Chutias
- discuss the state formation of the Bhuyans
- discuss the state formation of the Kacharis.

10.2 INTRODUCTION

The fragmentation of the ancient Kamarupa state was followed by the emergence of some petty regional zones. These zones were ruled by some chiefs. The medieval period in Assam history starts with the coming of the Muslim invaders. In 1206 Assam was invaded by BakhtiyarKhilji and it was considered as the starting point of medieval history of Assam. The

Ahoms , who entered in the Brahmaputra valley from Myanmar gradually established themselves as the ruling power of Assam . Simultaneously we also found some small chieftains who established their authority over some regions. In this chapter we will discuss the system and process of state formation of the Ahoms , Chutiyas , Bhuyans and Kacharis .To know the political history of medieval Assam we must have some information of the process of state formation of all these regions.

10.3 DEFINITION OF STATE FORMATION

State formation is a natural transition from a tribal society to a segmentary state or to a republic, monarchy and empire.Therefore state formation has always a link with the growth of agriculture,trade, industry and urbanization.In the ancient Indian context, the emergence of first state formation happened in the 6th century CE with the rise of the Janapadas in Norther India.State formation is a process of the development of a centralized administrative unit.

There are three main theories of origin of state formation in ancient India. These are social contract theory, divine origin theory and the organic theory. The institution of state can be studied in relation to its origin,nature, aims and functions of the state in ancient India. State formation is a social body with political power. In ancient India the concept of State was considered essential because itconfirmspeace, order and happiness. However, the origin of state has remained a controversial subject since ancient time. With the establishment of the kingship, the concept of state gradually emerged.

The social contract theory is one of the common theories of the origin of state. According to this theory state is a result of a contract between the king and his subjects. Theking, thus appointed was expected to save the state and the subjects from external aggression and establish order and security within the state. However, the Vedic works do not accept state as a result of contract. But they explained that king should protect the subjects from its enemies.

The theory of divine origin of kingship as well as the state was not widely celebrated in the ancient Indian polity. The divine origin theory of

kingship advocated that the king was appointed by God. He was answerable to God only. Certain ancient scriptures like Manusamhita explain that the origin of state is from the divine. The Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Puranas also describe the divine origin of the king and the state.

The organic theory holds the view that sate is like an organism and that each organ has a specific function to perform. This theory believes that the well-functioning of the whole organism depends upon the healthy conditions of each part of the body or organism and its efficient functioning. The seven parts of the state are the king or the sovereign, the minister, the territory and population, the fortified city or the capital, thetreasury, the army, the friends and the allies. Among the seven elements orparts, it is the king who is most important.

The Mauryan period of ancient Indiaprovided the world a significant treatise, the Arthasastra of kautilya. It was a book on statecraft. According to Kautilya there should be seven elements of a state. Kautilya termed these elements as Prakritis . This theory of Kautilya is known as the Saptanga theory of State formation. These seven limbs or elements are the essential organs of the state. These include-

(i) Swami (The ruler)
(ii) Amatya(The Minister)
(iii) Janapada(The population)
(iv) Durga (The fortified Capital)
(V) Kosha(The Treasury)
(Vi) Danda(The Army)
(Vii) Mitra(Ally and Friend)

Kautilya gives extensive powers to the kings. He also believed in the theory of divine right or divinity. According to kautilya the first and foremost duty of the ruler is to protect his subjects and their property.

In the Context of Assam we found more or less the same picture of the process of state formation. The history of Assam is the confluence of diverse people.In ancient period of Assam history we found three royal dynasties like the Varmanas , the Salastambhas and the Palas who ruled over the region . With the fall of the palas in the early part of the 12thcentury,

the powerful kingdom of kamarupa disintegrated. After the fall of the Kamarupa kingdom several petty independent or semi -independent principalities emerged in the different parts of the region. Thus we can see the emergence of the Ahoms, the Bhuyans, the Chutiyas and the Kacharis. They established their own respective principalities with a proper administrative unit.



LET US KNOW

Kautilya was an Indian philosopher, economist and policy maker. His name was Chanakya and Bishnugupta. He wrote the famous 'Arthasastra', a treatise on statecraft. He was known as 'Indian Machiavelli'. He served as the prime minister of Chandragupta Mauryan, the first ruler of the Mauryan dynasty. Kautilya belonged to a period of approximately 350-275 BCE.

10.4 STATE FORMATION OF THE AHOMS

The Ahoms were the members of the Shan branch of the Tai group. This group of people were called Shan because they first established themselves in a land known as Tyai-Shan. In 5th century CE they migrated to China. After that they migrated to Mungrimungram in Yunan .Due to a family dispute, Sukapha, a leader of the Tai group, left his homeland in 1215. He was accompanied by a few nobles. Sukapha moved towards the Patkai and entered in the Brahmaputra valley. On his way he subdued the Nagas. He reached Brahmaputra valley in 1228 and established the first capital of the Ahom dynasty at Charaideo in 1253.The Morans and the Barahis were subdued by Sukapha with a policy of peace and conciliation. Sukapha did not follow an extensive policy of expansion of his territory. He was assisted by two officials. Those were Burhagohain and Borgohain. Thus the process of state formation started under Sukapha.To understand the Ahom state formation we must know the administrative machinery of the Ahoms. A strong centralized bureaucracy is the prime element of state formation.

The Ahoms established a monarchical system of administration. Theoretically king was the fountain head of the administration but he had to

follow the advice and recommendations of the council of ministers. Divinity was attached to Ahom kingship. The Ahom king was considered as the divine power. Therefore he was termed as Swargadeo, the king of heaven. The prime duty of the king was to protect his subjects. Next to the king was the council of the five. They were known as patramantris like - Burhagohain, Bargohain, Barpatragohain, Barbarua and Barphukan . They were entitled the epithet 'dangariya'. Their duty was to select a king. They had the power to depose a king.Thus the government was a combination of 'limited monarchy and oligarchy'. The Ahom king assigned territories to these dangarias .They exercised power in their respective territories like independent sovereignty. During the wartime they supplied soldiers to the royal army. In the normal time they contributed labourers for construction of roads, bridges and temples, the offices of the Barbarua and Barphukan were created by Pratap Singha in the early part of 17th century. These two posts were not hereditary. The Barbarua was the chief executive officer and the head of the judiciary. The Barphukan was the viceroy. He had the right to nominate and recommend rajas as tributary to the king. The princes and the near relatives of the king were appointed as the governors. They enjoyed the title Raja.

With the extension of the Ahom power, the load of administrative power increased. As a result several new offices were created for the smooth run of the administration. Under the patronage of Pratap Singha ,paik or khel system was implemented by Momai Tamuli Barbarua. Under the khel or paiksyatem, every adult male between the ages 16 to 50 was listed as a Paik. They should render their service to the state. The control of the state over the paiks was very rigid. During the time of war emergency the paiks rendered their military service to the state. Besides all these duties, the paiks had to fulfill some feudal obligations to their immediate master. Sometimes they cultivate the lands of their masters. Each paik in return for his service to the state was allotted two puras of land. This land was termed as ga-mati, which was tax free. Thus the people under the Ahom rule rendered their service to the state.

The Ahom state formation also had a military department. The non-serving paiks constituted a standing militia. The Barbarua was usually the

commander -in-chief of upper Assam. Barphukan exercised his power in lower Assam. The Ahom army comprised of infantry, navy, artillery, elephants, cavalry and spies. The Ahoms were expert in guerrilla fighting.

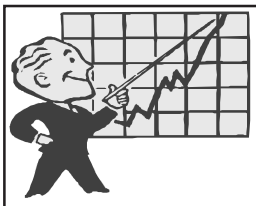
The Ahoms had no written code of law. The king was the head of the judicial department. He was assisted by a chief justice known as Nyay Sodha Phukan. The other judicial officers were Phukans, Rajkhowas and Baruas.

The Ahoms diplomatically maintained their foreign relations. The threat of early Ahom kingdom came from the outside. After establishing themselves in the region the Ahoms gradually checked the eastward expansion of the Kamata kingdom. The Ahoms devoted all their energy to unite the tribes of the eastern part under one political umbrella. The period of consolidation of Ahom power was also a period of foreign invasions. The Ahoms tried to introduce a new political identity to the inhabitants of Assam known as the people of Assam. Gradually the Ahom rulers themselves became Aryanised. They maintained a cordial relations with the Chutiyas and the Koches of Kamarupa. All these steps helped in the process of Aryanisation. The Ahom king, who first attempted to establish cultural contacts with Delhi and the Hindu rulers of India, was Rudra Singha. Under his ruling period the process of encouraging artists, musicians and sculptors to come into Assam was started.

The king was the owner of the lands of the kingdom. The forests and mines were under his control.The paiks were given two puras of lands in return of their service. The pamuas, who cultivated the lands, had to pay the plough tax. In lower Assam, especially in Kamrup, the Pargana system was prevailed. Each pargana was in charge of a Choudhury. On the other hand in the tributary states of Rani, Luki, Beltola and others, lands were held according to the old tribal system of community basis. Washing of gold from the sands of the rivers was an important source of income to the state. Other sources of revenue were the tributes pays in cash or kind by the subordinate rulers like Darrang Raja. The Ahom state also received custom duties from different markets.

From the discussion of the administrative system of the Ahoms we found that they more or less followed the Saptanga theory. They had the seven elements of the state formation in their administrative unit. The Ahoms

had no written code of conduct for their state policy. They were always ready to repulse any foreign attack. The liberal social outlook of the early Ahom rulers was one of the important characters of their state formation. The Ahom policy towards the neighboring hill tribes also helped in their state formation. They initiated a friendly and cordial relation with the ill tribes.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1: Write True/False:

(a) Morans and Barahis were subdued by Sukapha by a policy of blood and iron.

(b) The post of Barphukan was created by Pratap Singha.

(c) The Ministers were known as 'Dangnariayas'.

10.5 STATE FORMATION OF THE CHUTIAYAS

The Chutiayas were one of the kingdoms in the upper Brahmaputra valley which emerged in the political scene after the downfall of the Palas. Chutiyas were indigenous people of Assam. They were Mongoloid origin and their language had a similarity with the Bodo language.

The Chutiya kingdom was established by Birpal in 1187 CE. He was a Chutiya chieftain. The Chutiya kingdom was the largest kingdom in Assam after the fall of the Palas and before the rise of the Ahoms. The kingdom continued almost 400years in eastern Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The exact location of the Chutiya capital cannot be ascertained. However it is generally held that the Chutia capital was situated on the bank of the river Kundil. Therefore it was known as Kundil Nagar or Bhismak Nagar .It is assumed that the capital of Chutiya kingdom was Sadia and Ratnapur. The Chutiyas are now found in the districts of Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur, Sibssagar, Darrang and Duarareas.

The Chutiyas ruled over a territory bounded on the west by the river Sisi, a tributary of Subansiri, on the east by the Brahmakunda. In the northern side it was surrounded by hills and on the south by the river Burhidihing. The Chutiyas established a monarchical type of government. King was considered the supreme head of the monarchy. However e was assisted

by his officials. Most of their kings name ended with the suffix 'Narayan'. Birpal, the originator of the Chutiya kingdom, claimed his descent from a legendary king named Bhismak. He also took the title Gayapal after subjugating the nearby petty chiefs.

Birpal's son and successor Gaurinarayan or Ratnadhvajpal was one of the most powerful Chutia king. He defeated Bhadrasen with alarge army and made his son as a tributary ruler. After that Birpal took the title Ratnadhajapal. He also planned to subdue Nyayapala, the neighboring king. Nyayapala offered his daughter in marriage to the Chutiaking. Thus we found that the Chutiyas established their state formation on a monarchical structure. They had a strong military department. With the help of this army they subdued the nearby chiefs. Ratnadhvajpala built several forts along the foot hills to check the further aggression of the neighboring hill tribes. Ratnadhvajpal sent his army to Kamateswara .Ultimately the Kamata king Sandhya , gave his daughter in marriage to Vijaydhvajpal , the son of Ratnadhvajpal.

The Chutiya kings were diplomatic in foreign relations. Gatnadhvajpal maintained friendly relation with the ruler of Gauda. The political relations of the Chutiyas with the Ahoms started from the middle of the 14th century CE. Suhungmung or the Dihingia Raja, a powerful Ahom king finally conquered the Chutiya kingdom. The kingdom was annexed with the Ahom kingdom in 1523 CE.

10.6 STATE FORMATION OF THE BHUYANS

The Bhuyans were a class of new rulers who emerged after the dis integration of the ancient kingdom of Kamarupa in 12thcentury. Earlier they exercised their power in the region between the Dikrai and the Barnadi on the north bank and in the Kapilivalley. They did not introduce a monarchical type of government. The word 'bhuyan' means a landlord equal with the Persian term zaminder. The term Bhuyan came from Sanscrit word 'bhumi' meaning land. The Bhuyans are also found in Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa etc. The Bhuyans in Assam maintained a confederacy. The most of the Assamese Bhuyans were Kayasthas. We found the institution of Bhuyans in Bengal too.

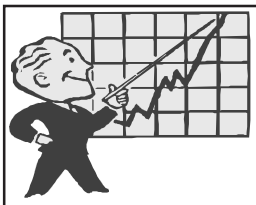
There are two opinions regarding the origin and state formation of the Bhuyans of Assam. According to one theory the Bhuyans came from Gauda. As a result of a peace agreement between the Gauda king Dharmanarayan and the Kamata king Durlabh Narayan in 14th century the Bhuyans entered into Assam. The Kamata king established them at Lengamaguri situated to the east of Hajo. However the Bhuyans could not stay long at Lengamaguri due to the inroads of the Bhutiyas .According to another theory the Bhuyans were the indigenous inhabitants of Assam. They were the descendants of Samudra, a minisrer of the king Arimatta.

The officials of the Bhuyans received land-grants in lieu of cash salaries. The land-grant system was not hereditary. But in actual practice the land-grants were possessed by the son of the deceased officer. Thus the state formation of the Bhuyans was formed in the method of feudalism. Their main source of income was the revenue paid by the cultivators. The feudatories grouped the villages together in some units. The purpose of these was to get well assessment of their income from a particular area. The units comprised of villages were known as Chakla. The Chakla was administered by an officer known as Bhuyan. If the unit comprised of twelve villages, the officer -in-charge was called a baro-bhuyan. If the number of the villages were less than twelve then the officer -in -charge was termed as Chota-Bhuyan or Saru-Bhuyan or Bhuyan .Sometimes the Bhuyans took title like raja, Chota-Raj, Gomathaetc.

Each Bhuyan was independent within his respective region. He could maintain his own army. The Bhuyans ruled like independent chiefs. Inthe early part of 16th century they were subdued by the Ahoms. The Bhuyans also had judicial power overtheir respective areas. They established their own courts known as karkhanas.

The Bhuyans in the Kamata kingdom was very powerful. Niladhvaj, the ruler of Kamata kingdom became the sovereign lord of the whole kingdom. The Bhuyans took the leadership and overthrow the government of Hussain shah.

The power of the Kamata Bhuyans began to weaken with the rise of the Koches. Biswa Singha, who founded the Koch kingdom, subdued most of the Bhuyans.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.2: Who had established the Chutiya Kingdom?

.....

Q.3: Which term was used to denote the units of villages in the administrative system of the Bhuyans?

.....

Q.4: In which place the Bhuyans first settled down?

.....

10.7 STATE FORMATION OF THE KACHARIES

The Kacharis was a branch of the indo-mogoloid group of people. After the fall of the palas, the Kacharis rose into prominence. In the 13th century, at the time of the coming of the Ahoms the Kacharis were the most organized tribe with their kingdom. Their kingdom was extended from the river Dikhou in the eastern side to the Kapili River in the west. The present district of north Cachar was also under their jurisdiction.

The Kachari king contemporary to Sukapha was possibly Bicharpatipha. From the Buranjis we got the information that Sukapha fought with a large number of Kacharis at the foothills of Naga Hills. Suhungmung dihingia raja defeated the Kacharis in a battle in 1526 and made them Ahom feudatory. From that time the Kachari kings came to known as thapitasanchita (established and preserved) of the Ahoms. But later on the Kacharis revolted against the Ahoms and recovered their capital Dimapur. The Kacharis were again subdued by the Koches in 1562 and became subordinate to the Koches. The Ahom king Rudra Singha finally defeated the kacharis.

They introduced a developed administrative system. They introduced a monarchical type of administration. King was the supreme authority. We do not found any reference of assemblies. The king was assisted by some ministers. The kingship was hereditary.

The royal authority had an efficient military administration. The army was consisted of infantry,artillery elephantdetachment etc. The king was

also the head of the judiciary and militia. He was the commander in chief in the battles.

Ministers held the second position in the administrative unit. Ministers were generally appointed from the nobility. They advised the ruler duringemergency. There were administrative divisions in the Kachari administration. The provinces were under the governors

The Kachari kings also issued silver and gold coins. They maintained trade relation with the neighboring tribes and the Ahoms. Textile, timber and salt were the chief source of state revenue. The finance department looks after the trade and commerce. Moreover the state also levied house tax, market tax and land revenue. Textile, salt and timber were the chief source of revenue from exports. About imports item we found reference of minerals.

The Kacharis had numerous towns like Kasomari, Sonapur, Banpur, Maibong, Khaspuretc. The growth of urban centers indicate development of municipal administration. The administration of the towns were under the direct supervision of the ruler. The kachari villages were governed by the village headman.



ACTIVITY 10.1

Write a short note on the Ahom-Kachari relation.

.....

.....



10.8 LET US SUM UP

- In Indian context the first state formation was happened in the 6th century CE with the rise of the Janapadas in Northern India
- There are three main theories of state formation. These are - social contract theory, divine origin theory and organic theory.
- Kautilya introduced the Saptanga theory of kingship.
- The essential seven limbs or organ of the Saptanga theory were-Swami (the ruler) Amatya (the minister), Janapada (The population), Durga The Fortified (fort), Kosha (The treasury), Danda (The army) and Mitra(ally and friend).

- The Ahoms entered in the Brahmaputra valley in 1228 CE and gradually started their state formation. However there are some differences with the state formation of early period.
- A strong centralized bureaucracy is the prime element of state formation.
- The Chutiaya established their kingdom in 1187 CE by Birpal. They established a monarchical type of state formation.
- The term 'bhuyan'means 'landlord'. They did not introduce a monarchical type of government.
- The kacharis came into prominence in 13th century CE. They also introduced a monarchical type of state formation.



10.9 FURTHER READING

1) Barpujari, H.K.(ed) *Comprehensive History of Assam* (Vol II), Assam Publication Board, Guwahati , 2004(1990).

2) Baruah, S.L, *A comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Monoharlal Publishers. Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, 2002.

10.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: (a) False (b) True (c) True

Ans to Q No 2: Birpal

Ans to Q No 3: Chakla

Ans to Q No 4: Lengamaguri.



10.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Very Short Type questions (Answer each question within 50 words)

Q 1: What were the three basic theories of state formation?

Q 2: What term was used by kautilya to denote the elements of Saptanga theory?

Q 3: Who was Sukapha and how he establish Ahom dynasty in Assam?

Q 4: What was the character of Ahom administration?

Q 5: Who introduce the paik system?

B. Short Type Questions (Answer each question within 150 words)

Q 1: Discuss the three main theories of State Formation.

Q 2: Who was Kautilya? Discuss his theory of Saptanga for the state formation.

Q 3: Who were Chutiyas? How they establish their state formation in Assam?

C. Long Questions (Answer each question within 500 words)

Q 1: Discuss briefly the policy of State formation of the Ahoms

Q 2: Who were the Bhuyans? What was their system of State Formation? Discuss.

Q 3: Who were the Kacharis? Discuss briefly their system of State Formation.

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UNIT 11: EXPANSION AND CONSOLIDATION OF THE AHOM EMPIRE

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 Ahom Expansionist Policies

11.3.1 Conquest of the Chutiyas

11.3.2 Occupation of the Kachari kingdom

11.4 Westward Expansion

11.4.1 Ahom-Koch Conflicts

11.4.2 Ahom-Mughal Conflicts

11.5 Let us sum up

11.6 Further Reading

11.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

11.8 Model Questions

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the origins of the Ahoms,
- discuss the expansionist policies of the Ahoms,
- describe the conquest of the Chutiya and Kachari Kingdom,
- analyse the Ahom-Mughal and Ahom-Koch conflicts.

11.2 INTRODUCTION

We have already some basic knowledge of the Ahoms in Assam from the prevoious chapters. They came to the Brahmaputra Valley in the 13th century and established their political power in this region. In this unit we are going to discuss about the expansion and consolidation of the Ahom power in Assam. You will come to know about the struggles of the Ahoms with the indigenous tribes as well as the Turko-Afghan invaders for their establishment in the Brahmaputra Valley. However, it was only with the accession of Suhungmung (1497-1539 A.D.) that the Ahom dynasty became

the most dominant power in Assam, and maintained their uniqueness of sustaining for almost six hundred years.

11.3 AHOM EXPANSIONIST POLICIES

Suhungmung (1497-1539 A.D.), the son of Supimpha ascended the Ahom throne in 1497 at Charguya with all pomp and splendour. He was also known as Dihingiya Raja due to the fact that he made his capital at Bokota on the bank of the Dihing. His reign is marked as an important one due to the changes he brought into the map of the Ahom territory.



LET US KNOW

Suhungmung assumed the name of Swarga Narayan which reveals the growing influence of Hinduism. It was from his time that the Ahoms took the title of Swargadeo as the honorable designation in all official documents.

11.3.1 Conquest of the Chutiyas

In the initial years of his reign, Suhungmung first had to face the revolt of the Aitonia Nagas in 1504, who were however subdued. The Aitonia Nagas agreed to pay tribute in kinds like axes, gongs and timber. The Ahoms had also to wage a fight against the Chutiyas. The Chutiyas under Dhir Narayan invaded the country in 1513, but were defeated at Dikhowmukh by the Ahoms. A naval defeat was also inflicted on the Chutiyas at Siraati. Eventually the town of Mungkhrang was occupied by the Ahoms. Dhir Narayan tried to bring the Raja of Mungkhrang to his aid but failed as the latter made peace with the Ahom king. After a long gap, the Chutiyas again attacked Mungkhrang in 1520, and were successful. In 1552 Suhungmung sent a fresh expedition and the Chutiyas were defeated. The Ahoms not only recovered the lost territory but also occupied lands even further to the North of the river Tiphao, where a fort was erected. In 1523, the Chutiyas renewed their attack but met with the same fate. They sued for peace but Suhungmung demanded the *heirlooms* of

the Chutiya kingdom, his gold elephant, gold cat and the gold umbrella. The Chutiya king refused to oblige with this demand. The war continued again. The Chutiyas took up position at the mouth of a river near Sadiya, but they had to flee and were pursued by the Ahoms till the Akitara hills. The Chutiyas gave a stiff check to the Ahoms by rolling down big boulders on them. However, the Ahoms were not to be deterred by this and they made a surprise attack on the Chutiyas from the rear. In the battle that ensued, the Chutiya king and his son were killed. Their heads were buried under the steps of the Ahom temple of the Charaideo, for the king to walk upon. Upon the annexation of the whole Chutiya kingdom a new officer was appointed for its administration by the designation of Sadiya Khowa Gohain.



LET US KNOW

Suhungmung made Senglung the Barpatragohain, a new office made equal in rank with that of Bargohain and Burhagohain.

11.3.2 Occupation of the Kachari Kingdom

In 1526, the Ahoms marched against the Kacharis who were defeated after a tough battle. The Chutiyas also revolted in 1527 but were subdued. Suhungmung's reign is also known for the first Muhammedan invasion in Ahom history. The Muslim commander was known by the name of Wazir. The Ahoms drove away the Muhammedans as far as the river Burai where a fort was constructed. 40 horses and 20 to 34 canons were captured. Towards the close of the year 1529, the Chutiyas revolted again but were defeated in different fronts on the Chandangiri and Dangthang hills, and on the banks of the Brahmaputra, Dihing and Kundil river.

In the year 1531, the Kacharis gave the Ahoms a tough time. The Kachari king Khunkhara tried to drive away the Ahoms from Marangi but in the battle the former was routed. Suhungmung tried

to punish the Kachari king and sent an expedition against him. The Kacharis were defeated and a prince named Detsung was installed as their ruler.



LET US KNOW

A new officer Marangi Khowa Gohain was created for the control of the lower valley of the Dhansiri.

11.4 WESTWARD EXPANSION

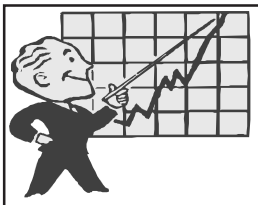
The Ahoms again came face to face with the Muhammedans at Temani in the western border. The Muhammedan Commander fled after his army was routed. The Ahoms then placed their garrisons at Sala and at Singiri. However, the Muhammedans again attacked and this time it was at Singiri, but the Barpatragohain, who was in charge of the place, defeated the Muslim force. Bit Malik, the commander of the Muslim army was slain. Many canons and guns, besides horses were seized by the Ahoms. The Barpatragohain was generously rewarded.

In 1532, the Muhammedans under Turbak camped opposite the Ahom fort at Singiri and this time they were prepared with thirty elephants, 1000 horses, a large number of foot soldiers and artillery. Suklenmung, the son of Suhungmung was given the charge to repel them. However, after a few *skirmishes* he became impatient. He crossed the river Brahmaputra, against the advice of his astrologer. He was defeated and eight of his commanders died. The Ahoms retreated to Sala and the Barpatragohain was made the commander-in-chief of the whole mission. Initially the Muhammedans had an upper hand. They burnt houses and captured seven of the Ahom boats. But luck favoured the Ahoms, when in March 1533, the Muhammedan commanders Benagl and Taju were slain and a naval victory was achieved near Duimunisila. Both the rival groups camped at the opposite sides of the river Dikrai, each waiting for the other to abandon the entrenchments. The Ahoms took the first step and defeated the Muslims. The last battle took place at Bharali. Turbak was killed and the Muslim army was totally routed. They were pursued by the Ahoms as far as the Karatoya

river. Hussain Khan was also killed in the fight. Horses, elephants and other booties in the form of gold and silver were all seized.

During the years 1535 and 1536, the Ahoms had to deal with revolts from the *Khamjang, Tablung* and *Namsang* Nagas. All of them were subdued in due course of time. The Kacharis, again under Detsung, started their hostility towards the Ahoms and, therefore, Suhungmung sent an army against him. The Kacharis were defeated and Detsung fled from one place to another but at last he was caught and put to death. Thus, the whole of Kachari kingdom came under the Ahoms. In 1537, the Koch king Visva Simha and his brother visited the Ahom king with presents. The Raja of Manipur, too, exchanged gifts with the Ahom king.

Suhungmung was, however, assassinated in 1539 by a Kachari servant Ratiman. It is often stated that the assassination plan was made by his son, Suklenmung who was not on good terms with his father. After a reign of 42 years Suhungmung left the Ahom kingdom on a firm foot. The Nagas, Chutias and Kacharis were defeated. The Muhammedan invasions had been driven back. Friendly relations were maintained with the Koches and Manipur. The reign of Suhungmung was eventful from many aspects. From a religious point of view, the period witnessed the spread of the Vaishnava form of religion, propounded by Sankardeva. The Saka era was adopted from his time. It must also be mentioned here that collection of census data took place from this time. The society was divided into clans and the artisans were imported from Chutiya country and some other places. The use of firearms also began from Suhungmung's reign. Earlier, the Ahom army used swords, spears, bows and arrows. Suhungmung was an enterprising king as he gave a new vision to his successors. He extended the Ahom territory on all sides through his prowess.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.4: What name was taken by Suhungmung after his accession?

.....

Q.5: Who was appointed to the office of Barpatragohain?

.....

Q.6: Who commanded the Muhammedan army during the first Muslim invasion on the Ahoms?

.....

Q.7: Name the office that was made by Suhungmung and was made equal to that of Bargohain and Burhagohain.

.....

Q.8: Name the Koch king who visited Suhungmung along with his brother and when?

.....

11.4.1 Ahom- Koch Conflict

The relation between the Ahoms and the Koches were never smooth. They were at war with each other at the slightest pretext. Again, in times of need they entered into marital alliances. The Koch had a friendly relation with the Ahoms as mentioned in the Ahom Buranjis. There is the mention of a friendly visit by Visva Simha and his brother in 1537 to the Ahom king. However, the Koch chronicles describes Visva Simha as having invaded the Ahom territory, in which the Koch army had to retreat.

After Visva Simha, his son Malla Deva ascended the throne. He was famous by the name of Nara Narayan. Another son of Visva Simha was Sukhladhvaj, better known as Chilarai. During the time of Nara Narayan, the Ahoms and the Koches came into conflict and the Ahoms had to face a serious setback. It started with a conspiracy against Nara Narayan by a petty chief who fled to Suklenmung when detected. Suklenmung gave shelter to the chief. The result was that a battle was fought between the Koch king Nara Narayan and the Ahom king. The Koch army under Chilarai fought at the banks of the river Dikrai and was able to defeat their rival. Another battle was fought at Kaliabor, but the Ahoms were again routed with a heavy loss. During this time, the Koches under Gohain Kamal, another

brother of the Koch king, constructed a road from the Koch capital to Narayanpur (North Lakhimpur sub division). This road came to be known as the Gohain Kamal Ali. This construction was completed in 1547, after which the Koches built a fort at Narayanpur.

Soon Suklenmung attacked and encamped at the bank of river Pichala. This resulted in a disaster as the supplies of the Koch army were cut off and many of them died. The Koch army was in a bad shape after this battle. Nara Narayan soon made an attempt by burning down some villages within the Ahom boundary. The Ahoms retaliated and in an engagement at the mouth of the river Dikhou, the Ahoms were defeated. Again in a second engagement at the same place, Chilarai, the Koch commander inflicted another crushing defeat on the Ahoms. The Ahom king and his nobles fled and soon Garhgaon, their capital city, was captured. The Ahoms had to sue for peace. The Ahom king had to surrender many of their nobles and sons of their chiefs to the Koches as hostages besides paying a war indemnity of sixty elephants, sixty pieces of cloths and a large amount of gold and silver as per the conditions set while making peace with the Koch king.

However, even though Nara Narayan was successful everywhere, yet in the case of Padshah of Gaur, the Koches had to face much trouble. The Koch chronicle informs of the defeat of the Koch forces under Chilarai who was taken captive. This made the Koch king, Nara Narayan very desperate to make a good relation with the Ahoms. He, therefore, decided to release the prisoners he had taken during the war with the Ahoms. But this he did by a trick so that nobody could understand the real motive. He called for a game of dice to be played with Sundar Gohain, one of the hostages and staked the release of the hostages, in case of his loss. He deliberately lost the game and thus released the prisoners and made friendship with the Ahoms.

In July 1563, the Koch commander, Tipu led an invasion up to the Brahmaputra. But the Ahoms defeated him. In 1570 again,

Tipu and Bhitarual raised an army against the Ahoms but the Ahom army was successful in crushing their efforts. In 1577 three men revolted against Nara Narayan, but having failed they sought the shelter of the Ahom king. The Ahom king, Sukhampha allowed them to settle at Gajala. In 1585, the Koch King of Koch-Hajo, Raghudeb gave his daughter Sankala in marriage to Sukhampha with a handsome dowry. Sukhampha in his turn gifted the Koch King generously.

After the death of Nara Narayan the Ahom-Koch relations entered a new phase. The Koch territory was divided among the sons of Nara Narayan and Sukhladhvaj (Chilarai). The river Sankosh became the dividing line. The tract of land east of Sankosh was given to Raghudeb, son of Chilarai, while the west remained with Lakshmi Narayan, son of Nara Narayan.



LET US KNOW

Nara Narayan did not marry for long and had declared Raghudeb, his brother Chilarai's son as his heir apparent. But later Nara Narayan got married at the coaxing of his brother and was blessed with a son. This made Raghudeb very insecure. Therefore, after the death of Chilarai, Raghudeb sought to revolt. His uncle Nara Narayan therefore decided to divide his kingdom for the sake of peace.

However, Raghudeb was made to pay tributes to his uncle Nara Narayan and acknowledge his lordship. But the death of Nara Narayan gave Raghudeb the much needed opportunity to declare his independence. Therefore, Nara Narayan's son and successor Lakshmi Narayan instigated Raghudeb's son Parikshit Narayan to revolt against his father. Parikshit revolted but was caught and imprisoned. He escaped later and took shelter at the Ahom kingdom. He returned on the demise of his father to claim his right over the territory in1603 A.D. Parikshit now defied the overlordship of Lakshmi Narayan and hence they exchanged swords in which the latter was

beaten. Both now looked for Ahom friendship. Parikshit gave his daughter Mangaldahi to the Ahom king Pratap Singha in marriage. Lakshmi Narayan had no choice but to turn for help to the Mughals. The Nawab of Bengal saw his chance and so sent an army under Mukkaram Khan against Parikshit Narayan. Parikshit Narayan had to sue for peace. He turned to the Ahoms for help, but they insisted that the Koch army join their forces at which Parikshit chose to fight the battle alone. He had to suffer defeat and his brother, Bali Narayan fled to the Ahom king for asylum. Pratap Singha installed him as the Raja of Darrang as a tributary ruler and renamed him as Dharma Narayan.

The Ahoms thus came into conflict with the Mughals because of the Koches. The Ahoms were successful against them. However, in a new expedition sent from Bengal in 1637, the Ahoms and their allies were defeated. Dharma Narayan was killed in 1638 and peace was negotiated. Parikshit's territory now passed to the Ahoms, while the Mughals occupied the tract of land west of the river Barnadi. Sundar Narayan, son of Parikshit was made the new king but he was no longer an independent king. He was required to consult the Barphukan on all important matters. The western Koch kingdom also, in the same way became a vassal of the Muslims. Thus, the Koch kingdom ceased to exist on its own. However, in 1658, the ruler of Koch Bihar, again, came into conflict with the Ahoms. With the death of Shah Jahan, the Mughal troops were withdrawn and this emboldened Pran Narayan to assert his independence. He defeated the Mughal forces led by Wazir Bhabanath. Encouraged by his easy win, he proposed for an offensive and defensive alliance with the Ahoms which was rejected. Rather he was defeated by the Ahoms and was driven across the river Sankosh. During the accession of Chakradhwaj Singha (163-1670 A.D.), the Koch Raja of Darrang sent his warm wishes. Again, there was an incident of the Koch ruler helping the Mughals. However, Chandra Narayan or Surya Narayan, grandson of Bali Narayan was made a tributary ruler

of Darrang by the Ahom king Udayaditya Singha (1670-1672 A.D.). Thus the Ahom–Koch relation went through different phases. The Koches tried to establish their independence but had to submit before the power of the Ahoms.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.9: Name the Koch king who succeeded Visva Simha.

.....

Q.10: Sukhladhvaj was better known as ……..

Q.11: Name the road constructed by the Koches connecting the Koch capital in Koch Bihar and Narayanpur.

.....

Q.12: Name the Koch princess married to Pratap Singha.

.....

Q.13: Who was made the king of Darrang by the Ahoms?

.....

11.4.2 Ahom- Mughal Conflict

It was during the time of Suhungmung that we hear of the Muhammedan invasion. Their attacks were repulsed. The next invasion by the Mughals took place in the time of Susengpha (Pratap Singha). The reason was the shelter provided to Bali Narayan (brother of Parikshit Narayan) and the murder of a Mughal trader near Kaliabor. The Nawab of Bengal, Sheikh Qasim sent an expedition against the Ahoms, in which they were accompanied by Sattarjit and Akhek Gohain. The enemies met each other at the bank of the river Bharali. Initially the Mughals had an upper hand due to the fog but ultimately due to the treachery of Akhek Gohain, the Mughal forces were taken by surprise in an attack by the Ahoms, both by land and by water and the Mughals had to face defeat. Many of the generals and soldiers were killed or taken captive. The rest were put to death and a huge booty earned. Soon, the Ahom

commanders ignoring the orders of the king pursued the Mughals to Hajo, but they were defeated and had to retreat to Srighat. The Burha Gohain was taken captive. Many ships, elephants, and booty were taken away by the Mughals. Many Ahom soldiers were wounded.

Fresh hostilities began in September 1612 when the Mughals besieged Dharma Narayan in his fort, south of the river Brahmaputra. The Ahoms soon came to his rescue and in the battle that ensued, the Mughals were severely routed. There were attempts for a friendship pact but it could not be materialized because of foul play by Sattarjit. After some years the relation became strained because of Sattarjit and his tricks and also because Harikesh, a defaulting officer under the Nawab of Bengal, was given protection by Pratap Singha. The Mughals tried to seize Harikesh to which the Ahoms replied by force and in the battle the Mughals were defeated. Pratap Singha now decided to fight the war in his enemy's territory and hence sought the friendship of local chiefs. Soon he occupied the Mughal forts at Deomiah, Bantikot, Chamaria, and Nagarbera. At Hajo the Mughals were reinforced by additional troops sent by the Nawab of Bengal. In the engagement that followed the Ahoms were defeated. But soon Pratap Singha sent more forces and the Ahoms once more advanced and pushed the Mughals back to Sualkuchi. In an interesting encounter the Ahoms also inflicted a heavy defeat on the Mughal fleet at the bank of Brahmaputra, near Hajo. The Ahom chronicles record the capturing of three hundred cannons, boats, guns and other spoils too. Hajo was soon infested by the Ahoms and supplies were all cut off leaving the Mughals with no other option but to surrender.

Another fresh invasion soon was made by the brother of the Nawab, Mir Zainuddin. On his way he heard of what had happened to his compatriots but he marched forward and he was assisted by Pran Narayan, ruler of Koch Bihar. The enemies camped at Jogighopa and at Hirapur. In the many engagements that followed

the Ahoms were defeated. In October 1637, the Ahoms attacked the Mughal army but they were defeated. At Barpeta, the Ahoms were surrounded from all sides by the Mughals and were beaten. The Mughals soon occupied the fort at Agiathuti and Srighat. The Kajali fort was soon captured by the Mughals and the Ahoms had to suffer a serious naval defeat. In 1638, the Mughals along with Pran Narayan came up to the river Bharali. Hostilities soon began in which the invaders had to retire back to Guwahati after undergoing a defeat. Peace was made between both the camps by which the Bar Nadi on the north bank of Brahmaputra and Asurar Ali on the south were fixed as the boundary between them.

The next Ahom-Mughal conflict took place during the reign of Sutamla or Jayadhvaj Singha. The death of Shah Jahan gave opportunities for those who were desirous of power and thus a long feud began for succession. Taking this chance Jayadhvaj Singha made an advance towards Guwahati. The Mughal Faujdar of Guwahati had fled leaving horses, cannons, guns etc. Pran Narayan the ruler of Koch Bihar sought alliance against the Mughals from the Ahoms but the Ahoms did not agree. They marched against the Koches who were driven across the river Sankosh. Thus, the whole of the Brahmaputra Valley came under the Ahoms. The Mughals under Mir Jumla who was the governor of Bengal marched against the Ahoms in 1662. He was accompanied by Rashid khan. After a long march he arrived at the fort of Jogighopa with a large army. The Ahom garrison at Jogighopa could not give resistance to the Mughal force and hence they retreated to Srighat. On hearing this Jayadhwaj Singha sent reinforcement to Srighat and Pandu, but the Mughals had already reached and the Ahoms gave no fight. The fort of Srighat was destroyed by the Mughals and Guwahati fell to the hands of the invaders. The troops on the North bank of the Brahmaputra fled to Kajali while those on the South bank were killed. The Ahom forces at Kajali were so upset with the news that came that they chose to retreat to Samdhara. The Ahoms began strengthening the forts at Samdhara and Simlagarh.

Meanwhile Mir Jumla marched towards Garhgaon, the Ahom capital. Many chiefs and rajas submitted to him, among those were the Raja of Dimarua and the Raja of Darrang. Mir Jumla next camped close to the fort of Simlagarh. The Ahoms after a feeble resistance gave up and fled. Thus, the fort of Simlagarh fell to the Mughals very easily. At this news the Ahom garrison at the fort of Samdhara lost heart. They fled, after destroying the store of gun powder. Mir Jumla appointed a Faujdar in charge of the fort and proceeded further. The Ahoms next attacked the Mughal fleet which was isolated as Mir Jumla moved ahead with his foot soldiers. The battle continued the whole night but when the Ahoms heard the trumpets of the coming of the Mughals the next day, they fled. As many as three hundred ships were captured by the Mughals. The Ahom forces under the Bar Gohain gained some success but they kept on retreating. The Ahoms next established themshelves at Lakhau or Lakhugarh but as the invaders arrived, the Ahoms retreated again. The Ahom king Jayadhvaj Singha ordered the Burha Gohain to remain at Garhgaon and himself along with the Bar Phukan and the Bar Barua and five thousand men fled to Namrup. On reaching Gajpur, Mir Jumla heard of the flight of the Ahom king. He at once sent his forces to Garhgaon.

On 17 March, 1662 Mir Jumla entered the Ahom capital, Garhgaon and occupied it. A large booty of eighty two elephants, gold and silver worth three lakhs of rupees and 170 storehouses, each being able to contain one to ten thousand mounds of rice fell into their hands. But slowly the rainy season set in. Taking advantage of it, the Ahom army launched some surprise attacks on the invaders. The garrison at Gajpur was overpowered by the Ahoms. But they failed at Deopani. As the rains continued Mir Jumla found it difficult to maintain his outposts and therefore retreated to Garhgaon. Most of the country had been re -occupied by the Ahoms and Jayadhwaj Singha returned to take charge. Negotiations for peace were made, but they failed. The Ahoms renewed their attack on the capital, Garhgaon. The Mughals gave up after a tough fight. The Ahoms

attacked the Mughal army day in and day out. Moreover, the food supplies had decreased and fever and dysentery plagued the Mughal army. Meanwhile, in Lower Assam, the Mughal garrison was driven away by Pran Narayan, the ruler of Koch Bihar.

By the end of September, rains had ceased to fall and reinforcements started pouring in. When the floods receded, the supplies started flowing lending mobility to the Mughal troops, the Mughals again prepared for a fresh attack. The Ahom king and his nobles fled to Namrup again. Mir Jumla attacked the Baduli Phukan who submitted and joined the Mughals in pursuing the Ahom king. But due to the famine in Bengal, supplies were not reaching the Mughal forces. Mir Jumla also fell ill and his soldiers were not at all ready to risk another rainy season and hence threatened to desert him. Thus the Nawab was compelled to negotiate for peace with the Ahom king. The famous Treaty of Ghilajhari Ghat was concluded on January 9th 1663 by which the country west of the river Bharali on the north bank of the Brahmaputra and to the Kalang on the south was ceded to the Emperor of Delhi. Soon after this, Mir Jumla gave orders for returning to Bengal. But on 30th march 1663, he died just before reaching Dacca.

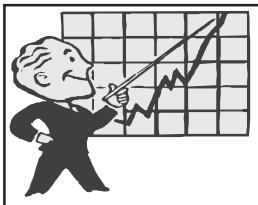
When Jayadhwaj Singha died, he had no direct heir and the nobles invited the Charing Raja to occupy the throne. He was named Supungmung and assumed the Hindu name Chakradhvaj Singh. New hostilities began with the Mughals on the question of payment of the indemnities as promised in the peace treaty made by Jayadhvaj Singha. Rashid Khan was succeeded by Saiad Firuz Khan as the Faujdar of Guwahati. Firuz Khan demanded the payment which was due from the Ahom king. Chakradhvaj Singh now decided to go to war and after more than a year of due preparation, on August, 1667 the Ahom army under Lachit Barphukan set out to take Guwahati from the Mughals. The outposts at Kajali and Bansabari were taken by the Ahoms. After a siege of two months, Guwahati and Pandu were captured too. The Mughal forces were routed and Firuz Khan

was killed. Even though fresh reinforcements arrived, yet the Mughals could not make much headway. They had to retreat from Agiathuti and fell back on the Manas river. They were surrounded from all sides. Many of them were killed and some were sent as captives to the Ahom capital, Garhgaon.

In 1668, fresh conflict began with the Mughals. Aurangzeb, the Mughal ruler sent one Raja Ram Singh as the commander of the imperial army to avenge the death of Firuz Khan and the loss of Guwahati. Raja Ram Singh was accompanied by Rashid Khan. In the battle near Tezpur, the Ahoms were routed but they soon gained a naval victory and also took over the fort at Rangmahal. The Mughals were again defeated near Sualkuchi, both on land and in water. At Sessa the Ahoms won a double engagement. Next, the fort at Agiathuti fell into the hands of the Ahoms. But very soon Ram Singh routed the Ahoms and the Bar Phukan had to retreat with a heavy loss. Raja Ram Singh now sued for peace. For some time hostilities between both the rival camps were halted.

Meanwhile, Chakradhwaj Singha was succeeded by Sunyatpha or Udayaditya Singha. Raja Ram Singh again presses for the recognition by the Ahoms of the old boundary. As he was desperate he started his march to Sitamary. The Ahoms also marched from Samdhara to Srighat. In an engagement the Ahoms were successful but due to their naval defeat the army had to retreat. But when reinforcements arrived the Ahoms were able to defeat the Mughals in a naval battle and a second land victory was also gained by them. After leading the Ahoms to victory at the decisive battle of Saraighat, Lachit Barphukan who was ailing succumbed to his illness. By March 1671, Ram Singh due to repeated losses had retreated to Rangamati. For some years there was peace. During the time of Sudaipha (1677-1679 A.D.), Guwahati was lost to the Mughals. In March, 1679 it was handed over by the new Barphukan who had allied with the Mughals on his falling out with the Burhagohain.

The last Muhhamedan war was fought during the time of Gadadhar Singha (1681-1696 A.D.). His first course of action on his accession was to oust the Mughals from Guwahati. At the first assault, the forts at Kajali and Bansabari fell into the hands of the Ahoms. Another naval victory was gained near the bank of the Bar Nadi. The Mughal Faujdar of Guwahati was too weak to give resistance and fled. Thus, Gauhati was re- occupied by the Ahoms along with a huge booty. From now onwards the river Manas was accepted as the boundary by both the parties.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.14: In which year did Mir Jumla invade Assam?

.....

Q.15: During whose reign did Mir Jumla invade Assam?

.....

Q.16: Name the capital of the Ahoms when Muhammedans came to Assam.

.....

Q.17: What was the outcome of the invasion of Mir Jumla?

.....

Q.18: During whose reign was the last Muhammedan war fought?

.....



11.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit you have learnt about,

- the origin of the Ahoms, their advent, and their establishment as a political power in the Brahmaputra Valley.
- from the time of Suhungmung the Ahom dynasty started its expansionist policy and was able to establish itself as a dominant power in the Brahmaputra valley.
- during the time of Suhungmung, there were conflicts with the Mughals,

Chutias, and Nagas, etc. Throughout the rule from Suhungmung to Rudra Singha, the Ahoms were fighting and had been successful in compelling their neighbours to submit to them. This period is very important as it marks the rise of the Ahoms and it can also be termed as the golden age of the Ahom dynasty.

- the inroads made by the Mughal army were reversed. The Ahoms also made friends with the tributary Rajas through matrimonial alliances.



11.6 FURTHER READING

1. Gait, Edward (2005): *A History of Assam,* LBS Publication, Guwahati
2. Baruah, S.L(1996): *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Manuharlal Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi
3. Barpujari, H.K(2003): *The Comprehensive History of Assam, Volume-I &II*, Publication Board, Assam, Guwahati

11.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1:

a) 1215 A.D.

b) Suteupha

c) Sutupha

d) Mong Kwang

Ans to Q No 2: Sukapha had a dispute with one of his brothers for which he left his ancestral kingdom to seek his fortune elsewhere.

Ans to Q No 3: It took 13 years for Sukapha and his followers to reach the Patkai.

Ans to Q No 4: Swarga Narayan

Ans to Q No 5: Senglung

Ans to Q No 6: Wazir

Ans to Q No 7: Barpatragohain

Ans to Q No 8: Viswa Simha

Ans to Q No 9: Nara Narayan.

Ans to Q No 10: Chilarai.

Ans to Q No 11: Gohain Kamal Ali.

Ans to Q No 12: Mangaldahi.

Ans to Q No 13: Bali Narayan or Dharma Narayan.

Ans to Q No 14: 1662

Ans to Q No 15: Jayadhvaj Singh

Ans to Q No 16: Garhgaon

Ans to Q No 17: The country West of the river Bharali on the North bank of Brahmaputra and of the Kalang on the South bank of Brahmaputra was ceded by the Ahoms to the Mughals.

Ans to Q No 18: Gadadhar Singha.



11.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) VERY SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 50 words)

Q 1: What do know about *Hangdang*?

Q 2: Name the route through which the Ahoms came into Assam.

Q 3: Who succeeded Sukapha?

Q 4: Who was Sadiya Khowa Gohain?

B) SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 150 words)

Q 1: Write briefly about Nara Narayan.

Q 2: Who were Ahoms?

Q 3: Write Short notes on-

a) Conquest of Chutiyas

b) Conquest of the Kacharis

c) Ahom-Mughal Conflict under Jaydhwaj Singha

d) Suhungmung

C) LONG QUESTIONS (Answer each question in between 300-500 words)

Q 1: Explain the role played by Sukapha in the establishment of Ahom rule in Assam.

Q 2: Describe the foundation of the Ahom kingdom.

Q 3: Describe Mir Jumla's invasion of Assam during the time of the Ahoms.

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UNIT 12: SOCIETY, ECONOMY AND RELIGION DURING THE AHOM PERIOD

UNIT STRUCTURE

12.1 Learning Objectives

12.2 Introduction

12.3 Society

12.4 Economy

12.5 Religion

12.6 Let Us Sum Up

12.7 Further Reading

12.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

12.9 Model Questions

12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- describe the social settings within the Ahom Empire
- explain the economic condition of Assam in the Ahom period
- discuss the religious condition during the Ahom rule
- analyse the trend of Bhakti and Neo-Vaishnavism in Assam and its influence on the culture of Assam.

12.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we have discussed the expansion and consolidation of the Ahom empire. In this unit we will be discussing the socio-religious and the economic conditions that existed during the rule of the Ahoms. The Ahoms ruled in Assam for nearly 600 years and during this long period they introduced new elements into the society of Assam. This unit takes a deeper look into the socio-cultural issues and economic affairs during the rule of the mighty Ahoms.

12.3 SOCIETY

The social life during the period of Ahom rule in Assam can be constructed from several sources like the *Buranjis* (chronicles),

Rajavamsavalis (genealogies), *Charitas* (biographies) of the Vaishnava saints and preachers, inscriptions of the Ahom and the Koch kings and the huge literary sources left behind by the Muslim historians and foreign travellers.

We find references to professional communities and traditional castes of Pre-Ahom Assam in the inscriptions. From the 13th century onwards fresh waves of Brahmanas who occupied a privileged position in Brahmanical Hindu society started settling down in Assam. The kings of Assam brought learned Brahmanas for the purpose of strengthening the Brahmanical tradition. There has been no reference made to any class distinction among the Brahmanas except for Hamilton who mentions two sections: *Radha* and *Vaidika* made on the basis of the areas from which they migrated.

The next rank in the caste hierarchy was the *Daivajanas* or the *Ganakas* who were astrologers by profession. They enjoyed the patronage of the Ahom rulers and an honoured position in the society. The Darrang Raja bestowed the title of "*Khari*", while the Ahom rulers gave them the title of *Doloi* or *Bordoloi*. However, even though they performed all forms of rituals and wore the sacred thread, the Brahmanas never made any matrimonial alliances with the *Ganakas* as the latter were considered to be of a lower caste.

The next were the *Kayasthas*, whose work was to maintain the accounts and serve as the record keepers or the scribes. Under the rule of the Kamata kings, the Kayasthas managed to carve out principalities. They were called *Sat Karmi* since they performed the six sacraments. They did not plough their fields or carry loads.

The *Kalitas* surpass the Brahmanas or the *Daivajanas* in numbers. The origin of the *Kalitas* is not known but they have been occupying a respectable position in the Assamese society since the 14th century. They have been referred to as belonging to the Alpine stock by scholars like P.C. Choudhury and K.L.Barua. The *Katha Gurucharita* refers to a *Kalita Desa* in the Himalayan foothills in the North-Eastern region. In Assam the *Kalitas* were divided into two categories: *Bar Kalitas* and *Saru Kalitas*. Those

Kayasthas who were descendant from intermarriage with the *Kalitas* were known as the *Bar Kalita*. They rose into prominence as religious preachers during the Neo-Vaishnavite movement. The *Kalitas* pursued many professions and also performed many Hindu *samskaras* (rites and rituals).

The next position in the social hierarchy was occupied by the *Keots*. The term *Keot* originated from the Sanskrit *Kaivarta* which became *Kevatta* (boatman) and finally *Keot*. The earliest reference to the *Keots* is to be found in the *Katha Gurucharita*. The two classes of *Keots* were *Haluwa Keots* who were treated as upper caste Hindus and *Jaluwa Keots* who were treated as belonging to the lower depressed class of fisherman community. The Koch records refer to the *Jaluwa Keots* as *Dooms*, while the *Haluwa Keots* were termed as Keots. The foreheads of the fisherman were tattooed with the mark of a fish during the rule of the Ahoms. The *Kaivartas* followed the Vaishnavite religion.

The Koches or *Rajavamsis* were another high caste in the social ladder though not equal to the *Kalitas* or the *Keots*. The Koches were part of Tibeto-Burman stock and came to be known as Koch or *Rajavamsis* due to the influence of Brahmanical and Neo-Vaishnava preachers who admitted them into the Hindu fold.

The *Chutiyas* were another tribal group that underwent social transformation and caste status. A part of the community merged with the Ahoms, another with the *Mishing*, while a third section became a part of the *Barahis* of Eastern Assam and therefore came to be known as *Barahi Chutiya*. The priestly class of the *Chutiyas* or the *Deoris* remains true to their faith. The *Chutias* who accepted Hinduism maintained a separate identity. They were the *Hindu Chutias* who did not dine or enter into marital alliance with the *Ahom Chutiyas* and also with *Miri Chutiyas*.

Assamese society was also constituted of many other castes, sub-castes and professional classes which find mention in the *Dharma Purana* (12th century), the *Brhaddharma*, the *Brahma Vaivarta Puranas* composed in the 12th or 13th century also mentions the social classes of Eastern India. Madhava Kandali, the great poet refers to two caste groups or professional classes: the *Nathayogis* and *Haris* in a derogatory manner indicating their

low social status. Sankardeva mentions the hill tribes in his *Bhagavata-Purana*. Barring a few caste based professions, most of the professions could be pursued by all members of the different castes and creeds.

Assam was inhabited by a large number of tribes, who lived according to their own community rules and laws. The *Lalungs* or *Tiwas* and *Dimasas* were Bodo-Kachari tribes. Among the Buddhist communities that migrated from the early part of the 18th century, the *Khamtis,* the *Doanahs*, the *Tai Phakes*, the *Turungs*, the *Aitonias* and the *Naras* formed small groups. The Muslim invasion of Bakhtiyar Khilji also led to the settlement of the Muslims in the region. The assimilation of the tribes and the new Muslim population along with the plains people was very gradual and it continues even today.

The society of medieval Assam gave much space for the growth of art and architecture. The Ahom and Koch rulers rebuilt many of the old temples which were in ruins. They also built new ones and introduced new styles in the shape of an octagonal sanctum and beehive dome. They also initiated the widespread use of brick instead of stone blocks. Many of these temples still stand today in Sibsagar, Guwahati and other places. The Neo-Vaishnava movement resulted in the development of the art of illustrated manuscripts patronised by the Ahom rulers and the Koch king. It made great advancements in this regard. The manuscripts were illustrated with beautiful pictures in different colours and shades. Some of the illustrated religious manuscripts were *Bhagavata Purana*, *Sankhachuda-Vadha*, *Gita Govinda* and *Dharma Purana*. The *Hastirvidyarnama* is the most unique example of a painted manuscript among the secular branch of manuscript paintings.

It was owing to the impact of the emergence of Neo- Vaishnava movement that Assamese language and literature developed. Prior to it Sanskrit was the main language and the early inscriptions bear testimony to this fact. Sanskrit was studied by the *Satras* and their religious leaders and also by Brahmanas. But gradually Assamese took over and along with Sanskrit, Assamese language began to be used in land grants. King Rudra Singha is said to have read the *Sastras* and composed Assamese poems. Vernacular literature soon took over due to the distinguished personalities like Madhava Kandali, Sankaradeva, Bhattadeva, Ram Saraswati, Ananta

Kandali, etc. Sankaradeva's *Kirtana Ghosa*, *Rukmini Haran*, *Bhakti Ratnakara* are some classic works in the vernacular language. The Ahom and Koch rulers patronized vernacular literature, as they were themselves accomplished in poetry. Assamese language and literature grew to a new height with works like *Satriya Vamsavalis* (chronicles of the Satras) and the *Charita Puthis* **(*Hagiographies*)**. Many secular writings also enriched the Assamese literature. Bakul Kayasthas' *Kitabat Manjuri* (a mathematical treaties), Sridhar's *Sandhyakanda* (an astrological work) are some examples of non-religious literature. The *Buranjis* were the greatest contribution of the Ahom rulers towards the literature of Assam.



Hagiography- Literature concerned with the lives of saints.

Games and sports, dance and music were patronised by the Ahoms. Animal fights were the common pastimes. The appointment of *Senchowa Barua* (person in charge of training falcons), *Kukurachowa* Barua (trainer of cocks for cock fights) indicate the popularity of the above sports. Some of the sports which were imported from outside were wrestling, jugglery, etc. Dance and music formed an integral part of the Assamese culture. It revolved round festivals, both religious and agricultural. Mainly it was the agricultural festivals which were celebrated, like Bihu, but religious festivals like Durga worship due to the influence of Saktism were also celebrated with equal pomp and glory. The *Devadasi* form of dance also prevailed in the temples and was performed by the female dancers called *Natis*. Institutions like the *Satras* also encouraged the various forms of dance, mainly *Oja-Pali*, *Sutradhari*, *Dasavatar,* and *Krishna-Nritya*.

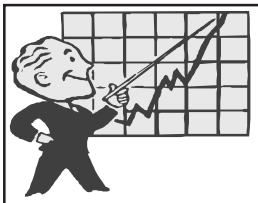
The joint family set up in medieval Assam was typically patriarchal. The entire family lived together. Women folks of Assam lived under patriarchal dominance, but did not suffer from social evils like *sati* which was rampant in the rest of the country, though we do have some instances of self immolation as mentioned in the *Haridevacharita*. The widows among the Brahmanas and the *Kayasthas* had to live an austere life. Formal education was not allowed for the women folk and they learned the 3 R's (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic) from the men folk of the family. They were considered educated if they could read the *Ratnawali*, *Kirtana* and the *Namaghosa*. However, the women folk equally participated in agricultural activities like

planting, sowing crops, etc. They faced fewer restrictions than their counterparts in other places of India. But there is no denying the fact that women were dominated. The women of each and every household were an expert weaver.

The marriage customs in the society were not uniform. The Ahoms had their own rites in matters of marriage called *Chaklang*. However, Vedic rites were followed if an Ahom king married a non-Ahom girl. The tribal groups of the region followed their own tribal customs but those who were Hinduised practiced Vedic rites.

Regarding the food habits, rice, milk, fish and pulses were the staple diet of the people, rich or poor. Liquor among the high caste Hindus was disfavoured. Chewing of areca nuts with betel leaves was a common practice.

During the initial phase of the Ahom rule, the society was marked by harmonious relation between different sections and classes although social harmony was often disrupted by war between the Ahoms and other tribes who were gradually assimilated into a greater Assamese society. After the Ahom rule had been firmly established over the greater part of the Brahmaputra Valley, we find a hierarchical society. The aristocracy consisting of the king, his circle of ministers (*Patra Mantri*), the local governors, the priestly class, the king's son, his wives and family members occupied the top rung of the social ladder. The next in line were the *Chamua* class who mostly occupied the office of the *Barua*, *Hazarika*, *Saikia*, etc. The people at the lowest order were the Paiks and the slaves. The Paiks formed the majority of the total population and also constituted the country's military as well as the labour force. The social distinction among the classes was in the matters of dress, food habits, possession of Paiks, etc.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1: What was the primary occupation followed by the Daivajanas or the Ganakas?

.....

Q 2: What title was bestowed upon the Daivajanas by the Ahom rulers?

.....

Q.3: Name the two groups into which the Kaivartas or the Keots were divided.

.....

Q.4: Name the various forms of dance that existed in Medieval Assam.

.....

Q.5: What do you understand by Chaklang?

.....

Q.6: Who was Senchowa Barua?

.....

12.4 ECONOMY

Agriculture was the backbone of the economy of the Ahom period. Though at times the wealthy section of the people took to trade (internal and external), yet an urban economy failed to develop their beyond a certain level. The agricultural economy was a self sufficient one and the people never faced insecurity regarding food, except during trying times like war and natural calamities.

Villages were organized in such a manner that the families belonging to a particular profession and ethnic origin were settled together. Many villages were occupied basically by people from a particular professional community and this is revealed by the names of the villages like *Tantikuchi*, *Kamarkuchi,* etc. The village life seemed very hard as the common man had to reel under the pressure both of paying taxes to the king in the form of manual labour as well as fighting during wars and at the same time they were required to pay their respect to the religious head of the *Satras* in the form of taxes.

There were urban settlements in medieval Assam. Some important urban centres were located at Rangpur, Garhgaon, Guwahati, Hajo, etc. These settlements grew up as administrative, trading or religious centres.

Many foreign travellers have left a rich account of the natural products found in Assam. It was the abundance of the agricultural products that attracted the Mughals to this region and trade also flourished. Rice was the staple food crop and hence it was cultivated on a large scale. Other agro based products were pulses, oil seeds, spices, mustard, poppy (as an intoxicant), bamboo, etc. Fruits like *thekera*, *owtenga, amara*, orange, lemon, etc. were very common. Shihabuddin Talish, who accompanied Mir Jumla during the latter's expedition to Assam in 1662-63, mentions an alkali called *Khar* used by the local people which was used as a substitute for salt. Black Pepper (*jaluk*) was produced in considerable quantity for internal consumption. Names of places like *Banhbari*, *Jalukbari*, *Adabari*, *Betkuchi*, etc indicate areas of cultivation of a particular crop. Bay leaves (*tejpat*) were cultivated in the hilly areas. Sugarcane of three varieties was cultivated as Shihabuddin Talish (a Muslim chronicler accompanying Mir Jumla) mentions it. Tobacco formed an important cash crop of Assam after it was first introduced into India by the Portuguese. Areca nuts and betel leaves were widely found and their use was very common. Talish speaks of the presence of betel nut sellers in the markets of Guwahati and Garhgaon.

As the economy was totally agricultural, the tools used were mostly bamboo-harrow, plough spade, clod breaker, rakes, axes, sickle, etc. Oxen, buffaloes and a few horses were used for cultivation purposes. The tribal population in the hills followed the *jhum system* (shifting system) of cultivation. Small industries grew up centering on textiles, metal casting, timber woods, etc. Ivory industry, gold washing, iron smelting, salt manufacturing, copper and bell metal industry flourished side by side. Wood craft attained some excellence though it was not of a high order. Pottery making was another industry which was carried out by the *Kumar* and the *Hira* communities. While the former used the potter's wheel, the latter were specialized in hand made pottery. Brick making industry grew up under strict state supervision. Brick was used to build many temples, tombs and palaces during the Ahom rule, from the reign of Rudra Singha onwards.

Trade did not play a major role in the medieval economy of Assam due to its self sufficient nature. Moreover, the houses of every people were

filled with a year's supplies for the family and hence the only person who sat at the market place to sell their wares was the areca nut and betel leaves sellers. This was the reason why during the early period of the Ahom rule, external trade was minimized. The Ahom rulers also followed an isolation policy or closed door policy during the days of conflict with the Mughals. However, the *Charita Puthis* give evidence of some people who made their living through trade. The *Buranjis* however give in detail the encouragement of the Ahom rulers in the sphere of internal trade. For the purpose of internal trade the Ahoms established different marts or *haats*, Sadiya being the central market for the entire hill tribes. Market regulations were made in order to keep in check the trading activities. The different hill tribes brought their products like millets and rock salt and exchanged their goods with each other and the plains people in lieu of goods itself as the circulation of money was limited.

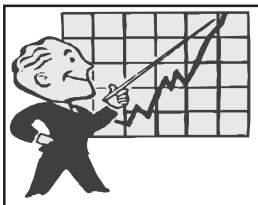
Trade with other parts of India was mainly carried through Bengal. Prior to Rudra Singha, the Ahoms considered any outsider as a threat to the country and hence many traders who came from Bengal were executed. But the Ahoms could not bar the growing curiosity of the outsiders towards the resources of Assam for a long time. It was Rudra Singha who abandoned the isolation policy and started a new economic policy and welcomed trade with other parts of India.

Assam-Bengal trade took a massive leap with the coming of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa under the East India Company's possession. The result was the coming of many foreign traders, thus facilitating trade in huge quantities. But the Assam-Bengal trade soon passed over the Company due to growing rivalry and hostility between the Assamese traders and the Company officials.

In order to facilitate trading activities, *Choukis* or outposts were erected under officers called *Duaria Baruah* or *Chakial Baruah* to collect taxes and control illicit transport of goods. The Hadira or Kandahar *Chouki* was an important outpost. After the Moamariya rebellion and the expedition of Captain Welsh to Assam, the Ahom king Gaurinath Singha agreed to expand trade with the East India Company. As a result, besides Salt, imports

from Bengal later included mainly salt, ghee, pulse, sugar and spice, stone beads, coral, gems, cutlery and glass-ware, paints, English woolen goods, shells, etc. The items of export were stick lac, muga silk, ivory, iron hoes, bell metal vessels, black pepper, silk cotton (*simolu*), mustard seed, slaves, etc. Apart from the trade with Bengal and the Mughals, trade relations between Bhutan and Tibet had always existed.

According to Talish, *Cowries*, rupees and gold coins were used in the Ahom kingdom. Similarly the Koch coins, the *Narayani* rupee was also accepted as a currency in Assam. Transactions were made directly between the producer and the consumer or through the middlemen.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.7: Name some urban towns of Medieval Assam.

.....

Q.8: Which Muslim invader was accompanied by Shihabuddin Talish?

.....

Q.9: What was the officer in charge of the Choukis or outposts known as?

.....

Q.10: The Koch coin is known as …….

12.5 RELIGION

Medieval Assam was very much shaped by the Bhakti movement in the religious sphere and its influence prevails even today. But that came later, and before that we need to have a glimpse of the other forms of worship that were a part and parcel of the life of the people. Brahmanical religion maintained its supremacy in the Assamese society. However, the religion became more complex with meaningless and elaborate rituals and ceremonies. Hence, it could not find favour with the common people. Esoteric forms of worship and *Vamacara* rituals and Tantric practices became common. Magic and incantation was practiced and people were very much attracted to it. Many made an earning out of it, for others it was a means of rising against social domination of the Brahmanas. These practices

continued long after the expansion of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement. This fact is revealed in many works like the *Ain-i-Akbari*, *Fathiyyah-i-Ibriyyah*, *Baharistan-i-Ghaibi*, *Alamgirnamah*, etc. The Ahom rulers also came under its spell. It is said that Pratap Singha (1603-1641) thought himself to be possessed by an evil spirit and that he had to be cleansed before his accession to the throne.

Tantricism was another form of cult worship that involved sacrifices, both animal and human. It found support amongst the tribal people. Contemporary sources mention many such sacrifices that were made in the name of this cult. It is said that human beings were sacrificed at the altar of Kamakhya, Kesaikhaiti and Jayanteshwari. These sacrifices continued until it was banned by Gaurinath Singha (1780-1795) towards the close of the 18th century. Besides these, the worship of Siva and Sakti was also followed. The ruling families as well as the tribal communities worshipped Siva and Sakti in their various forms. The Bodo-Kacharis worshipped *Bathow*, whom they identified with Siva. The Hindu families worshipped Siva according to the Brahmanical rites, while the tribal people followed their tribal rituals. The Ahom kings built many temples dedicated to Siva in order to win popular support.

Sakti worship was also very much prevalent among the local people. The Chutiyas worshipped Kesaikhaiti, who is identified as the Goddess Dikkaravasini of the Tantras. The Jayantias worshipped Jayanteshwari. It is suggested that Kamakhya was a tribal deity in its origin and hence the rulers paid their obeisance to it. A tribal God *Maroi* (Manasa in Hinduism) and another tribal deity known in its Hindu form as *Sitala Aai*, the Goddess of small pox was adored and worshipped with elaborate rituals.

Regarding Buddhism, it can be inferred from the literary sources that during the time of Sankaradeva, Buddhism was loosely associated with a degenerated form of Tantricism of the *Vajrayana* faith. There were of course some tribes who migrated from Myanmar and practiced Buddhism. The *Sherdukpens* and *Monpas* also followed the Tibetan Buddhist School.

There were followers of the Sikh faith as well in Assam. It has been believed that Guru Nanak dev visited Kamrupa, which led to many people

taking up the Sikh faith. Guru Teg Bahadur is believed to have visited the Kamakhya temple and left his followers in Assam. It is said that due to the belief of the outsiders that Assam was a land of magic and magicians, the invaders brought the spiritual leaders along with them just as the Guru was brought to Assam by Ram Singh.

Similarly, the Muslims were also settled in Assam due to the invasions of the foreign powers. Raja Ram Singh brought five Muslim saints with him. The *Kanai Barasi Bowa Rock Inscription* gives the earliest evidence of Muslim invasion in Assam. Though the Muslims were routed by then ruler of Kamrupa yet some of the soldiers remained behind. They were responsible for spreading the seed of Islam in Assam. Shah Badar was reportedly one of the earliest Muslim saints to have visited Assam, during the 14th century when Ibn Battuta visited Assam. The *Dargah* of the five *Pirs* (Sufi saints), namely, Shah Akhar, Shah Bagmar, Shah Saran, Shah Sufi and Shah Kamal in Dhubri stands as an edifice of the growth of Islam in Assam. Shah Milan was also a *Pir*, commonly known as Azan Pir, who composed many devotional hymns like *Zikirs* and *Jaris* in Assamese. The Ahom monarchs gave due patronage to the Muslim saints and their holy places. Land grants were also made in favour of the Muslim saints.

With the coming of the East India Company Christianity too started penetrating in Assam.

NEO-VAISHNAVISM

It was the launching of the Bhakti movement that brought the tumultuous phase in religious sphere to a halt. Sankardeva and his disciple Madhavdeva in the 16th century launched the Neo-Vaishnavite movement in Assam. The objective of the Vaishnavite creed was to form a broad society on the noble principle of Bhakti (devotion) faith. He included the diverse tribal communities within the Neo-Vaishnavite movement giving it a single entity. Islam too was not sidelined. He preached the doctrine of universal social brotherhood aiming at the harmonious settlement of all the population irrespective of caste, creed, religion, etc. Mir Jumla's chroniclers were surprised at the assimilation of the Hindus and Muslims as they paid homage to their respective saints and visited the sacred places. The Ahom kings

encouraged this process of assimilation and granted land grants to the Muslim *Pirs* and Mosques. Just as the Mughal music influenced the *Satras* and *Namghars*, similarly, the Vaishnava hymns influenced the Muslims so much that Azan Fakir composed his *Zikirs* on the lines of Vaishnava hymns.

The Bhakti movement started by Sankardeva was termed as *Mahapurushiya* dharma as the reformer himself was known as a *Mahapurush* or Great Man. Officially it assumed the name of *Ek-Sarana-Dharma*. As most of its teachings were based on the *Bhagavata Purana*, it was also known as *Bhagavati Dharma*. The Neo-Vaishnava religion was based on four principles namely, *Guru*, *Deva*, *Bhakta* and *Nama*. According to Sankaradeva, all the four elements are inter-linked. A devotee should not only keep in close association with the other devotees but also with his spiritual guide or *guru*. He considered other Gods as the offshoots of the Supreme Lord Vishnu. He never gave importance to image worship. Rather, he made the new disciples of the faith to prostrate before the *Bhagavata* placed on the altar. He accepted disciples from all walks of life and gave them equal space, thus giving a boost to social cohesion and harmonious living in the society of Assam. He advocated love towards all people however lowly placed. Anyone who meditated on the lord with his heart and souls was a true devotee to God and it did not matter if he was a *Chandala* (a low caste) or a Brahmana. His idea of community feeling was spread through his speeches and through prayers (*Kirtana - Nama*) in prayer halls (*Namghar*).

Satra, the highest seat of learning, is the most important organ of the Vaishnava organization. The first *Satra* was established in Bardowa in 1494 by Sankardeva following which many other *Satras* were established. The ecclesiastical ranks of a *Satra* consisted of *Satradhikar* (Abbot), *Bhakats* and *Sisyas*. The *Satradhikar* was sometimes a celibate and known as *Gossain* or *Mahanta*. It was the *Satradhikar* who initiated the disciple to the new faith and conducted religious functions. The *Bhakats* were the devotees who held clerical jobs. Celibate devotees were known as *Kewaliya Bhakats*. The laity or the laymen were called *Sisyas*.

Vaishnavism or the worship of Vishnu was prevalent in the ancient period of Assam. The Pala ruler, Dharmapala became a Vaishnavite as mentioned in the *Pushpabhadra grant*. The Vaishnava cult which existed prior to the coming of Sankaradeva was associated with *Pancharatra* cult. This form of *Pancharatra* Vaishnavism was allied with Tantric rituals. The copper plate grants issued by king Satyanarayana of Lakhimpur district dated in 1392 and 1401 A.D. gives evidence of the Vaishnava cult.

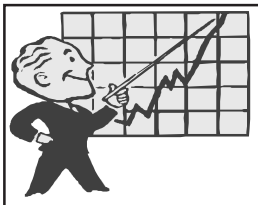
The Vaishnava cult of Sankardeva is immersed in the teachings of *Gita* and *Bhagavata Purana*, and they served as the source of guidance to its followers. The Neo- Vaishnavism cult encouraged its followers to surrender themselves into the absolute power of the sole Lord Krishna or Vishnu. Sankaradeva had announced that a true Vishnu devotee should visit no other temple but that which was dedicated to Vishnu. They should also not accept any offerings given in temples dedicated to other Gods or deities other than Vishnu. Like the rest of the Bhakti movement in India, Neo-Vaishnavism was based on devotional elements like the absolute surrendering to God and feeling joy and happiness in serving one's chosen God. Sankaradeva also laid stress on the acquisition of knowledge for self realization. According to the reformer, an ideal devotee should aim not for absorption in the Lord but for eternal continuity in his relationship with the Great Power.

Bhakti can be practiced through nine modes, which are (i) **Sravana** (act of listening to the tales, names, glories and dramas (*lila's*) of the Lord), (ii) **Kirtana** (chanting the Lord's name), (iii) **Smarana** (act of memorising the lord's words, acts, etc), (iv) **Padaseva** (serving at the Lord's feet), (v) **Archana** (act of ceremonial worship of the deity), (vi) **Pranama** (act of salutation or prostrating at the Lord's feet and the rest of the three are the relationship between the devotee and his Lord), (vii) **Dasya** (offering to serve the Lord as a faith or loyal servant), (viii) **Sakhya** (serving the Lord as a friend, a relationship between an adorer and the adored, (ix) **Atmanivedana** implying total surrender to the Lord. The Neo-Vaishnava faith laid emphasis on the first two, *Sravana* and *Kirtana*, the third most important element being *Smarana*. According to Sankaradeva, the best relation between the individual

and the creator (Lord) was that of the *Dasyabhava* attitude, where Vishnu was the Supreme Universal Lord and the devotee has faithful servants who serve him with whole hearted devotion. Sankaradeva did not believe in renunciating life or being a celibate for spiritual attainment. He also did not hesitate to initiate women into the faith.

The popularity of the new faith led to a creative upsurge of literary works like the translation of epics, devotional prose and lyrics (*Bargeets*), dramas, etc. Both Sankardeva and Madhavdeva, his disciple and successor were accomplished poets. Sankaradeva along with his cousin Ramaraya established prayer halls for religious discussion, mass prayer, occasional performances of dance and drama, etc. These prayer halls were known as *Namghars* around which developed a well organized institution called the *Satra* accommodating devotees. The *Namghar* today has become a symbol of traditional Assamese culture which is found in every nook and corner of Assam. The devotional lyrics sung and called *Bargeets*. The *Gayana-Bayana* or the Vaishnava orchestral party comprising singing and playing on instrument like the *Khol* played an important role in the religious functions.

After the death of Sankardeva in 1568, Madhavdeva succeeded him but the movement suffered a jolt due to the secessionist group led by Damodardeva and Harideva. The orthodox section led by Madhavdeva practiced celibacy. There were soon many rifts and division within the orthodox section too. Following the imitation of Rudra Singha's sons into Saktism, royal patronage of Sakti worship increased and Vaishnavism had to face many challenges.



CHECK YOUR POGRESS

Q.11: Which Ahom ruler stopped the practice of human sacrifice in matters of religion, especially Tantricism?

.....

Q.12: Name the God of the Bodo-Kacharis who is identified with the God Siva.

.....

Q.13: The Chutiyas worshipped the Goddess …….. often identified as Dikkaravasini of the Tantras.

Q.14: Jayanteshwari was the Goddess worshipped by the .....

Q.15: Vaishnava faith was launched by ……..……

Q.16: Who succeeded Sankaradeva after his death?

.....

Q.17: Where was the first Satra established?

.....

Q.18: Match the following**:**

a) Namghar	1. Azan Fakir
b) Charita Puthi	2. A Title
c) Khari	3. Prayer hall
d) Zikir	4. Devotional lyrics
e) Bargeet	5. Hagiographies



12.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learnt about

- The socio-economic and religious condition of Assam. We have discussed the society of medieval Assam which was hierarchical and loosely based on caste and profession. The Brahmanas still dominated the Hindu society. The tribal population followed their own social rules and customs.
- The economy was basically agricultural, and yet we find small industries related to wood and timber, textile, etc being encouraged by the Ahom rulers. The people of Assam did indulge in trading activities with outside powers though it was never very extensive. However, it cannot be denied that Assam had the power to attract foreign powers towards its rich resources.
- Religious affairs in medieval Assam underwent a tremendous upsurge with the infusion of the Bhakti movement by Sankardeva and

Madhavdeva. The Neo-Vaishnavite movement brought about social harmony and equality in the soil of Assam. As Assam passed from the medieval to the modern era, this socio-economic and religious condition had a deep impact in shaping the history of the days to come.



12.7 FURTHER READING

1. Baruah, S.L(1996): *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Manuharlal Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi
2. Barpujari, H.K(2003): *The Comprehensive History of Assam, Volume-I &II*, Publication Board, Assam, Guwahati
3. Gait, Edward (2005): *A History of Assam,* LBS Publication, Guwahati

12.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Astrologer.

Ans to Q No 2: Doloi/Bordoloi.

Ans to Q No 3: Haluwa and Jaluwa Keots.

Ans to Q No 4: Oja-Pali, Sutradhari, Dasavatar, etc.

Ans to Q No 5: The matrimonial ceremony according to Ahom rites.

Ans to Q No 6: The officer in charge of training hawks for fighting was called Senchowa Barua.

Ans to Q No 7: Garhgaon, Hajo, etc.

Ans to Q No 8: Mir Jumla.

Ans to Q No 9: Duaria Barua.

Ans to Q No 10: Narayani.

Ans to Q No 11: Gaurinath Singha.

Ans to Q No 12: Bathow.

Ans to Q No 13: Kesaikhaiti.

Ans to Q No 14: Jayantias.

Ans to Q No 15: Sankardeva.

Ans to Q No 16: Madhavdeva.

Ans to Q No 17: Bardowa.

Ans to Q No 18: a) 3, b) 5, c) 2, d) 1, e) 4.



12.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) VERY SHORT QUESTIONS: (Answer each question within 50 words)

Q 1: ……was the backbone of the Ahom economy. (fill in the blank)s

Q 2: Who composed *Rukmini Haran ?*

Q 3: Bihu was a……festival. (fill in the blank)

Q 4: Mention two food items, exported from Bengal.

B) SHORT QUESTIONS: (Answer each question within 150 words)

Q 1: Briefly discuss the condition of women in Ahom society.

Q 2: Write about Sankaradeva and his contribution to the Assamese society.

Q 3: Write a short note on Tantric cult.

Q 4: Write a short note on Spread of Islam in Assam.

C) LONG QUESTIONS: (Answer each question within 300-500 words)

Q 1: Discuss the social conditions in medieval Assam.

Q 2: Describe the economic condition of medieval Assam.

Q 3: Write a critical note on the religious condition of medieval Assam.

*** ***** ***

UNIT 13: THE KOCHES

UNIT STRUCTURE

13.1 Learning Objectives

13.2 Introduction

13.3 Origin of the Koches

13.4 Viswa Simha

13.5 Nara Narayan

13.6 Partition of the Koch Kingdom

13.7 Let Us Sum Up

13.8 Further Reading

13.9 Answers to check your progress

13.10 Model Questions

13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- trace the origin of the Koches
- discuss about Viswa Simha
- know about Naranarayana
- describe the partition of the Kingdom

13.2 INTRODUCTION

The Koches were a great power that emerged in the Western part of Assam in the 16th century. They founded a kingdom on the ruins of the old kingdom of Kamrup- Kamata. The meaning of the term 'Koch' is obscure. Probably the Koches had a Mongoloid origin. They were also known as Mech in the Assam history. This unit will enlighten you about the rise of Koch power under different Koch kings and due to inter dynastic conflict the Koch power was ultimately divided into two parts in 1581 A.D.

13.3 ORIGIN OF THE KOCHES

There are different opinions regarding the origin of the Koches. According to the *Puranas* and *Tantras*, they were of mix blood of

Mongoloid, closely allied to the Meches, the Tharus, the Garos and the Dravidians. Frequent inter-marriages between the Koches with others aspired their social uplift which encouraged their political as well as economic advancement in the Brahmaputra Valley. Adopting Hinduism, they sought skilfully reinforce their claim to a higher social status by the legend. In the *Darrang Raj Vamshawali*, it has been mentioned that they were of Kshatriya origin. The Brahmins encouraged them to patronage them Hindu deities like Siva, Shakti, Vishnu and in addition Sanskrit learning. Even in this process of Hinduisation, the first ruler Viswa Simha was said to have a divine origin, as the son of Siva himself. Thus rising in the social ladder the Koches gradually favoured to identify themselves of higher social order by disappearing their original tribal characteristics.

The earliest known ancestor of the Koch royal family was Hariya Mandal, a resident of Chiknabari village in the Khuntaghal pargana of Goalpara district. He was a chief or head of the 12 Koch or Mech families of the pargana. He married two sisters Jira and Hira, daughters of a Koch chief named Hajo. From them they two sons namely Visu, son from Hira and Sisu, son from Jira. It was Bisu more popularly known as Viswa Simha, with the assistance of his brother Sisu or Hinduised name Siva Simha, laid the foundation of the Koch political power, according to the chronicle *Darrang Raj Vamsawali*. Let us discuss about the chronological events of the Koch Kingdom.

13.4 VISWA SIMHA

Viswa Simha was a courageous man with tremendous military and administrative ability. His brother Siva Simha assisted him as minister and commander. His rise to power can be placed in about 1515 A.D. He defeated all the Bara Bhuyans (powerful class of local landlords) and set up a strong and independent kingdom with his headquarters at Chikangram. Later on, he shifted his capital to Koch Bihar. The kingdom initially extended from Karatoya in the West to the Barnadi in the East. After establishing his authority over the newly founded kingdom on a firm footing, Visva Simha gradually expanded to the East leading to a possibility of conflict with his

Ahom counterpart Suhungmung (1497-1539 A.D.) who too was expanding his dominion in the West. But there was no such direct conflict as both the kingdoms had to face the advancing Muslims.

It was in about 1532-33 A.D. that the Ahoms under their Commander-in-Chief Shankham first came into conflict with Visva Simha while returning from their victorious campaign against the Gauda commander Turbak. They had established friendly terms with the Sultan of Gauda who gave two of his daughters to the Ahom king along with a dowry. On the advice of his ministers, Kalketu and Dhuma Sardar, Visva Simha refrained from any armed confrontation with the Ahoms. He sent DhumaSardar with presents to meet Shankham and a peaceful relation was established. Visva Simha agreed to pay the annual tribute of horses to the Ahom king and became a *thapitasanchita* (established and protected by the Ahom king). The Ahom Commander-in-Chief Shankham also presented Viswa Simha the territories West of the river Sankosh that had been given as dowry by the Sultan of Gauda to the Ahom king.

This was a great political victory for Viswa Simha as he had not only made territorial gains, but also secured Ahom protection in the light of the danger of a possible Muslim attack. In 1537 A.D. Viswa Simha along with his brother Siva Simha personally went to the Ahom king to pay homage. With Ahom protection being secured, Viswa Simha gradually expanded his dominion. In the North, he brought Bhutan under his control. In the South and South-East he subdued the Bhuyans of Kamrup. In the South-West he conquered a part of Bengal in Jalpaiguri. He initially regularly paid tribute to the Ahoms. But with his growth in power, he defaulted in payment of tributes and invaded the Ahom kingdom to remove the disgrace of being a tributary. He sailed up the Brahmaputra to Singari (in Nagaon district), but withdrew thereafter owing to the hardship of the journey and shortage of provisions.

Three years later in 1540 A.D. Viswa Simha died after laying a strong foundation of the Koch kingdom. He consolidated his conquests with efficient administration under which he had 12 ministers or Qazis from among the 12 chief Mech or Koch families and other officials like Thakurias (placed over 20 men), Saikias (placed over 100 men), Hazaris (placed over 1000

men), Umras (placed over 3000) and Nawabs (placed over 66,000 men). Besides, he appointed officials like Wazir, Lashkars, Bhuyans, Baruas, ect. As wardens of the frontiers. He collected revenue from the peasants in kind. Having acceped Hinduism he, was a great patron of Hinduism, but equally tolerant to other religions. He restored the worship of Kamakhya, become her devotee and his sons rebuilt her temple on the Nilachal hill.

13.5 NARA NARAYANA

Nara Narayana, the eldest son of Viswa Simha succeeded his father to the Koch throne. He was also known as Mall Deva and was declared the successor by Viswa Simha. However he did not have a smooth succession to his father's throne as one of his brothes Nara Simha tried to usurp the throne, but failed. After ascending the throne, Nara Narayan appointed his beloved brother Sukladhwaj as the Dewn, combing the post of Prime minister and Commander-in-chief. Sukladhwaj was a great warrior and used to fight like a kite in the battle field. For this he was also known as "Chilarai" (Kite Prince). He was the main propelling force behind Nara Narayana. The military exploits of Chilarai expanded the boundaries of the Koch kingdom and brought them into the conflict with the Ahoms who also pursuing an expansionist policy from the reign of Shuhungmung onwards (1497-1539 A.D.).

(The Ahom-Koch conflict which started during the time of Nara Narayana and continued thereafter has been discussed in detail in the previous unit.)

Nara Narayan, after an initial reverse successfully defeated the Ahoms under the command of his brother Sukladhwaj and forced the Ahom king Suklenmung (1539-1552 A.D.) to accept Koch overlordship. Emboldened by the success against the Ahoms, the Koch brothers, Nara Narayan and Sukladhwaj also conquered the neighbouring kingdoms one after another, namely Kachari kingdom of Hidimba, Manipur, Khairam, kingdom of Jayantia, Tripura and Dimarua. Nara Narayan thus made himself the master of North-Eastern India and the Koch became the paramount power. He also attempted expansion Westwards and sent an army under

Sukladhwaj to attack Gauda. But the Padshah (ruler) of Gauda Sultan SulaimanKarrani (1563-1572 A.D.) defeated the Koch army and made Sukladhwaj a captive. However, Sukladhwaj was subsequently released by the Padshah of Gauda so that a strong alliance could be developed with the Koches in the wake of an inevitable danger of Mughal aggression.



LET US KNOW

The court of Nara Narayan was adorned with scholars of different branches of learning. Apart from Sankardeva and his disciple Madhavdeva, they were PurushottamVidyabagish, Ram Saraswati, Ananta Kandali, Sridhar and BakulKayastha. As such Nara Narayan was called the Vikramaditya of Assam.

Despite being released, no friendly relationship was established with the Padshah of Gauda. Rather, a few years later Nara Narayan along with Munim Khan, who was sent by the Mughal Emperor Akbar (1556–1605 A.D.), decided to attack *Gauda*. The Koch army under Sukladhwaj attacked from the East, while the Mughal army under Munim Khan advanced towards Gauda from the West. The Padshah of Gauda was easily defeated and his kingdom was equally divided between the Koch king Nara Narayan and the Mughal Emperor Akbar. But in the course of this expedition, Sukladhwaj contacted small pox and died on the bank of the river Ganga.



Gauda: Province of Bengal



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1: Match the following:

a)	Viswa Simha	1.	Sukladhwaj
b)	Siva Simha	2.	Nara Narayana
c)	Raghu Deva	3.	Hira
d)	Lakshmi Narayana	4.	Jira

Q.2: Name the earliest known ancestor of the Koch family?

.....

Q.3: Where did Viswa Simha initially establish his first capital?

.....

Q.4: What was the popular name of Sukladhwaj?

.....

13.6 PARTITION OF THE KOCH KINGDOM

Meanwhile an epoch-making event occurred which changed the history of the Koch kingdom and prepared the ground for foreign intervention, leading ultimately to loss of independence. The death of Sukladhwaj greatly undermined the power of the Koches. Nara Narayana took no further aggressive enterprise and devoted himself to public welfare and religious works. Being childless, he nominated his nephew Raghu Deva (son of Sukladhwaj) as his successor. But in his advanced age he was blessed with a son named Lakshmi Narayan. This created apprehension in the mind of Raghu Deva, who at the instigation of some officials, declared himself the king at Barnagar. Instead of fighting against Raghu Deva, Nara Narayana, in 1581 A.D. divided the Koch kingdom into two halves. The territories East of the Sankosh river known as Koch Hajo were handed over to Raghu Deva and Western part was retained by Nara Narayana for himself and his descendents. Raghu Deva ruled over Koch Hajo, but paid tribute to his uncle Nara Narayana, acknowledging his overlordship. But after the death of Nara Narayana in 1587, Raghu Deva stopped paying tribute and assumed independence by issuing coinage in his name.

The death of Nara Narayana marked the end of the glorious days of the kingdom of Koch Behar. Lakshmi Narayana (1587-1627 A.D.) became the new ruler of Koch Behar. The assumption of independence status by Raghu Deva was disliked by Lakshmi Narayana as it ended the authority of Koch Behar over Koch Hajo. As a result, there started a conflict between the two Koch kingdoms which finally led to the Ahom-Mughal conflict.



ACTIVITY 13.1

Write down few lines on Sukladhwaj.

.....

.....

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.5: When did the Koch Kingdom was partition?

.....

Q.6: Who was the king of Koch Hajo?

.....



13.7 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit you have learnt about,

- the Koches were original Mongoloid people of the Brahmaputra Valley living on the Western part of the land. But after the process of Hinduisation, they raised their social status to that of the Kshatriya.
- the earliest known ancestor of the Koch royal family was Hariya Mandal, a resident of Chiknabari village in the Khuntaghal pargana of Goalpara district.



- Viswa Simha, son of Haria Mandal established the Koch kingdom. Because of his administrative and military ability, the kingdom soon acquired the political dominance over the area.
- the most able king of the Koch kingdom was Naranarayana. He was not only a able leader but also a wise man. He was a great patron of Hinduism. He with his brother Chilarai expanded the boundaries of the Koch kingdom and brought them into the conflict with the Ahoms.
- with the death of Nara Narayana, the Koch kingdom was divided into two parts namely Koch Hajo and Koch Behar 1581 A.D.



13.8 FURTHER READING

1. Barpujari, H.K.(2003): *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Volume-II, Assam Publication Board Assam, Guwahati
2. Barua, S.L. (1996): *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Guwahati
3. Gait, E.(2005): *A History of Assam*, LBS Publication, Guwahati



13.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: a) 3, b) 4, c)1, d) 2

Ans to Q No 2: Haria Mandal

Ans to Q No 3: Chikangram

Ans to Q No 4: Chilarai

Ans to Q No 5: 1581

Ans to Q No 6: Raghu Deva



13.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) VERY SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 50 words)

Q 1: What does *Purana* speak about the origin of the Koches?

Q 2: What does *Darrang Raj Vamsawali* speak about the origin of the Koches?

Q 3: Who was Raghu Deva?

Q 4: Who was Lakshmi Narayana?

B) SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 150 words)

Q 1: What do you know about the origin of the Koches?

Q 2: Why did the Koch kingdom partition in 1581?

Q 3: Write short note on-

a) Chilarai

b) Nara Narayana

c) Viswa Simha

C) LONG QUESTIONS (Answer each question in between 300-500 words)

Q 1: Describe the foundation of the Koch kingdom.

Q 2: Do you think that Nara Narayana was a able administrator as well as an wise king? Discuss.

Q 3: Discuss about the partition of the Koch Kingdom.

*** ***** ***

UNIT 14: CULTURAL AND ARCHITECTURAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

UNIT STRUCTURE

14.1 Learning Objectives

14.2 Introduction

14.3 Palaces, Temples and other monuments in Medieval Period

14.4 Literature during the Medieval Period

14.5 Cultural development during the Medieval period

14.6 Origin of Vaishnavite Movement

14.7 Centre of Pro-Vaishnavite

14.8 Let Us Sum Up

14.9 Further Reading

14.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

14.11 Model Questions

14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the palaces temples and monuments of Ahom period
- know the structural development in the medieval period
- discuss the literary development during the medieval period
- discuss the cultural progress in the medieval period
- know the emergence of Vaishnavite movement in Assam
- discuss the structural form and activities of the pro- Vaishnavite centers.

14.2 INTRODUCTION

The medieval period in Assam history starts with the coming of the Muslim invaders. In 1206 Assam was invaded by Bakhtiyar Khilji and it was considered as the starting point of medieval history of Assam. In 1228 the Ahoms, a group of Tai people entered in the Brahmaputra valley from Myanmar. They established their first capital at Charaideo under their leader

Sukapha. The Ahoms continued their rule for a long period of 600 years. With the signing of the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, Assam was annexed by the British. In 1449 Sankardeva, the harbinger of the Vaishnavite movement was born. He started a new form of Vaishnavite movement to reform the whole Assamese society and culture. In this chapter we will discuss the palaces, temples and other monuments of pre Vaishnavitetimes. Along with this we will discuss the literary and cultural developments of pre-Vaishnaviteperiod. Moreover we will also discuss the centers of pro-Vaishnavite movement like Satra and Namghars, their origin and activities.



LET US KNOW

The Bhakti movement originated in the eighth-century Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Later on it spread to Northwards. It was a theistic devotional trend.

14.3 PALACES, TEMPLES AND OTHER MONUMENTS OF THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The architectural remains of Ahom period are mainly scattered in the undivided Sibsagar district of Assam. The Ahom rulers patronized in the construction of different palaces, temples, douls, ramparts, bridges and roads. The Ahom architectures were constructed from the last part of the sixteenth century up tothe eightieth century. The architecture of Ahom period can be divided into two groups – the Royal architecture and the religious architecture. The religious architecture further can be divided into two groups-the temple architecture and the *satra*architecture.

The medieval period witnessed the construction of a large number of temples. The old temple of Kamakhya which was destroyed by Kalapahar was rebuilt by Chilaraiin 1565 CE. Chilarai was the brother of Koch king Naranarayana. This temple contains *nat –mandir* or *mandapa*, the *gopuram*and the *garbha-griha*. The *Sikhara*is a combination of *Nagara* and *Vesera* type. Near the Kamakhya temple is the temple of Ugratara. It shows the same design with an imposing gate at the approach to the temple. The temple was built by GarhgayanSandikaiPhukan at the instance of Gadadhar

Singha in 1694. The temple of Hajo was rebuilt by Raghudeva, son of Chilarai. The*sikhara* of this temple is different from the earlier temples.Thestructure of the temples was influenced by different Indian schools.

The ruling period of king Rudra Singha(1696-1714) is the significant period of the architectural development of the Ahom dynasty. During his reign steps were taken to introduce indigenous style in the architectural buildings. Besides temples he took steps to rebuild the city of Rangpur. The ruling period of Siva Singha(1714-1744) can be designated as the golden period in the architectural development of the Ahom period .

The Ahom kings constructed a large number of temples. These temples were specially dedicated to lord Siva and Durga. The Siva temple at Sibsagar was constructed by Siva Singha. It had an area of 4 ½ acres. This temple has a mandapa, a garbhagriha and a gate. Over the *garbha-griha* rises the *sikhara* with fluted vertical lines. The main *sikhara* is surrounded by its replicas called *uramanjari* . The Devi temple at Gaurisagar does not contain the familiar *amalaka*. A tier of gold-plated *kalasas* in tapering sizes is placed on a solid circular base made of bricks. The style of other temples of Ahom kings are more or less similar tothat of the Siva temples at Sibsagar. Some of the most important temples constructed under the patronage of the Ahom government are theSukleswar, the Rudreswar and Navagraha temples at Gauhati and the Siva temples at Dergaon and Biswanath. In Sibsagar we found Vishnu temples on the same site with Siva and Devi temples.

Remains of the Ahom palaces constructed during the Ahom period are important architectural achievements of the Ahom rulers. These palaces were constructed with bricks. The first Ahom capital was Charaideo, established by Sukapha in 1253. The coronation ceremony of the Ahom rulers known as “singarighorutha “was held in Charaideo. Later on Charaideo was used for doing religious activities of the Ahom rulers. Charaideois famous for the graveyard of Ahom rulers, queens administrative officials and nobles known as ‘maidums’. The structure of the maidums ishemispherical. The large maidums contain several rooms and multiple stories. We can notice two kinds of maidums – earthen maidums (made of

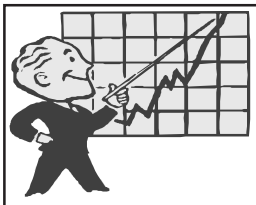
earth) and brick maidums (made of stone or bricks). Metropolis of Rangpur was constructed during the period of Rudrasingha .The original name of Rangpur was Meteka. Rudrasingha had established this city in 1699. The new metropolis at Rangpur contains the famous Talatalghar. TheTalatalghar can be designated as the greatest architectural achievement of Ahom period. Interestingly drainage system was introduces in the construction of Talatalghar. It should be noted here that this palace has some underground stories also.Rudrasingha and his successors had constructed several roads, palaces and doulsin Rangpur. The famous Joysagar was constructed in Rangpur city. Another important palace of Ahom period was Ranghar or amusement pavilion. This is a two-storied brick structure with its roof designed after the fashion of a thatched house. This building is like amphitheater of present day stadium.

In the old metropolis, at Garhgaon too there was a Kareng-ghar. TheGarhgaon capital was constructed by king Suklengmung (1539-1552). The most important palace of Garhgaon is the Karengghar which was constructed by RajeswarSingha (1751-1769). The Karengghar was used as the administrative house. Therefore he was also known as the Garhgayaraja. It is surrounded by a brick wall about two miles in circumference. The ruins of the masonry gateway are still seen. This construction was completed by twelve thousand workmen engaged for one whole year. It also contains an audience hall. This palace had seven stories. But people can notice only four stories now.

Numerous stone bridges were constructed during the Ahom rule. But only those over the Namdang, Darika and Dijai are intact. The Namdang Bridge was built by King RudraSingha in 1703. It was the biggest stone bridge of the Ahom period. Besides these bridges the Ahom rulers also constructed large numbers of roads,ramparts, ponds etc. Two most important ponds of Ahom period are – the Jaysagar Pukhuri and the Sibsagar Pukhuri.

The architectural developments of medieval period will not be complete if we do not mention the architectural remains of the neighboring areas of Ahom state. The Kacharies had rich architectural remains. They

knew the use of bricks prior to the Ahoms. Some important archaeological sites of Kachari kingdom are – Dimapur, Maibong, Kasomari and Khaspur. Dimapur was the oldest capital of the Kacharies. The capital city of Dimapur is covered by bricks walls. In the northern side of the capital city there is a brick gateway. The courses of bricks in the structure were very nearly laid and the mortar used was very fine and good. The ground plan of the gateway has width of 16.10m facing to the east. The Ahom chronicles refer to the existence of brick built structure at Dimapur. The gateway is also decorated by engraving severalflowers, birds, animals etc. Another important place of architectural importance of Kachari kingdom was Kasomari. The important architectural remains of Kasomariare the megaliths. These are monolithic structures. Instead of Hindu influence these structures were influenced by the Islamic art tradition. The objectives of the making of these architectural remains is not clear. But probably these are commemorative structures to celebrate victory in a war or any heroic deeds. Maibong, the another capital of Kachari kingdom was also important for architectural remains. The lion gateway of Maibongstill exists. The Ranchandi temple in Maibong is famous for architectural remains. This is an incomplete double storied temple. It is a rock-cut temple. The last capital of Kachari kingdom was Khaspur. The city of Khaspur is surrounded by brick walls. In Khaspur, gateway made of bricks, temples and royal palaces have been discovered. Bengal influence is noticed in the architectural remains of Khaspur.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1: Write True or False :

(a) The first Ahom capital was established at Charaideo.

(b) The Ahoms did not use brick in their architecture.

(c) Namdang bridge was built by Rudra Singha.

14.4 LITERATURES DURING THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The Ahom rulers were initially concerned mainly with one branch of literature, i.e. historical chronicles called Buranjis .The Ahoms started the

writing of Buranjis. In the beginning, Buranjis were written in Tai –Ahom language. But from the 16th century Assamese was used to write the Buranjis. Since the time of RudraSingha , the Ahom kings started patronizing Hindu religious and different branches of secular literature. Kaviraj Chakravarty, the poet-laureate of king RudraSingha and his son Siva Singha translated the *Brahma-Baivarta Purana* and the *Abhigyan Sakuntalam* into Assamese. His astronomical work *Bhaswati* is a translation of the *Surya Siddhanta*. Of the secular works of the Ahom period the most important is the *Hastividyarnaba* compiled by Sukumar Barkaith. *Hasta –muktawali* on dance technique, *Kama-ratna-tntra*on sexology and *Ghora-nidan* on the diseases and treatment of the horses may be ascribed to about the same period.

There are some undated poetic works some ofwhich might have received royal patronization. These are Kaviraj Mishra's *SialGosain* , Ananta Acharya's *Ananta Lahari* and Rama Mishra's *PutalarCharit*etc. Towards the later part of the Ahom rule, a new type of drama in Sanskrit-cum-Assamese languages were written under royal patronage. *Dharmodaya* by DharmadevaSarma is an example of such play. It was staged at the royal court on the occasion of reinstallation of Lakshmi Singha.

Assam's contact with Islam also had its influence in the literature. Two famous Assamese lyrics *Mrigawati Charit* and *Madhu-malati* were based on 16th century Sufipoems. Moreover the *zikirs* and the *zaris*, the Sufi religious preaching were composed in the style of *Kirtan –ghosa* , *Nam-ghosa* and *Bargeets*.

In medieval period traditional education consisting of Sanscritgrammar, the religious texts were imparted as in ancient period. Educational institutions were mainly the tolas where the Brahmanas played the role of teacher. Education was however confined mainly to the Brahmana and Kayastha pupils only.

The royal court also served as the center of learning for the royalty and the nobility. The Kamata and Koch kings gathered a number of scholars and poets around their courts and thus used to patronize learning and education. Naranarayana, the great Koch king was very educated. He studied at Benaras. He even organized religious debate. The Ahom kings had great interest in historical literature. Buranjis were compiled under the direct

patronization and supervision of the Ahom kings. Besides Buranjis the Ahom kings also interested in other secular literature also. One important classic is *Pung-gao-kham* (Ahom Ramayana).



ACTIVITY 14.1

Write a short note on the literary development during the Ahom period.

.....

.....

.....

14.5 CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT DURING THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The medieval period of Assam history shows significant development in the different aspects of culture. Itexhibit development in the field of architecture and literature. We have already discussed the architectural development and literary development of the medieval period. Now we will discuss other aspects of cultural developments in the medieval period.

The Ahoms performed their marriages according to their own rites called Chaklang. But if a Ahom king married a Hindu girl then Vedic rites were observed. Among the tribes there was no system of dowry. Instead of it the bridegroom had to pay bride –price (ga-dhan) there was no child marriage except among the Brahmanas and Kayasthas.

The Hindus observed Vedic funeral rites and non-Hindu tribes observed their respective tribal rites. The Ahoms buried their dead in vaults called maidums. Since the time of Rajeswar Singha, the Ahom kings took to cremation and performed their funeral ceremonies according to Vedicrites.

Rice, pulses, fish and milk were the staple diet of both aristocratic and common people. Taking of liquor was disfavored by the caste Hindus the practice of chewing areca-nut with betel leaf was a common habit of the people of medieval Assam. This is also mentioned by the person chronicler Shihabuddin Tallish.

The full dress of the nobles during medieval period, in general, consisted of a *churia* or *dhuti*, a jacket like *half –coat*, a *turban* and a *chaddar* folded over the right shoulder. The common people used only a *churia* and a *gamocha*. The garments of the nobles were made of silks like pat, muga and fine cotton. Whether the common people used cloths made of cotton and eri. Distinction was there in the use of ornaments and utensils etc. Common people were not allowed to wear gold ornaments. The women of the nobility wore three pieces of garments. The lower garment was called *mekhela*and two upper garments called*riha* and *chaddar*. The common women wore only two piecesgarments, the *mekhela*and the *chaddar*.

The Ahom kings took keen interest in games and sports. This includes the fights of different animals like elephant,bull,buffalo, tiger and birds like cocks. Hawk fight was their favoritepastime. To train these hawks, there was *khel* under an officer called *SenchowaBarua*. The Ahom kings were also fond of elephant catching and hunting. The venue of the performance of the games and sports was the RupahiPathar. The king and the nobles witnessed the performance from the Rangghar.

The most important and popular festival was Bihu. The most important dance form was Bihu. In the temples, dances like *nati*, *deodhani* and *devadasi* were performed usually by a class of professional dancers called *nats*. Queen Phuleswari was originally such a dancer attached to the Siva temple at Dergaon. Some common musical instruments were horns,flutes, drums etc. King RudraSingha had high regard for Mughal music. He therefore sent Assamese musicians to Delhi to learn the instruments like *pakhuaj*.*Rashjatra*, *douljatra*, *janmastami* were also performed in the Satras. After the acceptance of Saktism by the Ahom kings, the worship of Durga was performed in the royal courtyard.

14.6 ORIGIN OF VAISHNAVITE MOVEMENT IN ASSAM

A social reform movement was started all over India between the 12th and 15th century CE. This reform movement was known as bhakti movement. The movement was liberal and based on the doctrine of bhakti or devotion. The bhakti movement gradually encompassed the whole India

and brought new thoughts and ideas in the socio-religious life of the Indian people.

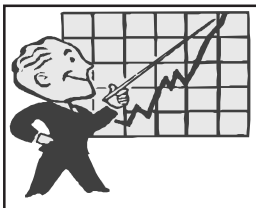
Assam was also come under the influence of this bhakti movement. The ancient kingdom of Kamarupa was disintegrated slowly since the 13 th century. Assam was then ruled by several petty chieftains like Kachari, Chutiya, Bhuyan, Kamata king etc. Constant conflict for supremacy among these powers brought instability in the political history of Assam. The political instability ultimately brought chaos in the field of society and religion. Assam in the fifteenth century presented a diverse shades. The majority of the people belonged to non-Aryan tribes. The followers of Hinduism basically worshipped Sakti. Tantricism was in its highest pick during this period. At this background Sankardeva appeared as a spiritual leader of the Assamese society. He was a social reformer, prolific writer. The neo-Vaishnava movement initiated by Sankardeva started a new era in the socio-cultural history of Assam. He actually brought all the scattered people of Assam under one umbrella. This new creed of faith initiated by Sankardeva is known as *eka-sarana –nam-dharma*. Sankardeva believed in devotion to a single god. Lord Vishnu or Krishna was considered the supreme deity in the neo-Vaishnava movement. This new religious movement of Sankardeva was very liberal and opened to all casts and creed.

14.7 CENTRE OF PRO-VAISHNAVITE

The neo-Vaishnavite movement initiated by Sankardeva has two institutions or centers viz the Satra and the Namghar. These two centers associated with the social, cultural as well as religious life of the Assamese society. The Namghar is actually a miniature replica of the Satra institution. The Satra is an institution where devotee can devote a single god with the help of a Guru or teacher. One of the functions of these Satras was to initiate aspirants to neo-Vaishnavism. The initiation by the Satras actually brings the cultural integrity among different sections of Assamese society. The Satras contains four Samhatis – 1. Purusha, 2. Nika, 3. Kala and 4. Brahma. The PurushaSamhati derives its origin from PurusottamaThakura. He was the eldest grandson of Sankardeva. This Samhati emphasized on

nam or prayer. The Nika Samhati was founded by Mathuradas Burha- ata. In this Samhati the position of Madhavdevais more important than that of Sankardeva. The Satrasestablished by Gopaldeva and his successors are known as Kala Samhati. The kala Samhati gave the Guru a supreme position. This Samhati was more liberal in matters of casts. The most prominent Satras of this Samhati were the Moamariya and Dihingsatras. The Brahma Samhati consisted of the subsects of Damodardeva and Harideva.

The Satras has significant contribution towards the cultural development of the Assamese society. The first stage of evolution of the Satra naturally began with Sannkardeva. It was during the time of Madhabdeva and Damodardeva that the Satra institution attained the second phase of its growth. During this period the architectural structure of the Satras received its final stage. By the middle of the 17th century the Satra institution establish itself. The Ahom kings and nobles accepted neo-Vaishnavism. One component of the Satra institution, the Kirtanghar, became an integral part of Assamese village. Another name of Kirtanghar is Namghar. The Satra institution contributed several important religious literatures. It also contributed the cultural history of Assam by introducing classical dance and music. The establishment of Namghar came with the idea of popularizing the neo-Vaishnavite faith among the masses. The Namghars are democratically designed. People of all caste and creed can enter into it. The Namghar is built without walls. It has a symbolic meaning that the Namghar is open to all people irrespective of caste and creed. The Namghar became the place of community prayers. The Namghar also played the role of Panchayat. Assam conceived the idea of community development and Panchyatiraj through the institution of village Namghar.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1: In Satra Institution teachings are offered by whom?

.....

Q.2: What is another name of Kirtan Ghar?

.....

Q.3: From which the Purusha Samhati originated?

.....



14.8 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learnt –

- The Ahoms established their firstcapital at Charaideo.
- The architecture of medieval period can be divided into three groups – the Royal architecture, the Temple architecture and the Satra architecture
- Kamakhya temple was destroyed by Kalapahar and it was again built by Chilarai, the brother of Koch king Naranarayana.
- The Ahom kings constructed a large numbers of temples. These temples were mainly dedicated to lord Siva and Durga.
- For the construction of palaces the Ahom kings used bricks.
- Charaideo is well-known for the graveyard of the Ahom rulers, queens and administrative officials. These are known as 'maidums'
- Some important architectural remains of Ahom period are – Jaydoul, Sivdoul, Kareng Ghar, Talatal Ghar and Rang Ghar.
- The Buranji writing was started with the coming of the Ahoms .
- Some important literatures of Ahom period includes – translated version of Brahma-Baivartapurana, translated version of Abhigyan Sankuntalam, Hastividyarnaba, Hasta-Muktavalietc.
- The Ahoms performed their marriage according to their own rite called Chaklang.
- Rice, pulses, fish and milk were the main food during medieval period
- The most important festival was Bihu.
- Sri Manta Sankardeva initiated the Ek-Sarana –Nam-Dharma in Assam. He was a social reformer of medieval period of Assam.
- Satra and Namghars are the two important institutions of Pre-Vaishnavite Movement.



14.9 FURTHER READING

1. Barpujari, H.K. (ed) *Comprehensive Aistory of assam*, Vol. III, Assam Publication Board, Guwahati, 2004 (1990)
2. Barua, S. L. *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Monoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd, Guwahati, 2002

14.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: (a) True (b) False (c) True.

Ans to Q No 2: Guru or Teacher.

Ans to Q No 3: Namghar.

Ans to Q No 4: Purusottama Thakura.



14.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Very Short Type questions (Answer each question within 50 words)

Q 1: Who built the Ugratara Temple and When?

Q 2: What is Coronation ceremony?

Q 3: Who was Kaviraj Chakravorty?

Q 4: What is Maidums?

Q 5: How many Samhatis are there in Satra institution? Give details.

B. Short Type Questions (Answer each question within 150 words)

Q 1: Discuss the Temple architecture of the Ahom period.

Q 2: Give a short note on the paleces of Ahom period.

Q 3: Discuss the literary development of the medieval period.

Q 4: What is Bhakti Movement? Who was the propagator of this movement in Assam?

C. Long Questions (Answer each question within 500 words)

Q 1: Discuss briefly the architectural development of the Medieval Period.

Q 2: Make a note on the cultural development in the medieval period.

Q 3: Discuss the activities of pro-Vaishnavite institutions of Assam.

*** ***** ***

UNIT 15: WOMEN IN THE MEDIEVAL ASSAM

UNIT STRUCTURE

15.1 Learning Objectives

15.2 Introduction

15.3 Definition of Medieval Period

15.4 Medieval period of Assam

15.5 Social Condition of Women in Medieval Assam

15.6 Political Condition of Women in Medieval Assam

15.7 Let us sum up

15.8 Further reading

15.9 Answers to check your progress

15.10 Model Questions

15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- find the definition of medieval period in History
- learn the medieval period of Assam
- discuss the social condition of women in medieval Assam
- discuss the economic condition of women in medieval Assam
- discuss the political condition of women in medieval Assam

15.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we are going to have a discussion of the social and political condition of women in the medieval period in Assam. The Medieval period in Assam started with the coming of the Ahoms in 1228 CE. The period continued till the signing of the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826CE. This period witnessed the glorious rule of the Ahoms for six hundred years.

The medieval period of Assam is important not only for the political developments but also for the cultural and social developments. In this chapter we will discuss the socio-political position of women in medieval period. We shall have a look on the women belonging to different strata of society. While dealing with women we will also discuss the patriarchal nature of the society of medieval Assam.

15.3 DEFINITION OF MEDIEVAL PERIOD

History is a continuous process. Periodization in history is not an easy task. It is not always easy to distinguish clearly when one period ends and another begins. Although for our convenience of study we may divide historical developments into certain periods like Ancient, Medieval and Modern.

In the history of Europe, the middle ages or medieval period lasted from 5th to the 15th century. It began with the fall of the Western Roman Empire and merged into the renaissance and the age of discovery. The term medieval has its origin in the Latin term "*mediumaevum"* (middle age). The term medieval first came into use in the 19th century, although the idea of a middle age had been around for several hundred years.

In Indian historical context the medieval period started from around 8th century to the mid eighteenth century (Battle of Plassy). Some historians divide medieval Indian history into two parts, before the coming of the Mughals and from the Mughal period to the coming of the English East India Company, these are-

1. Early medieval period (8th century to the 13th century)
2. Late medieval period (13th century to 18 the century)

15.4 MEDIEVAL PERIOD OF ASSAM

The medieval period in Assam began with the attacks from the Bengal sultanate. The first of which took place in 1206 by Bakhtiyar Khilji as mentioned in the Kanai –Boroxiboa Rock inscription, after the breakup of the ancient Kamarupa kingdom. But commonly, the medieval period of Assam history is said to have started from the coming of the Ahoms in 1228 till the termination of their rule by the British in 1826. The Ahom kingdom was established in 1228 when Sukaphaa, a Shan prince of Mong Mao came to Assam by crossing the Patkai mountains and entered in the Brahmaputra valley (Which we have already studied in our previous units). The rule of this dynasty ended with the Burmese invasion of Assam and the subsequent annexation of the state by the British East India Company following the

Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826. The six hundred years of Ahom rule had great contribution towards the society and culture. Besides the Ahom ruling dynasty some petty feudatory chiefs also ruled in some parts of Assam in medieval period.



LET US KNOW

The Treaty of Yandaboo was signed after the defeat of Burmese at the hands of British in 24 February 1826. The treaty was signed after the first Anglo-Burmese war. To drive out the Burmese; Ahom king took help from the British power. After the sign of the treaty of Yandaboo Assam was annexed by the British power.

15.5 SOCIAL CONDITION OF WOMEN IN MEDIEVAL ASSAM

The social structure of a civilization to a great extent based upon the status of women in its various periods. Since the origin of society, women have become an essential part of the social structure. With the changing times, the society also changes. With continuous changes in the society, the position of women also undergoes certain changes. It has been found that women had to face many ups and downs in their position during the different periods of history.

Regarding the position of women in the ancient and medieval period of Assam history, there is a difficulty of authentic sources. But it can be assume that, as an integral part of the Indian society, the Assamese women were also influenced by the same Indian dogmas and customs rampant in the other parts of the country.

The social structure of Assam in the medieval period comprised of the different ethnic groups. The society of that period was mainly patriarchal. Like the other patriarchal society, in Assam also women enjoyed a lower position compared to men. But as the social structure of Assam was originally non-Aryan and the position of women was to some extent favorable here. Assamese society by practice was a rural society. In this traditional rural society, women of different ethnic group suffered less from social

disabilities like the other parts of India. Because of the influence of the Mongoloid culture on the Assamese society, some strict social taboos like Child marriage, Purdah*, sati –dah etc*. did not affect the Assamese women in general.

But, like the greater Indian tradition, Assamese Hindu society was also based on male –dominated family system where elder male used to take the leading roles in the family matters. They had the right to inherit the family property and they were socially considered as continuing the family line. The women however had right to claim the bridal gifts and presents.

Though the evil custom of dowry was not prevalent in the Assamese society, but the social status of the groom's party was always superior in comparison to the bride and her family. But, the system was quite different in the non –Aryan society. In the non-Aryan society, the system of bride price, which was contrary to the dowry system was prevalent. In medieval society too, the birth of girl child was not a desired one. People celebrated the birth of a male child. But killing of girl child was not existed in Assam. In shaping a family the contribution of women is significant. In medieval period too women played a significant role in shaping the family as a mother, wife, cook and an honorable host for the guest etc. She had an authority only in the household activities. She did not enjoyed the power of decision –making.

There was a sexual division of labor in Assamese society. Certain tasks were fixed for women while certain other tasks were meant for men. In case of agricultural works , women can engage themselves in water –supplying, weeding reaping , thrashing and so on . But they were not engage in ploughing. The women from so-called upper classes cannot engage in agricultural activities. There was restrictions for the upper class women to work in outside. They generally engaged themselves in household duties only. All women from queen to the common women were proficient in spinning and weaving. The women of Assam did not constitute a caste by themselves. They naturally took the caste of their fathers and husbands.

In comparison to the women of the upper class, women of the peasant and working class had to take lots of burden. Apart from doing the household liabilities, they had to do some outdoor duties. Women helped

their husbands in cultivation. They engaged themselves in bamboo, cane or wooden works. Under the supremacy of the Ahoms, the most important and compulsory work allotted to the women were spinning and weaving.

In the Ahom period, we found reference of royal consorts, who occupied significant position in administration. But the women from lower strata of society did not participated in political machinery. It indicates a social difference between the women from royalty and the general women.

Polygamy was the common feature of the medieval social structure. The system was more prominent among the royal folks. In medieval Assam Durlabh Narayan, the Kamata king had seven queens. Almost all the Ahom kings had at least two or three principal queens. These queens were known as Parbatiakuwari, Barkuwari, Tamuli Kuwari and many subordinate queens known as Chamuakuwari. The nobles and ministers also adopted the manner of polygamy. It appears that in the medieval Assamese society, polygamy was widely practiced; especially by the members of the royal family. The existence of polygamy proves the low status of women in medieval Assam. The position of co –wives was tremendously miserable.

Chastity is considered an important quality of women in medieval Assam. The medieval social reformers were not different from such ideas. The Neo-Vaisnavite movement had put forward certain other restrictions. Madhavadeva even advised Sankardeva's wife to address her husband as Gosain or God. Thus chastity was considered important in medieval period.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

State True or False

Q.1: The society of Medieval Assam was patriarchal. ……..……

Q.2: Pardah system was existed in Medieval Assam. .....……

Q.3: Polygamy was continued in medieval Assam. .....……

Pardah system was unknown in the medieval Assamese society. The Assamese women were free to move and take equal shares in the agricultural works with the men folk in the society without covering their

faces. In the picture of queen Ambika, we never see her to wear a veil on her head. The tribal women were given a large degree of liberty in every matter. They never wore veil or covered their heads.

No formal education was given to the girls. However from a very early age girls got teachings of morality and spirituality from the elder member of their family.



ACTIVITY 15.1

Write a short note on polygamy in Medieval Assam

…….....……..

…….....……..

15.6 POLITICAL CONDITION OF WOMEN IN MEDIEVAL ASSAM

In Medieval period the political machinery was in the hands of the male members. From king to paiks, the people who were associated with royal duties were male. But we notice some instances of association of women in royal duties as well. But it should be mention that these women had associated with the royal duties through their family relation. The first women who ascended on the throne of Ahom dynasty was 'Barraja Phuleswari Kuwari'. She was the wife of Swargadeo Siva Singha. During the ruling period of Phuleswari Kuwari the famous Moamoria rebellion took place. Though she ascended on the Ahom throne according to the Ahom rule yet she cannot issue coins independently in her own name. She issued coins along with Swargadeo Siva Singha. This is a clear example of the patriarchal nature of the Ahom royalty. After the demise of Phuleswari Kuwari another wife of Siva Singha Rani Madambika and Sarbeswari Kuwari started to rule the Ahom dynasty. These three queens emphasized on welfare activities. They constructed several douls and ponds. They also patronized the culture and literature. Phuleswari Kuwari also emphasized on education and she introduced a school in the royal premise. Under her patronization Kabiraj Chakravorty wrote the '*Sankhachur Badh'* and '*Sankuntala Kabya'*. Under the patronization of Rani Madambika, *'Kam*

Kumar Haran' was composed by Kabiraj Dwija. The famous book on veterinary science *'Hastibidarnwab' was* composed during this period.

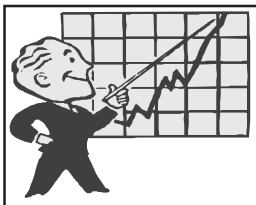
Besides the Ahom queens, Bhanumati, the wife of Koch king Naranarayana, requested Purosottam Gajapati to compose a book on Grammar, *'Ratnamala Byakaran'*. Another queen from Nara community, Chao Ching kuwari was famous for transferring the Ahom capital to Gargaon. She was the wife of Suklengmung (Gargaya raja). Chao Chingkuwari was a very learned queen. Swarnalata Baruain her *'A Comprehensive History of Assam'* and Dambarudhar Nath in his *'Asom Buranji*' mentioned Chao Ching Kuwari as a beautiful, intelligent and competent women. According to Swarnalata Barua, Chao Ching Kuwari can wrote tai language. She had a great contribution to the royal duties and the matter of defense of the state.

Matrimonial alliance always played a significant role in the diplomatic relation of any particular dynasty. The Ahoms also used matrimonial alliance as a tool to initiate favorable relation with neighboring states. Swargadeo Rajeswar Singha married Kuranganayani, the Manipuri princes and daughter of king Jai Singha. Kuranganayani became the chief queen of king Rajeswar Singha. During the period of Moamoria rebellion, the Moran ruler Ragh Moran forcefully married Kuranganayani. It was Kuranganayani who planned to murder Ragh Moran. She ultimately succeeded in her plan and rescued Ahom dynasty from its downfall though for time being. Another important woman who took part in royal matters was Rajmao Dangariayani. She was the mother of King Chandrakanta Singha. She considered Badan Barphukan guilty for the Moamoria rebellion. Therefore, she tried to restore the Ahom ruling dynasty by murdering Badan Barphukan with the help of Rupsing Chubedar.

Polygamy as already mentioned was a common phenomenon existed among the Ahom rulers. There were several categories of queen like – Barkuwari, Parbatiya Kuwari and Tamuli Kuwari. Besides these three categories others were known as Chamua Kuwari. The queens enjoyed the right to look after and administer the land which was allotted to them. But it should be mention that the existence of polygamy definitely worsened the status of Ahom queens.

The Ahom queens were also good warrior. Some of them fought bravely in the battlefield along with their male counterparts. The Muslim ruler Turbak attacked the Ahom kingdom in 1532 CE. During that period Suhungmung (Dihingia Raja) was the ruler of Ahom dynasty. In this battle the Ahom commander Phrasengmung Bargohain died and eventually his wife Mula Gabharu fought bravely along her women associates with the foreigners. She died while fighting with the invaders. Another brave woman of Ahom period was Nangblock Gabharu. She was the wife of Ahom royal officials Tankham Bargohain. She played an active role in the Ahom-koch conflict. During the reigning period of Jayddhaj Singha, the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb appointed Mirjumla as the commander in chief to fight with the Ahoms. The Ahom ruler Jayaddhaj Singha after his defeat in the hands of Mirjumla sent his six years old daughter Nang Cheng or Ramani Gabharu to Mughal royal house in marriage to Mughal emperor. Along with Ramani Gabharu, the daughter of Tipam Raja, Mohini Aidew was also sent. In Mughal royal house these two daughters from Assam came to be known as Rahmat Banu and Maphija Begum. After 13 years later, during the battle of Saraighat, Laluksola Barphukan intended to surrender Guwahati to Mughal without fighting. Hearing this news Rahmat Banu, who was a niece of Laluksola Barphukan wrote a letter to her maternal uncle not to surrender Guwahati. This proves her bravery and a deep love for her motherland. Jaymoti kuwari, the wife of king Gadapani was another example of brave woman. She died for the security of Ahom throne.

Those women who had some royal links were only associated with the political arena of medieval Assam. The women from lower strata of society did not play any role in politics. A few common women were politically conscious during that period. On the other hand, the daughter of royal officials had played some important role in political field. In medieval period matrimonial alliances with nearby states played an important role. Ahom, Koch, Kachari , Nara, Naga, Moran, Chutia etc. had maintained matrimonial alliance with Gauda, (Bengal) Brahmadesh (Myanmar) and Mughals. Matrimonial alliances were made to initiate friendly relation so that in need of emergency the ally can help them.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions:

Q.4: Who was the first women who ascended on the Ahom throne?

.....

Q.5: Who was the author of Ratnamala Byakaran?

.....

Q.6: When Turbak invaded the Ahom dynasty?

.....



15.7 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit you have learnt about –

- The social structure of medieval Assam was based on patriarchal nature. Women did not enjoy equal status with their male counterparts.
- As Assamese society consisted of different ethnic groups. Therefore, the women of Assam enjoyed some freedom.
- The evil customs like Child marriage, Sati system, and dowry and Pardah system were not existed in medieval society in Assam. Education was not imparted to the women in medieval Assam.
- The common women had no hold in political field during the medieval period. The women from the royal links only participated in the political field. Bar Raja Phuleswari Kuwari and Rani Madambika were two prominent women who took part in politics.
- The Queens could not issue coins independently in their own name.
- Poligamy was practiced by most of the medieval rulers. They had at least three chief queens. The custom of polygamy lowered the status of women in medieval Assam.
- We found the names of some women who took part in battle with their male counterparts. Some brave women from medieval Assam were Mula Gabharu, Ramani Gabharu, Joymoti Kuwari and so on .



15.8 FURTHER READING

1. Barpujari. H.K (1990) *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol.III, (ed) Assam publication Board, Guwahati, 2004
2. Barua,. K., (1986) *A Cultural History of Assam,* (Reprinted), vol.I, Bina library, Guwahati
3. Barua, S., L., (2002) *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Monoharlal publishers pvt. Ltd, Guwahati

15.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: True

Ans to Q No 2: False

Ans to Q No 3: True

Ans to Q No 4: Bar raja Phuleswari Kuwari

Ans to Q No 5: Purosattam Gajapati

Ans to Q No 6: 1532 CE



15. 10 MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Very Short Questions (Answer each question within 50 words)

Q 1: Who were the Ahoms?

Q 2: What were the household duties of the women of Medieval Assam?

Q 3: What kind of marriage system was prevailed in Medieval Assam?

B. Short Questions (answer each question in and about 150 words)

Q 1: Write a short note on the joint family system in Medieval Assam.

Q 2: What was the social status of the medieval women?

Q 3: Write a short note on the matrimonial alliances followed by the Ahom rulers.

C. Long Questions (Answer each question in and about 500 words)

Q 1: Discuss the role played by the Ahom queens for the development of literature and culture.

Q 2: Write a short note on the military role played by the women of Medieval Assam.

Q 3: What was the role of the medieval women in the political field? Discuss.

*** ***** ***



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Learner's Feedback on Course

Dear Learner,

Regarding the course as mentioned above, we would like to know your opinions and comments so as to improve the quality of self learning materials in future. Please respond to the following statements by ticking the number you feel most reflect your opinion. After completion of the additional comments, please detach the page and send/mail the same to us at the address given below.

The Director, Centre for Internal Quality Assurance, KKHandiqui State Open University
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1. Approximately how many hours did you spend for studying the units in the course? | | | |
2. Please give your opinions (by √ mark) to the following items based on your reading of the block:

Sl. No.	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I.	The SLMs of the course fulfil the learning objectives set out in the beginning of each unit					
II.	The units of the SLM could satisfy my academic needs and expectations					
III.	The Unit writers have excellent knowledge about the course contents					
IV.	Language and contents of the units were presented at a level which I could readily understand					
V.	Ample opportunity for participation in the activities provided in the units					
VI.	Used enough Illustrations (Diagrams, tables etc.) for conceptual clarity					
VII.	Quality of content is engaging, relevant, and up-to-date					
VIII.	The self check questions are very helpful					
IX.	The Possible/model questions and the answers to check my progress have benefited me a lot					

Additional Comments: *(Please feel free to provide your open comments)*

1. Which aspects of the SLM, according to you, worked well?

   ---

2. What sort of changes/improvements do you feel KKHSOU could implement to improve the overall quality of the SLM?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form.