



## ASSAM HISTORY



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## Physiography

Assam is situated in the extreme north-east frontier of India, in between 28° and 24° North latitude and 89°86' to 96° East longitudes and borders on the hill States of Bhutan, Arunachal, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya in the vicinity of China and Tibet on the north, of Burma on the east and the south and of Bangladesh on the west.



## Periodization

Assam history can be divided into three periods –

- **Ancient Period:** Ancient Assam history roughly covers the period from the days of the Epics to the early part of the 13th century.
- **Medieval Period:** Medieval Assam history may be said to have begun with the coming of the Ahoms to this land in the early part of the 13th century and covers the entire period of their rule till the formal inauguration of the British regime in 1826.
- **Modern Period:** With the formal inauguration of the British rule in 1826 began the modern period in the history of Assam which covers the period till India became free in August 1947 and thereafter.

## ANCIENT ASSAM HISTORY

In ancient days, Assam was known as Pragjyotisha and later as Kamarupa.

### Theories regarding the origin of the name Pragjyotisha

1. A branch of people called Chao-Theius of China migrated to India at a very early period and occupied three important centres – in the east in Assam, in the centre in the present Bareilly district and in the

north-west in Afghanistan. In India they came to be known as the Zuhthis and the three centres they occupied, were later on named as Prag-Zuhthis, Madhya-Zuhthis and Uttar-Zuhthis respectively. The word Zuhthis was subsequently transformed into the Sanskrit for Jyotisha. This theory is not supported by sufficient evidence.

2. As mentioned in the Kalika Purana, that Brahma made the first calculation of the stars in Pragjyotisha. Prag means former or eastern and Jyotisha, a star, astrology, shining. Pragjyotishpur may therefore, be taken to mean the "City of Eastern Astrology".

### Theories regarding the origin of the name Kamarupa

1. The word Kamarupa has been derived from an Austric formation like Kamru or Kamrut, the name of a lesser divinity in Santali which justifies the association of the land with magic and necromancy. It is said that the word symbolises a new cult, namely the worship of the mother goddess kamakhya and in exaltation of it, the land was rechristened.
2. Gopatha Brahmana narrates the story of Kamadeva's revival in this land, after his destruction by the fiery glance of Siva.

### Theories regarding the origin of the name Assam

1. It is derived from the word "Asama" meaning uneven as distinguished from the Samatata or the level plains of Bengal.
2. The word Asama (peerless) may be a later Sanskritisation of an earlier form of Acham. In Tai, 'cham' means "to be defeated". With the prefix a, Assam would mean "undefeated", "conquerors". The name once applied to the people was subsequently applied to the country as well.
3. Assam is derived from a Bodo formation like Ha-chom, meaning low land.

There is no denying the fact that the name Asam or Assam is connected with the Shan invaders, who entered the Brahmaputra valley in the beginning of the 13th century, for the term nowhere occurs prior to the Ahom occupation.

## Extent of Pragjyotisha-Kamrupa

The modern state of Assam is but a part of the extensive kingdom of Pragjyotisha or Kamarupa of ancient times. Though the extent of the kingdom varied from time to time, there is no doubt that its northern and south western limits extended much beyond the modern state of Assam. According to most of the Puranas, the kingdom of Kamarupa extended up to the river Karatoya in the west and included Manipur, Jaintiya, Cachar, parts of Mymensing, Sylhet, Rangpur, and portions of Nepal and Bhutan.

## Traditional rulers and early history

### Mahiranga Danava

The earliest known king of ancient Assam was a non-Aryan named Mahiranga Danava. His capital was at Mairanka, which may be identified with a hill called 'Mairang Parvat' still existent at a distance of seven miles from Guwahati on the GS road. He was a Kirata chief (*The Kirāta is a generic term in Sanskrit literature for*

people who had territory in the mountains, particularly in the Himalayas and Northeast India and who are believed to have been Sino-Tibetan in origin). Epithets like Danava and Asura were applied indiscriminately to all non-Aryans.

Mahiranga Danava was succeeded by Hatakasura, Sambarasura, Ratnasura and Ghatakasura.

Ghatakasura was killed by Naraka, who then founded a new line of kings.

### Naraka's legend and its historicity

The legends represent Naraka as being born of the Mother Earth, Prithvi through Vishnu in his boar incarnation. It is for this reason that he is called Bhauma (born of earth). He was left on the sacrificial ground of king Janaka of Videha, who brought him up in his court along with the royal princes till he was sixteen years old. Goddess Prithvi impersonated herself as a nurse, Katyayani, and looked to the child's upbringing.

With the help of his real father Vishnu, he subsequently became the ruler of Pragjyotisha, ousting Gatakasura. He made his capital at Pragjyotishpur and made it "inaccessible even to the gods." This is perhaps the earliest settlement of Aryans in Pragjyotisha.

During his early career as a king, he was pious and ruled the country justly but afterwards he came under the influence of Banasura, the king of Sonitpur and grew irreligious and presumptuous. He became so arrogant that he wanted to take goddess Kamakhya as his wife and to carry out her terms of agreement, he erected a temple for her on the Nilachala hill, excavated a tank and constructed a road to the temple in a single night. Seeing that Naraka almost accomplished the impossible task, the goddess caused a cock to crow signalling the approach of dawn and on this plea evaded her promise to marry him.

The news of narakas atrocities reached Dwaraka and Lord Krishna, the incarnation of Vishnu, subsequently killed him and placed his son Bhagadatta on the throne.

### Bhagadatta

Bhagadatta was the son of Naraka. Legends state that Bhagadatta gave his daughter Bhanumati in marriage to Durjyodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas and for this relationship participated in the great Mahabharata war on the side of Kauravas. Bhagadatta is a well known figure in the Mahabharata, celebrated as a powerful warrior-king "not inferior to Chakra (Indra) in battle" and also skilled in wielding the chariot. He is called "the mighty king of the Mlechchhas" and described as the best wielder of the elephant squad". He was killed by Arjuna in the Kurukshetra war.

### Successors of Bhagadatta

A number of epigraphs mention that Bhagadatta was succeeded by Vajradatta. What was the exact relation between them cannot definitely be ascertained. The genealogy of the rulers after Vajradatta is uncertain. The Nidhanpur grant of Bhaskaravarman states that a period of three thousand years elapsed between the death of Vajradatta and the accession of Pushyavarman, the ancestor of Bhaskarvarman.

### Bhismaka

Archaeological remains discovered around Sadiya in the extreme north-eastern region are attributed to a king named Bhismaka. His kingdom is called Vidarbha, which traditions located in the region of Sadiya. His capital was at Kundina, situated on the bank of the river Kundil, which flows through Sadiya.

Bhismaka had five sons and a beautiful and accomplished daughter named Rukmini. Krishna having heard of her beauty wanted to marry her. Rukmini also desired Krishna as her husband. But her father arranged her marriage with a prince named Sisupala. On the wedding day, before the betrothal ceremony could take place, Krishna, on receipt of a secret message from Rukmini, appeared on the spot and carried her off in his chariot to Dwaraka defeating the crowd of princes present in the wedding. This story has been narrated in the Bhagavata and the Vishnu puranas as well as in the Rukmini-Harana of Sankardeva.

The *Chutiyas* who came into power towards the close of the 12th Century AD trace their descent from Bhismaka.

### Banasura

Banasura was contemporary to naraka. Bana's kingdom extended in the east as far as the modern district of Lakhimpur and in the west probably to North Bengal. His capital city was Sonitpur. The Siva temple of Mahabhairab in the modern town of Tezpur is attributed to him. Bana had many sons but only one daughter named Usha. The story of Usha's gandharva marriage with Aniruddha, the grandson of Krishna, with the help of Chitrlekha, Usha's artist friend, and subsequent capture of confinement of Aniruddha and his final release by Krishna is narrated in a well-known Assamese poetical work Kumara Harana by Sankaradeva. The great battle where Bana was defeated by Krishna is said to have been fought in the modern site of the Tezpur bil.

Tezpur fort is supposed to have been at the same site where the Tezpur Court is situated today. The Agnigarh hill is said to have been the place, where Bana concealed his daughter. About a mile from Tezpur town towards the west are seen two tanks, one of which is attributed to Bana and the other his minister Kumbhanda. Bana's grandson Bhaluk made his capital at Bhalukpong near Balipara at the foot of the Aka hills. The Akas claim their descent from this prince.

### Varman Dynasty

With the rise of the Varmana Dynasty disappears the uncertainty which enveloped the early history of Assam. These kings gave a new orientation to the civilization and culture of ancient Assam and made it a power to be reckoned with in Indian politics. The literary and epigraphic evidences of the period furnish us a comparatively clear outline of the political and cultural history of Assam.

Sources – Dobi grant, Nidhanpur Grant, Nalanda seals of Bhaskarvarman.

#### Pushyavarman (c. 355 – 380 AD)

One Pushyavarman was the founder of this new line of kings. When and how Pushyavarman came into power is not known. In the Allahabad pillar prasasti of Samudragupta, the name of Kamarupa occurs as a frontier kingdom along with Samatata, Davaka, Nepal and kartipur, whose kings owed allegiance to Samudragupta. Although the name of the Kamarupa king was not mentioned in the Allahabad pillar, it was identified with Pushyavarman.

Pushyavarman was succeeded by his son Samudravarman (c. 380 – 405 AD).

#### Balavarman - I (c. 405 – 420)

Samudravarman was succeeded by his son Balavarman-I. He is taken to be the father of princess Amritaprabha, married to king Meghavahana of Kashmir. Kalhana's Rajtarangini refers to Amritaprabha as a Kamarupi princess. Amritaprabha is said to have been accompanied by her father's preceptor, a Tibetan

Buddhist monk named Stunpa. This Stunpa erected a stupa in Kashmir called Lo-stupa. Amritaprabha also erected in Kashmir a lofty vihara for the benefit of the foreign monks called Amritabhavan. It indicates that Buddhism entered Kamarupa long before the visit of Hiuen Tsang and that Kamarupa had cultural contacts with Kashmir as early as the 5th century AD.

### Kalyanavarman (c. 420 – 440)

It is believed that Kalyanavarman brought Kapili valley under his control and ousted its king and sent a diplomatic mission to China.

### Mahendravarman (c. 450-485)

Kalyanavarman was succeeded by Ganapativarman, Mahendravarman and Narayanavarman. Except that of Mahendravarman, the reigns of the other rulers do not appear to be eventful. He was contemporary to Kumaragupta and Skandagupta. Towards the end of the reign of Skandagupta, it is possible that Mahendravarmana shook off the last vestiges of Gupta influence of allegiance and that he extended his sway to south-east Bengal. He was also the first Kamarupa king to perform Aswamedha yajna.

### Bhutivarmana (c. 510 – 555)

The territorial aggrandisement in the west begun by Mahendravarman was further enhanced by his grandson Bhutivarman. His reign forms a brilliant chapter of military glory in the early history of Kamarupa. Yasodharman of Malwa gave an effective blow to the declining power of the Guptas. Mandasor epigraph of Yasodharman informs us that homage was tendered to him by chieftains from the neighbourhood of the Lauhitya in the east to the western ocean and from the snowy heights of the Himalayas in the north to the Eastern Ghats in the south. This statement seems to be poetic exaggeration, but even if we accept this statement to be true, it did not result in any loss of territory of Kamrupa, for shortly after the conquest of Yashodharman, Bhutivarman conquered lands in Pundravardhana to the west of the Trisrota in between 545-550 AD and donated lands to more than 200 families of Brahmans in the Pundravardhana bhukti (roughly north Bengal). It also appears that some portions of south east Bengal were occupied by Bhutivarman. Thus Bhutivarman became the first king of Kamarupa to extend the western frontier of the kingdom beyond the river Karatoya.

Bhutivarman was succeeded by Chandramukhvarman and Sthitavarman. Sthitavarman's son and successor Susthitavarman was renowned as Mriganka. The harshacharita describes him as a powerful monarch. Later Gupta monarch Mahasenagupta led an expedition against him and defeated him. As a result of the defeat, Kamarupa lost her possessions in North Bengal.

Susthitavarman had two sons – Supratisthitavarman and Bhaskaravarman. Supratisthitavarman had a premature death and after a very short reign, he was succeeded by his illustrious brother Bhaskaravarman who ruled for more than 50 years.

### Reign of Bhaskarvarman : Zenith of the glory of ancient Assam (c. 594 – 650)

An ancient Assamese work called Kamrupar Purabrita refers to a date to mark an era commencing from 594 AD and it is believed that the local era started from the time when Bhaskara ascended the throne. The Chinese sources use the prefix Kumararaja before the name of Bhaskara. He was so called probably due to his early accession to the throne or probably because he remained a celibate.

Bhaskara played an important role in the political history of northern India in the first half of the 7th century AD. In the early part of his career, he formed an alliance with Harshavardhana, which brought fresh glories to Kamarupa and enabled it to participate in pan-Indian politics. Bhaskara could not tolerate the gradual rise into prominence of Sasanka. But Bhaskara dared not attack Sasanka single-handed and for that reason might have been looking for an ally for some time past. So he sent his ambassador Hamsavega to meet Harshavardhan who had also vowed to avenge the death of his father. Thus an alliance was formed between two independent monarchs of northern and eastern India. A community of purpose – that of ousting or killing Sasanka – drew both Harsha and Bhaskara to be parties to an undying association.

While Harsha's cousin and general Bhandi attacked him from the west, Bhaskara fell upon him from the east. It appears that unable to face this two-fold attack, Sasanka fled to the south and consequently Gauda with its capital city Karnasuvarna came to the possession of Bhaskara. To celebrate the occasion, Bhaskara issued from his victorious camp at Karnasubarna the famous Nidhanpur grants reconfirming the land-grants made by Bhutivarman in Pundravardhana.

Another event which crowns the career of Bhaskara and adds lustre to the history of ancient Assam is the visit of the reputed Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang to Kamarupa in 642-43 AD. In honour of the Chinese pilgrim, Harsha arranged a religious assembly at Kanauj. There were assembled no less than 18 vassal kings of different countries of India besides 3000 Buddhist priests, about the same number of Brahmanas and Nirgranthas and about a thousand monks from Nalanda. After the assembly at Kanauj was dissolved, Harsha arranged a religious convocation at Prayag which lasted for 75 days. After these ceremonies were dissolved, Hiuen Tsang made preparations to return to China. Bhaskara offered him money and many valuable articles, but he accepted only a simple present from Bhaskara, a cap of skin to protect him against rain and cold.

### Hiuen Tsang's account of Kamarupa

Hiuen Tsang has left a valuable account of Kamarupa (Si-yu-ki). From the text of the Si-yu-ki, it is mentioned that "the country of Kamarupa is about 10,000 li (nearly 1700 miles) in circuit. The capital town is about 30 li. The land lies low, but is rich and regularly cultivated. They cultivate the jackfruit and the coconut. The climate is soft and temperate. The manners of the people are simple and honest. The men are of small stature and their complexion dark yellow. Their language differs a little from that of mid-india. Their nature is very impetuous and wild; their memories are retentive and they are earnest in study.

They adore and sacrifice to the Devas and have no faith in Buddha. There are abundant Deva temples. The present king is Bhaskaravarman, his title, Kumar. He is of the Brahman caste. Though he has no faith in Buddha, yet he much respects Sramanas of learning.

On the east, this country is bounded by a line of hills so that there is no great city to the kingdom. The frontiers are contiguous to the barbarians of the south-west of China. On the south-east of this country, herds of wild elephants roam about in numbers, therefore in this district they use them principally for war".

Bhaskaravarman was perhaps the most illustrious of all the monarchs of ancient Assam. His kingdom included, besides the whole of Kamarupa defined in the Yogini Tantra, considerable portion of Bengal and some portions of Bihar or at least the Nalanda region.

Bhaskara perhaps died a celibate leaving no successor to the throne. An anarchy seems to have soon followed his death, which was turned to his own advantage by an usurper named Salastambha, probably of non-Aryan origin, who founded a new line of kings.

Who was the immediate successor of Bhaskara is not known for certainty. Some scholars take him to be Avantivarman, perhaps a distant relative of Bhaskaravarman, who could not withstand the Mleccha revolt. Whereas some scholars hold that Salastambha and Avantivarman were the same person.

## Salastambha Dynasty

Salastambha shifted the capital city Pragjyotishpur to the present Tezpur area and named it after the name of his tutelary deity Hataka or Hetuka Sulin as Hatakeswara or Haruppeswara. Salastambha was succeeded by a line of 20 kings ending with Tyagasingha. Salastambha was followed by Vighraha, Palaka Kumara and Vajradeva, about whom all available records are silent.

### Sri Harshadeva (c. 725 – 750 AD)

After these insignificant rulers came Sri Harshadeva, whose reign forms another glorious chapter in the history of Kamarupa. The Pasupati epigraph of the Nepal Licchavi king Jayadeva II mentions a king named Sri Harshadeva, who has been described as Gaudradi-Kalinga-Kosala-pati. Harshadeva's marriage alliance with the Nepal king Jayadeva II helped him in leading the campaigns. His conflict with the western Chalukyas is hinted in the Samangad epigraph of Rashtrakuta king Dantidurga dated 752 AD. Even though for a brief period, Kamarupa did become the suzerain power over nearly half of northern India from Sadiya in the east to Ayodhya in the west and from Himalayas on the north as far as the Bay of Bengal and Ganjam to the south. But finally Harshadeva was overthrown by Yasovarman.

Harshadeva was succeeded by Balavarman-II and Pralambha or Salamgha. Pralambha was succeeded by Harjaravarman.

### Harjaravarman (c.815 – 835 AD)

Harjaravarman has left us with two inscriptions – the Hayunthal grant and the Tezpur Rock epigraph. Harjara was the first of the Kamarupa kings to assume high-sounding epithets like Maharaja-dhiraja Parameswara paramabhattacharaka. Harjara was probably a contemporary of Devapala of Gauda and it is likely that he came into conflict with the latter. Harjara built a lofty temple for Hetuka Sulin and rows of stately buildings in the capital city at Haruppeswara. Extensive ruins of temples and buildings in and around Tezpur along with the existence of a big tank called Harjarapukhuri bear testimony to Harjara's patronage of art and architecture and his attention to public works.

### Vanamalavarmanadeva (c. 835–865 AD)

He was the son of Harjaravarman. Vanamala recovered Kamarupa's lost possessions in Bengal. His kingdom extended over the hilly regions in the north and east as well as over south-east Bengal, including Sylhet, Mymensingh, portions of Dacca, Samatata and the neighbouring lands. Vanamala, like his father, was a devout worshipper of Siva and abdicating the throne in favour of his son Jayamala, he fasted unto death, evidently under the influence of religion.

### Jayamala (c. 865 – 885 AD)

Jayamala was also known as Virbahu. Attacked by a fatal disease, he considered the world vain and man's life a water-drop and abdicate the throne in favour of his son Balavarman-II

### Balavarman-III (c. 885 – 910 AD)

He was the last important ruler of Salastambha Dynasty.

### Tyaghasinga (c. 970 – 990 AD)

The last ruler of Salastambha dynasty was Tyaghasinga. He died childless and hence to avoid the danger of anarchy, his officials appointed Brahmapala as their king. Brahmapala was a governor under the Salastambhas, and he too traced his descent from Naraka.

Note:

- Salastambha Dynasty ruled for more than three hundred years
- Kamarupa witnessed the zenith of her military power and glory during this period.
- During this period, Sankaracharya, the great Vedantist reformer of South India, came to Kamarupa to enter into a debate with the prominent Tantrik Scholar Abhinava Gupta.

## Pala Dynasty

### Brahmapala (c. 990 – 1010 AD)

Brahmapala has left us no record but in the epigraph of Ratnapala he is described as a great warrior, though simply called Maharajadhiraja.

### Ratnapala (c. 1010 – 1040 AD)

He left us Chorabari grant, Bargaon grant and Sualkuchi grant.

Ratnapala had beautified and well fortified the city of Hadapyaka (probably later name of Harupeswara) and renamed it as 'Durjaya' or the 'impregnable one'. He defeated a king of Gauda named Rajyapala. Ratnapala's kingdom might have touched the extreme north-eastern region now covered by Arunachal Pradesh.

### Indrapala (c. 1040 - 1065 AD)

We have two records of him - Gauhati grant and the Guakuchi grant.

He strengthened his position as powerful ruler of Eastern India by entering into a marriage alliance with the Rashtrakutas. He held sway over Pundravardhana.

### Gopala (c. 1065 - 1085 AD)

He has left us the Gachtal inscription. His mother was a Rashtrakuta princess named Rajyadevi.

### Harshapala (c. 1085 - 1095 AD)

Harshapala was a weak ruler. Jatavarman, a king of East Bengal snatched away a part of Pundravardhana which belonged to his kingdom. The invasion of Chalukya Vikramaditya VI, who is said to have overrun Magadha, Anga, Gauda and Kamarupa, may also be ascribed to the period of his reign. The expedition, however, did not result in the loss of any territory either in Gouda or in Kamarupa.

### Dharmapala (c. 1095 - 1120 AD)

(Khonamukhi grant, Subhankarapataka grant and Pushpabhadra grant)

The last important ruler of the dynasty. He restored the lost glory of the kingdom by making conquest in North Bengal and probably toward the sea in the south-west of the kingdom. Dharmapala thus succeeded in pushing back the western boundary of the kingdom beyond the river Karatoya. The famous Kalika Purana was written under his patronage.

Towards the end of his reign, Dharmapala shifted his capital city to Kamarupanagar, which probably stood for North Gauhati.

### Jayapala (c. 1120 - 1138 AD)

Jayapala was defeated by king Ramapala of Bengal. This event is mentioned in the Ramacharita by Sandyakara Nandi. But it appears that Ramapala did not occupy or conquer Kamarupa proper but only snatched away her possessions in North Bengal over which he appointed Tingyadeva as a ruler.

## Later kings

Vaidyadeva, succeeded Tingyadeva as the ruler of the eastern possessions of Gauda and subsequently conquered Kamarupa. So Vaidyadeva became the first Gauda ruler to conquer Kamarupa. Initially he was a feudatory ruler under the Palas of Bengal, but after the death of Kumarapala, he became independent. He left us the Kamauli grant.

### Successors of Vaidyadeva

It is not known who succeeded Vaidyadeva. The Tabakat-i-Nasiri mentions that Prithu or Viswasundaradeva was the king of Kamarupa at the time of the invasions of Bakhtiyar Khilji (1205-06)

## Administration of Ancient Assam

Our only source of information about the administration of ancient Assam is some stray epigraphic references and the Kalika Puran, where there is a chapter on Rajniti, which too, is only on the duties of the king and the ministers.

Seven component parts of a state was known to the kings of Kamrupa. The kalika Purana lays importance on these elements and calls them Rajyngam. These components are - King, minister, territory, fort, treasury, army and ally.

## Central administration

Monarchy was the normal form of government. Chief title used by the rulers of ancient Kamarupa was maharajadhiraj. Often, divinity was attached to the kingship. Ideal duties of the king -

- Welfare of his subjects
- His own and his family's protection
- To protect and maintain Varnasrama Dharma
- Learning and expansion of Arya Dharma
- To patronize learning and promote art and culture

King was advised by a council of ministers. The actual strength of the Council is not known. Inscriptions refer to the ministers as mantris, amatyas and sachivas. A set of officers helped the king. It included the Rajaguru (royal priest), Bhisaka (Physician), Mahadvaradhipati (chief warden of the palace), Mahapratihara (head chamberlain) etc.

## Local administration

The administrative divisions are in line with the Guptas. The Bhukti was perhaps the largest division. The mandala, appears to be the next administrative division. Mandala was probably a collection of many visayas, the next administrative division. The lowest unit of administration was the grama or village. Inscriptions also mention small divisions like pataka, konchi and palli. The area of a pataka is uncertain. It perhaps constituted only a part of a village. The term konchi might have stood for a part of a village or a small village inhabited by members of a class or caste. The term palli means a row or group of house or a hamlet.

## Revenue administration

The principal sources of revenue were regular taxes, occasional taxes, commercial levies, fines, income from state properties and tribute from feudatories. The commercial levies included the custom-duties and polls. Sulka (toll) collected from the Kaivartas on the bank of the Brahmaputra. State derived considerable revenue from the copper mines. Officers associated with revenue administration included uparika, utkhetika etc.

Epigraphs mention various types of lands, such as kshetra (arable land), khila (waste land), and vastu (building sites). Land granted to the Brahmanas were called Brahmadaya landgrants and it was revenue free.

## Military organisation

The king was probably helped by a war minister. Under him there was a Commander-in-Chief or general. The division of the army was the traditional four fold one. The military camp consisted of splendid ships, elephants, horses and infantry. The army personnel were recruited from all classes of people including the Brahmanas. The chief weapons of war were asi(sword), parasu(axe), khatvanga (spear) and gada (mace) as well as the bow and arrow. The assam tribes have always been expert archers and they used to poison their arrows with aconite. The Doobi grant mentions Chakra (wheel), discus, javelin, sharp arrows and other deadly weapons.

Surprise attack such as lying in ambush and then suddenly falling upon the enemy was the chief strategy of the Assam tribes.

## Diplomatic Relation

The diplomatic relations of the Kamarupa kings with the feudatories and the neighboring states are mentioned in the epigraphs.

### Relations with the feudatories

The kings were required to fight the feudatories frequently who always attempted to shake off their vassalage to the Central Authority. The number of the feudatories might have been large and their titles varied according to their ranks. The kamarupa kings appointed the powerful feudatories to responsible offices in central administration so as to keep them under their close observation.

Important feudatories enjoyed autonomy and had their own subordinate feudatories. They were also permitted to grant land in their name without first obtaining a permission from the king. The smaller feudatories could not make any change in the administration of their property without the king's permission. Abiding by his oath of loyalty, a feudatory was required to pay an annual tribute and to help the king with a specified number of troops whenever called for, the failure of which was regarded as a serious offence.

### Relations with the hill tribes

Some of the neighboring hill tribes owed allegiance to the Kamarupa kings, whereas those of the interior remained independent. On the whole, it appears that the hill people were left to themselves who had their own systems of administration.

### Relation with neighbouring kingdoms

The Kamarupa kings had diplomatic relations with the contemporary neighbouring kingdoms. The famous alliance between Bhaskaravarman and Harshvardhan brought through the instrumentality of Hamsavega was itself a high water-mark of ancient Kamarupi diplomacy.

The Rajatarangini mentions the alliance between Meghavahana and the king of Kamarupa through the marriage of the latter's daughter Amritaprabha to the Kashmir king. In a similar way Kamarupa was tied to Nepal in the 8th century through the marriage of Harshadeva's daughter Rajyamati to the Nepal king Jayadeva II. Similarly, Purandarapala's marriage with a princess of the extreme north-eastern region served the purpose of a diplomatic alliance. Indrapala's queen Rajyadevi was a Rashtrakuta princess and this matrimonial alliance had an important bearing on Indrapala's successful military exploits against Gauda and led to close cultural contact between Kamarupa and Dravida.

There were diplomatic relations with Tibet and China as well. Princess Amritaprabha took to Kashmir a Tibetan Buddhist monk who had been staying in her father's court. Kalyanavarman, who may be identified with King Yu Chai of Chinese sources, sent a diplomatic mission to China in 428 AD. Bhaskaravarman's concern about the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang's visit to Kamarupa was determined as much by diplomatic interest as by religious learnings.

## Social Division

The society in Pragjyoitisha-Kamarupa rested largely but loosely on the Varnasrama dharma. The Brahmanas occupied a position of higher prestige in the society. In their bid to spread Aryanism via the Varnasrama dharma, the Kamarupi kings adopted a systematic policy of establishing agrahara settlements for Brahmanas in the midst of the non-Aryan people. The Brahmanas tried to instill into the hearts of the people of the area a reverence for the king and thus helped to strengthen the royal power. They also opened new areas of settlement and helped in the growth of production by their knowledge of agriculture and animal husbandry.

The Assamese society in the ancient days, as it has always been, was predominantly a non-Aryan society. The Brahmanic mission had apparently confronted stiff opposition from the non-Aryans and had to make large-scale compromises in course of time. As a result, strict observance of caste rules and the practices of untouchability failed to strike deep roots in this land.

## Position of Women

Women in upper class homes were expected to be socially accomplished and some sort of education was provided to them. The Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeya informs us that its prasasti was composed by Brahmana Monoratha in conjunction with his wife Padma. Sculptures of the period portray women as playing on musical instruments and dancing. The purdah system was probably unknown and the Tezpur grant of Vanamala indicates that women even took their bath in the open. There is no mention of the practice of Sati in the epigraphs or local literature of ancient Assam. Child marriage was prevalent among the Brahmanas and the Kayasthas and widow-remarriage was common among other classes. Inter-caste marriage was not rare among the lower classes and polygamy was almost a universal practice. On the whole, women enjoyed greater freedom from male-domination among certain sections of the people who were less under the Aryan influence or were non-Aryans. Epigraphs and literature depict the life of the city damsels, courtesans and devadasis or temple girls.

## Religion

Kamarupa came into contact with Vedic culture in very early times. The Kamarupa kings' policy of establishing Brahmanas in different parts of the country led to rapid expansion of Vedic culture and conversion of the non-Aryans to hinduism. In their efforts to assimilate the non-Aryans, the Aryans had to radically change their own cultural outlook so much so that the Vedic culture also acquired new forms and flourished with the addition of new deities to its pantheon together with the adoption of religious myths and cults of the non-Aryans.

The **worship of Siva** in Assam has a remote antiquity. That Siva was also worshipped in various forms is confirmed not only by literature but by extensive ruins of temples and his numerous icons found throughout the State.

Ancient Assam was an important centre of **Sakti worship**. The temple of Kamakhya on the Nilachala hill is a famous Sakta shrine in India. Another noted centre of Devi worship was the temple of Tamreswari at Sadiya, where the goddess in her Kesai Khaiti form was propitiated with sacrifices even of human beings.

**Sun worship** also prevailed in Assam from very early times which is proved by literature and architectural remains. The very name 'Pragjyotisha' points to the antiquity of the cult. According to Taranatha, before the introduction of Buddhism, the people of Kamarupa were sun-worshippers. There are remains of a sun-temple at Sri Suryya pahar in Goalpara. The recent architectural findings at malinithan in the lower Siang district of Arunachal contain beautiful images of the Sun-god.

**Vaishnavism** was established in Assam at a time when sun-worship and Brahmanical culture made considerable progress. Pragjyotisha had long been associated with Vishnu worship. Naraka traced his descent from the Boar incarnation of Vishnu. Vishnu as Hayagriva is still worshipped in Assam in the temple of hayagriva madhava at Hajo.

Some scholars think that Kamarupa remained outside the pale of **Buddhistic faith**, but there were evidences to show that the faith existed even before the visit of hiuen Tsang to the land. Kamarupa was a stronghold of **Vajrayana** of Tantrik Buddhism and most of the Vajrayana siddhas are associated with this land.

Apart from these major cults, there were such other religious practices as the worship of minor deities like Ganesa, kartikeya, indra, Agni, Kubera and manasa are there. There is, however, no evidence of any major conflicts between the civil authority and the adherents of various cults in Assam during the period.

## Art and architecture:

Epigraphs and literature speak of the construction of numerous temples dedicated to various deities by the kamarupa kings but not a single of these early edifices exist today in its original condition.

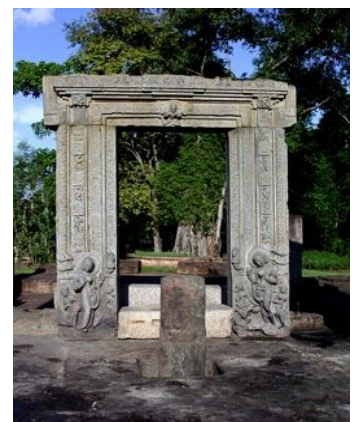
The materials used for their construction were stone, brick and clay. The existing remains include architecture and fortifications, sculptured designs, icons and a few specimens of painting.

A close examination of these remains reveals parallels between kamarupi art and the art of Bihar, Orissa, Bengal, Central and Southern India, Sri Lanka and even distant places like Java. there lies in Dah-Parvatiya in

Evidences revealed that the sculptural art of Assam was started from the Gupta time. The Daparbatia temple of 5th-6th century A. D was the earliest example of the sculptural art of Assam. The carving door frame bears the characteristic feature of the early Gupta School of sculpture

### Da-Parvatiya

Located in the village of Dah Parbatia which is few kilometres west of the city of Tezpur in Assam, Da-Parbatia Temple is one of the oldest Hindu temples in Assam. The door's framework with the stunning carvings and imprints, which are believed to be the part of the architecture patterns famous during the early Gupta School of sculpture. The door jambs of Da Parbatia Temple are ornamented with the figurines of 2 Hindu mythological Goddesses, Ganga and Yamuna, who are seen standing with grace and dignity and have garlands in their hands as a sign of welcoming people inside the temple.



### Deopahar / Deopani



The literary evidences mentioned that a local art style, which was known as Deopani School of Art, was developed between late 7th century A. D – 8th century A. D. in Kamrupa. This group of sculptures came to be focused for the first time at the place, Deopani, Golaghat of Assam. The Deopani sculptures retained the characteristic features of the last phase of Gupta classical style. The classical features like transparent drapery, limited jewellery, drooping eyelids, finely polished body were found in this new style. Besides, sculptures were carved out on black sand stone. Some other characteristic features such as the round face with thick lips, broad and pointed nose, long ears, broad forehead, long hair and

thick eye brows, and broad shoulder are illustrated.

### Akshaiganga

Remains of about three temples exist at Akashiganga Archaeological Site. One of the shafts of the pillars from the site show design resembling the Chalukyan style.



### Gosaijuri

Stone pieces from Gosaijuri in Nogaon showing yavanika and other designs are similar to the art of southern India and even of Sri Lanka.

### Madan Kamdev

Sculptural evidences showed that sculptural representations of dance and erotic postures of Madan Kamdeva temple are very similar to the sculptures of Khajuraho.



### Haygriva Madhav Temple

It is a stone temple and it enshrines an image of Hayagriva Madhava. The Kalika Purana composed in the 11th century CE in Kamarupa talks about the origin of this form of Vishnu and his final establishment in the hill of Monikut. The present temple structure was constructed by the King Raghudeva Narayan in 1583. According to some historians the King of Pala Dynasty constructed it in 10th century. Some Buddhist believe that the Hayagriva Madhava temple, best known in the group of Hindu temples, is where the Buddha attained Nirvana.

A most striking feature of the temple is the continuous row of elephants carved on the lowest level of the temple walls - a structure akin to the stone cut temple of Ellora.



The non Aryan influence on Assamese art is clearly visible in the ruins from places like Dimapur, Sadiya, Nogaon, Deopani etc. the icons of different deities in their different forms made of different materials familiarise us with the utmost degree of technical and artistic skills of the ancient Assamese artist and craftsment.

### Paintings

Little is known about paintings in ancient Assam. There are, however, vague references in the epigraphs to realistic pictures and beautiful portraits on the rooms of the palace. Bana also speaks of different kinds of Kamarupi paintings. We have only one specimen in the Guakuchi plates of king Indrapala which belongs to this period.

## MEDIEVAL ASSAM HISTORY

With the fall of the Palas in the early part of the 12th century, the powerful kingdom of Kamarupa disintegrated. A class of officeres entrusted with the assessment of revenue of certain areas under the old administration became powerful land-lords and exercised important political powers. They called themselves "Bhuyans" and often behaved as kings. There a line of kings exercised power till about the middle of the 13th century, after which the Bhuyans gradually rose to power.

The early part of the 13th century saw two major events in the history of Assam: one was the beginning off a series of invasions from the wwest led by the Turko-Afghan rulers of Bengal and the other was the foundation of a kingdom by the Tai-Shans, who came to known as Ahoms in the south-eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley.

### Invasion of Muhammad-bin-Bakhtiyar Khalji (1205-06)

The account of the expedition is based on that given in Tabaquat-i-Nasiri by Minhajudding Siraj. Muhammad-bin-Bakhtiyar Khalji, was the governor of Bihar under Qutb-ud-din Aibak, the ruler of the possessions of Muhammad of Ghor in India. In 1202 AD, Bakhtiyar occupied Lakhnauti (Bengal) without facing any resistance and three years later he launched a campaign of territorial expansion to the east with his eyes fixed on the distant countries like China, Tibet or Turkestan. Starting from Devkot towards the close of the winter of 1205 AD, he proceeded with an army of 10 to 12 thousand well equipped horsemen.

He managed to get the services of a Mech chief whom he converted to the Islamic faith and christened as Ali Mech. under his guidance, Bakhtiyar marched through a country inhabited by the Koch, Mech and Tharo tribes. He then crossed a stone bridge over a river with 29 arches of hewn stone on it, and soon entered the hills. Presumably one Prithu was the king of Kamarupa at that time who can be identified with king Viswasundaradeva of the Gachtal inscription.

Bakhtiyar continued his march in great straits from 16 days, until at last, he embarked on a populous and well-cultivated plain. His soldiers started plundering the village, at which the inhabitants offered stubborn resistance to Bakhtiyar who was then compelled to retreat. This retreat was disastrous. The road to the rearward of the invading army had been blocked, food-supplies cut off and the Kamrupi soldiers soon fell upon the retreating host. A large number of them were killed or captured. With untold hardships, Bakhtiyar reached the stone-bridge and, to add to his misery, he discovered that it was made impassable by having two of its piers removed. Bakhtiyar then took shelter in a temple in the vicinity, but the king of Kamarupa besieged him right there and constructed a bamboo palisade around the temple. Bakhtiyar however, broke through the palisade and made a desperate attempt to cross the river by fording, in the course of which hundreds of his soldiers met a watery grave. Bakhtiyar, with a few of his best mounted soldiers, managed to reach the opposite bank and to return to Devkot but only to die soon afterwards.

Kanai Barasi Rock of North Gauhati records -

***"On the 13th of Chaitra, in the Saka year 1127, the Turks coming into Kamarupa were destroyed".***

## Invasion of Ghiyasuddin Iwaz Khalji (1227)

Ghiyasuddin Iwaz Khalji, the governor of Bengal under the Delhi Sultan Iltutmish. He led the second expedition to Kamarupa in 1227 AD. From the Gachal inscription it is learnt that Iwaz advanced as far as Nogaon. In the meantime, Iltutmish's son Nasiruddin invaded Bengal. Hearing the news, Iwaz hurried back to Bengal, but he was defeated and put to death.

Nasiruddin then ruled over Bengal and during this period he killed Prithu and placed his successor Sandhya on the throne on the condition of paying annual tribute.

## Invasion of Tughril Khan

Soon after Nasiruddin's death, Sandhya stopped the payment of tribute and became independent. He formed an alliance with the Chutiya king of eastern Assam through wedding ties. He occupied certain portions of Gauda and assumed the title Gaudeswara. Tughril Khan, governor of Bengal marched against him in 1257 AD. Sandhya, without offering any resistance, fled away and Tughril Khan became the master of the city.

Meanwhile, Tughril Khan rejected a peace proposal offered by the Kamarupa king. Finally, the Kamarupa king created an artificial flood by cutting out the dykes all around during the spring harvest season. This created havoc in the Muslim camp and Tughril Khan started a retreat. The king of Kamarupa then came out of his place of resort and attacked the retreating army. The Sultan was killed and his army defeated. Only a few escaped to Bengal.

Sandhya shifted his capital from Kamarupanagar to Kamatapur near the present town of Cooch Behar. Thenceforth the Kamarupa king assumed the title Kamateswara or Kameswara.

The rulers in succession of Sandhya were Sindhu Rai, Rup Narayan and Singhadhvaj. Later Singhadhvaj was killed by his minister Pratapdhvaj.

## Dharmanarayan and Durlabnarayan

At the death of Pratapdhvaj, the throne was seized by his cousin Dharmanarayan. His right to the throne was challenged by Durlabhnarayan, the son of the deceased king and therefore, the legal claimant to it. At last a peace was concluded, according to which the kingdom was divided between them, Durlabhnarayan taking the northern and eastern parts along with the city of Kamatapur and Dharmanarayan retaining the rest which included Rangpur and Mymensingh. This partition probably took place in about 1330 AD.

After the conclusion of the treaty, Dharmanarayan sent, at the request of Durlabhnarayan, 14 families of learned Brahmanas and Kayasthas to the latter's kingdom, with Kayastha Chandivar, the great - great - grandfather of Sankardeva as the leader. Durlabhnarayan (1330-50) gave Chandivar the title *Devidasa* and also lands to settle at a place called Bordowa. Durlabhnarayan of Kamatapur was a great patron of learning.

The famous Assamese poets - Harihar Vipra, Ram Saraswati (popularly known as Kaviratna Saraswati) and Hema Saraswati adorned his court.

**Note:**

*Hema Saraswati - Prahlad Charit, Hara-Gauri-Sambad (a version of [Kumarasambhavam](#) by Kalidasa).*

*Ram Saraswati - Jayadratha Vadha*

*Harihar Vipra - Babrubahanar Yudha, Lava-Kushar Yudha, Tamradwajar Yudha*

## Invasion by Sikandar Shah (1362)

Durlabhnarayan was succeeded by his son Indranarayan. It was probably during his reign that Sultan Sikandar Shah led an expedition to Assam. The army overcoming the resistance offered by Indranarayan proceeded as far as Kapili valley in the Nogaon district. The initiative of offering resistance to the Sultan appears to be taken by some Bhuyans. But in the meantime, having received the news of the attack of Bengal by his overlord Firoz Shah Tughlaq of Delhi, Sikandar Shah hurried back to his domain.

### Arimatta

Indranarayan's inability to resist the Muslims paved the way for the rise of the Bhuyans. One of them, Arimatta or Sasanka, became so ambitious that he killed Indranarayan and usurped the throne of Kamata. There are varied accounts and numerous conflicting legends concerning Arimatta but it is certain that he was originally the son of a Bhuyan, possibly in the district of Darrang. A skilled warrior, Arimatta rose to power after defeating a number of petty Bhuyans and finally, became the king of Kamata. Arimatta's rule of about twenty years may be placed between c. 1365-85 AD.

The insignificant successors of Arimatta ruled one after another till the middle of the 15th Century.

## Khen line of kings and invasion of Hussain Shah

During the weak rule of the successors of Arimatta, disorder and confusion prevailed in the kingdom. Everywhere the Bhuyans became independent, styled themselves as Rajas, entered into mutual clash for supremacy in the region. At last one Niladhvaj Khen uniting the strength of several Bhuyans, established his authority over the whole Kamata. The dynasty founded by Niladhvaj was called Khen dynasty which had three kings only, ruling from the middle of the 15th century till Alauddin Hussain Shah's expedition in 1498 AD.

Niladhvaj succeeded by his son Chakradhaj. Bengal sultan Barbak Shah led an expedition to Kamata, but was defeated by the Kamata ruler. On the death of Chakradvaj, his son Nilambar ascended the throne of Kamata. Nilambar occupied the north-eastern part of Bengal. Soon after his accession to the throne, the Bengal Sultan Alauddin Hussain Shah led a campaign on a grand scale against the king of Kamata with a view to recovering the lost possessions of Bengal. They destroyed the city, captured Nilambar and took him to Gauda, who, however, subsequently escaped. The adjoining territory upto hajo was annexed to the domain of the Sultan. This is the first success of the Muslims in the history of medieval Assam. The Sultan set up his son Daniel as the ruler of Kamata.

The Buranjis also mention the names of Masandar Ghazi, Kalu Dewan and Sultan Ghiyasuddin, who were possibly other generals of Alauddin Hussain Shah. **Ghiyasuddin** is said to have built a mosque at Hajo and

was buried near it. He had been exalted to the position of a saint by the local Muslims, who consider this place as **Poa-Mecca** (one-fourth of Mecca) and they still visit it to pay their homage to the saint.

But the rule of the Muslims was short lived. The Bhuyans made a united attack on Daniel's garrison and destroyed it to the last man. With the overthrow of Nilambar the rule of the Khen kings of Kamata came to an end. The kingdom again passed on to the rule of the Bhuyans till the rise of the Koches in about 1515 AD.

## The Chutiyas and their kingdom

Amongst numerous kingdoms in the upper Brahmaputra valley, which emerged following the extinction of the Palas, those of the Chutiyas and the Kacharis were the most powerful. The Chutiyas ruled in the country bounded on the west by the river Sisi, a tributary of the Suvansiri, on the east by the Brahmakunda, on the north by the hills and on the south by the river Burhi Dihing.

Birpal, who was originally the head of sixty Chutiya families, was the founder of Chutiya kingdom. He claimed his descent from a legendary king named Bhismak.

Birpal's son and successor Gaurinarayan, or Ratnadhvajpal was one of the most powerful of the Chutiya kings. Soon after his accession to the throne, he subjugated the neighbouring hill chiefs. He established his capital at Ratanpur on the north bank of the Brahmaputra and assumed the name Ratnadhvajpal. Ratnadhvajpal was also a good administrator and a patron of fine arts. He consolidated the conquered territories and built a line of forts, along the foot of the hills to check the inroads of the bordering hill tribes. He dug large tanks and built many temples.

After consolidating his power, Ratnadhvajpal sent an embassy to the Kamateswara, evidently Sandhya, asking him his daughter to give in marriage to a Chutiya prince, Vijaydhvajpal. But the Kamata king refused. Ratnadhvajpal then embarked upon an invasion of Kamata and the Kamateswara being terrified by the strength of the Chutiya army, made peace with him and offered his daughter to the Chutiya prince.

Ratnadhvajpal had very cordial relations with the ruler of Gauda. He sent one of his sons to Gauda for higher education. Unfortunately the Chutiya prince died there. The corpse was sent to Ratnadhvajpal, who was then engaged in building a city at Sindhukshetra on the bank of the Kundil river, where it was cremated. From that time onward the place came to be known as Sadiya, where the permanent capital of the Chutiyas seems to grow up.

The last powerful ruler of the Chutiya kingdom was Dhirmarayan or Dharmadhvajpal, whose son Sadhaknarayan was a minor at the time of his death. Therefore, Dhirmarayan was succeeded by his son-in-law Nitipal, a commoner by birth, who had married the Chutiya princess Sadhani by winning a marriage archery contest. Nitipal was the last ruler of Chutiya kingdom. During his rule, Chutiya kingdom was annexed to Ahom Kingdom by Suhungmung in 1523 AD.

## The Kacharis and their Kingdom

In the beginning of the 13th century, when the Ahoms appeared on the political scene of Assam, the Kacharis were the most important and organised tribe with their kingdom extending from the river Dikhou in the east to the Kapili in the west and covering the present district of North Cachar in the south.

The Kacharis have no written records of their rule. According to certain traditions, there were two branches of Kacharis, one ruling at Sadiya and the other on the south bank of the Brahmaputra with capitals at Dimapur, Maibong and Khaspur. The southern branch of the Kacharis claimed their descent from Ghatotkacha, son of Bhima, through the Kachari princess Hedamba or Hidimba. As for the Sadiyal Kacharis their identity is not fully established.

The Kacharis are known under different names in different places throughout north-east India. In Goalpara and North Bengal they are called Mech and in North Cachar Hills Dimasa. In the Brahmaputra valley, the Kacharis call themselves Bodo or Bodo-fisa.

The first encounter of the Kacharis with the Ahoms took place about the end of the 15th century. The Ahoms were defeated and compelled to sue for peace. This humiliation was fully retaliated by Suhungmung or the Dihingia Raja, who inflicted a crushing defeat on the Kacharis in 1526 AD and made them feudatory to the Ahoms. Thenceforth the Kachari kings were called thapita sancita of the Ahoms. But soon afterwards, the Kacharis revolted against the Ahoms who led an army to subdue the rebels, killed their king and took possession of their capital city Dimapur. The Kacharis then moved downwards and established their headquarters at Maibang on the bank of the Mahur river, but the Ahom kings did not refrain from considering the Kacharis as being in virtual subordination. The Kacharis were conquered by the Koches in 1562 and Kamalnayan, popularly known as Gosain Kamal, who was another brother of Naranayan, the Koch king, was appointed governor of Cachar. This had stopped Ahom intervention in Kachari affairs as the Ahoms also by that time had become tributary to the Koches. However following the defeat of the Koches in Bengal (1567-68), the rulers of the north-eastern states reasserted their independence.

## The Koch kingdom

The progenitor of the Koch royal family was one Haria Mandal, a resident of the village Chikanagram in the Khuntaghat pargana in the Goalpara district. He was the chief of the twelve leading Koch or Mech families of that area. Haria Mandal's son Bisu was a great warrior. He organised the strength of his tribe and rose to power in about 1515 AD. It is said that he took 12 years to subjugate the neighbouring Bhuyans, after which he declared himself king in 1527 AD. His kingdom was called Koch Behar with its capital at Kamatapur. Bisu assumed the title Biswa Singha.

Biswa Singha's contemporary Ahom king was Suhungmung or the Dihingia Raja (1497-1539). The territorial expansion of the Koches towards the east and that of the Ahoms towards the west was sure to lead to a direct confrontation of the two powers sooner or later. But since, meanwhile, the Muslims launched their expeditions to the Ahom kingdom, both the Koches and the Ahoms had to be on the alert against the advancing Muslims. The Ahoms finally defeated the Muslim army and pursued the retreating army right up to the Karatoya, which marked the western boundary of Biswa Singha's kingdom. On their way back, the Ahom army under

Chankham Bargohain is said to have attacked Biswa Singha, who made his submission on promise of Becoming tributary to the Ahoms.

Sometimes later, Biswa Singha, however, dishonoured the terms of agreement with the Ahom king. By this time, Biswa Singha fully consolidated his conquests and brought under his control the vassal chiefs of Dimarua, Beltola, Rani Luki, Darrang etc. thus strengthened, he proceeded with a huge army against the Ahoms, but had to retreat owing to shortage of provisions and difficulties of transport. Biswa Singha died in 1540 AD.

## Naranarayan

At the time of Biswa Singha's death his two elder sons, Malladev and Sukladvaj, were away from the kingdom at Benaras prosecuting their studies there. Taking advantage of the situation Nara Singha, another son of the deceased king, usurped the throne. When the news reached Malladev and Sukladvaj, they hastened to their kingdom, raised an army and defeated Nara Singha.

After expelling Nara Singha, Malladev became king and assumed the name Naranarayan. He made his brother Sukladvaj his commander-in-Chief, who was also given a new name, Sangram Singha. Sukladvaj was so skilled and swift in military operations that he was nicknamed **Chilarai** or the 'Kite King', by which name he is generally known in history.

The Ahom rulers Suklenmung or Gargayan Raja and Sukhapha or Khora Raja were contemporary of Naranarayan. Ahoms were defeated by the Koch kingdom during the rule of Naranarayan. Ahom king proposed terms of peace. The Koches accepted the proposal on the following conditions and Ahoms acknowledgement of the Koch suzerainty. After subjugating the Ahom kingdom, the Koches turned their attention towards Hidimbapur, the kingdom of the Kacharis. The Kachari king submitted without giving any battle. Messengers were then sent to the Raja of Manipur calling on him to submit and offer tribute, which the latter did without any protest. The victorious Koch king and the general, his brother, went on conquering the rest of the neighbouring states one after another. They also led an expedition to the kingdom of Jayantiya and the Jayantiya Raja was killed by the Koch general himself. Chilarai then moved against Tripura with a huge army and defeated and subsequently killed its king. The king of Sylhet is also said to have been defeated and slain by the Koch general.

The Koch army thus conquered the whole of the north-eastern India within a brief period of about 4 years (1662-65). It is to be noted that the Koches did not annex these conquered territories, but were satisfied to secure their allegiance and tributes.

Elated with the repeated success in the east, the Koches next turned towards the west, to the kingdom of Gauda (1567-68). In the first expedition, Chilarai was taken prisoner. However, he was later rescued by the Koch army under Naranarayan. In course of his second expedition against Gauda, Chilarai was attacked by small-pox and died on the bank of the Ganges sometime between 1572-75. He had a son named Raghudev. After Chilarai's death, there was no more wars in the Koch kingdom for several years. Naranarayan was childless till late in life and therefore, it was believed that Raghudev would succeed him. but, in his advanced age, Naranarayan was blessed with a son named Lakshminarayan. This created suspicion in Raghudev's mind. The peace-loving Naranarayan preferred dividing the kingdom to going on war against his own nephew. Accordingly he made over to Raghudev the territories east of the Sonkosh and retained the western part of the

kingdom for himself and his descendants. On his part, Raghudev agreed to acknowledge the suzerainty of his unce, pay him tribute and stike coins only in the latter's name. This had happened in 1581. The eastern part of the kingdom came to known as Koch Hajo and the western part Koch Behar.

This dismemberment greatly weakened the power of the Koches. However, as long as naranarayan was alive, he could check the evil effects of the partition. With his death in 1587, discord and rivalry overpowered the two royal houses and the glory and power of the Koches disappeared.

Naranarayan was not only the greatest of the Koch kings but also one of the most remarkable rulers o north eastern India. Naranarayan rebuilt the tmeple of Kamakhya with bricks in 1565. But Naranarayan's name has bere been celebrated in the cultural history of Assam more as the patron of the neo-Vaishnavite movement than for anything else. Sankaradeva, a subject of the Ahom kingdom who started this movement failed to get wupport from the Ahom government and, therefore, moved to the Koch kingdom for shelter and support. It is under the patronage of the Koch government that he founded the institute of Satra in ouder to propagate his teachings.

Naranarayan has been styled as Assam's Vikramaditya. His court was adorned with scholars of varied branches of learning. Apart from Sankaradeva and Madhvdeva there were Prurshottam Vidyabagish, who compiled a grammar, Ram Saraswati, who made valuable renderings o the Mahabharata, Ananta Kandali, the translator of the Bhagavata, Sridhar and Bakul Kayastha, who made Assamese renderings respectively of astrological works and of Arithmetic by Lilawati in verse.

Welfare activities also received equal attention from Naranarayan. Anumber of roads were built and trees were planted along them in traditional style. The most famous of these roads was the Gohain Kamal Ali, from Koch Behar to narayanpur in the present Lakhimpur district, constructed by his another brother Gohain Kamal. Ralph Fitch, a Portuguese traveller visited the Koch kingdom during his reign.

## Ahoms

### Sukapha - Rise of the Ahoms

The Ahoms are the members of the Shan branch of great Tai or Thai family of South-East Asia. it appears that, as a result of a dispute with one of his brothers, Sukapha left his homeland MongMao in about 1215 AD to seek his fortune elsewhere. As Sukapha moved towards the patkai via the Hukong valley, he reduced to submission the local tribes found along the road. In 1228 he reached Namrup and subsequently Tipam, where he had his first headquarters. He took 13 years to subjegate the war-like tribes who inhabited the region extending from the hukong valley to the Patkai range. He finally settled at Charaideo in 1253. Thus Charaideo became the first Ahom capital.

In his administration, Sukapha was assisted by two counsellors or ministers appointed from amongst the nobles. They were called **Burhagonain and Borgohain**. When Sukapha reached the Brahmaputra valley in 1228, he ordered his chroniclers to keep record of all events. This was the glorious beginning of the history writing in Assam.

Sukapha was a person of relentless energy, indomitable courage, rare foresight and diplomatic skill. He knew the master art of dealing with the tribes and harnessing their strength to his advantage. He always first proceeded with peace proposals and if peace-overtures failed, then only he applied force, but when he applied it, it was terrifyingly exemplary, which sometimes went to the extent of compelling a person to eat the flesh of his own son.

Sukapha came not as a raiding conqueror but as the head of an agricultural folk in search of land. It appears that he did not encroach upon the lands of the local peasants, rather he opened up new areas for settlement, procuring with shrewd diplomacy what he direly needed for the purpose - the services of the local inhabitants. He organised feasts and invited them to dine with him and sought their co-operation in friendly terms. He moved and lived amongst the tribesmen, learnt their languages, honoured their religious rites, married their daughters and led the simple life of a commoner, himself cultivating the land. He accepted them to his social fold, placed them on an equal footing with his own men and treated them as his friend.

Sukapha died in 1268. He was succeeded by his son Suteupha (1268-81), who extended the western boundary of the Ahom kingdom to the river Namdang. From the reign of Subinpha (1281-93) to that of Supinpha (1493-97) covering a long period of more than two hundred years no extension of territory was made by the Ahoms.

### Sudangpha or Bamuni Konwar (1397-1407)

The next important Ahom king was Sudangpha, better known as Bamuni Konwar, as he was born and brought up in the house of a Brahman. When he usurped the throne, he took with him his Brahmana foster-father who was allowed to stay with him in the palace entourage. With the Brahmana came the worship of Lakshmi - Narayana - Salagram, or of god Vishnu - the first official entrance of Hinduism to the Ahom court. The worship of Vishnu continued along with the Ahom deity Chom-Cheng (Chomdeo).

The reigns of the five immediate successors of Sudangpha were mainly spent on suppressing the rising of the rebellious Naga tribes.

### Suhungmung (1497-1539)

In 1497, Suhungmung became the king, whose reign marks another new epoch in the political and cultural history of the Ahoms. Suhungmyng was popularly called the Dihingia Raja, as he shifted his capital to Bakata on the bank of the Dihing. He assumed the hindu title Swarganarayan. He had also adopted the Saka era in place of the Ahom system of calculation by cycle of 60 years. It was during his reign that the first buranji in Assamese entitled *Sri Sri Swarganarayan Maharajar Janma Katha* was written, wherein the Ahoms were assigned the origin from the Aryan god Indra.

In 1513, a border dispute led to a clash between the Ahoms and the Chutiyas. In 1523, the last ruler of Chutiya Kingdom Nitipal (Chandranarayan) was speared to death and his head was buried under the footsteps to the temple of Charaideo. Soon after the Chutiya king had fallen into the hands of the Ahoms, his queen **Sadhani**, who preferred death to rurrender, committed suicide by throwing herself from the top of the Chandangiri hill. The victory over the Chutiyas was celebrated by the Ahom king by performing the **Rikkhvan** ceremony. The

whole Chutiya territory was then annexed to the Ahom kingdom and an officer called **Sadiyakhowa Gohain** was appointed to administer it. The first incumbent to this office was **Phrasenmung**.

Suhungmung wanted to expand the Ahom power towards the west, and therefore, a conflict with the Kacharis became inevitable. Applying both diplomacy and force, Suhungmung acquired from the Kacharis all the plains territory upto the river Dhansiri in 1531, but allowed them to enjoy their autonomy. In 1536, the kacharis, in a bid to regain their independence, revolted against the Ahoms. Their king Detchung was caught and beheaded and the whole of Dhansiri valley along with the Kachari possessions upto the Kalang river were annexed to the Ahom kingdom. The administration of this tract was placed under a new officer called **Marangikhowa Gohain**.

In 1532, the general from Bengal Turbak Khan invaded Assam. He was a very efficient general and the Ahoms took three years to defeat him finally. This conflict with the army of Turbak khan cost the lives of eight Ahom commanders, including the general Phrasenmung. The Buranjis narrate that on hearing the death of Phrasenmung, his valiant wife, Mula Gabharu, herself proceeded to the battle-field on elephant back along with five other women and died fighting against Turbak. After defeating the Muslims, the victorious Ahom army pursued after the retreating Muslim soldiers as far as the Karatoya. Suhungmung sent a peace mission to the Orissan ruler Vikramasena (Prataprudra). The mission offered worship to the Jagannath temple and excavated a tank nearby. The peace, no doubt, had a political motive of forming an alliance between Assam and Orissa against Muslim expansion in the east. On their return journey, the Ahom army secured the submission of the newly grown Koch power.

### Suklenmung (1539 - 53)

Suhungmung met his death in 1539 as a result of a conspiracy hatched by his eldest son Suklenmung who was highly dissatisfied with his father's disgraceful act of marrying the daughter of a *Sonari* (goldsmith) and making her his chief queen.

Suklenmung was popularly called the Garhgayan Raja, as he made Garhgaon his capital. This king consolidated his father's conquests, the territories of the Chutiyas and the Kacharis.

Suklenmung disfavoured the idea of having both Chon-cheng and Lakshmi-Narayan deities representing two different faiths in the palace. He, therefore, installed the deity of Chom Cheng in a separate temple outside the palace but within the palace campus. This indicates the growing preponderance of Hinduism in the Ahom court.

### Sukhampha (1553 - 1603)

Suklenmung's son and successor Sukhampha was also called Khora Raja or the lame king, as he while hunting on an elephant before his accession to the throne, had one of his feet hurt.

His soldiers sustained defeat at the hands of the Koches in the battles fought at the mouths of the Dikhou and the handia rivers in 1562, and subsequently concluded peace with the Koches on most humiliating terms.

Meanwhile, the Koches suffered a defeat at the hands of the Padshah of Gaur, and their general Chilarai was imprisoned. This had greatly diminished the Koch power and the Koch king was anxious for a peaceful alliance

with the Ahoms to avert any future Muslim advancement. With that end in view, he released the Ahom hostages and sent a number of Koch artisans with them to the Ahom king. As a result of the contact with the Koches, the worship of goddess Durga penetrated to the Ahom kingdom.

## Pratap Singha (1603-41) : Ahom-Mughal Conflict

Sukhampha died in 1603. His successor Susengpha alias Pratap Singha (1603-41) was a very powerful and remarkable ruler. He was nicknamed Burha Raja for his accession at an advanced age. He was also called Buddhi Swarganarayana for his exceptional wisdom and intelligence.

After the death of Naranarayan, Koch Kingdom got divided into Koch Behar and Koch Hajo. The kingdom of Koch Behar was friendly with the Mughals since the days of Naranarayan and that of Kamrup had followed an anti-Mughal policy. Ruler of Koch Hajo, Parikshit (grandson of Chilarai), was defeated by the Mughals and he surrendered his kingdom to the Mughals. This annexation brought the Ahoms into direct clash with the Mughals. The main grounds for Ahom-Mughal friction were in boundary disputes and commercial relations. The conflict continued for twelve years with many reverses. This prolonged war exhausted their resources and both the parties desired for peace. Accordingly a treaty was concluded in **1639 (treaty of Asurar Ali)**, according to which, the Barnadi on the north bank of the Brahmaputra and the Asurar Ali, on the south, were fixed as the boundary between the Ahom and the Mughal territories.

Pratap Singha's reign is well known for works of social organisations. He introduced two new posts - **Barbarua** and **Barphukan** and appointed Mumai Tamuli and Langi Panisia to the posts respectively. It was he, who with Momai Tamuli as his Barbarua systematically introduced the **Paik System**.

### Paik or Khel system

Under the Khel or Paik system, every adult male between the age 16 to 50 was registered as a paik for State service. Four paiks (later three) formed a unit called got. The paiks in a got rendered service to the State in rotation, one paik serving for a period of three (later four) months a year. The cultivation or domestic concerns of the paik on duty was looked after by his comrades in a got. In times of emergency two, sometimes three, paiks were recruited from each got. Paiks were also organized into professional khels, each rendering a particular kind of productive work like boat-building and arrow-making for the State.

The control of the State over the paiks was very rigid. Over each twenty paiks there was an officer called Bara, over him was a Saikia commanding a hundred paiks. Then a Hazarika commanding a thousand paiks and then a Phukan commanding 6000 paiks.

The paiks, besides rendering their personal service to the state, had to fulfil some feudal obligations to their masters as well. For example, when called upon to do so, they were to cultivate the lands of their masters and had to offer them gifts on certain specific occasions. Being tied to a fixed khel or territory, they were not free to pursue independent trade and thereby to improve their material conditions. Their way of life was fixed by the state, which they had no right to alter. Only by paying a commutation of money of Rs 3/- per head per annum could a paik sometimes obtain exemption from personal service. In order to enjoy this privilege, some paiks borrowed money from the well-to-do and, unable to pay the debt, became bondsmen and consequently, slaves.

The paiks were broadly divided into two classes - kanri and chamua. The regular peasantry, which was bound to give its service to the State as a soldier in times of war and as a labourer in times of peace was called kanri paiks. Peasants of good birth or relative affluence were called chamua paiks. They could invariably enjoy exemption from personal State service by paying commutation money. They usually consisted of the dispossessed Bhuyans or landlords, the members of the Chutiya nobility, traders, artisans, scribes, etc.

Each paik in return for his service to the State was allotted two puras of best arable land called ga-mati, free of charge. The land, however, belonged to the khel and a paik. Who held his share of land, had no hereditary claim to it. Which was allotted to him only by the community.

## Mir jumla's Assam Campaign and the treaty of Ghilazharighat

The war of succession among the four sons of Emperor Shahjahan, which broke out in 1658, created great confusion in the Mughal empire. Shuja, the second son, the governor of Bengal, had to proceed with his troops for taking part in the war. His departure was immediately utilised by Pran Narayan, the king of Koch Behar, who not only assumed his independence but also occupied Goalpara and Kamrup.

The Assam king Jayadvaj Singha was also quick to take advantage of the situation and immediately sent an army to take possession of Gauhati. Jayadvaj Singha defeated the Koch and the whole territory from Barnadi to Sonkosh came under the Assam King. Hearing the news, Aurangzeb, who usurped the throne in 1658, sent Mir Jumla to restore the lost possessions. Mir Jumla set forth his invasion of Assam on January 4, **1662**.

Mir Jumla's soldiers had to fight at different places to make their way to Garhgaon. Ahom army was defeated in these battles. Under these circumstances, Jayadvaj king took to flight to Namrup (that is why he was called *Bhaganiya Raja*). Mughals occupied Gargaon.

No sooner had the Mughals consolidated their position than the monsoons set in, in a more serious form than in the previous years, carrying with it all its pestilences. Communication was blocked, food supplies cut off, soldiers were reduced to great straits and on top of all this, the Mughal general had to face a series of night attacks on their outposts from the Assamese side. Pressed, therefore, by circumstances, when Jayadvaj Singha offered for peace, Mir Jumla agreed to accept it. The terms of the treaty that followed were negotiated by Dilir Khan on the side of the Mughals and Atan Burhagohain on the side of the Assam king at **Ghilazharighat on January 22, 1663**. According to which the Assam king would offer his daughter to the Mughal harem (Nang Se or Ramani Gabharu was given in marriage to Azamtara, son of Aurangzeb), he would have to pay a huge war indemnity and an annual tribute of 20 elephants.

Jayadvaj Singha couldn't bear this humiliation and according to some accounts, this eventually led to his death in November 1663.

## Causes of defeat of the Assamese

- After the death of Pratap Singha and Momai Tamuli, Assam could not produce till then any worthy leader.
- Unlike Pratap Singha, Jayadvaj Singha failed to take various cross-sections of the people into confidence. The nobles instead of identifying themselves with the king, took advantage of the situation to fulfil their own interest.

- Jayadvaj Singha committed a blunder by appointing Manthir Bharali Barua, the officer in charge of the royal store, as the commander-in-chief of the army at lower Brahmaputra valley above the Barphukan, since this was a gross violation of the usual procedure of appointing military officers, according to which a junior officer was never allowed to supersede a senior one. The military officers stationed there, who took to it, a serious exception felt humiliated and declined to fight.
- Many from the Ahom's side defected the Ahoms. These betrayers from the Ahom camp divulged Ahom military secrets to Mir Jumla.

## Raja Ram Singha's expedition to Assam

Jayadvaj Singha left no male issue. He was therefore succeeded by his cousin, the Charing Raja, who on his accession, adopted the Hindu name **Chakradhvaj Singha** and the Ahom name Supungmung. Chakradhvaj Singha realised his predecessor's folly of not seeking help from the allied powers in the war against Mir Jumla. He, therefore, exchanged letters and greetings with the Rajas of Koch Behar, Jayantiya, Cachar and the hill states of kamrup and urged upon their help to fight the enemy. He had also strengthened his friendship with some border tribes like the Nagas, the miris and the Deoris.

Thus assured of help by the allied powers and having completed the necessary war-preparations, the king selected Lachit, the son of Momai Tamuli Barbarua, to command the expedition against the Mughals and appointed him the Borphukan. In August 1667, the Assamese army led by Lachit captured Gauhati. The news of the defeat of the Mughal soldiers and the loss of Gauhati reached Emperor Aurangzeb in December 1667 and he appointed Raja Ram Singh, son of mirza Raja Jay Singh of Amber to command the imperial army.

The Assamese were not yet fully prepared to resist the Mughals and Lachit was still busy in the construction of a rampart at Saraighat, along which to raise a blockade against the enemy. One unpublished buranji says that he appointed his own maternal uncle to supervise the work and asked him to have the remaining part of it completed within a single night. But in his surprise visit to the site, he found the soldiers asleep and the work unfinished. Unable to resist his rage, he slained his delinquent uncle with the epic utterance - "My uncle is not greater than my country." at his, the soldiers resumed their work and finished the construction of the rampart before the daybreak. The rampart, therefore, came to be known as *Momai Kata Garh*.

On the following day, the Mughal army reached near Saraighat, but they had to give up in the face of this invincible blockade, the idea of crossing the river to the south and decided to advance northward towards Darrang. Although in two battles fought on the way the Assamese suffered initial defeats, soon afterwards they overthrew the Mughals in a noval encounter and eventually Mughals had to retreat to Hajo.

## Battle of Alaboi

Ram Singh is said to have challenged Chakradhvaj Singha to a single combat and undertook in case of his defeat to return with his army to Bengal. The Assam king, in his turn, grew impatient and ordered his commanders to attack the Mughals immediately. The Mughals then concentrated their army near the Alaboi hill in the vicinity of Dalbari. There was a vast plain in front of the Mughal camp and the level lands touched the Brahmaputra on one side and the Sessa river on the other. Lachit Barphukan wanted to avoid an open encounter with the Rajput cavalry, but, by the king's order, he had to proceed. 10,000 Ahom soldiers were killed in this battle.

Soon after the battle of Alaboi, Chakradhvaj Singha died in 1669. He was succeeded by his brother, who in accession assumed the Hindu name **Udayaditya Singha** and the Aho name Sunyatpha (1669 - 73).

### **Battle of Saraighat (March 1671)**

Ram Singha advanced to Sitamari with a contingent of soldiers and sent another detachment to Darrand. The new king Udayaditya Singha also sent an army of 20,000 soldiers under Atan Burhagohain from Chamdhara to Saraighat. The Assamese then moored their boats at Aswakranta. The Barphukan was very ill at that time and this demoralised his soldiers. But the Barphukan who was watching the whole situation from his sick-bed at his archery store, witnessed the advance of the Mughal fleet from Juria to Aswakranta and the retreat of his soldiers soon after the battle started, and at this crucial moment, he, in spite of his illness, rushed into the thick of the Mughal fleet. He had with him six war-vessels. This unprecedented attack of the Barphukan restored the courage of the retreating Assamese soldiers who came back and fell upon the enemy. A terrible contest took place. The Mughals could not stand the "dash and fury of the Assamese onset." they suffered immense losses of men and materials and had to retreat with ignominy and disaster.

Lachit Barphukan did not long survive the battle of Saraighat. About one year after this battle, he breathed his last and was succeeded by his elder brother Nimati alias Laluk Sola as the Barphukan.

### **The period of political instability (1673 - 1681)**

#### **Rise of Debera Hazarika (Barbarua)**

Udayaditya Singha's younger brother hatched a conspiracy against him, and in league with Debera (alias Lechai) Hazarika, poisoned him to death. The fratricide, who then ascended the throne with the Ahom name Siklampha and Hindu name Ramdhvaj Singha, rewarded Debera with the post of Barbarua. At this time, Atan Burhagohain was away at Gauhati, fortifying the military outposts. Later he managed to cause Ramdhvaj Singha poisoned to death and his chief opponents arrested or killed. Then he placed a prince named Suhung on the throne. Debera did not spare any one suspected of challenging his authority and killed as many as fourteen princes. The new king could no longer tolerate the heinous acts of Debera and wanted to get rid of him. The result was that the king himself was assassinated after a short reign of 21 days only. Suhung was succeeded by Gobar.

Meanwhile, the works of fortification at Gauhati were complete and Atan Burhagohain and the Barphukan raised an army and marched against Debera. Debera was finally killed and so was Gobar.

#### **Rise of Atan Burhagohain**

The nobles and the officers requested Atan Burhagohain to become king, but the latter refused the offer stating that a minister could not become a king. At this, a descendant of Suhungmung, Sujinpha, was placed on the throne.

The Burhagohain now assumed all power. This created dissensions in the court between the supporters of the king and the Burhagohain, as a result of which the king was captured, extracted of his eyes and afterwards stoned to death. Sujinpha was succeeded by Sudaipha or Parvatiya Raja (owing to his residence at Charaideo Paravat). The Burhagohain, however, continued to be the de facto ruler who made and unmade the officers

according to his own sweet will. The deposed officers, who fled to Gauhati, reported to the Barphukan regarding the high-handedness of the Burhagonain.

### Rise of Laluk Sola (Nimati) Barphukan

Laluk Sola Barphukan entered into treasonable correspondences with the Mughals. Ramani Gabhoru's mother was Laluk Sola's elder sister. On the strength of this family relation, he appealed for Mughal help to make him the king of Assam, in return for which, he agreed to surrender Gauhati to the Mughals. The proposal was most welcome to prince Azamtara (Ramani Gabhoru's husband). By November 1679, Laluk Sola made himself master of the whole kingdom. King Sudaipah and Aton Burhagohain along with his sons were executed.

The Barphukan then brought in a fourteen year old prince name Saru Goahin. On his accession, the prince assumed the Ahom name Sulikpha and Hindu name Ratnadhvaj Singha. But he was better known as *Iora Raja*.

Laluk Sola gave a new orientation to the Ahom right of kingship by declaring that a prince having any physical deformity, nay, even for being pock-marked on the visible parts of the body would not be eligible to sit on the throne. In pursuance of this principle, he, under the orders of the king, is said to have killed or mutilated several hundred scions of the royal family.

### Episode of Jaymati

Laluk Sola Barphukan's main target of attack was Gadapani, son of Gobar, who ruled for 24 days during the Barbaruaship of Debera. Spies were sent out on foot to gather information of Gadapani, who had been roaming about incognito. Gadapani's pregnant wife jaymati was therefore brought to the court and interrogated, but she refused to say anything about her husband's whereabouts. She was then tortured to death at Jerenga pathar. This noble sacrifice of Jaymati for the cause of her husband and hence for her country is still held in great esteem by the Assamese.

Finally Laluk Sola Barphukan was killed and Gadapani usurped the throne with the Hindu name Gadadhar Singha in 1681. Gadapani became the founder of a long line of kings, who continued to rule till the close of the Ahom regime.

### Gadadhar Singha (1681-1696)

On ascending the throne, Gadadhar Singha set his mind on recovering Gauhati from the Mughals and lost no time to send a large army for the purpose. The Mughals retreated to Itakhuli, near Sukleswar in Gauhati. The Ahom army defeated the Mughals in the battle of Itakhuli in 1682 and the river manaha remained the boundary between Mughal India and the kingdom of Assam.

Then Gadadhar Singha turned his attention to the internal affairs of the kingdom where his main problem was to ensure the stability of the Ahom monarchy and to restore peace and order. To accomplish the first, it was necessary to put an end to the intrigues and conspiracies of the king makers so rife in the period prior to his accession, to curb the influence of the Vaishnava Gosains in the affairs of the State and to subdue the rebellious hill-tribes.

The Satras under royal patronage soon grew prosperous. The Satras had vast extent of land under their occupation, sometimes exceeding 30,000 puras of land and they enjoyed the service of several hundreds of paiks. The economic prosperity of some Satras became a matter of concern for the king. As a result of the greater extension of royal patronage to the Satras, the number of their disciples increased so greatly that offices of Phukan, Hazarika, Sikia, Bora etc. parallel to the pattern of the Ahom administrative set-up were introduced. Thus a state within a state had grown up and some Vaishnava Satradhikars transgressing their limit, began to interfere even with purely political matters of the kingdom. Such ominous development started threatening the prestige and power of the Ahom king.

Jayadvaj Singha granted the celibate disciples exemption from personal labour to the state. A large number of Vaishnava disciples falsely introduced themselves as kewaliya bhakats (celibate disciples) and claimed exemption from personal labour to the State. Gadadhar Singha also feared that the feudal forces let loose by the Neo-Vaishnavite movement would demolish in the near future the very system of exaction of compulsory manual labour, which had been the basis of the Ahom monarchy.

So many Satras were pillaged and their heads were either killed or banished to Namrup. Money was also extorted from the Medhis. The false Kewaliya Bhakats were forced to eat the flesh of swine, cows and fowls, robbed of their properties, and compelled to do manual labour. Some of them were mutilated and others were put to death, and a few were offered up as sacrifice to idols (Gadadhar Singha was a follower of Saktism). It is said that the Dhodar Ali, which is still existent, was built with the service of such convicted Vaishnava Bhakats.

Gadadhar Singha had a number of roads and bridges constructed and several tanks excavated. It was he, who first introduced the system of survey and measurement of land. The temple of Umananda on the Peacock island was built under his auspices. Thus, by patronising Saktism, Gadadhar Singha wanted to use religion as a weapon to fight those, who were on the side of the feudal forces rising against the system of virtual state slavery enforced through the Paik system.

However, at his death-bed, he advised his elder son - "Do not appoint persons of low social ranks in high offices. Do not trust persons with foreheads smeared with horizontal lines (the Sakta Brahmanas). Do not entertain the courtiers with female-dancers dancing to the tune of drums". It is also said that he suggested his son to reinstate all the Vaishnava Gosains and Mahantas deposed or persecuted by him. From this, it appears that Gadadhar Singha, at last, realised his own folly of making an alignment with the Sakta Brahmanas against the Vaishnava priests, whose sect had already become the people's religion.

## Rudra Singha (1696 - 1714): Climax of Ahom Power and Glory

Rudra Singha, following the words of his father decided to reinstate the Vaishnava Gosains and Mahantas. He resorted to a new policy of reducing the power of the Satradhikars. He brought them back and ordered that the Brahmana Gosains should have their headquarters on the majuli. He received the Auniati Gosain, who was the most influential of the Brahmana Satradhikars, as his religious preceptor. Soon he pursued a policy of divide and rule, so as to prevent an excessive accumulation of power in the hands of the Satradhikars, which he got materialised through the Synod of Garhgaon (1702). This synod debarred the Sudra Mahantas from initiating the Brahmanas. By this, Rudra Singha engineered a clash between the two parties attending the synod - the Brahmanas and the Sudra Mahantas.

Rudra Singha's inclination towards Sakta hinduism increased as he grew older and at last he decided formally to embrace that religion and become an orthodox hindu. For initiation, he summoned from Bengal a Sakta Brahmin priest, named Krishnaram Narayanvagish. But when the priest arrived, the king declined to become his disciple and asked him to go back. The return of the priest was followed by a severe earthquake, which was interpreted as due to the curse of the priest. Krishnaram was then called back, but the king died before having his initiation. He however, instructed his sons to accept the Bengali priest as their religious preceptor and establish him on the Nilahala hill, for which the latter came to be known as the Parvatiya Gosain.

Rudra Singha who was very much attached to each of his sons expressed his will from his death-bed that all of them should become kings in order of succession.

### Patronage of cultural Activities

The Kareng-ghar, a seven storied palatial building at Rangpur was built during the reign of Rudra Singha. He had also excavated the Jaysagar tank, the biggest of its kind in Assam and built a temple called Jaydaul, to commemorate his mother's name. Besides, he had several roads and bridges constructed including those over the Namdang and Dimau rivers. It is said that it was he, who, for the first time had the Bihu celebrated in the palace courtyard and organised varied performances for full seven days including competitions on different kinds of sports and games and cultural shows.

### Siva Singha (1714-1744)

Siva Singha was greatly influenced by Brahmana priests and astrologers. He accepted initiation from the Parvatiya Gosain and put him in charge of the Kamakhya temple. In 1722, his spiritual guides and astrologers predicted an end of his rule in the near future due to the evil consequence of the *Chatra-bhanga-yoga*. Therefore, at the suggestion of the Parvatiya Gosain, he readily consented to endow his chief queen Phuleswari (or Phulmati or Pramatheswari) with the supreme vest. The latter accordingly took the regalia to her hands with the title *Bar Raja*.

Phuleswari was more under the influence of the Brahmanas. At the instigation of the Gosain, she attempted to make Saktism the state religion. Over zealous to execute her plan, she even summoned the Sudra Mahantas to the Durga Puja held in a Sakta Shrine and compelled them to bow their heads before the goddess, have their foreheads besmeared with the blood of the sacrificed animals and made them accept nirmali and prasad. More than others, the powerful Moamorian Mahanta considered it a serious insult, not to be forgotten or forgiven. Phuleswari also suppressed the age-old Ahom custom of burying their dead and compelled them to take to cremation. Phuleswari had the Gaurisagar tank excavated.

Phuleswari died in 1731 and the king then married her sister Draupadi and made her the Bar Raja. Draupadi had the Sivasagar tank excavated and the Siva temple built. It was under her patronage that the famous Assamese work on elephantry called *Hasti Vidyarnava* was written. At her death in 1738, she was succeeded as Bar Rajaby another wife of Siva Singha, named Enadari, who was renamed as Sarveswari.

### Pramatta Singha (1744-51) and Rajeswar Singha (1751-69)

Siva Singha was succeeded to the throne by his brothers Pramatta Singha (Susenpha) and Rajeswar Singha (Surampha) and Lakshmi Singha (Sunenpha).

Pramatta Singa's reign saw a large construction works. He had the Rang-ghar rebuilt (originally built by bamboo during the rule of Rudra Singha) with bricks as well as the structures in the old Ahom metropolis of Garhgaon.

A notable event of the reign of Rajeswar Singha was an expedition to Manipur, whose king Jay Singha, being unable to resist repeated aggressions from the Burmese, lost a part of his kingdom to the invaders. This expedition is referred to as *Lata-kata-ran* by the Assamese. As a token of gratitude, the Manipuri king gave his daughter Kuranganayani in marriage to the Ahom king and offered him valuable presents.

### Rise of Kirti Chandra Barbarua

Towards the end of his career, Rajeswar Singha was much influenced by his Barbarua Kirti Chandra. Indeed, the Barbarua became the policy maker. The arrogance and overbearing conduct of the Barbarua created much resentment among the nobles as well as in the Moamoria Mahanta, who had to bear grave insult at his hands.

Numali Bargohain wrote a chronicle entitled Chakari-Pheti Buranji, where he made some aspersions regarding the origin of the Barbarua. That buranji was destroyed by Kirti Chandra Barbarua.

### Lakshmi Singha (1769-80) : the first challenge to the Ahoms by Moamariyans

#### About Moamoria Satra

The Moamoria Satra (or Mayamara Satra) was founded by Aniruddha Bhuyan, popularly called Aniruddhadeva, a relative of Sankaradeva, towards the close of the 16th century. It was a member of the Kala Samhati, one of the four Samhatis or groups of Satras in Assam. The Kala Samhati was founded by Gopaldeva of Bhavanipur. It had twelve main Satras, six presided by Brahmana and six by Sudra pontiffs called Gosains or Mahantas. Among the twelve Satras, those of Moamoria and Dihing were most notable. Both of them freely admitted converts from the backward or depressed classes of the society and placed them on an equal footing with the caste-Hindus like the Brahmans, Kayasthas and Kalitas.

The Dihing Satra, which secured royal patronage from Rajeswar Singha and could claim some of the leading officers of the Ahom court as disciples. The Moamoria Mahanta, on the other hand, declined all court help but had equal or presumably more flourishing growth on independent lines. Their Mahanta was not only their spiritual head, but also their virtual sovereign. He thus occupied the same exalted position as the Guru in Sikhism. The Mahanta, who was virtually a feudal lord, contended for political power and sovereignty with the Ahom king.

*The Moamariyas are also called 'Mataks' and sometimes 'Purani Bhakats'. The term Mayamara denotes the Satra, whose disciples are called Mayamariyas or Moamariyas, Maran is a tribe, whose members are all disciples of the Mayamara Satra and Matak is another appellation by which the Moamariyas in general and the marans in particular are known.*

### The first Moamoriyan rebellion (1769-70)

With the rise of Kirti Chandra Barbarua, fresh insults were heaped upon the Moamariyas. For instance, he abused the Mahanta's eldest son, the Deka Mahanta with insulting epithets on the alleged ground that the latter greeted king Rajeswar Singha near his Satra, but remained indifferent to the Barbarua, who also accompanied the king. Again in October 1769, Nahar Khora and Raha Maran, both disciples of the Moamariya Satra, were mercilessly beaten and the ears of the former cut off at the orders of the Barbarua on the alleged charge of bringing for him a lean elephant.

At that time the followers of the Moamariya Satra numbered eight lakhs. The Marans were the first to raise the banner of rebellion. Towards the close of October 1769, when the Barbarua sent his men to cut timbers from the Maran area, the people of the locality led by Nahar's two wives Bhatuki and Bhabuli (who took the name Radha and Rukmini) refused them entrance to the area and declared that they were independent. The king sent a contingent but the army sustained a serious defeat. That was the beginning. In a number of following engagements, the royalist soldiers were defeated by the Moamariyas. In no time, the Moamariyas occupied Garhgaon and then marched towards the new capital at Rangpur. The king left the capital along with Kirti Chandra Barbarua. The rebels occupied the capital and captured the king. Kirti Chandra Barbarua was executed. Moamariyas placed Ramakanta, son of Nahar Khora, on the throne. Raha was made Barbarua.

### Restoration of Lakshmi Singha

The new government failed to work to the satisfaction of the people due to lack of experience. The weaknesses on the part of the rebels were properly utilized by the royalists, who soon organised a strong counter offensive. On the Assamese New Year's Day in 1770 (14th April), through the machination of Kuranganayani, Raha was killed by a Huchary party. Ramakanta escaped but was shortly afterwards captured and put to death. Lakshmi Singha was then brought back from his place of confinement and reinstated on the throne.

The restored Ahom monarchy ordered a general massacre of the Marans, who were the most prominent among the rebels. The Moamariya Mahanta and his sons were killed. For fourteen years, the Satra remained without a Guru. But such a ruthless policy of repression brought fresh troubles for the Ahom government. Maran survivors considered it to be a sacred duty to avenge the death of their brothers.

### Gaurinath Singha (1780 - 95)

Lakshmi Singha was succeeded by his son Gaurinath Singha alias Suhitpungha. He continued the policy of suppression of the Moamariyas. He ordered indiscriminate killing of Moamariyas. A recent head of the Moamariya Satra had estimated that 700,000 Moamariyas were killed in six weeks. Maniram Dewan wrote in 1838 - "The water of the rivers could not be drunk and the people could not walk along the roads. Even the water and fish of the Brahmaputra became tainted with the stinking smell of the corpses.

In 1782, the Moamariyas' insurrection rose again with renewed vigour and increased violence. They advanced to Garhgaon and created panic among the population. The advance was halted and the rebels were treated with severity and many were executed. Such a step aggravated the situation. After a brief pause, the

disturbances caused by the Moamarias swept down across the north bank. After defeating the local Ahom governors, the Moamarias advanced towards the capital. The rebels occupied Rangpur; Gaurinath Singha fled with the members of his family. At Rangpur, the Moamarias set up Bharath Singha as king; but the Hatisungi Moamarias set up Sarbananda as their king of the territory to the east of Dihing, Krishnanarayan of Darrang occupied North Guwahati.

Gaurinath Singha appealed for help to the East India company's authorities through Raush, a salt merchant and Mr. Dauglas, Commissioner of Koch Bihar. In response to this, Lord Cornwallis, the Governor General despatched Captain Thomas Welsh with sepoy who arrived at Goalpara in early November, 1792. Welsh advanced to Jorhat, and then to Rangpur where he defeated the Moamarias, and restored the authority of Gaurinath Singha at Rangpur in 1794.

During his stay in the kingdom, Captain Welsh concluded a commercial treaty in 1793 by which commerce between Assam and Bengal was sought to be put on "reciprocal basis". The Report of Capt. Welsh which he submitted to his government in response to certain queries gives certain important information in regard to the system of Ahom govt., trade and commerce, products, etc. This report will later encourage the Britishers to acquire Assam for more revenue and market.

New Governor General John Shore recalled the British troop and despite Gaurinath's repeated pleas for retention of the British troop, Welsh returned with his troop in 1794. Afraid of renewed revolt, Gaurinath Singha shifted his capital to Jorhat (Last Ahom capital).

## Burmese invasion of Assam

### First Assamese -Burmese war (1817)

#### Background

Gaurinath Singha died in 1795. His successors, Kamaleswar Singha (1795-1811) and Chandrakanta Singha (1811-18), were mere puppets in the hands of Purnananda Buragohain, the prime minister. The reign of Chandra Kanta Singha (1810-18) saw the Burmese invasion. Friction between Purnananda Buragohain and Badan Chandra Barphukan and a conspiracy by Satram to overthrow the former led the latter to go to the Burmese capital Amarapura where he pleaded for assistance against the Buragohain. Budopaya was Burmese king who wanted to acquire Assam. Now Assam was weakened so it was now easy for him to acquire it. So he sent 16000 army under Badan Chandra to Assam in 1817. The first Assamese-Burmese encounter took place at Giladhari. The Ahom army was defeated. The king of Assam, Chandra Kanta Singha, concluded a treaty with Burmese according to which some part of land was given to Badan Chandra and he was made a minister. Burmese soldiers returned Burma by taking away large amount of wealth. Purnananda died during this invasion.

### Second Burmese invasion (1819)

In 1819 Badan Chandra was assassinated and Chandra Kanta Singh was replaced by Purnadar Singh by a coup. Purandar Singha was helped by Ruchinath (the son of Purnananda Buragohain) Thus Burmese again attacked Assam. Burmese under the command of Ata Mingi reached Assam in 1819. On their advance,

Purandar and his prime minister Ruchinath fled to Guwahati. Chandra Kanta Singha was once again restored to the throne.

### Third Burmese invasion (1821)

After the departure of the Burmese, Chandra Kanta Singha sought to raise a fort at Jaipur against further Burmese invasion. However, a Burmese force sent by their Monarch with presents of ornaments and dress to Chandra Kanta Singha seeing such preparations killed Patalong under whose supervision the fort was raised. Thinking this hostile move on the part of the Burmese army, Chandra Kanta fled to Guwahati and did not come back in spite of Burmese assurance. This was in 1821. The Burmese then set up an Ahom prince, Jogeswar Singha. Chandra Kanta Singha crossed the border and entered Bengal where he tried to collect arms and men to fight the Burmese. At the battle of Mahgarh, Chandra Kanta's army was badly defeated, and he once again entered the British territory. The period from 1821 to 1824 is called period of Burmese rule. Assam came directly under the rule of Burmese.

### Burmese Rule in Assam(1821-1824)

During this period, the Burmese devastated the country and committed atrocities by plunder and killing. The Britishers now feared that the Burmese might attack Bengal. So lord Amherst, the Governor General decided to declare war on Myanmar (Burma).

### First Anglo- Burmese war (1824 - 26)

War was declared on the 5th of March 1824. It lasted for nearly two years. On 24th February 1826 treaty of Yandabo was signed between Burma and English. The Burmese withdrew from Assam after the treaty. Now Assam was occupied by the British during the Anglo-Burmese war, it was kept under British occupation and started introducing British administration.

## MODERN ASSAM HISTORY

It is generally assumed that under the terms of the Treaty of Yandabo, Assam was ceded to the East India Company. But this concept of Assam being ceded was a loose interpretation of the Treaty of Yandabo by the authorities of the Company. Article II of the treaty merely states that -

*“ His majesty, the king of Ava, renounces all claims upon, and will abstain from all future interference with the principality of Assam and its dependencies, and also the contiguous petty states of Cachar and Jayantia”*

In the case of Manipur, the Burmese recognized Gambhir Singh's right to the throne but remained silent about his future relationship with the Burmese Monarchy. In case of Assam, Cachar and Jayantia, the Burmese simply formalised their withdrawal, leaving a political vacuum. It was now left to British Government to settle its terms with legitimate rulers.

Meanwhile, the British restored the deposed rulers of the neighbouring kingdoms of Assam to their respective possessions by way of protecting them. Thus **David Scott**, the Agent to the Governor General, North East Frontier (appointed in 1823), reinstated Raja Govinda Chandra of Cachar to his former position. He also

confirmed Raja Ram Singha of jayantiya in his possessions and restored Gambhir Singh to the throne of Manipur. The Agent also made agreements with the Singphos, the Khamtis and the Matakas, allowing them to enjoy their autonomy and secured their assurance of not allying themselves with the invaders. No alliance or negotiation was, however, made with any member of the Ahom royal family.

David Scott suggested the annexation of Lower Assam only, and the restoration of Upper Assam from Biswanath to the Burhi Dihing to an Ahom prince. While agreeing with the first part of the report, the government was not prepared to accept the recommendation regarding Upper Assam. Reasons stated - None of the aspirants to the Ahom throne had rendered any aid to the British during the war, and in view of the large number of claimants, it would be difficult to select a prince who would be able to command the support of the majority of the people. Moreover, there was possibility of economic potentiality of upper Assam.

Thus, **lower Assam was permanently annexed** to the British dominion on March 7, **1828**.

## Beginning of anti-British uprisings

The Assamese people had initially welcomed British rule because it had ensured peace and security. Years of turmoil and suffering had taken its toll. The assurance of the British that they would re-establish a Government adapted to the wants and calculated to promote the happiness of all classes had kindled hopes of the restoration of the Ahom monarchy in the minds of the nobility. Yet it soon became apparent that this was not to be.

### The first uprising

The first attempt was made towards the close of **1828** when a group of nobles under the leadership of **Dhanjoy**, a former borgohain, took up the cause of **Gomdhar Konwar**, a member of the Ahom royal family, to install him as the ruler of Assam. Plans made for the seizure of Rangpur. However, as the insurgents marched towards Jorhat, they were intercepted at Mariani. Gomdhar was initially sentenced to death, but later, considering his age (he was a minor) and the fact that he had been a mere tool in the hands of others, the sentence was commuted to seven years of imprisonment. Dhanjoy was awarded capital punishment but he managed to escape to the Naga Hills.

A second attempt was made by Dhanjoy Borgohain about a year later. He was assisted by Peali Phukan (son of Badan Chandra Barphukan), Rupchand Konwar, Jeuram Barua and Boom Singpho, amongst others. But the rebellion was again crushed by the British. All the leaders, except Dhanjoy, who escaped again, were arrested. **Peali Phukan and Jeuram Barua** were hanged in 1830 and others were given 14 years imprisonment.

However, the most determined and organised resistance against the British aggression came from the Khasis (1828-30) under the leadership of **Teerut Singh**. Many chiefs made submission by 1830, but Teerut Singh continued desultory warfare till 1832. But finally he made his submission in 1832. The British pacified the Khasis by bringing them under Subsidiary Alliance.

## Restoration of Ahom Monarchy

The new Governor General Lord William Bentick was convinced by Scott's argument and favoured the restoration of the Ahom monarchy for he believed that a monarchy that had lasted for six hundred years must be intrinsically good and that under the support and advice of a British officer might in fact provide the right solution to a vexed problem.

Eventually, in October 1832 it was decided to assign Upper Assam to a member of the Ahom royal family and the choice finally fell upon Purandar Singha. On 2nd March 1833, Robertson, on behalf of the East India Company concluded a treaty with Purandar Singha at Guwahati (**Treaty of Guwahati 1833**).

However, in **1838, complete upper Assam was annexed** owing to inefficient administration of Purandar Singha. Assam was declared a non regulated province. The Head Quarter of British administration was at Shillong.

## Revolt of 1857

In 1857, there were two main regiments stationed in Assam: the first Assam Light Infantry Battalion under Major Hannay with headquarters at Dibrugarh and the Second Assam Light Infantry Battalion with headquarters at Gauhati. Besides these, detachments were posted at some sadar stations. Until June 1857, the sepoys in the Brahmaputra Valley had on the whole remained loyal to the government. The situation, however, changed quickly in the subsequent weeks. Rumours that British rule had come to an end in northern India with the restoration of Bahadur Shah Zafar spread among the sepoys of the Brahmaputra Valley. Considering this an opportune moment, Maniram Barua, goaded Kandarpeswar Singha to raise the standard of revolt. He persuaded Kandarpeswar to send two confidential agents Nirmal Hazari and Peali Barua, to the military lines at Golaghat, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh and Saikhowa with tempting offers of high remuneration to anyone who would join his army. Maniram was convinced that if the sepoys of Assam collaborated with the rebels, the British could be easily dislodged. He prepared for an uprising during the Durga puja in October 1857.

Matters, however, were not so simple. As news of the preparations leaked, Major Hannay, with the help of Captain Lowther of Sadia, placed pickets at strategic locations, destroyed the bridges over the rivers Misa and Diju and cut off communications with Jorhat. In early September 1857, a bundle of letters Maniram had written was intercepted and they proved beyond doubt his conspiracy with Kandarpeswar to overthrow British rule. All the leaders were arrested. Towards the close of 1857, Maniram and Peali Barua were tried, found guilty of treason and sentenced to death. In Calcutta, Kandarpeswar Singha appealed to the government for his release. Realising that he was merely a tool, Kandarpeswar was released from prison, but was kept under surveillance.

## Agrarian uprisings (1861 - 1900)

### The Phulguri uprising (1861)

It was the earliest of the spontaneous popular movements in Assam against the policy of colonial exploitation. The episode is still remembered by the people of Assam as the *Phulagurir Dhawa*.

#### Causes

- Ban on opium cultivation
- Increase in land revenue
- Rumours that cultivation of *tamul* (areca nut) and *pan* (betel vine) would be made taxable

#### Events

- In September 1861, some 1500 ryots marched to the Sadar Court at Nogaon to protest against the ban on poppy cultivation and the contemplated imposition of tax on *tamul* and *pan*. Lt. Hervert Sconce, the Dy. Commissioner of Nogaon refused to hear their complaint.
- The aggrieved ryots then convened a 5 days rajj-mel at *Phulaguri* from October 15. About one thousand rayats assembled, five to six hundred with *lathis*.
- On 17th, about three to four thousand peasants assembled. Police tried and failed to break up the assembly. They arrested some of the leaders, but all of them were forcibly rescued by the people.
- Next day **Lt. Singer**, Assistant Commissioner himself appeared with a police party and ordered them to disperse and tried to seize their bamboo lathis.
- In the scuffle that followed, Singer was beaten to death and his body was thrown into the river Kalang.
- Sconce sent armed force to the spot, firing took place and several persons lost their lives while many were injured.

### The Rangia uprising (1893-94)

#### Causes

- Enhancement of revenue
- Supply of government opium

#### Events

- On 24 December, 1893 Rangia Bazar was looted by the protestors.
- Several leaders were arrested.
- On January 10, 1894, a huge crowd armed with clubs assembled at the open field near Rangia thanah. They shouted "We won't pay the increased revenue".
- In the evening they attempted to release the arrested leaders by forcing their way into the thanah. The police open fired.

### The Patharughat uprising (1894)

#### Events

- Anout 2000 rayats assembled in front of the rest house of Anderson, the Dy. Commissioner of Darrang, to lodge their protest against the enhanced rates of assessment.
- Anderson asked them to disperse.
- Rayats began to throw sticks and clods of earth to Anderson.
- Police open fired, which brought death to fifteen and severe injury to many rayats.

## Growth of National Consciousness

Causes of growth of political awareness:

### 1. Discontent among the Aristocracy.

The nobility had a vested interest in the preservation of the status quo. Those who had been deprived of the benefits and munificence of Ahom rule, were the first to resist the alteration of the status quo that followed British occupation.

### 2. The language issue

Bengali was imposed as the official language and medium of instruction in **1836**. As a result, recruitment of Bengalis in government services increased resulting in greater unemployment among the Assamese. Finally with the efforts of American Baptist missionaries and educated Assamese elite (the most important among them was Anandaram Dhekial Phukan), Assamese was adopted as the official language of the courts and schools in **1873**.

### 3. Agrarian unrest

The bulk of the Assamese population or the peasantry was mainly concerned with the progressive increase in land revenue and the numerous other taxes that were levied on them. In course of time rural poverty became so acute that every assessment of land revenue raised a storm of protest.

### 4. Immigration

The magnitude of immigration into Assam, especially the tea districts was so high that by the beginning of the twentieth century, a distinct demographic change had taken place. The expansion of industries had also opened up new avenues for enterprising businessmen, an opportunity that was seized mainly by traders from Rajasthan. In agriculture based economy it is generally expected that an increase in demand for food crops would automatically lead to greater production, in Assam, however, this was not the case and the increase in population did not result in increased production. The demographic and economic changes that gradually swept over Assam inevitably resulted in popular discontent.

### 5. Public Associations and popular protests

The popular rajmels were soon converted into more representative and more broad-based organisations called **ryot sabhas**. They were formed with the active support of the Assamese intelligentsia. Newspaper and public associations also made their appearance nearly simultaneously.

## Local political association

### Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha

The Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha was founded in **1884 under the initiative of Jagannath Barua**. He was inspired by the work of associations like the Atmiya Sabha, Bengal British Indian Society, Patriots' Association etc. he wanted to create a similar platform in Assam through which the aspirations and grievances of the people could be voiced and could take up government issues relating to the socio-economic development of the province. The founder president of the Sabha was **Raja Naranarayan Singha** while Jagannath Barua was the Secretary. Like most other organisations of the time, the Sabha did not believe in direct confrontation with the

government, but nevertheless espoused the cause of the people even at the risk of displeasing the government at times. The Sabha contributed significantly to the social and political awakening in Assam and paved the way for democratic and popular movements in the province.

### Assam Association

The Assamese intelligentsia, led by Manik Chandra Baruah, had increasingly felt the necessity of a more broad based provincial organisation to communicate the wishes, grievances and aspirations of the Assamese people. The idea took definite form in **1903** when Assam Association was founded with **Prabhat Chandra Barua, Jagannath Baruah and Manik Chandra Barua as president, vice president and general secretary respectively**. The first session of the Association was held at Dibrugarh in 1905. The headquarters of the Association was at Gauhati.

### The Literary Associations

The first of such associations was formed in 1872 by a group of students at Calcutta, under the leadership of Ganga Govinda Phukan. They called it Asamiya Sahitya Sabha. In 1857, Anandaram and Gunabhiram organised the Gyan Pradayini Sabha at Nogaon with the object of spreading advanced knowledge among the people. In 1885 was formed the **Assam Desh Hitasini Sabha** at Sibsagar through the efforts of Priyalal Barua.

It was in August **1888** that the Assamese youths studying at Calcutta made a serious attempt to form a new society called **Asamiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha**. Prominent among its members were Lakshminath Bezbarua, Chandra Kumar Agauwala, Padmanath Gohain Barua, Laksheswar Sarma, Hem Chandra Goswami, and Kamala Kanta Bhattacharyya. It also took up the publication of a monthly journal called **Jonaki**, the first issue of which was released in February **1889**. This journal brought a new era in Assamese literature. Now the focus of literatures had shifted from divinity to human concerns, beauty of the nature etc. This is known as beginning of "**Jonaki Age**" in Assamese literature. Jonaki age is like renaissance in Assam.

### Partition of Bengal and Swadeshi Movement

Bengal was partitioned on 16 October 1905 despite widespread protests. The new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam was placed under J. B. Fuller who assumed charge as Lieutenant Governor of the new province at Dacca. Earlier in Assam, both the Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha and the Assam Association expressed their apprehensions about the plan. The Sabha held that "Assam proper will secure only a small fraction of the Chief Commissioner's attention, his very seat will be removed and the people will have to meet a keen and unequal competition of highly educated, enterprising and advantageously situated districts, which they are not yet prepared for the same." The Association also apprehended "that the Assamese language will suffer and the removal of the seat of the government to a place outside Assam proper and further away from the geographical centre will necessarily make her lose the amount of care and attention which she at present received from the government."

In the Brahmaputra valley, however, the anti partition movement was largely confined to the urban and semi-urban areas. On an intellectual plane, Ambikagiri Raychoudhury, a poet and nationalist along with Govinda Lahiri, took the lead in instilling the concept of swadeshi in the minds of the students. The swadeshi

songs and drama of Mukunda Das left a strong imprint on the cultural scene of Assam. By and large, the movement in the Surma Valley was more widespread with the leadership being taken up by the Surma Valley Association. The stirring speeches of Bipin Chandra Pal, a son of the soil, had tremendous impact on the people.

## Political Development in Assam

The Bengal partition was annuled in 1911. **In 1912, Assam got a provincial Council of its own.** The prominent members (non-official) of the council were - Kammini Kumar Das, Manik Chandra Barua, Padmanath Gohain Barua, Tarun Ram Phukan, Ghanashyam Barua, Radha Binod Das, Muhammad Saadulla and Raja Prahat Chandra Barua.

The provincial council had no power to control the budget of the province though the representatives were allowed to criticise it. The budget, in fact, was an estimate from which the Government could at any time depart. No nation-building programme could be undertaken by the Council due to this prevalent rigidity of financial system. Many leaders resigned from the assembly because of lack of power like Tarun Ram Phukan, Radha Govinda Das (Sylhet) and Phani Dhar Chaliha.

Then in 1916 **Assam Student Conference** was organized. The President of its first session was great Assamese poet **Laksminath Bezbaruah**. Assam Student Conference created a cadre of students who played very proactive role during Non Cooperation Movement launched by INC. Leaders like Chandranath Sarma, Omeo Kumar Das, Hem Chandra Barua, Padmadhar Chaliha came into prominence first as student leaders. A full provincial status was being demanded by The Assam Association since very long. This demand was met by Montagu Chelmsford reforms of 1919.

## Non Cooperation Movement in Assam

Soon against Jallianwala massacre and under the influence of Gandhiji, Assam saw mobilization of youth for Hindu – Muslim unity. Slowly youth of Assam also participated in Khilafat – Non Cooperation movement. And Assam also got welded in to Indian National Movement. First time Assamese people saw resonance between situation in Assam and rest of India. All were suffering because of exploitative economic policies of Britishers. Thus by participating in Indian National Movement Assam became inseparable part of India.

1919 was an eventful year in the political history of India. Gandhiji launched the Non-co-operation movement on 31st August 1920, which was the direct outcome of Khilafat movement. In Assam, both the Hindus and Muslims equally responded to the cause of Khilafatist. In response to the Khilafat movement, Guwahati, Goalpara, Jorhat, Sibsagar and North Lakhimpur observed hartals and held public meetings respectively.

The Assam Association held district-level meetings at Nagaon, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Dibrugarh throughout October, 1920 and discussed the non-co-operation issue. While the issue of non-cooperation was being hotly debated, N.C. Bordoloi, the general secretary of the Assam Association, C.N. Sarma and Tarunram Phukan moved from one corner of the province to the other to mobilize public opinion. Almost all the district level Associations took decision to boycott Council elections and raised objection to take titles, honour and honorary posts from British Government.

The boycott agitation of the students had almost automatically led to the demand for setting up national schools and national colleges in the province. Finally, a national school was established in Feb. 1921, in the premises of the residence of Rohinikumar Choudhury, at Bharalumukh, Guwahati. Such establishment was followed in other parts of the province.

In **August 1921 Gandhiji visited Assam** to promote Non- Cooperation movement. He then set up **Assam Pradesh Congress Committee** or Assam Provincial Congress Committee. The participation of Assam in Non Cooperation Movement was at its peak in 1921. Top leaders of Assam like N.C. Bordoloi, C.N. Sarma and Tarunram Phukan were arrested on 30th November 1921.

In 1922, after the Chouri Choura riots in Uttar Pradesh, Mahatma Gandhi called off the movement. Since then, the leaders of Assam began to stress on the constructive programmes such as Hindu-Muslim unity, spinning of yarns and weaving of khaddar, being prosecuted withdrawal. In 1922, Omeo Kumar Das attended session of INC. He informed the INC about severe repression by British in Assam. Two-member committee of Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya came to Assam to study the political situation in Assam. The two leaders visited several places in Assam and were deeply impressed with the progress of the Non Cooperation movement in Assam and the contribution made by the people, in the shape of suffering and sacrifice for the attainment of freedom. As a result of which the Swaraja party which was created within INC in 1923 for the purpose of contesting provincial election decided to contest election in Assam also. The President of the Swarajist party of Assam was **Tarun Ram Phukan**. Swarajist won 13 seats out of 39 in Assam provincial election of 1923. So Swarajists formed a coalition government (Assam Nationalistic Party) in Assam with help of independent candidates. Then Swarajists forced for political reforms in Assam.

The British Government in Assam agreed to introduce measures for gradual decline of opium consumption in Assam. This was the most important achievement so far Assam was concerned. The next achievement of importance was introduction of Local self government Act and passing of Assam Municipal Act, 1923, with provision for more elected members and elected Indian chairman. The Assam Legislative Council succeeded in cutting the salary of ministers from Rs. 3,500/- P.M. to Rs. 1500/- P.M. And the opium Prohibition Act was also passed on 3rd March, 1925.

But split occurred in the Coalition party in March 1925 last, and the Swarajists realized that they could no longer command a majority. The Assam Court Fees (Amendment) Bill and the Assam Stamp (Amendment) Bill of 1925 were passed, despite the opposition of the Swarajists. Finally Swarajist party decided to withdraw from Assam government in 1926.

## Civil Disobedience Movement in Assam

Then the **41st INC session was held in Guwahati (1926)** under the Presidentship of **SS Srinivas Iyenger**. In December, 1929, in response to the call for Civil Disobedience movement launched by the National Congress, Assam spontaneously celebrated 'Independence Day' on 26th Jan, 1930. **Bishnu Ram Medhi** took the responsibility of launching CDM in Assam. Sri Bishnuram Medhi helped by Tyagbir Hemchandra Barua, Dr. Bhubaneswar Barua, Omeo Kr. Das, Sidhinath Sarma, Pitambar Goswami, Gormur Satradhikar, Lakhidhar Sharma and others conducted the movement very successfully. Srimati Chandra Prabha Saikiani and Srimati Durgaprava Barua took up picketing in front of Cotton College Guwahati.

Students also protested against Britishers during CDM. Then the Director of Public Information, JR Cunningham issued **Cunningham circular** in Assam. This circular demanded from the students and guardians an undertaking to abstain from joining politics. This led to even more stronger protests from the students. Some public high schools like Kamrup Academy, Barpeta Bidyapith, etc., were established by the Nationalists.

Between 1930 and 1938 Congress organisation got very strong in Assam. Now INC became the foremost political organization. But some differences also grew in Congress in Assam. In a bid to open up fallow waste lands in Assam for cultivation, influxes of landless peasants from East Bengal were being invited to Assam by the then Assam Ministry headed by Sir Md. Saadullah, and because flow of innumerable jobseekers continued to migrate to Assam, a section of Assamese nationalists got alarmed and **Ambika Giri Roy Choudhury, founded "Assam Sangrakshini Sobha"** and without seceding from the Congress, began to voice through this organisation, demands "for the right of the Assamese people against aggression of outsiders. This led to weakening of CDM in later phase. Assam Sangrakshini Sobha was later renamed as Assam Jatiya Mahasabha.

Rani Gaidinliu played major role in the Civil Disobedience in Assam. Gaidinliu organised a revolt against the constituted authorities. But CDM was withdrawn by INC in 1934.

## The Government of India Act 1935

The Government of India Act 1935 provided for a bicameral legislature in Assam. The council's membership was fixed at 22, of which 18 were to be elected and 4 nominated. The Assembly was to have 108 seats with representations to various communities. In the elections, the Congress emerged as the largest single party with 33 seats. Gopinath Bordoloi was elected as the leader of the Congress Assembly Party. The Congress could have formed a coalition ministry, but Bordoloi believed that forming a solid opposition instead would be more expedient at this stage. In this circumstances, Syed Mohammed Saadullah, the leader of the Muslim group, formed a non-congress coalition ministry. However, in 1938 Sir Sadaullah resigned due to internal issues and Gopinath Bordoloi became the Chief Minister.

In the meantime, in September, 1939, the Second World War broke out and as a consequence of the Congress refusal to be a party in the War, during October.-1939, the ministry in Assam resigned, and in November 1939 Md. Syed Saadullah again formed a Coalition Ministry. He joined Muslim League. Mohammad Saudullah was a staunch supporter of Britishers. He promised to support the British during war.

## Quit India Movement in Assam

In October 1940, on refusal of the Viceroy to concede to the demand of INC, a campaign of individual Satyagraha was launched under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi in Assam, Gopinath Bordoloi, Bishnuram Medhi, Omeo Kumar Das were its main leaders. They were all arrested. In Sibsagar, the individual Satyagraha movement was started by Moulana Tayebulla, the President of the Asom Pradesh Congress Committee.

Sir Stafford Cripps came to India in March, 1942 and put forward an offer of Dominion status. Congress refused and took up the famous "Quit India" resolution on 8th August, 1942. Assam jumped into the movement and on 9th August, 1942, Md. Tayabullah, Fakaruddin Ali Ahmed, Bishnuram Medhi, Debeswar Sarma, Dr.

Harekrishna Das, Lila Barua with many others were arrested by the British as preventive measure. Gopinath Bordoloi and Sidhinath Sarma who were away at Bombay in connection with the All India Congress meeting got arrested at Dhubri immediately on their return. This step of government intensified the movement in Assam. **Santi Sena** organisations were set up throughout the State under the leadership of local Congress Socialists to protest against the government. **Mrityu Bahini or death squad** was formed in the State under the leadership of Mahendra Nath Hazarika. The party carried out some serious acts of sabotage throughout the State.

In 1943, the Azad Hind Fauz organised by Subhas Chandra Bose who, attempted to win freedom of India with the help of the Germans and the Japanese, advanced to India through Burma and entered Assam. This alarmed the British Government in India, and in May, 1944, prompted release of Mahatma Gandhi who was in jail. In January, 1945, Mahatma Gandhi visited Guwahati along with four other leaders of Assam and performed mass-prayers to avoid Japanese invasion. This was his last visit to Assam. Slowly after it Quit India Movement also lost momentum.

In the meanwhile Muslim League was demanding a separate state Pakistan. The Sadaullah government in Assam also joined the demand of Muslim League. He also encouraged migration of Muslim populations from East Bengal to Assam to increase Muslim population in Assam. It would help in making Assam a part of Pakistan in case of partition.

In December, 1945, Pandit Nehru made a swift tour to Assam making an impact in the public mind in favour of the INC. So the congress won over 50 seats out of 108 in the election, two Independents joined later making the number 52 and the congress ministry with Gopinath Bordoloi as the Chief/Prime Minister was formed on 10th February, 1946.

But Muslim League formed a secret organization in Bengal and Assam by the name of "Banglo-i- Islam". The purpose of this organization was to mobilise Muslim youths for a separate state Pakistan.

Then came the Cabinet Mission to India, with a view to settle the Indian Problem. The mission introduced the grouping system in May, 1946. Assam was made part of section C –along with Bengal. As a result of which the Assam Provincial Congress rose under Gopinath Bordoloi (who was released from jail in 1944) to resist against Assam's inclusion in the Grouping system which would have made Assam in future a Muslim state.

In 1947, Lord Mountbatten took over as new Viceroy. He held separate meetings with the Muslim League, Congress and Mahatma Gandhi. They decided to go for Partition as a permanent solution instead of grouping. The plan proposed the division of Punjab and Bengal. In the case of Assam, a referendum was to be held in Sylhet district so that the people could decide for themselves whether to remain in Assam or opt to join East Pakistan. Thus, India and Pakistan became separate independent countries on 15th August 1947. Of the valid votes cast, 56% were in favour of Sylhet's inclusion in Pakistan.

Thus, Gopinath Bordoloi played a major role in securing the future of Assam which would have been included in East Pakistan otherwise and then would become part of Pakistan. He then became first Chief Minister of Assam after independence.

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