Chapter VIII

CONCLUSION

General considerations

'When exactly was the Ahom state born in Assam?', is difficult to say conclusively. We find that MacSmail has made it plainly clear when he says that the process of state formation is so slow covering wide time and space that even if the entire records are placed before us, it would not be possible to say precisely when the state began.

This is the most intricate problem faced by the students of state formation. It is true that the state is no one's discovery, nor did it spring up all on a sudden, neither it owes its origin to one or the other factor, the multiplicity of which sometimes goes beyond the range of human imagination. The state, being the creation of human civilisation, is as complex as the human phenomenon itself is.

In Ahom's case, the issues involved are more surmounting. Firstly, a group of people from Upper Burma known as the 'Tais' landed themselves in the wide valley of Upper Assam and after humbling the local Moran, Borahi tribes,
named the land of their new acquisition as Mungdunshun-kham, and in turn they got a new name as 'Ahom' from the local population. In due course, Mungdunshunkham was lost in the historical process, it was replaced by the Ahom state and under the process of development growing thereafter, the land of their new home came to be known as Assam; the state of the Ahoms, once again being replaced by the state of Assam.

Secondly, there were only some marginal differences in their traditional culture between the migrant Ahoms and the autochthones with almost an identical level in commensality and connubium, economic base and in the religious belief system tinged with animism. Therefore, intermingling was easy in social spheres. But in the sphere of civilization, the Ahoms were in an advanced stage of political culture. They lived in organised politics, had improved means of agricultural technique particularly in the practice of wet rice cultivation and above all, had the capacity for surplus productions. This was the main axle on which the process of Ahom state formation began to move at the very initial stage in which the social symbiosis, the congruency values and the transaction flows played a major role.
Thirdly, the migrating Ahoms acquired Mungdunshunkham through their armed might. In doing so, they neither liquidated nor expelled the humbled population, but on the contrary took them within their political systems, where if not total consensus, at least partial consent was available without any hurdles for further elaborations. That is, a sort of legitimacy was infused to the Ahom occupations. This was the situation at least for the first three generations of the Ahoms where assimilation was more on reciprocal basis. The conquerors made the land they had seized as their home and at the same time could establish themselves as a cohesive and distinct ruling body apart from and above their new subjects. Unfortunately, we do not have enough data to probe into this period of state formation but by any stretch of imagination, it could not have been other than this. Because, by this time, in 1401 A.D., the boundary between the Nara and the Ahom kingdom was finally settled and therefore, the birth of the Ahom state was a reality in any sense.

Fourthly, within the given time and space of three hundred years, the Ahom settlements in Upper Assam faced no major happening. It was only by 1523 that the first major clash took place with the powerful Chutiya state. Thus the
rudimentary polity formation of the Ahoms during this period, was still rooted in their southeast Asian heritage which speaks of their egalitarian tribal level base of social formations, more of, in an embryonic form. Thus the interregnums or the internal conflicts were mostly confined within the ruling body. It did not produce any serious internal contradiction so as to sweep over the existing social formations or so as to generate such internal social contradictions necessitating the state per se. Tribal level organization still could continue.

But the situation could not remain as the same. The Ahoms displayed immense organisational capabilities in the given ecological potentialities of their new homeland. Agricultural surplus was ensured to set up a viable economy and along with this their military capabilities also increased. Thus the growth of Ahom power and prestige now visibly manifested. This took the Ahoms to a state of confrontation with the local powers. This was entirely a new turn in the process of Ahom state formation. The conquest and absorption of the Chutiya state and the pushing back of the Kachari power beyond the Dhandiri valley were of immense consequences which we have already profusely highlighted, often almost with repetitions, in the chapters. To cut short the
thematic dimensions, this much can be said that the erstwhile tribal level organisation became incompatible to rule. New factors and variables provided the multiple feed backs which worked up homogeneously leading to the synthetic outcome - the state, if not state per se. (see the synthetic theory in Appendices)

It all happened and began to take place during the reign of Subhumung Dihingiya Raja. Meanwhile, the Brahmanical influence in the Ahom polity provided a much needed fill-up in the ideology of the Ahom state. The Brahmins grafted the Ahom legends into the Hindu Myths and ascribed the Kshatriya character to the Ahom rulers by assigning them heavenly lineages like the Indravamsi (god of heaven), Suryavamsi (solar race) and the Chandravamsi (lunar race) etc. The image of the kingship was so projected that in the eyes of the totality it appeared as inviolable and sacred in the person of the king, which, in turn, led to the growth of a despotic monarchy. Henceforth, the official title of the king came to be known as Swargadev, in whom the state was personified. Growth of a highly centralised authority structure on hierarchical basis; the institutionalisation of the pyke system - all these in the name of the Swargadev
came into being. Defence, putting down rebellions, undertaking of public works in the construction of roads, ramparts and dykes, animated the Ahom rulers in which the state fully manifested.

The process continued; gained momentum; stimulated the state building processes; accelerated its pace during the long reign of Sushengpha Pratap Singha. A monolithic bureaucratic structure sprang up with the creation of more new offices. The pyke militia underwent reforms so as to meet the challenges arising out of constant Muslim invasions and to maintain the agricultural productions unabated at the same time. The system so built up sustained the dreaded Muslim menace, inspite of the heavy set backs during the reign of Jayadhwaj Singha, till it was finally wiped out during the reign of Gadadhar Singha, by 1681.

Meanwhile, the Bhuyans and the Kochos were also absorbed into the Ahom syndrome, with this the character of the population of the Ahom state changed greatly. There were now more of Hindu population. Moreover, the rapid growth of the neo-Vaishnavite movement with its increasing popularity produced new dimensions in the polity of the Ahom state. In the wake of the growing Hindu influence via the neo-Vaishnavite movement, the climacteric of Ahom rule set in.
The civil constitution of the state faced the greatest test ever, during the period of weak rulers. The signs eroding the inviolability and sacredness of the Ahom sovereign swargadeva, became apparent casting dark shadows. Only strong and efficient rulers like Gadadhar Singha and Rudra Singha with some sort of benevolent despotism, could hold on to the system. With weak, inefficient and debauched rulers, the system began to totter.

This leads us to look into one of the most important factors in the formation of the state. That is what has been said by the theorists that the state existed in its capacity to reconcile the growing social contradictions in an advancing society. This very important aspect, we would be taking up again in the 'end of the state' in order to arrive at an understanding of the theoretical validity as to what the state actually is.

Meanwhile, we may recapitulate what we have narrated so far in the foregoing chapters, how far our definitions on the state co-relate, how far the theories have been put to test and finally how far our data have helped us in finding out the road to statehood. In doing so, we once again heavily draw upon Claessen and Skalnik.
I From definitions and theories

The two main theories which very much relate to the formation of the Ahom state are -(i) that the state emerged out of the inequalities in its social organisation in terms of unequal access to the resources which generally came out of birth, (ii) that the state emerged only through a useful association of the people or social groups having benefits from the effective central authority. All other theories like the 'conquest' and 'irrigation' are just inter-related to these two theoretical aspects.

Structurally, the Ahom state was an independent socio-economic organisation with a bounded territory and a hierarchically structured highly centralised government. The economy was rooted in the practice of wet rice agriculture which produced a surplus sustaining the state structure. The population consisted of two main classes - the upper and the lower. The upper class included the sovereign, his relatives and the aristocracy, better known as Satgharia Ahoms or the seven lineage based clans who accompanied Sukapha. The lower class included the common masses known as pykes plus the servitors like the bandi-beti, logua-likchow etc.
The access to resources was based on inequality and the inequality came out of birth.

Functionally, the Ahom state was in a continuous process of growth to regulate the relations between the 'ruler' and the 'ruled'; the relations being characterized by the political dominance of the former and the tributary obligations of the latter. The state was distinct from the society and it was the highest central and political authority which had control over the greatest amount of coercive force. The territory was divided into a loosely demarcated territorial divisions by officers appointed from the Satgharia Ahoms and who responsible only to the monarch and who were instrumental in ensuring the continuity through a constitutional means, i.e., the powers of the three Gohains to depose an inefficient or weak one and to elect a new one as replacement. The state maintained its integrity against the threat of separation from within and aggressions from without.

It served as the level of integration and as an instrument of integrating the divergent ethnic groups. The government had well defined organs with the divisions of function through the khel system — the titles of some of the officers itself suggesting this. The society was stratified
in terms of unequal access to the resources, political power, status, wealth and prestige in which the element of Hindu priesthood added new dimensions. Finally, the central government alone had the use of monopoly force.

II Factors leading to statehood

We would now take up some of the factors, in utmost brief, which had a relatively direct influence in Ahom state formation from the data already placed in the chapters.

The organisational pattern of the Ahom state fully admits of the characteristics of the Asiatic mode of productions. The hydraulic culture of the Ahoms or the irrigation hypothesis was at the root of the feudalistic character of the state.

The role of military adventurism or of conquest always remains as a complex issue because of its monothetic value. However, it did have some deep influence in Ahom's case as shown by the conquests of the Chutiya, Bhuyan, Koch and Kachari territories and their incorporations.

The birth of the Ahom state owes to the charisma and commanding dispositions of the rulers like Sukapha, Sukhumung Dihingiya Raja, Susenpha Pratap Singha, Supungmung Chakradhwaj Singha, Supatpha Gadadhar Singha, and Sukhrungpha Rudra Singha. Their roles are undeniable.
While discussing the galactic state structure we have attempted to show that the contacts with the neighbouring states was one of the basic factors on way to the growth of a full-fledged statehood. The various outlying states were brought into the orbit of the Ahom polity through wars, conquests and matrimonial relations. The relations with the neighbouring states had considerable contributions to the formation of the Ahom state.

The Ahoms were numerically poor. But with the conquests and absorptions of the local population, the state witnessed population growth. The Ahom state needed more manpower both for defence and production. Thus population growth, to some extent, accelerated the formation of the state. But it is to be noted that there was no role of population pressure so as to appear as major factor.

The state witnessed major internal conflicts. These conflicts played a major role in the emergence of the state. Because, in the reconciliation of the conflicts, the state survived and it plainly brought out the fact the state was necessary to reconcile and regulate the affairs arising out of these conflicts. Particularly, the internal conflicts generated by the neo-Vaishnavite movement with all its ramifications put the Ahom state on its toes.
The Brahmanical influence factor, with all its manifestations, happens to be the prime moving one in the formation of the Ahom state. Because, it transformed the egalitarian tribal base to one of a monarchical base and then to a feudalistic base which grew out of the agricultural routes. It not only brought the legitimization to the Ahom rule but also it allied itself with the feudalistic cults of the Ahoms to hold on to the unequal access to the resources. In fact, it contained the elements of a multi-systemic process which largely determined the processes thereafter.

The existence of social classes is discernible even before the Ahoms began their state building process in Assam. The Ahoms had already a three-tier stratified society in the Chaopha, his relatives; the nobles (Chaophrangmung, the Buragohain, Chaothaelung, the Borgohain and other); and the commoners, most probably the pais or the pyke, with the conquests and subjugations, the exploiter and the exploited classes emerged to use it in Oppenheimer's sense. The non-Ahom subjugated people were called by the Ahoms as kha or xa (meaning slaves or culturally inferior non-Ahoms), who became the object of exploitation for all purposes, although slavery did not develop as an institution as it was in the Greek and Roman cases.
It is conspicuous to note that the influence of trade and commerce was totally absent in the formation of the Ahom state. Whatever it had, cannot be used for our purpose. Why it did not develop is quite another matter. But the state had paid very little attention to this aspect, has been proved by some recent sources. Thus Guha records, ¹ Dupeix cast aspersions on the business ethics of the Assamese merchants and expressed doubts about the prospects of future deals as well.

Although the period from 1681-1769 was one of comparative peace and prosperity, the trade and commerce of the state were utterly neglected. Therefore, this factor can be overruled, at least in case of the Ahom state formation.

We have cited some eleven possible governing factors (chapter 1, p. 4) which might influence the formation of states. Our data now show that such factors invariably governed the processes in the formation of the Ahom state. These provided the multiple feedbacks, covering a multi-systemic process. The ones which had no influence at all, have been mentioned above. However, it is to be noted that there is no clear-cut measuring device to put these into real test because of the vastness of the data on the one hand, and the enormous complexities particularly in co-relating the factors and processes, on the other. Any way,

we have attempted where possible and in doing so it is not unlikely that it might have been superfluous somewhere and sometimes. Indeed the issue is so multi-casual that we would conclude with what Cohen has observed:

Each set of factors, or any particular factor, once it develops, stimulate and feed back onto others which are then made to change in the general direction of statehood. Although its roots may be multiple, once a society or group of them start developing toward early statehood, the end is remarkably similar, no matter where it occurs.

End of the state

Now once the warfares were over, agricultural production was stabilised, the state witnessed a period of peace and prosperity during the period from the reign of Rudra Singha upto Rajeswar Singha. Some of the internal contradictions which appeared earlier, were now settled in the reign of Rudra Singha. Thus when Rudra Singha left, the Ahom state was in its full manifestations but yet to do away with the feudalistic cults so as to move toward a mature modern state.

The reign of Rudra Singha is important and significant for more than one reason. Firstly, he was the first monarch to evolve a 'Northeast' concept through the state of Assam by bringing into all the surrounding states under one and common flag in his attempt to put an end to the Mughal Bengal menace for good. Secondly, it was he who strived for

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2Claessen & Skalnik, The Early State ... p.624
the social harmony irrespective of class-creed formations by striking a balance in the socio-religious contradictions. His was an open way policy and encouraged outside contacts. Inspite of his illiteracy, he possessed exceptional intelligence and power of initiative. No doubt, he was one of the greatest of all Ahom kings.

With him the ideology, so long sustained the Ahom state, ended. As long as the need to defend the state against constant Mughal invasions as well as to maintain the pace of agricultural productions existed, the ideology served the purpose of the state. But once such issues were over new dimensions of social antagonisms overtook the Ahom state. The relative peace, in fact, brought to the fore, the one pertinent question whether the feudalistic cult of the state could continue further or there must be some changes in the state authority structure, with necessary modifications. The monarchs after Rudra Singha were weaklings and at their behest the sanctity of the Ahom system was lost; the bureaucracy came to the top of hightandedness, arbitrariness and above all, the most crucial questions arising out of socio-religious issues were handled ineptly, impolitically. They failed to visualise the coming events and let
the things to take a deteriorating turn. The result was the Moamoria factor which Maheswar Neog has termed it as 'intestinal commotions'.

It is true that no society can remain master of its own system for a considerable long time. New issues with new dimensions appeared as a challenge to the Ahom statehood. These burst open during the reign of Gaurinath Singha and the climacteric period in the Ahom state set in. This leads us to look into the very genesis of the state. Besides the questions of nature of power, the nature of good government and the problems of justice in human affairs, as a socio-political system, the state permits greater iniquity within its population than any earlier known form of association. Why do people give up, or why they are forced to give up, so much local and individual autonomy to become part of, and subordinate to, despotic, sometimes quite cruel forms of government? ... Why do those who create such systems attempt the task of reshaping their societies? (Chapter I, p. 7.) If we find answers to these, perhaps, we may also find answers to such 'intestinal commotions', and also perhaps, answers to why and how the states are formed and what actually the state is.
perhaps, we may once again lean on Engels for an understanding of this unique phenomenon who has perceptively observed that:

The state is, therefore, by no means a power forced on society from without; ... Rather, it is a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it has split into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel but in order that these antagonisms, classes with conflicting economic interests, might not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, it becomes necessary to have a power seemingly standing above society that would alleviate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of "order"; and this power, arisen out of society, but placing itself above it, and alienating itself more and from it, is the state. (Chapter I, p.12.)

The irreconcilable antagonisms were the feudal-tribal contradictions which we have narrated earlier (Chapter VII). That the society failed to strike a reconciliation with the substitution of a new "order" marks the end of the state. Feudalism was decadent under the new forces of development. Could it have been replaced by a democratic process of a modern state? Are the questions still left to be answered. So that as it may, we may close our discussions with this ideological factor having some answers in the
questions raised as to the formation of the state as seen by Claessen and Skalnik:

when the basic ideological concepts become empty of meaning, then the end is near. An efficient governmental apparatus will be able for sometime to conceal this, but the need for new concepts, new rationalisations, or a new myth of the society nevertheless become apparent. An important point to note in this respect is the state hierarchy's increasing orientation towards property. Land as the basic means of production becomes an object of private ownership and the state organisation becomes an instrument in the hands of the members of that social class which is defined by its monopolistic control of the means of production. The mature state thus supplants the early state.

No further argument is necessary to prove this in case of the Ahom state formation in Assam. Our data have sufficiently reflected such trends. Perhaps, the truth, and the whole truth, in the end of the state, is this.

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3Claessen & Skalnik, The Early State, p. 634.