Chapter II

THE BEGINNING

Advent of the Ahoms

The Ahoms, a Mao-Shan branch of the Tai race of Southeast Asia, under the leadership of Sukapha, migrated into Assam through the Patkai hills from Upper Burma. At first, they set up a small principality on the south bank of the Buridihing river in the Tipam-Manipur area. The Tipam area might have covered from the Dilli river near present Namrup upto the present Digboi town. There is still a village and a tea estate by same sandwiched by the historical Bhadoinagar with its skeletal ruins near present Bhaidi Panchali on way to Digboi. All along the foothill slopes of this area the existence of a rampart in utter ruins is still discernible.

From Tipam to Charaideo, it took almost twenty five years for Sukapha and his followers to settle down. The location of

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1 The migration route of the Ahoms from Upper Burma to Eastern Assam has been mapped by P. Bogal, The Tai and the Tai Kingdoms, Guwahati University, 1968, p. 252. Though some names of the places on route could not be identified properly, the route so mapped appears to be correct, cf. J. N. Phukan, Kham-Jang Kong-Jang Aru Pat Kai Seng Pan (about Hokol Amonolai, The Amanolai), In Remembrance of the advent of the Ahoms to Assam: in Tai Sanskriti, 1st Issue, (ed.) Philip Kumar Buragohain, Gargoon Utsav Samiti, Sibsagar, 1975, pp. 36 ff.

2 It is difficult to identify exactly the Namrup area as mentioned in the chronicles. In all probability, the area might have been somewhere in the hilly regions at the source of the Dilli river which flows through present Namrup township.
the Tipam area, perhaps, did not hold out adequate prospects of a permanent headquarter either for future expansions or in consideration of strategic defence. So after staying for about three years there, Sukapha undertook an extensive survey of the land and the people after the submissions of the Moran Borahi tribes. The search began for a permanent headquarter for a gradually expanding kingdom. The survey covered the areas from Tipam to Habung in the north of the Brahmaputra river, then continuing down the Brahmaputra up to the Dikhowmukh and following the upstream of the Dikhow river arrived at Saring where the inhabitation of a large number of population was noticed. Then moving up to Simalugadi and staying there for sometime finally selected.

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3 The area was low lying and subject to inundation. See Deodhai Amon Boranj, S.K. Bhuyan, ed., DHAS, Guwahati, 1962, p. 8. (hereinafter DAB)

4 Habung is not yet satisfactorily identified. Amalendu Guha, (Ahom Political System ... n.28, p. iv, FN-51), says that Habung might have been Ha-Uziga Visaya as mentioned in a copper plate inscription of Ratnapala (c. 10th century).

Other prominent places mentioned in the various accounts in the course of this survey are Mungkhang Chekuru (Abhaypur), Ligirigao, Gaon, Sangtak, Salaguri etc. It is difficult to form an accurate account of Sukapha's survey route without the proper identification of all such places. However, we can surmise that all these places were within the Moran-Borahi territories later annexed by the Ahoms.

Charaideo as the new capital. The three main tributaries of the Brahmaputra, namely the Buridihing, the Dinsong and the Dikhow rivers with the Sona Hills Patka ranges in the background, figure prominently at the initial stage of the Ahom state building process.

The Buridihing demarcates the boundary between the Chutia and the Morans territories, the Dinsong between the Morans and the Barakhat, and the Dikhow between the Barakhat and the Kacharais. Sukapha's extensive survey for good cultivable land and a suitable site for the new capital centred round the vales of these three rivers which formed an axle through which the forces of the rise and growth of the rudimentary Ahom state began to work. The existence of a strong Chutia state was not unknown to the Ahoms, but the existence of an equally strong Kachari state extending from the Dikhow up to the Dhalaini river was, perhaps, not within their imaginations. Therefore, we find that during Sukapha's

Charaideo is situated to the south east of Simaluguri town in the Sibsagar district. It still encapsulates the glory of the teeming millions in the constructive activities in terms of roads and ramparts, dykes and tanks and the eye catching burial mounds of the Ahom monarchs. The momentous history of an emerging state has left its indelible marks in the vast paddy fields of Gachikala, Engera and the Borakhona khata (see, Harakanta Barua, Sadaranin, Amom Buranj, 1962, ed., DBS, Guwahati, 1962, p. 15; Kashinath Gosali Dahan, Amom Buranj, 1962, ed., DBS, Guwahati, 1964, p. 15) enshrining the vivid images of a past. Charaideo continued to be the de jure capital of the Ahoms even after the transfer of the capital to Gargoon in later times.

Considered as the Jerusalem/Meca of the erstwhile Ahoms, the place has since been developed into a tourists' spot by the Archaeology Department of the Government of Assam.
reign, only the Mahang area was wrested from the Kacharis by taking the advantage of the feuds between the Kacharis and the Nagas over it. On the whole, the three river valley areas formed the nucleus around which Sukapha laid the foundation of the Ahom state.

The waves of Ahom migrants

There were at least two waves of Ahom migrants in Upper Assam in the twenties of the thirteenth century; one at the time of the conquest of the Chutiya kingdom by Samlongpha and the other when Sukapha came. The expedition to and the conquest of the Chutiya kingdom was the result of the aggression and expansionist policy of the Mao-Shan chief.

7 Mahang was an important source of salt. It was an outlying part of the Kachari state in the east of modern Barhat town. It was the bone of contention between the Nagas and the Kacharis. (See Satsori Assom Burahali, S.K. Bhuyan, ed., Guwahati University, 1974, p.4. Hereafter CAPITOL. BARBARA, AHOM MH, Publication Board, Assam Guwahati, 1984, p.13). P. Gogoi (n.1, p.269) says that Sukapha wrested Mahang from the Kachari king while Kashinath Tamuli Phukan (n.6, p.18) mentions that Mahang was annexed in 1536 by Summung Dihingia Raja by defeating the Nagas. Mahang thus marks an important point in the Ahom-Kachari-Naga relations.

8 The whereabouts of Samlongpha after the conquest of the Chutiya kingdom is shrouded in obscurity. It is not clear whether Sukapha was the Mao-Shan General after Samlongpha or not, but it is also not unlikely that after Samlongpha, Sukapha was the only Mao-Shan General to have been sent for suppressing the Chutiya uprisings from the Mao-Shan capital. But citing Garo sources, P. Gogoi (n.1, pp.152-153) says that Samlongpha was very much alive when Sukapha landed at Tipam and the area was handed over to Sukapha by Samlongpha as his successor and retired or died. In any case, it appears probable that Sukapha had some knowledge of eastern Assam, either from his personal experience or from the narratives of his fellowmen before leaving his motherland for good.
Sukhanpha (1220-1250). He sent his brother Samlongpha, the redoubtable Mao-Shan General, whose first expedition was to Manipur through the Lushai Hills and Tripura from Northern Arakan and the second was the conquest of the Chutiya kingdom in Upper Assam. The Chutiya state became a tributary of the Mao-Shan empire and Samlongpha set up principalities at the Tipam-Harrupt area. The second migrations of the Aoms took place when Sukapha decided to leave his original home state at Mong-Mao in Upper Burma.

The political developments in the Mao-Shan empire necessitated this wave of migrations of a considerable section of the Taiss of the Mao-Shan branch. The aggressive designs of the Mong-Mao monarch Sukhanpha to do away with the internal independence of the various Tai chiefs, aiming at absolute centralisation of authority in himself, and to materialise his expansionist policy, resulted in the discontent of many of the Tai chiefs and Sukapha was one of them. His political frustrations were one of the reasons.

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10 P. Gogoi, n. 1, p. 262.

11 Sukapha had the first disappointment when his prospect of being chosen as the king of Mong-Mao was doomed, and the second and greater disappointment came when, after an interregnum of eighteen years of peaceful reign in his paternal kingdom he had to surrender its independence to the Mong-Mao chiefs, see P. Gogoi, n. 1, p. 253. Otherwise also Sukapha decided to leave because he realised that 'there cannot be two tigers in the same cage', see, Daru, p. 97.
to leave his original paternal kingdom where he was a successful ruler. To this, we may add that if the second conquest of the Chutiya kingdom by Sukapha, after SAMLONGPHA, is to be taken as authentic, then he might have possessed the knowledge of Eastern Assam, particularly about its ecological viability and ethnic compatibility for founding a new kingdom in this part of the land. With the Shan-Tai heritage behind him and with his faithful valiant followers, he could have foreseen this and this might have entered into his imaginative mind. Perhaps, that is why he made elaborate arrangements and plans before leaving his homeland for good. In such a case, the Ahom state was predestined to its rise through armed mights in striking roots in Upper Assam and through Southeast Asian heritage of wet rice culture as the prime basis. So when Sukapha landed in Tipam-Namrup area, it was already an Ahom stronghold, an important outpost of the early Ahom settlers. It was perhaps, because of this that the first Ahom headquarter was set up at Tipam. The easy submission of the Moran-Borahi chiefs, who were probably tributary to the Chutiya kings, was the natural outcome of the earlier

12 See P. Gogoi, n.1, p.163. Gogoi says, Chao Sukapha is said to be the same prince who later founded the Ahom dynasty in Assam. But read with n.8, the whole issue becomes unclear and a doubt arises to its authenticity since we do not have any corroborative evidence in the extant Ahom and Assamese sources. Any way, it remains heuristic for us.
Ahom conquest of the Chutiyas, followed by Sukapha's friendly but strong arm policies. Therefore, there seems to be little doubt that the initial Ahom settlements in Upper Assam came through conquests, the seeds of which must have been sown earlier even before the arrival of Sukapha.

That the Ahoms were an offshoot of the Mao-Shan branch of the great Tai race of Southeast Asia is acknowledged by all.¹³ A great deal of similarity is discernible in between the Tai and the Ahom formations particularly in matters of polity and economy, social system and culture of the Ahoms. Therefore, in looking into the rationale of the Ahom state formation processes, perhaps, it would not be out of place to trace their Southeast Asian heritage. Otherwise also, it appears inevitably imperative to look to the Southeast Asian roots, particularly of the Thai-Burmese sources, in order to fill up some of the gaps in Ahom studies, so far left out.

¹³ Regarding the great Tai race, see P. Gogoi, n. 1, pp. 1-209; also see the article in Assamese by J. N. Phukan, 'Tai hokolor Adi Bhumi sutra', in Prakasha, Publication Board, Assam, Guwahati, January Issue, 1983, pp. 51-57.

Southeast Asian Heritage

Firstly, in proto-history, at least dating back to 4-5 millennia, groups of inhabitants in southeast Asia did create an early civilization different from China and India with its own distinctive features. Its cultural complex was marked by the three elements, that of the plain, the hill and maritime cultures of which the plain element had a dominant role. The civilization so emerging was essentially from wet rice agriculture. 1

Based on such cultural history, there appeared the first unified states known by such peculiar names as Lan Phia (millions of granaries), Lan Na (millions of rice fields) and Lan Sang (millions of elephants). Lan Na is closely linked to Ahom's Ban Na, i.e. the muong linked pathar (rice fields) which were pivotal in the growth of the Ahom state system. Similarly, the Hastividyarnab puthi, a treatise on elephants and a monument-work of the later Ahom times, appears to have the source-link to the Lan Sang concept.

1Pham Duc Duong, "Study on History and Culture of Thailand" in: History and Culture of South East Asia, Studies on Thai, Department of South East Asian Studies, Social Science Committee of Vietnam, 1981, pp. 1-8. In analysing the Thai heritage, Duong says:

...there came into being a series of ancient states in the form of oriental feudalist power-centralised states which based on agriculture, established the traditional cultures embracing specific national character ... Referring to the Thai character, he further says that the Thais are like a water way which affects every form of the bank. This made the Thais subtle and creative in receiving cultures from their neighbours and delicate in behaviours.

On the convergence of the ancient Thai Muong, Duong says that there came into being of a power-centralised state which was loose and based on wet rice agriculture with a peculiar flexible irrigation style.
The Ahoms belonging to a Tai-substratum, carried with them the traditional social organisation based on nucleus families concentrated into village cells. Their concept of muong statehood, centred round a leader in whom the military and the civil functions were both combined. That the Ahoms were characteristically valley dwellers and wet rice agriculturists, true to their Southeast Asian heritage, has been proved beyond doubt. Their culture was essentially a valley culture and not 'mountain culture' as someone would say, nor they were 'hardy hillmen' as Gaits have seen. The rice plant and the wet rice agriculture of the valleys produced a social space with the assimilation of divergent cultures. It all started with the Ban-muong system where the traditional social culture was based. Such organisation is related to the irrigation model in drawing water from the brooks by means of dams and dykes. The Ban, being essentially a unit of social organisation, the Ban or Ban Na was the unit of the neighbourhood commune or land. Ban is composed of nuclear families which usually settle by a brooklet. Several such brooklets empty into a greater one forming a valley around which the Ban Na is formed. Several such Ban Nases formed a muong. The muong then presents an inter-Ban

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Terweil has since shown that the Tai peoples were characteristically valley dwellers. See, B.J. Terweil, Ahoms and the study of the Early Tai Society, Second Thai-European Research Seminar, Saarbruecken, Federal Republic of Germany, June, 1982.
organisation entirely depending upon a hydraulic culture on a vast area of fields covering a wide area of the valley which a single Ban is unable to attain the necessaries.

The muong thus, needed a leader to control and manage water for agricultural purposes. As per the religious notions, the leader was the soul of the earth and water. So the leader becomes a deified personality, being solely responsible for the distribution and conservancy of the water system. The relocation of Ban and muong sometimes leads to conflict and then to fierce fighting. Thus the leader has to assume military responsibility when occasion demands. In this way, a logical sequence arises from the water management to the management of internal and external affairs, consequently leading to the birth of the muong.  

Secondly, the existence of a totality of traits common to all Tai speaking people through an interconnected system is discernible in the organisation of the rural communities. From the religious point of view, the muong embodies an all inclusive hierarchical society. Thus the phi-muong, the protective spirit of the principality covers the different phi-bans, the protecting spirit of each village.

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with which the muong is constituted of. Like the phi-muongs, the phi-bans have not only jurisdiction over the entire population of the village but also over the whole territory along with the entire cultural formations, including the forests, water, the domestic animals and the game on land and water.

To understand this better, the semantic meaning of the word 'muong' may be taken into account. It stands for one and at the same time, the chief town and the principality on the one hand, and the divisions of different sizes in which the largest ones incorporate the smallest ones on the other. It is peculiar in some respects that it assumes statuses of territories. Thus the word 'muong' may also mean a powerful state as well as a principality on which the muong exercises its authority.

The character of the Tai expansions, at first, is marked by the chiefs related among them by throwing to the front small groups at the conquered valley or low paddy fields associated with agriculture, followed by a cohesion among the chiefs, in the second. The cohesion is maintained till such time as the full consolidation of the muong is reached. And finally, they resort to matrimonial alliances with the local rulers. 18

18 Terwiel, see n. 15.
The distinctive feature of Tai formations, in general is that their states grow up on the debris of high civilisation in a state of decline or on the annexations of the territories inhabited by a people of lower civilisation with a solid political organisation. They move towards the valleys of low land where there would be possibilities of carving out paddy fields or already carved out by other men.

Because of the rapid thrusts in the conquests, the small groups of Taïs remain tied to the nobles in armed companion in governing. The people in turn, to get rid of their conquerors, fall into the net of Taiisation. Inspite of all this, the conquering Taïs remain as a minority while majority of their subjects constituted the majority.

The birth of the Ahom state exactly witnessed similar situations. From 1228 to 1401, when the boundary between the Nara and the Ahom state was finally settled, the Ahoms continued to maintain their relation with the Shan states with mutual exchange of gifts and presents. As regards the matrimonial relations with the local rulers, it is an established fact. That the Ahom state was born out of the Moran, Borahi, Chutiya and Kachari's political debris is also a historical fact. The Ahom and Assamese chronicles bear ample testimony to this.

\[^{19}\] SAB, n. 7, p. 48; Tamuli phonak, n. 6, p. 10.
The Myths and the Gentile Constitution

In the structural system, the studies on myths, rituals and traditions might help us to a great extent to understand the formative processes of all social organisations as these represent the unity and exclusiveness of social groups with a degree of respectability and stability. The unthoughtful beliefs and notions that men upheld jealously, that they may live for or live by it, is dominant in the social order which is held together by a system of myth.

However, it is very difficult to give a definition of myth that would be acceptable to all. It is a cultural reality which can be approached and interpreted from various complimentary views and points of experience from the archaic societies, myths constitute the history of the acts of the supernaturals which is at once true and sacred; it is related to a 'creation' indicating how something has come into existence and that it serves as the paradigm of all significant human activities; that by knowing a myth one attempts to know the origin of things which is not an abstract knowledge but a knowledge experienced through rituals and ceremonies. In short, the foremost function of a myth is to reveal the exemplary models for all human rites and all significant human activities. 20

Myths and rituals are the two sides of the same coin. Myth is the counterpart of ritual, myth implies rituals and ritual implies myths. In all archaic societies, ritual is usually taken with a peculiar sense of rightness violation of which is considered as the violation of morality. It concerns with an intrinsic validity, not related to immediate purpose, but accepted without any reasoning or explaining. Gods and spirits are symbols expressing solidarity of particular social groups. The lineage, kinship systems are emphasized and derived from their dead ancestors. It is an attempt to arrive at an explanation of the universe and to find man's place in it validating the moral sanctions. To study myths and rituals in historical perspectives, is most often discouraged on grounds of survivalistic tendencies. Moreover, it has been very little emphasized in modern ethnological studies too. Further, ritual represents the individual's attempt to find his status as a social person in which he finds himself for the time being. It is in this context, that the Durkheim's view of representing solidarity of the participating groups in ritual observances is forcefully countered by Leach by saying that this solidarity among the participating groups continues for the

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22 Termiel, n. 13, Vol. I, p. 23
23 Leach, n. 21, pp. 10-11.
time being, and once the ritual celebrations are over, it is difficult to find a latent solidarity among the participating groups. He further argues that mythology and rituals are both the ideal versions of a social structure. It is, just a model, how people suppose their society to be organised but it is not a necessary goal towards which they strive for.24

Since any social system, however stable and balanced it might be, contains opposing factions, there are bound to be different myths to validate the particular rights of different groups of people. He goes on arguing, 'if ritual is sometimes a mechanism of integration, one could as well argue that it is often a mechanism of disintegration'.25

However, there are scholars who would not totally subscribe to this view. Terwel says that, 'the study of the survivals can be helpful and relevant, not so much as an independent method to establish links between different peoples living in different parts of the globe, but as an aid to deepen historical knowledge of a specific people in a limited region'.26

If myths and rituals are to be taken as cultural reality, then Taylor's assertion of many archaic aspects in culture...
cannot also be overlooked when he emphasizes, 'collection of such facts are to be worked as mines of historical knowl-

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dge.' Amalendu Guha also suggests a similar view. Quoting Evans-Pritchard, 'a myth may be false, yet historical in charac-

ter,' and also citing some Tai-Ahom myths, he observes, 'These myths then suggest that the polity emerged in the proto-historic times as an agency for reconciling social contradictions, and it was believed to be divinely ordained.'
P. Gogoi also speaks in the same tone: 'The eight lakhs of gods, mentioned in the Tai-Ahom chronicle, were no other than eight lakhs of Tai population (Mao-Shans)... and Lengdon was their sovereign. Hence the story of early Mao-Shans as fashioned in the chronicles to give it a heavenly character, appears to the reader extra-ordinary and mythical, but stripped of its garb, it is a history of the Mao-Shans plain and simple...'

Any attempt to historicise myths, rituals and traditions are bound to draw comments because of its overpowering influence in society. Even then certain inferences indicating the

28 Amalendu Guha, The Ahom Political System: An Enquiry into State Formation Process in Medieval Assam, 1228-1714, Occasion-

29 P. Gogoi, n. i, p. 125.
pattern of political orientations in these, might help us to deepen our knowledge with the admission of the fact that certain values, sentiments and orientations were the most critical in giving the collectivity distinctive character.

The Ahom kings, throughout their six hundred years of rule, claimed descent from their heavenly ancestor, Lengdon, the supreme ruler of heaven, and his two grandsons Khun Lung and Khun Lai who were sent down to rule over the wide earth. Yet, they widely differed in their concept of kingship as was the case with medieval Europe's divine right rulers. On the contrary, they continued to be somewhat constitutional as per the directives of Lengdon and so were pragmatic in their pronouncements, till up to the end of their rule. Lengdon remarked, 'He whose forefathers were never rulers, can hardly be expected to be a king. He can never get homage from others.' This view was supported by other two chief counsellors in the presence of all, on the ground that 'If an ordinary being is sent, he will not be able to rule the earth.' So his two grandsons were sent down to rule over the anarchic wide earth with a 'Code of Conduct' with them which formed the basis of the Ahom gentile constitution.

It can be noted that almost all the Ahom rulers followed this convention of discussion and consultation before taking any major decision concerning the affairs of the state. The evolution and emergence of the Bor Chara, bor Mel, i.e., the grand assembly, as an important aspect in the Ahom political system, is testified by such conventional facts in keeping with the mythical traditions.

The chronicles of the Ahoms, exclusively mention the directives of Langdon which substantially point to the concept of Ahom polity. To mention some of such directives, are:

- "There is no ruler on earth, I think, there, the wife of one is forcibly taken by another ... Large fields are lying fallow. These may be well cultivated."

- "... You should try to get the hearts of the people with sweet words ... You must always be alert in carrying out state affairs."

- "... The countries are not properly ruled. The strong oppress the weak. They live on cultivation ... You must rule the wide countries peacefully. You will take tributes from the people, ... Both of you must rule the countries without quarrel, ...

- "... If you quarrel amongst yourself, you are sure to lose your royal power."

- "... The country is full of Tais and slaves. They cannot distinguish right from wrong."

- "... If a person commits a crime, do not kill him at once without fair trial ... If any of them lives by oppressing others, he should be sent to exile ...

- They divided the land between their subjects ..."
The socio-political culture of the Ahoms is thus clear from this. Based on such mythical aspects of the Ahom political culture in its most rudimentary form, Guha observes:

The Ahoms thus believed that they were divinely ordained, firstly, to extend their permanent wet rice culture to areas dominated by large scale following and shifting cultivation and, secondly, to absorb stateless shifting cultivators into a common polity. We cannot disagree with Guha, although it looks mythical, such codes and directives clearly suggest the socio-political systems of the Ahoms. We may go back to proto-history of the Tais for little more elaboration on this point. The theory of 'Mandate of Heaven' pervades all through these myths. According to the mandate, the kings must follow the directions of the heaven ungrudgingly for the welfare of the people because the ruler ruled the people in trust from heaven and that when a ruler misruled he automatically forfeits his right to rule. Again, Heaven hears and sees through the eyes and ears of the people. Heaven expresses its disapproval through the expressed disapproval of the people. Confucius, the Chinese philosopher, also says in the same tone, 'for heaven is not an arbitrarily governing divine tyrant, but the embodiment of a system of legality.'

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Heaven does not act independently but follows a universal law, the so-called Tao. It may be noted that a blend of Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism and even Hinduism influenced the Tao culture and thinking in Southeast Asia even before the advent of the Ahoms to Assam.

If the mythical aspect of the divinity of the Ahom kings is taken out, at least three inferences appear before us. Firstly, the Ahom king was not a divine tyrant; secondly, he has to be constitutional as per the directives of his ancestors and were under obligation to consult his advisers from whom he derived powers; and thirdly, justice and welfare of his people were his first and foremost concern. Whenever there was a deviation from these set rules, the state faced collapse, and whenever these were adhered to, the state survived sometimes, miraculously. The chronicles bear ample testimony to this fact. Firstly, the early Ahom state survived at least three interregnums totalling nearly eighteen years, when the state was ruled with a symbolic king on the throne by the nobility and secondly, during the period of weak rule (1673-1681) when Atan Buragohain, the Prime Minister, twice refused the throne on the ground that he did not belong to the royal family. Such reconciliations through a mythical process is generally not noticed in other state systems.

36 Ibid., a quote from W. Eberhard, History of China.
However, the sacral status of the sovereign is found in almost all early states. The relationship between the godly ruler and the ruled is marked by trying to establish a legitimate position of the sovereign. Because, legitimacy is normally derived not from force or threats but from the values held by the individuals formulating, influencing and being effected by political ends. 37

In this respect, we can cite some illustrations from the Ahom chronicles. Once, the king Sukampha (1553-1603) had to change his decision of sending Chaopet, the son of the Borgohain, as the hostage to the Koch king on protest from his mother Nangbu, who took the king to task by saying, "Why should he reign when he is unable to save his subjects from enemies?" 38 Again, during the reign of Suklemung Garganya Raja (1539-1552), when the new capital of Gargaon was being constructed and a rampart was being erected surrounding the capital, the king failed to requisitete the land needed for the purpose, from one Hemena, who claimed to be the great grandson of Kanganganthaomung, the noble accompanying Sukampha. Hemena said, "This is my inalienable land. What is the king?" Thus the rampart could be completed only after his death and the place is still known as Hemenabari. 39

These speak of wider political dimensions.

37 See our discussions with regard to the problems of sover reign's legitimization in chapter VII.
The Early State and the Ahoms

So far we have attempted to present the stage of political development of the Ahoms when they first landed in Upper Assam. Besides, we have also to note that what the Ahoms did not have was a sufficient number of population and a definite territory. With the acquisition of these two, through the initial conquests, the state building process began with the new capital at Charaideo. To look into the specifics of the processes, an inquiry into their levels of socio-political organization in a civilizational perspective would be imperative, and indeed we heavily draw upon Engels, Claessen, and Skalnik.

With the foregoing data, it can be said that the Ahoms were in the Upper stage of Barbarism with the second great division of labour already taking place in the Ahom society. According to Engels, the stage of development, which he has analysed under given historical conditions, marks an important point on the way to civilization in which the handicraftsmen are separated from agriculture; slavery becomes an essential part of the social system; the distinction between the rich and the poor was marked by freemen and slaves; each new division of labour brings in a new division of society into classes; the individual family becomes the economic unit of the society; the increase in population causes closer union.

\[40\] F. Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property* ... p. 159.
internally and externally; leads to the amalgamation of the separate tribal territories into a single territory of the people; the military commander becomes an indispensable permanent official; a sort of military democracy with the military commander and the council members emerges; wars and organisation of wars becomes a regular function; the customary election of successors gradually transforms into hereditary succession and finally, the hereditary royalty and nobility comes into being.\(^{41}\)

Almost similar was the course of development in case of the Ahoms too, at least in the initial period during 1228–1407 A.D. Following Claassen and Skalnik, the characteristic features of the early state stage of the Ahoms can now be traced.

The early state is a centralised socio-political organisation for the regulation of social relations in a complex stratified society divided into at least two basic strata or emergent social classes—viz., the rulers and the ruled—whose relations are characterised by political dominance of the former and tributary obligations of the latter, legitimised by a common ideology of which reciprocity is the basic principle. Structurally, it is an independent socio-political organisation with a bounded territory and a central government. Its primary economy was agriculture and the surplus so produced constituted the income of the government. The

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population consisted of two strata, the sovereign, his relatives and the aristocracy at the top, and the common masses at the bottom. There was unequal access to the resources. The sovereign claimed divine descent. The aristocracy comprised of the relatives of the sovereign and the other lineage based kin groups and nobles. Private property of land was a rare phenomenon and social inequality was determined by birth. 42

Claessen and Skalnik have further categorised the early state into inchoate, typical and transitional ones. In Ahom’s case, however, it is somewhat difficult to make a straight categorisation. There appears to be some overlapping of the characteristic features of the typical and transitional states, while inchoacy may be totally ruled out. The typical characteristics appear very much in the first formative stages but it landed into the transitional stage after the Sanskritization/Hinduisation processes had begun in later times.

Each specific state is formed under specific conditions and so are the variations. Nevertheless, it is not so difficult to distinguish the early state as a distinct category in the evolution of human societies. The data of the Ahom chronicles point to a typical nature of the Ahom state. Because, the kinship ties were already counterbalanced by the terri

42 Claessen & Skalnik, n.30, p.23 app.640-41.
Citorial ones like the Namrup, Tipam, Saring and Tingkhong Rajaships, from where the regular tributes flowed in terms of kinds and services. The major works were organised by the government functionaries which were undertaken with the aid of compulsory labour through the pyke system.43

The Ahoms were literate, had political experience, and had the capacity for surplus productions. All these show that they were in a pre-state condition crossing the stage of primary statehood in a lower form of state, if not state per se.44 In the beginning, there appears to be an indication that the Ahoms professed relatively a covert colonialism with direct pressure in the form of political incorporation of the Moran-Borahi population. Unfortunately, we do not have adequate data as to the growth of the Ahom state after Sukapha up to 1401 A.D. At least two Ahom kings (1293-1332 & 1332-1364) had long periods of reign. Tributes seem to have flowed to their original state in Upper S年由 from Mungdunshunkham45 and probably the covert colonialism ended in 1401 when the boundary between Mungdunshunkham and the Nara kingdom was finally fixed at the Patkai hills.46

43 Ibid, p.64. See for the characteristic categorization of the early state into inchoate, typical & transitional stages.
44 Amalendu Guha, n.28, p.22.
45 Mungdunshunkham, meaning 'the land full of golden gardens' was the name given to Upper S年由 region by the Ahoms when they first landed there.
46 P. Gogoi, n.1, p.276.
There is reason to believe that the name Mungdunshunkham is closely associated with this covert colonialism of the time and it automatically disappeared when Mungdunshunkham became 'Asom' after their new name 'Ahom'.

All these facts lead us to issues involved in secondary state formations. Barbara Price has observed the situation like this:

For two ultimately related reasons the problem of the secondary state is an important one. First, the spread and dispersal of the state as a level of organization are in evolutionary terms principal indices of its adaptive success. An adaptive trait is one which increases the number of its carriers; state institutions expand at the expense of non-states ones via the process of secondary state formation. Second, it is evident that studies of secondary states are often uncritically at least implicitly, retrodicted into pristine situations, thus raising questions of epistemological legitimacy.

The enormous complexities of the issues in state formation studies make it epistemological, no doubt. But the Ahom state, at the initial stage, was neither in its pristine conditions, nor was it a primary one, nor in its inchoacy stage, should have no doubt. It is somewhere between the early and secondary state stages and the issue is indeed epistemological, we might say.

47 As regards the root and origin of the word 'Ahom', we would not lead ourselves into further controversy (see Gait, n. 15, p. 94; Gogol, n. 1, pp. 16–17 and others). But there seems to be no doubt that the name 'Asom' was the logical outcome of the currents of changes in socio-political changes of the time affected by the Ahoms.