Chapter III
THE FOUNDATIONS

The Conquest theory and its Relevance

There are states which have emerged from within through a process of change and growth. There are also states which have emerged out of conquests. The German, the Ankole, the Gonja, the scythian, and the Mauryan are some of the examples to mention a few.

The adherents to the conquest theory are Ratzel, Gumplovicz and F. Oppenheimer. Ratzel conceived of the state formation being the result of the external process of migration and conquest. Gumplovicz held that warlike hordes migrated into the neighbourhood of peaceful cultivators and forced them to give up part of their products out of...

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the meeting of the two heterogeneous peoples, the structural relation between the ruler and the ruled is established.6

To Oppenheimer, the state is an instrument of oppression designed to confirm social inequality which is, however, originated in the conquest and subjugation of one people by another. This subjugation had no other purpose than the economic exploitation of the defeated.7 Carneiro adds population pressure to the conquest theory and gives more emphasis on the environmental and social circumscriptions as the cause of the warfare which appear after the initial conquests are settled.8 Thurnwald and Westermann are others who have used the conquest theory to explain the state formation processes in Africa.9

Service has outrightly rejected the conquest theory though he accepts the agricultural routes to statehood.10

6 Lawrence Krader, n.2, p. 44.
Modern historians have refused to accept the conquest theory on the ground that the conquering and the conquered states had already possessed some sort of statehood. M.H. Fried has also argued that the type of society leading to state formation by conquest is a super stratified society, given that both the victors and the vanquished have already been internally stratified. To him, rank differences in local headmen, lineage elders, ward heads, factions or bigmen are universal features of such societies with unequal access to resources particularly in agricultural land.\(^{11}\) Claassen and Skalnik also hold the view that the state formation by conquest appears tenable only in case of secondary states.\(^{12}\)

These set some limitations\(^{13}\) in the Ahom's case. Because, it is the historical fact that both the conquerors and the

\(^{11}\) Morton H. Fried, "The Evolution of Political Society", in: Claessen & Skalnik, n.4, pp. 52-53.

\(^{12}\) Claassen & Skalnik, n.4, p. 627.

\(^{13}\) The limitations arise because of the conflicting views and interpretations on 'conquest' by the different scholars. It is not only unclear but also confusing. It poses a question like 'what came first? Chicken or the Egg?'. Whether states are formed after conquests or only after the formation of the state conquests take place, so the problem is epistemological. Hence, following Robert Johann Gustov Broyseen (cited by William Fogel & G.R. Elton, in: Which Road to the Past? Two Views of History, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1985, p. 11), we confine ourselves to 'ideengeschichte' or 'imaginative understanding' and in doing so, the dictionary meaning is followed here.
conquered were in a developed social stage. The Kacharies were already reaching some advanced class society stage\(^{14}\) while the Ahoms were already in a lower form of state as described earlier. The Chutiyas, Morchs and Borahs, and the Bhuyans too, possessed the full characteristics in the social formations as seen by Pried above. To relate the conquest theory in such a context, would be superfluous. The complexities are thus enormous.

However, there are scholars who do not altogether deny the role of conquests in state formations, although they would not consider it as the sole factor. They maintain that the state is not ordinarily founded by conquest of one ethnic group, tribe or nation by another. It may be, but more significantly, the forces of development are internal to the society.\(^{15}\) To Cohen, conquests stimulate, to Khazanov, it not only stimulates but determines the local specific variations.\(^{16}\) There is no denying the fact that conquests deeply affect the state formations. Since it relates only to the external factors, and does not take into account the internal factors, it fails to satisfy convincingly as the general theory of explanation.\(^{17}\)

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16 Claessen & Skalnik, p. 44, p. 46 & p. 83.
17 Ibid., p. 10; also see Krader, n. 2, p. 45.
Coedes evolved the theory of *infiltration* in place of conquests in case of the Tai expansions and founding of new states.¹⁸ Broman also says in a similar tone that a Tai ruler, accompanied by a band of warriors and their families, would descend upon a fertile valley and request the local population to recognise him as overlord or else give battle.¹⁹ We have enough data to test these facts of which we would mention only some.

Firstly, the Ahom penetration in Upper Assam was by no means peaceful; on the contrary, it had to be violent.²⁰ Of course, the first hundred years or so of the Ahom rule was rather peaceful, there having been no major battles after the initial subjugation of the Morans and the Borahis, except some minor skirmishes here and there. As Gogoi observes,

It appears that at the initial stage the Ahom monarchs and their ministers devoted more attention to putting their small state on a firm footing than to war and expansion and, for that purpose, avoided major conflicts with their powerful neighbours, ...²¹

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But wars and organisation of wars became inseparable with the ruling Ahoms, particularly after the war with the Kamarata kingdom in 1324 and after the final settlement of the boundary with the Mara kingdom in 1401 A.D. In fact, wars did fire the imagination of the Ahoms in their state building processes. The war with the Chutiyas and the subsequent annexation of the Chutiya territory and the absorptions of its population, is a case in point. The war with the Chutiyas was as important as one of the great battles in a nation's life. As against Coedes and Brown, in this respect, Terwiel seems to us more convincing when he says:

... as soon as the Tai appear in a region the old established cultural and literary traditions stop abruptly to make way for a Tai way of life; there is no sign of the compromise and mutual adaptation characteristic of a slowly "infiltrating" people. 22

Secondly, Sukapha, the founder of the Ahom state, was a man of outstanding personality, indefatigable in his pursuits, an excellent organiser in war and peace alike, singularly persuasive in his dealings and dispositions, provenly ruthless wherever necessary. 23

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22 B.J. Terwiel, The Tai of Assam ... etc., Vol. II, p. 5.

23 Abom Buranji, G.C. Barua, tr. & ed., Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta, 1930, p. 45, records thus: "A great number of the Nagas was killed and many were made captives. Some Nagas were cut to pieces and their flesh was cooked. Then the king made a younger brother eat the cooked flesh of his elder brother and a father of his son's. Thus Sukapha destroyed the Naga villages."

24 Purani Abom Buranji, H.C. Goswami, ed., Guwahati, 1922, p. 14, also mentions similar situation when those of the Moran, Borali tribes, who refused to submit to Sukapha, the headmen were invited to a feast and when they got intoxicated, Sukapha's men killed them. Although, these cast a dark spot on Sukapha's character, it was the age old practice to use such terror tactics to cause total submission of turbulent and defiant opponents.
This is proved by the fact that the way in which he was traversing through the difficult terrains overcoming and subjugating ferocious hill tribes, and in which he was bringing a large number of followers who already cast their lot in his unknown and uncharted military adventurism in search of a new home. The chronicles mention that Sukapha brought with him:

a large force composed of cavalry and infantry armed with cannons, guns and gunpowder so as to be able to fight his enemies and also there were other followers and servants.

The chronicles also confirm that the various nobles and chief-officials, who accompanied Sukapha, joined him from time to time and from place to place with their own contingent of forces, had also chosen him as their leader and were confident of his ability and leadership. The threat of wars or attacks always loomed large in the infant Ahom state, and wars and warfares became a logical consequence for the Ahom survival in terms of Darwinian dictum, defence, putting down rebellions and subduing rival states animated the early Ahom rulers. Thus conquests were intrinsically linked and destined to play a significant role in the formation and development of the Ahom state particularly in the initial stage of its rise and growth.


Regarding the knowledge and the use of fire arms, in Ahom's case, see Gait, A History of Assam ..., pp. 94-95. P. Gogoi, n.21, p.289 mentions the capture of large quantity of fire arms from the Chutiyas. Hiteswar Barbaruah, Ahom Pip, Publication Board, Assam, Guwahati, 1980, p.450, mentions the capture of the best Chutiya cannon (Mitha-Ruling Tup) after defeating them in 1523.

There seems to be no doubt that both the Ahoms and the Chutiyas knew about the use of fire arms, but probably because of tactical and circumstantial disadvantages, it was not used by the Ahoms prior to 1534.
Thirdly, with the increased number of subjugated population as well as the expansion of the territory, it led to the creation of new offices. Thus the posts of frontier governors that of the Sadiyakhowa and the Marangikhowa Gohains and the addition of the third member to the council of ministers in the Barpatragohain were the direct outcomes of such external factors and variables arising out of conquests and absorptions of the local peoples. So the foundations of a highly centralised hierarchical structure came into being. The exploitations of the labours of the subjugated population were also extended to the estates of the royal princes being settled at Dihing, Saring, Namrup, Tipam and Tingkhong. All these led to the centralisation of authority and marked the first major breaks in the gentile order of the Ahoms leading to further elaboration and sophistication, on both structural and functional basis.

But interestingly enough, we do not find the operation of Carneiro’s propositions, in as much as the environmental and population circumscriptions did not show up a positive role. Because, in the Ahom conquests, there appears no war aggressiveness forced under circumstances of either population pressure or territorial imperatives. The wars and conquests were, in essence, the Ahom’s attempt to establish their political supremacy to sustain their agro-economic system through a man-grabbing process.
As regards the contentions of Fried and Claessen that conquests could be relevant only in case of secondary states or in case of a superstratified society, the issue is epistemological as discussed earlier. Because, the Ahom's case, to some extent, displays an overlapping of the characteristic features of both the early and secondary states. Hence, the relevancy of the conquest theory cannot totally be ruled out. The initial Ahom conquests, at least to a considerable extent, largely determined some of the governing factors and thereby indicating the local specific variations.

Finally, for further elaboration on this point, the mode, the conditions and the nature of Ahom conquests may also be taken into account. As Fortes and Evans suggest, assuming that the necessary historical evidence is available - must take into account not only the mode of conquest and the condition of conquest and the conditions of contact but also the similarities or divergences in culture and mode of livelihood of conquerors and conquered and the political institution they bring with them into the new combination. 26

The necessary historical evidence is not lacking in the extant chronicles. In Ahom's case, the new combination produced a bond of understanding between the victors and the vanquished resulting in a conquest society with mutual benefits to each other which means that the Ahoms made their conquered land permanent home and therefore, they neither

liquidated nor expelled the native population and yet they established themselves as a cohesive ruling class apart from and above their new subjects.  

Further, in many ways, the Ahom's case demonstrates striking similarities with that of the Normans in early England, where the conquerors devised a system of administration leading to the feudal characteristics and also with that of the Pombina nomad originated states of Africa, where the conquerors usurped control of the land from previous owners by military force.

So following Jack Goody, we might say that a group of Tais from Upper Burma came and settled at Tipam. Gradually, they were successful in establishing their own state in Upper Assam and then over the whole of the Brahmaputra Valley. Separated by great distances, obstructed by inhospitable mountains from the home country, coming as a warrior band rather than as family migrants, they doubtless took their women from the new conquered land. The children of their unions adopted their mother's tongue and this helped linguistic assimilation. The political incorporation by conquest leading to partial consent was followed by a cultural assimilation.

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27. Karl A. Wittfogel, Oriental Despotism, ... p. 325.
28. S.K. Bhuyan, Anglo Assamese Relations ... p. 250; Guha, n. 20, p. 9; Cohen, in: Claessen & Skalnik, n. 4, p. 45.
The kingdom of Kamrupa was the earliest state in Assam. The available historical data show that the kingdom came into prominence with the rule of the Varman dynasty from the fifth century, and was in existence up to the first decade of the twelfth century. Altogether three dynasties that of the Varman, Salastambha and Pala, ruled during this period.

The legacy of this ancient state marks the beginning of the penetration of the Aryan/Hindu/Brahmanical civilization in a land where pristine tribal culture was predominant. The kings of Kamrupa made abundant land grants to Brahmanas and patronised them. There seems to have been a process of kshatriyaisation of the tribal population and hence, western Assam had more of Hindu population in later times.

The disappearance of the kingdom of Kamrupa leading to lack of patronisation of the Brahmanas especially by strong and famous rulers, forced them to move towards Eastern Assam. This might have been the cause of the Hindu elements in the Chutiya kingdom which otherwise was a tribal state. The existence of the Deori Chutiyas, even now, explains this. Be that

31 The chronology of the rule of these dynasties widely vary. See E. Gait, A History of Assam, LBS Publication, Guwahati, 1962, Reprint, p. 363, and K. L. Barua, Early History of Kamrupa, LBS, Guwahati, 2nd Edn., 1966, p. 85. However, all these are approximate dates.

32 See Chapter VII on the Aryan/Hindu/Brahmanical civilisation.
as it may, there appears to have been a considerable gap left by the process of Brahmanical civilisation between Western and Eastern Assam. The Ahom rulers were quick to grasp this gap and after consolidation of political power and with more inter-contacts, their response to the Hinduisation process was one of practical considerations. Therefore, the profuse land grants and patronisation to the Hindu priesthood, like the ancient Kamarupa kings, was but natural.

Besides, in the administrative sphere too, the legacy is discernible. K. L. Barua is of the opinion that the origins of at least two offices of the Ahom government, that of the Barbhandar Barua and the Nyayaodhna Phukan, can be traced back in the offices of the Bhandara garadhikara and the Nyaya karanika respectively of the ancient kingdom of Kamarupa. Whatever might be, the tribal-aryan cultural synthesis during the Ahom rule, owes much to the legacy and heritage of the ancient kingdom of Kamarupa.

(11) The Autochthonous states

The Ahoms landed themselves in a valley of immense size. The ecological potentiality of the land, being extremely suitable to the wet rice culture, led to the founder of the Ahom dynasty, Sukapha, to name it as 'Mungdunshunkham', i.e.

33 K. L. Barua, n. 31, p. 63.
the land, full of golden gardens. The valley was wide and sparsely populated with large tracts of alluvial marshy land with thick jungles lying fallow. The different tribal like states have been shown below. The polity of these states were still in rudimentary form in an inchoacy stage. The division of labour was simple and their gentile constitutions were yet to generate any social contradictions. A subsistence economy was the general characteristic. The class formation was still in its incipiency, although the 'ruling' and the 'ruled' classes were slowly appearing. All these states had distinct political entities, with definite territorial demarcations of their states. 34

34 Gogoi, n.21, p.266, has shown the political boundaries as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States</th>
<th>North</th>
<th>South</th>
<th>East</th>
<th>West</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chutiya</td>
<td>Mountain</td>
<td>Buridihing</td>
<td>Brahmakunda</td>
<td>Sisi river</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moran</td>
<td>Buridihing</td>
<td>Dibang</td>
<td>Suffry</td>
<td>Brahmaputra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borahi</td>
<td>Dibang</td>
<td>Dikhow</td>
<td>Nagaht</td>
<td>Barahi Pika</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kachari</td>
<td>Dikhow</td>
<td>Hils</td>
<td>Hils</td>
<td>Phansiri</td>
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<tr>
<td>BaraBhuyan</td>
<td>Mountain</td>
<td>Brahmaputra</td>
<td>Sisi river</td>
<td>Gang Bihali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sungi</td>
<td>Mountain</td>
<td>Brahmaputra</td>
<td>Gang Bihali</td>
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<td>(Daplia)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darangi</td>
<td>Mountain</td>
<td>Brahmaputra</td>
<td>Bhairabi</td>
<td>Manaha</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kingdom</td>
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</table>

That the Chutiya state extended up to the Swansiri river, is since corroborated by archaeological evidence. See Neog, n.35.
All these groups of people, except the Bhuyans, perhaps, were within the great Bodo race genus belonging to the Tibeto-Burman sections of the Indo-Mongoloid groups—a fact now accepted by almost all scholars. However, this is a broad generalisation since there is no concrete evidence to trace their origins. We may make a brief review of these tribes in order to find out some of the local specific variations in the formation of the Ahom state which engulfed all these tribes within its polity by the end of the sixteenth century.

THE CHUTIYAS

The origins of the Chutiyas is obscure and all the available accounts are but wild surmisals. But that they had a distinct political entity is beyond doubt. The archaeological evidences\(^{35}\) and also the \textit{Buranjia}\(^{36}\) indicate a fairly advanced class society of the Chutiyas. The society

\(^{35}\) Maheswar Neog, “Bormurtia-Beel Tamrapatra, 1314 Saka” in: \textit{Prakash}, July issue, 1976, a monthly Assamese magazine, Publication Board, Asansol, Guwahati, pp. 85–93. The Copper Plates of land grants made by the Chutiyas kings, so far have come to light are (i) Bormurtia-Beel Tamrapatra, 1392; (ii) Boromukhara Copper Plate, 1392; (iii) Chilimara Copper Plate, 1401, (iv) Chapakhowa Copper Plate, 1428; (v) Paya-Tamreswari Temple Plate, 1442.

\(^{36}\) \textit{Buranjia} stands for the chronicles and annals written both in the Ahom and the Assamese languages during the Ahom Age. Although the word \textit{Buranjia} is used as equivalent to the English word ‘history’, it specifically refers to the Ahom Government’s records re-arranged and re-written chronologically. Almost all such \textit{Buranjia} have made profuse references to the Ahom-Chutiya relations.
was stratified in terms of caste, the Hinduised Chutiyas forming the upper class, and the non-Hinduised ones, the commoners. However, the caste system was in its marginal form. Private property was slowly appearing but the labour utilisation processes were yet to generate enough surplus leading to class formations. The king exercised absolute power assisted by the crown princes in the administration. They posed a formidable barrier to Ahom expansion and growth as such, their annihilation and absorption by the Ahoms was the natural outcome. In the Ahomisation process, some of them became Ahom-Chutiya who were admitted into the higher offices in the Ahom government.

The conquest and absorption of the Chutiyas were a shot in the arm in the Ahom state building process. It brought the much needed population element to the growing Ahom state. The settlements of the Brahmons, the Kayasthas, the Kalitas and the Ganaks in the Ahom capital, brought from the Chutiya.

37 The chronicles mention the marriage episode of the Chutiyas princess Sadhani with one young man of low origin. She questioned, 'Why should I get myself married to a man of humble origin?' However, the groom had to undergo some purification ceremony after which the marriage was performed. See Gogoi, n.61, p.288.

38 Even after their complete defeat by 1523, the Chutiyas continued to revolt in 1542, 1563, 1572, to assert their independence from the Ahom yoke. However, these rebellions were suppressed. See Deodhar, Assam BaraK, DHAS, 1962, p.37, 46 & 47; also Gait, n.31, p.98 & 101.
state, further increased the Hindu influence in the Ahom state. Moreover, the Chutiyas were excellent professionals in the arts and the crafts. With the addition of such people, the Ahom society was destined to undergo tremendous changes in course of time.

That the Chutiyas had their capital at Sadiya and that they ruled over a considerable extent of territory has since been proved by archaeological evidences.\(^{39}\) Their clash with the Ahoms was due to the control of the resources. The growing Ahom kingdom naturally became a threat to their existence and the wars with them were necessary outcomes. The assassination of the Ahom king\(^{40}\) and the clash with regard to the fishing rights in the Buridihing river indicate these trends.

THE MORANS AND THE BORABIS

In all probability, these were petty chiefdoms, with a subsistence economy\(^{42}\) in an inchoate stage of tribal social formations. Our data on them are extremely limited. However, these provide us with ample scope for looking into factors which limit the growth of the primary states or which lead

\(^{39}\) Maheswar Neog, pp. 35.

\(^{40}\) P. Gogoi, p. 273. The Ahom king was Sutupha (1369-1376).

\(^{41}\) Ibid., p. 285.

\(^{42}\) Rice is conspicuously absent among the presents brought to Sutupha by these peoples. They did not know the arts of wet rice agriculture. The Ahoms first simply engaged them as fuel suppliers, orchard care takers, cooks etc. Almost all the Buranjis mention about this fact.
to their decline and disappearance. Their culture and civilisation was much at a lower stage, which the advanced culture of the Ahoms just overwhelmed them. As to the origins of these people, there is no unanimous opinion amongst scholars, nonetheless, none denies that they might have belonged to the great Bodo race.

THE KACHARIS

The Kacharis were the original autochthones of Assam and were a semi-civilised people still clinging to the clanish way of life with dominant tribal traits. The different Kachari segments were the Kacharis, Lalunga, Chutiyas, Dimasa, Tripuri, Mech, Rabha, Moran, Borahi, Gado, Bodo, and Tiwa etc., who were living in Assam in different places assuming different names. Thus the Kacharis had a loose territorial boundary extending over a great part of Assam. The Ahom-Kachari relations were mostly confined within the region from the Dikhow valley up to the Dhami valley.

The Kacharis represented the earliest form of state systems who were just reaching the class society stage. It is interesting to note that a clear distinction is discernible between the Hill Kacharis and the Kacharis of the plains.

43 For the Kachari State Formation, see J.B. Bhattacharjee, "State Formation in Pre-Colonial Tribal Northeast: A case study of the Dimasa state", The North-Eastern Hill University Journal ... etc.

44 Endic, The Kacharis, with an introduction by J.D. Anderson, Cosmo Publications, Delhi, 1975, Reprint, p. 7. That the Kacharis were the autochthonous groups is a fact accepted by all and that they were among the earliest inhabitants of the Assam valley appears to be beyond doubt. See J.B. Bhattacharjee, n. 43 p. 5.
while the plains Kacharis were agriculturists using the plough, speaking the Indo-European language, living under advanced society conditions and were in an identical level of culture and civilization with that of the Ahoms, the hill Kacharis were Mongoloid groups speaking Tibeto-Burman language, were hoe farmers, closely linked to the tribal communal social systems and were in a lower form of civilization.

THE BARBHUYAN:

The Bhuyans appear to have been the feudatory landlords and perhaps provincial or frontier administrators under the later rulers of the ancient kingdom of Kamrupa. With the decline of this kingdom, they might have assumed independent, semi-independent status and formed a sort of federated kindred tribes along the north bank of the Brahmaputra river. There are varying accounts as to their origins. However, that they were upper caste Hindus is no doubt about it. They were found both in Upper Assam in the district of Lakhimpur and also in the district of Nowgong in lower Assam. Like the Chutiyas, Morans and Borahis, they were also subjugated by the Ahoms.

The Kocbes were one of the aboriginal tribes of Western Assam. They might have been the scions of the Bodo race. They flourished in the sixteenth century and reached the zenith of their power during the rule of Haranarayan and Chilarai. After them, the Koch kingdom rapidly declined. The Darrangi kingdom was just an offshoot of the Koch kingdom. The Ahom king Susheena (1603-1641) put Balarayan renamed Dharmana-Rayan as the vassal king of the Darrangi kingdom in the early part of the seventeenth century.

The frequent Muslim invasions during the period produced new elements in the Ahom-Koch relations. The Ahoms continued to hold their political supremacy. Not only the Muslim invasions were successfully resisted but also the Kocbes came under firm control. On the whole, the Koch-Ahom relations were friendly and their combined strength gave effective resistance to the Muslims. The Muslim invasions were taken seriously by the Ahoms. Therefore, they always tried to maintain good relationship not only with the Kocbes but also with the Kacharis at any cost. But the Kocbes, on the other hand, failed to foresee the impending dangers of the Muslim invasions.

For details on the Kocbes, see Gait, 31, pp. 46-49.

Chilarai was the redoubtable Koch general who not only defeated the Ahoms but also all other neighbouring states.
The invasions of Chilarai went beyond all proportions... and failed to control it when it was most necessary. It can be said that the decline of the Koch kingdom was due to their short-sighted policy and political miscalculations rather than of growing Ahom power.

Therefore, it is interesting to note that the constant threat of wars from the Muslims led to the strengthening of the Ahom state on the one hand, and the declining of the Koch state on the other.

The Koches were in an identical level of socio-political and cultural developments with that of the Ahoms. They were predominantly under Hindu influence, and an apparent schism marks the Koch society into two strata on the religious plane. The Hinduised Koches formed the upper stratum while the non-Hinduised ones formed the lower and were much at a lower level in terms of social development too.

Both Naranarayan and Chilarai were devout Hindus. The period witnessed the progress of the Vaishnavite movement under Shri Sankaradeva, who was patronised by the Koch king Naranarayan. Owing to much Hindu influence, the Koch society emerged as a caste society.

Chilarai was a devout Hindu is proved by the fact that he was duped by the Ahoms in his attacks against them by sending the soldiers to look as Brahmins with sacred threads and marks on forehead. It was well known that Chilarai would not fight against the Brahmins and so the Ahoms played the trick. Any how, the episode suggests that Hindu influence was strongly increasing, and the Ahom state could not ignore this trend in the subsequent developments.
In fine, all these autochthonous groups had in appearance state-like formations. There was no economic basis for the unification and consolidation of the separate complex territories. The Ahoms provided the economic basis. Wars and close develop type societies of these autochthonous groups produced some specific factors in the emergence of the Ahom state. Thus the autochthonous states having Hindu influence and a system of power organisation contributed to the way to statehood of all these ethnic groups into a state under the hegemony of the Ahoms.

If the state was born out of those who were denied access to the resources, then the Ahom's case strongly points to this fact. All these subjugated people, from the very beginning of the Ahom state building process, were converted into a surplus producing machinery in the interest of the ruling class via the state. This can be proved nowhere else better than in the case of the Ahoms. Economic exploitation in the interest of the ruling class is the general rule, this was no exception in Ahom's case.

Human ecology in the Early Ahom State

With the conquest society, the emerging picture of demography changed enormously. To find out the potentiality as well as the actual interaction between man's physical environment and man's social life is a complex issue.

49 See Chapter VII for the content and meaning of conquest society.
studies on human ecology thus reveal the complexities of an environment and how completely it penetrates to the life of a social group. The main question is as to what extent the difference between human beings and social groups can be explained on the basis of the environmental differences. In the experience of the social being, the environment appears as a complex totality of many aspects. The Ahoms acquired in due course a definite territory and a divergent population and gained a control over the resources which were more than sufficient for mere sustenance of life. The unequal access to the resources and the utilisation of the subjugated man power through serfage and villenage, if not slavery proper, emanated from such local specific conditions and thus it became the prime mover on which the foundation of the Ahom state was laid. The process was further cemented through the institutionalisation of the pyke system—a corvee like system of the West.

The basis to this development was essentially agriculture. Both the rulers and the ruled were weighed down by economic considerations. The autochthonous populations had no advance technology in wet rice agriculture which the Ahoms imparted to them. Once this was picked up by them, it witnessed tremendous development of the fallow paddy cultivation which we may call energy crop in sociological terms. Undoubtedly an

51 Ibid., p. 118.
52 Ibid., p. 314.
economic security came both to the 'ruler' and the 'ruled'.

The situation has been well observed by Guha.\textsuperscript{53}

It appears from the scant information contained in the Assamese chronicles, that the bulk of the tribal population of Upper Assam, whom the Ahoms first confronted, were still carrying on cultivation of dry crops ... However, the local autochthones, with their primitive techniques did not produce any substantial surplus which could support the several thousand Ahom migrants. So from the very time of their entry into the Assam plains, the Ahoms carried on their sali or wet rice cultivation. It is to them that Upper Assam owes much of their settled cultivation.

This explains the reasons of non-occurrence of any serious and prolonged clashes between the Ahoms and the Moran and Borahi tribes. The Ahoms remained content with mere subjugation only. Otherwise also the Buranjis mention:

Though this prince (Sukapha) and his followers have made us so many servitors, yet we do not feel any resentment in our hearts; on the other hand, we long for serving and attending on them, and for meeting them as frequently as possible.\textsuperscript{54}

The human ecology or the social ecology that the Ahoms came to have had, just fitted into their man-grabbing process for the purpose of exploitation to advance the cause of their wet rice culture. The rigours of conquests were not inflicted upon them. They were allowed to remain as they were on


\textsuperscript{54}S.K. Bhuyan, Anglo-Assamese Relations 1771-1826, DHAS, Guwahati, 1949, p. 5.
the condition of offering tributes. What the Ahoms most
needed was human labour force to intensify their hydraulic
culture. In the process, a predominantly agri-based society
was emerging. The process of such evolutions has been well
analysed by Oppenheimer when he says:

The moment when the first conqueror spared his victim
in order permanently to exploit him in productive
work, was of incomparable historical importance. It
gave birth to nation and state, to right and higher
economics, with all the developments and ramifications which
have grown and which will hereafter grow out of them.

The growth of a wide agri-based society was the base on
which the ongrowing polity of the Ahoms rested. This is
the basic premise to start with.

This could not have been otherwise either in the absence
of trade, industry and commerce to form an alternative viable
economy. In fact, throughout the Ahom rule, trade, industry and
commerce had a very slow growth so as to replace the agri-
cultural economy and it is here that we find the agricultural
routes to statehood.

The social ecology largely determined as to why slavery
did not develop to its accepted form. At the initial stage, it
did not appear favourable to the Ahoms to institutionalise

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56 P. Oppenheimer, n. 7, p. 68.
slavery. Later on, when permanent wet rice cultivation was settled and the number in the Ahom aristocracy was increasing, the war captives were used as slaves. Even at that stage, a process was still continuing to take some of the slaves into the higher social units. 57

With extraction, coercion and exploitation, the self paddy cultivation progressed immensely, giving rise to an agrarian-based society striking its deep roots. The gentile constitution of the Ahoms could no longer remain as it had been. Unequal access to resources took its own natural course. Territorial estates were set up for the princely and royal family lineages. 58 Internal conflicts were also witnessed sometimes in revolt. 59 More centralisation of authority was now necessary in the hands of the mythical 'swargadewan' or the heavenly king leading to the birth of sovereign power. It is under this process that the Ahom state could withstand three interregnims, 1364-1369, 1376-1380 and 1389-1398. The emerging polity thus entangled the peasants at the rock bottom on the one hand, and the aristocracy and the sovereign at the top, on the other.

57 Ahom Burongi, G. C. Barua, ... etc., p. 30, 34, 37, 38. In p. 30, in the list of Chief Officers, one Mingsha, a war captive, and one Shukhamahong, a son of a female slave, have been mentioned.

58 Gogoi, n. 21, p. 283. Such territorial estates were at Dihing, Saring, Tikam, Tungkhong and Namer, under the princes of the ruling family with rights of succession to the throne.

59 This is evidenced by the dethronement of the king Taokhamthi(1385-1389) by the nobility and the revolt of Chao Pu Lai, the Saring Raja. See Gogoi, n. 21, pp. 272-273.
Economic and political socialisations

Extraction of tributes, exploitation of the labour force to acquire more surplus and coercion continued with state terror, sometimes with benevolence showering upon those supporting the authority structure and with constructions of roads and communications as measures of social welfare. These constituted the basic ingredients and were co-related to the socio-political and economic organizations. However, the important point is the capacity of the state to absorb people by establishing in effect a separate means by which they relate to the state structure because statehood involves not only the subjects but also citizens. The evolution and growth and its final institutionalisation of the political system was such a means through the ossification of the labour utilisation processes in the interest of the state vis-a-vis the ruling class.

The social relations thus taking an oceanic turn, the ruling class interest continued to take a pyramidal turn. The net outcome of the Ahom rule at the initial stage was manpower grabbing for the purpose of exploitation founded upon agriculture. The historical process of the growth of the Ahom state suggests that these social classes had not taken shape

in the bog of a declining autochthonous societies but in the
travail of a new. The dissolution of the autochthonous states
did not end in the subjugation alone but in the development
from the royal benifices and patronage, leading to a sort of
feudalism.

Accluturation and Assimilation
The Ahomisation Process

The Ahoms were never numerically strong in the land in
which they made their permanent home. That the Ahoms possess-
Ced characteristic assimilating capacities following their
Shan-Tai heritage has been shown by Coedes:
Throughout the whole of their history the Tais have
always had a remarkable capacity for assimilation,
and wherever they settled, they have always been able
to acquire the cultural traits necessary for the
process of raising themselves to the level of most
enlightened section of the society of their adoption.

In the chronicles we come across terms like 'Chutiya-Ahoms',
Kachari-Ahoms', 'Moran-Ahoms', 'Borahi-Ahoms' etc. These
fairly indicate the Ahomisation processes. Phukan attempts
to give a wider dimension to the Ahomisation process when he
gives of this based on some religious rites and ceremonies
of the Ahoms. He observes, 'The Ahom acculturation of the local
gods and spirits forms a part of a wider concept. The Ahom

61 George Coedes, The Making of South East Asia, English tr.
monarchs followed the theory that the conquest of a country brought not only the people and the land under their control and protection, but also objects like hills, rivers, as well as the gods and spirits dwelling therein. With the addition of new land and people, new gods and goddesses of the conquered peoples were also added and hence they must be maintained and propitiated according to the established custom. Following Condominas, he sees the Ahomisation process, particularly in the region of Upper Assam where the Ahoms first made their initial settlements. Guha also speaks of this Ahomisation process emphasizing the assimilative point. He says,

"There, (in Upper Assam) the Ahoms assimilated some of their Maga, Moran, Borali neighbours and later also large sections of the Chutiya and Kachari tribes. This Ahomisation process went on until the expanded Ahom society itself began to be Hinduised from the mid-16th century onwards. While the assimilative capacity of the Ahoms is agreed to by all, Guha finds the reason for this Ahomisation process in the liberal patrimony practised by the Ahoms and in the identical level of the animistic belief systems of the Ahoms and the auto-

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63 Guha, p. 20, p. 15.
He finally observes that this Ahomisation process was followed by the Hinduisation process which brought in enormous changes in the matter of language, living styles, food habits and even agricultural techniques of the autochthonous groups—all these constitute an important dimension in the formation of the Ahom state.

It is not clear in case of Phukan's contentions, whether assimilation and acculturation are used in the one and the same sense, or to what extent assimilation and acculturation are co-related to the Ahomisation process. Guha also does not explicitly state if later Hinduisation could be the effect of the Ahomisation process. However, it is very difficult to conceptualise the term 'assimilation' as it is subject to some misunderstandings. Traditional societies cannot of course assimilate the totality of a state culture. It may adopt only a limited number of traits and the adoption is generally pre-conditioned. They may also retain some degree of ethnic distinctiveness but as a sub-society, they only accommodate the total institutional and structural framework. Likewise, acculturation also gives a

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64 Ibid.
They have shown that assimilation and acculturation are synonymous.
too varied and ambiguous meaning. Change of any kind produced by the interaction of tribal level socio-cultural systems with one another might be distinguished as transculturation. At least it remains within trait dissemination. Therefore, assimilation here appears to us as accommodation—a process of compromise characterized by tolerance, while acculturation or cultural change resulting from the conjunction of two or more cultural systems.

We may look at the situation from a different angle. With their Shan-Tai heritage, the Ahoms displayed assimilative capacity for which they were given a new name as 'Ahom' by the local population. Socially, they fully identified with the local autochthonous groups. While politically, their new name 'Ahom' recognized and legitimized their political supremacy and leadership. The Ahomisation concept thus involves a bit of semanticism.

The process in general, particularly in a conquest society, refers to a subjugated group adopting the language of the conqueror in their dealings with them and ultimately in their customs. The material culture of the conquerors and their language replace those of the conquered or at least,

67 Ibid.

68 Acculturation is a term, coined by American anthropologists long ago, but there is no frame work to develop the concepts in a sociological theory. It still continues to be a study in the analysis of swapping particular traits between particular isolate cultures over a particular historical period of time. See E.R. Leach, Political System of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure, London School of Economics and Political Science, 1956, p. 284.
there is a sort of assimilation. Further, this begins with the aspirations of the subjugated people to attain a better status by imitating their masters. This is just what happened in the Ahom's case, and in return, the Ahoms assimilated some of the autochthonous populations in the interest of the ruling class only, just as the English anglicised some of the Indians, if we may quote analogically.

But this could not continue for long. The Ahoms being numerically poor and above all, having made Assam their permanent home, it could no longer serve the ruling class interest. It of course did, as long as the Ahom Munong territory was confined within Upper Assam. But with the extension of the territory and with further inclusion of divergent population, it failed to serve the interest of the state, hence a reverse process took place. The conquerors sanctioned the use of the language and culture of the conquered. Ahomisation was replaced by Hinduisation. The conqueror was culturally conquered. The road to statehood was now widely opened.

It is inexplicable in the context of other Tai state formations in Southeast Asia where Taiisation process is singularly different with that of the Ahomisation process in Assam.