The history of medieval Assam, particularly of the period beginning with the 17th century till the formal implementation of the British rule in 1826 is, in the main, the history of the Ahoms. By the early part of the 16th century, the Ahoms completed the conquest of the eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley and made its power felt in the western part and even beyond. When they laid the foundation of their kingdom in the 1228 A.D. there was no centralised power in the Brahmaputra valley. Following the disintegration of the extensive and powerful kingdom of Pragjyotisha or Kamrupa towards the close of the 12th century, a number of small independent states emerged. Most of these states were formed by tribal chiefs of Mongoloids origin.

Of such states in the eastern Brahmaputra valley, the most powerful and advanced state was that of the Chutiyas. The Chutiyas were of Bodo origin but were Hinduised at a very early period. They ruled in the country to the east of the river Suvansiri in the north bank and the river Dichang in the south bank.\(^1\) The area to the south and south-east of the Chutiya Kingdom was

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ruled by a few other Bodo tribes like the Barahis and the Morans. Another important Bodo tribe, the Kacharis, were ruling along the south bank of the Kalang or even beyond and including the Dhansiri valley and north Cachar tract. They had their capital first at Dimapur. Their ruling families were Hinduised in the 16th century, and their King started taking Hindu names Nirbhaynarayan, Jasanarayan etc. against those of their predecessors having Bodo names like Detchung, Khunkhura etc. In the western Brahmaputra valley, which came to be known as Kamrup-Kamata or simply as Kamata, a line of Hindu Kings were ruling till the close of the 15th century. Further, in both banks of the Brahmaputra, not directly ruled by the Chutiyas, the Kacharis or the Kamata Kings, a class of landlords called Bhuyans were ruling, who behaved as independent rulers when the sovereign power grew weak, and owed allegiance to it when it was strong. Some of these Bhuyans, like the predecessors of Sankardeva, were immigrants from Mithila or Kanauj. They were expert warriors, good agriculturists and learned scholars. They helped in the Sanskritization of the tribes of the Brahmaputra valley.

2. A. Guha, Medieval and Early Colonial Assam, p.25
All the Bodo tribes, mentioned above; and also the Bhuyans offered their resistance to the advancing Ahoms, who were also a Mongoloid tribes of the Tai Shan section of the Siamese - Chinese branch of the Sino-Tibetans, but in the long run, they were either fully subjugated by the Ahoms or had to recede further and further to the back woods. The Koches who built their kingdom on the ruins of that of Kamata Kingdom were also of Bodo origin. The division of the Koch Kingdom in 1581 AD greatly impaired their strength. The western part called Koch Behar became a vassal state of the Mughals and the eastern part called Koch Hajo or Kamrup was at first ruled by the Mughals and later by the Ahoms. The Koch ruling families got Hinduised soon after they assumed political power and they greatly helped in the propagation of the Neo-vaishnavite movement. In the neighbouring Khasi and Jaintia hills which had trade relations with the Ahoms, the state of Jaintia emerged by 15th century and its ruler came under the pale of sanskritization. Of the Khasi chief, reference in the contemporary Assamese sources are found only to that of KhaiREM. Manipur was a tribal state and its inhabitants accepted Chaitanya Vaishnavism beginning with the early part of the eighteenth century.
The Ahom political system, as pointed out by A Guha 'was not a wholesale importation nor was it entirely an autonomous growth in Assam'. It grew out of certain elements rooted in the region since the formation of the ancient state of Pragjyotisha or Kamrupa. The influence of tribal elements is a distinct feature in the formation of the Ahom state. It had at its base many agricultural village settlements consisting of a number of big or small families belonging to different classes or phoids. Each such settlement had a well defined territory including wet rice fields, wastelands, forest tracts and house sites. Several such settlements formed an administrative unit governed by a noble. At the apex of this structure was the king who could appoint and dismiss the noble but also in turn could be removed by the council of nobles. The Ahoms were also building the economic background for a larger state. It was at their initiative that cultivation by ploughshare gradually replaced hoe cultivation and wet rice cultivation expanded at the expense of dry rice. This led to a rapid rise in the surplus. Coins were minted by Suklengmung

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4. Ibid, p.84
5. Ibid, p.85
Gargaya Raja (1539-1552 AD) and both internal and external trade relations grew. Improved types of firearms came to be used since Turbak's invasion in 1532 A.D. and excellent gun powder, matchlocks and cannon were manufactured locally. Ahom population also greatly increased both by immigration and assimilation with the local tribes. All these helped in the gradual expansion of Ahom power and in the formation of their state, which fully developed by the middle of the 16th century. The nature of polity in the medieval Assam was thus a conditioning factor for the general structure of social, cultural and economic conditions of the people.

Kingship In the medieval society the reign of a monarch was recognised through birth genealogy. A particular family's rule was approved on the basis of certain concepts and thus kingship was not a factor of state formation, but it had its relation to ideological base which was hegemonic in nature. The Ahom government was a form of monarchy and aristocracy. The king being the head of the state, all honours, titles, offices, decisions and war measures etc. originated from him. Yet the king had to act basing upon the advice of the three

The Ahom king was called Chaohpa, Svargadev or Svargadeo. The word Chao is used as a manner of honour and dignity and Pha means simply a king or a ruler. The Kingship was hereditary in the male line. Generally after the death of a ruling king, his eldest son succeeded to the throne. Sometimes the eldest son may be superseded by the younger ones if the former be found inbecile or incompetent.

But the hereditary nature of being king was sometimes not meted out and three great Gohains could select a prince out of other royal houses, yet the genesis was that only a prince from the royal blood could become king and not from outside. Though by the law the eldest son should succeed the father, sometimes brothers took preference to sons, cousins or more distant relative took preference to near relatives. Thus excluding Sukapha, the state was ruled by 37 Ahom kings and they can be classified into three categories (1) sons of deceased kings (2) brothers of deceased kings (3) and princes of distant relatives. The princely families from

7. Tungkhungia Buranji, Intro. p.XXVIII
8. P.Gogoi, Tai and Tai Kingdom, p.541
which the king was selected were Dihingia, Charingia, Tungkhungia, Namrupia, Tipamia, Samaguria and Parvatia.¹⁰ The members of different princely dynasties sprang from their common ancestor Sukapha, who formed different phoids or families on the basis of expansion of their members.

Nobility - Though the king was the head of the administration, his power was restricted by the three great councillors of the state known as Gohains. They had their independent responsibilities so far as the general administration of the state and its relation with other powers were concerned.¹¹ Yet their functions were mere advisory. In the matters of policy and day to day administrative affairs, they had to discuss with the king. In principle, these three great councillors could enthrone and dethrone a king but in the later part of the Ahom rule, practically this was not in vogue. We find from 1670 A.D. onwards who ever was selected as king had the recommendation of only one councillor.¹² For instance, Loraraja or Sulikpha was made king by Laluk Sula Borphukon and Godadhar Singha by Bandar Borphukon.

The status of these three great councillors was always equal. They lived near the king's palace. Just as the King's office was at the hands of particular family or clan, so were the offices of the Gohains. The appointment of the Gohains ordinarily descended from father to son, the king had the right to select a member as Gohain from the prescribed clan and if desired could dismiss him. Any one of these three Great Gohains was appointed Rajmantri or Prime minister. They exercised independent right of sovereignty and could sanction death sentence on criminals by drowning in water or by pounding with hammer but had no right to order execution by beheading or shedding blood. The Gohains had their provinces assigned to them in which they exercised their power. But we find that the powers of the Gohains greatly depended upon the personal qualities and the character of the kings as well as the ministers themselves. So the rules of constitution cannot be said to be rigidly laid upon the kings or the ministers. For instance kings like Pratap Singha (1603-1641 A.D.), Godadhar Singha(1681-1696 A.D.) and Rudra Singha (1696-1714 A.D.) applied their own wishes without regard to their nobles, while kings

Kasi Nath Tamuli Phukan, Asam Buranji, Calcutta, 1906, pp.102ff
Sudaipha (1677-1679 A.D.), Loraraja (1679-1681 A.D.) and Kamaleswar Singha (1795-1811 A.D.) were puppets at the hands of the council of ministers.16

Regional Organisation - When the dominions of the Ahoms extended, it became imperative on the parts of the king to expand the strength of his ministry and thus were created the office of the Barbarua and the Barphukan, during the reign of Pratap Singha (1603-1641 AD). The council of ministers thus consisted of five great councillors or ministers, the Borgohain, the Buragohain, the Barpatra Gohain, the Barbarua and Barphukan. The Barbarua was the head of the executive and the judiciary and also the chief revenue officer. He received the revenues and administrated justice in the territory from Sadia to Kaliabor, which laid outside the jurisdiction of the Gohains. He was also assigned the duties of chief commander of forces.17 But he could not act independently of the three Gohains. Any matter required to be placed to the king by the Barbarua should be considered in the presence of the three Gohains.18 He had a council of six Phukons called Charua Phukons, namely Bhitarual Phukon,

17. Sadar Amin, Asam Buranjì, p.119
18. Tungkhungia Buranji, Intro. p. XXVIII
Na-Phukan, Dihingia Phukon, Deka Phokan and Neog Phukon. Moreover when occasion arose the Barbarua was assisted by two other Phukons who were Nyay-Sodha Phukon and Changrung Phukon. The former represented the sovereign and received any appeal from the Barbarua and the Borphukon and the latter was in charge of construction of buildings, maidams, (graves) ramparts and temples etc. The Nao-Baicha Phukon was the head of the navy. The Pani Phukon at Gauhati was second in command. During the time of Siva Singha, a number of new Phukons were created, some of them being Brahmins. The Parbatia Phukon who managed the affairs of the queen was assisted by a secretary or Barua. The Raydenggya Phukan who managed the affairs of another queen was also allowed to have a secretary. The Khangia Phukon and the Khangia Barua, both Brahmins served as officers in the queen mother's establishments. The Jalbhari Phukon was also a Brahmin who remained in charge of the servants that the king employed in Hindu temples.

The Tamuli Phukon was also a Brahmin who looked after the king's garden. The Naosaliya Phukon took charge of building the royal boats. The Choladhara Phukon was in

21. Ibid.
charge of ceremonies and religious functions. The Duliya Phukon was a Brahmin who remained in charge of preserving and repairing the Hindu temples. The Kharghoria Phukon had the charge of making gun powder. The Neog Phukon and the Dihingia Phukon remained in charge of King's messengers and they were immediate assistants of Borphukon.

The territory of Barphukon extended in the east to Koliabar and comprised Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong and the Desduars of the south bank. The Borphukon acted as viceroy in this territory and his head quarter was first at Kaliabor and afterwards at Guwahati. He looked after the collection of revenue, safety of frontiers, administration of paiks etc. on lower Assam. He had to conduct political relations with the border states like Bengal and Bhutan and if required he had to lead armies to the battle. He was to act on the advice of the king for the betterment and the welfare of the territory laid under him. There were also Sadiyakhowa Gohain, Solal Gohain and the Morangi Khowa Gohain who are known as Datiyalia Gohain or frontier governors. The status of

24. Tungkhungia Buranji, Intro. p.XXVIII
25. Sadar Amir, Asam Buranji, pp.119-120
these three Gohains were equal but less than three great councillors. They were to stay in their own places and on the advice of the king they proceeded to war. The Sadiyakhowa Gohain ruled at Sadiya after the fall of the Chutiya Kingdom, the Morangikhowa Gohain was the governor on the west of the Dhansiri river, while Solal Gohain administered a great part of Nowgong and a portion of Charduar after the transfer of the Head quarter of Borphukon to Guwahati. We also find another office called Kajali-Mukhia Gohain, who resided at Kajalimukh and commanded a thousand men of the Raja of Siring and the Raja of Tirap or the tract round Jaipur on the right of the Buri Dihing. The Jagiyal Gohain was also appointed to protect the frontier Kingdom from the introads of the hill people, but according to Hamilton the Jagiyal Gohain lived on the Kolong and was a military officer.

Next to the Phukons, there were some Baruas with different offices. They are Bhandari Barua (king's private treasurer), Duliya Barua (in charge of palanquins and bearers) Chaudangiya Barua (superintendent of public execution), Dola Kahoriya Barua (Chief of the

footmen) Khanikar Barua (superintendent of artificers), Mazumder Barua (private secretary and letter writer of the king) Bezbarua (Kings' physician) Changmai Barua (superintendent of royal taste), Hatibarua (master of elephants) Ghora Barua (master of horse) hiloidari Barua (in charge of armour personnel) Debigharar Barua (in charge of private chapel) etc.

Besides there were twelve Rajkhowas and some Kakatis and Dalais. The Rajkhowas were commanders of three thousand men and were subordinate to the Barbarua. They acted as arbitrators in settling disputes and as superintendents of public works. The Katakis were the agents of the king while dealing with foreign states and with the hill tribes. They were also writers while the Dalais worked as astrologers and studied Jyotish Sastras. In some places, the ruling chief who made their submission to the Ahoms were converted into local governors. To this category belonged the Rajas of Darrang, Dimarua, Rani, Barduar, Nauduar and Beltola. They had to maintain justice and collect revenues in their own districts, but an appeal lay from their orders to the Borphukon and the

33. Sadar Amin, Asam Buranji, p.130
monarch. They had to attend the king in person with their prescribed contingent of men when called upon by the king and they had to pay an annual tribute. There were other officials also who were recruited from the fifteen families who had the virtual monopoly of the highest appointments. For offices that did not relate to military services, the higher classes of the non Ahom natives and also persons of foreign decent domiciled in the country for three or four generations were eligible for appointment. The king also appointed and accredited ambassadors to foreign countries and received ambassadors and envoys from them.

**Decentralisation of Power** - No doubt the Ahom government was at all monarchial and aristocratical. Yet there is ample ground to say that the ruling power was not centralised in the king. We have cited earlier that the king had three Great Councillors of state to whom some powers were entrusted. In theory the king was bound to consult them on all important matters and without their counsel, was not permitted to take major decisions like declaring war or marking negotiations with other states. When the kingdom was getting larger

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more offices were created and they were made responsible for the security of the areas and peace under their charge. The king had great responsibilities and duties towards his subjects and thus his main tasks were to protect subjects from the external affairs and internal struggles, organisation of public works, distribution and redistribution of land resources, providing irrigation facilities etc. These works were done through his expert knowledge and all the works of general administration, war, agriculture, public works, revenue etc. were classified among the ministers or the governors about which discussion has been made earlier. Thus public works that were of much benefit to the subjects were almost a passion of the Ahom rulers who were motivated by the great love of their country and gratitude for the general welfare of their people.

**Paik System** - Reference has already been made in the earlier chapters in regards to the paiks of the Ahom rule during medieval times. Here an attempt has been made to discuss in detail the constitutional frame work of the paik system. Under this system, the whole male population between the age group of 15 to 50 years were liable to render service to the state.

38. A.C. Sarma, Tai Ahom System of Government, Delhi, 1986, pp. 83ff
They were divided into squads of four men, each called a got or unit and since the reign of Rajeswar Singha (1751-1769 A.D.) three members constituted a got. They had to render service as soldiers during war and as labourers during peace. Every member of each got had to be present for such work as was deemed necessary in rotational basis and in his absence from home, his lands were cultivated by the other members, and food was also supplied to him. They also had to work like a standing army and could be called and mobilised speedily whenever their necessity was found by the Kheldar. This paik system enabled the government to carry out the schemes of wide constructional works of the state. They were also organised into Khels who can be supposed as work guilds, who had to render productive works for the state. From the paiks 20 were commanded by a Bora, 100 men by a Saikia, 1000 men by a Hazarika, 3000 men by a Rajkhowa and 6000 men by a Phukon.

In return for his service to the state, each paik was entitled to get two puras of arable land free of

40. E. Gait, Op.Cit., p.239
41. N.K. Basu, Op.Cit., p.113
rent. The levy of the first man in a got was called the mul, the second the dewal and the third the tewal.\textsuperscript{43} When the mul levy was in active service the other two were to remain ready in their respective areas and when called for must join duties immediately. The king also engaged a vast number of men to work in his farms, gardens, fisheries, mines, arsenals, manufactories and to man and construct his vessels who all labour without any expense to the treasury.\textsuperscript{44}

Originally all the free Ahom commoners were under the direct control of the king. But king Subinpha (1281-1293AD) made distribution of Ahom subjects in equal proportions between the Borgohain and the Buragohain who had to command them. These Ahom subjects of Borgohain and the Buragohain, had also to serve the king. Moreover the king kept with him some reliable Ahom paiks along with the non Ahoms.\textsuperscript{45} When the new post, Borpatra Gohain, was created, the non Ahoms like the Barahis, Chutias and other were allotted to this.\textsuperscript{46}

During emergency, even three men from each got were recruited for state service. The army position in the capital was weak and so far it is learnt, in 1809 A.D. it consisted of 300 up-country sepoys and 800 native troops. In the times of war or other public...\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{43} Tunkhunia Buranji, Intro. p.XXX
\textsuperscript{44} F. Hamilton, Op.Cit., p.24
\textsuperscript{45} Deodhai Asam Buranji, p.103
\textsuperscript{46} Satsari Asam Buranji, p.13
occasions, the officers in charge of various khels mobilised their respective quotas of paiks. Sometimes a paik could obtain exemption from personal service by paying a commutation money of Rs.2/- per head. This privilege was generally enjoyed by the Chamuas or by the subjects of higher ranks. 47

Military Organisation - It has been mentioned earlier that the paiks had to serve as soldiers during emergency and thus it was not found necessary to keep a strong militia at the head quarter. During the time of war, the whole body of adult effectiveness could be requisitioned by the state and for this no formal conscription was required. Each paik was turned to an allrounder by imparting training in the field of military or civil. He was also to undergo a refresher's course to receive intensive training before proceeding to the battle field. 48 A Kheldar assisted by his hierarchy of subordinate officers had to mobilise his quota of soldiers for the army or navy.

The officers from the highest to the lowest rank were not spared from military service. They had to make constant vigilance over the military discipline of

the paiks, that fitted them to be efficient, effective, alert and disciplined soldiers in the war. Above all the king was the supreme commander. The Ahoms also had naval soldiers who were called Nao baicha and they were divided into two parts. The first part of Nao baicha had three khels e.g. Dihingia, Tungkhungia and Charingia who accompanied the king or the nobles when they had to travel in boats. The other parts included four khels e.g. Hejari, Khathania, Katunguchia, and simple nao-baicha who worked mostly as naval soldiers. 49 Pani Phukan or the Nao Saliaya Phukan was in charge of naval army. The officers like Hiloidari Barua, Dhenuchucha Barua, Ghora Barua, Hati Barua, Khargharia Phukan were put in charge of war materials and animals. 50

In times of war, the king appointed one from among the superior officers who was well adept in war strategy as commander. Before resolving to undertake a military operation, the king formed a war council. Thus King Rudra Singha (1696 - 1714 A.D.) before preparing to invade Bengal formed a war council with Laithapana Borgohain, Kuogyan Phukon Buragohain, Kenduguria Deka Barpatra Gohain and the Baruas and the Phukons. 51 In

regard to the valour and efficiency and war weapons of the Ahom soldiers Shihabuddin Talish stated "strength and heroism are apparent in the people of this country, they are able to undertake hard tasks, all of them are warlike and blood-thirsty. The weapons of war are match locks, cannons, arrows with or without iron heads, short swords, spears and long and cross bows."\(^{52}\) In theory the king was the commander-in-chief of the armed forces of the state. He appointed and dismissed the field commanders of the army and the navy and ordered the disposition of the forces and decided questions of war strategy in actual warfare with the help of his experts who moved with the king and issued commands from time to time.\(^{53}\)

**Judiciary** - In medieval Assam, there was no separate judicial branch of government like modern times. In the Ahom state, the king being the head of the state was also the fountain head of justice. Other high officials had also judicial functions and the chief judicial authorities were the three Gohains, the Bar Barua and the Barphukon.\(^{54}\) For imposing punishment by the king there was no hard and fast rule and he could punish his subjects as he liked.\(^{55}\) The Barbarua had

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always to be present at the court as all appeals lay from the Subordinates to the courts of the Barbarua and the Bar Phukon. From the judgement of the Barbarua and the Bar Phukon, a second appeal could be made to the sovereign, which was dealt with by him through the Nyaya Sodha Phukon. The president of each court was assisted by a number of assessors e.g. kataki, Ganaks and the Pandits. The administration of justice is said to have been speedy, efficient and impartial prior to the Moamoria disturbances.

Justice was not administered arbitrarily and in the court, trials were held properly. The power of inflicting death sentence was reserved for the principal officers and the Rajas. For other offences pardon may be granted but rebels were never spared. In case of political offenders, capital punishment may extend to their whole family. There was severe criminal law. Offenders were put to death in various manners by cutting their throats, by grinding thumb between two wooden cylinders, by sawing them between two planks, by beating them with hammers or by applying burning hoes to different parts until they died. Cases of theft and

57. Ibid
59. Ibid, p.50
robbery were very rare. However during the period of internal commotions arising out of the Moamoriya Rebellion, such cases began to take place. Hamilton informs us that robbers, atrocious house breakers, and pirates were punished by extracting their eyes or by cutting off their knee caps. Petty thefts were punished by whipping or by cutting off the nose or ears.60

In governing the country, the king was guided by the customary laws and religious codes believed to have dictated to their progenitors, Khunlung and Khunlai by Lengdeng, the God of heaven. The code was meant for protecting the life, property and morality of the subject population.61 For instance, the code says "There are innumerable people in the country. They can not distinguish right from wrong. They are in the habit of taking others property and wives by force. If a person commits a crime don't kill him at once without a fair trial... you must rule with a firm hand. I advise you to do justice."62 The nature of justice made to the people and the punishments imposed upon the culprits during the rule of the Ahoms make it clear that the code of Lengden

60. Ibid, Satsari Asam Buranji, p.210
61. A. Barua, 'An aspect of Tai Ahom Polity', Lik Phan Tai, Vol.I, p.77
62. G.C. Barua, Ahom Buranji, p.15
was mostly followed. Sources indicate that no record was kept in criminal trials, but in civil cases a summary of the proceedings was prepared and handed over to the successful party. 63

Revenue Administration - A distinctive feature of the revenue administration of the Ahoms was the absence of a regular land tax. As has been mentioned earlier, each paik for his service to the state got two puras of rent free agricultural lands (rupit mati or ga-mati) but when he got exemption from duty he had to pay Rs.2/- in cash to the state or in lieu of it his produce in the form of paddy, cereals or mustard seeds whose value was equivalent to that amount. But for using land for house and garden, each paik had to pay Rs.1/- as poll tax or house tax. 64 In Darrang a tax of Rs.2/- was levied upon each family using a separate kitchen or charu. Anybody clearing land other than the above could hold it after payment of one or two rupee a pura depending upon the nature of the land, so long as it was not required by the state for reallocation after new census. 65

64. H. Barbarua, Op.Cit., p.497
The hill people also had to pay tax in kind like cotton etc. and some of them worked for the king, as Dola-Bhari in lieu of the tax. For using lands to cultivate cotton, the Nagas and the Mikirs (Now Karbis) had to pay a hoe tax. The professionals like the gold smith, black-smith, carpenters and potters paid taxes higher than the usuals.  

Royalties on elephants and timbers and rent paid by farmers on mines and frontier traders were also a source of good revenue. Shihabuddin Talish who came to Assam with Mirjumla opined that if Assam would have been administered like that of Mughal dominions it was very probable that forty or fortyfive lakhs of rupees would have been collected as revenue from the ryots (subjects), the price of elephants caught in the jungles or other sources.  

From the chronicle of Atan Buragohain it is learnt that from the period of the king Pratap Singha, levy of taxes on Beel, Hat, Chat and Phat (Fisheries, market, riverways, market place etc.) was first introduced as the king felt short of revenues in the government exchequer. Likewise many other taxes were also levied which has been discussed in the chapter on economy.

67. S.K. Bhuyan, Anglo Assamese Relations, p.11
68. Sadar Amin, Asam Buranjı, p.40, Deodhai Asam Buranjı, p.108
State PolicyDivision of the State - For the smooth and efficient conduct of the kingdom the state was divided into Ujani (upper) and Namani (lower) Assam. The Ujani Assam, the portion of the eastern provinces from Sadia to Kaliabar was governed by Barbarua. The Barphukan at first governed as viceroy only on the tract between the Kalong and the Brahmaputra in Nowgong and when the dominion of the Ahoms was extended, his charge increased to the whole country from Kaliabar to Goalpara with Gauhati as head quarter. In upper Assam five territorial divisions were also made viz. Sadia, Marangi, Solal, Jagi and Kajalimukh. The Surveillance of these territories were under Sadia Khowa Gohain, Marangi Khowa Gohain, Salal Gohain, Jagialia Gohain and the Kajalimukhia Gohain respectively.

(b) External Relations - The external relations of the Ahom government were concerned with the state and the tribes contiguous to their immediate frontier and occasionally with the territories situated at a distance from the Assam boundaries. These relations sprang from the Assam's treatments of foreign demands for political

70. Ibid, Ibid, p.236
71. Tungkhungia Bursanji, Intro. p.XXIX
and commercial concessions, or their mutual wishes to establish bonds of friendship and alliance.\footnote{72}{S.K. Bhuyan, Anglo Assamese Relations, p.22}

The state had political relations with Mughal India including the Subah of Dacca and the Thana of Rangamati, Cooch Behar, Cachar, Jaintia, Dimarua, Khyrim, Bhutan, Manipur, Tripura, Nara and Munkang, while the principal hill tribes were the Daflas, Miris, Nagas, Khamtis, Singphows and Mishmis.\footnote{73}{Ibid, p.23} The Katakis who were disciplined, well trained, erudite and astute acted as government agents for conducting negotiations. The attitude of the Ahoms towards the Mughals was of watchful friendship in normal peace times and armed preparedness to oppose the Mughals in times of necessity.\footnote{74}{Ibid, p.26} The Ahom kings attempted hard to restore the old limits of their kingdom which was said to have been extended from Karotaya on the west to Dikhow on the east and which included the Brahmaputra valley, Bhutan, Rongpur, Koch Behar, the north east of Mymenshinga and possibly the Garo hills.\footnote{75}{E. Gait, Op.Cit., p:11} Their policy towards the conquered territories as well as the vassal states was also the same as adopted by Hindu rulers in ancient times. The subdued princes were allowed to retain their autonomy but they had to pay some tribute.
in cash or in kind, or in both, and furnish allotted quotas of men and provisions when asked by the king. 76

(c) Relation with the hill tribes - In medieval period the Ahom rulers had not only to maintain peace and harmony within the country and to protect the subjects from foreign aggression but they had to protect the people from the raids of the bordering hill tribes. The policy of the Ahom rulers towards the hill tribes was one of conciliation backed by the display of force, only when the situation demanded it and when it could be employed effectively. 77 Most of the hill tribes were deficient in certain necessaries of life as their living areas were not suitable for cultivation of all kinds of crops. In order to conciliate them and prevent them from committing raids in the plains, the Ahom rulers introduced the 'posa' system and granted some of the tribes lands and fishing water along with paiks in the plains.

Marts were opened in the duars or passes to the hills, where the hillmen exchanged their goods for produce of the plains. This had helped in fostering a spirit of 'mitahood' or fraternity between the people of

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76. S.K. Bhuyan, Anglo Assamese Relations, p.28
77. Ibid, p.34, L.Devi, Ahom Tribal Relations, p.272
the hills and the plains. Besides a member of Ahom kings entered into wedding relations with the hill tribes, like the Nagas, Jaintias and the Garos. Of all the hill tribes, relation with the Nagas was the closest. Naga Khunbaos: or chiefs were invited to royal feasts. In fact, the first Barpatra Gohain, Kancheng, was born and brought up in a Naga family. Many tribesmen were received to the Ahom fold and were entrusted with responsible offices. The Ahoms realised the difficulty of undertaking to the hills as the hillmen avoided open contest and resorted to guerilla tactics. Thus the Ahom Prime Minister Atan Buragohain said 'The Dufla miscreants can be captured only if an elephant can enter into a rat hole.' So it was necessary for the Ahom government to keep the tribesmen within proper control by preventing their incursions by diplomacy or force depending upon the situation. They never thought of complete subjugation of any of the tribes and annexation to their territories to the Ahom kingdom. The tribal policy of the Ahoms may be summed up as follows - 'conciliate these tribes by promising to furnish them their necessaries of life as far as possible on condition of paying annual tribute. If they, violate the agreements and indulge in raiding

78. S.K. Bhuyan, Atan Buragohain and His Times, p.80,
Assamese villages try to bring them to submission by employing force as well as persuasion and capturing miscreants, but never overstep the limits'.

**Role of Women in Politics** - Government in medieval Assam, whether of the Ahoms, the Koches or the Kacharis was monarchial. We do not have any evidence to show that people were dis-satisfied with the form of government. As there was no representative system of government, the question of enjoying political rights by men or women does not arise. In the sarumels or village assemblies which were democratic institutions, it was the menfolk who participated in the deliberations. It was too early to except women to get this status or to be concious of it. But it is true of the common women only. The career and the achievements of a number of queens and court ladies, on the other hand, show that there were women who played important role in politics either behind the curtain or outside it.

It must be admitted that there was no formal share for women in the administration of the country. Throughout the six hundred years of Ahom rule, we come across the names of the three queens of Siva Singha

79. S.K. Bhuyan, *Anglo Assamese Relations*, p.34
only, who took into their hands the actual reigns of the government. The first of them was Phuleswari alias Pramatheswari. When it was predicted by the astrologers, that the king was under the evil influence of the stars, (Chatra bhanga joga) as a result of which, he might lose his throne, he was advised to hand over the government to some one. It is said that the king, at the instigation of his priest Krishnaram Bhattacharjee, decided to hand over the reigns of the government to the chief queen Phuleswari. Krishna Ram Bhattacharjee was a Sakta priest and both the king and the queen were his devoted disciples. It is believed that the priest who hailed from Bengal and who was placed in charge of the temple of Kamakhya, for which, he was called the Parvatia Gosain, wanted to make saktism the state religion. He believed that to fulfil his ambition, the queen was better person and hence his suggestion to the king was to retire from the state affairs and to propitiate different Gods and Goddess. Accordingly the king gave the reigns of the government into the hands of Phuleswari. She took the title Bar-raja, meaning the Great king, minted coins jointly in her name and her husband, where she used Persian scripts for the first time and led the things

80. H. Barbarua, Op.Cit., p.244
81. S.K. Bhuyan (ed.), Asamar Padya Buranji, p.65
according to her own sweet will. She changed the old burial system of the Ahoms and introduced the system of burning the dead.\footnote{Tunkhungia Buranji, p.41, Sadar Amin, Asam Buranji, p.126}

In her zeal to make Saktism the religion of the people she even wounded the sentiments of the Vaishnavas. Thus, she arranged a Durga \textit{Puja} to where all the Mayamaria Mahantas were invited. They were compelled to bow their heads before the image of Durga and to take nirmali and prasad. Besides, their foreheads were besmeared with the blood of the sacrificed animals,\footnote{\textit{Ibid}, Intro.p.XXI, \textit{Ibid},p.71, G.R. Barua, \textit{Op.Cit.},p.99} which was a great insult to the Moamaria Mahanta and which was considered to be the main cause behind the Moamaria rebellion.

The power and the atrocity of Bar-raja Phuleswari began to increase. She abolished the system of summoning Barmel and Sarumel. She was now the defacto ruler of the Kingdom. She once again wounded the sentiments of the Moamoria Mahanta by another act. In her advanced stage of pregnancy, she was very much curious to know about her future progeny. The eleven of the Mahantas were called to predict her future issue, remained calm and quite, but Chaturbhuj Thakur, the Moamoria Mahanta predicted that the Bar-raja would give birth to neither a
son nor a daughter but a lump of flesh and this delivery would be the cause of her death. The Bar-raja getting very enraged ordered the execution of the Mahanta but he was rescued by the mercy of the Parbatiya Gosain. Phuleswari had also forbade the old mode of worship of Gods and Goddess in the temples and introduced a new and regular system of worship called Durgarccamani Manjuri. The Bar-Raja had also thrown away all idols of the deities in the temples except that of Phulbari, into the river Brahmaputra, at her personal supervision from the Sonarijan camp. Idols made of stone and brass were placed in every temple and saktism flourished along with the sacrifice of animals.

The clever, proud and accomplished lady Phuleswari offered many of the important portfolios to her own relatives. Thus her brother Harinath was made Bargohain, her uncle Joyananda was made Dhekial Barua and three of her maternal uncles subsequently were made Khanikar Barua, Chaudang Barua and Debigharar Barua. Her

85. Anirudha Devar Charit Aru Mayamara Satrar Vamsawali, vv.530,531.
86. Ibid, vv.533,539.
87. Durgarccamani Manjuri (Manuscript) No.1266
88. Tungkhungia Buranji, p.41, Satsari Asam Buranji, p.127
89. Ibid., Ibid, Kasinath Tamuli Phukan, Asam Buranji, p.51
nurse Sita was given the status of Rajmao and she got the Dhai Ali (road) constructed in her memory. She excavated the Gaurisagar tank and three temples were constructed on its bank which were dedicated in the names of Siva, Vishnu and Devi.

Phuleswari was succeeded as Bar-rala by her sister Draupadi alias Ambika. The new Bar-rala was not so powerful as her predecessor but she was a great patron of learning and education. She was the inspiring soul behind the composition of the Hastividyarnava. She excavated the famous tank at Sibsagar and on its bank three temples were constructed which were dedicated to Siva, Vishnu and Devi. The Siva temple with its golden dome is a place of pilgrimage still today. The last Bar-Raja was Enadari alias Sarbeswari. Nothing significant is known of her reign except that she constructed a temple at Sibsagar to commemorate the name of her mother-in-law, Keri Rajmao.

All these three Bar-Rajas were actually conducting the affairs of administration. The king remained simply as adviser and did not oppose any action of his queens. These were however not the lonely

90. H. Barbarua, Op.Cit., pp.244,245
92. Sadar Amin, Asam Buranji, p.71, Satsari Asam Buranji,p.127
examples. Before them also, another Ahom queen, the consort of Tao Khamti (1380-1384 A.D.) was overiding the power of the king, when Tao Khamti left the kingdom to conduct an expedition against the Chutiyas, he left the charges of his government to his chief queen.\(^94\) The power living, jealous lady getting the reigns of government in her hands not only ordered the execution of her co-wife but had also distributed properties, lands and slaves, as she liked. She was also making and unmaking officers at her own sweet will. The king failed in his attempt to prevent the queen from her mischievous deeds as a result of which, he was assasinated by the nobles.\(^95\)

Besides there was another Ahom queen Chauching, the consort of Swargadeo Suklenmung, the Gargaya Raja (1539-1552 A.D.). She was the daughter of the Nara King ruling at Mungkong in the Hukong valley. She was not only beautiful but also learned and intelligent. The buranjis state that it was at her instance that the office of the Bapatra Gohain, the third great minister of the Ahom kingdom was created. Thus records a buranji 'the queen told the king: "A cooking pot can keep its balance only when it is placed over three stools. How do you

\(^94\) Satsari Asam Buranji, p.9, Kasinath Tamuli Phukon, Asam Buranji, p.14
\(^95\) Ibid, pp.9, 10, Ibid, p.15
expect to maintain balance to the pot with two stools only"? The king understood what the queen meant and created the office of the third minister. Again, on another occasion, she had suggested to the king, "A capital should be properly fortified. Ours is not. So steps should be taken to surround it with embankments." The king did accordingly and hence named the capital as Gargaon.

Nangbakla Gabharu, the wife of Tao-munghing Bargohain was a very courageous lady, who had humiliated the king Sukhampha alias Khora Raja (1552-1603 A.D.) and his ministers for their suffering defeat at the hands of the Koches and thereby played a role in contemporary Ahom politics. According to the terms of the treaty concluded with the Koches, each of the Ahom nobles was to send one of their sons to the Koch court to live there as a hostage. The Bargohain was also to act accordingly. When his wife had to part from her son, she appeared in the court and rebuked the king and his ministers in the following words 'I won't allow my son to be sent to the Koch country. What kind of a king you are and what kind of ministers you are? You were defeated even by the Koches.'

96. Sukumar Mahanta, Asam Buranji, p.27
97. Ibid
Let me have your head dress, girdle, belt and sword. I shall fight with the Koch king and let him know how a female can fight with a male. Only if the course of the Dikhow river can be diverted upwards to the hill, by putting a dam across, then my son may be given. The king being at his wits end, then send his brother Sundar Gohain, instead of Nangbakla Gabharu's son to the Koch court.

In the contemporary Koch politics also, we find women exercising influence over political affairs. Thus it is recorded that Nara Narayana (1540-1584 A.D.) the great Koch king, after the imprisonment of his brother and general Chilarai at Gaur, wanted to release the Ahom hostages with a view to winning the good will of the Ahom king. The chief queen then told him that a straight release would amount to professing his weakness before the Ahom king, so she suggested him to hold a game of dice and pretend defeat at the hands of Sunder Gohain, the brother of Ahom king, who was staying in his court as a hostage. After this, he should show his appreciation to the hostage prince and release him and his friends. The king did accordingly.

98. Deodhai Asam Buranji, pp.47f, G.C.Barua, Ahom Buranji, pp.87ff
99. J.P.Wade, An Account of Assam, p.206
Jayadhaj Singha's (1648-1663 A.D.) mother also exercised much influence upon her son. It was at her suggestion that the king wanted to take initiation from the Mayamara Mahanta but that being refused, he became offended and wanted to execute the Mahanta who was living in exile. It was very certainly at the instance of the queen mother that the head of the Auniati Satra then implored the king to be merciful to the Mahanta and the request was compiled with.\textsuperscript{100}

It is learnt from the Tungkhungia Buranji that the court ladies were playing an important part in the intrigue during the period of ministrial supremacy in Assam. Debera Barbarua, who was the actual ruler was plotted to be killed by the nominal ruler, Swargadeo Ramadhaj Singha (1672-1674 A.D.) for which one Tangchu Phukon was appointed. Debera had amorous relations with one of the consorts of the king, who reported him the matter thus 'today is the last occasion when I see your face, you will be killed tomorrow by Tangchu Phukon'. This has been desired by His Majesty.\textsuperscript{101} Debera became extremely careful and when the next day, the Phukon was coming to the king's audience chamber armed with a knife concealed on a roll of soft mat, with a view to stabbing

\textsuperscript{100} Mayamara Satrar Vamsawali, vv.400-410

\textsuperscript{101} Tunkhungiya Buranji, p.5
Debera, the latter, all at once attacked him and cut him into pieces. 102 He then killed all other officials whom he suspected and even poisoned the king to death. Thus the queen brought the death of her husband and contributed to the continuation of misrule in the kingdom.

After putting Ramadhaj Singha to death, Debera brought a prince from Tungkhung and made him the king, who ruled only for a few days. After him a prince from Samaguria family was put on the throne and daughter of Momai Tamuli Barbarua was made the chief queen. But the queen disliked Debera's wielding of actual power in the kingdom. She therefore said to the king 'you are a king only in name, if Debera is allowed to wield power like this.' 103 At her instance, the king wanted to arrest Debera but the plot was revealed and both the king and the queen were killed.

There are a number of such instances of women taking part in court politics, during the days of Swargadeo Lakhi Singha, after his restoration in 1770. During the Moamaria regime, Ramakanta, the son of

102. Ibid.
103. Ibid, p.6
Naharkhora Saikia was made king by extirpating Lakhi Singha. Taking the opportunity of his dethronement, many of the nobles and princes wanted to usurp the throne and with that end in view, they organised a series of intrigues commonly known as Kunwar Bidroh. In these intrigues, many of the betrayed princesses, court ladies, wives of the nobles and ligiris participated with a hope of getting power and status or improving their lot. It is recorded in the buranjis, that being tempted by the princes, the court ladies including the ligiris did not hesitate to take the life of the reigning king by any means. Thus a ligiri named Bhakati, along with one Bhugai Kalita's wife were appointed by Bhudhor Gohain, grandson of Rajeswar Singha, to poison to death his paternal uncle, Tipamia Gohain. Bhakati was promised by Bhudhor Gohain, that if he succeeded in becoming king, she would be made his chief queen. But Bhakati was not successful as the conspiracy leaked out. There were, of course, women like Gauri, wife of Rajeswar Singha's second son, Charu Singha, who were not tempted by allurements. When Gauri had come to learn that a conspiracy was on foot against her husband, she got it confirmed by one of her attendents. She then reported her husband that the conspiracy was hatched by her step son, Bhudhor Gohain. Thus she saved the life of her husband.  

104. S.K. Bhuyan, Kunwar Bidroh, Gauhati, 1971, pp.10ff
Another rebellion during this period was organised by Malow Gohain, son of Pramatta Singha, where a number of women were involved. Among them, the most prominent was the Parbatia Kunwari of Swargadeo Lakhi Singha, who was the daughter of Khongia Phukon. Of the ligiris, Longkali, Rupohi and Chandmoti were important. The story behind the conspiracy as recorded in the buranjis is as follows - one day the king Lakhi Singha (1769-1780 A.D.) was astonished to find some lime marks on his gold water vessel (Bhogjara) which was kept beside his bed. This indicated that somebody visited his room at night with some hostile intention. Enquiries proved ligiri Longkali guilty. But Longkali had cordial relations with the king from her very childhood and therefore the king did not suspect her of any misdeed. On the other hand, his most beloved Parbatiya Kunwari along with two of her ligiris Rupohi and Chandmoti, hatched a conspiracy with Tipamia Gohain to take the life of the king. A secret letter related to the conspiracy written by Tipamia Gohain to the Parbotiya Kunwari was exposed by the King's officials. There-upon the king requested his Na-Kunwari Krishnapuriya and his Tamuli Kunwari, Kalindri, to investigate into the matter.

One day, while the king was going to take bath, he uttered before Budu Kunwari, that he would be going to
enjoy the elephant fighting. She misunderstood the remark and asked the king whom he was going to kill trampling by elephant. The king jokingly replied that he would kill those including Budu Kunwari who were plotting to kill him. Budu Kunwari informed Parbatiya Kunwari everything. Being frightened, she appealed to Tamuli Kunwari to save her life and subsequently at the advice of the Na-Kunwari, she entreated the king to pardon her. In this way the lives of the court ladies and the ligiris were spared by their mutual help and understanding.

But there was Sahita, one the ligiris of Tipamia Gohain, who could factually disclose the Gohain's intrigue to Kekeru Kalita Phukon as well as the King. She even sent an exact copy of the astrological reading forecasting the fortune of Tipamia Gohain, which made king Lakhi Singha alert. Her four letters sent to Lakshmi Singha give us an idea of her political insight even as a ligiri. The queens and the court ladies must have been more alert politically.

There are even instances of women interfering in the trial of the guilty. Thus when Tipamia Gohain was found guilty of treason, he was put to trial in which the

105. Ibid, pp.30ff
106. Ibid, pp.40ff
Rajmao intervened in favour of the Gohain. 107

Besides the rebellion of Rangai, a Moran rebel, who declared himself king, gives an idea of women's awareness of political affairs. It is recorded in a buranjí, that Rangai's attendant Bhutto declared in the trial before the king the common origin of Rongai and his illicit relations with the women of lower castes. His statements were confirmed by Rangai's wife which helped the king to identify Rangai that he was not a prince, but a Moran rebel. 108

In the Koch court also, court ladies or female attendants played an important role in deciding the fate of a king. It is learnt that it was Naranarayan and Chilarai's nurse who had managed to inform them of the usurpation of the throne by their third brother Nara Singha, following the death of their father Biswa Singha and advised them to come back to Kingdom and assume power. 109

The patriotic lady Ramani Gabharu was another illustration of the ladies who interfered in politics behind the screen. Ramani Gabharu, the daughter of

107. Ibid, p.49
108. Ibid, p.78ff
109. Darrang Raj Vamsawali, v.289f
Jayadhaj Singha was sent to the Mughal harem according to the terms of the treaty of Ghilajarihat (1663 A.D.). She was later on married to Prince Azam alias Azamtara, the third son of emperor Aurangazeb. When she came to know that her maternal uncle, Laluksola Borphukon, had conspired to surrender Gauhati to the Mughals, she secretly sent a letter to her uncle warning him of the treacherous and unpatriotic deed. She even managed to send Moinaligiri to Assam to tell her uncle in detail about the evil effects of surrendering Gauhati to the Mughals.

It was again because of the part played by Rangili in the Burmese court that the course of Assam history of the period took a different turn. Rangili, the daughter of an Ahom noble was first offered to the Singpho leader Bichanong by Puranananda Buragohain, who presented her to the Burmese king Bodowpaya (1782-1819 A.D.) to tighten the friendship with him. Rangili, who later became one of the favourite queens of the Burmese king entreated the king to help Badan Chandra Barphukon by giving him armed help. Her request was complied with and six thousand soldiers were placed at

110. S.K. Bhuyan, Ramani Gabharu, Gauhati, 1972, p.17
111. B. Sarma, Durbin, p.57f
the disposal of Badan Chandra. It is a fact that even without Badan Chandra or Rangili, there would have been a Burmese invasion to Assam. But it cannot be denied that Badan Chandra's personal appeal and Rangili's entreaties to the Burmese monarch hastened the coming of the Burmese to Assam, who committed inhuman atrocities on the inhabitants of this land.

   Pijau Gabharu, the daughter of Badan Bar-Phukon who was married to Oreshanath, the third son of Purnananda Bargohain also played a role in politics. When she came to know of the conspiracy made by her father-in-law to arrest her father, she secretly sent a letter to her father writing everything in detail. This compelled Badan Bar-Phukon to leave Gauhati for Calcutta to seek British help, but when this was refused he went to Burma and the Burmese king at the request of Rangili, as stated, extended his prompt help to Badan Barphukon.

   Some queen mothers or Rajmaos also played remarkable role in politics. Numoli Rajmao, the mother of Kamaleswar Singha (1795-1811 A.D.) and Chandra Kanta Singha (1811-1818 A.D.) took much interest in politics. Her son, Chandrakanta Singha, at the time of his accession to the throne was a young boy of thirteen

years. Though the reigns of the government was actually in the hands of Premier Purnananda Buragohain, he always sought the advice and guidance of the Rajmao and consulted her in all complicated affairs of the state. She thus exercised considerable influence in the deliberations of the state. In state craft and diplomacy, she was no inferior to Purnananda Burgohain. The farsighted Rajmao clearly grasped the critical political situation of the country and was sure of ensuing downfall of the Ahoms. She tried her best to regain peace and tranquility of the state. She disliked her son's intimate relation with Satram Charingia Phukon. She also could not tolerate the vanity and atrocities committed by Badan Barphukan upon the innocent subjects of Kamrup.

At the death of Purnananda Buragohain, when Badan Chandra became the premier taking the title Mantri Phukon, she feared anarchy for the kingdom and wanted to get rid of him. She had also come to know that Badan Chandra had in his possession some magical things ensuring his safety. She therefore secretly called Pioli, the son of Badan Chandra and asked him in course of a conversation. 'How has your father managed to come back all the way from Burma?' Pioli uttered in joy 'My father

has hundred and twenty amulets in his body and for this the enemies could not harm him.\textsuperscript{114} Getting the secret clue, the Rajmao intrigued with Dhani Barbarua and Nirbhayanarayan Barghain to take the life of Badan Barphukan. Accordingly Rupsingh Subedar and Rahmankhah Jamadar were appointed by the Rajmao, who did the job, when Badan was taking bath in a river.\textsuperscript{115} Numoli Rajmao was interested in public works also. During the reign of Purander Singha (1888-1819 A.D.) she had a tank excavated at Jorhat, which was dedicated to the name of Vishnu and which is nowadays known as Rajmao deotar Pukhuri.\textsuperscript{116} She even made arrangement to construct a temple on its bank but unfortunately she breathed her last.

Like Numoli Rajmao, the Chutiya queen Sadhani, the wife of Nitipal took part in politics. As Nitipal was from a low family, he did not know anything about state craft and diplomacy, and he was all the time guided by queen Sadhani. This brave queen, after the defeat of the chutiyas at the hands of the Ahoms in 1523 A.D. refused to part with her family heirloom and preferring death to hishonour jumped from the Chandangiri hill with the family heirloom.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{114} S.K. Bhuyan(ed.), Barphukonor Geet, Guwahati, 1950, Intro. p.7
\textsuperscript{115} Tungkhungia Buranji, p.200
\textsuperscript{116} H. Barbarua, Op.Cit., p.311
\textsuperscript{117} Deodhai Asam Buranji, p.200
The part played by Kuranganayani in terminating the rule of the Morans is also worth mentioning. Kuranganayani was the daughter of the Manipuri King Jay Singha. She was given in marriage to the Ahom King Rajeswar Singha as a token of gratitude for helping Jay Singha in getting his throne recovered from the possession of the Burmese. The Moamaria rebels imprisoned the old King Lakhi Singha (1769-1780 A.D.) and Ramakanta was declared king. Raghab Moran became the Barbarua and he married Kuranganayani, the widow of king Rajeswar Singha, who was accepted as wife by his brother Lakhi Singha. Kuranganayani successfully organised a conspiracy which compelled the Moamarias to leave the city of Rongpur. The conspiracy as described in the Buranjis is as follows - the ex Ahom officers in guise of a huchari party equipped with weapons went to the house of the Barbarua in the Assamese New Years' Day. Thereupon Kuranganayani, insisted upon Raghab to come out of the house to welcome the huchari party as was the custom of the land. Raghab came out with a knife in his hand and at this Kuranganayani said to Raghab in a sweet voice 'Are you a fool to suspect a huchari party? They will misunderstand you if you come with a knife.'

118 M.R. Dewan, Buranji Vivek Ratna, Vol.II (Manuscript), p.224
Accordingly Raghab left the knife and knelt down before the party to seek blessings. Then Kuranganayani struck a blow with a sword at his neck, at which Raghab fell down. She was soon followed by other members. The Matak officials left the Ahom capital.

Woman was also used as an instrument to cement political alliance. Whenever a treaty was concluded between two states the vanquished offered his daughter to the Victor. Examples are too numerous to be mentioned. Thus Ramani Gabharu and Mohini Aideo were offered to the Mughal harem by Swargadeo Jaydhaj Singha. Kuranganayani was received from the Manipuri King by Swargadeo Rajeswar Singha and Harmati and Darmati were received from the Kamata King by Suhungmung, the Dihingia Raja. The Weissalisa informs us that Badan Chandra Barphukon offered his daughter Hem-Chang-Shao to the Burmese monarch Badawpaya to get his assistance against Purnananda Buragohain. 119

The women in different capacities played an important role in politics of medieval Assam. It is often said that the petticoat government of Siva Singha was responsible for the fall of the Ahom monarchy. But Phuleswari alone cannot be held responsible for that. Her

neophytic zeal was only one of the factors precipitating the fall of the monarchy. Besides, there were women who showed much courage in the battle field. Radha and Rukmini, the wives of the Moran leader Nahar took a leading part in the Moamaria rebellion. After the restoration of the Ahom power, Lakhi Singha ordered a mass massacre of the Moamariyas. This had encouraged the widows of the deceased stalwarts for taking up arms against the oppressing government. It was, perhaps for all these that the Assamese women at a later period could take an active part in India's struggle for freedom from British rule.

120. For details on the role of women in Moamariya Rebellion see, S.L. Barua, *Last Days of Ahom Monarchy*, pp.110-111