Chapter 3
ECONOMIC PRACTICE

Economic practice is considered to be the ultimate determinant of the social formation\(^1\). But since every historical situation has its roots in the past, for a proper understanding of the economic practice as it existed during the eighteenth century, we have to first trace its pre-Ahom roots. We shall then trace the changes and continuities in its growth and the level of development it reached during the eighteenth century - the period with which we are essentially concerned here.

Pre-Ahom Situation and the Ahom Migration: Changes in the Basic Structure

Extensive information on crucial aspects of pre-Ahom economy of the Kamarupa period is not available. But from epigraphic and literary sources we are able to draw a rough picture. It appears that the Kamarupa kings claimed that all land belonged to the crown. On the basis of epigraphs, land was mainly divided into three categories \textit{kshetra} (arable land), \textit{khila} (waste land) and \textit{vastu} (homestead)\(^2\). Arable lands were held individually and by the family members but wastelands, forests etc were held in common, sometimes by the whole village. Revenues were mainly collected in kind by the state who hence was theoretically, the

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  \item \textbf{2.} P.C. Choudhury, \textit{The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.} (Gauhati, 1978), p. 277.
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owner of the land\textsuperscript{3}. The Kamarupa rulers also made grants of lands to Brahmins which were exempted from taxation and official harassments. Rice being the staple food, the cultivation of paddy constituted one of the chief pursuits of the people. Use of ploughs and hoes were known as proved by the grants in the Agrahara settlements. Alongside this agriculturally settled population, there were numerous tribes living by cattle-rearing and hunting supplemented by shifting cultivation using primitive technology. In pre-Ahom Upper Assam most of the rice cultivation was done by ploughless tribal cultivators. Short maturing dry (ahu) variety of rice, undulating land surface, broadcasting of seeds, slash and burn, land rotation for fallowing and the use of the hoe or digging sticks - these were its dominant features.

When the Ahoms entered into Assam during the thirteenth century, no semblance of a central kingship that Kamarupa had was left. In its place there existed a fragmented political system. Several new tribal polities as well as a number of petty non-tribal and armed land controllers (bhuyans) who were mostly concentrated on the western and central parts of the region co-existed side by side. Both settled and shifting cultivation was

\textsuperscript{3} Choudhury's argument that the royal claim to ultimate ownership had no effect on the peasant can be controverted. Since the peasants were paying taxes to the state against the use of the land shows that theoretically the king representing the state was the ultimate owner of the land. Choudhury, \textit{ibid}, p. 273.
practiced. Some tribes had moved from shifting to settled cultivation with or without the use of the plough.

The Ahoms were an advanced plough using wet rice cultivating tribe with the knowledge of higher agricultural technology. The use of the iron tipped plough and transplantation techniques along with a system of controlling the water in the rice fields were among the dominant characteristics of the wet rice technology. Hence the migration of the Ahoms into the region meant the invasion of the plough into pockets of hoe and stick culture and an extension of the wet rice (sali) cultivation at the cost of that of dry rice (ahu) and also of the transplantation technique in preference to the broadcasting of seeds. 4

In fact the Ahoms can be called a group of cultivators looking for fresh lands which brought them into the fertile Brahmaputra valley. The fertile and virgin land of the valley delighted the Ahoms who described it as 'Mungdunchungkham' meaning the land of golden crops. In course of time the disintegrated bhuyans were absorbed as officers into the lower escheleons of the Ahom administrative machinery and the tribal groups were subjugated and this huge manpower was pooled for the extension and development of a flourishing rice economy. By clearing dense forests, leveling extensive land surfaces, construction of massive embankments and water control irrigation with the help of

4. A switch from broadcast sowing to transplanting easily leads to an increase of yields by 40%; D.H. Girst, Rice, (London, 1975) p. 149.
a militia - organised out of the subject population - the Ahoms gradually extended their wet rice culture throughout the Brahmaputra valley. The package changes in the rice economy ensured an increased production thereby giving sustenance to the rising population and the state apparatus. With the emergence of settled agriculture, permanent settlements of villages developed. Within these villages small peasant economies also functioned. For exchange needs gradually small market networks also developed.

Development of the Ahom Economy: Its Essential Features

With the invasion of the plough and the bullock power into the primitive hoe and digging stick pockets the economic conquest of the Brahmaputra valley by the Ahoms was complete. The economic conquest coupled with political domination by the seventeenth century earned for the Ahoms total mastery over the land. Building on the earlier experiences from their homeland, by the eighteenth century the Ahoms had evolved and developed a highly unique agrarian system.

The successful role played by the Ahom king, originally a tribal chief, in the organization and continuation of wet rice cultivation stabilised and strengthened the institution of kingship. By virtue of his position and as a representative of

the agricultural community the control over the distribution of land was vested on the king, who theoretically was the owner of all categories of land - cultivated and waste alongwith all its natural resources. Of the cultivated land, the most prized were the rupit or wet rice land where sali was grown. This was because of its high productivity - a pura of wet rice land gave three times more yield than a dry one. Because of the scarcity of free labour and wet rice cultivation being labour intensive, the possession of wet rice lands by peasants was subject to their rendering periodic labour services to the state. In other words, to the king, his nobles and officers. In return, such a peasant, who was known as a kanri paik was granted the use of about 2.5 acres of rupit land. The wet rice land known as gamati was considered the property of the state and theoretically was neither hereditary nor transferable. It was redistributed from time to time after censuses. In addition a peasant possessed two other categories of land - (i) inferior land (known as baotali or faringati) suited for cultivation of mustard, summer rice and pulses; and (ii) homestead and garden lands known as bari or basti. Initially such categories of land were rent free but by the later part of the eighteenth century, these had become taxable.⁶ In the case of bari lands which descended from father to son and as such were considered hereditary⁷ the peasant's land rights could not be easily taken away by the state.⁸

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6. Known as Ga-dhan, each paik was required to pay Re. 1 as tax.  
8. Guha, as in n. 5 p. 502.
wastelands, the right of the state was not generally exercised. Wastelands could be reclaimed by any social group though this was subject to the condition that it was not required on a new census taking place to provide the paiks with their proper allotment. However, in course of time when the wastelands were made arable, the state claimed its rights. In the case of forests and mines, the Ahom rulers used to exact royalties for the sale of valuable timber, agar etc. and thus maintained their rights over them. Otherwise access to common land such as forests, grazing grounds and fisheries were open to all subjects.

The officials of the state in charge of the whole paik operation received their remuneration in the form of a percentage of paiks under their control and grants of rent free lands. Such category of land was however, linked to offices but officials could reclaim land at their private initiative and on these they had effective possession.

The secular aristocracy ie. the nobles and vassal chiefs had vast estates which were cultivated by the paik peasants, their bondsmen and slaves. The estates of the nobility were grants enjoyed at the pleasure of the king and hence theoretically not hereditary. However, at their private initiative the nobles could also reclaim wastelands with the help of their slaves and bondsmen for their private estates and these could be regarded as

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private property.\textsuperscript{10}

The Ahom state thus exercised an overall control over the distribution of land. Such control over the enjoyment of such an important resource increased the power of the Ahom throne. It also enabled the state to keep a check on the growth of large landed holdings. At the peasant level, though the \textit{paiks} had use of the wet rice land they did not own it. Besides, the compulsory state service restrained peasants initiative to enlarge holdings of land. The nobility as noted above, were granted huge estates with \textit{paiks} attached to it. These estates tended to become hereditary which allowed the nobles to extend and consolidate their hold over it. The royal control over these estates was in practice minimal - related only to the payment of royal dues and of supplying man and materials in times of need. The system in other words, created a class of landholding aristocracy with military strength. However, the nobility owing to its close links with the throne and because they enjoyed the estates at the pleasure of the king could not emerge as independent and powerful landlords. Landlordism however, was to emerge from another direction.

\textsuperscript{10} Towards the later part of the Ahom rule there are indications that the nobles could buy and sell lands as private property among themselves. Rock Inscription No. 156 in Maheshwar Neog (Comp. & Ed.) Prachya Sasanavali (Gauhati, 1974), p. 214.
Growth of Landlordism

Beginning from the seventeenth century, the Ahom state in its enthusiastic patronage of Hinduism began the practice of granting large estates to Brahmans, temples and religious institutions.\(^{11}\) Such grants were of three categories - *Devottar* made to temple gods, *Dharmottar* and *Pirpal* grants made to religious institutions and *Brahmottar* grants made to learned Brahmans. These lands were worked by *paiks* given along with it\(^{12}\) and by slaves and other bondsmen. Such grants were exempted from making any payment in the shape of land revenue and over such lands the state had but nominal control which meant supervision. In practice, the individual donees and the religious institutions came to become owners of the donated lands. Such grants of land and peasant *paiks* by the state to the religious functionaries notably to the *satras* or the Vaishnavite religious institutions tended in course of time to bring about a new class of landlords, who besides were also the spiritual leaders of the people. By the eighteenth century we find this class firmly entrenched in a position of power and dominance.

In the ultimate analysis the state was the source from which emanated all the grants made to the nobles and spiritual lords.

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11. A study of land grants given in P.S. (ibid) amply testifies this. Also see R.D. Choudhury, *Catalogue of Inscriptions in the Assam State Museum*, (Gauhati, 1987).

Theoretically, thus, the final ownership of land rested with the crown representing the state. The state could also confiscate the property of its nobles and spiritual lords and this right was exercised when it perceived any threat to its power. But such instances were generally the exception and not the rule. As long as the nobles and grantees fulfilled their obligations to the state, recrimination was avoided.

In the above distribution of the means of production political consideration was the determining factor. The state, nobility and the spiritual lords were linked together by practical and political expediency. The nobility and spiritual lords were dependent on state grants and patronage for their position and power. In return for this the nobility provided sustained feudal support for the regime, the spiritual nobility provided the ideological support both of which combined together to provide the regime with a legitimacy. 13

State Intervention in the Production Process

In Assam, the state played an important part in production by its active role in the organisation of production. Labour being the most crucial factor in production by the eighteenth century, the Ahom state had evolved an highly ingenious system of mobilisation of labour. This was the paik system under which every able-bodied adult male between the age of fifteen to fifty had to render compulsory labour services to the state. This system which

was given its final shape by Pratap Singha during the seventeenth century transformed the whole nature of the economic activity by bringing it directly under state control. Henceforth, the loosely organised militia was converted into a centralised militia pool with a regular hierarchical gradation. Since then every man with the exception of the nobles, religious lords, priests and slaves, had to register as paiks. These paiks were then divided and distributed into numerous khels (guilds or divisions) each having to render specific services like farming public works, mining, goldwashing etc. to the state. These khels were headed by Ahom officials known as Phukans or Baruas and were under the immediate supervision of a regular gradation of officers viz. Rajkhowas, Hazarikas, Saikias and Boras. A Bora had charge of twenty men, a Saikia one hundred, a Hazarika one thousand and a Phukan had charge of six thousand paiks and each were under as rigid discipline as a regular army.14

Each paik was organised by gots or units. Each got consisted of four paiks and was responsible between them for one man year of service to the state. Beginning from the mid-eighteenth century the number of men in a got was reduced to three. While on active state duty the other two members of his got looked after the cultivation of his land. In emergency two or even three members of a got were required to go and serve the state.

Such state control over the mobilisation of labour for production not only enhanced the prestige of the Ahom king but also enabled

14. Gait, H.O.A, p. 239
the state to intervene directly in the production process. The vital control over labour meant that economic activity was shaped and dictated by the Ahom state's interest and policies.

Organisation of Production in Agriculture

The emergence and development of the Ahom state from a small chiefdom had its basis on the rice culture which sustained the Ahom state apparatus. Hence the success of wet rice cultivation was crucial to the economy. Wet rice cultivation however, required not only a large base of manpower to clear the dense monsoon tracts and level the soil but also a system of efficient water control to irrigate the fields. The Ahom state was largely successful in providing the basic infrastructural facilities, for extension of wet rice cultivation. Through its control over the supply of labour the state played a dominant role in land reclamation and water control. It must be noted that in wet rice cultivation water is the most important factor for it usually supplies all the nutrients required for healthy growth. One way of increasing rice yields and land productivity is by control over the water supply. In Assam, rainfall being so abundant small scale irrigation facilities could be organized by the peasant community at the village level.

To a considerable extent the nature of wet rice cultivation depended on the varying ecological condition. The suitability of land for rice depended chiefly upon its elevation and in its capacity to retain moisture. For this purpose the field was

first levelled and low ridges or alis were raised in a criss-cross pattern to retain water in the fields - the excess being drained out when necessary. These ridges were generally not higher than a foot. This technique suited the extensive central alluvial plains of Assam and permanent wet rice cultivation was mostly carried out in this diluvial plain. Here, the level of the region being above the reach of the ordinary floods, sali was grown extensively. By the end of the eighteenth century, winter rice constituted nearly three fourth of the whole crops grown in Assam.

Central to the agricultural operation was the construction of extensive river embankments. The rainfall in normal years was so abundant that the danger to cultivation arose from floods rather than lack of water. To prevent the annual flooding of the rivers huge embankments were constructed on state initiative. These embankments served alike as bunds and the high roads of the region. One such bund is said to have extended throughout the whole length from Cooch Behar to Sadiya.

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16. 'In this country they make the surface of the fields and gardens so level that the eye cannot find the least elevation in it up to the extreme horizon' observed the Mughal writer Shihabuddin Talish during the seventeenth century. Quoted in Gait, H.O.A., p. 145.


"These river embankments were crossed by high raised pathways which were again joined by smaller bunds graduating down; and connecting the villages and fields at once formed most commodious areas of communication, and afforded opportunities for retaining or keeping out the inundation".20

Nearly every stream in Upper Assam was bunded. This was in contrast to Lower Assam where no general system of embankments existed though partial embankments on particular rivers existed, specially on either bank of the Kallang.

The overall effect of the introduction of improved agricultural techniques of wet rice cultivation was to result in increased productivity which helped to sustain the growing state apparatus and the rising population. Definite signs of a demographic growth was evidenced in the establishment of new villages both by the Ahom state and the satras.21 The mid-eighteenth century population of Assam has been computed at around 2.5 million.22 However, in the prevailing condition of land abundance, the population, the bulk of which resided at villages, was minimal. The situation deteriorated during the later half of the eighteenth century when the Moamaria rebellion depopulated the region by half.

Industry and Manufactures

With the success of wet rice cultivation and surplus that followed, industry also developed to meet the basic needs of the state for metals and scarce goods. Because of its specific importance the extraction of precious metals like gold and iron, boat building for transport and defense, and silk manufacturing for export received particular interest from the Ahom state. As in agriculture, the above industries were dependent on the forced labour of the peasant paiks.

Most of the rivers which flowed into the Brahmaputra being auriferous a segment of the state militia known as the Sonowal khel were involved in the collection of gold dust from the sands of the river. It is estimated that between twelve thousand to about twenty five thousand people were engaged in gold washing. Gold washing under the Ahoms was thus a national industry involving considerable labour and strict supervision by the state. The Sonowal khel began their work with the coming of the rains. They were accompanied by a number of Hazarikas, Saikias and Boras. The prospective site was carefully selected - the most preferred spots being where the river beds was composed of small rounded pebbles consisting of quartz and sandstone, with a considerable mixture of sand. Collecting the gold-dust from the sands involved a lengthy and tedious process of sieving.

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and washing. The metal was extracted \(^{25}\) by pouring on the gold dust a proportional quantity of quicksilver (or mercury) and water. Mercury reacted with gold to form amalgam and forms a little mass. This ball was then placed in shells and put in a charcoal fire of Nahor wood, by which means the quicksilver evaporates and the shells form into lime. The whole was then thrown into a pot of water and the pure gold sank to the bottom.

The iron ores existing along the foothills of the mountain ranges were extensively mined by the Ahom state. The smelting of iron ore was thus a considerable industry. The Lo-Salias were the people involved in extracting the iron. In a working team of every five men engaged in smelting \(^{26}\) there would be about five times the number for preparing the ore and the charcoal. The whole group was headed by a master craftsman called Ojha. From this metal large knives, swords, guns etc were made. A systematic arrangement was made under the supervision of the Khargaria Phukan and Barua to manufacture guns and cannons and prepare gun powder out of the saltpetre collected at Khargoli of Gauhati and other places.

\(^{25}\) The following process is based on W. Robinson's observations Op-cit., p. 37.

\(^{26}\) It was observed by William Robinson that Assamese furnaces were less efficient than those used in the Khasi hills worked by double bellows. Ibid., pp. 34-35.
Salt being a scarce commodity, the Ahom state made systematic arrangements to procure the precious article. Salt was mainly obtainable from the brine springs near the Naga hills and from Borhat and Sadiya. To oversee the operation an Ahom official called Sarvarahkar was placed in charge of one hundred workers in each salt mine and his duty was to look into the administration and collection of salt. Beginning from November till March/April the Ahom paiks known as Lon-Purias were involved in extracting salt. Salt spring wells were dug to a considerable extent. The evaporation was carried out in green bamboos placed over a long water-filled earthen trough used as a boiler. Firewoods, locally available was used as fuel. It was thus an exceedingly slow and wasteful process.

In a region where water afforded a ready and universal conveyance, boat-building was a popular industry. The industry was sustained by the easy availability of timbers and free labour of the paiks. The Ahom paiks made excellent boats large

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27. This fact was commented even by the Muhammedan writer Mohammad Cazim, 'A Description of Assam' (trns.) H. Vansittart, in Asiatic Research Survey, Vol. 2. p. 132.

28. The Ajhar (Lager-Stroemiareginoe) and Sam (Artrolar-trns Chaplasha) were best for canoes being both very buoyant and durable. The most durable canoes were constructed of the timber Gmelina arborea Roxb called Gomari in Assamese, since it was not readily affected by changes in weather from being kept in water and not readily attacked by insect. William Robinson, Op-cit., pp. 41-42.
and small. The Mughals were particularly impressed by the Ahom war boats, built locally, for its sturdiness and agility\textsuperscript{29}. The Nao-Salia Phukan oversaw the whole operation of construction and maintenance. The boat building technique was simple. The logs locally available were hollowed out until only an outer skin about an inch and a quarter thick remained. For large boats the shell was smeared with liquid mud and steamed inverted over a line of burning embers. The boat was then distended by the insertion of thwarts. In case of a split in the process and usually it happened the rent was patched by wood fastened in by clamps. In this way boats with a length of 60ft. and breadth of 6 or 7 ft. having a tonnage of about 30 to 35 tons, were constructed capable of lasting for ten years or more depending on the quality of the timber.

The technology of metal working in smithies was relatively more advanced. This was because of the Muslim artisans from Mughal India who were organised into a separate khel. Metal casting processes were used for making articles of gold, silver (this article was scarce in Assam), bronze, iron, bell metal and brass. Shihabuddin Talish observed that the Ahoms cast excellent matchlocks and 'bachadar artillery'. With the exception of the royal kharkanas in eastern Assam, there was one village of metal casters in Kamrup - Sarthebari that was known for its skill in metal casting.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{29} Shihabuddin Talish, Op-cit., p. 151.
\textsuperscript{30} Guha, Op-cit., p. 499.
Amongst the few manufactures produced and encouraged by the Ahom state the most important was silk. Nearly three fourth of the people were clothed in it. The rearing of silk worms and the weaving of silk cloth from its thread constituted a characteristic industry of the state. The weaving of cotton and silk cloth as well as the process of dyeing was done entirely by women. All women from the highest family of the Gohains to the poorest in the villages knew how to weave.\textsuperscript{31} Every household had to contribute to the royal stores one seer of homespun silk annually. Path, muga and endi were the three principal varieties of silk manufactured. The silk worms raised on the mulberry tree from which the path silk was made was the least common.\textsuperscript{32} Being scarce and not found in the wild, the mulberry silk was confined mainly to members of the royal family and the nobility and the rearing of the worms to the jugi caste.\textsuperscript{33} The muga silk came from the muga worm (saturnia) usually reared on the soom tree (Tetran thera - lanci folia) in the open air. The soom tree was found principally in the forests, in the plains and about the villages where it was planted extensively. The eri silk came from the eri worm (phalonocynthea) and was fed principally on the eri tree (Ricinus communis) on which it throve best and produced most. This tree was cultivated by every villager in his garden or near the edge of his fields.

\textsuperscript{31} B. Hamilton, Op-cit., p. 63.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 61
\textsuperscript{33} Robinson, Op-cit., p. 233.
The process of taking the silk thread differed slightly with the varieties of silk worms. When the cocoon had been spun, the initial step in procuring the cocoon for use, involved destroying the life in the chrysalis. For this purpose the cocoons were exposed to the sun for two or three days after which they were boiled in an alkaline solution over a slow fire. In case of the path cocoon, a bamboo spliner was used to stir the content - the fibres attaching themselves to it and the thread was thus carried to the reel and reeled off. The endi cocoon after it had been boiled was removed and its water gently squeezed out. Each cocoon was taken up separately and the silk placed within the thumb of the left hand while with the right hand the thread was drawn out. These were afterwards exposed to the sun or fire to dry, when they were wound up into skeins and the silk was ready to be woven. The endi silk was not reeled. Regarding the muga cocoons its silk was reeled. This required two persons - one to take the silk from the cocoon the other to reel it off. The former brought together the filaments of silk from a number of cocoons varying from seven to twenty, and handed them to the reeler. The reeler rubbed them into a thread with the right hand by directing the thread up the left arm, so it is twisted in coming down again towards the hand; while with her left hand she directed the thread over the reeling apparatus known as the bhangori.

The throw shuttle loom was widely used for weaving. The traditional Assamese loom was fitted to four bamboo or wooden

34. The following account is based on William Robinson's observations Ibid., pp. 228-234.
posts fixed on the ground. Shedding (opening of the warp threads) was effected by a set of healds operated by the foot, while the shuttle was thrown across the shed from one side to another. The beating of the weft was done by the reed commonly made of bamboo.

Though weaving and spinning were not caste specific professions, some professional castes such as the Tantis and Jolas did exist. These castes were engaged in weaving the finer fabrics required by the royal family and others of high caste.

Being basically an agricultural economy industry did not emerge as a popular occupation of the people. The limited industry that developed on state initiative was based on the easy availability of natural resources and to meet certain basic needs of metals and scarce products. Being a land of rivers which intersects the valley like a network, boat making developed. The salt industry was an important one for the very reason that the home reserve was meagre. Amongst the few manufactures produced silk was the most important, it also being an important article of export. Silk weaving was an ancient art and hence its manufacturing was a continuation of the popular tradition. A relatively stagnant technology and rather rudimentary implements were characteristic features of production. As elsewhere in India of the same period no scientific or geographical revolution formed part of the eighteenth century Assamese historical experience. Technology in general was backward. The uneven development of technology over a range of crafts resulted from a semi tribal economic base, a small quantum of surplus in circulation and a relative scarcity
of basic metals like iron within the region.35

Micro-Economies of Peasant Production

The paiks whose labour services sustained the vast Ahom state apparatus were also peasants and direct producers. While not on active state service the paiks carried on their subsistence mainly by cultivation. Alongside the cultivation of wet rice in the state allotted plots coupled with dry field and garden cultivation, the paiks were also involved in petty production mainly for home consumption.

On the sides of hills and undulating grounds which was not easily reducible to a plain level, or in deeply flooded plains, the peasants cultivated ahu or summer rice. After the fields were ploughed the ahu crop was sown broadcast in March or April according to the level of the lands on which it was being sown and the rice was reaped by summer. This was followed by the cultivation of sali. Sali being a transplanted crop, the grains after being sown in nursery beds for two months, the seedlings were transplanted in June or July to carefully manured beds, which had been ploughed as much as four or five times till the soil was reduced to a fine puddle of clay. The transplantation of the seedlings to the fields was mainly done by the women. The harvest was reaped by December - January. Each pura of rupit land yielded as much as fifty maunds of corn.36

The transplantation technique by reducing the period the rice plants spent in the irrigated fields enabled the peasants to go for double cropping. As such after the winter rice had been reaped, mustard seed was grown.

The dry field cultivation of the peasants included pulses, sugar cane and cotton. The most common pulse sown was the *Phaseolus Max* called *Mati Mah*\(^\text{37}\) which was sown broadcast in September - October to be reaped by December.\(^\text{38}\) Sugarcane which was of three kinds - black, red and white,\(^\text{39}\) was usually planted in highlands near the village sites. Maize was generally cultivated but nowhere as an extensive crop. Wheat, barley and millet were not very popular and so its cultivation was generally very small.\(^\text{40}\)

Of the crops grown for manufacture the most important was cotton. The cotton plant was generally cultivated throughout Assam and its adjoining hills, but more specifically by the hill tribes, notably the Garos. Small quantities of indigo, used for dyeing was also cultivated by the peasants in the vicinity of their villages. Lac another variety of dye was produced in large quantities.

In addition a rich variety of garden crops such as tobacco,

\(^{40}\) Robinson, *loc. cit.*
opium, several kinds of plantain, vegetables, betel leaf, areca palm, pepper and various other kinds of spices were grown by the peasants. The richness and variety of the crops grown indicated not only the fertility of the soil but also of a secure and cultivated life enjoyed by the peasants.

A great number of fruits such as mangoes, plantains, jacks, oranges, citrons, limes, pineapples were grown about the villages and most of them were indigenous to the region. Muhammad Cazim, a Muslim writer who accompanied the Muslim troops in its invasion of Assam during the seventeenth century observed apricots, jams and pomegranates growing wild in the environs of Ghergong, then the Ahom capital.

In addition to the agricultural and horticultural crops noted above, the region being richly endowed with forest products, the basic necessities of the peasants for shelter, fuel etc. were met without much effort. The forests provided valuable timbers chiefly adapted for constructing houses, furniture, boats etc. The bamboo which grew abundantly was utilised by the peasants for

41. It is stated by Harakanta Barua in his Assam Buraji, (Ed.,) S.K. Bhuyan, (D.H.A.S., 1930), that opium was introduced into Assam by the British, p. 91.
their houses, furniture, implements of agriculture etc. Such crafts constituted a subsidiary occupation of the peasants.

**Division of Labour**

The close unity between agriculture and handicrafts was reflected in the division of labour. Most of the peasants need for crafts and artisan services being satisfied within the household there was no strict division of labour. For e.g. the Kalita caste, the most dominant caste in Assam, besides having agriculture as their primary occupation were engaged in diverse occupations such as those of pottery, blacksmithy, goldsmithy, carpentry and boatbuilding. However, by the eighteenth century some occupational groups had emerged. These were the Hira (a caste peculiar to the valley) and Kumars who were engaged in the manufacture of pottery of the simple kind, Morias the braziers who made utensils out of brass, and the Brittials the net using fishermen. During the later part of the Ahom rule professional weavers such as the Jogis, Tantis, and Haris or scavengers were brought into Assam. Professional blacksmiths were very few.

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45. The use of the wheel was not known and the potters merely kneaded the clay into form. B. Hamilton, Op-cit., p. 65.
46. Ibid., p. 57.
47. Robinson observed in 1841 that there were seldom more than one or two blacksmith families in the most populous villages while generally six or eight villages possessed but one vulcan between them. Op-cit., p. 499.
The emergence of some occupational groups was an indication of the development and diversity in the economy. But as yet there was no sharp division of labour between agriculture and industry. Every peasant or rather every household build its own hut, grew its own opium, scooped out its own canoe and weaved its own mats. In most cases the crafts constituted a subsidiary occupation of the peasant and his family. The functional groups such as the Kumars and Morias also retained their link with agriculture.

Blessed by a favourable geography, the Assamese peasants could sustain and reproduce themselves without much labour and hardship. The micro-economies of the peasants was largely of a subsistence nature. The peasants produced up to the extent where their family needs could be met and self exploitation was minimal. Much has been written by British writers about the indolence of the Assamese peasants. But in the fertile river valley of Assam, forcing a living did not require prolonged physical exertion. Besides, the lack of incentives for surplus production which was linked to the mode of appropriation and the restrictive nature of state services did not encourage peasant activity. In the absence of incentives, peasant enterprise for enhancing productivity of crops by adopting new techniques was lacking. There was practically no rotation of crops apart from the system under which the winter rice was followed by pulse or mustard. A wooden plough with an iron tipped share, wooden rakes, a rough bamboo harrow, sickles, bill hooks, knives and baskets comprised a peasants tool even by the turn of the
nineteenth century. 48

Mode of Appropriation

By the eighteenth century the Ahom state had evolved an elaborate and systematic machinery for purposes of appropriation. This as we have noticed mainly took the form of labour services and collections partly in cash or kind. In certain parts of Kamrup which earlier were under Mughal administration, there was a land taxation according to the local divisions called parganas which were leased to chaudhuris, who paid a certain rent, half in kind and half in cash. 49 Rupit lands were assessed at 3 annas, the baotali lands at 2 annas, faringati lands at 1 1/2 annas per pura and the paiks (cultivators) were taxed at 1 1/2 rupee per gote (squad of four). 50 But generally, appropriation took the form of labour services which the peasant paiks offered to the state in various capacities. The Ahom king employed a vast number of paiks to work in his farms, gardens, fisheries, mines, arsenals, manufactories, and to man and construct his vessels. 51 Each of the three Gohains had the use of the services of 10,000 paiks who were almost their personal retinue because they were exempted from all other state services except for serving the

49. B. Hamilton, Op-cit., p. 34.
51. Hamilton, ibid., p. 25.
Gohains and going to war when the Gohains were called upon by the king to do so.\textsuperscript{52} The officials of the state in charge of the paik machinery were also entitled to a percentage of the paiks under their control, for their personal uses. The following table\textsuperscript{53} roughly indicates the total number of paiks under Ahom officials and the percentage allotted for their personal uses.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|}
\hline
Office & Total no. of paiks under his jurisdiction & Percentage of paiks allotted for personal use & Actual no. of paiks allotted for personal use \\
\hline
Barbarua & 14,000 & 7\% & 980 \\
Barphukan & 14,000 & 7\% & 980 \\
Nyaya-Sodha Phukan & 6,000 & 2\% & 120 \\
Phukan & 6,000 & 0.5\%-0.75\% & 30-45 \\
Rajkhowa & 3,000 & 0.3\% & 10 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

The officials employed the paiks to cultivate the farms which supplied their families with provisions, to build their houses, to make and man their boats, and to make their furniture and clothing.\textsuperscript{54} The paiks therefore, supplied almost, if not most of

\textsuperscript{52} H.K. Barua \textit{Asom Buranji} (Ed) S.K. Bhuyan, D.H.A.S., (Gauhati, 1945), p. 118.

\textsuperscript{53} Harakanta Barua, \textit{Ahomar Din.}, (Asom Prakashan Parishad, Gauhati, 1981) pp. 529-541.

\textsuperscript{54} F.B. Hamilton, \textit{Op-cit.}, p. 25.
the needs of the king, members of the aristocracy, besides being involved in numerous public works and constituting a standing militia.

Collections in kind were mainly realised from the professional *khels* of the *Sonowals, Morias, Lo-salias* and *Lon-Purias*. Each goldwasher was required to supply one and half tolas of gold dust to the state\(^{55}\), besides paying some amount to their respective officers in the *khel*. During the reign of Rajeswar Singha, the goldwashers after paying usual revenue supplied six to seven thousand tolas of surplus gold to the royal treasury. By the time of Gaurinath Singha this had come down to four thousand and by Chandrakanta's time the gold washers washing in Upper assam supplied only two thousand tolas of gold dust. Inspite of the reduced quantity, due to the unstable post Moamaria situation, gold still constituted one of the most important sources of revenue. During the later part of Ahom rule, a gold mine called Pakerguri produced for the royal treasury revenue worth 18,000 *sicca* rupees a year.\(^{56}\) Each *khel* of the blacksmith also had to supply its quota of iron to the royal house. As much as twenty *seers* of iron were supplied annually to the state by the iron workers at Bocha and Doyang. All the iron mines situated in the South-west of Jorhat were utilized for the service of the king. The Ahom state also derived considerable revenue from the salt collected from the brine springs and wells. The total amount of revenue derived out of the salt mines situated at Borhath and

\(^{55}\) Ibid., p. 49; M. Cazim, *Description of Assam*, p. 133.

\(^{56}\) B. Hamilton, *Loc-cit.*
Sadiya was estimated at Rs. 40,000 in 1809. 57

A considerable amount of revenue was also raised from the hats, ghats (crossing points of rivers), phats (taxes from boats carrying articles) on muga industries, fisheries and chowkeys (custom houses) which were established at various places like Hadira, Salalpht, Jagi, Raha and Batakuchi. Custom offices like the Duaria Barusas and Vishayas were appointed by the state for purposes of administration and revenue collection. The most important chowkey was the Kandahar or Hadira chowky. The Ahom ruler received in 1793 an annual rent of Rs. 90,000 from Hadira. 58 In the numerous hats an officer known as Hatkoa was in charge of revenue administration and collection. The hatkar collected from the Raha market indicated in the table 59 (Table II) will serve to give an idea of how the revenues were collected from the hats. From the duars or custom houses in Kamrup and Darrang some amount of revenue was received by the state. Some of the duars in Kamrup mainly Gurkuleah, Banska, Chappagoore, Chappakanor and Bijni were handed over to the Bhutanese kings in consideration of an annual tribute in kind consisting of cowries, ponies, musk, gold dust, blanket and daggers. 60 The duars of Darrang were jointly managed by the Bhutias and the Ahoms while

57. Ibid.  58. Ibid.
TABLE 2
Rates of Revenue Collection from the Raha Market.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Rate Charged</th>
<th>Rate in Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 bullock</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 pons or 3 annas or 240 cowries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areca nuts</td>
<td>(pons)</td>
<td>3/16</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betel leaves</td>
<td>(bundles)</td>
<td>3/20</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paddy</td>
<td>(Puras)</td>
<td>3/20</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silver pieces</td>
<td></td>
<td>3/20</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton packets</td>
<td></td>
<td>1/20</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

for the right over Na Duar the Daffalas supplied military levies to the Ahom king. Although at Charduar the Ahom rulers assessed revenue at Rs. 1 per plough along with a piece of muga cloth, they happened to give one half of the total revenue to the Daffalas.\(^{61}\)

The Ahom state also appropriated considerable revenue by way of tributes from its vassals and petty chiefs.\(^ {62}\) The tributes were exacted largely in kind. The vassal chiefs not only furnished

\(^{61}\) Mills, ibid., Clause 168.
\(^{62}\) The vassal states were Darrang, Cachar and Jayantia. Some of the important petty chiefs were those of Rani, Beltola, Lukiduar, Barduar, Bholagram, Dimarua, Neli and Gobha.
certain number of paiks to work for the Ahom king but also paid as tributes items such as horses, elephants, cloths, precious metals etc. From the tributary state of Darrang six thousand soldiers (mul levies) were transferred to Gauhati and placed at the disposal of the Barphukan. Those exempted from rendering personal services were required to pay in gold and blankets of Bhutan. The raja of Darrang also supplied to the Gauhati arsenals a large quantity of saltpetre.63

Some sort of tributes though on a limited scale were also appropriated from the hill tribes. The hill tribes such as the Mikirs, Nagas, Daffalas and Miris came annually to the Ahom court bringing with them a number of articles such as precious metals, swords, spears, cotton, Mithun (Indian bison), Mujitha, etc. The hill Kacharis and Daffala chiefs also supplied military levies regularly to the Ahom army. The exaction from the hill tribes was limited being exacted mainly for vindication of Ahom suzerainty. The idea was not so much to collect revenue as to bring and keep the indigenous hill tribes under complete or some sort of limited allegiance to the Ahom king. With the dislocation of the Ahom economy after the Moamaria rebellion and the acute need for ready cash to pay off the hired soldiers and Company's troops, the Ahom state allowed paik services to be commuted to cash. According to David Scott from the time of Gaurinath Singha commutation of paik services ranging from Rs. 6 to Rs. 18 for the squad was introduced in order to defray the expenses for maintenance of

Company's soldiers in Assam. The feudal obligations of the raja of Darrang and Beltola to supply soldiers and labourers was also commuted into cash amounting to Rs. 51,600 during Gaurinath Singha's period. Karikatana or house tax was levied on bori and bari lands which had so long remained tax free. Deserted homesteads were also leased out to the paiks on payment of revenue in cash. The paiks who reclaimed wastelands had to pay to the state one or two rupees a pura till it was included in the next census. Contributions both in cash and kind were also realised from the five categories of high dignitaries under the Ahom rulers. These included the Gohains, Barbarura, Barphukan, the rajas of Tipam, Namrup and Charing, the Sadiya Khowa Gohain, the feudatory rajas and from the principal satras of the valley. Voluntary contribution known as Barangani paid both in cash and kind was also realised from the religious institutions like the satras and devalayas.

The statement of revenues realised by the Ahom state during the year 1814 is reproduced below from the Memorial submitted to Mr.

A. J. M. Mills by Ghanakanta Singha Yuvaraj through Maniram Dutta Barua Dewan 68 (Table 3).

**TABLE 3**

Abstract of the Receipts in Assam, 1814

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Receipts From</th>
<th>Amount (in Rs.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangal hat</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buttakoochee duar</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salalphet</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gobah, Sonapur, Rahajagee</td>
<td>6,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gowhatty and other hats</td>
<td>12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namsang hat</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorehat</td>
<td>11,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teenemoonee phat</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panee Mussoree</td>
<td>3,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisheries</td>
<td>7,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paneephat, Kucharee hat and other Khoordan</td>
<td>12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolls realised from boats</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajdhonee (royal Revenue) Chengadsonhunee</td>
<td>4,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chooteea, Chatgong, Kureeapara</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoorea</td>
<td>2,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charduar</td>
<td>5,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jumoonamookh</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cacharee, Sonwal and Sonwal</td>
<td>21,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morias</td>
<td>5,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kullungea Moodheas</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaegerere</td>
<td>44,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Duars etc.</strong></td>
<td><strong>9,000</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,44,600</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


80
Other miscellaneous levies by the state as mentioned in the land grants included the jalkar or tolls realised from fishing in water or for trade in river; danda and chorchinla for penalties realised from the criminals; bandha for imprisonment, katal on the failure to render personal service by a paik; beth or catching wild elephants or buffaloes; pad on employment as an officer and begar or rendering forced labour on requisition from the monarch.69

Recent research has vindicated that the extent of appropriation by the Ahom state was not extensive as compared to the strength of the population and resources.70 Though the Ahom rulers attempted to cover all the probable sources of revenue available within the region, the royal receipts were comparatively small owing to the cumbrous nature of the system involved and the loose control over the receipts.71 Even during the seventeenth century Shihabuddin Talish had commented that

"if Assam was administered like the Imperial dominion of the Mughals a sum of forty or forty five lakhs of rupees would have been collected as revenues from the ryots."72

Though the number of revenue sources was increased to meet the growing need of resources, specially after the post Moamaria disturbances, yet the amount collected was far less of the

potential resources of the Ahom state. Most of the revenues went into the pockets of the state officials. There was large scale exemption from payment of levies from feudatory rajas and vassal chiefs. A large part of the collection from custom houses were appropriated by the ministers and other officers before it reached the state treasury. In fact the very nature of the dominant mode of appropriation which took the form of labour services and collections in kind restricted the possibility of effecting significant increases in revenue collection for the state.

TRADE

The mode and extent of appropriation by the state in the form of forced labour not only determined the level of production and the development of a marketing network, it also eventually determined the level of trade and commercial activity within and outside the state. Because of the serious limitations imposed by the mode of appropriation, the range of trading activities at various levels was greatly limited. The available evidence suggests that the state not only gave in kind but also received mostly in kind and services. Surplus, therefore, largely took the form of labour rent for direct appropriation by the ruling class. Besides most of the consumption needs of the peasant and his family for food, clothing etc were satisfied within the household itself. However, self sufficiency in the total sense was a myth. A minimal surplus production was necessitated by the scarcity of certain essential items within the state. Theoretically, production of surplus would be necessary to acquire artisan and
craftsmen services. But in case of Assam, the division of labour on caste specific professions was still in the process of emergence. Hence though the peasants did exchange their products, a substantial surplus production on their part was not necessary. Moreover, the artisans and craftsmen still retained their link with agriculture. Since surplus production was minimal a marketing network and trade that developed were essentially rudimentary in structure. At local markets exchanges were made of scarce products. The settlers were very often the producers or gatherers of the golds sold. Private trade not only did not appear in any substantial form, it was also not encouraged by the state. The major trade ventures with the neighbouring states were regulated and controlled by the state itself. Not that private trade was totally absent. Assamese traders mostly from the Kalita and Koch caste and some from the lower escheleons of the aristocracy participated in the trade. Some individuals did succeed as traders to become affluent. Sometimes individual traders even unified into a group to carry on long distance trade. But considering the magnitude of trade which in fact itself, was meagre, it appears that private trade was very limited and highly susceptible to the vagaries of the political situation of the day. Besides, most of the traders never cut of their link with agriculture which constituted their primary occupation.

73. As gleaned from the Guru-charita katha (Ed), Maheswar Neog, Guwahati, 1987.
The Marketing Network

Within the country a special feature of the marketing network was the existence of local markets or hats where most of the exchanges took place. Exchanges for the most part was intra-local on a petty scale and at a peddling level within the limitations of a basically barter and cowrie economy. Important marketing centres were at Dihing, Bakata, Namchang, Dopdor, Borhat, Raha, Gobha, Sonapur to name a few. The local hats or markets were generally held weekly or bi-weekly.

The markets contiguous to the hill areas were generally frequented by the neighbouring hill tribes. Important amongst such markets visited by the hill tribals was Sadiya in the north-east frontier of the Ahom kingdom, Nogora and Kacharihat near the Naga hills and Kukuriya at Barduar in Kamrup near the Garo hills. In these hats where a regular trade was carried on between the plains and hill tribals, a variety of goods mostly perishable were exchanged. At Sadiya the Mishmis brought Lama swords and spears, Mishmi tita (a vegetable poison) and gertheana (a vegetable production much esteemed by the plains people for its peculiar but rather pleasant smell and used chiefly for anointing the hair) which they exchanged for glass beads, cloths, salt and money.\(^{74}\) To the same market, the Adis (Abors) and Miris brought pepper, ginger, munjit wax, and jim cloth (a kind of blanket made with cotton) which they exchanged for plain products.\(^ {75}\) The only valuable article of trade with the Singphos was ivory which they brought down in great quantities. At the Kukuriya market

\(^{74}\) Robinson, Op-cit., p. 243. \(^{75}\) Ibid.
at Barduar, the Garos brought their knives, cotton and salt procured from Sylhet and Rajhat in Jayantia. In exchange they took cattle, goat, rice, tobacco, cloths etc.\textsuperscript{76} The markets at Nogora, Jorhat and Kacharihat were frequented by the Nagas who bartered their spears, cotton, ginger and chillies for minor articles.\textsuperscript{77} The Khasis also frequented all the markets along the Ahom frontier and bartered their iron implements chiefly hoes, honey, cotton, red chillies etc for cattle, goat, rice, tobacco, cloths, dried fish, silks etc.\textsuperscript{78}

The above trade with the frontier tribes was thus conducted on a small scale. Exchange was carried out mainly for use value or consumption. The tribes therefore, brought with them surplus items such as iron, copper, silver, cotton and salt scarce in the plains, and in exchange took back cloths, silks and other consumption items. Exchange for the most part was on a personal level and the goods usually bartered.

Slaves were also bought and sold openly in the Ahom markets. The marketable value of the slaves depended on his ability to do work, the price ranging from Rs. 20 for an adult of good caste to Rs. 3 for a low caste girl.\textsuperscript{79} When a slave was sold, a document was inscribed where the concerned slave was required to give his thumb impression in the presence of some witnesses. In the document the names of the buyer and seller along with their

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.; R.B. Pemberton, Op-cit., p. 80.
\textsuperscript{77} Robinson, ibid., p. 243; B. Hamilton, Op-cit., p. 31.
\textsuperscript{78} Robinson, ibid., p. 244; Pemberton, Op-cit., p. 81.
\textsuperscript{79} Gait, H.O.A., p. 265.
addresses, name and price of the slave sold, names of the
witnesses and scribe, the fees paid to them were enumerated. 80

The Ahom state exercised an overall supervision of these numerous
hats and levied duties on goods sold there. By the seventeenth
century the Ahom state had evolved an administrative machinery
for the supervision and sale of commodities in the market. Each
market was placed under the charge of a Phukan or Barua. The
frontier markets were generally placed under the charge of the
Chakial Baruas. Under them were a class of junior officers
called hatkoas who with the help of the paiks under them were
responsible for the collection of the tax called hatkar from the
sellers. Under Rajeshwar Singha the flat rate of hatkar imposed
by Pratap Singha was abolished and instead different rates of
hatkar was fixed depending on the value of the goods sold. From
the hatkar collected the officer in charge of the market
submitted a part of the collection to the Ahom treasury. The
rest of the collection was spent in bearing the expenses of the
establishment. 81

External Trade with Neighbouring Countries

By Sankaradevas time (15th century), the development of commodity

80. P.S. Plates No. 95 and 150 concerning the document of the
purchase of a slave by the Mahanta of Salaguri satra.
(Nowgong) 1721 Saka / 1799 A.D.) p. 179 and of the purchase
of one whole household by Sayani, wife of the Barphukan from
Gaurichandra Bajarbaruwa. 1727 Saka/1805 A.D. respectively.
81. S.K. Bhuyan (Ed) D.A.B., p. 142.
production and intensification of trade relations elsewhere, had established connection and exchange relationships between various regions of the country. But in comparison to North India, the trade economy in Assam was undeveloped. With the consolidation of Ahom political rule from the late sixteenth century some growth in trade and crafts and some advance towards monetization and specialization occurred. During the seventeenth century, owing to the danger posed by the Mughal invasions the Ahom state adopted a policy of isolation and severe restrictions were imposed on traders coming into or going out of Assam. However, scarcity of certain basic items and metals within the region necessitated exchanges with the neighbouring states. The trade was however, strictly regulated by the Ahom state. Frontier wardens of trade known as Duaria Baruas were posted at specific places through which the trade into or outside the country was carried. These frontier wardens levied duties on goods entering into and going out and a portion of the proceeds went to the state.

An important outpost through which the trade with Tibet was carried out was the Kariapar duar. Annually about twenty Lhasa merchants used to take up quarters at Chouna, near the Assam frontier for transaction of business with the Assamese merchants. The later used to take up quarters at Geegunshur about four miles distant from Chouna. The trade of the former consisted of silver

82. As gleaned from the Guru-charita katha.
83. B. Hamilton, Op-cit., p. 44.
in bullion to the amount of one lakh of rupees and a considerable quantity of rock salt.\textsuperscript{84} This they exchanged with the Assamese merchants for rice, which was imported to Tibet in large quantities, 

\textit{Tussa} (kind of coarse silk cloth), iron, lac, buffalo horns, pearls and corals previously imported from Bengal\textsuperscript{85}.

The Wazir Barua of a Kalita family, who had hereditary possession of the office, was in charge of the trade with Bhutan. The Barua resided at Symliabaree situated to the north of the seat of the Darrang Raja. The Wazir Barua who paid nothing to the king except some presents, levied no duties but received presents and was the only broker employed by the Bhutias and the Assamese for the mutual exchange and purchase of goods.\textsuperscript{86} The exports from Assam were lac, \textit{munjit}, silks-muga and endi, and dried fish. The Assamese merchants took smoking pipes of Chinese manufacture, woollens, gold dust, Tibetan cowries and Chinese silks.\textsuperscript{87} The magnitude of this trade can be gauged from the fact that during 1809, when Assam was still in an unsettled stage owing to the Moamaria rebellion, the trade still amounted to about two lakhs of rupees per annum.\textsuperscript{88}

For outside trade to Bengal, Gauhati was an important centre of commerce. Entry of goods into or outside Assam were effected from Hadira or Assam Chowky at the mouth of the Manas river near the

\begin{footnotes}
Ahom frontier. On the Bengal side Goalpara on the south bank of the river Brahmaputra and Jugighopa and Rangamati on the north were the three eastern outposts from where the Bengal merchants conducted their trade into Assam. The exclusive Assam-Bengal trade was under the monopoly of an official known as Duaria Barua. For this privilege the Barua paid an annual rent in kind equivalent to ninety thousand rupees to the Ahom government. The Duaria Barua received the goods of the Assamese merchants and exchanged them for Bengal products and vice-versa. He also received advances from the Bengal merchants for the delivery of Assam goods or accepted Bengal goods on credit. For his exertion he levied duties on all exports and imports, the rate undergoing fluctuation at the hands of different Duaria Baruas. The operation involved constant frictions with the Bengal merchants owing to the high rates of duties demanded by the Duaria Baruas, the non-fulfillment of their contracts or their refusal to carry on trade with particular individuals. When Bengal was under the Mughals the main item of demand from the Mughals consisted of elephant's tusks and agar (acquilaria) or aloes wood. Muga, a golden hued

89. Till 1787 there was only one Duaria Barua in charge of Hadira Chowky. From 1792 there were three Baruas at the Assam Chowky - the Kandahar Barua who looked after the administration of the district around the Assam Chowky and the two Duaria Baruas who jointly held the Assam Bengal trade.


silk variety of Assam was also a popular item of trade in Bengal. Salt was the main item of export from Bengal. Forty vessels from five to six hundred tons burden each, come annually to the Assam frontier laden with salt, which yielded two hundred percent profit. During the mid-eighteenth century the trade of Bengal with Assam became specially important because of the potential disintegration of the Mughal empire which by creating independent kingdoms multiplied custom barriers.

With the establishment of Company's rule in Bengal after 1757, some interest was evinced in the Assam trade. The Company was still at an experimental stage in its trade with Assam and owing to the disturbed situation within Assam after 1769 no long term commercial transaction was possible. The Ahom government restricted trade in such a manner that it was of little advantage to Bengal. The whole amount of this trade mostly by barter did not exceed six to seven lakhs of rupees per annum.

It is estimated that during 1781 Assam imported 82,870 maunds of salt at Rs. 4 per maund, in addition to some amount of copper and

95. Ibid.
cloths. Next year Assam imported about 40,000 maunds of salt. Exports from Assam included muga, pepper, stick lac, lump lac, munjit and ivory the quantity varying according to the home production and the situation prevalent inside the country.

In 1791 by a commercial treaty signed between the Ahom king Gaurinath Singha and Captain Welsh representing the Company it was agreed to establish a reciprocal and entire liberty of commerce between the subjects of Bengal and those of Assam. Though the provisions of the treaty were never implemented and the injudicious system of trade continued, the treaty could be said to have marked the end of state control of trade in Assam.

There is virtually no contemporary sources regarding the magnitude of trade with Bengal. The following figures based on the customs check post returns of the year 1808-1809 is indicated below to give a rough idea of the Assam Bengal trade. This is because the Moamaria rebellion had crippled the Ahom economy so that the Ahom kingdom in 1809 was not even half as populous and prosperous than it had been around 1750. The increase in the variety of items imported by Assam is to be attributed to the

96. Killican's statement submitted to Warren Hastings, March 20, Bengal Revenue Consultations, April 8, 1783.
97. Ibid.
opening up of the Ahom kingdom owing to the weakness of the Ahom state and the intervention of the East India Company in the affairs of Assam after 1783 albeit for a short period.

**TABLE 4**

Export From Bengal in 1809

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commodities</th>
<th>Unit (maunds)</th>
<th>Rate per unit (Rs)</th>
<th>Amount (Rs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salt</td>
<td>35,000</td>
<td>5 1/2</td>
<td>1,92,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghee</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine pulse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone beads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewels and Pearls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cutlery and glass ware (European)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paints</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benares Khinkobs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red lead</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Woollens</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tafetas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gold and Silver Cloth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shells</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>2,28,300</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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TABLE 5

Export from Assam in 1809

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commodities</th>
<th>Unit (maunds)</th>
<th>Rate per unit (Rs)</th>
<th>Amount (Rs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stick Lac.</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>35,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silk</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
<td>11,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muga cloth</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
<td>17,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munjit (Indian madder)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black pepper</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long pepper</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton (with seed)</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>35,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bell metal vessels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mustard seed</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron Hoes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slaves</td>
<td>100(nos)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thiakol fruit</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>1,30,900</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The balance of seven thousand rupees against Assam was paid in gold from the mines and in silver. The trade pattern as indicated above suggests that the merchandise trade surplus was generally in favour of Bengal. For Assam a substantial portion of the import trade was in salt. There was a great demand for Bengal salt in Assam and about 1,00,000 maunds to 1,20,000 maunds used
to be annually imported through in the year 1809 the figure had
gone down considerably.

The steady increase in trade and commerce both within and outside
the country was indicated by the circulation of rupee coins.
Though Ahom coins date back to the early sixteenth century\(^\text{100}\) yet
they were not intended to serve the purpose of a regular currency
but to facilitate distribution of gifts and as religious fee to
priests and Brahmans.\(^\text{101}\) By the second half of the seventeenth
century cowries, rupees and coins\(^\text{102}\) stamped with the stamps of
the Ahom raja were being used for currency purposes. Copper
coins were not current.\(^\text{103}\) The Rajmohri or coins of the Ahom
rajas had an extensive currency in Upper Assam. By the end of the
seventeenth century half rupee (adhali) and quarter rupee coins
(sicca or maha) and by 1750 one-eight rupee coins were in
circulation throughout the region.\(^\text{104}\)

We, therefore, find in three copper plate charters dated 1739,
1743 and 1754 A.D. prices being quoted for a range of food

\(^{100}\) The first Ahom coin is believed to have been struck by

\(^{101}\) J.P. Singh, Coinage and Economy of North-Eastern States of

\(^{102}\) Shihabuddin Talish, cited in Gaits H.O.A. pp. 146-147. A
standard Ahom coin weighed two fifth of an English ounce or
96 ratis.

\(^{103}\) Ibid.

\(^{104}\) From the reign of Rudra Singha the Ahom mint was kept
articles and goods for regular purchases to be made by certain temples. In the copper plate deed grant of 1661 Saka (1739 A.D) the prices of various commodities were quoted as given below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commodities</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Price (Rs.) (approx.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>maund</td>
<td>00.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>maund</td>
<td>00.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grain</td>
<td>maund</td>
<td>00.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt &amp; Oil</td>
<td>maund</td>
<td>00.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gur</td>
<td>maund</td>
<td>00.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black pepper</td>
<td>maund</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betel leaf</td>
<td>40 bundles</td>
<td>00.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4 bundles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>containing 20 leaves)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalsis or earthen pots</td>
<td>643 pieces</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areca nuts</td>
<td>5120</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In other similar records of the same period, the prices of some of these commodities are quoted as given below.

105. P.S. Op-cit. These were the Pingalesvara Brahmatar grant, p. 159, the Siddesvara Temple grant p. 151 and the Diptesvara Debottar grant p. 207 respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commodities</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Price (Rs.) (approx.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>maund</td>
<td>4 annas to 8 annas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gur</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>2 -1/2 annas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mati Kalai (Black gram)</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>5 - 10 annas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulses and ghee</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>10 annas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>3 - 1/3 annas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthen pots</td>
<td>224 pieces</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betel leaf</td>
<td>20 bundles of 20 leaves each</td>
<td>1 anna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goats</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ducks</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 anna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pigeons</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 pice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhutis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5 annas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gamochas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6 pice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt</td>
<td>maund</td>
<td>5 to 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fluctuations of prices in the records of the same period could be attributed to the difference in freight charges which varied from place to place depending on the difficulties of transport and distances.  

Almost all goods were relatively cheaper in Upper Assam. The

Moamaria rebellion resulted in an unprecedented spurt of prices. For eg. one lime pot of rice (weighing about 250 gm) cost Re 1; one mango Re 1 and one bundle of arum Re. 1.\(^{108}\)

From Francis Buchanan Hamilton\(^{109}\) we get scattered references to the prices of different varieties of silk cloth and cotton.

**TABLE 8**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item description</th>
<th>Size (in cubits)</th>
<th>Price (Rs.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muga silk</td>
<td>8 by 2</td>
<td>1.00 - 1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muga <em>dhuti</em></td>
<td>8 to 16 by 2</td>
<td>1.00 - 4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 to 2.25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muga <em>mekhala</em></td>
<td>5 by 2</td>
<td>1.00 - 3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muga <em>Riha</em></td>
<td>6 by 1 1/2</td>
<td>0.50 - 3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embroidered muga mosquito net</td>
<td>30 by 1 3/4 to 2</td>
<td>1.00 - 6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muga <em>chadar</em></td>
<td>4 to 5 by 2</td>
<td>2.50 - 4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 to 2 1/2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path <em>dhuti</em></td>
<td>8 to 16 by 2</td>
<td>1.00 - 8.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 to 2 1/4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mejankari <em>dhuti</em> (white or dyed red with lac)</td>
<td>8 to 16 by 2</td>
<td>2.50 - 6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 to 2 1/4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mejankari <em>riha</em></td>
<td>6 by 1 1/2</td>
<td>1.00 - 4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endi <em>riha</em></td>
<td>6 by 1 1/2</td>
<td>0.25 - 0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endi <em>cheleng</em></td>
<td>6 by 3</td>
<td>0.50 - 2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endi <em>mekhala</em></td>
<td>5 by 2</td>
<td>0.50 - 1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathari</td>
<td>4 to 5 by 2</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 1/2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finest Cotton Cloth</td>
<td>12 by 3</td>
<td>10.00 - 27.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{108}\) S.K. Bhuyan, (Ed) *Tungkhungia Buranji* p. 11.

The high price of cotton can be attributed to the fact that cotton generally had to be imported from the hill tribes. The weaving was confined to the Jogis and Jolas. Small dealers purchased the cloth from them and hawked it about.

However, the economy was far from being monetised. Even as late as 1794, Capt. Welsh found salt and opium to be more serviceable than money as a means of procuring supplies. He also found money price to be three times as great compared to the situation existing prior to the Moamaria rebellion and while measured in paddy was forty times as great.110 In general marketing and trade ventures outside was carried through barter. Most of the common place articles at rural areas were acquired through barter or cowries were used.

Down to the eighteenth century commerce in absolute term remained inconsiderable in Assam.112 The negligible growth of towns most of which owed its origin mainly to political factor, which besides were largely agricultural can be taken to indicate absence of vigorous exchange. The nature of appropriation in labour services with its concomitant results and the Ahom state's restrictions on traders into Assam were not conducive for a fruitful exchange of trade and commerce. The foreign traders, when permitted to enter Assam, had to transact their business in all possible haste, and return to their own land after completing their commercial activities in Assam. The less advanced technology also had a restrictive influence and confined

the possibilities of trade to local areas.

The state's involvement or rather interference in the trade of medieval Assam thus becomes a significant issue. The state control of trade and commerce was perhaps aimed at preventing the growth of any powerful private property holders. At least the result of the control shows that. Any powerful trading class did not emerge and grow. Such state interference in production and exchange helped the perpetuation of the system. But therein lay a basic contradiction. Encouragement and expansion of trade could have expanded the productive base of the Ahom State and overhauled it from the subsequent crisis of sustenance which it was to face during the later part of the eighteenth century.

Vaishnnavite Movement: Change in the Basic Structure

Starting from the sixteenth century the neo-Vaishnnavite faith of Sankaradeva with its call for social egalitarianism and a simple monistic faith based on bhakti began gaining new adherents in Assam amongst all sections of the society. Alongside, to propagate and practice the faith, religious institutions known as satras were established for bringing about new political and economic implications. The process was accelerated during the

112. As worked out from the list of satras given in Appendix V of S.N. Sarma's The Neo-Vaishnnavite Movement and the Satra Institution of Assam, (Gauhati, 1966) pp. 215-227. A total number of 247 satras were established during the 17th century as against only 63 during the 18th century. ibid.
seventeenth century when the Ahom state, after an initial period of hostility, began the practice of granting revenue free Devottar, Dharmottar and Brahmottar lands with paiks attached to the satras\textsuperscript{113} which put these institutions on a sound economic base.

All the satras of Assam possessed in varying degrees land ranging from few acres to several thousand acres. The principal satras of Majuli namely Auniati, Dakhinpat, Kamalabari and Bengenati were in possession of 21,000, 10,000, 5,900 and 2,500 acres of lands respectively.\textsuperscript{114} In 1835 it was found that the extent of land grants by Ahom rulers to different religious institutions in Kamrup was found to be nearly one half of the cultivable lands.\textsuperscript{115} In 1905, out of the total settled areas in Assam of 2,562,000 acres, were 1,83,000 were Nisf-Khiraj (half revenue paying) and 81,000 were Lakhiraj (revenue free).\textsuperscript{116} All these serve to give us a rough indication of the amount of land held under religious categories and of these a considerable proportion were satra lands. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the vaishnava religion and the satra institution were firmly rooted

\begin{itemize}
    \item 113. Neog P.S.; Choudhury, Catalogue of Inscriptions.
    \item 114. B.C. Allen, District Gazetteers of Assam. Sibsagar, 1905, p.98.
    \item 116. B.C. Allen, Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1905, p. 103.
\end{itemize}
in the soil and the royal authority had to acknowledge it as a 
fait accompli.\textsuperscript{117} Almost every village in Assam was under its religious influence. During Rudra Singha's period about 1280 Mahantas or satra heads received formal recognition from the Ahom state.\textsuperscript{118} The subsequent rulers of the Tungkhungia House continued the practice of patronising the different temples and satras of Assam.\textsuperscript{119}

Royal patronage and growth in satra prosperity resulted in significant changes within the satra institution. As holders of large revenue free lands and paiks there emerged within the satras an elaborate machinery for land management and revenue collection. Satras having several hundred paiks introduced the custom of conferring titles like Bara, Saikia etc. in imitation of the Ahom administrative system.\textsuperscript{120} In eastern and central Assam headship of satras began to devolve on hereditary lines. The Satradhikari as head of the satra came to enjoy the right to control the land and other properties of the satra. A number of satra functionaries such as the Medhis, Sajtolas and Pacanis were appointed to keep contact with disciples residing at distant villages and for collection of tithes or gurukar.\textsuperscript{121} For their

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{117} Sarma, Op-cit., p. 190.
\item \textsuperscript{118} Ibid, p. 183.
\item \textsuperscript{119} As evident from the study of copper plate grants in Neog, P.S., Choudhury, Catalogue of Inscriptions.
\item \textsuperscript{120} S.K. Bhuyan (Ed) Tungkhungia Buranji, p. 14.
\item \textsuperscript{121} S.N. Sarma, Op-cit., p. 109.
\end{itemize}
services these functionaries received certain commissions and satra lands for cultivation. Most of the disciples were given satra lands which they utilised for their benefits. In Garhasti satras the bhakats were given land for maintaining themselves and their family. They continued to enjoy their land over generation and by way of inheritance and thus came to accumulate wealth. Paiks engaged in cultivating satra lands were usually assessed at half the existing rate.

The system that was emerging within the satras represented a new development with far reaching consequences. As noted earlier, the Ahom state as the sole landlord controlled the ownership and distribution of land and labour. The distribution of land to the nobility and its subjects was undertaken in such a manner that no landed class could emerge. The growth of landlordism, a feature which had been kept in check by the Ahom state, however came to be institutionalized at the satra level. Whereas land grants to the secular aristocracy were linked to offices and hence temporary, satra lands were granted in perpetuity. In case of such land grants the king alienated his proprietary right in favour of the grantees. Thus the satras became proprietors of these lands. These estates were cultivated by the paiks assigned.

124. The situation was similar in Devalaya lands.
to them and in course of time these *paiks* came to constitute a body of tenantry with hereditary occupancy rights. Being exempted from state services and cultivating under liberal tenures the *satra paiks* had ample opportunities of indulging in other productive activities. Unlike the situation that prevailed on *Devalaya* and *Brahmottar* grants to temples and brahmins where state control was strict over the *satras* the state had but nominal control which it exercised through the Satriya Baruah. Though theoretically, the *satra* land belonged to the deity in practice the *gossains* or *satradhikaris* functioned as the lord of the *satra* lands. The grant of *satra* lands to its disciples on favourable terms as noted above, was gradually leading to a new land relationship and private ownership within *satra* lands. The parallel economy witnessed here represented a progressive development of the relations of production. The system that was emerging represented a new development in the Ahom economic system. This was to have far reaching consequences.

**Moamaria Rebellion : Crisis of the Structure**

The liberal *satra* economy encouraged large number of *paiks* to come and settle down at *satra* lands. In the first place, the large scale grant of *paiks* to the *satras* had meant the withdrawal from the state register of an important economic resource. In fact, land grants without its quota of *paiks* was superfluous in the context of land abundance and scarcity of free labour in Assam. Thus in a region where labour was scarce, the impact of this withdrawal on the economy was significant. This meant that the *paiks* had to be subjected to a longer duration of state
services. Consequently, during Rajeshwar Singha's period the number of paiks in a got was reduced from four to three. The paiks were thus subjected to a greater degree of exploitation. A natural corollary of this process was that paiks began evading state duties by withholding their names from the state register by bribing their kheldars or running away. One such convenient way of escaping state duties was by escaping to the satras as bhakats. Hundreds of able bodied persons putting or religious garb sought refuge in satras. The growth of large scale absentee paiks constituted a serious crisis in the economy. Another way through which the discontented paiks sought to be relieved from the forced labour was by commuting their obligations and going for a chamua status. To some extent the state could grant commutation but the very nature of the mode of appropriation with all its concomitants, meant that commutation of obligations on a wide scale was not possible. Alongside an ever increasing demand by new claimants for the resources of the state and on the other end a dwindling paik resource the Ahom state was hard pressed to set its economy at an equilibrium. The emerging contradiction in the mode of appropriation and resulting from it, of a breakdown in the distribution process brought about a structural crisis which was reflected in the Moamaria rebellion and given further fillip by it. The subsequent internal disturbances that followed broke up the steelframe of the Ahom economic system. The peasants left their

fields, many fled to adjoining safer areas. Large areas of cultivable fields were left to become wastelands. With the dislocation of the khel system and the necessity for money to pay off outstanding debts of East India Company's troops, the Ahom state could not retain its earlier system intact. The commutation of paik services for money payment and introduction of revenue collection partly in cash, were significant changes indicating the collapse of the Ahom economic structure.