CHAPTER IV

POLITICAL STUDY

The inscriptions issued by the Ahom kings constitute one of the most important and reliable sources for political history of Assam. They throw invaluable light on the Ahom kingship, political ideology of the Ahoms, power of the kings, growth of the Ahom monarchy, administrative system, administrative and territorial divisions of the kingdom, various gradations of officials and their appointment, relation with subordinate and frontier chiefs and even measures undertaken by the rulers against foreign invasions.

MONARCHY:

The form of government of the Ahoms had been monarchical since the beginning as recorded in the chronicles. The inscriptions also bear unmistakable testimony to the fact that monarchy was the singular form of government of the Ahoms. In the Sanskrit inscription in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Ahom kings were called narendra (nara = man, Indra = god i.e. Lord of men), nṛpati (nṛpa = man, pati = Lord, a master (masculine)),

1 Ins. No. 20, line 2
3 Ins. No. 72, line I
all denoting a king or ruler. In ancient Assam the kings too had been known as *nrpati* (Lord of men), *bhāpati* (*lord of earth*), and *nrpa* (Protector or Lord of men)\(^1\). *bhūpāla* (*bhū = earth, universe, pāla*\(^3\) = Protector of earth or men) referring to a ruler or a king.\(^4\)

**DIVINE ORIGIN OF AHOM KINGSHIP:**

The Ṣādiyā Snake-Pillar Inscription, the earliest epigraph of the Ahom period, bears the title *Chāo-Phā* prefixing the name *Syu-Hum-Mong*.\(^5\) The title *Chāo-Phā* which means (*Chāo* = Lord or king, *Phā* = Heaven) Heavenly king, had also been prefixed to the names of the Tai rulers of the Shan States of Myanmar and Southern China.\(^7\) The appearance of *Chāo-Phā* in Ahom language suggests that the Ahom kingship was based on the same theory as followed by other Tai peoples.

According to the tradition as recorded in the chronicles of the Ahoms, the Tai rulers in the Brahmaputra valley were descendants of Khun-lung, a

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1. V.S. Apte, *op.cit.*, p. 302
2. Ins. No. 170, line I
4. *Nidhanpur Plates of Bhāskaravarman* (first plate, V-13); *Hayunthal Plate of Harjaravarma* (middle plate, V.3.)
5. Ins. No. 1
grandson of Lengdon, who was the Lord of the Heaven. The epigraphic phrase in Sanskrit अदि-पुरुषानाम स्वर्गवताराना-सामया ग्रहिता and स्वर्गवताराना-सामया-ध्रुवा (since the time of descent of the first ancestor of the Ahom monarchs from the Heaven) only speaks the same tradition of divine origin of the Ahom monarchs. The Shan rulers of Myanmar too had, according to Ney Elias, the same tradition that their original ancestor descended from Heaven by means of a golden ladder.

The inclusion of many non-Ahom Hinduised population within the Ahom kingdom during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had occasioned the adoption of local language and also many Sanskrit equivalents. Consequently the Tāi title चाँ-फा was translated into Sanskrit as यानारायणादेव (svarga = Heaven, nārāyaṇa = God Viṣṇu/Deva), God of Heaven with its variants as यानेव and यानेव bearing the same meaning. Based on this theory of divinity, the title यानारायण was adopted by and applied uniformly to all Ahom sovereigns in Assam. This title यानारायण appears first in the inscription of Pratapsimha (A.D. 1603-1641) of saka 1538. Later on the title यानारायणादेव appears in the coins issued by Jayadhvajasimha in saka 1570 and was systematically adopted by the later Ahom kings.

2 Ins. No. 75, line 13
3 Ins. No. 76, line 14
4 As adopted by Leslie Milne and Cochrone, Shāns at Home, 1910, p.18
5 D.C. Sircar, Indian Epigraphy, 1965, pp. 463 and 470
6 Hem Chandra Barua, An Etymological Dictionary of the Assamese Language, p. 989
7 Ibid., p. 554, (Viṣṇu considered as the Supreme Being who existed before all worlds).
8 Ibid. , pp. 989-990 (a form of address to the Ahom kings of Assam)
9 Ins. No. 2, lines 6-7
10 A.W. Botham, Catalogue of the provincial Coin Cabinet, Assam, 1930, p.452.
The divine origin of the Ahom monarchs is also expressed by such epigraphic terms as *maghavād-vamśa* (maghavat² = Indra, vamśa³ = race); *svargēla⁴ vamśāvatāmsa* (Heavenly race), *vāsava⁵ vamśāvatāmsa* (vāsava⁶ = belonging to Indra) and *sakra⁷-vamśāvatāmsa* (sakra⁸ = Indra) all of which mean the race sprung from god Indra of the Hindus. The word "Indra", however, does not appear in the Ahom language lexicons. It is very significant that Lengdon from whom the Ahom kings claim their descent is identified with the vedic god Indra by the Brāhmaṇ-priests and thus placed the Ahom kings into the fold of Hinduism. On the basis of this, the Assamese language chronicles call the Ahom rulers *Indravainīśī*. It is for this reason the divinity of the Ahom kings is indicated by suffixing the term *svarga* such as *svarga-rājā*¹⁰ (king of Heaven), *svarga-nareśa*¹¹, *svarga nrpa*¹² and *svarga-mahārājā*¹³. This divinity of the Ahom kingship can also be placed in the line of divine origin of kingship of ancient India¹⁴.

1 Ins. No. 47, line 1
2 V.S. Apte, op.cit., p.416
3 Hem Chandra Barua, op.cit., p. 670
4 Ins. No. 126, line 4.
5 Ins. No. 159, lines 4-5
6 V.S. Apte; op.cit., p. 504
7 Ins. No. 112, line 4
8 V.S. Apte, op.cit., p. 544
10 Ins. No. 112, line 6
11 Ins. No. 132, line 4
12 Ins. No. 134, line 5
13 Ins. No. 235, lines 1, 15, 24
In conformity with the divine origin of the Ahom kings the divine qualities of the gods are attributed to them. An inscription of Pramattasimha of śaka 1674 depicts his father king Rudrasimha as nītau vākpatiḥ (nītau = continual); vākpatiḥ = Brhaspati, the Preceptor of the gods), rajośā surapatiḥ (rojasā = quality of kings, surapatiḥ = the Sun), bhūloka kalpa drumaḥ (bhūloka = earth; kalpa = sacred precept of rule or law; drumaḥ = a tree of paradise i.e., divine tree of wishes) and guṇamāṇiḥ (guna = good quality; mani = jewel) i.e., person with many excellent virtues. Similar instances of comparing monarchs with god or qualities of gods are also found in ancient Assam. In the Dubi Plates of Bhāskaravarmā, king Puṣhyavarmā is compared with Indra in strength and his ancestors with moon or Kuberā in glory.

The rulers of ancient and medieval Assam were attributed with these qualities because they were expected to receive obeisance from their subject equal to that of the gods. Manu glorifies the divinity of kings by saying that even an infant king should not be despised, as he is a great God in human form.
Political Ideology:

The Ahom rulers had inherited the political ideology of their early ancestors Khunlung and Kunlai, who were advised by Lengdon to follow the principle of protection and preservation of the subjects with paternal care. They were advised to follow a policy of moderation and conciliation towards all other conquered people in order to win over their support, goodwill and allegiance. Manu observes that the king should undergo a curriculum of training in all important subjects like morality, justice and good government. These tenets being basically at par with those of the Hindu political ideology which had greatly influenced them towards the close of their rule in Assam, therefore, were incorporated in their inscriptions of our period.

Consequently the knowledge of Hindu political treatises like the Arthasastras and of the dandamities was imparted to the Ahom kings. Thus in the later period, the Ahom political ideology was a cobination of the principles of Ahom codes and Hindu dandamities incorporating the primary duties and functions expected to be discharged by a monarch.

The epigraphic records amply confirm the political ideology of the Ahoms as referred to in the literary documents. The term bheda-ved-samkhyā-upaṇiṣṭa appearing in an inscription of Saka 1704 means the fourways of success, namely sama (ethics, morality), dāna (endowment), bheda (distinction), and danda (punishment), that should follow by a king.

1 Golap Chandra Barua, Ahom-Buraṇji (reprint) 1985, pp. 10-12
5 Ins. No. 194, line 26
Political ideology of the Ahoms are also reflected in their inscriptions. A rock inscription of 1641 extols the character of king Śivasimha as marataru (tree in desert) i.e. the protector of the sufferers. The qualities of Pramattasimha are highlighted in a rock inscription in the Kāmākhya temple of 1667 in the terms of puṇya kīrti nīti vidagdha i.e. reputed in virtue and morality and learned in politics, laws and justice. Two rock inscriptions of 1666 and of 1674 extol the generosity in sacrifice of the same king as karṇāyamāna (like Karṇa in sacrifice). In an inscription of 1683, the liberal grant of king Rājesvarasimha is expressed in term of arthādī-pramāṇa-patrika (a certificate endowing financial and like grant). The epigraphic term vairi-vāraṇa-dāraṇa-paścātāna-pratāpni-ratna-ratnākara (one who is to the enemy a veritable lion, whose power is like Śiva, and mines of gems in law and judgement) that appears in the rock inscription of 1674 highlights the power of Rājesvarasimha and regards him as the abode of all qualities of State craft like law, judgement, liberality and punishment. An ideal ruler, according to the Arthāśāstra, is one who could please his subject in all matters and is expected to strive for the welfare of his people.

In ancient Assam the Dubi Grant of king Bhāskaravarmā and his ancestors are described as the abode of politics, good qualities, protector of the terrified and compares them with Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu), Indra and Moon etc. in power, skill and in the application of the means of politics on proper occasions.

1 Ins. No. 45, line 4
2 Ins. No. 116, line 4,
3 Ins. No. 113, line 3
4 Ins. No. 132, line 2
5 Ins. No. 155, line 8
6 Ins. No. 133, lines 1-2
7 R. Shamasastry and J.F. Fleet (tr.), Kaṭhīya’s Arthāśāstra 1951, pp. 36-39
8 Dubi Grant of Bhāskaravarmā, verse 18, 23, 26
Efficiency of the Ahom monarchs is expressed by the term *sunaya-caya-manīṣi* (one learned in different state policies) which appears in two inscriptions issued by Kamalēśvarasimha in *śaka* 1721 and 1722. Another epigraphic term *vidūra-bhūmir naya-ratna-vallīh* (cats'-eye-gem producing land, which produces creeper-like gems of politics) inserted in inscriptions of king Candrakāntasiṃha of *śaka*, 1738, 1742 and 1743 indicates the excellent qualities of the Ahom kings as great experts in state craft. The term *datti-kalpa-dru-kalpa* (one comparable to the kalpa tree or the divine tree of wishes because of munificence) in the inscriptions of *śaka* 1708 and 1711 issued by king Gaurīnāṭhasimha speaks of the liberal grant (*dāna*) of the Ahom kings to virtuous men and religious institutions.

The monarchs were regarded as men of distinction (*bbeda*) upon whom are conferred the golden royal umbrella (*sōnowalī ḏāṇḍa ḍhattra*).

**The Power of the Ahom Kings:**

The king's power and authority are expressed in epigraphy in such terms as *ādeśa* (exercise of authority), *āgāḥ* (authoritative order) and *nirdeśa* (command). It was all under king's command (*nirdeśa*) that a rampart was raised and a moat was excavated in *śaka* 1654. The Dirgheshvarī temple built in *śaka* 1659, the Vijaya-dvār (Victory gate) constructed in *śaka* 1660 at
Guwahati, the temple of Dūrgā at Kaliābar erected in 1667 and the Rudrēvara temple built in 1671 were all under kings nirdesa (command). These records bear testimony that an Ahom king’s command must be faithfully obeyed, and his authority was absolute.

THE POWER OF APPOINTMENT:

Ahom kings exercised the sole authority in appointing ministers and officials of the state. With the extension of dominion in the seventeenth century, several higher posts were created to assist the king in the matter of administration. Still the king remained the sole authority to make all appointments. However, we have only a few inscriptions issued in this regard. King Gaurināthasimha (A.D. 1780-1795) appointed one Baloram as Vārtāvāha (messenger called Kaṭākā) in 1718. King Candrakāntasimha appointed one Bhutung as Dvāryādhīpata (Duvariya, the chief keeper of a door or outpost) at Batākuchi in 1742.

Since the religious authority was subordinated to the monarch during the Ahom rule, the kings exercised their authority in appointing priests of the temples and other functionaries. To cite a few examples, king Gadādharasimha (A.D. 1681-1696) appointed Govinda Chakravarty as thakur (priest) of the Viśvesvar Śiva temple at Bīswanāth in the present Sonitpur district) in 1605. On another occasion, king Lakṣhisisimha (A.D. 1769-1780) appointed

1 Ins. No. 117, line 6
2 Ins. No. 123, lines 5-6
3 Gunabhiram Barua, op.cit., p. 81; Gait, op.cit., p.246
4 Ins. No. 213, lines 4-5
5 Ins. No. 246, lines 5-6
6 Ins. No. 20, lines 3-4
Durgārām and his younger brother as thākurs (priests) with his two assistants of the Biswanath temple in saka 1696.

Epigraphy shows that the priests, kātakīs and duvārīyās were appointed hereditarily. The epigraphic terms putrapautradikrame (for sons and grandsons) and puruṣānukramena (from generation to generation) only supports that Ahom rulers utilised the extreme power of appointing the different functionaries on hereditary basis.

RE TENTION OF ROYAL POWER:

Royal power of the Ahom kings is expressed by the term rajaṇḍa (royal sceptre). The term asserts the sole authority of the king in administering different departments in the kingdom. The epigraphic term, rajaṇḍa byatireka (excluding royal authority) that appears in many inscriptions denotes that the Ahom rulers did not relinquish the royal authority rather retained the royal sceptre (authority) in their hands till the end of their rule.

In the sphere of royal punishment, the king was the sole authority. Literary evidence shows that all serious cases, specially the records of trial of capital offences had to be submitted to the king for his approval and the king

1 Ins. No. 180, lines 3-4
2 Ins. No. 213, line 17; Ins. No. 247, line 17
3 Ins. No. 246, line 5
4 Ins. No. 79, line 14; Ins. No. 153, line 20
5 Upendra Nath Mukhapadhyaya (ed.) Brīhimanauhmīta, Chapter XII, pp. 517-23
6 Ins. No. 96, line 11; Ins. No. 196, line 26; Ins. No. 247, line 21
7 S.K. Bhuyan (ed.) Deodhai Asam Buranji, (2nd ed), 1962, pp. 66,90
alone had the right to sanction the infliction of death penalties which requires the shedding of blood¹.

The epigraphic term गदवदने जनीव (know with caution) that appears in many copper-plate inscriptions, is in fact a notice served by the king to all the people and officers in Kamrupa and Darrang to observe the conditions laid in the grants. However, there is no such notice in the inscriptions of upper Assam, as it was directly ruled by the king. Kamrupa, Darrang and other petty states had enjoyed autonomy under officers like Baruā, Choudhury, Paṭowārı, Tālukdārı, Thākuriyā and other feudatory chiefs (daṭiyaliṇi rajāpowāli) whose authority was recognised by the Ahom government.

Some of the grants of the Ahom kings record that who ever violates the terms laid down in the order of the king, would face royal punishment (rājadaṇḍa baivek)². Where punishment is not feasible it has been reminded that such violator would face the highest degree (mahāpatake pāba) of sin⁴. Such warnings were also issued by kings of ancient Assam. Bhāskarvarma and Gopāladeva, the two kings of Kamarupa issued command to the officer-in-charge of law, subordinate kings, feudatory chiefs and other common people to obey the terms of land-grant in future, and in case of violation the fear of sin is also stated⁵. These terms only affirm the power that the subordinate kings, feudatory chiefs, princes, officers and the common people were under the direct command of the Ahom kings.

2 Ins. No. 139, line 4; Ins. No. 216, line 6
3 Ins. No. 164, line 26; Ins. No. 202, line 19
4 Ins. No. 140, line 33
5 Nidhanpur Copper-plates of Bhāskarvarmanv. 133-40; Gachtsal Copper-plates, of Gopālavarmanadeva, vv. 63-68
Succession:

The literary evidences affirm that among the Ahoms it was obligatory that only a prince of the Ahom royal family, descended from Sukaphā could become the king. Secondly, to become a king, he must be the son, brother or relative of the king, who belonged to one of the branches of the Ahom royal family such as Dibiringiya, Charingiya, Tungkhungiya, Namrupiya, Chamaguriya and Parbatiya.

Heredity in the fraternal line was the normal form of succession in the Ahom regime, as testified by the buranjis. This form of succession was systematic in the beginning, with occasional deviation in favour of a brother or a nephew.

Some scholars, however, think that since the beginning, the system of 'right of joint conquest' was admitted. Under this system the ownership of the land was vested in Sukaphā, as well as his followers of the adventurous march. On the basis of this principle of 'right of joint conquest', Sukaphā's descendents were hereditarily entitled to the Ahom throne, and his commanders and camp-followers were entitled to the principal officers of the state till the end of their rule.

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1 Ins. No. I and 123; S.K. Bhuyan (ed.), Tuṅghungia Buraṇji, (2nd ed), 1964, pp. 5-13;


3 Kasi Nath Tamuli Phukan, op.cit, pp. 13, 41, 43, 53

This hereditary rule in the fraternal line is also confirmed by the epigraphs. Inscriptions of saka 1671 and 1674 state, that śrī śrī rudrasimha mahārājādhirāja... tatputra... śrī pramattasimha nippa¹ (King Pramattasimha was the son of Mahārāja Rudrasimha) and śrī rudrasimha nippa tatputra... pramattasimha nippat² (King Rudrasimha's son Pramattasimha as the king). These inscriptions bear testimony that "succession" devolved from father to son and not from brother to brother.

Captain Thomas Welsh¹ who made an inquiry about the form of Ahom government reported that at the beginning of their rule, this principle of succession devolved from father to son was followed with great regularity, but in later times this unwritten law of the constitution was set aside by the nobles.

Burahjis⁴ refer that brothers of the deceased king had succeeded to the Ahom throne, and sometimes cousins or even distant relatives did so as any prince of blood royal could claim succession to the throne in Ahom regime. This happened when princes of the immediate line was not found. After the assassination of Udayādityasiṁha his brother Ramdhvajasirha ascended the throne in A.D. 1672 (saka 1594) to the exclusion of the sons of the deceased king. After Sujinphā's violent death, the nobles led by the Barphukan raised a prince Syu-lik-phā by name of the Chamaguriya branch to the throne in December A.D. 1679 who assumed the Sanskrit name Ratnadhvajasimha⁵.

¹ Ins. No. 123, line 4
² Ins. No. 131, line 3
³ H.K. Barpujari, An Account of Assam and Her Administration, 1988, p. 67
Under the Ahom reign, the king's person was regarded as sacred. Therefore, any noticeable scar or blemish on the person of the king was considered a bar to the succession. Towards the later part of the Ahom rule when claimants to throne increased in number, the practice of multilitating possible rivals started as a security against intrigues and rebellions. This theory, however, still remained in the documents as has already been stated, that the most essential qualification to become a king in the Ahom regime was that he must be of royal blood.

GROWTH OF THE AHOM MONARCHY:

The growth of the Ahom monarchy is visible in the epigraphs at least since the time of Jayadhvajasimha (A.D. 1648-1663). A cannon inscription in Sanskrit in saka 1580 bears his name as śrī śrī svargadeva-jayadhvajasimha-mahārajan (Jayadhvajasimha Mahārajan). Here the word Mahārajan denotes a more dignified royal title as king Jayadhvajasimha recovered possession of lower Assam expelling the Mughal forces from Kamrup in A.D. 1658.

Two identical cannon inscriptions of saka 1589 and 1590 in Sanskrit, mention Cakradhvajasimha as mahārajayādhiraja. This title mahārajādhiraja was assumed by Chakradhvajasimha (A.D. 1663-1670) after the defeat of the Mughals in November A.D. 1667 when the lost territories upto the river

3 Ins. No. 6, line 1; Ins. No. 8, line 1
4 One of the technical titles of paramount sovereignty, closely connected with Paramabhatparaka and Paramesvaraj. D.C. Sircar, Indian Epigraphical Glossary, 1966, p. 185
Mānāha was reoccupied. This success of the Ahoms against the Mughals in śaka 1589 was a momentous event for which three stones inscriptions and two cannon inscriptions were engraved.

The title mahārājādhirāja was also assumed by Gadādharaśīṁha as recorded in a cannon inscription of śaka 1616. The king Gadādharaśīṁha wrested back western Assam from the Mughals in śaka 1604 (July, A.D. 1682) which had earlier been surrendered to the Mughals in A.D. 1679. Consequently Assam’s western boundary was restored to the river Mānāha. It is quite natural, therefore, that Gadādharaśīṁha assumed the more dignified title mahārājādhirāja after establishing his power over the large areas of Assam.

This title mahārājādhirāja was assumed in ancient Kamarupa by Puṣyavarmanā and other kings of the Varmanā dynasty indicating their independent status. The Nidbanpur Plates of Bhāskaravarmā states that Bhāskara conquered a large number of frontier chiefs and annexed numerous states by defeating their rulers in battles and assumed the title mahārājādhirāja, denoting a monarch with paramountcy over a wider region. In this context, the Ahoms had much similarity with the Imperial Guptas, who assumed the more dignified title mahārājādhirāja after extending their power over the wide areas of northern India in the 7th century A.D.

However, in the declining period of the Ahom power the inscriptions do not bear any such grand titles but merely speak them as nṛpa, bhūpati and nāresvā etc. such as śrī śrī svarganārāyaṇadeva kamalaśvarasimha nṛpa; śrī śrī svarganārāyaṇadeva Candrakānta nāresvā.

1 Ins. No., 5 and 7
2 Ins. No. 24, line 1
3 S.K. Bhuyan(ed) A History Assam (Tuṅghkhungī Buraṇji, 2nd ed.) 1983, p.XX
4 Nalanda Seal of Bhāskara preserved in the ASM., Acc. No. 6003
5 Nidhanpur Copper-Plates of Bhāskaravarmā. 48.
6 D.C. Sircar, Indian Epigraphy, 1965, p. 333
7 Ins. No. 229, line 1
8 Ins. No. 245, line 1
The assumption of the titles mahārajā and mahārajādhiraja by the Ahom kings may indicate the rise and establishment of the Ahom monarchy, and the disappearance of the title in the epigraph may be taken to mean diminution of power and glory of the Ahom monarchs in the latter part of their rule.

**Administrative and Territorial Divisions:**

Ahoms were endowed with a high degree of political ideas. The kings, nobles and leading officials paid undivided attention towards the political affairs of the state and government. The Ahom rulers believed that the proper distribution of authority of state machinery was one of the primary duties of an ideal king, as the *Kālikā Purāṇa* suggests that for each department like treasury, local administration and judiciary a group of officers should be appointed. It seems that in consideration of medieval standard, the Ahom system of government was of a very high order.

The king was the first executive officer in the state and he presided over every department of the state. He distributed honours, titles and offices after consulting the aristocracy.

The king was regarded as the source of all energy and power. Hence all policy had been attributed to him alone. However, in taking decision in all serious matters like raising war or concluding treaty with any foreign power he always took concurrence of the aristocracy. He treated with foreign powers in his own name by his own ambassadors (Vārtavaha) or Kaṭakās with the previous consent of the aristocracy. He could dismiss the highest officials,

1 *Kālikā Purāṇa*, Chapter 84, verse 54
2 H.K. Barpujari, *An Account of Assam and Her administration* 1988, p. 67
3 H.K. Barpujari (ed.), op. cit., p. 67
and could even order their execution. He alone coined money. The execution of death sentence, involving the shedding of blood (rajadanda) had to be passed by the king alone, and to make his person and commands inviolable and sacred divinity was attributed to the Ahom monarchs by the Ahom priests at early date and by the Hindu priests at a later date.

CABINET:

The highest functionaries of the state constituted themselves into a cabinet, and were known as Patra-Mantri. It consisted of the Buragohain, the Bargohain, the Barpāragohain, the Barbaru and the Barphukan. The hereditary councillors are referred to as chatra-chāyūnasaraṇa mantrivara (followed the shadow of the umbrella by the ministers) in the epigraph of the southern gateway of the Guwahati city built in Saka 1655. The members of the cabinet or patra mantri were directly dependants on the monarchs in official or in social status and their duty was to perform the responsibilities entrusted to them in administrative discipline by the monarchs.

1 S.K. Bhuyan, Atan Burāghohain and His Times, 1957, p. 13
2 H.K. Barpujari, op.cit., p. 67
3 P.C. Choudhury (ed.), op.cit., p.82; it is observed that the word rajadanda bears double meaning, one is royal sceptre and the other is royal execution.
4 Ins. No. 69, lines 4-5
5 S.K. Bhuyan, Atan Burāghohain and His Times, 1957, p.14
THE GREAT GOHAINS:

The terms śrī śrī svarganārāyaṇadeva mahārajār mantrī bhāgadiyaś budāghōhin1 (Bāhgadiya Burāghōhin, the minister of Svarganārāyaṇadeva), śrīmaṭ-ananta-mahāmantrīś (Ananta, the prime Minister) and rājamantrī purnānanda budāghōhin2 (Prime Minister Purnānanda Burāghōhin), make it clear that the Burāghōhin usually acted as the Prime Minister, and conducted the officers of the government3. It was the prerogative of the king to appoint one of the three, Burāghōhin, Bargoḥāin and Barpātragōhin as the Prime Minister of state. However, the rank of all the three was always looked upon as equal4.

THE OFFICES OF BARBARUA AND BARPHUKAN:

With the expansion of dominions, king Pratāpsimha created two new offices that of the Barbaruā (bāda-bādva)5 and Barphukan (brhatphukkan)6, who belonged to the leading families who had accompanied sukāphā7.

1 Ins. No. 5, line 5
2 Ins. No. 162, line 6
3 Ins. No. 241, line 9
4 Hitesvar Barbarua, Ahomar Din, 1981, pp. 527-28
5 Gunabhiram Barua, op.cit., p. 207
6 Ins. No. 34, line 5
7 Ins. No. 7, line 3-4
8 S.K. Bhuyan (ed.), Tuṅghhungi Buraṇji (Reprint) 1983, p. XVIII.
Barbarua:

The *Barbaruā*, whose position was next to the three Gohāins, was the head of both executive and judiciary. His duty was to see the proper execution of king’s orders. He received appeals from the lower courts and tried important original cases. The *Barbaruā* had passed the sentences with the concurrence of the king and the three Gohāins. He exercised his jurisdiction over the portion of eastern provinces from Sadiyā to Kaliābar which lay outside the jurisdiction of the three gohāins.

The office of the *Barbaruā* was not hereditary. However, king Pratapsimha ordered that the family members of the Buragohāin, Bargohāin and Barphukan would not be entitled to get the post of *Barbaruā* and Barphukan. In this way the king broke the monopoly of the Gohāin families. In fact the *Barbaruā* was entrusted with the diplomacy, foreign relations, justice and all other important affairs directly under the king.

Barphukan:

Lāngī was the first *Barphukan* appointed by king Pratapsimha (A.D. 1603-1641). He distinguished himself in the battle against the Mughals in A.D. 1617 for which he was rewarded with the post of *Barphukan*. He was the governor of Lower Assam and administered the territory from Kaliābar to the Mughal frontier. The *Barphukan* was to conduct the relation with Bengal, Bhutan and other adjacent territories. He also served as the commander of

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1 S.K. Bhuyan, *Atan Barāgohāin and His Times*, 1957, p. 15
3 Ins. No. 2, line 3
4 S.K. Bhuyan, *Atan Barāgohāin and His times*, 1959, p.15
the Ahom army (brhat-sainyapo)\(^1\). Usually the Barphukan made all grants of land in Lower Assam on behalf of the king. However, when the king was present in Lower, Assam, he acted jointly with the Barbarua. This is shown by two epigraphs issued by Gaurināthsimha of Śrāvana 31 and Magha 10 of ṣaka 1714. The first one records the presence of Barbarua and Barphukan at the time of issuing the grant which runs as nāgosālar bāharar barcarāt\(^2\)devar āgni/badbaṭā badphukan bidyanāne ... balorāmak/guwāḥātīt baḍkataki pāti diyā gal\(^2\) (In the presence of Barbarua and Barphukan, the king in the royal dockyard issued the appointment of Baloraṁ as Barakāṭakī at Guwahati). The second inscription bears, baḍbaṭā badphukan bidyanāne/... barcaurāt colāṭharā phukane āgni sunāi tāmrapatra kari dile\(^3\) (In the presence of Barbarua and Barphukan the Cholāṭharāphukan delivered and issued the order of the king to renew the land-grant). In view of these records, it can be asserted that both Barbarua and Barphukan enjoyed the same rank and dignity next to the Burāgobāīn, Bargobāīn and Barbāṭragobāīn.

The Ahom kings also appointed frontier wardens and Governors\(^4\). The epigraphic term acaḷapāla\(^5\) (a chief, ruling over a hill tract, who owed allegiance to the Ahom monarch) that appears in the copper-plate inscription of king Sivasimha of ṣaka 1646 refers to the ruling chiefs of the hill tribes, who had made their submission to the Ahom kings.

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1 Ins. No. 48, line 11
2 Ins. No. 213, lines 5-6, 11
3 Ins. No. 216, lines 8-10
4 S.K. Bhuyan, Anglo-Assamese Relations, 1949, p. 46
5 Ins. No. 54, line 1; A chief of the hill is called Parbatiyā Rajā in Assamese.
THE BARUAS:

Inscriptions of this period record some Baruas, who headed certain departments. The rock inscription of Şaka 1589 refers Numali Dekā Barua, who was one of the officers responsible for battle against the Mughals and construction of rampart. The cannon inscription of Udayādityasimha of Şaka 1598 refers Nityānanda Colādharā Baruā, in connection with the manufacture of cannons. These officers were heads of minor departments which had a Phukan at the head.

OTHER OFFICERS:

The epigraphic term vārtāvahā (messenger or kaṭakīs) as recorded in the copper-plate inscription of Şaka 1714, refers the officers who served as envoys to foreign courts, and also as intermediaries between the king and his principle nobles and officers. One of the important functionaries of the Ahoms were the Barkaṭakīs (Chief messenger) who were employed over the kaṭakīs.

The stone inscription of Kamāleśvarasiṃha (A.D. 1795-1811) in relation to the sales and purchases of land records kaṭakatis (accountants) who had to keep accounts and maintain registers and assessment of paiks, and work as scribes and reporters.

1  Ins. No. 5, line 3.
2  Ins. No. 10, line 2
3  Gunabhiram Barua, op.cit, p. 207
4  Ins. No. 213, line 5; P.C. Choudhury (ed.), Asom Burañji Sāra, 1964, p. 69
5  Ins. No. 213, lines 11; S.K. Bhuyan, Atan Burāgobāin and His Times, 1957, p. 17
The Rājkhowās\(^1\) were district Governors who administered justice and supervised the working of the paik system in their respective areas. Copper-Plate Inscriptions of śaka 1677 and 1743 record meteri and menā\(^2\) as officers along with Rājkhowās. They were officers perhaps below Rājkhowās whose specific duties were not mentioned. However, it can be presumed that they were responsible administrative officers of the district. The junior officers of the Ahom regime were the Hazarikās, or commanders of 1000 men; Šaikiyās of 100 men and Borās of 20 men\(^3\).

**Qualities of Kings and Officials:**

Qualities of Ahom King and his officials are reflected in the inscriptions of the period. The stone-pillar inscription of śaka 1538 records the prowess of king Pratāpsimha against the Mughals, which runs as śrī śrī svarganārāyaṇa deva-visama-samaravijayinah\(^4\) (king Pratapsimha, the conqueror of many a terrible battle). The same stone-pillar announces the remarkable victory of the Ahoms by using the terms śrī svarganārāyaṇa jaya jaya śrī phuluṅg gosāi śrī kulūtāgosāi śrī jadu baruā jaya hat\(^5\) (The king, Phuluṅg Gosāi, Kulūtā Gosāi and Jadu Baruā had won the victory). The inscription records the victory of King Pratāpsimha against the Mughals in A.D. 1615 along with his officers (Gosāi and Baruā)\(^6\) with whose bravery the victory had won.

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2. Ins. No. 140, line 8; Ins. No. 248, line 23;
5. Ins. No. 2, line 1-6
6. According to Hemchandra Goswami the word Gohāī of today was written as Gosāin around 300 years ago; Benudhar Sarma(ed), *Racanāvalī, śaka 1893*, (A.D. 1971)p.280
The qualities of king’s officials are expressed in epigraphic terms as: age yavanaka nipata kari pace parbat kati gada sri bhândâri gosain karilenta saka 1538¹ (annihilated the Mughals first, and then constructed this rampart cutting through the hills by Bhândâri Gosain) in the rock inscription of saka 1538, records the victory of Ahoms against the Mughals (Yavana)² in A.D. 1616 and the erection of a rampart in the mountainous surrounding of the river Brahmaputra by Bhândâri Gosain, one of the most efficient officer of king Pratâpsirfiha.

Two inscription on a rock (both are identical) near the Manikarnesvar temple opposit Guwahati, during the reign of Cakradhvajasiînîha bears in Assamese sri sri svargaanarâyanadeva mahâraj mântri bhâgadîya budâgohain¹ badphukan ... samanâtúte saed sâna saed pirozaka mûrigaâla nirmitâng ughon mât saka 1589 (King’s Burâgohain and Barphukan after killing sayed Sâna and Sayed Firoz, constructed the fort in saka 1589 on November, A.D. 1667). The inscriptions record the activities of the Burâgohain and the Barphukan as the anihilators of enemy and the erectors of the fort as a means of defence against the Mughals.

In the same victory of the Ahoms, the person of the Barphukan, adorned with every ornaments, is also engraved on a stone-pillar which is preserved in the ASM. The inscription runs as: Kâmania guna... pratâpojjal... senâdhîpaâh... bâdabâduvâtmâja-nâmajâni-sri bhrâtphukkanaâh jîteva

¹ Ins. No. 3, lines 3-6
² Originally, the word denotes the people of Greek nationality, ultimately all foreigners were called yavanas.
³ Atan Buragohain was usually called Bâhgari because of the association of his family with the village Bâhgara, situated in the vicinity of Gargaon (Sibsagar); S.K. Bhuyan, Atan Burâgohain and His Times, 1957 p.2.
⁴ Ins. No. 5, line 5-7
yavana savígrabham... 1589'. (Nāmjāni Barphukan the son of the Barbaruā, as the commander-in-chief and the abode of all qualities, had won the battle against the Mughals in saka 1589, A.D. 1667). The inscription has extolled the qualities, prowess, power and glory of Lāchit Barphukan, the son of Mōmai Tāmuli Barbaruā, who had commanded the war and personally conducted the operation skillfully.

The qualities of the Officials of Ahom kings are again extolled on the rock inscription at North Guwahati which speaks, badphukan-samara-jaya-vidhinirahprakaramimam vyaracrayat... saka 1645 (Barphukan expert in the rules of victory, constructed the rampart in saka 1645). Here through the erection of rampart the expertise of the Barphukan in diplomacy, war and victory are expressed. The Barphukan mentions here was Bijoy Barphukan of king Śivasimha(A.D. 1714-1744). The inscription referring the rampart signifies the idea of selecting the most strategical point for constructing the rampart by the Barphukan and it bears great value as a means of defense which is rightly declared by Sonaram Choudhury as “demarcating rampart of Guwahati boundary”.

Another rock inscription of Pramattasimha (A.D. 1744-1751) of saka 1666 bears the qualities of the Barphukan as - maha-mahim-amatya-nayaka-samar-simānisāsimā-vimā-vikrama-nīḥrama-durdama-damana-yama-ṣadgūpya... sri tara duvara bhratphukkena. The inscription records the prowess of Taran Duvai Barphukan in policy making, war, diplomacy, treaty,
decision (in dilemma) and protection of the subject against enemies. These qualities of the officials of the Ahom kings are identical with the bravery, power, diplomacy in war, treaty-making, internal and external policies and security measures adopted by the high officials of the kings of ancient India as recorded in the *Arthashastra*.

1 R. Shamsastry and J.F. Fleet (tr.), *Kauṭiliya's Arthasastra* 1951, pp. 293-303