CHAPTER: III

THE PAIK AND KHEL SYSTEM OF THE AHOM AND DISCONTENTMENT

The various historians dealing with Ahom period describe the Paik system as a socio-economic cum military organization, which was also characterized by a trend of transformation in various ways in different stage.

The entire population of the Ahom kingdom was organized under the Paik and Khel system. It was the foundation of the entire Ahom socio-economic and administrative structure. The paiks were divided into two classes on the basis of grade; a) the Kanri or Kari, (lowest grade) ¹, and the; b) Chamua and Visayas or officers (higher grade).

The Ahom in conformity with the Tai or the Siamese traditions arranged all adult able bodied males, aged between 16 and 50- as Kanri paiks , (except the king, nobles, councilors or Dangarias, priest high caste personages and people employed in respectable occupations). These Kanri paiks were liable to compulsory service to the state, civil or military, as labourer or soldier. ²

The paiks were grouped in different khels according to the services rendered to the state. They were grouped into two broad classes, soldier and labourers. The most important was the archers (soldier) who not only fought in the battlefield during war but also served as workers in various public utility concerns as well as cultivators in peace time.³

¹. Besides Kanri paiks and Chamuas there were five other classes of people, Mahanta, bhakats, deollya, paiks and ghulam, with their respective Chamua
². In Siam the labour force was called prai. It is equated with the paiks of the Ahoms by Graham Wood, History of Siam,1,37.In Bengal the paiks were once very common as palace guards under Muslim Kings. In Persian the word means of footman, a messenger or guard. CHA voll III 1994 P36-42
³. Ibid P36-42
The rest were assigned to do various works and bore names according to their special occupation and profession under the Khel.⁴

The economic and productive activities of the Paiks were organized in the Khels, corresponding to the guild. A khel meant a division or unit of Paiks performing specific services to the state, under either a Phukan or a Barua, who were assisted by various graded subordinates, Rajkhowa, Barua, Hazarika, Saikia, and Bora. ⁵

The Khel system represented the socio-economic groups in Ahom polity and so differed from the Phoids. (The phoids were based on racial and communal lines, and representing the Ahom noble families).⁶

Regarding the evolution of the Paik system, the different Burunjis disclosed that the founder of Ahom kingdom - Sukapha entered Assam with 3000 Paiks. Sukapha placed these paiks under the Bargohain and Burahgohain according to their services through different “Khel”. (On the ethnic basis of these families (Phoids) were called the Hatimurias of two Gohain).⁷

Gradually the Paiks of one caste or of a specific area were grouped into Khels i.e. either an occupational or territorial basis. Each of these varied in numbers from 1000 to 5000 in each Khel. Their collective strength made the total population of the state. It is said that Paik System with its broad essential features introduced into Assam by Suklengmung (1539-52) by grafting —⁸

4. e.g Bharalua, serving the royal store (bharal); Yoganiya, suppliers of articles like fish, honey fuel; Bilatiya, tenants of the three Gohains; Bahatiyas, messenger to deal with hill tribes like the Miris and Daflas; Meldagias, employees in estates of kings and queen, and so on. 5/6/7/8. CHA voll III 1994 P36-42
— one paik (powa)* out of a unit of four for state service. The structure internally remained in abeyance till it was recast and enforced by Momai Tamuli BarBarua. One got means one unit of four (later on three)

Pratap Simha realized the fact that his kingdom grew unprecedentedly larger, which required reorganization. He entrusted the task to Momai Tamuli to conduct censes of the people and settles them systematically.

As the structure the same Paiks had to render duties pertaining to both civil and military department for half the year. The Paiks were initially organized by the BarBarua into a unit or got of four Paiks, which later on revised to three. One Paik thus became one “Powa”. The calculation was applicable to both; Kanri and the Chamua. A Paik had to serve the king or a Visaya (officer) for a definite period. When it ended, another replaced him as salani.9

Every unit of four had to supply one man (called mul) as permanent militia to the state. The term “mul” meant the levy of the first man in every got or unit of four (later, three) paiks. The term dewal implied the levy of the second man; while tewal of the third man. The paiks were under the Mular Barua (Main Barua) 10

*.One unit of four. In Assam, one sar (one kilogram) equal to four powa (one powa=250 gram). In division of Pike system they used the same terminology to make it simple to the common people

The Ahom army was also totally formed by the pike as there was no standing army up to the time of Gaurinath Simha. Ahom army was synonymous with the people, the Paik-peasants, hierarchically organized and trained; ready for short notice mobilization. There was no permanent generalissimo with a hierarchy of officers below. Normally each territorial governor was the permanent Commander in his jurisdiction, assisted by subordinate officers in charge of the armed forces, the three Gohain, the frontier governors, the Melkhowa Rajas, and outside their vilayets the tributary rulers and the feudal rajas were under the BarBarua and the Barphukan. Above all, there was the king, who, in theory was the Commander-in-Chief of all armed forces in land and water. In the practice it was not possible for the king to actually lead them in battles".\(^{11}\)

In the initial stages of Ahom rule in Assam, when the dominion was still small, it was possible for the king to depend solely on his Gohains, at first two, the Bargohain and the Burahgohain, and later (1532) three, including the Barpatra Gohain. Later on more officers with military duties had to be appointed e.g., the BarBarua and Barphukan.\(^{12}\)

Usually the supreme command was vested to the Barbarua in Upper Assam and to the Barphukan in Lower Assam. However, on special occasions like grave national emergencies the king must select the Commander-in-Chief from the Great Gohains (Councilors) with the consent of the Bar-Mei (Great Council), summoned by the king ——

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12. J. N. Sarkar Article CHA voll III "Military Department" Barpujari H.K (Edit)
—__, and often with astrological advice. The concept of compulsory military service on all able-bodied adults of the Ahoms came from the Tais who used to cast lots for the same. This, again, co-existed with the decimal system (in arranging the military personnel by ‘tens, centuries, chiliarchs, deka-chiliarchs’ and so on, coming from the earlier of the Tais of Namchao with the Mongols and percolating to the Ahoms through the Siamese.¹³

The armed forces of the kingdom in its full bloom consisted of five regular divisions. But, being of unequal importance, these may be graded in the following order of defence; infantry, elephants, and cavalry, navy and artillery.

The army needed communications, transport arrangements, sound logistics, and according to prevailing conceptualization, adequate fortifications, moats and ramparts duly guarded. The Ahoms made necessary arrangements for all these through the elaborate Paik system.¹⁴

The Ahom military system is usually described as part and parcel of the Paik system. This was the basis of the entire socio-political organization of the Ahoms. However, this is only a half-truth and is nor applicable to all periods of Ahoms rule...———

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¹³ In 1532 Koncheng Barpatra Gohain was selected Commander-in-Chief for his gallantry during the invasion of Turbak, the general of the Sultan of Bengal. Similarly Lachit Barphukan was selected Commander-in-Chief against the Mughals twice, and in 167 (Saraighat). AB, 68,181.
¹⁴ CHA voll III 1994 p 66
It might have been so originally but the army came to include other elements that were not co-evil with the paiks; Further they lost their pristine purity and declined.¹⁵

The civil functions of the paiks included manual works in different crafts; like making bows, arrows, boats, houses, roads, embankments, forts etc., besides supplying articles. It has already mentioned that the lowest unit or got (Khringlang) was originally a group of four men, supplied by each family.¹⁶

Every Paik had to serve gratis (compulsory service to the state) without cash payment in rotation for three months initially. While one Paik of the got had to serve gratis, the other three Paiks cultivated the jointly-held lands and the domestic work of the serving Paik—

— A got or unit supplied one, two or three paiks, respectively termed the mul, dewal and tewal, in rotation and according to the urgency of the situation during war or peace (e.g. public works).¹⁷

The paiks were grouped at first (1607) into khel or squads on a functional or occupational basis and later on a territorial basis. They were registered and placed under different officers in a hierarchical basis, viz Bora, commanding 20, Saikia 100, Hazarika 1000, Rajkhowa 3000 and Phukan 6000 paiks respectively.

¹⁵. J. N. Sarkar Article CHA voll III “Military Department” Barpujari H.K (Edit) p 66
¹⁷. Ibid
They were distinguished by the names of the khel to which they belonged. 18

The non-serving paiks (rotation wise) formed a standing militia of all able-bodies adults, capable of short-notice mobilization by officers on a given signal during wars and rebellions or emergencies. These officers were called *kheldar*. 10 Sometimes Rajkhowa held exercise the power of Barua or Phukan. The Phukan who presided over a department was assisted by a Barua. Barua headed a department, which had no Phukan. The BarBarua and the Barphukan also had Paiks under them ranging from 3,000 to 12,000. 19

The Bora and Saikia were appointed by respective Phukans and Rajkhowa. The Rajkhowa and Hazarika were named by the king with the advices and concurrence of the Gohains. The Privates or Paiks had limited share in control. They could demand through the regular channel to appoint their own nominees and dismissal of Boras and Saikias. Every officer could administer justice to their subordinates with the right of appeal to his superior officer and finally Nyayasodha Phukan. 20

18. Ibid
20. Ibid.

(The first three rank established by Momai Tamuli BarBarua under the king Pratap Simha. Sadar Amin, 41; Account, 74; Barbarua, 496. This seems to be a simple view of the organization. On the other hand, it is clearly mentioned that at the time of its introduction a Bora was placed over units not of Paiks but of 20 got (i.e. 20x3 or 60 Paiks) a Saikia over 100 got, a Rajkhowa over 3000 Paiks; Satsari, para 185: followed by Buranjis, 223. This however introduces an complexity which does not square with the strength usually attributed to the high grade officers. – J.N.Sarar Khels, art.CHA VII, III P39)
The Paik systems provided the required number of soldiers when necessary. This virtually supplied the needs of a regular but unsalaried army without any undue financial strain on the state exchequer. "The Paik system was a great lever in the king's hands to retain the command of the army. Its strength lay in the vast numbers of the population. Successive losses in manpower undermined it. Even after the heavy causalities in the wars with the Mughal which subjected it to strain the system continued. The first inroad into it was made in the time of Rajesvar Simha (1751-69) when the got was reduced from four to three on account of enormous loss of lives during Naga wars. The next dent was made as a result of further losses during the Moamariya insurrections, The paiks, allowed to commute their services by money payment, were transformed into mere labourers. The system thus broke up. The recruitment of Barkandazes as 'mercenaries from the western provinces' and the creation of a standing army on western model by Purnananda Burahgohain enabled him to use the whole power of the state, and transferred indirectly the command of the army from the king to the latter".21

Each Paik, as the return for service was granted two puras (each about 2 2/3 acres) of rent-free ropit (sali) rice land (gamati or body land). However, in case of no personal service was required the Paik had to pay two rupees. Further, he received the land free of direct taxation for house and garden —

— (barimati) and paid a poll tax as home tax of one rupee except in Darrang\textsuperscript{22}.

The all subjects had to perform all state works including going to war. When the need for a special task grew, the Kanri, who were specially gifted were promoted as Chamuas and even as Apaikan Chamuas\textsuperscript{*} (higher status, not belong to lower Paik category) and enjoyed a higher status. The chamua Paiks, who performed fixed duties only other than cultivation, did not go to war.

The promoted Apaikan Chamua had to undergo training for the particular khel. They were office holders or engaged as goldsmiths or artisans and were usually exempted from manual service.

A Chamua could be promoted as Visayas (officer), even as Barbarua and Barphukan but never as any of the three Gohains. Instead of monthly remuneration these Chamuas used to get several Paiks and allotted land to perform various services at state expense\textsuperscript{23}.

The Paik System closely associated with the Khel (Guild) system of the Ahom administration. This is a fact that the Khels were organized in different span of time to meet the demand of the changing situation and composition of the administrative structure.

In early hours, since the time of Sukapha when the Ahom were engaged themselves in constant battle with the indigenous tribes it required the multiplicity of functions of the same group of people.

\textsuperscript{*}(higher status, not belong to Paik category elevated from the paiks)

\textsuperscript{22} Jenkins's Report Para 15 Buranjis p-222 J.N.Sarar Khels, art.CHA VOIII IIIP38

\textsuperscript{23} T. B. p-237, Barbarua p570/571, Agar Din p-176/182, Inscription evidence Gaurinath Simha 1705 p-83, Chandrakanta Simha Saka 1756/1820 p-147/147/149
Then the Khels were also organized in numerous groups of the same ethnic group on the basis of the occupations or service rendered to the state.

Its formation reflected the primary needs of the state, for example; Kanris (archers and bowmen), the Kukura-Chowa (royal poultry Keeper) and all kind of agricultural laborers including peasants. The Khel of hilaidarlis (musketeer) etc developed later.

In the same way- industrial laborers in various arts and crafts, bow and arrow makers, basket worker, gunpowder manufacturer, suppliers of rice and other provisions collector, suppliers of honey, gold washer (Sonowal) etc were also organized.

The historians and modern writers said that the second phase in the evolution of the khels ushered during the reign of Pratap Simha (1603-1641). His reign witnessed the expansion and dominion over the new territories. Momai Tamuli Barbarua recognized such khel on territorial line in the different stages of production and distribution viz;

- Deogharia (ofDeodhai Bailung), Batbaria, Batkharia, Ramkha, Gharia, MadGharia, MalaiGharia, AyuBaria, Nagaria, Kukuraphahia, Hanhapahia, Gohainpahia, Kapaudheria, Dhenudhora etc.

During then reign of Jayadhwaj Simha (1648-1663) the number of gold washers increased from 12 to 20 thousand Paiks. It is said that probably it was the growing influence of Hinduism , as the Paiks who originally grouped for specific duties into Khels, were separated and attached to estates, temples and Sattras or Vaisnavite monasteries for their maintenance.
Chakradhvaj reign witnessed a major change in the Khelwary system, particularly, during the struggle for Kamrup. It was realized that the old individualistic system of one occupation was very practical, as the other Khels could not satisfy their need for articles of other Khels. This was most necessary during war. Lachit Barphukan re-oriented the Khelwary system by making a Khel self sufficient by grafting men of diverse Khel occupation within it.

Due to the changing situation and increasing number of population in the 17th century necessitated the development of new Khels beside their older occupational or professional basis. Thus, came into being the Dimarua khel with the people of Dimarua and Nagaya Khel with the united Khels of Nagaong. Later on Tiparniya, Namdangia and Solaguria Khels etc. Another striking feature of this development was that of the growing importance of the officers under whom these Khels were assigned.

The Paiks served as the national militia as well as workmen in all public utility services 24. The Paiks who belonged to the same caste or the same area were grouped under a particular Khel resulted an association or fraternity of kindred people which pursuing identical or similar interest or a common social object.

The system worked efficiently and served to secure increased output. But the system lacked elasticity. It failed to adjust to new circumstances.

24 J. N. Sarkar Article Comprehensive History of Assam voll III “Evolution of Paik System” p 36-42
In the new circumstances the Khels became ineffective and consequently revenue declined with declines in production. Internal corrosion set in with increasing oppression of that collective agency on the Paiks.

There were numerous factors, which compelled Rajesvar Simha (1751-69) to reduce the “got” (The lowest unit or got (Khringlang) was originally a group of four men, supplied by each family) to three men.

All below 15 and above 50 were exempted from state services by a money payment at a rate varying from Rs 6/- to 18/- for a “got”. Many other secured exemption on grounds of caste or rank. On the other hand the government got a new source of revenue in the form of commutation money of the Paiks who wanted to exempt from state services.

It worked like a double-edged sword; it was operative from side, top and bottom. Gradually the assigned officers found it convenient to commute personal service for cash payment.

It was so oppressive to the Paiks that the boys of the Paik used to wear churia or dhoti (lower garmen) when they became youth only, otherwise they were regarded a member of the Paik system and had to ran the service and to pay tax whatever assigned to him.

25. Account, 73-74; Rajkumar, Copperplate Grant of the reign of Rajesvar Simha; Manideep, v, 2, 91, Ibid,
26. CHA voll III “Evolution of Khel System” p 42
The situation reached to such an extent that the Paiks began to regard the poll tax and compulsory personal services as a ‘plague’.28

Sometime they cleverly sought exemption from these by passing themselves to the protection of certain families as slaves. As from the time of Rajesvar Simha the personal service could be sold for money with government sanction. The Paiks got the opportunity to leave the Khel.

J.N. Sarkar affirmed the fact that the Paiks took their only way to elope or desert as bhaganiya (refugee) Paiks, to escape from the taxation and the persecution of the Khel officers, whose jurisdiction was personal and not local. There mobility sounded the death knell to the Paiks system as well as Khels.29

The system became more ‘complicated but less convenient’ whom the Paiks originally tied to the Khel system and the locality became distorts and got mixed up with the diverse occupational groups in the same village with their “newly purchased freedom”.30

Among the public service they had to render services like construction of the road, ban to protect the flood, digging pond, pit take part in construction of Royal houses, temples, Devalayas as labours.

In fact they were the main instruments of the construction of the mighty ban, deep pond for defense purposes. They had to work in the Khat, Pam houses (land of kharib crops), ———

28. CHA voll III “Evolution of Khel System” p 42
29. J. N. Sarkar Article Comprehensive History of Assam voll III “Evolution of Khel System” p 42
30. Ibid
Bilat allotted to certain officers. During the war they had to go to take part in the war as a soldier.

As a whole during peace or war the state and bureaucrats run on the labour of these Paiks. It produced such a system where $\frac{1}{4}$th to $\frac{1}{3}$rd population of the state had to render services to the ruling class at any time without any wages.

The likes or dislikes of the paiks were never considered; in fact it was beyond the question. Neither had they had any right over the production nor do they get anything as wage. Even food was also not given to them in their respective engagement to the state.\textsuperscript{31} Except the allotted two pura of sali land without tax.

The ownership of land was also not provided to him. The Khel gave him the right to cultivate only. If the Paik died or missing, the land returned to the Khel. As a result the family of the Paik faced numerous problems to run their life.

Sometime the Paik fled from the got due to unbearable atrocities and miseries. Severe punishment inflicted on so called Ga-ara-paik (who fled from the 'got'). For that purpose a unified system established through Piyada, Takela, Spy and Chaudang.

It is already noted the Paiks were kept under the strict control of different officers dividing them in different groups. Some members of royal family like Tipam, Namrup, Charing, Majumel and Malbhangia. Three ministers vide Borgohain, Burahgohain and Barpatragohain each had ten thousands Paiks where they had supreme control\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{31} Guha Amalendu's Land Right & Social Classes in Medieval Assam. DHAASA
\textsuperscript{32} Rajkumar S. Itihansa Sonwara Sasata Basar 1980 p-154
The three Gohains (including Dantiaia), officers of nine Konwarimel, two assistant ministers, Barphukan and Barbarua used to get twelve thousands to fourteen thousands Paiks\(^3^3\), under Barphukan, Duialiaphukan had twelve thousands Paiks, six Charaphukans, feudal chiefs belonging to king's family had their own Paiks\(^3^4\).

The Paiks again distributed among twenty-five numbers of Chamuaphukan, sixty-four numbers of Baruas, and twenty-four numbers of Rajkhowas and Choudhury of Kamrup.

The officers had to mobilized the Paiks for public works and war. In general the officers were not given any salary, instead of that they were given some Bilat, Khat and certain numbers of Paiks.\(^3^5\)

The respective officer enjoyed this facility only during the period of holding the post. When he got out of the post the new officer receive this facility. Along with regular Paiks the respective officer also received certain number five to ten Paiks to engage them in hills, field's etc\(^3^6\).

Thus the officer along with slaves enjoyed the facilities of two types of Paiks, the regular one (Liksau) and some Paiks specially given for his household work. The condition of the first Paiks was not better than the slaves. The officers neither gave any payment nor supplied food to them\(^3^7\).

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\(^{33}\) Ibid 1980 -158

\(^{34}\) Ibid p-179/185

\(^{35}\) Wade J. P. An Account of Assam, pp Int XVI.

\(^{36}\) Ibid

\(^{37}\) Guha Amalendu's Land Right & Social Classes in Medieval Assam.
— The nobility and officers could donate the Paiks whenever or whatever they wished to. The sattras, temples, religious leaders received these Paiks as donation. A lot of copperplates of that time reveal the fact. These donated Paiks were abstained from any kind of public works and totally became the subject of the donee. Sometimes some felt splited and installed in different under different officers. ³⁸

Thus, these facts reveal that the Paiks neither had social right nor they were able to establish their right over their production and their own life.

This affirmed the fact of Bogle and Robinson (in 1841 during the time establishment of the commission to eradicate the slave) that the Paiks were the sole property of nobility and king and they could transfer according to their wish³⁹. They were not salable unlikely to slaves but the system of forced labour reduced them to a tool or means of production of the master and the state.

The ruling class again created division among the subject by offering certain privileges to the particular section of people.

This privileged class was known as Chamuapaik. The descendent of wealthy Ahom family, high birth kayastha, kalita, Brahmin, kakati and certain technical professional belong to this section.

They did not have to participate in compulsory work for the ruler or the public. They could receive any kind of job in administration. —

³⁸. Neog M. Prachya Sasanawali Plate No-13,14,15,82,86,87,90,150,152,153.
³⁹. Bogle Report to D. C. Robertson, 1834 reproduced in report form Indian Land Commissions’ relating to slavery in East India. British Parliamentary Papers 1841 A pp VI 461
Though the land remains under the control of the ruler the Chamua had the firm grip over the land than the general kanri-paik. It has been observed that, not even the king could take any Chamua's land without their consent.\(^{40}\)

In certain cases land were taken only after sufficient payment.\(^{41}\) The Chamua Paik had to pay rupees one as a tax per pura cultivated land and rupees one for garden (bari-mati) or rupees two annually as they did not have to serve in compulsory service.\(^{42}\)

The Chamua Paik could sell or transfer the land. All the documents related to selling and buying of land during Ahom rule confirmed the fact that the selling and buying happened only in case of Chamua Paik.\(^{43}\) Again they had the right to buy the slaves to work in their field and domestic purposes.\(^{44}\)

The condition of Chamua Paiks was much better than that of the general Paik. In fact they enjoyed social freedom. Some of them could even use the labour of slaves which already been mentioned. The Chamua Paik whose economic and social conditions were better could come out from the Chamua Paik and Khel-they were called Apaikan Chamua.

The people who received the Brahmottar, Devottar land- were the Brahman, Daivajna, the high birth Kayastha, the defeated clan or the established rulers of the state belong to that Apaikan Chamua category.

\(^{40}\) Bhuyan S.K Satsari Asom Burnji, DHAASA p20.

\(^{41}\) Gogoi. L Tai Sanaskitir Ruprekha, DHAASA p-18.

\(^{42}\) Bhuyan S.K Satsari Asom Burnji ,DHAASA p-20.

\(^{43}\) Neog M. Prachya Sasanawali Plate No-156 Introduction ,DHAASA p-104/105

\(^{44}\) Gogoi. L Tai Sanaskitir Ruprekha ,DHAASA p-18.
They were free from all kind of bondages from the royal house and became richer by using numerous slaves and Paiks. It is said that this section of people used maximum labours of slaves and the Paiks45.

Gradually this section became the feudal chief. They either utilized the land given by the king free of tax or paid full or half revenue for that.

Thus, in the transformed society under the Ahom the tribal folk lost their indigenous co-operative production system. A new kind of agrarian economy sprang out, which only fulfilled the need of ruling by all the means. The technical as well as the non-technical people were also belonged to the Khel. The Khel system took utmost responsibility to control the social life of the Paik. It acted as an instrument to control the Paiks as forced labor.

The ruling class exercised their power over the raw materials, means of productions and produced material through the Khel system. The different technical people as well as other groups did not have the right over them. Their labour and products were exclusively for the state (like the ironworkers, the brass metal workers, boat makers and others). In fact the manufacturer of usual things like potters, the hiras, carpenters could sell or barter their produced things.

45. Guha Amalendu quoting Bogles report, DHAASA(No-37/258) from figures from political consultation 9th September 1828 No-22/24 National Archives wherein it was stated “a very large population of land and very best lands is held by the Brahmins who are also principal holders of slaves”.
The Khel system unified these technical and non-technical groups and engaged them in respective work under their direct supervision. They imposed strict control over them which was completely exploitative. Generally these production units were installed beside the respective house of the respective officer, noble and royal palaces.

The Guild system, with its full form could not develop because of the fact that, the Paik system completely formed and controlled by the state and they exercised their control over them through the Khel system.

The system of state owned Paiks and the Khel greatly hindered the development of the pure Guild system. The Khel system was not formed according to the wish and well-being of the people. It was not coming from the bottom but it was imposed from the top by the ruling class for their own interest. The entire system was divided into certain ‘Mel’ or ‘Dagi’ and assigned under some royal officers.

The three great Gohains had some prime Mel and Dagi under their command from where they engaged necessary men power for the state and self. Their Mels were called Hatimur. One Mel with fourteen departments was kept to the royal household where the Phukan, Barua, Rajkhowa etc. exercise direction and administration.

Another Mel ‘which meant only for public and administrative purpose’ were under the command of Barbarua and Barphukan. Under this Khel majority section of the people was well-formed. Generally the soldiers were taken from them. If extra men or soldiers required then only recruitment were done from the ‘Hatimur’.
The expansion of the boundary of the Ahom kingdom led to an overwhelmed and complex administrative system.

The ruling class expanded and multiplied its members to continue a firm grip over the subject. The Apaikan Chamua, high-class people, nobility, religious leaders, elite officers, King and his family formed the new ruling class.

It has been already discussed that instead of cash payment the officers were paid in kind by allotting them different Khat, Pam and fixed number of labours (Paik- liksau). Along with that they could even utilize the labour of the Paik of their allotted area.

They could exercise judicial control over the subjects of their specific area according to their ranks. In fact they were the real master of their subject.

Sometimes the officer even took certain amount of their production as Bharbheti (bribe) along with the physical labour of their subject. Sometime certain administrative, sub-ordinate posts were sold. They even mis-appropriate public funds.

Thus, the Bhisaya or officer class grew wealthy. Though their job and Khat & Mel were not hereditary lot of examples are found in the history where the son received the post and other facilities enjoyed by his father. In fact they continued to enjoy these privileges generation after generation if they were not the victims of royal offense.

This new class with a characteristic of feudal nature made the common people’s life miserable through various means of exploitations. They had direct control over the administration and often created ——
— rift among themselves for the power. Sometime they fought among themselves to supercede others. Thus these officers gradually formed certain lobbies and became the kingmaker.

Up to Gadadhar Simha these allied feudal class continued to rule the country by forming different lobbies and installing some puppet kings. Even Gadadhar Simha acquired the crown with the help of a powerful lobby headed by Bandar Barphukan. Only the most powerful king could unite them and exercise control over them.

This nobility mainly utilize their money and resources for their own entertainment and lavish life style. Their extravagancy increased and the common subjects had to carry on the activities of public welfare and development.

The slaves, who belonged to lower the strata of the society, were called bandibets. They used to work in household field of a king, noble, Apaikan Chamua and Chamua family. Their private and conjugal life totally depends on their master’s service. They rendered their service for their shelter, food and cloths without payment for their service.

Though they were the main instruments of their masters, the masters could even sell them; though this practice was not honorable even then it happened. The debt slavery was also prevalent. This has been discussed in the related topics in details.

Thus, by the beginning of the 18th century the entire society was divided into certain classes viz. In the first category; the Aristocratic class by the king and family, nobility, religious preachers, the Apaikan Chamua, and the general Chamua.
The second category composed by the lower category people organized under the Khel and Paik system- the large number Kanri Paiks and different technical and handicraftsmen.

The bandibeti (slaves), debt slavery and Lagua Liksau etc composed the lowest section of the society.

There was some variation in Goalpara and Kamrup district. A new system of land assessment and cash payment of revenue system was introduced in some part of this area under Mughal. These elements started to work under the Koch kings. In fact a developed form of agro-economy prevailed in these areas, the nature of social exploitation and conflict among the social class also different.

The Paik system completed its primary stage up to Gadadhar Simha (1681-1695). From Rudra Simha to Rajesvar Simha(1696-1769) it entered the final phase and disintegration. The common people’s discontentment became intense due to the exploitation of ruling and aristocratic class during the peak hour of the Ahom rule.

The socio-economic foundation of the Ahom administration was Paiks and Khel system. It provided revenue, manpower, solders necessary labour and a strict social order to the Ahom administration.

The system gradually transformed the tribal society to a kind of feudal society. The organization fixed the relation between the society and production system. This is true that it has formed a wide agro-society with new relationship than that of the self-dependent tribal society.

It developed a close relationship between the lord and the people, as the Kanri Paik used to obtain the allotted land from him.
Though their land was not hereditary, the successive generation of same Khel utilized the same land. In the time except the compulsory service period he had developed close relationship with the lord.

It has been discussed that under this system the officers were allotted certain administrative unit and some Paiks-as Liksau. They had their own slave along with indebted slave. Through the labour of these Paiks and slaves they increased the cultivated area and gradually became the landlord or feudal chief.

The officer or Bhisaya were often took bribes, sold the post, misappropriate public fund. With all these elements they made the life of common people miserable.

The division of the Paiks into different Khels and allotting to them to respective officers also reduced the power of the central authority because they acted as administrative unit, collection of revenue and crops, recruitment of soldiers in the time of war, deliverance of justice etc. Hence, the power of the aristocratic class increased.

During the time of Rajesvar Simha (1701-1769) the “got” of the Paik reduced to three from four. As a result a Paik now had to work four month annually instead of three.

This increased the discontentment of the common people. The fact is that the Royal house was also aware of the growing dissatisfactions of the common people.

Rajesvar Simha once made a comment to Kritichandra Barbarua, observing the huge gathering at the elephant fight at Ranghar;
"Unification of people will be disastrous for us."\textsuperscript{46} BarBarua assumed the king that the chances of the unification of the people is too less.

The royal house over suspicious of any kind of organization of the people hence tried to curb it in the bud instead of consolidation.

During the time of Jayadhvaj Simha the land and paiks were allotted to the religious leaders, Dharmadhikars, Satradhikars (head of the Sattra institution), some Purohits and certain Devalayas (temples) for personal or institutional use. These Paiks did not have to render compulsory service to the state though their records were kept. In fact they became free from the khel and the Paik system.

Their labour was utilized by the religious leader or institution. These Paiks used to cultivate in a certain amount of land for himself and offered their labour to the religious head of institution or paid some amount of production as a tax to them.

The Satradhikar could dispense them justice in minor offense. Some Sattras of Majuli even had the power to punish the offender physically. These Paiks took active part in religious activity being the disciple of that sattra. They regarded the work of the Guru (or for the religion) as a pious duty.

Sometimes they used to cultivate the institution's land in return of certain revenue which termed as Rayat. These subjects gradually acquired some kind of social and economic freedom.

\textsuperscript{46} Dr Bhuyan S.K. Swargadeu Rajesvar Simha. Publication House Assam.
The Neo-Vaisnavite philosophy, value and sense developed their moral and social sense.

But the general Kanri Paik who remained their old position could not get such opportunity though they were affiliated themselves as a disciple of certain Sattras. Under the Paik system the different technical professional also organized themselves according to their occupation. —

This was a motive to increase the production of the society. During the time of Momai Tamuli Barphukan a system introduced by which every household or village had to prepare certain commodity and submit to the royal treasury.

Every woman had to make a fixed amount of thread or cloths and every man had to provide certain things of bamboo and cane, arrow or other items. The Khel officers were given the duty of supervision. Certain necessary raw materials provided by the royal treasury and returned to the same 47. The common people could not receive any payment for that. The entire system was almost like the forced labor at the cost of the Paiks.

Different sources mention about the increase of primary trade and commerce during the reign from Rudra Simha (1696-1714) to Rajesvar Simha (1751-1769).

Certain commodities like salt, handicrafts, iron implement, pat and muga cloths, betel nut and betel vain, tobacco, ornament and other commodities had a good business.

However, it did not lead to the development of an extensive trade and commercial activities in the state.
However, it did not lead to the development of an extensive trade and commercial activities in the state.

There was very limited cash system. Money flow was not good. The Ahoms used to mint the money generally for coronation ceremony and for donating purpose.

The money market and free trade remarkably limited. The Paik system hindered the growth of money market and free trade because it acted as a compulsory organization to utilize the men’s power for a pre-determined goal for the state and the nobility.

The majority of the Paik were small peasant. Though they were engaged in different occupations they could not separate themselves from the agriculture. They were bonded under such a social relation where they were acted only instrument of production without any payment.

Thus, during the time of his compulsory service to the state, in character, there were no difference between a slave and a Paik. He did not receive any wage, payment for his work.

Again in the rest of the period of compulsory service the Paik worked in his field and out of the production had to pay certain amount to the royal house as a tax.

The Paik along with the women folk had to supply certain fixed amount of commodities without any payment. Again, any utilization of state property, including performing any marriage ceremony etc he had to pay different taxes to the state.
It is already discussed that during the engagement in the royal or public work the other Paik had to render service to the home or field his fellow Paik.

Later on the got of the Paik reduced to three from four and thus increased the pressure of the work to the Paik. The Paik did not have the right over the land. There was no provision of *adhiari* or letting the large land of the feudal lords. Only in the *Sattra* institutions this system prevalent and hence created a class of royal cultivator.

Thus the Paiks were no purely slaves neither complete royal peasant nor independent small holders. This is true that the Paik system gave birth to a kind of system, which had its own characteristics and different from that common feudal system of Europe.

The Paiks were almost like *serf* in a vicious social system. It must be noted that the *classical feudal serf* and the Paik had a lot of difference. The difference was in the time duration of compulsory labor of a pike to the state or officers or public. The classical feudal serf worked for himself in the land of feudal lords or state. He had to render free service during the time of cultivation or harvesting or any time as required but not such a long period as the Paik did under the Ahom. The Chamua Paik enjoyed remarkable facilities than the rest of Paiks.

Thus, the Paik system was stood on a compulsory, rude and cruel base. The entire production, manpower of the state totally depended on this particular section. So, it was important to hold firm grip over that section of people. However, strict control from the top, and its exploitative nature gave the entire system an autocratic set up.
—for a complete feudal structure. The system curtailed the social freedom of common people. This increased the dissatisfaction among the common people and increased the hatred towards their master and the state.

Day by day the exploitation over the common people increased along with the increased religious activities in the kingdom. Sometimes the Paiks escaped from the system by taking shelter in different Sattra and other secret religious organizations which sprang up on the eve of the Moamariya uprising.

The situation demanded the change of state policy. The state had some options to mitigate the situation. As the first option it required the reform of the land and revenue settlement, administration, and development of a strong money market with improved trade and commerce, with the introduction of cash system to the employees instead of allotment of land, imposition of tax over the large estate of the feudal or religious chiefs, to make the royal treasury strong, remove the barrier over trade and commerce and movement of the people, to make a free environment, for spontaneous development of economy.

Or, as second option, extract more income from the existing system in a more forced way.

The ruling class opted for the second option. The process, in fact, started from Gadadhar Simha onwards. It carried on census of the people, measurement of land and effort were made to bring back the people already under the shelter of the Sattras or other religious groups. During the time of Pramatta Simha (1744-1751) census carried on—
Before the Moamariya uprising the Paik system newly organized under the instruction of Kritichandra Barbarua. The new system made a “got” of three people. By this system the Paik had to render service in a period of 4 month instead of three months in a year.

It made the discontentment intense among the people. The ruling authority could identify this discontentment and tried to continue the system with force; by applying different kind of atrocities, exhibiting fear, force, and political tactics. The administrative move to dilute the predominance position of Moamariya Mahanta can be seen in this context.

During the time of Rajesvar Simha (1751-1769) the total population of the country was twenty four lakh as estimated by Gunabhiram Barua, S.K.Bhuyan, D.A.Guha etc. Among this twenty four lakh, two hundred forty thousand (2.5 lakh) were slave.

Kanri Paik was more than fifteen lakh in number. Chamua, Apaikan Chamua Nobility, high caste Brahmin, Kayastha were six lakh in number. Among this six lakh, the privileged class nobility, religious leader and high cast ruling number not more than twenty four thousand.

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49. Ibid, Guha Amalendu’s Land Right & Social Classes in Medieval Assam.

Rajkumar S. Itihasaa Sowanra Sasata Basar 1980 p159

Rajkumar S Itihasaa Sowanra Sasata Basar 1980 p159,
This small number of twenty four thousand privileged class people concentrated the lion share of Paik (2.5 lakh in number) and largest area of land.\(^52\)

Thus on the eve of the Moamariya uprising the slave comprised the ten percentage of total population whereas the General Paik were sixty five percentage of the total population, Who were engaged themselves in a kind of forced labour system for three or four month as an instrument of production.

Thus, in any moment twenty-seven or twenty eight percent of common people lived under the production system in normal situation. This system greatly favored the upper section only at the cost of the common people's inconvenience.

Thus, the Paik system stood on a compulsory rude and cruel caricature. The strict control from the top and its related exploitation gave the entire system an autocratic set up. The system curtailed the social freedom of common people. This increased the dissatisfaction among the subjects against the state.

Again the Paiks were organized on an occupational and territorial basis and considered of men of all castes and denominations. A certain sprit of fellowship developed amongst oppressed members of the Khels. One section could naturally transmit its sympathies and antipathies, thoughts and feelings to other sections of members. These oppressed Paiks also faced numerous troubles in different wake of their life.

\(^{52}\)Ibid
In the economic sphere also, it is very clear that the Paik had to pay heavy taxes to the State in different occasion in different heads. The Paiks had less land than the requirement.

The Ahom government totally depended on the Paiks for tax; cash or kind for state expenditure. The trade and commercial activities were very low. It contributed negligible amount to the royal treasury. The subjects were suppressed economically under the Paik and Khel system of the Ahom. They were instrument only in the state production system. The entire burden of the state expenditure was born by the Paiks. From cultivation to handicrafts or mines, the entire production units were tightly tied with the royal taxation system through the Khels, at the cost of the Paiks. Again in performing any kind of ceremony, he had to pay stipulated tax levied by the state; cash or kind. It generally created an atmosphere of discontentment among the common people. The discontentment of the Paiks toward the Paik and Khel system coupled with the economic, social, religious and other dissatisfactions, which got manifestation in the form of Moamariya uprising.