CHAPTER II

THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE AHOM AND DISCONTENTMENT

The Ahom ruled over Assam for six centuries, an exceptionally long period, unprecedented in the annals of the history of India. The Ahom polity or administration, both in principles and practice, belongs to the domain of Lai-Shastra (i.e. Rajniti-Shastra). Though this script is not available, however, we get an idea of some of its features from scattered references in a few inscriptions and several early Buranjis*. The Account of Assam by Captain Thomas Welsh (1794), the Account as well as the Geographical Sketch of John Peter Wade; the Account of Assam by Francis Buchanan alias Hamilton (1807-14); and the Report of David Scott, Agent to the Governor-General (15 April 1825) and the Buranji Vivekratna by Maniram Dewan provide ample references for the study.

It is important to point out at the very outset that functional differentiations did not imply any structural or departmental divisions or any separation of powers in the system of Ahom government. In fact it was characterized by a spirit of amalgam. The entire structure presented a kind of monolithic unity, formed by union of the centre and the units, the civil and military, the executive and judiciary.

However, in the later stage the entire administration took a different turn.

*Barpujarbi writes:

"There is hardly any chronicle, Ahom and Assamese, on the administrative system of the Ahoms. Aspects of the Ahom court, machinery of government, internal and external, working of the system and warfare may be obtained from Satsari Assam Buranji, Tungkhunja Buranji. Sukumar Mahanta: Assam Buranji and Kasinath Tamuli Phukan: Assam Buranji Puthi.

To a discerning eye Haliram Dhekial Phukan’s Assam Buranji and Maniram Dewan’s MSS Buranji Vivekratna (Tran. No. 108 DHAS) will throw of flood of light on the subject'. Account, xxviii.note 27"
Another characteristic was the Ahom-rule like its contemporary the Mughals was literally a kaghazi raj. The Ahom governed their kingdom not merely on oral directions but written orders and decisions that were recorded and preserved in their archives.\footnote{SMAB, Para 253, xxviii.}

The normal form of government was monarchy. But it was peculiar in several respects and characterized by adjustability. In fact Ahom kingship in Assam developed as a compound of diverse constituent elements imbibed in centuries. The Khmer concept of Deva Raja (God-king), growing out of the Buddhist concept of Bodhisattva, adopted by the Siamese long ago had percolated among the Ahoms. They claimed, in accordance with their Tai and also Shan traditions, as descent from Langdon (Ruler of Heaven) i.e., a mythical origin.

To the local tribes of Assam, the fair-complexioned Ahoms were born of gods (deo-hos).

The Hinduised Ahom acquired a concept- the concept of divine origin, which was conferred to them by the Brahman. The later Ahom rulers were quite happy with their new identity along with their old one.

However this new concept had drove them away from the touch of common people. The common people gradually leaned toward the equality of Neo-Vaisnavite movement which was quite contrary of the royal thought of “divinity”.

The Brahman priests, on the other hand traced the divine origin of the Tai-Ahom rulers from Indra. —
— Corresponding to Langdon, and described them as Indravamsis. The Ahoms regarded kingship as continuous, so the death of a king was not publicized till the selection of a new one.²

The system of government under the Ahom rule in Assam is usually described as 'monarchical'. However in reality the Ahom system was both 'monarchical' and 'aristocratical', as Captain Welsh pointed out long ago.³ The power and influence of the 'aristocracy' was another striking feature in the Ahom kingdom.

In accordance with Tai-Ahom traditions succession was confined to the male descendants of Langdon. In other words, the primary or absolutely indispensable qualification of kingship was the possession of blue blood i.e., descent from Sukapha the founder. 'He whose forefathers were never rulers, can hardly be expected to be a king.'⁴

It is usually said that Ahom kingship was hereditary. In early Ahom age succession was normally based on the law of primogeniture.⁵

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2. The Taïs of Nanchao (in modern Yunnan of China) flourished during 7th-13th centuries A.D. with a highly organized State. JSS, xi, i, July 1962, 15, 18; Quaritch Wales, 16-7. For traditional accounts of Shans of Upper Burma, see N. Elias, Burma Census Report, 1891, 202; AB, 8; Sadar Amin., 1-6; Satsari, 1-2, 37-43, Deodhai, 1-3, 36-7; 213-9; Haliram; 21-7, H.C. Goswami, Ancient Chronicles of Assam, 1-22; P, Gogoi (541) holds that the Indravamsi was due to Hindu influence towards the end of Ahom rule.

3. Account, 66.

4. AB, 10; SMAB, para 257; Atan, 112

5. The kings of Siam were polygamous, but according to the law of A.D. 1360, the eldest son of the principal queen could succeed. In Assam too, kings could take several wives. The practice influenced the question of succession. The first three, known respectively, as Bar Kunwar, Parvatia Kunwar and Raidongia Kunwar, had to be of noble birth. Others of non-noble origin had a lower status and were known as Bar-Mahi-Kunwar and Saru-Mahi-Kunwar, Barbarua, 410-1.
But there were variants. Thus succession did not always move vertically from father to the eldest son but horizontally in case of his physical injury, imbecility or incompetence to a younger brother. The king's expressed will or hint regarding the heir proved decisive at times.\(^6\)

Rudra Simha's death-bed injunction to his sons, 'Old and young you shall all be kings successively',\(^7\) was followed in the case of four sons of his to the exclusion of the claim of the descendants of 'Siva Simha' (1714-44).\(^8\) Still monarchy remained 'hereditary in the fraternal line'.

As a matter of fact the exclusion of the claim of the sons of Siva Simha later created a great tension in the kingdom. They were sent to Kaliapani and later on they evidently joined the rebellious Moamariyas to end the injustice.

The deception to Mohanmala Gohain (Barjana Gohain)-the third son of Rudra Simha by the nobles as he was pitted with small pox for the cause of Rajesvar Simha gave the Moamariya a good pretext for the revolt and mobilize the people to their favour. Thus Rudra Simha violated the ancestral law of hereditary succession. It created a far reaching negative impact and a reactionary administrative mechanism which ultimately acted as a source of unrest in the society.

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6. One Ms. Tr. V.Pt. IV, 319 in DHAS states that on his death-bed Jayadhwaj Simha offered the crown to his Vaishnava Guru, Banamali Gossain of Daksinpat Sattra and that he ruled the kingdom for a time before Chakradhvaj Simha. This extraordinary story is not corroborated in the original Tai Ahom chronicle and may be an interpolation. The ministers might have managed the affairs as in the past.
7. Wade, 136, Sadar Amin. 68.
8. Gait E. History of Assam p175. 1992
In early Ahom age the concurrence of the three Gohains, the Burahgohain, the Bargohain and the Barpatra Gohain was considered to be obligatory. Thus an elective element was also present in case of selection of the king. It is for this reason that Welsh states; that monarchy was ‘partly hereditary and partly elective.’

Thus, in case of unsuitability of the sons and brothers of the late king, the son of the brothers next in seniority was chosen. Beyond this line, i.e. in exceptional cases, the aristocracy or the chief Councilors (Dangarias) had a latitude of selection. However greater emphasized were given on personal merit.

Sometimes brothers and even members of collateral branches of the Satgharia Ahom were also raised to the throne by the powerful Gohain, Barbarua or Barphukan. However, Barbarua or Barphukan could do so in exceptional cases. But all these Selections were confined, among so called pure and the blue section of the Ahoms.

Again, kings could be deposed by unanimous decision of the three Patramantries.


10. A wide field for such a choice had been created, perhaps unconsciously, by Dihingia Raja (1497-1539), who created four collateral princely house with assigned estates, in accordance with the traditions of the Tais (Welsh, 22) and of the Shans (Colquhoun, Hist. Sketch). These houses were Saringiya, Tipamiya, Dihingia and Tungkhungia after the names of the respective places according to seniority and ability. Later on the Namrupiya and Samaguriya were added. Royal candidates could be selected from these houses.

Gradually the power of the nobility grew. This was good in principle, but bad in effect, leading to ministerial supremacy. The succession never went out of the royal line. In certain cases the elective element yielded precedence to virtual nomination within the royal family.

In other words, the personal equation (or influence of a particular claimant or his relationship with the Dangarias) proved to be decisive notwithstanding all deviations, conspiracies and rebellions. The solitary example when the crown was offered to a commoner was that to Atan Burahgohain (1675). He declined the offer as he was only a minister. In sordid contrast to this attitude of Atan, Laluksola Barphukan, who entered into treasonable correspondence with the Nawab of Bengal and Badan Chandra Barphukan who brought Burmese into Assam for their selfish interest.

The Ministerial supremacy gradually became a part of the Ahom kingdom for example;

Debera Barbarua installed Suhung and Gobar (both in 1675),
Atan Burahgohain installed, Sujinpha (1675-77) and Sudaipha (1677-79),
Laluk Barphukan installed, Sulikpha or Lora Raja (1679-81)
Kirtichandra Barbarua installed, Laksmi Simha (1769-80);
Purananda Burahgohain installed, Kamalesvar Simha (1795-1810) and Chandrakanta Simha (1810-8), and
Ruchinath (son of Purananda) Burahgohain installed, Purandar Simha (1818-9).

12. SMAB, Para 257; Satsari, iii, para 223, Gait, 234; Atan, 112.GAIT E. P154 1983
Thus the predomination of the nobility is well apparent. In fact from the late 18th century the entire Monarchy was run according to the whims of the powerful section of Nobility.

The entire administrative machinery faced the impact of that. It resulted tension and confusion among the common people. In the presence of too many strong figures in the administration it was quite difficult for them to maintain a balance of loyalty between the the Monarch and the powerful so called Dangaria. The nature of this clash can be well understood with one example. As it was happened in case of Gagini Deka Mahanta of Moamariya Sattra;

According S.K. Bhuyan, “The greatest insult inflicted by Kirtichandra on the Moamariya Mahanta was on the occasion of the King’s journey from Dergaon to Rangpur. The king was followed at some distance by Kirtichandra. As the king reached the gate of the Moamariya Monastery the Mahanta’s eldest son Gagini Deka Mahanta alias Suptabhuj, greeted the monarch with two hundreds trays of presents. The usual procedure required the previous sanction of the Barbarua on every occasion when one proposed to offer presents to the Monarch, but it could not be followed as the king would pass the Mahanta’s gate if one had to wait for the arrival of the Barbarua. The Deka Phukan obtained the permission of the Baruas and Phukan who formed the personal guard of the king, The Barbarua on reaching the monastery gate was greeted with 80 trays of presents. 13

The Barbarua became highly incensed when he heard that the king had been approached without his permission and caused four blows to be inflicted on Gagini Deka Mahanta.\textsuperscript{14}

Another example can be given in this occasion. When Atan Burahgohain assumed the power of appointing and dismissing Phukans, the Deka Phukan commented at the dopdar of Guwahati: “The Swargadeo alone can dismiss or appoint a Phukan. It is against the rules of propriety that Phukans should be dismissed and appointed by a Phukan or a Minister. I have been dismissed to-day, and you will be dismissed to-morrow. Who is he to carry on dismissals and appointments in this manner?” \textsuperscript{15}

Here, it must be mentioned that ultimately it was because of the conflict between Barphukan and Burhagohain which led to the invasion of the Burmese and complete ruination of the Ahom kingdom and subjugation of Assam to the British territory.

So, it was necessary for the part of the Ahom kings to check the growth of nobility at the cost of Monarchy. Instead of doing so the incompetent rulers of the last century led to the division of power and power struggle between powerful nobility.

It can be well compared to the Maratha empire, when the Maratha kings - the successors of Sivaji became puppet in the hands of the Peshwas and led to the division of power between Schindhia, Gaikwad, Holkar and Bhonsie, which gave the -

\textsuperscript{14} Moniram Dewan’s Ms Assam Buranji as quoted by Bhuyan S.K. Anglo Assamese Relation. p 205 (1975)
\textsuperscript{15} CHA. VOLL III P 9
British an opportunity to acquire control over them. In fact that was the scene of all regional powers in the wake of British domination in India.

In the last century after nearly 400 years of their domination, in the last quarter of the 17th century a new theory of sacrosanct kingship developed. Monarchy being “divine in origin”, the person of the monarch must be free from any blemish, natural or artificial or accidental.

Such a theory was unthinkable among war-like people as that of the Ahoms. Many like the Naria Raja, Gargayan Raja (1539-53), the Dihingia Raja continued as kings notwithstanding being wounded during wars with the Muslims. Khora Raja (1552-1603) ascended the throne inspite of his lameness. Naturally the theory of blemish is not corroborated by the Tai-Ahom chronicles or Assamese Buranji. As the throne became the cock-pit of rival princes, an unscrupulous aspirant could disqualify all other likely candidates by mutilation. The slightest blemish (e.g. ear-splitting) could bar the aspirant from ascending the throne. The theory was propagated with an ulterior motive under Lora Raja (1679-81). He began a reign of terror by killing or maiming rival princes 16

Due to the growing Hinduism a lot of ceremonies and rites took the lion share of the administration and the Monarch. For example; the royal coronation ceremony was celebrated with great sanctity, pomp, merriment and feasts for several days. The rituals including the days of festivities, varied from time —

16. ARR, 12; Scott in Account, xxv, n; Barbarua, 410-4.
— to time. The ceremony would not be deemed complete unless accession was followed by ascending the *Singarighar* which ‘established’ him as king.

Again the traditional account, as given in the Ahom *Buranjis*, is that the king, mounting a gold *howdah* on a tusked elephant, went to the temple of the tutelary god, *Chomdeo* (*Somdeo*). Thereafter suspending the God’s image from his neck, the king returned and ascended the throne in the initiating chamber (*Singarighar*), where he used to admit the chanting of benedictory hymns of priests (*Bailung* and *Brahman*), volleys of cannon, beating of drums and other instruments, which was followed by incantations of *Deodhais*.

Then, leaving the image within the chamber the king came out to receive the homage of the officials. *Somdeo* image (*Chung*), suspended from his neck, the *ancestral hangdan* on his waist and wearing a turban decorated with the feathers of the sacred bird *Deo-kukura* (*kai sheng*), the king was accompanied by his chief officers a large section of the army and a vast populace.

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17. AB, 11-3,130,144-5,236-7,243-9; 301-24; Satsari, 118, 131-2; TB, 8, 45-8, 91; Hamilton, 17-8; BVR, ii 61-70; 87-90; 301-24; Sadar Amin, 20; Barbarua, 410-4.

18. The first ceremony of the coronation was performed at the Pat-ghar (lit. a throne-house); the house with a timber platform. The final or formal enthronement was held at the Singari-ghar or the house of singari tree. Description: BVR, 87-9. A king not performing this final ceremony was not held to be a full-fledged king, but merely a ‘Suleng Raja.’

19. Among the Ahoms there were three classes of priests according to function. (i) The Deodhais worshipped the gods; (ii) the Bailungs made divinations, and (iii) the Mohans arranged the worship.
There was a tradition of planting a tree by new monarch. After that the royal couple successively came to three different chang-ghar* set up for the purpose of coronation. They first entered the Ptaghars, where the presiding priest poured water on them from a shell, the Daksinavarta sarikha. Then they entered the Holong-ghar, (house made of holong wood) obeisance chamber and set on a stage made of bamboos. The water form nine tirthas of holy places, stored in a golden vessel containing the infusions of two medicinal plants (e.g., the sarvosadhi and mahausadhi) was poured over the royal couple by the royal priests — the Brahmans and the Bailungs and the water fell on the living beings placed under the bamboo platform, (a man, an elephant, a horse, a cow, a deer, a hog, a fowl, a duck, a snake, an insect, a fish etc). After the bath the kings used to kill a man (usually a criminal sentenced to death) with the hangdan before 1696 and thereafter a buffalo in conformity to the prohibitory order of Rudra Simha. Thereafter the royal couple proceeded to the Singari-ghar, a house of singari wood (coronation chamber) where the formal enthronement took place. Here the king ascended the throne (Singhasan) of gold, consisting of seven stages. The nobles walked seven times round the sovereign who then received the homage of his nobles, officials, —

Barbara (412-3) refers to a fourth house, the Pani-ghar for storage of water and auspicious articles according to Ahom and Hindu customs.

Hamilton's account of the ceremony (17-8) clearly indicates the change therein due to Hindu influence and lapse of time. Gait and Barbarua have followed him, though the latter occasionally differs. All hold the view that the king ascended the throne in the Singan-ghar, though the Pat-ghar was etymologically the proper place for it. P. Gogoi (545) holds that the Pat-ghat was added later for the coronation (abhisek) of the Hinduised rulers got priority over the other two houses.
the Deodhais, Brahman gurus, Hindu pandits, different subjects, feudatory chiefs and their envoys. This was accompanied by exchange of presents.

After the coronation the name of the king was written by the Majindar (Majumdar) on silk with a pen of gold and announced to all present. Next, the enthronement was followed by ploughing of the land by the king just to illustrate the dignity of labour, as royal princes lived by cultivation. Generally a new king issued coins after enthronement, but he could do so even before.  

The conception of the King's position and duties was a compound of old Tai and Hindu ideas. The king was Chaopha to the Ahoms and Swarga-narayan-deva, abbreviated into Swarganarayan, Swargadeva or Swaragadeo (God of heaven) to the Hindus, meaning the Heavenly king. He was also called Swargi-rala or Swarga-maharaja. These titles threw a divine image to the king and bore the influence of the legendary descent from heaven. His position became sacrosanct and inviolable due to Hindu influence. In the early days of Ahom rule it was customary during the coronation ceremony for the Ahom to recite the heroic deeds of earlier kings by the Siring (Chiring) Phukan. The three great Councilors (Dangaria) after paying homage to the new king at the installation ceremony, used to instruct and guide the king in the —

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20. Fathiyya, 56; BVR, 310. Suklenmung (1539-52) was the first Ahom ruler to issue coins. For different views infra 150f.
21. Chao or deo (deva) means a god or king (or any great man); Hpa or pha, Swaraga, means heaven. TB, 244-5; Charless Drekmeier, Kingship and Community in India, 251; Account, 68; Gait, 242.
— observance of the principles of traditional laws of the Ahoms and the Code of Langdon.

However, there is no reference in extant Tai-Ahom literature to any coronation oath of the Ahom king. It was due to the growing influence of Hinduism among the Ahom rulers of Assam. Yet the initiation ceremony does not seem to have been modified to provide for a formal coronation oath. Thus the conception of royal duties reflected two streams of thought: the traditional, was of the Ahoms and the Code of Lengdon, and the political ideology of the Hindus. Both harped on the same tune.

The keynote of both was the same; the king’s happiness lay in that of the people. The fundamental objective of kingship being protection: the king must exercise his supreme authority to ensure security of life, property and faith (morality) of the people. All other duties became subsidiary. A fairly exhaustive account of the duties and functions of the king is available in the ‘injunctions’ or ‘instructions’ given to him at his coronation by the Councilors.²²

Though absolute, the kings consulted all his Patramantris. Barphukan, Barbarua, the Meldagia rajas, Datiyaliya Gohain, and Karataliya rajas (tributary) in the court and acted on their advice in important matters. Thus the monarchy in Assam was absolute in form but limited in practice.

However, in our subsequent study we are trying to trace how far these objects were fulfilled by the Ahom Monarchs. How deviations of these principles led to the dissatisfaction of the subject.

²². Account, 3-4; also reproduced in Alan, 13-4, in Gait, 243.
The king was the head of the executive, judiciary and the army. As 'the first executive officer of the state', he exercised supreme authority over all departments, and presided over the important ones. He was above all, and the head of the royal court. But he could do nothing without the approval of the three Patramantries. He was the source of all offices, civil and military; of all honours and titles. He could distribute these after consulting his ministers even without their concurrence.

Under the powerful kings like Pratap Simha, Gadadhar Simha and Rudra Simha, the ministers were powerless. But princes, raised to the throne by the ministers were mere puppets. An all-powerful Gohains or Ministers often acted as kingmakers whether constitutional or not. The ministers deposed and even executed kings on grounds of misgovernment and oppression. 24

Thus, that practice took the erroneous turn in the last century of their administration as it led to the rise of aristocracy in unprecedented way.

The royal household formed a kingdom within a kingdom. The king was not only the hub of the administrative system; he was also the head of a vast family,

23. Appointments and dismissals were made according to a specified procedure. On being informed of the appointment in succession to the previous incumbent the new appointee had to express his gratitude and take an oath of allegiance with promise of efficient work. Dismissals were also arranged by the Melinda Barua through a BarkâKati in case of the Dangarias, ordinary messengers in cases of petty officer. Sadar Amin, 123-4; Satsari 212-3.

which included members of his own household, wives and sons as well as other close relations. Inevitably for the smooth running of the household the services of a large number of attendants or servants, male and female were indispensably required. This large multitude of human beings, kings and queens, wives and concubines, princes and princesses, the male and female attendants were maintained out of public funds and assigned estates called Mels. As the importance of the Mels was determined by the rank and status of the beneficiary, their management needed the services of numerous Paiks and officers. 25

The male beneficiaries were usually entitled Raja and named after the particular place. Thus, the Charingia Mel, the Tipamia Mel, the Namrupia Mel, the Maju and Saru Mel were usually assigned to the sons, brothers and nephews of the kings. Each of the first three had both a Phukan and a Barua, to look after the khel and the area. The last two had only a Barua for the respective Mel.

The Ahom kings were polygamous and maintained several queens and other women. Some royal spouses were assigned Mels or estates but others were maintained out of the royal stores (bhandar, bharal). But one and all held a position of honour in their respective quarters and had a staff of attendants (ligiras, ligiris).

25. NBP.122; Gohain, 119-21; Gait (3) 244; T.B, 242-4, XXX. Barbarua, 430-433, 560, 564-6, 265. ibid.
The different grades of the ladies had their respective dresses and paraphernalia. Their Mels and khels were administered by their respective Phukan and Barua. The Chief Queen (Barkunwari) naturally enjoyed a higher status than the other queens. She was the recipient of royal respects from all subjects and nobles. She was allotted the Raidangia Mel or estate for her maintenance, and it was placed under the Raidangia Phukan and Raidangia Barua who supervised all affairs of the Mel and the relevant khel. The second queen (Parbatiya Kunwari) had the Parbatiya Mel for her maintenance, administered by the Parbatiya Phukan and Parbatiya Barua who looked after the affairs of the Mel and the khel.26

The third in rank was the Purani-melia kunwari (queen). She was given an estate, called the Purani-mel27 (old Mel). It was managed by a Barua only. Again the kings had queens called Mahi kunwaris who enjoyed Mahi Mel, not for life but only during the life of their royal husbands.28

26. Bhuyan opines (TB, 243) that the first Parvatia Kunwari was Kuranganayani, wife of Rajesvar Simha, being the daughter of the king of Manipur situated among hills. But he referred to Parvatta Kunwari, queen of Gadadhar Simha and 'Draupadi Parvatia Kunwari' of Siva Simha. Ibid., paras 38, 70.
27. The same scholar (TB, 243) implies that the Purani-melia queen was the queen of the reigning king. But this does not square with the meaning of the term 'old'. So the writer has accepted the interpretation of Barbarua. Her status might have been third, as suggested by the editor.
28. The Mahi Mels were allotted not only to the mahi Kunwaris but also to sons and were administered by Mahi Melia Phukan and Mahimelia Barua along with the connected khels. Towards the end of Purandar's reign the mel was given to Ishwar Gohain Deo. Barbarua, p 565.
The estate, assigned to the reigning king’s mother, Rajmao deuta, was the Rajmao mel or Khangia mel, managed by a Khangia Phukan and Khangia Barua. The king’s daughters, sisters, nieces, daughters-in-law (aideos, gabhanis) were maintained out of the Gobharu Mel, managed by a Barua only. 29

To look after these large numbers of Mels, some specific Pikes were allotted. Increasing need of these Mel with rising number compelled the administration to exploit more working force. For example, during the time of Pramatta Simha (1744-1751) census carried on in Kamrup under the guidance of Kirtichandra Barbarua 30. Before the Moamariya uprising the Paik system newly organized under the instruction of Kirtichandra Barbarua. The new system made a “got” (unit of Paik) of three people. By this system the Paik had to render service in a period of four months instead of three months in a year. It made the discontentment intense among the people.

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. 31 Among this twenty four lakh two hundred forty thousand (2.5lakh) were slave 32. Kanri Paik was more than fifteen lakh in number. Chamua, Apaikan Chamua Nobility, high caste Brahmin, Kayastha were six lakh in number.—

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29. Ibid, 564-5.
30. Bhuyan S. K. Swargadeu Rajesvar Simha 1975
32. Ibid
— Among this six lakh, the privileged class of nobility, religious leader and high cast ruling number not more than twenty four thousand. This small number of twenty four thousand people of privileged class concentrated the lion share of Paik (2.5 lakh in number) and largest area of land.\textsuperscript{33}

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 normal situation, twenty-seven or twenty eight percentage of common people lived under a kind of compulsory production system for the nobility, king and the state. This system greatly favored the upper section only at the cost of the common people's inconvenience.

In distribution of the different important posts the Ahoms maintained a policy - "to treat power as a family heirloom", i.e. to safeguard the primacy of the different Ahom families, clans, or folds. Truly does S.K. Bhuyan observe: "the representation of the different Ahom families was an important factor in the grant of appointments. Not only the king but even his councilors, principal officers and the priests came from specified families... ———

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid
...— The selection of the king was confined to the six families: Charingia, Dihingia, Namrupia, Samaguria, Parvatia and Tungkhungia. The dangarias too, were selected from particular families or clans. The priests came from the Deodhais, Bailungs, Mohuns and Chirings...". 

The expansion of the kingdom created problem which could not be solved except by centralization of authority, though not over centralization. Pratap Simha had to create two new high offices of Barphukan and Barbarua, next to the Gohains. These offices were not hereditary as those of the three Gohains. 

An Ahom minister or officers were allotted separate areas or vilayets. The entire departmental works of the specific area were under them. So, formerly Assam was administered by ministerial councils. It is usually said that below the king there was an aristocratic body of the Patramanti of five Gohains to help him. This was not, however, the case throughout. The body evolved through several stages.

Originally, Sukapha, the first Ahom king, had only two principal Gohains, the Bargohain as the Mahamantri or Prime Minister, and the Burahgohain. The office of the third, the Barpatra Gohain was created, after nearly three centuries, by Suhummung alias the Dihingia Raja (1497-1538). The two other offices, the Barbarua and the Barphukan were added still later by Susengpha alias Pratap Simha (1603-41). 

34. As quoted by J.N. Sarar in CHA VOLL III 1994 P 15.
35. Account, 71; Hamilton, 19; Gohain, 101-Gait (1963), 246; Sadar Amin, 119; 39 (gives date of creation 1538 Saka (1616-7).
36. Ibid, 1,56, 68-9; xxvi, Sadar Amin, 118; Barbarua, 419, 526-7; SMAB (para 59, xivi)
— to meet the need of a growing dominion. Thus the five-member constitution of the *Patramantri* represented the third or final stage in its evolution during 400 years.

The first three *Great Gohains* represented the permanent and hereditary Councilors of the state. They had the same rank though the Burahgohain position was the foremost. They held an exalted position. Their rank and status were hardly inferior to the king's. Indispensable were their counsel on all occasions and their concurrence on all important affairs. The possessed power of governance of the Councilors was proved during the two interregnums in Ahom history. In the first interregnum the Bargohain as the Prime Minister ruled during 1376-80 with the united concurrence of the Burahgohain and the Phukans and Baruas.

In the second interregnum 1689-97, the Bargohain acted improperly and was killed by the Burahgohain and the king.\(^{37}\) The Council of Three, later expanded into the Councilor of Five, may be regarded as the *Mantri Parishad* or a Cabinet.

It is, however, doubtful if the body had any collective responsibility, as the Barphukan was always away from the capital and there are example that a very powerful member could take initiative on his own and even against the king and his colleagues.

However, the Councilors were virtually ‘an assembly of elders’ and represented the aristocracy of the realm on account of their high lineage and connection with the royal family.

\(^{37}\) *AB*, 48-9; *Sadar Amin*, 16-7, *Account*, 57.
Commensurate with their privileged position and designations, they were called the *Dangarias*. They were given the important insignias in the court, and assigned ‘provinces’ in which they exercised most of the independent rights of sovereignty. Owing to their traditional equality in status, each was exclusively assigned about 3000 families of *paiks* who served as militia during war and as workman for public works. The Prime Minister had an additional 1000. It has already mentioned that for reasons of security, the kings customarily appointed the three Gohains (and all officers of trust and responsibility) from particular families of hereditary nobility, commanders and camp followers of Sukapha.

A Gohain’s son invariably succeeded his father unless found unfit. But, invariably all nominees must be descendants from Sukapha’s associates. A Gohain could be removed with the concurrence of the other two. At times, however, the king alone dismissed or even put a Gohain to death.\(^{40}\)

\(^{38}\) The king called them Dangarias, and they, too, spoke of themselves as ‘the paiks of Swargadeo’; Ager Din, p 146.

\(^{39}\) Satsari, 146-98; Account, 68; Sadar Amin, 95; Gait, 245. Thus the three Gohains together had 10,000 paiks (3x3000 + 1000) called Hatimuriyas (Gait 245). David Scott valued this manpower at the old rate Rs. 90,000 in Assam a year and this time in Bengal at ‘tripple’ the amount or Rs. 270,000 a year. (Account, 70) Beside the hatimurs they also had ‘desh’ but received no honorarium.

\(^{40}\) AB, 133; 149, 258, 266-7, 312, 335-6, 357; Account, 60, 70; SMAB, para 119.]Naria Raja (1644-8) deposed both the Burahgohain and Barpatra Gohain for disobedience. Jayadhvaj (1648-63) had the conspirational Bargohain executed while Gadadhar Simha (1681-95) dismissed an offending Burahgohain. When dismissed by royal orders, a Dangagria had the insignia of his office carried away by the Barkataki; Barbarua, 668. There were some exceptions in the strict order of succession from the original families of these three Councilors. Barbarua, 528-9.
However in the spun of time particularly in their last century the incompetent rulers failed to check the ambitious Dangarias.

Lakshmi Simha reign (1769-80) witnessed the quick rise in the fortunes of Kalita Choladhara Phukan alias Kekeru Hazarika due to his adoration of the king and his equality sudden downfall for total neglect towards the Dangarias.41

As a matter of fact the Ahom nobility disliked the idea to provide high post to someone not belong to Satgharia Ahom. They always reacted critically each time when a person belongs to non-Ahom and non-Satgharia fraction got importance in the royal house or in administration. These all gave some pretext to the general people of divergent groups to extend support to the rebellious Moamariya.

The functions of these officers would show that the Ahoms did neither believe in distinction between the central and the provincial governments, between the separation of civil and military departments, nor in the doctrine of separation of powers.

The Barbarua, whose office was created in 1621, held jurisdiction over the central region of the dominion or the Upper Provinces from Sadiya in the east to Kaliabar (in Nagaon dt.) in the west including north Darrang, Golaghat, Nagaon and Raha except the areas under the Gohains and the princely states or the Meldagia Rajas. His headquarters were first at Garhagon and then Rangpur. As head of the executive he served as the chief Secretary. As the principal revenue officer, he received the revenues of the state and controlled all revenue officials.

41. SMAB, xii, TB, paras 132, 138, 151-82.
The Barbarua also collected fines from criminals. If the Barbarua chanced to be the Rajmantri, he could inflict punishments like the Dangarias. The usual ‘checks and balances’ also marked his office. Though head of the executive and the judiciary, he could not act independently of the Gohains. Besides his civil functions, he had also military powers, also usually commanded the forces with 14,000 paiks.\(^{42}\)

The Barbarua had an advisory council of six trusted Phukans, living in his court and collectively called Chorar Phukans or Choruwa Phukans. Each Phukan collected royal revenues in the shape of articles and each had a guild of paiks of particular professions. This body consisted of the following:

*Naobaicha Phukan,* -who manned the royal boats,*Bhitarual Phukan,* -in charge the palace of guards in the royal palaces,*Na Phukan,* -created by Rudra Simha (1696-1714), guarding nine gates of the capital,*Dihingia Phukans,* - in charge of Dihing territory,*Deka Phukans;* there were two such, at Garhgaon (or Gargayan, later at Rangpur) and at Guwahati (Dopdaria),*Neog Phukan,* - in charge of ordinary soldiers and their commanders (Neogs). They were two such, one at Garhgaon (later at Rangpur) under the Barbarua and staying in his *Chora;* and the other at Guwahati under the Barphukan.

If *Barbarua* was the Viceroy of Eastern or Upper Assam, the *Barphukan* was that of Western or Lower Assam.—

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42. Report of Welsh and Scott's observation, Account, 71; Satsari, 199, 210; Hamilton, 19; Gait (1963), 264-8; Settlements in Bassa, Dayang and Nagaon etc. Sadar Amin 96;119, Confusion about perquisties, TB, xxvii, Barbarua, 418, 529-31
— Originally the jurisdiction of the Barphukan was confined to the area between the Brahmaputra and Kallang with headquarters at Kajali and Kaliabar in Nagaon District.

With the conquest of Lower Assam his charge swelled to include the whole area from Kaliabar to Kamrup, Darrang, Nagaon and the Duars of the Dakhinkol, i.e. Kaliabar to Goalpara on the Mughal frontier and his headquarters was shifted to Guwahati for strategic reasons. He was assisted in the south of Guwahati by the Dihingia Phukan and Chetiya Phukan and in the north by the Pani Phukan, Deka Phukan, Chetiya Phukan (at times as required).

The Barphukan was the supreme military commander of both land and water forces in Lower Assam, and defender of whole Western Assam from Kaliabar and Darrang, and saddled with maintaining diplomatic relations with Bengal, Bhutan, the Assam frontier chieftains or neighboring rajas.43

The Barphukan’s office, though created later, grew to be of more importance than that of Barbarua. Another factor contributed to his virtual independent status was the distance of his headquarters from the royal capital. The ‘customary control’ of the Barphukan was chabuk (whip) or chamta, dhum (club), mutilation of nose and ears. Though blood-shedding was a royal prerogative, the Barphukan could inflict death sentence —

43. Jayantia and Cachar were friendly but subordinate allies of Assam, the first two accepted through centuries old usages, while Manipur and Khyrim were in friendly alliance. TB, xxviii.
— on thieves, dacoits and traitors according to situation and execute it by drowning or clubbing like the Gohains. He had merely to ask the buruk to execute the order. Appeals from his judgements were hardly practicable and made only on very important occasions. Thus the Barphukan managed his affairs in his jurisdiction 'more or less as an autonomous governor.44

The Civil Departments of the state were supervised by about twelve Phukans and twenty Baruas, selected from nine families of hereditary nobility. They were responsible only to the king. They could be elevated to the highest posts. The aboriginal inhabitants (i.e. non-Ahom natives) of Assam were eligible only in non-military offices that also confined among the higher classes only.45

Foreign immigrants were excluded but their descendants in the third or fourth generations only i.e. those absorbed or assimilated in the country were regarded eligible.

Upto 1772, all Phukanships were monopolised by members of Ahom families. Later non-Ahom Phukans came first from the Kalita Bhuyans and also from the Brahman Kakatia family, both as rewards for loyal services to the crown. Muslims came to be employed later on in some state departments for their skill in deciphering and interpreting Persian documents, in curving inscriptions on copper plates or other —

44.Account, 7; BVR, 77, 86-8; Sadar Amin, 96, 119-20; Gait (1963), 246-7; Barbarua, 529-31.
45.The Civil Departments included Arts, Sciences, Trade, Public Revenues, officers of the Royal Household and various other departments. Wade vi-ix, Account, 71-2, and xxvi, Gait (1963) 248, TB xxx; Barbarua, 67
— Matels, minting of coins, in embroidery, painting, carpentry, manufacturer of swords, guns and of gunpowder. Muslim religious preachers were given revenue - free lands, usually designated as *pirpal* lands.

The Phukans[^46] were at the apex of the officialdom. These were of two kinds: *Charua Phukan* or *Charar Phukans* and *Chamua Phukans*. They were recruited from Ahoms, later on from Brahmans, Kayasthas and Kalitas. Besides, there was the Nyayashodha Phukan, who stationed in the capital and represented the king only in his absence in the administration of justice, in the palace and the fort. The Nyayashodha Phukan not only assisted the Barbarúa, as a member of his Council but heard appeals from the Barbarua and the Barphukan[^47]. He thus enjoyed a very high rank. The post was completely prerogative of the blue section of the Ahoms.

The Baruas ranked next to the Phukan. They were heads of departments or *khels* or mels which had no Phukan or the deputies or second officers of departments under Phukans.^[48]*

The Rajkhowas exercised jurisdiction over the territories, grouped under twelve Rajas outside those under the three frontier governors.

[^46]: A word of Ahom origin, meaning ‘gentleman’ from a khel or a met, whose strength varied up to 5000 men., according to importance of the unit. TB, 343.

[^47]: Account, 72; and Scott’s comment in ibid; He is sometimes described as a ’Chief Judicial Magistrate’; Buranjis, 207; His appellate authority, however, would entitle him to a higher status.

[^48]: In the Chittagong there were many people with the title of Barua. But their origin is non-Assamses.
They were given the task of governing a specific area or a unit of paiks, collecting revenues and arrangement of local administration. 49

In addition, there were several miscellaneous officers. Of these the Katakis may be described as court messengers or envoys of the Ahom Government (Rajdoot). Kakatis served as writers, scribes, surveyors or as accountants, in effect as clerks. Dolois of Dalais were astrologers. 50

The Neogs were used in a variety of services, military and civil. 51 The office of the Court-Pandit was created by Rudra Simha. He used to advise the king in matters of dispensing punishments according to Hindu law.

The government adopted the same principle and adjustment in dealing with the several frontier kingdoms, outlying areas and numerous tribes which surrounded Assam. For this purpose the government harnessed the services of several agencies: the frontier governors; the Chakial governors, the Melkhowa rajas. With the gradual expansion of the kingdom, three local frontier governors were appointed by the king at strategic places, known as Datiyallya Gohains, corresponding to ‘Political Agents’. They were governors, commanders of armies, judges and advisers of the king.

They enjoyed a status lower than the three Dangarias. Between them, they had the same honour but with some difference in respective articles. They were on par with the Barbarua and the Barphukan —

49. AB, 44-6; Account, 73; Hamilton, 72; BVR, ii, 87; Sadar Amin, 121; Martin, iii, 614; Barbarua, 542-3.
50. The term doloi was also applied to the superintendent of a temple and a headman of Jayantia and Khasi tribes.
51. Gogoi, 211.
but exercised less power and had not power to inflict capital punishment. As a security against rebellion, the frontier governor had to be relatives of the Gohains at the capital, the first two from the family of the Burahgohain and the third from that of the Bargohain.\footnote{52}

In conducting foreign and frontier policy the Ahoms pursued certain traditional principles prescribed in sacred texts. Four ways of political conduct were laid down: sam, dan, danda and bheda. These respectively mean conciliation through equality in status; gift or presents, of protected i.e. subordinate feudatory status; punishment where necessary, which implies division; and rupture, implying a wedge among neighbours.

Thus, it has been clear that the very nature of the administration of the Ahom created a kind of feudalistic caricature in all the level. Practically, the executive was not separated from judiciary and revenue. It gave birth a top heavy administrative structure. It was not conducive to the common people. Being the Paik of the particular nobility or royal officer or councilor he had to provide him free service under a particular khel, had to group under him for military purpose, pay revenue and other taxes to him or to the state through him, and primarily he had to get justice from the same officer or councilor only, (appeal to high authority was very rarely opted by the common subjects). Thus the subject's prime obligation was to those officers, councilor or to the noble only.

\footnote{52: Sadar Amin, 95, 119; Barbarua, 420, 534-6; 546; 546: Welsh (Account, 74) characterises the creation of these three Gohians as the principal legal alteration of the original system.}
The well beings of the subjects greatly depended on the nature and policy of those officers, councilor or the noble. The Ahom Monarchy followed certain basic policy in their administration which in course of time created tension and dissatisfaction among the common people. The concept of Ahom and Non-Ahom fraction worked very badly in local as well as central administration.

The family basis of the Ahom administrative system served as a great integrating force in the initial centuries. However, the coming of Hinduism and related cast superiority complex had negative impact over the administration. The so called pure Ahom fraction even insulted Kirtichandra Ghandela as Jalambata or fake Ahom as he did not belonged to the pure group of Ahoms. The attitude towards the Non-Ahom officers who rose to the higher post through his competency was always critical by the blue section of Ahoms. There were some taboo in the Ahom Monarchy like Gadadhar Simha in his death bed advised to his son Saruk bar bab nicfibi (Do not give the high post to the low one). In the entire administration though the Ahom assimilated so many aboriginal group together, they always maintained a kind of superior outlook. That was in fact was necessary in the administration in the initial years and it worked well in those centuries but it needed changes with the change of time basically, in the time of Neo-Vaisnavite movement which started with the concept of equality. But the Ahom Monarchy along with the reactionary section continued with their so called superior and distinct outlook and gradually became isolated from the progressive minded Ahom section as well from the general people. Hinduisation gave them only a subordinate-
Thus; they were in a paradoxical position with a self made pride; as of “divine origin”, but in practically had subordinate position lower to Brahmana and isolated from the rest of the subjects. Keeping the key posts of administration among the pure section of the Ahoms, they left the room for the other groups to form a new section with superior religious orientation. Thus the conflict was inevitable.

The predomination of nobility is the most striking feature of the Ahom administration. The late 18th century the entire Monarchy was run according to the whims of the powerful section of Nobility.

The entire administrative machinery faced the result of that. It resulted tension and confusion among the common people. In the presence of too many strong figures in the administration it was quite difficult for them to maintain a balance of loyalty between the Monarch and the so called powerful Dangaria. It affected the Paik and the khels systems as well

Thus the high handedness of the aristocratic class in the administration, its feudalistic nature, new theory of sacrosanct kingship, fractional concept of Ahom and Non-Ahom, atrocities of the corrupted officers, and extreme religious percolation in administration created the discontent and unrest among the subjects.