CHAPTER III

Social Units and Administrative Divisions

1. Social Units:

(a). The Family or the Home:

The Hindus generally live in a joint family. As the Hindu Society is usually patriarchal, the father is naturally the head of the family. In Assam, almost all the people live in joint families with the father as the head. There are some tribes belonging to the non-Aryan stocks, who follow the matriarchal system; but we are not very much concerned with them here. The joint family means all the members of it are of 'Sapinda' relations having direct blood relationship. In such a family, so long the father or the head man lives, he is the owner of the property as well as the leader of the members of the family and represent them in all social, political and religious matters or functions of the Society. In absence of the father or at his death, if the family members remain in the same family, the headship goes to the eldest son and if they break into separate families or homes the procedure follows as usual, that is, the father becomes the head of the new family.

The family members live in some houses within a homestead or compound, generally within the boundary of a village (if not a town) which is called a 'home' or a 'family', the Assamese equivalents of which are respectively 'ghar' or 'pariyal'. The terms 'ghar' and 'pariyal' are derived from the sanskrit terms 'grha' and 'parivara' respectively. The term 'ghar' is a specific term, but in the sense of a family it is used as generic also.
(b). Family Members:

As stated above, in a family all the members of the 'Sapinda' relations, viz., the father, the mother, the sons, the daughters, the daughters-in-law, the grandsons and the grand-daughters, all of them live together. In addition to them, sometimes, the domesticated son-in-law, i.e., a son-in-law who lives at the father-in-law's house, with his wife, is also a member of the family, at his own will or at the request of his father-in-law or mother-in-law. Besides, there were slaves or servants, both male or female, in the aristocratic families. In the families of the higher officials, the number of such slaves were larger in those days. In those days, it was the custom of the higher officials to marry more than one wife, at least two or three. Naturally the number of children in such a family would be greater. The Ahom kings had at least two Chief queens known as 'Parbatia-Kuwari' and 'Haidangia-Kuwari' and many other queens of subordinate rank, known as 'Chamu-Kuwari'.

(c). Domestic Animals:

In an Assamese family or a home, along with the members of the family, animals and birds are also domesticated. The Assamese people, specially in those days, were mainly agriculturists; therefore, the domestic animals were an integral part of their daily life. The most important domestic animals which the Assamese people cannot part with is the cow, गाय. Then comes the buffalo, the elephant, the horse, the goat, the pig, the dog, the cat etc. Amongst the domestic birds, mention may be made of ducks, geese, hen, pigeon etc. Some of the Assamese families particularly the aristocratic ones, as a hobby or for recreation, reared peacock, deer, mongoose, rabbit, parrot, मामा, सालिका—
and many others. The birds like parrot, Mainā, Sālikā etc. were taught to imitate the speech of man. In the literary records, we have sufficient references of such domesticated birds, which, we think, it is needless to quote here. The important animals, viz., the cow, and the buffalo were engaged in agricultural and transport work. The horse and the elephant are also used in transport work and at the time of war they were used in various works, besides fighting with the enemies by riding on them. The dog served them as a guard in their homes and also accompanied their masters into the jungles or in the huntings. The cat drives away or kills some common enemies, viz., the mouse, snake, and other small insects. The mongoose were reared, as it is the best enemy of the snake. The elephant, horse and buffalos were costlier animals and only the rich people could afford to keep them in their homes. The aristocratic people used horses while going from one place to another; almost all the officials and the nobles of the country maintained horses to use as riding vehicle. Further, horses were engaged in carrying urgent news from one place to another. Only the members of the royal families and the officials of the higher rank could afford to maintain elephants.

The milk of buffalos, cows and goats are used as food. They prepare from the milk of the cows and the buffalos, curd, ghee, cream and other foods. The meat of goat, pigeon and duck are taken by all people. The hill and the tribal people, besides these, eat the meat of pig, hen, cows and of many other animals and birds. When dead, the hides of the cows and buffalos are used in making instruments, specially musical, and weapons. In short, an Assamese family cannot be thought of without some domestic animals and birds.
(d). The Home:

Every Assamese family lives in some houses constructed within a
planned compound or homestead which is generally called in Assamese
'akhan ghar', i.e., a home and this is the smallest social unit of the
Assamese Society. The number of houses and their designs and gorgeousness
have varied according to the rank and status of the families in those
days. A family of lower rank or a poor family could not certainly have
afforded to erect a number of houses for comfort and pleasure of the
family like the higher officers or the aristocratic families. Some of the
patterns and designs of constructing houses were strictly reserved for the
royal families only and were strictly forbidden to other people, even if
they could afford financially to construct houses of such designs or
patterns. The unit of such a family living in some houses within a compound,
taking all together, is called an 'ekhan ghar', or 'eghar mānuh' (a household).
In case of a higher official, a high Brahmā or Mahānta who maintain larger
number of houses and people, including attendants, such a home was called
a 'hāuli' or a 'tol'. The place, where the king and the queen lived with
the members of their family and attendants, was called 'Kareng', a word of
Ahom origin. The places where the high ranking Vaisnavite preceptors live
with their disciples are called 'Satra' or 'Thān'. The Muffossil camp of
a king or a high ranking Vaisnavite preceptor was called 'Bāhar'. About
'Kareng' (royal palace) and 'Satra' of a Vaisnavite preceptor, we will try
to discuss in detail in subsequent chapters. In Assamese, when we speak
of an unit of family as 'eghar mānuh', or 'ekhan ghar', or a 'hāuli', or a
'tol', it includes the whole compound with all its houses and living
beings.
The minimum number of houses, constructed by the family for their use, are the 'Chorā-ghar', the 'Maral-ghar' and the 'Bar-ghar'. The 'Chorā-ghat' is an outer house like modern drawing room, constructed for the purpose of sitting and receiving guests. Next to the 'Chorā-ghat' comes the 'Maral-ghar'. This is also an outer house used by the members of the family for sitting and working purpose and the female members generally receive their female guests here; some times sleeping accommodations are also made here. The 'Bar-ghar' is the main house of the family where sleeping accommodation for the headman and others and arrangements for keeping valuable things are made. Almost all the families had these three houses. Next to these three houses, there are the 'Hāndhani-ghar' (the kitchen), the 'Nām-ghar' or 'Gosāin-ghar' (a house for daily prayer or worship), the 'Gohāli-ghar' (a cow-shed), the 'Dhekī-sāl' (a shed where a paddle is kept for husking the paddy) and the 'Bhāral-ghar' (a granary or a store-house where the paddy or crops for the consumption of the family for the whole year is kept in store). Every family of the higher rank and status, including high Brāhmaṇas and Mahantas, had a 'Bāṭ-chorā', a shed at the gate, indicating the dignity or aristocracy and importance of the family. We will discuss about the materials of construction of the houses in a subsequent chapter. In the Medieval period, all the important people had more or less all these houses, mentioned above, but they were not very much conscious about the designs or permanency of the houses; importance was given only at the construction of the 'Bar-ghar', making it well-constructed and more strong, so that, no thief or robber could break into it. The houses of the nobles in the capital and the Royal palace, were built with beautiful designs and with great care. We will discuss about their constructions elsewhere in the book. The brick-built palaces and houses in the capital were introduced
only towards the later part of the Ahom rule, particularly from the reign of king Rudra Singha. Formerly, the royal palace and the great audience Hall, called 'Halong' were constructed of timber, the beauty and the marvellous workmanship of which greatly charmed the Mohammedan writer Shihabuddin, who came to Assam with Mirjumla, in 1662. About the audience Hall Shihabuddin writes: "The Rajas audience hall, called Solang (Halong), is 120 cubits long and 30 cubits broad, measured on the inside, it stands on 66 pillars, each of them about four cubits round. They have smoothed these huge pillars so well, that at first sight they seemed to have been turned on a lathe. Though the people pretended to have the art of turning on lathes, yet reason refuses to believe it. My pen fails to describe in detail the other arts and rare inventions, employed in decorating the woodwork of this palace. Probably nowhere else in the whole world can wooden houses be built with such decoration and figure-carving as by the people of this country. The sides of this palace have been partitioned into wooden lattices of various designs carved in relief, and adorned, both within and outside, with mirrors of brass, polished so finely that when sunbeams fall on them, the eye is dazzled by the flashing back of light. This mansion was completed by 12,000 men working for one year. .......... As for the many other wooden mansions - carved, decorated, strong, broad and long, which were inside the palace enclosure, their elegance and peculiar features can better be seen than described." About other mansions and houses of the nobles, Shihabuddin further writes: "outside the enclosure of the palace, a perfectly neat and pure mansion has been built for the residence of the Raja; and the nobles have built very nice and strong houses near the royal palace. ..... owing to the excess of damp, it is not the custom in
GROUND PLAN
A TYPICAL OF ASSAMESE HOMESTEAD

ORCHARD

BANDHANI GHAR

BAR GHAR

BACH CHOTAL (INNER COURT YARD)

CHORA GHAR

GHAT CHOTAL (OUTER COURT YARD)

GOHALLI GHAR

BHARAL GHAR

GOSAIN GHAR

PULKHURI (TANK)
this country to make the courtyard of houses on the surface of the ground; but they built their houses on the platforms resting on wooden pillars. Brick-built houses were not much in vogue, perhaps, because of the frequent earthquakes in the country.

(e) The Bari (Compound or Homestead) :-

The Assamese word 'Bari' comes from the sanskrit term 'bāti' or 'bātikā' and it means the compound or homestead. Before constructing their houses, the people select a plot of high land for the purpose and hemmed it with fences on all the four sides raising walls of earth and digging drains. Then setting apart a portion of it for plantation of fruit-trees or orchard, bamboos, kitchen-garden, bathing tank, gate entrance etc., they constructed houses in a planned way. The system of making a planned compound and a planned village, was first introduced by the Chief executive officer, Momai Tamuli Barbarua, during the reign of the Ahom king Pratap Singha. In front of the houses, in every Assamese family, there is an open court-yard for the children to play on and the members of the family can also enjoy the open air. The kitchen-garden is unavoidable in every Assamese family. In his 'Eastern India', Martin mentions about this kitchen-garden possessed by every Assamese family. The nobles and aristocratic families of the towns had flower gardens within their compound. Shihabuddin, who accompanied Mirjumla, in his expedition against Assam, in 1662, witnessing the garden in the compound of the Barphukan, wrote: "The Barphukan, who was Raja's son-in-law, had laid out an extremely elegant and fresh garden, round a very pure and sweet tank, within the grounds of his mansion. Truly it was a pleasant spot and a heart ravishing and pure abode". As stated, the plot chosen for a
compound was comparatively a high land and the area of the plot, even in case of an ordinary people, is not less than a 'bighā' and in case of officers or men of high rank and status it goes up to 80 or 90 'bighās' of land or sometimes more than that, as can be surmised from the relics of the historical compounds lying scattered in the country. According to \textit{Robinson}, even the ordinary 'paiks' were granted from one and a half to two 'purās' of lands (8 bighās) for homestead.

(f). The Chuburi, Pārā and Kuchi (Suburb or a part of a village):-

The next social unit is called a 'Chuburi', a part of a village, where a few families live in close contact with each other. The word 'Chuburi' perhaps comes from the Arabic word 'Chuba'. The families, who live in a 'Chuburi', generally, are of the same caste and community; but sometimes families of different castes and communities also live in the same 'Chuburi'. The 'Chuburi' is a small part or a corner of a village. There is another term 'Pārā' of greater denotation that has been found prevailing since the Medieval period, which also means comparatively a larger part of a big village. The term 'Pārā' comes from the Sanskrit term 'Pāra', meaning side or a bank of a river. Another term 'Pātaka' is found used in the grants of the kings of ancient Kāmarupa, about which Dr. Choudhury observes: "Pātaka is usually taken to be a part of a village, or an outlying portion of a village, or a kind of hamlet, having a name of its own, but belonging to a larger village. This is confirmed by the 'Abhidhāna Cintāmani' which explains the term as half of a village (Pātakastu tadardhe syāt). That Pātaka constituted only a part of a village, is shown by the local grants ..." From the above discussions
we have sufficient reason to believe that the term 'Para' might have come from the term 'Pataka'. In the Medieval period, instead of the term 'Pataka', we find the frequent use of the term 'Para' or in concise form 'Par' with the exception of one word 'Daksinpar', the name of a chief Vaishnavite monastery in Assam. The sense in which the term 'Para' was used in the Medieval period as well as the sense in which it is used now, lead us to a conclusion that it was used to denote a part of a village. In upper Assam, instead of 'Para' the term is used in a concise way as 'Par'. There is a place called 'Bhatiapar', near modern Sibsagar, where the Ahom king allowed the people coming from the west (Bhati), i.e., from Kochbehar, to live. 'Bhatiapar' means the side or the part where the people coming from the west lived together. Likewise, the parts, where the Duara-Kakatis, the Chalihaa-Kakatis and the Tukaria-Kakatis live, in the modern Kakati village of Charing, in the Sibsagar Subdivision, are respectively called 'Duara-par', 'Chalihapar' and 'Tukariapar'. In the lower Assam, there are parts of village called 'Bamunpara' (part or side of a village where the Brahmanas live), 'Chaudhurypara' (part or side where the Chaudhurys live) etc. In the local grants of the early period, we come across the terms 'Konci' and 'Patti'. In the Medieval period, we do not find the use of the term 'Patti', but the term 'Kuci', which is derived from 'Konci', has been found abundantly used in lower Assam, as can be gleaned from our sources, specially the biographies of the Medieval saints. It is also believed that the term 'Konci' or 'Kuci' stands for a part of a village or a small village where families of a professional class or caste or a community live together. For instance, 'Tantikuci' (the part of or a small village where the weavers live), 'Kamarkuki' (the part of or a small village where the blacksmiths live) etc. But such 'Kucis', as mentioned
above, were in existence (even now) in lower Assam, specially in the modern Kamrup district. Therefore, we have reason to believe, as Dr. P.C. Chaudhury infers, that the term 'Kuci' was used for a part of a village or a small village where members of a professional class or caste lived together.

(g). The Gaon (village):

The next social unit, after 'Chuburi', is 'Gaon'. The origin of the Assamese word 'Gaon' is the Sanskrit 'Grāma'. In every part of India, this is the lowest administrative unit. On the other hand, socially and culturally, this is the most important unit throughout India, as all the agriculturists, the back-bone of Indian life and culture, live here. Mention of 'Grāmas', i.e. modern 'Gaons', are found in the local grant also. Scholars are of opinion that since the evolution of the Indo-Aryan Policy, in every part of India, 'Grāma' has been considered as the lowest administrative unit. Generally a village or a 'Gaon' includes many 'Chuburis', or 'Pārās' and 'Kucis', besides other portions of lands, such as cultivable lands and pastures that are necessary for the maintainance of the village. From the Nowgong and Bargaon grants of king Balavarman and Ratnapala, it is learnt that a 'Grāma', i.e., a village, was constituted of high lands for building houses (Vasti), lands for cultivation purpose (Ksetra), waste land (Khila), cattle pastures (Goprachāra bhumi), forests, water etc. These are the most essential parts of a village which fulfil the immediate necessities of the inhabitants of the villages.

In Medieval Assam, people of different castes and professions lived together in a village. There were villages where the predominance of one caste or one class of professional people is also seen; for example, the
'Jāpisajī Gāon' (the village inhabited by a class of people who were in charge of making 'Jāpis', i.e., a kind of native hat), the 'Khanikar Gāon' (the village where image-makers, sculptors or engravers live together), the 'Kakati Gāon' (the village where the 'Kakatis', i.e., people engaged in clerical works, live), etc. There are villages, completely inhabited by Mohammedan people also; but such Mohammedan villages are mostly situated by the side of the main roads of the country. The Ahom king Pratap Singha entrusted his Chief executive officer, Momai Tamuli Barbarua, with the task of re-establishing the villages in a systematic way. As to the efficiency of Momai Tamuli Barbarua in discharging his duties entrusted to him, it is said: "Momai Tamuli was also entrusted with the task of reconstructing Assamese village life on a sound and secure economic footing. Villages were grouped into regular units for convenience of administrative control. Spinning and weaving on the part of the womenfolk was made compulsory in every Assamese home, and it is for this farsighted policy of Momai Tamuli Barbarua that weaving is now universal among Assamese ladies, irrespective of caste, creed or social status. Every village was made self-complete by being provided with the usual quota of artisans, priests and other functionaries. Economic independence was also the goal of family life in Assam, every family producing its own necessaries." 10

As a result of the great Vaisnavite movement, almost in every Hindu village in Assam, there stood up a 'Nāmghar', i.e., a village chapel, which served as the socio-religious cum cultural centre of the village people. The village 'Nāmghar' has a great bearing upon the life of the Assamese people; it is the place where the village people gathered for prayer,
justice, feast, refreshment along with cultural activities and to perform their festivals of minor and national importance at different times.

The inhabitants of each village lived in great amity and cordial relationship even if they belonged to different castes and communities. As stated above, this was the lowest administrative unit, and under the Ahom administration, there was, in each village, one officer, i.e., the headman known as 'Gāo-bārik' to look after the activities of the people in the village. Owing to the absence of informations, it cannot be said definitely whether this office bearer was called 'Gāobura' in the early part of the Ahom rule. According to Dr. Kakati, the term 'Gāobura' is a very old one having its relationship with the Marathi word 'Gāng-burā'. However, in the last part of the Ahom rule, we find reference of 'Gāobura' in the chronicles. During the reign of the Ahom king Lakṣmi Singha, it is stated that some 'Gāonburās' of the Moamaria Chungias, made a conspiracy against the king and locally set up a government, selecting a king and some officers, from among them. In lower Assam, the village administration was run by petty officers called Kāyastha, Barkāyastha or Thākuriā.

The names of the villages were determined by many factors. Usually, the names of the villages were classified according to profession or caste. Some of the villages were named after the name of the profession accepted by the inhabitants of the villages. For example, 'Khanikar Gāon', (a village where the Khanikars, i.e., the sculptors, engravers lived), 'Gunākatiā Gāon' (a village where the Gunākatiās, i.e., Gold-thread or silver-thread makers, lived), 'Dulia Gāon' (a village where the palki-bearers of the kings lived) etc. Again the villages were named after the commodity mainly or abundantly produced in that particular village, or
after popular tradition, or historical importance, or natural importance, or supernatural significance, connected with the village. For example, 'Gakhirkhowa' village (a village where milk was found in abundance), 'Tamol-bari' (a village where betel-nuts are produced in abundance), 'Fan-bari' (a village where betel-leaves are produced in abundance), etc.

The villages named 'Simaluguri', 'Kenduguri', 'Belguri', were so named attaching importance upon a particular tree of the respective places, viz., the 'Simalu' (Salmali) tree, the 'Kendu' (Tinduka) tree and the 'Bel' (Vilva) tree. From the biographies of the Vaisnavite saints it is learnt that many of the villages were named after a particular work done by them, in those places. For example, 'Madhupur', 'Kakatkuta' etc. In the same way there are villages whose names are associated with popular traditions, historical significance or natural phenomenon.

(h) Phaid (Clan):-

Sometimes, the members of a particular clan also formed a sort of social unit which was known as a 'Phaid'. The 'Phaid', sometimes, embraces people of the same clan over-stepping the jurisdiction of one village or more. The clan or the 'Phaid' is known by the name of the place also, where all the families of the clan live together and their lands and establishments are situated. About 'Phaid', Dr. S.K. Phuyan writes: "There were several families of the kings and nobles, generally named after the places where they lived, or where their lands and establishments are situated. Each such clan was known as a 'Phaid', which was different from a 'Khel"."
2. Administrative Divisions and Classifications:

(a) Khel (Guild) :-

The 'Khel' is "an official guild organised on occupational or territorial lines, on the basis of the services, it rendered to the State". For example, 'Naobaicha' (boat-pling) Khel, 'Dhenuchocha' (arrow making) Khel, 'Naosalia' (boat-building) Khel, or 'Dimaruguria' Khel (Khel, consisting of the men of Dimaruguri), 'Abhaipuria' Khel (Khel, consisting of the men of Abhaipur) etc. The 'Khel' is practically an administrative classification. It fostered social unity amongst the people living within such a 'Khel'. Each 'Khel' was in charge of a Phukan, if it was an important one or in charge of a Rajkhowa, if it was of less importance. The strength of a 'Khel' varied from 100 to 3,000.

(b) Mel (an Estate assigned to a Member of the Royal Family) :-

The 'Mel' is also a sort of feudal administrative unit, which means an estate, assigned to a member of the Royal family. Dr. Bhuyan writes: "The lands and establishments allotted to the prince, princesses, queens, queen-mothers were known as 'Mels', such as 'Tipamla Mel', allotted to the Tipam Raja; 'Charingia Mel', to the Charing Raja; 'Gabharu Mel', to the unmarried princesses; 'Parbatia Mel', to the Parbatia-queen; and 'Enaigharia Mel', to the queen mother". To conduct the affairs of the 'Mel', there were officers such as Phukan and Barua, appointed by the king for each of the 'Mel'; the Phukan is the head and the Barua is his deputy and they were known by the name of the 'Mel' in charge of, such 'Parbatia Phukan', the
officer in charge of the 'Parbatia Mel', and so on.

(c) Bilāt (a private landed Estate of the Royal Ministers):–

The Buragohain, the Bargohain, the Borpatra-Gohain, the Barbarua and the Borphukan, these principal royal officers were granted lands and establishments, according to their rank and position. These estates granted by the king were private estate. They maintained themselves and their families with the revenues, productions and services, procured from such estates. Such lands and establishments are known as 'Bilāt' and the people living within the jurisdiction of such a 'Bilāt', owing to their frequent contact with each other, formed a sort of unity or a homogeneous society. The administration of these units solely rested with the nobles to whom they were granted. The owners of these estates had absolute power over the people and property within his estate, but they cannot inflict death punishment without the permission of the king. The word 'Bilāt' or 'Bilālt' is of Persian origin; it means a foreign land also. But, during the Medieval period it particularly meant the land and establishments granted to the Royal Ministers of the Ahom king.

(d) The Talooks and Pargannahs:–

The administration of lower Assam, particularly from the eastern boundary of the modern Kamrup district to the western limit of modern Goalpara district, was frequently changing hands between three contending powers, viz., the Ahoms, the Koches and the Moguls. Therefore, certain differences could be noticed in respect of administrative system and divisions between upper Assam and lower Assam. When the administration of the lower Assam came to their hands, the Ahoms did not bring about a
radical change so as to adjust it with their own system. They kept the
revenue system and the administrative divisions of lower Assam as there
existed under the Koch or the Mogul administration. Under them (Ahoms), the
administration was entrusted to a new high-ranking officer, styled Barphukan,
with his headquarter, first at Kalikbar and then at Gauhati. He was, as it were,
the Viceroy of the Ahom king at Gauhati and a court of six Phukans helped him in the administration. In lower Assam, besides villages, there
were greater divisions, such as 'Talooks' and 'Pargannahs' made for the
collection of revenues. There were about twenty two 'Pargannahs' in lower
Assam, on the north and south banks of the Brahmaputra. The number of
Pargannahs on the south bank is smaller than those on the north bank. Each
Pargannah was again subdivided into some 'Talooks'. At first, for the
purpose of administration, the Pargannahs were divided among some Phukans
and Rajkhowas under the overall command of the Barphukan. These Phukans,
not only governed the territory allotted to each of them, but also constituted
the court of the Barphukan at Gauhati. But during the reign of king Gadadhar
Singha, these governors made a conspiracy against Sandikoi Phukan, the then
Barphukan at Gauhati. Henceforth, the Pargannahs were brought under the direct
administration of the Barphukan by the order of the king. There were
subordinate officers of different grades and ranks, such as 'Bujarbaru',
'Chaudhury', 'Taloakdar', 'Thakuri' etc.

(e) Territorial Divisions :-

Along with the consolidation of power and extension of the kingdom,
the Ahom kings gradually created some new divisions. For the smooth admini-
stration of these divisions, new posts were created to take charge of these territories. There were five such territorial divisions, viz., the Sadiā, Marangi, Salāl, Ḫājī and Kājālīmukh and the administrators of these territories were commonly known as 'Dātialīā Gohain'; they were respectively called the 'Sadiā-khōwā Gohain', the 'Marangi-khōwā Gohain', Salālar Gohain', the 'Jāgīāl Gohain' and the 'Kājālīmukhī Gohain'. Among them the 'Sadiā-khōwā' and the 'Marangi-khōwā' were the most important ones, owing to the strategic importance of their territories. The head quarters of these officers were respectively Sadiā, Marangi, Kaliābar, Jāgī, and Kājālīmukh. As they had to govern strategic territories, men of high calibre and personalities were selected for these posts. The officers were entrusted with the charge of governing the people of these territories, to give them protection from the inroads of the hill-people and above all, keeping a sharp eye upon the people so that they cannot conspire or rise against the Government.

(f) The Subordinate and Allied States:

Besides the Provinces and Divisions under direct administration, there were some small states as vassalage and allied to the Ahom kings. Among these states, the Province of Darrang enjoyed complete autonomy in its internal administration, as well as the other vassal states, Rani, Beltola, Luki, Barduar, Bholagaon, Mairapur, Pantan, Bangaon, Bogaduar, Dimarua, Neli, Gobha, Sahara, Dandua, Barapujia, Topakuchia, Khaigharia, Panbari, Sora, Mayang, Dhing, Tetelia, Salmara, Garakhia, Bahargaon and Bhurbhandha. Each State was ruled by a vassal Chief who was bound to furnish a stipulated number of paiks to work on the kings account or pay the
commutation money, if exemption from personal service was granted. In case of war the vassal Raja was expected to take the field at the head of his contingent of paiks by the side of his liege lord."

(g) The Greater Divisions:

**Ujani Asam and Namani Asam (Upper Assam and Lower Assam):**

Again, for the sake of speedy and smooth management and efficient administration, the whole Ahom kingdom was divided into two great divisions known as 'Ujani Asam', i.e., upper Assam and 'Namani Asam', i.e., lower Assam. It was during the reign of king Pratap Singha, the post of the Barphukan was first created and at that time his headquarter was at Kaliabar. But, later on, as the boundary of the Ahom kingdom was extended towards west, his headquarter was shifted to Gauhati. He was, as it were, the Viceroy of the Ahom king at Gauhati with the charge of administering lower Assam, with Kaliabar, in the district of Nowgong, as the easternmost boundary and the river Manaha as the westernmost boundary. The upper Assam was under the direct control of the Barbarua. "The Barbarua received the revenues and administered justice in those portions of the eastern provinces from Sadia to Kaliabar which lay outside the jurisdiction of the Gohains." 19

(h) Cities, Towns and Suburbs:

Both as the headquarters of administration and as commercial centres, there grew up a number of cities and towns during the early period. Most of these cities and towns have been established on the banks of the rivers, specially on both sides of the river Brahmaputra. The most notable among the ancient cities were Pragjyotispur or Gauhati (modern Gauhati),
Sonitpur, Hārupeswar, Durjaya, Kundilnagar or Sadiā, Kamrupnagar, Hedambapur or Dimāpur and the importance of these cities and towns, with a very few exceptions, had been continuing during the Medieval period also. The city of Kamatāpur which was no doubt very magnificent and powerful had been destroyed and buried in the dust in course of time. Some of the towns and capitals mentioned in the records have gone out of trace. The important capital towns of the Medieval period were Kamatāpur (capital of the kingdom of Kamarāpur), Kochbehar (capital of the kingdom of Kochbehar) and Gargāon. The Ahoms first established their capital at Charāideo, then shifted to Gargāon and then to Rangpur. Gargāon and Rangpur have been the capitals of the Ahom kingdom for longer periods, and it is only towards the last part of the Ahom rule, before the advent of the Britishers, the capital was shifted to Jorhat. The Chutiās had their capital at Kundil Nagar or Sadiā. The Kachāris, being driven back by the Ahoms, first made their capital at Dimāpur and then again shifted to Khāspur and Maibong. The other allied kingdoms which existed around Assam had also their capitals and commercial towns.

For proper vigilance and smooth administration, the Ahom kings established many sub-headquarters, sub-towns at different important places as Check-posts. Of these sub-towns, the important ones from the west were Manāhā, Ḥādirā chaki, Jugighopa, Guahāti, Kajalimukh, Jagi, Rahā, Kaliābar, Salāi, Mangaldai, Chatiā, Biswanāth, Marangi and Dergāon. During the reign of the Ahom king Pratap Singha, many towns and territories were established in the kingdom in a very well-designed plan. The plan was executed by his Chief Executive Officer Momai Tamuli Barbarua, who also re-established the
the villages in a sound economic footing. He was also entrusted with the charge of rehabilitation work. Momai Tamuli Barbarua, by the order of his king, cleared the Dihing forest and established people there whom he took from thickly-populated areas. From every twenty family, he selected one family to be rehabilitated in this new territory. This new territory later on came to be known as 'Bachā-Dayāṅg Chahar' and the people settled in this territory came to be known as 'Gharphalia', as they were taken away from their original allotments. Momai Tamuli reclaimed many other places and established towns and villages which were all well-planned. Thus he rendered yeoman service in this field. About his establishing the 'Bachā-Dayāṅg Chahar', there is a story in the chronicle, which runs thus: At the time of establishing the 'Bachā-Dayāṅg Chahar', his old servant once returning home, told his little son that in the execution of his plan, all was well with the Barbarua, but if anybody at the newly established territory would go to seek a needle, then it would be difficult for him to find it there. (This remark of the old servant showed that there were no professional people in the newly established territory.) This remark, somehow reached the ears of Barbarua and he realised the defect of his plan. Then he immediately selected one family from each of the professional people to be settled in these newly reclaimed places so that the inhabitants would get their required things within the jurisdiction of their territory. The other territories established by Momai Tamuli Barbarua were Ahoyāpur, Marangi, Bachkata, Dhemāji, Dwārikā, Mathurāpur, Tāokā, Gajpur, Mekurikhowā, Chinātali, Nāmdāng, Mērāgarh, Śukbāri etc. The Barbarua, further, gathered together all the Kāyastha-Kākatis (engaged in clerical works) and settled them at Chāring, in modern Sibsagar Subdivision. While he was at Kājąlimukh,
the Barbarua collected the Chamars (the cobblers or lime makers), the Kumars (Potters), the Kamars (blacksmiths), the Kaivarttas (fishermen) etc. and these professional classes were settled in separate villages. During the same period, he established the Nowgong Chahar combining the nearby nine villages.

The magnificent ruins, lying in different parts of Assam, bespeak of the existence of some of the rich and powerful cities and towns in ancient Assam. In the historical works of the later day historians, we find some descriptions of the remains of some of the historical cities belonging to the early as well as of the Medieval period. It is not possible to discuss about all those cities and towns; we will only discuss a little about a very few of them here. Dr. Bloch is of opinion that the modern civil stations of Gauhati and Tezpur stood upon large mounds, "which contain the remains of two ancient cities". So, also, the city of Kamatapur was once very strong and fortified. Describing about the Kamatapur city, H.N. Chaudhury, in his work, the "Coochbehar State", remarks: "The remains of the city of Kamatapur are gigantic works of human art and bespeak great power and wealth in the prince or princes who conceived such an idea of a capital." In the literary works of the Medieval period, we find colourful descriptions of cities and towns. The writers who had depicted such pictures of cities and towns, surely have gathered their knowledge from the cities and towns witnessed by them, in the State, at least partially, if not fully. In his work, 'Rukminihran Kavya', Sankardeva gives a very fine and graphic description of the city 'Kundil Nagar' which runs thus: "Sri Gopala saw the most beautiful city 'Kundil Nagar'. The city was
bedecked with various tall houses, the four roofs of which were very beautiful to look at. There were houses made of glasses and the roofs were covered with "Khau" (?); they looked like all white mountains, their inner apartments were worked and decorated with lac. The expert stone-cutters, by cutting the stones have constructed the plinths of the houses engraved in various sculptural designs and decorated with paintings. Tigers, hyenas, lions and many birds in various postures were seen sculptured there. Dolls in the postures of dancing with hands raised were also seen carved in the houses. Windows and ventilators were constructed in the shape of looking glass. The doors were made of marble stones encrusted with corals and carved with the figures of elephants. Pitchers made of gold were seen dazzling above all the houses. The city was surrounded by an impregnable wall through which the gods even dare not enter. There were traders who sold various kinds of stones to the customers. The sweet fragrance of aloe oil that was pervading all through the town, exhilarated the minds of the people. In some places the petty shopkeepers had been selling cardamom, nutmeg, pieces of dry coconut, sugar and camphor and the places were filled with the scented air of the burning incense and resin. The children of the town were seen indulging in various games in the streets and bazars. The women were seen roaming dressed with beautiful garments and adorned their limbs with pearls, diamonds and corals.

In the city, (Gopala) saw the innumerable tanks full of transparent water, the four sides and the steps of which were constructed with stones and marbles. The banks of the tanks looked splendid with blooming flowers of various kinds, such as Champaka, Bakula, Banduli etc. and in water were seen the flowers like Badma, Bheta, Utapala etc. Various birds including
Kanka, Baka, Chataka etc. were seen in water, the presence of which enhanced the beauty of the tanks. The Rajahangsas were seen enjoying the roots of the lotuses. The women of the town who enthralled the minds of the people by their charming smiling faces were equal with the Vidyādharis in beauty, and they were seen going batch by batch to take bath after anointing their bodies with oil. All looked beautiful with their faces resembling the full moon and their hands and feet being well-proportioned. They were all seemed happy in their couplet life and could immediately charm the minds of the male persons by exhibiting expressions of erotic sentiment.

King, paramount kings and princes were seen going to take their bath riding on elephants and then (after bath) worshipping their forefathers returned to their destination. Brāhmaṇas were seen offering libation entering deep into the water, while some others were seen meditating Lord Hari on the banks of the tanks after taking their bath and making bestowals. Having entered into the city Kundila (Gopala) the student saw all these delights of it. (He saw) the students studying epics, lexicographies and other scriptures taking proper advise from the teachers. (In the city Kundila) the incessant reading of Vedas by the Brāhmaṇas was heard. The Brāhmaṇas were seen very often engaged in Puja (worship) functions also. There was none who was sad, all the subjects under king Bhismaka were seen happy and satisfied.23 Suryyakhari Daivajna, in his work 'Darrang Rājvamsāvali' and Ṛṣimati Ramrai in his biographical work of Damodordeva, called 'Guru Līlā', depict the cities of Kochbehar and Bijoypur, respectively.24

References

2. Ibid .. .. .. p-151.
3. A Descriptive Account of Assam, By- W. Robinson, 1841, p-203.
15. Anglo Assamese Relations, By- Dr. S.K. Bhuyan, 1949, p-10.
22. Ibid ..... p-268.
23. Rukminiharan Kavya, By- Sankardeva, Published by Dutta Barua & Co., 498 Sankarabada, verses- 197 to 205.