CHAPTER IX

Dress and Ornaments

1. Dress:

The Medieval Assamese Society laid especial stress on the use of indigenous products. Whatever was not made and produced in the country, the people were not easily prone to accept it. In the 16th century, the Koch king Naranarayana sent a few pieces of 'Sāri' (a piece of long cloth worn by women) to the Ahom king along with other presents. As it was the custom of wearing 'Mekhela' and 'Rīha' and not 'Sāri' among the women of Assam, the Ministers of the Ahom king immediately returned it, saying sarcastically that in this country only the 'Khārchar' woman (morally degraded and wicked) wears such a cloth. We have already referred to another instance of refusing the Mogul dresses by the Ministers of the Ahom king Rudra Singha. It is obvious that during the Ahom rule, dress, ornaments and other articles of luxury were produced and made in the country sufficiently, although some other cloths and metals that were not produced and found in the country were imported from other places. The dress and other garments in the period were generally made of cotton, edi, muga, silk, tassar and woolen cloths. Sufficient quantity of woolen cloths were imported every year to Assam from the neighbouring hill States, particularly from Bhutan. In a subsequent chapter we shall discuss about sericulture, weaving and dying industries in Assam. Spinning and weaving were compulsory in Assam. From the queen down to the ordinary woman, the spinning and weaving were universally practised in Assam. Edi, muga and silk worms were reared in the Assamese families. The women of the family spun cocoons and cottons and weave cloths to provide the family with necessary garments. In the Medieval period, the Assamese women could not only
provide cloths for their family, but also produced sufficient quantity of surplus cloths for export to other countries. This had greatly helped the economy of the State. As said above, though an Assamese woman could weave all sorts of cotton and silk cloths, everybody could not use all of them without maintaining any distinction. The dress and garments made of muga and silk were not allowed to be worn by common people. Distinction in wearing dresses and garments had been maintained between the high and the low.

The contribution of the non-Aryan tribes towards the weaving industry, is also very significant. The Ahoms introduced the custom of wearing of 'Bachowal' and 'Tangali' by the higher officials in their State which was originally the custom of the Bhuyans. Till the reign of the Ahom king Chakradhvaja Singha (1663 - 1669 A.D.), the Assamese people never used a piece of cloth which did not belong to Assam. It was the Ahom king Rudra Singha (1696 - 1714 A.D.) who first introduced Mogul dress, viz., Pág, Jâmâ and Ijâr in Assam. The dress worn by king Rudra Singha and Siva Singha, as shown by 'Hasti-Vidyârâma', are Mogul dresses. Still then, in introducing the Mogul-style of dress, Rudra Singha had to face severe criticism from his Ministers. The Ministers returned the Mogul dresses, sent by the king saying that they would not wear the dresses of the Moguls -- the foreigners. The king had to send again country-made dress to the Ministers. However, Mogul-style of dress, among the higher officials, came to be in vogue in Assam, since the reign of king Rudra Singha. Prior to king Rudra Singha, the Ahom kings used a sort of head-gear or turban, tied over their head, called 'Phasau'; but since the time of Rudra Singha, the 'Pág', used by the Mogul nobles, has been introduced among the Ahom kings, instead of 'Phasau'. 
The garments used by the people are of two types, viz., the (a) 'Adhovastra', i.e., garments worn on the lower part of the body and the (b) 'Uttaria-vastra', i.e., garments worn on the upper part of the body. The Assamese people used both stitched and unstitched cloths. Dr. Choudhury surmises that there were no use of shirts in the early period. But in our Medieval period, we find the use of different kinds of shirts among the officials and other aristocratic and high ranking people. After a careful scrutiny of the literary works and our sources, attempt has been made to give an exhaustive list of the pieces of cloths and garments used by the Assamese people, in the Medieval period, as far as possible. The common term used for cloths in Assamese, is 'Kapor' which is believed to be a variation of the sanskrit term 'Karpatā'.

(a) Adhovastra- (garments used for covering the lower part of the body):

Churia or Dhuti - This is the main piece of cloth worn round the waist by male persons hanging down to the knee or below it. The term 'Churia' indicates the meaning that with it the private part is concealed. In the early period, this 'Churia' or 'Dhuti' was held tight round the waist with a sort of girdle called 'Parivesa' which, in our Medieval period, was called 'Komarbāndh' (like a modern belt). The 'Churia' in the Medieval period was made of silk, muga, or cotton. The common people were allowed to wear cotton 'Churia' extending only upto the knee. The 'Churia' made of silk and muga were allowed to be worn by the higher officials, the head of the Satras and the high class Brahmins and in their cases it could go below the knee. To work in the religious functions, or to worship God, coloured 'Dhutis', specially of the red colour or made of silk, are mostly preferred. The 'Churia' is an unstitched piece of cloth. In the literary works, particularly in the biographies, the 'Churia' is called
'Bhuni'. According to Hamilton, it was 8 (eight) to 16 (sixteen) cubits long and from 2 to 2½ cubits wide.  

**Mekhela** - (lower garment worn by women) - This is the main piece of garment worn round the waist by women covering down to the ankle-joints. This is a garment, like the modern petti-coat, made by stitching the two ends of a piece of cloth. The word 'Mekhela' has its origin in the Sanskrit word 'Mekhola' and the idea of the garment 'Mekhela' also originates from the Vedic 'Mekhola'. 'Mekhelas' were also made of cotton, muga, edi and silk in this period; but only the women of the aristocratic or high-ranking families and the wives of the higher officials were allowed to wear 'Mekhelas' made of silk and muga. According to Hamilton, 'Mekhela' "seems to be the original female dress of Kamrup, and is the same with the dress of the Koch women in Ranggapur, and with the female dress in Ava, and of the shepherd tribe in Mysore."  

**Ijar (Trousers or Breeches)** - The practice of wearing 'Ijar' (trouser) among the higher officials and the kings, like the Moguls, was first introduced by the Ahom king Rudra Singha.  

**Paijar (Chappal)** - 'Paijars' were either made of leather or of canvas, specially decorated with golden and silver threads, for the use of the kings only. Others were not allowed to put on 'Paijars'. Towards the last part of the Ahom rule, shoes were also introduced. Francis Hamilton says that "No one is allowed to wear shoes without a special license from the King, and it is an indulgence that is very rarely granted. At the capital there were a few Bengalese shoe makers, who are ready, whenever His Majesty chooses, to have a pair of shoes, or to indulge one of his chiefs with that luxury." The Brahmins and the Mahantas could wear wooden chappals in their houses only.
Ghuri - In other parts of India, women put on a petti-coat like waist-cloth, called 'Ghagra'. In Assam, this 'Ghagra' is called 'Ghuri'; but the custom of wearing 'Ghuri' or 'Ghagra' among the women of Assam was not in vogue. In the theatrical performance called 'Bhaona', the actor called 'Sutradhar' and the members of the band of singers and dancers called 'Gayan-bayan' or 'Jora' used to put on 'Ghuri' in some places of Assam. The dancer called 'Natua' in the Satras and the ordinary dancers who take part in Bihu-dance used to put on 'Ghuri'. Besides, in those days, even the bridegrooms also wore 'Ghuri'.

(b) Uttaria-Vastra (Upper garments):

There are two varieties of wrappers, one is called 'Cheleng' and the other is called 'Khaniā'. The 'Cheleng' is a plain, longitudinally woven sheet of cloth, generally 6 cubits in length and 3 cubits in breadth, having the two ends embroidered with musā thread or golden thread or other coloured thread, or without any decorative work. The 'Khaniā' is a double folded, i.e., altogether 12 cubits in length and 3 cubits in breadth. It has also decorative work at the two ends of it. The higher officials and the high-ranking people, both male and female, generally used 'Khaniā' variety made of silk. The 'Cheleng' or 'Khaniā' is wrapped round the upper part of the body. The wrapper made of edi is the most prized integument in winter as it gives comfort and protects from cold. As said above, both male and female used to take 'Cheleng' or 'Khaniā' made of silk or other yarn, according to their rank and status. Different varieties of 'Cheleng' and 'Khaniās' are found in use till very recently, of which some are given below.

Bar-Kāpor - This is also two fold, made of coarse yarn for the use of in
the winter season. Again there are different varieties of 'Barkapor', such as Pit-kapor, Pit-khania, Titā-kariā, Chhakathia, Nara-kapor, Charā-kapor, Phulām Bar-kapor etc. All the varieties of cloths, with the prefix 'Nara' should be understood as made with the design prevalent in the 'Nara-country.'

Khania - The different varieties of 'Khaniās' are; Ukā-khania, Mugā-phular-khania, Achu-phular-khania, Gunā-kaṭā-khania, Gāridiā-khania, Dariali-Gunādiā-khania, Butādiā-khania, Gutibolowa-khania, Norakata-sutar-khania, Karchipikhania etc. 11

Cheleng - Ukā-cheleng, Achu-diā-cheleng, phul-diā-cheleng, Gāri-diā-cheleng, Dariali-cheleng, Mugā-gutidī-cheleng, Son-sutar-chāb-mara-cheleng etc. In lower Assam the general term used for a wrapper is 'Pachrā' and in upper Assam, it is simply called 'Chādar'. 12

Rihā - This is a piece of cloth generally 8 cubits in length and $\frac{1}{4}$ to 2 cubits width (according to Hamilton, 6 cubits long and $\frac{1}{2}$ cubit wide) worn by women. Some scholars go to the extent of finding its origin with the 'Vṛhatrīkā' worn by women of Vedic age in place of the sacred thread. 13 This piece of cloth is generally wrapped round the body with one end kept suspended after fixing it under the waist-cloth called 'Mekhela' at the navel point and then, the other part is coiled round the upper part of the body specially covering the breasts, from the right hand side to the left. This end is also used as veil by the married women. 'Rihās' were also made of silk, mugā, cotton and edī. There was no restriction in wearing the latter two, but the first two were exclusively reserved for the royal and the aristocratic families.

Jhardar or Mongjuri - This piece of cloth is used by the women just like a
scarf, but smaller than a wrapper; it is from 4 to 5 cubits long and 2 to 2 1/2 wide. "The Jhardar is of a flowered pattern, the Mongjuri is plain."

Cholā (shirt) - The male persons used different kinds of shirts in this period; but as to the use of blouse or other jackets by the women-folk, our sources and other records cannot supply dependable informations. In a booklet published very recently, B.C. Handique refers to a kind of blouse with long hands and ornamented with flowers of golden threads. Besides, in a painting of Ambika Devi, queen of the Ahom king Siva Singha (1714 – 1744 A.D.), found in the famous manuscript 'Hasti-Vidyārnava', we have seen her wearing a blouse; but as it is a bust, we cannot form an accurate idea about the shape and size of it. From the reign of the Ahom king Rudra Singha, the Ahom kings, Ministers and other high officials began to put on shirts known as 'Chaugā' and 'Chāpkan', in the style of the Moguls. Below is a list of different kinds of shirts used by the male persons in the Medieval period.

Engā-Cholā - It is a vestment of the type of a tunic reaching to the knee.
Buku-Cholā - A kind of shirt, reaching to the waist and the hands of the shirt are extended upto the elbow.
Mirjāi-Cholā - Almost like the Buku-Cholā mentioned above, it is a sort of coat or jacket.
Chāpkan - A kind of surcoat or robe reaching to the knee, used by the officers only.
Chaugā - It is a cassock-like drapery worn over the Chāpkan.

The kings used a kind of costly shirt called 'Rupar-beridā-Cholā', i.e., bordered with silver. The bride-grooms put on ornamented shirt called 'Jamā-Cholā'. An ordinary type of shirt called 'Phatuwai' was in use, perhaps,
among the common people. The shirts are all stitched garments and were made of silk, mugā, edi and of cotton. Instead of buttons made of bones or plastic, cotton globules, called 'Gunathi' were attached to the shirts or simply cotton fasteners were used.

Pāguri, Phasau and Jāmā (turban) — 'Pāguri' or turban is an important head-gear of the Assamese people; whenever they go out, they used to put on a turban on their heads, may it be a simple one in case of a common man or a specially made one in case of a noble or higher officer of the State. The turban or 'Pāguri', as it is called in Assamese, is a narrow but sufficiently long piece of linen being about 1 cubit wide and 16 to 20 cubits long. The turbans are also made of all varieties of silks and cotton. The Ahom kings, up to the reign of Gadadhar Singha, used a very simple form of turban which was called 'Phasau'. It was simply a piece of costly linen with which they tied the long curling hair making a knot on the right hand side of the head, and a part of the linen is spread over the shoulder. Instead of 'Phasau', Rudra Singha introduced 'Jāmā' — a head dress, put on by the Mogul Emperors. The bride-grooms also, in those days, nay to the early part of this century, used to put on 'Jāmā'. The 'Sutradhār' of the 'Bhaona' performance and the members of the band of singers and players of instruments, called 'Gayanbāyan', put on this 'Jāmā', in some parts of Assam.

Tangālī (linen girder or belt) — This piece of cloth is about 4 to 5 cubits in length and about 2 cubits in width, the ends being profusely decorated with coloured threads. It is used as a belt to gird the waist. The two decorated ends are suspended on the front. Though apparently it seems to serve as a modern belt, it is actually used as a decorative piece. There are 'Tangālīs' made of all varieties of silks, such as mulberry silk, mugā and edi and also cotton. Besides having designs of flowers, the two ends are
also trimmed with fringes. In the chronicles it is stated that the Ahoms learnt to put on 'Tangali as a part of their dress, from the Bhuyans. Reference to a cloth girdle called 'Komar-bandh' as a separate piece, is also found, but Hem Chandra Barua has identified it with the 'Tangali'.

Bachowal (a cloth worn over the waist cloth)- The 'Bachowal' is a piece of dotton, made cloth, worn by the officials of the Ahom kings, tied to the waist with a linen girdle, extending to the knee. The Ahom kings learnt the art of putting on the 'Bachowal' from the Bhuyans as a part of their official raiment.

Hachati - This is a small narrow piece of cloth for holding betelnuts, that are generally carried with the person.

Pakharutang- This is the lining of the 'Hachati' made by joining the different pieces of cloth of different colour, in which betelnuts are kept. Along with the 'Tangali' and the 'Bachowal', it is stated in the chronicles written by Harakanta that the Ahom king Shumungmung borrowed the system of taking 'Hachati' from the Bhuyans and introduced it in his kingdom.

Gā-mochā (Towel) - This piece of cloth is generally used as a towel after bath or sometimes for keeping betelnuts and is about 3 to 4 cubits in length and 1 to 1½ cubit in breadth. This is called 'Gā-mochā', because with it the body is rubbed (Gā = body, mochā = rub). Sometimes the common people used this piece as a turban on their head. This is the most common piece of cloth required for the daily use of the Assamese people and is the most significant piece of garment in the national life of the Assamese people. In their national festival called Bihu', the Assamese people offer 'Gā-mochā' to their kith and kin, or to their dearest ones, as a token of their love and regard to them. Besides, the holy and respectable persons are also
honoured with this 'Ga-mocha'. The ends of the 'Ga-mochas' are decorated with floral designs with coloured threads. There are different varieties of 'Ga-mochas'.

Tana - There are two varieties of it, one is a narrow piece of cloth, the ends of which are sewn into two bags and the other is a narrow loin cloth.

Kavach-Kapor - It was the custom of the Assamese women, in those days, to present a piece of cloth to their husbands at the time of going to the battle field which she had to prepare within a night. This cloth was known as 'Kavach-Kapor', because it was the belief of the people that if a soldier goes to the battle field with such a cloth presented by his wife, he would not meet any reverse in the battle field. This cloth serves as a protective armour against death in the battle field and that is why it was called 'Kavach-Kapor' (Kavach = armour, Kapor = cloth). No woman was allowed to make this cloth while she is in her menstruation or sundry other impurities.

Tupi (Cap) - In the records we find the mention of caps being used by the Assamese soldiers in the battle field. The Ahom kings put on caps beautifully embroidered with gold or silver strings.

Gati, Thenga & Kurtta - The Assamese soldiers while going to the battle field wrapped and fastened round their body, either a muga or an edi cloth (generally coloured), which is called 'Gati'. Besides 'Gati', every soldier was provided with a cap, a girder and a bag. During the reign of the Ahom king Kamaleswar Singha (1795-1810 A.D.), Prime Minister Purananda Buragohain organised an army in the model of the army of the East India Company; each one of these soldiers was provided with a trouser and a shirt known as 'Thenga' and 'Kurtta' in Assamese, respectively.

Chandrataap (Sanskrit - Chandratap) (canopy) - The 'Chandrataap' (canopy)
Bm is kept hanging over an altar of a deity in the chapel or temple or over the throne of the king or seat of the Satrādhikār, or other holy personages and officials. The borders of the canopy are sometimes decorated with coloured threads or gold or silver strings. Sometimes, five whisks of yak-tails are also affixed, four to the four corners and one to the centre of it.

Kethā (Quilt) - The kethā (quilt) is made of worn-out cloths or rags. The common people take it over their bodies in the winter season.

Athuā (mosquito net) - Nets were also woven in those days. They were made of very thin fabrics and were beautifully designed with flowers. A single piece for one curtain, as Hamilton says, was about 30 cubits long and 1 or two cubits wide.

Thanga - A woolen blanket, used for sitting purpose. There were 'Thangas' of different colours of which the red coloured one was considered the most respectable.

Talacha - A piece of cloth, spread under a seat or mattress.

Kepkara Talacha - An embroidered cushion.

Gom-cheng - This was a kind of fine Chinese silk having designs of flowers like those on the body of the snake called 'Gom'. The kings and the nobles selected this variety of silk cloth for their shirts.

Banāt - A woolen cloth imported from Bhutan. Sometimes there were embroidered works of gold or silver on it.

Pāmari - A kind of fine silk cloth.

Lāhāri - Nothing is known about 'Lāhāri'; but most probably this is also a kind of silk cloth. 'Lāhāri' and 'Pāmari', these are the two varieties of silk cloths mentioned side by side in the records.
Dresses.

Ga-Mocha.

Tangali.

Riha.
MEKHELA:
(a) Kingkhop.
(b) Bankora.
(c) Uka.

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[Diagram of garments]
Tāch kāpor – Perhaps this was no other than the cloth made of 'Tassar' silk. In the records very often we come across this 'Tāch kāpor'. This 'Tassar' silk was produced from a kind of worms, which were fed on the leaves of 'Kotkora' or 'Phutukalā' or 'Bagari' (jujube).

Mirijim – It was a kind of rug made by the 'Miri' people, which was either used as carpet or as warm cloth in the winter season.

Sufficient quantities of strong cloths were made for the sails of boats and for tents as both the boats and the tents were in great demand. The other pieces of drapery used, are mentioned below; it is not possible to describe the nature, form and utility of each of them. They are; Kunmin, Fākhrau, Kirjīj, Chikan-kāpor, Jālî-cholā, Majhi-Bhuni, Dhekeri-Bhuni, Sonowāli-chirā, Patuķā, Jalam, Mako, Bih-Kharuā-kāpor, Jigirā, Satrancha, Sonowāli-ūrānī, Sonowāli-pāg, Sonowāli-patukā, Dualā- phulān- Barkāpor, Sonowāli- Atlancha etc.. In fine, the Assamese people at the initiative of the Ahom kings, became rich with their dress and garments by accepting different varieties of cloths and garments from the surrounding tribes and other peoples, such as the Bhuyans, the Narās, the Daflās, the Ābors, the Miris, the Nagas, the Manipurs, the Burmese and the Moguls, besides their own. From the Bhuyan they took Bachowāl, Tāngālī, Hāchati; from the Moguls, the Ijār, Chapkan, Chaugā, Jāmnā; from the Narās the different varieties of Narā-kāpars; from the Manipurs the Leicheng; from the Burmese the Kunmin and Kunkhā; from the Ābor, the Daflā and Miris, the Miri Jims.

2. Ornaments:—

Both male and female persons used ornaments of various designs and
made of various metals. About ornaments used by the Assamese people of the Medieval period, Rai Gunabhiram Barua in his article 'Agardin- Aru Etiyardin' gives an elaborate list. On the other hand an estimate of it can be made from the ornaments used till recently and from the descriptions that are found in the literary works of the period. The different metals and other materials used for the making of ornaments were gold, silver, copper, brass, bronze, amber, rhinoceros' horns, ivory etc. Different kinds of valuable jewels and stones were also used as ornaments. The ornaments of gold, silver, amber, ivory etc. were made precious and beautiful to look at by setting precious stones and jewels, such as emerald, diamond etc. on them. The male persons put on ornaments on their neck, hand, fingers and the ear. The kings and officials of the highest cadre used to put on ornaments on the toes of the feet as well as on the ankle-joints.

On the wrist of their hands the male persons put on bracelets made of either gold or silver, known as 'Cheokharu', 'Gām-kharu' etc.; on their necks, they put on necklace prepared with bigger beads, called 'Mata-maṇi'. Sometimes, a larger bead of the shape of a 'Rudrākṣa' (*eleococarpus gemitrus*), made of gold, or a drum-shaped ornament called 'Madali' or 'Biri', put on by male persons as pendants. On their ears, they put on different varieties of earings, such as 'Lokapāra' and 'Long-keru'; on the arms, ornaments called 'Bāju' or 'Kankan' were put on. On the fingers of the hands, they put on rings made of gold or silver and of various shapes and designs. On the ankle-joints of the feet, an ornament called 'Nepur' was used. It has small balls inside, which produce a tinkling sound. The rings put on the toes of the feet are called 'Ujanti'. The nobles and the high officials thresh on the turbans
on their heads, an ornament called 'ṣiropesh' or feathers of the birds, in order to make it more beautiful. The ornaments put on by the female persons were more or less of the similar kinds. Women also put on ornaments on the nose and on the head. The ornament put on the nose by women is called 'Nāk-phul'. Attempt has been made to give a list of the ornaments used in the Medieval period, some of which are still in use, as afar as possible. The ornaments were made of various shapes and designs. It is not possible for us to describe the shape and design of all the ornaments. The names applied to the ornaments are mostly descriptive and they themselves indicate the shape and designs of the ornaments in most cases. Some names are given according to the design of the ornaments, some are given according to the decorative work of the ornament and some again according to the metal of the ornament with which it is made of. For example, the 'Jon-biri' means an ornament made in the shape of the crescent moon, 'Ṣilikha-mādali' is an ornament made in the shape of the 'Ṣilikha' fruit, 'Kathāl-kuhiā-mādali' is an ornament in the shape of the bud of the jack-tree, 'Jāngphāi-keru', an ear-ring made of amber, 'Jethi-negurī-Āngathī', a ring made in the shape of the tail of a house lizard etc.

Ornaments used as Necklace - Jon-biri, Dhol-biri, Dhariā-biri, Ṣilikha-mādali, Ṣilīkha-mādali, Jālpahī-mādali, Ṣachh-Sākhara-mādali, Jāphār-mādali, Gazerā, Bīnā, Dokmalā, Kāṭhāl-kuhiā-mādali, Dugdugi and Sonar-hār were used to put on both by males and females except 'Jāphār-mādali' and 'Gazerā' which were worn by females only. The ornaments such as 'Gala-kaṇṭha', 'Chandra-hār', 'Rupādhar', 'Galpāṭā', 'Peshandār', 'Kaṇṭha-sobhā', 'Gajamati-hār' and 'Bāgh-dāt' were put on as necklace by female persons only.
Ornaments

LOKA PARA:-
KARIA :-

GAL PATA:-

BANA :-
DUG DUGI:-

JONBIRI :-
DHARIA BIRI:-

SAT GABARI :-

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RING:\n
KHARU:\n
TAD & BAJU:\n
KERU:
Ear ornaments - Among the different ear-ornaments mention can be made of Lokāpāra, Long-keru, (these two were for male persons), Thuriā, Dighal-keru, Barai-lagā-keru, Bākharā-keru, Ukā-keru, Titakariā-keru, Jāngphāi-keru, Kān-thāsā, Karnaphul etc.. On the top of the ear, the women put on an ornament called 'Chāi-khāle' or 'Chāki-saīā'.

Rings - Rings, put on the fingers, are called 'Āngathi' in Assamese. Rings of various designs and with stones and jewels engraved on them, were in use in this period. Besides, gold and silver, the rhinoceros' horns, the two-anna, and four-anna coins were also used to make rings. The rings of various designs were 'Jethineguri-Āngathi', 'Tarjani-Āngathi' "Pāktīpāṃsa 'Pātīā-Āngathi', Bābāri-phulīā-Āngathi' etc. etc..

Besides 'Ujanti' and 'Nepur', bracelet-like ornaments called 'Bhari-khāru' were also put on the feet. A garland of small balls making sound, called 'Ghāgar' was put on the waist by the young children and women, in those days.

Bracelets - 'Cheo-khāru' and 'Gām-khāru' were used by the male persons only. The 'Gām-khāru' is so called because it was originally the ornament used by the 'Gāms' (the chiefs) of the Miris. There were other bracelets, such as 'Epatā-Belā', 'Dupatā-Belā', 'Muthi', 'Sat-juri-Muthi', 'Son-khatowā-khāru', 'Rupar-khāru', 'Epatā-Mugar-khowā-Belā', 'Ukā-khāru', 'Cheo' etc.. On the arms of their hands, both men and women, wore ornaments called 'Bāju', 'Kankan', 'Tād', 'Balaya' etc.

The women on their nostrils put on an ornament called 'Nāk-phul', made of either gold or of silver, ornate with stones. The common women, who
3. Cosmetics and Toilet:

Discussing about the use of cosmetics in the early period, Dr. Choudhury says "The use of scented oil by women and even by men, before and after bath has been a common practice among the Assamese. The Tezpur Grant (Verse-30) mentions that women used scented oil and anointed their breasts with odorous substances. The use of perfume was believed to increase one's beauty and grace. Sandal paste in particular has been universally used in all religious and social ceremonies. The 'Kalika Purana' lays stress on the importance of the use of perfumes".

The use of scented oil by men and women, is proved by the literary records. It was the custom of the Hindus of using oil on their body before bath and the reference of this anointed oil by the holy persons is proved by the biographies and other works. Sandal paste was not only in use in the religious and social ceremonies, but every Hindu had to take marks on their foreheads either of sandal paste or other things as prevalent at the time. The male persons, according to their rank and status, used to take marks on their foreheads called 'Regha', 'Urddhapundra', 'Peuri', 'Dyanghal', 'Phot' etc. The fragrant things which were in prevalence were 'Kasturi' (musk), 'Gorachana' (a bright yellow fragrant supposed to be found in the head of a cow or prepared from its urine), the 'Agara' wood and the different varieties of sandal woods, such as 'Jati-chandan', 'Ranga-chandan' etc.

Assam was, at that time, famous for her 'Agara-wood', from which a perfumed oil was extracted. In ancient Kamarupa, it is stated that there were innumerable antilopes from which best quality of musks was produced. According
to Dr. Motichandra, "There are three grades of musk, the most valued coming from China, the second grade from Assam and Nepal and the last grade from central Asia." Further he says that "Assam was the home of aromatic woods as pointed by the 'Artha Sastra' and this fact is fully supported by the 'Mahabharata'." In other sources also, the musks of Assam are described as the best. * References to anointing 'Angarâga' (cosmetics) on the body are also found in the literary records. Collyrium has been used by the women on the eye-lids. The women of Assam invariably take particular care for the upkeep of a long and dark cluster of heir by applying oil mixed with lime juice. Lime juice is also applied to the body to make the skin smooth and lustrous. Till recently, the Assamese people used to prepare a kind of scented oil from a variety of small flowers, called 'Mirikā', by an indigenous method, in the Nowgong district. They wash their hair with alkaline solution and other herbs, in order to maintain a luxuriant growth. Another favourite practice of the Assamese women, as stated in the 'Yogini Tantra', is the colouring of their teeth. This process of blackening their teeth is seen even now among some of the women of the villages. The practice of colouring the different parts of the body among the tribes is still in vogue.

Among the male persons, the common people cut their hair short and were not allowed to keep long hair except the higher officials and Mahantas.

* Kapila, pāngala, krīṣṇa kasturi trividhā kramāt / Nepāla aśīcā Kāśmirē Kāmarupe aśīcā yayate //
Kāmarupodhava śreṣṭha Naipāle madhyama bhavet / Kāśmiradesa sambhutā kasturi hi adhamā smṛtā //

—— Rajnirghantakar ——
and Satrādhikārs. The higher officers used to keep long and curling hair which was called 'Pāhkata-chuli'. The Mahantas and Satrādhikārs have been keeping their hair long, like the women. Some Brāhmanas shaved their heads totally. Again, the male persons, just above their foreheads, shaved a portion measured about two to three inches wide. The mendicants and the ascetics keep matted hair. For the women, the long and a dark cluster of hair is a thing of beauty as well as of pride. Women of Assam generally dressed their hair twisting into a coiffure, called 'Khopā', of various designs. Besides, they consider it a matter of pride if they possess a big coiffure. To make the size of the coiffure bigger, they use a trassel inside the cluster of the hair. Further, to enhance the beauty of the coiffure, they put on garland of flowers over it or thresh a comb in it.

The Assamese people dress their hair with 'Phani' (comb) and 'Kākai' and in the Medieval period, the people probably used a mirror, made of brass and bronze mixed, called 'Dāpon', a variation of the Sanskrit term 'Darpana'.

In those days, male persons also put on garlands made of flowers on their heads. The variety of garlands called 'chāki' and made of high class flowers, such as 'Juti', 'Mālati' etc., were not allowed to be worn by all classes of people.

The Assamese women dress their hair in various beautiful designs and in this respect, they were perhaps influenced by the women of the non-Aryan communities to a great extent. The women of the non-Aryan communities have been dressing their heads in various designs and in most fascinating styles. Pointing to the style of hair-dressing by the Khamti women, Dr. G.S. Phurya writes: "Their (Khamti's) manner of dressing their head is the most remarkable, having evident similarities with those
Khopas and Combs.

Khopa:

Combs:
represented in the sculptures of Sanci. The hair is twisted into a knot which projects over the forehead and the white Musli turban is so folded round the head as to leave this projected exposed. The manner of doing the hair adopted by their females too, is the reminiscent of the sculptures of Mathura, Sanci and Bharhut. Not only do they raise the hair-knot to form the top-knot but also they encircle the roll of hair by embroidered band. The Assamese women, after their bath, twist their hair into a knot, just above their forehead, similar to that of the Khamtı mentioned above, in order to make it dry soon. As said above, coiffures of various designs were prevalent among the women, and they were known by different names, such as 'Negheri-khopā', 'Ghilā-khopā', 'Kaldilā-khopā', 'Kamalyutī-khopā' etc. Chilarai, the brother of the Koch king Naranarayana, married Kamalpriya, the daughter of Ramrai, being charmed at her cluster of hair. Let us know cite one or two extracts from the literary records to show how the Assamese women made her dress, put on her ornaments and used other cosmetics, in those days. Sankardeva, in his epic, called 'Rukminihraran', portrays a fine picture of Rukmini while at her dressing before going to the temple of Goddess Durgā, just on the eve of her elopement with Lord Krishna of Dwāraka.

(44) (1) "After taking her ceremonial bath prior to going to the temple of Goddess Durgā, Rukmini rubbed her wet-body and beautifully dressed herself up with fine silken garments. She wore 'Mekhelā', ornamented with gold and jewels, on her waist which was so fine and so thin that one could catch hold of it within one's grip. She beautifully tied the 'Khopā' (coiffure) of her hair, high up, and thrusted upon it a bunch of 'Mālatī' flowers. She took vermilion just above the forehead, on the line, made by parting the hair on
the head and marks of 'Āgarā on her forehead. The ornaments called 'Khanja khili' was worn in the ear by her and she put on a diadem on her head. The upper parts of the ears were adorned with an ornament called 'Chāki śalā' and the neck by necklaces made of gold, called 'G palpā', 'Sātsari' and 'Guliā'. Her breast began to glitter by an ornament called 'Peshandār', hanging down from the neck. She decorated her arms with an ornament called 'Ṭāq' and made of gold and the wrists with bracelets of varieties made of gold and conch-shell. The forehead was shining with an ornament, called 'Jethi' and all the fingers of both the hands with rings. Round on her ankles were the anklets called 'Nepura' made of gold and having little balls in it were making a rhythmic jingling sounds all the while."29

---Rukminiharan Kāvyā---

(ii)

"Goddess Durga cleared her cluster of hair with the comb called 'Kānkai' (modern 'kākai') and then tied the 'Khopā' (coiffure) with her hair styled as 'Kamāljuti', i.e., resembling a lotus flower and thrust upon it 'Bakula' and 'Mālati' flowers. She then besmérred scented paste of sandal wood on her body. The parting line of her hair on the head was beautified with vermilions and the eyes with collyrium. Then she put on an ear-ornament called 'Makara-kundala' (the ornament looked like the head of a Magara- a water animal). On her neck, she put on necklace and round on her waist she wore 'Kanchulīkā', the rows of which were bedecked with jewels. On the fingers of the foot she put on rings called 'Ujhati' (ujanti). She decorated her arms with ornaments called 'Bāju' and 'Keyura' and the wrists with bracelets. Then she wearing the 'Mekhēla' round on her waist put on a kind of ornament called 'Ghāgara' (a girdle of small bells) upon it round the waist. Her ankle-joints were adorned with the ornament called 'Nepura' where the round balls were making jingling sounds. Then she dressed herself with beautiful garments smooth and beautiful like flowers which enhanced her beauty surpassing all the beauties of the three worlds. And thus, adorning herself with thirty-two ornaments, she appeared in front of her father."30

---Manasā Kāvyā---
The taking of mark on the forehead and on the line made by parting the hair on the head with vermilion by married Hindu women is an indispensable part of their toilet. The marks of vermilion, specially on the parting line of the hair on the head, is an indication of being married and her husband is living. Those who are widows, do not take vermilion marks. Gunabhiram says that some of the Muslim women also took vermilion marks on their foreheads like the Hindus. The widows of the Brahmanas take marks of sandal paste on their foreheads.

4. Royal Dresses and Ornaments of the Ahom Kings:

The Ahom kings had many valuable dresses and ornaments which were kept in the royal store-house under an officer, called 'Cholā-dhari' Phukan. It is said that during the reign of king Buddhiswa Narayana, seven royal dresses were made with seven styles, collected from seven countries, such as Burma, China, Mungkang, Bengal, Delhi, Assam etc. The other valuable ornaments used by the kings were the nine jewels set on gold plate, the pearl, the diamond, different kinds of necklaces known as 'Fāch-sari', 'Sāt-sari', 'Navāhāri', 'Chandrahār' and 'Gazerā' etc. Other ornaments used by the kings are the different kinds of ear-rings, such as 'Karna-bhusan', 'Karna-bāla', 'Makara-kundal', 'Hangsa-kundal', 'Kundal' and 'Lokāpāra'; different kinds of armlets, called 'Bāju'; different kings of bracelets; head-dress, such as 'Siropesh', 'Kalki', 'Diadems' called 'Kiriti', 'Mukut' etc. All the garments, such as turban, shirt, girdle, waist cloth and the slipper were embroidered and bordered with gold or silver strings. The kings could put on royal dress and royal ornaments with the approval of the three great councillors and other high officials on
on the occasions of sitting on the throne or on any other festival or ceremony. The royal throne had seven stairs, each stair being supported by four wooden leogrigf models. The whole throne was constructed with special workmanship decorated with colour and precious metals, stones and jewels. Upon the throne seven canopies, placing one upon another were kept hanging. Each of the canopies was made of precious silk and are coloured and decorated.

REFERENCES

12. Ibid... pp- 134, 135.
22. Ibid ... pp- 6-7.
27. Vide, Asamar Loka Sankratri, By- Dr. B.K. Barua, 1961, p-152.