PART—II
SOCIAL ASPECTS.
CHAPTER I

Racial Admixture and Hinduisation

1. Introduction:

In the study of the social aspects of the Medieval Assamese society, the first thing that strikes most is the admixture of different racial elements and the conversion of a large number of non-Aryan population into Hinduism. These two are the main factors which contributed a great deal towards establishing a spirit of harmony and cohesion amongst the diverse racial and cultural elements and thus paved the way for a strong national unity among them. Assamese society, in fact, is a mixture of diverse racial strains. In no part of the world, any race can claim the purity of blood, and Assam being the home-land of diverse racial strains, the admixture here happened in a greater degree. About the admixture in the early period, it is difficult to ascertain the extent and the manner of this intermixture. But, from the anthropometry and the ethnography evidences, it is clear that "the early inhabitants of Assam had an admixture of different racial strains." It is believed that this admixture, "happened both before and after their migration and settlement in this land." During the Medieval period, the admixture was continuing. On the strength of the available sources, it can be said, that this admixture in this period, happened, in three ways: viz, (a) admixture by degradation and elevation of castes and sub-castes, (b) admixture by fusion of blood and (c) admixture by conversion.

2. Admixture by Degradation and Elevation:

It is very interesting to note that unlike other parts of India, the caste system, based on Hindu ' Varpâsrama dharma', is very liberal
in Assam. Practically, the castes are divided according to profession or work. In Assam, the different castes were very liberal in their outlook regarding occupation; a profession allotted to one caste, is, sometimes, seen, adopted by people of another caste. Even in the Medieval period, we have seen that some of the so-called lower caste people, who gave up their occupation and adopted cultivation, were regarded as purer than their colleagues. Accordingly, the former was given a better position in the society. For this liberal attitude regarding caste system and adherence to occupation, Gunabhi Ram Barua adduces two reasons; first, he thinks that it so happened because of the influence exerted by Buddhism upon the people here for a considerable time during the early period. The second is owing to a lesser number of people following a particular profession than the demand. This second is the strongest factor no doubt, but we may add a few lines more by saying that those Aryans, who were present here, had to become more liberal in their outlook regarding caste system and occupation, because of the presence of the vast majority of non-Aryan population who were quite ignorant of the caste-system or the laws of *varṇāśrama dharma*. Want of sufficient number of professional people, in this period, was felt by the kings very much. Most of the kings of this period eagerly imported professional people from other parts of India and established them here, giving all sorts of facilities. In the midst of a vast majority of non-Aryan population, Aryans had to forego some of their rigid customs in their attempt to adjust themselves with the local inhabitants. The Aryans became more liberal in their food, drink, dress and customs and manners.
In one of the 'Darrang Rajvamsavali' it is frankly confessed that in course of time, the Brahmans of the northern bank of Brahmaputra though purer by blood and customary rites, would be degraded by coming in contact with non-Aryans. In the same way it is said that the Brahmans of the southern bank would be degraded, because of the contact and fusion with the non-Aryans. In the 'Yogini Tantra', it is said that in the region of Yovinipitha, i.e., in Kamarupa, the religion is of kirata origin. Observance of 'Brahmacharyya' (celibacy) and 'Sannyasa' (asceticism) for a longer period, is not allowed and fish and meat are allowed to be taken freely here. 'Darrang Rajvamsavali' further states that the Brahmans took to cultivation for their livelihood. They take fish, meat and betel-nut and instead of observing fast on the eleventh day of the dark half of the month they observe fast on the 8th day of the bright half; this means, they were non-vegetarians and Tantrik by faith. Owing to their contact with the non-Aryans, the Brahmans, even occupying a higher position above all, had to be very liberal in many other social dealings and accordingly they revised their social laws in order to enable themselves to adjust to the new society. The other main reason for such degradation, is the influence of crypto-Buddhist sects that were prevalent in the early period. A section of scholars does not like to admit the existence and influence of Buddhism and its different sects in Assam. Elsewhere we have mentioned about the existence of Buddhism in Assam. In spite of the fact that Buddhism had to decline by the beginning of the Medieval period, its influence still remained in the land to a considerable extent in the garb of other religious sects. From the 'Katha-surucharit', it is learnt that Sri Sankaradeva faced many pseudo-Buddhists in the early part of his career and he had to struggle
hard to drive them out from the country. The Koch king Naranarayana and his brother Chilarai, who patronised the Hindu culture, gave shelter to a Buddhist in their palace. Sri Sankardeva expresses his high resentments against degradation of the people, under the influence of these mixed sects of Buddhism. In his most popular work 'Kirtana', Sri Sankardeva, by saying that all the people are illusioned by the 'Vamanaya-niti', that is by non-vedic rites, perhaps hinted at the same people under the influence of crypto-Buddhist sects. As a result of this influence of Buddhism the Brāhmaṇas also became degraded and the Kalitās and other lower castes gained the upper hand in the society and became contemptuous of Brāhmaṇas. Most of the Kalitās began to act as priests in the society, specially in the Koch kingdom. There are some scholars who do not like to hold the view that the Kalitās were the priests of the Koches.

Another important fact of racial admixture by elevation and degradation in social hierarchy is the great Vaisnavite movement of this period. Due to the reformatory works done by the exponents of this movement, a good number of non-Aryan inhabitants were elevated and included in the Hindu society. The Koches, the Chutiās, the Kachāris and many other non-Aryan tribes, after a gradual process of purification, were initiated into Vaisnavism by the preceptors and were thus brought into the Hindu fold. In the same way, the Vaisnavite movement brought degradations in the highest rank of the society, i.e., of the Brāhmaṇas. Nowhere in India, the Brāhmaṇas are seen initiated by Sudras; but here in Assam, a large number of Brāhmaṇas took initiation under Sudra Mahantas and gave up observance of their daily Brahmanical rites. This happened perhaps after Sri Sankardeva had retired from this mortal world. This degradation of the Brāhmaṇas came to the notice of king
Rudra Singha (A.D. 1696-1714) who decided to put an end to this unorthodox practice. In the Saka era 1328, i.e., A.D. 1702, the king ordered those who supported the initiation of Brāhmaṇas by Sudra Mahantas and those who opposed it, to assemble in the great royal Assembly Hall at Gargaon and to plead their respective viewpoints with appropriate authorities in order to convince the Assembly. Five Sudra Mahantas and many Brahmin scholars assembled in the great Hall, but the Mahantas miserably failed to justify their views. Then the king ordered for the imprisonment of the five Mahantas, some of whom were later sent on exile.

After this the king issued a decree that no Brāhmaṇa should be allowed to stay within the compound of a Satra presided by a Sudra Mahanta. A Sudra Mahanta also by no means should attempt to initiate a Brāhmaṇa. "If anything contrary to this would happen", the king said, "the Mahanta and the Brāhmaṇa both would be severely punished." But, in spite of this injunction from the king, secret initiation of Brāhmaṇas by the Sudra Mahantas continued.

"Some of the Baidiks (Vaidiks) have become Bara (Varna) and in consequence have degraded themselves in the eyes of their brethren. They instruct the impure tribes, which is considered a great degradation, to which none of the Baidiks of Bengal have submitted." W. Robinson perhaps refers here to those Brāhmaṇas who accepted the priesthood of the newly Hinduised Chutias, Koches, Ahoms etc. Robinson mentions about a class of Muno-Singha (Man Singha) Brāhmaṇas who were not connected with any religious activities and were usually employed in low offices. Haliram Dhekiyal Phukan refers to a class of Brāhmaṇas called 'Kadi-Brāhmaṇas'.
who had to render manual services to the State under the Ahom rule; other Brahmanas did not maintain close and intimate connections with them. In other chronicles we do not find such references. During the Ahom rule the Brahmins were not usually required to undertake any physical labour. Degradation among all castes and communities took place, in the great turmoil and confusion that occurred during the Moamaria insurrections and the Burmese invasions, in the later part of the Ahom rule.

3. Admixture by Fusion of blood:

The second type of admixture amongst the people of different castes and communities can be ascribed to the fusion of blood. This type of admixture had been occurring since the early period. In the Medieval period, we very often meet with references of such fusion between the Aryans and non-Aryans. The historians are of opinion that most of the Brāhmaṇas of Assam and Bengal "must have assimilated Alpine blood at an early period". The Brahmins were subjected to such fusion of blood with other people also, in spite of the best protection extended by the Ahom and the Koch kings to the Varnasrama dharma. During the reign of Sukhāṃśā, alias Khorāraja (A.D. 1552-1603), the king in order to deceive the Koch king sent a large number of Sudras to fight with the Koches, each on a bullock giving a false sacred thread and frontal marks on forehead. The Koch commander Chilarai thinking them to be Brāhmaṇas, did not fight with them as it was not possible for a Hindu to kill Brāhmaṇas and cows both. Many of these false Brāhmaṇas did not remove their threads and began to live in the society claiming themselves as Brāhmaṇas. That
is why the Brāhmaṇas of the Habung territory were considered inferior. Later on, the king Pratap Singha sent one Lekāi Chetia to discharge the pseudo-Brāhmaṇas by removing their false threads and to send them back to their own communities. But Lekāi Chetia, in his discretion, allowed eight families of such Brāhmaṇas to remain, by adding an affix 'Āl' after their surnames so that they might be easily detected. According to Hem Chandra Barua, the Ahom king sent six hundred Kachāris and Barāhis on the back of the cows giving frontal marks on forehead and false thread like the Brāhmaṇas. The Ahom king, later on, discharged all these false Brāhmaṇas, removing their false threads, except only eight Barāhis with whom the king was very pleased and therefore allowed them to remain as Brāhmaṇas. These eight families were the Ulual, the Jahal, the Gheriāl, the Thehāl, the Pithiāl, Chāvariāl, the Kātuāl and the Sihual. Barua is of opinion that the word 'Āl' which was attached to each of the eight families, is not a suffix but a short deviation of the word 'Āul' which means disorder. However, in course of time, the descendants of these eight families, had completely merged themselves with other Brāhmaṇas, by concealing their suffix 'Āl' from their surnames. It will be found, in our discussion below, that now and then some Kṣatriyas and Kāyasthas, from other parts of India, have migrated to Assam and made their settlements here. These migrated Kṣatriyas and Kāyasthas, intermarried with the local Kalitās, came to be known as 'Sāt-Sūtra' (a pure Sudra) and began to perform their social duties like other Sudras in Assam.

The Ahoms who were very small in number and practically no women folk at the time of their migration to Assam, had to marry from the local
inhabitants, such as the Barahis, the Morans, the Chutiäs etc.. The Ahom kings had matrimonial relations with all the Aryan and non-Aryan kings of the land of that time. It was the convention that an Ahom king should marry for his Chief queen from the seven high ranking Ahom families, who came with Sukāphā. But in practice, it is seen that they married from different castes and communities; of course in such cases the queen was generally not allowed to be the Chief queen of the king. As it was not possible to run the administration of an extensive kingdom thronged in by people of different races and tribes, with the powerful Muslims in the west as a source of perpetual danger, the Ahoms were compelled to increase their strength by incorporating Chutiäs, Kachāris, Barahis and Morans etc., into their own community. They also absorbed people of other races and tribes like Hindu-Kalitā, Hindu-Dobā (washer man) Koch, Miri, Naga etc. Today people generally speak of three classes of Chutiäs, viz, the Deuri-Chutiā, the Hindu-Chutiā and the Ahom-Chutiā. The first two classes have their separate identities but the separate identity of the last one who completely merged with the Ahoms does not exist today. The different Ahom kings, viz, Shuhumung, Shuklemun, Shukhāphā, Shusenphā, Rajeswar Singha, Chandra Kanta Singha etc. married from different castes, communities and tribes. King Chandra Kanta Singha, in the teeth of great opposition from the ministers and nobles, married one girl, Padmavati by name, the daughter of a disciple of Benganā Ati Satra. In one of the chronicles it is said that the king of Kamatā married Susuddhi, the daughter of the Nowab of Gauḍā, after having converted her into Hinduism. Subsequently she was married by the Kachāri and the Ahom kings. Many of the Ahom kings had their 'Chamaā' queens (who cannot sit on the throne with the king) from the princesses of the Naga
kings. Some of the Ahom and Chutiñ kings had matrimonial alliances with the Hindu kings of Kamatå. The Koch king Naranarayana and his brother Chilarai married girls from the Kāyastha Bhuyan family. Bhanumati, the Chief queen of Naranarayana and Chandraprabha, wife of Chilarai, respectively were the daughters of Pratap Bhuyan and his brother, who were related to Sri Sankardeva. Thus, fusion amongst various racial elements occurred in a great measure during the Medieval period. It is needless to say that intermixture of blood between different castes and communities also happened during and after the Noāvarī insurrections and the Burmese invasions. Instances of elevating low professional classes to a higher category of the Hindu society are not very rare in Assam. For example, we can take the case of the Keot, who occupied a position next to the Kalitas in the social hierarchy. The term Keot is derived from the Sanskrit word Kaivarta, meaning a fisherman. A section of the Kaivarttas gave up their profession of fishing and adhered to the cultivation work; in course of time they came to be known as Keot and became more pure in thought and action. Then they were promoted and offered a status next to the Kalitas. The Brāhmaṇas and the Kāyasthas and the Kalitas take uncooked things distributed by the Keots. But their brothers, the other section of the Kaivarttas, remained far below in the society and not to speak of the Brāhmaṇa, Kāyastha, Kalitå and Keot, even the newly Hinduised Koches, Chutiñs, Ahoms etc. refused to take things distributed by them. In the same way we can point out to the Kumāras (Kumbha-kūras), Chañāras (Charma-kūras), Nāṭas etc. These people, because they maintained improved standard, were given better position in the society in Assam than their counterparts in other parts of India.
4. Admixture by Conversion:

The work of Hinduisation in the midst of the non-Aryan inhabitants was continuing since the early period and the Brahmin priests were the pioneer workers in this respect. In the Medieval period we have seen three main working agents in this field. They are the (a) Brāhmaṇa priests, (b) the Royal patrons and the great (c) Vaisnavite movement.

(a) Brāhmaṇa priests:

The Brāhmaṇa priests and scholars gave a divine pedigree to each of the non-Aryan ruling dynasties. Thus by incorporating the non-Aryan kings into the Hindu fold and by giving them a higher status in the Hindu Society, the Brāhmaṇa priests forged the way for a closer relationship between the Aryans and the non-Aryans. There are numerous episodes, wherein we find descriptions of the divine origin of the non-Aryan kings and their descent is traced back to eminent Kṣatriya heroes or gods mentioned in the great 'purāṇas' and epics. According to these episodes the Chutia kings were the descendants of god Kuvera, the Koch kings were the descendants of God Siva, the Ahom kings were the descendants of god Indra etc. Similar episodes, tracing the divine origin of other tribal kings, are found in respect of the Jayantīs, the Gāros etc.17

The Brāhmaṇa priests improvised methods to include the non-Aryans into the Hindu Society. Under the patronage of the Koch king Naranarayana, Pitambar Siddhanta Vagisa, the famous author on Smṛti nivandhas, and the grammarians Purosottam Bhattacharyya, besides writing liberal works on Smṛti, tried their utmost to upgrade the Koches by initiating them to Hindu rites and ceremonies and customs and manners. It is stated in a 'Rājvamsāvali' that
"the two Bhattacharyyas began to work for the spread of Hindu culture among the non-Aryan people according to the injunctions laid down in the Sastras. For the fulfilment of the purpose, Siddhanta Vagisara wrote eighteen Kaumudis (18 works of Smrti) based on puranas and other Hindu Sastras. The eighteen Kaumudis are: the Danda, preta, Vrsotsarga, Prayag, Yaga, Sraddha, Durgotsava, Ekadasi, Siddhi, Pratiṣṭhā, Sankalpa, Prayashchitta, Tirtha, Kaal, Panchadikṣa, Sambandha, Tithi, Daya, and Āchāra. He divided the four main castes, viz, the Brāhmaṇa, the Ksatriya, the Vaisya, the Sudra and many other minor castes allotting rights, duties and status to each one of them. All people in the kingdom had to follow the caste system, perform their functions and observe other customs and manners as directed by Sidhanta Vagisa. Those who went against it, were severely punished by the king and were boycotted by their own people."

Thus, Hindu rites and manners were gradually established amongst the non-Aryan populations as a result of the liberal views held by the Brāhmaṇa scholars and priests under the patronage of the kings. Many of the tribal people who eschewed their tribal customs and manners and accepted the Hindu faith, were promoted to the Hindu society. In the modern Hindu (Assamese) society, the Koches, who became Hindu, are considered next to

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* "Bhattacharyya doyojane mone ranga kari /
  Dharma chalibaka laila, Sāstra anusari //
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Vagisara mate samasta pravarte kare dharma karma chaya /
Āchāra bichāra jāti byavahāra tāna mate pravarta //
Kata Vagisara eri yito nara balātkāre pravartaya /
Taka Narpati danda kare ṛeti svajane tāka tejaya //
(Brhat Rajvamsāvali- by Raja Harendra Narayan Deva- verses, 1773- 1795; Assam Government collection No.2)
the Keots. They perform Śrāddha, marriage and other social functions like
the Hindus and are considered as one in the Śudra Community. So also, the
Hindu-Chutiās, who perform their social functions according to Hindu rites,
are considered as a sub-caste of the Śudra Community and occupy a position
next to the Koches in the society. A large number of Ahoms including the
kings and nobles accepted Hindu faith. But they did not give up all their
customary functions and did not strictly follow the rules and regulations
in respect of food and drink as the Koches and the Chutiās did. In the
records, it is found that when a king married a girl from the Hindu family,
he married her according to Hindu rites. The other people mentioned above
do not take cooked or boiled food distributed tham by the Ahoms. However,
they were given a good status in the Hindu society. Thus a large number of
non-Aryans had been brought into the Hindu fold and it is for this reason
that the Smritikāras in Assam held liberal views in their works, in order to
make them easily accessible to the new converts and that is why "...in the
field of Smritis we get occasional glimpses of the views they held,
different from those expounded by the Smritikāras of other parts of India." 19

(b) The Royal Patrons :

In respect of conversion, the royal dynasties of non-Aryan origin
contributed a great deal. The Kamata, the Koch, the Chutiā, the Ahom and the
Kachāri kings offered invaluable services in this respect. Most of the
kings of these dynasties accepted Hindu faith and helped in spreading it
among their subjects. The kings of these dynasties were very liberal and
enthusiastic in importing high-class Hindus like the Kayasthas and Brāhmaṇas
and other professional people from different parts of India and settled them
permanently. The Kamata and the Koch kings invited scholars and gave
shelter to them. It was under their inspiration that a number of enics,
purāṇas and other scriptures were translated into Assamese, which, in fact, facilitated the preachers in proselytising the non-Aryan inhabitants. The significant role played by the Koch kings, viz, Biswa Sinchha and Naranarayana, in this sphere, deserves mention. Just after coming to power, Biswa Sinchha, father of Naranarayana, was given a divine padi by the Brahmin priests as the son of God Siva by the Brahmin priests. Biswa Sinchha himself accepted Hindu faith and became a devotee of Siva and Pārvatī. He celebrated the worship of Goddess Durga and he himself also worshipped her. He sent his sons Naranarayana and Sukladhvaja to Benares where they were taught politics, astrology, logic, ethics, epics, purāṇas and other Hindu Šāstras by an ascetic named Brahmananda. During the reign of the last king of the Khen dynasty the Mohammedan invaders under Hussain Shah destroyed the impregnable city of Kamatāpur and the temples of the Hindu gods and goddesses, including that of the Kamateswari. Biswa Sinchha rebuilt the city Kamatāpur and a new temple was erected with bricks and stones for the worship of Goddess Kamateswari. All over Koch-Behar, he installed various images of Hindu gods and goddesses and brought Brahmapaṇs from Mithila to Kochbehar, for conducting worship in these temples. As these Brahmapaṇs belonged to 'Vasiṣṭha gotra' (clan) Biswa Sinchha also took for himself the Vasiṣṭha gotra.

After ascending the throne, king Naranarayana invited scholars from different places and engaged them in translating the representative works.

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* Puja avasāne vibragana kari japa /
  Sehi belu upasthita Biswa Sinchha nṛpa //
  Kusa-hasta haiya basi viṣṇuka sumāri /
  Gosānīka pujā kare mula mantra smari //

(Darrang Rajvamsavali- verse - 217)
of Sanskrit into Assamese, so that they might be easily understood by all sections of people. He was a great patron of Sanskrit learning. The great Grammarian of his court, Purusottam Bhattacharyya, wrote the Sanskrit grammar 'Proyoga Ratnamālā' in a very lucid and simple style at the instance of the Chief queen Ratnamālā. Pitambar Siddhanta Vāgīśa laid down the details of duties and rites to be observed by the neo-converts. Those who did not follow the dictates of Siddhanta Vāgīśa, were severely punished by king Naranarayana. Further, the king divided the Koch people into two divisions, viz, those who remained in their tribal faith and those who followed the Hindu faith. The king declared that it was his royal behest that in all temples lying to the north of Gohain Kamalā road, which demarcated the northern and southern part of his kingdom, the Koches and the Mechas would continue to worship according to their tribal rites while in the south, the Brāhmaṇas would officiate. This law was to hold good in all places. The Bhotas and Kachāris would eat fermented liquor and rice. They should give him gold and horse, for the enjoyment of their land.

*Sanata khuvai Raja bulilā bachan /
Suniyo samaste mora vākya nibandhan //
Gohāin kamala āli madhye simā kari /
Uttarara phāle āchhe yateka kachāri //
Sehi phāle devālaya āchhe yata yata /
Kocha Mecha pujibeka mohora vākyata //
Daksināra phāle pujā Brāhmaṇe kariba /
Ehi nibandhane save dharma pravartiba //
Bhota Kachāri tai madya bhāta khēbī //
Mātira kārāpe moka sonā ghorā dibhi //
Ehi nibandhana bāndhi pāchha Naresvara /
Singarita raila gai sajāi bāsara //

(Darrang Rajvamsāvali - by Suryyakhari Daitrajna, verses 336-338)
During the rule of the Koches, Saktism was predominant in the country. Biswa Sinha himself was devotee of Durga and Siva. He performed the worship of Durga and offered animal sacrifice to her. King Naranarayan and Chilarai re-built the temple of goddess Kamakhya destroyed by a Mohammedan invader and granted money and property for the maintenance of the temple. Later on, it is recorded in hagiographies that Chilari was initiated to the Vaisnava faith by Sri Sankardeva. The descendants of the Koch kings, both in the western and eastern portions, were mainly Saktas and they performed the worship of Durga annually in their capitals. The Koch kings and the Koch people, who accepted Hindu faith, performed their Srađha, marriage and other religious functions according to Hindu manners.

We have discussed above that the Chutiā kings accepted the Hindu faith, due to perhaps similarities between their own tribal faith and the Tāntrik faith. The Chutiā kings built many temples of Hindu gods and goddesses and settled Brāhmanas, Kayasthas and the other professional people in their kingdom. Though the Kachāris may perhaps be described as the aboriginal or earliest known inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley, yet their progress proved very slow in this respect. It can be said that Saivism spread among the Kachāris even at an early period; but their cultural development appeared to be very slow. This is why the Kachāris had to engage themselves in political rivalry with the Bhuyan Chiefs and the Ahom kings and they were forced by the latter to retire to the hilly regions on the south of the Brahmaputra valley beyond the easy reach of the Brahmin priests and the Vaisnavite preacher. However, it is commonly believed that Madhab Kandali, under the patronage of Kachāri king Barāh Mānikya, translated the entire Rāmâyana into Assamese. That the Kachāris
did not observe the orthodox Hindu rites, there is no doubt about it and that is perhaps why they accepted the Hindu Saivism in the remote early period for its liberal outlook as regards food and drink and other customs and manners. Some of the Mlechha kings of the early Kāmarūpa, whose tutelary deities are described as God Śiva or Goddess Pārvatē or Durgā in the epigraphic records, surely belong to the Kachāris or widely speaking Tibeto-Burman group. We think that some sort of synthesis between Hindu—Saivism and their tribal faith had happened in the early period. God Śiva and Goddess Pārvatē are worshipped, even now, by different groups of Kachāris, in their tribal manner, in different names.

In the later part of the Medieval period, the Kachāris kings formally adopted the Hindu faith and proclaimed themselves as Kṣatriya tribe. As to the conversion of the Kachāri kings Edward Gait observes that the process of Hinduisation had already commenced in the royal court at Ḍaindpok. In the year 1790 A.D., the formal act of conversion took place at Khāspur, when the Kachāri king Krishna Chandra and his brother Gobinda Chandra entering into the body of a copper effigy of a cow came out of it. Immediately after their emergence from it, they were proclaimed to be Hindu of Kṣatriya caste and the Brāhmaṇas composed a genealogy of hundred generations beginning from the 2nd Pāndava Bhima, the great Kṣatriya hero of the Kuruksētra fame.

The Ahom monarchs followed a very liberal religious policy. It is believed that the Ahoms deliberately became liberal in their religious and social outlooks, because of their minority in number. At the first instance, the dynasty of the Ahom kings came to be known as 'Indravamsi' kings. Their
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Chāṇḍophāṇa, king of heaven (Swarga Dava), was identified with Indra and their secret family idol *Somdeo* with the Hindu idol *Śalagrama*. Accordingly many of the Ahom Gods, Goddesses and legends were identified with Hindu Gods, Goddesses and legends. The influence of Hinduism first entered into the royal families along with Sudāngphā, alias Barumi Konwar, who was born and brought up in a Brahmā family of the north bank. He brought his companions, the sons of the Brahmā, and the idol *Laksminārāyana Śalagrama* along with him to the capital. The sons of the Brahmā were established in the territory of Dihing and the dignity and privileges of royal prince had been conferred upon them and the idol of Laksminārāyana continued to be worshipped in the capital with the same devotion and grandeur shown to *Somdeo*, the family idol of the Ahom kings. Sri Sankardeva, the founder-propagator of the Vaisnavite faith was contemporary to the Ahom king Shuhungmung. But his movement could not exert any influence upon the royal Ahom family, because of the political enmity between the Ahoms and Bhuyan Chiefs. This enmity between the Ahoms and the Bhuyans continued for a long time. This might be the reason why Vaisnavism, propagated by Sri Sankardeva, a Bhuyan, could not or did not enter into the capital of the Ahom kings. In the next phase, Hinduism made a considerable progress in the Ahom court, during the reign of the powerful Ahom king Shusenphā. He was a devout Saiva and Saivism became a popular religion amongst his subjects. He constructed two Siva temples, one at Dergāon (it was reconstructed only) and the other at Biswanāth. It was at his instance that people from Assam were sent to Kochbehar to learn the art of making earthen image of Goddess Durgā and some artists of Kochbehar also, were brought to Assam for permanent settlement. The influence of Hinduism
and Brahmin priests, became "more marked in the reign of king Pratap Singha (Shusenphä) who was personally grateful to the Brahman priests for riding him of a 'demon' which had possessed him during his princehood, and whose continuance was considered by that monarch to be distressful and undignified if he had to perform his royal duties with justice and equanimity." Since then, in one of the chronicles it is said that the king became Saivite and devoted to Brāhmaṇapās. The progress of Hinduism in the Ahom court reached climacteric stage when the Ahom monarch Jayadhvaja Singha (1648-1682) was formally initiated into Vaisnavism by Niranjan Bāpu, whom he established as the first Satrādhikār of Āumiṭi Satra, one of the four principal Satras of Assam. Further, "hearing the fame of Banamali Gosain, then living at Kochbehar, he sent for him and gave him land for setting up Satras at Kaliabor and Majuli". Thus Vaisnavism entered into the Ahom palace for the first time during the reign of Jayadhvaja Singha and it continued to receive royal recognition up to the reign of king Sulikā, alias Lorājā (1679-1681). Jayadhvaja Singha's successor, Chakradhvaja showed keen interest in and devotion to Banamali Bāpu. Many of the Ahom nobles and officers also took their initiation from Vaisnava Gosains or Mahantas and showed due respect and devotion to them. Amongst the Ahom kings Jayadhvaja Singha, for the first time, issued grants to different religious institutions and individuals. But the table turned in favour of Saktism from the reign of Ahom monarch Rudra Singha. His father Gadāhar Singha already showed predilection towards Saktism. Rudra Singha himself was initiated to Vaisnavism by Harideva Bāpu of Āumiṭi Satra. He issued ample grants and gifts to the Brāhmaṇapās. In the later part of his life, he became a strong supporter of Śīkṣa faith and sent for one Krishnarāmn Bhattacharyya of
Jivadivina, whom he established at Kilghala hill giving lands and other facilities. But Rudra Singha did not take initiation from Krishnaram Bhattacharyya. According to his advice, his son Siva Singha was initiated into Sākta faith, under Krishnaram Bhattacharyya. Since then, Sākta faith came to receive royal recognition from the Ahom kings. Siva Singha's consort, queen Phuleswari, the de facto ruler, began to show more regard to Saktism and forced the subjects to follow Sākta faith, as a result of which the Moamarias, a Vaishnava sect, became highly infuriated with the Ahom kings.

In the beginning of the Ahom rule the Ahom priests known as Deodhai, Bailung, and Mohan, had to act both as priests and lawgivers to the Ahom kings. Gradually the Ahom kings became more liberal and appointments of Sabhāpaṇḍīteś (court-scholars to help in judicial matters), Katakī (envoy), Kathati (clerk), Jyotisāsa (astrologers), Beṣbarua (Physician), Majumbār Barua (personal assistant to the king), Deoliya Barua (officers to supervise and keep account of the temples and Devalayas etc.) and many others were from the Hindu community to manage political as well as socio-religious affairs of the State. The Ahom kings freely borrowed suggestions from the Hindu political works; the diplomatic letters sent by the Ahom kings to the neighbouring and distant States give sufficient testimony to this. Diplomatic relations, declaration of war, treaty, phalanx of troops, construction of fort, rampart etc., all the such things were made according to the suggestions embodied in the Hindu works on polity. Towards the last part of the Ahom rule, during the reign of Kamalakswar Singha, a small treatise was composed, known as 'Mitraśāstra', which dealt with war, battle-field, the array of soldiers, diplomatic relations etc. on the basis of Hindu political code. The influence of 'Kamandakāya Niti śstra',
'Mahābhārata' etc. is obvious on this book. Dr. S. K. Bhuyan observes: "During the later periods, the Ahoms were imparted systematic knowledge of Hindu political treatises, Artha Sastras and Dandanitis through the learned pandits attached to the royal court and to the families of the leading Ahom nobles."

In the beginning of the diplomatic letters, dispatched by the Ahom kings, the protection of the cows and Brāhmaṇas in the State and the prevalence of Sama, Dama, Dāna, and Bheda without any interruption, are always sought for. King Pratap Singha struck octagonal coins in the geographical shape of Saumāpitha, mentioned in the Yogini Tantra. To avert the wrath of some Deity at the time of epidemic in the country or other national crisis, the Ahom kings performed worship of Gods or Goddesses, Homa (oblation to fire) and Nāma-Kirtana. Necessary expenses for such functions were sanctioned from the royal treasury. The coronation ceremonies of the kings were performed according to Hindu as well as Ahom rites. After the coronation, the Satrādhikārs and the Mahantas of the country were invited to the court to offer blessings to the new king. It has been mentioned above that a large number of temples and tanks were constructed during the Ahom rule. These newly constructed temples and the tanks were dedicated to the gods or goddesses, by installing their images therein. The practice of cremating the dead body and performing the Sūddha ceremony of the deceased were adopted by the Ahoms. Prior to king Rudra Singha, as recorded in the Dāndā Buranji, the dead bodies of the Ahom kings were laid to rest after having raised a high mound of earth. King Rudra Singha first introduced the procedure of burning the dead body of a king and putting the ashes in a grave, raising a high mound of earth. The subsequent Ahom kings, accordingly, burnt the dead bodies of their predecessors and the
Sāddha ceremonies were also performed. For example, about the burning of Rajeswar Singha's dead body and his Sāddha ceremony as referred to in the Ahom Buranji, it is said, "After ten days the dead body of the deceased king was burnt. The bones and ashes were carried to Charaideu and put into grave. An earth mound was raised over the grave." So also it is found, "After nine days' suffering, the king's mother expired on Hindu Saniبار (Saturday). In the very day the dead body of the Royal mother (viz Lakṣmi Singha's mother) was burnt on the funeral pyre by the side of the Dikha river. A few bones were taken to the Engera field and entombed there. On the 10th day, the 'Dahit' ceremony (a ceremony observed by the Sudras on the 10th day of the expiry) was performed. The Hindus were given milk, curd, plantain and sugar-cane and the Ahoms 'komal' (soft) rice and fried rice to eat. At the end of one month all the Gosāins were called in and the Sāddha ceremony was performed at Rangpur according to Hindu custom."

King Rudra Singha first created the post of 'Khound' to take the bones of expired kings and nobles to the places of pilgrimage and immerse them there according to Hindu rites. Towards the later part of the rule, the Ahom kings performed some purificatory rites of their sons, such as Karna Vedha, Durgotsava (worship of Goddess Durgā) and Phalṛutsava (Holi festival), these were the two main Hindu religious festivals performed in the capital at the patronage of the Ahom kings with great pomp and devotion.

The Ahom kings gave protection to the 'Varnasrama Dharmā' in Assam. It is said above that at the time of the Koch invasion some of the people went to the battle field riding on cows with frontal marks on foreheads and putting on false sacred thread, in order to deceive the Koches. These
people, afterwards, remained in the society claiming themselves as Brahmanas. King Pratāp Singha ordered for the removal of their false thread and for sending them back to their own community. King Jayadhvaja Singha passed a sentence on a fisherman to the effect that his chest (fisherman's) be torn asunder with an axe for feeding the people of all communities by performing Bar Sabāh! (recital of Holy name by a congregation of people). Further, we have discussed above, that king Rudra Singha strictly ordered the Sudra Mahantas not to initiate the Brahmanas and the Brahmanas were strictly forbidden not to take initiation under Sudra Mahanta. The Ahom kings, themselves, offered the Brahmanas, the Kayasthas and the Kalitas only milk, banana, sugar-cane and such other things to be taken, whom they invited to the Brāddha ceremonies performed in their houses. In one of the chronicles, it is said that one Majumder Barua, who belonged to the Daivajna community, was a very favourite of king Gadādhar Singha and as the king was very pleased with his conversation, he always kept him by the side of his dining table at the dinner time. The other Ahom officers objected the presence of a non-Ahom at the time of king's dinner. The king was so fond of him that he in order to get him at the side of his dinner table, ordered for the conversion of the Barua into the Ahom community. The officers could not consider this conversion as proper. At last, having failed to convert the Barua to the Ahom community, he was incorporated in the Lākhām Ghetā family (a royal family) in order to enable him to be present at the side of the king's dinner table and a certain Ahom family was attached with the Majumder Barua to take the dishes offered from the king's house to be taken by Majumder Barua, as the custom was in vogue.
The Parbatia Gosain, that is Krisharam Bhattacharya, tried to introduce the new Hindu code, Smārtta, introduced by Raghunandan Bhattacharya, in this country, but the Brāhmaṇas and the Mahantas who followed the old code, did not agree to this. The king Siva Singha passed an order saying that the disciples of Parbatia Gosain would follow the new code and the others would follow the old code and thus the quarrel between the two parties was brought to an end. Another quarrel arose during the reign of this king, between the Brāhmaṇas and the Daivajnas. The Parbatia Gosain held the view that the Gaṇakas (Daivajnas) are inferior to the Brāhmaṇas and they should not use the surname 'Sarvan' and should not accept honorarium. Then, after sufficient discussion in the court, the king declared that the Daivajnas would use the surname 'Sarvan' and they would perform the worship of the planets and for this honorarium would be taken by them, but they must not perform the Śrāddha ceremony, Prayāṣchitta etc. The Brāhmaṇas on their part must not perform the worship of the planets.

King Rudra Singha was a devotee of Siva and daily worshipped Siva by making earthen 'Sivalinga'. King Rajeswar Singha, once at the time of full eclipse of the moon, donated a handful of gold (kanakānjali) to the Brāhmaṇas at Aswakṛanta temple. Thus we have seen that the Ahoms to a great extent merged themselves in the Hindu Society and extended all possible help for promotion and spread of Hindu culture in Assam.

(c) The Vaisnavite Movement:

The most noteworthy contribution towards Hinduisation, in this period, was that of the Vaisnavite movement, inaugurated by Sri Sankaradeva.
It can be said that this movement succeeded in converting the people of different tribes and races to the Vaisnava faith in a large scale for three main reasons. First, the Votaries translated the epics and the Purāṇas into simple Assamese verse, in order to make the tenets of their faith to be easily understood by the common folk. Secondly, on finding that it was impossible to spread their religion through literature, they resorted to the medium of arts, such as dance, music, theatrical performance of devotional plays, composed by them and religious festivals. Thirdly, they made the caste system more liberal and elevated the socially backward classes and tribes to the Hindu Society after making them more pure, refined and enlightened with ethico-devotional dores and rules of conduct. By adopting this method, the Vaisnavite movement converted a large number of people to Hinduism. Due to catholicity on the part of the Vaisnavite movement regarding caste system, the bond of friendship and fraternity among the different tribes and races, became solid and firm and the Assamese Society became more extensive. In his translation of some of the verses of the 2nd book of ' Bhājavata Purāṇa', Sankardeva slightly deviates from the original in enumerating the tribes sanctified by Vaisnavism. Replacing the unfamiliar tribes by the tribes living in Assam, he writes:

"Mirāta Kacchari, Khāni, Gāro Kiri, Yavana Kanka Goñal /
Acama Maluka, Rajaka Turuka,
Kuvāca Illechha Chandal //
Āno Pūpi nara, Kṛṣṇa Sevaka,
Sangata pāvitra hay /
Śakati labhiā, Jamsara tariā,
Vaikuntha Sukhe labhay //"
(Translation: The Kiratac, the Kacharis, the Kiris, the Garos, the Kiris, the Yavanas, the Kankas, the Goelas, the Acanas, the Malukas, the Rajakas, the Turukas, the Kuvachas, the Kockhas, the Chandelas and other sinners, living in the company of the devotees of Krishna attain sanctity and can successfully proceed to Vaikuntha, the abode of Lord Krishna, crossing the ocean like world by dint of their devotion, acquired from then, i.e., the devotees.

The original one :

"Kiritā Hunāndhra Pulinda Pukkasa Abhira Kanka Yavanakhasādayah
Ye anya ca pāpā yadupāsrayarayashrayah suddhyanti tasmāi
prabhavispave narnah //")

As a matter of fact, the Vaisnavite movement not only preached Vaisnavism among the non-Aryan people, but also successfully brought these people into the fold of the one Assamese Society. Because of the simplicity it enjoined upon devotional matters and equality preached among all categories of people, Vaisnavism became very popular amongst all sections of people. The Vaisnavite movement removed the differences between the high and the low in the society and opened the door for the tribes to enter into the Hindu society, "provided the men were devoted, righteous and ruled in manners". The Satra institutions were in charge of initiating people and teaching the codes and the rules of conduct. The Vaisnavite movement penetrated into the remote hill tribes also and credit for this must be attributed to a sect known as 'Kala Samhati'. But unlike the Koches, Chutias and Ahoms, these hill tribes cannot be regarded as completely Hinduised. The hill tribes, like the Kacharis, the Mikirs, the Garos, the Kiris, etc., who were converted into Hinduism are called 'Saranipās', that is, they may be classed as semi Hinduised. W. Hunter, in his Statistical
Account of Assam wants to equate the Koches and the Chutias with the Saraniyas (now Hinduised) Kacharis, Mikirs, Rabhas etc; but we think it will be quite unjustified to place Koches and Saraniyas' Kacharis in the same footing. The Koches and the Chutias became more righteous and refined in customs and manners and in food and drink. Thus the Vaisnavite movement in the Medieval period rendered significant services in establishing a healthy Assamese Society embracing the non-Aryan tribes and low races, by maintaining and infusing a spirit of humanity, cordiality and brotherhood in the heart of all those who came into the touch of it.

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