Chapter 3

Political- Administrative Organisations

A discussion on the political and administrative organisations of the vassal kingdoms under the Ahoms would reveal the true character of their rule in conformity with the wishes and aspirations of the people. Besides, it would reveal the nature of the polity prevailing both within the vassal kingdoms as well as within the Ahom territory. The political and administrative organisations of the vassal kingdoms were of similar nature with those prevailing in the erstwhile Kamrup- Kamata, Koch Behar, Chutiya kingdoms and the contemporary Kachari, Jaintiya, and the Ahom kingdoms. Only difference was in respect to their territorial extent and location.

The political capacity, sagacity and acumen of the vassal kings were of the same nature as had been demonstrated by the Ahom liegelords themselves. The vassal kings exercised the same kind of control over their subjects as did the Ahom sovereign over his/her.

As has been demonstrated in the introductory chapter the vassal kingdoms of the Ahoms were of two kinds, one had been in existence since the pre-Ahom period, while the second were created during the Ahom regime.

Desh Darrang was the first to accept Ahom suzerainty in 1614 A.D. in the north bank of the Brahmaputra. Then it was the king of Dimorua to accept the suzerainty of the Ahoms in 1616 A.D. and become a tributary chief.¹ It was during the reign of Jayadhvaj Singh that the three vassal kingdoms of Mikirgaya,
Barepujia and Tupaehakuchia were established in the year 1649-50. They formed parts of the "Panchorajia". The king of Gobha accepted the Ahom tutelage in 1658 during the reign of Jayadhvaj Singha. The kingdoms of Dandua, Khukhnagog and several other were also organised almost during the same period. Then it was the turn of Beltola.

Before the establishment of Ahom suzerainty over the kingdoms of Darrang and Beltola they had formed parts of the Koch kingdom. The petty kingdoms and chieftainships lying to the west of Darrang and Beltola also had been under the Koch rule. Therefore, the nature of political organisation and administration over these kingdoms and chieftainships were very much akin to those of the Koches.

On the other hand, the border kingdoms of Panbari, Dimorua, Gobha, Neli, Khola, Sahari and Damal had long been in closer contact with the Jaintiyas. Some of them were the vassalage of the Jaintiya kings. Therefore their political administrative organisation and system were similar to those of the Jaintiya kingdom. Thus the political and administrative organisation of these kingdoms bore the imprint of the Jaintiya rule.

Most of the vassal kings preferred to claim their origin from some kind of divinity, born either from some Hindu God or Goddesses, mainly Mahadev or Sib. Biswa Singha claimed his origin from the Hindu God Siba. It is said that Hira- the wife of Haria Mech (Mandal)- had some extra-marital relation with Sib and out of this relation Biswa Singha was born. So also the case with the origin of several kings like those of Gobha, Neli, Khola, Sahari and Damal. They claimed their origin from Mahadev and Parvati. This nature of claims lends credence to the fact that there had been an attempt by the priestly class, either belonging to the Brahmins or non- Brahmins, to bestow divinity on the person of
the king. In this way an attempt had been made to show the divine origin of kings so that ordinary mortals would follow their dictates. The origin of the Ahom kings also had a story like this. The Ahom kings are said to have had originated from the House of Indra, the King of Heaven.

**Rules of Succession:**

The succession to the throne was based on the hereditary principle. The elder/eldest son usually succeeded to the throne after the death or otherwise of the reigning king. Sometimes younger son was also preferred to succeed to the throne by the reigning king because of the former's competency. In the event of a clash developing among several sons for the throne, the king in consultation with the elders decided in favour of the competent one.

In the event of a clash developing between two princes for succession, the kingdom itself was seen divided between the two. The clash between Lahan Singh- the king of Gobha- with his brother Nileswar for succession led to the division of the kingdom into two, Gobha and Neli. The former remained with Lahan while Nileswar became the king of Neli. In the like manner, the quarrel between Mrigangka and Ja^angka led to the division of Kumoi kingdom into Kumoi and Baghara.

It is also seen that sometimes the reigning king of a kingdom parted away a portion of his kingdom to his daughter as a gift in her marriage and the son-in-law in consequence became the king. In this way separate kingdoms were created. Mangal Singha- the king of Baghara- gave his daughter in marriage to Suparadhvaj along with a portion of his kingdom. This portion of the kingdom was known as khukhnagog and thus Suparadhvaj became the king of Khukhnagog. Nileswar Singha- the king of Neli made his son-in-law, Judhajit,
the king of his kingdom. In this way sons-in-law were also allowed to succeed to the throne in vassal kingdoms.

The kings of Kumoi and Tarani kingdoms gave their daughters in marriage to Ranasiddha kowar of Damal. Each of them also parted away a portion of their kingdom creating the Tetelia kingdom so as to enable Ranasiddha Kowar to become the king of that kingdom.

Originally Gobha, Neli, khola and Sahari kingdoms were matriarchal and therefore daughters succeeded to the throne in these kingdoms. Subsequently this practice was abrogated. The ancestors of the chiefs of Mikirgaya, Barepujia and Tupakuchia kingdoms had formerly belonged to the matriarchal society. After revolting against this practice they under the leadership of one Tangara left the original habitat and settled near Raha. Telek Sandikai—the Raha Baruah restored the chiefs to royal status by creating the three kingdoms of Mikirgaya, Barepujia and Tupakuchia during the reign of Jayadhvaj Singha.

In the absence of a natural heir, the elders exercised the right to choose a king from amongst the important families of the kingdom.

The principle of succession to the throne in Beltola, Dandua and Darrang was akin to that of the Koch kingdom under Maharaj Namarayan, i.e., the eldest son succeeded after the death of his father.

**Qualities of the King:**

The person of the king must be sacred, and he must be a man of character and good conduct. He must have certain qualities. He must be good looking and of sound health, a good warrior, and a competent judge. The subjects held him in high esteem.

The king must have military knowledge and he must not work for his own living or do any physical labour. The person destined to become king received all
sorts of required training before being the king of a particular kingdom. The kings of Tupakuchia, Rani and Luki proved their mettle in the war against the Moamoria rebels. Earlier in the war against the Jaintiya king Ranasiddha Kowar fought bravely on the side of the Ahom king Rudra Singha and received as a token of love and gratitute the kingdom of Tetelia from the vassal kings of Tarani and Kumoi.

Apart from this, some of the vassal kings were great patrons of learning. One vassal king, Afua, rendered great help in the restoration of the Bardua satra- the birth-place of Srimanta Sankardev (1449- 1569).

The tradition of rendering help and assistance for the cause of learning and cultural advancement of the people appeared to have come down since the time of Mahamanik/Mahamanikya/Mahamanikyapha of the Barahi- Kachari king of the Kopili valley. He had patronised the great Sanskrit scholar Mahendra Kondali and his school of learning at Bardua- Alipukhuri. Later other tribal chiefs or kings demonstrated these qualities of head and heart under the Ahoms.

As a result of the proselytising effect of the neo- vaishnavite movement of Sankardev several tribal chiefs or kings came under the influence of Hinduism. The process of Hinduisation was treated as a mark upward mobility in the social hierarchy.

**The Coronation Ceremony:**

The coronation ceremony was regarded as one of the most important festivals in the vassal kingdom. The coronation ceremony was not everywhere the same. The day before the coronation ceremony was a day of fasting and prayer for the heir- apparent in some kingdoms. The women folk, singing ceremonial songs and accompanied by players of drums and cymbal, would bring water from the river or tank for ablution of the heir- apparent before being put on
the throne. Garlands of flowers were prepared beforehand so as to decorate the heir-apparent in a befitting manner and style. Thereafter, the official, called Sonamati, would place the various ornaments on the body of the heir-apparent. Then the official called Lar would place the crown on the head of the heir-apparent. Then the heir-apparent would take his seat on the throne. The officials and the subjects present would then kneel down before the king to show their respect and the king in turn would give gifts and presents to them in conformity with their rank and status. Great feasting and merriment marked the ceremony.

Rights and Duties of the King:

The king was the fountain-head of all departmental activities within the kingdom. He was the highest executive of the land. He kept a strict vigil on the day to day functioning of each and every official of the land. He must look into the needs and requirements of the subjects and to redress their ills and difficulties. There was no written law his verbal instructions were treated as the law of the land.

There was scope of the king being absolute in all respects. The officials kept a strict vigil on the functioning of the king so that he could not become absolute or exercise absolute power detrimental to the interests of the subjects. The king normally derived his power from the clan or tribe to which he belonged. The land was normally treated as the common property of the clan or tribe. And, therefore, the power and authority enjoyed by the tribal king was exercised in conformity with the wishes and aspirations of the tribe or clan.

In the event of failure of a king to protect the interests of the subjects or being incompetent, he faced deposal in preference to another. The officials of Dandua deposed Bhim Singh— the king of Dandua— for the latter's failure to safeguard their status and dignity at the Jagi durbar. They made one Bahu
The officials of the Khoia kingdom put to death their king belonging to the Masrang clan for his being oppressive. The principal duty and responsibility of the king was to safeguard the interests of his subjects, to protect them, to provide security and defend the country.

The king appeared to be the prime mover in the field of learning and advancement of culture. He appeared to be the patron of learning and Brahmins. He made land grants to the Brahmanis and priestly for educational and charitable purposes. Jayadhvaj Singha- the king of Baghara made land grants to the Brahmins of his kingdom in the Saka year 1412. Suryakhari Daibagya wrote 'Darrang Raj Vamsavali' under the patronage of the Darrangi king of Mangaldoi. Ram Ata established the Kalsila Satra at Mayang under the patronage of the king of that kingdom. Ram Ata also established another Satra at Naokata at Dandua under the patronage of Bahutfmkonwar. The latter also made a land grant to Ram Ata.

In the like manner, the king of Tupakuchia established the Chenglai Satra, the king of Mikirgaya the Bardowa and Narowa Satra through various land grants and thus patronised the expansion of neo-vaishnavite movement in Assam. The process helped in the conversion of the tribal society into the Hindu fold. The Kings of Beltola, Rani, Luki, etc. patronised the Samaria Satra.

The vassal kings had to pay annual tributes to the Ahom king. This was treated as one of the important duties of the vassal kings. Hiteswar Barbaruah writes that the petty kings of the border kingdoms paid tributes to the Ahom king and the latter in turn called them 'Raja Powali'. Important of those kings were the kings of Rani, Luki, Boko, Bangaon, Chaygaon, Bagai, Pantalia, Barduar, Bholagaon and Maruapur. They had absolute rights over the landed estates they
had been enjoying. They enjoyed these rights as hereditary. Though the Ahom king had the right to withdraw these privileges at will they did not resort to such practices in reality.\textsuperscript{14}

On the estates of the vassal kingdoms a Government report says, "There are some estates, which are held by the Rajas, who have succeeded hereditarily to the management…. Such are the deshes and some of the Duwars in Kamroop, Jomoonamook, and Jagi-Mehals in Nowgong… They were feudal tributaries under the Assam Government, and though it is stated that they were removable at the will-pleasure of the ruling power (The Ahom Kings) yet the power was seldom or never exercised to have proprietary rights in the soil, equal, if not superior, to that of any of the Zaminders of Bengal."\textsuperscript{15}

In the day to day administration of their kingdoms the vassal kings enjoyed maximum freedom and independence. These vassal kingdoms were treated something like autonomous political administrative units within the Ahom kingdom. Prof. Bhuyan gives details on the name and nature of the tributary chiefdoms thus, 'Darrang, Rani, Beltola, Luki, Barduar, Bholagaon, Moirapur, Pantan, Bangaon, Bageduar, Domorua, Neli, Gobha, Sahari, Dandua, Barepujia, Tupakuchia, Khaigoria, Panbari, Sara, Mayang, Dhing, Tetelia, Salmara, Garakhia, Baghara, Na- dur and Bhurbhandha. These kings, either after being defeated or on their own accord, accepted the Ahom suzerainty. They could administer justice independently though an appeal lie with the Barphukan, Barbaruah and the sovereign. In the event of death of a king, the Ahom sovereign could nominate his successor from amongst the sons and brothers of the deceased king in consultation with his Patra-Mantri (Council of Ministers). They paid annual tributes and in times of need supplied soldiers and paiks. The king of Rani was freed from paying any tributes in recognition of his meritorious
services in the war against the Mughals. The vassal kings could not give death sentences without the permission of the Ahom king. The erring king had to pay a fine to the Ahom king. In their day to day administration the vassal kings enjoyed absolute freedom and only on urgent and important matters it was the custom to get permission from the Ahom sovereign beforehand.\textsuperscript{16}

On this issue he further writes, “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, Bongaon, Bogaduar, Dimorua, Neli, Gobha, Sahari, Dandua, Barepujia, Tupakuchia, Khaigoria, Panbari, Sora, Mayang, Dhing, Tetelia, Salmara, Gorokhia, Bagharagaon and Bhurbandha. Each states was ruled by a vassal chief who was bound to furnish a stipulated number of Paiks to work on the king’s 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 liegelord. The frontiers of the kingdom were protected from the inroads of the hill people by several wardens, the Sadiya Khowa Gohain, the marangi Khowa Gohain and the Kajalimukhia Gohain and they were always selected from the families of three Gohains at the metropolis.”\textsuperscript{17} Gait also made similar comments on the emergence and functioning of the vassal kingdoms under the Ahoms.\textsuperscript{18}

In case of delinquency the Ahom sovereign punished the vassal kings. The king of Rani revolted against the Ahom king Rudra Singha and the former was sentenced to death.\textsuperscript{19}

The supremacy of the Ahom king over the vassal kingdoms was not absolute. This has been proved by the people of Desh Darrang twice. They protested against the enhancement of revenue during the reign of the Ahom king
Lakshminath Sinha (1769-80) and against the oppression of the Ahom officials during the reign of Gaurinath Singha.\textsuperscript{20} In the earlier occasion nearly 4000 people of Darrang had marched to the Ahom capital Rangpur and staged demonstration “exacting a royal proclamation withdrawing the order on high rates of assessment of revenue”. \textsuperscript{21} In the second occasion, 240 headmen of the villages caused the withdrawal of 6000 paiks serving under the Barphukan at Guawahati in protest against the oppression meted out to the Darrangi people by the Ahom officials in the wake of the Moamoria rebellion.\textsuperscript{22}

The vassal kings had to attend the coronation ceremony of the Ahom king at the capital. They had specific places to sit for the occasion. The kings of Darrang and Rani were allotted seats by the side of the ‘Dantiyalia Gohains’, i.e., frontier wardens, \textsuperscript{23}

Hiteswar Barbaruah says,\textsuperscript{24}

On the payment of tributes by the vassal kings Barbaruah says in the event of the vassal king or his messenger being absent on the day of coronation,
he must pay his allegiance and express his submission personally with gifts and presents to the king within a month from the day of coronation.25

**Council of Ministers:**

The council of ministers consisted of nearly twenty persons holding different departments. They were variously known according to their status and functions. They were,

1. Yubaraj or Deka Raja (heir-apparent),
2. Pator or Home Minister,
3. Bangthai or Defence Minister,
4. Senapati or Commander-in-chief,
5. Bordoloi or Chief Executive,
6. Daloi or Administrative Officer, and several other functionaries.

The ministers hold their offices by the hereditary principle. During the lifetime of an incumbent minister his son was required to serve as apprentice so as to enable the latter to succeed him immediately after his death.

1. **Yabaraj or Deka Raja:**

   Next in status, power and functions and importance to the king was the Yabaraj or Deka Raja, i.e., heir-apparent. He discharged all sorts of duties and functions of the king in the latter's absence and on his behalf. In consultation with other functionaries he managed the affairs of the important departments. The Deka Raja was responsible for the management of religious functions in the *Than* and *Satras* and that of the fairs. Even today the Deka Raja of Gobha attended the Jonbil Mela (fair) along with the king. The Deka Raja was held in high esteem in the determination and collection of tools and taxes from the Jonbil Mela or fair and from any fair held during the month of Bohag (April-May).
2. **Pator or Home Minister:**

The Pator or the Home Minister had an advisory power in the day to day administration of the kingdom. He was responsible for the maintenance of peace and tranquility among the subjects. He was in charge of the internal and external affairs of the kingdom.

3. **Bangthai or Defence Minister:**

He was an important official of the vassal kingdom. His primary duty was to defend the land of his master. He must work in close cooperation with the Senapati or Commander-in-chief. The *Bar- Baruati* and *Bar-Dhulia* were his immediate subordinates.

4. **Senapati:**

The Senapati or the Commander-in-chief was in charge of leading the forces in the war of aggression and defence. He was also required to lead the contingent force of his king in the war waged by the Ahom sovereign.

5. **Bardaloi:**

The function of Bardaloi was to manage the finance of the land of his master. He was required to keep records of the royal estates, their products and other revenues of the land.

6. **Daloi:**

The office of the Daloi was prevalent mainly in the kingdoms that had formerly belonged to the Jaintiya king. The Jaintiya king had 12 Dalois. The Daloi led the king to the play-field holding the mast of the flying flag of the king.

Below the Daloi there were some other officials known as the *Deka Daloi*, the *Tamuli Daloi* and *Lor*. In the kingdoms that originated from the Jaintiya tribe or had belonged to the Jaintiya king, Lor occupied an important position. In the Tiwa society in the kingdoms of Gobha, Neli, Khola, Sahari the Lor occupied an
important position. He mainly administered the justice. He was required to supervise the management of religious performance relating to sacrifice in the temples. He did not perform the sacrificial rite with the help of the sword the Deuri did it.²⁶

There were some other lesser functionaries in each of the vassal kingdoms. They were known as Khelma, Raj Phamgai, Sonamati, Tekela, Bar Garakhia, Bhitar Majhi, Choudung, Dhulia, Kalia, Santari, Phura Khel, Athaporia, Hari Konwari, etc.

The khelma was required to supply all the offerings like flowers, fruits, the sacrificial goat for the performance of religious rites. He was an assistance of the Deuri— the high priest.

The Raj Phamgai was similar to a Dakowal, a messenger. He was required to serve notices to the subjects for mel or public meetings.

The Sonamati was responsible for the dresses and ornaments of the kings. He was responsible for preparing the king for public appearance.

The Tekela was a messenger and he was to serve notices to the highest officials and to accompany the drummers to proclaim royal orders amongst the subjects.

Bar Garakhia was responsible for the collection of all kinds of cess for the king, betel leaves and nuts, bananas, ropes, gamosa, milk, curd, cakes, rice-bear, etc.

Phura Khel was the secret spy appointed by the king to collect information from all corners of the kingdom. He was to gather information on the secret machination of the enemies of the king and his subjects.
In the kingdom of Dandua, the **Thakurias** known as Chari (four) Thakuria appeared to be very powerful as ministers. They could even make and unmake kings.  

In the Mikirgaya kingdom, only certain particular families belonging to certain clans were appointed ministers.  

The kingdom of Luki had different officials, the Ministers, Mukhtiar, Dakua, Dolai etc.

Thus it is seen that politically and administratively the vassal kingdoms were well-organised. Though feudal in nature these kingdoms fulfilled the immediate requirements of their subjects. Besides meeting the expectation of their subjects they also provided them security from external invasion that occurred almost repeatedly for a long period. The existence of the vassal kingdoms and their political entity and administrative acumen lingered on to act as a legacy of a federating experiment with internal cohesion and tranquility in the history of Assam. The Ahoms also had shown their political dexterity by preserving and maintaining these kingdoms as federating units of Assam.

**Notes and References**


5  Handwritten Buranji of Baghara.


7  Deka, Lakshmi Singha, Mani Kowarar Akhyan, p.51


9  Rabha, Biren, Lukir Itibritta, Dhupdhara, 1968, pp.10-12

10 This paragraph is prepared on the basis of information gathered from: Deka Uhiram, op.cit., p.58; Konwar, Akan Chnadra, "Sahari Rajar Herowa Smriti", in Senapati, Ganesh, ed., Ringsang, 1980, pp.7-8

11 Deka, Jagat Singha, op.cit., pp.10-11


13 Copper Plate on Land Grants preserved in the residence of Uttar Singha of Silsako.

14 Barbaruah, Hiteswar, Ahomar Din, APB, Guwahati, 1981, p.503

15 Quoted in ibid., p.503

16 Bhuyan, S.K., Rajeswar Singha, APB, 1975, Guwahati, p.240


21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.


24 Barbaruah, op.cit., p. 429

25 Ibid., p. 414

26 Senapati, Ganesh, Rahar Rahial Baruah Aru Panchraja Powali, 1997, p. 100

27 Sachipotia Puthi of Dandua kingdom by Bhim Singha, Published by Deka, Jagat Singh, op.cit., pp. 7-9


29 Rabha, Biren, op.cit., p. 29