CHAPTER IV

MARKET SYSTEM
4.1 INTRODUCTION:

The Ahom kings in order to encourage trade and commerce established many markets at convenient places and in the border areas from which they had a fairly good income. Besides these, every important town like Gargaon, Nazira, Guwahati, Hajo, Jorhat etc. also had its own market. As stated by J. Borgohain, the concept of the idea of trade was first developed in the border areas among the different hill tribes and from the border areas it gradually penetrated into the interior of the tribal society. Before the coming of the Ahoms, the Bodos, Kacharis, Barahis, Chutias and Morans and the other tribes depended mainly on the production of the tribal areas. But when the division of labour was started among them, barter system was also developed. In the beginning of the 17th century the division of labour was largely seen among the Ahoms and from that time the use of gold coins was started. Before that time salt, iron, cloths, different kinds of beads and pearls, dye were bartered among the tribes through different duars (Borgohain, Jatin, 1985).

4.2 DEVELOPMENT OF TRADING POINTS DURING THE AHOM REIGN:

The needs of the people grew on increasing with the increase of population and so the Ahom kings in order to meet the requirements of the people established more or more internal markets. During the reign of Suhungmung Dihingia Raja (1497-1539), markets were established at Dihing, Bokata, Sadiya, Salal, Nogora, Kacharihat and also at Doloiguri (TamuliPhukon, Kashinath, 1964). His son and successor, Suklenmung Gargaya Raja (1539-1552) founded a large market on the bank of the river Dikhow [Bhuyan, S.K.(ed.), 1964]. Pratap Singha (1603-1641) established markets at Titabar, Namchang, Dupgarh, Borhat, Roha, Jagi, Kajalimukh etc. [Bhuyan, S.K. (ed.), 1964].
He also constructed a fort at Salal and established a market there known as Salalphat (TamuliPhukan, Kashinath, 1964). It was through Salalphat, business transactions between Bengal and Coch Behar was conducted and the officer put in charge of that market was known as Salalphatia Baruah (Borbaruah, Hiteswar, 2013). It was also during the reign of Pratap Singha a market was established at Latasil (Guwahati) known as Saudatanhat [Bhuyan, S.K.(ed.), 1962]. Besides these, some of the important markets were Balihat (Barbarua Duara, Srinath, 1964), Panichokihat [Bhuyan, S.K. (ed.), 2009], Dupgarhat (TamuliPhukan, Kashinath, 1964), Mandiahat [Neog, Maheswar (ed.), 2003]. Sutyunpha alias Nariya Raja (1644-48) established a market at Marangi to establish friendly relation with Cachar [Bhuyan, S.K. (ed.), 1984]. Rajeswar Singha (1751-1769) established markets at Raha, Gobha and Sonapur [Bhuyan, S.K. (ed.), 1962] and his Barbarua Kirtichandra reorganized the outposts at Raha where he set up a market with fixed boundary. Gadadhar Singha (1681-96) established two markets at Chakihat and Rajahat and his son and successor Rudra Singha (1696-1714) established a market at Gobha for collection of revenue. Towards the end of Ahom rule, two markets were established by Purnananda BuraGohain at Jorhat on both sides of the river Dichai (Bhogdoi) which flows through Jorhat town (Dewan, Maniram, 2002). Shihabuddin Talish also refers to a daily market held at Gargaon which was not so important because only minor articles like betel leaf and betel nuts were sold there (Borboruah, Hiteswar, 2013). It may be due to the fact that during the days of the Ahoms, there were some markets where some special items were sold and Gargaon was one of such kind of markets. But it is a fact that all the markets were established at royal patronage.
There were also markets known as Phukonorhat (North Lakhimpur), Nagahatand Kacharihat (Golaghat), Kolarhat or Kolorfat (Kaziranga), Khitlurhat (across the river Kakodunga), Holarfat or Holarhat (across the river Difolo) which possessed custom houses. From this it is evident that there was a large scale business transaction and people from outside Assam came here for business purpose (Borgohain, Jatin, 1985). We have also references of the markets named Tamulihat (market for areca nut), Sariyahhat (market for mustard seeds) and also the markets like Moranhat, Darangihat, Sunpurahat, Dihinghat etc. situated at particular places for the convenience of the concerned people of the locality. All these hats proved the evidence of expansion of internal trade during the days of the Ahoms.

In Lower Assam, Guwahati, the head quarter of the Barphukon, was an important centre of trade. Bangalhat or Hadira Choki or Kandahar Choki or Assam Choki situated opposite Goalpara and at the mouth of river Manas was the most important trade centre through which commercial transactions between Bengal and Assam were conducted. Free trade was impossible because of the strict control of the officers appointed by the kings at Hadira Choki and so trade was centralized at this choki. Besides Hadira Choki, there were many duars or passes through which trade with Bhutan and other hill tribes like Garo, Khasi, Luki etc. were conducted. Such important passes were Chariduar, Satduar, Naduar, Chayduar, Borduar etc. Chariduar was consisted of four passes i.e. Dhansiri (Bhairavkunda), Namati-Routa, Pachnoi and Doimara (Belsiri). These passes spreading from Bharali to Bhutan border were just like business corridors. Satduar was consisted of seven passes i.e. Bijni, Chapakhamar, Chapaguri, Baska, Ghoukula, Khaling and Buriguma. Through these passes trade with Bhutan, Kamrup and Goalpara was conducted. Through Naduar, trade between the Akas
and the Daflas (Nishis) and other plains tribes was possible which was conducted mainly through barter system. Through Chayduar trade was conducted from Borgang to the east of Lakhimpur and through Borduar, trade with the Garos and the Khasis was possible. The important centres of exchange of commodities were at Luki, Boko, Bongaon, Pantou, Bhulagaon and Moirapur (Borgohain, Jatin, 1985). Through these passes barter trade continued for a long time till internal markets were established in different parts of the kingdom.

Shop keeping as a means of trade developed in Hajo earlier than in other parts of Assam. This was because Hajo was under the Mughal administration for a long time. But up to the expedition of Captain Welsh (1792-94) there was no record of having shops in Assam. It was after this expedition few shops were opened at Guwahati by some traders accompanying Welsh which had motivated the local entrepreneurs to take up shop keeping as a permanent business. During the reign of Chandrakanta Singha (1811-1822) three shops were opened at Jorhat, out of these three, two belonged to the family of Maniram Dewan (Barua, Gunabhiram, 1972). The same source further reveals that some Muslim women of Jorhat had also set up shops at their own residences (Barua, Gunabhiram, 1972). Moreover there were also references of women sellers called *puharis* in the ‘*Katha Guru Charita*’ who dealt in betel nuts, fishes, vegetables, fuels etc. [Lekharu, U.C. (ed.), 1987].

### 4.3 BORDER MARKETS AND COMMODITIES DEALT IN:

To facilitate commercial transactions between the hills and the plains, markets were opened at places accessible to both plains and hill tribes. There were as many as thirty five passes in the north through which the hill people maintained their contacts
with the plains. These passes also served as market places and one such famous market was at Karampatan, where a cattle market was held every day and where about 1,500 tangahan horses of Bhutan were sold (Nath Gogoi, J., 2002). There was another such market at Geegunshur, four miles away from Chauna on the Bhutan border. To this border market the Bhutanese brought silver bullion amounting to Rs. 2,00,000/- and a considerable amount of gold dust, cow tails and woolen clothes which they exchanged with rice, silk, iron, lac, deer skins, buffalo horns etc. (Baruah, S.L., 1977). Charigaon market situated in the Darrang district was another market which was attended by the Bhutanese, Hill Miris, Daflas and Assamese (Pemberton, R.B., 1966). Another important trading centre on extreme north eastern border of Assam was at Sadiya which can be termed as international market because all the hill tribes like the Mishmis, Singphos, Hill Miris, Adis etc. visited this market. To this market the Mishmis, who were called intermediary of Assamese, Tibetan and Chinese trade, brought lama swords, spears, ivory, musk, mishmitita (a kind of poison pasted at the edge of arrows), gatheon (a perfume used in marriage ceremony) which they exchanged for glass beads, cloths of various kinds, salt and cattle. The Singphos brought to this market a considerable amount of ivory, copper and silver bought from China [Barpujari, H.K. (ed.), 2007, Vol.III]. Hill Miris and the Adis brought to the market of Sadiya pepper, ginger, manjit (madder), wax and a kind of cotton blanket called mirijim and they exchanged them with the products of the plains (Robinson, William, 1975).

The Nagas were very expert in barter trade and they usually came to the border markets and to the the markets of Nagora, Jorhat, Kacharihat and they exchanged their commodities like spears, cotton, ginger, chillies and salt with the commodities of the plain area (Baruah, S.L., 1977). To the Kurkuriya market at Barduar, the Garos brought
their commodities like knives, cotton and salt and exchanged them with cattle, goat, rice, tobacco and clothes etc. (Mills, A.J.M., 1984). Similarly the Khasis, also came to the markets situated at the border and came up to the middle of Nagaon and exchanged their commodities like hoes, honey, cotton and red chillies with cattle, goat, rice, tobacco, clothes, dried fish, silk etc. (Baruah, S.L., 1977). Hats or markets were generally held weekly but Mills stated that in Kamrup, markets were held bi-weekly and there was a record of visiting these markets by a huge gathering varying from 500 to 1,500 (Mills, A.J.M., 1984)

4.4 Fairs Held During the Time of Festivals:

Fairs were held at different places annually during the time of festivals like Bhotheli, Ambubachi, Asokastami, Maghi Purnima, Buddha Purnima etc. Among such fairs mention may be made about the Bhotheli Mela held in the villages of Lower Assam, Ambubachi Mela held at Kamakhya from 7th to 10th Ahar (3rd week of June), Asokastami Mela held at Siddeswari temple at Sualkuchi and Kamakhya temple at Silghat, Maghi Purnima Mela held at Sri Surjya Pahar in the district of Goalpara and at Udalguri in the district of Darrang (Baruah, S.L., 1977). Fairs were also held at Phukonhat (Lakhimpur) on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra and at Hajo during the time of Buddha Purnima. The main purpose of these fairs which continued for several days and where a large number of people congregated was to provide a market centre where trade and business on a large scale could be conducted.

4.5 Volume of Transactions:

It is seen that the markets were efficiently managed by the Ahom kings and from these markets they had a fairly good source of income. Mills in his report of 1853 had
given an abstract of income derived from different market places of Assam during the
days of Premier Purnananda BuraGohain (1813-14) which is as follows:-

Table 4.5.1: Income from Markets (1813-14)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Markets</th>
<th>Income per Annum (Rs.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Bongalhat</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Batakuchi</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Solapat</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Gobha, Sonapur and Raha hats</td>
<td>6,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Guwahati and other hats</td>
<td>12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Namchang</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Jorhat</td>
<td>11,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mills A.J.M., 1984

It is to be noted that out of the income derived from different market places
situated at the border area, the Ahom kings had to give a part of it to the respective hill
chiefs or kings. As for example, out of the taxes collected from market places of the
Kachari kingdom, a part was to be given to Kachari king [Bhuyan, S.K. (ed.), 1962].

4.6 COMMODITIES AND PRICE LEVEL:

Sources of information regarding different kinds of commodities and
commodities sold during the Ahom rule are very scanty. The following table, however,
furnish us with the price of some agricultural and other products in the 1st half of the
18th century as found in the copper plate inscription of 1739 A.D. (Gohain, U.N., 1992).
Table 4.6.1: Prices of Agricultural and Other Products

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commodities</th>
<th>Quantity/Unit</th>
<th>Price (Rs.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>Maund</td>
<td>0.14 Approx (2 annas 4 gonda)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>„</td>
<td>0.16 “ (2 anna 10 gonda)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grain</td>
<td>„</td>
<td>0.25 ” (4 anna)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saltandoil</td>
<td>„</td>
<td>0.30 ” (4 anna 15 gonda)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gur (Jaggery)</td>
<td>„</td>
<td>0.08 ” (1 anna 5 gonda)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black pepper</td>
<td>„</td>
<td>20.00 ”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betel-leaf</td>
<td>Bundle containing 20 leaves</td>
<td>0.06 per 40 bundles (1 anna)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalas (Earthen pot)</td>
<td>Piece</td>
<td>1.00 per 643 piece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areca-nut</td>
<td>Piece</td>
<td>1.00 per 5120 piece</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The scattered references however show fluctuations in price level of the commodities of the same period. From another source of the same period the prices of commodities were found as such:

Table 4.6.2: Prices of Agricultural Products

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commodities</th>
<th>Quantity/Unit</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>Per maund</td>
<td>4 anna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gur (jaggery)</td>
<td>„</td>
<td>2 rupees 8 anna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matimah</td>
<td>„</td>
<td>5 anna</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pulses and Ghee  
"  
10 anna

Oil  
"  
3 rupees 5 anna 4 pai


Again in another source the prices of the commodities were known as such:

Table 4.6.3: Prices of Agricultural and Other Products

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commodities</th>
<th>Quantity/Unit</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>Maund</td>
<td>8 anna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matimah</td>
<td>Maund</td>
<td>10 anna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalas (earthen pot)</td>
<td>Piece</td>
<td>224 pieces for 1 rupee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pan (betel leaf)</td>
<td>Piece</td>
<td>20 guci for 1 anna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goat</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 rupee each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duck (pati hanh)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 anna each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pigeon</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 pai each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhuti</td>
<td>Piece</td>
<td>5 annas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamocha</td>
<td></td>
<td>6 pai each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt</td>
<td>Maund</td>
<td>Rs. 5 to Rs. 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In other records belonging to the same period, prices of some of these commodities are shown as below:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commodity</th>
<th>Unit Description</th>
<th>Price (Rs.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Rice</td>
<td>Maund</td>
<td>0.25 to 0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Matikalai</td>
<td>,,</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Pulse and Ghee</td>
<td>,,</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Oil</td>
<td>,,</td>
<td>0.32 Approx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Salt</td>
<td>,,</td>
<td>0.47 ,,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Betel Leaf</td>
<td>Bundle of 20 leaves</td>
<td>0.06 per 20 bundles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Goat</td>
<td>Each</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Duck</td>
<td>,,</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Pigeon</td>
<td>Pair</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Dhuti</td>
<td>Piece</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Gamocha</td>
<td>,,</td>
<td>0.10 Approx</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


From the above tables it is noticed that the prices of same commodities were different at different places. It was perhaps due to the difference in quality, contemporary situation, famine, draught, freight charges, distance and difficulty in transportation. The prices of all the commodities which were available in Upper Assam were relatively cheaper as compared to Lower Assam. For example, a *gamocha* was sold at 4 *annas* in Lower Assam in the 16th century. But a *gamocha* was sold at a price of 1½ *annas* in Upper Assam even after the *Moamaria* Rebellions, when the prices of all the commodities were increased (Baruah, S.L., 1977). The price difference in Upper and Lower Assam was possibly due to the fact that there was continuous inflow of
immigrants to Lower Assam during Assam Muslim conflicts in the 16th and 17th centuries for which the demand for goods was more. Lower Assam was also the main centre of Ahom Mughal conflicts where political instability always prevailed which hampered the production of the areas severely. Another reason of high price in this area was that the Bhutiyas frequently looted the inhabitants at the foot hills which resulted in the shortage of food stuff.

Shihabuddin Talish also stated that *mati mah* was sold at Re. 1/- per seer in 1662 at Gargaon which was sold at 20 cowries in Kamrup during peace time (Nath Gogoi, J., 2002). From the ‘Tungkhunga Buranji’, we can know that during Moamaria Rebellion as production and population ran short, the price of all the commodities went up to an unprecedented level. After that rebellion, a famine had occurred in 1789 and during that famine one lime pot of rice (about 250 gms) cost Re1/-, one mango Re1/-, and one bundle of arum Re1/- or 1.50 (Barbarua, Duara Srinath, 1964). But this seems to be an exaggeration to describe the havoc caused by the Moamarias upon people because arum so abundantly grew everywhere in Assam could never be sold at such high prices.

The prices of different varieties of silk cloth and cotton in 1808-1810 gathered from Hamilton’s Account are given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Size (in cubits)</th>
<th>Price (Rs.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>Muga Silk</em></td>
<td>8 by 2</td>
<td>1.00 to 1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <em>Muga Dhuti</em></td>
<td>8 to 16 by 2 to 2.25</td>
<td>1.0 to 4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <em>Muga Mekhela</em></td>
<td>5 by 2</td>
<td>1.0 to 3.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4.6.5: Prices of Silk Cloth and Cotton (1808-10)*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Size/Weight</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Muga Chadar</td>
<td>4 to 5 by 2 to 2 ½</td>
<td>2.50 to 4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Muga Riha</td>
<td>6 by 1 ½</td>
<td>0.50 to 3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Muga Silk Embroidered Mosquito Net</td>
<td>30 by 1 ¼ to 2</td>
<td>1.0 to 6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Pat Dhuti</td>
<td>8 to 16 by 2 to 2 ¼</td>
<td>1.0 to 8.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Mejankari Dhuti white or dyed red with lac</td>
<td>8 to 16 by 2 to 2 ¼</td>
<td>2.50 to 6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Mejankari Riha</td>
<td>6 by 1 ½</td>
<td>1.0 to 4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Endi Riha</td>
<td>6 by 1 ½</td>
<td>0.25 to 0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Endi Cheleng</td>
<td>6 by 3</td>
<td>0.50 to 2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Endi Mekhela</td>
<td>5 by 2</td>
<td>0.50 to 1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Mathari</td>
<td>4 to 5 by 2 to 2 ½</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Finest Cotton</td>
<td>12 by 3</td>
<td>10.00 to 27.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


From the table, we can say that the cotton cloth was the costliest of all. This was due to the fact that cotton was usually cultivated in the hills and not in the plains as the soil of Assam was not suitable for cotton cultivation. Hamilton observed "the cotton weavers are foreigners, Jogis and Jolas and both men and women work. They have a little capital to enable them to purchase thread. Small dealers purchase the cloth and hawk it about, for there are no shops and few markets" (Hamilton, Francis, 1963). But Hamilton’s observation on Jolas and Jogis as foreigners is not acceptable. Again we can say that price of endi was the cheapest of all because its production was very common
and extensive owing to the fact that in a year 7 to 8 generations of *eri* worms can be reared but in case of *muga* only 5 generations and in case of *pat* worms it takes 10 months to complete the process. As such *eri* cloths were used by poor sections of the people, *pat* by members of the royal family and gentry and *muga* by middle class people.

4.7 SLAVERY:

The institution of slavery that existed in ancient days in Pragjyotisha-Kamrupa was somewhat different from the institution of slavery existed during the days of the Ahoms. Under the *paik* system introduced by the Ahom kings, every male adult was required to render his services to the state in the manner of public works. He had even to go to the battle field at the time of war. But there was very strict restriction to make any *paik* a slave. Only the prisoners of war, criminals who had been sentenced to death and some free men who were assigned by the king to work in the *khats* or estates of the nobles were called slaves [Barpujari, H.K. (ed.), 2007, Vol. V.]. The nobles, upper class and priestly class were allotted vast areas of lands by the Ahom government along with *paiks* and slaves to cultivate their farm lands. Besides cultivating farm land, the slaves were to perform domestic works, maintain homestead gardens of the nobles and temple compounds. Thus it can be said that the institution of slavery was an important element of the Ahom system of managing the economy.

4.7.1 GROWTH OF SLAVERY IN ASSAM:

The *paik* system indirectly helped in increasing the number of slaves in the country. According to this system, each *paik* in return for his service to the state was given two *puras* of arable land called *gamati* for his maintenance. He could also acquire
surplus land called *katanimati* for which he had to pay a rent of Re 1/- per *pura* annually. But the acquisition of surplus land proved meaningless because in every new land survey, these were categorized as regular land and the possession of the *paiks* upon these lands was curtailed, if necessary and was distributed among the additional *paiks*. Some of the *kheldars* arbitrarily deprived some *paiks* of their lands to give it to other *paiks* for making adjustment. Such action of the *kheldars* dissatisfied those *paiks* and due to the scarcity of arable land with the increase of the population of *paiks*, they preferred to work in the estates of the nobles as slaves. Again some of the *paiks* preferred to become slaves than to remain as *paiks*. It was perhaps for the reason that by becoming slaves they would get exemption from compulsory state service and from going to the battle field which had great risk to their lives. The descendents of those *paiks* in their second and third generation were considered as actual slaves (Robinson, William, 1975)

As money economy did not emerge, the ministers and other officials of the Ahom state were paid in terms of lands with a number of *paiks* under their jurisdiction according to their status. They were also provided with a kind of slaves called *likchows* whose number was quite considerable. The three Gohains – the BuraGohain, the BorGohain and BorpatraGohain and also the Barphukon had full control over the *paiks*. These officers could even sentence the *paiks* into death but without shedding any blood. Besides the three Gohains, huge amount of land grants along with *paiks* were given to the Brahmanas and to the religious heads and those *paiks* became the personal property of the masters. For certain offences the *paiks* had to pay fines (Gait, Edward, 1994), and if they failed to pay fines they had to mortgage themselves and their labour to their master. Thus those *paiks* became bondsmen and consequently slaves. Criminals who
were spared of capital punishment were also made slaves for life. Sometimes they were
bartered as slaves for horses of Bhutan in the foot hill markets of North East (Nath
Gogoi, J., 2002).

During the Moamaria rebellion and the Burmese wars, the economic condition
of the people of Assam was vey deplorable and under such conditions many poor
families even sold their children and those children thus became slaves (Barua,
Gunabhiram, 1972). Generally in Kamrup, the revenue officers harassed the poor
peasants compelling them to pay exorbitant amount of tax for their own benefit. Under
such condition, the poor peasants who were unable to pay the tax fled to other places.
Adult men and women sold themselves as slaves to rich peasants for get them free from
their debt obligation and to meet their bare necessities. Again some of the paiks in order
to get exemption from manual labour paid Rs.2/- per annum which they borrowed from
the nobles and when they unable to repay the amount were compellled to work as slaves
in the houses of the creditors. This kind of slaves called bondsmen could free
themselves by serving for an agreed period of time. But it is seen that bondsmen could
not clear their debts with interest within the stipulated period of time and finding no
other way they became slaves. If the bondsman died before clearing his debt his heir
was bound to serve in the house of the master till the debt was cleared (Robinson,
William, 1975). Mumai Tamuli Barbaruah remained as bondsman in his maternal
uncle’s house for his inability to repay Rs.4/- before his recruitment to the post of
Barbaruah (Bhuyan, S.K., 1947). It is also mentioned in the ‘Katha-guru-Charita’ that
one Baloram Atai belonging to Tapa village of Kamrup, had became a slave by
mortgaging himself for Rs.5/- [Lekharu, U.C. (ed.), 1987]. The state of bondage
continued from father to son and from one generation to another generation (M’Cosh, John, 2010).

It is known from the Assamese chronicles that the Naga chiefs used to present the Ahom kings with a number of slaves when they came into peaceful terms with the Ahom kings [Bhuyan, S.K. (ed.), 1960]. Just like the Nagas, the Kamata, Kachari, Koch and Mantara (Mungkong) kings sent both male and female slaves as presents to the Ahom kings after coming into peaceful terms with them [Bhuyan, S.K. (ed.), 1960].

Some of the paiks preferred to remain as slaves in the houses of the rich peasants and nobles because in Assam the slaves were not harshly treated as in other parts of India. In middle class families the slaves and the bondsmen were treated just like the members of the family. Slaves took their meal from the same kitchen and wore same home spun dress like the mistress. The slaves had the liberty to get themselves married but their children were also considered as property of the masters.

But from the biographical works, we get references of ill treatement meted out to the slaves by their masters. On the basis of a complaint lodged by a slave to a Vaishnava saint, we can know that though the slave worked hard from morning till night he was not allowed to sleep, eat and wear properly and he was also frequently beaten [Lekharu, U.C. (ed.), 1987 & Neog, Maheswar (ed.), 1977]. But such ill treatments were very rare as most of the families treated the slaves as members of their family. One such example was of Chanderi Ai, who was treated just like the mother in the family of Sankardeva [Lekharu, U.C. (ed.), 1987 & Nath Gogoi, J., 2002]. Mr. Jenkins also stated that during his long stay in Assam he found only two or three cases of complaints made by the slaves for ill treatment by the masters (Baruah, S.L., 1977). Treating the slaves
leniently was a must for the Assamse people because the ill treated slaves easily got a place of refuge in the hill areas where they could easily manage their livelihood.

Slavery had also some bad impacts upon the society. The slaves had no personal property and whatever they produce, all went to the coffers of the masters and thus it helped in creating a rich peasant class in the society. It can be referred that during the period of Burmese wars, when plunder and raids very common due to the atrocity of the Burmese, slaves were engaged by their masters in the acts of robbery (Borbaruah, Hiteswar, 2013 & Nath Gogoi, J., 2002). But before that time there was no any instance of robbery encouraged by the masters. Therefore, the minds of the slaves were very much disturbed and Robinson described their mental position as follows: ‘these poor creatures feel that they are the property of their masters, who have the power to do, as they like with them and it is their duty to submit to all. It is also their impression that any appeal to a public authority will not redeem them from thraldom, while on the contrary this only will bring upon them the displeasure of their masters and their connections’ (Robinson, William, 1975).

4.7.2 KINDS OF SLAVES:

According to F. Jenkins, Commissioner of Circuit in the Province of Assam, there were three distinct classes of slaves- (a) children of parents who were slaves (b) children of female slaves and (c) females who might have been purchased and voluntarily married to male slaves.

There were many kinds of slaves during the reign of the Ahoms. The male slaves were known as laguas, likchows, bahatiyas, bilatiyas, marakeeyas, bandis etc. and female slaves were known as bati, kharsai, tirote etc. (Baruah, S.L., 1977). It is to
be noted that the marakeeyas were provided with a pair of bullocks and a plough. He was allowed to plough his master’s land for two days. On the third day he could till his own land with master’s bullocks and plough. He did not receive any wage from his master. But he had to live in master’s house who gave him shelter and food and for the works he had performed he received a share of master’s product (Baruah, S.L., 1977).

4.7.3 MARKET PRICE OF THE SLAVES:

Slaves were bought and sold in the open market and their price varied from place to place according to their caste and ability to work. Prices vary from Rs.20/- for an adult male to Rs.3/- for a girl belonging to low caste (Gait, Edward, 1994). For the purchase and sale of slaves, a sale deed was to be prepared in where the concerned slave was to give his thumb impression in presence of some witnesses. The witnesses were also offered fees in the form of areca nuts and betel leaves. The Kakoti, who prepared the sale deed, was also offered areca nuts, betel leaves and gamocha as fees. In the sale deed, the names of the buyers and sellers along with their addresses, price and name of the slave, name of the witnesses along with the offerings and fees paid to them and also the name of the Kakoti were written [Neog, Maheswar (ed.), 1947]. In ‘Prachchya Sasanawali’ it is recorded that one Jahari, a paik sold his wife for Rs. 8/- to one Gangaram Thakur of Kamakhya (Neog, Maheswar (ed.), 1947). Again one Mahanta of Salaguri Satra purchased a man sold by twenty villagers at Rs. 6/- in Saka 1721 (1799 A.D.) [Neog, Maheswar (ed.), 1947 & Nath Gogoi, J., 2002].
The cost of a slave belonging to upper castes like Kalita, Keot and Koch was as follows –

1. A male slave between the age group of 28 to 30 years was worth Rs.20/- to Rs.28/-
2. A woman slave between the age group of 16 to 25 years was worth Rs.15/- or Rs.16/.
3. A girl between the age group of 8 to 16 years was worth Rs.8 to Rs.12/- (Baruah S.L., 1977).

From the following table taken from Lt. Matthie’s report we can see how prices of slaves varied from district to district.

**Table 4.7.3.1: Prices of Slaves in Kamrup and Nowgong**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>Rs. 40/-</td>
<td>Rs.15/- to Rs.20/-</td>
<td>Rs.20/-</td>
<td>Rs.12/- to Rs.20/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgong</td>
<td>Rs. 20/-</td>
<td>Rs.10/- to Rs.15/-</td>
<td>Rs.15/-</td>
<td>Rs.8/- to Rs.12/-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Report on the Judicial and Revenue Administration of Assam 1835 (Letter from Matthie to Jenkins, August 22, 1835).

Slaves were also exported from Assam to Bengal and sold there. From Hamilton’s record and other different sources it can be known that 100 numbers of slaves belonging to the upper class were exported to Bengal annually (Khan Choudhury Amanatullah, 1926, Ghosal S.C., 1942 & Hamilton, Francis, 1963). Generally girls were bought for prostitution and their cost vary from Rs.12/ to Rs.15/-. The cost of a
Koch boy was Rs.25/- and a Kalita boy was Rs.50/-. Low caste slaves were sold to the Garos and many were sent to Mungkong and from there they were exported to Ava (Hamilton, Francis, 1963).

During the Burmese wars, many of the Assamese were taken as captives by the Burmese and they were made slaves there. Therefore, Captain Neufville, soon after the British occupation of Assam, released from the Singphos alone more than 5,000 Assamese captive slaves (Hunter, W.W., 1975). In 1837 there were 1,00,000 Assamese and Manipuris who remained as slaves in Burma (Hunter, W.W., 1975). The number of slaves in Assam was not few. When the British had taken the possession of Assam David Scott released as many as 12,000 slaves from the district of Kamrup alone (Gait, Edward, 1994 & Gohain Barua, Padmanath, 2004). This economic emancipation of the slaves indirectly helped the British in collection of more revenues.

From the census report of Kamrup probably done in the year 1830, it is seen that out of total population of 2,71,944, 16,354 were slaves and 7,993 were bondsmen. From the census report, it can be presumed that the number of slaves and the bondsmen were higher in Kamrup than any other districts of Assam (Nath Gogoi, J., 2002). This was perhaps due to the political crisis and civil wars towards the close of the 18th century.

Inspite of the objections from slave masters and land owners, slavery was abolished in the territories of East India Company including Assam on April 7, 1843 by Act V of the regulations, 1843 [Barpujari, H.K. (ed.), 2007, Vol. V]. The abolition of slavery had adverse impact on the economy of Assam because members of the nobility and priestly class wholly depended on the slaves and bondsmen for getting their estates cultivated. Though the slaves were freed they had neither any source of income nor any
savings to buy land of their own to become free farmers. Finding no way out, many of them returned to their masters, old or new, ‘to serve as bandhas (bond labourers), bherunias (agricultural labourers) and marakiyas (landless wage labourers). Slavery in a less rigorous form thus survived even when trafficking or keeping slaves became an offence in the Indian Penal Code 1860’ [Barpujari, H.K. (ed.), 2007, Vol. V].

4.8 BARTER SYSTEM:

During the reign of the Ahoms, trade was initially carried on through barter system. Though coins were first minted by Sudhangpha Bamuni Konwar (1347-1407), yet the circulation of money as a medium of exchange among the common people was much limited. There was no fixed place for bartering of different commodities. Until a few years back and till today in some of the rural places some tribal people come down from the hills and barter their commodity from door to door. The Junbil Mela annually held near Jigiroad bears evidence of barter system. During the days of Ahoms, the hill tribes exchanged their products for necessary articles produced in the plains. But before making such exchange, they determined the value of the commodities in terms of price. When the value of the commodities of one of the parties was estimated to be more than the value of the others, then the other party had to pay the excess either in coins or in gold. W.W. Hunter in his book ‘Statistical Account of Assam’ gives an account of the articles exchanged between the Assamese merchants and the Bhutias in the fairs of Udalguri in the district of Darrang in 1857 (Hunter, W.W., 1975). From the same source, we can know that the Bhutias exchanged wal-nuts, bundle dye, needles, turnips, onions, garlics, chillies and spice for paddy, rice, silk, cotton and clothes, brass pots, iron bars, betel nuts, betel leaves, cotton threads, dried fish and tobacco etc. from the Assamese merchants. The total value of the commodities taken from the Bhutia
merchants became almost twice the value of the commodities taken from the Assamese merchants. In that case, the Assamese merchants paid some money to make up the excess value (Hunter, W.W., 1975). When on a large scale articles were exchanged between the two parties for business purpose, the value of the articles was determined in terms of money i.e. gold and silver coins. How the other hill tribes like the Mishmis, Singphos, Adis, Miris, Nagas, Garos and Khasis bartered their commodities with the people of plains is elaborated discussed at relevant places.

The barter system that existed between the hills and the plains people was very old. This system clearly highlighted the economic interdependence of tribal and non tribal neighbours. In spite of having some hindrances imposed by the ruling authority the barter system acted as incentives to produce more and more goods to exchange for other goods they needed from their non tribal neighbours. But the underlying fact is that the barter system restricted the growth of trade and commerce in Assam. With the advent of the British to Assam and the introduction of monetary system, the economy of Assam opened up resulting in an increase in trade and commerce with steady growth.

4.9 CURRENCY:

According to Shihabuddin Talish, currency in the Ahom kingdom consisted of cowries, rupees and gold coins. There is no reference in the original Ahom chronicles regarding the existence of coins in the beginning of the Ahom rule. But in some indigenous Assamese chronicles, it is mentioned that early Ahom rulers minted and used both gold and silver coins. From one such chronicle it can be known that Sukapha, the founder king of the Ahom dynasty, offered both silver and gold coins to his family deities on the occasion of laying the foundation of his first permanent capital at
There is conflicting opinion among the scholars regarding the Ahom kings who first of all minted coins in their name. According to J.N. Phukon coins were first minted by Sudangpha Bamuni Konwar (1397-1407) on the occasion of his accession to the throne and later by Suhungmung Dihingia Raja (1497-1539) on the occasion of his coronation ceremony (Phukon, J.N., 1973). Suhungmung also sent 200 gold coins on a religious mission to the temple of Jagannath at Puri [Bhuyan, S.K. (ed.), 1960]. The view of J.N. Phukan was supported by P. Gogoi who stated that “the first Ahom coins of gold and silver with Tai Ahom legends were struck by the 8th king Hso-dang-pha alias Bamuni Konwar (1397-1407) of the dynasty on his accession to the throne” (Gogoi, P., 1990). The view of P. Gogoi also supported by Lila Gogoi and Jatin Borgohain (Gogoi, Lila, 1994 & Borgohain, Jatin, 1985). In the Sibsagar District Gazetteer, it is mentioned that King Sudangpha first of all minted coins (Assam District Gazetteer, 1967, Sibsagar District, Shillong). But the coins of these two kings i.e. Suhungmung Dihingia Raja and Sudangpha Bamuni Konwar had not come to light and hence very little is known regarding the shape, size and weight of these coins.

On the other hand scholars like E. Gait, A. W. Botham, Hem Barua were of the opinion that coins were first minted during the reign of Suklengmung (1539-1552). Gait stated “the earliest Ahom coins bear a date equivalent to 1543 A.D. and were struck by Suklengmung in the fourth year of his reign. More than a century elapsed before any of his successors followed his example” (Gait, Edward, 1994). According to Hem Barua, “Suklengmung was the first Ahom king to introduce coinage system in Assam” (Barua, Hem, 1991). Dr. A. Guha also stated “the first batch of local coins of our period were gold coins issued by an Ahom king in 1543 A.D. No Ahom coins were further issued
during the century” [Guha, A., 1982]. S.L. Baruah was also of the opinion that “the earliest known Ahom coins belong to Suklengmung Gargayan Raja (1539-1553) though records reveals that minting of coins took place as early as the reign of Sudangpha Bamuni Konwar” (Baruah, S.L., 1997). Minting of coins by king Suklengmung during his reign was proved to be true because coins belonging to his reign were discovered and these coins are claimed to be the earliest. These coins were octagonal in shape and in these coins Ahom script and language were used (Phukon, J.N., 1973). Though there is conflicting opinions among the scholars regarding the authorship of coins, G.C. Barua confirmed that the coins were belonged to the reign of King Suklenmung as they bear of the Ahom date ‘Lakni-plekni’ and on the reverse side was inscribed the picture of goddess Tara. Barua’s reading and rendering of the legends have been accepted by other scholars in this field as correct (Phukon, J.N., 1973).

From the study of the list of the coins it is seen that octagonal silver coins bearing the saka date 1570 (1648) and the title ‘Sri Sri Swarga Nayayanadeva’ of the Hindu Script is the earliest Ahom coins (Phukon, J.N., 1973). But the title Swarga Narayanadeva was taken by almost all the Ahom kings and therefore, there are conflicting opinions among the scholars regarding the authorship of these coins. But V.A. Smith confirmed that Sri Sri Swarga Nayayanadeva was none but Pratap Singha alone (Phukon, J.N., 1973). The view of V.A. Smith was supported by Kashinath Tamuli Phukan who says that Pratap Singha reigned from saka 1533 to 1571 (1611-49) and he was the first Ahom king who minted octagonal silver coins where he used Hindu scripts (Tamuli Phukon, Kashinath, 1964). Again some of the scholars like Gunabhiram Barua, Padmanath Gohain Barua and Umanath Gohain and Prafulla Mahanta are of the opinion that coins were first minted during the reign of Pratap Singha (1603-1641). In
the ‘Yogini Tantra’ it is mentioned that the Ahom kingdom had eight corners and pandits residing in the court of Pratap Singha advised him to mint coins in octagonal shape (Tamuli Phukon, Kashinath, 1964). U. N. Gohain also stated that ‘Pratap Singha was the first Ahom king to strike octagonal coins according to the shape of his country over which he ruled’ (Gohain, U.N.,1992). Hiteswar Borboruah and P. Mahanta were also of the same opinion that King Pratap Singha minted octagonal coins following one of the slokas of the ‘Yogini Tantra’ (Borboruah, Hiteswar, 2013 and Mahanta, P., 1991). But in ‘Satsori Asom Buranji’, it is mentioned that King Pratap Singha minted silver coins in octagonal shape to commemorate the conquest of eight principalities viz Chutia, Kachari, Kamata, Turbaska (a part of Bengal), Patilajaha, Eghara Sindur, Baro Bhuyan and Chungi (Dafla) [Bhuyan, S.K. (ed.), 2009].

But S.K. Bhuyan opined that Joydhaj Singha (1648-1663) was the first Ahom king who minted octagonal silver coins where he used ‘Hindu’ scripts [Bhuyan, S.K. (ed.), 2009]. On those coins the image of Singha Pahu (Singha means lion and Pahu means deer i.e. loin deer or the dragon of the Ahom royal insignia) were engraved. It was from the reign of Joydhaj Singha silver coins came into circulation [Bhuyan, S.K. (ed.), 2009]. J.P. Wade was also of the opinion that Joydhaj Singha was the first king of Assam to coin money (Wade, J.P. 1972 & Phukon, J.N., 1973).

Rudra Singha (1696-1714) was the first Ahom king who introduced the practice of minting coins annually besides at the first year of his reign i.e on the occasion of his coronation. This system was followed by his successors [Barpujari, H.K. (ed.), 2007, Vol. III]
During the reign of Siva Singha (1714-1744), Borraja Phuleswari alias Pramatheswari, his wife, minted square coins instead of conventional octagonal shape and in these coins she used Persian scripts for the first time. Prior to this, three scripts i.e. Ahom, Devanagari and Assamese were used in Ahom coins. The Ahoms in the early part of their rule used Ahom (Tai) script, middle part of their reign Devanagari script and in the later part of their rule used Assamese script (GogoI, Lila, 1961). It was also for the first time during the Ahom reign that Siva Singha permitted his three queens viz Phuleswari, Ambika and Sarbeswari to mint coins in their names along with his own.

After two decades square shaped coins were minted by King Rajeswar Singha in which Persian legends with Assamese scripts were used. Few tiny coins circular or oval in shape belonging to the reign of King Gaurinath Singha and Chandrakanta Singha were also deciphered. Except a few square shaped coins belonging to the reign of Siva Singha and Rajeswar Singha, the octagonal shape was followed throughout the Ahom reign.

Thus it is seen that the coins of the Ahom kings bear legends either in Assamese or Ahom script and a few in Persian. On one side of the coins the name of the issuing king, Ahom date of accession to the throne were engraved and on the other side the picture of the deity whom the kings had worshipped was engraved.

The Ahom kings generally used gold and silver coins only, when copper coins were in circulation in other parts of India. It is not that copper was a rare metal at that time in Assam. Copper was used for making pots, dishes and other utensils for religious purposes. For this sanctimonious use of copper, this metal was not used for making coins. It may be perhaps due to the fact that as barter being the chief mode of transaction, copper coins were not used. It might be for the fact that copper was chiefly obtained from Bengal and during the days of disturbance, supply of copper remained
uncertain. The number of the gold coins so far discovered is less in comparison to the silver coins which are pretty numerous.

Ahoms like many other tribal people who in the initial stage had not depended on coinage for commercial transactions and so circulation of coins had little impact in the medieval economy. Coins were not minted in abundance to meet the demands of daily transactions but the cowries and the barter system played the conspicuous role. “Only in bigger commercial and diplomatic transactions and in gifts on ceremonial occasions the coins were mostly used in Ahom kingdom” (Sarma, S.N., 2001). From the same source it can be known that the Ahom kings minted coins with four fold purposes – i) to mark the special occasion of their reign i.e. coronation ceremony, performance of the Rikkhvan ceremony and other some similar ceremonies ii) to give gifts (dakshina) to the Brahmanas and religious persons iii) to use them as a medium of exchange on a limited scale iv) to use them for the purpose of external trade specially with Bengal (Sarma, S.N., 2001). Because of such above mentioned reasons the use of coins had gradually increased from 16th century onwards. Therefore, A. Guha opined –‘Local coinage on a limited scale, however started from the 16th century. Land revenue was paid in labour as a general rule, and in produce or money in special cases’ (Guha, A., 1991).

4.9.1 DENOMINATION OF THE COINS:

Contemporary records, literary and epigraphic sources speak of the existence of coins of different denominations. Buranjis make reference to mohar (coin), taka, sicca, rup (rupee), adhali (1/2rupee), siki or maha (1/4thrupee), ad-maha (1/8th of a rupee), charatiya (1/16th of a rupee) and kara or kari (cowrie). Half mohars known as adhali or
ad taka were first introduced by Rudra Singha (1696-1714) (Phukan, J.N., 1973). Edward Gait mentions that Rudra Singha also struck quarter mohars known as siki or maha (Gait, Edward, 1994). But Botham’s ‘Catalogue of the Provincial Coin Cabinet Assam’ does not contain any quarter coins belonging to the reign of Rudra Singha, instead shows this denomination first appeared in the reign of Siva Singha (Botham, A.W., 1930). The term mohar was applied to both gold and silver coins of any denominations [Bhuyan, S.K. (ed.), 2009]. Scholars, however, use the term mohar to gold coins and term rupee to silver coins. The differentiation is also made by using the term sonar mohar and rupor mohar. Generally, these terms were applied to mean a full coin i.e. a coin whether of gold or silver of one tola in weight and therefore it was also called taka. The gold and silver coins belonging to Ahom period were hundred percent pure and the coins were of the same weight standard of 176 grains which remained constant throughout the period. There was no difference between the weight of a tola and a full coin. From this it can be known that throughout the Ahom period barring the last few years there remained a stable economy in medieval Assam.

The coins called ad-maha ($\frac{1}{8}$th of a rupee) and charatiya ($\frac{1}{16}$th of a rupee) were first minted during the reign of Gaurinath Singha (1780-1795) (Baruah, S.L., 1997). The smallest coin was tiniratiya (equal to half anna). The coin was so named because it weighed 3 ratis only. From ‘Tungkhungia Buranji’ it is known that while Gaurinath Singha stayed at Disoi, he minted tiniratiya coins for giving charities due to paucity of cowries [Barbarua Duara, Srinath, 1964].

The king had only their exclusive right to mint money and money was minted only in the capital cities. But he could enjoy this privilege only after performing his coronation ceremony which was called Singari-Gharat Utha. From inscriptions
belonging to Ahom kings it can be known that mints were found only in three places Rangpur, Gargaon and Disoi and these three places were the capitals of the Ahom kingdom.

4.9.2 COWRIES:

Besides coins, cowries were also used in pretty business transactions. Because the value of the coins, even of the lowest fractional unit, was so high that it was not within the reach of the common people. In small transactions barter always did not serve the purpose and in that case cowries were used as common currency. Reference to the use of cowries in small transactions are found in contemporary epigraphic records wherein oil, rice, betel nut and betel vine are said to have bought and sold in terms of cowries [Lekharu, U.C. (ed.), 1987]. ‘Fathiyiya-i-Ibriya’ mentions that during the reign of Joydhaj Singha cowries were used side by side along with the gold and silver coins (Phukon, J.N., 1973). From the ‘Ahom Buranji’ it is known that Siva Singha distributed clothes, silver and cowries to the workers and attendants in a grand feast organized by him [Barua, G.C. (tr. & ed.), 1930 and Phukon, J.N., 1973]. During the reign of the same monarch, the prices of all articles required for the daily worship of the idol Gopeswar were paid in cowries and gondas and total expenditure to be paid per day were thirteen gondas and two kadis (cowries) only. This was known from the copper plate which was in the possession of the Head Priest of the temple of Gopeswar in North Kamrup. In some of the copper plates prices of articles were recorded in cowries. It is also known that tolls were collected in cowries in Raha market during the reign of Rajeswar Singha [Bhuyan, S.K. (ed.), 1962]. Cowries were also collected as fare while crossing a river. It can be mentioned that there were two rivers in the Lakhimpur district which derived their names after the amount of fare collected at ferry crossing. One is
Ekariya (means one cowrie) and another is Chari Kariya (means four cowries) – that means a passenger had to pay one cowrie/ four cowries while crossing those particular rivers as fare. From this it can be known that cowries were widely circulated and had great value during the reign of the Ahoms.

But the fact is that cowries were not found in Assam and its neighbourhood. But they were to be brought from Bengal and to Bengal cowries were imported from Maldip and other islands. In the later part of the 18th century, the Governor General, Warren Hastings, introduced copper coins in place of cowries. When the flow of cowries from Bengal to Assam was ceased, Gaurinath Singha in order to meet the shortage of cowries issued coins of $\frac{1}{31}$ denomination [Bhuyan, S.K. (ed.), 1964].

### 4.9.3 COINS OF MOAMARIA CHIEFS

Besides the Ahom kings, the Moamaria chief Ramakanta, after the occupation of the Ahom capital in 1769 A.D. minted coins in his own name and his coins were novogonial in shape (Barbarua Duara, Srinath, 1964 and Phukon Tamuli, Kashinath, 1964). The other Moamaria king Bharat Singha (1791-93) minted coins in 1791, 1792 and 1793 (Phukon, J.N., 1973). When Sarbananda was declared king by the Moamarias at Bangmara he assumed the tittle of Swargadeo and minted coins in his name in 1794 (Barua, S.L., 1997). Both the Moamaria kings Bharat Singha and Sarbananda used Assamese and Sanskrit scripts and dedicated their coins in the name of Lord Krishna (Barua, S.L., 1997 & Handique, K.J., 2009). H.K. Barpujari also mentions “The struggle which began as a protest against their religious persecution by the Ahom rulers developed into a scramble for power, for it in 1769, a Moamaria chief seized the reigns of the government, dethroned the monarch and struck coins in his own name”
The coins of Moamaria chiefs were full, half, one fourth, one eighth and one sixteenth of denominations. In shape, weight and size they were similar to those of the Ahom coins.

### 4.9.4 KOCH COINS:

In Lower Assam side by side with the Ahom coins, Koch coins called *Narayani* or *Narani* or Narengi were in circulation since the middle of the 16th century (Nath, D., 1989). The *Narayanitaka* was first minted by the Koch King Naranarayana (1540-1587). Holiram Dhekial Phukon stated that in Lower Assam the circulation of the *Narayani* coins was extended upto Rota or Rauta river on the north bank and Mayang on the south bank (Dhekial Phukon, Holiram, 1962). The Koch coins were of one rupee and half rupee denominations. The *Charit Puthis* and Koch genealogical works make mention of the use of money in transactions. For example, the ‘*Darrang Raj Vansawali*’ records that the Koch king Naranarayana granted Rs. 25,000/- for the maintenance of the Kamakhya temple (Daivagya Surya Khari, 1973). The Jayantia Buranji records that Barphukon of Guwahati paid twelve *Narayani Taka* to two ambassadors deputed to the capital of Jayantia [Bhuyan S.K. (ed.), 1964]. There is much similarity between the coins of the Koches with those of the Ahoms (Gait, Edward, 1994).

Besides the coins of Naranarayana, coins belonging to the reign of his son Lakshinarayan (1588-1627), Raghudev (1581-1603), the son of Chilarai and Raghudev’s son Parikhit (1603-1613) who ruled in the eastern part of the kingdom were found. Twenty coins belonging to the reign of Laxminarayan, which were dedicated to Hara and Gauri, are still preserved in the State Museum at Guwahati. One silver coin of Raghudev and another of Parikhit are also preserved in the State Museum at Guwahati.
The Koch coins were heptagonal in shape, their legends were in Sanskrit and script used was archaic Assamese (Baruah, S.L., 1997).

4.9.5 KACHARI COINS:

The coins of the Jayantia and Kachari kingdom and the coins of the Mughal emperors belonging to the reign of ShahJahan, Aurangazeb, Muhammad Shah, Ahmed Shah, Alamgir II, Shah Alam II found their way to the Ahom kingdom (Phukon, J.N., 1973) because it was for several decades Lower Assam was under the Mughals.

The Kachari and Jayantia kings sent their coins as presents or tributes to the Ahom kings but these coins were not in circulation in the Ahom kingdom. The Kachari coins (full coins) belonging to the reign of king Yaso Narayana Deva (1583 A.D.) were of 165.5 grains in weight and 1.5 inch in size (Phukon, J.N., 1973). The one rupee coins of Yasonarayan Dev bear a date of 1505 A.D. (saka 1583) showing that Yasonarayan ascended the throne some twenty years before Satrudaman alias Pratap Narayan Dev. The coins of Pratap Narayan Dev were also preserved in Assam Coin Cabinet. The coins belonging to the reign of Tamradhaj was also preserved where engraved the date 1706-1708 A.D. From this it can be known that a series of coins were struck for at least 120 years. The last Kachari king Govinda Chandra (1813-30) also struck a modern type of coin [Barua, A. (ed.), 1999, Vol. I]

4.9.6 JAYANTIA COINS:

In the Koch, Kachari and the Ahom annals, there is occasional reference of the early rulers of Jayantia. Jayantia coins bearing the saka dates 1591, 1592, 1630, 1653, 1696, 1704, 1707 and 1712 corresponding to the modern dates like A.D. 1669, 1670, 1707, 1731, 1774, 1782, 1785 and 1790 are found. These dates were perhaps the dates
of the accession of kings to the throne. Because the name of the kings were not found engraved upon the coins due to the prohibition of the Koch kings in this respect. “but the quarter rupees dated 1653 and 1712 saka era bear the name of Borgosain and Ram Singha respectively. These rupees are locally known as “katra taka” (sword rupees) and from the fact that they bear the devise of 200 swords and a musket on them” [Barua, A. (ed.), 1999, Vol. I]. The Jayantia coins were bigger in size but lighter in weight. They were of 170.2 grains in weight 1.12 inch in size (Phukon, J.N., 1973).

The coins of the Koch, Kachari, Jayantia and Ahom were in vague up to the third Burmese invasion of Assam. Mints were closed in Assam in 1821 A.D. due to the atrocities of the Burmese upon the Assamese people. After the treaty of Yandabo in 1826 A.D., a separate currency system had started under David Scott, the agent to the Governor General, North East Frontier.

4.10 TRADE REGULATIONS:

As trade and market system helped a lot to improve the economy of the Ahom kingdom, the Ahom kings framed some rules for regulating the sale of commodities in the market. Pratap Singha was the first Ahom king, who with the help of Mumai Tamuli Barbarua imposed some taxes on the commodities which were brought for sale to the market [Bhuyan, S. K. (ed.), 2009]. The king had to do it on the basis of a complaint lodged by the Baro-Bhuyans that the troubles were created by one Bhandari Chetia in one of the markets [Bhuyan, S.K. (ed.), 2009]. It was also for the reason that sometimes the border markets were raided by the neighbouring hill tribes. The king in order to put a check appointed officers like Phukon and Barua in charge of each market.
The main officers who controlled the frontier markets were the Chokial Boras and under them there were the Hatkhowas (marketing officer) who collected hatkar (market tax) from each seller of the market with the help of paiks (Baruah, S.L., 1977). The hatkar thus collected was equal to one twentieth of the goods brought for sale. During the reign of Pratap Singha out of the market tax collected from the sellers only one fourth was to be deposited to the royal treasury and the rest were distributed amongst the Chokial Boras, Hatkhowas and the paiks who assisted them in collection of taxes. It is seen that the tax imposed by king Pratap Singha was at a flat rate i.e. one twentieth of the goods brought for sale but king Rajeswar Singha abolished this flat rate of tax and imposed taxes at different rates depending upon the value of goods sold (Baruah, S.L., 1977). But it is not known definitely how much different rates of tax were fixed on the value of goods sold and how much amount was deposited to the royal treasury. It is clear from the above that market taxes were collected in cash and thus we can conclude that gradually currency was becoming popular instead of barter system.

As has already been mentioned the Ahom kings established custom houses called chokis at the border areas and the biggest of such choki was Kandahar Choki where one Duaria Barua and sometimes two Duaria Baruas were appointed. The Duaria Baruas fully conducted the Assam Bengal trade by paying an annual rent of Rs.90,000/- to the Ahom government (Gait, Edward, 1994). They were so powerful that they could even change the rates of taxes on import and export of goods fixed by the Ahom kings. They exchanged the goods of the Assamese traders with those of Bengal and their transactions were made sometimes on credit also (Bhuyan, S.K., 1949).

Markets established under the sponsorship of Ahom Kings served the dual purpose of meeting and trading for both the hills and plains people and thus through
these markets a feeling of unity and brotherhood grew among them. Because of having such feelings and goodwill they stood unitedly in times of prosperity as well as adversity.

4.1 REFERENCES:


43. Neog, Maheswar (ed.), 1947, ‘Prachya Sasanawali’, plate No. 95 where it is mentioned the purchase of a slave by a Mahanta of Salaguri Satra (Nagaon), 1721 saka or 1799 A.D.


