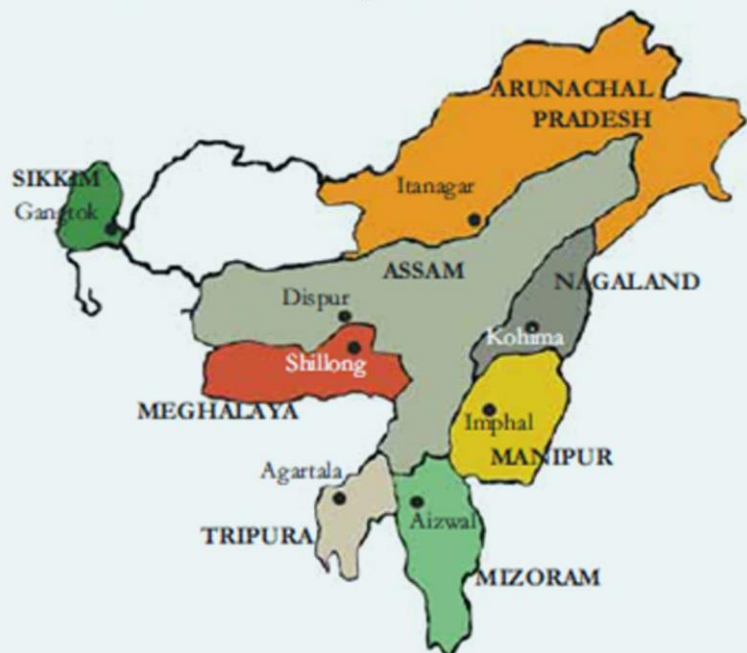




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Rajiv Gandhi University

# BAHIS101

## HISTORY OF NORTH-EAST INDIA (1228-1947)-I



# BA (HISTORY)

## 1<sup>ST</sup> SEMESTER

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## About the University

Rajiv Gandhi University (formerly Arunachal University) is a premier institution for higher education in the state of Arunachal Pradesh and has completed twenty-five years of its existence. Late Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, laid the foundation stone of the university on 4th February, 1984 at Rono Hills, where the present campus is located.

Ever since its inception, the university has been trying to achieve excellence and fulfill the objectives as envisaged in the University Act. The university received academic recognition under Section 2(f) from the University Grants Commission on 28th March, 1985 and started functioning from 1st April, 1985. It got financial recognition under section 12-B of the UGC on 25th March, 1994. Since then Rajiv Gandhi University, (then Arunachal University) has carved a niche for itself in the educational scenario of the country following its selection as a University with potential for excellence by a high-level expert committee of the University Grants Commission from among universities in India.

The University was converted into a Central University with effect from 9th April, 2007 as per notification of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

The University is located atop Rono Hills on a picturesque tableland of 302 acres overlooking the river Dikrong. It is 6.5 km from the National Highway 52-A and 25 km from Itanagar, the State capital. The campus is linked with the National Highway by the Dikrong bridge.

The teaching and research programmes of the University are designed with a view to play a positive role in the socio-economic and cultural development of the State. The University offers Undergraduate, Post-graduate, M.Phil and Ph.D. programmes. The Department of Education also offers the B.Ed. programme.

There are fifteen colleges affiliated to the University. The University has been extending educational facilities to students from the neighbouring states, particularly Assam. The strength of students in different departments of the University and in affiliated colleges has been steadily increasing.

The faculty members have been actively engaged in research activities with financial support from UGC and other funding agencies. Since inception, a number of proposals on research projects have been sanctioned by various funding agencies to the University. Various departments have organized numerous seminars, workshops and conferences. Many faculty members have participated in national and international conferences and seminars held within the country and abroad. Eminent scholars and distinguished personalities have visited the University and delivered lectures on various disciplines.

The academic year 2000-2001 was a year of consolidation for the University. The switch over from the annual to the semester system took off smoothly and the performance of the students registered a marked improvement. Various syllabi designed by Boards of Post-graduate Studies (BPGS) have been implemented. VSAT facility installed by the ERNET India, New Delhi under the UGC-Infonet program, provides Internet access.

In spite of infrastructural constraints, the University has been maintaining its academic excellence. The University has strictly adhered to the academic calendar, conducted the examinations and declared the results on time. The students from the University have found placements not only in State and Central Government Services, but also in various institutions, industries and organizations. Many students have emerged successful in the National Eligibility Test (NET).

Since inception, the University has made significant progress in teaching, research, innovations in curriculum development and developing infrastructure.

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# SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

## History of North East India (1228 to 1947)

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Syllabi	Mapping in Book
<b>Unit I- Early History of North East India I</b> a. Geographical Setting: River System, Mountain System, Flora, Fauna and Climate b. Pre-history of North East India	<b>(Pages 7-26)</b>
<b>Unit II Early History of North East India II</b> a. Pattern of Settlement c. The Varman Dynasty	<b>(Pages 27-38)</b>
<b>Unit III- Medieval North East India I</b> a. Rise of Ahom State: Sukapha and Sudangpha b. Consolidation: Suhungmung, Pratap Singha and RudraSingha	<b>(Pages 39-65)</b>
<b>Unit IV- Medieval North East India II</b> a. Ahom Frontier Policy b. Moamaria Rebellion and Captain Welsh's Mission	<b>(Pages 66-84)</b>
<b>Unit IV- Modern North East India</b> a. Anglo-Burmese War and North East India (1824-1826) b. Treaty of Yandaboo and its Impact	<b>(Pages 85-96)</b>

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# INTRODUCTION

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The North East is the eastern-most region connected to east India via a narrow corridor squeezed between Nepal and Bangladesh. It consists of the contiguous Seven Sister states—Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura—and the Himalayan state of Sikkim. These states are grouped under the Ministry of Development of North-Eastern Region (MDONER) of the Government of India. Except for the Goalpara region of Assam, the rest were late entrants to political India—the Brahmaputra valley of Assam became a part of British India in 1824, and the hilly regions even later. Due to cultural and historical reasons, parts of North Bengal in West Bengal (districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, and Koch Bihar) are often included in North-East India. Sikkim was recognized as a part of the North-Eastern states in the 1990s. On 15th August, 1947, when India became an Independent nation, North East Frontier Agency commonly known as NEFA became an integral part of the Union of India. It was administrated by the Ministry of External Affairs with the Governor of Assam acting as agent to the President of India. The administrative head was the advisor to the governor.

The states are officially recognized under the North Eastern Council (NEC), constituted in 1971 as the acting agency for the development of the eight states. The North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd (NEDFi) was incorporated on 9 August 1995 and the MDONER was set up in September 2001. In 1972, the NEFA became a Union Territory when Indira Gandhi was the Prime Minister and acquired the name of Arunachal Pradesh. After three years, in 1975, it acquired a legislature. And finally, on 20 February 1987 statehood was conferred on Arunachal Pradesh when Rajiv Gandhi was the Prime Minister and it became the 25th state of the Union of India.

This book, *History of North East India (1228-1947)*, has been divided into five units and deals with early, medieval and modern history of North East India. The book also elaborates on the British policy of Northern Frontier of Assam and the struggle of the people of North East against the British imperialism.

This book, *History of North East India (1228-1947)*, has been designed keeping in mind the self-instruction mode (SIM) format and follows a simple pattern, wherein each unit of the book begins with the *Introduction* followed by the *Unit Objectives* for the topic. The content is then presented in a simple and easy-to-understand manner, and is interspersed with ‘*Check Your Progress*’ questions to reinforce the student’s understanding of the topic. A list of *Questions and Exercises* is also provided at the end of each unit. The *Summary* and *Key Terms* further act as useful tools for students and are meant for effective recapitulation of the text.

## NOTES



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# UNIT I EARLY HISTORY OF NORTH EAST INDIA

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Early History of North  
East India

## NOTES

### Structure

Introduction  
Unit Objectives  
Geographical Features of North East India  
Pre-History of North East India  
Tripura; 1.3.2 Manipur; 1.3.3 Assam  
Summary  
Key Terms  
Answers to 'Check Your Progress'  
Questions and Exercises  
Further Reading

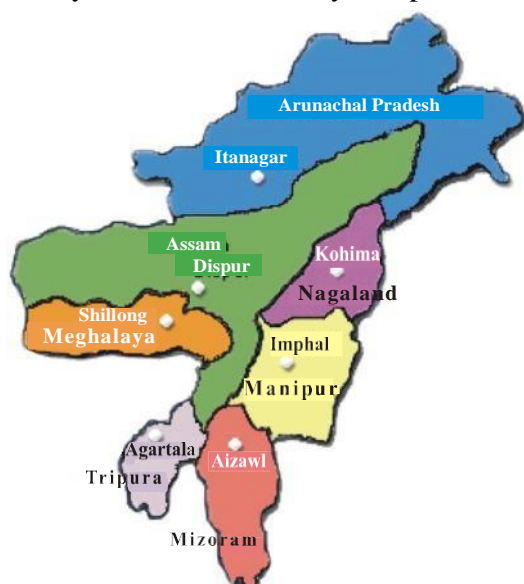
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## INTRODUCTION

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North East India has over 2000 km of border with Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh and is connected to the rest of India by a narrow 20 km wide corridor of land. One of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse regions in Asia, each state has a distinct culture and tradition of its own.

From times immemorial, India's North East has been the meeting point of many communities, faiths and cultures. A place renowned for its magical beauty and bewildering diversity, North East India is the home for more than 166 separate tribes speaking a wide range of languages. Some groups have migrated over the centuries from places as far as South East Asia; they retain their cultural traditions and values but are beginning to adapt to contemporary lifestyles. The jungles of North East are dense, its rivers powerful and there is heavy rain in the hills, valleys and plains during the monsoons.



*States of North East India*

*Self-Instructional*

## NOTES

North East India comprises of seven states commonly known as the ‘Seven Sisters’. They are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. In this unit, you will learn about the early history of North East India.

The lushness of its landscape, the range of communities and geographical and ecological diversity makes the North East quite different from other parts of the subcontinent. The festivals and celebrations in the Northeastern states of India are a colourful reflection of the people and their lives.

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### UNIT OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- State the geographical features of North East India
- Discuss the pre-history of North East states
- Analyse the history of Assam through excavated evidences

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### GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF NORTH EAST INDIA

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The state of Assam was divided into four states viz. Assam, the parent state, Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya. Besides, the two princely states of Tripura and Manipur were merged in the Indian Union and came into existence as independent states. Another territory, North East Frontier states, sandwiched between Himalayas and Brahmaputra, was made into a full-fledged state of Arunachal Pradesh. Thus the seven states of North East India came into existence. Together these states have an area of 2,55,000 square kilometer.

North East India, as we know today, is very different from what it was centuries ago. The region was not part of India politically and not even administratively, till the British unified it with the rest of India in the beginning of the 18th century.

Based on political and administrative convenience, the region is divided into seven political units—Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. Unlike the state formation that took place in India in 1950s on linguistic basis, these states in North East India was formed on the basis of ethnic and tribal boundaries. Therefore, the basis of the creation of these seven political units is on ethnic and cultural differences. However, on the basis of some common shared problems, nature of its geographical isolation, similar tradition, the whole region was brought into a single entity, known as North East. It is also due to a particular unique geo-political strategy in the Indian polity that for all practical purposes the whole region is looked upon as a single unit.

From the geographical point of view it is known that all the major types of land forms, like Achaean massif, young folded hills and mountain of tertiary origin, and the recently built riverine plains are found in this region. Such diverse geographical features have great impact on the development of different socio-cultural groups of people.



Therefore, it is pertinent to understand different geographical and topographical feature of the region. On the basis of the physiographic characteristics of the region, it may be broadly divided into three major divisions.

- The plateaus – Meghalaya Plateau and Karbi Plateau
- Hills and Mountains – North Eastern Himalayan Ranges of Arunachal Pradesh, Eastern Hills of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, Mizoram, and Tripura
- The Plains – Brahmaputra and Barak Plains of Assam, Imphal Valley of Manipur Plain and plains of Tripura

On the whole, the terrain condition of the region is extremely rocky and unfavourable for human settlement. The details of this division are given below.

### **The Plateau**

The Plateau consists of Meghalaya state and Karbi Anglong District of Assam, combination of which is commonly known as Shillong Plateau. This portion forms a part of the Peninsular Plateau of the country. As this area is rich in natural resources like coal, uranium, limestone, and other minerals, they constitute an important economy of the region. By covering an area of 32,861 square kilometer which is about 12 per cent of the total area of the region, the contribution of this area in the development of the socio-economic life of the region is well known.

### **Hills and Mountains**

The hills and mountains of North East comprise the Northeastern Himalayan Ranges of the state of Arunachal Pradesh and Eastern Hills of the states of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, Mizoram and Tripura. It covers a total area of 1,50,000 square kilometer which accounts for nearly 60 per cent of the total area of the region. It has extended between Orkhala range along the Bhutan-Arunachal border in the West and the Siang-Dihang River in the east. Among all the parts of this region, the hill ranges in the state of Arunachal Pradesh is the highest mountainous area of the entire North East India. Therefore, a large expanse of this area is also extremely rugged.

From the above account we can gather that the region encompasses vast fertile plains and hills. Because of its two opposite geographies and its corresponding resources, the people in the hills and plains are highly interdependent. Because of its unique geographical features, people and its culture, different people describe its uniqueness differently. Some describe it as a miniature India – an epitome of the sub-continent, some anthropologists consider it as a paradise for research – an anthropological museum, and some describe the land as the Switzerland of the East.

### **Rivers of North East**

The region is covered by the mighty Brahmaputra-Barak river systems and their tributaries. Geographically, apart from the Brahmaputra, Barak and Imphal valleys and some flat lands in between the hills of Meghalaya and Tripura, the remaining two-thirds of the area is hilly terrain interspersed with valleys and plains; the altitude varies from almost sea-level to over 7,000 metres (23,000 ft) above MSL. The region's high rainfall, averaging around 10,000 millimetres (390 in) and above, creates problems of ecosystem, high seismic activity, and floods. The states of Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim have a montane climate with cold, snowy winters and mild summers.

## **NOTES**

## NOTES

### Flora and Fauna of the North East

The North East region of India is best explained as the land of surging Himalayas, lush green valleys, and ecological diversity. Because of its different terrains, different ecological zones and altitude, the region is also known for its rich bio-diversity and vegetation. The region because of its topographical condition has a variety of forests in the form of tropical moist evergreen, semi-deciduous and wet temperate conifer forests which also form an important source for livelihood of many tribal communities. The region is also known for its original home of many rare species of wildlife.

The hilly terrain of the North East and its climate is best suited for the growth of rare breed of flora and fauna. The state of Arunachal Pradesh is famous for beautiful blossoms. The state is renowned for its rare species of flora and fauna. One gets to see the most amazing breed of orchids growing in the region, because of which Arunachal Pradesh is also called 'Orchid's Paradise'. The sub-tropical climate of North East India along with monsoon rains supports wilderness. This climate has attributed to the growth of different breeds of flora and fauna in this region. The region is home to a diverse range of animals and because of its rich resource of flora and fauna it is also referred to as a treasure trove of ecological diversity.

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### PRE-HISTORY OF NORTH EAST INDIA

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The Neolithic culture of North East India is distinguished by the predominance of Cord-impressed pottery. It has no definite parallels within the Indian subcontinent though the shouldered tool type can be found in the adjacent states of Eastern India. As far as the Neolithic period is concerned, there appears to be no doubt about the relationship between Northeastern India and the countries of Southeast Asia. The excavated sites like Daojali Hading (Shrama, 1967), Sarutaru (Rao, 1973), Parsi-Parlo (Ashraf, 1990), sites in Garo Hills (IAR, 1966-67, 67-68), and Manipur (Singh, 1993), have yielded numerous Cord-impressed and other handmade wares. The fast moving wheel was unknown to the Khasi. The pottery technique exhibits the survival of one of the oldest traditions of hand-modelling without any decoration.

It is still not confirmed as to whether rice was first a dry land crop which later got adapted to wet conditions or vice-versa. Most of the Neolithic sites of the north east region are located near the hilly areas, which are generally away from the big rivers like Brahmaputra and its tributaries which may indirectly indicate that rice was a dry land crop during the Neolithic time. However, it does not necessarily imply that the Neolithic people of North East India did not occupy the river valleys. Due to various reasons, we have no significant archaeological data from these river basins till date.

The scant evidence of ceramics during the Neolithic culture of North East India can be explained by using ethnographic parallels. These simple communities used different types of bottle gourds and bamboo tubes as vessels and containers for storage purposes. Easily available raw materials like bamboo were used for various purposes such as for making containers to store grains and vegetables. The production of pottery might have been negligible as the Neolithic people used other materials. Cord-impressed handmade pottery tradition is seen among the present day potter communities of North East India. The Cord-marked pottery from the archaeological sites of Manipur cannot be compared with those of the modern day pottery, except in certain aspects of manufacturing technology.

#### Check Your Progress

1. Name the different states that comprise North East India.
2. Who was instrumental in unifying North East with the rest of India?

## NOTES

The occurrence of the Neolithic tools on the surface of the present shifting cultivation fields in the regions of North East India, especially in the Garo hills, indicate the possible use of the associated tools. Historical as well as situational records reveal that the surface of the excavated site of Parsi-Parlo in Arunachal Pradesh has experienced slash and burn cultivation at least twice since its ancient use. The predominant use of the Neolithic axes in the primitive agricultural system of North East India can be presumed as over 300 stone tools and a large number of potsherds have been found in the site of Rangru Abri (JAR 1966-67) in Garo hills. The artefacts collected from these sites consist of Neolithic stone axes and adzes, grinding stones and pottery which were discovered on the surface of hill tops that was cleared for shifting cultivation. Thus, the formation process of the Neolithic site of North East India have undergone different kinds of activities, particularly, the cultural disturbance process.

The discovery of artefacts related to the subsistence activities at the site of Daojali Hading is very important. The artefacts include twenty two grinding stones, four querns (tools for hand-grinding), and six mullers with the Neolithic celts made of the locally available raw material. This indicates the existence of food processing techniques. These objects were probably used for grinding food grains during the Neolithic period as similar equipment are still used by the people of North East India. Though excavation has not revealed any organic remains of plants, we cannot ignore the fact that the early inhabitants of this site were involved in some kind of cultivation, most likely rice. It can be inferred that the inhabitants were practicing the primitive form of agriculture i.e. shifting cultivation.

Due to the strategic geographical location of North East India which connects the East and the South Asian regions, cultural affinities can be observed in the material cultural objects since prehistoric times. These cultural affinities during the Neolithic period in Northeast India are basically based on the Celt making tradition, Cord-impressed pottery, and rice cultivation. These are the characteristic features of the Neolithic culture which connects Northeast India with Chinese Neolithic and Southeast Asian Neolithic cultures.

For our study of the sources for reconstruction of history of North East India prior to independence, we will look at the three states that existed during that time—Tripura, Manipur and Assam.

### Tripura

The origin of the name, Tripura, is still a matter of controversy among historians and researchers. The 'Rajmala' is the royal chronicle of the kings of Tripura who reigned for around 5,000 years since the pre-historic era. As per 'Rajmala' the royal house of Tripura trace their origin to the 'lunar' dynasty, following the footsteps of their royal Hindu counterparts across India who claim to have originated from the 'lunar' or 'solar' dynasty. According to the *Rajmala*, Tripura's celebrated court chronicle, an ancient king named 'Tripur' ruled over the territorial domain known as *Tripura* and the name of the kingdom was derived from his name.

Many researchers explain the name 'Tripura' from its etymological origin—the word 'Tripura' is a compound of two separate words, 'tui' (water) + 'pra' (near) which in totality means 'near water'. The geographical location of the state with its close proximity to the vast water resources of eastern Bengal coupled with the generic identity of the state's original inhabitants as 'Tipra' or 'Twipra' apparently justify this explanation of the state's name.

**Table 1.1** General Information on Tripura

**NOTES**

<b>Area</b>	<b>10,491.69 sqkm</b>
<b>Capital</b>	Agartala
<b>Altitude</b>	12.80 meters
<b>Population</b>	3,671,032 (Census-2001)
<b>Temperature</b>	Summer: 20 to 36 degree C. Winter: 2 to 27 Degree c.
<b>Clothing</b>	Summer-Cotton. Winter: Woollens
<b>Rainy Season</b>	June to August
<b>Average rainfall</b>	2500 mm per annum
<b>Official Languages</b>	Bengali and Kokborok
<b>Other Languages</b>	English, Hindi, Manipuri. Chakma
<b>International Border</b>	<b>856 Km.</b>
<b>Literacy rate</b>	87.75% (2011 census)
<b>Per capita income</b>	`55,004 (2012-2013)

The state of Tripura shares common boundaries with the states of Manipur and Assam. The Vigyan Prasara website of the Government of India says the following about the sources for reconstructing the history of Tripura.

There is not enough tangible evidence to reconstruct the ancient history of Tripura prior to the rule of the Manikya dynasty. ‘Sri Rajmala’ is the only source book of the princely regimes of Tripura.... The first part of Sri Rajmala was compiled during the reign of Dharma Manikya in the 15th century. The second part was compiled during the reign of Amar Manikya in the 16th century and the third part during the reign of Govinda Manikya in the 17th century.

Table 1.2 from the site of the Archaeological Survey of India provides the history of the various archaeological excavations conducted in Tripura since 1947.

**Table 1.2** Excavations - Since Independence - Tripura

Site	Year(s)	Excavated by	Reference
Shyamsundar Tila	1984-85	ASI	IAR 1984-85, pp. 78-79
Thakurani Tila	1984-85	ASI	IAR 1984-85, pp/ 79-80

The Khowai and Haora valleys have revealed fossil wood tools (Figure 1.1) in the Upper Paleolithic layer. More sources of the history of Tripura are ancient religious texts like the Puranas, the edicts dating from the third century BC.

It does appear that other than the *Rajmala* there is no document which is authentic enough for using as the base for reconstructing the history of Tripura, while various numismatic and archaeological evidences have been found for reconstructing the history of Tripura over the past five centuries.



**Fig. 1.1** Fossil Wood Tools

**Table 1.3** Collection of the Tripura Government Museum

<b>Total No. of Collections</b>	<p>:- 1645 nos.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Coins<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i. Gold Coins – 8 nos.</li><li>ii. Silver Coins – 244 nos.</li><li>iii. Copper Coins – 522 nos.</li></ul></li><li>● Sculptures : 79 nos.</li><li>● Terracotta : 141 nos.</li><li>● Copper inscriptions : 10 nos.</li><li>● Stone inscriptions : 09 nos.</li><li>● Bronze images : 39 nos.</li><li>● Textiles : 102 nos.</li><li>● Oil paintings : 58 nos.</li><li>● Sketches and drawings : 63 nos.</li><li>● Jewellery : 197 nos. and others.</li></ul>
<b>Reference Library</b>	<p>:- Books on art, architecture, archaeology, the anthropology, history and other aspects of the state.</p>
<b>Epigraphical Collections</b>	<p>:- Number of manuscripts – 120 nos.</p>
<b>Language</b>	<p>:- Sanskrit and Bengali.</p>
<b>Type</b>	<p>:- Mythological.</p>
<b>Sculpture</b>	<p>:- Most of the sculptures acquired and displayed so far are from Udaipur, Pilak, Jolaibari and other sites of Tripura. Out of them, the sculptures from Pilak are exquisite collections, depicting mixed culture of both, Hindu and Buddhist pantheon. They are famous for the style and variety of theme. The sculptures are mostly dated back to 9th and 13th AD. Most of the sculptures are made of sandstone and for that the formation of sculpture is very crude in nature.</p> <p>Low relief Dasavatar panels collected from Radhanagar in the vicinity of Agartala, date to 18th century AD, are exquisite pieces of sculpture. From these sculptures, local influence about their formation, style and anthropomorphic details can be gathered.</p>
<b>Terracotta</b>	<p>:- Most of the terracotta figures collected in this Museum are from Pilak and Amarpur. Some terracotta figures belonging to Bengal School have been contributed by Historian Dinesh Ch. Sen, and are prized collection. Terracottas of Pilak symbolizes a unique craftsmanship of traditions, that prevailed in Bengal and the rest have mythological themes, floral designs, animal motifs, etc. Due to poor firing and clay, the quality of the terracottas found in Pilak are not as good as those of Bengal.</p>
<b>Bronze Images</b>	<p>:- Bronze images of Tripura are no less important in moulding technique, theme, variety and unique craftsmanship. Some of the important collections are of miniature Mukhalinga Avalokitesvara, Tara and Vishnu.</p>
<b>Coins</b>	<p>:- The most ancient coin of the Tripura ruler so far discovered is that of Maharaja Ratna Manikya (1464 AD) the 145<sup>th</sup> King of the state.</p> <p><b>Characteristics of the Coins of Tripura</b></p> <p>(a) Mostly made of silver and copper, some gold coins are also in the collection.</p>

## NOTES

## NOTES

- (b) Coronation, pilgrimage, conquest, etc. types of commemorative coins are the general collection.
- (c) The Queen's name along with the King's are inscribed on the coins, e.g. depict the legend Sivadurgapada, Srijuta Dharma Manikya Deva, Sri Dharmasila Mahadevi.
- (d) Iconographic symbol is also found on the coin.
- (e) The script of the coins is in Bengali and partly Assamese. The language is Sanskrit.

### Paintings

:- Paintings are mostly acquired from the Royal House of Tripura on permanent donation. The paintings mainly belong to the life-size portrait collection of the rulers of the State. There are paintings of non-Indian origin. Some sketch drawings of famous artists like Nandala Gagan Thakur and Dhiren Krishna Deb Ba the most valuable collection of this museum.

### Tribal Sculpture Gallery

:- Tripura being a land of various ethnic groups, an attempt has been made to depict the culture of the major tribes of Tripura. Some of the unique collections of ornaments, instruments and textiles used by them in different stages of life are shown through models and diorama.

### Photo Gallery

#### Bronze objects

- Buddha : Circa 9th-10th Cent A.D.
- Siva Parvati : 9th-10th cent A.D.

#### Stone objects

- Bhairava : 12th cent, Sonamura, Tripura
- Buddha : 10th cent, Pilak, Tripura
- 3 Uma-Maheswar : 11th cent, Udaipur, Tripura

#### Stone plaque (Dashavatara panel)

- **Kalki avatar** : 18th cent, Radhanagar, Tripura
- Kurmavatar : 18th cent, Radhanagar, Tripura
- Krishna : 18th cent, Radhanagar, Tripura

#### Terracotta

- Kinnar : 18th cent, Pilak, Tripura

## Monuments of Archaeological Importance in Tripura

*Table 1.4 Gauhati Circle, Tripura*

Sl. no	Name of monuments/ sites	Location	District
1.	Sculptures and rock-cut relief of Unakuti Tirtha, Unakuti Range,	Unakuti Range	North Tripura
2.	Ancient Remains, Baxanagar,	Baxanagar	West Tripura
3.	Gunavati Group of Temples, Radha Kishorpur,	Radha Kishorpur	South Tripura
4.	Temple of Chaturdasa Devata, Radha Kishorpur,	Kishorpur	South Tripura
5.	Bhubaneswari Temple, Rajnagar,	Rajnagar	South Tripura
6.	Thakurani Tilla, Paschim Pillak,	Pillak	South Tripura
7.	Ancient Mound called Shyamsundar Ashram Tilla, Baikhora Jolaibari	Baikhora Jolaibari	South Tripura
8.	Ancient Mound known Puja Khola, Paschim Pillak,	Paschim Pillak	South Tripura

Source: Tripura.nic.in

## Manipur

The history of the early period of the state was reconstructed from the chronicles of the Ningthouja dynasty along with some literary sources and various clan genealogies. The various annual administrative reports such as the one of 1894-95 also provide valuable information. Documents like the 1470 Agreement between King Kiyamba of Manipur and Khekhomba of Pong in upper Burma, Anglo Manipur Friendship Treaty in 1762, Anglo Manipuri Defense Protocol of 1763, and Treaty of Yandaboo, 1826, between the British government and the Burmese government after the Burmese captured Manipur from 1819 – 1826, which is still remembered as the ‘Seven Year Devastation’ also provide a great deal of information. The court history or the chronicle of Manipur, *Cheitharon Kumpapa*, is a stirring literary source and provides concrete evidence from 33 CE till Bodhchandra, the last king (1955). According to Saroj N. Arambam Parrat in the court chronicles of the kings of Manipur, ‘The earlier part of the chronicle is problematic both as regards dating and historicity, though the information it contains is still useful in reconstructing Manipur’s early history.’

*Ningthourol Lambuba* is yet another literary source for the reconstruction of the history of Manipur.

The Manipur State Archives are another source of information about the history of Manipur. The ancient treaties, such as Sakoklamlen, Chinglon Laihui, Nuglon, Kanglei, Layat and Kangla Houba also aid in the reconstruction of history, especially in the understanding of the rules for the construction of Kangla. We get information regarding the governance of Manipur during the ancient period from the written constitution ‘Loyumba Shinyen’. *Mashin* is another text that provides information about the economic and social history of Manipur. Yet another text of ancient times is *Panthoibi Kongkhul* in which, besides other things, refers to the plantation of varieties of crops and paddy by Nongpok Ningthou and Panthoibi.

Manipur being one of the oldest civilizations, the evolution process of the state goes back to the pre-historic period of which evidences have been discovered. Though there have been debates over references to Manipur being there in the Mahabharata, it has been rejected by scholars, even from Manipur.

Table 1.5, from the site of the Archaeological Survey of India, provides the history of various archaeological excavations conducted in Manipur since 1947.

**Table 1.5 Excavations - Since Independence - Manipur**

Site	Year(s)	Excavated by	Reference
Kanchipur	1991-92	Govt. of Manipur	IAR 1991-92, pp 75-76
Khangkhui	1968-69	O. K. Singh	IAR 1968-69, p.20
Sekta	1994-95	Manipur State Archaeology	IAR 1994-95, pp. 58-59

In Manipur, evidence exists of cultures of the Old Stone Age, New Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age. Manipur has hills with rock shelters and caves that would have given shelters to prehistoric men. Though Old Stone Age evidence is only found in the hills, the relics of the New Stone Age can be seen in the valley too. Imphal valley could have experienced the copper-bronze age culture, a significant phase in the history of mankind. The traits of Bronze Age Culture in Manipur seem to have come from Upper Burma and Thailand. Excavations in Manipur after 1970 help to infer that Manipur sites also harboured Hoanbinhian culture. The archaeological linkage of pre-historic culture also existed in Manipur.

Information from various edicts is of prime importance, such as from the edicts of Meidingu Naophangba, which provides a short account, 115 types of crimes in ancient Manipur and their related punishments. Nangshamei Puya and the annual administrative

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reports of the political agents and the writing of British administrators in Manipur have even contributed some information regarding criminal justice system in the region.






To quote from - *History of Manipur: An Independent Kingdom (AD 33-1949)*:

‘The intellectual reservoir of manuscripts, which are in the personal custody of the “Maichous” and many of which have been published in modern Meitei enriched the knowledge of a number of human disciplines viz., Administration, Arts and Culture, Astrology, Charms and Mantras, Creation Theories, Dictionaries, Fine Arts, Geography, Geology, Health and Hygiene Genealogy. Poetry, Prediction, Prose, Religious Philosophy, Scripts Supernatural stones, Yek, Salais and miscellaneous aspects (Khelchandra quoted in Sanajaoba op.cit). Few of them in Manpuri title includes Cheitharol Kumbaba, Ningthourol Lumbaba, Numit Kappa, Leithak Leikharon, Chainarol, Panthoibi Khongul, Nungan Pombi Luwaoba, Loyumba Shinyen, Sanamahi Leikal, Mashin, chadda Laihui, Chakpa Khunda Khunthok, Naothingkhong khunghoklon, Poirenton Khunthokpa, Pakhangba Nongkarol, Laishemlon and Sakok Lamlel are some of the outstanding Meitei early scriptures which record the story of human evolution, the myths, legends, pre- and proto-history and the history of the seventy-four kings who ruled the country since AD 33 till the merger of Manipur with the Union of India in 1949 (Sanajaoba op.cit).’

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### List of Monuments of National Importance in Manipur

*Table 1.6 Monuments and Temples of Manipur*

SL. No.	Description	Location	District	Image
N-MN-1	Temple of Vishnu	Bishenpur	Bishnupur	
N-MN-2	Ultra sanglen	Imphal	Imphal West	
N-MN-3	Temple at Kangla	Imphal	Imphal West	
N-MN-4	Monument of Bheigyachandra Maharaj	Imphal	Imphal West	
N-MN-5	Kanchi-gate	M.U.Campus, Kanchipur, Imphal	Imphal West	
N-MN-6	It is the monument of ‘Paona Brajabashi’, one of the national heroes of Manipur.	Khongjom	Thoubal	



## Assam

Oldest written record of the relics of Paleolithic culture of Assam is found in A.H. Dhoni's *Pre-history and Proto-history of Eastern India*. In the prehistoric antiquities found in the Garo hills, Dhoni saw a stone tool and classified it as Acheulean hand-axe. This tool is currently housed in Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford. In Garo hills' Ron Gram Valley a huge number of tools from this period have been found. These sites were selected for the dig based on their having ready raw material and water needed for the early humans to fashion tools.

### Assam in Pre-Historic Age

#### Mesolithic Age

In the Ron Gram Valley of Garo Hills, Mesolithic stone tools were discovered. It seems that handmade pottery was used by the people, who were food gatherers and hunters.

#### Neolithic Age

Archaeological evidence of the early Neolithic culture were unearthed in the north Cachar, Naga and Garo hills. It can be found all across Assam, but is mostly concentrated in the hill districts. They employed shifting or 'jhum' cultivation of grains like millet and rice, possibly because of floods. They ate fish, goats, deer and other wild animals. They used bark to make clothes. An influence of both Southeast Asian and Indian cultures can be found in this region.

#### Iron Age

No archaeological evidence of the Iron Age has been found in this region.

#### Megalithic Age

A little earlier than the first millennium is fixed as the time period for the beginning of the Megalithic culture in Assam. It is seen at sites in Karbi and Kamrup hills and along the borders of Garo hills.

Table 1.7 from the website of the Archaeological Survey of India provides the history of various archaeological excavations conducted in Assam since 1947. Figure 1.2 shows the Ambari Archaeological Site, Kamrup, Assam

*Table 1.7 Excavations in Assam Since Independence*

Site	Year(s)	Excavated by	Reference
Ambari	1968-69 & 1970-71; 1987-88; 1989-90	Guwahati University; Assam State Archaeology [1989-90] & Deccan College, Pune	IAR 1968-69, pp. 3-4 & 1970-71, p. 4; 1987-88, pp. 8-9; 1988-89, p. 6; 1989-90, pp. 8-9
Dah-Parvatia	1989-90	ASI	IAR 1989-90, p. 10
Daojali-Hading.	1962-63 & 1963-64	Guwahati University	IAR 1962-63, p. 3 & 1963-64, p. 4-5.
Deopani-Tham	1962-63	Assam State Archaeology	IAR 1962-63, p. 3.
Devasthan	1984-85	Assam State Archaeology	IAR 1984-85, p. 8.
Gauhati	1974-75	University of Guwahati	IAR 1974-75, p. 7
Jalukbari	1967-68	Guwahati University	IAR 1967-68, p. 8.
Na-nath	1984-85	Assam State Archaeology	IAR 1984-85, p.8.
Paya	1965-66	ASI & Local Govt.	IAR 1965-66, p. 35.
Selbalgiri-2	1967-68	Guwahati University	IAR 1967-68, p. 8.
Shri Shri Suryapahar	1992-93; 1993-94	ASI	IAR 1992-93, pp. 4-5; 1993-94, p. 9

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**Fig. 1.2** Ambari Archaeological Site, Kamrup, Assam

**Source:** Archaeological Survey of India: <http://www.asiGauhaticircle.gov.in>

### Sources for Ancient Assam

When it comes to literary evidence, there are references to Assam in the Mahabharata. The early contact between the Aryans and Assam has found references in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

There is no chronicle for Assam which is reliable for reconstructing its history. From the medieval period we have the chronicles ‘Buranji’. Yet, other types of sources need to be relied on, of which the epigraphic sources are of prime importance.

When we refer to ancient history, let us take a quick look at the types of sources we can use for reconstructing the history of Assam.

#### 1. Literary Sources

The *Puranas* like the *Harivamsa*, and Mahabharata carry legends of the mythical kings Brajadatta, Bhagadatta and Naraka. *Kalika Purana* contained the Naraka legend’s latest form of *Harshacharita* written by Bana during the reign of Harshavardhana provides important information regarding the king of Assam Bhaskarvarmana. There are accounts of Hiuen-Tsang the traveller (known to have been in Assam from AD 629—45) and inscriptions of Bhaskarvarmana in which there is mention of Assam. Various tantric works are also sources of information regarding Assam or Kamrupa, like the *Yogini Tantra*. There are also references in Greek historical works to people of Assam (primitive Kirata people). *Tabakat-E-Nasiri* written by Minhujuddin’s is a work of prime importance and it refers to Kamrupa as falling on the route taken by Muhammad-I-Bakhtiyar on his expedition against Tibet. Assam is also mentioned in a few Persian and Arabic texts of approximately AD 851.

*Sankhyagrihasangraha* recounts that Surjya Pahar in Goalpara was a land that worshipped Surya and was also known as the place for ‘Jyotish Sastra’.

Mention of ancient Assam can also be found in *Arthasastra* authored by Kautilya.

Writings of Kalidasa and accounts of Periplus also carry important information regarding Assam (Kamrupa).

The *Periplus of the Eastern Sea* talks of Rome and Egypt trading with Assam. Almost all the historians of ancient times refer to Assam as having the best quality of silk. Yet another source of information about Assam is the *Devi Purana*, which was written at the close of the 7th century and beginning of the 8th century.

## 2. Inscriptions

Assam's oldest epigraphic records are from 15th century AD.

As provided by the literature made available by the government of Assam, below is a chronological list of the epigraphic evidence for Assam.

- Umachal (Kamakhya hill, Kamrup district). Rock inscription of Maharajadhiraja Surendravarman of dynasty of Pushyavarman (Figure 1.3).
- Nagajari (Sarupather, Golaghat district). Fragmentary stone inscription assigned to the fifth century AD.
- Bargana (near Doboka, Nogaon district). Rock inscription of Paramabhataraka Maharajadhiraj Bhutivarman of sixth century AD.
- Doobi (Barpeta district). Copper-plate originally issued to Bhutivarman and later reissued by Bhaskarvarman.
- Nidhanpur (Sylhet district, Bangladesh). Copper plate issued to Bhutivarman.
- Nalanda (Patna district, Bihar). Clay seals of Bhaskaravamana.
- Silimpur inscription

There are nearly 38 similar inscriptions.'



*Fig. 1.3 Rock inscription of Maharajadhiraja Surendravarman of Dynasty of Pushyavarman*

## 3. Coins

Coins with names of early kings of Assam have not been found. Pre-Ahom coins were found at Brahmaputra River's south bank. Coins of the same type have been discovered in Tripura and Bangladesh as well. Recently, in a tea estate close to Tezpur (Dhulapadung Tea Estate) some copper coins were discovered.

## 4. Archeological and Monumental Sources

Stone Age artefacts are found in Assam as also a few sculptural and architectural remains of the ancient period. One of the well-known excavation sites is Dah Parvatiya near Tezpur (Figure 1.4).

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*Fig. 1.4 Dah Parvatiya near Tezpur*

The excavation has revealed sculptures and statues that display a keen likeness to the style used during the Gupta period.

Gauhati's 'Nabagraha' temple of the nine grahas or planets is a living testament of the development of astrology in early times in Assam.

According to the Government of Assam's website, the sources of history of the medieval period of Assam from 13th Century AD to 18th Century AD are:

### **1. Contemporary Chronicles**

The 'Ahom Buranji' is a digest of events of the reigns of the Ahom rulers from Khunlung and Khunlai to Rudra Singha. It is an almost complete and comprehensive account written in the Tai-Ahom script. The 'Purani Assam Buranji' or the 'Buranji' from the earliest times, i.e., Sukapha (1228) to Gadadhar Singa was written in Assamese prose. The 'Sat Sari Assam Buranji' is a collection of seven old Assamese Buranjis.

The 'Ahom Buranji' the 'Purani Assam Buranji', the 'Sat Sari Assam Buranji' are regional accounts comprising chronicles of religious institutions and founders of monasteries, family histories and dynastic chronicles. Religious records comprise the Tripura, Jaintia and Kacahari Buranjis.

### **2. Memories and Farmans in Persian**

*Tabaquat-i-Nasiri: Tarikh-i-Firose Shah*, by Zia ud din Barani, *Tarikh-i-Feista: Gulshan-i-Ibrahimi*, by Muhammad Oasim, *Akbarnamah* of Sheikh Abdul Fazl, *Muntakhab ut Tawarikkh* by Abdul Quadir of Badaun, *Baharistan-i-Ghaibi* by Alau' ddi Ispahana

### **3. Letters in Assamese**

Extremely important sources, at times diplomatic letters, were contained in the Buranjis, for example, in Cachar, Jaintia, Kamrup and Assam. They provide information regarding the period's interstate relations.

### **4. Archeological, Numismatic, Epigraphic Sources**

These help to reconstruct the period's political history and to fix dates and names of rulers, the various activities (social, political, etc.) and provide information regarding the period's cultural and socio-religious milieu.

## 5. Archaeological Evidences

For archaeological evidences, the website of Government of Assam website has the following to say:

The Koch and Ahom rulers had to their credit numerous public works: tanks, embankments, roads, forts and temples. The Muslim conquerors also built a few mosques and roads. The most important Koch monuments are in the form of temples. The King of Koch-Hajo had the Vishnu (Haygrib-Madhava) temple built atop the Mani Hillock at Hajo. Ahom rulers like Rudra Singha built the brick city at Rangpur; Pramatta Singha built masonry gateways at Garghgaon and an amphitheatre at Rangpur. The temples tell us about their patronage of Hinduism. The conquering Sultans of Bengal constructed a few mosques during their invasion of Kamrup. The most reputed is 'Poa Mecca', built near Hajo to perpetuate the memory of a Muslim divine, Sultan Ghiyasuddin Aulia, probably in 16th century.

## 6. Geographic and Numismatic Sources

Coins aid in creating a chronology of the rulers as also fixing their status. We can obtain the date, title and name of rulers from coins. From the legends on the coins it could be possible to know the script, language, as well as the religion the rulers patronize.

Here are some of the evidences that have been affixed with the help of coins. 'The Koch coins were known as Narayani, from ending names of the rulers. Ahom coins were called 'Takka'. Jayadhwaj Singha (1648-63) was the first king to introduce coins. Gold coins were issued by Chakradhwaj Singha and Udayaditya Singha. Sir Edward Gait, the eminent historian, refers to Jaintia coins with various Saka dates. Coins of the Sultans of Bengal (from thirteen to sixteenth centuries) who invaded Kamrup have been discovered in different parts of these areas. The provenance of Muhammad bin Tughlaq's coin tends to support the solitary and 300-year late literary evidence of *Alamgimamah* about his undated Kamrup expedition. The next invasion of Kamrup was by the Ilyas Shahi Bengal Sultan; here too, coins constitute the sole evidence.'

## 7. Epigraphic Sources

Inscriptions related to matters of Koch Bihar, Kamrupa, and Assam that stress on Assam's relations with Delhi's Sultans were discovered in many areas in the country. Mostly, the Assamese and Sanskrit scripts (Figure 1.5) were used. Persian was used for Mughal inscriptions.

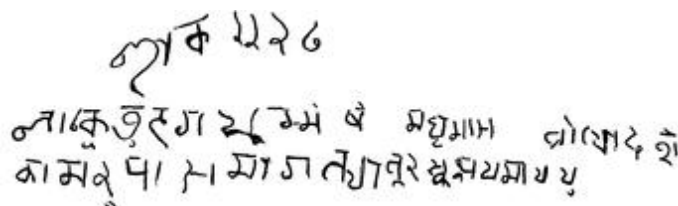


Fig. 1.5 Kanai-boroxiboa rock inscription, 1207 CE, shows proto-Assamese script

Just two Koch epigraphs of the 16th century exist; one of 1487 Saka on the Kamakhya temple, and one of 1505 Saka, regarding rebuilding of the Manikut or the Hayagrib temple on Mani hillock at Hajo. The 1362 rock inscription of Gachtal is the earliest Ahom period inscription. Clearly inscribed upon a snake-pillar, the inscription describes the reign of Suhungmung. The 1616 rock inscription of Samdhara Rampart provides information regarding the victory of Pratap Singha, the Ahom king. Two Kachari inscriptions exist, which are known. One is at Kachari on a temple which is rock-cut

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while the other provides information regarding making of a place in Khaspur. Highly valuable inscriptions have been found on the canons. These belong to both Ahom kings and Koch rulers as well as to the Mughals. The writing is either Persian or Sanskrit. Assam's oldest discovered canon is of Koches of the 16th century. Inscriptions engraved on buildings of religious importance such as mosques and Dargahs show Muslim influence in the region. Another type of historical and informative record is the copper-plate grants. They can be used to fix the chronology of the kings'.

### 8. Accounts of Foreign Travellers

Ralph Fitch, an English traveller, went from Bengal to Koch Bihar. He has described the country. Jesuit Portuguese travellers, Father John Cabral and Father Stephen Canella, in 1626, came to Dacca, Koch Bihar and Kamrup till Pandu. Through their letters we get important information, though meager, regarding relations between the Mughals and Koch.

Latter half of the 17th century has accounts of travellers such as physician Francoise Beemer and the French jeweller Jean Baptize Tavernier, regarding the battles of that period.

### 9. Reports and Records of the East India Company

The reports sent to the authorities at the Fort William by the military officers of the British regarding Assam are valuable documents for information. Records and reports of this nature range chronologically starting mid-18<sup>th</sup> century depicting the cultural, socioeconomic and administrative milieu of Assam. Captain Thomas Welsh in the year 1792 was sent to Assam to assist Raja Gourinath. From him there became available plenty of information regarding the commercial, economic and social bearing of Assam during that period including records of, for example roads, buildings traditions etc. Then again David Scott, who was the then Northeast frontier Governor General's Agent made available an English version of an Assamese chronicle from AD 1603 to AD 1822, containing how the Ahom monarchy degenerated and declined. There are also available writings of Sir Edward Gait who has provided earlier work which is rather imperfect but further work is authentic and extremely creditable, so much that he is considered to be 'the father of historical research in Assam'. Gait's *History of Assam* was published in 1906 and was a first of its kind – scientifically written. It was a systematic and comprehensive history of Assam from earliest times, written by performing a comparative utilization of Persian chronicles, the Buranjis and other available materials of historical value.

### Temples and Monuments of Assam

Nestled in the Brahmaputra valley this state has Tantrik Shaktism, Shivaism and later Vaishnavism flourishing in its laps. From time to time people from different races, religion and culture have migrated to this place.

The Mohammedan invasions brought Islam into the state. Sikhism flourished here, Buddhist communities have kept the flag of Buddhism flying high. The famous Gurudwara at Dhubri established by the ninth Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur is held in the high veneration by the Sikhs throughout the country.

With the advent of new faith and religion, many temples and monuments were built all over Assam. Most of these architectural grandeurs belong to the medieval period and represent the architectural style of the Koch, Kachari and Ahom royal courts.

These temples and monuments, spread almost all over Assam, bear silent witness to a glorious past.

### ***Kamakhya temple***

The Shakti temple of goddess Kamakhya situated on the top of Nilachal Hills, overlooking river Brahmaputra, is 8 km away from the Gauhati railway station.

This greatest shrine of tantric shaktism is mentioned in the inscription of the Allahabad pillar of Samudragupta. Devotees from all over India converge on this holy place during Ambubachi and Manasha puja.

### ***Nabagraha temple***

This temple of nine planets is situated on Chitra Chal Hill in Gauhati. In ancient times, it was said to have been a great centre of study of astronomy and astrology. This is also one of the reasons why Gauhati is referred to as Pragjyotishpur or the city of eastern astrology.

### ***Umananda temple***

The great Shiva temple, situated on the peacock island in the middle of the Brahmaputra, in Gauhati attracts devotees from all over the country during 'shivaratri'. One can visit the temple by crossing the river by country boat plying from Kachari ghat, on the northern banks of the Brahmaputra, where the third Pandava, Arjun, is believed to have watered his horse while undertaking journey during Ashwamedh Yagna.

### ***Basisthashram***

Situated in the southernmost outskirts of Gauhati city on the Sandhyachal hill is a well known holy spot, called Basisthashram, named after the great Vedic Sage Bashistha, who is said to have lived here. Three rivulets named Sandhya, Lalita and Kanta meet here and flow perennially.

### ***Mahabhairab temple***

It is an ancient temple where King Bana worshipped Mahabhairab; another incarnation of Lord Shiva.

### ***Madan Kamdev***

Madan Kamdev is an enigma, a mystery, a marvel and in the words of Omar Khayam, 'a veil past which I could not see'. Very little is known about the origin of these magnificent archaeological ruins. Written history is almost silent on it, leaving wide room for conjectures and hypothesis.

### ***Kamrupa***

The ancient name of Assam, is believed to have derived its name from the legend that love God Kama or Madan, after being turned into ashes by an angry Shiva, was reborn here. One school believes that Madan was reborn and united to Rati on this tiny hillock.

### ***Poa-Mecca***

There is also a mosque built by Pir Giasuddin Aulia and is held that it has one-fourth sanctity of Mecca and so it is known as Poa-Mecca. It is believed that by offering

## **NOTES**

prayer here, a person gains one-fourth (poa) spiritual enlightenment of what could be gained at Mecca and so is known as Poa-Mecca.

### ***Da-Parbatia***

The ruins of the door frame of Da-Parbatia Temple a few kilometers from Tezpur town, is perhaps the finest and oldest specimen of sculptural or iconoclastic art in Assam. Its carving has the characteristics of the style of early Gupta School of sculpture. The door-jambs having two goddesses, Ganga and Yamuna, standing with garlands in their hands in an artistic pose and elegance are decorated with beautiful ornamental foliage.

### ***Agnigarh***

'Preserving the sweet memory of young lovers', Agnigarh or the rampart, is situated in Tezpur. According to legend, Princess Usha, the only daughter of King Bana, was kept inside the palace which was surrounded by rampart of fire.

## **SUMMARY**

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In this unit, you have learnt that:

- The state of Assam was divided into four states viz. Assam, the parent state, Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya. Besides the two princely states of Tripura and Manipur were merged in the Indian Union and came into existence as independent states.
- North East India, as we know today, is very different from what it was centuries ago. The region was not part of India politically and not even administratively, till the British unified it with the rest of India in the beginning of the 18th century.
- The term 'sources' refers to a collection of proofs or evidences used to reconstruct a depiction of the past which is accurate.
- In one form, we can categorize sources into primary and secondary sources.

### **Check Your Progress**

9. \_\_\_\_\_ Varman was the founder of the Varman dynasty.
10. Son and successor of Samudra Varman was \_\_\_\_\_ Varman.



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- Another categorization of sources can be under the heads written, pictorial, oral, artefacts. Some types of literary sources could be: traveller accounts, treaties, reports, charters and court proceedings.
- Types of archaeological sources are: coins, cultural evidences, edicts, inscriptions, monuments and sites, tools and weapons
- Types of oral tradition sources are: Folk tales, legends, ballads, songs
- There is not enough tangible evidence to reconstruct the ancient history of Tripura prior to the rule of the Manikya dynasty. 'Sri Rajmala' is the only source book of the princely regimes of Tripura. Archaeological excavations carried out at various sites reveal a good deal of historical information.

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## KEY TERMS

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- **Folk tale:** A story originating in popular culture that is typically passed on by word of mouth.
- **Legend:** A traditional story sometimes popularly regarded as historical but unauthenticated.
- **Oral tradition:** Cultural material and traditions transmitted orally across generations.

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## ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

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1. The states that comprise North East India are: Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Meghalaya.
2. The British unified the North East with the rest of India in the beginning of the 18th century
3. The three types of literary sources are:
  - Traveller accounts
  - Treaties
  - Reports
4. Two types of archaeological sources are:
  - Coins
  - Cultural evidences
5. Some forms of oral tradition sources are:
  - Folk tales
  - Legends
  - Ballads
  - Songs
6. Bodo, Kuki and Adi are some of the major tribes of North East India.
7. The Khasi tribe reside in the Khasi and Jaintia hills of Meghalaya.
8. Tribes of North East India have originated from the ethnic groups of Tibeto-Burmese, proto Austrioloids and some groups of Indo Mongoloids.
9. Pushya
10. Bala

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## QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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of  
Arunachal  
Pradesh?

### Short-Answer Questions

1. Name the different tribes found in North East India.
2. State any three features of Neolithic culture of North East India.
3. How do literary and oral sources help in reconstruction of history.
4. How is the mode of resource utilization important for understanding the social life

### Long-Answer Questions

1. Briefly discuss the geographical features of North East India.
2. Give a detailed account on the history of Manipur and Assam

# UNIT II EARLY HISTORY OF NORTH EAST INDIA - II

Early History of North  
East India

## NOTES

### Structure

Introduction  
Unit Objectives  
Pattern of Settlement  
The Varman Dynasty  
Summary  
Key Terms  
Answers to 'Check Your Progress'  
Questions and Exercises  
Further Reading

### INTRODUCTION

North East India has over 2000 km of border with Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh and is connected to the rest of India by a narrow 20 km wide corridor of land. One of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse regions in Asia, each state has a distinct culture and tradition of its own.

From times immemorial, India's North East has been the meeting point of many communities, faiths and cultures. A place renowned for its magical beauty and bewildering diversity, North East India is the home for more than 166 separate tribes speaking a wide range of languages. Some groups have migrated over the centuries from places as far as South East Asia; they retain their cultural traditions and values but are beginning to adapt to contemporary lifestyles. The jungles of North East are dense, its rivers powerful and there is heavy rain in the hills, valleys and plains during the monsoons.



*States of North East India*

Self-Instructional

## NOTES

North East India comprises of seven states commonly known as the ‘Seven Sisters’. They are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. In this unit, you will learn about the early history of North East India.

The lushness of its landscape, the range of communities and geographical and ecological diversity makes the North East quite different from other parts of the subcontinent. The festivals and celebrations in the Northeastern states of India are a colourful reflection of the people and their lives.

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## UNIT OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe Assamese society at the time of the Varmans
- Describe the economy, religion and polity in Assam at the time of the Varmans

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## PATTERN OF SETTLEMENT

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M. L. Bose in his book *History of Arunachal Pradesh* (op.cit. pp.6-8) provides us the settlement pattern in brief. He is of the view that at least three major climatic zones can be recognized on the basis of temperature although temperature, pressure, precipitation and winds vary with altitude. The foothill area is hot and humid and has a sub-tropical climate, the lesser Himalayas enjoy cooler or micro-thermal climate, and finally in the higher region a Himadri type (alpine) climate is found. The flora and fauna of the province vary with the climate and soil. The forest types range from tropical evergreen in the foothills, through temperate evergreen in the middle ranges, to the coniferous in the higher elevations and the high Himalayas in the extreme north.

The altitude of these hills is comparatively lower, except in the north, than the other hills of this region of the Himalayas. The hills in the lower region are steep and inaccessible. The pass leading to Tawang along the Kameng valley and then through Bomdila and Sela lead through higher altitude. At Sela the elevation is 4680 metres but the Tawang region is relatively lower and the altitude of the Tawang itself is 3000 metres above sea level. The climate of these hills is humid upto 1200 metres, temperate upto 2100 metres and cold with heavy snowfall beyond that. Rich with evergreen deciduous forest, the hills in the upper region have pine, oak and fir trees. Carpeted with wild strawberries and a display of rhododendrons and a score of other multicolour flowers, these hills are the most picturesque of all the Arunachal hills. Much of the land in the northern region of the greater Himalayas has remained virtually empty, the middle zone is moderately populated, but the foothills and valleys have higher population.

Geography has influenced the cultural development of the province to a great extent. The northern region, has been greatly influenced by the Indo-Tibetan culture. For many centuries, the Tibetan traders crossed the borders and traded in the region and many of them got settled in the valleys of the greater Himalayas. This accounts for the large Buddhist settlements in the Siang districts and the Buddhist impact is visible in the way of life of the people in the higher regions. The southern belt of the foothills has had similar contact with the plains of Assam. The results are manifested in the religion, language, clothing, food habits, and mode of agriculture. But the middle zone has remained comparatively backward. Both Tibetan and Assamese influences are visible in the ways

### Check Your Progress

3. State the three types of literary sources.
4. Name any two types of archaeological sources.
5. List some forms of sources that fall in the category of oral traditions.

of life of the people settled in this region. The tribes living in this region had very little

contact with the outside world and even today they can be seen living in extremely primitive conditions.

As groups, even though partially, settled at a place to practise agriculture, a system of complex socio-economic relationship developed which was remarkably different from those in primitive economies. In these agricultural settlements, food stockpiling played a decisive role. This role led to an increase in the density of the group whose base was not limited to the small family. This represents the permanent aggregation of a family as its base gets wider. Some members thus, though only partially, are able to work on things which are not directly linked with the search for food. This ensures a wider division of labour as the number of members in the functional group increases. These members apply techniques that make them share the burden of the 'specialist' in techniques whose economic utility is not immediately obvious.

Other factors also played an important role, such as the change in the pattern of settlement and periods of food production. The new economic equations such as the invention centres on methods of defence of the agrarian equipment (fortification and metallurgy), storage (basket weaving and storage pits), and the preparation of grain (grinding mills and pottery) determined the 'creative urge'.

The earliest settlers were Austro-Asiatic speakers, followed by Tibeto-Burmese and lastly by Indo-Aryans. Archaeologists believe that early settlers of North East India had domesticated several important plants due to bio- and crop diversity of the region. According to Chinese explorer, Zhang Qian, indicate an early trade route via North East India.

In the early historical period (most of first millennium), Kamarupa, one of the historical kingdoms of Assam that existed from 350 to 1140 CE and was ruled by three dynasties included most of present-day Northeast India, besides Bhutan and Sylhet in Bangladesh. Xuanzang, a Chinese Buddhist monk, visited Kamarupa in the 7th century, described the people as 'short in stature and black-looking'. For many of the tribal people, their primary identification is with subtribes and villages, which have distinct dialects and cultures.

Different ethnic groups and tribal groups inhabit the region of North East India. They all have their own culture and tribal tradition and speak their own tribal languages. This has made North East India one of the most culturally diverse regions of the world. The cuisines and attires also different among the tribes. Each tribal community have their unique way of living.

### **Origin of the Tribes**

Tribes of North East India have originated from the ethnic groups of Tibeto-Burmese, proto Austrioloids and some groups of Indo Mongoloids. The trend can be seen in the looks, traditions that are visibly followed by these communities. They also show a cultural bridging with the neighbouring countries. India has till now provided them with a safe haven, compared to living in neighbouring communist nations of China and Burma.

### **Types of Tribes in North East**

North East tribes constitute a major part of Indian tribal community. They are scattered all over the states of North East. Arunachal Pradesh consists of around 25 types of tribes. Nagaland has more than 16 major tribes. Some examples of prominent tribes are Garo, Khasi, Jaintia, Adi, Nyishi, Angami, Bhutia, Kuki, Rengma, Bodo and Deori. Some tribes are Christians and some follow Hinduism and Buddhism. The rest still have their indigenous beliefs and practice animism.

## **NOTES**

## NOTES

Some major tribes of North East India are as follows:

- **Bodo Tribe:** It is a vast tribe and constitutes a considerable part of Assamese population. The tribal people have also migrated to other parts of India as well as to neighbouring countries. It is believed that Bodo tribes have introduced rice cultivation, tea plantation, poultry farming, and silkworm rearing in the North Eastern parts of India.
- **Kuki Tribe:** They can be found all over the northeastern states. The language of the tribe varies but are all similar in a way, and can broadly be termed as the Kuki language. They prefer to live on hilltops. The tribe cultivates dwarf cotton and spun yarns.
- **Adi Tribe:** This tribe has two divisions namely Bogums and Bomis. They are found in Arunachal Pradesh. This group is again divided into various small sub-tribes.
- **Nyishi or Nishi Tribe:** This tribe has originated from the Indo-Mongoloid stock. They mainly inhabit the lower region of the Subansiri district in Arunachal Pradesh and are considered a large tribe based on the area and population of Arunachal Pradesh. They speak a language that is quite different from the other tribes of the Tibeto-Burman language.
- **Angami Tribe:** This is one of the major tribal communities of Nagaland. Angami tribe is also found in Manipur and has a total population of 12 million. The tribal community believes in Christianity and speaks *Tenyidie*. They cultivate rice and grains on the hilly areas.
- **Rengma Tribe:** They are a Naga tribal community, and are found in both Nagaland and Assam. The community is further divided into two categories, Eastern and Western Rengmas, and are considered experts in terrace cultivation.
- **Bhutia Tribe:** This tribe is a prominent tribal community of Sikkim and have migrated from Tibet. They are mostly found in the Lachen and Lachung areas of North Sikkim. They speak *Bhutia* (a dialect of Tibetan language). They are considered one of the most developed tribes and earn their livelihood through agriculture, government jobs and local business.
- **Garo Tribe:** They are the second largest tribal community of Meghalaya. They constitute 1/3rd of the total state population and mainly reside in the Garo hills of Meghalaya, some districts of Assam and West Bengal. Their traditional religion was *Songserak* and later changed to Christianity.
- **Khasi Tribe** are one of the major tribal communities and occupies almost half of the total population of Meghalaya. They reside in the Khasi and Jaintia hills of Meghalaya and follow the matriarchal society. Their language is *Mon-Khmer* which belongs to the Austro-Asiatic family.

North East Indian tribes are undoubtedly one of the most colourful and culturally rich communities of India. They represent a totally unique trend and living among the Indian tribal community.

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## THE VARMAN DYNASTY

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The genealogy of the Varman dynasty appears most fully in the Dubi and Nidhanpur copper plate inscriptions of the last Varman king, Bhaskar Varman (650-655), where

### Check Your Progress

6. Name any three major tribe of North East India.
7. Where do the Khasi tribe reside in North East India?
8. From where have the tribes of North East India originated?





Pushya Varman is named as the founder. The Dubi copper plate inscription of Bhaskar Varman asserts that Pushya Varman was born in the family of Naraka, Bhagadatta and Vajradatta (as did the other two Kamarupa dynasties) three thousand years after these mythical ancestors.

Historical documents are contradictory on the ethnicity of this dynasty, with Yuan Chwang, calling Bhaskar Varman a Brahman king who originated with Narayana Deva, while Bhaskar Varman told She-Kia-Fang-Che that his ancestors hailed from China, which according to 'Sylvain' is nothing more than an act of diplomacy. Many scholars including Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti considers the Varman dynasty as the first Indo-Aryan dynasty in Assam, that was overthrown by Salastambha of Mongoloid origin, who then made himself the king of Kamarupa, whereas others term the dynasty as Sanskritized non-Aryan tribal rulers.

*Table 1.8 Varman Dynasty*

	Reign	Name
1	350-374	Pushya Varman
2	374-398	Samudra Varman
3	398-422	Bala Varman
4	422-446	Kalyana Varman
5	446-470	Ganapati Varman
6	470-494	Mahendra Varman
7	494-518	Narayana Varman
8	518-542	Bhuti Varman
9	542-566	Chandramukha Varman
10	566-590	Sthita Varman
11	590-595	Susthita Varman
12	595-600	Supratisthita Varman
13	600-650	Bhaskar Varman
14	650-655	Avanti Varman

## 1. Pushya Varman

Pushya Varman (AD 350–374) was the first historical ruler of Assam who established the Varman dynasty in 350 AD and the historical Kamarupa kingdom. He encouraged Vedic culture to flourish in his country. Brahminical influence was widespread during his reign. He maintained cultural, political and diplomatic relationship with other states under Gupta Empire like Samudragupta. The son of Pushya Varman was Samudra Varman who married Datta Devi. The name of the queen of his great contemporary Samudragupta was also Datta Devi, probably both married in the same family. Though related Samudragupta fought with and defeated Bala Varman, son of Samudra Varman, in connection with the performance of the Asvamedha sacrifice. This is recorded in Samudragupta's Allahabad Inscription. He had to quell internal dissidence as well as external threats. Just as Samudragupta founded an empire which included the Indian subcontinent, Samudra Varman extended his power to the Eastern Peninsula the shores of which were washed by the Pacific Ocean.

## NOTES

## NOTES

### 2. Samudra Varman

Samudra Varman was ruler of Kamarupa kingdom from AD 374-398. He was son of Pushya Varman, the founder of Varman Dynasty of Kamarupa. Samudra Varman who was likened to the 5th ocean, in whose kingdom the weak were not oppressed by the strong, who shone like a jewel and was quick in accepting a duel. Datta-Devi was the name of his queen, she gave birth to Bala Varman whose strength (Bala) and armour (Varma) were never separated and whose soldiers were always ready to fight his enemies. Samudragupta was compelled, in spite of this relation, to fight Bala Varman according to the rules of Asvamedha sacrifice which took place in AD 350-380. So it may be admitted that Samudra Varman lived during this time. Perhaps this invasion of Samudragupta limited the power of the kings of Kamarupa for sometime.

### 3. Bala Varman

Bala Varman was successor and son of Samudra Varman who ruled Kamarupa for the period AD 398-422. He was known for his physical strength which reflects in his name and courage. The name of Bala Varman's wife was Ratnavati who gave birth to Kalyana Varman.

### 4. Kalyana Varman

Kalyana Varman ruled Kamarupa from AD 422-426. He was married to Gandharvavati and his successor to the throne was Ganapati Varman.

### 5. Ganapati Varman

Ganapati Varman ruled Kamarupa from AD 446-470. He was married to Yajjivati and his successor to the throne was named Mahendra Varman.

### 6. Mahendra Varman

Mahendra Varman ruled Kamarupa from AD 470-494. He married Suvrata and had a successor to the throne named Narayana Varman. It is said that he mastered his self, and worked towards the stability (of the rule) of the world, who, like Janaka (or his father) was well versed in the principles of the philosophy of the (supreme) Self.

### 7. Narayana Varman

Narayana Varman ruled Kamarupa between AD 494 and 518. He married Devavati and his son was named Bhuti Varman.

### 8. Bhuti Varman

Bhuti Varman ruled Kamarupa between AD 518 and 542. He married Vijnanavati and his son was named Chandramukha Varman.

### 9. Chandramukha Varman

Chandramukha Varman ruled for the period AD 542-566. Chandramukha, who was charming, as the name suggests, possessed all the arts of the moon (by the digits), was a dispeller of (all) gloom (as the moon dispels the darkness). He married Bhogavati and had his successor to throne named Sthita Varman.

## 10. Sthita Varman

Sthita Varman ruled from AD 566-590. Sthita Varman, the supporter of the world, has innumerable (sources of) enjoyment. He married Nayanadevi and had his successor to throne named Susthita Varman.

## 11. Susthita Varman

Susthita Varman ruled from AD 590-595. Susthita Varman held the kingdom together, and was renowned as Sri-Mriganka. His successor was named Supratisthita Varman.

## 12. Supratisthita Varman

Supratisthita Varman ruled from AD 595 to 600. His younger brother Bhaskar Varman was named his successor.

## 13. Bhaskar Varman

Kumar Bhaskar Varman (AD 600–650) was the last and most illustrious ruler of the Varman dynasty of Kamarupa. He came to power after his brother Supratisthita Varman died, a bachelor. After his death Salasthambha, who established the Mlechchha dynasty, acquired power of Kamarupa.

## 14. Avanti Varman

Avanti Varman is believed to be the last of the Varman dynasty who ruled Kamarupa briefly after Bhaskar Varman before being overthrown by Salasthambha, the founder of the Mlechchha dynasty. No direct evidence of this king exists, and the name Avanti Varma is reconstructed from the benedictory verses of a Sanskrit play *Mudrarakshasa* by Vishakhadatta. According to Bargaon grant of Ratnapal, Salasthambha took over the rule of Kamarupa from the descendants of Naraka which, according to K L Barua, occurred after a Mlechchha revolt.

Not much is known about Avanti Varman and his rule but scholars like P.C Choudhury opines that Salasthambha, the founder of Mlechchha dynasty and Avanti Varman is same person. Avanti Varman suppressed the rebellions arose after Bhaskar Varman, but ultimately fell.

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## SUMMARY

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In this unit, you have learnt that:

- The state of Assam was divided into four states viz. Assam, the parent state, Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya. Besides the two princely states of Tripura and Manipur were merged in the Indian Union and came into existence as independent states.
- North East India, as we know today, is very different from what it was centuries ago. The region was not part of India politically and not even administratively, till the British unified it with the rest of India in the beginning of the 18th century.
- The term ‘sources’ refers to a collection of proofs or evidences used to reconstruct a depiction of the past which is accurate.
- In one form, we can categorize sources into primary and secondary sources.

## NOTES

### Check Your Progress

11. \_\_\_\_\_ Varman was the founder of the Varman dynasty.
12. Son and successor of Samudra Varman was \_\_\_\_\_ Varman.

## NOTES

- Another categorization of sources can be under the heads written, pictorial, oral, artefacts. Some types of literary sources could be: traveller accounts, treaties, reports, charters and court proceedings.
- Types of archaeological sources are: coins, cultural evidences, edicts, inscriptions, monuments and sites, tools and weapons
- Types of oral tradition sources are: Folk tales, legends, ballads, songs
- There is not enough tangible evidence to reconstruct the ancient history of Tripura prior to the rule of the Manikya dynasty. 'Sri Rajmala' is the only source book of the princely regimes of Tripura. Archaeological excavations carried out at various sites reveal a good deal of historical information.

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## KEY TERMS

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- **Folk tale:** A story originating in popular culture that is typically passed on by word of mouth.
- **Legend:** A traditional story sometimes popularly regarded as historical but unauthenticated.
- **Oral tradition:** Cultural material and traditions transmitted orally across generations.

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## ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

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11. The states that comprise North East India are: Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Meghalaya.
12. The British unified the North East with the rest of India in the beginning of the 18th century
13. The three types of literary sources are:
  - Traveller accounts
  - Treaties
  - Reports
14. Two types of archaeological sources are:
  - Coins
  - Cultural evidences
15. Some forms of oral tradition sources are:
  - Folk tales
  - Legends
  - Ballads
  - Songs
16. Bodo, Kuki and Adi are some of the major tribes of North East India.
17. The Khasi tribe reside in the Khasi and Jaintia hills of Meghalaya.
18. Tribes of North East India have originated from the ethnic groups of Tibeto-Burmese, proto Austrioloids and some groups of Indo Mongoloids.
19. Pushya
20. Bala

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## QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short-Answer Questions

5. Name the different tribes found in North East India.
6. How is the mode of resource utilization important for understanding the social life of Arunachal Pradesh?

### Long-Answer Questions

3. Give a detailed account on the history of Manipur and Assam.
4. Discuss the pattern of settlement of the tribes in North East.
5. Write an account on the Varman Dynasty.

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## FURTHER READING

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## NOTES



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# UNIT III MEDIEVAL NORTH EAST

## NDA- I

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### NOTES

#### Structure

- Introduction
- Unit Objectives
- Rise of Ahom State: Sukapha and Sudangpha
- Consolidation of the Ahom Kingdom
- Ahom Frontier Policy
- Policy of Ahom Rulers towards the North East Tribe
- Policy of the Ahoms
- Summary
- Key Terms
- Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- Questions and Exercises
- Further Reading

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### INTRODUCTION

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The Ahoms are the descendants of the Tai race, who had accompanied the Tai prince Sukapha into the Brahmaputra valley in 1228 and ruled the area for six centuries. Sukapha and his followers established the Ahom kingdom (1228–1826) and the Ahom dynasty ruled and expanded the kingdom till the British gained control of the region through the Treaty of Yandabo upon winning the First Anglo-Burmese War in 1826. The Tibeto-Burman locals near the Ahoms gave them the name 'Ahom'.

The Ahoms mostly had cordial relations with every tribe of the region, except with the Jaintias who kept defying them. Even though the Kacharis were defiant, they were not much of a trouble for the Ahoms. The overall Ahom policy towards their neighbours was based on four well-known principles of the Indian political philosophy, viz., *Sama-dana-danda-bheda*, i.e., establishment of relations of equal status, establishment of subservient suzerainty, by awarding punishments and driving wedges between neighbours.

The Moamaria rebellion during the 18th century was a conflict between the Morans, adherents of the Moamara Sattrā, and Ahom kings. Gaurinath Singha, the Ahom king, appealed for help of men and materials to the East India Company. In response to this, Lord Cornwallis, the Governor General despatched Captain Thomas Welsh with sepoy to help Gaurinath.

This unit will discuss the rise and fall of the Ahom kingdom. It will also discuss the Moamaria rebellion in the 18th century and how the British helped the Ahom ruler to fight the rebels.

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## UNIT OBJECTIVES

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### NOTES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the formation of the state of Ahom
- Discuss the rule of the important kings of Ahom

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### RISE OF AHOM STATE: SUKAPHA AND SUDANGPHA

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The Ahom Kingdom is also known as the Kingdom of Assam. It spanned for nearly 600 years of the history of Assam from 1228 to 1826. Ahom Kingdom was situated in the Brahmaputra valley. It was a sovereign state that successfully warded off Mughal attempts of expansion. Sukapha is credited with having established the Ahom kingdom. He was a Tai prince from Mong Mao. It started with being a Mong in the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra river with its base lying in wet rice cultivation. In the 16th century, there was sudden expansion of the kingdom under Suhungmung. At this point the Ahom Kingdom turned multi-ethnic. This created a huge effect on both social and political life of the people in the Brahmaputra valley. During the phase of the Moamoria rebellion, the Ahom kingdom got weak and as a result it was plagued by Burmese invasions. In the First Anglo-Burmese War, the Burmese were defeated and had to enter into a treaty with the British. The treaty was known as the Treaty of Yandabo 1826. Under the terms of the treaty, the East India Company got control of the Ahom Kingdom.

#### Early Ahom state

From the thirteenth to the fifteenth century A.D., Ahoms were busy mainly consolidating their newly acquired territory and also protecting it from neighbouring powers. However, the reign of Sukhangpha (1293-1332), the fourth Ahom king, saw the first war with the ruler of Kamata kingdom. The reason for the war is not given in the Ahom chronicals, or buranji. It was brought to a close when the Kamata ruler sued for peace by offering a princess, named Rajani. This event indicates the growing strength of the Ahom power. Tao-Kham-thi (1380-89), the seventh king led a successful expedition against the Sutiya king for murdering his brother Sutupha (1369-76) at a regatta. The reign of Sudangpha (1398-1407), better known as 'Bamuni Konwar' for his birth in the house of a Brahmin at Habung, is important in several respects. It was for the first time that Brahmanical influence had its entry into the Ahom royal palace, the capital was transferred to Charagua near the bank of river Dihing. On the report of some nobles who were dissatisfied with Sudangpha for his subordination to Hindu influence, the Tai rulers of Mong Kwang (Mogaung) sent an expedition to annex the Ahom kingdom. In the battle fought at Kuliarbari, the invaders were forced to retreat and come to terms in a treaty concluded on the shore of the Nongjang lake in AD 1401. By this treaty the Patkai was fixed as the boundary between Assam and Mong. Sudangpha suppressed a revolt of the Tipamiyas and asserted his sovereignty over the three eastern dependencies, viz., Tipam, Aiton and Khamjang. The reigns of four successive kings—Sujangpha (1407-22), Suphokpha



(1439-88), and Supempha (1493-97), covering a period of ninety years were comparatively peaceful, barring a brief war with the Dimasa Kacharis in AD 1490. The bordering Nagas, who made some raids were kept in check.

### **Consolidation of the Ahom Kingdom**

The real expansion of the Ahom kingdom began with Suhummong (1497-1539), better known as Dihingiya Raja, as he belonged to the Dihingia clan of the royal family. By this time the Brahmanical influence grew considerably in the Ahom court so much so that the king is said to have received the Hindu title Swarganarayan, an equivalent of in chao-pha Tai. He transferred his capital to Dihing. A census of population was done during his reign. After a series of armed conflict caused by boundary dispute, the Sutiya king was defeated and killed and his kingdom centering Sadiya was annexed to the Ahom dominion as a province over which a governor, titled Sadiya Khowa Gohain, was placed. He also defeated the Kacharis of the Doyang-Dhansiri Valley and brought their territory under the Ahoms as a province called Marangi and placed a provincial governor titled Marangi Khowa Gohain. This was in 1526. The Kachari royal family moved to Maibong leaving Dimapur. After sometime, on an appeal, the Kachari king at Maibong was given recognition as Thapita-sanchita (established and preserved) by Suhummong. The same king also brought the Bhuyans on the north bank under Ahom control. It was during the reign of Suhummong that the first major invasion of Assam by the Pathan rulers of Bengal occurred. After an initial expedition by Bir Malik and Bar Ujir, the two Bengal generals, Turbuk was commissioned by the Sultan of Bengal. In a major encounter, the Ahom side lost several of their generals and many soldiers. However, in a renewed naval war after sometime, the Ahom side gained superiority leading to the defeat and death of Turbak. A large number of arms, cannons, horses and soldiers were captured by the Ahoms. The defeated army was pushed through Kamrup and Kamata where the people cooperated with the victors.

The ruler of Kamata, Durlabhendra, accepted Ahom protection by offering his daughter. The Ahom army marched westward as far as the Karatoya, the eastern frontier of Bengal, and built a small brick temple on its bank. Thus by 1534, the Ahom army liberated Kamrup and the Kamata king. Suhummong established relation with Manipur and Orissa; and Viswa Singha, the rising Koch chief visited his court and acknowledged his allegiance. By his great zeal and enterprise, Suhummong extended the Ahom dominion from the eastern confine of Sadiya to the Karatoya and successfully failed the invasions of Assam by the Muslim rulers of Bengal. Due to the expansion of the Ahom dominion during his reign, non-Ahom population in the Ahom kingdom greatly increased. The reign of Suklenmong (1539-52) and Sukhampha (1553-1603) were mainly important for Koch expeditions to the Ahom kingdom. The first was conducted by Viswa Singha which, however, did not materialize. The second major invasion was led by king Naranarayan, with his younger brother Suklathwaj, popularly known as Chilarai, occupied the Ahom capital Garhgaon. However, the Koch army soon returned after a peace treaty. This was the last Koch invasion of the Ahom kingdom.

### **Period of Ahom-Mughal Conflict**

The history of the Ahoms during the seventeenth century was mainly the history of the Ahom-Mughal conflict which arose due to the imperial ambition of the Mughal emperors to extend their dominions to east beyond Bengal and if possible to seek routes to China and Tibet; at the same time to collect articles such as gold dust, long pepper, elephant teeth, musk, and lac, which were valued greatly by the royalty and nobility in the Mughal

### **NOTES**

## NOTES

courts. The annexation of the Koch kingdom into the Mughal dominions made the Ahom kingdom coterminous. The long reign of Susengpha (1603–41), better known as Pratap Singha, was important in the history of Assam in several respects. The Mughal claim on the Koch territory to the east of Barnadi and the trading adventures of certain Mughal merchants caused conflict and tension along the border leading to the first serious battle with the Mughal army and navy at Bharali near Tezpur in which the enemy side was completely routed. This was in AD 1616. A vivid description of the plight of the Mughal soldiers is given in the *Baharistan-i-Ghayli* by Mirza Nathan, a Mughal general. About 1700 men of the enemy side were killed, double this number were wounded and 9,000 men were taken as prisoners. This was followed by a series of campaigns against the Mughals. In 1618, there was another serious battle at Hajo in which the Ahoms lost nearly 4000 boats, and an equal number of men were killed. The war, however, did not stop but continued with occasional outburst and the pendulum of victory moved from one side to another in Kamrup. Ultimately, peace was restored by a treaty concluded by Momai Tamuli Barbarua and Allah Yar Khan in 1639 where Barnadi in the North and the Asurar Ali in the south were fixed as the boundary between the Ahom and Mughal territories. It did not, however, last for a very long time.

During the early years of Pratap Singha's reign, the Kachari king, who was always considered thapita-sanchita status by the Ahom kings, was bold enough to show his defiance by declining to comply a request for passage of a Jaintia princess through his country. An Ahom army led by Sunder Gohain was badly defeated and the general himself was killed by the Kacharis led by Prince Bhimbal in 1606 AD. Soon, however, relation with the Kachari king was restored. Pratap Singha also cultivated good relations with the Jaintia king. Pratap Singha introduced certain reforms in the administration and reorganized the paik. Two very important posts that of the Barbarua and the Barphukan were created; the former was placed as the head of the secretariat and judiciary immediately under the king; the later was given the charge of lower Assam, west of Kaliabor and also head of diplomatic relations with the west. Several other new posts of lesser importance were also created. A census of population was undertaken, and the paik system was extended to newly acquired territories. All free adult population were registered as paik for state services. A squad for four paiks constituted the lowest unit. Twenty such units were commanded by a Bora, one hundred by a Saikia and one thousand by a Hazarika. Departments were usually headed by Phukan, Baruah, Rajkhowa, according to their importance. Among other notable works of Pratap Singha included construction of several important roads, bridges, excavation of tanks and ramparts. He also built several towns. The king was liberal and catholic in his religious policy. The short reigns of his two immediate successors Surampha (1641–44) and Suchingpha (1644–48) were not of much importance.

The reign of Sutamla, better known by his Sanskrit title Jayadhwaj Singha (1648–63) was marked by a major invasion of Assam by the Mughal army headed by Mir Jumla, the newly appointed Nawab of Bengal. It was apparently a retaliatory action taken against the occupation of Sarkar Kamrup by the Ahom army by taking advantage of the confusion that ensued following the removal of Shah Jahan from the throne by his sons. The large army of infantry and cavalry supported by a strong navy mostly manned by Europeans, chiefly the Portuguese and the Dutch, proceeded towards the capital of Assam by overrunning the defences put up at Hatichala-Baritala, Pancharatan-Jogighopa and Pandu-Saraighat. After the occupation of the fort at Samdhara following a stiff battle and a keenly contested naval victory near Kaliabor on the Brahmaputra, the Mughal army advanced towards the Ahom capital, Garhgaon, Jayadhwaj Singha with his family

and close associates evacuated the capital and retreated to Namrup hills close to Patkai. The Mughal army occupied Garhgaon, and established outposts at several places in Upper Assam; Mir Jumla himself made his headquarters at Mathurapur. However, when the rainy season started, these outposts got cut off by flood and became isolated while the Mughal navy with big war boat which remained at Lukhnow could not help them. The Ahom army then started to harass the Mughals by adopting guerilla method of warfare. Due to disruption of communication, the Mughal army faced great hardship; the physical as well as moral condition began to deteriorate. The health of Mir Jumla deteriorated as he had been suffering from consumption. Under these circumstances, a peace proposal initiated by the Ahom side was ultimately agreed upon.

The treaty of Ghiladharighat at Tipam on the Buri Dihing was drawn up on 9 January 1663 between Jayadhwaj and Mir Jumla. He agreed to pay a huge war indemnity, the cessation of all territory west of Bharali on the north bank of the state of 'Dimarua', Beltola west of the Kallong on the south bank of the Brahmaputra. Jaydhwaj Singha's daughter accompanied by the daughter of Tipam Raja was sent to Delhi and the sons of the ministers were sent as hostage with the Mughal till full payment was made. Mir Jumla and his army left Assam. Soon after his return to Bakotha, as Garhgaon was despoiled by the Mughals, Jayadhwaj Singha passed away in 1663. He was the first Ahom king to embrace Hinduism by receiving initiation from a Vashnava priest. He made large revenue free land grants with paiks to several Hindu satras (monasteries). One of the notable achievements of Jayadhwaj Singha's reign was the planned settlement of villages in certain tracts of the country.

However, Mir Jumla's invasion caused devastation of the economic and social condition of the kingdom. Mir Jumla was accompanied by a news reporter (waqia navis) named Mirza Mahammad Wali, poetically known as Shihabuddin Talish, who left a very valuable account of Assam, its climate, population, customs, products, and of its capital Garhgaon. A few excerpts may be of interest. 'Although most of the inhabitants of the neighbouring hills pay no tax to the Rajah of Assam, yet they accept his sovereignty and obey some of his commands.' 'From Lakhaugarh to Garhgaon, also, there are roads, houses and farms in the same style and a lofty and wide embanked road has been constructed up to Garhgaon for traffic.' The people of the country are free from certain fatal and loathsome diseases such as leprosy, white leprosy, elephantiasis, cutaneous eruptions, goitre and hydrocele, which prevail in Bengal.' 'It is not the custom here to take any land tax from the cultivators; but in every house one man out of the three has to render service to the Raja.' 'In all the past ages no (foreign) king could lay the hand of conquest on the skirt of this country, and no foreigner could treat it with the foot of invasion.' 'And all the people of his country, not placing their necks in the yoke of any faith, eat whatever they get from the hand of any man, regardless of his caste and undertake any kind of labour.' 'Their language differs entirely from that of all the people of Eastern India.' 'They cast excellent match-locks and bachadar artillery, and show a great skill in this craft. They make first rate gunpowder..' 'The common people bury their dead with some of the property of the deceased, placing the head towards the east and the feet towards the west.' Talish also left a vivid and valuable description of Garhgaon, and the royal palace. Chakradhwaj Singha (1663-70), a person of indomitable courage and firm determination, refused to put on the gown (siropa) sent by the Mughal court to him as a tributary king. 'Death is preferable to a state of subordination to Bangal' he uttered.

Preparations for war were soon complete, and Kamrup was again recovered by a strong Ahom navy and infantry under the command of Lachit Barphukan in 1667. The

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Mughal army was badly mauled. Following this, several fortifications were raised on both banks surrounding Gauhati to protect it against any further attack. Having received the news of Mughal reverse, the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb dispatched a Rajput general Raja Ram Singh, son of Raja Jay Singh of Amber, with a large force with order to chastise the 'wicked tribe' (the Ahoms). Ram Singh advanced towards Gauhati by occupying several posts which the Ahoms evacuated for strategic reasons to concentrate on Gauhati. Ram Singh built his camp at Hajo.

The Ahom army under Lachit Barphukan and other generals including Atan Buragohain, foiled every attempt of Ram Singh to occupy Gauhati by war and diplomacy and the war dragged on for several years with loss on both sides. In the meantime, Udayaditya ascended the throne in 1669. The Battle of Saraighat fought in 1671 was the last determined attempt of Ram Singh which met ignominious defeat at the hands of the Ahom. The defeated army was pushed back beyond the Manaha river. It may be mentioned that in the war against the Mughals, many of the neighbouring hill people sent their contingents and successfully fought against the invaders. From the death of Ramdhvaj Singha, the successor of Udayaditya Singha, in 1675 to the accession of Gadadhar Singha in 1681, there ensued a period of weak and unstable government during which several weak and young kings were placed on the Ahom throne and quickly removed by ministers and high officials for their own selfish gains than for the welfare of the kingdom. By taking advantage of the situation, Laluk Barphukan, the Viceroy of Lower Assam at Gauhati treacherously handed Gauhati over to the Mughals. The first major achievement of Gadadhar Singha (1681-96), who was crowned the king at Kaliabor by the nobles and officers, was the expulsion of the Mughals from Gauhati and Kamrup by defeating them at the Battle of Itakhuli. They were pursued to Manaha, which henceforth became the Ahom-Mughal boundary till 1826. The king then suppressed all conspiracies to weaken the power of the Monarch, and reduced the tribes who created troubles in the border. He also controlled the growing power of the Hindu religious heads, but he was no bigot in his religious policy. Possessing a towering personality, Gadadhar Singha restored the authority of the king and brought peace and order to the country.

Rudra Singh's reign (1696-1714) marks a new turning point in the history of Assam. Inherited from his father a strong monarchy and a peaceful kingdom, Rudra Singha now found time and resources to build a new capital at Rangpur near the present town of Sibsagar on the Dikhow by importing artisans and masons, and know-how from Bengal. When the Rajas of Cachar, who was treated by the Ahoms as thapita-sanchita, and Jaintia, showed signs of insubordination, they were captured and brought before Rudra Singha and were compelled to acknowledge the sovereignty of the Ahoms. The king had planned to invade Bengal with the support of the rulers and the chiefs of the neighbouring states like Tripura, Koch Bihar, Burdwan and Nadia. When all preparations were complete and the vast army assembled at Gauhati for the march, Rudra Singha suddenly fell ill and died. The king is known for his liberal policy; he allowed to grow trade with Bengal, and also imported several cultural items like dress, festival, songs, etc., from that country. This resulted in a slow cultural synthesis.

### Later Ahom kings

The first half of the eighteenth century was peaceful and the reigns of two kings Siva Singha (1714-44) and Pramatta Singha (1744-51), saw the unprecedented growth of Hindu religious proclivities, and the building of Hindu temples. A great number of endowments of land and man were made for sustaining these. Siva Singha's queen

Phuleswari, who acquired great influence over him, even dared to insult Vaishnava mahantas by forcing them to bow down to the Goddess Durga. From this time onwards, the Ahom kings became more attached to Sakta faith which introduced a new element in the social and political life. The traditional Ahom religious institutions fell into negligence and the Ahoms who stuck to their own religion and customs, became a degraded class. At the same time, cultural penetration from Berigal continued unabated. The reign of Rajeswar Singha (1751-69), a younger brother of Siva Singha, saw the rise of Kirti Chandra Barbarua to power and status. One of the important events of his reign was the dispatch of the Ahom army against the Burmese in Manipur whose legal ruler Jai Singh (known as Bhagya Chandra in Manipur) was driven away by them and who came to Assam through Kachari country. Jai Singh strengthened his relation with Rajeswar Singha by giving his daughter Kuranganayani in marriage to the latter. This followed the policy of his predecessors by making endowment of land and men to religious persons and institutions.

Lakshmi Singha's reign (1769-1780) was disrupted by the revolt of the Moamarias, the followers of the Mayamara Mahanta of orthodox Vaishnava persuasion. Several causes are attributed to the revolt of which one is the physical punishment meted by Kirti Chandra Barbarua to Nahar, the chief of the Morans who came to make annual offer of elephant which was found lean and haggard. Nahar was mortified at this and was looking for support to take revenge on the Barbarua. Phuleswari's action had already inflamed the situation. It reached the climax when the Moamaria Gossain was abused by the Barbarua for being indifferent to him. The Morans were then ready to fight. They were joined by three exiled Ahom princes. The rebels advanced towards the capital Rangpur and after defeating the royal troops at several engagements they arrived at Rangpur. The king who attempted to flee was pursued and captured, and was put in confinement at the temple of Jaysagar. Ramakanta was declared king and Nahar became the Barbarua. The Morans preserved the entire structure of the Ahom government. However, after a few months, the Moran rule was overthrown and the insurgents were punished. King Lakshmi Singha was released from captivity and was restored. Like his predecessors, the king made a number of grants of rent free land with men, and built several temples.

### **Ahom Frontier Policy**

The Ahom Kingdom was surrounded by hilly tracts all around. Various tribes with different languages and customs were inhabitants of these hilly areas. Most of these tribes were fierce and warlike. Some of the tribes were Akas, Daflas, Miris, Mikirs, Abors, Mishmis, Khamtis, Singphos, Nagas and Bhutias, etc.

Some tribes were friendly with the Ahoms as they traded with them. Some tribes like Bhutias and Miris were poor and lacked the basic necessities of life so they raided and plundered the inhabitants of the plains and carried with them the plundered goods.

Prior to Pratap Singha, no other Ahom king had any policy towards these hillmen. The Ahoms controlled these tribes by force or weapons but never tried to conquer their lands as the Ahom rulers knew that they would not easily surrender to the Ahom rulers because of their ferocious nature. To save the people of the foot hills from the raids of these tribes, Pratap Singha was the first Ahom king to evolve a sound frontier policy to deal with them. He introduced the system of paying Posa to the Bhutias, the Akas, the Daflas. Posa is a kind of payment that was made by the inhabitants of the Duars to the tribes to buy off their raids. The Ahom king selected some villages in the plains and asked them to pay the Posa to the hill tribes.

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Pratap Singha dealt with the Nagas and Mikirs differently. He granted them lands at the foot of the hills for cultivation. These lands were called Naga Khats. The Ahom government appointed some Naga Khatakis to look after the lands. Due to such policy these tribes were sincere to the Ahom rulers and paid annual tributes. A different settlement was done with the Bhutias from the north. They were allowed to be the master of the lands at the foot of the hills and the mountain passes they occupied while the Ahom kings were engaged in the battles. In return the Bhutias acknowledged the supremacy of the Ahom rulers and paid tributes to the Ahom kings.

Sometimes due to their ferocious and wild nature the tribes did raid the Ahom kingdom but were dealt with severely. Sometimes their houses were burnt to teach them a lesson.

The Ahom policy towards the frontier tribes were three fold.

- The Ahoms satisfied the hillmen by supplying them with their essential economic needs. The Ahom government extended or withdrew the trading facilities on occasions for exercising some amount of control over the fierce hill men.
- Sometimes the Ahom kings sent some punitive expeditions against some hill tribes who raided the plains in violation of the agreements.
- Lastly the Ahom government neither interfered in the internal matters of the hillmen nor tried to annex the tribal lands.

From this discussion we can conclude that the policy of the Ahom rulers towards the hillmen of the North East frontier was successful and it did much to forge friendship and goodwill between the hill and people belonging to the plains.

### **Policy of Ahom Rulers towards the North East Tribe**

The policy of friendly relation of Ahom rulers with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh is also reflected through the measure of the grant of fertile land (*Khats*) in the foothills to the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh especially to the Noctes (generally mentioned in the contemporary literature as the Nagas) for cultivation. The Ahom rulers also considered the tribes inhabiting the area south of Sibsagar district of Assam, such as Namchangias (Namsangias), Bardurias, Banferas, Chagnois, Tablungias, Panidurias, etc., as their subjects, and claimed its right to share with the Nagas the produce of the salt manufactured in the Lower hills. In the *Buranjis* it is mentioned that Naga chiefs used to pay tributes to the Ahoms and received grants of Khats and of *bheels* or fishing waters in the plains in lieu of the same. The Naga chiefs were also allotted paiks like the other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and the Ahom nobility.

The Ahom king Pratap Singha (1603-1641), started the institution of Kotokis in order to regulate his relation with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and other neighbours. The British found this mechanism useful and continued the same. Pratap Singha highlighted the importance of the Kotokis in these words: 'Kotokis should be like shieldmen. Your words alone constitute your rice and cloth.' The Kotokis who were employed to deal with the tribal were familiar with the customs and dialects of the tribal. The Kotokis were the agents of the Ahom government who conducted political and diplomatic relations with the neighbouring powers. The role of the Kotokis in the Ahom-tribal relation as 'gobetween' or of the 'intermediaries' between the Ahom and other powers is a well-known fact. It was possible mainly because they were very intelligent and educated people and in most of cases, their capacity to argue and presentation of facts became the decisive factors. The services of the Kotokis were also utilized 'to carry and to

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explain the letters, orders, and request of the Ahom monarchs to the neighbouring powers'. We have, however, enough evidence to suggest that they also played an important role in determining the terms of agreement between the tribes of Arunachal and Ahom. The Ahom government appointed a number of *Katakis* (or *Kotokis*) to look after and manage the Khats. Kotokis was appointed mainly to maintain a 'channel of communication between the government and the tribes.' 'They also kept a watch over the movement of the hill people' and 'were paid by a remission of the poll tax.' One important feature of the tribal-Ahom relations was the role played by the Kotokis in promoting and maintaining these relations. Gait clearly writes (p.113), 'In order to stop the acts of oppression committed by the Miris and Daflas, *Kotokis* were appointed to watch them and keep the authorities informed of their movements. In this connection, however, it should be mentioned that in 1615, when reprisals were attempted after a raid perpetrated by these hill men, the Ahom forces were obliged to beat a retreat.' He further writes (p.114), 'Hindus were often appointed as envoys (*bairagis* and *katakis*) in preference to Ahoms....'

Pratap Singha, through the mediation of the Kotokis, was able to normalize relation with the Miris and *posa* was given to them. Again in AD 1665, one Kalia Kotoki was sent to negotiate with the Miris. The Miris also utilized the services of the kotokis and sent their message through them to the Ahom officials. Likewise in the struggle between the Nishis and the Ahoms, the *Katakis* played an important role. The *posa* with the Nishis was settled with the help of these officials and they again negotiated with the Nishis during the reign of King Sutyinpha in 1648 and again in 1678 during the rule of Udayaditya Singha (1669-73). The services of the Kotokis were also used in the Ahom-Mishmi confrontation 1675. Chaodang, a Kotokis, was entrusted the duty by the Ahoms to negotiate with the Mishmis. Though the Adis never came in direct confrontation with the Ahom and as such the Kotokis did not approach them directly, we must remember that the Miris who acted as the agents of the Adis were in constant contact with Kotokis and as such were a key factor in establishing the Adi-Ahom relations.

The socio-cultural developments of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh too made the institution of Kotokis important in the dealings with the Ahom rulers. The tribes of Arunachal, except for the Khampis and the Monpas, did not have any written language and often communicated through dialects that varied from tribe to tribe, the Assamese as the *lingua franca*. The sole responsibility of representing the case of these tribal to the Ahoms and vice versa, therefore, rested with these Kotokis and it was here that their ability to persuade the tribal was tested. On the occasions when these Kotokis failed to persuade the people of Arunachal Pradesh, they were punished by the Ahoms, as was done by King Rudra Singha, when the Kotokis were charged with a traitorous neglect of their duties. These two Kotokis who had been sent to negotiate with the Nyishis in 1713-14, could not bring satisfactory results, were put to death by the Phukan on orders from the king. The Kotokis, therefore, certainly played a key role in determining the relation of the tribal with Ahoms.

### 1. The Akas-Ahom Relations

The Akas are a comparatively small in number, and call themselves as Hrusso. They inhabit the area between the Bharali River and the Buddhist tribes of the West Kameng and Tawang districts. The Akas, who lived in the hills north of Charduar, comprised of mainly two clans — the Hazarikhawas (means 'eaters at a thousand hearths') and the *Kapaschors* (means 'thieves who lurk amid the cotton plants). The Ahom government had granted right of *posa* to the *Hazarikhawas* to prevent their aggression. But the *Kapaschors* were more troublesome. According to the records of 1825, the Akas were

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entitled to receive from each house of their allotted Paiks, 'one portion of a female dress, one bundle of cotton thread and one handkerchief.'

It is worth mentioning here that only the Hazarikhowa clan of the Akas was entitled to receive *posa* and no such right was given to *Kapaschors*. It is suggested that the name *Hazarikhowa* came into use because a thousand *gots* or *paiks* or individual groups of revenue payers were set aside for the collection of *posa* by the Akas. The *Kopaschors*, on the other hand, simply extorted some articles from the cultivators in the plains. It is also suggested that the *Kopaschors* were not considered separate from the *Hazarikhowas* and the latter were supposed to share a part of their *Posa* with the former. This goes on to suggest, therefore, that though originally the *Kopaschors* were not entitled to receive *Posa*, they began to assert their right to collect the same and compelled the *Hazarikhowas* to share it with them. In addition to the *Posa* given to the Akas, there cannot be any doubt that like many other tribes, they also collected paddy from the *paiks* assigned to them. One important thing about the Aka-Ahom relation is that throughout the entire period of Ahom rule over Assam no conflict ever took place between the Akas and the Ahoms.

### 2. Ahom's Relation with the Noctes

The term 'Naga' is a generic term applied to a large number of tribes and sub-tribes living in the Tirap and Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Historically their place of habitation had been in the valley of the Dhansiri in the west to the hills of the Patkai in the east, and from the border of Nowgong, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts of Assam in the north to the North of Cachar and Manipur in the south. They were organized in many groups, such as the Banferas, Noctes, Wanchos, etc. In Assam they were known by their place of abode, such as the Namsangias, Bordurias, Panidurias, etc. Lakshmi Devi (op.cit. pp. 19-56) provides a comprehensive picture of the Ahom-Naga relations.

The Ahom-Naga relation in the context of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh is mainly concerned with the Noctes. The Noctes means village people (*Noc* means village and *te* means people) and are settled in the Tirap district of Arunachal from as early as the 12th or 13th century. These Noctes came into contact with the Ahoms when the latter were wandering for permanent settlement. The Nagas did not welcome the first invaders and gave tough resistance to them. The Ahom king Sukapha terrorized them by adopting brutal method of suppression. Later, the Ahoms conciliated with them. Conflict between the Ahoms and the Nagas continued throughout the Ahom rule. The main causes of the conflict were the right to use Naga products and control over the salt wells. The Nagas of Jaypur, Namsang, Paniduria and Barduria lived mainly by manufacturing salt, which they traded in Assam. There were as many as eighty-five salt wells in the lower hills. The Ahom government imposed a nominal tax on the salt brought for sale by the Nagas. Later Ahom rulers (for example Purandar Singha) employed their own men to extract salt from the wells. The basic source of conflict between the Noctes and the Ahom were the salt-springs and wells and according to the Buranjis, the Ahom seized a salt-well in Mohang in 1536, and in due course of time enjoyed either exclusive rights on several such wells or share in the salt produced in them. There are also evidences to suggest that some of the groups of Noctes entered into friendly alliances with the Ahoms. One Bonfera chief named Karangpha extended close friendly relations with the Ahoms. King Pratap Singha (1603-1641) tried to check the Naga attacks by constructing a rampart called the Nagagarh but the Naga raids could not be prevented permanently. During the rule of King Gadadhar Singha (1681-1696) the Namsangia Nagas attacked an Ahom salt mine in 1692. They again attacked a salt mine at Barhat in 1701. King



Rudra Singha (1696-1714) subdued them. There is one instance of 1576 when the Nagas obtained a remarkable victory over the Ahoms, and it was decided that the Nagas would use the salt springs of Longpong during the daytime and the Ahoms at night.

Amrendra Kr Thakur in his article *Salt: Sources and Struggle in Arunachal Pradesh*, (*Proceedings of North East India History Association*, 30th session, Nagaon, pp. 124-136) provides a detailed account of the struggle between the Noctes and the Ahoms for the same.

The Ahoms considered the Nagas as a whole of their subjects and they were asked to pay tribute in the form of slaves, elephant teeth, spear shafts, goat's hair and above all these salt. In return, the Ahom government granted lands (*khats*) to the Nagas. The Ahoms had good relations with some of the Nagas. Sometimes the Ahom kings acted against one Naga group on the request of the other Naga group.

Thus, in 1665 on the request of the Banfera or Banpara Nagas the Ahom King Chakradhvaj Singha (1663-1670) attacked the Banchang Nagas and defeated them. Their houses were destroyed. In fact, the Ahoms had special relationship with the Banferas. In fact, the enmity among the Nagas themselves prevented a united resistance of theirs against the Ahoms. In spite of this, the Nagas could not be subdued permanently and their insurrections occurred throughout the Ahom rule. It may be mentioned here that the Nocte-Ahom relationships were not always based on friction and enmity, but friendship, commercial and cultural intercourse also existed between them. Evidences show that the Namsangia, Borduaria and Paniduaria Noctes traded with the Ahoms for the supply of salt to the plains of Assam. A nominal tax was imposed by the Ahoms on the salt brought from the hills. By the way of trade, the Noctes also developed cultural contacts with the plains of Assam. A section of them came under the influence of Vaishnavism and adopted a very elementary form of Vaishnavism which was rather a compromise between some tenets of this sect and the tribal ways. Ajay Kr Mishra in his article '*Religious Practices of the Noctes of Arunachal: Exposure and Response*' (*Proceedings of North East India History Association*, 25th (Silver Jubilee) session, Shillong, 2004, pp. 265-273) provides detailed accounts of impact of the Neo-Vaishnavism and the title given to the Nocte chief as 'Narrottam'.

(There is a story that one of the Ahom King Supimpha's wives happened to see a Banfera Naga chief who had come to pay tribute. She praised the beauty of the Naga chief. The king, being unhappy with this, gave away his wife to the Naga chief. She was pregnant that time and subsequently gave birth to a son in the Naga village. King Suhungmung, the Dihingia Raja (1497-1539) were very impressed to see the boy, named Senglung, who used to come to pay tribute. He also came to know that his mother was already pregnant before Supimpha sent her away. Suhungmung patronised Senglung by creating a new post of Barpatra Gohain for him. This post was made equal to those of the Bar Gohain and Burha Gohain).

### 3. Ahom's Relations with the Nyishis

The Ahom-Nyishi relations has also been studied in details by Lakshmi Devi (op.cit., pp. 217-234). The Nyishis are mentioned as the Daflas in the contemporary Ahom documents and consequently the British documents as well as the historians of the post-independence period used the same term for the Nyishi. This terminology is, however, not used nowadays. The Nyishis of Arunachal Pradesh are settled mostly in the hills north of Nao Duar (the nine passes) in Darrang and Che-Duar (the six passes) in Lakhimpur. Those who resided on the border of Darrang were known as '*Paschima* or

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*Western Daflas*, and those on the border of North Lakhimpur were called as the '*Tagin or Eastern Daflas*'. On the west, the Akas were their neighbours and on the east lived the Galo, Adis and the Hill Miris. They occupied the territory situated between the Bhorali River on the west and the upper courses of Subansiri River on the east. The Nishis were divided into two broad categories. The eastern members of the tribe living on the borders of Lakhimpur called themselves Ni-Sing or Nyising and were called Tagin Daflas by the Assamese. In the western branches, settled near the plains and foothills of Darrang, they were called Bag-ni or Bang-ni and the Assamese called them Paschima Daflas.

One important feature of the Nishi tribes was that they were not organized in one or two single groups, but were rather a collection of small clans which were independent of each other, and as such, rarely resorted to any combined action. The number of chiefs who were recognized by the British government for the grant of *posa* clearly shows this. The total number of such chiefs was 238. The form of government of the Nishis was oligarchical and there were 30 to 40 chiefs in a single clan. The Ahoms came in contact with the Nyishis only after the annexation of the Sutiya territories (1522-23).

We get the first reference of any contact between the Nishis and the Ahoms in the year 1614 during the reign of Pratap Singha in Assam. Provoked by the attack of the Nishis in the plains, the king ordered Lako Borpatra and Bharali Gohain to proceed against the Nishis on the frontier of Darrang. However, this expedition resulted in heavy losses for the Ahoms and a number of soldiers were killed by the Nishis, and the two Ahom officers were compelled to return. Thus, in the very first contact between the Nishis and the Ahoms, the latter realized the ferocious nature of the former. It was, therefore, thought proper to follow a policy of give and take by the Ahoms and in order to put some check to the raids of the Nishis, Pratap Singha constructed a Daflagarh (fortification) in the eastern parts of the Tezpur sub-division of Darrang division which was also known as 'Rajgarh.' The Nishis were also granted *posa* by the Ahoms. A number of Paiks were assigned to the Nishis in the duar area who became known as Dafla-bahatias or the serfs of the Daflas and an officer known as Dafalaparia Phukan was appointed to look after these men. In the relations with the Ahoms, the Nyishis proved to be the most formidable. The Ahom prime minister, Atan Burhagohain's acceptance that 'it was impossible to capture the Daflas' and 'the Dafla miscreants can be captured only if an elephant can enter into a rat-hole' clearly indicates the strength of the Nyishis. In 1562, the Nyishis (along with the Koches) invaded the plains. The Ahom king Sukhapha, the Khora Raja (1552-1603) adopted defensive measures by constructing forts and appointing a new officer called Salal Gohain to keep the Daflas and Akas in check. King Pratap Singha had also got constructed a fort called the *Daflagarh* in Darrang. This step was taken after an utter failure of the Ahom expedition against the Western Daflas in 1614. Pratap Singha even granted '*posa*' to the Nyishis in order to conciliate them. From an account of 13th May 1825, we know that every year from every ten houses of Dafala-bahatias, the Nishis were entitled to receive one double cloth, one single cloth, one handkerchief, one *dao*, ten heads of horned cattle and four seers of salt. In addition, the Nishis must have received some paddy which is stated by Padmeswar Singh Naobakha Pukan and also by Col. White. Because of this, the paiks were given corresponding concessions in the tax which they paid to Ahoms.

These measures could not stop the Nyishi raids into the Ahom territory. Sutyinpha's (1644-1648) expedition of 1646, and King Sunyatpha's (or Udayaditya Singha, 1670-1672) expedition, (1672) against them could not bring success to the Ahoms. The Nyishis

were supported by the Hill Miris in their fight against the Ahoms. King Gadadhar Singha (1681-1696) pacified with the Daflas by placing at their disposal a number of people (known as the Dafla-Bahatia). King Rudra Singha (1696-1714) was also successful in invoking the Nyishis to send their troops in his proposed invasion of Bengal. The Western Daflas, numbering six hundred, came down from the hills north of Darrang to join the Ahom army. But after Rudra Singha's death in 1714, their relationship again turned hostile. King Siva Singha (1714-1744) subdued the Daflas in 1717.

King Rajendra Singha (1751-1769) also tried to prevent the Dafla raids. He got forts erected and put restrictions on entrance to markets by the Daflas. The Daflas suffered badly due to the ban. At last, their delegation came for agreement. But the Ahom king was not satisfied. He got arrested the members of the delegation. The Daflas retaliated by capturing a number of people from the plains. After the event both the parties reached to an agreement and released the captives. The Daflas were allowed to levy *posa* on condition of their refraining from the act of aggression.

On the basis of above discussion we can say that the Nyishis always resisted the Ahom moves of expansion or restricting the Nyishis into the hills. During the initial contacts with the Nishis, the Ahoms realized the ferocious and independent nature of the former and in order to avoid any further complications, *Posa* was granted to them. Despite this, whenever the Nishis were in need of labourers and other necessities of life, they simply came down to the plains and collected the dues from the villages. The Assam centric history portrays the Nyishi claim as the looters or plunderers. The observation of Muhammad Kasim, a historian during the days of Aurangzeb mentions about the Nyishis is important to be mentioned here: 'The Daflas are extremely independent of the Assam Raja and whenever they find an opportunity, plunder the country contiguous to their mountains.' The introduction of the *Posa* system, however, was an important measure taken by the Ahom kings to regulate the Ahom-Nyishi relations.

#### **4. Ahom's Relations with the Adis (Abhors) and Mishings (Miris)**

The Adis were known as the Abors in the Ahom and British documents (however nowadays *Adi* is popularly used in place of *Abor*). Now the Galos have separate identity, however earlier known as the Gallongs they were part and parcel of the *Adi* society, culture and identity. The Adis came in contact with the Ahoms when the Sutiya Kingdom was annexed to the Ahom territory in the year 1523 during the reign of Suhungmung, or Dihingia Raja. With this annexation the Ahom territories were extended up to river Subansiri, which was the homeland of the Adis, then called Abors. The Adis lived in the East and West Siang, eastern border of the Upper Subansiri and the south western part of the Dibang Valley of present Arunachal Pradesh. Both belonged to the same origin, but in the process of migration the latter settled along the north bank of Brahmaputra (Lakhimpur district of Assam). There had been close relationship between Adis and Mishings (Miris). In fact, the Mishings of the plains were claimed by the Adis as 'their dependents and runaway slaves.' The term 'Miri' in Assamese means go-between and true to this meaning, the Miris acted as such between the Adis and the traders of Assam. The Adis also claimed that all the fish and gold found in the rivers that flowed through their territory belonged to them.

Under the Ahom government, the plain Miris played the role of intermediaries between the Abors and the traders of Assam. There were other branches of Miris who were called the Hill Miris, and settled in the hills to the north of Sisi and Dhemaji (Lakhimpur District). The Ahom government had granted them right to *posa* similar to

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the Nyishis, Akas, Monpas and Sherdukpens. But still the Miris raided the plains in 1655 and again in 1665. Their raid on Sadiya (1683) during the rule of Gadadhar Singha was a very violent one. They set fire to the house of the Sadiya Khowa Gohain, destroyed the villages, and killed about two hundred people. However, pressurised by the Ahom king, they had to submit. In the later period, too, the Miris created problem for the Ahom government especially during the Moamaria rebellion.

The Ahom government did not grant right to *posa* to the Adis, as it was granted to other tribes. The Adis had a different type of right, that is, they claimed 'absolute sovereignty over the Miris of the plains, and an inalienable right to all the fish and gold found in the Dihong River. The Ahom government had tacitly accepted such claims of the Adis. It had relieved the Miris of all revenue charges for performing services to the Abors. In this way the Ahoms had acknowledged the subjugation of Miris to the Abors.

The Adis had a peaceful relation with the Ahoms, and they were 'never known to committed an act of unprovoked ravage or outrage on the villages of the plains'. Rather, on one occasion the Abors (Padam Clan) rejected the Khampti proposal of combined attack on the Ahoms. The Padams got assistance from the Ahom government. Some of the Abors even came for help of the Ahoms during the Moamaria rebellion.

In recognition of this privilege that was given to them by the Ahoms, the Adis were supposed to pay an annual tribute to the Ahom government. Some historians have maintained that through such agreements, 'Posa' was granted to the Adis but this does not seem to be true. The concessions which were granted to the Adis by the Ahoms were not actually concessions but a mere recognition of the claims of the latter over the Miris. No direct relation worth mention ever existed between the Ahoms and the Adis and the Adis continued to trade with the outside world through the Miris. Likewise, the Ahom Buranjis do not give us any clue of Adis-Ahom conflict.

### 5. Ahom's Relations with the Mishimis

The Mishings were the immediate neighbour of the Sutiya and so after the annexation of the Sutiya kingdom, the Ahoms came in contact with the Mishimis. To the east of the Adis across the Dibang river lived various branches of the tribes who were collectively called the Mishimis. The clan, also known as Digaru Mishmis, lived to the west of Digaru River, near the famous Brahmakunda and were constantly in touch with the plains. They also acted as guides to the Hindu pilgrims visiting Brahmakunda. The Mezho lived to the north-east of Du River and traded with Tibet; the Maros lived south of Brahmaputra and their settlements were scattered and mixed up with Khamptis and Singphos. Various groups of Mishmis (such as, the Idus or Chulikata, the Taraon or Digaru and the Kamanor Miju) lived in the hills to the east of the Adis. At present they mostly inhabit in the Lohit, Anjaw and Dibang Valley districts of Arunachal Pradesh. The Ahoms had peaceful relations with the Mishimis. They had not been granted right to *posa*, but they enjoyed trade facilities. In fact, the Mishimis were keen traders and their contact with the neighbouring countries and the markets in Assam proved catalyst in facilitating the same.

They used to come to Sadiya market with the hill produce. They traded mainly in musk, skins of animals, 'Mishmitita', some ivory and few other articles. The policy of non-intervention and better trade opportunities offered by the Ahoms led to the better relations between the Mishimis and the Ahoms.

There are not many references of the Mishimis in the *Buranjis* (the Ahom chronicle). King Sutyinpha (1644-48) got constructed a *Mishmigarh* (Rampart) to resist the Mishmi raiders. The only conflict that took place between the Mishimis and the

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Ahoms was during the reign of Ramdhrāj Singha (1673-75), when, in the month of June in 1675, the Mishmis killed four Ahom priests in the Deoghar (temple) in Sadiya. When the Sadiyakhowa Gohain (he was an Ahom officer, who was appointed to guard the Sadiya frontier against the inroads of the tribes) informed the Ahom King of the incident and requested for assistance, the Mishmis, with the help of the Doanias, who are said to be the half-breeds of the Singhphos, erected a stockade near a deep sheet of water. The combined strength of the Mishmis and Doaris compelled the Ahom forces to retreat and some Assamese villages were also burnt by the tribal near river Ziri.

The Ahom king then sent fresh reinforcements and also ordered Baraphukan to proceed against the Mishmis. A fort was erected at Tishing and the Ahom forces put up there. A few days later, Chaodang Kataki was sent to ask the Mishmis the reasons for their inroads. Chaodang brought back two hundred Mishmi men with him. Upon inquiry, it was revealed that four Mishmis who had committed the murders were Pude, Mirishang, Bajing and Phakushi. The Baraphukan and Sadiyakhowa Gohain were determined to capture and punish the offenders and the Ahom forces rather frightened the Mishmis who agreed to hand over the guilty. The culprits were subsequently handed over to the Baraphukan by the Mishmis along with some tributes. These culprits were put to death, and thereafter no major raid worth mention was carried out by the Mishmis over the Ahom territory. We have some evidence to show that the Ahoms recognized the possessions of the hills adjacent to the Dibang River by the Mishmis and the Mishmis paid four baskets of poison to the Ahoms as tribute. This fact is reflected in a stone pillar of octagonal shape found on the banks of Deopani River about 7 miles north of Sadiya.

The agreement to this effect was signed in 1687 between the Mishmis and the Dihingia

Phukan also known as 'Bargohain of Sadiya.' Thus the Ahoms followed a policy of equity and persuasion towards the Mishmis.

The *Sadiya Stone Pillar Inscription* (probably inscribed in about 1687) issued by the Dihingia Bargohain (the Ahom overlord of the Sadiya region) confirms a settlement between the Ahoms and the Mishmis. The Mishmis were asked to pay tribute to the Sadiyakhowa Gohain.

### 6. Ahom's Relationship with the Khamptis

The Khamptis were probably the nearest kinsmen of the Ahom ruler of Assam and migrated to India from the ancient kingdom of Mung-Mau or Pong in Burma. The Khamptis entered in big numbers the borders of Sadiya in Assam in the middle of the 18th century due to constant wars and confusion in the Mogoung area. Being the close kinsmen of the Ahoms, the Khamptis were allowed to settle on the banks of Tengapani River in 1751 A.D. But the other migrants, particularly the Singhphos (of Burmese stock) ousted the Khamptis from their settlements, so they moved to the Sadiya region. South of Manbhum ranges on the bank of Buri Dihing there were four important Khamti villages. The Noa Dihing forms the west side of this rough square and on this river, were located the other nine Khamti villages. The banks of these rivers were very fertile and known for the settled rice cultivation. The Khamtis were rice cultivators, traders, warriors and good artisans. They used to come to the Sadiya market to buy and sell various articles. They had their small principality. E.R. Leach in his book *The Political System of the Highland Burma* (London, 1959) provides a detailed description of the origin, migration and settlement of the Khamptis in the areas of Arunachal Pradesh.

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Things went on peacefully and no confrontation took place between the Khamptis and the Ahoms in the beginning. This peaceful co-existence did not continue for long. The opportunity to fulfill the political ambition of the Khamptis to expand their area of influence in the territories of Assam came only when the Ahom rulers were in trouble due to the Moamaria rebellion (1779-onwards). The Khamptis crossed the river Brahmaputra in 1794, ousted the Sadiyakhwa Gohain, the Ahom Governor of Sadiya, and established their rule over Sadiya with two chiefs named Burha Raja and Deka Raja. The Ahom king was rather compelled to accept this agreement because of the overall adverse political condition. The Khamptis, however, were not contended with that and during the reign of Kamaleshwar Singha (1795-1811), came further down the plains in AD 1799. We have some evidence to suggest that the Khamptis were helped by some other Shan tribes such as Pan, Naras and Phakials and also by the Miris, Mishmis, the Muluks and the Adis. This time, however, the Khamptis were badly defeated by the Ahom army sent by the Prime Minister, Purnananda Burhagohain. The Burha Raja of the Khamptis was captured but was pardoned and re-established by the king. The Khamptis remained quiet for some time but certainly caused trouble to the Ahoms during the Burmese invasion of Assam (1816-1824), because the British found that the entire Sadiya tract was under the control of the Khamptis. Thus we see that the Khamptis took full advantage of their kinship relations when it suited them and forgot it at other times when the Ahoms became weak.

The Ahom Rule was on decline at that time. It seems that the Khamptis, at the time of the Burmese invasions of Assam, regained their hold over Sadiya.

### 7. Ahom's Relations with the Singphos

The Singphos, like the Khamptis migrated from the Upper Burma and settled in this part of Arunachal Pradesh. In the south of Manbhum ranges on the bank of Buri Dihing there were six Singpho villages. The Noa Dihing forms the west side of this rough square and on this river, were located the other eighteen Singpho villages. The banks of these rivers were very fertile and known for the settled rice cultivation. The Singphos were loosely organized under two significant chiefs of Bisa Gam and Duffa Gam across the Patkai ranges in Burma. Besides the fertile rice valley and the rich forestland, this area was rich in mineral resources such as coal, lime, iron, silver and petroleum. The indigenous tea-bushes and elephant-catching and trade in ivory tusk and elephants were other attractions of the area. The nearby forest was also abounded in the natural rubber trees, which were tapped and the juice was processed for producing rubber. The Singphos like the Khamptis were the keen traders in slaves; mostly captured from the territories of Assam and traded up to Bhamo or Yunnan province of China.

The engagement of Singphos with the Ahom ruler came during the reign of Kamaleswar Singha (1795-1811) when the Moamaria rebellion was at full swing. The Singphos entered into some understanding with the Moamaria rebels who had been defeated by the Ahoms, and attacked a number of villages in the eastern parts of Assam. They also imported some Burmese troops. When the Ahom king got this news, he sent troops under Deka Phukan. The Singphos, initially, were successful in checking the Ahom advances and also inflicted losses to them; but in a renewed attempt, the Ahoms were able to break the fort of the Singphos. An agreement was arrived at and the Ahom Prime Minister Purnananda Buragohain presented an Ahom girl named Rangili to the Singphos chief Bichanong. Bichanong presented Rangili to the Burmese king in order to strengthen ties with him. The agreement of the Singphos with the Ahoms did not last

long and during the time of the Burmese invasion of Assam, Singphos like the Khamptis, made a number of attacks on the villages in the plains, carried away a number of slaves, and reduced the population of the village in the eastern parts considerably. About 3000 of the Assamese subjects were recovered from the captivity of the Singphos by Captain Neufville, the first Political Agent of Upper Assam. The problem of slavery abolition and occupation of Singpho land for tea cultivation were the areas of concern between the Singpho-British relation which will be discussed in the following units. The Singphos, thus, took full advantage of the troubled times of the Ahoms, and refused to be ever loyal to them after their appearance in Assam.

### **Highlights of the tribal-Ahom relations**

When the Ahom rule was established in Assam, the tribal of Arunachal continued to follow their policy of trade and raids (extortion and plunder) on the plains of Assam. This policy of the tribal was the result of difficult geographical conditions of the hills, the want of the necessities of life in their areas and the traditional rights of the tribes of the hills upon the plain people of foothills of Assam to collect dues. The Ahom rulers of Assam could cross the northern bank of the Brahmaputra, assumed the responsibility of protecting their subjects from the raids of these tribes. Here it would be worth mentioning that any political or socio-economic relation between the tribal and the Ahoms was, in almost all the cases, initiated by the Ahom government and not by the tribal. Most of the tribes of Arunachal were very independent in nature and never desired any outside interference in their lives unless compelled by their existence at stake.

So far as the Ahoms were concerned, their policy towards the tribal of Arunachal was based on the policy of reconciliation and persuasion; for the occupation of the hill areas of Arunachal was out of question, and the Ahoms never had any desire to interfere with the polity of the tribal. The tribal were hardly influenced by the formative changes taking place in the plains of Assam, and continued to live during the Ahom period as they used to do thousands of years ago.

In order to protect their subjects from the raids of these tribal and also to maintain peace and tranquillity in the area, the Ahoms granted the right of Posa to some of the tribes of Arunachal, and certain other concessions were given to the tribes, like the Adis, who were not granted Posa. The Ahom policy towards these tribes of the hills was of conciliation followed by the display of force whenever possible. However, in spite of the Posa and other concessions granted to them, most of the tribes often violated the friendly agreements and raided the villages in the plains. This rather compelled the Ahom government to send some punitive expedition against these tribes resulting in the loss of lives and properties. But, generally speaking, the Ahoms were able to maintain comparative peace and harmony with the tribes of Arunachal and in most of the cases these tribes accepted the Ahom sovereignty in the plains and paid tribute to them in return of the various concessions given by Ahoms.

### **Policy of the Ahoms**

Apart from their conciliatory approaches, the Ahoms did not desist from displaying their power over the tribes. Regarding Sukapha, it is said that he adopted policies both of peace and terror. He first went with peace proposals towards local tribes. When it failed he used the most brutal methods to suppress them. But before the actual application of force, the Ahom government banned the commercial facilities given to the tribes of the hills. Sometimes only this method worked to bring them to terms.

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### 1. Policy of Subjugation

It has now been well established that the Ahoms were a section of the Tai race. Historically, these people are known for their valley-dwelling and wet-rice-growing character. The particular branch to which the Ahoms belong is known as the Tai-mao, or the Mao section of the Tai but widely known through the Burmans as the Shan. Ahom chronicles, or *buranji*, make specific mention that the Ahoms were led by Prince (Chao-lung) Sukapha who left Mong Mao-lung in 1215 AD. Sukapha's followers included several nobles (thao-mong), a number of officers of various ranks, nine thousand men, woman and children. After a westward march for thirteen years and staying at several places for periods ranging from one to three years, they arrived at the Patkai in 1228 AD. Posting a governor at the Khamjang valley, their first territorial unit, situated on the shore of the Nongjang lake, Sukapha and the rest of his party at first followed the Namrup, then the Buri Dihing (Nam-jin), thereafter the Brahmaputra, and the Dikhow before finally arriving at Charaideo, which became his permanent capital. On the way, he also organized several other *territorial* units along the bank of these rivers. In this way a small kingdom bounded by Patkai, the Buri Dihing, the Brahmaputra, the Dikhow and the Naga hills was founded in Upper Assam over which Sukapha ruled till his death in 1268 AD. This territory was peopled chiefly by the Morans and the Borahis, and a few villages of the Chutiyas and the Kacharis evidently of Bodo origin; Nagas were also included in the hilly region of the Patkai. Sukapha won over the chiefs of Morans and the Borahis, and even encouraged intermarriage with them, and appointed some of them in various capacities in the royal household.

### 2. Commercial Facility

The Ahom rulers by allowing free commercial activities further facilitated the trade relations with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. There were the frontier wardens known as *Datiyalia Bisayas* and *Duarias*, who looked after the interest of traders. The Ahom government established several *haats* (small markets) near the foothills and the *duars* (mountain passes), where the tribes of the hills could come and exchange their commodities with those of the plains. The Sherdukpens could bring silver, woollen cloth, Chinese silk, ponies, gold dust and rock salt to Udalguri and Doimara. They exchanged them with items such as iron, lac, rice, Assam silk, dried fish and buffalo horns. The Noctes brought salt, cotton, and elephant teeth to the markets in and around Sibsagar. The Mishimis brought to the Sadiya market the Lama swords, spears and Mismi *tita* (a medicinal herb). The Adis and the Hill Miris exchanged copper, wax, madder (dye), and jim cloth (cotton blanket) for the products of the plains. The Singphos brought ivory, copper and silver. The mutual benefits emerging out of this transaction helped in creating good feelings between the people of the hills and plains. The participation of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh in trade activities has been studied by A. K. Thakur in this article 'Pre-colonial Trade in Arunachal Pradesh: A Reconstruction of Economic History', *Resarun* Vol. XXVII, 2001, pp. 17-27, Journal of the Directorate of Research, Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh, special issue on Golden Jubilee of the Department of Research, Itanagar, 2002.

### 3. Payment of *Posa*

Braj Narain Jha in his article 'Politics of *Posa*: A Case Study of Pre and Post-Independence Scenario in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam' (*Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 57th session, Madras, 1996, pp. 446-58) analyses the background of the



origin of the *Posa*, its nature and provides the gamut of historiography related to its nomenclature. The bias in the writings of the British period and even after (especially from the Assam centric history writing) and equating the *posa* with ‘blackmail’ etc. have also been critically analysed by Jha. This article situates the problem of *Posa* comprehensively. The term ‘Posa’ literally means a collection of subscription for a common purpose. When this term is used to explain the payments made to the tribes of the hills, it represents the subscription which was collected by the villagers in order to meet the customary demands of the hill people. In the official glossary of terms of the British period the term is explained as the ‘allowances paid to certain tribes of the hills inhabiting the hills on the northern frontier of Assam bordering Darrang and Lakhimpur, on account to commuted ‘black mail’, or in consideration of the abandonment by them of their claims with regards to certain duars.’ In general, the term ‘*posa*’ came to be applied to all payments made to the tribes of the hills by the Governments; whether it was in commutation of blackmail or compensation for customary demands of the tribal chiefs of the bordering hills of Arunachal Pradesh. It can neither be compared with ‘blackmail’ nor ‘the *chauth* of Marathas’, nor a ‘barbarian cupidity’. It was the outcome of a well negotiated policy initiated by the Ahom rulers between the subjects of the plains of Assam (*paiks*), hill chiefs of Arunachal Pradesh and the Ahom rulers. A triangular relation existed among the Ahom State, the Paiks and the tribal chiefs receiving *posa*. The recipients of *posa* paid tribute to the Ahom king and in lieu of that they were granted the right to collect a fixed annual amount of *posa* from the paiks of the adjoining foothills of Assam and also provided their services, sometimes to particular chiefs. For fulfilling these obligations, certain remissions in the state demand were given to those paiks. All the payments were made in kind.

Jha rightly concludes ‘... the nature of *posa* (was) based on the socio-political realities of the contemporary period of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh .... it has often been wrongly interpreted as blackmail.’ Knowingly or unknowingly most of the writers of the history of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam regard the *posa* system as blackmail, to meet the need of the hills.

The observation of A. Mackenzie (*The North East Frontier of India*, reproduced 1999, Mittal, New Delhi, p.21) is relevant to be mentioned about the nature and system of *Posa*. He writes, ‘It is a mistake to suppose that the *posa*, which, as we shall see, was paid to most of the tribes of the hills bordering on the plains, was an uncertain, ill-defined exaction, depending in amount upon the rapacity of the different hordes who might descend to levy it. It was really a well ascertained revenue payment, on account of which a corresponding remission was made in the state demand upon the ryot satisfying it. It may have had its origin in encroachment, or it may have been based upon customary and primeval rights asserted by the hill men, but it was a distinct feature in the revenue system of the country when the British annexed Assam.’

In this way the *posa* system originated due to certain exigencies of the time. The Ahom king pratap Singha, gave to it a formal shape. The *posa* was granted to the Bhutias, the Akas, and Daflas, and the Miris. The Ahom king Gadadhar Singha conciliated the Daflas ‘by assigning to them a number of paiks in the *duars*. They were called Dafla Bahatias, or the serfs of the Daflas. Every ten houses of the Dafla Bahatias used to pay to the Daflas per year on double cloth, one napkin, one *dao*, ten heads of cattle, and four seer of salt. Similarly, each family of Bahatias assigned to the *Hazari khowa*, the Akas used to pay a portion of female dress, one bundle of cotton thread, and one napkin. They also serviced as labourers under Akas.

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Consequential to the commutation of *posa* to cash by the British, the annual receipts of the various beneficiaries were estimated as follows:

Nyishis (Daflas)	1020/-
Bhooteahs (Sherdukpents of Rupa and Shergaon)	2526-7/-
Tagee Akas Raja and Kuppachor Akas	580/-
Hazaree Khoa Akas	88/-
Thebengia Bhooteahs (Bapus of Thembang)	145-13.6/-
Tawang Raja	5000/-

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### 4. Grant of Land and the Origin of the Kotokis

The policy of friendly relation of Ahom rulers with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh is also reflected through the measure of the grant of fertile land (*Khats*) in the foothills to the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh especially to the Noctes (generally mentioned in the contemporary literature as the Nagas) for cultivation. The Ahom rulers also considered the tribes inhabiting the area south of Sibsagar district of Assam, such as Namchangias (Namsangias), Bardurias, Banferas, Chagnois, Tablungias, Panidurias, etc., as their subjects, and claimed its right to share with the Nagas the produce of the salt manufactured in the Lower hills. In the *Buranjis* it is mentioned that Naga chiefs used to pay tributes to the Ahoms and received grants of Khats and of *bheels* or fishing waters in the plains in lieu of the same. The Naga chiefs were also allotted paiks like the other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and the Ahom nobility. The Ahom king, Pratap Singha (1603-41), started the institution of Katakis in order to regulate his relation with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and other neighbours. The British found this mechanism useful and continued the same. The Ahom king Pratap Singha (1603-41) highlighted the importance of the Kotokis in these words: 'Kotokis should be like shieldmen. Your words alone constitute your rice and cloth.' The Kotokis who were employed to deal with the tribals were familiar with the customs and dialects of the tribals. The Kotokis were the agents of the Ahom government who conducted political and diplomatic relations with the neighbouring powers. The role of the Kotokis in the Ahom-tribal relation as 'go-between' or of the 'intermediaries' between the Ahom and other powers is a well-known fact. It was possible mainly because they were very intelligent and educated persons and in most of the cases, their capacity to argue and present facts was the decisive factors. The services of the Kotokis were also utilized 'to carry and to explain the letters, orders, request, etc. of the Ahom monarchs to the neighbouring powers'. We have, however, enough evidence to suggest that they also played an important role in determining the terms of agreement between the tribes of Arunachal and Ahom. The Ahom government appointed a number of *Katakis* (or *Kotokis*) to look after and manage the Khats. The *katakis* were appointed mainly to maintain a 'channel of communication between the government and the tribes.' 'They also kept a watch over the movement of the hill people' and 'were paid by a remission of the poll tax.' One important feature of the tribal-Ahom relations was the role played by the Kotokis in promoting and maintaining these relations. Gait clearly writes (p.113), 'In order to stop the acts of oppression committed by the Miris and Daflas, *Katakis* were appointed to watch them and keep the authorities informed of their movements. In this connection, however, it should be mentioned that in 1615, when reprisals were attempted after a raid perpetrated by these hill men, the Ahom forces were obliged to beat a retreat.' He further writes (p.114), 'Hindus were often appointed as envoys (bairagis and *katakis*) in preference to Ahoms....'

Pratap Singha, through the mediation of the Kotokis, was able to normalize relation with the Miris and the *posa* was given to them. Again in 1665 A.D., one Kalia Kotoki was sent to negotiate with the Miris. The Miris also utilized the services of the kotokis and sent their message through them to the Ahom officials. Likewise in the struggle between the Nishis and the Ahoms, the Katakis played an important role. The *Posa* with the Nishis was settled with the help of these officials and they again negotiated with the Nishis during the reign of King Sutyinpha in 1648 and again in 1678 during the rule of Udayaditya Singha (1669-73). The services of the Katakis were also used in the Ahom-Mishimi confrontation 1675. Chaodang, a Katakis, was entrusted the duty by the Ahoms to negotiate with the Mishimis. Though the Adis never came in direct confrontation with the Ahom and as such the Kotokis did not approach them directly, we must remember that the Miris who acted as the agents of the Adis were in constant contact with Kotokis and as such were a key factor in establishing the Adi-Ahom relations.

The socio-cultural developments of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh too made the institution of Katakis important in the dealings with the Ahom rulers. The tribes of Arunachal, except for the Khamptis and the Monpas, did not have any written language and often communicated through dialects that varied from tribe to tribe. Assamese was the *lingua franca*. The sole responsibility of representing the case of these tribal to the Ahoms and vice versa, therefore, rested with these Kotokis and it was here that their ability to persuade the tribal was tested. On the occasions when these Kotokis failed to persuade the people of Arunachal Pradesh, they were punished by the Ahoms, as was done by King Rudra Singha, when the Kotokis were charged with a traitorous neglect of their duties. These two Kotokis who had been sent to negotiate with the Nyishis in 1713-14, could not bring satisfactory results, were put to death by the Phukan on orders from the king. The Kotokis, therefore, certainly played a key role in determining the relation of the tribal with Ahoms.

The Ahom rulers had advanced war weapons (matchlocks and guns), large surplus production and the *paiks* to aggressively pursue their imperial policy. Though the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh had mostly the traditional tribal war weapons (daos, spears, bows and arrows, etc.), the Ahoms avoided straight military fight against them mainly due to the geographical reasons. The reason behind the same was also the indigenous system of defence mechanism of the villages and the guerrilla and ambush mode of warfare of the people of Arunachal Pradesh. On the other hand, a hill campaign was always difficult due to bad communication to the hills, narrow paths or tracks over precipices, were the only means to reach the hills. In such inhospitable conditions the policy of conciliation was the best choice. The Ahom rulers generally avoided complete subjugation of the tribes. It was very difficult for them to rule over the hill. So they were always cautious in shaping policy towards tribes of the hills. The Ahom policy can be summarized like this: 'Conciliate these tribes by promising to furnish them their necessaries as far as possible. If they indulge in wanton pillages; pursue and capture the miscreants, but never overstep the limits'. Under this policy the Ahom rulers initiated many measures which are described in the following section, in short.

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## SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- State formation is the process of the development of a centralized government structure in a situation where one did not exist prior to its development. 49
- Sukaphaa, is credited with having established the Ahom Kingdom. He was a Tai prince from Mong Mao.

- It started with being a Mong in the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra river, with its base lying in a wet rice cultivation area.
- In the 16th century, there was sudden expansion of the kingdom under Suhungmung. At this point its character changed and it turned multi-ethnic.
- In 1228 the kingdom of Ahom got established with the coming of Chao Lung Siu- Ka-Pha, the 1st Ahom king, from Mong Mao (now part of Peoples Republic of China), who traversed the Patkai mountain range and reached the valley of Brahmaputra.
- He brought took under his occupation the area on the river's south bank, the Patkai mountains in the east, the Dikhau river in the south and the Burhi Dihing river in the north.
- He set up his capital in Charaideo and set up offices of the Dangaria— Borgohain and Burhagohain.
- Persons ready to fit in with the Ahom polity and lifestyle were welcomed into the fold and this process is referred to as Ahomization.
- The Ahom government adopted a policy of conciliation, as well as a policy of force towards various tribes of the north east.
- The Ahoms did not interfere too much in the affairs of the hills. Rather, they conciliated with the tribes by providing them many types of facilities and privileges.
- The Ahoms were more or less successful in their dealings with the tribes of the hills and were able to control the tribes in the confines of the hills of Arunachal Pradesh, except the trade missions, in which they could enter beyond the foothills.
- The Ahoms also applied force against the tribes, whenever the situation demanded.
- With rapid expansion and addition of large territories to the kingdom, the pace at which Ahomization was occurring was not good enough and in their own kingdom, the Ahoms had become a minority. This caused the kingdom's character to change. It turned inclusive and multi-ethnic.
- Marangikowa Gohain and Sadiakhowa Gohain were two special offices, set up for overseeing those territories, which had been taken from the Kachari and Sutiya kingdoms, respectively.
- The Paik system was employed to organize the kingdom's subjects which formed the militia.

#### Check Your Progress

5. Under which ruler did the Ahom kingdom start declining?
6. Who abolished human sacrifice in the Sadiya's *Kechaikhati* temple?
7. The Assamese were good at guerrilla warfare. (True/False)

- The features that are seen in the mature Ahom kingdom were adopted during the period of Pratap Singha.
- There was the reorganizing of the Paik system under the *khel* system which was more professional, and it replaced the *phoid* system which was kinship based.
- Both Borphukan and Borbarua got set up as also some more small offices.
- The kingdom of Ahom was under the rule of a king who was known as *Swargadeo* (*Chao-Pha* in the Ahom language). The king had to be from the line of Sukaphaa, the first Ahom king. Generally, succession was based on primogeniture, though on the occasion, it was possible for the great Gohains (*Dangaria*) to elect another descendant of Sukaphaa from a different line or even enthroned or depose one.
- Sukaphaa had two great Gohains to aid him in administration: Burhagohain and the Borgohain.
- During his reign, Pratap Singha introduced two offices to be directly under the king. These offices were Borphukan and Borbarua.
- Patra Mantris was the council of ministers that comprised five positions.
- Judicial and well as military responsibilities rested with both the Borphukan and Borbarua, and both got help from two separate councils (*sora*) of *Phukans*.
- There were twenty or so Baruas, some of these were:
  - o Sonadar Barua: Chief jeweler and mint master
  - o Khanikar Barua: Chief artificer
  - o Hati Barua: In charge of elephants
  - o Ghora Barua: In charge of horses
  - o Duliya Barua: Royal palanquins' in charge
  - o Chaudang Barua: Executions' superintendent
  - o Bhandari Barua: Treasurer
  - o Bez Barua: Royal family physician
- Some other officers were 12 Rajkhowas, various Katakis, Kakatis and Dolais.
- Those of the royal families held rule over certain territories and were addressed as Raja.
- Royal families' members who had lower positions got regions known as *mels* and were addressed as *melkhowa raja* or *meldangia*.
- Princes who were even lower were *Meldangia gohains* and were *Sarumelia gohain* and *Majumelia gohain*.
- Individual *mels* were provided to the royal ladies.
- The forward territories were administered and ruled by forward governors, who also were military commanders. Such offices were given to members of families that were eligible to being the three great Gohains.
- Vassals or dependent kings were addressed as *Raja*.
- The Ahom kingdom had huge dependence on the Paik system which was just a corvee labor form.
- Gadadhar Singha made himself fully acquainted with the Mughal's system of land measurement and had it introduced all across the kingdom.
- It has been opined that the Dimasa's initial state formation took place at the region of Sadiya.

## NOTES

## NOTES

- The Moamoria rebellion occurred from 1769 to 1806. The conflict occurred in the 18th century between the Ahom kings and Morans who were the adherents of the Moamara Sattrā. It caused general and extensive disgruntlement amongst the populace against the Ahom king and the nobles. It spanned two periods during which the Ahom kings were bereft of all control over the capital of their kingdom.
- The Ahom capital was occupied by the rebels on 21 November, 1769. Naharkhora's Ramananda was put on the throne. Lakshmi Singha, the defeated Ahom king, was captured and imprisoned. The defeated king's high officers were executed.
- There was lack of experience amongst the rebels as far as statecraft was concerned. Due to this missing ingredient, they were unable to bring any kind of new order and in a bid to imitate them, they ended up doing just the same as their erstwhile leaders.
- Sukaphaa is said to have established the Ahom kingdom.
- Moamoria rebellion rebels stole away the power of the Ahoms.
- 1769 to 1806 was the period of the Moamoria rebellion. It was the conflict that occurred in the 18th century between the Ahom kings and Morans who were the adherents of the Moamara Sattrā. The rebellion destroyed approximately a half of the population and played havoc with the economy of the kingdom. Thus weakened, the Ahom kingdom became an easy target for invasion and the Burmese invasion followed.
- Crisis had been brewing in the Ahom Kingdom as the basis of the state, the Paik system was not flexible enough to change and adapt to the changes in society and economy.
- The leakage of manpower from the Paik system was caused in one way by the rise of the sattrā which came in conflict with the Ahom kingdom.
- In the sixteenth century the Mahapuruxiya Dharma was established by Srimanta Sankardeva. It made available such opportunities to the common tribesmen, which would help them to better them economically and socially. Also, the sattras made available to them a safe escape from the mandatory labor they had to perform under the system of Paik.
- The Moamaria Rebellion occurred in two phases.
- The decline of the Ahom Kingdom started with the rule of Gaurinath Singha (1780-95). When he was attacked and Rangpur was taken over Gaurinath Singha along with his entire family sailed off to Nagaon, then further to Gauhati.
- Gaurinath Singha sought help from the East India Company through Raush, a salt merchant and Mr. Dauglas, Commissioner of Koch Bihar for both materials and troops. The Governor General, Lord Cornwallis, responded by sending Captain Thomas Welsh with a troop of trained and armed sepoy.

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## KEY TERMS

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- **Posa:** It is a system that allows you to pay for only what you sell.
- **Moamoria rebellion:** The 18th century conflict between the Morans, adherents of the Moamara Sattrā, and the Ahom kings
- **Borbarua:** One of the five patra mantris (councilors) in the Ahom kingdom, a position created by the Ahom king Pratap Singha.
- **Rebel:** A person who rises in armed resistance against an established government or ruler.

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## ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

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1. The Ahom rulers had advanced war weapons (matchlocks and guns), large surplus production and the *paiks* to aggressively pursue their imperial policy.
2. The Ahom policy can be summarized like this: 'Conciliate these tribes by promising to furnish them their necessaries as far as possible. If they indulge in wanton pillages; pursue and capture the miscreants, but never overstep the limits'.
3. In general, the term *posa* came to be applied to all payments made to the tribes of the hills by the Governments; whether it was in commutation of blackmail, compensation for customary demands of the tribal chiefs of the bordering hills of Arunachal Pradesh.
4. Fill in the blank
  - (a) 1228, 1826
  - (b) Sukaphaa
  - (c) wet rice cultivation
  - (d) Borgohain, Burhagohain
  - (e) 1769 to 1806
  - (f) Mahapuruxiya Dharma
  - (g) Subinphaa was the third Ahom king.
5. Under Gaurinath Singha's reign the Ahom kingdom started its decline.
6. Gaurinath Singha abolished human sacrifice.
7. True

## NOTES

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## QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short-Answer Questions

1. Who was the founder of the Ahom kingdom?
2. What do you understand by *posa*?
3. What acts reflect the policy of friendly relation of Ahom rulers with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh?
4. What measures were used to stop the Nyishi raids into the Ahom territory?
5. Write a short note on the relationship of the Mughals and the Ahom kingdom.
6. Why was Captain Welsh able to gain such success in his mission in Assam?
7. What were the causes of the Moamaria Rebellion?

### Long-Answer Questions

1. Explain the policy of conciliation of the Ahom rulers.
2. Write a note on the relations between the Akas and the Ahoms.
3. Write a short note on the relations between the Ahoms and the Nyishis.
4. Summarize the highlights of the relations between the Ahoms and the tribals.
5. What were the reasons for the decline of the Ahom kingdom?





Write in detail the frontier policy of the Ahom kings.

6. Describe the Moamaria Rebellion.
7. Discuss Captain Welsh's Mission.
8. Describe the events that led to deploying Captain Welsh's Mission.

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## **FURTHER READING**

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## UNIT IV MEDIEVAL NORTH EAST INDIA

### – II

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#### Structure

Introduction  
Unit Objectives  
Decline and Fall of the Ahom Kingdom  
Ahom Administration  
Moamaria Rebellion and Captain Welsh's Mission  
Summary  
Key Terms  
Answers to 'Check Your Progress'  
Questions and Exercises  
Further Reading

### INTRODUCTION

The Ahoms are the descendants of the Tai race, who had accompanied the Tai prince Sukapha into the Brahmaputra valley in 1228 and ruled the area for six centuries. Sukapha and his followers established the Ahom kingdom (1228–1826) and the Ahom dynasty ruled and expanded the kingdom till the British gained control of the region through the Treaty of Yandabo upon winning the First Anglo-Burmese War in 1826. The Tibeto-Burman locals near the Ahoms gave them the name 'Ahom'.

The Ahoms mostly had cordial relations with every tribe of the region, except with the Jaintias who kept defying them. Even though the Kacharis were defiant, they were not much of a trouble for the Ahoms. The overall Ahom policy towards their neighbours was based on four well-known principles of the Indian political philosophy, viz., *Sama-dana-danda-bheda*, i.e., establishment of relations of equal status, establishment of subservient suzerainty, by awarding punishments and driving wedges between neighbours.

The Moamaria rebellion during the 18th century was a conflict between the Morans, adherents of the Moamara Sattrā, and Ahom kings. Gaurinath Singha, the Ahom king, appealed for help of men and materials to the East India Company. In response to this, Lord Cornwallis, the Governor General despatched Captain Thomas Welsh with sepoy to help Gaurinath.

This unit will discuss the rise and fall of the Ahom kingdom. It will also discuss the Moamaria rebellion in the 18th century and how the British helped the Ahom ruler to fight the rebels.

### UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the causes and the outcome of the Moamaria rebellion
- Describe the phases of Moamaria rebellion from 1769 to 1806

Interpret the reason behind Captain Welsh's mission.

*Self-Instructional*

## **Decline and Fall of the Ahom Kingdom**

The Kingdom began to decline from the time of Gaurinath Singha (1780-95). In 1782, the Moamarias insurrection rose again with renewed vigour and increased violence. They advanced to Garhgaon and created panic among the people. The advance was halted and the rebels were treated with severity and many were executed. Such a step aggravated the situation. After a brief pause, the disturbances caused by the Moamarias

### **Check Your Progress**

1. What kind of weapons did the Ahom rulers have?
2. How can we summarize the Ahom policy?
3. How was the term, *posa* generally applied?

## NOTES

swept down across the north bank. After defeating the royalists, the Moamarias advanced towards the capital. Assistance was sought from Manipur, Kachari, Jaintia and the chiefs of Rani, Beltola, Luki. Before the help arrived, the rebels occupied Rangpur. Gaurinath Singha with the members of his family sailed downstream, and reached Nagaon and then Gauhati. At Rangpur, the Moamarias set up Bharath Singha as king; but the Hatisungi Morans set up Sarbananda as the king of the territory to the east of Dihing and both minted coins in their names. Krishnanarayan of Darrang had also organized a large force and occupied North Gauhati. Purnananda Buragohain shifted the centre of administration of Dichoi, later known as Jorhat, which became the new Ahom capital. Under the circumstances, Gaurinath Singha appealed for help of men and materials to the East India Company's authorities through Raush, a salt merchant and Mr. Douglas, Commissioner of Koch Bihar. In response to this, Lord Cornwallis, the Governor General dispatched Captain Thomas Welsh with sepoy who arrived at Goalpara in early November, 1792; and from there, on receiving urgent message from the king moved upstream of the Brahmaputra. The meeting between the king and Captain Welsh took place at Nagarberra on the Brahmaputra. Advancing further, Captain Welsh suppressed the rebellious elements at Gauhati and on the north bank. He also pacified Krishnanarayan, the rebellious prince at Darrang and expelled many of the Burkendazes who assisted him. Sometime later he advanced to Jorhat and then to Rangpur where he defeated the Moamarias, and restored the authority of Gaurinath Singha at Rangpur in 1794.

In the midst of this success, Capt. Welsh was recalled by Sir John Shore, the new Governor General and he left Assam. During his stay in the kingdom, he concluded a commercial treaty in 1793 by which commerce between Assam and Bengal was sought to be put on 'reciprocal basis'. The Report of Capt. Welsh which he submitted to his government in response to certain queries gives certain important information in regard to the system of Ahom government, trade and commerce, products, etc. Although Gaurinath Singha is depicted by some as cruel and vindictive, he had certain pieces of good work like the abolition of human sacrifice at the Kechaikhati temple at Sadiya. Kamaleswar Singha's reign (1795-1810) witnessed localized revolts at several places in Kamrup which was successfully suppressed, at Sadiya by the Khamtis, Pani Noras, Miris and others, fresh Moamaria insurrection in league with the Daflas. In spite of these, he connected the new capital Jorhat by constructing several new roads like the Na-ali, the Rajabhar Ali, the Mohabandha Ali, the Kamarbandha Ali, etc. and also built a copper-house at Kamakhya.

The reign of Chandra Kanta Singha (1810-18) saw the Burmese invasion. Friction between Purnananda Buragohain and Badan Chandra Barphukan and a conspiracy by Satram to overthrow the former led the latter to go to the Burmese capital Amarapura where he pleaded for assistance against the Buragohain. Bodoupaya, who had already had his eyes on Assam, seized the opportunity to send an army of about sixteen thousand men with Badan Chandra to Assam. The Burmese army after defeating the Assamese army at several engagements arrived at Jorhat. Chandra Kanta Singha was retained as king, and Badan Chandra assumed power as minister. The Burmese then retired to their country with a large booty. But soon the assassination of Badan Chandra and installation of Purandar Singha by ousting Chandra Kanta Singha, once again brought the Burmese under the command of Ata Mingi to Assam in 1819. On their advance, Purandar and his prime minister Rudinath fled to Gauhati, and Chandra Kanta Singha was once again restored to the throne despite his mutilation of person caused in the meanwhile. After the departure of the Burmese, Chandra Kanta Singha sought to raise a fort at Jaipur against further Burmese invasion. However, a Burmese force sent by their Monarch

with presents of ornaments and dress to Chandra Kanta Singha seeing such preparations killed Patalong under whose supervision the fort was raised. Thinking this hostile move on the part of the Burmese army, Chandra Kanta fled to Gauhati and did not come back in spite of Burmese assurance. This was in 1821. The Burmese then set up an Ahom prince, Jogeswar Singha. Chandra Kanta Singha crossed the border and entered Bengal where he tried to collect arms and men to fight the Burmese. At the battle of Mahgarh, Chandra Kanta's army was badly defeated, and he once again entered the British territory.

The period from 1821 to 1824 is called period of Burmese rule. During this period, the Burmese devastated the country and committed atrocities by plundering and killing. The Burmese also threatened the Goalpara frontier of Bengal by demanding the surrender of Assamese refugees including Chandra Kanta Singha, and their supporters who often gave trouble across the border. In that time, the border conflict in the East India Company's Chittagong frontier with the Burmese empire took serious turn. Anticipating a threatened invasion of Bengal, the prized possession of the Company in India, Lord Amherst, the Governor General decided to declare war on Myanmar (Burma). War was declared on the 5 March 1824. This is the First Anglo Burmese War which lasted for nearly two years. Immediately after the declaration of war, the British army entered Goalpara frontier of Assam and after defeating the small Burmese garrisons in Lower Assam, it advanced to Upper Assam. By taking advantage of a dissension among the Burmese commanders, the British occupied Rangpur in 1825 and drove the Burmese and their allies, the Singphos out of Assam. A section of the Burmese army surrendered to the British remained in Assam. Immediately on the occupation of Assam by the British, martial law was declared; David Scott was appointed as civil officer in charge of civil matters, and Col. Richards was made in charge of the army and the British started their administration. By Article II of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship, which was concluded between the British and the Burmese at Yandabo on 24 February 1826, the Burmese monarch renounced all claims and promised to refrain from interference with the principality of Assam and its dependencies. As Assam was already occupied by the British during the Anglo-Burmese War, it was kept under British occupation and introduced British administration.

### **Ahom Administration**

The system of government was partly monarchical and partly aristocratic. The king or Swarga Maharaja as he was called, was the supreme head of the state. All honours, titles, offices, decisions and war-measures emanated from the king, but he had to act according to the advice of the five hereditary councilors of state, the Buragohain, the Bargohain, the Barpatra-gohain, the Barbaruah and the Barphukan. The state of Jaintia, Cachar, Khrim and Manipur were in friendly alliance with the Ahom government. The province of Darrang enjoyed complete autonomy in its internal administration, as well as the other vassal states. There were six establishments of princes introduced by Suhummong Dihingia Raja at Charing, Tipam, Tungkhung, Dihing, Samaguri and Namrup. Each of these princes had their own estates and dependents. All of them were entitled Raja and belonged to the royal family which started with Sukapha, the first Ahom king. Subsequently, the title of Charing Raja was reversed for the heir apparent while the title of Tipam Raja and Namrupia Raja were meant for other nearest blood relations of the reigning monarch.

Ambition for the throne nurtured by some of these families without any political and military training became the cause of the downfall of Ahom rule in Assam. The Patra-mantries occupied important position in the political administration and enjoyed

## **NOTES**

## NOTES

enormous powers. The Barphukan governed as viceroy or deputy to the king, in the tract between the Brahmaputra and the Kalang in Nagaon, but after extension of the Ahom kingdom in the westward direction he was put in charge of the country from Kaliabor to Goalpara with his headquarters at Gauhati. He had conducted diplomatic relations with Bengal, Bhutan and chieftains of Assam frontiers. Other local governors such as Sadiya Khowa Gohain, Marangi Khowa Gohain, the Solal Gohain and the Kajali Mukhia Gohain, etc., were appointed for the administration of the outlying areas of the country. Besides, there were other positions recruited from respectable Ahom families for high posts. Among them, the highest rank was of the Phukan, next in rank were the Baruas. There were twelve Rajkhowas, a number of Khatakis and Dolois.

Adult population of Assam was divided into Khels, Khels into Paiks and areas were constituted into Chamuas for revenue administration. It was not the usual practice in Assam to pay the revenue in cash. It was paid through services or paiks, etc. The currency of Assam consisted of gold and silver coins. The liberal and practical outlook shaped the religion of the Ahom monarchs. The image of 'Chom-Cheng' which Sukapha had brought with him from his ancestral home was the tutelary deity of the Ahom rulers till the end of their rule. The general success of the Ahoms in their dealings with the hill tribes was admitted by the Mughal chronicler Shihabuddin Talish who accompanied Mir-Jumla's expedition in 1662-63 AD. He wrote- 'Although most of the inhabitants of the neighbouring hills pay no tax to the Rajah of Assam yet they accept his sovereignty and obey some of his commands.' Regarding the military system of the Ahoms, Ram Singh, the Mughal general had to admit that every Assamese soldier was an expert in rowing boats, in shooting arrows, in digging trenches and cannons and that he had not seen such specimen of versatility in any other part of India. This proves that the organization of army under the Ahom rulers was efficient and effective. Law and justice was in action during the Ahom reign. The criminal law was characterized by sternness and comparative harshness. The penalty for rebellion was various forms of capital punishment.

In 1228, the kingdom of Ahom got established with the coming of Chao Lung Siu-Ka-Pha, the first Ahom king, from Mong Mao (now part of Peoples Republic of China). He traversed the Patkai mountain range and reached the valley of the Brahmaputra. It appears that Sukapha faced no challenge or had not required to battle with an existing kingdom. He brought under his occupation, the area on the river's south bank, east had the Patkai Mountains, south, the Dikhau River and north, the Burhi Dihing River. Local groups like those of the Marans and Barahi were befriended by him. He set up his capital in Charaideo and set up offices of the Dangaria—Borgohain and Burhagohain. Both the offices got their separate regions of control in 1280s and what check and balance each of the three would have on the others was also clearly laid down. Wet rice cultivation technology was introduced to the people of this region by the Ahoms. Persons ready to fit in with the Ahom polity and life style were welcomed into the fold and this process is referred to as Ahomization. Due to Ahomization, to take an example, the Barahi people became totally subsumed while groups such as Maran and Nagas became Ahoms this significantly raised the number of Ahom. Right up to the 16th century, the Ahomization process remained highly significant as in this period led by Suhungmung the Ahom kingdom was hugely expanding in territory, taking in regions at the cost of the Kachari and the Sutiya kingdoms.

With the rapid expansion adding large territories to the kingdom, the pace at which Ahomization was occurring was not good enough and in their own kingdom, the Ahoms became a minority. This caused the kingdom's character to change. It turned inclusive and multi-ethnic. The influences of the Hindus which had first been felt at the close of

the 14th century under Bamuni Konwar, now took on a significant form. The Assamese language entered the Ahom court and was used alongside the Tai language for a while during the 17th century. Then the Tai language was replaced by Assamese. With the state expanding rapidly, the Borpatrogohain which was a new high office was installed. It was at par with the two high offices installed previously. The two previous offices did have objection to the new one. Marangikowa Gohain and Sadiakhowa Gohain were two special offices, set up for overseeing those territories which had been taken from the Kachari and Sutiya kingdoms, respectively. Paik system was employed to organize the kingdom's subjects which formed the militia.

Bengal's Afghan and Turkic rulers attacked the Ahom kingdom but with no success. There was also an occasion when under Ton-Kham Borgohain the invaders were pursued by the Ahoms and they went as far as the Karatoya river, and post this the Ahoms looked upon themselves as being the rightful heir of the erstwhile Kamarupa Kingdom.

The features that are seen in the mature Ahom kingdom were adopted during the period of Pratap Singha. Let us look at some of the changes.

There was the reorganizing of the Paik system under the *khel* system which was more professional, and it replaced the *phoid* system which was kinship based. Both Borphukan and Borbarua got set up as also some more small offices. Then on, no other restructuring of a major kind of the state structure took place.

The 17th century saw repeated attacks from the Mughals on the Ahom kingdom. Garhgaon, the Ahom capital, was even occupied by Mughals in 1662, under the leadership of Mir Jumla but were not able to hold on to it. When the Battle of Saraighat came to a close, the Ahoms had come out victorious from the invasion of the Mughals and also managed to further the kingdom's boundary in the west right up to the river Manas. Post a short period that was fraught with confusion, the kingdom got itself the last set of kings, the Tungkhungia kings, established by Gadadhar Singha.

Paik system was the basis of the Ahom kingdom. It is a type of corvee labour, not Asiatic or feudal. In upper Assam, Ahoms started wet rice cultivation. This region had low population density and was mostly marshy. The superior rice cultivation technology and land reclamation by employing irrigation systems, embankments and dykes, the very initial state structure was established by the Ahoms. In the sixteenth century, Suklenmung introduced the first coins. The personal service system that was rampant under the Paik system kept continuing. It was in the 17th century that expansion of the Ahom kingdom led to the inclusion of the erstwhile Mughal and Koch areas, and with this contact the Ahoms were influenced by their revenue systems and adapted accordingly.

## 1. The King (Swargadeo)

The kingdom of Ahom was under the rule of a king who was known as *Swargadeo* (*Chao-Pha* in Ahom language). The king had to be from the line of Sukaphaa, the first Ahom king. Generally, succession was based on primogeniture, though on occasion it was possible for the great Gohains (*Dangaria*) to elect another descendant of Sukaphaa from a different line or even enthroned or depose one.

## 2. Dangaria

For support in administration, Sukaphaa had two great Gohains: Borgohain and Burhagohain. They both had independent territories in the period of the 1280s, and were made veritable sovereigns in these territories called *bilat* or *rajya*. Borgohain's territory lay to the west up to the Burai River while that of Burhagohain lay between Sadiya and

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Gerelua River on the north bank of the Brahmaputra River. Both had complete command over the *paiks* that they controlled. Generally, people from specific families were put on these two administrative positions. The Princes considered to be eligible for becoming Swargadeo would not be in the running for either of these positions and it was also true vice versa. Suhungmung, in the 16th century, had another Gohain created and named Borpatrogohain. The territory of the Borpatrogohain' lay in the middle of the other two Gohains.

### 3. Royal officers

During his reign, Pratap Singha introduced two offices to be under the king directly. These offices were Borphukan and Borbarua. Borbarua was both the judicial and military head and was in command of the territory lying to the east of Kaliabor which was not commandeered by the *Dangaria*. Unlike the Dangariyas, the Borbarua was allowed to utilize for personal use only that section of the *paiks* which was under his command while the remaining were at the service of the state of Ahom. The civil and military command over the territory to the west of Kaliabor lay with the Borphukan who also held the position of viceroy of *Swargadeo* in the west.

### 4. Patra mantris

The council of ministers or *patra mantris* comprised five positions. Since Supimphaa's time (1492–1497), one *patra mantri* was made the prime minister or *Rajmantri* and was given additional powers as well as 1000 additional *paiks* of the Jakaichuk village were placed at his service.

### 5. Other officials

Judicial as well as military responsibilities rested with both the Borphukan and Borbarua, and both got help from two separate councils (*sora*) of *Phukans*. While Gauhati was the seat of the Borphukan's *sora*, the capital was where the Borbarua's *sora* sat. *Baruas* was the name given to superintending officers. The highest amongst the officers was of the *Phukans*. All together, 6 *Phukans*, each holding a specific responsibility, comprised the council of the Borbarua. The Neog Phukan, Deka Phukan, Dihingia Phukan, Na Phukan, Bhitara Phukan and the Naubaicha Phukan who was allotted 1000 and took care of the royal boats, all together comprised the council of *Phukan*. Similarly, even for the Borphukan there existed a council of six subordinate *Phukans* whom he was obligated to consult regarding every important issue. In this council were two *Sutiya Phukans*, *Nek Phukan*, the *Dihingia Phukan*, *Deka Phukan* commandeering 4000 *paiks* and *Pani Phukan* commandeering 6000 *paiks*.

There were twenty or so *Baruas*. Some of these were:

- Sonadar Barua: Chief jeweler and mint master
- Khanikar Barua: Chief artificer
- Hati Barua: In charge of elephants
- Ghora Barua: In charge of horses
- Duliya Barua: Royal palanquins' in charge
- Chaudang Barua: Executions' superintendent
- Bhandari Barua: Treasurer
- Bez Barua: Royal family physician



Some other officers were 12 Rajkhowas, various Katakis, Kakatis and Dolais. A Rajkhowa was a territory's governor as well as commanded 3000 *paiks*. A Rajkhowa was a public works supervisor as also an arbitrator for local disputes. A Katakis was an envoy dealing with hill tribes and foreign nations. Kakatis wrote documents that were official while the Dolais were expounders of astrology who also ascertained the most auspicious time and date for important tasks.

## 6. Governors

Those of the royal families held rule over certain territories and were addressed as *Raja*.

- *Charing Raja*, *Swargadeo*'s heir apparent, administered the tracts around Joypur on the right bank of river Burhidihing
- *Tipam Raja* is the second in line
- *Namrup Raja* is the third in line

Royal family members who had lower positions got regions known as *mels*, and were addressed as *melkhowa raja* or *meldangia*. Princes who were even lower were *Meldangia gohains* and these numbered two *Sarumelia gohain* and *Majumelia gohain*.

Individual *mels* were provided to the royal ladies. There were 12 such allotments at the time of Rajeshwar Singha. Of the highest importance was the one provided to the chief queen and was known as the *Raidangia mel*.

The forward territories were administered and ruled by forward governors who also were military commanders. Such offices were given to members of families which had the eligibility for being the three great Gohains.

- *Jagiyal Gohain* served under Borbarua, administered Jagi at Nagoan and maintained relations with seven tribal chiefs, called *Sat Raja*.
- *Kajalimukhiya Gohain* served under the Borphukan, administered Kajalimukh and maintained relations with Jaintia and Dimarua.
- *Marangi khowa Gohain* administered the regions that were contiguous to the Naga groups west of the Dhansiri river.
- *Sadiya Khowa Gohain* based in Sadiya, administered the regions that were acquired after the conquest of the Sutiya kingdom in 1523.
- *Solal Gohain* administered a great part of Nagaon and a portion of Chariduar after the headquarters of the Borphukan was transferred to Gauhati.

Rajkhowas were lesser governors. Some Rajkhowas were:

- o Abhaypur
- o Bacha
- o Darrang
- o Solaguri

Vassals or dependent kings were addressed as *Raja*. Each of these Rajas gave an annual tribute with the exception of the Raja of Rani. It was required of these Rajas to provide paiks and resources as and when required, for example at war time.

- Barduar
- Beltola ruled the tracts southwest of Gauhati, and were the descendants of Gaj Narayan, a grandson of Chilarai of the Koch dynasty

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- Darrang Raja ruled over later-day Darrang district, and were the descendants of Sundar Narayan, a great-grandson of Chilarai of the Koch dynasty
- Dimarua
- Luki
- Rani
- Tapakuchi

### 7. Paik officials

The Ahom kingdom had huge dependence on the Paik system which was just a corvee labour form. All common subjects fell in the category of *paik*. A group of four *paiks* was referred to as a *got*. All through the year one paika was in the king's direct service while the remaining three paikas would take care of his fields besides their own. This Paik system was under the administration of Paik officials.

- Bora had 20 *paiks* under his charge
- Saikia had 100 *paiks* under his charge
- Hazarika had 1000 *paiks* under his charge

### Land survey

While hiding in Kamrup prior to his ascent to the throne, Gadadhar Singha made himself fully acquainted with the Mughal's system of land measurement. Immediately after the end of the war with the Mughals, Gadadhar passed orders to have a system on the same lines introduced all across the kingdom. They had surveyors brought in from Bengal and Koch Behar for implementation of the system. The first implementation happened in Sibsagar from where it was moved quickly. Despite all the speedy work, the survey got completed only after the death of Gadadhar. The survey of Nowgaon was conducted next and the following settlement was done under the personal supervision of Rudra Singha.

It is said that the method of survey included:

measuring the four sides of each field with a *nal*, or bamboo pole of 12 feet (3.7 m) length and calculating the area, the unit was the 'lucha' or 144 square feet (13.4 m<sup>2</sup>) and 14,400 sq ft (1,340 m<sup>2</sup>) is one 'bigha'. Four 'bighas' makes one 'pura'.

Even today in Assam, a similar system of land measurement is followed.

### Satgharia Ahom Aristocracy

The third Ahom king was Subinphaa (1281–1293). He is responsible for clearly defining *Satgharia Ahom* aristocracy or the Ahom of the seven houses. These are the families or *Gohains* of the *Chaophaa*, *Burhagohain* and *Borgohain*. He also had specified the 4 priestly lineages—*Deodhai*, *Mohan*, *Bailung* and *Chiring* (the *Gogois*). There existed marital relationships of an exogamous form in these lines. In the later period, there was an increase in the number of lineages probably because of incorporation of other lineages or because of division of the existing ones. While the king had to be from the first family, the *Borgohain* and *Burhagohain* came from the third and second families. *Borphukans*, came from the *Sutiya* ethnic group and the *Borbaruas* belonged to the *Khamti Chiring Kachari* and *Moran* groups. At a future date, to the *Bailung* group were also added the *Mising*, *Naga* and *Nara* (*Mogaung*) oracles. The composition of the extended nobility was the non-taxpaying spiritual class and landed aristocracy.

The gentry freed from the *khels* was known as *apaikan chamua* and it paid tax in the form of money. The *paikan chamua* comprised literati, artisans, and other skilled persons who performed non-manual work and paid their taxes in the form of their service. Manual labour was performed by the *kanri paik*. At the lowest rung stood *bandi-beti*, *licchous* and other serfs and bondsmen. Some amount of inter class movement was allowed. This is evident from the fact that from the rung of bondsman Momai Tamuli Borbarua climbed up the ranks and under Pratap Singha he was made the first Borbarua.

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### MOAMARIA REBELLION AND CAPTAIN WELSH'S MISSION

The Moamaria rebellion occurred from 1769 to 1806. The conflict occurred in the 18th century between the Ahom kings and Morans who were the adherents of the Moamara Sattras. It caused general and extensive disgruntlement amongst the populace against the Ahom king and the nobles. It spanned two periods during which the Ahom kings were bereft of all control over the capital of their kingdom. When they managed to take back their capital, there was nothing but widespread slaughter of the subjects because of which huge areas were bereft of population. It had not been possible to get back the entire kingdom for the Ahom king. Bengmara which was part of the north-east region of the kingdom gained virtual independence from Ahom rule.

The rebellion had greatly weakened the kingdom of the Ahoms. It destroyed approximately half of the population and played havoc with the economy of the kingdom. Thus weakened, the Ahom kingdom became an easy target for invasion and the Burmese invasion followed. The next devastation was the colonization of the region by the British.

Crisis had been brewing in the Ahom Kingdom as the basis of the state, the Paik system was not flexible enough to change and adapt to the changes in society and economy. The leakage of manpower from the Paik system was caused in one way by the rise of the sattras. This led to tension and conflict between the Ahom kingdom and the sattras. The Moamara sattras which had Moran tribes' people as adherents followed the non-conformist Kala-samhati sect that competed against the royalist sattras belonging to other sects. As this sattras grew, the Ahom kingdom also grew more and more uncomfortable. To try to suppress them, the Ahom kingdom resorted to their repression and to insulting the sattras' followers.

As time went by, the guru of the Moamaria compromised with the Ahom rulers. Inspiration was gained by the rebels from the magico-religious cult of night worshippers, which was a mix of Tantricism and tribal fertility rites.

#### Sattras–Ahom conflict

In the sixteenth century, the Mahapuruxiya Dharma was established by Srimanta Sankardeva. This was a religion which was proselytizing and was one which opened itself to everyone, even the tribesmen and the Muslims. It was a religion which made available such opportunities to the common tribesmen that would help to better them economically and socially. Also, the sattras made available to them a safe escape from the mandatory labour they had to perform under the system of Paik.

The new religion propounded by Sankardeva appeared like a huge threat to the Ahom rulers. When Suklenmung was on the throne, to escape persecution Sankardeva ran off to the Koch kingdom. Pratap Singha, destroyed both the Kuruabahi and the

#### Check Your Progress

4. Fill in the blanks:

(a) The Ahom kingdom existed from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.

(b) \_\_\_\_\_ established the Ahom Kingdom.

(c) Ahoms cultivated \_\_\_\_\_ in the marshy and less populated regions.

(d) \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ were the two great Gohains and Sukaphaa.

(e) The Moamaria rebellion occurred from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.

(f) In the sixteenth century Srimanta Sankardeva established the \_\_\_\_\_.

(g) Who was the third Ahom king?

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Kalabari sattras setting precedence for his successors who carried on a similar oppressive policy. This policy of oppression was changed by Jayadhwaj Singha and the rulers who succeeded him, till Sulikphaa Lora Roja made attempts to accept and live with the sattras. When Gadadhar Singha ascended the throne, he reversed the policy again. He started the persecution of the sattras. Rudra Singha, the son of Gadadhar Singha, made attempts to isolate those who were more of a threat to the Ahom kingdom, these would be the ones who were more liberal and were of the non-Brahmin sattras. He put in all efforts to promote the Brahmin sattras. When the failure of his policy became evident to him, he changed course and began to provide saktism with state support. Saktism was the historical and theological *bete noire* of the Mahapuruxiya dharma. He was sure that this policy would curb the influence of the sattras. His new policy caused much greater persecutions. The one which is of greatest significance is the one that occurred in the time of Siba Singha under Bor Roja Phuleshwari Kunwonri. The conflict remained unresolved and came to the front finally in the form of the 18th century Moamoria rebellion which made the Ahom kingdom weak and hollow to such an extent that with the coming of the 19th century it collapsed.

### The First Phase

Ahom officials flogged a sattra's leading disciple, Ragh Neog, on 15 September 1769. The reason for the flogging was that he had not made available the number of elephants that were required. Ragh Neog, Naharkhora Saikia and his two wives Radha and Rukmini led the Morans, assured the three Ahom princes, the king's (Lakshmi Singha's) brother Mohanmala, and two nephews of the king, that they would help to liberate the area lying to the north of river Burhidihing. And this they did. The Ahom capital was occupied by the rebels on 21st November 1769. Naharkhora's Ramananda was put on the throne. Lakshmi Singha, the defeated Ahom king, was captured and imprisoned. The defeated king's high officers were executed. Three of the common Morans were made the three great Gohains. Two common Ahoms were made the Gohains at Marangi and Sadiya, a *kanri paik* was made the Borphukan and Ragh Neog became the Borbarua.

There was lack of experience amongst the rebels as far as statecraft was concerned. Due to this missing ingredient, they were unable to bring any kind of new order and in a bid to imitate them, they ended up doing just the same as their erstwhile leaders. Many daughters and wives of noblemen were seized by Ragh Neog and added to his harem. Many of the new rebel officers started imitating and behaving just like the old nobility had done and this caused dissatisfaction to the other rebels. These rebels, under the leadership of Govinda Gaoburha, moved from the capital and entered Sagunmuri. This situation was seized by a few persons of the old nobility who lost no time in putting Ragh to death and took back their capital. This they achieved on 11 April 1770, aided by Kuranganayani who was an Ahom queen from Manipur. The following purge led to the execution of, amongst others, the Moamara sattradhikar and his son Saptabhuj, Rukmini, Radha, Astabhujdev, Naharkhora and Ramananda the rebel king.

Once the Ahoms had managed to recapture their capital, the rebels under the leadership of Govinda Gaoburha in Sagunmuri made an attempt to again dethrone the king. Even this attempt and movement were characteristic of a popular uprising. Weapons that the rebels mostly employed were clubs and bamboo staffs. The slogan that they chanted was *praja-oi joroiroa, chekani-oi sopai dhora* ('Ye oppressed subjects, hold your stave close'). The uprising under Govinda Gaoburha's leadership is referred to as *chekani kubua ron* ('The war of the slaves'). During the course of one such engagement, the Dhekial Phukan and the Borpatrogohain lost their lives while the

Borghain had a narrow escape. Marching towards Rangpur, the rebels met forces at Thowra. The forces comprised fighters of the Burhagohain, the new Borpatrogohain, the Borgohain and a detachment cavalry sent by the king of Manipur. The rebels faced a defeat in this encounter. Their leader Govinda Gaoburha was taken captive and put to death.

Several rebels went into the deep forests and from there, with leadership from men like Lephera, Parmananda and others carried engaged in guerilla warfare. At the very start under the leadership of the Deka-Phukan and the Na-Phukan a royalist force tried to further the cause but met with defeat. A while later, another force under the leadership of the Borpatrogohain managed to get rid of Parmananda and Lephera. Then on, the Burhagohain followed a systematic obliteration of villages as also the leaders who remained. In a seize, starvation led to the death of many rebels along with their families. Those who survived were separated and settled at different places. Finally, Nomal, probably the last holdout, was captured and executed. With this, Moamoria rebellion's first phase came to a close.

### The Second Phase

Rebels who were armed attacked Garhgaon and Rangpur in April 1783. Though the rebels were driven away, what followed was a month-and-a-half-long continuous slaughter of Morans.

An army of Dafla-Bahatias and Moamarias was raised by Harihar Tanti in the year 1786. Auniati sattrah had kept a grandson of the late Moamara sattradhikar, Pitambar, in his custody. Pitambar was freed by a contingent of the rebels. In 1788, on 19 January, Rangpur was surrounded by rebels. King Gaurinath Singha as well as the inhabitants of the capital fled. This region which was captured began to be administered locally. Brahmaputra's north bank was administered by Harihar Tanti, Majuli was under Howha and the Moran tracts from Bengmara (present-day Tinsukia) were under Sarbananda. The position of King was given to Bharat. Regular striking of coins was done in the names of Sarbananda and Bharat. The regrouping attempt made by Purnananda Burhagohain failed and he established himself in Jorhat, the vanguard of the royalist forces. Darrang is where the Ahom nobles set up camp while Nagaon was where the king stayed. The king met with dissensions due to which on 11 June 1792, he moved to Gauhati.

About 1792, counter attacks started when an attack made by the Manipuri king was warded off by Bharat. In the same year, the East India Company sent 550 fully armed well-trained troops along with Thomas Welsh to help the Ahoms. On 24 November 1792, facing no resistance they captured Gauhati. Next, on 18 March 1794, they gave Rangpur to Gaurinath Singha. Thomas Welsh was awarded prize money and on 25 May, 1794 he returned to Bengal. In 1794 itself, Gaurinath Singha passed away in Jorhat. Kamaleswar Singha succeeded him. The suffering of the rebels did not abate under his rule and they suffered further reverses. The experience that they had with the troops of Thomas Welsh and their military display inspired the Ahoms to do away with the *paik*-based militia and establish for themselves a standing army comprising mostly paid Hindustani sepoy.

The fate of the rebels was not too good. In 1796, the rebel Phopai was killed, rebel king Bharat was killed in 1799 while 1800 Sadiya fell to the royalists. In spite of many attempts through 1802 and 1806, Sarbananda held out from Bengmara. Finally, the title of Barsenapati was conferred on him and he was given the territory of Matak.

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So, Moamaria rebellion came to an end managing to nearly finish the Paik system as also create a near-independent Matak tract under the rule of Barsenapati.

The decline of the Ahom kingdom started with the rule of Gaurinath Singha (1780–95). The rebellion of the Moamarias began again in 1782, this time more violent and more vigorous. The rebels marched to Garhgaon, creating panic among the people. The rebels' advance was arrested, with the rebels being severely put down and a large number of them were executed. This just worsened the situation and after giving it a little time, the Moamarias created disturbances across the north bank. The royalists were defeated by the Moamarias and post this victory they headed towards the capital.

The king looked towards Manipur, Kachari, Jaintia and the chiefs of Rani, Beltola, and Luki for help. Before assistance could arrive Rangpur was taken over by the rebels and Gaurinath Singha along with his entire family sailed off to Nagaon, then further to Gauhati. In Rangpur, Bharath Singha was made the king by the Moamarias. Meanwhile, Hatisungi Morans made Sarbananda the king of the region lying east of Dihing. Coins were struck in the names of both the kings. North Gauhati too had been occupied, by Krishnanarayan of Darrang who had done so with the help of a large force.

The administrative centre of Dichoi (Jorhat) was moved by Purnananda Buragohain and at a later stage it was made the new capital of the Ahoms.

This was when an appeal was made by Gaurinath Singha seeking help from the East India Company through Raush, a salt merchant and Dauglas, Commissioner of Koch Bihar for both materials and troops. The Governor General, Lord Cornwallis, responded by sending Captain Thomas Welsh with a troop of trained and armed sepoy. They reached Goalpara at the beginning of November, 1792. Here, they got the king's urgent message. On the Brahmaputra at Nagarberra, a meeting was held between Thomas Welsh and the king.

From there, Captain Welsh moved further and both at Gauhati and on the river's north bank he was able to defeat the rebels. At Darrang, Welsh even succeeded in pacifying the rebelling prince Krishnanarayan, and expelling a number of the Burkendazes who were assisting the prince. After a while, Welsh marched to Jorhat, then to Rangpur, where after being victorious over the Moamarias in 1794, he reestablished Gaurinath Singha at Rangpur.

While Capt. Welsh was gaining one success after the other, the new Governor General Sir John Shore recalled him. While he had been in Assam, in 1793 itself Welsh had concluded a commercial treaty under whose terms the inter Bengal and Assam commerce was to be on a 'reciprocal basis'. In answering the queries of his government, he presented his answers in *The Report of Captain Welsh*. In it he provided vital information pertaining to the Ahom's system of Government, their products, trade and commerce, to name a few. Despite the fact that many people considered Gaurinath Singha to be vindictive and cruel, Welsh says he did a lot of good too; for example, it was he who had human sacrifice abolished at Sadiya's *Kechaikhati* temple.

Let us look at the help that Welsh provided to the Ahom King from a different angle. Towards the close of the 18th century, the East India Company was presented with a lucrative opportunity when trouble started in the Ahom kingdom due to the Moamaria rebellion. It gave them huge means of surveying and understanding the region.

When King Gaurinath Singha's call for help reached the Company, it initially dithered since it was in the middle of a war on taxation against Tipu Sultan of Mysore.

Finally after the siege of Srirangapatnam and a treaty in 1792, they were free to indulge in other issues.

That very year, they dispatched Bengal Army's Captain Thomas Welsh to aid Gaurinath Singha. He set out with six companies of sepoy, every company had 60 fighting men, and there were small medical corporations under Dr John Peter Wade. The entire unit had just 550 fighters.

At the close of November of 1792, this unit had its first military encounter with the local population. Northern Kamrup, inclusive of North Gauhati, had been occupied by Darrang Raja Krishnanarayan. He ignored the various requests the English had made to him to disband his barkandaz army. This led to a battle and post just two engagements, he put down arms, removed the barkandazes from his army, and accepted the Ahom king's vassalage.

Captain Welsh, at the start of 1794, had started to negotiate with upper Assam's Moamariyas. The negotiations were unsuccessful and the atmosphere for an armed encounter brewed. Again, the English gave battle and the militia again lost to the Bengal Army. Reinstating of Gaurinath Singha was accomplished and at the same time the English army was recalled to Bengal.

### **Why was the Bengal Army invincible?**

The armies of the East India Company fought in a European style on the infantry front. The Company lacked cavalry units in the true sense for quite some time. The British Army had perfect ones. The armies in India had total reliance on cavalry, and infantry for them was of scarce importance. In this regard, the army of the Ahoms was an exception, being possibly the only one with no cavalry. Assamese were brilliant foot soldiers and expert implementers of guerrilla warfare.

The unit that came to fight the Moamariyas had better leadership and training than the Moamariyas. The weapons that they used were also better. Well drilled, the unit's troops had the doggedness that had been displayed by English armies throughout the world at different theatres of war. They were trained not to flee or break up under any circumstance. They were trained to hold their ground, even in the most adverse situation. To quote Manimugdha Sharma, 'It was this superior will to prevail that probably made all the difference.'

Troops of the Company, in the 1770s itself had short-land pattern. The muskets were easy to load and were of high performance. An expert soldier could fire four rounds in approximately one minute.

On the other hand, when compared with the company units, both leadership and weapons of the Moamariyas were deficient. Moamariyas had no idea of the style of fighting employed by the Europeans. Moamariyas did not possess real firearms except for some obsolete matchlocks. Moamariyas would use anything as a weapon such as bamboo sticks, spears, pick-axes, pikes and swords. The Ahoms did not possess muskets.

When Captain Welsh and team were recalled by Sir John Shore in 1794, they were full of stories about Assam, which aided the Company to interfere in the future affairs of Assam.

In the Gazetteer of India, Assam, Vol 1, it is mentioned that, 'According to Captain Welsh's account, Gauhati was an expansive and populous town at that time. It was situated on both sides of the banks of the Brahmaputra and extended to the neighbouring hills. Along the river bank there was a rampart on which mounted 113 guns, including 3

## **NOTES**

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of European manufacture. Another fortification of the town was a large enclosure, surrounded by a brick wall. Rangpur was a largely populated town, spanning about 20 miles. The surrounding country had been very densely cultivated. The nobles held large estates of land, which were tilled by their slaves, but the products were never brought to the market. It was almost impossible to buy grain: it was easier to buy salt or opium. The price of commodities was very cheap. Buffaloes were sold for five rupees.'

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## SUMMARY

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In this unit, you have learnt that:

- State formation is the process of the development of a centralized government structure in a situation where one did not exist prior to its development.
- Sukaphaa, is credited with having established the Ahom Kingdom. He was a Tai prince from Mong Mao.
- It started with being a Mong in the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra river, with its base lying in a wet rice cultivation area.
- In the 16th century, there was sudden expansion of the kingdom under Suhungmung. At this point its character changed and it turned multi-ethnic.
- In 1228 the kingdom of Ahom got established with the coming of Chao Lung Siu-Ka-Pha, the 1st Ahom king, from Mong Mao (now part of Peoples Republic of China), who traversed the Patkai mountain range and reached the valley of Brahmaputra.
- He brought took under his occupation the area on the river's south bank, the Patkai mountains in the east, the Dikhau river in the south and the Burhi Dihing river in the north.
- He set up his capital in Charaideo and set up offices of the Dangaria— Borgohain and Burhagohain.
- Persons ready to fit in with the Ahom polity and lifestyle were welcomed into the fold and this process is referred to as Ahomization.
- The Ahom government adopted a policy of conciliation, as well as a policy of force towards various tribes of the north east.
- The Ahoms did not interfere too much in the affairs of the hills. Rather, they conciliated with the tribes by providing them many types of facilities and privileges.
- The Ahoms were more or less successful in their dealings with the tribes of the hills and were able to control the tribes in the confines of the hills of Arunachal Pradesh, except the trade missions, in which they could enter beyond the foothills.
- The Ahoms also applied force against the tribes, whenever the situation demanded.
- With rapid expansion and addition of large territories to the kingdom, the pace at which Ahomization was occurring was not good enough and in their own kingdom, the Ahoms had become a minority. This caused the kingdom's character to change. It turned inclusive and multi-ethnic.
- Marangikowa Gohain and Sadiakhowa Gohain were two special offices, set up for overseeing those territories, which had been taken from the Kachari and Sutiya kingdoms, respectively.
- The Paik system was employed to organize the kingdom's subjects which formed the militia.

### Check Your Progress

8. Under which ruler did the Ahom kingdom start declining?
9. Who abolished human sacrifice in the Sadiya's *Kechaikhati* temple?
10. The Assamese were good at guerrilla warfare. (True/False)



- The features that are seen in the mature Ahom kingdom were adopted during the period of Pratap Singha.
- There was the reorganizing of the Paik system under the *khel* system which was more professional, and it replaced the *phoid* system which was kinship based.
- Both Borphukan and Borbarua got set up as also some more small offices.
- The kingdom of Ahom was under the rule of a king who was known as *Swargadeo* (*Chao-Pha* in the Ahom language). The king had to be from the line of Sukaphaa, the first Ahom king. Generally, succession was based on primogeniture, though on the occasion, it was possible for the great Gohains (*Dangaria*) to elect another descendant of Sukaphaa from a different line or even enthroned or depose one.
- Sukaphaa had two great Gohains to aid him in administration: Burhagohain and the Borgohain.
- During his reign, Pratap Singha introduced two offices to be directly under the king. These offices were Borphukan and Borbarua.
- Patra Mantris was the council of ministers that comprised five positions.
- Judicial and well as military responsibilities rested with both the Borphukan and Borbarua, and both got help from two separate councils (*sora*) of *Phukans*.
- There were twenty or so Baruas, some of these were:
  - o Sonadar Barua: Chief jeweler and mint master
  - o Khanikar Barua: Chief artificer
  - o Hati Barua: In charge of elephants
  - o Ghora Barua: In charge of horses
  - o Duliya Barua: Royal palanquins' in charge
  - o Chaudang Barua: Executions' superintendent
  - o Bhandari Barua: Treasurer
  - o Bez Barua: Royal family physician
- Some other officers were 12 Rajkhowas, various Katakis, Kakatis and Dolais.
- Those of the royal families held rule over certain territories and were addressed as Raja.
- Royal families' members who had lower positions got regions known as *mels* and were addressed as *melkhowa raja* or *meldangia*.
- Princes who were even lower were *Meldangia gohains* and were *Sarumelia gohain* and *Majumelia gohain*.
- Individual *mels* were provided to the royal ladies.
- The forward territories were administered and ruled by forward governors, who also were military commanders. Such offices were given to members of families that were eligible to being the three great Gohains.
- Vassals or dependent kings were addressed as *Raja*.
- The Ahom kingdom had huge dependence on the Paik system which was just a corvee labor form.
- Gadadhar Singha made himself fully acquainted with the Mughal's system of land measurement and had it introduced all across the kingdom.
- It has been opined that the Dimasa's initial state formation took place at the region of Sadiya.

## NOTES

## NOTES

- The Moamoria rebellion occurred from 1769 to 1806. The conflict occurred in the 18th century between the Ahom kings and Morans who were the adherents of the Moamara Sattrā. It caused general and extensive disgruntlement amongst the populace against the Ahom king and the nobles. It spanned two periods during which the Ahom kings were bereft of all control over the capital of their kingdom.
- The Ahom capital was occupied by the rebels on 21 November, 1769. Naharkhora's Ramananda was put on the throne. Lakshmi Singha, the defeated Ahom king, was captured and imprisoned. The defeated king's high officers were executed.
- There was lack of experience amongst the rebels as far as statecraft was concerned. Due to this missing ingredient, they were unable to bring any kind of new order and in a bid to imitate them, they ended up doing just the same as their erstwhile leaders.
- Sukaphaa is said to have established the Ahom kingdom.
- Moamoria rebellion rebels stole away the power of the Ahoms.
- 1769 to 1806 was the period of the Moamoria rebellion. It was the conflict that occurred in the 18th century between the Ahom kings and Morans who were the adherents of the Moamara Sattrā. The rebellion destroyed approximately a half of the population and played havoc with the economy of the kingdom. Thus weakened, the Ahom kingdom became an easy target for invasion and the Burmese invasion followed.
- Crisis had been brewing in the Ahom Kingdom as the basis of the state, the Paik system was not flexible enough to change and adapt to the changes in society and economy.
- The leakage of manpower from the Paik system was caused in one way by the rise of the sattrā which came in conflict with the Ahom kingdom.
- In the sixteenth century the Mahapuruxiya Dharma was established by Srimanta Sankardeva. It made available such opportunities to the common tribesmen, which would help them to better them economically and socially. Also, the sattras made available to them a safe escape from the mandatory labor they had to perform under the system of Paik.
- The Moamaria Rebellion occurred in two phases.
- The decline of the Ahom Kingdom started with the rule of Gaurinath Singha (1780-95). When he was attacked and Rangpur was taken over Gaurinath Singha along with his entire family sailed off to Nagaon, then further to Gauhati.
- Gaurinath Singha sought help from the East India Company through Raush, a salt merchant and Mr. Dauglas, Commissioner of Koch Bihar for both materials and troops. The Governor General, Lord Cornwallis, responded by sending Captain Thomas Welsh with a troop of trained and armed sepoy.

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## KEY TERMS

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- **Posa:** It is a system that allows you to pay for only what you sell.
- **Moamoria rebellion:** The 18th century conflict between the Morans, adherents of the Moamara Sattrā, and the Ahom kings
- **Borbarua:** One of the five patra mantris (councilors) in the Ahom kingdom, a position created by the Ahom king Pratap Singha.
- **Rebel:** A person who rises in armed resistance against an established government or ruler.

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## QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short-Answer Questions

8. Who was the founder of the Ahom kingdom?
9. What do you understand by *posa*?
10. What acts reflect the policy of friendly relation of Ahom rulers with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh?
11. What measures were used to stop the Nyishi raids into the Ahom territory?
12. Write a short note on the relationship of the Mughals and the Ahom kingdom.
13. Why was Captain Welsh able to gain such success in his mission in Assam?
14. What were the causes of the Moamaria Rebellion?

### Long-Answer Questions

9. Explain the policy of conciliation of the Ahom rulers.
10. Write a note on the relations between the Akas and the Ahoms.
11. Write a short note on the relations between the Ahoms and the Nyishis.
12. Summarize the highlights of the relations between the Ahoms and the tribals.
13. What were the reasons for the decline of the Ahom kingdom?

## NOTES

14. Write in detail the frontier policy of the Ahom kings.
15. Describe the Moamaria Rebellion.
16. Discuss Captain Welsh's Mission.
17. Describe the events that led to deploying Captain Welsh's Mission.

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## FURTHER READING

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# UNIT V MODERN NORTH EAST INDIA

## - I

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### Structure

- Introduction
- Unit Objectives
- The British in India and South East Asia
- Burma before the British Conquest
- North East India
  - Anglo-Burmese War and North East India (1824–1826)
- Causes of the Anglo-Burmese War
- Series of Events of the War
  - Treaty of Yandabo and its Impact
- Importance of the Treaty of Yandabo
- Aftermath of the Treaty of Yandabo
- Summary
- Key Terms
- Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’
- Questions and Exercises
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### NOTES

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## INTRODUCTION

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The British came to India as traders and wanted to explore other regions of South East Asia as well so that they could strengthen trade links and in the process strengthen the economy of Britain. Slowly and steadily, the British however, started to interfere in the political functioning of India and gained control over the subcontinent by following the policy of annexation. With India under control, the British wanted to expand their political as well as commercial territory and focused on gaining control of other South East Asian countries. The British were able to easily control Nepal and China but Burma posed many threats to the British because of its power and the fact that the Burmese were expanding their Indian territory. This eventually led to a war between the Burmese and the British which ended in the victory of the British and they were finally able to expand their territory to Burma as well. The British waged several wars against the Burmese. These series of wars were called Anglo-Burmese Wars and were fought by the British with the help of the Indian army. After the very First Anglo-Burmese war, the Burmese empire came crumbling down. In fact, the Burmese army did not only face a humiliating defeat but also was left economically weak and crippled. The Burmese also had to cede several of their territories to the British. Though subsequent kings tried to get back their territories, but the British army was far more superior and had much better weaponry

## NOTES

and all subsequent attacks of the Burmese failed. The British were finally able to consolidate their position in Burma and by 1885 had complete control over Burma. In this unit, you will study about the factors which lead to the Anglo-Burmese War, the significance of the Treaty of Yandabo, and the annexation of the North Eastern region by the British.

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### UNIT OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Assess the British rule in India and South East Asia
- List the reasons behind the Anglo-Burmese war
- Examine the terms of the Treaty of Yandabo

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### THE BRITISH IN INDIA AND SOUTH EAST ASIA

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The British ruled over India for nearly 200 years. It is interesting to note the emergence of traders as the largest political power in India and subsequently in Asia. Since early times, India had close commercial links with the European countries. In the fifteenth century the trading routes between east and west came under the Turkish control. This led the Europeans to search for new trade routes to the East. This is when Vasco da Gama, a Portuguese explorer discovered a new sea route to India using which many Europeans came to India. This is the route through which the British entered India and established commercial as well as political rule in India. The British first came to India in the form of East India Company in 1608 when the Mughal Emperor Jahangir ruled India. The East India Company was given the permission to establish factories in India. Consequently, the East India Company was able to establish factories in Madras, Bombay, Surat, Orissa, Hugli, Hyderabad and Calcutta. With the increasing trade, the British were also able to politically control the several princely states and territories in India. By this time, the British had taken advantage of the poor state of affairs and economic condition of India for which they were themselves responsible.

The British followed several policies which were inhuman and had turned mercenaries to gain complete political control over India. By 1818, the entire Indian subcontinent except Sind and Punjab was brought under the control of the British. The conquest of Sind occurred due to the growing Anglo-Russian rivalry in Asia and also because the British feared that Russia might attack India through Afghanistan or Persia. Also, river Sind opened several commercial possibilities for the British. Sind was annexed by the British by a treaty in 1843 and roads and rivers of Sind were thrown open to the British for trade. With Punjab and several small territories coming under the control of the British, by 1857, the whole of India was under the control of the British commercially as well as politically. With Britain's ever increasing power in India, it became concerned with protecting India's borders and access routes.

With India under control, the British now shifted focus on expansion in South East Asia. From its base in India, the East India Company established trade links with China. Subsequently, China and Nepal became allies of the British. The English took over Sri

Lanka from the Dutch in 1798 and it became their colony of Ceylon in 1802. The British gained monopoly over the trade of fisheries, cinnamon, salt and tobacco in Ceylon. The only South East Asian country that posed a threat and problems for the British was Burma. Burma was a powerful and confident nation and became an example of ‘Mission Creep’ for the British. Burma had established control over Assam and Manipur in early nineteenth century which made the boundary line of Burma touch the border of British India and so clashes became obvious and frequent between the two powers. The British were finally able to annex Burma as well and with so much under their control, the British became the most dominant power in South East Asia in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

### **Burma before the British Conquest**

Before the British conquest, Burma was under the rule of the Konbaung dynasty. The Konbaung dynasty was established in 1752 by a village chief. The dynasty, last to rule Burma ruled from 1752 to 1885. The second largest empire was created by this dynasty in Burma. The Konbaung dynasty under its various rulers brought about several administrative reforms in Burma that led to the foundation of the modern-day Burma. The dynasty also established Burma as a strong military nation. The Konbaung dynasty was as expansionist and waged several campaigns against Arakan, Manipur, Assam, Siamese Kingdom and the Mon Kingdom of Pegu and was thus able to establish the third Burmese empire. The Konbaung dynasty practiced a centrally controlled government. The basis of economy in Burma was agriculture. Burma was kept wealthy throughout because of its location and trade routes with China and India passing straight through it. This South East Asian country was a very strong one and the Konbaung dynasty was always on the lookout for expansion. The British felt insecure with the ever-increasing trade and territory of Burma. The conflict between the British and Burma began when the Konbaung dynasty decided to expand into Arakan in Assam, close to British territory.

### **North East India**

The North Eastern states were always a part of India, geographically, culturally and politically. The longest ruling dynasties were established in North East states of India. The state of Assam was ruled by Ahoms for almost six centuries. In Manipur, the ruling dynasty lasted for over nineteen centuries. The long dynastic rule in North East India played a significant role in keeping the British away from the region for a long time. During the early years of the British rule, the Nagas, Mizos and other tribes raided and conquered the plains and hills of Brahmaputra and Surema valleys. The long lasting dynasties further added to the existence of powerful empires with effective control. The Cachari and Jaintia dynasties had the plains as well as the hills under control. The Mughals as well as the Delhi Sultans were never able to conquer the North Eastern states. Thus, the region of North East got partially isolated from rest of the country. This is when Burma invaded Manipur and Assam and the British feared the loss of territory. The British therefore, shifted focus to North East India to consolidate their hold on the Indian territory.

## **NOTES**

### **Check Your Progress**

1. Why did the British want to take control of South East Asian countries?
2. Why was Burma a threat for the British?
3. Why was North East region isolated from the rest of India?

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## ANGLO-BURMESE WAR AND NORTH EAST INDIA (1824–1826)

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### NOTES

The Burmese and the British, both expansionists and powerful, were always in conflict with each other. Eventually, the British were able to annex Burma following a series of wars known as Anglo-Burmese Wars. The first Anglo-Burmese War was fought between 1824 and 1826. By the end of the first war in which the British emerged victorious, Assam, Manipur, Cachar, Jaintia, Arakan province and Tenasserim came under the control of the British.

Though the main aim of the British to get into war with Burma was to expand their territory, they had other reasons too. One reason for the British to be at war with Burma was the search for new markets for British manufactured goods. The British did not want the French to use the Burmese harbours for trade. Increased trade with France was a threat for the British as it hindered the trade relations of the British with other countries. The British were also concerned about the French influence on the Court of Ava and feared loss of territory, control and trade. A war with Burma and the annexation of Ava was the only way in which the French could be driven out by the British.

### Causes of the Anglo-Burmese War

Burma was a strong nation and it always posed a threat to the British because of its invasion in the North Eastern states. In addition, Burma was strong economically because of its trade links with other countries. By 1822, long borders had been created between British India and the Burmese because of Burmese conquests of Assam and Manipur. The British at that time were based in Calcutta and had different plans for the North East region. The British also actively supported rebels in Assam, Manipur and Arakan. When the British in Calcutta unilaterally declared Cachar and Jaintia British territories and sent in troops to drive away the Burmese, the Burmese were vexed and surprised with the attacks. The then Burmese Commander-in-Chief, Maha Bandula, was convinced that a war with the British was inevitable and thus, adopted an offensive policy against the British. Maha Bandula was ready for war against the British because he believed that a decisive victory could allow Ava to consolidate its control in Arakan, Manipur, Assam, Cachar, Jaintia. Maha Bandula also wanted to take control over East Bengal and strengthen the Burmese empire in India as well. In September 1823, Chittagong which was a part of the East India Company was invaded by Burma. Burma wanted to occupy Shalpur Islands and this gave rise to another conflict between the British and the Burmese. In January 1824, when rebels entered Cachar and Jaintia, the Burmese sent in their troops to drive the rebels away. On the other hand, the British sent their troops to meet the Burmese in Jaintia. This was what led to the first war clashes between the British and the Burmese. Following border clashes in Arakan, the war formally broke out on 5 March 1824.

### The conflict

The King of Ava had become increasingly aggressive and expansionist towards the British held territories. In 1776, the Burmese had seized Tenasserim from Siam. In 1784, Arakan was incorporated as a part of Ava and in 1813, the Burmese conquered Manipur. Though a war was inevitable, the British at that time involved in other areas, tried to delay it. The final stroke came in September 1823, when the Burmese invaded and captured Shalpur islands near Chittagong. The preparations for the war began thereafter.



Until now, all British actions against Burma were land based. The British decided to undertake amphibious actions in order to take over the town of Rangoon (now Yangon) which lay upon the banks of river Irrawaddy. A joint naval and infantry expedition was planned at Port Cornwallis in Andaman Islands under the control of General Archibald Campbell and Commodore Grant. The 13th Regiment made up part of 11,000 infantry sector and was placed under the command of Major Robert Sale. The first role of the 13th Regiment in the conflict was to seize and occupy the island of Cheduba which lay on the Arakan coast. Three companies were detailed to carry out this attack while the rest of the soldiers were asked to march to Rangoon. The attack on Rangoon was a successful one and the town was soon seized by the British and converted to a defensive stronghold. The Burmese, however, used to fighting in the jungle terrain with their muskets, swords and spears soon surrounded Rangoon from the outskirts. In the meantime, the monsoon season arrived and converted the country into mud and also spread disease. The British decided against a defensive action and planned an attack. The British did not find it easy because of the terrain of the jungle. They had to carry artillery in hand and the soldiers were falling fast because of the disease that had spread. The Burmese army was slowly pushed back up the Irrawaddy Valley. By February 1826, the Anglo-Indian army had advanced 300 miles to the town of Yandabo. From here, the Burmese capital lay just a short distance. The advance of the Anglo- Indian army on the capital began on 9 February 1826 with the 13th Regiment leading a night attack. This caused the enemy to flee. The capital was reached just two weeks later when the King of Ava sent a peace treaty to the British and agreed to pay the expenses of the war and also surrender a considerable part of his territory.

## NOTES

### Series of Events of the War

The first Anglo-Burmese War was not an easy win for the British. There were several encounters between the Burmese and the British and after the loss of many soldiers and after incurring a lot of expenses on the war, the British were finally able to win and make Burmese cede a lot of its territories. The Burmese were also left in debt and consequently the Empire crippled and lay defeated.

#### 1. War with the British on the outskirts of Burma

The Commander-in-Chief, Maha Bandula, of the Burmese army was supported by twelve best divisions of Burma. Burma had an army of 10,000 men and 500 horses. With the support of the best soldiers and men, Maha Bandula planned to attack the British from two sides Chittagong from Arakan in the South East and Sylhet from Cachar and Jaintia in the North. While Maha Bandula handled the war from Arakan, Uzana was given the command of Cachar and Jaintia. When the war began, the Burmese were able to push back the British. This was because the Burmese soldiers who had fought in the jungles of Assam and Manipur were more familiar with the terrain as opposed to the British. The British had already been defeated in January 1824 in Cachar and Jaintia. In May, the Burmese led by Myawaddy U Sa, entered Bengal and defeated the British at the Battle of Ramu. The units led by Bandula and Myawaddy then united forces and marched on to capture Cox's Bazar. The Burmese invasion led to extreme panic in Chittagong and Calcutta. However, Bandula did not want to overdo this victory and stopped the army from proceeding to Chittagong. This was one of the major factors that led Burma to lose the war. Had Bandula marched onto Chittagong, which was lightly held by the British, the Burmese would have got easy access to Calcutta. This would not have led to

Burmese victory but would have helped the Burmese to negotiate more strongly on the terms of the Treaty of Yandabo.

## 2. Wars inside Burma

### NOTES

Some of the wars fought inside Burma has been discussed in this section.

### **Battle of Yangon, May–December 1824**

The British were having trouble fighting on the hard terrain and so they decided to take the war to the Burmese mainland. The British took the Burmese by surprise when a British naval force of 10,000 men entered the harbour of Yangon. The Burmese chose to fortify the positions outside the city, leaving the city of Yangon empty for the British to capture. The British took positions inside a fortified Shwedagon Pagoda and attacked the Burmese from there. By July 1824, the British were able to drive away the Burmese to Kamayut and the Burmese were unable to gain Shwedagon back. The Burmese army including the units at Arakan and Cachar and Jaintia were called to fight the British in Yangon. By November 1824, Bandula was able to command a force outside Yangon. Bandula believed that he and his army could meet the British head on and win the battle. However, Bandula was unaware of the fact that the British weapons were far more superior to that of Burmese. On 30 November 1824, Bandula ordered a frontal attack on the British positions, making possibly the biggest mistake of his career. The British army with a large number of soldiers and superior weaponry was able to withstand several attacks made by the Burmese and reduced the Burmese army by thousands. The British troops within a few days started to gain an upper hand in the battle. On 15 December 1824, the Burmese were driven away from Kokine.

### **Battle of Danubyu, March–April 1825**

After his defeat in Yangon, Bandula went back to his base Danubyu, a small town not far from Yangon. The Burmese army was left with few men with mixed capabilities. In March 1825, the British army consisting of not more than 4000 soldiers and gun boats attacked Danubyu. The first British attack failed here. Bandula tried to fight with foot soldiers, cavalry and elephants. The British had rockets that stopped the elephants from marching ahead. The cavalry could not move even a bit because of the continuous artillery fire from the British army. On 1 April 1825, the British launched a major attack on Danubyu supported with heavy guns and rockets that were fired on all Burmese lines. In the attack, Bandula was killed and with his death, the Burmese evacuated Danubyu leaving it for the British.

### **Arakan Campaign, February–April 1825**

After Bandula left Arakan, Myawaddy U Sa was left to command the troops in Arakan. Once Bandula was defeated and Yangon was under the British control, the focus turned to Arakan. On 1 February 1825, a force of 11,000 soldiers led by general Morrison attacked the Burmese positions in Arakan. The British army was supported by a flotilla of gun boats and armed cruisers. Though the British were more in number and had superior weapons, they were given a tough fight by the Burmese for almost two months after which the British were able to reach the main Burmese garrison in the capital of Arakan, Mrauk U. Once there, the British launched an attack on Mrauk U. On 1 April 1825, the Burmese were defeated at Mrauk U and U Sa and the remaining Burmese forces evacuated Arakan. The British then proceeded to occupy the rest of Arakan region, in which they succeeded easily.

## Battle of Prome, November–December 1825

In November, the Burmese who did not want to give up their territories easily, decided to put in one last effort to try and overpower the British. In mid-November, the Burmese army consisting mainly of the soldiers of the Shan regiment threatened Prome in a circular movement that enabled the Burmese to surround the entire town and cut off communication lines to Yangon. However, the British had better soldiers as well as better guns and missiles. On 1 December, General Campbell led an army of around 4000 soldiers supported by a flotilla of gun boats attacked the Burmese positions outside Prome. On 2 December 1825, Maha Ne Myo was killed and the Burmese army was dislodged by 5 December. The defeat left the Burmese army in disarray. The Burmese army went into a retreat mode after their defeat in Prome. The Burmese army, now totally defeated sent a flag of truce on 26 December 1825 to the British camp. With this, negotiations were started between Burma and the British but the Burmese had no choice but to agree to all the terms that were laid by the British. To put an end to the war, the Treaty of Yandabo was signed in February 1826.

### Consequent Anglo-Burmese Wars

The loss in the First Anglo-Burmese War did not change the attitude of the Burmese towards the British. Burmese kings tried to gain their territory back and even tried to revoke the Treaty of Yandabo. These kings even looked upon the British representatives with contempt. King Tharrawaddy was able to put down rebellions in lower Burma and in 1841 he staged a military demonstration on his visit to Rangoon. This alarmed the British in Arakan as well as in Tenasserim. King Pagan, successor of king Tharrawaddy was more bent upon religious interests and left the day-to-day function of the ministers. This meant that the administration in Rangoon was unbending and there were profit hungry British traders which led to a volatile atmosphere in Rangoon. In 1851, a minor incident between two British traders and the governor of Rangoon led to a battle between the two armies. The battle ended in the British emerging victorious.

The British traders were increasingly becoming interested in trade of rubies, teak and oil from northern Burma. The Burmese Crown, during their declining years tried to develop friendly relations with European rivals including France and Italy. In 1878, after the death of King Mindon, his son Thibaw came to the throne. After a commercial dispute in 1885 and the fear of growing French influence in Burma, Lord Randolph Churchill decided to invade upper Burma and dethrone Thibaw. The war soon ended and the British were able to take full control of Burma.

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## TREATY OF YANDABO AND ITS IMPACT

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The Treaty of Yandabo is the peace treaty that put an end to the First Anglo-Burmese war with the British emerging victorious. The treaty was signed on 24 February 1826, almost two years after the war broke out on 5 March 1824. The treaty was signed by General Sir Archibald Campbell on the British side and on the Burmese side by the Governor of Legaing Maha Min Hla Kyaw Htin. The British army had reached Yandabo village which was just eighty kilometres from the then capital Ava. This was one of the main reasons why the Burmese agreed to sign the treaty without any discussion.

## NOTES

### Check Your Progress

- Which territories were ceded to the British after the end of the First Anglo-Burmese War?
- Who was the Commander-in-chief of the Burmese army during the First Anglo-Burmese War?
- From which areas did Maha Bandula plan to attack the British?
- What items of trade were the British interested in from North Burma?

## Terms of the Treaty of Yandabo

The terms of the Treaty of Yandabo are as follows:

- The Burmese agreed to cede Assam, Manipur, Arakan, Tanasserim coast to the British completely without any type of control over these territories.
- The Burmese were to stop all interference in Cachar and Jaintia hills.
- The Burmese had to pay an indemnity of one million pound sterling in four instalments to the British with the first instalment being paid immediately. The second instalment was to be paid within the next 100 days. The last two instalments were to be paid within two years. The British also made it clear that they would not leave Yandabo till the second instalment was paid.
- The treaty forced the Burmese to allow exchange of diplomatic representatives between Calcutta and Ava.
- The Burmese were also asked to sign a commercial treaty with the British in due course of time. This simply meant that the British were to have more control over trade practices in and with Burma.

## NOTES

### Initial Negotiations

The initial peace negotiations began in September 1825 when the British were already in full control and had an upper hand. After their victory in the battle of Danubyu, the British consolidated their control in Lower Burma, Rakhine, Taninthayi coast, Assam and Manipur. The British wanted the Burmese to recognize the independence of Manipur. The British also wanted the Burmese to stop all intervention in Assam and Cachar. The British also wanted the Burmese to cede Rakhine along with all its dependent territories. The British further demanded the Burmese to pay an indemnity of two million sterling pounds and that the Burmese receive a British resident in the Court of Ava. The British also made clear that the territories of Taninthayi and Yangon would be held by the British until the indemnity was paid by the Burmese. The Court of Ava had not expected so much penalty. The Burmese were also unwilling to cede the various western territories. The Burmese envoy, Lord of Kawlin replied to the initial negotiations that the Burmese would give up claim of Assam and Manipur. The Burmese also objected to the choice of the British of the future ruler of Manipur. The Burmese agreed to cede Taninthayi coast but not Rakhine. The British, however, were unimpressed and did not agree to the terms laid down by the Burmese. The initial negotiations between the British and the Burmese broke down and the Burmese army decided to fight on to gain back control of their territories. In November 1825, the Burmese made an effort to recapture Pyay and succeeded. However, by early December, the British with superior men and weaponry were able to defeat the Burmese altogether. The final negotiations of the Treaty of Yandabo were not negotiations but the demands of the British that the Burmese had no option but to agree. The terms of the treaty were laid down keeping in mind the loss that the British had incurred in the war.

### Importance of the Treaty of Yandabo

The Treaty of Yandabo finally enabled the British to annex Burma and consolidate their position in South East Asia. The treaty put an end to the most expensive and the largest war in the British Indian history. The battle cost the British between five million sterling pounds to thirteen million sterling pounds, thus leading to severe economic crisis in British India in 1833. About 15,000 European and Indian soldiers lost their lives with even a

higher number on the Burmese side. The Treaty marked the beginning of the end of Burmese independence. The powerful Burmese empire that always posed a threat for the British was finally conquered and crippled. The British were able to secure the Eastern Frontier. The War and the Treaty left Burma weak economically and politically and enabled the British to engulf the entire country by 1885.

### **Aftermath of the Treaty of Yandabo**

The Treaty of Yandabo brought humiliation and long lasting financial burden on the Burmese. During the battle, a whole generation of Burmese men had been wiped out. The Court of Ava could not come to terms with the severe loss of men and their territories. It made several failed attempts to get the territories back. An uninvited British representative in the Court of Ava was a constant reminder of the humiliation and defeat that the Burmese suffered. The indemnity of one million sterling pounds was a considerable amount even in Europe those days. The indemnity left the Burmese economy and treasury crippled and thus the Treaty of Yandabo was able to achieve its basic objective. The War and the Treaty also affected the British. For the British, the cost of the war left the British economy in crisis and also bankrupted the Bengal Agency Houses in 1833. The East India Company had to give up its privileges and the British also lost their monopoly of trade to China.

## **SUMMARY**

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In this unit, you have learnt that:

- The British came to India as traders and wanted to explore other regions of South East Asia as well so that they could strengthen trade links and thus the economy of Britain.
- The British ruled over India for nearly 200 years. It is interesting to note the emergence of traders as the largest political power in India and subsequently in Asia.
- The British followed several policies which were inhuman and had turned mercenaries to gain complete political control over India. By 1818, the entire Indian subcontinent except Sind and Punjab was brought under the control of the British.
- Burma was a powerful and confident nation and became an example of 'Mission Creep' for the British.
- Before the British conquest, Burma was under the rule of the Konbaung dynasty. The Konbaung dynasty was established in 1752 by a village chief.

#### **Check Your Progress**

14. What was the main reason of conflict between the British and the Garos?
15. When were Naga Hills and Lushai Hills annexed by the British?

- The North Eastern states were always a part of India, geographically, culturally and politically. The longest ruling dynasties were established in North East states of India. The state of Assam was ruled by Ahoms for almost six centuries.
- Burma and British, both expansionists and powerful, were always in conflict with each other. Eventually, the British were able to annex Burma following a series of wars known as Anglo-Burmese Wars.
- Burma was a strong nation and it always posed a threat to the British because of its invasion in the North Eastern states. In addition, Burma was strong economically because of its trade links with other countries.
- The Treaty of Yandabo is the peace treaty that put an end to the First Anglo-Burmese war with the British emerging victorious. The treaty was signed on 24 February 1826, almost two years after the war broke out on 5 March 1824.
- The Treaty of Yandabo finally enabled the British to annex Burma and consolidate their position in South East Asia. The treaty put an end to the most expensive and the largest war in the British Indian history.
- Once the British were able to take over Burma, they made it clear that they had no intention of ruling the country. However, the British started following the policy of annexing the various territories so that they had more territory as a part of British India.
- The Garos have been said to have immigrated to Garo Hills from Tibet. The Garos settled in the Garo Hills as they found providence as well as security in this territory and claimed it to be their own.

## NOTES

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## KEY TERMS

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- **Indemnity:** It refers to a sum of money paid as compensation, especially one paid by a country defeated in war as a condition of peace.
- **Imposts:** It refers to a tax or similar compulsory payment.
- **Vassal:** It a person who held land from a feudal lord and received protection in return for homage and allegiance.
- **The Charter Act of 1833:** It marked the beginning of a system of government for all India. It also tried to separate and decentralize executive and legislative functions.
- **Pargana:** It refers to a group of villages or a subdivision of a district in India.

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## ANSWERS TO ‘CHECK YOUR PROGRESS’

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1. The British wanted to take control of South East Asian countries as it wanted to secure the borders and access routes of India.
2. Burma posed a threat for the British as the former was a strong, powerful and an expansionist nation. Burma had already occupied Assam and Manipur and the British feared loss of territory to the Burma.

## NOTES

3. The North East region became isolated from the rest of India as it was ruled by powerful tribes who were in complete control of the region. The Mughals and the Delhi Sultans were not able to attack and occupy the North Eastern region.
4. After the end of the First Anglo-Burmese War, the territories that were ceded to the British were Assam, Manipur, Cachar, Jaintia, Arakan province and Tenasserim.
5. Maha Bandula was the Commander-in-Chief of the Burmese army during the First Anglo-Burmese War.
6. Maha Bandula planned to attack the British from two fronts: Chittagong from Arakan in the south-east and Sylhet from Cachar and Jaintia in the north.
7. The British were interested in the trade of rubies, oil and teak from North Burma.
8. The Treaty of Yandabo was signed on 24 February 1826. The treaty was signed by General Sir Archibald Campbell on the British side and by the governor of Legaing Maha Min Hia Kyaw Htin on the Burmese side.
9. The Burmese had to pay an indemnity of one million sterling pounds to the British as per the terms of the Treaty of Yandabo.
10. The First Anglo-Burmese war cost the British between five million sterling pounds and thirteen million sterling pounds. This cost of the war led to an economic crisis in British India.
11. The main aim of the Treaty of Yandabo was to leave the Burmese empire crippled. The treaty not only asked the Burmese to pay a huge sum as indemnity but also forced Burma to cede several of its territories. This left the Burmese defeated and humiliated.
12. The main reason for annexation of Jaintia was human sacrifice. The Jaintia kings carried out human sacrifices of British subjects and after the first instance, the Jaintia kings were warned against human sacrifices and if they were found doing so, their territory was to be confiscated by the British.
13. During the annexation of Cachar Hills, the northern Cachar region was under the rule of Govinda Chandra while South Cachar was under the control of Tularam.
14. When the British occupied Brahmaputra, they wanted to connect the valleys of Brahmaputra and Surma with an all-weather road. The Garos were against the construction of the road and protested against it. This was the main reason behind the conflict between Garos and the British.
15. The Naga Hills were annexed to the British in 1881 while the Lushai Hills were annexed in 1895.

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## QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short-Answer Questions

1. Why was Burma able to invade Assam and Manipur?
2. Why did the British want a war with the Burmese?

3. Briefly describe the battle of Danubyu.
4. How were the British able to annex Garo Hills?
5. When and how were the British able to annex Naga Hills?

### Long-Answer Questions

1. What were the causes of the First Anglo- Burmese War?
2. Describe the war between the Burmese and the British on the outskirts of Burma.
3. Describe the battle of Yangon.
4. What were the terms of the Treaty of Yandabo? Analyse the significance of this Treaty.
5. Give a detailed description of the annexation of Jaintia Hills.
6. Explain in detail the annexation of Cachar Hills.

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### FURTHER READING

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### NOTES





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