



INSTITUTE
OF DISTANCE
EDUCATION **IDE**
Rajiv Gandhi University



MAHIS-403

History of North East India (Early times-1947) - I

MA HISTORY

1st Semester

Rajiv Gandhi University

www.ide.rgu.ac.in

**HISTORY OF NORTH-EAST
INDIA
(EARLY TIMES-1947)-I**

MA [History]

First Semester

MAHIS – 403

RAJIV GANDHI UNIVERSITY
Arunachal Pradesh, INDIA - 791 112

BOARD OF STUDIES	
1. Prof. SK Singh Department of History, Rajiv Gandhi University Arunachal Pradesh	Chairman
2. Prof.B. Tripathy Department of History Rajiv Gandhi University Arunachal Pradesh	Member
3. Prof. S. Dutta (Retd.) Ward No. 2, Bairagimath, PO: Dibrugarh-786003 Assam	Member
4. Prof. (Mrs.) S. Hilaly Department of History Rajiv Gandhi University Arunachal Pradesh	Member
5. Prof.AshanRiddi Director, IDE Rajiv Gandhi University	Member Secretary

Authors

Paulomi M Jindal, Idea Syndicate

Revised Edition 2021,

All rights reserved. No part of this publication which is material protected by this copyright notice may be reproduced or transmitted or utilized or stored in any form or by any means now known or hereinafter Invented, electronic, digital or mechanical, including photocopying, scanning, recording or by any information storage or retrieval system, without prior written permission from the Publisher.

"Information contained in this book has been published by Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. and has been obtained by its Authors from sources believed to be reliable and are correct to the best of their knowledge. However, IDE—Rajiv Gandhi University, the publishers and Its Authors shall be in no event be liable for any errors, omissions or damages arising out of use of this information and specifically disclaim any implied warranties or merchantability or fitness for any particular use"



Vikas®¹ is the registered trademark of Vikas® Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.

VIKAS® PUBLISHING HOUSE PVT LTD¹

E-23, Sector-8, Noida - 201301 (UP)

Phone: 0120-4078900 • Fax: 0120-4078999

Regd. Office: 576, Masjid Road, Jangpura, New Delhi 110 014

• Website: www.vikaspublishing.com • Email: helpline@vikaspublishing.com

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 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.

About IDE

The formal system of higher education in our country is facing the problems of access, limitation of seats, lack of facilities and infrastructure. Academicians from various disciplines opine that it is learning which is more important and not the channel of education. The education through distance mode is an alternative mode of imparting instruction to overcome the problems of access, infrastructure and socio-economic barriers. This will meet the demand for qualitative higher education of millions of people who cannot get admission in the regular system and wish to pursue their education. It also helps interested employed and unemployed men and women to continue with their higher education, Distance education is a distinct approach to impart education to learners who remained away in the space and/or time from the teachers and teaching institutions on account of economic, social and other considerations. Our main aim is to provide higher education opportunities to those who are unable to join regular academic and vocational education programmes in the affiliated colleges of the University and make higher education reach to the doorsteps in rural and geographically remote areas of Arunachal Pradesh in particular and North-eastern part of India in general. In 2008, the Centre for Distance Education has been renamed as "Institute of Distance Education (IDE)."

Continuing the endeavor to expand the learning opportunities for distant learners, IDE has introduced Post Graduate Courses in 5 subjects (Education, English, Hindi, History and Political Science) from the Academic Session 2013-14. The Institute of Distance Education is housed in the Physical Sciences Faculty Building (first floor) next to the University Library. The University campus is 6 kms from NERIST point on National Highway 52A. The University buses ply to NERIST point regularly.

Outstanding Features of Institute of Distance Education:

(1) At Par with Regular Mode

Eligibility requirements, curricular content, mode of examination and the award of degrees are on par with the colleges affiliated to the Rajiv Gandhi University and the Department(s) of the University.

(ii) Self-Instructional Study Material (SISM)

The students are provided SISM prepared by the Institute and approved by Distance Education Council (DEC), New Delhi. This will be provided at the time of admission at the IDE or its Study Centres. SISM is provided only in English except Hindi subject.

(iii) Contact and Counseling Programme (CCP)

The course curriculum of every programme involves counselling in the form of personal contact programme of duration of approximately 7-15 days. The CCP shall not be compulsory for BA. However for professional courses and MA the attendance in CCP will be mandatory.

(iv) Field Training and Project

For professional course(s) there shall be provision of field training and project writing in the concerned subject.

(v) Medium of Instruction and Examination

The medium of instruction and examination will be English for all the subjects except for those subjects where the learners will need to write in the respective languages.

(vi) Subject/Counseling Coordinators

For developing study material, the IDE appoints subject coordinators from within and outside the University. In order to run the PCCP effectively Counseling Coordinators are engaged from the Departments of the University. The Counseling-Coordinators do necessary coordination for involving resource persons in contact and counseling programme and assignment evaluation. The learners can also contact them for clarifying their difficulties in their respective subjects.

SYLLABUS
History of North-East India (Early Times-1947)

UNIT I: SOURCES

- a) Literary
- b) Archaeological
- c) Oral Traditions

UNIT II: EARLY STATES IN ASSAM: VARMANAS

- a) Society
- b) Economy
- c) Polity and Religion
- d) Hiuen-Tsang's Account of Assam

UNIT III: EARLY STATES IN ASSAM: PALAS

- a) Society
- b) Polity
- c) Economy and
- d) Religion

UNIT IV: STATE FORMATION IN MEDIEVAL NORTH EAST

- a) Ahom State
- b) Dimasa State
- c) Jaintia State
- d) Manipur State

UNIT V: AHOM RELATIONS WITH THE NEIGHBOURS

- a) Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh: Nyishi, Adi, Mishmi, Bhutia
- b) Khampti, akas
- c) Other tribes: Nagas, Khasis, Jaintias, Kacharis

INTRODUCTION

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..

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.

This book - History of North-East India (Early Times - 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, Key Terms and Activity further act as useful tools for students and are meant for effective recapitulation of the text.

This book is divided into ten units:

Unit 1: Describes different sources dealing with the history of North-East India.

Unit 2: Discusses early states in Assam with special focus on the Varmanas.

Unit 3: Discusses early states in Assam with special emphasis on the Palas.

Unit 4: Covers state formation in medieval North-East India.

Unit 5: Introduce you to Ahom relations with the neighbours.

UNIT 1 HISTORICAL SOURCES

Structure

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Units Objectives
- 1.2 Sources of History: Literary, Archaeological and Oral Tradition
 - 1.2.1 Tripura
 - 1.2.2 Manipur
 - 1.2.3 Assam
- 1.3 Summary
- 1.4 Key Terms
- 1.5 Answers to 'Check Your Progress
- 1.6 Questions and Exercises
- 1.7. Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The term 'sources' refers to a collection of proofs or evidences. Various sources are studied by historians so that they can put together or reconstruct a depiction of the past which is accurate.

In one form, we can categorize sources into primary and secondary where primary sources are those which are given by those who were part of or were viewers of the historical event. Secondary sources are those provided by persons who were neither direct participants nor direct witnesses of events which they have described and so, the secondary sources would record the investigations and study of the primary sources.

Another categorization of sources can be under the heads written, pictorial, oral, and artifacts.

In this unit, we will look at the literary and archaeological sources and those handed down to us via oral tradition for the reconstruction of the history of Northeast India prior to India's Independence.

Some types of literary sources could be:

- Travelers accounts
- Treaties
- Reports
- Charters
- Court proceedings

Some types of archaeological sources could be:

- Coins
- Cultural evidences
- Edicts
- Inscriptions
- Monuments and sites
- Tools
- Weapons

NOTES

Some types of oral tradition sources could be:

- Folk tales
- Legends
- Ballads
- Songs

1.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Describe the various literary, archaeological and oral sources available for reconstructing the history of Northeast India up to 1994.
- Discuss the historical sources of Tripura
- Interpret the historical origin of Manipur
- Analyse the history of Assam through excavated evidences

1.2 SOURCES OF HISTORY: LITERARY, ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND ORAL TRADITION

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

1.2.1 Tripura

Origin and history

The origin of the name of Tripura is still a matter of controversy among historians and researchers. The 'Rajmala' is the royal chronicle of kings of Tripura who reigned for around 5,000 years since the pre-historic era. As per 'Rajmala' the royal house of the Tripura trace their origin to the much honoured '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

Area	10,491.69 sqkm
Capital	Agartala
Altitude	12.80 meters
Population	31,91,168 (Census-2001)
Temperature	Summer: 2 to 36 degree C. Winter: 7 to 27 Degree c.

Clothing	Winter
Rainy Season	2 deg. C Min
Average rainfall	Summer-Cotton. Winter: Woolens
Official Languages	June to August
Other Languages	2100 mm per annum
International Border	Bengali and Kokborok
Literacy rate	English, Hindi, Manipuri. Chakma
Per capita income	856-Km.
	80.42%
	₹29,000

NOTES

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 BCE.

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.



Figure 1.1 Fossil wood tools

NOTES

Total No. of collections	:- 1645 nos.
	a. Coins
	i. Gold Coins – 8 nos.
	ii. Silver Coins – 244 nos.
	iii. Copper Coins – 522 nos.
	b. Sculptures : 79 nos.
	c. Terracotta : 141 nos.
	d. Copper inscriptions : 10 nos.
	e. Stone inscriptions : 09 nos.
	f. Bronze images : 39 nos.
	g. Textiles : 102 nos.
	h. Oil paintings : 58 nos.
	i. Sketches and drawings : 63 nos.
	j. Jewellery : 197 nos. and others.
Reference library	:- Books on art, architecture, archaeology, the anthropology, history and other aspects of the state.
Epigraphical collections	:- Number of manuscripts – 120 nos.
Language	:- Sanskrit and Bengali.
Type	:- Mythological.
Sculpture	:- 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 sand stone and for that the formation of sculpture is very crude in nature. Low relief Dasavata panels collected from Radhanagar in the vicinity of Agartala date to 18 th century AD are the exquisite pieces of sculpture. From these sculpture we get local influence about their formation, style anthropomorphic details.
Terracotta	:- 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 Sri Dinesh Ch. Sen, Historian, are our prized collection. Terracotta's of Pilak symbolizes a unique craftsmanship of t traditions, as prevailed in greater Bengal and the rest having 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.
Bronze images	:- 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.

Coins

- :- The most ancient coin of the Tripura ruler so far discovered is that of Maharaja Ratna Manikya (1464 A.D.) the 145th King of the state.

The Characteristics of the coins of Tripura.

- (a) Mostly made of silver and copper, some gold coins are also in the collection.
- (b) Coronation, pilgrimage, conquest, etc. types of commemorative coins are the general collection.
- (c) The Queen's name along with King's inscribed on the coin, 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.

Development of new galleries

- :- The Victoria Memorial Hall, Kolkata, has come forward with a project for the development of a big hall into a photographic gallery on "Hill scapes of India", which is under progress.
- The Indian Museum, Kolkata, has remodeled a big room for exhibition of the folk & tribal crafts of Tripura. The famous bamboo and cane objects, sculptures on wood carving and ivory are its special attraction.

Photo gallery**Bronze objects**

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

Stone objects

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

Stone plaque (Dashavatara panel)

1. **Kalki avatar** : 18th cent, Radhanagar, Tripura
2. **Kurmavatar** : 18th cent, Radhanagar, Tripura
3. **Krishna** : 18th cent, Radhanagar, Tripura

Terracotta

9. **Kinnar** : 18th cent, Pilak, Tripura

NOTES

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

1.2.2 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 edict of Meidingu Naophangba which provides a short account, 115 types, of crimes in ancient Manipur and their related punishments. Then again, Nangshamei Puya and the annual administrative 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):

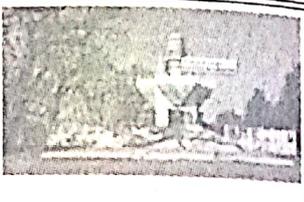
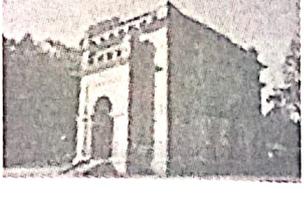
‘The intellectual reservoir of manuscripts, which are in the personal custody of the “Maichous” and many of which have been published in modern Meitei enriched the knowledge of a number of human disciplines viz., Administration, Arts and Culture, Astrology, Charms and Mantras, Creation Theories, Dictionaries, 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).’

NOTES

List of monuments of national importance in Manipur

Table 1.6 Monuments and Temples of Manipur

NOTES

SL. No.	Description	Location	District	Image
N-MN-1	Temple of Vishnu	Bishenpur	Bishnupur	
N-MN-2	Uttra 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, Kan chipur, Imphal	Imphal West	
N-MN-6	it is the monument of 'Paona Brajabashi', one of the national heroes of Manipur.	Khongjom	Thoubal	

1.2.3 Assam

Assam in the Pre-Historic Period

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 Acheu lean 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.

Mesolithic Age

In the Garo hills' Ron Gram Valley, 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. We see an influence of both Southeast Asian and Indian cultures 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 site 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 - Since Independence - Assam

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

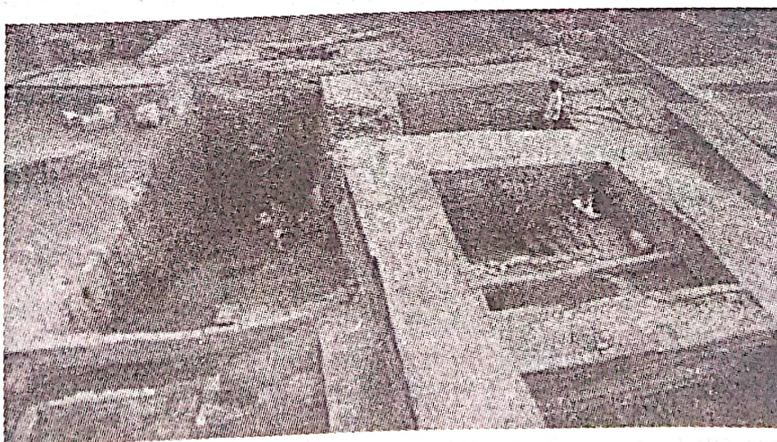


Figure 1.2 Ambari Archaeological Site, Kamrup, Assam

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

NOTES

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.

NOTES

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.

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 start of the 8th Century.

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.

1. 'Umachal (Kamakhya hill, Kamrup district). Rock inscription of Maharajadhiraja Surendravarman of dynasty of Pushyavarman (Figure 1.3).
2. Nagajari (Sarupather, Golaghat district). Fragmentary stone inscription assigned to the fifth century AD.
3. Bargana (near Doboka, Nogaon district). Rock inscription of Paramabhataraka Maharajadhiraj Bhutivarman of sixth century AD.
4. Doobi (Barpeta district). Copper-plate originally issued to Bhutivarman and later reissued by Bhaskarvarman.

5. Nidhanpur (Sylhet district, Bangladesh). Copper plate issued to Bhituvarman.

6. Nalanda (Patna district, Bihar). Clay seals of Bhaskaravamana.

7. Silimpur inscription

There are nearly 38 similar inscriptions.'

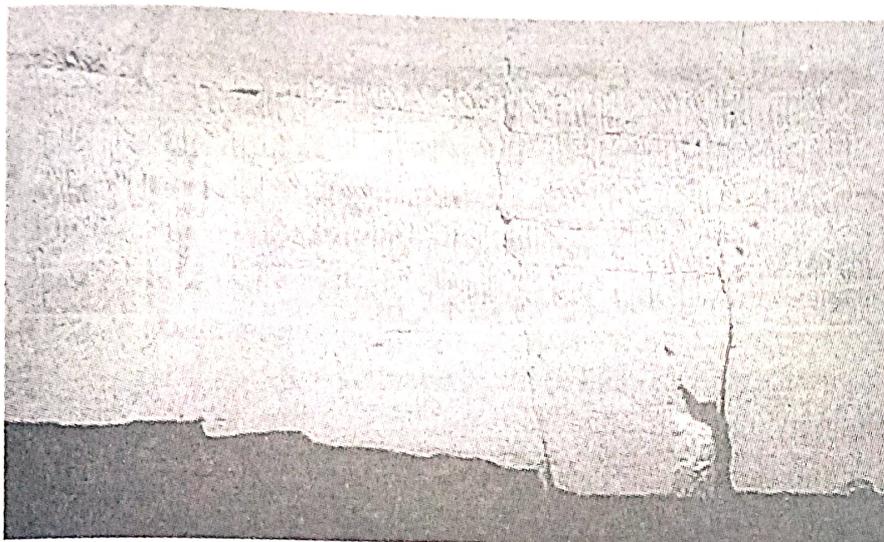


Figure 1.3 Rock inscription of Maharajadhiraja Surendravarman of dynasty of Pushyavarman

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.

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).

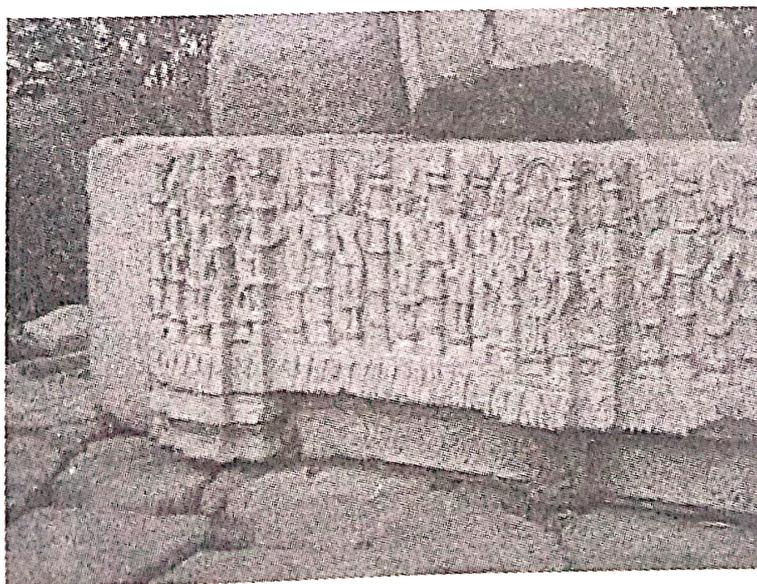


Figure 1.4 Dah Parvatiya near Tezpur

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

NOTES

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

NOTES

• 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', 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.

• 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

• 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.

• 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.

• Archaeological evidences

For archaeological evidences, the 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.

• 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.'

• 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.

Figure 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, Ahom king. Two Kachari inscriptions exist, which are known. One is at Kachari on a temple which is rock-cut while one 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 kings' chronology.

• 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 jeweler Jean Baptize Tavernier regarding that period's battles.

NOTES

NOTES

• 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-18th 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 & 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 railway station of Gauhati.

The greatest shrine of tantric shaktism find mention 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 'shiva ratri'. 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 rim of Gauhati city on the Sandhyachal hill is a well known holy cum picnic spot, called Basisthashram, 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 adding scenic grandeur to the place.

Mahabhairab temple

List 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. The season to visit is from October to May.

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 prayer a faithful 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 kms. 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 below with garlands in their hands in artistic pose and elegance are decorated with beautiful ornamental foliage.

Agnigarh

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

NOTES

NOTES

3. Create a list of the various archaeological sites in Assam.
4. List the various types of subjects that were of importance and Tripura.
5. Write a short note on the archaeological sources with regard to the study of Manipur.

1.7 FURTHER READING

- Gait, E.A.; *A History of Assam*, BiblioBazaar, US, 2010.
- Choudhary, Pratap Chandra; *The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam, Assam, 1966.
- Bhattacharjee, Jayanta Bhusan; *Social and polity formations in pre-colonial north-east India: the Barak Valley experience*, Haranand Publications in association with Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1991.
- Sinha, Surajit; *Tribal Polities and State Systems in Pre-colonial Eastern and North Eastern India*, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, 1987.
- Chakravarty, I. N., Chakravarty, Lakshmi N.; *Glimpses of the Early History of Arunachal*, Research Department, Arunachal Pradesh Administration, Arunachal Pradesh, 1973.
- Barpujari, Heramba Kauta; *Assam in the Days of the Company: 1826 - 1858: a Critical and Comprehensive History of Assam during the Rule of the East-India Company from 1826 - 1858*, North-Eastern Hill University Publications, Assam, 1996
- Barpujari, Heramba Kauta; *The Comprehensive history of Assam*, Publication Board, Assam, 1990.
- M. Horam; *Naga Polity*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 1975.
- M. Horam; *Social and Cultural Life of Nagas: (the Tangkhul Nagas)*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 1977.
- Sangkima; *Mizos, Society and Social Change, 1890-1947*, Spectrum Publications, New Delhi, 1992.
- Sangkima; *A Modern History Of Mizoram*, Spectrum Publications, New Delhi, 2004.
- Bhattacharjee, Jayanta Bhusan; *The Garos and the English, 1765-1874*, Radiant Publishers, Hyderabad, 1978.
- Kar, Parimal Chandra; *Garos in Transition*, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1982.
- Venuh, N. and Bonita Aleaz; *British Colonization and Restructuring of Naga Polity*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2005.
- Lahiri, Rebati Mohan; *The Annexation of Assam: 1824-1854*, General Printers & Publishers, Mumbai, 1954.
- Bhuyan, Suryya Kumar; *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, Lawyer's Book Stall, Assam, 1974.
- Elwin, Verrier; *The Nagas in the 19th Century*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1969.

- Lahiri, Nayanjot; *Pre-Ahom Assam*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1991.
- Birinchi, B.K. and Banikanta Kakati; *Cultural History of Assam*, K. K. Barooah, Assam, 1951.
- Basu, Nirmal Kumar; *Assam in the Ahom Age, 1228-1826: Being Politico-economic and Socio-cultural Studies*, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, Kolkata, 1970.
- Nath, R.M.; *The Background of Assamese Culture*, A. K. Nath, 1948.
- Bareh, Hamlet; *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, Spectrum Publications, Gauhati, 1967.
- Chatterjii, S. K.; *The Place of Assam in the History and Civilization of India*, Gauhati University, Gauhati, 1970.
- Dani, A. H.; *Prehistory and Protohistory of Eastern India*, Firma L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1960.
- Dhavlikar, M. K.; *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute* 31-32: 137-49, Archaeology of Gauhati, 1973.

NOTES

UNIT 2 EARLY STATES IN ASSAM: VARMANAS

NOTES

Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Unit Objectives
- 2.2 Society in the Time of the Varmanas
- 2.3 Economy
- 2.4 Polity and Religion
- 2.5 Hiuen Tsang's Account of Assam
- 2.6 Summary
- 2.7 Key Terms
- 2.8 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 2.9 Questions and Exercises
- 2.10 Further Reading

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The real political history of ancient Assam begins with the foundation of the Varmana line of kings. The inscriptions of Bhaskaravarman, the greatest king of this dynasty as well as of ancient Assam, Banabhatta's Harshacharita and the accounts of the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang furnish considerable materials relating to the history of the Varmanas. It is learnt from epigraphical sources that Pushyavarman, born in the lineage of Naraka-Bhagaduta, was the founder of the Varmana of Bhauma line of kings. When and how Pushyavarman came to power is not known. He probably took advantage of the political instability of the time, and proclaimed himself king, and to justify his claim, traced his descent from Naraka-Bhagadutta. Pushyavarman was probably a contemporary of Samudragupta. In the Allahabad pillar inscription of this Gupta emperor, the name of Kamrupa, occurs as a frontier kingdom Samalata, whose king owed allegiance to Samudragupta on his own accord. The unnamed king of Kamarupa of this inscription is usually identified with Pushyavarman. If we count the date of Pushyavarman on the basis of the Badaganga epigraph of Bhutivarman (dated 234 Gupta era which corresponds to 553-54 AD), Pushyavarman's reign would fall between AD 355-80. He would and thus, be a contemporary of Samudragupta (320-80 AD).

During the reign of Kalyanavarman, the Davaka or the Kapili valley (comprising possibly the present district of Nagoan, Karbi Anglong and North Cachar area) was absorbed into the empire of Kamarupa. Signaling this victory, he sent a diplomatic mission to China in AD 428. Mahendrarvarman, grandson of Kalyanavarman, expanded his empire to south-east Bengal upto the sea by shaking off the last vestiges of the Gupta influence in Kamarupa. He was the first king of Assam to perform *Aswamedha yojna* and he did it on two occasions. Mahendrarvarman's grandson Bhutia Varman was a powerful king. He conquered Pundravardhana (North Bengal) sometime between AD 545-50 and donated lands to more than 200 Brahmanas in the Chandrapuri visaya located within the Pundravardhana bhukti. He might have also extended his sway in the south and the west and brought the outlying regions of Samatata, Sylhet, Tripura and other regions under his control. He has also performed one *Aswamedha* sacrifice.

The glory of Kamarupa suffered a temporary setback during the reign of Bhaskara Varman's father Susthitavarman, who suffered a defeat at the hands of the later Gupta

NOTES

monarch Mahasenagupta and as a result of this defeat lost the possession of Pundravardhana. Bhaskara Varman (AD 650-655), ascending the throne at a time when the reputation of his family was at a low ebb, not only restored it but made Kamarupa a power to be reckoned with whose alliance was welcomed by a monarch of Harsha's (AD 606-648) fame, the last great monarch of ancient north India. By this alliance, Bhaskara not only recovered Pundravardhana but also brought Gauda with its capital Karnasuvarna under his control. It was during the reign of Bhaskara Varman that the great Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang visited Kamarupa in AD 643 and stayed in his capital for nearly two months. The pilgrim speaks highly about the noble qualities of Bhaskara and his prowess. In the religious assemblies held at Prayag and Kanauj by Harsha, Bhaskara was shown special honour in the presence of all the kings assembled there. After the death of Harsha in AD 648, Bhaskara became the supreme lord of eastern India extending his sway as far as Nalanda. He had also brought under his control Sylhet and Tripura, including south-east Bengal. This is testified by Hiuen Tsang who refers to Bhaskara as "King of eastern India" and stated that the rules of Kamarupa had the sea-route to China under their protection.

In this unit, you will learn about the society, economy, polity and religion during the Varmana rule in Assam.

2.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Describe Assamese society in the time of the Varmanas
- Describe the economy of Assam in the time of the Varmanas
- Describe polity and religion in Assam in the time of the Varmanas
- Discuss Hiuen Tsang's account of Assam

2.2 SOCIETY IN THE TIME OF THE VARMANAS

Genealogy

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 Pushya Varman is named 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 terms the dynasty as Sanskritized non-Aryan tribal rulers.

	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

NOTES

1. Pushya Varman

Pushya Varman (AD 350–374) 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 most notably rulers of stature like Samudra Gupta. The son of Pushya Varman was Samudra Varman who married Datta Devi. The name of the queen of his great contemporary Samudra Gupta was also Datta Devi, probably both married in the same family. Though related Samudra Gupta fought with and defeated Bala Varman, son of Samudra Varman, in connection with the performance of the Asvamedha sacrifice. This is recorded in Samudra Gupta's Allahabad Inscription. He had to quell internal dissidence as well as external threats. Just as Samudra Gupta founded an empire which included at last the Indian subcontinent, Samudra Varman extended his power to the Eastern Peninsula the shores of which were washed by the Pacific Ocean.

2. Samudra Varman

Samudra Varman was ruler of Kamarupa kingdom for the period 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 who was quick in accepting a duel. Datta-Devi was the name of his queen, she gave birth to Bala Varman whose strength (Bala) and armor (Varma) were never separated and whose soldiers were always forward against his enemies. It is known from the inscriptions of Samudra Gupta that the name of his queen, too, was Datta-Devi, and that he defeated King Bala Varman. It appears from this that Samudragupta and Samudra Varman married in the same family. Thus, Samudragupta was compelled, in spite of this relation, to fight with Bala Varman according to the rules of Asvamedha sacrifice which took place in AD 350-380. So it may be admitted that he lived about this time. Perhaps this invasion of Samudragupta limited the power of the kings of Kamarupa for a time.

NOTES

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 great amount of physical strength as reflected in his name and courage. His soldiers are always on front against enemy. Bala Varman's wife's name was Ratnavati who gave birth to Kalyana Varman.

4. Kalyana Varman

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

5. Ganapati Varman

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

6. Mahendra Varman

Mahendra Varman ruled Kamarupa for the period AD 470-494. He married Suvrata and had successor to 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 as 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 for the period 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 for the period AD 590-595. Susthita Varman held the kingdom in his own hand, 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.

Society

Kampura was a place where proto-Monogoloid and proto-Australoid, Tibeto-Burman and Alpine people lived. Aryan culture started with other racial culture when they shifted to Assam. The kings of Kampura took utmost care to retain the traditional divisions of society, which are, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras. It is important to note that the concept of 'Varna' lost its importance and the concept of 'Jati' (caste) started gaining importance on birth and heredity. The original concept of Varna vanished and numerous new castes and sub castes emerged mainly due to different type of professions, arts and crafts of different tribes, races and religions.

Around 5th century AD, the influence of the Guptas increased in Assam and as a result a large number of Brahmins migrated to Kampura. The Brahmins who migrated were also gifted lands. The Brahmins were categorized by gotras and Veda-sakhas. Originally, gotras were only seven or eight and they were denoted by *rishis*. The term 'Pravara' is strongly entwined with that of the gotra. Some of the titles were Deva, Sarman and Swamin. The Brahmins had to live a strictly holy and righteous life and have to meticulously follow and practise their 'six fold duties'. The most important duty of a Brahmin was to learn Vedas. Topics such as science and arts were also discussed among them. They were the people who occupied high positions in administrative offices and even occupied some space in the army. This is assumed from Kautilya who is normally quoted as having said that kings of Kampura had armies comprising Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras. Other than Brahmins, the Karana and Kayastha were chiefs and state officials. The kayasthas were in royal cadre and this was recorded from the 9th century. The kayasthas were supposed to be the descendents of 'Nagara' Brahmins. The 'Ganakas' and 'Lekhakas' had their association with the royal court (Durbar). The 'Guanacos' are astrologers and studied *grahas* or planets. The 'Vaidya' had high positions in society. The Kayasthas and Kalitas are assumed to be the purest of the old Hindu people of Assam. Koches are highly populated in Assam next to Kalitas till this day. Some of the other castes are named after their professions such as kaivartas, kumbhakara (potters), tantuvaya (weavers) and nauki (boatmen).

NOTES

Social institutions

The family is the smallest unit of society and marriage is an important celebration and ceremony of the society. As per Hindu shastras there are eight types of marriages:

NOTES

- **Raksasa:** the bride would be married by force
- **Paisaca:** the bride and the bridegroom secretly elope
- **Gandharva:** secret union by copulation with the consent of the bride and bridegroom
- **Brahma:** the bride and the bride groom get wedded with ceremony
- **Daiva:** the bride is married to a priest
- **Arsa:** wedding is conducted after the bride's father gets a formal gift of oxen from the bridegroom
- **Kaya:** the proposal is made from the bridegroom
- **Asura:** the bride is purchased

Assamese marriages are done following the Vedic rites. Marriage is arranged after pairing the horoscopes 'rahi-joracova'. At times a price is paid by the bride groom. The marriages are conducted for five days. Usually the bridegroom arrives at the house of the bride on the marriage day in a propitious hour in the evening. On the third day of the wedding in the evening the married couple, make a contribution to two demons 'Khoba and Khubuni'. The marriage function concludes with this ceremony.

Chastity and devotion towards their husband were mainly expected qualities of Brahmin women. It is believed that the queens had some powers in matters of the state. As per the inscriptions they were highly pious and cultured women. Queen Jivada, mother of Harjavarmana was the source of highest spiritual force to him. Motherhood was considered the highest aims of married life and at the same time widowhood was the most unwanted and unwarranted calamity of married women and married life. Sati was not practised here. When we take into consideration the various historical records and references, women were usually very beautiful. It was quite common and a custom in Assam that they appointed dancers and courtesans in connection with temple services and these women dedicated their lives in the service of the temple. Such women were known as 'Nati or Daluhangana'. Brahmin women were well educated and skilled in the arts of poetry and rhetoric.

Rice was considered as the staple food of this region. However, early Assamese literature consisted of a lot of descriptions related to a range of hundred different kinds of paddy. The boka dhari is a favourite meal amongst the Assamese people during the celebrations of a festival. It is a variety of rice that is usually eaten uncooked. The hill people use the shifting method of cultivation which is known as jhum. Other than rice, Assamese people cultivate a large variety of fruits. Some of the well-known fruits are mangoes, oranges, plantains, citrons, limes, pineapples, and so on. People used to consume rice, fruits, fish, vegetables, and meat in the early days and they still do. The most favourite dish was *payaasam*. Literature describes more than twenty five to fifty varieties of special dishes were cooked using vegetables, pulses, fish, and meat. Along with the main ingredients, spices like ginger, cumin, pepper, and mustard were also used. Along with the spices, edible herbs such as mulaka, rajaka, vastuka, palanga, nalika, and such herbs were commonly used. The two popular dishes in the region were Pocola and kharika. These were made using young banana plant and bamboo shoots. Sour preparations were made using various fruits such as cakala, tenteli, and Ou. Assam people eat a lot of fish and this is considered as a pre-Aryan custom. This eating habit is assumed to be

NOTES

Most common art amongst the people of the hill tribe in Assam was dying both yarn and cloth. Some people from the Naga tribes were experts in this art and they could produce brilliant and radiant colours. The Manipuri are renowned for being very skillful and artistic dyers. Many people practised embroidering on cloth. The dress that the Manipuri use is a very simple single uncut and unstitched dress. The men and women wore different ornaments on different parts of the bodies with various designs.

The kalika puran states that there are forty varieties of such designs. These ornaments are made out of silver and gold. 'Dugdugi', 'Kerua', 'Galpata', 'Angada' and 'Kankana' were some name of ornaments worn by the people. These ornaments are worn by them even today. People wore kundal in the wears, kharu as angles on the wrists, *mupura* and *kinkini* (anklets) which are worn by women. Women adorned a forehead ornament called *tilaka*. This idea of the adornment and the hair arrangement can be found and borrowed from the sculpture of the ancient periods. The simplest and the most common hair arrangements of that time is the variation of the *khopa*.

People used to play dice and it was the most popular indoor game. Children played a game with sticks that was called *bhanta*. Hunting was one of the commonest past times of the people. They used to go for hunting in groups with spears, bows, and arrows. People used to try catching elephants. This is a very dangerous sport and it has a very interesting history. The people who drive elephants or the mahouts were capable of handling elephants very well. The ahom kings had other recreational activities such as Hawk-fights, elephant-fights, and bullfights. Dancing and music were amongst the best past times and entertainment for the people.

It is very much evident that education was not given significance as it is today. Brahmins were considered to be the learned classes. However, the 'Vyavaharis' (lawyers) and 'Lekhakas' (scribes) were also very well educated.

Education was focused more in the *guru griha* (the house or the ashram of the teacher). Brahmins maintained schools as the place for education; learning Vedas was more important to them and it was taught in Sanskrit. These schools taught Vedas and other Hindu texts. One of the biggest Vaishnavi apostles, Sankardeva, received his education from mahendra kandali at his tole in Assam. This proves that non-Brahmins were also a part of the schools held by Brahmins and they were given equal importance. Assam was considered to be the land of exemplary talent according to the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang. Assam became attractive to the scholars of other countries as education, talent and learning flourished.

Visits of scholars like Sankaracharya (788-820 AD), Nanaka (1649-1538 AD), and Guru Teg Bahadur (17th century) prove that Assam was indeed a very attractive place for its highly skillful people. It is said that Sankaracharya had visited Assam to have discussions with the *sakta* teacher Abhinavagupta. The poets and scholars of the royal court were always encouraged to compose and compile agreements on different subjects. Some of the works of these poets and scholars are as follows:

- Naranarayana translated *Bhagavat Purana* to Sankaradeva.
- Purushothama completed Sanskrit grammar.
- Sridhar prepared the book of astronomy and *baluka kayastha* which comprised the translation of Lilavati's book on mathematics.

The curriculum of studies comprised the four Vedas, four Upanishads, Puranas, Sastras and other Hindu scriptures and texts.

NOTES

In ancient times jyotisa vedanga was studied widely by many in Assam. Jyotisa vedanga is the science that calculates time by observing the movements of planets and the stars. Ayurveda is the study of medical science and it was also studied extensively. The royal physicians were held at the state medical department of Assam. Along with medical science that involves human beings; veterinary science was also studied to a large extent. Assam had hospitals for all kinds of living creatures like sheep, goat, cats, and birds. Elephantology was an important study concerning analysis of the characteristic diseases of elephants and providing cure and training to them.

Other than the above-mentioned sciences, the following art forms were also a part of study:

Music: Music was studied scientifically, while singing, dancing, and playing instruments was given more importance. Most of the kings maintained the custom of having singing and dancing as the means of entertainment in the court. These songs were composed based on various ragas. Art of developing paintings on the wall and normal painting started developing from 14th century AD. Sankaradeva had also painted some of the celestial figures for the China yatra. Earth, bark, leaves, gold, copper, and silver were used as the writing material in those days. The pens used for writing were made up of bamboos, reed, copper, bell-metal, gold, and iron. The ink used in the pen for writing purposes was obtained from a fruit named silikha. Earthworm sap was also used to extract ink. However, it was used to make invisible ink. Amongst all the other art forms, the kings took special interest in Sanskrit literature and *Kalika purana* is one of the notable works of the literature in that time.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. The Brahmins were categorized by _____ and _____.
2. In which form of marriage does the bride marry the priest?
3. What are the three kinds of wild silk?

2.3 ECONOMY

The state's economic life is generally controlled by the following three factors:

- The geography of the landscape
- Climate
- General living pattern of the people

Assam was crumpled by two large rivers, the Brahmaputra and Surma. Rainfall increased the intensity of the impact. Due to the various climatic conditions, people cultivated suitable fruits and vegetables such as banana, coconut, and cotton. Villages in India have been the backbone of any land's economy from ancient times. Agriculture was the main occupation of the villagers. Cultivating rice was their chief employment and it served as a reason for leading compact villages. Compact villages are much easier to manage the defense and other matters. Village is usually called *grama*. Although there were many villages and people mostly lived in villages, the towns were called as *pura*, *nagara*, and *kataka*. Towns were considered as the seats of government and the royal camp or the forts for the kings. Religious and commercial reasons played an

NOTES

important role in the creation of new cities. The importance of the cities rose to significance from the medieval period. Many scriptures say that the cities were well protected. The durjjaya city was surrounded by rampants and a fence. The city of Sonitpura was believed to be protected by flames of fire. The cities have a lot of magnificent buildings. Only the royal palace is one of the most impressive buildings and they were decorated very well during Ratnapala's regime. Other than the royal palace the remaining houses were plastered and whitewashed. The other houses were built of mud or stone.

The inner walls of the buildings were built with impressive forms while the outer walls were covered with sculptures. Often, the civilization endorses its city and it becomes the sole representative. The civilization is built with its inhabitants like artists, philosophers, teachers, priests, nobles, and merchants. The civilization is built with the contribution of religious preceptors and poets. The streets are of considerable width and are bright with radiant colours. The city comprises wealthy trading and industrial lass. Goldsmiths in the city deal with pearls, jewels, rings, and bracelets with precious stones. Merchants in that period developed with a lot of wealth and prosperity in the ancient times. The civilization had public parks too. The towns had a lot of temples. These temples were used for many other purposes along with worship. These were the spaces for the community, where the heads of the village held meetings, celebrated festivals, and organized a lot of performances.

At that time, all the land belonged to the king. The kings were the sole owner of the woods, forest, ferries, mines and everything else. Although there is not much information on the land system and the tenure of ownership, it is known that the kings often gave lands as a gift to Brahmins. Mostly, land was given to the heads of the city or the village temples. Occupations were not chosen but they are considered as hereditary. The ancient tradition of the kingdom was to consider the pious buildings as rent free.

From ancient times, forest lands were considered as no-man's land and all of them in the village held their household rights over the forest. Forests served as burial places, pastures, cremation grounds for the villagers. Slowly, forest property was acquired by the state government. Kampura is said to be Tejpatis very well identified by the ahoms and some of the writers as the malabothrum of Greeks and Romans. It was traded and sent to them from India from early times. Tejpat is an evergreen tree and it has aromatic leaves. Among the large variety of trees, the 'Vata' (*ficus indica*) and 'Asvattha' (*Ficus religiosa*) are used for religious purposes.

The most authentic and the best quality of sandal wood are grown in the forests of Assam and they were produced in abundance. The most valuable products of Assam were aloe wood or agaru. It was used as incense and was also used to produce perfumes; it is being used for the same purpose even today.

Other than this, the black pepper and long peppers are two common products of the Assam forest. A large amount of shellac is produced in Assam. It is exported to China and Japan and it is used to manufacture cabinets. It is known to have the best quality in the whole continent. Forest has very beautiful inhabitants like the peacock, kokila, keteki, and so on. Dhanesha is a rare species animal which is seen only in this region.

Assam had a vast range of craftsmen. There were weavers, potters, goldsmiths, spinners, and workers who worked with raw materials such as ivory, bamboo, wood, hide, and cane. Assam silk was well known for its quality and perfection. The Mohammedan historians reckoned that the silk produced in Assam were best in quality.

and were excellent. They always thought that the silk produced in Assam were similar to those produced in China. Almost all the renowned scholars of the world have commended Assam silk as the best in quality.

The following three types of silk are found in Assam and are used extensively by everyone: *pat*, *muga*, and *eri*. Assam was known as the land of cocoon rearers at the end period of Ramayana. *Muga* is considered as the golden silk of Assam owing to its incredible and unique beauty. Assam produced considerable amount of cotton. The Assamese women were considered as excellent weavers. They are still retaining their quality of weaving skills in Assam.

Gold washing and jewellery making are considered to be amongst the ancient industries of Assam. Assam's river was found with abundance of gold. According to the inscriptions in Silimpur, it was said that King Jayapal gifted a large amount of gold equivalent to his weight to a learned Brahmin. Even during the Ahom regime, gold washing was practised in an extensive scale and wonderful jewels with intricate designs were crafted. There were other types of craftsmen who made amazing baskets, who worked with wood and paints. There were other kinds of people who worked on elaborate designs in stone carving and made copper plates and so on. The large numbers of various toys, pots, vases evidently show that the people of Assam were involved a lot in craft work using terracotta. The Assamese were also involved in leather work in ancient times.

Assam is well known for its textiles, its forests with very rare trees, and minerals. The resources of Assam were also exported to neighbouring countries such as Tibet, Burma, and China. River transport was used to trade the resources and the products made in Assam.

Economic conditions

The economic life of a state is generally controlled by three factors, viz., the geography of the landscape, the climate and the general living pattern of the people. Assam was furrowed by two large rivers, the Brahmaputra and the Surma. Also there was a huge amount of rainfall. The Assamese people cultivated rice and fruits like banana, coconut, cotton etc. suitable to the climatic conditions. From early times, the villages in India have been the back bone of the land's economy. People lived a rustic life with agriculture as their main occupation. Rice cultivation was their chief employment; this led to the formation of compact villages. Compact villages were convenient for matters of defense also. The usual name for village was 'grama'. Although people lived mainly in villages, cities were known by the common name 'pura', 'kataka' and 'nagara'. They were also the seats of the 'adhikarana' (government), 'skandhavara' (royal camp), or of 'durga' (fort). Religious as well as commercial consideration played an important part in the creation of new cities. The cities rose to importance during the medieval period. From the Grants we note that the capital Durjjaya was surrounded by ramparts and with a fence. The four sides of the city Sonitpura were supposedly protected by huge flames of fire. The cities were extensive and filled with magnificent buildings. The royal palace was an impressive building with well decorated apartment's during Ratnapala's regime. Other houses were plastered and white washed. Houses were either made of stone or mud and were plastered over with lime water. The inner walls were decorated with beautiful forms and on the outer walls, sculptures were artistically laid out. The *Yogini Tantra* gives us a beautiful description of the sacred city 'Apunarbhava' which has since been identified with the modern Hajo that has the temple of Hayagriva Madhava.

NOTES

NOTES

More often than not, civilization is identified with the city. Within its walls artists and philosophers, teachers and priests, nobles and merchants found shelter. These cities were inhabited by hundreds of well-to-do people, and adorned by religious preceptors and poets. The streets were of considerable width and were gay with brilliant colors. Women of great beauty and courtesans decked profusely with all kinds of adornment and jewels could be seen on the streets. The cities possessed a wealthy trading and industrial class. The goldsmiths' shop attracted people from afar because they were filled with pearls and jewels, rings and bracelets flashing with precious stones. Assamese merchants were full of enterprise and grew in wealth and prosperity during the time. Public parks were also to be found. The towns were adorned with many temples. These served more purposes than worship; and were spaces for the community, where village meetings were held, festivals celebrated, and performances organized.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

4. The state's economic life is controlled generally by three factors. What are they?
5. _____ is considered as the golden silk of Assam owing to its incredible and unique beauty.
6. Mention two most ancient industries of Assam.

2.4 POLITY AND RELIGION

Assam's history is very much clear from the 4th century AD.

The credit to the account of Assam's history goes to the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang to a large extent. The first authentic information regarding the history of Assam is evident from Bana's *Harsha Charita*. He depicts the king as a Brahmin. It is evident that the copper plates that were found in Assam are related to Kampura. From various researches it proves that it dates back to the 4th to 13th century artefact.

Kampura was ruled by the Varmanas, the Salasthambha, and the Pala dynasties.

The ancient history of Assam starts from the 4th century with the regime of Varman dynasty. The Varman dynasty in Assam was first founded by Pushya Varman. He was considered as the modern-day king resembling king Samudragupta (350–380 AD). He titled himself as Maharajadhiraj. The dynasty's capital was Kampura. Mahendra Varman won against the Gupta dynasty and was the first king of Varman dynasty to perform the Aswamedha yagna.

Kumar Bhaskar Varman (AD 594-650) was the most popular and the last king of the Varman dynasty. Kumar Bhaskar Varman was the modern-day king resembling Harsha Vardhana. He was also known as Siladitya and was honored by Harsha Vardhana at a conference held at Kanouj.

The following table lists the genealogy of kings:

Name	Date
Pushya Varman	4th century AD
Samudra Varman	
Bala Varman	
Kalyan Varman	5th century AD
Ganapati Varman	
Mahendra Varman	
Narayan Varman	
Mahabhuti Varman	6th century AD
Chandramukha Varman	
Sthita Varman	
Mriganka	
Supratisthita Varman	7th century AD
Bhaskara Varman	

NOTES

Salasthamba established a new dynasty after Bhaskar Varman as Bhaskar Varman was unmarried and he did not leave any heir behind him. The evidence for Salasthamba's rule is notable in the inscriptions on the copper plates of Ratnapala. It is said that 27 kings ruled Kampura between Salasthamba and Brahma Pal. All the kings worshipped Lord Shiva. Harshadeva (AD 725-750) was very well behaved and a much liked king among the other kings of Kampura. The last king Tyaga Sinha (970-990 AD) did not leave any heirs as he was childless.

Following are the kings of the Salasthamba dynasty:

Name	Dated (approximately)
Salasthamba	Middle of 7th century AD
Palaka	Later part of 7th century AD
Kumara	8th century AD
Vajradatta	
Harsa	
Balavarman	
Cakra and Arathi	Did not reign
Pralambha	9th century AD
Harjjara	
Vanamala	
Jayamala	
Balavarmana	10th century AD
Tyagasinha	

The family of Salasthamba became extinct and the kingdom passed to a new line of rulers — the Pala dynasty. It was founded by Brahmapala (AD 990–1010). There is no study or track of information related to Brahmapala. But there is some information regarding his son Ratnapala and it looks like he ruled Kampura around AD 1000. Ratnapala is known as the most and the first powerful monarch of the Pala family and dynasty.

Ratnapala later shifted his capital to Durjaya. The Pala dynasty saw its last king in Jayapala (AD 1120-1142).

The Gour dynasty replaced the Pala dynasty which was reigned by Rampala.

NOTES

Administration

Becoming a king was a familial thing. The coronation of the king was an important function. Apart from the other spiritual reasons for coronation, it is made to offer the king his title legally. Some of the kings took new names after becoming a king. Resigning from the post of a king was not rare. Normally kings resign if they wish to pass on the crown to their children or to spend the remaining life in a spiritual way. The kingdom worked more based on the personal and natural qualities of the ruler. The history provides a lot of evidences on the required personal qualities of a king. Other than the virtuous qualities required, the physical body of the king was also necessary. Some of the qualities of the king were that the king must have a border chest, slim and slender waist, with a thick-set neck and club-like arms. War is the most important sport for all kings. The success in the war and the valour that they showed in the war is the highest aim that any king would want to have. The king has to possess innumerable good qualities. A king must never become angry and he should never use abusive language. A king must always be just and noble. The most important duty of a king is to protect the people of his kingdom look after their needs and well-being.

From the times of Mahendra Varman, the Kampura kingdom had stopped being a small state and started emanating majestic magnitude. The Kampura kingdom grew to what it was only by defeating neighbouring territories, rulers, and heads of the villages in battles. The most important officers of the central administration were the *mahasenapati*, *yuvaraja*, *samantas*, and *amatyas*.

The Vedas, Angas, Dharmasastras, and the Puranas were the basis for justice in the local villages. Revenues were collected from the villages under regular taxes, occasional taxes, commercial taxes, fines, income from state properties, and tribute from feudatories. The administrative heads of the village, like the 'Vasayapati', the 'Nayaka' and the 'Gramika', collected taxes from the village. The head officers of police were called 'Dandika', 'Dandapasika', 'Cauroddharanika'. The documents of the village were written by the lekhakas and they were stored in the registrar's custody.

The defense system and the military setup of this empire were very strong and efficient. Senadhaksha is known as the commander in chief for the army. Assam showed a lot of significance to waterways because of its climatic conditions. Assam used rivers for this communication and trade. The royal navy of Assam was maintained by many kings. Elephants were used for defense in the armies from ancient times. Kampura army had an important division of elephant squadron, as Assam is well known for its well-bred and trained elephants. Elephant was the natural symbol for the Kampuras like the tiger for cholas, bull for the pallavas, and the boar for chalukyas. However, the Kampura army did not show much of significance to its cavalry. This might be because cavalry needed good horses that can survive a battle. However, Assamese people feared horses.

Weapons such as 'asi' (sword), 'parasu' (axe), 'katanga' (spear), 'gada' (mace) as well as the bow and arrow were considered as the main weapons during the war. The kings use a cloth that protects the king's chest. It is known as the bargoan grant. Other significant things used in the battle are the Dhvaja' (flag) and 'Pataka' (banners). It is clear that the Assam kingdom had departments such as civil, judicial, police, revenue, and military properly maintained and civilized.

The form of government prevalent in ancient Assam was monarchy. Kingship was hereditary. The 'abhiseka' (coronation) of the king was an important ceremony. Apart from its mystic value, the rite of coronation conferred upon the king the legal title to his office. The symbol of royalty was an umbrella which was of moon-like whiteness, embellished with the chowries. Some of them took on new names after assuming kingship. Abdication was not rare. Usually a king abdicated for his son and retired to spend his life in pious meditation. The working of a monarchy depended largely on the personal qualities of the sovereign. The epigraphs provide us with numerous references to the personal qualities necessary for kingship. This included the physical body of the king – he needed to be "broad in the chest, slender and slim in the waist, with a thick set neck and club like arms." For almost all kings, war was the important sport and success in war and valour in the battle was the ruler's highest ambition. The king needed to be endowed with innumerable good qualities. He must never get angry, and never use improper words. His deposition must always be noble. He was to be just and righteous. He was the supporter of learning and of the fine arts, and a patron of poets and wise men. The first and foremost duty of the king was to give protection to all of his people and look after their general well-being. The Vedic religion was assiduously practiced by the kings. Numerous references are also available to kings who studded the kingdom with 'white washed temples' and sacrificial courtyards with immolating posts.

NOTES

Central administration

We have seen that from the time of Mahendra Varman, the Kamrupa kingdom ceased to be a small state and developed imperial dimensions. The empire was built up by defeating in battles, the rulers and chieftains of the neighboring territories. Among the officers of the central administration, the most important were the Samantas, Yuvaraja, Mahasenapati and the Amatyas.

Local administration

The rajya, desa or mandala denoted the kingdom as a whole. It consisted of a series of well-defined administrative units. The biggest division was Bhukti or province. The next unit was visaya or district. Visayapati was the head of a visaya. Justice was administered according to the *Vedas*, the *Angas*, the *Dharmasastras* and the *Puranas*. Revenues were collected under the head of regular taxes, occasional taxes, commercial taxes, fines, income from state properties, and tribute from feudatories. Taxes were collected through administrative heads like the 'Vasayapati', the 'Nayaka' and the 'Gramika'. The chief officers of the police i.e. the judiciary department was 'Dandika', 'Dandapasika', 'Cauroddharanika'. The writers were designated 'Lakhakas', and the documents were kept in the custody of the registrar.

The military organization of the empire was strong and efficient. The commander-in-chief was known as 'Senadhaksa'. Owing to geographical conditions, waterways were of vital importance for Assam. Assam was largely dependent on her rivers for communication. The royal Navy was maintained by many kings. From the epic period, elephants had an important rank in Indian armies. As Assam is noted for its well bred elephants, elephant squadrons naturally formed an important division of the Kamrupa army. As was the tiger to Cholas, the boar to the Calukyas, the bull to the Pallavas, so was the elephant the natural symbol of Kamrupa. On the other hand the Cavalry did not seem to have occupied an important place in the army. This was probably due to want of good horses. 'Muhammad', a writer of the later period

NOTES

noted that cavalry was not in use in Assam. In fact the Assamese were greatly frightened by horses. Writers on 'Nitisastras' attached great importance to the constructions of forts. The geography of Kamrupa accorded an ideal opportunity for the construction of hill-forts. Judging from the locations of the great cities, Pragjyotisha, Harrupesvara and Durjaya, it is clear that the Kamrupa kings understood the necessity of fortifying the capital as a defensive measure. The chief weapon of war was 'asi' (sword), 'parasu' (axe), 'katanga' (spear), 'gada' (mace) as well as the bow and arrow. The Bargoan Grant refers to the 'cloth which protects the king's broad chest'. The 'Dhvaja' (flag) and 'Pataka' (banners) were also used in the battle fields. It is, therefore, plain that the ancient administration of Assam consisted of civil, judicial, police, revenue, and military departments. The religious institutions were also controlled by the state officials in some way or the other.

Religion

The Brahmins of Assam followed the Vedic religion. Many Brahmins moved from the madhyayadesa to Assam and this migration had a lot of historical and sociological importance. Kings extended their support to the Brahmins and the non-Aryan tribes started converting to Hinduism. The kachari and Koch kings were officially converted to Hinduism. Shaivism was a fully developed religion and it prevailed in Assam for a very long time. Lingam was worshipped as the form of Lord Shiva. Shiva was worshiped in different ways based on the devotees. The kacharis offered swine, buffalos, rams, and goats as sacrifices to worship the gods. This tradition follows even today and the animals are sacrificed in the name of offering as a norm in many temples of Assam.

According to the *Devi Purana*, Durga Devi is worshipped extensively in many forms in various places. The Kamakhya temple was constructed in Kampura. Sikhism was the leading religion in Assam throughout the medieval period. The chief temple of the Sakta cult was constructed in Kamakhya and Kampura was recognized as the focal point of the Sakta cult. Similar to Shaivism, worshipping Vishnu was also present in Assam for a very long time. The Badaganga rock inscription of AD 554 proves that the people of Kampura had worshipped Vishnu for a very long time. For some time, Vaishnavism was not given much of importance. However, during the reign of Pala dynasty under Dharmapala (AD 1200) Vaishnavism was under light again.

People who believed in Vaishnavism worshipped the ten avatars of Vishnu. The avatar of Krishna was a very significant one in the later Vaishnava cult. Krishna's narratives became the main theme of Assamese literature. Other than Krishna, Hayagriva was also a very important avatar for the Assamese people. Hajo has a temple named Hayagriva madhava temple which is visited by the Buddhists from Bhutan, Tibet, Ladakh and southwestern China. Along with the Hayagriva temple at Hajo, all the other temples in the hills at Hajo were given great importance by the Buddhist monks. There is a strong belief amongst the lamas that the Buddha's mahaparinirvana took place in some spot approximately in Hajo. This Hayagriva Madhava temple was built by a Koch king, Raghudevyanarayan of Kampura in 1583. The Assamese people believed in the worship of sun in the ancient times and even today in some parts of Assam.

Worshipping the sun and the planets was very intricately connected to the study of astrology. Although the sculptures of Ganesa were found in almost all the temples, people did not create a Ganesa cult separately in Assam.

Shaivism plays an important role and it is considered to be the most prevailing faith in Assam. It is very much evident that the cult of Shiva was much eminent than the

other cults in Assam from ancient times. There were several Shaivite temples and various forms of Shiva in the early medieval period. Some of the iconic forms of Shiva are as follows: are the 'urdha-medhra' or the 'urdhva-linga' (phallus erectus), the 'trinetra' (the third eye shown vertically in the center of the forehead) and the 'jatamukuta' (crest of matted hair) with chandrakala or indukala (crescent) on it.

Among the weapons, the trisul was considered the most popular form according to the images found in north India. The images of Shiva also show the 'akshamala' (rosary), the 'damaru' (kettle-drum), mundamala' (garland of skulls), and a tiara of skulls adorning the hair also shows the fierce and violent form of Shiva in a separate way. Sometimes he is shown in same way seated and meditating, while at times he is shown dancing on the mountains. Shiva is also worshipped in various forms in Assam. Some of the following are listed as follows:

Siva

In the Brahmanical system Saivism had been the most dominant faith in Assam. Siva was in most cases worshiped in his phallic form. It is sure that from the earliest times the cult of Siva enjoyed a much greater preeminence over other Brahmanical cults in this territory. There were numerous Saiva temples in Assam during the early medieval period, and innumerable iconic forms of Siva. These are the 'urdha-medhra' or the 'urdhva-linga' (phallus erectus), the 'trinetra' (the third eye shown vertically in the center of the forehead) and the 'jatamukuta' (crest of matted hair) with chandrakala or indukala (crescent) on it. Among the 'ayudhas' (literally: weapons) the 'trisula' (trident) is most prominent, especially from the images found in north India. The other ayudhas like the 'akshamala' (rosary) as lord of meditation, the 'damaru' (kettle-drum) as lord of sound can also be seen. The 'Mundamala' (garland of skulls) and a tiara of skulls adorning the hair also distinguish the fierce form of Siva. Sometimes he is shown seated and sometimes dancing on his mount.

- **Sadasiva:** Depicted as the deity with five faces and ten arms. Fairly known in eastern India.
- **Yoga Murty:** Depicts Shiva as a saint and a scholar par with excellence and one who is constantly engaged in meditation.
- **Gyana-Murty Vyakhana-Murty:** Depicted Shiva as the lord of wisdom and a great teacher.
- **Nritya Murty:** Depicted as Nataraja.
- **Uma-Mahesvara:** Siva is seated with the goddess on his lap and caressing her with one hand.
- **Ardhanarisvara:** Displays half of the body as that of a male and the other half as that of a female showing the specific iconic traits of the goddess.
- **Urga forms:** The bhairava: According to Shiva Purana, Agni Purana. He is said to have assumed this form to cut off the fifth head of Brahma.
- **Aghora:** He is said to have assumed this form to cut off the fifth head of Brahma.

Lakulisa

Lakulisa, the Pasupata teacher, is regarded as the last avatara of Siva. Descriptions of his form may be found in the *Vayu-Purana* and the *Linga-Purana*. Figures of Lakulisa usually appear on Saiva temples, like the temple of Dah-Parvatiya, near Tezpur. This temple was exquisitely decorated and can be traced back to the 5th-6th century.

NOTES

NOTES

Ganesha

Ganesha had been a popular divinity in the Hindu pantheon. In the developed Puranic mythology he was associated with Siva and Durga, and temples affiliated to either of these great divinities mandatory have representations of this god. His preeminent position is indicated by the fact that in Hindu rituals, the first invocation is always offered to Ganesha. The iconography is described in all the major texts, like *Brihat Samhita* and the *Matsya Purana*. He was described to have a short-statured corpulent body with a distended belly and an elephant head with a simple tusk. He was portrayed as being fond of sweets. In the iconographic representations the god is also seen with a *mulaka* (radish) in one hand. Seated images of Ganesha were more common. They occur among the rock-carvings at Pandu, Umananda and Urvasi. Independent images of the dancing Ganesha were also not rare in Assam.

Sakti/Devi

The concept of 'Sakti' is said to have originated from various sources: pre-Aryan, non-Aryan, Aryan and aboriginal. The processes in fertility and motherhood and the active and energizing forces involved therein apparently led to the emergence of the concept of a supreme goddess who was considered to be the repository of all energy governing the universe. She is known under various names. The most common name was Durga or Devi. The *Puranas* gave us lists of her names. This divine mother goddess functions for the good of mankind and for the destruction of evil. She manifests herself in innumerable forms in accordance with her functions. Assam was considered to be the land of Sikhism and some scholars were of the view that this territory was the chief diffusion center of Sikhism along with its Tantric aberrations. The iconographic representation of the Devi in Assam was mainly seen in the images showing the goddess in the act of fighting and killing the demon. 'Durga Mahisasura-Mardini' had been represented in Indian art from the early centuries of the Christian era. Some of the different names of Durga can be presented in the following way:

Katyani

This image is fairly common in Assam. In this image the goddess was to stand in her right foot stretched on the back of the lion and left, slightly bent, on that of the buffalo from which issues the asura.

Ugrachanda

The *Agni-Purana* describes a representation of nine Durgas under the collective designation of Nava-Durga. Each of them is shown to be in the act of killing Mahisasura. This Devi was fashioned with eighteen hands, and was the central divinity of the Nava-Durga theme.

Matrikas

It will be relevant here to mention the part that the Saktis of different gods played in the exploits of the Devi in her fight with the danavas. These saktis came to be known later as 'Matrikas'. Among the minor goddesses, we can name Laxmi—the patron deity of wealth and prosperity; Saraswati - the goddess of learning and music; and Manasa - the goddess of snakes.

Vishnu

The iconography of Vishnu had been described in a number of texts like the *Mahabharata* and the *Brihat Samhita*. The special iconography features of the gods were that he was to have the kaustabha jewel on his chest and 'vajrayantimala' hanging down from his shoulder. He was to be adorned with jeweled ornaments. The image, having four hands and standing erect upon a lotus, is the standard iconic pattern of a 'Chaturvimsati-murtayah'. The rock cut figures of Vishnu at Surya-Pahar, Goalpara, seem to belong to the 9th century.

Vibhavas/Avataras

The conception of Vibhavas (evolved forms) or avataras (descended forms) of the Supreme God was a characteristic of Vaishnava theology. The collective representation of the ten avataras may also be seen on various architectural slabs, like those in Cole Park at Tezpur, Moroni in Goalpara district, and at Hajo.

Matsya

In this form, the upper part is human whereas the lower part is that of a fish (matsya). The image has two hands, the right bearing a 'gada' and left a 'chakra'.

Kurma

In this icon, the upper part belongs to a human and the lower is that of a tortoise holding a 'gada' and 'chakra'.

Varaha

Here again, the upper part is of human form while the lower part is a boar standing in 'pratyalidha' to the right. This icon has four hands.

Narasimha

This is by far among the more popular forms with its torso and lower body being that of a human and its face that of a lion. It was shown as tearing into the entrails of the demon Hiranyakasipu that lay across the knees of the angry avatar of Vishnu.

Vamana

Vishnu in this form was said to have deceived the demon king Bali and sent him to the nether regions. The god was said to have come to the demon king in the form of a dwarf (vamana) Brahmana and asked him for 'tripada-bhumi' (earth that would be covered by three paces). Bali agreed, and Vamana assumed a colossal form ('Virata-rupa'), covering the three worlds with his three steps. Bali was left with no other option but to be pushed to the nether regions.

Parasuram

Parasurama is considered only an 'avesa-avatara' of Vishnu who temporarily reposed in his person to destroy the kshatriyas as many as twenty-one times in order to cleanse the world of sin as told in the *Gitagovinda*

Raghav Rama

Rama, the son of Dasaratha of the Raghu dynasty, is recognized as the seventh avatara of Vishnu. The story of Rama is well known to all Assamese people as the *Ramayana*.

NOTES

Balarama

In Indian mythology, Balarama has a dual personality. He belongs to the category of the four 'vyuhas'. He is also recognized as the eighth avatara of Vishnu.

NOTES

Buddha

Buddha, the propagator of the heterodox creed of Buddhism, has also been incorporated as the ninth avatar in the traditional list of the ten avatars of Vishnu.

Kalki

Kalki, the last of avatars, is to appear at the end of the present aeon ('Kaliyuga') to purge the world of sin by destroying the 'mlechchhas'. These are the ten avatars of Vishnu that are often the reference points in ancient Hindu iconography of Assam.

Surya

Surya is another principal god of sectarian Hinduism and is considered to be the presiding deity of the Saura sect. From fairly early times in Assam, Surya worship is common: he was worshipped not only for the attainment of desire and wealth, but also for the healing of many ailments.

Miscellaneous Divinity

Among these miscellaneous categories of icons, we find Brahma – the creator of the world; Dikpalas – the guardians of the directions; Indra – the guardian of the east; Varuna – guardian of the west; Yama – of the south; Kubera – of the north; Agni – of the north-east; Isana of the north-east; Vayu – of the north-west; and Nirriti of the south-west. Kamadeva is the representative God of love in Hindu mythology.

Buddhism in Assam was not prominent in Kamrupa, according to Hiuen Tsang. K. L. Barua has referred to two representations of the Buddha, one in stone and the other in terracotta. From these it can be said that Assam indicates the prevalence of Buddhism in this territory. Mahapratishara was one of the goddesses of the 'Pancharaksha' group and descriptions of her form may be found in the *Sadhanamala*. One other Tantrik Buddhist goddess, Chunda was seen to have been represented in a metal image from the Narakasura hoarding.

Relics of the 'Jaina' faith had earlier been unknown in Assam. It was only recently that two rock-cut images with definite Jaina affiliation have been discovered in a cave in Surya-Pahar.

Besides these, there are other forms too. Assamese people worshipped Shiva in various forms in thematic and symbolic ways. Two four-handed images of Shiva along with a four-handed Vishnu in between were found. Shiva can be observed in three different images in the Kamakhya temple. An image of Shiva seated in meditation and another image with a trisul were found in Akasa Ganga. An image of Shiva seated on a bull was present at *mikir ati*.

Other than the iconic forms of Shiva and the ten avatars of Vishnu, Brahma is known as the creator, and the guardians of the world are Indra, who guards the east, Varun guards the west, Yama guards the northeast, Kubera guarding the north, Agni guards the northeast, Isana guards the northeast, Vayu guarding the northeast, and Nirriti was guarding the southwest corner of the world. Assam promises abundance of architectural activity. This is both secular and religious.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

7. Kampura was ruled by the Varmanas, the Salasthambha, and the Pala dynasties. (True/False)
8. The government that was widespread in ancient Assam was _____.
9. Which form of Lord Shiva is depicted as Nataraja?

NOTES

2.5 HIUEN TSANG'S ACCOUNT OF ASSAM

Hiuen Tsang was a well-known 7th century Chinese Buddhist and a pilgrim. His writings on his travel provide very integral and comprehensive information regarding that period. Hiuen Tsang embraced Buddhism when he was only thirteen years old. There was political and social chaos when the Sui dynasty fell. So he moved to Xingdu in Sichuan. He started a journey to search the sacred texts related to Buddhism throughout China. After being to several places in China, he decided to embark on a journey to India. However, he was worried about not being able to complete his search for scriptures completely in China. He began his travel to India via central Asia using the northern trade route through Kucha and he arrived in the northern part of India. His travelogue is named as *Xiyu Ji (Hsi-yu Chi)*, and it provides vast information on the then countries of south and central Asia. Although he came in search of Buddhist scriptures and instructions, he spent 16 years in India obtaining and achieving more than that.

He has recorded the political and social status of the places he visited and this updated and built the history of this region. Hiuen Tsang visited almost all the Buddhist pilgrimage places which were of importance to India. He spent many years learning about Buddhism in Nalanda University.

His visit to Kampura in Assam gave an actual base to reconstruct the history of Assam. Hiuen Tsang in his account described Kumar Bhaskar Varman as the 'The aristocratic King of eastern India'. He was a devotee of Shiva and followed Shaivism, but being a learned king, he accepted Buddhism too. Tsang wrote – 'The frontier of Kamrupa extends about 10000 'Li' (approx. 2720 km) and the capital is around 30 Li'. Although the land has slopes, it's very productive. Local people are mostly involved in cultivation. People cultivate jackfruits and coconuts. These trees are planted very deftly. Dams are erected on rivers or lakes bringing forth the streams, which keep flowing all the year. Hiuen Tsang also provided a detailed account of the climate and people. 'The climate of the region is tropical and wet. People belonging to this place are simple, honest and modest by nature. They are aggressive at times. They have sharp minds and very intelligent. The people are fair in complexion with a copper or yellow tinge. They are short in height and have a flat nose.' About the local language, Hiuen Tsang mentioned that 'The language they speak varies from the language spoken in the central India.' On the religion Tsang reports – 'Noatives of Kamrupa worshipped God and use to offer sacrifices to gratify their revered God. The empire has various temples belonging to various tribes. Although the king himself was a devout Shaivite Brahmin, he was not opposed to the spread of Buddhism.'

Bhaskar Varman's contemporary ally king of whole Northern India, Harshavardhan, was very much impressed by Hiuen Tsang's visit to Kamrupa. Harshvardhan invited Hiuen Tsang from Kampur to Kanouj and honored both Bhaskar Varman and Tsang.

Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim who visited Kampura during the reign of Bhaskarvarman, recorded that the king was fond of learning, and men of high talents came to his dominion from distant places aspiring after office.

NOTES

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

10. Name Hiuen Tsang's travelogue.
11. Hiuen Tsang in his account described Kumar Bhaskar Varman as the _____.
12. Who honoured Hiuen Tsang in Kanouj?

2.6 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- Various kinds of silkworms were used to obtain a particular silk called *kasaja*. Silk was categorized as:
 - o **Wild silk:** this kind of silk is obtained from silkworms that feed on plants and trees growing in the forests.
 - o **True silk:** this kind of silk is obtained from silkworms that feed on mulberry leaves. Wild silk can be further classified as: Eri: The eri cloth was known for its durability. It was of drab color, and it was light and warm. Muga: Many varieties of muga cloth were available such as mejankari muga. This kind of silk was used by the upper class people for their dresses. Pat was another kind of silk available in ancient times.
- Black pepper and long peppers are two common products of the Assam forest. A large amount of shellac is produced in Assam. It is exported to China and Japan and is used to manufacture cabinets. It is renowned that it has the best quality in the whole continent. Forest has very beautiful inhabitants like the peacock, kokila, and keteki. Dhanesha is a rare species animal which is seen only in this region.
- As per Hindu *shastras* there are eight types of marriages. They were **Raksasa:** the bride would be married by force; **Paisaca:** the bride and the bridegroom secretly elope; **Gandharva:** secret union by copulation with the consent of the bride and bridegroom; **Brahma:** the bride and the bride groom get wedded with ceremony; **Daiva:** the bride is married to a priest; **Arsa:** wedding is conducted after the bride's father gets a formal gift of oxen from the bridegroom; **Kaya:** the proposal is made from the bride groom; **Asura:** the bride is purchased
- Rice was considered as the staple food of this region. However, early Assamese literature consisted of a lot of descriptions related to a range of hundred different kinds of paddy. The boka dhari is a favourite meal amongst the Assamese people during the celebrations of a festival. It is a variety of rice that is usually eaten uncooked. The hill people use the shifting method of cultivation which is known as jhum. Other than rice, Assamese people cultivate a large variety of fruits. Some of the well-known fruits are mangoes, oranges, plantains, citrons, limes, and pineapples.
- Based on the kalika purana, textiles are divided into the following categories: 'karpasa' (cotton), 'kambala' (wool), 'balka' (bark), and 'kasaja' (silk from cocoon).

NOTES

- Around 5th century AD, the influence of the Guptas increased in Assam and as a result large number of Brahmins migrated to Kampura, The Brahmins who migrated were also gifted with land as they have to settle themselves and can focus on religious matters. The Brahmins were categorized by gotras and Veda – sakhas. Originally, gotras were only seven or eight and they were denoted by *rishis*. The formation of the term 'Pravara' is strongly entwined with that of the gotra. Some of the titles were Deva, Sarman and Swamin.
- It was quite common and a custom in Assam that they appointed dancers and courtesans in connection with temple services and these women dedicated their lives in the service of the temple. Such women were known as 'Nati or Daluhangana'. Brahmin women were well educated and skilled in the arts of poetry and rhetoric.
- Mulaka, rajaka, vastuka, palanga, nalika, and such herbs were used commonly. The two popular dishes in the region were Pocola and kharika. These were made using young banana plant and bamboo shoots. Sour preparations were made using various fruits such as cakala, tenteli, and Ou. Assam people eat a lot of fish and this is considered as a pre-Aryan custom. This eating habit is assumed to be borrowed from the Mongolian people. Meat such as duck, pigeon, and wild boar were also consumed generally.
- Shaivism plays an important role and it is considered to be the most prevailing faith in Assam. It is very much evident that the cult of Siva was much eminent than the other cults in Assam from ancient times. There were several shaivite temples and various forms of Shiva in the early medieval period. Some of the iconic forms of Shiva are as follows: are the 'urdha-medhra' or the 'urdhva-linga' (phallus erectus), the 'trinetra' (the third eye shown vertically in the center of the forehead) and the 'jatamukuta' (crest of matted hair) with chandrakala or indukala (crescent) on it.
- Normally kings resign if they wish to pass on the crown to their children or to spend the remaining life in a spiritual way. The kingdom worked more based on the personal and natural qualities of the ruler. The history provides a lot of evidences on the required personal qualities of a king. Other than the qualities required mentally, the physical body of the king was also necessary. Some of the qualities of the king were that the king must have a border chest, slim and slender waist, with a thick set neck and club-like arms. War is the most important sport for all the kings. The success in the war and the valour that they showed in the war is the highest aim that any king would want to have.
- Hajo has a temple named Hayagriva Madhavatemple which is visited by the Buddhists from Bhutan, Tibet, Ladakh and southwestern China. Along with the hayagriva temple at hajo, all the other temples in the hills at hajo were given great importance by the Buddhist monks.
- There is a strong belief amongst the lamas that the Buddha's mahaparinirvana took place in some spot approximately in Hajo. This Hayagriva Madhava temple was built by a Koch king, Raghudevyanarayan of Kampura in 1583. The Assamese people believed in the worship of sun in the ancient times and even today in some parts of Assam.
- Most of the kings maintained the custom of having singing and dancing as the means of entertainment in the court. These songs were composed based on various ragas. Art of developing paintings on the wall and normal painting started developing from the 14th century AD. Sankaradeva had also painted some of the celestial

NOTES

figures for the China yatra. Earth, bark, leaves, gold, copper, and silver were used as the writing material in those days. The pens used for writing were made up of bamboos, reed, copper, bell-metal, gold, and iron. The ink used in the pen for writing purposes was obtained from a fruit name as silikha. Earthworm sap was also used to extract ink. However, it was used to make invisible ink.

2.7 KEY TERMS

- **Balka:** Bark
- **Jati:** Caste
- **Kambala:** Wool
- **Karpasa:** Cotton
- **Kasaja:** Silk from cocoon
- **Kumbhakara:** Potters
- **Nauki:** Boatmen
- **Tantuvaya:** Weavers

2.8 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Gotras and Veda-sakhas
2. Daiva
3. Eri, Muga and Pat
4. The geography of the landscape; climate; and general living pattern of the people
5. Muga
6. Gold washing and jewellery making
7. True
8. Kingdoms
9. Nritya Murty
10. *Xiyu Ji (Hsi-yu Chi)*
11. 'The aristocratic King of eastern India'
12. Harshvardhan

2.9 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Who occupied Kampura earlier?
2. As per Hindu shastras there are eight types of marriages. What are they?
3. What were the disciplines studied in Assam in ancient times?
4. Give examples of ornaments worn by the people of Assam during earlier times.
5. What role does Shaivism play in Assam?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Describe what Assamese society was like during the time of the Varmanas.
2. What was the economy like during the time of the Varmanas?
3. Write a note on: Polity and religion in the time of the Varmanas.
4. How did Hiuen Tsang depict Assam?
5. Discuss the cultural aspect of Assam during the time of the Varmanas.

NOTES

2.10 FURTHER READING

- Gait, E.A.; *A History of Assam*, BiblioBazaar, US, 2010.
- Choudhary, Pratap Chandra; *The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century AD*, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam, Assam, 1966.
- Bhattacharjee, Jayanta Bhusan; *Social and polity formations in pre-colonial north-east India: the Barak Valley experience*, Haranand Publications in association with Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1991.
- Sinha, Surajit; *Tribal Polities and State Systems in Pre-colonial Eastern and North Eastern India*, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, 1987.
- Chakravarty, I. N., Chakravarty, Lakshmi N.; *Glimpses of the Early History of Arunachal*, Research Department, Arunachal Pradesh Administration, Arunachal Pradesh, 1973.
- Barpujari, Heramba Kauta; *Assam in the Days of the Company: 1826 - 1858: a Critical and Comprehensive History of Assam during the Rule of the East-India Company from 1826 - 1858*, North-Eastern Hill University Publications, Assam, 1996
- Barpujari, Heramba Kauta; *The Comprehensive history of Assam*, Publication Board, Assam, 1990.
- M. Horam; *Naga Polity*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 1975.
- M. Horam; *Social and Cultural Life of Nagas: (the Tangkhul Nagas)*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 1977.
- Sangkima; Mizos, *Society and Social Change, 1890-1947*, Spectrum Publications, New Delhi, 1992.
- Sangkima; *A Modern History Of Mizoram*, Spectrum Publications, New Delhi, 2004.
- Bhattacharjee, Jayanta Bhusan; *The Garos and the English, 1765-1874*, Radiant Publishers, Hyderabad, 1978.
- Kar, Parimal Chandra; *Garos in Transition*, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1982.
- Venuh, N. and Bonita Aleaz; *British Colonization and Restructuring of Naga Polity*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2005.
- Lahiri, Rebati Mohan; *The Annexation of Assam: 1824-1854*, General Printers & Publishers, Mumbai, 1954.
- Bhuyan, Surya Kumar; *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, Lawyer's Book Stall, Assam, 1974.
- Elwin, Verrier; *The Nagas in the 19th Century*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1969.

NOTES

- Lahiri, Nayanjot; *Pre-Ahom Assam*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1991.
- Birinchi, B.K. and Banikanta Kakati; *Cultural History of Assam*, K. K. Barooah, Assam, 1951.
- Basu, Nirmal Kumar; *Assam in the Ahom Age, 1228-1826: Being Politico-economic and Socio-cultural Studies*, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, Kolkata, 1970.
- Nath, R.M.; *The Background of Assamese Culture*, A. K. Nath, 1948.
- Bareh, Hamlet; *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, Spectrum Publications, Gauhati, 1967.
- Chatterjii, S. K.; *The Place of Assam in the History and Civilization of India*, Gauhati University, Gauhati, 1970.
- Dani, A. H.; *Prehistory and Protohistory of Eastern India*, Firma L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1960.
- Dhavlikar, M. K.; *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute* 31-32: 137-49, Archaeology of Gauhati, 1973.

UNIT 3 EARLY STATES IN ASSAM: THE PALA DYNASTY

*Early States in Assam:
The Pala Dynasty*

NOTES

Structure

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Unit Objectives
- 3.2 Pala Rulers and North-East India
- 3.3 Society
- 3.4 Polity
 - 3.4.1 Administration
 - 3.4.2 The Pala Kings of Bengal
- 3.5 Economy
- 3.6 Religion
- 3.7 Summary
- 3.8 Key Terms
- 3.9 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 3.10 Questions and Exercises
- 3.11 Further Reading

3.0 INTRODUCTION

The Pala dynasty (Pal Samrajya) was a powerful ruling dynasty during the classical period of India. The names of the kings in this kingdom ended with Pala which means 'protector'. The Palas ruled Bihar and India from 8th to the 12th century. The Pala dynasty came into existence after the death of Sasanka of Bengal. Bengal faced a lot of chaos and political turmoil after the death of Sasanka who was a rival of Harsha of Kanauj. The founder of Pala dynasty was Gopala, who ruled from AD 750 to 770. Dharmapala was the successor of Gopala, and he ruled from AD 770 to 781. Dharmapala made the Pala's a very strong and dominant power in north India.

The origin and rise of power of the Pala dynasty cannot be stated exactly in any of the Pala records. There are no exact evidences on the origin and ancestry of the Pala. Scholars suggest that the Pala kings were connected to king Rajabhata of the Buddhist Khadga of eastern Bengal. Studies reveal that Gopala was a 'sudra', and the Palas were low-born Kshatriyas. There are various beliefs regarding their origin. Scholars are of the opinion that the Palas were originally descendants of the Bhadra dynasty. Khalimpur Plate of Dharmapala, son of Gopala, states that Gopala was a son of a warrior (Khanditarat) Vapyata and grandson of a highly educated Dayitavishnu.

The Palas came to power and ruled for about four hundred years. The ruling period of the Palas was considered the golden age of Bengal as it witnessed many achievements. Social life prospered during this period, and social conditions were peaceful. The society was dominated by religion, but the status of the Vedic Brahmins declined.

The basis of the Pala dynasty's administration was monarchy. The king or monarch was the center of all power. Kings were accompanied by a prime ministers. The empire was divided into Vuktis or provinces. Furthermore, these Vuktis were divided into Vishaya or divisions and then into districts or mandalas.

NOTES

The Pala period introduced the society to a feudal economy. Agro economy and trade flourished, in addition to these, minerals also played a key role in uplifting the economy of the state.

The Palas followed Buddhism and belonged to the Mahayana Buddhism group. Buddhism and Hinduism were the religions that flourished under the Pala dynasty.

The Palas were excellent in art and sculpture and presented a unique form of Buddhist art. The art and architecture of this period was called the Pala school of sculptural art. The magnificent works of the Pala Empire consisted of Odantpuri Vihar, Vikramshila Vihar and Jagaddal Vihar. Literature under Pala dynasty promoted the proto-Bangla language. The language originated during the reign of the Pala dynasty. The Buddhist texts of the Charyapada were the initial form of Bangla language.

Pala dynasty ruled both Bihar and Bengal from the middle of the 8th century AD. The dynasty ruled the state with eighteen generations of kings. The dynasty gained power in Bengal under the reins of Dharmapala and Devapala

The decline of Pala Empire started after the death of Devapala. Foreign invasions are said to have a strong impact on the fall of the Pala dynasty.

In this unit, you will learn about the society and polity under the Palas, the religious practices followed and the economic activities undertaken.

3.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Describe the social life during the Palas
- Discuss the political situation during the reign of the Palas
- Discuss about the achievement and administration of some of the important Pala kings
- Explain the economy in the times of Palas
- Discuss the religious policy of the Palas

3.2 PALA RULERS AND NORTH EAST INDIA

The title 'Pala' is an abbreviation of the Sanskrit term *Palaka*, which means protector, i.e., a ruler or administrator. It seems that this title was a popular one among the rulers of north eastern India of the time and in imitation of the contemporary Pala kings of Bengal, Brahmapala also assumed that title. Brahmapala's reign may be placed between AD 990 and 1010. Towards the close of rule of the Salastambhas, Pundravardhana passed on to the hands of Bengal's ruler. The western boundary of the Kamrupa kingdom at the time of Brahmapala's accession to the throne was, therefore, again regressed to the river Karatoya. Brahmaputra abdicated the throne in favour of his son Ratnapala.

Ratnapala (AD 1010-40) was a powerful king. He made several land grants. He shifted the capital city of his kingdom of Pragjyotishpur, strongly fortified it and named it Durjaya or Sri Durjaya (impregnable). He defeated a king of Gouda named Rajyapala, which is evident from an inscription belonging to one of his successors, Gopala. Ratnapala appears to have encouraged trade and commerce as well as learning and education.

Ratnapala's son Indrapala (AD 1040-1065) defeated Kalyana Chandra, son of Sri Chandra of Bengal and to mark this victory made land-grants in Pundravardhana to a Brahmana hailing from Sravasthi. Indrapala married Rajyadevi, a Rashtrakuta princess. He was succeeded by his son Gopala (1065-85 AD), who was a man of merit and intelligence. His Grachtal inscription contains important information about his predecessors. During the reign of the next king Harshapala (AD 1085-1095), Jatavarman, king of east Bengal snatched away a part of Pundravardhana, then under the sovereign rule of Kamarupa. However, this was soon recovered by Dharmapala (AD 1095-1120), son and successor of Harshapala. Three inscription belonging to Dharmapala's reign have been found, which speak about his prowess and manifold qualities. He was a great patron of religion and learning and himself a poet. The first eight verses of the Pushpabhadra grant were composed by him. Towards the end of his reign, Dharmapala was conducting his administration from his capital at Kamarupanagar, which can be considered only as an extension of the old city of Pragjyotishpur to North Gauhati.

Jaypala, the son of Dharmapala, who is identified by P.C. Choudhury with Ramchandra mentioned in *Ram Charita* of Sandhyakaranandi, ruled sometime between AD 1120 and 30. During his reign, Kamarupa was attacked by Mayana, the general of Ramapala, the Pala king of Bengal and as a result of the war, the *Kamarupadhipati* lost his possession in North Bengal. The Bengal king placed Tingyadeva as his vassal king in the part. Later when Tingyadeva rebelled, Ramapala's son Kumarapala, who then ruled Gauda, sent Vaidyadeva to suppress him. Vaidyadeva not only suppressed Tingyadeva but also conquered Kamarupa and declared his independence in AD 1138. He assumed the title *Maharajadhiraja Parameswara Paramabhattaraka*.

You will learn about the important Pala rulers of Bengal in **Section 3.4** (Polity during the Palas).

3.3 SOCIETY

The reign of the Palas is referred to as a golden period in the history of Bengal. The Palas ruled for about four hundred years, which can be noted as a rarity in the chronicles of dynastic history. The Palas can be held responsible for all the praise that Bengal achieved during this long period. The Palas are responsible for the foundation of Bengali nationalism, which was apparent from social structure plus life of the people during the Pala period.

By the beginning of the 9th century the Palas had extended their sphere of authority to as far as Kanauj, if not over the whole of north India. The Palas could not hold their administration in northern India for a long period, but the power and strength generated during the early years of Pala rule enabled them to hold on their own against the invasions of the north Indian powers in the 10th and 11th centuries AD.

The Palas had laudable accomplishments in the area of administration. The copperplates found from the times of Palas bear sufficient testimony to their well-organized administration practices. An organized system of administration predominated from village level to the level of central government. The efficient administrative structure of the Palas, acquired from the Gupta Dynasty, brought them a lot of credit though they made the structure more efficient and introduced many new characteristics. The Palas built an effective structure of revenue collection. The lengthy list of state-officials, found on the Pala copper plates, clearly point out that the administration cared for every aspect of public life — from the land routes to ferry

NOTES

NOTES

ghats, river ways, towns and ports, trade and commerce, and law and order in the country. Forest or market management was not left behind as well. The foundation of their long rule was their efficient administrative system.

Despite the fact that the Palas were inclined towards Buddhism, the socio-cultural aspect of life of the Palas maintained the essence of Brahmanism. The *varna* or caste system was not as rigid as it was in its preceding eras but was rooted deeply within the society and the Buddhists had to adapt themselves to it. Though caste system predominated, the orthodox Brahmanical division had experienced a massive change. The domination of the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas did not bear much important in the socio-political life. The Palas kings were Buddhists but the social structure was based on Brahmanical Hinduism. Buddhism earned tremendous patronage from the Pala kings. The Palas respected the Brahmins and their status and apparently had accepted the system of *varna*. They had given higher status to the middle varnas and sudras.

Though the caste system was not so rigid in the Pala period, the people belonging to lower castes were regarded as untouchables. Bhaba-Deva Bhatta in his book described that the Medas, Chandalas, Savaras, and Kapalis were untouchables. They were considered outcasts and lived on the outskirts of the villages. The kshatriyas and the trading class had lost their importance in the society. This happened mainly due to the decline of trade in the 7th century AD. The rigidity in the *varna* system did not influence the society of Bengal during the Pala age, presumably due to the nonexistence of 'smritis' or the law books in Bengal.

Brahmanical Hinduism gained a lot of popularity during this period due to Vaishnavism and Shakti cult but it had to go through a lot of changes during the Pala period. Puranic themes and legends dominated the religious beliefs of people. The essence of Puranic Hinduism was depicted in the inscription and images of deities in the temples during this period. Vedic gods and Vedic Hinduism had passed into Nirvana during the Pala period. The importance of vedic rituals like yajna and homa had also lost much of its glory.

The lifestyle of the Puranic kings and heroes became widely popular in the Pala period. These included kings like Nala, Sagara, Bali, and Rama. Vishnu became more humanized through the Pala phase which gave rise to the cult of Krishna. Bengalis considered Krishna to be more humane in comparison to Vishnu during this period. Due to the influence of Puranic Hinduism, the concept of Shiva had to face a massive change. Lord Shiva was considered to be a generous and a powerful god who had no material interests and was kind towards his followers. Siddhidata Ganesha came into existence and was worshipped by the merchant communities. People started worshipping goddess Saraswati as the concept of learning developed. Goddesses Lakshmi and Saraswati were considered the wives of Lord Vishnu. Worship of phallus became popular during the Pala period. Images of lord Shiva dancing or 'Nataraja' emerged during the Pala phase indicating the other forms of lord Shiva. The joint vestiges of Shiva- Parvati designated that Shiva had a great impression in the socio-religious life of the era.

Buddhism experienced a massive support under the Palas and Mahayana Buddhism was further remodeled. Tantric practices infiltrated through the Mahayana cultism, which was known as 'Vajrayana'. It was said that protection could be attained by practicing 'Bodhichitta'. Another school of Buddhism, known as 'Sahajayana' flourished during this period. While the Vajrayanists had faith in *mantra tantra*, gods and goddesses were discarded by Sahajayanists. They completely denied the efficacy of worship, sacrifices,

rituals, penance and suffering for achieving salvation. According to them, body is a temple, which alone could bring salvation. Thus, both the theory of Vajrayana and Sahajayana affected the socio-religious life of the people during the Pala period.

Apart from Vajrayanas and Sahajayanas, there also formed some other sects, which attained popularity during the Pala phase such as Sahajiya and Nathas cult. According to historians, the *bauls* of Bengal owes its origin from the Sahajiya cult. As the socio-religious codes during the Pala period was widely flexible, different religious sects apart from the Brahmanical Hinduism and Buddhism also prospered.

The public-welfare was the most remarkable aspect of the Pala rule. The Pala rulers were Buddhists, but most of their subjects were Hindus. Dharmapala adopted the policy of toleration for religion as the state policy. He declared that he is 'conversant with the rules of shastras', and he made 'the castes adhere to their proper principles.' This policy was followed by his heirs. The Hindu gods and goddesses and Brahmins received generous patronage from the Pala rulers although they were devoted Buddhists. Brahmins occupied high official posts. Except for one or two, all the Pala copper plate records granted lands to temples of Hindu gods. There is no evidence of any religious disharmony between the Buddhists and the Hindus in society. Religious toleration and mutual coexistence can be recognized as the characteristic of the social life in the Pala period.

This social peace for a long period of time contributed to the developments in different fields. There are examples of welfare activities of Pala rulers. Dharmapala is famous for having constructed a few tanks by spending a few thousand silver coins. Mahipala I had made a place in the hearts of people of Bengal with his welfare activities like establishing towns and digging tanks. Remains of many buildings of the Pala period owe testimony to the welfare activities of the rulers of this dynasty. The tradition of religious harmony and tolerance created in the Pala period was given a sudden jerk during the period of the Senas and the people had to prepare for the acceptance of Islam in the following period. The long Pala period created an atmosphere of convenience and a mixture of Hindu-Buddhist culture which contributed to the formation of the tantrik and sahajiya cults, the legacy of which transformed through the medieval period down to modern age. The legacy of religious-cultural-social union that evolved during the rule of the Palas was a splendid achievement of the period. Buddhism reached Tibet, Sumatra, Java and Malayasia during the Pala reign. The pundits from the Buddhist Viharas of Bengal played a very significant role in the distribution and spread of Buddhism in these countries.

Everyday lifestyle of the Bengalis during the Pala phase points to one of the significant characters of social life. People led a simple life and staple food of the Bengalis included rice, lentil, milk and milk products, jaggery or sugar, fish, meat and rice. People chewed betel leaves mixed with spices after their meals. People devoted their leisure time in different pastimes during the Pala period. The ruling and upper class people were fond of hunting which was livelihood for the lower class people. The inscriptions of Paharpur and Moynamoti depict various hunting expeditions. Chariot racing was a favourite past time of upper class men whereas women were fond of water sports, dancing, singing and gardening. Common people were fond of wrestling and horse racing. There was a class of concubines and temple dancers called *devdasis*. The system of *devdasi* was widely prevalent during the Pala civilization.

Garments worn by the people of the Pala period were simple which showed their belief in a simple lifestyle. Men wore dhoti and *chaddar*: Stitched garments were seldom

NOTES

NOTES

used for the upper part of the body. Women wore sarees. Women from aristocratic family wore *cholis*. Jimutavahana had sanctioned special dress for festive seasons. Dancing girls wore special decorative garments. Workers and common individuals used to wear a very short dhoti or a short cloth just to cover the waist.

The position of women in society during the Pala period was no way different from the previous periods. According to Vatsayana, the women of Gauda loved luxury. They applied vermilion dots on their foreheads and aromatic sandal powder paste on their body, and flowers in their hair. Women belonging to upper class lived in a lavish style but the women in villages had a simple, unsophisticated life style. Poor women had to participate in domestic duties along with their male partners. Polygamy was practiced widely. Upper class men married lower class women provided they could get good amount of dowry. Widows were highly abhorred in the Pala society, and were compelled to live a life of penance. A woman was expected to be a caring mother, a good and devoted wife and be able to bear the sins done by her husband. The male predominant society diminished the self-respect and freedom of women. On a whole, the Pala period in ancient India witnessed a period of staggering peace and security in their societal life. Caste system was more flexible, and people belonging to diverse caste and creed were given due respect and status. The social life during the Palas made its mark in the history of early India as an era of absolute peace and prosperity. This social union during the Palas added to the prosperity of ancient India in all areas over a long period of time.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Fill in the blanks.
 - (a) The _____ found from the times of Palas bear sufficient testimony about their reign.
 - (b) _____ adopted the policy of religious toleration.
2. Who was the first king of the Pala dynasty?
3. What religion was followed by the Pala kings?

3.4 POLITY

The Pala dynasty came into existence after the death of Sasanka, and continued to rule the extended regions of Bihar and Bengal for four hundred years—from 8th century to 12th century AD. There was a great political upheaval in Bengal after the death of Sasanka. Bengal faced a lot of chaos and the Palas rescued the region from all such socio-political upheaval. The kingdom was protected from breaking down, and the Palas ensured consolidation of the Empire under their supremacy. The founder of this dynasty was Gopala. He reigned from AD 750-770, and strengthened his position by controlling Bengal. His successor was Dharmapala, who ruled from 770-781 and made the Palas a very strong power in northern India by taking over the once-prestigious throne of Kanauj. Soon after, the Pratiharas of central India started threatening the Palas but did nothing as they faced greater danger from Rashtrakutas of Deccan. The Pala rulers established a significant epoch in the history of ancient India.

However, there are no clear evidences on the origin and early history of Palas. The epigraphic sources and official Pala records does not say much about the caste.

origin and early chronicle of the Palas. Since no definite evidence is available, historians have no choice but to depend on indirect evidences, which drop light on the reign of the Palas in Bengal. Therefore there are lots of controversies among the historians on the origin and ancestry of the Palas. From the official records of Palas, it is known that Vapyata was the father of Gopala and Dayita Vishnu was his grandfather. Based on facts provided by the poet Baribhadra, who was a contemporary to king Dharmapala, some scholars propose that the Pala kings were correlated to king Rajabhata of the Buddhist Khadga of east Bengal. Again some scholars opine, taking the evidences from Khalimpur Copper Plate under consideration that the Palas were originally the descendants of the Bhadra Dynasty. Though the initial Palas did not submit themselves to any mythical ancestry, the later Palas declared themselves as descendants of the Sun or 'Surya Kula'. Ghanarama in *Dharma Mangala*, Sandhyakara Nandi in *Rama Charita* and other histories of the Age referred to Samudra Kula, or the 'origin of the Palas from ocean.'

Though there are no convincing evidences about the origin and ancestry of the Palas, yet the historians are of the opinion that the Palas were Kshatriya by caste. Evidences from *Ram Charita* and *Taranatha* confirm this theory. This was further strengthened by their marital relationship with the Kalachuriyas and the Rashtrakutas. Some historians opine that the Palas did not belong to any high caste and described them as 'Dasajivina' or Sudra by occupation in *Arya-manjusri-mula-kalpa*. Depending on this tradition, Abul Fazal, a medieval Muslim writer, described the Palas as 'kayasthas'. Modern scholars are of the opinion that the Palas were staunch Buddhists as per their official records. Copper plates of the Pala kings exhibited a clear indication of their Buddhist affiliation. It is not known if the founder of the Pala dynasty in Bengal was basically of Buddhist origin; there is evidence that the Pala kings had an important position in the world of international Buddhists.

The original homeland or the actual extent of the kingdom of Gopala, the founder of the Palas, cannot be exactly determined but since most historians of the early Pala kings originated from Magadha, the historians assume Magadha to be the original homeland of the Palas. They consequently conquered Bengal and became a part of it.

The century following the death of Sasanka witnessed extreme chaos, political upheavals and foreign invasions. The province was horribly disturbed and lacked peace. After the death of Sasanka, Harshavardhana and the Kamrupa king Bhaskarvarmana had appended Bengal or Gauda. Later a strong Tibetan invasion cleared away the political stability of Bengal. This caused the Bengal to divide into various provincial units. Each one struggled for the mastery of land. The absence of any central authority or Government made the condition anarchic. With Gopala taking over the throne, the anarchy in Bengal ended. The Khalimpur Copper Plate depicts that Gopala was crowned by popular support. To put an end to this lawlessness, Gopala chose the central authority and appeared in the political plot of Bengal. Gopala was a prominent chief and a qualified military general. It is said that Gopala did not possess royal blood as he was not born in a prominent family but it was just on account of his martial and exceptional leadership qualities that he was chosen as the leader. The establishment of peace within Bengal and removing the state of anarchy were the main achievements of Gopala. He became the king of Bengal and sovereignty of the Pala kings was established in the 8th century, which continued uninterrupted till 12th century AD.

NOTES

NOTES

3.4.1 Administration

The Pala dynasty ruled for four hundred years and expanded their empire far and wide. Their ruling policy led towards matchless growth in the fields of arts and literature. The Palas had an organized administrative system. Welfare of the people was their major concern. The Palas extended their power towards Kanauj in the beginning of the 9th century. Bengal got involved in politics of northern India in the period of the Pala dynasty.

The dynasty followed the monarchical system of administration. The monarch or king was the centre of power. The kings of Pala were given the title of Paramvattaraka, parameshwar or Maharajadhiraja. The Pala Empire was divided into several Vuktis or provinces. These Vuktis were further segmented into Vishaya (divisions) and then into mandala (districts). Other smaller units were Bhaga, Khandala, Avritti, Chaturaka, and Pattaka.

The Palas managed the society from the commonality to the royal court. Their achievements were in all spheres—from the village level to the level of central government was introduced in an exceptionally planned structure. The Palas it is said inherited the administrative structure from the Guptas. Nonetheless, the administrative system of the Palas was more efficiently practiced. The system had an explicit arrangement for revenue collection. The administration cared and took interest in improving the lives of their citizens. During their long period of leadership, the Pala dynasty developed the land routes, ferry ghats, the river ways, towns and ports, trade and commerce, as well as skillfully managed the law and order in their territory. The Pala system of government had a long list of state-officials. The copperplates from the Pala dynasty point out their efficient administrative system. Further, these copper plates give details of the achievement of the administration. The Pala dynasty assigned positions such as Raja, or the (vassal kings) Mahasamanta, Duta (head ambassador), Rajasthaniya (deputy), Mahasandhi-vigrahika (foreign minister), sasthadhikrta (tax collector). Other prominent positions in the royal court were that of the Mahaksapatalika (accountant); the Ksetrapa (head of land use division), Jyesthakayastha (dealing documents) and Pramatr (head of land measurements). The administration also appointed the chief justice or Mahadandanayaka/Dharmadhikara, police forces or the Mahapratihara, secret service or Khola. Agricultural posts were also allotted as Gavadhakshya or head of dairy farms, Chhagadhyakshya or head of goat farms, Meshadyakshya or head of sheep farms, Mahishadyakshya or head of buffalo farms and Nakadhyakshya or aviation ministry. This extensive system of administration and management venerated the power and strength of the Pala reign and allowed them to occupy supremacy in northern India till 10th and 11th centuries AD.

NOTES

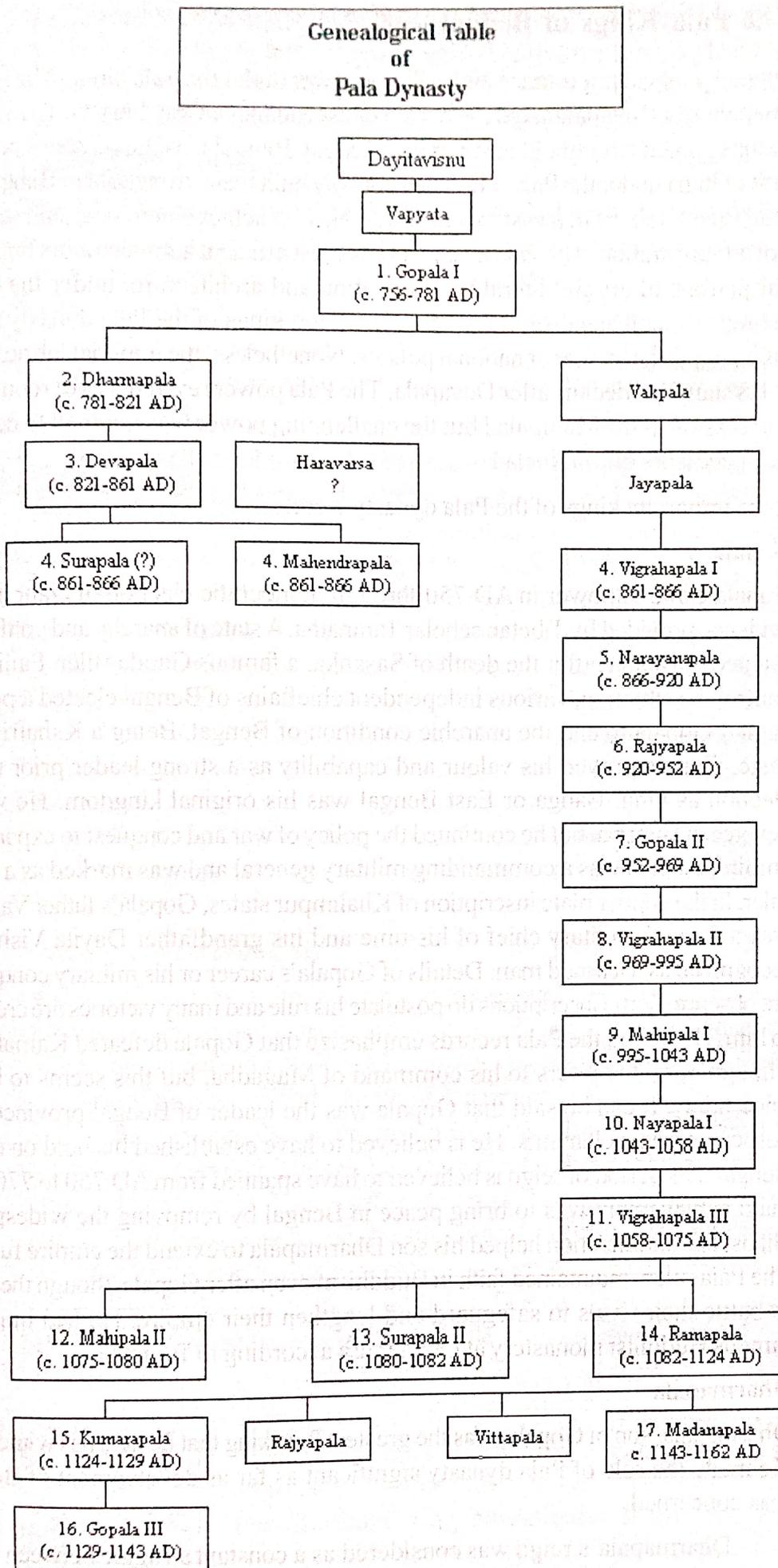


Fig. 3.1 Genealogical Chart of Pala Kings

3.4.2 The Pala Kings of Bengal

Bengal gained political importance and military power under the Pala kings. The reigns of Dharmapala and Devapala were the period of ascendancy of the dynasty. The rule of the Pala kings gained stronghold in Bihar and Bengal. Bengal was the center of politics in the north of India under the Pala rule. They not only built their stronghold in Bengal but also spread their territory to a vast extent. Their biggest achievement was said to be in the field of administration. The Pala kings were not just efficient administrators but were also great patrons of art and literature. Education and architecture, under the Palas received huge impetus in north India. The celebrated kings of the Pala dynasty made Bengal as an important center of national politics. Nonetheless, the imperial fabric of the Pala powers started to decline after Devapala. The Pala power revived its lost reputation with the accession of the Mahipala I but the challenging power was doomed to decline under the successors of Mahipala I.

Some of the important kings of the Pala dynasty were:

1. Gopala

Gopala came to power in AD 750 through democratic election in Gaur as per evidence provided by Tibetan scholar Taranatha. A state of anarchy and confusion reigned in Bengal after the death of Sasanka, a famous Gauda ruler. Failing to control the situation, various independent chieftains of Bengal elected a person named Gopala to end the anarchic condition of Bengal. Being a Kshatriya by caste, Gopala proved his valour and capability as a strong leader prior to his election as king. Banga or East Bengal was his original kingdom. He was a devotee of Buddha, but he continued the policy of war and conquest to expand his empire. Gopala was a commanding military general and was marked as a great ruler. In the copper plate inscription of Khalimpur states, Gopala's father Vapyata was a famous military chief of his time and his grandfather Dayita Vishnu is recognized as a learned man. Details of Gopala's career or his military conquests are obscure. Some inscriptions do postulate his rule and many victories are credited to him. However, the Pala records emphasize that Gopala defeated Kamakaris. Though Taranatha refers to his command of Magadha, but this seems to be an uncertainty. It can be said that Gopala was the leader of Bengal province and curbed anarchic elements. He is believed to have established his hold on entire Bengal. His period of reign is believed to have spanned from AD 750 to 770. His main achievement was to bring peace in Bengal by removing the widespread chaos. His stabilization helped his son Dharmapala to extend the empire further. The Pala rulers maintained faith in Buddhism even after Gopala, though they had to battle their rivals to safeguard and lengthen their empire. He had built the famous Buddhist monastery at Otantapura according to Taranatha.

2. Dharmapala

Dharmapala, son of Gopala, was the greatest Pala king that Bengal has witnessed. He made the rule of Pala dynasty significant as far as development of Bengal was concerned.

Dharmapala's reign was considered as a constant struggle between Pala, Pratihara and Rashtrakuta over the supremacy of North and East India. Major ruling dynasties benefited the absence of a supreme ruler in North India. This created a tripartite strife between Pratiharas of Rajputana and the Malwas, Palas of Bengal and Rashtrakutas of the Deccan. The northern opponent of Dharmapala

was Vatsaraja Pratihara of Rajputana and Malwa. While Dharmapala wanted to expand his kingdom to the extreme west, Vatsaraja tried to expand his kingdom in the east, with the intention of occupying the city of Kannauj. Dharmapala probably conquered Magadha and extended his sway beyond Allahabad.

Battles of Dharmapala

The first phase of struggle of Dharmapala started with the battle between him and Vatsaraja, in the region of Doab where Dharmapala was defeated. At the same time, Rashtrakuta king Dhruva defeated Vatsaraja. Dhruva's next target in his campaign in the north was Dharmapala. He marched towards Doab and defeated Dharmapala but was unable to annex this northern empire. When Dhruv left for Deccan, Dharmapala resumed his struggle with the Pratiharas for mastery over north India.

Dhruva returned to the Deccan creating a void in the political scenario of North India and Vatsaraja was already destroyed by the Rashtrakutas earlier. Dharmapala took advantage of this situation and strove for his own ascendancy because of the temporary obscurity of his rivals. The Bhagalpur Copper Plate of Narayana Pala and the Khalimpur Copper Plate of Dharmapala provides facts about the northern victory of Dharmapala. Dharmapala's victory on Kanauj and deposition of the king of Kanauj, Indra Raja was found in the Bhagalpur Copper plates. He stationed his own candidate, Chakrayudh on the throne of Kanauj and in this way Dharmapala assumed sovereignty of Kanauj. Dharmapala also occupied the regions of Kedara, Gokarna and many other Himalayan regions. Dharmapala also held a Durbar at Kanauj in which kings of Matsya, Madra, Bhoja, Kuru, Yadu, Avanti, Yavana, Gandhara and Kira were invited and who gave their submission to Dharmapala as their suzerain.

Conquests of Dharmapala

Dharmapala extended his territory to a larger extent through his conquests. Dharmapala conquered major parts of North India, but he did not rule the whole Empire individually. He had trusted vassals to rule on his account with a degree of autonomy. Sub chiefs of Dharmapala ruled a lengthy stretch of the territory, between the boundaries of Bihar and Punjab. A significant number of kingdoms in Punjab, Malwa, Eastern Rajputana, Berar worked as the vassal states of Dharmapala. The tangible extent of Dharmapala's Empire extended from Bengal in the east to the distant limit of the northwest and conceivably even beyond the Himalayas in north. Dharmapala's empire towards the south included the regions of Malwa and Berar. Due to his enormous conquests in the North, Dharmapala was given the title 'Uttarapatha Swamin'.

This fame and prosperity for Dharmapala was short-lived as renewed attack of the Pratiharas challenged his sovereignty. Nagabhatta II initiated the second round of tripartite fight, by attacking Kannauj and crushing Chakrayudh, the subordinate chief of Dharmapala. This event created new conflict between the Pratihara king Nagabhatta II and the Pala king Dharmapala. There was a battle between these two powers in the region of Monghyr, where Dharmapala was defeated. At the same time, Tibetan invasion against the authority of Dharmapala in north India also came into existence. Before Nagabhatta could crush the power of his eastern adversary completely, the Rashtrakutas from south had cut short the triumphant career of Nagabhatta II.

NOTES

NOTES

Ultimately the Rashtrakuta king, Govinda III, destroyed the Pratiharas and the Pala supremacy. Rashtrakutas withdrew to their original homeland in Deccan, after which Dharmapala revived his power again.

Dharmapala as patron of art

Dharmapala had marked the ancient history of India not just as a mighty conqueror, but also as a great patron of art, architecture, and literature. He was a great patron of Buddhism and propagated Buddhism as the religion of the state. He has instrumental in building the great Vikramsila Vihara in Magadha, the famous monastery of Odantapuri. He also constructed the most celebrated Somapura Vihara. Dharmapala also patronized education. A galaxy of scholars flourished during his time. Haribhadra was one among such scholars.

Dharmapala was a Buddhist king but was tolerant towards other religions as well. He equally patronized the Brahmanical shrines and started a policy of religious toleration and correlative existence of several religions, which was one of the remarkable legacies of the Pala rule in Bengal. Dharmapala was a clever diplomat and a good statesman. His efficiency as a statesman is evident from the thriving prosperity, attained by Bengal in his reign.

3. Devapala

Devapala, the successor of King Dharmapala was the third king of the Pala dynasty. The Pratihara kingdom suffered diminution due to Devapala's invasion.

Devapala had encompassed almost all of Northern India. He was a worthy and a competent son. Devapala retained the vast kingdom he had inherited by the policy of blood and iron. He made some additions to the vast Empire of his father Dharmapala, who reigned from 810 to 850 AD. According to the Badal Pillar Inscription, Devapala was the paramount lord of the entire north India, extending from the Himalayas to the Vindhya and from the eastern seas to the western seas. The period of his reign was highlighted with a sequence of military campaigns against adversaries like Pragjyotishas, Huns, Utkalas, Gurjaras and the Dravidians.

As per the Badal Pillar Inscription, Devapala's minister (Brahmin) Darbha Pani and his grandson Kedara Mitra helped in the expansion of Devapala's kingdom. These inscriptions also depict how Darbha Pani used his diplomacy to make Devapala the lord of northern India. Devapala had conquered the Huns, Utkalas and the Gurjaras. He conquered the frontier states and made extended his father's Empire. Devapala had also conquered the powerful tribes Latas and Khasas occupying their kingdoms. Kings of Pragjyotishas and Kamarupa became his vassals in the east. In the south, king of Utkala was routed in a battle, and the region was occupied by Jaya Pala, brother and general of Devapala. The king of Orissa, Siva Kara also became his vassal.

Devapala's imperial vision was not only limited to North and South India. Devapala conquered the Dravidians in South India. He also defeated Sri Vallabha the Pandhya king and an adversary of Devapala. Devapala was patronized education, literature and culture apart from being a famous conqueror. During his rule, Bengal witnessed prosperity in every field. Devapala was a Buddhist and had granted five villages to Buddhist monasteries for promoting Buddhism

and for the welfare and comforts of Bhikshus. He initiated construction of numerous temples and monasteries in Magadha. Devapala was very benevolent as an administrator. He was tolerant towards other religions and promoted growth of other religions within his Empire.

During the first half of the 9th century, Devapala was regarded as the most powerful monarch of North India. Devapala kept a steady check on the powers of Pratihara and Rashtrakuta after rounding the Pala Empire in the east (Kamarupa) and southeast (Utkala). He led his forces to Vindhya in the south and the Indus in the west. He possessed enough power to intervene in the politics of the Tamil Nadu joint confederation against the Pandya King. The king of Sailendra, Balaputradeva of Java and Sumatra sent an envoy to his kingdom by acquiring the grant of five villages to build a monastery in Nalanda. People from various parts of India and even from overseas came to Nalanda University to learn Buddhist literature. Elite scholars had prospered during his reign. Bengal showed an unparalleled progress during his reign.

Devapala's triumphant record was devoid of defeat. Under his dominion, Pala's domination reached its highest mark. However, Devapala's death led to deterioration and disintegration of the Pala dynasty.

4. Mahipala I

Mahipala I reestablished the dynastic rule of Palas in the middle of the eighth century and restored the fallen fabrics of the empire by heroic efforts.

Mahipala's reign is labeled with restoration of the Pala dynasty. The Pala Empire disintegrated into small kingdoms by the end of the 10th century. Bengal, the heart of the Pala Empire lost its glory during the reign of the weak Pala kings after the death of Devapala. Mahipala I retrieved the former glory of the Pala Empire by repelling all the foreign invasions including internal discords. Mahipala initiated recovery programmes in Bengal immediately after ascending the throne. Tippera and Bangarh Inscriptions provide facts about the military conquests. They also state that Mahipala I had recovered western, northern, and parts of eastern Bengal. He overpowered the Kamboja and Chandra tribes, who usurped the Pala territories after the rule of Devapala. Mahipala I was able to recover only the eastern and northern parts of Bengal. The inscription of Bahgaura of Coomilla asserts his hold over the region. Mahipala conquered North Bengal and used it as his entrance to the East Bengal. The Belba Grant attests his hold over the area of Varendri or north Bengal. The Tirumalai Inscription of Rajendra Chola points indirectly to the hold of Mahipala over west Bengal. These inscriptions state that Dandabhukti or Danton in south of Midnapore and the regions adjacent to it were ruled by independent kings who were defeated by him. Therefore, it is believed that Mahipala had reestablished a part of Bengal, except a piece of southern west Bengal, where the Ranasura and Dharmapala ruled.

Epigraphic evidences confirm that Mahipala I ruled entire Bihar. However, South Bihar was inherited by Mahipala I from his father Vighrahapala II and had presumably also conquered north Bihar. The Sarnath inscription depicts that Mahipala I gave orders for the construction of saintly structures in Bihar.

The most important event of Mahipala's reign was the attack on Rajendra Chola in Bengal. The Chola soldiers, led by the general of Rajendra Chola,

NOTES

procrastinated for two years, from 1021 to 1023 AD. The Cholas defeated some local kings of Bengal. These kings included Dharmapala of Dandabhukti, Govindachandra of Vangla and Rana Sura of Southern Radha. These local kingdoms were not included in the kingdom of Mahipala I in Bengal. The Chola records suggest that they had conquered the areas of Tandabhutti, Uttiraladha, Vanga Desa and Takkanaladha. The Cholas then waged war against Mahipala in Bengal and usurped the region of Northern Radha. Cholas defeated Mahipala I and compelled other vanquished kings of Bengal to accept their supremacy. Though the hold of Mahipala over Bengal was diminished, northern Bengal and northern Radha still owed loyalty towards Mahipala I. Mahipala saved the Pala kingdom from being completely shattered, and also revived its former glory, magnificence and power of the Dynasty to a great extent. Mahipala I cared for regional and local interests and was accused of indifference towards national causes as he refused to join the Hindu confederation organized by the Punjabi Shahi kings to resist Sultan Mahmud's invasions. Historians have pointed out that it was his inclination towards Buddhism that prevented him from being part of this Hindu confederacy. However Mahipala I was credited to have arrested forces of disintegration within the Pala Empire and for recovering the imperial dream of the Palas by spreading the boundary of his kingdom on all sides.

5. Ramapala

Ramapala is recognized as the last king of the Pala dynasty. He restored the past glory of the Pala ancestry, to a great extent.

The Pala Empire was a Buddhist dynasty ruling the eastern region from Bengal. Pala rule was acknowledged as the golden empire of Bengal. Ramapala was the successor of king Shurapala II. He extended his empire further to Kamarupa, Orissa and North of India after crushing the Varendra revolution. The Ramacharitam recognizes Ramapala as a Kshatriya, succeeded by Kumarapala. As per a tale he died by walking into the sea. Ramapala governed for almost fifty three years. Brothers of Mahipala II, Surapala and Ramapala, escaped to Magadha while revolting against him.

Ramapala's reign can be divided into two stages. One was his conflict against the Kaivarta Kings, and the other was the revival of glory of Pala Dynasty. Ramapala collected support from feudatory chiefs and some kings of Rashtrakuta and chiefs of numerous territories to overpower Bhima, the third Kaivarta ruler of Virendra. The chiefs readily accepted to help the Pala king and sent their armies to fight the Kaivartas. Ramapala, with his army, crossed the northern bank of Ganga in Varendra. A severe battle took place between the two armies where Bhima was defeated. Bhima and his family members were mercilessly executed by Ramapala consequently recovering the ancestral kingdom. After the reconquest of Varendra, Ramapala initiated reconstruction of the houses which were destroyed in the battle. This prompted him to build a new capital city. It was named Ramavati after him. Ramapala espoused a liberal policy of taxation as high taxes were forced on them by the Kaivarta rulers, and regular cultivation of lands was continued under his patronage. Ramapala tried to consolidate his position by restoring the former glory of his family. He did this by giving a scientific figure to his province by conquering the adjoining regions. The feudatory of Radha came under his influence. Hari Varman,

the Varman king, surrendered to his supremacy. Ramapala sent an allied chief, Timgyadeva, to conquer the countries in the east. He defeated Dharmapala and occupied Kamarupa. Ramapala despatched an elephant force against the Gahadavalas of Kannauj but Govindachandra, the prince of Gahadavala revolted against them.

During Ramapala's reign, two local kings of Orissa were quarrelling for power. One was backed by Ananta Varman Chodaganga of the Ganga dynasty, and the other was king Somavamsi kesari. Ramapala took up the cause of the latter and put him on the throne after defeating Ananta Varman. Ramapala's success was transitory. His influence did not stand long. Later, Ananta Varman reinstated Karnakesari or his successor on the Utkala throne. A king of the Naka dynasty threatened by the Nagas, sought protection from Ramapala. He is said to have even captured the capital of Naga. Ramapala made an alliance with the Chola king Kullotungo to be able to fight against Chalukyas and Gangas. It did not help him much as Chalukyas invaded parts of Bengal and created trouble for Ramapala.

The Pala Empire was threatened by King Govinda Chandra of Uttar Pradesh. However, Ramapala made matrimonial alliance with him. On the news of the death of Mathanadeva, his maternal uncle, Ramapala committed suicide by drowning himself in the River Ganga near Munger. Ramapala was succeeded by Kumarapala, Gopala III and Madanapala. This was the tragic end of a memorable and remarkable career. His presence of mind, resourcefulness and a wonderful personality are a reason for praise and admiration. He struggled hard to recover his ancestral property. His long life was full of military campaigns, endowed with success. His rule brought an age of peace and prosperity to Bengal. Death of Ramapala led to a terminal decline of the Pala dynasty.

Rulers of the Pala Dynasty

1. Brahmapala (AD 900-920)
2. Ratnapala (AD 920-960)
3. Indrapala (AD 960-990)
4. Gopala (AD 990-1015)
5. Harshapala (AD 1015-1035)
6. Dharmapala (AD 1035-1060)
7. Jayapala (AD 1075-1100).

Brahmapala (AD 900-920) was founder of Pala dynasty of Kamarupa kingdom. He married Kula Devi by whom he had successor to his throne named Ratnapala.

Ratnapala (920-960) married Durlabha. He was succeeded by Indrapala.

Indrapala (960-990) Ratnapala's son, Purandera Pala, predeceased him, and thus the later's son, Indrapala, his grandson became the successor.

Gopala was the successor and son of Indrapala and his queen Rajya Devi, who ruled for the period AD 990-1015.

Harshapala was the son of Gopala and Queen Nayana. He ruled for the period AD 1015-1035.

NOTES

Dharmapala (AD 1035-1060). Harshapala's son, Dharmapala, left three copper plates: (1) Khonamukh Plates (2) Subhankarapataka Grant (3) Pushpabhadra Plates.

Jayapala (AD 1075-1100) was the last ruler of this dynasty.

NOTES

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

4. Fill in the blanks.
 - (a) The historians are of the opinion that the Palas were _____ by caste.
 - (b) The Palas had an organized _____ system.
 - (c) Dharampala was succeeded by _____.
5. Who defeated Dharampala in the Doab region?
6. What was Dharampala's religious policy?

3.5 ECONOMY

Economic life in the Pala period was marked by simultaneous growth of feudalism and agriculture. The period constituted one of the notable eras in the ancient Indian history. Under the majestic Palas, Bengal experienced a period of social peace and material prosperity. Though there is not much information available on the economic structure during the Pala phase, sources available assert that the Pala period was distinguished by economic and material prosperity. The economy in the Pala period was mainly based on agriculture. Lands were granted to the farmers by the Pala kings. The chief source of income of the common people was from agricultural products of the granted lands. Rice, mango, bamboo, sugarcane, coconut were the main agricultural products produced in the Pala era. During the Palas, production of paddy became an important source of the economy in Bengal. Narayanapala's *Bhagalpur inscription* also refers to the crop of rice and mango, betel nut as the principal agricultural products produced in lands granted by the Pala kings. Salt production also shared an important position in the agricultural economy during the Pala phase.

The Nayapala's *Irda inscription* refers to salt production. South Midnapore or Danton was renowned for the production of salt. North Bengal was famous for producing Pundri sugarcane from which good quality sugar was produced. Fruits like jackfruit, betel nut, date palm, coconut, mango and useful items like bamboo, were also grown. Betel leaf was farmed on a wide scale. Cocoa leaf, cardamom, pepper, and clove were grown and exported to west Asia. High quality cotton was also produced in Bengal. Venetian traveller Marco Polo and Chinese traveller of the 13th century referred to the production of fine quality cotton in Bengal. *Charya Padas* refer to the production of cotton as the important part of the economy of Bengal during the Pala period. Silkworm Cultivation was also very popular in Bengal.

Agriculture was a significant part of the economy during the Pala period. Apart from agriculture, mineral resources also played an influential role in the economy. There were abundant mineral resources during the Palas. There were iron ore deposits in Radha's Jangalkhand, in Bankura and as well as in the Birbhum districts. The use of iron ore was not extensive but the people were familiar with the process of melting ore. Bengal, heart of the Pala Empire, was renowned for providing the double-edged sword from the ore which was in great demand during the Pala period. Copper deposits were

observed in the Suvarnarekha valley. Diamond ores were available in the Tippera and Pundravardhana Valleys. Kautilya mentioned this in his accounts. Pearl was also found in the convergence of the Ganges according to Periplus, but not in plenty.

Not only agriculture and mineral resources, Bengal also witnessed prosperity in the field of industry during the Pala period. Most of the industries were agro-based because agricultural products were grown in plenty. Textile industry was highly required during the Pala period. Cotton industry formed the principal industries of Bengal which became the harbour of quality cotton fabrics. Trade of cotton goods with far-off countries, like Arab and China also grew during the Pala dynasty. Besides the production of fine cotton, creation of crude cotton goods for daily use was also produced on a daily basis. Most of the people adopted weaving as a profession in the Pala era. Literary sources of the Pala period recorded that the profession of weaving became a source of living for the common people. Silk industry was very popular in Bengal; it not only owned a domestic market, but a foreign market, as well. Economy during the Pala reign flourished both in inland as well as foreign countries. Bengal was also known for its sugar industry, next to the textile industry. Gur (molasses) and sugar was produced in abundance from the sugarcane industry. Gur still remains as one of the important food article of Bengal. Scholars say that the name 'Gauda' is derived from 'Gur'. In the Pala period, Gur produced in Bengal, was exported to foreign countries like Arabia, Persia and Ceylon. The Portuguese traveller Barbosa, in the 13th century stated that Bengal during the Pala kings was in tremendous competition with Southern India in the export of sugar to foreign countries. Apart from these two major industries, industries like, gold smithy also produced gold and silver ornaments and plates. Black smithy, carpentry, and brass metal industry also played an important part in the industrial economy of the Pala period.

Though trade flourished during the Pala phase, it could not attain the blooming economy like in the Gupta period. The deterioration of standard of trade is evident from the degraded coins of the Pala period. There was scarcity of gold and silver coins which led to the dependence on copper coins. As a result, foreign trade received a great blow during the Palas. Furthermore, the brisk trade from the port of Tamralipta had degenerated after the alteration of the course of river Saraswati. The trade of the Palas declined considerably, with the destruction of the Tamralipta port during 8th century AD. As a result, the economic system became completely dependent on agriculture. Agriculture flourished on a large scale because of the agrarian climate of Bengal, and this agrarian economy resulted in feudalism in the society. Agricultural economy and feudalism had developed concurrently by dominating the peasants ruthlessly. Therefore, the Pala epoch though had observed material and economic prosperity and affluence, yet it mainly benefitted the upper class or the aristocratic society. Common people did not flourish much economically during the Pala regime.

3.6 RELIGION

The Palas followed Mahayana Buddhism. Their popular beliefs created several temples and works of art. After the reign of King Harshavardhana, Buddhism suffered a possibility of extinction, but it became popular again in the period of the Palas. Religion under the Palas was mainly Buddhism and Hinduism. The Palas were devotees of Buddha and also worshipped the idols of Vishnu. Various temples were built during the Pala rule in Bihar, Bengal and Assam. According to history, the famous Hayagriva avatar temple in Assam was built by one of the Pala kings. The Palas were said to have constructed a temple of god Janardana (Krishna-Vishnu) also.

NOTES

NOTES

Religion during Palas saw the emergence of Buddhism. The palas favoured Mahayana Buddhism which is one of the significant branches of Buddhism. Apart from India, Buddhism also existed in countries like Tibet, China, Japan, Vietnam, Taiwan and Korea. Mahayana Buddhism had spread to countries like Bhutan, Tibet, Nepal, Myanmar and the Indonesian archipelago, during the Pala rule. Several Buddhist scholars of the Pala empire voyaged from Bengal to the Far-East to propagate Buddhism. Outstanding personalities such as Padmanava, Dansree, Bimalamitra, Shantarakshit, Jinamitra, Sugatasree, Dansheel, Sambhogabajra, Muktimitra, Virachan, Manjughosh and Atish Dipankar Srigyan went to the neighbouring countries to spread Buddhism. The Pala dynasty contributed a lot to the societies of Bihar, Bengal and Assam. Because of this, universities of Vikramshila and Nalanda gained huge popularity and became seats of learning for East Asia. Pala Dynasty supported both Vaishnavism and Saivism. Coins found from the Pala period depict the existence of worshippers of Lord Shiva, Vishnu and as well as Saraswati. Substantial evidences prove that female deities were also worshipped in the Pala dynasty. Several images of goddess of different types were worshipped. Yet, only Hindus practiced the worship of the goddess in the society. The selected region during the Pala dynasty and their long reign produced a mixed atmosphere of Hindu-Buddhist culture. This coexistence resulted in the evolution of the *sahajiya* and *tantrik* cults. The Palas launched a heritage of religious-social-cultural organization, and this can be marked as the magnificent achievement of the period which became an important ingredient of ancient Bengal.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

7. Fill in the blanks.
 - (a) _____ was the main source of economy in the Pala period
 - (b) The trade of the Palas declined during the _____ century.
 - (c) Palas followed _____.
8. What minerals were found in the Pala region?

DID YOU KNOW

The *Sailendra* Empire of *Java*, *Sumatra* and *Malaya* was a colony of the Palas.

ACTIVITY

Find out about 'Pala School of Sculptural Art' from the Internet.

3.7 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- The word Pala means 'Protector' in Sanskrit.
- The Palas ruled for about four hundred years, which can be noted as a rarity in the chronicles of dynastic history.
- The Palas are responsible for the foundation of Bengali nationalism, which was apparent from social structure plus life of the people during the Pala period.

NOTES

- An organized system of administration predominated from village level to the level of central government. The efficient administrative structure of the Palas, acquired from the Gupta Dynasty, brought them a lot of credit though they made the structure more efficient and introduced many new characteristics.
- Despite the fact that the Palas were inclined towards Buddhism, the Socio-cultural aspect of life of the Palas maintained the essence of Brahmanism.
- The *varna* or caste system was not as rigid as it was in its preceding eras but was rooted deeply within the society and Buddhists had to adapt themselves to it.
- The Palas kings were Buddhists but the social structure was based on Brahmanical Hinduism.
- Though the caste system was not so rigid in the Pala period, the people belonging to lower castes were regarded as untouchables.
- Buddhism experienced a massive support under the Palas. Mahayana Buddhism was further remodeled.
- Tantric practices infiltrated through the Mahayana cultism which was known as 'Vajrayana'.
- Apart from Vajrayanas and Sahajayanas, there also formed some other sects, which attained popularity during the Pala phase such as Sahajiya and Nathas cult.
- People led a simple life and staple food of the Bengalis included rice, lentil, milk and milk products, jaggery or sugar, fish, meat and rice.
- Garments worn by the people of the Pala period were simple which showed their belief in a simple lifestyle. Men wore dhoti and *chaddar*. Stitched garments were seldom used for the upper part of the body.
- According to Vatsayana, the women of Gauda loved luxury. They applied vermilion dots on their foreheads and aromatic sandal powder paste on their body, and flowers in their hair.
- A woman was expected to be a caring mother, a good and devoted wife and be able to bear the sins done by her husband. The male predominant society diminished the self-respect and freedom of women.
- The founder of this dynasty was Gopala. He reigned from 750-770, and strengthened his position by controlling Bengal. His successor was Dharmapala, who ruled from 770-781 and made the Palas a very strong power in northern India by taking over the once-prestigious throne of Kanauj.
- The historians are of the opinion that the Palas were Kshatriya by caste. Evidences from *Ram Charita* and *Taranatha* confirm this theory.
- Gopala was a prominent chief and a qualified military general. It is said that Gopala did not possess royal blood as he was not born in a prominent family but it was just on account of his martial and exceptional leadership qualities that he was chosen as the leader.
- The kings of Pala were given the title of Paramvattaraka, parameshwar or Maharajadhiraja.
- The Palas appointed Prime Ministers. The Pala Empire was divided into several Vuktis or Provinces. These Vuktis were further segmented into Vishaya (Divisions)

and then into Mandala (Districts). Other smaller units were Bhaga, Khandala, Avritti, Chaturaka, and Pattaka.

- Education and architecture, under the Palas received huge impetus in north India. The celebrated kings of the Pala dynasty made Bengal as an important center of national politics.
- Gopala came to power in 750 AD through democratic election in Gaur as per evidence provided by Tibetan scholar Taranatha.
- Dharmapala's reign was considered as a constant struggle between Pala, Pratihara and Rashtrakuta over the supremacy of North and East India.
- The first phase of struggle of Dharmapala started with the battle between him and Vatsaraja, in the region of Doab where Dharmapala was defeated.
- Dharmapala conquered major parts of North India, but he did not rule the whole Empire individually. He had trusted vassals to rule on his account with a degree of autonomy. Sub chiefs of Dharmapala ruled a lengthy stretch of the territory, between the boundaries of Bihar and Punjab.
- Dharmapala was a Buddhist king but was tolerant towards other religions as well. He equally patronized the Brahmanical shrines and started a policy of religious toleration and correlative existence of several religions, which was one of the remarkable legacies of the Pala rule in Bengal.
- As per the Badal Pillar Inscription, Devapala's minister (Brahmin) Darbha Pani and his grandson Kedara Mitra helped in the expansion of Devapala's kingdom.
- Devapala's imperial vision was not only limited to North and South India. Devapala conquered the Dravidians in South India.
- Devapala was a Buddhist and had granted five villages to Buddhist monasteries for promoting Buddhism and for the welfare and comforts of Bhikshus.
- Devapala's death led to deterioration and disintegration of the Pala dynasty.
- Mahipala's reign is labeled with restoration of the Pala dynasty.
- Mahipala initiated recovery programmes in Bengal immediately after ascending the throne. Tippera and Bangarh Inscriptions provide facts about the military conquests.
- Ramapala is recognized as the last king of the Pala dynasty. He restored the past glory of the Pala ancestry to a great extent.
- Ramapala's reign can be divided into two stages. One was his conflict against the Kaivarta Kings, and the other was the revival of glory of Pala Dynasty.
- Economic life in the Pala period was marked by simultaneous growth of feudalism and agriculture.
- Rice, mango, bamboo, sugarcane, coconut were the main agricultural products produced in the Pala era.
- There was scarcity of gold and silver coins which led to the dependence on copper coins. As a result, foreign trade received a great blow during the Palas.
- The Palas followed Mahayana Buddhism. Their popular beliefs created several temples and works of art.
- Many coins found at the time of Pala period depicted the existence of Shiva, Vishnu and Saraswati worshippers.

3.8 KEY TERMS

- **Dynasty:** A series of members of a family who are distinguished for their ruling, success, wealth, etc.
- **Reign:** The period during which a sovereign occupies the throne.
- **Charyapada:** Collection of oldest verses written in pre modern Bengali.
- **Cult:** A system of religious worship or a group or sect bound together by veneration of the same thing, person, ideal, etc.
- **Copper plate:** Ancient Indian records used to write grants of lands or list of royal lineages.
- **Gauda:** A territory located in Bengal in ancient and medieval times.
- **Feudalism:** A system for structuring society.

NOTES

3.9 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Fill in the blanks.
 - (a) Copper plates
 - (b) Dharmapala
2. Gopala was the first king of the Pala dynasty.
3. The Palas were Buddhists.
4. Fill in the blanks.
 - (a) Kshatriya
 - (b) Administrative
 - (c) Devpala
5. Vatsaraja defeated Dharmapala in the war in the Doab region.
6. Dharmapala was a Buddhist king but was tolerant towards other religions as well. He equally patronized the Brahmanical shrines and started a policy of religious toleration and correlative existence of several religions, which was one of the remarkable legacies of the Pala rule in Bengal.
7. Fill in the blanks.
 - (a) Agriculture
 - (b) 8th Century
 - (c) Mahayana Buddhism
8. Iron-ore was abundantly found in the Pala region.

3.10 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. How did Gopala establish the Pala kingdom?
2. Write a short note on the social conditions of the people during the Palas.
3. Write about the origin of the Palas.

4. Describe the administrative system of the Pala.
5. In what ways did the Palas encourage art and education during their reign.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the condition of women in the times of Palas.
2. Discuss about the battles fought by Dharmapala.
3. Give a detailed account Dharampala's reign.
4. Did the field of Industry prosper in the Pala times? Comment.
5. What was the situation of trade during the Pala regime?

3.11 FURTHER READING

- Gait, E.A.; *A History of Assam*, BiblioBazaar, US, 2010.
- Choudhary, Pratap Chandra; *The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century AD*, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam, Assam, 1966.
- Bhattacharjee, Jayanta Bhusan; *Social and polity formations in pre-colonial north-east India: the Barak Valley experience*, Haranand Publications in association with Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1991.
- Sinha, Surajit; *Tribal Polities and State Systems in Pre-colonial Eastern and North Eastern India*, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, 1987.
- Chakravarty, I. N., Chakravarty, Lakshmi N.; *Glimpses of the Early History of Arunachal*, Research Department, Arunachal Pradesh Administration, Arunachal Pradesh, 1973.
- Barpujari, Heramba Kauta; *Assam in the Days of the Company: 1826 - 1858: a Critical and Comprehensive History of Assam during the Rule of the East-India Company from 1826 - 1858*, North-Eastern Hill University Publications, Assam, 1996
- Barpujari, Heramba Kauta; *The Comprehensive history of Assam*, Publication Board, Assam, 1990.
- M. Horam; *Naga Polity*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 1975.
- M. Horam; *Social and Cultural Life of Nagas: (the Tangkhul Nagas)*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 1977.
- Sangkima; Mizos, *Society and Social Change, 1890-1947*, Spectrum Publications, New Delhi, 1992.
- Sangkima; *A Modern History Of Mizoram*, Spectrum Publications, New Delhi, 2004.
- Bhattacharjee, Jayanta Bhusan; *The Garos and the English, 1765-1874*, Radiant Publishers, Hyderabad, 1978.
- Kar, Parimal Chandra; *Garos in Transition*, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1982.
- Venuh, N. and Bonita Aleaz; *British Colonization and Restructuring of Naga Polity*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2005.
- Lahiri, Rebati Mohan; *The Annexation of Assam: 1824-1854*, General Printers & Publishers, Mumbai, 1954.

Bhuyan, Suryya Kumar; *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, Lawyer's Book Stall, Assam, 1974.

Elwin, Verrier; *The Nagas in the 19th Century*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1969.

Lahiri, Nayanjot; *Pre-Ahom Assam*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1991.

Birinchi, B.K. and Banikanta Kakati; *Cultural History of Assam*, K. K. Barooah, Assam, 1951.

Basu, Nirmal Kumar; *Assam in the Ahom Age, 1228-1826: Being Politico-economic and Socio-cultural Studies*, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, Kolkata, 1970.

Nath, R.M.; *The Background of Assamese Culture*, A. K. Nath, 1948.

Bareh, Hamlet; *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, Spectrum Publications, Gauhati, 1967.

Chatterjii, S. K.; *The Place of Assam in the History and Civilization of India*, Gauhati University, Gauhati, 1970.

Dani, A. H.; *Prehistory and Protohistory of Eastern India*, Firma L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1960.

Dhavlikar, M. K.; *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute* 31-32: 137-49, Archaeology of Gauhati, 1973.

NOTES

UNIT 4 STATE FORMATION IN MEDIEVAL NORTH EAST

NOTES

Structure

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Unit Objectives
- 4.2 The State of Ahom
 - 4.2.1 History
 - 4.2.2 Ahom Administration
 - 4.2.3 *Satgharia* Ahom Aristocracy
- 4.3 The State of Dimasa
 - 4.3.1 Neighboring States
- 4.4 State of Jaintia
- 4.5 The State of Manipur
 - 4.5.1 Clan (Salai) System
 - 4.5.2 Judicial System
- 4.6 Summary
- 4.7 Key Terms
- 4.8 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 4.9 Questions and Exercises
- 4.10 Further Reading

4.0 INTRODUCTION

State formation is the process of the development of a centralized government structure, in a situation where one does not exist, prior to its development. According to Romesh Buragohain, 'The emergence and growth of a large number of polity formations during the period from the 13th to the 16th century is the key feature of the medieval history of North east India. The social organization of these sedentary as well as segmentary states was dominated by their traditional customs and culture, pristine in its form.

In this unit, we take a look at the processes involved in the formation of the states of Ahom, Dimasa, Jaintia and Manipur.

4.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Describe the formation the state of Ahom
- Discuss the creation of the state of Dimasa
- Describe the formation of the state of Jaintia
- Describe the creation of the State of Manipur

4.2 THE STATE OF AHOM

The Ahom Kingdom is also known as the Kingdom of Assam. It spanned a long 600 years of the history of Assam—from 1228 to 1826. It was situated in the Brahmaputra

NOTES

valley. It was a sovereign state that successfully warded off even Mughal attempts to expansion. 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 wet rice cultivation. In the 16th century, there was sudden expansion of the kingdom under Suhungmung. At this point its character changed and it turned multi-ethnic. This created a huge effect on both the social and the 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.

4.2.1 History

The Early Ahom state

From the thirteenth to the fifteenth century A.D., Ahoms were busy mainly in 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, whose name was 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 came 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 Tipamias, and he also 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.

Expansion of the Ahom kingdom

The real expansion of the Ahom kingdom began with Suhummong (1497-1539), better known as Dihingiya Raja, as he belong to the Dihingiya phoid (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 the 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 Sukladhwaj, 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.

The 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 of 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 certain articles such as gold dusts, long pepper, elephant teeth, musk, and lack obtained in Assam which were valued greatly by the royalty and nobility in the Mughal courts. The absorption 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 9000 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 by the

NOTES

Barnadi on the North and the Asurar Ali on 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 placed in charge of lower Assam west of Kaliabor and also head of diplomatic relations with the west. Several other new posts of lesser important 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 called got and 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 disposal of Shah Jahan by his son's. 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 defenses 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 the 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 had been 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 by adopting guerilla method of warfare. Due to disruption of communication, the Mughal army was placed under great hardship; the physical as well as moral condition began to deteriorate. The health of Mir Jumla became worse as he had been suffering from consumption. Under the circumstances, a peace proposal initialed by the Ahom side was ultimately agreed upon.

The treaty of Ghiladharighat at Tipaim on the Buri Dihing was drawn up on Jan.9, 1663 by which Jayadhwaj became a tributary of the Mughal Emperor. He agreed to pay a huge war indemnity, the cessation of all territory west of the Bharali on the north bank on the state of 'Dimarua', Beltola west of the Kallong on the south bank of

NOTES

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, 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, manners and 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) himself to be a person of indomitable courage and firm determination who 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 Mughal occupational army was badly mauled. Following this several fortifications had been 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 at Gauhati. Ram Singh made 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 Ramdhwaj Singha, the successor of Udayaditya Singha, in 1675 to the accession of

Gadadhar Singha in 1681, there ensured a period of weak and unstable government during which several weak and young kings were placed on the Ahom throne the 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 installed 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 down to the 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 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 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 passed away in that city. 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 remained 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. Already Phuleswari's action had inflamed the situation. The climax was reached 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 govt. 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.

NOTES

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 population. 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 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 reaches Nagaon and then to Gauhati. At Rangpur, the Moamarias set up Bharath Singha as king; but the Hatisungi Morans set up Sarbananda as their 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 the Brahmaputra. The meeting between the king and Capt. 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 govt., trade and commerce, products, etc. Although Gaurinath Singha is depicted by some as cruel and vindictive, he had certain pieces of

NOTES

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 Rajabaha 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 large presents. 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 plunder 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 of them 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 5th of 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 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 upon and promised to refrain from all 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 started introducing British administration.

4.2.2 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 him, 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 reserved 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 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 religious 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.'⁸⁷ 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 did not see such a 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 Peoples Republic of China).

NOTES

NOTES

He traversed the Patkai mountain range and reached the valley of the Brahmaputra. It appears that Sukaphaa faced no challenge from 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 the 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 2 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 as also managed to further the kingdom's boundary in the west right up to 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 labor not Asiatic or feudal. In upper Assam, Ahoms started wet rice cultivation this region had

NOTES

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 accordingly adapted.

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.

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 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 other two Gohains.

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.

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.

Other officials

Judicial and 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, Dekha 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, Dekha Phukan commanding 4000 *paiks* and Pani Phukan commanding 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 were a territory's governors as well as commanded 3000 *paiks*. A Rajkhowa was a public works supervisor as also an arbitrator for local disputes. A Kataki 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.

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 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 these numbered 2: *Sarumelia gohain* and *Majumelia gohain*.

Individual *mels* were provided to the royal ladies. There were 12 such allotments by 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*.

NOTES

- *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:

- Abhaypur
- Bacha
- Darrang
- 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
- 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

Paik officials

The Ahom kingdom had huge dependence on the Paik system which was just a corvee labor form. All common subjects fell in the category of *paik*. A group of 4 *paiks* was referred to as a *got*. All through the year from every got 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 on the ending 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 on. Despite all the speedy work, the survey got completed only post 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 m²) and 14,400 sq ft (1,340 m²) is one 'bigha'. Four 'bighas' makes one 'pura'.

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

NOTES

4.2.3 Satgharia Ahom Aristocracy

The third Ahom king was Subinphaa (1281–1293). He is responsible for the clear defining of the *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*, most 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*.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. The Ahom kingdom spanned a long 600 years of the history of Assam; from _____ to _____.
2. _____ is credited with having established the Ahom Kingdom.
3. Ahoms started _____ in regions with low population density and mostly marshy.
4. The two great Gohains and Sukaphaa were _____ and _____:

4.3 THE STATE OF DIMASA

The Kachari kingdom which in medieval times was known as the *Dimasa* kingdom was one of Assam's powerful kingdoms. The rulers came from the *Dimasa* people who themselves were part of the greater *Kachari* ethnic group. Along with kingdoms like *Sutiya* and *Kamata*, the kingdom of the *Dimasa Kachari*, was an example of state formation of the *Kachari* ethnic groups in Assam during the medieval times post the kingdom of *Kamrupa* which existed since the ancient period. When the British came, evidence could still be seen of the kingdom of the *Dimasa Kacharis* and from thus

arose the district names of Cachar and North Cachar Hills. The name North Cachar Hills was replaced by Dima Hasao district in April 2010.

There is no clarity regarding the *Dimasa Kachari* kingdom's origin. Tradition has it that the Kacharis Dimasas during ancient times, had to leave the kingdom of Kamarupa because of the existing political turmoil. While crossing river Brahmaputra some persons from the party got swept down the river. They were then known as Dimasa (*Dimabasa*), meaning the sons of the great river Dima.

It has been opined that the Dimasa's initial state formation took place at the region of Sadiya.

Evidence of polity formation of the Dimasa's is seen at Dimapur. The kingdom, by the thirteenth century, had spread right up along river Brahmaputra's southern banks, from river Dikhow to river Kallang, including the Dhansiri valley as also present-day district of Dima Hasao.

The Buranjis say that, the *Dimasa Kachari* settlements on the east of Dhansiri had moved prior to the advance of the Ahoms. While the Kamata Kingdom was to its west that of Sutiya was on the east.

The region between the *Dimasa Kachari* kingdom and the Cutiya kingdom was taken over by the Ahoms which was inhabited by the Matak and Borahi peoples. In 1490, they had their first conflict with the kingdom of Ahom Kingdom where Ahoms were the losers. Peace was sought by the Ahoms and they offered an Ahom princess to the king of the *Dimasa Kachari* king. At this point, the land that lay beyond the Dhansiri, was taken control of by the *Dimasa Kachari*. But the Ahoms were gaining power and the *Dimasa Kacharis* were driven west by them. The Ahoms, in 1526, were defeated by the *Dimasa Kacharis* but in the same year the *Dimasa Kacharis* lost to the Ahoms. Ahoms came right up to Dimapur in 1531. Dimapur, was the *Dimasa Kachari*'s capital or Hirmba kingdom under the cover of cow (Musu). When in 1536 the *Dimasa Kachari* capital was again attacked by the Ahoms it was sacked. The *Dimasa Kacharis* had to leave Dimapur, beating a retreat to south where they set up capital at *Maibang*. The origin dialect of the *Dimasa Kachari* is *Maibang*. 'Mai' means 'paddy' and 'bang' means plenty or abundance.

In *Maibang*, Brahmin influence fell on the *Dimasa Kacharis* kings. Dersongpha's son changed his name and took the name Nirbhay Narayan, a Hindu name. He even recognized his Brahmin guru as the *Dharmadhi* which then came to be an important state institution. It is believed that, the genealogy of the king got traced to Bhima the Pandava, and Ghatotkacha his son whose mother was Hidimba. This gave the kingdom the name Heramba while its rulers came to be known as Herambeswar.

A council of ministers (*Bhandari* and *Patra*) helped the king perform the duties of the state. The council was headed by *Barbhandari*. - Hinduized/non Hinduized Dimasa's were put on the council and other state offices. Approximately 40 Dimasa people's clans (*Sengphong*) existed and each sent a representative to the royal assembly called *Mel*, a powerful institution that could elect a king. Based on what status the *Sengphong* had, its representatives had their seat in the council hall or *Mel mandap*.

With passage of time, a hierarchy developed in the *Sengphongs* comprising five royal *Sengphongs* even though majority of the kings came from the clan of *Hacengha* (Hasnusa). The ministers of the state received specialized services from some clans and so did other bureaucrats, court writers, store keepers, ambassadors, to name a few. Over course of time, these grew to be professional groups, such as *Nyablasa* (fishermen) and *Songyasa* (king's cooks).

NOTES

The rule of the *Dimasa Kachari* by 17th century had moved as far as the Cachar plains. There was no direct participation of the people of the plains in the *Dimasa Kachari* king's court. The people of the plains were organized based on *khels*. They were provided justice by the king who also received revenue from them through an official named *Uzir*.

4.3.1 Neighboring States

In 1562, when Durlabh Narayan was the king, the kingdom of the *Dimasa Kacharis* was attacked by Chilarai. The kingdom of the *Dimasa Kacharis* at this point became a Koch kingdom tributary. The Kachari state's resourcefulness is evident from the amount of tribute they paid annually – 60 elephants and 70,000 gold *mohars*. One tiny settlement of Koch soldiers (later called *Dehans*) had special privileges in the *Dimasa Kachari* Kingdom. Conflict regarding the reign of Dimarua caused a battle with the kingdom of the Jaintia in which the Jaintia king (Dhan Manik) was defeated.

Post Dhan Manik's demise, Jasa Manik was put on the throne by the *Dimasa Kachari* king Satrudaman. It seems that Jasa Manik caused conflict in 1618 between the Ahoms and *Dimasa Kacharis* by manipulation of events.

Satrudaman was the most powerful of all of the *Dimasa Kachari* kings. He ruled over parts of eastern Sylhet, plains of Cachar, Dhansiri valley, North Cachar and Dimarua in Nagaon district. Post his Sylhet conquest, he struck coins in his name.

Khaspur

Khaspur region originally belonged to the kingdom of Tripura. In sixteenth century, the Chilarai took it over. It was under the rule of Chilarai's brother Kamalnarayana who was a tributary ruler. Khaspur gained independence after the Koch's decline. Mid 18th century saw the last Koch ruler die heirless which put the under *Dimasa Kachari* Kingdom's control. With this merger, Khaspur became the *Dimasa Kachari* Kingdom's capital.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

5. What was the Kachari kingdom called in the medieval times?
6. Where is it said that the Dimasa's initial state formation took place?
7. What is the meaning of *Maibang*?
8. Khaspur originally belonged to which kingdom?

4.4 STATE OF JAINTIA

The first stage of state formation of the Jaintia was the family which would be part of a specific clan. All members who belonged to a clan had a tendency to stick together and be together in a migratory route. The clans and families were responsible for having created the unit of the political society, namely the village or the *Chnong*. All male members from all families of the village who were 18 and above and had a mustache would together elect a village head or the *U Waheh Chnong*. He handled all matters that were secular in nature. Religious matters were handled by a priest or *U Langdoh Chnong* elected in the same manner. While both these offices were vested in the same elected head when the first headman was chosen, with increased functions of the political kind, the post of *U Waheh Chnong* was formed.

In the second stage of state formation, there came into being the office of the provincial governor or Doloi. It happened after much time when the Jaintias were well settled.

To quote from *Nongtslang Doloiship: A socio-Political Study of an Administrative Unit in Jaintia Hills of Meghalays* (I S Gassab):

'A particular point of time they hit upon the idea of solidarity among the neighbouring Raids having common traditions and clan relations. It was also a period of competition among the various neighbouring Raids having varied traditions and clan relations.....Thus, common relations and clan relations and competitions among different Raids made solidarity movements among the Raids all the more necessary. It was this necessity which brought some Raids to form a federation of Raids into an Elaka, which was an independent political unit.

In its early period, an Elaka resembled a state in as much as there was no outside control at the time of its formation. However, later political developments made an Elaka the second tier of state formation in pre-colonial Jaintia. Hence, at a later stage, it could not be termed either as a sub-state or as an autonomous state with a nominal sovereign called the Doloi, leading over it. Thus, an Elaka was in charge of a political head with the designation of U Doloi or a governor assisted in some Elaka by U Pator or a Lt Governor.

Based on the Elaka's nature, each of the Doloiships would either be an oligarchy or an independent republic. The above mentioned process culminates to the establishing of a Doloi's office in the Jaintia hills.

With the coming into being of the office of a Raj or Syiem, there was established the third and in hierarchy the highest level of administration of power. With the establishing of the Syiem, there came into existence in the Jaintia Hills a three tier system of administration. Till 1835 it remained so till the Syiem's office was abolished.

From the 1858 report of Allen we gather crucial information about Doloi's and their administration:

The whole of Jaintia Hills was divided into nineteen separate Elakas or districts, fifteen of which are Doloiships (Doloiships); to each of these districts, there is one Doloi (Doloi), who is the chief village authority. The remaining four Elakas are under the charge of thirteen headmen called Sirdars. Moreover, the responsibility to the Government for (British) for carving on the public business of these fifteen Elakas rests entirely with the Doloies, yet a great part of the work is ordinarily done by village officers of an inferior grade, called Pathors (Pators) and Lungdoes (Lyngdohs). The former are deputies or assistants to the Doloies, but can only hear cases in durbar and act as assistants to the Doloies. In some of the Doloiships, which are extensive and contain several villages, there are two or three Pathors or deputies and the Lungdoes vary in number from one to ten. In the Elakas of Lakadong and Amwai (Amwi) there is no Pathor; the Doloies transact all business activities themselves.

NOTES

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

9. What happened in the second stage of the formation of Jaintia?
10. What was the role of U Waheh Chnong?
11. What was the second tier of state formation in pre-colonial jaintia?
12. What did the U Doloi head?

4.5 THE STATE OF MANIPUR

It appears that much before the period of recorded history, in Manipur there had already evolved a concrete civilization. Royal family of Assam, Tripura and neighbouring Shan lands had matrimonial relations with the kings of early Manipur. Relations of trade existed between Manipur and its neighbours and others like the Greeks, Arabs, the rest of British India, China and Burma. Manipur fell enroute the trade route that led from India to Southeast Asia and China.

This region started to be known as Manipur during King Pamheiba's reign in the beginning of the 18th century (AD 1709–1748).

According to the State of Manipur's Archives, from AD 1733 onwards, Manipur saw the rule of 76 kings. Of the Meiteis, both political power and development stayed linked with the organizing and controlling of available resources in the region of the hills, the full valley as also the central loci of Imphal. At a later stage, the 'Loyumba Shinyen' which was a written constitution was used to govern the Kingdom. In AD 1110, King Loiyumba issued this decree. It has its basis in the conventions and codes of earlier times. Kings who followed King Loiyumba, are responsible for later additions made to the Loyumba Shinyen. Some of these kings were Kiyamba (1467-1508), Khagemba (1597-1652), Garibniwaj (1709-1748), Bhagyachandra (1763-1798) and Chourjit (1803-1813). With these additions the decree became an inclusive code of the duties of the hill tribes and the Kingdom's other communities. Evidence has been unearthed by Oinam Bogeshwar of the existence since AD 429 of a centralized constitutional Government.

Foreign powers, too, recognized the power that Manipur held, of these, the prime was the Shan with the Agreement of 1470 between Manipur's King Kiyamba and Khekhomba of Pong in Upper Burma. The 1762 Anglo Manipur Friendship Treaty came on its tail followed by the 1763 Anglo Manipuri Defense Protocol, and in 1826. Treaty of Yandaboo (between Burma and the British government).

For centuries, the Meiteis have had a distinct territorial and political status. Their culture too is extremely developed, they are extremely literate and have literary tradition which are far advanced coming from 1000s of years back. Even their linguistic tradition is distinct.

Since it is among the oldest civilizations, Manipur's state evolution begins from the pre-historic times as is evident from the objects belonging to the prehistoric culture which have been found here. The hills of Manipur have many rock shelters and caves which must have given the prehistoric men shelter. Across the valley and the hills, evidence can be found of the New Stone Age. It seems that traits of Bronze Age Culture came to Manipur from Upper Burma and Thailand.

4.5.1 Clan (Salai) System

The Meities that exists in the present times got created when there was an amalgamation of the seven allied, close knit though different principalities, which at a time occupied separate regions of Manipur, all independent of the others. confederacy of Meitie comprised the Moirang, Luwang, Khuman, Angom, Chenglei, Khaba-Ngamba and Meities. There were other tribes too like the Heiren Khunju, khende, Chiren, Mangding and Mangang, each one of who over time became part of the above mentioned seven. It has been observed by Gangumei (ibid) there is historical evidence of the existence in Manipur valley of several ethnic lineages and groups such as the Angoms, Luwangs,

NOTES

In the period of history, it is observed that there were 7 Meiteis clans and 5 principalities under the rule 5 clan chieftains who were political as well as social heads of the can they ruled. Of these, the foremost was the Kangla Kingdom set up by Pahangba of the Ningthouja dynasty. Others were the Kingdom of Moirang, Khuman principality, Angom principality and the principality of Luwang. The Khaba who had ruled at Kangla and had faced the Pakhangba challenge strongly had been finished off by the Ningthouja dynasty. At the same time, the Nganba had lost all political power. Simultaneously, there existed chiefdoms tans at village levels amongst the Mangangs, the Chakpas, the Heiren Khunjan, the Sarang Leishangthem and the Chengleis. The 7 clans' consolidation was done by Pakhangba with 1 pibas from every clan. The coronation ceremony lasted 5 days at the end of which in different areas of the kingdom he set up villages for ease of administration. Over time with increase in the clan population and economic prosperity, the clans become stronger and even conquered the weaker group. They even became independent of the entire system, even causing frequent disturbance within the Kangla principality. With diplomacy, Pakhangba kept such trouble makers under control through bringing in the clan system.

The seven tribes/principalities over several centuries came under the supremacy of the Meities or the Ningthoujas. Post the assimilation the common name for them all became Meitie. The Lois are considered the most early settlers in Manipur whom the Meiteis subdued by the. At the beginning, those Meiteis who were to be punished were degraded to the Lois community.

A sophisticated Meitei state developed under the leadership of the Ningthouja in pre-colonial times. It was in the valley that the actual state formation happened and only after that did the kings established their control over the hills and further to regions beyond those hills with even foreign nations recognizing the power they wielded.

Meiteis expanded politically and even in the direction of social formation with steady and ongoing absorption ethnic groups, tribes and clans into the fold of the social structure of the Meiteis. *Khaba* was the very first salai to be absorbed. The expansion of the power of the Meitei beyond Kangla made land appropriate for agriculture available to them and even made available more fowl and farm animals. It even got into their fold means of quick boat communication from *Nambul*, *Imphal* and *Iril* rivers, as also the deliberate pattern of settlement directed towards defense in which Kangla was now guarded by hillocks and natural barriers. The inhabitants in the north owned ponies and it was used for sports and pastime of the aristocratic as well as a means of consolidating martial strategies in both defense and offence.

From historical evidence it is seen that Manipur possesses a wide socio-political framework enabling frequent assimilation and integration of tribes into the Meitei fold making the formation of the Meitei formation a process which was ongoing. The boundary of the Meitei kingdom varied depending on the ability of the ruling king.

Nongda Lairen Pakhangba is the first Meitei king and he was crowned in AD 33. At that time *Kangla* was the state's focal centre and capital, whose control was at the root of all religious and political power. From the ancient period right up till 1891, Kangla region remained Manipur's capital. In Kangla were incorporated the land that was adjoining it of the four traditional *Panas* or state divisions, which were *Naharup*, *Ahallup*, *Khapham* and *Laipham*, while *Imphal* was a distinct administrative unit that included Kangla. Kangla was the symbol of power and had a central architectural

construction of palace, from where the king conducted his public duties. It was constructed with care and was made of materials brought from different parts of the kingdom. It is opined that procuring of material in this manner, such as wooden pillars of different woods from different areas, was done for the purpose of consolidating and integrating the hill and valley people.

Such a pattern of settlement was both effective and singular as Kangla served as the capital of numerous ethnic communities and all of them share their wealth with a sense of responsibility.

The king's coronation took place at the sacred *Kangla*. Ceremony of putting the Meitei king on the throne both politically affirmed his right for obeisance of those he ruled, as well as invoked the ancestral spirits so that they aid in the realm's prosperity and welfare.

In Manipur, there have been various forms of administration - village polity to constitutional monarchy. During a major period it remained feudalism based centralized monarchy with the king being the total authority. It is evident that the Meiteis' political and social development revolved around the dynasty which was ruling. It is observed by Gangumei the reason for the emergence of the state was the 'gradual growth of human civilization with development of economic organization, social order and steady livelihood.' The state was headed by the king and he had all powers of veto. There was a control on the powers of the king to prevent it from becoming autocratic. This was achieved through the *Ningthou Pongba Tara*, *Nine Khunpangthous*, *Sixty four Phandous* and *Clan Pibas*.

Most powerful was the Angom Ningthou and headed 64 Phandous. The *Maichous* (Pandits) advised him in everything and at all times. The Council of Minister and the King kept a check and control on one another.

Evidence has also been found of elements that were democratic in nature. For example, public opinion which even worked to keep the state and king in check while they used their powers. Even so, if the Angom Ningthou and other members were weak, the King could become autocratic.

It has been opined by Sanajaoba that even their own the king, used auto-limitation and made major decisions, without consulting the '*High lord's* and the '*Pongba Tara*'.

The kingdom was governed by '*Loyumba Shinyen*', the written constitution. Based on traditional conventions and codes, it was first proclaimed in AD 1110 by Loiyumba and further additions were made to it by future kings, such as Kyamba (1467-1508), Khagemba (1597-1652), Garibniwaz or Pamheiba (1709-1748), Bhagyachandra (1763-1798) and Chourjit (1803-1813). In this text, there are guides for creation of administrative department (*Loishang*), duties and function of the kings and queens, royal etiquette, titles and decorations awarded to the nobles, administration of justice, keeping of standard time, to name a few.

According to Maichou Oinam Bogeshwor, collaboration between the king and people was the basis of administration of the Meitei expressed as '*Leibanka Nama, Ningthouna Nama*' or 'one part by the people and another by the king'.

Meiteileipak's administration was carried out by ten cabinet ministers (*Pongba Tara*) which were Chonghanba, Pukhangba, Khurai Angouba, Wangkhei Louremba, Hiyangloi, Ahallup Lakpa, Naharus Lakpa, Yaiskul Lakpa, Khwairakpa and Nongthongba. They were above the sixty four high lords who were representatives of the 32 administrative units.

Ningthou Pongba Tara which was the Council of Minister was an extremely important unit of the kingdom's administration. A minister's post was not hereditary but was given to a those considered to be of exceptional ability and also extremely loyalty to the throne.

Of the 64 Phamdous, 10 were picked to be '*Ningthou Pongba Tara*' Thus till King Loyumba (1074 A.D) time, the Council of Minister comprised 10 members. Later this number fell to 9. It rose to 12 in the reign of King Garibniwaz, in which his Chief Queen was included. In King Chandrakiti's reign, the Chief Queen's post got replaced by foreign Minister or *Awa Purel* who was more a military than civil minister. The periods of emergency the Chief Pandit or *Pandit Achouba* became part of the Council of Ministers.

The kingdom was split into two for the purpose of administration: surrounding hills and centrally located valley. The valley's administration was made up of rural and urban administration. The hill areas' administration was made up of that of the hills areas adjoining the valley and hills areas far from the valley.

Under the king, people had to adhere to three types of subject hood: (i) *phamnaiba*, (ii) *lallup*, and (iii) *loipot*. The king's subjects comprised the aristocrats, commoners and vanquished. Based on the relationship's nature every subject was obligated to carry out some obligations towards the king/state. He was the possessor of divine rights and all persons who were politically controlled by him owed him allegiance.

The *phamnaiba* (aristocrats) stood exempt from performing physical labour and had to help the king with daily administration and military affair, based on the job's nature. This position was based on hierarchy. Priests, chiefs and the king's favourites, especially those with martial connection with the royal family got put in high offices, became part of the aristocracy and served the king through services which were 'non-laborious.

The commoners directly under the king's administration and between 16 and 60 years of age provided him labour termed *lallup*. *Loipot* depicted the king's revenue and administrative control over the subjects who did not fall under the fold of his daily administration, for example the conquered, controlled or defeated. This category comprised nearly all Manipur's hills tribes where the king could extend his military expedition. Pakhangba's rule is significant as during this period he attacked the joint family system through the introduction of *Lallup* which was forced male labour in return for land-use, and he created 4 Pannas or divisions for effective administration plus stationed 400 regular militia at the service of Kangla at all times.

Valley

In the valley, to make the administration more effective, four *Pannas* or administrative divisions were created. The Meitei king was rendered service by them. It is felt that it was in the reign of Pakhangba that the Pannas started. But during the time of the Loyumba, he systematized the country's administrative division through the creation of 6 lups. *Khongchalup*, *Nongmailup*, *Angoubalup*, *Leichol Lakpa Talong Khombalup*, *Khurailup*, *Lipp hambamlup* and *Khangjeilup*. Possibly this was the base on which the Panna system was later created. To begin with, 4 Pannas were created: *Ahallup* (comprising old men), *Naharup* (comprising Young men), *Laipham* (ancestral are of worship), *Khabam* (Kha-south, mapham-place). At a later stage there was addition of 2: the Lois and Tangkhuls. The Tangkhuls were *Potsangba* (watchman) while the Lois was *Hidakphanba* (those who attend the Hookah or tobacco). At a later stage, the potsangba become potsangbam and were taken into the fold of the Meitei.

NOTES

At the head of a panna, was a *Panna Lakpa* and directly under him was the *Lallup Chingba*, serving as a go between for the village men and the officers located in Kangla. Under *Lallup Chingba* came the *Machahal*, who provided assistance to the *Lallup Chingba* in meetings the providers of *Lallup*.

The four principal pannaes comprised two departments: *Sanguba* and *Sanglen*. The *Sanglen* officers took care of king's service and *Sanguba* officers took care of the queen's services.

In every panna there were many tribes and families. Each tribe and family head would choose from his tribe or family such persons who could provide the king 10 days of service (*lallup*).

A man was liable to provide *Lallup* when he was of age to cultivate a part of the land which was age 17. He needed to pay tax to the King for the land in kind. The rotation of the ten day service provided the man thirty days off after each 10 days of service all year round. A person defaulting either provides a substitute or pays a rupee in fine. If a person under 60 is disabled or suffers from permanent illness he is excused from *lallup* if the authorities are satisfied with his indisposition. 'In the event of an individual wishing to escape his turn of duty, he must either provide a substitute or pay a certain sum, which sum goes to pay for a substitute if required, or the rest of the *lallup* may agree to do the extra duty receiving the money.' Such money never goes to the Government. The '*Lakpa*' heads a *Lallup* or class of labourers. This officer holds responsibility for correct imparting of duties by the labourers. The duty of the *Khundin lallup* was to ensure that who were to perform *lallup* did it well.

The other system used for allocation of work was '*Yumnak Mashin*'. In this system, every household or '*Yumnak*' from all 7 salais has its own work or '*Mashin*'. The work performed by a *yumnak* decided its name. The works were created to cover society's all cultural, religious, political and socioeconomic aspects. In this development is seen the seed of the rise of feudalism in the Meitei Kingdom's political, administrative and social structure.

Hill

Hills were administered in uniformity with the valley. Hill people too performed *Lallup*. At a later stage, various tribal villages near the valley also got village wise duties. For example, *Kabuis of Wakha* (a village situated some six kilometers east of Kangla), near the foothill of Nongmaiching, were asked to grow *Kaphoi* (Pomegranate).

Those hill regions far from the valley, there was more of indirect administration which was two tiered. On the one hand the people were to provide regular service to their respective *Khullapas* or *Ningthous*. They were directly controlled by him. Though in some tribes, absolute authority rested with the *Ningthou* or *Khullapa*, in others it was limited. On the other hand, other than doing duty for the village chief and the village, the hill people had to give the state also their service.

There was no interference from the king in the affairs of the hill villages till the *Khullapas* or *Khunbus* or *Ningthous* maintained peace and provided to state administration.

4.5.2 Judicial System

In societies of the early times, justice administration was looked upon as an affair that was private though at times it was implemented with community help. If a community law got broken, the punishment was meted out in front of the entire community so that

NOTES

others would be deterred from breaking the law. This was truer for customary law. This is the style of administration that was followed in early Manipur. A simple criminal law was prevalent in early Manipur. On receiving a complaint, Dolaipada (police) would go to make an arrest of the accused. As soon as the accused was produced in court, the trial would begin. The accused would be put under questioning or a judgment would be pronounced.

Information about crime and punishment is available from the Royal Edicts of which the most important is Edict of Meidingu Naophangba (429 A.D) which provides information regarding crimes and punishments of ancient Manipur. Information is also available in cheitharol Kumbaba, Manipur's royal chronicle. Even the Nangshamei Puya, the Political Agents' annual administrative reports and the writing of British Administrators in Manipur provide relevant information pertaining to the system of criminal justice.

Prior to the year 1709, Manipur's kings disposed all cases from the Cheirap Court (Highest Court) by consulting 64 phamous. The kings actively participated in the daily imparting of justice. By a reform passed in 1715 in the reign of Garib Niwaz (Pamheiba) with which administration went into the hands of his nobles while the king was now only the highest appellate authority.

Manipur has 4 types of court besides the court of the king (*Kuchu*, the highest court. These 4 courts were: (i) Courts concerning religious matters (ii) Court concerning secular matters (iii) Court for females (iv) Military courts.

Another division of courts was Cheirap Court (like Supreme Court) which held original and appellate jurisdiction and Village court for trying small cases.

Set up in the time of Nongda Lairem Pakahngba (33 A.D-154 A.D), the *Kuchu* became the highest court with complete state's comprehensive jurisdiction. Here, the hearing was presided over by the king and serious cases were tried by the king and his nobles. Located at Kangla's south western corner it was looked upon as being a sacred place where formal swearing of oaths with other tribes and Yeks and tribes also took place. The administering of the Cheirap court was in the hands of the Angom Ningthou (chief) with the nobles.

Punishment

Imprisonment and death sentence were not conferred upon Brahmins and women. The highest offence was considered to be conspiring against the king and treason and a death sentence was the highest punishment.

It has to be noted that the punishment for a crime did vary depending on who was on the throne. A lenient king could let off offenders easily by banishing those Naga or Loi villages. Mostly murder was punished by death to all involved in the act. Robbery, theft, stealing and such was punished with limb mutilation. Offence of kidnapping and murder was punishable with blinding. Corporal punishment like whipping was meted out for trading in man, beating someone with insufficient reason and general quarrel. Petty offences and assault attracted cane flogging on the shoulder and at times severe beating and exposure in the bazaar was the punishment. *Phaouba* or exposed in the sun was another form of corporal punishment. A common punishment was banishing to the offender to Loi village. Imprisonment was allowed in cases where the offender was to be provided time to modify the law breaking behavior.

Table 4.1 Establishment of Police (Civil and Armed Battalions) in Manipur (AD 33 – 1826)

Sl. No	Civil Police	Year	Reigning King	Armed Battalion
1.	Establishment of Lallup, Patcha Pheida, Panchayat	33	Pakhnagba	
2	Leikai Lakpas and Ningol Lakpas	2 nd Century	Khuyai Tompok	
3	Establishment of jail	664	Naothingkhong	
4	Laws Codified	1074-1112	Loyumba	
5	Establishment of 18 police Out posts	1467-1508	Kiyamba	
6	(i) Establishment of Doliapas (Civil Police) (ii) Dolaipabas replaced Loishanglois	1596	Khagemba	
7	(i) Changes in the functioning of Patcha Pheida. (ii) Establishment of Shanghuba Shanglakpa in charge of Jail and Law and order (iii) Khurailakpa made in charge of Flaw and order of Khurai (iv) Pacha Hanjaba made in charge of Pacha	1709-1740	Garib Niwas	
		1824	Gambhir Singh	Establishment of Manipur Levy (Army)
		1825	Gambhir Singh	Mr. Grant and Pemberton Attached to teach drill and Discipline to Manipur Levy (Army)
		1826	Gambhir Singh	Manipur Levy was changed to State Military Police

Source: Singh Ibomcha (2007)

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

13. During whose reign did Manipur get its name?
14. How many rulers has Manipur been ruled by?
15. What was the clan system in Manipur known as?
16. What was believed to be the reason for getting materials from different regions to build Kangla?

ACTIVITY

Form a group to make a collage of the lifestyle, dressing, food, dance and culture of Assam. Use colourful pictures to make it attractive and appealing.

NOTES

DID YOU KNOW

The population of Assam is a broad racial intermixture of Mongolian, Indo-Burmese, Indo-Iranian and Aryan origin. The hilly tracks of Assam are mostly inhabited by the tribes of Mongolian origin.

4.6 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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

- Evidence of polity formation of the Dimasa's is seen at Dimapur. The kingdom, by the thirteenth century, had spread right up along river Brahmaputra's southern banks, from river Dikhow to river Kallang, including the Dhansiri valley as also present-day district of Dima Hasao.
- The *Dimasa Kachari* settlements on the east of Dhansiri had moved prior to the advance of the Ahoms. While the Kamata Kingdom was to its west and that of Sutiya was on the east.
- A council of ministers (*Bhandari* and *Patra*) helped the king perform the duties of the state. The council was headed by *Barbhandari*.
- Hindu/non-Hindu Dimasa's were put on the council and other state offices.
- Approximately 40 Dimasa people's clans/*Sengphong* existed and each sent a representative to the royal assembly called *Mel*, a powerful institution that could elect a king.
- Based on what status the *Sengphong* had, its representatives had their seat in the Council hall or *Mel mandap*.
- The ministers of the state received specialized services from some clans and so did other bureaucrats, court writers, store keepers, ambassadors, to name a few. Over the course of time, these grew to be professional groups, such as *Nyablasa* (fishermen) and *Songyasa* (king's cooks).
- By the 17th century, the rule of the *Dimasa Kachari* had moved as far as the Cachar plains. There was no direct participation of the people of the plains in the *Dimasa Kachari* king's court.
- The people of the plains were organized based on *khels*. They were provided justice by the king who also received revenue from them through an official named *Uzir*.
- The formation of the State of Jaintia was a 3 stage process with the king at the head of the hierarchy.
- In the first stage, there were the village headmen, then the provincial governor or *Doloi*. Then came the *Raj* or *Syiem*.
- It appears that much before the period of recorded history, in Manipur there had already evolved a concrete civilization.
- In Manipur, there have been various forms of administration - village polity to constitutional monarchy.
- During most of the period it was a feudalism-based, centralized monarchy with the king being the total authority.
- It is evident that the Meiteis' political and social development revolved around the dynasty which was ruling.
- The state was headed by the king and he had all powers of veto. However, there was control on the powers of the king to prevent it from becoming autocratic. This was achieved through the *Ninghou Pongba Tara*, *Nine Khunpangthous*, *Sixty four Phandous* and *Clan Pibas*.
- The kingdom was governed by '*Loyumba Shinyen*', the written constitution.
- For Manipur, information about crime and punishment is available from the Royal Edicts of which the most important is the Edict of Meidingu Naophangba (429 A.D) and Cheitharol Kumbaba, Manipur's royal chronicle.

- Prior to the year 1709, Manipur's kings disposed all cases from the Cheirap Court (Highest Court) by consulting 64 phamous. The kings actively participated in the daily imparting of justice.
- A reform was passed in 1715, in the reign of Garib Niwaz (Pamheiba) with which the administration went into the hands of his nobles while the king was now only the highest appellate authority.
- Manipur has 4 types of court besides the court of the king (*Kuchu*, the highest court. These 4 courts were: (i) Courts concerning religious matters (ii) Court concerning secular matters (iii) Court for females (iv) Military courts.
- Another division of courts was the Cheirap Court (like Supreme Court), which held original and appellate jurisdiction and village court for trying small cases.
- Set up at the time of Nongda Lairem Pakahngba (33 A.D-154 A.D), the *Kuchu* became the highest court with complete state's comprehensive jurisdiction.

4.7 KEY TERMS

- **Moamoria rebellion:** The 18th century conflict between the Morans, adherents of the Moamara Sattrā, and the Ahom kings
- **Polity:** A form or process of civil government or constitution
- **Borgohain:** The second of the two original counselors in the Ahom kingdom
- **Corvee:** Unpaid labourers (as for the maintenance of roads)
- **Serfs:** An agricultural laborer bound under the feudal system to work on his lord's estate
- **Bondsmen:** A person who stands surety for a bond
- **Borbarua:** One of the five patra mantris (councilors) in the Ahom kingdom, a position created by the Ahom king Pratap Singha
- **Decree:** An official order issued by a legal authority
- **Meiteis:** The majority ethnic group of Manipur, India, who are sometimes referred to as Manipuris

4.8 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. 1228, 1826
2. Sukaphaa
3. wet rice cultivation
4. Borgohain, Burhagohain
5. The Kachari Kingdom was known as the Dimasa Kingdom in medieval times.
6. It has been opined that the Dimasa's initial state formation took place at the region of Sadiya.
7. The origin dialect of the *Dimasa Kachari* is *Maibang*. 'Mai' means 'Paddy' and 'bang' means 'Plenty or abundance'.
8. Khaspur region originally belonged to the kingdom of Tripura.

NOTES

9. In the second stage of state formation, there came into being the office of the provincial governor or Doloi.
10. He handled all matters that were secular in nature.
11. The second tier of state formation in pre-colonial jaintia was Elaka.
12. the U Doloi headed an Elaka
13. This region started to be known as Manipur during King Pamheiba's reign in the beginning of the 18th century (1709 – 48 A.D).
14. Manipur has seen the rule of 76 kings.
15. The clan system in Manipur known as Salai
16. It is opined that procuring of material in this manner, such as wooden pillars of different woods from different areas, was done for the purpose of consolidating and integrating the hill and valley people.

4.9 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-answer Questions

1. What were the various types of punishments given in medieval state of Manipur?
2. What was the area of the Ahom kingdom?
3. Write a short note on Doloiship.
4. Write a short note on Elaka.

Long-answer Questions

1. Write a detailed note on the judicial setup in the state of Manipur.
2. Explain the three-tier system of administration in the state of Jaintia.

4.10 FURTHER READING

- Gait, E.A.; *A History of Assam*, BiblioBazaar, US, 2010.
- Choudhary, Pratap Chandra; *The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam, Assam, 1966.
- Bhattacharjee, Jayanta Bhusan; *Social and polity formations in pre-colonial north-east India: the Barak Valley experience*, Haranand Publications in association with Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1991.
- Sinha, Surajit; *Tribal Polities and State Systems in Pre-colonial Eastern and North Eastern India*, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, 1987.
- Chakravarty, I. N., Chakravarty, Lakshmi N.; *Glimpses of the Early History of Arunachal*, Research Department, Arunachal Pradesh Administration, Arunachal Pradesh, 1973.
- Barpujari, Heramba Kauta; *Assam in the Days of the Company: 1826 - 1858: a Critical and Comprehensive History of Assam during the Rule of the East-India Company from 1826 - 1858*, North-Eastern Hill University Publications, Assam, 1996

- Barpujari, Heramba Kauta; *The Comprehensive history of Assam*, Publication Board, Assam, 1990.
- M. Horam; *Naga Polity*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 1975.
- M. Horam; *Social and Cultural Life of Nagas: (the Tangkhul Nagas)*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 1977.
- Sangkima; Mizos, *Society and Social Change, 1890-1947*, Spectrum Publications, New Delhi, 1992.
- Sangkima; *A Modern History Of Mizoram*, Spectrum Publications, New Delhi, 2004.
- Bhattacharjee, Jayanta Bhusan; *The Garos and the English, 1765-1874*, Radiant Publishers, Hyderabad, 1978.
- Kar, Parimal Chandra; *Garos in Transition*, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1982.
- Venuh, N. and Bonita Aleaz; *British Colonization and Restructuring of Naga Polity*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2005.
- Lahiri, Rebati Mohan; *The Annexation of Assam: 1824-1854*, General Printers & Publishers, Mumbai, 1954.
- Bhuyan, Suryya Kumar; *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, Lawyer's Book Stall, Assam, 1974.
- Elwin, Verrier; *The Nagas in the 19th Century*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1969.
- Lahiri, Nayanjot; *Pre-Ahom Assam*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1991.
- Birinchi, B.K. and Banikanta Kakati; *Cultural History of Assam*, K. K. Barooah, Assam, 1951.
- Basu, Nirmal Kumar; *Assam in the Ahom Age, 1228-1826: Being Politico-economic and Socio-cultural Studies*, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, Kolkata, 1970.
- Nath, R.M.; *The Background of Assamese Culture*, A. K. Nath, 1948.
- Bareh, Hamlet; *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, Spectrum Publications, Gauhati, 1967.
- Chatterjii, S. K.; *The Place of Assam in the History and Civilization of India*, Gauhati University, Gauhati, 1970.
- Dani, A. H.; *Prehistory and Protohistory of Eastern India*, Firma L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1960.
- Dhavlikar, M. K.; *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute 31-32: 137-49*, Archaeology of Gauhati, 1973.

UNIT 5 AHOM'S RELATIONS WITH ITS NEIGHBOURS

NOTES

Structure

- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1 Unit Objectives
- 5.2 Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh
 - 5.2.1 The Akas-Ahom Relations
 - 5.2.2 Ahom's Relations with the Noctes
 - 5.2.3 Ahom's Relations with the Nyishis
 - 5.2.4 Ahom's Relations with the Adis (Abhors) and Mishings (Miris)
 - 5.2.5 Ahom's Relations with the Mishimis
 - 5.2.6 Ahom's Relations with the Khamptis
 - 5.2.7 Ahom's Relations with the Singphos
- 5.3 Other Tribes
 - 5.3.1 Nagas
 - 5.3.2 Khasis
 - 5.3.3 Jaintias
 - 5.3.4 Kacharis
- 5.4 Summary
- 5.5 Key Terms
- 5.6 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 5.7 Questions and Exercises
- 5.8 Further Reading

5.0 INTRODUCTION

The Ahom people had come to the region of Assam and had begun their rule. It was not an easy task as they had to subjugate and keep under control those, who had been residing around those areas prior to their coming. They mostly had cordial relations with every tribe of the region, except with the Jaintias who kept defying them and locking horns with them. Even though the Kacharis were defiant, they were not much of a trouble for the Ahoms.

Let us look at the kind of relations that the Ahoms managed to keep with various tribes of the region.

In the hill-plain relationship during the pre-modern period, 'trade and raid' had been a universal phenomenon. The people living in the hills always needed formal or informal market/ *haat*/ place to exchange their goods with the people of the valleys/ foothills or the plains. The two always depended upon each other for products. This was a mutually accepted practice. In this system, mainly to minimize the language barrier and facilitate trade, some institutions of middlemen and frontier officers were formed. This section of people (Kotakis and others), besides playing an economic role, also played the role of middlemen in the political relations between people living in the hills and those living in the plains. Till technological progress of the two areas reached similar levels, there was, it can be said, a peaceful co-existence. However, with development in social and higher levels of polity formations (in case of Assam the emergence of Ahom kingdom) among the people of the valleys, people living in the hills were suppressed or restricted into the confines of hills. On

the other hand, the people living in the hills were always making efforts to retain their previous rights and privileges in the foothills or the plains. The gamut of the relationships between Ahoms and tribals in general and between the Ahoms and the other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, centres around the same. However, it was not always the principle of war or conflict; there are also evidences of policies of conciliation and respect for the rights of the people living in hills by rulers of the valleys. 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.

For a comprehensive view of the topic, a brief overview of literature is important. It will help you to understand the historiography of the same. E. A. Gait's *A History of Assam* (reprint Gauhati, 1997 and first published 1905), though mainly a book on medieval Assam, could devote only a few paragraphs dealing with the relation of the Ahom rulers with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. A detailed study appeared much later; Lakshmi Devi wrote *Ahom-Tribal Relations (A Political Study)*, (Gauhati, 1968). In addition to these two pioneer works, the *Gazetteers* of the British period and after, have also dealt with the subject. Some modern and contemporary historians too have written on the same, however, not in the form of books. These have mostly been written in the form of articles on certain themes. Amalendu Guha's book *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam: Society, Polity, Economy* (A collection of his papers published earlier in Calcutta, in 1991) is an important book to comprehensively understand the developments of Assam in the period. The textbooks written by D. Pandey, D. Pandey, C. M. Nayak and some other authors provide easy reading of the topic. All these provide a comprehensive picture of the relation of tribes with Ahom rulers. At the outset, it is important to mention that sometimes we witness the bias, either in favour of the people of the hills or the plains or sometimes, the continuance of traditional colonial historiographical approach in these works. This unit is based on these writings.

In the process of foundation and extension of the Ahom kingdom and, especially after extending its control to the northern bank of Brahmaputra, came in direct contact and consequently in conflict with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The Noctes were the only exception. While coming to Assam, the Ahoms had already crossed the hills where the Noctes lived and had encountered them in the early years of the 13th century. The tribes such as, the Noctes, Nyishis, Adis, Mishings (Miris), Mishimis, Khampitis, Singhphos, Sherdukpens and others developed relationship with the Ahom rulers.

In this unit, you will learn about the Ahom's relationships with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, the Jaintias, the Khasis, the Nagas and the Kacharis.

5.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Interpret the policy of the Ahom rulers towards the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh
- Discuss the policy of peace, conciliation and mutual coexistence
- Describe the policy of force used by the Ahoms against the tribes
- Explain the relations of the Ahoms with the Nyishi, Adi, Mishmi, Bhutia, Khampiti and Akas tribes of Arunachal Pradesh
- Compare the relations of the Ahoms with the Nagas, Khasis, Jaintias and Kacharis

5.2 TRIBES OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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. Amrendra Kr Thakur in two of his articles has studied this (Rural Technology in Arunachal Pradesh: Interface of Defence and Agrarian Technologies', in Vijay Kumar Thakur and K. K. Mandal eds. *Science, Technology and Medicine in Indian History: Essays in Honour of Dr. D. K. Singh*, Janaki Prakashan, Patna, 2000, pp. 253-74 and 2. 'Fortification and Forts of Arunachal Pradesh' in N. Nagaraju and B. Tripathy (eds.), *Cultural Heritage of Arunachal Pradesh*, Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2006, pp.241-58). On the other hand, a hill campaign was always difficult due to bad communication 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.

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 iron, lac, rice, Assam silk, dried fish, buffalo horns etc. The Noctes brought salt, cotton, elephant teeth, etc. to the markets in and around Sibsagar. The Mishmis 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 hills and plains. The participation of tribes of Arunachal Pradesh in the 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).

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*

NOTES

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' 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, 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 foot hill 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 kinds. 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 history of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam write the posa system as the blackmail, to meet the need of the hills. Contrary to these approaches S. Dutta in his article 'The Posa System: A Historical Analysis' (S. Dutta and B. Tripathy (eds.), *Sources of the History of Arunachal Pradesh*, Gyan Publishing, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 161-82) and Amrendra Kr Thakur in his article 'Sat Rajas of Arunachal Pradesh: A Study' (in J. B. Bhattacharjee and D. R. Syiemlieh (eds.), *Early States in North East India*, Regency Publications, New Delhi, 2013, pp. 190-211) also provide some other details of the posa system.

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.

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/-

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 (1603-1641), 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 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 of they were very intelligent and educated persons and in most of the cases, their capacity to argue and presentation of facts were the decisive factors. The services of the Kotokis were also utilized 'to carry and to 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*. The *katakis* were appointed mainly to maintain a 'the 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

NOTES

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 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 *Katakis* were also used in the Ahom-Mishmi confrontation 1675. Chaodang, a *Kataki*, 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 *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, 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.

5.2.1 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, were comprised of mainly two clans — the *hazari-Khowas* (means 'eaters at a thousand hearths') and the *Kapachors* (means 'thieves who lurk amid the cotton plants). The Ahom government had granted right of *posa* to the *Hazari Khowas* to prevent their aggression of the plains. But the *Kapachors* were more troublesome. According to the records of 1825, the Akas were 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 *Kopachors*. 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 *Kopachors*, on the other hand, simply extorted some articles from the cultivators in the plains. It is also suggested that the *Kopachors* 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 Kopachors 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.

Policy of subjugation (use of force)

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.



Fig. 5.1 The Ahom King Sukapha

5.2.2 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 to the Noctes. The Noctes means village people (*Noc* means village and *te* means people) and were 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

NOTES

NOTES

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 on the Ahoms conciliated with them (as has been discussed already). Conflict between the Ahoms and the Nagas continued throughout the whole period of the Ahom rule. The main causes of the conflict were the right to use the 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 entered in close friendly relations with the Ahoms. King Pratap Singha (1603-1641) tried to check the Naga attacks by constructing a rampart called the Naga-garh. 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 on a salt mine at Barhat in 1701. King Rudra Singha (1696-1714) subdued them. But 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 details accounts 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 Banfer or Banpara Nagas the Ahom King Chakradhvaj Singha (1663-1670) attacked on 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 'Narottam'.

(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) became very much 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).

NOTES

5.2.3 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 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 actions. 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 into 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 back. 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 Dafla-garh (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 areas who became known as Dafla-bahatias or the serfs of the Daflas and an officer known as Dafalaparua Phukan was appointed to look after these men. In the relations with the Ahoms the Nyishis

NOTES

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 strengths of the Nyishis. In 1562, the Nyishis (along with the Koches) invaded the plains. The Ahom king Sukhampha, 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 *Dafla Garh* 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 erected forts and put restrictions on Daflas entrance to markets. 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 plains people. 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 loot or plunder. 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.

5.2.4 Ahom's Relations with the Adis (Abhors) and Mishings (Miris)

The Adis were known as the Abors in the Ahom and British documents (however now-a-days Adi is popularly used in place of Abor). Now the Galos have separate identity, however earlier know as the Gallongs they were part and parcel of the Adi society.

NOTES

culture and identity. The Adis came into 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 as whole 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 came down to the plains and 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 the Nyishis, Akas, Monpas and Sherdukpens. But still the Miris raided on the plains in 1655 and again in 1665. Their raid on Sadiya (1683) during the rule of Gadadhar Singha was very violent one. They set fire to the house of the Sadiya Khowa Gohain, destroyed the villages, and killed about two hundred people. However, the on the pressure of 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 commit 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 Aid-Ahom conflict.

5.2.5 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 into 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 Mishmis. 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 Mishmis. They had not been granted right to posa, but they enjoyed trade facilities. In fact, the Mishmis 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 produces. 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 Mishmis and the Ahoms.

There are not many references of the Mishmis in the *Buranjis* (the Ahom chronicle). King Sutyinpha (1644-48) got constructed a *Mishmi-garh*' (Rampart) to resist the Mishmi raiders. The only conflict that took place between the Mishmis and the Ahoms was during the reign of Ramdhraj 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 Singphos, 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 one 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.

5.2.6 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.

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 Sadiyakhowa Gohain, the Ahom Governor of Sadiya, and established their rule over Sadiya with two chiefs namely 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 contented with that and during the reign of Kamaleshwar Singha (1795-1811), came further down the plains in 1799 A.D. 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.

5.2.7 Ahom's Relations with the Singhphos

The Singhphos, 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 Singhpho villages. The Noa Dihing forms the west side of this rough square and on this river, were located the other eighteen Singhpho villages. The banks of these rivers were very fertile and known for the settled rice cultivation. The Singhphos 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

NOTES

NOTES

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 Capt 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 when 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 tranquility 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.

NOTES

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?

5.3 OTHER TRIBES

In this section, you will learn about Ahom's relations with some other important tribes of north-east such as Nagas, Khasis, Jaintias and Kacharis.

5.3.1 Nagas

In the 13th century, when there was the rise of the Kingdom of the Ahoms, a contact between the Ahoms and the Nagas was established. Originally from Burma, the Ahoms entered north-eastern Assam, via, the North Eastern Frontier and the Patkai range. Slowly, they established themselves in the plains of the Brahmaputra valley. Sukapha was the first Ahom ruler of Assam and he succeeded in establishing the Ahom paramountcy over the tribes of the hills though he could not introduce Ahom rule amongst them.

It has been opined that the Ahoms were looking for food when they first attacked the Naga villages. Undoubtedly, the Nagas who despised interference in their affairs resisted the Ahom advance, but were not powerful enough to face repeated efforts of the Ahoms. This led to the subjugation of some tribes but whatever rule was established, did not last for long.

The retaliating Nagas even raided territories which were under the control of the Ahom kings. The tribes that the Ahoms subjugated lived near Assam's plains and were: Ao, Lotha, Konyak and Nocte. Despite defeating these tribes, no rule was established by the Ahoms over the Nagas, instead, they were pushed into showing their allegiance through payment of a tribute. A treaty between the Nagas and the Ahoms gave the Nagas an exemption from paying rent for the region meant for the purpose of fishing. The right to *posha*, a kind of tax, was granted to the Naga chief. According to J F Michael, 'Present inhabitants are the remains of the hill regions enlisted by the rajas of Assam and had been given the present lands as their reward of good service.'

The Nagas are of the opinion that though the Ahom rulers entered some Naga territories and compelled the Nagas to pay tribute, they were never under the Ahom rule. The forceful relations were always of a temporary nature. According to Butler, the supremacy of the Ahoms had been accepted by the Nagas, but they had been granted the exercise of freedom as far as their internal affairs were concerned.

NOTES

However, it does seem that compulsion and force was used to keep the Nagas in a relationship with the Ahoms. Lakshmi Devi is of the view that when in the 17th century, Lotha Nagas rebelled against the Ahoms, T C Phukan had severely dealt with them. This led to the Lothas agreeing to be under the Ahom rule

In the beginning of the 18th century, due to various reasons, the Ahom Kingdom had weakened. Taking advantage of this, the subjugated Nagas freed themselves. Following this, they began to raid the Ahom subjects.

The warlike tribes in the interiors never came in contact with the Ahom rulers. The Ahom rulers changed the policy they would follow with frontier tribes based on political exigencies, but more so on the ability of the tribe or the tribal chief. It is known that at the beginning of their rule, the Ahom rulers followed a policy of slow but steady penetration, occasionally attended with revolting cruelties. With a view to terrorizing the tribal people, the Ahoms followed the policy of terrorism and committed atrocities compelling the relatives of the Nagas to eat the flesh of their roasted brethren. This was the reason they did not get the support, faith and cooperation of the Nagas, instead got their enmity. When Nagas were raided by the Ahoms, their houses were burnt down, following which, they submitted and were pardoned and given compensation for the losses inflicted on them. The tribal chiefs were captured and beheaded.

These instances make it clear that there never were peaceful and friendly relations between the Ahoms and the Nagas. In times of declining power, the Ahoms followed a policy of appeasing the tribes of the frontier region. Post Pratap Singha's death, those who succeeded, failed at keeping the tribes subjugated. With decline of the kingdom, the tribes, along with the Nagas rose to take revenge for the excesses committed on them by the Ahoms, when they became powerful.

5.3.2 Khasis

According to the legends, the Khasis were said to be the earliest immigrants who made their way across northern Myanmar to the present location where they established new centre. Linguistically the Khasis represents a unique case of being the isolated austere group, speaking the dialects from the Mon Khmer family of languages which is spoken in the other South-East Asian region.

The tribes in Meghalaya can mainly be classified into three groups Garos, Khasis and Pnars or Jaintias. Garos are believed to be the descendants of Tibeto Burmar race who came down all the way from Tibet to the North-Eastern States while the Khasis and Pnars or Jaintias are the descendants of Proto Austroloid Monkhmer race. While Garos can be located in the Garo hills of Meghalaya, the Khasis are scattered all across the State and are known by different names.

Mainly, the pure Khasis can be sited at the Khasi hills, the Pnars or Jaintias can be located on Jaintia hills. Apart from these, there are many other tribes in Meghalaya. They are Bhois in the north of Meghalaya, Khyntriams in the central and Wars in the southern region. They are all a sub-tribes of Khasis and live a lifestyle similar to that of the Khasis.

The term—Khasi is applied to the group of matrilineal and Mon Khmer speaking people who presently inhabit the east and the west Khasi Hills and the Jaintia Hills district of Meghalaya. The term includes Amwis and the Lyngams. Garo is a term used by others to refer to a particular group of people who are mainly concentrated in the

Garohills. The Garos prefer to be called by *Mande* or *Achik*. The term—Jaintia is a generic term which includes the Pnars/Synteng and other sub groups.

Anglo-Khasi War (1829–1833)

U Tiroi Sing as a king of the Khasi people in the early 19th century, ruled in Nongkhlaw, which was part of the Khasi Hills convened a Durbar, where he passed orders for the British to evacuate Nongkhlaw. The British, under David Scott who was the agent to the British Governor General for the Northern Territory did not pay any heed to the order. That is how the Khasis attacked the British garrison in Guwahati on two April 1829 and killed two British officers. The British retaliated with a fury and started military operations against U Tiroi Sing and other Khasi chiefs were started immediately. Thus began the Anglo-Khasi war during 1829–1833.

Although the Khasis lacked firearms and had only swords, shields, bows and arrows they resorted to guerrilla activity, when they found that it was impossible to engage in open battle against an enemy who could kill from a distance since they were untrained in the British type of warfare. The Anglo Khasi war continued for the next 4 year from 1829.

The might of the British colonial rulers over powered the Khasi's as U Tiroi Sing was finally captured by the British and in 1832, the Khasi king was deported to Dhaka, where he died on 17 July 1835. His death anniversary is commemorated every year in Meghalaya.

After the Khasi king surrendered, the British increased their influence over the Jaintia Kingdom, which was finally annexed on 15 March, 1835. The king of Jaintiapur handed over his property in Sylhet and was given a monthly salary of '500.

The British administered the plain areas directly and the hill region indirectly via a system of 15 dolois and 4 sardars, as an agent of the British administrators. The 15 administrators were free to adjudicate on all but the most heinous crimes. Eventually, the British incorporated Meghalaya into Assam in 1835. Later, the British occupied the Garo Hills in 1872.

When Bengal was partitioned on 16 October 1905 by Lord Curzon, Meghalaya became a part of the new province of East Bengal, along with Assam. However, when the partition was reversed in 1912, Meghalaya became a part of the province of Assam.

5.3.3 Jaintias

It was in the beginning of the 17th century that the Ahoms and the Jaintias first came into contact with each other. At that time, Pratap Singha (1603-1641) was the Ahom king. The Jaintia king, Jasa Manik formed a bond of friendship with King Pratap Singha by offering him two Jaintia princesses in marriage. The friendship was short-lived. With new rulers taking over the thrones of both the Ahoms and the Jaintias, hostility became the common factor. It ended only after AD 1662, when the Ahoms defeated the Mughals and drove them out of Gauhati. Yet, some skirmishes did take place between the Jaintias and the Ahoms even after 1662.

5.3.4 Kacharis

According to the Ahom-Buranji records, 'In ancient time, the heavenly King Sukhapa conquered the Sutiya, the Kacharis, the Mataks, the Barahis, the Nagas and the

NOTES

Kamateswars. They were allowed to remain as they were on the condition that they offer tributes.'

Even the Purani Assam Buranji carries a similar statement. Chronicles also record that when Sui-Ka-Pha reached the valley of the Brahmaputra, these territories gave him their tributes. To quote, 'After this, the king Sukapha arrived in this country. He got homage and tributes from all.'

From what has been discussed, it would seem that Sukapha kept getting tributes from the Kacharis. The territory of the Kacharis was on River Dikhow's left bank.

The fact that the Kacharis paid tributes to Sukapha is further confirmed through the warning that was given to them by Suteupha (Sukapha's son) to pay tribute or move out of their territory right till Namdang River. The warning could have come, because seeing a new king, the Kacharis deliberately stopped payment of tribute.

The Ahom's were not averse to foul play, when it came to pushing the Kacharis out of the region they occupied. Here is an example to quote from I S Mumtaza Khatun's (Associate Professor, Department of History, University of Gauhati): The nature of the Ahom-Kachari relations can be quoted as follows:

On learning that the Kacharis were highly superstitious and could easily be duped, the Ahoms proposed that this should be decided by a test in which both parties dig separate canals. Whoever could link the canal with the river Dikhow, before daybreak would be considered the owner of the tract. The Kacharis, having agreed to the proposal, the two sides started digging the canals. In their attempt, the Kacharis almost surpassed the Ahoms, who, on learning this, brought some fowls and made the birds to crow as they would do before dawn. The night being a full-moon one, the Kacharis heard the fowls crowing and thought that it was already dawn. Thus, they left the canal incomplete while the Ahoms continued to dig and succeeded in finishing the task before dawn. The Kacharis, admitting defeat, surrendered the territory (till Namdang), to the Ahoms.

It took the Kacharis nearly 200 years to get back at the Ahoms and make them subordinates. They defeated the Ahom King Siu-hen-pha (AD 1488-1493) and forced them to offer a girl to the Kachari king.

Siu-hum-mong, was the ruler of the Ahom's from 1497 to 1539. He was not averse to using any means to establish the old territorial status with the Kacharis. Headed by Kan Seng, an army was sent, which used dexterous means to take hold of region till the Dhansiri valley. This success made the Ahoms bold and they set on a path to crush the Kacharis. A battle ensued in 1531, in which, Khunkhara was defeated and the Ahoms put Detchungpha on the Kachari throne. He claimed to be descendent of the original Kacharis. Then, the Kacharis became subordinate to the Ahoms and in every Ahom correspondence, the term thapita was used for them, meaning established.

Some years later, the new Kachari king tried to assert independence and an Ahom army was sent against him that killed his mother and him. Prince Madan was taken to the capital of the Ahoms. Later, when the Kachari nobles made a solicitation to the Ahom king, Madan was put on the Kachari throne. He was renamed Nirbhaya Narayan. He was also given a girl by the Ahoms. Nirdhaya Narayan consented to pay annual tribute to the Ahoms. The Kachari king came to be known as thapita-sanchita which means established and preserved.

The Kachari kings wanted to shake off this title and used the smallest opportunity to free themselves of Ahom authority. Their first opportunity came when after having

defeated the Ahoms, the army of the Koch led by Chilarai brought the Kachari kingdom under it. The Kacharis regarded this as the suzerainty of the Ahoms, leaving them forever. Therefore, when some years had gone by, during the reign of Pratap Singha, Sundar Gohain was killed by the Kacharis and they openly declared that they would stop all tribute paying to the Ahom overlords. At the same time, the Kacharis renamed their capital to Kirtipur and their king changed his name from Yasa Narayan to Pratap Narayan.

NOTES

To quote I S Mumtaza Khatun's *The Nature of the Ahom-Kachari Relations*,

Just after the accession of Sui-ram-pha in 1641, to the Ahom throne, after the death of Sui-sen-pha, the Kachari king, Indrabalnarayan, the successor of Bhimbalnarayan, deputed envoys with letters to the new Ahom king. These were sealed with *Singhasab*, or the seal of independence, instead of the *Phukan sab*, or the seal of subordination, which he was supposed to use.

While one envoy was sent to get the communication again with the Phukan sab, the other was held by the Ahoms.

Another instance, in which the Kacharis tried to gain their independence, was when the Ahoms were under Mughal attack during 1615 to 1619. Bhimbala Narayana, the then Kachari king, in an attempt to assert his position, attacked a village which was part of the kingdom of the Ahoms. He was well aware that at such a time he would face no resistance from the Ahom forces.

Another time, following the invasion of Mir Jumla, envoys were dispatched by Chakradhvaj Singha to the Kachari Kingdom for information regarding Barchetiya, an Ahom officer, who had run off to the kingdom of the Kacharis. To begin with, Barchetiya was not returned by Bidarpa Narayan and he insulted the Ahoms by sending his reply through an envoy. This was not the existing etiquette. The letter was returned to the Kachari King, unaccepted by the Ahom ruler.

There are various such repeated incidents which show that while the Ahoms wanted the Kacharis under their subordination, the Kacharis incessantly strived to remain independent. The Ahoms expected the Kacharis to carry five letters in all diplomatic exchanges, for the king and the ministers. After having broken relations, if the Kacharis wanted to revive them with the Ahoms, they needed to provide five letters for the resumption of good relations. This was resented by the Kacharis. Yet this process was repeated time and again. Whenever the Kacharis did provide the five letters, the Ahoms promptly began to refer to them as *thapita-sanchita*. This was disliked by the Kacharis and they promptly made a demand for an Ahom girl, which would prove that they were really established, when in fact they knew that providing a girl would show the subordination of the Ahoms.

Though the Kacharis did not like to be called *thapita-sanchita*, they were only too happy to be such in a situation where the Ahom king was powerful. Also, the Kacharis rejoiced and declared their independence each time that a foreign invasion, like that of the Mughals took place on the Ahoms and they were pushed against the wall. Promptly, when the Ahoms were victorious, the Kacharis would rush to revive good relations.

According to I S Mumtaza Khatun's *The Nature of the Ahom-Kachari Relations* can be quoted as follows:

Another point, which comes to our notice, is that the Ahom king himself never took any initiative to establish friendly relations or to revive such relations. In case of extreme necessity, the Ahom monarch sent envoys on behalf of his ministers as in the case of Pratap Singha, who, anticipating the Mughal invasion, sent five people on behalf of his ministers and the governor, to the Kachari court in AD 1615.

NOTES

ACTIVITY

Talk to some people from the North East living in your locality or working with you. Find out how different is their lifestyle, as compared to yours.

DID YOU KNOW

North East possesses more than 550 varieties of orchids, which is said to be almost 70% of the total species of orchids identified so far.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

4. How did the Ahoms come to India?
5. When did the Ahoms and the Jaiantias first come in contact with each other?
6. How long did it take for the Kacharis to get back at the Ahoms and make them subordinates?

5.4 SUMMARY

- In this unit, we have studied that 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 led very few expeditions towards the hills, because of many types of problems.
- 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.
- The tribes of the hills also utilized the troubled times of the Ahoms, due to foreign invasions or the internal problems and chaos due to the rebellion of the Moamarias.

5.5 KEY TERMS

- **Haat:** Place to exchange goods
- **Sama-dana-danda-bheda:** The political methodologies prescribed by the scriptures
- **Historiographical:** A body of historical literature
- **Ambuscade:** Attack from an ambush
- **Duars:** The floodplains and foothills of the eastern Himalayas in North-East India around Bhutan. It means 'door' and symbolizes the region forming the gateway to Bhutan from India. This region is divided by the Sankosh river into the

Eastern and Western duars. The Western duars is known as the Bengal duars and the Eastern duars the Assam duars.

- **Paik system:** A type of corvee labor system on which the Ahom kingdom of medieval Assam was based
- **Posa:** It is tributes paid in kind. In AD 1685, after the defeat of the Miris, Posa was renewed.
- **Ryot:** A general economic term used throughout India for peasant cultivators but with variations in different provinces
- **Khats:** Fertile land at foothills
- **Lingua franka:** A medium of communication between peoples of different languages
- **Overlord:** A ruler, esp especially. a feudal lord
- **Paramouncy:** The state of being paramount; the highest rank or authority
- **Warlike:** Suggesting war or military life

NOTES

5.6 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

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 necessities 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. Originally from Burma, the Ahoms entered north-eastern Assam, via, the North Eastern Frontier and the Patkai range.
5. It was in the beginning of the 17th century that the Ahoms and the Jaiantias first came into contact with each other.
6. It took the Kacharis nearly 200 years to get back at the Ahoms and make them subordinates.

5.7 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. List the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.
2. What do you mean by *posa*?
3. What acts reflect the policy of friendly relation of Ahom rulers with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh?
4. How were the relations between the Ahoms and the Nyishis?
5. What measures were used to stop the Nyishi raids into the Ahom territory?

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. Discuss the policy of subjugation.
4. Summarize the highlights of the relations between the Ahoms and the tribals.

NOTES

5.8 FURTHER READING

Gait, E.A.; *A History of Assam*, BiblioBazaar, US, 2010.

Choudhary, Pratap Chandra; *The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam, Assam, 1966.

Bhattacharjee, Jayanta Bhusan; *Social and polity formations in pre-colonial north-east India: the Barak Valley experience*, Haranand Publications in association with Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1991.

Sinha, Surajit; *Tribal Polities and State Systems in Pre-colonial Eastern and North Eastern India*, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, 1987.

Chakravarty, I. N., Chakravarty, Lakshmi N.; *Glimpses of the Early History of Arunachal*, Research Department, Arunachal Pradesh Administration, Arunachal Pradesh, 1973.

Barpujari, Heramba Kauta; *Assam in the Days of the Company: 1826 - 1858: a Critical and Comprehensive History of Assam during the Rule of the East-India Company from 1826 - 1858*, North-Eastern Hill University Publications, Assam, 1996

Barpujari, Heramba Kauta; *The Comprehensive history of Assam*, Publication Board, Assam, 1990.

M. Horam; *Naga Polity*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 1975.

M. Horam; *Social and Cultural Life of Nagas: (the Tangkhul Nagas)*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 1977.

Sangkima; Mizos, *Society and Social Change, 1890-1947*, Spectrum Publications, New Delhi, 1992.

Sangkima; *A Modern History Of Mizoram*, Spectrum Publications, New Delhi, 2004.

Bhattacharjee, Jayanta Bhusan; *The Garos and the English, 1765-1874*, Radiant Publishers, Hyderabad, 1978.

Kar, Parimal Chandra; *Garos in Transition*, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1982.

Venuh, N. and Bonita Aleaz; *British Colonization and Restructuring of Naga Polity*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2005.

Lahiri, Rebati Mohan; *The Annexation of Assam: 1824-1854*, General Printers & Publishers, Mumbai, 1954.

Bhuyan, Suryya Kumar; *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, Lawyer's Book Stall, Assam, 1974.

Elwin, Verrier; *The Nagas in the 19th Century*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1969.

Lahiri, Nayanjot; *Pre-Ahom Assam*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1991.

Birinchi, B.K. and Banikanta Kakati; *Cultural History of Assam*, K. K. Barooah, Assam, 1951.

Basu, Nirmal Kumar; *Assam in the Ahom Age, 1228-1826: Being Politico-economic and Socio-cultural Studies*, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, Kolkata, 1970.

Nath, R.M.; *The Background of Assamese Culture*, A. K. Nath, 1948.

Bareh, Hamlet; *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, Spectrum Publications, Gauhati, 1967.

Chatterjii, S. K.; *The Place of Assam in the History and Civilization of India*, Gauhati University, Gauhati, 1970.

Dani, A. H.; *Prehistory and Protohistory of Eastern India*, Firma L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1960.

Dhavlikar, M. K.; *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute* 31-32: 137-49, Archaeology of Gauhati, 1973.

NOTES



INSTITUTE
OF DISTANCE
EDUCATION **IDE**
Rajiv Gandhi University

Institute of Distance Education

Rajiv Gandhi University

A Central University

Rono Hills, Arunachal Pradesh

Contact us:



+91-98638 68890



Ide Rgu



Ide Rgu



helpdesk.ide@rgu.ac.in



**INSTITUTE
OF DISTANCE
EDUCATION** **IDE**
Rajiv Gandhi University

Institute of Distance Education Rajiv Gandhi University

A Central University

Rono Hills, Arunachal Pradesh

Contact us:

 +91-98638 68890

 Ide Rgu

 Ide Rgu

 helpdesk.ide@rgu.ac.in