

# **HISTORY OF ASSAM (1228-1826)**

**MA (History)  
Second Semester  
Course 206  
Block- 1**



**Gauhati University**  
**Institute of Distance and Open Learning**

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**Course : 206**  
**History of Assam**  
**(1228-1826)**

**Brief overview of the Course :**

History of Assam from 1228 to 1826 is generally considered as the Medieval period of Assam history. The beginning of this period coincides with the decline and disintegration of the kingdom of Kamata and the coming of the Ahoms to this part of the country. This period covers the entire period of Ahom rule till the Treaty of Yandaboo (1826) when Assam was annexed to the British Indian Empire.

This period witnessed the emergence of another power in the western part of the Brahmaputra valley in the form of the Koch kingdom. Apart from the political struggles among the powers of the region, the period also witnessed a number of invasions by powers from the west which included the Mughals. The Ahom power resisted these incursions and fought the famous battle of Saraighat which culminated the final defeat of the Mughal power. However, the civil wars also referred to as the Moamaria rebellions in the later part of the eighteenth century, followed by the Burmese invasions from the east finally ended with the Treaty of Yandaboo (1826) and made Assam a part of the British Indian Empire.

→ **Important information on the course material :**

- ✓ This self learning manual will help you to know the major events and issues of the history of medieval Assam. You shall have to supplement your study by going through the other prescribed texts stated after the units here and in the syllabus.
- ✓ The Assamese and other indigenous words have been stated in English keeping the popular usage in mind.
- ✓ Authors have used various ways of writing the names of Ahom rulers. The most popular form has been Sukapha, Suhungmung, etc.. The names of the same rulers have also been written by some other authors as Siu-ka-pha, Siu-hom-mong, etc... It is true that the pronunciation of the names perhaps is more similar to the later representations. The popular form of writing the names of the Ahom rulers, i.e., Sukapha, Suhungmung, has been used in this study material for convenience.
- ✓ Frequently use the relevant maps and the chronological tables of rulers and events to understand the developments and events of history of Medieval Assam over space and time.

## Unit - I

Sources - Literature : indigenous, foreign; Archaeology : inscriptions, coins and other material remains

### 1.1 Introduction

The historical sources available for history of Assam from 1228 till 1826 are varied and numerous. In this unit the various sources of the medieval history of Assam would be discussed. The sources to be highlighted are – literature (both indigenous and foreign), archaeology, epigraphy, numismatics and other material remains.

### 1.2 Objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to :

*Discuss* various sources of History of Medieval Assam

*Explain* literary, archaeological and other material evidences of Assam History pertaining to this period

### 1.3 Literature

Literature is considered to be an important source of history. There are substantial literary sources available of the medieval history of Assam. Such literature may be broadly divided into two – indigenous and foreign.

Indigenous literature includes the literary works of native writers. During the medieval period in Assam, such works include mainly the *Buranjis*, the *Vamsavalis* and the vast Assamese *Vaishnava* literature.

Foreign literature includes the Persian Chronicles written mostly by travelers and visitors to Assam. Such writers often accompanied Muslim invaders. Another category of foreign writers were the British officers and the contemporary foreign travelers who came to Assam during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries.

#### 1.4.1 Indigenous Literature

**Buranjis** : *Buranjis* or chronicles were a unique contribution of the Ahoms. The Ahoms had a procedure of keeping records of all events of the time, in a class of documents called the *Buranjis*. The *buranjis* were so numerous and voluminous that they overshadow the other primary sources of history of the period like archaeology and numismatics.

*Buranji* is an Ahom word and means a store-house of knowledge that enlightens the ignorant. However, from the point of view of the contents, most of the *buranjis* can be considered as chronicles. They generally deal with the political events of the period, such

as war and diplomacy; appointment and dismissal of ministers and officials, working of the general administration, etc.

There were buranjis written on the history of other states. The *Padshah Buranji* was written perhaps to acquaint the people of Assam with the Muslim rulers of Delhi. The *Kachari Buranji*, *Tripura Buranji* and *Jayantia Buranji* mostly dealt with the diplomatic history of the Ahoms with these kingdoms.

Important Tai-Ahom Buranjis included the *Ahom Buranji* (translated and edited into English by Rai Bahadur Golap Chandra Baruah), *Deodhai Asam Buranji* (compiled and edited by S.K. Bhuyan and containing the text *Swarga Narayan Maharaja Akhyan* in 1931) of the period from Kamaleswar Singha to Purandar Singha) and the *weissalisa*.

Some reports of officials have also been considered as buranjis. The nomenclature of such buranjis indicated the theme on which the same were written. For example, *Datiyalia Buranji* contained reports of frontier officials which *Kataki Buranji* contained reports of emissaries or ambassadors. *Chakialar Buranji* contains the report of the officers at different outposts. *Satryia Buranji* is an account of the satras while *Changrung Phukanor Buranji* contained plan and estimates of the Chief engineer.

The buranjis that related comprehensive political history and were voluminous were called *Lai-lik-Buranji*. On the other hand, the buranjis that narrated a single event only were called *Lit-Buranji*. *Lai-lik-Buranjis* are called *Barpahi Buranji* in Assamese while the Assamese word *Katha* is used to refer to the *Lit Buranjis*. Many Ahom families have their own account of their lineage.

The buranjis were written in both Tai-Ahom and Assamese languages. The earlier Buranjis were written in the Tai-Ahom language. It was in the reign of Suhungmung (1497-1539) that Buranjis in Assamese were first written. Most of the Buranjis were anonymous.

There are two buranjis written in verse and the remaining are written in prose. The language used in the buranjis is simple and clear. Bani Kanta Kakati in his edited work *Aspects of Early Assamese Literature* (Gauhati University, 1953) writes that buranjis present, "a confluence of history and literature not to be found in any modern literature in the pre-British period."

The writers of the buranjis were given free access to all official records and documents including correspondences of officials and ministers and proceedings of courts. This was done to maintain accuracy of the accounts. The official who was in charge of such records and documents was designated as Gandhia Phukan. The buranjis that were in royal possession were also preserved by Gandhia Phukan. Thus, there was a semblance of a modern archive in the Ahom headquarters.

One of the important limitations of buranjis lies in the fact that they were concerned mainly with political events and throw only scattered light on the socio-economic condition of the common people. Historians consider the buranjis as a reliable source of information as the chroniclers were not found to flatter the royalty or indulge in any literary exhibitionism.

Most of the buranjis that were published saw the light of the day during the colonial and post colonial period. The Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies (established at Guwahati in 1928) and the Kamrup Anusandhan Samiti made the effort to publish several buranjis.

In 1922, the Kamrup Anusandhan Samiti published the *Purani Asom Buranji*. This buranji written during the last part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century narrates the events from the establishment of the Ahom power till the reign of Gadadhar Singha (1681-1696) along with the origin of several Ahom families. The *Kamrupar Buranji* compiled during the same time is an important source of the Ahom-Mughal conflict.

Other important buranjis include the *Tunghungia Buranji* (compiled by Srinath Dhara Barbarua) *Satsari Asom Buranji* (Compiled from seven different chronicles and edited by S.K. Bhuyan), *Asam Buranji* (obtained from the family of Sukumar Mahanta) and *Asamar Padya Buranji* (consisting of *Belimara Buranji* and the *Kalibharat Buranji* compiled into one edited volume by S.K. Bhuyan, *Padum Konwarir geet*, *Maniram Dewanar geet*, etc..

**Vamsavalis :** The *Vamsavalis* are genealogical accounts of noble families of Assam. Some royal families like the Koch Rajas of Darrang and chiefs of smaller states like Rani and Dimarua maintained their own *Vamsavalis*. There were also similar accounts on *Sattrar Vamsavali* in this regard. However the most detailed and important narrative of this genre is the *Darrang Raj-Vamsavali*.

#### Check your Progress

1. Discuss the role of Literature as an important source of Assam history.
2. Write a brief note on *Buranjis*.

#### 1.4.3 Assamese Literature

Besides the buranjis written in Assamese, the Vaishnava literature remains a very vital source for the socio-economic history of medieval Assam. Such literature included large varieties of folk songs and ballads which were finally put into records in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Important historical ballads included *Mani Konwarar geet*, *Barphukanar geet*, *Radha-Rukminir geet* – other accounts that contained information on Mirjumala's invasion of Assam.

**1.4.3 Foreign Literature :** Foreign literature forms an important source of history of medieval Assam. Such literature may be categorized mainly into Persian and European (mostly English)

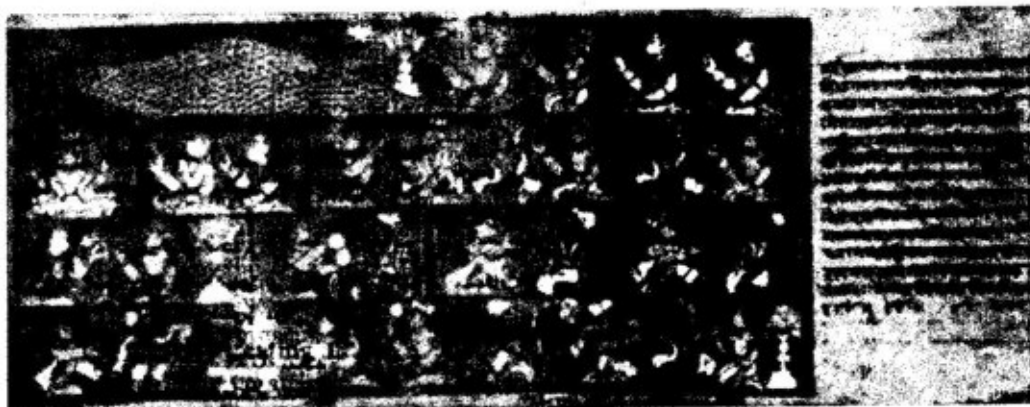
**Persian :** There were several works written in Persian that are accepted as sources for the history of medieval Assam. Such accounts mostly relate to the Muslim invasions to Assam. *Tabaquat-i-Nasiri* by Minhaj-ul-Siraj, *Tarikh-i-Firoz-Shahi* by Ziauddin Barani includes rare information on the history of Kamatapur. *Baharistan-I-Shaibi* by Mirza Nathan Alaud-din Ispahani, the *Akbar-namah* and *Ain-i-Akbari* by Abul Fazal refers to the Koch-Mughal contacts.



Information on Mirjumla's invasion to Assam are contained in Persian works like *Alamgirnamah*, *Muntakhab-ul-lubab*, *Masir-i-Alamgiri*, etc. However, the most important work that contains vital information on the socio-economic condition of medieval Assam is the *Fathiya -i- Ibriyah* by Shihabuddin Talish. Talish was a historian who accompanied Mirjumla during his invasion of Assam.

**European** : Ralph Fitch, a Portuguese traveler visited Naranarayan (1540-84) the Koch king and had left an account that contains information on the administration, Society and economy of the kingdom. A Jesuit traveler Stephen Cacella visited Koch Behar and Kamrup and has left his observation. There were several-

Mention may be made of *Storia da Mogar* by Niccolao Manucci and *Travels in the Mughal Empire* by Francois Bernier.



There were other accounts in English that are considered important source for the history of medieval Assam. Mention may be made of Dr. John Peter Wade's article *Geographical Sketch Assam* which contained information of Assam during Captain Welsh's expedition (1792-94). Administrators like David Scott also made observations on Assam.

Francis Buchanan Hamilton wrote *An Account of Assam* based on information collected from Assamese fugitives in Bengal and visitors from Assam. It is a fact that Hamilton did not visit Assam, yet his work is an important contribution towards reconstruction of history of medieval Assam.



Francis J. Buchanan  
O-1295505  
Erie, PA  
45th Infantry Division  
179th Infantry Regiment  
Italy, Southern France  
Germany  
Awarded:  
THE PURPLE HEART WITH  
OAK LEAF CLUSTER

Dr Francis Buchanan, later known as Francis Hamilton but often referred to as Francis Buchanan-Hamilton was a Scottish physician who made significant contributions as a geographer, zoologist, and botanist while living in India

#### Check Your Progress:

1. Who wrote the book *An Account of Assam*?
2. Vaishnava literature includes.....(fill in the blanks)

#### 1.4 Archaeology

There are substantial archaeological remains of medieval Assam that may be considered important source of history. Such remains consists of buildings, temples, forts, ramparts, bridges, roads, satras, namghars, as well as the maidams on the burial places of the Ahom kings and nobles.

There are remnants of many buildings in the district of Sibsagar which include a seven storeyed palace in the metropolis of Rangpur and Gargaon. The stone bridge over Namdang is presently covered by National Highway No 37. The various *douls* (temples) dedicated to Siva, Vishnu and Devi at Sivasagar and Gaurisagar not only depict the architectural development but also throws light on the belief system of the royalty and people of the period. Bridges and tanks (often referred to *sagar* because of their big size) constructed during the Ahom era were significant in terms of the technical expertise in hydrology. Besides, *Rangghar* the amphitheatre of the Ahoms helps one understand the various forms of games and entertainment prevalent in medieval Assam. Remnants of the earthen ramparts at Sandhara and Saraighat are still visible though they are constantly being encroached upon.

There are also some other archaeological remains relating to the Chutiyas, the Kacharis and the Koch and Kamata kingdoms. Mention may be made of Malinithan (ascribed to the Kacharis), or the remains of the Koch Kingdom.

Other important archaeological remains that lie scattered over a large part of Assam are the Dargah, Idgahs and Khanqas established by the peers of Islamic faith.



However, it needs to be mentioned that many remains have been lost due to the humid tropical climate and the seismic activities.

**Check Your Progress :**

1. Discuss the Archaeological evidences of Assam History in medieval times.

**1.5 Numismatics**

Coins were issued by different kingdoms in medieval Assam. The metal used in making the coins, the depiction of various symbols in the coin, the script use in mentioning the date and value – all contribute towards understanding the economic and political condition of the medieval period. Coins are also important for the chronology of different rulers and events.

Ahom coins, Koch coins, Kachari coins, Jayantia coins, as well as coins of Moamariya and Muslim rulers have been recovered in Assam.

**Ahom Coins :** The earliest known Ahom coins were issued by Suklengmung the Gargayan Raja (1539-62). There are also records that reveal that the minting of coins took place as early as the reign of Sudangpha (1397-1407)

The Ahom coins were mostly octagonal in shape, one side containing the name of the king and the date of the impression of the deity of the king concerned. The coins in the early part of their rule were mostly in Ahom script while in the middle part those came to be issued in the Devanagari script. During the latter part of the Ahom rule the coins were mostly issued in Assamese. Queen Phuleswari was the first to use Persian script on her coins. Rajeswar Singha was known to have issued coins in both Persian and Devanagari scripts.

The rupee and gold Muhars of the Ahom kings were struck to the Indian standards. There was no copper coinage during the Ahom period.



*Ahom coins*

**Koch coins :** Coins were issued by the Koch kings Narayayan (1540-1603) and Parikshit (1603-1613). Parikshit ruled Koch Hajo, i.e. the eastern part of the Koch Kingdom after it got bi-furcated in 1584. The coins of Narayan were dedicated to Siva while those issued under Lakshminarayan were dedicated to Hara and Gauri. The Koch coins were heptagonal in shape and struck in silver. The legends used were in Sanskrit and archaic Assamese.

**Kachari coins :** Five coins issued by the Kachari king Gasanarayan (1583-1610) have been found the legend in the coins are in Sanskrit and the script Assamese. The coins are dedicated to Hara and Gauri.

**Jayantiya coins :** A few coins of the Jayantiya Kingdom have been found. These anonymous coins were dated 1708 CE. The coins interestingly had a six-pointed star at the end of the legend in Sanskrit which was written in Assamese script.

**Moamariya coins :** Coins were also minted by the two Moamariya chiefs, Sarbananda Singha and Bharath Singha. These coins issued towards the end of the Ahom rule were dated from 1794 to 1796 A.D. They are in Sanskrit legend and Assamese script and dedicated to Lord Krishna.

**Muslim coins :** A significant number of Muslim silver coins have been found in different parts of Assam. They included coins of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Iwaz (1213-1227) Malik Yuzbak-Tughril Khan (1252-1257) Ghiyasuddin Bahadur Shah (1310-1323) Sikandar Shah (1359-1389) Alauddin Hussain Shah (1493-1519) and of Mughal emperors Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb. The coins were circular in shape and had Persian legends. All of them are dated in the Hijri era, excepting a few coins found at Panbari in the district of Goalpara. These coins point out to the economic and other relations between Assam and the Muslim powers of India.

#### **Check Your Progress :**

1. Make an account of the various archaeological remains of medieval Assam
2. How is numismatics important as a source of history of medieval Assam?

#### **1.7 Epigraphy**

Another very important source of history medieval Assam is epigraphy. They provide history valuable insight into political economic and cultural history of the period.

**Important information :** The texts of the epigraphs of medieval Assam are incorporated in the *Prachya Sasanavali* edited by Maheswar Neog.

Inscriptions of medieval Assam are very numerous and deal with various subjects. Such inscriptions were engraved on rocks, pillars, walls of temples or buildings, copper plates, bodies of cannon, etc. Articles donated to temples and satras at times contain incised text

counting information of the donee and the donor and the date and occasion of the donation.

The Kanai-Barasi rock inscription may be considered as one of the most important inscriptions as it is considered to mark the dividing time between the inscriptions of ancient and medieval Assam. The last rock inscription was issued by the Ahom king Chandrakanta Singha in 1822 CE whereby he made a Dharmottara land-grant to the Aibhati-Na-Satra in Kamrup.



Epigraphs were also issued by other rulers in medieval Assam. They include the Koch, Kachari, Chutiya and Jayantia Kings as well as ruler of Rani.

Inscriptions were issued sometimes for the following purpose:

- (i) Making or renewing of land-grants like *Brahmottar*, *Dharmottar* or *Nankar*,
- (ii) Making appointments in different capacities of the state or of temples,
- (iii) Making announcement of victory over enemies;
- (iv) Granting revenue to religious institutions;
- (v) Matters relating to construction, excavation, revenue and taxation and ecclesiastical affairs.

१५५५ ॥ श्री गणेशाय नमः ॥ १ ॥ श्री गणेशाय नमः ॥  
 १५५५ ॥ श्री गणेशाय नमः ॥ १ ॥ श्री गणेशाय नमः ॥  
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 १५५५ ॥ श्री गणेशाय नमः ॥ १ ॥ श्री गणेशाय नमः ॥  
 १५५५ ॥ श्री गणेशाय नमः ॥ १ ॥ श्री गणेशाय नमः ॥  
 १५५५ ॥ श्री गणेशाय नमः ॥ १ ॥ श्री गणेशाय नमः ॥  
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 १५५५ ॥ श्री गणेशाय नमः ॥ १ ॥ श्री गणेशाय नमः ॥

Sanskrit was the usual language used in the inscriptions. Some copper plates also contained a summary of the Assamese text in the Ahom language. There were a few epigraphs written in Sanskrit as well. Though most of the latter land-grants were written in Assamese yet Sanskrit was used in writing the preamble.

### 1.8 Summing Up

1. The historical sources available for history of Assam from 1228 till 1826 are varied and numerous.
2. Literary sources of the medieval history of Assam may be broadly divided into two – indigenous and foreign.
3. Indigenous literature includes the literary works of native writers and include mainly the *Buranjis*, the *Vamsavalis* and the vast Assamese *Vaishnava* literature.
4. Foreign literature includes the Persian Chronicles written mostly by travelers and visitors to Assam.
5. Among the literary sources of medieval Assam, the *buranjis* are the most noteworthy and numerous.
6. There were buranjis written on various aspects of the Ahom rule.
7. The *Padshah Buranji* was written perhaps to acquaint the people of Assam with the Muslim rulers of Delhi.
8. The *Kachari Buranji*, *Tripura Buranji* and *Jayanitia Buranji* mostly dealt with the diplomatic history of the Ahoms with these kingdoms.
9. Some reports of officials have also been considered as buranjis. *Datiyalia Buranji*, *Chakialar Buranji* and *Kataki Buranji* fall in this category.
10. *Changrung Phukanor Buranji* contained plan and estimates of the Chief engineer.

11. The buranjis were written in both Tai-Ahom and Assamese languages. There are two Buranjis written in verse and the remaining are written in prose.
12. Bani Kanta Kakati wrote that buranjis present, "a confluence of history and literature not to be found in any modern literature in the pre-British period."
13. The most detailed and important narrative of the genre of 'vamsavalis' is the *Darrang Raj-Vamsavali*. The earlier Buranjis were written in the Tai-Ahom language. Most of the Buranjis were anonymous. Buranjis in Assamese were first written from the reign of Suhungmung (1497-1539).
14. Foreign literature forms an important source of history of medieval Assam. Such literature may be categorized mainly into Persian and European (mostly English).
15. There are substantial archaeological remains consisting of buildings, temples, forts, ramparts, bridges, roads, satras, namghars, as well as the maidams on the burial places of the Ahom kings and nobles of medieval Assam that may be considered important source of history.
16. Ahom coins, Koch coins, Kachari coins, Jayantia coins, as well as coins of Moamariya and Muslim rulers have been recovered in Assam.
17. The metal used in making the coins, the depiction of various symbols in the coin, the script use in mentioning the date and value – all contribute towards understanding the economic and political condition of the medieval period. Coins are also important for the chronology of different rulers and events.
18. Epigraphy provides history with valuable insight into political economic and cultural history of the period.
19. The Kanai-Barasi rock inscription may be considered as one of the most important inscriptions as it is considered to mark the dividing time between the inscriptions of ancient and medieval Assam.
20. The texts of the epigraphs of medieval Assam are incorporated in the *Prachya Sasanavali* edited by Maheswar Neog.



## Unit II

**Foundation, Expansion, and Consolidation of Ahom rule, relation with the Kacharis, Kamatas, Chutiyas, Koches and Bengal Sultans.**

### 2.1 Introduction :

This unit will discuss the establishment of the Ahom Kingdom. It will also make you understand the early phase of expansion and consolidation of the Ahom Kingdom. Expansion of the Ahom Kingdom led to increasing relations and conflict with other kingdoms of the region. The Bengal Sultans wanted to expand their sway over the Brahmaputra valley. They invaded Assam but could not succeed in their mission.

This unit therefore deals with the formative phase of the Ahom kingdom.

### 2.2 Objectives :

After going through this unit you will be able to :

**Discuss :** The establishment of the Ahom kingdom and its gradual expansion and consolidation.

Ahom's relation with the other kingdoms.

**Explain :** The change of balance of power in the Brahmaputra valley.

### 2.3 Origin of the Ahoms :

The Ahoms are members of the Shan branch of the Tai family of South-east Asia. It is said that the Tai Shans migrated from their original homeland - T'ai-Shan on the bank of the river Tarim in north Mongolia and China, to China in the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Gradually they came down to the area now known as Yunnan.

These Tai Shan people set up several small states in the Hukong valley. The Ahoms claim Mungrimungram as their original homeland and state. This state was divided by one of their later Kings into Mungrimungram Proper and Maulung. Sukapha, the founder of the Ahom kingdom was born at Maulung.

### 2.4 The advent of Sukapha in Assam

Sukapha left his homeland in 1215, it is said after a dispute with his brother. He was accompanied by a few nobles, a few hundred followers and had a retinue of 2 elephants and 300 horses. They carried along with them different weapons like swords, spears, bows and arrows and ten special swords called *hengdars*. Sukapha also carried with him the image of their tutelary deity *Chom-Cheng* or Chomdeo.

As to the total strength of Sukapha's followers, there are differing accounts. The number varies between 500-9000. The *Ahom Buranji* and the *Deodhai Asom Buranji* puts the number at 9000. There are also differences of opinion as far as the number of female members of the group was concerned. Migration takes place in history from time to time and in many of these immigrations women formed part of the migrants. It may be that



Sukapha started his journey with a few hundred followers but their numbers began to increase as some members of the conquered tribes from the Hukong valley till the Tipam area might have joined his ranks.

Sukapha reached Brahmaputra valley in 1228. Therefore, since leaving Maulung in 1215 CE, Sukapha took 13 years to subjugate the war-like tribes who inhabited the region extending from the Hukong valley till the Patkai mountains.

As Sukapha moved from Hunkong, he had to cross the Daikham hill and the Khamjang river after which he stopped near the Nongyang lake. The Nagas who inhabited that area resisted his advance but Sukapha subjugated all of them with a heavy hand. The area between Daikham and Patkai was constituted as a province called Khamjang over which Sukapha placed a governor or condition of paying tribute. Sukapha then proceeded to Dai-kao-rang (a collection of nine hills) and conquered the Nagas living in that region. It is said that Sukapha had to force some Naga tribes to eat their own flesh in order to subjugate them.

Sukapha reached Namrup first and then proceeded to Tipam where he put up his first capital. From there he shifted his headquarters to Abhaypur in 1236. Subsequently because of flooding the capital was again shifted to Habung (1240), Simaluguri (1246) and finally to Charaideo in 1253. Charaideo was on a highland and not prone to flooding. There the Ahoms built up the Ahom capital that remained at least for the next two centuries.

Sukapha adopted peace and conciliatory policy with the neighboring tribes of Morans and Barahis. The King of the Morans was Badancha while that of the Barahis was Thakumtha. After defeating those who opposed him, Sukapha adopted a conciliatory policy and established matrimonial relations with them.

Sukapha appointed the two great officers of the state, Borgohain and Burhagohain to look after the affairs of the state. Sukapha died in 1268.

### **2.5 Personality of Sukapha :**

Sukapha was endowed with relentless energy and indomitable courage along with rare foresight and diplomatic skill. All these qualities helped Sukapha to achieve success in establishing a Kingdom in the Brahmaputra valley after a prolonged journey from Maulung in upper Burma. In a way Sukapha knew the art of dealing with the tribes and winning them over to his side. During the course of his expedition Sukapha made both force and conciliation his main strength. His statesmanship and politics led to establishment of a kingdom that lasted for almost six hundred years.

### **2.6 Ahom Kingdom and the dawn of a new era:**

When Sukapha arrived in the Brahmaputra valley, there were several tribal groups living in the upper Brahmaputra valley. The state policy adopted by the first king of the Ahom Kingdom Sukapha had far-reaching impact on the history of the entire region. In the words of the noted historian of S.L. Barua, "The tribesmen did not consider Sukapha a king exacting heavy tribute from them or one living aloof from them. On the contrary, they considered Sukapha and his men, their friends, who however, were more skilled as

cultivators, knew astrological calculations, had some knowledge of density of water, distinguished themselves by possessing war-horses, and therefore superior to them. It was for such reasons that the local tribesmen did not mind becoming their servitors, supplying them with elephants, fire-wood, vegetables, honey, etc. It is said that the tribesmen designated them as men of divine origin."

Sukapha and his followers called their new kingdom Mung-dam-sun-kham which literally meant a country full of golden gardens. Perhaps this name refers to the productiveness of the area.

The conquest of the Tai-Shans changed the entire course of history of North-East India. To quote Prof. S.L. Barua again, "It marks the beginning of a process leading to the establishment of non-Aryan hegemony and the end of the long drawn-out period of struggle against Aryan domination. In an atmosphere of political stability the inhabitants of the region subsequently found their new regional identity as the subjects of the kingdom of Assam and developed a new fabric of culture and society which was to become distinctly Assamese. It was no longer to the west but the east to which the rulers of the north-east looked for friendship and good will. In fact, with the coming of the Tai-Shans, the centre of political and the organized pro-Aryan society of the ancient days tended to become pro-Mongolian". These Tai-Shans in course of time came to be known as the Ahoms.

The energy that was unleashed with the advent of Sukapha and his men led to the formation of a composite civil society and a state whose defence became the concern of all the inhabitants of the region. This was evident in the famous battle of Saraighat where the Ahom army consisting of soldiers from different communities and faiths defeated the mighty Mughals. (Unit IV)

One very important contribution of the Ahoms was the compilation of the Buranjis details of which are in Unit I. Wet-rice cultivation using buffaloes for ploughing and building of embankments were new agricultural practices introduced by Sukapha and his followers.

**Check your progress :**

1. Describe the circumstances leading to the establishment of the Ahom kingdom in Assam.
2. What is the historical significance of the establishment of the Ahom Kingdom?

**2.7 Factors behind Success of the Ahoms:**

There were several factors that helped in the initial phase of the foundation of Ahom rule. The resistance to the Ahom invader was limited and weak. The availability of vast areas which were cleared for cultivation by the Ahoms and introduction of new methods of cultivation did not give rise to much conflict with the other tribes that were already there. Thus in a way Sukapha did not encroach upon the lands of the local peasants, rather he opened up new areas for settlement. He organised festivals and feasts where the neighboring tribes were invited. Seeking the cooperation of the neighboring tribes Sukapha is said to have said, "come and have mutual introduction with us. You are the

host, the natives of this land; we are guest coming from an up-country. You should introduce us to the local people." (*Deodhai Asom Buranji*)

Thus it may be stated that the existing situation in the Assam valley was somewhat favorable to the invading force of the Ahoms under Sukapha. Moreover, the personality of Sukapha and his inclusive political ideology helped in the establishment and consolidation of his rule.

### **2.8 Successors of Sukapha (1268-1497)**

Succeeded by his son Suteupha (1268-1281). During his reign, the Kacharis abandoned some area east of the Dikhow river till Namdang and the same was brought under the control of the Ahoms. For the next two hundred years there was no expansion of territories. From the reign of Subinpha (1281-93) to Supimpha (1493-97) the Ahoms confined themselves to their Kingdom. It may be considered to be a period of consolidation.

→ **Special Note :** Go through a list of the Ahom Kings. Mark out the important kings and their period of reign.

### **2.9 Interregnums :**

During this long period of comparative peace there were three interregnums. Interregnums means the periods where there was no king. The three periods of interregnum are 1364-1369, 1376-1380 and 1389-1397. During these periods of interregnums the two main councilors of the state, the Borgohain and the Buragohain carried on the functions of the state till a prince of royal lineage was found to ascend the vacant throne.

During the long period of Ahom rule no king outside the royal families ascended the throne. There was no attempt to usurp the king though later on some nobles did try to put kings who were favourable to them. This is a significant aspect of the Ahom monarchy.

### **2.10 Tyao-Khamti and Sudangpha :**

Though the period from 1281-1497 did not witness any significant war or conquest, yet the reign of two kings Tyao Khamti (1380-1389) and Sudangpha (1397-1407) were important for other reasons.

Tyao Khamti had to undertake an expedition against the Chuityas to avenge the murder of his predecessor Sutupha (1364-1376). Sutupha was treacherously murdered by the Chuitya king during a visit. Tyao Khamti was victorious in his campaign.

Sudangpha was the son of the younger queen of Tyao Khamti, who became the victim of jealousy of the elder queen. The younger queen who was pregnant at the time of her banishment gave birth to a son in the house of a Brahmana. As Sudangpha was born

born and brought up in the house of a brahmana, he came to be known as Bamuni Konwar.

After the death of Tyao Khamti in 1389, there was an interregnum. Finally the ministers came to know of Sudangpha and brought him to the capital and made him the king.

Sudangpha brought his brahmana foster father with him to the palace. It was during the reign of Sudangpha that the worship of *Lakshmi-Narayana-Salagram* or of Vishnu first started. This is considered to be the first official entry of Hinduism to the Ahom court. The worship of Chomdeo also continued along with that of Vishnu. The sons of the brahmana were settled at Dihing, thereby starting a phase of royal patronage to Hinduism.

**2.11 The reign of Suhungmung (1497-1539):** The reign of Suhungmung is of considerable significance as the Ahom kingdom witnessed the first big expansion under his rule. The Ahoms were able to conquer the neighbouring Kacharis, Chutiyas and eastern Bhuyans. Thus, he can be considered as a real builder of the Ahom kingdom. He extended the frontiers of the kingdom of *Mung-dun-sun-kham* till Kajalimukh in the Nagaon district and repulsed the Muslim invaders. Suhungmung adopted the Hindu title of *Swarganarayan* and also adopted the Saka era. It was during his reign that the first Buranji in Assamese *Sri Sri Swarganarayan Maharajar Janma Katha* was written. It was in this Buranji that the ancestry of the Ahoms got linked to the Aryan God Indra. Thus it was also a period of growing influence of Hinduism in the Ahom royalty.

#### **2.11.1 The Expansion of the Ahom kingdom under Suhungmung :**

**Chutiyas :** A border dispute led to a clash between the Ahoms and the Chutiyas in 1513. After some initial success, the Chutiyas had to take to the defensive in face of the Ahom attack under the leadership of Suhungmung. Battles took place at Dikhowmukh and on the Dibru river. The final encounter took place in 1523 in which the Chutiya king was killed after which the Chutiya kingdom was annexed to the Ahom kingdom. This increased the territorial limits of the kingdom to include the plains both on the north and south banks of the river Brahmaputra. A Sadiya-khowa Gohain was appointed to administer the newly acquired territory. The Ahoms also came in contact with eastern hill tribes.

**Bhuyans :** After his success with the Chutiyas, Suhungmung subjugated a number of eastern Bhuyans one after another. Some of the Bhuyans were given offices under the Ahom government, while some others were settled in different parts of the kingdom.

**Kacharis :** Suhungmung acquired from the Kacharis all the plains territory upto the river Dhansiri in 1531 through diplomacy and force. The Kacharis were allowed to rule on their remaining territory with autonomy. However, the Kachari king Khunkhura took to flight and a prince named Detchung was placed on the throne. The Kacharis revolted against the Ahoms in 1536 following which the Ahoms took the offensive, defeated the Kacharis and beheaded Detchung. The whole of the Dhansiri valley upto the Kalang river



were annexed to the Ahom kingdom. A new officer Marangi-khowa Gohain was appointed to administer these newly acquired territories.

**Check your progress :**

1. Describe the circumstances leading to the Ahom conquest of the Chutiyas and Kacharis.
2. What is the historical significance of the territorial aggrandizement of the Ahom Kingdom under Suhungmung?

**2.11.2 The Muslim invasions:**

During the reign of Suhungmung, Assam was invaded by a Muslim army from Bengal in 1527 under the command of a person referred to as the Bar Ujir in the *Buranjis*. It is to be noted that the Bengal Nawab Alauddin Hussain Shah had conquered Kamata in 1498 bringing the Muslim rulers nearer to the Ahom kingdom. It appears that the Bar Ujir was accompanied by two other commanders called Bit Malik and Lupit. According to the *Deodhai Asam Buranji*, the fugitive Kachari king Khunhkura was also in the enemy camp. It might be that the invasion was at the instigation of Khunhkura. The Muslim army advanced as far as Temani where the Ahom army led by Kancheng Borpatra Gohain defeated them. In another encounter Bit Malik was slain and a large number of weapons, horses and other spoils were taken by the Ahom army.

Another Muslim general Turbak invaded the Ahom kingdom in 1532 with a huge army consisting of a hundred horses and a large artillery. It led to a war that lasted for three years at the end of which the Muslims were defeated. The battles were fought in the Kapili and Kalang valleys on the south bank of the Brahmaputra River and the Bharali and Dikrai on the northern part.

The first battle was at Kāliabor on the confluence of the Kalang and Brahmaputra where the Ahom general Phrasengmung killed a Muslim commander Hyat Khan. In the second battle fought in the Kapili valley opposite the Singri fort of the Ahoms, several Ahom generals including Phrasengmung were killed. It was after this that Mula Gabharu, the wife of Phrasengmung along with five other women took to battle and died fighting. The third battle was fought at Sala where the Muslim forces again defeated the Ahoms but failed to take the Ahom fort. It was followed by another encounter at Duimunisila where the Ahoms won a great naval victory, capturing about 2,500 men and large war materials. The Muslim forces received strong reinforcements at this crucial juncture.

The invaders were again heavily defeated in a battle fought on the river Dikrai. The final battle took place near the Bharali river where the Ahom forces routed the enemy. Hussain Khan and Turbak both fell in the battle and their heads were entombed on the Charaideo hills. The Ahom army pursued the retreating Muslim soldiers till Karotoya. They even appeared on the borders of Gauda whose leader made peace by offering two of his daughters Khanbibi Harmati and Khanbibi Darmati to the Ahom king along with five paraganas of Ghoraghat, Fariabad, Eghara Sendur, Sherpur and Patladoh as dowry. The Ahom army also secured the submission of the Koch power on their way back to their headquarters.

Suhungmung also sent a peace mission to Orissa during this period. The mission offered worship in the Jagannath temple and even dug a tank there.

**Check your progress :**

1. Write an account of the muslim invasions to Assam during the reign of Suhungmung.

**2.11.3 Other activities of Suhungmung:**

Suhungmung could conquer the Chutiyas, Kacharis and the eastern Bhuyans. He took a census and reorganized the society on the basis of clans. The princes descending from the former kings were settled in the districts of Tipam, Charing, Dihing, Chamaguri, Tungkhung and Namrup thereby giving rise to the royal houses of Tipamia, Charingia, Dihingia, Chamaguria, Tungkhungia and Namrupia. The war-spoils greatly enriched the Ahom treasury and strengthened their armed forces with the help of which they could fight the invading Muslim forces. Annexation of the new territories forged new racial ties. Many artisans were settled in the Ahom capital following which the royalty started using various articles of special significance like the royal palanquin, gold-embroidered throne, umbrella, etc.. the increasing workload of the Aho government also led to the creation of several new offices like the Barpatra Gohain, Sadiya-khowa-Gohain, Marangi-khowa-Gohain, Datiyalia Gohain, Dihingia Gohain, Namtiyal Sandikai Phukan, Baitungia Gohain, etc. The Barpatra Gohain was made the third great minister of the state.

**2.12 Successors of Suhungmung :**

Suhungmung was succeeded by Suklenmung (1539-53) and Sukhampha (1553-1603). The reign of both these kings was known for their fight against the Koches. They would be followed by one of the greatest kings of the Ahoms, Swargadeo Pratap Singha (1603-1641).

Suklenmung was known as the Garhgayan Raja for making Garhgaon his capital. Garhgaon was fortified with strong ramparts all around. There was also many public works like building embankments and roads during his reign. Suklenmung also intervened in the inter-tribal conflicts between the Banchungia and Banphera Nagas and successfully restored peace. He also intervened in a border dispute between Mogung and Burma. This role of the Ahom king reflected the growing importance of the monarchy.

The reign of Sukhampha was known for the struggle against the Koch forces. Sukhampha was also called *Bhagania Raja* or fugitive king for having fled away from the capital with his nobles after being defeated by the Koch forces. He was finally able to remove the disgrace by recovering his position. The Ahom Koch struggle will be discussed in greater details in the next unit (Unit III).



#### Summing up :

1. The Ahoms are members of the Shan branch of the Tai family of South-east Asia.
2. Sukapha left his homeland it is said after a dispute with his brother in 1215 and reached the Brahmaputra valley in 1228.
3. Sukapha and his followers called their new kingdom *Mung-dum-sun-kham* which literally meant a country full of golden gardens. Perhaps this name refers to the productiveness of the area.
4. Sukapha adopted peace and conciliatory policy with the neighboring tribes of Morans and Barahis and established matrimonial relations with them.
5. The personality of Sukapha and his inclusive political ideology helped in the establishment and consolidation of his rule.
6. It was during the reign of Sudangpha that the worship of *Lakshmi-Narayana-Salagram* or of Vishnu first started. This is considered to be the first official entry of Hinduism to the Ahom court. The worship of Chomdeo, the tutelary Ahom God also continued along with that of Vishnu.
7. The reign of Suhungmung is of considerable significance as the Ahom kingdom witnessed the first big expansion under his rule.
8. The Ahoms were able to conquer the neighbouring Kacharis, Chutiyas and eastern Bhuyans under Suhungmung.
9. Suhungmung extended the frontiers of the kingdom of *Mung-dun-sun-kham* till Kajalimukh in the Nagaon district.
10. Suhungmung repulsed the Muslim invaders from the Bengal.
11. Suhungmung adopted the Hindu title of *Swarganarayan* and also adopted the Saka era.
12. It was during Suhungmung's reign that the first Buranji in Assamese *Sri Sri Swarganarayan Maharajar Janma Katha* was written.

#### Suggested Readings :

1. Guha, Amalendu, *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam, Society, Polity, Economy*.
2. S.L. Baruah, *A Comprehensive History of Assam*.
3. Gait, E.A., *A History of Assam*.

### Unit III

#### The Emergence of the Koch Kingdom; Relation with the Mughals; Administrative System of the Koches

##### 3.1 Introduction

**Background :** This unit will make you learn of the rise and fall of the Koch kingdom. The Koch power occupies an important place in the history of Medieval Assam especially for defeating the Ahoms and patronising Sri Sankardeva, the great neo-Vaishnavite Saint. The rise of this mongoloid power in the western Assam also brought it in direct contact with the ascendant Mughal power. The important political events of the Koch kingdom are limited to the sixteenth century from the rise of Biswa Singha in 1515 till the division of the kingdom into two parts, viz., Koch Behar (the western part) and Koch Hajo (the eastern part) in 1581.

##### 3.2 Objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to

*Explain* the rise and fall of the Koch kingdom.

*Discuss* the military exploits of Chilarai.

*Understand* the relations of the Koch kingdoms with the Afghans and the Mughals.

**3.3 The rise of the Koch kingdom :** After the downfall of the Kamarupa - Kamata kingdom towards the close of the fifteenth century, there was a period of political uncertainty as the Muslim rule established there was short lived. The Bhuyans managed to overthrow the alien domination but subsequently the Koches, another mongoloid power was able to establish their kingdom in the sixteenth century.

**3.3.1 Biswa Singha (1515-1540) :** The first ruler of the Koch kingdom Bisu who later assumed the name of Biswa Singha, was the son of Haria Mandal, the chief of the twelve leading Koch or Mech families of Goalpara area. Biswa Singha was a great warrior and he organized his tribe to defeat all the neighbouring Bhuyans, after which he declared himself king in 1527. Thus, he took around twelve years to subjugate the neighbouring Bhuyans.

Biswa Singha's lineage was soon assigned divine origin by the Brahmanas, he being the son of god Siva and the Koches as a whole were assigned the status of Kshatriyas. Biswa Singha himself was a worshipper of Siva and patronised the worship of Vishnu. He brought Brahmanas from other important religious centres of India like Banares, Navadip, Mithila, Gauda and Kanauj and settled them in his kingdom. Biswa Singha was also a great devotee of goddess Kamakhya. He is said to have rebuilt the Kamakhya temple in Guwahati.

Koch - Ahom Relations developed from the time of Biswa Singha. The expansion of the Koch power towards the east and that of the Ahom power towards the west of the Brahmaputra valley made a conflict between these two powers inevitable. However, the relations between these two important powers were also influenced by the invasions of the Muslim and Mughal powers from time to time.

Biswa Singha's contemporary Ahom king was Suhungmung (1497-1539) who extended the western boundary of the Ahom kingdom to include some parts of the Nagaon district. The Ahoms under Suhungmung defeated the Muslim invasions and chased the invaders till Karotoya. On his way back to Assam, Chankham, the Ahom general who led the expedition to chase out the invaders is said to have attacked Biswa Singha who made his submission to the Ahom forces. In return the Koch king was placed in charge of the newly acquired parganas from the ruler of Gauda (Patladoh, Ghoraghat, Eghara-Sendur, Fariabad and Sherpur).

Biswa Singha felt humiliated by the submission to the Ahoms and decided on an invasion of the Ahom kingdom later on after he had consolidated his hold over the new Koch kingdom. Biswa Singha brought under his control the vassal chiefs of Rani, Luki, Beltola, Darrang, Karaibari, Kamalabari, Chaygaon, Bholagaon, etc., after which the expedition against the Ahoms was launched. However, the Koch forces had to retreat because of lack of provisions and transportation problems.

Biswa Singha died in 1540 after laying the foundation of a Koch kingdom. He was a successful conqueror and an efficient administrator.

#### **Check your Progress**

1. Estimate the role of Biswa Singha as a founder of the Koch kingdom.
2. What was the political situation in the western part of Assam before the emergence of the Koch power?
3. Biswa Singha became the king in .....

**3.3.2 Naranarayan (1540-1584) :** At the time of Biswa Singha's death, his two eldest sons out of his eighteen sons, namely Malladev and Sukladvaj were studying at Banares. Under the circumstances, Nara Singha, another son of the deceased Biswa Singha usurped the throne. After expelling the usurper, Malladev became the new king of the Koch kingdom and assumed the name Naranarayan. His reign can be divided into two periods viz., 1540-1581 when he was the king of undivided Koch kingdom and 1581-1584, when he was the king of Koch Hajo, the western part of the divided Koch kingdom.

**3.3.3 The exploits of Sukladvaj (Chilarai):** Naranarayan appointed his brother Sukladvaj his Commander-in-Chief with a new name Sangram Singha. However, Sukladvaj was more popularly known as Chilarai or the 'Kite king' for his swiftness in military combat and operations. Soon after his accession, Naranarayan came into conflict with the Ahoms. The actual cause of the conflict is not very clear though it appears that the conflict started in 1543 over the Ahoms taking over of a Koch post at Sala. Hostilities were renewed in 1546 after which Naranarayan himself led his forces. During

these operations, the Koch started building a 350 miles long road from their capital in Koch Behar to Narayanpur on the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra. The road was completed in 1547 after which the Koch erected a fortress at Narayanpur.

During this phase of war, the Koch forces were initially successful, though they were ultimately overcome by the Ahom. Sometimes after 1547 the Koches suffered a disastrous defeat with heavy losses in man and materials at Pichala, following which there was a lull in fighting.

Naranarayan renewed his attack on the Ahom kingdom in 1562. The cause of the conflict was the devastation of a few Ahom villages during the Koch invasion of the Kachari kingdom. Sukladhvaj organized an attack on the Ahom kingdom both by land and water. With the support of some Bhuyans and Daflas, the Koch forces advanced till Narayanpur without any resistance.

At the advance of the Koch forces, the Ahoms resorted to a subterfuge. The Ahoms force was garbed as Brahmanas, who rode on the back of cows exhibiting their sacred threads and sacred lines on their forehead. Seeing the horde of Brahmanas on cows, the Koch generals, being orthodox Hindus ordered retreat fearing slaughter of both Brahmanas and cows. The Koches later on learnt of the trick of the Ahoms, they launched an attack on the Ahoms next year in 1563 Chilarai and inflicted a crushing defeat on the Ahoms both on land and water near the mouth of the Dikhow river.

After these reverses, the Ahom king Sukhampha along with his nobles fled to Charaikhorong in the Naga Hills. The Koch forces occupied the Ahom capital Garhgaon. Some months later the Ahoms proposed terms of peace. The Koches accepted the proposal and left Garhgaon with several sons of the chief nobles as hostages to ensure fulfilment of the terms of peace. The terms of peace included acknowledgement of Koch suzerainty, cessation of the whole territory on the north of the Brahmaputra and payment of indemnity.

After defeating the Ahoms, the Koches turned their attention towards the Kachari kingdom of the Hidimba. The Kachari king submitted without any battle and agreed to pay an annual tribute. Messengers were then sent to the Raja of Manipur asking him to submit and pay tribute. This was accepted by the Kachari king without any protest. The Koch king and his brother then went on to defeat several other neighbouring rulers.

They led an expedition against the Jayantias and killed their king in the battle. The son of the deceased Raja was placed on throne. The new Jayantia ruler offered presents to the Koch ruler and agreed to pay annual tributes.

Chilarai then attacked Tripura with a huge army of 40,000 and killed its king along with about 18,000 of his soldiers. The brother of the slain king who offered presents and agreed to pay annual tributes was placed on the throne. After conquering Tripura the Koch king is said to have constructed a fort near Brahmapur which was subsequently named Kochpur or Khaspur.

The king of Sylhet is also said to have been defeated and killed by the Koches. The brother of the slain king was placed on the throne on the condition of paying annual tributes.

On the other hand, the Raja of Khairam, Viryavanta, is said to have voluntarily made his submission to the Koch king by offering presents of gold and silver coins, horses and elephants.

The Raja of Dimarua was then attacked by the Koch general. In the battle that followed the Dimarua Raja was taken a prisoner. Later, he was reinstated on his promise to pay an annual tribute.

The Koch king thus was able to conquer a large part of north east India within a brief period of about four years (1562-1565). The Koches did not annex the conquered territories but were satisfied with the allegiance or tributes of the conquered powers.

The Koches then turned against the kingdom of Gauda that lay to the west of their kingdom. Gauda was then ruled by Suleiman Kararani. There is difference between the Persian and the local Koch accounts regarding the manner in which the conflict between the Koch and the Gauda rulers started and progressed.

According to the local sources, the Koch king proceeded against Gauda and got defeated in the battle that followed (1567-68). Chilarai was taken a prisoner by the Gauda ruler, while the victorious Muslim army proceeded till Tezpur, devastating certain areas on the way. However, the siege of the Koch capital by the Gauda forces had to be lifted because of an outbreak of rebellion in Orissa.

Following the Gauda debacle, the Koches took steps for improving relations with the Ahoms. This was initiated by the release of the Ahom hostages taken by the Koches after their successful campaign against the Ahoms. Naranarayan also sent a letter of friendship along with some of his artisans and goldsmiths along with the freed hostages to the Ahom king.

#### **Check your Progress**

1. Give an account of the military exploits of Chilarai.
2. Discuss the relations between the Koch and the Ahoms during the sixteenth century.
3. Chilarai died in .....

#### **3.4 Koch-Mughal Relations :**

Chilarai soon got released from his captivity at Gauda, though there is difference in the local and Persian sources regarding the manner of his release. It was during this time that the Mughal emperor Akbar had to undertake a campaign against the Gauda ruler David Kararani who had succeeded Suleiman Kararani after his death in 1572. David Kararani had thrown off his father's nominal allegiance to the imperial throne at Delhi. Akbar was already consolidating his position in the east and had Bihar under his control. He sent a force under one Munim Khan to subjugate David. The Koch sources mention that Naranarayan assisted the Mughal forces in defeating the Gauda ruler David after which the kingdom was divided amongst the Mughal and the Koch victors. The Persian sources give a different account of the situation. According to the *Ain-i-Akbari*, Naranarayan 'renewed his demonstration of obedience' to the imperial throne at Delhi by sending 54 elephants and some valuable presents to the Mughal Emperor. The Koch sources mention of this as a friendly gesture and not as tribute. S.N. Bhattacharyya in his book *Mughal*



*North East Frontier Politics* (Calcutta, 1926) writes that, "there was no acceptance of formal supremacy of the Mughal emperor on the part of the Koch king". In the course of the campaign, Chilarai suffered from Chicken pox and died on the bank of the Ganges sometime in between 1572-75.

### **3.5 Division of the Koch Kingdom :**

After the death of Chilarai, there was no war and Naranarayan devoted himself to religion and public welfare. Naranarayan did not have any son and therefore it was believed that Chilarai's son Raghudev would succeed to the Koch throne after Naranarayan. However, Naranarayan was blessed with a son in his advanced age. This son of Naranarayan was named Lakshminarayan.

Raghudev started to fear that he would not become the king and was also instigated by some of the Koch gentry. Subsequently, Raghudev proceeded to Baranagar on the banks of the river Manas and declared himself a king. To avoid further conflict, Naranarayan decided to divide the Koch kingdom in 1581 into two. Accordingly, Raghudev, the son of Chilarai was recognized as the king of the eastern portion of the Koch kingdom that lay east of the Sankosh river. Raghudev on his part agreed to acknowledge the suzerainty of Naranarayan and pay tributes to him. Further Raghudev also agreed not to strike coins in his name. The Koch dominion on the western part of the Sankosh river remained with Naranarayan and his descendants. The new Koch kingdom in the east came to be known as Koch Hajo while the western part of the divided Koch kingdom came to be known as Koch Behar.

**3.5.1 Koch Hajo :** The territories of the Koch Hajo kingdom extended bank till the river Bharali in the northern bank of the Brahmaputra and included Goalpara on the Southern bank, the kingdom's limits extending till the northern part of the Mymensingh district. Its capital was Barnagar near to which a new city was built named Ghilajaypur or Bijaypur with a very strong fortress.Rangpur.

**3.5.2 Koch Behar :** The capital of Koch Behar was Kamatapur and included the modern district of Koch Behar and parts of the Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and Rangpur.

#### **Check your Progress :**

1. Why did the Koch kingdom get divided towards the latter part of the sixteenth century?
2. Lakshminarayan became the king in .....

**3.6 The Afghan and Mughal Intervention :** The division of the Koch kingdom greatly weakened the Koch power. However, till the death of Naranarayan in 1587, major conflict could be averted. After his death, lust for power and mutual jealousy between the divided Koch houses led to violent conflicts and finally paved the way for foreign intervention.

After the death of Naranarayan, Lakshminarayan became the king of Koch Behar. Raghudev refused to acknowledge the supremacy of the new king and declared himself



independent. Raghudev also went on to strike coins in his own name. This led to a war in which Raghudev was defeated and the supremacy of Koch Behar was restored.

Raghudev continued to be hostile and defiant. To subdue him Lakshminarayan instigated Raghudev's son Parikshit to rebel against his father. The uprising was unsuccessful and Parikshit was made a prisoner. Later Parikshit managed to escape to Koch Hajo where Lakshminarayan cordially received him.

With a view to becoming the king of an undivided Koch kingdom, Raghudev made friendship with Isa Khan, the Afghan governor of Bihar. Lakshminarayan became nervous at this development and decided to formally acknowledge the supremacy of the Mughal emperor Akbar. He proposed friendship with the governor of Bengal Raja Man Singh by giving his sister in marriage to him.

Meanwhile Raghudev strengthened by his friendship with the Bihar governor attacked Koch Behar and managed to proceed towards the capital after capturing Bahirband. Lakshminarayan was besieged in a fort where he had taken shelter. Man Singh came to the aid of Lakshminarayan and defeated Raghudev in 1597. Isa Khan hastened to help Raghudev, defeated Man Singh but could not proceed to help Raghudev. Thus, the Koch-Mughal alliance defeated Raghudev's ambition to become the ruler of an unified Koch kingdom. He died in 1603.

After Raghudev's death Parikshit who was at Koch Hajo hastened to the capital to lay his claim on the throne. Parikshit succeeded in defeating his step-mother's attempt to place her son Indranarayan on the throne. Indranarayan was executed and Parikshit became the new king of Koch Hajo. The capital was shifted to North Guwahati.

Like his father, Parikshit too refused to acknowledge the supremacy of Lakshminarayan. This gave rise to a new conflict and both the powers sought alliance of the Ahoms. Parikshit gave his daughter Mangaldoi (Mangaldahi) in marriage to the Ahom king Pratap Singha in 1608. The Ahoms however could not provide immediate help to Parikshit because of their engagement with the Kacharis.

The conflict between the two Koch kingdoms continued. Parikshit attacked Koch Behar at Bahirband and in the battle that followed, Lakshminarayan had a narrow escape. Lakshminarayan then wanted to take the help of the Nawab of Bengal and formally accepted the imperial vassalage and agreed to pay an annual tribute. The Nawab despatched Mukarram Khan with a large army against Parikshit and in the battle that ensued (November 1612 to July 1613), Parikshit was defeated and taken a prisoner. Koch Hajo was annexed to the Mughal empire.

Balinarayan, the brother of Parikshit fled to the Ahom kingdom and sought the help of the Ahom king Pratap Singha. Balinarayan was renamed as Dharmanarayan and made the tributary ruler of Darrang. Since then, Koch Hajo remained an ally of the Ahom kingdom while Koch Behar continued to be aligned with the Mughals.

**Check your Progress:**

1. Give an account of the Koch-Mughal relations after the death of Chilarai.
2. How did the Koch-Ahom relations change after the division of the Koch kingdom?

**3.7 Administrative system of the Koches :** The founder of the Koch kingdom Biswa Singha was also a good administrator. He appointed twelve ministers from the twelve different families of the Koch or Mech families that were headed by his father once. He is said to have taken a census of his kingdom after which he appointed a gradation of some military-cum-administrative officers. Thus, a Thakuria was appointed over 20 men, Saikia over 100, Hazari over 1,000, Omra over 3,000 and Nawab over 66,000.

The Koch kingdom was a monarchy where the role of the king was central to the administration. The royal family led the administration as well as the defence system. Chilarai was the *Senapati* (Commander-in-Chief) and was central to the military leadership while Naranarayan looked after the other branches of administration.

The kingdom got divided over the issue of succession. It appears that there was no established rule of succession. Overall, the Koch kingdom may be said to have survived in its full glory from the accession of Biswa Singha (1515-1540) till the division of the Koch kingdom in 1581 into Koch Behar and Koch Hajo. The short time span of the Koch kingdom therefore had its adverse impact on the development of a durable administrative system.

#### Summing Up

1. The Koch power occupies an important place in the history of Medieval Assam.
2. The founder of this kingdom was Biswa Singha.
3. The Koch-Ahom struggle for supremacy under Chilarai, the Koch General and brother of the Koch king Naranarayan, went on from 1523 till 1563.
4. The Koch forces under Chilarai defeated the Ahoms completely in 1563.
5. After defeating the Ahoms, the Koches turned their attention towards the Kachari kingdom whose king submitted without any battle and agreed to pay an annual tribute.
6. Chilarai led an expedition against the Jayantias and killed their king in the battle. The son of the deceased Raja was placed on throne. The new Jayantia ruler offered presents to the Koch ruler and agreed to pay annual tributes.
7. Chilarai then attacked Tripura with a huge army of 40,000 and killed its king along with about 18,000 of his soldiers. The brother of the slain king who offered presents and agreed to pay annual tributes was placed on the throne.
8. After conquering Tripura the Koch king is said to have constructed a fort near Brahmapur which was subsequently named Kochpur or Khaspur.
9. The king of Sylhet is also said to have been defeated and killed by the Koches. The brother of the slain king was placed on the throne on the condition of paying annual tributes.

10. On the other hand, the Raja of Khairam, Viryavanta, is said to have voluntarily made his submission to the Koch king by offering presents of gold and silver coins, horses and elephants.
11. The Raja of Dimarua was then attacked by the Koch general. In the battle that followed the Dimarua Raja was taken a prisoner. Later, he was reinstated on his promise to pay an annual tribute.
12. The Koch king thus was able to conquer a large part of north east India within a brief period of about four years (1562-1565). The Koches did not annex the conquered territories but were satisfied with the allegiance or tributes of the conquered powers.
13. The Koches intervention in Gauda led to the complications subsequent to which Chilarai was imprisoned by the ruler of Gauda.
14. There is difference between the Persian and the local Koch accounts regarding the manner in which the conflict between the Koch and the Gauda rulers started and progressed.
15. The Koch king Naranarayana patronised Sri Sankardeva, the great neo-Vaishnavite Saint.
16. The important political events of the Koch kingdom are limited to the sixteenth century from its rise in 1515 till the division of the kingdom into two parts, viz., Koch Behar (the western part) and Koch Hajo (the eastern part) in 1581.

**Suggested Readings :**

1. S.L. Baruah, *A Comprehensive History of Assam*.
2. Gait, E.A., *A History of Assam*.
3. Berpujari H.K. (ed.), *Comprehensive History of Assam Vol II*.

