

Chapter-III

Socio-cultural change in the Ahom society during the Pre-colonial period

This chapter deals with the socio-cultural change in the Ahom society in Assam in the Pre-Colonial period on the basis of secondary source of data. Here main discussion is about the origin of Ahom, the socio-political condition of the Assam before the advent of Ahom, their religion and change, economy, education system, culture, dress pattern, way of life style and what type of change had been taken place particularly in this period among the Ahom.

Brief note on Ancient Assam

Assam is known as 'Pragjyotisha' in the ancient times and later known as 'Kamrupa'. By this name the country was known in the great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabarata, as well as in some of the principles of Puranas. The Pragjyotisha was situated in the near modern Guwahati and later known as Kamarupa. Gait (2005), mention that 'Prag' means former or eastern and 'Jyotish' means a star, astrology, shining. Thus 'Pragjyotisha' may be taken to mean the 'city of eastern Astrology'. The name is interesting in connection with the reputation which the country has always held as a land of magic and with the view that it was in Assam that the Tantrik form of Hinduism is found. The astronomical significance of the country is justified by a number of references in the Vedic literature to its association with the solar cult and the planetary worship and is confirmed by a number of Assamese works dealing with this subject (Choudhury, 1966). Therefore it is said that the original name of Assam has an astronomical significance.

The Kalika Purana has been described that immediately after Naraka of Mithila became king and was placed in goddess Kamakhya, the name of the land was changed from Pragjyotisa to Kamrupa (Borua, 2003). The word Kamrupa has been derived from an Austric formation like Kamrut or Kamru, the name of a lesser

divinity in Santali which justifies the association of the land with magic and necromancy (Kakati, 1941). B. K Kakati mentions that the word symbolizes a new cult, namely the worship of mother goddess Kamakhya and in exaltation of it the land was rechristened. Kakati further state that the word 'Kamakhya' too has been derived from an Austric formation such as Kamoi (demon) in old Khmer, Kamoit (devil) in Cham, Kamet (corpse) in Khasi, Kamui (grave) or Komuoch (corps) in Santali (Boruah, 2007).

The early history of Assam is lost in the midst of antiquity, though there are several references to it in the Mahabharata, the Kalika Purana, and the Yogini Tantra. In these sacred scriptures the area was known as Kamrupa; encompassing the Brahmaputra valley, Bhutan, Cooch Behar (West Bengal), and the Rangpur region which is now in Bangladesh. According to the tradition, the earlier kings of Assam belonged to non-Aryan tribes such as Danavas and Asuras. The earliest political entity seems to have been led by a Danava dynasty with Mahiranga mentioned as the first king. This dynasty was later removed by Narakasura marking the beginning of the Naraka dynasty. Naraka is mentioned both in the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Harivamsa and Kalika Purana have also detailed the life and career of Narka. Naraka was born to Bhumi (mother of earth) by Vishnu and the child was deposited on the sacrificial ground of the King Janaka, its head being placed on skull of dead man. Janaka brought up the child in his court along with royal princes till he was sixteen years old (Barua, 2003). According to legend, the last of the Naraka kings was killed by Krishna and his son Bhagadatta took the throne. Bhagadatta is said to have participated in the Mahabharata war with an army of "chinas, kiratas and dwellers of the eastern sea", thereby indicating that his kingdom, Pragjyotisha, included part of Bangladesh. The king ruled Kamrupa from his capital at Pragjyotishpura (modern Guwahati). The site has a famous temple dedicated to the Tantric goddess Kamakhya.

The historical account of Assam begins with the establishment of Pushya Varman's Varman dynasty in the 4th century in the Kamarupa kingdom, which marks the beginning of Ancient Assam. This dynasty was most likely of aboriginal origin, but drew its lineage from Narakasura. Pushya Varman took on the title of Maharajadhiraj and ensured steps to establish Kamrupa as a prosperous state. The glory of Varman dynasty reached its zenith during the rule of Bhaskar Varman (594 - 650 AD), who was a contemporary of Harshavardhan. The Salasthambha dynasty established by Salasthamba was the next to rule Assam. After the fall of the Mlechchha dynasty in the late 9th century, a new ruler, Brahmapala was elected, who established the Pala dynasty. The last Pala king was removed by the Gaur king, Ramapala, in 1110. But the two subsequent kings, Timgyadeva and Vaidyadeva, though established by the Gaur kings, ruled mostly as independents and issued grants under the old Kamarupa seals. The fall of subsequent kings and the rise of individual kingdoms in the 12th century in place of the Kamarupa kingdom marked the end of the Kamarupa kingdom.

It is observed that the society of ancient Assam mainly mixed of Aritic, Mongoloid, Alpain, Aryana and non Arayn and it is the main stream of Indian culture and they used to establish relation with many an Indian power. Thus the society of Assam had been predominantly of non-Aryan culture but when Aryan entered Assam they introduced Varna based society and process of Aryanisation was developed. According to the Aryan culture Brahmana get the higher prestige in the society and *Sudra* was the lower caste people. In this regard various non Hindu tribes were placed *Sudra* caste, later embarrassing all non Brahmana. The Kamrupa kingdoms were establishing Brahmana in the different parts of the country leading to rapid expansion of Vedic culture and conversion of non-Aryans to Hinduism. The assimilation of Aryan and non-Aryan culture and Vedic culture acquired a new form with the adoption of religion myths and Cult. of the non-Aryans. The worshiping of Siva is the ancient religion of Assam. The worship of Shiva was a popular deity

among both Aryan and non-Aryan people of Assam. Sakti worship was also a practice of that time. The Kamakhya temple on the hill of Nilachals was the example of Sakti worship. Another Devi worshipping centre of Assam was Tamreswari temple at Sadiya. Thus, it can be said that in the ancient time different type of religious beliefs and practices co-existed in Assam. The attitude of the ruler seems to have been generally tolerant to the followers of the different cult.

Medieval Assam

Since the 13th century onwards to till the arrival of the British in Assam in 1826 A.D.; this period is called Medieval period of Assam History. The beginning of this period is marked by the rise of the Khen dynasty of the Kamata kingdom, established by a king named Prithu in the western part of the old Kamarupa Kingdom. Here it is mentioned that towards the second half of the twelve century; the kingdom of Kamrupa covered the greater part of the Brahmaputra valley and parts of North Bengal. But after Joypala (1120-1138A.D) the kingdom of Kamrupa was disintegrated and as a result emergence of local kings took place.

In the early part of the 13th century two major events were observed in the History of Assam. Those two were- 1) The beginning of a series of invasion from the west led by the Truko rulers of Bengal and 2) The foundation of a kingdom by the Tai-Shans to be known as 'Ahom' came in the south eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley. The Turko-Afghan rulers of Bengal appeared as raider with a flaming zeal for territorial aggrandizement and on the other hand 'Ahom' came here in search of land for initiating the agriculture in the Brahmaputra valley.

As a result of Muslim invasion, the western part of Kamrupa Kingdom was disintegrated and king Sandhya (1250-1270) shifted capital of Kamrup from Kamrupa Nagar to Kamatapur, the present town of Cooch Bihar in the middle of the 13th century. Having shifted the capital, he assumed the title *Kammuateswar* or *Kameswara* and his Kingdom was known as Kamata or Kamrup-Kamata.

Meanwhile, the eastern part of the old Kamarupa kingdom, the Kachari and the Chutiya kingdoms arose, with portions of the north bank of the Brahmaputra river controlled by the Bhuyan chieftains. The Bhuyans was a class of offices entrusted with the assessment of revenue of certain areas under the old administration of Kamrupa kingdom, they become powerful land lord and exercised important political powers.

On the other hand, in the eastern part, the first Ahom King Sukapha established the Ahom state between the rivers Dikhou and the Buri Dihing. Sukapha followed the policy of peace and consolation with the local people of Assam through Assimilation. In course of time they extended their power to westward, pushing the Kachari power to the south western direction and their kingdom ruled more than 600 year independently in Assam.

Rise and advent of Ahom state in Assam

In the beginning of 13th century a Mongoloid group of people came from Upper – Burma by the north-eastern route crossing the Patkai range and entered the Brahmaputra valley known as Ahom. Linguistically they were belonging to Siamese-Chinese branch of Sino-Tibeto language and spoke Tai language. Originally, Ahom are the member of great Tai or Thai family of South-East Asia. The Shans were so called because they first inhabited a land named Tyai-Shans on the bank of the river Tarim which flowed to north of Mongolia and China (P.K.Borgohain, 1946). S.L. Boruah (2007) in his book '*A Comprehensive History of Assam*' mention that "Tai-Shan they first migrated to China in about the 5th century A.D. and thence to Mungrimung in Yunan. They expanded gradually to the whole of the Hungkong valley and established there a group of states. The most powerful of these states was inhabited by the Mau branch of the tribe. They called it Mungmao, whereas the Manipuris used to refer to it as the kingdom of Pong, which term sometime denoted the entire collection of Tai-Shan states in the Hunkang

valley. The Ahom claim Mungrimungram as their original homeland and state that Khunglai, their younger progenitor ruled over this kingdom. The third king of Khunglai's family divided the kingdom, Mungrimungram proper and Maulung on the bank of the Sheuli River in upper Burma between his two sons. It was at Maulung, where Sukapha the founder of the Ahom kingdom in the Brahmaputra valley was born".

Sukapha or the first Ahom king left Moulung (original homeland) with a small band of Shan followers in 1215 A.D and entered the Brahmaputra valley in 1228 A.D. For the first time, Sukapha moved place to place and searched cultivating land in a new home when he settled or established headquarter at Charaideo (Present Sibsagar District) in 1253 A.D. At that time, Sukapha met different tribesmen, learnt tribesmen languages, honoured their religious rites, married their daughters and led simple life of commoners. Sukapha also accepted the tribesmen social fold, place them equal footing with his own men and treated as friends. Regarding Sukapha's confidence of tribesmen Assamese chronicle makes the following observation: "Sukapha has greater regards for the abilities and personal qualities of the Chutiyas, Barahis and Morans, whom he met at different place, than towards his own followers. Since that time, there was an admixture of blood and children were mixed origin, as the Ahom had not brought their wives when they first came Nara country and they accepted wives only when they came here"(Bhuyan, 1932).

It is said that Sukapha, the founder of Ahom kingdom formed Ahom state by subduing two local tribes like the Moran and the Borahi a small principality kingdoms and established headquarter at Charaideo. In course of time both two tribes were socially and culturally admixture with the Ahoms. Sukapha had also intermarriage relationship with the Moran and Borahi girls and through this started the process of unification of all the local tribal people in the valley. Thus, Ahom took diplomacy policy to increase their number by absorbing local people into

Ahom fold. This process continued following the later Ahom kingdom in Assam and this process brought the changed in Ahom social organization.

Therefore, it is observed that through assimilation Sukapha tried to maintain good relationship and social relationship with the local people of the Brahmaputra valley. Sukapha did not compel the local people to learn the Ahom language and culture. Therefore, the local people gradually accepted the Sukaphas policy and assimilated with Ahoms. Sukapha was an agriculturalist but he did not did not encroach upon the lands of the local peasants rather, he search a new agricultural land.

Ahom political expansion and process of inclusion

Sukapha bounded Ahom territory between the rivers Dikhou to Dishang. Sukapha did not extend the boundary in his reign but next Ahom king Suteufa, son of Sukapha, extended the western boundary of the Ahom territory upto the river Namdang. After that a long period of more than two hundred years there was no extension of the Ahom territory. But S.L. Boruah (2007) writes “the Ahom king Sutupha (1364-76) paid a friendly visit to the Chutiya capital, where, he was treacherously murdered. To avenge his death, Tao-Khamti (1380-89), led an expedition against the Chutiyas king with a view to avenge this murder but achieved nothing”.

After these events, no serious conflict was observed between Ahom and Chutiyas for a long time more than a century. Most probably during this period Ahom followed inclusion of the local people to the Ahom fold for increasing the number. Because, nearest kingdoms like Chutiyas and kocharis were politically more powerful than the Ahoms at that time. So, Ahom avoids to conflicts with them and they give attention to the development of their power and number by subjugating weak kingdom in this valley.

At the same time the Kamata ruling authority was observed by the Ahom and they show that Kamata kingdom political power was very weak. So, Ahom gives attention to conflict with the Kamata Kingdom. The battles between Kamata and Ahom continue for several years but the battle came to an end with a peace talk, the Kamata king offered his daughter to the Ahom king. This is the first recorded marriage of an Ahom king with a Hindu princess and which defiantly brought out some Hindu elements to the Ahom royal house (Baruah, S.L, 2007). The sociological significance of this relation is that when Ahom married Hindu princess, it contacts the Ahom with Hindu culture which helped to change their social structure.

Gradually, Ahom kingdom began to expand territory at local chief and tribes. This process was brought direct conflict with the Chutiyas, the Kachris and the Bhuyans. These were discussed below

Ahom Relationship with Chutiya and subjugating their territory

The Chutiyas are the Mongoloid origin and their language was closely akin to Bodo. According to W.B. Brown, the author of the "*Deori-Chutia-Grammer*" the Chutiyas language 'may briefly claim to be the original language of upper Assam'. When the Ahom established their kingdom in the south eastern corner of the Brahmaputra valley at that time Chutiya tribe ruled in the east of the rivers Subonsuri and the Disang. But, according to the Assamese chronicle Ney Elas in his book '*Introductory Skeeth of the History of Shans in the upper Burma and Yuan*' mention that "the Chutiyas Kingdon extended in their territory in the west as far as the country Kushans (Perhaps Hindu tribe ruling independently or owing legiance to the kings of Kamrupa and at times to Chutiyas)". The Chutiyas originally worshipped a goddess called *Kechai-Khati* (eater of Raw flesh) with scarifies of animal and human beings. They had built for her temple at present Sadiya with a copper roof for which the goddess was also known as Tameswari or Tamreswari (the

Assamese meaning of Tam is copper); which temple was one of the temple of Sakti worship in Assam. The Ahom king Gaurinath Singh stopped the practices of human scarifies. Later, they accept Hinduism perhaps; it was the Monogloid tribe who accept Hinduism the earliest in the upper Brahmaputra valley.

The political relation was began between the Ahom and the Chutiyas in the middle of the 14th century, when the Ahom king Sutupha (1364-76) made a friendship the contemporary Chutiyas king, although the name of the king is not known. But this relationship was not maintained for a long time between them. But the Chutiyas tried to recover their los territory Namdang and therefore in 1520 A.D. they attacked the Ahom fort to Mungkhang. The Chutiyas succeeded in this mission and got back to the lost territory Namdang. Two years later, the powerful Ahom king Suhungmung or the Dihingia Raja (1497-1539) attacked Chutiyas kingdom (1523 A.D.) and annexed their state to Ahom territory. The Chutiyas had advanced civilization and skilled of expert warriors. So, the Ahom king Suhungmung utilized Chutiyas service entrusting them in the high offices of Ahom administration. As a result, a section of Chutiyas socially and culturally assimilated with Ahom, that section of Chutiyas known as Ahom-Chutiya. The Ahom was also growing social admixture with Chutiya through the intermarriage.

Ahom- Kacharis Relationship and pushback Kacharis

The Kacharis were another tribe, who ruled in the Brahmaputra valley during the 13th century onward. Gait (1926) writes “the Kacharis may perhaps be described as one of the earliest aboriginal tribes in the Brahmaputra valley”. The Kacharis claim descent from Ghatotkacha, the son of Bhima (the second Pandava). They are Mongoloid branch of people; have their own language *Boro*, which is one of the living languages of present day Assam. In the beginning of the 13th century when Ahoms entered Assam, the Kacharis kingdom covered from the river Dekhou in the east to the Kapili in the west and including the present district of North Cachar in the

south and their capital was Dimapur. According to “*Deudhai Assam Buranj*”, “The first Ahom conqueror Sukapha, after Placing Kangkhrumung (or Kanchangmung) in charge of the country of Khamjang (beyond the Patkai hills) crossed the Patkai hills and made his way into Assam through the land of Nagas. At the foot of the Naga Hills (i.e. the present Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh) he encounters a great number of Kacharis. From them he came to learn that the Kachari King, being defeated in an engagement with the Nagas had to surrender Mohang (home town) to the side of river Dekhow”. From this account it is observed that before the coming of the Ahoms to the Brahmaputra valley the Kacharis kingdom was extended upto Mohaong or Namchang beyond the river Dichang. Sukapha was aware of the power of Kacharis and avoided to attack the Kacharis Kingdom. Thus it can be said that at the beginning of the Ahom rule in Assam there is no conflict with the Kacharis Kingdom.

From the above observation it is said that prior to the advent of Ahoms, Kacharis government ruled extending over a vast territory of Brahmaputra valley. The Kacharis political power was stronger than the newly established Ahoms state. So, it is assumed that Sukapha may have avoided to conflict with them and maintained good relationship. But Suteupha son of Sukapha sent ambassadors to Kachari King demanding the surrender of the territory up to Namdang and later Suteupha extended his territory to Namdang. Later, the end of the 15th century the Kacharis were forced to surrender their capital Hi-Dimbapur (now Dimapur, in Nagaland) and the adjoining these areas to the Ahom state. The Ahom also maintained a good relationship with the Kacharis through inter-marriage and recruitment of the Kacharis officers to the Ahom administration. Kacharis civilization, art and culture were more advanced than those of Ahom at that time and which was influential in the Ahom society after subjugating the Kacharis.

Bhuyans Subjugated by the Ahom

The one of the powerful classes was emerged when disintegration of the ancient kingdom of Kamrupa kingdom and that new ruler class called Bhuyans. They politically dominated some areas of Kamrupa and covered the present districts of Nowgona, Marigona, Lakhimpur, Darrang, Sunitpur and one part of Kamrup. The word Bhuyans means a landlord which is same with the Persian equivalent *Zamindar* and Sanskrit *Bhumika*. The Bhuyans original homeland was Kanauj but when the city fell into the Muslims they migrated to Gaunda and thence to Kamata (or Western Assam). The Kamata king established them at the place of Lengamuguri situated to the east Haju and south the river Bornadi. The main source of income of Bhuyans was revenue paid by the cultivator and they were like a federator. Thus, the Bhuyans are closely related with the cultivator. The Bhuyans consisted of a twelve villages and the officer-in-charge was called Baro-Bhuyan and if less than twelve he was called Chota-Bhuyans, Saru Bhuyans or simply Bhuyans. The Bhuyans made the valuable contribution to the Assamese society. Originally the Vaishnava saint Sankardeva belonged to Bhuyans. Sankardeva developed the Vaishnava literature, Neo-Vaishnava religion in Assam and these contributions was helped the growth of the Assamese society. In the other hand the Bhuyans were more advance in the agricultural side and their military skill.

After the annexed of Chutiyas territory to Ahom state Suhungmung subjugated a number of eastern Bhuyans one after another. Suhungmung appointed some Bhuyans offices under Ahom government. On the other hand some Bhuyans were disorganized and settled them in different parts of the state. But some of the Bhuyans reorganized their strengths and started a rebellion against Ahom towards the end of Suhungmung region. It was Suklengmung who finally defeated the Bhuyans and included their territory into the Ahom territory. When powerful Koch King Chilarai attacked Ahom kingdom in 1562 a few Bhuyans joined in the Ahom kingdom and fought against Chilarai. After the domination of Koch, Sukelengmung

subjugated Bhuyans and for establishing peace he offers them the officers of Phukan, Baruah, Tamulis, and Panchanis etc.

From the above discussion, it can be said that Ahom adopted a dual role policy in Assam mainly with the eastern tribal peoples. Because, for expansion of Ahom territory Ahom conflicts with Chutiyas, Kacharis and Bhyans, but after subjugation some of the people each of tribes were included in the office of the Ahom administration. The newly included groups or members had impact on the Ahom social organization and through integration with newly entered people Ahom society came into contact with Aryan culture. Because it is true that before the advent of Ahom the process of Aryanisation was started in the Brahmaputra valley and as such most of the tribes concurred by the Ahom already adopted the Aryan culture (Phukan, 2010; pp-148). Ahom also established matrimonial relation with them through intermarriage. As a result a section of each tribal group directly involved with the Ahom administration and social system, this process was termed as inclusion. Thus, the Ahoms were gradually influenced by Hindu culture after the inclusion of newly entrants' people to the Ahom fold.

Ahom-Koch relation

. In 16th century the Koches tribes in Kamata became more energetic and powerful, who had foundation of their kingdom in Kamrupa or Kamata and ruined the Bhuyans powers. Biswa Singha established the Koches kingdom with a well organized army and subdued most of the Bhuyans Chiefs one after another. Biswa Singha extended his rule towards the east along the north bank of the Brahmaputra up to about the Mara-Dhansiri River of present Mangaldoi Subdivision in Darrang district and along the south bank of the Brahmaputra up to some parts of Nowgong district and extending territory from Karatora in the west to Bornadi in the east. Biswasingha was a great patron of Hinduism; worshipped Durga, Siva and

patronized Vishnu also. Biswasingha was the great devotee of goddess Kamakhya and he rebuilt the Kamakhya temple on the Nilachal hill near Guahati.

The relationship between Ahom and Koch took place during the reign of Ahom king Suhungmung. It may be observed that when Suhungmung expanded the territory in the western side by subjugating Bhuyans, it brought the Ahom to contact with the founder Koch king Biswa Singha, but the accounts differed as to what happened. According to chronicles of the Koch Kings, Biswa Singh undertook an invasion of Ahom territory, but he had retreat owing to hardships experienced during the journey and the great difficulty of obtaining supplies. According to Ahom chronicles, in 1537 Biswa Singha paid a friendly visit to the Ahom king Suhungmung and exchanged presents with him (Gait, 1926). In this regard L. Devi (1992) writes on the basis of some *Buranjeis* that Suhungmung sent an army to help the fugitive Kamata King (whose name is not given) to establish his territory. After establishing the Kamata King Ahom army proceeded as far as the Karatya River where they erected a temple and excavated a tank. The Ahom commander was also sent an envoy to Gaur King for friendship relation. The Gaur king was given a daughter to the Ahom king with his five districts as dowry. When Ahom army back to Assam, the commander Chankhm Borgohain said to attacked Koch state. But, the Koch King Biswa Singha made friendship relation with Ahom without any conflict and acknowledge the overlordship of the Ahom king. Later during the reign of Suklengmung, a series of conflicts between Ahom and Koch took place pertaining to territory expansion.

But, when the Kochs were defeated at the hands of Padshah of Gaur and their General Chilarai was imprisoned, this conflict was ended. After that Koch political power remained greatly downward and they wanted to make a peaceful alliance with the Ahom. For that purpose the Koch king Ragu Deb gave his daughter Sankala in marriage to Sukhampha with dowry of elephants, horses, and a hundred domestic and Sukhampha gave in return 22 elephants and 12 horses (Gait, 1926). After the

alliance Kochs sent a number of artisans to the Ahom kingdom. As a result, the contact with the Kochs, a number of Koch artisans came with the Ahom hostages, including potters skilled in the art of making images Durga and other Hindu deities (Basu, 1970). After that the worshipped of goddess Durga penetrated to the Ahom kingdom. The Ahom king also sent artisans to the Koch kingdom to learn the art of making eastern images of the goddess.

It was only in the 17th century the Ahoms came into direct conflict of arms with the Mugals. It is noted that when Koch kingdom made alliance with the Ahom, they were divided into two parts namely- Koch Hajo and Koch Behar in 1581 A.D. Under this situation Koch external and internal relation very weakened and it ultimately led to political instability. Lakshminarayan, the King of Koch Behar who was a successor of Naranarayana, made alliance with the Imperial Mugals, while the counterpart Koch Hajo the king Parikshit, prayed help from Ahom but Ahom kept themselves aloof from the fight. Parikshit fought with all his strength but at last he surrendered his kingdom in the hand of Mugals.

Ahom-Mugal war

Mughals attacked Assam for several times, but the Ahom and Mughals direct come to conflict in the second decade of the 17th century. When the Koch Kingdom of Koch-Behar had friendly relation with the Mughals since the days of Naranarayan, at the same time Koch-Haju kingdom had followed anti Mughal policy. The Koch King of Kamrupa gave his daughter to Ahom king Pratap Singha for friendship relation between Ahom and Koch Kamata Kingdom for the purpose of helping the Koch king to attack Mughals policy. However, Ahom King Pratap Singha was shrewd enough to realize the joining the force against Mugals, which was not prepared. Koch Kamata King Parikhit attacked on Bahirband which lay within Koch Behar. The Koch-Behar King Lakhminarayan, son of Naranarayan, accepted Mughal vassalage in 1609 by promising to pay annual tribute, appealed for

Mughal help. Parikhit on his part asked aid from his allies –the Ahom and Afgans. But Afgans fails to come in time and Ahom deliberately kept them aloof from the scene. Therefore Parikhit had to fight alone against the Mughal army and later he surrounded his kingdom to the hand of Mughals (Boruah, 2007).

After the annexation for Koch Kamata Kingdom by the Mughals which brought the Ahom into direct clash with the Mughals. At that time Mughal had almost entire India under their control except the small kingdom in a single enterprise, but here history records different tale (Baruah, 2007). The main ground for Ahom-Mugal war was boundary disputes and commercial relations. The Mughals annexation of Koch-Kamrupa to the river Barnadi but the Mughals traders used to intrude into the tracts beyond this river as far as Bharali. This eastern part was belonging to the Ahom and western part to Koch king of Darrang. The Ahom was not only protecting the imperialists antagonized but also by claiming illegally their authority over that region.

A series of battle had taken place between Ahom and the Mughals. In 1670, the major battle took place at Sarighat Ahom Army led by Lachit Borphukan where Mughal were crushed by the Ahom and their army totally destroyed. The victory earned, the Ahom Commander, such a distinction that today his name lies on the tongue tip of common folks of Assam. The last Mughals attack come upon towards the reign of Ahom king Godadhar Singh in 1682. This Mughal attack was led by Nawab Mansoor Khan and Ahom defeated Mughals at Itakhuli.

The Ahom-Mugal war had great significance in the history of Assam as well as sociological study. Because this war not only ended the Mugal power from western Assam but also stabilized the socio-economic set up of the land. When Mughals subjugated the Kamrupa, they established a new administrative system which was not acceptable for the people of western Assam. The Mugal ill treated the local people physically, mentally and the people lost their rights and liberty. Life and property was not secured of the people; even their wife and daughters. Under these

circumstances the chief of Kamrupa came to conclusion that unless they united under a leading power, their future was doomed. Therefore, they wanted to a new form of administrative system, which concluded the Mughals power, so the local people of Assam joined with the Ahoms to fight against the Mugal. During the period of Ahom-Mugal war the Brahminical influence increased among the Ahom and also encouraged the Hindu priests.

Meanwhile, in the eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley the Ahoms had already established the potential power. The people of western Assam observed that Ahom had subjugated the local power like the Kacharis, the Chutiyas and the Bhuyans and protected the Muslims in 1532. Thus, the chief of Kamrupa friendly joined with the Ahoms kingdom to fight against the Muslims. The most important social aspect of the war was uniting the diverse people of the land. Under this circumstance the people of Brahmaputra valley grew a new identity which is called 'Assamese' and made a strong, integrated Assamese society. After this war Ahom organized a uniformed pattern of administration and penal code where there was no distinction between Ahom and non-Ahom people. The number of non-Ahoms people was recruited in the responsible offices of Ahom administration. A feeling of identity was growing up among the rulers, which was an outcome of major changes in relation of production of the region.

Therefore, it is observed that the two parts namely eastern and western of the present's day Assam was not politically united till the half of the 17th century, when they finally came under the Ahom rule. Before that in the western part of the Brahmaputra valley a number of small kingdom and petty principalities rose in this parts which greatly hampered the development of trade and commerce. The people had suffered extremes of poverty and pain and they faced burdens of taxation, obligation to give free labour to the lords, threats and agonies of war, both from internal and external force enemies like Muslims and raiding hill tribes, who use to take away crops, forest produce and even men to be used as slaves. So, the people of

western Assam wanted a new social structure and political power which would minimize their obligation and free them from all these miseries. On the other hand, in the eastern part the Ahom kingdom gradually stands as a powerful kingdom with the support of local people because Ahom protected the indigenous culture and language. The Ahom accepted Assamese language as a main language for communication which helped them to create integration among the people of the state. Through this process Ahom integrated the local people and developed a new fabric culture and society which is later known as Assamese society. In this way the Tai-Shan group gradually through their diplomacy of goodwill and friendship extended their territory upto west. In fact, the coming of the Tai-Shans the centre of political gravity in the west to the east and organized pro-Aryan society of the ancient days tended to become pro-Mongolian.

Thus, the advent of the Ahoms in the Brahmaputra valley was an event of great significance to the radical change of the political history of north eastern India. The Ahom transformed political power of Assam from west to east and ended the process of Aryan domination to established non-Aryan hegemony. Assimilation is main factor in the Ahom state building process from east to west in the Brahmaputra valley. It is also observed that the Ahom generally followed social inclusion process for establishment of their potential power in Assam. When Ahom subjugated any one tribal Kingdom they included some of their member into the Ahom administration. The newly entered groups defiantly influenced on social and culture structure of the Ahom society.

Religion

According to oxford dictionary of sociology, 'religion is a set of beliefs, symbols and practices (for example rituals), which is based on idea of the sacred and which unites believers into socio-religious community'. Sociologists have defined religion with reference to the sacred rather than to a belief in a god or gods, because

it makes social comparison (Oxford dictionary of Sociology). Thus, sociology of Religion is the study of the beliefs, practices and organizational forms of religion using the tools and methods of the discipline of sociology.

In case of Ahom, Religion is based on certain fundamental beliefs in supernatural powers. They had the conception of “omnipotent being” that is Pha-Tu-Ching (Pha-Heaven; Tu-a-being; and Ching- highest) (Gogoi, N.C 2004; pp-153). The Ahom worshipped their ancestors (Dam) and (Phi). According to R.Buragohain (2007), “they were partly Hinayana Buddhist, partly Tantric Buddhist, partly animists and finally they had their own form of ancestor-worship together with many goods and sprits. The influence of Tao religious thought is also discernible in the Ahom religion”. It is argued that the Tais accepted Buddhism before their advent to Assam and that the Ahoms were in the first stage Buddhism (Gogoi, 1985). P.Gogoi (1976) mention that “the Buddhist elements in Ahom rituals but he argued that Ahom religious beliefs is mainly based on the ‘supernatural powers’ formless spirits or *nats* invoked with rice, eggs, flowers and sometimes with animal scarifies but without the icons of gods for the purpose of worship”. B.J. Tiwari mentioned that worship of Somdeo or *Chumpha* is the icon of Ahom god. Ahom system of propitiations, oblations to the gods generally begins with the prayer *Cao-phra, Chao-Tra, Chao-Nu-Ru, Chao-Kao-Oil* with head high towards the sky and bowing down before the image of any deity. Therefore, it can be said that the Ahom is worshipped *Chumpha* in mental or imaginary plane and greatly influenced Tai religious culture such as Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism and even Hinduism before the advent of the Ahom to Assam.

Ahom religious concept is related to their state called them *mong* concept. Ahom believe that *Phi-mong* is the protecting of the whole state (*mong*), embracing the Phi-bans, the protecting spirit of each village stretching sometime *Phi-huene* of each household. In this regard R. Buragohain (2007) writes that “*Phi-huen* is individual localized while *Phi-ban* like the *Phi-mong* has not only included all

inhabitants but also territory including forests, water, domestic animals and the game on the land and water. The Ahom thus propitiated a number of gods; the Lengdon being the foremost *Phi-Mung* followed by other gods in hierarchal order”.

From the above discussion, it can be said that Ahom are the section of great Tai race and they know their capacity of assimilation. In this regard when they arrived in Assam, they immediately concerned their defiance and religious problem through the process of assimilation and were called ‘Ahom’ by the indigenous people. Because, it is said that the indigenous tribes namely Moran, the Borahi, the Kacharies ruled in the Brahmaputra valley at the time of Ahoms arrival in Assam. Those tribes had animistic tribal features (R.Buragohain, 2007). The Ahom adopt their culture, language, religion and assimilated with them. Ahom celebrate religious functions such as *Umpha*, *Saipha* with sacrifices of animal, which is animistic in nature. This indicates that Ahom had animistic belief and it synchronized with their political socialization with identical practices.

Habit of Ancestor worshiped in Ahom religion

Ancestor worship is the main character of tai-Ahom culture. It is also one of the socio-cultural religious customs of the Chinese people as well. The first Ahom king Sukapha brought this culture from their homeland Moulung (Thailand). The Tai-Ahom ancestor worshipped lengdon (lord of heaven). Ahom people make regular offering to the dead, including those who not directly descended from, sometimes extending to quit distant relative. A Tai people worshipped ancestor because he obliged to do so. Ancestors are brought benevolent. They may be harm to living descendants if these descendents do not pay obeisance with offerings. A man is free to believe in gods or not to, but one has to believe ancestors. So, it is tradition that Ahom practice a variety of rites and ritual pertaining to ancestor worship (Gogoi, 1998). So, Ahom people practice Dam-Phi after the death of a

person and annually perform Me-Dam-Me-Phi (worship of dead ancestor spirits) in the Ahom areas of Assam.

Process of Hinduism among the Ahom

The beginning of the 13th century to end of the 17th centuries may be called a period of the expansion and consolidation of Hinduism as the dominant religion of Assam (Sarma, 1989:188). The process of Hinduism existed in north-east India since the early times when the Kamrupa rulers patronized a large number of Brahmans. This process revived in the Bhuyan Chiefdom and Chutiya Kingdom in the west. Here it is to be mentioned that before Ahom, a number of pretty chief known as Bhuyas, who ruled to the west of both Kachari kingdom and Chutiyas, were mostly Sakta (Gogoi, 2006). The Chutiyas propitiated various forms of the Goddess Kali with the aid of their priests called 'Deories'. 'Kechaikhati' (the eater of raw flesh) was most important form of Kali that needed to be appeased with human sacrifices (Gait, 1926).

Ahom had followed their own religion for the first two centuries and in that period they started the process of Ahomisation. But after the annexation of Chutiyas, Bhuyans and Koch kingdom in the west the process of Ahomisation gave to Hindunisation. Thereafter the Ahom kingdom influenced Hindu religion in grained ground.

It was Sudangpha *alise* Bamuni Konwar (1398-1407), who intruded of the Brahminical cult of the Hindu religion to the Ahom royal place. The Buranji narrate the history of his childhood that he was born in the Brahmana house and brought up in the Brahmana family (Baruah, 2007, Pp-225). When he became the king he treated the sons of said Brahmana family as his own brothers and brought them in to palace a 'Laksminarayana Salagrama' (i.e. a stone representing god Visnu) for regular worship (Sarma, S.N, 1989, Pp-225). Sudangpha was also the first Ahom king to adopt the coronation of *Singarighar utha* ascending by Brahminical rites as

well as Ahom rites. Sudangpha also appointed Brahmana as an advisor in the Ahom administration.

Therefore it was observed that from the reign of Ahom king Sudangpha, process of Hinduism slowly came in the Ahom royal place. The king did not convert their religion to Hindu religion but he had inclination towards Hinduism. The Ahom commoner were least affected by the tenants of Hindu philosophy. Presumably, the commoners were following the traditional Tai-religion as their history is as usual silent (Gogoi, 2006).

The Ahom patronized all religions within their kingdom which was prevalent in the medieval period in Assam. Hence due to the contact with the non-Aryan people the religious beliefs and practices underwent radical changes among the Ahom. They were influenced by different cult of Hinduism namely- Saivism, Saktisim and Vaisnavism.

Saivism

Saivism or Siva worship in various forms was prevalent in Assam. It was the popular form of religion both amongst the aboriginals and the Aryanised people in Assam. Siva is usually worshipped with the offering of rice, pulses, fruits, lamps of mustard oil and ghee, incense, resin, flowers and bilva leaves. The Tibbeto-Burman people of Assam, viz., the Kachari, Mech etc offer worship to Siva or Batho, Bathau, Bathau-brai or Bathau-sivrai symbolized in a *siju* plant (cactus). They offer buffaloes, swine, he-goats, cocks, ducks and pigeons, besides wine, cooked rice etc. (Sarma H.K, 1992: Pp-10-11). People usually worship Siva in his *linga* form. The *linga* is a straight pillar of stone erected on a pedestal, symbolic of female reproductive organ called, *yoni*.

Susengpha (1439-1488) was the first Ahom King to get directly involved with the Saivism as an aspect of Hinduism through rebuilding Naga-Sankar temple on the north bank of Brahmaputra valley. This helped the King to gain him the good

will of Aryanised Monggolid tribes of the region and they help him in his subsequent conquest of Habung and Panbari (Boruah, 2007). The Ahom accepted worshipping Siva in a Brahminical way. It was seen in the reign of Ahom king Susenpha (1623-1664) alias Pratap Simha, who first appointed a Brahmana priest for worshipping the deity Siva and also constructed the Siva temple at Negheriting. The Ahom king Gadadhar Simha (1681-1696) constructed another Siva temple at Umananda.

Suhungmung (1497) popularly known as Dihingia raja was the first Ahom king to assume the Hindu name title *Swarga-Narayan*. Gait (1926) pointed that after the reign of Suhungmung the Ahom King used their Hindu names than Ahom names in official records. He also adopted the Saka era in place of Ahom system of calculation by cycle of 60 years and during his reign first Assamese Buranji entitled –*Sri Sri Swarganarayan Maharaja Janma Katha* was written, wherein the Ahom were assigned the origin from the Aryan god Indra making thereby another forward step in the process of conversion of Hinduism (Baruah, 2007). Thus, it may be said that during reign of Suhungmung, process of Hinduism came in the Ahom royal place. At that time Neo-Vaishnavatic movements was also spread under Sankardeva and his disciple Madhavdeva.

Saktism

Saktism was a dominant cult of Assam in the ancient and medieval periods before the emergence of neo-vaishnavism movement in Assam. It is the cult of worshipping the female goddess as the supreme deity called *Devi, Durga, Kali, Kamakhya* and so on. The Kalikapuran composed in Assam in eleventh century for describing and prescribing the Sakta cult is particularly a Purana and partially a Tantra (Sarma, 1989, Pp-222). Kamakhya was the main centre of Saktisim situated in the hill of Nillachal. This cult was prevalent in early medieval period of Assam.

In Saktism the principal deity is called Sakti and the worship of this deity was associated with the various rites, mantras and animal sacrifices. The Ahom were worshipper of Durga called *Purimatao* in Ahom language and their disposition towards Saktism as practiced in Brahminical way after the influence of Hinduism. The reference has been made that the Ahom king Pratap Simha sent Khonikar to the Koch Behar to learn the art of making earthen image of Durga. Queen Phuleswari was the follower of Sakta cult and took initiation. The Ahom King Siva Simha was also followers and patron of Sakta cult and constructed temple not for goddess also for Vishnu and Siva. Siva Simha also granted land to the priests of Kamakhya and Ugratara temples which indicated that Ahom were the followers of Sakta cult of Hindu religion.

Vaisnavism

The worship of Vishnu and his incarnations was prevalent in Assam from early times. The 'Kalika-puran' mentioned five manifestations of Vasudeva with their 'pitha' of which 'Hayariva-madhava' at 'Manikuta' and 'Vasudeva' in the 'Dikkaravasini' region were most important (See. Gogoi, 2006, p.2; Kakati, 1948). One of the important practices of the Vaisnavas is the respect shown to some relics of the principal Vaisnav saints and preachers. Such relics are being preserved in sattras founded by apostles or closely associated persons of principle Vaishnava preachers (Sarma, 1989). The Vaishnavism cult believes that the worship of innumerable gods and goddess is essential for earning religious virtues.

Sutyinpha or Jayadvaj Singh (1648-1663) was the first Ahom king to formally accept Hinduism, who wanted to propitiate the gods by his devotion to religion and atone for his patricide. Sunyatpha or Udayaditya Singha (1669-1673) became highly unpopular for showing undue favour to a *sanyasi* named Paramananda coming from Gokulur (*Buranjis* say he hailed from Brindaban) whom he accepted as his spiritual guide and established with land-grants at Chamaguri. He

also induced many nobles to accept initiation from the *sanyasi* and thus made many enemies. From the reign of Ahom king Jayadvaj Singh to Sulikpha or Lora Raja (1679-1681) accepted Vaishnavism as their creed, which was the predominant faith in Assam during that time.

Sukhrangpha or Rudra Singh (1696-1714) was an orthodox Hindu and sent Brahmin boys to great centres of learning in other parts of the country. He also established numerous schools for the Brahmins and final triumph of Hinduism over the national religion in the Ahom state. Many of his predecessors had taken Hinduism, as well as Ahom names, and had shown great respect for the Brahmins, but Rudra Singh was the first to announce publicly his intention to become a disciple of a Hindu priest. His son and successor Sutanpha or Sib Singh (1714-1744), was completely in the hands of the Brahmins of the Sakta sect. Thus Saktism became the religion of the kings and Vaishnavism that of the majority of their subjects. The Ahom monarchy adopted a policy designed to win support of the heads of the *satras* and yet to maintain the spiritual status of the Deodhais unimpaired. In this way they consciously shaped a liberal policy towards all the creeds which, however they could not continue for long because of the threat of danger inherent in Vaishnavism.

The process of Hinduism changed the socio-cultural life among the Ahoms and also helped the expansion of Ahom territory in the Brahmaputra valley. As the result of adoption of Hinduism among the Ahom, R. Buragohai (2007) mention that “the title of Ahom King, the traditional *Chao-pha*, was replaced by the Aryan Swargadeo which had more connotation befitting the power and image of raising Ahom sovereign. The Ahom kings had reason to be elated when Brahmans grafting the Hindu myths on Ahom legends and deified the sovereign by attributing a sacred status to him. And which image of inviolability of the Ahom king was created by giving him divine descent which was necessary means at that time to enable the king to restore to more warfare and extract more surpluses to build up the infant state”.

Hinduisation of the Ahom was the logical process towards sophistication of the rudimentary formation of Ahom state (Buragohain, R, 2007). Through this process Ahom create the integration among the people of Brahmaputra valley both tribal and non-tribal groups. As a result intellectually advanced Hindu population come under a common flag.

The Ahom patronized Hindu religion in Assam, but at the same time they equally treatment towards other religious sect. such as Vaishnava, Sakta, Brahmana or Non-Brahmana. They did not make any state religion, nor imposed their own religion on their subject. This religious policy of the Ahom rulers may be regarded as secular outlook through modern context.

From the above it can be said that Ahom being influenced by the Hindu religious faith, and patronized Hindu religion as state religion. It is said that Ahom had their own religion and culture of Ancestor worship but they never imposed their religious beliefs upon the local people. They followed the liberal religious policy in Assam. The Ahom Kingdom sanctioned rent free land for construction of temple, *sattras* and *Dargah*. They appointed Brahmana to run the religious affairs of the temple and donated land. The Ahom influence different cult of Hindu religion i.e. Siva cult and built huge temples called *Siva Dol* and *Joy Dol* with their capital complex near the modern Sibsagar town in Upper Assam and dug a huge lake called Joysagar close by (Baruah, 2007). However, later some of the Ahoms kings patronized Vaishnavism and zealously established *sattras* and allocated large areas of revenue free land. They greatly influence the Brahminical sect of Vaishnavism and established number of *Sattras* in different part of the Brahmaputra valley. Brahmin influence grew rapidly in the capital and the Vaishnava movement of Sankardeva was making itself felt more and more in the north-western part of the kingdom.

Emergence of Neo- Vaishnavatic movement

Towards the last part of 15th century the religious history of Assam took a new turn. Through neo-Vaishnavatic movement Sankardeva (1449A.D-1568A.D) and gave a new faith of Vaishnava religion. Sankardeva was the founder of *Ek Sarana Nam Dharma*--“the religion of taking refuge with the one god only” popularly known as ‘*Mahapurushiya Dharma*’, which was based on Bhakti Culture where worship of only Krishna is made.

In Assam, the Bhakti or Neo-Vaishnavism movement was launched by Sankardeva and his disciple Madhavdeva in the 16th century. Before, Sankardeva the religion and culture of Assam was far from satisfactory. The people of Assam worshipped different god and goddesses’ like- Siva, Durga, Lakhi etc. and they offer animal and even human being also for the propitiation of different god and goddess. Thus, Saktism, Trantricism, Sivasim, and Vaisnavism play an important role in the society. On the other hand through the Hindu social system the Brahmana occupied the highest position in the society and they dominated politically the other people of Assam. However, social inequality was patronized in the socio-political spheres in the social system during the Ahom period.

But, Sankardeva was avoiding the traditional ritualism of worshipping different god and goddess which were prevalent during his time in many parts of Assam as well as India. He also opposed the Hindu social system where caste system was dominating the society. According to Sankardeva, in the eye of god all man is equal irrespective of their race, religion and caste.

Sankardevas thought was that religion was the absolute surrender to one supreme God and advocated the *Dasya* attitude of *Bhakti*, which considered himself as the servant of God. Sankardeva comprised mainly of four fundamental elements of Neo-*Vaishnavism* are (i) God, (ii) *Guru* (the religious preceptor) (iii) the fraternity of *Bhakats* (devotees) and (iv) *Nām*. Of the different attitudes of *bhakti*, Srimanta Sankardeva advocated *dāsyā* or servitude to God. *Eka-Sarana-Nām-Dharma* is also

known as *Mahāpurushiā Dharma*, after *Mahāpurush* Srimanta Sankardeva, who founded it. [*the epithet 'Mahāpurusha', in Assam Vaishnavism, refers to the Supreme Being (Nārāyana-Visnu-Krishna) and it is actually for this reason that Sankaradeva's religion is known as Mahāpurushiā*]. Since Sankardeva religious teachings were mainly based on the *Bhagowata Gita* and the *Bhagowata Purans*. Thus, the tribesman's, the Muslims and other people accepted the disciple of Sankardeva and were deeply influenced by Sankardeva's religious ideology.

According to Sankardeva Bhakti is the path of knowledge. The *Bhakti* worship is the part of the culture which helps to moral development of a person. So, Sankardeva was organized a Vaisnavitie society mainly three component, namely- *Nama Kritona*, *Satra* and *Namghar* which are also the part of *Bhakt* culture. The *Nama Kriton* or community prayer, which fostered community feelings, the *Satra* or the religious headquarters of Vaisnava teacher, which is the centre for disseminating spiritual knowledge as well as imparting the training in different crafts and the village *Namghar*, which is the prayer hall of the village from the hub of its moral and cultural life, all of this brought a new orientation to the society. The practice of human equality on the spiritual plane and the organization of *Satras* and *Namghar* had great impact on the socio-cultural and political life of the people. Through the *Satras* and *Namghar* Sankardeva gave the teaching of cultural, religion, moral, spiritual etc. and it also helped in a nation building of country.

Sankardeva was the founder of '*Satras*' (Monasteries) organization, through which Sankardeva spread his religious teaching. After the death of Sankardeva, Madhavdeva and Damodardeva with the discipline Sankardeva gave a definite shape to the structural and organizational aspects of the *Satras* institution. Each *Satra* consisted of *Satradhikar* (head of the Monasteries), *Bhakats* (Desipoles) and *Sisyas* (Novice). The head of the *Sattra* was known as *Adhikar*, which was also popularly called as *Gosain* or *Mahanta*. The *Satradhika* initiated disciples and conducted the religious functions. The *Bhakats* were the devotees who held ecclesiastical office

under the *Sattra* or led intensely devotional life within the campus of the *Sattra*, remaining celibates throughout life. The lay devotees or disciples of a *Sattra*, called *Sisyas*, lived in scattered villages, leading the life of house-holders. The important functions of *Sattra* were the *Bhagawati* who recited and expounded the *Bhagwata*, the *Pathak* who read the religious texts, the *Deori*, who distributed the *mah-prasad* (a nutritious combination of banana, coconut, gram, sugarcane, sweet-ball, etc) after the congregational prayer, the *Bharali* (treasurer) or the store keeper, the *Sravani* or hearers who listened to the daily recitations and expositions of the scriptures, the *Hatimota*, who summoned the disciples in the *Hatis* (cell where they lived), the *Gayan* or singer and *Bayan* or player of musical instruments.

Thus, *Satras* were the centre of learning, education, guardians of religion and morality. The Regular Nama-prasanga, recitation from religious texts, learned discussion, performance of drama on religious themes, classical dance and music skill in some technical art made the monastic life an ideal way of living in the *Satras*.

Another important component of neo-vaishnavic movement was *Namghaar*. The *Namghaar* was a centre of religious life of the village, which was decentralized replica of the *Sattra* and the village people promoted the intellectual and cultural activities. Here the religious texts were recited and expounded, community prayers were held, dramatic performances were enacted, festivals were celebrated and greater problems of life, philosophy and religion were discussed and debated. Thus *Namghar* was a centre of village activity; it was village club and theatre. The *Namghar* creates the unity of the village and also it was recognized as village court.

From the above discussion, it can be said that Neo-vaishnavic movement had dramatic change in the Assamese society as a whole in the culture and religion. The movement was quickly spread to all sides of Assam and various caste groups, tribal people were deeply influenced by this movement. It generated a strong community feeling among the people of Assam and which satisfied the feudal

requirements of the time. As a result, a large number of people were involved in the *Sattras* and enormous wealth and power. This process weakened the power of Ahom administration.

In the initial stage Mahapurusiya dharma could not gain patronage of the Ahom state and Sankardeva with his followers had to move out to the Koch kingdom around the middle of sixteen century A.D. The pioneer reformer like Vasigopaladeva had to live in hiding for several years when his *Sattras* at Kalabari was set on fire under the order of ahom king Pratap Simha. The two colleagues of Gopaldeva, Mukhinda Gosain and Balabhadra were beheaded. The Kuruwabahi *sattras* was demolished (Gait, 1926: pp-121).

But, in the end of 17th century and the beginning of 18th century the network of neo-vaishnavic movement established in every part of North east India. The most distinguishing feature of Sankardeva's neo-Vaishnavism was the network of de-centralized monasteries (*Sattras*) under an abbot (Guru designated as Mahanta, Goswami or Satradhikar). Propagating the faith was the most important function, and soon hundreds of monasteries sprang up in the Brahmaputra valley.

By the seventeenth century, ideological differences created four sub sects or Samhatis (Brahma, Purusha, Nika and Kaal). The first to secede from the neo-Vaishnava orthodoxy led by Madhav Deva were Damodardeva and Harideva who formed the Brahma Samhati. It occurred immediately after Sankardeva's death. This section is known as Brahma Samhati and was more numerous. Some of them, patronized by later Ahom rulers, became very affluent and prosperous after receiving thousand acres of revenue free grants. The principal *Sattras* of Upper Assam like Auniati, Dakhinpat, Garamur, Kuruabahi, Pat Bausi in Barpeta and Vaikanthapur at Cooch Behar are Brahma Samhati. It upheld the supremacy of the Brahmans even within the Vaishnava fraternity, confirmed to idol worship and had only Brahman abbots.

The most non-conformist of the other three was the Kaal Samhati who had the largest followings among the low-caste and tribal converts. In 1600-1880 A.D, this sub-sect established number of *Sattras* in Brahmaputra valley. More than half of the Kaal Samhati *Sattras* were located in the present Jorhat district. This order had two branches: the Dihingya and Mayamara (later corrupted to Moamora). The Dihingya branch was initially very popular and had a large followers consisting of Ahoms of the official class, prominent being Kirti Chandra Barbarua. The Mayamara branch of this order had a guru Aniruddha who had in his possession Tantric scriptures. This guru was adept in yogic practice. Some members of this branch took to Kalachakaria, a leftist Buddhist sect, said to practice esoteric ceremonies. The Ahom King Khora Raja conferred the appellation Mayamara as guru Aniruddha could mara (dominate) maya (illusion). The Kaal Samhati lay stress on the original guru (Sankardeva) alone who they considered to be the human representative of God. They were the most liberal in admitting disciples from all communities including tribals.

The sub sect *Purusha Samhati* regarded Sankardeva as the only Guru. It is said that the glory of Sankardeva was fading due to the over-zealous efforts of some followers of Madhavdeva. The *Purusha Samhati* proclaimed that other religious heads that followed after Sankardeva were just his agents. They were reluctant to acclaim Madhavdeva as the second Guru. Purushottom Thakur from whose name this order originated was the grandson of Sankardeva. They took an ambivalent attitude towards image worship and Brahmanical rites. This order laid emphasis on the *Naam* and developed various creative congregational practice like *pal naam* (night long chanting of prayers) and *utha naam* (chanting of prayers accompanied by rhythmic body movements).

The Nika Samhati emphasized the importance of association (Bhaktasangha) and adhered scrupulously to the ideals of Madhav Deva. This order originated after the formation of the other three sects. In their perception the other

sects had gone wayward. A set of rules was evolved to purify the Vaishnava's body and mind. They lay stress on proper food, dress, and cleanliness of habit and purity of conduct. Madhav Deva is considered their guru and Sankardeva the guru of their guru.

Gradually, the Ahom Royal classes observed that neo-vaishnavism movement change the attitude of the people of Assam and they deeply influenced through this movement. So, since the days of Jayadvaj Singh (1650-1663) the Vaishnava *sattras* were becoming powerful under royal patronage. Despite the best attempts made by the Ahom kings since the reign of Pratap Singh to crush this institution, the Neo-Vaishnavite movement had attained such remarkable dimensions that the Ahom kings had to accept the *sattra* institution as a fact and to mould the religious policy of the State with a view to serving the interests of the *sattras*. Realizing the importance of the *sattras* some of the Ahom kings established some Brahmanical *sattras*. The four noted ones are at Auniati (1654), Dakhinpat (1662), Karunabahi and Garamur.

Gadadhar Singh (1681-1696) though formally not a Saktist, greatly patronized the Sakta sect. The temple of Umananda on the Peacock Island near Guwahati was built under his auspices and the earliest known copper-plates record the grants of land by Ahom kings to Brahmins at the cost of Neo-Vaishnavism which had become the religion of the people. S. L. Baruah (2007) says that Gadadhar Singh wanted to use religion as a weapon to fight those who were on the side of the feudal forces rising against the system of virtual state slavery enforced through the Paik system [bonded men by birth]. It was from his reign onward that the king's religion and the people's religion began to confront each other, leading finally to the great crisis at the time of the revolt of the Moamariyas.

When Siva Singh's queen Phuleswari insulted the Vaishnavas of the Moamariya sect whom she had invited to Sakti worship, the Vaishnavas openly revolted against the Ahom king. This religious revolt is one of the causes of the

decline and fall of the Ahom power. The discrimination and religious intolerance leading to division of the spirit were reflected in the literature of the period.

Later, a new custom in the form of blessing the king the heads of the principle *sattras* on the occasion of the coronation ceremony came into vogue. Accordingly, the king Pratap Simha (1744-1751), Rajeswar Simha (1751-1769) and Gaurinath Simha (1780-1794) succeeded to the throne. Thus by then Neo-Vaisnavism which hitherto had to face persecutions by the state became the most powerful religious institution under the royal patronage (Gogoi, 2006).

Above all it is said that The Ahom king patronized Hinduism particularly Vaishnavism and liberal grant of land for religious institutions like *Sattras* and temples. It is also observed that since the period of Joydhaj Singha (1648-68), a number of *Sattra* institution were established with the support of royal patronization and most of the Ahom became disciples of these *Sattra* (Phukan, 2010). This brought a significance changed in the faith and way of life of the Ahom. As a result, later the Ahoms were divided into two sect of religion namely Sakta and Vaishnava. Further the Vaishnava sub-sects arose among the Ahoms such as Mahapurusiya and Damudariya Kacha and Paca pantha etc.

But, at the same time the ancestral tribal god and goddess were worshipped by the Deodhais in Ahom traditional manner. Ahom also performed some other rituals such as Lakhimi Sabha, it is related to agriculture. Ahom used to perform this ceremony of collecting the first sheaf of paddy in their own traditional way (Sarma, S. N, 1989; Pp-206). The womenfolk worshipped some ceremonies like Apesori Sakan, Ai Sakam and Subhacani.

Culture

Sociologist and anthropologist use 'culture' as a collective noun for the symbolized and learned aspect of human society including language, custom and convention. According to E.B. Tylor, "culture is a complex whole which include

beliefs, ideas, customs, laws, morals, arts and other capabilities and skills acquired by man as a member of society”. The culture consists of the thoughts and behavior patterns that member of a society learn through language and other form of symbolic interaction.

The Ahom had their own religion, language and other cultural traits, but when they came to Assam did not want to keep their culture rather they assimilated their culture with the local people. For the growth of Assamese culture Ahom abandoned their own culture and assimilated with the local people through intermarriage which helped them to integrate the diverse people of the Valley.

Bihu Festival

It is difficult to discuss the origin of *Bihu* festivals in Assam. The *Bihu* is a popular festival both among the tribal and non tribal people in Assam. *Bihu* deals with practices related to cultivating the land and raising livestock. Thus, the rituals and customs associated with it are seen by scholars as being closely linked to ideas about the promotion of agriculture prosperity, the transition of the seasons and the mode of living in rice growing society a tropical plane ecosystem (Barua 1966, 338). Before Ahom, *Bihu* was performed in different tribal groups living in Assam such as Bodo, Chutiya, and Kachari etc. The Boro-Kachari people called it Baisgu,

The Ahom society was mainly agricultural society and agriculture related festivals are mainly preferred by them. In this regard P. Nath (2004) writes that Ahom had performed ‘Poi-Sang-Ken’ or ‘Poi-Sang-Naam’ festivals at the time of Bohag *Bihu* which is as same as the Bohag *Bihu* of Assam. Hence this festival also performed by Tai-Ahom group in Burma country before they entered the Assam and it closely related to the *Bihu*. Thus, when they entered Assam and established their Kingdom, *Bihu* was popularized in the state. It is worth mentioning that Ahom king Rudra Singha, for first time, had got the *Bihu* celebrated in the place courtyard and organized varied performance for full seven days including competition of different

kinds of sports and games and cultural shows (Boruah, 2007; p.293, L.Gogoi, Ahom Jati aru Asamiya Sanskriti). So, we can say that after the arrival of Ahoms in Assam, they unified the Bihu dance and popularized in the state.

The Ahoms observed three Bihu (festivals related to agriculture) which has its origin from the Tai word “Pi-Hu’ or ‘Poi-Hu” (Duwarah, 2013), viz., *Bohag Bihu* or *Rongali Bihu* which augurs the wish for a good harvest because this is the time when farmers start sowing, *Kaati Bihu* or *Kangali Bihu* which is observed to mark the cutting and binding of grains and *Magh Bihu* which marks the season of harvesting of grains.. *Bohag* or *Rongali Bihu* is the main festivals in the Ahom society which is observed at the beginning of Spring Season and just before Paddy Cultivation. This *Bihu* is started in the last day of Assamese month *Soat* (April 14). The First day of this *Bihu* is called ‘*Uruka*’ or ‘*Goru Bihu*’. Tai Ahoms are agriculturist, so *Goru Bihu* (Cow-Festival) is an auspicious festival. In the day of *Goru Bihu*, People wash the cows and bullocks at the Open Field or at River in morning. Before this smear or mix pulses (Mati-Mah) Flour, Turmeric Flour with Mustard oil and massage whole body with mixture of three medicinal goods. Every Family brings new rope made from one medicinal tree’s bark named ‘*Tora Gosh*’. Before tying cow’s and bullock’s neck by rope-a mixture prepared as sacred and medicinal by using Tulsi Leaf (Sacred Tree) and mixture of pulses(*Mati-Mah*),Turmeric flour with mustard oil. At the evening before giving new ‘*pogha*’(rope) earth lamps put on in front of cow shed to drive away poisonous insects and ants. Mainly used medicinal plants are Bhang, Kaniya Kothal (Thorny plant) and Makhiyoti trees’ branch to kill mosquito and insects. In this day Ahoms’ are also habituated to take one hundred and one different varieties of medicinal plant and vegetable at supper. A special food items is also prepared on this *Amlori Porua*’s cocoon (one kind of insect that takes shelter by making nest on branch of trees) is fried with duck egg.

The next day which synchronizes with the first day of the month of '*Bohag*' of the Assamese almanac is called *Manuh Bihu*. On this day, people show respects to their elders and give the *Bihuwan* or Bihu present *Gamucha*. In the evening the young men and women of the village come out in groups singing and dancing.

The second *Bihu* of Ahom society is called *Kati Bihu* or *Kongali Bihu*. This *Bihu* is observed after the planting of the crops was over. Small oil lamps in an earthen vessels are placed in the crop-field and a similar light is placed on alter on which a *Tulsi* plant was planted.

The third *Bihu* is called *Magha Bihu* or *Bhugali Bihu*. The *Magh Bihu* is observed in the last day of Assamese month Puhā (middle of January). This *Bihu* is called *Bhugali* because the farmer after harvesting the crops, get their *Bharal* (granaries) full with the new crops.

The first day is called *uruka*, when young people construct *bhela ghar* in the paddy field and made *meji* (a pile or column on split fire wood or straw erected for burning in the early morning of the Magha Bihu) is built in the shape of the temple, in a conical shape. In the early morning of the next day people take bath and after that *meji* is lighted. All the members of the village, old and young alike gather in front of the fire offering pair of areca-nut and betel leaves. The villagers pray for the well-being of the village and its people.

Bihu Dance and Song

The Bihu dance and Bihu Song is the most popular among the Ahom in Assam. The Bihu dances with their different postures and accompanying song have crotic features. The people sing and dance together to the accompaniment of *Dhol* and *Mahar-Singar pepa*. The Ahom sing *Bihu* song in Tai language, but gradually it transformed to Assamese language. The singing and dancing *Bihu* dance is related to the concept of *husori*. The *husari* group visited the king and nobles to bless them with prosperity and good health by singing and dancing *Bihu* dance (Gogoi, 2006).

Me-Dam-Me-Phi

The ancestor worship among the Ahom is called Me-Dam-Me-Phi. It is a socio-religious festival among the Ahoms. Literally, 'Me' means worship, 'Dam' means the dead and 'Phi' means God. That is, the dead ones are worshipped as gods by the Ahoms. This belief in the divinity of the dead is an ancient one and it is said that all the Tai (Thai)-speaking people have had the custom of worshipping the ancestors as gods in their own way.

It is also written in history that Chaolung Shu-ka-pha, the first Swargadeo (heavenly king) of the Tai Ahoms observed this sacred ritual of Me-Dam-Me-Phi and sought the blessings of his forefathers in the new palace. After his death, Chaolung Shu-Ka-Pha was buried in Charaideo and Me-Dam-Me-Phi was observed by his son who became the King after him. As all the kings and queens of the Tai Ahoms got buried in this sacred place, Charaideo became the Jerusalem of the East for all the Tai-speaking people and the designs and techniques of the Maidams have become the object of attraction and the subject of research for all inquisitive and knowledge-loving people.

The Ahom celebrated *Dam-Puja* in every year. The ancestors of the family are worshipped with great reverence. There is a household Dam-post or Phi-lang post in the kitchen in every Ahom families in pre-British period. Of course, without propitiation of the gods *Lang-Kuri* (the fifth guru), *Janchaihong*, *Lareng* and *Lengdon*, *Dam-Puja* of the family in the first month of *Lakni-era* (i.e Assamese month Aghon and English month November-December) is not held. In this Dinching month of Lakni, three previous generations of the dead are worshipped. The concept of having a post for the worship of gods is not unusual in traditional societies. Among the hill Lalungs (Tiwa) such a post is kept in the kitchen and offerings are given there.

Rituals concerning Death

Before adopting Hinduism, Ahom followed the practice of burring death body, called *Maidam*. Sihabuddin describes Ahom burial procedure, “the common Ahom people bury their dead with some of the property of the deceased placing the head towards the east and the feet towards the west” (see Bosu, N.K; 1970, pp-217). The King was buried with all his paraphernalia including living attendants (Boruah, S.L; 2007). The practice of burring a man alive was stop by the Ahom king Rudra Simha. After adopted Hindu religion this system was changed by the Ahom. *Bor-Raja* Phuleswari, the non Ahom wife of Siva Singha enforced Hindu practice and changed this system from burial to cremation (Gogoi, P., 1976). Later during the reign of Swargadeo Rajeswar Singha, who was influenced by Hinduism, gave the direction that the dead bodies should be cremated and not buried. He also ordered that the death ceremony should be done in the Brahmanical style by calling in a Maithil Brahmin priest and the traditional Deodhai priest.

Preparation of Rice beer (*haj*) by the Ahom

Rice beer was the most important beverage which is used frequently in religious rites and rituals practiced among the Ahom in Assam. It was part and parcel of the Ahom social life. The Ahom called rice beer as '*haj*'. The Ahom prepared rice beer through fermentation process using yeast and various plant materials as sub-ingredient collected from the forest wilderness. Traditionally Ahom people were use rice beer in their ritual ceremonies, festivals, marriages and even in the death ceremonies in the pre-British period. But after the adoption of Hindu religion the Ahom mainly use rice beer during *Bihu* festivals as refreshing drink, some their tradition rituals like- *Bjitor sakan*, *mritukat diya*, *Habi Dangoriya puja* and also taken after hard labour.

The brewing rice was common household practices among the Ahom, mainly Ahom are expert in this job and this process transmitted from generation to

generation. No advanced technology is used at the time of making rice beer. For preparation of rice beer main rice variety used by the Ahom is *Bora* rice belonging to *Sali* variety. The fermentation technique from *Bora* rice is known as *Sewa diya*, which in Tai language is known as *Lao fuk*. Firstly, the *Bora* rice is cooked and spread on plain plate, which is left open for about 1 hr (Saikia, B. 2007). After that rice is mixed with *vekur-pitha* (a kind of cakes made from rice powder of leaf and herbs by using water) and the mixture is stored into a clay pot, commonly known as *Kalah* and kept at dark place inside the corner of house, mainly *Majiya* for 4-5 days. After that juicy was stored in *Kalah* and pour out the beer.

Kinship and Social Structure of the Ahom

Ahom society was based on *Clan* or *phoid* system. Originally there were seven principles *clans* or *Phoid* was called *Satgharia* Ahom and they formed the Ahom aristocracy. According to them, first three houses were Royal family, the Buragohain family and the Borgohain family and the remaining four were Priest and astrologers family namely-the Deodhai, Mohan, Bailung and Siring Families. Later, Lahan, Sandikai, Dihingia and Duara joined the aristocrat family. They were exogamous family and later they were divided into a number of sub-groups and they generally named after the inhabitant of places. Thus, there were seven sub-houses of the royal family, eight of the Burhagohain family, sixteen of the Borgohain family, twelve of the Deodhai, seven of the Mohan, eight of each the Bailung and the Siring families. Those superior exogamous families were future subdivided into two main divisions, the Gohains and Gogois. Some of inferior Ahom families such as- *Chaodangs*, *Garphaliias*, *Likchows* etc. were the members of *satgharia* Ahom families did not intermarry (Baruah, S.L, 2007).

The kinship system of the Ahom was distinctive as it followed seniority on the basis of ascending generation rather than age. In course of their long contact with other autochthons in Assam, there had been partial change in kinship terms;

nevertheless, certain terms like *Nisdeo* [MoBr(e)/FaBr(e)], *Epadeo* [MoBrWi/FaBr/MoZ(e)/FaZ(e)/FaZ(e)], *Enaideo* [MoMo], *Puthadeo* [MoFa/FaFa], *Ahtao* [FaMo] etc., were retained and which are commonly used by other Assamese communities (Gogoi, 2006).

According to Ahom social structure the entire adult population was divided into 'khels'. All the member of the 'Khels' were termed as 'Pikes'. The 'Pikes' were group of people who rendered service to the state. Ahom socio-economic cum military organization was organized according to 'Pikes' system. The first Ahom king Sukapha entered Brahmaputra valley with 3000 'pikes' and placed them under the Borgohain and Buragohain and arranged them according to their services (Sarkar, J. N., 2007). Each *paik* was granted two *puras* of rent free *rupit* land for rendering service to the state. In case no personal service was required then *paiks* had to pay two rupees. Gradually, one specific *pikes* were grouped into *Khels* i.e., either on an occupational or territorial basis. Ahom king Pratap Simha systematically organized the 'Pikes' system through appointed officer over the '*paiks*'.

From the above discussion it can be said that Ahom society was based on *Khels* system and the village was also set up on the basis of *Khels*. The work specification was shown in the Ahom society which related to division of labour. The high status was privileged aristocracy consisting king at the centre, the tributary Rajas, the Patra-Mantris, the frontier or local governors and the priestly class which included mainly the pontiffs at the leading *sattras*. Those people had big land and they got free pike for work in their land. The king's sons were known as Raja and appointed them as governors in different areas. The Queen also got a property for their consumption. The Kings family and royal class people had got more power. This distribution of power was determined by the social status among their families.

Economy

Sociologists study society in terms of their economic institutions and their type. The study of type of economy shows well the value of a sociological approach, which attempts to view synoptically and to elucidate the complex interrelation between the property system, the organization of industry, social stratification and political organization (Bottomore, 1985). Thus, the economy is an important variable to understand the change to one type to another.

The Ahom economy was mainly rural-cum-agricultural pattern. Agriculture was the most important means of livelihood among the Ahoms. The Ahom introduced the wet-rice cultivation system in Assam and raised varieties of rice cultivated such as *Ahu*, *Bao*, *Lahi* (Nath, P. 2004; Pp-143). The Ahom established the initial state structure with a superior technology of rice cultivation, as well as reclamation of land using dykes, embankments and irrigation systems. The first coins were introduced by Ahom king Suhungmung the in the 16th century. In the 17th century Ahom Kingdom expanded their territory in the erstwhile Koch and Mugal areas which came into contact with revenue system. Thus the system of revenue was adopted by the Ahom from Koch and Mugal.

The agriculture not only determined the economic condition among the Ahoms but also determined the socio-cultural pattern of the Ahom society in Assam. The peasants ploughed the land and produced their own food and built their house with thatch and bamboos. The women also took an active part in the rearing of crops.

In the Ahom society social distinction was observed which related to economic status and position. In the initial stage there was no social distinction among them. But when Ahom subjugated Chutiya and Bhuyans after that Ahom royalty and nobility acquired the tastes and fashions of the upper stratum of Indian feudal society. So that as the feudal super-structure was developed, there was steady

increase of pomp and pleasure appropriate to their respective status and enough to maintain their vanity.

Dress pattern and its change

In the early years of the Ahom rule in Assam, the Ahoms were wear black clothes and it was only later on that they switched to the white coloured clothes. The higher officials, queens, princesses and the King used to drape turbans made of silk (pat-muga) in their head. Due to contact with non-Ahom peoples these types of clothing changed and the Ahom females started wearing the 'Mekhela Sadar' made of Pat and Muga. Males used to wear 'Suria' (clothes covering from the waistline) and 'Suti Sula' (short shirts) and tied 'Basual Tongali'' (a kind of belt type strap) on their waist. These clothes were worn by both male and females of Ahom kingdom but the only difference was that based on the class of people, the materials and designs of these things varied. The Ahom also got influenced by the Mugals dress and use of *pags* (turbans), *mirjais* (coats), *paijar* (shoes), etc by the member of the nobility according to Mugal style.

The full dress of the noble consisted of a *churia* or *dhoti*, a jaket- like half coat, a turban and *chaddar* folded over the right shoulder. On the other hand the masses used only a *churiya* and a *gamucha* which he tied rounding his head and in winter an upper garment called *chalang* which he wrapped round his body. The garments of the noble were made of silk like *pat* and *muga* as well as of fine cotton whereas the masses were made of coarse cotton and *endi*.

The womenfolk of the nobility wore three piece garments, a sewn lower garment called *mekhela* and two upper garments called *riha* and *chaddar*. In winter, they used embroidered shawls and later part they also used blouse and jackets. The common womenfolk wore only two piece garments, the *mekhela* and the *chaddar*. Thus, it can be said that in the Ahom periods the social system was based on social class and social distinction was found in that time.

Even though the Royal house did not impose anything of their Tai culture and social customs on the subjects, yet all the good customs and culture flew into the Assamese culture thus a strong fabric of national cultural assimilation was woven. The Assamese musical instruments dhol (drum) was brought by the Ahoms from the Shan country, Maolung. Maihang, Bankahi, Banbati, Sharai, etc. the dishes and utensils used by the Ahoms became popular among other communities of Assam, as well. Assamese ornaments like Jangphai, Jonbiri, Gam Kharu etc. and dresses like Khingkhap, Ahom Mekhela are all of Ahom origin. Muga silk worms were first reared by the Ahoms. The costumes prepared with Muga golden silk fabrics are still regarded as the dresses of national honour and dignity in Assam. The plain Janpis and floral Janpis used by the Ahoms became popular headgears for other tribes also. Maan-dhora system (honouring the seniors and the visiting guests) in Assam came originally from the Ahom culture.

Family and Marriage system

In the Ahom age in Assam joint family system was privileged. Ahom family was patriarchal and the daughter had no rights to the fathers' property. However, girls had to right to claim some gift at the time of her marriage from the family and after death of her husband look after her, by her sons or brothers of her husband maintain her. At the death of the father, the property was divided by the elder member or their son's and the youngest sons getting the first preference in choosing share. However the type of family in this period among the Ahom was joint in nature.

Marriage is an important social institution which is closely related to socio-religious process. Traditionally, Ahom were an endogamous group following clan exogamy. The Satghariya Ahoms were more rigid in this regard. The practice of maintaining *Bongshwali* (genealogies) helped them to avoid unprescribed marriage (Gogoi, N, 2006; Pp-10). Many customs followed in an Ahom wedding are common

to all Assamese communities such as *joron* ceremony; *daiyan* and *gathiyan* are same as others. The Ahom marriage ritual is called *Chaklong*. “In *Chaklong* marriage the kings had to prerogative of performing their marriage or of daughter in their own residence” (Bosu, N.K, 1970; pp-216). A very important part of *Chaklong* marriage was that the priests narrated the genealogies of the bridegroom and the bride and the heroic exploits of the forefathers and advise the couple to have mutual confidence and respects (Sarma, S. N, 1989; Pp-229).

In the beginning Ahom rulers married from recognized Ahom families including new entrants. The first Ahom king Sukapha married girls from Moran and Borahi tribes when they came to Ahom fold. The Ahom had also matrimonial alliance with Chutiys, Kacharis, Manipuris, Nagas etc. Later Ahom occasionally married Hindu families also (Bosu. N.K; 1970, pp-220). For example Khora Raja married two Sonari girls, Siva Simha married Nati girl, Phulmati and after his death, her sister Damaynti. This process changed the way of life and religious faith of the Ahoms. This policy of the Ahom kings brought a contact with Hindu religion.

Thus, it can be said that after the acceptance of Hinduism, some Ahom adopted the Hindu marriage system according to Hindu rites, but a section of Ahom followed their traditional manner. Therefore change had taken place in case of marriage system in the Ahom society.

Education and literature of the Ahom

Education is an important aspect of change in the socio-cultural life people of a society. In the Ahom period mass education was among the Ahoms. Perhaps the economy of the state did not permit opening schools for the masses or it might be the wish of the crown to keep the common subjects unschooled. The nobles' members of the Ahom king's family, member of the priestly class learned education in their respective schools in Ahom language i.e. Tai language. The Ahom kings charged two officers namely Phukan and Bar Chering for teaching of Ahom

language (Bose, N.K, 1970). The education system of the Ahom was transformed by generation to generation because according to Khel system one specific Khel were live in separate village and they learned their professional through education by their seniors. The military education was more important in this period for war and conflicts. All the youngmen of royal Ahom family take military training and *paik* and all officers were bound to learned military education (Bosu, N. K. 1970).

After the adoption of Assamese language Ahom also encouraged Sanskrit learning for growth and development of Assamese language and culture. The Ahom kings had established *tols* and settled Sanskrit pandit in the land. It indicates that Ahom kings accepted Sanskrit language which was observed during the reign of Ahom King Rudra Simha, who sent Brahmana boys to Navadwip, Kashil (Banarash) etc for learning Sanskrit language.

The Ahom rulers were aware of concern one branch of literature known as Buranji (historical Cronicles). The first Ahom king Sukapha along with himself brought this culture to Assam. Ahom kings and the respective Ahoms families keep their all events of their life through *buranji*. In the initial stage Ahom ruler tried to make Ahom language of court language, therefore in the beginning Ahom use Tai language to write Buranji. But when they made contact with local people and married Hindu girls, they use Assamese for communication. Gradually, Ahom speaking people were merged by use of Assamese language. Thus after the adoption of Assamese language *buranjis* were written in Assamese language. But the Ahom royal family and nobles also writes *buranjis* in Ahom language to the end of the Ahom rule. Those *buranji* are the valuable sources to know or studies the medieval Assam.

The Ahom also deals a large number of works with religious rites and rituals, astrology and romance which were written in Tai- Ahom language and script such as written on Ahom *Ramayana*, manuscript *Phumgchin* (dated 1473) which gives the

idea of Ahom concept soul of heaven, manuscript *Suktanta Kyempongu* which deals with various aspect of drama (Boruah, S. L; 2007).

Gradually, language change had been observed in the literature of the Ahom rulers which were patronized by the Ahom Royal court. The *Brahma-Baivarta Purana* and the *Abigyan Sakuntala* were translated into Assamese by the Ahom king Siva Simha and Kaviraj Chakravati. The astronomical work *Bhaswati* was translated by Suryya Sddhanta in an abridged form. *Hasti Bidyarnav*, a pictorial Hand-Book on elephant written in Assamese during the middle part of the Ahom regime is a master piece of its kind in the whole world. The works such as *Husta-Mukatawali* deals with dance technique and *Kama-Ratna-Tantra* on sexology were developed under the Ahom royal patronage.

The Ahom government also patronized some poetry works such as Kaviraj Misra's *Sial Gosain*, Ananta Acharyya's *Ananta Lahori*, and Rama Misra's *Putala Charit*. In the later part of the Ahom rule a new type of drama were written under the royal patronage in Sanskrit-cum-Assamese language, such as *Dharmodaya* by Dharmadeva Sarma, *Vignesa Jonandaya* of Kavi Surjya Vipra, *Kama-Kumar-Haran* by Kavi Chandra Vipra and *Sankha Chudha-Vadha* by Kaviraj Chakravati.

Thus, it can be observed that the practice of writing Buranjis started from the days of the founder king Hso-Ka-Hpa. So, Assam has the credit of writing history first in India quite systematically and scientifically. Assamese language, which was developed as lingua-franca during the regime of Hso-Ka-Hpa, was further developed into a full fledged language during the Ahom rule adding Sanskrit roots to it gradually.

From the above observation it is said that change had taken place in case of Ahom society in the pre-colonial periods. The major changes were related to assimilation and adoption of local culture, Hindu religion. It is said that traditional Ahom society was free from social distinction. But, the adoption of Hinduism led to the sectarian division among them each group following its own habits and

inhibitions and distinctive form of worship (Phukan, 2010). It also changed in economic organization, rites and rituals, food habit and customs among the Ahoms. A large section of Ahom left their language, culture and merged them with *Saraniya* section of Vaishnavism. The process of assimilation plays an important role to change the social and cultural structure of the Ahom society.

The Ahom society were a high degree of fluidity in the socio-cultural arena so that inter-mingling of various streams of people, including biological admixture, produced diverse social alignments and group identities. The Ahom society was more flexible than other society of Assam. Because Ahom society was developed through kingship relation with the local tribal people mainly Chutiya, Moran, Borahis, Kacharis and other non-Ahom people of Brahmaputra valley. This kingship relation was developed by the inter-marriage relationship with them.

Due to the contact with Hindu people they influenced Hinduism and later adopted Hindu religion. For adoption of Hinduism may be policy of Ahoms to strengthen the unity of the diverse population of the Brahmaputra valley. This helped the Ahom to increase the population of the Ahom state because after that the Hindu population came into the Ahom fold. Thus, the various 'tribal' inhabitants of the hills got integrated and often absorbed into the fold of the Hindu peasantry consequent on changing their niche from the hills to the plains. In the plains as Assam, tribal groups such as the *Bodo-Kechari*, *Rebhs*, *Nech*, *Karbi* and the *Deuri-Chutiya* had thus, for centuries, provided the main source of Hindu population through a process of conversion and subsequent Sanskritization. . However, the changed of religion, language and marrying non-Ahom girls which impact on the socio-cultural life of the Ahoms. Through these processes Ahom assimilated with the local people of Brahmaputra valley and developed a new culture by mixed between Ahom and non Ahom cultural elements known as Assamese culture.

In conclusion it is said that rise and fall occur with every monarchy in the world but the biggest prize the Ahoms could give Assam was resisting powerful

Mughal attacks for as many as seventeen times, otherwise the history of Assam would have taken a different turn. Credit must be given to the tribal friendly Ahom monarchy in diluting the caste system in Assam and removing untouchability, in particular, to a great extent. The Ahom kings are noted for sacrifice of their own Tai culture and own Ahom language in the interest of the greater Assamese nation. This fact perhaps can never be denied. Some of the Swargadeos definitely had big hearts, and that is why they are still remembered with honour by the present Assamese generation and perhaps they would be remembered in days to come. One can definitely learn the ethics of co-existence, brotherhood, social and religious tolerance from the Ahom monarchy to embolden the fabric of the great Assamese society to march forward with glory.

Summery

In the begging of 13th century a Tai branch group of people migrated from Tibet-Burma under the leadership of Sukapha crossing Patkai Hills and entered Brahmaputra valley in 1228 A.D. This group of people were advanced agriculturalist, therefore at the very begging Sukapha searched a land for agriculture and moved place to place in the eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley. Sukapha and his followers did not encroach upon the land of the local peasants in the valley rather than they opened a new land for cultivation. Gradually they settled in the eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley and started the process of interaction with the local people those whom met there. Sukapha tried slowly form a kingdom known as Ahom kingdom and in 1257 A.D. they established their capital at Charaideo (Sibasagar district). The territory of Sukapha was bounded by the Buri Dihing, the Brahmaputra, the Dekhou and the Naga hills. This group of people is known as Tai-Ahom or Ahom.

It is observed that before the coming of Ahom to the Brahmputra valley, the political condition was not satisfactory. Various small tribal kingdoms were ruled in

the eastern part of the valley such as Chutiya, Kacharis, Moran and Borahi and in the western part Kamrupa kingdom were ruled. Sukapha first subjugated two local tribes like Moran and Borahis through the policy of goodwill and friendship. Through marriage alliance Ahom king Sukapha and his followers' material kinship relation with them. They also assimilated with the local people through acculturation process. Gradually the Ahom subjugated one by one the local tribe of the Brahmaputra valley and some of them appointed in offices of Ahom for administration. As a result many tribes like Moran, Borahi, Chutiyas, and Kacharis were assimilated with the Ahom social organization. They were used term like Chutiya-Ahom, Moran-Ahom, Borahi-Ahom and Kacharis-Ahom. By this system defiantly changed the social structure and impact on the socio-culture life of the Ahoms in Assam.

It is observed that when Sukapha subjugated Moran and Borhi people, they included them in the Ahom social fold and followed their own culture. In this system Ahom started the process of Ahomnisation (Phukan, 1968). But the Ahom kings observed that through this process political demine in the country was not possible because most of the people were influenced Ariyan culture before the Ahom. So after the subjugation of Chutiyas territory the process of Ahomisation gave way to process of Hinduisation. The Hindu cultural element come into Ahom royal placed during reign of Sukhangpha (1293-1332) when the Kamata king offered his daughter to the Ahom king to conclude the battle (Boruah, S.L, 2007). This is the first recorded marriage of an Ahom king with a Hindu princess and which defiantly brought out some Hindu elements to the Ahom royal house. After the annexation of Chutiyas, Kacharies and Bhuyans kingdom, the Ahom assimilated the culture with them. The Ahom also appointed the some Chutiyas and Bhuyans in their office, inter-married relation with them. Thus, the cultural assimilation took place which impacts the social structure, belief and practices in the Ahom society.

The Ahom contact with the local people the Ahom learned local language and culture for communication and interaction with local people. Because Ahom are the Tai or Shan group of people followed Tai language. So for communication and smooth running of the Ahom administration they learned local Assamese language. After the appointed of Chutiyas and Bhuyans in the Ahom administration gradually Ahom adopted Assamese language but they not totally forgot their Tai language. The adoption of Assamese language also changed the language of Chronicle writing where they write their all events.

Gradually the Ahom influenced the Hindu religion and Brahmonical cult of Hindu religion came in the Ahom royal palace during the reign of Sudangpha or Bamuni Kowar in 1397. Sudangpha appointed the Brahmana as a advisor in the Ahom Royal court and also the first Ahom king to adopt the coronation of *Singarighar utha* ascending by Brahminical rites as well as Ahom rites. .

So, changed had been taking place among the Ahoms after the influenced of Hindu religion. Suhungmung was the first Ahom king to adopt the Hindu title Swarganarayan as well as Ahom name and from his time Ahom king were entitled as 'Swargadeo'. Thus, it was observed that from the reign of Ahom king Sudangpha, process of Hindu cult influenced came in the Ahom royal palace. The Ahom kings did not convert their religion to Hindu religion but merely positively inclined towards Hinduism which impact on their socio-religious life.

After the Hinduism influence the Ahom kings constructed started to construct Hindu temples. Susengpha (1439-1488) was the first Ahom King to get directly involved with the Saivism as an aspect of Hinduism through rebuilding Naga-Sankar temple (first Hindu temple made by Ahom) on the north bank of Brahmaputra valley which helped to conclude the war between Kacharis and Ahom. The Ahom were also accepted worshipping Siva in a Brahminical way. It was seen in the reign of Ahom king Susenpha (1623-1664) alias Pratap Simha, who first appointed a Brahmana priest for worshipping the deity Siva and also constructed the

Siva temple at Negheriting. The Ahom were worshipper of Durga called *Purimatao* in Ahom language and their disposition towards Saktism as practiced in Brahminical way after the influence of Hinduism. Sutyinpha or Jayadhvaj Singh (1648-1663) was the first Ahom king to formally accept Hinduism, who wanted to propitiate the gods by his devotion to religion and atone for his patricide.

The process of Hinduism not only changed the socio-cultural life among the Ahoms but also strengthen the political system in the Brahmaputra valley. Thus, Hinduisation of the Ahom was the logical process towards sophistication of the rudimentary formation of Ahom state (Buragohain, R, 2007). Through this process Ahom created the integration among the people of Brahmaputra valley both tribal and non-tribal groups. As a result, intellectually advanced Hindu population had come under a common flag. The adoption of Hindu religion also changed the burying practices of death body to cremation. Before adopted Hindu religion Ahom buried their death bodies, known as *Moidam* but when they became Hindu, cremation of death body became a common practice among the Ahom in Assam.

In the initial stage no social distinction among the Ahom. But when the Ahom subjugated Chutiyas and Bhuyans, the Ahom royalists and nobility acquired the tastes and fashions of the upper stratum of Indian feudal society. So that as the feudal super-structure was developed, there was steady increase of pomp and pleasure appropriate to their respective status and enough to maintain their vanity.

In the 15th and 16th century, Sankaredeva 'Neo-Vaishnavism' movement or reform movement played an important role to change the socio-cultural life of people in Assam. Sankardeva 'Neo-Vaishnavism' movement was based on Bhakti culture. The 'Neo-Vaishnavism' movement reformed the Brahminical dominated Vaishnava religion and spread a new faith in the case of religion in Assam. As a result established *Sattra* and *Namghar* were also played an important role to change the religious belief, culture and social structure of people in the Brahmaputra valley.

Later, the Ahom were adopted vaisnavism and they identified themselves as Assamese.

From the above discussion it can be said that the change had taken place in the socio-cultural life of the Ahom society during the pre-colonial periods. Process of assimilation was played an important role to change the socio-cultural life of the Ahom. This process comes through subjugations, war, inter-marriage among the different tribal groups such as Chutiyas, Borahis, Manipuries. As a result they influenced on Hindu religion and adopted Hinduism. There is no sectarian cult in Ahom society. But, the adoption of Hinduism led to the sectarian division among them each group following its own habits and inhibitions and distinctive from of worship (Phukan, 2010). It also changes in economic organization, rites and rituals, food habit and customs among the Ahoms. A large section of the Ahom left their language, culture and merged them with *Saraniya* section of Vaishnavism. The Hinduisation also creates another process which is called inclusion. Through this process the Hinduised kingdom came under the Ahom and other kingdom excluded from Ahom territory i.e. Kacharis Kingdom. Thus, the process of assimilation and inclusion play an important role for changing the socio-cultural life of the Ahom. Through these processes the Ahom developed a new identity called 'Assamese' and their society is known as Assamese society. Therefore, Ahom were the integral part of Assamese society, they developed a new culture called Assamese culture which was mixed in different tribal and non tribal cultural elements.

During the last part of the Ahom kingdom some internal conflicts as Moamoriya revolution and Burmese invasion weakened the political power of the Ahom and British East India Company get to chance to enter Assam. After the Treaty of Yandboo (26 February, 1826) British entered Assam and annexed Assam under the Bengal presidency. Thus the British ruled were started.

There is rise and fall with every monarchy but the biggest prize that the Ahom could give to Assam was by resisting the powerful Mughal attacks for as

many as seventeen times, otherwise the history of Assam would have change a different turn. Credit must be given to the tribal friendly Ahom monarchy in diluting the caste system in Assam and removing untouchablity, in particular, to a great extent. The Ahom sacrificed of their own Tai culture and language in the interest of the greater Assamese nation. This fact perhaps nobody can deny. One can definitely learn the ethics of co-existence, brotherhood, social and religious tolerance from the Ahom monarchy to embolden the fabric of the great Assamese society to march forward with glory.