

Chapter-II

MEDIAVAL ASSAM: A BRIEF STUDY

2.1: Location

Assam, the beautiful land of the nature, the frontier province of India on the North-East, the boundaries of which lie between latitudes 28°18' and 24° North and longitudes 89°46' and 97°4' East. It contains at present an area of 54,000 square miles, of which a little over 24,000 square miles constitute the plains districts, 19,500 the southern hill tracts and the rest, the trial hill tracts to the north.

On three sides the province is shut in by great mountain ranges, inhabited by people mostly of Mongolian stock. To the north lie the Himalayan regions of Bhutan and Tibet. Below the high mountains is a range of sub-Himalayan hills, inhabited to the west by small races of Bhutia origin, and east-ward by Tibeto-Burman tribes, Akas, Daflas, Miris, Abros and Mishmis. To the north-east lie the Mishmi Rhills, curving round the head of the Brahmaputra Valley. 'Withreference to these northern frontier tracts, it is noteworthy that the international boundary between Assam and Tibet has not been clearly defined. However, in 1914 a tentative agreement was reached. Embodying a line on the map called the McMahon line. Continuing to the east is the Patkai Range, which defines the western boundary of Ava, the intervening ranges being inhabited chiefly by various tribes of Nagas and the native state of Manipur.

¹. Robert Reid: *The excluded area of Assam*, G.J.CIII, PP—18, Mills: *The Assam Burma Frontier*, Idid, LX VIII, pp-289.

Through the Great natural boundary between Assam and Burma consists of a tangled mass of mountains whose summits rise to 12,000 ft., yet the geographical barriers are not insuperable; the passes crossing these mountainous regions are actually not very difficult and inter-communication has been plentiful and constant. To the south lie the Lushai Hills, Hill Tippera and the Bengal Districts of Mymensingh and Rangpur. Here, also is the native state of CoochBehar, which was once an integral part of Kamarupa (Assam).

Assam is therefore, divided physically into two main parts, the high lands of the frontier tracts to the north and east and the plains below. The plains consist of the great river Valley- of the Brahmaputra. The area of the Brahmaputra Valley is 24,283 square miles. Between the Valleys lie the broken hills of the Assam Range comprising the administrative districts of Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the North-Cacher Hills (Sub-division) and the Naga Hills. Cacher was originally an independent state. It came under British possession in 1830 and was subsequently attached to Assam as an administrative unit².

Through the heart of the province runs the great river called in Sanskrit the Brahmaputra or Sri Lauhitya³. In Assamese it is called Lohit or Luit. It enters the North-Eastern corner of Assam through the Mishmi hills and turning nearly due west, passes through all the districts of north Assam. It is the chief artery and highway of Assam. For generations the Assamese have watered their fields with its life- giving floods and drunk of its blessed

2. Galt, P-303 ff Pemberton: *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, pp 189-210.

3. Hamilton: *Geographical, Stastical and Historical Description of Hindustan and the Adjacent Countries*, II pp-741.

water; their whole history and culture are intimately connected with the Brahmaputra.⁴

The Brahmaputra Valley comprises the modern districts of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur and the Frontier Tracts of Balipara and Sadiya. It consists of a wide alluvial plain, about 450 miles in length, with an average breadth of about 50 miles, lying almost east and west in its lower portion, but in its upper half trending somewhat to the north-east. The lower ranges of the Himalayas rise abruptly from the plains; to the south is the elevated plateau or rather succession of plateaus, called the Assam Range, irregularly broken at its eastern and western extremities and along its northern face but in its central portion, from the eastern border of the Garo Hills to the watershed of the Dhansiri forming a region of table-land and rolling uplands. The broadest part of the Valley is where the river divides the districts of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur, below which the isolated block of the Mikir hills on the south (a mass of mountains over 3,000 square miles in area cut off from the main Assam Range by the Valley of the Dhansiri, Langphor and Jamuna rivers). And the projecting group of the Drafla hills to the north, suddenly contract it. Forty miles lower down it widens out. At the lower end of the Nowgong district it is again restricted by the Khasi hills, among the spurs of which the river makes its way through Gauhati. Once again, it is almost completely shut in just to the west of the town, below the temple-crowned hill of Nilachala or Kamakhya, where it is only some 800 yards broad. Beyond this point the hills recede again and the valley widens as far as Goalpara situated on a spur of the Garo hills. Here at its confluence with the 'Manah, between the rocks

⁴. *The Legandary account of the origin of the Brahmaputru is given at length in the Kalika Purana , Ch-82.*

of Jogighopa and Pagla Tek is the 'Gate of Assam' Immediately beyond this point the valley again widens, and at Dhubri finally opens out into the great delta of Bengal.⁵

As has been pointed out, the Brahmaputra Valley is a compact geographical unit. It will be seen in the next chapter that Assam proper, which at present is conterminous only with the six districts of the great Valley, in early times included the whole of Eastern Bengal down to the sea, as well as a part of Bihar and the rugged mountains of Bhutan.⁶

Assam has always held a distinct and independent political existence, though her political frontiers have advanced or receded according to her prosperity and at times her area varied greatly from what it is today. It must, however, be noted that although the political boundaries of the country have changed from age to age, its geographical limits have been marked out by nature in such a manner as to ensure that it retained its cultural identity through ages. The unbroken units of its history are the result of the geographical unit of the area of the Brahmaputra valley which is the heart of Assam.

It is, therefore, not surprising that Assam should be racially and linguistically homogeneous; that is to say, its inhabitants form a distinct entity among the people of India, united by a common tongue, an Aryan dialect of great antiquity. Even in the early part of the

⁵ Report on the Administration of the Province of Assam, pp-1, ff Lyall: *The province of Assam, J.S.A, LI 1903* pp 612-636.

⁶ *E.R.E. II. P 132.*

seventh century, Hiuen Tsiang was able to report that the language of Assam differed a little from that of Mid-India.⁷

2.2 geographical background

Assam may be divided broadly in to two physical units- the North-Eastern and central hills tracks and the Valley of the Barak and the Brahmaputra. On the North of Assam lies the Eastern Himalaya reaching the highest attitude in the North-East at Namchu Burwa 7,756 meters.

The whole of North-Eastern India can be divided in to three district regions each of which has distinctive physiography and Geomorphology. The North and North-Eastern region is composed of folded and tectonically disturbed metamorphic and sedimentary rocks which were involved during the upheaval of the Himalayas and the Patkai - Bharail range some five million years ago. The Shillong plateau forming the central highlands of the Meghalaya is regarded as an extension of the peninsular India. The Brahmaputra Valley covered by the Pleistocene and recent alluvial deposits comprises the third region and represent the easterly extension of the Indo - Gangetic alluvium.

Geography plays a very important role in moulding the history of the country, it is not only political, but even cultural history is influenced by the Geographical conditions. Assam proper means the Brahmaputra Valley and the great river Brahmaputra enter in to Assam from the North East frontier and flows through from the east to the west traversing a distance of 805 kilometres. Assam's culture and civilization had flourished in the plain lands of the Brahmaputra Valley and all ancient kingdoms of Assam had risen in this Valley. In fact, the importance of the Brahmaputra Valley in the history of Assam cannot be overemphasized.

⁷ Watters: *On Yuan Chwang's Travel in India*, V, p 186.

There are many mountains in Assam and these Mountains are the homelands of different tribes. Assam is surrounded both in the north and the east by lands inhabited by the Mongolian people and both North and east there are passes through which from very early times Mongolian people had entered in to Assam. The Aryans had come to Assam from the west and Assam has become the meeting ground of Aryan and Mongolian culture. The land of Assam was very fertile and this fertility of land had a rather adverse effect on its inhabitants.

Assam is land of numerous rivers and there is a net work of rivers flowing in to the Brahmaputra both from the North and the South. Most of the tributaries of the Brahmaputra become furious during the rainy season. The atmosphere of Assam is surcharged with moisture and all these together with the mountains proved insurmountable barriers to enemies who had invaded Assam from the west. Assam throughout her history remain to a great extent in the background of the political history of India it is mainly due to Assam is a mountainous country.

2.3: Origin of the Name of Assam

The modern name of the province, Assam, is actually of quite recent origin. It is connected with the Shan invaders who entered the Brahmaputra Valley in the beginning of the thirteenth century A.D., and who were known as Ahoms. The tradition of "unequaled" or "peerless". They say that this was the term applied to them at the time of their invasion of the Valley by the local tribes, in token of their admiration of the way in which the Ahom king first conquered and then conciliated them⁸. Kakati suggests that "Asama", "peerless", may be a latterday Sanskritisation of an earlier form,

⁸. Gulf, *History of Assam*, pp 245-246. I

"Acham". In Tai Cham means "to be defeated". With the Assamese prefix, Assam would mean "undefeated", "conquerors".

If this is its origin, from the people the name was subsequently applied to the country.⁹ However, another derivation has been suggested. The name (Assam), observed by Baden-Powell, "is most probably traceable to (the Boro) Ha-com the low or level country"¹⁰. In this case, it was the country which gave its name to the people.

2.4: People of Assam

The earliest inhabitants of Assam were the Kiratas, Cinas and other primitive tribes commonly designated as Mlecchas and Asuras. The Mahabharata refers to the army of Bhagadatta composed of Cina and Kirata soldiers who glittered like gold; *tasya cinaih kirataiscakancanairiva samvrtam babhau baJam*¹¹: We have traced the various routes through which these people came to Assam during Vriou times.

Kirata according to the Samhitas is a name applied to a people living in the caves (guha) of mountains as it appears clearly from 'the dedication of the Kirata to the caves in the Vajasaneyi Samhita and from the reference in the Atharvaveda to a Kirata girl (Kairatika).¹² In the Puranas Kiratas are designated "foresters", "barbarians". "Mountaineers"¹³ appellations which are understood as referring to the inhabitants of the mountains of eastern India. In another Purana, they are described as "shepherds living on hills to the

⁹ Barua, B.K: *Assamese: Its Formation and Development*, pp-1-3.

¹⁰ *The Indian Village Community*, p-135.

¹¹ Udyoga, XVIII, 584-5, *The wild Tribes in Indian History*, pp 13-37.

¹² *Vedic Index of names and subjects*, Vol-1, pp—15 7-83.

¹³ *Vishnu Purana* (Tr.) pp—1 75.

north of Bengal".¹⁴ In the Mahabharata the Kiratas are placed around the Brahmaputra. They are undoubtedly the same people mentioned by Periplus, Ptolemy and other early writers as Cirrhadoe. The Kiratas who possess a tract of hilly country in the Morung, the west of Sikkim and situated between Nepal and Bhutan, appear to be descendants of the ancient Kiratas. Lessen takes them to belong to the Bhota tribe¹⁵. In the present context the word appears to denote the entire race with the Mongolian type of features along the eastern limits of India. The Kalika Purana describes these original inhabitants of Assam as Kiratas with shaven heads and yellow skins. They were strong, ferocious, ignorant and addicted to meat and drink¹⁶.

Linguistic evidence¹⁷, popular customs and some of the place names of the province also indicate that the earliest inhabitants of Assam were speakers of the Indo-Chinese language of the Mon-Khamer family¹⁸ which has been characterized by Schemdt as the Austric 'family of languages. The date when the Austric speakers began to filter into Assam is not known, but it must have been several hundred years B.C. and certainly long anterior to the advent of the Aryans from the west¹⁹. It is not easy to say how much the Austric speaking Mongolian peoples contributed to the racial make-up of Assam; but it is evident that their culture still survives in many existing institutions, customs and manners of the Assamese people.

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14. Wilford : *Essay on the Secred Isles of the West, As Res*, Vol. VIII, p—38.
 15. *Ind.AIt.*/pp—185. —
 16. *Mibid* .
 17. Barua, B.K. *Assamese: Its Formation and Development*, pp. 32-47.
 18. *Census Report of India*, 1931. p-443.
 19. *Indi-Aryan and Hindi*, p-39.

A glance at the map of Assam will show how many places and river names bear witness to an Austric substratum.

The next wave of Indo-Chinese invasion is represented by the various peoples speaking tribe to-Bhutan languages. The original home of these speakers was in western China near the Yang-tselkiang and the Hwag-ho rivers. From these they went down the courses of the Brahmaputra and the Chindwin and the Irrawaddy and entered India and Burma. The swarm which came to Assam proceeded down the great bend of the river Brahmaputra near Dhubri. From there some of them went to the south and occupied first the Garo hills and the state of Hill Tipper. Others appear to have ascended the valley of the Kapili and the neighboring streams into the 'hilly country of North Cachar, but the mountainous tract between it and the Garo hills now known as the Khasi and Jaintia hills, they failed to occupy and it ever remained a home of the Mlon-Khmer speaking people. Other members of this Tibet-Burman horde halted at the head of the Brahmaputra Valley and turned south. They took possession of the Naga Hills and become the ancestors of that confused sample-bag of tribes whose speeches are classed as the Naga-group. Another of the swarms that settled in the upper basins of the Chindwin and the Irrawaddy gradually advanced towards the south of Assam and colonized in the Lushai, Cachar and even in some parts of Manipur and Naga Hills²⁰. The most important group of tribes of the Tibeto-Burman race known as Bodo forms the numbers and important section of the non-Aryan peoples of Assam. The Bodo group of tribes includes the Koch, the Kachari, the Lalung, the Dimacha, the Garo, the Rabha, the Tipra, the Chutiya and the Maran, the Bodo people who live to the west of

²⁰. *Linguistic Society of India, Vol- 1*

the present Kamrup district are called Mec by their Hindu neighbours .This word is probably a corruption of Sanskriti mleccha. Thiose of them who live in and tgo the west of the district of Kamrup are called kachari . Various guses have been made about the origin of the word kachar I but it seems that the word panralledled to Sanskrit kirata.²¹

Linguistic evidence shows that at one time the Bodo peopleextended over the whole of the present province west of Manipur and the Naga hills, excepting onlythe Khasi and Jaintia hills. Lnfact, they have given their own names to many of the most prominent features of the province. The Bodos built their coloniesnear about streams and so most of the river names in easternAssam are of Bodo origin. The Bodo equivalent for water is di (in thehills andin Eastern Assam). They even rechristenedr a river name ofearlier Austric origin by prefixing it with their own equivalent forwater, e.g. Di-hong, the name of river where Bodo di was placed before Austric hong (water), perhaps the name of the river in oldentimes.

The Bodos built strong kingdom and with various fortunes and undervarious tribal names- the Chutiya, the Kachari, the Koc, etc., helds way over one or another part of Assam during different historicaltimes. During the course of centuries the Bodos suffered much from external pressure. They were hemmed in from the east by theAhoms of the great Tai race and from the west by the Aryans²².

²¹. Buruu, B.K: *Assamese, Its Formation and deve/opment*, P-47.

²². Galt, pp- 46ff

The Tais or Shans ²³ first appeared in history in Yunnan and from thence they migrated into upper Burma. In the 6th century A.D. they migrated from the mountains of Southern Yunnan into the Valley of the Sheweli and the adjacent regions. In the 13th century one of their tribes, the Ahoms overran and conquered Assam itself, giving their name to the country. Other Shan tribes who followed the Ahoms were the Khamtis, Phakiyals, Naras and Aitonyas, whomostly inhabit the eastern part of Assam.

The Tibeto-Burmans and the Shans to-day constitute the bulk of the population of the province, valleys as well as hills. Risley rightly remarks that the Assamese are unmistakably Mongoloid.²⁴ Elwin considers them a rather modified Mongoloid with a dolichocephalic or long head but with the typical flat nose, high cheek bones and oblique slit-eyes.

At what period of history the Aryan speakers came into the valley of the Brahmaputra we cannot say. But there is hardly any doubt that they arrived at a fairly early period either as the result of invasion or by means of peaceful penetration. Assam's early contact with Aryan India is revealed by reference in the Ramayana and Mahabharata. In the Aryanisation of the province the Naraka legend 'also bears significance; In a subsequent chapter it has been shown in the early centuries of the Christian era high class Aryans, such as Brahmanas, Kayashas and Kalitas came and settle in Assam. The Nidhapur Copper Plate grant also records that king Bhutivarman (6th century, A.D.) Granted special Agrahara settlements to more than two hundred Brahmanas in various Agahara

²³. *The Shans call themselves Dai or Tai, meaning 'ourself/ves', equivalent to the 'we' group in the meaning of Dr. Li Chi's classification of peoples, The Formation of the Chinese People*

²⁴. *The People of India*, P-42.

settlements to more than two hundred Brahmans of various gotras and vedasakhas for promotion of Vedic religion and culture. Traces of early Aryan settlements of the kalitas are found in the Sadiya tract of eastern Assam. They not only established Aryan settlements with their own people but brought the earlier inhabitants to their fold by giving them Aryan religion, rites and language. In this process of Aryanisation even tribes' names were changed to caste names. Thus the Koo which was originally used to designate a tribe has become in later years the name of a recognized Aryan caste into which are absorbed converts from the Kachari, the Lalung, the Mikir and other original tribes.

The Aryan influence becomes so widespread and penetrating that even minor Vedic customs and rituals become deep-rooted in the life of the common people. For instance, the Vedic customs of worship of Indra by setting up Indradhavaja still survives in Assam in the popular festival of Bhatheli (Bha-sthali).²⁵ The existing practice of animal sacrifice by strangling on the Siva caturdasi day is also a Vedic survival. It is significant that the Assamese woman's undergarment mekhela is a phonetic variation of mekahala which was a girdle for woman or Brahmacharya in Vedic times, but the greater cultural influence of the Aryans which also brought unity among the diverse tribes and races of the province however, was the language. Sanskrit not only became the language of the court, it also becomes the medium of expression for poets, philosophers and preachers. Modern Assamese as an Aryan speech developed out of the Sanskrit as early as the 10th century A.D.

²⁵ S. C. Goswami, *JARS. Vol-K pp- 26-33.*

It should also be noted that the Aryan speakers migrated to Assam mostly from Madhyadesa or Mid-India. A succession of influences, ideas and cultures entered Assam down to the mediaeval period through Madhyadesa. Tradition bears testimony to the fact that the Brahmans and the Kayasthas came to Assam from Videha (Mithila) and Kanuj. Geographically this had to be so, for in the early times, Assam's western boundary extended to the river Kausika in Bihar and the Kamarupas were included in the list of the Pracya peoples (Easterners) along with Paundras, Odra, Angas, Vangas and Guadas.²⁶

Anthropometric researches have not been carried out in Assam. So nothing can be said about the ethnic affinity of these Aryan speakers. It is nevertheless certain that before their arrival in the valley of the Brahmaputra these speakers had lost the purity of Nordic blood and become almost a mixed race.

Early thirteenth Century becomes important in the pages of history of migration into the province of Assam. The Muslims entered Karnrupa leading an invasion towards Tibet under the leadership of Bakhtiyar uddin Khalji in 1205/06 but on the way the Raje of Karnrupa attacked them, defeated and compelled to return to Bengal. A good number of Muslim war captives remained in Assam and took permanent settlement. They married the local girls and gradually the number of Muslim population increased in the province. The other section of the migrated people was the Ahoms who hailed from Arakan region in around 1228 under the leadership of Choulong Sukafa. They were the successful warrior's able diplomats and by dint of these qualities they could gradually occupy the political suzerainty of the whole province and ruled the Country for a long period of six

²⁶. *Arya Manjuri Mulakalpa*

hundred years. The common phenomenon between both these groups that they did not accompany women in a proportionate way and made matrimonial relations with the women local tribes.

2.5: Origin of the Ahoms

The origin of the Ahoms is a confused matter, just as it is that of the other remote tribes of India. The majority of the scholars and historians are of the opinion that they are the descendants of the Shans or Tais of south East Asia.²⁷

Beyond the opinions of the scholars, the traditions of the Ahoms regarding the origin of their kings tally very closely with those preserved by the Shans of Upper Burma. But there are also some differences in matter of detail and especially in the names of the various rulers and of the places where they reigned.²⁸ Early in thirteenth century a band of hardy hill men wandered into the eastern extremity of the Brahmaputra Valley who was the offshoot of the great Tai or Shan race.²⁹

2.6: Advent of the Ahoms in Assam

Sukapha left his homeland in around 1215 A.D. in search of his fortune. He was accompanied by a few nobles, few hundred followers and a retinue of two elephants and 300 horses³⁰. He had as weapons swords, spears, bows and arrows, besides 10 special swords called 'Hengdang'. On the way towards Kamrupa, Sukapha faced a few obstacles which he reduced to submission with the policy 'blood and repine', finally he reached 'Namruk' (Namrup) in the year 1228 and founded his head quarter at Tipam.

²⁷ Acharyya, N.N, *The History of Mediaval Assam*, P-38

²⁸ *ibid*, P—38.

²⁹ Gait, Sir Adward, *A History of Assam*, P-71.

³⁰ Barua, S.L, *A comprehensive history of Assam*, P—221.

Sukapha reach Brahmaputra valley in 1228 AD and wandered till his settlement at Charaideo in 1253. A.D. Sukapha, by dint of his policy of 'Peace and Conciliation' subjugated the local tribes like Moran and Borahis. Thus Sukapha started the beginning which continued till the Treaty of Yandaboo in the year 1826 A.D. with countless events of historical importance. The successors of Sukapha conquered almost all the local tribes and expanded the geographical boundary of the mighty Ahom Kingdom from the Korotoya River in the West to Arakan Region in the East and from Himalaya in the North to the Bay of Bengal to the south.

2.8: Formation of Greater Assamese Society during Ahom Rule

The Aryans had successfully penetrated to this region and made their settlements but they had failed to Aryanise this land completely. They had to leave some of their customs to adjust themselves with the vast majority of non-Aryan population. They became liberal in their food habits, drink, dress, custom and manner. It is also observed that the interaction and the consequent fusion of the blood of the different racial stocks contributed to the evolution of Assamese society, where in the Aryans and the non-Aryan beliefs, practices and way of living interfuse to form a composite Assamese culture. The composite Assamese culture did not necessarily contain all the disgrading customs and obscurantist practices like sati, child marriage etc., prevalent in other parts of India under the major Aryan influence. So women of this region were not affected by those evil and rigid social customs and practices of the Aryans. It proves that the position of Assamese woman was comparatively better than their sisters living in other parts of India. In the social, religious or political arena of the Assamese culture, women occupied dignified position and were considered in reverence as the pivots of the entire social organism.

2.9: Social Stratification

Social stratification in the form of Caste System is a common picture in the India society and Assam is not an exception in this regard. Traditional Indian society was primarily based on Varnasrama dharma. The Varnasrama principle of categorization of society into four groups viz. Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras and four stages of life viz. Brahmacharyya, Garhasthya, Vanaprastha and Sannyasa existed in the Vedic society. The Rigveda stated that the Brahman was born from the mouth of the Lord, Khatriya from the arms, Vaishya from his stomach and the Sudra sprang from his feet ³¹. In the early stage, the Varna system was not a hereditary institution, but based on occupation. The works of Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and the Sudras are divided according to the qualities (gunas) born of their own inner nature.³² Gradually the Varna System started to be critical. After the Rigvedic period, the Varna was not based on occupation but on birth. P.V. Kane points out that in the period of the Brahmanic literature, all the castes of the Brahmans, Khatriyas and the vaishyas were endorsed as an upper position and crystallised according to birth, while the Sudras had been sanctioned a lower position.³³ The four varnas were mentioned in order of wherein the first three were called *dwana* i.e, twice born while the Sudras occupied the lowest position in the society, and they are expected to serve the other three varnas. This has become the common phenomenon of the rigid Hindu society of India.

But, so far Assam is concern; no concrete evidence either inscriptional or literary is available about the existence of all the four varnas. The social stratification of The Assamese Hindus, though fundamentally allied to that of India, presents picture of

³¹. *Tenth Mandala of RG Veda*, cited in Dr. Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya, *Social We in ancient India*,

³². *Bhagabat Gita*, XVIII—41.

³³. P. V.Kane, *History of the Dharmasastras*, Vol-I, 1931, P-48.

liberalized caste hierarchy. This liberalism was due to the emergence of Neo-Vaishnavism and emergence of Islam, according to which all the castes 'are equal in front of God. Due to the liberal outlook in the caste system and occupation, the Varnasrama dharma were also not properly observed here, as was followed in other parts of India. But as Assam was an adjacent country, Assamese social life was also shaped on the influence of Varnasrama dharma which was provided by ancient epigraphic and literary sources.

In fact some of the epigraphs and literatures give us some impression that the ancient Indian Society was based upon divine social order and the early Kamrupa kings were created for upholding that order, but strictly speaking, existence of the Varnasramadharma in proper order in ancient Assam was absent. The only Varna category, which is referred to in the inscriptions, is the Brahmin caste, the donors of the epigraphs. The epigraphs are completely silent about the intermediary of the two Varnas the Kshatriya and the vaisya. Maniram Dewan in his *Buranji Vivekratna* observed that amongst the four castes of Hindu society, there were only two castes in Assam, the Brahmins and the Sudras, There were no Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas³⁴. Other historians like Dr.P.C. Choudhury and Haliram Dhekial Phukan also support that there were only two groups of people the Barhmihis and the Sudras, but they did not completely deny about the existence of the Vaishyas.³⁵ Thus it is clear that the principle of stratification acquired normative significance by legitimizing the overlordship of the Brahmins. The Varnasrama was empirically expressed through various caste groups indicating adjustment to the development needs of the society.

In the medieval society social stratification determined the professions in the society, but it was not so rigid. While mentioning the social system of Assam, William Robinson

³⁴. Maniram Dewan, *Buranji Vivekratna* (MS).

³⁵. P.C. Choudhury, *the history of civilization of the people of assam* , P-316.

remarks that 'in Assam there seems to have been little or nodistinction of castes from professions and each caste or tribe practiced all thearts which are known in the country. They were farmers, traders, blacksmiths,carpenters, extractors of oil, potters, weavers, dyers etc., but they had no art of» shaving, washing or bleaching, working in leather or of making sweetmeats,butter and ghee.³⁶ The main reason behind the liberal attitude of the Assamese folkmind in the caste based society was the preaching of the great Vaishnava Guru Sankardeva and the Muslim saint Azan Fakir and the associates of them.B.K. Barua says that the way for the social mobility was facilitated by the liberal attitude of the Neo-Vaishnavism who recognized the equality of status for all Vaishnava devotees.³⁷

It is very interesting to note the influence of caste system upon the women folk ofn Assam. The concept of Hypergamous 'anoloma' and hupogamous "pratiloma'Marriagesby definition denigrates women. A marriage where a boy of uppercaste marry a girl of lower caste had been approved and was called 'anu, loma', while marriages of women of ritually pure groups with men of lower ritual status does not receive a similar approval and known as pratiloma marriage. If a man of high class community or caste married a girl from a low class or community orcaste that the man was degraded to the low community or caste of the girl.³⁸ On the other hand, if a man of the low community or caste married a girl of highcaste, then both of them were considered as degraded and impure.³⁹ Maximumpunishment in such inter marriages could be evoked for transgressing the norms. Women as a guardian of purity has not to lower herself but she could be raised high.⁴⁰

³⁵ William Robinson, *A Descriptive Account of Assam*, P-264.

³⁷ B.K.Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam*, P-59. '

³⁸ . *ABGB*, P-253.

³⁹ S. Rajguru, *Mediaval Assamese Society*, P-195.

⁴⁰ Neera Desai and M. Krishnaraj, *Women and Societyin India*, P-29.

Other point of social inequality is the differential status of bride giver and bride-taker where the bride taker was always considered as superior. Even within the same group matter was same and the bride giver had to pay compensation in terms of dowry.⁴¹

2.10: Administrative System of Medieval Assam

2.10.1: Political Conditions

The Political conditions of Assam were more chaotic in the 14th century A.D. Although some minor kings, like Arimmatta (1385-85) had come to power, though he was a powerful king, but did not succeed. The petty Bhuyans asserted their independence in everywhere they settled to establish peace and order. These Bhuyans rulers traced their descent from some Legendary or historical person and entered into reciprocal clash for supremacy in the region. One Niladhvaj, who established the Khan dynasty by uniting several Bhuyans at Kamatapur. Relating their matters Gait observed- "It is said that the founder of the dynasty was a Cowherd, whose master, a Brahmin, is said to have foretold that he would become king and helped him overthrow the last degenerate descendent of the-pala family, on ascending the throne he embraced the Hindu religion, assumed the name Niladhvaj and made his old master his Chief Mantri or Minister." But K.L Barua expressed opposite opinion regarding this matter. According to him, Niladhvaj was a Bhuiya having the surname Khan, and that after the death of Mriganka he forcibly took possession of the throne." Niladhvaj is said to have imported many Brahmans from Mithila and settled them in Assam, and for the purpose of securing he constructed walls encircling the capital Kamatapur. But the reign of Niladhvaj could not long remain peacefully and he was succeeded by his son Chakradhvaj (1460 - 80). In 1458-74 Barbak, sultan of Bengal

⁴¹. Veenu Das, *Indian women; work, Power and status* :1976, P-122

invaded Kamata but his invasion was came to end by-failure. After Chakradhvaj his son Nilambar (14-80-90) ascended the throne of Kamata and taking advantage of the anarchical position in Bengal under the rule of Habshishe occupied the North-Eastern part of Bengal and consolidated his conquest by building a road from his capital to the frontier fortress of Ghoraghat on the Karatoya. In 1493-1519 to recovering the lost possession of Bengal, Alauddin Hussain Shah, Sultan of Bengal, led a campaign against the Kamata, destroyed the Capital city Kamatapur and Nilamber was captured and took him to Gauda, who however, subsequently escaped and fled towards the hills. The invaders the adjoining territory up to Hajo was annexed to the dominion of the Sultan and established Muslims powers. The Sultan appointed his son Daniel as the ruler of Kamata and settled some people around Hajo where they dispossessed the local chiefs and took up to themselves the offices in administration and Hajo made his Head Quarter. In consequence Hajo became an important center of Muslims saint named Giasuddin Awlia who established a Mosque at Hajo and it has acquired fame as a place of pilgrimage.

But the rule of Muslims in Kamrup-Kamata did not last long period of time. The Bhuyans of Goalpara and Kamrup revolted and made a united attack on Daniel, killed Daniel along with his great followers. The reign of Khan dynasty came to an end with overthrow of Nilamber and the power of administration again passed on to the ruler of the Bhuyans and they ruled an independent chief till the rise of the Koch in 1515 A.D.

2.10.2: Koch Administration

About two centuries before the Ahom occupation in 13th century A.D. Assam passed a confused period. The rise of Bisu, an adventurous Koch youth, in the beginning of the 13th century A.D. was the important event in the history of not only Koch Bihar but also in the part of Assam. After foundation of a Koch kingdom Bisu assumed the name -Biswa Singha

(1515-1540). Biswa Singha the founder of the Koch kingdom was a courageous and ambitious man who occupied the territory between the Karotoya and the Bara Nadi ⁴². He was a great patron of Hinduism, worshipped Siva, Durga and Vishnu and was a great devotee of Goddess Kamakhya who rebuilt the Kamakhya Temple on the Nilachal Hill near Guwahati and imported many Brahmins from Kanauj, Varansi and other centers of learning.

Regarding the political relations with the Ahoms there were different versions in the Koch Chronicles and Ahom Buranjis. According to the Koch Chronicles Biswa Singha undertook an invasion of the Ahom kingdom but he had to retreat due to difficulties of Journey. But in the Ahom Buranjis merely relate that in 1537 Biswa Singha paid a friendly Visit to the Ahom king Suhungmung.

From the Ahom Buranjis we come to know that the territorial expansion of the Koches towards the east and that of the Ahoms towards the west was sure to lead a direct confrontation of the two powers, but meanwhile the Muslims launched their expeditions to the Ahom kingdom, so both the Koches and the Ahoms had to be on the alert against the advancing Muslims. There was a serious threat to the kingdom of Biswa Singha which was still in its infancy and contiguous to that of the Muslims. However, the Muslims among whom Bar Uzir paid little heed to the rising Koch power and made the Ahom kingdom its first target but the Ahom army defeated the Muslims in 1529. In 1532-33, there was another invasion by the Muslims on the Ahom under Muslim general Turbak but they were completely defeated and pursued them up to the Karatoya river in the west. In this time Biswa Singha co-operated with the Ahom, he made submission on promise of becoming

⁴² Baruch, S.L.: *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, PP-180-181

tributary to the Ahoms. According to the Ahom Buranji further states that Biswa Singha along with his brother Siva Singha came to the Ahom Court to offer the annual tribute.

After the death of Biswa Singha in 1540 his eldest son Malladev ascended the throne of Koch Bihar and assumed the name Naranarayan (1540-1584). His younger brother Sukladhvaj better known as Chilarai was his right hand man of his all military activities and also the general of Koch royal army. Soon after his accession to the throne Naranarayan came into conflict with the Ahoms. The Ahom ruler Suklenmung (1539-52) and Khora Raja (1552-1603) were his contemporary.

A war was inevitable between the Koches and the Ahoms and in 1546 a war was fought between them and the Ahoms being severely defeated, they fled away, the Koch armies pursued them and defeated at Kaliabar and Sala. In the course of operations Naranarayan constructed an embanked Road under the supervision of Gohain Kamal, covering a distance of 350 miles from their capital Koch Bihar to Narayanpur in the present Lakshimpur district with a view to keep the flow of provisions to the advanced army regularly towards enemies and this road came to be known as Gohain Kamal road. Naranarayan renewed his attack on the Ahom kingdom in 1562 and the war of 1562 and 1563 the Ahoms were defeated by the Koch forces and entered the Ahom Capital Garhgaon in triumph. The Ahom king Khara Raja signed a treaty with the Koch king with the following provisions:

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1. The Ahom king acknowledged the Koch suzerainty.
 2. Some Ahom Nobles were sent to Koch Capital as hostages.
 3. The Ahom king had to pay an indemnity.
 4. The modern Mangaldai sub-division to the east of Bara Nadi was surrendered to Naranarayan.

Naranarayan not only defeated the Ahom king, but also defeated the Kacharies and the king of Kachari signed a treaty with the Koch king, where the Kacharies accepted the Koch supremacy gave 84 elephants and agreed to pay a heavy annual tribute. The king of Manipur and Jayantia also accepted the supremacy of the Koch king and rulers of Khyram and Dimarua Voluntary paid tributes to Naranarayan. The most important event was the war with Suleiman Kararani, The Sultan of Bengal. In 1564 Kararani's General Kala Pahar, attacked the Kochkingdom, defeated the Koch army destroyed the all Hindu Temples including Kamakhya and Hajo.

The rise of the Koch power under king Naranarayan who sought to build up a powerful Koch kingdom covering a large part of ancient Assam was short lived. The successors of Naranarayan had going to wreak mutual clash among them as a result the mighty Koch kingdom was divided. At that time in the western part of the Koch kingdom, the Mughals became powerful rulers. It led to hostilities between the Ahoms and Mughals. From 1616 to 1639 the present Kamrup changed hands in several times. A treaty was signed in 1639 between Ahoms and the Mughals at Kaliabar and according to this treaty Bar Nadi in the North and Asur Ali in the South was fixed as the boundaries between the Ahoms and the Mughal territories.

The Mughals after their occupation introduced new administrative system in Kamrupa. During the period of their administration they divided their newly occupied area into four Sarkars Viz- Sarkar Kamrup, Sarkar Dhekari, Sarkar Dhakhinkul and Sarkar Bangalbhum. A Sarkar was split up into a numbers of Parganas and Pargana was subdivided into Taluk. Village was the smaller unit of this administration. For civil and Revenue administration

they created new system of administrative divisions as — Choudhury, Patowary, Talukdar and other posts.

Before the coming of the East India Company in 1826 the Brahmaputra Valley was ruled by the Ahoms. Sukapha, founder of the Ahom dynasty, a member of the Shan branch of great Tai or Thai family of South-East. Asia entered into Assam in the beginning of the 13th century A.D. and established the Ahom administration. In the next three centuries the conquerors reduced to submission, the Morans, the Barahis and the Nagas and the original inhabitants of the region and brought under the control of them a greater part of the Assam.

In the early sixteenth century A.D. the growth of the powerful Koch kingdom, the Ahom policy became halt. But the most terrible enemy was the Mughals which challenged the authority of Ahoms in the west, Barphukan, a new post was created with Headquarter at Guwahati to control the lower Assam.⁴³

After 20 years later of the treaty of Kaliabar between Ahoms and the Mughals (1639), in 1658 the Ahom king Yaydhaj Singha recovered Kamrup from the hands of the Mughal rulers. The consequence of the occupation of Kamrup by Jaydhaj Singha was the Mughal invasion of Assam under Nawab Mirjumala in 1662. In this invasion, the Ahom suffered huge defeat at the hands of the Mughal army who later successfully captured the Ahom Capital Garhgaon.

⁴³Dutta, Debobrom: *History of Assam*, PP—54-

A treaty was signed on January, 1663 between Ahoms and the Mughals at Ghilazharighat.

The main terms⁴⁴ of the treaty were;

1. Ahom king and the Tipam Raja would offer their daughters to the Mughal harem.
2. The Assam king would deliver immediately a war indemnity of 20,000 tolas of Gold, 1,20,000 tolas silver and 20 elephants.
3. He would send 30,000 tolas of silver and 90 elephants to the Mughal emperor during the course of one year in three equal instalments as the balance of indemnity.
4. Pending the full payment of indemnity, each of the three Gohains and the Garhgayan Raja Sahur Phukan shall send a son as hostage.
5. The Ahom king would pay a regular annual tribute of 20 elephants.
6. The province of Darrang to the west of the Bharali River on the North Bank of the Brahmaputra and the States of Dimarua, Beltola and Rani to the west of the Kalang river on the South Bank, were to be ceded to the Mughals.
7. All. Prisoners including the family of Baduli Phukan were to be released.

According to the terms of the treaty we find that the Ahoms were compelled to restore Kamrup to the Mughals. But in 1667 Ahom king Chakradhaj Singh arrested back Kamrup from the Mughal and the Ahom retained its possession till 1679 when Laluk Barphukan, viceroy of Ahom king at Guwahati entering into collusion with the Subedar of Bengal, Sultan Azamtara.⁴⁵ But again Kamrup came to the hand to the Ahoms in 1682 after the battle of Itakhull.

⁴⁴ Burpujori , H. K.: *The Comprehensive History of Assam*,. PP- 69-98

⁴⁵ Guit, Sir E : *The History of Assam*, 1992, P-131.

It was the final battle among the Ahoms and the Mughals.⁴⁶ According to Lakshmi Devi, The Ahoms came in complete possession of present Kamrup district only in 1682 A.D. during the reign of Gadadhar Singha (1681-1696 A.D.). From the reign of Gadadhar Singha the position of Kamrup was same till 1824, when the East india Company took over Assam after defeating the Burmses.⁴⁷

From the above discussion it becomes clear that Kamrup was the confflecting place among various races and invaders. In Medieval period it was mainly theI battle field of Ahoms and Mughals. The lay man of Kamrup has confused by the series of various wars. Kamrup has always been a premier place of Assambecause of its advantageous location. Kamrup serves as the gate way to the east from the west, so outsider invaders had an eye on Kamrup. At first the Ahoms was not much interested in occupying Kamrup.

After the occupation of Kamrup the Ahom rulers had classified it as Desh and administration was in trusted to a new High ranking officer, called Barphukan and his Headquarter at Guwahalt. He was assisted by a host of subordinate officers.The Barphukan was the Chief executive officer and he also enjoyed the post of a Chief Judge of Kamrup. The Barphukan was assisted by a group of Phukans (subordinate Barphukan) and other officials. His other important role was that hewas the supervising officer over the vassal states in central and lower Assam. Due to the distance from the Capital, the Barphukan enjoyed greater authority.

From the rest of the Ahom kingdom, the Revenue and land settlement in Desh Kamrup was different. In the directly administered areas of the Ahom kingdom.

⁴⁶ Bhuyon, S. K.: *Anglo-Assamese Relations* , P-5

⁴⁷ Devi, L.: *Ahom-Tribal Relations*, 1992, P-7

The paik system to succeed in its full form. But in Kamrup, the pargana system earlier introduced by the Mughal was to be kept by the Ahom Government. Besides that this allowed the Choudhury, Talukdar, Patowary of the Mughal Days to be continued. The Barphukan has collected the land Revenue from the ryots by his subordinate officers. Another Peculiarity in Kamrup was that a class of landlords existed and the landlords paid Revenue in cash to the Government. A considerable Amount of trade was carried on Kamrup with the neighbouring states and a class of traders existed. As a result of its important trade centers were ground up. At that time Hadira was the western gateway of Assam and all trade with Bengal passed through this border post.

The Ahoms entered into Assam with their own religion and after established contract with the Assamese society they adopted Hindu religion and Jayadvaj Singha (1649-63) was the first Ahom king who accepted Hindu religion. From Jayadvaj Singha to Sulikpha Lara Raja (1679-81) all the Ahom kings were initiated by Vaisnavism.

The advent of the Tunkhungia dynasty with Godadhar Singha, rise of Sakta faith (faith in mother Goddess of Hinduism) in the Ahom Court, in though people prayed religious. They granted land to Brahmins for religious organization in charring temples. There are many existing Hindu Temples in Kamrup which were built under the Patronage of Ahom rulers, for examples Umananda, Sukleswar, Rudreswar and Navagraha in Guwahati. The Ahom rulers had also patronized the Satras in Kamrup. These Vaishnavite religious institutions (Temples, Namghars and Satras) had played a vital role in the social cultural life of the Kamrup people. During the Ahom rule, the Kamrupi people enjoyed peace and prosperity; they were free from the raids of the Hills tribes.

2.10. 3: Ahom Administration

Assam was ruled by the Ahoms from 1228 to 1826 A.D., an uninterrupted period of long six hundred years; The Ahoms established a strong and stable Government, gave peace and prosperity to the subject of Assam and successfully resisted many foreign invasions including mighty Mughals. Lord William Bentinck, the British Governor General of India, referred to the long continuance of Ahom rule in Assam as almost without example in history. He also inferred from the long domination of the Ahoms in Assam that there must have been something intrinsically good in the original constitution or in the administration system of the Ahoms. The Ahoms undoubtedly had a sound administrative system which enabled them to rule for such a long period.

Monarchy was the normal form the Government of Ahoms although it was somewhat peculiar. The very fact that the people were of necessity primarily organized for warfare prompted monarchy rather than other forms of Government.

2.10. 3.1: The King

Under the form of monarchical Government the king was the supreme authority of the administration, but he was assisted by three great councilors of state, called Gohains. All honours, titles, offices, decisions and war measures emanated from him, but he had to act accordingly to the advice of the three Gohains. He was not only the owner of the land but also the master of his subjects. In the early period the succession to the throne was hereditary, but in later days there were irregularities.

The King was the very Pivot of the administration and all efforts were made to create a halo of divinity around him. The people considered him as the God of heaven, which is the equivalent of Ahom chaopha. According to Shan traditions, the patriarchal ancestor by the

Ahoms is said to have been of L.angdon or Indra. He was not a descendant of Indra but a consecrated king attained the very essence of Indra. The Ahom Kings followed the Hindu political ideology and the fundamental duty was the protection of his subjects, to give them security of life, property and belief. The Kings maintained and conduct the foreign policy. Thus the King was the supreme in all departments of the Government.

2.10.3.2: Mantri-Parisad

The King had a Mantri Parisad to assist him, consisted five councilors, known usually as the Patra Mantri— the Bar Gohain, Burha Gohain, Barpatra Gohain, BarBarua and the Barphukan. There were originally two Gohains the Bar Gohain and the Burha Gohain and in the reign of Suhummung the third post Barpatra Gohain was created. The functions of the Gohains were always advisory but the king did not generally disobey their unite resolutions. The Gohains occupied an exalted position in Ahom Policy.

The Ahom King Pratap Singha (1603-1641) created two Posts namely Barbarua and Barphukan. In rank and dignity these two officials were next to the three great Gohains. The Barbaruah and the Barphukan along with the three Gohains formed the council of five known usually as Patra-Matri, functioned something like the modern Cabinet. The Barbarua was the commander of forces, looked after the revenue and judicial administration of the Eastern most region. The Barphukan governed as the viceroy of the tract between Nowgong and Goalpara with his seat of Government at Gawahati, and occupied very important position “in the administration of Ahom.

To each of these councillors was assigned a certain number of Paiks or individuals over whom no other officers of the Government had any control. In the event of war or construction of Public works they furnished their portion of militia. According to David Scott, the Gohains had allotted for their own use 10,000 polks which he reckoned to be

equivalent to a grant of Rs. 90,000 per Annum Barbarua control over 14,000 Paiks, but they were also bound to render service to the King.

2.10.3.3: The Local Governors

There were a number of local Governors who were next in power to the fivecouncillors as Sadiyakhowa Gohain, Marrangi Khowa Gohain, Salal Gohain and Kajali Mukhia Gohain. The post of Sadiye Khowa Gohain was created by the Ahom King Suhummung. Sadiya was the capital of the Chutia King, in 1823, Suhummuhg annexed the whole Chutia territory to the Ahom Kingdom and entrusted it under the Supervision of a Gohain, called Sadiya Khowa Gohain.

The post of Marrangi Khowa Gohain was also created by Ahom King Suhummung. Marrangi was an outpost of the Ahoms in lower part of the Dhansiri valley and in 1535, Suhunmung annexed the whole Kachari territory west of the Dhensiri bordering the Naga Hills and entrusted the region under a Gohain who was celled Merrengi Khowa Gohain. To administered a great portion of Nowgong and portion of charduar created a post known as Salal Gohain. The functions and the responsibilities of these Goheins were confined to the provinces of which they were the governors. At Kajeli mukh appointed a Gohain called Kajali Mukhia Gohain; His functions and responsibilities were identical with those of other Governors of the provinces.

2.10.3.4: Other Officials

There were numerous officials, who were generally appointed from respective fertilise end Amongst these officers the highest in rank were the Phukans. The first six were called Ghana Phukan and of these six officials four had special responsibilities. The Naobaicha

Phukan was the head of the Royal Navy, the Bhitara Phukan used to supervise the household affairs, the Dihingia Phukan was posted on the river Dihing and the Pani Phukan was in charge of the waterways. Other two Na Phukan and Deka Phukan, who had no special duties to perform.

There were twelve Rajkhowa in different twelve Provinces of the kingdom and they were administered of their respective Provinces. The Ahom king appointed some ordinary Phukans entrusted with particular duties. The Panvatiya Phukan, the Raidangiya Phukan and the Khangiya Phukan were responsible to look after the Queen, mother and the princesses. The Tamuli Phukan was the supervisor of the royal Garden, Naosaliya Phukan was in charge of the royal navy, the Chola Phukan was in charge of the royal robes and garments. After the Phukans the king appointed some Baruas. Like different categories of Phukans there were several types of Baruas like Bhandari Barua, Duliya Barua, Chaudangliya Barua, Bej Barua, Hati Barua, Ghora Barua etc.

2.10.3.5: Military Administration.

The Ahoms established an independent kingdom of their own in an unknown land testifies to their superb quality of army organization of military invincibility. The extent of the Ahom kingdom was great, to maintain and control of such a vast kingdom they organized a strong and well equipped army department. The Ahom army mostly consisted of Infantry, elephants, Cavalry, Navy, Artillery and spies and one officer in charge was appointed for each department such as- Hatibarua in charge of elephant force, the Ghora Barua for Cavalry force, the Nao-Saliya Phukan for Navy force and the Kharghoria Phukan officer in charge of the artillery, who were exclusively in charge of the various branches of the army. There was a regular system of gradation of officers in the Ahom army.

There was a regular system of gradation of office in the Ahom army. The Paiks, the lowest military unit were supervised by the Borah, the Saikias and the Hazarikas who were commanded by the higher military officials such as the Baruas, the Rajkhowas and the Phukans. Ordinarily the Phukans were the commanded of 6000, the Rajkhowas 3000, the Baruas 2000, the Hazarikas 1000 and Borahs of 20.

The cavalry forces were strong and important force of the Ahom army. The Ahoms were imported large number of Horses from Bhutan and Ghora Barua was the superintendent of this force. In the hills and forests of Assam the elephant force was of great importance for Ahom army and Hati Barua was Presided over this departments. The Naval achievements of the Assamese were high efficiency under the Ahom rulers and every Assamese soldier in expert in rowing boats.

The appointment of spies in times of peace and war was a regular Practice of the Ahom-army. Spies formed an essential instrument of Ahom power whose existence was based on military capability. The main weapons of war were swords, spears, axes, maces, daggers, slings, bows and arrows. Ahom soldiers were trained to stand firm on the battle-field. Besides their numerical strength, Physical vigour, Courage and endurance of the Ahoms were some of the decisive factors for military superiority.

2.10.3.6: Revenue Administration

During the. Ahoms cultivation was the main occupation of the People of Assam. The soil of Assam was very fertile and well-adapted to all kinds of agricultural Purposes. On the arrival to Assam, the Ahoms found three kinds of land such as Kshetra, Khila and Vastu there were also both collective and individual ownership of land.

The Basis of the land tenure in Medieval Assam was the Khel system.- A great portion of area of the country was cultivated mainly by emigrating ryots who paid a plough tax. The hill tribes, who grew cotton, paid at hoe tax. Artisans, smiths, weavers, oil-pressers, fishermen, gold-gathers etc. enjoyed their portion of land for their home-stead and farm free of tax. The rice lands were redistributed from time to time. The other lands which could be regarded as private property were the estates granted to the nobles.

A standard system of land tenure was known to the Ahoms. The chief features of this system were proper system and measurement of land. The Ahom kings granted lands to Temples, Religions institutions and Pious and meritorious persons. Land in Assam was tenured not on the basis of payment of revenue but on the basis of the paik system. In every house one man out of three or four has to render service to the king. Thus in Medieval Assam the subjects were equally A the property of the state and therefore not only the houses and the lands but the cultivators were also assessed.

2.10.3.7: Law and Justice

Justice was the main aims of Ahom administration, the kings regarded speedy administration of justice was one Ahoms followed their original customs and 'tradition as the law of the land. The king wielded the rod of Punishment and was not subjected to it and he was assisted by other officers.

After the Hinduisation of the Ahoms, Hindu law as expounded by the Brahmins seems to have been generally followed. Among the crimes enumerated, theft, robbery, adultery, abduction, the killing of man and treachery, punishable by death; Petty offences in the village seem to have been left to the village judge for disposal.

Ahom administration of justice was the responsibility of the king himself but he was assisted by high officials at the centre. In villages, justice was administered by royal officials with the help of the members of the village council. The criminal law was excessively severe. The chief judicial authorities of the state were the Barbarua and the Barphukan in their own administrative jurisdictions. An appeal could be made to the Barbarua or the Barphukan in case the trials were conducted by their subordinates. In the latter cases, a second appeal lay to the sovereign was assisted by the Nyayakhoda- Phukan. There were a number of assessors attached to every court of justice, whose opinions were regularly consulted before any clear decision was taken by the president of a court. The administration of justice of Ahoms appears to have been efficient, speedy and impartial.

2.10.3.8: Socio-Economic Conditions

Assam is a secure homeland of various races. The composition of various culture and religious elements has reached the Assamese society in a most colourful way. The history of migrated people and their settlement were very interesting and magnificent habitual character. The Alpines Tibet-Burma, Thai-Chinese, Negritos, Dravidas, Mongoloids and above the Aryan came and occupied the entire tract of the Assam Province. The serial waves of migration at different times from different directions viz- China, India, Burma and Tibet since early times made the population of Assam varied with plurality of race, religion and cultural. Although we find the presence of the Aryans group's administered of different castes and Muslims, it may be admitted that a huge majority of the social groups racially belonged to the non-Aryan Mongoloid groups. It has been the important diverse feature of Assam's demography and society since colonies times. It shows that different ethnic groups came and peacefully settlement in these Region.

Thus the history of Mediaval Assam has experienced lots of historical evidences, when people from different gerions hailed and took permanent settlement. Somebody of them become the rules, some of them become their helpers and some of them become their subjects. All these people lived together in a peaceful and congenital situation.