

Study on the economic condition of the Ahom state with special reference to Paik or Khel System, Wet rice Cultivation and Assimilation

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Abstract - The state formation process in the Brahmaputra Valley with the coming of the Ahoms went through tremendous changes. Specially in the field of economy the Ahoms brought a revolutionary change with the introduction of wet rice cultivation, surplus production, organization of different paiks, introduction of different khel, different professionals which were crucial factor behind the economic as well as state mechanism of the Ahom Government.

keywords - Land, Wet rice cultivation, Paiks and Khel system, Assimilation, Subjugation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The continuous evolution of human society, mobility of people from one place to another caused changes in the socio-economic and cultural scenario of different geographical sector. The migration of the Ahoms to the land of Assam in the 13th century is significant from historical point of view. The Ahoms had deep influence on the socio economic and cultural context of Assam. This paper attempts to study the economic condition of Assam in the Ahom period with special reference to *paik* or *khel* system, wet rice cultivation, assimilation and subjugation of people.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

- *Agrarian System of Medieval Assam* of Jahnabi Gogoi Nath provides valuable source regarding the agricultural system of Assam. The book discusses about the land system, extent and method of cultivation, revenue administration, condition of peasant class, trade in agricultural product. Here we get a picture about the economic condition of Assam.
- *Itihashe Suwara Sosota Basor* of Sarbananda Rajkumar is a comprehensive work about the Ahom kingdom and its administration. Here he discusses about the export and import of the commodities, trade, economy, society and administration in the Ahom period.
- *The Comprehensive History of Assam, vol.3rd* of H.K. Barpujari is a very important book regarding Ahom administration system. It discusses about the socio economic political and cultural sphere of the Ahom kingdom in the medieval period.
- S.N. Sarma in his book *A Socio Economic and Cultural History of Medieval Assam (1200-1800 A.D.)* gives a detail account of the economic condition of medieval Assam. Here the author discusses about the people, social and professional castes, economic condition, agricultural system, arts and crafts of the medieval period.
- *Science, Technology and Social formation in Medieval Assam* written by Sanjeeb Kakoty provides information about Ahom state formation. In his work he made an attempt to study the state formation from economic perspective.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The present study will discuss the issues relating to economic condition of Medieval Assam in the Ahom period. Was there any impact of State administration system and policy in the economy of the Ahom kingdom. How the land system, Paik system, assimilation and subjugation of tribes and states influenced the economy of the Ahom state.

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The present study will focus on the role of economy and its impact in the state formation process of the Ahoms. Here the working group '*paik*' or unit of people and their organization under different officials to regulate the different body of work will be discussed. The objective of this study is to bring new area of discussion of the Ahom period by establishing some new questions. Here an attempt has been made to study the impact of the Ahoms on the ground of society, economy and changes in demographic set up, mode of production etc.

5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Whether the wet rice cultivation had any impact on the economy of the Ahom period?
- Whether the organization of *paiks* or *khel* system had any role in the Economy?
- What were the impact of assimilation and subjugation?

6. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To study the wet rice cultivation as a factor of change in the economy of Assam.
- To analyze the *Paik* system or the *Khel* system.
- To study the impact in the economy for assimilation and subjugation of other tribes and states.

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study will be made on the data collected from the primary and secondary sources. Historical methodology will be followed in this work. All the available and relevant sources will be consulted here.

8. Land and Wet rice cultivation

The Ahoms assimilated the entire Brahmaputra Valley by subjugating the local inhabiting tribes and formed it into a stable state. The Ahoms reached the Brahmaputra valley in search of cultivable land in 13th century. They brought with them the culture of wet rice cultivation from their homeland Yunan. In the Ahom period land was the basic source of production. Lands were classified on the basis of their use. It is recorded in the epigraph that lands were divided into cultivated, cultivable and uncultivated lands. Cultivated lands were classified into two category *rupit* (land under permanent cultivation) and *pharingati* (lands lying uncultivated).¹ Lands also classified as *kathiyatali* (land use for growing seedlings), *dalani* (low-lying or marshy lands), *habi* or *habitali* (forests) etc.²

The river valley habitation of the Ahoms and their knowledge of wet rice cultivation considered to be a driving force in the economy of the Assam and the Ahom state formation. As the land was frequently flooded by the Brahmaputra river and its tributaries, the wet rice cultivation proved to be suitable for the climate and soil of the Brahmaputra valley. It is mention worthy that there was different varieties of rice cultivated in different season. Rice cultivated in Assam mainly consists of *Ahu*, *Bao* and *Sali*. *Ahu* was a short maturing rice, which was sown broadcast. It required no standing water hence there no ridge or *ali* in the paddy field. *Bao* was a variety of rice which grown in the low lying lands next to the *chaporis*. It was also a kind of deep water or floating rice. But the *Sali* cultivation considered to be more productive and a long maturing one. It required wet conditions and transplantations.³ The process of wet rice cultivation brought by the Ahoms made the surplus production which resulted the engagement of non agrarian professional class in different activities like trade and craft. Hence, the wet rice cultivation proved to be beneficial for the entire economic pattern of the Brahmaputra Valley.

9. Organization of the Paiks or Khel system and their role in the economy

In the Ahom period (1228-1826 A.D.) society was organized into *paik* or *khel* system. The Ahoms subjugated all the ruling tribes and make them tributary under the Ahom king. It was Sukapha who introduced a system of rendering personal service from the members of the tribal communities. The Marans and Barahis used to supply fuel, water, honey etc. to the Ahom king. With the extension of the Ahom Kingdom more tribes came under the Ahoms. Hence to administer the vast territory more efficient administrative system was needed. Probably it was Sukapha who first introduced the system. In the *paik* system one who was between the age of 16 to 50 had to render personal service to the state.⁴ The *paiks* also had to give military service to the state in times of war as the Ahoms lacked of any standing army organization. Hence there was lots of responsibilities on the shoulder of the *paiks*. In the field of economy the *paiks* had a crucial role. In the Ahom period initially four *paiks* formed a unit or *got* and later in the reign of Ahom king Rajehwar Singha it was reduced to three. Among the three or four *paiks* one had to perform his duties towards the state for three or four months and remaining *paiks* had to cultivate his field. Each *paik* received three puras of cultivable land from the state in return of the manual labor. But those lands were not hereditary and they could not transfer it to others.⁵ In the book *Ahomr Din*, Hiteshwar Barbaura mentioned that the *Paiks* had received land for settlement and for this they had to give one rupee as revenue to the state. On the basis of their work the *paiks* were divided as *Chamua* and *Kanri paiks*. *Kanri paiks* performed the duty as regular peasantry and gave compulsory service in times of war and in time of peace as labor. The *paiks* who were allotted as tenants in the estate of nobles called *bilatiyas*. Those were assigned to the *Satras* and other religious institutions were called *dewaliyas*. Another kind of paiks comprised of *bahatiyas*, who had to yield service to the hill people. *Chamua paiks* were those who were good by birth and could free themselves from state service by paying money.⁶ The *Khel* system was introduced in order to organize different communities under a *khel* who were engaged in different tasks or professions. The villages inhabited by *paiks* worked for different *khels*. Ahom King Pratap Singha had made the *paik* system more strict in 1609 A.D. Momai Tamuli Barbrua was the first who organized the villages and *paik* system under the patronage of Pratap Singha. A Bora was placed above twenty *paiks*, *Saikia* above hundred paiks, *Hazarika* placed above one thousand *paiks* and *Phukan* was above six thousand *paiks*. He also organized and resettled the villages by transferring people from thickly populated region. The resettlement of the villages organized the villages with professionally specialized class such as weavers in Suwalkuchi, Oil pressures at Ramdiya which made their work more productive.⁷ The *paik* system can be considered the back bone of the economy of Assam. But the system of exemption from manual labor for *paiks* by paying compensation reduced the number of *paiks*. Those who worked as *dewaliya*, *bilatiya paik*, *chamua paiks* were free from compulsory state labor. Hence many *paiks* preferred to work as *dewaliya* and *bilatiya paiks*. These situation lacked the number of *paiks* working for state. During the reign of Ahom King Gadadhar Singha (1681-96 A.D.) he captured a large number of *vaishnava* disciples who pretending to be worked under *Satras*. Hence the *paik* system was the basic foundation of the Ahom Economy. They not only performed for state but also as cultivator and military in times of war.

10. ASSIMILATION AND SUBJUGATION

The Ahoms followed the process of assimilation of people and culture. The process of assimilation with the subjugated tribes, migrated people brought more professionally skilled people to the Ahom territory. The Ahoms appointed them on the basis of their skills. For instance we can say about a section of muslim people who were skilled as inscribers (*akharkatia*), embroiders

of gold and silver thread (*guna-katias*), dyers and painters (*rahan-karas*), tailors (*darjis*), Persian readers (*parsi parhias*) etc.⁸ Matrimonial relations and subjugation of tribes also influenced the economy. As the Ahom kings received dowry by establishing marital relations. The subjugated tribes and the tributary kings also contributed to the Ahom economy by offering tribute. The war booties which the Ahom kings received by conquering other state enriched the Ahom treasury.

11. CONCLUSION

The entire system of *paik*, the wet rice cultivation and population pattern connected with other components of economy. The Paik system organized the society systematically and the wet rice brought more surplus production. These two factors had crucial impact in determining the economic condition of the Ahoms. Also the assimilation of the Ahoms with different caste communities and tribes had impact on the economy of Assam. Every tribe and caste were rich in different activities. The Ahom kings utilized all their knowledge in different fields by appointing them in their respective works. Thus the effective organization of their works made the Ahom economy more efficient and systematized.

12. REFERENCES

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