B A 4th Semester

Sub-History (General)

Paper-4.4 (1228-1826 A.D)

Topic-Ahom Administration

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Hist\_IV (General)\_Dr. A Patowary\_Ahom Administration

 With the establishment of the Ahom power in the 13th century, the centre of gravity in Assam's political life shifted from western Assam to the eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley, social structure of the country changed radically and a corresponding change in the administrative set up became inevitable. The Ahoms build up a administrative machinery elaborate and efficient enough to accommodate itself to the tribal and semi-tribal societies in the valley.
         A process of assimilation of Hindu, Tai-Ahom, and Tribal elements was set in, which gave a new orientation to the political and social institutions of the country and its cultural values.
Central Government
**Kingship**
 The Ahom Government was basically monarchic. In theory the king was the source of all powers, the fountain head of justice, but he had to abide by the recommendations of Council of Ministers. The right of succession was generally hereditary of the male line with due regard to the law of primogeniture. But in case of absence of a legal claimant the throne was offered to the king's brother and nearest relatives.
         Divinity was attached to kingship, and his person was considered sacrosanct and inviolable. He was called Swargadeo. In the later part of Ahom rule the concept of divine origin of kingship perverted so much that s prince having any physical blemish was not allowed to sit on the throne.
          The main duty of the king was protection of his subjects.This was evident from the advice given to Khunlung and Khunlai, the progenitors of the Ahoms by their grandfather Lengdon, the God of heaven at the time of their departure to earth, "Just as a man losses his wife if he quarrels with his father-in-law and brother-in-law , and just as a mother bird guards her nestlings with her wings and protects them from rain and storm and rears them up by feeding them herself, so you two brothers should protect your subjects and desist from quarreling with your friends and supporters.
**Coronation Ceremony**
        The Coronation Ceremony called Singari-ghar-utha was an important ceremony of the Ahoms. The king wearing the Somedeo or the image of tutelary deity and carrying the hengdan or the ancestral sword in his hand accompanied by chief queen and chief officials first went to Charaidro, the capital. The royal couple entered in 3 separated chambers called Pat-ghar, Holong- ghar and Singari-ghar.The priest gave necessary instructions regarding the primary duties and function of the king. The king usually mint coins only after coronation ceremony. Sudsngpha or Bamuni Konwar was the first Ahom king to perform the Singari-ghar-utha ceremony, which corresponds to the Abhishek ceremony of the ancient Hindu king.
**Patra Mantris**
            Next to the king was the council of five known as Patra Mantris, consisting of the Buhragohain, Bargohain, Barpatra Gohain, Barbarua and Barphukan. The three Gohains known as Dangarias were hereditary councillors to the state and occupied an exalted position next to the king. It was their duty to select a king from among the legal claiments should there be a problem of succession. If United they could depose a king. However the king could remove a Gohain from his office with the concurrence of the other two. A powerful king could override the decision of the three Gohains. The government was thus a combination of "limited monarchy and oligarchy".
           To each of the Dangarias the king assigned territories in which they exercised most of the rights of independent sovereignty. In times of war they supplied soldiers to the king's army and in normal times contributed labourers for carrying on such works as construction of roads, bridges and temples. Within their respective territories, they could even inflict the penalty of death. The Gohains took the field, when necessary, and all important matters connected with defence,, survey and settlement of land were carried on under their supervision. The authority of Buragohain, the senior most Dangariya extended from the north of Dikhou river to Sadia. The jurisdiction of the Bargohain extended from south of the Dikhou river to Kaliabar.
           The offices of Barbarua and Barphukan created by Pratap Singha in the early part of 17th century were not hereditary and could be filled up by any member of certain specified families excluding those of the hereditary Gohains.The Barphukan was the chief executive and head of judiciary. He was alloted territories laying outside the jurisdictions of the Gohains in upper Assam along with the services of 14,000 paiks who were bound to render service to the king in times of emergency.
           The Barphukan was the viceroy who had his headquarters first at Kaliabar, then at Kajali. With the extension of the Ahom suzerainty his jurisdiction extended from Kaliabar to Goalpara. He then lived at Gauhati and conducted the political relations with Bengal, Bhutan and chieftains of the Assam passes. Placed in distant places from the capital, he enjoyed a great amount of executive powers and could even inflict death sentences. He could nominate and recommend Rajas as tributary to king and collect revenues of those areas of Kamrup. He enjoyed the services of 100 attendants and was alloted 1,000 puras of land.
**Local Goovenors and Vassal Chiefs**
 The princes and the near relatives of the reigning king were appointed as governors in certain areas and they were given the title 'Raja'. Of them, the heir-apparent was usually made the Charing Raja or Governor of a tract called Charing. The next in order of succession was Tipam Raja. The frontiers of kingdom were placed under wardens like Sadiakhowa Gohain, Marangikhowa Gohain who were selected from the families of 3 Gohains. The province of Darrang enjoyed full autonomy in its internal administration, so did the other Vassal states like Rani, Luki, Beltola, Barduar, Dimarua, Neli and Gobha. In times of war they assist the king with paiks.
**Paiks or Khel System**
 The organization of the society during the Ahom rule was known as the Paik or Khel system. The system was systematically implemented by Momai Tamuli Barbarua under King Pratap Singha. Under the Khel or paik system, every adult male between the age of 16 to 50 was registered as paik for state service. Four paik (later 3 ) formed a unit called got. The paik in a got rendered service to the state in rotation, one paik serving for 3 (later 4) months a year. The cultivation or domestic concern of the paik on duty was looked after by the comrades in a got. In times of emergency 2, sometimes 3 paiks were recruited from each got. The first levy in a got was called mul, the second dewal, the third tewal.
            Some paiks were also organised professional khels like boat-building and arrow making for the state. The larger Khels like that of boat building were placed under the charge of a Phukan (Naosaliya Phulan) and smaller Khel like that of bow making were placed under a Barua (Dhenu chocha Barua).
            The control of the state over the paik was very rigid. Over each 20 paiks was a officer called Barua, over 100 Saikia, over1000 Hazarika, and over 6000 Phukan. The paiks besides rendering their personal service to the state, had to fulfill some feudal obligations to their masters. When called upon they were to cultivate the land of their masters and had to give gifts on certain specified occasion. By paying commutation money of Rs 3/ per annum a paik could exempt from personal service.
            The paiks were broadly divided into two classes-kanri and chamua. The regular pesantry, which was bound to give its service to the state as a soldier in times of war and as a labourer in times of peace was called kanri paik. Peasants of good birth were called chamua paiks. They enjoyed exemption from personal state service by paying commutation money. Those paiks working as tenants in the private landed estate of the nobles were called bilatiyas. These two classes of paiks were exempted from paying a number of taxes and were not sending to battlefield unless the situation so demanded.  Besides the bahatiya paiks were to render service to their hill masters.
            Each paik in return for his service to the state was allotted two puras of best arable land called ga-mati, free of charge. The land however belonged to the Khel and not hereditary.
            The paiks, whether they pursued another craft or not, were all peasants. The professional paiks were kept under strict royal supervision so that trade was not allowed to grow among them. In Kamrup however, the Khel system could not implement in proper sense. People pursued some trade, giving rise to something like guilds. So the paik system was obstacle to the growth and development of trade and professions.
            The paik system enabled the king go the maximum utilisation of man-power both in times of war and peace. It proved an effective weapons to fight the external enemies. When the danger of external aggression was over, then the paik system also facing popular resistance. Purnanand  Buragohain realised the defects of the paik system, so decided to raise a standing army. It was too late. Meanwhile people's dislike for this system grow silently during the war of resistance and their resentments took the form of popular rebellion under the leadership of the rising feudal lords or head of Satras.

 **References-**

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2. A History of Assam- Edward Gait.

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