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The Ahom Kingdom: A Historical Analysis on its Political Strategy and Governance System

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Abstract:

The Ahom Kingdom established in the early 13th century, located in present-day Assam, India, was notable for its unique blend of indigenous and external influences, shaped its political and administrative systems maintaining its sovereignty for nearly 600 years and successfully resisting Mughal expansion in Northeast India. The study explores the Ahom kings' political authority and their methods of consolidating power through innovative governance strategies. Key elements include the role of the Swargadeo (king) as both a political and spiritual leader. The kingdom's approach to law and order, land management, and integration of diverse ethnic groups within its territory, diplomatic strategies, which contributed to their stability and expansion. By analyzing historical texts, administrative records, and contemporary scholarly interpretations, this paper provides insights into how the Ahom Kingdom's governance system influenced its political stability, legacy, and administrative efficiency. This analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of historical governance systems and their relevance to modern political studies.

Keywords: Ahom, Assam, Governance, Structure, System.

Introduction: The Ahom Kingdom, which was founded in the early 13th century in what is now Assam, India, is a remarkable example of political stability that has been maintained and creative governance in the face of many obstacles. From the 13th to the 19th century, the Kingdom thrived in northeastern India and is a noteworthy example of native statecraft and governance. The kingdom, which was founded by the Tai Ahom people, is well known for its distinctive political tactics that helped it to withstand colonial forces and strong regional powers while retaining its independence. The Ahom kings skilfully combined different ethnic groups, creating a multicultural society that strengthened the stability and adaptability of the kingdom. Over the course of nearly 600 years, from 1228 to 1226, the Ahom Kingdom successfully resisted the Mughal Empire's ambitious expansionist plans in Northeast India while simultaneously preserving its sovereignty. Chao Lung Siu-Ka-Pha (Sukapha) founded the Ahom kingdom, which was located in modern-day China and belonged to the Shan branch of the Tai group in Southeast Asia. The Ahom administration

was a well-organized, multi-level hierarchical system of governance that was monarchical in nature and infused with many democratic values. With a traditional administrative structure, the Ahom society was traditional. "Monarchy was the normal form of Government although it was somewhat peculiar," according to Sir Edward Gait in his book "A History of Assam" regarding the administration of Ahom. Ahom government was referred to as an "oligarchical monarchy" by N.N. Acharya in his book "The History of Medieval Assam." Their administration system, which possessed a number of unusual features that allowed the Ahoms to rule for 600 years, was the basis for their long reign. The Ahoms had a single feudal system in which the crown was the sole owner of the land. Chao-pha is the name of the Ahom king; the Assamese equivalent is Swargodeu. Together, Chao and Pha are given the meanings of king and heaven, respectively, signifying heavenly king.

An attribute of the Ahom political strategy that set it apart was its adaptable approach to governance. The Ahom kings established a decentralized administrative system that preserved central supervision while granting considerable local autonomy. This system promoted loyalty among various ethnic groups and made resource management more efficient, which helped to create a sense of unity among the many cultures that make up the mosaic. The Ahom's policies, which encouraged interfaith unions and cross-cultural interactions to forge a stronger social fabric, demonstrate their dedication to inclusivity. Another essential component of the Ahom's political strategy was their diplomatic acumen. The kingdom skilfully handled alliances and rivalries with surrounding nations, securing its borders with both force and diplomacy. Using a combination of strategic warfare and diplomacy, the Ahoms successfully repelled invasions by the Mughals and other regional powers, demonstrating their skill at striking a balance between aggression and diplomacy. A participatory approach to administration was made possible by the rulers' establishment of a council known as the "Buranji," which functioned as both a historical record and a tool for governance. This emphasis on accountability and documentation was progressive and helped to create a more informed and involved public.

Objectives:

1. To highlight the political authority of the Swargadeo (king).
2. To assess the strategies of Ahom Kingdom governance system in maintaining its legacy.

Methodology: The study uses a descriptive and analytical methodology, concentrating on a historical analysis of the governance and ruling structure of the Ahom Dynasty. Secondary data from a variety of sources, such as books, journals, academic publications, editorial opinions from newspapers, and scholarly articles, is incorporated into the study.

Chao-Lung- Siu-Ka-Pha's Role in founding Ahom Kingdom: During the 13th century, the first Ahom King Siu-ka-pha crossed the rough Patkai mountain range to arrive in the Brahmaputra valley from Mong Mao, where he was a member of the Tai community. In all, over nine thousand people were with him, including his two sons, three queens, numerous nobilities and their families, additional officials and their families, and soldiers. Although the exact details of Siu-ka-pha's birth are still unknown, historical accounts and records

place his parents' birthplace in the Tai state of Mong, which is now the province of Yunan in China, as Chao- Chang- Nyeu and Nang Mong- Blak- Kham- Sen. Mong Mao was left in 1215 by Siu-Ka-Pha. He entered the Naga valley, where Siu-Ka-Pha clashed with the Nagas, prior to traversing the Patkai hills. From the upper Burma region, Siu-Ka-Pha traveled by land via the Yamuna to reach India from China. One of his cousins, Samlungfa, arrived in Assam ten or twelve years prior to Siu-Ka-Pha and took over the regions extending from Tripura to Khasi Hill. People in the area paid taxes to Samlungfa, who established a few ministerial positions in the area. One of the ministers sent by Samlungfa to establish the Ahom Kingdom was a Naga, and he provided assistance to Siu-Ka-Pha. Because they respected Siu-Ka-Pha's ability to lead, the kings of Borahi and Moran welcomed him when he began to rule Assam. Siu-Ka-Pha introduced the science of cultivation, imparting knowledge on how to transform barren land into a fertile agricultural area. The people in the area learned how to preserve food and how to grow new varieties of rice from Siu-Ka-Pha. Siu-Ka-Pha continued to travel over the ensuing years in search of a suitable location to establish his capital. When he arrived at Tipam in 1230, he saw a stunning land, but he decided the place was unsuitable, so he set out and arrived in Abhoypur, where he remained until 1238. He did not stay in Abhoypur for long; in 1241, he moved to Habung, in the modern-day Dhemaji district, as he did not think the area was suitable for his capital due to frequent flooding. Siu-Ka-Pha eventually established his capital at Charaideo in 1251 after looking in numerous locations. Perched above the flatlands was a small hill known as Charaideo. Charaideo was the first capital of the Ahom kingdom because Siu-Ka-Pha chose it as his capital. Thus, Siu-Ka-Pha had a long-term vision to locate the capital in the most advantageous location possible. He understood the importance of the capital's geographic location for the smooth operation and expansion of a kingdom. The success of the Ahom kingdom in Assam can undoubtedly be attributed in part to Siu-Ka-Pha's vision. In contrast to aggression, Siu-Ka-Pha prioritized cooperation. Most of the territories under the control of the Chutias, Kacharis, Morans, Borahis, etc. were subjugated by Siu-Ka-Pha. In the Ahom kingdom, matrimonial alliances were a tactic for maintaining diplomatic relations as well as for territorial expansion and defence. This was in addition to aggression and cooperation. Ahom women were utilized as political instruments in these situations. In order to further their assimilation with the local tribes at the outset and to further the formation of the Ahom kingdom, Siu-Ka-Pha even married women from other local tribes, such as the daughters of Thakumatha, the chief of the Borahi tribe, and Badaucha, the chief of the Moran tribe. Another factor that allowed Ahom kings to keep friendly relations with a large number of people during their reign was polygamy. In a process known as Ahomization, those who embraced the Ahom way of life and politics were accepted into their group. The process resulted in the complete subsumption of some groups, such as the Borahi people, and the Ahom population being greatly increased by the conversion of some other groups, such as the Nagas and the Moran peoples. Up until the 16th century, when the kingdom expanded significantly geographically under Suhungmung, at the expense of the Chutiya and Kachari kingdoms, this Ahomization process was especially important. Almost entirely, Sukapha subjugated the region of upper Assam, stretching from the Patkai Range at the border of

upper Burma to the tract east of the Kacharis and south-west of the Chutias. His capital, Charaideo, was established in the present-day Sivsagar district.

In his administration, Siu-Ka-Pha established two significant ministerial positions, Buragohain and Borgohain, whose appointments were hereditary and came from particular families. These positions were not open to princes who qualified for the Swargadeo post. They were granted independent lands in the 1280s, and these lands, known as Rajya or Bilat, were their sovereign domain. The Burhagohain occupied the region to the west of the Burai river, and the Borgohain occupied the area to the north of the Brahmaputra, between the Sadiya and Gerelua rivers. Over the paiks under their control, they were granted complete authority. Siu-Ka-Pha assembled his council of obedient subjects to their king, the land, and their responsibilities because he recognized the importance of a strong administrative structure to a prosperous dynasty.

The Governance Structure: Even though the king was supremely powerful and the embodiment of justice, he was nevertheless bound to follow the Council of Ministers' advice. On the male line, the right to succeed was typically inherited. Nonetheless, the throne was offered to the king's brother or the closest relative in the event that there was no legitimate claimant. By dictating on his deathbed that his sons should take turns ruling the nation after him, Rudra Singha transgressed the custom of the right of succession. The protection of the people was the king's primary responsibility; foreign policy was another. In Charaideo, a grandiose event known as Singari Ghar Utha is held to crown the king.

The relationship that the Ahoms built with the tribes in the southeast of the Brahmaputra valley gave rise to the paik or khel system, which was the social structure in place during their rule. The Paik system was established by Siu-Ka-Pha, who demanded personal services from the tribal communities' members. These services included providing the ruling tribe with fuel, water, honey, and other necessities. However, Momai Tamuli Baruah worked under Pratap Singh to methodically execute the Paik system. Male adults who were willing to work for the good of the state made up the Paiks. The most distinctive aspect of the Ahom system of government, which allowed the king to force the people to perform services for the states, was the introduction of the Paik system. For State service, any adult male between the ages of sixteen and fifty was registered as a paik under the Khel or Paik system. A unit known as Got was made up of four (later three) paiks. Every paik in a got was required to serve the State in turn, with each paik dedicating three (and eventually four) months of service annually. The paik on duty had his comrades in a got take care of his domestic duties and cultivation. Emergency situations required the recruitment of two, occasionally three, paiks from each got; the first levy in a got was known as the mul, the second as the dewal, and the third as the tewal. A few paiks were also grouped into professional khels, each of which provided the State with a specific type of productive job, such as building boats and arrows. The state maintained extremely strict control over the paiks. An officer named Bora was in charge of every 20 paiks, Saikia over 100 paiks, Hazarika over 1000 paiks, and Phukan over 6000 paiks.

Suhungmung added the Borpatrogohain, a third Gohain, in the sixteenth century. The lands of the other two Gohains, Borgohain and Buragohain, were situated between the Borpatrogohain's territory. Two additional offices that were directly under the king's authority were added by Pratap Singha: Borbarua and Borphukan. East of Kaliabor was under the authority of the Borbarua, who served as both the military and the head of the judiciary. Just a portion of the paiks at his command could be used for his personal benefit; the remainder had to be used to support the state of Ahom. Acting as the viceroy of the Swargadeo in the west, the Borphukan held both military and civil authority over the territory west of Kaliabor.

Five outstanding ministers, chosen by the king, made up the Council of Ministers: the Borgohain, the Burhagohain, the Barpatrogohain, the Barbarua, and the Barphukan. Each of them had a personal accountability to the King. They didn't have collective responsibility in the contemporary sense of parliament, but they did discuss policy and day-to-day operations as a group in the King's Council Chamber. The Barphukan, one of these counselors, resided in his remote headquarters in Lower Assam. He had no right to use the sword or to decapitate someone. With the heavy duty of thwarting the Mughal India invasion route through the main gateway of Gauhati (Guwahati), the Barphukan had to protect the kingdom. The Pani Phukan, Deka Phukan, Neog Phukan, and the two Chetia Phukans were among the six Phukans present in his court to assist and counsel him in the effective performance of his duties. As chief revenue officer, chief secretary, and head of the judiciary, the Barbarua, who held equal status with the Barphukan, was required to be present at the royal court at all times. He heard appeals from all subordinate courts. A judge known as the Nyay sodha Phukan (Phu-kan-Phu-shan-ngin) presided over all cases, save those that the King alone could decide. The judge was expected to be an expert in law. Apart from the provinces ruled by the Great Gohains, all of the lands east of Kaliabar fell under the Barbarua's legal authority. A property valued at 14,000 paiks was also bestowed upon him. His estate's servants could be slightly disfigured, but he lacked the authority to order the execution of criminals. Equal standing belonged to the three Great Gohains. Rajmantri was the title given to one of them. It was always essential to have their agreement on significant matters. In the case of incapacity or extreme delinquency, they could remove the Monarch, who they had proclaimed. The majority of their autonomous rights to sovereignty were exercised in the provinces that were assigned to each. With the Gohains, the line of succession was typically hereditary, with the exception of situations in which a Gohain's son was rendered incapable due to incapacity or another reason. When it was thought that the Great Council's counsel and approval was required on a significant matter, like war and peace, the choice of a new monarch in the event that the established line failed, or any disorder or uprising in the nation, the council was called together. The heirs and close relatives of the reigning king were bestowed with the offices of Tipam, Chaing, and Namrupia Rajas, which were not hereditary. These Rajas assisted the King in running state affairs and relieved him of less significant responsibilities, exercising the same powers as the Great Gohains.

The Unique Strategy: Sukapha's military strategy allowed the Ahoms, who had a modest beginning, to reach a high watermark. The king's military victory in the early days rested solely on the three Gohains. Infantry and elephants made up the bulk of the Ahom army. And in times of war, the kheldar could call upon the paiks as a standing militia. Guerrilla warfare was combined with open encounters in war strategy. Additionally, the Ahoms possessed a highly skilled espionage network and an effective navy, which allowed the king to keep a watch on crucial state affairs. Law and Justice: Hindu laws outlined by the Brahmanas have been largely adhered to in modern times when it comes to civil matters. The criminal code was known for its strictness and comparative harshness. For example, when it came to crimes against people, the general rule was "an eye for an eye" and "a tooth for a tooth," meaning that the offender would receive the exact same punishment that he had inflicted on the complainant. Trials were held before the Barbarua and the Barphukan, who were the principal judicial authorities in their respective provinces. Revenue Administration: The subjects and the land belonged to the State equally under the national laws. The paik system was implemented in upper Assam, so cash payments for land revenue were not necessary. Chandrakanta Singha imposed a kharikatana tax on lands in Kamrup. Additionally, Kamrup's revenue administration was distinct from that of eastern Assam, where the Muhammadans continued to use Bengal's revenue system. The districts were split up into parganas, which were under Choudhury's jurisdiction, for budgetary purposes. Subsequent parganas were split up into Taluk, each overseen by a Talukdar. The land that the Ahoms rajas granted can be divided into various categories, including Debottor land, which was used for temple upkeep, Brahmottor land, which was given to the brahmanas, and Dharmottor land, which was given for charitable and religious reasons.

Conclusion: An intricate fusion of military might, inclusive political norms, and efficient administrative structures can be seen in the governance and strategic frameworks developed by the Ahom Kingdom under Siu-Ka-Pha and his successors. A difficult geopolitical environment was made possible for the kingdom to prosper by the foundation Siu-Ka-Pha laid through the integration of various communities, the paik system, and the creation of hereditary ministerial positions.

The use of matrimonial alliances and the incorporation of neighboring tribes, which not only expanded their territory but also enhanced their cultural fabric, are two examples of the Ahom approach to governance, which prioritized cooperation over simple conquest. Effective governance was made possible while preserving local autonomy thanks to the special fusion of a powerful central authority and a decentralized administrative structure. The success of the Ahom Kingdom's governance model, which deftly struck a balance between tradition and adaptability, is demonstrated by its legacy. The remarkable achievements and lasting impact of the Ahom Kingdom serve as a reminder of the value of cooperative politics and cultural assimilation in promoting societal resilience and cohesion.

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