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An assessment of the economic condition of the Ahom People (1526-1707)

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Abstract

To evaluate the economic condition of Ahom people during 1526-1707, various aspects related to Assam have to be observed which include climate of Assam, area expansion of Assam, production, people of Assam, economic system of Assam, currency system, agricultural system, urbanization etc. aspects have to be evaluated. During the period 1526-1707, many Mughal attacks were made on Assam due to which the situation of ups and downs continued and ultimately the Ahom people got victory in 1681 AD. The Mughal-Assamese contact that was established during the Mughal period brought out many new facts in which Assamese administration, military power, weapons, various situations of war which arose due to the geographical structure and natural climate of Assam were observed. To clarify the facts related to Assam-Mughal relations during the Mughal period, it is important to review all the facts related to Assam during the period 1526-1707.

Keywords: Ahom people, economic policy, agricultural system, market system, currency system

Introduction

Ahom Tribal Area Assam was a very diverse region between 1526-1707 where many rivers flowed which surrounded the landmass of Assam from three sides, in clear words these rivers formed the border of Assam from three sides. And on one side, the high mountain used to sing the victory of Assam by taking upon itself the responsibility of border security of Assam. It rained throughout the year and hence there was abundance of bushes and forests which made this region a scary and dangerous place due to which it was difficult to approach this country easily. Many people lived near the border of this country. In Assam, the Brahmaputra River used to flow from east to west, "The length of Assam from west to east is 200 kosh from Gauhati to Sadion and its width from north to south is from the hills of Garo, Miri, Mismi, Dafla and Ladakh to the hills of Naga people. It is equivalent to a journey of about 7 or 8 days, its southern hills correspond in length to the Khasiyan, Cachar and Gonsheer hill regions and in width to the Naga people" (Sarkar Jadunath, 1921) ^[1].

Thus, between 1526-1707, the border of Assam extended to the border of Ladakh hill and Gonsheer hill, near the Assam border area was the area inhabited by Garo, Miri, Mismi, Dafla, Naga people, the height of the mountain in Assam was quite high. "There are high mountains in Assam to the north-west of Bengal, the length of which is 100 Jaribi Karoh" (Syed Anees Jahan, 1977) ^[2]. Thus the border of Assam extended to the state of Bengal. The climate here, located at a short distance from the Brahmaputra, was very poisonous for the foreign warriors and visitors, the people living in Assam were familiar with the way of living in the natural climate here, in which the Assamese people lived like a soldier. And every person there looked like a soldier. The adversity of nature had greatly strengthened the survival of the Assamese due to which the climate was beneficial for them but was a very poisonous environment for other outsiders. "At some distance from the Brahmaputra river the climate was poisonous for foreigners, it rained eight months of the year and even four months of winter" (Gatt E.A., 1933) ^[3]. Due to heavy rainfall in Assam between 1526-1707 AD, the ground always remained slippery. Due to adequate rainfall, there was always moisture in the climate which was very harmful for foreigners. Due to excessive rainfall, the ground became covered with bushes and a dense forest was formed in Assam due to which the entry route into Assam was full of difficulties and due to which it remained safe from external attacks for 300 years.

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Objective

The aim of the researcher to show the economic condition of Ahom people between 1526 and 1707 is that many misconceptions can be removed by evaluating this neglected society which has currently become synonymous with backward and barbaric community. Tribal history is seen in a state of neglect but the above statement “Until the lion has its own history, the history of the hunter makes the prey proud” seems to be true. The researcher has the following objective of making the title the subject matter-

1. Wants to bring to light that the economic development of Ahom people was similar to that of Rajputs and Mughals.
2. It is often believed that the tribal people consider the people of the outside society as their enemies and want to avoid establishing relations with the outside world, whereas the Ahom people had trade relations with many countries, this has to be brought to light.
3. There is a perception that the transactions of tribal people depend on the exchange of simple goods, but we see that the Ahom people use currency and coins as a medium of trade; this has to be pointed out.
4. The original tribal structure of the Ahom people was breaking and economic development was taking place, this has to be brought to light.
5. Ahom people are seen assimilating new customs and traditions in the agricultural tradition, as a result of which they make new experiments in the agricultural tradition and connect other caste groups with the agricultural tradition; this has to be brought to light.
6. The Ahom people develop self-sufficient villages between 1526 and 1707, resulting in extensive urbanization in Assam.

Literary Survey

Different historians made it the subject matter by keeping the Ahom people in context, the assessment made by these historians has been less in throwing light on the social and economic structure of the Ahoms during the transition period between 1526 to 1707. These historians worked by keeping the topic of political activities of the Ahom people at the center, as a result of which the entire situation related to the Ahom people cannot be observed and their evaluation related to the Ahom people comes before us as a weak link.

W. Ravenson was the first to look at the Ahom people as the subject matter in “A Descriptive Account of Assam” in 1841. After spending 15 years on Assam and Ahom people, he has thrown light on the political, administrative and economic history of Ahom people. The editor of this book is Dr. Ramesh Chandra Kalika (Retired Prof. Tezpur College, Assam). After this E.A. Gait has evaluated the important facts related to Ahom people in his book “A History of Assam” in 1933, but this book also underlines the political developments. The biggest weakness of this book is that it does not give importance to the date. Has gone. Along with this, in 1970 N. Of. Vasu wrote the book “Assam in Ahom Age”. In this book, he has thrown light on the history of Assam from the establishment of the Ahom people to the language of the Ahom people. In 1974, Surya Kumar Bhuiya wrote the book “Eglo Assamese Relations”. This book shows us the development of Hindu religion or Aryan civilization in Assam as well as the relationship of Ahoms with other tribal people.

In 1984, Dr. N. N. Acharya wrote the book “History of

Medieval Assam”, this book highlights the geographical location of Assam and the trade relations of Assam with other border countries. S. I. Barua wrote “A Comparative History of Assam” in 1995 AD, in this book also the political development of Assam has been underlined, in this book he has given important place to the political works of Ahom rulers. Even after these works, we do not get complete information about the facts related to the changes in the economic development of the Ahom people between 1526 and 1707, due to which the sociological historical assessment of the Ahom people appears to be incomplete.

Hypothesis

Many Indian laws and regulations were adopted in the economic system by the Ahom tribal society, which must have affected the form of the Ahom tribal society and as a result, the tribal form of Ahom started breaking and people from other castes entered the Ahom tribal area. The form of agricultural system started changing in the Ahom tribal area, due to which, as a result of contact with people of other caste communities, the Ahom people would have come out of the tribal society and its traditions and came under the influence of expansionist tradition and would have adopted their customs.

The business and economic position of the Ahom tribal chiefs was very strong, as a result of which the Ahom chiefs must have worked for the benefit of the lower class Ahoms, due to which urbanization is seen in the Ahom region. Along with the upper and middle class Ahoms, the lower class Ahoms must have played an important role in business activities. While the role of people associated with the monarchy was essential in conducting administrative activities, the Ahoms of rural areas must have played an important role in small jagirs with the help of Ahom chiefs.

Methodology

The presented research related facts will be obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The facts obtained have been analyzed on the basis of historical method. In the context of social utility of analysis, practical method of research has been used in which-

1. To relate the facts obtained from primary and secondary sources.
2. To relate the facts obtained from regional sources and contemporary Persian sources.

Primary Sources: In the presented study, contemporary regional inscriptions, Barunji, works of contemporary Mughal historians and travelogues of foreign travelers have also been used as primary sources. Apart from this, the texts written by the Mughal emperors have an important contribution in it. In this research, help has been taken from different regional literatures like Bengali, Assamese, Hindi, Sanskrit etc.

An Assessment of the Economic Condition of the Ahom People (1526-1707)

An introspection of the economic condition of the Ahom people between 1526-1707 makes it clear that the Ahom tribal area Assam was a country of golden land. Here, the people of Assam had received the gift of many natural resources from nature for free, which made the people of Assam self-reliant. Here, there was sufficient stock of all the things necessary for the life of any human being. “From the

point of view of production, Assam is the best country in Asia where all the essential things for human life were available. In Assam, gold, silver, steel, glass, iron were found in large quantities and silk was found in large quantities and whatever silk was available was made from trees and animals" (Travenier J.B., 2007) ^[4]. Travenier called this country the best country in Asia and the gold and silver mines found here were present which are essential for the progress of any country, due to which Assam became a very prosperous country during the time of Aurangzeb. Was present. This abundant reserve of nature was responsible for the power of Assam even during the time of Aurangzeb due to which the Mughal rulers made the North-East Frontier Policy and many Mughal raids were carried out in Assam. "Silk, gold and silver were found in the southern part of Assam. Aurangzeb's Mughal Subedar Mir Jumla had prepared a written list of 20 thousand people, mostly landlords, who were employed in collecting gold" (Syed Anees Jahan, 1977) ^[2]. During the invasion of Assam, Mughal Subedar Mir Jumla saw 20 thousand people engaged in collecting gold and silver in this country, whose list was made by Mir Jumla. The fact that such a large number of people were engaged in this work in this country meant that there was abundant amount of gold and silver available in this area.

In improving the economic condition of Ahom tribe, the nature provided forest produce and agricultural crops of Ahom state helped. Many types of fruits were produced in Assam, due to abundance of rainfall, many types of sugarcane crops were produced which were produced in different colours. "Between 1526-1707, in Assam, lemon, betel nut, peepal, different varieties of sugarcane, banana, mango, pineapple trees grew on the land without any limit, black, white, red types of sugarcane were found." (Syed Anees Jahan, 1977) ^[2]. Thus, after observing the facts related to Ahom people, it becomes clear that due to the favorable natural climate, forests developed in Assam due to which the density of many types of fruit trees were present in Assam and Assam has a very favorable climate from the point of view of orchards.

On introspecting the facts related to the economic condition of the Ahom tribe, it becomes clear that the people of Assam used to make many types of goods themselves and also produced and traded them on a large scale. The Assamese people of Aurangzeb's era were very hardworking and maintained their livelihood by carefully using the natural gifts given by nature. Lac was produced in abundance in Assam, which was of two types and was made red in color from trees. With its help Asami used to dye unprinted white cloth and when the cloth turned red then they used lac to make golden cabinets and various types of objects and Spanish wax. Lakhs were exported largely to China and Japan for making cabinets. To fulfill this purpose, the best lac of Asia was produced here" (Travenier JB, 2007) ^[4]. In this way, high quality lac was prepared in Assam, which was used in making wooden items, it was used on a large scale in wax manufacturing. On introspecting the facts related to the Ahom tribal region of Assam between 1526-1707, it becomes clear that Assam had trade relations with China and Japan, inter-state trade relations were established with the aim of meeting its needs. The Ahom rulers were always ready to improve the economic condition of their kingdom. "The Ahom ruler Chakradhwaja introduced the measurement and census of

land in the Ahom kingdom" (Vashu N.K., 1970) ^[5]. This measurement of land continued during the reign of Ahom rulers Gadadhar Singh, Rudra Singh, Shiv Singh and was completed during the reign of Pramatt Singh. "The largest unit of land measurement in Ahom state was Pura* whose measurement was equal to 57 thousand 6 hundred square feet or 1.32 air. The other unit of measurement was Bigha which measured 14 thousand 4 hundred square feet" (Niyog Maheshwar, 1973). "One Bigha was equal to 5 Katthas and the smallest unit of measurement was Licha which measured 144 square feet. A stick was used as a measuring instrument, which measured 4.2 centimeters"

(Niyog Maheshwar, 1973), this was the oldest method of measurement. Ahom ruler Chakradhwaj made a plan to strengthen the agricultural system and income of the state by arranging the scattered and spread lands of the Ahom state. Now the preparation of accounts of the already existing land system began. This system ensured the decline of the clan-based agricultural system.

Ahom ruler Chakradhwaj changed the existing land system and for the first time separated residential land from agricultural land and typed the correct measurement of cultivated land. Chakradhwaj decided to measure the tax free land provided by the state and impose tax on it also. "Chakradhwaja imposed a tax called Khariktana on the tax-free land, which was 6 annas on a pura" (Mills A.J.M., 1984) ^[7]. Chakradhwaj worked to ensure the income of the state by creating a new agricultural policy in the Ahom state. Other Ahom rulers also took many steps to strengthen the agricultural system. Now in the Ahom state, the narrow-mindedness and caste barriers associated with doing agricultural work weakened, as a result "along with Ahom farmers, cobblers, washermen, Kahars, barbers, boatmen (fishermen) etc. all got involved in agricultural work. Along with these castes, Brahmins also started taking part in agricultural work" (Wade J.P., 1927; Bhuiya Surya Kumar, 1974) ^[8, 9].

Many policies were adopted from time to time by the Ahom rulers for improved agricultural system, as a result of which every section of the society along with the Brahmin class took part.

The advanced agricultural system contributed in improving and strengthening the economic condition of the Ahom people.

Ahom tribal rulers took up the task of formulating policies from time to time for the better economic condition of the state. Gave important place to trade and market system in his economic policy. Ahom ruler Pratap Singh established two markets for the development of the state and ease of buying and selling of goods, the first of which was Doopgarh and the second was Namchang Borhat. The Naga people used to bring salt from the salt mines in Namchang Borhat, in return they took rice, tin, thick red cotton and dry fiber" (Wilcox R., 1853; Datta Ajit, 1990) ^[10]. The commercial activities of the Ahom state in which "development of manufacturing, industry, crafts, commerce etc. promoted urbanization" (Vashu N.K., 1970) ^[5]. The development of markets and haats gradually attracted builders, artists, craftsmen, business class, manufacturers and other organizations. Ahom ruler Gadadhar established "Barkola Town" (Bhuiya Surya Kumar – Editor, 1933) ^[12], Ahom ruler Rudra Singh established "Rangpur Town" (Bhuiya Surya Kumar – Editor, 1933) ^[12] which remained the capital of Ahoms for 80 years. "It is mentioned in

Devdhai Assam Barunji that Rajeshwar Singh's minister Chandrakirti Baruva developed a market in Raha, in this market people like Nagas, Kacharis, Karbis, Sinthas etc. from different areas came to buy different goods." (Bhuiya Surya Kumar-Editor, 1933) ^[12]. Apart from these markets, "Ahom ruler Gadadhar Singh established two markets named Chowkihat and Rajhat" (Barpujari HK-Editor, 2004) ^[13]. "Rudra Singh established a market in Gobha from a commercial point of view" (Bhuiya Surya Kumar – Editor, 1933) ^[12]. By observing the facts related to the haatmarket system of Ahom people, it becomes clear that "Ahom ruler Jaidhwaj Singh established Phulguri Haat to facilitate trade with Jaintia and Garo castes" (Bhuiya Surya Kumar – Editor, 1933; Barpujari H. K.-Editor, 2004) ^[12, 13]. "Rudra Singh established the outposts of Raha and Jagi near Jayantiya and Garo border from where betel nut, betel leaf, paddy, silver, cotton were traded and the profits were divided among Kachari, Mikri-Kachari and local officials." (Bhuiya Surya Kumar-Editor, 1933; Neog Maheshwar, 1973) ^[13, 6-15]. Ahom ruler Rudra Singh took important steps to connect the Ahom people with the border states, Rudra Singh understood the economic importance of trade, hence he established many haats, markets, marts, foreign markets. The market-markets established by the Ahom rulers contributed significantly in strengthening the economic condition of the Ahom people. These markets changed the nature of the closed and unsophisticated economy as a result of which the Ahom people came into contact with outside states. Buying and selling of goods gave rise to new scientific thinking.

By observing the facts related to the Ahom people, it becomes clear that the changing nature of the markets gave rise to a detailed and self-sufficient urban plan by the Ahom rulers, where people of different communities and castes were settled, after which social, cultural, harmony was established. Together, peace and harmony can be promoted. A strategic plan was made by the Ahom rulers for the construction of such self-sufficient towns and land was allotted by the Ahom rulers for these towns. The Ahom ruler "Pratap Singh founded self-sufficient towns called Basa Doyundya" (Wade J.P., 1927) ^[8]. "An entire village in which people from caste communities like Dhobi, Mali, Teli, Kahar, Tanti, Chamar, Sonar etc. were settled along with the Ahom people" (Wade J.P., 1927) ^[8]. Along with Brahmins, Dom, Garia, Boriya etc. were settled in such self-reliant villages. Apart from this tribal cultural system, everyone was settled together by the Ahom rulers. Such self-reliant villages definitely underline the change in the tribal, social and cultural system of the Ahom people, this is historically confirmed by the above mentioned facts.

When the Ahom market system got connected with the trade of other countries, 'currency' became the medium of the market system. Now the circulation of currency increased along with transactions in buying and selling. By introspecting the facts related to Ahom people, it becomes clear that earlier the medium of trade was based on exchange. "Shihabuddin Talish writes that the currency system in the Ahom kingdom was based on cowries and gold coins" (Rodges N.G. and Bose S.K., 2004) ^[14]. In the then Barunji, there were "Mohar, Taka, Sikka (Rupee), Athhalli (Half Rupee), Sikki or Maha (Quarter Rupee), Aad Maha (1/8 Rupee), Charatiya (1/16 Rupee) and Kara or Curry (Kauri)." (Niyoga Maheshwar, 1973) etc. are mentioned. "Jayadhwaja was the first Ahom ruler during

whose reign coins were officially minted" (Gogoi P., 1976) ^[16]. Earlier, coins were issued by Ahom rulers on the occasion of very special celebrations and festivals. "On the occasion of festivals, coins were minted to give as gifts to Brahmins, sages, officials, members of the royal family" (Chaudhary Tapan Roy and Habib Irfan-Editors, 1982; Rodage N.G. and Bose S.K., 2004) ^[17, 18]. The circulation of gold, silver and copper coins and the currency based market system in the Ahom tribal society between 1526 to 1707 is indicative of the advanced economic condition of the Ahom people.

On observing the revenue system of Ahom people, we get information about two important sources related to Ahom revenue, "First is the inscription related to land grant, second is the revenue text Perakkat" (Chaudhary Tapan Roy and Habib Irfan-Editors, 1982) ^[17]. In Assam, the upper part of the Ahom kingdom, there was no tax system, no revenue tax officer was appointed and in its place the 'Pike' system existed. By examining the facts related to the cash tax system in the Ahom state, it becomes clear that after the capture of Cooch Raja by the Mughal army in 1612 AD and the demand for cash as compensation, Pratap Singh realized the importance of cash tax. Sensing this, first of all it was decided to collect some taxes in cash form and started collecting taxes in cash" (Mills A.J.M., 1984) ^[7].

"Pratap Singh imposed house tax, tax on some lands, business tax, property tax, personal tax, spade tax, wood tax etc." (Mills A.J.M., 1984) ^[7]. "In the Ahom state, 'Katal' was a personal tax which was imposed on artists, in which gold and brass artisans were charged Rs 5, fishermen and oilmen were taxed at Rs 3 and silk traders were charged Rs 2" (Niyoga Maheshwar, 1973). To collect taxes in the Ahom state, "Ahom ruler Pratap Singh formed a tax department for the operation of which two officers were appointed – first Barbaruwa and second Barphukan. In the Ahom state, Barbaruwa was the chief executive revenue officer and also the judicial officer of Upper Assam" (Bhuiya Surya Kumar – Editor, 1933) ^[12]. "During the time of Rudra Singh, two central revenue departments were established – the first in Rangpur (Upper Assam) and the second in Gauhati (Lower Assam)" (Bhuiya Surya Kumar-Editor, 1933) ^[12]. The Ahom rulers now divided the kingdom's border into two parts to collect cash taxes. The Ahom kings also entered into agreements with the frontier states to collect taxes in the frontier areas. In the Ahom state, the means of tax collection were collected through personal service tax and secondly by taking share in the produce of the land, but as a result of the changing political circumstances, the Ahom rulers gave place to the cash tax system in the Ahom tribal area. The implementation of cash tax system in the Ahom tribal area by the Ahom rulers brought about a radical change in the tax system of the Ahom people, resulting in the emergence of a dynamic economy in the Ahom tribal area.

Conclusion

The economic policy adopted by the Ahom rulers between 1526 and 1707 brought about a change in the tribal structure of the Ahom people. As a result of the far-sighted economic policy of the Ahom rulers, while the economic condition of the state got strengthened, people of every caste and community got involved in agriculture due to measurement of land and encouragement in agricultural work. Markets, markets, marts and foreign trade attacked the closed and unsophisticated market system and the ancient tradition of

local exchange, as a result of which big cities and self-reliant villages emerged. The changing nature of markets gave rise to money based transactions due to which the trade of Ahom state became quite prosperous and developing. In this way, the excellent economic policy of the Ahom rulers helped in changing the tribal nature of the Ahom people.

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