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THE MATAKS AND THEIR KINGDOM
CASTES AND TRIBES OF ASSAM

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE DIVISION OF THE PHYSICAL SCIENCES

1955

The Matakas and their Kingdom

Castes and Tribes of Assam

72269



SRISTIDHAR DUTTA

Department of History,
Jawaharlal Nehru College, Pasighat,
Arunachal Pradesh

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PREFACE

This work is almost a reproduction of my Ph. D. Thesis submitted to the Dibrugarh University, entitled 'The Matak and their kingdom', with minor corrections and amendments here and there, as per suggestions of the learned Examiners. The Matak, the disciples of the Mayamara Satra, whose history and culture is the theme of this work, are one of the aboriginal peoples of Assam, and have played a very significant role in various evolutionary phases of the history and civilisation of Assam. The population of the Matak at present, according to an unofficial source, is more than 12 lakhs. Though majority of them now live in the Dibrugarh district of Assam, a good number of them are also found in Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Darrang and Nowgong districts. The early history of the Matak is obscure. It is only with the coming of the Ahoms in the early part of the 13th century that we get the first reference to the Matak in the political history of the land. The Matak were conciliated by Sukapha, the founder of the Ahom kingdom in Assam. But subsequently, they, for various reasons, became critical of the Ahom government and in 1769 reared against it the first standard of their Rebellion, which is usually known as the Moamaria Rebellion in the history of Assam. They deposed the then Ahom king Laksmi Singha and placed their own ruler Ramakanta on the throne. Even though this usurpation was shortlived, the Matak were not reconciled; they revolted again and again. At last, Purnananda Buragohain, the Ahom Premier (1783-1817) made a compromise with them in 1805 recognising their autonomy. This autonomous Matak Kingdom, with its capital at Bengmara (present Tinsukia town of Assam), was recognised by the British too. But the annexationist policy of the British deluged the Matak Kingdom in 1839.

Though some scholars have dealt with this problem within the limitations of their works, it can safely be said that much remains to be done, and the Matak, as such, with their history, culture and civilisation need a special study. It is, therefore, felt that a number of problems like the creation of the Matak community under the banner of their *Satra*, drawing members from different castes and tribes, the relation of the

Satra with the Ahom government, the process of the organisation of a popular Rebellion centering mainly round the humiliations heaped upon the heads of the *Satra* and some of the disciples, a correct analysis of the nature of the Rebellion which brought forth all disaffected elements into action everywhere in the Ahom kingdom, the foundation of the Matak Kingdom, life of the people under its government, exact relation between the Matak rulers or Barsenapatis with the Ahom and the British governments, etc., deserve proper scrutiny and scientific treatment. An analysis is also felt essential on the religious beliefs prior to their conversion to Vaisnavism and the impact of this new creed on their socio political life. As such, it is an humble attempt to analyse these problems and give, on the whole, a connected and clear account of the political history of the Mataks with relevant weightage to their social life, on the basis of all available sources, both published and unpublished.

The work has been divided into seven chapters. Chapter I gives a brief introduction of the subject with an attempt to interpret the meaning of the terms 'Matak', 'Matek', 'Moamaria' and 'Mayamara'. It also deals with the racial origin and political background of the different tribes and castes composing the Matak community. Chapter II gives an idea of the socio-economic life of the Mataks before and after their conversion to Vaisnavism. In Chapter III, an attempt has been made to discuss the conflicts of allegiance of the Mataks to their own *Satra* versus the State. Chapter IV deals with the Rebellion of the Mataks against the Ahom monarchy, with an attempt to analyse its real nature. In Chapter V, the spread of the Rebellion to all the disaffected elements in the Ahom kingdom leading to the coming of Capt. Welsh to Assam, and the establishment of the Matak Kingdom has been discussed. Chapter VI deals with the Matak Kingdom under its own rulers and its relations with the Ahom and the British governments till its annexation by the British in 1839. Chapter VII, the concluding one, gives an idea of the life and conditions of the Matak people after their subjugation by the British and their attitude to the alien rule, where an attempt has also been

made to analyse the causes of the present backwardness of these once historically powerful people.

To complete the work, I had to collect data from different libraries like the National Archives of India, New Delhi, the National Library, Calcutta, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, Gauhati, the libraries of Dibrugarh University and Jawaharlal Nehru College, Pasighat. I express my sincere gratitude to the authorities of these libraries for their help and co-operation.

I am thankful to Dr. (Mrs.) N. Chatterjee, Principal of my college and to the Government of Arunachal Pradesh for granting me leave for completing the work. I also take the opportunity to extend my gratefulness to all the *Satradhikars*, specially to Sri Jibanananda Ch. Goswami of Dinjoy Mayamara Satra, the *Dekadhikars* of the different Mayamara *Satras* and leading personalities of the Matak community whom I interviewed in connection with my work.

It is my pleasant duty to acknowledge my debt and gratefulness to my Supervisory Dr. (Mrs.) S.L. Barua, Head, Deptt. of History, Dibrugarh University for her constant guidance and inspiration, but for which the work could not have been completed. I am also grateful to Prof. K.P. Barua of D.H.S. Kanoi College, Dibrugarh and Dr. H. Goswami, Reader, Deptt. of Economics, Dibrugarh University for their manifold help in completing my work.

I am thankful to my colleague Prof. H.N. Bora, M.Sc. for helping me in drawing the maps. My thanks are also due to Sri K. Gogoi for typing out the manuscript. Lastly, I extend my thanks to my wife Uma Dutta and all other colleagues of mine who have extended their help and inspiration to complete the work.

Sristidhar Dutta

Department of History
Jawaharlal Nehru College, Pasighat
Arunachal Pradesh.

ABBREVIATIONS

- AAL — R.M. Lahiri, *The Annexation of Assam*.
- AARB — S.K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*.
- AB — *Ahom Buranji*, (ed. & tr.), G.C. Barua.
- AB(SM) — *Asam Buranji* (obtained) from the family of Sukumar Mahanta), (ed.) S.K. Bhuyan.
- ABNP — Padmeswar Sinha Naobaicha Phukan Buragohain, Ms. *Asam Buranji*.
- ACMSV — Chidananda Goswami, *Sri Sri Aniruddhadevar Charitra aru Mayamara Gosain Sakalar Vamsawali*.
- ADCB — H.K. Barpujari, *Assam : In the Days of the Company*.
- APB — *Asamar Padya Buranji*, (ed.), S.K. Bhuyan.
- BPG — *Barphukanar Git*, (ed.), S.K. Bhuyan.
- BPC — *Bengal Political Consultations*.
- BSPC — *Bengal Secret and Political Consultations*.
- BRC — *Bengal Revenue Consultations*.
- BVMD — Maniram Dewan, Ms. *Buranji Vivek Ratna*, Vol. II.
- CBMR — Sarbananda Rajkumar, *Chutiya, Bhuyan aru Matak Rajya*.
- DAB — *Deodhai Asam Buranji*, (ed.), S.K. Bhuyan.
- DHAS — Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Gauhati.

- HAG — E.A. Gait, *History of Assam*.
- HKB — Harakanta Barua, *Asam Buranji*, (ed.), S.K. Bhuyan.
- ISSB — Sarbananda Rajkumar, *Itihashe Suanra Chasata Bachar*.
- IHQ — *Indian Historical Quarterly*.
- JARS — *Journal of Assam Research Society*.
- JASB — *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*.
- KTP — Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Asam Buranji Sar*, (ed.), P.C. Chaudhury.
- PAB — *Purani Asam Buranji*, (ed.), H.C. Goswami.
- PHA (I) — *Political History of Assam*, Vol. I, (ed.), H.K. Barpujari, *et al.*
- SAB — *Satsari Asam Buranji*, (ed.), S.K. Bhuyan.
- SRSB — S.K. Bhuyan, *Swargadeo Rajeswar Singha*.
- TB — Sreenath Duara Barbarua, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, (ed.), S.K. Bhuyan.
- TB (E) — —do— (English version).

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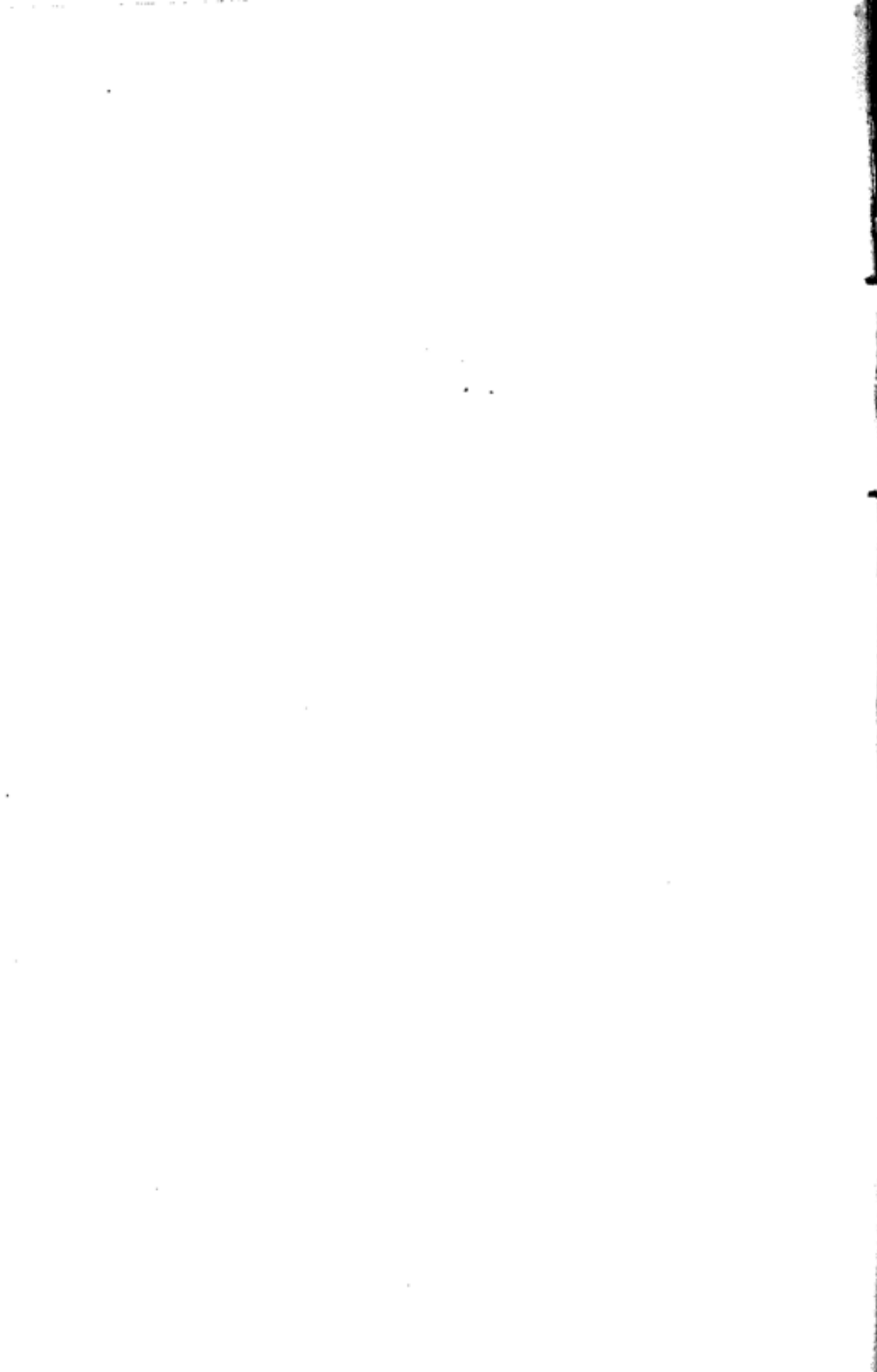
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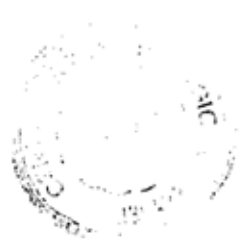
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1

Introduction

Scope of the work :

Situated in the North-East Frontier of India, Assam is an integral part of the country with a history of her own. Assam has been contributing, since time immemorial, towards the growth and development of the Indian culture.¹ Like India, Assam also presents a picture of great variety with her people belonging to different racial groups, speaking different dialects and professing different religious rites and practices.² Assamese culture, being thus a composite one, the true essence of it is not properly understood without a study of the history and civilisation of its different constituent elements. The Matakas who formed a distinct community by themselves, developing certain cultural traits and patterns of social behaviour under the Vaisnava reformers, form one of these important constituent elements. They also played a very significant role in the political developments of the history of

1. S.K. Chatterjee, *The Place of Assam in the history and Civilization of India*, Gauhati, 2nd print, 1970, p. 82.

2. N.K. Basu, *Assam in the Ahom Age*, Calcutta, 1960, pp. 1 f.

the entire north-east, since they became politically organised towards the later part of the 18th century till the annexation of their kingdom to British India in 1839.

The Matak

s are mainly known to the readers of Assam history as the authors of the first popular rebellion against the Ahom government (1769), which had till then an uninterrupted sovereignty for more than five hundred years. They challenged the despotism of the Ahom monarchy based on divine right, deposed the reigning King Laksmi Singha and put their own nominee, Ramakanta, a commoner, on the throne. Their success, however, was shortlived. The Ahom king soon recovered his throne and attempted at complete extermination of the Mataks. The resultant bloodshed made the waters of the rivers red with the blood of the Mataks and the roads filled with their corpses.³ But even this inhuman cruelty did not damp the spirit of the Mataks. In 1786 they again rose in rebellion against the government in alliance with hill-tribes, occupied the capital at Rangpur and compelled the reigning king Gaurinath Singha (1780-1795) to take his flight to Gauhati.

This success of the Matak

s brought forth all the disaffected dormant elements into action everywhere in the Ahom kingdom. Krishnanarayan, a rebellious Koch prince of Darrang, even procured the assistance of the Barkandazes and committed depredations in the Ahom territory. The situation became so critical that the king was compelled to appeal to the Company Government in Bengal for help. The latter, long-interested in having commercial relationship with Assam, immediately caught hold of the opportunity and sent Captain Welsh to Assam with a contingent of 360 Sepoys (September, 1792). Welsh settled Krishnanarayan's issue, made commercial treaty with the Ahom king advantageous to the British, and recovered the Ahom capital from the possession of the Mataks.

3. Maniram Dewan, *Buranji Vivek-ratna*, MS No. 272, DHAS, Gauhati, (henceforth abbreviated as BVMD).

After Welsh's return in July 1794, the Mataks again occupied the capital city and began to form alliance with the Burmese. The evade a crisis for the time being, Purnananda Buragohain, the Ahom Premier, made a compromise with the Mataks by ceding to them an autonomous kingdom bounded by the Brahmaputra on the north and the west, the Buri Dihing on the south and an imaginary line drawn from Kundil Mullah i.e. Sadiya to the Buri Dihing on the east, in 1805 and conferred the title Barsenapati, on their Chief. This apparently solved the question of the Mataks. But neither the British nor the Burmese would rest content merely with commercial benefits or alliance of the anti-Ahom forces. Indeed, with the conquest of Arakan in 1784, the Burmese possessions in the south-west became contiguous to those of British India. Thenceforth, the Burmese had continuous misunderstanding with the British who possessed the district of Chitagong touching the frontiers of Arakan and separated from it by the river Naf. Magh or Arakanese refugees began to pour into the British territory, which event, made the relations between the British and the Burmese governments strained.

Meanwhile, taking advantage of the internal situation in Assam arising out of the rivalry of two leading Nobles, Purnananda Buragohain, the Premier and Badanchandra, the Barphukan, or the Governor of Gauhati, the Burmese invaded Assam in 1817 and continued their attacks till they became the virtual master of the land in 1821. Intending to extend their sway further to the west of Assam, the Burmese made frequent inroads to the British territory. Their occupation of the islands of Shahpuri at the mouth of the river Naf in 1823 followed by their warlike preparation in Assam, Cachar and Arakan and their march to Bhutan⁴, made it crystal clear that they were bent on invading British territory. Early in 1824, when the Burmese converged on Cachar from three directions, the British declared war on them on March 5, 1824. In the Brahmaputra valley, the war began early in March, 1824. In the

4. H.H. Wilson, *Documents Illustrative of the Burmese War*, Nos. 19-21; AARB, p. 512.

course of events that followed, the British expelled the Burmese from Assam and by the terms of the Treaty of Yandaboo, (February, 1826), which ended the First Anglo-Burmese war, the British came into possession of Assam along with other territories like Manipur, Cachar, Jaintia, etc.

After occupying Assam, the British recognised the autonomy of the Matak kingdom, as they were in need of the assistance of the Matak to fight the turbulent hill-tribes in its neighbourhood, like those of the Singphos and the Khamtis. But as soon as the British consolidated their position in Assam and subjugated these hill-tribes, the alliance of the Matak was no longer essential. Consequently, the Matak kingdom was annexed to the British possessions in 1839.

As such, a study on the history and culture of the Matak forms an important chapter in the history of the North-East. Certain scholars within the limitations of their own works have dealt with the Rebellion of the Matak or the annexation of the Matak kingdom to the British. But such accounts are too sketchy to give a clear and complete picture of the important role that these people played in the history of this part of the country. An attempt is, therefore, made in the following few pages of this work to give an account of the history of the Matak with particular emphasis on the significant role that they played in the political development of this land since they rose in rebellion against the Ahom government in 1769.

[*The terms Matak, Moran, Moamaria and Mayamaria*

The population of the Matak community, at present according to a census, carried through their own organisation, *Sadau Assam Matak Sanmilian*, is more than 12 lakhs.⁵ Most of them live in the present Dibrugarh district, which once formed the major part of their kingdom. The rest lie scattered through-

5. Malbhog Barua, 'Matak Jati aru Matak Sanmilian' (in Assamese), *Souvenir Sadau Asam Matak Sanmilian aru Sadau Asam Matak Chhatra Sanmilian*, Chabua, 1977, p. 18.

out the Brahmaputra Valley, mainly, in the districts of Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Darrang and Nowgong. Now they are included in the list of the More Other Backward Classes, of Assam.

There is a great difference of opinion regarding the origin of the word 'Matak' and its actual interpretation. The term is also confused with those of 'Moran' and 'Mayamaria' or 'Moamaria', and often used in an identical sense with them. According to one group of scholars, the actual spelling of the term is not 'Matak' but 'Matek' (*Mat*—principle or creed, *Ek*—one), meaning a people of one determination, principle or creed. This interpretation of the origin of the word 'Matek' which was later corrupted into that of 'Matak', as alleged, has been given in the *ayamara Satrar Vamsawali*, which states that this name was first given to them by the Ahom King Susenpha alias Pratap Singha (1603-1641) after testing the unflinching obedience of the 'Matek' disciples to their *Guru*.⁶ R.K. Bordoloi, a well-known Assamese scholar, supports the contention given by the *Vamsawali*, and further states, that at a later period, the term 'Matek' was corrupted into 'Matak' in an insulting and derogatory sense⁷. This story however, is not mentioned in any other contemporary source. Even then, there would have been no difficulty in accepting the contention, if there did not occur the term 'Matak' in certain old *buranjis* preceding the reign of Pratap Singha, although some scholars like P. Gogoi assert that the combination of the words *Mat* + *Ek* should have been 'Matoik' and not 'Matek'.⁸

The *buranjis*, while giving a picture of the political conditions of the eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley at the time of the advent of the Ahoms, a group of Tai-Shans from Upper Burma under the leadership of Sukapha in the early part of the

6. Chidananda Gaswami, *Sri Aniruddhadevar Charitra aru Mayamara Satrar Gosain Sakalar Vamsawali*. Tinsukia, 1933, pp. 47ff (henceforth abbreviated as ACMSV).

7. R.K. Bordoloi, 'Mayamara Sakalar Bishaye' (in Assamese) incorporated in ACMSV.

8. P. Gogoi, *Tai Ahom Religion and Customs*, Gauhati, 1976, pp. 107 ff.

13th century, refer to the Mataks as a tribe ruling within Buri Dihing river on the north, Disang river in the south, Suffry river in the east and Brahmpautra in the west⁹. According to several Tai-Ahom and Assamese chronicles, like those of *Bangharia Buragohain's Buranji*, which is included in the *Deodhai Assam Buranji*¹⁰, and *Asam Buranji from Khunlung-Khunlai to Arjun Dihingia, Raja* (1675-1677) incorporated in the *Satsari Asam Buranji*,¹¹ the Ahoms named the people they met, according to their physical traits or nature. In the Ahom language *Ma* means powerful (scholar) and *Tak* means weighed or examined, i.e., a tested powerful man.¹² Sukapha, the founder of the Ahom kingdom in Assam had to face a strong resistance from a section of the Marans, whom he ultimately overcame by applying a two-fold policy of coercion and conciliation. After their subjugation, one of the Morans displayed great courage in defeating the Nagas for Sukapha and thus rendered a great service to him.¹³

There are, therefore, reasons to believe that impressed by the courage of the Morans Sukapha and his followers might have named them as 'Matak'. Late Golap Chandra Barua, the noted Tai-Ahom linguist, found the term 'Matak' in several *buranjis* written in that language, dealing with the events from the time of Sukapha till the end of the 16th century.¹⁴ Later Assamese

9. *Buragohain Vamsawali* (MS).

10. *Deodhai Assam Buranji* (ed.) S.K. Bhuyan, DHAS, Gauhati, 1932, pp. ff (henceforth abbreviated as DAB).

11. *Satsari Assam Buranji* (1st chronicle), (ed.) S.K. Bhuyan, Gauhati University, 1960, p. 4. (henceforth abbreviated as SAB).

12. Malbhog Barua, *loc. cit.*, pp. 12 f; B. Sarma, *Presidential Speech, All Assam Matak Sanmilan*, Tinsukia Session, 1968; B. Das, 'Buranji Matak Moran' (in Assamese), *Manideep*, 8th year, Nos. 2 & 3; J. Talukdar, 'Matak Sabdar Utpati O Tatparjya', (in Assamese), *Assam Bani*, 28th August, 1976. These articles are also inserted in a book named *Mayamara Satra-Samaj : Bhashan aru Prabandha* (ed.) S. Gogoi, Chabua, 1981.

13. Hem Chandra Goswami, *Purani Assam Buranji*, Gauhati, 1922, pp. 30 f (henceforth abbreviated as PAB).

14. B. Sarma, *loc. cit.*, p. 4; B. Das, *loc. cit.*, P. 72; J. Talukdar, *loc. cit.*, pp. 80 ff.

chronicles, like those of Kashinath Tamuli Phukan,¹⁵ and Harakanta Sarma Barua,¹⁶ have clearly mentioned that the Matak's referred to in connection with Sukapha's encounter with the local tribes, were the Morans.

Incidentally the word 'Matak' had a similar meaning among the Singphos and the Khamtis also. Following this, certain British officers and historians like Robinson,¹⁷ opined that the term 'Matak' was coined by the Khamtis. Later on, this view found mention in the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, which states that the Matak's used to inhabit the district of Lakhimpur (which included at that time the present district of Dibrugarh as well), and that they were so called by the Singphos because they were found to be strong 'in contradition of the Mullang or weak-people'¹⁸ of the Ahom kingdom. Maniram-Dewan also, writing in the early part of the 19th century, accepted this interpretation regarding the origin of the word 'Matak', coined according to him, by the Khamtis and meaning 'a man with a robust and vigorous physique',¹⁹ which the Morans did actually possess. The *Census Report of Assam* for 1881,²⁰ however, has mentioned 'Matak' as an old division of Upper Assam, which is supported by Hunter also.²¹ The *Census Report of Assam* for 1891, on the other hand, mentions like this, 'the term Matak applies to the people residing in the tract of country formerly ruled by the

15. Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, *Assam Buranji* (ed.) P.C. Choudhury (now entitled *Assam Buranji Sar*), 3rd impression, 1964, p. 10 (henceforth abbreviated as KTP).

16. Harakanta Sarma Barua, *Assam Buranji* (ed.) S.K. Bhuyan, 2nd edition, 1962, p. 12 (henceforth abbreviated as HKB).

17. William Robinson, *A Descriptive Account of Assam*, Reprint, [1975, pp. 326 ff.

18. *Imperial Gazetteer of India* (Provincial series), Eastern Bengal and Assam, Calcutta, p. 35.

19. BVMD.

20. *Report on the Census of Assam for 1881*, Calcutta, 1883, pp. 98 f.

21. W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam*, Vol. I, Reprint, 1975, p. 292.

Bor Senapati, and has no reference to any particular caste or tribe.²²

Rajmohan Nath gives a different interpretation to the origin of the term 'Matak'. According to him it originated from the term 'Mahtak' meaning the head or upper part of the country, inhabited by the Moria sect of the Austrics, who after their assimilation with the Bodo tribes came to be known as the Morans.²³

According to S.K. Bhuyan the word 'Matak', "by which the Morans, and loosely the Moamarias, are known, is also applied to a robust and sturdy man lacking in refinement and not easily amenable to reason."²⁴ Gunabhiram Barua in his *Assam Buranji* uses the term 'Matak' while referring to Sukapha's confrontation with the tribes.²⁵ According to a modern scholar S. Rajkumar, the Moamarias are called 'Mataks', for they fought as one man against the Ahom monarch and finally occupied the throne.²⁶ It is possible that during the time of the Matak Rebellion, any rebel joining hands with the Mataks or giving any kind of support to them was also labelled as Mataks, even though they were not members of the Matak community or Mayamara sect.

Nothing is known regarding the origin of the word 'Moran'. According to certain members of the Moran elderfolk, whom I had interviewed, the word owes its origin to a myth. It is said that an old lady of this community, a physician by profession, had the supernatural power of giving life to dead ones, for which she was called 'Moran', meaning one who can

22. *Census of India, 1891, Assam*, Vol. I, Report by E.A. Gait, 1892, pp. 236 ff.

23. R.M. Nath, *The Background of Assamese Culture*, 2nd edition 1978, p. 2.

24. S.K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, 2nd edition, 1974, pp. 254 f., (henceforth abbreviated as AARB).

25. Gunabhiram Barua, *Assam Buranji*, Reprint, 1972, p. 67.

26. S. Rajkumar, *Chutiya, Bhuyan aru Matak Rajya*, Gauhati, 1965, p. 66 (henceforth abbreviated as CBMR).

call back a dead (*Mor-Mar*-to die; *an*-to bring-meaning to bring back a dead one). This contention, however, appears doubtful. Kedar Brahmachari expresses the view that a people known as *Maurang*, *Muurang* or *Morang*, migrated to *Saumar* area (estermost part) of ancient Assam from Nepal and, in course of time, came to be known as Morans.²⁷ Biradhar Das echoing a similar view, states that these people migrated to Assam with a prince of Nepal in about 7th century A.D. They entered first to western Assam, proceeded further to *Saumar*, settled there and in course of time, came to be known as Morans.²⁸ Benudhar Sarma, however, has mentioned that many years before the coming of Sukapha to *Saumar*, a man from the *Meram* clan of the kingdom of Dharmapala, a king of ancient Assam, became king in a place known as Lahdoi (the region lying on the south of Upper Brahmaputra and on the east of Sadiya). The word Moran perhaps was coined from the name of this king.²⁹ According to Endle, the original home of the Morans was in the Hukong valley and the term 'Moran' comes from the name of their progenitor 'Moran', who came over to Assam and settled near the Tiphuk river.³⁰

In the British records of the period, the term 'Moran' sometimes finds a reference as a distinct tribe inhabiting the jungles,³¹ and sometimes as a division of Upper Assam, denoting the northern part of the Matak country which covered the extensive tract of land to the east and north-east of Dibrugarh, 'where several *Gosains*' had their residence, and which was inhabited by the Moran people.³² J.P. Wade, one of the earliest British officers mentions the term 'Moran' [to mean the rebels against the Ahom monarch].³³ There is no denying

27. Kedar Brahmachari, in an article in *Batori* (now extinct), the edition of 1st August, 1931.

28. B. Das, *loc. cit.*, pp. 63 ff.

29. B. Sarma, *loc. cit.*, p. 5.

30. S. Bindle, *The Kacharis*, Reprint, 1975, pp. 87 f.

31. Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 326 ff.

32. *The Report on the Census of Assam for 1881*, *loc. cit.*, pp. 98 f.

33. J. P. Wade, (ed.), B. Sarma, *An Account of Assam*, 2nd impression, 1972, pp. 164 ff.

the fact that it was after the name of the Moran tribe that the locality they inhabited also came to be known as such. Earlier, the tract of Moran was a large one, covering an extensive area of the present Dibrugarh district, but, at present, the name Moran is applied only to a sub-division of this district.

Whatever the origin of the term 'Moran' might be, it is an established fact that it denotes a tribe who was also called 'Matak'. It is interesting to note how the term 'Matak' originally applied to a particular tribe, in course of time, came to be used to denote tribes other than the Morans and also members of the caste-Hindus, like the Brahmanas, Kayasthas and Kalitas. This was possible through the process of Aryanisation of the different Bado tribes dwelling in the eastern part of Assam through the Vaisnava reformers. The Morans were the first tribe in eastern Assam to be converted to Vaisnavism by Aniruddhadeva, the founder of the Mayamara *Satra*, about whom we shall discuss in detail in a subsequent chapter of this work. Certain patterns of behaviour and laws of discipline were set for them by the great reformer. The task was, however, not easy. Vaisnavism had to make large-scale compromises with them. It may also be noted that the new creed brought for them not merely a new ideology, but also a new way of life, which had a great impact on their tribal economy. Ploughing was introduced, certain craft and industries were taught and the community feeling, which existed in their tribal life, was given fresh impetus for development. This had encouraged the other neighbouring tribes, like the Barahis, Kacharis and the Chutiyas, to accept the new creed. These new tribes, as they conformed to the disciplines already set in for the Matak, were not distinguished from them by separate appellations. In the process, they preferred to introduce them as 'Matak'. As a result, the term 'Matak' was no longer confined to the Moran people alone, but was extended to include the other tribal members as well. P. Gogoi found that even the Ahoms, who became disciples of the Mayamara *Satra*, had identified themselves with the Matak and did not

introduce them as Ahoms but as Mataks.³⁴ In course of time, Brahmana families in the neighbourhood of the *Satra* and so also the Kalitas became members of the same *Satra*, and identified them as such.

Thus a greater community, namely, the Matak community was formed, which had its members drawn from different castes and tribes. As pointed out by S.K. Bhuyan,

The Moamarias were all disciples of one *Satra*, or its few branches : but they belonged to separate tribes and communities, Morans, Chutiyas, Kacharis, Bihias, Ahoms, Kaivartas and Brittials ; any many caste Hindus, Brahmans, Kayasthas and Kalistas were found among the Moamarias. The disciples were confined to no particular territory, but were scattered over the whole country as far as Goalpara.³⁵

Their common bond of unity was their sect, i.e. the Mayamara sect, which developed through the Mayamara *Satra* with the *Guru* at its head. Their communal unity was so strong and their tribal traits so predominant that some of the British officials refer to the Mataks not as a community but as a tribe. Thus, Pemberton states that "the area of this island (ruled by the Burra Sunaputtee).....is almost entirely inhabited by the Moamareea, Moran, Muttuck or Marah tribe."³⁶ Hunter in his *Statistical Report of Assam* also writes, "The Moamarias are a rude tribe who had early become converts to Hinduism in its Vishnuvite form, but denied the supremacy of the Brahmans."³⁷ Robinson mistook the term 'Matak' to denote the Mayamara sect³⁸ and stated that this sect, namely the Mataks, "it divided into two distinct clans, the Moamarias, so

34. P. Gogoi, *Tai Ahom Religion and Customs*, pp. 109 ff.

35. AARB, p. 254.

36. R.B. Pemberton, *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, 2nd impression, 1966, p. 70.

37. Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

38. Robinson. *op. cit.*, pp. 326 ff.

called, from their being a distinct sect from the generality of the Assamese ; and the Morans, signifying the inhabitants of the jungles.”³⁹ This shows that not only the Morans but the non-Morans also appeared to be members of a distinct clan possessing tribal traits, and, as such, different from the rest of the Assamese population. It also appears that initially the different members of the Matak community used their respective original identities as a suffix to the term Matak, such as, Matak-Moran, Matak-Chutiya, Matak-Kachari, Matak-Ahom, etc. This practice was abandoned during the time of the Matak Rebellion, when all members preferred to identify themselves with a single identity, namely, the Matak community. The Census Report for 1881 mentions that “a follower of one of these *Gosains* would call himself Matak Moran, but the distinction is one neither of caste nor nationality.”⁴⁰

Later, during the British rule, when the spirit of communalism grew strong in the whole country under the patronage of the government, a tendency also arose among the members of the Matak community to introduce themselves through their separate identities. It was, therefore, beginning with the announcement of the Communal Award in August 1932, that the Matak also started introducing themselves through their separate identities now using them as prefixes to the term Matak, such as Kalita-Matak, Moran-Matak, Kachari-Matak, Ahom-Matak, etc. Any way, the term ‘Matak’ in the recent times got wide publicity in the process of the political development of the period, when they organised a society in 1937 under the nomenclature ‘*Matak-Moran Sanmilan*’, later on known simply as *Matak Sanmilan* which included all the members of the Matak community, with the Morans as the pre-ponderant group. Subsequently however, the Morans defected from the *Sanmilan* and formed their own organisation called the *Moran Sabha* in 1965, thinking that if they identified themselves with the rest of the members of the Matak

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Report on the Census of Assam for 1881*, loc. cit., pp. 98 f.

community, which included the non-tribals also, their demand to get consideration as a Scheduled-tribe by the National Government would be weakened.

When the Matak carved out their own kingdom, which got recognition from the Ahom government in 1805 as the *Matak Rajya* or the kingdom of the Matak, all people living within that territory came to be identified as Matak. In course of time, subjects from the Ahom kingdom also infiltrated to the Matak kingdom. These people also came to be known as Matak, even though they were not members of the Mayamara sect, or the Matak community, but the number of such Matak was very few. At present, we do not find any Matak in Assam, who is not a disciple of the Mayamara *Mahantas* or *Satradhikars*. It was, therefore, not the kingdom but the people who named it as *Matak Rajya*. Although this fact is very clear, some British officers used to refer to 'Matak' as the name of an old division of Upper Assam. Even according to Gait, Matak is a territory, 'which lay to the south of Sadiya, in the angle between the Brahmaputra and the Burhi Dihing, and was chiefly inhabited by persons of the Moamaria sect'.⁴¹ Pemberton and Hunter also meant by the term 'Matak' usually a geographical division in Upper Assam divided into Upper and Lower Matak and chiefly inhabited by the Moamaras or the Morans.⁴² These officers were under the impression that these people were so called mainly because they inhabited the territory called the *Matak Rajya*; but we have already contended that it was not the territory but the people who named it as such.

As the terms 'Matak' and 'Moamaria' or 'Mayamaria' are used in an identical sense, as because all the members of the Matak community are also disciples of the Mayamara *Satra*, the origin of the word 'Moamara' or 'Mayamara' deserves a reference here. According to the *Satradhikars* of the Mayamara

41. E.A. Gait, *A History of Assam*, 2nd edition, revised. Calcutta, 1926, p. 59 (henceforth abbreviated as HAG).

42. Pemberton, *op. cit.*, p. 70; Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

Satras, the actual term is not 'Moamara' but 'Mayamara'. The *Mayamara Satrar Vamsawali* contends that the appellation 'Mayamara' was given to their original *Guru* Aniruddhadeva by the Ahom king Sukhampha Khora Raja (1552-1603), being impressed by the former's mastery over *maya* or magic, by which, he could create a cobra out of an empty pitcher and then make it vanish simply by touching the sides of it. From this incident, Aniruddhadeva's *Satra* came to be known as 'Mayamara'.⁴³ But, according to Utsawananda Goswami, an ex-*Satradhikar* of the Puranimati Mayamara *Satra*, the *Satra* was so named by the Ahom King Susengpha alias Pratap Singha or Buddhiswarga Narayan (1603-1641) as he found the *Guru* and the disciples of the Mayamara *Satra* above *maya* or pleasure and not easily overpowered by worldly temptations.⁴⁴ These accounts appear to be unscientific and not supported by historical records. M. Neog rightly concludes that it was a *Bhakatiya Byakhya* or the interpretation of a devotee to ascribe supernatural power to the founder of the *Satra*.⁴⁵

R.M. Nath gives a different interpretation to the origin of the term 'Mayamara'. He states that "the Moria sect of the Austries, who were originally known as the Mei-Morias settled in the north-eastern part of the country which was later known as the head or the 'Mahtak' or Matak country. Later on they mixed up with the Bodos and other tribes and were known as Morans, while their tribe-name was changed from Mei-Moria to Maya-Moria or Moamaria.⁴⁶ But his theory is not supported by any other source, nor is there any evidence to ascribe Austric origin to the Morans against their well-founded Bodo origin.

It is seen that in case of the other *Satras* of Assam, most of them are named after their geographical location. It is, therefore, probable that the *Satra* was called Moamara because it was located at one time, in the early period of its history,

43. ACMSV, pp. 27 f.

44. Utsawananda Goswami, *Malau Patharar Buranji*, p. 8.

45. M. Neog, *Mayamariyar Buranji*, Chabua, 1968, p. 3.

46. R.M. Nath, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

on the bank of the *Moamari Bil* which abounded in *Moa* fish. This view was first forwarded by Maniran Dewan. Supporting Dewan's contention, Robinson stated that the people who inhabited the area close to the lake were called Moamara and the *Satra* located therein was also therefore called as such.⁴⁷ According to Maniram Dewan, Aniruddhadeva founded two *Satras*, one at Moamara and the other at Puranimati near Jorhat.⁴⁸ But this is not mentioned in other sources including the *Vamsawali* of the Mayamara *Satra*. There is a tribal area in upper Majuli which is still known as Moamara,⁴⁹ which evidences the existence of a lake bearing that name in that area at one time. The lake might have dried up or washed away by the Brahmaputra, as Majuli is still the most flood-affected area of Assam.

The term 'Mayamara' is found neither in the *buranjis* nor in the *Chrit-puthis* (biographies of the Vaisnava saints). Only one official record, a letter dated 8th *Ahara*, 1724 *Saka* (July, 1802) written by King Kamaleswar Singha (1795-1811) to the then Governor-General, Wellesly, used the term 'Mayamara'. But, in course of time, the term 'Mayamara' became more popular than that of 'Moamara', perhaps because, the heads of the Mayamara *Satras* give wide publicity to this term through their published *Vamsawali*. Moreover, as there is hardly any difference in the accent of the word 'Moamara' to 'Mayamara', the gradual corruption of the term 'Mayamara' to 'Moamara' or vice versa was but very natural.

As the Mayamara Mahanta accepted disciples from amongst the so called low caste or depressed classes of the society and greatly compromised with tribal manners and customs, the term 'Moamara' or 'Mayamara' was also used in a derogatory sense. Haliram Dhekial Phukan,⁵⁰ and Maniram Dewan⁵¹ state that

47. Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 326 ff.

48. BVMD.

49. Nomal Gogoi, *Mayamara Sampradai*, Tinsukia, 1981, p. 43.

50. Haliram Dhekial Phukan, *Assam Buranj*, 2nd impression, Gauhati, 1966, p. 96.

51. BVMD.

because of this reason, the other Satras did not keep any relation with the Mayamara *Satra*. Gait mentions that the term 'Moamaria' was a nick-name given to the original disciples Anirudhadeva, who lived near the Moamari lake, used to catch and eat a kind of fish called *Moa*.⁵² Gait's opinion is echoed in the Census Report of 1881 which states that "The Assamese of the lower districts regarded the *Gosain* and his medly following with some contempt, which they expressed by the term 'Moamaria', or catchers of the *Moa* fish, in allusion to the fishing carried on by his *Dom* disciples in the lake on whose bank the *Gosain* had seat."⁵³ *Imperial Gazetteer* also writes in the same vein.⁵⁴ Perhaps, it was this reason that the Mayamara *Mahantas* preferred to designate their *Satra* as Mayamara and repeatedly emphasised that the actual name of their *Satra* was not 'Moamara' but 'Mayamara'.

This resentment amongst the Mayamara *Mahantas* was also occasioned by an interpretation given in the *Hemkosh*, the earliest Assamese dictionary compiled by late Hemchandra Barua that this term denotes cruelty. The dictionary states that the Moamaris or Morans are an aboriginal people of Assam, who had accepted Hinduism. They rose in rebellion in the reigns of Lashmi Singha and Gaurinath Singha and cruelly massacred many people to take revenge on the insults heaped upon their *Mahanta* by queen Phuleswari (which, however, was not a fact). Hence the terms 'Matak', 'Moamaria' or 'Moran' mean very cruel people ("A race in Upper Assam said to be cruel. Hence cruel").⁵⁵ In other words, according to this dictionary the meaning of these terms is cruel. When this came to be known, there was wide resentment not only among the

52. HAG, P. 59.

53. *Report on the Census of Assam for 1881, loc. cit.*, pp. 98.

54. *Imperial Gazetteer of India, loc. cit.*

*Endle, however, while enlisting the sub-tribes of the Kacharis, mentions "Moomara-roi" as "the Mao-fish folk", because the dwellers lived near the Moamari lake. (Endle, *op. cit.*, p. 27). He does not mention that the term was used in a derogatory sense.

55. *Hem-Kosh* (com.) Hemchandra Barua, 4th edition, Sibsagar, 1965, p. 783.

Mataks, but also among the Ahoms, who by the term 'Matak' mean, 'a tested powerful person'. In the annual conference of the *All Assam Ahom Sabha*, held at Bhojo in 1946, the members even adopted a resolution demanding a correction of the interpretation given in the dictionary, which was honoured.

Neither the *buranjis*, nor the British records, nor most of the scholars on the field are consistent in using the terms—'Moran', 'Matak', 'Moamaria', or 'Mayamaria'. The *Ahom Buranji*, for example, uses all the three terms,—Matak, Moran and Moamaria including a new term Moamaria—Matak.⁵⁶ While using the first two terms in a synonymous sense, it uses the third term to designate the disciples of the Mayamara *Satradhikar*, whose abode was at Moamara. The term also denotes the rebels, who took arms against the Ahom government. This shows that there were some non-Mataks, who under the banner of the Mataks rose in rebellion against the government.

The *Deodhai Assam Buranji*⁵⁷ uses the term 'Moran' only, whereas, the chronicles incorporated in the *Satsari Assam Buranji*⁵⁸ refer to the terms 'Moran' and 'Matak' in an identical sense. The *Tungkhungia Buranji*,⁵⁹ on the other hand, gives preponderance to the term 'Moran' and uses the term 'Moamaria' while referring to the *Mahanta* (i.e., *Satradhikar*) of the *Satra*. The term 'Matak' finds reference here only on one occasion, while narrating the alliance of the Mataks with the Singphos. Two metrical chronicles *Belimarar Buranji* and *Kalibharat Buranji* written by Dutiram Hazarika and Bisheswar Vaidyandhip respectively (published under the nomenclature *Asamar Padya Buranji*) use all the three terms synonymously.⁶⁰ Maniram

56. (tr. & ed.) Golap Ch. Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, Calcutta, 1930, pp. 37 f, 293 f, 262 f etc. (henceforth abbreviated as AB.)

57. DAB, pp. 99 ff.

58. SAB, pp. 5, 151, 178 f, etc.

59. Srinath Duara Barbarua, *Tungkhungia Buranji* (ed.) S.K. Bhuyan, 2nd edition, 1964, pp. 56, 70 f, 186 ff, etc. (henceforth abbreviated as TB).

60. *Asamar Padya Buranji* (ed.) S.K. Bhuyan, DHAS, Gauhati, 1933 pp. 80 f, 92, 95, 162, 189, 213, etc. (henceforth abbreviated as TB).

Dewan uses the term 'Moran' to denote a tribe already mentioned and the term 'Matak' to denote the rebels against the Ahom government, who were also disciples of the 'Moamaria Satra'.⁶¹ Haliram Dhekial Phukan uses the term 'Moran' to denote a section of indigenous inhabitants with whom Sukapha had intermarried, and who towards the close of the Ahom rule organised a rebellion against it and created a crisis for the Ahom monarchy. He uses the term 'Moamaria' to denote the *Satra*.⁶²

Most of the modern scholars, including S.K. Bhuyan use the terms 'Mayamara' or 'Moamaria' and 'Matak' in an identical sense. P.N. Gohain Barua means by the term 'Matak' a tribe (i.e. the Moran), who were one of the aboriginal inhabitants of Assam.⁶³ Hiteswar Barbarua, however, refuses to accept the terms 'Mayamara' and 'Mayamaria' to denote the *Satra* and its disciples respectively, as according to him, these terms did not find any reference in any source of the period. But it has already been stated that an official letter of 1802, the Persian transcript of which is still preserved in the National Archives at New Delhi, uses the term 'Mayamara'.

The British officers are not even consistent in spelling the terms mentioned above. J.P. Wade uses the term 'Moran' to mean the rebels and the terms 'Mahamaries' or 'Moamaries' to denote the disciples of the Mayamara *Satra*.⁶⁴ Pemberton and Adam White spell 'Moran' as 'Moram' or 'Morah' and 'Matak' as 'Muttuck' respectively. Buchanan Hamilton uses the term 'Mahamari' to denote the Mayamara *Mahanta*, the spiritual guide of these ruffians "of low origin".⁶⁵ In Robinson's account an abridged form of 'Moamaria' as 'Mora' is found, which, he states, was "the designation of a particular sect of

61. BVMD.

62. Haliram Dhekial Phukan, *op. cit.*, pp. 43 f.

63. P.N. Gohain Barua, *Asamar Buranji*. Reprint, 1976, p. 4.

64. J.P. Wade, *op. cit.*, pp. 42, 152 f, 164 f, etc.

65. Francis Buchanan Hamilton (later Francis Hamilton), *An Account of Assam* (ed.) S.K. Bhuyan, 2nd impression, 1963, pp. 10 f.

the Assamese population.”⁶⁶ While some British Officers, as stated, designated the Moamaras as a tribe, some others again referred to them as members of a distinct religious sect. Capt. Hannay, contradicting to the contents of a letter published in the Government Gazette for June, 1825, wherein the Moamaras were referred as a distinct tribe, had emphatically stated that “the Moa Murreahs are not a distinct tribe, but a religious sect of the Assamese population, composed of individuals from most of the known tribes of Assam.”⁶⁷ In another letter written by him to Capt. Jenkins, he had stated “the Moamaras living in the Brahmaputra valley on the north bank of the Buri Dihing river are generally called Matak. They are divided into two branches. The branch occupying the upper Dibru region was all Morans, who were also known as Barahi-Morans. They formed an independent tribe under their own chief at the time of Sukapha’s invasion of Assam. The other branch lived mainly near the Sessa river; though they were within the Moamaria fold, many Ahoms and other original inhabitants were found among them.”^{67a}

The Census Report for 1881 referring to the Matak as “the followers of the Matak *Gosain*” emphatically states that the term ‘Matak’ does not denote the residents of the country, namely, the Matak Kingdom, but the members of a distinct sect. But the Report also opines that at the relevant time though the Matak were returned as a separate caste, the Census Commissioner had expressed his doubt whether this should have been actually the case.^{67b}

The Matak are also known as *Puranibhakats*. There are three opinions as to why they are called so. According to one opinion, while Aniruddhadeva was going to visit his preceptor

66. Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 326 ff.

67. Capt. S.O. Hannay, ‘A Short Account of the Mamorah Sect, and the Country at present occupied by the Bor Senaputtee’, *JASB*, August, 1838, pp. 671 ff.

67a. P.C., 1839, Feb. 20, No. 89; Hannay to Jenkins, Jan. 6.

67b. *Report on the Census of Assam for 1881*, pp. 98b.

Gopaldeva at Kaljhar* for initiation, he proceeded through an old route to reach the *Satra*, by abandoning the new one constructed in his honour. This had symbolised that Aniruddhadeva would not teach a new tenant but would pursue the old one as taught by the *Guru*. For this, he was called *Puranibhakat* (*purani*—old, *bhakat*—disciple), and his followers also came to be known as *Puranibhakats*.⁶⁸ Another explanation is that Aniruddhadeva's followers consisting mostly of tribal and backward people did not altogether give up their old practices even after their conversion. As they adhered to old customs (*Purani*-old, *pratha*—system), they were called *Puranibhakats*.⁶⁹ But the more convincing explanation is that after the Matak occupied the Ahom throne in 1769, their minister Ragha Barbarua ordered the conversion of the non-Moamarias to the Mayamara fold. But the Mayamara *Mahanta* Astabhujadeva restricted the conversion to only those who were not earlier initiated by any *Gosain* or *Mahanta*. These new disciples were called *Natunbhakats* or new disciples, in order to distinguish them from the *Puranibhakats* or old disciples. After the Ahom king was restored to his throne, many of the *Natunbhakats* reverted to their old faith. Thus the term '*Natunbhakat*' disappeared, but the term '*Puranibhakat*' continued.⁷⁰ Although the term did not receive any official recognition, the Matak, in some parts of the country are still referred to as *Puranibhakats*.

From all this we have come to the conclusion that Moran is a tribe, Moamaria or Mayamaria is a sect whose followers are called Moamarias or Mayamarias and Matak is a community, which included all the disciples of the Mayamara *Satra* belonging to different castes, tribes and professional groups. It was not from the name of their kingdom that the Matak were so called, but it was they who named their kingdom as such, namely, the Matak kingdom. As the

*Kaljhar was situated on the east of Purula river near Bhawanipur in lower Assam.

68. ACMSV, p. 16; S.N. Sarma, *The Satra and the Satra Institution of Assam*, Gauhati University, 1966.

69. S.N. Sarma, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

70. G. Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 106; CBMR, pp. 63 f.

Satradhikars prefer to call their *Satras* as 'Mayamara', we would also be, in our work, referring to the *Satra* and its *Mahuntas* as such, but while referring to the disciples we would use the term 'Moamaria' following the *buranjis* and the British records of the period. In this work also the terms 'Matak' and 'Moamaria' would be used synonymously, but the term 'Moran' would always denote a particular tribe.

Composition of the Matak Community :

We would now discuss, in brief, the racial origin and political background of the different tribes and castes composing the Matak community, highlighting only those points as would be essential in better appreciating our problem.

The Morans : They were the first among the tribes to accept initiation from the Mayamara *Mahanta*. They were also the most dominant among the Mayamara disciples. The Ahoms and also the Singphos and the Khamtis, at a later period, referred to them as 'Mataks', the implication of which term has already been discussed. On the basis of their racial and linguistic affinities, the Morans are ascribed Bodo origin. Gait, in his Report, *Census of India, Assam, 1891* mentions that the Morans had a language of their own, which was allied to the Kacharis, but they gradually abandoned it in favour of Assamese.⁷¹ Further, in the *History of Assam*⁷² Gait emphatically states that the Moran language was undoubtedly Bodo. P.R.T. Gurdon, furnishes some concrete linguistic evidences to prove the affinity of the Moran language with that of the Bodos,⁷³ (see, Appendix A). The views of Gait and Gurdon are also supported by scholars like Endle and Grierson. Endle assumes that the Morans originated from Mongkong (Maingkhwang) in the Hukong Valley, at the upper reaches of the Chindwin river. A few centuries ago, three brothers named

71. *Census of India 1891, loc. cit.*, pp. 236 f.

72. HAG, p. 78.

73. Major P.R.T. Gurdon, 'Notes on the Morans' *JASB*, Vol. LxxIII, Part I, No. I, pp. 36 ff.

Moylang, Moran and Moyran inhabited there. While the eldest of them remained there, the youngest, Moyran migrated to Nepal, and the second one Moran, crossed the Patkai range, entered Assam and settled near the Tiphuk river. According to him the descendants of Moran came to be known by his name. They are also sometimes called *Habungiyas* i.e., earth-folk, meaning true autochthones or the sons of the soil.⁷⁴ Pemberton is of opinion that the Morans are identical with the Noras who, as pointed out by Hamilton, inhabited the Dihing valley.⁷⁵ Endle's story of the migration of the ancestor of the Moran people from the Hukong vally and Pemberton's assertion that the Morans are indentified with the Noras, meaning the people of Mungkong indicate that the original homeland of these people was somewhere in western China on the valley of the Yang-tse-Kiang and the Howang-Ho.

Grierson, confirming language affinities of the Morans with the Bodos states thus,

To complete the survey of this (Bodo) group, we may mention Moran, a language which is believed to be now extinct.....Their language belonged to the Bodo group, but they have nearly abandoned it in favour of Assamese.⁷⁶

Assamese scholars like Rajani Kanta Bordoloi⁷⁷, and B.K. Barua⁷⁸ also support the Bodo origin of the Morans. B.K. Barua, following Endle, holds that the original home of the Bodo people (including the Morans) was in western China near the Yang-tse-Kiang and the Howang-Ho rivers.⁷⁹ Benudhar Sarma and following him Biradhar Das, however, do not accept the Bodo origin of the Morans. They are in a tendency to

74. Endle, *op. cit.*, pp. 87 f 115.

75. Pemberton, *op. cit.*, pp. 70 f.

76. G.A. Grierson, 'Assamese Burmese Branch', *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol I, Part I, Reprint, Delhi, 1973, p. 65.

77. R K. Bordoloi, in ACMSV, pp. 1, 221.

78. B.K. Barua, *A cultural History of Assam* (Early Period) Vol. I, Gamhar, 2nd edition, 1969, p. 7.

79. BB.K. arua, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

ascribe them Aryan origin.⁸⁰ But their contention does not rest on a strong foundation against the established fact that the Morans are a Bodo tribe.

Linguistic affinity, physical features and other common characteristics of the Morans with the rest of the Bodos evidence their origin from this race. It is generally held that the original home of the Bodos was near the headwaters of the Yang-tse-Kiang and the Howang-Ho rivers, to the west of China from which place they started to move south and west, probably from 2000 B.C. onwards. They infiltrated into India mostly along the western course of the Brahmaputra. The great Bodo tribe would appear to have been established over the valley of the Brahmaputra fairly early, and to have extended into the North and East Bengal and thence into North-Bihar.⁸¹ The Morans who perhaps came a little later than the earliest stream of the Bodos, occupied a part of the extreme eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley, vacated by their predecessors. Therefore, the date of their immigration may be a little later than that suggested by S.K. Chatterjee as 2000 B.C. Thus there is no denying the fact the Morans are one of the aboriginal people of the Bramaputra valley.

The Morans, along with the Barahis, were also the first tribe, whom Sukapha (1228-1260), the founder of the Ahom kingdom in Assam, had to encounter, in course of his march to the Brahmaputra valley. At the time of Sukapha's advent, the Morans were ruling in the tract bounded by the rivers Buri Dihing in the north, Disang in the south, Suffry in the east and Brahmaputra in the west.⁸² Though they then lay scattered within this area, still they were united under their chief Badaucha,^{83*} who had his headquarters at Kaktal.⁸⁴ Sukapha

80. B. Sarma, *loc. cit* ; B. Das, *loc. cit*.

81. S.K. Chatterjee, *The Place of Assam in the history and civilisation of India*, p. 9 ; *Kirata-Jana-Kriti*, Second edition, 1974, pp. 45 f.

82. *Buragohain Vamsavali* (MS).

83. HKB, p. 12 ; HAG, p. 78.

*According to some chronicles Thakumtha was the chief of both the Morans, and Barahis. (SAB, p. 5 ; DAB, p. 100).

84. Extract of an old chronicle published in the *Lik Phan Tai* ; HKB, p. 12 ; Endle, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

won over the Moran chief by diplomatic means.⁸⁵ Those sections of the Morans, who refused to surrender, were compelled to do so by force. According to *Purani Asam Buranji*, the headmen of these families were invited to participate in a feast, they were then made intoxicated and killed by Sukapha's men.⁸⁶ Sukapha gradually managed to engage the Morans as fuel-suppliers and orchard-keepers.⁸⁷ He also opened three *khats* (gardens or cornfields) at Gachikala, Barakhowa and Engera and engaged many Morans in clearing lands for the purpose.⁸⁸ In his dealings with the Morans and the Barahis, Sukapha was assisted by Thao-mung-Kling-lun-mung-rai Buragohain and Thao-mung-Kan Borgohain, who acted as his two ministers.

Sukapha received converts from the Morans. Thus while at Tipam by the side of the Dihing river, he was impressed by a Moran who used to supply him brinjals. Sukapha named him Lanmakkhru, as brinjals in Anom language is called *Makkhru*.⁸⁹ Lanmakkhru also rendered him great help in fighting the Nagas. In appreciation of this, Sukapha accepted him into the Ahom fold. Lanmakkhru became the progenitor of a distinct Ahom *Phoid* or clan named after him. Haladhi Thenga and Bandar, who were the Borphukans or Governors of Lower Assam in the reigns of Pratap Singha (1603-1641) and Sulikpha Lara Raja (1679-1681) respectively, were descendants of this clan.⁹⁰ Sukapha accepted another Moran, Maimai Khirat, a weigher by profession, from Tipam, to his fold. His family was subsequently made *Patar* by Sukhampha Khora Raja (1553-1603). Later on, a family of this clan was taken to

85. SAB, p. 6 ; DAB, pp. 100 f.

86. PAB, p. 14.

87. HKB, pp. 12 f ; KTP, p. 10.

88. HKB, p. 13 ; KTP, p. 10.

89. PAB, pp. 38 f ; *An account of Ahom Phoids and Clans*, Tr. No. 131, Vol. XIV, Part II, p. 35.

90. S. Rajkumar, *Itihase Suara Sushata Bachar*, Jorhat, 1980, p. 73: (henceforth abbreviated as ISSB).

Tingkhong as *Hatimuria* by Chaupet Buragohain.⁹¹ These new families were thoroughly assimilated with the old Ahoms. Offices and privileges enjoyed by the latter were made open to them.

Thaururu, the Buragohain of Subimpha (1281-1293), who having lost his way, while making an investigation in the neighbourhood of the Moran area, took shelter there and married a Moran girl and had two sons by her. After his death, when the secret was made known to the Ahom king, he appointed the elder son as the Buragohain and the younger one as Moran Gohainbarua i.e., the Governor of the Moran area.^{92*}

In the reign of Suhungmung or the Dihingia Raja (1497-1539) the descendants of the Moran and Barahi chiefs were established in responsible positions in different parts of the kingdom, such as, Chargua, Paibela, Dihing, Janji, Bagh-chau, Langkak, etc.^{93**}

91. AB, p. 36 ; PAB, pp. 30 f.

92. *Moran Buragohain and Moran Gonainbarua Vamsawali* ; P. Gohainbaru, *op. cit.*, pp. 33 f.

*Tharuru Buragohain married Dabuka, the daughter of the Moran chief and had two sons by her, Thabuk and Bakul. At the time of his death, the Buragohain handed over his *Hengdan* (the insignia of Ahom nobility) inserted in a bamboo pole. Thabuk supplied fuel to the royal household along with other Morans, but did not hand over the bamboo pole that he used to carry the fuel-loads, while the others surrendered theirs with the fuel-loads. One day in a tug-of-war for the bamboo pole between the royal cooks and Thabuk, the *Hengdan* was discovered. The secret of the *Hengdan* was revealed by the mother of Thabuk when she was summoned to the court. Being convinced, the King appointed the sons of the Buragohain as mentioned above. Certain chronicles, however, state that the Buragohain married not with the daughter of the Moran chief but with that of an ordinary Moran, and that he had only one son, who was sub-sequently made the Buragohain. (DAB, pp. 105, 211 ; SAB, pp. 10, 47 ; PAB, p. 15).

93. SAB, p. 15.

**P. Gogoi locates Chargua up the river Dhola and near Dihing where Sudangpha, a later Ahom king (1397-1407) built his capital. (P. Gogoi, *The Tai and the Tai Kingdom*, Gauhati University, 1968, p. 275). Excepting one or two places mentioned above, all other sites are still in existence.

When the Ahom kingdom was further extended towards the west, many officers of the Ahom administration were recruited from amongst the Morans. Even some top-ranking officers like that of the Borpatragohain⁹⁴ were recruited from the Morans. Moreover, as Moran people were expert in catching and training elephants, the Ahom elephantry was practically monopolised by them. Because they were brave warriors, they also contributed a major share to the man-power of the Ahom army. Thus the service of the Morans was of great help in the expansion and consolidation of the Ahom power in Assam.

The Barahis : The Barahis were another Bodo tribe, who lived near the Morans. It is not definitely known as to why they were called so. According to some member of the Barahi elderfolk, whom I interviewed, they are called Barahis, because originally they were worshipper of *Varaha*, an incarnation of god Vishnu. Madhav Kandali, a noted Assamese literary figure of the 14th century, acknowledges his gratitude to his patron, the Barahi King Mahamanikya, who ruled over the Kapili valley.⁹⁵ From this it appears that the different families of the Barahis were ruling in different parts of the Brahmaputra valley. But in course of time, they were overshadowed by some other powerful tribe like the Chutiyas and the Kacharis. A section of the Barahis still introduces themselves as Barahi-Chutiyas, from which, it appears that they were a clan or division of the Chutiyas.

At the time of Sukapha's advent to Assam, a branch of the Barahis was ruling in the tract bounded by the river Disang in the north, river Dikhow in the south, Nagahat in the east and Barahi-fika in the west.⁹⁶ Their chief was Thakumtha or Thamithuma,⁹⁷ who had his capital at the Charaideo hill.

94. ACMSV, p. 47 ; AARB, p. 200.

95. Hemchandra Goswami, *Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts*, Calcutta University, 1930, p. 139.

96. *Buragohain Vamsawali* (MS)

97. HKB, p. 12 ; HAC, p. 78.

According to some chronicles, Thakumtha was the chief of both the Morans and the Barahis.⁹⁸ As Sukapha, on grounds of political expediency, was pursuing a policy of peace and conciliation towards the conquered people, he won over the Barahis also by diplomatic means. He intermarried with these people as well,⁹⁹ and appointed them as cooks, store-keepers, poultry-farm managers, physicians, etc.¹⁰⁰ The Barahis had such proficiency in cooking that royal cooks were always appointed from amongst them.¹⁰¹ Members of the Barahis were also accepted to the Ahom fold and given responsible offices.

Following the Morans, they accepted initiation from the Mayamara Mahanta.

The Chutiyas : Next to the Morans, the most dominant members of the Matak community, were the Chutiyas. The origin of the name 'Chutiya' cannot be definitely ascertained. According to Benudhar Sarma, these people had their abode on the bank of the river Swatee, which flowed through Vidarbha (which he identifies with the Sadiya area), and for this, they were called 'Swateas' corrupted into Chatiyas or Chutiyas.¹⁰² But the existence of such a river in the area mentioned by Sarma is doubtful. R.M. Nath writes in a similar strain. According to him, there was a kingdom known as Chutan in the north-eastern region of the Brahmaputra valley, which may be identified with modern Arunachal. The people of that kingdom were called Chutiyas.¹⁰³ The existence of a kingdom known by that name in that area is yet to be proved. Hence his theory that the term 'Chutiya' originates from 'Chutan' is doubtful.

Whatever the origin of the term 'Chutiya' might be, there

98. SAB, p. 5.

99. SAB, p. 6 ; DAB, p. 100.

100. HKB, pp. 12 f ; KTP, p. 10.

101. PAB, p. 14.

102. B. Sarma, 'Chutia Culture' (in Assamese), *Souvenir, All Assam Chutiya Sanmilan, Golden Jubilee Issue*, 1974, p. 2.

103. R.M. Nath, 'Archaeology of the Chutiya Race' (in Assamese), *Souvenir, All Assam Chutiya Sanmilan*, p. 10.

is no denying the fact that like the Morans and the Barahis, they were also a Bodo tribe, speaking a language, which had close affinity with that of the Kacharis. According to W.B. Brown, the Chutiya language "may fairly claim to be the original language of Upper Assam",¹⁰⁴ which is now spoken by the Deoris, the priestly class of the Chutiyas.¹⁰⁵ P.R.T. Gurdon even provides a list of Deori-Chutiya and Kachari words to show their inter-linguistic relationship,¹⁰⁶ (see, Appendix B). Linguistic affinities well-evidence that the Chutiyas were a branch of the vast Bodo tribe. From the physical appearance of the Chutiyas, Gait opines "they have in their frames a considerable infusion of Shan blood....."¹⁰⁷ This may be possible because the Chutiyas were the next neighbours of the Shans of south-east Asia.¹⁰⁸

Assamese scholars are of one accord that the Chutiyas were the authors of the Kundil civilisation. They rose into power towards the later part of the 12th century or even earlier. According to P. Saikia, a modern researcher on the Chutiyas, the Chutiya kingdom was bounded by the Himalayas on the north, river Buri Dihing on the south, Patkai ranges in the east and Bharali river in the west.¹⁰⁹ Robinson¹¹⁰ and following him, N.N. Acharyya,¹¹¹ are of opinion that the Chutiya kingdom extended upto Viswanath in the present Darrang district of Assam. The Ahoms called the Chutiyas, Tiura.¹¹² According

104. W.B. Brown, *An Outline Grammar of the Deori-Chutiya Language*, Introduction, p. III.

105. Endle, *op. cit.*, p. 4 ; E.T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1879 (now entitled) *Tribal History of Eastern India*, Delhi, 1973, pp. 77 ff ; *The Assam District Gazetteers*, Sibsagar, 1905 ; CBMR, p. 4.

106. P.R.T. Gurdon, *loc. cit.*, pp. 36 ff.

107. HAG, p. 40.

108. *Ibid.*

109. P. Saikia, *Deori-Chutiya*, Jorhat, 1974, pp. 2 ff.

110. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 323.

111. N.N. Acharyya, *The History of Medieval Assam*, Gauhati, 1966, p. 232.

112. CBMR, p. 14.

to an Assamese chronicle, the Chutiya kingdom, at the advent of the Ahoms, was bounded by the mountain (meaning the Himalayas) in the north, Buri Dihing in the south, Brahmaputra in the east and river, Sisi, a branch of the Subansiri, on the west.¹¹³ According to an old *buranji* both the Morans and the Barahis were subordinate to the ruling tribe, the Chutiyas,¹¹⁴ which may not be impossible.

A section of the Chutiyas who came to be identified as Hindu-Chutiyas was Aryanised at a very early period. Indeed it appears that of all the tribes of the Brahmaputra valley, the Chutiyas were the most advanced and had a well-developed civilisation. The *Chutiya buranji* states that Gauri Narayan or Ratnadhvaj Pal (c 1224-1259), the greatest of their kings could make his power felt as far as Gaur and compel the king of Kamata to give his daughter in marriage to his son.¹¹⁵ The Ahoms avoided any confrontation with the Chutiyas, till they could strongly organise themselves. In 1376, the Chutiya King Sankhadhwaj Pal (c 1364-99) invited the Ahom king Sutupha (1364-1376) to witness a boat-rowing competition in the Suffry river within his kingdom and treacherously killed him.¹¹⁶ To avenge this, the next Ahom king Tyaokhamti (1380-1389), led an expedition to the Chutiya kingdom, but without any effect.¹¹⁷ The Chutiya power began to decline with the beginning of the 16th century. Taking advantage of an anarchical condition in the Chutiya kingdom under the rule of an inefficient king Dhir Narayan (c 1504-1523), the Ahom King Suhungnung or the Dihingia Raja (1497-1539) annexed the Chutiya kingdom in 1523, and appointed an officer called Sadiya Khowa Gohain to govern the territory. The annexation so greatly increased the workload that the office of the third minister namely, that of the Borpatragohain in Ahom

113. *Buragohain Vamsawali* (MS)

114. Assamese Manuscript incorporated in Ney Elias'—*Introductory Sketch of the History of the Shans in Upper Burma and Western Yunnan*, Calcutta, 1876, pp. 61 f; N.N. Acharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

115. W.B. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 78 f; N.N. Acharyya, *op. cit.*, pp. 235 f.

116. N.N. Acharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 236; HKB., p. 15.

117. AB, p. 49.

administration had to be created. Suhungmung scattered the Chutiya nobles in different parts of his kingdom, so as to prevent an organised rebellion from them.¹¹⁸ Still then the Chutiyas continued to rebel till the close of the 16th century.¹¹⁹ The Ahoms accepted many Chutiyas to their fold and offered them responsible offices in the administration. Langi Panisiya, the first Borphukan, was a Chutiya by caste.¹²⁰ The founders of noted Ahom families like those of Chetia and Lahon were Chutiyas.¹²¹

The Chutiya war brought not only large annexation of territory to the Ahom kingdom, but also brought groups of people proficient in different technical skills, such as blacksmiths, goldsmiths, weavers etc.¹²² Henceforth, the Chutiyas were engaged in all technical jobs of the Ahom kingdom. For example, the *Khanikar Khel* (guild of engineers) was always manned by the Chutiyas. The *Japi-sajiya Khel* (guild for making *Japis*) was also monopolised by them. The Chutiyas being expert warriors, knew the use of matchlocks. After their subjugation, the Chutiyas were, therefore, engaged in manufacturing matchlocks and they became prominent in the *Hiloidari Khel* (guild for manufacturing matchlocks). Besides, items of Chutiya aristocracy like the *Danda-Chhatra* (royal umbrella), *Arwan**, *Kekura-dola* (Palaquin), embroidered-*japi* etc., were adopted by the Ahoms.¹²³ The Chutiya kingdom had also several salt-springs at places like Borhat, which came under the Ahoms after its annexation.

Those Chutiyas, who were not Hinduised and lived in the neighbourhood of the Mayamara *Saira*, accepted initiation

118. SAB, pp. 13 f; HAG, pp. 87 ff.

119. N.N. Acharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

120. PAB, p. 31.

121. *Ibid.*; pp. 29 f.

122. SAB, p. 14.

*Arwan—an insignia of authority circular in shape made of wicker—work covered with embroidered silk or cotton case, used by the king, the three great nobles and the three frontier governors.

123. SAB, p. 14.

from its *Mahanta* and came to be known as Matak-Chutiya. At present the Matak-Chutiyas are mostly the disciples of the Tiphuk Mayamara *Mahantas*. There is a clan among the Chutiyas, known as Buruk-Chutiya, who are also disciples of the Mayamara *Satra*. The Buruk-Chutiyas, according to P. Saikia, are the direct descendants of the Chutiya royal family. Sarbananda Singha, the ruler of the Mataks, is said to be a Buruk-Chutiya by caste.¹²⁴

The Kacharis : The Kacharis are perhaps the earliest known indigenous inhabitants of Assam. They are genuine Bodos and are still called so in the Brahmaputra valley. In the North-Cachar Hills, they are called 'Dimachas', meaning, sons of the big river. The Ahoms refer to them as 'Tinisa', obviously a corruption of the word 'Diamacha'. In the Brahmaputra valley the Kacharis call themselves 'Bodo' or 'Bodo-fisa' (meaning sons of the 'Bodo'). The Kacharis are identical with the people called Mech, in Goalpara and North Bengal.¹²⁵

The origin of the word 'Kachari' is still a matter of conjecture, and inference. According to the Limbu legend of creation, mentioned by Risley, "one of the two progenitors of human race settled in the *Khachar country*, which is the name given by the Nepalese to the tract at the foot of the hills between the Brahmaputra and the Kosi rivers, and there became the father of the Koch, Mech and Dhimal tribes."¹²⁶ Waddell, echoing a similar view, says that the term 'Kachari' is an 'Indian term' denoting an inhabitant of the *Kachha* or sub-mountain marshy tracts.¹²⁷ The opinion that the present district of Cachar gave the name 'Kachari' to these people cannot be accepted. "They are known by that name in many parts far removed from Cachar, and were so called long before

124. P. Saikia, *op. cit.*, pp. 2 ff.

125. HAG, p. 299; N.N. Acharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

126. H.H. Risely, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1872, p. 247; HAG (Reprint, 1967), p. 299.

127. L.A. Waddell, *The Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley*, Delhi, Reprint, 1975, pp. 44 f.

a section of the tribe took possession of that district."¹²⁸ It is, therefore, possible that Cachar, the present district of Assam, got its name from the Kachari people themselves, who formed a principal tribe of the region.

When the Ahoms came to Assam, the Kacharis were ruling over an extensive territory west of the Morans and the Barahis on the south bank of the Brahmaputra. Their kingdom also stretched half-way across the modern Nowgong district and included about three-fourths of the present Sibsagar district.¹²⁹ They have left traces of their domination over this tract in the nomenclature of some of the places and rivers. The Bodo equivalent for water is di, which forms the first syllable of the names of the chief rivers of eastern Assam, such as, Dihong, Dibang, Disang, Dibru, Dihing, Dikrong, Dikhow, etc.¹³⁰

The Ahoms had their first encounter with the Kacharis in the reign of Suteupha (1268—1281), who drove the latter to the west of the river Dikhow. But in 1490, they suffered a defeat while attempting to push further at the cost of the Kacharis and sued for peace.¹³¹ Thenceforth the Ahoms pursued a policy backed by both diplomacy and force in their dealings with this tribe. The powerful king Suhugmung or the Dihingia Raja (1497-1539) occupied the Kachari territory upto the river Dhansiri including their capital at Dimapur, compelled them to retreat further south to the present districts of Cachar and North Cachar ; and declared their king as "thapita-sanchita" i.e., established and protected by Ahoms.¹³² This king created offices of Marangikhowa Gohain to govern the lower valley of the Dhansiri and Rahial Barua to watch the movements of the Kacharis in the Kapili valley. The Kacharis did not accept the Ahom subordination and made repeated attempts

128. HAG, pp. 299 f ; N.N. Acharyya, *op. cit.*, pp. 213 f.

129. L. Devi, *Ahom-Tribal Relations*, Gauhati, 1968, p. 77 ; HAG (Reprint, 1967), p. 300.

130. Endle, *op. cit.*, pp. 1 ff ; N.N. Acharyya, *op. cit.*, pp. 216 f.

131. HAG p. 301 ; Devi, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

132. HAG p. 301 ; Devi, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

to assert their independence. The Kachari king Krishnachandra Narayan (c 1790-1830) lent support to the Matak rebels and refused to send the Matak refugees from his kingdom, which resulted in a war in 1803, where the Kacharis and their Matak allies were decisively defeated by the Ahoms.¹³³

In spite of continued warfare between the Kacharis and the Ahom kings, a great number of Kachari people remained within the Ahom kingdom. The Ahoms received many Kacharis to their fold, and sometimes appointed them to the highest offices in the administration. For example, in the reign of Rudra Singha (1696-1714) a Kachari held the post of Borgohain.¹³⁴

The rivers in the area occupied from the Kacharis were abounded with gold-particles; the Kacharis were therefore, proficient in extracting gold by washing sands of the rivers. When they became subjects of the Ahom kingdom, they were therefore, appointed as gold-washers and organised into a *Sonowal Khel*. These Kacharis came to be known as Sonowal Kacharis.

A large number of Kachari became disciples of the Mayamara *Satras*. They introduced themselves as Matak Kacharis.

The Ahoms: The Ahoms are the members of the Tai or Shan section of the Siamese-Chinese branch of the Sino-Tibetans.¹³⁵ They emigrated to Assam in the early part of the 13th century. It is said that the term 'Ahom' is a corruption of the Sanskrit word 'Assam' meaning 'unparalleled', which was applied to the Shan invaders by the subjugated Barahis.¹³⁶ Subsequently, the term 'Asama' or 'Asam' or 'Assam' used to

133. TB, p. 149; SAB, pp. 179 ff; HAG, p. 309; Devi, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

134. AB, p. 31; Devi, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

135. Waddell, *op. cit.*, p. 17; Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 159; Grierson, *op. cit.*, p. 59; HAG, p. 70; AARB, p. 2; S.K. Chatterjee, *Kirata-Jana-Kriti*, pp. 51, 102; P. Gogoi, *The Tai and the Tai Kingdom*, pp. 1 ff; Lila Gogoi, "The Tai, their origin and branches", *The Tai Khamtis*, Chowkbam, 1971, pp. 1 ff.

136. HKB, pp. 12 f.

denote the country inhabited by these people. According to another opinion, the term 'Ahom' has been derived from the Tai word 'Ao-Hom' meaning 'to get-together',¹³⁷ which refers to Sukapha's free mixing with the local tribes and adding to the numerical strength of his followers with converts from among these people. But it is more probable that the term comes from the Bodo word 'A-Shan' (Shan), meaning the land of the Shans,¹³⁸ which was later applied to the people as well, and corrupted into 'Ahom' (Ahan/Aham) as the sibilant 's' (sh) used to be pronounced by the Tai-Shans as the aspirit 'h'.¹³⁹

Before their conversion to Hinduism, the Ahoms were animists adhering to Taoism. They worshipped a number of gods whom they propitiated with sacrifices and offerings.¹⁴⁰ Their tutelary deity was Chom-Cheng, whose worship was believed to bring peace and prosperity and defeat of the enemy.¹⁴¹ Sukapha was accompanied by his priests—*Deodhais* and *Bailungs*. In course of time, they came under the pale of Hinduism, which afterwards so much overruled them that their traditional priests were reduced to insignificance, and some of later Ahom monarchs became more concerned with observing religious rites than performing their state-duties. The Ahom religious policy would be discussed in relevant places of this work.

Although the Ahom royalty, since the beginning, adopted in general, a hostile attitude towards the Mayamara *Satra*, many Ahom commoners, nay even members of the Ahom nobility, accepted initiation from the Mayamara *Mahanta*. This had greatly increased the strength and power of the *Satra*. These disciples, some of whom were also in the service of the government, divulged military secrets of royalist side and thereby

137. Bimalakanta Barua, *Tai Bhasha*, Jorhat, 1974, p. 3.

138. P. Gogoi, *The Tai and the Tai Kingdom*, p. 269.

139. HAG, p. Appendix G.

140. P. Gogoi, *The Tai and the Tai Kingdom*, pp. 523 ff.

141. AARB, p. 17.

contributed to the success of the Matak Rebellion.¹⁴²

The Kaivartas : The Kaivartas are one of the early inhabitants of Assam.* They might have immigrated to Assam from neighbouring countries of Bengal and Bihar.¹⁴³ Indian classical writers made mention of them as offsprings of a *Nishada* father and an *Ayogava* mother.¹⁴⁴ According to the *Brahmavaivarta Purana*, a Kaivartra was born of a Kshatriya father and a Vaishya mother.¹⁴⁵ The Buddhist Jatakas refer to a class of fishermen who worked with nets and baskets and were called Kevattas.¹⁴⁶ It is held by some that the term 'Kaivarta' is a Sanskritised form of this Prakrit 'Kevatta'.

Gait,¹⁴⁷ Robinson¹⁴⁸ and others allude Dravidian origin to the Kaivartas of Assam. This origin of the Kaivartas is supported by their still-retaining some prominent Dravidian traits.

The Kaivartas were generally known in Assam as 'Doms', and by this term they are referred to in all Assamese chronicles. But they now consider this appellation as derogatory and introduce themselves by the Sanskrit appellation 'Kaivarta'. They were also called *Nadials*, meaning one who lived in the river side, which evidences the fact that fishing being the main occupation of the Kaivartas, they were required to live on the banks of the rivers. They are still prominent in the population of Assam.

142. BVMD.

*Even in the ancient period a few Kaivartas held administrative offices. The Tezpur Rock Inscription of Harjaravarman (c. 820—836 A.D.) refers to a Kaivarta, who was in charge of collecting State-toll on the rivers. (K.L. Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 115).

143. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

144. Manu-*Manusamhita*, Ch. X, 4,

145. Chapter X, 34.

146. Social Glienderung, Tr., p. 392 (cf. B.K. Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 114).

147. HAG, p. 2.

148. Robinson, p. 263.

The Kaivartas had their own priests and formed a distinct class in the society. Their professional and sectarian identities fostered in them a strong community feeling, for which they were considered as potential enemies by the Ahom government.¹⁴⁹ In the social stratification they were put in the lowest ladder.

The Kaivartas were attracted easily towards neo-Vaisnavism, particularly towards the Mayamara *Satra*, which uplifted the oppressed and down-trodden backward classes by giving them equal status with the disciples of the higher caste. Besides, the democratic organisation of the *Satras* not only honoured their community feeling but created conditions for its further development. Still now, a sizeable section of the disciples of the Mayamara *Satras* belongs to the Kaivartas.

H.R. Dhekial Phukan informs us that the Ahom king distinguished the Kaivartas by putting the mark of a fish on their foreheads, as the latter, disguising themselves as men of superior rank, were found to intermarry with the higher castes of the society.^{150*} But what is more probable is that the Ahoms considered the Kaivartas, who were disciples of the Mayamara *Satras*, as their enemies, as they were suspected of propagating revolutionary ideas among the people.

The Kaivartas took a very active part in the Matak Rebellion. One of them named Haidhan (Haridhan) even challenged the Ahom King Gaurinath Singha when he was at Gauhati, after being driven out from his capital at Rangpur by the Matak insurgents, and compelled to leave his Gauhati camp.¹⁵¹ Another assumed independent power about the same period near Sadiya.¹⁵²

149. S.L. Barua, *Rajmantri Purnananda Buragohain and His Times* (Ph. D. Thesis).

150. H.R. Dhekial Phukan, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

*Maniram Dewan, however, states that it was Purnananda Buragohain, the Ahom Premier, who did so. (BVMD).

151. TB. p. 125.

152. Capt. S.O. Hannay, *loc. cit.*, pp. 67 ff.

The Brahmanas (Brahmins) : Assam came into contact with Aryan culture at a very early period. Even legendary kings like Naraka and Bhagadatta are credited with the establishment of Brahmanas in the land.¹⁵³ The influence of Kamarupa over north-eastern India, after the fall of the Imperial Guptas in the later part of the 5th century A.D., caused the migration of a large number of Brahmanas to Kamarupa.¹⁵⁴ The kings of ancient Assam adopted a systematic policy of establishing the Brahmanas in their kingdoms by *Agrahara* landgrants. The earliest reference to this is noticed in the *Nidhanpur* plates, by which Bhaskarvarman confirmed the landgrants made by his predecessor Bhutivarman (c 510-555 A.D.) to more than 200 Brahmana families in North Bengal.^{155*} The later kings including the Koches and the Ahoms continued to patronise the Brahmanas.

The social organisation of the Brahmanas was distinguished by *gotras* and *Vedasakhas*.¹⁵⁶ The Brahmanas of Assam traced their descent from the Brahmanas of Kanyakubja (Kanauj), and followed the Mithila School in matters relating to inheritance, marriage, worship, sacrifice, performance of daily *sandhya* prayers, etc.¹⁵⁷

In the *Satras* of the Brahmanical order, the Brahmanas continued their social importance and the hierarchy as being at the top of the ladder, but their counterparts, who became disciples of the Mayamara *Satras*, greatly lost their prestige and position. They were placed on an equal footing with the *Sudra* or non-Brahmana disciples, which included the tribals.

153. K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamarupa*, 2nd edition, Gauhati, 1966, p. 14.

154. B.K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam*, (Early period), Vol. I, Nowgong, 1951, p. 104.

155. *Ibid.*

*The creation of *Agraharas* for Brahmins of various *gotras* is also found in the epigraphs, such as, Tezpur Grant, v. 30 ; Nowgong Grant, v. 26 ; Sualkuchi Grant, v. 16 ; Gauhati Grant, v. 26, etc.

156. B.K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam*, p. 104.

157. *Ibid.*, (2nd edition), Gauhati, 1969, p. 119.

Although the Matak Brahmanas continued to perform the Vedic rites, they had to give more emphasis on Mayamara religious scriptures and performance of *Gayan-bayan*, so that the Brahmanic rituals among them were reduced to a negligible proportion. It was possibly for this reason that Maniram Dewan remarked that the Brahmanas of the *Kalasambati Satras*, which included mainly the Mayamara and Dihing *Satras*, did not observe the *Sandhya-Gayatri*.^{158*} The number of Brahmanas in the Matak community is of course very few.

The Kayasthas : They are of Aryan stock and came to Assam from Videha (Mithila) and Kanauj along with the Brahmanas and later also from Bengal. The kings of ancient Assam established both Brahmanas and Kayasthas in their kingdom. They enjoyed a high social status and worked as officers and scribes under the kings of ancient Assam as well as under the Ahom rule. In the later period, during the reign of Durlabh Narayan (1330-1350), a few families of Kayasthas were established in the western part of the Brahmaputra valley. Among these Kayasthas was Chandibar, the great grand-father of Sankardeva, the founder of the neo-Vaisnavite movement in Assam.¹⁵⁹ Many of the Vaisnava reformers including Aniruddhadeva, the founder of the Mayamara *Satra*,¹⁶⁰ were Kayasthas. In the Matak community, however, except the families of the *Satradhikars*, there is no other Kayasths.

The Kalitas : The Kalitas occupied an important place in the medieval Assamese society. According to popular tradition, the Kalitas were Kshatriyas, who fled to the forest of Assam to escape the wrath of Parasuram, who was determined to exterminate the Kshatriyas. So they came to be known as *Kula-lupta* (*Kula*-caste, *lupta*-gone), which term was later

158. BVMD.

*This view of course, has been denied by the Brahmanas of this sect.

159. Ramcharan Thakur, *Sankar Charit* ; P. Gohainbarua, *op. cit.*, pp. 3 ff ; HAG, pp. 40 f. ; R.M. Nath, *op. cit.*, 55.

160. ACMSV, pp. 6 f.

corrupted into Kalita,¹⁶¹ thereby implying a degraded caste.* On the basis of this tradition the Kalitas claim themselves to be Kayasthas and hence of Aryan origin. But according to most of the scholars, the Kalitas were Vratyas or Alpines, who entered Assam before the Aryans.¹⁶⁵ Waddell noticed slight Mongoloid traits in some of them,¹⁶³ which was evidently due to their interfusion with the Mongoloid tribes in later times.

The Kalitas were distributed all over Assam, and they monopolised most of the trades and professions of the land. They were divided into two classes—*Barkalitas* and *Sarukalitas*. The *Barkalitas* acted as scribes, traders or merchants. When the *Satra* institution was established, some of them also became *Satradhikars*. The *Sarukalitas* were professionals, which included the blacksmiths (*Kamar-Kalita*), goldsmith (*Sumari-Kalita*), bell-metal workers (*Kanhar Kalita*), potters (*Kumar-Kalita*), washermen (*Dhoba-Kalita*), dancers (*Nat-Kalita*), etc.

Tradition speaks of a Kalita kingdom,¹⁶⁴ which was situated at a distance of 40 days journey from Sadiya. The biography of Bhavanipuriya Gopal Ata (1541-1611 A.D.), a disciple of Sankardeva, mentions of a Kalita kingdom that lay to the north-east of 'Achama' (Assam) and near the region inhabited by the hill-tribes like the Mishings and the Adis*.¹⁶⁵

161. *Assam District Gazetteers*, Sibsagar district, p. 91.

*Since the very historicity of Parasuram is doubtful, who is placed both in *Treta* and *Dwapara Yugas*, the mythological interpretation of the word 'Kalita' cannot be accepted, (For details, see B.K. Kakati, *Kalita Jatir Itibritta*, 2nd publication, Gauhati, 1962, pp. 45 ff.

162. K.L. Barua, 'Alpines in Eastern India', *Studies in the Early History of Assam* (ed.) M. Neog, Jorhat, 1973, pp. 126 f ; P.C. Choudhury, *The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam to the 12th Century A.D.*, DHAS, Gauhati, 2nd edition, 1966, pp. 101 f.

163. Waddell, *op. cit.*, pp. 49 f.

164. B.K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, 3rd impression, 1967, Gauhati, pp. 59 ff ; *Kalita Jatir Itibritta*, pp. 4 ff ; Major S. Johri, 'A brief History of Assam', *where India, China and Burma Meet*, Calcutta, 1933, pp. 34 ff.

165. Cited from, B.K. Kakati, *Kalita Jatir Itibritta*, pp. 4.

*Early Rey were known as Miris and Abons respectively.

On the basis of these references, Neufville located the kingdom 'to the eastward of Bhot (Bhutan) and the northward of Sadiya, extending in the Plains beyond the mountains. Neufville also confirms that the kingdom was washed away by a great flood during the middle of the 18th century,¹⁶⁶ which view is supported by S.K. Bhuyan.¹⁶⁷ The *buranjis*, however, do not speak of any Kalita kingdom. It is probable that some of the Bhuyans, who, at times, need to govern their-respective territories on both banks of the Brahmaputra, as independent lords, were Kalitas. The *Bibidh Khanda Buranji*, incorporated in *Deodhai Assam Buranji*, contains reference to one Bhadrasen, who was ruling in a tract in the north bank and was defeated by the Chutiya King Gauri Narayan or Ratnadhvaj Pal (c 1224-1259).¹⁶⁸ This Bhadrasen might be a Kalita Bhuyan, ruling like an independent king. The Bhuyans were finally subdued by the Ahom King Pratap Singha (1603-1641).

There are references to certain Kalitas who were given responsible offices in Ahom administration. One of them was Manthir Bharali Barua, the Incharge of the royal store, who was promoted to the rank of a Phukan and then sent as the supreme commander of the Ahom army to fight the invading Mughals under the great general Mir Jumla.^{169*} Another Kalita, named Kekeru, who was holding the office of Cholahdara Phukan (chief chamberlain) during the reign of Lakshmi Singha (1769-1780), rendered valuable service to the monarch in suppressing the Matak Rebellion, for which he became such a great favourite of the latter, that he began to disregard even the three cabinet ministers—the Buragohain and the Borpatragohain. Pressurised by the ministers, the monarch

166. J.B. Neufville, 'On the Geography and Population of Assam', *Asiatic Reserches*, Vol. XVI, Calcutta, 1828, pp. 344 f.

167. S.K. Bhuyan, *Swargadeo Rajeswar Singha*, Gauhati, 1975, p. 104. (henceforth abbreviated as SRSB).

168. DAB, p. 194.

169. SAB, pp. 31 f, 90; AB (SM), p. 93.

*His appointment created dissatisfaction among the Ahom nobles. S.K. Bhuyan refers to him as a Kayastha (AARB, p. 8)

at last dismissed the Kalita Phukan and ordered him to settle in Tamulbari on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. The Phukan, soon after his arrival in that place, proclaimed himself King, assuming the name 'Mirhang'. An expedition was sent against him. He was defeated and then killed.¹⁷⁰ Haradata Chaudhury of Kamrup, who revolted during the reign of Gaurinath Singha¹⁷¹ (1780-1794), was perhaps a Kalita by caste. His activities would be discussed in a subsequent chapter of this work.

Several Ahom kings married Kalita girls. Thus Suhungmung or the Dihingia Raja married the daughter of a Sonari¹⁷², who was a Kalita. Queen Phuleswari, who yielded sovereign power in the reign of Siva Singha (1714-1744) and who by her activities precipitated the Matak Rebellion, with the daughter of a Nat-Kalita.¹⁷³ Chandrakanta Singha married Padmavati, the daughter of an ordinary disciple of the Bengena-ati *Satra* and made her the Chief Queen.¹⁷⁴ Padmavati is believed to be a Kalita girl.

Quite a good number of Kalitas accepted initiation from the Mayamara *Mahanta* and introduced themselves as Matak-Kalitas. Being traders and professionals, they added to the economic prosperity of the *Satra* and contributed to the success of the Matak Rebellion.

The *Brittials* or the professional castes : There were also certain professional castes in the Matak community. They were loosely called *Brittials*. Though the term usually denoted the goldsmiths and the blacksmiths, other professionals were also included within it. Most prominent of these were the *Yogis* (snake-charmers), *Katanis* (rearers of *Muga* and *Pat* worms),

170. TB, pp. 76 ff ; MS chronicle of Lakshmi Singha ; HAG, p. 198 ; SRSB, pp. 103 f.

171. TB, p. 118.

172. P. Gogoi, *The Tai and the Tai Kingdom*, p. 309.

173. TB, p. 37.

174. HKB, p. 35 ; TB (E), p. 197.

Hiras (potters), *Salois* (carpenters), *Rajakas* (washermen), *Gowals* (cowherds) and *Napits* (barbers).

Further, a Muslim tailor named Dheli Darji accepted initiation from Aniruddhadeva, the founder of the Mayamara *Satra*. He was shown the highest respect by the *Guru*, who passed injunctions to his disciples that any of them, be he a Brahmana, if visited his (Dheli Darji) place, should dine from the same hearth, or in his turn, if the Muslim convert would visit the house of caste-Hindu Matak, he was to be shown all respect due to an honoured guest. Dheli Darji after his conversion, was named Dhyanapati. He also enjoyed the office of a Bora under the Ahom government. Among the Matakas, the descendants of Dheli Darji are still known as '*Garia Barar Ghar*', meaning the 'family of the Garia Bora', as the Muslims in Assam are popularly called *Garia*, which is a corruption of the term '*Gauria*', indicating that they hailed from Gaur. Later, when a branch of the Mayamara *Satra* was established at Tiphuk in about 1765, a line of the descendants of Dheli Darji, who became disciples of that *Satra*, was shown regards in like way. The head of the line who was a *Khatowal Burha* or incharge of a *Khat* belonging to the *Satra* was made a member of the Council of four, who could make and unmake the head of a *Satra*.*

Conclusion :

Thus members of different castes and tribes, becoming disciples of the Mayamara *Satra*, formed a greater community—the Matak community. There was never a tribe called 'Matak', but their sectarian unity, which was later reinvigorated by a political purpose of fighting the government was so complete that they possessed almost all the characteristics of a regular tribal organisation.¹⁷⁵ Further, the Mayamara and also the Dihing *Satras* did great service to the society by accepting the members of the depressed classes to their fold and placing them

*See *infra*, Chapter II, p. 75.

¹⁷⁵. AARB, p. 254.

on an equal footing with members of the so-called higher castes. S.K. Bhuyan rightly points out :

In other parts of India, the humiliation to which these unfortunates were subjected, drove them to the bosom of other religions ; in Assam, the liberal policy of the Kalasamhati *Satras* (Mayamara and Dihing being the most leading ones) endowed them with a sense of self-respect and individual value.¹⁷⁶

This led to the great popularity of these two *Satras* and particularly the Mayamara, *Satra*, whose disciples increased day by day. As a result, not only the government, but some other *Satras* too, belonging mainly to the Brahmanical order considered the Matakas as their rivals. But the latter overcame all stress and strains and finally succeeded in carving out for themselves an autonomous kingdom.

176. *Ibid*, p. 197.

Socio-Economic Life of the Matak*

In this chapter, we would give a brief account of the socio-economic life of the Matak community, which drawing a new inspiration from the Neo-Vaisnavite movement prepared the platform, from where, it organised its successful challenge to the Ahom monarchy. In doing this, we would also show how the Vaisnava reformers, in order to make the new creed amenable to the tribal communities, made compromises with their traditional rites, manners and customs, and at the same time, introduced certain new cultural elements, which only strengthened their solidarity. As the number of Caste-Hindus had been very small in this community, we would confine our discussion, here, to the life of the tribal members, in the main. As such, the term "Matak" in this particular chapter would denote the concerned tribes only.

*The present Socio-Economic conditions, rites and celebrations of the Matak People, living in different parts of the State, are subjected to local variations, which may be ascribed to various factors, such as, geographical distance, historical time gap, growth of local branches, *Satras*, etc.

Society :

Morans, Barahis, Kacharis and Chutiyas were the main tribes in the Matak Community. As all of them were Bodos in origin, they had a common pattern of living too. They lived in joint families. The number of members in a joint family, sometimes exceeded one hundred.¹ The father was the head of the family. It was only when the family became too big and unmanageable, that married sons were allowed to have their independent establishments. Joint families were not allowed to have separate hearths.² Household duties were discharged by the family members with mutual understanding and co-operation, on rotatory basis. The seeds of community life were thus sown in their family life itself.

Several such families united together and formed a village. Each village had a headman called *Gaonburha*. His office was hereditary. He was elected by the elders of the village, taking into account his moral integrity, intellect and such other qualities. The elders of the village formed a body or Council called *Rajmel* with the *Gaonburha* as its President. The Council looked after any matter relating to the village. Questions of defence, crime and punishment were also under its jurisdiction. Its decision was binding upon all villagers. Public works, like digging of a tank, constructing and repairing an embankment, a road or a bridge were done jointly by all villagers.*

The feeling of this corporate life was further strengthened by the Neo-Vaisnavite movement, which disseminated such ideals through the *Satra* and the *Namghar*.

Child marriage was unknown among the tribes. Girls were free to choose their partners in life. Even in cases of

1. CBMR, p. 15.

2. P.C. Chaudhury, *op. cit.*, pp. 319 ff; P.C. Choudhury, "Prak Ahom Yogar Asamiya Sanskriti" (in Assamese), *Asamiya Sanskriti* (ed.), H.P. Neog and L. Gogoi, Jorhat, 1966, pp. 62 ff.

*Most of these features are also applicable to an Assamese village.

settled marriages, consent of the girl was always taken. There was no system of dowry, on the other hand, the groom had to pay a bride price called *Ga-dhan*. Family was monogamous. Polygamy was allowed only in cases of a childless marriage and that too, with the consent of the first wife. The widows had the liberty to remarry. Women thus enjoyed equality and liberty in the society to a great extent. And it was for this spirit of equality between man and woman that a large number of women could participate in the Rebellion against the Ahom monarchy and some, like Radha and Rukmini, even took the lead.

The social rites of the Matak, connected with birth, marriage and death were very simple. After the birth of a child, gods and goddesses were propitiated by the offering of fowls. Marriage was performed according to their tribal rites. The ceremony was invariably held in the bride's place. In case of a settled marriage, the proposal was formally given to the bride's party. A suitable date was then fixed and the marriage was celebrated with a community feast. When the marriage was arranged by the couple itself the same procedure was followed. But in case of abduction, the groom was to pay a fine and then entertain the villagers with a feast. Some tribes like the Chutiyas and the Barahis observed certain death rites. In performance of these rites also, their community feeling was clearly discernible. For example, the expenditure, incurred in connection with a marriage or death ceremony, was not an individual affair. When a marriage was held the family of the bride or the groom was materially helped by the community. Again, when a person died, the bereaved family would perform the death rites jointly along with some other bereaved parties, and for doing this, a bereaved party sometimes had to wait for a year or so.

Theirs being an agricultural society, almost all the social functions of the Matak were connected either with agriculture or hunting. Before sowing seeds and after completing harvesting, certain merriments were performed, on a community basis, where singing, dancing and feasting predominated.

The most popular festival of the Mataks, like the rest of the Assamese population, was *Bihu*, but their performance of it was connected with worshipping their tribal goddess, the Primal female deity.³ Unless sacrifice was made to her, they would not start the festival. The Vaisnava reformers failed to persuade them to perform *Bihu* in a secular manner, as the other Assamese people used to do.

Even after their conversion to Vaisnavism, the tribal members of the Matak community continued to perform their marriage and death rites according to their traditional customs. Subsequently, however, some of them adopted the practice of performing the *Nama-prasanga*, on occasions of celebrations connected with marriage and death.*

The dress and food-habits of the Mataks were very simple. The manfolk used to wear a *churia*⁴ and tie *gamocha*-like piece of black cloth on their heads, which distinguished them from the rest of the Assamese population, whose *gamocha* was usually white with a red border. In my personal interview with some Moran elderfolk, I was informed that, they originally used a kind of black turban in order to protect their heads from the biting of a kind of snake called *Danhisap* abounded in their area, whose habit was to bite on the head of a man. The replacement of the black turban by a piece of *gamocha*-like black cloth was perhaps owing to the fact, that turban being the insignia of the Ahom king and the *Dangarias*, the subject population were prohibited from using it. The Matak womanfolk initially used a single garment called *Thia-mekhela*, tied from breast to ankles and wrapped the same kind of black *gamocha* on their heads. Later, they used to wrap their bodies

3. D. Deori, *Deori Sanskriti*, 1964, pp. 72 f, 136 ff ;
B. Narzi, *Bodo Kacharir Samaj aru Sanskriti*, 2nd edition, 1971, pp. 271 f.

*The Caste Hindus, however, performed their marriage and death rites like their counterparts in other *Satras*, but with emphasis on Mayamara religious scriptures and *Gayan-bayan*.

4. SAB, p. 7.

with a kind of upper garment called *parkani*. This practice perhaps came through Neo-Vaisnavism, which made it compulsory for a woman to cover her head with a veil, while offering prayers to God. The use of blouse came at a much later date. The garments were made of coarse cotton and *Endi*, use of *Muga* and *Pat*, being restricted for the common people.

A notable feature of the Matak community was the absence of a caste-system. There was inter-dining and inter-marriage among the tribes and castes composing the community. Although, the caste-Hindus of the community now claim that there was no inter-marriage between them and the tribes, the practice of taking wives by their *Gurus** themselves from amongst the tribes, lead us to conclude that such restriction was a later development. Of course, the Brahman Matak probably did not inter-marry with the non-Brahman or Sudra Matak. With the introduction of Neo-Vaisnavism, some animals and birds, like pigs and fowls, were considered as unclean and the Matak disciples were advised to abhor the practice of taking these. The new creed also considered *Lao-Pani*, a kind of home-made rice beer, used by all the tribes as unclean. But it introduced the use of milk, earlier considered a taboo among the tribes, in the form of *paraman* or *payasha* in religious gatherings.

Religious Beliefs and Rites :

Most of the tribal members of the Matak like the Morans, Barahis, Kacharis and Chutiyas, being members of the great Bodo family, had allied religious beliefs and customs. All of them worshipped a Primordial male deity and a Primordial female deity, and all of them were animists,⁵ before their conversion to Vaisnavism. The male deity was called by the Kacharis as *Bathau*, *Bathau Brai*, *Bathau Chi-baurai*, *Khauriya*

*The Tiphuk *Gosains* are very liberal till to-day in their marriage system. Astabhujadeva, it is said, married a Moran lady, which, of course, is denied by the *Mayamara Satrar Vamsavali*.

5. Shakespear, *op. cit.*, pp. 71 f ; Endle, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

Baurai, Gila Dambra, etc.,⁶ and by the Chutiyas as *Kundimama*, *Balia-Baba* or *Pisha-dema*.⁷ The Primordial female deity was called by the Kacharis as *Al-Deo*, *Kamakhi*, *Kamlakhi*, etc., and by the Chutiyas as *Pisha-si*, *Kechaikhati*, etc. The tribes also believed in the cosmic union of the Primordial god and the Primordial goddess. The Chutiyas, for example, worshipped the Primordial parents *Gira-Girasi* or *Bura Buri*, who were later Hinduised as *Siva* and *Sakti*. The ruins of the *Bura-Buri* temple are still found in a place, named *Tarani*, at the confluence of the *Dibrang* and the *Deopani* rivers, at a distance of about 16 Km. north of *Sadiya*, and those of the *Balia-baba* temple are found at the foot of the *Jaidam* hills on the eastern bank of the *Tengapani* river. The most famous temple of the Chutiyas was that of *Kechaikhati*, their Primordial female deity, situated on the south bank of the *Deopani* river in the *Payar* forest, at a distance of about 48 Km. on the north-east side of *Sadiya*.⁸ Since time immemorial, this was one of the two noted centres of *Sakti* worship in *Assam*, the other being that of *Kamakhya*. In both places, the goddess was worshipped with human sacrifice. As the roof of the temple at *Sadiya* was made of copper, the goddess was also called *Tameswari Mai*, latter Sanskritised as *Tamreswari*. The practice of making human sacrifice in the temple of *Kechaikhati* was continued by the *Ahoms*, till it was stopped by *Ring Gaurinath Singha* (1780-1795) towards the close of the 18th century. Votaries from the neighbouring countries like *Nepal*, *Bhutan*, *Tibet* and *China* used to visit this temple.⁹ The Chutiyas had also idols of their Primordial god and goddess. This shows that following the conversion of a section of the Chutiyas, mostly from the ruling class, to *Hinduism* several centuries before the rise of *Neo-Vaisnavism*, their traditional gods and goddesses were Hinduised and were given iconographic

6. Narzi, *op. cit.*, p. 21 f; Endle, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

7. Deori, *op. cit.*, pp. 10 ff; Endle, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

8. Deori, *op. cit.*, pp. 42, 56 ff; Endle, *op. cit.*, pp. 93 f.

9. Deori, *op. cit.*, p. 73; U. Chetia, 'Saktir Pratik Kechaikhati ba Tamreswari Mandir' (in Assamese), *Souvenir*, Asam Sahitya Sabha, Tinsukia Session, 1981, pp. 45 ff.

representation with temples to shelter them. Another sacred place of the Chutiyas, Morans and Barahis was Charaideo, where the Barahis, in particular, worshipped a god bearing the same name (namejy Charaideo).¹⁰ Nothing distinct is known about the religious beliefs and practices of the Morans and the Barahis, but as they were only the sub-tribes of the Bodos, we may conjecture that they shared the religious beliefs and practices of the Bodos and the Chutiyas.

The Kacharis, who were Hinduised at a later period, worshipped the *Hiju/Siju* tree (*Euphorbia Splendens*), a kind of cactus, resembling somewhat a *Sivalinga*, which they believed, was a living manifestation of the Primordial deity. They used to offer all their sacrifices to this tree. That they had also worshipped a Primordial female deity called *Kamakhi* or *Kamlakhi*, has already been mentioned. It is believed that this tribal female deity was later Sanskritised into *Kamakhyā*.

Besides the Primordial deities, the tribals also believed in different junior deities or spirits. For example, the Kacharis worshipped a dual-deity called *Jaumaun Jaula* and *Jaumaun Buri* believed to be the god and the goddess of the forests, with sacrifice of fowls. The Morans similarly worshipped *Sadan-Madan*, god of elephants, before going to catch wild elephants or when domestic elephants used to give trouble. This worship called *Charai-Mela* is still practised by some tribals. Besides, ancestor-worship was an important part of their religious beliefs and rites. All these Bodo tribes had their own respective priests called *Deoris*.

The Matak Kaivartas also, like their counterparts elsewhere in Assam, had their own priests, so also the *Jogis* (rearers of worms) and the *Katanis* (Spinners). The Matak Ahoms, before their conversion to Neo-Vaisnavism, were animists, adhering to Taoism.*

10. Nath, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

*This is also true of other Ahom as well.

When Tantricism secured a foot-hold in this land under the patronage of the Pala Kings of Kamarupa, all people, tribals and non-tribals, came under its spell. As the Tantrics allowed the five M's *madya* (wine), *mangsa* (meat), *matsya* (fish), *mithuna* (sex) and *mudra* (perced grain), certain debaucheries in the name of religion entered the social fold of the Mataks, as well. Beliefs in magic and incantation had also become predominant. However, it may also be mentioned in this connection, that despite the leftist practices associated with Tantricism, it gave complete equality and liberty to men and women in performing religious rites, and as such, it suited the spiritual and social needs of the tribal communities, who continued to practise these rites till late.

Introduction of Neo-Vaisnavism :

Long accustomed to their traditional rites, manner and customs, the tribes were found in the beginning to be not easily amenable to the discipline of Neo-Vaisnavism or any other humanising process.¹¹ Any imposition or drastic change in their traditional pattern of life, would have naturally caused a hostile reaction. The Vaisnava Reformers had, therefore, to proceed with tact and caution, so that the sentiments of the tribal people were left unhurt, and their traditional cultural values were not injured. The Mayamara *Mahantas* accordingly, shaped their religious dogmas and practices in such a way so as to suit the temperament of the tribal communities. Relaxation and compromises, thus became the corner-stone of their policy in their dealings with these people. Accordingly, while efforts were made to carry on the messages and teachings of the new creed into the midst of these new converts, some of their old beliefs and rites were allowed to continue.

It has been learnt from Sri Jibanananda Goswami, the present *Satradhikar* of the Dinjoy Mayamara *Satra*, that when the Morans were converted to the new creed, the Mayamara

Satradhikar had to grant them great laxities. Thinking that if these people, who had been propitiating their tribal deities with animal sacrifice since time immemorial, were asked to stop the practice suddenly, there would be wide resentment amongst them, making the missionary activities an impossibility, the *Satradhikar* permitted them to bring living animals and birds, like goat or duck to him, as he himself had personified all their gods and goddesses. In other words, he assured that he would take all responsibility for offending their gods and goddesses for not propitiating them by animal or bird sacrifice.* Even after their conversion to Neo-Vaisnavism, the tribes continued to worship their tribal deities, while accepting at the same time Krishna, Vishnu or Hari as the Supreme God and *Nama-prasanga* as the superior and binding practice of enchanting the name of God. Thus it is seen that the converted Kacharis gave up the practice of offering sacrifices to the *Hiju* tree and their Chutiya counterparts the practice of worshipping *Kechikhati* with human or animal sacrifice. In fact, the very practice of worshipping gods and goddesses with the sacrifice of living beings or with liquor was discontinued. The Vaisnava reformers, however, honoured their sentiment for discontinuing this age-old practice by a novel way. For example, on certain days in a year in the months of *Vaisakh* (April/May), *Bhadra* (August/September), *Puha* (December/January) and *Magh* (January/February) in the *Yajnya Ghar* (which they interpreted as the house for feast) of the *Satra* Campus, sacrifice of goats, ducks, etc., was now allowed to be made in the name of the community, as a whole, by drowning. The wife of the *Satradhikar*, conceived as a living goddess, was to pour few drops of mustard oil on the cooked-curries. This practice was prevalent in the Tiphuk *Satra*, a branch of the Mayamara *Satra*, till very recent times. We are also informed that from the time of the third *Satradhikar* Sankerbhujā, a goat used to be offered from the *Satradhikar*'s side. Any person wishing to offer goat, duck or pigeon, praying goodwill of the community, or in fulfilment of his desires, was allowed to do so, on such

*The Interview with the *Satradhikar* was held in the Dinjoy *Satra* on 19.6.78 and 24.6.81.

occasions. Curiously enough, the *Guru-Tithis* were also observed in the *Satra* on the same day with such *Yajnyas*, which they interpreted as community prayer and feast.* Further, the Chutiyas, the Moran and Barahis, conforming to their traditional practice of starting the *Bihu* festival on the first Wednesday (which they considered as sacred, for on this day, human sacrifice was made to goddess Kechaikhati) of the month of *Vaisakha* (April/May), were allowed to make their offering to the *Satra* on that day, and then begin their festival. Similarly, the Kacharis were permitted to bring fowls to the *Satra*, which they earlier used to offer at the Tamreswari Temple. Moreover, on occasions of natural calamities like drought, flood and epidemic, many of the tribes like the Morans used to offer fish to the *Satradhikar* which they earlier used to do before their gods and goddesses, considering it as the best of all offerings.

The tribal women, who used to worship their goddesses earliest with performance of music and distribution of rice-power, fruits, etc., were allowed to do so in the form of *Lakhimi Sabah*, thereby implying that each of the women was like goddess Lashmi. Such exceptions and concessions can be noticed in the case of newly converted Muslims and Christians in many places of India, where they are allowed to practise some rituals of their old beliefs. For example, the *Gaores* of Goa even after their conversion to Christianity have not given up their old customs and traditions. They still maintain a form of caste-rigidity and do not take non-vegetarian meals, which was earlier a religious taboo for them. The same is the case with their Hindu counterparts, who would not take their meal even if it is prepared and offered to them by a Brahman.¹²

*This was traced in course of my discussion with Sri M. Saikia, Kakapathar town, Sri S. Dahotia, Principal, Kakapathar H.S. School, and the *Satradhikar* of Lajum Amguri *Satra*. The Uban *Satradhikar*, however, denied the observation of such *Yajnyas*.

12. Sisir Rajchoudhury, 'Goar Gaore Adivasi' (in Bengal), *Desh*, 8th Sept., 1979.

The Vaisnava reformers had also usually avoided introducing Hindu rites or rituals among the tribal communities or imposing Brahmana priesthood on them. The tribal disciples of the Mayamara *Satra* had, therefore, no relation with Brahmana priesthood. In course of time, when they became more Hinduised, they gave up most of their tribal rites but did not accept Brahmana priesthood. The recent tendency among the Assamese Vaisnavas to do away with the Brahmana priesthood owes its origin to such practices pursued by the tribal Vaisnava converts.

Further, the tribal communities considered all their members as equal. The hierarchy of caste, as pursued in a Hindu Society would, therefore, be not acceptable to them. As a result, we find great flexibility of caste-rules among the disciples of the Mayamara *Satras*. Here a Brahman, simply because of his birth, could not claim a higher position or status to a non-Brahman in the social functions like the *Sabah* (religious congregations),¹³ where a *Bhakat* (devotee), irrespective of his caste, took the leading part in its management, by virtue of his being the *Barburha* (senior old man) or holding the position of the *Gaonburha* (village headman). A Brahman, if he lacked these qualities, could not take the leading part simply because of his birth.

The tribal people, illiterate as they were, could not read the religious texts written by Aniruddhadeva or other Vaisnava reformers. Moreover, being accustomed to worship some concrete object so long, they could not grasp immediately the philosophy of Neo-Vaisnavism. To meet the problem, the *Guru* himself was considered as the *Murti* or the Image of God and Aniruddhadeva, the founder of the Mayamara *Satra*, was thus conceived as the *Adyamurti* (The Primal Image). It may also be mentioned here, that unlike many other Vaisnava *Satras* of Assam, the Mayamara *Satras* never had any *Bigraha Worship* (image worship). This honour was always given to their *Gurus*.

Equality of human being was not only taught but also

practised in a Mayamara *Satra*. It was also more democratic in organisation than other Vaisnava *Satras* and gave more emphasis on community-feeling. All this suited the needs and temperament of the tribal people. Equality was so much emphasised that all disciples, Brahmins or *Chandals*, were placed on an equal footing. The *Guru*, despite the extreme reverence shown to him as the living embodiment of God, did not consider himself superior to the community of disciples. In the social field, he was only a senior disciple. When the disciples bowed their heads to him, he also reciprocated by bowing his head to them in a like manner, which was even never imagined in other Vaisnava *Satras*.

Unlike other *Satras*, in the Mayamara *Satras*, the *Guru* was always accessible to the disciples. Any disciple at any moment could directly come to the *Guru* and discuss any problem with him ; but community feeling being very strong, disciples usually came in groups to visit the *Guru*. All disciples were *Atas* or *Atois* (i.e., *Atma* meaning soul of God). Though this was the concept in all Vaisnava *Satras*, it is in the Mayamara *Satra*, that this concept was practised in reality. The *Atois* were inspired by a spirit of universal brotherhood. They considered themselves as only a part of the great community, namely, the human community. To foster the feeling of brotherhood among the disciples, it was laid down that all disciples should behave with one another with love and veneration. Any harsh word to a co-disciple was considered a very serious offence (*Nam-Aparadha*) and any one guilty of the offence had to beg pardon from the community of disciples and the *Satradhikar*.

Even in practising certain social rites in the *Namghar* or the *Satra*, this spirit of equality was greatly emphasised, where all disciples irrespective of age or sex were given equal importance. It is still seen in a Mayamara *Satra* that while distributing *Mah-Prasad*, no one is allowed to take his share, unless each of them gets his. They all would start together and leave together. Even little children are not given any relaxation.

Such practice had undoubtedly fostered discipline in the society.

The democratic feeling is best seen in the organisation of the *Satra*. The head of the *Satra* is called *Satradhikar*, or simply as *Adhikar*, *Mahanta*, *Gosain* or *Goswami*. Next to the *Adhikar* is the *Dekadhikar* or the *Deka-Mahanta*, the would-be-*Anhikar*. The *Dekadhikar* is appointed by the *Adhikar* with the approval of the community, usually on the basis of seniority. We are also informed that if the *Dekadhikar* was found to be lacking in saintly qualities, he was removed from his office and a new one was selected by the disciples in his place. But the *Vamsawali* of the *Satra* does not give us any concrete evidence to this practice. In other *Satras*, at the installation ceremony of *Adhikar* or *Gosain*, his co-*Adhikar* from a fixed *Satra* used to send the *Nirmali* or garland, only after receiving which, the *Dekadhikar* was formally declared as *Adhikar*. But in the *Mayamara Satra* there was no such practice. Here, it is not a co-*Adhikar*, but the community of disciples, which installed a *Dekadhikar* on headship. The disciples coming to perform the death ceremony of the deceased *Adhikar* performed the installation ceremony with *Gayan-bayan* and *Nam-charan* (chanting of the name of God), and formally installed the *Dekadhikar* on headship.

As the disciples considered the *Guru* as the living embodiment of God and hence immortal, the chair of *Guruship* also, under no circumstances, could lie vacant. When the *Guru* died, they used to say that he simply assumed a new form in that of his successor. And therefore, at the time of his demise, if the *Dekadhikar* was away from the Headquarters, the disciples selected a senior member of the *Guru's* family as their religious head. To cite examples, at the time of the death of the *Jairamdeva*, the 6th *Satradhikar*, the eldest son of *Jadunandandeva* was appointed as his successor, because the *Dekadaikar*, the younger brother of the *Adhikar* was then away from the *Satra*. Again, at the time of the demise of *Bhaktanandadeva*, the 12th *Satradhikar*, as the *Dekadhikar* *Bhawananda*, who was also his brother, was away from the *Satra*,

Bhawananda's son was made the *Satradhikar*. Thus the son became *Satradhikar* superseding his father.

The democratic feeling was more seen in case of the Tiphuk *Satra*, a branch of the Mayamara *Satra*, which was established during the time of the Matak Rebellion with a view to intensifying the conversion and organisation of the inhabitants of the Moran area by drawing them to the fold of the Mayama *Satra*. Its first *Satradhikar** Krishnabhujdeva was assisted by four *Burhas* or eldersmen, belonging to different castes and professional groups, Ahom, Rachari, Khatowal and Mudoi. The Ahom *Burha*, the Kachari *Burha* and the Khatowal *Burha* were from the Ahom, Kachari and the converted Muslim communities respectively, whereas the Mudoi *Burha* was a representative of the traders. Subsequently, these *Burhas* played such an important role in the function of the *Satra* that their consent was indispensable in the election or selection of a *Mahanta*.

Sarana or initiation: Though the detail procedure of the initiation ceremony was not uniform in all *Satras*, yet there was a general agreement in fundamental points. Certain specialities were, however, noticed in the Mayamara *Satras*, where, because of the cordial relationship between the *Satradhikar* and the disciples, no mediator was allowed to work in matters of initiation. In some *Satras*, the *Dekadhikars* or the *Rajmedhis* were allowed to initiate disciples on behalf of the *Satradhikars*, but in the Mayamara *Satra*, this right was exclusively reserved for the *Satradhikars*.**

Before initiation, a novice was first to bow his head before

*The *Satradhikars* of the Mayamara Tiphuk Mulani group of *Satras* take the titles of either *Bhuj* or *Murti*. In this group of *Satra*, next to the *Satradhikar*, is the *Acharyya*, who succeeds the *Satradhikar*. Another office-bearer known as *Mahabhakta*, ranked next to *Acharyya*, is also found.

**Statements of the *Satradhikars* of Dinjoy and Puranmati Mayamara *Satras*.

his parents and in their absence before some aged *Bhakats* by the customary procedure of offering Areca-nut and betel-leaves. The practice was followed to seek the blessings of the parents or the aged disciples, for a new life. The novice was required to fast on the day preceding initiation. Early in the next morning before going to receive initiation, he was to shave his hair and beard. This practice was followed to impress upon the novice the idea that he had closed the life of temporal beauty and pleasure and had assumed a new life of spiritual beauty and bliss. After shaving off his hair and beard, he would wear new white garments, as a sign of purity, self control and aversion to pleasure. He would then line up with other novices either in the village *Namghar* or the *Gurugriha*, where he would be given a packet (*Tupula*) of 80 nos. of fresh betel leaves bound together with an *Aghat* (front part of a plantain-leaf). These eighty leaves symbolised the eighty kinds of *Sakam Bhaktis* (objective devotion controlled by the *Aghat*, which symbolised the *Nisaam Bhakti* (selfless devotion). The 81 kinds of *Bhaktis* like *Sravana* (hearing), *Kirtan* (Prayer), *Padasevana* (prostrating before the feet of God) etc.* are discussed in detail in the *Adyeswar Sastra* of the Mayamariyas. In other words a novice is to surrender his selfish interests, in the name of God, and desiring nothing in return. This is a special feature of the *Mayamara Satras*.¹⁴

The novice would receive the *Tupula* with folded-hands raised to his forehead from the *Guru* and would then proceed for taking bath in the nearest river or tank. After having three dips, chanting the name of God with the *Tupula* in its original position he would come back with wet-cloths to the place of initiation. He would then fall prostrate with all the eight of the body (*sastanga pranam*) touched on the ground before the *Guru* and pray for *Sarana* or initiation. Then the office-bearer called *Khataniyar* (one of the chief officials of the *Satra*) would take away the *Tupula* from each novice, and place the

*Statements of the *Satradhikars* of the Dinjoy and Uban Mulani *Satras*.

same at the feet of the *Guru*, mentioning the parent-given name of the novice. The *Guru*, then would give to each of the novices a name from amongst the 'thousand names of God Narayan', explaining the significance of it. The names thus given by the *Guru* to the disciples were used by them in addressing each other. This name-given practice or ceremony had been introduced to remind the disciple that all people were a part of the Great Soul and therefore should be respected accordingly. Another aim of introducing this system was perhaps to make the disciples take the name of God through uttering the *Guru*-given names of their co-disciples in their daily life. The *Guru* reciprocated to the *pranam* of the community of disciples and then rendered religious advice to them.

After completing this ceremony, called *namdan* (name-giving ceremony) the *Guru* offered a *paka-mithoi* (a kind of round cake prepared with dried rice-powder and *gur*) to each of the disciples, with which they would break their fast.* From the time of initiation, the disciples considered the *Guru* as the Supreme Representative of God and venerated and obeyed him accordingly. This *Guruvada* or extreme veneration of the *Guru*, as stated, is one of the most important characteristics of the Kalasambhati *Satras*, which includes the Mayamara *Satra* as well. These disciples thenceforth addressed each other as *Ata* or *Atoi*. Here, in the initiation ceremony, the community feeling was so emphasised that it was not their precedent to go individually for the purpose, but in a group, with their comrades collected from their own village, as well as, from the neighbouring area. Again when the *Guru* offered initiation, he did it, not to a single disciple, but to a group of disciples. Such importance on corporate life, such democratisation of religious institution and such adherence to one leader in the person of the *Guru* solidified the Matakas into a strong community, and enabled them to get organised for a greater political cause, namely, starting a popular rebellion against the existing government based on absolute despotism.

*The same procedure is followed still now.

A *Bhakat*, after remaining *Saraniya* or laity for a long time, could proceed for *Bhajana* in his mature age, when he was given an opportunity to go deep into the mystery and philosophy of the creed. Religious texts teaching higher philosophy could be studied by these *Bhajaniyas*, usually, at night hours.

The Mayamara *Adhikar* or *Mahanta* : As the Mayamara *Satradhikar* was personified as God, he was referred to by his disciples in highly euphemistic tones. When the *Guru* suffered from illness or had an attack of Small-Pox, the disciples expressed it thus "Illness or Smallpox has paid its homage to His Holiness," The *Guru* never 'dies', he simply 'closes the drama of his life'. The disciples therefore expressed his demise as '*Gurur Ichha Hal*', i.e., the *Guru* wished to close his drama.¹⁵ The *Adhikar* or the *Mahanta* did not collect any religious tax, and therefore officers like *Sajtola* (*Satola*), *Medhi* and *Barmedhi*, found in other *Satras* for such purposes were absent here. Refusing to accept the offer of rent-free grants from the Ahom king, the Mayamara *Satra* had developed an independent growth. The *Satradhikar* here was not amassing landed property. In fact, the land that he enjoyed was not his individual property, but [the property of the community of disciples. These lands were cultivated by the disciples in rotation and a portion of it was marked and cultivated for the *Guru* by the disciples themselves. The disciples, on their own of course, collected *Gurukara* (religious tithe to be *Guru*), but the tax was meant for the upliftment of *Satra* and not for the personal gain of the *Mahanta*.* In the British rule, however, such noble ideologies suffered a set-back and the then Mayamara *Mahanta*, deviating from the time-honoured practice, received land-grants from the British Government.

Mayamara *Namghar* : In the construction of the Mayamara *Namghars* and the *Satras* as well, certain specialities were:

15. BVMD.

*Statements of Jibanananda Adhikar Goswami of Dinjoy *Satra* and Harichananda Adhikar Goswami of Puranimati *Satra*..

observed. A Mayamara *Namghar* did not have a *Monlkat*. Instead, it had a separate house called *Dharmaghar*, which was also called *Namghar*, where the religious scriptures were kept. The hall for community prayer was called *Rabhaghar*, which did not have any enclosure, as it had to accomodate a large number of people. As such, a *Rabhaghar* was considered unfit for keeping the religious scriptures, and a separate chamber for the purpose had to be built. Moreover, the Mayamara *Satra* had certain scriptures which were accessible to only a permitted section of the disciples, for which also, some amount of privacy and security was essential. Besides, in the public prayer hall, all kinds of discussions including public disputes could take place. Thinking that such practices would lower the veneration of the religious texts before the disciples, the Mayamara *Mahanta* deemed it fit to have a separate house for keeping them. Again, in the absence of an image, the religious scriptures themselves served as one of the two concrete forms of God, the other being the *Guru* himself. Considering that their regular public visibility could diminish their importance, the *Satras* were kept separately and were brought to the public prayer house only occasionally, showing highest veneration to them.

In the Mayamara *Satra*, the *Ojapali* and other dances performed by individual disciples in most of the other *Satras*, were not given any importance. On the other hand, it was the *Gayan-Bayan*, a community orchestral party, which used to predominate. *Gayan-Eayan* in a Mayamara *Satra* totally differed from that of the other *Vaisnava Satras*, where the religious recital from the other *Kirtana* of Sankardeva and *Namaghosa* of Madhavdeva was performed with clappings and playing of *Khol* and *Tai* (Cymbal). In the Mayamara *Satra*, on the other hand the place of the *Kirtana* was taken by the *Adyeswar Sastra* i.e., the text composed by the Primal Image, or the founder of the *Satra*, Anirudhadeva.

Another important point of difference between the Mayamara *Satra* and the other *Vaisnava Satras* was the non-

performance of any *Bhaona* (Religious play). *Marich Badh*, a play written by Nityanandadeva, the 4th *Satradhikar* of the Mayamara *Satra*, is perhaps the only exception in this respect. As Aniruddhadeva elevated the tribal people into a footing of equality with the caste-Hindus by giving them certain relaxations, they readily agreed to accept his teachings. There was, therefore, no need of staging *Bhaona* to attract the people, which Sankardeva had to do to attract the people in other areas. Another reason for non-performance of *Bhaona* might be that, in a *Bhaona*, be it for short while, certain evil forces like *Asuras*, and other gods and goddesses get importance. Such performance might create some confusion in the minds of the tribal people, as it might go against monotheistic principle taught by the new creed. Because of the same reason, *Raslila* performed in some prominent Vaisnava *Satras* of Assam, is not observed in the Mayamara *Satras*. Monotheism, being one of its main tenets, only Krishna or Vishnu is given supreme importance.

As the performance of *Bhaona* became obsolete in the Mayamara *Satra*, it naturally obviated the use of *Khol* as well, which appropriately fits with *Bhaona*. In the *Gayan-Bayan* of a Mayamara *Satra* only *Mridanga*, which is a traditional musical instrument of the region, is used.¹⁶ This instrument is conspicuously absent in the musical performance of other *Satras*.

Economy :

The Matak society was predominantly agricultural. The tribes initially resorted to *Jumming* or shifting cultivation. Some Morans as late as the 19th century, followed this practice of cultivation.¹⁷ Neo-Vaisnavism, however, introduced ploughing amongst the tribes, an advanced method of cultivation, with improved implements like plough, yoke, harrow, etc. This required the domestication of cows and buffaloes. The Vaisnava

16. *Sattriya Dances and their Rhythms* (ed.) M. Neog, Gauhati, 1973, p. 60.

preachers including the Mayamara Mahantas used to open *Khats*¹⁸ (gardens or corn-fields), where their tribal disciples were engaged in tilling the soil, and such other agricultural operations, in doing which, the latter learnt the new method of cultivation. The tribes initially followed broadcast method of cultivation, mainly, with *Ahu* and *Beo*. *Sali* or wet cultivation, which required transplantation, was introduced at a little later period.

Community feeling is also seen in their agricultural operations. Most of their agricultural pursuits, like ploughing, planting or harvesting were done on community basis, which exists till to-day. According to this practice, one peasant would solicit the help of his neighbour-friends to plough his field or harvest his crops on a certain day and at the end of the performance would offer them light refreshment.

The tribes, particularly the Morans, were expert horticulturists. It was for their efficiency in horticulture, that the Ahom kings appointed the royal orchard-keepers from amongst the Morans only.¹⁹ They used to cultivate different varieties of sugar-cane, plantain, orange, citrus fruits, as well as mango and jack-fruits. Sometimes, jack-fruits served as a substitute for rice, for which, cutting of these trees, was considered a social taboo. The tribes had also cultivated different varieties of vegetables like gourd, pumpkin, brinjal, arum, yam, ginger and spices. Cereals like *Moti-mah* (*Phaseolus mungo*) and *Mug mah* (*Phaseolus aureus*), were also produced. While Sukapha was residing at Tipam, the Morans used to supply him with brinjal, ginger, different kinds of yams and arums and such other vegetables.²⁰ The Barahis, who were expert cooks, lent their service to the Ahom Royalty from the beginning of their rule in Assam to the end.²¹

17. Mills, *loc. cit.*, Lakhimpur, Nos. 9-15.

18. BVMD.

19. HKC, p. 12 ; KTP, p. 10.

20. PAB, p. 14.

21. SAB, pp. 6 f.

Other important crops of the Matak

s were cotton and mustard. They were noted suppliers of these articles to the Ahom royal store.²² They also produced *gur* and honey. For this purpose, there were distinct *Khels*, like *Gur Joganiya* (supplier of *gur*), *Mau Joganiya* (supplier of honey), etc. The Kaivarta-section of the Mataks supplied the Royalty with fish, and a section of the Morans supplied them with fuel (*Khari Joganiyo*).²³

Craf and Industries : Weaving and sericulture was an important cottage industry of the Matak

s as it had been among the rest of the Assamese people. Amongst the Mataks there were professional spinners of *Pat Silk*, called *Yogis* and *Katanis*, and professional weavers, called *Tatis*. It would be seen that a noted leader of the Matak Rebellion was a weaver, named Harihar Tati. Besides *Endi* and *Pat*, they also used to supply a special type of *Muga Silk* called *Mejankari* to the royal store. This was the most superior variety of *Muga Silk*, and as such, much costly tao, one Maud of its thread costing rupees 437/- (apparox.) in 18th century against ordinary *Muga* costing Rs. 175/- (approx.) per maund.²⁴ This was also an important article of trade between the Ahom kingdom and the Mughal India. The Mataks thus enabled the Royalty to carry on a profitable trade with outside country by their own products. But as *Muga Silk* was a dress of the upper class of the society, the Mataks being commoners, were not allowed to use it. They were also expert dyers,²⁵ and proficient in bamboo and wood works, as the area they resided were abounded with these materials. The Ahoms engaged the Morans as *dharibowas*²⁶ or suppliers of mats and other bamboo articles. Initially, the Morans and the Barahis constructed their houses with wood and bamboo, having two-rounded ends. The design was so

22. PAB, p. 14.

23. SAB, p. 6.

24. Hamilton, *op. cit.*, pp. 46, 63.

25. SAB, p. 7.

26. Hannay, *loc. cit.*, pp. 671 ff ; AARB, p. 207 ; Devi, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

beautiful that Sukapha adopted it for the Ahom Royalty,²⁷ and thenceforth prohibited them from constructing their houses in the like design. This evidently was a disincentive to the architectural skill of the Mataks. However, when Neo-Vaisnavism brought the *Namghar* to their villages, they got an incentive to develop their wood and bamboo crafts, as large number of articles made of these materials and preferably, with beautiful carvings, were required in the *Namghars* and the *Satras* for purposes of community prayer as well as for decoration.

A section of the Mataks, who earlier were probably the subjects of the Chutiya kingdom, were excellent *japi*-makers (makers of a kind of wicker hat serving as umbrella), which they used to supply to the Chutiya Royalty and nobility. They continued to make such ornamental *japis* for the Ahom aristocracy as well. The existence of a village called Japisajiya in the present Dibrugarh district, which once formed a part of the Matak kingdom, indicates that this was the place, where this craft was cultured.

Another section of the Mataks used to make matchlocks for the royal store. This is again evident by the presence of another village called Hiloidhari (meaning manufacturers of matchlocks) in the present Dibrugarh district.

The Sonowal Kacharis of the Matak community were proficient in extracting gold by washing the sands of the rivers. They were to supply one *tola* of gold per head per year to the royal store. But as the commoners were prohibited from using gold ornaments, the gold they extracted, was meant for the upper classes of the society only.

The Kalita-Mataks, like the *Kumar-Kalitas* (Potters), *Kamar Kalitas* (Blacksmiths), *Hira Kalitas* (Potters without using wheels), *Kanhar Kalitas* (Brass-metal workers) etc. were mainly professionals. They supplied the royal store with iron

implements, brass-metal utensils and potteries. But again commoners being deprived of the metal utensils, they had to satisfy themselves by having their household utensils made of clay, wood and bamboo.

Borhat and Jaiaur, which lay near the area inhabited by the Mataks, were famous for salt springs. The tribes in the locality extracted salt from these brine-springs and supplied it to the royal store, this commodity being the most rare and precious one in medieval Assam, till it could be imported from Bengal towards the close of the 18th century. There are still villages called Lunpuria (village producing salt) and Matapung (place of dried salt-springs), in the present Dibrugarh district, which indicate that the Mataks, who lived in this locality, manufactured salt.

Further, the area inhabited by the Mataks abounded in wild animals particularly elephants; and among them, the Morans were the most proficient in elephant catching. There was a *Khel* among them called *Hatichungi*, whose duty it was to catch and train elephants for the royal store.²⁸

Thus it is seen that different tribal people becoming members of a certain Vaisnava Order, namely, the Mayamara sect, developed certain common cultural traits, which helped them to get organised into a distinct community. The community feeling got more strengthened when oppressions were heaped upon their *Guru* and their comrades by the Ahom Government. In course of time, many of them gave up their separate caste or tribal identities and introduced themselves simply as Mataks. But as the Morans were most conspicuous among them, certain contemporary sources, as stated earlier, used to refer to them as two distinct communities, namely, the Morans and the Mataks.

This organised community, as has been stated, contributed greatly to the economic prosperity of the Ahom kingdom.

Further, it was they who formed a strong pillar in the Ahom army, the elephantry, in practice, being controlled by them. As such, when they rose in rebellion against the Government, the whole administrative machinery became inoperative and the monarchy could avert the crisis by seeking foreign help only.

The social and economic condition of the Matak community is to be understood in the light of the *Paik* system, which was the basis of the Ahom administrative structure. By this system, the State exacted personal manual labour from the subject population. For the purpose, the population, at large, was divided into certain guilds or *Khels*, organised both on functional and territorial basis. Among the Matak, a number of functional guilds like those of *Hatichungi* Morans (a guild of the Morans for catching elephants), *Dhenuchocha Khel* (guild for making bows and arrows), *Hiloidhari Khel* (guild for making matchlocks), were formed. Initially, the Matak, compromised with the *Paik* system, but later they grew critical of it. In fact, the rigidity associated with the *Paik* system, restricting the movement of the common people, and defining a strict standard of living for them, encouraged the Matak to organise a popular uprising against the Government.

Conflicts of Matak Allegiance : The Mayamara Satra Versus the Ahom State

A great change took place in the socio-cultural history of Assam in the 16th century in the form of the Neo-Vaisnavite movement sponsored by Sankardeva and his disciple Madhavdeva. Within a short period Neo-Vaisnavism became the faith of the people. It not only changed their spiritual and moral outlook but prepared the ground for the establishment of a new society based upon the principle of "universal social brotherhood". This humanism with emphasis on equality in the spiritual plane and practised socially through the democratic organisation of the *Satras* were in direct confrontation with the principles of despotism and rigid social distinction pursued by the Ahom State. A conflict between these two ideologies was inevitable, which culminated in the rebellion of the *Mataks*, as it was these people, who were most democratically organised, and, as discussed in the preceding [chapter, had a wide control over the economy and military strength of the Ahom State.

Growth and Development of the Mayamara Satra :

The new creed, namely Neo-Vaisnavism dispensed with

worship of all other gods except Vishnu, did away with the worship of images, the elaborate rituals and sacrifices and the esoteric rites practised by the *Saktas*, enjoined simple ceremonies consisting of *Nama* or recitation of hymns and prayers, and *Bhakti* or incessant devotion based on implicit faith in God.¹ These teachings were based on *Bhagawati Dharma*. After the death of Sankardeva in 1568 A.D., his creed came to be divided into four *Samhati*s or sects, namely, the *Brahma Samhati*, the *Purusha Samhati*, the *Nika Samhati** and the *Kala Samhati*. The process of their growth may be compared to the course of a river which divided itself into several channels without completely losing its original identity. The different channels, no doubt, derived their strength from the original source, but they received a considerable supply of water on their way downwards from other sources also.² The *Kala Samhati* owes its origin to Gopaldeva, popularly called Gopal Ata of Bhawanipur. The disciples of *Kala Samhati* state that Gopaldeva extracted religious truths from the bosom of *Kala* or eternity, for which, the *Satra* founded by him was known as *Kaljhar*.³ Although orthodox Vaisnavas give different mythological interpretation to the origin of the term *Kala Samhati*, the explanation that it derived the nomenclature from a place named *Kaljhar*, where Gopaldeva had his headquarters, appears to be more reasonable.⁴ It is said that it was Gopaldeva, who enunciated the doctrine of *Guruvada* in Neo-Vaisnavism. The *Guru* in his *Samhati*

1. AARB, pp. 191ff.

* The *Brahma Samhati* was so called because Brahmanic elements predominated here.

The *Purusha Samhati* derived its name from that of its founder Puroshottam Thakur, the eldest grandson of Sankardeva.

The *Nika Samhati* was so called because it strictly conformed to the rules and regulations prescribed by Madhavdeva, and claimed to be a purified sub-sect (*Nika-pure Samhati*—Sect).

For details, see S.N. Sharma, *Tee Neo-Vaisnavite Movement and the Satra Institution of Assam*, Gauhati University, 1966, p. 68.

2. S.N. Sharma, *op.cit.*, p. 68.

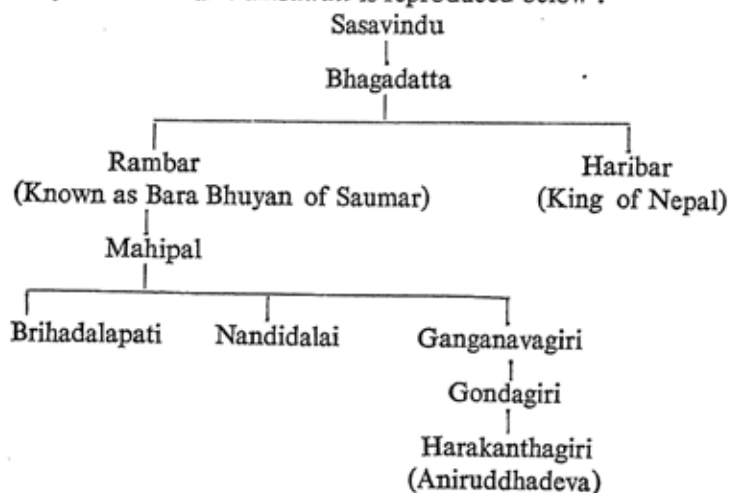
3. Preface to *Gopaldeva Charit* compiled by Jogeswar Mahanta, p. 12.

4. S.N. Sarma, *op.cit.*, p. 70.

occupied the same exalted position as that of one in Sikhism.⁵

Twelve *Satras* were established under the auspices of Gopaldeva : six of them were presided over by *Sudra Manantas* and six by *Brahmana Mahantas*.⁶ The former six included those of Banhbari or Dihing, Haladhi-ati, Gajala, Mayamara, Nagaria and Doloi-Po, and the latter six included those of Ahatguri, Kathpar, Khaura-mochar, Ikarajan, Habung and Charaihahi. Of the *Sudra Satras*, the most important were those of Dihing and Mayamara, but it was the latter which played a significant rôle in the history of the land. The Mataks, who were the disciples of this *Satra*, form the subject of our study.

The Mayamara *Satra* was founded by Aniruddhadeva. He was the son of a Bhuyan named Gondagiri, who traced his descent from Sasavindu of Yadu Vamsa. His mother Ajali Devi was the daughter of Sankardeva's paternal uncle. He was born on Thursday, 15th *Vaisakha* in 1475 *Saka* (April, 1553 A.D.). The geneology of Aniruddhadeva as given in the *Mayamara Satrar Vamsawali* is reproduced below :



5. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 84; M. Neog, *Sankardeva and His Times*, Gauhati University, 1925, p. 138; AAHB, pp. 189, 184.

Gondagiri was a resident of Bishnu Bali-Kunchi of Narayanpur in the present Lakhimpur district. Aniruddhadeva's earlier name was Harakanthagiri. When he grew up, he became interested in the teachings of Neo-Vaisnavism and wished to receive instructions from Gopaldeva of Kaljhar for which purpose he sailed down the Brahmaputra to that place. There he received religious instructions from Gopaldeva for about three and a half years, after which he came back to his own place and founded a *Satra* at Bishnu Bali-Kunchi. At the time of initiation, Harakanthagiri was advised by Gopaldeva to strictly follow the path of *Bhakti* (devotion) and disseminate this idea among the neophytes in his turn. It is said that it was because Harakanthagiri was to close all other paths of salvation save the one of *Bhakti* he was named as Aniruddha.⁷ He started propagating the Vaisnava religion from the month of *Magha* January/February) of 1523 *Saka* (1601 A.D.).⁸

Aniruddhadeva's first disciple was a Muslim tailor called Dheli Darji, who after initiation, was named Dhyanaapati. After staying at Bishnu Bali-Kunchi for some time, Aniruddhadeva, because of frequent Dafala raids, shifted its location to Nahar-Ati, on the bank of Marnai river in the present Narayanpur *Mauza* of the North Lakhimpur Sub-division. With his headquarters at Nahar-Ati, Aniruddhadeva initiated a large number of disciples into Neo-Vaisnavism. He also stayed for some time in Majuli on the bank of a lake called Moamara and converted many people of the area to the new creed. He used to send his apostles or visit himself the tribal areas and spread the message of love, equality and brotherhood among the inhabitants. The democratic outlook of the *Satra* and the spirit of humanism appealed the tribesmen and they immediately accepted him as their religious preceptor. It has also been told that the Vaisnava reformers were not merely disseminating religious ideas, they were also teaching certain crafts as well as cultivation by ploughing among the tribal communities, who had been

7. Nakul Chandra Chetia, 'Mayamara Vaisnav Dharman Itibritta' (in Assamese), *Sankari Smriti Grantha*, 1972, p. 24; P. Gogoi, 'Ahoms in the Mayamara Sect', *Tai Ahom Religion and Customs*, pp. 105f.

8. ACMSV, pp. 21f.

resorting to jhumming. This was an incentive to the tribal members to accept the new faith.

Amongst the tribes, the Morans were the first to be converted. They were followed by the Kacharis, Chutiyas, Barahis, Ahoms and the *Brittials* (professional castes). Within a short time, Aniruddhadeva occupied among them a position higher than a temporal overlord, so that they would bow their heads only to him and no one else. So rigidly they followed this principle, that to avoid bowing heads at the door, they had the entrances to their houses cut at the gable ends and not at transcripts.⁹

Aniruddhadeva had scholarly talents as well. He translated the fourth and the fifth *cantos* of the Bhagawata to Assamese, composed a work called *Bhakti Mangal Ghosa* in line with Madhavdeva's *Namaghosa*,⁹ as well as 182 *Bargeets* (Prayer Songs). All this influenced the upper section of the society as well.

The news that a large number of the subjects had been accepting Aniruddhadeva as their spiritual preceptor, who was to them also their temporal overlord, reached the Ahom King Sukhampha Khora Raja (1552-1603). The Ahom monarchs had been considering the Vaisnavite movement a danger to their growing power, as the teachings of the Vaisnava reformers stood diametrically opposed to the principles, on which, the Ahom State rested. Earlier, with a view to nipping the movement in the bud, Suhungmung or the Dihingia Raja (1497-1539), who annexed the Chutiya kingdom in 1523 and extended the western frontier of the Ahom State upto the river Kolong at the cost of the Kacharis, adopted a hostile attitude towards the Vaisnava reformers. He ordered Madhavdeva and Hari, Sankardeva's son-in-law, to be beheaded on the plea that they failed to catch elephants for the King. However, finally, he spared Madhavdeva's life knowing that he was an innocent.

9. ACMSV, p. 48.

bechelor devotee. At this, Sankardeva, a subject of the Ahom kingdom, left his homeland and went to Koch Behar. Now Sukhampha wanted to make an investigation to the missionary activities of Aniruddhadeva, who was alleged to propagate seditious teachings among his disciples, who were at the same time subjects of the Ahom kingdom. Aniruddhadeva was summoned to the court, but he could convince the king of his purely missionary work among the backward classes without any tinge of political dogma. He could also impress upon the king, it is said, by performing certain magical feats. The king was satisfied and permitted him to go on with his work. The Mayamara *Satra* thus survived the first test of its existence.

Aniruddhadeva passed away on 11 *Pausa* (first week of December) 1548 *Saka* (1626 A.D.). At his demise, his son Krishnanandadeva became the *Satradhikar*, who shifted the *Satra* to Khutiapute in Jorhat in February, 1630.

While the Ahoms were consolidating their power with the help of swords, the *Kala-samhati Satras* and that of Mayamara, in particular, were winning the hearts of the people through the messages of devotion, love and peace. With the increase of the number of disciples, there was a corresponding development in the wealth and prosperity of the *Satra* through cultivation and promotion of trade-pursuits, so that the *Satra* soon posed a challenge to the political supremacy of the Ahoms. Meanwhile some prominent Ahom nobles including two cabinet ministers of Pratap Singha (1603-1641) accepted initiation from the Mayamara *Mahanta*. This alarmed the king, who began to watch the movement of the Mayamara disciples with suspicion. On the occasion, he ordered a prominent disciple of the Mayamara *Mahanta* to be executed for making a remark that the great hall of the King would be a commodious place for religious recital and prayer.¹⁰ Learning that the Mayamara disciples would not bow their heads before any one except their *Guru*, he made four Mayamara disciples gallop their horses.

10. ACMSV, p. 14.

against swords placed horizontally with their necks. In undertaking this test, Salal Bargohain and Neog Phukan lost their lives, at which the others were desisted from doing it.¹¹

With his keen foresight, Pratap Singha smelt a potential enemy in the person of the Mayamara *Mahanta*. Reports might have also reached him, that his *Satra* was gaining further strength and power. The extreme devotion of the Mayamara disciples to their *Mahanta* or *Guru* created in him the conviction that his personality in their eyes was being overshadowed by that of the former. But as this king had also to meet the first threat from the mighty Mughals, he did not get much time to give due attention to his internal problems.

In order to mobilise the strength of the entire population of the State against the Mughals, Pratap Singha introduced the *Paik* system in 1609. This system was based on a procedure of exacting compulsory manual labour from every adult male of the State in the age group 16-50, with the exception of the Brahmanas, the religious preceptors and the nobles. Four *Paiks* formed a unit called *Got*; one member from each *Got* was always to be available for service. In times of emergency, two and sometimes three *Paiks* were recruited from each *Got*. When a *Paik* was on State duty, his family and domestic affairs were looked after by the other members of the *Got*. For his services, each *Paik* was allotted two *puras* (about 3 acres) of best arable land. The *paiks* were further organised into *Khels*, which were both occupational and territorial. There was a gradation of officers to control the movements of the *paiks*. Thus 20 *paiks* were commanded by a Bora, 100 by a Saikia, 1000 by a Hazarika, 3,000 by a Rajkhowa and 6,000 by a Phukan. Another set of officers called Baruas served as heads of certain departments and they commanded 100 to 3,000 *paiks* depending upon the work-load of the department concerned.

The Matakas, as the subjects of the Ahom kingdom, were

¹¹. *Ibid.*, pp. 47ff.

also arranged into different *Khels* under different officials. The most prominent of their *Khels* were that of the *Hatichungi*, whose duty it was to capture and train elephants for the king. Other *Khels* were those of *Sonowals*, *Muga-Chungis*, *Rang-joganiyas*, *Maujoganiyas*, *Hiloidharis*, *Dharibowas* etc., whose duty it was to supply gold, muga-silk, dye, honey or manufacture matchlocks or prepare bamboo articles respectively for the royal store. Further, the *Mataks* formed the pillar of the Ahom army and as such, during the period of the Muhammadan wars, they had to supply constant man-power to the army. This naturally tolled heavily on their economic life. But in return for their services, the *Mataks* received only step-motherly treatment from the Ahom monarchy. In addition to this, the rigidity of the *Paik* system curbing the freedom of movement of a *Paik* and setting up a strict pattern of life for them, deprived the *Mataks* of the liberty they had been enjoying in their earstwhile tribal structure as well as under the organization of the *Satras*.

Pratap Singha died in 1641 A.D. and was succeeded by Surampha alias Jayaditya (1641-44). The new king invited the Vaisnava *Satradhikars* and *Mahantas* to attend the funeral rites of the deceased monarch. The Mayamara *Mahanta* Nityanandadeva also along with other *Satradhikars* came to the capital to attend the ceremony. In the procession that was organised in the honour of the deceased monarch, it was found that Nityanandadeva's retinue was the largest of all the *Satradhikars* present there. At the end of the ceremony, when the *Mahantas* at the night hours were retiring to their respective camps, some of them were accompanied by only 10 or 12 torch bearers, whereas, the Mayamara *Mahanta* alone had 120 of the kind, which exceeded the customary number of 100 torch bearers that were to accompany the king. The *Mahanta*, elated at the sight of his own superior following, is said to have remarked, "The other *Mahantas* cannot compete with me in point of influence and power. My only equal is the Ahom Monarch descended from the great God Indra. The monarch should devote his temporal duties and a *Mahanat* to his spiritual ones. All the *Mahantas* are jealous of us, but if we do the

same, there will be trouble in the country."¹²

One royal attendant named Mara Pachani overheard the remark of the Mayamara *Mahanta* and reproduced it before Bezdoloi Bhandari Barua, who carried it to the monarch. This Bezdoloi had an enmity with the Mayamara *Mahanta*. For, once he offered a proposal for the hand of the *Mahanta*'s daughter for his son. But as the *Mahanta* refused the proposal stating that the daughter of a Vaisnava preceptor should not be married to a royal official or to his descendants, Bezdoloi became highly offended. He was eagerly waiting for a chance to avenge the insult.¹³ Bezdoloi, therefore, exaggerated and misrepresented the statement of the *Mahanta* before the king, who becoming will with rage, immediately sent an executioner to kill the *Mahanta*, who had already set out for his place. The *Mahanta* was captured at Kujibali, ruthlessly killed right there, and his body was thrown to the river Dikhow. Along with him, nine of his disciples and attendants were also executed. The rest fled away. An old woman, however, rescued the dead body of the *Mahanta* and handed it over to the disciples.¹⁴

The news of the barbarous slaughter of their esteemed *Guru*, who was for them a good on earth, highly infuriated the Mayamara disciples, who became resolved to avenge it. They were only searching for a leader, but there was no one to lead them, because, Joiramdeva, Nityanandadeva's brother and successor had to live in exile for fear of punishment from the king and was appointed as the *Satradhikar* only in 1654.

In 1658 the Ahom throne passed to the hands of Jayadhwaj Singha, whose mother had high regards of the Mayamara *Mahanta*. Persuaded by his mother and also out of a political necessity to conciliate the Maymaras with a view to getting mass support against the Mughals, Jayadhwaj Singha desired to accept initiation from Joiramdeva. He might have also thought

12. BVMD.

13. ACMSV, pp. 56f.; BVMD.]

14. ACMSV, pp. 56ff; BVMD.

that with the powerful Mayamara *Mahanta* at his back, he would be able to crush the other Vaisnava *Satras* in near future. But following the example of Sankardeva, who refused initiation to the Koch King Naranarayan, Joiramdeva refused to be a royal preceptor. The king then approached the Brahmana *Gosain* of the Kuruabani *Satra*. The latter sent his nephew Niranjandeva to initiate the monarch. Niranjandeva established his *Satra* at Auniati.¹⁵ The king, because of Joiramdeva's refusal to initiate him, arrested and tortured many of his disciples. Joiramdeva requested Niranjandeva to interfere, which the latter did. The Mayamara disciples were then released.¹⁶ This king had also established another Brahmana *Satra* at Dakshinpat and made lavish grants of lands and *Paiks* to the Brahmana *Satras*. These *Satras*, in return for this patronage, extended all their help and support to the Ahom Government.

The persecution inflicted on the Mayamara *Mahanta* and his disciples only added to the popularity of the *Satra*. The number of its adherents further increased and it became difficult for a single *Satra* to manage the affairs. After the death of Joiramdeva, therefore, his brother Madhurmurti founded a *Satra** at Puranimati, near the main *Satra* at Khutiaputa.¹⁷

This wide popularity of the Mayamara *Satra* with a corresponding development in its material prosperity, excited the jealousy of other Vaisnava *Satras*, including its counterparts within the *Kalasamhati* itself. Although the *Satra* declined royal favour, it had prosperous growth on independent lines. It is learnt that in the middle of the 18th century, the *Satra* had "several wicker-barrels loaded with gold and silver, ten to

15. DHAS, TR. 94, Vol. V, part V, p. 309 which contains an account of the Auniati *Satra* of Assam; ACMSV, pp. 65ff.

16. ACMSV, pp. 67f.

17. ACMSV, p.47.

* Sri Hari Charanananda Goswami, the present *Satradhikar* of the Mayamara Puranimati *Satra*, however, does not accept the contention that the Puranimati *Satra* is a branch *Satra*. H. Goswami, *Pabitra Assam*, (ed.) M. Neog, 2nd edition, 1969, p. 79.

twelve thousand *bhakats*, ten to twelve *khats*, and four to five thousand buffaloes."¹⁸ Similar might have been the condition in this period as well. Such prosperity, therefore, encouraged the rival *Satras* to make some hostile propaganda against the Mayamara *Satra*. Certain heterodox practices observed by isolated groups were attributed to the entire body of disciples of the *Satra* and the Mayamara *Mahanta*, was alleged to be a promoter of unholy rites and ceremonies.

Several stories were invented to ridicule not only Aniruddhadeva, the founder of the Mayamara *Satra*, but the entire group of *Kalasamhati Satras*. Many of the stories were embodied in a work called '*Adicharit*', alleged to have been written by Madhavdeva. The first story describes Aniruddhadeva as the pilferer of a Tantric work, *Kalpataru Sastra*, from the possession of Sankardeva, with the help of which, he could perform various magical feats. The second story says that Sankardeva passed orders of ostracism against Aniruddhadeva as he had Sakta leanings, whereas according to another story, he suffered this fate for giving forbidden food (dried fish) to Gopaldeva and Bar-Jadumanideva during their visit to his place. Even Gopaldeva the *Guru* of Aniruddhadeva, and the immediate successor of Madhavdeva, is not spared. He is depicted as the unholy claimant of the full knowledge of Vaisnava religion against the partial perfection of Sankardeva and Madhavdeva. Another story attributes Gopaldeva's ostracism by Madhavdeva and still another makes Gopaldeva the patron of the '*Ratikhowa Sampradai* (or the fraternity of night-worshippers).

The authenticity and historicity of the *Adicharit* is doubtful. The stories narrated in the work can hardly stand the scrutiny of chronology and geography. Patbaushi *Satra* is situated in the south-east corner of the present Barpeta town of Kamrup district, and Dakshinpat *Satra* is situated in the extreme eastern corner of Majuli island, which is situated in the Sibsagar district of Upper Assam. But the author of the *Adicharit* has

shown these two places together. No dates are given against the events described. There is also no proof of any literary talent, which is found in the writings of the noted Vaisnava pointiffs of the period. Madhavdeva could not have written this work as it refers to events of much later dates, like the establishment of the *Satras* of Mayamara, Dihing and Dakshin-pat by Aniruddhadeva, Jadumanideva and Banamalideva in 1601, 1625 and 1653 respectively. It seeks to connect the eastern Assam group of Bara-Bhuyans with the ancestors of Sankardeva, and gives a geneology of the latter, which is distinctly different from the one given in the *Gurucharits*. In some other points also, the *Adicharit* gives certain views, which had no basis at all.

The view that the Moamarias, as a whole, practised left-handed rites cannot be accepted. Neither Gopaldeva nor any of his principal followers are known to have any association with these practices. Again, there is no evidence to support its contention that Aniruddhadeva had a schism with Sankardeva, while they were sailing up the Brahmaputra to eastern Assam or that Aniruddhadeva stole away the *Kalpataru Sastra* from his possession. There is no reference in the *Gurucharits* that Sankardeva ever sailed to eastern Assam.* Even if he did it, at that time, Aniruddhadeva might not have been born, or if born, he was only a minor, because when Sankardeva died in Cooch Behar in 1569, Aniruddhadeva was only 16 years old. Moreover, no other source associates Sankardeva with the fact of his possessing a Tantric work like *Kalpataru Sastra*. Under the circumstances, the allegation of Aniruddhadeva's stealing this work from Sankardeva does not arise. Similarly, there is nothing to prove that Aniruddhadeva was ostracised by Gopaldeva or that Gopaldeva was ostracised by Madhaveva. However, the story that Gopaldeva ostracised Aniruddhadeva for giving him

* Sankardeva after leaving Bordua, lived in Gangmau, Alipukhuri and then in Barpeta, Patbaushi and other places for several years. After that, he left for pilgrimage, and on his return he went to Cooch Behar where he died in 1491 Saka.

forbidden food got much publicity. Maniram Dewan also, writing in the early part of the 19th century, gave vent to this story.

Besides *Adicharit*, there are two other such spurious works, *Satsampradai Katha* and *Santanirnav*, alleged to have been written by Bhattadeva and Krishnabharati, both Vaisnava saints, and containing villification of the Vaisnava saints of the rival *Satras*. As S.N. Sarma points out, such works "contained sectarian villification, which is usually rare in the earlier biographical literatures"¹⁹ and hence they must be works of a much later date.

Further, it is impossible that Madhavdev, a man of saintly qualities, who soared high in metaphysical speculations "could dip his pen in scrolling such villification and abuse against pontiffs of his own following."²⁰ It, therefore, leaves no doubt that *Adicharit* was a spurious work written by some members of the hostile camp with the intention of creating a slur on the image of the Mayamara *Mahanta* and his disciples.

The contemporary political scene also invites attention here. Jayadhwaj Singha (1648-63), taking advantage of the War of Succession in Delhi among the four sons of the Mughal Emperor Shahjahan (1628-1658), occupied Kamrup (1658) which was then under the Mughals. This event led the next Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb (1658-1707) to send his most efficient general, Mir Jumla to Assam in 1662-63. In the war that followed Jayadhwaj Singha's soldiers suffered a defeat. The Ahom capital at Garhgaon was lost to the Mughals, and the king was compelled to sign a treaty on very humiliating terms promising to pay a war indemnity and annual tributes.

Chakradhwaj Singha (1663-1669), the next ruler, who was determined to avenge the insult and shake off the Mughal

19. S.N. Sarma, *op.cit.*, p. 99.

20. AARB, p. 197.

allegiance, adopted a defiant attitude, at which the Mughal Emperor sent another of his efficient generals, Raja Ram Singh to Assam. In the final clash of arms, which took place at Saraighat, the Mughals being badly defeated were driven out of Kamrup, and the river Manaha was fixed as the boundary between Mughal India and the kingdom of Assam. This battle in fact officially closed the Ahom-Mughal conflict which started with the Mughal occupation of Kamrup in 1615.

A political instability followed the battle of Saraighat and a series of ministers began to exercise sovereign power one after another. One of them, namely, Laluk Sola, who was the Barphukan or Governor of Kamrup, even surrendered Gauhati to the Mughals. Subsequently, Gadapani alias Gadadhar Singha, who became the king in 1681, fought the Mughals at Itakhuli near Gauhati, defeated them and recovered Kamrup from their possession in 1682.

It may also be noted in this connection that the system of exacting compulsory manual labour from the people through the *Paik* system worked efficiently so long the external threat worked as Democle's sword on the minds of the people. But as soon as that fear was over, people also wanted to have their release from that life of State bondage and rigidity. But any change in that system would amount to a total change of the administrative structure, which the monarchy was not prepared to do. Many *Paiks*, detested of that life fled away to the different parts of the country. Many concealed their names, whereas, many became Vaisnava *Bhakats* and took shelter in the *Satras* to evade the State-bondage.

Gadadhar Singha's Policy of Vaisnava Persecution :

Gadadhar Singha was well aware of this. He calculated that the only way to solve the problem was to strengthen the monarchy. In his bid to accomplish this end, he pursued a policy of ruthless persecution of the Vaisnava reformers, as he considered the *Satras* a potential threat to Ahom power. He

had some personal knowledge of the growing influence and prosperity of the *Satras*. While concealing himself and moving in disguise to escape the notice and political vendetta of King Chulikpha or Lara Raja, who at the instance of Laluk Sola Barphukan, had been maiming or killing all legal claimants to the throne, in order to make it safe* for him, he was visiting a number of *Satras*. There, to his surprise, he found a life full of pomp and grandeur, which in some cases, even surpassed that of the king. Further, some of the devotees of the Dakshinpat *Satra*, in particular, misbehaved with him.²¹ the *Gosain* of this *Satra*, who was also the royal preceptor, even claimed that he was the virtual ruler of the kingdom.²² Gadadhar Singha, therefore, considered the *Satras* to be states within the state. He, therefore, resolved to curb their power. Accordingly, after being enthroned, he confiscated the property of the *Satradhikars*, drove them out from their *Satras*, and even mutilated and killed some of them. In doing all this, he was actively helped by his Bhandari Barua, Rangacharan.²³

Baikunthadeva, the 7th *Mahanta* of the Mayamara *Satra*, was one of those unfortunate victims. He was tortured and killed in 1691. Madhai and Sadai, the sons of Krishnadeva of Puranimati *Satra*, a branch of the Mayamara *Satra*, and one Raghunandan from the main *Satra* at Khutiaputa were exiled to Namrup, and then killed. The disciples belonging to the higher castes, such as Brahmanas, Kayasthas and Kalitas were spared. But those of the lower castes, such as Tatis, Katanis, Kaivartas and *Haris*, most of whom belonged to the Mayamara sect, were hunted down and their properties were robbed of. They were forced to eat the flesh of swine and cows,²⁴ which was considered a great insult by these people.

* The divine origin of Ahom kingship was carried to such an extent during this period that any prince having any physical deformity, nay even for being pock-marked, was not allowed to sit on the throne.

21. SAB, p. 117; TB, pp. 26f; APB, 28f.

22. KTP, p. 38.

23. TB, pp. 26f; SAB, pp. 117f; HKB, p. 59; AB, pp. 271f.

24. ACMSV, pp. 70ff; HAG, pp. 168f.

Gadadhar Singha was succeeded by his son Rudra Singha (Sukhrungpha, 1696-1714), who is regarded as the greatest of the Ahom kings. This king considered his father's policy of Vaisnava-persecution as detrimental to the interest and integrity of the State. He therefore, adopted a conciliatory policy towards the Vaisnavas.²⁵ Accordingly, he restored the various *Satradhikars* to their former places. The Mayamara *Satra* also, which remained without a *Guru* for the last five years, was allowed to have its own *Mahanta*. Baikunthadeva's brother Chaturbhuj thus became the head of the Mayamara *Satra*.

Synod of Garhgaon :

But inspite of this liberal attitude towards the Vaisnavas, Rudra Singha, under the influence of a section of Brahmanas, cultivated certain prejudices against the non-Brahmana *Gosains*. The Brahmanas questioned the authority of the Sudra *Mahantas* to initiate the former. They submitted a petition to Rudra Singha to decide the point. It may be mentioned here that Sankardeva made no discrimination of caste and creed in matters of initiation and mass-prayers. Even Madhav Kandali, a versatile Brahmana Sanskrit scholar, who was the preceptor of Sankardeva, preferred initiation from the latter (Sankardeva). In course of time, however, the idea of the superiority of the Brahmanas crept in among a section of them and a strong movement was started against the practice of a Brahmana being initiated by a non-Brahmana. This group totally forgot the fact that Sankardeva himself was not a Brahmana and that Shree Krishna, the Supreme god of the cult, was also a milk-man by profession. This movement, which M. Neog rightly terms as 'the reversion of the history of the *Mahapurushiva* religion'²⁶, is said to be initiated by the Tantric Brahmana, who were receiving royal favour and encouragement from the four

25. TB, pp. 27f.

* As Sanuardeva is popularly known as *Manapurusha*, literally the Great Being, i.e., God, the religion propagated by him is also known as the *Mahapurushiva* religion.

26. M. Neog, *Mayamariyar Buranji*, p. 6.

prominent Brahmana *Satradhikars*²⁷ of Kuruabahi, Garamur, Auniati and Dakshinpat. The situation reached such a stage that Rudra Singha had to summon the Sudra *Mahantas* to a convention to establish their right on the basis of scriptural evidence, to initiate the Brahmanas. Chaturbhuj, the *Mahanta* of Mayamara *Satra* along with four other Sudra *Mahantas*, accepted the challenge. But they failed to convince the king. They were then expelled from the court with earthen-pitchers painted with lime hung from their necks, which was a mark of great dishonour. The king then promulgated the Synod of Garhgaon, by which, the Sudra *Mahantas* were debarred from initiating the Brahmana disciples.²⁸ This action of the king created wide resentment among all Sudra Vaisnavas, particularly among the Moamarias. The king also passed orders prohibiting the Brahmanas to stay in or visit any Sudra *Satra*. The *Mahanta* of the Mayamara *Satra* was inflicted corporal punishment for sheltering some Brahmana disciples in his *Satra* campus, in violation of the royal decree.²⁹ The Sudra *Mahanta* of the Kamalabari *Satra* was publicly whipped for preaching against the worship of idols.³⁰

State Policy of Using Saktism as a Weapon against Vaisnavism :

Rudra Singha first favoured Vaisnavism and accepted initiation from Harideva *Gosain* of Auniati *Satra*. But subsequently, he realised that by joining hands with the Vaisnavas, he would not be able to strengthen the position of the monarchy, because the powerful *Satra* institution would mar the image of the king sooner or later. He, therefore, decided to utilise Saktism as a weapon against the Vaisnavas³¹ and for this preferred to bring

27. TB, pp. 27f.

28. TB, pp. 31f.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 30f.

30. TB, p. 31; SAB, p. 120.

31. S.L. Barua, *Rajmantry Purnananda Buragohain and His Times* (Ph.D. Thesis).

a strong Sakta Brahmana priest from Bengal* The choice fell on Krishnaram Bhattacharyya Nyayavagis of Nadia.³² But before he could receive initiation,** Rudra Singha died at Gauhati,*** where he had been mobilising his forces in an effort to lead an armed aggression to liberate eastern India from the yoke of the Mughals.³³ Rudra Singha, however, instructed his sons to receive initiation from the Bengal priest.³⁴ He had also made a will at his death-bed that all his sons should reign after him in order of succession.³⁵ Accordingly, his eldest son Siva Singha (1714-1744) became the king and following the instruction of his deceased father, he placed the priest in charge of the Kamakhya temple on the Nilachal hill at Gauhati. The priest for that reason was known as *Parbatiya Gosain*. He was given a vast extent of revenue free land-grants, along with the service of a large number of *Paiks*.**** Some scholars opine that this importation of the Bengali Sakta Brahmana priest sowed the seeds of future discord in the land (*desh bibhratar muda-ankur*), leading ultimately to the outbreak of the Matak Rebellion, which shook the very foundation of the Ahom

* The contention of certain chronicle (APB, p. 51) that Rudra Singha decided to bring a priest from outside the country for initiation, as he could not tolerate the idea of humbling himself before a subject priest of his own country, cannot be supported. For, he was initiated to Vaisnavism by a subject-priest.

32. KTP, p. 41.

** Harakanta Barua states that when the king had asked for initiation, the priest, considering the king of low origin, sent one of his disciples for the purpose, at which, the king was greatly offended, and ordered the priest to return. But his departure was followed by an earthquake. Believing that this was at the curse of the priest, the king sent men to take him back, but before he could receive initiation, he died. The opinion that the king refused to accept the priest as his preceptor because of his humble bearing (BVMD; AARB, p. 202) appears baseless.

*** According to *Asamar Padya Buranji* (p. 58), the king died just after the arrival of the priest at Gauhati.

33. For details, see, TB, pp. 34 ff; AARB, pp. 5f, 25.

34. APB, p. 58.

35. HKB, p. 68; APB, p. 58.

**** Lands were also allotted to him in Upper Assam (APB, p. 63; KTP, p. 42).

monarchy.³⁶

Attempt to make Saktism the State Religion : Germination of the Matak Rebellion :

Siva Singha was completely under the influence of the Brahmana priest, particularly the Parbatiya *Gosain* and astrologers. and in 1722 he was alarmed by their prediction that his rule would shortly come to an end as he was under the evil influence of the stars (*Chhatra-bhanga Yoga**). The remedy suggested for it was his retirement from State affairs and propitiation of different gods and goddesses.³⁷ Accordingly, at the suggestion of the Parbatiya *Gosain*, the king vested the sovereign power in the hands of his Queen Phuleswari,³⁸ giving her a new name Pramatheswari. Phuleswari (Phulmati) originally was a dancer attached to the Siva Temple at Chinatoli near Dergaon in the district of Sibsagar. When the king visited the temple, he was captivated by her exceptional beauty, took her as his wife and ultimately made her Chief Queen. This intelligent and accomplished woman soon exercised tremendous influence on the king's person, and after being vested with sovereign power with the title *BarRaja* (the Great king), she became the defacto ruler of the kingdom. She had struck coins under the joint names of her and her husband. She was also the first Ahom ruler to use Persian legend in her coins.

Phuleswari alias Pramatheswari was a staunch devotee of Saktism, and was more under the influence of the Parbatiya *Gosain* than her husband. She gave up the old Ahom burial system (*Maidam bandha*) and started cremating dead bodies.³⁹ She even attempted to make Saktism the State religion, and with that end in view, she ordered all the Vaisnava *Gosains* to worship the idol of goddess Durga and forced the Sudra

36. M. Neog, *Mayamariyar Buranji*, p. 6.

* Chhatra-Royal umbrella, Bhanga-fall, Yoga-Junction of stars, i. e., junction of evil stars indicating the fall of the monarch.

37. APB, p. 65; KTP, p. 51; AARB, p. 203.

38. BVDM.

39. TB, p. 38; SAB, p. 126.

Mahantas to bow their heads before the Brahmana *Gosains* of Auniati and Dakshinpat. She then forbade the worship of other gods in the kingdom and, holding a temporary camp at Sonarijan, supervised the work of bringing the idols of other deities from the *Devalayas* (temples) and throwing them away to the Brahmaputra. Idols of Durga made of stone and brass-metal were then placed in every temple and all people were ordered to worship them.⁴⁰ Such activities made her highly unpopular among the Vaisnavas. Phuleswari did not rest content with this. With her neophytic zeal, she then invited the Sudra *Mahantas* to attend the celebration of Durga *puja* held at the capital, where she compelled them to bow their heads before the image of the goddess, to accept the *prasad* and *nirmali*, and to have their forehead besmeared with the blood of the sacrificed animals.⁴¹ This injudicious act of the queen throwing down the right of worship of the people is considered by several Assamese *Buranjis* as "the germination of the Matak rebellion (*Matakar Adi Beej*)".⁴²

This fanatical zeal of the power-intoxicated queen greatly exasperated the feelings of the Vaisnava *Gosains*. More than others, the powerful Mayamara *Mahantas*, who then commanded eight lakh disciples, considered it a serious injury not to be forgotten or forgiven, and planned schemes of vengeance "to seige the political power" as, otherwise, religious freedom was at an end.⁴³

Phuleswari had incurred further displeasure from the Mayamara *Mahanta* by the following incident : In 1731 when she was in her advanced stage of pregnancy, she was curious to know about her future progeny, and asked the Vaisnava *Mahantas* to predict the sex of the baby. Most of the *Mahantas*, so also the Parbatiya *Gosain*, made flattering predictions, but the Mayamara *Mahanta* prophesised that she would deliver neither

- 40. TB, p. 38; SAB, pp. 126ff; SRSB, p. 144.

- 41. APB, p. 66; SAB, p. 151; HKB, p. 71; KTP, p. 43; HAG, p. 189.

- 42. SAB, p. 151; BVMD.

- 43. p. Gogoi, *The Tai and the Tai Kingdom*, p. 511.

a male nor a female child but only a lump of flesh, and that the delivery would cause her death. The prediction added fuel to the fire and the queen immediately handed over the *Mahanta* to the executioners. However, the *Mahanta* was rescued from his fate at the intercession of the Parbatiya *Gosain* and the king.⁴⁴ In due course, the Queen, as predicted by the *Mayamara Mahanta*, actually delivered such a child, which brought her death.*

Phuleswari's two successors Ambika (Draupadi) and Sarbeswari (Enadari) continued to wield the sovereign power assuming the same title *Bar-Raja*. They were, however, personally not as energetic as their predecessor in patronising Saktism. Throughout this period, Siva Singha paid very little attention to the administration of the country, and devoted most of his time to religious pursuits. He erected several temples and made large number of land-grants to the Brahmanas, so that out of a total forty-eight copper plates recording land-grants to temples and Brahmanas by all the Ahom monarchs, nineteen belong to him.⁴⁵ Thus an all out effort was made by the monarchy to make Saktism a counter force against the growing power of the Vaisnava *Satras*. Alongside, he made land-grants with the services of *paiks* to some Brahmana *Satras* as well.⁴⁶ This he might have done because he considered the support of the Brahmana *Satras* essential to give Saktism a strong foot-hold in the country.

The negligence of the political duty by the monarch and leaving it entirely in the hands of the queens helped the rise of some officials, who exerted tremendous influence in the political affairs of the country in a subsequent period. Siva Singha died

44. ACMSV, pp. 86ff; AARB, p. 203; SRSB, p. 145.

But in the *Assamar Padya Buranji*, it is mentioned that the prediction of a monstrous child to be delivered by the queen was made by all the *Mahantas*, and not by Chaturbhujdev alone. The queen became angry and imprisoned all the *Mahantas*. (APB, pp. 67f.).

45. HAG, (Foot note), p. 189.

46. HKB, p. 72.

in 1744 and was succeeded by his brother Pramatta Singha (Sunenpha), as per the will of their father Rudra Singha, although an attempt was made to place Siva Singha's son on the throne. Pramatta Singha was greatly helped by Pukhuri-para Buragohain and Gendhela Hazarika of Bakata, later known as Kirtichandra, in foiling the attempt.⁴⁷ Thus coming to the king's good book, Gendhela rose in power step by step till he became the Barbarua (the Chief Secretary). This officer, as would be seen, played a crucial role in fomenting the Matak Rebellion. Pramatta Singha continued to patronise Saktism and erected Rudreswar and Sukreswar temples at Gauhati.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, the Mayamara *Satradhikar* Chaturbhujdeva died in 1748 A.D. and was succeeded by his son Astabhujdeva. Considering increased number of disciples, as well as, the necessity of having an intimate communication between the *Satra* and the disciples, Astabhujdeva established a new *Satra* at Tiphuk and made Kachinaliya alias Krishnananda its *Satradhikar*. The Tiphuk area was mainly inhabited by the Moran people.*

Pramatta Singha was succeeded by his brother, Rajeswer Singha (suranpha), the fourth son of Rudra Singha in 1751 A.D. The succession ought to have passed to Mohanmala alias Barjana Gohain, his elder brother but Kirtichandra Barbarua contrived to set aside Mohanmala Gohain's claim on the flimsy ground that his face was pitted with small-pox marks, because he fore-saw the loss of his influence and power if Mohanmala was allowed to sit on the throne. Mohanmala Gohain along with his family was exiled to Namrup. The Gohain had thus a serious grievance against Kirtichandra Barbarua. When the Mataks raised their rebellion against the Ahom government, he joined his hands with them.

47. TB, Pp. 40 ff; SAB, pp. 128f.

48. HKB, p. 72; KTP, p. 44; TB, p. 45.

* According to *Vamsawali* Kachinaliya was a disciple of Astabhujdeva (ACMSV, pp. 103f) and not his son as claimed by the Morans.

Gathering of the Storm : Mayamara Mahanta insulted by Kirtichandra Barbarua :

Rajeswar Singha preferred pleasure to the affairs of the State, and left the government in the hands of Kirtichandra Barbarua.⁴⁹ The Barbarua earned special favour from the king by leading an expedition to Manipur and getting its throne recovered from Burmese possession* for its legal claimant.⁵⁰ Jai Singha, the Manipure king, as a mark of gratitude for this valuable help gave his daughter Kuranganayani in marriage to the Ahom king.⁵¹ Rajeswar Singha, pleased with the services of the Barbarua, named him as 'Kirtichandra' meaning 'the man of fame', as he brought fresh honour to the Ahom monarchy, and granted him some special prerogatives like the right to use gold-embroidered umbrella and to sit on a carpet in the royal court.⁵² The Barbarua, thus basking in the royal favour, became extremely proud and began to disregard even the three Great Gohains—the Buragohain, the Bargohain and the Barpatragohain.** The king, in fact, was ruler only in name, Kirtichandra managed the entire administration.⁵³

49. HAG, p. 186.

* The first expedition sent for the purpose under Haranath Senapati Phukan had to come back after vainly trying to reach Manipur by cutting creepers and jungles on the route, for which the battle was known as the *Latakata-ran* in the history of Assam.

50. APB, p. 75; TB, pp. 48ff.

51. APB, p. 78; TB, p. 51; KTP, pp. 45f; HKB, pp. 74f.

52. APB, p. 78; KTP, p. 46; HKB, p. 75.

** Kirtichandra's elevation to Barbaruaship in violation of the customary rules of appointing only nobles to that post and his overbearing disposition, dissatisfied the nobles, for his Numali Bargohain wrote a *Buranji* making certain aspersions on the purity of Kirtichandra's origin. Convincing the king that such remarks might be passed against the king also, unless certain drastic actions were taken, he brought all the *Buranjis* for examination with the tacit approval of the monarch. Those *Buranjis* which were alleged to have contained 'objectionable' remarks were burnt. This action of Kirtichandra led to the destruction of a large number of Assamese chronicles.

(APB, p. 79; KTP, p. 46; HKB, p. 75; AARB, p. 204)

53. G. Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

Rajeswar Singha also was a disciple of the Parvatiya *Gosain*. He established a relative of this *Gosain* near Pandu, who came to be known as the *Nati Gosain*. Further, he continued to patronise Saktism by erecting several Siva temples at places like Gauhati and Sibsagar.* He went personally to Gauhati to visit the Kamakhya temple, celebrated the *Phalgutsav* there and erected a temple named *Phakudaul* for the purpose. After coming back from Gauhati he decided to build a new Siva temple at Negheriting, as the old one at Dergaon had been eroded by the Brahmaputra.⁵⁴

Rajeswar Singha took a diplomatic step to counteract a possible trouble from the Mayamara *Mahanta* by establishing friendship with the *Mahanta* of the Dihing *Satra*, another powerful and influential *Satra* of the *Kala Samhati*.⁵⁵ It is said that he even asked for initiation from the Dihing *Mahanta*, which, of course, the latter evaded, forwarding the suggestion that monarchs should preferably be Saktas.⁵⁶ He then used the services of his astute officer Kirtichandra Barbarua, who was a disciple of Kaivalyanandanadeva, the Dihing *Mahanta*. With the support of the Barbarua, the king then pursued a policy of 'divide and rule', by which, he created dissensions between the two powerful *Kala Samhati Satras*—Dihing and Mayamara, who till then had been living in complete amity. It may be mentioned in this connection that since the days of Jayadhwaj Singha, who formally accepted Vaisnavism, the *Satradhikars* were allotted seats in the royal court in the hierarchy of their official status and positions. A regular gradation of *Satras* was made keeping in view their size (meaning extent of revenue-free grants under its possession), prestige and power. The Brahmana *Satras* were treated as Class I category and were allotted seats in the front row. The *Satra* of Dihing, Maya-

* The Siva temples at Bashisthashram, Manikarneswar and Chitrachal, all at Gauhati and the Hara-Gauri temple at Sibsagar are ascribed to his reign.

54. HKB, p. 76; KTP, p. 47.

55. APB, pp. 80ff; HKB, p. 76; KTP, p. 47.

56. APB, p. 85.

maras, etc. were treated as Class II category and they were allotted seats in the second row and so on. The Class I category of *Satras* had the privilege of directly meeting the King and offering him blessings by touching his head.*

Now Kirtichandra promoted his own *Guru*, the Dihing *Mahanta* to Class I category, which made his position officially higher than that of the Mayamara *Mahanta*. The Dihing *Mahanta* through allusions of royal power was thus ultimately entrapped to the politics of the time.⁵⁷ Kirtichandra then started praising the performance of the *Gayan-bayan* of the Dihing *Satra* and condemning that of the Mayamara, though actually reverse was the fact.⁵⁸ The royal tricks immediately bore fruits. The Dihing *Mahanta* divulged all secrets to Rajeswar Singha relating to the rebellious attitude of the Mayamara *Mahanta* and even informed him that the latter had been hatching a conspiracy to acquire suzerain power. Thus alarmed, the king killed or punished many Moamaria disciples suspected to be rebels.⁵⁹

The arrogance and overbearing conduct of Kirtichandra Barbarua further antagonised the Moamarias and sharpened the rift between the Mayamara *Satra* and the Ahom State. Once the king was returning from a pleasure trip from Dergaon to his capital at Rangpur, accompanied by the Barbarua. As the king, who was proceeding ahead of the Barbarua, reached the gate of the Mayamara *Satra*, the *Mahanta's* eldest son Gagini *Deka Mahanta* greeted the monarch with two hundred trays of presents. The usual procedure required the previous sanction of the Barbarua, to visit and offer presents to the monarch on any occasion. But it could not [be done on this particular occasion, because if the *Mahanta* would wait for the arrival of the Barbarua to seek his permission, the king would cross his gate and he would miss the opportunity of greeting the monarch..

* For details, see, S.N. Sarma, *op. cit.*, pp. 188f.

57. S. Bora, *Rajsatra Dihing Satrar Buranji*, Mangaldai, pp. 17f.

58. BVMD.

59. HKB, p. 77.

The *Deka-Mahanta* therefore, greeted the monarch, taking permission from the Baruas and the phukans accompanying him, as his personal guards. The Barbarua, when he reached the *Satra's* gate, was also shown proper honour by the offering of 80 trays of presents. But the Barbarua became highly enraged with the *Deka-Mahanta*, when he came to know that the king had already been greeted without his permission and, he, at once, caused four blows to be inflicted on the *Deka-Mahanta* in presence of his disciples.⁶⁰ This was too much to be tolerated and the *Deka-Mahanta* had now resolved to wreck vengeance.

Before taking up arms, the *Deka-Mahanta* wanted to know the numerical strength of the Moamaria disciples. For that purpose, he announced the erection of a new *Namghar* (*Kirtan-ghar*) at Malaupathar near the main *Satra* at Khutiaputa and asked each of the Mayamara disciples to come to the spot and throw a clod of earth on the site for constructing the *Barbheti* or the plinth of the *Namghar*. It is said that the clod-throwing ceremony continued for several days which was participated by about 8,00,000 disciples.⁶¹ When the construction of the *Namghar* was completed with each disciple contributing towards it, a grand religious convocation was summoned in the month of *Magha* (January/February)/1769 which lasted continuously for seven days.⁶² It was here that the *Deka-Mahanta* reported to the Mayamara *Gaonburhas* (village headmen) the humiliation that he suffered at the hands of Kirtichandra Barbarua and discussed with them the measures to be taken to retaliate the injustice. But now the *Mahanta*, Astabhujdeva, intervened and dissuaded his son from resorting to violence stating thus :

“Why do you seek for political power ? I am the owner of unlimited property. A single individual like Kirtichandra Barbarua can do us but little harm. A hill stream does

60. BVMD; AARB, p. 204

61. ACMSV, p. 106; HKB, p. 77; TB, p. 52; APB, pp. 80f.

62. BVMD.

frequently leave its channel; but the ocean remains confined within its limits, but when it once transcends its shores, countries become devastated. King[†] Rajeswar Singha is like my father. If you launch any warfare, the king will have anxiety and suspense. Wait for some time. Better opportunities are bound to come sooner or later.⁶³

The *Mahanta* thus persuaded his son and devotees from immediately taking arms against the Ahom government. His request not to take arms against the Ahom monarchy indicates that he was not against the system of monarchy as such, but against the evils of monarchy only. He might have also thought that a drastic change in the existing social set-up would deprive him of the privileges that he was so long enjoying. What he immediately wanted was, therefore, extermination of the Barbarua, whom he considered solely responsible for all the misfortunes that befell on his *Satra*. He, therefore, began to incite his disciples against the Barbarua only. The *Mahanta* thus played the role of a mere reformer. The attitude of the *Deka Mahanta*, however, was different. He was critical of the Ahom monarchy itself and wanted to overthrow it, before it was too late. It was, therefore, mainly through him that dissatisfaction among the Mayamara disciples against the existing government was spread.

Rajeswar Singha died in May, 1769 having left three sons—Charu Singha (Majugohain), Ratneswar (Sarugohain) and Patkonwar, and also a brother named Kalsiliagohain. Though attempts were made to place Charu Singha on the throne, Kalsiliagohain, who was also the youngest son of Rudra Singha, despite his alleged illegitimacy*, managed to get the throne through the machinations of Kirtichandra Barbarua on the plea that this was only in accordance with the death-will of King Rudra Singha. It is even said that the Parbatiya *Gosain* refused

63. BVMD; AARB, p. 205; SRSB, p. 148.

* This illegitimacy was doubted because his physical features and skin entirely differed from those of Rudra Singh. (APB, p. 92; HAG, p. 189; AARB, p. 205).

to initiate him on grounds of his doubtful origin. Kalsiliagohain after his accession assumed the name Laksmi Singha (Sunyeopha). He was then 53 years old. He mutilated the sons of Rajeswar Singha and banished them to Namrup in order to make the throne safe for him.⁶⁴

Laksmi Singha took initiation from Ramananda Acharyya, a local Sakta priest, whom he established at Pahumara with vast extent of land-grant, for which, the latter came to be known as Pahumariya *Gosain*. The priest was also popularly called *Na-Gosain*, in order to distinguish him from the Parbatiya *Gosain*. Laksmi Singha then issued a charter confiscating the landed property of the Parbatiya *Gosain* and expelling him from the Ahom kingdom and prohibiting any subject from receiving initiation from him. Though the expulsion order was subsequently withdrawn, the Parbatiya *Gosain* remained highly critical of the Ahom monarch. On the other hand, because of the royal favour, the followers of the *Na-Gosain* greatly increased and he soon became influential. Thus Laksmi Singha sowed seeds of discord even among the Saktas. This was an undiplomatic act on his part, as he ought to have realised that he would be in need of the united support of all the Saktas to face any probable rising from the disaffected Mataks.

The Barbarua's high handedness over the affairs of the administration went on increasing to the great displeasure of the Mayamara *Mahanta*. It has already been mentioned that after the death of Rajeswar Singha, his sons were mutilated and exiled to Namrup. The wives of Rajeswar Singha, 24 in number, were also exiled to Barkola, another penal colony. They were placed in a boat with the service of two maids only, and without any provision for food or other bare necessities. All their ornaments and other belongings were confiscated by the Barbarua. In their journey the boat, which was piloted by a Mayamara disciple, stopped near the Mayamara *Satra*. The

Mahanta seeing the sufferings of the widowed queens, supplied them with sufficient quantities of food, clothes and utensils for the rest of the journey. It is said that the ex-queens were treated with utmost respect during the two days when the boat halted at the *Satra*. The *Mahanta* had also arranged for the escort of these queens to Barkola.⁶⁵

Kirtichandra became highly infuriated when he came to know about this. He created stories to cast slur on the moral integrity of the *Mahanta* and his son out of the hospitality accorded by them to the widowed queens making propaganda that "it had been actuated by ulterior objects to which the ladies had been compelled to yield".⁶⁶ As a mark of humiliation, the usual monthly *Nirmali* or presents of flowers sent by the *Mayamara Mahantas* to the king was returned. The *Khataniyar* or the messenger who brought the *Nirmali* was also punished for bringing it from the 'unholy' *Mahanta*. The *Khataniyar* went back and reported everything to the *Mahanta* and his son *Gagini Deka Mahanta*.⁶⁷ This was too much for the *Mahanta* to bear. He then permitted the *Deka Mahanta*, who was already at the height of his temper, to organise the disciples, but instructed him to concentrate his effort on the destruction of the *Barbarua* alone.⁶⁸ This happened in July, 1769.

The preparation for an open rebellion continued during the months of August and September. Soon after, the *Mayamara Mahanta* received fresh insults from the *Barbarua*. One day King *Laksmi Singha* and *Kirtichandra* in course of a river journey by boat, halted for a few minutes at the ferry-*ghat* of the *Mayamara Satra*. The *Mahanta*, who was standing on the *ghat*, saluted and blessed the king, but ignored the *Barbarua* altogether. The *Mahanta*, it appears, wilfully did the same, as he was highly offended with the *Barbarua* for the false propa-

65. BVMD; AARB, p. 206; SRSB, pp. 150f.

66. AARB, p. 206.

67. BVMD.

68. *Ibid.*

ganda he carried on against him on the affairs of the widowed queens of Rajeswar Singh. Highly enraged, the Barbarua rebuked the *Mahanta* in very harsh words in presence of his disciples and the attendants of the king.⁶⁹

The Rebellion in the making :

It was not difficult for the *Mahanta* to mobilise the strength of his disciples. There had long been a revolutionary atmosphere among them, arising out of the oppression that they had been suffering under the government. They were only seeking for an opportunity and a green signal from their revered *Guru*. Now that the signal was given by the *Guru* on his own, be it against the Barbarua only, the leading disciples spared no time in spreading the revolutionary spirit among all their friends. The writings of their *Gurus* were now extensively used for the purpose. As rightly pointed out by S.K. Bhuyan, "The Moamaria discontent was promoted not only by oral propaganda but also by literature which was revolutionary in tone."⁷⁰ The hymns used for the purpose having diabolical meaning could be understood by the Mayamara disciples only. Thus a hymn composed by Aniruddhadeva, the founder of the *Satra*, was sung by one Bhogananda Matak amongst his comrades which instilled into their hearts a revolutionary spirit. Few lines from this hymn are reproduced below.

*E bhai kemana kara vihara
Prachanda begara thata rushi ashe
Umana nepawa gara
Gandharva kataka gute gute pari
Agate mariya jai
Tringsha paike hazara parai
Ranga kara taka chai.*

This perhaps meant that the royal fort was well-protected and barricaded; and so the rebels should proceed with tact

69. BVMD; AARB, p. 151; HAG, p. 194.

70. AARB, p. 206.

and caution, forsaking temporal pleasure and according to the injunctions of the *Guru*. If they would stand as one man, thirty of them would be sufficient to defeat even thousand belonging to the royalist camp.

A number of revolutionary slogans in the form of hymns were also composed to inspire the disciples. These hymns depicted Nityanandadeva, the 4th *Mahanta* as the first martyr, and narrated the tragic fate of their earlier *Gurus* and comrades at the hands of the government. These hymns assured them of their success stating that the swords and the match-locks of the government were owned by the Mataks themselves and as such, when they would rise in rebellion, there would be no alternative for the monarchy but to surrender.

The Mataks had certain advantages. Many of them were serving the government in different capacities. This 'fifth column' used to communicate the secret news in codes that could be understood only by their own camp followers.⁷¹ Further, as the junior officers like Boras and Saikias were not only men of the locality, but also were easily approachable by the *paiks*, there was no difficulty in transmitting the news from one *khel* or area to the other. These officers always sided with the *paiks*, and the *paiks* also had implicit confidence on them.⁷² Thus Ragha Neog and Naharkhora Saikia, who were officers of the Ahom government, were men of the people, and it was they, who subsequently took the lead in organising the Rebellion. The officers in charge of certain important *khels* like those of *Hiloidari*, *Dhenuchucha*, *Do-dhara* (*khel* for manufacturing swords), although all of them were not Mataks, assured to divert the skill and manpower of the *khels* under their respective control against the government, whenever it was required.

The Mataks then started a fort near the Sessa river. When a call for the purpose was given, hundreds of them assembled

71. TB, p. 62.

72. S.L. Barua, *op. cit.*

there with whatever weapons they could procure. Out of seven thousand men assembled there, three thousand were then selected for effective training.⁷³ In doing all this, Gagini *Deka Mahanta*, who already left the *Satra* at Khutiaputa for organising the disciples in the extreme eastern part of the valley, played a very important role.

Thus the Mataks, who had so long been extending their all co-operation to the success of the Ahom monarchy, enabling it to resist all external invasions, had now, organised themselves into the first band of revolutionaries against it. S.K. Bhuyan points out that :

"The transformation of the Moamarias into a military body has its parallel, though in a much larger scale, in that of the Sikhs who contributed to the subversion of Mogul authority in India. In both cases the fighting element in their sectorial organisations was introduced as a result of the clash of the *Gurus* with Government of the land."⁷⁴

But it must be borne in mind that the Mataks were never crusaders fighting for a religious cause, although the symbol and the platform of their unity were their *Guru* and the *Satra* respectively. It is also true that the rebellion started on a religious pretext, but its motive was never aimed against a particular creed. The fact is that the Mataks had been seething under the Ahom government on various fields : religious, political, social and economic. Exploitation on them by the Ahom government reached such a point that they realised that there would be no end to their miseries unless the ruling power was overthrown. Though they had no new political ideologies, they were of one accord that the destruction of the existing structure was a must. It is ofcourse a fact that the subjects other than the Mataks also suffered equally under the Ahom regime. The standard of rebellion was raised by the Mataks first because they were strongly organised around the

73. BVMD.

74. AARB, pp. 256f.

platform of the *Satra* and centering round their *Guru*. That subsequently other people also, who were not disciples of the *Mayamara Satra* joined hands with the rebels, prove that there was general discontentment against the government.

How the Matak

s raised the banner of their rebellion against the Ahom monarchy, which was so long conceived as infallible, and to what extent they could achieve success would be discussed in the next few pages of this work.

The Matak Challenge to the Ahom Monarchy

The Mataks had been effectively organising themselves and maturing plans to challenge the Ahom monarchy since July 1769. Women joined with men and inspired their sons and husbands to put an end to the rule of oppression, injustice and cruelty. The whole atmosphere was thus surcharged with a rebellious spirit. Only a spark was necessary to set it ablaze, which was supplied soon by the same overpowering Ahom noble, Kirtichandra Barbarua.

Immediate cause :

On September 15, 1769, Ragha Neog and Nahar Khora Saikia, two Moran members of the Matak community, delivered to Kirtichandra Barbarua their usual supply of an elephant. But the arrogant Barbarua, charging them that they were bringing for him only a lean elephant, ordered his men to cut off the ears of Nahar and inflict twenty lashes on Ragha.¹ While taking the merciless treatment Ragha, agonised with pain, cried

1. AB, p. 293.

out, "This country is infested with devils. The sun, the moon, the air and the clouds are standing witnessess of this injustice and cruelty. Retribution is writ large on the fate of the wrong-doer."² Nahar, with streams of blood coming out from both of his ears, joined Ragha. Indeed, this was not the lonely cry of Ragha and Nahar; it was the general cry of the oppressed commonality against the despotic government. Ragha and Nahar, with heavy bandages, were taken by their friends all the way from Rangpur to their *Guru* at Khutiaputa. The *Mahanta* was shocked to learn the incident. The *Deka Mahanta*, who had already been organising the disciples had now resolved to strike before it was too late. He immediately sent orders to the *Gaonburhas* to mobilise the people of their respective villages.³ The *Mahanta*, under the situation, though regardful of the Ahom monarchy had to give up the vascillation of his mind and extend qualified support to the rebellion, in the following words :

The Ahom rulers conquered this country after undergoing great hardships and difficulties. They deserve our gratitude for having converted this forest-clad wilderness into a settled habitation. They have, besides, supported us in our spiritual leadership. A prince of the Tungkhungia royal family should, therefore, be placed on the throne, and you should never aim at capturing suzerain power for yourselves. The families of the 'Seven Houses'* should be preserved and the Gohainships should be conferred on the members of the respective families, who are adherents of our *Satra*. You can hold offices as Phukans, Baruas, and Saikias. The

2. BVMD; AARB, p. 207.

3. BVMD.

* The seven principal Ahom clans were called *Sat-gharia*-Ahoms, literally, the Ahoms of seven houses. The first three houses were the royal family and the Buragohain and the Bargohain families. About the remaining four families there is a difference of opinions, for according to some they are the Deodhai, Mohan, Bailung and Siring families of priests and astrologers, while according to others, they are the secular families of Lahon, Sandikoi, Dihingia and Duara. (AARB, p. 16).

Khels should not be dislocated. You should live in peace and concord with the disciples of the other *Satras*, and show due reverence to the saints and preachers. As you are not aware of the art of administration, you should take the counsel of the *Katakis* and the *Kakatis*, and reward them handsomely. Man-slaughter should be confined to soldiers, actually engaged in hostilities. If you violate these instructions, you are sure to cause destruction of all of us including our hallowed-*Satra*.^{4*}

The first Matak Insurrection (1769-1770) :

The Matak members of the *Hatichungi Khel*, who were all Morans, were the first to raise the banner of Rebellion. In October, 1769, when the Barbarua sent his men to cut timbers from the Moran area to make *Bardhaks* or big drums, the people of that area led by Bhatuki and Bhabuli, now named as Radha and Rukmini,** refused them entrance to the area and declared that they were independent under their own King and Barbarua. Considering it a minor local uprising, the king sent a small contingent of 2000 soldiers under the command of a Tekela Bora named Bez, but the army was cut to a man; the Tekela Bora made a hair-breadth escape and informed the king of the seriousness of the situation.⁵ He further reported that

4. BVMD, translation is from AARB, pp. 207f.

* Hridayananda Goswami of Mayamara Dinjoy *Satra* states in the preface to the *Mayamara Satrar Vansawali*, that Astabhujadeva, the Mayamara *Mahanta*, never permitted anybody to revolt. On the other hand, he prohibited such a course. But the circumstances leading to the outbreak of the Matak Rebellion, and its subsequent events, evidence the fact that the Mayamara *Mahanta* extended support, though qualified, to the Rebellion.

** Rudha alias Bhatuki was the wife of Nahar Khora Saikia and Rukmini alias Bhabuli was the wife of his brother (AB, p. 307). Certain sources, however, mention that both Radha and Rukmini were the wives of Nahar (AARB, p. 208). while in some other source Radha-Rukmini is referred as one woman who was the wife of Nahar. (G. Barua, op. cit., pp. 105ff).

5. TB, pp. 57f; HAG, p. 195.

the two women leaders were possessed of supernatural powers, by which, they were catching the bullets with the corners of their *chaddars*.⁶ Meanwhile, the Mataks, under the command of Ragha, pitched their camp at Sessa and thus freed a vast area lying on the north of the Dihing from the Ahom control.⁷ In the south of the river Dihing, a strong advance-guard was stationed at Namrup. There also, the inhabitants, who were mostly Morans and Kacharis extended all their support.⁸ The Mataks then made alliance with the three exiled Ahom princes, Mohanmala Gohain, Charu Singha and Ratneswar, assuring them that in case of their winning success, they would place one of them on the throne.⁹ The rebels calculated that such a declaration could create a division in the royalist camp, for, these princes, specially Mohanmala Gohain were very popular and their banishment was considered as an act of injustice and highhandedness on the part of Kirtichandra Barbarua.¹⁰

The king then summoned a meeting of his nobles, where, it was decided to send a strong army of 14,000 [soldiers under the command of Haranath Senapati Phukan.¹¹ It was found that even in the royalist camp, there were some persons who could realise the gravity of the situation. One such person was Chandrahash Deka Barbarua, son of Kirtichandra Barbarua. While commanded by his father to recruit forces and make provisions for counteracting the Mataks, the Deka Barbarua pointed out to his father the impracticability of fighting a war with the rebels, who were ready to do or die for the sake of their cause. He understood the strength of the enemy and had well realised that it was not a minor uprising by a small group of persons, but a popular movement, not to yield to the threat of arms. He had also pointed out to his father the follies he committed in dealing with the powerful Mayamara Mahanta

6. TB, p. 57; AARB, p. 208.

7. TB, p. 62.

8. HAG, p. 195.

9. TB, pp. 58f; Wade, *op.cit.*, pp. 166f.

10. AARB, p. 208.

11. TB, p. 58.

and suggested him to seek apology from the *Mahanta* without least delay, and to pursue a conciliatory policy towards the rebels. He emphasised that by this policy only, he would be able to avert his personal ruin and the impending great crisis. But the Barbarua replied that he would least care a handful of *Hatichungi Morans*. "The sons of Rajeswar Singha conspired to kill me. How do you advise to make them monarch?", he further said. The Deka Barbarua then went away with a heavy heart.¹²

Haranath Senapati Phukan encamped on the bank of the Dibru river. With an advance-guard, he then crossed the river and pitched his camp on the other bank with a view to advancing against the Matak. But the rebels immediately destroyed the bridge and thus severed his connection with the main army, putting the Phukan into very serious straits.¹³ The Matak then dashed towards the Phukan's fort placing the exiled Ahom princes on elephant's back in the vanguard of their army.¹⁴ Mohanmala Gohain attempted to convince the Phukan, that as a member of an old Ahom noble family (Duara), the latter should not obstruct his elevation to the throne, which was the 'primary object of this Moran enterprise'.¹⁵ Mohanmala further pointed out that his actions would be directed against the Barbarua only, and no harm would be done to other officials.¹⁶ With a voice of authority, he uttered :

Know ye not my inprescriptible right to the throne of Assam. Know ye not the cruel sufferings to which the Barbarua has subjected your prince, and will ye rise against him in battle ?¹⁷

But the Phukan did not yield. The rebels then attacked his fort, seiged his person and kept him under confinement at a

12. BVMD; SRSB, pp. 152f.

13. TB, p. 58.

14. TB, pp. 58f.

15. TB, p. 59; AARB, p. 208.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Wade, *op.cit.*, pp. 168f.

short distance from their own camp. At this, the Phukan's soldiers went over to the side of the rebels.¹⁸ It appears that from his place of confinement the Phukan escaped and while trying to cross the river, he was pierced to death by the enemy.^{19*}

The news unnerved the king. He then sent orders to the Barphukan of Gauhati to recruit soldiers from the vassal states of Rani, Luki and Topakuchi, as they were not supposed to have sympathy for the rebels.²⁰ He also sent men to the Manipuri king Jay Singha seeking his help against the Matakas. At the same time, he asked Kirtichandra Barbarua to take adequate steps to resist the advance of the rebels. Accordingly, the Barbarua sent a fresh contingent under the three Rajkhowas of Abhaipur to fight the Matakas at Namrup. But before the royalist force reached its destination, it was intercepted and defeated by the rebels at Dighalighat.²¹ The rebels meanwhile rose in rebellion in several places on the north of the Dikhow river. The royalist army also advanced through different routes to face the rebels. Thus the *Deka* Phukan advanced to Timun and encamped there; Mai Barua proceeded to Changmai; the Dualia Pani Phukan advanced across the Dhari Ali and Likchan Bacha-Rajkhowa set out through a hilly route.²² But nothing came out. The *Deka* Phukan's army was routed; Mai Barua's advance was intercepted and he had to suffer a defeat; the Pani Phukan, offering a very gallant fight, at last, perished in battle and Likchan Bacha-Rajkhowa could not make much headway.²³

18. TB, p. 59.

19. *Ibid.*

* According to the chronicle incorporated in Wade, *op.cit.*, p.175, the rebels laid a siege to the Phukan's fort, at which the latter took his flight, in course of which, he plunged into the stream of the Disang and was pierced to death by the enemy.

20. TB, p. 6.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

22. TB, p. 61.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

It was also found that in many cases the royalist soldiers defected to the side of the rebels, or deserted their camps out of fear.²⁴ The disciples of the Mayamara *Mahanta* serving as attendants of the Barbarua and other officials, began to divulge the secrets of all the war-plans of the royalist camp to the *Deka Mahanta*.²⁵

The victorious Morans, meanwhile, crossed the Charaideo hill on their way to Gargaon, the old Ahom capital²⁶, raising slogans²⁷ like :

*Astabhuje, Saptabhuje, Chaturbhuje rakhe,
Jare dai take kate tare hilo take mare,
Chaturbhuje rakhe* : meaning, "We will be protected by our *Gurus* Astabhuja (the then *Mahanta*), Saptabhuja and Chaturbhuja (two leading deceased *Mahantas*). King's swordsmen and matchlockmen, who are also the disciples of our *Guru*, will work only to bring ruin of the government."
and

Mori jaon mari jaon,

Gurur rin suji jaon : meaning "I will kill or be killed, but I will repay my debt to my *Guru*." In fact, as the Mataks were winning victories, more and more men from the royalist camp were also defecting to their side.

The Mataks within no time occupied Gargaon²⁸ and then marched towards the new capital at Rangpur under the command of Ragha. The king sent the Gauhati detachment, which had just reached Rangpur, under the command of the Dihingia Phukan of Gargaon, to proceed across the Dhai Ali and despatched two other contingents, one under the Dihingia Phukan of Gauhati to march along the Tamulibazar road and the

24. TB, p. 63.

25. TB, p. 62; AARB, p. 209.

26. Wade, *op.cit.*, p. 185.

27. TB, p. 61.

28. Wade, *op.cit.*, p. 185.

other under the Barpatra Gohain to advance across Lechang.²⁹ But the Mataks completely routed them all, inflicting very severe losses.³⁰

The Ahom King's flight from the Capital :

The king was at his wit's end. He did never imagine that the situation would be so serious and the Mataks would be getting such a massive popular support. Finding no way to meet the situation, he left his capital at Rangpur in the early night hours of November 21, 1769, with the object of going down to Gauhati.³¹ He was accompanied by Kirtichandra Barbarua, Bhagi Buragohain, the Duara Barphukan and a few nobles³², as half of the Phukans and Baruas deserted him and decided to remain in Rangpur. The Barpatra Gohain also did not accompany him.³³ On their way to Gauhati, the king and his party were compelled to halt for the night at Chintamoni Garh, on the bank of the river Sonai, as no boat could be procured to take them down.³⁴ Moreover, as the boatmen were all disciples of the Mayamara *Satra*, they would not ply the vessels for the benefit of the Ahom king.³⁵ The king then discussed with the fugitive nobles as to what should be done.

Kirtichandra Barbarua proposed a fight to Kaliabor, where it would be possible to collect an army with the help of the local officers.³⁶ Failing to diagnose the real nature of the rebellion, the Barbarua said to the king :

.....The Morans are wicked people and many other wicked people had joined the ranks of the rebels. Their promises

29. TB, p. 63.

30. TB, pp.63f; Wade, *op.cit.*, pp. 184ff.

31. TB, p. 64.

32. *Ibid.*

33. AB, p. 299.

34. TB, p. 64.

35. AARB, p. 209.

36. TB, p. 63.

have no value and they will never refrain from committing atrocities. If they once taste the prestige of sovereign authority they will never stoop to play the role of subjects. The report that their resentment is solely directed against me should never be believed. They will extend their cruelty to all alike. Many loyal subjects have joined the Morans on the assumption that Mohanmala's son has become king. They are all guilty of treason having joined the rebels whatever their reasons may be.³⁷

The Barphukan pointing out the impracticability of moving towards Kaliabor, as no boats were available, stated :

Even if they procured a few boats, the Moamaria fishermen are ever ready to seize on enemy vessels. It will be impossible for the king to sail down unnoticed. The fishermen as well as their religious head have no sense of right or wrong. They are sure to attack the royal-boats, plunder the goods and assault the occupants.³⁸

The Barphukan, moreover, suggested to start negotiation with the Mataks, which would provide the much-needed time to the royal camp.³⁹

When the king and the nobles were thus discussing the rival proposals at Chintamani Garh, the Mataks led by Ragha, on being informed of the king's flight by one Ambarish, whose father Abhay was in the service of Kirtichandra Barbarua, occupied the capital at Rangpur at midnight.⁴⁰ They declared their victory by making a round of gunfire. A detachment of four hundred Mataks then set out to seize the king and his nobles. They captured them all in their shelter at daybreak and brought them to Rangpur.⁴¹ The king was confined in the

37. AARB, pp. 209f.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

39. *Ibid.*

40. TB, p. 64.

41. TB, p. 61.

Joysagar temple.⁴² Kirtichandra Barbarua and all other nobles and officers accompanying the king were chained with iron fetters and kept in the elephant sedan in front of the *Na-duar*.^{43*}

Installation of a Matak on the Ahom Throne :

The Matak, thus becoming the masters of Rangpur, took to their hands the formation of their government. They killed Mohanmala Gohain for alleged sympathy with his deposed brother, Laksmi Singha,^{44**} and poisoned to death, the two other exiled Ahom princes Charu Singha and Ratneswar.⁴⁵ In the new government, the Matak retained the Ahom administrative structure, but selected all officers from amongst them. It may also be noted that the three cabinet ministers were taken from amongst the old Ahom nobility. Thus the son of one Gogoi of Railungia Buragohain family, was made the Buragohain, the Marangikhowa Gohain of the erstwhile government (who was a disciple of the Mayamara *Mahanta*) was made the Bargohain, and the son of the Sadiyakhwa Gohain was made the Barpatra Gohain.⁴⁶ One Kaduman Kalugayan, who was a Hazarika, was now made the Barphukan⁴⁷, and all officers under the Barphukan too were taken from amongst the Matak.⁴⁸ Ragha was made the Barbarua and the *Deka Mahanta* was made the King.⁴⁹ The new king was offered a *Kekuradola*, a sword, seven elephants and thirteen horses as the insignia of

42. TB, pp. 64f, BVMD; KTP, p. 58, APB, pp. 93, 221.

43. TB, p. 65, SAB, p. 153, AB, p. 300.

* According to P.N. Gohainbarua (*op.cit.*, p. 85) Kirtichandra Barbarua, while leading an expedition against the Matak was imprisoned by the enemy and subsequently, he was killed by Mohanmala.

44. AARB, p. 210.

** According to *Asamar Padya Buraji* (p. 220), Mohanmala was driven away by the Matak.

45. P. Gohainbarua, *op.cit.*, p. 85.

46. AB, p. 303.

47. *Ibid.*

48. TB, p. 66.

49. AB, p. 301.

royalty. The deposed king Laksmi Singha was then brought before the new king and made to salute the latter.⁵⁰ Hearing the news, the *Mahanta* become very angry and sent the following message to his son :

If he has made himself king, he should not come to my home. If I see him become king, I shall leave my home. This is not an order of Tara.⁵¹ (misspelt of *Tera*, by which term the Moamarias meant god).

The *Deka Mahanta* thought over the matter and to please his father, abdicated the office of king and returned to his place.⁵²

At the abdication of kingship by the *Deka Mahanta*, the Mataks raised Ramakanta, son of Naharkhora Saikia to the throne⁵³ and showed due honour to Radha and Rukmini, who, along with some of their colleagues, had been playing an important role in organisational works.⁵⁴ Ramakanta struck novagonal coins in imitation of the octagonal coins of the Ahoms.^{55*} He then married the daughter of Tarimua Bhandari Barua.⁵⁶ He also paid a visit to the *Mahanta* at Khutiaputa to get his blessings.⁵⁷

The Matak officers and leaders then held a council as to what should be done with the deposed nobles and officers including the king Laksmi Singha. In the council, a leader named Bholai suggested that all of them should be put to death. His view was supported by all others.⁵⁸ But before implementing the decision, the king, his Barbarua and his other nobles were taken

50. AB, p. 301.

51. AB, p. 301.

52. *Ibid.*

53. AB, p. 303; SAB, p. 153; KTP, p. 58.

54. AB, p. 305; TB, p. 65.

55. APB, p. 83; AARB, p. 210.

* The Moran rupee weighed one and a half *tolas* (MS chronicle of Laksmi Singha's reign).

56. TB, p. 66.

57. *Ibid.*

58. AB., p. 306.

to the *Mahanta*. Certain sources inform us that the *Mahanta* showed some commiseration to Laksmi Singha,⁵⁹ which made Ragha so highly indignant that he proceeded in person to lay his hand on Laksmi Singha in *Mahanta's* presence. The latter, highly displeased with Ragha's conduct, uttered :

Well, Ragha, the power has made you mad. Like a comet you will cause the destruction of all of us. Know for certain that your days are numbered. The coming *Bihu* will see the end of your mortal existence.⁶⁰

The *Mahanta's* attitude did not find favour from other disciples also, who were resolved to kill both Kirtichandra Barbarua and Laksmi Singha. However, at the intercession of the *Mahanta*, they spared the life of Laksmi Singha, but killed Kirtichandra Barbarua with his sons as well as the Bargohain and the Buragohain.⁶¹ The lives of Barpatra Gohain, who did not accompany the king, and also of the Barphukan, who had some sympathy for the Mataks, were spared. The Salal Gohain was retained in his position. The Marangikhowa Gohain, as stated, was made the Bargohain.⁶²

The new officers then requested the *Mahanta* to pay a visit to Rangpur to give his suggestions to reconstruct the administrative structure. When the *Mahanta* came to Rangpur, Ragha proposed that he should make all people his disciples, but the *Mahanta* restricted his initiation to only those who were not formerly initiated by any *Mahanta* or *Gosain*.⁶³ The newly converted disciples were called *Natunbhakats* in order to distinguish them from the old disciples, who introduced themselves as *Puranibhakats*. Subsequently, however, the *Natunbhakats* reverted to their old faiths.⁶⁴ The head of all the *Satras* of the *Brahma Samhati* were then put into confinement and made to

59. TB, p. 65; ACMSV, pp. 110ff.

60. ACMSV, p. 112; AARB, p. 210; SRSB, pp. 157f.

61. SAB, p. 153; APB, p. 93.

62. AB, p. 303.

63. ACMSV, pp. 111f.

64. G. Barua, *op.cit.*, p. 106; CBMR, pp. 63f.

pay fines as follows—Auniati and Dakshinpat *Satradhikars* Rs. 8,000/- each, Garmur and Kuruabahi *Satradhikars* Rs. 4,000/- each, and other junior *Satras* depending on their status.⁶⁵ This penalty was imposed on these *Satras* as they were lending support to the erstwhile government and were believed to be at the back of its policy of persecuting the Mayamara *Mahanta* and his disciples. The head of the Auniati *Satra* had also suffered the loss of his nose, ears and eyes.⁶⁶

In the new government, Ragha Barbarua yielded the actual affairs of administration. But power soon corrupted him and his activities cast a slur on the new regime. It is said that Ragha took the daughters of many Ahom Baruas and Phukans, including Kuranganayani, the queen of the Ahom King Rajeswar Singha and then of his brother Laksmi Singha, to his seraglio.⁶⁷ He also accepted Kirtichandra Barbarua's wife as his consort.⁶⁸ All this created wide resentment. Further, he changed his attitude to Laksmi Singha and assured him all protection, when the latter proposed to give his daughters in marriage to him.⁶⁹ He went a step further. He claimed the insignia of royalty as he thought that the success of the Matakas was due to his inspiration and enterprise.⁷⁰ But Ramakanta refused to hand over the honour conferred on him.⁷¹ When [this news reached the Mayamara *Mahanta*, the latter asked the followers of Ragha to leave his camp. This development encouraged the royalists to organise a counter rebellion⁷² and they started to make raids in different places of the kingdom.⁷³ Till now the Matakas could consolidate their position only in the area to the east of the river Dikhow. Although all officers in the Gauhati establishment were Matakas, their position was yet to be consolidated

65. BVMD, TB, p. 66, B. Sarma, *Dakshinpat Satra* Gauhati, 1889 Saka, p. 58.

66. TB, p. 66.

67. TB, p. 65; HAG, p. 196.

68. AB, p. 302.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 304.

70. TB, p. 67; BVMD; AARB, p. 211.

71. TB, p. 67.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

73. AB, p. 307

there. The *Tungkhungia Buranji* informs us that Radha, the woman leader of the Matak proceeded to Gauhati,⁷⁴ obviously to help and guide the administration there. Rukmini remained in Rangpur⁷⁵ and helped in the administrative affairs there.

Restoration of Laksmi Singha :

The Matak did not have any superior military strength. Their strongest weapon was their unity. Now that dissension took place between the king and the Barbarua, who was his premier, the subject-people were confused. Meanwhile, many of the Matak leaders returned to their natural avocations, because their occupation being mainly agriculture, they could not afford to remain absent for a long time from their fields.⁷⁶

The Royalists, who came over to the side of the Matak, were frustrated to find that the new government was only old wine in new bottle—it was the same old government but with a new set of officers. It was yet to take any new policy or programme aiming at the welfare of the commonality. They, therefore, looked to the deposed Ahom king as their real leader and started to make plans to restore him to his position.⁷⁷ They appointed one Ramkrishnai, son of Jadav Tamuli, to secretly contact Kuranganayani,⁷⁸ who was most critical of Ragha's activities and refused to accept him as her husband. The royalist leaders planned to utilise the *Rangali Bihu Samkranti* day (*Chaitra-Samkranti* of the year 1770) as their day of action and decided to enter the residence of the Barbarua on that night in the guise of a *Huchari** party, each secretly armed with a sword.⁷⁹

74. TB, pp. 67ff.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

76. ACMSV, p. 117; G. Barua, *op.cit.*, p. 106.

77. AB, p. 307.

78. TB, p. 68; BVMD.

* Beginning with the night of *Chaitra Samkranti* persons go in procession from house to house singing songs and making dances with playing upon drums, flute, etc. When a party enters a house, the owner is to come out and welcome it. After the end of the performance, the party prays for the welfare of the house, during which time, the owner is to kneel down to get its blessings.

79. AB, p. 307; TB, p. 68.

When they did so on the appointed day, Kuranganayani urged upon the Barbarua to come out to welcome the party. The Barbarua wanted to take with him a sword, but Kuranganayani informed him that the participants were no other than his own friends and people and, therefore, he should not suspect their movements. According to the customary procedure, the head of the house at the end of the *Huchari* performance, is to kneel down to seek blessings from the party. When Ragha did so the *Huchari* party was reciting the words of blessings, Kuranganayani struck the first blow with a sword on his calf from behind him. Ragha fell down, the party then followed up her action.⁸⁰ When this news reached Ramakanta, he took his flight with his father Nahar.⁸¹ The Royalists then killed all the Matak officers they found in the capital, and thereafter proceeded to Hara-Gauri temple, where they seized Radha.⁸² Those Matak officers, who could escape the sword of the Royalists, fled to different directions.⁸³

The Royalists then brought back Laksmi Singha from his confinement at the Joysagar temple and reinstated him on the throne.⁸⁴ The king then appointed his ministers and officers from amongst the selected Ahom families.⁸⁵ He then issued an order that the Matak should be killed by whosoever and wherever they were found, and also should be brought as captives. Men on horseback went on announcing this order in different parts of the kingdom, which created a panic all around.⁸⁶ In pursuance of this order, innumerable Matak were captured and put to death.⁸⁷ Many were yoked in pairs and confined in the elephant sedan, where they were tortured in various ways till they met their deaths.⁸⁸ Nahar was captured at Panipara and

80. TB, p. 69.

81. AB, p. 307.

82. TB, p. 69.

83. HAG, p. 154.

84. TB, pp. 69f.

85. AB, pp. 307f.

86. BVMD; TB, p. 70.

87. TB, p. 70; AARB, p. 212.

88. TB (E), p. 74.

was brought to the capital. Nahar and Radha's hands and feet were "pressed in presence of all" and were then brutally put to death.⁸⁹ Ramakanta was also seized in his father-in law's place and put to death in a similar way.⁹⁰ Persons were sent to seize the Moran officers at Gauhati. Many of them including Rukmini were captured, and killed.⁹¹

The Mayamara *Mahanta* and his son *Gagini Deka Mahanta* were captured and brought from Khutiaputa to Rangpur on an elephant, heavily fettered. Their hands and feet were pressed with bamboo pieces and then they were beheaded.⁹² Most of the women members of the *Mahanta's* family were killed at their place in Khutiaputa.⁹³

Soon after his restoration Laksmi Singha rewarded his supporters by appointing them to high offices. Thus Bhadrasen was made the Barbarua, Bailung was made the Bargohain, Ghanashyam was made the Buragohain and also *Rajmantri* and Phedela, who was member of the Ahomised Moran Patar clan, was made the Barpatra Gohain. Barphukanship was conferred on the old Paniphukan of the Dihingia family.⁹⁴ Kuranganayani was also amply rewarded and her old position as queen was restored.⁹⁵ He then convened a council of the ministers and officers and sought the suggestion regarding the policy to be adopted against the Mataks. Most of the members were in favour of a policy of conciliation, but Ghanashyam Buragohain, who was the Premier and the most influential of them, advocated a policy of ruthless suppression. He stated thus :

The men who commit treason against the King thereby perpetrate a crime against their countrymen. The rigorous

89. AB, p. 308.

90. AB, p. 309.

91. TB, p. 71; TB (E), p. 75.

92. AB, p. 308; TB, p. 71.

93. AB, p. 308.

94. AB, p. 307; TB, p. 70; APB, p. 95.

95. APB, pp. 93ff.

measures adopted [against such men in previous reigns are on record. Every man's person is sacred, and it cannot be surrendered even to God Vishnu if He asks for it. Even if one's spiritual head tries to hurt your body, a Kshatriya is justified in raising his sword against him. Enemies should be killed and destroyed. Such a policy alone will remove disturbance from the land, by creating fears in the hearts of all potential miscreants, and by dissuading loyal citizens from sympathising or collaborating with rebels. We have killed the Moamaria *Guru* and a large number of his adherents. I have killed many Moamaris with my own hand. The survivors can never entertain friendly feelings towards us. The king should execute those whose loyalty is questionable; and no one should be spared. His Majesty should not listen to the Counsel of his pacific and time-serving Ministers. The king's predecessors had established peace and quiet in the country by executions and massacres. We should also institute enquiries into the movements of the Moamaris who had taken shelter in the neighbouring territories.⁹⁶

The eloquency of Ghanashyam Buragohain prevailed upon the opinions of the rest and the king ordered a vigorous persecution of the Matak. Thus the latter irrespective of age and sex, as stated earlier, became victims of ruthless slaughter. They were tagged together and buried in the ditches dug for the purpose by the unfortunate victims themselves.⁹⁷

Fresh Matak Uprisings :

The ruthless atrocities of Laksmi Singha inflicted upon the Matak had immediate repercussions in different places of the kingdom. Thus on 4th *Vaisakha*, 1692 *Saka* (April 19, 1770), only three days after Laksmi Singha resat on the throne, the Matak of Sagunmuri village rose in a rebellion under their village headman, Govinda Gaonburha. This uprising was called

96. MS Chronicle of Laksmi Singha's Reign, the translation is from AARB, pp. 214f.

97. ACMSV, p. 134.

Chekani-Kubua Ran,⁹⁸ as the rebels with a Chekani i.e. a slender bamboo birch or stick, gave their call to the *Praja Oi Jararowa*⁹⁹, i.e. the oppressed subjects to come out and join their hands against the oppression of the king. Two cabinet ministers—the Bargohain and the Barpatra Gohain proceeded against the rebels in different directions, but both of them had to face such a strong resistance that the Barpatra Gohain along with the Dhekial Phukan and many soldiers lost their lives, and the Bargohain could escape only with great difficulty. The news created a sensation in the capital. The king then sent the Buragohain and the Barbarua along with some Manipuri cavalry forces, which reached Rangpur in response to Laksmi Singha's request for help to the Manipuri king made before his flight from the capital, to combat the rebels. The confrontation took place at Thaura; where the Mataks were badly defeated. Govinda Gaonburha was arrested near Dihing and was executed.¹⁰⁰ To announce the royal victory, drums were beaten in all the roads, and guns were mounted on all sides of the city and were fired.

Another uprising took place near Namrup. The Morans of the *Hatichungi Khel* took the lead and started the rebellion by killing some members of the royalist camp who had been sent there to construct a fort. This was in the last part of April, 1770. An expedition was sent under the command of the Na-Phukan and Nyaysudha Phukan against the rebels, but it gained little success. A strong reinforcement was then sent under the command of the Dualia Phukan. Skirmishes continued without any decisive result. In November of that year, the King sent another contingent under the Buragohain, who attacked the rebels at such strategic points that all their communication was cut off and they had to surrender. The rebels numbered nine to ten thousand and they belonged to the villages of Saruchakari, Barchakari and Hulungaguri. The rebels from the first two villages were allowed to go back to their respective places, but

98. TB, pp. 71f.

99. *Ibid.*

100. *Ibid.*; TB (E), pp. 75f.

those from Hulungaguri were settled in Rangdaichuk.^{101*}

Significance of the Rebellion :

The success of the Mataks, though shortlived, had a great significance in the history of the Ahom rule in the Brahmaputra valley. This was for the first time that a successful challenge was made to the Ahom monarchy, which proved its invincibility by successfully resisting the expansion of the mighty Muhammadan power in India towards the east. The success was more significant, when one takes into consideration the fact, that the Mataks were not backed by any foreign power, and even the entire strength of the rebels was yet to be harnessed. The event thus proved to the people the hollowness of the Ahom power and the weakness of its government.

This was also for the first time that a commoner was placed on the Ahom throne. The divinity of Ahom [kingship was at one time carried to such an extent, that a prince having any physical blemish, nay even for being pock-marked, was not allowed to sit on the throne. He was *Chao-Pha*, meaning, *Swargadeo* or a 'god coming from heaven', which was his title. But, this heavenly god had to give way to Ramakanta, an ordinary Matak, and pass the life of a prisoner at Joysagar temple. The divine origin of Ahom kingship was thus thrown asunder and the sanctity centering round the Ahom monarchy was thus reduced to the dust.

The fact that a handful of Mataks could acquire suzerain power encouraged all daring and ambitious men to take up arms against the Ahom government in an opportune moment. Therefore, any one who could command, a group of followers, aspired to challenge the ruling authority and assume royal power. Thus, Kekeru Kalita Phukan, who first won the king's favour by suppressing the Mataks, but was later deposed on

101. TB, pp. 73ff; TB (E), pp. 77ff.

* The Moran area of the present Sibsagar Sub-division.

the demand of the nobles for his overpowering nature, declared himself King at a place called Kachamati on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, bearing a tribal name 'Mirhang'. Kalita Phukan was captured and executed.¹⁰² A group of Mohammadans under the leadership of one Hazari Dewan attempted to make one of Mohanmala Gohain's sons the king. The plot was detected; the conspirators, however, were let off with light punishment.¹⁰³ Several *Satras* harboured princes to set them up as claimants to the throne whenever any opportunity occurred.¹⁰⁴ As a result of such rebellions, political stability in the kingdom was lost.

The precedent, sent up by the Matak inspired several deposed and exiled Ahom princes to try their luck in an opportune moment. They hatched a series of conspiracies to oust the reigning Ahom monarch. Most important of these conspirators were Ekadah Gohain, the son of Lechai Namrupia Raja, the brother of King Rudra Singha; Khora, Kalia and Dhupal Gohains, the grandsons of Lechai Namrupia Raja; Phedela Gohain, the son of Mohanmala Gohain; Bhudhar Gohain, the son of Charu Singha and grandson of King Rajeswar Singha—all of whom belonged to the *Tungkhungia* clan. Japara Gohain, Chela Gohain, Takaru Gohain, Bopai Gohain, Sogor Gohain, Molou Gohain, Ranga Gohain and others belonging to other clans also conspired to seize the royal power.¹⁰⁵ The restoration-regime of Laksmi Singha was thus spent in suppressing the conspiracies of these princes. These conspiracies greatly weakened the royalty, because when dissensions and animosities ruled the royalist camp, unity and solidarity solidified the rebels.

A group of Chutiyas also raised a local rebellion near Sadiya in 1779, under the leadership of a Nara of Khamjang, who was settled near Sadiya after his flight from his own country. The

102. TB, pp. 76ff; SRSB, pp. 103f; HAG, p. 198.

103. MS Chronicle of Laksmi Singha's Reign.

104. AARB, p. 215.

105. S.K. Bhuyan, *Konwar Bidroh* (ed.) D.K. Barua, Gauhati, 1948, p. 6.

rebellion, of course, was suppressed.¹⁰⁶

Another very significant result of the first Matak rebellion was the gradual emergence of the feudal forces elsewhere in the kingdom. We can cite here the example of the peasants of Darrang, an autonomous State governed by the Koch King belonging to the family of Chilarai, the brother and general of the great Koch King Naranarayan. Darrang was surveyed several times, once in the reign of Rudra Singha and again in the reign of Siva Singha. Now Laksmi Singha also ordered a re-settlement of Darrang. It was found that each survey was followed by a new and higher rates of assessment, which told very heavily upon the taxpaying poor peasants of Darrang. Even though, they suffered from enhanced rates of assessment, they dared not protest against it, because of the prowess of the Ahom monarchy. Moreover, the people of Kamrup and Darrang were not allowed to enter in the Ahom capital, for which, they so long could not approach the monarch to submit their grievances to him. But the fact that the Mataks, all commoners had not only entered the capital, but also deposed the Ahom monarch and introduced their own regime, although for a short period only, inspired the people of Darrang also to attempt to have their grievances ameliorated. Soon after the restoration of Laksmi Singha, about four thousand of them, therefore, with leaders of their own rank, marched in a body to the capital to protest to the king against the settlement of Darrang. All resistance to prevent them from approaching the monarch failed miserably, they entered the palace campus and refused to leave it unless their grievances were redressed. The king sent the Parbatiya Gosain to plead for him but to no avail. They replied that they were resolved to die on the spot or get their grievances redressed. Two days later, the monarch had to agree to the suspension of the settlement in Darrang.¹⁰⁷ The source of inspiration of such an unprecedented move can certainly be traced to the Matak challenge to the Ahom monarchy.

106. HAG, p. 198.

107. MS Chronicle of Laksmi Singha's Reign; AARB; pp. 269f.

On the part of the Royalists, it was a blunder to pursue a policy of ruthless suppression of the Matak without making any attempt to diagnose the real cause and nature of the Rebellion. As rightly pointed out by Capt. Hannay, "to this indiscriminate massacre may be attributed the subsequent civil wars of Assam, which in the end have brought it to its present degenerate and comparatively impoverished state."¹⁰⁸ Another blunder committed by the Ahom government was the execution of both the *Mahanta* and *Deka Mahanta*. Despite his soft corner for the Ahom monarchy, the *Mahanta* did not lose the regard of his disciples, and the *Deka Mahanta* was their most esteemed and dear leader. Even though the latter abdicated the throne at the intercession of his father, he continued to carry on works of organisation. Indeed, according to popular tradition, the main person behind all the plans of the Matak Rebellion was the *Deka Mahanta*. But as both the father and the son were killed, the Mayamara *Satra* had to remain without a *Guru* for a long period of fourteen years (1770-1785). This had further strained the relationship between the Matak and the Ahom government. The former was only looking for an opportunity to avenge the death of their revered *Guru* and their dear leader, who was at the same time their would-be-*Guru*.

It has already been mentioned that the leadership in this stage of the Rebellion was taken by the Morans under the guidance of Ragha Neog and Nahar Khora Saikia, who continued to retain their position till they were ousted or killed by the Royalists. So very often this Rebellion is termed as the Moran Rebellion. It is true that the Rebellion first started in the Moran area and as such the Morans were most conspicuous among the rebels. But even in this early stage it was not confined to the Morans alone. Namrup, near the Moran area, was a penal colony, that housed the dissatisfied exiled Ahom princes, who joined hands with the rebels and extended them all their possible help and co-operation. Moreover, as the

¹⁰⁸. Hannay, *loc.cit.*, pp. 671ff.

Morans were advancing to pitch a camp on the bank of the Sessa, the Kachari Matak of the area lying on the south of the Dihing river readily joined their advance-guard. Again, when they occupied the Ahom capitals at Gargaon and Rangpur, the inhabitants of these areas also, whether Matak or not, joined hands with the rebels. The popular character of the Rebellion, therefore, soon became visible, which became more prominent with the advance of time, when all people, irrespective of communal or sectarian identities joined hands with the Matak to get a change in the existing structure.

True it is that the Matak failed to achieve anything concrete during their short reign. But with exception to Ragha Barbarua, the remaining officers were devoted to the cause of the people. The cruelty of the restoration Ahom regime made many Royalists repugnant of it. As a result, the subsequent Matak Rebellion became much wide-based, wide-spread and more serious with consequences of immense magnitude.

Spread of the Rebellion and Establishment of the Matak Kingdom.

Gaurinath Singha's Policy against the Mataks :

Laksmi Singha died in December, 1780, and was succeeded by his fifteen year old son Gaurinath Singha, alias Suhitpangpha. The new king was greatly whimsical* and was more devoted to observing religious rites than performing kingly duties. He accepted initiation from a son of the Pahumariya Gosain. He was a great patron of Brahmanas and Brahmanical rites and spent so lavishly in the daily and periodical Sakta sacrifices that

- * He used to present thousand rupees to a man who could eat a vulture, five hundred rupees to the eater of a crow, and four hundred to one, who could eat ten pounds of rice at one sitting, (BVMD; AARB, p. 217). One day he was annoyed with one of his childhood-friends, and ordered the extraction of his eyes. But later on, when this man could decipher a letter written in a foreign language with the help of his hand, the king ordered the restoration of his eyesight. Even while shaving his head, he did not remain steady, thinking it to be a subordination to the barber. (G. Barua, *op. cit.*, pp. 190f).

the royal exchequer became almost bankrupt.¹

Gaurinath Singha was much addicted to opium. In the words of Gait, he was "the most incompetent, blood-thirsty, disreputable and cowardly of all the Ahom kings."² Capt. Welsh has described him as a "poor debilitated man not capable of transacting business himself", who was "either praying or washing" and when seen was always to be found "intoxicated with opium".³ He was the head of the most "corrupt, cruel and despotic government", of which history could not offer a better example.⁴

Gaurinath Singha was also a bitter enemy of the Mataks and lost no opportunity to persecute them. But the Ahom policy of ruthless suppression failed to subdue the Mataks. Even after the loss of their prominent leaders during the days of Laksmi Singha's restoration regime, the Mataks did not become despaired. On the other hand, they came forward with greater vigour and earnestness to offer resistance against the Ahom government. Further, they now realised the folly of sparing the life of the Ahom monarch. They understood that mere removal of officials like the Barbarua would not serve their purpose. The monarch himself had to be slain, if at all a change in the existing structure was to be made.

Coronation Building burnt by the Mataks :

Determined to take the life of the king, the Mataks were only looking for an opportunity. One night, in the month of April, 1783, the king was returning to Gargaon after a boating expedition in Najiraghat in the neighbourhood of Gargaon. A number of Mataks, in the guise of torch-bearers and attendants followed the king and entered the Palace campus where they set fire to the house of the guards and attacked the royal sedan. One

1. AARB, p. 218.

2. HAG, p. 215.

3. Welsh to Cornwallis, Dec. 4, BPC, Dec., 17, 1792, No. 50.

4. Welsh to Cornwallis, Feb., 4, BPC, Feb. 15, 1793, No. 15.

Lephera, the Dulakasharia Barua and the Dhekial Phukan suffered injury, but they somehow managed their escape. The rebels then aimed a stroke at the person of the king, which due to the pell mell situation in the darkness of night misfired, bringing death to the king's body-guard only. The king on his part, managed his escape on an elephant, and took shelter in the under-ground compartment of the brick-built palace at Gargaon, accompanied by Naga Majinder Barua, the Dulia Barua and a few attendants. The rebels then set fire to the coronation building (*Singarighar*). Ghanashyam Buragohain, getting this information from his son Lari Gohain, came with Haranath Senapati Phukan. They faced a stiff resistance from the Mataks near the main gate. Both sides lost some lives, but ultimately the Buragohain and the Phukan won.⁵ They then traced out the monarch as well as the Barbarua, who were dashing out to Rangpur.⁶

The Mataks also marched towards Rangpur where they met with a stubborn resistance from the guards of the city. But they overcame it, broke open the gates of the city, paraded the streets, killed some Royalists, and put the local officers to flight.⁷ They stayed that night in the capital; and next day in the morning, set fire to many houses including those of the Bargohain, the Barpatra Gohain, the Barphukan, the Bhitaraual Phukan, the Dihingia Phukan and the Na-Gosain. The Dihingia Phukan fell to the hands of the rebels, who immediately slain him, but the rest managed their escape. It is said that the rebels had also insulted the Parbatiya Gosain, who was then in his Rangpur residence, for which, the latter cursed them for an immediate fall.⁸ In the meantime, the Buragohain and the other high officials marched with a strong contingent to recover Rangpur from the rebels. They inflicted a serious defeat on the Mataks and compelled them to take to flight. Rangpur was

5. TB, pp. 86f; APB, p. 99; SAB, p. 155.

6. TB, pp. 87f.

7. AARB, p. 220.

8. TB, p. 88.

thus recovered, and the next day, the king returned to the capital.⁹ It was revealed that the sons of the deposed Barbarua Sivaram had been taking an active part in the Rebellion. The king ordered extraction of the eyes of the four sons of Sibaram.¹⁰

Attempt at Extermination of the Mataks :

Soon after this incident the king had a deliberation with his ministers regarding the measures to be implemented against the Mataks.¹¹ Ghanashyam Buragohain, who played a very important role in the expulsion of the Mataks from the capital two days back, again pleaded for a rigorous repression and general massacre of the rebels. The other ministers did not wholeheartedly support this extreme view, but they had to submit to his eloquence.¹² Accordingly, the king issued an order to the effect that the "Moamarias should be killed with their sons and friends by whomever and at whatever place they were met."¹³ "Having heard this dire command of His Majesty", writes the author of the *Tungkhungia Buranji*, "our men captured and killed the Moamarias in all the villages with their sons and wives."¹⁴ Some of them saved their lives by escaping to the territories of the Dafalas, the Bhots, the Kacharis, and the Jayantias.¹⁵ Many Mataks, of their own accord surrendered to the Royalists and begged for an opportunity to share the fates of their murdered relatives and comrades.¹⁶ Prestige and rank were decided, it is said, by the number of Matak-heads a Royalist could take.¹⁷ This barbarous massacre continued for one and

9. TB, pp. 89f; APB, p. 99; SAB, p. 155.

10. TB, pp. 90f; BVMD.

11. TB, p. 90.

12. BVMD; AARB, p. 220.

13. TB (E). p. 94; TB, p. 90; AB, p. 338; BVMD.

14. TB (E), p. 94.

15. *Ibid.*

16. BVMD; AARB, p. 221.

17. AARB, p. 221.

a half months, and Mataks in thousands, including women and children, were put to death.¹⁸ According to the *Mayamara Satrar Vamsawali*, eight lakh disciples of the *Mayamara Satra*, were exterminated during this period.¹⁹ Maniram Dewan describes this reign of terror in the following words :

The waters of the rivers could not be drunk, and people could not walk along the roads. Even the fish of the Brahmaputra became unconsumable for being tainted with the stinking smell of corpses. Half the country was depopulated. Thus was vengeance wreaked upon the Moamarias for burning the *Singarighar* and attempting to kill the monarch. From that period, the kingdom became thinned and light. If a Matak was captured, he would shout to his friends, "Oh my comrades, I have been arrested"; having heard this, his friends would come forward and offer themselves to be apprehended and killed.²⁰

The *Mayamara Satrar Vamsawali* informs that anybody suspected to be a disciple of the *Mayamara Satra* was not spared, and that the *Mayamara* disciples even in the face of this mass-slaughter, did not conceal their identities before the State officials.²¹

At last the Bargohain, the Barbarua and the other high officials advised the monarch to stop the massacre. They pointed out that the kingdom was going to be ruined totally, for, many innocent people were killed along with the guilty.²² Ghanashyam Buragohain's reaction to this advice was :

I intended to exterminate the poisonous nest of the Moamarias. My colleagues now desire the suspension of the slaughter after half the enemy have been destroyed. I

¹⁸. HAG, p. 196.

¹⁹. ACMSV, p. 124.

²⁰. BVMD; AARB, p. 221.

²¹. ACMSV, p. 124.

²². BVMD; AARB, p. 221.

predict that the Mataks will rise again and again and "devastate the country. My colleagues will then remember me and realise the wisdom of my present action."²³

The king at last issued orders for suspending the massacre.

These atrocities led to further disaffection. The Morans of the *Hatichungi Khel* in the extreme east revolted under the leadership of one Badal Gaonburha. He was assisted by one Charal.* When the Barbarua reported the matter to the king, he sent the Na-Phukan of Duara family with his contingent to meet the situation. The Na-Phukan won over the rebels through diplomatic means and captured Badal and Charal, who then were taken to the capital. The king ordered their execution.²⁴

Gaurinath Singha adopted another undiplomatic move to infuriate the Mayamara *Mahanta* and his disciples. The monarch asked one of his court-poets, Dharmadutta Sarma** to write a drama depicting the Mataks as a batch of immoral rascals. Accordingly, the poet composed a Sanskrit drama named *Dharmodaya* (rise of *Dharma*), where Gaurinath Singha was shown as the image of *Dharma* and the Mataks as the symbols of sin, which was staged in the royal court.²⁵ This effort of the king undermining a popular and big community was very seriously viewed by the Mayamara *Mahanta* and his disciples.

The Spread of the Rebellion : Hill-tribes joining hands with the Mataks :

The policy of Matak extermination adopted by Gaurinath

23. BVMD; the translation is from AARB, p. 221.

* According to ACMSV, both of them were Neogs.

24. TB, p. 92; ACMSV, p. 126.

** Certain source mentions his as Dharmadev Goswami (H.C. Bhattacharyya,) *op.cit.*, p. 66.

25. R.M. Nath, *op.cit.*, p. 150; Harichandra Bhattacharyya, *Asamiyah Natya Sahityar Jilingani* (Adirpara, 1967 parjyanta), Gauhati, 1968, p. 66; S.N. Sarma, 'Purani Asamat Sanskrit Charcha', *Prabandha Chayanika*, Gauhati, p. 28.

Singha created serious discontentment in all parts of the kingdom. All disaffected elements now came forward to join their hands with the rebels. One of these elements was the *bahatia paiks*. These unfortunate people had several grievance against the Ahom government. In order to protect the plains areas of Assam from frequent raids of the neighbouring hill-tribes like the Akas, Dafalas*, Hill Miris, Mishmis, etc. the Ahom government introduced a kind of political bribe through the settlement of a class of Assamese *paiks* called *bahatias* in the foot-hill area, who were obliged to give their services to the respective hill-tribes.²⁶ Thus, the *bahatias* assigned to the Akas were called *Aka-bahatias*, those assigned to the Dafalas were called *Dafala-bahatias***, etc. Each hill-tribe enjoying this privilege was allowed to receive certain articles in the form of *posa* from the *bahatias* assigned to them. Thus the *posa* of the Dafalas, to be collected every year, from every ten houses of *Dafala-bahatias*, consisted of one *khania*, one *cheleng*, one *gamocha*, one *dao*, ten horned-cattles and four *seers* of salt.²⁷ In addition to these things, the *bahatias* had to supply paddy or rice to their hill-masters.²⁸ In fact, their corn, cattle and life were at the mercy of the hill-men. In return for their services to the hill-masters, the Ahom government granted a concessional rate of assessment to the *bahatias*, for, each *got* (unit of 3 *paiks*)*** of *bahatias* paid to the government an amount of Rs. 3/- instead of the usual Rs. 9/-.²⁹ Besides this, the *bahatias* had to serve the Ahom army whenever called for. Thus these unfortunate subjects were exploited by both the hill-masters and the Ahom government.

* Now they are called Nishis.

26. HKB, p. 40; KTP, p. 32; Padmeswar Singha Naoboicha Phukan, *Asam Buranji*, Rr No. 109, Vol. IX, p. 318, DHAS (henceforth abbreviated as ABNP).

** According to S.K. Bhuyan, the *bahatias* allotted to the Dafalas were generally culprits convicted of various offences, AARB, p. 37.

27. A. Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier of Bengal*, Reprint, Delhi, 1979, p. 27; L. Devi, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

28. ABNP.

*** King Rajeswar Singha reduced the strength of a *got* from four to three.

29. L. Devi, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

Naturally, these people could not have a good feeling toward the Ahom government, and they were long groaning against such exploitations. But they could not raise their heads due to the lack of leadership and an effective organisation. Now that the Mataks who fled to the hills and jungles to escape the vengeance of the Ahom government, prepared the revolutionary base, they readily extended their support to them.

The *buranjis* speak of the Dafala and Miri *bahatias* only, allying themselves with the Mataks, but it is most probable that following the *Dafala-bahatias*, who were first among their class to join the Mataks, all their counter parts did so. It is interesting to note that several hill-tribes, to begin with the Dafalas, had also now come out to participate in or lend support to the Rebellion. Their participation might be prompted by two factors: one, to avenge the occasional punitive expeditions carried on by the Ahom monarchy to their area, and the other, to make fortunes out of the internal turmoil of the Ahom kingdom. Whatever the reason might be, their participation greatly strengthened the Mataks.

The *Dafala-bahatias*, in particular, were roused to action not only by the Matak fugitives, but also by Pitambardeva, a distant relative of the deceased Mayamara *Mahanta*, who was later raised to *Mahantaship*. Pitambardeva had been leading an exiled life in the Dafala-hills to escape vengeance of the Ahom government.³⁰ The part played by this *Mahanta* in the subsequent phases of the Matak Rebellion leaves us no doubt that he was spreading revolutionary ideas in the north bank of the Brahmaputra,³¹ including the area inhabited by the *Dafala-bahatias*, and it was for this reason that the people of the north bank now came forward to lead the Rebellion.

The spread of the Rebellion was accompanied by greater participation of women. In the initial stage of the Rebellion;

30. ACMSV, pp. 119ff.

31. S.L. Barua, *op.cit.*, p. 274.

only two women leaders, Radha and Rukmini already mentioned, played very important part in its success. No doubt, they had a large following of their own sex, but the contemporary sources had not recorded the names of these women workers. Subsequently, the mass massacre of the Matakas made many of their women lost their husbands, parents or children. These helpless women nurtured extreme hatred against the Ahom government, and along with the menfolk, they too now came forward to avenge the death of their near and dear ones, and fight against the oppression of the Ahom regime. The *Mayamara Satran Vamsawali* gives a long list of names of such women stalwarts. To mention a few of them are—Dvijakanya, Chandra, Mala, Madhuri, Rambha, Jayanti, Bhanumati, Bhadrawati, Subhadra, Suchala, Jaya, Ruhini, Sumati etc.³² R.M. Nath opines that the widows of the massacred-Matakas, who fled to the north bank of the Brahmaputra, were organised into a volunteer unit by Harihar Tati in the Bandardewa hills,³³ which appears possible.

The leadership in this phase of the Rebellion was taken by Harihar Tati, a common man, and a weaver by caste. Most of his lieutenants likewise were commoners. Phophai, for example, was the leader of the *Dafala-bahatias*. Other commanders were Tamai, Prashad, Howha, Bidur etc. Their identity simply by their surnames, indicate that they did not hold any office under the Ahom government, and were ordinary *Paiks*. The fact that the people accepted the leadership of these commoners in a country, where so long the concept of divine origin of kingship prevailed, shows that the movement was actually a movement of the people, where a commoner with talent and efficiency, and identifying himself completely with the interest of the people, could command their respect and confidence.

Appointment of Purnananda Buragohain :

In the year 1783, Ghanashyam Buragohain died and his eldest son Lari Gohain alias Purnananda was made the Burago-

32. ACMSV, pp. 136ff.

33. R.M. Nath, *op.cit.*, p. 152.

hain and Premier.³⁴ Ghanashyam left a warning to his son that the Mataks were the source of all troubles and should be dealt with accordingly.³⁵ But Purnananda Buragohain had statesmanlike qualities and could, therefore, realise where the wound lay. He preferred to deviate from his father's policy and suggested to the king to adopt a conciliatory attitude towards the Mataks. But the king did not pay heed to the counsels of this wise Premier and continued to persecute the rebels. The Premier, however, could pursue the monarch to allow the Mataks to have their own *Guru*. Accordingly, Pitambardeva, about whom mention has already been made, was brought back from his hide-out in Dafala-hills, and made the 10th *Mahanta* of the Mayamara *Satra* in February 1784.³⁶ The *Satradhikar* of the Auniati *Satra* remained a guarantor to the Ahom monarch for the good conduct of the new *Mahanta*.³⁷ Thus after the execution of Astabhujdeva in 1770, the Mayamara disciples now got their *Guru* after a long gap of fourteen years.* Pitambardeva's *Mahantaship* helped the establishment of a link between the revolutionary elements of the north and the south banks.

Combined Rebellion of the Mataks, the Dafala-bahatias and the Dafalas under Harihar Tati :

The Rebellion, as stated, recurred on the north bank of the Brahmaputra under Harihar Tati. He unified the Mataks, the *Dafala-bahatias* and the Dafalas. It is said that he claimed to have possessed some magical power by meditating on the Bandardewa hill for five years.³⁸ The rebels began to raid the neighbouring villages of the Ahom kingdom in the early part

34. TB, p. 91.

35. BVMD.

36. ACMSV, p. 127; BVMD.

37. TB, p. 97.

* The place of the old Khutiaputa *Satra*, being considered as an abandoned place, was given up and a place known as Agnichapari near Dakshinpat, slightly above the old Khutiaputa *Satra* was selected as the new venue of the *Satra* (ACMSV, p. 127).

38. ACMSV, p. 134; TB, p. 94.

of 1786.³⁹ Some of the main lieutenants of Tati were Kaliabhoma, Bidur, Howha, Tamai, Prashad and Phophai.⁴⁰ Besides this, as already stated, a large number of Matak women, mostly widows, joined Tati's camp to avenge the death of their near and dear ones.

In February 1786, the king went to Garmur for hunting expedition and on one occasion proceeded to Khakandaguri on the north bank, where a large number of people came to him and complained of the ravages of Tati with his Dafala and *Dafala-bahatia* followers. The king asked his Barbarua Bhagati to enquire into the matter, who possibly, because of his sympathy to the rebels, replied that such activities were very common in that locality and, therefore, the king should not be serious about this. However, the king sent a contingent under the Na-Phukan of the Duara family, who could square up the matter temporarily.⁴¹ After his return to Rangpur, the king continued to receive repeated reports of Tati's depredations. At last, the Chaharia Barua himself came from the Dafala *Barduar* and reported the seriousness of the situation. The Barua stated that Tati's followers were increasing day by day, who used to parade in the streets with fans made of peacocks' feathers announcing their independence under Tati, who had till then as many as eleven lieutenants including Phophai⁴², the leader of the *Dafala-bahatias*.^{*} The king became highly offended with the Barbarua for giving him a wrong impression of the situation and took him to task.⁴³ He then summoned a *Barmel* (the great council) and sought the advice of the nobles

39. TB, p. 94; AB, p. 340; SAB, p. 155; BVMD; HAG, p. 201; AARB, p. 222.

40. TB, p. 95.

41. TB, p. 94; ABNP.

42. TB, p. 94; TB (E), pp. 97f; BVMD.

* The names of the eleven leaders mentioned in the ACMSV (p. 135), who helped Tati, however, were—Howha, Jaynath, Lohong, Poran, Abhagan, Parasu, Parai, Suthir, Haha, Padmapani and Barphukan, the son of Tamai Katakai.

43. BVMD; AARB, p. 223.

and officers to meet the situation.⁴⁴ It was decided to summon contingents from the vassal states of Lower Assam like Rani, Luki and Tupakochi and meanwhile send a strong force under responsible officers to subdue the rebels.

Accordingly, a strong expedition was immediately sent under the command of Helimeli Salal Gohain, the Marangikhowa Gohain, the Dihingia Phukan of Gargaon, and Lephera Chaudang Barua.⁴⁵ The army crossed the Brahmaputra, and the Mataks lured them to camp at Salmari Bil. Helimeli Salal Gohain, retired from the camp on pretext of illness. In the engagement that followed, both the Marangikhowa Gohain and the Dihingia Phukan were killed along with a large number of Aham soldiers. The rest fled away along with Lephera Chaudang Barua.⁴⁶

The Ahom Capital at Rangpur attacked by the Mataks :

Thus the Mataks under Tati won a massive victory, and acquired a vast quantity of provisions and ammunitions, which had greatly increased their strength. On the other hand, the news of the defeat of the vast Ahom contingent and the death of some important officials in the encounter, greatly dampened the spirit of the Royalists. Even the three cabinet ministers were so much terrified that they removed their property from their houses to safer places, thinking that the insurgents would soon come and seize the capital.⁴⁷

When the king received the news of this great setback, he summoned a second *Barmel* to find out means to meet the situation. A decision was taken to send a fresh expedition under the command of the Na-Phukan, the Dihingia Phukan of Gauhati and the Nao-boicha Phukan. After crossing the Brahmaputra, the Na-Phukan and the Dihingia Phukan erected

44. AB, p. 341; TB, p. 94.

45. TB, p. 94; SAB, p. 155; AB, p. 304.

46. TB, p. 95; SAB, p. 155; AB, p. 340; BVMD.

47. TB, p. 95.

forts at Miri Tangani and Phukanhat respectively near the Somdiri (Subansiri) river, and the Nao-boicha Phukan erected one at Khararbari. Meanwhile, a heavy flood occurred in the Brahmaputra, which prevented the movement of the Ahom forces; Nao-boicha Phukan also fell ill. When these developments were reported to the king, he sent Rudreswar Barpatra Gohain with his own contingent. The Gohain was also accompanied by the *Konwar-Hiloidaris* or Princes' regiment. Besides, the three Abhaypurias, and the Rajkhowas of Namdayang and Bacha were also ordered to join the army with their *dowals* or second levies. The recruitment of the *dowals* shows the seriousness of the situation. Borpatra Gohain, who was also appointed as the Commander-in-Chief of the entire expedition, crossed the Brahmaputra, joined the Nao-boicha Phukan and encamped at Khararbari.⁴⁸ The Phukans resented his appointment as the Chief of the expedition. This, they considered as a supersession and so, very often, refused to act harmoniously,⁴⁹ which had further weakened the Royalist camp. The Barpatra Gohain then moved forward and constructed seven forts around the Garaimari *Bil*, near Japarihita.⁵⁰

A confrontation between the Royalists and the Matak

s took place in November 1786. The Mataks killed a large number of soldiers of the three Abhaypurias, and also seized the fort of the Barpatra Gohain. In this engagement, the female stalwarts of the Mataks fought along with the menfolk and exhibited rare bravery and skill. The monarch, having received the information of the disaster from Dhireswar Kataki, sent further reinforcements under the command of Rajneog Phukan of the Buragohain family. As soon as this force crossed the Brahmaputra and camped at Garmur, news poured in that the Moran-Mataks of Hulungaguri settled at Rangdaichuk were in revolt. The Neog Phukan was, therefore, directed to deal with this fresh uprising. The royal force thus could not be concen-

48. TB (E), pp. 99f; TB, pp. 95f.

49. TB, p. 96; SAB, p. 155; AB, p. 341.

50. TB, p. 96; AARB, p. 224.

trated in the same place, as they were to deal with the rebels in several fronts. One Jutakia Barua of Leba family, along with Mai, the Changrung Barua, were sent to Garmur with a force of 2000.⁵¹

The contingents from Rani, Luki, Tupakochi and Beltola meanwhile reached the capital and they were directed to proceed to Pahunara in Majuli.⁵² By that time, a series of sporadic engagements of the Mataks took place with Rudreswar Barpatra Gohain who was camping at Garaimari *Bil*, and with other Ahom generals at Phukanhat near the Somdiri river. Unable to gain any notable success, the Mataks left these fronts, crossed the Brahmaputra near Garmur and encamped there. Here Tati came in direct contact with Pitambardeva, the Mayamara *Mahanta*, who lent his support by giving the service of Bharat Singha, a relative of his own. Bharat Singha was destined to play a very important role in the subsequent events of the period. Thus emboldened, Tati attacked the Garmur *Satra*. The resistance offered by the Royalists was of no avail. A large number of them including many disciples of the *Satra* were killed. The *Satradhikar* escaped to Rangpur. The *Satra* was then set on fire.⁵³ The Royalist army retreated and joined the garrison at Pahunara. The other main *Satras* at Majuli like those of Auniati and Dakshinpat, were also burnt and many disciples were killed.⁵⁴

Realising the gravity of the situation, the king sent Purnananda Buragohain with his contingent for necessary action, who proceeded accordingly, and halted at Sagunmuri near the Sonai river.⁵⁵ In the mean time, the Barpatra Gohain retreated to and halted at Dakshinpat *Satra*, whose *Satradhikar* also had left for Rangpur, obviously on getting the news of the reverses of his counterpart at Garmur. A severe engagement took place

51. TB, p. 96.

52. TB, pp. 97f; HAG, p. 201.

53. TB, p. 97; SAB, p. 155.

54. SAB, p. 155.

55. TB, p. 97; ABNP.

at Pahumara, in which, a large number of Royalists, including the commanders Mai Barua and Jutakia Barua were killed.⁵⁶ The Barpatra Gohain instead of helping the Royalists at Pahumara, crossed the Brahmaputra and, joined the Buragohain at Sagunmuri. These victories increased the confidence of the rebels, who now began to make plans to proceed to the Ahom capital at Rangpur. Accordingly, they crossed the Brahmaputra to the south bank.

In order to resist the further advance of the Matak, the Royalists planned their defence strategy, concentrating their forces at Dikhowmukh, Gaurisagar and Sagunmuri. Barpatra Gohain was ordered to move to Dikhowmukh and then to Gaurisagar.⁵⁷ The Matak planned an engagement with the Buragohain at Sagunmuri. On their way to that place, they were joined by their comrades from Rangdaichuk. A serious engagement then took place in Sagunmuri which brought death to a large number of Royalist soldiers along with the Deka Phukan and the Tekela Neog. The loss of the Matak was also considerable. The Buragohain then withdrew to Gaurisagar.⁵⁸ The Matak pursued him and burnt the houses on their way. They advanced further and made Bhatiapar their headquarters, which was located at a distance of four miles southwest of Gaurisagar, on the bank of the Namdang river. There they set fire to the residence of the Gaharichowa Barua, the Incharge of the royal piggery. In the mean time, a Royalist leader, named Aka Bailung, collecting a force from Janji arrested the progress of the enemy. But he was soon defeated and pierced to death.⁵⁹ The Matak halted at Bhatiapar for three days before moving for the next course of action.⁶⁰ All these victories of the Matak unnerved the Royalists. The attitude of the people around Gaurisagar was also quite hostile to them.⁶¹ As a

56. TB, p. 97.

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 98f.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

result, the three cabinet ministers withdrew to the capital and joined the monarch.⁶² A great consternation prevailed in the capital. In order to keep the moral of the people high, as well as, to prevent the occupation of the capital city, Purnananda Buragohain chalked out a detailed war plan. He posted garrisons under leading officials at the three principal gates of the city, himself taking the charge of the Na-duar.⁶³

At this critical hour, Brajanarayandev, the *Mahanta* of the Dihing Satra extended his help to the Ahom king with the service of nearly 2,000 soldiers recruited from amongst his disciples. He personally led his contingent under the command of the Na-Phukan across the Mathadang road, but meanwhile, the advancing Mataks had been setting on fire to some neighbouring areas, which had frightened the *Mahanta's* disciples resulting in their retreat.⁶⁴ The Ahom priests—the Deodhais and Bailungs offered the service of 600 men placed under the Dihingia Phukan. They proceeded through the Buragohain Pathar, but sustained a serious defeat at the hands of the Mataks.⁶⁵ The *Satradhikars* of Auniati and Dakshinpat also in a like way offered help to fight the Mataks, but to no avail.⁶⁶ The Mataks reached the outskirts of the capital and attempted to enter it through the Na-duar. Gaurinath Singha then sent urgent messages for help to the Barphukan of Gauhati and the kings of Manipur, Cachar and Jayantia.⁶⁷

The Mataks faced a very stiff resistance from the Ahom Premier at the Na-duar. Realising the impossibility of winning a victory at that moment, they retreated to their respective villages on the pretext of celebrating the *Magh Bihu*.^{68*} All the

62. *Ibid.*

63. *Ibid.*

64. TB, pp. 99f; BVMD; SAB, p. 156.

65. TB, p. 100; AB, pp. 342f.

66. SRSB, p. 161.

67. TB, p. 101; TB (E), p. 104.

68. *Ibid.*

* *Magh Bihu* is the second important *Bihu* festival, next to the *Bohag Bihu* of the Assamese people, which is celebrated in the month of January after the harvesting season.

Royalist commanders now moved towards Gaurisagar, some four miles west of Bhatiapar. After about a month, the Mataks renewed their attacks on the capital, proceeding along the Janji river and pitching their camp at Machkhowagarh. Overcoming the Royalist resistance they then proceeded to the Pajikatapukhuri situated on the southern side of the capital, and then advanced to Alikekuri. The Royalist garrison posted at that place then took to flight.⁶⁹

Gaurinath Singha's flight to Gauhati and the Occupation of Rangpur by the Mataks :

While the Mataks were knocking at the doors of the capital, Gaurinath Singha held a discussion with his ministers regarding the measures to be taken. The Buragohain and the Barpatra Gohain* including the Barbarua suggested a retreat to Gauhati as "the hearts of the people (were) not well-disposed."⁷⁰ Accordingly, the king left his palace in the night of January 19, 1788 by a secret passage. He was accompanied by the Na-Gosain and a number of officials and attendants, but was in such a hurry that he had to leave his queens behind, who managed their escape to Lechang and so did the Buragohain and the Barbarua. The Barpatra Gohain, however, sailed towards Gauhati. The remaining officials fled away in different directions.⁷¹

Next morning, the Mataks occupied the capital city of Rangpur. The citizens who remained there offered submission to the Mataks. Thus the latter became once more the masters of the Ahom capital. They then sent for their *Guru* Pitambardeva to seek his suggestions to reorganise the government. The rebels remained without any action for seven days, because they had to wait for the arrival of the different leaders at the capital to take a concerted action. When all leaders reached the capital, they decided to place Bharat Singha on the throne.

69. TB (E), p. 105.

* The Bargohain at that time was camping at Auguri.

70. TB (E), p. 105; TB, p. 102.

71. TB, p. 102.

Pitambardeva continued to live in the capital.⁷² Tati and his chief lieutenants Howha and Prashad were directed to manage the affairs in the north bank.⁷³

In the Royalist camp, the initiative to recover Rangpur from the occupation of the Mataks was taken by the Chief Queen and the Premier Purnananda Buragohain.⁷⁴ They managed to collect a big army of more than 20,000 strong from different places, particularly Abhaypur and placed it under the command of newly appointed Dihingia Barbarua. An advance-guard, sent under Merkai Senapati, was cut to a man by the rebels at Joysagar. The main battle was fought at Darika. The Premier himself joined the commander and the battle was very decisive. But in the end the Royalist army was completely routed and the Dihingia Barbarua was killed.⁷⁵ The queen meanwhile appointed another Barbarua named Manjay of the Bakatial family and sent him with one Bhogai to protect the old capital at Gargaon,⁷⁶ which was not yet occupied by the Mataks. Manjay halted at Gargaon for eight days. After repulsing the attack at Rangpur, the Mataks proceeded towards Gargaon and attacked Bhogai's detachment stationed at Alikekuri. Bhogai was killed and his soldiers dispersed. At this, Manjay Barbarua took his flight. The Mataks then entered Gargaon and burnt all the houses within the walls of the city.⁷⁷ They then advanced to Charaideo, which was the principal place of Ahom worship and destroyed the temples there. The inhabitants of the locality then offered their submission to the Mataks.⁷⁸

The Mataks fighting the Ahom Premier :

The Mataks thus occupied the capitals at Rangpur and Gargaon and established their hold over a considerable area in

72. TB (E), p. 107

73. AARB, p. 226.

74. TB (E), p. 107.

75. TB, pp. 104f; TB (E), p. 107; AARB, p. 227.

76. TB (E), p. 107; AARB, p. 227.

77. TB, p. 105; TB (E), p. 108.

78. AARB, pp. 227f.

the north bank. They then faced a strong attack from the Royalists under the command of their Premier Purnananda Buragohain, who was reinforced by a strong army of 30,000 strong sent by the king after his arrival at Gauhati.⁷⁹ The Buragohain divided the army into three divisions—one under the Dhekial Phukan, one under the Pani Phukan and one under his own person. A Royalist leader, called Mir Senapati, also collecting a force of his own, joined the Buragohain. The Pani Phukan encamped at Kapaukhat near the Chintamoni Garh. The other commanders, from their camps near Mitangjan, attacked the Mataks at several places. But the latter successfully overcame all attacks and inflicted a crushing defeat on the Pani Phukan.⁸⁰ The demoralised Royalist troops fled in different directions. The Premier then shifted his camp to the bank of the Namdang and with a fresh reinforcement from Gauhati under the command of the other two cabinet ministers checked the advance of the Mataks beyond the Namdang river.⁸¹ The Mataks tried to push further and on one occasion they even crossed the river and attacked the Royalist garrisons at several places, but without any decisive result.⁸² The Premier constructing a line of forts from the Bar-Ali to the Kharikatia Ali along the Namdang river, was protecting the remaining part of the kingdom from falling into the direct control of the Mataks.⁸³

Meanwhile Patkonwar, the only surviving son of Rajeswar Singha, who had been leading an exiled life in Namrup with a view to making himself the king*, collected an army from Tipam and Abhaypur and made attempts to recover Rangpur. His position was strengthened when an army of 8,000 strong arrived from Mungkong to his aid.⁸⁴ Patkonwar and his lieu-

79. TB, p. 105; HAG, pp. 197f; AARB, p. 228.

80. TB, pp. 106f.

81. TB, p. 109; AARB, p. 228.

82. TB, pp. 106ff.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

* He was supported by several Ahom princes, such as, Dighala Gohain, Barmura Gohain and Japara Gohain.

84. AARB, p. 229.

tenant Japara Gohain, overcoming the Matak resistance, were advancing towards Rangpur and pitching their camp in its vicinity. The Matak thus found themselves in a critical position. But soon a quarrel broke out between Patkonwar and one of his lieutenants. The Matak took advantage of the situation, destroyed Patkonwar's fort, at which the Royalist leader took his flight to Lechang. But he was seized and killed.⁸⁵ The detachment under Japara Gohain was also routed.⁸⁶

The Matak repulsed another serious attack made by one Pahar Senapati, who was also joined by the Barpatra Gohain, the Bargohain and then by Japara Gohain. The Matak beset the two great Gohains for seven days, compelling them to retreat to Pangera.⁸⁷ After this, the Royalists ceased to make any attempt to recover their capitals.

The Matak, winning a series of victories over the Royalists, again attempted to push further to the Ahom territory. Two Matak brothers from Lakhimpur, recruiting an army from their locality, encountered the Barpatra Gohain on the bank of the Janji river, but could not achieve any success due to the timely arrival of reinforcement from the Buragohain's camp.⁸⁸ In April, 1789, they beset the Ahom fort at Gaurisagar for 2 months, towards the end of which, there occurred such an acute scarcity of foodstuffs in the Royalist camp that many of the soldiers died of starvation. Several prominent officers including the Bargohain, the Pani Phukan and the Nao-boicha Phukan died in action. The Buragohain, suffering a great reduction of his strength, retreated first to Taratali and then to Dichoi. The Buragohain erected a strong fort at Dichoi. This place ultimately became the new capital, which came to be

85. TB, pp. 108f.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

88. *Ibid.*, pp. 110f.

known as Jorhat.^{89*}

*Barkandaz army of Gaurinath Singha routed by the Matak*s :

The rebellious spirit meanwhile spread to different parts of the kingdom. The Ahom Premier, despite his best attempts, could no longer recruit fresh soldiers. In some areas like Bacha, people flatly refused to serve the Ahom army against the Mataks. When the Premier personally approached them for the purpose, they advised him to go back 'in the same way as he came'.⁹⁰ The traditional system of recruiting soldiers through the *Paik* system was thus becoming almost paralysed and new devices had to be adopted. It has already been mentioned that Gaurinath Singha appealed for help to the kings of Cachar, Jayantia and Manipur. The first two sent evasive replies;⁹¹ it was only the king of Manipur, who recollecting the Ahom king's help to him against the Burmese in 1765, was sending his troops from time to time. But this time a troop sent by the Manipuri king under his *Dharmadhi* or High Priest, instead of proceeding to the Buragohain's camp, as directed by Gaurinath Singha, returned suddenly to their own country after having plundered the Assamese villages on the Assam-Cachar Frontier.⁹² This obviously created much confusion in the Royalist camp. Further, the attitude of the people throughout the kingdom towards the Ahom monarchy appeared hostile, so that the king could not think of sailing up to Dichoi to join the Buragohain.

Finding no way out, the king asked Gogoi Barphukan and Bhagati Barbarua in October, 1789 to arrange Barkandaz force from Bengal. The Barphukan expressed his inability on pretext of illness and the Barbarua flatly refused stating, "I, your servant, can neither arrange for soldiers from Bengal, nor can I conduct Your Majesty to Upper Assam as long as the

⁸⁹. TB, pp. 113f; TB (E), p. 114.

* There were two *hats* or markets on the two banks of the river Dichoi; hence the place came to be known as *Jor-hat* or couple market.

⁹⁰. TB (E), p. 119; TB, pp. 112f; AARB, p. 232.

⁹¹. G. Barua, *op.cit.*, pp. 151f.

⁹². TB (E), p. 119; TB, pp. 116f; AARB, p. 232.

Moamarias are alive. The person who will undertake to escort the king should be appointed Barbarua."⁹³ The king dismissed them both and appointed one Medhi of the Dihingia family as Barphukan and Jainath of the Bakatial family as Barbarua, who assured him to carry out his orders. The new Barphukan then wrote a letter, on his master's behalf to Hugh Baillie, the Resident of the British East India Company at Goalpara, asking for military aid.⁹⁴ Baillie permitted the Barkandazes, who were employed by him earlier and were disbanded, to go for the Ahom king's help.⁹⁵ But while proceeding towards Gauhati, they were intercepted and used by Krishnanarayan, the rebellious Koch Prince of Darrang, whose activities would be discussed later on. Then the king himself wrote to Daniel Raush, a private merchant at Goalpara. Raush responded by sending 700 Barkandazes from Dacca, under one Chait Singh Subedar.⁹⁶ The Barkandaz troop reached Gauhati in May, 1790. The king then under its escort, moved to Nowgong and keeping forty Barkandazes as his personal guards, sent the rest to the aid of the Buragohain, who was camping at Dichoi.^{97*} With the arrival of this mercenary force, the Buragohain wanted to play an offensive and established a fort at Teok for the purpose, but had to withdraw at the advent of the rainy season. He however, posted an advance garrison on the bank of the Kakila river. Knowing his intentions, the Mataks attacked the advance guard, to protect which, the Buragohain sent the Barkandazes. But in the engagement that followed, the Mataks killed the Barkandazes to a man.⁹⁸ Soon after, the Mataks had also attacked a royalist fort near the Bar-Ali, but were repulsed with heavy losses.⁹⁹

93. TB, pp. 117f; AARB, p. 232.

94. Baillie to Cornwallis, Nov. 9, 1789, where he wrote, "I yesterday received a letter from the Burah Fogun in the name of the Rajah requesting assistance." (BRC, Dec. 9, 1789).

95. AARB, p. 232.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 233.

97. TB, p. 114; AARB, p. 233.

* According to *Tungkhungia Buranji*, 400 Barkandaze Sepoys were sent to the Buragohain under Dihingia Medhi Barphukan. (TB, p. 114).

98. TB, p. 114; Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

99. TB, pp. 113f; APB, p. 108; HAG, pp. 198f.

After this reverse, the Matak

s resorted to guerilla warfare. They used to make inroads to the areas held by the Buragohain. Sometimes they entered the villages by the rivers Kakadonga and Dhansiri and returned with boat-loads of plunder.¹⁰⁰ The people under royalist control lost heart and would have accepted the domination of the Mataks, but for the ceaseless efforts of the Buragohain, who coaxed them by offering food and clothing, and inflicting punishment on those who proved disloyal.¹⁰¹ Because of continuous warfare, a severe famine occurred; price of eatables went so high that five *seers* of rice used to be sold for a *tola* of gold and many died of starvation. The sufferings of the people were so great that husbands used to abandon their wives and fathers their children.¹⁰² Meanwhile, the Barpatra Gohain, who was camping at Benganabari, was attacked and killed by the Mataks.¹⁰³

*Manipuri Army defeated by the Matak*s :

From his Nowgong camp at Khutamur, Gaurinath Singha sent another deputation to the Raja of Manipur in July 1790 with a request for fresh military aid.¹⁰⁴ This time, the Manipuri Raja Jay Singha, personally came with his son *Jubraj* Madhuchandra at the head of a huge army. And after meeting the king in his Khutamur camp, they proceeded to join the Buragohain at Dichoi. On his arrival, the Buragohain made a fresh attempt to recover Rangpur. The Raja personally advanced to Gaurisagar with his men and a detachment from the Buragohain, but was compelled to retreat by the well directed fire of the Matak cannon. The Raja then returned to his country, leaving a thousand of his men with the Buragohain. But these soldiers were of very little help to the Ahom monarch as they deserted in a body, on the approach of the Matak

s.¹⁰⁵

100. TB, p. 114; HAG, p. 199.

101. *Ibid.*

102. TB, p. 115; AB, p. 349.

103. TB, p. 116.

104. TB, pp. 118f.

105. TB, pp. 118ff; SAB, p. 158; HAG, p. 200; AARB, p. 236.

Gaurinath Singha's expulsion from Nowgong under Matak leadership :

Gaurinath Singha stayed for some time in Nowgong, during which period the Na-Gayans, i.e. the inhabitants of Nowgong, had to supply him and his numerous camp-followers foodgrains and other articles. The officers used to forcibly bring down arecanuts and betel leaves from the trees in the orchards of the villagers. They also carried away virgins from their parents' protection. Many of them even acquired *khats* and engaged the inhabitants of the locality in compulsory labour.¹⁰⁶ There were a number of Mataks in Nowgong, who groaned against these exploitations.¹⁰⁷ The non-Matak people of the area were equally critical of the Ahom government and joined hands with the Mataks. They then rose in rebellion under the leadership of one Sindhura Hazarika, a Matak,¹⁰⁸ and proceeded to the Royal camp, armed with spears and swords. They destroyed the bridge on the river Rupahi and surrounded the king's camp one day in February, 1791 and demanded either his departure from Nowgong or the dismissal of the oppressive officials.¹⁰⁹ The king promised to dismiss the officials as demanded and appoint new ones in their place; but after nine days, they submitted a counter-petition to retain the earlier officials. The king did accordingly.¹¹⁰ This shows that the king was wholly powerless and yielded to whatever demands made by the people.

A few months later, there was another attack to the Royal camp at Khutamur. One Bairagi, who was probably a Matak leader, collected a force from Panisangal near Biswanath. He declared himself as Raja and appointed a Barbarua of Lahon family. He got the support of the local Ahom governor Helimeli Salal Gohain, who permitted his men to join the rebel

106. TB, pp. 119f.

107. G. Barua, *op.cit.*, p. 112.

108. HAG, p. 209; P. Gogoi, *Tai and the Tai Kingdom*, p. 531.

109. TB, p. 119.

110. *Ibid.*, p. 119f.

leader. He then crossed the Brahmaputra at Kaliabor and overcoming the Royalists' resistance besieged the king's camp one midnight. The Na-Gayans and Kharangis sent by the Bakatial Barbarua to the aid of the king joined the opposite camp. The king however, managed his escape through a secret passage to Gauhati.¹¹¹ The people of Nowgong received from that time the appellation of '*Raja-Kheda*' or king-expelling Na-Gayans. The Matakas in Upper Assam attacked Dergaon and killed several Ahom officials. But they could not penetrate into the area within the fortification of Dichoi.¹¹²

Spread of the Rebellion to Darrang and Kamrup :

As stated, the Rebellion of the Matakas brought forth all dormant discontented elements into action everywhere. Subjects of the provinces of Darrang and Kamrup had long standing grievances against the Ahom government. As has been observed, "Both political and socio-economic factors had been working since a long time past creating wide discontent against the Ahom rule in Darrang and Kamrup."¹¹³

The first Darrang Raja, Balinarayan alias Dharmanarayan was established by the Ahom king Pratap Singha in 1615.¹¹⁴ Dharmanarayan, who is also called Raja Baldev in the *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, fought heroically the Mughals to recover Kamrup from their possession.¹¹⁵ Dharmanarayan enjoyed large amount of independence, but at his death, his successor was deprived of most of the rights and privileges enjoyed by him.¹¹⁶ Gradually, the Darrang Raja was reduced to the status of a pure vassal ruler. His territorial jurisdiction was also

111. TB, pp. 120f.

112. AARB, pp. 236f.

113. S.L. Barua, *op.cit.*, p. 311.

114. *Kamrupar Buranji* (ed.) S.K. Bhuyan, 2nd edition, 1958, DHAS, Gauhati, p. 27; HKB, p. 37; HAG, p. 68; AARB, p. 264.

115. Mirza Nathan, *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, (Tr.) M. Islam Bora, DHAS, Vol. I, pp. 396ff; AARB, pp. 263.

116. AARB, p. 266.

reduced from the river Dikrai to river Barnadi in the west. The eastern boundary was marked by river Bharali.¹¹⁷ He was required to attend not only the Ahom king but also the Barphukan in person, when called upon to do so, which was considered by him to be most humiliating. But no action could be taken by the Raja because of family-feuds. In 1728, Modnarayan, the younger brother of the reigning Raja Adityanarayan, occupied two-thirds of Darrang and proclaimed himself *Burha* or Senior Raja relegating Adityanarayan to the position of the *Deka* or Junior Raja. A dual-monarchy was thus instituted in Darrang. Taking advantage of this disunity, six thousand *muls** from the province were transferred to Gauhati and were placed at the command of the Barphukan. The Rajas filed formal protest to the Ahom monarch for this heavy loss of man power, but without any effect.¹¹⁸

To the grievances of the Rajas, was added the discontent of their subjects. It has already been mentioned that the people of Kamrup and Darrang were ordinarily not allowed to enter in the capital.¹¹⁹ Moreover, they were not allowed to stay overnight at the Barphukan's headquarters at Gauhati. "This prohibition order was not only a question of prestige, but of grave economic concern," as commercial interest of the traders of Kamrup as well as of Darrang required their constant presence at Gauhati.¹²⁰ Besides this, the people of Darrang resented the increased burdens of taxation under repeated surveys, to protest which, several thousand of them, soon after the restoration of Laksmi Singha, reached the capital, violating the prohibitory orders and succeeded in getting a suspension of the settlement.¹²¹ Besides, the king gave them certain assur-

117. *Ibid.*, p. 259.

* The first *paik* of a *got* of three was known as the *mul*.

118. Wade, *op. cit.*, pp. 233ff.

119. *Assam District Gazetteers*, Kamrup, Vol. IV, 1905, pp. 38f; G.R. Barua, 'Bidrohar Buranji' inserted in *Assamese Prose Selection*, Gauhati University, 1951, p. 19.

120. S.L. Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

121. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

ances but these were not followed up. In course of the Matak Rebellion, a large number of fugitives from Upper Assam took shelter in Darrang. They began to subsist there by plundering grain, betel-nut and other articles in the village orchards, which resulted in a shortage of foodstuffs in the province. As a result, forty two Gaonburhas assembled in a meeting, to decide the course of action. The meeting decided to recall their 6000 *muls* from Gauhati as a protest against the Ahom government, which was heaping on them fresh oppression in the form of the Upper Assam refugees and also to issue an order of excommunication with the threat of severe punishment, against any one co-operating with the Ahom monarch. Then a message was sent by the Gaonburhas to their *Burha* and *Deka* Rajas, both named Hangsanarayan, who were camping at a place called Ghiladhari* to fight the Matak in response to an order of their overlord Gaurinath Singha, to withdraw and to join their people to fight the tyranny of the Ahom king. The *muls* immediately responded to the order, left Gauhati and reached their homeland. The Rajas also responded to the call of their people, and withdrew inspite of the effort of the Salal Gohain to prevent them from doing so.¹²²

While camping at Ghiladhari, the Rajas were influenced by the revolutionary ideas of the Matak. The Matak leaders sent them letters stating that they would not fight against the two Rajas, who were descendants of the illustrious Narayan family, and that, they had no cause of enmity with them and their subjects. They even went to the extent of forwarding a proposal of partitioning the Ahom kingdom, offering the country west of Kaliabar to the Darrang Rajas and keeping the eastern part for themselves.¹²³ The Darrang Rajas would have submitted to the alluring proposal, but for a fresh order from Gaurinath Singha to proceed against the rebels. But now when they received an ultimatum from their people, they withdrew from the battle-field.

* Situated at a distance of about ten miles to the west of Biswanath.

122. Wade, *op.cit.*, pp. 242ff; AARB, pp. 268ff.

123 AARB. p, 270.

Gaurinath Singha sent a messenger to investigate the situation in Darrang, as well as to deliver an order, asking the Darrang Rajas to return the 6000 *mul*s and pay a visit to the capital. The messenger reported to him the seriousness of the situation that prevailed in Darrang. The *Burha* Raja sent his nephew Bishnunarayan and the *Deka* Raja his son Krishnarayan to the Ahom monarch. They explained that the withdrawal of the Rajas from the camp was owing to the shortage of food-stuffs.¹²⁴

In the meantime, Haradatta Buzarbarua, the Chaudhury of the Jikeri Pargana,* playing upon the long standing grievances of the people of Kamrup, decided to act for the expulsion of the Ahom monarch from Gauhati, whose long stay there along with his numerous followers was telling heavily upon the life of the people. There were also other reasons, cultural and political, for which, there was no cordial feeling between the people of Kamrup as well as of Darrang with those of Assam proper.¹²⁵ In order to strengthen his position, Haradatta crossed to Darrang and encouraged the two Rajas there to join him. He promised to make them the masters of Kamrup if he succeeded in overthrowing the Ahom rule from that province.¹²⁶ The *Deka* Raja assured his participation, but the *Burha* Raja preferred to remain neutral. The combined forces of the *Deka* Raja and Haradatta Chaudhury then proceeded against the Ahoms. But they suffered a defeat and took to flight. The *Deka* Raja Hangsanarayan was at last arrested and executed.¹²⁷ Haradatta escaped to Bengal, but some of his relatives were put to death.¹²⁸ Bishnunarayan was now appointed as the *Deka* Raja, depriving

124. Wade, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

* Kamrup was divided into 26 Parganas and each was put under the charge of a Chaudhury, who used to have great influence in the locality.

125. G. Barua, *op. cit.*, pp. 167f; AARB, p. 271.

126. AARB, pp. 272f.

127. Wade, *op. cit.*, p. 244f.

128. AARB, p. 273.

Krishnanarayan, the son of Hangsanarayan *Deka* Raja from that position.¹²⁹

Krishnanarayan, a boy of 17 years inspired by Haradatta, who kept in touch with him, as well as by some other aged and experienced leaders of Darrang, who entertained deep hatred of the Ahom government, asserted his claim to the *Deka* Rajaship. To achieve his end, Krishnanarayan at the instance of Haradatta repeatedly appealed for help to the Company Government in Bengal which refused to comply with his request. In August 19, 1791, he submitted a fresh petition to the Government asking for permission to recruit sepoys on his own account in the Company's territory. By a resolution in the Board of the Company dated September 9, 1791, the Government instructed Mr. Lumsden, the Magistrate of Rangpur, neither to assist nor 'to prevent him entertaining in his service persons residing in the Company's provinces', so long his troops acted peacefully within the Company's territories.¹³⁰

Krishnanarayan then recruited Barkandaz sepoys who were well-known for their plundering activities and whose depredation "unhinged the rural administration of Bengal."¹³¹ With the help of these sepoys, he expelled Bishnunarayan from Darrang, occupied North Gauhati, and encamped at Asvakranta threatening to cross to the south bank. The Barkandazes then let loose their atrocious ravages on the innocent people of the area.¹³²

Gaurinath Singha's appeal for British help :

Finding the expulsion of the Barkandazes from Assam with the help of the local army impossible, Gaurinath Singha, at last, wrote to Lumsden, for help. The matter was referred to Lord Cornwallis, the Governor-General. The Government of Bengal

129. Wade, *op. cit.*, pp. 244f; AARB, p. 273.

130. Government to Board of Revenue, Sept. 9, 1791, BRC, same date, No. 21; AARB, p. 276.

131. W.W. Hunter, *The Annals of Rural Bengal*, Vol. I, pp. 70ff.

132. BPC, October 22, 1792, No. 21.

then issued a proclamation asking the Barkandazes to return to Bengal, but the latter replied that they were serving the cause of Krishnanarayan in return for pay and the Company was in no way implicated in or committed by their work.¹³³ The conduct of the Barkandazes became gradually more and more violent. Gaurinath Singha, therefore, wrote to the Governor-General asking for a battalion of sepoy and agreeing to pay the entire expenses of the expedition.¹³⁴ Mr. Lumsden, and Deniel Raush, the farmer of the salt revenue at Goalpara, also wrote to the Governor-General advocating the cause of the Ahom monarch.¹³⁵ Gaurinath's petition was considered along with that of the Raja of Nepal, who had solicited the Company's assistance against the Emperor of China, in the Board's meeting of October 3, 1792. Lord Cornwallis stated in the meeting:

After considering the request of the two Rajas and the commercial advantages that Bengal may obtain by a friendly and open intercourse with both countries, it appears to me, that it will be no less political than humane in us to interfere our good offices to establish peace and tranquillity in those quarters.¹³⁶

He considered that six companies of sepoy commanded by an able officer would be sufficient to meet the situation.¹³⁷ He further directed :

No pains or attention should be spared to avail ourselves of so favourable an opportunity to obtain good surveys, and to acquire every information that may be possible both of the population, and of manners and customs, of trade and manufactures, and natural productions of countries with

133. A.C. Banerjee, *The Eastern Frontier of British India*, 3rd edition, Calcutta, 1964, p. 69.

134. APB, pp. 110, 213; Assam Raja to Cornwallis, undated, BPC, Sept. 10, 1792, No. 49.

135. Lumsden to Cornwallis, Sept. 10, 1792, BPC, Sept. 19, 1792, No. 13; Raush to Cornwallis, Sept. 17, BPC, October 3, 1792, No. 18.

136. AARB. p. 301.

137. *Ibid.*

which it must even be our interests to maintain the most friendly communication.¹³⁸

Expedition of Captain Welsh :

Accordingly, in September 1792, six companies of sixty sepoy each, were sent to Assam under the command of Capt. Welsh, with Lt. Macgregor as Adjutant, Ensign Wood as surveyor and Dr. John Peter Wade as Assistant Surgeon.¹³⁹ Meanwhile, Gaurinath Singha faced a fresh trouble at Gauhati. Krishnanarayan, who had consolidated his position at North Gauhati, was now joined by the Mataks. He threatened to attack the Ahom king at Gauhati. Moreover, a group of Kaivarta Mataks from Pakariguri and Chelenghat, under the leadership of one Haidhan, declared one Beiragi as their Raja.^{140*} They enjoyed the shelter and support of Krishnanarayan.¹⁴¹ Descending the Brahmaputra, the Bairagi Raja set fire to some houses near the residence of the Ahom monarch. Gaurinath Singha and his ministers had become so completely demoralised by this time, that they were horribly terrified at the scene of the fire, and without making effort to resist the rebels, sailed down the Brahmaputra. The Bairagi Raja then occupied Gauhati.¹⁴²

On 19 November, Capt. Welsh met the boats of Gaurinath Singha at Nagarbera, which is situated 21 miles east of Goalpara. The combined fleet began their journey upstream towards Gauhati. On 24 November, when the party was about 8 miles from Gauhati, a Barua informed Capt. Welsh that it would be possible to make a surprise attack on the Bairagi Raja by a circuitous route leading round the Kamakhya hill.¹⁴³

138. Cornwallis, minute, BPC, Oct. 3, 1792, No. 17.

139. TB, p. 126; APB, pp. 110, 214; HAG, p. 201; AARB, p. 300.

140. TB, p. 125.

* This Bairagi Raja was a different man from that Bairagi, who also declared himself Raja in Panisangal near Biswanath.

141. AARB, p. 308.

142. TB, p. 125; HAG, pp. 202f. AARB, p. 308.

143. AARB, p. 309.

Capt. Welsh following the Barua's suggestion, proceeded towards Gauhati via Dharapur, Jalukbari and Maligaon villages accompanied by a number of Ahom officials. After arriving at Bharalumukh, he sent an advance force under Lt. Dick and Lt. Macgregor to deal with the Raja. Proceeding to his residence, the Lieutenants found the Raja and his followers performing some kind of religious ceremony. After a feeble resistance, the Raja made his escape but a number of his followers, including Haidhan, were imprisoned.¹⁴⁴ Thus Gauhati was recovered practically without any resistance. Gaurinath Singha made his entry into the town in the evening of 25 November. On 26 November, Gaurinath Singha and his Barbarua visited Capt. Welsh and requested his assistance not only against the Barkandazes but also against the Mataks. Welsh promised to do his best.¹⁴⁵

Expulsion of the Barkandazes from Kamrup and Darrang :

While camping at Bharalumukh after his arrival at Gauhati, Capt. Welsh had to face repeated firings from the Barkandazes of Krishnanarayan from across the Brahmaputra. He issued them two *Parwanas* one after another, asking them to report at Gauhati within a time limit, failing which, they would face severe consequences. But these were of no avail. Welsh then decided to attack the Barkandazes at their strongholds in North Gauhati. In the encounter that followed, they were defeated and were dislodged from the area.¹⁴⁶ Krishnanarayan then retreated with about 1500 Barkandazes to Jikeri, situated at a distance of 20 miles west of the present town of North Gauhati. Jikeri at that time was a Pargana under the Chaudhuryship of Krishnanarayan's chief adviser Haradatta. Krishnanarayan, without a fight, then withdrew to a place known as Kalitakuchi in Darrang near the Bhutan border. Welsh sent a detachment to dislodge the Barkandazes from that place. An encounter

144. TB, pp. 125f; HAG, p. 203; AARB, pp. 308f.

145. AARB, p. 311.

146. AARB, p. 313.

took place in Kalitakuchi between Krishnanarayan and the detachment of Capt. Welsh. Krishnanarayan, suffering a disastrous defeat, escaped to Bhutan along with Haradatta.¹⁴⁷ Welsh was elated with joy at this easy success over the Barkandazes,¹⁴⁸ but their expulsion was only partial, as many of them continued to make depredations to the plains of Assam from their shelter in Bhutan.¹⁴⁹

Welsh now turned his attention to restoring Gaurinath Singha to his lawful authority, because unless peace and order was restored in the country, commercial pursuits, which was the main objective of the expedition, would not be possible. Welsh, therefore, tried to conciliate the enemies of Gaurinath Singha in conformity with his Government's policy of non-intervention. He found it extremely difficult to deal with Gaurinath Singha, who was not only weak in his personality, but also extremely cruel. Thus the Capt. wrote to Cornwallis, "this poor debilitated man of a Rajah is not capable of transacting any business himself. He is either praying or washing; and when he is to be seen he is intoxicated with opium. His ministers are a set of villains all drawing different ways."¹⁵⁰ Further, he "has always a number of executioners with him ready to despatch for their infamous purposes."¹⁵¹ Welsh soon found that his suggestion to the king to be conciliatory and lenient to the prisoners, who were followers of the Bairagi Raja, were not followed by him. He found that after his return to Gauhati, Gaurinath Singha ordered execution to no less than one hundred and thirteen persons, while seventy others were found starving to death in the prison.¹⁵² When charged by Welsh for disregarding his advice, Gaurinath Singha replied that "if he was deprived of the power of killing or mutilating his subjects at pleasure he would not wish to be a Raja."¹⁵³

147. *Ibid.*, p. 314.

148. Welsh to Cornwallis, Jan. 1, BPC, Jan. 14, 1793, No. 21.

149. AARB, p. 314.

150. Welsh to Cornwallis, Dec. 4, BPC, Dec. 17, 1792, No. 50.

151. Welsh to Cornwallis, Feb. 2, BPC, Feb. 15, 1793, No. 15.

152. AARB, p. 319.

153. AARB, p. 321; HAG, pp. 205f.

Despite all this, Welsh succeeded in bringing about a negotiation between Krishnanarayan and Gaurinath Singha. In response to a correspondence made by Capt. Welsh with Krishnanarayan, the latter arrived at Gauhati on May 20, 1793 accompanied by 400 Barkandazes,¹⁵⁴ and on May 24 took an oath of allegiance to Gaurinath Singha. He was then formally installed as the Raja of Darrang. He offered to pay monetary compensation for the 6000 *muls* taken from his province, to which, Gaurinath Singha had to finally agree. The princes of Darrang also compromised their differences on the line of recommendations made by Capt. Welsh.¹⁵⁵

Commercial Treaty with Gaurinath Singha :

In spite of his heavy military engagements Capt. Welsh did not lose sight of the commercial objectives of his expedition. After his arrival at Gauhati, he reported to Lord Cornwallis that after the restoration of peace and order in Assam, "a new source of wealth and riches must flow to the Company."¹⁵⁶ He pointed out that Assam had good markets for salt and opium and, therefore, requested the government to send a few boat loads of these articles. On February 28, 1793, Capt. Welsh entered into a commercial agreement with Gaurinath Singha establishing "a reciprocal and entire liberty of commerce between the subjects of Bengal and Assam for all singular goods and merchandizes."¹⁵⁷ The terms of the agreement were obviously more in favour of the Company.

Capt. Welsh's March to Rangpur : The Mataks facing the Captain :

Gaurinath Singha insisted on Capt. Welsh to proceed to Rangpur to dislodge the Mataks.¹⁵⁸ Welsh also realised that

154. AARB, p. 327.

155. *Ibid.*, pp. 328ff.

156. Welsh to Cornwallis, Nov. 27, BPC, Dec. 17, 1792, No. 47.

157. AARB, pp. 340f.

158. *Ibid.*, p. 336.

restoration of peace and order in Upper Assam was most essential to make the implementation of the commercial treaty successful. He, therefore, began to make careful preparation to achieve these purposes by pursuing a conciliatory attitude towards the Matak

s. There was the possibility of having a clash with the rebels. He, therefore, asked for more troops. Lord Cornwallis, approving his project, sent him six more companies of sepoys. In the beginning of November, 1793, he sent an advance-guard to Kaliabor under Lt. Macgregor. The party arrived the place on November 6, after which, the pacification of Nowgong was effected in consultation and co-operation with Helimeli Salal Gohain and other nobles.¹⁵⁹ The only chief who could not be persuaded to come to Kaliabor for a compromise, was Sindhura Hazarika, who, as has been stated earlier, compelled Gaurinath Singha to flee from his camp at Khutamur and later on asserted independence. Lt. Macgregor sent a party to bring him to Kaliabor, which, of course, did not succeed.

On 16 November, Lt. Macgregor despatched letters to Purnananda Buragohain and to Pitambardeva, the Mayamara *Mahanta*. In his letter to the Buragohain, the Lieutenant emphasised the desire of Welsh and of himself to restore peace and order in Assam with the co-operation of the Buragohain, and the nobles; and in the one addressed to the *Mahanta*, he pointed out that the warfare between the Ahom monarch and his disciples was prejudicial to both sides. He assured the *Mahanta* of Capt. Welsh's determination not to listen to the one sided report of the Ahom monarch and his officials. Further, he invited the *Mahanta* to Kaliabor for a meeting with the Captain to discuss the matters like amnesty to his people, and general policy of the Company towards Assam. He reiterated his statement to Pitambardeva "in acting otherwise, the blame of the consequences will be imputable to yourself alone."¹⁶⁰ It was afterwards ascertained that this letter was not received by the *Mahanta*.¹⁶¹ This might be due to the fact that the

159. TB, p. 127; HAG, p. 213; AARB, pp. 348f.

160. Lt. Macgregor to Purnananda Buragohain and to Pitambardeva, Nov. 16, BPC, Dec. 16, 1793, No. 41.

161. HAG, p. 209.

bearer of the letter, who was a member of the Royalist camp, was afraid of or unable to go to the *Mahanta* because of the Matak forces.

Meanwhile, a great change took place in the Company's Government in Bengal. Lord Cornwallis, retired from his office towards the end of October, 1793. His decision to send an armed expedition under Capt. Welsh was a very bold one. For, the Act of 1784 issued strict direction to the East India Company not to interfere in the internal disputes of the Indian States. But Cornwallis could afford to send Capt. Welsh's deputation to Assam, inspite of having such a stricture, because of certain factors. He was the personal friend of Henry Dundas, President of the Board of Control and even of the then Prime Minister of England, William Pitt. Besides this, he enjoyed the support and confidence of the Court of Directors and he was entrusted with certain extraordinary legal powers given by the Act of 1786.¹⁶² This privileged position, as well as his bold nature, enabled Cornwallis sometimes to depart from the policy of strict neutrality, as evidenced in Capt. Welsh's expedition to Assam. But Sir John Shore, his successor, had neither the bold personality nor the advantageous position of his predecessor. His Governor-Generalship, therefore, was marked by full implementation of the policy of non-intervention.¹⁶³ Moreover, the then political condition of India; also compelled Sir John Shore to follow this policy strictly in case of Assam. For, the Marathas and the Nizam, under the influence of the French, adopted a hostile attitude against the Britishers in India.¹⁶⁴ Creation of an additional trouble in the Eastern Frontier of India as a result of British intervention, was not desired by Sir John Shore. He, however, asked for certain information from Capt. Welsh through a letter dated 6 January, 1794, before effecting the order of withdrawal of his force from Assam.¹⁶⁵

162. P.E. Roberts, *History of British India*, 3rd Edition, 1952 (Reprinted 1958), p. 222; AARB, p. 344.

163. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

164. A.C. Banerjee, *op. cit.*, pp. 95f.

165. Secy. to Govt. to Welsh, Jan. 6, 1794, BPC, same date, No. 23.

In the meantime Capt. Welsh, unaware of any drastic change of policy with the change of Governor-General, proceeded with his work in Assam. Welsh decided to follow his advance party to Kaliabor with Gaurinath Singha. But for various reasons his departure from Gauhati was delayed. Anyhow, on January 17, 1794, Capt. Welsh with his force along with Gaurinath Singha started to Kaliabor by boat. On January 27, on his way to that place, Welsh received the letter mentioned earlier from Sir John Shore, to which he decided to respond on his arrival at Kaliabor. Reaching that place on January 31, Welsh sent Lt. Macgregor and Ensign Wood on February 3 to collect information of the country east of Kaliabor. Macgregor reached Dergaon on February 11. On 14th, he paid a there-day visit to Jorhat and met the Buragohain, "who was still maintaining the unequal struggle against the Moamarias for about seven years."¹⁶⁶ After his return from Jorhat to Dergaon, Macgregor got an urgent request for help from the Buragohain, who was being attacked by a large number of Matak. A Subedar and twenty men, out of his total 46, were immediately sent to Jorhat. Next evening, he too with Ensign Wood, accompanied by a Havildar and 14 men, followed the earlier party to Jorhat. A small force was left behind to guard the boats.¹⁶⁷

The Matak in the meantime advanced quite close to Jorhat, and about 2000 of them attacked the British force. Lt. Macgregor and Ensign Wood, who hurriedly arrived at Jorhat, by leaving behind the contingent that accompanied them, faced the Matak with the force that arrived with the Subedar, the previous day. The small British force inflicted heavy losses on the Matak, compelling them to retreat. They made a second attack on Macgregor in the same afternoon, but had to withdraw with heavy losses. In both these engagements, the Matak are said to have lost about 80 of their men, either killed or wounded. Only four men on the British side were injured.¹⁶⁸ Lt. Macgregor reported his encounter with the Matak to Capt. Welsh and

166. HAG, p. 209; TB, p. 127.

167. TB, p. 127; HAG, p. 209.

168. TB, p. 127; HAG, p. 210.

requested for reinforcements. Welsh, at once, proceeded with all his troops, except one company, which was left behind at Kaliabor to guard the grain-depot.¹⁶⁹

During his stay at Jorhat, Lt. Macgregor was surrounded by members of the Royalist camp. From the information supplied by them, he observes that all those who did not support or favour the Mataks, were killed by them. For this, the people were afraid of openly supporting the Buragohain.¹⁷⁰ He also states that many joined the Mataks for their own safety and advantage : "and many betook themselves to the neighbouring hills and many were carried off by the Duflas". Lt. Macgregor was further informed of 'the encouragement which the Moamarias had received from the principal chiefs in the beginning of their mutinous career....But when they began to encroach too far on the privileges of the Boorah Gohain and some other of the chiefs they thought it was time to oppose their progress.'¹⁷¹ There is some truth in his second statement. But his observation that the Mataks killed all their opponents and that the inhabitants joined the rebels for their safety and advantage cannot be accepted at its face value. Man-slaughter, on the part of the Mataks, was very limited. They killed only those selected officers who were reactionaries heart and soul. It was for this reason that they were able to get supporters in almost every family in Assam. Macgregor himself informs us that "...it is no incurious circumstance to be observed that there is hardly a cadet of any good family in Assam, who is not bound to the interests of the Moahmariahs, while his father, mother, brother, uncle or cousin is engaged in that of the Surge Deo." He was also astonished at the fact that none of the followers of the Buragohain was willing to carry a letter from him to the Raja or "Guru of the Moahmariahs", even though many of them confessed that they had near relatives in rebels' camp.¹⁷²

169. TB, p. 127; HAG, p. 210; AARB, p. 363.

170. AARB, p. 364.

171. Macgregor to Welsh, Feb. 19, first letter, BPC. May 28, 1794, No. 31; AARB, pp. 364f.

172. *Ibid.*

Meanwhile, Welsh submitted from Kaliabor his answers to the queries of Sir John Shore. One of the queries was regarding the causes of the prevailing discontent in Assam, to which Capt. Welsh forwarded his analysis as follows :

The supersession of Mohanmala Barjana Gohain by his younger brother Rajeswar Singha, through the intrigues of Kirtichandra Barbarua; the supersession of the rights of the hereditary nobility by the appointment of Rupchandra and Kirtichandra to the office of Barbarua, the secret machinations of Gohains, general struggle for power under a weak monarch and the discontent of the people culminating in the Moamaria insurrections; the execution of Astabhujdeva, the Guru of the Moamarias and of his son; the depravity, caprice and cruelty of Gaurinath Singha and the oppressions of his ministers; the execution of Bailung Bargohain and of his five sons, and the mutilation of Sibram Barbarua and other nobles; and the division of the men of consequences in opposite interests, united only by sentiments against the wicked favourites of Gaurinath.¹⁷³

Welsh also pointed out the probable results of the recall of the British force from Assam emphasising on the relapse of chaos and confusion, which would greatly hamper their commercial pursuits.¹⁷⁴ He then went on prosecuting the objects of his stay in Assam. He, however, declined to approve Lt. Macgregor's engagements with the Mataks. Capt. Welsh had contemplated to conciliate the Mataks, but Macgregor's almost unprovoked attack on them defeated his plan of obtaining their submission by pacific overtures.¹⁷⁵ He, therefore, considered it a distinct violation of the instructions given to Macgregor at the time of sending him to Dergaon and Jorhat.¹⁷⁶ The matter was reported to the Governor-General, who recalled Macgregor.

173. Cited from AARB, pp. 359f.

174. Capt. Welsh's letter of Feb. 6, 1794, BPC, Feb. 17, 1794, No. 20.

175. AARB, p. 263.

176. Welsh to Lt. Col. P. Murray, Adjutant General, Feb. 24, BPC, March 14, 1794. No. 27.

Capt. Welsh arrived Dergaon on March 8, 1794 with Gaurinath Singha and his followers. From this place, he sent a letter to Pitambardeva and the Matak chiefs, asking them to help in the restoration of peace and order in the country.¹⁷⁷ But this letter also, like the earlier one, was never delivered.¹⁷⁸ When the advance was resumed, Lt. J.A. Irwin was asked to proceed with two companies towards Rangpur. As Irwin reached a place about twelve miles from Rangpur, a large group of Mataks, armed with matchlocks, spears and bows made a violent attack on him, while some had remained concealed in the jungle with *Jinjals*.^{*} Lt. Irwin defeated them in several engagements and took his position at the stone-bridge over the Namdang, at a distance of about four miles from Rangpur. The Mataks suffered heavy losses, while on the side of the Company's side, only fifty got wounded mostly by arrows.¹⁷⁹

Capt. Welsh hastened to join the advance-guard of Lt. Irwin, and on March 18, the whole party advanced to Rangpur, which had been evacuated in the meantime by the rebels. Their flight was so sudden, that they left behind large amount of grain, cattle and property. On 19th, Capt. Welsh despatched a force to escort Gaurinath Singha, who had been halting with the boats on the bank of the Dikhow river. Gaurinath Singha arrived Rangpur on March 21, with his *Patromantries* except the Borpatra Gohain, who joined the party a little later.¹⁸⁰

On the arrival of the monarch in the capital, Capt. Welsh held a grand *Durbar* and asked the monarch, in presence of the nobles, whether he any longer needed the help of the British force, now that he was restored to the throne. The Raja and his ministers firmly expressed the opinion that, if the British support would be withdrawn, the country would inevi-

¹⁷⁷ Welsh to Pitambar, Mar. 10, BPC, Mar. 27, 1794, No. 23.

¹⁷⁸ HAG, p. 210; AARB, p. 370.

^{*} *Jinjals* were wall-pieces carrying small-balls varying from half a pound to two or three pounds in weight.

¹⁷⁹ HAG, p. 210; AARB, p. 370.

¹⁸⁰ APB, pp. 111f; TB, p. 128; AARB, p. 371.

tably return to the same state of anarchy. Welsh, therefore, had to decide the completion of the pacification of the Matakas. Before resorting to arms, he made a fresh attempt for a peaceful settlement with them. At his suggestion, Gaurinath Singha assured a general amnesty if they came to terms. Welsh himself guaranteed the fulfilment of this promise. Accordingly, letters were despatched to the Matakas, who had been posting themselves in the villages around Sibsagar. But meanwhile majority of them retreated to Bengmara, perhaps with the intention of making a plan for a fresh attack.¹⁸¹ After waiting for a month, and receiving no response from them, Capt. Welsh despatched three companies to attack them at Bengmara.¹⁸²

Meanwhile, on March 19, 1794, on the day of Capt. Welsh's occupation of Rangpur, the Board approved the decision of Sir John Shore for recalling the detachment from Assam. The order of recall was received by Capt. Welsh at Rangpur on April 21, whereby he was directed to withdraw from Assam on or before 1st July, to cease all kind of military operations and to withdraw all control that he might have exercised over the internal government of Assam.¹⁸³ Capt. Welsh, as a result, had to recall the forces that he sent to Bengmara immediately.

The orders of the recall caused great apprehension and disappointment in the Royalist camp. Capt. Welsh also never thought that he would be recalled before completing his work in Assam.¹⁸⁴ He, therefore, made a last minute effort in his letter dated April 25, forwarding several grounds to get approval for staying in Assam.¹⁸⁵ Gaurinath Singha and his ministers also wrote letters urging the Governor-General to permit Capt.

181. HAG, p. 211; AARB, p. 372.

182. AARB, p. 384.

183. *Ibid.*, p. 381.

184. *Ibid.*, p. 383.

185. Welsh to Ed, Hay, Apr. 25, BPC, May 12, 1794, No. 2.

Welsh to remain in Assam to restore complete peace and order.¹⁸⁶

Last encounter between the Mataks and Capt. Welsh :

On Capt. Welsh's withdrawal of his forces from Bengmara, the Mataks crossed the Dikhow and set fire to several houses and granaries in the vicinity of Rangpur. Capt. Welsh then marched out the 16th Battalion for the protection of the capital, and at the sight of the British troops, the Mataks recrossed the Dikhow and fled to their camps. On the second day, the Mataks appeared again but retreated at the sight of the sepoys. In the face of these renewed activities of the Mataks, and the anticipated danger to which the king and his followers and also his own expedition would be exposed, Capt. Welsh decided to take action against them. On May 5, Welsh crossed the Dikhow and proceeded towards the rebels' encampment at Sibsagar. But they had already moved off to different directions. The Captain, at the same time, sent conciliatory letters to the Matak chiefs, but they proved of no avail. Thereafter, at 10 A.M. on May 12, Capt. Welsh with 250 sepoys crossed over to Sibsagar and reached within half an hour the vicinity of the Matak camp. The rebels advanced to meet the sepoys, and began to attack them with arrows and matchlock pieces. But the sepoys continued to advance and, within a short time, completely routed the Mataks, who crossed over the Darika river and fled to a considerable distance. Capt. Welsh returned to Rangpur with only two casualties, after having set fire to the Camp of the rebels.¹⁸⁷ Their number was estimated at 6000 with 4000 fightingmen.

According to local sources, Capt. Welsh's last encounter with the Mataks was a very serious and decisive one. Bharat

186. Gaurinath, Purnananda Buragohain, Bishnunarayan Bargohain, Panisilla Barbarua, Sivadatta Barphukan, Apr. 26, to Shore, BPC, June 2, 1794, Nos. 22-23; AARB, p. 385.

187. HAG, pp. 212f; AARB, pp. 285f.

Singha, the Matak ruler of Rangpur, seeing the repeated victories of Capt. Welsh, fled to Bengmara, and asked for military aid from Sarvananda Singha, the Matak chief of the area, who sent a huge army under the command of his Premier Godha Barbarua. The joint forces of Bharat Singha and Sarvananda Singha marched towards Rangpur. The battle took place at Sibsagar on the road called Dhai Ali. Gaurinath Singha watched the battle from the *Ranghar** with the wife of Capt. Welsh** and guarded by force.¹⁸⁸ It is said that Gaurinath Singha was extremely terrified at the sight of the huge Matak army which might beat the small British force and massacre them all, and began to lament for coming to Rangpur leaving Gauhati, trusting on the British Captain. The wife of Capt. Welsh, however, consoled the Raja. In that decisive battle, a large number of Matak soldiers lost their lives. Bharat Singha lost a finger and fled away from the battle-field with his Barbarua. The remnant of the Matak soldiers soon followed them.¹⁸⁹

As Capt. Welsh was directed to withdraw from Assam by 1st July, and as he received no response to his letter of April 26, he had to leave Rangpur for Gauhati with much reluctance. He reached Gauhati on 30th May. Here he received a number of petitions obviously from the Royalist camp, asking him to stay in Assam, as the withdrawal of the British force would ruin their interests.¹⁹⁰ Capt. Welsh stayed at Gauhati for the whole month of June, perhaps still hoping a favourable response from his government. But as nothing of the kind reached him, he departed from Gauhati on July 1, and on 3rd July, 1794 reached back the British territory.¹⁹¹

* Ranghar—A two-storeyed house near the ruins of the Ahom Rajas, palace at Rangpur (now near Sibsagar town), still in good condition. It was used as a pavilion from where the Rajas used to watch the amusements.

** According to some, she was the wife of Mr. Wood, the Surveyor, who accompanied Capt. Welsh to Assam (CBMR, p. 80).

188. APB, p. 223.

189. APB, pp. 225f.

190. HAG, p. 213; AARB, p. 387.

191. APB, p. 226; TB, p. 129; HAG, p. 213.

Affairs in Assam after Capt. Welsh's Return :

Soon after the return of Capt. Welsh, Gaurinath Singha and Purnananda Buragohain left Rangpur for Jorhat on May 26, leaving the other two cabinet ministers and some other officials in charge of the affairs there. The Mataks, hearing the departure of the British troops, collected their scattered forces, and advanced towards the capital. At this, the Ahom garrison and the officials left there by Gaurinath Singha fled away to Jorhat without making any effort to resist the Mataks. Rangpur again came under the control of the rebels.¹⁹²

After the departure of Capt. Welsh, Gaurinath Singha adopted severe vindictive measures against all those officers who were either friendly or protected by Capt. Welsh. The Bairagi Raja and Haidhan were beheaded.¹⁹³ The Mataks living within the Ahom territory were deprived of their property, and were killed after severe torture. The brutalities were said to be so severe, that many Mataks preferred suicide to falling into the hands of the Royalist persecutors.¹⁹⁴ According to Gunabhiram Barua, very few Mataks were punished as rebels during the stay of Capt. Welsh in Assam. But after his departure, a large number of them were captured and severe punishments were inflicted on them. Thus the Ahom monarch repeated the vendetta of the first Matak uprising of 1769 : for, anybody with the label of a Matak, was killed. There is a place still known as the *Moamaria Kur* in the Kalang river in Nowgong. Gunabhiram Barua informs us that the Rahial Barua, at the orders of the government, killed many Mataks by various means and heaped the dead bodies in that place.¹⁹⁵ The Buragohain continued to suggest the monarch, to stop the policy of persecution against the Mataks, but the latter would not listen to his words.

192. APB, pp. 226f; TB, p. 129; HAG, p. 213; A.C. Banerjee, *op.cit.*, p. 94.

193. TB, p. 126; AARB, p. 310.

194. HAG, p. 213.

195. Gunabhiram Barua, *op. cit.*, pp. 117f.

Subsequent Matak uprisings :

The retaliatory measures pursued by Gaurinath Singha only instilled fresh courage to the hearts of the Mataks, who were temporarily demoralised by superior military skill and strength of Capt. Welsh. They were now looking for new allies within and outside the kingdom.

Gaurinath Singha died early in August, 1795 leaving no male heir to succeed him.¹⁹⁶ The Buragohain, therefore, placed Kinaram, the son of the Charing Raja*, Kadam Dighala Gohain, who was the grand son of Rudra Singha's brother, Lechai Namrupia Raja, on the throne with the concurrence of other ministers. The new king assumed the name Kamaleswar Singha.¹⁹⁷ He was less than a year old at the time of his accession,¹⁹⁸ so the Buragohain became the *de facto* ruler of the kingdom. As the boy-king grew up, he was found to be very cool and calm with strong confidence on his Premier.

Purnananda Buragohain was a shrewd diplomat. A Royalist to the backbone, he tried his best to restore the confidence of the people in the Ahom monarchy and establish peace and order in the kingdom by both peace overtures and threat of arms. With his statesmanlike qualities, he took adequate measures to create a standing army, the first of its kind in Assam. In this he was greatly inspired by the well-disciplined and well-trained British army under Capt. Welsh, who could rout thousands of indisciplined non-professional Matak stalwarts with a handful of sepoys. Further, it has been mentioned earlier that the military organisation of Assam based on the *Paik*-system, had become practically inoperative during the Matak Rebellion, and a regular army was the only alternative, if at all the traditional monarchy was to be maintained. Again, the kingdom was witnessing a recrudescence of the Barkandazes and the

196. TB, p. 134; AARB, p. 429.

* The statement of the *Ahom Buranji* (p. 357) that Kamaleswar Singha who succeeded Gaurinath Singha was his son, is no-well-founded.

197. TB, p. 135; KTP, p. 51; HKB, p. 82; SAB, p. 171.

198. ABNP; TB (E), p. 193.

Buragohain was also fearing an invasion from Bhutan, which had been harbouring the rebel leaders of Assam and the Barkandazes. With that end in view, the Buragohain managed to detain two sepoys, named Dina and Fakirchand from the detachment of Capt. Welsh, to train the Assamese stalwarts in the line of British soldiers. He also managed to procure flint-guns and gunpowder from the Company. Within a brief period, he thus created a well-disciplined army of 18 companies of hundred sepoys each, and made his brother Chandra the commander, who for that reason came to be known popularly as Captain Gohain.¹⁹⁹ He met the expenses of the army mainly by collecting subscriptions from the Vaisnava *Satradhikars*.²⁰⁰

The Mataks had thus to face a strong force in the person of the Buragohain with his army trained in modern lines and equipped with up to date arms and ammunitions. To counter the force of the Buragohain, they not only continued their alliance with the Dafalas and the hill-Miris and their *bahatias*, some of whom procured the service of the Barkandazes, but also with other hill-tribes like the Singphos and the Khamtis and through them even with the Burmese. Cachar and Jayantia also gave them their support by sheltering the Matak refugees and refusing to send them back, although repeated requests to that effect were made by the Ahom government. Thus strengthened, the Mataks used to make sporadic incursions to the Ahom territories and harass the government.

Fresh Matak uprising in league with the Dafalas and the Dafala-bahatias :

In 1795, the Mataks of the north bank in league with the Dafalas and the *Dafala-bahatias*, crossed the Brahmaputra near Silghat. The Premier sent a detachment of the newly-trained army from Jorhat under Bhadari Barbarua. An encounter took place near Silabandha; the allied force was badly defeated by

199. AB, p. 358; SAB, pp. 169f; TB, pp. 129f; TB (E), p. 132.

200. ABNP; TB, p. 138; TB (E), p. 140.

the Royalists.²⁰¹ Many of them were killed on the spot and many, while hastening to get into their boats, fell into the river and were drowned. Some were captured and beheaded and their heads were stuck up on stakes to serve as warning to others.²⁰²

But this defeat could not demoralise them. Realising that without external aid, it would not be possible for them to challenge the new army of the Ahoms, they procured the assistance of some Barkandazes through one Madhuram Bairagi. The Dhekial Phukan also joined them.^{203*} Phophai, mentioned earlier, again led the *Dafala-bahatias*. The rebels then ravaged several villages within the Ahom territory. The Premier sent the *Deka* Phukan of the Gauhati establishment against them. At the advance of the Phukan, the rebels made their retreat. It appears that, the Phukan was directed to capture the leaders, but as he failed to do so, the Buragohain in person led an expedition against them and killed Phophi in an encounter. The Dhekial Phukan, who meanwhile took his flight, was arrested, but he committed suicide to escape punishment.²⁰⁴

*The Ahom Premier ousting the Matak*s from Rangpur : *Matak* resistance in alliance with the Singphos :

It has been mentioned that soon after the return of Capt. Welsh, when Purnananda Buragohain and Gaurinath Singha retreated to Dichoi, the Mataks reoccupied Rangpur and reinstated Bharat Singha on his position. Bharat Singha, who had been issuing coins in his name since 1791, claiming his

201. TB, pp. 137f; TB (E), p. 140; HAG, p. 225.

202. *Ibid.*

203. TB, p. 140; TB (E), p. 142.

* SAB, pp. 173f; TB, p. 140; AB, pp. 360f speak of one Sagunkanipora Raja on the North Bank of the Brahmaputra during this period. It appears that the rebels declared him as their Raja.

204. SAB, pp. 173f; AB, pp. 360f; TB, pp. 140f; TB (E), pp. 142ff.

ancestry from Bhagadatts*, repeated the same in 1795. The *Tungkhungia Buranji* informs us that sometime in 1795, Bharathi Raja alias Bharat Singha was leading a Matak Rebellion in Chokyhat near Sualuguri. The Premier personally proceeded against him with six companies of sepoys, advancing both by land and water. In the battle that followed, his followers were badly beaten. Most of them including Bharat Singha fled away and the rest for want of foodstuff offered submission. The Premier settled them in Khutiaputa, Thali, Jankhana, Uttar-Gahpur, etc.²⁰⁵ Purnananda Buragohain then considered that the *Mahanta* was at the root of all these Matak uprisings. He, therefore, summoned the *Mahanta* Pitambardeva to the capital and exacted a written guarantee from him against any involvement in future uprisings of his disciples.** The *Gosain* of Auniati *Satra* remained the guarantor for the *Mahanta*.²⁰⁶

In 1799, when Bharat Singha again issued coins in his name, Purnananda Buragohain decided to bring him under complete submission. With that end in view, he this time sent against him a strong force under Haripada *Deka* Phukan and other officers, who forced his followers to retreat to Namrup. Bharat Singha then made an alliance with the Singphos and in league with them ravaged a number of villages in the eastern part of the Ahom kingdom. It is even said that Bharat Singha, from

* One of his coins was dated 1718 Saka i.e. 1796 A.D. The legend in this coin in archaic Assamese was as follows :

One Rupee Coin : Obverse—*Sri Bhagadatta Kulodhaya Sri Bharatha Singha nripasya Saka 1718*. Reverse—*Sri Sri Krishna Charanav, Vindamakaranda Pramatta Madhukarasya* (Born in the family of Sri Bhagadatta, King Sri Bharatha Singha, Saka 1718; of the bee-intoxicated with the honey of the feet of Sri Krishna).

S. Rajkumar, 'Purani Asamar Mudra' (in Assamese), *Asamiya Sanskriti* (ed.) H. Neog and L. Gogoi, 2nd publication, 1975, pp. 211f; Kanaklal Barua, 'Some notes on Assam coins' (in English) *Studies in the Early History of Kamrupa*, p. 3.

205. TB, p. 141; TB (E), p. 142.

** According to certain sources Pitambardeva was imprisoned (TB, p. 141; SAB, pp. 174f;), where he died. (BVMD; AARB, p. 437). According to Gait, he was put to death (HAG, pp. 219f).

206. ACMSV, pp. 142f.

his shelter in Beesa Gum alias Bichanong's (Singpho chief) village sent a person named Ramnath Barbarua to the Burmese Emperor Bodawpaya to seek his help, but the latter did not respond.²⁰⁷ Anyhow, in the battle that took place in Dangarikukh, the combined force of the Mataks and the Singphos, suffering a defeat, fled away in different directions along with Bharat Singha.²⁰⁸ But the Ahom sepoys besieged them while concealing in jungles. Bharat Singha gallantly came forward to confront the enemy with a few of his followers and speared an Ahom sepoy. At this another Ahom sepoy named Jogisingh shot at Bharat Singha which wounded his thigh. Still then Bharat Singha grabbed the enemy rifle, but was bayoneted to death by two Ahom sepoys.²⁰⁹ His dead body was then sent to the Ahom monarch who pinned it in a spear and kept it exhibited at Khutiaputa.^{210*}

Following the death of Bharat Singha, the Royalists recovered their capital at Rangpur, which had been under the possession of the Mataks since Gaurinath Singha's flight to Gauhati in 1788, with an interrupting for a few days when Capt. Welsh reinstated the Ahom king on his throne.

Mataks seeking Burmese aid through the Singphos :

The Mataks, with the aim of recovering Rangpur, appealed for Burmese help in 1805 through the Singpho chief Beesa Gum. The Burmese Emperor Bodawapaya (1782-1819) immediately responded to this appeal by sending an army, which on its arrival was won over by Purnananda Buragohain through diplomatic overtures.²¹¹ The Buragohain then, to keep the Singphos in good humour, and to keep them dissociated with.

207. Hannay, *loc.cit.*, pp. 671ff.

208. TB, 144; AB, pp. 362f; SAB, pp. 175f; HAG, p.226.

209. SAB, p. 176; TB, pp. 144f; TB (E), pp. 147f.

210. TB, p. 145; TB (E), p. 148.

* According to *Satsari Asam Buranji* (p. 176) his dead body was taken by boat to Sarbaibhaga and was burnt at the order of the Buragohain..

211. Hannay, *loc. cit.*, p. 673.

the Mataks, presented an Ahom girl named Rangili along with numerous slaves and attendants to their chief Bichanong.²¹²

Mataks leaguings with the Khamtis and seeking Burmese aid :

The Mataks had also made alliance with the Khamtis. These people descended from the hills and settled on the area on the bank of the Tengapani river, with the permission of the Ahom government in 1751.^{213*} They crossed the Brahmaputra in 1794 in the reign of Gaurinath Singha, ousted the Ahom governor Sadiyakhowa Gohain and usurped his title and dignity for their chief.²¹⁴ Undoubtedly they were inspired to such action by the uprising of the Mataks, but they do not appear to have alliance with the latter before 1799, when they made inroads to the Ahom territory along with the Matak fugitives. Purnananda Buragohain sent the Dihingia *Deka* Phukan, the Nao-Salia Phukan and the Neog-Phukan with their contingents and one of the companies of the newly raised force. The Ahom army killed a large number of them and captured many including one of their chiefs.²¹⁵ The Buragohain adopted a conciliatory attitude towards the captives and settled them at several places like Simaluguri, Titabar, Marangi etc.²¹⁶ But this did not have the desired effect. The Khamtis again came to the support of the Mataks and their chief Hocass Gohain procured a Burmese army for them.²¹⁷ When that army reached Assam, the Buragohain won them over by kind words and rich presents.²¹⁸ It may also be mentioned in this connection that even after the recognition was given to the Matak kingdom at Bengmara by the Ahom government, the Mataks, in league with the Khamtis and the

212. AARB, p. 41.

213. Devi, *op.cit.*, p. 189.

* Either in the reign of Pramatta Singha (1744-1751) or Rajeswar Singha (1751-1769).

214. Dalton, *op.cit.*, p. 10; Mackenzie *op.cit.*, Chapter XI.

215. TB, p. 141; TB (E), p. 144; SAB, pp. 176f, AB, p. 365.

216. SAB, p. 177; AB, pp. 365f.

217. Hannay, *loc.cit.*, p. 673.

218. Hannay, *loc.cit.*, p. 673.

Singphos, raised a standard of rebellion at Sadiya. The Buragohain himself proceeded against them and inflicted a crushing defeat on the rebels.²¹⁹

Jayantia and Cachar supporting the Matak fugitives :

It has already been stated that Gaurinath Singha appealed for help to the kings of Jayantia and Cachar against the Matak, but they sent him evasive replies. Indeed; they had all sympathy for the Matak rebels and extended ready asylum to the Matak fugitives. Purnananda Buragohain made correspondence with the kings of Cachar and Jayantia asking them to send back the fugitives to the Ahom kingdom and declaring free pardon to all those who would return and surrender themselves to the Ahom king. But the Matak fugitives were not willing to leave their places of shelter, nor the sheltering kingdoms were willing to send them back.²²⁰ This led to a long correspondence of the Ahom government and its counterparts in these kingdoms. The Premier at last decided to get back the fugitives by force. In case of Jayantia, however, he did not take any drastic action and remained content simply by expelling the envoy of their king Ramchandra, alleging that the letter he was carrying from his master to the Ahom monarch was discourteous in tone.²²¹

Unlike their counterparts in Jayantia, the Matak fugitives in Cachar were aggressive in their behaviour; they were making depredations in the villages of the Ahom kingdom extensively. In spite of repeated requests from the Ahom king Kamaleswar Singha and his Premier Purnananda Buragohain, the Kachari Raja Krishna Chandra did not refrain his subjects from allying themselves with the Matak fugitives, who even declared their own 'Raja' alleged to be a prince of the Ahom royal blood.²²² The Buragohain, therefore, sent an expedition under his brother

219. TB, pp. 185f; Robinson, *op.cit.*, pp. 369ff.

220. TB, pp. 149f; HAG, p. 220.

221. TB, pp. 180f; TB (E), pp. 184ff.

222. SAB, pp. 179ff; TB, p. 149.

Sivanath Namdayangia Rajkhowa.²²³ The Royalist force crossed the Kalang river and defeated the allied forces near Jamunamukh. The 'Raja' along with some other leaders were made captives and sent to the Ahom monarch. The rest fled away. The 'Raja' on trial was found to be an imposter and was executed.²²⁴

The Matak fugitives and the Kacharis then united under the command of a son of Bijoy Barmura Gohain, grandson of Rajeswar Singha, and began to commit depredations in several villages in Nowgong. Sivanath Rajkhowa, who was still there with his force, asked for reinforcement. The Buragohain immediately sent a contingent under the *Deka Phukan* of Gauhati, who on his way to Nowgong via Raha had to camp at Putani, where he was attacked by the rebels. Many people of Nowgong also joined the rebels.²²⁵ At this, the *Deka Phukan* withdrew and finally joined the main army under the Rajkhowa. The entire force then crossed the Kalang and Kapili rivers and confronted the rebels. But they gained complete victory, compelling the Ahom force to retreat with heavy loss of men and material.

On getting the news of this reverse, the Buragohain called the troops stationed in Rangpur under the command of Captain Gohain.²²⁶ The Gohain joined the Bacha Rajkhowa, who was meanwhile sent with an advance-guard of 3 companies of sepoy, on the north of Kalang river above Khagarijan. In the battle that ensued there, the rebels were defeated with the loss of 122 lives including one of their important leaders Barjogdhari Hanumanta.²²⁷ The rest fled to Cachar. The Royalist force camped at Raha before getting more reinforcement to attack the rebels within the Kachari kingdom. When the same had reached them, the Ahom sepoy proceeded up the Jamuna to Dabaka, where they sacked and destroyed a large number of

223. TB, p. 145.

224. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

225. *Ibid.*

226. APB, p. 118; TB, p. 150.

227. TB (E), p. 154.

villages. A panicky situation developed, as a result of which, some Kacharis deserted to the Ahom camp. This had weakened the rebels, who had to sustain a serious defeat costing lives to a large number of them. The survivors dispersed and those who could be captured were brought back to the Ahom kingdom and settled in different places.²²⁸ Seven Saikias of Nowgong and a number of tribal chiefs of the area were put to death at the order of the Premier on the charge that they extended their help to the Matak rebels.²²⁹

Rebellion under Sarbananda Singha and Ahom recognition of Matak autonomy :

After recovering Rangpur and freeing the north bank from Matak occupation, Purnananda Buragohain wanted to overthrow the Matak government in Bengmara. With that end in view, he sent in the middle of the year 1805, five companies of sepoys under the command of the Deka Phukan against Sarbananda Singha, the Matak king of Bengmara. The Phukan was accompanied by the Bhitaraual Phukan, Capt. Gohain, Bacha Rajkhowa, Hausagar Bora and others. The army crossed the Dibru river and confronted the enemy at Bhutiating. Sarbananda Singha, being unable to stand against the well-trained army of the Buragohain, withdrew into deep jungles and then took shelter in a Singpho village, wherefrom he is said to have asked for Burmese aid in alliance with the Singphos and the Khamtis.²³⁰ The battle was continued by his son Matibar, who also suffered a defeat and made retreat to Hulungaguri. There he suffered great hardships owing to the rainy season, and about a thousand of his men died of fever and dysentery. An acute scarcity of foodstuff occurred, as a result of which, a section of them made submission. They were then settled in a place called Ghilamara. A garrison was posted there to guard their movements.²³¹

The Premier realised that the Matak of Bengmara, who were mostly Morans, were very strongly organised and it was usually

228. SAB, pp. 179ff; TB, pp. 150ff; TB (E), pp. 152ff; HAG, pp. 221ff.

229. TB, p. 155; TB (E), p. 158.

230. Hannay, *loc.cit.*, pp. 673f; AARB, pp. 437f.

231. TB, pp. 169f; HAG, pp. 221f.

they, who had been rising in frequent rebellions against the Ahom government. He, therefore, thought that it would be more proficient to win them over by a policy of conciliation then trying to subdue them by force; because there was every fear that they would continue to give trouble allying themselves with the neighbouring hill tribes or by seeking aids from the Burmese. He, therefore, proposed certain conciliatory terms to the Matak Chief. The latter also, seeing the fate of his counterpart in Rangpur, thought that it would be better for him to make compromise with the Ahom Premier, who, if necessary, would procure help from the British and subdue him. He, therefore, decided to respond to the conciliatory proposal of the Buragohain. But before an agreement could be made, Sarbananda Singha died. The agreement was, therefore, made by his son Matibar. According to its terms the Buragohain conceded to the Matak Chief the territory that laid in the angle between the Brahmaputra and the Buri-Dihing on an autonomous basis and recognised his title 'Barsenapati'.²³² Matibar, in his turn, agreed to pay an annual tribute in kind, such as elephant and silk, to the Ahom government.²³³

Fate of the other Matak kingdoms :

It has been mentioned earlier that after the flight of Gaurinath Singha from his capital and its occupation by the Mataks in January 20, 1788, the Matak leaders in consultation with their *Guru* Pitambardeva, tried to reorganise the government. Tati and Howha were directed to proceed to the north bank to manage the affairs there.

Accordingly, Harihar Tati began to rule as an independent Chief at Japaribhita, an extensive tract extending from the foot of the Dafala hills to the Brahmaputra, which now covers a

232. HAG, p. 222; AARB, p. 556; H.K. Barpujari, *Assam: In the Days of the Company*, Gauhati, 1963, p. 7, (henceforth abbreviated as ADCB).

233. A.J. Moffatt Mills, *Report on the Province of Assam*, Calcutta, 1854, pp. 2f; Hannay, *loc.cit.*, pp. 671ff; Robinson, *op.cit.*, p. 328; John M'Cosh, *Topography of Assam*, Reprint, 1975, pp. 334; HAG, p. 222.

major part of the present district of Lakhimpur. Tati had his headquarter at Tatibahar, near the Bandardewa hills, a place near which, at present, houses the temporary capital of Arunachal Pradesh.* Tati's administration appears to be based on democratic lines, because tradition still current in the locality, speaks of him as a very beneficial ruler. It appears that Tati even attempted to extend his jurisdiction towards Sadiya which brought him into a clash with the Khamtis, resulting in his death in 1795.²³⁴ It is not definitely known who succeeded Tati. Certain sources speak of a Raja named Sagunkanipara in connection with the Rebellion of the Matak in alliance with the Dafalas and the *Dafala-bahatias* in 1795.²³⁵ It appears that Tati was succeeded by this Sagunkanipara Raja. The present stream of the Dikrong, which flows through the Bihpuria circle of North Lakhimpur was also known as Sagunsuti.²³⁶ It is possible that Harihar Tati's successor shifted his headquarters to the bank of the Sagunsuti, for which, he came to be known as Sagunkanipara Raja. Sources are silent regarding the career and activities of this ruler. Phobably he took to flight, when the Royalists were successful and Phophai, the leader of the Rebellion, was killed.²³⁷ Following the death of Phophai, Ahom rule was restored in the north bank.

Howha, who was ruling in Majuli, could not hold his power long. Because it was found that in 1792 Majuli was under the control of Bharat Singha. Whether Bharat Singha forcibly took possession of Majuli or did it following Howha's death in that year or a little earlier, is not known. With the final defeat and death of Bharat Singha, Majuli was also annexed to the Ahom kingdom along with the possessions of Bharat Singha.

* According to popular tradition the place is so called because it was ruled by a Tati Raja, meaning a king who was originally a weaver by profession. This Tati Raja was no one but Harihar Tati, a principal Matak leader of the north bank.

234. Hannay, *loc.cit.*, p. 673.

235. SAB, pp. 173ff; AB, pp. 360f; TB, p. 140.

236. CEMR, pp. 86f.

237. SAB, p. 174; AB, p. 361.

An Assessment of the Rebellion :

Thus the Mataks, who had been in armed conflict with the Ahom government since 1769 and who had twice occupied its capital at Rangpur, making themselves the masters of the major part of eastern Assam, had at last to remain content with the possession of small autonomous kingdom. True it is that their's was a popular Rebellion against the exploitation of the Ahom government, but it was a Rebellion without efficient leadership. Even Pitambardeva, the spiritual head of the Mataks, on whom greatly depended the success of the Rebellion, and implementation of a new policy and programme, failed to give his disciples the sense of political unity and guidance, which they badly required during that period. For, Pitambardeva was not in favour of a drastic change in the existing structure and wanted to preserve some of the traditional values of the erstwhile government. He even did not want the destruction of the Ahom monarchy. The leaders of the Rebellion, on the other hand, wanted a drastic change. Dissention was the inevitable result, which shattered the dream of establishing a greater Matak kingdom. As a result, four Matak kingdoms independent of each other, one at Japaribhita in the North Bank, one in Majuli, and two in the South Bank at Rangpur and Bengmara were established. This greatly weakened their solidarity, for which, they could not offer a united resistance to the Royalist, and all of them excepting the one at Bengmara, fell like nine pins before the newly created Ahom army.

Thus, there were many shortcomings in Matak leadership. They had courage no doubt, but lacked foresight. They also made no attempt to improve their military strength. As a result, they miserably failed to withstand the new army of the Ahom government-trained on British lines. Their conviction that they would be able to oust the Ahom monarchy with the help of the Burmese was a wrong one. Purnananda Buragohain had very good relation with the Company Government, which in its turn, was equally interested in the affairs of Assam. If required, Purnananda Buragohain would seek British help and the Burmese

were far inferior to the British as a military force.

Although the Matakas failed to overthrow the Ahom monarchy and could at last retain their hold over a small area only, the event had far-reaching impacts in the history of Assam. As stated, it threw asunder the divine origin of kingship by putting a line of commoners on the throne and thereby greatly tarnished the image of the Ahom monarchy. Purnananda Buragohain's endeavour to restore the confidence of the people in the monarchy had little effect. The neighbouring hill tribes joined their hands with the Matakas; the rebels sought foreign aid which made the situation highly complicated.

As a result of the prolonged disturbances, cultivation suffered, people faced acute shortage of foodstuffs and it is learnt from the *Tungkhungia Buranji* that price of all eatables during the course of the rebellion went up to such an unprecedented level, that one *Pua* (approx. 250 grams) of rice was sold for one rupee, and one bundle of arum for one rupee and a half.²³⁸ Even though it appears to be a little exaggeration, yet there is no denying the fact that there was an acute shortage of foodstuffs.

During the period of the Rebellion many people left their villages to the jungles, or the neighbouring countries. Purnananda Buragohain's attempt to bring them back had met with very little success. Again, large number of people, both Matakas and non-Matakas were put to the sword most inhumanely and indiscriminately. As a result, the population of the country was reduced to more than a half. According to the *Mayamara Satrar Vamsawali*, the Matakas alone suffered a loss of about eight lakhs of their disciples.²³⁹ Such drastic decline in the strength of the population made the villages desolate and deserted. Lt. Macgregor, while advancing from Dergaon to Rangpur, had marked that "in the space between Kaliabar and Joarhat, it would be difficult perhaps to find 300 persons", and that "the country which though now a desolate waste everywhere exhibits indubi-

238. TB, p. 111.

239. ACMSV, p. 124.

table proofs of former industry."²⁴⁰ The situation was further aggravated by the Bengal Barkandazes.

The Rebellion made the very basis of the administrative structure of the Ahom monarchy, i.e. the *Paik* system obsolete. As a result, there was the dire need of having a standing army. Though with the help of the army, the Buragohain succeeded in quelling certain internal disturbances, the government had to yield to many demands of the people. Thus the latter were given the right even to demand the dismissal of the State officials,²⁴¹ a right which could not even be dreamt of earlier. Certain privileges, which were earlier monopolised only by the privileged class, were now made open to all. To cite an example, the right to use *Palanquin* was made permissible on paying rupees thousand.²⁴² Even the creation of the army on new line failed to save the ultimate ruin of the Ahom monarchy, because, the Rebellion itself let loose certain problems which could be solved only through foreign intervention. The Britishers from the west and the Burmese from the east, both interested in the affairs of Assam, collided in this land, as a result of which, the Ahom monarchy was doomed and the era of British colonialism ensued.

The monarchy did not have any idea either of the seriousness or of the magnitude of the Rebellion. This was mainly due to the fact that since the last formal clash of arms between the Ahoms and the Mughals in the battle of Saraighat in 1671, the Ahom monarchs gradually kept themselves away from the people. As the threat of an external danger was over, the monarchy was also not in need of the support of the people. The absence of fear of any external threat made the Ahom kings and the nobility fond of ease and pleasure. Since the reign of Siva Singha, they became more priest-ridden and devoted their time mostly in religious pursuits, neglecting their state

240. BPC, May 28, 1794, No.31, Macgregor to Welsh.

241. TB (E), pp. 122f.

242. M.J. Butler, *Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam*, 1855, p. 223; S.L. Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

affairs. They also became disinterested in the welfare of the people and did not hesitate to persecute some of them in the name of religion. This had made the people disregardful of the government. Besides, the wide gap that was created between the ruler and the ruled following the battle of Saraighat, made the Ahom monarchy completely ignorant of the life and aspirations of the people.²⁴³ Consequently, when the monarchy and the nobility were passing their days in pomp and grandeur at the cost of the labour of the people, the latter became not only detestant, but also organised against the government. Though the Mataks were the first to ring the bell, the rebellion was not confined to them alone. It became a mass movement.

The Ahom monarchy should have resorted to a policy of peace and conciliation. But it was foolish enough to pursue a policy of ruthless exploitation and oppression. This policy not only brought greater solidarity to the rebels, but also created dissension in the royalist camp itself. Indeed, even from the very beginning, there were a large number of Ahom officials, who had their sympathy towards the rebels, and some of them even openly participated with them. Further, the spy system also became absolutely inoperative. Persons employed in the secret service had greater leanings towards the rebels than towards the Ahom monarchy. Whereas the Ahom government failed to get reliable informations about the rebels, the latter, through their fellow workers, got regular intelligence of the war-preparation of the Royalist camp. This was a great drawback to the Royalists. There were also some nobles, including certain frontier governors like Helimeli Salal Gohain, who were supporting the cause of the Mataks. Such factors made the problem more critical. Thus there was only one way by which the catastrophe could have been averted. This was, as mentioned, the pursuance of a policy of peace and conciliation. But the government adhered to its traditional policy of blood and iron, and resolved not to bring about any change in the existing structure at the cost of their privileges and prerogatives, a series of problems came to the forefront, which could be solved with

foreign intervention only, leading to the fall of the Ahom monarchy.²⁴⁴

² Opinions widely differ regarding the nature of the Rebellion. To one group of scholars, it was a crusade between the Vaisnavas and the Saktas; to another, it was a Rebellion of the non-Ahoms against the Ahoms and still to a third group, it was an uprising of different power-loving adventurous Chiefs against the existing government.

Our study of the Rebellion shows that the two rival camps were not Vaisnavas and Saktas. True it is, that Saktism was the creed of the then Ahom royalty, but it is equally true that the Dihing *Satra*, which was a branch of the *Kala Samhati*, was in the camp of the Royalists, and so were the four dominant Brahmana *Satras*, viz., Auniati, Dakshinpat, Garmur and Kuruabahi. At the same time, a number of Ahom officers, whose creed was Saktism, was on the side of the rebels. It may also be noted that, the exiled Ahom Princes, who joined the *Mataks*, were also not Vaisnavas. Further, had it been a crusade, Ragha Barbarua, after seiging power, would have ordered the initiation of the Saktas only by the *Mayamara Mahanta*. But it is found that his grudge was mainly against those *Satras*, which joined their hands with the Ahom monarchy. Even though the *buranjis* state that the *Mataks*, after seiging power, persecuted all rival disciples, our study of the *Vamsawalis* of different *Satras* shows that the *Matak* persecution was confined mostly to the Brahmana *Satras*. It is also to be noted that they did not aim at mass conversion. What they wanted to do was to curtail the political influence and economic prosperity of the powerful *Satras*, which had been securing royal patronage. They were, therefore, satisfied in getting these *Satras* heavily fined. Again, nowhere in the *buranjis* the Rebellion has been described as a crusade. Rather, it has been referred to as a contest between *Dharma* (Justice) and *Adharma* (Injustice), where the *Mataks* are described as robbers and

persecutors, and slayers of cows, Brahmanas and children.²⁴⁵ It may also be noted that the grievances of the Mataks were not against the Brahmanas as a community, but against only those of their counterparts, who sided with the Royalists.

The opinion that it was a Rebellion of the non-Ahoms against the Ahoms, is also wholly baseless. Amongst the Mataks themselves, there were a large number of Ahom officials. When the exiled Ahom princes joined the rebels, there was a great confusion even in the Royalist camp. There were many who thought that, it were those princes, who had been mobilising the strength of the Mataks against the ruling authority. When the Rebellion was in progress, large number of soldiers and military officers of the Royalist camp came over to the side of the rebels. The words of advice which were given by the *Mahanta* to his disciples, before giving his qualified sanction to the Rebellion, shows that the latter did not want the destruction of the Ahom monarchy. On the other hand, he repeatedly requested the disciples to maintain the monarchy and to be satisfied with their getting a reasonable share in the government. All this shows that the feeling that the non-Ahoms should take up arms against the Ahoms was beyond the imagination of the people. Indeed, such a community feeling, aiming at political end, was never there throughout the progress of the Rebellion. It is only an interpretation of a biased group of modern scholars guided by communal feeling.

The opinion that it was an uprising of different adventurous Chiefs against the Ahom monarchy appears, on the surface, to be true. It was a fact that in course of the Rebellion, different adventurous Chiefs established their independent or semi-independent principalities in different parts of the country, assuming the title 'Raja'. The situation created widespread disorder and confusion. But behind all these uprisings, there were certain common features. All these rebellions were

245. R.M. Nath, *op.cit.*, p. 150; H. Bhattacharyya, *Asamiya Natya-Sahityar Jilingani*, p. 66; S.N. Sarma, *Prabandha Chayanika*, p. 28; A. Guha, 'Vaisnavbadar Para Mayamariya Bidrohaloi' (in Assamese), *Amar Pratidin*, 19th year, 8th edition, p. 650.

rebellions organised by the people, and mostly by unknown and insignificant leaders. All the rebels were dissatisfied with the ruling authority; all wanted a change in the existing structure. Under such circumstances, it cannot be accepted that the Matak Rebellion was only a rebellion of adventurous upstarts who aimed at seiging political power for themselves.

It has been discussed in details, as to how the Mataks started a course of events in which all the disaffected popular elements raised their heads against the Ahom monarchy. Though the Rebellion started initially on a religious pretext centering round the insults heaped upon the Mayamara *Mahanta*, yet it was never a religious uprising. Indeed, the *Mahanta*, despite his spiritual leadership, was not the hero of the movement. The leadership was taken by the people themselves. What people detested most was the system of exacting compulsory manual labour from them by the rigorous *Paik* system, which reduced them to the status of virtual slaves. Along with the *likchous* (domestic servants), they formed a "discontented set of people, comparable to the Helotes of ancient Sparta, politically dangerous and socially degraded."²⁴⁶ When they got fresh impetus for an egalitarian society from the Neo-Vaisnavite movement, they aspired the same in the political plane. But the despotic Ahom monarchy, betrayed them all their aspirations. Naturally, they became discontented. It has already been discussed, how the Mataks under the banner of the *Satra* united themselves against the monarchy. In the first phase of their struggle, when they achieved remarkable success against it, they made the whole state machinery inoperative, and popular elements everywhere were aroused to action. Thus the people of Darrang raised their protests against the exploitative policy of the Ahom government. Subsequently, the people of Nowgong under a Matak leader put the Ahom monarch Gaurinath Singha and the nobles to such humiliating position that they had to leave Nowgong. Soon after, the people of Darrang and Kamrup united against the monarchy creating very serious problems for it.

246. S.N. Bhattacharyya, *Mughal North-East Frontier Policy*, Calcutta, 1929, p. 27.

Thus, throughout the entire course of the Rebellion, it has been found that it was the people who were leading the events. Had there been an efficient leader, all the discontented popular uprisings could have been united together, changing the entire face of the country. Thus we find that the Rebellion was not only the first challenge to the Ahom monarchy, but also the first "socio-political movement in the history of Assam made for the people and by the people."²⁴⁷

247. D. Neog, *New Light in the History of Asamiya Literature*, Gauhati, 1962, p. 282.

The Matak Kingdom at Bengmara : Its Relation with the Ahom and the British Governments

Although several kingdoms were set up by the Mataks in different parts of eastern Assam, it was the one at Bengmara, which got its recognition from the Ahom government as an autonomous state and which retained this status till its annexation by the British in 1839. The boundary of the kingdom is not given by the *buranjis*. Even the *Vamsawali* of the Mayamara *Satra* is silent on this matter. It is, therefore, from the British records of the early 19th century that we can get an idea of its extent. Bengmara was known earlier as Changmaipathar.¹ Hamilton states that it was situated at three and a half days' journey south-east of the Ahom capital Rangpur in the south of Sadiya.² According to Pemberton, the Brahmaputra formed the northern and western, the Buri Dihing the southern and "a line extending from the Dihing to a point nearly opposite to the mouth of the Koondil nullah" the eastern boundaries of the

1. Hannay, *loc.cit.*, 672ff.

2. Hamilton, *op.cit.*, P. 11.

Matak kingdom.³ This is corroborated by Hannay, Robinson, Mills, M'Cosh and later by Hunter.⁴ The *Imperial Gazetteer of India, Eastern Bengal and Assam*, also states that the area between the Noa-Dihing, the Brahmaputra and the mountain ranges in the south, viz. the entire area of the erstwhile Lakhimpur district on the south bank of the Brahmaputra was known as the Matak Kingdom.⁵ In fact, it laid in the angle between the Brahmaputra and the Buri Dihing.^{6*}

The area of the Matak Kingdom was about 1800 square miles (11,52,000 acres).⁷ According to Pemberton, its "houses are said to amount to 10,000 and the men to 25,000, which if correctly estimated proves it to be one of the most adequately populated tracts in the whole valley of Assam."⁸ Later on, with the influx of immigrants from the territory of Purandar Singha, the tributary Ahom king, its population exceeded more than a lakh.⁹ The British sources divide the Matak kingdom into two divisions—Upper Matak and Lower Matak.¹⁰ Upper Matak was inhabited by the Morans. This tract was situated between the Dangoree and the Dibru rivers. The Morans inhabited a portion of Lower Matak as well, immediately to the south bank of the Dibru. Some of the important places of this area were—Barchakari, Saruchakari, Kachujan, Hulungaguri, Guijan,

3. Pemberton, *op.cit.*, p. 70.

4. Hannay, *loc.cit.*, pp. 671ff; Robinson, *op.cit.*, p. 329; Mills, *loc.cit.*, pp. 2ff; M'Cosh, *op.cit.*, p. 154, Hunter, *op.cit.*, pp. 292f.

5. *Imperial Gazetteer of India, Eastern Bengal and Assam*, 1909, p. 591.

6. HAG, p. 222.

* According to certain sources the boundaries of the Matak Kingdom were as follows : Dafala hill on the north, Disang river on the south, Arunachal Pradesh (earlier NEFA) on the east and the North Lakhimpur Sub-division (of the present Lakhimpur district) on the west. (*Matak Rajyamsha*), (ed.) D. Gohain and B. Gohain, (two descendants of Sarbananda Singha) January, 1978, pp. 6f; D. Gohain, "Matak Rajyar Chamu Itibritta" (in Assamese), *Souvenir, Matak Sanmilan*, p. 21.

7. Pemberton, *op.cit.*, p. 70; Mackenzie, *op.cit.*, p. 73.

8. Pemberton, *op.cit.*, p. 70.

9. Hannay, *loc.cit.*, pp. 671ff.

10. Hunter, *op.cit.*, p. 292.

Deomali, Bothojan, Jenganigaya, Majuligaya, Beesakhopi and others,¹¹ most of which are now tea estates and still known as such. Lower Matak lies between the Buri Dihing and the Brahmaputra covering an area of about 432,124 acres, excluding the *Chars* of the Brahmaputra.¹² It was mainly inhabited by members of the Matak community excluding the Morans. In course of time, immigrants from other parts of Assam, who were followers of the Brahmanical *Satras*, came and settled in this area; they were called *Bamuniyas* by the local people.¹³

The British sources mention Rangagara as the capital of the Matak kingdom.¹⁴ But Rangagara was only its temporary headquarters. Owing to constant engagements with Purnananda Buragohain, Sarbananda Singha built his temporary headquarters at Rangagara situated at a distance of five miles north of the present Tinsukia town. Sometimes, Sarbananda Singha even had to retreat to interior places like Barchakari and Saruchakari near the mouth of the Dibru river, where also he set up his temporary headquarters.¹⁵ In 1791, Sarbananda Singha finally abandoned Rangagara and established his permanent headquarters at Bengmara, identified with the present town of Tinsukia of the Dibrugarh district.¹⁶ Archaeological remains still existent in the Tinsukia town, as well as, contemporary literature support this contention.

The Matak Kingdom under Sarbananda Singha :

Sarbananda Singha was the first ruler of the Matak Kingdom at Bengmara. Contemporary chronicles contain only stray references to his activities, so it is difficult to know in detail about his ancestry and career. However, a *Vamsawali* named *Chutkichandra* written by Priyabat Gohain, a great grandson of

11. Mackenzie, *op.cit.*, p. 73; Hannay, *loc.cit.*, pp. 671ff.

12. Mills, *loc.cit.*, p. 4,

13. *Ibid.*

14. Neufville, *loc.cit.*, p. 334; Pemberton, *op.cit.*, p. 71; M'Cosh, *op.cit.*, p. 156; HAG, p. 291.

15. Neufville, *loc.cit.*, p. 334.

16. CBMR, p. 83.

Sarbananda Singha, throws some light in this respect. It is learnt from this source that Sarbananda claimed his descent from Bihar or Birpal, the founder of the Chutiya line of kings ruling in Sadiya from the later part of the 12th century to the early part of the 16th century, who in his turn claimed his descent from Bhismak, whose daughter Rukmini was married to Lord Krishna. Lankeswar Gohain, the last pensioner of the Matak ruling family, who died recently, claims that they belong to the Buruk Chutiya clan.^{17*}

Sarbananda's father Marutnandan hailed from 'the district of Sadiya',¹⁸ where once existed the historic Chutiya kingdom. Sarbananda's early name was Mejera. After his restoration, when Lakshminath Singha ordered a mass arrest and massacre of the Matak, Mejera was also one of those unfortunate victims to court arrest and wait for a tragic end of his life. During the period of his detention, he saw with his own eyes the inhumane punishment meted out to his comrades and their wives and children. According to the *Chutkichandra*, Mejera, resolving to take revenge on the Royalists escaped from the prison. He then joined Harihar Tati and actively helped him in organising the Rebellion, as a result of which, Gaurinath Singha had to take his flight to Gauhati.

After Matak occupation of the Ahom capital when Bharat Singha was made King at Rangpur, Mejera returned to his own area. His followers then selected him as their ruler. Mejera now assumed the name Sarbananda Singha and took the title 'Swargadeo' like his counterpart at Rangpur at the influence of the Mayamara *Mahanta* Pitambardeva. But he ruled the kingdom with the help of a Council of Elders. Godha alias Gopeenath, who also played an important role in organising the Rebellion, was made the Barbarua, who is referred to as a very clever diplomat (*Karjyata Kushala Chakri*), in certain Assamese chronicles.¹⁹

17. CBMR, p. 84; *Matak Rajvamsawali*, p. 1.

* *Asamar Padya Buranji* (p. 107) mentions Sarbananda as Ahom.

18. Hannay, *loc.cit.*, pp. 671ff.

19. APB, p. 223.

Initially Sarbananda Singha faced some troubles from a section of the inhabitants of Sadiya, assisted by the Khamtis and six Singpho Gams, residing on the east bank of the Noa-Dihing, who killed a number of his people near the confluence of Noa-Dihing and the Buri Dihing.²⁰ Within a short time, he overcame these troubles and consolidated his rule in the area with the help of a section of Singphos,²¹ who even joined him against the Ahom government. He had also cordial relation with Bharat Singha of Rangpur. While the latter was driven out from the capital at Rangpur by Capt. Welsh, Sarbananda Singha sent a contingent under the command of Gopeenath Barbarua to his aid. But their combined resistance against the Captain was of no avail. Later, Purnananda Buragohain, who was resolved to restore the strength and power of the Ahom monarchy, after his recovering Rangpur, sent a strong expedition against Sarbananda Singha. The latter, as has been mentioned earlier, was defeated who made his retreat to a Singpho village, wherefrom, he sought Burmese help. Purnananda Buragohain at last adopted a policy of conciliation with Sarbananda and tried to win him over. But Sarbananda Singha died in the later part of the year 1805 before the negotiation could be materialised. It was, therefore, his son Matibar, who made the agreement with the Buragohain.

According to some, Purnananda Buragohain conferred the title 'Barsenapati' on Sarbananda Singha,²² the source of this was a report of the British officers submitted to their government in 1881 where Sarbananda is referred as 'Barsenapati'. But the report submitted at such a later period cannot be a conclusive proof in this respect. Sarbananda Singha issued coins in his own name, wherein, he assumed the title 'Swargadeo'. The *buranjis* do not give us any information that Sarbananda paid any kind of tribute to the Ahom government. But the case was different with Matibar, who does not have any coin to his credit. Further, the British

20. Hannay, *loc.cit.*, pp. 672f.

21. *Ibid.*

22. CBMR, p. 84.

sources inform us that Matibar paid a tribute in kind to the Ahom government, and during the period of the Burmese invasions, he established himself in his father's position, which indicates that he began to behave as an independent ruler like his father. This shows that it was Matibar who entered into an agreement with Purnananda Buragohain.²³ Again, the observation that the title 'Barsenapati' was conferred on the Matak chief is not agreeable, because Matibar was already the Barsenapati or the 'great general' of the Matak kingdom. The Ahom government simply recognised this title on the understanding that thenceforth he would cease to use the title 'Swargadeo' and mint coins like an independent ruler.

During the days of Sarbananda Singha, several buildings such as, *Kamghar* (Administrative building), *Charaghar* (Reception room), *Melghar* (Council hall) etc. were constructed at Bengmara. A number of tanks were also dug in different parts of the kingdom, such as Na-Pukhuri, Bengmara Pukhuri, Gadhua Pukhuri, Chaul-dhua Pukhuri, Mah-dhua Pukhuri, Tinsukia Pukhuri* etc., which are still existent in the present Tinsukia town and other places of the Dibrugarh district. A number of roads, for example, Na-Ali, Godha Ali, Hati Ali, Rangagara Ali, Joypur Ali, Raj-garh Ali etc., which exist till to-day, were also built under the supervision of Godha Barbarua. There is a place known as *Rangmala* on the bank of the Dibru river. It is said that in this place, contrary to the *Rang-ghar*, the pavilion in the Ahom capital meant for the king and the nobles only, arrangements were made where all people could witness the amusements or participate in the mass fares.

Sarbananda Singha struck coins in both gold and silver. However, his silver coins only are extant. These are—one rupee, half rupee, *admahiya* (twelve paise) and *charatiya* (one anna=6 paise). The legends of the coins are as follows:²⁴

23. ADCB, p. 7.

* Because of this Tinichukia Pukhuri (three-cornered tank) the capital city at Bengmara later came to be known as Tinsukia.

24. S. Rajkumar, 'Purani Asamar Mudra', *op.cit.*, pp. 211f; Kanaklal Barua, 'Some Aspects of Assam Coins', *op.cit.*, p. 3.

One rupee coin :

obverse	Reverse
(a) <i>Sri Sri Swargadeva</i> <i>Sri Sarvananda sinha</i> <i>Nripasya Sake 1716</i>	<i>Sri Sri Krishana Charana</i> <i>Kamala makaranda</i> <i>madhukarasya</i>
(b) <i>Sri Sri Swarga Deva</i> <i>Sarbananda Sinha</i> <i>Narendrasya Sake 1717</i>	<i>Sri Sri Krishna Padapadma</i> <i>danda Makaranda brinda</i> <i>Madhukarasya</i>

Half rupee coin :

(a) <i>Sri Sri Sarbananda</i> <i>Sinha Nripasya</i>	<i>Sri Sri Krishna</i> <i>Madhukarasya</i>
(b) <i>Sri Sri Sarbananda</i> <i>Sinha Narendrasya</i>	<i>Sri Sri Krishna Pada</i> <i>Parayanasya</i>

Admahiya :

<i>Sri Sri Sarbananda</i>	<i>Sinha Nripasya</i>
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Charatiya :

<i>Sri Sarbananda</i>	<i>Sinha Nripasya</i>
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The script used in these coins is archaic Assamese. The weight of the one rupee coin is one *tola*. The invoking deity in his coins is Lord Krishna.

Matibar Barsenapati :

Sarbananda Singha was succeeded by his eldest son Matibar, who was already made the Barsenapati or the great general of the Matak army, during the life-time of his father. He continued negotiation with Purnananda Buragohain and entered into the agreement already referred to, by which the Ahom government recognised the autonomy of his kingdom as well as his title 'Barsenapati'. Matibar in turn, agreed to pay an annual tribute to the Ahom government in kind, consisting of articles

like elephants and silk.²⁵ This was sometime towards the later part of the year 1805. After this agreement, the Matak Chief appears to maintain friendly relationship with the Ahom government. For, the chronicles of the period do not contain any reference to a conflict between the Matak Chief and the Ahom government. After this agreement, both the Ahom Premier and the Matak Chief turned their attention to works of public welfare in their respective territories.

Affairs in Lower Assam :

The affairs in western or Lower Assam, which became a hot bed of conspiracies against the Ahom government, after the return of Capt. Welsh in 1794 and subsequently whose governor Badan Chandra became instrumental in precipitating the Burmese invasion to Assam, which consequently led to the inauguration of the British rule, sealing the fates of both the Ahom king and the Matak Chief, deserve a short reference here. When Purnananda Buragohain was preoccupied with restoring peace and order in Upper Assam, certain State officials of Gauhati tried to overthrow the Ahom rule from Lower Assam and establish their independent authority. To realise their selfish ends; some even went to the extent of procuring help from the Barkandazes. As a result, certain Barkandaz leaders for a time became real master of Lower Assam. For example, Sivadatta Chetia Barphukan, in league with Helimeli Salal Gohain and others, procured help from a Barkandaz leader Hazara Singh, and installed one Bapi Gohain's son as the king of Gauhati.²⁶ This was in the middle of 1794. The loyal State officers of Gauhati led by Jati Rajkhowa, could at last procure the arrest of the Barphukan by offering a reward of Rupees 10,000/- to the same Barkandaz leader.²⁷ Jati Rajkhowa was then made the Barphukan by common consent. But he could

25. Hannay, *loc.cit.*, pp. 673ff; Robinson, *op.cit.*, p. 328; M'Cosh, *op.cit.*, pp. 154f; Mills, *op.cit.*, pp. 2f; Neufville, *loc.cit.*, p. 334; HAG, p. 222; AARB, p. 437.

26. TB, pp. 130f.

27. TB, p. 131; BVMD; AARB, p. 131; *Barphukanar Geet* (ed.) S.K. Bhuyan, Gauhati, 1924, pp. 34f. (henceforth abbreviated as BPG).

remain in office only for three days.²⁸ For, Badan Chandra, the son of Haranath Senapati Phukan, who rendered great service to the Ahom monarch during the Matak Rebellion, promised a heavy bribe of sixty thousand rupees to Hazara Singh, who was then dictating the affairs of Lower Assam, in case the office of the Barphukan was given to him. Badan Chandra paid the promised amount to Hazara Singh by despoiling the gold and silver utensils of Kamakhya, Hajo and other temples.²⁹ In the meantime, encouraged by the fortunes of Hazara Singh, another Barkandaz leader Jogangiri by name, occupied Gauhati, and Badan Chandra fled away to Kajalimukh in Nowgong. The king at the instance of the Premier, sent a troop to recover Gauhati. This troop, with the help of the contingent coming from Bengal under the command of Niamut-ullah to guard the arms sent by the Governor-General from Bengal, in response to an appeal of the Assam King Gaurinath Singha, killed Hazara Singh and his followers; Jogangiri appears to take his flight.³⁰ Badan Chandra was deposed from his office and Kaliabhumura, the Uppar Dayangia Rajkhowa was placed in his stead. Kaliabhumura expelled the Barkandazes from Gauhati, recruiting a local force, for which he earned the title *Pratapballav*, meaning "one whose friend is valour",³¹ from King Kamaleswar Singha during whose reign, Purnananda Buragohain, as stated, was the *de facto* ruler. At the death of this king in 1811, the Buragohain with the consent of the other to great Gohains, placed Chandrakanta, the younger brother of the deceased monarch, on the throne, and continued to wield the reins of the government. But the Buragohain's love of power and his over-bearing conduct was disliked by the new king and a number of nobles. Kaliabhumura Barphukan died in November, 1810 and Purnananda Buragohain reinstated Badan Chandra to this office considering his family relation with the latter.*

28. TB, p. 131; BPG, p. 35.

29. TB, p. 131; HAG, p. 219; AARB, p. 390.

30. TB, pp. 132ff.

31. TB, p. 136; HKB, p. 83; KTP, pp. 51f; APB, p. 117.

* In the meantime, a marriage agreement was incidentally made between Pijau Gabharu, the daughter of Badan Chandra and Oreshanath, the son of Purnananda Buragohain,

His reinstatement, as rightly pointed out by Gait, was 'the most disastrous one which was destined to lead the country to even greater troubles than from which it had recently emerged'.³²

Burmese Invasion to Assam and Matibar Barsenapati :

The new king Chandrakanta Singha calculated that so long the Buragohain would remain in power, he would be only the titular head of the kingdom. He, therefore, hatched a conspiracy against the Premier with the help of Satram, who was originally the son of the Incharge of the royal poultry, but was subsequently raised to the office of the Charingia Phukan.³³ Badan Chandra Barphukan was also a party to it. When the conspiracy was detected, Satram was punished by the Buragohain,³⁴ but the involvement of Badan Chandra could not be proved. Chandrakanta Singha then hatched another conspiracy with the active support of Badan Chandra.³⁵ Believing that without foreign aid, deposition of the Buragohain was not possible, Chandrakanta directed Badan Chandra to secure British aid. Learning this, the Buragohain sent persons to arrest Badan Chandra, but the latter receiving a timely warning by an express courier, left Gauhati to Bengal.³⁶ He stayed there for some time and tried his level best to procure British aid,³⁷ but in vain.³⁸ He then went to Burma, and through Rangili,* the Assamese queen of the Burmese Emperor Badawpaya, he could convince the Emperor to send an army against the

32. HAG, p. 224.

33. ABNP; KTP, p. 53; HKB, pp. 85f; AARB, p. 449.

34. BVMD; HKB, p. 86; KTP, p. 53; G. Barua, *Assam Buranji*, pp. 176ff.

35. S.L. Barua, 'Chandrakanta Sinha and the fall of the Ahom Kingdom', *Journal of the Assam Research Society*, Vol. XX, 1972, pp. 39f.

36. BSC, July 14, 1826, Nos. 2-5; APB, p. 132; KTP, p. 53; HKB, p. 86.

37. BPC, Dec. 8, 1815, Nos. 52 & 53 (A&B).

38. BPC, Dec. 8, 1815, No. 54; AB, p. 378.

* Rangili, who belonged to the Ahom Duara family, was presented to the Singpho Chief Bichanong by Purnananda Buragohain as a peace overture. Bichanong offered her to Badawpaya.

Buragohain to restore Chandra Kanta to his proper authority.³⁹

Keenly interested in territorial aggrandisement towards Assam, with a view to making it a base to fight the British, Badawpaya simply considered it as a God-sent opportunity. Ere long he had several times sent Burmese soldiers to Assam in response to appeals of the fugitive Ahom princes, and of the Mataks in league with the Singphos and the Khamtis. Thus Bijay Barmura Gohain, the grandson of Rajeswar Singha, twice appealed to the Burmese monarch for help and the latter twice sent his army to Assam, once early in 1797 and again in August of that year,⁴⁰ only to be called back at the intervention of Capt. Hiram Cox, the British Resident at Amarapura,⁴¹ who falsely represented that Assam was already a "tributary to the English and under their protection".⁴² Further, as stated, in response to appeals made by the Mataks in alliance with the Singphos and the Khamtis, the Burmese soldiers had twice entered Assam. But Purnananda Buragohain managed to send them back with bribes and presents on both occasions.⁴³

Under the circumstances, the Burmese Emperor who was eager to extend his arms up to Chittagong, Luckipore, Dacca and the whole of Cossimbazar,⁴⁴ then under British possession, was only too glad to extend his help to Badan Chandra. Accordingly, he sent a large army of 8,000 strong under the command of the Man-Mo Chief in the early part of 1817 for the help of the Barphukan and the Ahom king, which swelled to 16,000 when it reached Assam, being joined by the Chiefs of Mungkong

39. Scott to Swinton, Nov. 28, 1821, BPC, Jan. 11, 1822, Nos. 22-23; AB, p. 378; AARB, pp. 459, 466; BPG, pp. 67-73.

40. AARB, pp. 454f; Capt. Hiram Cox, *Burman Empire*, London, 1821, p. 70. In the latter source, the name of the Prince is not mentioned. Bhuyan, however, has mentioned that he was probably Bijay Barmura Gohain.

41. AARB, p. 462; D.G.E. Hall, *A History of South East Asia*, Reprint, 1970, pp. 589ff, 596.

42. BPC, March 2, 1798, No. 5; Cox, *op. cit.*, pp. 138f; AARB, p. 465.

43. Hannay, *loc. cit.*, p. 673f; HAG, p. 228; AARB, p. 464.

44. Cox, *op. cit.*, p. 300; Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 594f.

and Hukong.⁴⁵ Hearing of the advance of the Burmese, the Buragohain sent an army to resist their advance. Battle was fought at Ghiladhari. But at this critical juncture, Purnananda Buragohain breathed his last.⁴⁶ He was then succeeded by his son Ruchinath, who suggested the king to leave Jorhat and to go down to Gauhati, but Chandrakanta did not listen.⁴⁷ The Burmese soldiers in the company of Badan Chandra then advanced to Jorhat and reached the place in the middle of March 1817. At the instance of the Burmese, Chandrakanta then appointed Badan Chandra as his Premier with the new designation *Mantri-Phukan*.⁴⁸ Then the Burmese returned to their country with a huge war indemnity and an Ahom princess, named Hemo Aideo, for their monarch.⁴⁹

Soon after the return of the Burmese, Badan Chandra was killed at the instance of the queen-mother Numali.⁵⁰ Chandrakanta then sent messages to Ruchinath Buragohain to come back to Jorhat and resume charge of the administration. But Ruchinath could not forgive Chandrakanta for conspiring against his father, and for having "entered into a humiliating alliance with the Burmese."⁵¹ On the other hand, he raised an army with the help of his brother, Jagannath Dhekial Phukan, and proceeded towards Jorhat. On their approach Chandrakanta fled to Rangpur. Ruchinath occupied Jorhat and declared Purandar Singha, the son of Brajanath, the great grandson of Rajeswar Singha as the King. He then arrested Chandrakanta Singha and kept in confinement at Taratali near Jorhat. This was on February 20, 1818.⁵²

45. *Weissalisa*, (ed.), M. Bora, Dibrugarh University, 1977, p. 17.

46. KTP, p. 54; HKB, p. 87; APB, pp. 135, 235; BVMD; ABNP; AB, p. 379; SAB, p. 190.

47. HKB, p. 87; KTP, p. 54; AARB, p. 467.

48. TB (E), p. 199; KTP, p. 58; HKB, p. 88.

49. HKB, p. 88; KTP, p. 5.

50. BSC, July 14, 1826, Nos. 2-5; BVMD; HKB, p. 88; KTP, pp. 54f; SAB, p. 193; AB, p. 382; AARB, p. 469.

51. AARB, p. 469.

52. HKB, pp. 88f; KTP, p. 55; TB (E), p. 201; AB, p. 383; AARB, pp. 470f.

When this news reached the Burmese Emperor, he sent his second army to restore Chandrakanta Singha to his legal position under the command of Kiamingi alias Alumingi Bargohain.⁵³ It is believed that this time the Burmese army was accompanied by one Assamese named Patalang Senapati, alias Momai Barua, who settled in Burma and accepted service under the Burmese government.⁵⁴ Ruchinath and Purandar Singha, at the advance of the Burmese army, fled towards Gauhati. They continued to hold, however, a nominal control in the tract west of Jorhat. Chandrakanta Singha was again placed on the throne by the Burmese in the month of March 1819.⁵⁵ Kiamingi returned to Ava, leaving Mingimaha Tilowa and his two lieutenants Sajati Phukan and Patalang Senapati, to help Chandrakanta Singha in establishing his authority firmly in Assam.⁵⁶

Chandrakanta Singha decided to bring the rest of Assam under his control. He calculated that for this purpose, the help of the Matak Barsenapati Matibar, was also essential. When this appeal was made, Matibar readily agreed. Accordingly, the combined forces of the Burmese, the Ahoms and the Mataks, sent under the command of Momai Barua, attacked Ruchinath Buragohain at Khagarijan in Nowgong,⁵⁷ and compelled him to retreat to the British territory. He was also accompanied by Purandar Singha. From their resort at Silmari, Ruchinath and Purandar tried to procure British help to recover their lost positions. But the British declined to give them help, though they were granted safe asylum within their territory.⁵⁸ Meanwhile the Burmese force, after firmly establishing the authority of Chandrakanta Singha, returned to their country leaving Patalang Senapati to his help, who had married Chandrakanta's sister and became his chief adviser, being appointed to the

53. KTP, p. 57; HKB, p. 90; SAB, p. 193; TB (E), p. 203; AB, p. 383.

54. AARB, p. 472.

55. KTP, p. 57; HKB, p. 90.

56. AARB, p. 473.

57. APB, pp. 269ff, AARB, p. 473.

58. BPC, July 29, 1820, No. 85; HAG, p. 233; AARB, p. 473.

office of the Barbarua.⁵⁹ Chandrakanta sent another princess named Upama Aideo to the Burmese monarch as a token of gratitude.⁶⁰

Chandrakanta Singha, an ambitious and power-loving man as he was, did not like to remain a puppet at the hands of the Burmese. He was inspired by Patalang Barbarua to construct a fort at Dighalihat near Joypur, to be used as a protective measure against further Burmese invasion.⁶¹ He had also calculated that cementing an alliance with Matibar Barsenapati was highly essential, because the Matak, who had so long been in good terms with the Burmese, might join their hands with the latter, in case he would raise his head against them (the Burmese). So he offered the post of Buragohain to Matibar Barsenapati's brother Kalibar and thereby placated the Matak Chief against the Burmese.⁶²

In May 1819, Badawpaya breathed his last, and was succeeded by his grandson Bagyidaw (1819-1837). The new Emperor deputed a contingent under Mingimaha Tilowa with some valuable presents as a mark of his apparent friendship,⁶³ but with the actual design of exercising his sovereignty over the Ahom monarch. On approaching Joypur, Mingimaha saw the fort and could understand the real object of the Ahom king. He destroyed the fort and proceeded towards Jorhat. Scared at this, Chandrakanta Singha fled away towards Gauhati, handing over the administration of his country to Kalibar Buragohain. Kalibar tried to resist the Burmese, but sustained defeat and imprisonment. Later on, he was killed by the Burmese.⁶⁴

After occupying Jorhat, Mingimaha vainly tried to induce Chandrakanta Singha to return to the capital. He became

59. AARB, p. 475.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 473.

61. HKB, p. 91; KTP, p. 57; TB (E), p. 205; AB, p. 383.

62. APB, pp. 267f; HKB, p. 90.

63. APB, pp. 165f, 187; HKB, p. 91; TB (E), p. 205; KTP, p. 57; *Assam: Buranji*, Kamaleswar Singha to Purandar Singha.

64. APB, pp. 267f.

highly exasperated on Chandrakanta's refusal to return, and as a measure of retaliation, killed a large number of people including several high officials. He then placed Jogeswar Singha, a brother of Hemo Aideo, on the Ahom throne.⁶⁵ Jogeswar Singha was a mere puppet and Assam practically passed under the control of the Burmese.⁶⁶ Thus, the long cherished desire of the Burmese Emperor to get a base in Assam to carry on his imperialistic aggression against the British was fulfilled. The fugitive Ahom kings, Chandrakanta and Purandar, continued their isolated efforts to recover their lost possessions,⁶⁷ but without any success. Their activities encouraged the Burmese monarch to send fresh reinforcements in order to strengthen their base in Assam against the British.

During the period of the Burmese rule in Assam, which is rightly referred to as the 'Reign of Terror', there was no security of lives and properties of the people. Nay, even on earlier two occasions when the Burmese returned from Assam, they committed plunder and rapine on the innocent inhabitants that they came across.⁶⁸ The weight of their oppressive rule was felt in the arbitrary taxes imposed on all classes of people and the way in which the money was realised.⁶⁹ Besides, pecuniary burden imposed on the people, the Burmese killed many innocent people in the most barbarous way.⁷⁰ "Some they flayed alive, others they burnt in oil, and others again they drove in crowds to village *Namghars* which they then set on fire." "All who were suspected of being inimical to the reign of terror were seized and bound by Burmese executioners, who cut off the lobes of the poor victims' ears and choice portions of the body, such as the points of the shoulders, and actually ate the raw flesh before the living sufferers: they then inhumanly inflicted with a sword, deep but not mortal gashes on the body, that the

65. AB, pp. 383f; HKB, p. 91; KTP, p. 58.

66. KTP, p. 58; HKB, p. 91; AARB, p. 484; HAG, pp. 224f.

67. APB, pp. 262, 270ff; AARB, pp. 473ff; HAG, p. 233.

68. AARB, p. 506.

69. *Weissalisa*, pp. 27f.

70. BVMD.

mutilated might die slowly, and finally closed the tragedy by disembowelling the wretched victims.”⁷¹

During the period of the Burmese invasions, Matibar Barsenapati played a diplomatic role. As he was already in good terms with the Burmese, he did not like to offend the Burmese Emperor. But at the same time, when the Ahom king Chandrakanta Singha requested him to make his brother Kalibar to accept the office of the Buragohain, he complied with it. This shows that the Barsenapati was not willing to create ill-feelings with the Ahom monarch as well. But after Chandrakanta's flight, and Kalibar's death in the battle against the Burmese, Matibar Barsenapati gave his undivided loyalty to the Burmese monarch. To cement his alliance, he even kept in his residence a *Vakeel* or an agent of the Burmese, named Kaminee Phukan, on regular pay,⁷² and established marriage relationship with the Burmese monarch by giving one of his daughters in marriage to him.⁷³ Further, during the period of the Burmese invasion, he offered all kinds of help except military to the Burmese soldiers.⁷⁴

By thus keeping the Burmese in good humour, Matibar Barsenapati assumed independence and “practically established himself in the position of his father.”⁷⁵ Further, his diplomacy had protected his people from Burmese depredation in the Matak kingdom. This is also confirmed by British sources, according to which the people of the Matak kingdom alone were free from Burmese oppression.⁷⁶

71. J. Butler, *Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam*, pp. 248f, cited from HAG, p. 237.

72. Hannay, *loc.cit.*, pp. 671f.

73. CBMR, p. 90.

74. Mills, *loc.cit.*, pp. 2f (from Dalton's Account).

75. Hannay, *loc.cit.*, pp. 671ff; Robinson, *op.cit.*, p. 328.

76. Pemberton, *op.cit.*, p. 70; Robinson, *op.cit.*, p. 328; Hannay, *loc.cit.*, pp. 671ff; Neufville, *loc.cit.*, p. 334; Mills, *loc.cit.*, pp. 2f; M'Gosh, *op.cit.*, pp. 154f.

The Burmese also, on their part, wanted the Matak as their ally; because they considered the help of the Matak indispensable to carry on their aggressive policy against the British. The strategic position of the Matak kingdom, being contiguous to the territories of the Khamtis and the Singphos, which lay on the way between Burma and Assam, made it essential for the Burmese to retain their alliance with the Matak. The Burmese knew that for the supply of foodstuffs and even manpower, they would have to depend on the Matak. It is also for this reason that the Burmese did not commit any plunder or ravage in the Matak Kingdom.

Anglo-Burmese War :

The attitude of the British government towards the affairs of Assam since the departure of Capt. Welsh, had been that of a silent observer.⁷⁷ But inspite of this so-called apathetic attitude, the British government was unnerved and unhappy to see Assam becoming a prey of the Burmese expansionist policy, which injured their commercial and imperial interests in the north-east. The Burmese, encouraged by their success in Assam, made frequent inroads into the British territory with an intention of extending their sway further west.⁷⁸ They also demanded the expulsion of the fugitive Ahom monarchs from the British territory with threats of arms.⁷⁹ Not prepared to fight the Burmese right then, the British used to give polite and conciliatory replies, which led the Burmese to underestimate the strength of the British.⁸⁰ But when the Burmese occupied the British outpost at Shahpuri at the mouth of the river Naf on September 24, 1823,⁸¹ and soon afterwards made war-like preparations in Assam, Cachar and Arakan and marched to

77. ADCB, pp. 7ff; HAG, pp. 224ff; R.M. Lahiri, *The Annexation of Assam*, Reprint, 1975, pp. 7f (henceforth abbreviated as AAL).

78. BPC, Nov. 28, 1821, No. 3.

79. BPC, July 26, Nos. 48, 49, 51, Sept. 9, Nos. 20-21; Sept. 27, No. 71 of 1822.

80. AARB, pp. 510f; Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

81. Wilson, *op. cit.*, Nos. 10-21.

Bhutan,⁸² the British government also abandoned its pacific policy and mobilised its army against the Burmese. When the latter attacked Cachar in the early part of 1824, the British government declared a formal war against them on March 5, 1824.⁸³

Within three weeks of the declaration of the war, Assam up to Kaliabar came under the British.⁸⁴ Colonel Richards advanced to Jorhat, at which, the Burmese made a hasty retreat to the fort of Rangpur. In the meantime, dissension cropped up in the Burmese camp, and an acute shortage of foodstuffs compelled the Burmese leaders at Rangpur to surrender to the British on January 31, 1825.⁸⁵ With the capitulation of Rangpur, the First Anglo-Burmese War* in Assam came to a close, though it was continued in two other fronts, Aracan and Rangoon, till the Burmese were finally defeated, and peace was concluded at Yandaboo on February 24, 1826. By this treaty, the Burmese monarch gave up his claim on the provinces of Assam, Manipur, Cachar and Jayantia.⁸⁶ Assam thus formally passed into the hands of the British.

*Changed Relation between the Matak*s and the Singphos :

During the period of the Burmese rule in Assam, there occurred a change in the relation between the Mataks and the Singphos. The latter possibly disfavoured the negotiations between the Matak Chief and the Ahom government and more.

82. BPC, Nov. 9, 1822, No. 42; AARB, p. 512.

83. HAG, p. 234; Roberts, *op.cit.*, pp. 295f; Wilson, *op.cit.*, No. 30.

84. BSC., 1824, May 28, No. 19; AAL, p. 14; A.C. Banerjee, *op.cit.*, pp. 250f.

85. Wilson, *op.cit.*, No. 92 (f); BSC, March 4, 1825, No. 2; AARB, p. 542; A.C. Banerjee, *op.cit.*, pp. 285ff.

* For details, see A.C. Banerjee, *The Eastern Frontier of British India*, Chapter IX, pp. 247ff.

86. C.U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads*, Vol. II, Calcutta, 1909, p. 230; Hall, *op.cit.*, p. 599; Roberts, *op.cit.*, pp. 297f; HAG, p. 340; AARB, p. 550; TB (E), p. 210.

particularly the acceptance of the office of the Buragohain by the Barsenapati's brother. Now as they got the opportunity arising out of the confusion of the Burmese invasions, they repeated their depredations to the plains of Assam and carried away a large number of Assamese people as slaves, with the help of Boglee Phukan, a Burmese Commander, and his followers, who were allowed to leave after the Burmese capitulation at Rangpur.⁸⁷ In second week of March, 1825, about 7,500 Singphos heavily armed, attacked the Matak Kingdom, as well as, Sadiya, where a Khamti Chief, assuming the title Sadiyakhwa Gohain, had been ruling since 1794, driving away the local Assam governor of that area. Considering the formidability of the raid, the two Chiefs, viz., Matibar Barsenapati of the Matak Kingdom and the Khamti Chief of Sadiya, appealed for British help.⁸⁸ The British also agreed to respond to their appeal thinking that by this, they would be able to win over both the Mataks and the Khamtis, whose service they could utilise against the Burmese and their allies in future.

Accordingly, Lt. Neufville proceeded against the raiders.⁸⁹ The Barsenapati and the Sadiyakhwa Gohain offered all possible help to the British officer. The Singphos sustained a crushing defeat, at which the Burmese soldiers who were meanwhile reinforced by a contingent of six hundred strong, made retreat to their country. Several Singpho Chiefs then surrendered to the British. Lt. Neufville released about 6,000 Assamese captives from the hands of the Singphos.⁹⁰ He had rewarded Matibar Barsenapati and the Sadiyakhwa Gohain with cash payment for their help in conducting the expedition.⁹¹

87. S.P., 1825, May 28, No. 28; AAL, p. 22.

88. BSPC, 1825, April 15, No. 13.

89. ADCB, 15; Nirode K. Barooah, *David Scott in North-East India*, Delhi, 1970, p. 116; AAL, pp. 22f.

90. BSPC, 1825, Sept. 30, No. 14; Mackenzie, *op.cit.*, p. 64; HAG; p. 286; AARB, pp. 544f; ADCB. p. 15; AAL, pp. 22f.

91. AAL, pp. 23f.

The Political Settlement with Matibar Barsenapati :

The British, as soon as they reached Gauhati on March 28, 1824, on their way to drive away the Burmese from Assam, issued a proclamation that they were not led by the thirst of conquest, but were forced in the interest of their defence to intrude into this country, and assured that soon after the enemy would be expelled, they would re-establish a government adapted to the needs of the people and 'calculated to promote the happiness of all classes'.⁹² But after the conclusion of the Treaty of Yandaboo, they slowly began extending their arms to North-East India. David Scott was appointed as Agent to the Governor-General, North-East Frontier.⁹³ He suggested the restoration of the former Ahom monarchy in Upper Assam above Biswanath, under British protection on a tributary basis.⁹⁴ But his suggestion was rejected by the Supreme Government. Lower Assam, which was expected to yield a revenue of 3 lakh rupees, had already been annexed to the British Indian Empire.⁹⁵ Scott had also suggested to station an officer in or near the area occupied by the Matak, the Khamtis and the Singphos. Accordingly, Capt. Neufville was appointed political Agent, Upper Assam, with headquarters at Biswanath, who was to visit Sadiya at least once a year. The British expected that the revenue of Upper Assam also, under better management, would yield a surplus even after making adequate provisions for the members of the royal family and dignitaries of the realm. They were, therefore, unwilling to hand it over to an Ahom Prince. But Upper Assam, which was contiguous to the Burmese border and inhabited by the 'sturdy and freedom-loving people' like the Matak, the Khamtis and the Singphos, was a serious problem in comparison with Lower Assam, whose inhabitants as Scott himself felt, "would not have the same aversion to the rule of the British, rather they might prefer them to their former masters, who were reported to have humiliated and heaped upon

92. Wilson, *op.cit.*, No. 32.

93. HAG, p. 290; AAL, pp. 28f.

94. BSC, 1826, July 14, No. 2.

95. *Ibid.*

them all sorts of indignities."⁹⁶ Above all, the British feared that they would be responsible for the general defence and protection against internal commotion or external aggression of this region. They had already been warned by the activities of the Burmese, and by the alliance of the Matak, the Singphos, and the Khamtis with these invaders. They, therefore, wanted to maintain the territories of these people as buffer ones between the Burmese and British Empires. With this end in view, they made a settlement with the Matak in May, 1826.

The British officers who knew the Matak through their Singpho expedition, were impressed by their strong, sturdy and courageous feats. They in fact, realised that the Matak, along with the Khamtis, were the only persons of consequence in Assam, who were of any use in maintaining tranquillity on its borders, infested as they were with wild and war-like tribes.⁹⁷ David Scott suggested to utilise these people as a political screen between the Burmese and the newly acquired possessions of the Company. He, therefore, recommended that the territory of the Matak along with those of the Khamtis and the Singphos, should be handed over to their own control, after their 'nominal annexation'.⁹⁸ He also urged upon the government to bestow upon the Chiefs of these territories, some marks of distinction.⁹⁹ The Calcutta Council, however, feared that in case an Ahom prince was restored in Upper Assam, there would be constant feuds between him and these Chiefs, but this apprehension of the Council was removed by Scott's suggestion that a 'clear definition and demarcation of the boundaries among them would solve the problem'.¹⁰⁰ Agreeably to the suggestion of Mr. Scott, the Barsenapati was placed 'in the semi-independent possession of the Matak country', and

96. BSPC, 1826, March 7, No. 4, April 5, No. 27; AARB, pp. 55 ; ADCB, p. 19.

97. AAL, p. 35.

98. S.P., 1826, July 14, No. 9.

99. *Ibid.*

100. BSPC, 1828, March 7, No. 8; AAL, p. 34.

Scott entered into an agreement with him on May 13, 1826.¹⁰¹

According to the terms of the Agreement,* the Barsenapati, undertook to provide an armed contingent of 300 *gots* of *Paiks*, and to supply provisions to any British expedition passing through his territory. But his criminal and judicial power were reduced. He was to send reports to the Agent, in cases of murder, dacoity, grave wounds, and thefts above rupees fifty. The papers and the person or persons concerned would be produced before a court instituted for that purpose. The proceedings, were of course to be submitted to the Chief, and under his orders, sentences would be carried out. He was not to pay any revenue. He, however, was to be held responsible for the collection of the poll-tax of the British subjects emigrating to his territory. To collect that tax, an officer of the Company would be stationed in his capital. A similar Agreement was made with the Khamtis of Sadiya also.

The Supreme Government considered the Agreements with the Bar-Senapati and the Khamti Chief, to be the soundest policy for the pacification of these people.¹⁰² Cordial relationship existed between the Bar-senapati and the British government till the year 1833, when Upper Assam was restored to Purandar Singha, an Ahom prince, even though the British had suspected the Matakas of having an alliance with the rebellious elements in Upper Assam, who started their activities soon after the inauguration of the British rule.

Anti-British Movements :

As Scott's suggestion for restoring Upper Assam to a prince of the old ruling family did not get favourable response from the government, he had to proceed with introducing the New

¹⁰¹ P.C., 1833, Jan. 7, No. 82; Aitchison, *op.cit.*, pp. 138f; Robinson, *op.cit.*, p. 329; HAG, p. 291; AAL, p. 37; ADCB, p. 34; Nirode K. Barooah, *op.cit.*, p. 121.

For the Agreement, see, 'Appendix D'.

Administration. His policy of reconciling the old aristocracy, whose monopolies of privileges and perquisites were badly affected by the British regime, by involving them in the New Administration did not bear the desired fruits. They proved to be utterly incompetent in the new set up, which was completely foreign to them. Moreover, the number of beneficiaries was extremely small to successfully silence the strong opposition of the disaffected groups. David Scott, therefore, recruited 'men of ability and business' from the neighbouring province of Bengal, who replaced the old aristocracy.¹⁰³ Thus shorn of power and privileges, the old aristocracy was subjected to abject poverty. The introduction of a new revenue system,¹⁰⁴ in the form of cash payment at the rate of Rs. 3/- per *Paik* in place of the old *Paik* system by which each *Paik* was to give his service to the State for 3 or 4 months in a year, created discontentment among the people. Because, there being little circulation of money, and trade being at a standstill during the period of the Burmese war, very few people could afford to make cash payment.¹⁰⁵ Further, as the estates held by the nobles were now made liable for taxation, which they had been enjoying rent-free since time immemorial, there was great resentment amongst them against the New Regime.

As a result of all this, the old aristocracy began to pin their hopes in the restoration of the old regime, and along with other disaffected elements made a series of attempts to overthrow the new government. As pointed out by R.M. Lahiri, "It was a united front blessed by Chandrakanta, connived at by the Ava authority and led by the ex-functionaries of the Ahom government."¹⁰⁶ A series of attempts were made by the members of the old aristocracy towards that end. One such attempt was made by Dhanjay Pealia Buragohain, who was inflicted death punishment for attempting to make one Gomdhar

102. BSPC, 1828, Nov. 7, No. 8; ADCB, p. 34.

103. BPC, 1831, June 10, No. 51; ADCB, p. 51.

104. AAL, p. 61.

105. ADCB, p. 48; AAL, p. 167.

106. AAL, p. 58.

the King.¹⁰⁷ He managed his escape to the Matak kingdom towards the close of the year 1829. One of the sons of the Matak Barsenapati joined Dhanjay [going against the advice of his father. A number of Matak subjects also extended him their help.¹⁰⁸ But the plot was soon detected and the leaders were either hanged or imprisoned. In the hill area, the most serious and protracted rebellion was carried on by the Khasis under the heroic leadership of Tirut Singh.* In 1830, reports were also received of hostile preparations among the Singphos and the Khamtis aided and abetted by 'their brethen beyond the frontier'.¹⁰⁹ In March of that year, they actually invaded the plains, and marched towards Sadiya. Capt. Neufville, however, dispersed them. Arrangements were also made to prevent any attempt from the Burmese side.¹¹⁰ The Barsenapati was suspected by the local authority of abetting some of these anti-British movements, but no conclusive proof could be traced.¹¹¹

Restoration of Upper Assam to Purandar Singha and its Annexation :

The Government then restored Upper Assam to an Ahom prince, Purandar Singha, who entered into a formal agreement with the government on March 2, 1833, agreeing to pay an annual tribute of Rs. 50,000/- and to obey the orders of the Political Agent.¹¹² The tribute was fixed on a mere guess work. It was a very difficult problem for Purandar to realise the amount from the impoverished *riots*, satisfy the old aristocracy by providing them with ranks and privileges and at the same time obey the orders of the Political Agent. According to the British officers themselves, "compared to the meagre resources,

107. BSPC, 1830, March 5, No. 3; ADCB, pp. 51ff.

108. BPC, 1830, Sept. 24, No. 76; AAL, 68.

* For details, see, R.M. Lahiri, *The Annexation of Assam*, Chapter III, Section III, 'The Khasi Insurrection', pp. 72ff.

109. AAL, p. 100.

110. AARB, p. 560.

111. ADCB, p. 128.

112. Aitchison, *op.cit.*, pp. 135ff; AARB, p. 563.

Raja Purandar had paid the highest amount of tribute in British India."¹¹³ Francis Jenkins, the new Commissioner and Agent to the Governor-General could realise the difficulties of Purandar Singha, 'who ruled in a territory bounded on the one side by the Matak territory, where the assessment was too low, and on the other, by British territory, where the redressal of grievances was quick'.¹¹⁴ There was large emigration from his kingdom to that of the Barsenapati or to the neighbouring British territory. Purandar Singha appealed to the government to get a redress of these grievances but in vain. The result was obvious. On charges of default of payment and mal-administration, Purandar Singha was deposed in October, 1838 and his territory was annexed to the British Indian Empire.

Revision of the Agreement with the Barsenapati :

Meanwhile the government wanted to have a revision of the terms of the Agreement with Matibar Barsenapati, the Matak Chief. The local authority had a suspicion that the Barsenapati had been concealing the actual number of the *Paiks* in his territory, and so they had been always insisting on commuting the *Paik* service into money payment.¹¹⁵ They also wanted to make the Barsenapati a tributary ruler, which would give their government a new source of income. As a preliminary step to this end, Capt. White made a proposal to the Barsenapati to commute the services of the contingent supplied by him for an amount of Rs. 10,000/- 'on the tempting allurement' of conferring the title 'Raja' on him and on the assurance of safe succession to his heirs.¹¹⁶ The Barsenapati emphatically turned down the proposal saying that, "If the Government was prepared to tax his subjects, they must take the country into their own hands; he would rather go out of the country than raise such a tax."¹¹⁷ This was in the early part of 1835.

113. P.C., 1837, Jan. 26, No. 59; AAL, p. 174.

114. ADCB, p.121.

115. Robinson, *op.cit.*, p. 329.

116. BPC, 1835, April 13, No. 4; ADCB, p. 105.

117. BPC, 1835, April 13, No. 4.

In the mean time, a serious dispute arose between the Barsenapati and the Sadiyakhowa Gohain on the question of exercising authority over certain refugees of Upper Assam, who settled near Saikhowa. The British officer stationed there, to avert the clash, asked the two Chiefs to appear before him to find out a solution. The Khamti Chief defied the order, and forcibly occupied the disputed area, which he refused to give up on demand. Action was taken against the Khamti Chief, who was removed from his office and then taken to Gauhati as an internee. The area on either side of the river, i.e. Sadiya and Saikhowa, was brought under British control.¹¹⁸

The Agent again proposed a revision of the Agreement. The Barsenapati, seeing the fate of the Khamti Chief for defying the orders of the Government, had now agreed to the proposal. Consequently, a revised agreement* was made on January 23, 1835 by which the Barsenapati agreed to give up his claim on the disputed area in Saikhowa, and to pay capitation tax for the 300 men that he used to supply to the British government, at the rate of Rs. 6/- per man i.e. Rs. 1800-per year.¹¹⁹

After the annexation of Purandar Singha's territory in October, 1838, the British government now faced the problem of exodus from Upper Assam to the Matak kingdom which had so long embroiled that unfortunate ruler. Therefore, they felt the need of again revising their settlement with the Barsenapati in a way that would serve their interest best. The Matak kingdom had already attracted the attention of the British officials, as the best tea-growing area of Upper Assam. Moreover, the sturdy Matak people, they thought, could be profitably engaged in tea-cultivation. The 'Political danger from Burma' was gradually receding and the British had been well consolidating their position in the rest of Assam. Under the circumstances, it appeared

118. BPC, 1835, March 13, No. 1; *Ibid.*, White to Jenkins, Dec. 22, 1834; Jenkins to Secy., Govt. of Bengal, Jan. 20, 1834; HAG, p. 303; ADCB, p. 127.

* For the Agreement, see, 'Appendix E'.

119. Aitchison, *op.cit.*, pp. 138ff, No. XXXVII.

that the Matak Chief would soon suffer the fate of Purandar Singha.

Matibar Barsenapati, who had been ailing, had divided his kingdom into seven administrative divisions and placed his seven elder sons in charge of each of them.¹²⁰ Jenkins thought that this arrangement would fit most to adopting a policy of creating a division amongst the Matak. He calculated that if separate arrangements were made with the seven brothers regarding cultivation of tea in their respective areas, there would not be a united opposition from these brothers. Further, such an arrangement would keep the brothers weak and hence obliged to the British government. With that end in view, he sent Capt. White to visit the Matak kingdom in March 1838. White was also instructed to see the possibility of imposing any new tax on the Barsenapati. White, after his visit to the Matak kingdom, submitted a proposal that after the death of the Barsenapati, the country should be handed over to his sons as allotted to them by their father, but on condition of paying half of their collected revenue to the British government. When the proposal was sent to the Supreme Government by Jenkins, the Government refused to comply with it, for it thought, that this uncalled for interference would create unrest amongst the Matak who had been remaining 'otherwise peaceful'.¹²¹

Meanwhile, the health condition of the Barsenapati further deteriorated. He, therefore, with the consent of the Council of Elders, as well as of all his sons, selected his second son* Bhagirath alias Maju Gohain, as his successor and handed over the charge of administration to him. He then sent the proposal to the British Government for approval, which it accorded as a provisional measure, but cautioning the Chief at the same time, not to make permanent assignment to any of his sons without referring the matter to it.¹²² On January 2, 1839, Matibar

120. AAL, p. 200.

121. P.C., 1838, April 18, Nos. 56-57; ADCB, pp. 128f.

* According to R.M. Lahiri, he was Barsenapati's third son. (*op.cit.*, p. 200).

122. P.C., 1838, Oct. 31, Nos. 84-85; AAL, p. 200; ADCB, p. 129.

Barsenapati breathed his last.

The Annexation of the Matak Kingdom :

A few days after the death of the Barsenapati, Capt. Hannay, the Commandant of the 2nd Assam Sebundy Corps, visited the Matak Kingdom and found that the charge of its administration was already assumed by Maju Gohain.¹²³ 'To set aside altogether the arrangement made by the (Barsenapati) and to impose a new one would not have been easy on the part of the local authorities, had the Matak remained solidly behind the family of the Barsenapati as hitherto they had'.¹²⁴ But in the mean time, disintegration had set in amongst the Matak and fissiparous tendencies were to be seen even during the later part of the rule of Matibar. Opinions differ as regards the causes of this disunity. According to Capt. White, the dissensions were occasioned by sectarian differences between the Morans, the inhabitants of Upper Matak, who were followers of the *Mahanta* of Tiphuk *Satra*, a branch of the main Mayamara *Satra* and the non-Morans, who inhabited the Lower Matak and were disciples of Bhaktanandadev, the head of the main *Satra*.¹²⁵ But according to Capt. Vetch, the quarrel arose 'from the independent feeling to the Morans', who could not submit 'quietly to be taxed by those whom they always considered on an equality with them'.¹²⁶ Capt. Hannay echoes a similar view stating that the 'Morans, who had set up a *Guru* for them, considered themselves on an equality with the Senaputtee', and 'they are not at all satisfied with the high station he (meaning Barsenapati) has lately assumed, and particularly with their having been money taxed, and also with regard to other unusual exactions made on them by him'.¹²⁷

123. P.C., 1839, Jan. 30, No. 63.

124. ADCB, p. 129.

125. P.C. 1839, Feb. 20, No. 89; Hannay to Jenkins, Jan. 6; Aug. 14, No. 105, White to Jenkins, Jan. 26.

126. *Ibid*, Vetch to Jenkins, May 11, 1839.

127. Hannay, *loc.cit.*, pp. 671f.

Anyhow, the causes of dissension appear to be more deep rooted. Whereas the *Mayamara Satrar Vamsawali* disclaims any blood relationship with Krishnabhujadeva,¹²⁸ the first *Mahanta* of the Tiphuk *Mayamara Satra*, the *Vamsawali* of the latter claims that Krishnabhujadeva was the son of Astabhujadev the tenth *Mahanta* of the *Mayamara Satra*, by his second wife Daivaki, the daughter of a Moran named Mridang Niranjana of the Dainigayan clan.^{129*} This source further informs us that Sarbananda Singha, the Matak king at Bengmara, with the ambition of assuming the charge of the *Satra* as well, wanted to murder Krishnabhujadeva, but could not succeed. Enmity started from this incident.¹³⁰

The Morans were also dissatisfied with the fact that ignoring their immense contribution to the success of the Rebellion, since the very beginning, Sarbananda, a Buruk-Chutiya, was made the King at the influence of the *Mahanta*. Further, the Matak capital at Bengmara was situated at a considerable distance from the locality of the Morans, for which, they could not have a close touch with it. They also felt that they were not getting their due share in the new administration. For, as stated, the administrative divisions, including Upper Matak, were administered by the sons of the Barsenapati. There was also ill-feeling between the heads of the two *Satras* and each of them used to incite their disciples against those of the others. So long Sarbananda Singha was there, this dissension could not gain ground. Even Matibar Barsenapati, who was indifferent to the

128. ACMSV, p. 104.

129. *Mayamara Tiphuk Mulani Satrar Pamkhedi* (ed.), S.N. Mahanta, Doomdooma, pp. 5ff.

* According to Sri Lihing Mahanta, the present *Mahanta* of Lajum Anguri *Satra*, Prabhu and Bibhu, the two sons of Sadanandadev, a descendant of Aniruddhadeva, fled away to extreme parts in Upper Assam at the time of the Matak Rebellion. After the Rebellion was over, Prabhu came back to Puranipam; but Bibhu stayed in a Moran village and married a Moran girl. His son Kachinaliya alias Bhawananda founded the Tiphuk *Satra* with the name Krishnabhujaya by taking permission from Astabhujadeva (1670-1692 Śaka), *Pabitra Asam*, p. 31.

130. *Ibid.*

bigoted views of Bhaktananadadev, was acceptable to the Morans.¹³¹ But Maju Gohain, the new Barsenapati, is said to be under the complete influence of the *Mahanta*,¹³² which fact was viewed seriously by the Morans and their *Guru* Krishnabhujadeva.

The local authorities, intending to take advantage of this dissention, directed Capt. White to visit the Matak kingdom and extract better terms from the new Barsenapati. But White felt that the *status quo* was all the more desirable, "because the territory would yield but little revenue and most of it would be swallowed up in the management and providing for the sons and relatives of the Barsenapati."¹³³ He, however, desired to raise the Barsenapati's tribute from Rs. 1800/- to Rs. 10,000/- and demand the wasteland in his kingdom for cultivation of tea. He also wanted to propose that a British officer be stationed in the Matak kingdom with powers to decide the cases arising out of any dispute between the Matak people and the British subjects on the question of cultivation of tea.¹³⁴

With these proposals in mind, Capt. White arrived at the headquarters of the Matak kingdom on January 20, 1839.¹³⁵ When he placed the proposal before Maju Gohain, the latter convened a *Durbar* the next day, which was attended by all the members of the Council of Elders, including all the brothers of Maju Gohain and also by all officials. The *Durbar* agreed to give the wasteland for cultivation of tea and to have the posting of a British official as proposed,¹³⁶ but vehemently opposed the idea of raising the tribute. Maju Gohain politely submitted that the Matak were very poor to bear any heavier burden of

131. Hannay, *loc.cit.*, pp. 671ff.

132. *Ibid.*

133. P.C. 1839, Aug. 14, No. 105, White to Jenkins, Jan, 26; ADCB, (2nd edition), p. 147.

134. *Ibid.*

135. *Ibid.*

ADCB (2nd edition), p. 147.

taxation, and that nothing but force would enable him to raise the assessment.¹³⁷ He, however, assured the Captain that after performing the *Shradha* ceremony of his father he would ascertain the actual number of *Paiks* in the kingdom and would let him know what additional amount could be paid to the British government.¹³⁸ Mr. White, who could realise that there was hardly any possibility of getting a higher tribute than Rs. 2,500/-, suggested to the Commissioner in his letter of January 26, 1839, to retain the existing arrangement in the Matak kingdom. He further pointed out that, "Money 'will not do in a country like this (where) good will of the people will be more efficacious than the pecuniary benefit to be derived from taxation.'"¹³⁹

Meanwhile wild rumours were afloat that the tribes of extreme east were forming an anti-British confederacy and that they were getting support from the Burmese.¹⁴⁰ This created much confusion in the area. The rumour came to be a fact, when on January 29, 1839, the Khamtis burst out, attacked the headquarters of the Assam Light Infantry at Sadiya and killed a large number of men, women and children including Capt. White.¹⁴¹ About the same time, a number of Kachins made their appearance in the Matak Kingdom and there was a rumour that a Burmese force was already in the advance.¹⁴² Capt. Hannay immediately subdued the Khamtis in which work, he was actively helped by Maju Gohain, the new Barsenapati of the Matak.¹⁴³ But despite his active co-operation, his bonafide was suspected throughout. Major Jenkins, the Commissioner, also feared that "if he (Barsenapati) establishes a firm authority, he would be the first to rise against us at any opportunity."¹⁴⁴ He, therefore, invited the opinion of Capt. Vetch, the Principal

137. *Ibid.*

138. AAL, p. 202; ADCB, p. 131.

139. P.C., 1839, Aug. 14, No. 105; White to Jenkins, Jan. 26.

140. P.C., 1837, May 15, No. 12; Miller to Jenkins, April 14.

141. P.C. 1839, Feb. 20, Nos. 105-106; Shakespear, *op.cit.*, p. 66.

142. ADCB, p. 149.

143. P.C., 1839, Aug. 14, No. 105; Jenkins, May 29; ADCB (2nd edition), p. 150; CBMR, p. 94.

144. ADCB, p. 150.

Assistant of Lakhimpur and Political Agent, Upper Assam, on the matter.

Capt. Vetch, pleased with the help of Maju Gohain, informed that the raising of the tribute to Rs. 10,000/- would create dissatisfaction among the Matak people. But at the same time "forgoing the demand without a fair equivalent would be attributed to weakness."¹⁴⁵ He, therefore, forwarded certain suggestions that the territory should be left under the management of Maju Gohain, and that instead of imposing a tribute on mere assumption, a fresh census of the *Paiks* should be undertaken, after which Maju Gohain would be asked to give either the service of two-thirds of the *Paiks* or commute the same for money payment.¹⁴⁶ Maju Gohain accepted the proposal, but asked Capt. Vetch to carry on the census without military help, as proposed by him.¹⁴⁷

Meanwhile, the dissensions among the Matak became very serious. The Morans submitted several petitions to the local authorities not to place them under the rule of Maju Gohain. The Government thus got opportunity of imposing harsher terms on the Matak Chief, which would consequently give them a chance of annexing his territory. This is clear from the following remark of Jenkins : "Should Maju Gohain or any of his family... commit themselves as to oblige us to remove them of the management of the country, it would be the best event that happens for the people and the interests of the Government."¹⁴⁸ The Governor-General in-Council concurred with the Political Agent and resolved to vest the management of the territory on Maju Gohain on the following conditions :¹⁴⁹

(1) The management of the Matak country would be left to Maju Gohain, with similar authority in civil affairs as was enjoyed by his father.

145. P.C. 1839, Aug. 14, No. 105; Vetch to Jenkins, May 11, 1839.

146. *Ibid.*

147. *Ibid.*; AAL, p. 203.

148. P.C., 1839, Aug. 14, No. 105; Jenkins to the Secy., Govt. of Bengal, May 29.

149. P.C., 1839, Aug. 14, No. 106.

(2) The Supreme Authority would have a proportionate right on the service of the *Paiks* or money payment commuted for that, in the Matak territory.

(3) The *Paiks* and riots of the Matak territory would have to be given option either of manual labour or commuting it by a money payment on a fixed rate as had been done in other parts of Assam.

(4) The unoccupied jungle land of the territory should be handed over to the British for tea-cultivation, over which the Matak Chief would have no authority.

(5) The Upper Matak would be separated from the Lower one and the New Chief would have his jurisdiction only in the latter.

Jenkins instructed Cap. Vetch to make an agreement with Maju Gohain on the above terms, and in case he refused, he was authorised to make the agreement with any one of his brothers. In case of a final breakdown of his negotiation, he was further authorised to take possession of the country.¹⁵⁰ Even though it had been mentioned that Maju Gohain would be placed on an equal footing in civil affairs as was enjoyed by his father, it becomes apparent from the conditions that the same was drastically sliced down. For, the Barsenapati under the new agreement would have no authority over the tea gardens, as well as, on Upper Matak. Capt. Vetch was of firm conviction that the agreement would not be acceptable to Maju Gohain and his brothers and, therefore, he might be required to take possession by force. For such an eventuality, the Government took necessary military precautions. Accordingly, detachments were despatched to Dibrumukh and Tiphuk, and adequate measures were taken to prevent an alliance between the Mataks and the Singphos.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰. P.C., 1839, Oct. 16, No. 89; AAL., p. 206; ADCB, p. 135.

¹⁵¹. ADCB, p. 152.

Capt. Vetch then proceeded with a strong force to the capital of the Matak Kingdom on November 12, 1839. On his way to the capital, he was represented at Tiphuk, by the *Mahanta* of Tiphuk *Satra* and the village headman of Upper Matak not to place them under the control of the family of the Barsenapati. They further informed him that they were ready to serve the 'Sarkar (the British Government) by all possible means', but would not accept the rule of Maju Gohain, unless they were compelled by force to do so.¹⁵² Capt. Vetch asked them to send a deputation to the Matak capital.¹⁵³

On his arrival at the Matak capital, a great council was summoned which was attended by all the brothers of Maju Gohain, the officials, the heads of the *Khels* and villages and a large number of people. A deputation of the Morans, as advised by Capt. Vetch, also attended the meeting. Capt. Vetch then explained the terms of the new agreement one by one, emphasising the point that the old agreement was made for the life of the Barsenapati only, which had automatically lapsed with his death. The British government, he said, wanted to leave the management of the Matak territory of the Barsenapati to his sons as a mark of respect and favour to the departed Chief, but they must accept the terms of the new agreement. But the proposal to separate Upper Matak, as anticipated, was vehemently opposed by all, excepting the Moran deputation. Further, all the Gohain brothers (meaning Maju Gohain and his brothers) refused to accept the management of the truncated territory.¹⁵⁴ Under the circumstances, Capt. Vetch agreed to reconsider the matter, in case they could arrive at a compromise with the Moran deputation, which, he knew, was not possible. Even after three days' deliberation, they could not make a compromise. At the final meeting with Capt. Vetch, Maju Gohain and his brothers raised objection to the fourth clause also, besides the one of taking possession of Upper Matak. Capt. Vetch tried

152. P.C., 1839, Dec. 26, Nos. 74-75; AAL, p. 204; ADCB, p. 136.

153. P.C., 1839, Dec. 26, No. 74.

154. AAL, p. 205; ADCB, p. 136; HAG, p. 310.

155. ADCB, p. 153.

to win over the Gohain brothers individually but without any effect. As per orders of the Supreme Government, the Captain then issued a proclamation by which he assumed the charge of the Matak territory on behalf of the East India Company in November 1839.¹⁵⁶ The Supreme Government approved the arrangement made by Capt. Vetch. Rangagara was made the temporary headquarters of this new division, but soon it was shifted to Dibrugarh.¹⁵⁷ With the annexation of the Matak Kingdom, the whole valley of the Brahmaputra came under the British government.

Considering that unless a liberal assessment was introduced, there would be wide resentment amongst all the Mataks, the Government imposed a capitation tax of rupees two per head on each male, against rupees three in the rest of Assam. The *Paiks* were also given the liberty to occupy and till as much land as they could.¹⁵⁸ The Gohain brothers were tried to be conciliated by the offer of pensions, for which an amount of one-third of the net revenue of the territory estimated at Rs. 15,000/- was sanctioned.¹⁵⁹ The Gohain brothers considered the amount as inadequate and objected the payment of pension entirely in cash.¹⁶⁰

The Gohain brothers were mortified at the loss of their autonomy and were highly resentful of the arbitrary arrangement. They, therefore, planned to overthrow the new rule and began to hatch conspiracies in concert with the frontier tribes. The Government took sufficient measures to prevent such a rising, and as a guarantee for good behaviour, "on the part of the members of the deceased Senapati's family", three of his most influential sons were shifted as hostages to Gauhati.¹⁶¹

156. P.C., 1839, Dec. 26, No. 75; Robinson, *op.cit.*, p. 330; Mackenzie, *op.cit.*, pp. 73ff; Mills, *loc.cit.*, pp. 2f; *Imperial Gazetteer of India* (Eastern Bengal and Assam), p. 38.

157. P.C., 1840, Jan. 15, Nos. 115-116.

158. *Ibid.*, Jan. 15; Feb. 5, Nos. 73-74.

159. P.C., 1840, April 27, Nos. 140-141.

160. P.C., 1840, April 27, No. 140; AAL., p. 205.

161. P.C., 1840, June, No. 137.

The Government then agreed that of the proposed amount to be distributed as pensions, one-half would be paid in cash and the other half in terms of land. The three sons of the deceased Barsenapati kept as hostages at Gauhati, agreed to the new arrangement at which they were allowed to come back to their territory.¹⁶² But at the time of executing, the settlement when individual holdings were to be demarcated, the Gohain brothers demanded one-third of the country in one compact area in lieu of the proposed pension. But submission to such a proposal would only give a chance to the Gohain brothers to get themselves organised against the British government, it tried to evade it tactfully.

Dissatisfied with the attitude of the Government, the Gohain brothers made elaborate plans of rebellion against it.¹⁶³ Although the former friendly relations of the Matak

s with the Singphos and the Khamtis had become strained for a time, they soon made up their conflicts. The Mataks sent their agents to the hill people with presents of hoium, imploring them to rise against the new ruler. The agents pointed out to the Singphos how the colonial rulers had been encroaching on their land for tea-cultivation; and to the Khamtis as to how they were inflicted severe punishment when they first rose against the Government for having lost their autonomy. These aggrieved people, therefore, readily agreed to give their support to the Gohain brothers. But before the plan could be matured, the British-hawk got a scent of it and removed the brothers along with some of their principal advisers to Biswanath to be kept there under strict surveillance.¹⁶⁴ They were given pensions entirely in cash as originally proposed. Thereafter, an effort was made to implicate the Gohain brothers in a case of criminal conspiracy against the British government,¹⁶⁵ but due to want of conclusive proof, they could not be punished.¹⁶⁶ During

162. P.C., 1840, June 8, No. 138.

163. P.C., 1841, Jun. 25, Nos. 73-75.

164. *Ibid.*

165. P.C., 1841, Jan. 25, Nos. 73-75.

166. ADCB, p. 156.

their internment at Biswanath, their family estates were cultivated for them by their dependents or were managed by officers appointed for the purpose by the Government. Ultimately, the Government by an order of November 29, 1841, made provisions for pensions and rent-free grants to the Gohain brothers individually on a fixed rate. The *Mahantas* of the Matak kingdom who had tremendous influence over the people, were granted rent-free holdings during their lives, and afterwards to their heirs, at half or quarter rates. The ex-officials and men of rank were granted remission in revenue to procure their good will.¹⁶⁷ A school was started at Saikhowa to educate the Matak youths to make them fit for government jobs.¹⁶⁸

The people also gradually reconciled to the new order. Maju Gohain and his brothers, on their return from Biswanath, therefore, had to accept the happenings as a fait accompli and tried to adjust themselves with the situation.¹⁶⁹ Later on, Maju Gohain was appointed as a Sadar Amin on a reduced salary, in addition to his pension, and on his death, another member of his family was appointed in his place.¹⁷⁰ In the beginning, an amount of Rs. 7,000/- was annually distributed as pension to the members of the deceased Barsenapati's family, which included two of his brothers Kalibar and Kamaleswar. The last pensioner of the Matak ruling family was Lankeswar Gohain, who received an amount of Rs. 6 annas 6 pice 9 till his death on March 6 in 1973. The descendants of King Sarbananda are still found in different parts of the Dibrugarh district.*

The annexation of the Matak Kingdom by the British, is a clear example of their naked aggression, as "...there was no charge of misgovernment, exactions or incapacity. Rather the liberal and efficient administration of the country by the Barsenapati and his family, which bestowed peace and prosperity on the land under their management, had been

167. P.C., 1841, Nos. 28, Nos. 130-133; ADCB, pp. 140f.

168. ADCB, p. 140.

169. *Ibid.*

170. Mills, *loc.cit.*, No. 62 (Lakhimpur district).

* For details, see, *Matak Rajvamsa*.

approved by the Supreme Government, and they were averse to the imposition of any tribute on the Barsenapati from the very beginning.¹⁷¹ Neither the Barsenapati at any time violated the terms of the Agreement imposed on him by the British. To most of the British officers, Matibar Barsenapati was a very capable, vigorous and courageous man, 'plain in his apparel, simple in his habits and possessed of great talent for business'.¹⁷² They are also almost unanimous in their opinion regarding his diplomatic ability to protect his people from the inroads of the Burmese and the neighbouring hill tribes.¹⁷³ This unstinted praise for the Barsenapati continued up to the outbreak of the anti-British movements in the third decade of the century. The strategic position of the Matak kingdom, being situated near the Khamti, Singpho and other border hill tribes, as well as, on the Assam-Burma route, created suspicions in the minds of some British officials regarding the bonafide of the Barsenapati. Thus, Mr. Bruce, who was in-charge of gun-boats stationed at Sadiya, referred to him as 'one always dissatisfied and always ready to enter into any secret plot'.¹⁷⁴ A little later, Pemberton wrote in the same vein, "No reliance can I think be placed upon the fidelity of this Chieftain, except it is insured by the continued presence of a superior force at Sadiya."¹⁷⁵ M'Cosh also echoed such an opinion.¹⁷⁶

Such doubt on the fidelity of the Barsenapati developed gradually owing to the fact that a part of his territory was used by the rebels as their rendezvous during the anti-British movements. Although the Barsenapati dissuaded his son from taking part in these movements, there was sufficient ground on the part of the Government to suspect that the Barsenapati had at least extended his moral support to the rebels. But it was difficult for the British officers to prove his involvement, so

171. AAL, p. 206.

172. P.C., 1833, Jan. 7, No. 82.

173. Pemberton, *op.cit.*, p. 70; Robinson, *op.cit.*, p. 328; Hannay, *loc.cit.*, pp. 671ff; Neufville, *loc.cit.*, p. 334; Mills, *loc.cit.*, pp. 2f; M'Cosh, *op.cit.*, pp. 154f; HAG, p. 291.

174. P.C., 1835, Feb. 11, No. 91.

175. Pemberton, *op.cit.*, pp. 70f.

176. M'Cosh, *op.cit.*, p. 155.

that even Capt. White had to remark that "the Barsenapati was decidedly faithful to his engagements"¹⁷⁷ and opposed the comment that he was 'brusque in his manners',¹⁷⁸ by observing that "accustomed to act as an independent Chief for 50 years and his territory unoccupied either by the Burmese or by the British, he is, naturally, independent and somewhat harsh in his manners, which, combined with a ...dislike of innovations, too natural to that period of life, has occasionally given to rise to impropriety of expression and acts of seeming disobedience, apt to give offence to young military men trained in the habits of rigid subordination."¹⁷⁹ An illiterate man by British standard¹⁸⁰ and with his tribal upbringing, the Barsenapati could not naturally be expected to behave in a polished way, that was expected of him by them. He, therefore, failed to impress them as a polished gentleman. But that could be no ground to conclude that his administration was not beneficial.

The local officers were energetic enough to impose tribute on the Barsenapati on mere assumptions, pleading that the Agreement made by David Scott with him was a provisional one, and that the latter was a vassal ruler to the Ahom monarch, paying a substantial tribute of Rs. 12,000/- per year. The Barsenapati himself emphatically denied the last clause, for, he paid only a nominal tax in kind, like ivory and *muga* silk to the Ahom government.¹⁸¹ The plea that the Agreement was a provisional one, to be revised after the death of the Barsenapati, was also baseless, because, there was no such indication in the Agreement to that effect. Even the Governor-General Lord Dalhousie, in his minute of March 6, 1853, admitted this.¹⁸² As per the Agreement between David Scott and the Barsenapati, the British Government had the right to make fresh census and assessment whenever it deemed necessary, but it had no authority

177. P.C., 1838, April 18, Nos. 56-57.

178. *Ibid.*

179. *Ibid.*

180. Hannay, *loc.cit.*, pp. 671ff.

181. P.C., 1839, Aug. 14, No. 105.

182. AAL, p. 207.

to insist on some fresh conditions, that would nullify the very existence of the Matak kingdom. So long there was fear of a threat from the Burmese, the Supreme Government had been rejecting the proposals of the local officers to increase the tribute on the Barsenapati. But as soon as the fear was over, and the turbulent hill tribes on the border, like the Khamtis and Singphos were subjugated, the British did not hesitate to annex the Matak kingdom without any qualms of conscience for legal or moral rights. Thus the Matak kingdom, like many of its counterparts elsewhere in India, fell a victim to the maxim of 'might is right' pursued by the Colonial Rulers.

Administration and Material condition of the Matak Kingdom :

The Matak, in their kingdom at Bengmara, tried to set up an egalitarian government based on the principles of social equality and justice. Even though, Sarbananda Singha assumed the title 'Swargadeo', his power was not absolute, which is clear from the administration of his son Matibar Barsenapati, who was only the nominal head of the State, actual power being vested in the Council of Elders, which consisted of representatives of all the clans.¹⁸³ The Barbarua acted as the Secretary of the Council and the Barsenapati was to abide by its decision. It was with the consent of the Council, that the Barsenapati divided the kingdom into seven administrative units and placed his sons in charge of each, he being only the supervising authority.¹⁸⁴ The nomination of Maju Gohain as his successor by Matibar Barsenapati, was made only with the consent and approval of the members of the Council.¹⁸⁵ Heads of the villages and *Khels* were invited to attend the Council, when any question of general interest was taken up. Thus when Capt. Vetch announced the new terms to the Gohain brothers, village headmen were invited to attend and participate in the discussion of the Council. Thus 'there existed a greater spirit of equality

183. S.L. Barua, 'A Study on the Nature of the Moamaria Revolts', *Journal of Historical Research*, Vol. I, part I, March, 1974, Dibrugarh University, p. 19.

184. Mills, *loc.cit.*, pp. 2f; AAL., p. 200.

185. AAL, p. 200.

in the community than to be found elsewhere in Assam'.¹⁸⁶ To quote Hennay, "The Moa-Mureeahs seem to have a good deal of republican feeling, with regard to equality and free will"¹⁸⁷ There was no charge of misgovernment, exactions or incapacity in the Matak Kingdom. The liberal and efficient administration of the Kingdom bestowed peace and prosperity on the people.¹⁸⁸ Even the Morans, who submitted memorandum not to placethem under the rule of Maju Gohain, did not complain of any maltreatment at the hands of the Barsenapati or his sons.¹⁸⁹

The *Paik* system was continued in the Matak Kingdom but in a modified form, as no immediate alternative arrangement could be found out for it. The use of money was not widely prevalent to pay the officials in cash. For the same reason, no step could be taken to maintain a standing army. So, for defence, as well as, for public works, the *Paik* system was continued. But unlike the Ahom administration, the system greatly served the interests of the State. Further, the rigidity and exploitation, associated with this system, was greatly removed. This, as well as, the lower rate of assessment, indeed attracted large scale immigration to the Matak Kingdom. The Council of Elders discussed all questions of general interest and the village headmen arranged for giving service from their respective villages to works of public welfare like digging of tanks, construction of roads, etc.

In the Matak Kingdom taxation was very light. Even the British officers had to admit that "the man of his (Barsenapati) tribe paid little or nothing."¹⁹⁰ But when the Barsenapati was required to commute the service of 300 *Paiks* to the British government, he was compelled to impose a capitation tax on the people. The rate of assessment on his own people is not

186. P.C., 1839, Aug. 14, No. 105; White to Jenkins, Jan. 26; ADCB; pp. 140f.

187. Hannay, *loc.cit.*, pp. 671ff.

188. Mills, *loc.cit.*, pp. 2f; Hunter, *op.cit.*, p. 293.

189. AAL, pp. 204f.

190. Mackenzie, *op.cit.*, pp. 73ff.

known, but it is learnt that the immigrants were taxed only after their settlement in the Matak kingdom for one and a half years,¹⁹¹ and "the assessment imposed was a capitation tax of Rs. 2/- for each grown-up male, which was one-third less than the lowest rate in Poorunder's territory. This too appears for the most part to have been paid in produce or labour."¹⁹² From this it can be conjectured that the assessment on his own people was much low. It appears that they were taxed at the rate of Rs. 1/- to 2/- per year, against Rs. 3/- in the neighbouring Ahom kingdom.

People living in the areas adjacent to the Ahom kingdom paid taxes in cash, which came up to Rs. 12,000/- per year in the beginning of the reign of the Barsenapati, but those living on the Singpho and the Khamti borders paid in kind in the form of grains, spices and elephants' tusk.¹⁹³ With an increased rate of assessment, the revenue also increased to Rs. 20,000/- and then to Rs. 22,000/- annually in the last part of the Barsenapati's reign which under British fiscal system, as pointed out by Mackenzie, could have come up to Rs. 50,000/- annually.¹⁹⁴ It is said that when the rate of assessment was increased, many immigrants took shelter in jungles to escape taxation, for which the Barsenapati had to face often the allegation from the British of concealing the real number of immigrants to his territory.¹⁹⁵

After the annexation of the Matak Kingdom, the British Government abolished the capitation tax and commuted it into an assessment on land in 1841-42 in Lower Matak in the following rate : twelve annas per *poorah** of *rupit* land and eight annas for other lands. This brought them an amount of Rs. 12,781 annas 11 pice 9 in the year 1841-42 against

191. Hannay, *loc.cit.*, pp. 671ff.

192. Mills, *loc.cit.*, pp. 2ff.

193. AAL, p. 36.

194. Mackenzie, *op.cit.*, pp. 73ff.

195. Mackenzie, *op.cit.*, pp. 73ff; Hannay, *loc.cit.*, pp. 671ff.

* More than an acre.

Rs. 13,222 annas 8 pice 8 collected in 1840-41 under the poll-tax system.*

In Upper Matak, the capitation tax continued, and for its payment, each peasant was entitled to cultivate as much land as he could till, for which he was granted a *patta* by the Collector.

Pemberton estimated that the number of houses in the Matak kingdom, when Matibar Barsenapati made the agreement with the British government in 1826, was 10,000 and the number of people was about 25,000,¹⁹⁶ which appears to be wrong. Considering that one house contained one family (although joint family was the usual practice), consisting of father, mother and three children, the total population should have been 50,000 or even more. On the other hand, Robinson appears to be correct in estimating the population of the Matak kingdom at about 50,000.¹⁹⁷ According to Hennay, the immigration to the Matak kingdom from Purandar Singha's territory assumed such a wide proportion that 'there cannot be less than a hundred and twenty thousand inhabitants there'.¹⁹⁸ He further continued that, "The whole of the Beheeah population of the district of Sessee and Dumajee, three-fourths of the Cassaree population, originally belonging to Sudiya, and three-fourths of Dhoania population released from Singpho slavery; amounting to 8 or 9,000, are all located within the boundary lately assigned to the Senaputtee."¹⁹⁹ with such a strength of population and their interest and proficiency in agricultural pursuits, the material condition of the Matak kingdom, under their own management developed considerably.

The soil of Upper Matak, being of a high and undulating nature, was less suitable for rice cultivation, but was admirably

* For details, see, Mills, *Report on the Province of Assam* (Lakhimpur district).

196. Pemberton, *op.cit.*, p. 70.

197. Robinson, *op.cit.*, p. 329.

198. Hannay, *loc.cit.* pp. 671ff.

199. *Ibid.*

suited for cotton, sugar-cane, tea, opium and the early variety of rice known as *Ahu*. Agricultural resources of Lower Matak were different from those of Upper Matak, and it contained a large area for cultivation of wet rice or *sali*, in addition to high land suitable for cultivation of tea.²⁰⁰ In fact the Matak kingdom was abounded with rice fields and was considered 'a rich depot of grain' in Assam. Cotton of an excellent quality was produced in great quantity, particularly in Upper Matak, and was considered to be of a far superior quality to that grown in other parts of the Brahmaputra valley. Sugar-cane of a superior quality was cultivated and the major part of it was used for producing *goor*. As the area was also admirably suitable for tea-cultivation, several tea estates were started by the British, which produced tea of an excellent quality. Consequently, "with luxuriant crops of rice intermixed with mustard, sugar-cane, cotton and mulberries, the Moamaria territory under the Barsenapati became the granary of the North-East Frontier."²⁰¹

The Matak territory, during the days of Matibar Barsenapati used to export annually nearly 7,000 maunds of cotton. As it was of a superior quality, it fetched much higher price, so that while common cotton was sold for Rs. 2/- or 3/- per maund, that of the Matak country was sold at Rs. 4/- per maund. Besides cotton, the kingdom also exported rice, *goor*, mustard, muga silk, dyeing materials, timber and elephants' tusk. The good that found markets for ready sale in Barsenapati's territory were salt, tobacco, flints and steel, knives, brass-pots, earthen-pots, etc.*

From this it appears that the nature of the goods exported was primary and that of the import was finished and manufactured. So even though the Matak could succeed exporting in bulk and could afford to import less, their trade hardly left any

200. Mills, *loc.cit.*, (Lakhimpur), Nos. 2 and 15.

201. ADCB, p. 105.

* For details, see, Robinson, *An Account of Assam*, pp. 330ff; Hannay, *loc.cit.*, pp. 671ff; Mills, *Report on the Province of Assam* (Lakhimkur district).

surplus hard cash either with them or with their government. As a result, for internal administration the Matak kingdom, as has been mentioned earlier, had to continue the paik system.

Besides agriculture, sericulture, carpentry, blacksmithy, goldsmithy, pottery, ivory-works and fishery appeared to be the most important occupations of the people. As observed by Mills, "Thus every family has its looms for weaving, and its implements for cleaning and spinning cotton thread and silk ... They are their own weavers, their own carpenters, and if a man is cunning worker in ivory, precious metals, or in iron or pottery, he and his family perform between them all the other arts besides."²⁰²

Communication, the backbone of economic development of an area, was given due importance by the Barsenapati and his predecessor. Reference has been made to a net-work of roads constructed during the period. The principal rivers and streams like those of the Brahmaputra, Dibru, Dihing, Na-Dihing, Tingrai, Sessa etc., served the purpose of water communication, most of which, remained navigable for the greater part of the year for common canoes. As a result, "boats laden with rice, cotton, molasses and raw silk were always to be seen plying along the Brahmaputra"²⁰³ and other rivers.

In the Matak kingdom there was complete religious toleration. Many fresh converts accepted initiation from the Mayamara *Mahanta*, which necessitated the establishment of another branch *Satra* at Garpara in 1806 near Lahowal in the present Dibrugarh district under the *Adhikarship* of Harimaidev. During the days of Matibar Barsenapati, a large number of followers of the Brahmanical *Satras* came and settled peacefully in the Matak kingdom, where taxation was very light. These people were never discriminated on grounds of religion.

Bhaktanandadev, the *Mahanta* of the main Mayamara *Satra* during the Burmese ravages, shifted his headquarters temporarily to Garmur in Majuli in 1822. After staying there for four

202. Mills, *loc.cit.*, p. 6 (No. 31 of Lower Matak).

203. BPC, 1835, April 13, No. 4; ADCB, p. 105.

years, he came back to his permanent place *Barbheti* near Khutiaputa at Jorhat in 1826. But at Matibar's request, the *Mahanta* shifted his *Satra* in 1833 to Rangagara in the Matak kingdom. However, as the site was found unsuitable for establishment of a *Satra*, as well as, for a capital, the *Mahanta* shifted his headquarters to a place called Dinjay on the bank of Dinjay river in 1837. This *Satra* subsequently became famous as the Dinjay Mayamara *Satra*, which is still the most prominent of the Mayamara *Satras*.²⁰⁴

204. N. Chetia, *Mahapurush Sri Sri Aniruddhadevar Dharmamat oru Mayamara Samaj*, Chabua, 1967, pp. 48ff.

Epilogue

The Mataks fought for justice, freedom and human equality and finally succeeded in carving out an autonomous kingdom for themselves. Their struggle to achieve these ends, as narrated, had been a very strenuous one, which can be compared with the struggle of the Jews against the Nazi oppressions. The Mataks had to bear all oppressions and humiliations heaped upon them by the existing government. But the devotion to their cause was so great, and their unity for purpose of overthrowing the oppressive government was so strong, that they successfully withstood the Ahom policy of Matak extermination which brought deaths to 3/4ths of their comrades. Even the superior military strength of the Ahoms, as organised by their astute Premier Purnananda Buragohain, could not curb their rebellious spirit and the Ahom government had at last to make compromise with the most organised section of them by recognising their autonomy. In their kingdom, the Mataks realised to a great extent, justice, equality and freedom and made their government an ideal one to the rest of the Assamese population. But they had already attracted the attention of the colonial government, which was resolved to extend its arms to the whole

of the North-East India. For, the number of well-to-dos was certainly more than that of Sir John Shores in the history of British India. Consequently, Assam, nay the entire North-East including the Matak kingdom, fell a prey to the expansionist policy of the British, which event changed the entire course of the history of this part of the country.

After the annexation of the Matak kingdom, the British government, which could understand the nature and temperament of these people, tried to win them over by various means. As has been stated, the members and relatives of the late Barsenapati's family were given pensions and rent-free grants. The *Mahantas* or *Satradhikars*, who had tremendous influence over their disciples, were granted holdings either rent-free or at concessional rates. The officials thrown out of employment and men of rank were also granted remissions in revenues. To win over or appease the most war-like families from among the Matak and the Doaneahs,* a local corps known as Second or Upper Assam Sebundy was raised at Jaipur. But the corps had to be disbanded in 1844, as military discipline "proved to be too irksome and extremely galling to those for whom liberty and freedom were the very breath of their nostrils."¹ A school was also started at Saikhowa, to educate the Matak youths for making them fit to get employment in the government.

In the wake of the Great Rebellion of 1857, which shook Assam as well, the Matak again expressed their rebellious spirit. For, in a message of August 20, 1857, Maj. Hannay, the Commandant of the Assam Light Infantry, reported: "At this station (Dibrugarh) what I have all along expected has taken place...an intended rise of the Muttucks and their intrigues also to get adherents."²

In course of time "the emergence of a group of Assamese elite, though small, imbued with advanced political ideas,

* A group of Matak people having a mixed parentage with the Singphos.

1. ADCB, p. 182.

2. BJP, 1857, Sept. 17, No. 482; Hannay to Jenkins.

produced a radical change in Assam politics. Regional patriotism gave way to national patriotism."³ Subsequently when Gandhiji launched the non-violent Non-cooperation Movement in 1921 Assam favourably responded to it. Matak people also, as members of the Assamese population, actively participated in the movement. Thereafter, the Matak continued to participate in the national struggle for Independence along with their Assamese or Indian counterparts. Many of them suffered lathi-charge, imprisonment or the penalty of collective fines for refusing to pay taxes to the government. Majority of the Matak refused not only to accept jobs under the British government, but even nurtured a feeling of hatredness towards anything English, like that of taking instructions in English language. They had such aversion to English education that they refused entry to books written in English to their kitchens. On the other hand, they continued to have implicit faith on their religious texts written in *Sanchipat* (*Aquilaria Agallocha*) revering them as God-given treasures. This aversion to western education was noticed among the Matak, particularly amongst those inhabiting the rural area, till the Second World War. Those few who received education in English School and accepted jobs under the government were looked down by the rest of the Matak. For this, the Matak had to pay heavily afterwards. The British government had been recruiting 'men of ability and business' from outside to run the administration, which subsequently made the Matak aliens in their own territory.

After the formation of the Congress Ministry in Assam in 1937, a feeling gradually cropped up in the minds of certain Matak that they were lagging far behind in comparison with the rest of the Assamese population. As a result of this consciousness, they organised an association of their own, called "*Mayamara Hitsadhini Sabha*" in 1937 in imitation of the then '*Asamiya Bhasa Hitsadhini Sabha*'. Its branch organisation, formed about the same time in the Doomdooma region (erst-

while Upper Matak), was known as the '*Moran Hitsadhini Sabha*' and that in the Tinsukia region was known as '*Matak Sabha*'. The organisation, in its second stage, was named as '*Moran-Matak Sanmilan*' and its first session was held in 1938. In 1938 the organisation was named '*Moran-Matak League*' which was subsequently renamed as '*Matak League*'.

With intensification of the struggle for independence, the demand for creating a separate State for the Muslims, out of the Muslim majority areas, also became strong under British manoeuvre and patronage. To create a division among the Hindus as well, a Machiavellian effort was made by the Government to exclude the Scheduled Caste and the Tribal people from the general Hindus. When such endeavours were going on, Sir Muhammad Sadulla, the then Chief Minister of Assam, accompanied by his Cabinet colleagues, Saidur Rehman and Miss Davis Den, in order to incite the Matak people to get themselves enlisted to the list of the Scheduled Caste and Tribe, personally came to the 4th Matak Sanmilan held at Chabua in 1940. But in the larger interest of the State and the country as a whole, the *Sanmilan* declined to become a prey to the allurations offered to it.⁴ For this sacrifice, the Matak people are deprived of many special privileges now enjoyed by the members of the Scheduled Caste and Tribes in independent India.

The present organisation of the Matak known as *Sadau Asam Matak Sanmilan*" has started functioning since Independence with its first session held at Chetiapathar in Dibrugarh in 1948. An organisation of the Matak students with the name '*Sadau Asam Matak Chhatra Sanmilan*' was also started in the year 1940. The Morans, however, formed a separate organisation of their own in 1967, which is till now known as the '*Moran Sabha*'. These organisations had made

4. D.N. Hazarika, '*Matak Sampradai Ketia aru Kiya Bechi Pichpara Srenir Talikat Bhukta H' al*', *Smritigrantha*, Matak Sanmilan, 1977, pp. 2ff.

consistent efforts to uplift the social and economic conditions of the Matak people and succeeded in getting them included in the list of the 'More Other Backward Classes' of Assam, for which certain facilities are now forthcoming to them in different fields.

But the facilities provided by the Government to the Matak people, and that too, only recently, are very limited. It is regrettable that the general condition of these once-powerful people, still remains considerably backward. Various factors are responsible for this marked backwardness. After its annexation, the erstwhile Matak Kingdom was used by the British government for extensive tea-cultivation. Chabua, a place in the Matak Kingdom, is traditionally famous as being the first site for cultivation of tea. Along with tea, other ancillary industries gradually grew up in several places of the old Matak Kingdom and specially in Tinsukia, which once housed its capital. In course of time, oil and coal were discovered in this area. To speed up communication for facilitating the industrial growth, the railway communication was introduced linking several places of the historic Matak Kingdom. All these developments required the service of a huge manpower in the area. It has been already mentioned that the Matak people nurtured a feeling of hatredness towards anything English. As a result, the Matak people did not take part in these revolutionary economic developments. This required importation of a huge manpower, both from within and outside Assam. Consequently, the Matak people got deprived of the benefits of the economic and industrial developments taking place in their own area. The resultant backlog of backwardness thus inherited from the British regime, is greatly responsible for the present backwardness of the Mataks. Even after independence, the Mataks due to the lack of proper facilities are lagging far behind in comparison with most of the members of the Assamese population.

Another factor responsible for the backwardness of the Mataks, was their large-scale addiction to opium. The British

Government, in order to kill their independent-loving spirit by making them lazy and inactive, introduced the use of opium among them, as they did it in case of the rest of the Assamese population. The habit became such an acute problem amongst the Matak that their area became noted as the highest opium consuming area in Assam and the best efforts made by the Ministries under Gopinath Bardalai and Muhammad Sadullah in pre-independent days, failed to have the desired effect. An opium hospital had to be opened at Chabua few years after independence to treat the patients suffering either from excessive use of opium or from abrupt stoppage of the practice, under pressure from some social workers or government officials. The practice, however, has now died out and the hospital was also abolished in 1973.

Further, the Matak people, in general, even in present times, suffer from certain superstition and religious orthodoxies, for which some of them still have aversion or apathy to scientific ideas and developments, like the use of tractor, chemical manures etc. in cultivation or the use of improved tools in spinning and weaving. The *Satradhikars* of the different Mayamara *Satras*, who could have played an important role in uplifting the social and economic conditions of their disciples, do not appear to have risen to the demand of the time and the occasion. On the other hand, it is felt that, friendly understanding and co-operation are markedly absent among the different Mayamara *Satradhikars*. It has been stated how the division amongst the Matak inhabiting the Upper and the Lower parts of their territory was utilised by the British, to their advantage. The division between the disciples of the main Mayamara *Satras* at Dinjoy and those of Tiphuk exists till today. What is more regrettable is that casteism which was totally absent among the Matak till their Kingdom was annexed to the British, had subsequently intruded into their community and their caste-Hindu members began to look down upon the tribals and the so-called low-caste members. As a result, religious factions, casteism and social differences are still noticed among the disciples of the different Mayamara *Satras*. Thus the democratic and humanitarian outlook of the early

Mayamara *Satradhikars* were thrown asunder by their successors in later times, who were swayed by the waves of communalism and sectarianism brought in by the colonial Government. The changed outlook of the later Mayamara *Satradhikars*, favouring dissensions among their disciples as well, whose unity and solidarity were proverbial among the Assamese people; the physical and moral degradation of the Matak, resulting from the excessive use of opium are subjects of study beyond the scope of our work. Again, it is to be noted that religion which was a dynamic force in their social and intellectual life had afterwards made them sterile and apathetic even to scientific developments. This role of religion in the social life of the Matak is another subject of social study.

Some Matak now-a-days even hesitate to introduce themselves as so. The distortion of facts regarding the events of the period and the interpretation of the Matak Rebellion as a crusade between the Vaisnavas and the Saktas or as a conflict between the Brahmanas and non-Brahmanas or between the Ahoms and the non-Ahoms, by certain local communalists, is perhaps the main reason for this. However, in recent years, some Matak social workers including a few *Satradhikars*, are found to engage themselves in making efforts to improve the conditions of their community.

Further, the Matak, in general, are perturbed over the fact that practically no step has been taken by the Government to restore and preserve their historic capital site in the present town of Tinsukia and other ruins of the old Kingdom. Certain leading Matak personalities including late Lankeswar Gohain, therefore, submitted memorandums twice to the Government of India—one on April, 1964 to the then President of India and again in March, 1967 to the then Home Minister of India urging upon the National Government to restore and preserve their historical places, but nothing came out. In 1967, the Matak even demanded the creation of a separate Matak State with its capital at Tinsukia (Bengmara). But this separatist tendency

has now almost died out and the Matak

s have completely assimilated themselves with the rest of the Assamese population.

These are recent happenings not known even to all members of the Matak community. In the history of Assam, the Matak

s are best known as the makers of the First Popular Rebellion which compelled the King to surrender to the voice of the people. The history of the Mataks is to be seen mainly in this light because if not interfered by the expansionist policy of the British, the Mataks would have established an egalitarian society at least in the whole of the Assam valley.

APPENDIX A

English	Moran	Kachari	Hodgson's Bodo (Mech)	Dimasa (or Hill Kachari)
One	Sē	Sē or Sāi	Si	Chē
Two	Ne	Ne	Gui	Gini
Axe	Rāoyā	Ruā	Rua	Roā
Buffalo	Manimi or Michit	Moisya	Moishojola	Miship
Bow	Kangphai	Zilit	Jilit	Baithuli
Bad	Hāmiha	Hama	Hamma	Hāmyā
Broom	Haisip	Hāsip	—	Noship
Cow	Machan	Machan	Mūshojo	Mūshū
Crow	Daokha	Daokha	Daukhā	Daokhā
Cook (V)	Sogong	Sang-nu	—	Song
Cut (V)	Daula	Dau-nu	—	Gain, Dain
Cloth	Hinkhā	Hi	Hi	Hi
Dog	Chaima	Suimai	Choima	Sisha
Elephant	Matma or Manima	—	Moidet	Miyang
Egg	Daōdi	Dāodē	Doudoi	Dāodi
Earth	Hā	Hā	Hā	Hā
Fish	Nā	Nā	Gnā	Nā
Father	Abai	Afā	Afā	Bofā
Fruit	Bithai	Fithai	Bethai	Bathai
Goat	Bārūma	Baramā	Burmā	Burūn
Monkey	Mukhārā	Mokhrā	Mokhora	Māsgusā
Sickle	Khāsi	Khāsi	Kachi	Songi
Tiger	Maochi, Michi	Mosa	Mocha	Misi
Water	Di	Dūi (Doi)	Doi	Di

APPENDIX B

English	Deori-Chutiya	Plains Kachari
Fowl	du	dāo
Cat	midige	manzi
Tiger	mesa	mosa
Deer	meshi	Masamai
Snake	dubra	Zibu (Dimasa-Jubu)
Dove	duchu dua	doutho
Crow	duka	daokha

APPENDIX C

The names of the *Mahantas* of the Mayamara *Satra* from the time of Aniruddhadev till date are given below.*

Sl.	Name	Saka of being Satradhikar	Saka of Death
1.	Aniruddhadev	1523	1548
2.	Krishnadev	1548	1563
3.	Hariramdev	1563	1566
4.	Nityanandadev	1566	1572
	Vacant	1572-1576	
5.	Jairamdev	1576	1605
6.	Jadunandandev	1605	1610
7.	Baikunthanathdev	1610	1613
	Vacant	1613-1618	
8.	Chaturbhujdev	1618	1670
9.	Astabhujdev	1670	1692
	Vacant	1692-1706	
10.	Pitambarchandadev	1706	1727
11.	Bhajanandadev	1727	1730
12.	Bhaktanandadev	1730	1762

* SRSB, p. 137; Jibanananda Chandra Goswami, *Satradhikar*, Dinjay Mayamara *Satra*, letter dated 29.8.81.

1	2	3	4
13.	Swarupanandadev	1762	1765
14.	Bhawanandadev	1765	1779
15.	Jayanandadev	1779	1790
16.	Chidanandadev	1790	1802
17.	Jagatanandadev	1802	1812
18.	Hridayanandachandradev	1812	1855
19.	Abyaktanandadev	1855	1858
20.	Mahadanandadev	1858	1882
	Vacant	1882-1885	
21.	Jibanananda Chandra Goswami	1886	till date

APPENDIX D

Copy of the Agreement executed between Matibar Barsenapati and David Scott on May 13, 1826.*

"No XXXVI Kabuliyat of feudal submission executed by the Barsenapati of the Mataks, dated 13th May, 1826.

The Bur Senaputtee in the presence of Mr. Scott agreed to the following Kuboolyut :

I, Mateebur Bur Senaputtee of the Muttocks, write what follows :

The pykes belonging to the phokuns, Burooahs, Brahmins, and others that are under me, amount to 160 Gotes, and my own amount to 260 Gotes. Of these 42 Gotes are my own Liksoos, 11 belong to the Hazareekeeahs.

* Aitchison, *op.cit.*, pp. 138f.

5 Sykeahs
15 Barakayees
42 are Raj Sumunlyahs (Provide rice)
5 to the Neoogs
<hr/>
120 total.

300 Gotes remain, deducting these. Of these 150 are fighting men, 150 labourers, these I will furnish, according to the custom of the country, by Mal, Dewal, Teeal and what russud the Sircar may want that I will furnish on getting the amount of its cost. Over these people I will exercise jurisdiction, enquire and decide, but in cases of murder, dacoity, and great wounding and thefts above Rs. 50, I will institute investigation, and send the paper and the men to the presence, and whatever ordered I will obey. This Kuboolyut shall remain until another is made."

Witness
Jutozye Dewalyah
Gudadhur

Signed by the Bursenaputtee.

APPENDIX E

Copy of the Agreement entered into by Matibar Barsenapati on January 23, 1835 in the presence of the political Agent, Upper Assam.*

Article I: "I agree to relinquish my claim to the village of Suckhowah, which has been the cause of dispute between the Suddiya Khawah Gohain and myself; further I agree that the following shall be recognised as the territorial boundaries of my district. On the north the Berhampooter, on the west the Boorme Dehing River; separating my territory from that of Raja Poorunder Singh, to the east Dibroo River and the Danquiree

* Aitchison, *op.cit.*, pp. 138ff, No XXXVII.

Nullah, which falls in to it. From the rise of the nullah a boundary line will be formed to connect it with the Booree Dehing River, for this purpose Lt. Charlton can depute one person and I will depute another.

The lands lying between the Dhuljan and Gooroo Jan Nullaha, which fall in to the Danquree nullah, to be considered under my jurisdiction, and the persons deputed as above can connect them by definite marks, so as to form a boundary line. These are the territorial boundaries of the country under my jurisdiction and have no reference to the pecuniary question now pending between me and the British Government.

Article 2 : I can not agree to the demand which the British Government has made to contribute towards the expenses of the states in an increased proportion, quinquennially, or by paying a tribute of Rs. 10,000/- per annum., as I engaged to do under the Assam Government. But if the British Government, requires me no longer to furnish a military contingent of 300 men, I agree to pay in their stead the usual Capitation Tax for these 300 men, which at the rate Rs. 6/- per head will amount to Rs. 1800/- per annum. I further agree to restore to the British Government the arms of this force if required. I likewise will adhere to the engagement I formed with Capt. Neufville, to pay Rs. 551 per annum, on account of pykes who absconded from Upper Assam, whilst that province was under his charge in 1829; and further I agree to pay for those who have absconded from Rajah Poorunder Singh's territory within the last two years. I will cause them to be counted, but if suspicion is entertained that a false enumeration will be given in, I agree that the British Government may nominate an officer to take a new census."

Witness :

(Sd) Matee Bur Bur Senaputtee

Chota Gohain Khamtee, residing at Saddeya.

Sadee Man, Jemadar, residing at Morung.

Golaub Singh, Jemadar, residing at Bishenath.

Gopee Surma Dola Suvya Bora, residing at Jorehaut.

APPENDIX F

Description of the tanks constructed during the days of the Barsenapati.*

The Matak Capital at Bengmara was surrounded by ramparts on all sides. The main buildings of the capital are said to have situated near the present site of the Senairam Higher Secondary School of Tinsukia. The main capital area is now under occupation of either private parties or public institutions.** Roads like Hati Ali, Rangagara Ali, Joypur Ali; etc., constructed under the government of the Barsenapati are still existent. A list of tanks (*Pukhuris*), dug during the period indicating their present location, is given below.

(1) *Bengmara Pukhuri* : It is situated in Dag No. 402 of the Tinsukia town. The area of the tank is 3 bighas, 4 Kathas, 19 Lochas (more than an acre).

(2) *Tinsukia Pukhuri* : Godha alias Gopeenath Barbarua dug a three-cornered tank at the entrance of the present Tinsukia town from towards Dibrugarh. Later on, the area was named after it replacing the old name Bengmara.

(3) *Kawoi Pukhuri* : The area of the tank is about 10 bighas, 4 Kathas, 2 Lochas (more than 3 acres) in Dag No. 316. Certain areas on the bank of the tank are now settled in the name of certain private individuals.

(4) *Kadamani Pukhuri* : It is situated in Dag No. 748. Major part of the bank area is settled in individual names.

(5) *Na-Pukhuri* : It was dug by Matibar Barsenapati, which is situated in Dag No. 2083, covering an area of 10 bighas

* For details, see, CBMR, pp. 97f; *Matak Rajyamsha* (Editorial comment).

** A part of the old Capital area (59 bighas, 1 Katha, 4 Lochas—approx. 20 acres) is now under permanent occupation and official settlement with a private farm, named Senairam Dungarmal. Another part (6 acres) at present houses the Daily Bazar and the Football ground of the Tinsukia town.

3 Kathas, 4 Lochas (more than 3 acres). The banks of the tanks are used for a park, at present named after Gandhiji.

(6) *Kunwari Pukhuri* : It is situated in Mudoi village.

The tanks situated in the Bajaltali village are as follows :

(7) *Leogani Pukhuri* : It is situated in Dag No. 421, containing an area of 3 bighas, 1 Katha, 9 Lochas (more than an acre).

(8) *Bat-Pukhuri* : Dag No. 253 contains this tank with an area of 3 bighas, 3 kathas, 13 Lochas (more than an acre).

(9) *Lemten Pukhuri* : It is situated in Dag No. 61 with an area of 1 Bigha, 3 Kathas, 19 Lochas (less than an acre).

Another tank named *Kunti Pukhuri* is found in a village named Kakaratali in Dag No. 282. But most of these tanks lack proper care and preservation.

Glossary

- Acharyya* — a preceptor; a spiritual guide.
- Adhikar* — the head of a Vaisnava *Satra* or monastery.
- Adyeswar Sastra* — a scripture of the Moamarias composed by Anirudhadeva, the founder of the *Satra*.
- Bahatia* — a class of *Paiks* assigned to different hill-tribes like the Akas, Dafalas and the hill-Miris. They were bound to render personal service to their hill masters and pay a tribute in kind called *posa*.
- Bailung* — an Ahom priest mainly engaged in astrological calculations.
- Bairagi* — a samnyasi ; a member of a religious sect having no fixed habitation.
- Barbarua* — Head of the Executive exercising control over all justice, revenue and even military affairs, and hence also the Chief Secretary to the Ahom monarch. He was one of the five members of the *Patro-mantris*. He commanded 14,000 *Paiks*.
- Bardhak* — the great State-drum; one of the insignias of Ahom royalty.
- Bargit* — a class of devotional songs attuned to classical ragas, composed by the Vaisnava preachers.

- Barpatra Gohain** — one of the three cabinet ministers of the Ahom government. This office was created by Suhungmung, the Dihingia Raja, after his annexation of the Chutiya Kingdom in 1523. The first Barpatra Gohain Kancheng, who was a son of the deceased King Supimpha (1493-1497) was born and brought up in a Naga family.
- Barphukan** — The Viceroy of Lower or Western Assam. The office was created by Pratap Singha (1603-1641). Initially territorial jurisdiction of the Barphukan extended to the river Kalang only, with headquarters at Kaliabar. But when Kamrup was recovered from the Mughals, his jurisdiction also extended upto the river Manaha with headquarters at Gauhati. He conducted the political and commercial relations with Bengal and Bhutan and the chieftains of the Assam Passes. He enjoyed the service of 100 attendants.
- Barmel** — a state meeting attended by the king and his full quota of officers.
- Barmedhi** — an officer appointed to look after the religious affairs of one or more villages under the supervision of the *Rajmedhis*.
- Barraja** — title applied to King Siva Singha's three queens who wielded sovereign authority during the period of their husband's disability on astrological grounds.
- Barsatola** — the head of the *Satolas* or officers appointed by the *Adhikars* of some *Satras* for collecting tithes from their disciples.
- Barsenapati** — literally. the Commander-in-Chief; the title of the ruler of the Matak Kingdom.

- Barua** — an officer of rank having superintendence over a department or *Khel*.
- Bhajan** — the ceremony of ordination after the first initiation to Vaisnavism.
- Bhakat** — a devotee. Though the term means any devotee, it usually refers to one who used to hold an ecclesiastical office of the *Satra*. The celibate devotees attached to the monastic *Satras* were called *Kewaliya-bhakats*.
- Bhaona** — the dramatic show of Vaisnavite dramas.
- Bhandari** or **Bharali Barua** — store-keeper. Bhandari Barua or Bharali Barua was the officer-in-charge of the royal store.
- Bhitaraal Phukan** — commander-in-charge of the personal troops of the Ahom king keeping guard over the royal palace and its precincts.
- Bihu** — the national festival of the Assamese. There are three Bihus celebrated on the last day of the months of *Aswin*, *Pausha* and *Chaitra* and hence known as *Kati*, *Magh*, and *Bahag* and also as *Kangali*, *Bhogali* and *Rangali Bihus* respectively.
- Bil** — a small lake.
- Bora** — the juniormost officer in Ahom administration commanding 20 *Paiks*.
- Bargohain** — one of the three cabinet ministers of the Ahom government. He governed the tract from the south of the Dikhow river to Kaliabar. He commanded 80,000 *Paiks*.

- Buragohain* — the chief of the three ministers of the Ahom cabinet. He governed the tract from the north of the Dikhow river to Sadiya and commanded 80,000 *Paiks*. He was considered as the seniormost member of the Ahom cabinet.
- Buranji* — chronicle. It is a Tai-Ahom word meaning 'a store-house of knowledge' which teaches the ignorant. It was with the coming of the Ahoms that the practice of keeping records of all political events came to be introduced. The Ahoms wrote *Buranjis* first in their language and later in both Assamese and Tai-Ahom. There are numerous *buranjis* in Assamese throwing light on the history of the Ahom rule.
- Chadar* — a single cloth wrapped round the body by a woman. It usually measures 9 feet in length and 5 feet in breadth.
- Chamua* — an Ahom subject of a higher status than the *Paiks*. They had the privilege to get exemption from rendering personal service to the state by paying commutation money.
- Changmai* — a cook, an Ahom *khel*, the members of which served ordinarily as cooks, most of whom belonged to the Barahi tribe.
- Charit-Puthi* — a biography of Vaisnava saints.
- Cheleng* — a thin cloth wrapped round the body or over the shoulders.
- Chekani* — a slender bamboo birch or stick.
- Choladhara* — royal chamberlain.
Phukan

- Churia* — an under-garment used by a man which measured 9 to 15 feet in length and 2½ feet to 4 feet in breadth.
- Dafala-barduar* — the largest of the mountain passes adjoining the Dafala hills.
- angaria* — a title applied to the three cabinet ministers, the Buragohain, the Bargohain and the Barpatra Gohain.
- Dao* — a big Assamese knife.
- Deka Barbarua* — the heir-presumptive to the office of the Barbarua.
- Dekadhikar* or *Deka Adhikar* — would-be *Adhikar* and hence the Vice-*Adhikar*.
- Deka Phukan* — a commander of 6,000 chosen youths. There were two such Phukans—one at Rangpur and the other at Gauhati.
- Deodhai* — an Ahom priest who offered worship to the deities of the Ahom pantheon in strictly orthodox form.
- Dewal* — the second levy of *Paiks* from a unit or *got*.
- Deori* — a Priest; the priestly caste of the Chutiyas and of several animistic tribes of Assam.
- Dhekial Phukan* — a household officer commanding 6,000 *Paiks*.
- Dihingia Phukan* — a military officer from the place Dihing. There were two Dihingia Phukans—one at Rangpur and the other at Gauhati, each commanding 6,000 men.
- Dola* — the Assamese litter, sedan or Palanquin.
- Durbar* — conference.

- Gayan-bayan* — an orchestral performance on devotional occasions.
- Gaonburha* — a village headman.
- Ga-dhan* — a bride price ; a poll-tax.
- Gamocha* — an Assamese towel.
- Ghat* — a landing place on the bank of a river.
- Gosain* — a spiritual guide ; the head of a *Satra*, initially only the Brahmana *Satradhikars* were called *Gosains*, but subsequently all *Satradhikars*—Brahmanas or non-Brahmanas were called so.
- Guru* — a spiritual preceptor.
- Gurugriha* — the house of a *Guru* in the *Satra*.
- Gurutithi* — tithi literally means a lunar day ; it denotes the birth and death anniversaries of Vaisnava saints.
- Hatimur* — a unit of retainers allotted to the Bura-gohain, Bargohain and Barpatra Gohain, usually consisting of one thousand men.
- Jangphai* — amber.
- Japi* — a hat made of wicker-work.
- Jubraj* — a crown prince.
- Kekora-dola* — a special kind of palanquin associated with Ahom aristocracy.
- Khania* — double cloth. It measures 18 feet to 24 feet in length and 10 feet in breadth.
- Khat* — an estate ; cornfield or garden.
- Khataniar* — an accredited representative of an *Adhikar* or *Mahanta*.

- Kirtana* — the act of chanting prayers ; it is the name of a devotional work of Sankardeva.
- Khel* — a unit or division of subject population under the Ahom having to perform specific services to the state.
- Lakhimi Sabah* — congregation in honour of goddess Lakshmi.
- Lao-pani* — rice beer.
- Mahanta* — literally means a noble man; non-Brahmana heads of *Satras* are popularly called *Mahantas*.
- Mahapurusha* — literally the Great Being, *i.e.* God ; Sankardeva is popularly called as Mahapurusha, for which his religion is also known as *Mahapurushiya dharma*.
- Manikut* — the shrine where the sacred scriptures are installed.
- Mauza* — a fiscal unit.
- Medhi* — a functionary appointed by the *Satra* to look after the affairs in a village.
- Moa* — a kind of small fish.
- Mul* — the first levy of *paiks* from a unit or *got*.
- Namghar* — a prayer hall.
- Nama-prasanga* — devotional services consisting of prayers, recitations and religious discussions.
- N a o b a i c h a* — officer-in-charge of the navy, commanding
Phukan 6,000 *Paiks*.
- Naosalia Phukan* — officer-in-charge of the royal dockyard commanding 7,000 men.

- Nirmali* — a flower or garland offered to a deity ; or a garland given by priests and Brahmanas with blessings.
- Pachani* — informants or carriers of orders attached to the Ahom government or the *Satras*.
- Paik* — an adult male-subject of the Ahom kingdom, who had to render specific services to the State or the *Satra* in rotation.
- Pargana* — a revenue division in Kamrup introduced by the Mughals. The Ahoms, after occupying Kamrup maintained the Mughal structure with necessary modifications. In Ahom administration, Kamrup was divided into 24 Parganas, each placed under an officer called Choudhury.
- Parwana* — a written notice or order.
- Patta* — a lease deed.
- Patramantris* — council of five ministers of the Ahom administration consisting of the Buragohain, Bargohain, Barpatragohain, Barbarua and Barphukan.
- Parman* or *Payasha* — rice boiled with milk and sugar ; sweetened rice-milk.
- Phalgutsov* — Holi ; a festival of colour generally celebrated in the Hindu month of *Phalgun*.
- Posa* — articles given by the *bahatias* to their hill-masters.
- Raijmel* — a conference of the people.
- Rajkhowa* — governors of specific areas like Bacha, Namdayang, etc., having executive power over the men under their command.

- Rajmantri* — the Premier. Initially the office of the *Rajmantri* was given to the Buragohain only, later it was opened to the other two cabinet ministers as well and even to the Barbarua. The *Rajmantri* enjoyed the service of an additional *Hatimur*, meaning one thousand *paiks*.
- Rajmedhi* — an officer appointed to look after the religious affairs of several villages. He was also to collect *guru-kar* (tithe) and supervise the works of the other junior officers like *Barmedhi*, *Sajtola*, *Pachani* etc.
- Rupitland* — cultivable land.
- Sabah* — a congregation of people for religious or semi-religious purposes.
- Sadiakhowa* — a frontier governor stationed at Sadiya.
Gohain He was to conduct relations with the Hill Miris, Mishimis, Singphos and the Khamtis.
- Sandhyagayatri* — a sacred verse of the Rig Veda chanted at morning and evening.
- Sajtola* or — an officer appointed by an *Adhikar* to
Satola collect tithes.
- Samkranti* — the passage of the sun to a new sign or position; the last day of a Hindu month.
- Sastras* — scriptures.
- Satra* — a Vaisnavite monastery.
- Satradhikar* — religious head of a *Satra*.
- Saumar* — a division of ancient Assam known as *Saumar*, which comprises of the present districts of Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar.
- Shraddha* — a Hindu ceremony performed in honour and for the benefit of the soul of the dead by the relatives, at fixed intervals.

<i>Singarighar</i>	—	a house of Singari wood, where the formal enthronement of an Ahom king used to take place.
<i>Sudra</i>	—	Generally a man of the fourth of the four original classes or castes among the Hindus. In Assam all non-Brahman people are called <i>Sudras</i> .
<i>Swargadeo</i>	—	the god of heaven. It is an Assamese equivalent to the Tai-Ahom word <i>Chao-pha</i> (meaning a god coming from heaven). This was the title of the Ahom kings.
<i>Tamuli Phukan</i>	—	officer-in-charge of the royal garden.
<i>Thia-mekhela</i>	—	a kind of petticoat used by an Assamese woman.
<i>Tola</i>	—	a small unit of weight; generally 1/80th part of a <i>seer</i> (approx. 1 kg.).
<i>Vamsha</i>	—	race, family.
<i>Vamsawali</i>	—	geneological table.

COINS

One Rupee coin of Bharat Singha (1718 Saka/1796 A.D.)



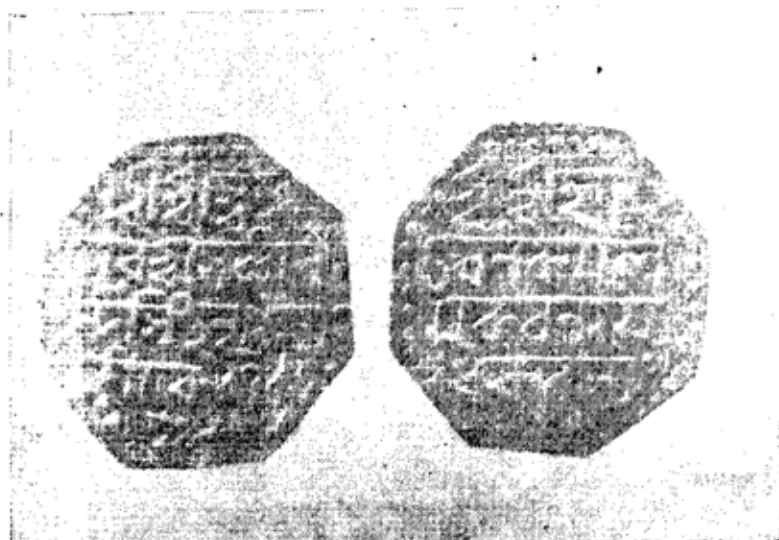
Reverse :

*Sri Sri Krishna-Charanava Vinda
makaranda Pramatta
Madhukarashya
(courtesy : Satradhikar Dinjoy Mayamara Satra)*

Obverse :

*Sri Bhagadatta Kuludbhava
Sri Bharatha Sinha nripasya
Sake 1718*

One Rupee coin of Sarbananda Singha (1716 Saka/1794 A.D.)



Obverse :

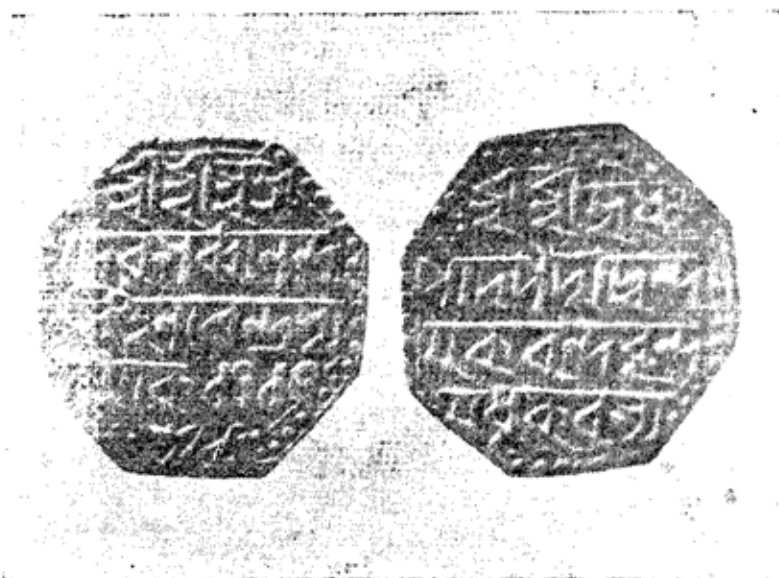
Sri Sri Swargadevo Sri Sarvananda

Singha Nripasya Saka 1716. Kamala mekaranda madhukarasya.

One Rupee coin of Sarbananda Singha (1717 Saka/1795 A.D.)

Reverse :

Sri Sri Krishna charana



Obverse :

Sri Sri Swarga Deva Sarbananda

Singha Narendrasya Saka

1717.

Reverse :

Sri Sri Krishna Padapadma

danda Mekaranda binda

Madhukarasya.

(Courtesy : DHAS, Assam, Gauhati)

Half-rupee coin of Sarbananda Singha :



Obverse :

*Sri Sri Sarbananda Sinha
Narendrasya.*

Reverse :

*Sri Sri Krishna Pada
Parayanasya*

Half-rupee coin of Sarbananda Singha :



Obverse :

*Sri Sri Sarbananda Sinhasya
Nirpasya*

Reverse :

*Sri Sri Krishna
Mahakarsya*

(Courtesy : DHAS, Assam, Gauhati)

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