

Chaolung Su-ka-pha: The Builder of Ahom Kingdom, It's Administration & Economy

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Abstract: *The man behind the foundation of the Ahom kingdom in the early 13th century was Chaolung Su-ka-pha. Early in the thirteen century, a strong group of people entered in the east of the river Brahmaputra valley and nobody could ever predict at the time of their penetration that their descendants would rule one day over the Brahmaputra valley for about 600 years. They were none but the Ahoms under the leadership of this iron man. As he started his journey from MungMao to Charaideo with a group of some hardy men, he had to face one a series of difficulties uninterruptedly and how did he tackle that and take a leading role in building the kingdom, its administration and economy, especially, at that critical juncture; this paper seeks to address and trace- out them all.*

Key-words: *Conjecture, contradictions, fluids, offshoots, progenitors, pursuits*

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I. INTRODUCTION

That the Mung Mao man Chaolung Su-ka-pha laid down the basic foundation of the Ahom kingdom in 1228 in Assam, it is not only confirmed by the facts of sources like the '*buranjis*' but also by the well-remembered and universal tradition. Early in the thirteen century, a strong group of people entered in the east of the river Brahmaputra valley and nobody could ever predict at the time of their penetration that their descendants would rule one day over the Brahmaputra valley for about 600 years. They were none but the progenitors of the Ahoms, the offshoots of the Thai or Shan race of Burma, Thailand and Cambodia.

The beginning of the Ahom kingdom was of late medieval in the Brahmaputra valley which was well known for maintaining her sovereignty for nearly 600 years successfully resisting the inroads of the Mughal expansion in the in North-East India. Established by Su-ka-pha, a Tai prince from Mong Mao, it began as a mong in the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra valley based on wet rice agriculture. It expanded suddenly under Su-hung-mung in the 16th century and became multi-ethnic in character, casting a deep effect on the political and social life of the entire valley. The kingdom became fragile with the rise of the Moamoria uprisings and subsequently fell to repeated Burmese invasions of Assam. With the defeat of the Burmese after the first Anglo-Burmese war and the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, the control of the kingdom passed into the East-India Company's hands.

Though it came to be called the Ahom kingdom in the colonial and subsequent times, it was largely multi-ethnic, with the ethnic Ahoms consisting less than 10% of the population towards the end. The identity of the Ahoms in this kingdom was fluid, with the king controlling who belong to it and who did not. The Ahoms initially called their kingdom Mong Dun Shun Kham till 1401 but adopted Assam in later times. The British controlled the province after 1838 and later the Indian state of Assam came to be known by this name.

The most significant role in the growth of the Assamese civilization in Assam was played by the Ahoms. In course of time, as a result of their conflict with the Chinese, some of them had migrated as far as Yunan and established there a number of principalities. Gradually, they expanded and occupied the whole of the Sheuli valley down to the Irrawaddy in Upper Burma and formed there a number of Tai states. According to S.K.Bhuyan, it was Mao-Lung within the kingdom of Mung Mao from where Su-ka-pha came. P.Gogoi is of the opinion that it was from the Tai state of Mong Mit that the Ahoms under the leadership of Su-ka-pha came to Assam. In Gait's history also, Su-ka-pha's original home land is mentioned as Mou Lung. But there have been a number of contradictions as to the place from where Su-ka-pha and his people came to Assam. From the extend of the spread of the same people over a wide range of territories, we may conjecture that the Tais might have spread from Western Yunan to Upper Burma and it was from the nearest station that they came to the Brahmaputra valley.

Su-ka-pha was accompanied by a large number of followers. The Chronicles mention various numbers between 480 to 9000. Founding a new kingdom in an unconquered land makes it clear that Su-ka-pha was

accompanied by a large number of followers most of whom were men. The regular fighting force of Su-ka-pha was 9000 strong. Besides, Su-ka-pha had with him 300 horses and two elephants leaving aside a number of swords (*hang -dang*)

Su-ka-pha moved towards Patkai amidst dense jungles inhabited by ferocious tribes. But he conquered the regions around the Daikhram Mountains south of Patkai and entered the Naga territory wherefrom he crossed the river Khamjang and reached the Nangyang lake. He defeated the Naga's there and made it a province called Khamjang and appointed one as governor. He then marched towards the Patkai range and conquered the Naga territories and subjugated them. Then he reached Namrup and Tipam and entered the Brahmaputra valley in 1228 AD. The whole course of action since his leaving from Mao-Lung took a period of 13 years.

Su-ka-pha then moved from one place to another in search of a suitable place for capital. Finally, he reached Charaideo in 1253 A.D, and established his head quarter there. At the time of his arrival, the land was inhabited by some tribes who were in their primitive stage and mode of production. Among them, the Marans were besieging the regions between the Burhi Dihing and the Dichang river, the Barahis were between the Dichang and the Dikhow-both on the south bank of the Brahmaputra. The chiefs of the Morans and the Barahis were brought under his control by friendly means. He cemented his relations with these local tribes by marrying their daughters and appointing their men as cooks in the royal kitchen.

Thus, by the middle of the 13th century, the Ahoms established a small kingdom centering round Charaideo and received all co-operation from the local tribes who also belonged to the same Mongoloid race. Unlike these tribes, the Ahoms were already having an improved culture and economy based on developed agricultural systems. He made arrangement for development of agriculture in Khamjang for collecting revenue.

Besides that, he made administrative arrangements of the territories he had conquered already on his way and kept his people in those places in order to engage themselves in agricultural pursuits. He himself changed places for a number of times due to floods, which was hindrance for agriculture, before he finally settled at Charaideo. The Ahoms used animals like buffaloes and oxen in their farms and developed irrigation for the purpose of cultivation. At the time of Su-ka-pha's arrival in the easternmost part of the Brahmaputra valley, the region was wild and uncultivated. It therefore appears that the Ahoms had a mission of making Assam green with agricultural productions and Su-ka-pha, as founder of their kingdom laid the first step towards that direction.

Su-ka-pha died in 1268 AD after a reign of 40 years. Before his death, he not only laid the foundation of a kingdom on a strong and permanent footing but also started the process of bringing about a radical change in its material life through the introduction and expansion of wet-rice culture. He appointed two of his accompanying senior nobles as ministers of kingdom called Burhagohain and Borgohain respectively. It was again he who introduced the process of recording the political events of the state which came to be known as '*buranjis*'.

Su-ka-pha's successor Su-teu-pha ruled for about 14 years. He was succeeded by his son Su-bin-pha in 1291AD. During the reign of Su-bin-pha's successor Su-khang-pha(1293-1332),the Ahom kingdom grew in power and its influence was felt as far west as the kingdom of Kamata. The increasing power of the Ahoms was not liked by the neighboring Chutiyas which resulted in series of conflicts between the two powers.

The last years of the 14th century saw the rule of a king who introduced a number of new elements to the Ahom state. He was Su-dang-pha who introduced certain Brahmanical elements in the royal household and appointed Brahmana counselors in the court.

Su-dang-pha's successors were capable of maintaining their territorial integrity but could not achieve much expansion. The Ahom kingdom was firmly established and extended by Su-hung-mung (1497-1539). He vigorously followed an expansion policy and it was during his reign, the Chutiyas were completely subjugated and their kingdom was annexed to his dominions. During his reign, the Kacharis were also expelled from the plain regions. Besides, he subjugated the Bhuyans, made the Koch king his tributary and concluded alliance with the rulers of Orissa and Manipur. The growing powers of the Ahoms under Su-hung-mung attracted the attention of the Muslim rulers of Bengal which led a number of invasions by the sultans of Bengal during the first half of the 16th century.

The process of emergence of the Ahom kingdom as the only major power of the region with its strong agrarian economy was, however, not completed till the time of king Su-seng-pha(1603-1641) who not only fought the Mughals for almost four decades but also formed a concrete civil society in Assam. The '*buranjis*' mentioned that during the Ahom-Mughal conflicts, a number of tribal chiefs came forward to co-operate with the Ahoms against the invaders. Su-seng-pha gave Assam permanent socio-economic structures. It was during his rule; Momai Tamuli Barbarua established model villages and introduced the *paik* system in systematic way.

The Ahoms had to wage protracted wars against the Mughals for at least another four decades even after Su-seng-pha to establish permanently their western boundary and make their kingdom the most dominant one. During this period, the Ahom rulers tried their best to improve the economy of the state by various ways and resisted the mighty Mughals successfully. It should be noted that the sound and stable economy of the state

played the most important role in enabling the Ahoms to resist the attack of the Mughals. Gadadhar Singha by defeating the Mughals in the battle of Itakhuli extended the boundary of the Ahom kingdom up to the river Manah in 1682 and made it a permanent part of the Ahom kingdom. The part of the territory of the former Koch kingdom also became now a part of the Ahom kingdom and remained with it till it was taken over by the British in the early part of the 19th century i.e.1826.

Thus, a small state formed in the extreme south east corner of the Brahmaputra valley in the early part of the 13th century became the single largest kingdom covering almost the entire region of the valley by the last part of the 17th century. The political expansion was accompanied by the growth of population of diverse ethnic groups, professions and cultures. Behind the formation and growth of the kingdom was its economy which was largely based on its agriculture.

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