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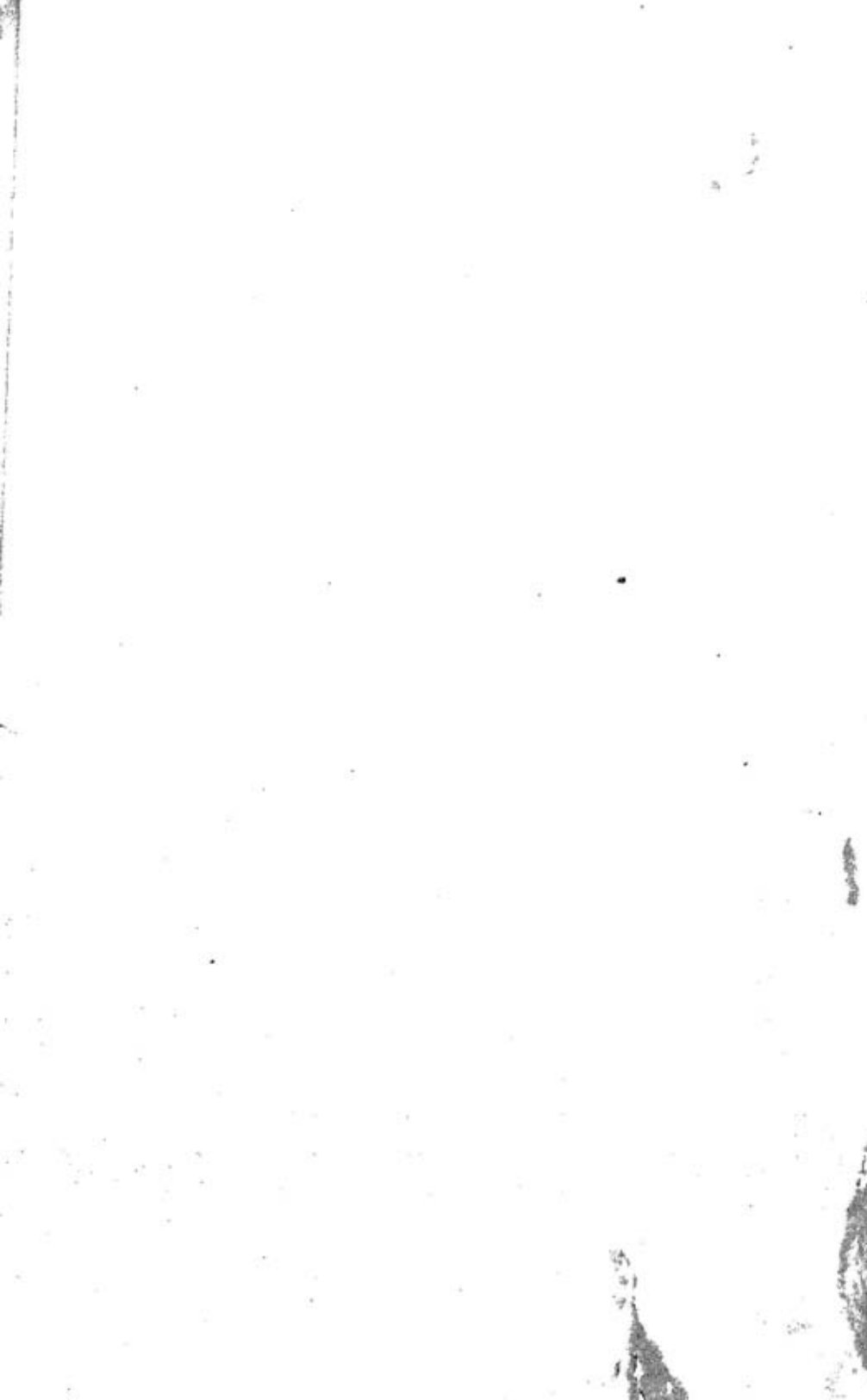
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WORKS BY DR. S. K. BHUYAN

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 SATSARI ASSAM BURANJI. SEVEN OLD CHRONICLES.

STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF ASSAM

Ministry of Education

Government of India,
New Delhi.

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BY

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DR. SURYYA KUMAR BHUYAN

Born January 27, 1894

Died July 5, 1964



FOREWORD

By Dr. Maheswar Neog

When Professor Dr. Suryya Kumar Bhuyan passed away peacefully in the American Baptist Mission Hospital at Chatribari, Gauhati, in the morning of the 5th of July 1964, the most enlightened and scientific brain at work in the field of Assam's history was lost. He was one of the foremost scholars of Indian history, and his was a name of honour and value in noted centres of historical studies in India. Early in his career his works were received with approbation by such eminent persons as Sir Edward A. Gait, Lt.-Col. P.R.T. Gurdon and Lt.-Col. Sir Wolsey Haig on the pages of the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, the *Bulletin of Oriental and African Studies*, London, and the *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*, Leipzig.

Born in 1894 in the small town of Nowgong, Suryya Kumar Bhuyan had his early education in the Government High Schools at his native place and Shillong and Cotton College, Gauhati. From the last institution he passed the Intermediate Examination in Arts of Calcutta University with credit in 1911. He had his B.A. Honours and M.A. in English Literature from the Presidency College, Calcutta, and his B.L. from the Calcutta University Law College. He was appointed Professor of English at Cotton College from the 4th of July 1918. A serious student of literature, Bhuyan's intellectual interests soon gravitated towards biographical and historical studies. In 1918 was published a small but significant work of his, *Ahomar Din*, a treatise on the Ahom system of administration, which indicated, as it were, the direction in which wind of Bhuyan's life was to blow. A poet of no mean degree, he also published in the same year a collection of his beautiful lyrics, *Nirmāli*, to be followed in 1920 by the historical narrative, *Jaymati Upākhyān* in the traditional metre, style and language of Vaishnava poetry. His *Anuṣṭupam Borooah* (1920) is an important biographical work, betraying

a great deal of painstaking over widely scattered materials about the great Sanskritist of Assam (1851-1889), who died young at the age of thirty-nine. Bhuyan continued his literary pursuit with great vigour, was prolific in his valued contributions to current Assamese journals, and associated himself actively with the Kāmarupa Anusandhān Samiti (Assam Research Society), having acted as its Honorary Secretary in 1921-22 and again in 1926-29. But the work that was to move the tide with great force to make the great historian in him was *Early British Relations with Assam* (1927). The then Director of Public Instruction in Assam, J. R. Cunningham, saw the manuscript copy of this small book, was fascinated to realise its value, and arranged with the Government to publish it. Cunningham, being inspired by the same book, induced the Government to establish the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, with A. H. W. Bentinck as Honorary Director, and Professor Bhuyan and J. P. Mills as Honorary Assistant Directors. But it was Bhuyan who became the life and soul of the Department by putting in all the time he could spare at the service of the Department. With immense labour he collected a number of manuscripts of great historical value, collated and edited some of them on modern critical lines with introductions in English and Assamese, and published them through the new Department. In 1933 Professor Bhuyan became its full-fledged Honorary Director; and in 1936 the Department's house, Narayani Handiqui Historical Institute, built on a magnificent donation of the philanthropist, Radhakanta Handiqui, was formally declared open. The five Bulletins of the Department brought out so far show on what sound foundation Bhuyan was building this fine institution.

In 1936 Professor Bhuyan proceeded to the United Kingdom and joined the School of Oriental and African Studies to work under the guidance of Professor H. H. Dodwell. His dissertation, *Anglo-Assamese Relations, 1771-1826* (1947), which was to be his magnum opus, was approved in 1938 for the Ph.D. degree of London University. At the School he acted as Additional Lecturer in Assamese, and his short stay in England also gave him the opportunity to work at the old Assam records at the India Office Library.

After his return from the U.K. Dr. Bhuyan re-joined Cotton College. He served the Government from time to time in other capacities—as Special University Officer in 1940-41, as Inspector of School in 1941-42 and as Principal of the College for a brief spell in 1946. But all the time he continued to be the Honorary Director of the Historical and Antiquarian Studies, and became its whole-time Director in January 1947, being relieved of his duties at Cotton College. He became Director of Public Instruction for Assam in 1948-49, but having retired from that office on the 31st March 1949, again took whole-time charge of the Historical Department. He was elected Vice-Chancellor of Gauhati University in 1958, and steered the course of that centre of learning for a full term of three years. After that Dr. Bhuyan was living a fully retired life ; but he did not, all the same, retire from the passion of his life, history and literature. Even when he was growing physically feeble and finding it difficult to write an easy and clear hand, he plied the type-writer to catch his teeming thoughts, and this piece of modern device remained his close friend till even the last hours of his life. I have not seen a life more dedicated and self-made, more planned and better spread-out. One has to see only the well made out bibliographies attached to his published works and the many files which he maintained for all the different subjects connected with his studies and ordinary things of life in order to be convinced of his neat method of living. Even when, just a few hours before his last breath, he got into the car to go to the hospital, he did not forget to take his personal file with earlier medical records and his small attache case with pen, pencil, knife and other tit-bits. It is precisely because of this method, which he probably picked up very early in his life, that he was able to put up a large amount of achievement packed into the duration of one single life in this distant corner of the world. Even in his Bibliography of Works we must needs have a list of proposed publications, divided into books ready for press, books in the course of preparation and contemplated compilations.

Throughout his busy career Dr. Bhuyan was associated with a number of literary, historical and cultural bodies in the country. He was a Corresponding Member of the Indian Historical Records Commission in 1928-47 ; President of the Com-

mittee for the translation of the Indian Constitution into Assamese, 1949; Chairman of the Regional Survey Committee under the auspices of the Indian Historical Records Commission, 1955. He was a member of the Executive Council of Gauhati University since almost its inception in 1949, and a member of the Committee appointed by the University Grants Commission and the Government of India Ministry of Education to consider the question of setting up a University for the North-Eastern region of India, which is now in the offing. He presided over the Modern History Section of the Indian History Congress held at Gwalior in December 1952, the Local History Section of the Congress held at Gauhati in December 1959 and the Shillong Session of Asam Sahitya Sabha in 1953. Dr. Bhuyan was a member of the Rajya Sabha in 1952-54.

Dr. Bhuyan will perhaps live with posterity as an eminent historian. But he was a poet, as already mentioned, and a 'pure' litterateur too. A few of his poems, written when he was young, strike a high level of sublimity and beauty. He wrote a sheaf of short stories too (*Panchami*, 1927). He took the rôle of a folklorist when he collected and published (1924) with a critical introduction the valuable historical ballad centering around Badanchandra Barphukan, an Ahom officer who invited the Burmese hordes to Assam only to lay it under devastation. He made biography his fortè when he published his works on Gopalkrishna Gokhale (1916), Rabindranath Tagore (1920), Anundoram Borooah (1920), Rani Phuleswari (*An Assamese Nur Jahan*, 1926) and sketches of other eminent women in *Chāneki* (1928), *Asam-jiyari* (1935), and *Ramani Gābharu* (1951), and a sketch of the eccentric Vaishnava saint, *Harihara Atā* (1960), or when as a historian he made a prominent figure in Assam's past the signal for the study of an epoch, as in *Swargadeo Rājeswar Singha* (in the press), *Lachit Barphukan and His Times* (1947) and *Atan Buragohain and His Times* (1957). His *Mir Jumlār Asam Ākraman* (1955) is a close study of the Mogul invasion of Assam under Nawab Mir Jumla in 1662-63. In all these works, whether in Assamese or in English, his style has the ring of an unmistakable sincerity combined with a sweet literary flourish. His keen dramatic sense, which helped him see the dead past as a living phenomenon, is well brought

out when he pictures the Ahom princes, Ramani Gābharu, married to Aurangzeb's third son, Azam Shah, prattling love and politics to her consort, or when he imagines the Macbeth-like general, Laluk Barphukan, soliloquising. It was Dr. Bhuyan, among others, who rendered the historical essay in Assamese into a distinct literary form as in *Āhomar Din* and *Buranjir Vāni* (1951). His *Tripadi* represents three aspects of Assam's literature, history and culture in three straightforward essays. Dr. Bhuyan has to his credit other essays in criticism in English as in *Studies in the Literature of Assam* (1956) and autobiographical sketches as in *The Seven Hindrances* (1953), *Some Literary Reminiscences* (1954) and *Men I have Met* (1962).

Dr. Bhuyan's original research in the field of history consisted of, beside his independent treatises, the modern editions of quite a good number of Assamese chronicles, called buranji, and other old records: Harakanta Barua's *Asam Buranji* (1930), *Kāmrupar Buranji* (1930), *Deodhāi Asam Buranji* (1932), *Tungkhungiyā Buranji* (1933), *Asamar Padya Buranji* (1933), *Pādshā Buranji* (1935), *Kachāri Buranji* (1936), *Jayantiā Buranji* (1937), *Tripurā Buranji* (1938), Francis Buchanan's *An Account of Assam* (1940), *Asam Buranji* recovered from North Gauhati (1945) and *Sātsari Asam Buranji* (1960). These acquainted the student of history with original materials on which to build a scientific history of Assam. Professor Bhuyan translated the whole of the *Tungkhungiyā Buranji* into English (1933) with additional matter bringing the account up to the end of the Ahom rule in Assam in 1826. He himself showed how to reconstruct history on a wide scale in his *Anglo-Assamese Relations*. The fresh materials about Mogul India which he discovered from Assamese sources have been marshalled in his *Annals of the Delhi Badshate* (1947).

Yet another branch of useful investigation, which we are generally apt to neglect but cannot afford to, Dr. Bhuyan made his domain. This is bibliographical study. His own views on its utility is worth quoting here: "In a place like Assam, where there are no proper facilities for publication, where there are no libraries containing complete volumes of old periodicals, and where there are no arrangements for preserving traces of an author's writings, they have every possibility of being completely

blotted out of human memory though there may be materials enough in those writings which may prove useful as a source of information and entertainment, as well as a means of edification and inspiration. Some kindred spirit may take up the cue in future and complete the work commenced, suggested or hinted at by a preceding author. Continuity is thus maintained between the literary activities of one period and those of subsequent ages." He has left us the bibliography of his own works as well as very useful ones on the subjects of history and literature of Assam.

In the above I have mentioned only those works of the scholar which have been made public in book form. Quite a large number of his writings, however, lie away from common reach. One reads with avidity Dr. Bhuyan's charming reminiscences of his stay in England in a magnificent English, taken from his unpublished *London Memories* and printed in the columns of *The Assam Tribune*. The autobiogramemoir of his childhood days and of his rambles in the realms of history come out equally magnificently in *The Story of My Life* and *A Historian's Haversack*, which he delighted in occasionally listening to being read out by some intimate visitor to his quiet study.

The present volume represents the learned writer's studies in the field of Assam's history dealing with a variety of topics and spread over quite a long period, from 1926 to 1961. These are in a way only splinters from Dr. Bhuyan's historical workshop. This is, moreover, a companion volume to his earlier publication, *Studies in the Literature of Assam*, which also includes a few papers on historical subjects.

The Assamese people have the proud tradition "in a branch of study in which India, as a rule, is curiously deficient", as Sir George Abraham Grierson says, meaning history and referring to the "numerous and voluminous" chronicles (buranji). These ancient writings cover not only the annals of Assam, beginning with its early semi-legendary rulers, but also interesting accounts of countries having some diplomatic relations with the local Administration. It is the Ahoms who brought this tradition of chronicles into Assam. Dr. Bhuyan explored the buranjis in

the true spirit of a serious student of history. The essays in the following pages give us the meaning and significance that he found in the past of this part of the country. They also bring to us a panorama, not very comprehensive though, of this past, giving a view of Assam's administrative and military systems, of great events in its annals, of its notable men and women (like Amritaprabha, Lachit Barphukan, Atan Buragohain and Maniram Dewan) and those others who came as invaders (like Mir Jumla and Ram Singha) or as investigators (like Shihabuddin Talish and Dr. John Peter Wade). Of great interest are Dr. Bhuyan's scheme for the creation of an Asiatic Society of Assam (This, it may be noted, was presented at a meeting of the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti in March 1927 while the Assam Government Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies came into being the following June, thus fulfilling at least some of his expectations.) and his survey, 'Historical research in Assam', coming in a line with Sir E.A. Gait's *Report on Historical Research in Assam*. Sometime before his death Dr. Bhuyan was requested by Assam's enthusiastic Education Minister, Shri Devkanta Borooah, to take up the work of writing or compiling a comprehensive history of Kamarupa-Assam with the co-operation of other local writers. He made out a tentative plan, which Time would not allow him to fulfil; but his 'Bibliography of Assam History' is sure to offer the proper guide to such a project, which now devolves on younger scholars in the field. It is thus that the savant would happily project himself into the future scholarship of Assam.

PUBLISHER'S APPEAL

The present publication was sent to the press in April 1964. Its author, my husband, died on the 5th of July 1964. It is really very unfortunate for me and the family that the writer himself could not present the book to the public. In spite of our limitations, therefore, we consider it our duty to the departed soul to bring it out as it was left by its author.

The Government of Assam were very kind to have sanctioned a financial grant as assistance towards publication of this volume. We are grateful on that account to the Chief Minister, Shri Bimala Prasad Chaliha, and the Education Minister, Shri Devkanta Borooah, for without this financial assistance it would not have been possible for us to publish the present work.

We are thankful to Dr. Maheswar Neog of Gauhati University for his Foreword as well as for his advice in connection with seeing the book through the press. Our thanks are also due to Sriman Hemrath Barman, who rendered immense help in the preparation of the press copy.

I am sure my late husband would have ensured the publication of the book in a far better way. In his absence mistakes are bound to occur in the body of the text. I would only crave the indulgence of the kind readers in this respect. It would be a source of immense happiness to me and the family if the book is received with the same kindness as it would have deserved had it been brought out by its learned author.

I must take this opportunity of conveying our gratitude to Shri Kalicharan Pal of Nabajiban Press for his kind co-operation and interest in the publication.

Company Bagan Road
Ujan Bazar, Gauhati
The 5th July 1965

LAKSHESWARI BHUYAN

PREFACE

The present volume *Studies in the History of Assam* contains a number of articles of historical interest written by the author between the years 1925 and 1961. It is hoped that they will throw light on some aspects of the subject. Most of them have been published or broadcast before. But as they lie scattered in different periodicals and journals the average reader is not expected to have a ready access to them. They are therefore collected together and published under one cover. A few pieces on the present state of historical research in Assam have been added to serve as a guide and a stimulus. The details of publication, together with other relevant information, have been inserted in the Bibliographical Notes in Appendix B.

The present book is meant to serve as a companion volume to the earlier one *Studies in the Literature of Assam*, published by Sriman Bichitra Narayan Dutta Barua, Proprietor of Lawyer's Book Stall, Gauhati, with a Foreword by Shri Sri Prakasa, formerly Governor of Assam, and of Madras, Bombay and Maharashtra. The border line between a historical article and a literary one being very thin several pieces of historical interest were incorporated in the earlier volume. I hope, readers will consider the two books as being of one intent and purpose, namely, the unfolding of the culture and history of Assam. A list of historical articles and notes, compiled by the author from time to time, and not included in either of the two volumes, has been inserted in Appendix C.

The date of compilation has been noted at the end of each article, to indicate the extent of information available on the subject or the position of historical research at that time. Some repetitions have been unavoidable, as the articles were written at different times, and an attempt was made in each case to make it as independent and self-complete as possible.

Lastly, I embrace this opportunity to acknowledge my indebtedness to the periodicals, organisations and institutions through whose kind instrumentality the studies were first brought to light : Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti or the Assam Research Society, Assam Government Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Indian Historical Records Commission, Hills-Plains Peoples' Week Celebration at Shillong in November 1947, Gauhati University Postgraduate Students Union, Gauhati Centre of the All India Radio, Reception Committee of the 63rd Session of the Indian National Congress held at Gauhati in January 1958, Reception Committee of the 22nd Session of the Indian History Congress held at Gauhati in December 1959 ; Journal of Indian History, Madras ; Assam Review, Silchar ; Bengal : Past and Present, Calcutta ; Assam Tribune, Gauhati ; Lucknow Herald ; Dainik Asamiya, Gauhati ; Amrita Bazar Patrika, Calcutta ; Frontier Times, Shillong. I am also thankful to the authorities of the Assam Secretariat Record Room and the West Bengal Government Record Room for kindly furnishing copies of papers preserved in their respective archives.

Company Bagan Road,
Gauhati, Assam.
The 15th February, 1962.

S. K. BHUYAN

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TO
MY SON-IN-LAW
SRIMAN BHARAT CHANDRA DAS
WITH
AFFECTION AND LOVE

SURYA KUMAR BHUYAN



STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF ASSAM



ASSAM THROUGH THE AGES

The most curious thing about Assam is the conspicuous ignorance about it on the part of my countrymen in India and my fellow mortals in other parts of the world. This ignorance has persisted since olden times. European merchants trading with Assam in the eighteenth century regretted that they knew very little about Assam as about the interior parts of China. At the present time, the situation seems to be improved to some extent owing to the constant visits of men and women from other parts of India, the publicity given by the press and the Government, and the publication of books in English throwing light on different aspects of Assam. As Assam was a base for military operations during World War II, a great deal of attention was focussed on it in that momentous period.

Those who have seen Assam have been charmed by its natural attractions and the simplicity and candour of its inhabitants. The attractions are so irresistible that an outsider living in Assam for a short time do not desire to go back to his native land which gave rise to the report that the people of Assam can transform a man into a lamb; and serious-minded

persons whom I met in Delhi and elsewhere had asked me whether it was a fact. Stories of witchcraft and magic practised by Assam's men and women are current all over India ; and Ram Singha, the Rajput Raja of Amber, invading Assam in 1669-71, brought with him a number of Muslim saints to undo the effects of Kamrupi black arts. Some years ago, an Urdu book, entitled *Kamrup-ki-jadu*, was published from Bareilly. So, in the popular conception of India, Assam's importance lies in its thaumaturgy. Malaria and general unhealthiness are other factors associated with Assam. It is believed that generals whom the Mogul emperors wanted to get rid of were sent to Assam to die here from the effects of its pestilential climate.

But the story is not like that. Assam is a very ancient country with a distinct culture and civilisation of its own, which if properly studied and understood will be an object of amazement and admiration. The elements of this culture and civilisation have begun to be explored comparatively recently ; and fragments which have come out have never failed to create respect for Assam and its people.

The most outstanding feature of Assam's pre-eminence in the ideals of human perfection reveals itself in an inscription of the eleventh century. Speaking of the capital of Pragjyotishpur, the inscription says,—

“It is adorned by learned men, religious preceptors and poets, who have made it their place of resort, just as the sky is adorned by Mercury, Jupiter and Venus. . . . Here, dullness might be observed in necklaces, but not in the senses of its inhabitants ; fickleness in

apes, but not in their minds; changefulness in the motions of their eyebrows, but not in promises; accidents happening to things, but not to the subjects."

The inscription goes on to record the military fortifications of the capital,—

"Like the cloth which protects the king's broad chest, its boundaries were encompassed by a rampart, furnished with a fence strong like that used for the game-birds of the Cakas, fit to cause chagrin to the king of Gurjara, to give fever to the untameable elephants of the chief of Gaura, to act like bitumen in the earth to the lord of Kerala, to strike awe into the Bahikas and the Taikas, to cause discomfiture to the master of the Deccan country; and generally to serve for the purpose of discomfiting the king's enemies. It is rendered beautiful by the river Lauhitya."

The above statements regarding the contents of the capital of ancient Assam remind us of the claim made by Pericles that the Athenians were lovers of beauty without extravagance, and lovers of wisdom without unmanliness. Men who cherished the above ideal about their capital could not be citizens of a mean city. This ideal has influenced their minds throughout the ages. The study of the process by which Assam has acted in consonance with the spirit of this ideal, in different branches of human activities, material, intellectual and spiritual, is an object lesson of the highest value to all mankind.

The factor which has shaped the history and culture of Assam is its geographical situation. Some thirty years ago, a British officer had appropriately

suggested Arva, Flumina, Montes,—cultivated plains, rivers and mountains—as a motto for a coat-of-arms for the province of Assam. The river Brahmaputra, or Lauhitya as it is sometimes called, flows from one extremity to the other. The neighbouring plains have been the home of people from ages past. Here have flourished in full splendour the arts of war and peace. The Brahmaputra has provided a mighty channel for commercial communication. Soldiers going out of Assam, and coming into Assam, have used that river as their means of transport. It has been a sacred outlet for pilgrims visiting the holy shrines of India. It has served as the life-line of Assam, and has contributed to the fertility and verdure of its soil. The tributaries have served as riparian arteries of the main channel. In a sense, the civilisation of Assam can be called Lauhitya Civilisation.

The Brahmaputra plains have naturally been selected as the habitat of its settled population; while the martial races, tribes as we call them, have preferred to live mostly in the hills for their assured immunity from floods and inundations. But their contacts with the plains people have been maintained from time immemorial, necessitated by the law of inter-dependence and mutual benefit. The intimacy of this contact is seen in the invariable practice of a plainsman accosting a hillman by the word *Mita*, which means a friend, being derived from the Sanskrit word *Mitra*. This *Mita*-hood has served as the symbol of unfailing good-will and understanding between plains people and their brothers and sisters living in the hills.

It should not however be assumed that the tribals live only in the hills. Many of them live in the plains following their own customs and practices. They mix

freely and intimately with their Hindu neighbours, and the history of Assam is replete with examples of their imbibing the manners of their neighbours.

In fact, if the Aryans of Assam were left alone to carve out their destiny they would have cut a very sorry figure. It is a well-known fact that Aryans, engaged in the arts of refinement and in speculations about the life to come, become gradually enervated; and unless the population is constantly reinforced by the enduring muscles of the martial tribal races their position in military conflicts becomes a precarious one. In Assam, the inevitable physical deterioration of the people was checked by the influx of tribal elements. The armies of Assam presented a spectacle of the assemblage of non-tribals and tribals. This combination of intellect and vigour conferred on Assam the perennial prestige of being successful resisters of foreign invasions. While a large part of India had been subject to foreign domination, Assam kept her flag of independence flying throughout the ages. This continued independence enabled Assam to shape its own pattern of society and culture, and to formulate a philosophy of life which is marked by vitality and vision.

Assam's civilisation is catholic and universal. Though living in a sequestered region, the people have received ungrudgingly all the good things that the Gangetic Valley has to offer. This open-mindedness has brought Assam within the cultural hegemony of India without eclipsing its own inherent traditions and ideals. The time has now come when the Gangetic Valley should study the redeeming elements of the civilisation of its Lauhitya counterpart.

As we have said, the first significant feature of

Assam's civilisation is the part that non-Aryans have played in moulding and shaping it. Turning to the epical age, we find the great hero Bhagadatta, king of Kamarupa, appearing in the battlefield of Kurukshetra at the head of his Kirata legions whose array and splendour caused terror and dismay in the hearts of the warriors. In the seventh century A.D., the throne of Kamarupa, occupied so long by princes of the line of Bhagadatta, was wrested by a tribal leader named Salastambha who was succeeded by twenty-one monarchs of his line. The Ahoms who conquered Assam in the beginning of the thirteenth century, and who have contributed so much to the growth of Assam's culture, were of non-Aryan origin. They came gradually under the influence of Hinduism, and became ardent and liberal patrons of that religion.

The necessity to encourage the non-Aryans to enter the Aryan fold, and remain there as faithful adherents, led to the development of a code which would be popular amongst the new entrants. Buddhism had anticipated this necessity and had accordingly modified its practices and rites under the name Vajrayana, which of course denotes a debased form as contrasted with the original tenets. The Hindus admitted the same practices, and gave them a new label—Tantricism. The esoteric and secret character of these practices were viewed with disfavour by orthodox Hindus, though it appears that these concessions were necessary to attract tribals to Hinduism.

In Assam, the Vajrayanic and Tantric forms were labelled under one head—Bauddhachara, which consisted of night-worship, promiscuous gathering and eating. They were resorted to not only by non-Aryans but also by a section of the Hindus.

The continuance of this Bauddhachara was regarded as a menace to the purer form of Hinduism; and the Vaisnava reformers of Assam, beginning from Sankardeva, 1449-1568, waged a holy crusade to restore the worship of one God, Vishnu. The Adherents of Bauddhachara were called Bodha, though they were miles apart from the code of righteous conduct—right thought, right speech and right action—preached by the Blessed Lord Sakyamuni Gautama Buddha.

Any way, one thing remains prominent that the rigour of Hindu manners and practices had to be relaxed to admit of free and intimate intercourse with tribal neighbours. It led to a process of liberalisation, and a new-comer to Assam will be struck by the cordiality and freedom with which the different elements of the population are mixing with one another. There is no fear of losing one's caste, or forsaking one's primordial identity.

This liberalisation has been further promoted by the long continuance of Ahom domination in Assam, for full six hundred years, 1228-1826 A.D. Though in the beginning, the Ahoms adhered to their Shan customs and practices, they had gradually to give way to those of the neighbouring Hindus. The Ahom rulers patronised Hindu priests, erected Hindu temples, and made endowments for their maintenance and worship. The Hindus in their turn attributed a divine origin to their princely patrons, and brought it in line with the customary beliefs of the Shans and the Hindus.

This compromise between Aryanism and non-Aryanism led to the numerical expansion of the Hindu fold. Many amongst the present-day Assamese Hindus are believed to be assimilations from the tribes.

Mahapurush Sankardeva led the way by conferring upon tribals the privileges of full-fledged Hindus provided they conformed to certain simple practices leading to refinement and a purer way of living. He had among his near disciples two Muslims named Jaihari and Chandsai, and a Garo, named Govinda. After Sankardeva's death, the message of Vaisnavism was carried to the eastern districts of Assam where lived unorthodox inhabitants, or Bodhas as they were called. This mission was mainly under a very pious reformer, named Kathar-sagar Gopaldeva of Bhavanipur, who like Saint Paul, preached among the heathens, softened their ways of living, and brought them gradually to the fold of Vaisnava Hinduism, and they proved to be devoted followers of the faith.

The influence of the tribals in the development of Assamese culture has been many-sided and significant. Assamese vocabulary has been enriched by introductions from tribal dialects. Assam's music has borrowed many elements from tribal singing and dancing. Spectators and listeners who have seen and heard Manipuri, Bodo, Lushai, Miri, Khasi and Naga dances and songs in the variety performances of the presentday have been impressed by their exquisite rhythm and melody. Manipuri dance has become widely known and even imitated in India, and it has added a new pattern of Indian dancing.

Most of the tribals are neo-literates in the sense that the written word was unknown amongst them till very recently. But there are three races amongst them who possess a varied written literature, which, apart from maintaining its own integrity, gives evidence of its indebtedness to the literature of the Aryans.

First come the Ahoms, the whilom rulers of Assam. They brought with them their canonical classics when they first came to Assam from their Shan homeland. Their literature consists of worship manuals, astrological treatises, chronicles and romances. Living in Assam for a long time, the Ahoms could not but be influenced by the models available in their adopted country. They wrote the story of the Ramayana in the Ahom language, compiled lexicons from Ahom to Assamese and vice-versa. Their greatest book is *Min-mang-phura-lung*, which represents the gospel of Ahimsa in the form of a simple story. Unfortunately, the indigenous literature of the Ahoms is gradually becoming obsolete owing to the paucity of men conversant with the language.

The Khamptis and the Phakials, who came to Assam later than the Ahoms, possess a splendid literature of Buddhism. It deals with Buddhist tenets, way of life, cosmogony and mythology. One Khampti manuscript, recently unearthed, contains a complete criminal code, enumerating punishments for offences both trivial and serious. Several other manuscripts have been found containing miniatures of Buddha in the customary postures. The literature of the Ahoms, the Khamptis and the Phakials constitutes a treasure-house of information about the form and contents assumed by Buddhistic traditions far away from their place of origin. This literature deserves the serious attention of scholars in India and the world, because Buddhism is being studied more widely and closely than before as it is believed to contain the panacea for establishing peace and amity among the jarring races of man.

The tribals have been ignored and neglected on

the plea that they are ignorant and backward, and that we have nothing to learn from them. But it is a very serious mistake. They are good and great in their own way. They possess a marvellous capacity for organisation. They are restrained in their speech, but when they talk they mean business. They have powerful instincts with the help of which they can quickly distinguish between sincerity and simulation. Their straightforwardness, stamina and fortitude, capacity for endurance and hard work, freedom from social inequality, and their onemindedness represent the highest assortment of human attributes.

Turning to the history of Assam, the most striking feature is the people's love of independence. "Death is preferable to a life of subordination to foreigners", declared the Assamese monarch Chakradhwaj Singha ; and it summarises in a way the political idealism of the people of Assam throughout the centuries. In the long history of a nation occasional reverses in military conflicts are inevitable ; but the people of Assam were not accustomed to becoming upset and down-and-out at their descomfitures. Their usual motto under such circumstances was,—“If the sun is once eclipsed, does it not make its appearance again.” This hatred of foreign domination and capacity for recuperation constituted the dominant feature of Assam's foreign policy. The successful pursuance of this policy enabled Assam to maintain its independence in a practically uninterrupted manner.

Foreign rule was always regarded as an abomination. Even female hawkers openly rebuked their rulers if they failed to give protection to their subjects by expelling the enemies from the land. At the sight of the vast array of Mogul forces encamped in the neigh-

bourhood of Gauhati, the Assamese general Lachit Barphukan admitted the seriousness of the situation in the following ever-memorable words,—“It is a tragedy that my country has to face this dire caastrophe during my Phukanship ! How will my king be saved ? How will my people be saved ? How will my posterity be saved ?” This realisation was a prelude to vigorous action which enabled him to crush the invading Mogul army in the naval battle of Saraighst fought on the waters of the Brahmaputra near Gauhati.

The Assamese did not confine their love of independence to themselves. After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, the subjects of Mogul India had to face direful consequences of political upheavals. A leader sprang up in Assam who planned to free his countrymen in India from the burden of Mogul yoke. He planned to invade Bengal, and then to proceed to Delhi to unfurl his flag of victory. He was aided by a number of tribal chieftains with their quotas of fighting men and equipments. But as ill-luck would have it, the king died in September 1714, on the eve of his departure at the head of the expedition. He was Swargadeo Rudra Singha the Great, king of Assam from 1696 to 1714. History would have taken a different turn if King Rudra Singha had succeeded in his enterprise. It may be, the centuries of British rule in India would have been a non-existent chapter of its history.

The successors of King Rudra Singha on the throne of Assam were not men of high military ambition. They perfected the arts of peace, and patronised religion and literature. Most of the Hindu temples in Assam were constructed during this period; large endowments were made to Brahmans, and the royal

court teemed with learned men, poets and artists. The gorgeously illustrated works, *Hasti-Vidyarnava*, *San-khachura-vadh*, *Gita-Govinda*, and *Dharmapuran*, were compiled during this period. Three queens of King Siva Singha, son of Rudra Singha, reigned successively as co-rulers with their husbands. The first of these, Queen Phuleswari Devi inspired the translation of *Sakuntala* in Assamese verse; the second, Queen Ambika Devi, was instrumental in the compilation of the magnificent treatise on elephants, known as *Hasti-vidyarnava*; the third, Queen Sarveswari Devi, was a patron of music and weaving. She admitted to the palace all the girls of the neighbourhood, and taught them to spin, weave and sing. The manuscript of *Salya-parva Mahabharat*, compiled under her auspices, contains on every page exquisite designs of borders, obviously selected from models in vogue in different parts of India. King Siva Singha was himself a songwriter of considerable eminence. His age may be rightly called the Augustan Age of Assamese literature.

The last monarch of this period of peace was Rajeswar Singha, 1751-69. He restored the Raja of Manipur to his throne which had been usurped by Burmese invaders. The grateful Raja Karta Maharaj Jai Singha gave his daughter Kuranganayani in marriage to King Rajeswar Singha; and it is regarded as a great landmark in the cordial relations between Assam and Manipur. The Ahom king checked the French adventurer and merchant, Monseigneur Jean Baptiste Chevalier, from setting his foot in Assam.

But the political situation of Assam assumed a different turn from the reign of Rajeswar Singha's successor, Lakshmi Singha. In the eastern districts of

Assam there lived a very virile and sturdy race known as Morans. They were followers of a Vaishnava Gosain, the Mahanta of Mayamara. The liberal character of the Mahanta's views and social practices made him highly acceptable to his disciples, who increased in number, and contributed in consequence to their Guru's wealth and power. They even subordinated their political loyalty to their veneration for their spiritual leader, and refused to bow down before the monarch, as they thought their Guru alone was entitled to their undivided obeisance. All this led to a smouldering conflict between the Mayamara Mahanta and other Vaishnava preachers. The Ahom kings also looked upon the pre-eminence and prosperity of the Mayamara Mahanta with suspicion and misgiving. Things came to a head during the reign of Lakshmi Singha when the Mayamara Mahanta and some of his leading disciples were grossly insulted by a high Ahom official who was a disciple of a rival Gosain.

The disciples of the Mayamara Mahanta rose as one man to avenge the insults inflicted on their Guru and their comrades. King Lakshmi Singha was imprisoned by the Morans, and his leading nobles were put to the sword. A Moran leader now occupied the throne and the officials were selected from among his co-disciples.

The royalists could not remain complacent at this grave turn in the course of events, and they planned to restore the ancient regime, and the services of the ex-queen Kuranganayani were harnessed for this purpose. A number of royalist leaders proceeded to offer their customary New Year's Day greetings to the *de facto* head of the Morans, Ragha Barbarua, with swords concealed in their cloths, singing songs of the

season. Ragha Barbarua came out to salute the gathering; and as instructed by Kuranganayani, who was there as an unwilling member of his household, knelt down before the audience. The valorous daughter of the Manipuri Raja struck the Moran leader on his calf with a sword, and the royalists gave the finishing touches. The other Moran leaders were similarly liquidated, and Lakshmi Singha was restored to his ancestral throne.

The Moran insurrection was suppressed for the time being, but it raised its head with redoubled fury in different parts of the kingdom, and gradually undermined the fabric of Ahom sovereignty. Other recalcitrant elements took advantage of the disorders and set up independent principalities. The strife became so acute that the British Resident at Goalpara, Hugh Baillie, who had been appointed to superintend the Bengal trade with Assam, suggested the closing down of the East India Company's factory at that place. "The civil dissensions," wrote Baillie in November, 1789, "still rage in Assam to the destruction and ruin of that once opulent kingdom".

To add to the miseries of the people, marauders from Bengal, commonly known as Burkendazes, came in hordes and swept down the villages and devastated the fields and granaries. The Ahom king, Gaurinath Singha, son and successor of Lakshmi Singha, petitioned Lord Cornwallis, the Governor-General of India, for his intervention. A detachment of the Company's troops was sent under Captain Thomas Welsh, who succeeded in quelling the Burkendazes and restoring peace to some extent. But Cornawallis's pacific successor Sir John Shore withdrew the detachment before its task of rehabilitation was completed. Assam

relapsed into chaos and disorder, and continued in that state till the second decade of the nineteenth century.

Political rivalry being the order of the day, the Ahom viceroy of Gauhati, Badan Chandra Barphukan, proceeded to Burma in quest of military aid to suppress the alleged autocracy of the Prime Minister Purnananda Buragohain. The Burmese came, saw and conquered. Their oppressions reduced the country to desolation and ruin from which it was rescued by the British, who drove the intruders from the land and established their own domination.

Peace was restored, and the new British rulers made every endeavour to bring back the country to its pristine prosperity. But the Assamese, who were at first grateful to the British for the restoration of peace and order, became gradually disgruntled at the sight of foreigners occupying their land, for they believed that good government is no substitute for self-government. For the attempts made by the Assamese to regain their independence during the early period of British rule, Piyali Barphukan and Jiuram Duliya Barua paid with their lives. In the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857-58 the attempt was revived, though it did not become successful. The principal leaders, Maniram Dewan and Piyali Barua, were hanged, and their chief compatriots were sentenced to banishment. British rule was now consolidated in Assam, though signs of opposition were revealed here and there in sporadic outbursts.

But Assam could not share the best fruits of British rule owing to its isolation and remoteness, and the absence of educational facilities which were enjoyed in abundance by sister provinces. The Assamese had to wage a regular war to establish the

separate identity of their mother tongue, as attempts were made in influential circles to brand it as a patois of Bengali. The members of the Americal Baptist Mission have earned the eternal gratitude of the Assamese people by coming to their rescue at this critical juncture. The Assamese language became acknowledged as a distinct and separate identity, which is enriched by a literature of great antiquity, variety and vitality.

The people of Assam threw themselves, heart and soul, into India's struggle for independence under the leadership of the Father of the Nation. Its patriots and martyrs, though shining in lesser limelight, are reverently enshrined in the grateful remembrance of the people.

Now Assam is independent as an organic constituent of the Sovereign Republic of India. Occupying a strategic position in the political set-up of India, its betterment and progress will reflect on the corresponding prosperity and well-being of the entire Union; while its neglect will not be conducive to the amelioration of the general cause. Assam is not vocal, and its voice does not usually reach the ears of the Indian public. Assam was previously called a Cindrella province, which is no longer the case, as it has been united with a rich and powerful life-partner. A new designation has now fallen on Assam—a problem-province; and its problems are manifold and difficult. A right and sympathetic approach to a solution of these problems, economic and cultural, will alone bring about a change for the better; and it is earnestly hoped that the desired approach will be forthcoming from all quarters.

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ASSAM : ITS HISTORICAL POSITION

The following broad facts should, in our opinion, be borne in mind in considering the question of reshaping the present boundaries of the State of Assam :

Assam, as it stands at present, or most of it, was an integral part of the once-extensive kingdom of Kamarupa, mentioned so frequently in the epics and Puranas of India. The word *Kamarupa* survives in the name of a present district of Assam, the head-quarter town of which is Gauhati.

The western limit of the old kingdom of Kamarupa was the Karatoya, a river which rises in the extreme northwest of the Jalpaiguri District and falls into the Jamuna. This river separated Bengal from Kamarupa. This western limit has been defined in the 'Yogini-tantra'.

The kingdom of Kamarupa comprised "roughly, the Brahmaputra Valley, Bhutan, Rungpore and Koch Behar"—Gait, *History of Assam*, 1906, page 10.

According to the late Shri K. L. Barua, "The kingdom included not only the whole of the Assam Valley, but also parts of northern and eastern Bengal, part of Bhutan, the Khasi and Garo Hills, and the northern portion of the district of Sylhet"—*Early History of Kamarup*, page 10.

In the Rungpore District Gazetteer compiled by Mr. J. A. Vas, it is stated, "Rungpore was originally included, together with Assam, Manipur, Jaintia, Cachar and part of Mymensing and Sylhet in the kingdom of Kamarupa or Pragjyotish, the Karatoya

river forming the boundary between that dominion and Matsya or Bengal,"—page 10.

Mr. J. F. Gruning, in the Gazetteer of Jalpaiguri makes a similar statement, "In prehistoric times Jalpaiguri district formed part of the kingdom of Pragjyotish or, as it was afterwards called, Kamarupa, which extended as far west as the Karatiya river",—page 18.

A similar limit is also specified by Mr. F. A. Sachse in the Gazetteer of Mymensing,—"At the time of the Mahabharata, Mymensing formed part of Pragjyotish, which 3,000 years later in Buddhist times was known as Kamrup. The western boundary of Kamrup was the Karatoya river, which still runs out of Nepal parallel to the Atrai through Rungpore and Pabna. So the present bed of the Jamuna and considerable strips of the Rajshahi Division districts (Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Malda, Rungpore, Bogra and Pabna) as well as the northern parganas of Mymensing must have been included in Kamarupa,"—page 22.

Mr. B. C. Allen in the Goalpara District Gazetteer asserts that "Goalpara was originally included in the ancient Hindu kingdom of Kamrupa which is mentioned in the Mahabharata and which at one time occupied North East Bengal and the greater part of what is now known as the province of Assam",—page 16.

The districts comprising the kingdom of Kamarupa have many things in common, with regard to soil, climate, vegetation, and ethnic and cultural affinities. Mr. E. G. Glazier wrote in his Report on Rungpore, page 6,—"The indigenous inhabitants of Rungpore are the Koch and other allied tribes." Mr. Glazier also referred to the common Mongal physiognomy. He

even says,—“Above a line drawn about 30 miles north of Rungpore town, west of the Teesta, the women of the common people wear the old Kamrup dress which offers a marked contrast to the common Sari of Bengal”. In our opinion similar observations can be made with regard to the people of the other districts of the old kingdom of Kamarupa.

The ancient kingdom of Kamarupa therefore presents a compact homogeneous entity with similarities of climatic condition and cultural affinities. The progress of civilization has also moved on similar lines: the basic trends of Hinduism have been reinforced from contacts with non-Aryan inmates and neighbours, thus evolving a unique feature in the civilisation of India, sharing in what we have said on an earlier occasion,—“Assam presents an instructive spectacle of the compromise between Aryan orthodoxy and the so-called heterodoxy of the tribesman. Aryan and non-Aryan are the twin pulses of that whole grain of the civilization—which we may name the ‘civilization of Assam’,”—Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies Bulletin No. 2, pages 2-3.

The political and cultural history of Assam presents also very close relations between the component parts of the different areas of the old kingdom of Kamarupa. They were on several occasions, subsequent to the dismemberment of the old kingdom, brought together under one political hegemony. The rulers of the separated territories were patrons of Assamese poets and authors. Brahmans from Assam have catered till this day to the spiritual needs of the population. The different rulers have looked towards each other for help in their political ventures aiming at consolidation

of their respective powers or in offering resistance to their common enemy the Moguls.

After the Mogul general Nawab Mir Jumla had left Assam, Raja Prana-narayan of Cooch Behar wrote to Swargadeo Jayadhwaj Singha of Assam,—“You are Srikrishna, and you should consider me as your devoted friend Arjuna, and I shall act as directed by you. Our friendship is not of to-day’s growth.” The Assam king wrote back,—“When fire and wind act in unison they take no time in burning the trees and grasses.”

The dissimilarity which can be noticed at present in the various groups of people, is due mainly to their divergent political associations. Assam proper remained independent till 1826, while the other districts of ancient Kamarupa were mostly under foreign domination. Cooch Behar, an integral part of this territory, enjoyed however complete independence till about the beginning of the seventeenth century; and after that period its tutelage under the Moguls or under the East India Company did not substantially disturb its internal arrangements; it enjoyed more or less complete autonomy, and was thus able to promote its culture and religion according to its own requirements, which were linked up with those of Assam. In any case a few centuries of separate political dispensation was hardly able to relax the age-long ties and affinities which bound the people of Assam with the rest of Kamarupa, the force of geography and ethnic similarities being stronger than the transient influence of political associations. To state plainly, two hundred years exercised very little influence in the way of disintegration on fundamentals which had been brought to being by long years of neighbourly existence. A re-union on

the political basis is only necessary to bring about a revival of the age-long ties and cultural similarities.

The old political leaders of Assam, long before its contact with the British, had foreseen the possibility of a re-union of the disintegrated elements of the ancient kingdom of Kamarupa. Attempts were made every now and then, whenever opportunities offered themselves, to re-build ancient Kamarupa with its old western limit of Karatoya. No enterprise caused greater thrill and enthusiasm amongst the Assamese than a proposal to revive the ancient boundaries up to the Karatoya river. This is supported by evidence from recorded history :

(a) About the year 1532 A.D., the Ahom king, Dihingia Raja, succeeded in repelling the invasion of Turbak, a Muslim general of the Padshah of Gaur, a kingdom in Bengal. The help of the Assam Raja was solicited by the king of Kamata whose territories stretched from the Karatoya to the neighbourhood of Gauhati. Biswa Singha who had just emerged into political prominence, taking advantage of the weakness of Kamata also sought the aid of the Assam Raja to consolidate his newly acquired sovereignty over a portion of western Kamata which became afterwards known as Cooch Behar. The Ahom forces pitched their camp at Jogighopa, opposite Goalpara, wherefrom they despatched troops to the aid of the Kamata Raja and Biswa Singha. The Ahom army then advanced towards Gaur. Their general Koncheng Barpatra Gohain washed his sword in the waters of the Karatoya river, which amounted to subjugation of the territories up to that limit. The Padshah of Gaur established friendly relations with the Ahom Raja by offering him two princesses accompanied by a dowry

of several villages in East Bengal. The Ahoms could have very easily maintained their direct political hold up to the Karatoya, but they deliberately refrained from doing so in pursuance of their declared unwillingness to extend the physical limits of their dominion. As the Koch king obtained support of the Ahom Raja at the initial stage of the foundation of the kingdom of Cooch Behar, he was considered as belonging to the category of "thapita-sanchita", a name applied to the rulers who were first settled and established by the Assam Raja in the government of a particular state.

(b) Dihingia Raja's success in carrying his victorious arms to the Karatoya river was ever afterwards considered as a great landmark, and was referred to constantly as the goal of Assam's political ambition. The great king Pratap Singha, 1603-1641, once referred to the event as follows,—“During the reign of Dihingia Raja his army proceeded down the Brahmaputra, and washed their swords in the Karatoya river, and constructed a small temple and excavated a tank on its bank as a mark of victory. They then established friendship with the Padshah of Gaur. They also established Biswa Singha in the government of Cooch Behar as a friend, and he paid his homage to Dihingia Raja with two pots of gold and silver. Our soldiers were rewarded with suitable presents, and the general of the expedition was given the title of Bar-Azam.” King Pratap Singha himself waged a long war with the Moguls, but he had no time to think of an expedition to Bengal. He was about 95 years old when he concluded a peace treaty with the Moguls in 1639.

(c) The first attempt to revive the limits of the ancient kingdom of Kamarupa was made by King Naranarayan of Cooch Behar, 1540-1584-C; He along

with his brother Sukladhwaj launched a career of conquest, and subjugated Cachar, Manipur, Jaintia, Tripura, Sylhet, Khyriem and Dimarua. The Ahom king sued for terms, and peace was concluded. But Naranarayan's triumph was a shortlived one as his kingdom became dismembered soon after his death. Disputes between rival princes becoming acute, no ruler of Cooch Behar could dream of reviving the attempt of King Naranarayan.

(d) Pratap Singha's grandson King Jayadhwaj Singha, 1648-1663, took advantage of the fratricidal war in Delhi following the illness of Emperor Shah Jehan. The Mogul garrisons in Eastern Bengal were practically emptied of their soldiery as the governor Sultan Shuja had taken most of them to join his struggle for the Delhi throne. King Jayadhwaj Singha of Assam stated his purpose in definite terms as follows : "Our ancestors had subjugated the territory up to Karatoya-Ganga and constructed there a temple and a tank as a mark of victory. The Padshah occupied it subsequently. We should take advantage of the present opportunity and seize it." Ahom armies then occupied the whole of Kamrup which had been under Mogul occupation for twenty years, 1639-58. They then overran Eastern Bengal up to the neighbourhood of Dacca. Emperor Aurangzeb having consolidated his throne despatched Mir Jumla against Cooch Behar and Assam to re-establish Mogul prestige in those two areas where it had been undermined.

(e) The last recorded attempt to restore the old limits of Assam was made by King Rudra Singha, 1696-1714. He took advantage of the growing unpopularity of Mogul domination amongst the Hindus of India. Rudra Singha organised a Hindu confederacy

to protect Hinduism from the reported hostile intentions of the Moguls. Embassies were despatched to different Hindu rulers to join the confederacy. He mobilised a large army which was to march into Bengal in November 1714. The king's intentions came out in the deliberations of his cabinet. "I propose to invade the territories up to Dacca. What is your opinion?", asked the king. The ministers supported the king's ambitious proposal. The Barpatra Gohain said, "The territories bordering on the Karatoya are ours. The enemies have got possession of them only on account of our indifference and inaction. The duty of a king is to destroy the enemy, and to recover his lost possessions with a view to preserve the ancient boundaries of his kingdom". "The ancestors of our king", said the Buragohain, "had, by virtue of their prowess and courage, crossed the boundaries of Rangamati and washed their swords at the Karatoya-Ganga. They found it inconvenient to fix the boundaries of Assam at the Karatoya, and so they made the river Manaha the western limit of Assam and established a garrison at Gauhati."—*Tungkhungia Buranji*, edited by Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, para 65.

In his despatches to the Hindu rulers of India, King Rudra Singha had asserted,—“We formerly possessed the provinces on this side of the Karatoya river and we are now desirous to resume them. Do not prove inimical to us, be yours the countries, the government and revenue, mine the name”—J. P. Wade's *Account of Assam*, page 131.

The king halted for sometime at Gauhati to mature his preparations but he died there in September 1714, and the dream of reviving the boundaries of the old Kamarupa kingdom was dashed for ever. The king

himself regretted on his death-bed,—“I proposed the reduction of the provinces contiguous to the Karatoya river : but my design must perish with me, for who will be found capable to pursue my plans ?” The Ahom monarchs who succeeded King Rudra Singha were more inclined to the pursuit of peace than to the launching of military measures. At a later stage, internal conflicts and strifes became the order of the day, and the country became ultimately a prey to the ambitious designs of the Burmese.

The above examples and utterances will demonstrate the entertainment of the dream of reviving the ancient limits of Kamarupa. This dream is reflected till now in the cherished desire of the Assamese people to see the revival of the ancient limits of their land as an objective for ultimate realisation.

A word must be said about Cooch Behar, Manipur and Tippera in the context of our old cultural ties or comparatively recent administrative relations. Cooch Behar was always regarded by the Assamese people as a sister state. Its rulers were patrons of Assamese poets and scholars. Two very early Assamese poets, Hem Saraswati and Harivara Bipra enjoyed the patronage of Durlabhanarayan, king of Kamata. The rulers of Cooch Behar designated themselves as *Kamatadhipati* as their kingdom was more or less identical with the defunct state of Kamata. Sankardeva and his immediate apostles found an asylum in the court of the Koch king Naranarayan and his successors. The saints Sankardeva, Madhabdeva and Damodardeva breathed their last near the capital of Cooch Behar, and the three Vaishnavite Satras, Madhupur, Baikunthapur and Bhela, are visited by numerous pilgrims from Assam. Members of the Cooch Behar ruling family

had ruled also in Bijni, Durrang and Beltola, and they were Assamese to the very core. King Naranarayan summoned the poets and scholars of his realm and commissioned them to translate a number of Sanskrit classics, including the Mahabharata and the Bhagavata, into Assamese and also treatises on Astronomy, Grammar and Arithmetic. The king's object, in his own words, was "the enlightenment and edification of women and Sudras at the present time and of Brahmans at a later stage." The books translated and compiled under the aegis of King Naranarayan have served as the foundation of Assamese literature and of Assamese scholarship. The famous temple of Kamakhya which is visited by pilgrims from all parts of India was constructed by Naranarayan and his brother Prince Sukladhwaja. The Hayagriva temple at Hajo, sacred to Hindus and Buddhists alike, was built by Sukladhwaja's son Raghudeb. Assamese Brahman priests are held in high esteem by the people of Cooch Behar.

During the administration of eastern India under the East India Company the Commissioner of Cooch Behar conducted for some time the company's relations with Assam. During the first few decades of British administration, the Commissioner of Assam had his jurisdiction extended up to Cooch Behar. All these associations have contributed to the growth of a desire on the part of the people of Assam to come near to Cooch Behar and live a common life to revive their old cultural relations. This desire, we understand, is shared by the indigenous people of Cooch Behar as well. We are even told that so recently as 1946 "The Maharaja of Cooch Behar is awaiting advice from the Chamber (of Princes), but is thinking in terms of an understanding with Assam, with which Cooch Behar

has long historical and cultural affinities",—Letter of Mr. H. J. Todd, Resident for the Eastern States, to Mr. C. G. Herbert, Political Advisor to his Excellency the Crown Representative, dated 30th July 1946, reproduced in Shri Harekrishna Mahtab's *"The Beginning of the End,"*—page 27.

As regards Goalpara which is now an organic part of Assam we shall repeat what we had said on a former occasion,—“Goalpara, though a part of Assam from very ancient times was severed from the province for a few centuries, being a buffer state of the Mogul Empire, while the rest of Assam had been enjoying absolute independence. But its social, religious and commercial relations with the rest of Assam continued in an uninterrupted fashion, so that when Goalpara was linked to Assam in 1826, it represented the reunion of one homogeneous people having common cultural, historical and linguistic affinities, slightly disturbed under the temporary influence of divergent political associations.”—Dr. S. K. Bhuyan's *Early British Relations with Assam*, 1949,—page 42.

Cachar was a territory of the *thapita-sanchita* (established and preserved) order, as after its defeat by Dihingia Raja about 1530, it underwent a brief interregnum at the end of which Nirbhaynarayan was placed on the throne by the Assam Raja, and was endowed with all the paraphernalia of a ruler. There were occasional frictions between the two states, but Cachar was finally subjugated by King Rudra Singha in 1706, and was allowed a semi-independent status. The affinities between the two states arose mainly on account of the preponderant Bodo element in their population, and intimate relations between the Kacharis of Assam and Cachar continued throughout the ages.

The intimacy was kept up by the community of language and customs. Every Kachari family, wherever it lived, paid annually to the Cachar Raja a pecuniary token of their racial identity, and it was collected by persons regularly deputed from Cachar. The copper temple at Sadiya, dedicated to Kechai-khaiti Gosani, was sacred to the Kacharis of Cachar as well. As we have said elsewhere,—“The annual tribute to the Cachar Raja and worship at the Sadiya temple accomplished what the Olympic games and the temple of Apollo at Delphi had done in the unification of the separated states of Hellas”—*Kachari Buranji*, 1951, edited by Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, Introduction, page 18.

Manipur is a territory contiguous to Assam. In pre-British days Assam had extensive political relations with Manipur. The king of Assam helped the Manipuri king Jai Singha in times of difficulty; and similar help was offered by Jai Singha during Assam's troubles. As has been said elsewhere—“Jai Singha's visits to Assam exercised a far-reaching influence in promoting friendly relations between the two states. A section of his camp-followers settled in the villages near Sibsagar where they are to be found even till this day. Kuranganayani, daughter of Jai Singha and consort of the Assam king Rajeswar Singha, occupies an honoured place in the pantheon of Assam's heroic women. A tank was excavated in her name near Gaurisagar which is still known as “Mangalujyekar Pukhuri”. The Manipuri chronicles refer to Jai Singha's successful passage through the elephant ordeal instituted by the Assam monarch to ascertain whether the fugitive was a real Raja or an imposter. On the night before the ordeal, Jai Singha saw a dream in which he was told that he would come out unscathed provided

he promised to introduce the worship of Radha and Gobinda after his restoration to the Manipuri throne. After the systems prevailing in Assam, Jai Singha introduced land surveys in Manipur, excavated large-size tanks, and established smithies for making muskets and cannon. Gharib Newaz had already popularised the Bhagavata in Manipur by taking the original manuscript from Assam; and this fact is recorded in Manipur chronicle "Ahanba"—Dr. S. K. Bhuyan's Inaugural Speech at the Manipur Sahitya Parishad, October, 1952, page 7. Those who have come in close contact with Manipuris feel very strongly that they entertain very affectionate feelings towards the Assamese and that they are swayed by a keen desire to make the mutual relations more intimate and productive of common good to both the states. Full facilities should therefore be forthcoming to ensure the progressive strengthening of this desire for increasing mutual understanding and good-will. The fact that Assam and Manipur had lived one administrative set-up from 1874 to 1947 has further brought the two peoples nearer each other. Though Manipur was not an integral part of Assam during 1826 to 1874 yet the British authorities in Assam felt the need of greater association with Manipur for reasons of security in the frontier.

Tippera is contiguous to Assam and its link with India lies only through Assam. The road to Agartala now under construction will be vital to the future progress of Tippera. King Rudra Singha, about the year 1710, sent an embassy to Raja Ratna Manikya of Tripura soliciting the latter's co-operation in a scheme to oust the Moguls from power. Being apprised of the greatness of the Assam king the Tripura Raja

entertained a desire to establish friendship with him. There was an interchange of embassies till the year 1714 as a result of which the two countries became known to each other. The Assamese ambassadors deputed to Tripura at that time have left a complete account of their journey and their embassy and of the happenings at Tripura, to which they have added a very valuable description of the administration and resources of the country. This account of Tripura has been published by the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies under the title *Tripura Buranji*, and it is the only authentic contemporary history of the Tripura state. The late Maharaja of Tripura realised the value of the Assamese chronicle and commenced translating the book into English, but the attempt was cut short by his untimely demise. The very fact that Assam has treasured the annals of Tripura in a contemporary record, compiled so early as 1724, will undoubtedly earn the gratefulness of the people of Tripura and foster sentiments of friendship and good-will between the two states.

Another paragraph in Mr. Todd's letter, referred to above, bears evidence of Tripura's inclination to be drawn nearer to Assam. The passage runs as follows,—"As regards Tripura I found that the Maharaja has few ideas except a preference to look to Assam rather than Bengal. At my suggestion he made indirect contact with the Congress Ministers in Shillong and his intermediary tells me that Bardoloi was very friendly and inviting. The Congress in Assam would of course welcome accretion to their small province, and Bardoloi said all they would expect would be a constitutional Ruler in Tripura, a comparable standard of administration and economic collaboration,"—page 26.

May 1955.

PRINCESS AMRITAPRABHA

Kashmir and Kamarupa were two kingdoms at the two extremities of India. There was a time when Providence was propitious to Kamarupa, and as a result princes of different parts of India felt themselves proud if they could obtain the hands of brides sprung from the royal family of Bhagadatta. In such an age, Amritaprabha, daughter of a king of Kamarupa, adorned the royal palace of the monarch of Kashmir. Amritaprabha is a Cinderella of history; but she has acquired an enduring fame in the annals of Kashmir and in the history of the ascendancy of Buddhism in India.

The story of Amritaprabha is found in the chronicle of Kashmir *Raja-tarangini*, written by Kahlān; and there is also some reference to her in the account of that kingdom written by the Chinese pilgrim Ou-kong. But her sisters and brothers of the present day do not know anything about this daughter of Assam, so reputed in history. Their ignorance is not at all surprising !

A powerful king named Meghavahana ruled in Kashmir in the first century of the Christian era. Amritaprabha was the consort of that monarch, and also his chief queen. Her father was the king of Kamarupa, but the name of this monarch has not been known. It can be inferred with certainty that he was of the line of Bhagadatta. On being the chief queen of the king of Kashmir, Amritaprabha established a Vihara or monastery for the residence of Buddhist Bhikshus. The ruins of this Vihara can still be seen

at a distance of three miles from Srinagar, the present capital of Kashmir. The name of this Vihara was Amrita-bhavan; and it was known afterwards as Anta-bhavan among the people of Kashmir. For long ages afterwards this Vihara afforded shelter to Buddhist Bhikshus and pilgrims. Amritaprabha, having gone from the heart of Assam, established her reputation in a distant land, and became ever-memorable there. To the children of poor Assam what can be a matter of greater pride and satisfaction?

The immediate predecessor of Meghavahana on the throne of Kashmir was Sandhisat, also known as Aryyaraj. The responsibilities of kingship became gradually unbearable to him owing to his incessant religious devotions. Forty-seven years passed in this way. The people of Kashmir became displeased, and began to search for a suitable prince capable of establishing a strong government. Their fears emanated principally from the king of Gandhara in the immediate vicinity of Kashmir. The ministers thought,—“How can an imbecile monarch give protection to his kingdom?”

Prince Gopaditya, a descendant of Yudhisthira, was then living in Gandhara, being given shelter and maintenance by its king for utilising the former's assistance in an eventual attack on Kashmir. A son was born to Gopaditya while he was living as a fugitive in Gandhara; this prince was named Meghavahana. In course of time, Meghavahana attained the age of marriage. Just at that time, arrangements were in progress for the Swayamvara or self-selecting ceremony of Amritaprabha, daughter of the king of Pragjyotish of the line of Vishnu, and invitations were sent to kings and princes of countries far and near. Gopaditya

thought that in view of his reduced fortunes, his power, fame and prosperity would all be enhanced if his son could be the elected husband of the princess of Kamarupa. So, Gopaditya explained the circumstances to his son Meghavahana, and persuaded him to proceed from Gandhara to Amritaprabha's Swayamvara ceremony at Pragjyotishpur.

There was a wonder-working article in possession of the royal family descended from Bhagadatta,—the parasol or umbrella wrested by King Narakasura from the rain-god Varuna. The parasol emitted a cool shade when it was held over the head of a person endowed with the marks of a potential sovereign : this miraculous effect was not produced when it was spread over the heads of others. This parasol was used in the Swayamvara ceremony of Amritaprabha. It can be assumed that in the congregation of kings and princes the umbrella-bearer held the parasol over the head of one candidate after another as he was approached by Princess Amritaprabha, garland in hand and accompanied by her friends and attendants. When it was held on the head of Prince Meghavahana the cool shade emanating from the parasol enveloped that prince. From this the princess came to know that Meghavahana would one day become a great king,—a Rajadhiraja Chakravarti-raja. Amritaprabha then placed the bridal garland on the neck of Meghavahana. It was soon followed by the celebration of the festivities of their marriage.

Taking with him his bride, the Assamese princess Amritaprabha, and a vast amount of dowry and presents Yuvaraja Meghavahana went to his father Gopaditya in Gandhara. There is a proverb,—“Prosperity comes by the luck of women, and children by

that of men." The sun of fortune began to shine in the firmament of the son of the fugitive prince Gopaditya after his marriage to the Lakshmi-like Assamese princess Amritaprabha. The people of Kashmir accompanied by their ministers proceeded to Gandhara and offered the throne to Meghavahana. Previously to this, the ancestors of Meghavahana who all belonged to the dynasty of Gonanda, had ruled in Kashmir for 1002 years. Princes of another dynasty then ruled in Kashmir for 192 years ; King Aryaraj was the last monarch of this new dynasty. The ministers now said to Meghavahana,—“This kingdom of Kashmir is worthy only of the princes of your family.”

Having heard this the pious king Aryaraj abandoned the throne of his own accord, dressed himself in the robes of a Bhikshu, proceeded northward with a begging bowl in his hand and entered into a deep forest. He arrived after a few days at the pilgrimage of Nandi-kshetra where he besmeared his body with ashes, took the Rudraksha rosary in his hand, tied his hair into a knot, and publicly assumed the vows of a Sannyasin. He observed them with such solemnity and rigour that the wives of the sages living in hermitages were anxious to give him alms. But Kahlan says that the bowl of the saintly king being filled with fruits and blossoms he was freed from living the life of a suppliant even in his state of a Bhikshu. In compliance with the wishes of his ministers Yuvaraj Meghavahana came from Gandhara and occupied the throne of Kashmir. He busied himself in numerous religious activities even after he had assumed the royal sceptre, by which he excelled the previous Bodhi-sattwas, or future Buddhas, in piety and fame. While ascending the throne he caused an edict to be promul-

gated by his officers prohibiting the slaughter of animals, and he arranged for giving money to those who had formerly earned their livelihood by selling meat. King Meghavahana then acquired fame as a patron of Buddhism by constructing two Agraharas or monasteries known as Meghavana and Meghamatha.

In conformity with her husband's religious inclinations, and following the example of Migara-mata Visakha, the Chief Lay-disciple of Buddha, the queen Amritaprabha constructed a Vihara for the residence of foreign Bhikshus. It was first known as Amritabhavan; the name was afterwards transformed into the Prakrita form Amitabhavan; and in the lips of the people of Kashmir it was known subsequently as Antabhavan. In the court of the king of Kamarupa there was a learned saint named Staunpa who had hailed from the land of Loh or Tibet; he was the preceptor of that monarch. Amritaprabha took Staunpa from her father's court to Kashmir. This Staunpa constructed a Bauddha Stupa or mound which was known by the name Lo-Staunpa. Yukadevi, another consort of King Meghavahana, with a view to bedim the achievement of her co-wife Amritaprabha, erected a Vihara named Naravana; and similarly, a third consort Indradevi constructed a Vihara named Indradevi bhavan. The other wives of Meghavahana had also a number of Viharas constructed after their respective names.

King Meghavahana then went out on an expedition of conquest with the object of propagating the religion of Ahimsa, so that other monarchs would also promulgate orders prohibiting the slaughter of animals. He took with him the parasol of Varuna which he had brought from Kamarupa. Proceeding with his army

he occupied the island of Lamka or Ceylon. Meghavahana returned to Kashmir after having established in Lamka the religion of Ahimsa.

King Meghavahana died after a reign of thirty-four years. Nothing is known about the subsequent career of Amritaprabha. Meghavahana was succeeded on the throne by Sresthasena, his other names being Pravarasena and Tunjin. The chronicle is silent on the point whether he was the son of Amritaprabha or of some other consort. But the name Amritaprabha was adopted as the name of several queens of Kashmir for long ages afterwards. Ranaditya became king of Kashmir 177 years after Meghavahana; one of his consorts was also known as Amritaprabha. Vinayaditya became king 528 years after Ranaditya; his mother's name was also Amritaprabha. Her son being attacked by a serious illness this Amritaprabha had a temple constructed bearing the name Amratakeswar. From the repeated adoption of the name Amritaprabha we can form some idea of the popularity and fame of the first Amritaprabha, the daughter of Assam.

After the Assamese princess Amritaprabha, Kashmir came in contact with Kamarupa once again. In the eighth century of the Christian era a victory-minded king named Muktapida-Lalitaditya sat on the throne of Kashmir. After having subjugated King Yasovarman of Kanauj and the Turaskas he effected a hurried march with his army through Northern India, and occupied Bhutan and Tibet. He then conquered Pragjyotisha, and then invaded Stri-rajya, the kingdom of the females. In the words of Raja-tarangini,—“Having arrived at Pragjyotishpur which had already been denuded of its inhabitants, Lalitaditya saw the smoke coming out of the forest of black *agarus* burnt

by his soldiers, and in the deserts resembling the expanse of seas he saw mirages of water-currents, and his elephants were mistaken for crocodiles. The women of Stri-rajya did not of course show the temples of elephants, but they agitated the hearts of the Kashmir soldiers by exhibiting the full splendour of their loaded youth. When the queen of Stri-rajya visited Lalita-ditya her distemper was seen in the quaking of her limbs, and it could not be known whether this distemper had sprung from amorous excitement or from fear." Some historians conjecture that this Stri-rajya was the kingdom of the Khasis and the Jayantias amongst whom matriarchy is in vogue. This kingdom is also believed to be the country known as Pramilar-des.

According to Raja-tarangini, Meghavahana took the Varuna parasol from Kamarupa to Kashmir, and mention is also made of the use of this parasol in his expedition of conquest. But according to Vana's *Harsha-charit*, this umbrella was the property of Kumar Bhaskaravarman who ruled in Kamarupa in the seventh century A.D. This umbrella, which bore the name Abhoga, was the principal article among the presents which Bhaskaravarman's envoy Hamsavega had taken to Emperor Harshavardhana seeking the latter's friendship and alliance. Hamsavega was very enthusiastic and eloquent in describing the miraculous powers of the umbrella. Having heard of such powers Harshavardhana said,—“What else but life-long friendship can be a fitting return to this invaluable present?”

February 1932, and October 1951.

HILLS AND PLAINS PEOPLES

The attainment of independence has been followed, within less than three months, by this great step to bring together all the people of the Province, inhabiting the hills and the plains and representing different types of culture, but all united in their common allegiance to their motherland, and in their common desire to work for its prosperity and welfare. The eminent organisers are to be thanked for entertaining this vision and carrying it into effect in such picturesque and appealing details,—exhibitions of arts and handicrafts, dramatic performances, dances both martial and civil. Recorded history offers but few examples of mammoth gatherings like this one except for purposes of war or political convulsions. The great hero Lachit Barphukan had in his army several divisions of tribal soldiers, and they were a terror to the invading Moguls. King Rudra Singha assembled at Gauhati an army of 4,00,000 strong for the purpose of invading Bengal; and his concern for the comfort of his allies of the hills illustrates that monarch's magnanimity and magnetic personality. In the year 1830, Piali Barphukan attempted to organise a confederacy of the Assam tribes in order to wrest back the country from the hands of the East India Company; and his emissaries scoured the courts of the chiefs of the Khasis, Jaintias, Bhutias, Nagas, Singphos, Khampis, Miris, Mishmis and the Manipuris. But, it is peaceful reconstruction, and not belligerency, that has brought us here to-day.

It is a mistake to suppose that the hillmen lived apart from the plainsfolk. They were inter-dependent

for the products of the forests and mines, and the labours of the cottage handlooms; and in times of emergencies each sought the other's help. Assam's gold came principally from Bhutan, and the Duflas depended on Assam for their winter clothing and assistance in the operations of the paddy-fields. The Jayantia Raja once wrote to the Ahom King,—“It is a disgrace that I was living in happiness and comfort when your country was overrun by the Moguls”.

This hills-plains contact has been maintained from time immemorial, and it has entered into the texture of Assam's religious developments, into Assam's music and dancing, and into Assamese vocabulary. The Ahoms strengthened their numerical fold by admitting men from the tribes and conferring upon them full-fledged Ahom citizenship; and this process of assimilation contributed to Ahom national solidarity which enabled them to maintain their sway over Assam for six hundred years. Friendship with the tribes was assiduously cultivated, and Assam possessed a large number of experts conversant with the languages and customs of the tribes, and their experiences were requisitioned in all diplomatic negotiations. This attitude of friendship is reflected in the universal use of the word “Mita”, Sanskrit “Mitra”, a friend, in accosting a tribesman; and in this word “Mita” there is no touch of ridicule or contempt which we associate with the term “Gentiles” used by the Jews against all non-Jews.

The Vaisnava movement in Assam brought the tribes still nearer. Mahapurush Sankardeva himself took the lead in this respect by admitting a Garo, newly named Govinda, into the intimate circle of his disciples. Through the reforming zeal of several Vaisnava Satradhikars thousands of tribesmen accepted Hindu-

ism, and gradually became one with the older followers of that religion. The Morans and the Matakas who were disciples of the Mayamara Mahanta succeeded in crippling the authority of the Ahoms, and in ultimately setting up a government of their own. The Satradhikars of Assam, in the new set-up brought about by Assam's independence, can once more play an important part in bringing the tribals nearer our homes and our hearts.

The tribals, on account of their excellent health and physique, are fine specimens of humanity, and they were occasionally adopted as sons by Assamese princes, potentates and queens. The visit of a tribal chieftain to the Ahom metropolis was solemnised by great rejoicings and festivities. Princesses presented by tribal chiefs flaunted along the corridors of the Ahom palaces at Gargaon and Rangpur, and Ahom Swargadeos always felt gratified at such connections.

Close contact with the tribes was thus necessary for the very security and welfare of Assam, and it was therefore organised on a mutually advantageous basis. The necessity for this contact was bedimmed during the last 125 years as our relations with the tribes were conducted according to a policy in the formulation of which we had practically no hand.

Now this old contact has to be recreated, refostered and reinvigorated to suit the context of our present political situation. Our mutual dependence is the result of the forceful logic of geography which can never be overcome or ignored. Destiny has made the hillmen and the plainsfolk eternal neighbours; and their relations will have to be governed by the immutable law of neighbourliness.

Our first duty as neighbours is to understand each

other and to realise the strength and limitations of our common motherland. Very few provinces in India can vie with Assam in economic resources and man-power. But these resources have to be tapped and developed; and for this purpose a united Assam is the first desideratum. Whether in war or in peace, we cannot dispense with the friendship and support of any section of our people, not to speak of our friends the tribesmen, whose muscles, simplicity, straightforwardness and courage constitute an asset of the highest value in building up a new Assam.

The great problem of building up a new Assam must be approached with determination which does not eliminate humility. We must take lessons from all if such lessons conduce to our welfare and prosperity. One of the lessons which the tribals can teach us is their self-sufficient domestic economy. They are less dependent on supplies from outside than we are. There was a time when every Assamese family produced its own requirements, its own food and clothing. We have deviated from this wholesome custom while the tribesmen have honoured it till now. The result is that difficulties of transport and complications in the supplying areas have produced severe scarcity of our necessities in the plains, whereas the tribesmen are living in comparative ease and comfort in their sylvan homes. The universal difficulties of food-supply which Assam is experiencing at present, and which the Government is trying its best to ameliorate will be solved only if the people of Assam follow the example of the industrious tribesmen, and regulate their domestic economy on the basis of self-sufficiency. "Dependence on others is equivalent to a life of banishment in the forest", so goes an Assamese proverb,

and it is nowhere truer than with regard to our present position of food and clothing.

This great gathering of to-day, the 5th November 1947, will go down in the pages of Assam's history as a landmark of the highest importance ; and posterity will be grateful to His Excellency Sir Akbar Hydari, Lady Hydari, and the Hon'ble Prime Minister Mr. Gopinath Bardoloi, and their patriotic helpers for laying this foundation for reviving the old-time cordiality and understanding between the people of the plains and the hills, between the "Thal-parvatis" to use the old phrase of Assam.

November 1947.

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE HILLS AND PLAINS OF ASSAM

The people of Assam including those inhabiting the hills inside the state and on its neighbouring frontier can be mainly divided into two categories—Aryan and non-Aryan. The Aryan population has grown out of the nucleus which had come to eastern India in very ancient times and which has expanded by fresh influxes from western India through the progress of the centuries. As the logic of geography is unrefutuable the Aryans and the non-Aryans have lived side by side in a spirit of accommodation and compromise. The socio-religious customs of the Aryans have been influenced by the habits and manners of their non-Aryan neighbours; the latter, too, have not been able to escape the influence of the Aryans with whom they have held commerce from time immemorial. The two elements have flourished side by side leading to the evolution of a unique civilisation which has imbibed and incorporated the assimilable features of both.

The Aryan elements have been mainly moulded by the influence of Hinduism; and many non-Aryans have adopted the religion of their Hindu neighbours. These Hinduised non-Aryans are to be found mostly in the plains. Inter-marriages have taken place between the original Hindus and the new Hindus which practice has led to the presence of a perceptible Mongoloid strain in the physiognomy of a large portion of the Hindu population of Assam.

A large number of non-Aryans living in the neighbouring hills have not received the influence of

Hinduisation. They have lived in their primitive habits and customs, geographically remote from the people of the plains, but maintaining communications with their Hindu neighbours on account of the necessity to satisfy their economic needs.

In spite of the varying degree of remoteness, one fact is sure that the two elements of Assam's population have been living in intimate contact on account of the exigencies of neighbourliness and other indispensable requirements of close proximity. The culture of Assam has developed in a manner which makes this intimacy and contact advantageous to both parties. Isolation or separation was outside the scope of the intentions of Assam's statesmen and leaders. Their objective was always to bring the two elements as much closer as possible. The very independence and solidarity of Assam depended on the measure of success that was attained in maintaining a closer understanding and a spirit of mutual dependence between the two.

It has been found convenient to designate the non-Aryans by the word "tribes", though for myself I do not favour its adoption on account of its missing the sense of oneness with the rest of Assam's population. There are tribals who live in the plains portion of Assam, a large number of whom are already an organic part of the Hindu population of the state; and the tribals who live in the hills have not yet been assimilated with the Hindus.

The tribals living in the plains are mostly the Bodos in their different branches who are inheritors of a unique culture and civilisation and who ruled over several parts of Assam in the past. The tribals living in the hills are mainly the Khasis and the Jayantias,

the Garos, the Lushais, the Miris and the Mikirs. The tribals living in comparatively remoter areas are the Akas, Duflas, Abors, Khamptis, Singphos, and Mishmis. The Nagas can be divided into two classes; those who live at a little distance from the plains districts, and those who live in the interior hills.

The languages spoken by these tribesmen are different from each other, and also their manners and customs. Some tribes, like the Nagas, are again divided into a number of sub-tribes, each speaking a dialect entirely different from those used by the other sub-tribes.

The welding together of the different tribes of Assam engaged the attention of Assam's thinkers and leaders in the past for such welding was necessary not for the purpose of embellishment or prestige, but for the very existence of a united Assam which had to remain in perpetual preparedness for resisting invasions from the west. As we have once remarked,—“The vigour of our primitive tribes has served as a complement to the subtlety of the intellectual Aryans. The dwindling virility of the ease-loving plainsfolk has been reinvigorated by the elemental energy of the hillmen, whose muscles and sinews are at our eternal command whenever we project any enterprise of valour. The proper marshalling of these two elements of our population, and the rapprochement necessitated by their proximity and contact have permeated the culture, civilisation, religion and society of the people of our province”.¹

The process of assimilation has been seen in a

¹ S. K. Bhuyan, Bulletin II of the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam, p. 1.

number of spheres, linguistic, social, religious and political. The vocabulary of the Assamese language has been greatly strengthened by words used by the tribals. Assamese proverbs are brimful of references to the customs of our tribal neighbours. The popular music and dance of Assam have been largely reinforced by borrowings from the tribals. Weaving which is universal amongst women in Assam is also to be found amongst a large section of the tribal population. The rigours of Hindu religion had to be considerably relaxed to encourage the admission of tribals into its fold, and Tantricism is believed to be the outcome of the necessity for this assimilation. The liberal spirit of the Assamese Vaisnava monks has led to the conversion of a large number of tribals into the Hindu fold and they are as ardent devotees of Hinduism as their older co-religionists. Assam had to depend on products of the hills, and so had the hillmen to depend upon the products of the Assam plains. There was thus considerable commerce between the two areas which also encouraged the improvement of their social relations and mutual understanding.

The attitude of good-will and friendship which the Assamese of the plains entertained towards the hillmen is seen in the invariable use of the word *mita*, (Sanskrit *Mitra*, a friend), in accosting a man from the hills. The latter knows what the word means and on hearing it he feels that he is in an atmosphere of familiarity and love. He at once becomes disarmed of his suspicions and fears, and reciprocates the cordial advances of his friend from the plains. The use of the word *Mita* summarises in a sense the whole attitude of cordiality existing between the people of the plains and of the hills.

An English resident in Assam said so early as 1837,—“Few nations bordering upon the British dominion in India are less generally known than those inhabiting the extreme north-east frontier of Bengal ; and yet in a commercial, a statistical, or a political point of view no country is more important. There our territory of Assam is situated in almost immediate contact with the empires of China and Ava, being separated from each by a narrow belt of mountainous country, possessed by tribes and capable of being crossed over, in the present state of communication, in 10 or 12 days. This beautiful tract of country, though thinly populated by straggling hordes of tribesmen and allowed to lie profitless in impenetrable jungle, enjoys all the qualities requisite for rendering it one of the finest in the world. Its climate is cold, healthy, and congenial to European constitutions ; its numerous crystal streams abound in gold dust, and masses of the solid metal ; its mountains are pregnant with precious stones and silver ; its atmosphere is perfumed with tea growing wild and luxuriantly ; and its soil is so well adapted to all kinds of agricultural purposes, that it might be converted into one continued garden of silk, and cotton, and coffee, and sugar, and tea, over an extent of many hundred miles.”²

It is natural to expect that the Government and the leaders of old Assam realised the vast potentiality of the tribal regions of Assam both in man-power and resources and welded them for the common benefit of the nation.

If we dig into past history we come across a continuous attempt to harness the co-operation of the

² Dr. John M'Cosh, *Topography of Assam*, 1837, pp. 132-33.

tribals in all enterprises whether of war or of peace or of the economic development of the country. The Mahabharata has recorded that the army of Bhagadatta, king of Assam, consisted of Kirata soldiers who were no other than recruits from the muscular and hardy tribal population living inside and on the frontiers of Assam.

Coming to the period of Ahom administration of which we possess ample contemporaneous records, we find that the tribals were assimilated more closely by ties of marriage and common citizenship. The new conquerors, viz., the Ahoms, had to depend upon the guidance of the old settlers in obtaining a knowledge of the conquered territory. The Ahoms designated themselves as "guests" and the old settlers as "ancient lords of the country". Sukapha, the first Ahom conqueror despatched messengers to the older inhabitants living in different parts of the country inviting them to come to the capital and to acquaint the newcomers with the situation of the villages. The message ran as follows,—*"They should come to us for personal meeting. We have come from the east, and they are Sthana-giris, or ancient lords of the country. We are guests, and they should therefore acquaint us with the villages and the lands."*³ The older inhabitants soon realised that though the Ahoms had occupied the country, yet the conquerors had endeared themselves to the conquered races by their sympathetic and cordial behaviour. This policy of endearment became the pivot of the relations of the Ahoms with the tribals of Assam.

The conquerors married wives from among the

³ S. K. Bhuyan, *Deodhai Asam Buranji*, 1932, p. 92.

tribals; and enterprising tribals, who could show their mettle in any deed of valour, or bore marks of future eminence were admitted into the Ahom fold, and became to all intents and purposes equal in rank and status to the older Ahoms. Some family names of the Ahoms bear traces of this infusion,—Naga Patar, Miri Sandikoi, etc.

The process of assimilation was necessary on political considerations. As I have said on another occasion, "The Ahoms with their small numbers found it impossible to maintain their comparatively extensive dominions in Eastern India, peopled by heterogeneous races and tribes, with the powerful Muslim and Koch rulers on the west as a source of perpetual danger; they were therefore compelled to increase their community by conferring upon the new entrants the status and privileges of the members of the ruling race. The records of these new affiliations were carefully maintained and brought up to date periodically."⁴ We read in an old chronicle,—“A childless Borahi purchased the son of a Naga of the Banfrang clan and brought him up as his own son. The king, in appreciation of the work of that Naga, made him Barphukan, or viceroy of Gauhati, in place of Langi Barphukan.” Dihingia Raja was deeply attached to one Karengpa Naga of the Bangfrang clan and took meals with him in the royal palace. The queen having cast constant glances upon Karengpa excited the wrath of her royal husband, and she was made over to the guest. The son born of the Naga was afterwards brought to the Ahom capital, and he became the first Barpatra Gohain. The illustrious Ahom family of the Miri Sandikois was founded by one Miri who had been adopted as a son

⁴ S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, 1949, p. 15.

by one Buragohain. King Gadadhar Singha accepted two Naga princesses as his consorts. The consort of King Siva Singha appointed a Bhutanese youth as her page. Instances can be multiplied to show assimilation of tribals into the fold of the Ahoms. It may be affirmed that the new entrants became gradually indistinguishable from the members of the older stock.

The tribals were recruited to the Ahom army in recognition of their muscular strength and capacity for endurance. A British military officer affirmed that "the Assamese army appears at this time (1660) to have been largely recruited from Nagas and Miris, and it is evident that they were quite able to hold their own against the well-trained armies of Hindustan."⁵ Soldiers from the tribal areas formed part of the great army of Lachit Barphukan. The general referred to them on one occasion by saying, "Numerous chieftains of the frontier have joined our ranks. Some of them sought a diversion without consulting us. A detachment has been lost; we have many more still fully prepared for action."⁶ King Rudra Singha, during his preparations for invading Bengal, assembled at Gauhati an army of four lacs which included recruits from the tribal chieftains of the neighbouring regions. In the year 1850, Piali Barphukan attempted to organise a confederacy of the Assam tribes to wrest back the country from the hands of the British; his emissaries scoured the courts of the chiefs of the Khasis, Jayantias, Bhutias, Nagas, Singphos, Khamptis, Miris, Mishmis and Manipuris.

⁵ Capt. St. John F. Michell, *Report on the North-East Frontier*, 1883, p. 30.

⁶ S. K. Bhuyan, *Lachit Barphukan and His Times*, p. 69.

The participation of the hillmen in the military enterprises of the old Assam Government was facilitated by the existence of mutual friendly relations. There were periodic incursions of the hillmen no doubt; but they ended in the re-establishment of the old relations of friendship and co-operation.

The old frontiers of Assam can be roughly divided into four regions. The first one was the Bhutan frontier, to the north of Darrang and Kamrup. Its management was placed in the hands of the Raja of Darrang; and there were officers in charge of the Duars or passes through which the Bhutanese came down to the plains. The Barphukan, as the viceroy of Gauhati, exercised general supervision over the transactions with the merchants of Bhutan and their government. During the weak days of the Assam Government the Darrang and Kamrup Duars were made over to the Bhutanese in consideration of an annual tribute of local Bhutanese products. The Kariapar Duar was the channel of trade between Assam and Tibet. Lhasa merchants brought Chinese silks and other Tibetan products to a market situated near the Kariapar Duar. Visits of Bhutanese envoys to the Ahom capital were carefully recorded in the old chronicles of Assam with all incidental details.

The Dufas were conciliated by the assignment of a number of paiks in the Duar areas. These paiks were called Dafala-Bahatias, and they consisted of deported criminals. They paid nominal taxes to the Ahom Government; but they were compelled to furnish the Dufas with such necessaries as cloths, cattle and salt. In course of time the Dufas imbibed the habits and manners of the neighbouring hillmen.

The relations with the Khamptis, Miris, Mishmis,



and Singphos were regulated by the governor of Sadiya known as the Sadiyakhwa-Gohain. The hill-men, were kept in proper restraint by the enactment of stipulations under which they obtained facilities for trade and supply of their necessary articles and other concessions.

The Nagas came in more frequent touch with the Assamese than the other tribes; but the relations were mostly confined to the Nagas occupying the low hills between the Sibsagar and Lakhimpur Districts. The Assam Government obtained a considerable revenue from the import of salt; and the Nagas depended on the Assam markets for grain and other articles. This inter-dependence, said a writer in 1841, "contributed to a mutual good understanding between the two people. The Naga hills have in consequence been always accessible to the people of the plains; whilst the Nagas have been always permitted access to the markets of the frontiers."⁷ The salt that came annually from the Naga hills amounted to about 650 maunds. Several vegetable and mineral substances were also found in the Naga hills,—bay leaf, several species of laurels, and wild plants in considerable quantities.

These Naga tribes were claimed as subjects of the Assam government. Their chiefs were granted lands and retainers like other nobles of Assam. The estates thus granted were known as Naga-khats, and they were managed by Assamese agents called Naga Katakis. It was the custom for the Nagas to leave their spears at their Katakis' house as they came down from the hills on trading expeditions, and to reclaim them on their return.

⁷ William Robinson, *A Descriptive Account of Assam*, 1841, pp. 384-385.

The fugitive Ahom prince Gadapani, who afterwards sat on the throne from 1681 to 1696, had taken shelter in the Naga hills, and stories of his escapades and wanderings are still current amongst the Nagas as amongst the people of the plains.

A question may be asked as to how the hillmen, Nagas or others, carried on their business with the Assamese of the plains? A kind of bilingualism was in vogue amongst the tribes, especially among those of their members who had to maintain contacts with the plains-folk; and the latter too had to know the tribal dialects sufficiently enough to be able to carry on conversation with the hill people. So a knowledge of Assamese had to be acquired by the visiting tribesmen by way of necessity, and the same was the case with the people of the plains who had to carry on trade or transact business of the state. As I have said elsewhere, the frontier wardens and governors of Assam "had in their respective establishments a number of men versed in the languages, customs and habits of the tribes. There were also tribal experts in the court of the king, and their services were utilised in connection with a peace mission or a military expedition."⁸ A British officer writing in 1875 said that "in every tribe on this border some men are to be found who have learnt Assamese, and are spokesman for the rest when brought in contact with the plains people. In dealing with the tribes these men are very useful."⁹

The old government of Assam had to maintain contacts with the hillmen as a measure of necessity,

⁸ S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, 1949, p. 47.

⁹ P. T. Carnegie to Deputy Commissioner, Sibsagar, July 10, 1873, reproduced in Mackenzie's *North-East Frontier of Bengal*, p. 400.

and a process of mutual understanding developed between the two. But things were changed with the advent of the British. The tribes had their links with the people across the eastern hills of Assam, and frictions with the tribes were expected to produce consequences which were much more serious than their local implications. Hence the British rulers proposed to deal with the tribes on a separate basis altogether. These fears came out prominently during the discussions about the restoration of an Ahom prince to the throne of Assam. It was held that the administration of the eastern frontier could not be made over to such a prince as collisions with the tribes would be inevitable involving the British government in perpetual embarrassments. Sir Charles Metcalfe even suggested that Raja Gambhir Singh of Manipur should be invited to hold charge of the Sadiya frontier. After protracted discussions lasting for some six years it was decided in 1832 that, Upper Assam, *minus* the Sadiya country, should be made over to Raja Purandar Singha on a tributary basis.

The Sadiya country, and in fact the entire frontier area, thus became from the beginning a separate territory administered on different lines from the rest of the province. Such a difference was perhaps necessary especially in the administration of regulations and laws; but the difference was felt in the absence of opportunities for plains people to meet their tribal neighbours, and *vice versa*. Still then we come across a number of Assamese gentlemen—remnants of the tribal experts of the old Assam government—whose services were invaluable to the British rulers in dealing with the hill tribes. Rai Bahadur Jadab Chandra Barua's influence upon the Naga tribes was remarkably

effective; similarly Rai Sahib Bholanath Sarma Hazarika, from his station at North Lakhimpur, exercised a great deal of control over the Dufilas and the Miris, and so did Srijut Jibeswar Barua over the Khamptis, Abors, Singphos and Mishmis near Sadiya. There were other Assamese gentlemen whose knowledge of tribal customs and manners and whose capacity for tactful management were harnessed by the British in the task of administering the frontier areas. The success of these tribal experts indicated that the hillmen could be more easily conciliated by people who know their ways of living and thinking much better than outright strangers.

A very significant process of integration had been going on for centuries through the activities of the Vaisnava preachers of Assam. Mahapurush Sankardeva preached the equality of all human beings, and persons outside the fold of Hinduism were accepted by him as his immediate disciples, e.g., Joihari Atoi, originally a Muslim; Govinda Atoi, a Garo; Bholai Atoi, a Mikir; and Ram Atoi, a Kachari. Gopaldeva, the third head of the Vaisnava hierarchy, directed his attention chiefly to the inhabitants of eastern Assam; and his followers preached amongst the tribes and gradually brought them under the influence of Vaisnavism. The Dihing and Mayamara Satras have been conspicuous in thus spreading the influence of Vaisnavism amongst the tribals of Assam. The new converts have now become an integral part of Assamese Hindu society. The activities of Vaisnava Mahantas were however confined more or less to the tribals of the plains, the inhabitants of the accessible Duars, and periodic visitors from the interior hills.

With the advent of the British the task of humanising the tribals became mainly the work of Christian

Missionaries. David Scott, the first Commissioner of Assam, arranged to bring a number of English missionaries to work amongst the Garos. He was of opinion that rude tribes were more likely to profit by the teachings of the gospels as "they are still in that state of national childhood which enabled the stranger priest to enact the schoolmaster and teach them what he likes."¹⁰ Major Francis Jenkins, a subsequent Commissioner of Assam, also held the view that the tribes on the Assam frontier should be brought within the scope of missionary activities as early as possible as "the influence of persons skilled in the languages of these tribes, and devoting all their time and attention to humanise these races could not fail of being useful to us and to them."¹¹ It was through Jenkins's attempt that Rev. Nathan Brown of the American Baptist Mission arrived in Sadiya in 1836 to take up missionary work in Assam.

William Robinson, writing in 1841, "hoped, that by the blessing of Divine Providence, through the efforts of these excellent men, the Nagas, who from time immemorial have been the scorn and prey of their more civilized neighbours may shortly begin to emerge from the dark barbarism which now renders the tribe of each hill an enemy to that of the next, and has hitherto prevented an Alpine tract of great material resources and high fertility, from supporting more than a very scanty population in a state of discomfort and privation."¹²

¹⁰ David Scott to Govt. of Bengal, April 27, 1825, quoted in Mackenzie's *North-East Frontier*, p. 254.

¹¹ The Chinese Repository, pub. by Kegan Paul, London, 1837, *A Description of Assam*.

¹² William Robinson, *A Descriptive Account of Assam*, pp. 382-

Another English man writing about the same time considered Assam to be a missionary field of great interest. He wrote,—“Connected as Assam is with Tibet, the headquarter of Lamaism, with Burma, and with the inaccessible Chinese Empire, we cannot but regard it with peculiar feelings of hope, as destined in Divine Providence to be a centre from whence the true light may radiate on all the surrounding darkness. It is but 150 years since the system of Hinduism was introduced, and though by the influence of the Raja and the Brahmins, it rapidly gained ground, it has not yet taken full hold on the passions of the people. ...Yet this state cannot continue long; and even now the Indian religion is extending with the extension of British influence, and the introduction of Hindu soldiery.”¹³

It thus becomes apparent that the British rulers wanted to counteract the spread of Hinduism amongst the tribes, and interposed in its behalf the influence of Christian missions. The age-long process of integration thus came to an end somewhat abruptly, except in a modified form necessitated by the scanty requirements of trade. Relations with the tribes were conducted henceforward under the strict supervision of British officers, and free association of the hills and the plains of Assam thus began to be seriously handicapped.

But now the British rulers are no longer on the scene, and we can now revive the old process of free intercourse with the tribal people, and demolish the existing barriers in all fields of activities, political, economic and social.

¹³ The Chinese Repository, pub. by Kegan Paul, London, 1837, *A Description of Assam*.

All the component parts of Assam, tribal and non-tribal, hills and plains, should be developed simultaneously on a well-considered plan; otherwise the backwardness of the tribals will react on the progress of their fortunate brethren of the plains. The feeling of oneness must be generated in all our hearts for in the ultimate realities of life we rise and fall together. The earthquake of 1950 and the subsequent floods presented problems which had to be faced both in the hills and the plains. The advent of an invader will have to be resisted by the combined efforts by all the inhabitants of Assam living in the plains as well as in the hills.

It must also be remembered that the unsophisticated people of Assam, both of the hills and the plains, are averse to carrying on relationship with strangers whose habitats and whereabouts cannot be known or traced; nor will the former listen with confidence to anything said by the latter. The averseness had been felt by outsiders even before the advent of the British, and it has continued till this day.

The hillmen do not consider the plains-folk of Assam as outsiders in any way, and this feeling is reciprocated by the latter. The two have known each other from time immemorial, and there is little chance amongst them of hurting their mutual sentiments and susceptibilities. Besides the hillmen and their brothers in the plains have developed a method by which they can express their ideas and thoughts in a mutually understandable manner. The intervention of an absolute stranger, unless he knows the language of social intercourse, and the niceties of the customs and manners will always fail to carry conviction or make any impression. The hill people have their own way

of looking at things, and they have acquired a common-sense view of life, and unless the inner meaning of their intentions and view-points is properly appreciated there will always be room for misunderstanding which may lead to serious consequences. No headway can be made in establishing cordial relations with the tribal people if we approach them only from the official angle without the trust and confidence generated by real feelings of love and sympathy. Our dealings must be simple and straightforward; even the remotest traces of insincerity and selfishness are easily detected by hillmen who are guided by their powerful instincts rather than by logic and analysis.

It is a matter of singular gratification that the attainment of India's independence has been followed by an organised attempt to impart to our tribal brothers the amenities of an advanced social life; and measures are in progress to open in the frontier area a net-work of schools, hospitals and roads. But the primitive races will never be drawn towards us if they see about them strangers who are unfamiliar with their languages, manners and customs and their inarticulate delicate sentiments. The tribes must be placed in their easy and natural surroundings and in all measures of rehabilitation, prominent part must be taken by their brothers of the Assam plains whom they have seen and associated with throughout the ages.

July 1955.

ASSAMESE MUSIC

I am thankful to the Gauhati University Postgraduate Students' Union for asking me to inaugurate the cultural performance held in connection with the Parting Social to bid good-bye to their friends who have completed their courses of study at the University. Messages of good-will and good luck have already been exchanged at to-day's afternoon meeting. I can only say that true education begins only after you leave the University. Here you have acquired the preliminary requisites,—mental training and powers of observation—with which the battle of life will have to be waged; and your success will depend upon the equipment and outlook you carry with you from the armoury of your intellectual pursuits. I would also point out that the education you have received here has been imparted to you at considerable expenditure of public revenues; and you should therefore mix intimately with your countrymen of all categories, and give them a share of the good things you have learnt here, and convey to them the impression that University education has endowed you not only with a developed intellect and knowledge of men and things, but has also brightened your hearts with the ray of human sympathy. Therein lie the path of peace, the progress of humanity, and the fulfilment of the object of education.

As regards the cultural performance which is going to be of the nature of a musical *soiree*, I congratulate the Union on their attempt to sweeten the exertions of an academic life by diversions into the

realm of fine arts. Nothing is more potent in the ennoblement of the human heart than music, and a great poet has gone to the extent of saying,—“The man that hath not music in himself, and is not moved with concord of sweet sounds, is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils; let no man trust him”. Only four days ago, Sir Winston Churchill eulogised the arts by saying that they “leap across the gulf of ideology, race and religion. They have a vital part to play in the building up of the human mind, indeed, the whole human race.” I am sure, the sweet notes you shall all hear this evening will not be momentary in their effect, but will reverberate in your memory during the rest of your life, eliminate the grosser elements in your nature, and bring out the noble sentiments lying dormant in the recesses of your hearts.

For some time past I have been trying to find out the most redeeming characteristic of the Assamese people. I have arrived at the definite conclusion that no sentiment sways the Assamese bosom with such dominance as love of music. It is borne out by the facts of life and of history.

All manifestations of nature's beauty, and all occasions of joy and sorrow find a spontaneous expression in songs. They are composed by unlettered villagers, and relayed from mouth to mouth throughout the country. The sum-total of Assamese feelings and aspirations—not sophisticated by the rigours of criticism, nor trammelled by the fetters of convention—is to be found in our Bihu Gits, Ai Nams, Bia Nams, Huchari Kirtans, Bahua Kirtans, Baramahi Gits, and such-like songs. Deep religious thoughts are to be found in our Jikirs and Deha-Bicharar Gits. The Vaisnava reformers of Assam adopted songs as one of

the mediums for the transmission of their message. According to a prevailing custom, the Adhikar of a Vaisnava Satra in Assam has to give proof of his poetical and musical talents by composing a drama. Festivities and occasions of felicitation follow in quick succession in our villages where music plays an important part. It will not be far from the truth that every piece of our ancient poetry—whether it is written in Pad, Dulari, Chabi, Lechari or Totaya—can be set to music. I wish some one amongst our students had taken up this musical aspect of our culture for intensive investigation and research.

As regards the facts of history, a few examples will, we hope, suffice for the present :

The defeat of King Susthitavarman of Kamarupa at the hands of Mahasena Gupta, one of the Later Gupta monarchs, was sung on the banks of the Lauhitya by the Siddhas in pairs when they wake up after sleeping in the shade of the betel plants in full bloom.

During Hiuen-Tsang's visit to the court of the Kamarupa king Bhaskaravarman, the monarch expressed his anxiety not only to know about the significance of the Buddhist faith, but also of a song which was heard in various states of India, namely, "the music of the conquests of Chin Wang of Mahachina". The same enquiry was made by Emperor Harshavardhana. It transpired that the song commemorated the victory and death of the Chinese prince Chin Wang Shihmin. Thomas Watters, the translator of Hiuen-Tsang's *Travels*, observes : "It is interesting to find that the fame of Tang Tai-Tsung's (Chin Wang) glory and achievements had reached the two Indian rulers (Bhaskaravarman and Harshavardhana)."

The Ahom king Khora Raja was living in retreat at Charaikhorong, being unable to resist the attack of Chilarai. An astrologer was singing a song at midnight in the camp of the fugitive king in a rapturous tone. When questioned about this sudden outburst of joy when the king was plunged in disgrace and humiliation, the astrologer said that he was singing out of his heart's gladness as happy tidings would come to the Ahom king the next day. The astrologer's prediction was fulfilled, and he was loaded with presents and honours.

The Assamese knew how to utilise artistic skill in the operations of war. During the course of a naval engagement at Gauhati, an Assamese captain managed to escape by a dancing feat. The Moguls had captured him with his boat. They proposed to celebrate their triumph by a diversion, and they accordingly asked the Assamese captain to amuse them by dancing. The captive agreed to the proposal and he asked his captors to clap their hands to the rhythm of his dance. Koa Mriddha, for that was the name of the Assamese captain, danced on merrily, and the Moguls offered the necessary music, which was supplemented by the timely strokes of the oars. Taking advantage of the engrossment of the Mogul captors in the feat of music and dance the Assamese boatmen steered the vessel to their side of the bank and soon got out of the reach of the enemy. The captors then shouted,—“The Koa, or crow, has flown”.

The Assamese monarchs Rudra Singha and his son Siva Singha were both writers of songs, and one of the latter's songs was sung by Pundit Patwardhan at Gauhati some months back. Rudra Singha asked his musicians to learn Sankirtan music songs from a party of Sankirtan singers visiting the Ahom court. He also

introduced varieties of musical instruments from other parts of India. Siva Singha imported musicians and dancers from Northern India, and the manuscript of *Hasti-vidyarnava* contains several illustrations of their performances before that king and his court. His brother Rajeswar Singha was the author of a drama entitled *Kichak Badh*. To celebrate the visit of the Rajas of Manipur and Cachar, a Bhawana was performed at the Ahom capital Rangpur, and the master of the performance was the Deka Barbarua, son of Kirti Chandra Barbarua.

The universal practice of *Nama-kirtan* in Assam had been heard of in far-off Rajputana; and Lachit Barphukan's antagonist Raja Ram Singha received letters from his mother and also from his wife warning him of the impious character of a war against Assam where *Nama-kirtan* was so much in vogue. This warning served the purpose of an army of resistance. Let music be our armament in the future.

Instances can be multiplied to show that Assam has resounded through the ages with music, whether in the villages, in monasteries, or at the king's court. Even at the present time, a very large number of organisations have cropped up all over the country spontaneously with the object of promoting musical culture and studies. Variety shows seem to be the order of the day almost in all parts of Assam. Such resurgence has not been seen in any other sphere of Assam's cultural life.

Your cultural performance this evening is only an illustration of this resurgence; and you deserve the admiration of your countrymen for having so earnestly responded to the rising tide of national regeneration in the field of music.

With these few words, I with pleasure inaugurate the cultural performance held this evening under the auspices of the Postgraduate Students' Union.

The 2nd May 1954.

WEAVING IN ASSAM

A unique feature of Assamese society is the absence of any specific class reserved only for weaving. Every Assamese woman, be she the daughter of a Brahman or a Sudra, a Buddhist or an animist, a Muhammadan or a Christian, a prince or a beggar, is a weaver by birth. A knowledge of weaving is an essential qualification for her, while proficiency in the art ensures for her a ready disposal in the matrimonial market. An Assamese maiden of the marriageable age, tarrying long in her mother's roof, is not a financial burden to her parents. Many Assamese families have been saved from ruin by the labours of their womenfolk. The men go to the field to earn the bread of the family, while their women remaining at home provide them with the other necessary articles of existence, their apparel. An Assamese widow, however destitute she may be, is never driven to the extremity of earning her bread by living a life of shame; and many instances have been seen where widows have, by the products of their labours in the handloom, borne the expenses of educating their children up to the highest stages of the University. The utter worthlessness of an Assamese woman is indicated by the invariable remark that she cannot even twist a thread. Nothing is considered to be more disgraceful to an Assamese woman than her appearance in society being clad in garments not woven by herself.

All kinds of cloths, from handkerchiefs to gorgeously brocaded and golden-embroidered upper pieces and skirts, constitute the handiwork of Assamese ladies.

The tribes on the Assam frontier were conciliated by presents of Assamese cloths; and distant rulers and potentates were won over by the same presents.

Assamese warriors of old marched to the battle-field having on their body the wonder-working and evil-averting *Kavach-kapor*, or talisman cloth, whose yarn for the warp and the woof must be spun and the weaving completed during the course of one single night. History relates that the great Ahom general Phrasengmung Bargohain, husband of Mula Gabharu, perished in the battlefield as he went there without being equipped with this protective garment. It is natural that the presence of this cloth in the person of the soldiers, a handiwork of their wives and sisters, sharpened the blades in their hands, and served as the voice of duty heard amidst the crack of drums and the splintering of spear-shafts.

The universal popularity of weaving in Assam, and the consequent partial solution of the problem of existence led the great Bengali preacher and savant, Pundit Sivanath Sastri, to remark during his visit to Assam in the last century, that it was only in Assam that he found a justification for the alleged derivation of the word *wife* from *weave*. We still remember the glowing tribute paid to Assamese womanhood by the late Sir Archdale Earle, a popular Chief Commissioner of Assam, in his evidence before the Parliamentary Joint Committee under the presidency of Lord Shelbourne. Mahatma Gandhi, whose celestial virtues included the admiration of beauty in any form, paid the highest compliment to Assamese women when he said,—“Every woman of Assam is a born weaver. No Assamese girl who does not weave can expect to become a wife. And she weaves fairy tales in cloth.

Some of the old pattern that our host, Mr. Phookun [the late Shri Tarun Ram Phookun] showed me were of matchless beauty. And as I saw these beautiful patterns, I could not help shedding a silent tear over India's past glory, and her lost art." Having noticed that ladies in Assam, almost without exception, were clothed from head to foot in khaddar, Dinabandhu C. F. Andrews observed,—“When I have seen the delicate and artistic borders, it has given me the greatest joy, and also a new revelation of the beauty of khaddar as a work of fine art. It has further been impressed on me, many times over, that if this one custom could gradually spread in the other provinces of India—at least among Congress households—it would be a glorious achievement.”

There are many factors at the bottom of this beneficent custom, the principal circumstances being the patriotic bent of the old-time Assamese people and the deliberate measures of the state.

The Assamese of yore abhorred the idea of using foreign apparels. King Naranarayan of Cooch Behar sent to the Ahom monarch several articles as presents, including “five beautiful silk *saris* made in Barnagar”. The four Katakis who brought the presents were informed,—“The five *saris* which you have brought here are worn by undesirable women of our country. They are not worn by men. How is this that you, being ambassadors, have brought apparels worn by women ?” The envoys were then dismissed and given *mekhelas*, or skirts, the usual wear of Assamese women.

The Raja of Mantara had once presented to his father-in-law, the Nara Raja a suit of garments. The Raja of Nara, which was the original homeland of the Ahoms, consulted his ministers as to the propriety of

wearing the cloths. They in a body replied,—“A foreign article, however attractive it may be, should not be worn by the king”.

King Rudra Singha presented to his ministers sets of garments of the Mogul fashion consisting of cloaks, head-dresses and shoes. The three Dangarias, or principal ministers, returned the presents, saying,—“Why should we wear these presents imitating the fashions of foreigners in supercession of our own indigenous costumes?”.

The measures adopted by Momai-tamuli Barbarua, during the reign of Swargadeo Pratap Singha, 1603-41, constitute an important aspect of the efforts made by the state to popularise and perpetuate weaving in Assam. The Barbarua toured round the kingdom, charged with the task of reorganising the domestic, agricultural and social life of the people. He promulgated an order that every capable woman should spin two cosses of yarn, and every man should make a basket or a sieve before retiring to bed. The village headman while going round the next day would find out whether and how far this order was carried out. Besides, it was obligatory on the part of every Assamese household to contribute to the royal stores one seer of home-spun silk annually. These measures not only fostered habits of industry by enforcing the profitable employment of time, but also averted the possibility of eventide serenadings on the part of village gallants. They had also the far-reaching effect of ensuring the economic self-sufficiency of the people.

But we feel specially gratified when we recollect a measure adopted by Queen Sarveswari Devi, consort of King Siva Singha. Coins were struck in her name from 1739 to 1744 A.D., as in the case of the two earlier

consorts of the same monarch—Queen Phuleswari Devi and Queen Amvika Devi. The apartments, courtyards and the grounds of royal palaces remain practically empty, or are filled up with articles of luxury or paraphernalias of pomp and grandeur, or attractive gardens. But Queen Sarveswari Devi admitted the girls of the neighbourhood within the palace enclosures and taught them to spin. The girls who were musically inclined were taught music. About this we reproduce the following excerpt from a contemporary Buranji or chronicle,—

“Anadari, the daughter of Solal Bargohain, became the Barkuanri or Chief consort of the king, when she took the name Sarveswari. . . . The queen adopted a Bhutanese boy, and kept him with her as a *ligira* or page. As an innovation, she admitted inside numerous batches of girls belonging to all communities and castes, and engaged them in spinning. She also taught music to girls who were musically inclined.”

As a culmination of her efforts for the promotion of artistic weaving in Assam, Queen Sarveswari Devi collected patterns and specimens of brocades and flower-designs for borders in vogue in different parts of India, for reproduction by Assamese weavers. They were inserted on the four margins of every double-page folio of the illustrated manuscript of *Salya-parva Mahabharat*, written by the court-poet Bholanath Dwija.

We now ask,—In the year 1740, how many kings or queens of the world laid open their palaces and gardens for the benefit of the subjects, and how many queens brought into the royal premises girls of all denominations for teaching them spinning and music?

December 1926, April 1947 and January 1958.

NOBLE WOMEN OF ASSAM

The history of Assam abounds in examples of womanly courage and determination.

First comes Mula Gabharu, who rushed to the thick of the contest, sword in hand, to avenge the death of her husband in the war with the Padshah of Gaur, and died, like Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, fighting in the battlefield.

Next comes Nangbakla Gabharu, who in the open court arraigned the king and his ministers for their discomfiture at the hands of the Koch general, and snatched away her son whom they proposed to send as a hostage to Cooch Behar, saying,—“Give me your battle-dress, and I shall fight. You will then know whether I am a man or a woman. You can send my son only if you can make the Dikhow river flow up the current.”

The picture of Ramani Gabharu, daughter of King Jayadhwaj Singha, and daughter-in-law of Emperor Aurangzeb, then floats before our mind's eye. Her maternal uncle Laluk Barphukan had conspired to surrender Gauhati to the Moguls bloodlessly and treacherously; and Ramani Gabharu, living in the Mogul viceregal palace near Dacca, wrote to her uncle to desist from that infamous and unpatriotic act.

Princess Jaimati, wife of Gadapani Kowanr, next appears before us, suffering tortures for refusing to give any clue likely to disclose the whereabouts of her fugitive husband.

We then meet Rani Kamaleswari Devi, widow of King Gaurinath Singha, who proceeded to Calcutta,

and requested Lord Wellesley, Governor-General of India, for permission to transport an armed contingent to Assam with which she proposed to quell the disturbances in her country and restore it to tranquillity and peace.

Besides these acts of gallantry and courage, women of Assam offer us noble examples of tenderness and grace.

A number of Ahom princes were living in Cooch Behar as hostages. They were manly and handsome, and being young in years their natural place was their hearth and home where they should live in the enjoyment of domestic bliss. The consorts of Sukladhwaj Kowanr, brother of the Koch monarch King Naranarayan, taking pity on the youths, implored their husband to release them and send them back to Assam, saying "You have kept here the Assam princes as captives. They are young in years, comely in features, and well-equipped in their accomplishments. We beseech you to give them leave to go back to their country". The hostages were accordingly set at liberty, and allowed to return to Assam.

Next comes the Barkuanri, or chief consort, of Sudoipha Parvatia Raja. She happened to be the daughter of the Prime Minister Atan Buragohain Rajmantri Dangaria. According to the custom of the Ahom court, the premier and his cabinet colleagues had to pay their homage to the Barkuanri by kneeling down before her. But, how can a daughter, however exalted she may be, see her father prostrating before her? The queen therefore left her seat when her father approached her to perform the obeisance. The king became indignant, and accused the Buragohain for not acting up to a time-honoured practice. A double-

edged device was then adopted to solve the delicate predicament of both the premier and his daughter. A manuscript of the Vaisnava scripture *Ratnavali* was placed on a *sarai* or tray in front of the queen, and the Buragohain knelt before it in an attitude of reverence and devotion. The queen's filial conscience was eased by the thought that her father's obeisance was directed towards the book, and the king became satisfied that the premier had offered due salutation to the queen.

Instances can be multiplied to illustrate the courage and tenderness of the women of Assam. The importance which is given to the activities and utterances of women in the indigenous chronicles displays the esteem and regard with which they were held in society, and the influence which they exercised in the public affairs of the country.

September 1957.

MIR JUMLA AND RAM SINGHA IN ASSAM

The Mir Jumla couplet : Every student of Indian History knows the couplet about Warren Hastings,—

“Hati par howdah, ghora par jin,
Jaldi ao, Jaldi ao, Saheb Hasting.”

Mir Jumla who invaded Assam in 1662-63 had previously played a very important part in the affairs of the Deccan and the Mogul capital. His meteoric rise to wealth and power from the position of a mere fortune-hunter from Persia, his *debut* at Golconda, his prime-ministership in the court of Emperor Shah Jahan, his assistance to Aurangzeb with his twenty maunds of diamond ultimately placing the latter on the throne, made Mir Jumla the most conspicuous figure in Mogul India, and created round him a very magnetic and influential personality. When such a man appeared on the precincts of Assam, and carried his victorious arms to the furthest limits of the kingdom, he naturally left a very deep impression upon the minds of the people, and the result is a couplet which we have found in several old Assamese Buranjis or chronicles,—

“Khata-khuta Majum Khan, mukhe chap dari,
Beharaka bhangе jaibo Guahata bari.”

which, when translated into English, will be approximately as follows,—

Short and robust Majum Khan,
With rounded beard in his face,

First will vanquish Cooch Behar,
To Gauhati then he'll pace.¹

A prediction : This is how the couplet originated. —Mir Jumla stood on the borders of Cooch Behar and Assam with 60,000 horse, and despatched two messengers to the Barphukan at Gauhati demanding the evacuation of that place. According to the custom of the Ahom court the messengers were served daily with provisions and necessaries. One day, a deer was added to the articles of food. The Mogul ambassadors retained the other provisions and let loose the deer, and told our men as follows,—

“Now, listen. I will tell you a story. Two flocks of peacocks were engaged in fighting, flying from one branch to another. From there they flew upon a hill. As they were engaged in a long and continuous fight from midday they were all exhausted with fatigue. A herd of elephants witnessed the fight, and their aged leader said,—“It will be disastrous if we remain here; and so let us move from hence”. Another elephant retorted,—“Why should we leave this place? If the birds fly upon our bodies, do you think we shall not be able to kill them?” Then the birds engaged in scuffling dropped upon the herd, and wounded and pierced the eyes of several of the elephants which being seized with fright dispersed in confusion in all possible quarters. They fell on pits, on beds of thorns,

¹ Mir Jumla appears under various designations in Assamese chronicles,—Mir Jumla, Mirja Mula, Amir Jumla, Majum Khan, or simply Khan-khana. “Mir Muhammad Said Ardastani, surnamed Mir Jumla, and afterwards Muazzam Khan, Khan-khanan Sipahsalar, was born in Ardistan near Ispahan, and came to India as the personal attendant of a Persian merchant”.—Bernier, Constable, 1891, p. 10, footnote.

or got themselves bogged in morasses. Most of them perished in the scare, and only a few could depart with their lives. The elephants met with this calamity because they ignored the sage counsel of their leader. But stirred and agitated by our elephants, horses and foot-soldiers, the waters will be converted to blood, the forests to sands, and the deer will come out in herds; for Mir Jumla who is short and stout and has a rounded beard in his face will proceed to Gauhati after the conquest of Cooch Behar”.

And its fulfilment : The Barphukan discovered from the trend of the fable that Mir Jumla meant mischief, and accordingly sent messages to the Ahom monarch Jayadhwaj Singha at Gargaon. The prediction made by the Mogul diplomat and story-teller was fulfilled. “Mir Jumla made his way into Cooch Behar by an obscure and neglected highway”.² ‘On the 27th of Rubby-al-Aul (December 1661) Mir Jumla took possession of the capital of Cooch Behar, and in compliment to the reigning Emperor, changed its name to Alamgir-nagar’.³ The Nawab then invaded Assam, and entered Gargaon on the 17th of March 1662. The Ahom king fled to the pestilential hills of Namrup, and earned for all ages the unpatriotic epithet of *Bhaganiya Raja* or the Deserting King. A treaty was concluded which was favourable to the invaders. But the great Khani-i-Khanan Mir Jumla died in March 1663 on his way back to Dacca, and Aurangzeb wrote to the valourous commander’s son Muhammad Amin Khan,—“You mourn the death of an affectionate

² Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Aurangzeb*, Vol. III, 1916, p. 180.

³ Charles Stewart, *History of Bengal*, 1910, p. 325.

parent, and I the loss of the most powerful and the most dangerous of my friends".⁴

Dead bones unspared : We shall give an instance of the accuracy of details noticeable in Assamese chronicles, as seen from the manner in which facts narrated there are confirmed by the accounts of Mogul historians. During Mir Jumla's residence in or about the Ahom capital he excavated several tombs or *maidams* of Ahom nobles and princes in which were deposited their personal belongings, their garments and their jewels. We reproduce the following passage from *Fathiyah-i-ibriyah*, the official Persian account of the expedition by Shihabuddin Talish,—

"The common people bury their dead with some of the property of the deceased, placing the head towards the east, and feet towards the west. The chiefs build vaults for their dead, and place therein the wives and servants of the deceased, after killing them, together with necessary articles for a few years, including various kinds of gold and silver vessels, carpets, clothes and food-stuffs. . . . From the vaults which were dug open nearly ninety thousand rupees on all accounts were realised".⁵

The first part of the above passage describing the contents of the tomb of an Ahom noble is thus supported in an Ahom chronicle as we read in Col. T. R. T. Gurdon's *Short Note on the Ahoms*,—"A Buranji describes how at the funeral of Raja Gadadhar Singha who died in A. D. 1696, a number of living persons, who had been the deceased's attendants, were interred

⁴ Bernier, Constable, 1891, p. 173.

⁵ The extract is taken from *Assam and the Ahoms in 1660*, by Prof. Jadunath Sarkar, published in the *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society* for December 1915.

with the corpse, together with many articles of food, raiment and ornaments". Though Shihabuddin wrote of Assam thirty years prior to King Gadadhar Singha's death he only speaks of a custom prevailing in both these periods.

The second part of the passage, quoted above from the *Fathiyah-i-Ibriyah*, describing the exhumation of the remains of Ahom tombs is thus supported in another Assamese chronicle,—“During Mir Jumla's stay in upper Assam he came to learn from some Assamese people who became friends with the Moguls that the tombs of the kings contained vast wealth, and he accordingly employed his men to dig open the graves. Our men pointed out the entrances of the tombs, after which Mir Jumla carried on his excavations. The tombs of Barjana Gohain, and Lachit Gohain yielded huge treasures, and their bones were also extracted and removed. During the months of Baisakh, Jaishtha and Ashar, the grave of Burha Raja [King Pratap Singha] was unearthed, and untold wealth was recovered from there; his bones were also removed. On the seventh of Baisakh 1584 *saka*, the tombs of Gargayan Raja, Bhaga Raja, Naria Raja, and Khora Raja, were excavated and their treasures and bones removed. King Jayadhwaj Singha heard this, and he expressed his sorrow, saying—“I have not been able even to protect the bones of my forefathers !”⁶

The valour of Assamese soldiers : The terms of the treaty concluded between Mir Jumla and Assam were certainly favourable to the invaders. From the humiliating nature of the treaty it is evident that Assam had not played its part so well in the game. The

⁶ See also Sergeant C. Clayton's *Description of the Tomb of an Assamese Noble* in the J.A.S.B. for June 1948.

Assamese were not lacking in vigilance or courage or military craft. They dealt heavy blows on the invaders; and the poet Mulla Darvish of Herat, 'that master of eloquence' who accompanied Mir Jumla during the expedition has thus celebrated the bravery of the Assamese people in an elegant *qasida* or ode, where he says in one place,—

"The Rajah of Assam brought to the field an army,
Whose large number became a cage on earth.

[They were] tumult-raising and sudden (in attack)
like the eyes of the fair sex,

Hurling arrows and (other) missiles, and making
a (firm) stand in the battle-field.

Their bodies full of life, they robbed lives
on plains and hills.

All of them were terrific, like the demon
Ifrit in the river.

If one of them made a charge on the battle-field
Their bodies would be severed from their heads,
and their heads from the bodies (before
they left it).

They seem to be Ahrimans come out of hell,
Or some heart that has escaped from the
chains of captivity.

They are strong-limbed to such a degree that if
they are turned to dust

Their veins do not become the least slack.

All of them are without light like the eye-balls
of the blind,

All of them are like poisonous plants in quality
and effect.⁷

⁷ Jadunath Sarkar, *Assam and the Ahoms in 1660*, J.B.O.R.S. for December 1915, page 184.

Jayadhwaj Singha's delinquency : Then why could not the Assamese do justice to the valour and martial ardour attributed to them by successive generations of visitors? There were men and money, and all the requisite materials for victory, but the Assamese army were at that time a body without a head. There was no military commander of supreme genius who could marshall and co-ordinate the materials, to bring out and organise the unexplored energies of the people rendering them efficient for the issues of the war, to rouse national consciousness to a point when all subordinate consideration would be relegated to the background. The absence of such a leader and commander was felt even then, and the king's inability to face manfully and tactfully the critical juncture in the history of his country was recognised by his contemporaries. King Jayadhwaj Singha failed to attend to the serious duties of a monarch. An old chronicle specifically pins the whole blame on the king when it says,—"The fisherwomen and female hawkers said to the king at Dalouguri Road during his flight to Namrup,— 'O Lord, you had paid your attention only to pleasure and dalliance. If you had put, during these fifteen years of your reign, fifteen piles of earth at proper places, your fate would not have been like this. Where are you fleeing leaving us in the lurch?' The king was extremely aggrieved to hear this admonition from the lips of the female hawkers.

"The same unknown chronicler refers to the absence of able generalship at the time of Jayadhwaj Singha, 1648-63, when he describes the proceedings of the war-council convened by King Rudra Singha, 1696-1714, at North Gauhati, to discuss the proposal to invade Bengal with a view to restore to Assam the territories

extending up to the river Karatoya long held in fee by the sovereigns of Kamarupa,—

“The Barpatra Gohain in support of the king’s proposal said,—“The territories bordering on the Karatoya are ours. The enemies have got possession of them only on account of our indifference and inaction. The duty of a monarch is to destroy the enemy, and to recover lost possessions with a view to preserve the ancient boundaries of his kingdom. We have a large fleet and naval soldiers, and abundance of war materials. If the king orders, the enemy will be crushed and destroyed’. The Buragohain then added,—“The king’s proposal is reasonable, and what the Barpatra Gohain says is equally reasonable. The ancestors of our king had, by virtue of their prowess and courage, crossed the boundaries of Rangamati, and washed their swords in the waters of the Karatoya-Ganga. They found it inconvenient to fix the boundaries of Assam at the Karatoya, and so they made the Manas river the western limit of Assam, and established a garrison at Gauhati. In the reign of Jayadhwaj Singha there was an abundance of provisions and men, and still he acquired the title of the *Deserting king*. Arms and ammunitions, materials and supplies are torpid and impotent; the followers and subordinates of His Majesty are symbols of life and animation : they alone can infuse into the immobile war-provisions a dynamic force”.

• **Raja Ram Singha in Assam :** Jayadhwaj Singha was succeeded on the throne by Chakradhwaj Singha. Being highly sensitive to his prestige and dignity, the new king resolved to free the country from the burden of the heavy indemnities payable annually to the Mogul court. A new army was raised, and trained on new

lines and models. The king personally supervised the military manouvres and practices. Lachit Barphukan was placed at the head of this new army. Gauhati was wrested back from the Moguls. The Mogul forces under Raja Ram Singha, the heroic son of Aurangzeb's firm and resolute Rajput adherent, Mirza Raja Jai Singha of Amber, were after a series of engagements defeated in the naval battle of Saraighat near Gauhati in 1671. The chivalrous Rajput commander Raja Ram Singha was deeply impressed by the dash of Assamese soldiers, their tact, versability, courage and tenacity in the battle-field, and the invincible leadership of the Assamese general, and he said,—“Glory to the king ! Glory to the counsellors ! Glory to the commander ! Glory to the country ! One single individual leads all the forces ! Even I, Ram Singha, being personally on the spot do not find any loophole and opportunity !”

A patriotic bluff : Having seen for himself the great leadership of Lachit Barphukan, the Rajput Raja concluded that Assam would not have been discomfited during Mir Jumla's invasion had Lachit conducted the warfare on behalf of his country. The Raja said,—“May I know, where was the valiant general Lachit Barphukan when Mir Jumla overran your country ?” The Assamese ambassador Kaupatiya Madhabcharan thundered forth a Himalayan bluff,—“In the eastern region there is a kingdom named Nara, which was bound by a treaty to pay annually to the Ahom monarch a stipulated tribute of horses, clothes, elephants and money. The king of Nara disregarded the terms of the treaty, and Lachit Barphukan was despatched by the Ahom monarch to extort the tribute from the refractory ruler. The Ahom general devastated the country of Nara, and exacted from its unwilling lord the tribute.

On hearing of the arrival of Mir Jumla in Assam the Assamese commander hurried back from Nara, pursued the Nawab, but on reaching Kaliabar he learnt that Mir Jumla had been gathered to his forefathers." There is a Nara tribe living beyond the Patkai Hills to the south-east of Assam, with whom the Ahoms came frequently into conflict, but we have not heard of any Nara expedition during the reign of King Jayadhwaj Singha. Lachit was then only a junior commander in the Ahom army, and history is mute regarding his alleged association with any frontier warfare.

Why was Mir Jumla sent to Assam ?—Both Mir Jumla and Ram Singha were outstanding figures in Mogul India. Why did not Emperor Aurangzeb despatch inferior commanders to invade Assam, and retain these two able leaders for more urgent imperial purposes ? There is a suspicion in some quarters that the Emperor, after sitting on the throne, looked upon Mir Jumla with fear, thinking that the man who had helped him to wade through slaughter to the throne might also remove him from that giddy eminence. Bernier explicitly states in this connection that 'Aurangzeb justly apprehended that an ambitious soldier (like Mir Jumla) could not long remain in a state of repose, and that, if disengaged from foreign war, he would seek occasion to excite internal commotions'. So, off to Arracan and Assam, and the pestilential airs and floods and mosquitoes and inclemencies of the eastern regions of India ! Bernier seems to think that the invasion of Assam had already figured in the imagination of Mir Jumla, who intended to carry his victorious arms to the mountainous steppes of China and thereby earn immortal fame ; and so, the Emperor's orders to invade Assam gave him the official sanction to pursue his own

ambitious project. Professor Jadunath Sarkar says that Mir Jumla was appointed viceroy of Bengal with orders to punish the lawless zemindars of the province, specially those of Assam and Magh, who had caused injury and molestation to the Muslims. The king of Arracan had already exasperated the Great Mogul by harbouring his only surviving brother and rival Sultan Shuja, and Aurangzeb desired that Mir Jumla, the new viceroy of Bengal, should after conquering Assam lead an army to Arracan to recover Shuja's family if possible.

Charles Stewart is however of opinion that the provocation for the invasion of Assam was given by King Jayadhwaj Singha himself. He says in his *History of Bengal*,—"The prince of this country Jydej Singha had during the civil wars sent an army down the Brahmaputra which had plundered and laid waste the country as far as Dacca, and carried away with them a number of the inhabitants as slaves. To avenge these insults, and to re-establish the fame of the Mogul government, was an object of great solicitude to Mir Jumla, who, as soon as he was satisfied with regard to the prince Shuja, in the year 1071 A.H., collected in the neighbourhood of Dacca a numerous army, well equipped with artillery and warlike stores, and accompanied by a fleet of war-boats".

The offence of Ram Singha : We have got some idea of the complicated motives of Mir Jumla's invasion of Assam. But, why was Raja Ram Singha selected to lead the expedition against Assam provoked by King Chakradhwaj Singha's bold and chivalrous stand against the indignities he had received at the hands of the Mogul ambassadors and deputies? It was Ram Singha who under the orders of the Emperor had looked after Shivaji when that great empire-

builder was a virtual prisoner at Agra. Jai Singha invaded Bijapur, and at his instance Aurangzeb wrote to Shivaji inviting him to the Mogul court. We read in the *Life of Shivaji Maharaj* by Messrs Takakhav and Keluskar,—“Jai Singha advised Shivaji to proceed to Agra without any anxiety, promising that his son Ram Singha would look after his comfort and safety. Upon these assurances Shivaji resolved to visit Agra.”

Shivaji's restless and undaunted spirit pining in the luxuries of the Mogul capital resembled the grains of dynamite cribbed and confined in a German howitzer, ever ready to burst and explode, producing a terrific boom and commotion, and blowing to smithereens all surrounding objects. Shivaji by a bold and original strategem threw dust into the eyes of the wily Emperor and escaped from the surveillance and humility to which he was subjected, and the suspicion naturally fell upon his Hindu custodian Ram Singha as having loosened the strings of the caged bird. The Mahratta historians continue,—“Ram Singha did not quite escape a certain measure of suspicion. Chitnis asserts that Ram Singha connived at Shivaji's escape. Some Mahratta Brahmans who were caught admitted that Shivaji had escaped with the connivance of Ram Singha. But when Jai Singha heard that he protested his son was innocent of such faithlessness to the Emperor. But Aurangzeb would not listen, and Ram Singha was forbidden to appear at court”.

Jai Singha who had served the Emperor so well in his struggle for the throne, and in his campaigns in the Deccan, took to heart his son's humiliation. He hurried to the defence of his territories intending to recover his independence. But the valiant Rajput chief, an offspring of the renowned Kuchchwas of

Amber, died on his arrival at Burhanpur, on the tenth of July 1667. The culprit Ram Singha was placed at the head of an expedition against the Raja of Assam as a punishment for his alleged connivance at Shivaji's flight from Agra.

Warning to Ram Singha : But Ram Singha's mother and his wife, with the instinctive foresight of Rajput women, could imagine the disastrous consequences of the expedition to Assam. The unknown Assamese Buranjist, ever eager to record the minutest detail about the great Mogul personalities connected with Assam, thus writes,—

"When Ram Singha was in Assam he heard the story that Emperor Aurangzeb in a fit of anger had asked his son Krishna Singha to entertain the Emperor by playing with tigers. Krishna Singha agreed, and two tigers were let loose within a net. Krishna Singha, armed with his shield and sword, saluted the Emperor and leaped into the arena. The brutes rushed towards him, but the Rajput gladiator escaped being mauled and torn to pieces by a deft manœuvre of his shield. When he was next attacked he with his sword cut one tiger into two pieces, dashed off at its fellow and killed it as well. Then the surrounding people rent the sky with acclamation, shouting,—'Glory to thee, O Krishna Singha, son of Ram Singha, thou art a true Kshatriya's son'.

"Ram Singha's widowed mother and his wife sent a letter to him in which they wrote,—“The Emperor contrived the death of Krishna Singha by making him wrestle with tigers. Such a friend is the Emperor ! We have received enough tokens of gratitude for the conquest of countries for the Emperor by your father and yourself ! Never think that by your invasion of

the eastern country of Assam we shall gain more. We are told that there is universal *nama-kirtan* (religious music and recital) in that country, and that Vaisnavas, Brahmans and cows are living there in peace and happiness. By invading it, oh, how long could Mir Jumla thrive? So, take heed, and do as you think proper”.

Nawab Shaista Khan, the Subedar of Bengal, was of opinion that the existence of the powerful independent kingdom of Assam made the Emperor careful in his dealings with his chiefs and lordlings, as he had to count upon their support and co-operation in times of emergency, specially when he projected an invasion of that frontier kingdom. The position of the governor of Bengal was of supreme importance under the circumstances. Shaista Khan therefore said to the messenger proceeding to Ram Singha's camp in Assam, —“Well, tell Ram Singha that for the fear of Assam the honour and prestige of the Nawabs and Rajas have remained intact. If that country be invaded and subjugated then we shall be dishonoured as well”.

On receiving these messages from Rajputana and Dacca, Ram Singha was believed to have lost his heart in the Assam campaign. The naval encounter at Saraighat followed soon afterwards, and Ram Singha's forces were completely defeated and routed by Lachit Barphukan. Hadira, opposite Goalpara, now became the Ahom frontier outpost on the west.⁸

December 1926.

⁸ For detailed information about the invasions of Assam by Nawab Mir Jumla and Raja Ram Singha, the following books by the present author may be read : *Lachit Barphukan and His Times*, 1947; *Ramani Gabharu*, 1951; *Mir Jumlar Assam Akraman*, 1956; and, *Atan Buragohain and His Times*, 1957.

ASSAM AS SEEN BY SHIHABUDDIN TALISH

Mir Jumla in his Assam expedition, 1662-1663, arranged to get an account of the events compiled by his own chronicler, as the accounts compiled by reporters deputed by the Emperor were expected to be misleading and inaccurate, and not in the manner as the general would like them to be. Shihabuddin Talish, son of Muhammad Wali Ahmad, was appointed to do the work. He was with the expedition from the day of its departure from the neighbourhood of Dacca to its return to the same place. He was a literary artist, and a careful observer of man and society. He was a master of chaste and elegant Persian style. The product of his labours was the valuable chronicle known as *Tarikh-i-Asham*, or the history of the conquest of Assam; and also as *Fathiiyya-i-Ibriyya*, or victories that give warning. The book was considered as a reliable account of the expedition, and the corresponding descriptions written by other Mogul historians were based on Shihabuddin's chronicle.

The historian is not satisfied by merely giving a day-to-day account of the progress, encounters, sieges, victories, retreats and sufferings of the Mogul army: he gives the genesis of the conflict, and takes very objective and elaborate note of the country traversed by the army, and points out its products and resources, and the customs and usages of the people. The general accuracy of Shihabuddin's description can be judged from its agreement with the account recorded in contemporaneous Assamese Buranjis, and by European writers like Glanius, Manucci, Bernier and Tavernier.

Mir Jumla's invasion of Assam, considered in the light of its perspective, and its immediate results and remote consequences, was an event of great importance to Mogul India and Assam, and Shihabuddin Talish's chronicle, being a first-hand account of the same, will remain a reliable testimony of the leadership of Mir Jumla and the war-strategy of the Assamese people.

The original manuscript of the book is deposited in the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, and the Khuda Buksh Oriental Public Library, Bankipore. A French translation based on an earlier Urdu version was published in 1845. Partial English translations have been published by Mr. Henry Blochmann and Dr. Jadunath Sarkar. A complete English translation of the book is still a desideratum.

Shihabuddin's account of Assam falls into three main divisions, political, economic and social.—

Political : The object of Mir Jumla's expedition was to punish the rulers of Cooch Behar and Assam for the violation of their treaty terms with the Moguls. The Raja of Cooch Behar was a vassal of the Moguls ; and the boundaries of Assam and Mogul India were fixed in 1639 at the river Barnadi and the road Asurar Ali near Gauhati. Taking advantage of the contest for the throne of Delhi among the sons of Emperor Shah Jahan and the anarchy and confusion that occurred in Mogul India, Raja Pranaranayan of Cooch Behar assumed independence and invaded Mogul territories. King Jayadhwaj Singha of Assam expelled the Mogul governor from Gauhati, took possession of the lost dominion of Kamarupa, and devastated Mogul territories up to the neighbourhood of Dacca. This was made possible owing to the withdrawal of most of the Mogul troops by Sultan Shuja, Subedar of Bengal, from

the frontier garrisons, for their employment in his war against his brothers. After that prince's flight into Arracan, Mir Jumla was appointed Subedar of Bengal with express orders to recover the prestige of the Moguls in Cooch Behar and Assam by punishing their refractory rulers.

Mir Jumla's army left Khizirpur, near Dacca, on the 1st November 1661, accompanied by a large fleet manned by European gunners. He occupied Cooch Behar on the 10th December 1661, and named it Alamgir-nagar. The Raja fled into the hills of Bhutan. Mir Jumla then marched to Assam, and occupied Jugighopa on the 21st January 1662. The soldiers had fled without striking a blow. Similar fate overtook the Assamese garrisons at Saraighat, Pandu, Gauhati and Kajali; and no resistance worth the name was offered at these places. The first contest with the Assamese took place at Simalugarh fort, near Silghat, and at Samdhara on the opposite bank of the Brahmaputra. The Nawab expressed his wonder by seeing the strength of the fortifications at Simalugarh. The defeat of the Assamese forces at these two places broke their morale, and the opposition offered at the remaining places was easily repulsed. Having left his fleet at Lakhow, Mir Jumla marched towards the capital Gargaon, and occupied it on the 17th March 1662, King Jayadhwaj Singha having already left it for shelter in the wilds of Namrup.

Mir Jumla established garrisons at all important places. He issued coins in the name of Emperor Aurangzeb, and encouraged the people to come and live within Mogul enclosures. But the Assamese would not allow the Moguls to consider their occupation of the capital and its neighbourhood so very easy and

peaceful. They used to attack the Moguls suddenly and unawares, specially at night, and no one dared to stray out of his camp. The tortures inflicted by the Assamese on their Mogul captives were most dreadful and horrible. These guerrilla attacks were accompanied by a systematic attempt to cut off the supplies of the Moguls. A famine having raged in Dacca no reinforcement of food provisions could reach the Mogul army in Assam. The pestilential climate of the hills near Gargaon caused heavy mortality in the Mogul camp. The result was the loss of two-thirds of the original army of Mir Jumla. The sufferings of the Mogul army, owing to scarcity of food, diseases, and tortures were so severe that, in the words of Shihabuddin Talish, "the soldiers looked longingly towards Delhi and the Amirs longed for the embraces of their wives and children." Floods and inundations which broke unexpectedly, detached one camp from another, making united action an impossibility.

An army under a lesser general would have been demoralised, but Mir Jumla maintained the morale of his soldiers by sharing in their exertions and sufferings, wearing outside a smile of victory and a cloak of happiness. Had the Assamese been a little more tenacious and patient they would have seen the compulsory retirement of the Moguls from Assam. But they had never seen foreigners ever occupying their capital. The glamour of the Mogul equipages and Mir Jumla's towering personality diverted the loyalty of several Assamese nobles. They became seized with panic, and the fugitive king Jayadhwaj Singha sent repeated reminders to the fighting nobles to empty the country of the Moguls by offering them attractive terms. The peace terms of the Asamese were unexpec-

ted though seasonable. They were readily accepted by Mir Jumla, though he tried to increase the burden of the indemnity, lest easy winning makes light the prey.

According to the terms of the treaty the Ahoms were to pay to the Moguls an indemnity of ninety elephants and three lakhs of rupees ; restore Kamrup ; and send to the imperial harem a princess royal for being wedded to the son of the Emperor. Having received the first instalment of the indemnity Mir Jumla retired from Assam in the last week of January 1663, but he died near Khizirpur before he reached Dacca. Here ends Shihabuddin's description of Mir Jumla's expedition. His chronicle is rightly named *Fathiyyah-i-Ibriyya*, or conquests that give warning, for though the Moguls obtained some sort of a victory in Assam, it was bought with unspeakable and unprecedented sufferings. Shihabuddin Talish also wrote a continuation of this chronicle which brings the narrative to the conquest of Chatgaon by Shaista Khan in 1666. The Moguls during their stay in Assam captured 675 guns, 1343 Jambarus, 1200 ramchangis, 6570 matchlocks, 340 maunds of gunpowder ; 1960 boxes of gunpowder, 7828 shields, and 1000 ships.

Economic : The forests of Kajali were full of orange trees : the fruits were very large and unusually juicy ; they used to be sold at the Mogul camp at ten for a pice. Houses and orchards met the Moguls' eye as they travelled from Kaliabar to Gargaon. Bamboo-groves and cultivated fields stretched all the way from the homesteads to the foot of the hills. The chief crop is rice, but the thin and long variety is rare. Salt is very dear and difficult to procure. The salt found in the skirts of certain hills, or salt prepared from the

decoction of the ashes of banana plants, are both bitter and blackish. Cocks, waterfowl, geese and goats are plentiful. Elephants abound in the hills and forests; and the mahouts are experts in cajoling and capturing wild elephants. Ten to twelve thousand men are employed in the washing of gold from the sands of the Brahmaputra, and each of them has to supply a tola of gold annually to the royal stores. The currency of Assam consists of gold mohurs, silver rupees, and cowries. Copper coins are not current. Musk-deer and elephants are found in the hills inhabited by the Miris and the Mishmis. Aloe wood, which grows in the hills of Namrup, Sadiya and Lakhowgarh, is heavy, coloured and scented. Assam if administered on Mogul lines would have fetched a revenue of forty to forty-five lakhs of rupees. There is practically no land-tax in Assam.

An Assamese *ryot* enjoys his portion of land tax-free by rendering personal service to the state. The *ryots* are grouped into squads of three men, and one man in each squad has to serve the king in turn. Asses, camels and horses are rare in Assam; and the people are terribly afraid of horses. The sale of an elephant is considered as a disgrace. Boats constitute the chief means of transport; and an official Mogul report estimated the number of boats reaching and passing Gauhati during one single month to be 32,000. Shihabuddin Talish mentions the following fruits and plants as being grown in Assam: cocoanut and *nim* trees, somewhat rare; pepper, spikenard, and lemon; mangoes are full of worms, but juicy and sweet; sugarcane, in three varieties, red, white and black; ginger is juicy, delicate and stimulative. Nobles prefer *panials* to plums, on account of the tastefulness and delicacy of

the former. Silver, copper and tin are extracted from the Miri and Mishmi hills. Ninety thousand rupees worth of treasures were extracted from the burial mounds dug open by the Moguls. The Assamese make first-rate gunpowder, but the ingredients are obtained from the Mogul dominions. Brick buildings are rare, and houses are commonly constructed with wood, bamboo and straw. During the occupation of Gauhati by the Moguls, and prior to the confusion and turmoil of the War of Succession, Assamese traders used to come to Gauhati with the products of their country, gold, aloe-wood, musk, pepper, spikenard and silk-cloth, and bartered them for salt, saltpetre and sulphur.

Social : Shihabuddin Talish pays high tribute to the martial spirit of the king and the people of Assam. No invader on former times was successful in his enterprise in Assam. The king does not allow foreigners to enter Assam, nor does he permit his subjects to go out of Assam. Invaders who entered Assam could hardly go back alive. Shihabuddin Talish recalls the sad fate of Hussain Shah's son who with his army was slain or captured by the Assamese. A very small number of Assamese soldiers can checkmate thousands in battle. The usual time for their attacks is the night of Tuesday which they consider to be very auspicious.

The Rajas of Assam are self-confident and proud by reason of the numerical superiority of their followers and attendants, and the abundance of their property, treasure and armed force. The present king of Assam is Jayadhwaj Singha ; he calls himself Swarga-Raja, because he believes that his ancestors descended from heaven by a golden ladder, and having found this earth prosperous and pleasant declined to return to his original abode in paradise. The king has only daughters

and no son. Adoration in Assam takes the form of kneeling down. The king and his nobles ride on *singhasana* and *dolas* which are carved out of wood. It is not the custom of the people to use turbans, coats or trousers. A piece of fine linen tied round their head, a waistband round the middle, and a chaddar on the shoulders constitute the normal dress of an Assamese. Nobles and rich men put on a half-coat in winter. The persons of Assamese women are marked by beauty and delicacy of features, blackness and length of hair, softness of body, fairness of complexion, and loveliness of hands and feet. The wives of the king and the populace never veil their faces before anybody, and they move about in the market-place with bare heads. Most of the men have four or five wives. The weapons of war used by the Assamese are,—matchlocks, light fieldpieces, cannon, arrows with or without iron heads, half-swords, spears, bamboo bows, and cross-bow arrows.

Shihabuddin Talish makes two very important observations. He says that the language of the people of Assam "differs entirely from that of all the peoples of Eastern India"; and that the hearts of the Mahomedans in Assam "are inclined far more towards mingling with the Assamese than towards association with Muslims." Shihabuddin Talish divided the people of Assam into two categories,—the Assamese and the Kalitas. In his opinion the Kalitas were superior to the Assamese in all things; "but in performing difficult tasks and making a firm stand in battle, the opposite is the case", said Shihabuddin. It has been generally concluded that by the word "Assamese" the Persian chronicler meant the Ahoms.

Mir Jumla had in his entourage a poet named

Mulla Darvish of Herat. His ode or *qasida* written in celebration of the conquest of Assam is incorporated by Shihabuddin in his chronicle. "Assam is another world, another people and other customs", wrote the poet, "The Khani-i-Khanan, Commander-in-Chief, leader of armies, led his army from the west towards the east. The Rajah of Assam brought to the field an army whose large numbers became a cage on earth. They were tumult-raising and sudden in attack like the eyes of the fair sex, hurling arrows and missiles, and making a firm stand in the battle-field".

Though Assam, the subject of Shihabuddin's description was an enemy territory, his account on the whole is fair and accurate. He pays tribute to the gallantry and courage of the Assamese, notices the value and variety of the products and resources of the country, but he gives warning about its unhealthy climate and the unfathomable character of the inhabitants. In fact, the title of the book *Fathiyya-i-Ibriyya*, meaning, conquests that give warning, constitutes in a sense the whole purpose of the chronicle of Shihabuddin Talish.

August 1950.

LACHIT BARPHUKAN

The details of Lachit Barphukan's gallantry and leadership, like many other great and good things of Assam, are not yet fully known, for they are buried in the pages of old chronicles very few of which have seen the light of day. The respect of the outside world towards the Assamese, and their confidence in themselves are bound to increase with greater knowledge of their own past achievements. There are elements in Assamese civilization which will contribute to the enrichment of the civilization of India and the world. The time has now come when we should explore these elements by a systematic study of the past history and literature of Assam.

The life of Lachit Barphukan falls distinctly into four divisions : *first*, his career as a junior military commander, a Dulia Barua, Simaluguria Phukan, and a Dola-kasharia Barua, during which he gave proofs of his qualities of leadership ; *second*, his appointment as the commander-in-chief of the Ahom forces, and his expulsion of the Moguls from Gauhati and Lower Assam in November 1667, followed by the restoration of the western limits of Assam to the Manaha river ; *third*, the vigilant preparedness of the Ahoms to counteract Mogul designs to reinvade Assam ; *further*, conflicts with the Mogul forces led by Raja Ram Singha of Amber, and the final defeat of the Mogul army in the naval battle of Saraighat in March 1671, followed by the retreat of the Rajput Raja to Rangamati in Bengal where he waited till 1676 for an opportunity to reattack Assam.

Being the son of Momaitamuli Barbarua, Lachit received a sound and all-round training at home, both from Pundits, and from his experiences gained from personal observation of his father's activities. As a junior officer he proved earnest and daring in his duties. His thorough mastery of the responsibilities entrusted to him earned the approbation of the Ahom monarch, and he was marked for higher appointments in military service.

In 1663, Mir Jumla left Assam after having imposed upon the Ahom government an exacting treaty, according to which they were required to pay a heavy war-indemnity, and deliver periodically a stipulated amount of tribute in cash, and a fixed quota of elephants. King Jayadhwaj Singha instituted vigorous measures to free his country from this state of vassalage to the Moguls. He entered into an alliance with the rulers of Cooch Behar and Jayantia to resist the Moguls. But he died before he could rehabilitate his kingdom and his government. He died in November 1663, but before his death he enjoined upon his nobles and officers "to extract from the nation's bosom the spear of humiliation fixed upon it by our enemy, the Moguls."

Jayadhwaj Singha's successor Chakradhwaj Singha could not brook the harassing demands and reminders sent by Mogul officers for the payment of the war-indemnity, and he shouted out : "Death is preferable to a life of subordination of foreigners." Preparations were launched for attacking the Moguls at Gauhati. The smithies and arsenals were planted inside the palace enclosures. The king personally supervised the preparations to their minutest detail, and taught the archers, shieldsmen and musketeers with his own hand. The Ahom king received reports of Shivaji's successes

in the Deccan, and he considered the time to be opportune for attacking the Moguls in Assam.

Lachit was appointed commander-in-chief of the Ahom forces, partly on account of his proved ability and partly for his great potentialities. He was also appointed Barphukan over the limited area from Kaliabar to the neighbourhood of Gauhati. The three Dangarias, the Buragohain, the Bargohain and the Barpatra Gohain, gave their concurrence to this appointment, even though it made them liable to serve under the Barphukan who was by custom their official subordinate. Before the departure of the army to Gauhati, King Chakradhwaj Singha, exhorted each commander to do his duty, reminding him of his wives and children, and of the punishment to be meted out to him in the event of slackness and delinquency.

The battles took place mainly in the neighbourhood of Gauhati. After a series of desultory fights Lachit Barphukan succeeded in expelling the Mogul forces from Gauhati. Having heard this news King Chakradhwaj Singha expressed his gratification saying,—"It is now that I can eat my morsel of food with ease and pleasure."

Emperor Aurangzeb then despatched Raja Ram Singha of Amber to recover Gauhati from the Ahoms. His deputation was more or less a punishment for his alleged connivance at the escape of Shivaji from Agra, and the Raja's championship of the cause of the Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur.

Ram Singha proceeded to Assam at the head of a numerous army. The Sikh Guru accompanied him as far as Dhubri. Ram Singha's forces spread themselves in the outlying villages near Hazo, while the Assamese army encamped within the fortifications of

Gauhati on both banks of the river. Lachit Barpukan's base was at Itakhuli or Sukreswar on the south bank, while the Buragohain fixed his headquarter at Lathia Parbat on the north bank. The Barphukan shed bitter tears at the sight of the numerous Mogul forces, being overwhelmed with a consciousness of his grave responsibilities. But he came out of his momentary sadness with a grim determination to resist the invaders.

He issued an order that every slacker would be instantly decapitated. The Assamese commanders prayed in a body to Kamakhya "to eat up the foreigners and protect our own people."

Ram Singha began by taking recourse to diplomatic manouvres. He demanded the evacuation of Gauhati, and reversion to the terms of the treaty enacted in 1639 between the Moguls and the Ahoms. The Ahoms poohpoohed the idea of settling the issue by mere negotiation, pointing out that Ram Singha had been sent by the Delhi Emperor to win victory in an open fight. The Rajput Raja asked Lachit Barphukan to give him fight for an hour : and the Ahom general replied that he was ready to fight till the last drop of his blood. Ram Singha desired an interview with the Assamese commander Buragohain-Phukan, but the latter replied that he would meet the Raja's wishes by despatching a force of 20,000 soldiers who would pound the Raja's men to a thin paste. To Ram Singha's request for a duel with the Ahom monarch, King Chakradhwaj Singha replied "that the Rajput Raja was not entitled to this honour as he is a mere servant, and has no umbrella over his head." The Rajput Raja's attempts to corrupt the Assamese commanders with presents and to create dissension in their camp met with miserable failure.

In the armed conflicts also the Rajput Raja could not score better results. The damages done to the Ahom forts were instantly repaired, and the Mogul forces did not get any opportunity to effectively use their arrows, matchlocks and guns, for the Assamese avoided coming out into the open, and their attacks were chiefly made at night.

The Barphukan's envoys who visited the Rajput camp instilled awe and fear into the hearts of the Mogul commanders, and succeeded in convincing them that their defeat in Assam was a foregone conclusion. The Rajput Raja showered praises on the Assamese for their impregnable fortifications, and for their gallantry, discipline and capacity for organization.

But the Ahoms met a severe reverse in the battle of Alaboi, near the Dalibari village. They were attacked by Rajput troopers in an open field, and the Ahoms, being shy of cavalry charges, lost ten thousand of their men during the course of one single day. The Alaboi defeat was very regrettable no doubt, but it did not confer upon Ram Singha any decided military advantage.

Meanwhile Emperor Aurangzeb pressed Raja Ram Singha to act with greater vigour. There was a slight opening in the fort at Andharubali sandbank between Itakhuli and Bharalumukh : and Ram Singha steered his boats towards the breach carrying on them horses and soldiers. Owing to the illness of Lachit Barphukan the Ahoms lost their heart, and made preparations for retreat. Nara Hazarika knelt down before the retreating soldiers at Aswakranta, and shouted at the pitch of his voice : "Oh, my countrymen, please flee, if you want to pour poison into this platter of gold." The Barphukan in a state of physical prostration came down

the steps of Sukreswar Hill, boarded his boat, and rushed at the head of seven war vessels into the midst of the Mogul fleet. He shouted out, "The King has placed at my disposal vast quantities of provisions and men. Should I now desert the battle-field and revert to the embraces of my wives and children?"

The example of Lachit Barphukan filled the wavering hearts of the Assamese soldiers with courage and determination. They fought with all their might; and the result was their decisive victory. This battle is known as "Saraighatar Juddha," and the heroic leadership of Lachit Barphukan and his commanders has been a perennial source of inspiration to the Assamese.

The story of Lachit Barphukan is of absorbing interest to students of Indian History, for it brings into the picture some of the greatest figures of the time, Emperor Aurangzeb, Shivaji Maharaja and the Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur,—all of whom were directly associated with the events leading to Raja Ram Singha's deputation to Assam. The notable utterances of the Assamese kings and commanders demonstrate that Assamese leadership was not deficient in the qualities which ensure the solidarity and stability of a nation. The example of Lachit Barphukan and the selfless patriots of Saraighat will be a source of inspiration not only to the Assamese, but also to their friends in other parts of India.*

February 1947.

* For a detailed history of the careers of General Lachit Barphukan and Prime Minister Atan Buragohain Rajmantri Dangaria, the following two books by S. K. Bhuyan are recommended: *Lachit Barphukan and His Times*, and *Atan Buragohain and His Times*.

ATAN BURAGOHAIN RAJMANTRI DANGARIA

Atan Buragohain Rajmantri Dangaria was one of those distinguished figures of Assamese history whose names have now been consecrated to oblivion, but who piloted the affairs of the country in periods of storm and stress and left an indelible impression upon the hearts of their contemporaries. Had they been born in more fortunate surroundings a splendid array of literature would have sprung round their names; and historians, poets and dramatists would have vied with one another in portraying their achievements and triumphs and setting them up as examples of statesmanship and unflinching devotion to their motherland.

Atan Buragohain flourished at a very critical juncture of his country's history. The imperialism of the Moguls could not tolerate the existence of a powerful independent territory on the eastern frontier of Hindusthan. The jat and sawar cavalry of the generals of the Timurid sovereigns were constantly knocking at the door of Assam threatening her peace and solidarity. When the tide of nationalism, evoked by the necessity to adopt concerted measures to resist the onrush of the invaders, had passed away owing to the forced withdrawal of the imperialistic menace, the country was swept by dissensions, internecine conflicts and ministerial usurpation of sovereign power.

Atan Buragohain, in his capacity as prime minister, was at the helm of affairs during the period from 1662 to 1679. Sober and steadfast in counsel, valiant and expeditious in battle, his political wisdom and foresight elicited unstinted praise from the lips of his adver-

saries, the Mogul generals ; and made him, in the estimation of his countrymen their only regenerator and saviour. He refused the proffered crown not once but twice, and preferred to serve his country as a counsellor and advisor rather than as a sovereign. It may be added to his glory that he employed his unbounding power and influence for the good of his country, and never for the promotion of his selfish ends like the other potentates of the age.

His utterances delivered on crucial occasions and interspersed in the pages of old Assamese chronicles, reveal his deep knowledge of human nature and the requirements of political expediency. They afforded ready solution of the complex problems of the state in times of peace and war, and gave a new turn to the course of his country's history. The Buragohain was also a military engineer of first-rate skill ; and the forts and ramparts on both banks of the Brahmaputra at Gauhati, which were described as being "made by Viswakarma, and impenetrable even to the gods", were the handiwork of Atan Buragohain ; as well as the Chintamani rampart constructed for guarding the environs of the Ahom capital Gargaon. To the qualities of a statesman, warrior and engineer, the Buragohain added the equipment of a trained historian as we know from the chronicle he compiled.

Atan came to prominence with his appointment as Buragohain in January 1662 on the sudden and unexpected demise of Lecham Buragohain. The additional dignity of Rajmantri which generally accompanied the office of Buragohain was enjoyed at that time by the king's father-in-law Khamun Naobaicha Phukan, and it was conferred on Atan after the execution of Khamun Phukan in 1664. Previously to this Atan had served

as Khanikar Barua, or officer in charge of the guild of artisans and image-makers. Atan's father was at that time Neog Phukan-Gohain, in charge of the king's household troops.

Immediately after his appointment the new Buragohain was placed in command of the southern division to resist the forces of Nawab Mir Jumla who were then marching towards Gargaon after the fall of Gauhati and Samdhara. There was hardly any well-equipped garrison or fortress in the districts between Samdhara and Gargaon, and the belated efforts of the Buragohain's forces to thwart the progress of the Mogul army met with reverses. Mir Jumla occupied Gargaon in March 1662 and appointed Thanadars in the newly erected Mogul outposts. A vigorous campaign of guerrilla attacks and ambushes was now instituted by the Ahoms under the direction of Atan Buragohain and Khamun Rajmantri Phukan. Ten months of unprecedented suffering in Assam, inflicted both by man and nature, made the Moguls anxious for withdrawal from that land; and the Assamese were equally eager to see their country emptied of the foreigners.

A treaty was concluded in January 1663 according to which the Ahoms had to part with Gauhati and Kamrup, pay a heavy war-indemnity and tribute in cash and elephants, and present a princess to the imperial harem. Ramani Gabharu, daughter of the reigning king Jayadhwaj Singha, was made over to Mir Jumla, and the first terms of the treaty were duly fulfilled for which the nobles and officers of Assam received praises from the Mogul general. Mir Jumla then left Assam wishing the monarch and the people prosperity and peace. The negotiations and parleys with the Mogul camp were conducted under the perso-

nal direction of Atan Buragohain who was one of the signatories to the treaty. After the departure of Mir Jumla the first preoccupation of the Buragohain was to bring back the villagers who had fled to the hills and forests, and resettle them in their old homes and pursuits.

Embassies were now deputed to Cooch Behar, Jayantia and Cachar deploring the disasters of the previous year, and exploring possibilities of common action against the Mogul invaders. King Jayadhwaj Singha died soon after, his death being accelerated by continued repentance and remorse for having brought his kingdom to such a plight in consequence of which he had to part with his dear child, then only six years old.

His spirited successor Chakradhwaj Singha resolved to shake off his obligation to pay further instalments of the indemnity and tribute. He also gave vent to his determination to expel the Moguls from Gauhati. The king's impetuosity was checked by the Buragohain who pointed to the necessity of first collecting and storing sufficient provisions and war-equipments before launching offensive measures. Early in November 1667, the Ahom forces reoccupied Gauhati and restored the old western limits of Assam at the Manaha river. Shivaji's initial successes against the Moguls in 1665, of which the Ahoms had received information in time, had spurred them to prompt and vigorous action.

Emperor Aurangzeb now deputed Raja Ram Singha, son of Mirza Raja Jai Singha of Amber, charged with the task of recovering Gauhati. The Ahoms replied to the Rajput Raja's persistent demands for the restoration of Gauhati with taunts and rebuffs like these ; "God has given us Gauhati and Kamrup, and

when He desires He will give them to our brother-sovereign the emperor of Delhi. Our sovereign the Swarga-Maharaja is the lord of the East, and the Padshah is the lord of the West : if they decide we can surrender our territory, and the Rajput Raja can also surrender Bengal. The Raja has been sent to win the glory of a victory, and his reputation for valour will receive a set-back if he returns from Assam empty-handed." Hints were also thrown in to show that the Raja was a mere servant of the Moguls, and that he had no umbrella over his head.

After a year of negotiations attended by abortive conflicts the Mogul forces led by the Raja were finally defeated in the naval battle of Saraighat near Gauhati. The victory of the Assamese was due to the intrepidity and leadership of the generalissimo Lachit Barphukan, and the sound direction and efficient organisation of the prime minister Atan Buragohain who had taken the field in person as commander of the division in the northern bank of the Brahmaputra.

Lachit Barphukan died soon after the battle of Saraighat, and was succeeded in the Barphukanship by his elder brother Laluk. Raja Ram Singha halted for five years at the frontier Mogul garrison of Rangamati hoping to reattack Assam when opportunities presented themselves. The Buragohain and the leading nobles had therefore to remain at Gauhati with a powerful army, ready to repulse any eventual attack by the imperialists.

The absence of the senior nobles and commanders at Gauhati encouraged the ambitious potentates at the capital to push forth their machinations and designs. Intrigues and conspiracies, attended by the murder of opposing nobles and the massacre of innocent princes

became the order of the day ; kings became puppets at the hands of unscrupulous ministers ; life and property became insecure ; and it seemed as if the whole country was going to be divested of the very essentials of peace and orderly government.

The atrocities at Gargaon having assumed intolerable dimensions the stalwarts of Gauhati, with Atan Buragohain as their head, marched up to the capital, pursued and captured the leading miscreants, and brought them to condign punishment. Debera Barbarua, the arch-villain of the reign of terror, was executed after being subjected to severest tortures. During the course of his fateful trial Debera predicted a similar rôle on the part of his judge and accuser Laluk Barphukan.

Gobar Raja who had been placed on the throne by Debera was deposed and then killed. The nobles now asked the Buragohain to be the king, but he declined the honour, saying,—“I belong to a family of ministers, and as such I cannot wear the kingly crown. A member of the royal family should alone become a king. A reed-stick cannot bear the weight of a buffalo-thigh, and a Sudra cannot wear the sacred thread of a Brahman”. After a vigorous search for a suitable prince the Buragohain came upon Arjun Kowanr who was then living at Dihing. He was now placed on the throne, after which the Gauhati commanders returned to their respective charges leaving Atan Buragohain to manage the affairs of the capital. The country was now restored to tranquillity and peace which elicited the following observation from a contemporary chronicle,—“The people and the country became well settled, and the government began to function according to the usages of the past.”

Troubles began to raise their head again when the weak-kneed monarch Arjun Dihingia Raja gave his ears to the whispers of his seraglio and suspected the intentions of the Buragohain and his friends, and in the struggle that ensued the king lost his throne as well as his life.

The Buragohain was now held in greater esteem as the benevolent dispenser of affairs, and the saviour of his country. On the death of Arjun Dihingia Raja, the crown was again offered to the Buragohain; it was pointed out that his refusal to do so on the previous occasion had led to the installation of a weakling on the throne who acted in defiance of his well-wishers and the best interests of the people. But, Atan Buragohain declined that honour on this second occasion also, saying,—“I thank you for your offer which however I cannot accept, as it is not proper for a minister to hold the office of a monarch. Kingship should go to the scion of a royal family, and saintship to the descendant of a saint”. After a considerable search the Buragohain and his colleagues selected a prince who bore the mark of an able ruler. The new monarch came to be known as Parvatia Raja. Following the example of his predecessor, the new king conferred additional privileges and honours upon the Buragohain in appreciation of his refusal to wear the crown and of his services in elevating the prince to the throne. During the brief interregnum of three fortnights, between the deposal of Dihingia Raja and the succession of Parvatia Raja, the Buragohain had ruled the country with justice and firmness as the head of its government.

A Machiavel now made his appearance in the arena of Assam politics in the person of Laluk Barphukan, the Ahom governor of Gauhati, who had under his com-

mand the well-equipped army posted at the vice-regal capital. The Barphukan viewed with jealousy the growing power of the Buragohain, and his suspicions were fomented by the tell-tale favour-seekers of the viceroy and the interested opponents of the prime minister. Laluk had given evidence in the past of his adroitness and vigour by acting as a prosecutor in the trial of King Jayadhwaj Singha's father-in-law Khamun Naobaicha Phukan who had been accused of high treason. He also conducted in person the extirpation of that condemned potentate and his family. As a reward for these energetic services Laluk had himself been appointed to the vacant office of Naobaicha Phukan.

The Barphukan now resolved to make his position strong and invulnerable by an alliance with the Moguls. He made secret overtures to Emperor Aurangzeb's son Sultan Azamtara who was then seated on the musnud of Bengal. Laluk utilised in this connection the services of his uncle Baduli who had accompanied Mir Jumla to Bengal and had been living at Dacca as a pretage of the Moguls. The Barphukan sent a proposal to Dacca that he would evacuate Gauhati and Western Assam for being occupied by the agents of the Bengal Subedar, on condition that he would be given a cash reward of rupees four lacks, and that the Moguls would confer on him the rulership of the rest of Assam. Laluk had expected that his plans would also be promoted by his niece Ramani Gabharu, consort of Sultan Azamtara; but the patriotic Assamese princess characterised her uncle's proposal as unbecoming and reprehensible, which admonition however failed to deter the ambitious Barphukan from prosecuting his cherished designs.

Sultan Azamtara had himself demanded the res-

toration of Gauhati while he was encamping at Rajmahal on his way to assume charge of his new office of Subedar of Bengal. To overawe the Assamese, the prince made mention of three hundred elephants and one lac of horses as forming part of his war-equipment. Atan Buragohain's reply to Azamtara was of the same tenor as its forerunners to Raja Ram Singha. "The territories claimed by the Padshazada", said the Buragohain, "are not his. He alone gets them on whom God is pleased to confer them. As to the information sent to us that he is accompanied by numerous elephants and horses, we would say that his horses, in our estimation, are as useless as deer, because horses can neither shoot an arrow nor fire a gun." Now when Laluk Barphukan, the Ahom viceroy, offered to surrender Gauhati of his own accord, the Padshahzada acquiesced in the proposal with gratification and joy. He made preparations for despatching a force to Assam, and even asked the French and Dutch factories at Dacca to furnish European artillery-men to serve in the expedition.

Atan Buragohain who had been kept informed of the developments at Gauhati thought it prudent not to give prominence to the manouvres of Laluk Barphukan lest they gave an encouragement to the intriguing nobles to rally round the powerful viceroy for the accomplishment of their nefarious ends; and moreover, the Moguls who were entrenched at the frontier would rush into Assam the very moment they heard of any internal disorder. The Buragohain said,—“The enemy is lurking in our immediate neighbourhood; and hence it will be inadvisable to pursue the Barphukan and capture him, whatever may be the differences between ourselves. Such an action will give the enemy

an additional incentive." He then constructed the Chintamani rampart as a bulwark of defence against the eventual entrance of the invaders into the environs of Gargaon. The Buragohain's hesitation to take timely action against the refractory Barphukan was not appreciated by his adherents and friends.

The Barphukan acted up to his promise; and by tacit support and connivance he made it easy for the Mogul forces to infiltrate into Kamrup and march gradually towards the fortifications of Gauhati. Towards the end of February 1679, the Barphukan evacuated Gauhati and sailed upstream to Kaliabar. Gauhati was occupied soon after by Azamtara's deputy Nawab Mansur Khan. This fact was proclaimed at Delhi as a great victory; and Emperor Aurangzeb paid handsome rewards to the messenger, and sent costly presents to his son Azamtara.

The Buragohain then sailed down to Kaliabar at the head of an army; but his forces were attacked on the way by the Barphukan and repulsed with heavy losses, whereupon the premier left the field in search of a refuge. He was hotly pursued by the emissaries of the Barphukan, and captured and imprisoned. Laluk Barphukan then marched up to Gargaon where he began to act in an independent manner, dismissing and appointing officers at his own sweet will in total disregard of the authority of the reigning sovereign, Parvatia Raja. The king's attempt to suppress the Barphukan ended in his deposal and death.

Laluk then placed on the throne a stripling of fourteen, who is commonly known as Lora Raja. The Barphukan, now called Buraphukan, became the virtual dictator of affairs. He extorted from the monarch orders for the execution of Atan Buragohain and of his

brother who was Naobaicha Phukan. The sentences were carried out at Kaliabar in the beginning of December 1679 by executioners despatched from the metropolis. Thus died Atan Buragohain Rajmantri Dangaria—statesman, warrior and patriot ; but Hamlet-like, cautious and reflective, and the excess of the deliberative temper brought him to retribution at the hands of his unrelenting and unobstructed foes.

Laluk Barphukan had persuaded Parvatia Raja to send an embassy to Dacca for the avowed purpose of offering felicitations to Sultan Azamtara as he was, by marriage, a kinsman of the Ahom Swargadeo. The Assamese envoys were entrusted by Laluk to carry his own secret communications to the Bengal Subedar. Meanwhile, Azamtara had left Dacca to meet Emperor Aurangzeb in Rajputana ; and the letters and presents from Assam were delivered to the prince's successor Nawab Shaista Khan. The Nawab in reply sent a letter to Laluk Barphukan conferring on him the Rajaship of Assam. The embassy returned to Assam, accompanied by the Bengal envoy Govindaram, in the beginning of Lora Raja's reign. Laluk Buraphukan attached great importance to Shaista Khan's message, and he arranged to celebrate the occasion with due ceremony. He stole the regalia from the royal stores, and received Govindaram in the pomp and array of a crowned monarch.

Laluk then instituted a campaign of liquidating and mutilating the princes one by one as they were likely to contest the throne in future ; and one of them, Prince Gadapani, son of a previous king Gobar Raja, saved his life by wandering from place to place. His wife Jaimati died in the midst of tortures inflicted on her by the agents of the Buraphukan in the course of their

attempt to extract from her information about the movements of her fugitive husband. The murder of Princess Jaimati marked the climax of Laluk Buraphukan's orgies of massacre and treachery.

But, be it recorded to the eternal credit of the Assamese people that they refused to remain callous to the grave deterioration in their country's affairs brought to being by a succession of imbecile monarchs and self-seeking ministers. Laluk Buraphukan, the tyrant and imposter, was hated universally, though no one dared to attack him in person as he lived with the utmost vigilance. The distress of the people rose to such a pitch that the Ahom priests suggested the propitiation of the gods by offering human sacrifices at the Kechaikhati temple at Sadiya; and Bhotai Deka, a man of daring disposition and spotless body was chosen as a victim. Bhotai, in league with his friend, murdered Laluk Buraphukan one night while he was asleep in bed. The desperadoes were now acclaimed as benefactors of the country for having rid it of a common foe. Thus relieved of the Satanic regime of the Buraphukan the people urged their leaders to meditate on appropriate measures for the restoration of peace and order, as well as for the revival of their perennial prestige of being successful resisters of Mogul imperialism. The nobles paid heed to their countrymen's demand, and on the plea of expelling the Moguls from Gauhati they sailed down to Kaliabar with a large and powerful force.

Here, in the new viceregal headquarters of Kaliabar, the nobles and officers of Assam deliberated coolly and dispassionately on the increasing tempo of inefficiency, intrigue and treason, and decided that the first step in the direction of improving the situation was the installation of a capable and vigorous ruler on

the throne, for, said they,—“How can an incompetent monarch give protection to his people?” Prince Gadapani was selected for that exalted office in consideration of his manly physique and forceful character, combined with the fact of his being the son of a previously reigning king. He was brought from his refuge, and declared king at Kaliabar. The nobles then sailed up to Gargaon, deposed the boy-king, and crowned Gadapani as the Swargadeo-Maharaja of Assam, whereupon he assumed the name Gadadhar Singha, August 1681.

The new monarch suppressed all existing and newly developed disorders, placed the administration on a vigorous and efficient basis, and after a year of preparations his forces expelled the Moguls from Gauhati, and restored the western limit of Assam at the Manaha river which remained undisturbed till the occupation of the country by the British in 1824-25.

Supported by the advantage of a stable government, and the war-like man-power and material wealth of Assam, and the active co-operation of its tribal allies and neighbours, King Gadadhar Singha's son Rudra Singha planned to unfurl the flag of victory in Mogul India. But the monarch's sudden death at Gauhati in September 1714 put an end to the prosecution of this ambitious projects; and his successor, too pleasure-loving and refined, was incapable of executing the patriotic intentions of his illustrious sire.

January 1925.

A CRIMINAL TRIAL OF SWARGADEO LAKSHMI SINGHA'S REIGN

An account of police administration in old Assam, showing the procedures followed in the detection of crimes and the award of punishments is a great desideratum. But, for writing such a book, prolonged and intensive research and study of old records is necessary. For the present, we shall place before our readers a brief account of a criminal trial that took place in the reign of Swargadeo Lakshmi Singha, king of Assam from 1769 to 1780 A.D.

Background : The Morans raised the standard of revolt in November 1769. An insurgent leader Ramakanta was declared king, and Ragha Moran became the Barbarua or the chief executive officer. The king Lakshmi Singha was imprisoned in the temple of Jaidoul, and all the principal Ahom nobles and officials were executed by the rebels. In April 1770, the royalists succeeded in recovering the throne for Lakshmi Singha, and in suppressing the Moran revolt. Sporadic insurrections however persisted during the remaining years of Lakshmi Singha's reign. Ahom princes rose in open arms against the lawful authority of the monarch here and there, but they were promptly detected and suppressed. In November 1776, a plebeian who had no trace of royal blood in his veins conceived the idea of seizing the throne. The plan was to be carried into effect in April 1777. His supporters used to hold their deliberations in an orchard in Adabari. The keepers of the garden maintained a close eye upon

the movements of the conspirators, and reported the matter to the appropriate authorities of the government. Just as preparations were a-foot for the final action they were all pursued, arrested and tried, and condign punishments were inflicted on the offenders.

Accused : The principal offender was an ordinary village carpenter named Rongai Barmoran who posed himself as a surviving son of Mohanmala Gohain, the deceased brother of King Lakshmi Singha, and claimed thereby the allegiance and support of the villagers in his candidature for the throne.

Offence : Conspiracy to seize the throne by ousting the lawful monarch from power.

Facts of the case : Rongai Barmoran first earned his living as a Dhan-khana Bez, or a quack who claimed to possess the power of locating the sites of forgotten or hidden treasures. He also knew some arithmetic—division and multiplication. The profession of a Dhan-khana Bez having proved unprofitable, Rongai became a carpenter making *piras* and *chorias*, or wooden seats and basins. He possessed a fine physique and a dignified presence, and looked very much like a prince. His appearance suggested to his friends that Rongai could be very conveniently set up as a claimant to the throne. This idea was first conceived by an Ahom priest named Adaya Bailung and his associate Budai of Chaoruk. They consulted their astrological treatises, and found out that Rongai's stars were in the ascendant, and that he would enjoy kingship in the ensuing month of Bahag. He was advised to describe himself as the son of Mohanmala Gohain, the third son of King Rudra Singha. He was asked to tell people that, after the suppression of the Morans, he took shelter in the Naga Hills from

where he proceeded to Sadiya, and from there to Nara or Magaung in Upper Burma. He brought therefrom the image of Chengdeo, the tutelary god of the Ahom. As an instance of his alleged aristocratic origin and connection Rongai used to go to the capitals Rangpur and Gargaon every now and then, and visit the noble families. His sole companion in these princely peregrinations was his servant Bhatu Banua.

Supporters : Rongai gave out that several leading families were going to support his cause by giving him military assistance in the shape of men and equipment. He also assured his adherents that the watchmen posted at the principal gate of the capital would open the door at the appointed hour, and that they would put water in the muzzles of the guns mounted at the gate for its protection. Rongai's henchman in carrying out the preparations was one Phedela Kari. One Uni Naga who was attached to the worship of Chengdeo was appointed Barbarua by Rongai. Rongai used to move about like a real prince, and he received the adoration and hospitality of the simple village folks.

Action : On the day fixed for the attack on the capital, Rongai with his followers halted near the Singhaduar, or the principal gate of the capital. Many of them, disguised as vegetable sellers, stayed in the nearby houses. Rongai was to give the signal at midnight when his men would enter the capital and fall upon the king and his officers.

Detection : The agents of the king had received timely information about the plot, and a contingent of soldiers was despatched to Singhaduar. The conspirators, including Rongai, took to their heels. Batches of Dola-kasharias, Chaudangs, Da-dharas, Tekelas, and

others were despatched to scour the jungles in search of the culprits. Full details of the conspiracy were now revealed by the captured offenders. Rongai, the principal figure, was arrested a few days later, and he confessed his guilt.

Rongai's confession, in his own words : "I am a Barmoran. My father's name is Chandmat, and mother's Memeri or Rupahi. I had two borthers, Surath and Lath, now both dead. The villagers would know me. I was a retainer of Namrupia Gohain, and the Gohains would also recognise me. I know some medicine and spells, and men used to visit my place. I am a carpenter, and I earn my bread by making *piras* and *chorias*. In the month of Kati the Bailungs took me to their company as a prince, and I do not know why they did so. They made me mad, and I posed as a prince. You may behead me or kill me. I am not a prince, I am only a Moran".

Bhutu Ligira's confession, in his own words : "He is a retainer of Namrupia Gohain. He is a Barmoran, and his name is Rongai. His brothers were Lath and Surath, and one named Puran who is blind of one eye is still alive. His father is dead, and his mother named Memeri died some three years ago. I am very poor, having nothing to eat and wear. After the suppression of the Morans, Rongai said to me,— "We are living in extreme poverty. Let us go to some other place where we can live in happiness and eat well". I agreed and came with him. We lived in a Chutia village for some time. There being an exchange of hot words between us we parted. I am not his servant, I described myself as his servant being asked to say so. He had an affair with the daughter of one Ranjoy Chutia, a retainer of the Bargohain. The affair

found out, he was compelled to marry the girl, and I also married the daughter of a Moran. He lived for sometime by making *piras* and *chorias*. The Bailungs made him a prince in the month of Kati, and he has from that time become a prince. The Chutias gave me blows asking me if Rongai was the offspring of a serpent, to which I replied,—“He is the son of a ‘guin’, [or iguana.] If he be the son of a serpent, how is it possible for him to cut and work on so much wood?” My assailants then left me alone. Rongai is not a prince. He is uninitiated : he is not a Bhakat”.

The confession of Rongai's wife, in her own words : In the trial before the Swargadeo, the Khargharia Phukan and the Choladhara Phukan interrogated Rongai's wife, and she replied as follows,—“He is not a prince, and he told me before that he is the son of a Barmoran. His mother's name is Memeri which is also the name of my aunt. He used to earn his bread by making *piras* and *chorias*. In the month of Kati the Bailungs conferred on him the title of a prince. At the time of giving me in marriage to him my father took him to the god Nakuri-Nakhām, saying,—“Please swear by this image whether you are a Moamaria or any other man”. He then touched the image, and swore that if he was untrue then Nakuri-Nakhām would destroy him. His identity being known I was given in marriage to him. Now he falsely poses as a prince. The Bailungs have further attempted to take me away from him, and to give to him one of their own daughters”.

Trial papers submitted to the king : In April 1777, the papers connected with the conspiracy were duly submitted to the monarch by the Choladhara Phukan and the Khargharia Phukan. The Phukans recorded their comment as follows, “He is not a prince,

he is the son of a Barmoran", thereby trying to mitigate the severity of the offence. The king took exception to the Phukans' comment and attributed it to their attempt to protect the offenders who mostly belonged to their respective units. The king became angry, and said,—“Even if he be a Moran, he had come to kill me in league with a large number of followers.” The Majumdar Barua was asked to hand over the culprits to the Chaudangs for being beheaded with their children placed on their bosoms. After the king's wrath had abated a little, the Majumdar Barua proposed that it would be proper to present the accuseds before the Barbarua next morning. The king agreed, and the Barbarua being informed of the proposal suggested that the principal culprits should be delivered to the Chaudangs that very day; and that with regard to the rest, the king would consider their cases and pass orders later on.

Retrial by the Barbarua : The offenders were produced before the Barbarua and he tried them again. He found out some additional proofs which he recorded in the papers at the proper place. The trial papers were then sent to the monarch for final adjudication. King Lakshmi Singha discussed the case with his cabinet ministers, Baruas and Phukans, and awarded appropriate sentences to the culprits. They are recorded in a contemporary Assamese chronicle, and an indication is given in each case regarding the nature of the offence committed.

Punishments :

Rongai : “Rongai Barmoran who moved about saying that he was a prince is to be killed at Jerenga by being blown off by two shots, at a point of four

finger-spaces of the neck, from a cannon loaded with twelve tolas of pellets. On the way to Jerenga he is to be cut in pieces and made to eat the flesh".

Ramkanai : Ramkanai of the Ghorakowanr unit who is known to the 'prince' is to be beheaded near the gate and his body impaled".

Phedeli Kari : "Phedeli Kari of the Dibarual chiliarchy is to be cut in pieces and his head pressed between cylinders, for the offence of canvassing supporters of the prince, bringing articles from Barkola. and attempting to kill the son of Kalugayan Aikuanrideo after having entered into a fight with him".

Uni Naga : "Uni Naga Chengdhara, Rongai's consultant in all matters, who came forward as the prince's intimate, is to be pressed between cylinders after having cut off slices from his body".

Budai : "Budai of Chaoruk who gave importance to Rongai by calling him a prince, and who feasted him with wine and rice and pig's meat, and gave him dresses, money, silver limepot, plates and cups, is to be made over to the Chaodangs".

Adaya Bailung : "Bailung Adaya of Simaluguri is to be given thirty lashes, blows and slaps and to have his ears, and nose sliced off and his two eyes extracted, for the offence of giving importance to Rongai by calling him a prince, and for feasting him with wine and rice and pig's meat, and giving him dresses, money, silver limepot, plates and cups".

Patia Boiragi and others : "Chutia Magal, Patia Boiragi and the prince's father-in-law are to be punished by slicing off pieces from their bodies, and then placing them near the gates of their houses ; their children are to be placed on their bosoms".

The prince's wife : "The two ears of the prince's wife are to be sliced off, and one ear of the little boy is to be clipped".

Rongai's aunt-in-law : "Charu's wife Memeri and Charu are to be let off after being given some lashes and blows".

October 1961.

DR. JOHN PETER WADE

During the latter half of the eighteenth century there was an insistent regret on the part of the East India Company that "they knew little more of the interior parts of Nepal and of Assam than of the interior parts of China"¹. And the distinguished orientalist Horace Hayman Wilson attributed this ignorance to Assam "having been closed against the inquiries of the Company's officers by the inherent physical deformities, the barbarous habits of the people, the jealousy of their chiefs, and the unwillingness of the Indian Government to sanction any enterprise of their servants which might inspire doubt of their designs in the minds of the rulers of the adjacent regions"².

So, when a contingent of British force came to Assam in 1792 at the express invitation of the Ahom monarch Gaurinath Singha, the Governor-General Lord Cornwallis commanded Captain Thomas Welsh who was in charge of the expedition that "no pains 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 the manners and customs of the inhabitants, as well as the trade and manufactures, and natural products of countries with which it must ever be our interest to maintain the most friendly communication"³.

¹ *Capt. Welsh's Expedition to Assam in 1792-94*, by Lt.-Col. James Johnstone. 1912, p. 11.

² James Mill, *History of British India*, edited with Notes by H. H. Wilson, Vol. III.

³ Lt.-Col. J. Johnstone, *Capt. Welsh's expedition to Assam*, quoted ante. See also Mackenzie's *North-East Frontier of Bengal*.

The result of this minute from the administrative head of the Company in India was the preparation of a number of maps of Assam by Ensign Wood who accompanied the expedition as Surveyor, and the compilation of three monographs by Dr. John Peter Wade dealing with the history, geography, resources and trades of the kingdom and the customs of the people. As regards Nepal, an embassy was despatched under Captain Kirkpatrick. Captain Welsh embodied his observations on Assam in his despatches to the Governor-General.

Dr. Wade came to Assam as Assistant Surgeon attached to the expedition under Captain Welsh on Rs. 150 a month, as we learn from the account of the expenses of the expedition inserted in Sir Alexander Mackenzie's *North-East Frontier of Bengal*. Before this he had served with ability in different places in India,—Berhampore, Calcutta, Banaras, Surat, and Chunar. He had published a number of medical treatises. One, entitled "Prevention and treatment of Disorders of Seamen and Sailors in Bengal", was published in 1791, a copy of which is now in the Imperial Library at Calcutta. The manuscript of another treatise on fever, compiled almost at the same time, is now deposited at the Imperial Record Department, Calcutta. John Laird, President of the Hospital Board at Calcutta, wrote on February 15, 1796,—"Dr. Wade has at all times conducted himself with the strictest propriety and attention to his duty. His medical publications sufficiently evince his industry and professional abilities". J. Fleming testified to Wade's tenderness and humanity to the sick. Besides his normal efficiency as a Surgeon, Wade was also the author "of the evacuating system which he recommends

as the basis of all sound practice in the disorders of warm climates"⁴.

Wade's honesty as a servant of the Company was best shown in his refusal to accept the request of the authorities that he should take charge of the business concern of a particular merchant in Assam. Wade's ground for refusal was to the effect that as a servant of the Company he should not violate the Company's general regulation prohibiting its servants from engaging themselves in trade on private account.

Wade was a hardworking man, and himself characterised his life as one of strenuous labour. He died in Calcutta on October 14, 1802, and his remains lie buried in the Old Cemetery of that city.

During his stay in Assam Dr. Wade collected materials for a history and geography of Assam on the terms laid down by the Governor-General in his minute to Captain Welsh. But, unfortunately, none of his historical compilations saw the light of day during the life-time of the author. His papers and correspondence were handed over to the East India House by Sir John Malcolm in 1827, and passed subsequently through the editorial eclecticism of Montgomery Martin. The present article is based on the manuscript records of the India Office lent to the Government of Assam and to me.

The Wade papers at the India Office Library can be grouped under three major heads,—his *Account of Assam*, *Geographical Sketch of Assam*, and the testimonials which he submitted to the Hon'ble Court of Directors on April 8, 1796, as proofs that he was not

⁴ Opinion of Dr. W. Ross Munro, Head Surgeon at Berhampore, dated November 1, 1795. India Office MS Records, Home Miscellaneous Series, containing the testimonials given to Dr. Wade by his superiors.

"altogether unworthy of their attention". Besides, we also get there a reference to another valuable historical monograph, *viz.*, his history of the reign of Gaurinath Singha, and to his plan of compiling an account of the civil, military and ecclesiastical government of Assam.

1. *Memoir of the reign of King Gaurinath Singha* : Swargadeo Gaurinath Singha was the Ahom sovereign at whose instance the expedition under Captain Welsh was sent to Assam in 1792 to put a stop to the marauding activities of Bengal burkendazes. The Captain and his Surgeon both came in personal contact with the monarch, and Wade's history of his reign would have been an invaluable historical document. Besides his personal knowledge of the king and the Ahom court, Wade had also access to the indigenous accounts of the sovereign's reign, and the Assamese had the great distinction of recording the events of their country as they happened in their Buranjis or chronicles. Wade compiled this history in 1796, soon after the death of Gaurinath, and sent it in April of that year to the press in England for printing with the approbation of Lord Teignmouth. The author wrote in his dedicatory preamble to his *Account of Assam* addressed to Lt-Col. Kirkpatrick,—

"The curious and interesting circumstances relating to Assam are exhibited at some length in the continuation of the history, containing the reign of the late monarch Swargadeo Gaurinath Singha. I have compiled the memoir of his reign from authentic documents, and despatched the book to Europe for publication in April 1796, with the approbation of Lord Teignmouth, but I have not as yet received

any account of it, and not having retained a copy I am deprived of the pleasure of sending it to you".—Kishengunj, Bengal, March 20, 1800.

The same note of regret was sounded in the epistolary introduction to his *Geographical Sketch of Assam*, dated July 4, 1802, addressed to Sir John Malcolm,—“I regret the Europe press has not yet enabled me to offer you a copy of the history of Maharaja Swargadeo, late monarch of Assam”. The author died three months later, with the result that this valuable account of a contemporary Assamese king has been lost to the world for ever. The book was never published, and neither the India Office Library, nor the Royal Asiatic Society, the Asiatic Society of Bengal, the Bodleian Library and the Cambridge University Library has been able to offer any clue which may eventually lead to the recovery of the original manuscript.

The only evidence of the style and treatment of the book has fortunately been preserved for us in a few stray leaves bound with the India Office manuscript of Wade's *Geographical Sketch*. This fragmentary passage gives us an accurate glimpse into the character of the prime minister, Purnananda Buragohain, whose high-handed usurpation of the powers of the sovereign and the bestowal of high offices on his kinsmen and adherents irritated a very strong section of the Assamese, and led to several conspiracies and intrigues to overthrow his autocracy and restore the legitimate authority of the monarch. This was the subject-matter of the complaint which Badan Chandra Barphukan made before the British Governor-General at Calcutta and before the Burmese king Bodawpaya at Ava. This contemporary verdict on the character of Purnananda is not

however accepted by the present generation of Assamese to whom he is a great statesman, and the only person capable of averting the impending downfall of the country.

The language of the piece is *journallese*, if not epical, and it approaches the sonorous rhythm of Gibbon and of other prose writers of the latter half of the eighteenth century. Wade's conjecture as to what could be achieved by a possible British alliance with Assam is also interesting in the light of the subsequent history of the province.

The subject-matter of this fragmentary piece is the contest waged by the Manipur Raja Jai Singha, now a powerful ally of the Ahom monarch, who came to Assam a second time in 1792 at the express invitation of the premier Purnananda, at the head of a force of four thousand Manipuri soldiers. The Manipuri Raja and his son Juvaraj Madhuchandra were received by the prime minister at Dichoi or Jorhat to which place the Ahom headquarters were now shifted as Rangpur was now in the occupation of the rebels. The Buragohain personally conducted the Raja and his son to Teok where he had erected two stockades. From Teok the Raja despatched against the Moamarias. Jai Singha chased the rebels and encamped at Gaurisagar. From the latter place Madhuchandra marched towards Rangpur, being followed afterwards in the same direction by his old and valorous father. The Manipuri forces could not foresee the secret movements of the rebels whose guerilla tactics had already baffled the highly developed military organisation of the Ahom generals. Jai Singha returned to his dominions after leaving a contingent of one thousand Manipuris in the service of the Buragohain. Wade's account agrees in

substance with the relevant narrative in Assamese chronicles.⁵

2. *An Account of Assam* : The materials for this book were collected by Wade during his residence in Assam. He worked at them after his departure from the province, and submitted the final copy to Colonel Kirkpatrick with a dedicatory letter, dated Kishengunj, March 20, 1800. The book was mainly a translation of two Assamese chronicles of the Ahom sovereigns, one written in Assamese, and the other in the now obsolete Ahom language. The Assamese chronicle was presented to Captain Welsh, and the Bailing or Ahom one to Lord Teignmouth, as we learn from the letter to Kirkpatrick. These chronicles are known in Assam as Buranjis, and there were systematic arrangements for compiling them under royal commission or by individual nobles. The Ahom Buranji used by Wade was known as *Roo-poot*, literally, a book of knowledge, and was compiled by Manohar Bailing under the orders of King Siva Singha, 1714-44. The royal orders were communicated to the historiographer in the following significant terms,—“That the histories of the king’s predecessor’s should be compiled, the succession of the Ahom monarchs mentioned in details, and the book should be called *Roo-poot*; and that the history should only contain the names and transactions of the Swargadeos or Ahom kings”. Wade’s book deals also with the three successors of Siva Singha, viz., Pramatta Singha, 1751-51, Rajeswar Singha, 1751-69, and Lakshmi Singha, 1769-80.

⁵ For the entire text of this fragmentary piece see S. K. Bhuyan’s *Tungkhungia Buranji, or, A History of Assam, 1681-1826*, published by the Oxford University Press, 1933, pp. 231-232.

The account commences with the legendary description of the earliest ancestors of the Ahoms and their advent into Assam. Separate chapters are devoted to the kings of ancient Kamarupa, of Cooch Behar, and to the Mogul wars of Assam, and to the functions of state officials. For the reign of the Ahom kings from the earliest times to Siva Singha, Wade's source-book was certainly the *Roo-poot*; and for the rest he must have consulted the Assamese chronicle subsequently presented to Captain Welsh.

Wade's translations are generally faithful; but they do not constitute a history in the modern sense of the term. The Assamese Buranjis, whether in popular Assamese or in Ahom are mutually supplementary rather than exhaustive. One Buranji does not, for example, mention a particular detail in the evolution of a historical theme, or makes only a casual reference to it; this missing link will be taken up by another chronicler who will do ample justice to it and elaborate it into twenty folios. This varying sense of proportion is due to the political environments of the compiler, the audience for whom his account is intended, no less to the fact of his possessing other Buranjis which fully deal with the detail he passes over. The scientific historian will have to collate his materials from as many Buranjis as possible, and other sources of information, such as epigraphic, numismatic and literary records. The importance of Wade's compilation lies in its being an invaluable source-book written from materials now lost and beyond resurrection.

Wade was not satisfied by merely translating the original Assamese documents. Here and there he has adopted the interpretative method with the help of the information personally acquired during his stay of

eighteen months in Assam. The following passage describing the functions of the Phukans could never occur in any Assamese Buranji of those days,—

“In some respects the Phukans resemble the Judges of Israel. They not only command the armies, and administer the justice of the Kingdom, but also have a principal share in the public councils. Their opinions are received on all affairs of importance in the presence of the Monarch. This privilege, however, is confined to a decoration of their sentiments, for they possess not an effective vote like the Gohains. Yet the opinion of an eloquent man frequently influences the decrees of the Gohains. Eloquence is therefore in high estimation at court, and leads to fame and honours under the government, not in any degree democratic.”

Dr. Wade has given us a novel though curious interpretation of the origin of the word *Asam* or *Ahom*. The consort of the king of the Naras, a Buddhist tribe living in the Shan hills, was having a child through Indra. The child was to have the resemblance of his divine progenitor, and was destined to rule the earth. The celestial paramour visited the queen in a dream, and asked her not to receive the embraces of her royal husband, the king of the Naras, till the birth of the child. She asked Indra if he intended to come to her, on which the god replied,—“*Ahim, Ahim*”, literally meaning, I will come, I will come. The word *Ahom* or *Asam* is supposed to originate from this *Ahim*. The child in question was known as Swarganarayan, and he became the royal ancestor of the Ahoms. Swarganarayan

or Swargadeo became in fact the common title of all the Ahom kings indicating their divine origin.

The book contains an exhaustive treatment of the reign of Swargadeo Rudra Singha, 1696-1714, and of his colossal preparations to invade Bengal for the purpose of including the Ganges within the Ahom territories. The ambitious monarch's first step was the subjugation of the neighbouring states, which were thereby compelled to contribute largely in men and money to the huge manouvres then in progress. Gauhati was appointed the place of rendezvous, and the king proceeded to that place accompanied by his ministers and generals. Rudra Singha despatched ambassadors to the Rajas and Nawabs of Bengal with letters expressed in the following terms,—

“We formerly possessed the provinces on this side of the Karatoya river, and we are now desirous to resume them. Do not prove inimical to us. If we remain friendly everything will succeed. Be yours the countries, the government and the revenue, and mine the name. Act in a manner to preserve peace. Fear not our approach. Send friendly answers respecting your welfare without delay”.

The huge army of 6,00,000 men had to be reduced, and the pick only were selected to participate in the actual operations. Arrangements were then made to send an advance division to Hadira Choki, the Assam outpost at the mouth of the river Manas. But as fate would have it, this great scheme to bring the neighbouring provinces within the fold of Ahom supremacy, magnificent as it was in its conception, fell through owing to the sudden death of the royal dreamer. The

death-bed injunction of the mighty monarch to his five sons bespeaks of his wisdom and ambition,—

“Take your seats. Remain in friendship. You will be monarchs in your turn. Nothing will succeed if you are inimical to one another. If any attempts are made to place you at variance, and many will be made, listen not to suggestions of that kind, but remain united. We were formerly two brothers, but listening to the suggestions of the enemies I drove away the younger. I now perceive my error. Continue therefore in friendship, and all your pursuits will succeed ; if you prove enemies, nothing. Old and young you shall be kings successively. I have subdued the countries that surround my dominions. I proposed the reduction of the provinces contiguous to the Karatoya river. But my design will perish with me, for who will be found capable to pursue my plan ?”

As we have said, Dr. Wade ends his account in the events of the reign of Lakshmi Singha, the youngest son of Rudra Singha. But Lakshmi Singha's successor Gaurinath Singha with whom our author came in personal contact has not been ignored. Dr. Wade compiled an intimate monograph of Gaurinath and sent it to England for publication.

The second part of the book is devoted entirely to the origin and history of Kamrup from the earliest times down to Captain Welsh's expedition. The reigns of the descendants of Biswa Singha in Cooch Behar and elsewhere have been detailed elaborately. The chronicle is brought down to Krishna Narayan, the claimant to the Rajaship of Darrang who came into

conflict with Captain Welsh. Reference is also made to the insurrection of the Moamarias in Darrang and of Haradatta in Kamrup.

The third part deals with the wars between Assam and Bengal, including the expeditions sent to Assam at the instance of the emperors of Delhi. Fourteen expeditions were despatched from Bengal and Delhi to bring Assam within the pale of Mogul sovereignty, but never could the imperial invaders secure a firm footing in the land. The valour and military craft of the Assamese people were eulogised by successive Muhammadan generals. The last Muslim expedition was undertaken in the second year of the reign of King Gadadhar Singha, 1681-96, but the invaders were completely defeated in the battle of Itakhuli near Gauhati, and they had to abandon a great quantity of valuable plunders to the victors. Thus ended the long series of hostilities between the Ahoms and the Moguls, and the latter never afterwards attempted to coerce or subjugate the province.⁶

3. *Geographical Sketch of Assam* : This is by far the most important of the compilations of Wade. It deals with the divisions and districts of Assam as grouped for administrative purposes by the Ahom government. The natural products and manufactures of the country are mentioned *en passant*. The author also refers to the religious institutions and social customs of the people. The chapters on the river system and the vegetable products of Assam are contributions of permanent importance.

The dedicatory letter attached to the manuscript.

⁶ Dr. J. P. Wade, *An Account of Assam*, edited by Srijut Benudhar Sarma, and published by Srijut Rameswar Sarma, Sibsagar, 1927.

is undated, while a copy of the same found with his testimonials bears the date July 4, 1800. The letter is addressed to Sir John Malcolm, and it begins,—

“Permit me to send you a few sheets on the Geography of a Country entirely unexplored by Europeans before the late Deputation which I had the pleasure to attend. These pages are chiefly translations from original documents in the Assamese language; but partly derived from the information of intelligent natives, and partly from my own observation. Should these communications prove acceptable, I shall hope in a short time to present you with some account of the Civil, Military and Ecclesiastical Government of that Country which you will probably find more interesting than a full geographical detail”.

From the last sentence it is evident that Wade collected materials also for a systematic survey of the secular and religious institutions of Assam, besides the three books already mentioned. The materials which Dr. Wade had collected as a basis for the fourth compilation have now been lost, while in his history and geography of Assam we find only a few scraps of information on the subject reserved for full treatment in the book contemplated. The reason is obvious. Wade died a few months after writing the above letter, and naturally the notes he had collected for the book could not be given a definite literary shape.

The manuscript of Dr. Wade's *Geographical Sketch* represents the author's first draft embodying the notes which he took from his informant, an Assamese Pundit, and from the original Assamese documents referred to in the above letter. Some chapters are however in an

improved fashion, evidently representing the author's final version. The comparative finish of the final version as contrasted with the crudeness of the earlier one will be evident from the following extracts relating to Haboong reproduced verbatim,—

First draft.—

“Long 1½ day broad 3 prahars, better soil than the other, more rice, much more tambool pan and Moogha, much cuttal fruit, inhabitants chiefly Brahmans, who cut fodder for Surgeedeo's elephants, but he liberated them from such menial services. They refused the compliment saying their ancestors had employed so and they must. One man here can eat at one meal the seeds of three jackfruits, 2 seers of chaul, very fat and large people, with big bellies, wear very thick and large Brahminical strings the size of ropes of cotton, two tamools sell for one cowree, 40 pans large for 5 gandas. The Burrooah gives justice here”. —

Final version.—

“Continuous to Guslong, still in an easterly direction lies Haboongh, which is thirty miles in length and fifteen in breadth. This district is remarkable for the superior richness of the soil, and for the industry, size and appetite of the inhabitants”.

We have two versions only in the case of Wade's description of the two major divisions of the kingdom, Uttarkul and Dakshinkul, and of the rivers of Assam. With regard to the rest only the first draft is available. It may be mentioned here that the earlier version contains a large mass of information; besides, it has an

archaic *naivette* of its own, being representative of the unsophisticated methods adopted by the Assamese people of the later eighteenth century in describing places and men.

The second version is also available in print in Montgomery Martin's *Eastern India*, Volume III, pages 637-640. Martin whose eclectic methods have been seriously questioned in recent years adds the note,—

“In order that the Assamese country may be better known, I insert here Dr. Wade's descriptive geography, from papers deposited by the late Sir John Malcolm in the Library of the East India House in 1827”.

The plan of the book has been set forth in the prefatory pages, but it underwent material variations in the actual drafts. Several sections which were outside the purview of the original plan found place in the narrative, while several topics contemplated in the plan have been left out altogether. The plan was to deal with the following subjects,—

Part I. Divisions of the Kingdom :

- A. Uttarkul, or the Northern Division.
- B. Dakhinkul, or the Southern Division.
- C. Majuli, or the great island.
- D. Sub-divisions : (a) Upper Assam,
(b) Lower Assam.

Part II. Rivers of Assam :

- A. Rivers flowing from the Northern Mountains.
- B. Rivers flowing from the Southern Mountains.
- C. The Brahmaputra and its branches.

Part III. Frontiers of the Province :

- A. Western Confines.
- B. Northern Confines.

- C. Southern Confines.
- D. Eastern Confines.
- E. Neighbouring Nations.

The first two parts are now available in the original manuscript of the India Office Library : they have also been reproduced in Martin's *Eastern India*. There is no trace of the third part except a few disjointed notes on the Mikirs and the Manipuris. This omission has been compensated by the inclusion of notes on sundry topics here and there, which did not find any place in the original plan, the most important being the author's dissertation on the natural history of Assam, being notes on "vegetables collected October 6", which contain accounts of endi and muga silkworms besides others. Under the head of nondescript matter can be included the author's account of the queen's death and burial at Gauhati; the funeral of Gosains; anecdotes of Kabir Gosain "a Muhammadan much revered by all the Hindoo who sing the hymns of his composition" and during whose residence at Hajo "a temple was formed by God"; route from Bengal to Ava through Assam; itinerary of Captain Welsh's expedition to Assam in 1792; princes of the southern provinces; names of chowkies or military and commercial outposts; Turner's Bhutan and Tibet; translation of a portion of the story relating to the origin of the name Nilakantha. The last few leaves of the manuscript contain a disconnected account of the reign of King Gaurinath Singha, which is certainly a fragment of the author's monograph on that monarch as we have said before.

Dr. Wade begins his book by mentioning the sources of information,—Turner, D'Anville, DuHalde, Glanvius, Chevalier, Rennell and Vansittart, the materials received from his Pundit and the Assamese documents.

Kamrup and Darrang are then described with the necessary particulars of the contiguous tracts. The jurisdictions of the Ahom officers are stated in precise terms besides the trades and customs of the people.

Of the miscellaneous information supplied by Wade, that about a Muslim priest offering worship on behalf of the Hinduised Ahom monarchs is worthy of note,—

Powa-Mecca mosque at Hajo : “A Nabob of Dhacca had a most holy peer or saint who visited Mecca and brought back some of its earth. The Nabob requested the peer to deposit some at Hadjoo in Camroop where he formed a pukka mosque. A Mussleman of the name of Newas was gooroo-general of his persuasion in Assam, from about the time of Roodur Singha. He had numerous attendants dressed in the high Mussleman dress. He resided at or near the capital and frequented the durbar ; and the Swargeedeos used to despatch him to pray at Hadjoo after the Mussleman fashion for their prosperity. He was usually succeeded by his nearest relations. He and his family disappeared during the Swargeedeo's flight (during the Moamaria disturbances). The latter has had no pooja since at Hadjoo. He was indulged with the privilege of riding on horseback, but not in a palki-dolah. Three or four priests always remained in attendance at the place. The moment the king came forth to take the air, they called down the blessing of God on him with elevated hands. Whenever the Surgee sent this man to perform pooja for him at Mokam Hadjoo, he always sent con-

siderable presents to the temple, but they had no regular establishment from the Kings".

The Muslim shrine at Hajo is called Powa-Mecca, and is resorted to by pilgrims even up to this day. The following passage recording the educational facilities open to the Muhammadans in the olden days is equally important,—

"The Mussleman burials are the same as in Bengal. There are ten or twelve houses of instruction for the children of Musslemans at Goahawtee; and more than twenty at Rangpoor, the capital of Assam. They are neither prohibited nor encouraged by the monarch to instruct youths and exercise their religion".⁷

Conclusion.—Dr. Wade did not live long to compile a history of Assam on scientific lines. No one was more conscious of the shortcomings than the author himself. His contact with Assam lasted only for eighteen months. The busy demands of his professional duties left him little leisure for historical pursuits. To this should be added the difficulty of finding a man at that time who knew both English and Assamese. Wade must have received information from his Pundit in Hindi the knowledge of which was confined in those days to a number of Assamese officials, specially those employed

⁷ Dr. Wade's *Geographical Sketch of Assam* was edited by the present writer, by collating the different versions, with introductions and notes, and published as a serial in the *Assam Review*, Silchar Series, from December 1928 to August 1929. Charles Stewart in his *History of Bengal* has made two references to Wade's *Account of Assam*, pages 53 and 324, Bangabasi edition. Some portions were also published in the *Asiatic Annual Register* for 1805.

in diplomatic missions to Mogul India. Wade wrote in the preface to his *Geographical Sketch*,—

“Exclusively attached until the period in question to the study and practice of my profession, I had not acquired the requisite and scientific accomplishment which might have rendered my opportunities of acquiring geographical knowledge of more utility to Government or to the public. Yet I shall venture to hope that the general and unscientific sketch of the country contained in the following sheets will not prove entirely unexceptionable when it is considered that no Europeans have ever explored or probably will explore the provinces of Assam, with the consent of the Government of that country”.

Yet, we have in the pages of the indefatigable Doctor a mass of information which will be of invaluable help to all future workers in the field of Assamese history, as they were written by a critical western scholar, who was at the same time an eye-witness of the existing machinery of the Ahom government, before the catastrophic disruption brought about by the Avanese hordes of Mingi Maha Bandula.

December 1929.

THE MILITARY SYSTEM OF THE AHOMS

The military system of the Ahoms derived its efficiency from the maximum utilisation of all the resources of the country—its man-power, its economic strength, its strategic advantages, the religious sentiments of the people and even their superstitions. They also took into account the peculiar features of hostile organisations, the strong and weak points of the enemy, and moulded their war-methods accordingly. The system thus developed enabled the rulers to expand a small state on the Dihing and the Dikhow rivers into an extensive dominion spreading from the confines of Sadiya to the river Manaha, a territory of 500 miles in length and an average of 60 miles in breadth, with a fighting strength of 240,000 adult male effectives.

In the long course of their rule in Assam the Ahoms had to frequently confront organised attacks from the west, and incursions of the tribesman from the northern, southern and eastern borders. With the help of an organisation based on perpetual vigilance and preparedness, and diplomacy of a very high order, the Ahoms maintained their sway over the Brahmaputra Valley in an almost uninterrupted manner for six hundred years; and successive generals of the invading forces—Afghan, Mogul and Burmese—expressed their unstinted admiration of the fighting mettle of the Assamese, their versatility, and their ability to shrink their differences in the face of a national ordeal. It was these redeeming features that led Lord William Bentinck to observe, "The fact that the ancient Government [of the Ahoms] continued for six centuries in-

licated that there must be something intrinsically good in the constitution."

The Ahoms had conquered Assam initially by the force of arms, and consolidated their authority by supplementing the basic military prowess by a policy of appeasement and endearment, in order to keep the subdued races in constant dread of punishment for intransigence, and in expectation of reward for loyalty and co-operation. As for the rulers, promotions and honours were awarded on the solitary basis of patriotic and valorous deeds in the battlefield and signal achievements in the administrative and diplomatic spheres. A bridegroom, at the time of his marriage with a princess of blood royal was reminded of the patriotic exploits of his ancestors or of himself, in recognition of which he was now honoured with relationship with the royal family. This militaristic bias was deeply rooted in Ahom traditions, and the earliest Shan rulers, Khunlung and Khunlai, when leaving their homeland in Yunnan, were given a sword—the famous Hengdan—which was expected to bring about the subjugation of a people in whatever direction it would be turned. —

The Ahom conquerors and their descendants, and the specially favoured members of their race constituted the steel frame of the military system, and minor commands were given to non-Ahoms only in the last few decades of their rule. The officers and men were organised for the dual purpose of service in the civil administration and employment in war. In peace times the villagers pursued their normal avocations, only one-fourth of them being ordinarily liable to serve under the state. The maintenance of a standing army was thus dispensed with, and the economy of the villages remained undisturbed. The adult males were registered

as state *paiks*, who were in turn grouped into squads or *gots* of three or four men. Ordinarily, one man from each *got* was required to serve the state, and his work in the village, both in the field and his orchard, was carried on by his home-keeping comrades. In times of an emergency, two men and even three were pressed into state service. Dr. John Peter Wade's observation "that the military commander and the judge are united in the same person" is equally applicable to the populace—the registered *paiks*—in the sense that they served as labourers in times of peace and as soldiers in times of war. A ready militia was thus available for speedy mobilisation, and the *paiks* with their graded commanders—the Phukans, Rajkhowas Baruas, Hazarikas, Saikias and Boras—marched to the training centres or directly to the battlefield at a short notice. Supplies were also guaranteed as cultivation of paddy and other stuffs was unimpaired under this system, though the incidence of war imposed a heavier burden on the home-keeping *paiks*. The co-operation of the tribesmen was an asset of the highest value in the military operations of the Ahoms.

To meet the requirements of an abnormal situation like war the whole energy of the nation was pitched to the fulfilment of a single purpose. The production of materials—war equipments and food provisions—was carried on a more vigorous footing. The dockyards and arsenals became more active; and smithies were established even in the place enclosures where muskets, cannon, swords, spears and arrowheads were made under the direct supervision of the king who also directed the training and manouvre of the recruits. It is also recorded that to meet an emergent situation cultivation of crops was carried on under rigorous pressure from

the government. The personality of a monarch and his officers was the *primum mobile* for success in war, and this fact was fully realised by the Ahoms as we know from the advice of a minister offered in the war-council of King Rudra Singha,—“In the reign of Jayadhwaj Singha there was an abundance of provisions and men; and still he acquired the title of ‘the deserting king’. Arms and ammunitions, materials and supplies are torpid and impotent; the followers and subordinates of the king are symbols of life and animation; they alone can infuse into the immobile war-provisions a dynamic force”.

The espionage system of the Ahoms was highly efficient, and the spies supplied constant information about the designs of the neighbours or resources of the enemy. The Moguls had to ply their boats upstream, and the progress of their march was necessarily slow. The Ahoms took advantage of the interval, gained additional time by despatching emissaries to the invading generals on thousand and one pretext, and meanwhile perfected their own preparations. The invaders, naturally unwilling to enter into a practically unknown territory like Assam, would be deluded by any bait to attain their objectives by peaceful negotiations if possible. The interval would also be used by the Assamese in hurling bluffs about their invincibility and the sure defeat of the enemy. On one occasion a Mogul general swallowed a bluff that there were Rakshasas or demons in the Assamese camp. The Ahoms appointed very astute and intelligent Brahmans as emissaries, and their representations, consisting of half-truths and exaggerations, mystified the Mogul commanders, with the result that in many cases they became dispirited and entertained dubious hopes of success against Assam.

The topography of Assam dictated its methods of warfare. The trained cavalry of the Moguls were too much of a match for the Ahoms, and they therefore avoided open encounters in the plains. Guerilla tactics consisting of ambushes and sudden attacks constituted their principal *modus operandi*. Their commando soldiers entered into hostile camps during the still hours of the night when they carried off the treasures or gagged the muzzles of the guns kept ready for action next day. The Ahoms studied Mogul strategy very carefully, including the details of Mogul engagements in other parts of India. They knew that the later hours of the night were very suitable for attacking the Moguls as they fell fast asleep at that time. Shivaji's successes against the Moguls in 1665 encouraged the Ahom king Chakradhwaj Singha to speed up his preparations to recover Gauhati. The Assamese soldier was the master of a variety of activities which he acquired as a cultivator and a householder. Erection of hedge-fencing, rowing, swimming, digging and house-construction constituted the normal occupation of an Assamese cultivator, and this varied knowledge was brought to bear upon his military career. This versatility amazed the Mogul general Raja Ram Singha of Amber and he exclaimed at the conclusion of the hostilities,—“Every Assamese soldier is an expert in rowing boats, in shooting arrows, in digging trenches, and in wielding muskets and guns. I have not seen such specimens of versatility in any other part of India”.

The food menu of an Assamese soldier was extremely simple. He had in his kit a bag of specially prepared raw rice, soaked in water,—*komal chaul* as it is called—and he thrust morsels into his mouth from time to time and thereby satisfied his alimentary need.

The Ahoms also used a kind of peripatetic oven : cooking vessels were suspended from a bamboo pole, and appointed men while running or walking fast held a constant fire beneath to boil the contents. This simplicity was in marked contrast with the culinary elaborateness of the Moguls.

The hills of Assam offered ready-made sites for fortifications. The hills on both banks of the Brahmaputra near Tezpur were capped with forts which caused wonder even to the veteran general Mir Jumla. The mountains in the neighbourhood of Gauhati were similarly fortified and linked with each other by ramparts erected in the intervening plains. A well-armed soldier was posted at an interval of nine to fifteen feet, and guns were mounted at advantageous points. The hills of Gauhati, thus fortified, constituted an impregnable wall of resistance, and the Assamese army could fight within the Gauhati enclosures "as if sitting in their own homes", to quote the words of General Lachit Barphukan.

It is not possible to give a full idea of the Ahom military system within the compass of a few pages. The system was highly successful and it enabled the Ahoms to maintain their sway over Assam for such a length of time. A Muslim historian, Muhammad Kazim, admitted that "the Rajas of Assam had curbed the ambition and checked the conquests of the most victorious princes of Hindustan ; the solution of a war against them has baffled the penetration of heroes who have been styled Conquerors of the World. Mir Jumla's chronicler, Shihabuddin Talish, who was with the general in his Assam campaign, wrote in the same vein,—"Every army that entered the limits of this country made its exit from the realm of Life ; every

caravan that set foot on this land deposited its baggage of residence in the halting-place of Death". Lachit Barphukan's antagonist Ram Singha had to exclaim,— "Glory to the king, glory to the counsellors, glory to the commanders, glory to the country! One single individual leads all the forces! Even I Ram Singha, being personally on the spot, have not found any loop-hole and opportunity! An Englishman, writing a few decades ago, paid the highest compliment to the mettle of the Assamese army when he said,— "The Assamese were to the Moslems what the Numidians and Mauritians were to the old Romans—*Genus insuperbile bello*".

May 1954.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM OF THE AHOMS

The Ahoms are members of the Shan branch of the great Tai or Thai family of the human race. Sukapha who first conquered Assam in 1228 A.D. was a prince of the Shan state of Maulung in Upper Burma. The Ahoms ruled in Assam for six hundred years, till the year 1826, when the government of the kingdom passed into the hands of the East India Company by the Treaty of Yandabo. The territory first occupied by them was a small one, mainly confined to a portion of Eastern Assam, but it gradually extended westward ; and on the termination of the Mogul wars in 1682, it extended up to the river Manaha, opposite Goalpara. This limit remained unaltered till the end of Ahom rule in 1826. The kingdom was always known as Assam irrespective of the fluctuations in its dimensions.

The question has always been asked as to how it was possible for the Ahoms to continue in power for such a length of time. Their numerical strength was very much inferior to that of the conquered races, who belonged to different faiths and racial affinities, and spoke different languages. Lord William Bentinck, Governor-General of India, admitted that the fact that the government of the Ahoms continued for six centuries indicated that there must be something intrinsically good in the constitutions.

Two basic factors stand out prominently to explain the efficiency of the Ahom system of government. The rulers loved the country and their subjects with emotional fervour. They described Assam as a casket of gold, *sonar saphura*, and they would never allow any

outsider to have a footing in the land, and any misdeed to tarnish its fair name. They were never dismayed by temporary discomfitures. "If the sun is once eclipsed, does it not make its appearance again?" was their motto in all measures of recuperation and rehabilitation. The ninety-seven-year old monarch Swargadeo Pratap Singha, sailed along the Dikhow river in a barge, baring his body, and bidding farewell to his subjects lined on both banks of the river. The assemblage in their turn offered to sacrifice one hundred stalwarts from amongst them if by doing so they could renovate the king's failing health. His grandson Swargadeo Jayadhwaj Singha wept bitter tears when he peeped through the gate of the capital city of Gargaon devastated by the Mogul invaders under Nawab Mir Jumla.

The success of the Ahoms was also due to their ability to take full advantage of the surroundings and circumstances in which they were placed, and adjust their administrative policy in accordance with the resources and opportunities of that set-up.

The Ahom kings were known by the appellation of Swargadeos, as their earliest ancestors were regarded as the sons of the great god Indra who came down from heaven in a golden ladder to redeem mankind from misery and injustice. There was thus a halo of divinity round the monarchs, and their person was always sacrosanct and inviolable. All honours and prerogatives emanated from the monarchs, and all superior appointments were made by them. Important cases, specially the records of trials involving capital offences, had to be submitted to them for final orders; and they alone could sanction the infliction of death penalties which required the shedding of blood. Elaborate instructions were given to the monarchs at the time of their coronation.

tion which combined the injunctions of the Ahom priestly code and of the Hindu Dandanitis.

The king's highest advisers were known under the collective name of Patra-mantri, consisting of the Buragohain, Bargohain, Barpatra Gohain, Barbarua and Barphukan. Supreme decisions like the selection of monarchs and their deposal were taken by the three Gohains. The kings had to abide by the recommendations of the three Gohains, and their refusal to do so always led to complications. A tactful sovereign could bring the Gohains to his way of thinking by means of persuasion, and he was at liberty to exercise his prerogative of acting independently of the advice of the Gohains. He had then to fall back upon the support of the executive officers, the Phukans and the Baruas. The government was thus a combination of limited monarchy and oligarchy, and the balance of power was steadily and carefully maintained between the sovereigns and the nobles. Troubles came when there was a collision of interests, and the monarchs and the nobles exercised their power in excess of their limitations. The Gohains took the field when necessary, and all important matters like the construction of fortifications, and survey and settlement operations were carried out under their direct supervision.

The Barbarua was the chief executive officer and the head of the judiciary, and as such he wielded great power. The records of all important trials came up to him for adjudication. He made arrangements for the king's coronation and for his intinerary. The Barphukan lived at Gauhati as viceroy, and he went up to the capital frequently for personal consultations with the king and the ministers. His office was a very important one as he had to face the first brunt of an attack from

the west. The Rajkhowas were governors of specified areas. In times of war they marched to the battle at the head of the contingent composed of the levies in their jurisdiction. The harmony of the administration sprang from the symmetrical working of the different wings, and difficulties arose when one wing proved refractory or disloyal. The possibility of delinquency was reduced to a minimum as the movements and activities of every paik and his immediate superiors were supervised by a gradation of officers.

The Ahoms harnessed every adult male in the service of the state as a labourer or a soldier. He was registered as a paik, and every four paiks constituted a squad known as a *got*. The paiks had to serve the government in turn, and the normal work of the absentee paik had to be performed by his home-keeping comrades. Usually, one man out of the four had to be absent from home, sometimes two, and when emergencies came three men in a squad were employed in state service. Thus every able-bodied male subject of the kingdom acquired some elementary knowledge of the requirements of the state, and when he returned home after his allotted period of service he became a centre of political gossip in his village. Some degree of civic obligation was fostered by the system of rendering assistance to the normal work of the comrades absent from their homes on state service.

The levy of the first man in a squad was called a *mul*, of the second a *dowal*, and of the third a *tewal*. The *mul* levy being on active service, the *dowal* and the *tewal* remained ready in their villages for being called upon to report for duty at any time. An elaborate machinery was set up for maintaining a record of the paiks, and for filling up vacancies as occasions arose.

The concealment of a paik was considered to be a very serious offence. Twenty paiks were placed under an officer known as a Bora, a hundred under a Saikia, and a thousand under a Hazarika. The head of the unit under whom the paiks served was called a Barua ; and sometimes a Phukan if the unit was of greater importance. Each unit was called a Khel ; and the components of a Khel regarded themselves as members of one political fraternity.

The paik system of the Ahoms obviated the necessity of maintaining a huge army at the headquarters, as the non-serving paiks constituted a standing militia which could be mobilised at a short notice by the Kheldar working through his subordinate officers. Some preliminary knowledge of his duties, civil and military, being implanted in each paik by his previous service in the state, he had to undergo a brushing off or a refresher course at his allotted headquarter or the metropolis, combined with intensive training specially needed for the occasion. Only a signal had to be passed on to the Kheldar, and the machinery of mobilisation moved on apace placing at the disposal of the government the requisite number of men as the occasion demanded. Some subjects enjoyed immunity from personal service if their absence from their villages caused dislocation to the normal life of the people. Government had not to resort to formal conscription as the services of the whole body of adult effectives could be commanded in times of emergency.

The paiks were grouped on an occupational and territorial basis, and were attached to the several guilds of Khels, such as, the guilds of bow-makers, bow-shooters, gunpowder manufacturers, boat-pliers, boat-builders and boat-repairers, gold-washers, rice suppliers,

supervisers of temples, etc. The paiks of a specified area were placed under a Rajkhowa who administered justice in his jurisdiction.

Assam extending to the foot of the hills on the north, east and south, is intersected by numerous streams which, after the monsoon rains and floods, leave a deposite of silt which makes the land extremely fertile. and capable of yielding a variety of crops. The rulers aimed that the vast tracts of arable lands should be cultivated, and their produce feed and maintain not only the population, but also the princes and nobles, and provide sufficient reserves for emergencies like wars and lean years. No one, not even the highest functionary was paid his salary in cash. A contingent of paiks or servitors was placed at his disposal who ploughed the fields, and produced the needed crops ; they also helped in furnishing the other necessities to the household of their master. In emergencies rigorous measures were instituted so that villagers would take to cultivation without any demur in order to produce the required quota of foodgrains. An officer when out of employment had to depend upon his family retainers, bondsmen and slaves, and his relatives and dependants. An ordinary paik who served the state was given free of rent about three acres of land as his remuneration. A newly enthroned monarch had to perform the ceremony of sacrificial ploughing at the time of his coronation ; and nobles and princes did not think it beneath their dignity if they ploughed in their fields. Several princes expressed the view that they were much happier in their villages where they earned their livelihood as ploughmen than when they were monarchs entangled in political controversies and machinations.

The Ahom attitude towards the tribesmen of the

frontier was one of amity, accompanied by the application of force if the situation so demanded. The Ahoms realised that the chasing of tribal miscreants to the recesses of the hills was a fruitless endeavour : it was like "an elephant entering into a rat-hole". Regular blackmail was paid to the hillmen to prevent their foraging excursions into the plains. The blackmail consisted of articles of necessity to the tribes, like clothes, metals and salt. Intercourse with the Nagas was conducted under the supervision of a number of local officers called Naga Katakis, who controlled the entrances and exits of the tribesmen. The conciliatory policy of the Ahoms made the hillmen their eternal friends, and all major operations like wars received the support of Assam's stalwart and martial neighbours.

The strategic frontiers of Assam were placed in charge of high-ranking wardens, recruited from the families of the Buragohain and the Bargohain. The Sadiya-khowa Gohain held the passes near Sadiya ; the Solal Gohain lived in his headquarter at Biswanath or Kaliabar ; the Jagiyalia Gohain with the Kacharis ; and the Kajalimukhia Gohain lived at the mouth of the river Kapili to the east of Gauhati. The Raja of Darrang was in charge of the relation with Bhutan ; and the Duaria Barua, stationed at Hadirachoki, with Bengal. The Barphukan, or the Ahom viceroy at Gauhati, was in overall charge of frontier relations to the west of Assam. He also dealt with the relations with the Muslim power in Bengal, and, later on with the affairs of the East India Company. Of course, all matters of importance were communicated to the king and his ministers, and the Barphukan acted in accordance with the instructions received from the capital.

The Ahom attitude towards the entrance of out-

siders from the west of their kingdom was one of extreme caution. Hordes of invaders, both Afghan and Mogul, had entered Assam through Bengal, and they had to be resisted with all might. Westerners were therefore looked upon with suspicion, as they had a separate political loyalty, and the exact purpose of their visit could not be ascertained at all times. But Assam wanted men to work in several avocations,—accountants, artisans, architects and mechanics, and their introduction was freely encouraged, provided they settled in Assam for good, and did not return to their homeland. All possible facilities were given to them for their permanent residence in Assam by granting them lands and servitors. These new-comers were gradually assimilated with the original inhabitants, and their descendants did not suffer any disability for their extraterritorial descent.

Punishments were inflicted in a very exemplary and rigorous manner. A traitor was punished by execution which in many cases extended to the leading members of his family. The common punishments were—extraction of eyes and knee-cups, slicing off of noses and ears, throwing into water, hammering by clubs, hanging by a hook, pressure between two wooden cylinders, and hoeing from head to foot. The severest form of execution consisted in cutting off slices from the body before final decapitation. Crimes were perceptibly reduced as the people lived in perpetual dread of the inevitable consequences of the violation of law and order.

The first batch of Ahom conquerors numbered only a few thousand stalwarts. But the original fold was gradually reinforced by the introduction of the members of the subject races. The new entrants enjoyed all the

privileges of the original Ahoms when they proved worthy of them. The Ahoms thus became in course of time a cosmopolitan entity. The steel frame of the administration was however confined to the descendants of the companions of Sukapha. The elevation of new entrants to high offices no doubt caused at first some chagrin in the camp of the older Ahoms, though resistance melted down as the new-comers distinguished themselves by their loyalty, gallantry and success in the diplomatic field. The Ahoms were free from caste prejudices, and what appealed to them was a finely built body, some amount of dash, and a sense of probity and quick decision.

A very large majority of the people of Assam were Hindus, and the Ahom religious cult was a different feature altogether. The Ahoms gradually adopted Hindu customs and manners, although a large number still adhered to their original Shan faith. The rulers adopted a definite policy of non-interference and tolerance. Not being aware of the full implications of the Hindu faith they looked askance at any innovation in that faith fearing that such an innovation might be followed by a commotion in the land. Hindu institutions received liberal patronage from the Ahom sovereigns. They erected Hindu temples, endowed lands and paiks for perpetual worship in those temples, and also in the Vaisnava monasteries. They also continued to respect Ahom customs; and Ahom priests were held in high reverence till the end. Muslim priests and preachers were given due honour, and lands were bestowed on them to enable them to carry on their devotional functions in ease and comfort. This religious neutrality, and encouragement of the faiths prevailing in the land accounted for the long popularity of Ahom rule in

Assam. Trouble came when an Ahom queen in her zeal for Saktatism offended a very powerful Vaisnava pontiff who had a numerous and united body of disciples.

The Ahoms brought with them their manuscripts dealing both with religious and secular matters. But the knowledge of their literary treasures became gradually confined to the members of the priestly order, the Deodhais, Bailungs and Mohans, and the higher aristocracy. The Ahom language was used on ceremonial occasions like worship of the deities and coronations. It was also used in some copper-plates and coins. Knowledge of the language had to be maintained because the Ahoms continued their intercourse with the Shans of Upper Burma till the end of their rule. From the stray glimpses that we have got of Ahom literary remains they seem to be rich in astrological treatises and chronicles. Lexicons from Assamese to Ahom and vice versa were also compiled ; and the Ramayana story was also rendered in the Ahom language.

But the use of Ahom as a spoken language gradually became obsolete, and the rulers found it convenient to use the medium of the local inhabitants in their daily intercourse. The princes and nobles became patrons of Assamese writers ; and several monarchs wrote songs in Assamese, and one of them wrote a drama. Hindu scholars and poets flourished in the Ahom court, and produced works which have enriched the literature of the Assamese. The adoption of the Assamese language as the medium of social intercourse with the inhabitants made them feel that the rulers were one with them, and they never felt for a moment that they were being governed by outsiders. In fact, in the beginning of Ahom rule in Assam the inhabitants freely admitted that though the conquerors had come from a far country

they liked to meet them frequently on account of their affable and endearing manners.

One of the greatest contributions made by the Ahoms to the culture of the Assamese people was the custom of compiling chronicles, which were first written in the Ahom language, and subsequently in both Assamese and Ahom. All political transactions were recorded in the chronicles or Buranjis, and they were mostly compiled under official auspices to serve as precedents. Bad deeds and good ones were scrolled with impartiality, as the authors enjoyed immunity from vengeance or reward because the chronicles were preserved with the utmost secrecy, and the divulgence of the facts recorded there was considered as an insult shown to one's mother. The scope of the historical literature of Assam was not confined to the four corners of the kingdom; it extended to the neighbouring races and tribes, and the states of India with which Assam had some sort of political relations. There were monographs dealing with the Muslim rulers of Delhi, as their knowledge was an essential prerequisite to the successful implementation of war measures.

Besides the Buranjis, books containing useful information were compiled under official direction. Assam is the land of elephants which were used on ceremonial occasions, and also for commercial purposes and wars. The subject of elephants inspired numerous treatises of varying length and treatment. There were treatises also on horses, hawks, fortifications, construction of temples and tanks, and the order of precedence of the nobles and officers. The Ahoms reduced all useful knowledge into writing so that each department of the government could have a staff manual for ready reference.

The Ahoms as a sovereign power have ceased to exist since the year 1826, but visible traces of their rule still exist in different forms. The common Assamese titles,—Gohain, Phukan, Barua, Rajkhowa, Hazarika, Saikia, Bara, Kakati, Katak, Bujar-Barua, Bardoloi, Neog, Patowari and Choudhury—are still used by the descendants of the original holders of the respective offices. Land-grants made by the Ahom monarchs are still enjoyed by the successor individuals and institutions. Worship is still going on in the temples erected by the Ahom rulers. The tanks excavated under their orders are still used as water reservoirs and fisheries, and their highways traversed by thousands of travellers till this day. The Khel system so much in vogue during the Ahom age still influences the social order of the Assamese people. All this shows how intimately and extensively the impact of the Ahoms had permeated the country and the masses.

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MANIRAM DEWAN : SOME NEW FACTS

Any fresh revelation about Maniram Dewan and his times is welcome, as it helps us to draw a full-length picture of the doings of that great patriot which, unfortunately, is still wanting. The family chronicle of the Bhatia Barbaras, compiled by Srijut Gauri Charan Barbara of Jorhat, throws new light on some of the compatriots who associated themselves with the move to recover the independence of Assam taking advantage of the great uprising, the Sepoy Mutiny.

Saruman Barbara was seventh in descent from Purnananda Giri Bhuyan, the earliest recorded ancestor of the Bhatia Barbara family. Saruman's eldest son Sombar, *alias* Memera, was executed in 1778 by King Lakshmi Singha for his active support of Prince Bijay Barmura Gohain's bid for the throne. Sombar's brother Jeuram died in 1818, and his wife Thunu burnt herself as Sati on the funeral pyre of her husband. Another brother, Krishnaram, 1756-1826 A.D., assisted Maharaja Purandar Singha in resisting the Burmese invaders for which he was raised by that monarch to the rank of a Phukan. Krishnaram's eldest son Juran Phukan helped the British in the expulsion of the Burmese, and his services were rewarded by the grant of an estate of 100 puras of revenue-free land, known as Mankhat ; of a Sanad of recognition from Lord Amherst, Governor-General ; and the administration of a Mauza in Bacha, the original home of the Barbaras. The famous Hao Bara of Panigaon in North Lakhimpur, a member of this family, displayed conspicuous bravery in resisting the Burmese in Baskata.

Krishnaram's two other sons, Chitrasen and Mayaram, were trusted friends of Juvaraj Kandarpeswar Singha, grandson of Purandar Singha. In 1856, Maniram Dewan proceeded to Calcutta, and arranged to submit a petition to the Governor-General for the relief of Kandarpeswar Singha, who had been reduced to a very deplorable condition, hardly capable of maintaining the dignity of a prince of royal blood. The Sepoy Mutiny having meanwhile broken out, and British authority being in jeopardy, Maniram Dewan wrote a letter to Kandarpeswar Singha in a very cryptic style, the purport of which was as follows : "The plantain leaf in this part of the country is in a drooping condition, and the sickle has also become sharpened. It will be proper to remain in preparedness and sharpen the sickles in our part as well."

Kandarpeswar Singha made over this letter to Chitrasen, hoping that the Barbara as a member of a semi-military family would plan and mature the arrangements for the *coup d'état* to place Kandarpeswar on the Assam throne. Chitrasen consulted his brother Mayaram, and they both agreed to accord their full support to the enterprise. Maniram Dewan's letter was kept concealed in the pillow of Mayaram's bed. The fact came somehow to be known to Gopal, son of Mayaram, aged about eight years.

Haranath Parbatia Barua was placed in charge of the investigation in his capacity as Inspector of Police. His residence at Golaghat was situated near that of Chitrasen and Mayaram. Haranath plied Gopal with fruits and sweets, and extracted information from the boy about the concealment of Maniram Dewan's letter in the pillow. Haranath at once searched the house of the Barbaras, and obtained possession of the incrimina-

tory document. He also took away with him the Sanad granted to Juran Phukan by Lord Amherst.

Chitrasen and Mayaram, and Juran Phukan's son Narayan were arrested and subsequently tried and sentenced to imprisonment. Their properties were confiscated including the Mankhat and the privileges under the Sanad. Later on, on an appeal being preferred to the Supreme Court at Calcutta, they were eventually released. Mayaram returned home, but Chitrasen passed the rest of his life in Brindaban. Narayan also did not return home and he died at Karnal in the Punjab.

The above facts are taken from the family history of the Bhatia Barbaras. The following additional information is derived from the proceedings of the trial of Mayaram Barbara Nazir and his nephew Narayan, held on March 18, 1858, by Captain Charles Holroyd, Commissioner appointed under Act XIV of 1857.

Mayaram was charged with two offences, *first*, "For having during the months of Jeit, Ahar, Sawun and Bhadra 1779 Assam Suk (May, June, July and August 1857) read out to the Sepoys on the Golahghat command, the News papers with a view to excite them to rise in rebellion against the Government, and having himself promised assistance, and endeavoured to excite discontent by seditious talking"; and *second*: "For having held seditious communications with the Saring Rajah". Narayan, Ganesh Chandra and Umakanta were charged with a similar offence alleged against Mayaram at the first instance.

Mayaram was sentenced "to fourteen years imprisonment in banishment with hard labour in irons in any Jail in the Bengal Presidency the Government may be pleased to direct; and ordered that all his property

and effects of every descriptions is forfeited to Government."

About Narayan, Ganesh Chandra and Umakanta, the Commissioner Captain Holroyd ordered,—“The Prisoners however are inferior Omlah, and not persons of any great weight or substance; they appear to me like ignorant fools to have followed in the wake of others, without considering the enormity of the offence they were committing. I do not consider it necessary in their instance to pass a very severe sentence. I accordingly dismiss them from Government employ, declaring them incompetent to serve Government in any capacity : declare all their goods and effects to be forfeited to Government; and sentence them each respectively to three years imprisonment with hard labour in the District Jail”.

December 16, 1948, and

February 15, 1963.

MADHU MALLIK

Madhu Mallik is a well-nigh forgotten patriot who suffered incarceration for the part he played during the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. The scene of his activities was Jorhat in Assam where he lived in intimate association with the young prince Kandarpeswar Singha Saring Raja, grandson of Maharaja Purandar Singha. A large section of the Assamese nobles planned to set up Kandarpeswar Singha on the throne of Assam acting under the inspiration of the mighty upsurge which was then sweeping over many parts of India.

The principal incentive was offered by the letters of encouragement received from Maniram Dewan Barbhandar-Barua who was then living in Calcutta submitting petitions and memorials to the Government on behalf of his master Kandarpeswar Singha. "Letters have come from the Dewan", the prince was reported to have said on one occasion, "that down below [in provinces West of Assam] all the Rajas have got over the sepoys, and have taken each his own country. I have also made it an object worth living for."

Madhu Mallik was a Bengali Muktiar who had been sent up by Maniram Dewan from Calcutta a few months before the disturbances. His primary object was the establishment of an indigo factory in Assam. Being an English scholar he was engaged as the tutor of Kandarpeswar Singha. He lived in a house of the Dewan situated in the bazaar at Jorhat. His name occurs prominently in Captain Charles Holroyd's report relating to Kandarpeswar Singha, in the depositions of witnesses attached to the report, and in Kandarpeswar

Singha's statement in explanation of the charges levelled against him. It must however be mentioned that the facts recorded in the above documents, as far as is known, were not subjected to the test of cross-examination.

Maniram Dewan's first letter, received in May-June 1857, was reported to be a long one dealing with indigo and other business. Inside this letter there was a slip of paper in which the Dewan referred to the successful rising of the sepoys in favour of Bahadur Shah Badshah and the imminence of the fall of Calcutta. Madhu Mallik delivered this letter to Kandarpeswar Singha, and advised him to assemble some of the Baruas and Phukans living round Jorhat in order to make arrangements with the sepoys to gain possession of the country. This was done accordingly. The scene was thus laid for one of the most momentous phases of national resurgence in Assam the memory of which has lingered till this day.

Kandarpeswar Singha's palace at Jorhat became the rendezvous of his adherents where they matured the plans and issued directions for their execution. Mahesh Chandra Sarma Barua Mauzadar, commonly known as Piali Barua, proceeded to Sibsagar to induce Dutiram Barua Shirastadar and other leading persons to join the cause. Piali then went to Golaghat to arrange matters with the sepoys and their Indian officers and other men of influence in that place so that the rising could occur at the time of the Durga Puja when Maniram Dewan was himself to arrive.

Shortly afterwards, Nur Muhammad Jemadar of the 1st Assam Light Infantry came down from Dibrugarh on private leave, and met Kandarpeswar Singha at Jorhat with whom he discussed about the assistance to

be afforded by the sepoys, and the remuneration they were to receive for placing him on the throne. It was followed by the visit of Rustom Sing Jemadar who conferred with the Saring Raja about the arrangements made with Piali at Golaghat. It was intended that Bhikum Subedar should at the time of the Durga Puja come down to Jorhat from Golaghat with the sepoys, and that all the Phukans and Baruas and the nobles of the country should on that day assemble, and that the Raja should be proclaimed and placed on the throne.

Among those who attended the deliberations at the prince's residence at Jorhat were Piali Barua, Madhu Mallik, Luki Senchowa Barua, Kamala Charingia Barua, Bahadur Gaonburah and Farmud Ali. The other supporters who lived at a distance from Jorhat included Mayaram Barbara of Golaghat, and Debidatta Sarma Mazumdar and his brother Lakshmidatta Sarma of Dergaon. The three Baruas—Piali, Luki and Kamala, and also others met in the house of Madhu Mallik "when the state of affairs in India was talked over, and the news written by Maniram from Calcutta, and how things were to be managed for the rising here." Letters from Maniram Dewan, despatched from Calcutta, and addressed to different parties, continued to be received up to the end of August 1857.

Madhu Mallik and Piali Barua once accompanied Kandarpeswar Singha, mounted on his elephant named Motimalla, and contacted an influential grandee for the purpose of winning him over to their side. The rice necessary for the enterprise was to be collected in the house of Madhu Mallik. His exertions in promoting the cause of the prince were so conspicuous that they led a witness to observe,—“Maddoo Mullick was the

chief instigator of the Raja in all these designs and intrigues."

Captain Holroyd, the Magistrate of Sibsagar, received timely information about the developments at Jorhat, and he resolved to arrest Kandarpeswar Singha. Captain Lowther, commanding a corps of Gurkhas, surrounded the Saring Raja's place before day-break on the 7th September 1857. With the help of his police guide, Captain Lowther entered the palace, and was soon brought to the presence of the Saring Raja. After some hesitation, the prince made his surrender and delivered his state sword. The Captain had despatched a party of men to the town to arrest "an educated Bangalee, agent to the conspirators", who was obviously Madhu Mallik, as there was no other Bengali associated with the plot.

Three days before this event, the Saring Raja, at the instance of Piali Barua, Madhu Mallik and Saru Gohain, had written a letter to the authorities stating that he was in alarm of being looted by the sepoys. The letter was drawn up by the above three, and it was then given to Madhu Mallik to write in English.

Maniram Dewan was arrested in Calcutta, and imprisoned in the Alipore Jail. On the 31st December 1857, he was put on board the 'Koladyne' for being conveyed to Assam to stand his trial there.

The trials presided over by Captain Holroyd in his capacity as Commissioner, appointed under Act XIV of 1857, continued from time to time during the months of February to August 1858. The sentence of death passed against Maniram Dewan and Piali Barua was carried out on the 26th February 1858. Others were sentenced to transportation and various terms of imprisonment.

Madhu Mallik was tried by Captain Holroyd at Jorhat on the 26th March 1858, for the offence of "having during the months of Jeit, Ahar, Sawun and Bhadro, 1779 Assam Suk,—May, June, July and August 1857, conspired with the Saring Rajah of Joorhath to rebel and wage war against the Government, and having sided and abetted the said Rajah by advice and counsel to rise in rebellion against the state". He was sentenced to "transposition as a felon beyond sea for the term of his natural life".

The following remarks were recorded by Captain Holroyd in his judgement on the case, dated Jorhat, the 8th April 1858 :

"The Evidence adduced in this case against the Prisoner Muddoo Mullick is conclusive, and the fact of the Prisoner having been the direct Agent of Muniram in his Intrigues with the Saring Rajah is fully established. That Muniram sent letters to the Rajah under cover to the Prisoner as stated by the witnesses on oath is fully proved by the fact of documents having been found so addressed among the attached Papers. The Prisoner's Knowledge and complicity in the Act is established beyond doubt, & I fully convict the Prisoner on the charge preferred against him. The Prisoner from his position as the accredited Agent of Muniram was in a position to influence the Saring Rajah & persuade him to carry out the dictates of his employer in Calcutta, and that he did so influence the too willing Rajah, and encourage and exhort him to rebel against the Govt. is proved. Taking these facts into consideration, and the leading part taken by the Prisoner in the conspiracy, I sentence him to be transported as a felon beyond sea for the term of his natural life".

After his arrest, Kandarpeswar Singha, the Saring

Raja, was sent down to Bengal, and confined in the Alipore Jail as a state prisoner till 1859, when he was released and allowed to reside at some place near Calcutta under the surveillance of the authorities.

In 1863, Dutiram Shirastadar was released from his detention in the Andaman Islands, and so were Mayaram Nazir, Bahadur Gaonburha and Farmud Ali. But nothing definite is yet known about the fate of Madhu Mallik. The sentence of transportation was probably mitigated as in the case of the above upholders of the cause of Kandarpeswar Singha Saring Raja.

August 1957 and February 1962.

INDIAN HISTORY CONGRESS : GAUHATI SESSION

Brother Historians, Ladies and Gentlemen present,

I thank you from the bottom of my heart for having asked me to preside over the Local History Section of the twenty-second session of the Indian History Congress held at Gauhati. In doing this honour to me you have honoured all workers in the field of historical investigation relating to the state of Assam.

It is in the fitness of things that there should be a section in each session of the Indian History Congress devoted to the past history of the province where the session is held. This is more appropriate in the case of Assam which has unlimited possibilities of historical research, to which the attention of Indian historians should be drawn, because the facts of Assam history if properly disseminated will convince our countrymen in India and our fellow human beings in other parts of the world that the people of Assam are inheritors of great achievements in the political as well as in the cultural and spiritual fields. The knowledge of these achievements is practically confined to the four corners of the state. It is a good sign that our countrymen in India are gradually taking interest in the heritage and glory of Assam. The fixation of the venue of the twenty-second session of the Indian History Congress in Assam is a visible symbol of this growing interest.

I welcome you all, brother historians, to Gauhati and Assam, where you will see nature in all her luxuriance and grandeur, and also monuments of the country's past greatness. This is not the first time that scholars

and savants have come to the sacred soil of Assam. So early as the seventh century A.D., the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsiang found that "the king of Kamarupa is fond of learning and the people are so likewise in imitation of him. Men of high talent from distant regions, seeking after office, visit his dominions". In an inscription of King Ratnapala of the eleventh century, the capital of Kamarupa is described as being "adorned by learned men, religious preceptors and poets who have made it their place of resort, just as the sky is adorned by Mercury, Jupiter and Venus". Coming to later times, we find the great ruler of Cooch Behar, King Naranarayan, inviting to his court all the Pundits of Gaura and Kamarupa, and commissioning them to translate Sanskrit classics into Assamese, "so that the books will be read by women and Sudras in the present age, and by Brahmans in later times : it is only by this means that the scriptures can be prevented from loss in this Kali-yuga". King Rudra Singha of Assam invited to his court the Brahmans and Pundits of Bengal, and sent them back with rich presents, and those who could not come had presents sent to them in Bengal. The king's courtesy to scholars can be judged from the manner in which he rescued a visiting Pundit from embarrassment. A Pundit from Tripura, Rameswar Nyayalankar, came to Assam in charge of a diplomatic mission. Jaigopal, the Pundit of King Rudra Singha's court, took advantage of the Nyayalankar's presence amidst them, and entered into a dialectical contest with him. The discussions having assumed some degree of animation, the king intervened and said,—“Rameswar Nyayalankar has come here in the role of an ambassador. The contest would have been proper if he had come here as a Pundit”.

We in Assam have always honoured learned men for we know that by honouring honourable men we honour ourselves. Brother historians, you have come to this land of glorious traditions; and we feel proud of your presence in our midst. We thank the authorities for having invited the History Congress to Assam. It has given an opportunity for the congregation of such a galaxy of talents from all parts of India and even from outside India.

Assam was, and is still to some extent, an unknown country, and desire for information about the kingdom was in evidence even during the days of the East India Company. Lord Cornwallis while sending an expedition to Assam which was then independent asked the leader of the expedition Captain Thomas Welsh to collect all possible information about the kingdom. This information is embodied in Captain Welsh's despatches, and in the sustained compilations about Assam's history and geography by Dr. John Peter Wade, the Surgeon attached to the expedition. Dr. Buchanan Hamilton wrote a very valuable account of Assam in 1807-14 with the help of the information collected by him from the Assamese refugees whom he met in Goalpara and Rungpore in Bengal.

Assam passed into the hands of the East India Company in 1826 by the Treaty of Yandabo. There is a large mass of historical materials in the despatches of Assam's first Commissioner David Scott; besides, he compiled a history of Assam based on the Buranjis; and his report on slavery in Assam is a piece of genuine historical contribution. In 1831-32, Captain Francis Jenkins and Captain Richard Boileau Pemberton toured in Assam, Khasi Hills and Manipur, and collected information about the resources and products of these terri-

ories. A microfilm copy of their report has recently been obtained by Gauhati University through the courtesy of the authorities of the India Office Library. Jenkins visited Upper Assam in 1838 in his capacity as Commissioner, and he met the tributary ruler Raja Purandar Singha and the faineant members of the Ahom royal family ; he also made a thorough survey of the economic condition of the villagers. The diary of this tour, a transcript of which is in the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, will be useful to all who are interested in the study of the condition of the province immediately after its occupation by the British. At the instance of Jenkins, an account of Assam was compiled in 1841 by William Robinson. A number of writers contributed articles on different aspects of Assam in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal and other oriental journals. Henry Blochmann contributed to the J.A.S.B. of 1872 a paper on Assam and Cooch Behar giving a summary of the relevant portions of the *Akbar-namah*, *Padishahnamah*, and *Fathiyah-i-Ibriyah*. A. F. Rudolf Hoernle published in the same journal scientific descriptions of the copperplate grants of several kings of ancient Kamarupa. One going through the old issues of the J.A.S.B. will be struck by the variety and richness of the information about Assam embodied in the articles contributed to it.

But the first organised effort to institute an enquiry into the history of Assam was made in the year 1894. The measure was first taken up during the Chief Commissionership of Sir William Ward, and pushed forward by his successor Sir Charles James Lyall. The prime mover in this matter was Mr. (afterwards Sir) Edward Gait, I.C.S. The Department of Ethnography was established in 1894, with Mr. Gait as its first Honorary

Director. He drew up a scheme for the collection of coins, inscriptions, historical documents, quasi-historical writings, religious works and traditions; and District Officers and Heads of Departments were requested to furnish all possible assistance. As a result of the operations undertaken in pursuance of this plan, the Government of Assam collected during the following years a large quantity of materials for historical investigation. The results of this measure are embodied in Mr. Gait's *Report on the Progress of Historical Research in Assam*, published in 1897. He worked at the collected materials, and his monumental single-volume history of Assam which was first published in 1906. Mr. Gait left Assam in 1898. The impetus he gave to historical research in Assam will be enshrined for ever in the memory of the people. It may be added, that as Lieutenant-Governor of Bihar and Orissa he was chiefly instrumental in establishing a research society in that province.

Later on, the Ethnography Department began to busy itself with the compilation and publication of monographs on the tribes of Assam, and the volumes published hitherto have proved useful both for administrative and anthropological purpose. The following tribes are represented in the series,—

Mikirs, by E. Stack and Sir Charles James Lyall ;
Kacharis, by R. S. Endle ;

Khasis, by P. R. T. Gurdon ;

Garos, by A. Playfair ;

Naga Tribes of Manipur, and Meitheis, by T. C. Hodson ;

Ao Naga Tribes of Assam, by W. C. Smith ;

Lhota Nagas, 'Ao Nagas, and Rengma Nagas, by
J. P. Mills ;

Angami Nagas, and Sema Nagas, by J. H. Hutton ;
Lushei-Kuki Clans, by J. Shakespeare ;
Lakheras, by N. E. Parry ;
Thadow Kukis, by W. Shaw.

Dr. Verrier Elwin is continuing the same tradition by compiling several informative volumes about the tribes of the North-East Frontier Agency. Colonel Gurdon collected materials for compiling a volume on the Ahoms, and he proposed to work upon them after his retirement, but he could not do so on account of failing health. His *Note on the Ahoms*, contributed to Hastings's *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, and a few articles in journals however give some basic information on the subject.

The part played by the American Baptist Mission which first came to Assam in 1836 was a very notable one. It collected a number of old historical manuscripts three of which, viz., *Kamrupar Buranji*, *Purani Assam Buranji*, *Lakshmi Singhar Buranji*, were published serially in the pages of the Mission's monthly Assamese magazine *Arunoday*. The Mission also published a history of Assam compiled at the instance of Maharaja Purandar Singha by Radhanath Barbarua and Kasinath Tamuli Phukan.

The role of Bengali writers in unearthing the past history of Assam is significant. Rangalal Banerji made an attempt to identify certain tribes of the Puranas with those noticed in Dalton's *Ethnology of Bengal*. Pundit Ramkumar Vidyaratna published an account of Assam containing an economic and historical survey ; he also inserted a number of the texts of old inscriptions. Tarachand Chakravarti wrote a review of Haliram Dhekial Phukan's history of Assam in Bengali first published in 1829. Jogesh Chandra Datta compiled an account of

the old relics of Kamarupa with reproductions of the texts of several copperplate and rock inscriptions. M. N. Ghose published an account of the religious beliefs of the Assamese people, and Nagendra Nath Basu of the social history of Kamrup. Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Khan compiled in Bengali a history of Cooch Behar which throws ample light on the relations of that state with Assam. Mahamahopadhyaya Padmanath Bhattacharyya first brought to light the copperplate grant of Kumar Bhaskaravarman, king of Kamarupa, generally known as the Nidhanpur Copperplate. He collected and published with translation and editorial elucidation all the copperplate inscriptions of ancient Kamarupa under the title *Kamarupa Sasanavali*, and it has become an indispensable source-material for all who attempt to reconstruct the ancient history of Assam.

The Assamese people are renowned for their devoted passion for knowledge of their country's past. They developed the practice of recording all important events that happened in the country. The records were mainly compiled under official auspices, and they are known as Buranjis. They are invaluable for reconstructing the past history, not only of Assam, but also of other parts of India. The Buranjis contain accounts of Assam's relations with Mogul India, and the neighbouring states. We have Buranjis dealing with the rulers of Delhi. A very valuable account of Tripura was compiled in 1724 A.D. by two Assamese ambassadors who led the diplomatic missions to that state during the years 1710 and 1715.

It is therefore natural that the past history of Assam should be investigated into by Assamese scholars. The results of their labours have been published to some extent in book-form ; but, unfortunately, most of them

still lie buried in the pages of contemporary journals. An attempt has been made recently to compile a list of historical articles contributed by scholars to Assamese magazines and periodicals. Of Assamese historical scholars who are no longer in the land of the living, mention may be made of :

Haliram Dhekial Phukan,
Radhanath Barbarua and Kasinath Tamuli
Phukan,
Visweswar Vaidyadhipa,
Dutiram Hazarika,
Maniram Datta Barbhandar Barua,
Harakanta Barua Sadar-amin,
Indibar Barua,
Upendra Nath Barua,
Benudhar Rajkhowa,
Ananda Chandra Agarwala,
Rajani Kumar Padmapati,
Ratneswar Mahanta,
Sonaram Choudhury,
Hemchandra Goswami,
Lakshminath Bezbarua,
Padmanath Gohain-Barua,
Hiteswar Barbarua,
Sarat Chandra Goswami,
Banikanta Kakati,
Kanaklal Barua,
Kshetradhar Bargohain,
Kaliram Medhi,
Sarveswar Kataki,
Bhramar Chandra Saikia,
Rajani Kanta Bardoloi,
Golap Chandra Barua, and
Harinarayan Datta-Barua.

A full narrative of their works will be a valuable contribution to the study of the progress of historical investigation in Assam.

A considerable number of scholars have now interested themselves in historical investigations, and they have produced works which throw light on different aspects of Assam's history and culture. Mention may be made of the theses on Assam subjects which have won for their writers the Doctorate degrees of Universities,—

- Dr. Nagendra Nath Acharyya, Ph.D. (Lond.), the subject of his thesis being, *The History of Medieval Assam, 1228-1603.*
- Dr. A. C. Banerji, Ph.D. (Cal.). *The Eastern Frontier of British India.*
- Dr. Aswini Kumar Barkakati, Ph.D. (Lond.). *Local Self-Government in Assam.*
- Dr. Heramba Kanta Barpujari, Ph.D. (Lond.). *British Administration in Assam, 1826-1858.*
- Dr. Birinchi Kumar Barua, Ph.D. (Lond.). *A Cultural History of Assam.*
- Dr. Sudhindra Nath Bhattacharyya, Ph.D. (Cal.). *A History of Mughal North-East Frontier Policy.*
- Dr. Suryya Kumar Bhuyan, Ph.D. (Lond.). D.Lit. (Lond.). *Anglo-Assamese Relations, 1771-1826.*
- Dr. Bhupendra Narayan Choudhury, Ph.D. (Lond.). *British Rule in Assam, 1845-1858.*
- Dr. Pratap Chandra Choudhury, Ph.D. (Lond.). *The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*
- Dr. Hariprasanna Das, Ph.D. (Lond.). *Forests in Assam : A Study in Economic Geography.*

- Dr. Bhubanmohan Das, D.Phil. (Cal.). Somatic Variability among some population of South Goalpara, Assam.
- Dr. Prafulladatta Goswami, D.Phil. (Gau.). Folk-literature of Assam : Ballads and Marchen.
- Dr. Prabhas Chandra Goswami, Ph.D. (Lond.). Economic development of Assam.
- Dr. Banikanta Kakati, Ph.D. (Cal.). Assamese : Its Formation and Development.
- Dr. Rebati Mohan Lahiri, D.Phil. (Cal.). Annexation of Assam.
- Dr. Maheswar Neog, D.Phil. (Gau.) Sankaradeva and His Times.
- Dr. Jagadish Narayan Sarkar, D.Phil. (Cal.) Life of Nawab Mir Jumla.
- Dr. Satyendra Nath Sarma, D.Phil. (Gau.). Vaisnava Institutions of Assam.
- Dr. Upendra Nath Goswami, D.Phil. (Gau.). The Kamrupi Dialect of the Assamese Language.

There are other scholars who are working wholeheartedly in the field of historical research, and mention may be made of,—Shri Benudhar Sharma, Shri Rajmohan Nath, Shri Sarvananda Gohain Rajkumar, Shri Keshab Narayan Datta, Shri Padmeswar Gogoi, Shri Lila Gogoi, Shri Bhuban Chandra Handiqui, Shri Dimbeswar Neog, and Shri Premadhar Choudhury.

* Five other theses on Assam subjects have since been approved for the D. Phil. degree of Gauhati University, viz., Dr. Miss Lakshmi Devi's thesis entitled *Relations of the Ahom Government with the Tribal People of Assam*; Dr. H. V. Srinivasha Murty's *Sankaradeva and Ramanuja, a comparative study*; Dr. Padmeswar Gogoi's *History of the Tais and the Tai Kingdom in Assam*; Dr. Hamlet Bareh's *History and Origin of the Khasi People*; and Dr. Hari Chandra Bhattacharyya's *The Assamese Drama*.

There are several institutions now in Assam which are engaged in the promotion of historical research,—

The Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti, or the Assam Research Society, was established in 1912. Its collection of old historical relics, potteries and manuscripts, formed the nucleus of the Assam State Museum. The Museum has since been replenished by fresh collections, and it has become a popular resort for scholars, students and the general public. The Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti also publishes a journal which has been appreciated in learned circles in India.

The Assam Sahitya Sabha, with its headquarters at Jorhat, has collected a large number of manuscripts and books on Assam, and has published several old Assamese classics. Its annual conferences are scenes of great enthusiasm, and a historical section is also held in each annual session. The Sabha has recently published a collection of the presidential addresses in two volumes, and it also proposes to bring out the presidential speeches of the history section as well.

The Assam Government Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, established in 1928, has collected a large number of manuscripts, transcripts and rare books on Assam, and has published several old chronicles, and also constructive historical compilations.

The University of Gauhati has also taken all possible steps to promote historical studies about Assam, and a number of scholars are engaged in research under its auspices. A systematic attempt is being made for the collection of old manuscripts, and old ballads ; folksongs and folktales. The Publication Bureau of the University is arranging to publish old classics and historical compilations.

Historical societies and museums have also been

started in several parts of Assam. There appears to be a great deal of enthusiasm in Assam at present for exploring into its past history both through institutional and individual efforts.

Facilities for research are available in the institutions named above. The records of the Government of Assam deposited at the Secretariat Record Room at Shillong contain valuable documents about the British period of Assam history. The Central State Library situated at the same place contains the early volumes of the J.A.S.B. and other oriental journals where valuable information can be obtained from the articles and notices published in them.

For researches into the past history of Assam, scholars are induced to go to London where in the India Office Library they can consult the old records and all published books and reports on Assam. A number of scholars from Assam have worked for their doctoral theses at the India Office Library, as students of the School of Oriental and African Studies, under the encouraging guidance of eminent historians like Professor C. H. Philips, Prof. D. G. E. Hall, Dr. A. L. Basham, Mr. K. de B. Codrington, Dr. K. A. Ballhatchet, and the late Professor H. H. Dodwell. They never failed to be moved by the traditional courtesy which has so distinguished the staff of the Library and of the School. The time has now come to build up in Assam a central research centre where scholars can work with the help of all-needed records and published works.

Lastly, brother historians, I invite you all to study the culture and heritage of Assam. There was a complaint about the paucity of books on the subject, but the complaint is no longer tenable at present as there is a growing mass of printed materials. You will see that

physically remote, Assam was not outside the cultural hegemony of Aryyavarta and Dakshinatya. Its inhabitants had been influenced by the great religious upheavals that swept over India. The Vaisnava movement in Assam conformed in basic principles to the upsurge in the rest of India, but on the social side it developed a form which established the equality of all human beings irrespective of their birth and origin. The mighty power of the Timurids found a set-back here in Assam as in Rajputana and Maharashtra. Assam enjoyed its independence when most other states in India had been brought under foreign yoke. It will be realised that Assam's civilisation is not a growth of the unilateral type; it had evolved out of the twin threads of Aryan and non-Aryan culture; and the rapprochement which has been effected in Assam will constitute an energising factor in India's civilisation.

Assam is now an integral part of India. Its situation on the easternmost frontier in immediate proximity to such independent foreign states as the Empire of China, the country of Burma, the kingdom of Bhutan, and Eastern Pakistan, has endowed it with strategic importance to the whole of India. A thorough knowledge of Assam is therefore a matter of vital necessity to Indians in general and to the people of the province in particular.

I thank you again for giving me an opportunity to say a few words, and I am confident your visit to Assam will be followed by world-wide dissemination of the great and good things of our little known province.

December 1959.

MONUMENTAL UTTERANCES FROM ASSAM'S HISTORY AND LITERATURE

A number of monumental utterances, selected from the history and literature of Assam, are reproduced below, to indicate the height of thought and idealism to which the Assamese mind soared in days of yore :

1. *An Assam king's yearning for Buddhist teaching* :—The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsiang recording his impressions of Kamarupa or Assam said,—“The people have no faith in Buddha ; hence from the time when Buddha appeared in the world even down to the present time [about 642 A.D.] there never as yet has been built one *Sangharama* as a place for the priests to assemble. Such disciples as there are of a pure faith say their prayers (repeat the name of Buddha) secretly, and that is all”.—*Si-yu-ki*, Buddhist Records of the Western World, translated by S. Peal, Trubner, 1906, Volume II, p. 196.

In spite of this alleged non-prevalence of Buddhism, Kumar Bhaskaravarman, king of Kamarupa, evinced his solicitude for realising the converting power of Buddhism, and he thus wrote to Silabhadra, the head of the Nalanda monastery, requesting him to send the Chinese pilgrim to Kamarupa,—

“Your disciple like a common man had followed the way of worldly pleasure, and has not as yet learnt the converting power residing in the Law of Buddha. And now when I heard the name of the priest [Hiuen-Tsiang] belonging to the outside country, my body and soul were overjoyed, expecting the opening of the

germ of religion (within me). But you, Sir, have again refused to let him come here, as if you desired the world to be for ever plunged in the dark night of ignorance. Is this the way in which your Eminence hands down and transmits the bequeathed Law for the deliverance and salvation of all the world ? Having an invincible longing to think kindly of and show respect to the Master, I have sent a messenger with a written request. If he does not come, your disciple will then let the evil portion of himself prevail".—*The Life of Hiuen-Tsiang*, tr. by S. Peal, Trubner, 1886, pp. 170-71.

2. *An ideal society and an ideal state* :—Social and political Utopias have been the dream of poets and philosophers of all ages and climes. The following sentiments find expression in an old Assamese chronicle compiled by Atan Buragohain Rajmantri Dangaria, prime minister of Assam from 1662 to 1679 A.D.—

"The period of the Satyayuga was passed in amity and peace. Love was the order of the time. Men used to take food in the same dish like sons of the same mother ; and nobody entertained any jealousy or hatred towards any other person. During his [a descendant of Khunlung] rule the suffering of the people came to an end, they became happy as before. He governed his subjects as his own sons. There was no taxation in his time. He lived in the ways of righteousness according due punishment to every guilt, and reward and honour to virtue and merit".—*Bahgaria Buragohain's Buranji*, inserted in *Deodhai Assam Buranji*, edited by S. K. Bhuyan, pp. 88-89.

3. *Different customs and religions to be preserved* :—It has been recorded in an Assamese chronicle com-

piled in the seventeenth century A.D. that the first Muslim conqueror of India asked the high-priest of the vanquished Hindu Raja, as to the proper means of perpetuating the domination of the new conquerors. The following reply was given by the Hindu priest,—

“O, Padshah, what shall I say? You are yourself acquainted with all laws and traditions. God has created the nations of the earth in separate groups, each different from the other; and He has not provided uniform customs and religions for all. If the different castes and creeds are protected, God will protect you also, and you will be able to remain at Delhi without any trouble or fear”.

The Padshah then said,—“Thanks very much, Pundit, you have given me wholesome and salutary counsel.” The Padshah presented to the priest rewards and four thousand rupees, and made the following declaration,—“The laws and traditions which existed before will remain unaltered”.—S. K. Bhuyan, *Annals of the Delhi Badshahate*, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam, Gauhati, 1947, p. 74.

4. *Renunciation and austerities of an Assamese saint*: A Vaisnava devotee named Govinda Das, writing in 1700 A.D., thus describes the austerities of the reputed Assamese saint Gopal Deva, generally known as Bangshi-gopal Deva;—

“From that day the prosperity of Gopal knew no bounds. But he was not at all interested in his worldly belongings, because prosperity is regarded by a saint as a hindrance, and by a fool as a source of pleasure. But just see what Deva Gopal did when he was placed in the midst of such fortune and prosperity. He used to sit on a sheath of betelnut, never wore

a gay apparel, never tasted sweet things, and never glanced at women and gold. At night he used to sit inside a curtain four cubits square, and he averted his sleep by being engaged in the counting of the beads in his rosary. Such was Deva Gopal. There was never a saint like him, and there will be no one like him in future.”—*Santa-samprada* by Govinda Das, MS in the Library of the D.H.A.S.

5. *An Assamese princess admonishes vanquished nobles* :—Women in old Assam were not only powerful influences in domestic circles, but were also important factors in political matters. After the defeat of the Ahoms by King Naranarayan of Cooch Behar, it was proposed to send four sons of nobles as hostages. This was opposed by the wife of the Bargohain, one of the three principal ministers. She came to the court and said,—“Why should I allow my son to go to the down country? What sort of a king are you that you have been defeated in the war with Cooch Behar? The ministers are also mere nincompoops. Let me have your battle-dress and equipment. I shall fight with the Koches. You shall then know whether I am a man or a woman.”—*Deodhai Assam Buranji*, edited by S. K. Bhuyan, D.H.A.S., 1932 p. 44.

6. *Cooch Behar princesses feel for Assamese hostages* : The four hostages from Assam lived in Cooch Behar for some time, cut off from their nearest and dearest ones. The hapless condition of the youthful princes roused the pity and sympathy of the consorts of the Cooch Behar general Chilarai. It is thus recorded in an old Assamese chronicle,—

"The wives of Chilarai said to him,—O, husband, we ask you a boon.

Chilarai,—“Please ask, and it will be granted forthwith”.

Chilarai’s wives,—“Do you solemnly promise that you will grant us our prayer?”

Chilarai,—“Yes, I do solemnly affirm, I will grant it”.

Chilarai’s wives,—“You have brought here four princes of Swarga-Maharaja, king of Assam, and kept them here under confinement. their parents and their wives are passing their days in great agony and sorrow. The princes are in the prime of youth, and are well accomplished. So please allow them to return to their own country”.

Chilarai,—“But, how are we to send them back?”

Chilarai’s wives,—“In the dice game played with you, Sundar Gohain, one of the Ahom princes, has proved himself to be an expert player. Please relax a bit, and allow him to win”.

The Ahom hostages as prearranged easily won the bet on which they were allowed to return to Assam.—Assamese chronicle obtained from Bengena-ati Satra in Majuli inserted in *Satsari Assam Buranji*, edited by S. K. Bhuyan, Gauhati University, 1960, pp. 73-4.

7. *Righteousness should not be detached from power* :—On the eve of the invasion of Assam by Aurangzeb’s general Nawab Mir Jumla, his agents tried to demoralise the Assamese by describing him as an

invincible commander unmindful of the principles of right and wrong. To this the Assamese envoy replied,—

“In days of yore, Duryodhana and his supporters, by machinations and conspiracies, robbed Yudhisthira and his brothers and their wife Draupadi of sovereignty ; but, by the wheel of time, Yudhisthira became the Raja-Chakravartin or emperor of the world. Duryodhana’s misdeeds disappeared with him, without leaving any trace of fame or piety. So, lust should be avoided : favours are conferred by God alone. It has been said that Mir Jumla is a sturdy Nawab, and that he cannot distinguish right from wrong. A noble unheeding of right and wrong does not deserve any respect. He cannot be said to be a powerful man : he is unmanly”.—*Kamrupar Buranji*, edited by S. K. Bhuyan, D.H.A.S., 2nd edition, 1958, p. 57.

8. *Promises are to be fulfilled in all circumstances :* The Ahom outpost at Raha was established during the reign of King Jayadhwaj Singha, and Teleka Sandikoi, the father-in-law of the monarch, was appointed as its first warden. He was entrusted with the conducting of the political and commercial relations with Cachar and the tribal regions of the neighbourhood. Raha was then a wild and desolate tract. The king gave the officer assurances of protection and safety, and made ample provisions for the maintenance of himself and his entourage. The king summed up his assurances by a promise in the following words,—“If I erect walls of wood, they will become rotten in no time. If I erect walls of earth, they will give away as time advances. I have erected a wall of promises : it will remain intact as long as life subsists”.—*Deodhai Assam Buranji*, edited by S. K. Bhuyan, D.H.A.S. 1932, pp. 120-21.

The laws of nature may be disturbed, but the sanctity of a promise should never be violated. This sentiment found expression when the Raja of Cachar entered into a covenant to accept King Rudra Singha, 1696-1714, as his paramount sovereign. The Raja said,—"The pumpkin will go down the water, the stone will float on the surface, the crow will become white, and the heron will become black, and the Brahmaputra will flow up-stream, even then my promises will not be abandoned".—*Deodhai Assam Buranji*, edited by S. K. Bhuyan, D.H.A.S., 1932, p. 129.

A similar sentiment was expressed by Raja Lakshmi Singha of Jayantia in his letter to Assam's premier Atan Buragohain Rajmantri Dangaria, written in November 1678 A. D.,—"We have entered into a solemn agreement that our mutual relations of friendship will not witness any diminution even if the sun rises in the west, the Brahmaputra flows eastward, the crow becomes white and the heron turns black in hue".—*Atan Buragohain and His Times*, by S. K. Bhuyan, Gauhati, 1957, p. 337.

9. *A religious country should not be disturbed* : During the invasion of Assam by the Rajput general Raja Ram Singha of Amber, he received a message from his mother and his chief consort asking him to desist from war with Assam which was a religious country and where Vaisnavas and Brahmans were living in peace and happiness. The message ran as following,—

"Never think that the subjugation of the eastern kingdom [Assam] will add to our longevity and prosperity. We have heard that there is universal *Nama-kirtan* [religious music and recital] in that country, and that cows, Brahmans and Vaisnavas are

living there in peace and happiness. You know the consequences of bringing them under sway. By invading that country, Oh, how long could Majum Khan [Mir Jumla] thrive ? He could not even return to his old place. It is advisable therefore that you should come back. So take heed, and do as you think proper". This passage is found in several old Assamese chronicles, and is reproduced in S. K. Bhuyan's *Lachit Bar-phukan and His Times*, D.H.A.S., 1947, p. 117.

Alexander the Great was influenced by a similar sentiment when, in the destruction of Thebes, he ordered the house of the great Greek poet Pindar to be spared.

10. *A Sudra is superior to a Brahman* : Sudras occupy a comparatively low status in the Hindu caste system. But, if they are true devotees of God they become superior to Brahmans. This idea finds an eloquent expression in the history of the Assamese Vaisnava saints written in 1700 A.D. by Govinda Das,—

"One who disregards Sankardeva because he is a Sudra will be doomed to perdition. Sisupal abused Srikrishna in the presence of the courtiers as the son of a cowherd ; and this led to Sisupal's deprivation of prosperity and life. He who strikes against a piece of stone gets pain himself ; similarly the disparager of saints goes to hell. You may ask, why does God assume a transient physical form ? Then, please listen. Brahma is indivisible, and he sometimes takes his birth as a boar. Does he not thereby retain his godhead ? In the Kaliyuga the three other castes could not display devotion to God, and they became subjected to the rituals enjoined in the Vedas. The Sudras became receptacles of godly devotion. Thus it has been said in the twelfth

canto of the Bhagavata. So, having taken his birth in the Sudra caste Sankardeva became a preacher and propagated the divine faith. Godly devotion does not discriminate between one caste and another. If a man is endowed with faith he becomes superior to a Brahman. In the seventh canto, Prahlada said to Nrisingha,—“A man of low birth is fit to become a preceptor if he is endowed with piety and faith”.—*Santa-samprada* by Govinda Das. MS in the D.H.A.S. Library, Gauhati.

Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva gave expression to a similar sentiment of equality when he said,—“He alone is an all-knowing Pundit who does not make any distinction between a Brahman and a Chandala ; looks upon a giver of gifts and a thief with the same reverence ; and pays the same respect to the lowly as well as to the saintly”.—Sankardeva's *Kirtan-ghosha*, Srikrishnar Vaikunthaprayan, Stanza 38.

June 1949.

DRAMATIC INCIDENTS FROM ASSAM HISTORY

A number of dramatic incidents from Assam History are mentioned below. They can be presented in the form of a tableaux, or a procession of scenes.—

(1) Prince Meghavahan of Kashmir attends the Swayamvara ceremony of Princess Amritaprabha of Kamarupa. She places the garland round the neck of the Kashmir prince thereby selecting him as her husband. C. 80 A.D.

(2) King Bhaskaravarman of Kamrupa receives the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang, and asks him about China, and specially about Chinese songs. Hiuen-Tsang praises the learning of the Kamarupa monarch and the Pundits of the court. 645 A.D.

(3) King Naranarayan of Cooch Behar asks saints, scholars and poets to translate Sanskrit classics into Assamese for the enlightenment of Sudras and women, and later on, of the Brahmans as well. C. 1550 A.D.

(4) Princess Nangbakla, literally, flower-maiden, snatches her son Chaopet who with three princes were being sent to Cooch Behar as hostages. She rebukes the king and his ministers, including her husband for their disgraceful discomfiture at the hands of the Koches. C. 1580 A.D.

(5) King Jayadhwaj Singha's daughter Ramani Gabharu is made over to Nawab Mir Jumla in fulfil-

ment of the terms of the treaty between Assam and Mogul India. She was later married to Sultan Azamtara, third son of Emperor Aurangzeb, when her name was changed to Rahmat Banu. 1663 A.D.

(6) King Jayadhwaj Singha, prohibited to enter the abandoned capital Gargaon which had been in the occupation of the Moguls for ten months, peeps through its main entrance-door, and bewails the devastated condition of the city. November 1663.

(7) Lachit Barphukan and his commanders survey the array of Mogul soldiers near Gauhati led by their general Raja Ram Singha of Amber. The Barphukan expresses his feelings about the terrible menace to Assam. 1669 A.D.

(8) Lachit Barphukan beheads his own maternal uncle for the latter's failure to construct a strategic rampart by the appointed time. 1669 A.D.

(9) The nobles offer the kingly crown to Atan Buragohain Rajmantri Dangaria, but he declines to accept the offer, saying that he would prefer to serve the country as a minister, the crown being the prerogative of princes of royal blood. 1676 A.D.

(10) King Sudoipha Parvatia Raja's Barkuanri or chief consort, who was the daughter of the prime minister Atan Buragohain, receives the prostration of her father, with a raised tray before her containing the manuscript of Mahapurush Madhavdeva's *Ratnavali*, and thereby eases her filial conscience and satisfies her royal husband. 1677 A.D.

(11) Princess Jaimati is pressed by the emissaries of Laluk Buraphukan to disclose the movements of her fugitive husband Gadapani. The prince visits his tortured wife standing among the crowd of spectators. His hint that she should communicate her husband's whereabouts meets with a rebuff from his determined consort. 1679 A.D.

(12) A Naga chieftain presents two princesses to King Gadadhar Singha as a token of friendship and solicitude for protection. 1685 A.D.

(13) At a durbar at Biswanath, King Rudra Singha places his eldest son Siva Singha on the right knee and the Cachar Raja Tamradhwaj Narayan on the left knee, and assures the latter of friendship and protection. 1706 A.D.

(14) Maharaja Jai Singha Karta-Maharaj of Manipur offers his daughter Kuranganayani to the Ahom monarch Rajeswar Singha, and requests the latter to help him with arms and men to oust the Burmese usurpers from Manipur. 1765 A.D.

(15) Ex-queen Kamaleswari Devi, widow of King Gaurinath Singha, meets Lord Wellesley, Governor-General of India, and implores him to give her military aid to enable her to restore peace and good government in Assam. 1806 A.D.

(16) Badan Chandra Barphukan, the Ahom viceroy of Gauhati, appears before King Bodawpaya of Burma, expatiates on the sad plight of Assam, and solicits the grant of military assistance with which he would restore tranquillity and order in Assam. 1816 A.D.

September 1947.

AN ASIATIC SOCIETY OF ASSAM

Introduction.—Investigations into the history, literature and antiquities of Assam have hitherto been pursued by scholars mainly in their individual capacity, without much of the facilities placed at their disposal by a well-established and well-organised research institution. Their efforts have attained the success possible under the limitations of their circumstances. That further achievements would be possible with the stimulating help and encouragement of a research society established on a sound and solid basis will not be denied by anybody. Research work is always expensive, and the financial limitations of an individual investigator cannot create for him the facilities with which alone he can pursue his labours with fruitful results. The ultimate beneficiaries of all historical investigations are the society of which the individual scholar is only a constituent part. Hence the nation or society for which he works, whose past he unravels, reconstructs, and interprets, must place before him all facilities and advantages without which even the most indomitable worker cannot long carry on his pursuits with success. The contributions of past scholars should be readily available, co-workers and co-thinkers must be encouraged to interchange their ideas, the guidance and help of veteran scholars should be made accessible to willing and earnest novices for the direction of their researches; materials should be collected, and workers should be assured of the publication of the results of their investigations, and arrangements should be made for taking stock of historical contributions from time to time; in brief the

atmosphere must be made congenial and stimulative for genuine and steady investigations.

The words of Sir William Jones, uttered on January 15, 1794, on the eve of the establishment of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, may be repeated here with advantage : "In the fluctuating, imperfect and limited condition of life, such enquiries and investigations could only be made by the united efforts of many, who are not easily brought, without some pressing inducement of strong impulse, to converge in a common point."¹ The learned historian of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Raja Rajendralal Mitra, adds : "Sir William Jones's address was enthusiastically received, and a resolution was adopted to establish the Society under the name of the Asiatic Society of Bengal."² What the Asiatic Society of Bengal has done during its life of nearly one hundred and fifty years is evident to all who have taken the slightest interest in historical pursuits. The efforts of Charles Watkins Wynn and of his colleagues resulted in the establishment of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, on August 11, 1824, "for the investigation of subjects connected with and for the encouragement of science, literature and arts in relation to Asia."³ The above societies situated in the two greatest cities of the British Empire have been the

¹ Discourse on the institution of a Society for enquiring into the History civil and natural, the Antiquities, Arts, Sciences and Literature of Asia, by Sir William Jones. *Asiatic Researches*, i-ix.

² *Centenary Review of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Part I, 1784-1883, by Dr. Rajendralal Mitra D. L., p. 2.

³ Charter of Incorporation of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, granted by George IV, King of England, on August 11, 1824.

parents of other Asiatic Societies in India and elsewhere. The Bihar and Orissa Research Society, founded in 1914 by Sir Edward Gait, who had previously played such an important part in organising and advancing historical research in Assam, had rendered valuable services in unearthing the glories of the civilisation centering round the once renowned city of Pataliputra.

We would therefore propose that a central bureau of research, to be named the Asiatic Society of Assam, should be established at the earliest possible date. Other measures can wait, but the crumbling blocks of ancient masonry, the fading letters of old inscriptions, the fast disappearing legends of the country folks, the rapidly dwindling institutions of the primitive races will not brook any delay; and posterity will not be grateful to us if we suffer these relics, documents and customs to be transformed into 'fading histories', or be engulfed in the limbo of oblivion, by our hesitation to resuscitate them before the powerful hand of destruction effaces them from the earth, or beyond the reach of the most ardent enquirer.

On February 24, 1826, was signed the Treaty of Yandabo by which Assam passed into the hands of the British. Let this passage of a century, which has been attended by all the beneficent advantages of our association with the most cultured minds of the world, be signalised by the foundation of an Asiatic Society of Assam. Let some Britisher, inspired by the love of learning and the spirit of enquiry which characterise his race, do for Assam what Sir William Jones, Charles Watkins Wynn and Sir Edward Gait have done for Bengal, Great Britain and Bihar. His name and hallowed memory will be enshrined in the hearts of the future generations of Assam and his act deepen the

attachment of the Assamese for the British connection. Wherever Albion has planted its banner, light and culture have followed in the train. Let the Asiatic Society of Assam remain for ever a never-perishing example of the humanising influence of our western contact. We cannot conceive of the exact nature of the white man's burden if the infusion of the critical spirit, love for truth for its own sake, veneration of the past, and rigid and selfless worship of culture be eliminated from its category.

The cultural advancement of the people is one of the time-honoured obligations of the state. Tutankhamens and Nebuchadnezzars have come and gone, but Pericles, Marcus Aurelius, Alfred, Akbar, Asoka, Chandragupta, Vikramaditya, Harshavardhana and our own Naranarayan have received the unstinted gratitude of posterity for their patronage and inspiration of culture. An act of Providence has wedded the once glorious Kamarupa kingdom with the British; and it is in the fitness of things that the history and antiquities of that ancient country and of the lands fringing on its borders should be studied and investigated under the auspices of that benign connection.

Full and detailed knowledge of the institutions of a country is indispensable for its good government; for no political measure, however assiduously conceived and constructed will fall in the natural stage of evolution unless it is based on the corresponding indigenous system which is already in existence. The mentality of the people must be realised, their expectations thoroughly studied, and precedents under the old regime must be clearly sifted in order to eliminate the risk of committing catastrophic political blunders. The administration of a country in-

volves a series of experiments or rapprochements and compromises, and they are possible only by a carefully accumulated knowledge of the customs and traditions of the land. India is not governed in India alone ; the ultimate responsibilities for its administrations are shouldered by people six thousand miles away from the scene, who must be kept acquainted with the systems and institutions obtaining among the three hundred million souls constituting the population of this vast continent. This need has been realised by many, and we will quote here the words of Lord Crewe, a former Secretary of State for India : "The advancing steps of Indian government, aided as time goes on by the guiding hand, rather than by the all-sustaining arm of Britain, are a matter of concern to millions of Britons who will never see India. It is our duty, therefore, to admit into the recesses of an obscure and difficult enquiry all the light which can be thrown upon them by comparative study of past annals."⁴

What is true of India as a whole is also true of this easternmost province, which contains within its limits a heterogeneous population, representing numerous grades of civilisation and diversified traditions and customs. No political measure of a homogeneous character can ever be introduced without making elastic provisions for its modification in different areas. No revenue measure can be inaugurated which will be applicable to Goalpara and Sibsagar ; no law of inheritance can be formulated which will embrace the Khasis and the Tangkhul Nagas. The administrator in Assam must be a linguist, an anthropologist and a sociologist ;

⁴ Foreword to Prof. Radhakumud Mookerji's *Local Government in Ancient India*.

in brief, his equipments must verge on the side of omniscience. The words of Lord Ripon, Viceroy and Governor-General of India, may be quoted to emphasise once more the importance of historical knowledge for purposes of administration,—“To me as a public man, it is peculiarly interesting to see that the founders and the first members of the Asiatic Society of Bengal,—most of them administrators and judges or men with official duties,—approached the problem of Government from one of its most important sides, and sought to obtain a real and substantial comprehension of the feelings and genius of the people among whom their lot was to be cast.”⁵ The future Asiatic Society of Assam will diffuse knowledge of Assam among those who happen to seek it.

Objects.—Let us make an attempt to define the scope of the activities of the Asiatic Society of Assam admitting at the same time the difficulties in the way of limiting them down precisely. Provision should also be made for new fields of investigation, which may be brought to existence with the increase of years and the widening process of human experience. The words of Sir William Jones, the Founder-President of the A.S.B., may be useful in suggesting the aims and objects of the A.S.A.—“You will investigate whatever is rare in the stupendous fabric of nature; will correct the geography of Asia by new observations and discoveries; will trace the annals and even traditions of those nations, who, from time to time, have peopled or desolated it;

⁵ Lord Ripon's after-dinner speech in the Centenary Celebrations of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, held on January 15, 1884. See also Dr. J. H. Hutton's Presidential Address on Administration and Anthropology, delivered in the Anthropological Section at the 14th Indian Science Congress.

and will bring to light their various forms of Government, with their institutions, civil and religious; you will examine their improvements and methods in arithmetic and geometry, in trigonometry, mensuration, mechanics, optics, astronomy and general physics; their systems of morality, grammar, rhetoric and dialectic; their skill in chirurgery and medicine and their advancement, whatever it may be, in anatomy and chemistry. To this you will add researches into their agriculture, manufacture and trade; and whilst you enquire into their music, architecture, painting and poetry, you will not neglect those inferior arts, by which comforts and even elegances of social life are supplied or improved." The prophetic vision of the great orientalist saw the futility of such definition, which made him add: "If now it be asked, what are the intended objects of our enquiries within these spacious limits, we answer *Man* and *Nature*; whatever is performed by the one, or produced by the other."⁶

The object of the A.S.A. will be the stimulation, furtherance and encouragement of Kamarupalogical research. The words of the great founder of the A.S.B. may be adapted and re-iterated to suit our present purpose: "The bounds of the investigations of the Asiatic Society of Assam will be the geographical limits of the ancient Hindu kingdom of Kamarupa; and within these limits, its enquiries will be extended to whatever is performed by man or produced by nature."⁷ It will not exclude investigations into Indology or even Orien-

⁶ Sir William Jones's Discourse on the institution of a Society etc., *supra*.

⁷ Ancient Kamarupa included the Brahmaputra Valley, Bhutan, Rangpur and Cooch Behar; it roughly coincided with the now defunct province of Eastern Bengal and Assam.

tology, as far they can be pursued with the materials obtained within the geographical limits of the Society.

Library and Museum.—We shall try to reduce these all-embracing ideals to practical formulas. The A.S.A. will have a library which will stock—

- (1) All books relating to Assam in whatever languages they might have been written ;
- (2) All volumes of the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, the Indian Antiquary, the Epigraphica Indica and other similar antiquarian journals and reviews :
- (3) All volumes of literary magazines which contain articles dealing with some aspect of the history, manners and antiquities of Assam ;
- (4) All volumes of the periodicals published from Assam in the past and the present ; it is not generally known that articles of historical interest are scattered in the pages of vernacular periodicals, and the foreigner, uninitiated in the literature and languages of the province is handicapped in his investigations by his ignorance of these priceless sources and materials ; this can be removed only by an exhaustive bibliographical compilation ;^a
- (5) The original records or their copies in possession of private individuals and families, and Government archives ; the Punjab Government has instituted an elaborate arrangement for preserving facsimiles of all such historical records.

^a A Bibliography of Assam History, giving names of all books and articles, etc., in all languages, is under compilation by the present writer.

The museum section of the A.S.A. will receive and preserve,—

- (1) Inscriptions on brass, copper, stone and other substances ;
- (2) Ancient monuments, Muhammadan or Hindu, which can be removed from their original sites ;
- (3) Ancient coins and tokens of currency ;
- (4) Ancient manuscripts ;
- (5) Instruments of war peculiar to Assam ;
- (6) Articles of dress and ornament used by the various tribes and races of Assam ;
- (7) Instruments of music ;
- (8) The vessels used in religious ceremonies ;
- (9) Implements of native art and manufacture, etc. ;
- (10) Animals peculiar to Assam, dried or preserved ;
- (11) Skeletons of particular bones of animals peculiar to Assam ;
- (12) Birds peculiar to Assam, stuffed or preserved ;
- (13) Dried plants, fruits, etc.
- (14) Minerals or vegetable productions peculiar to Assamese pharmacy ;
- (15) Ores of metals ;
- (16) Native alloys of metals ;
- (17) Minerals of every description ;^o
- (18) Specimens of ancient costumes ;
- (19) Articles and belongings associated with historical persons ;

^o Items Nos. 1 to 17 have been adapted from the plan in forming a museum in 1814. The collections of the A.S.B. museum have now been made over to the Indian Museum, Calcutta.

- (20) Specimens of ancient painting, penmanship, etc. ;
- (21) Autograph writings of celebrated personages ;
- (22) Rare printed books, and newspaper cuttings of historical significance.

Publication.—The publication department of the A.S.A. will conduct a journal which will place before the public treatises and dissertations written by researchers in the latest methods of historical investigations. This department will also edit and translate old treatises on the lines of the *Bibliotheca Indica* published by the A.S.B. The journal will acquaint the public with the latest advancements in Kamarupalogy, point out possibilities of research in virgin and unexplored fields, and record the activities of the Society for the enlightenment of the public. Authorship in Assam is very seldom a profitable concern, less so in the case of antiquarian publications. Historical investigators will not shrink from compiling books and treatises if they are assured of their publication by a well-organised and well-financed institution like the A.S.A. At present there is generally an utter disregard of the recognised methods of historical investigations, specially on account of the practically universal ignorance of the critical methods of weighing and sifting evidence, and the sense of proportion in handling materials for deducing conclusions. There is noticeable a marked tendency towards impulse and patriotism than towards a dispassionate and disinterested endeavour in the depiction of historical events. The habit of recording facts without any citation of the sources of information has become practically universal. All this tends to make our historical research appear puerile in the light of the rigorous critical standard adopted in all advanced communities. Papers and

books published under the auspices of A.S.A. will set the correct standard which will ultimately regulate even other antiquarian efforts of scholars in their individual capacity. The final achievement of the A.S.A. will be the revelation of the past; but there is another aspect of the results which will have a more enduring and valuable significance, namely, the dissemination of the critical spirit, which is rightly characterised as western as it constitutes the greatest gift which the west has made to the east. Once this spirit is in, there is no Rubicon which it will not cross. This was the selfsame spirit which ushered in the humanities of the Renaissance in place of the dogma-ridden mediaeval stupor. In India it has penetrated through the thick masses of conventions and customs and eliminated the grain from the chaff. It embodies the frankincense and myrrh which the magis of the west laid at the feet of the newly incarnate child of the east. Man does not live by bread alone, and the wealth of a Pharaoh should be lavished on the attainment and diffusion of this spirit, on the proper assimilation of which alone lies India's salvation and redemption.

Programme of Research.—So early as September 1894, Mr. E. A. Gait (now Sir) submitted a note to the Government of Assam "in which the different sources from which information regarding the past history of Assam might be sought were classified, and detailed proposals were made regarding the manner in which action should be taken in order to render such information available."¹⁰ The sources were classified as follows :

¹⁰"Progress of Historical Research in the Province of Assam", by E. A. Gait, 1897, p. 1. The note referred to was published in the Proceedings of the A.S.B. for June, 1895, Vol. VI.

- (1) Information recorded at the time on coins, and inscriptions on temples and rocks, etc.
- (2) Historical documents drawn up at or about the period to which they relate.
- (3) Quasi-historical puthis or manuscripts written long after the events with which they deal.
- (4) Stray historical references in religious works.
- (5) Traditions unwritten but still current amongst the people.

It is significant that the great Hindu historian of Kashmir, Kalhana, writing in the eleventh century in his *Rajatarangini*, anticipated Sir Edward Gait's classification of the sources of historical information when he said : "By looking into the inscriptions recording the consecration of temples, by looking into the grants of land by former kings, by looking into laudatory inscriptions and manuscripts, is overcome the tedium of historical errors." It is needless to mention that the objects formulated by Kalhana and Sir Edward Gait should be brought within the purview of the research programme of the A.S.A. We will elaborate them keeping in view the special requirements of Assam :¹¹

- (1) Compilation of a Bibliography of 'Assam History.
- (2) Collection of Ancient Puthis and Manuscripts.
- (3) Collection of Manuscript Assam Buranjis or chronicles.
- (4) Examination of the East India Company's Records.
- (5) Examination of the Records deposited in

¹¹ A chapter has been devoted to each of the subjects enumerated here in the author's "Historical Research in Assam", now in MS., showing the work that has hitherto been done and that remains to be done in each.

Government Archives in Assam, and the adjoining Bengal Districts.

- (6) Collection of Ballads, Folk-songs, and Folk-lore, Traditions, etc.
- (7) Compilation of a Descriptive List of the Archaeological Remains of Assam, preferably with photographs.
- (8) Collection of other Historical Relics and Curios.
- (9) Anthropology of the various tribes and races living in Assam.
- (10) Collection of Ancient Copper-plates or their authoritative facsimiles and impressions.
- (11) Collection of Rock Inscriptions.
- (12) History of Towns and other Historical places ; topography and toponomy.
- (13) Accounts of Foreign Travellers.
- (14) Persian Accounts.
- (15) References to Assam in Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit Literature.
- (16) Paleolithic Implements.
- (17) Mineralogy.
- (18) Fauna and Flora of Assam.
- (19) Cannon and Warlike Implements.
- (20) Records relating to the History of the Tea Industry in Assam.
- (21) Activities of the various Christian Missions in Assam.

Members.—All persons who have “a love of knowledge, and a zeal for the promotion of it,” and have expressed a voluntary desire to become members should be admitted as such. Distinguished scholars and persons of high rank and eminence whose association with the Society will add to its weight and dignity

should be made its Honorary Members and Patrons. Members should be kept in constant touch with the activities of the institution, and this can be done by supplying them gratis the Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Assam. All classes of persons who have some love of culture, or are inclined to promote historical investigation may be regarded as potential members ; and if properly approached they will readily join an institution like the A.S.A. We shall enumerate the sections of this cultured group who will constitute the chief prop and backbone of the A.S.A., knowing full well that overlapping cannot be avoided in such divisions :

- (1) Gentlemen engaged in Government services, and other professions, trades, industries, etc.
- (2) Gentlemen who after passing the best years of their lives in Assam, have now retired in Assam, in England or other parts of India, will gladly become members to be in touch with the country they have served.
- (3) The educated sections of the public of Assam will join the A.S.A. and promote investigations into the past history of their own country.
- (4) Ladies and gentlemen associated with the various Christian Missions of Assam.
- (5) The European community associated with tea plantations and other enterprises.
- (6) Educated and cultured representatives of the primitive communities.
- (7) Other gentlemen, not in any way connected with Assam, but desirous of joining the Society for enlightenment and cultural sympathy.

Office-bearers.—The A.S.A. will have the usual quota of officer, paid and honorary, which should

include an Honorary President, one or more Honorary Vice-Presidents, an Honorary Secretary, one paid General Secretary, one Honorary Librarian, a paid Librarian, an Honorary Treasurer and a salaried Curator of the Museum Section. Honorary assistants will be necessary, but the actual administration of the Society by co-ordinating the activities of the different departments must be in the hands of a person who will have no other occupation. The pay of the General Secretary should be sufficiently attractive to enable the Society to obtain the services of a really efficient and capable organiser. The President, Vice-President or the Honorary Secretary should be relieved from the normal routine work of the Society, though they will be expected to supervise it, and help the General Secretary by suggesting new lines of action, fresh measures, and do all that is necessary for the promotion and furtherance of research. One of them, at least, should be a gentleman personally interested in research work, and equipped with a knowledge of up-to-date methods of historical investigation. The guidance and direction of such a person will be indispensable during the first few years of the Society's existence, if not throughout. Such men are not rare in the rank and file of the Indian Civil Servants serving in Assam; and one of them might be posted to the headquarters of the Society as Deputy Commissioner or in any other capacity. Positions should not be coveted by men who think they have neither the capacity nor the time to further the objects of the Society. Parochial and partisan spirit should not be permitted to dominate their selection. In the free republic of letters only the highest motives should inspire and guide our actions. We may quote here the noble words of Warren Hastings, Governor-General of India,

penned by him in declining the Presidentship of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, though he was an oriental scholar of no mean erudition : "From an early conviction of the utility of the institution, it was my anxious wish that I might be, by whatever means, instrumental in promoting the success of it, but not in the mode which you have proposed, which I fear would rather prove, if of any effect, an incumbrance on it. I have not the leisure requisite to discharge the functions of such a station ; nor, if I did possess it, would it be consistent with the pride, which every man may be allowed to avow in the pursuit or support of the objects of his personal credit ; to accept the first station in a department in which the superior talents of my immediate followers in it would shine with a lustre, from which mine must suffer much in the comparison, and to stand in so conspicuous a point of view the only ineffective member of a body, which is yet in its infancy, and composed of members with whose abilities I am, and have long been, in the habits of intimate communication, and know them to be all eminently qualified to fill their respective parts in it. On these grounds I request your permission to decline the offer which you have done me the honour to make to me, and to yield my pretension to the gentleman (Sir William Jones) whose genius planned the institution, and is most capable of conducting it to the attainment of the great and splendid purposes of its formation."¹²

Funds.—The Asiatic Society of Assam, in order to discharge its trust must have a steady and adequate supply of funds. Some money will be raised by subscription from members, and large amounts may be

¹² The Centenary Review of the A.S.B., Part I, p. 12.

occasionally available from members who will prefer to compound their subscriptions. But no guarantee of permanence can be obtained under these fluctuating incomes. The Asiatic Society of Bengal receives a recurring grant from the Government of Bengal, and till very recently the Assam Government made an annual contribution to its funds. The Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland receives an annual grant from the Government of India. The Government of Bengal pays a very large amount yearly to defray the expenses of research work in the Universities of Calcutta and Dacca. The Government of Assam will not, we are sure, lag behind in providing a recurring annual grant to the A.S.A. But the people whose history and culture it will investigate, and whose relics it will preserve, will have to contribute to its funds.

A solvent institution is not dependent on annual grants and uncertain private benefactions. The appearance of a hostile Dreadnought in the English waters, or the outbreak of a famine or epidemic in the Central Provinces, or the gentlest move of the Bolsheviks on the Frontiers, or delayed outburst of the monsoons, or the discovery of a rival substitute for tea will bring about a financial stringency in the province when all sources of expenditure under cultural heads will have to be curtailed or suspended, which will necessarily terminate the activities of all Asiatic Societies or reduce them to a moribund condition. Private generosities may be spent out in the purposes ear-marked by the donors.

To ensure the maintenance of the A.S.A. in a solvent condition an untouchable and inalienable Reserve Fund must be built up, to be invested in Government Securities, from the interest of which the recurring and normal

expenses of the Society will be defrayed. The interest fund if judiciously administered should enable the Society to execute any ambitious project which it may like to take up. A valuable library of old manuscripts or a collection of coins and other historical relics may be offered to the Society for sale ; it may also decide to undertake an expensive compilation or publication of a valuable treatise or old book. If the normal income of the Society is not sufficient to permit the execution of such an object an appeal might be made to the Government for a non-recurring ear-marked grant, or our captains of industry might be approached to come to the rescue of the Society.

In order to build up a Permanent Reserve Fund yielding a substantial regular income several sources may be tapped. The Government will no doubt make a substantial contribution. I am not pessimistic about private munificence. Assam has not got an extensive landed aristocracy, but the few Zemindars that we have may come forward with their resources to help an institution the primary objects of which is to prove that they are inheritors of a great renown. The spiritual leaders of the Assamese people, the Gosains and Satradhikars, may be approached to contribute to the funds. The Dolois of Jaintia and the Wahirdars of the Khasi Hills, as well as the wealthy land-holders of Kamrup may be invited to pour their mites into such a useful channel of national activity. The proprietors of the tea-concerns and others who have financially profited by the same may be requested to contribute a moiety to the funds of the Society. Merchants, traders, contractors and other businessmen belonging to all communities and races will, we believe, most ungrudgingly give a share of the profits made in the land for whose cultural

progress the Society will be working. But success in inspiring benevolence and charity can be attained not only by tact and personality, but by convincing the public of the earnestness and sincerity of purpose, and close identification of the workers of an institution with the aims and objects with which it was founded. If business principles are followed by the Society some considerable amount can be realised by the sale of its publications. The time-spirit of India and elsewhere has set a premium on historical publications, and there is no reason why those of the A.S.A. will not be welcomed in all circles of oriental culture. But before the Society has been firmly consolidated and a strong Reserve Fund built, it will have to be run mainly with the help of recurring Government grants and members' subscriptions.

The appeal which Sir Asutosh Mukherji made to the people of Bengal, to attract their liberal sympathy for strengthening the financial position of Calcutta University, may be repeated here in connection with the scheme of an Asiatic Society of Assam, which will be an indispensable adjunct of the future Assam University : "No people attained to real eminence as a Nation unless they maintained in a state of the highest efficiency and excellence their chief seat of learning, their most potent instrument for the discovery and dissemination of truth in all departments of human activity. Let the people of Bengal take this to heart ; let them realise that the work of the University as an institution for teaching and research, is carried on under extremely unfavourable circumstances. Our embarrassments, due chiefly to lack of funds, are almost overwhelming."¹³

¹³ Statement on the present condition of Post-Graduate

Elsewhere the same illustrious educationist said :
“The people of Bengal seem ignorant of the vast organisation for higher teaching and research which is in full operation in their University, and which it is their paramount duty to expand and support to the utmost of their ability.”¹⁴

Conclusion.—It is needless to say that in the above pages I have tried to give only a bare scheme of an Asiatic Society of Assam. There may be defects and shortcomings which will be evident in the light of practical experience. The details are not so material ; some will certainly require modification. But what we want to urge upon the attention of the public and the authorities is the fact that the establishment of a central organisation for research, supported by an allotted contribution from the provincial revenues has been long overdue.¹⁵ The intelligent and educated section of the people of Assam have a limited number of careers and occupations. The creation of a research atmosphere in the province will inaugurate new avenues of income. The bookselling trade will be brisker than before. Materials will be forthcoming for the production of creative literature, such as, drama and poetry. Rare books and autograph documents will be purchased by connoisseurs at fancy prices.

We may conclude by quoting the words of our own countryman, the late Mr. Anundoram Borooah :
“The whole field of national literature is entirely in our

studies in the University of Calcutta, by Sir Asutosh Mookerji, on October 8, 1920.

¹⁴ Statement by Sir Asutosh Mookerji, on August 23, 1919.

¹⁵ After the above lines were written the Government of Assam have established the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in June 1928.

hands and it is much to be regretted that our countrymen do not yet fully see that it is in our power to improve it to a great extent. The law of supply and demand applies as much to literature as to political economy, and school-masters cannot do better than fully impress the truth of this maxim on their students and make them appreciate and love their own history and literature. We must act up to it not simply for the literature, but for the vast amount of remunerative work that will be thrown into the hands of our educated class—some of whom are now struggling for life and subsistence. It is easy to criticize the actions of Government. But people do not see what amount of good they can collectively do.”¹⁶

¹⁶ *Bhavabhuti and His Place in Sanskrit Literature*, by Anundoram Borooah, 1878, p. 3, footnote.

This paper was read at the 15th Anniversary of the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti, held in March 1927. The Assam Government Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies was established in June 1928.

HISTORICAL RESEARCH IN ASSAM

I. THE AIMS OF A RESEARCH ORGANISATION

The work of an antiquarian institution like the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti is bound to be imperceptible and slow. A lot of spade-work has to be done, and a lot of correspondence has to be entered into before any historical article can be acquired for the museum or the library. There must be some one to give information regarding the existence of a historical relic, a cannon or a sword, a puthi or an image. The owner should be persuaded to part with it. Somebody must be sent to acquire and bring it to the Samiti, or the owner requested to send it. All this involves an unavoidable circumlocutory process. Besides, you have to fight with the sentiments of the owners, who are naturally unwilling to part with family heirlooms.

Another function of a representative antiquarian society is to educate public minds in the value of old historical articles. An image or a historical relic embedded on the earth has no importance to the ordinary passer-by. Some training coupled with sentiment is necessary to attach to it any importance, and to realise the part which it can play in the reconstruction of the past history of the land. To educate the public in the historical value of these relics is another function of an institution like Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti. For that purpose, pamphlets and literature widely broadcast should be continually streaming from the institution, and stock must be taken every now and then of all antiquarian work and activities.

To fulfil the great ends of a research organisation like the K.A.S. two things are necessary, men and money. A number of earnest and disinterested workers is the first desideratum. At the same time it must be admitted, that as we are circumstanced at present, it will be difficult to get wholtime workers. We deprive ourselves of what leisure we get, in the intervals of official or professional business, to carry on the work of the institution. Those who are not prepared to go to that extent can at least help us by taking a keen interest in the progress of the institution, by sending us clues or informations of any historical relic, and by becoming members.

An anomaly with research work is its huge expense, unaccompanied by any material profit. We will shudder if only we remember what untold wealth has been spent on the excavations at Luxor and Taxila. The great Victoria Memorial Hall, the consecration of the dream of Lord Curzon in white marble has in its spacious room and corridors only a few war trophies, autograph-letters, and cuttings and issues of old papers. You can never say that the men who have financed these expensive excavations, and the construction of the Victoria Memorial Hall do not understand the value of money. They have all been inspired by the ideal that in order to effect the conservation of the deeds and achievements of men on this earth, these expenses in historical investigations are necessary, and that there is "Neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth", in the great republic of historical learning.

If similar expenses had been made in historical investigations in Assam, the results would have been marvellous. Assam is a virgin field for research; and much of its past history, inspite of the labours of Jenkins, Robinson, Hannay, Gait and Gurdon, is still shrouded

in mystery. The purse of an Assamese Lord Carnarvon, and the tenacity of an Assamese Howard Charter should be available for excavating the ruins and temples in the vicinity of Sadiya, Tezpur, Rangpur and in the very town of Gauhati. Government has discharged to some extent its obligations for the prosecution of historical and archaeological research. The Archaeological Department has been established in the recent Imperial Budget, and some amount has been spent in the excavating operations near Tezpur, which have been attended with fruitful results. The fact of state obligation does not absolve our own countrymen from financing investigations into the past history of the land where they have taken their birth.

The prospect of a University for Assam is looming large in the eyes of all educated Assamese. But, what is a University without facilities for original historical investigations? What will be the advantage, if the would-be Assam University manufacture Graduates and Masters, who are thoroughly conversant with the history of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires, but who cannot utter a word about King Bhaskaravarman or Maharaja Naranarayan? The Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti, or whatever be its name in the near future, will be an indispensable adjunct of the future Assam University. The early foundation of the University in Assam depends upon what progress we make in this institution, what relics and manuscripts we can collect, what library of antiquarian and historical books we can build.

I see before my eyes, students of the future University of Assam aspiring after academic laurels poring over books, and manuscripts in the library of the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti, the epigraphist deciphering the illegible characters of the inscriptions, and the

numismatist with magnifying glass trying to read undiscovered annals in the coins preserved in the museum. The fulfilment of this dream depend upon the hearty and material co-operation of the children of the soil, of those placed by Providence to watch their well-being and advancement, and of those guided by love of knowledge for its own sake.

From the speech delivered as Honorary Secretary of the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti at its 14th Anniversary, held on the 11th September 1926.

II. PUBLICATION OF BURANJIS

The publication of the chronicles which we have already collected will alone keep us busy for years. The trend of narratives in old chronicles cannot be followed by uninitiated readers on account of the multiplicity of facts of a similar character, viz., wars, intrigues, and diplomatic negotiations, etc. Considerable difficulties also arise from the archaic character of the language, from the long strings of toponomous and patronymic appellations to indicate the identity of historical personages, generally aggravated by the mixing up of words and sentences, when there are no signs separating them. The reduction of the chaotic mass of materials full of unfamiliar names and expressions to a presentable form, without at the same time making any alteration in the text, is obviously a matter of delay, and requires long practice, discretion and judgment which can be attained only by close and intimate knowledge of the minutiae of Assam history.

The following processes are involved before a chronicle written on the folios of a *sanchipat* manuscript

can be placed on the desk of a reader as a finished ready-made machine product : transcription of the original ; comparison of the transcript with the original to guarantee accuracy ; grouping of the transcript into paragraphs and chapters with appropriate headings ; collation of the text in the event of there being two or more chronicles containing the same version, so that no important detail or expression having any philological interest may be left out from the final version ; correction of orthographical errors which reveal scribal idiosyncrasy rather than a system, rigidly avoiding any correction which will involve phonetic alteration ; preparation of a fresh copy for the press if the transcript has been subjected to heavy alterations and corrections ; numbering of the paragraphs ; correction of the galley proofs by comparison with the original manuscript so that inaccuracy in the transcript undetected in previous comparisons may have one more chance of being detected ; correction of the page-proofs once, twice and even thrice by comparison with the corrected galley proofs and with press-copies and originals where necessary ; compilation of the title-page, table of contents, preface, errata, etc., and their transcription and proof-reading. We are having a constant eye on the introduction of shorter methods as far as they are compatible with literary accuracy, and the approved traditions of scientific editing of ancient texts.

We have refrained for the present from annotating and commenting on the text which can be better accomplished when sufficient original sources of information have been published facilitating the indication of references.

The publication of the Assamese Buranjis, when completed, will place at the disposal of students of

history a large mass of materials throwing light on the foundation, growth and decline of Ahom power in Assam ; on the history and traditions of the Mongoloid tribes who constituted themselves into important political units such as the Kacharis, Jayantias, Chutias, Koches, Naras, etc., on the numerous principalities and frontier chieftains, who accepted the sovereignty of the Ahoms ; on the conflicts between Assam and the invading forces of the Mogul Emperors of Delhi. The Buranjis will also supply desultory glimpses into the history of pre-Ahom Assam which will indicate the broad lines of investigation into a comparatively unknown field of study. Events of the Court of Delhi were not excluded in the Assamese Buranjis, and in the class of chronicles known as Padshah-Buranjis we have very interesting episodes revealing the glamour and romance of the India of the days of the Muhammadan Sultans and Badshahs. The Buranjis have conserved the feelings, customs manners and institutions of the people of Assam, and couched as they are in a natural and racy prose style they constitute an unrivalled monument of national literature which few other peoples of India possess. To scholars working in a wider field of research, these Buranjis have a peculiar significance inasmuch as they reveal the processes by which the constructive forces of Aryan idealism permeated the institutions of the non-Aryan races of the North-East Frontier of India, as well as the reverse one of the primitive vigour of the Mongoloid tribes leaving their traces on the humanising and all-embracing tendencies of Aryan culture and civilization.

It is because we realise the extreme importance of these existing ancient historical treatises, commonly known as Buranjis, in the compilation of which the

nobles and literati of the Assam Court had to pore over voluminous masses of state-papers, documents and despatches, that we have undertaken their publication first, knowing at the same time that modern historical compilations on scientific lines will be possible only when the invaluable sources of information stored in the dilapidated pages of the Buranjis are fully utilised. The Department also contemplates to publish English translations of the Assamese chronicles when funds and opportunities permit. We have at present the English version of the *Tungkhungia Buranji* in the press.

From Bulletin 1 of the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam, dated February 22, 1932.

III. SOURCES OF ASSAM HISTORY

No place-name has been subject to such variation in meaning and etiology as the term by which we designate our province. But the consensus of opinion is in favour of interpreting Assam or 'Asam' as being equivalent to 'uneven' or 'peerless'. For uneven it is, undoubtedly, and its peerlessness has sprung from the unique possibilities emanating from the God-given combination of mountains and valleys. The vigour of our primitive tribes has served as a complement to the subtilty of the intellectual Aryans. The dwindling virility of the ease-loving plainsfolk has been reinforced by the elemental energy of the hillmen, whose muscles and sinews are at our eternal command whenever we project any enterprise of valour. The proper marshalling of these two elements of our population, and the rapprochement necessitated by their proximity and

contact have permeated the culture, civilization, religion and society of the people of our province.

The natural resources of our province, its numerous rivers and streams, its fisheries, its petroleum and coal mines, its lime quarries, its virgin forests, combined with the richness and variety of its soil, constitute an economic asset of the highest importance. These different factors available for building up the wealth of the province, if properly utilized and explored, will earn for it the epithet of the Rising Sun in the East, speaking in terms of the Indian continent ; and the old-time labels 'benighted', 'Cinderella', and 'Sleepy Hollow' will only accentuate the rapidness with which we shall climb the Everest of Glory.

Assam is a small province on the north-east frontier of India. It has an area of 67,334 sq. miles, and a population of 9,247,857. Mountains, valleys, and rivers constitute its superficies ; and someone appropriately suggested *Arva, Flumin, Montes*,—cultivated plains, rivers and mountains—as a motto for a coat-of-arms for the province. Its population include highly enlightened Aryan races as well as most primitive hillmen presenting the different grades of civilization through which mankind have passed' in order to reach their present culmination. Some of the hill tribes, each divided into numerous septs and phratries, are still pursuing their primordial customs and manners, while others have accepted the humanising process of modern civilization. Assam has within its borders speakers of no less than 120 languages, Austric, Tibeto-Chinese, Dravidian and Indo-European ; and each exercises a living vital force among the people to whom it belongs. To the student of anthropology no province will provide such varied data for investigation as Assam.

The valleys and river banks have been the home of Aryan settlers from ages past. The original Aryan stock has been strengthened from time to time by immigrants from the plains of Northern India. The neighbouring hill-tribes have been brought within the influence of Hindu civilization, accompanied by their preference for the softer valleys to their sturdy mountain passes. The gradual enervation of the Aryan settlers has been followed by the establishment of the supremacy of the non-Aryans, who asserted their might from within the province or by entering it from outside. The non-Aryan conquerors gradually came under the influence of the culture and civilization of the conquered races, necessitated the evolution of a religion and a code of customs which would accommodate the vigorous demands of the new entrants. Assam thus presents an instructive spectacle of the compromise between Aryan orthodoxy and the so-called heterodoxy of the tribesmen. Aryan and non-Aryan are the twin pulses of that whole grain of the civilization which we may name 'the civilization of Assam'.

To Indologists working in a wider field, Assam is a new mine for exploration. Apart from the fusion of the Aryan and non-Aryan elements, and their co-extensive, parallel or separate developments traceable in the social, religious and political institutions of the people, the ruins and remnants of its ancient architecture and iconography will help us to re-interpret those of other parts of India. The recorded materials of Assam will throw light on the history of ancient and medieval India. There sprang up here a new school of Smritis or laws arising from the peculiar conditions or usages of the province. Its astronomy and astrology evolved new principles which may supplement the knowledge

we have of those subjects. The Ahoms preserved and maintained a vast treasure of religious literature. Their earliest religious treatises are impregnated with Buddhistic leanings. The Buddhism of the Ahoms thus re-entered India through Northern Burma where their first germs were spread. It is interesting to study how far this imported Buddhism resembles the Buddhism of the original soil. The study of the Assamese sources and materials will enable us to write a new chapter in History, the contribution of Kamarupa towards the civilization of India.

A land of such fertility and wealth of natural resources could not but excite the cupidity of ambitious conquerors. The pages of its history record the ascendancy of one dynasty and its expulsion by another who had at their command fresh energy and valour. Ruins of ancient capitals and forts meet our eyes at rapid intervals, and the uninitiated spectator is bewildered at the amazing variety of their structure and contents. There are ruins without names while others are duly mentioned in recorded history.

The spade of domestic labourers, of the enterprising planters, and of the trained but casual excavators, have brought out many an inscribed copperplate, stoneslab and boulder from under the earth, or disclosed them to public view. They have enabled us to weave out a connected history of many dark periods and have thrown new lights on subjects already within the purview of our knowledge. There are, besides, inscribed pieces which have not yet dipped below the surface of the earth. The utilization of the already discovered inscriptions, and the institution of organized efforts to redeem others from their destined burial are inviting the attention of all investigators. What Henry Thomas

Colebrooke said more than a century ago deserves repetition here :

“In the scarcity of authentic materials, for the modern history of the Hindu race, importance is justly attached to all genuine monuments, and specially inscriptions on stone and metal, which are occasionally discovered through various accidents. If these be carefully preserved and diligently examined, and the facts ascertained from them judiciously employed towards elucidating the scattered information, which can yet be collected from the remains of Indian literature, a satisfactory progress may be finally made in investigating the history of the Hindus.”

Assam is a most inexhaustible mine of recorded materials. In addition to the inscriptions, we have in the country a large mass of documents and records as an off-shoot of the historical instincts of the Assamese people. The Ahom conquerors and settlers and their Assamese compatriots maintained a rigorous system of reducing everything to writing. Every event that happened within the land, and even outside it, was duly recorded, and was ultimately incorporated in the voluminous chronicles of the government which were known as Buranjis. They have conserved the language, customs, institutes, official and judicial procedures, social and religious usages, and the intricate details of the state machinery. One would be justified in saying,—‘Give me the Buranjis of Assam, and I will say what the people are’. The Buranjis are our strengthening tie to bind us with the past, and maintain the solidarity of the Assamese people, and protect us from any threatened erosion of our nationalism.

Long before the Library Movement was started

in any part of the world the Assamese adopted the system of having a considerable quantity of useful literature in every family. A cluster of manuscripts, whose number increased with the social position, religious or intellectual heights of the possessor concerned, formed the usual heirloom and heritage transferred by a paterfamilias to his successor. Every Assamese family of some distinction or antiquity had in its possession a small library of manuscripts. Even to-day, after centuries of political revolutions, fires, earthquakes and floods, almost every Assamese family has retained its ancient archive of manuscripts. The manuscripts did not lie mute with their sibylline leaves. The illiteracy of the possessor or of the householder was not an impediment to his knowledge of their contents. The family-priest, or the village pundit, or a literate neighbour of relative, was always at hand, and the manuscripts were frequently read and their contents explained to the audience of household members and their friends. Thus knowledge was driven into the minds of the audience, if not through their eyes, at least through their ears, both of which are equally effective mediums of transmission. Thus in Assam and among the Assamese we come across the peculiar phenomenon of illiterate literacy.

But the facilities of the printing press and the gradual curtailment of religious observances have led to the breaking up of the family store of manuscripts. In a few more decades old manuscripts in possession of Assamese families will be rare. Every family had anciently a repository of manuscripts and we have to collect them in a central place applying to this work all the technique and methodology which have been developed on the subject of scientific preservation of manuscripts.

Like British heirlooms drifting into the hands of American plutocrats we also receive occasional reports of Assamese manuscripts leaving the frontier of the province through the active mediation of enterprising visitors and sojourners from neighbouring lands. In this connection we may repeat the words of Mahamahopadhyaya Dr. Ganganath Jha :

"India is subject to such ravages of fire and water that each year we are losing in the shape of manuscripts, burnt or washed or crumbled away, an amount of treasure, which could not be replaced in the future even at the expenditure of millions of rupees ; and the callousness which the public displays towards this would be appalling anywhere else except in this unfortune country."

From Bulletin II of the D.H.A.S., dated February 23, 1934.

IV. DIFFICULTIES OF A RESEARCH WORKER IN ASSAM

To realize the importance of the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies and the reasons which led to its establishment one has to remember the fact that Assam has no University of its own. The educational destiny of our province is roped in with the University of Calcutta which is controlled by the Government of Bengal. Hence research activities in Assam have to be conducted by individual workers in the face of enormous difficulties, while in a University they receive all the necessary facilities from the permanent and stable organizations maintained for the purpose. Investigations into the past history of India or of a particular province form part of the normal

activities of a University. Higher academic degree, promotions and even continuance in an academic position cannot be expected without some intrinsic achievement in the field of original research. Fame and preferential treatment accompanied by material gain supply the necessary incentive for original work in all provinces blessed with Universities. In every centre of learning there is an atmosphere of scholarship, and frequent consultations between co-workers can be held thus avoiding unnecessary loss of time in going through the spade-work. Treatises compiled by scholars are published at the expense of the Universities in the usual course of business. Materials are collected under University auspices for which the individual worker may even expect some remuneration.

Plutarch, the prince of biographers, whose observations are 'even for modern times, an object of indestructible interest', had, so early as the first century A.D., realized the advantages of a big city for the purpose of historical investigation. Thus he writes in the life of Demosthenes :

"The first requisite to happiness is, that a man be born in a famous city.....As he (the writer of history) has materials to collect from a variety of books dispersed in different libraries, his first care should be to take up his residence in some populous town which has an ambition for literature. There he will meet with many curious and valuable books ; and the particulars that are wanting in writers, he may, upon inquiry, be supplied with by those who have laid them up in the faithful repository of memory. This will prevent his work from being defective in any material point."

But here in Assam the research worker is hampered by endless disadvantages. He works single-handed. Half his life is spent in doing the spade-work. The loan of books or records from distant libraries involves interminable correspondence. He collects his materials at his own expense ; prepares transcripts and digests at his own expense too. The reading public being generally unacquainted with the importance of serious treatises are indifferent to his toilsome compilations. Besides, his activities, however indefatigable they may be, do not form part of any institutional or departmental programme. Not infrequently he is subjected to misgivings for transcending the needs of his bread-earning avocation. He ruins himself financially, and as the major part of his labour is spent in providing a library and a workshop at his own home, or poring over work which can be performed by mechanical assistants, he is in a position to contribute but little to the advancement of learning. In advanced contries the equipment of a historical investigator is regarded as a national asset ; and the nation provides him facility and time to interpret and reconstruct its past. The public here being better regaled with the romancings, inventions and exaggerations of uncritical history-writers are not trained to appreciate the laborious and scientific reconstructions of academic workers.

The present writer and his comrades engaged in the wearisome and spendthrift business of original research have constantly realized the extreme difficulty of their situation. The University is not to come soon, and at times pessimism and even suspicion about their own wisdom constantly harass their minds. But the moral obligation that we few who have some pretence of education and enlightenment have to contribute our

mite to the cultural regeneration of our lands, has served as the silver lining behind the cloud, and saved us at times when less vigorous souls would have succumbed to the depressing gloom of the surrounding atmosphere.

From Bulletin II of the D.H.A.S., dated February 23, 1934.

V. THE IMPORTANCE OF PROVINCIAL HISTORY

Historical research presupposes the employment of a critical technique, and hence it is a matter for experts, who also foresee the importance of things long before their lay contemporaries can estimate their value. In a province where the first full-fledged College came with the advent of the Century, which has still no University of its own, and where the study of provincial history does not extend beyond the last two classes of the High School course, we do not expect that our work will attain the popularity we generally associate with Fleet Street feuilletonisms and Vaudeville gaieties. Our eyes are riveted on posterity whose gratefulness we shall share in proportion to the heritage we leave behind. As for our contemporaries the active support of 'a fit audience, though few', is all that we count upon. We are, however, trying to effect a compromise between technical appreciation and popular appeal. It does not require any prophetic prevision to declare that historical activities in Assam will attain during the course of another decade a legitimate place in our programme of cultural uplift and national regeneration, as well as a guaranteed position in our educational syllabus.

There is a feeling that the study of the history of a small province like Assam is not so valuable as that of bigger states and empires. This feeling, lamentable

though it be, accounts for the omission of provincial history in the Matriculation, Intermediate and B.A. Examinations. We do not like to minimize the importance of the histories of Rome, Greece, England, Modern Europe or of India as whole. They certainly contribute to the expansion of our mental outlook enabling us to see things in their proper perspective. But they do not form any organic part of the post-university life of the intelligentsia of Assam, neither are they constantly refreshed, recalled and revived in the experiences of our countrymen during their professional careers; hence their value is mainly limited to academic necessity. Character, wisdom and vigilance can be formed only by the application of what we have learnt in the College to surroundings in which we are placed in our struggle for existence. The officer or publicist who has a masterly knowledge of the economic condition of the Assamese ryots will be better able to deal with them with sympathy and understanding than one who has on the tips of his fingers the wage returns or the vital statistics of New York and Manchester, but is bereft of any knowledge of our farmers and cultivators. If he is thoroughly conversant with the past history of Assam, the peoples and places of the province will serve as constant reminders and reminiscent echoes of what he had learnt in the College.

The extreme necessity of a knowledge of local or provincial history has been most emphatically described by Mr. J. D. B. Gribble in the preface to his *History of the Deccan* :

"I was first struck with the necessity of a work of this kind by a conversation with the son of a Hyderabad Noblemen who had just finished his study in the Nizam's College. I asked him who was the first of the Bahmanee

Sultans of Gulburge, and he said that he did not know there had been any. He was equally ignorant of the fate of the last King of Golconda, although the remains of the old royal fortress are within an hour's drive of the city where he lived. In our Indian schools and colleges we teach the broad outlines of Indian History, but we pay very little attention to the details of the different provinces. Now it seems to me that it is as essential for a Deccan boy to know something of the early history of that part of the country in which he lives, as it is for him to know about Akbar, Aurangzebe, Clive or Warren Hastings. In the same way a Poonah boy should be thoroughly grounded in the history of the Mahrattas, and a Bangalore boy in that of Mysore. In the schools of Europe a boy goes through a detailed course of the history of his own country, and is only given a general outline of the history of other nations. In India, the reverse seems to be the case. A general system is laid down for the whole of India, which does not embrace local and provincial history. The present volume therefore is an attempt to make Deccan readers more familiar with the history of their own country."

Mr. K. P. Jayaswal in his speech delivered as President of the Seventh Indian Oriental Conference, held at Baroda in December 1933, emphasized the importance of provincial history when he said,—'Within the last few years the attention of Indian historians has been drawn towards composing text-books on individual provinces or dynasties. This scheme affords scope for intensive studies, and our nations become more definite.'

The publication of source-books is a pioneering work, and the spade-worker is doomed to supression and oblivion owing to the greater importance that is attached to constructive works. Hence some people

rush to reconstruct the past without sufficient evidentiary materials and data at their disposal, which amounts to putting the cart before the horse. The pioneer is a martyr to his cause, but the fortunate scientific historian cannot achieve anything of enduring value without the materials stacked and gathered by the pioneer's labours. The work of a historian is exposed to his limitations, including the four Idolas enunciated by Lord Bacon. The existence of a mass of contemporary records affords the only safeguard to prevent the operation of individual sympathies and affiliations, or what Lecky says, "The unfair distribution of lights and shades." For some years to come historical activities in Assam should be directed towards the unearthing of the valuable data, thus making it possible for the architect to erect the huge edifice of our past. Prof. Frederick J. Teggart has in his *Theory of History*, makes a clear exposition of the historian's work when he says,—“Historical work involves, first, the critical examination of the documentary sources of information, and second, history-writing or historiography.”

‘History makes man wise’, ‘History is philosophy taught by examples’, these are at best half-understood truisms; very few people realize the direction through which wisdom filters as a consequence of the study of history; or the manner in which war, bloodshed, dynastic overthrows and political convulsions can approach the ethereal heights of pure philosophy.

The message which the past history of Assam brings to the door of us moderns, will prevent the repetition of the blunders which we committed, the effects of which have permeated every artery of our present national life. History will enable us to form a proper notion of our weakness and strength, and their elimina-

tion, reinforcement and compromise will lead us onward in the path of progress. At intervals a nation should take stock of its achievements and failures ; and these intervals, a century or a millenium in the life of a nation, are like a day or a year in our individual existence. Rightly has Frederick Harrison observed,— ‘All our hopes of the future depend on a sound understanding of the past’.

From Bulletin II of the D.H.A.S., dated February 23, 1934.

VI. A PANORAMA OF ASSAM HISTORY

In bringing this speech to a conclusion I must frankly declare that our chief handicap is one of time. The normal duties of a teacher in the constituent colleges of Calcutta University leave him very little leisure for research and investigation. The routine work of our Department which has increased rapidly in recent years, caused by the necessity of securing a fair market for our publications in order to give some return for the money spent upon the Department by the Government, together with the task of rearing an infant institution by enlisting support in its behalf, and conferring upon it status and prestige in the hierarchy of orientological institutions, and the unavoidable worries and cares relating to all these endeavours, have taken our life-blood out. I would only say that a scrutiny of our office files and ledgers, where most of our labours are enshrined, and also entombed, will bring out the truth and pathos of my lamentation. With this enormous routine work to discharge where is the time for original contribution to which we feel tempted in view of the

large mass of materials at our disposal? My own cherished researches have been sacrificed at the altar of the exacting goddess of routine and red-tapism. As nobody else has done I would for myself, with all humility, draw the attention of those who are assembled here to this tragedy, which is inevitable in all cases where researchers have to play the role of routine workers as well.

But the sting of this jeremiad is mitigated by one consideration. Our sufferings have been lightened by the feeling that building up an institution and a system to perpetuate service to the country is of nobler potency than satisfying the cravings and aspirations of an individual. Those nations who have directed their efforts to the building up of systems have been able to maintain their solidarity longer than those who have counted for their progress upon the abortive and sporadic leadership of individuals, which is necessary sometimes provided their disappearance from the world does not drive their countrymen to sleep, or to a relapse into the status quo ante of inanition and inaction. The Assamese victory at Saraighat was mainly due to the personal leadership of the general Lachit Barphukan and the premier Atan Buragohain Rajamantri Dangaria, who suppressed the voice of rupture, brought the jarring elements into concord, punished delinquency, and encouraged valour and inventiveness. But when the cohesion for war purposes declined Assam became the hotbed of dissensions and jealousies, and the result was a protracted civil war followed by a foreign invasion. In the history of man's progress we see the mighty pageant of the clash of one system against another, one philosophy against another philosophy, and one culture against another culture, and the survival of those nations

who have superior systems, philosophies and cultures. Individuals are great in proportion to the greatness of the system which they represent and which they inspire. Alfred Nobel has rendered greater service to civilisation by the endowment of the Prizes than by the invention and manufacture of dynamite.

Let us revert to topics nearer home. Under the roof of this building will be conducted investigations into the history and antiquities of the province. In its spacious rooms solemn-looking professors and youthful enthusiasts will sit side by side poring over newly-discovered documents and records, or scanning the printed pages of a newly-acquired antiquarian volume or periodical. Assam will no longer remain that benighted Cinderella province, of which Horace Hayman Wilson wrote in the beginning of the Nineteenth Century,—“We know little more of the interior parts of Nepal and Assam than of the interior parts of China”. As a result of the investigations of the future workers under the auspices of the Department, the greatest names in Assam’s history and literature will be as familiar as the heroes of Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives*; the triumphs of Bhaskara varman and Harshadeva will be depicted in glowing colours like those of Julius Caesar and Alexander; Momai-Tamuli Barbarua and Atan Buragohain Rajmantri Dangaria will go down in history as Assam’s Solon and Pericles; Swargadeo Pratap Singha and Swargadeo Rudra Singha will have their parallels in Charlemagne and Frederick the Great; the pencil, the pen and the screen will vie with one another in portraying the patience and fortitude of Assam’s Griselda Princess Jaimati and the charms and intrigues of our Cleopatra Susuddhi Garama Kuanri; the history of Assamese Vaisnavism will excite the same interest as

the history of Protestantism in Europe ; the plans of the battles of Saraighat, Itakhuli and Mohgarh will be scrutinised with the same zeal as those of Blenheim, Trafalgar and Waterloo ; the writings of Sankardeva, Madhavdeva, Ram Saraswati and Kaviraj Chakravarti will be arrayed in the same shelf as the works of Shakespeare, Dante and Kalidas ; some Boccaccio will fuse the romances and folktales of Assam into a new *Decameron* ; the Bihu songs and lyrics will be as popular as the quatrains and qasidas of Omar Khayyam and Jalaluddin Rumi ; the democracy of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills will be studied in the perspective of its ancient counterparts in Athens and Sparta ; the prowess and statecraft of the great Bodo race will be compared to the valour, stamina and strategy of the Macedonians : a Lecky will come forward to write a History of Rationalism in Assam ; some Gibbon will devote his life's labours to the compilation of a History of the Decline and Fall of the Ahom kingdom ; there will be Assam Encyclopedias, Dictionaries of National Biographies, and International Libraries of Assamese Literature.

All these will enhance our prestige and glory in the estimation of the world ; and in our hearts there will be the pulsation of a new life throbbing with the consciousness that great we were and still great we can be. I utter this dream with the voice of the future as I "see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks".

With these few words I request His Excellency to perform the historic function of this morning, namely, the Opening Ceremony of the Narayani Handiqui Historical Institute.

From the speech delivered as Honorary Provincial Director of the D.H.A.S., at the Opening Ceremony of the Narayani Handiqui Historical Institute, performed by Sir Michael Keane, Governor of Assam, on April 4, 1936. Published in Bulletin III of the D.H.A.S., dated July 25, 1936.

APPENDIX A

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APPENDIX B

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON THE STUDIES INCORPORATED

Almost all the articles inserted in the present book *Studies in the History of Assam* have been published before. The details of publication, together with other relevant information, are given below :

1. ASSAM THROUGH THE AGES. Included in the souvenir volume published by the Reception Committee of the 63rd session of the Indian National Congress held at Gauhati in January 1958.
2. ASSAM : ITS HISTORICAL POSITION. Submitted to the States Reorganisation Commission at Gauhati on May 11, 1955. Published in Assam Tribune, Gauhati, May 10, 1955.
3. PRINCESS AMRITAPRABHA. An English version of the Assamese article inserted in the author's book *Buranjir Vani*. It was published in Assam Tribune of October 28, 1951; and in Lucknow Herald of October 30, 1951. Shri Rajeswar Prasad Narayan Singha, M.P., B.A., of Muzaffarpur, Bihar, has brought out a long narrative poem in Hindi based on the story; and Srimati Nirupama Hazarika a radio play in Assamese.
4. HILLS AND PLAINS PEOPLE. Summary of the speech delivered on November 5, 1947, in connection with the Hills and Plains people Relationship Week held at the Hydari Park, Shillong. Published in Assam Tribune of November 8, 1947; and by the Publicity Department of the Government of Assam, and in Hindusthan Standard, Calcutta, of November 15, 1947.
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APPENDIX C

OTHER PAPERS OF HISTORICAL INTEREST

A list of other articles and notes of historical interest, written by the author in English, and not included in the present book *Studies in the History of Assam*, or in the earlier publication *Studies in the Literature of Assam*, is given below. Most of them have been published as indicated against the respective items.

1. Ahom Rule in Assam. Originally compiled in 1910. Inserted in "The Work of the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti", edited by Chandra Nath Sarma, 1920.
2. A Letter leads to a Conquest. Pijou Gabharu's letter to her father Badan Chandra Barphukan, the Ahom viceroy of Gauhati, leading to the first invasion of Assam by the Burmese in March 1817. Published in *Statesman*, Calcutta, of December 5, 1924.
3. Introduction of Hindu Astronomy into Europe. The Times of Assam, Dibrugarh, of January 2, 1924; and the Cottonian, Gauhati, for March 1933.
4. Report on the old Assamese manuscripts in possession of the American Baptist Mission at Gauhati. Compiled in June 1925.
5. Settlement Operations in Pre-British Assam. Compiled in January 1926.
6. Ancient Cannon-Balls near Gauhati. The Times of Assam, March 20, 1926; Asam Banti, Tezpur, March 21, 1926; and Amrita Bazar Patrika, Calcutta, March 26, 1926. Inserted in the Report and Conspectus of the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti for 1925-26 and Part of 1927-28.
7. Dr. J. H. Hutton, anthropologist. Speech proposing him to the Chair at the 13th Anniversary of the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti, held on October 27, 1925. Inserted in the Report and Conspectus of the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti for 1925-26 and Part of 1927-28.

8. The Assamese. Published in Assam Review, Silchar, Part I in March 1928; and Part II in April 1928.
9. Some provincial facts you ought to know. Assam Review, Silchar, for May 1928.
10. Some Stray Notes on David Scott. Assam Review for May 1928.
11. Pundit Hemchandra Goswami, an obituary notice. The Times of Assam, of May 12, 1928.
12. Ancient Gauhati and its Surroundings. Editorial Notes in the Cotton College Magazine for February 1929.
13. Introduction to Shri Tarini Charan Bhattacharyya's edition and English translation of GHORA NIDAN, an Assamese treatise on horses. Dated December 9, 1931. Published by Assam Government in 1932.
14. Shivaji Maharaja from Assamese Sources. Inserted in Shivaji Nibandhayali, Part II, Siva-charitra Karyyalaya, Poona, 1930.
15. A Pre-ahom Rock Inscription near Gauhati. It records the invasion of Assam by Muhammad bin Bukhtiyar Khiliji. Written in January 1932 for Mr. C.E.A.W. Oldham, Honorary Secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society, London, at the request of Sir Laurie Hammond, Governor of Assam.
16. Opium in Assam. Paper submitted in July 1933 to Mr. J. A. Dawson, I.C.S., Chairman of the Assam Opium Enquiry Committee.
17. Sir Shafaat Ahmed Khan. Speech proposing him to the Chair at the first session of the Indian History Congress held at Poona in June 1935. Inserted in the Proceedings of the session.
18. Indian History Congress. An account of the first session held at Poona in June 1935. The Times of Assam, Dibrugarh, July 6, 1935; and, The Cottonian, Gauhati, February 1936.
19. Speech as President of the meeting where Dr. M. Islam Bora delivered his first series of Pratibha Memorial Lectures at the Cotton College Gauhati, on November 28, 1935, on The History of Assam as told by Muslim historians. The Times of Assam, December 21, 1935.

20. Assamese Historical Literature. Summary of the paper read at the fifth session of the All-India Oriental Conference held at Lahore in November 1928. Published in *Summaries of Papers*.
21. Dr. John Peter Wade, an early historian of the East India Company. Summary of the paper read at the annual session of the Indian Historical Records Commission held at Gwalior in December 1929. Printed in *Summaries of Papers*.
22. Lachit Barphukan. Summary of the paper read at the first session of the Indian History Congress held at Poona in June 1935. Published in the *Proceedings*.
23. Anglo-Assamese Relations. Abstract of the Ph.D. thesis submitted to the University of London on June 3, 1938.
24. Swargadeo Rudra Singha, king of Assam, 1696-1714. Summary of the paper read at the Calcutta session of the Indian History Congress held in December 1939. Published in the *Proceedings of the session*.
25. An Assamese Premier on War Provisions, being Atan Buragohain's advice on the subject. *The Cottonian* for March 1943.
26. The Baillie Brothers, including Hugh Baillie, the pioneer of E.I.C.'s commerce in Assam. Summary of a paper read at the Jaipur session of the Indian Historical Records Commission held in February 1948. Published in the *Summaries of Papers*.
27. Rai Bahadur Kanaklal Barua, an obituary notice. *Hindusthan Standard*, Calcutta, January 12, 1940.
28. General Editor's Preface to Dr. M. Islam Bora's English translation of *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi's*. Dated August 10, 1936.
29. Foreword to Professor K. A. Nilakanta Sastri's *Banikanta Kakati Memorial Lectures*, second series, 1956, published by Gauhati University. Dated 27th January 1959.
30. Foreword to the *Collection of Jikirs and Jaris*, edited by Shri Syed Abdul Malik, and published by Gauhati University, December 1958.
31. Foreword to Shri Rajatananda Dasgupta's "*Architectural Survey of Kamakhya*", July 1960.

32. Foreword to Harakanta Barua Sadar-amin's "Atma-jivani", or autobiography, edited by Shri Kumud Chandra Sarma Bardoloi, December 1960.
33. Assam, a Hundred Years Ago. Assam-Tribune, September 30, 1946.
34. Observations of David Scott on the Muga Industry of Assam. Assam Tribune, June 27, 1947.
35. Karatoya, Assam's western boundary. Assam Tribune, August 15, 1947.
36. Assam and the Royal Commission on Opium, 1892-94. Assam Tribune, August 15, 1949.
37. Ruins of a Pre-Ahom Hindu temple near the Bhutan Hills. Assam Tribune, November 17, 1951; Assam Review, Calcutta, December 1951.
38. Coronation Advice to Assam Kings. Assam Tribune, February 24, 1952.
39. Cultural Relations between Assam and Orissa. Assam Tribune, April 18, 1953; Eastern Times, Cuttack, April 15, 1953; Assam Review, Calcutta, June 1953, Amrita Bazar Patrika, Calcutta, April 17, 1953.
40. Note on Darrang-Raj-vamsavali Manuscript. Assam Tribune, April 28, 1954; Natun Asamiya, April 28, 1954; and Hindustan Times, New Delhi, May 9, 1954.
41. Old Canon at Nongktem Smit. Democratic Review, Shillong, June 26, 1954.
42. Assam-Dravida Relations. Note compiled for Shri N. Satyanarayan, M. P., Secretary, Telugu Bhasha Samiti, Madras, dated June 10, 1954.
43. A Note on the introduction of the subject "Culture and Civilisation of Assam" as a course of study and teaching for the M.A. Examination of Gauhati University, dated November 8, 1957.
44. Mission of Music. Written for the All-Assam Music Conference held at Nowgong in January 1962. Published in *Jhankar*.

COMPANION VOLUMES

Dr. S. K. Bhuyan's articles and essays on literary, historical and educational subjects, published in journals and periodicals, and broadcast from the All India Radio, or still unpublished, have been collected in book-form, and grouped in volumes, as follows :—

ENGLISH :

1. *Studies in the Literature of Assam*. Eleven essays written between 1928 and 1955. With a Foreword by Shri Sri Prakasa. Published by Lawyer's Book Stall, Gauhati, First edition in 1956, and second edition in 1962.
2. *Studies in the History of Assam*. Twenty-three essays and articles on different aspects of Assam history, written between 1926 and 1961. Published by Srimati Laksheswari Bhuyan, Company Bagan Road, Gauhati, in 1965.
3. *London Memories*. Seven essays in reminiscence depicting the author's experiences and impressions gained during his two years' stay in England, 1936-38. Ready for the Press.
4. *Recollections and Reflections*. Six narratives embodying the author's experience and philosophy of life, written in 1958-64. Ready for the Press.
5. *An Educational Miscellany*. Twenty-seven essays and speeches written between 1927 and 1963. Ready for the Press.
6. *An Assamese Miscellany*. A collection of one hundred and twenty literary, historical articles and notes, and abstracts and occasionals, written between 1918 and 1961. In preparation for the Press.

ASSAMESE :

1. *Buranjir Vani*. Sixteen essays on different aspects of Assam history, written between 1925 and 1950. Published by Pragjyotish Granthasala, first edition in 1951 ; and, second third, & fourth editions by Layers's Book Stall in 1955, 1956 and 1961 respectively.
2. *Kitapar Katha, or, A Book about Books*. A collection of thirty-two prefaces and reviews of books. Written between 1916 and 1961. In preparation for the Press.
3. *Asamiya Sahitya-samparkiya Prabandhavali*. Twenty-eight articles and notes on different aspects of Assamese literature, mostly of the modern period, written between 1908 and 1960. In preparation for the Press.
4. *Asam Buranjir Katha*. Twenty-five articles on different topics of Assam history, written between 1908 and 1950. In preparation for the Press.
5. *Bibidh Prabandha*. Thirty-eight miscellaneous articles and notes, mainly of literary and historical interest, written between 1908 and 1962. In preparation for the Press.

ADDITIONAL TITLES

ENGLISH :

7. *Annals of the Delhi Badshahate*. Translation of an Assamese chronicle of the seventeenth century. Originally published as a serial in the *Islamic Culture*, Hyderabad, Deccan, in 1928-29 and 1833-34. Published by the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam in 1947.
8. *Assam in the Eighteenth Century*. Being Dr. John Peter Wade's "Geographical Sketch of Assam", from the original manuscript in the India Office Library, London. Edited with Introduction and Notes. Published as a serial in the *Assam Review*, Silchar, in 1928-29. Ready for the Press.
9. *Assam-Khasi Relations*. The Khasi version was published in the "U Lurshai", Shillong, in July to September 1926. Being re-translated into English.

ASSAMESE :

6. *Añomar Din*. A treatise on the 'Ahom system of administration. First published as a serial in *Usha*, Tezpur, Volume IV, 1912-12. Published in book-form by Assam Publishing House, Jorhat, in 1918.
7. *Jonaki*. Life-sketches of eminent men. First edition published by Barkakati Company, Jorhat, in 1928; second edition, by the author at Gauhati in 1938; and the third edition, illustrated, by Lawyer's Book Stall, in 1955.
8. *Chaneki*. Sketches of some illustrious women. Published by Barkakati Company, Jorhat, in 1928.
9. *Asam-Jiyari*. Part I, survey of Assamese women of history; Part II, Life-sketch of Jaimati Kuanri, with an examination

of the sources of information. Published by Kamrupa Mahila Samiti, Gauhati, in 1935.

10. *Kowanr-vidroh*. Episodical history of the revolt of princes during the reign of King Lakshmi Singha, 1769-80. First edition published in 1948 by Ramdhenu Prakash Bhavan, second and third editions by Lawyer's Book Stall, in 1956 and 1962.
11. *Swargadeo Rajeswar Singha*. King of Assam, 1751-69. An exhaustive history of his reign. First published as a serial in the *Banhi*, Gauhati, Volumes XV and XVI, 1925-26. Being published by the Publication Board, Assam, Gauhati. In the Press.
12. *Tripadi*. Three essays on aspects of Assamese literature, history and culture. Published by Lawyer's Book Stall in 1959.

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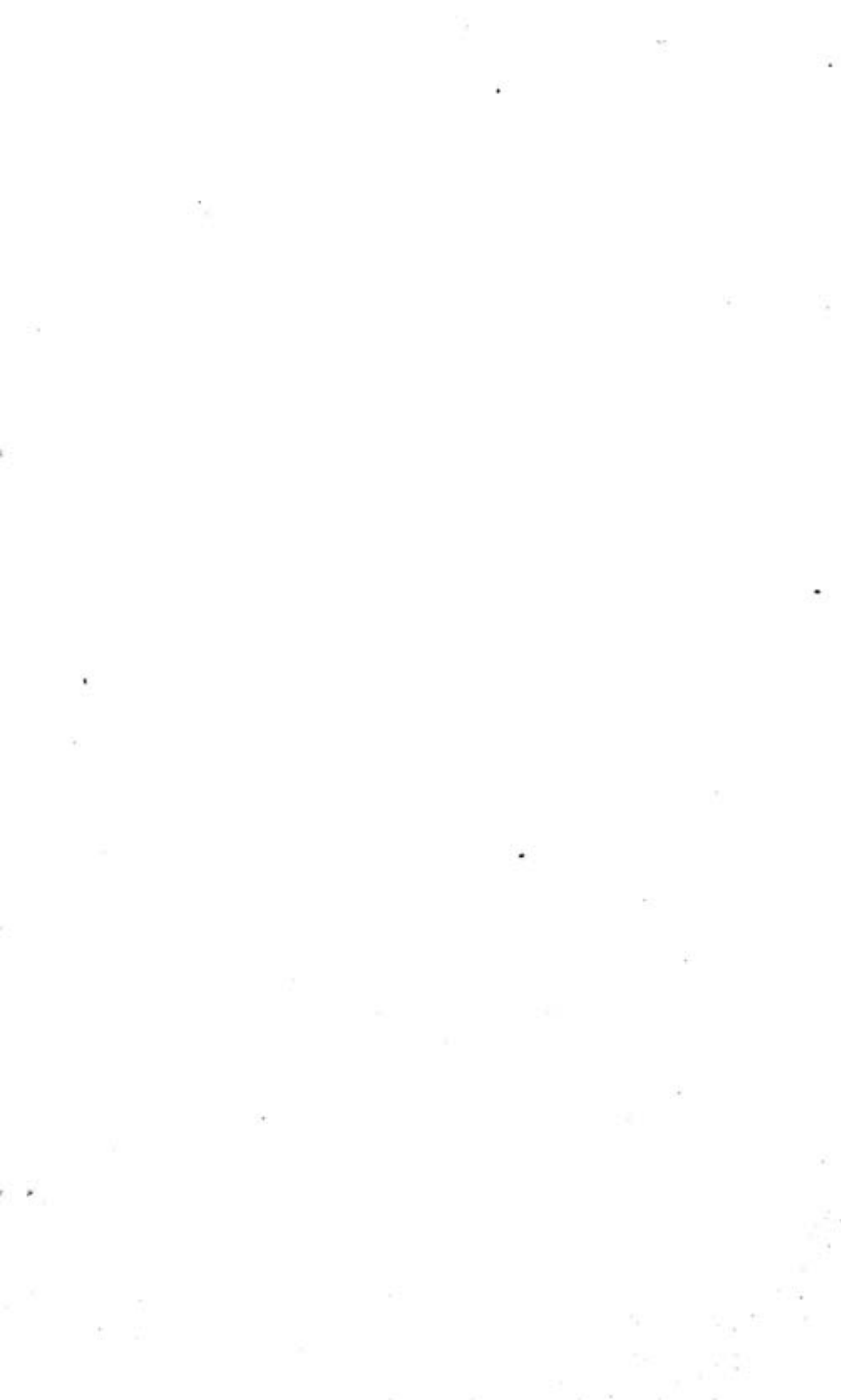
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