

Court Intrigues in the Ahom Court

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ABSTRACT : *Court Intrigues in the Ahom Court*

The Ahoms belong to the Shan branch of mighty Tai or Thais of the South-East Asia. They entered into north eastern part of India, Assam in the first Quarter of the 13th Century in 1228 A.D. and ruled up to 1826 A.D. till the signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo between the British East India company and the Burmese kingdom and in according to the same passing of Assam from the Burmese Imperial authority to the British East India Company. The Ahoms ruled over Assam for about 600 years. In this period of their political authority, the Ahom court politics experienced conspiracies and intrigues which played an important part in the Ahom politics. These intrigues and conspiracies posed serious threats weakening the Ahom monarchy and in the later period specially in the early 19th century even led to the downfall of their political authority.

KEYWORDS: *Raja, , Buragohain, Barbaruah, Barphukon, Juboraj, Tungkhungia*

I. INRODUCTION

The Ahoms belong to the Shan branch of mighty Tai or Thais of the South-East Asia. They entered into Assam in the first Quarter of the 13th Century in 1228 A.D. and ruled up to 1826 A.D. till the signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo between the British East India company and the Burmese kingdom and in according to the same passing of Assam from the Burmese Imperial authority to the British East India Company.

II. OBJECTIVES:

The Ahoms achieved a remarkable success by ruling over Assam for about 600 years. In spite of this achievement court intrigues and conspiracies which is a common occurrence among almost all the ruling dynasties of the different states of the world often with significant consequences, even the Ahom state was not free from it. These intrigues or conspiracies played an important role in shaping the Ahom State policy and this paper aims at discussing some significant episodes of such cases.

III. METHODOLOGY & SOURCES:

To enquire in to the court intrigues of the Ahom court historical method is used by taking contemporary Ahom chronicles called Buranjis as primary sources. In secondary sources several books written by established writers on Ahom history were used. First of such intrigues or conspiracies as far as the History of Ahom rule is concerned have appeared to take place during the rule of Tyo-Khamti who married a Kamata princess as an outcome of a peace settlement between the Ahoms and the Kamata state. This marriage was the first recorded between an Ahom king and a Hindu princess. This queen exercised tremendous influence over the Ahom king so much so that her son Chao-Phulai was appointed the Charing Raja (Governor of Charing), who was usually the heir apparent. Taking Tyo-Khamti's absence as for her advantage in the capital as he was away in an expedition against the Chutias, this favourite queen of the king ordered the assassination of the younger queen on the false allegations of adultery. However she was spared by the ministers who were to carry out the orders as they came to know of her pregnancy and set her adrift on the river Brahmaputra. The elder queen began to cause numerous atrocities and acts of oppression. This irritated the nobles so much so that they ultimately caused Tyo-Khamti to be assassinated. This put the Ahom state into interregnum when the ministers ruled the state for about nine years. Suhungmung Dehingia raja has been regarded as one among the greatest Ahom kings. He can be credited as the real builder of the Ahom kingdom. Suhungmung met his death in 1539 A.D. as a result of a conspiracy hatched by his eldest son Suklenmung who was highly dissatisfied with his father's disgraceful act of marrying the daughter of a sonari(goldsmith) and making his chief queen. However, Edward gait has suggested that the realtions of the king with his son Chaopha suklenmung gradually became strained. Suklenmung had been very anxious to take for himself the three kachari princess captured at Dimapur and was mortally offended when his father asserted his right to them. Suhungmung was exasperated by his son coming on one occasssion into his presence without making the customary obience.

They quarreled again over a cock fight. In the month of Dinchit (Jaistha, i.e. Mid May to Mid June) the heavenly king had high words with his son Juboraj (Heir Apparent). Suklenmung had already been suspected of treachery during the war with the muhammadans. Both of them became openly hostile. The king suspecting treachery from Suklenmung summoned his mother. When the queen arrived the king made her to take an oath of fidelity in the name of gods by plunging her hand in to holy water. Suklenmung felt insulted and commissioned one kachari servant of the king named Ratiman to assassinate the king. The assassin stabbed the king while he was in his sleep. The assassin was caught and killed by the palace guard before he could make good his escape. Afterwards Suklenmung succeeded Suhungmung on the Ahom Throne.

Sukhampha ruled over the Ahom state from 1552 A.D. to 1603 A.D. He was also known as Khora Raja (Lame king). One important event of his reign was the rebellion of seven princes of blood against him. In lakni mungkeu (i.e., 1553 A.D.) the princes, Chao-Shupen, Chao Shamchu, Chao-Ngipam and Chao- U, And Lapet, son of Shenglung and Lashampeng,, son of Shenba rebelled against the king. They were caught but on the intercession of the Borgohain, were released without punishment. Later again they conspired after the clemency in 1559 A.D. but this time they were not spared by the king and were killed at the kings orders. In Lakni Kasheu (i.e. in 1559 A.D.) Seven Kuonrs (princes) with all other members again in their family rebelled against the king. Lashempeng, the son of Shenba and Lapet, the son of Shenlung also joined with them. They were put to death by the orders of the heavenly King. Moreover Sukkhampha married a number of wives, and there were number of scandals in the royal harem. Three of the men were beheaded on account of an intrigue in which one of the queens was concerned. In 1603 A.D. Sukhampha died after ruling over the country for 52 years.

Pratap Singha probably one of the greatest kings of the Ahoms died in 1642A.D. He had three sons Surampha, Sutyinpha and Sai. After Pratap Singha, Surampha ascended the throne. On this the youngest son Sai collected a number of troops and conspired and revolted against the new king however he was arrested and killed at the orders of the king. The heavenly king Surampha was a man of ordinary principles of morality. He committed various acts of oppression, and was disliked by the nobles. The nobles conspired against the king by taking his brother Sutyinpha into confidence. Surampha was deposed by the nobles, and removed him to a remote place in the hills. According to the buranji- 1 (Assam Buranji of Kasinath Tamuli Phukan and Radhanath Baruah) he was later poisoned and thus killed. He ruled the country for three years. Sutyinpha ascended the throne by deposing his brother Surampha. He was also known as Nariya raja or sick raja. He first put to death certain officials who were opposed to his coronation. Soon afterwards one of his wives, who was the sister of the Buragohain, persuaded him that the son of his chief queen was conspiring with her father Lako Borpatra. The chief queen, her father Lako Borpatra gohain and his family members were also killed at the king orders. The rank of the chief queen was conferred upon the women who had made the mischief. Her son was placed at the rank of Kukura Chowa Gohain who became oppressive to his subjects bringing unpopularity to his father's name. The nobles too started disliking as because of his ill health he started abstaining from the state business. On this in November 1648 A.D. he was deposed by the nobles. According to Kasinath Tamuli Phukan and Radhanath Baruah's Buranji, Golap Chandra Barua's Buranji the king fell ill and being neglected by all the ministers and family members he abdicated the throne in favour of Sutamla who became king by taking the hindu name Jayadhwaj Singha. However, Padmeswar Naobaishya Phukon's Buranji refers to the king Sutyinpha was poisoned by the nobles. Sutamla became the Ahom king in 1660A.D. he also faced several conspiracies during the early part of the reign which also included the princes Ring and Sheng as according to Golap Chandra Barua's Buranji they were opposed to his coronation. Huiphak Buragohain also conspired against him. However he along with his sons and other conspirators were put to death. Shutamla ruled till 1663A.D.

IV. PERIOD OF KING MAKERS AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY

The post Saraighat period from 1673 A.D. to 1681 A.D. is known as period of political instability in the Ahom period. This political instability started with the death of Udayaditya Singha (1671 A.D.-1673A.D.). The king became very unpopular because he came under the influence of a sanyasi name purnananda. According to the Buranjis the king's younger brother Deka Raja with Debera Hazarika conspired against the king and poisoned him to death. The Deka Raja ascended the throne by taking the Hindu name Ramdhvaj Singha and the Ahom name Suklenpha. Debera Hazarika was promoted to the rank of Barbarua, and his nephew Chengmung to the position of Borgohain. During this period, the Ahom nobles used their power and position for the fulfillment of their selfish ends emerged as king makers. In 1675 A.D., Ramdhvaj Singha fell seriously ill and thus came forward the question of succession. With the contenders coming forward specially Kalia Gohain, the nobles got divided in to two camps as supporters. Now Debara Barboruah suspicious of losing his power grip assassinated a large number of officers at the capital *and also poisoned the king Ramdhaj. Debera* thus created a reign of terror and eliminated all his opponents.

According to S.K.Bhunya, Debera placed a prince of Tungkhungia family who ruled for just 12 days whom he killed for unknown reasons. This ruler's name is omitted from the records as to his accession the concurrence of other nobles was a necessity. Debera then placed a new king Suhung Raja upon the throne. The new king could not tolerate the heinous acts of Debera and wanted to break free from his power grip. But he too was eliminated by Debera after a reign of 21 days. In the meantime Attan Buragohain (prime minister) and Laluksola Barphukan, governor of Gauhati who were busy erecting a rampart against the Mughals came to know of Debera's treacherous conspiracies at the capital. According to S. K. Bhunya after completing their duties at Gauhati Buragohain collected a strong force and marched against Debera. He was defeated and killed. The king Guber Raja made by Debera was also killed. The death of Debera Barbarua gave rise to the power of Attan Buragohain who was requested by the nobles to become king which he refused. He put Sujinpha on the throne but he retained the powers of the court bringing a dissection among the nobles in terms of premiere's followers and those of the king. So Attan eliminated the king. Next he put Khamcheo of the parbatiya clan to the Ahom throne, who took the Ahom name Sudapha. The Buragohain continued to be the de facto ruler of who made and unmade the officers according to his sweet will. On this Attan came into political conflict with Laluk Sola Barphukon the commander of Gauhati.

Laluk Sola too wanted to control the political authority in the Ahom state. Knowing his intentions the king and the Buragohain erected a fort at Chintamoni so as to stop a possible attack from Barphukon of Gauhati. However Laluk Sola who was in good terms with the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's third son Azamtara or Muhammad Azam the viceroy of Bengal asked for his help and surrendered Gauhati to them. With the help of the Mughals the Barphukan strengthened his reinforcements and marched against the king and the premiere. The king and the Buragohain were defeated and were put to death. Now Laluk Sola assumed all powers of the state and placed a minor from the Chamughoria royal family as the king. He took the Ahom name Sulikpha and because of his minor age was also known as Lora Raja (Boy King). He was a mere puppet in the hands of Barphukon. In fact Laluk Sola himself wanted to become king.

To eliminate his rivals he even introduced a new orientation to Ahom right of kingship by declaring that a prince with any physical deformity or even pock marked on the visible parts of the body could not become King. The Ahoms had a long line of princes from king Sukapha. Owing to the presence of this numerous body of princes, he, under the orders of the King, killed or mutilated a large number of princes of the royal family. Laluk Sola was mainly behind the prince Gadapani of the Tungkhungia Royal Family. He was wandering in disguise as a fugitive to save himself from the slaughter of Barphukon. Laluk also arrested his wife Jaymati and assassinated her committing atrocities in Jerenga Pather. However the nobles were agitated with the activities of Barphukan and came together to support the cause of Gadapani's succession to the throne. Accordingly Laluk Sola Barphukon was killed in 1680 A.D. Lara Raja or Sulikpha was banished to Namrup and was later put to death. Gadapani became king and took the Hindu name Gadadhar singha. Gadapani became the founder of a long line of Kings, who continued to rule till the close of the Ahom regime. During the initial period of reign Gadadhar singha, his primary internal policy was to suppress the intrigues and conspiracies to restore peace and order in the state, among others. In spite of this, tungkhungia buranji gives us an account of Bandar Barphukan the principal supporter of Gadadhar along with Pani Phukan conspired and rebelled against the king. On detection they were dismissed from the court and spared of their lives considering their past services. Gadadhar singha ruled till 1696 A.D.

Conspiracy and The Burmese Invasion: During the minister ships of Purnananda Burhagohain and Badan Chandra Barphukon, the commander of Gauhati, a tussle of power took place between these two powerful ministers which again created tensions in the Ahom state. Badan Chandra's political ambition to take control of political power of the state made the premier Purnananda to put a check in his activities and dismiss from his position. However he was later reinstated to the position of Barphukon because of matrimonial alliance between his daughter and the premier Burhagohain's son. Badan Chandra wanted some power and requested the king several times to utilize the revenue of his jurisdiction Gauhati. But the king at the intercession of the Burhagohain, rejected the proposal. Assam Buranjis suggest that the main cause of contention between the Purnananda and Badan Chandra was the question of Opium. The Buragohain was opposed to the cultivation and the use of opium as an intoxicant, while Badan Chandra wanted to use it as a support to his making wealth. In the mean time the relation between the king and the premier also got strained and the king entered in to a conspiracy with both Badan Chandra and Barpatra Gohain to seek British aid to eliminate the old premier. However the plot was discovered by the supporters of Buragohain and a force was sent to apprehend Badan Chandra. But after receiving the message of Buragohain's actions Badan fled to Bengal to seek British aid in vain.

He then opened negotiations with the agent of Burmese king at Calcutta and shifted to Burmese capital Amrapura. It was taken as an opportunity by the Burmese king Badawpaya to interfere in the Ahom state and extend his imperialistic policy in to Assam. Consequently in 1817 A.D. the first Burmese invasion took place. Ahoms were defeated and Badan Chandra allowed Chandrakanta singha to remain as king and himself became the mantra Phukan as defacto ruler of the state.

V. CONCLUSION

In the ultimate resort, it can be concluded from the above discussed cases of court intrigues and conspiracies that the pride, ambition and wrath among the Ahom princes, the nobles and ministers to take control of the political power were in search of opportunities leading to court intrigues and conspiracies. These events resulted in to war of succession among princes, put sons against fathers, ministers against the kings, dissections among nobles in relation to their allegiances to the kings creating political unrest in the state. Even the last such state of affair of Badan Chandra facilitated the Burmese invasion which ultimately culminated in to the down fall of the Ahom state and the passing of political authority of than Ahom state to the British East India Company in accordance to the treaty of Yandaboo of 1826 A.D.

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