

The Khel System of Administration in the Medieval Assam: an Analysis

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The Khel System of Administration in the Medieval Assam: an Analysis

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ABSTRACT: A peaceful and prosperous society and a stable government is depending upon a highly effective and efficient administration. The Ahoms of Assam ruled for a long duration of 600 years without any internal disturbance except the Moamoriya rebellion in the last part of Ahom rule. The Khel system of Ahom administration was one effective organization formed by the Ahom rulers, probably by the first Ahom king Sukapha. The system rooted deep with the passing of time and expansion of territory. It was formed in a very systematic manner from top to bottom. Khels enjoyed limited autonomy within their organization and maintained harmony among the people of various tribes. For a long period the khels formed the backbone of the administrative machinery of the state. It also reflected the unique place occupied by the common man of Assam in the state affairs.

KEYWORDS: Khel, Paik, administration, monarchy

INTRODUCTION:

The Ahoms of Assam ruled for a long span of six hundred years. Under the reign of the Ahom kings, numerous tribes of this region tied into one Assamese society with peace and harmony. The peace and harmony among the people under one administration system is also responsible for the development of the state. The stable administrative machinery which last for such a long duration demands good study on its features and the factors behind its successfulness. Ahom administration was monarchical where king became the head of executive, judiciary and military system. But there were some aristocratic elements too. A council of ministers engaged in guiding the king in all the important matters of administration. The councilors could even depose a king if the king misuse his power.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

This study is conducted on the basis of both primary and secondary data. Primary data are collected through archival records. Secondary data like books, journals, articles by noted writers and scholars have been analyzed through historical method.

DISCUSSIONS AND RESULTS:

Sukapha, the first Ahom king introduced a system of personal service under his rule. The Ahoms subjugated a large number of tribes and those tribal people served the Ahoms by supplying fuel, honey and other necessities. Gradually with the expansion of land they ruled, loads of administration also increased. To cop up with the situation the system of rendering personal service from the subjects were organized in a more systematic order; popularly known as ‘Khel’. The system constituted the foundation of a wide socio-political organization. The Khel system stands for good example of delicate balance of power in the Ahom administration.

Sukapha came to Assam along with 3000 paiks and placed them under Bargohain and Burhagohain. Probably he was the person who introduced the system of paik. Every adult man between the age of 16 to 50 was registered as ‘paik’ and engaged in the state service. “The paiks were initially organized by the Barbaruah into a ‘got’ of three paiks later revised to four. Every unit of four supplied the state with one man (called mul) as permanent militia. If necessary for public service, two (dewal) and in grave emergencies, either of war or public works, even three men (tewal) would be requisitioned.”(Barpujari, 2007).

According to their service, paiks were grouped and organized in specific ‘Khel’s. The Khels were official guilds organized on the basis of occupational or territorial line. The Khel and the paiks formed the backbone of the economic machinery and military service of the state. Every paik of the khel earned two puras of rupit land without paying any revenue. “Further he got land without any limit as to extent and free of direct taxation for his house and garden (barimati) and paid a poll-tax or house tax of one rupee except in Darrang”(Barpujari,2007).

Under the system of Khel, paiks were devided into two categories, ‘Kanri paiks’ or archar paiks, most important among the paiks and formed the strength of the system. In the time of peace they served for public utility, whereas during the time of war fought in the battlefield as ferocious soldiers. Another class was ‘Chamua paik’; they held a comparatively higher social status than the ‘Kanri paiks’. Chamua paiks held offices and those who were employed as goldsmith and artisans were comes under ‘Chamua paik’. Chamua paiks were placed under a Chamua Phukan and a Chamua Boruah.

The Khels were generally named after the respective work allotted to them or by the name of the territory. “For example, Naobaicha(boat-playing) khel, Dhenuchoca (arrow-making) khel, Naosaloya(boat-building) khel, or Dimaruguria khel (khel, consisting of the men of Dimaruguri), Abhaipuriya khel (khel, consisting of the men of Abhaipuri) etc.” (Rajguru, 1988) .

The administration of the khel was strictly observed by the state by appointing different rank of officials from the top to bottom. 20 paiks were placed under an officer Bora (Ru-chao), above him a Saikia (ru-pak) was appointed over 100 paik. A Hazarika (ru-ring) was appointed over 1000 paiks. Above him a Rajkhowa(fu-kin-mung) was appointed over 3000 paiks. Above all a Phukan was placed and he had the manpower of 6000 paiks. Phukan administered a department and a Baruah assisted him.

To manage all the manpower engaged in the state service, it was very important to keep registers of the paiks of a Khel. By ascertaining the number of manpower the government could access the

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military power as well as economic prosperity of the state. The organization of the Khel fostered friendship and unity among the paiks. A got or group of paik consisted of four paiks and when one or two paiks of the group leave their village and family to serve the state, another remaining paiks of their group took the responsibilities of his family and his household affairs. When the paiks returned from their duty they brought along with them information about the current affairs of the state. “These information brought by the servitors from the court and the capital to the village people, living at a distance from the metropolis, made them mentally sufficiently advanced for receiving the vast mass of political literature that was in circulation in the country.”(Bhuyan, 1956).

Khel system had been going through numerous changes with time. The most important aspect was its adjustability. With changing situation and expansion of power and territory ‘Khel’ also went through expansion of its activity and power. In different times different kings and his prime officials added something new to it to make the organization more effective.

In the first stage Sukapha and his successors organized khels on the basis of occupations. The second stage was started during the reign of King Pratap Simha (1603-41). His foresighted minister Momai Tamuli Barboruah took the responsibility of reorganizing khels in more effective way. “There inherent professional character continued but with the emphasis on the territories with different ethnic group pursuing different professions the age of territorial khels began.” (Barpujari, 2007) . Another major change was happened under Jayadhwaj Simha (1648-63). People engaged in gold-washing profession increased and they were generally exempted from manual labour. The reign of Chakradhwaj Simha, witnessed another important change in Khel system. Lachit Barphukan made the Khel system self-sufficient by grafting paiks of different occupations in one Khel. Thus the khel system underwent through different principles on different time. “For the few centuries the paiks and the Khels represented the obverse and the reverse of the same coin, the social solidarity of the Assamese people.” (Barpujari, 2007). Gradually the system lacked its elasticity. New circumstances brought dissatisfactions among the paiks. Frequent wars with the Mughals in the 17th century were also responsible for the downfall of Khel system. With the loss of paiks in the wars khels were strained. In the 18th century another problems shook the organization when Moamoriya Uprisings resulted internal disturbance in the state along with great famine. Fall of population resulted fall of revenue too. In process of time paiks were allowed to escape from personal service by cash payment. Freedom of migration was also given. The system became complicated when paiks started pay the cash and not personal service and migrated from their locality. According to Jenkins (1849) by the time of British occupation of Assam the traditional khels of the country has dispersed and very few remained.

CONCLUSION:

The long rule of 600 years of Ahoms lies behind the efficient administrative system. The khel system of Assam mobilize a vast manpower during any need of the state either it was during the time of peace or war. Because of the ethnic and cultural bonding, the system fostered unity among the people. State exercised strict control on it and people were abided by their duty. But once the state control was shaken the system became complicated and meets its end. In the medieval Assam state was ultimately dependent on the system of Khel and its efficient functioning for the growth of peace and prosperity.

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