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# A Study of Women Participation in Politics During Ahom Period

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**Abstract :** The Ahoms belong to the Tai of the South East Asia ruled over a major part of Assam from 1228 AD upto 1826 AD. As they grew powerful they acquired some duties, privileged and status and these became hereditary in time. These duties and status of men simultaneously began to determine the position of women in that society. In North East India the tribal societies , women enjoyed sustainable amount of freedom than their counter parts of others part of the country, this makes the women participation in politics an important field for research studies. The present study tries to evaluate the political status of women in Ahom period. During this period of their political authority women played significant role in different aspects of Ahom political life from regency to political conspiracies and even fighting wars.

**Keywords :** Women, position, politics, Ahom, Society

**Introduction:** The medieval period in Assam history is generally defined as the period from the arrival of the Ahom's in 1228 to the end of their rule by the British in 1826. Sukapha the founder of Ahom dynasty , a Shan prince from Maulung, came to Assam in 1228 and established the Ahom kingdom. The ahom dynasty ruled for 600 years and their ruling period is very significant not only in terms of political development but also in terms of cultural and social development. In Assam, Social structure was made up of various ethnic groups. That's era's society was primarily patriarchal. However Assam's social structure was originally non-Aryan and women positions were somewhat favourable. Besides, like the history of the world in the Assam chronicles too, the role of women was grossly underplayed, women emerged as a reference of some political deals or may be as a necessary elements for matrimonial relationship. In society the social status of women drastically fell as their role was confined to marriage , producing children and looking after household activities. The same is true for medieval Assam where due to similar reasons status of women was relegated to poorer positions. However in the Ahom royal families the women had a better status, administrative power and some sort of independence compared to women of the royal families of the other part of India. Women have always been an important part of society dating back women have experience many ups and downs in their status throughout history.

**Review of Literature:** Women played an important role in the society of Assam till date there has been no particular study focussing upon the position of women in medieval period. In the "comprehensive History of Assam Vol – 1" edited by H.K. Borpujari (2004) the position women has given focus only in a small part.

In "Political History of Assam" edited by H.K. Borpujari (1977) here there is a comprehensive study of political changing nature according to the changing social structure of different period of history of Assam. But there is not any comprehensive study about the position and status of women in medieval societies of Assam. S.K. Bhuyan (1938) in "Tungkhungia Buranji" studied about household centric women's social position in medieval period but not a very brief manner. Boruah (1992) "Status of Women in Assam" pointed out an Assamese women's life ranging from ancient period to the British rule in Assam. In the book Boruah discusses different themes, such as marriages, education for women and women role in royal court etc. This book give a systematic introduction to women's history in Assam and has strongly influenced further research in this field.

Rajguru (1998) in his book , "Medieval Assamese Society" traces the role of women in the socio-cultural and political life during the medieval period. He takes a critical approach to gender relations between Assamese women and mainstream Indian society (L.Tamuli 2005). A few common were politically conscious during that period. On the other hand the daughter of royal officials had played some important role in the political field.

The women played important role and enjoyed dignified status during the role of Ahom dynasty. But unfortunately very few research works has done on the undertaken a humble attempt to explore this unexplored side of the women in Ahom period.

#### **Objectives of the study :-**

1. To highlight the status of women in the medieval Assamese society.
2. To study the role of women in politics and administration during the Ahom period.

**Methodology:** The historical perspectives has been taken for the present research work. The present research has been prepared with help of secondary sources of data. Data have collected from various books, journals, articles, websites etc.

**Analysis:** In a patriarchal society, administration and politics are generally dominated by male. But it doesn't mean that women had no interest in this field. There are instances of intelligent and courageous women, who formally took the reins of government to their own hands. In Assamese society there were no proofs of practicing veil system. Shihabuddin Talish, a Mahammadan writer who accompanied Mirjumlal on his invasion Assam (1662) wrote that - "Wives of Raja's and peasants a like never veil their faces before anybody and they move about the market places with bare heads. This who possible due to the practice of the Principle of granting equal status of men and women by the rulers of Assam which was practiced not only in royal families but also in the mass. Even in contemporary period in rural areas women never sit at home they took equal part in planting and harvesting crops with the men folk.

Historical records pointed out that women of the royal families were politically conscious, brave and patriot and played some important role in the political field. In 1527 to 1532 the Mugal attacked Assam on several times. During the second expedition

the Ahom General Franchengmung Buragohain was killed in the battle field. His wife Mulagabharu died fighting against the enemy force and took the leadership of it.

Queen Chao-Ching a very accomplished consort of the Ahom king Suklenmung, Garhgayan Raja (1539-52) acted as informal adviser to the king. It was at her instance that the office of the Borpatragohain, the third "great Minister of Ahom Kingdom was created." In 1663 AD the invasion of Mughal General Mirjumlal came to an end with signing of the treaty of Ghiladharighat. According to one of the provisions of the treaty the Ahom king has to offer his only daughter princess Ramani Gabharu to the Mughal Harem, who was only six years old. Acharya N.N (1987) has observed that later Ramani Gabharu was renamed as Rahmat Banu Begum and was married to the Mughal prince Azamtara the elder son of Mughal, Badshah Aurangzeb. She was a true patriot and in spite of this unfortunate fate of her she could not forget her motherland. S.K Bhuyan (1957) has mentioned that during the period of political instability (1673 AD to 1681AD) when Ramani's maternal uncle Laluksula Borphukan commander of Guwahati Comprised against the king and was ready to surrender Gauhati to the Mughal subedar Azamtara then the governor of Bengal in lieu of his help of usurp the throne she boldly wrote a letter to her uncle, Lalukula not to betray motherland and take to the friendship of Mughals which could have serious consequences. This act showed her boldness and concern for her motherland.

Phuleswari Konwari who historian considered as "Assamese Nurjahan" played an important role during the period of Sivasingha (1714-1744) was the first Queen of Assam to govern the kingdom directly. Sivasingha's wife Phuleswari was a great devotee of Siva and Sakti, her actual name was Phulmati and soon after her marriage she becomes Princess Phuleswari. It is noteworthy that she was originally "Devdasis" (dancing girl) in a Siva temple, she was picked up by the king for her beauty and artistic accomplishment. In 1722, a Royal court astrologer predicted that the Siva Singhas kingdom may fall into disarray under his kingships and advised him to transfer power. Accordingly, the king appointed Phul as (Bor-Roja) the main ruler and renamed her Bor Roja Phuleswari. She also minted coins in the joint name of herself and her husband. Phuleswari had a number of good qualities too. Apart from her religious zeal she was also a patron of learning and opened a large number of tols and even one of the Palace campus for teaching Sanskrit. She excavated the Gaurisagar tank near the present town of sibsagar and also built there temples on its banks dedicated to Siva, Vishnu and Devi. Phuleswari died in 1642 Saka and following her death Siva Singha married her cousin sister Ambika, appointed her as Bor Raja. The last Bor Raja was Sarbeswari who was a patron of music, weaving and literature. All these queens had actually governed the kingdom one after another. Whereas the king acted simply as an advisor. However, upon the death of Siva Singh in 1666 Saka and interesting Kingship was transferred to his brother Promotta Singha while the Queen was diverted of the power to the main ruler.

Kuranganaini, the daughter of Manipur's King Jay Singha who was married to Ahom king Rajeswarsingha palyed an important role in reviving the Ahom kingdom through political conspiracy to resist and quence the Moamoria Rebellion. Besides the

Rajmao, mother of the imprisoned king Chandrakanta Singha conspired with the Hindustani Sepoy Roop Singh Subedar, a loyalist to assassinate Badan Borphukan with his own sword which he had left outside when he was attending nature's call. Another remarkable women figure of Ahom history was Jaymoti Konwari who was married to the chief of chasing Gadapani. During the time of political instability (1673-1681AD) when the Ahom kingdom handed over to king Sulikpha at the age of 14 and indirectly the reigns governed by his father in law Lalukhula Borphukan and ordered their disfigurement as customarily, disfigured individuals were not supposed to become kings, Gadapani a konwar and chieftains of the Charing fled to the Naga hills. This led to the arrest of Joymoti, the wife of Gadapani by the Saudangs (Punishers). At that time Joymoti was pregnant, she was made to undergo severe punishment and bound to a tree in the Jerega Pathar (Paddy field) for 14 days and received in human torture. Jaymoti died in March 1679.

**Findings:** Above discussion it has been noticed that women of the royal families were directly and indirectly instrumental in the conniving political treaties. It reveals that women in medieval period in Assam were used as political weapons but were not given due to first Bor Raja Phuleswari a women, in annals of Ahom history was not taken kindly by the historians right from that period and till date. Rather she is considered to be the reasons for the beginning of the downfall of the Ahom kingdom and also responsible for the Moamoria Rebellion.

- Another instances, the most tragic character of reputed chieftain family was Jaymoti, she died in human torture by the Sandangs. Moreover, description of these series of incident of indictment of Jaymoti is not found in the chronicles or history of Ahoms. As Jaymoti belonged to a family of royal. It speaks of the sorry state of status of women in medieval Assam as no one including her family members came forward to her rescue or to protest. Jaymoti own family remained silent spectators to torment of Jaymoti.
- Royal families maintained matrimonial alliance with neighbouring countries in order to strengthen their power and extend the territory, Ramani Gabharu, the only child and daughter of king Jaydhaj Singha was married to Ajamtara son of Aurangzeb after the treaty of Ghiladharighat.
- Rangali an Ahom girl was presented to the Singpho leader Bichanong by the Ahom Borgohain Purananda to prevent the former from offering help to the rebellions Moamorias. But Bichanong again gave her away to the Burmese king Badawpaya (1782-1813) to strengthen friendship with the Burmese authority.

Those examples shows that the women of aristocracy were used as potent instrument by nobility to achieve their political ambition it appears that they accepted this arrested social status as a customary and surrender themselves to it without any objection.

**Conclusion:** Women in the Ahom period had remarkable excelled in their position and could make a mark in the political life and society. In respect of political consciousness

some of their names have become examples for comparison today. However, it needs to be discerned by the readers to explore the real status of women as the role played by these women will be treated with subjective analysis that shall vary from individual to individuals.

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