

# Society and Economy in North-East India

Volume 2

**Editor**  
**FOZAIL AHMAD QADRI**

# **SOCIETY AND ECONOMY IN NORTH-EAST INDIA**

**VOLUME 2**

**Editor**

**Fozail Ahmad Qadri**



**Regency Publications**  
New Delhi

Department of History  
North Eastern Hill University

*Editorial Board*

J.B. Bhattacharjee  
David R. Syiemlieh  
Mignonette Momin  
Manorama Sharma

© 2006, Department of History, NEHU, Shillong.

*The Publication of this book has been financially supported by the SAP-DRS (UGC). Department of History, NEHU, Shillong and the responsibility of the facts stated, opinions expressed, or conclusions reached rests entirely with the authors of the articles and the SAP-DRS (UGC) or the Department of History, NEHU, Shillong accepts no responsibility for the same.*

No part of this book may be reproduced, except for reviews, without written permission from the publisher.

ISBN 81-89233-40-8

Published by *Regency Publications*, 20/36-G, Old Market, West Patel Nagar, New Delhi 110 008 and printed at *Radiant Printers*, New Delhi, Phones: 4248 4101, 5546 2898; Telefax: 2588 4571.

Email: [regency@satyam.net.in](mailto:regency@satyam.net.in) • [www.regency-books.com](http://www.regency-books.com)



There has been a system of compulsory labour called *Pokat* by the subordinate villages, which accepted it after subjugation, by a powerful chief. Under the *Pokat* system the villagers of Doidam, Soha, Turet, Makat, Dongrong, Kenon and Longkhong used to perform compulsory labour for the chief of Namsang. In addition to the *Pokat* these villages also paid annual tribute to the chief. Similarly, the chief of Borduria used to enjoy compulsory labour from Lothong village. The subordinate villages also rendered any services or assistance demanded by the respective paramount chiefs. These villages were also required to surrender to the chief all human heads collected by them, the heads of big animals hunted by them and the captives of war.<sup>22</sup>

All the Nocte villages have been paying the annual tribute called *khe*, *se*, or *soksa* in kind to their respective overlords (both subordinate and paramount chiefs). According to Parul Dutta, "The probable date (of the system of tribute paying) may be from the time the authority of a chief was acknowledged and accepted by the people. The system continued unchanged to the present day."<sup>23</sup> From the data supplied by him it becomes clear that 14 villages were under the direct control of the paramount chief of Namsang since these paid fixed tributes to that chief only. On the other hand six villages under the subordinate chief of Khela, three villages under the subordinate chief of Laju and one village under the subordinate chief of Dadom paid their annual tributes to their respective chiefs as well as to the paramount chief of Namsang. Laho village paid its fixed amount of annual tribute earmarked for the two subordinate chiefs of Dadom and Laju and also to the paramount chief of Namsang. Similarly, 11 villages paid their fixed respective amounts of annual tributes only to the paramount chief of Borduria while another seven villages paid their tributes both to the subordinate chief of Dadom and the paramount chief of Borduria. In the same way, 11 villages paid their annual tributes only to the paramount chief of Tut or Tutnu. There were also five villages, which paid their earmarked portion of annual tribute to both the paramount chiefs of Namsang and Tut separately. The annual tributes were paid after the harvest of millet or paddy. For payment of tribute almost all the villages used to clear the paths leading to the villages of their respective paramount chiefs. From the preceding discussion, it is evident that the system of paying

tribute to more than one chief was a complex political adjustment having feudal overtone. The system of payment of tribute regularised the relations among the village chiefs, subordinate chiefs of Khela, Laju and Doidam and the paramount chiefs of Namsang, Borduria and Tut depending upon their respective subordination and jurisdiction.<sup>24</sup>

The above discussion of the Nocte political set-up indicates the crystallisation of the territorial state of the Nocte with its different essential features and structures. It may also be summarised here that the body politic of the Nocte was quite developed when they first interacted with Sukapha and his men, forcing their way in Assam amidst the resistance of the Nocte and others in the early decades of the 13th century.<sup>25</sup> The *Buranjis* testify this fact as these inform the advance of the Ahoms during their incursion in Assam. Ultimately the Ahoms become victorious and at least from the time of Supimpha (A.D. 1493–1497) the Noctes were in the habit of paying their annual tribute in kind to the Ahom kings.<sup>26</sup> In other words, by the end of the 15th century the Nocte chiefs had become feudatories of the Ahoms. In the reign of king Suhungmung, Dihingia Raja (A.D. 1497–1539) the political ascendancy of the Noctes was given due recognition when a Nocte Chief named Kancheng was included in the topmost advisory body of the Ahom king by creating a new post of Barpatra Gohain for him.<sup>27</sup> The *Assam Buranji* gives a different picture for the creation of the post of the Barpatra Gohain, However, "the question of occupancy over the salt wells seems to be the main determinant of this political adjustment. Needless to say that the salt springs and wells of the Noctes were a source of constant friction between them and the Ahoms and one such major clash took place in Mohong (near Namsang)s in A.D. 1536."<sup>28</sup>

Later on during the reign of Ahom king Susengpha alias Pratap Singha (A.D. 1603–41) a rampart called the Nagagarh was constructed and the estates (*Khats*) were granted to Nagas (Noctes) alongwith *Paiks* to cultivate them<sup>29</sup> In return, these chiefs were obliged to pay annual tribute to the Ahom king in the shape of mithun, elephant tusk, goat's hair, cane slips coloured in red, salt and various other articles produced in their areas.<sup>30</sup> These estates were called the *Naga Khat* and were managed by the Assamese Agents called the *Naga Katakis* and products of those lands were used to supply the tribes with foodstuffs. The measure of Pratap



Singha seems a definite attempt at extending Ahom suzerainty gradually over the Noctes and Wanchos and thereby ensuring the regular and increased supply of salt

A.D. 1692 the Namsangia Noctes cut 23 persons at the salt mine. The king Gadadhar sent an expedition against them in which many Noctes including their Raja were made captives. According to the *Tungkhungia Buranji* all of them were beheaded and the brother of the Namsangia Nocte Raja, Latha Khunbao was made Raja.<sup>31</sup> Later on, Latha Khunbao and his men joined the Vaishnava faith between 1699 and 1745 under the influence of Sri Ramdeva, the Vaishnava saint of the Bali Satra in Naharkatia. After his initiation Latha was given the name Narottama and surprisingly enough, we do not hear any raid of the Noctes after that until the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the Ahom kingdom had already begun to decline. While reporting in early 1838, Captain Jenkins frankly admitted, "the Naga country about Borhat was comparatively well peopled and their cultivation is rough in many instances close down to the plains with the inhabitants of which the Nagas freely mix", and they were therefore "not the uncivilised beings like their counterparts further to the westward."<sup>32</sup>

Evidently, the trading centres in the vicinity of salt mines became the arsenals of socio-cultural contacts between the plains and the hills. Assamese developed as the *lingua franca* among the Noctes and served as the trading language too. Many of the Noctes accepted Assamese manners and accepted initiation by the Assamese Vaishnava saints (*Gohains*). Thus in the interest of regular salt production and trade the Ahom rulers took good care to maintain close relations with the Noctes which was further facilitated by the trade networks. They not infrequently interfered in the internal feuds of the Namsang and Borduria Noctes so that the salt production might not suffer. Purandar Singha, the Ahom monarch asserted his rights over the salt wells very successfully.

### **Role of Culture and Ideology**

In the socio-economic formations of Arunachal Pradesh the role of culture and ideologies has also played an important role. by Redfield that in a relatively stable state formation the notions of authority, legitimacy, jurisdiction, resistance and rebellion must