

The Military administration of the Ahom

The Ahom ruled for long six hundreds year in Assam, which is a rare case in the history of world. According to *Lord William Bentinck the excellence of the Ahom Government was at the bottom of their ability to rule Assam for such a long period of time.* The Military system of the Ahom was one of the important wings of this success.

The king was the supreme commander of the state as well as the Military. The Ahom king himself led the state forces in the time of wars. All peace and wars were declared by him. The Paiks were the main army of the state. There were two types of Paiks i.e. serving and non-serving. The non-serving Paiks constituted a standing militia which could be mobilized at a short notice by the **kheldar**. He was an expert military organizer.

There were several military wings in the state which were looked after by some officers. Usually, the **Barbarua** was the Commander in Chief of upper Assam and the **Barphukan** of lower Assam. The Gohains and **even the king**, the princes took to the field depending on the exigency of the situation. There were 12 military phukans, 6 in the Rongpur establishment and 6 in the Guwahati establishment.

The full contingent of the Ahom Army consisted of infantry, navy, artillery, elephantry, cavalry and spies.

Infantry: The Infantry played very vital role in the Ahom soldiers. The technical skill and general excellence of the infantry was very high. According to **Sihabuddin Talish** one of them was more than a match for ten Muslim soldiers. After defeat in the battle of Saraighat, Ram Singha said- 'Every Assamese soldiers is expert in rowing boats, in shooting arrows, in digging trenches and in wielding guns and cannon.....' The book **Baharistan-i- Ghaibi** estimated this strong forces about two hundred thousand on one occasion.

The Navy: The **Naosaliya Phukan** was the supervising officer of the naval department of the state which was attained high efficiency. The war-boats were termed **bacharis**. They were very strong, big and durable. Furnished with big guns, and cannons, it could carry 70 to 80 men. During the time of Ahom-Mughal conflict, it is said that there were 32000 boats in the Ahom navy. There were two naval workshops in the state. In **Barnaosal**, the large and in the **Naosal** the smaller boats were built. The strong Ahom navy surprised the Mughals in the battle of Kaliabar and Saraighat.

Artillery: It is generally said that the fire-arms was introduced in Assam from 1532 only. But Assamese chronicles show that it was used long before the date. The Ahom got 69 fire-arms from the Chutiyas in 1523. Some scholars opins that the use of gun-powder was learnt by the Chinese from the Ahom. The Ahoms were experts in making various kinds of guns, match-locks, artillery and big cannons. These fire-arms and gun-powder were manufactured by the Ahom under the supervision of **Kharghariya Phukan**.

Elephantry: Under the supervision of an officer called Hatibarua, the Ahoms took special care of the elephantry. The Hati Chungi Moran tribe supplied elephant to the Ahom. The elephantry formed an indispensable part of the army as an auxiliary to the infantry. Elephants were used to break the forts and clear jungles for the infantry to pass through.

Cavalry: Despite Sukapha used 300 hundred horses to subjugate Nagas and the tribes of the valley, but his successors failed to keep up the efficiency of the cavalry. The Fathiya-i-Ibriha states the fear of Ahoms soldiers of horses and one Mughal trooper was sufficient for dispersing 100 paiks. But in later period they import horses from Bhutan and used horses in few wars. That is why the prominent historian says that the Assamese cavalry was more decorative than effective.

Espionage and war-strategies: The Ahoms sent spies to the enemy's camp before leading an expedition to study the strength and the war strategies of the enemies and accordingly they arranged the suitable strategies. The Ahom soldiers were expert in guerilla fighting. By this tactics they nearly succeeded in thwarting the mighty Mughals. Sometimes they allowed the enemies to enter the country, then cut off their communications and attack them in front and rear. In addition to it their diplomacy is also admirable. Many important forts were constructed. Among them Chamdhara, Srighat or Saraighat, Singiri, and Athgaon of northern bank, Lakhougarh, Simalagarh, Kaliabar, Kajali and Pandu of southern bank are mention worthy. They also learnt the technique of constructing boatbridge in the Brahmaputra. The main war weapons consisted of bows and arrows, swards, Javelins discus, guns, match-locks and cannons. Observing military performance of the Ahoms, the Mughal General Rashid Khan stated that '*the enemy is beyond the reach of our artillery and there is no opportunity for fighting with arrows and guns....*'

Nevertheless, the Ahom army had many defects too for which they failed to subjugate the rebellious subjects of the kingdom. They could not face the Burmese and the British forces. First of all they did not maintain regular standing army. Their soldiers were soldier only in war time; otherwise they were peasants or labourer class attached to manual work. There was no discipline among the armies which is a most important one for soldier. Cavalry was very weak. The Ahoms boats were large in sizes and not suitable for swift operation.

Above all, the mutual understanding among the civil and military wings, unity among the nobles always worked as strong weapons of the Ahoms.