

Political Contribution and Role of Assamese Women During Ahom Period

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Abstract

Because of the influence of the Mongoloid culture mainly in the Assamese society and the Assamese women of various tribes and caste suffered less amount of social discrimination and disabilities than the other parts of Indian society. Though most of the time their works are only confined into household activities but in to some extent at the same point of time no one can deny their significant role mainly in political and social arenas along with the household responsibilities. An attempt is made through this paper to study about the position of Assamese women in the politics of mediaeval Ahom period also about their changing status as a result of social evolution.

Introduction:-

Over the past fifty years, social scientist and scholars have virtually ignored the study of women. But recently scholars gives more emphasis on the study of women issues like gender, race, age, ethnicity, sexuality harassment, political rights and other differences impact almost every facet of the social, economic, political, and cultural experience. As a new branch of social science, women studies is focused upon academic areas such as history, psychology, political science, sociology, cultural studies and anthropology, it also crosses the boundaries of traditional social science disciplines raising important questions regarding the way women have organized themselves within the socio-cultural and political arena. Meanwhile, scholars also focus on the study of women history. It is interesting to note that Women's history is the study of the role that women have played in human civilization. Women history includes the study of the history of their growth and the contributions of women in different fields of human society. However, this research work attempts to analyse position of Assamese women during the medieval period. It is needed to mention here that women played a significant role in the sociocultural and political life in the medieval Assamese society.

Review of Literature:-

Recently published literary works generally deal with women as visible participants in the feminist movement and the socio-cultural concept of family as sources of women's exploitation and oppression. Many academic historians were reluctant to accept women's history as a part of Assam history. There is a dearth of literary works on the status of women in the medieval Assamese society. Baruah (1992)

‘Status of women in Assam’ sheds a light on Assamese women’s life ranging from ancient period to the British rule in Assam. In the book, Baruah discusses different themes, such as marriage, education for women and women's 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

Hence, Rajguru (1998) in his book ‘Medieval Assamese Society’ traces the role of women in sociocultural and political life during the medieval period. He takes a critical approach to gender relations between Assamese women and mainstream Indian society.

No doubt, few studies have been conducted on women history of Assam. But they have not discussed position of women in medieval

Assamese society. This is a research gap that the present paper attempts to fill in. Objectives of the present study.

The following objectives are taken:

- To highlight the status of women in the medieval Assamese society.
- To study the role of women in politics and administration during the medieval period.
- To analyse the position of women in socio-religious life in the medieval Assamese society.

Methodological part of the study:-

The methodology which I have labelled "conceptual history" links together the above objectives by examining concepts which have been particularly identified with women in Indian history. However, the

historical perspective has been taken for the present research work. The present research paper has been prepared with help of secondary sources of data. Data have collected from various books, journals,

articles, newspapers and website. Discussion:-

Woman and politics:

All over the globe, employment and political activities are referred and linked to sex and gender where men are responsible and assigned to superior positions while women aren't supposed to have the same. Government in medieval Assam, whether of the Ahom, the Koch or the Kacharis was monarchical there was no representative system of government, the question of enjoying political rights by men or women does not arise. However the liberal policies followed by the Ahom rulers towards women provided with opportunities to develop herself and to enjoy a privileged position. Their presence and prominence ranged from king making and battle field to agriculture, weaving, singing, dancing and even political conspiracies.

Most of the people who were associated with royal duties were male. But we notice some instances of association of women in royal duties as well. These women had associated with the royal duties through their family relation, mainly through their husband. There were several categories of queens like Barkuwari, Parbatiya Kuwari, Tamuli Kuwari; to whom land was allotted with the right to administer.

The first woman who ascended on the throne of Ahom dynasty was 'Barraja Phuleswari Kuwari'. Her husband Swargadew Siva Singha was under the influence of Brahmin priests who predicted or declared the end of his rule in 1722 A.D. So in order to save his rule he declared his chief queen Phuleswari Kunwari the Bar Raja or the chief queen to run the state affairs on his behalf. Although she ascended to throne by following the Ahom rituals, She couldn't issue her own coin but along with her husband Siva Singha, which shows the patriarchal nature of Ahom royalty. Like a true politician she immediately after taking the reins of the state made her brother the Barpatra Gohain, her paternal uncle to Phukon and her nephew Dhakial Baruah to strengthen her position (Bhuyan S. K; p210). Edward Gait has observed that the coming of Phuleswari Kunwari to the power greatly diminished the prestige of the Ahom crown in the eyes of the people. However, on the basis of her policy it cannot be denied that coming of Phuleswari kunwari to power ushered a new beginning in the Ahom Statecraft at least in the field of religion (Hazarika N.). She also built new learning center in Royal premise and patronized Kabiraj Chakravorty who wrote Sankhachur Badh and Sakuntala Kabya. After the demise of Phuleswari Kuwari another wife of Siva Singha Rani Madambika and Sarbeswari Kuwari started to rule the Ahom dynasty. She was no different than her sister Phuleswari and followed her footsteps. (Baruah S.L; 1995). They patronized culture, literature; constructed several doul and ponds; and emphasize on welfare activities. During Rani Madambika's reign, the famous book on veterinary science Hastibidyarnva and Kam Kumar Haran was composed. Queen

Sarbesvari herself taught young girls of different communities, batch by batch, the art of spinning, weaving, singing and dancing within Royal haram under her own supervision (Rajguru, S.1998). Jaymati, wife of king Gadadhar Singha was one of the woman crusader, who raised voice against the patriarchal hegemony (Kalita, B:2017,Srotaswini). Jaymati died of the brutalities committed by Laluksola Barphukan. Her sacrifice became fruitful and the Ahom state witnessed great development during Gadadhar Singha and their son Rudra Singha. The lady of higher strata contributed in different ways from acting as advisors to directly ruling the state. The finest example is queen Chao Shin the chief consort of king Suklengmung, who advised king to erect a rampart for the newly shifted capital city Gargaon. She hailed from the neighbouring Nara country was an accomplished scholar in the Ahom language and could write with the toes of her feet. (S.K Bhuyan:1945:p:32) She was famous for transferring the Ahom capital to Gargaon and had a great contribution to the royal duties and the matter of defense of the state. During the period of political instability (1673-81) Debera Borboruah employed three woman as consort of king Suhung to constantly being aware of King's intentions. One of the consorts was Pakhari Gabharu who was also being asked by Debera to educate the king. But she instead tried to make aware the king of the Debera's designs.

Coming to know of the same Debera put both Pakhari and the King Suhung to death. (N. Hazarika, IJHSSI, 2015) There are instances of women being employed as spies in the Ahom period. (SK Bhuyan 1957). In the Ahom state, women were used as an instrument to cement political alliance or to initiate favourable relation with neighbouring states (Bishnu K. Gurung: 2020, vol:2, issue-1). Examples are too numerous to be mentioned. When Jayaddhaj Singha was defeated in the hands of Mirjumla, he sent his six years old daughter Ramani Gabhoru and the daughter of Tipam Raja Mohini Aidew to Mughal

harrem. Both converted to Islam and renamed as Rahmat Banu and Maphiza Begum. Later on Rahmat Banu was married to Azamtara, the elder son of emperor Aurangzeb. During the

period of political instability (1673A.D.-1681A.D.) when Ramani's maternal uncle Laluksola Barphukan commander of Gauhati conspired against the king and was ready to surrender Gauhati to the Mughal subedar Azamtara then the governor of Bengal in lieu of his help to usurp the throne, she boldly wrote a letter to her uncle

Laluksola not to betray motherland and take to the friendship of Mughals which could have serious consequence (Bhuyan S.K, 1957). Ramani Gabharu's this act of boldness and her concern for her motherland is an example of her passion for her country. Swargadew Rajeswar Singha married Kuranganayani, whom he accepted as offer from Manipur kingdom, became the chief queen and successfully planned to murder Ragho Moran, the infamous leader of Moamoria Rebellion. The Royal mother of king Chandrakanta Singha; Rajmao Dangariyani tried to restore Ahom dynasty by murdering Badan Barphukan, whom she considered guilty for Moamoria Rebellion; with the help of Rupsing Chubedar. The Weissalisa informs us that Badan Chandra Barphukan offered his daughter Rangili to the Burmese monarch Badawpaya to get his assistance against Purnananda Buragohain. Another Royal Lady to catch attraction was Pijou Gabhoru, daughter of Badan Chandra Barphukan and daughter in law of Purnananda Buragohain. Badan Chandra was the commander of Gauhati and was planning and preparing to increase his political authority. (Rajkumar S; 2000) Moreover he committed a lot of atrocities upon the people of Gauhati. On receiving the information on Badan Chandra's acts Purnananda Buragohain with consultations with the king Chandrakanta Singha sent a party to arrest Badan Chandra. Pijou Gabharu to save her father sent an express message about the king's and the Purnananda Buragohain's actions (Bhuyan.S.K; 1964). It is evident from the sources that the chief queen of the Ahom king Taokhamti was the first woman to play direct role in the administration. She took the charge of administration when king was out for war (Biraj kalita: Srotaswini: 2017: 261). Tyo Khampati married a princess of Kamata state. She was beautiful and became the favourite queen of the

king (Dutta D 1986). She hatched a conspiracy against the beautiful and younger queen. She charged adultery against her and ordered execution. She even influence the king and became more and more tyrannical which eventually led to the assassination of the weak king. The Ahom queens were also good warrior. Before the battle Ahom woman had to supply a piece of cloth known as Kavach-Kapor to their warrior husband which they had to weave within a night. Some of them fought bravely in the battlefield along with their male counterparts. The Muslim ruler Turbak attacked the Ahom kingdom in 1532 CE. During that period Suhungmung (Dihingia Raja) was the ruler of Ahom dynasty. In the battle Ahom commander Phrasengmung achieved martyrdom.

The wife of Phrensenmung, Mula Gabharu on hearing the valiant death of her husband moved to the battle field and inspired the Ahom soldiers by fighting against the invading forces. Mulagabharu died fighting the enemy forces but the example of patriotism, valour, bravery and courage inspired the Ahoms who finally defeated the Ahoms. She mobilised a women force and took the leadership of it.(Sarbeswar Rajguru:1998).Turbak was killed and his head was buried on the top of Charaideo hill. (L.Tamuli 2005). A few common women were politically conscious during that period. On the other hand, the daughter of royal officials had played some important role in political field. At the time of Mirjumla's invasion while king Jayaddhvaj Singha escaped to Namrup, a woman of fighter community who met him at the Dalauguri road, in a tone of reprimanding the king said, "oh king you have spent the last fifteen years in pleasure and luxury only; had you been conscious enough to give at least fifteen sods of soil where it was necessary, in these long fifteen years, why such a state of things should have befallen. Now leaving us in such a state where do you want to go?"(Bhuyan SK, 1960,p90). This incident shows the interest of common masses in the day to day Political affairs.

Conclusion:-

The Assamese society of the mediaeval period was an admixture of different tribal groups and

communities along with their own dialects, manners, customs and traditions; where since the inception of Assamese society women played a vital position. They also contributed to the various fields like music, art, dance, literature, science, religion etc. The women were also supposed to serve organization in the 20th century time period. In the post independence era of modern India their demands also included wider scope in the field of politics, societal and economic activities and so on.

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