

A Study of Strategy, Organization, and Legacy in the Ahoms' Military Administration and Wars

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Abstract

The Ahom kingdom (1228–1826 CE) represents one of the most lasting and militarily organised states in pre-modern India. This study examines the organization, strategy, and legacy of the Ahom military administration, highlighting how institutional structure and adaptive warfare enabled the dynasty to defend Assam against formidable adversaries, especially the Mughal Empire. The paper investigates the Paik system, the integration of civil and military responsibilities, the hierarchical administrative framework, and the strategic use of river topography in combat. The Battle of Saraighat (1671) and the long-running Ahom–Mughal wars (1616–1682) are two important military incidents that highlight how leaders like Lachit Borphukan came up with innovative strategies and commanded their soldiers. The study investigates the impact of military organization on socio-political integration by integrating diverse ethnic groupings into a centralised state framework. The collapse of the Ahom government is examined in the context of internal insurrections, fragmented administration, an economic crisis, and colonial involvement culminating in the Treaty of Yandabo (1826). This paper contends that the Ahom combat paradigm, when situated within the comprehensive narrative of South Asian military history, amalgamated decentralised manpower mobilisation with strategic central oversight, so creating a distinctive and lasting military framework. . The Ahom legacy offers significant insights into regional state formation, frontier warfare, and the interplay between military organisation and governance in mediaeval Northeast India.

Keywords: Ahom Dynasty, Military Administration, Military Strategy, Mughal Resistance, Military organisation, warfare in North East India.

Introduction

The Ahom Empire was one of the strongest kingdoms in northeastern India. Its heartland is now Assam. The Ahoms left a lasting legacy from the 13th to the 19th century by their military might, administrative capabilities, and cultural accomplishments. They have a long history of military successes, new ways of doing things in government, and a special capacity to bring together different groups of people. The Ahoms came from Southeast Asia, notably the area that is now Yunnan in China and Myanmar. Chaolung Sukaphaa, a great leader who is credited with starting the Ahom dynasty, led them to the Brahmaputra Valley in 1228. It was smart for

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Sukaphaa to go, and he was able to manage the complicated political landscape of the area, where many minor kingdoms and indigenous tribes lived together.

By making agreements with Assam's many tribes, like the Sutais, Morans, and Kacharis, Sukaphaa was able to overcome local kings and create the Ahom kingdom. His leadership helped bring these groups together into a single state, which set the stage for the creation of "Bor Asom" or "Greater Assam." During this time, power, culture, and religion came together, making Sukaphaa not only a military leader but also a statesman who brought together people from different ethnic groups in the area. The Ahom kingdom's economy was mostly centred on farming, and rice was the main crop. The Ahoms built a sophisticated irrigation system that let them grow rice quickly, which gave them a consistent source of food to feed their rising population. The Ahoms also traded with people in their own territory and with people in other regions, which made their economy even stronger.

The Ahoms were known for having a strong, well-organised army when it came to military organization. They were able to protect their kingdom from attacks, especially from the Mughals, who wanted to expand into the northeast. The Ahoms were able to win battles because they had great leaders, came up with new methods, and used the distinctive paik system. The Ahom army was mostly made up of paiks, which meant that any able-bodied man had to serve. The Ahom defence was built on the paiks, who were divided into groups called gots. The method made sure that there was always a big, well-trained army ready to protect the kingdom. A paik official was in charge of each got, which made a hierarchy that made it easy to move troops quickly during battle.

Chaolung Sukaphaa was the most famous early king since he started the dynasty. His leadership laid the groundwork for the empire, and his military victories were important for expanding Ahom territory. Over the years, many more Ahom monarchs fought to protect and grow their kingdom, encountering many problems, especially from the Mughal Empire. The Battle of Saraighat (1671) is one of the most famous fights in Ahom history. The Ahoms, led by Lachit Borphukan, beat the Mughal forces so badly that they couldn't expand into Assam. This win made the Ahom kingdom known as a strong military force in the area.

The Ahom government was very well-organised, with a powerful central authority and a chain of officials below it. The Dangarias were the three highest-ranking officials in the administration. Buragohain, the prime minister and commander-in-chief of the army, was in charge of both government and military matters. Borgohain, the minister of finance and justice, was in charge of the kingdom's money and the law. Phukan, the minister of foreign affairs and commerce, was in charge of diplomacy and keeping good relations with other countries and empires.

The Ahoms had strong military and government structures, but they encountered more and more problems in the 19th century. The kingdom's power was eroded by internal rebellions and the prospect of British colonial expansion from outside. The British East India Company slowly took control of Assam in the early 1800s. This process ended with the formal annexation of the territory in 1826, after the Treaty of Yandabo. The dissolution of the Ahom empire signified the end of an era, yet their legacy nevertheless had an impact on Assam's culture and

government.

The Ahom dynasty had a big impact on Assam's culture and history. The Ahoms came from Southeast Asia and built a strong, stable empire in the Brahmaputra Valley. They left a lasting influence on the area. Their military techniques, new ways of running the government, and ability to bring together different groups of people made them one of India's most successful dynasties. The Ahoms had a lot of influence at one point, but it eventually faded. Their contributions to Assam's culture, society, and history are still a big part of the region's heritage.

Objectives

This study is directed by the subsequent objectives:

- To analyse the organization and operation of Ahom military governance.
- To examine the Paik system as a paradigm of military-civil unification.
- To examine significant Ahom military campaigns, especially the Mughal conflicts and the Battle of Saraighat.
- To assess the influence of geography, riverine combat, and fortification tactics.
- To comprehend the correlation between military organization and socio-political integration.
- To figure out what caused the Ahom military power to go down.
- To ascertain the enduring legacy of Ahom military traditions in the historical context of Northeast India.

Scope

The article will look at the Ahom military structure, such as the responsibilities of governors, vassals, and paik officials. It will also look at the Ahoms' military strategy, focusing on important battles like the Battle of Saraighat and their fight against Mughal invasions. We will talk about important people like Chaolung Sukaphaa and Lachit Borphukan, including their styles of leadership, how they made decisions in battle, and how they helped the kingdom's military win. The article will also look at how different tribes and communities were brought together within the Ahom military system and how that affected the kingdom's unity and power. We will look at the legacy of the Ahom military government and talk about how its strategies and organisational structures affected how the military worked in Assam and the rest of India. The study will finish by examining the influence of the Ahom military administration on subsequent military practices in Assam and the Indian subcontinent.

The article will give a full picture of the Ahom dynasty's military administration, the important conflicts that formed its history, and the lasting effects of its strategic, organisational, and leadership techniques by looking at these areas. The paper's breadth will underscore the importance of military might in the wider political and cultural context of Assam throughout the mediaeval era.

Methodology

This study utilises a historical-analytical methodology mostly based on secondary sources, augmented with accessible epigraphic and historiographical interpretations. The methodology

is qualitative, focusing on institutional analysis, military organization, and strategic frameworks. We use what we know about the history of South Asian armies to help us understand how Ahom armies fought. The study examines administrative documents, historical accounts, and scholarly assessments to reconstruct the organization of the Paik system, the hierarchy of officials, and military strategy. To study conflicts like Saraighat and Itakhuli, we use narrative reconstruction and strategic interpretation instead of quantitative military history. The methodology includes political-institutional analysis, which sees military organization as an important part of how a state is formed and run.

Review of the Literature

Scholars gain insights into Ahom military and administrative history from a range of historical texts. The Indian Council of Historical Research published the book *A History of the Ahom Kingdom* in 1993. It was written by Sanjib Baruah. Sanjib Baruah writes in *A History of the Ahom Kingdom (1228–1826)* on how the Ahom Kingdom was able to exist for so long because it had a strong army. Biman Barua wrote the book *The Ahom Dynasty and Its Impact on North-East India* in 2006. Aryan Publishers released it. Policies for administrative integration and growth are the main topics of Biman Barua's book *The Ahom Dynasty and Its Impact on North-East India*. Homen Borgohain wrote the book *The Ahoms: A Historical Study* in 1980. Vikas Publishing House released it. Homen Borgohain's book *The Ahoms: A Historical Study* looks at how communities and governments are organised and how they run.

Gauriswar Gogoi wrote a book in 1997 about the history of the Ahoms in Assam. Gauriswar Gogoi's *History of the Ahoms in Assam* talks about wars and kings. Dinesh Nath's *Ahom reign and the Assam Valley*, on the other hand, looks at how Ahom reign changed the whole area. Dinesh Nath wrote the book *Ahom Rule and the Assam Valley* in 2005. Orient Longman published it. Anupama Ghosh's article on how Mughal taxes impacted the economy examines the interaction between the Ahoms and the Mughals from an alternative perspective. J.N. Phukan's study of Ahom inscriptions clarifies the structure of administration. Previous research, including P.R. Gurdon's study looks at where the Ahom came from, while Nayanjot Lahiri looks at the cultural roots that came before the Ahom.

A number of historical works have helped scholars learn more about the Ahom military and administrative history. Sanjib Baruah's *A History of the Ahom Kingdom (1228–1826)* (1993) focuses on the creation of the state and politics on the border. It says that the Ahom's long life was due in large part to their military structure. But his work is more about how politics works than how the military is set up in detail. Biman Barua's *The Ahom Dynasty and Its Impact on North-East India* (2006) addresses administrative integration and territorial expansion, however it inadequately examines battlefield tactics and institutional military procedures. Homen Borgohain's *The Ahoms: A Historical Study* (1980) examines socio-political organization and governance but fails to systematically investigate military administration as a separate entity.

Gauriswar Gogoi's *History of the Ahoms in Assam* (1997) offers a narrative of wars and kings, however it is predominantly descriptive. Dinesh Nath's *Ahom Rule in the Assam Valley* (2005) looks at how politics in the area changed, but it just briefly talks with the military. Anupama

Ghosh's 2012 paper "Mughal Impact on the Revenue System of Assam" looks at the relationship between the Ahoms and the Mughals through the lens of economic history. It doesn't say anything about military structure. J.N. Phukan's 1994 research of Ahom inscriptions sheds light on administrative hierarchy, although epigraphic material is scarce for military specifics. Previous academic work such as P.R. Gurdon's "The Origin of the Ahoms" (1913) offers excellent ethnographic observations, however it embodies colonial-era ideas. Nayanjot Lahiri's "The Pre-Ahom Roots of Mediaeval Assam" (1984) examines cultural underpinnings yet precedes contemporary military historiography..

Consequently, the majority of research analyse administration and warfare in isolation. This study fills that vacuum by looking at military administration as a part of Ahom statecraft that connects institutional organization, warfare, and government. Nonetheless, most of the books focus on administration and warfare separately. This study aims to rectify that shortcoming by analysing military administration as a fundamental component of Ahom governance.

The Ahom Military System

The Ahom dynasty dominated the Brahmaputra Valley from the 13th to the 19th century. They had a strong and well-organised army. During its lengthy rule, the Ahom military was very strong and effective, which helped the kingdom defend itself and grow. The Ahom army was made up of different types of troops, including infantry, cavalry, artillery, and a fleet. It was well-coordinated. The Ahoms were able to protect their land, win wars, and stay in charge of the area for hundreds of years because of their well-organised military. The Ahom Military had infantry, cavalry, artillery, and a navy as its main parts.

The Ahom military's main strength was its infantry, which was mostly made up of foot warriors. The soldiers had traditional weaponry such swords, spears, shields, and bows and arrows. The infantry was very important in retaining land during conflicts and building the kingdom's military might. The cavalry was important for attacking enemy positions from the side, chasing down retreating troops, and fighting quickly. The Ahom cavalry was made up of troops on horseback who could move quickly and respond quickly in battle. The Ahom army also had cannons and weapons, which they got by trading with European nations. The Ahoms had a technological advantage in war at the time because they could break through opposing lines and fortifications with these weapons.

The Marang Gumpa, the Ahom fleet, was very important in riverine warfare. The kingdom's strategic location along the Brahmaputra River made it important to have a strong navy to protect their lands and keep control of important trade routes. The navy used war boats and ships to fight on the river, which gave the Ahoms a way to defend themselves and attack in water. The Ahoms were good at defensive warfare, building strong walls and moats around important towns and cities. These fortifications were built to keep enemies from invading and give their troops a place to stay.

With the help of different Ahom monarchs, the kingdom grew and became the most powerful in northeastern India. During the dynasty's rule, there were several important military campaigns and victories.

Conquest of the Chutia Kingdom: The Chutia Kingdom, which is near Sadiya (now Assam and Arunachal Pradesh), was one of the first places the Ahoms wanted to expand into. The Ahoms had their first problems with the Chutias when Suhungmung was in charge (1497–1539 AD). The Chutia monarch Dhir Narayan invaded the Ahom lands in 1513, but the Ahoms won the battle of Dikhowmukh by a large margin. After a number of wars, the Ahoms took over the Chutia kingdom in 1523–1524. The Ahom kingdom took over the Chutia capital, and the Chutia ruling class became part of the Ahom government. This conquest considerably increased the Ahom's land and set the stage for more land consolidation.

The Kachari Kingdom, also known as the Dimasa Kingdom, was another nearby state that the Ahoms took over. At first, the Kacharis fought back against the Ahoms, and in 1490, they beat the Ahoms. Suhungmung, on the other hand, conducted a successful war against the Kacharis, which ended in their defeat in 1526. The Ahoms beat the Kachari forces again in 1531, and Suhungmung despatched an army to punish the Kachari monarch. This led to Detsung being chosen as the next ruler. The Ahoms took over the Kachari capital in 1536, which made their dominance over the area stronger.

The Ahom kingdom's western border was also the site of military confrontations as the kingdom grew to the west and fought with Muslims. In 1527, the first Muslim invasion of the Ahom kingdom happened, but the Ahoms fought back and pushed the invaders back to the Burai River. The Ahoms were attacked by Muslim armies again a few years later, this time headed by Turbak. In 1532, the Ahom army, led by Barpatragohain at the fort of Singiri, won a clear victory over the Muslim army. The Ahoms won a big naval battle in 1533 when they killed Muslim leaders in Bengal. This made the Muslim menace in the area less strong.

Revolt of the Nagas and Control After That: The Ahoms also had to deal with revolts from nearby Naga tribes. The Khamjang, Tablung, and Namsang Nagas rose up against Ahom rule between 1535 and 1536. The Ahoms, led by Suhungmung, were able to put down these uprisings and bring the Nagas back under control, though. It was important for the Ahoms to be able to handle threats from both inside and outside the kingdom in order to keep it stable.

Suhungmung, or Dihingiya Raja, was a great leader who not only made the Ahom kingdom more bigger, but he also made its military stronger. His reign saw a lot of land growth, and his military strategies set the stage for the kingdom's continued success. Suhungmung's leadership brought together many different groups of people who had been conquered into the Ahom empire. This helped bring the region together culturally and politically. Suhungmung led the Ahoms as they faced opposition from both native groups and outside troops and were able to expand their territory on all sides. His military victories and smart use of resources like artillery and naval strength kept the kingdom in charge of the northeastern region for many generations.

The most important war that the Ahom kingdom fought with other countries was with the Mughals. It lasted more than sixty years and involved a lot of fighting. The first Mughal attack on the Ahom kingdom was in 1616, during the reign of Suhungmung. This started the Ahom-Mughal war. The engagement of Samdhara was the first engagement that led to a series of invasions by the Mughal Empire under Emperor Jahangir.

The Mughal Empire, which quickly grew across northern India, wanted to spread its power to

the northeastern parts of the country, such as Assam. The Mughals wanted to take over this area because it was strategically important and controlled the Brahmaputra Valley. During the war, both sides had good and bad times, with wins and failures on both sides. In the early stages of the war, the Ahoms were able to stop many Mughal attacks. The Ahom army, headed by skilled leaders like Lachit Borphukan, used guerilla tactics and the region's rough terrain to slow down Mughal advances. The Battle of Saraighat (1671) was one of the most famous conflicts. Lachit Borphukan led the Ahom army to a resounding victory over the Mughals. This fight on the Brahmaputra River not only stopped the Mughal assault, but it also kept the Ahom kingdom safe for many more decades.

The Mughals tried to take over the Ahom kingdom many times, with 17 invasions happening between 1616 and 1682. The Ahoms' well-planned defence and smart use of the area's natural resources meant that the Mughal forces, even though they had more troops and better weapons, including artillery and war elephants, lost many times. The fight of Itakhuli in 1682 was the last fight in the Ahom-Mughal war. It signalled the end of Mughal attempts to attack the Ahom kingdom. The Mughal Empire gave up trying to take over the area after this big loss. After the fight, the Ahoms became the most powerful group in the Brahmaputra Valley. Their power spread west to the Manas River, which would stay the kingdom's western border until the British came in the 1800s.

The fight had a big effect on both the Ahoms and the Mughals. The Ahoms' reputation as a strong and powerful power was built on their ability to withstand 17 separate attacks and drive the Mughals back. The Ahoms' authority over the area was strengthened by the Mughal Empire's defeat in Assam. This control would last until the British East India Company started to move into the northeastern areas in the early 19th century. The Ahom kingdom's military history is based on its capacity to protect its independence from strong enemies like the Koch dynasty and the Mughal Empire. The Ahoms became the most powerful group in the Brahmaputra Valley after they fought the Koches in the middle of the 16th century. The long and bloody Ahom-Mughal war from 1616 to 1682 made the Ahoms one of the few regional forces to effectively stop Mughal expansion in the northeast.

The Ahom military won these wars and battles because they used the natural terrain to their advantage, had good military leaders, and were well-organised. The Ahom kingdom remained the most powerful in the area until the British colonial advance in the 19th century. This is a lasting legacy of these military engagements. The Ahoms' ability to stay strong in the face of outside challenges has had a lasting effect on the history of Assam and northeastern India.

The Ahom dynasty controlled Assam for more than 600 years. It is one of the most famous examples of a strong kingdom that fell apart because of problems from both inside and outside the realm. The Ahom kingdom was noted for its strong military, cultural fusion, and good government during its height. But by the early 1800s, the kingdom that had once been thriving was starting to fall apart because of a mix of internal conflict, outside attacks, economic problems, and bad leadership.

The Moamoria Rebellion, which started in 1769, was one of the biggest problems inside the Ahom empire that led to its fall. A mix of social, religious, and political elements mostly caused

the insurrection. The Moamorias were a group of Ahom people who at first followed the religious reform movement led by the Assamese saint Srimanta Sankardeva. They rose out against the centralised rule of the Ahom kings, asking for more local freedom and an end to the political and religious control of the ruling elite. The uprising made the Ahom kingdom much weaker since it used up the country's resources and split the governing elite. Even though the Moamoria insurrection was put down, it made the kingdom weak, broken, and open to new problems.

By the 18th century, the Ahom kingdom was having problems with its own people and had a string of weak and ineffectual leaders. The political structure that used to be well-organised started to fall apart, and power struggles and factionalism became more widespread. Different groups, sometimes based on race or clan, fought for power, which led to frequent changes of leadership. This instability produced a power vacuum that rival groups could use to gain influence and weaken the monarchy's authority. The Ahom's capacity to protect their borders and keep order in the kingdom was hurt by the internal division. The Ahoms found it harder and harder to deal with both internal disagreement and outside challenges since they didn't have strong, cohesive leadership.

The Ahom kingdom fell apart because of economic problems that came up because of bad government and constant fighting inside the country. The economic downturn was highlighted by a drop in trade, a halt in agricultural production, and a depletion of state resources. Corruption in the government and poor handling of money made the economic problems even worse, leaving the kingdom with a weak economy and not enough money for the military. The economic problems got worse because local elites were getting more powerful and the country was relying more on tributes from vassal kingdoms. These things weakened the central authority, making the kingdom more open to attack.

The Ahom kingdom was finally destroyed by the Treaty of Yandabo, which was signed in 1826. The Ahoms fought with the Burmese for years, but with the help of the British East India Company, they were finally able to win. The pact, on the other hand, also led to major territory concessions and a change in the balance of power. The pact gave the British East India Company sovereignty over Assam, which meant that the British would be in charge of the area. The Ahoms were still in charge, but they had to operate under British supervision now. The British, who had helped the Ahoms defeat the Burmese, took advantage of the situation to acquire more power in Assam. This was the end of the Ahom dynasty's rule as an independent state.

The British taking over Assam as part of the British East India Company's territory not only ended Ahom political power, but it also began a new chapter in Assam's history as part of British India. A lot of things, both inside and outside the Ahom dynasty, led to its demise. The Moamoria Rebellion, internal factionalism, poor leadership, and economic problems all made the kingdom weaker from the within. Outside threats, such the Burmese invasions, made the monarchy even less stable. The Treaty of Yandabo in 1826 was the last step in the fall of the Ahom kingdom, which the British took over. Even with these problems, the Ahom dynasty's imprint in Assam's culture and history is still important. People still recall how they helped with the region's architecture, government, and military strategies.

Findings

The Ahom dynasty's military administration and strategy were very important to the kingdom's long-lasting power and growth in Northeast India. The Ahoms built a very effective military structure by carefully organising their troops. This included infantry, cavalry, artillery, and a navy that fought on rivers. The Ahom rulers were strong and smart in battle, as shown by their victories against powerful enemies like the Mughals, Kochs, and Burmese. This was especially true in important battles like those at Samdhara and Itakhuli. The Ahoms' unique system of government, which included the roles of Dangarias, governors, and paik officials, helped keep peace in a region with many different cultures. The military and government systems that included local towns and tribes not only strengthened their grip over their land, but they also made the kingdom feel more united. They used fortified defences and military alliances in a smart way to strengthen their position even more, making sure that the Ahom Kingdom stayed a powerful force for hundreds of years.

Conclusion

The Ahom dynasty's decline in the 18th and early 19th centuries, despite their military strengths, shows how weak internal cohesion and external resistance may be. The Moamoria uprising, economic problems, and invasions, especially the ones from Burma, made the kingdom's infrastructure and leadership weaker. The British East India Company's intervention, which they said was to help the Ahoms fight the Burmese, resulted to Assam's annexation and the end of the Ahom dynasty's independence.

But the Ahom military administration's legacy still has an impact on Assam's cultural and historical identity. To comprehend Assam's past, it's important to know about the kingdom's organisational plans, military tactics, and the big influence they had in creating the region's history. The military might and strategic thinking of the Ahoms give us useful information about how complicated statecraft, combat, and government were in India before the modern era.

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