



## History

## A STUDY OF THE AHOM INFANTRY SYSTEM

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**ABSTRACT**

The Ahom infantry was the most important branch of the Ahom army organization. The Assamese infantry showed its very high technical skill during the six hundred years of their reign. The Ahom army was a militia organized on the basis of the paik system. Every paik had to get military training. They were trained under their departmental officers. The king was the head of the militia. He ordered the disposition of the force, appointed and dismissed the commanders of the army. During emergency the king also proceeded to the battle-field. Before going to war the Ahoms completed all their preparation necessary for success. The production of materials, war equipments, food provision, making of muskets, cannons, swords, spears and arrow heads were carried on vigorous footing under the direct supervision of the king. The main objective of this paper is to highlight the working of the infantry system of the Ahoms. This paper is a descriptive in nature and based on primary and secondary sources.

**KEYWORDS :** *Ahom, Army, Infantry, King***INTRODUCTION:-**

The Ahoms were the members of great Tai or Shan family, inhabiting the northern and eastern hill tracts of upper Burma. Sukapha who conquering Assam in 1228 A.D., was a prince of the Shan state of Maoulung in upper Burma. Under the able leadership of the Ahom kings and their strong military system enabled them to rule Assam for a long period of six hundred years. In the long courses of their reign in Assam they had to fight either for extension or preservation of their kingdom. Being a conquering race they had to fight for the extension of their kingdom at the first quarter of their rule and towards the last part of their rule they had to fight for the preservation of their power.

**Objectives Of The Study:-**

1. The main objective of this paper is to highlight the infantry system of the Ahoms.
2. To identify the main system of recruitment and training of their infantry.
3. To discuss the measures undertaken by the Ahom kings for the development of their infantry system.
4. To find out the solutions for overcoming the problems during war and peace.

**Methodology:-**

The present study is based on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources have been collected from the original volumes and the secondary sources have been gathered from different books, journals, souvenirs and newspapers etc. Source of Internet also used.

**Ahom Infantry System:-**

The Ahoms were a conquering race and established their kingdom with their military power. The territory first occupied by Sukapha was a small one comprising a portion of eastern Assam, but it gradually extended westward upto the river Manah which remained their western boundary till the end of their rule in Assam in 1826 A.D. At the time of Sukapha's advanced towards the Patkai hill through the Hukong valley with his followers he subdued the Naga tribes very ruthlessly with his brave soldiers. The main objective of this paper is to highlight the working of the infantry system of the Ahoms. The Assamese infantry showed its very high and technical skill during the six hundred years of their reign.

The Ahom army was a militia organized on the basis of the Paik system. Under the Paik system every adult male between the ages of 16 to 50 was registered as a paik and they were required to serve the state as labourers in time of peace and as soldiers in time of war. The control of the state over the paiks was very rigid. Over each twenty paiks there was an officer called as Bara, over him was a Saikia commanding a hundred paiks, then a Hazarika commanding a thousand paiks and then a Phukan commanding six hundred paiks. Every paik had to get military training. In lower Assam the Paniphukan and in upper Assam the Deka Phukan trained the soldiers. The Purani Asam Buranji mentions the attendances of King Chakradhvaj Singha (1663-69) in the training camp of the soldiers at the time of preparation of war against the Mughals. After the training period was over the soldiers were tested of their efficiency. The soldiers were given reward for their

better performance. Besides this ready paik soldiers the feudal chiefs supplied contingents to their Ahom overlord, when they were called for. Among the feudal chiefs were the vassal Rajas or tributary chiefs, the adjacent hill-chiefs, the frontier and the local governors.

Strict discipline was observed in the army organizations. The negligence of duty in the battle-field and disloyalty of the soldiers and the military officers were regarded as serious offence.

**Guerrilla Fighting:-**

The Assamese soldiers were experts in all the aspects of warfare. In fact, guerrilla tactics were applied by them in battles. The Assamese soldiers used to attack the enemies in the darkest hour of the night abruptly preventing the enemies to safeguard themselves. It was through the use of this tactics that they could defeat the mighty Mughals several times to their retreats. According to Sir Edward Gait, "They would only come out of their forts at night and fall on the enemies unnoticed; invest them if they could and in the event of their repulse they would hurry back to their retreats. By these tactics they nearly succeeded in thwarting the activities of Mir Jumla's army." The Assamese chronicles mentions some of the famous guerilla leaders of the Ahoms. The most noted among them being Ghora Konwar, Jati Deka and Baduli Phukan. Sometime the Ahom soldiers destroyed the bridges or their grains to create trouble to the enemy soldiers. Shihabuddin Talish mentions that when the Assamese soldiers went to battlefield, "like Jackals they set up a concerted howl, all at the time and deliver a great assault. These Jackal-hearted people imagine that by means of such shouts they would frighten the lions of the forest of battle and tigers of the plain to fight."

**Weapons of Ahom Soldiers:-**

Generally Ahom infantry used *hengdung* (a kind of Sword), *tarowal* (sword), *daa* (big knife), *Jathi* (flat type spear), and *barcha* (needle headed spear), as weapons and *dhal* (shield), *baru* (a big size shield), *tupi* (cap), *gati* (a kind of skin made jacket) as instrument of self defense. The shields were made of Buffalo, Rhino, and Deer skins. Some scholars are of the opinion that the Ahoms from the time of Sukapha used the gunpowder and cannon known as *saru hiloi* (small gun) and *bar hiloi* (big gun) made from iron and bronze. Travernier is of the opinion that Ahoms were the people that formally invented gunpowder, which spread itself from Assam to Pegu and from Pegu to China from when the invention has been attributed to Chinese.

**Military Officers:-**

The king was the supreme commander of the armed forces of the state. He ordered the disposition of the force, appointed and dismissed the commanders of the army. The king was assisted by a council of ministers, known as Patra-Mantris consisting of the Buragohain, the Bargohain, the Barpatragohain, the Barbarua and the Barphukan. They were also frequently found commanding army in the battle-field. Generally the Barbarua was the commander of the Ahom army in upper Assam and the Barphukan was of Lower Assam. The Barbarua had under him a council of six Phukans in Rangpur. There were a twelve military Phukans in the Ahom army, six in Rangpur and six in the Gauhati establishment. The military Phukans of Rangpur were as

follows:-

1. Neay Khoodah Fokun
2. Nowbeissa Fokun
3. Dehinghiea Fokun
4. Dayka Fokun
5. Nayowg Fokun
6. Bithurooal Fokun
7. Noh Fokun

The Phukans of Gauhati establishments were as follows:-

1. Burro Fokun
2. Pawnee Fokun
3. Dehinghiea Fokun
4. Dayka Fokun
5. Seowtea Fokun

The Phukans were exclusively in charge of the various branches of the army.

#### Food Menu For Soldiers:-

There were ample arrangements for meals for the Assamese soldiers during war time. There was a team of people in Ahom militia who were always ready to supply food regularly to the soldiers during war. Meals are traditional item like *Chira-Doi* (Flattened rich and curd), *Komal-Chaul* (a kind of boiled but dried rice), *Sandahguri* (a kind of powder made of boiled, dried and fried rice), *Karaiguri* (a kind of powder made of unsoiled but fried rice). The Atoms also used a kind of peripatetic oven, cooking vessels were suspended from a bamboo pole and appointed men while running or walking fast held a constant fire beneath to boil the contents.

#### CONCLUSION:-

The infantry was the most important branch of the Ahom army organization. The infantry soldiers were possessed of high technical skill and general excellence because they were capable to fight in the plain valleys, hills and in all weather. The Ahom and the Hindu astrologers played a very important role in the Ahom military system. The Ahom army marched to the battle-field and attacked the enemy following the direction of the astrologers. The Persian chroniclers speak very high of the technical skill and general excellence of the Assamese infantry. According to Shihabuddin Talish one of them was more than a match for ten Muslim soldiers. Ram Singha after his defeat at the battle of Saraighat, acclaimed, "Every Assamese soldier is expert in rowing boats, in shooting arrows, in digging trenches and in wielding guns and cannons. I have not seen such specimen of versatility in any other part of India".

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