

Lesson- 8

The Fall of the Ahom Kingdom in Assam and the Rise of the British



Learning outcomes :

Students will–

- ✦ get an idea of the rebellions that took place during the Ahom rule in Assam.
- ✦ learn about the arrival of Captain Welsh in Assam.
- ✦ learn about the attack by the Burmese and its consequences.
- ✦ get information on the terms and conditions of the Yandaboo Treaty and its effects.

In the second and third chapter of the history section of this textbook, you have received some information on the Ahom *Swargadeos* and the political, social and economic conditions of the Ahom period. In this chapter, you will learn about the internal quarrels of the Ahom kingdom and the rebellions that followed. You will also know how these circumstances brought the British to Assam.

The First Moamoriya Rebellion:

The *shakta* cult of Hinduism is said to have got a new lease of life from the time of Swargadeo Lakhmi Singha in the middle of the 18th century. It was during the reign of this king, the custom of cremating dead bodies begun and the traditional customs of the *Deodhais* was given up and Hindu rituals were introduced in worship. The Vaishnavite *Mahantas* on the other hand, were a powerful class belonging to the upper class of society. In Lakhmi Singha's court, there was a controversial officer called Kirti chandra Borbaruah. He was a strict follower of *shakta* cult. One day, Borbaruah insulted a *Moamoriya Mahanta* before the king himself. This is believed to have led to the first rebellion of the *Moamoriyas*. In the beginning, the *Moamoriyas* had defeated the king but later they were suppressed by the king's forces. Swargadeo Lakhmi Singha died soon after this rebellion.

Activity :

- ✦ What do you understand by *shakta* cult of Hinduism? What is the main base of this cult of Hinduism?

The Second Moamoriya Rebellion:

After the death of Lakhmi Singha, Gaurinath Singha became the king. This *Swargadeo* was completely against the *Moamoriyas*. Meanwhile, the *Moamoriyas* too were waiting for a

chance to avenge their first defeat. In 1782 A.D. the *Moamoriyas*, suddenly attacked the Ahom capital Gargaon one night. Swargadeo Gaurinath Singha was able to save his life by escaping to Rangpur. The rebels created havoc and butchered anyone who came their way. The Ahom forces however, held out against the *Moamoriyas* from Rangpur under the command of Ghanashyam Borbaruah. At the death of Borbaruah, his son Purnananda became the *Burhagohain*. Purnananda was successful in suppressing the second *Moamoriya* rebellion.

The Third Moamoriya Rebellion:

Even after the suppression of the second rebellion, swargadeo Gaurinath Singha continued his atrocities on the Moamoriyas. Thus, the Moamoriyas rose in rebellion for the third time in 1786 A.D. Gaurinath Singha tried to suppress this rebellion with the help of small kingdoms like Rani, Luki, Beltola etc, but failed. Helpless, he escaped to Guwahati. Purnananda Burhagohain fought with great courage and tried to save Rangpur. In the end, however, he was forced to shift the capital to Jorhat. At this time, the landed aristocracy also tried to take advantage of the rebellion to fulfill their political ambitions. Realizing the deteriorating condition, Gaurinath Singha begged help of Governor General Lord Cornwallis. The British were happy to receive this petition because they knew of the rich natural resources of this land and were waiting for a chance to exploit them for their own benefit. Moreover, the East India Company based at Calcutta was aware of the sources of salt at Sadiya. They wanted to invest in this business. Besides, they also knew that the rich natural resources of Assam would provide them with means to maintain their army. Therefore, Lord Cornwallis sent Captain Welsh to Assam in 1792 A.D. Swargadeo Gaurinath Singha met Captain Welsh and his army at Nagarbera and their combined forces soon recaptured Guwahti from the rebels. Next, Captain Welsh suppressed the rebellion of the Darrangi king, Krishnanarayan. Gradually, Captain Welsh suppressed the rebellions in both upper and lower Assam and handed over the Ahom kingdom to Gaurinath Singha. Due to the changes in foreign policy made during Lord Cornwallis' successor Governor General Lord John Shore's time, Captain Welsh returned home to England in 1794 A.D.

Let us know :

- ✦ Captain Welsh was not only a good soldier and officer but also a good writer. He has written a valuable account of Assam's administration, society and economy. This account is regarded as important material in writing Assam history. Welsh described Guwahati as a secured and populated city. Similarly, he described Rangpur as a big city with a boundary of 20 miles. Assam was rich in natural resources and agriculture. Assam also did trade with Bengal. Welsh has also written in detail on the *paik* system and the aristocracy.

Write answer :

- ✦ Which Ahom official had shifted the capital from Rangpur to Jorhat?
- ✦ Which Swargadeo had begged Lord Cornwallis' help?
- ✦ Who was Krishnanarayan?
- ✦ In which district is Nagarbera situated?

First Burmese Invasion of Assam :

Do you have any idea about the Burmese or perhaps heard of them from your grandparents? They came from Burma. Burma is known as Myanmar now. The original name of Burma was **Bamba** or **Barma**. The invasion of the Burmese had turned Assam into a graveyard. The Assamese phrase '*Maanor din*' or Burmese aggression still conjures up terrible images and people used to be terrified at the mention of their name even years after they had left!

After Captain Welsh had left Assam, there were still rebellions within the Ahom court which led to the fateful attack by the Burmese. The actual cause of this invasion was the struggle for power between Badan Chandra Borphukan and Purnananda Burhagohain. The Ahom swargadeo Chandrakanta Singha was a young boy then and the administration was actually in the hands of Purnananda Burhagohain. Badan Borphukan on the other hand, was a very ambitious man. He had even plotted to murder Purnananda Burhagohain. Angry at this, Purnananda Burhagohain sent Parbatiya Gohain to arrest Borphukan but Borphukan came to know of this and escaped to Calcutta. There he asked for help from the East India Company but the Company refused. So Borphukan went to Burma. He sought the help of king Bodopaya saying that in Assam Purnananda Burhagohain was misusing power. This led to the first Burmese invasion of Assam. Purnananda Burhagohain died during the time of Burmese invasion and his son Ruchinath Burhagohain took the charge of Burhagohain. Ruchinath Burhagohain valiantly fought the Burmese but was defeated and he escaped to Guwahati. The Burmese reinstated Chandrakanta Singha on the Ahom throne and made Badan Borphukan the new Raj Mantri (Burhagohain). They then returned to their country with the riches looted from the Assamese.

The Second Burmese Invasion :

After the invaders left, Badan Borphukan became the omnipotent ruler of the kingdom. Instead of standing by his king, he became a tyrant. Unable to tolerate his atrocities, the Queen's mother Numali conspired with Borbaruah and Borgohain and had Badan Borphukan killed by Rupsingh Subedar. The weak and dependent Swargadeo Chandrakanta Singha, again called for Ruchinath Burhagohain to take charge. Ruchinath suspected a conspiracy and sent a troop to Jorhat instead. The king again escaped to Rangpur. Ruchinath easily conquered Jorhat and made Purandar Singha the king. Wanting to take advantage of the unrest in Assam, the Burmese king Badopaya sent a huge army under Alumingi to attack Assam. The Ahoms were again

defeated in this war and swargadeo Purandar Singha and Ruchinath Burhagohain escaped to Guwahati. Alumingi made Chandrakanta Singha the king again and left some Burmese soldiers under the command of Mingi Maha Tilowa. He then went back to his country.

Activity :

- ✦ What was the reason behind the clash between Badanchandra Barphukan and Purnananda Buragohain? Discuss in group and prepare a note on it.

The Third Burmese Invasion:

Although Chandra Kanta Singha was the king, Assam was actually ruled by the Burmese general Mingimaha. Chandra Kanta Singha had practically no power and Burmese did whatever they wished. The king was slowly becoming rebellious of the Burmese interference and once when the Burmese commander had gone to his country, he tried to close the border between Burma and Assam. However, the new Burmese king Bagyidowa invaded Assam for the third time and defeated the king's army. Assam had to go through great suffering economically due to the Burmese invasion. The Burmese imprisoned the king at Rangpur and brought most of the regions of Assam under their control.

Write answer :

- ✦ Who was the Ahom Swargadeo at the time of the third Burmese invasion?
- ✦ Why was Chandra Kanta Singha held captive at Rangpur?

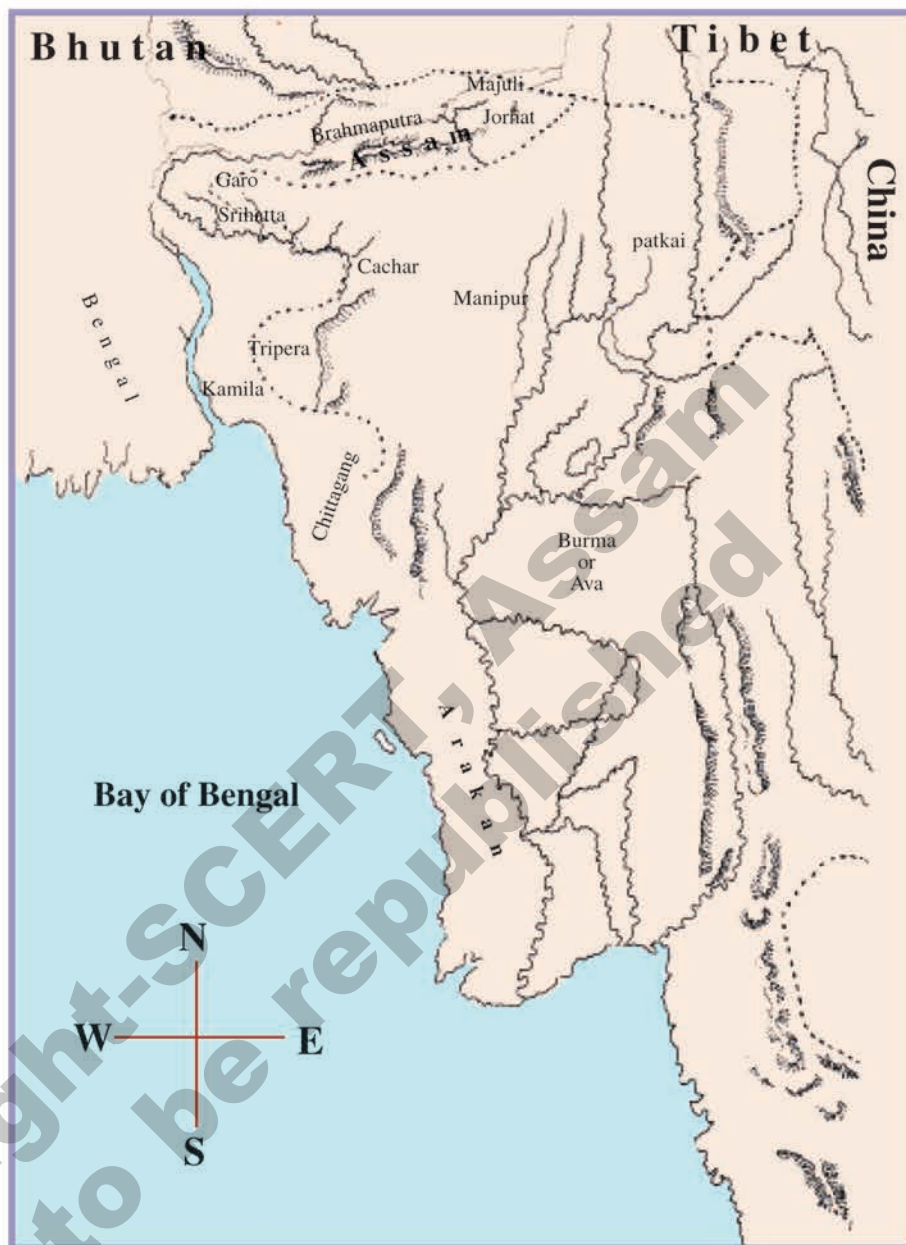
After Captain Welsh had left, the British had stayed away from Assam and her politics. But when the Burmese entered the British occupied regions, they were forced to react. After their occupation of Assam, the Burmese entered Manipur and Cachar also. So far the Company had followed its policy of non interference in the internal politics of other states but the Burmese aggression forced them to change their stand. Another important happening was that the British had given shelter to many refugees from Burmese occupied Arakan and also to the Ahom

Let us know :

- ✦ In 1817, 1819 and 1821 A.D. the first, second and third Burmese invasion had taken place.
- ✦ The range of mountains on the south east corner of our country, are called the Patkai Mountains. On the north of this range is Assam and on the south Burma. The Burmese had crossed these mountains to enter Assam.
- ✦ The Assamese learnt to organize their army like the British under the assistance of Captain Welsh.

kings Chandra Kanta and Purandar Singha. The Burmese king was therefore unhappy with the Company. So, the Burmese troops began to attack the Company occupied regions of Goalpara, Chattagram, Sylhet and loot the people. The British representative of East India, David Scott advised the Company to attack Burma. In 1824 A.D. the Governor General Lord Armherst declared war against Burma. In this war, the Burmese were defeated by the British army and in the year 1826, a treaty was signed at Yandaboo between the two parties. This is the famous Treaty of Yandaboo.

As per the terms of this treaty, the Burmese king had to pay compensation to the British and also give them the districts of **Arakan, Tenaserim and Yeh**. Secondly, they also gave up the control of Assam, Cachar and Manipur and promised not to lay claim on them again. In this way, by signing this treaty the British brought Assam under their direct control. Initially, they allowed the *Mataks*, Morans, Khamti and the Singpho king in the east to rule their kingdoms and brought under their control the regions in the Brahmaputra



Pic- 8.1 Tentative Map of 19 Century Burma

Let us know :

- ✦ Ava is the capital of central Burma (Myanmar). The present name of Ava is Inwa. Yandaboo is 80 km. from Ava.
- ✦ At that time the chief of British army in Burma was Archwel Cambel. He travelled to Burma through the sea. Pagidawa the king of Ava never imagined that the British would attack his kingdom Ava from the sea.

valley. In this way from 1826A.D. to August 1947, Assam was under the rule of the British. In this period, Assam had suffered economically and socially to a great extent.

Let us remember:

- ✦ In the mid of 18 century, the *shakta* cult was recognized as the royal religion.
- ✦ There were three *Moamoriya* rebellions in Assam. This was the first rebellion of common people against the king.
- ✦ Captain Welsh came to Assam in 1792A.D. and he returned to England in 1794A.D.
- ✦ Captain Welsh has written a valuable account of Assam.
- ✦ The Burmese (*Maan*) were from Burma.
- ✦ The struggle for power between Badan Chandra Borphukan and Purnananda Burhagohain helped the Burmese to come to Assam.
- ✦ The Burmese had invaded Assam thrice.
- ✦ The Burmese invasion had put Assam in great economic difficulty.
- ✦ The expansion policy of the Burmese was responsible for their conflict with the British.
- ✦ The war between the British and the Burmese came to an end with the signing of the treaty of Yandaboo. According to the terms of this treaty the Burmese left Assam.
- ✦ The British imperialism in Assam began from 1826A.D.

Exercise:

1. Answer the following questions—
 - (a) Since when did the shakta cult receive a new lease of life in Assam?
 - (b) Who ascended the Ahom throne after Swargadeo Lakhmi Singha?
 - (c) Who was the British Governor General when Captain Welsh came to Assam?
 - (d) Who was the last king of the Ahoms?
 - (e) In which year was the treaty of Yandaboo signed?
2. Arrange in sequence—
 - (a) The first rebellion of the Moamoriyas.
 - (b) The second Burmese invasion.

- (c) The arrival of Captain Welsh in Assam.
- (d) The third Burmese invasion.
3. Tick the correct answer–
- (a) Lord Cornwallis came to Assam to suppress the Moamoriya rebellion.
- (b) Kirti Chandra Borbaruah was a strict vaishnavite.
- (c) Badopaya was the Burmese king at the time of the first Burmese invasion of Assam.
- (d) According to the terms of the treaty of Yandaboo the British had received Arakan, Tenaserim and Yeh.
- (e) Badan Chandra Borphukan was killed by Ruchinath Burhagohain.
4. Write short answers (within fifty words)
- (a) What were the causes of the first Moamoriya rebellion?
- (b) What were the causes of the third Burmese invasion?
- (c) What were the two conditions of the treaty of Yandaboo?
5. Write short notes–
- (a) Kirti Chandra Borbaruah (b) Purnananda Burhagohain (c) Badan Chandra Borphukan.
6. Who was Captain Welsh? Why did he come to Assam and what was its outcome?
7. “The struggle for power between Badan Chandra Borphukan and Purnananda Burhagohain helped the Burmese to come to Assam”– How far is this statement true?
8. Why do you think the British had not tried to bring the whole of Assam under their control after the signing of the treaty of Yandaboo? Give your opinion.

