

Lesson -2

Medieval Assam

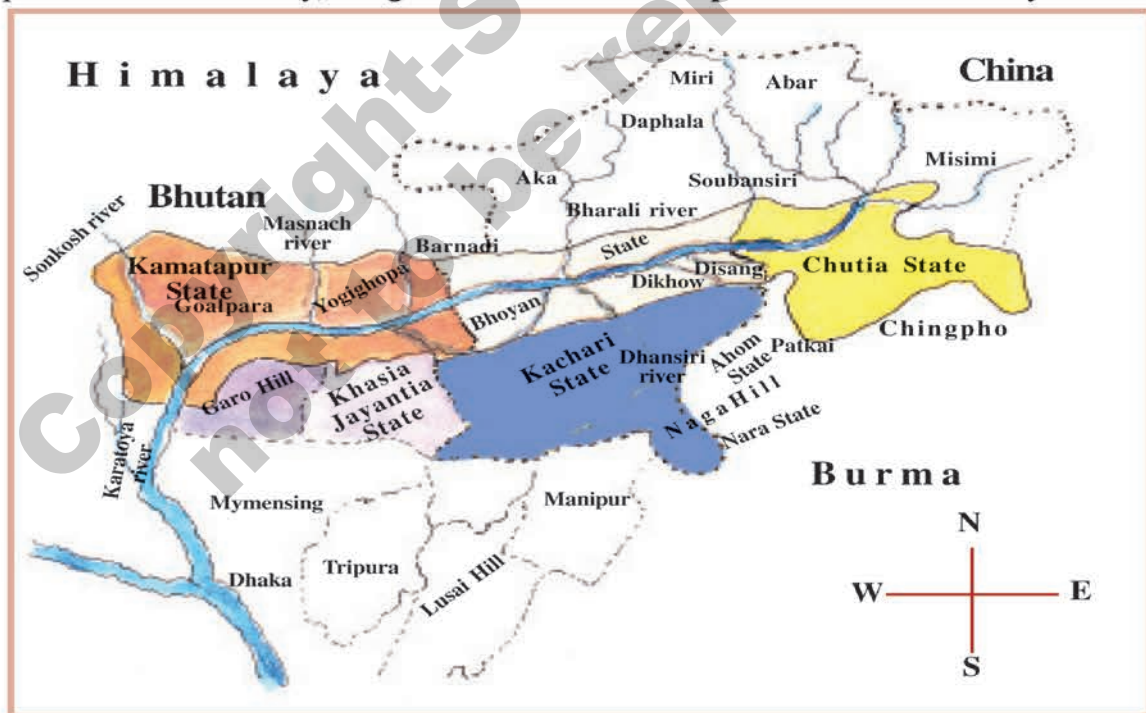


Learning outcomes :

Students will–

- ✦ know which period is called the medieval period of Assam
- ✦ understand the geographical location of medieval Assam
- ✦ get an idea of the important kingdoms of medieval Assam
- ✦ understand the relationship shared by the kingdoms of medieval Assam
- ✦ identify the states of 13 century Assam in the maps given.

In our history text book of class VII, we have read a chapter on Pre-Historic Assam where we have discussed the history of our state. We know that Assam was previously known as **Pragjyotishpur** and **Kamrup**. The boundary of our state changed time to time in respect of shape and size. After the migration of the **Ahoms** to Assam in the 13th century, the ancient land of **Kamrup** along with a few other regions came to be known as Assam. The period from the advent of the **Ahoms** in the 13th century to the signing of the **Yandaboo Treaty** in the early part of the 19th century, is regarded as the **medieval period** of Assam history.



Pic-2.1 Tentative Map of 13th Century Assam

Look at the map given. This is the map of 13th century Assam. When the Ahoms came to Assam, it was divided into many small kingdoms. From the **Karatoya** river in the west extending up to the present **Darrang** and **Nagaon** districts, was the kingdom of **Kamrup- Kamata**. The

Chutias ruled from the rivers **Subansiri** and **Disang** on the north of the Brahmaputra. To the west of the **Chutia** kingdom and on the **southern bank** of the **Brahmaputra**, extending from the rivers **Dikhow** to **Kolong**, the **Kacharis** had their kingdom. On the north-west of the **Kachari** and west of **Chutia** kingdom and on the banks of the Brahmaputra, were scattered the smaller states of the **Bhuyans**.

Activity :

- ★ Identify and list the kingdoms lying on the borders of Assam from the map given in the previous page.

The Ahom Kingdom :

The **Ahoms** migrated to Assam in 1228 A.C. Their reign covered a span of almost six hundred years- from the 13 century to the first two decades of the 19 century. Examples of such long reigns are rare in world history. **Sukapha** was the founder of the Ahom dynasty. About 784 years ago Sukapha came from the **Mawlung** kingdom through **Mungkong** and crossed the **Patkai** hills to enter Assam. He had to face many challenges from the local people before he could establish his capital at **Charaideo** in **1253 A.D.** Sukapha brought these people under him very tactfully. He subjugated the two tribes of **Moran** and **Borahi** who controlled the region between the **Disang** and the **Dikhow** rivers by establishing marital relationship

Sukapha was a shrewd, brave and a skillful warrior. He had brought with him two officials called **Burhagohain** and **Borgohain**, who acted as his advisors. Sukapha died in 1268 A.D. after a long and glorious reign of 36 years.

Let us know :

- ★ There are many legends about the origin of the Ahoms. According to one such legend, the Ahoms are the descendents of *Indra* (Lengdon), the king of heavens. So the Ahom kings used the title *swargadeu* (Swarga- Heaven, Deo- Lord) before their names.

After Sukapha, 39 kings of the Ahom dynasty ruled Assam. During their 600 years of reign they fought many battles with their neighbouring kingdoms which extended or reduced their borders. At first, keeping their tradition safe the Ahoms worshipped their native deity called **Somdeo**. From the time of Swargadeo Sudangpha or Bamuni Konwar the influence of Hinduism began to be felt in Ahom administration. Sudangpha shifted his capital to **Soragua**, about 17 kilometers from Sibsagar town.

During the reign of the 14th Ahom ruler, Swargadeo Suhungmung or Dihingiya Raja, Assam was invaded several times by a Muslim ruler, Turbak Khan. In this war, Mula Gabharu, gave her life fighting valiantly to avenge the death of her husband Frasengmung Borgohain.

The tradition of adopting Hindu names by the Ahom kings began from the time of Swargadeo Suhungmung. Suhungmung took the name of **Swarganarayan**. He also created the post of Borpatra Gohain. The battle between the Ahoms and the Chutias is an important event of Suhungmung's

reign. The Chutias were defeated in this battle and their kingdom annexed to the Ahom Empire and its administration was entrusted to Sadiyakhwa Gohain. During this king's reign Srimanta Sankardev preached Vaishnavism in Assam.

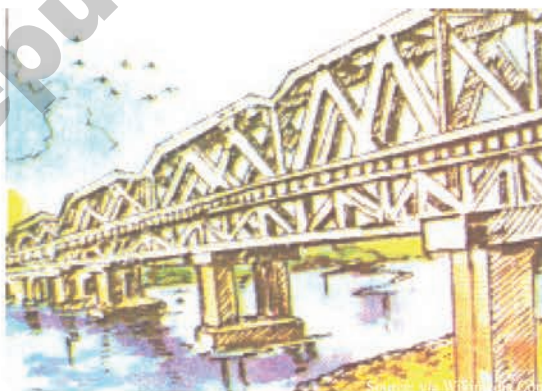
Write Answer :

- ✦ Who established the Ahom kingdom in Assam? How long did they rule Assam?
- ✦ During whose reign did Hinduism exert its influence on the Ahom administration?
- ✦ What was the post created during the rule of Suhungmung or Dihingiya Raja?

The period from 1603- 1673 A.D. was critical for the Ahoms. During this period they were engaged in a long drawn battle with the Mughals. The battle started during the reign of the 17 Swargadeo, Pratap Singha and ended in the reign of Swargadeo Udayaditya Singha. The defeat of the mighty Mughals led by Ram Singh in the battle of Saraighat under the command of Lachit Borphukan is a significant event of the period.

In 1662 A.D. the Ahoms under the rule of Swargadeo Jayadhwaj Singha, suffered a defeat in the hand of the Nawab of Bengal, Mirjumla. Mirjumla captured Gargaon. In 1663, a truce was signed between the two powers according to which the Ahom border was drawn from the river Bharali lying to the north of the Brahmaputra to the Kolong river in the south. **Sihabuddin Talis**, a historian who came with Mirjumla, wrote an account of Assam, her people and society and the indigenous tribal population which is a valuable record of the times.

The refusal of Jayadhwaja Singha's successor Swargadeo Chakradhwaj Singha to pay tribute to the Mughals led another battle between them. The Mughal emperor Aurangzeb dispatched Ram Singh to subjugate the Ahoms and in 1671, the battle of Saraighat was fought. The Ahoms, fighting under the charge of the intrepid Lachit Borphukan, vanquished the Mughals and redeemed the glory of their mother land.



Pic-2.2 Old Saraighat bridge

Let us know :

- ✦ The bridge over Brahmaputra connecting Jalukbari and Amingaon is called the Saraighat Bridge. The name is a memorial to the momentous battle of Saraighat.

The eleven years between 1673A.D. to 1681A.D. is a decade of upheaval in Assam history. The weak Ahom kings could not control their ambitious courtiers whose conspiracies shook the very foundation of the kingdom. This tumultuous period of strife and unrest came to an end in 1681A.D. when Gadadhar Singha ascended the Ahom throne. He crushed the conspiracies and revolutions and brought peace to the land.

During the reign of Gadadhar Singha, the Ahoms and the Mughals fought their last battle at

Itakhuli in the year 1682A.D. which again defined the Ahom border on the west at river Manah.

Gadadhar Singha's son Swargadeo Rudra Singha is considered as the finest of the Ahom kings. A brave and skilled warrior, Rudra Singha was engaged in long battles to control the rebellion of the Kacharis and the Jayantiyas but he undertook many welfare activities for his people.

Swargadeo Rudra Singha tried to form an alliance among the states of Assam, big or small. The reason for this could be perhaps to put up a united resistance to frequent foreign attacks. Keeping this mission in mind, he took the help of the neighbouring states and formed a common army. Unfortunately, before he could realize his dream, he fell fatally ill and died in the year 1714 A.D. Rudra Singha was succeeded by Shiva Singha. Shiva Singha did not rule his kingdom but gave the reins to his queen Phuleswari. Under Phuleswari's rule, the Ahom rulers were gradually attracted to the cult of Shaktism. With the ascension of Swargadeo Lakhmi Singha to the throne, the decline of the Ahom Empire began. The rulers following Lakhmi Singha were plagued by a series of domestic strife; the rebellion of the Moamariya, revolt of **Dondua**, the **Burmese aggression** etc. Signing of the **Yandaboo Treaty** in 1826A.D. brought the Ahom kingdom under the British Empire thereby marking an end to a glorious reign of 600 years.

Activity

- ★ Which period of the Ahom rule is regarded as the period of crisis? Give reasons.
- ★ How did Gadadhar Singha establish peace in his state? Read necessary reference books and write a note on it.

Let us know :

Which Ahom Swargadeos established their capitals and where were they?

Swargadeo Sukapha	<i>Charaideo</i>
Swargadeo Sudangpha or Bamuni Konwar	<i>Sorgua</i>
Swargadeo Suhungmung or Dihingiya Raja	<i>Bakata</i>
Swargadeo Suklenmung or Gargoyan Raja	<i>Gargaon</i>
Swargadeo Rudra Singha	<i>Rangpur</i>
Swargadeo Gaurinath Singha	<i>Jorhat</i>

Other states of medieval Assam :

So far we have discussed at length about the Ahom dynasty. In the beginning of the chapter we had mentioned the states that were in existence when the Ahoms entered Assam. We will now discuss briefly about these states.

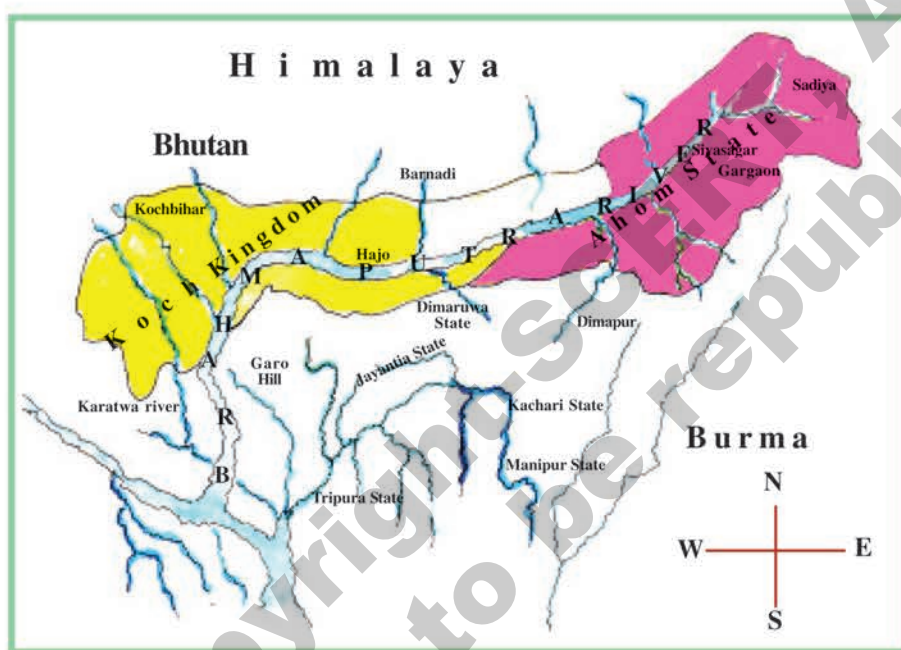
Kamrup-Kamata and the Koch Kingdoms :

The last ruler of ancient Kamrup was probably Jaipal. He ruled Kamrup up to 1100A.D. approximately. History mentions Tingyadev and Vaidyadev as the two other kings of Kamrup after Jaipal. There is a rampart called **Vaidyargarh** in **Betana** near Guwahati which is presumed to have been constructed during Vaidyadev's time and is named after him. Vaidyadev is believed to have ruled Kamrup till 1140 A.D. The death of Vaidyadev brought to an end an era of political succession and also changed the political map of Kamrup. There is not much information on the kings who ruled Kamrup from 1140-1250A.D.

From the last decades of the 12 century, Kamrup was invaded several times by the Turks

and the Afghans. In 1257 A.D. during the reign of king Sandhya, Kamrup was invaded by Subedar Ikhtiyaruddin Malik Uzbek **Tukhril Khan** of Bengal. King Sandhya resisted the invaders and shifted his capital from North Guwahati to Kamatapur and his kingdom also came to be known as Kamata. We do not have much information of the reign of King Sandhya. Of Sandhya's successors, King Durlavnarayan is most prominent. Srimanta Sankardev's ancestor Chandivar was a contemporary of Durlavnarayan. According to popular legends, an ambitious Bhuyan named Arimatta assassinated Durlavnarayan's successor king Indranarayan and captured the throne of Kamata. Arimatta shifted his capital to Betana. The Nawab of Bengal Hussein Shah attacked Kamata in the year 1498 A.D. and captured it by ousting its last ruler Nilambar.

You must have noticed on the map given in the first page, the big region of the Kamata kingdom from the west of the Karatoya river to the present districts of Darrang and Nagaon in the east. Now, look at the map given on the right. You will notice that the Koch kingdom is marked covering almost the same area from the west of the Karatoya river to the Bornadi in the east. Thus, we can see that



Pic-2.3 Tentative Map of 16th Century Koch & Ahom Kingdom

Koch kingdom came to exist where once there was the Kamata kingdom. The Koch kingdom included undivided Goalpara district and a portion of Cooch Behar.

Biswa Singha was the founder of the Koch dynasty. The **Darrang Rajbanshavali** mentions how Biswa Singha defeated the Bhuyans of Kamata and seized their land. Biswa Singha patronized Hinduism. He founded his

capital in Cooch Behar. During his rule, the Koch were engaged in battles with the Ahoms.

Naranarayan was the worthiest king of the Koch dynasty. The legendary **Veer Chilarai** was his brilliant and courageous general. Not only do the Koch Rajbanshi community, but all the people of Assam including the earlier state of Cooch Behar, take pride in the exploits of Veer Chilarai.

Let us know :

- ★ Biswa Singha had eighteen sons. His eldest son Malladev became the king after his father's death and assumed the name Naranarayan. He appointed his younger brother Shukladdwaj as his general who came to be known as Veer Chilarai for his ability to attack his enemies with the speed of a falcon.

In 1562 A.D. king Naranarayan invaded the Ahom kingdom. General Chilarai captured the Ahom capital **Gargaon** and made the Ahom king a tributary king of Naranarayan. Later, Chilarai attacked and subjugated the states of Kachari, Manipur, Jayantiya, Tripura, Khairam, Dimarua, Srihatta etc. He also invaded the Gaud kingdom. The English traveller **Ralph Fitch** toured the Koch kingdom and wrote a valuable account on its socio- economic condition.

You must have heard of *Gohain Kamal Ali*. This is a road constructed under the supervision of Naranarayan's younger brother Gohain Kamal during battle between the Koch and the Ahoms. This road is a witness to the fact that Naranarayan and Chilarai concentrated not only on warfare but also on welfare activities.

After Naranarayan, the Koch kingdom divided into the two states of **Cooch Behar** and **Kochhajo**. Later, the Koch ruled over the Darrang region as the tributary kings under the Ahoms. During the rule of the Darangi king Krishna Narayan, Darrang came under the rule of the British.

Chutia Kingdom :

The Chutias had their kingdom to the east of the rivers Sobansiri and Disang on the north and southern banks of the Brahmaputra respectively. The Chutias were divided into many factions like the Hindu Chutia, Borahi Chutia, Deori Chutia, Miri Chutia etc.

Not much is known about the origin of the Chutias. *Deodhai Asom Buranji* specially mentions ten Chutia kings from early 12 century to the beginning of the 16 century. Birpal was the first king of the Chutias and Ratnadhwaipal or Gaurinarayan was their most powerful ruler. He had established an alliance with the king of Gaud. The Chutias were efficient administrators. They had their own religion and language. They were the followers of the Shakti cult and worshipped **Kesaikhati Goxani** of Sadiya. They were defeated and brought under the Ahoms in 1523 A.D. and the administration entrusted to an official called Sadiyakhwa Gohain.

The Baro Bhuyans :

We have seen that in the 14 century, Kamatapur had divided into two states. The north and eastern part of the state and the city of Kamatapur was ruled by king Durlavnarayan. On the south, comprising of Rangpur and Mymensingh, Dharmanarayan became the king. Both the kings adopted the titles of **Kameswar** or **Kamateswar** and **Gaudeswar** respectively. At the time of the division, Durlavnarayan had received seven families of Brahmins and Kayasthas from Dharmanarayan as a gift. These people later became famous as the *Baro Bhuyans*. Chandivar was their leader and was known by the title of *Shiromoni Bhuyan*. Sankardev was a descendent of Chandivar.

The Bhuyans of Assam were mostly Kayasthas, Daivagyas and Brahmins. The term Bhuyan means a landlord. Many accounts are found about the rise of the Baro Bhuyans. According to some, the Baro Bhuyans were originally the wealthy and powerful landlords who had stopped paying tax to the king and declared themselves as independent. Originally they were the independent chiefs of regions within Kamrup. The Bhuyans were rich in money and land and taking advantage of the weak kings of Kamrup, they became independent and began to call

themselves kings. With the fall in power of the Kamata kingdom, the Baro Bhuyans gradually became very powerful. In the middle of the 16 century, the Bhuyans were defeated by the Ahoms and came under their rule. The Ahoms tried to pacify the Bhuyans by giving them important positions in the administration. The Bhuyans had also helped the king of Kamrup in their battle with the Turkish Afghans.

Activity :

- ★ Which of them were contemporaries ?

Chandivar Bhuyan, Naranarayan, Ikhtyauddin Malik Uzbek Tughril Khan, Durlavnarayan, Gohain Kamal, Sandhya.

The Kacharis :

The Kacharis are the oldest inhabitants of Assam. Historians believe that ancient Kamrup was ruled by the Kacharis and their kingdom had extended from Sylhet and Mymensingh of present Bangladesh to the seas. The tribes of Garo, Koch, Rabha, Chutia, Tripuri, Saraniya, Lalung and Dimasa were of Kachari origin. However when these people settled in different parts of the land, they created their own culture and customs which differed to a certain extent from the original common Kachari culture. Thus, these people came to be identified by separate names such as Bodo Kachari, Mech, Dimasa, Garo, Hajong, Saraniya, Sonowal, etc. Because of existence of this large number of groups belonging to Kacharis, the historians believe that once, almost the major part of the north east was under the rule of the Kacharis.

There is little written history of the Kacharis. Written records on them can be found only after the advent of the Ahoms in the 13 century and particularly after the north east came under the rule of the British. We have seen that, at the time of the advent of the Ahoms, Kacharis had their kingdom in the extended region from Dikhow to Kolong that lay to the south of the Brahmaputra. According to *Ahom Buranji*, the Kacharis were a formidable power and it took the Ahoms almost 200 years to subjugate them and annex the Kachari kingdom lying in the Brahmaputra valley. The local legends of the Kacharis say that they migrated to India from Tibet and China. Some of the prominent kings of the Kacharis are Mahamanikya, Khunkhura, Yashonarayan, Tamradhwaj, Krishnachandra, Govindachandra etc.

After their defeat, the Kacharis made **Dimapur** their capital. When the Ahoms attacked and defeated the Kacharis again, they shifted their capital to **Maibong**. *Ahom Buranji* relates how the Kacharis were engaged in frequent skirmishes with the neighbouring Jayantias. In 1832, the British annexed the Kachari kingdom after the death of their king Govinda Chandra. They also appointed a general named Tularam as a tributary king of northern Cachar. General Tularam ruled north Cachar till 1854 A.D.

Let us remember :

- ★ When the Ahoms came to Assam, there were many small states.

- ✦ The Ahoms came to Assam in the 13 century and set up their capital at Charaideo.
- ✦ A total of 40 Ahom kings ruled Assam. They called themselves *Swargadeo*.
- ✦ The influence of Hinduism on Ahom administration was felt from the time of Sudangpha or Bamuni Konwar and from the time of Swargadeo Suhungmung or Dihingiya Raja, they adopted Hindu names.
- ✦ Rudra Singha was the worthiest of the Ahom kings.
- ✦ The decline of the Ahom dynasty began from the time of Swargadeo Lakhmi Singha.
- ✦ The Ahoms came under the rule of the British under the Yandabo Treaty of 1826.
- ✦ It is believed that Vaidyadev, the king of Kamrup, constructed the rampart Vaidyargarh.
- ✦ Durlavnarayan, the king of Kamata was a contemporary of Sankardev's ancestor Chandivar.
- ✦ Kamata kingdom was destroyed by Hussein Shah, the Nawab of Bengal in 1498.
- ✦ The Koch kingdom was founded in the heart of the Kamata Kingdom. Biswa Singha was the founder of the Koch kingdom.
- ✦ Naranarayan was the finest Koch king. His brother Chilarai was his chief general.
- ✦ Birpal was the first Chutia king and Ratnadhvajpal was their most powerful king.
- ✦ Swargadeo Suhungmung brought the Chutias under the Ahom rule.
- ✦ The term Bhuyan refers to a landlord. The Bhuyans of Assam were known as the Baro Bhuyans.
- ✦ Sankardev was born to the family of the Baro Bhuyans. He preached Vaishnavism during the rule of Swargadeo Suhungmung.
- ✦ The Kacharis are the oldest inhabitants of Assam. Some of their famous kings are- Mahamanikya, Khunhura, Yashonarayan, Tamradhwaj, Krishna Chandra and Govinda Chandra.

Exercise

1. Write answer—
 - (a) When did the Ahoms migrate to Assam?
 - (b) Which two ministers accompanied Sukapha to Assam?
 - (c) Who was Mula Gabharu?
 - (d) In which year did Gadadhar Singha ascend the Ahom throne?
 - (e) In which year did the Koch king Naranarayan invade the Ahom kingdom?
 - (f) Which king is regarded as the best of the Chutia kings?

2. Arrange in sequence–

- (a) The Yandabo Treaty.
- (b) The invasion of Kamata by Hussein Shah.
- (c) The Battle of Saraighat.
- (d) The invasion of Assam by Mirjumla.
- (e) Establishment of the Ahom capital at Charaideo by Swargadeo Sukapha.
- (f) The invasion of Kamrup by Ikhtyaruddin Malik Uzbek Tughril Khan.

3. Write true or false–

- (a) The period from the advent of the Ahoms to the signing of the Yandabo treaty is called the middle age of Assam.
- (b) The Ahoms adopted Hindu names from the time of Swargadeo Sudangpha or Bamuni Konwar.
- (c) The scribe Sihabuddin Talish, came to Assam during Mirjumla's invasion.
- (d) The Kacharis came under the British during the rule of king Govinda Chandra.
- (e) The Chutias were Vaishnavites.
- (f) The Bhuyans had helped the Turkish- Afghans during their raid on Assam.

4. Fill in the blanks–

- (a) After the advent of the Ahoms, Kamrup came to be known as _____.
- (b) The Ahoms worshipped the deity called _____.
- (c) _____ was the Hindu name of Swargadeo Suhungmung or Dihingiya Raja.
- (d) Sandhya shifted his capital from North Guwahati to _____.
- (e) _____ was the most powerful king of the Chutias.
- (f) The term _____ means a landlord.

5. Write within fifty words–

- (a) Who had established the Ahom kingdom in Assam and when?
- (b) Between which two powers was the battle of Saraighat fought? What was the outcome?
- (c) Who was Bir Chilarai? Which kingdom did he conquer?
- (d) Who were the Baro Bhuyans?
- (e) Who are the Kacharis?

6. Prepare a comparative short note based on the two maps given in your lesson.

