



# Title: Exploring the Paik System: A Unique Labor and Taxation System of the Ahom Kingdom

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## **Abstract:**

The Paik system, a unique labor and taxing scheme utilized by the Ahom kingdom in medieval Assam, India, is thoroughly examined in this book. The Paik system was a sophisticated network of labor units, or "paiks," that were in charge of providing labor for a range of jobs, including as construction, agriculture, and military duty. This system, which allowed for consistent taxes and effective labor use, was an essential part of the administration of the Ahom kingdom.

A network of officials and administrators in charge of managing the labor units and the monarch at the top of the hierarchy defined the Paik system. Additionally, the system was highly decentralized, with community leaders and municipal politicians having a major influence on how labor was organized and managed.

The structure, advantages, and drawbacks of the Paik system are examined in this research, which also highlights its special qualities and importance within the setting of medieval Assam. The research also looks at the Paik system's social, economic, and political ramifications, including how it affected common people's lives, how power and riches were distributed, and how the Ahom kingdom developed as a whole.

Keywords: Paik system, Ahom kingdom, labor, decentralized, medieval Assam, political ramifications.

## Introduction

Sukapha founded the Kingdom of Ahom in 1228 AD. Physically fit adult males were compelled to work for the state in exchange for land under the Paik system of military tenure and revenue in medieval Assam. The system was an integral part of the Ahom kingdom's economics and governance for six hundred years. Being a "paik" means working or serving in the military. The Paiks were a significant social and military group in Ahom society. The purpose of the Paik system was to maintain a regular army, safeguard the king, and quell unrest among the indigenous tribes. Except for slaves, all physically fit males between the ages of 16 and 50 were required to support. In exchange for their service, the Paiks were given agricultural land held by the crown. The Paik approach reduced unemployment and military expenses while helping to create a strong Ahom regime. The towns established for the Paiks became important centers of occupation, commerce, and business. The Paik system, which is believed to have originated in South-Eastern Asia, was brought to Assam by the Ahoms around 1228. Similar methods were also used by the Kingdom of Manipur, the Jaintia kingdom, and the Kachari kingdom.

### Significance of the Study

During the Ahom reign, the Paik system was more important and powerful. Known as "paiks," the intricate network of labor units that made up the Paik system was in charge of providing labor for a variety of jobs, including as construction, agriculture, and military duty. High levels of decentralization were another characteristic of the Paik system, with community leaders and municipal politicians being heavily involved in labor management and organization. Scholars have paid very little attention to the Paik system, despite its importance, and much of what we do know about it comes from fragmentary and incomplete sources. This study aims to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive examination of the Paik system, its structure, benefits, and limitations, and its impact on the lives of ordinary people in medieval Assam.

### Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study are:

1. To give a thorough explanation of the Paik system's composition and functioning.
2. To assess the Paik system's advantages and disadvantages as well as how it affects the governance and advancement of the Ahom kingdom.
3. To examine how the Paik system affected the lives of common people in medieval Assam and its social, economic, and political ramifications.

### Literature Review

The Ahom kingdom in medieval Assam, India, used a special labor and taxing system called the Paik system. The Ahom kingdom has a substantial collection of literature, although researchers have paid comparatively little attention to the Paik system. The purpose of this literature review is to give a summary of the current research on the Paik system and point out any knowledge gaps on this intricate and intriguing subject.

### Early Studies

Gordon (1904) carried out one of the first investigations of the Paik system, giving a concise synopsis of the system's functioning. Gordon's research offered a useful understanding of the Paik system and was founded on colonial documents. Nevertheless, his research was constrained by its dependence on colonial sources and its inability to offer a comprehensive comprehension of the system.

### Colonial and Post-Colonial Studies

The Paik method was the subject of several investigations throughout the colonial era, including those by Butler (1855) and Mills (1854). Although these studies offered a more thorough knowledge of the Paik system and how it functioned, they were frequently constrained by their colonial viewpoint and disregard for the Ahom people's experiences and viewpoints.

The Paik system was the subject of several studies throughout the post-colonial era, such as those by Guha (1983) and Dev (1985). These investigations offered a more sophisticated comprehension of the Paik system and its functioning, emphasizing the significance of taking into account the social, political, and economic environment in which the system functioned.

### Recent Studies

The Paik system has been the subject of several research in recent years, such as those by Das (2015) and Sharma (2011). In addition to highlighting the significance of taking into account the experiences and viewpoints of the Ahom people, these studies have offered a more thorough knowledge of the Paik system and how it functions.

The Ahom kingdom in medieval Assam, India, used a special labor and taxing system called the Paik system. Despite the substantial amount of material on the Paik system, there are still a number of unanswered questions regarding this intricate and intriguing subject. The necessity for more research on the Paik system, especially from an Ahom perspective, has been emphasized by this survey of the literature, which has also pointed out a number of areas that require more investigation.

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## **Methodology of the Study**

The study will use a range of primary and secondary sources, including:

The historical writings that serve as main sources of knowledge on the Paik system are the Ahom Buranji and the Assam Buranji. Documents from the National Archives of India, the Assam State Archives, and other archives that offer details on the Paik system. Also some Books, scholarly papers, and other materials that offer details about the Paik system.

## **Paik officials**

The origin of the word paik is unknown and it is believed that the system is based on the South-East Asian legacy the Ahoms brought with them in 1228. The mature structure was designed by Momai Tamuli Borbarua in 1609. Scholars believe that a major reason for the collapse of the Ahom kingdom was that the Paik system had outlived itself by the 18th century.

The paiks in a khel were organized under a gradation of officials who commanded a set number of them. They were Bora who commanded over 20 paiks, Saikia who commanded over 100 paiks and Hazarika who commanded over 1000 paiks. More important khels were commanded by a Phukan Who could grip 6000 paiks, a Rajkhowa, a governor of a territory, or a Barua, a superintending officer, each of whom could command between 2000 and 3000 paiks. The Phukans, Rajkhowas, Baruas and Hazarikas were nominated by the king and appointed in concurrence with the three great Gohains which were Burhagohain, Borgohain and Borpatrogohain. The Boras and Saikias were appointed by their respective Phukans and Rajkhowas.

## **Advantages of Paik System**

The Paik System of the Ahom Monarchy had some great advantages which can be designated as under the following heads. These are: Economic Advantages, Social Advantages, Administrative Advantages, Military Advantages:

### **Economic Advantages**

The Paik system made it possible for the state to mobilize a sizable workforce for a variety of jobs, including as construction, agriculture, and military duty, allowing for the effective use of labor. The Paik system guaranteed a steady flow of labor, products, and services, giving the state a reliable source of income. The Paik system stimulated economic expansion by facilitating trade and commerce by supplying a consistent supply of products and labor.

### **Social Advantages**

Social mobility was made possible under the Paik system, since people may advance in society by giving the state more work or services. The Paik method fostered collaboration and teamwork among community members, which aided in community growth. In exchange for their labor, workers in the Paik system were entitled to food, clothes, and other essentials, ensuring their wellbeing.

### **Administrative Advantages**

Decentralized administration was made possible by the Paik system since labor was organized and managed mostly by local officials and community leaders. Because the Paik system allowed the state to retain authority over a sizable region and populace, it made efficient government possible. Because the Paik system was adaptable, the state could change the tax rates

and labor requirements in response to evolving conditions.

### **Military Advantages**

The Ahom kingdom was able to maintain an enduring and efficient military because of the Paik system, which offered a ready supply of labor for military battles. Because it made it possible to quickly mobilize labor and resources during emergencies, the Paik system helped to defend and secure the Ahom kingdom. The Ahom kingdom's growth and conquest were made easier by the Paik system, which offered a consistent flow of labor and supplies for military operations.

### **Challenges of the Paik system**

The Ahom ruler acquired services from the people and returned those services to them through the Paik system. It had developed into a strong system by the 17th century, which helped the Ahom kingdom withstand a lengthy conflict with the Mughals. However, it quickly encountered difficulties. Over time, Kanri Paik's services were appropriated by the nobility, and as a likchou, he started working for them rather than the monarch. Following the pargana system that was left behind, the Ahom kingdom expanded the Paik system to areas that had previously been ruled by the Mughals but where royal service was now paid in cash when the Ahom-Mughal wars ended.

The Paik system was unable to manage the monetization of the economy that was required due to the rise in paik output and the development of an internal market throughout the kingdom. As a result, a class of Paiks known as the apaikan chamua were freed from their khels and paid a monetary tribute to the monarch in exchange for their service. Pariks who want to avoid the mandatory duty were also drawn to the satras. By entering new social groupings that the Ahom kingdom would not have otherwise entered and by offering a different method of economic production, the Satras also entered a competitive market with the Ahom kingdom. The Moamoria insurrection resulted from this battle with the Satras, utterly destroying the Ahom kingdom.

### **Economic Challenges**

A common result of the Paik system was the inefficient distribution of labor, since people were compelled to perform duties that did not correspond with their interests or abilities. The Paik system's emphasis on manual labor and subsistence farming hindered the Ahom kingdom's ability to innovate and prosper economically. The Paik system was susceptible to changes in the supply and demand for labor since it relied heavily on physical labor.

### **Social Challenges**

While the Paik system permitted some social mobility, it was restricted, and people were frequently restricted to their conventional jobs. This resulted in the perpetuation of social inequity, as those who were unable to supply labor or services were frequently reduced to lower social rank. In a vast and varied kingdom like Ahom, the Paik system was especially intricate and challenging to manage.

### **Military Challenges**

The military power of the Ahom kingdom was constrained by the Paik system's dependence on manual labor and subsistence farming. The Paik system made it hard to organize a sizable and capable military force, leaving the Ahom kingdom open to outside assaults. Because the Paik system prioritized manual labor and subsistence farming, the military's access to logistical assistance was restricted.

## Conclusion

The Ahom kingdom in medieval Assam had a special labor and taxing system called the Paik system. The intricate network of labor units, referred to as "paiks," that made up the system was in charge of providing labor for a variety of jobs, including as construction, agriculture, and military duty.

The Paik system offered a number of benefits, such as steady taxes, effective labor utilization, and trade and commerce development. Social mobility, community development, and worker welfare were among its other advantages. But the system also had to deal with social inequity, slow economic development, and ineffective labor allocation.

The Paik system was essential to the governance and growth of the Ahom kingdom, despite its drawbacks. In addition to facilitating the kingdom's growth and conquest, it allowed the state to retain authority over a sizable population and area.

To sum up, the Paik system was a distinctive and intricate taxing and labor structure that was essential to the governance and growth of the Ahom kingdom. Its research sheds light on the social, political, and economic dynamics of medieval Assam and emphasizes how crucial it is to take local groups' experiences and viewpoints into account when analyzing historical systems.

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