



Shifting Of Ahom Capital: Geography, Security And Statecraft

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Abstract: The Ahom kingdom witnessed a series of capital shifts over the period of nearly six centuries, reflecting the dynamic interplay of geography, security, administration, demography and political exigencies. This study examines the evolution of Ahom capitals from Charaideo to Jorhat, highlighting the underlying reasons of each relocation. Charaideo, established by Sukapha in 1253 AD, was chosen for its elevated, flood free terrain, fertile agricultural land and central location, symbolizing both spiritual sanctity and political authority. Subsequent shift to Charagua under Sudangpha were driven primarily by security concerns. Similarly, establishment of Gargaon by Suklenmung marked a strategic and administrative considerations, whereas Rudra Singha's transfer of capital to Rangpur was a response to the demographic growth and economic expansion. Finally, the shift to Jorhat in 1794 AD under Gaurinath Singha was compelled by internal instability due to the Moamaria rebellion.

Keywords – Ahom, capital, Charaideo, Charagua, Gargaon, Rangpur, Jorhat.

In 1253 C.E, Sukapha constructed a town at Charaideo adjacent to a small hill. The *Deodhai Asom Buranji* states that Sukapha founded a city at the hill adjacent to Lankuri hill in lakni Mungkeu. He, In order to propitiate the gods, sacrificed a horse in the north and another in the south. He worshipped the three spirits, Kamle, Rangle and Rangmlao near a tree (Barua:1930:47). *Che* means City or Town, *Rai* means Shine or Dazzle and *Doi* means Hill or Mountain. Therefore, *Charaideo* means, “a shining town situated on a hill top”. Sukapha after entering into the Brahmaputra valley started searching for a suitable place to establish his capital. After staying in different places such as Tipam, Salaguri, Habung, Santak, Simaluguri, he finally came to Charaideo. All the earlier places were low lands and prone to inundation. So he chose a high land, Charaideo as his capital. There were available cultivable lands in abundance at Charaideo. Sukapha brought the culture of paddy cultivation from his homeland to Assam. Thus, one of the down side of Charaideo, he established three cultivable fields namely *Gosikolakhat*, *Borakhowakhat* and *Angerakhat* for paddy cultivation. (Bakatial:2009:26-27) As this type of paddy cultivation was more productive than the shifting mode of cultivation. The high location safe from flood is one of the prime reasons for Sukapha to establish his first capital at Charaideo (Buragohain:2020:5). Charaideo provides another political and administrative advantage. Charaideo lies in the centre of the region occupied by Sukapha. Its location helped him administering the territory properly.

Sudangpha, also known as the *Bamuni Konwar* shifted his Capital to Charagua from Charaideo. Charagua was also a high land and was free from floods. There was enough cultivable land, fishing tank, sufficient grassland for animal husbandry at Charagua. Besides the above mentioned causes, the main cause the shifting the Capital City from Charaideo to Charagua was for security purpose. Sudangpha established his Capital at Charagua on the boundary lines of the Chutiyas for defending them to attack the Ahom territory at Charagua. The Chutiyas were the first Hinduised community among the all community of the Brahmaputra valley. Bamuni Konwar who brought up in a Brahmin Hindu family knew the military power of the Chutiyas. Therefore, he shifted his Capital from Charaideo to Charagua due to security purpose from the Chutiyas (Buragohain:2020:5). However, when Sudangpha shifted his capital to Charagua, it had been seen merely as an administrative city. Most of the people did not leave Charaideo and decided to remain there. During the earlier years of his reign, Sudangpha involved more in the dispute between the Naras and the Ahom. Although he shifted the capital to Charagua from Charaideo, he was out of the capital. According to Arup Kumar Dutta as described in his work *The Ahom*, Sudangpha shifted his capital to Charagua as he had many sad memories associated with kareng and the city (Charaideo) and wanted to keep pace with the times and expand their influence and dominance throughout the golden valley (Dutta:2022: 101).

Gargaon, also known as *Che-hung*, founded by the Ahom king Suklenmung in 1540 C.E., was the third capital of the Ahom dynasty. The Garhgyan Raja shifted his Capital from Charagua to Garhgaon because of suitability for transportation and security. (Gogoi:2006:261) As Garhgaon was located at the middle part of the Ahom Kingdom at that time. It was suitable for ruling the state, so there was an advantage of ruling the Ahom territory (Buragohain:2020:5). The queen Nang Sao Seng had a great influence on the king. He shifted the capital to Gargaon on her advice. The main purpose was security. He widened the southwest side of Dorika city in a deep place and raised it with wooden walls. The city of Gargaon was surrounded by three forts. The outermost fort, the first fort, was called Rajgarh and this huge fort was built more than 30 feet wide and 15/16 feet high. Outside the fort there was a deep and wide ditch under a high cliff and it was always filled with water. The fort was topped with thick, easily growing twisted bamboo. The *Talatal ghar* had secret underground passes through which the king could escape the city in unwanted situation. Through this the king was transported to the Dikhau and to further Brahmaputra. These features provide an idea of the strategic and aspect of security of Gargaon. Therefore the main purpose of shifting the capital to Gargaon from Charagua was more of a strategic purpose. Besides these, being situated on the bank of river Dikau and having large fertile cultivable area, Gargaon was also suitable for cultivation.

Rudra Singha shifted his Capital from Gargaon to Rangpur in 1699 A.D. He shifted the capital to Rangpur due to over population at Garhgaon. At that time, there were enough cultivable lands and there were free lands for habitation at Rangpur. For the inhabitation of growing population of the Ahom state and growth of agricultural economy, the Ahom ruler Rudra Singha shifted his Capital from Garhgaon to Rangpur (Buragohain:2020:5). According to Lila gogoi, Rudra Singha built a two-story wooden and bamboo amphitheatre (Rangghar) in the Ruphi field. They hold elephant-fights, cow-fights, elephant-buffalo fights, tiger-bear fights, methon-pig fights in the courtyard of the Rangghar. Instead of commuting from the fort, Swargadeo decided to build a city outside Meteka and built a fort (গুৰু হাত) high covering 423 pura, 3 bighas, 2 katha and 8 lochas of land and the city was named as Rangpur. Rangpur served as the capital for long period of time till Gaurinath Singha shifted the capital to Jorhat in 1794 A.D.

During the reign of Gaurinath Singha the capital was shifted to Jorhat, on the bank of the river Disoi (Bhogdoi) in 1794 A.D. In order to prevent from the Moamoria rebels, the Ahom King Gaurinath Singha shifted the Capital to Jorhat for security reason. According to Hiteswar Barua as mentioned in his work *Ahomar Din*, During the Moamaria revolt Rangpur was destroyed and only few people left there. Therefore Purnananda Buragohain considered Rangpur not suitable to be continue as the capital, on

saka 1717, asked Gaurinath Singha to shift to the camp at Jorhat and from that day Rangpur was abandoned. Actually, the long stretched civil war made the Ahom monarchy very weak and was no more capable to recover and restore the city of Rangpur or Gargaon. The Morans or Moamarias became very powerful in the region and caused a great challenge to the Ahom monarchy. They occupied Rangpur and established their supremacy. The Ahoms under the leadership of Purnananda Buragohain somehow managed to defend Jorhat, on the bank of river Disoi. Apart from these strategic aspects Jorhat did not possess any other great geographical advantage as the previous capital sites had. Even, Purnananda Buragohain had to dig a river from Disoi to Brahmaputra, called the Bhogdoi river that flowed through the capital city to fulfil the need of the capital city.

It is important to note that not only in Ahom kingdom but also in other contemporary kingdoms, any rebels or invaders often did not change old capital cities after seizing power for various practical, political, and symbolic reasons. Actually the existing capitals were already established as the centres of administration, communication, strategic and other aspects which provide the new rulers with various advantages. Also, maintaining the old capital helped confer legitimacy on the new regime. By ruling from the existing capital, they could present themselves as rightful successor of the order. Therefore, in context of the Ahom kingdom the Moamarias did not shift the capital from Rangpur. The rebels occupied the capital city and the rebel leader Ramakanta ascended the throne in 1769 A.D and ruled the region from the already existing capital of Rangpur. During the second Moamaria rebellion (1782 A.D) the rebels occupied the capital again and the new ruler Bharat Singha became the king and ruled for the period between 1788 to 1794 A.D from Rangpur.

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