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## Matrimonial Diplomacy and the Dynamics of Ahom–Kachari Political Relations

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### ABSTRACT

Matrimonial alliances historically served as vital instruments of diplomacy, political consolidation, and interstate relations across global civilizations. In medieval Assam, the Ahom kingdom (1228–1826 C) effectively deployed matrimonial diplomacy as a core mechanism for state formation, territorial expansion, and socio-political integration. Utilizing an analytical and historical framework, this study examines the nature, objectives, and significance of royal marriages established between Ahom monarchs, neighboring states, and indigenous communities of the Brahmaputra Valley. The paper draws primarily upon indigenous primary sources, including Assamese and Tai-Ahom *Buranjis*, *Koch Vamsavalis*, and *Charit Puthis*, to reconstruct these diplomatic networks. The study argues that these alliances transcended simple dynastic arrangements, functioning instead as deliberate political strategies designed to secure peace, stabilize volatile frontier regions, formalize trade channels, and accelerate cultural assimilation. Through targeted intermarriage, the Ahom state successfully integrated a diverse matrix of ethnic and political groups—such as the Kacharis, Chutiyas, Koches, and surrounding hill polities—into a centralized administrative framework. This cross-cultural statecraft evolved continuously to meet shifting geopolitical requirements. A critical focus is placed on the Ahom-Kachari nexus, demonstrating how matrimonial diplomacy operated as a decisive instrument for conflict resolution, strategic

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alignment, and regional stabilization. Additionally, this paper highlights the institutional and political agency of royal women, whose marriages carried profound diplomatic implications that directly reinforced Ahom imperial authority. By transforming the domestic institution of marriage into a flexible, state-level diplomatic tool, Ahom rulers successfully fostered the political cohesion, cultural accommodation, and social integration necessary to sustain a multi-ethnic political order. Ultimately, these findings underscore how matrimonial diplomacy provided the structural foundations for one of the longest-lasting empires in pre-colonial Northeast India.

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**Introduction:**

The migration and subsequent establishment of the Ahom dynasty in the Brahmaputra Valley during the thirteenth century inaugurated a transformative six-century era in the historiography of Assam. Initiated by Sukapha along the foothills of the Naga Hills, this nascent polity gradually evolved into the preeminent hegemony of the region. The consolidation of this expansive empire was an incremental process driven by multifaceted administrative and geopolitical factors. Among these, the strategic deployment of matrimonial alliances emerged as a crucial diplomatic instrument, enabling Ahom monarchs to cultivate strategic partnerships and assimilate various indigenous populations within the valley.

**The Historical and Theoretical Context of Matrimonial Diplomacy:**

Dynastic marriage as an instrument of international diplomacy is a deeply entrenched historical practice with origins extending into antiquity. In Western classical tradition, narratives such as the Trojan War highlight early prehistoric precedents where the transfer of royal women was utilized to secure peace or reinforce inter-state coalitions.

Historically, the formulation of royal marriages was governed by rigorous geopolitical considerations:

- **Territorial Dominion:** The geographical scope of the territory governed by a prospective royal house served as a primary metric of suitability.



- **Geopolitical Stability:** The degree of administrative control and internal stability exerted by a ruling line over its domain directly influenced its diplomatic appeal; territorial volatility typically disincentivized foreign royal houses from entering into marital contracts.
- **Strategic Alignment:** Intermarriage functioned as a binding legal and political mechanism to align sovereign families and their respective nation-states, providing institutional justification for critical foreign policy shifts during intervals of both peace and warfare.

### **Global and Cross-Cultural Precedents**

The utilization of matrimonial diplomacy to consolidate authority, append territory, and maintain regional stability is widely documented across global historiography. During the fourteenth century BCE, dynastic marriages constituted the structural framework of international relations throughout the Near East, directly accelerating the geopolitical ascendance of the Hittite Empire and the Middle Assyrian Kingdom.

Similarly, within the Indian subcontinent, ruling dynasties frequently leveraged marital alliances to facilitate territorial expansion and secure political compliance. During the early modern period, the Mughal Emperor Akbar systematically contracted marriage alliances with various Rajput clans. This strategic integration effectively co-opted the martial aristocracy of the Rajputs, thereby neutralizing a potent regional threat and converting them into vital pillars of Mughal imperial administration.

The Ahom state operated in direct alignment with these global patterns of statecraft, adopting comparable matrimonial strategies to navigate its own complex multi-ethnic frontier.

### **Objectives of the study:**

The present study aims to examine the matrimonial alliances forged by the Ahom kings with various indigenous tribes and neighbouring states of the Brahmaputra Valley, primarily on the basis of the indigenous Ahom Buranjis (chronicles). Although matrimonial diplomacy constituted an important aspect of Ahom statecraft, it has not received adequate attention in historical studies. The study focuses on the period of the Ahom kingdom and seeks to explore the political, diplomatic, and socio-cultural significance of these marital alliances.

Particular attention is given to understanding how the Ahoms strategically employed matrimonial relations as a diplomatic instrument to strengthen political authority, secure alliances, and facilitate the consolidation and expansion of their empire in Assam. This paper also investigates the status and role of



women within the Ahom polity, highlighting their participation in political and diplomatic processes through these alliances.

Furthermore, the study analyses the underlying motives behind matrimonial relations established between the Ahom rulers and neighbouring polities, as well as indigenous communities. It argues that such alliances played a crucial role in promoting political integration, cultural assimilation, social cohesion, and religious accommodation within the expanding Ahom state. Consequently, matrimonial diplomacy emerged as one of the significant mechanisms through which the Ahoms successfully integrated diverse ethnic and political groups under their rule and sustained their authority in the Brahmaputra Valley.

### **Methodology:**

The present study adopts an analytical and scientific methodology in examining the subject under investigation. Every effort has been made to maintain objectivity and scholarly impartiality throughout the research, without being influenced by any political, ideological, or sectarian considerations. The study seeks to provide a balanced, rational, and critical interpretation of historical events based on a careful assessment of available evidence.

The research is primarily based on a wide range of primary historical sources. These include the early chronicles of Assam, particularly the Assamese and Tai-Ahom Buranjis, which constitute the principal source materials for reconstructing the political and diplomatic history of the Ahom kingdom. In addition, the genealogical records of the Koch rulers (Vamsavalis) have been consulted to understand the dynastic connections and political relationships of neighbouring states. The study also draws upon the biographical literature of the medieval Vaishnava saints, commonly known as Charit Puthis, which provide valuable insights into the socio-cultural and religious milieu of the period. The careful examination and cross-verification of these sources have enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the nature and significance of matrimonial alliances in the political and cultural history of Assam.

### **Ahom Matrimonial Alliances:**

Diplomacy has historically constituted one of the most significant instruments of state formation, consolidation, and expansion across regions and civilizations. The Ahom kingdom (1228–1826) was no exception to this broader historical pattern. In the course of establishing and maintaining political authority in the Brahmaputra Valley, the Ahom rulers developed a multifaceted diplomatic framework characterized by diverse objectives and strategic considerations. Their relations with neighbouring states



and indigenous communities were shaped by political exigencies, economic interests, historical ties, and concerns of territorial security.

Following their migration into Assam, the Ahoms encountered considerable resistance from several established indigenous groups and regional powers. The process of consolidating authority over the extensive territory stretching from Sadiya in the east to the Manah River in the west therefore necessitated the adoption of both military and diplomatic measures. While military campaigns were undertaken against groups such as the Morans, Borahis, Chutiyas, Kacharis, Koches, and the Mughals, the Ahom rulers simultaneously employed diplomatic strategies to secure political stability and facilitate imperial expansion. These strategies operated through four principal channels: warfare, diplomatic correspondence and embassies, trade relations, and matrimonial alliances.

Among these mechanisms, matrimonial alliances emerged as one of the most effective and enduring instruments of Ahom diplomacy. Rather than relying exclusively on military coercion, the Ahom rulers strategically utilized marital relations to establish political partnerships, promote social integration, and facilitate cultural accommodation with neighbouring states and indigenous communities. These alliances played a crucial role in reducing political tensions, securing peace agreements, strengthening commercial networks, and stabilizing frontier regions during periods of political uncertainty.

The Ahom policy of matrimonial diplomacy thus represented far more than a series of dynastic marriages. It functioned as a deliberate political strategy aimed at fostering alliances, integrating diverse ethnic communities, and strengthening the foundations of imperial authority. By transforming marriage into an effective instrument of diplomacy, the Ahom rulers successfully bridged ethnic and cultural divisions, promoted processes of assimilation and integration, and contributed significantly to the emergence and longevity of a centralized political order in the Brahmaputra Valley for nearly six centuries.

### **Nature of Ahom Matrimonial Alliances:**

The significance of matrimonial diplomacy was such that it gradually transcended the traditional endogamous practices of the Ahoms. According to established Ahom customs, the office of the Bor Kuwari (Chief Queen) was generally reserved for women belonging to the Satgharia Ahom—the seven principal Ahom noble lineages that formed the core of the ruling elite. However, the practical demands of statecraft and political expediency increasingly challenged these customary restrictions. This



transformation is reflected in the elevation of non-Ahom women such as Queen Phuleswari Konwari and the Manipuri princess Kuranganayani to the position of Chief Queen. Despite their non-Ahom origins, both women exercised considerable influence within the Ahom court and played important roles in the political and administrative affairs of the kingdom.

The nature and objectives of the matrimonial alliances established by the Ahoms with neighbouring states and indigenous communities underwent significant transformations over time, reflecting changing political circumstances and diplomatic requirements. Following their entry into the Brahmaputra Valley in the thirteenth century, the Ahoms encountered resistance from several indigenous groups that had long been established in the region. These groups included the Morans, Borahis, Chutiyas, Kacharis, and Koches of the plains, as well as the hill states and tribes such as the Jayantias, Manipuris, and Tripuris. Many of these communities had already come under the influence of Hindu socio-cultural traditions, which facilitated their interaction with neighbouring political powers.

The Ahom rulers considered their relations with these groups to be of strategic importance, particularly because many of them occupied fertile plains and geographically significant territories that were essential for the territorial expansion and consolidation of the Ahom kingdom. Consequently, the Ahoms adopted a dual policy of military intervention and diplomatic engagement in their dealings with these communities. While military campaigns were undertaken, when necessary, diplomacy remained an indispensable instrument for securing political stability and fostering long-term alliances.

Among the various diplomatic strategies employed by the Ahoms, matrimonial alliances occupied a prominent position. Marital ties served as an effective means of establishing political partnerships, reducing hostilities, and integrating diverse ethnic and political groups into the expanding Ahom polity. The cultural affinities shared with several Hindu-influenced neighbouring states and communities further facilitated the formation and maintenance of such alliances.

In their relations with the hill states, however, the Ahoms adopted a somewhat different approach. The hill polities were often economically dependent on the exchange of goods available in the plains, while the Ahom kingdom benefited from access to resources obtained from the hill regions. This mutual economic interdependence formed the basis of diplomatic relations between the two. Matrimonial alliances therefore functioned not only as political agreements but also as mechanisms for strengthening economic cooperation and securing access to trade networks. Through such alliances, the hill states sought to maintain favourable relations with the Ahom kingdom and ensure continued economic



interaction, while the Ahoms used these relationships to enhance their political influence and maintain stability along their frontier regions.

Thus, matrimonial diplomacy emerged as a flexible and effective instrument of Ahom statecraft, serving both political and economic objectives and contributing significantly to the integration of diverse communities within the broader framework of the Ahom empire.

### **Matrimonial Alliances between Ahoms and Kachari:**

The history of relations between the Ahom and Kachari kingdoms constitutes an important aspect of the political history of medieval Assam. Among the various diplomatic mechanisms employed by these two powers, matrimonial alliances emerged as a significant instrument for maintaining peace, consolidating political authority, and managing interstate relations.

### **Early Geopolitical Landscape and Initial Contacts (13th–15th Centuries)**

Prior to the consolidation of Ahom authority in the Brahmaputra Valley during the thirteenth century, the Kacharis constituted one of the most powerful, highly organized, and indigenous polities in the region. According to historical observations by Sir Edward Gait, the medieval Kachari kingdom occupied a vast territory along the south bank of the Brahmaputra River, extending from the Dikhou River to the Kallang River, and encompassing the Dhansiri Valley and the modern North Cachar subdivision. While traditional Kachari accounts point to two distinct geographical branches—a northern faction near Sadiya and a southern faction operating from capitals at Dimapur, Maibong, and Khaspur—the *Ahom Buranjis* (official chronicles) focus exclusively on the southern branch. This southern lineage claimed mythic descent from the Mahabharata figures Bhima and the Rakshashi Hidimba (Heramba).

When the foundational Ahom monarch, Sukapha, migrated into the Brahmaputra Valley via Naga territory, he encountered a dense and formidable Kachari population. Recognizing that an immediate military campaign against such a well-entrenched and structured kingdom would be a strategic error, Sukapha deliberately avoided conflict with the Kacharis. Instead, he focused his initial state-building efforts on annexing the less powerful territories of the Moran and Barahi tribes.

Following Sukapha's demise, his successor, Sutenpha (1268–1281), initiated a westward expansion policy. Through a calculated diplomatic maneuver, Sutenpha coerced the Kachari leadership into ceding territory up to the Namdang River. For the subsequent two centuries, the Namdang River



served as the established and mutually respected geopolitical boundary separating the Ahom and Kachari domains.

### **The Genesis of Matrimonial Diplomacy and the *Thapita-Sanchita* Framework**

As the Ahoms systematically augmented their regional power, their foreign policy transitioned from peaceful containment to aggressive territorial acquisition. This expansionist stance led to the first major military confrontation between the two powers in 1490 AD, during the reign of Swargadeo Suhenpha (1488–1493). The Ahom forces suffered a definitive defeat. To mitigate further losses and sue for peace, the Ahoms offered an Ahom maiden to the Kachari monarch, accompanied by a substantial dowry of elephants, alongside male and female slaves. This incident established the historical precedent of utilizing matrimonial alliances as a pragmatic diplomatic instrument to resolve armed conflicts between the two states.

In the sixteenth century, under the leadership of Suhungmung (1497–1539), commonly known as the Dihingia Raja, the Ahom kingdom aggressively expanded in multiple directions. Employing a combination of military coercion and strategic diplomacy, the Ahoms successfully pushed the Kachari borders back to the Dhansiri River. Tension escalated in 1531 AD when Suhungmung ordered the construction of a strategic fort at Marangi, directly threatening Kachari sovereignty. In response, the Kachari King Khunkhara and his brother Detcha mobilized an army to repel the Ahoms. The ensuing war resulted in a catastrophic defeat for the Kacharis and the death of Detcha. Suhungmung subsequently advanced along the Dhansiri River, completely routing the remaining Kachari forces, forcing King Khunkhara to flee, and capturing the capital city of Dimapur.

In the wake of this vacuum, a political claimant named Detchung petitioned Suhungmung to recognize his ancestral right to the Kachari throne, offering his sister in marriage to cement the arrangement. Suhungmung acceded to the request on the condition of receiving a tribute of one thousand rupees, an elephant, and the princess. This matrimonial alliance proved highly advantageous to the Ahoms, as it temporarily neutralized the Kachari threat, allowing the Ahom state to consolidate its internal strength and resources.

Crucially, this alliance formalized the subordinate political doctrine of *Thapita-Sanchita* (established and preserved). By acknowledging Ahom suzerainty, King Detchung surrendered vital symbols of sovereignty to the Ahom court, including his gold standard, gold sofa, gold jars, large gold plates, and three of his queens. The text highlights that queens were treated as ultimate embodiments of



state honor, and their forfeiture underscored the comprehensive vassalage of the defeated kingdom. This tributary relationship fractured when Detchung later displayed hostility toward the Ahoms. Suhungmung dispatched an army led by Chaolung Shuleng (the Saring Raja), which crushed the rebellion, executed Detchung's mother, and permanently transferred the three Kachari queens into the Ahom royal harem.

The Ahom hegemony established under the *thapita-sanchita* framework was disrupted in 1562 AD when the Koch general, Chilarai, invaded the region. The Koch forces defeated the Ahoms and annexed the Kachari kingdom. Because the Ahom state failed to provide military protection to its vassal during the Koch invasion, the Kacharis deeply resented the Ahoms, subsequently rejecting any historical claims of *thapita-sanchita* and actively opposing Ahom authority.

### **Seventeenth-Century Geopolitics and the Mughal Threat**

In 1606 AD, external manipulation by the Jayantia monarch, Jasa Manik, triggered a fresh war between the Ahoms and the Kacharis. Seeking revenge against the Kacharis, Jasa Manik offered a Jayantia princess in marriage to the Ahom king, Pratap Singha, on the strict condition that the Ahom escort retrieve her via Satgaon—a route cutting through the heart of the Kachari kingdom. When the Kachari King, Jasa Narayan, denied the Ahoms transit rights, Pratap Singha opted for military enforcement. The Ahoms defeated the Kacharis and successfully escorted the princess. However, when Pratap Singha attempted to capitalize on this victory by ordering an outright conquest of the Kachari kingdom, his forces were soundly defeated, and the Ahom commander, Sundar Gohain, was killed in battle. Following this victory, Jasa Narayan assumed the triumphal title of *Pratap Narayan* and declared absolute independence.

This military setback forced Pratap Singha to re-evaluate his foreign policy, turning once again to matrimonial diplomacy to stabilize the frontier. This became urgent by 1615 AD due to the imminent threat of a Muhammadan (Mughal) invasion. To avoid exhausting his military resources on a two-front war, Pratap Singha sought an immediate truce with the Kacharis. The Kachari King, Bhimbal Narayan, demanded an Ahom maiden as a condition for peace. Pratap Singha agreed to send the daughter of Saringia Sandikoi, provided Bhimbal Narayan personally received her at the Singhaduar. Although the Kachari king breached this protocol, Pratap Singha prioritized regional stability and dispatched an envoy to deliver the princess directly, thereby temporarily securing the border.

This diplomatic peace collapsed in 1617 AD when Bhimbal Narayan demanded the territory of Dimarua. Pratap Singha denied the request, asserting that the King of Dimarua was also "established and



preserved" (*thapita-sanchita*) under Ahom protection. Insulted by the implication that the Kacharis shared this subordinate status, Bhimbal Narayan demanded another Ahom princess to remedy the slight. Pratap Singha rejected the proposal, prompting the Kacharis to annex an Ahom border village across the Dhansiri River. The Ahoms retaliated by establishing fortified settlements along the Dayang River to permanently secure their boundary, ending the peace.

### **The Decline of Marital Diplomacy and Subsequent Vassalage**

During this period, delivering a princess in marriage to a protected or neighboring prince was viewed as a foundational obligation for maintaining inter-state relations. Following the death of Bhimbal Narayan, his successor, Indrabal Narayan, sought to restore relations and requested an Ahom princess. Pratap Singha agreed, stipulated that a royal Kachari prince must escort the bride, but died before the alliance could be finalized.

The successive Ahom monarchs progressively abandoned this accommodative marital diplomacy:

- **Surampha (Bhaga Raja, 1641–1644):** Ignored the outstanding marriage proposal, expelled the Kachari envoys from court, and severely damaged bilateral relations.
- **Sutyinpha (Nariya Raja, 1644–1648):** Rejected marriage demands from the new Kachari king, Birdarpa Narayan, citing the historical protocol failures of Bhimbal Narayan.
- **Jayadhaj Singha (Bhaganja Raja):** Agreed to a matrimonial request from Birdarpa Narayan but mandated that the king's brother or son escort the bride. Because Birdarpa's heirs were minors, the condition could not be fulfilled, allowing the Ahoms to assert political dominance without actually surrendering a princess.

In 1658, exploiting the internal Mughal war of succession, Jayadhaj Singha briefly seized Guwahati. However, the ascension of Aurangzeb and the subsequent invasion of Assam by Mir Jumla completely altered the geopolitical paradigm. Facing an existential Mughal threat, the Ahoms urgently revived their alliance with the Kacharis to fortify their rear. The Ahom Barphukan, Pickchai Chetia Neog, combined military threats with the promise of a matrimonial alliance. This diplomatic maneuver succeeded: Birdarpa Narayan accepted the alliance, the border was stabilized without a military deployment, and the Ahoms secured their frontier during a time of crisis.



## **Eighteenth-Century Imperialism and Comparative Policy Analysis**

By the eighteenth century, the Ahom state completely discarded matrimonial diplomacy in favour of outright military subjugation. In 1706 AD, Swargadeo Rudra Singha (1669–1714) launched a massive, coordinated, two-pronged invasion of the Kachari kingdom. One column, commanded by the Dihingia Deka Barbaruah, advanced via the Dhansiri route, while a second column, under the Pani Phukan, moved through the Kapili route. The Kachari forces were totally defeated, and their entire kingdom was formally annexed into the Ahom Empire. During the later reign of Rajeshwar Singha, another military demonstration forced the Kachari king to formally submit to Ahom hegemony without offering armed resistance. No records of matrimonial alliances exist between the two polities during the eighteenth century.

### **Conclusion**

The study demonstrates that matrimonial alliances constituted a vital component of Ahom diplomacy and statecraft throughout the history of the Ahom kingdom. Far from being merely dynastic or familial arrangements, these alliances functioned as strategic political instruments employed to establish peaceful relations, secure territorial interests, promote economic cooperation, and integrate diverse ethnic and political communities within the expanding Ahom polity. The Ahom rulers skilfully utilized matrimonial diplomacy alongside warfare, trade, and diplomatic negotiations to consolidate their authority in the Brahmaputra Valley and manage relations with neighbouring states and indigenous groups.

The nature of these alliances evolved in response to changing political circumstances and geopolitical necessities. While matrimonial relations initially served as mechanisms for conflict resolution and alliance-building, they later became important tools for maintaining frontier stability, strengthening interstate relations, and facilitating cultural assimilation. These alliances also contributed significantly to the incorporation of non-Ahom groups into the broader socio-political framework of the kingdom, thereby promoting the processes of integration and state formation.

The study further reveals that women occupied an important, though often overlooked, position within Ahom diplomacy. Royal marriages frequently carried significant political implications, and several queens exercised considerable influence within the administrative and political structures of the state. Ultimately, the successful deployment of matrimonial diplomacy enabled the Ahoms to transcend



ethnic and cultural boundaries, fostering political cohesion and contributing substantially to the durability and stability of one of the longest-lasting kingdoms in the history of Northeast India.

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