

10. A Historical Overview of the Ahom Culture

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Abstract:

The Ahom Dynasty (1228–1826) ruled the Ahom kingdom in Assam for nearly 600 years. The dynasty was established by Su-ka-pha. The capital of Ahom Kingdom was established at Charaideo, which lies close to the Sivasagar district. Here we have observed the climate as well as the socio-economic life of the people of Assam and their cultural traditions very carefully. Through this paper, we are attempting to describe the various food habits, language, festivals, dresses and ornaments of the Ahoms in the medieval Assam. This paper is based on secondary source. The materials collected from various articles both web and print serve as the secondary source.

Keywords:

Ahom Dynasty, Dresses, Ornaments, Food habits, Assam.

10.1 Introduction:

Assam situated in the north east part of India, represents “Unity in Diversity” with its people, race, culture, creed, food habits, dresses, languages and traditions etc.

As Observed by S.K. Chatterjee, “Assam has thus to meet all the tribal movements from the east, involving the advent into India of the Tibeto-Chinese speaking Mongoloids and it was in Assam primarily that this great element in the formation of the Indian people became largely Indianised particularly in the Brahmaputra Valley”.

The thirteenth century marked a significant turning point in the history of Assam, also known as the dawning of a new era. Sukapha, the esteemed leader of the Tai group, laid the foundation of the Ahom kingdom in Assam. Under his leadership, Ahom migrants from upper Burma successfully crossed the Patkai Range and established a kingdom. Here, they encountered multiple tribal communities and engaged in numerous conflicts and wars to establish their dominance. The advent of Ahom contributed largely toward the social and political formation of a unique society. The process of assimilation and adoption of people belonging to various groups took place under the initiative of the Ahom rulers for different purposes. Thus, Sukapha was successful in establishing his “land of a dream.” Sukapha successfully established his “land of dreams,” which endured as a sovereign state for 600 years until the British seized it in 1826. However, during the Colonial and post-colonial eras, the Tai Ahom community experienced significant socio-cultural changes, primarily due to technological advancements.

Globalisation, modernisation, and social movements can influence cultural norms and values, resulting in shifts in societal attitudes and behaviors. The Tai Ahom community is an ethnic group and an integral part of Assamese society. They have a rich historical and cultural heritage, and their contributions have played a significant role in shaping the history and culture of the region.

10.2 A Closer Look at the Ahoms Religion and Culture:

Although there is an effort to restore the original Ahom faith, most Ahoms nowadays return to Hinduism as their religion. Despite this, Me-Dam-Me-Phi is well-known. During the reign of Suremphaa Rajeswar Singha, who enforced Sanskritisation, the Ahom faith collapsed. A Maithil Brahmin priest and a traditional Deodhai priest were to conduct all funerals according to Hindu cremation rites as well as marriages.

Wedding of the Ahoms is known as Cho Klong rituals. Cho Klong is a Tai Ahom word that means (full form in English) [“Cho= combine” and “Klong=to perform a ritual.” The ritual is described in an ancient Tai Ahom script Lai Lit nang Hoon Pha. There are 101 ban-phai (earthen lamps) or lights glowing. Here The bride presents the husband with a heng-dan (sword) in exchange for his protection of her, their children, family, race, and nation. Sum of twenty rituals is performed in Ahoms wedding along with Cho klong, including: Juron, worshipping the priest etc

Language: The Ahoms are the most popular group in Assam. They speak the Tai language, which is part of the Tai kadai language. But their language, Tai-Ahom, has diminished to the point of extinction Few Tai Ahoms in Assam still use their Tai languages. m. Under the influence of the dominant Assamese language, many Tai Ahom people switched to speaking the Assamese languagHowever, the Ahom priestly class still uses the traditional form of Tai-AAhom for religious ceremonies and divination. n. Ahoms was influenced by Britshers, which promoted the English language as a medium of instruction and culture. And this led to the end of the Tai language.

Food Habit: Every community has its own food habits. Historically, Tai Ahom has had a unique food culture with a rice - based dishes and the use “khar” traditional food items like eri polu (silk worms), chuanga saul (bamboo rice) also another item famously known as Haj (rice beer) , homemade items pitha ,til pitha,tel pitha , chuanga pitha etc Also there are many items like:- .Gahori Mankho: Pork meat

- Amloi: - Red ant eggs are stir-fried and served as a delicious item
- Muga Leta: Silkworms are cooked with onions and other ingredients
- Luk: Rice beer, made of fermented rice
- Khar: Khar is made by distilling water into the ashes of pseudostem, corn, and banana skins
- Ou Tenga: Ou Tenga is known as Elephant Apple in the English language. It’s sour in taste.
- Chunga chawal: Rice cooked inside bamboo tubes. It is just one of the many ways of making rice
- Tupula Bhat: This is nothing but steamed rice that is covered in leaves

- Hukoti Maas: Hukoti is an authentic fish dish made from dried small fish
- Kekura: Crab
- Kusia: Eel fish is cooked into a delicious fish curry
- Akhoi: A snack made out of rice
- Handoh: Roasted rice powder
- Chira and Mohor Doi: A great combination food of yoghurt made from buffalo milk and flattened rice
- Dohi Kosu: Taro stems or Dohi Kosu is an authentic Assamese dish
- Pani Tenga: A tangy mustard chutney
- Jati Lao: Bottle gourd
- Ronga Lao: Pumpkin

Dress: Before the arrival of the British, Tai Ahom had a distinct dress style that was primarily based on locally available materials and reflected their socio - cultural beliefs. This traditional dress mainly has four sets of clothes; each has a different name.

Faa Ru – The crown. (Silk)

Faa Mai – A single piece of cloth folded and then worn around the body. (Silk)

Faa Su – The golden colour shirt. (Silk)

Faa Sin – The long skirt is worn at the Bottom. (Silk)

Ornaments: Like dresses, ornaments, too played a significant role in the attire of Ahom personality. The buranjis have kept in accounts of the ornaments worn by Ahom royalty, aristocrats and common folk.

Ornaments of men: It is recorded that during the coronation ceremony the Ahom king was adorned with Jewels. The king wore jewels made of gold, diamond, and various precious metals. The ornaments Included golden karnavusha, makor kundal, kiriti, lokapar, mukut, nohorihhaar, nepoor, gaamkharu, Bajubandhan, various ring, bracelets etc.

Ornaments worn by women: The ornaments worn by Ahom ladies, both royalty and Common. The royalty wore gezera, madoli, biri, dugdugi, bala, gamkharo etc. Their ornaments were made of Gold, diamond, etc. The common ladies worn keru, thuria, golpata, gezera, dugdugi, muthikharu etc.

10.3 Social Festivals:

Bohag Bihu:

Bohag Bihu is also known as Rangali Bihu. This festival is Observed with much amusement like singing folk songs, dancing and playing some musical instruments like dhol, tal, pepa, gogona etc. by all People irrespective of ages. This Bihu started from the day of Sangkranti (last day of the month of Chaitra, April) and continues at least for seven days.

Kati Bihu: - This Bihu falls on the day of sangkranti of the month of Ahin (October). According to Tai Ahoms Aghun is the first month of. The year and Kati is the last month. The festival which is observed in the Last month of the year is called 'Chip Chang Kauthan' in Tai language. This festival is observed by following the rites and rituals of the Tai Ahoms. As this festival falls in the month of food scarcity it is called as Kangali Bihu. This festival is connected with agriculture mainly and hence this Kati Bihu may be termed as the festival of Lakhimi adora e.g. paying homage to goddess Lakhimi so that crops may grow in plenty.

On the evening of the first day of Kartika (generally 14th or 15th October) matisaki (earthen lamps) with mustard oil are lighted in the Paddy fields, vegetable gardens, granary houses and in all sides of the Houses. A Tulsi tree is also planted in one corners of the courtyard in the East and an earthen light is lighted under it at the evening. A sarai is also Offered under the Tulsi tree and devotional songs are sung by the Children and female members of the family (very simply this is known As Jangalao).

Magh Bihu: -Magh Bihu is observed on the day of sangkranti of the Month of Magh (January) after the completion of rice cultivation or after harvesting of crops. This Bihu is also observed as one of the winter Festivals not only by the people living in Assam but by other people of

India also. The Tai Ahoms called this Bihu Meji or Meiji Pura Bihu. In Tai language 'Mei' means bamboo or timber and 'Ji' means stocks or Dol. Magh Bihu is also known as Bhogali Bihu for the simple reason that This Bihu is observed with community feast or dishes (jalpan) with Cakes (pitha), chira, sandah, curd etc. On the evening of the last day of Puh month (January) feast is arranged in all villages, the villagers set Fire on a huge stock of fuels called 'Meiji'.

Mae Dam Mae Phi: - Another Notable Tai Ahom festival is **Mae Dam Mae Phi**. This festival is celebrated on 31 January every year in memory of the departed souls. People bestow honour to the ancestors who left this world and cherish their contribution to society.

Na – Khuwa: - The Famous **Na-Khuwa** is celebrated in the month of Aghun (according to the Assamese calendar). It is at this festival that the first seasonal vegetables, fruits, and other crops produced by the people are cooked and eaten. They first pray to the deceased ancestors and then offer them food.

10.4 Conclusion:

In conclusion, the Tai Ahom community in postcolonial Assam underwent significant cultural changes. Modernization, Westernization, colonialism, and assimilation were the influential factors.

However, the Tai Ahom community demonstrates a strong commitment to preserving their cultural heritage through language revitalization, the revival of traditional practices, and community engagement. Balancing tradition and modernity, along with collaboration and awareness, are essential for sustaining the uniqueness of the community.

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