



An analysis of Religious beliefs and customs of Ahom people of Assam

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Abstract:

Assam is situated at the heart of northeast India and the meeting ground of different ethnic groups, communities and cultural entitles since time immemorial. Among them Ahom is one of the major ethnic groups in Assam. They entered Assam through the crossed of Patkai Hills in 1228 A.D. and ruled about 600 years. They had their own culture, language and religious belief and practices. When they entered Assam having integrated with the local people and socially, linguistically, culturally assimilated with them. For the first few decades they maintained their own faith and language but with the expansion of their boundary they wisely opted for the language and religion of the majority. But in the course of history they adopted Assamese language and embraced Hinduism. Ahom religion is primarily based on worshiping Deities called Phi and Dam (Ancestor Spirit). Ancestor worship and the animistic concept of khwan are two elements it shares with other Tai folk religions. This paper aimed to analyse about the religious beliefs and customs/practices of Ahom people of the Assam.

Keywords: Religious practices, customs, Ahom, ethnic groups etc.

Introduction: Assam is situated at the heart of northeast India and the meeting ground of different ethnic groups, communities and cultural entitles since time immemorial. The inhabitants of Assam are a broad racial networker of Mongolion, Indo- Burmese, Indo-Iranian and Aryan origin. The state has the largest number of ethnic groups like Miri/ Mishing, Mishimi, Kosh-Rajbanshi, Rabha, Bodo, Karbi, Ahom etc. within their variety in tradition, culture, religious beliefs and practices, dresses, and exotic way of life. Among them Ahom is one of the major ethnic groups in Assam. They entered Assam through the crossed of Patkai Hills in 1228 A. D. and ruled about 600 years. They were a branch of great Tsi race and belonged particularly to Shan section thereof, which occupied the Northern and Eastern hill tracts of upper Burma and Western Yunnan. Linguistically they belong to the Siamese- Chinese branch of the Sino- Tinetian language. They brought with them their own Tai language. Script. They were worshippers of Phura Tara Along and few tribal deties including Lengden, the king of heaven. They also brought with them practice of writing chronicles. The founder of Ahom kingdom Sumapha first established the territory in upper Brahmaputra valley and gradually they extended their territory down the Brahmaputra valley. They had their own culture, language and religious beliefs and practices. When they entered Assam having intgrated with the local people and socially, linguistically, culturally assimilated with them. For the first few decades they maintained their own faith and

language but with the expansion of their boundary they wisely opted for the language and religion of the majority. But in the course of history they adopted Assamese language and embraced Hinduism.

The aim of this present paper is to analyse about the religious beliefs and practices of the Ahom people of Assam in the present day.

Objectives of the Study:

The present research paper is based on following objectives:

To analyse the Ahom religious practices

To analyse about the various customs of the Ahom people.

Methodology of the Study: To prepare this paper descriptive and analytical method is used with secondary data collected from the various books, magazines research article, journals, internet etc.

Analyse and Discussion of the paper : The Ahom people of Assam had a unique religion and customs such as ancestors worship, animal sacrifice Phuralung, chumpha, Me-Dam-Me-phi, Cao-phura, cao-Tra, chao-Nu-Ru, chao kao-oil etc. and a belief in a heavenly kingdom.

The Ahom religion also known as Phuralung. It was based on Tai origins and ancestor worship, animal sacrifice, and a belief in a heavenly kingdom. The Ahom people did not worship idols, except for the titular god of the Ahom king. The Ahom King's deity was called "Chumdeo" and was believed to possess mystic powers and give the king unlimited wealth and power.

The Ahom had many religious rituals that involved the use of natural resources. The Ahom people also had various social beliefs about trees, which influenced their daily lives. The Ahom had several customs associated with death such as Navi Kota, Pengoni Kubua, Rang, Mo'cheora and janming etc.

The Ahom religion declined in the early 19th century and was replaced by Hinduism. However, since the 1960's there has been an Ahom revivalism movement that has led to the revival of some older Ahom practices. The Ahom religion is the ethnic religion of the Ahom people. The Ahom people came into Assam in 1228, led by a Tai Prince Sukapha, and admixed with the local people. The people who came into Assam included two clans of Priests, joined later by a third, who brought with them their own religion, rituals, practices and scriptures. The religion is based on ritual-oriented ancestor worship that required animal sacrifice (Ban-phi), though there was at least one Buddhism influenced ritual in which sacrifice was forbidden (Phuralung). Ancestor worship and the animistic concept of khwan are two elements it shares with other Taifolk religions. There is no idolatry except for the titular god of the Ahom king and though there is a concept of heaven or a heavenly kingdom (Monglhi), sometimes identified with a part of Tian, China), there is no concept of hell. It was the state religion of the Ahom kingdom in the initial period.

The Ahom originally worshipped their own gods. Over time, many of them adopted Hinduism along with customs of Hindu culture, though they also kept some of their traditional beliefs. The Ahom started to speak Assamese. In modern times, some people of Ahom descent began to work to revive their original Tai language and elements of their traditional culture. Ahom political and cultural revival movements began in the late 19th century and again in the late 20th century.

The majority of present-day Ahoms profess Hinduism as their religion, yet there's a movement aiming to rejuvenate the ancient Ahom faith. The Ahom religion started to decline since the days of [Jayadhwaj Singha](#), he was the first Ahom king to adopt [Ekasarana Dharma](#) and to take initiation of the Auniati Mahanta. From Jayadhwaj Singha to [Rantadhwaj Singha](#) all were followers of [Ekasarana Dharma](#). From [Gadadhar Singha](#) onwards the kings veered towards [Shaktism](#). [Siva Singha](#) made the [Shaktism](#) the state religion, [Suremphaa](#) Rajeswar Singha (1751–1769) ordered [Sanskritisation](#). All funerals were to be practised under the Hindu cremation rites, conducted by a [Maithil Brahmin](#) priest and a traditional priest. Nevertheless, [Me-Dam-Me-Phi](#) is widely celebrated.

The Ahoms of Assam have a rich culture and many beliefs and customs. The Ahoms originally worshipped their own gods, but over time, many adopted Hinduism and Hindu customs. Their religion was based on Tai origin, but they also adopted Buddhism before entering Assam. The Ahoms believed in ancestor worship and the animistic concept of khwan. They also performed sacred offerings of chicken and Lao rice beer. The Ahoms spoke the Tai language. They translated many Sanskrit works into the local language. The Ahoms were admirers of art and literature. They recorded their history in chronicles called buranjis. The Ahoms had social beliefs in trees that greatly affected their daily lives. The Ahoms believed they were destined to cultivate fallow land using wet-rice farming methods. The Ahoms absorbed Naga, Borahi, Moran, Chutia, and Dimasa-Kachari peoples into their society. The dress of the Ahoms included the dhoti or churia, pha nai or pha rem, shirt or pha ciu, turban pha hu or pha chau, mekhela or pha chien, blouse or pha chuo, and chadar or pha bai or pha mai. Ahom weddings included Ju-ron, Rik-Khwan, Aap-Tang, Chow Ban, and Jon-ming.

Besides these, there are some other customs of the Ahom people:

Me-Dam-Me-Phi

A public ceremony to appease the spirits of the dead, this festival is celebrated annually on January 31. The ceremony involves the construction of a temporary octagonal structure called a ho phi.

Poi cheng ken

A spring festival that includes rituals such as bathing livestock, honoring ancestors, and worshipping the insignia Chum Pha Rueng Sheng Mueang.

Cho Klong

A marriage ritual that involves the bride presenting a sword to the groom in exchange for his protection.

Mortuary traditions

These include the Navi Kota ritual, where a bamboo implement filled with yarn is placed on the deceased's navel, and the Pengoni Kubua ritual, where a priest kills a chicken and places its legs on the Rang.

Conclusion: The Ahom are an Indian ethnic group that hails from Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. They are descended from the Tai people, who first came to Assam's Brahmaputra valley around 1228. They are currently India's biggest Tai-tribes, with a population of over 1.3 million. Until 1826, the Ahom kingdom (1228-1826) controlled over much of the Brahmaputra valley. In 1228, Sukaphaa, a Mong mao Tai king, with a party of followers landed in Assam with the intention of establishing presence. This research paper tries to analyse and discuss about various religious practices and beliefs of Ahom people. The above article gets a closure look at the Ahoms people including the introduction of the Ahom people, their language, religious beliefs and customs and so on. Ahom are the section of great Tai race and they have known their capacity of assimilative. The Ahoms of Assam have a variety of religious beliefs and customs, including ancestor worship, animal sacrifice, and the worship of the Ahom god Chumpha. From the above analyse and discussion we conclude that they had their own culture, language, customs and religious beliefs and practices.

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