

## Assamese Literature during the reign of Ahom kings

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The real history of Assamese literature begins from the fourteenth century. There was great literary progress in Assam during the Ahom period. Assamese literature made a very promising start with translations from the two great copies and Puranas. The Puranas translated were the Vishnu Purana, Brahmavaivarta Purana, Padma Purana, Markandeya Purana and Dharma Purana. As the translations were meant for common people, simple style was adopted.

Under royal patronage Harivamsa and some portions of the Mahabharata were translated. One Raghunatha Mahanta made an abridgment in prose of the Ramayana. He also composed two long narrative poems - Adbhuta Ramayana and Satrunjaya, based on some floating Ramayana legends.

Another author of outstanding merit was Kaviraj Chakravarty. He translated a portion of Brahmavinarta Purana and Padma Purana under the royal patronage of king Rudra Singha and Siva Singha. Among his other works are Sankha-Suravadha, Sakuntala Kavya and Gita Govinda.

Some Sanskrit tenets on Kamasashtra were translated under the royal patronage of the Ahom kings, some of the poets developed the tales from the Puranas, Panchatantra and Hitopadesa. The Ahom kings encouraged development of drama and theatre. Under the royal patronage a new type of drama in Sanskrit came to be written. To this class belong Dharmodaya by Dharmadeva, Kama-Kumara-Harana by Kavichandra vipra under the patronage of king Siva Singha.

During the reign of Ahom kings Sanskrit texts dealing with science were translated into Assamese. The chief among this class of literature is Hastividya by Sukumar Barkath. The Ghora-Nidana a treatise on horse was also compiled in this period. A treatise on training and treatment of hawks known as 'Senar Vyadhi' has also been discovered.

The greatest development in Assamese literature under the Ahoms was in the Buranjis. The Buranjis contain continuous chronicles of the Ahom rules. These were prepared by men who had a comprehensive knowledge of state affairs and who were high government officers. At first the Buranjis were written in Ahom language but later they were compiled in the Assamese. The Buranjis based on state documents, periodic reports from military commanders and frontier Governors, judicial and revenue papers were submitted to kings. Buranjis constitute an unprecedented chapter in Assamese literature. It is from the Buranjis modern Assamese prose emerges. Sir E.A. Grierson observes : "The Assamese are justly proud of their national literature. In no department have they been more successful than in a branch of study in which India as a rule, is curiously deficient. The historical work of Buranjis are numerous and voluminous. A knowledge of Buranjis was an indispensable qualification to an Assamese gentlemen.<sup>1</sup> The language of the Buranjis were dignified and graceful.

Apart from the Buranjis there were other classes of historical writings composed both in verse and prose. These were generally known as *Charit-puthi* and *Vasavali*. *Charit-puthis* are important type of literature. This works were developed during reign of the Ahom kings. There *Charit-puthis* are writings mainly on the life of Vaisnava saints. According to 'Katha-Guru-Charita (a prose biography of Sankkardeva and Madhavadeva) Madhavadeva introduced this practice and undertook a daily recitation of his Guru's biography".

There was another important historical writing known as *Vamsavalis*. They recorded the genealogical history of the different families of the kings, and sketched the lives and careers of the nobles. A most notable *Vamsavalis* in the Darrang-Raj-Vamsavali which was composed in verse by Suryakhari Daivajna during the later part of the eighteenth century.

Under the Ahoms, there were the growth of secular and prose literature. There was study of mathematics and of architecture and of astrology and astronomy. In the treatise of Jyotisa the authors described planetary motions and natural phenomena. In the treatise on Ayurveda, pharmaceutical, botanical and zoological observations were made together with theapeutic and pharmacological reflections. The rationalistic temper of the later Ahom age had a direct effect on arts and literature which enriched and sweetened the life of the people.<sup>2</sup>

Tantrik works also developed during the reign of the Ahom kings. One tantrik work 'Hara-Gauri-Sambada' was probably written during the reign of the Ahom king Kamaleswar Singha. Under the patronage of the Ahom king Siva Singha karya text were written. Among Kavirajas noted Ayurveda work, Vaidyakalpataru was written under the patronage of the Ahom king, Laksmi Singha.

There was also a steady growth of Tai-Ahom literature. The Ahoms brought with them their canonical classics when they first came to Assam from their Shan homeland. Their literature consists of worship manuals, astrological, treatises, chronicles and romances. Living in Assam for a long time, they wrote the story of the Ramayana in the Ahom language, compiled lexicons from Ahom to Assamese and from Assamese to Ahom. Their greatest book is Ming-mung-Phura-Lung which collaborate the gospel of Ahimsa in the form of a simple story.<sup>3</sup>

The Ahom manuscripts are on diverse subjects. Much of the wealth of Ahom literature is being gradually lost to us because of the growing paucity of scholars conversant with the language and capable of translating the manuscripts. Even among the Deodhais and Bailing the remnants and orthodox priestly clans of the Ahoms, there are now few who can read and interpret the Ahom language with any amount of accuracy. An Ahom book, *Laitu* or *Haophala*, published by Rai Saheb Galap Chandra Baruah, deals with the Ahom version of the creation of the world. *Bancheng Dinchow* is a very small pocket book on astrology for consultation in any emergency, each page containing a sentence open to clastic interpretation. The famous Chaklang-puthi describes the rituals to be observed in an Ahom marriage. An Ahom puthi contains the criminal code of the Ahoms which constituted the statute book of the Ahom sovereigns of Assam. A voluminous Ahom puthi acquired from a descendant of Purnananda Burhagohain is an invaluable treatise on Ahom cosmology. H.C. Goswami in his descriptive catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts notices an Ahom book, *Amar*, being a dictionary of Ahom language containing Ahom words with their Assamese equivalents and also *Deo Buranji I* and *Deo Buranji II*, which give an account of the creation of certain heavenly beings, and of Lengdon's sending down Khunlung and Khunlai to the earth respectively. Besides, chronicles in the Assamese language, many more were compiled in the Ahom

language, e.g. *Lailit Buranji* and *Haitu Buranji*. Gait refers to the following Ahom Buranjis : (1) Buranji from Khunlung and Khunlai, (2) Buranji from Cantaikha to Cukapha, (3) Buranji from the death of Supatpha alias Gadadhar Singha.<sup>4</sup> Dr. S.K. Bhuyan rightly observes that the riches of Tai Ahom literature should engage the serious attention of scholars.

#### References

1. G.A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. V, p. 396.
2. B.K. Barua, *Assamese Language and early Assamese Literature : Aspects of the Heritage of Assam*, p. 96.
3. S.K. Bhuyan, *Studies in the History of Assam*, p. 9.
4. E. Gait, *Report on the Progress of Historical Research in Assam*. pp. 22