

HOW RELIABLE ARE THE ASSAMESE-LANGUAGE BURANJIS FOR THE EARLY AHOM HISTORY?

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The particular type of records of events locally known as buranji¹ was introduced in Assam in the thirteenth century by the Ahoms, a Tai people who came from Mong Mao, a Shan State in the north of Burma.² As the Ahoms had their own language which is now called Ahom language,³ buranji writing was done in that language. For a long time till at least the end of the sixteenth century, all buranjis were written in the Ahom language.

The system of recording events was an old one among the Ahoms and they continued the same practice in the Brahmaputra valley. As they introduced no new form of government in Assam different from what was prevailed in their home state, the accounts in the Ahom-language buranjis of the early period reflected a picture of that form, administrative arrangements and other features. A study of the contemporary Ahom-language buranjis reveals that the early Ahom government was basically the same with those of other Tai groups in Burma, Thailand and southern China. Consequently, most titles and terms relating to kings, officials and other functionaries of the state which are found in the Ahom-language buranjis are also found among the Shans or the Thais.⁴ They carried the same meaning for all the groups, and hence the Tai speakers could, with little difficulty, understand their meaning and significance.

Buranji writing in the Assamese language is a late development, and it started, according to scholars, in the early seventeenth century.⁵ By this time the system of government introduced by

the Ahoms had taken firm root and the local population became well-acquainted with its working. By this time many local terms equivalent to purely Ahom terms had either been found or coined and became current among the local population. Consequently, these terms crept into the Assamese-language buranjis.

With the writing of buranjis in the Assamese language in the seventeenth century, the need for writing accounts of the early Ahoms in the Assamese language naturally arose. As all accounts for this period were recorded in the Ahom language, the Assamese-buranjis writers had to depend on the Ahom-language buranjis as their original source. But they did not always depend on literal translations of the Ahom-language buranjis; in some cases they only collected the basic information from the Ahom-language buranjis and added their own interpretations, stories, or local tradition that were current, to their accounts. Thus the Assamese language buranjis covering the early Ahoms have the following sources:

- (1) Literal translation of the Ahom-language buranjis.
- (2) Compilations by drawing information from Ahom-language buranjis.
- (3) Local tradition and stories then current and personal observations of the writers.

The Assamese-language buranjis which are available to us in published forms such as the Purani Asam Buranji (PAB), Deodhai Asam Buranji (DAB), Asam Buranji (AB) edited by S.K. Bhuyan, Satsari Asam Buranji (SAB) in which accounts of the early Ahoms are found are thus translation or compilations with occasional interpolations and interpretations. It is for this reason, the Assamese-language buranjis suffer from several defects as discussed below.

1. In the Ahom-language buranjis of the early period all names of persons, titles, people, places, rivers, hills, etc. are recorded in their Ahom terms or Ahomised forms in case of foreign words. For instance, a 'king' was ordinarily called khun or chao, but the Ahom king was addressed as chao-pha, a 'kingdom' or 'state' was mong, a 'town' was che or wieng according to its nature; the two ministers were known as Thao-mong-lung and Chao-phrang-mong, the governor of a province was Thao-mong, and so on. In the Assamese-language buranjis such names, words or terms, titles are either given in their Assamese transliteration, translation or in local Assamese equivalents. In the process, many original Ahom terms got distorted, and hence no correct meaning could be derived from such distorted words without consulting the original Ahom terms in the Ahom-language buranjis. For instance, the Ahom year named lak-ni Kap-Cheo is given as nak-lik Kapchoi (PAB, p.55), Kan-ngan, the name of a high official who accompanied Siu-ka-pha is given as Kandan (PAB, p.46, AB, p.3), Mong-Mit Kup-King-Dao, a Shan State is written as Mubhmit Kukkingtao (SAB, p.43), Kan-Khru-Mong is Kakhrum (AB, pp. 3,5), Phrangpem is Phamupin (AB, p.3), Thao-Mong-Ban-lung is Thaomun Balung (AB, p.5), Chao-Seng-Lung is Daochilung (AB, p.8), Thao-mong is Thaomun (AB, p.7), Khun-Tiora, the king of the Chutiyas is written as Khuntai or Khuntu (AB, p.9), Ta-khun-lak, the name of an official is written as Chakhanalak (PAB, p.46).

In some cases, the local equivalents of Ahoms or names are alone given such as Chao-phrang is written as Buragohain, Thao-mong-lung as Bargohain, Heu-nang as Dangaria or Adhikari, Thao-Tang-mong as Dangaria, Chao/Khun as Raja, Thao-mong as Barua/Gohain, Tilao as Lohit, Nam-Sao as Dikhow, Nam-Khun as Disang/Dilih,

Namjin as Dihing/Buri Dihing, Tamisa as Kachari,
Tio-ra as Chutiya, Rang-jao as Barahi, Chao-Pha
Ban-Ak as Nara Raja.

It is difficult to explain as to how Thao-Mong-Lung, which in Ahom language means (thao=old man, mong=state, lung=big) 'big old man' or 'chief old man' as applying to one of the two ministers became Borgohain. If lung is rendered as 'big', then Thao-Mong must be taken to mean Gohain. In the same way it is difficult to explain how Chao-Phrang-Mong, the title of the other minister is rendered in Assamese as Buragohain, or Phuke is rendered as Barua in Assamese.

In many cases, Assamese literal translations of Ahom words are given. Khak-Chang-Wieng-Men is translated as Hatidhara or Hatikharia, Phu-Kin-Mong, a title (phu=man, kin=to eat, mong=country/state, the person who eats the country) as Rajkhowa, Ru-Chang (ru=head, chang=elephant) as Hatimuria, Pet-Ban (pet=eight, ban=village) as Athgaon, Pat-Lung (pat=door, lung=big) as Barduar. It may be noted that most of the Assamese equivalents of Ahom terms did not carry the actual meaning and significance of the terms. For instance, the Assamese term Dangariya/Gohain used for Thao-Mong in Assamese does not carry the proper meaning of the term. It is also difficult to know what meaning the words Dangariya or Gohain originally carried in Assamese. In the same way, raja is used for Ahom khun or chao; but the two Ahom words have acquired slightly different meanings, Neog is used for Neu-Mong, Barua for Phu-Ke, and so on.

Sometimes the Ahom title and its Assamese equivalent are so juxtaposed as in Thaomun Borgohain (AB, p.8) that Thaomun may be easily mistaken as the name and Borgohain as title. But in fact, Borgohain is the Assamese equivalent of the

Ahom title Thaomun (properly Thao-Mong). It is for this reason, one scholar has committed the mistake of writing as 'Mungklang Dihingia Borgohain'.⁵ The Assamese buranjis therefore do not lead us to understand the basic structure of the Ahom system.

That the Assamese-language buranji writers could not fully understand the meaning of the Ahom language expression is clear from the following fact. In the Ahom-language buranjis, the number of persons accompanying Siu-ka-pha is given thus: mi tang sam ring maw tang deng maw khao cham kin le sam kun which when translated means "total copper-pot three thousand. One pot could prepare meal for three persons", has been put as "bhat randha tamar tekeli 360 ta, tini kathakoi chaul sije, ehi pramane manuh 1020 bujiba pari" (AB, p.5), i.e. copper-pot for cooking rice 360, a pot is sufficient to cook rice of weighing 3 katha, in this way, the number of persons could be counted at 1020". But in the same page of the buranji another figure is given thus "3 kathakoi chaul sije tamar tekeli 300, ehi praman manuh 900" (AB, p.5) i.e. "copper-pots each sufficient to cook 3 kathas of rice numbered 300, from this number of persons could be counted at 900". Again in the same buranji at page 3, the number of persons (paiks) accompanying Siu-ka-pha is given as 3000. This figure is also given in PAB (p.46). The SAB (2nd Chronicle) also gives the figure at 900 (p.45). All these confusions occur due to misunderstanding of the Ahom language passage in the original buranji.

2. In the Ahom-language buranjis, the dates of events are recorded in the Ahom era called lak-ni, a sixty-year circle. In the lak-ni era, the years are named, and the same year is repeated after every fifty-nine years. As the

year in the lak-ni era consists of 354 days, an intercalary month was inserted in every third year. Moreover, a lak-ni year begins about the middle of Agrahayana. This system is therefore different from the saka era. In most of the Assamese-language chronicles the dates are recorded in saka era by converting the Ahom era into saka dates. It appears that the writers did not follow a single system. As a result a lot of discrepancies in dates are noticed in the Assamese-language buranjis. For instance, in the Ahom-language buranjis, the date of Siu-ka-pha's departure from Mong-Mao is given as lak-ni Kat-Rao, and his death in lak-ni Tao-ngi, and we get a total of 54 years. In AB (p.3), the date of Siu-ka-pha's departure is given as saka 1144 (1222 A.D.), but at page 5 of the buranji it is given as saka 1270 (1348 A.D.). The same AB (p.6), the date of Siu-ka-pha's death is given as saka 1311 (1389 AD). If we accept saka 1144 as given at page 3 as the date of his departure from Mong-Mao, we get a total of 168 years till his death, which is an impossibility. On the other hand, if we accept saka 1270 (1348 AD) as given at page 5, we get only 41 years from his departure from Mong-Mao to his death. This date is again comes into conflict with the generally accepted date.

Again, according to this buranji, Siu-hum-mong became king in saka 1390 (p.8) and died in saka 1464 (p.24), thus he ruled for a period of 74 years, which again comes into conflict with dates in other buranjis.

In the SAB, 2nd Chronicle, the date of Siu-ka-pha's birth is given as saka 1117 (1195 AD) (p.45), and his departure from Mong Mao as saka 1137 (1215 AD) (p.45) and his death in saka 1190 (1268 AD) (p.49). On the basis of this we find that Siu-ka-pha left his kingdom at the age of 21 years.

All these show that without a proper verification of the Ahom-language buranjis it is not possible to arrive at a correct date solely on the basis of the Assamese-language buranjis.

3. The Assamese-language buranjis also contain a number of interpolations which are not found in the original Ahom-language buranjis. Speaking about Siu-ka-pha's time SAB (1st Chronicle) says (p.4.) thus:

"ji chutiya kachari moran pai lagat
lale, taro karja anurupe nam thoi gal.
nami ahatkoi harapua manuhathe apah pai.
sei belar para manu mihali hal. tare
jiyati putati mitra karile. purbbe ahoté
tiruta aha nai. etiyahe tiruta hal".

The editor Dr. S.K. Bhuyan has put this passage under the caption: Ahamat ahomar tirota grahan. This passage is clearly a later interpolation.

Notes & References

1. The word 'buranji' is said to have been derived from the Ahom compound word 'bu-ran-ji' which means; according to the generally accepted explanation, "a store-house of knowledge". It, however, needs further investigation. A short discussion is made in "The Nature of the Ahom Buranji", the **Journal of North-East India Council for Social Science Research**, Vol.VI, No.1, April, 1982, p.11.
2. **The Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States**, Vol.I, Pt.I, compiled by J.George Scott and J.P. Hardiman, Rangoon, 1900, pp. 195-96.
3. Ahom is a Tai language.
4. **Gazetteer of Upper Burma**, Sao Saimong, **The Jengtung Chronicle**.
5. N.N. Acharyya, **History of Medieval Assam**, p.92.