

Revival of the Tai Language in the North-Eastern States in India

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The purpose of this paper is to study how an ethnic group of people, the Tai Ahoms, are trying to revitalize their traditional Tai Language through various means of academic effort and cultural usages and practices. To know about their language and its identity, the historians as well as researchers must reach the early part of the thirteenth century because the pioneer group of Tai speaking Mao – Shan¹ people brought with them their 'Tai' speech to the Brahmaputra valley from their original home land *Muang Mao – Lung*² in the Hukwang valley (on the upper reaches of the Chindwin in the present day Myanmar). It appears in the Ahom chronicles (*buranji*) that after traversing the pat-kai³ hills, a group of Tais entered the eastern part of Assam in the upper courses of the Brahmaputra Valley under the leadership of a Tai prince Chao – Lung Siu – Ka – Pha⁴ who established a Tai kingdom in the early part of the 13th⁵ century, and it existed gloriously for a period of six centuries i.e. from 1228⁶ to 1826. The descendents of this group of Tais are later on known as the Ahoms and their kingdom as Assam. Earlier, the Tai called it *Mung – Dun – Sun – Khan*.⁷

(a) Tai Speaking Groups

Much later, at different periods of time the Tai Ahoms were followed by five other Tai speaking groups viz. the Tai Ahoms, Tai Phakes, Tai Khamtis, Tai Khamyangs, and Tai Turungs from Upper Myanmar. At present, they are inhabiting in several pockets in Upper Assam and in eastern part of Arunachal Pradesh. All the six groups of Tai people spoke Tai as their mother tongue when they left their original home land in Upper Myanmar. But, due to some reasons three of them viz. the Tai Ahoms,⁸ Tai Khamyangs,⁹ and Tai Turungs¹⁰ have lost their speech identity. The rest of the Tais are, however still Tai speakers. The total strength of them is approximately slightly over twenty thousand, and Ahoms alone exceed 2.5 million¹¹ while Buragohain and Taher mention only a little over 1 million.¹² At present, there are probably a hundred¹³ million speakers of Tai language in South East Asia. But, it is a great misfortune in case

of today's Tai Ahoms that they cannot be included within the Tai speaking groups of people of the Mainland South-East Asia where they are now found spread over in Thailand, Northern Myanmar, Laos, and in the Southern China (in the province of Myanmar).

(b) Tai Language and Priestly Class

The priests (*mo*¹⁴ or *mo – mong*¹⁵) constituted a separate class during the Ahom period. They belonged to three traditional priestly clans¹⁶ viz. *mo' – sam*,¹⁷ *mo' – hung*,¹⁸ and *mo' – plang*,¹⁹ known in Assamised form as *deodhai*, *mohan*, and *bailung* respectively those who alone conducted religious ceremonies both in private and in public. They kept all records of the Ahom administration besides social, religious and cultural system of the Ahom society. Thus, the regular practices, as mentioned above, made them well-versed in Tai to conduct even the rules and procedures of religious ceremonies, and at the same time they possessed a vast knowledge of writing system in Tai which they practiced till the end of the Ahom period. Mention is to be made that their descendents are still following the same culture, and conducting all religious rites and ceremonies in Tai.

(c) Tai language and its use in the Ahom period

The written records and oral traditions of the Tai Ahoms established the fact that Siu-Ka-Pha brought with him a group of literate persons along with their families²⁰ and persons from Mao kingdom to the Brahmaputra valley. They were called *mo'* or *mo' – mong* as mentioned earlier. They were the priest-scholars (*m'*) of the Ahom kingdom. The Tai prince Siu-Ka-Pha entrusted them to write all major and minor events which they recorded soon after they reached *kham-jang*²¹. Chronicles (*buranji*) say that it was *muang kham-jang* below the pat-kai hills, at which place Siu-Ka-Pha was much determined to get their all accounts recorded²². He asked the priest-scholars (*mo'*) to record all events so as to keep an account of their long journey i.e. if some one expired, if they meet any strangers, if they made any conversation on their way, and so on. Since then began the practical system of chronicle (*buranji*) writing among the Tai Ahoms, and such culture continued till the end of the Ahom dynasty. It is worth to mention that all the events were recorded in Tai only.

(d) Tai language and its script

In regard to language and script, we have a reliable evidence that the Tai Ahoms, when they left their original home land (*Muang Mao-Lung*) have brought with them script along with their language (which is believed to be related to *Mon*²³ script, that was derived from *Brahmi*²⁴ script of ancient India). Later, the same script was introduced in the Brahmaputra valley.

Further, the chronicles mention that after their settlement at *sang-tak*²⁵ on the bank of the *nam-sao* (Dikhow) Siu-Ka-Pha himself sent letters and presents²⁶ through the embassy to the kingdom of *muang-kwang*. Expressing his gratitude the king of *Muang-kwang*, in return, delivered letters and presents²⁷ which again proved that the Ahoms brought with them not only the language but also the script which they used to exchange letters between the two countries and also applied the same to write chronicles (*buranji*).

Revitalization of Tai language

It is a great misfortune to the present day Tai Ahoms that they no longer speak Tai as their mother tongue. Practically, they lost their language in speech habit about two centuries ago. Their speech is now Assamese, an Indo-Aryan language. The remnant of the Tai language exists only among the priestly clans. However, some efforts were made since eighteenth century to revitalize the Tai Ahom language.

From the academic point of view it is worth to mention that the study of the Tai Ahom language starts since the later part of the eighteenth century. An important source material is an old manuscript '*Bar-Amra*' (known earlier as '*Bora Kaka Humung Puthi*') compiled in A.D. 1795²⁸ i.e. just on the last year of the then reigning Tai Ahom monarch Chao-Pha Suhitpungngammung²⁹ alias Gaurinath Simha. The manuscript contains a big list of Tai Ahom words written in Tai Ahom script and compiled by a priest scholar³⁰ of an Ahom priestly clan. It is later published by the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies (DHAS), Guahati, in 1964 as Ahom Lexicons which is great help to the scholars to study the Tai Ahom language and scripts.

As early as 1920, the first Ahom-Assamese-English Dictionary was prepared and printed. The compiler and editor of this book was Rai Sahib Gopal Chandra Baruah. The original book is out of print. However, it is

incorporated in *Linguistic Survey of India*, 1904, and combined under the title of *Tai Language and Ahom-Assamese-English Dictionary*.

*The Ahom Buranji*³¹ (written in Tai language with parallel English translation) which is translated and edited from an old manuscript by G.C. Barua came to light in 1930. Mention is to be made that it is a pioneer work of the six hundred years Tai Ahom administration in the Brahmaputra valley, also it is a well-informed chronicle (*buranji*) to the researchers.

Since mid-fifties of the twentieth century, a number of Tai Ahom organizations³² began to keep alive their traditional cultural heritage which was in decline. This includes language, religious rites and rituals, history, culture and so on. As such, in a bid to bring back their traditional traits and archaic Tai culture, a group of Tai Ahom intellectuals constituted an academic forum 'The Tai Historical and Cultural Society of Assam' (here in society) at Patsaku, Sibsagar, in June, 1955.³³ In 1982, it made its constitution³⁴ in which they clearly mention their aims and objectives³⁵ specially to collect, translate and publish old manuscripts, inscriptions, and other records relating to their language, literature, history and culture and so on. Indeed, they wanted to pay more attention on the growth and development of distinct Tai identity so that they can place their future demands to protect all cultural heritage like historic buildings, monuments and the achievements of the Tai Ahoms. Another significant act of this Society is the publication of books and journals. One of which is the '*chak-long*',³⁶ a book on the traditional system of Tai Ahom marriage which is translated from an original Tai Ahom manuscripts with the help of priest-scholars (mo'). This book gained popularity among all sections – both Tai and non – Tai. Further, the society had published three issues of a journal, named *Lik Phan Tai* in 1966, 1981 and 1986 respectively. It also published two important researchs journal i.e. *Tai Sanskriti* both in English and Assamese. All these published works bear some of the most significant research studies on the various aspects of the Tai Ahoms. It is an encouragement to the young researchers to do in depth study on the archaic culture of the Tai Ahoms. Further, to create consciousness in regard to their original history and culture, occasionally the society organizes conferences, seminars, symposias, special lectures and so on relating to the study on the Tai Ahom language, history and culture. There has been no significant publication from the Society after 1986.

However, one of the pioneer acts of this Society is that, in 1987 it organized, 'The All India Conference on Tai History and Culture' at

Dibrugarh, Assam where more than 20 scholars from within and outside Assam presented their research papers on different themes i.e. on the Tai Ahom language, culture and heritage. The papers presented by the scholars from outside Assam prove that academic interest in Tai studies on language, religion and culture gained a momentum every where.

Mention must be made that only for the effort of this Society a traditional religious ceremony *me-dam-me-phi*³⁷ was revived among the Ahoms and it is now celebrated every year on the 31st January,³⁸ in many places in Upper Assam and also at Guwahati. The ceremony is conducted by the Ahom priests (*mo'*) in traditional way and invokes prayer in Tai language. The use of the Tai language in public was enhanced by this celebration.

In 1962, another important Ahom organization 'The All Assam Mohan Deodhai Bailung Sanmihan' was established, and it is actively working for the development of the Tai Ahom language, culture and religion. In 1981 an Ahom organization 'The Ban-Oak Pup Lik Miung-Tai' (The Eastern Tai Literary Association) was established. It has passed twenty three years by organizing academic conference annually on Tai language and culture since its birth. Also, it published several books on Tai language and culture besides publishing a souvenir every year. This organization in Assam may be described as a direct result of 'The First International Conference on Thai Studies (ICTS)' held in Delhi in 1981. It was attended by scholars from several countries and a few scholars from Assam. This small group of scholars from Assam owed much to the impact of the First ICTS, because 'The Ban-Oak Pup Lik Miung-Tai' was formed just after the scholars returned from the conference. The present momentum in Tai language studies is also a fruit of the same.

For the revival of Tai language the role and initiative taken by the academic organizations in Upper Assam is also worth mentioning. Towards the latter part of the twentieth century there is a growing demand for the introduction of Tai language in schools in Upper Assam.

After the establishment of the Ban-Oak Pup-Lik Miung-Tai in 1981, most of the Ahom organizations placed their strong demand³⁹ to the Govt. of Assam for the same. In response to this demand in 1984, two years Diploma Course in Tai language was introduced in the Department of Assamese, Dibrugarh University, in Assam, where graduate students are taught Tai by some teachers well versed in Tai and belonging to the Tai community. Of late, the Tai language has been introduced at the

primary schools in some Tai Ahom inhabited areas in Upper Assam. By now the said University produced more than three hundred Diploma holder students. Further the Ban-Oak Pup-Lik Miung-Tai often organizes Tai language training camp⁴⁰ in different places with a view to teach Tai to the younger generations. For this academic pursuit some of the literate persons having a good hold in Tai language are engaged. Most of them belonging to the Tai community of the Tai Aiton, Tai Phake, Tai Khamti, Tai Khamyang, and also the Tai Ahom are well experienced in Tai. At present 200⁴¹ Tai language teachers are appointed in primary schools by the Govt. of Assam.

In 1964, a Tai language school was established named 'Patsaku Central Tai Academy' at Patsaku, Sibsagar, in Upper Assam. In this school, besides teaching Tai language some other cultural training⁴² is also given to the students. In 2001 a new academic organization has come in to existence.

But there has been a great decline in number of students coming out for higher Diploma Course, or in Tai medium schools. The decrease might be due to the lack of appointment-opportunity in Tai schools or other avenues. It definitely leads to the rise of a question whether the interest in Tai language would increase or go to stagnation once again in future.

The Tai Ahom community, which is now a part of the larger Assamese community has already merged with the mainstream of Assamese life and culture in many respects. It is really difficult to identify the Tai Ahom culture from the present day Assamese cultural traits and practices. A few antique family customs and religious practices are the only identifiable elements which keep up the specific Tai Ahoms identity in a large perspective of Assamese identity. Among them the best known are the '*cak-lang*'⁴³ marriage rites, worshipping of *om-pha*⁴⁴ *sai-pha*⁵⁴, *me-dam me-phi*⁴⁶ and so on. But due to time and space we have taken for discussion only '*cak-lang*' which is performed by the priest scholars (*mo'*) entirely in Tai language.

It is to be noted that the Tai language culture among the Ahoms has lost its practice. Perhaps many Ahom people have neither heard nor seen the very scripts of the language. The only scope that, they occasionally get to hear and utter is in time of marriage ceremony per the traditional '*cak-lang*' system. The couple are to imitate some charms (*mantra*) in Tai as conducted by the Ahom priests (*mo'*). It is perhaps

the single opportunity in life to speak Tai language. The couple who opt for some other means of marriage even miss this single opportunity to speak Tai. Interestingly enough, the bride and the groom who utter oaths and invocations in Tai as directed by priests do not, infact, perceive any meaning. The priests have to translate the same into Assamese and interpret the meanings to the couple and guest around.

So far the tradition allows, the priests are the *deodhais* (*mo'-sam*) who have command over old Tai language and scriptures. As such, they are invited to conduct the '*cak-lang*'. But due to dearth of such experienced priest-scholars, some newly trained young people have also come out to conduct such marriage (*cak-lang*). It is a good sign that the youngsters have developed an interest in the Tai language-culture which is indirectly an attempt to revive the original Tai Ahoms language.

In the olden Ahom society the priestly classes, namely, the *deodhai* (*mo'-sam*), *mohan* (*mo-hung*) and *bailungs* (*mo'-plong*) were engaged in the profession by hereditary. But at present the Tai Ahoms of other clans also act as priests because they know to cultivate the Tai language. But it is still doubtful whether the newer generation would carry on the profession and practices. Moreover, the true tone and purity of the language has not been maintained perfectly by the present day novices of priesthood. It is because their mother tongue is Assamese, which is the medium of their schooling.

Recent Trends in Tai Language

Some ostensible signs of Tai language revivalism are in the publication⁴⁷ of several souvenirs, books and journals in which the Tai language has been used to keep up and popularize the ethnic identity of the Tais. The names of souvenirs are sometimes printed in the Tai words in common Assamese and English script. There are also booklets and souvenirs with titles in both Tai and Assamese. The intention is obviously to make the Assamese speakers familiar with the Tai script and language. For example, the booklet of the Tai Ahom marriage '*cak-lang*' contains the title in both Tai and Assamese. The incantation and prayers are still printed as they are spoken in Tai but in Assamese script along with their respective translated form in Assamese. The common people, who know only Assamese, are at ease with the Tai language when they read it in Assamese script and understand it through translation. It is an attempt at popularization of the Tai language not only among the Ahoms but Assamese as a whole.

A very fascinating recent development in respect of the Tai language development programme in Assam is that several Souvenirs published on the occasion of different conferences provide appropriate sections for new writings in the Tai language by new learners of the language. However the new learners are found to be trying their hands in Tai writing using either the Tai script or the known Assamese script. Moreover, the new writers in Tai are not essentially Tai speakers learning Tai. This development of creative literature in Tai is undoubtedly a promising pioneering task for the Tai language in the North-East.

The royal symbol of flying dragon with some variations is occasionally printed on the front piece, which is a recent trend in some publications of books and journals. It may be read as an attempt to revive the sense of belongings to a rich ethnic and cultural tradition of the past. The designing of different symbols to be printed such as octagonal⁴⁸ coin-design with flying dragon inside, the structural designs of the entrance gates, flages, the puja house (usually erected while perform *me-dam me-phi*), backdrops etc. are generally based on old cultural items or models. After all, there appears to be a sprit of revivalism in every thing including the language. It is to be noted that the adoption of dragon symbol has become a new feature since latter part of the twentieth century. In other printed literatures such design symbols are not found. The dragon, in its queer aspects, attracts and rouses mixed responses, and at the same time invites quite a comprehensive and separate study on it.

The present emblem of the cultural organization is not only octagonal but also it has imprints of two / three languages in Tai, English and Assamese. There are other such signs of octagonal design imprinted on the front pieces of journals and souvenirs. The use of the dragon symbol is an attempt to re-establish the Tai ethnic identity in the present times.

There are some reflections at personal or family levels of the general spirit of revivalism of the Tai Ahom culture and linguistic identity. Many of the sweet sounding, rhythmic and meaningful Tai names have been also revived. Children in recent years have been given Tai name by conscious parents who at present share and patronize the growth of the Tai language.

Another aspect of the same spirit is manifest in naming business houses, vehicles, memorial houses and parks, proposals for naming big construction etc. This is, of course, a reflection of both a love for the Tai language and ethnic identity and a search for uniqueness in naming.

The Electronic media such as the Radio (AIR) and TV etc. have also taken up regular broadcasting of talks and songs and audio visual programmes in the Tai language. So also there are cultural programmes on the stage to promote popularization of the Tai language.

The word '*chao*'⁴⁹ is used before personal names of males of the Ahom community. In recent years, it seems to be used as an alternative to popularly used '*Sri*' (of Indian origin) and '*Mr.*' (of English origin). But, in time of communal festival of the Tai Ahoms, it is generally seen that the invitation letters, appeals, leaflet etc. contain Tai Ahom names with '*chao*' before the names. In several souvenirs,⁵⁰ the use of '*chao*' before the names of the author is mostly noticed. For example, such names includes Chao Anil Buragohain,⁵¹ Chao Jatin Bargoahain,⁵² Chao Kamal Barpatra Gohain,⁵³ Chao Nayan Phukan⁵⁴ and so on. The names if written in proper Tai form would be Chao Anil Chao-phrang – mung, Chao Jatin Thao-mung-lung, Chao Kamal Chao-sheng-lung, Chao Nayan phu-kan respectively. The males of the community do not appear to entertain the later parts of the original surnames but only '*chao*' in place of traditional '*Sri*'. This seems to be an attempt to replace '*Sri*' as the pre-name or title of self respect. It is one of the several trends of ethnic revivalism in recent times. But in reality the word '*chao*' in Tai refer to 'a king'; 'a god'; 'a deity', 'a master'; 'a owner'; 'a great man' and so on, as far as used as a noun⁵⁵ or pre-name. In all the example of using personal names, the general meaning is 'great man'.

The Shans⁵⁶ of Myanmar also use '*chao*' in the above sense i.e. 'great man'. But they do not use it before names of ordinary or layman. The modern Thais use '*noi*'⁵⁷ in place of '*Mr*' or '*Sri*'. The people of South-East Asia, and also the Tai speaking people of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh perceive that the person whose name is preceded by '*chao*' is obviously 'a prince' or 'high born one'. Similarly female names of the Tai Ahom Community are now preceded by the word '*nang*'⁵⁸ (lady) that again seems to replace '*Srimati*' or '*Mrs.*'.

Conclusion

From the materials presented above, it can be summarized that the Tai language, which was once a dominant tongue of the Tai Ahom royal family, gradually lost its prior importance due to many reasons, and in course of time it merged with the local Assamese speech. Fortunately the traditional Tai language, in its original script, was kept alive by the priestly clans of the Tai Ahom community. From that point of view, they

highly deserve praise because the Tai language survived only due to their constant effort and conservative strictness of the people. It appears that since early thirteenth century a vigorous attempt was made by the priestly clans to preserve this language in traditional style by using its original script, which they always cultivated and they are still cultivating the language.

The language, which was brought by Chao-Lung *Siu-Ka-Pha* (in the early thirteenth century) from Muang Mao-Lung was quite different that existed prior to it. Also it was distinct from the languages that were prevalent at that time in Assam. Chronicles (*buranji*) reveal that *Siu-Ka-Pha* was brought up at Mao-lung, and passed his early stage up to 19⁵⁹ years there. So, it is quite natural that *Siu-Ka-Pha* and his companions brought with them Tai Mao language (which is known today as Ahom language). Also, it is identified that the Tai of the thirteenth century brought with them a script (known today as Ahom script) in which they recorded⁶⁰ all important events, and later used it to write chronicles (*buranji*) and other topical writings.

The Tai Ahom kingdom that existed for about six hundred years produced lots of written documents and materials on history, culture, ancient rites and rituals, and also religious observations. But, due to lack of readers of traditional Tai language many of the written records are silently lying unused. Many of the manuscripts, written in Tai Ahom on sanchi bark, are also lying untouched. However, it is a sign of great prospect that the younger generations of the Tai Ahoms have seriously starting to acquire knowledge on Tai language by attending Tai medium schools. It would be nice if it can be learnt scientifically and with all care. Further, they must be guided by Tai speaking teachers to teach Tai perfectly. Because it is a tonal language. A slight change in tone or pitch of voice or sound may alter the total meanings⁶¹ and can be expressed by means of tone only. Practically all the branches of the Tai language use tone⁶².

The students usually follow two dictionaries viz. G.C. Barua (com), *Ahom-Assamese-English Dictionary* (1920) and B. Barua and N.N Deodhai Phukan, (ed), *Ahom Lexicons* (1964) as mentioned earlier. But, as they do not have any phonetic symbols as how to pronounce the words, there is possibility to occur confusion while reading words. Thus, students must be guided by the teachers who are possessing knowledge on the traditional Tai Ahom language. In addition, we would like to mention here

that after training in Tai Ahom language, students will definitely possess a good habit of writing Tai, expressing its meaning. But at the same time if they are not given speech training in tone, it may create problem in conservation. As such, to learn Tai perfectly both students and teachers must be attentive in teaching and learning. If it can be taught methodically and in scientific way, the treasure of the Tai Ahom language would give a fruitful result in the field of literature for further study of the Tai Ahom language, and scholars would discover more source materials from the hidden treasure of the Tai Ahom.

Notes and References

1. Several references of *mao-Shan* people are found in P. Gogoi, *The Tai and the Tai kingdoms: With a Fuller Treatment of the Tai Ahom Kingdom in the Brahmaputra valley* (here in TTK), Guwahati University, 1968, p. 103 ff; It refers to the first group of Tai speaking people who accompanied *Chao-Lung Siu-Ka-pha* from his original homeland *muang-mao-lung* or *mao* kingdom or *muang-mao*; In his article J.N. Phukan states that "The main group of Tai who accompanied Sui-Ka-Pha comprised Tai mao people", "Language and script of the Ahom in the thirteenth century", *Charaideo*, Souvenir of the Closing ceremony of 770 anniversary of Chao-Lung Siu-Ka-Pha, 1997-98. The word 'Shan' is used by the Burmese to denote the Tais living in Burma (Myanmar). The term is also used by the British to denote the Tais. Frank. M. Lebar, *et.al.*, *Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia*, New Haven, 1964, p. 192.
2. It is the original home land of the first group of Tai people. The name appears for the first time in G.C Barua, *Ahom-Buranji: from the Earliest time to the End of the Ahom Rule* (with parallel English Translation), (here in A-B) 1930, p. 42. At that time it covered a part of southern Yunnan and a part of present - day Myanmar, J.N. Phukan, *Charaideo, Ibid.*, p.3 "Language and Script of the Ahom in the Thirteenth Century", *Charaideo*, Souvenir published on the Occasion of the 770 Anniversary of *Chao-Lung Siu-Ka-Pha*, 1990, p. 3.
3. It is a Tai word, meaning *pat*-to cut, *kai* = *fouls*, Kashi Nath Tamuly Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, (here in KTP), Calcutta, 1906, pp. 16-17. There is a reference in the chronicle that a treaty was made between the two generals of two countries i.e. Muang-Dun sun-Kham and Muang-

Kawang. The treaty was concluded by sacrificing fowls on the spot, at which place the generals fixed the boundary of the two countries. The original name of this hill given by *Siu-Ka-Pha* was doi -kao-rang (*dai* = mountain, *kao* = nine, *rang* = to unite or meet i.e. collection of nine hills; 'A-B, p. 45: S.K. Bhuyan (ed), *Deodhai Assam Buranji* (here in DAB), Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, (here in DHAS), Guwahati, Assam, 1962. p.7.

4. The name was given by his grandfather Chao Taiplung. A-B, p. 43, while his grandmother named him *Chao-Lung Siu-Ka-Pha*, *Ibid*.
5. The historieans proved that the foundation of the Tai kingdom in Assam was laid down in the early part of the thirteenth century A.D when there was a great west ward movement of the Tai speaking group of people from Southern China and began to penetrate through the Mainland South-East Asia. TTK, p. 250; This migration was not a sudden shift of population but a slow and steady infiltration, see, Charles F. Keyes, *Golden peninsula: Culture and Adoption in Mainland Southeast Asia*, London, 1977, p.74; In his book *The Making of South East Asia*, tr. & ed. by H.M. Wright Berkely and Loss Angels, University of California press, 1966, p.126; George Coedes states that "the thirteenth century was a watershed in the history of the Indianized states of southeast Asia".
6. The year 1228 is the traditional date of the establishment of the Ahom kingdom. TTK, p.251; some of the historians mention 1229, see D.G.E. Hall, *A History of South - East Asia* (here in HSEA), *Ibid.*, p. 186; KTP, Appendix p. 1; DAB, p.234.
7. It is a Tai word. The Ahoms, soon after they reached into the Brahmaputra valley they applied this ward to denote Assam. The total expression of this word is "a country full of gardens of gold". (*muang* = country, *dun* = full of , *sun* = gardens, *Kham* = gold).
8. The present day Tai Ahoms no longer speak their traditional Tai language. In course of time, they adopted the speech of the local Assamese people. However, it exists among the priestly clans usually, they use Tai Ahom language while performing religious ceremonies, and cak-lang.
9. The Tai Khamyangs, also called Nora, is a group of Tai people found in four districts of Assam vix. Golaghat, Jorhat, Tinsukia and Sibsagar in Upper Assam. They are Buddhist of Hynayana sect, and speak Assamese. However, the people of Powai Mukh (Margherita), in Tinsukia district, still speak Tai as their mother tongue.

10. The Turungs are living in three districts in Upper Assam viz. Golaghat, Jorhat and Karbi Anglong. They profess Theravada Buddhism. According to their tradition, they originally came from muang-mang khao-sang on the North-East of Burma (Myanmar) where they settled on the Turung pani in the Hukawang valley. But while they crossed Pat – Kai en route for the Brahmaputra valley they were held up by the Kachins (Singphos) and lived with them for quite a long period and adopted the language of their master, G.A Grierson, *Linguistic survey of India : Mon-Khmer and Siamese-Chinese Families (including Khassi and Tai)* 1904. pp. 6-7; In their daily life they speak a dialect similar to Singphos but heavily mixed with Tai.
11. J.N. Phukan, "The Tai of India: The Ahom case – The Treasure They Possess", *Indian Journal of Tai Studies*, (here in IJTS), vol. III, Institute of Tai Studies and Research, Moranhat, Assam, India, 2003, p.31.
12. Pratashlota Buragohain and Md. Taher, "The population in Assam: A Spatial Analysis of Growth and Distribution", *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Tai Studies*, SOAS, London, July, 1993, p. 5.
13. B.J. Terwiel, "Revivalism in Northeast India: A Case of the Ahoms", IJTS, vol, II, 2002, p.6.
14. It is a Tai Ahom word, meaning 'learning person', known also as deodhai or Tai Ahom priests. See, B. Baruah and N.N. Deodhai Phukan (ed), *Ahom Lexicons* (here in AL), 1964, p. 91; G.A. Grierson (com), *Ahom – Assamese –English Dictionary*, (here in AAED), Calcutta, 1920, pp.174-175.
15. A section of high priest, accompanied Siu-Ka-pha from his original home land. see J.N. Phukan, *Charaideo*, p.2.
16. It can be assumed from the references given in A-B, pp.10-16, that the priestly clans of the Tai Ahoms were of divine origin. They were sent to the earth by Lengdon (The Heavenly God), from the heaven along with two heavenly princes, Khun-lung and Khun-Lai; Also, we have some other references that, Siu-Ka-Pha while migrated to the westward he was accompanied by the families of priestly clans. A-B, p.15.
17. One of the titles of three main Ahom pandits, A L, p.91; AAED, pp. 174-75. They are known popularly as *deodhai* among the Ahoms.

See also, P. Gogoi, *Tai Ahom Religion and Customs* (here in TARC), Guahati, 1976, p.15.

18. An Ahom priestly clan, AL, Ibid; AAED, Ibid. They are known as *Mohan* among the Tai Ahoms, P. Gogoi, TARC, Ibid.
19. A priestly clan of the Tai Ahoms. AL, Ibid; AAED Ibid; They are called *Bailung* by the Ahoms, P. Gogoi TARC, Ibid.
20. A-B, p.34.
21. Chronicles bear several references of this name. The place is important due to many historical evidences. The Tai prince Siu-Ka-Pha while made his Journey from muang kawang towards the pat-kai via Hukawang valley, he marched through many places and then reached kham-jang or kham-yang valley after crossing the dol-kham (meaning crossing mountain, see A-B, p.45) hill and founded his first muang (country) called muang kham-jang leaving a thao-muang in charge of the muang, A-B, p.45; *Satsari Asom Buranji*, (here in SAB), ed. by S.K. Bhuyan, DHAS, 1974, p.3; DAB, p.7
22. SAB, p.3.
23. J.N. Phukan, "Ahom Rajyat Ahomhakale Kenekoi Teolokar Niza Bhakah Herowabolo Dhare" (in Assamese), Gargaon, Souvenri of the BOMP, 1996, p.5.
24. *Ibid*.
25. *Sang* = two, *tak* = balance, meaning double the weight or twice heavy. DAB mentiond that on his journey by water, Siu-Ka-Pha while reached a place called Muang-rin Muang ching (*muang* = country, *rin* = stone, *muang* = country, *ching* = high level i.e. a country of high level), i.e. a valley at a higher level, he wighted the water of another stream and got twice heavier. So he named the river sang-tak due to its significant character. Later the name became applicable to denote the whole area, DAB, pp. 8-9.
26. Some of the presents were silver winter-vessel with a spout, pieces of court dress and fine cotton pieces, DAB, pp. 8-9.
27. The presents were among others, cross baws, gold embroidered shoes, gold embroidered head dresses, DAB, Ibid.
28. AL 'Preface', p. III.
29. A-B, p. 335.
30. Tangai Pandit of *mo' - hung* family, AL, see 'Preface', p. III.

31. Its original manuscript was found in the possession of Pancharam Phukan of Akhoiya Village, in 1894, see Normal Chandra Gogoi "A Critical study on the Ahom Buranji," *Gargaon*, Souvenir of the 13th Annual Conference of BOPMT, Gargaon, Sibsagar, 1996, p.2; It was written by Monohor Bailung during the reign of Siva Singha, see, Chao Bhadreswar Bokatial, "Contribution of Ahom Rulers to the Development of Tai and Assamese Literature".
32. *Bulletin of the Tai Historical and Cultural Society of Assam* (here in THCSA), No. 1, January, 1983 p.9.
33. Constitution of the THCSA, published by Dr. J.N. Phukan, Guwahati, January, 1982.
34. *Ibid.*
35. The book is published in 1972.
36. It is a religious ceremony in which oblations are offered to the dead and sacrifices are made to the gods. Chronicles of the Ahom mention several references of this religious ceremony celebrated since the days of the first Ahom monarch Chao-Lung Siu-Ka-Pha, see, A-B, *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 47; DAB. P.9.
37. The executive members of the THCSA submitted a memorandum in 1982, to the then Governor of Assam Sri Prakash Mehrotra to declare as 'Sectional Holiday', See, J.N. Phukan, *me -dam me-phi*, 1986, p.8; The day is now observed as state holiday.
38. Souvenir, *Ban-Oak Pup-Lik Miung-Tai*, (here in BOPMT). The 14th Annual Tingkhong Conference, 1997, pp. 40-41.
39. G. Phukan, "Culture and Politics in Assam: Understanding the Politics of Ahom Identity", *Tingkhong*, Souvenir of the 14th Annual Conference of BOPMT, 1997, p. 42.
40. P. Gogoi, "State of Tai in Assam and Ahom's Struggle for Revival", *Tingkhong*, *Ibid.*, p. 42.
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*
43. It is a traditional and formal ceremony of the Tai Ahom marriage, called cak-lang in Tai. It is mentioned in Lai-Lit Nang Hung-Pha, a tai Ahom manuscript, that the cak-lang system of marriage was introduced by the heavenly King Lengdon, *Cak-Lang*, published by THCSA, Guwahati, 1972, see Preface; Further, it appears in the same manuscript that it was Lengdon who married Nang Hun-Pha, the

- eldest daughter of Ak-Kai-Mo-Hung of the kingdom of the gods;
Ibid.
44. It meant the worshipping of Lengdon, the lord of Heaven and other gods too, see, P. Gogoi, *Tai-Ahom Religion and Customs*, (here in TARC), 1976; p. 15.
 45. It was a congregational worship performed by the people in general, see, P. Gogoi, IARC, *Ibid.*
 46. *rik* to call, *khwan* = long life, meaning calling for the long life. Its full expression is *rik-khwan mung -khwan*. It means certain spiritual rites performed by the Ahom kings to prolong their lives, or calling for the well-being of the king and the country, TARC, p. 15.
 47. *Ngì-Ngyao-Kham*, Souvenir of the 9th Me-Dam Me-Phai, Dhemaji, North Lakhimpur, 1983; *Lik - Tai Khwam-Tai*, Souvenir of BOMPT, Guwahati, 1990; *Lik-Dam Lik-Phi*, Souvenir, published, on the occasion of *Me-Dam, Me-Phi, Siu-Ka-Pha* Nagar, Guwahati, 1991; *Ai-Ma-Nang*, Souvenir, of the BOMPT, North Lakhimpur, 1998; *Lik Phan Tai*, Journal of the THCSA, published in 1966, '81, '86; *Pu-Lan-Chi*, An Annual Research Journal, Published by the Institute of Tai Studies and Research, Moranhat, Assam; J.N. Phukan, *Mo-Dam Me- Phi*, Guwahati 1986; *Cak-lang*, published by THCSA, 1972; *Miung-Dun Sun-Kham*, Souvenir, published on the Occasion of inauguration of Assam Tai Museum, Sibsagar, 1992.
 48. The octagonal coin design was accepted from Hindu tradition. It was during the time of king Chao-Pha Siu Sheng-Pha alias Buddhiswarganarayan alias Pratap Singha, that he wished to get metal coins-designed and stamped in Hindu model as it had been done by the Koch Kings in the 17th century. The octagonal design was accepted after a discussion with and recommendation by some Hindu scholars who had prescribed it on the basis of the *Yoginitantra*, because the design was supposed to be sign of good luck and the dominion at that time was described as octagonal. So, when the design was approved by the top court-members, the Ahom king got it minted it octagonal design and with imprint of the Hindu name 'Swarganarayan' dropping 'Budhi' from 'Buddhi swarga narayan' but not the Tai name., See, *Asom Buranji Sara*. DHAS, Guwahati. 1964, p. 92.
 49. At., *Ibid*, p. 104, has given fifteen distinct meanings for the word 'chao' while it is found ten different meanings in AAED pp. 198-

- 99; See also Jaya Buragohain, "Chao Sabdar Byabahar" (in Assamese), Souvenir, *Me-Dam Me-Phi*, Sonari, Sibsagar, Assam, 1998, pp. 1-4.
50. As for example, BOMPT, 1990, 1996, 1999.
 51. During the Ahom period it was a dignitarian title and the denotating term of the Prime Minister of Tai Ahom king. In Tai it was known as Chao-Pharang-Mung (*chao*-a-god, *phrang* = wide, *muang* = Country i.e. a god of a wide country), AAED, pp. 200-01. During the Ahom period it was a dignitarian title and the denotating term of the Prime Minister of the Tai Ahom king, see also AL, p. 105. At present it has become a family title.
 52. Known as thao-muang-lung (*thao* = old, *muang* = country, *lung* = great) in Tai. During the Ahom kingdom it was the second dignitarian title of one of the great councillors; AAED, pp. 216-17; AL, p. 113. Another title of Borgohain is *thao-thum-lung*, AL, p. 113.
 53. It was a dignitarian title of the third great councilor of the Ahom kingdom known in Tai as chao-shong-lung (*chao* = a god, *shong* = holy, *lung* = great i.e. 'a great holy god', AAED, pp. 202-03; AL, p. 106.
 54. It was a title of dignity in the Ahom kingdom. known in Tai phukan (*phu* = a male, *kan* = nice, meaning 'a nice male person', AAED, pp. 132-33; AL, p. 71.
 55. AAED, pp. 198-99. AL, p. 104;
 56. The Shan of Myanmar use it to denote a Shan chief, or Shan prince or hereditary prince known popularly as 'sao pha. Conceptually, 'saopha' is a 'divine king, 'an absolute monarch'. Further, the Shan ideal of a saopha would seem to have been best achieved by the kings of Burma, see for details, E.R. Leach, *Political System of Highland Burma: A study of kachin Social Structure*, London, 1964, pp. 213-15.
 57. De Young, *Village life in Modern Thailand*, University of California, Berkely and Los Angles, 1958, p. 27.
 58. The term 'nang' is used by the Tais of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh to denote a 'lady' or 'young sister'. The same is also popular among the Thais of Thailand. See, De Young, *Ibid*.
 59. A-B, p. 43.
 60. SAB, p. 3.

61. As for example, the A-B, p. 84, has given eight separate meanings for the word 'ma' i.e. 'to come', 'satisfy call of nature', 'a god', 'a horse', 'a fox', 'an ass', 'the negative particle', 'a kind of plant'. Similarly, for the word 'ka', it had given fifteen distinct meanings i.e. 'to go', 'to trade', 'to measure', 'to offer things to the parents of the girl when wooing', 'to dance', 'a crow', 'hardship', 'pain', 'a leather block', 'a piece of wood tied to the neck of animal', 'a paddy seedlings', 'a forehead ornament', 'trade', 'sufficient'.
62. J.N. Cushing, *Grammar of the Shan Language*, Rangoon, 1887, pp. 20-25.