

A Study on the Impact of Tai Ahoms on Assamese Language and Culture

Dr. Pranab Jyoti Gogoi

Associate Prof. Dept of English Moridhal College, Dhemaji.

&

Mr. Prnajal Gogoi

Assistant Professor, Dept of History SMD College, Charing, Sivasagar.

ABSTRACT

The Tai Ahom culture and language has ample impact on the formation of dominant Assamese culture and language. Many Tai words now become the recognised words of Assamese language and are popularly used in day to day Assamese conversation and writing. There are scarce of substitute words for many Assamese terminologies other than the Tai version of words are used spoken Assamese on different occasions. Such many Tai words have been recognised as substantive Assamese words by modern Assamese dictionaries too. The Tai Ahoms demand that they are the harbinger of Assamese Bihu festivals that accompany with typical Bihu dances, songs and other related activities performed by the Assamese people today. The base of their demands lie on the fact that all the dances, songs, musical instruments and other customs associated with Bihu show greater similarities with the traditional dances, songs and other co-activities of different festivities of the Tai people living in the central part of China from where the present Tai Ahoms migrated to Assam centuries back.

Date of Submission: 28-02-2021

Date of Acceptance: 13-03-2021

I. INTRODUCTION

The Tai Ahoms of Assam are basically the people of Syam- Chinese linguistic stock and originally inhabited in the central and sub-central parts of China till 400 B.C. They had to be involved in frequent feud and war with other Chinese people for their survival. They were obsessed by unfavourable demography as well as climatic condition of their original habitat and a fraction of the Tais of China including the Tai Ahoms started migrating to the foothills of the Chinese mountain range where they started to live for several decades. Subsequently they spread up to the South-East Asian locations especially, to Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, North East of India and many other places for permanent settlement. They established separate Tai kingdoms in the newly occupied regions under their powerful rulers. The Tai Ahoms of Assam are fraction of Tai-Chinese race landed in Assam during the first decades of 13th century A.D.

MIGRATION TO ASSAM

The Tai Ahoms first landed in Assam in 1828 A.D under bold and courageous leadership of Sukapha, the leader of Tai group entered in Assam. At the time of their entry into Assam the entire place of it was scattered in different small states lived by the people of Chutia, Borahi, Kachari, Moran, Mottok, Bodos etc. under their powerful kings. These aboriginal races became heavily disgruntled with the upcoming of Ahoms and put powerful challenge by raising war against them. As the Ahoms were more strong, brave and courageous race, so they were easily capable to thwart all the attacks of these small races. Subsequently the Ahoms brought their territories under their power. Sukapha became an undisputed monarch of the entire place. Thus the Ahoms were capable to settle permanently in Assam and to rule its entire people from the 14th century onwards.

SOURCES OF STUDY ON TAI AHOMS

The Tai Ahoms have remarkable contribution to the formation of Assamese society, language, culture and tradition. Only a few Tai scholars of Assam are working on different aspects of Tai Ahom culture and traditions and its impact on the formation of greater Assamese society and culture till date. In this regard Dr.Puspa Gogoi's *The Tai of North East* and *The Ahom Religion and Custom*, J.N.Phukan's *The Tai Ahom Language*, Umesh Chetia's *Tai Ahom Buranji Aru Sanskriti*, Dr. Lila Gogoi's *Tai Ahom Culture and Sanskriti* etc. are

worth mentioning. Their valued study and research on the Tai Ahom culture and language enables to find adequate information on the subject so far. The present study is a pilot survey on the issue and is based on already published secondary sources of information only. This is a humble attempt to focus on the Tai Ahom culture and tradition and its impact on the modern Assamese society from new perspective. This insight will help for planning out an extensive study and research on the Tai Ahom culture and language in future.

RELATION WITH OTHER NATIVE PEOPLE

As Sukapha brought only the male members with him so he desired his people to make matrimonial alliance with the local tribes of Assam and as a result of which a foundation for strong racial as well as lingo-cultural assimilation between the Ahoms and the non-Ahoms was built up. Gradually under the rule of the successors of Sukapha the Ahom were capable to capture and rule the lower Assam areas, up to Guwahati in the South bank of the river Brahmaputra. Sukapha possessed with broad-minded, cordial and friendly personality, and always preferred to maintain peaceful as well as amicable relation with all the natives of Assam. He had vision for establishing a unique cohesive Assamese race with harmonious co-existence of all the communities through exercising of the ideals of brotherhood, friendliness, mutual help and co-operation. Neither he interfered himself to the peaceful way of life of the local inhabitants after defeating them in Assam nor allowed his men to act as such. His successors were greatly inspired with his brotherly attitude to the non-Ahoms and his lofty enterprise for building up of social harmony among the masses irrespective of the diverse community identity. He always emphasised on the continuance of the same harmony among all the people forever for ensuring prosperity among all. His mission was to get one identity of all the people living in Assam i.e. unique Assamese identity and to build up a strong foundation of this unique Assamese race to prosper.

TAI AHOM LANGUAGE

The original language of the Tai Ahoms was the language spoken by the Tai people living in South East Asia and China. The Tai Ahoms migrated, especially from a place called Mung Mao of Yanun province of China during the first decade of 13th century. So, their language bears close similarity with the Tai language spoken by the natives of Mung Mao or entire people of Yanun itself. Their language shows slight difference from the language spoken by some other Tai communities like Khamti, Phake, Aiton, Turung and Khamaayang inhabiting in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh though they belong to same lingo-cultural and ethnic stock with the Tai Ahoms. These Tai groups of people, excluding the Tai Ahoms got accustomed to Burmese culture and traditions due to their continuous abode in Burma for several centuries after their migration from the deep terrains of China. The Substantial Tai language of these people of Tai origin was remarkably contaminated and got new form, termed as Tai-Burmese language. So, such lingo-cultural variation between the Tai-Ahoms and other Tai communities of their vicinity is quiet observable. But the Tai Ahoms landed first at Khamjang, the border area of present Myanmar and Monipur where they lived for a very shorter period of time. So, there was less possibility of their language got contaminated by the language of other groups of people especially, by the Burmese speaking groups. Hence the language spoken by the Tai Ahoms is supposed to be the original form of Tai language rather than the Tai language spoken by some other Tai peoples (Phake, Khamti, Turung, Aiton, Khamayang etc.)

CHANGES IN TAI AHOM LANGUAGE

Till 1503A.D. no considerable change to the Tai Ahom language occurred. But from the time of Ahom King Suhung Mung changes in the Tai Ahom language is quiet discernible. After 1503 large numbers of North Indian people speaking different languages of Sanskrit origin migrated to Assam and started to live here permanently. The Ahoms came into contact with these non-tai Indians and were greatly influenced by their language, culture and traditions. In early stage of Tai language no grammar patterns were followed but later on, due to their contact with the people of other language and culture they were interested to formulate the Tai language under grammatical patterns. A renowned Tai Ahom linguist, Chao Ratneswar Buragohain observes that the substantial form of Tai language was remarkably changed during the period of Ahom King, Gadadhar Singha. During the time, many Assamese words got mixed up with the Tai language and the Tai Ahoms were accustomed to express many Tai terminologies in Assamese version. The process of mixing up of both Assamese and Tai language continued till the later part of 18th century and as a result of which the Assamese became the popular language among the Tai Ahoms. The Tai people started speaking Assamese during their interaction with other people of Assam. Gradually the Assamese even became the language of their casual familial conversation while it was recognised as a language of school education in Assam. Finally from the state of casual family conversation and interaction with other non-Tai people the Tai Ahoms mostly chose to speak in Assamese only even among their own people on various social occasions rather than in Tai language.

DILUTION OF TAI LANGUAGE

The Tai language got diluted through entanglement of certain hindrances in it in Assam with the advent of British. The British established its sway over Assam with its imperialistic network by defeating the Burmese ruler in 1825A.D. The British administration started to function in Assam from 1853 onwards. The British officials working in Assam found the Tai language difficult to pronounce in their communication with the Tais and other non Tai peoples who were well versed in Tai language. They found the Assamese words easier for pronouncing as well as understanding. Gradually they became habituated to speak Assamese in broken form and preferred to communicate in broken Assamese with all the people living in Assam. Thus having royal favour as well as support of the British the Assamese became the recognised language of Assam for all types of communication except the internal affairs of British administration. During the time, even large numbers of non Assamese Indian people migrated to Assam were also much interested in learning Assamese language and they used to speak only the Assamese during their interaction with Assamese people. Later on the British policy of education recommended Assamese to be the second language for teaching in the schools of Assam. Thus Assamese language got recognition as an institutional and a media language of communication for all classes of the people of Assam. With the popularity and acceptance of Assamese language everywhere in Assam, the importance of Tai language lessened considerably. On the other hand the Tai people also gradually came to realise the fact that learning Assamese would be much essential for over all development of them. They put much emphasis in learning and speaking Assamese and consequently they were about to forget their own substantive Tai language. As a consequence the Tai language was degraded to the position of an obsolete and irrelevant language in Assam. Tai language survived only among a very limited section of the Tais belonging to the class of the front ranked Tai linguists and the priests. By the by they also very rarely took to speak the language except in some special occasions like traditional rituals and ceremonies.

INFLUENCE OF THE TAI LANGUAGE ON ASSAMESE LANGUAGE

The Tai language left indelible influence on the Assamese language through prolonged lingo-cultural admixture between the two. Many Tai words have been considered to be the recognised words for both writing and communication in Assamese language. Some examples representing such linguistic assimilation are listed below.

Assamese	Tai Ahom	Meaning
Ping dia	Ping	Pinch with a needle or stick
Cheng loga	Cheng	Influence of spirit or some Power
Chung Saluwa	Chung	Change of sheltering
Jai lang thake lang	lang	Back of man (let back be broken, but one would fight)
Lang lang thang thang	Lang	Back (tilted up and down, disadvantage)
Than than ban ban (aimless separation)	ban ban	Split
Bang bang	bang bang	Moved aimlessly
Thung thung thang thang	thang	Beating drum or other metal
Ping ping pang pang	Ping Pang	Move aimlessly
Li lia	li li	Thin, elongated thing
Agoli	li	Top of a thing
Tinya	Tinya	Dwarf
Chakchon	Chak chon	A chi card
Cham soi	soi	A kind of ant
Chang mai	Chang mai	Cooking man,
Kang	Kang	The body structure
Rangkang	Rang Kang	The shape of skeleton
Jang	Jang	Line, shape, structure etc.
Yang	Yang	Glue
Jangphai	yang phai	Ebony, glue like fire
Khang	Khang	Basket
Rong	Rong	Pleasure, a special house

Rong hai	hai	Joy and screaming
Bura Metha	Pu/Me thao	Old man/woman
Da	Dap	Sword, knife
Mitda	mit, dap	Knife, a special Tai knife
Khiptin	Khip tin	Shoe
Tongkora	tong	Feeling, try to understand
Rangkai	rang	Shape, figure
Lingkai	ling kai	Portion of mouth
Jin gol	jin	Cold, become calm and quiet
Patghar	Pat, Pratu	Door house
Pa tu,	Pa tu	Sound of frying in oil
Pik ban	Pik	Spitting pot (Pik= spit, Ban= pot)
Hom homai thoka	hom	Feel simple pain
Kela kla		Exclamatory word For getting strength
Chong	Cheng	Disguise, acting, design
Lailingia japi	Lai lying	Specially designed, (Kup lai Lying=designed hat)

Some Tai words are used in prefixes of Assamese words

Assamese	Tai Words	Meaning
Ao kora	Aa	Open mouthed
Ai chu	Ai Sao	Respected Ahom woman
Um	Un	Warm
Kon	kon	Spouting seed, germ
Kan	kan	Equal friend
Ka reng	Ka rong	Royal house
Kham kapur	Pha kham	Golden cloth
Chop chopia	chop	Full, over flooded
Tong kora	Tong	Felt
Jin jowa	Jin	Mixed
Garu tu	tu hu	Used as gender classifier
Phuka Phukuwa	Phuk	pass air
Phai uth	Phai	Fire, becoming angry
Phut, Phuta	Phut	bubble of boiled water
Phat phat poha	Phat	Reading (Poha= read in Assamese)
Mai hang	Mai hang	Raised tray of wood
Lao chiga	Lao	Word, talking
Ligira Likchow	Lik, Lik chow	Boy, servant
Rap thoka	Rap	interest, wish
Pam khowa	Kin pam	Kin=khowa=eat, pam=new Land, settling in new land
Thunga	Thung	bag
Motong	Mo tong	Cooking pot
Tou	Tau	A kind of pot
Langching	Lang ching	A stick to control elephant

Some Tai words are used in suffixes of Assamese words

Tai Ahom	Meaning	Assamese
Kinle	Kin=eat	Khale, Kha= eat
Paidai	Pai=go	Jao dei (Jao=go)
Kin la ne?	Have you eaten?	Kha la ne?
Ban a	Please speak	Kowa na
Pai la	please go	Bola
Kin cha	eating (you)	Khai cha
Kin chu	eating (I)	Khai chu

Ba/Wa kin khao	eat rice	Bhat khaba
Ba pai	and go	Jabai

INFLUENCE OF TAI AHOM CULTURE

The Tai culture and tradition has made greater contribution to the flourishing and nourishment of Assamese culture in various ways. The Tais have left its imprint on Assamese way of food habits, dress, cloth making, songs and dances, festivals, agricultural and other related economic activities. The dainty and delicious veg and non-veg dishes of the Tai are now taken to be the most popular and tasty food items of entire Assamese people. Especially the smoked fish and meat, sour curry prepared with the combination of fish, dhekia (furn) and elephant fruit supposed to be most interesting and delicious dishes of the Tai Ahom is commonly accepted as the most attractive and delicious dishes by all. Different medicinal plants such as Vedi climber (chunk vine), Drun, Machunda(heart leaf), Manimuni (Indian pennywort), Narsigha (Murraya Koenigii), Titakachi (bitter herb), Suklati (Vern) used by Tai Ahoms since ancient time as medicinal herbs against different bodily disorders are now taken to be widely used by all for same purposes. Garments of the Tai Ahoms like that of muga (cocoon), pat(sari), silk chadar (scarf), blouse, mekhela, riha and eri chadar (scarf) produced through homestead looms by Ahom women are treated as most loving and fashionable dresses of all the indigenous communities of Assam. The Tai scholars across the globe claim that the entire Bihu Festival of Assam was originated in central China from where the Tai Ahoms migrated to Assam. The base of their demand lies on the ground that the tradition of singing and dancing in group, sometimes on the bank of river or sometimes under the tree was in vogue during the time of festival among young Tai boys and girls in the central China including Mung Mao from where the Tai Ahoms first migrated to the foothill areas of the Chinese mountain range. Dances and songs were performed with joy and merriment in group by the young boys and girls bear the note of mutual love and affection among youth. All such ancient love songs and dances were performed in same tune and style like our modern Bihu songs and dances. Further, the songs of merriment and love were accompanied by some typical musical instruments like drums, clappers, cymbals, pipes, flutes etc. used by the Tais of China, now also used for performing Bihu dances and songs in Assam. The Tai Ahoms followed the same method of agriculture practiced by the Tais of the central china. The cultivable land was tilled with the help of plough and bull or buffalo and the Tai farmers practiced both, the dry and wet rice cultivation in the selected plots of land. This Tai Ahom mode of cultivation is being widely practiced in Assam at present time.

II. CONCLUSION

The process of lingo-cultural assimilation among different races is a common phenomenon of human society. No language or culture of the people is static or isolated to be practiced only within the community to which it belongs to. Language or culture of a particular community may be extinguished due to the impact of dominant culture of its vicinity. But in the process of extinction, a language or culture always leaves innumerable attributes to its successor language or culture to prosper.

It is unquestionably true that in the formation and development of modern Assamese culture and language the Tai Ahoms have greater contribution. The Tai dictions are now recognised as part and parcel of Assamese language to give it a composite character. The words of Tai version are widely included in modern Assamese Dictionary too. The modern Assamese language that we speak today is nonetheless, a language formed with balanced admixture of both the Tai and Assamese words. Assamese language will undoubtedly lose its composite structure if the Tai terminologies are separated from it. The Assamese people irrespective of class, creed and religion have accepted those Tai versions of words as well as the Tai customs as essential part of Assamese language and culture as a result of which it is possible today for all Assamese people to give its identity as a unique linguistic group in the world.

REFERENCE

- [1]. Gait. E (1926) *A History of Assam*, Guwahati, Layers Book Stall.
- [2]. Gogoi, P (1996) *The Tais of North-East India*, Sumphra Printers, Dhemaji
- [3]. Gogoi P (1999) *The Tai and the Tai Kingdoms*, Guwahati, Layers Book Stall
- [4]. Gogoi P. eds(2007) *A Glimpse of Ethnicity of North-East India, South-East Asia etc.* Sumphra Printers, Dhemaji
- [5]. Chetia, U (2013) *Ahom Buranji Aru Sanskriti*, Kiran Prakashan, Dhemaji
- [6]. Terwiel, B.J. (1981) *The Tais of Assam and ancient Tai Rituals*, CSAS, Gaya, Vol-II.
- [7]. Gogoi, L.(1976) *Tai Sanskriti Ruprekha*, Banalata, Dibrugarh.
- [8]. Gogoi, Bagen (1994) *Tai Sanskriti*, Purbanchal Tai Sahitya Sabha, Dhemaji
- [9]. Borpujari, H.K. (2007) *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Guwahati, P.B. Assam.
- [10]. G.C.Boruah-(1998) Trans- Ahom Buranji, Kausturi Printers, Jorhat.
- [11]. Basu, N.K (1970) Assam in the Ahom Age, Kalkata, Pustak Bhandar.