



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**History**

**AHOM REVIVAL MOVEMENT AND THE AHOM PRIESTLY CLASS**

**KEY WORDS:** universal, ethnic, tradition, revival, movement etc.

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**ABSTRACT**

Quest for own identity has been a universal phenomenon among all ethnic groups in all over the world. Today each and every community is trying hard to maintain their traditional heritage. In the post-colonial period expression of own identity based on religion, tradition, language, common origin and other cultural elements has been found among several ethnic groups in the north east India. The Ahoms were not different from this. They also started campaign to preserve their tradition and cultural heritage which resulted in the formation of several organizations which fought for the cause of Ahom Revivalism. This paper tries to trace the importance of Ahom Priestly clans in Ahom Revival Movement.

**INTRODUCTION:**

After the treaty of Yandaboo, Assam was taken over by the British and the Ahoms who were the rulers before the advent of the British became degraded to common class. There was a great change in socio-political strata of Assam. The British tried to re-organize the economy and society of Assam in a non-traditional way which led to mass dissatisfaction among the masses. A popular belief persisted that the British could bring back the old heritage of Assam that was destroyed by the Burmese invasion. The Ahoms tried to regain their heritage by revolting against the British. Under the leadership Gomdhar Konwer, Peali Phukan etc. people revolted against the British but all of them came into vain and after the uprising the British did not take the Ahoms into confidence and all the government jobs and offices were acquired by the caste Hindus. The Ahoms lagged behind in all aspects economic, education and polity.

During the British rule, the Ahom became backward educationally, socially, economically and even politically. In fact they failed to occupy prominent place in British administration; important place positions were held by either by the Bengalis or the Assamese upper caste elite. The British did not recruit them, as being a ruling race they were not taken into confidence. As such, under the British rule, the Ahoms found that leadership in all spheres were slipping out of their hands and they were reduced to play second fiddle to the caste Hindus. Indeed, from a position of dominance, they sank to the rank of a "Backward Class" eligible for favour granted by the British government.

**METHODOLOGY:**

The approach of this study is historical and exploratory in nature. To serve the purpose of the topic, both conventional and analytical methods of investigation are followed. Interviews are also taken for the purpose. However, the facts collected from edited books, journals, internet files are also taken.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE:**

Numerous books have been published on the Ahom revival movement. Yasmin Saikia in her book 'Assam and India: Fragmented Memories, Cultural Identity and Tai-Ahom Struggle' has discussed about the Ahom movement and the identity issue of the Ahoms. Dr. Birendra Kumar Gohain in his book 'The Ahoms and their Traditions' has given a brief description on the Mohans, Deodhais and the Bailungs. Moreover, it has also given a brief description about traditional Ahom rites and rituals. 'Documents of Ahom Movement in Assam', Vol-I & II (ed.) by Girin Phukan is one of the most notable book of Ahom Movement. From this book we can get valuable information about the Ahom movement. Taranath Dowerah in his book 'Ethnic Resurgence among the Tai Ahoms of Assam' has discussed about the factors related to the Ahom movement and the identity issue.

**DISCUSSION:**

After the loss of power in 1826 the Ahoms became an integrated community. In order to recover their past glory and to maintain their distinct identity Ahom community started a movement to unite their community on the basis of their ethno-cultural traits. In

this period nationalism grew among the Ahoms which inspired them to fight for the integrity and safety of their community. All this led to the formation of some political and social organizations of the Ahoms. Towards the end of nineteenth century a few educated Ahom leaders came forward to organize their community under a common platform to uplift the condition of the Ahoms. The result of this identity consciousness among the Ahoms was the establishment of Ahom Sabha which was formed in upper Assam in 1893 under the leadership of Padmanath Gohain Barua. Subsequently its name was changed to "All Assam Ahom Association". At the initial phase of its formation, leadership of All Assam Ahom Association (AAAA) pleaded for conceding the demand such as free studentship, appointment in government services, reservation of seats in local bodies and provincial legislature. The leaders of Ahom Association strongly believed that acquisition of political power is the perquisite for safeguarding the socio economic interests of the Ahom community. After the independence of India, the leaders of the Ahom Sabha lured by the National Politics of Congress party and joined in it. Thus the Ahom element being cornered by the leaders and the Ahom Sabha became weak in this time. And, after this several other organizations came into existence for the cause of Ahom revivalism.

**AHOM REVIVAL MOVEMENT AND THE AHOM PRIESTLY CLASS:**

In post-independence period the Ahom Movement is fully based on the three priestly clans of the Ahoms i.e. Mohan, Deodhai and Bailungs as they did not lost their traditional way of life or the traditional Ahom rites and rituals. The Mohan, Deodhai and the Bailungs in the post colonial period took a formidable step to revive their culture and to unite all the three clans under the same roof. The first step in this regard was the foundation of the All Assam Mohan Deodhai Bailung Sanmilan. After the establishment of the 'Mohan Deodhai Bailung Sanmilan, Assam' in 1962, it worked for the cause of Ahom revivalism and took necessary steps to preserve their traditional cultural heritage.

**MOHAN DEODHAI BAILUNG SANMILAN, ASSAM:**

After the failure of the All Assam Ahom Association to fulfil the aspirations of the Ahoms, the Ahom revival movement became a matter of dead after the Independence of India. In this juncture, some prominent personality of the Ahom Priestly Class took a formidable stand to preserve the age old Ahom traditions, religious beliefs among the masses. The ultimate result of this effort was the foundation of the All Assam Mohan Deodhai Bailung Sanmilan in 1962. It may be noted that in 1936, the Ahom Priestly Class with the leadership of some prominent personality such as Dam Chao Milkham Phukan, Dam Chao Manuram Mohan and Dam Chao Ashadhar Phukan organised a public meeting in which a decision was taken to establish an organization among the Mohan, Deodhai and the Bailungs. However due to several reasons establishment of the organization was not successful. In post-Independence period, an initiative was again taken to establish an organization. In such circumstances All Assam Mohan Deodhai Bailung Sanmilan was established in 1962. At first this organization is named as 'All Assam Mohan, Deodhai, Bailung

Sanmilan'. But the registration certificate and some other important documents were lost and it was again renamed as 'Mohan Deodhai Bailing Sanmilan, Assam'.

With the initiative of Mohan, Deodhai, Bailing Sanmilan, Assam several attempts were made to revive the Ahom language and to popularise the traditional Ahom beliefs and customs. With the initiative of Mohan Deodhai Bailing Sanmilan, Assam and Dambaru Deodhai Phukan, Central Tai Academy was established in 1964. Then the Chief Minister Bimalaprasad Chaliha in the Second Bantung Sanmilan in 1967 assured the establishment of a Tai Museum in Sivasagar. To serve the purpose of the third objective that to preserve the traditional beliefs and customs, the Phuralung Sangha was established in 1975.

Mohan Deodhai Bailing Sanmilan, Assam from its inception worked for the preservation of the traditional Ahom religious rites and rituals and to popularise the Tai language among the common masses. However after the establishment of the Phuralung Sangha in 1975 and Purbanchal Tai Sahitya Sabha in 1981, it concentrated more among the people of Mohan, Deodhai and the Bailing. It had a tremendous mass base in the areas where the Mohan Deodhai and the Bailing are living.

In this way, 'Mohan Deodhai Bailing Sanmilan, Assam' from its establishment has been working for the cause of Tai-Ahom revival through preserving age old Ahom traditional rites and rituals. It had also played a prominent part in establishing several organizations or institutions such as Central Tai Academy, Phuralung Sangha, Purbanchal Tai Sahitya Sabha etc.

#### **CENTRAL TAI ACADEMY, PATSAKU:**

With the initiative of Mohan, Deodhai, Bailing Sanmilan, Assam and the efforts of Dambaru Deodhai Phukan Tai Academy was established at Patsaku in 1964. The chief motive behind the establishment of this Academy was to culture and revive the Tai Ahom language.

The Central Tai Academy is presently working on different areas of Tai Ahom Community. They are working on the spreading the knowledge of Tai Ahom language among the masses by organizing seminar workshop etc. Central Tai Academy also formed a Tai Education Council which looked after the academic activities of the institute and prepares course and curriculum of the institute. The Institute also included modern Information and Communication Technology paper such as Computer Application under its curriculum.

Under the Central Tai Academy several Tai-Ahom language Schools were established. In early 1990's the government of Assam started the Tai Ahom language in the primary schools of Assam an elective subject. In 1994, the Govt of Assam appointed 200 Tai language teachers in these schools across the state. The Central Tai Academy is still playing a prominent role for the cause of Tai-Ahom language.

#### **CENTRAL TAI MUSEUM:**

When the Mohan, Deodhai Bailing Sanmilan was established in 1962, it took a prime objective to preserve the Tai manuscripts and other historical items. For this cause establishment of a museum was need of the hour. The executive committee of the Mohan Deodhai Bailing Sanmilan, Assam decided to establish the Tai Museum in the premise of the Binapani Girls High School in Patsaku. However the planning of the Tai Museum was changed during the tenure of the then chief minister Bimalaprasad Chaliha. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bantung conference of the Mohan Deodhai Bailing Sanmilan, Bimalaprasad Chaliha assured the grant for a museum. But this was not successful during his tenure. When the Sanmilan approached to chief minister Mahendra Mohan Chaudhury, he welcomed the intention of the establishing Tai Museum and assured that the government would give the fund and would take all necessary arrangement but on condition that it would be established at Sivasagar.

At the initial phase on 15<sup>th</sup> August in 1972 the foundation of the

Museum was laid. But due to some reasons the construction work of the museum lagging behind to 12 years. At last the chief minister Hiteswar Saikia laid the foundation of the Tai Museum on 16<sup>th</sup> August in 1984. And, thus after several years on 31<sup>st</sup> January in 1992 the Central Tai Museum was inaugurated. Several people donated Tai manuscripts and other historical item to the museum. Now, it has a collection of several Tai manuscripts, ornaments, weaponry and other decorative items.

#### **ALL ASSAM PHURALUNG SANGHA:**

With the initiative of the Mohan, Deodhai, Bailing Sanmilan, Assam to guide the Ahom religious beliefs and customs a concrete shape Axom Phuralung Sangha was established in 1975. Initially Brajamon Mohan was entrusted with the responsibility of temporary President. They soon realized the necessity of organizing all the Ahoms under a common organization and from that year onwards started working as a permanent basis. Keshav Phukan and Tileshwar Mohan were selected as President and vice president. The organisation was registered as Axom Phralung Sangha in the year and the name Buddha was dropped as the Scholars of the priestly classes considered and concluded that the Ahom religion is not essentially a form of Buddhism although there might have been some influence of Mahayani Buddhism in it. For a permanent office of the Phuralung Sangha, Keshav Phukan and Dambaru Deodhai Phukan donated a plot of land in Patsaku in the memory of their uncle Sarunath Deodhai Phukan.

The Phuralung Sangha considered and named the Ahom religion as Phuralung religion or Phra long religion and took all necessary steps popularise the traditional Ahom rites and practices among the Tai Ahoms and it insisted on observing the phuralung ceremony by Tai Ahoms.

#### **PURBANCHAL TAI SAHITYA SABHA:**

The Purbanchal Tai Sahitya Sabha was established with the initiative of the members of the Mohan Deodhai Bailing Sanmilan and Phuralung Sangha. It is also known as Eastern Tai Literary Association and Ban Ok Pup Lik Mioung Tai. When the International Conference on Thai Studies (ICOTS) was held in New Delhi, some members of the Mohan Deodhai Bailing Sanmilan, Assam and Phuralung Sangha also participated in that conference and exhibited some ancient Tai Manuscripts written on Sanchi barks and other writing materials. Many Scholars got attracted with these after seeing these. Some members of Khamyang, Aitons, Khamtis, Phake and Turung community also participated in that conference and they together felt the need of a Literary Society among the Tais of the North East India. The other factor leading to the establishment of Purbanchal Tai Sahitya Sabha was that in the mean time all the Mongoloid origin in the north east India like Bodo, the Rabhas, the Tiwa, the Deori, the Karbi, the Mishings, the Garo, the Khasi, etc. have already formed literary societies for culture and development of their languages. In this way Purbanchal Tai Sahitya Sabha was formed at Dhemaji on 8<sup>th</sup> April in 1981.

From its inception in 1981, Purbanchal Tai Sahitya Sabha or Eastern Tai Literary Society has been constantly working among the common masses of the Tai communities in North East India. The Purbanchal Tai Sahitya Sabha has been holding seminars on different topics relating to Tai language, Literature, Culture, Religion etc. different cultural functions have been organised and performed in different parts of the North East India. Workshop on language, culture etc, have been held at different times over and above the Tai language training programmes. The Purbanchal Sahitya Sabha has also been publishing several books which definitely enrich the Assamese literature also. It also published several leaflets, memoranda on different occasions.

#### **ALL ASSAM MOHAN DEODHAI BAILUNG PANDIT PARISHAD:**

With the initiative of the Mohan Deodhai Bailing Sanmilan, Assam, All Assam Mohan Deodhai Bailing Pandit Parishad was established in 1985. The main purpose of this organization is advisory. It has been acting as a guide to the Ahom traditional rites and beliefs. It is also working as a common organization among

the Tai pundits or molungs All Assam Mohan Deodhai Bailung Pandit Parishad since its establishment has been working as an advisory organizations for the Tai Pundits or molungs. To preserve the traditional rites and rituals of the Ahoms, it played a vital role. For this cause, it along with the MDDBS has been organizing several workshop, symposia etc. on traditional Ahom rites and rituals.

#### CONCLUSION:

The Ahom revival movement started with the formation of the Ahom Sabha in 1893. However the Ahom Sabha concentrated more on the political aspirations rather than the issues of language and other related issue. Although some members of the Ahom Sabha tried to revolutionize the Ahom language however it was not successful due to several reasons. After independence, members of the Ahom Sabha got attracted towards the Indian national Congress and thus the Ahom revivalism got influenced by the politics of the Congress. In post-independence period, several organizations were established to revive the traditional rites and practices of the Ahoms and Ahom language, but they were confined in more elite category. In true sense the revivalism among the Ahoms started with the establishment of the Mohan Deodhai Bailung Sanmilan, Assam. Although it was an organization created by the Ahom Priestly Class i.e. Mohan, Deodhai and the Bailungs it became the torchbearer of Ahom revivalism in Assam. It became successful to guide the Ahom religion a concrete shape and it started to campaign to preserve the traditional Ahom religious rites and practices and revive the Ahom language. In this period, the Ahom Priestly Class i.e. the Mohan, the Deodhai and the Bailungs gained larger attention of the Ahoms because the Priestly clans of the Ahoms did not lost their tradition, rites and rituals. In this juncture Ahom Priestly Class became an important factor in the Ahom revival movement. On the basis of the Mohan, Deodhais and the Bailungs, the Ahom revival movement in the post-colonial period took a concrete shape. Under the leadership of MDDBS several feather organizations were established among the Ahoms. Some of the notable organization which worked for the revival of the Ahom religion and languages are Phuralung Sangha, Puarbanchal Tai Sahitya Sabha, All Assam Mohan Deodhai Bailung Pandit Parishad etc. These organizations have been working tremendously for the cause of Ahom language and religion and to popularise it among the Ahom community. In this way Ahom Priestly Class i.e. Mohan Deodhai and the Bailungs played a vital role in the Ahom revival movement.

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