

# CLASSIFICATION OF TAI AHOM MANUSCRIPTS AND CONTENT ANALYSIS: A STUDY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

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**Subject area of manuscript: History and Culture**

## ABSTRACT

Ancient Assam has a long history in cultural field. All the Tais of Northeast India possess a rich manuscript culture. The Mongoloid origin Tai groups inhabit mainly in large tracts of Southeast Asia viz. Southern China, Northern Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar. In India, the Tai people live in the Northeastern parts of Assam, Arunachal and Manipur who are known as *Tai Ahom*, *Tai Khamti*, *Tai Phake*, *Tai Aiton*, *Tai Khamyang*, *Tai Turung* and *Tai Lai*. A Tai Mao group, which was migrated from Southern China later, came to be known as Ahom brought with them Tai scripts and written language when they migrated to the Brahmaputra Valley in 1228 A.D. They had recorded all their significant events in manuscript form. All the Ahom documents and literary works were compiled in their own script and language. The Tai Ahom language is now found in manuscript form. Most of the Ahom manuscripts usually written in *Sanchi* tree bark, the bark of aloe tree (*Aquilaria agallocha*) dated to the 17th and 18th centuries. The Tai Ahom manuscripts represent all aspects of political events, tradition and culture of the Ahom people and it also played a vital role in maintaining the Ahom's cultural identity. The paper is prepared to highlight the classification and the content analysis of the Tai Ahom manuscripts.

**Keywords:** Culture, History, Manuscripts, Tai Ahom.

## INTRODUCTION

The Tai Ahom who was ruling for six centuries in the Brahmaputra valley (1228-1826 A.D.) produced a good number of manuscripts written in Tai Ahom language. The Tai Ahom manuscripts form the most important documents and most substantial part of their heritage. These Tai Ahom manuscripts represent the history and culture of the Tai Ahom people and are the one of the oldest example of Tai language. The Tai Ahom manuscripts were composed several hundreds of years ago. Prof. J. N. Phukan writes, the Ahom priest who accompanied with Siu-ka-pha from Mong Mao were literate and wrote manuscripts in the script that was prevailing there during the twelfth-thirteenth century.<sup>1</sup> During the whole Ahom rule and afterwards many priestly class and their descendants continued the manuscripts writing in their original language and script. Thus, there were produced a huge amount of manuscripts during the Ahom rule. These Tai Ahom manuscripts are preserved both in institutional level and private collection. The Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies (DHAS) Guwahati, Tai Museum at Sivasagar, Institute of Tai Studies and Research, Moranhat mainly kept and preserved these rare manuscripts. The members of the Tai Ahom priestly class have inherited these manuscripts since the period of Ahom kingdom any many of the descendant and members of the priestly class viz. *Mohan*, *Deodhai* and *Bailung* still read and explain these manuscripts. In private collection, these are mainly concentrated in the villages of Bokota, Patsaku, Parijat, Akhoya, Hatibaruah, Jajalhabi, Lechaihabi, Maniki, Moranjan, Laicheng in the undivided Sivasagar district of Upper Assam.

### 1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The medieval Assam history is very significant in the field of development of language and literature. The Tai Ahom manuscripts are the best example which is solid evidence and precious relics of golden past in the development of the manuscript culture throughout the Ahom kingdom. These manuscripts are one of the prime sources of ancient history of Assam. These Tai Ahom chronicles are commonly known as *buranji* in Assamese. Large numbers of Tai Ahom manuscripts are kept in public as well as private collections which are slowly deteriorating. Tai Ahom language was only used in writing these manuscripts during the first 300 years of the Ahom rule while Assamese and Tai Ahom both language were used in the later half of their rule.

These texts were written on *Sanchi* barks, the bark of aloe tree (*Aquilaria agallocha*). Thickly woven *endi* or *muga* cloth was also used as writing materials. However, some works were inscribed on outer crust of oblong bamboo pieces of small size tapering towards one end. A small hole is made in the middle or at one end through which a string is passed to keep the strips together. Sometimes, wooden surface and animal skin are used for writing. Among the animal skins, usually buffalo skins were used to write texts. But most of the Tai Ahom manuscripts were written on *Sanchi* bark. The ancient Ahom manuscripts are great historical and cultural value and the texts of manuscript serve as proof of their kinship with other Tai people of the world.

### 1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The art of manuscript writing is not a new one for the Tai people of Southeast Asia. All the Tai people of Northeast India also had the knowledge of manuscript culture. The Tai Ahom manuscripts have been preserved in the homes of members of the Ahom priestly class viz. *Mohan*, *Deodhai*, *Bailung* for many generations. The tradition of manuscript writing of Tai Ahom in Assam enriches the Assamese culture and heritage since medieval age. But due to lack of preservative measures and durable substance of the

manuscripts undoubtedly some important texts has been lost. One of the most significant things about the Ahom manuscript is that they represent one of the ways in which the Ahom culture is preserved. A thorough study of the Ahom manuscripts is thus a matter of the importance for the advancement of knowledge of the Tai Ahom. Moreover, the Ahom manuscript has great literary and historical value. The treasure of wisdom containing the past knowledge and significant events has come down to us in the form of manuscripts. The aged old Ahom manuscripts of our forefathers represent the ideas, customs and traditions and philosophy of life of the Tai Ahom people. The Tai manuscripts deserve attention of the learned section of the society and a needful action of preservations. So, it will be a part of our responsibility to take appropriate measures to conserve those “endangered” wealth before these lost forever.

### 1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

The some of the works reviewed to the undertaken study to gain first-hand knowledge. These are as following:

**Phukon, Girin, (2019)** *Tais of Northeast India and Southeast Asia; A Study of Ethno-Cultural Linkage*, DVS Publishers, Panbazar, Guwahati, Assam

This volume is very significant in case of study of ethnography and rich cultural heritage of the Tais of Northeast India and rest of the other Tai community people of Southeast Asia. This book highlights the common cultural elements of the Tais of northeast India and deal with extensively with the all Tai people of Southeast Asia. It contents six chapters in which chapter fifth deals with language, script and manuscripts culture of the Tais of northeast India and their linguistic linkage with the other Tais of Southeast Asia. Besides, this volume projects the elements of traditional Tai culture and their cultural linkage with the Tais of Southeast Asia and China.

**Gogoi, Lila, (1986)** *The Buranjis; Historical Literature of Assam*, Omsons Publications, Jasomonta Road, Guwahati

This comprehensive and analytical work has carried out by the eminent scholar which deals with all the relevant aspects of Buranjis indicating their values. This work contains ten (10) chapters. In the chapter number eight he discussed about the historiography of the Ahoms and in chapter nine (9) he discussed the writing materials and script of the Tai people and also the preservation of the manuscripts.

**Neog, Maheswar, (2004)** *Cultural Heritage of Assam*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi

This scholarly work is a collection of some important studies of Assamese Culture by Prof. Maheswar Neog. This work contains sixteen chapters in which chapter number three (3) entitled as ‘Manuscripts and Manuscriptology in Assam’. In this article the author discussed from the ancient Assam copperplates and stones which were used as materials to inscribe documents of royal grants of land to the preparations of *sanchipat* (aguru bark) and pressed cotton called *tulapat* for the writing purpose of manuscripts. Prof. Neog also discuss about preparation and use of ink for writing and painting.

**Barua, Rai Sahib Golap Chandra (ed.) (1985)** *Ahom Buranji- From the Earliest time to the end of Ahom Rule*, (Reprint) Spectrum publication, Panbazar, Guwahati, Assam

Translated and compiled by the noteworthy Ahom scholar, this book is the most important and significant source for study of the Ahom period. The book is the translation of the manuscript *Ahom Buranji*, which has parallel writings of Ahom script and translated English version. It contains six chapters as in the original manuscript without any divisions or paragraphs. Each chapter is written in continuity from beginning to end. This manuscript was divided into two parts *Deo-Buranji* (History of heavenly bodies) and *Din Buranji* (deals with extension of the Tais and migration of Sui-Ka-Pha from his homeland) The second part of this Buranji also dealt with rise and fall of the Ahoms and the advent of the British in Assam

**Buragohin Romesh (ed.) (1994)** *The Lost Trails*, vol.I, Ban Ok Pup Lik Mioun Tai, Dhemaji, Assam

This book contains seven chapters relating to Tai language, literature, history, culture and civilization of Tai people of Northeast India. The writer has also given an outline to the problems appeared in historical studies relating to the Tais of Northeast India

**Gait, Sir Edward, (1926)** *A History of Assam*, (Reprint) Lawyer’s Book Stall, Panbazar, Guwahati, Second edition

This is a massive work on history of Assam from the Prehistoric time to the consolidation of British rule as well as relation with frontier tribes and growth of tea industry in Assam. In the ‘Appendix D’ of the book Gait has given a description of the Ahom manuscript records and preparation of *Sanchi* bark for inscribing the writings in manuscripts.

### 1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The process of the manuscript culture among the Tai families has great cultural value. This inherited ancient Tai heritage has been developed in this region undoubtedly represent Tai culture. The main objectives of the study are:

- To project the manuscripts of the Tai Ahom and its classification.
- To trace the content of the Tai Ahom manuscripts and its historical analysis
- To highlight the literary and historical value of the manuscript possessing by the Tai Ahom community

### 1.5 METHODOLOGY

In this study, the relevant data and information are collected from a wide range of ethnographic literature about Tai Ahom manuscript culture and personal field observation. The secondary data sources are based upon the reviews and references, journals, books, periodicals, gazetteers and internet. The data and information collected are empirically verified with crossed examination.

### 1.6 RESEARCH QUESTION

Based on the objectives of the study, the following research questions are formulated:

- How the Tai Ahom manuscripts can be classified?
- What was the content of the Tai Ahom manuscript writing induces by the Tai Ahom?
- What is the significance and historical value of the manuscripts possess by the Tai Ahom people.

### 2.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The manuscripts of Tai Ahom language cover a diversification of subject matter. Chronicles or *Buranjis* are the most important among them as they are the very original sources of the history of Assam. The majority of the manuscripts deal with

cosmology, the earth and history. Other kinds of manuscript are *lexicons* (Tai Ahom dictionary) astrology books, books on rituals, *Phura-lung*, omen and divination, prayers in offering to spirits, *lik rik khwan* (prayers in the calling of life essence), *Lak-ni* (Tai Ahom calendar) etc. We may classify the Tai Ahom manuscripts into eight categories as per the subject matters of the manuscripts. A brief description of the different categories of manuscripts is given below:

a) **Chronicles:** A chronicle is a historical account. The Tai Ahom chronicles are called *Pu-lan-chi* in Tai language and termed as *Buranji* in Assamese. The Tai Ahom chronicles are traditionally divided as *Deo Buranji* and *Din Buranji*. *Deo Buranji* contained the accounts of ancestral gods of Ahom. The lineage of the Ahoms with Lord Indra and their heavenly origin were described in *Deo Buranji* with an objective to establish the divine origin of the Ahom ruler.<sup>2</sup> *Din Buranjis* are the royal account of the Ahom dynasty written from the time of the descent of *Khun-Lung* and *Khun-Lai* to the last king of the Ahom kingdom. The *Ahom Buranji* translated and edited by Rai Sahib Golap Chandra Barua is the most significant chronicles written in Tai Ahom language which contains almost a complete account of Ahom kingdom in Assam except the reign of Rudra Singha. Another important Tai Ahom chronicle is the *Weissalisa* originally written in Tai language and translated by B. Barua and edited by M. Bara. This historical account is a compilation of two chronicles, *Weissali-Hukong* and *Weissali-Mung-Dun-Sun-Kham* which give a vivid description of Burmese invasion to the Ahom kingdom in 1817. The Tai Ahom Chronicles under *Din* category can be sub-divided into Royal and family lineage. The Royal chronicles again can be sub-divided into Ahom Royal chronicles and the chronicles of neighboring countries. The family chronicles are the lineage accounts of a clan or particular family. All the chronicles of Tai Ahom contain rare information and treasures of fact and figures of Ahom dynasty.

b) **Lexicons:** Tai Ahom lexicons based on original Tai manuscripts. Lexicons are the Tai Ahom Assamese Dictionary. They are written in Tai scripts but the language is Assamese. Ahom lexicons are known as *Amra*<sup>3</sup> which is the most important Ahom language reference resource. There are mainly two types of *Amra*, viz. *Bor Amra*, and *Loti Amra*. *Bor Amra* contains the main and important words of the Tai Ahom. *Loti Amra* contains the words relating to house building, human body, fish, vegetables, flowers etc. *Amras* are arranged in Ahom alphabetical order. The most notable and significant work of the category *Bor Amra* was under the title 'Bor Kakot Ho Mung Puthi'. Tengai Pandit of Dihingia Mohan family was the first person who wrote the Ahom Lexicon during the last period of the reign of Gourinath Sinha in the year 1795 A.D. The total number of lexicons recorded so far is more than fifty.

c) **Lak-Nis:** *Lak-Ni* year is the Ahom calendar calculated under 60 year circle of Ahom era. Hence, in Ahom there are sixty year-cycle and sixty-day cycle. The sixty day cycle also moves on. J.N. Phukan and Girin Phukon write 'The Tai had their own system of calculation of time which was brought to Assam from their homeland and was used by them in all writings and also in coins and inscriptions. The *Lak-Ni* calculation moves from the larger unit to smaller unit that is from year to month and from month to day and again by divisions of the day'<sup>4</sup>. This system was followed by the Ahom throughout their rule of six centuries. Even today, the learned pundits calculate day, year etc. in *Lak-Ni* system. The manuscripts under this category are very few in number. Calculation of *Lak-Ni* and also the results of events occurred in each *Lak-Ni* is regarded as an important matter during the Ahom period. *Lak-Ni* calculation of important events that happened in the past are also incorporated in the *Lak-Nis*.

d) **Legend and Story:** Another important classification of Ahom manuscripts are legend and story. Manuscripts in this category contained stories and legends which prevailed among the Ahom people. The creation legends (*Lai-ko-Muong*) of the universe, sun, moon, star, wind, water, fire, animal, planet etc., legends (*Doi-Lai*) account of *Ngi Khrai-Kham* and *Chao-ngi*, and the story of *Pung-ngao-kham* (Ahom Ramayana) account of *Leng-don* (Ahom legend) etc. are some of the popular manuscripts under this category. The total manuscripts in this category recorded so far 65 only<sup>5</sup>.

e) **Phura-Long:** The *Phura-Long* manuscripts contain the life story of certain persons. These are in fact the *Jataka* or stories of Buddha's previous birth presented in a fascinating and attractive manner. The Ahom believe that *Phura* or *Phra* has no physical structure but an invincible power that has created the universe. So, many scholars try to establish the relationship between the *Big-bang* theories of astrophysics with that of Ahom Cosmogony<sup>6</sup>. The ritual of *Phura-Long* is mainly based on the manuscript known as *Phura-Long*. There are lots of manuscripts found which are related to *Phura-Long*. In a very important manuscripts of Tai Ahom, which is known as '*Lit-Lai-Pen ka-ka*' the origin of *Phura-Long* is given. Some other complementary manuscripts for the above mentioned manuscripts are – '*Lit Lai-Ka Muang*', '*Lit-Pun-Ka-Muang*', '*Li-Phura-Lung*', '*Lit-Khen Lung*' explains about the rituals of *Phura-Lung*. These manuscripts have been copied by more than one writer in different times. The '*Phra-long*' tradition still exists among the Ahom priest. The worship of '*Phra-Long*' is done publicly on different occasions and even shrines are being constructed for the worship of '*Phra-Long*'. A good number of Ahom identify themselves as the followers of '*Phra-Long*'

f) **Omen & Divination:** The Tai Ahom manuscripts on omens contained the system, rules and the techniques of calculation of omen including the preventive solutions of evil omens. Occurrences such as snake entering a living house, white tiger comes and enters the village, cock sitting on the house roof, bees making a hive inside a living room etc. These manuscripts also speak of telling the results of the dream, earthquake or unnatural events.

There are some important manuscripts containing procedures for divination. The chicken-bone divination is an ancient method of divination or forecasting the results of events. J.N. Phukan & Girin Phukon write 'This is a very proven method of telling the outcome of action in advance. Only expert priests could examine the chicken bone by reading the particular writing given by the side of the bone sketch. In the olden days the Ahom kings almost always relied on the result of chicken-bone divination in appointing an army general in the battlefield or attacking or declaring war against the enemy. Today only a few priests had the knowledge of examining the chicken bone'<sup>7</sup> Generally, each page of manuscripts has two to four sketches of *kukuratheng* (chicken thigh-bone). Forecasts of each sketch according to the position of the holes in the bone as indicated by bamboo needles are given in a few words (field observation). Apart from chicken-bone divination, there are several types of divination such as *Ban Cheng Lung* (finding of auspicious time, i.e. attacking enemies in the battlefield) *Phe Ban* (calculation of auspicious moment, i.e. undertaking a auspicious time for marriage, house building or journey) *Phe Lung*, *Sai kai*, *Lit-Du Kai Seng* etc.

g) **Ritual and Mantra:** Tai Ahom manuscripts under this section contain the systems of worship the deities and gods and the different rituals which are observed by the Ahoms. The Ahoms have inherited books containing chants or *mantras* for praying ancestors and gods. These kinds of manuscripts are still available among the Ahom priest and the *mantras* are chanted by the priests during the time of rituals or offering *puja*. ‘Charaideo Bar Bidhi’ (the rules containing procedures for the great worship at Charaideo) is an important manuscripts under this category. It contains the different spots of the shrines of Gods in Charaideo. Part I of this manuscript contains the worship of *Chum-Seng Mong*, *Lang-Ku-Ri* and other gods at Charaideo- calling of Khwan<sup>8</sup>. Part II is details of articles, animals and birds, their colour and other things for the worship of Lang-Ku-Ri, Jan-Sai-Hung and other gods at Charaideo. Some important Ahom manuscripts of this category preserve on DHAS, Guwahati are ‘Khek-Lai’ (1172 number in the accession Register of the DHAS) which contains the rules and procedures for Khek-Lai *puja* performed to avert war, this manuscript is missing folio number 1,2,4,11, and 12. ‘Ahom Karati Puthi’ (Incantations) – *mantra* for ceremonial bath of the king etc.

h) **Astrology:** The Tai Ahom people have the knowledge of astrology. They discuss the system and the techniques of location of stars in the universe and their probable influences on human being. The number of manuscripts in this category is very few. ‘Sai-Kai’ and ‘Lit-On-Dao’ are the two notable manuscripts under this section preserved in the DHAS in the 1174 and 2004 number in the accession Register respectively. Both the manuscripts contain the calculation of star position and its influence on human being.

The manuscripts written in Tai Ahom language are as old as the advent of the Ahom to Assam. All the Ahom documents and literary works were compiled in their own script and language. The Ahom script and language that we find today in old manuscripts are exceptionally valuable as these are the specimens of Tai Mao script and language in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The Ahom chronicles written in Ahom (Tai Mao) language are the primary source of the Ahom kingdom as well as the history of medieval Assam. While the language of the Mong Mao Tai had undergone evolutionary change in course of time, the old Tai Mao language came with the Ahoms underwent little change at least for the first three centuries. Many words and phrases, which became obsolete or disused in other Tai languages, can be found in Ahom. Therefore, the Ahom language before sixteenth century may be termed as true specimens of old Tai Mao language. Therefore, the linkage of Ahom language with the Tai Mao language is obvious.<sup>9</sup> The Ahom priest accompanied with Siu-Ka-Pha from Mong Mao (at present within the Dehong Dai Jingpho Autonomous Prefecture of Yunan Province of PRC) wrote manuscripts in the script that was prevailing in there region. They had also brought with them manuscripts containing of various rites and rituals, calculation of auspicious time, *lak-ni* system etc. Afterwards, especially the Ahom priests continued the writing chronicles and other works in their original language and script in Assam. Hence, a huge amount of writings in Ahom language and script was produced during the Ahom rule

### 3.0 Content Analysis of the Tai Ahom Manuscripts:

The advent of the Ahom and founding a Tai kingdom in the Brahmaputra Valley is a far reaching significance not only for Assam but also to the Northeast as a whole. The ancient Tai Ahom manuscripts about the Ahom rule and Tai Ahom religion and culture are the significant assets of Assamese literature. These manuscripts contain a considerable amount of historical records of the Ahom period. The Tai Ahom manuscripts were written mainly to keep serial record of the royal genealogy, which described the Ahom administrative policies and processes, appointment of royal officials in the court, war expeditions, construction of various historical monuments including palaces, forts and temples, building of roads and ponds etc.<sup>10</sup> There are many Tai Ahom manuscripts which are mainly religious in character. These manuscripts are written to preserve traditional Ahom belief system, rituals and customs and the culture of the Tai Ahom, they have possessed.

#### 3.1 Tai Ahom manuscripts in creation legend and myth:

The Tai people throughout their land possess a common pantheon of creation of the universe and the earth. Whenever the Tai moved to different lands, they carried this pantheon along with them but due to long separation and in contact with other peoples, they appear to be slightly different. So, the Ahom also did the same when they moved from Mong Mao to the Brahmaputra Valley. Scholarly studies on the Tai have conclusively proved that Ahom creation myth has been inherited from their ancestors.<sup>11</sup> The latest and most complete publication of the Ahom creation legend appeared in 1930. Rai Sahib Golap Chandra Barua’s *Ahom Buranji*, the whole first chapter comprises this Ahom myth as follows:

“In the beginning there were no gods and men. The world was void and surrounded by the water of ocean. There were no air, no animals, no land, no rulers, no countries and no living beings. Also the sun, the moon and the stars did not exist. There was neither the earth nor the heaven. It was total void. There was only one omnipotent being the Great God”

This book includes not only the English translation but also provides a transcript of an original Ahom manuscript. In this version the text continues beyond the division of the universe to sending down of various deities to teach the rules of behavior, the celestial ancestry of the first ruler, Khun Lung and Khun Lai and an enumeration of number of their respective offsprings.<sup>12</sup> There are about six original manuscripts so far discovered and which contain this myth. A comparison of this publication reveals that these various texts are all closely related to one another, whole phrases of the one text can be found another. The myth gradually unfolds as the texts are read in the sequence of when they were first published. On first sight this Ahom myth is admirably represented in the publications. Terwiel opines “When this impressive document is scrutinised much of the apparent solidity proves illusionary. The Ahom texts reproduced were based on a single document. Ahom texts have been copied by people who had at best a very incomplete knowledge of the language and as a result copying errors did multiply. Therefore these published texts must be checked with the original manuscripts and the translations must be critically examined before the myth may be analysed”<sup>13</sup> It is needless to emphasize that anyone who attempts to translate Ahom text must have a good grasp over grammatical constructions in Tai language. Therefore, even though the Ahom myths have been widely published in translation, it is yet doubtful for an authoritative authenticity. There is need to re-examine the original manuscripts.

There is also another creation Ahom myth. The myth of gourd origin or the Ahom story of flood. This was first published in 1894 as an article by E.A. Gait in “Abstract of the contents of one of the Ahom Puthis.”<sup>14</sup> Gait gave the heading “The Ahom Story of Flood” The summary of the myth is as follows:

“Once the heat from the sun dried up all the water causing widespread death. The earth cracked and masses of the boiling water killed all remaining life except the old man Thaw Lip Ling and a cow who were in a boat made a stone. The flood carried this boat to the mountain Iba in the Northeast. The stench of rotting corpses caused the gods to send down fire. Thaw Lip Ling saved himself by killing the cow and hiding in its body. There he found the seed of a gourd, which he later planted. An immense plant emerged with branches in four directions. The northern branch was killed by the cold, the southern dead from heat, the western drowned, but the eastern branch thrived and grew a gigantic gourd which contained all types of life. The creatures inside cried and Indra’s messenger Pan Thoi heard them. Indra’s eldest son Ai Phan Lan was sent to open the gourd by means of a flash of lightning. Whenever he aimed the creatures at that spot begged him to spare them. Finally, Thaw Lip Ling, who was sitting at the point where the flower had died off from the gourd, offered to sacrifice himself. Thaw Lip Ling was killed and life escaped from the open gourd. Ai Pha Lan then taught the creatures their various skills. Thaw Lip Ling is still worshipped by the Ahom priests who makes offerings to the man, but for whose act of self-abnegation the gourd might have remained unbroken to the present day”.

Terwiel opines that Gait did not supply a copy of the text in the original Ahom, and this account represents the contents as related to him by the owner of the manuscripts. While the gist of the story is clear, it is therefore not certain if the name of Indra was actually in the manuscript or whether it represents a translation of an Ahom name, such as Lengdon.<sup>15</sup>

The second version of this gourd or flood myth contained in a book called *Lai Tu*. According to Prof. J.N Phukan and Prof. Girin Phukon the main content of the myth as follows:

“At one time the world was divided into many parts and as there were no kings to rule over them, the world fell into utter chaos and fighting ensued among the earthly beings endlessly. In such a situation, people forgot about Gods and neglected the worship of Gods. Under this situation, two giants appeared; one of the two became king over them who suspended the wild ones. Although they restored peace and order, there was no worship of the Gods. Not receiving worship, the Gods became restless and they went to Lengdon, the Lord of Heaven and petitioned him for rectifying the disorder. Lengdon then thought of destroying these unfaithful people and, therefore, he sent down a giant bird to eat all human beings. But the bird could not eat up all human beings as their number was too large. He then sent down many snakes but they too could not finish the human beings. Ultimately the Lord of Heaven sent down a deluge to wash away the sinful mankind. The great flood that came suddenly killed all except an old man. In the womb of the cow was found a large seed of gourd which was planted. The gourd seed sprouted and the plant produced, in course of time, a very large gourd. When it became ripe, Lengdon asked Ai-pha-lan, his eldest son to break it into two parts with magical spear so that the people who were inside could come out. When Ai-pha-lan pointed his spear, the people inside it prayed not to do so for fear of death of many. From every side the prayer of the people inside was heard. However, one Chao la-pang stood in front of the spear and told Ai-pha-lan to pierce him first so that the people would not see the thrust of the spear. Accordingly Ai-pha-lan pierced him by throwing his spear with great strength that passed through the body of Chao La-pang and entered the gourd. Out of the hole came men all sorts of men, some black and some white. In this way, the whole earth was populated again”.<sup>16</sup>

This Ahom legend with slight variations is found among several other Tai groups. Even today, the Ahom priests in their exposition of the creation recall this legend. (Field observation)

There was another version of this myth which is found in *Ahom Buranji*.<sup>17</sup> As the Ahom and English texts are provided and it being available in manuscript form, this version may be taken with a measure of authority. The text of this version in *Ahom Buranji* describe by Terwiel as such:

“At the time water flooded the forest. In the 19th and 20th year of the 60 years cycle fire destroyed the world. In the 21st year there came down and was planted a gourd near the middle. Late that year (it) burst and became people. In the 22nd year new human seeds were sent sown. Late that year (they) burst and became people. Not sufficient for every town. In the 23rd year Lord Lan was ordered to go down to continue to seed humans. Late that year Thaw Lip Ling and (his) servant Thaw Man Singh were sent down to teach humans below in 30,000 towns. In 23rd year towns were confused (?) and in the 29th year there was no overlord. This was discussed by Thaen Kham and Leng Don together with all kinds of Thaens (gods) from beyond the sky. There was no one to rule the 30,000 towns. In the 30th year they placed Khun Lung and Khun Lai to be rulers”.<sup>18</sup>

All the three accounts regarding the myth of gourd and story of flood are three version of the same story. They refer to a world-wide flood which destroyed all life and the re-seeding of life through gourd. Ai Pha Lan is may be the same character as Lord Lan, and in all stories Thaw Lip Ling occurs even though the task allotted him differ in the three versions. The flood/gourd myth is one of the most common stories of mainland Southeast Asian mythology.<sup>19</sup> Therefore; the Ahom share of this myth is not unusual. But there are some differences in the names and characters of the Ahoms with that of other Tai versions in general.

### 3.2 Belief system in Tai Ahom manuscript:

#### a) Gods and Spirits:

The available recorded data in the Tai Ahom manuscripts exhibit that the Ahom people believe in multiple Gods (pha) both on earth and even in the sky. Among the Gods in the sky (heaven), they believe that Leng-don is the greatest of all Gods (Pha-niu-ru-Leng-don), who presided over the council of Gods who include among others Ja-sing-pha, Lang-din, Jan-sai-hung, Nyot-sai-lum.<sup>20</sup> Among the Ahom Gods, Pha Leng-don is the supreme and primary god. He resides in Heaven and looks after the world of men, animals and planets. Next to him is Ja-sing-pha, the goddess of learning and wisdom. Jan-sai-hung, another Tai Ahom God is the guardian god of rain. There is Nyot-sai-lum, the god of wind, Lang-ku-ri, the grand old god, who lives under a banyan tree. A large number of earthly supernatural are believed to exist who are known as *Phi*, a term usually translated as ‘spirit’. Some of these guardian gods of the earthly objects like *Phi Nam* (guardian spirit of water/river), *Phi-Tun* (guardian spirit of tree), *Phi-Phai* (guardian spirit of fire), *Phi-Ruen* (guardian spirit of the house), *Phi-Doi* (guardian spirit of hill) and others.<sup>21</sup> In addition to these spirit, the

Ahom believed and still believe that there are malignant spirits also called *Phi* who cause trouble and disturb peace. This rituals and practices performed by the Ahom through their priest. Every year at particular time these Gods are paid offerings of their best and choicest food and other things. It appears that the belief system prevailing in the Tai Ahom society forms a part of their cultural heritage.

#### b) Khwan belief and Rik Khwan:

The Tai Ahom manuscript<sup>22</sup> also dealt with Tai Ahom belief of *khwan* or calling of *Khwan*. In Ahom belief system a man possesses his *khwan* i.e. 'essence of life' or 'live-soul'. According to Phukan & Phukon whenever there is some ailment in any part of the body, it is believed that the *khwan* or guardian of essence of that part has taken some offence and has gone away. A religious ceremony called *Rik Khwan* meaning "the calling of the *Khwan*" is performed in which the *Khwan* is entreated to come back.<sup>23</sup> According to this belief, there is a master *Khwan* that resides in the body of a person. When a *Khwan* goes away, there is a way of calling back to its original place. This ceremony is called *Ril Khwan* (*rik*-calling) i.e. calling of the *Khwan*. This function is generally performed by an elderly female who accompanied by some ladies goes to a nearby river or pond with fishing trap called *jakoi*. There she calls (*rik*) the *Khwan* by loudly by chanting mantra, sometimes very loudly entreating the *Khwan* to come back. Whatever fish is caught in the fish trap, is supposed to represent the *Khwan* (Field observation). This belief is performed periodically or at times by the Ahom people to restore the vigour and vitality of the people for greater assertion in life. *Rik Khwan* ceremony is performed during the time of ascending the throne of an Ahom king or before or after of a battle during the Ahom rule. Moreover, in some instance it is performed on the day before the marriage day called *Chaklong* by the Ahom priest. (Field observation) Even today, some of the orthodox priestly families performed this ritual when there is some problem of the body of a person, thinking that some fairy might have allured the *Khwan* of that person. This belief is very common in the Tai society. This belief is a Tai concept dealing with life and changing existence and it is wide spread among the Tai people of mainland Southeast Asia.

#### c) Phi Mong Phi Ban:

Tai Ahom belief system of *Phi* (spirit) recorded in the Tai Ahom manuscripts of under category rituals and mantra. A very important part of the Ahom rituals is composed of offerings to the different gods, ancestors and *phi*. Among the different *phi* in Ahom belief system *Phi Mong Phi Ban* is important one. It is the guardian spirit of the whole kingdom that includes villages as well. In Ahom language, *mong* means country or kingdom and *ban* means village; a *mong* necessarily includes villages.<sup>24</sup> The *Phi Mong* was always worshiped by the king as he was the head of the kingdom. He prayed for destruction of his enemies, and good health, prosperity and well-being of the kingdom. Like, *Phi Ban* or guardian deity of the village was worshiped by the head of the village for peace, happiness and prosperity of the people of the village. Sacrifices to the spirits *Phi* were a key element in the Tai Ahom rituals. Sacrificed poultry, raw and cooked meat, best rice-wine (*luk lao*), glutinous steamed rice and other things are offered by the Ahom priest. Lightening oil lamps constitute important ritual objects in the Tai Ahom rituals and ceremonies. (Field observation)

#### d) Om Pha:

The Ahom manuscripts under rituals and mantra category belongs the grand worship of *Om Pha*. The Ahoms continued to worship their gods and spirit throughout the period of Ahom rule. *Om Pha* is the grand worship of all gods and spirit.<sup>25</sup> This is one of the important religious functions performed during the Ahom rule and worshiped now a days too. The Ahom priestly class namely, the *Mo-Sam*, *Mo-Hung* and *Mo-Sai* known as Deodhai, Mohan and Bailung performed all sorts of religious ceremonies of the Tai Ahom. They are the custodians of all religious matters of performing rites and rituals, chanting mantras, interpreting the religious books, praying to the gods etc. The priests performing worship belonged to different categories. In the same way the chants are also different with reference to the gods. Earlier *Om Pha* was performed in Charaideo. But towards the close of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the shrine was shifted to the bank of Disang River near Lakwa in Charaideo District, Assam. *Ompha* at Lakwa Dewshal has been performed in a grand style every ten year since the time of king Purandar Singha, 1833-38.<sup>26</sup> The under mentioned Ahom gods are worshiped in *Om Pha* puja as stated Phukan and Phukon: a) Khao Kham, b) Ai Lang Din, c) Pha Niu Ru Leng-Don, d) Jan Sai Hun, e) Chet Lam, f) Mut Kum Tai Kum, g) Ja Sing Pha.

Since it is a very large scale *puja* and the cost is heavy, at the present time, this grand worship is done on an auspicious day every twelfth year when all gods are propitiated at the same place on that day.<sup>27</sup> Since this rituals have come down from generation to generations, they constitute the heritage of Tai Ahom culture.

#### e) Omen & Divination:

The chicken-bone divination is an ancient method of divination or forecasting the results of events and once it was universal with the Tai people. There are three ways of divination among the Ahoms.

These Tai manuscripts are description of rituals and religious ceremonies of Tai Ahom people like *Rik-khan-mung-khan*, *Phra-long*, *Om-pha puja*, *Lang-kuri puja*, *Me-dam-Me-Phi* etc. Nartsupha and Wichasin comment that the Ahom worship of nature and ancestors is a belief system different from Aryan Hinduism. In *Phra-Lung* the gods and natural elements have no specific form. They are the sky, the sun, the moon, the river, and the mountain. The ancestral spirits are the souls of people known to the community. Both *fai* and *phi* are familiar. But in Hinduism the gods and goddesses such as Siva, Visnu, Paravati appear in the form of humans. These gods require elaborate rituals, admirations and sacrifices. As long as the Ahom state upheld the *Phuralung* religion, the king, priestly class and the officials were not separated from the common people...The *Phuralung* religion reflects a Tai society where class differentiation was not develop much and different communities co-existed.<sup>28</sup>

Another important segment of the Tai Ahom manuscripts was the *Vamsavalis* which was recording the royal genealogy. Apart from the royal families, the Ahom officials and other elite families recorded their genealogy history by themselves, for example, *Buragohain vamsavali*, *Barbaruah vamsavali* etc. The *vamsavalis* narrate the life and career of the ancestors of the family and their relations with the Ahom government.<sup>29</sup> The Tai Ahom manuscripts dealt with various traditions and culture of the Tai Ahom community. There are some astrological manuscripts namely *Ban-seng* and *Kukura-theng*, which dealt with forecasting individual life and pre-evaluating wars and other official matters respectively. These manuscripts are written in Sanchi bark and even on smooth

bamboo sheet or muga silk. There are some illustrate manuscripts in this category. The Tai Ahom manuscripts apart from custom and traditions, cultural and religious texts also recorded about the description of building techniques of houses, roads, stone bridge, forts, ponds or *pukhuris*, *maidams* (burial palaces of the Ahom king and nobles) temple structure etc. These manuscripts recorded the employee count for the entrusted work, accounts of goods and items, measurement and cost of the expenses too. *Chang-rung-Phukan* was the official responsible for these recorded works. The text written in this category of chronicles was known as *Chang-rung-Phukanar Buranji*. Different manuscripts under different topics were written and preserved under the individual instruction of various officials, particularly different *Phukans*.<sup>30</sup>

There were some manuscripts on medicine and herbal remedies. The text or manuscripts in this content were known as *Nidans*. During the Ahom rule, people who practiced medicine were known as *Bez* and the royal medicinal petitioner was known as *Bezbaruah*. He was entrusted for recording and preserving the text on medicine in the Ahom period. Herbal remedies were mentioned in various *Nidans*. All these *Nidans* are significant sources of today’s medical practices. Apart from human beings, there were remedies and medical treatments for animal and birds too, as written in various *Nidans*.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the Ahom manuscripts provide important information with its own writing scripts. Moreover, these manuscripts may be considered as a prime source for reconstructing the Ahom cultural heritage and grammatical structure of the Tai Ahom language.

#### 4.0 Historicity and Significance of the Tai Ahom Manuscripts:

Evolution of historiography in Assam dates from the coming of the Ahoms to this land in the early part of the thirteenth century.<sup>32</sup> Dwijen Sharma stated that the first Ahom king, Sukapha, who came along with soldiers and kinsmen from upper Burma ordered the writing of *buranji* as a part of documenting the battles they fought, incidents that took place, followers they gained etc.<sup>33</sup> True to that tradition, Sukapha (1228-68), the founder king of the Ahoms, soon after he laid his foot on this land, instructed his *Pandits* “to write down all particulars, whenever an incident takes place, when a person dies, and when we acquire new followers”<sup>34</sup> The Ahom priests (*Pandits*) who accompanied with Siu-ka-pha were literate and wrote manuscripts and kept records of all important events in their language and script. Thus, a huge amount of writings of Tai Ahom manuscripts was produced during the Ahom rule. During the first 300 years of Ahom rule, all the books and manuscripts were compiled in Tai Ahom language alone. During the second half, Assamese language was used along with Tai Ahom to document these texts and manuscripts.<sup>35</sup>

The Tai Ahom manuscripts give us a scope to explore the all Ahom royal family, their polity and diplomatic relationship with neighbouring states, Tai Ahom belief system and religious tradition, Tai society and culture as well. According to Nartsupha and Wichasin Tai Ahom *Buranji* and other Tai documents show that Tai society and culture had their own identity. They said that the Ahom *Buranji* give us a pen picture of the topography and landscape of Muang-Dun-sun-Kham. As it is a low land, full of river tributaries, such as *nam-yen* (cold water, Sessa), *nam-khun* (muddy water, Gabharu), *sup-nam-ha-khwae* (meeting place of five river tributaries, Panchanadi) *nam-rup/ nam-huk* (the sixth tributary, Namrup). The Ahom *Buranji* mentioned that there were floods, *nam-thum-cha-thum-chung* (the river flooded the town and countryside) Travel was principally by boats *rua*, though horses and elephant were also used.<sup>36</sup> This description in Tai Ahom manuscript is consistent with the present geography of Assam that the upper Assam or the Brahmaputra Valley which is a lowland with heavy rainfall and flooded in summer season.

The Tai Ahom manuscripts recorded in Ahom scripts constitute strong points about the uniqueness of Ahom culture. The Ahom chronicles recorded the Tai people heritage of wet-rice culture using water to irrigate rice land. Nartsupha and Wichasin writes “When legendary ancestors of the Tai, Khunlung and his brother Khunlai, rode on elephants to see their settlements, they blade dikes and distributed water to rice land in these settlements. Professor J. N. Phukan pointed out that The Ahom converted the swamps surroundings the Brahmaputra river into rice farms using plough *thai* to prepare the soil for sowing paddy *wan-khao*. The most general term to designated rice is *khao*. At Habung in Upper Assam there were three rounds of planting in a year. Ahom documents mention many different forms of rice: baked rice *khao-ping*, red rice *khao daenig*, bummed rice *khao- tchii*, sweet rice *khao-mun*. In addition there were other kinds of food such as ginger *khing*, salt *klua*, chilli *prik* duck *pet*, chicken *kai*, areca nut *mak*, and betel leaves *phlu*”<sup>37</sup> The Ahom manuscripts also recorded the various practices of agricultural and forest products. They planted cotton *kui*, spun yarn *kwak dai*, raised silk cocoons and weaved. The weaving tools included the loom *kii* and the wheel *kong*. As the Ahom grew rice and also wove cloth they did not depend much on external trade. The Tai Ahom economy and their culture is closely linked with the other Tai community of Southeast Asia Thus, the Tai Ahom *buranjis* and chronicles give us accounts of the Tai Ahom material culture.

The Tai Ahom manuscripts show another story in their writings about the importance of the institution family and kinship. The family position in the genealogy is an important asset considered for kinship relations. Likewise kinship terminology is generation specific rather than age specific. An aged number of a family has to address and treat a much younger member of the senior family with due respect and honour. For example, a 10 year old boy will be address as as elder brother by a 25 year old boy if the former happens to belong to the senior family. (Field observation) This is the binding force of the whole clan for generations irrespective of time sequence. Tai people are taught to remember the senior-junior kinship relationship from childhood days. Any man or women of older age does not earn higher position if he or she does not belong to “elderly family”. The son of younger brother addresses the son of elder brother as ‘*Pi-chai*’ – “elder brother” or the son of elder brother addresses the son of younger brother as ‘*Pi-nong*’ - “younger brother”. A family attains higher position due to marriage or birth. The system of kinship in Tai Ahom and Thai particularly Tai Yuan of Northern Thailand appears to be similar. A single term is used for a number of kin in both Tai Ahom and Thai. Girin Phukon cited about the Tai Ahom and Thai kinship term as following:<sup>38</sup>

**Table: 1**  
**System of Kinship in Tai-Ahom and Thai particularly Tai Yuan of Northern Thailand**

Tai Ahom	Tai Yuan (Yhai)	Meaning
Ni-Chao (Lung Chao)	Lung	-Mother’s elder sister’s husband
		-Father’s elder brother

		-Mother's elder brother
		-Father's elder sister's husband
Apa	Pa	- Mother's elder sister
		-Father's elder sister
		-Wife of Mother's elder brother
		-Wife of Father's elder brother

**Table: 2**  
**Any women who is elder than the addresser's parents**

Tai Ahom	Tai Yuan (Yhai)	Meaning
Me-thao	Ja	-Grandmother, any old women
		-Grandmother
		-Mother's mother
		-Father's mother
Pu-thao	Pu	-Father's father
		-Mother's father
		-Any old man

There is another system that keeps the status of the members of the same family. It is the naming of a person. The naming in Ahoms is in consonance with the Ahom social structure and status. The sons and daughters of the same parents are named according to the sequence of birth. The eldest son is named Ai, second Ngi, third Sam, fourth Sai, fifth Ngu, Sixth is Luk, seventh Chet, eight is Pet etc. In the same way, daughter's names are given as Ye, Am, I, Oi etc.<sup>39</sup> All these remind the seniority and juniority status of a person in the family. In the Tai Ahom family, the father is viewed as a figure of authority and the mother is viewed more as a nurturing figure and a source of affection. Other parts of Ahom Buranji mentioned cases of sexual wrongdoings between brothers and sisters and between a man and women who had a common grandfather. These people had to be punished.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the long six hundred years of Ahom rule left legacy of mannerism that still persists in the Assamese society more so in the Ahom people.

The Ahom Buranji and the other Ahom historical documents tell us that the Tai Ahom people possessed archaic elements inherent in its society. The Ahom society still held on to the Tai beliefs. They worshiped nature and ancestors. The Tai Ahom still believed in *Phuralung* religion; at the same time they adopted Hinduism of the Neo-Vaisnavite doctrine. The Ahom cultural history we read about the attempts to resist the domination of Hinduism. Chatthip Nartsupha and Ranoo Winchasin writes, the Ahom Buranji recorded that during the reign of Susenpha (reigned 1744-51), Ahom priest asked the king to construct a wooden house for the coronation on grounds of tradition *fiŋ pu pan on*. When a comet appeared in the reign of Surampha (reigned 1751-1760), the Brahmins recommended the king to stay at Chae Mam, but the Ahom priests recommended the king to stay at Tai-Muang. The king followed the advice of the Brahmins. In the reign of Sunyeopha alias Lakshmi Singha (reigned 1769-1780) there was a question whether one should bury or cremate the body of the late king. After the real body was had been cremated, Sunyeopha agreed to have an effigy of the late king buried according to Tai custom. King Sunyeopha tended to follow the advices of the Brahmins in many rituals. The Tai priests recorded all these struggles between them and the Brahmins in the Ahom Buranji.<sup>41</sup> We can detect these characteristic by reading the Ahom Buranji and other documents in the Tai language.

The Ahom paid respect to the natural spirits such as god of the earth *phi-din*,<sup>42</sup> god of wind *phi-lom*,<sup>43</sup> god of fire *phi-fa*,<sup>44</sup> god of the mountain *phi-doi*,<sup>45</sup> god of moon *phi-duan*,<sup>46</sup> and god of the clouds *phi-khung-chon-mok*.<sup>47</sup> In addition to the nature worship, the Ahom worshiped their ancestors by making offerings to the spirits of the ancestors *phi dam*.<sup>48</sup> The *phi dam* were kept in the house. Before doing anything important such as construction of a new town, offerings had to be made to the spirits, the future predicted through the ritual of examining the legs of the fowl.<sup>49</sup> Anyone who had violated the customs and sought purification, also had to make offerings to the spirit and ask forgiveness from his ancestors and from his community. The feeling of the Ahom of being one with their ancestors appeared in the oath-taking ceremony among the officials (in the reigns after Chao Kamyang or Gobar in 1675). The officials swore that if they did not obey the orders of the king, they and their ancestors should go to hell.<sup>50</sup> Thus, the Ahom Buranji and other Tai documents trace these belief systems of the Tai Ahom people during their rule.

The Ahom Buranji also recorded the Ahom system of administration. The Ahom manuscripts and Tai Ahom documents recorded large number of official titles signifying government by senior persons. Such titles include *thao* (elder), *phuke* (elder or Barua), *thao muang luang* (elder of the big town or Borgohain), *thao muang* (elder of the town or Gohain), *phuke luang* (senior elder or Barbarua). Chatthip Nartsupha and Ranoo Winchasin writes, the phuke title had many subdivisions, such as *phuke hua chang* (elder who supervises the elephants), *phuke chao ye* (elder who takes care of the rice storage), *phuke phu du kai* (elder who takes care of the chickens), *phuke chang sara* (medical doctor), *phuke chao dong pa plong* (elder who supervises a forest), *phuke phu feng kan ham* (elder who carries a palanquin). These titles and practices suggest that the administrative system originated from the ancient communal system in which rule rested with the elders.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, the Ahom power was in the hands of the king *chao pha* and officials known as *thaa tang lai*, *phuke phukang* or *phuwa phuprang* as mentioned in the Ahom Buranji.<sup>52</sup> The Ahom Buranji mentioned the three *dangarias*<sup>53</sup> namely the Buragohain *chao prong muang*, Borgohain *thao muang luang* and Borpatragohain *chao sung luang*. Below the three *dangarias* there were the following positions in descending order: *phukan luang* (Barphukan), *phuke luang* (Barbarua), *phuke* (Barua), *phu kin muang* (governor of town, Rajkhowa), *hua heng* (one who commands 1000 persons, Hazarika), *hua pak* (one who commands 100 persons, Saikia), *hua sao* (one who commands 20 persons, Bora) The Phukan positions

were subdivided according to the various kinds of duty. Nartsupha and Winchasin give the position and functions Phukans<sup>54</sup> as follows:

**Table: 3**  
**Positions and Functions of Phukans**

Positions	Functions
phukan na	Supervisor of the rice field
phukan phai rua	Supervisor of boats
phukan phu tham kham	Judge
phukan phak kud	Supervisor of vegetable farms
phukan khwae	Supervisor of river, tributaries
phukan doi	Supervisor of mountain
phukan tun rung dam	Supervisor of Kaliabar
phukan sung rua	Supervisor of boat docks
phukan phu tu khao	Supervisor of rice barns
phukan sairing	Governor of Sairing
phukan tai sun kluay	Supervisor of the Tai people in the banana forest

The Tai names for these positions indicate the scope and functions of the Ahom government. The names of the official positions support this assertion and also the division of official functions.

The advent of the Ahom to the Brahmaputra valley marked the beginning of a new tradition of writing and documentation of important events in the first quarter of thirteenth century. This *burnji* tradition was brought by Sukapha with him and instructed his followers to document all the important events that happened during the course of time. Hence, a large number of Tai Ahom manuscripts produced during the Ahom rule and it was continued by his successors too. The Ahoms considered *buranji* as sacred and source of all kind of knowledge. Most *buranji* manuscripts available date to seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but they also copy as well as discuss much older texts, confirming that *buranjis* were updated carefully on instructions by successive generation of Ahom rulers, who assumed the title of *Swargadeo* (god-like king) from the late fifteenth century. It was *buranji* that all important decisions and records related to enthronement, dethronement, birth and death of royalty, marriage, alliances royal genealogy, important appointments, imperial/court orders, trials, punishments, agreements and so on were documented. Thus, many legitimacies were based on *buranji* records. Thus, *buranji* as a distinct history-writing tradition is generally associated with authority and legitimacy and therefore, many noble families invested and arranged to possess their own *buranji* as a source of enlightenment and edification.<sup>55</sup>

### 5.0 CONCLUSION

The tradition of manuscript writing of Tai Ahom in Assam enriches the Assamese culture and heritage since medieval age. The texts of the manuscripts were originally composed several hundred years ago, which represents examples of the way Tai language were used at that time. The Tai Ahom manuscripts are the treasure of wisdom of forefathers. They represent the ideas, customs and tradition of the life of Tai Ahom. It is necessary to make an effort to unfold this treasure house of learning and knowledge. So, it will be a part of our responsibility to take appropriate measures to conserve those “endangered” wealth before these lost forever.

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