

## TRADITIONAL FOOD HABITS OF THE AHOM COMMUNITY

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### ABSTRACT

THE AHOM, ALSO KNOWN AS THE TAI AHOM, ARE AN ETHNIC GROUP FOUND MAINLY IN ASSAM THE CURRENT AHOM PEOPLE AND CULTURE ARE A MIX OF THE TAI PEOPLE, WHO FIRST CAME TO ASSAM'S BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY IN 1228 C.E. AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE WHO JOINED THEM. SUKAPHA, THE TAI GROUP'S LEADER, AND HIS 9000 SUPPORTERS FOUNDED THE AHOM EMPIRE (1226 CE). WHICH RULED OVER PART OF MODERN DAY ASSAM'S BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY UNTILL 1826 C.E. THE CURRENT AHOM PEOPLE AND CULTURE ARE A MIX OF THE ANCIENT TAI PEOPLE AND CULTURE. AS WELL AS INDIGENOUS TIBETO. BURMAN PEOPLE AND CULTURES THAT THEY ASSIMILATED IN ASSAM IN AN EFFORT TO KNOW THEIR CULTURE AND TRADITION. AN STUDY HAS BEEN MADE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THEIR FOOD HABITS

**KEYWORDS :** INDIGENOUS, FOOD HABIT, DRINKS, AHOMS

### INTRODUCTION

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF TAI AHOM CULTURE IS EATING HABITS. THE MAJORITY OF AHOMS, PARTICULARLY IN RURAL REGIONS, ARE NON-VEGETARIANS WHO LIKE OTHER TAI PEOPLES, RETAIN A TRADITIONAL CUISINE OF THEIR OWN FOOD. THEIR TRADITIONAL DRINKS INCLUDE LAOC HOME MADE RICE BEER(, LUK LAO OR NAM LAO (RICE BEER, UNDILUTED OR DILUTED), XAAJ, ROHI ETC. AHOM EATING HABITS ARE SIMILAR TO THAI CUISINE WHICH INCLUDE THU-DAM (BLACK LENTIL); KHAO-MOON (RICE-FRUMENTLY, (HEWAKHAOCSTEAMED RICE); KHAO-TYVEK, AMLOI TU (STIR FIRED RED ANTS). HUKOTIS MAAS, PANI TENG, TUPULA BHAT, XANDOH ETC. SOME SECTIONS OF THE AHOM PEOPLE EAT BEET ALSO CONTRAY TO THEIR HINDU BELIEF BUT IN SYNONIMITY OF THEIR ANCESTRAL FURALUNG RELIGION.

### OBJECTIVE

THE MAIN OBJECTIVE IS TO REVIEW THE FOOD HABITS OF THE AHOM PEOPLE SO AS TO FIND A GLIMPSE OF THEIR CULTURE AN ATTEMPT WILL ALSO BE MADE TO EXAMINE WHICH ANCESTRAL FOOD HABITS AHOMS HAVE RE

TAINED AND HABITS THAT THEY INCORPORATED AS A RESULT OF ASSIMILATION

### **METHODOLOGY**

THE STUDY INVOLVES THE QUALITATIVE AND ANALYTICAL METHOD OF RESEARCH ON THE BASIS OF BOTH PRIMARY AND SECONDARY RESOURCES WHICH CONTAINS THE BOOKS AND JOURNALS, REPRINT OF PUBLISHED PAPERS SOFT COPIES INCLUDED WEB PAGES, PDF ETC. DOWNLOADED FROM THE WEBSITE. THE STUDY WILL BE MAINLY ON THE PRIMARY SOURCES. WHILE SECONDARY SOURCES WILL BE CONSULTED WHEREEVER AND WHENEVER IT IS FOUND NECESSARY.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

THE AHOM FOOD HABIT IS A MIXTURE OF BOTH INDIGENOUS AND SOUTH EAST ASIAN PEOPLES. THEY MADE AND STILL MAKE NO DISTINCTION IN PARTAKING FOOD FROM ANYBODY. THIS WAS QUITE CONTRARY TO WHAT PREVAILED AMONG THE PEOPLE OF NORTH EAST INDIA SHIHAB UD DIN TALISH. THE PERSIAN WRITER WHO WAS IN AHOM KINGDOM DURING 1662-63 WAS SURPRISED BY THIS AHOM BEHAVIOURS AND THEREFORE OBSERVED THUS.

THEY EAT WHATEVER THEY GET AND FROM WHOMEVER IT BE. FOLLOWING THE BENT OF THEIR UNCIVILISED MINDS. THEY WILL ACCEPT FOOD FROM MUHAMMADANS AND OTHER PEOPLE, THEY WILL EAT EVERY KIND OF FLESH EXCEPT HUMAN WHETHER OF DEAD OR KILLED ANIMALS (FATIHA-IBRIYA)

IT BEARS A PICTURE TRUE OF THE AHOM LIFE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY, AND THIS PICTURE DID NOT CHANGE MUCH DURING THE FOLLOWING CENTURIES ALTHOUGH MAJORITY OF THEM BECAME HINDUS BY TAKING INITIATION FROM HINDU GOSSAIN.

IN 1908 P.R. GORDON OBSERVED, "PIGS AND FOWLS ABOUND IN THE DEUDHAI VILLAGES AHOMS WHO HAVE NOT HINDUISED, SOMETIMES EVEN THOSE WHO HAVE BECOME DISCIPLES OF VAISHNAVITE GOSSAINS, EAT PORK AND FOWLS, AND DRINK RICE BEER AND RICE SPIRIT, MUCH TO THE SCANDAL OF THEIR SANCTIMONIOUS ASSAMESE HINDU NEIGHBOURS, WHO REGARD THEM WITH HORROR. (ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RELIGION AND ETHICS)

BE ALLEN OBSERVED, THE AHOMS FOUND THE RESTRICTIONS OF THEIR NEW RELIGION IRKSOME RUDRA SINGH ALTHOUGH HE HAD BEEN PUBLICALLY ADMITTED TO THE CHURCH BY AUNIATI GOSSAIN, FEASTED HIS FOLLOWERS ON BUFFALOS AND PIGS ON THE OCCASION OF HIS FATHERS FUNERAL, WHILE NOT ONLY BUFFALOES BUT EVEN COWS FOUND A PLACE IN THE MENU OF HIS CORONATION BANQUET. THIS CLEARLY SHOWS THAT EVEN TOWARDS END OF

THE EIGHTEEN CENTURY, THE HINDUISM OF AHOM KING ONE OF THE MOST LIBERAL VARIANTS OF THAT CATHOLIC CREED (ASSAM DISTRICT GAZETTE TOR)

PEOPLE WITNESSING THE OMPHA RITUALS ON EVERY 12<sup>TH</sup> YEAR AT LAKWA IN SIVSAGAR, WILL FIND NO DIFFERENCE OF AHOM FOOD HABIT BETWEEN THEN AND NOW IN THE PRESENT OMPHA, WHITE BUFFALO, A WHITE COW. A RED DOG. SCORES OF PIGS, SEVERAL GOATS AND DUCKS AND CHICKEN ARE SACRIFICED TO GODS AND SPIRITS AT THE END OF THE RITUAL THERE STARTS AMONG PRESENT A SCRAMBLE TO GET FLESH PORTIONS OF THESE ANIMALS AND BIRDS NO INHIBITION IS SHOWN FOR EATING THE FLESH OF SACRIFICED ANIMAL. THE AHOM PEOPLE ARE FOND OF EATING PORK, DUCK, BAMBOO SHOOTS GRINDED AND FERMENTED. HUKATI (PA-NIU) AS ARE COMMON AMONG THE TRIBAL ALL OVER SOUTH EAST ASIA.

IN 1901 L.A. WADDELL WROTE “STILL THE MAJORITY OF THE AHOM EVEN NOW, ALTHOUGH PROFESSING HINDUISM, EAT BEEF AND PORK, AND BURYING THEIR DEAD INSTEAD OF BURNING BODIES, AS DO THE HINDUS” (THE TRIBES OF BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY, REPRINT, 2000, P. 18)

THE DRINKING OF RICE WINE CALLED NAME LAO WAS UNIVERSAL AND IS STILL FAVOURITE AMONG MANY AHOMS IN THE VILLAGES IN UPPER ASSAM. IN MANY FAMILIES, NO RITUAL IS COMPLETE WITHOUT RICE WINE AND OFFERING OF RICE WINE TO THE ANCESTORS IS CUSTOMARY AND OBLIGATORY FOR THOSE AHOM WHO STILL PERFORM TRADITIONAL RITES.

#### **P.R.T. GUARDON'S OBSERVATION :**

“THE AHOMS ARE HEAVY DRINKERS, CONSUMING LARGE QUANTITIES OF RICE BEER, CALLED BY THEM LAU, WHICH THEY IN THEIR VILLAGES. THE BIHUS ARE CELEBRATED BY MORE THAN USUALLY HEAVY POTATIONS. THE DEOBHAIS OR AHOM PRIESTS DISTIL A SPIRIT FROM RICE” (P.R. GURDON IN ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF RELIGION AND ETHICS, VOL-I, EDITED BY JAMES HASTINGS, 1<sup>ST</sup> IMPRESSION, 4<sup>TH</sup> IMPRESSION 1959, NEW YORK, P. 235).

DR. SATHIP NARTSUPHA OF THE CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY OF BANGKOK, WHO HAS UNDERTAKEN A MAJOR PROJECT OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF TAI PEOPLE IN BURMA, SOUTHERN CHINA AND INDIA SAYS “THESE FINDINGS SUGGESTS THAT THE ANCIENT TAI SOCIETY WAS AN ASIATIC TYPE AND THAT THE ANCIENT TAI CULTURE REVOLVED AROUND WORSHIP OF NATURE AND ANCESTORS” AND THIS IS VERY MUCH TRUE TO AHOM AND “THE AHOM WORSHIP OF NATURE AND ANCESTORS IS A BELIEF SYSTEM DIFFERENT FROM ARYAN HINDUISM” (SATHIP NARTSUPHA AND RANOO WICHASIN, “THE STATE OF KNOWLEDGE OF AHOM HISTORY”, IN TAI CULTURE, INTERNATIONAL REVIEW ON TAI CULTURAL STUDIES, VOL-III, NO. 1, JUNE 1998, SEACOM, BERLIN, PP. 16-48)

## **CONCLUSION**

IN THE LIGHT OF ABOVE DISCUSSION, IT CAN BE CONCLUDED THAT THE ANCIENT TAI SOCIETY WAS AN ASIATIC SOCIETY AND THAT ANCIENT TAI CULTURE REVOLVED AROUND WORSHIP OF NATURE AND ANCESTORS ALTHOUGH THEY PRACTISE THE SAME HINDUISM OF THE ARYAN ORIGIN AND YET THE PRACTICE OF FORALUNG RITUALS IN CONJUNCTION WITH THOSE OF TRADITIONAL ASSAMESE ONES THROUGH THE AMALGAMMATION OF FOOD AND HABITS HELP TO VEVELOP A HOMOGENOUS CULTURE THAT FURTHER CONTRIUBUTED TO FORM THE “THE GREATER ASSAMESE COMMUNITY”.

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