



Research Paper

NGI NGAO KHAM- A Mythical Figure of Tai Ahom People of Assam

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ABSTRACT: The Ngi Ngao Kham or a figure of dragon like winged lion is a mythical animal which is found among Tai-Ahom people. The figure of Ngi Ngao Kham is found in different historical palces of ancient Ahom kingdom and some other tribal areas. Again this Ngi Ngao Kham figure has discovered in Meghalaya and Mizoram too, which reavels the relationship between the Tai-Ahom king and other king of Meghalaya and Mizoram. The Tai-Ahoms established the Ahom kingdom (1228-1826) in parts of present-day Assam and ruled it for nearly 600 years. They have given up their own language and accept Assamese language and culture.

Keywords: Assamese society, Identity, Ngi NgaoKham, Tai-Ahom.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Ngi Ngao Kham or a figure of dragon like winged lion is a mythical animal which is found among Tai-Ahom people in Assam. The figure of Ngi Ngao Kham is found in different historical palces of ancient Ahom kingdom and some other tribal areas too. This figure has found in the historical places like Charaideo, Ranghar, Karenghar etc in Sibsagar district of Assam. That was happened to be the capital of Ahom kingdom. Again this Ngi Ngao Kham figure has discovered in Meghalaya and Mizoram too, which reveals the relationship between the Tai-Ahom king and other king of Meghalaya and Mizoram.

II. TAI-AHOM PEOPLE OF ASSAM

The Tai-Ahoms people of Assam, established a kingdom in 1228 of their own in the south-eastern corner of the Brahmaputra valley when Sukaphaa entered. In the course of time that followed, they established their sway over the whole of the valley till their kingdom was occupied by the British in 1826. In this context, Satynath Chetia (2005) said:

They were thus the ruling people in the Brahmaputra valley for long six hundred years. In their own language they called their kingdom Mung-Dun-Chun-Kham, but was better known as Asam, Assam in English, and Acam in the Persian chronicles Almost, 780 years ago, in 1228 AD, Siukapha entered in Tipam, Namrup, in the Brahmaputra valley, from Mong Mao. Now-a-days, Mong Mao is situated in the Yunnan province of China. According to historian DGE Hall witnessed a very strong 'effervescence' of the Tai people that led to the forming of several Tai States in the Upper valleys of the Mekong, the Menam, the Irrawady and the Brahmaputra. So Professor David K. Wyatt terms the period from 1200 to 1350 AD as a Tai Century.

During the early part of the same century that a Tai Prince, Siukapha, from Mong Mao took a move to push to the west to found the Ahom kingdom in the Brahmaputra valley. In the Brahmaputra valley the Ahoms occupy an exceptional position compared to the other Tai groups of South East Asia. Siukapha befriended the local groups, the Barahi and the Marans, finally settled his capital at Charaideo and established the offices of the Dangarias- the Burgohain and Borgohain. In the 1280s, these two offices were given independent regions of control, and the check and balance that hese three main offices accorded each other was established.

After settled at Charaideo Siukapha, ruling for forty one years, he died in 1268 AD and he was entombed at Charaideo. This was the beginning of Tai culture in North-East India. Siukapha was a unique mind of egalitarian way, adopted a policy of mobilizing the local people for consolidating his dreamed state. Their religious beliefs were respected by Siukapha. Besides intermarriage with them caused fusion of social adaptability that had contributed ultimately to the growth of a culture that is in the long run called Assamese

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culture. He bound all the diversified small communities around Charaideo with one thread. This example was followed by his successors and thus created a new understanding among the different groups.

The king of Tai-Ahom kept a good relation with the neighbouring other groups like the Bhutiyas, the Akas, the Daflas, the Abors, the Miris, the Singphos, the Nagas, the Mikirs, the Khasis and the Jaintiyas. The Government of Assam has befittingly honoured the historical figure by celebrating his first day in the region as Assam Divas, formerly Siukapha Divas and announcing an annual award in his name. Chaolung Siukapha was a great leader and a brave warrior ruler under whose guidance a solid process of unification of various ethnic groups and assimilation had been set in motion from Charaideo. Looking back at the end of the 12th Century disintegrated ruling dynasties of Brahmaputra valley; it was Siukapha, the person who laid the foundation of a unified and united Assam and Assamese society.

At present they occupied most of the places of upper Assam. The Tai-Ahom population of Assam is 4 million (according to 2011 census). They speak Assamese language and observe Hinduism.



Researcher with Tai-Ahom people at Sivasagar, Assam

III. THE NGI NGAO KHAM

In the Tai-Ahom Kingdom, the base of present day greater Assamese society, one common images found in many monuments and archeological sites are Ngi Ngao Kham, a winged lion - dragon. Even the ancient copper plates and coins bearing these images reveal that the Tai-Ahom sovereigns once used Ngi Ngao Kham as their royal emblem.

3.1 Buranji (chronicle) writing tradition. The Tai-Ahom people have brought the tradition of history writing (buranji) to Assam. (Gogoi 2005) As per the Tai-Ahom belief, the origin of Ngi Ngao Kham can be traced back to the Tai-Ahom buranji (chronicle), the sacred manuscript. This mythical animal appears as a hybrid of a snake, a lion, a tortoise, a horse and a bird. Tai Ahom people believe that Ngi Ngao Kham also has close relationship with dragon of the Chinese.

3.2 Ngi Ngao Kham and Tai-Ahom identity. The Tai-Ahom people used their national flag where The Ngi-Ngao-Kham has found. The flag termed as khring fra. The khring fra is used in every occasion like religious, cultural activities and any royal programme, by the Tai Ahom people. During the ruling of Ahom dynasty, the Tai king and his people hoisted khring fra , before going to war. When the king went to the war and even the ambassador moved to another country, then they took khring fra with them. Even now-a-days, using khring fra tradition is observed, in different social and community activities. The location of Ngi Ngao Kham in the khring fra is in middle. The khring fra is close friend of God. Tai-Ahom people believe that where khring fra is hoisted, God comes to that place. According to Tai-Ahom belief, whatever ask from khring fra, they people will get.

3.3 Color and size of khring fra. The colour of the TaiAhom flag khring fra is white and the size is rectangular. The color of the Ngi Ngao Kham is not white in the khring fra. The color of the Ngi Ngao Kham placed in the middle is red color. Above the Ngi Ngao Kham in the khring fra, there are fourteen pair parallel circle found.

3.4 Myths associated with Ngi Ngao Kham. According to Tai Ahom belief, there is an evolutionary theory behind of the creation of the world and the Ngi Ngao Kham. According to this theory, the first creation is

Fura along or Farlong. He creates this world. Before this creation, it was a black hole. At first, according to the will of Fura, jelly like material create and from that, Goddess Ai Sang born. After that, those jelly material gave birth to the Khun Theu Kham. After that Fura send some gods through vomiting. After that Khun Theu Kham came down to earth and started to meditation and he touched water. The complete myth is as follows:

After touching the water, it starts to flow and one crab (i.e. god) blocked the water. Then some water tried to cross nearby, and another god blocked the water as tortoise form. Still the water is flowing. Another god blocked that crossed water as Ananta Nag (king of snake) form. The Ananta Nag touched the crab through his tail. And in between the crab and Ananta Nag, the earth or soil came and this soil was first earth in this world . Again some soil are extending to down and another white elephant (another form of god), blocked the earth or soil. After that the soil or earth which was under control of the Ananta Nag, and that became world. In the pole of the world, one god lived as the form of a big spider. The big spider makes a big web. One day, the lovely Goddess Fukao kham, who is owner of heaven, came through that route. When they met they had sexual intercourse and after that Fukao kham laid four eggs. Fukao kham gave responsibility for incubate to Thao Lungam. Thao Lungam failed to give birth. Then they sprinkled holy water and then all eggs became four gods. The first one was Saw-Ai-Kofa-Sang- Din who looks the world, the second one was Sing-Sofa-Fa-Kham, who looks eight million Nag, the third one was Sing-Kam-Fak, who was looking the thunderstorm and stayed at heaven and the last one was Ngi Ngao Kham who got responsibility to spread the Tai Ahom religion. This is the story how Ngi Ngao Kham came into being. (Gogoi 1994:33-35)

3.5 Ngi Ngao Kham as Identity marker. The image of Ngi Ngao Kham has re-gained popularity among the Tai Ahom people. The motifs of this legendary creature can be found everywhere. Some of the figures available in different places are shown below. Several cultural organizations and political movements have adopted the icon as a part of their emblems. Some even revere Ngi Ngao Kham as one of the Gods along with the Hindu Pantheon as most of the Tai-Ahom people have adopted Hindu religion.

The Ngi Ngao Kham has therefore become a dominant symbol of the Tai Ahom in their current process of re-building collective consciousness. This phenomenon along with the revival of Tai-ness in other aspects (e.g. myths, history, language and rituals) aim at reformulating the Tai Ahom ethnic identity in order to distinguish themselves from the Assamese and to define their identity amidst ethnic diversity in Modern day India.

The symbol of Tai ethnic Assamese is a major contemporary dragon lion with wings called Ngi Ngao Kham that appeared in various forms. Assamese people are really understanding the reference plate on which copper stored in the Assam State Museum situated at Guwahati. This Ngi Ngao Kham is found in the different historical places like Rong Ghar, Talatal Ghar, Kareng Ghar etc. at Sivasagar ("Fig") and Kamakhya temple at Guwahati.



Ngi ngao nham figure at Sivasagar

[Photograph by Associate Professor Kanyarat Vechasat and Assistant Professor Monthira Tamuang]



Ngi ngao kham figure at Saraideo gate

3.6 Ngi Ngao Kham in Vaishnavite monastery. The Ngi Ngao Kham figure is available in the some of the vaishnavite monastery of Assam like Barpeta, Barduwa etc. It shows the cultural assimilation in the greater Assamese society.

3.7 Ngi Ngao Kham figure at Mizoram and Meghalaya. It is interesting that some stone relics are still found in some tribal dominated hilly areas like Mizoram and Meghalaya, which is still unknown for the local people, but that is same with Ngi-Ngao-Kham figure. Again these figures reveal the evidence of the Tai-Ahom and tribal relations.



This 'unidentified stone' found at the Museum of Department of Art and Culture, Aizawl, Mizoram, which is figure of the Ngi-Ngao-kham. The state Mizoram is dominated by Lushei and other Mongoloid people.



These above relics have found at Jaintiya hills of Meghalaya. The Jaintiya king had a good relation with Tai-Ahom king. This Ngi-Ngao-Kham like structure was found in the stone gate. It may be the entrance gate of the Tai-Ahom king to the Jaintiya kingdom.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Tai-Ahom group has played a major role in the formation of the greater Assamese society. Though they have their own Tai identity but they tried to adopt the Assamese culture too. The Ngi Ngao Kham is a mythical figure of the Tai-Ahom people of Assam, which they use as their mythical symbol or emblem of their kingdom. Now it became an identity marker of them. At present, this Ngi Ngao Kham is available in the Vaishnavite monastery too. It shows the proof of the greater Assamese society how elements from different communities are adopted easily. Again the Ngi Nao Kham figure found in other places like Mizoram and Meghalaya which shows the good relation between Tai-Ahom king and those tribal kings and their states during the Tai-Ahom kingdom. This paper is the starting only in this field of research. Someone can do more work and compare this mythical figure with other parts of the world.

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