

Buranji- A Unique Historical Literature of Assam

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Abstract

The Ahoms were originally Tai- Shans. They came to Assam via the Patkai hills in the early part of the thirteenth century from upper Burma under the leadership of Sukapha, who laid the foundation of their kingdom in Assam with Charaideo as the capital in 1228 AD. The Ahoms had a highly developed historical faculty and introduced historiography in to Assam. Their historical works are called Buranjis. Buranji is an Ahom word meaning a store- house of knowledge that enlightens the ignorant. The objective of the paper is to make a comprehensive study Buranji literature developed by the Ahoms of Assam which is considered as most important historical literature of medieval Assam.

Key words: Ahoms, Buranjis, Chronicles, Tai-Ahom Buranjis

I: Introduction:

The Ahoms were originally Tai- Shans. They came to Assam via the Patkai hills in the early part of the thirteenth century from upper Burma under the leadership of Sukapha, who laid the foundation of their kingdom in Assam with Charaideo as the capital in 1228 AD. They gradually extended their sway and became the master of the whole of the Brahmaputra valley. They brought political integration to Assam and ruled Assam about 600 years. The Ahoms had a highly developed historical faculty and introduced historiography in to Assam. Their historical works are called *Buranjis*. *Buranji* is an Ahom word meaning a store- house of knowledge that enlightens the ignorant. Their general contents justify to them the application of the English equivalent ‘chronicles’. They generally deal with the political events of the period, such as, warfare, diplomatic correspondences, working of the administration, etc.

II: Objective:

The objective of the paper is to make a comprehensive study *Buranji* literature developed by the Ahoms of Assam which is considered as most important historical literature of medieval Assam.

III: Methodology:

The method of this research paper is analytical and historical. A comparative study has been done while the published chronicles are studied and verified to make a rational view on the subject matter. For the purpose of the study, major sources of information are gathered from the Assamese Chronicles (*Buranjis*) and bio-graphical works of the Vaishnava saints of medieval Assam (*charit puthi*). Other

sources in the forms of articles published by different authors in different newspapers, periodicals, magazines, souvenir etc. and books are also be consulted to supplement the main sources.

IV. Classification of *Buranjis*:

On the basis of the size *Buranjis* are divided in two classes- *Lai-Lik-Buranji* or *Barpahi Buranji* and *Lit Buranji* or *Sarupahi Buarnji* or *katha*. Those *Buranjis* which are much bigger in volume and cover all topics relating to political history is known as *Lai-Lik-Buranji* in Tai-Ahom language and *Barpahi Buranji* in Assamese. Another class of *Buranjis* which are dealing with one event only is small in size and known as *Lit Buranji* in Tai-Ahom and *Sarupahi* or *Katha* in Assamese. There is another class of *Buranji* which are treats the lineage of the Ahom families. That class of *Buranji* is known as *Chakaripheti Buranji*.¹

On the basis of subject matters the *Buranjis* can be divided into following sections²-

- (a) *Buranjis* of pre-Ahom age
- (b) *Buranjis* of Ahom age
- (c) *Datiyalia Buranji* or Reports of the frontier officers of border areas
- (d) *Buranjis* of neighbouring states
- (e) *Kataki Buranji* or Reports of the ambassadors
- (f) *Chakiyal Buranji* or Reports of the officers of different outposts
- (g) *Satriya Buranji* or the history of satras, its foundation, life and career of its pontiffs and its relation with the ruling power.
- (h) *Chang-Rung- Phukanar Buranji*, or the record of the Chief Engineer, which mainly deals with the construction of maidams, temples, roads, bridges, buildings and ramparts etc.

V. Language of *Buranjis*:

Initially *Buranjis* were written in the Tai- Ahom language. It was in the reign of Suhungmung or *Dihingia Raja* (1497-1539 AD) that *Buranjis* in Assamese were first written. Since then, numerous *Buranjis* were compiled both in Tai- Ahom and Assamese under the orders of the kings, their ministers or chief officers of the State.

VI. Authorship and preservation of *Buranjis*:

Most of the *Buranjis* are anonymous. Unlike his Persian counterpart, an Assamese chronicler was not anxious to flatter some royal patron or to mar the gravity of the historical events by a show of his scholarship.³ However, it must be admitted that the *Buranjis*, at large, were official records, as they were subjected to governmental scrutiny from time to time. Obviously, therefore, the chronicler was not free to exercise his mind or express any opinion that might create displeasure from the ruling authority. Moreover, the *Buranjis* are mainly concerned with political events and, hence throw only scattered light on the socio-economic life of the common people, for which we are to seek materials elsewhere.⁴ Thus, the *Buranjis*

were the records not so much of the people as of the kings and their courtiers, their wars and conquests, successes and failures.⁵

Buranji writing was always considered as a pious work during the Ahom age and it was a symbol of aristocracy for the noble Ahom families. The family history once written was often copied by other family members and for this reason several copies of the same *Buranji* are found in the later period. During the initial period of the Ahom rule their priests and leading families possessed *Buranjis* which were periodically brought up to date.⁶ Later, generally *Buranjis* were written by Chiring Phukan under the guidance of Burhagohain. Later on, a class of writers known as *Lekhuru Khel* was created only to do the work of writing *Buranjis*. These were written in fast coloured ink on oblong strips of bark of *Sanchi* tree or aloe wood (*agaru*) yielding a superior or thick variety (*Sanchipat*) glossy after an elaborate process of curing, seasoning and publishing.⁷ All writings were scrutinized carefully and preserved in the *Gandhia Bharal* under royal custody. On the other hand, the reports of all Ahom officials and all other valuable documents were kept in the *Gandhia Bharal*. *Buranjis* preserved in the *Gandhia Bharal* were generally unbiased, based on true facts.

Though numerous *Buranjis* were written during the Ahom period, but huge number of *Buranjis* were destroyed due to the humid climate and war situations.

VII. A brief description of some published and unpublished *Buranji*:

Buranjis were written in both Tai-Ahom and Assamese language.

(a) ***Buranjis* written in Assamese language-**

A number of *Buranjis* written in Assamese have been published by the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam and *Kamrup Anusandhan Samiti*. The important *Buranjis* written in Assamese language are-

Purani Asam Buranji- This chronicle was written towards the close of the 17th century deals with the events from the establishment of the Ahom power in the Brahmaputra valley down to the reign of Gadadhar Singha (1681-1696 AD)

Kamrupar Buranji- This *Buranji* was compiled towards the end of the 17th century, is a very important source for a study of Assam's war with the Mughals. It contains the Assamese text of eighteen diplomatic letters exchanged between the Ahom court and the Mughal generals after the conclusion of the treaty of 1639 AD.

Asam Buranji- This *Buranji* obtained from the family of Sukumar Mahanta, which had a note on the Ahom progenitors and on their ancestral kingdom and treats also the history of Assam from the commencement of Ahom rule till the accession of Gadadhar Singha in 1681 A.D.

Satsari Asam Buranji- Seven different chronicles, dealing with various events of Assam history and written at different periods ranging from the early 16th to 19th century AD were compiled and

edited by S.K.Bhuyan and published under the caption *Satsari Asam Buranji* to give a connected history of Assam under the Ahoms.

Tungkhungia Buranji- This chronicle was written towards the close of the Ahom rule by a member of the Ahom cabinet, Srinath Duara Barbarua, which deals with the rule of the *Tungkhungia* clan of the Ahom kings from Gadadhar Singha to Kamaleswar Singha (1681-1810 A.D.). This chronicle was edited by S.K.Bhuyan and published by Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam. To present the *Tungkhungia* period as whole, the editor has incorporated in it accounts from other sources of the preliminary and supplementary period left out by the author. Final phase of the Ahom- Mughal conflict apart, the chronicle provides detailed account of the Moamariya instructions, working of the administrative machinery and relation with neighbouring States and frontier tribes.

Asam Buranji- This chronicle dealing with the events of the period from 1641 to 1681 AD. This chronicle was edited by S.K.Dutta.

Asam Buranji Sar and ***Asam Buranji***- In the early part of the 19th century, Kasinath Tamuli Phukan and Harakanta Sarma Barua Sadar Amin compiled *Asam Buranji Sar* and *Asam Buranji* respectively, both of which, contain a complete history of Assam under the Ahom rule.

Asamar Padya Buranji- Two chronicles, one is *Belimarar Buranji* composed by Bisweswar Vaidyadhip and the other is *Kalibharat Buranji* composed by Dutiram Hazarika in the 19th century and these two chronicles were edited by S.K.Bhuyan and published by the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam in a single work entitled *Asamar Padya Buranji*.

Buranji Vivek Ratna- This chronicle is written by Maniram Barbhandar Dutta Barua Dewan, popularly known as Maniram Dewan, a martyr of the 1857 Revolt in Assam. This work not only dealt with political history, it covers cultural as well as religious history of the land.

Other chronicles: There are also a number of Assamese chronicles dealing with the history of other states. Among them the *Padshah Buranji*, the *Kachari Buranji*, the *Jayantiya Buranji* and the *Tripura Buranji* are important. *Padshah Buranji* deals with the *Badshahs* of Delhi, from the establishment of the Muslim supremacy in India, up to the second half of the 17th century. The *Kachari Buranji*, the *Jayantia Buranji* and the *Tripura Buranji* primarily deal with Ahom diplomatic relations with the kingdoms of Cachar, Jayantiya and Tripura, respectively.

(b) *Buranjis* written in Tai-Ahom language:

‘There is an almost complete and comprehensive *Ahom Buranji* from the earliest times to Purandar Singha (1832-1838 or end of Ahom rule) in Tai- Ahom script. It is divided in to two parts: *Deo-Buranji*, history of heavenly bodies, creation up to descent of Khunlung and Khunlai: *Din-Buranji*, history of earth, from the extension of the rule of the Tais and migration of Sukapha from Maulung to *Mungdunshunkham* (country of full of gardens of gold) on Assam i.e. rise and fall of the Ahom power in Assam.’⁸

Of the Tai-Ahom *Buranjis*, the most important is the Ahom *Buranji*, which contains a complete account of the Ahom rule in Assam. It was translated and edited into English by Rai Bahadur Golap Chandra Barua. It uses the *Aijepi* era and contains some information not found elsewhere.

Deodhai Asam Buranji is a collection of some old chronicles describing the earlier period of Ahom history, relation with neighbouring tribes, the Koches, Jayantias, Kacharis, Mikirs, Chutiyas, Naras and Mantars, and with the Mughals and social customs and administration of the Ahoms etc.⁹ This chronicle was edited by S.K.Bhuyan.

Another note-worthy Tai-Ahom Chronicle is the *Weissalisa*, translated by B.Barua and edited by M.Bora and published by Dibrugarh University. It is compilation of two chronicles called *Weissali- Hukong* and *Weissali-mung-dun-sun kham*. The first gives an impressive and informative account of the first Burmese invasion of Assam in 1817 AD and the second one gives a brief account of the second and third Burmese invasions.

VIII. Conclusion:

Thus, the *Buranjis* not only deals with the royal family of the Ahoms, it deals with the regional accounts, dynastic chronicles, family histories, chronicles on religious institutions (*Satria Buranjis*) and metrical chronicles on religious pontiffs and founders of monasteries. The tradition of *Buranji* writing among the Ahoms created a trend of historical literature of Assam. In conclusion it might be said that composed by different men in different ages from different angles and suited to different requirements the *Buranjis* differed in contents and style of each other. While some *Buranjis* are repetitive, covering events of same period, others are supplementary in character containing fresh materials not recorded elsewhere. The *Buranjis* therefore form an invaluable source material for a critical and comprehensive study of Medieval Assam.¹⁰

Notes and References:

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