

## TRADITIONAL DRESS OF AHOM IN ASSAM

**K. Borgohain**

Cotton University

kuhisopunborgohain11@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

*The Ahom age is the age of ornaments and attires of several types. For every class of people particular dresses was being assigned and therefore, it is through the appearance of the person only, one could be identified without any difficulty. The dresses that were worn by the king or by the higher officials of the Ahom kingdom were not worn by a subject. For male and female both the genders, different varieties of dresses were available. The age of the Ahoms where we can see the royal behaviours, the royal costume senses and also the way of the styling of people of that time.*

**Keywords:** Ahom, Dress, Kingdom..

### Introduction

Traditional dress may be defined as the ensemble of garments, jewelry and accessories rooted in the past that is worn by an identifiable group of people. Though slight changes over time in color, form and material are acknowledged, the assemblage seems to be handed down unchanged from the past. Traditional dress or costume is a phrase used widely both by the general public and writers on dress. It conjures up images of rural people dressed in colorful, layered, exotic clothing from an idealized past in some faraway place. This notion of traditional dress has been scrutinized and found inadequate by many researchers and scholars, but its uncritical use continues into the twenty-first century. The phrase traditional dress or costume is often used interchangeably with the terms ethnic, regional and folk dress. Assam is a beautiful place which happens to be one of the Seven Sisters in the North East. Assam is not just a budding state, but also a place with deep cultural roots and the people here take pride in the refinement of their cultural roots. This state portrays its beauty not traditionally. Tradition is the caravan of the heritage passed on to us by our forefathers and these people here have very elegantly managed to carry forward the flame that was passed to them rightly.

The Ahom or Tai-Ahom is an ethnic group from the Indian states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. They are the admixed descendants of the Tai people who reached the Brahmaputra valley of Assam in 1228 and local indigenous people who joined them over the course of history. Sukaphaa, the leader of the Tai group and his 9000 followers established the Ahom kingdom (1228-1826 CE), which controlled much of the Brahmaputra Valley in modern Assam until 1826.

The modern Ahom people and their culture are a syncretism of the original Tai and their culture and local Tibeto-Burman people and their cultures they absorbed in Assam. The local people of different ethnic groups of Assam that took to the Tai way of life and polity were incorporated into their fold which came to be known as Ahom as in the process known as Ahomisation. Many local ethnic groups, including the Borahis who were of Tibeto-Burman origin, were completely subsumed into the Ahom community; while members of other communities, based on their allegiance to the Ahom kingdom or the usefulness of their talents, too were accepted as Ahoms. Currently, they represent the largest Tai group in India, with a population of nearly 1.3 million in Assam. Ahom people are found mostly in Upper Assam in the districts of Golaghat, Jorhat, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia(s

outh of Brahmaputra river) and in Lakhimpur, Sonitpur and Dhemaji (north). There is a significant presence in Karbi Anglong and Lohit District of Arunachal Pradesh.

Even though the already admixed group Ahom made up a relatively small portion of the kingdom's population, they maintained their original Ahom language and practised their traditional religion till the 17th-century, when the Ahom court as well as the commoners adopted the Assamese language and Ekasarana dharma and Sakta sects of Hinduism.

### **The dress of Ahom in Assam**

in the early years of the Ahom rule in Assam, the Ahoms were seen to wear black clothes and it was only later on that they switched to the white coloured clothes. As I said earlier, the dresses and ornaments depicted the class of person of that time and that was displayed better by the turban and kind of scarf, which is known as the Seleng Sadar. The higher officials, queens, princesses, and the king used to drape turbans made of silk (pat-muga) in their head. Certain attires that were quite widely used and worn by the higher officials and also by some classes of the subjects are Riha (a kind of cloth draped around the body and the shoulder), Mekhela (a wrapper kind of cloth worn in the waist) and sula-suria (a kind of short shirts and clothes made of Assam silks like Golden Muga, White pat and Eri silk) etc. So, whatever they used to wear basically were made of Golden Muga, Pat, Eri silk only. Majankari and Sopapotia Kapur are also certain types of clothes which are being considered to be the best of the best and were worn by the Kings, Queens (Kuwaris) or other higher officials in special occasions only. It is since that golden age of handmade silk, Assam till now is carrying its glory of being the uncrowned monarch in the silk industry.

Now let's have a look at the particular type of dresses that were worn by the Ahoms. The females of the Ahom kingdom did not have to keep themselves under veils. In stead of that, they had to wear Seleng Sadar in their heads like a turban and wore Sula (a kind of one piece attire). Day by day these types of clothing changed and Ahom females started wearing the Mekhela Sadar made of Pat and Muga. Males used to wear Suria (clothes covering from the waistline) and suti-sula (short shirt) and tied Basual Tongali (a kind of belt type strap) on their waist. These clothes were worn by both male and females of Ahom kingdom but the only difference was that based on the class of people, the materials and designs of these things varied.

So, after the dresses of the Ahoms, now comes the details about the jewellerys and ornaments worn by them. The Ahoms were known for golden jewellerys. They were rich in gold and hence, you can see them wearing heavy jewellerys made of gold only. As gold was the recognition of the wealthy and royal families of Ahoms similarly, the people from lower strata used to wear jewellerys made of silver and bronze. However, some other poor natives wore brass-made ornaments too. The jewellerys were being designed and studded by colorful beads. Male and female, all used to wear various occasions but as it is very obvious, the females used to be ornamented more than the males. The jewellerys carried by the males were finger rings, Hilikhamoni and Motamoni (kind of chains worn around the neck), Koriya and Lokapar (ear rings) and Baju (an armlet).

The females of Ahom kingdom, mostly from the wealthy and upper-class families were being designed and ornaments in such a way that each of them used to carry jewellerys weighting 20 to 30 Tolas. The jewellerys worn by them including Hirpota (worn in head, amidst hair); Kopali (worn on forehead); gold and silver made flowers in hair bun; Keru,

Thuria, Nejepota, Jangphai, Nejepota jangphai, Uka jangphai, Bakhrua, Long Keru, Boboilog, Kaanphul and Karnabaala in ears, Naakphuli (nose ring), Baju (armlet), Muthikharu, Gaamkharu, Hosoruakharu, Potiya Kharu, Mogormukhikharu, guta kharu, Kangana and Doliya kharu (Bangles), Siripota,

Henepota, Jethinejia, P arosokua, Mouranejia, Podumkali, Barobirosa, Maas Bakoliya, Hirapota,

Bakhorua and Uka (finger rings) and Chandrahaar, Kokali, Kardhoni and Ghagor on waist.

Except for all those heavy and valuable ornaments, there are some other materials too which were quite widely used in the Ahom

days. Actually such types of ornaments were used by those people who cannot afford to buy the golden, silver or bronze jewellery. These are like the ornaments made of pig's teeth, elephant's bone and tiger's nails etc.

### Conclusion

The traditional dress of Ahom in Assam is one of the main elements, which conduct a separate identity to it and its culture.

As the Ahom community have been connected to several other communities of North-East like Manipur, Nora, Joyonta and Bhutan etc, one can see the influence of such cultures on it. The Ahom custom, tradition and even the lifestyle have more or less kind of similarities with such tribes.

### References

1. Baruah, S. L. (1977). "Ahom Policy Towards the Neighbouring Hill Tribes". Proceedings of the Indian History Congress. 38: 249-256.
2. Chetia, S.N. (2001) The Ahom marriage system with emphasis on Chaklong. Ph.D Thesis
3. Duangthi, R. (2012). Tai-Ahom and standard Thai: a descriptive-comparative study. Ph.d Thesis
4. Duleswar Konwar (1972). Chak-long published on behalf of Tai Historical and cultural society of Assam.
5. Dutta Sristidhar (1985), The Matak and their kingdom, Allahabad : Chugh publications
6. Gogoi, Shrutashwinee (2011). Tai ahom religion a philosophical study (PH.D). Retrieved 31 January 2019
7. Gogoi, Nitul Kumar (2006), Continuity and Change among the Ahoms, Concept publishing Company. Delhi
8. Gogoi, Nitul Kumar (1995). Acculturation in the Brahmaputra Valley: the Ahom Case (Ph.D). Retrieved 29 December 2018.
9. Gogoi, Padmeshwar (1976), Tai Ahom Religion and customs, Publication Board, Gauhati, Assam
10. Guha, Amalendu (December 1983), Tai Ahom Political System: An Enquiry into the State Formation Process In Medieval Assam (1228-1714), Social Scientist, 11(12):3-34, doi:10.2307/3516963, JSTOR 3516963
11. Morey, S tephin (2014), Ahom and Tangsa: Case Studies of language maintenance and loss in North East India, In Cardoso ,Hugo C.(ed), Language Endangerment and preservation in South Asia, Honolulu: University of Hawaii, Press, pp.46-77
12. Phukan, J N (1991). Relations of the Ahom King of Assam with Those of Mong Mao (in Yunan, China) and Mong Kwang (Mogaung in Myanmar). Proceedings of the Indian History Congress .52: 888-893. JSTOR 44142722
13. Phukan, D r Girin (2017), Cultural Linkage of The Ahom with the Tais of Southeast Asia: A Case Study of Ahom -Thai Linkage, I, II, IV, Khwan Mung Magazine.
14. Terwiel, B.J. (1996). Recreating the Past: Revivalism in Northeastern India. Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde. 152(2): 275-92. doi:10.1163/22134379-90003014. JSTOR 27864746