



# BACKGROUND OF THE CAPITAL CITIES OF THE AHOMS

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## ABSTRACT

The Ahoms belong to the *Tai* or *Shan* race inhabiting in Southern Siam and Southern China happened to be the early settler of Eastern Assam of the Brahmaputra Valley. They ruled over six hundred years (1228-1826 AD) with a reasonable stable government, and their kings governed till the British's annexation in the 1<sup>st</sup> half of 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first Ahom King Sukapha established his Caraiideo in 1253 AD. After him the later Ahom kings established another four Capital cities at Charagua, Garhgaon, Rangpur and Jorhat. In this paper, we are trying to discuss the background of the Capital cities of the Ahoms.

**KEY WORDS:** Ahoms, Capital cities, background.

## INTRODUCTION

The Ahoms belong to the *Tai* or *Shan* race inhabiting in Southern Siam and Southern China happened to be the early settler of Eastern Assam of the Brahmaputra Valley. In the early part of 13<sup>th</sup> century they established their state in the eastern division of the Assam State where from the actual ruling of the Ahom dynasty started. (Gait 2013:38) They ruled over six hundred years (1228-1826 AD) with a reasonable stable government, and their kings governed till the British's annexation in the 1<sup>st</sup> half of 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is learnt that they had efficient political and administrative system for which they could establish their dynasty in five capital cities at Charaideo, Chargua, Gargaon, Rongpur and Jorhat.

The decay and fall of the ancient kingdom of Pragiyotisha-Kamrupa of the Brahmaputra valley by the mid 12<sup>th</sup> century AD witnessed a period of political decentralization throughout the valley. Various tribal states and feudal territories at the hands of the members of the old aristocracy began to crop up in different parts within and outside territorial jurisdiction of the old kingdom. The Bhuyans, they carved out their respective "territories which are currently the districts of Kamrupa, Darrang, Nagaon and Lakhimpur. Along with the rise of the Ahoms, the other tribal states like Chutiyas, Kacharis, Koches and also the Bhuyans rule was ended. The first Ahom king Sukapha(1228-1268 AD) who migrated from Mong Mit in the modern Shan states of Burma, crossed the Patkai hills

in 1228 AD and established the first Capital of the Ahoms at Charaideo in 1253AD. After him the later Ahom kings established another four Capital cities at Charagua, Garhgaon, Rangpur and Jorhat.

### Aims/Objectives of the Study

- The aim of the study is to highlight the geographical location and the historical importance of the capital cities.
- The causes of shifting the capital cities from one place to another place.

### Methodology:

- The information related to the above study is collected through field study.
- The secondary data are collected from various published documents of the recent times including the subject related publications of the state/central governments.

## THE CAPITAL CITIES OF THE AHOMS

### CHARAIDEO

Charaideo was the first Capital of the Ahom kingdom established by Sukapha(1228-1268AD)in 1253 AD. It is about 30 km away from present Sivasagar town. Sukapha established his Capital at Charaideo due to its high land and safe from flood.(Choudhury 1991:10) As per government revenue record the Charaideo Capital complex covers an area of 35 bighas and 19 lossas.(Field Survey,DC Office, Charaideo) During the reign of Sukapha, the royal palace and the residence were built at Charaideo by wood and bamboo. The type of houses was *duchola* (double roofed). With the connection of the indigenous people Moran and Borahis, Sukapha borrowed their style of construction their house as *duchala* (Assam type) and *tupdiya* (gabled). During this period the materials which were used for constructions of buildings were indigenous materials like wood, bamboo, reeds, thatch, cane etc.

Later period, Charaideo became the sacred burial ground of the Kings, Queens and nobles of the Ahom kingdom. The Tombs of Kings and Queens at Charaideo hillocks are comparable to the pyramids of Egypt.(Saikia2009:57) It was came to be known as The Jerusalem of the Ahoms also. (Bora & Bora 2005:113). Numerous royal graveyards and burial vaults of the Ahom Kings and nobles still exist in Charaideo. The maidams<sup>1</sup> reveals the superb skill of sculptures and fine form of architecture. The maidams were divided into three types- (i) The maidams built by soil (ii) The maidams built by wood and (iii) The maidam built by bricks. (Sharma1993:163) From the reign of King Shiva Singha (1714-1744 AD) bricks were used for the construction of the maidams. The materials which were used for the construction of *maidams* were mortar-molasses, pulses, sun hemp, shells lime, stone lime, lime water, fish, mustard oil, duck's egg resin, *bora saul* (rice) etc.(*ibid*:45) The actual number of *maidams* at Charaideo has exceeded 150 but only 30 *maidams* are protected by the Archeological Survey of India and Assam State Archeology Department and the remaining *maidams* are unprotected. Charaideo is now historically important for *maidams*, tanks, roads and temples. The important *maidams* located at Charaideo are *Godadhar Singha's maidam*, *Rudra Singha's maidam*, *Bali maidam*, *Phuleswari Konwari Maidam*, *Naphuki Aideor Maidam* etc. There are many historical tanks of the Ahom period near Charaideo. These are like *Buragohain Pukhuri*, *Rohdoi Pukhuri*, *Sunadoi Pukhuri*, *Petudhuwa Pukhuri*, *Bheseli Pukhuri* and *Bauli Pukhuri*, *Chetia Phukanar Pukhuri*, *Bailung Pukhuri*, *Kuta Borphukan Pukhuri*, *Borpukhuri*, *Dighali Pukhuri*, *Mithapukhuri* or *Borgohain Pukhuri*, *Kur Dhuwa Pukhuri*, *Saw Dhuwa Pukhuri*, *Konseng Borpatra Gohain Pukhuri*, etc. *Lankuri Dol* and *Deoshal*, *Maibela Dol* etc are the important historical temples of Charaideo. There are some historical roads and bridges at Charaideo. These are - *Rohdoi Ali*, *Romoni Ali*, *Dhodor Ali*, *Rohdoi Silasaku* and *Dorika Silasaku*.

## CHARAGUA

The next Capital after Charaideo was Charagua. This Capital City was founded by Ahom king Sudangpha popularly known as Bamuni konwar (1397-1407AD) in 1407AD near Dihing River. (Bhuyan 1990:19) Charagua covers half part of the present Thowra mouza and presently it is in the Thowra legislative Assembly constituency. Sudangpha shifted the Capital from Charaideo to Charagua due to security purpose mainly. He was the first Ahom ruler enthroned himself on the *Singarighar* with great pomp and grandeur. (Baruah 2013:226)

Historically Charagua is famous for some *maidams*, tanks, *doles* (temples) and roads of the Ahom period. Though Charagua was the Capital of the seven rulers of the Ahom Kingdom, from Sudangpha (1397-1407AD) to Suhungmung (1497-1539AD), there are only three *maidams* located at Charagua area. The historical tanks which were dug during the Ahom period at Charagua are- *Rajmao Pukhuri*, *Thawra Pukhuri*, *Charagua Bor Pukhuri*, *Dhaibari Pukhuri*, *Nangal Dhuwa Pukhuri*, *Gazpuria Pukhuri*, *Nitai Pukhuri*, *Raisai Pukhuri* etc. *Dhai Ali* and *Sensua Ali* are the two historical roads at Charagua constructed during the reign of Shiva Singha. Thawra Dole is the historical temple of the Ahom period situated at Charagua.

## GARHGAON

Garhgaon, the third Capital of the Ahoms was established by Ahom monarch Suklengmung (1539-1552AD). He was keen to shift his Capital from Charagua to Garhgaon, located on the bank of the river Dikhow. (Bhuyan 1994:20) It is 13 km away from present Sivasagar town. After Charaideo, Garhgaon was the most revered and well known Capital city of the Ahoms. There are a number of remarkable buildings at Garhgaon which depict the Ahom style of architecture. The royal palace *Kareng Ghar* stands in the metropolis of Garhgaon. It is surrounded by a brick wall about two miles in circumference. The old palace of Garhgaon was built by King Suklengmung with wood and bamboos which was destroyed. King Rajeswar Singha (1751-1769 AD) built the present seven storied palace known as *Kareng Ghar*. (Gohainbaruah 2004:81) The important buildings of the Ahom period at Garhgaon are *Golaghar* (arms store), *Pujaghar* and *Govindra Dole*, *Namti Dole*, *Vishnu Dole*, *Pioli Phukan Dole*, *Singha Duwar*, *Sunpura Paniduwar* etc. There are a few historical tanks located at Garhgaon, such as the *Damodor Pukhuri*, *Mithapukhuri*, *Pujaghar Pukhuri*, *Hahchara Pukhuri*, *Kankhuwa Pukhuri*, *Bauli Pukhuri*, *Ma-dum Pukhuri*, *Ligiri Pukhuri*, *Borpatro Pukhuri*, *Deodhai Pukhuri*, *Aideopukhuri*, *Hundar Pukhuri*, *Dole Pukhuri*, *Bor Pukhuri*, *Borbaruah Pukhuri* etc. There are many historical roads lying at Garhgaon. These are- *Dhudor Ali*, *Naga Ali* (Nazira), *Haripora Ali*, *Hologuri Ali*, *Hukoti Ali*, *Garhgaon Ali*, *Satai Ali*, *Bor Ali* etc. There is also a stone bridge made by King Suklengmung on Garhgaon Ali which is known as *Hahchara Silar Saku*. The historical *maidams* of Garhgaon are - *Aton Buragohain Maidam*, *Chepeta Maidam*, *Sunpura Maidam*, *M'dam Maidam*, *Da-Ga Phukan Maidam*, *Bharalichuk Maidam*, *Aideo Maidam*, *Bauli Maidam*, *Hukoti Tamuli maidam* etc. There are many notable ramparts during the Ahom period located at Garhgaon. These are- *Banharh*, *Rajgarh*, *Pathali Garh*, *Itagarh* etc. Shihabuddin Talish who accompanied Mirjumla-the great invader, in his account *Fatiya-i-Ibria* praised the Garhgaon city and its royal palaces. (Sharma 2001:277)

## RANGPUR

Rangpur was the 4<sup>th</sup> Capital of the Ahom Kingdom. It was established by Ahom King Rudra Singha (1696-1714 AD) in 1699AD. (Bhuyan 1930:29) The city of Rangpur is situated on the left bank of the river Dikhow, 4 km west of present Sivasagar town. Rangpur continued to be the Capital till 1780 AD, when Gaurinath Singha's (1780-1795AD) Premier Purnananda Buragohain, shifted the Ahom headquarters to Jorhat. The architectural plan of Rangpur spread over almost a thousand bighas of land. Ghanasyam, an architect from Koch Bihar, was deputed by Rudra Singha to design and adorn his new Capital at Rangpur with necessary buildings. (Gohainbaruah op.cit:72) The most popular buildings today at Rangpur is the *Talatal ghar* or the *Kareng ghar* (royal palace) constructed with



bamboo and wood, by King Rudra Singha. In 1751-52AD, his son King Rajeswar Singha rebuilt the palace with bricks. The *Kareng ghar* is a seven storied palace with three storey's underground and four above. The underground portion of the *Kareng Ghar* is known as *Talatal ghar* while the upper storeys are known as *Kareng ghar*. It is said that Rudra Singha had constructed only the portion of *Talatal ghar*. His son Rajeswar Singha enlarged the structure into a multistoried one by constructing the additional stories above ground. (ibid:81) It was the enlarged structure, which finally came to be known as *Kareng ghar*.

Besides *Kareng Ghar*, Rangpur is historically famous for Royal Pavilion, Temples, Tanks, Roads, Stone Bridge, Ramparts, *maidams* etc.

Ahom King Pramatta Singha (1744-1751 AD) built a high pavilion called the *Rang Ghar* with bricks and stones for watch elephant fights and other sporting events for the Ahom rulers and high officials. (Barbaruah 1981:247)

The notable temples of the Ahom period located at Rangpur are- *Ghanasyam temple*, *Shiva Dole* (Joysagar), *Shiva Dole* (Sivasagar), *Vishnu Dole* (Sivasagar), *Devi Dole* (Sivasagar), *Joy Dol*(Joysagar), *Devighar or Devi Dol* (Joysagar), *Hara-Gauri Dewalay*(Sivasagar), *Siva Dol*(Rudrasagar), *Borpatra Dol*, *Ranganath Shiva Dol*, *Joyapar Hara-Gauri mandir*, *Garakhia Dol*, *Azan Peer Dorgah* etc.

There are many historical tanks situated at Rangpur. These are- *Jaysagar Tank*, *Gourisagar Tank*, *Sivasagar Tank*, *Rudrasagar Tank*, *Talatal Ghar Pukhuri*, *Rang Ghar Pukhuri*, *Keri rajmao Pukhuri*, *Shukan Pukhuri*, *Bogi Dole pukhuri*, *khemdoi Pukhuri*, *Suladhara Pukhuri*, *Rahdhala Pukhuri*, *Tenga Pukhuri* and *Mitha Pukhuri*, *Mesagarh Pukhuri*, *Lakhimi Pukhuri* etc.

*Laithepena Maidam* and *Borpatra Gohain Maidam* are the two historical *maidams* located at Rangpur area. There are some historical roads lying on Rangpur. These are- *Naga Ali*, *Deka Baruah Ali*, *Dhai Ali* etc. There is also a stone bridge named *Namdangar Silasaku* (Namdang Stone Bridge) constructed by King Rudra Singha (1696-1714AD). The notable ramparts of Ahom period at Rangpur are- *Garh Khawoi* of the *Jaysagar Pukhuri*, *Rang Ghar Garh*, *Talatal Ghar Garh*, *Talatal Garh Khawoi*, *Dhuliapar Garh* etc.

## JORHAT

Jorhat was the fifth and the last Capital of the Ahom Kingdom. It became Capital when the Moamaria rebels occupied Rangpur. This Capital was established by Gaurinath Singha (1780-1795AD). (Bhuyan 1994:178-179) From that time, Jorhat remained the Capital of the Ahom kingdom till the British occupation of Assam in 1826 AD.

Jorhat is famous for historical tanks, *maidams*, *garh*, temples etc. The historical *maidams* situated at Jorhat are- *Rajamaidam*, *Lachit Borphukans Maidam* and *Captain Gohain's maidam*. *Rajmao Pukhuri* and *Mithapukhuri* are the historical tanks of Jorhat. The notable temples of the Ahom period at Jorhat are- *Burhi Goshani Dewalaya* and *Hatigarh Dewalaya*. *Bibudhi Garh* is one of the major ramparts during the reign of King Gaurinath Singha. The *Borbheti*, situated at Jorhat, is one of the historical holy places of the Ahom period.

## MAIN CAUSES OF SHIFTING THE CAPITAL CITIES

During migration from one place to another for searching a place to establish a Capital, Sukapha found Charaideo as a suitable place for a permanent Capital City. There were available cultivable lands in abundance at Charaideo. It attracted Sukapha because he brought the culture of paddy cultivation from homeland to the Brahmaputra valley. Thus, one of the down side of Charaideo, he established three cultivable fields namely *Gosikolakhat*, *Borakhowakhat* and *Angerakhat* for paddy cultivation. (Bakatial 2009:26-27) As this type of paddy cultivation was more productive than the shifting mode of cultivation. The high location safe from flood is one of the prime reasons for Sukapha to establish his first Capital at Charaideo.

Sudangpha, popularly known as Bamuni Konwar (1397-1407AD) shifted his Capital from Charaideo to Charagua reason being the Charagua was also a high land free from flood. There was enough cultivable land, fishing tank, sufficient grassland for animal husbandry at Charagua. Besides the above mentioned causes, the main cause the shifting the Capital City from Charaideo to Charagua was for security purpose. Sudangpha established his Capital at Charagua on the boundary lines of the Chutiyas for defending them to attack the Ahom territory at Charagua. The Chutiyas were the first Hinduised community among the all community of the Brahmaputra valley. Bamuni Konwar who brought up in a Brahmin Hindu family knew the military power of the Chutiyas. Therefore, he shifted his Capital from Charaideo to Charagua due to security purpose from the Chutiyas.

After that, Suklengmung *Garhayan Raja* (1539-1552 AD) shifted his Capital from Charagua to Garhgaon, on the bank of the river Dikhow. The *Garhayan Raja* shifted his Capital from Charagua to Garhgaon because of suitability for transportation and security. (Gogoi 2006:261) As Garhgaon was located at the middle part of the Ahom Kingdom at that time. It was suitable for ruling the state, so there was an advantage of ruling the Ahom territory.

The Ahom King Rudra Singha(1696-1714 AD) shifted his Capital from Garhgaon to Rangpur due to over population at Garhgaon. At that time, there were enough cultivable lands and there were free lands for habitation at Rangpur. For the inhabitation of growing population of the Ahom state and growth of agricultural economy, the Ahom ruler Rudra Singha shifted his Capital from Garhgaon to Rangpur.

During the reign of Gaurinath Singha (1780-1795 AD) the Ahom Capital was shifted from Rangpur to Jorhat on the bank of the river Disoi(Bhogdoi) due to Moamaria rebels occupied Rangpur. (Gohainbaruah *op.cit*:93) In order to prevent from the Moamoria rebels, the Ahom King Gaurinath Singha shifted the Capital to Jorhat for security reason.

## CONCLUSIONS:

From the discussion of the above topic, it is learnt that over their 600 years rule, the Ahom rulers established their capital in five different places of the Brahmaputra valley. The first Ahom King Sukapha established his Caraideo in 1253 AD. After him the later Ahom kings established another four Capital cities at Charagua ,Garhgaon, Rangpur and Jorhat. The causes of the shifting of the Capital cities were- security purpose, flood, over population, availability of cultivable land, food security etc.

## Notes

1. Burial vaults of the Ahom Kings and Nobles.
2. *Singari Ghar* was the coronation hall of the Ahom Kings. It was made by *Singari kath*(wood).

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