

## TĀI ELEMENTS IN THE PLACE NAMES OF ĀSSĀM

SARAT KR. PHUKAN

Research Scholar

Assamese Department, Dibrugarh University.

**INTRODUCTION :-** The word 'Tāi' is a generic name denoting a great branch of Mongoloid population of Asia the present inhabitant of the Tāi people extends from Āssām (North-East India) in the west to Kwāngsi and Hainan in the East and from the interior of Yunān in the North to the southern most proximity of Thāiland in the South, i.e. 90° East-180° East longitude and 6° North to 33° North latitude. The Tai groups and sub-groups in this vast region are known by innumerable other local names, which at times tend to obscure their racial identity such as in Burmā, 'Shān', in Thāiland 'Siānese', in Lāos 'Lāo' (Combodia), in Yunan 'pie' and in Assām (the Brahmaputra valley) as Tāi-Āhoms, Tāi-Phāke, Tāi-Khāmti, Tāi-Turung, Tāi-Āi-ton and Tāi-Khāmyāng. But the members of this great race, whatever the local groups to which they may belong, call themselves 'Tāi'.

The Tāi-Āhoms, a branch of the great 'Tāi' race, conquered the valley of Brahmaputra, Āssām in the early part of the 13th century (1228 A.D.) under the leadership of Chāolung Sukāphā. Sukāphā laid foundation of a Tāi state here which lasted for nearly six hundred years.

This state was known as Prāgjyotishpur and Kāmrupa in early times. Sukāphā renamed the state as

Mung-Dun-Chun-Khām ; Mung=country, Dun=full of, Chun=garden, Khām=gold ; a country full of garden of gold.

The Āhoms brought into being during their reign in Āssām a stabilized polity, a balanced society, a liberalized economy and a flourishing cultural life. Their endeavours left their impress on all aspects of life and culture, literature-particularly the 'Buranjies' (Chronicles), music, dance, drama, architecture, Sculpture and painting even today bear the testimony of the achievements made in this field during the six hundred years of their rule. In the words of Dr.B.K.Baruā "the most distinctive aspects of the period were the geographical and racial unification of the country, stabilization of the political institutions, organisation of the economic, social and religious system and finally the rise of nationalism". In the same context a noted historian of Āssām Dr.S.K.Bhuyan rightly remarks, "The Āhoms as a sovereign power have ceased to exist since 1826 A.D., but visible traces of their rule still exist in different form".

The Āhoms as they advanced into and conquered Āssām used their own language. This language of Āhoms were a branch of Siāmesese-Chinese group which is a member of Sino-Tibetan family. In spite of the fact that the Āhom Rulers had their own manners and customs, language, and religious rites, they didn't impose their language, culture and religion on the conquered. On the other hand by inter marriage, by speaking the language of the indigenous people and by adopting their culture, the Āhom conquerers gradually became one with the

conquered. Finally, in course of time they had to give away to the language of the people, i.e. Āssāmesē and the language got confined to the priestly clans-the Deodhāis, the Bāilungs, the Mohans etc. But today most of the people have rejuvenated their language.

In the formation of the modern Āssāmesē language the following groups of people have contributed, such as the Indo-Chinese, particularly Austro-Asiatic-Khāsi, Kolāriān and Mālayān ; Tibeto-Burmāns-Bodo, Koch, Rābhā, Hojāis, Lālunḡ, Gāro, Morān, Borāhi, Chutiā etc. and 'Tāi', Tāi-Āhom, Tāi-Phāke, Tāi-Khāmyāṅ, Tāi-Turung, Tāi-Āiton, and Tāi-Khāmti. Except the Tāi-Āhoms, these later-migrated Tāi groups have been continuing their language and culture as before with local variations.

The Tāi elements in place names owe their origin to association with Lakes, Rivers, Trees or some striking natural characteristics or incidents that happened in the locality. Similarly, river names are associated with terms indicating noise, breaking terrain, quality, specific gravity etc. A good number of these places still retain the original names and are currently in use mostly in the district of Golāḡhāt, Jorhāt, Sibsāḡar, Dibrugārh, Tinsukiā, Lakhimpur and Dhemāji. The Tāi-Āhom historical documents, Burānji or Chronicles abound in such names, in short, Āhoms were well-acquainted with the places under their domain.

1. RIVER NAMES :- As we have mentioned earlier a handful of Tāi elements can be traced in river names of Āssām. The Tāi Āhom

