

### A STRUCTURAL BEAUTY OF THE AHOMS ARCHITECTURE.

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#### **Abstract:**

The Ahoms according to the chronicles inherited a tradition of large but impermanent buildings of timber and thatch, which were structurally perfect and aesthetically beautiful. The earliest records of this are found in the accounts of Shihab-ud-din Talish who accompanied the Mughal General Mir Jumla during his Assam campaign in 1662-63 CE (Barpujari 1994: 323). The permanent phase of construction using brick and lime started from the reign of king Rudra Simha (CE. 1696-1714) who in the absence of artisan in his kingdom imported one called Ghanashyam from Koch Bihar, who is believed to have taken up major construction works in Sivsagar and Charaideo. (Barpujari 1994: 324-25). It won't be out of place to mention that though the Ahoms ruled the Brahmaputra valley from the second quarter of the thirteenth century to the first quarter of the nineteenth century but their major building activities were confined to the eighteenth century (Barpujari 1994: 336).

During the long six hundred years the Ahom Kings took up lot of structural activities both secular and religious, which are still seen all over the state . The early structures of the Ahoms were of perishable materials and it was from the time of Rudra Singha (1696-1714) that the Ahoms started using brick and lime mortar as the medium of construction. In this study, I am only giving a brief description of Ahom architecture highlighting .

Keywords: Ahom, Maidams, Architecture, Temples, Road and Bridges:

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

Ahom rule is remarkable for the architectural history of Assam. They ruled in Assam for around six hundred years and contributed significantly towards the polity, economy, society, and culture. An abundance of archeological remains scattered in different parts of the present Sivasagar district underscores the richness of Ahom architecture. The Ahom rulers created capital cities made several buildings and temples, constructed roads, and dug many tanks during their rules.

The Ahoms arrived in the Brahmaputra valley in 1228 under the leadership of Saulung Sukapha, the prince born at Mong Mau Lung of Yunan. They were the members of the Shan branch of the great Tai or Thai family of south East Asia (Baruah, 220). They had to cover a very long way and it was indeed a journey full of hardships through the mountain Patkai's hilly road. As they entered the valley they were affected largely by floods. They finally reached Charaideo, where they found it comfortable to settle in primarily because of the safety from flood and established their capital in 1253. Based on the Buranjis, it is cleared that their conquest was not an invasion; rather it was a peaceful penetration that caused no problem for the existing tribes. To maintain a peaceful relation with the communities Sukapha started matrimonial relations with them and he also took their confidence in various purposes (Barpujari, 53). In this way, Sukapha set up the basis of the Ahom kingdom in the Brahmaputra valley. Subsequently, the boundary of the Ahom kingdom was widely extended towards the vast areas of the valley.

The entire Ahom period covered the activities of almost 38 Ahom kings until the beginning of the British colonial rule. The entire period of Ahom's reign did not witness the development in architecture equally. Most of the structural developments emerged from the 17th century onwards. This systematic progress was initiated by king Gadadhar Singha which continued almost till the reign of Rajeshwar Singha (1761-68). They constructed numerous structures of both religious and secular architecture. This trend ended with the continuous rebellion of Moamorias followed by the Burmese invasions into Assam.

The reign of Rudra Singha records the peak of the architectural development of Ahom architecture. The exotic structural beauty of the Ahom architecture was enriched by the initiatives of this great Ahom ruler. This study deals with a discussion on the architectural heritage of three considerable places viz. Charaideo, Garhgaon and Rangpur of Ahom period where a great number of the Ahom architectures are scattered.

### **OBJECTIVE OF MY STUDY:**

The main objective of my study are as follows

1. To highlight the architectural constructions of both religious and secular kind of structures.
2. To highlight the significance of architectural heritage of Ahoms.
3. To highlight the great number of the Ahom architectures where are scattered.

### **3. Methodology :**

In the present paper used the historical methodology. The source of this research have been collected from a wide range of primary and secondary sources along with the personal observation. The present study is carried out on descriptive mode of analysis.

**Maidams:**

One of the significant contributions of Ahom architecture is Maidams of Charaideo. Charaideo was a first capital of Ahoms and acquired a distinctive place in the Ahom kingdom for association with the various activities of the later Ahom period. Charaideo remained the capital of the Ahom kingdom for the next one hundred and fifty years. These constructions were burial mounds of Ahom royalty and nobility. Most of the Ahom royals were given Maidam at Charaideo. There are hundreds of Maidams at this place and its neighborhoods . The Ahom kings buried the demised along with several objects used by him during his life, like clothes, ornaments, weapons, etc in the Maidams. Although hundreds of Maidams are scattered across Charaideo, only four Maidams are still under the Archaeological Survey of India. Some of these are protected by the government of Assam while a large number of them are left unprotected. The maidams of Ahom kingdom are comparable with the pyramids of Egypt.

**Kareng Ghar:**

Kareng Ghar of capital city Gargaon stands with the utmost pride of the Ahom period. From Suklenmung to Pratap Singha, several buildings and Kareng were constructed in this capital city whilst only the Kareng Ghar now exists. This majestic building was constructed during the reign of Rajeswar Singha. It is believed that this masonry palace was comprised of seven storeys. Three out of them are under the ground and the rest is above the ground. The outer length of this royal palace in north-south direction is 74ft 9 inches and its breadth in east-west direction is 58ft 10.5 inches (Konwar, 10). The first storey over the ground of the Kareng Ghar is rectangular in size and height is about four meters. This story has three rooms, one is big in size and other two are small. The second storey made up of one big room and two medium rooms. There were four chambers in each corner of the storey for four watch-men. The third

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storey consists of one big room which was also equipped with four small watching rooms for royal security gaurds. The top floor of the palace has a dome-like roof with a small chamber. The upper storeys of the palace are gradually smaller. It is believed that there was a secrete tunnel from the ground floor of the Kareng Ghar which was connected with the Talatal Ghar in Rangpur. Kareng Ghar is one of the most beautiful buildings in Ahom period. Although most of the construction during Ahom period has ruined in this capital city, yet Kareng Ghar is shining the memories of the rich architectural development of medieval Assam at this place.

Rang Ghar:

Rang Ghar is one of the major monuments of the Ahom capital Rangpur. This building was made for royal amusement during Rudra Singha. It can be recognized as a present-day amphitheater. In Ahom kingdom games and sports and other certain cultural events acquired a significant place and the monarchs patronized them. Certain games were shown publicly in the huge field and the king himself enjoyed them with his followers. The king took the pleasure of the programs from the Rangghar which were performed under the appreciation of the king while common people enjoyed them from the adjoining field, which was well known as Rupohi Pathar. In this field, bullfights, cockfights, and wrestling etc. were organized. The Rang Ghar was first constructed during the reign of Rudra Singha. It was a two-storeyed construction from the wood. But this monument was beautified by coloring with the color of Hengul Haital and it was initially decorated by the stonecutting of different shapes of animals, flowers, etc. The Rang Ghar was rebuilt by the Ahom king Pramatta Singha in 1745 keeping the previous two-storeyed constructions. He also erected some small Rang Ghars near this construction which are currently not visible.

The Rang Ghar has two beautiful stone-carved crocodile structures on either side of its entrance. The roof of the monument is shaped like an inverted royal Ahom longboat. The base of it has a series of arches adorned with unique sculptures. The Rangghar is 10 meters in height. It is about 27 meters in length and 11 meters in width. There three turrets in the center of the roof and its eastern and western ends are embellished with a pair of a curved stone crocodile.

### **Talatal Ghar :**

Talatal Ghar is the largest structural splendid of the Ahom kings. It was constructed during the reign of Swargadeo Rajeswar Singha in 1765. It is a seven-storied bricks building. Three out of them were built below the ground and the rest were above it. There were two stories of a wooden structure on the remaining two stories of bricks of the building now. The wooden part was burnt down during the Moamariya Rebellion. Several doors are attached with every storey of the Talatal Ghar and all these doors look identical. On the contrary, windows were not much used in its walls. However, the size of the doors is not also tall which is shorter than the average height of a person. To find out the proper direction from underground rooms to the above stairway there were certain suggestions. Without proper guidance of the entry and exit, if someone proceeds to the inside, he may get it difficult to find out the door to come out. Talatal Ghar is famous for its incredible structure and design.

This palace was originally an army base and later used in administrative purposes. Earlier it was built during the tenure of the king Rudra Singha with the bamboo woods cans etc. which was shined with the excellent craftworks. The palace was incorporated with several rooms for different administrative purposes. Kings from Rudra Singha to Pramatta Singhal run their administration from this wooden palace. Later on, it was completely constructed during the reign of Rajeswar Singha. It was surrounded by a fortification of bricks. Garhkhaoi (the earthen fort with water ditch) also excavated outside the wall. There is a Golaghar (gun powder and ammunition store) near the Talatal Ghar. A huge number of visitors visit this royal palace every year.

Rangpur was the fourth capital of Ahom kingdom. The great Ahom king Rudra Singha (1696-1714) transferred the capital from Garhgaon to Rangpur. This place was originally known as Meteka. Later on the city witnessed a large scale growth so far as the architectural constructions are concerned. A very beautiful description of the city of Rangpur is recorded in the history of Chang Rung Phukan. King Rudra Singha decorated the capital with new approaches. He patronized several structural activities. But due to the lack of skilled artisans to construct temples, roads etc., he imported several artisans from Cooch Bihar. Among the name of Ghanashyam Khanikar, the chief architect to build the capital city of Rangpur is significant (Buragohain, 112). He was the mastermind behind several architectures in Rangpur. Rudra Singha and his successors constructed several roads, palaces, temples and dug many tanks in this capital city and its neighbouring areas.

### Temple architecture:

The temples of Ahom monarchy are the cornerstone of the Ahom architecture. Even though Ahom rule continued for such a long time, the building activities were mostly confined to the eighteenth century (Barpujari, 336). Ahom Chronicles referred to the construction of the earliest temple Nagasankara Devalaya by the Ahom king Sushenpha (1439-88) at Jamuguri in today's Sonitpur district. But except a tank, no evidence could be traced regarding the temple in that place. In this regard, Garakhiya dol is one of the earliest pieces of evidence of the construction of temples in the Ahom kingdom. Swargadeo Pratap Singha (1603-41) erected this temple. This temple is also in a ruinous condition where most of its sculptures have been damaged. Gadadhar Singha also constructed a few temples including Thaora dol and the Umananda temple on the river island Umananda in Guwahati. During his reign, a group of Assamese artisans was sent to Cooch Bihar to learn the art and the techniques of making clay images of Durga to worship her. Afterward, they returned to their homeland and created clay images in the temple. This tradition also helped in the construction of the Devidol in the subsequent period (Barpujari,). King Rudra Singha imported artificers and technology from neighboring Bengal who helped to make the temple of varied shapes and sizes (Gait, 176).

Ahom temple architecture received a fine shape under the Tungkhungia Rulers. Simultaneously, their embrace of Hinduism also influenced the construction of the temples. The most significant outcome of their devotion to Hinduism was the construction of the temples dedicated to the Shiva, Vishnu, etc. These were mainly erected during the reign of King Rudra Singha and his successor king Shiva Singha. The constructions took place extensively by the king Rudra Singha after he transferred his capital from Gargaon to Rangpur. He started the building of the temples on the bank of the Jaisagar Tank which was excavated in 1697 and completed within 45 days (Handique, 46).

There he constructed three main temples viz. Joydol, Devidol, and Sivadol. The Joydol is the most beautiful temple amongst them. It is also known as the Kesavanarayana Temple. Owing to its graceful proportion and external decorations, this temple may be said to the best of the Ahom edifices. The architectural style of the temple is Nilachala type with Pancaratha and its shikhara is dome-shape. Temples are mainly constructed in the Sivasagar, Jaysagar, and Gaurisagar areas. The temple architecture reached its zenith in the years of Shiva Singha. During his reign temples were mainly constructed in two places- Gaurisagar and Sibsagar respectively. The Gaurisagar tank

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(presently beside NH 37) was excavated in 1724 and he constructed three temples viz. Devidol, Sivadol and Vishnu dol on the north bank of this tank. Among these temples, Devidol is the largest and well preserved. This temple is dedicated to the goddess Durga. The architectural style of Devidol is Nagara type while the other two contain the Nilachala style.

Siva dol :

Siva dol was built in the year of 1734. This temple is one of the tallest Siva temples and the tallest Ahom architecture in Assam. Standing with a height of forty meters (Barpujari, 340) the Sivadol has a golden dome of 2.4 meters. The temples was is Nagara style with Shikhar, Garbhagrih and 'Mukhamandapa' . The walls of the temple were decorated with various engravings of gods and goddesses. The two other temples Devi dol and Vishnu dol are situated by the side of the Shiva dol. Lakhs of people across the country gather in the temple every year to celebrate during the great festival of Mahasivaratri.

Roads and Bridges:

Ahom rulers constructed a huge number of roads (Ali), embankments, ramparts (Garhs), tanks, and bridges (Sakos) etc. Their interest towards the road construction helped to the greatest development of the communication during the Ahom period. Some of these road constructions are-Rajmao ali, Senchowa ali, Naga ali, Nahar ali, Sukati ali, Bar ali, Salaguri ali, Bairagi ali, Dhodar ali, Halau Phukanar ali, Kharikatia ali, Meteka ali, Barpatra ali, Dhai ali, Aideo ali.

Ahoms chronicles referred to 12 stone bridges during the Ahom rule in Assam. Several bridges was constructed by Ahoms (Sako) over the canals and the rivers of wood and bamboo. Later on, rulers started to make stone bridges. The earliest evidence of stone bridge of Ahom rulers Pratap Singha can be found over the river Darika at Gargaon. King Gadadhar Singha made two stone bridges over the river Dijoikhana and the Rahdai to the east of the Garhgaon City. Ahoms were mainly built over the rivers namely Dijai, Darika, Rahdai, Dimow, Hanhchara, Namdang, Nafuk, etc.(Buragohain N.,62). Among these stone bridges, the stone bridge over Namdang River is important which is still in good form. It was constructed during the reign of Rudra Singha in 1701. To build this bridge a massive stone was used and cut several holes in it. The bridge is about 60 meters in length and 6.5 meters in breadth. Along with the Namdang Darika and Dijai are still running in good condition.

The Ahom rulers commonly used such materials in early period likes wood, bamboo, cane etc. for their construction of the numerous buildings which were decorated beautifully with different colors and craftworks. After that, the Ahom rulers started to used stones, bricks, and Karhal (indigenous cement) etc for constructions buildings from the wooden form. In Ahom administration a special group of labour (silakutia paiks) were kept for the various stone works. Stones were mainly used to build the temples, buildings, maidams, embankments, bridges etc.

The Ahoms know the different brick-making techniques with different shapes and sizes. Bricks are also used in construction of several structures during Ahom rule a large number of bricks were made to be used in the construction. Most important ingredients for construction was indigenous cement(Karhal). The Karhal materials were jaggery,black gram, xon (a kind of plant fiber) snail slime, stone lime, fishes, oil, resin of sal tree etc.(Boruah, 12).

### 6.Conclusion:

A lot's of Ahoms architecture are found at Sivasagar district. The precious architecture have

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been reflecting the glorious Ahom kingdom. Now a day it is important to preserve it to . It is very important to preserve the historical architectures in scientific manner with the initiatives by the archaeology department and Assam Government for carry forward the glorious kingdom of Ahom .

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