

TIPAM, AN OVERLOOKED AREA IN DIBRUGARH DISTRICT, ASSAM

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Abstract:

The period of Thirteenth century AD (1223), witnessed coming of a group of people from Yunan province of China led by a Shan general Chaolung Sukapha in the Brahmaputra valley, North-East India. He met various groups of people like Moran, Barahi, Kachari, Chutiya, Naga and settled them sometimes with mutual understandings or by defeating them. The valley onlooked the foundation of Ahom kingdom with the arrival of Sukapha. The first ever temporary capital of the Ahom kingdom was Tipam, in the Dihing valley, the name that has been recorded since 1228 A.D. As a kingdom stands by a strong capital, so thus Sukapha was in search of a suitable place and subsequently he found Charaideo Sivasagar as his permanent capital in the year 1253. The advent of Ahoms thus, gave birth to a significant area, Tipam which is historically significant till today. The area became an important place for the Ahoms for searching the suitable place for their kingdom's capital and also for the Britishers as a hub of commercial advantage by growing the lush tea gardens. Today the area, Tipam is basically came in notice with the Tipam Deohali hills which provide an intrinsically beautiful natural view of Buridihing River, Tea Garden and the Dihing Patkai Rainforests. The paper here also discusses about the Deohali Aai than which is located in the hill top of the Tipam hill and its art and architectural belongings. As a part of the methodology, a field visit was made to the location and several secondary sources were used.

Keywords: -

Ahom, Deohal, Hill, Medieval, Sculptures, Than.



Figure 1 :LOCATION MAP OF TIPAM DEOHALI HILL SITE (source: Google Earth)

Introduction:

Tipam, a historically significant location in Upper Assam, lies 22 kilometers from Naharkatiya in the Dibrugarh district. The word 'Tipam' is a combination of two Tai words, 'Ti' meaning 'place' and 'Pam' meaning 'slaughter', thus, the word as a whole refers to a place where animals are worshipped and slaughtered.¹ It is one of the most important sites related to the Ahom kingdom. Later under the British territory, the area gained importance for the cultivation of a commercial crop, tea. With the passage of time, the area remained significant for the cultivation of the tea bushes for the commercial purpose. Today, Tipam area came into notice mainly due to a Than or a temple located in the hill top of Tipam. The people of Tipam Fakial village became the regular visitors of the temple which influenced the tourists to visit the area making it a tourist place.

¹Rajkumar, Sarbananda, *Itihase Soaura Chasahata Bachar*, Makhan Hazarika, Banalata, Natun Bazar, Dibrugarh-I, 2023, Ed. 4th, pg. 32

Tipam during ancient period:

As the details about the Upper Assam and its regions are very less documented in the ancient literature, so thus Tipam, an area within Dibrugarh district, unlike the regions like East Bengal, Kamarupa and Goalpara is difficult to find. As some modern historians of Assam, while determining the boundaries of the ancient Pragjyotisha Kamarupa state, assume that the area surrounding Dibrugarh town belong to Saumarpatha of Kamarupa state², therefore, the Tipam being within the Dibrugarh district falls within the same *pithastahana*. The information regarding its population and other aspects like society, economy and polity of the ancient time are till now have not been in the light. But the area gained its prominence during the days of Ahoms when it became the first temporary headquarter of Ahom kingdom.

Tipam during medieval period:

When people talk about the Ahom kingdom, Sivasagar often comes to mind because it is famous for its grand and well-preserved monuments. However, *Buranjis* suggest their shift of capital multiple times throughout history. Sivasagar became most recognized capital mainly because of the impressive structures built there and Tipam remained overlooked.

Tipam, the area in Dibrugarh district held a great importance during the days of Ahoms. It is regarded as the first temporary headquarter of the Ahom kingdom. The origins of the Ahom presence in Assam trace back to Chao-lung Sukapha, who led a small group on a long and challenging journey. After crossing the near-impregnable Patkai hills, they finally descended into the fertile Brahmaputra valley. He bridged the Sessa river and ascended the Dihing, but found it unsuitable which led him reach to Tipam proceeding towards downstream³ of Dihing river. They reached Namphuk (Namrup) and subsequently reached and settled in and around the Tipam hills for about ten years⁴, and monitored places for his permanent capital or headquarter. Here he met Chutias, Kacharis, Maran and Barahis and moving from place to place he reached to a place called Charaideo and settled there in 1253. During the time of Sukapha's residence in Tipam he found a family of Tula-Chalanidhara. Maimai Khiyarat was one of the member of the family who prepared royal robes.⁵ Also, an another family who formerly supplied brinjal to the king was taken to the Matak kingdom by Sukapha.⁶ Originally when Sukapha came from Hukong valley he had about few hundred people with him but their number swelled as he was having his followers from the conquest areas and when he reached Namrup-Tipam the population rose to thousand men with him.⁷ According to P.S. Naobaicha Phukan, it is said that victorious Shan general Samlongpha, invited Sukapha to join him in the Tipam-Namrup area but S.L. Baruah seems it to be doubtful.⁸ Tipam welcomed them with rich soil and strategic promise. Later, Sukapha, finding the area overflowed by the river Dihing, he put Kanngan as the incharge of Tipam and left for search of a better place for kingdom's capital far downstream of the Dihing river.⁹

A well mentioned rebellion in Tipam area is found in Buranji fought during the reign of Sudangpha alias Bamuni Konwar (1397-1407 AD). A Tipamiya chief named Tashulai (Tao-Chulai) was associated with a love affair between him and the newly wedded Tipamiya queen of the king Sudangpha. Fearing punishments from the king the chief fled the of Mungkomng and managed to get his armed assistance. A battle was fought near Kunhiarbari in Tipam area.¹⁰ There were no further hostilities and the battle ended with a formal treaty in 1401, by which the Patkai was fixed as the boundary between the two kingdoms.¹¹ After sometime, Tao-Chulai out of frustration, took refuge with the Raja of Kamata, who refused to give him up. An expedition was sent under the

² Nath, D. (ed.), *Dibrugarhar Buranji*, Reception committee, 66th Conference of Asom Sahitya Sabha, Dibrugarh, 2001, pg. 84

³ Gait, Sir Edward, *A History of Assam*, Thacker, Spink & Company, 1906, pg.78

⁴ Borbaruah, Hiteswar, *Ahomar Din*, Publication Board Assam, 1997, Ed.2nd, Pg.20

⁵ Barua, Rai Saheb Golap Chandra, (ed. and tr.), *Ahom Buranji: From the Earliest Time to the End of Ahom Rule*, Authority of the Assam Administration, Calcutta, 1930, pg.37

⁶ Ibid, pg.38.

⁷ Baruah, S.L., *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1995, pg. 221, note 1.

⁸ Ibid, pg. 223

⁹ Barua, Rai Saheb Golap Chandra, (ed. and tr.), *Ahom Buranji: From the Earliest Time to the End of Ahom Rule*, Authority of the Assam Administration, Calcutta, 1930, pg.46

¹⁰ Ibid, pg.50

¹¹ Gait, Sir Edward, *A History of Assam*, Thacker, Spink & Company, 1906, pg.83

Tachangbing Bargohain to invade Kamata, but Raja averted the war by giving his daughter Bhajani to Sudangpha, with a dowry of a tusked elephant, a female elephant, a big red horse with a silver saddle to ride on, twelve ordinary horses, twenty female slaves, forty-seven male slaves and a quantity of silver and gold. Sudangpha then became firmly engaged in the subjugation of the Tipam, Khamjang and Aiton tribes, whose chiefs had again refused to pay tribute and wished for the destruction of their rebellious spirit.¹²

Later, during the days of Shuhungmung alias Dihingia Raja (1497-1539), various *khels* or *mels* such as Tipamiya, Dihingia, Charingia, Chamguria, Tungkhungia, and Namrupia were established and later declared them as the districts where the princes descending from the former kings were settled.¹³ From this arrangement, arose the royal houses or clans respectively which were placed under the Phukan or Rajkhowa officials¹⁴ or the governor called Raja, invariably a prince of the ruling family. Among the four sons of Swargadeo Shuhungmung, Sukhreng, the third son of the king, became the Tipamiya *Mel* Raja.¹⁵ After the death of Swargadeo Suhungmung, his eldest son, Suklengpha or Suklengmung alias Gorgaya Raja became the king of Tipam area.¹⁶ Therefore Tipam remained an alarming region during the days of Ahoms.

Tipam during British period:

The British, arriving in Assam valley noticed the land suitability for the cultivation of commercial crop like tea. The failure of the first Government Tea Plantation located on a sandbank near the confluence of the Brahmaputra and the Kundil rivers, influenced the establishment of tea factories in Dibrugarh and at the junction of the Burhi Dihing and Tingrai rivers¹⁷ which may have included the Tipam area. In the earlier phase, the company was far from the prosperous, but from about 1852 its prospects began to improve and the lands increased for the cultivation.¹⁸ Moreover, the private speculators entered the field and formed their own companies such as Maijan Tea Company, and the Jorhat Tea Company, which started gardens in different places of Upper Assam.¹⁹ The suitability of land for the tea cultivation brought Tipam under cultivation. Today, the whole and its surrounding hillocks are tea gardens owned by Jeypore Tea Estate which provide more aesthetic look to the hills.

Tipam Deohali Hills:

Tipam-hill or Tipam Deohali hill, situated at a height, clearly explains why it was chosen as the site of the first settlement by the Ahom king Sukapha. Its elevated position provides a sweeping 360-degree view of the entire landscape. From this vantage point, the Burhi-Dihing river can be seen winding through the distance. The lush rainforests of the Dihing Patkai and the road leading to the rugged, inaccessible mountains of Tirap (Now part Arunachal Pradesh) are also visible from here.

A Tipam Deohali hill has more than 1000 steps beautifully constructed having break points for resting. The top of the hill has a temple or than where a goddess generally Durga is worshipped by which the temple is called Tipam Deohali Aai Than. The Tipam hills are now covered with tea plantations. The collage of the tea gardens, the Dihing river and the hills together peaks the natural beauty of the area.

¹² Barua, Rai Saheb Golap Chandra, (ed. and tr.), *Ahom Buranji: From the Earliest Time to the End of Ahom Rule*, Authority of the Assam Administration, Calcutta, 1930, pg.51.

¹³ Bhuyan, S.K., (ed.) *Assam Buranji or A History of Assam*, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, 1930, pg.23

¹⁴ Ibid, pg.25

¹⁵ Ibid, pg. 28.

¹⁶ Gohainborooah, Padmanath, *Asamar Buranji*, A.B.T. Publication Panbazar, Guwahati, January, 2017, pg. 71.

¹⁷ Gait, Sir Edward., *A History of Assam*, Thacker, Spink & Company, 1906, pg. 355

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Baruah, S.L., *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1995, pg.642

Tipam Deohali Aai Than:

The area, Tipam recently gained popular concentration due a sacred place, Tipam Deohali Aai Than in the top of the Tipam hill. In
Figure 1: Tipam Hills or Deohali Hills

Figure 3: Buri Dihing River at a distance

the early time of Ahoms, they didn't introduce the temple-architecture in the first phase of their rule due to their engagement in the establishment and consolidation of the state. But they erected some Deohals and the Tipam Deohal might be among all early deohals that can be considered as constructed by the Ahom rulers, located in Tipam hills but till date no evidence has been found that proves this deohal was erected by them. Moreover, it might also be possible that later the Tipamiya rajas constructed the same than for religious or political purpose. The temple or than is dedicated to Goddess Durga or Devi. The temple is a newly constructed one without any decoration, having a simple *mandapa*, *garbhagriha* and a *pradakshina patha*. Beside the temple, there is a sacred place and opposite to the temple lies a bamboo constructed room where a large size portrait of Swargadeo Sukapha is placed where Tai people offer their prayers, reflecting the rich culture of Tai-Ahom and attempt to reclaim the heritage.



Figure 4: Tipam Deohali Aai Than



Figure 5: Portrait of Chaolung Sukapha

Sculptures of Tipam Deohali Hills:

Tipam, the place famous from the Medieval period, located in 22 km from Naharkatiya, Dibrugarh, has a newly built temple up to the Tipam hills. Dedicated to Goddess Parvati, usually called Devi, the temple came to be known as Tipam Deohali Aai Than. Beside the Devi temple, there lies a sacred place. Two unidentified and mutilated sculptures or amorphous stones are there in this sacred

place which is prohibited to touched. The two sculptures, when asked to the priest of the temple, he responded them as Lord Hanuman (only two legs are noticed) and Lord Ganesha. Also, when asked about the originality of the Devi idol, the pandit replied that the original idol of Devi got vanished by own long ago²⁰ due to which the management committee has place an earthen image developed at recent time. The Aai than has become a regular sacred destination for the local people and now the tourism to Tipam is also increasing day by day.²¹



Figure 2: Lord Hanuman



Figure 7: Lord Ganesha



Figure 8: Present Earthen Devi

Conclusion:

Tipam, the historical place of Assam, despite its great contribution to the Assam history is one of the forgotten and ignored places in Assam, North-East India. Only a few years ago, efforts started to attract people to this place. This happened when the stairs were built to the top of the hills. The surrounding foliage, lush green hills and the meandering Dihing river collectively contribute to the region's ecological significance and scenic beauty.

The isolation of Tipam is now slowly getting away. This area is also the gateway to parts of eastern Arunachal such as Namdapha, Pangsau and Tirap. In addition to its scenic expanses of tea gardens, the area is rich in historical significance such as the Tipam hill which was the Ahom's first settlement area and also there are two Buddhist villages, Namphake and Tipamphake. Since the hill is currently part of a Jeypore Tea Estate, it could easily be integrated into a tea tourism area. What truly sets Tipam apart is its unique and varied topography, enhancing its charm and tourism value.

²⁰ Personal communication with the priest

²¹ Personal Observation

As a historically significant place, the Tipam area requires increased attention and systematic increased preservation efforts from the government. While local people are actively involved in weekly cleaning of the hill, temple surroundings and the adjacent areas, official support is necessary to ensure proper maintenance, infrastructure development and heritage conservation and promoting the site's cultural importance to the visitors.

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